Wait for Her: A Family Memoir between Italy and Palestine.

An Analysis of Literary Strategies to Negotiate Personal and Collective Transnational Identities.

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Abstract

This thesis is formed by two parts: the memoir *Wait for Her,* and a theoretical exegesis. In order to understand the purview of this study the two parts should be read jointly.

This research developed from an interest in understanding how the personal struggle to negotiate one's own transnational identity relates to a collective struggle for self-determination.

Wait for Her is an experimental memoir where I retrace the story of my parents and the life of my half-Italian, half-Palestinian family, from the 1960s to 2020. After the loss of my mother, I try to renegotiate my identity and understand what it means to grow up across cultures and under the influence of the Israel-Palestine context. My narrative mixes performative and embodied knowledge, memoir, fiction, and historical investigation in order to cast a new layered light on the events which have affected my family and shaped the relationships between Europe and the Middle East for the last fifty years.

Many works in recent years have explored the importance of specific literary strategies in postcolonial and transnational writing, but this thesis focuses specifically on the potential and pitfalls of non-fiction genres based on a narrative of the I – like memoirs, travel writing, life writing, autobiography – to offer a space for personal and political analysis.

The main objective of this thesis is to overcome these genres' major inadequacies: the inadequacy of a first-person non-fiction narrative when writing about an entire cultural group; the inadequacy of the narrative form to convey the fluidity of identities in formation and hybrid identities; and finally, the inadequacy of narrating collective historical trauma from a personal perspective.

The contextual essay is divided into two main chapters. In the first one, *Themes and Methods*, I explore the concept of performative. From it, I delineate

those characteristics that allow me to put together the three sides of my research, namely an interest for daily embodied practices and how they influence our identities, the focus on Palestinian history, and the use of creative writing as my research methodology.

In the second chapter, *Analysis of Techniques*, I give a close reading of my book. I pin down four techniques – a metanarrative adoption of fiction and non-fiction, third-person narration compensating for first-person narration, the role of performative elements, and the use of multiple languages – that I believe not only answer my research questions, but can contribute to the field of writing, especially non-fiction writing – from memoirs to historiography – to avoid the objectification of complex personal and communal identities on the page.

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Wait for Her: An Analysis of Literary Strategies to Negotiate Personal and Collective Transnational Identities

Introduction

This thesis consists of two components: a creative writing component – the family memoir *Wait for Her*, and this contextualising analysis. For the purpose of this study, the two parts are not separable, and a familiarisation with the memoir is essential to understand this exegesis.

Such is the nature of a practice-based PhD[1] that the practice, in this case a work of creative writing, forms the main output of research and the major contribution to new knowledge. The aim of this essay is to clarify that contribution. In the following pages, I will examine the process of writing to find exemplary moments of decision-making that moved the investigation forward. I will identify those criteria used to respond to problems and to decide if something worked or did not: this is not only about aesthetics and artistic achievement, but in the context of the overall doctoral thesis, it links with what the book can offer in connection with other disciplines and larger issues. This essay also wants to demonstrate how a close commentary upon one's own process of writing can add to the theoretical discussions of crucial topics.

My book and this exegesis both originated from an interest in understanding how the personal struggle to negotiate one's own transnational identity relates to a collective struggle for self-determination. In my case that meant looking at the process of identity-formation of my Italian-Palestinian family living through the events in the Palestinian territories from 1948 to 2020 and witnessing the relations between Western countries and the Middle East.

The heart of my inquiry developed around the potential of the memoir genre to provide a space for transnational and postcolonial writing and to simultaneously

[1] I will use in this exegesis the terms practice-based, practice-led, practice-as-research. Although there are some differences among them (see Candy and Edmonds 2018: 63-69 and Nelson 2013: 8-10), they all refer to a research which is based primarily on (artistic) practice, and therefore I will use them interchangeably.

exercise personal and political functions. I was interested to see how innovative practices in the genre could put under scrutiny the way western media and arts represent the issues that affect me and my community daily. Finally, I wanted to see how a creative writing informed by other disciplines could offer an alternative to such accounts. To achieve that, I combined my practice with theoretical frameworks such as performance studies and the concept of the performative, oral history, cultural studies, identity and trauma studies.

As a result, I believe the main contribution to knowledge of this critical section is the proposal of four techniques that can be used in non-fiction writing – from memoirs to ethnography and historiography[2] – to avoid the objectification of complex personal and communal identities on the page.

Although this is the main premise, it is not the first spark of my research. When asked by my supervisors what motivated me to write this book, I instinctively answered: grief. Grief was definitely the initial push into writing my first book-length work. When I started to write in English, I preferred short pieces, as English is not my first language. But soon, a recurrent theme started to surface: my mother, whom I had lost just the year before, kept appearing in all my writing and always in correlation with Palestine. My mother being my Italian side, I found this pairing curious, and I wanted to delve more into it. I wanted to know why the grief for my Italian mother reopened a nostalgia and sense of loss for Palestine.

My project has three purposes. A more personal one: through the research, the writing and the fieldwork, I wanted to reconnect with my Palestinian side as well as understand more about my relationship with my Italian side. This was complicated by my life in the UK, the unfolding of Brexit agreements, and finally by the Covid-

[2] Many works have dealt with the importance of the relation between writing and ethnographic research (see for example: Clifford and Marcus 2010). In *Writing Against Culture* (2006), Abu-Lughod suggests a "variety of strategy for writing *against* culture" (466) to try and limit the imbalance of power in writing about "the other". However these strategies focus on the content of writing rather than on the form of writing itself.

19 pandemic that forced me away from both sides of my family for almost two years. I believe that in looking closely at this desire for belonging and recognition some interesting aspects of creative writing as a place of complex identity formation can be analysed.

Secondly, I wanted the reader to experience an emotional attachment to the collective loss of the Palestinian people through the experience of personal grief.

At the stage of writing my final drafts, this second reason is becoming more compelling than ever. The events in Palestine in May 2021 crystallized some of my understanding and made my critical essay more urgent and therefore sharper.

Among the protests in Sheikh Jarrah, the attacks on the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, hundreds of deaths in Gaza, and a reignition of young resistance, this month is also my mother's death anniversary. It is also the anniversary of my last trip to Palestine with her, and my social media feed shows me a picture of me and my mother in Jerusalem back then. No picture can explain what I mean better than this one: when I see it, I have to deal with a double loss.

A few weeks after that picture was taken, my mother discovered that she had only a few months to live and died a year after, in May 2013.

The pain, suffering and powerlessness I experienced in those months belong to the same range of emotions I am feeling now as I watch what is happening in Jerusalem, Gaza, and in the West Bank.

Finally, these two previous aspects were put together by an artistic curiosity: I wanted to investigate the potential of creative writing in generating political and historical interest through the medium of a personal story. I was particularly interested in experimenting with forms of non-fiction centred on the viewpoint of the I – like travel writing, memoirs, autobiography, life-writing – as an entry point to a larger social context.

However, I was aware of how these genres risk flattening realities unfamiliar to the reader towards an uncomplicated understanding of the other.

I imagine the reader of *Wait for Her* as someone who may know something about the general Palestinian history, but who picked the book rather for its connection to transnational stories and grief memoirs. My aim then became to work across topics like family dynamics and personal loss to create an emotional common ground where the reader could get closer to the Palestinian loss without however compromising its specificity. The crossing of these emotions sustained my writing over the past years and is at the base of my research questions.

This contextual essay is divided into two main chapters. In the first one, *Themes and Methods,* I talk about the development of my project from a travelogue enhanced by the use of folktales to an experimental memoir interlaced with performative knowledge. After a short excursus on the reasons for this development, I pin down my research questions, and follow them with a literature review around my main themes and terminologies. In this part I try to identify those characteristics that allowed me to put together the three sides of my research, namely an interest in daily embodied practices and how they influence our identities, the focus on the Palestinian situation, and the use of creative writing as my research methodology.

In the second chapter, *Analysis of Techniques,* I retrace the themes and apply the methods as explained in my first chapter to give a close reading of my book. I look at four techniques that I believe not only answered my research questions, but can also help other writers, especially non-fiction writers, dealing with complex personal and communal transnational identities.

It may be argued that this exegesis does not consider the full range of themes that my creative writing engages with. For example, I could have given more attention to the role of women, and in particularly mothers, in identity-formation in

unstable and endangered contexts. However, my scope was strictly to identify literary techniques that allow writers to negotiate transnational identities, away from a narrative focused on the hero journey of the I, and closer to the potential of creative writing to offer a platform for communal stories.

Themes and Methods

1. From folktales to folklore

In my research proposal I defined my book as a travelogue. My idea was to produce a travel writing narrative about Palestine and to use folktales to give a cultural and ethnographic background to my story. In my research plan, three months from the beginning of my PhD, I had already changed the definition of my work and called it a memoir. Travel writing as a genre felt too embedded in the dichotomy I/other and it didn't fit with my position of insider/outsider. The memoir instead offered a more interesting platform because it allowed me to consider this tension between familiarity/foreignness in a more reflective way. My interest therefore changed from Palestinian travel writing towards the exploration of the relation between western genres and non-western forms, between fiction and non-fiction, and finally towards my own positionality as a writer of mixed identity between European culture and Arab culture.

Both my creative and my contextual research started by exploring the stylistic and epistemological possibilities of oral storytelling and folktales when using them inside non-fiction texts. When I started to research material for my transnational memoir, I wanted to find a way to express the layered identity of my family and to show the encounter between two cultures. By narrating my Italian mother's life in Palestine, I wanted to represent her journey from one country to another and how she formed a new hybrid individuality. At the same time, I wanted to give more information about the Palestinian society itself. Finally, I wanted my practice to be a process of self-discovery of my own Italian-Palestinian identity. I believed that the solution for these three different points was to use traditional Palestinian tales.

However, after experimenting with this idea inside my book and especially during my first fieldwork in Palestine, I realised that my project needed to move away from the focus on folktales. In my practice, for example, I wanted to find a way to integrate folktales in my writing, and I thus tested a few techniques.

I firstly worked on my style, adopting typical folkloric elements like repetitions, epithets, and tripartite structures. Secondly, I tried to work on the content, by rewriting folktales and adapting them to my mother's experience. For instance, when describing my mother's relationship with her sisters-in-law, I adapted one of the folktales about the same relationship and integrated it in the chapter. This would have allowed me to position the events of my mother's life in the Palestinian society and retrospectively illuminate behaviours typical of Palestinian family dynamics.

This might be an interesting approach, but it was ultimately limiting for two reasons.

On the style: by adding a folktale in each chapter or by shaping the style of each chapter around the structure of a folktale, the narration was weighed down and it didn't flow properly.

On the content: my mother's experience of Palestine was not "purely Palestinian". As an Italian woman she broke many Palestinian conventions. Therefore, trying to mirror her experience with the traditional social milieu of the folktales was a distortion of her personality and true experiences. Instead, I believe that the divergence of her story is what needed to be emphasized.

During my first trip to Palestine the doubts which arose from my practice were confirmed by findings on the field.

Folktales in Palestine are a women's art. They are usually told by the elder women in close circles with other women and their children (Kannana and Muhawi 1989: 4). It is not easy to be admitted into these circles, especially for someone who is considered a foreigner, like my mother or myself.

Moreover, folktales are generally disappearing in Palestinian society. Palestinian folktales mainly focus on the social dynamics between the women of the enlarged family. These dynamics, that were unavoidable in the close environment of the rural society, are now changing in a fast-growing urban setting, and thus folktales are not felt to be relevant anymore for a modern city-dweller.

Moreover, due to the political situation, folktales are seen as a trivial entertainment compared to other forms of orality, like personal narratives of war and oppression.

My findings were confirmed by scholars of Palestinian folklore. When I interviewed Prof Kanaana on the matter, he affirmed that, in the early 80s, it was already hard to find women able to narrate more than one or two popular tales.[3]

Therefore, following Zipes's statement that forms of folklore can be "eliminated in reaction to the needs and conflicts of people within the social order" (2006: 6), I needed to find other receptacles of these new needs and conflicts.

If it is true that folktales are not told anymore and thus are difficult to retrace, other forms of folklore are still valued and used: above all, folk songs, jokes, proverbs, and nursery rhymes. In addition to these forms of folklore that rely on a text and therefore can be analysed and interpreted, there are other non-textual forms of folklore. Due to their high relevance in the daily life of Palestinians, they also need to be considered: food (including the symbolic attachment to traditional Palestinian ingredients), popular music and dance, embroideries and other crafts.

These forms are more used and therefore more meaningful for the current Palestinian society. Moreover, they are the way my mother learnt about and got integrated into her new environment. For example, my mother's first friendships with Palestinian women and her relationship with her mother-in-law developed through

[3] Another interesting testimony comes from Rosemary Sayigh: "I suggest that the Nakba constituted a historic rupture that shifted women's narrative from the *hikaya* [Traditional Palestinian folktale], a gender-specific, rural mode of cultural heritage, towards the *qissa*, the reportorial story about events in the "real" world […]." (2007: 153).

learning traditional recipes (see for example, *Wait for Her*, Chapter 6). Or also, one of her first contacts with the Palestinian culture was through the traditional dances, which she learned and performed when still in Italy (Chapter 3). Finally, my mother learnt Arabic from children's rhymes and stories, when working in a kindergarten (Chapter 6).

2. From folklore to performative

Folklore offered a better category not only because popular songs, dances, and festivals are still very common in Palestine, but also because in my creative practice, general folkloric elements, like food and proverbs, were entering naturally as part of my own personal heritage, while I was struggling to insert folktales.

During my second fieldtrip to Palestine in 2019, I started to translate traditional folksongs and categorise their content for their historical value; I did the same with proverbs and jokes linked to a specific context, and the uses of dances and embroideries. Although this approach was more useful in revealing important aspects about the use of folklore, the main problem remained the same: most of this material is accessible through archived collections, museums, folklorists, and folkloric festivals, not on the streets. If people are asked about it, they know about it not because they sing these songs every day or because they wear embroidered dresses every day, but because for them too this material has acquired symbolic value, something to protect as part of their threatened heritage, rather than a common practice.

For example, when I was participating at a family wedding, the bride insisted on having songs from the *zaffe* (wedding procession) when exiting her parents' house. However, none of the older women of her household – who are usually the

ones in charge of this tradition – could sing these songs, as the practice is not common anymore, and so she used a YouTube video with recorded voices.

Moreover, folklore bears a disciplinary heaviness and has been mostly abandoned as a cultural term. As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett explains in *Folklore's Crisis* (1998), the reasons for this can be found in the origin and past of folklore in academia and its conservative nationalist use. These associations with nationalism and nationalistic enterprises like colonialism and imperialism make folklore hard to redeem as a proper research term. For example, UNESCO soon abandoned the term folklore for intangible cultural heritage.[4] This latter is another term that can be used to describe non-textual and non-material ways of cultural production. However once again this terminology has its pitfalls, especially among those communities which are more affected by the safeguarding of this heritage.[5]

For these reasons, the use of folklore in my creative writing made me question how my Palestinian identity is formed in the first place, and which role I was playing in simply taking traditional forms and inserting them in my own writing. The work on folklore and my second fieldtrip highlighted a sense of inadequacy both as a writer and in front of my material. I decided, thus, to track back the themes of inadequacy and identity-formation to see if I could find seeds of these areas in the first stages of my inquiry. I indeed found some related recurrent doubts and expressions. Since the beginning:

- I have defined my book as a quest, actually as a *triple quest* – for Palestine in its historical dimension, for the meanings of Palestinian identity, and for my mother's story as an Italian woman in Palestine.

[4] "At the Washington conference in 1999,29 a commonly voiced criticism of the Recommendation was the inappropriateness of the use of the term "folklore" to describe the range of cultural heritage for safeguarding. Indigenous peoples regard it as a term that demeans their traditional cultural heritage and does not accurately describe it." (Blake 2001: 7)

[5] For an interesting view on this issue and on the concrete steps UNESCO is taking to deal with Intangible cultural Heritage please see Taylor 2003: 23-24.

- I have been interested in identifying the best narrative discourse to represent Palestine and my story. I have also been concerned about the power dynamics inside language and creative writing itself when telling the stories of minorities and marginalised communities. In particular, I was trying to find a solution for the inadequacy of what Pratt calls the 'monarch-of-all-I-survey' attitude, defined as the perpetuation of imperial rhetoric through narrative (2008: 197-204). In first-person narratives, the equivalent of this perpetuation is the pretension to give an authorial account of the incoherent otherness opposed to the coherent *I*.
- Finally, and linked with the previous point, I have always felt a sense of inadequacy in narrating painful personal and collective moments from my individual viewpoint.

The sense of inadequacy, therefore, came first and foremost from the narrative form itself, from the first-person narration to the power dynamics perpetuated by language; this in particular caused a sense of inadequacy regarding the use of the English language to narrate events that happens in other languages and cultures. I also felt my own inadequacy of writing in English as a second language; finally there was an inadequacy felt towards writing itself as a medium to communicate both individual and collective traumatic experiences.

In light of this progression, I was able to rephrase my main research question as follows:

Which forms and techniques of narrative can enable the writer to negotiate between the particularity and contingency of the personal and the historicity of communal identities, while guarding against homogenization and archetypal representation?

This question can be divided into three sub-questions:

- Which narrative techniques can be used in creative non-fiction to avoid the monarch-of-all-I-survey effect and instead create a narrative partly rooted in community meaning-making?
- Which writing process can be used to avoid the objectification of identities on the page? And especially how can transnational writers represent the ongoing interplay of identities in the fixity of narrative?
- Finally, how can a narrative of personal trauma help the writer represent communal trauma and vice versa?

By communal trauma I mean a trauma that due to historical, political, and social circumstances is experienced by a whole community. In my particular case, this is represented by the ongoing ethnic cleansing and land dispossession of the Palestinian people.

3. The definition of performative and its applicability

While trying to push forward my research and find frames more suitable than folklore, I read *Oral Traditions of Naqab Bedouin Women* (2016) by Richter-Devroe. It was for me a theoretical game changer because I discovered the concept of performative knowledge in relation to the Palestinian current situation. Richter-Devroe defines the performative as the "role that oral, sonic, and embodied performances play in constituting individual and communal identities" (2016: 41) and then, quoting Clifford, she adds: "less a matter of preserving traditions for the salvage 'record' than of enacting them in new social contexts – a new gathering self in a mode of engagement" (2013: 17 as quoted in Richter-Devroe 2016:41)

This definition allowed me to better align my areas of exploration, especially linking *individual and communal identities* against objectification (*record*) and towards constant *engagement*. My way to such an approach came from an

investigation into personal memoirs. I was curious to see how this genre could take into account the being of the self as part of an intergenerational and communal experience. I was especially concerned about how memoirs can become a tool of revindication and reassertion for those whose identities are the target of settler colonialism and ethnic cleansing. This scenario is further complicated by my transnationality: being in between a Western-Italian and an Arab-Palestinian identity created interesting internal dynamics that the genre of memoir could work with.

One of the reasons why folktales and folklore didn't work as part of my practice-as-research process is because they failed to account for the practices of everyday life, to quote the famous work of De Certeau (1984). As I said, nowadays folktales are rarely told in households and most folkloric traditions are indeed seen as folkloric, something to preserve rather than to embody. What I wanted instead was something that could describe those rituals and habits that are practised every day. In other words, I wanted to find a category that could help me interpret what makes up my Palestinian identity on a daily basis, how this identity is communal, and how shared aspects are transmitted across space and time.

The performative as interpreted by Taylor (2003) seems to do exactly that: it becomes a "category of everydayness" (Harrotunian 2004: 181). Following this interpretative line, performative and everydayness can be seen as what happens in the realm of the ordinary, "from the workday to the evening, from cooking to legends and gossip, from the devices of lived history to those of history retold" (De Certeau 1984: 78), and all those "non-verbal practices – such as dance, ritual, and cooking, to name a few – that long served to preserve a sense of communal identity and memory" (Taylor 2003: 18).[6]

[6] In this regard the concept of habitus as devised by Pierre Bourdieu may result useful. Bourdieu defines habitus in various places and ways (see for example Bourdieu 2005: 43). I find useful the following definition:
"the countless minute choices, perfectly improvised and perfectly necessary, that one is able to operate instantaneously at every moment of life and whose achieved product one discovers, at the end, almost

Performative knowledge is part of what Taylor (2003) calls the repertoire. The repertoire exists not against, but as a different set from what is intended as the archive.

But what is the archive?

Taylor (2003) defines archive as follows:

> Archival memory exists as documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archaeological remains, bones, videos, films, cds, all those items supposedly resistant to change. […] we might conclude that the archival, from the beginning, sustains power. (19)

For the archive, writing, the ability to make something textual, to make something collectible, is considered the highest strategy:

> The mastery of language guarantees and isolates a new power, a "bourgeois" power, that of making history and fabricating languages. (De Certeau 1984: 139)

This connection of writing and power demonstrates how the archive was born and grew together with political and economic systems that benefit from it: the ideology supporting nation-state and capitalist enterprises.[7]

This connection becomes even more dangerous when applied in a context of colonialist conquest: writing and the writing of history then became a proof of superiority, on the premises that the colonised groups did not have a good-enough system of knowledge. Not only that, but western writing also allowed the colonisers to present themselves as saviours, coming to rescue the inferior society, which was bound to disappear unless the coloniser created textual evidence.

So, the famous saying that history is written by the victor should rather be: the victor is made by the writing.

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like a spectator" (Bourdieu 2005: 48). It is interesting for the scope of this thesis that Bourdieu uses this second definition of habitus in relation to artistic practice.

[7] Interesting also the role of printing, see: Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 309-310.

The archive creates and is created by dynamics of power, and it serves the creation of historical narratives that favour the myth of the nation-state, the colonial conquest, and the economic system.

Those who are left out from this history are those who do not fit: minorities, vulnerable groups, indigenous people, women, queers, and so on (De Certeau 1984: 59).

It is not by accident that the research fields interested in these marginalised groups were the first to recognise the importance of the performative: it was mainly in the everyday space that they could find alternative sources to start building and revindicating their histories.

The everyday has often become a place for resistance, that is, a place where those same minorities started to carry out and practice their agency: in front of the political power and domination that often dismisses their original culture and substitutes it with 'acceptable' forms, the performative becomes "an optic through which to account for the experience of a phenomenal present, as such, rather than resort to the 'knowledge' offered by an historical representation of the past." (Harootunian 2004: 182)

The place – both physical and historical – left to marginalised groups has many similarities with the space left to everydayness and the performative. The acts of everyday life and performative are not specific to marginalised groups, but they become particularly interesting as an analytical and epistemological tool for these groups because they resonate with that condition.

To exemplify this and to delve deeper into the aim of this thesis, I am going to analyse the specific case of Palestine. I am going to use the work of those scholars who, especially in the last fifteen years, have given more and more attention to the category of everydayness to analyse Palestinian history.

Finally, the performative is an interesting term not only for my contextual framework but also for my creative practice:

> Performance carries the possibility of challenge, even self-challenge, within it. As a term simultaneously connoting a process, a praxis, an episteme, a mode of transmission, an accomplishment, a means of intervening in the world, it far exceeds the possibilities of these other words offered in its place. (Taylor 2003: 15)

In other words, the idea of performative as exemplified by Taylor became a way for me to link the material I was working with and the way I was working with it – the what with the how – making it particularly interesting for practice-based research.

In order to do that I identified four characteristics that could connect the definition of performative with the Palestinian context and finally with the process of creative writing.

- **Presence**

One way to look at the everyday/performative is through its presence. This presence is seen as both temporal – being in the present – and physical – being present, taking part in something. The former meaning refers to the fact that this performative knowledge needs to be happening, needs to be in progress, and needs to be *en*-acted to be acknowledged and absorbed. In this regard, the everyday can be defined "the spectacle of the present" (Harootunian 2004, 182), as opposed to a narrative of the past, which instead needs to be completed, concluded, to be interpretable and intelligible. To reiterate its unfolding in the now, its openness to the contemporaneity of the surrounding, this category of knowledge is often adjectivized with words like *living, becoming, in-vivo, live* (See Jayyusi 2007).

On the other side, the physical attribute of presence identifies the bearer and the transmitter of the embodiment: "people participate in the production and the

reproduction of knowledge by "being there", being part of the transmission." (Taylor 2003: 20)

Here the term embodiment is probably more effective because it focuses on the presence of a body, on the presence of *some*-body as an essential moment in the creation of knowledge.

De Certeau explains this connection between the everyday and presence by comparing it to the enunciation in speaking acts and by identifying four elements as foundational: two of them are the presence of an interlocutor and the "establishment of a *present* through the act of the 'I' who speaks" (De Certeau 1984: 33, emphasis in the original text).

Connected to these ideas is Judith Butler's concept of the performative as a way of coming into being "by virtue of this fundamental dependency on the address of the Other" (1997: 5).

For all these reasons, the performative is considered a way of being rather than a way of knowing. However, this distinction needs to be clarified, otherwise it risks undermining at its core the importance of this concept. It is essential to understand that the performative is both ontic and epistemic, but it is epistemic because it is ontic, and, in opposition to the traditional concept of theoretical knowledge, it cannot ever be only epistemic: it needs to be lived to be known and become constitutive knowledge.

As we have seen through the words of Harootunian, groups left out from the mainstream of nation-state formation, need to deal with ways "to account for the experience of a phenomenal present." Since they do not belong to the finished neat dominion of the past, histories of marginalised and other vulnerable groups are usually still unfolding, unclosed.

This is for sure the case for Palestine, where the question of presence perfectly aligns with the double sense of being present, meant as taking part in something (in space) and being in the present (in time).

The importance of the presence on the land is at the base of the Palestinian struggle against settler-colonialism: as this presence is constantly put into doubt, threatened, and literally put under occupation, Palestinians have to constantly find ways of reasserting it.

Being in the present, on the other hand, underlines the impossibility of having a neat past narrative and is linked to the unfolding situation which is still influenced by past events. This is also due to the non-recognition of these events by both the displacing nation-state power, and also by the international public opinion for which these events do not constitute the *common knowledge* of history. *Iterability, Cumulativity, and Presence* by Lena Jayyusi (2007) is extremely useful for anyone seeing to understand this situation of the always-present and to see the present as a fertile historical category to explore:

> Sites of experience and temporal events were reconnected into a living narrative, which continues to reconstitute the salience of the past in the fabric of the present. Palestinian memory and its narratives, then, have to be located relationally in this unfolding context (110)

The past is not closed for those who are still living it and are still dealing with its consequences. Therefore, the present becomes not only the condition of the here and now, but also the lenses through which one can look at the unresolved past.

For this reason, many Palestinians refuse to consign their memories to the archive, for this would entail accepting the situation as something fixed and unchangeable, as well as entrusting their story to a place of power from which they are excluded.

> Elders sometimes actively resisted speaking about the past. In certain cases this resistance seemed connected to a residual fear that committing memories of pre-1948 Palestine to the historical record was in some way to recognize

> them as past and over, imposing finality on a story still unfolding and unresolved. […] By extension, he also implicitly questions the project of archive – the unequal power relations and imperial logics and complicities it instantiates, and the conceit that documenting histories of dispossession can bring justice for victims, or alleviate suffering.[8] (Allan 2018: 75-76)

Therefore, being in the present and being present remains the only form of agency and history-building available. The present becomes a "double present: the everyday and the historic, each recoverable from the other." (Jayyusi 2007: 130)

I believe memoirs offer a good place to experiment with this double dimension. In my writing, the work with memories and the account of the past were never a way to dwell in nostalgia. Instead, as the double narrative line of present and past shows – and that I will explain in more detail later – the memoir became a genre to experiment with, in order to find the intersecting points between the everyday present and the historic present and look at how the two influence each other.

Presence is an essential part of the process of creative writing. This may seem self-explanatory, but it has a deeper implication if we look at creative writing as an embodied practice. This means that writing requires to be situated. Writing is situated in the "experiential moment" (Langellier and Peterson 2004: 3) of the writers-tellers who experience for themselves, or observe experience, or trace back to their experience, the material with which they are working, in a process of taking and making (Langellier and Peterson 2004: 3). However, writing is especially situated in specific contexts and constraints where the creation take place, from language to medium, from historical events to cultural habits. In this regard, the process of storytelling is both present through experience and through the influence of the environment. So creative writing requires presence to be produced and is, then,

[8] See also Sayigh 2007:153: "The Nakba […] generates new catastrophes that scar each succeeding generation afresh. It cannot be separated from what happened afterword: to view it as an event, recorded and classified, would be to mask its meaning as a continuing predicament."

interpreted by the presence of the readers who will read the text through the lenses of their own experience and context.[9]

- **Againness**

Contrary to the unique events of history, that need to be learned and known exactly for their uniqueness, the everyday becomes familiar and knowledgeable for its repetitiveness. This quality has nothing to do with the scientific need of reproducibility and replicability which evaluates its success in the ability of reproducing the same results. Instead, the everyday is successful when it does the exact opposite, that is when each repetition gives way to a refraction of differences.

This is the concept of againness as explained by Taylor (2003):

> Multiple forms of embodied acts are always present, though in a constant state of againness. They reconstitute themselves, transmitting communal memories, histories, and values from one group/generation to the next. (21)

Repetition is a characteristic of everyday knowledge not only as a way of transmission and communication, but also as a way of remaining.

In fact, despite the debates about the ephemerality of performance and performance as disappearance (Schneider 2001, Muñoz 1996), I agree with Rebecca Schneider that "performance becomes itself through reappearance, challenging, via the performance trace, any neat antinomy between appearance and disappearance." (2001:103)

Disappearance is another important concept to keep in mind when looking at the history of folklore first and performative knowledge and everydayness after. The fear of loss of traditional, popular customs is the starting point of folklore as a discipline (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 300), and it serves to put the performative in

[9] Differently from the type of presence of performative knowledge, the presence of the two sides of the writing-performance do not need to be contemporary – present at the same time – to allow transmission.

antithetic position with what instead stays: archival sources. The connection of performative knowledge with its disappearance served to undermine the reliability of the field in contrast to more official knowledge.

Finally, againness is essential in Butler's performative: thanks to the possibility of repetition, "that is at once a reformulation" (1997: 87), the subject can perform agency. This gives an idea of how Butler's performative stands as antidote against essentialism: for Butler, the performative, through the capacity of reformulation, allows for repossession and reinterpretation of imposed identities and enables the subject to perform a more open individuality against fixed categories.[10] In other words, repetitions become a way of transmission and identity-formation as well as affirmation.

This is an important concept for my attempt to understand the effects of both personal and communal trauma. In Palestinian history, events like the Nakba, the Naksa, the first Intifada, the second Intifada, and the attacks on Gaza hit generation after generation, creating a sense of collective identity. On top of that, repeated expropriations, arrests, checkpoints, and abuses shape the day-to-day life and create an embodied knowledge out of historical circumstances.

Again, in the words of Jayyusi (2007):

> The complex figure of iteration, repetition of the *same/different* produces the pattern of ramifiability of a condition that reproduces itself within every dimension of individual and collective life. (116)

The repetition of trauma, however, allows for performative iterability and therefore becomes a tactic against disappearance and a way to keep the community together in space but also in time through intergenerational againness.[11]

[10] "In this sense the social performative is a crucial part not only of subject formation but of the ongoing political contestation and reformulation of the subject as well." (Butler 1997: 159)

[11] See Allan 2018: 82: "These narratives suggest a historicity not linear but recursive and open-ended. As with many other sites of (post-)colonial study, Palestinian pasts demand 'recursive analytics'"

In my book I interpret and use repetition in various ways. For example, we will see how repetition of scenes serve to demonstrate how embodied knowledge is passed through generations.

Repetitions of sentences and expressions, instead, are used to recreate the ongoing abuses that the Palestinians are facing again and again. An example of this is in the airport scenes (Chapter 15 and Epilogue) where the same questions are asked multiple times:

> The new black-dressed woman started asking me the same questions, exactly the same, in the same order. What's your name? What's the name of your father? Of your mother? How old are you? Why are you here? How long do you plan to stay here? What is your address? Your email? Your phone number? The man in this picture came two years ago: is he your brother? Is the man in this photo your uncle? Where were you born? (pp. 303-304, but see also p.302, 321,323)

These questions push the person to declare an identity not only in line with what is expected from them, but in line with past generations of family and community. On the other hand, despite trying to encapsulate the Palestinian identity in a specific category, these questions give the possibility of exercising resistance using them to constitute a different sense of self and build a place for community making.

This concept of againness and repetition is also important for understanding the recursive nature of creative practice: it requires re-enacting and revisiting both as representation and reproduction of an experience on the page, and as part of the process of composition itself.

The writer reembodies the experience of what they want to communicate by "occasioning it" (Langellier and Peterson 2004: 13) through writing. This is an act of interpretation of reality, but it is mainly an act of meaning-making through reliving: through the present process of writing (but also of reading) I can bring back through

the lenses of this moment not only previous moments of my life, but an insight on other lives' moments.

> […]it is at the heart of my present that I find the meaning of those presents which preceded it, and that I find the means of understanding others' presence at the same world (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 97 as quoted in Langellier and Peterson 2004: 17)

Notice in this quotation the expression *presents which preceded it* instead of *past.* This emphasises the element of presence and recurring presence both as a place of practice and as an always unfolding content.

As part of the process of writing, againness can be interpreted through Robin Nelson's model of art praxis (2013) as well as Nicola Boyd's strange loops (2009), for which creative practice develops not linearly but as a self-repeating spiral where different stages of knowledge keep repeating themselves to reach a new stage from which the process will start again.

- **Non-textuality**

We saw that performative knowledge requires presence to be attained; however, presence only is not enough. Performative knowledge needs repetition; that is, it needs a recurrent presence. This indicates that the meaning of performative knowledge becomes available to its audience only if the audience is a constant part of the system that creates and is created by the performance. This is a matter of positionality. The producers of the performative meaning or of the everyday tactics are also its receivers and its transmitters. We can see here how performative knowledge is an essential part of communal identity building, and therefore is hardly accessible and translatable outside of the community itself.

The problem of accessibility is strictly linked with the problem of translatability and transcription. Performative knowledge and the everyday are never written. They can take place in the dominion of language, like many forms of oral

traditions,[12] but most everyday acts are non-textual; they are indeed embodied – like cooking, dancing, but also ways of moving and walking, as well as connections with the environment and objects that use all the senses.

This untranslatability is often considered the weakness of performative knowledge, the base of its unreliability and one of the reasons for its "disappearance".

However, this low accessibility, together with againness, becomes a place for agency. The non-textuality and the untranslatability give to everyday practices their ability to be inserted undetected into different systems of powers and thus their potential as place of resistance.[13]

I have already shown how among Palestinians, especially among elders, there is often a mistrust towards the writing of stories and archival projects; this is because putting into the dominion of the text their lived experience means consigning it to the past and putting it under the control of a fixed narrative.[14]

Not only that, but in the Palestinian case, being in and embodying their surroundings is one of the strongest proofs of their right to the land against the settler-colonialist propaganda. Diana Allan (2018) explains this cleverly by quoting Darwish, but in the words of Darwish himself:

> Your awareness of the need for proof of the history of a rock and your ability to manufacture proof does not give you priority of belonging vis-à-vis someone who can tell when the rains will come from the smell of that rock. For you that rock is an intellectual exercise, but for its owner it is a roof and a wall. And a rock is not a rock when it can change into a totem that you can carry in your bag and bring out as a demonstration in your lecture. (2010: 39)

[12] It is not by accident that it is exactly from these oral textual forms that disciplines like folklore and ethnographic studies, as well as methodologies like oral history, start their works of transcribing, categorising and archiving. (De Certeau 1984: 160-161 and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 309-310)

[13] Very interesting the cases described by Diana Taylor about the indigenous Indians re-enacting their performative knowledge inside the imposed rules of colonial power (Taylor 2003: 30-31 and 41-43).

Also, very poignant the image of everyday practices as "a subtle 'art' of 'renters' (De Certeau, 1984: xxii)

[14] On the danger of archiving the embodied knowledge of the Palestinian communities please see Richter-Devroe (2016).

The connection with the everyday life is even more important because it is not textual and therefore it cannot be archived, copied, stolen, or forged. For this same reason it also harder to control and thus can offer the space for resistance. The non-textuality makes the performative and the everyday

> both more difficult to censor and harder to decipher for colonialist powers. With their 'repertoire' the oppressed and colonised are able to evade colonial or state censorship more easily than they could with fixed written sources (Richter-Devroe 2016: 49).

In my creative writing I have often felt a further inadequacy in the act of writing down, of making textual, mine and my community's embodied experience. Therefore, for me it became essential to find a way of writing to balance the tension between my need to tell my family's story and my desire to "shield the gesture and the illegible from the hunger to capture, acquire, incorporate" (Allan 2018: 82).

The characteristic of non-textuality is harder to associate with creative writing. Here, however I am looking at the process of the creative writing practice and not at its product that is undeniably textual.

The non-textuality goes hand in hand with the problem of accessibility. Webb and Donna Lee Brien (2010) come back many times on this point, talking about artistic "unarticulated knowledge" that "goes missing in translation" (186) and characterised by a "non-transparent nature" (191).

Unarticulated, missing in translation, non-transparent. All this terminology connects on one more ground the creative writing practice to the performative.

The research journey in creative practice is often associated with the image of an iceberg where the textual is the surfacing part, but what constitutes the biggest chunk of the work remains undetected under water.

- **Ambiguity and the importance of pleasure**

"As a constant evolving but culturally-specific episteme, embodied, performed and oral tradition contain a certain informality and ambiguity." (Richter-Devroe 2016: 48)

These qualities of informality and ambiguity are connected to the untranslatability and the open repetition of againness, and they are the reason why performative knowledge has been sometimes associated with the unconscious, as a place characterised by the same qualities.

> As theories of trauma and repetition might also instruct us, it is not *presence* that appears in performance but precisely the missed encounter – the reverberations of the overlooked, the missed, the repressed, the seemingly forgotten" (Schneider 2001: 104. Emphasis in the original).

Also Harootunian (2004) defines the everyday as "returned of the repressed" (186), and even "cultural unconscious" (193).

However, this focus on the unconscious as the place of performative production creates a problem with the concept of agency, which is extremely important for the everydayness.[15]

For this reason, the idea of ambiguity provides a more useful approach to the task of delineating the epistemological power of performative knowledge: ambiguity and informality help the everyday to cope with a hostile system and escape censorship; morever, the often gratuitous and playful nature of performative acts does not diminish their intentionality, but rather strengthens it.

In *What Bodies Remember*, Diana Allan looks at how the Palestinian relation to the past stands on a position of ambiguity between unconscious and conscious, typical of the everydayness:

> The reproduction of the past through bodily practice, which records its own history of sensation separately from the mind, can be knowing or unconscious, explicit or implicit. (Allan 2018: 77)

[15] See for example Salih 2017: 743 where the author uses expressions like "*other than* conscious knowledge" and "beyond the realm of knowing" without clarifying the space of this realm.

It is in this in-betweenness that the agency of the performative takes place. This is particularly true for Palestine: when the everyday is not only the sole allowed place for flexibility, but is also a place constantly under attack, practices of everyday life become acts of resistance (Pappe 2018: 165).

Once again, we need to understand that the power of the everydayness as a place of resistance exists only in the oscillation between intentionality and unintentionality: the disruptive takes its strength not from the political agenda, but from the gratuitousness, the pleasure, the informalities of this practice. The question of pleasure is a very important one, as its affirmation can become a very disruptive force:

> If what is at stake in Palestine today is the very possibility of life itself and the ability of Palestinians to exercise control over their colonised bodies and spaces of everyday life, then the affirmation not only of death but also of life and pleasure becomes a meaningful aspect of the Palestinian struggle. (Junka 2006: 422 as quoted in Richter-Devroe 2011: 41)

This invites us to rethink the importance of what is usually considered trivial details in the equilibrium of a creative writing page. For example, the long descriptions of food and recipes, which are disseminated all through *Wait for Her*, would have no sense outside a recipe book or a food memoir. However, here they acquire meaning as an emotional affirmation of simple existence whose triviality is the higher ground for agency and resistance.

Palestinians see their everyday life being repetitively attacked and their present/presence threatened through the system of settler-colonialism. It is in their affirmation of this everyday that Palestinians challenge the imposed narrative, and

this affirmation is stronger as it revindicates the everyday not as political space, but simply as the right to pleasure.[16]

When it comes to writing practice, creative inspiration has been often associated with the concept of the unconscious. It is a tempting association, not only because the unconscious still offers that unexplored place that cannot be explained, but it also perpetuates that dichotomy for which the artistic creation pertains to the illogical.

As for the performative, this simplification undermines the writer's intentions as well as the importance of other spheres of influence, like the presence in a specific historical and cultural context.

Once again, this relation with the unconscious should be shifted.[17] The ambiguity that characterises the everyday better describes the creative practice too, and provide it with a larger space for interpretation and therefore agency.

Moreover, the writer at the desk performs writing not only as an intellectual exercise, but as an intellectual exercise situated in a body: thus, an embodied knowledge takes part in the creation and through that, other embodied experiences come back to the page from the realm of the non-textual.

Creative writing is therefore a performative practice, but it has a textual output, and not only textual – as oral tales, songs and proverbs may have – but written. I argue that it is in this paradox, in this peculiarity of being a performative act with an archival output, that creative writing can become a methodology for exploring the category of the everyday and reclosing the dichotomy between mind-body and repertoire-archive.

[16] Interesting in this regard the warning against analysing every performative practice as a place of resistance, and to instead looking at it as a "Diagnostic of power" (Salih and Richter-Devroe 2014: 13)

[17] I suggest talking not about an illogical unconscious, but about an alternative logic: to be more precise a symmetric logic as explained by Matte Blanco (1981).

This is not a new idea,[18] but as a creative writing practitioner myself and as a practice-led researcher I can bring to the table an insider perspective and give examples of how this double nature worked in my own writing practice.

This place of in-betweenness is thoroughly explored by Webb and Lee Brien in *Addressing the 'Ancient Quarrel': Creative Writing and Research* (2010), a study completely dedicated to the space of creative writing research between traditional academia and artistic practice:

> A bowerbird, in other words, is a researcher capable of drawing data and ideas together from across fields and disciplines to find harmonies and synergies, and to combine them in a manner that produces not only a satisfying and resolved creative artefact, but a fresh way of understanding those points of connection and their wider implications and applications. (199)

The practice of creative writing sits in the middle as a *fresh way of understanding* the performative.

4. Application of the performative to the methodology

The four characteristics as explained above enter both the material of my writing and my methodology. On the content side, performative elements that are part of the "embodied habitus" (Allan 2018: 78) of Palestinian everydayness, permeate the narrative in many different capacities: in the next chapter I will explain as an example the use of food. In my writing process, instead, I started by noticing those moments in which the performance of writing allowed me to understand better my own and my community's performative identity, and how this understanding was taken into and reworked through the practice of writing.

[18] Creative writing and narrative as a middle ground between the archive and the repertoire has already been suggested by De Certeau (1984): "Narration does indeed have a content, but it also belongs to the art of making a coup […] something in narration escapes the order of what it is sufficient or necessary to know, and, in its characteristics, concern the style of tactics." (79. Emphasis in the original)

To answer my research questions, I needed to find a way to observe when moments of presence, againness, non-textuality and pleasure allowed for the emergence of a writing decision that could offer a solution or at least a different way to look at the issue. In order to do that I combined Robert Nelson's model of art praxis (2013: 37) with the idea of "position of enunciation" (Haseman and Mafe 2009: 219), which I interpret as moments of decision-making.

Nelson's model is divided in three stages:

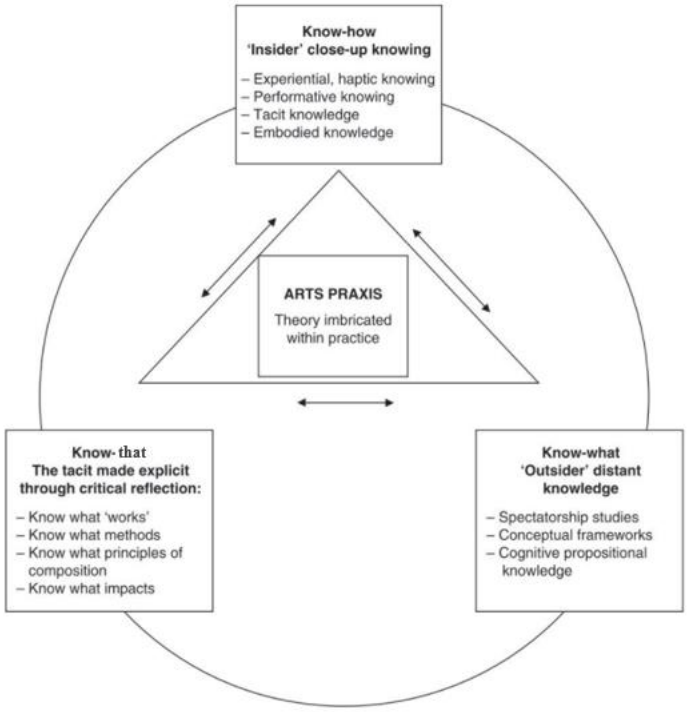

Figure 1: Nelson, R., 2013, Modes of Knowing: Multi-mode Epistemological Model for PaR

The know-how is the stage of the performative, tacit, embodied knowledge. The know-what deals with theoretical frameworks and previous knowledge. The know-that is the stage where the performative practice through theoretical reflection allows for the identification of meaning-making moments and creation of new

knowledge. These three stages however are not linear; most of the time they happen concurrently and most importantly the know-that doesn't mark the end of the process, but simply a new starting point in a cycle that repeats itself (againness) in order to keep generating.

In my project the know-how corresponds to the moments of free writing and fieldwork: I experiment through my presence at the desk, on the page and on the land, the performative of my identity as an Italian-Palestinian transnational writer. I try to live this presence without further consideration but simply noticing moments of pleasure and moments of uneasiness. The know-what then puts that raw experience into the larger context: this is where the theoretical reading, interviews, and creative reading take place. This is also the moment of reflection when I try to relook and reinterpret the lived experience through the contextual lenses by keeping a journal of practice. The know-that is the new stage of writing, where I can take back those moments of pleasure and unpleasantness and rework them in light of the readings and reflection. Once again, this moment is not the last. In fact, most of the time the experience of rewriting brings new embodied knowledge to the surface that needs to be refed into the cycle.

Here, I am using terminology borrowed from other disciplines and that therefore requires further clarification. When I talk about fieldwork, I mean a type of research associated with my creative writing practice. Despite being aware of and using some of the tools and techniques associated with ethnographic fieldwork - like interviewing, recording, observant participation, and so on - and despite having applied for, obtained and adhered to ethical clearance, the main purpose of my presence on the field was to refamiliarize myself with my relatives, my identities, my memories and my mother's stories. It is true that some of the material for this thesis come from more structured and official interviews; however, most of the fabric of my narrative and my research comes from spontaneous, unrecorded private

conversations, informal moments with my family and friends, fortuitous encounters, and experiences in the routine of my daily life in Palestine and Italy.

More specifically, when I talk about fieldwork, I refer to two main fieldtrips which took place for 1 month and 15 days from July to August in 2018 and for two months and 10 days from June to August in 2019 in the West Bank.[19]

I spent the first trip mainly in Bethlehem and the second one mostly in the area of Ramallah and Birzeit.[20]

The difference between fieldwork for Creative Writing, especially creative non-fiction, and ethnographic fieldwork, can be quite subtle. Afterall both fieldworks are born from the need to fully understand and immerse oneself, both are dealing with finding a balance between observation and participation, and both deal with the negotiation of the writer/researcher's positionality.

Kim Fortum writes about the relation between fieldwork and writing in ethnographic studies: "The prospect of writing can orient without determining our inquiries" (2010: xii). This is the main difference with a creative writing fieldwork: in creative writing the writing does indeed determine our inquiries.

This difference can be seen in the journal of practice. When I refer to journal of practice, I do not intend a fieldwork diary, but rather the working tool common to many artistic disciplines. This is quite hard to define as each writer-artist shapes their own diary in their own way, but usually we speak of a space where, yes, there are

[19] I have also conducted shorter and more informal research in Italy. As it was more common for me to travel to Italy for private as well as for research matters, it was hard to distinguish when a family visit stopped and the investigation started. This also helps to better clarify the nature of creative writing fieldwork, as a space which is at the same time deeply personal and deeply entangled with the writing practice.

[20] During the first one, I interviewed folklorists and people considered by the community as bearers of traditional performative knowledge. These interviews were semi-structured and focused on people's knowledge of folktales and more generally folklore in relation to historical events. They were recorded, but not transcribed. Interviewees were given the right to withdraw their contribution until May 2020.

The second fieldwork, due to the development of my practice and research, didn't include any planned or recorded interviews. This second fieldwork was clearly shaped towards helping my creative writing practice.

observations about the surrounding environment, interviews etc., but there are also sketches and drafts of pieces, editing and re-editing of the same sentences, personal life insights, frustrations on delayed work, annotations on other artists' works, and also more random notes like phone calls, text messages, and shopping lists: anything that has influenced one own's creativity in that period. The other difference is that a journal of practice does not end when the fieldwork ends. A journal of practice is ongoing and can last for the span of a project or uninterrupted for several years.

When I talk of fieldwork or journal of practice in the analysis of my research, I therefore indicate something that is slightly informed by ethnographic and oral history's methodologies, but that primarily is highly embedded in the creative writing practice.

If I look at the progress of my PhD through the cycle of art praxis, I can summarise my process as follows: in my first phase of focus on folktales both my writing experience and my fieldwork reach a roadblock. Theoretical research and reflection confirm that folktales are not the best tools to answer my inquiries. Moreover, in the journal of practice of my fieldwork new elements start to emerge: food is prominent, but also sonic components are important; above everything there is the shock of remoulding my Palestinian identity inside my community through daily routines and the experience of the occupation. This pushes me to veer towards folklore, hoping to offer a more flexible category to my practice. My phase two therefore opens with some writing that tries to incorporate various folkloric elements. Again, the presence on the land shakes the work. In my theoretical reading I finally bump into the idea of performative knowledge connected to the Palestinian condition. In my second fieldwork, despite focusing on archival work on folklore, my writing still does not find a way to answer my research questions. Instead, my free writing is influenced by daily life among family and community. In my journal of that period my style as a writer and my identity start to merge by paying attention

to my embodied experience. The performative is now offering a theoretical framework as much as a creative content. In my last stage I try to implement the idea of performative in my practice. Through exercises of free writing, by paying close attention to feelings and reactions in my writing, by reliving moments of my family and community life through the writing and rewriting of the same scenes and motifs, and by a close attention to the performative value of language, I finally pin down techniques that can offer a viewing platform to the issues I have encountered since the beginning of my research: the inadequacy of the first-person narrator, the uneasiness towards the objectification of identity through narrative, and a need to connect personal and communal trauma.

Analysis of Techniques

So far I have tried to delineate a framework that could put together performative knowledge and identity, an interpretation of the Palestinian historical situation, and an approach to the process of creative writing.

In this section I am going to analyse the moments of impasse in my writing. I will then observe if and when presence, againness, non-textual, and pleasure elements helped me find a way out and propose a possible solution. In order to do that I will look at first drafts and notes of my creative writing (know-how); then I will bring in those readings and experiences that enlarged my understanding and check my reflections through my journal of practice (know-what);[21] finally, I will analyse my final draft to see how the process of art praxis and decision-making has been enhanced by an attention to the performative (know-that).

Through this methodology I identified four main techniques that distinguish my poetics.

- A metanarrative adoption of fiction and non-fiction.
- Third-person narration used to compensate for the inadequacies of first-person narration and the monarch-of-all-I-survey.
- The role of performative elements, especially food.
- The use of multiple languages.

All these techniques helped me cope with the sense of inadequacy, identity loss, and personal and historical grief that have shaped my writing since the beginning.

[21] It often happens in creative writing scholarship that a small canon of two or three texts is taken into consideration as a reference for similar style and/or material. In my process however, I never felt like I was able to put together such a canon, but I rather traced different strands of influence.

Waiting for Anna

These techniques are disseminated all through my work and they do not emerge at any specific moment. For this reason, I found it hard at first to select any excerpt that could help me exemplify a moment of decision-making. However, rereading my journal of practice, I realised that the creation of the character of Anna stands at the core of my writing: the development of my relationship with this character is what helped overcome difficulties when dealing with the dichotomies fiction/non-fiction and third-person/first-person.

As explained in the previous section, my sense of inadequacy towards using the first person has haunted my writing since the beginning: on one side it was mainly an emotional difficulty. I found it hard to narrate my mother's life from the daughter's viewpoint and I didn't feel comfortable enough in disclosing certain details of her story. The same applied to other situations and members of my family: I felt that I didn't know enough to write this memoir and that I needed my family's confirmation and approval for each sentence. On the other side, it was a stylistic problem, as there was a directness in my first-person voice that didn't help me convey the nuances and complexities of my material.

Three months into my research I wrote in my journal of practice:

> I think my major problem at the moment is that I can't approach my topic directly. I don't really want to talk about Palestine, not directly at least. This is why I thought about folktales. But it is still early for it. I kind of need to make peace, reconcile with my Palestinian identity before being able to write about it. Not mentioning making peace with my mother. Especially my mother's past. It bothers me so much that I don't know almost anything about it. And I don't feel ready to ask others about it. I want to know, but from her or from an omniscient narrator (11/01/2018)

This paragraph outlines many of the tensions and problems that I have kept encountering during my project: the unease of a plain non-fiction narration, the idea of other forms of storytelling (folktales) to deal with the unease, a sort of equation

between my sense of loss for a Palestinian identity and for my mother, the phantom of not knowing enough of either, and finally a need for alternative ways of knowing.

As a way to answer to these needs, I wrote down my first paragraphs moving from a first person-narrative and referring to "my mother" to a third-person narrator using "she". The material was however still approached with a sort of chronicle style, moving from one event to the other very quickly because I didn't know how to deal with the spaces left empty by what I didn't know and couldn't recover from other sources.

Look for example at the difference between the first draft about the importance of religion in my mother's village:

> Religion entered into her life in many different, traumatizing ways. This was not so surprising in a little village in Italy in the 60s, where there were more cathedrals, churches, and seminaries than shops (03/2018)

And the sentence now in the final version:

> Religion often added to the tension and Anna was living the conflict directly at home, where the battle was fought by two women. (p. 18)

As it has been explained in the previous section and it is confirmed by the journal paragraph quoted above, folktales were my first idea of covering those gaps in knowledge. I explained the reasons why I decided to abandon them due to theoretical developments during my fieldtrip, but the problem was also a problem of creative practice. From my journal:

> How to integrate the use of folktales? I am already disappointed by it. It is more an excuse to incorporate fiction inside my memories because I don't know much about my subject. (16/01/2018)

The idea of having a fictional dimension became more and more alluring, but I was still cautious about how to create it and how to use it due to the delicate material I was working on. I started to read books that could help me finding my way, like *Running in the Family* by Michael Ondaatje for its experimental non-fiction writing,

and *My Damascus* by Suad Amiry for its use of irony and for a background similar to mine.

Both of these transnational memoirs play across the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, but then it seems that there is an urge to address such trespassing as a sort of after-the-deed justification in the acknowledgements.

Ondaatje:

> While all the names may give an air of authenticity, I must confess that the book is not a history but a portrait or 'gesture'. And if those listed above disapprove of the fictional air I apologize and only say that in Sri Lanka a well-told lie is worth a thousand facts. (2009: 232)

Amiry:

> In other words/I do not know reality from fiction/And if the reader of this book cannot figure out/ What was reality/Or more accurately/When was reality/It is because of these three cunning personalities/Not counting devious Aunt Laila/And discreet Jiddo. (2016: 203)

This is why I often felt attracted by another genre: I am a bit cautious about using the term autofiction because sometimes it feels a bit blurry and seems to serve the purpose of grouping some hip writers together rather than defining a proper new form.[22] However, there are aspects of it that may be useful for understanding the relation fiction/non-fiction.

I think we can find an interesting working definition of autofiction from this interview with Ben Lerner, a writer considered a strong representative of the genre:

> My concern is how we live fictions, how fictions have real effects, become facts in that sense, and how our experience of the world changes depending on its arrangement into one narrative or another. (Lerner 2014)

In this interpretation, autofiction has the ability to experiment with various narrative forms and devices to explore the subtler meanings of the term 'fiction', the

[22] Another problem that seems to affect autofiction is that the label is given to mainly white western writers (Folarin 2020), as if the possibility to explore the fictions that make the self is only open to those who already have an establish identity to work against. Autobiography, memoirs, non-fiction coming from BAME writers are often seen as trying to establish a new identity to compete in validity with the western one.

problem of making precise distinctions between fiction and non-fiction, and the relationship between the fictions that made us and the fictions we made.[23]

In devising my use of fiction, I was attracted by this same possibility: I wanted to look into the processes that create our stories, the influences of events around us, and the interpretations that we give to them. In my journal of practice, I often look at these interconnections. One page is particularly interesting and helps clarify my thoughts:

> Whatever happened in my past, in the past of my parents and in the past of their parents before them, does indeed travel all the way to where I stand today. But it's not who I am, it's raw material which is part of what I rework to be who I am that will enter the sphere of sense or meaning in contact and in reaction to the context I live in, with all the other people I met and will meet. The individual I am and the things I can say are the results of this intertwined reality of individual past (that is not really individual because it influenced and was influenced by the various past contexts), individual perception of myself (which is shaped by the sense of perception of my society) and collective reality, the collective habits of the time, the evolving facts around me. To work for meaning I need to create something from the encounters and clashes of these dimensions. (04/04/2019)

This clash of dimensions was a first step towards what I wanted my book to look like, but I still did not know how to achieve it. Then, during my first fieldwork in Palestine in 2018, I met the Palestinian writer Suad Amiry, and we talked about her process of writing *My Damascus*, her memoir unfolding between Palestine and Syria. Discussing with her some of my writing issues helped me to finally structure my writing. I found especially useful the advice she was given by her editor during the writing of her family memoir and that she passed to me: "You never know how much you know about your family until you write about it!"

[23] This idea is at the base of Butler's performative in connection with the narrative of the I: "I am always recuperating, reconstructing, and I am left to fictionalize and fabulate origins I cannot know. In the making of the story, I create myself in new form, instituting a narrative 'I' that is superadded to the 'I' whose past life I seek to tell." (2005: 39). In other words, if any attempt of giving an account of oneself is confronted by a dimension fictionality, then where does the threshold between fiction and non-fiction really stand?

In my notes from that period, I started jotting down some more paragraphs using the pronoun *she.* That helped my transition from the *she* I had used previously as a substitution for my mother towards a different, more independent *she*. It took only a couple of days before I started a new paragraph with the name Anna.

Once Anna was created, I wrote the first chapter about her childhood in Italy in two weeks after seven months of struggle. That was however an easy step: Italy in the 50s felt far enough removed and yet sufficiently familiar for me to write with ease. Anna became essential when I had to put on the page the first experiences of my mother in Palestine as a foreigner.

In my journal of practice I wrote:

> It's hard to imagine how my mother/Anna was living her life the first months and years she was in Palestine. It's a work of reconstruction: what was she doing daily? How did she communicate? What did she think? How did she move in the new space? (19/02/2019)

Those were questions that no one else could answer but my mother. Yes, by interviewing members of my family and friends, by looking at her letters and by studying the historical context, I could get an idea, but ultimately her truth was lost.

It is at this point that the categories of presence, againness, non-textuality, and pleasure became useful. With the creation of Anna, I could use my presence in the same place and my experience of similar conditions and feelings as a starting point for a reliving and resignification as much as perpetuation.

This is why in the same entry of my journal of practice I wrote:

> I am aware that when I write about my mother/Anna there is a lot of me in her (and also found lot of her in me) and I know that I invest her life with the meaning of mine. (19/02/2019)

To exemplify this, I would like to focus on the making of the following paragraph from Chapter 5 - Dairy:

> Forced in bed and into inaction, spending the days staring at the ceilings, her hearing refined. Anna could clearly hear the cutlery being set on the tables, and the songs coming out from the radios, the call of the peddlers – ka'ek,

> ka'ek! Khamse il kilo il batata! Ta'abored Ta'abored ta, ta, ta, ta, ta, ta ... Or the arguments of the neighbours – la! Mish zay hek! La, wallahi? Yin'al abuku! She felt she could map the whole area with sounds. She swore she could even guess the direction of the prayers: recognising the churches from the ringing of their bells and the mosques from the call of their muezzins. (p. 110)

This happens while Anna is forced to remain in bed during her second pregnancy in the first months of her life in Palestine.

As I declare at the beginning of that same chapter, "I have slept in that [same] room myself for a few months during the summer of 2018" (p. 100), so I used my experience in that same space to build up this scene. In the first draft of my book, while the character of Anna was not fully delineated and I hadn't understood my relationship with it yet, this part was not there. During my first draft, Anna was supposed to be just a temporary name to allow me to write: the plan was to delete and substitute it with my mother's name when writing my second draft. For this reason, I kept the scenes of Anna limited to the few strings of facts that I had managed to verify. However, by the end of the first draft I had fully realised the value of Anna as a character impersonating my mother, but also an interpretation of her story, as well as a place to negotiate my loss and my identity as a woman in Palestine. In writing my second draft therefore I felt freer to use my notes from my fieldtrip to populate the space between the strings of facts. I knew that my mother had been forced to spend a period in bed in the same room I was sleeping in, but I didn't have any idea of what she did with her time there. Rather than trying to imagine what she thought or felt, I simply observed, through my presence in the same place, the surrounding elements that had possibly formed my mother's embodied knowledge and that were forming mine nearly forty years after.

In my notes I wrote:

> Sounds of my land =
> […] calls for prayers: 5 times a day. Some voices sound as a call from god, some others sound [like] a call from your neighbour, the one with the STRIDULA voice. They mix together and pierce through all the other

> sounds, the cars, the fireworks, the birds, the CICALE… They reach wherever you are and whatever you are doing and you can't help, but listen and even if just for a sec, you wait still.
> Vendors = of almost everything. Caek, busa Rukab, sabir, seeds, etc.,
> Children playing
> Neighbourhood quarrels and food making (smell).
> (Undated, but written on the back of *Midnight's Children*, book I was reading during my first fieldtrip in summer 2018).

By rewriting and reliving my notes in the book, I formed a hybrid between my mother's story and mine and I generated a sort of third layer: Anna's. Anna rather than being an invention, is an intersection created as an archive for embodied and affective knowledge that connects intergenerational experience.

In an article about writing her family memoir, Aida Edemariam admits how spending time in her grandmother's village, and riding across a mountain path as her grandmother used to do, helped her learn about her material more than "days of visiting the British Library" (2018).

There is a repertoire of embodied knowledge that writers can access, and they can be access it thanks to the nature of the process of creative writing.

Edemariam however follows up the previous concept by declaring the dangers of relying only on this type of knowledge:

> Though, to be fair, there were also many things about that morning I would not have noticed if I had not first spent time talking and reading. And while bodies and landscape, or bodies in landscape, can feel as though they can collapse time, the cliche that the past is its own country is so for a reason: the mores and assumptions of now are different from those of yesterday, and part of the challenge is to place a person accurately within the latter. (2018)

I think that this opinion rather than dismissing the use of embodied knowledge, simply puts it in the context of the process of art praxis. In other words, the process of creative writing, with its circular pattern of knowledge and its commonalities with the performative can help create a more complex picture of reality and access the domain of the archive as much as that of the repertoire.

Writing Anna also helped me deal with the sense of inadequacy towards first-person narrative coherence and control that I had felt since the beginning of my project.

Narrative coherence has been often accused of forcing an idea of mastery and unity that, far from being universal, is often a form that privileges certain modes of knowing and producing, excluding others (Borg 2018, Pollock 1998, Smits Keeney 2014). This is particularly true when it comes to narrative of trauma. As Borg explains in his article (2018), often victims of trauma are encouraged to create a coherent account as a way of recovering a sense of self, as unity and control are considered the base of identity. Often victims unable to put together such a narrative are considered less reliable, and their stories excluded (Borg 2018: 458, but also Smits Keeney 2014: 3-5).

The idea of performativity, both in its sense of everydayness and its Butlerian value, offered an alternative perspective. When it comes to narrative coherence, for example, Butler is clear in condemning the idea of mastery and unity over one's own account (2005). For Butler, the identity formation of the "I" is inextricable from the identity formation of other subjects.

Butler expands the applicability of this idea in her more recent works where she talks about grief. Butler explains that the reality of the I is so imbricated with the reality of the you that, when the you dies, the identity of the I is at a loss: "Who am I without you? I was not just over here and you over there but the I was in the crossing, there with you but also here." (Butler 2014)

I also find very interesting the concept of transactive memory of the psychologist Daniel Wagner. In the words of Malcom Gladwell:

> transactive memory, which is the observation that we don't just store information in our minds or in specific places, we store memories and understanding in the minds of the people we love. That's transactive memory; little bits of ourselves reside in other people's minds. You know when one-half of a long marriage dies and the surviving partner says that some part of

> them has died along with their spouse? Wagner has a heart-breaking riff about how that is actually true. When your partner dies, everything that you have stored in your partner's brain dies along with them. (2017)

It is in understanding that area of "crossing" that creative writing becomes a useful tool to understand grief and trauma as a category for knowledge.

To summarise, the creation of Anna helped me address the gaps in the strings of facts and transform them into a starting point for further exploration. Anna's dimension is not, as I have tried to clarify, a fully fictional one, but rather a crossing of different layers of reality and different temporalities of similar experiences. However, it is undeniable that the creation of a third-person narrative would have not been as strong if I hadn't let myself play more freely with fiction and if it didn't run parallel to the non-fiction narrative of the first-person. The juxtaposition of fiction and non-fiction creates a space for metanarrative where the I ceases to be what Pratt calls the 'monarch-of-all-I-survey' in order to openly navigate the process of narrative-making.

When I started to write Anna, my first intention was to revert everything to the first-person after completing the first draft. However, I soon realised that both first person and third person were covering a function in my writing. While the former was providing an anchor where the process of research, the interviews, the fieldwork was made explicit with all its contradictions and gaps, the latter was rearranging and reworking those experiences and information into a possible version of the story.

In other words, the parallelism between fiction third person and non-fiction first person allowed me to target all the anxieties about representation which had emerged in my project, not by dismissing them or hiding them, but by foregrounding them.

The readers are made aware of the presence of two lines by the title of the prologue: *Back and Forth*. The most immediate interpretation of these two poles is of

course a geographical one: “back and forth between two countries” (p. 11) as it is made explicit at the end of the prologue; this movement is also a temporal one:

> Each book released for her not just the words and stories she used to find inside it, but also the stories she herself had put there: the stories of the moments when she was reading those books, twelve years ago, twenty years ago, thirty years ago. Some food for the house, my brothers drawing for her while she was cooking, her mother missing her on her birthday, a kiss between her and my father. (p. 10)

And:

> The box was full of her words, her stories.
> The stories of those moments when she was writing those letters, twelve years ago, twenty years ago, thirty years ago. Some food for the house, my brothers drawing for her while she was cooking, what she did on her birthday, a missed kiss between her and my father. (p. 11)

The movement between ways of producing stories is introduced too – from books to drawings, from letters to food – together with a recognition that we make narratives as much as we are made by them – “the words and stories she used to find inside it, but also the stories she herself had put there”. It is finally a movement through generations as books and letters of my mother’s stories are passed to and rediscovered by me.

In this way, the prologue offers an implicit set of instructions for reading the book: the reader is encouraged to expect displacements and shifts and to move between the dimension of the I, with its research of events, and Anna’s dimension, with its possible version of the events. The use of fictionality therefore is not about making-up events and memories but about putting them against the light to see through the fabric.

Now I need to take a step forward and look at how the creation of Anna helped me also come to terms with historical grief, with the loss and trauma experienced as a Palestinian.

The wish to explain the historical and political context and show how it is imbricated with the unfolding of my family's story had always been strong, and it became even stronger with my two fieldworks during which such context stopped being an abstraction and became something tangible.

Although I was born during the first Intifada in a village near Ramallah and although I spent most of my childhood between my two countries, I received my education completely in the Western-hemisphere and my knowledge of the Arabic language is limited compared to my Italian fluency. Not only that, but over the years my parents kept me away from the occupation and allowed me to travel only during safer periods. Finally, my Italian passport has often shielded me from the most traumatic events and often put me in a position of privilege and safety compared to my family and even my own father. These circumstances increased my sense of inadequacy when trying to assess that historical context that I could escape from and that my family instead was forced to live every day. In my creative component this inadequacy comes to the surface many times, but probably the most open declaration is in Chapter 11:

> I don't look Arab. I don't talk like one, I don't walk like one, I don't dress like one, and apparently even when I stand still and mute, there is still something that gives me away. I don't belong. I know I am not one of them. I don't speak their language as they do. I don't understand them when they talk to me, I don't remember the same things, I haven't lived through the same history. I am always surrounded by people who talk for me, and I have a passport that in any second can take me away from here. (p. 235)

Although I address this feeling many times in the book, it is again through Anna that my confrontation with the historical context becomes more meaningful and interesting as a creative process. The creation of Anna not only helped me understand my mother's evolving relationship with Palestine, but through the crossing process it helped me go through my own reacquisition of a Palestinian identity. There are many instances in my creative component where we can see this – from Anna's first contact with international politics in Chapter 3 to Anna's trouble

with learning Arabic language in the following chapters – however, I want to focus on the composition of the final scene of Chapter 8.

Chapter 8 was the hardest chapter to write and the last one to be written. It signs the end of the first part of the book, and it does that for several reasons. Firstly, it is the last chapter where we see my mother/Anna living in Palestine; in the next chapter the scene will move again to Italy. Secondly, my mother/Anna's relationship with Palestine reaches a sort of peak, and, after fully embracing a Palestinian identity, she starts to re-evaluate the situation with a sort of detachment before leaving the country in the next chapter. Finally, this is the chapter where my birth is narrated and therefore it introduces me as a character in the third-person narrative, and marks the moment my memories can be placed next to the other participants' memories in the formation of the story. Inserting myself in the third-person narrative presented some problems in my poetics: the points of view, for example, become four. The division between the I in the present of the research and Anna in the third person blurs, and the I enters the dimension of Anna, both as I and as a fictionalised character, Sabrin. The process of crossing is therefore complicated because the experiences and feelings of the present that served as an embodied starting point for reliving and reconstruction are counterbalanced by my memories of the event in the past. The crossing happens rather between a present self and a past self:

> My diary: "Today 2nd of January, I woke up really early at my friend's house and I went immediately downstairs where my friend's parents were talking over the phone with my father who was explaining that he would pick me up at 4pm".
> Right on that page I was lying, and I was lying out of regret. (p. 250)

Chapter 8 therefore became for me a way to pass the baton from Anna to myself as Sabrin. That doesn't mean that in the following chapters I completely abandon my crossing with Anna, but I rather move it to more personal and intimate experiences – like the reflections on interracial love (pp. 270-271) or the feeling of

solitude and defeat back in Italy (pp. 209-211) – while the historical and political witnessing is taken by other characters (especially Rami) and my own memories.

The final scene of Chapter 8 narrates an event of my mother's life that she often told me about with a sort of affection. The recurrent details of her memory were that she was in the last months of her pregnancy, that a burst of gunfire started when she was outside alone, and that a stranger had pushed her towards a door, covered her with his body, and then disappeared before she could say thank you.

These elements can make the scene a quite dramatic one, but that was not the tone my mother used to give to the story; at the same time I wanted to give to the scene the space and importance it actually had in my life – both because my life was actually saved and because of the impact my mother's telling had on my imagination and identity – without making it about me. The character of Anna offered once more that hybrid dimension where I could explore my feelings and experiences but in connection with my mother's background and memories of that time. However, this time such a strong personal episode was also part of an important historical moment for the whole community and in my crossing I needed to take that into account.

To do that I delved into two additional ideas.

The first one was inspired by an early reading of *Running in the Family*. In this family memoir, Ondaatje travels to Sri Lanka to retrace the story of his father. Soon however this focus is shattered by the different points of view, the contrasting memories, and the author's presence on the field of his research. The pages of Ondaatje are full of metanarrative observations about the composition of a family memoir,[24] and soon the narrative line opens with a cut-up technique to the insertions of different genres, from poems to chronicles. One of the main concerns that runs through the book is a sense of attachment to the history of the community. This is

[24] For example: "No story is ever told just once. Whether a memory or funny hideous scandal, we will return to it an hour later and retell the story with additions and this time a few judgements thrown in. In this way history is organised." (2009: 11-12) where the difficulties of working with memory and the importance of againness in the process of writing are made explicit.

expressed through a desire of reconnecting with the past generations and making sense of their lives and their influences on him. History in other words is seen not as an archival source, but once again as an embodied practice passed through generations:

> She reels off names and laughs at the facial expressions she can no longer see. It has moved tangible, palpable, into her brain, the way memory invades the present in those who are old, the way gardens invade houses here, the way her tiny body steps into mine as intimate as anything I have witnessed, and I have to force myself to be gentle with this frailty in the midst of my embrace (2009: 115)

The use of verbs like invading, stepping into, and the three-stage simile going from memory-brain through garden-house to body-body, highlight how the past is not only an abstract concept, but something tangible that can inhabit a body.

In my journal of practice, I kept exploring this concept and even in my creative component this idea surfaces in more than one place.[25] However, Ondaatje's narrative is still attached to the journey of the I, and examples of communal voices are missing.[26]

It was only in Chapter 8 that I could really take a step forward in my poetics and I was able to do that thanks to a second concept that I had started to explore during my second fieldtrip.

As explained in my previous section, my second fieldtrip signed the moment where I started to detach from the idea of folklore and instead focus on embodiment

[25] See for example Chapter 2: "It seems as if my father's parents didn't have any influence on me, but I know this is not true. If I haven't received their direct influence, I surely have been shaped by them through my father, my aunts and uncle, my mother, my cousins, and all the others who create a connection between them and me." (p. 28)

[26] In regard of the difficulties of writing as a communal voice for western audiences please see Nixon's example on Mandela and Maathai's autobiographies: "The ghostwriter discovered, to the publisher's consternation, that Mandela's autobiography had advanced with only a smattering of "I's"; his preferred, default personal pronoun was "we" as in "we, the ANC." The ghostwriter was tasked with disaggregating that movement "we" and channelling it into an "I" story that American readers and Oprah viewers would recognize and respond to. For Maathai, as for Mandela, the single-authored movement memoir raises profound representational dilemmas intricately entangled with transnational power imbalances in the publishing industry—entangled, too, with the genre expectations of projected readers, who reside mostly in the global North. Maathai's 2004 Nobel Peace Prize—and with it, the publishers' investment in a celebrity memoir—intensified the pressure on the writer to recast a collective struggle in largely personal terms." (2011: 143).

and performative knowledge. I will come back and analyse my use of performative elements in this scene of Chapter 8, but for now I would like to focus on how, while exploring the potential of performative knowledge, I was at the same time worried about the symbolisation and metaphorization of such a knowledge and how I used this worry to define my poetics.

The following quotation was extremely influential in my process:

> Sometimes when I am walking in the hills, say Batn el-Hawa, unselfconsciously enjoying…the smell of thyme and the hills and the trees around me, I find myself looking at it, it transforms itself before my eyes into a symbol of sadimin, of our struggle, of our loss. And at that very moment, I am robbed of that tree; instead there is a hollow space into which anger and pain flow. (Shehadeh as quoted in Parmenter 1994: 86-87)

Many of the elements in this paragraph – the hills, the thyme, the trees – are recurrent elements of Palestinian traditional imagery, appearing constantly in popular songs, tales, embroideries, poetry and so on. However, this imagery is weighed down by the political and historical meaning that transforms these elements into symbols of struggle and loss.

This paragraph resonated enormously with my experience during my second fieldtrip: I was part of a group of international students and while some of us had ties with Palestine, the majority were first-time visitors. In my journal of practice, I reflect on the difference between us:

> The hottest hour of B.[irzeit] brings news from the sea, but the sea is far away. I will miss these hills of bushes and rocks. I have 10 more days left, but not here in the village, in this place really similar to what my mum use to love, the hills of bushes and rock that speak of an unreachable sea. These 2 months have been slow and yet so fast and I have to think about what I really got from it […] maybe the awareness that some people will never understand (01/08/2019)

Hills and bushes are present in my paragraph too, but they are already symbolic and influenced by reading: this use is accentuated by the insertion of *rocks*,

as an icon of Palestinian resistance, and *unreachable* sea, as a metonymy for the coastal towns of 1948. But what is important is the contrast with those who *will never understand* because they are not forced to look at the surrounding reality through symbols. In me there was a sort of envy for their freedom of not understanding, and a sense of guilt for desiring that same freedom.

All these threads went into the formation of Chapter 8 where Anna becomes a receptacle of the contradiction between the importance of political engagement and a need for free enjoyment.

In the pages of my journal leading to the writing of Chapter 8 I clarify to myself:

> What I am trying to do with my book is to go back to that first unselfconscious enjoyment of Palestine, of the land, of the everyday life, without charging it with superimposed, textual, ideological, abstract meaning. […] In a way my mother, as an ajnabie, was able to look and enjoy her life in Palestine with much more freedom of meaning. I hope I have inherited that. (29/04/2020)

Let's look closer at the opening of Chapter 8: Anna, seven months pregnant, is walking with a bag of warm bread at sunset. It is a scene of everydayness with focus on details of landscape and family life:

> How many times had they walked in that same street all together – she, Rami, the boys – hand in hand or busy holding the sticky ice-cream of Rukab, or a shawarma? Why couldn't life be always as simple as a sunset walk with the winds bringing the dust from the rocky hills and people chatting and sipping coffee on the street? Since the beginning of the Intifada, every little pleasure counted, like that warm bread hanging at her side, or the singing of the cicadas on the pines. (p. 169)

The elements both from Shehadeh's passage and from my notes resurface here but the focus is strictly on the pleasure of them – Anna is able to look at them without seeing symbols. However, the dimension of collective politics can't be ignored for much longer and it's the baby that tellingly becomes the fulcrum of this shift:

> But that whole country was exactly like Anna: having this baby inside her without knowing anything about it, without being able to give it a name, a definition, and without being able to promise anything to it, no safety, no stability, no peace. (p. 169)

It is only after this realisation that the violence of history enters in the chapter. This is not the first time in the book where we see how the events of the first Intifada impact my family, but it is the first time that we see Anna right in the middle of it. What follows is drawn almost exactly from my mother's memories of the event, but the realisation of Anna and her shift from the free pleasure to the symbol gives me the space to add a metaphorical interpretation to what my mother used to describe to me as a very personal and cherished moment. By inhabiting Anna – in this case both creatively but also literally as the daughter she was expecting – I inhabit that historical knowledge, that dripping of the past that moves from one generation to the other not through archival sources, but by the sharing of pleasures and burdens. In other words, Anna becomes again a milieu of crossing where I can come to terms with the ongoing struggle and the ongoing loss of my community that affect generation after generation.

Pasta in Palestine

In the previous part I tried to explain how a focus on performative and embodied elements allowed me to generate that crossing between my mother's experience and mine, and to create Anna as a hybrid identity. I have also tried to explain how this crossing allowed for a further intersection, not only between the present and the past, but also in facing grief: in my writing I could not go into any depth of my personal grief without encountering the communal grief of my community and vice versa. The technique of crossing provided a place to explore the encounter between these two losses without losing the perspective of the real

suffering of people living every day under occupation. In this regard, crossing performative elements becomes essential because, as Taylor explains, they "long served to preserve a sense of communal identity and memory." (2003: 18).

The use of these elements replaced the first idea of inserting folktales to fill the gaps by creating a layer of shared embodied knowledge. We have seen how these elements have such a strong value for the reaffirmation of community identity in face of the ongoing threat of dispossession and ethnic cleansing, that they often become abstract symbols and lose the freedom of embodied pleasure. This situation is defined *double dispossession* (Allan 2018: 81) as the performative element is not only physically taken away by military occupation, but also in its dimension of pleasure.

By inserting these elements in my writing, I wanted to experiment whether creative writing could reconstitute this dimension of pleasure, even if only in the limited space of the page and even if only as a returning pleasure.

For this reason, my book is filled with performative elements like songs, music, dance, and so on, but two in particular have played an important creative strategy: food and language.

In this part I will focus on the use of food, and I will talk about language in the next part.

Food emerged as an important theme linked to my Palestinian identity even before this project. This can be seen in some of my published pieces,[27] where food becomes a portal to a discussion of my relationship with Palestine. This theme was so strong that my tutors during my MA suggested to call my book as one of the published pieces: *Pasta in Palestine*. This title seemed to them able to invoke that hybridity of my background. Despite using this title for two of my chapters, it was

[27] See for example: Hasbun, S. (2016), *Pasta in Palestine*, in *Wales Arts Review*. Online: https://www.walesartsreview.org/transnational-series-pasta-in-palestine/

not a good overall title for my book, because it actually missed the point of my use of food. In the words of Narayan *Pasta in Palestine* could not "adequately account for the complexity of an identity in which multiple countries, regions, religions, and classes may come together" (1993: 673).

For me it never was a matter of hybridity, or, to stay in kitchen terminology, a matter of fusion; on the contrary, food was there as an instinctual way of disproving an easy duality, and instead inhabiting, at any given moment, a different set of knowledge coming from my inherited cultures.

It is again through Anna, and in the contrast between Anna and the I, that this meaning of food is developed throughout the book.

Anna's relationship with food starts only when she first goes to Palestine and tries the Ma 'moul: "She was there trying everything for the first time, trying to find her own natural way and make it hers." (p. 85)

Each of the following chapters – up to Chapter 8 – mark a new stage of Anna's approach to Palestinian food as a way to build her new identity. One extremely important moment is in Chapter 6, where, learning from Palestinian women, Anna stops being a consumer of culture and starts being a producer too, leaving behind an Italian identity that she had always refused to produce:

> Anna was going back and forth in Hoda's kitchen, getting her body used to moving from the counter to the stove, from the hobs to the oven and the pot of fresh herbs, following the two women in that meticulous use of food, not wasting a drop. Really, it was no different from her mother's kitchen, from the poverty of the Ventoruccia, that dependence on even the smallest piece of meat. Yet Anna, there with Hoda and Dina, didn't feel the same self-commiseration. (p. 131)

While in Italy, Anna saw cooking only as a way to perpetuate an imposition that she could only passively pass on. Instead, she finds in the new Palestinian embodiment a possibility of affirmation. In the following scene in Chapter 6, she metaphorically and physically starts to pass on this new embodiment by

(breast)feeding a girl in the community. This uncomplicated embracement however starts to crumble by the end of this same chapter, and it transitions towards a more problematic, but also more mature connection between Anna's Italian and Palestinian sides. Chapter 8 acts once again as a fulcrum, and the final scene and poem, as well as my difficulties in writing them, can better explain my process in using food.

I want to discuss that initial paragraph again (please refer back to page 380, or see page 169 of my creative component)

This paragraph is influenced by my reflection on Shehadeh's quotation as much as my presence on my own land and is reworked and unpacked in the final poem.

The difference between Anna and I is clear from the first sentence. While Anna's dimension puts the emphasis on walking the "street all together", the poem of the I clarifies that "It is hard to walk alone" (p. 172). That was a way for me to define how, while for Anna/my mother the Palestinian identity was linked to the choice of growing a family there, and it could be moved and readapted by moving that family away, for the I, there is no choice: the street needs to be walked even if alone, even if the "I get lost" (p. 172).

To the question: "Would all the pleasures be there for the child she was expecting?", the poem answers with the anaphoric use of "I know this place" (pp. 173-174) followed by a list embodied elements passed down by my parents, where food is prominent, but also songs, movements, instruments, smells, languages create the repertoire. Through the image of the hills and the sunset taken from Anna's scene, the poem however shows that it is impossible to enjoy this repertoire without encountering borders, checkpoints, and signs of the occupation. And so again the pleasure dimension of an intergenerational identity is weighed down by symbols:

> the za'atar, the oil, the fruit of the saber
> are battlefields for meaning
> the 'oud has broken chords.

I can’t hear my mother’s voice (p. 175)

The poem would not add anything different from Anna’s previous scene if it ended here. However, the I is able to take a further step. In my poetics this step is allowed by two things: the ability to move across sets of embodied knowledge, and the belief that the agency of pleasure in writing can help take back – even if only partially, even if only for a moment – the occupied imagery.

In my journal of practice, I write: “Writing is that act of balance between looking for an identity and not wanting to be stuck in just one identity” (03/01/2018).

My process is a continuous reflection on how to avoid the reification of narrative. As Butler explains in *Excitable Speech* (1997), “language remains alive when it refuses to ‘encapsulate’ or ‘capture’ the events and lives it describes” (8). This is why *Pasta in Palestine* was an unacceptable title for me, because it reifies the duality instead of opening it up. The poem therefore reinforces the idea of “belong[ing] to the un-belonging” (Godden 2016: 195).

> I never belong entirely
> or maybe we don’t need to belong
> to each other.
> I don’t need to prove
> that you are mine. (p. 175)

By renouncing the idea of belonging, or at least of a belonging made of symbols, writing becomes a way of revindicating pleasure. The words of Chimene Suleyman are here essential for understanding my process:

> But tradition is an inescapable trait of our communities – those who cannot rely on land or home for their identity. Our parents, and their parents, and theirs before, have little more to leave us beyond their names, beyond their language. We have inherited the knowledge that community means to remain. When we cannot return to our homes – or are waiting for them to be taken from us again – we must get the hang of how to recreate it elsewhere. It is in the particular smell of rice or aubergines, the pastry that survived in the windowsills of our mothers’ kitchens. (2016: 26)

My elsewhere place of recreation is Italy for Palestine, Palestine for Italy and the English language for both: my elsewhere is therefore my writing. This crossing of multiple elsewheres is found in these lines:

> Because I know the surprise
> of a glimpse of yellow lemons
> even in the winter garden. (p. 175)

The lemon is a common symbol of homeland and nostalgia in Palestinian writing – from prose to song writing [28] – but here lemons enter through the medium of Italian poetry. The image of a glimpse of yellow is taken from Italian Nobel prize poet Montale:

> Quando un giorno da un malchiuso portone
> tra gli alberi di una corte
> ci si mostrano i gialli dei limoni;
> e il gelo del cuore si sfa […][29] (1948: 18)

The lemon trees in this Italian poem are linked with a sort of joy of small things, a sort of richness for those who don't have much ("anche a noi poveri" 17). They are also in opposition to the symbols and metaphors of formal poetry, what Montale calls *poeti laureati* (17), laureate poets, which only use plants with *nomi poco usati* (17), with rare names.

Using Italian poetry and imagery, the Palestinian symbolism is not annulled, but it is repopulated towards a place of un-belonging or of another kind of belonging. Once again crossing – this time of different layers of the I – allows a hybridity made of performative elements, by being present and relieving my backgrounds one through the other. My writing creates for me a space where I am at the same time able to affirm my identities and free to let them be fluid. The lemon through this crossing is reinhabited, and the enjoyment comes back as a ruse of language.

[28] See for example Darwish: "The lemon shines like a lamp in an emigrant's night." line from the poem *And We Have Countries…* (Darwish 2006).

[29] Then one day, through a half-closed gate/among the trees of a courtyard/we glimpse the yellow of the lemons/and the ice of the heart melts (translation mine).

The use of languages

As seen in the previous example, language plays an important role in creating the condition for crossing. Not only I put Italian and Palestinian imagery together, but I did so through the medium of English language, having a sort of triple translation or triple crossing: from the Palestinian tradition across Italian poetry to a final output in English.

Language has always been an important element in my project: not only because I express my research through the practice of creative writing, but because I work across three different languages. When starting my project, I didn't have a specific idea about incorporating languages in the main English layer, but soon untranslatable words from Italian or Arabic forced me to look at this possibility. The first word appearing as untranslatable in my writing is lontananza, a key concept throughout the book. However, it was again only with the first fieldwork and by learning and using Arabic in everyday life that I started to think about the use of multiple languages more seriously. Inadequacy was again the pushing feeling: there was a sense of inadequacy for not speaking Arabic fluently and going to Arabic classes together with non-Palestinians; and there was a sense of inadequacy regarding the use of English language both to narrate events that happen in other languages and cultures, and my own inadequacy at writing in English as a second language.

From my journal of practice:

> Every time I open my mouth, I know that my speech will not sound natural, not to them, not to me. That I won't be able to express myself fully and deeply. I know that Italian is my first language. The language of my emotions. Still I can't write in Italian. I can't recognise my Italian writing. And I am writing a book about a woman (my mother) learning Arabic from zero by herself and I am writing the book in English, while I am too learning Arabic. (28/03/2019)

The book became a sort of journey through languages: my own one learning Arabic and English writing, my mother/Anna's journey learning Arabic, and my father/Rami's learning Italian.

My use of languages followed three stages, influenced by readings and fieldwork. I want to clarify that these stages rather than replacing each other, cover different needs in my writing and they are now utilised at the same time despite having been implemented in different phases.

Phase 1 – One word at the time

Before my first fieldwork and straight after that, my use of languages was still shy. I was confident neither in my insertion of Arabic nor in the experiments within English.

My readings of Palestinian memoirs at the time were Amiry, *My Damascus* and Karmi, *In Search of Fatima.* Their use of Arabic in their English writing is very similar:

> Like the other women, she regularly engaged in the practice of what was called the *istiqtibal*. This was a women-only reception, held in the afternoon, when the men were out of the house. Once it so happened that my father was at home and sitting reading in the *liwan* (the main reception room) as the women began to arrive. (Karmi 2002: 29)

> The feast included an array of salads such as *fattoush, shanklish, tabouleh,* and spreads like *mtabal, baba ghanoush* and *hommous.* No feast was complete without the spicy Armenian sausages, *sujuk* and *naqanek,* and the meat patties, *lahmeh bi'ajeen.* (Amiry 2016: 117)

Both texts use only Arabic words that are, let's say, common knowledge or refer to cultural referents: they are always italicised, and they are always followed by a direct translation or an explanation in English (in other books we can sometimes

find a glossary);[30] they usually refer to greetings, food, or are added to create a remote – not to say exotic – atmosphere. Once these terms are introduced in Arabic, they are repeated all through the text which maintains the italics.[31]

My first use of language, both Italian and Arabic was very similar:

Italian: "Teresina's favourite one was still giving its *uva fragola*, the foxgrapes, so sweet you could eat it with bread, just like that, still warm from the sun's heat." (First Draft, Chapter 1)

Arabic:

"*Sfiha*, my favourite, they are always so good when you make them!"
"The generals are triumphant and they are announcing that…"
"The secret is in the meat, in how you mince it."
"Really? I thought it was in the dough?"
"Rising against the enemy"
"Believe me. I will tell you this story so you can understand!" (First Draft, Chapter 2)

The engagement across languages here is kept to a minimum and the linguistic strategies stay on the surface without performing against the grain of English language. On the contrary, they strengthen the western discourse on the Arab identity, making the Arabic language and culture a commodification and allowing the "reader to believe that s/he is interacting with and appropriating the linguistic Other" (Torres 2007: 78).

When redrafting my book, I often made sure to rework this use of languages, in most case eliminating translations and italics, and leaving more fluency on the page.

[30] See, for example, Abulhawa 2020.

[31] Similar way of inserting the Arabic language can be seen in more recent fiction works:

"She peered into the oven, flipping over a batch of *za'atar* pies she had backed for lunch, while Fareda and Nadine sipped chai at the kitchen table.

'Brew another *ibrik*,' Fareeda told Isra when she set the *za'atar* pies on a rack to cool." (Rum 2019: 157);

And:

"But they played some of the classics with a *takht* orchestra and some instrumental *taqseem*. There were enough of us from the Levant that they even played a *jafra*, and we lit up the dance floor, stomping out a high-stepping *dabke*." (Abulhawa 2020: 37)

> "Sfiha, walla zakie, they are always so good when you make them!"
> "The generals are triumphant and they are announcing that…"
> "The secret is in the meat, lahme mafrume, in how you mince it."
> "'an jadd? I thought it was in the dough."
> "Rising against the enemy…"
> "'an jadd 'an jadd. Believe me. I will tell you this story so you can understand!" (p. 40)

However, I sometimes decided to keep these techniques because I believe that once the writer is aware of their effects, these can help achieve certain goals. Therefore, I left single words in italics with some sort of translation when I wanted to indeed give a caricatural or parodying effect, or when I wanted to highlight a clash of cultures:

> "*Zibde, zibde*, Anna!" Rami was saying, forcing the sound D. "*Zibde* means butter, *zib* means dick!" (p. 120)

Despite finding a way to work with this way of inserting languages, I soon found it limiting and further reading, practice, and my second fieldwork, pushed me towards a second phase.

Phase 2 – Worlds of words

By the end of my second fieldtrip, my fluency in Arabic had improved as well as my confidence in writing in English. Being away from Italy also increased a desire for reconnection with the Italian language, and so I found myself juggling three languages without knowing exactly how to use them in my writing.

I started to observe my everyday use of the three languages, especially during my time in Palestine, and notice how I would shift from one language to the other, without needing explanation. This happened particularly in communication with my father and my cousin, who both are able to shift across the three languages. This movement across languages was automatic, without too much thinking, and I wanted to be able to recreate the same on the page.

It was hard to find examples of such writing especially with Arabic, and even harder in three languages. It was thanks to *The Parisian* (2019) by Isabella Hammad which came out just before my second fieldtrip, that I was able to step up my work with languages. *The Parisian* was also the first book that I felt was very close to my project: despite her book being set in a different time frame and despite its being a work of fiction, the author took inspiration from her family and spent a long time historically researching her material in Palestine. Moreover, Hammad chose as her main protagonist a transnational figure, divided across cultures and struggling to find his own identity among the uncertainty of international historical events.

The book opens with Midhat, the protagonist, travelling from Nablus to France before World War I; the first part is about his difficulties getting used to the new environment. These difficulties are shown first and foremost through Midhat's struggle with the French Language:

> "[…] But Pisson will help you in the first few days. On Monday je crois qu'il y a une affaire d'inscription, and then, you know, tout va de l'avant"
> There were several words in this speech that Midhat did not understand. He nodded. (Hammad, 2019: 14)

The insertion of a foreign language is not limited anymore to a single word: a whole French sentence is inserted without italics or translation. This technique puts the reader in the same condition as the protagonist, where the meaning is not given for granted, and understanding is an effort rather than something provided.

This way of working with languages resonated deeply with my book: after all, I had Italian characters struggling to understand Arabic, and Palestinian characters struggling to understand Italian. Therefore, I used a very similar technique every time I wanted to convey the same situation of misunderstanding and effort for meaning.

> "Yes, laqetu. Te'laish." Yosef paused. "But he has been held by the soldiers. Some boys threw rocks in Al-Bireh and they are holding all the

> men. Inti bti‘rafi keef btimshi il umour. Kal‘adeh. I saw his car. They left it on the side of the street. Bniqdaresh ni‘amal ishi. Jarbi tnami. He will probably be back before you wake up.”
> Yosef spoke fast. Anna wondered if he did it on purpose so that she couldn’t get the meaning of what was happening. (p. 154)

When it comes to Arabic, *The Parisian* offers another great example of language crossing that I believe is particularly strong in the rendering of fast dialogues; in the second chapter of part two, for example, Hammad composes a very well-balanced scene where a group of friends from different areas of the Ottoman empire discuss the current politics in a small flat in Paris:

> “Khaleek shway,” said Faruq.
> “What ‘khallek shway’? They have just killed our best men. This is not about being one of humanity. We are from the East, every one of us in this room, and we have suffered enough. Lazim, kuluna, rise up.” […]
> “Come on Hani, be realistic, ya‘ni. Think. Use your … you know.”
> “I am thinking. Are you thinking?” said the thin man named Hani. “I don’t think this is enlightened talk, Habibi.” (Hammad 2019: 162)

We can see again Hammad’s way of inserting languages in the English writing without explanation and italics. The words she is inserting moreover have nothing to do with folkloristic aspects, as we have seen in the examples in phase 1. However, for an Arabic speaker or for someone who has more than a superficial knowledge of Arabic, these words are a sort of language tags, used often in conversations like the one Hammad is depicting. The scene is also strong because Hammad uses this conversation among friends to explain the historical developments of the time and the various positions of the future Arab countries after World War I. The use of language therefore helps establish the political and cultural environment that the characters are moving in.

Multilanguage writing is also used to show the fictionality of language itself: from the point of view of a leading character who cannot find a place in the world and define himself, and in the middle of an historical moment that deals with the

remapping and redefinition of the Middle East by Western powers, the use of languages to break the linearity of the English sentences serves to criticise the whole apparatus of ideological discourse. In this way Hammad makes the reader understand the constant position of negotiation we are all in, and the fiction of stability. When she writes of her own leading character "the foreigner unable to control his own meanings, lost in the wild multiple of language" (2019: 89), she is really pointing at the condition we are all in.

When reading these pages, I was redrafting my Chapter 3, the chapter where Anna and Rami and their two backgrounds meet, as well as Anna's first contact with international politics. My mother used to tell me about the political engagement of those years in Florence, and how my father's flat became a hub for international students sharing the same anxiety and dreams about the future of the world. However grandiloquent this description might be, it is actually not hard to imagine such a group at the end of the 70s. Archival research confirmed that Florence in the years 77-78 was the stage of many youth movements and protests, especially for women's rights.

Before reading Hammad I had issues in representing the atmosphere in which my parents lived among their friends. The first draft of Rami's flat was:

> There were French and British and Italians, but for the most they came from that far far away that Anna had only imagined. Kurdish, Jordanian, Iraqis, and after the revolution, more Iranians, and Palestinians. They were all students, but they spent most of their times discussing the reasons why they were there, all in Florence, instead of being in their countries. In their stories, Anna heard again many of Teresina's stories and her hatred for Fascists. The hidings, the lies, the wiles for some more food or protection. Stories of small villages divided, one piece apart from the other, and families too cut off with an invisible line. Taking sides. Sides again. Black and white. (First draft, Chapter 3)

Using Hammad's techniques of inserting dialogues to discuss current events and using languages to show the speaker's background, the scene became, for example:

> "Walla, we believed once that people would stand with us, and look what happened!"
> "Yes, Ali is right," Sharif was sitting on the table, behind Rami's chair. "Look what happened in Tel al-Zataar. Who was there with us, then, min?"
> Sharif's tone was sombre, as it always was. The line across his forehead wrinkled for the effort of explaining his opinions.
> "Bizzapt, and now with Sadat going to speak in the Knesset, we are more alone than ever!"
> "Noi siamo sole da sempre," got back Luisa. "Last among the lasts, our needs were always less important than the common good. Only last March they called us puttane here in Florence, just because we protested for our rights to have an abortion!" (p. 66. To read whole scene, please refer to creative component)

While Hammad was working only with Arabic, I had to work with Italian and Arabic at the same time and recreate that fluidity in the conversation I was experiencing every day. Also, the historical events had to double, and each character had to bring their identity to the front.

In other words, the use of multilingual writing shows identity formation and subjection. There is not only one language adding flavour to the English: languages enter depending on those who are speaking and where they are speaking. So Italian interlaces with English in Italy and through Italian characters or Italian language learning, as much as Arabic does in Palestine with Palestinian characters. This already shakes a bit the linguistic hierarchy. From Hammad I borrow this flexible use of languages for various purposes. Firstly, to plunge the reader into the scene, including dialogues, where languages serve to give a sense of place, culture, and also social structure. Secondly, to confound the reader: as the characters find themselves speechless and unable to express themselves fully when moving across countries and

events, their experience is not only described, but it is recreated on the page. The reader needs to go through full sentences in Italian or through dialogues full of Arabic without translation or cushioning. Of course, this makes the text more accessible to those who can actually move across the three languages, but at the same time it offers a rich participation to the monolingual reader who experiences the same disorientation as the characters.

Phase 3 – Whose words are these anyway?

The use of languages as explained in phase 2 helped me finetune many of the scenes where there was a sort of contrast among languages, or at least an effort for understanding. However, the languages are still kept separate, and even if there is a sort of back and forth, I was still looking for a way of crossing. The next stage of my writing across languages came after a conversation among peers where I was made to notice that I was still treating language only as a tool of the performative, rather than a performative element in itself.

After that conversation I wrote in my journal: "Also language for me becomes one more lived experience rather than a means of communication" (29/04/2020).

While reflecting on how to achieve that, I bumped into the notes of a workshop I attended at Bath Spa in 2016 with Prof Nicholas Jose on Translation Plus, which involves literary experimentation with languages (Jose 2015: 5). Inspiration for that workshop was *Leaving the Atocha Station* by Ben Lerner and especially this passage:

> One of these days I worked on what I called translation. I opened the Lorca more or less at random, transcribed the English recto onto a page of my first notebook, and began to make changes, replacing a word with whatever word I first associated with it and/or scrabbling the order of the lines, and then I made whatever changes these changes suggested me. Or I looked up the Spanish word for the English word I wanted to replace, and then replaced that

> word with an English word that approximated its sound ("Under the arc of the sky" became "Under the arc of the cielo," which became "Under the arc of the cello"). I then braided fragment of the prose I kept in my second notebook with the translations I had thus produced ("Under the arc of the cello/ I open the Lorca at random," and so on). (Lerner 2012: 16)

In this example we can see how language is openly played with and how it becomes part of the story and not only the tool to tell it. Moreover, the difficulty of cross-cultural communication becomes part of the poetic. This way of dealing with languages opened new possibilities in my writing. The difference with Lerner is not only that he is writing across two languages while I had to deal with three, but especially that his protagonist remains always completely estranged from the Spanish language and culture, and he plays with it as an outsider that cannot gain access. Myself and my characters instead work through Italian and Arabic as outsiders becoming insiders, and perhaps more interestingly, as insiders becoming outsiders. For example, I had to estrange myself from Italian to understand my father/Rami's struggle with learning it: to do that, to understand that, I had to use my own experience with English and Arabic. Thinking about how I associate words with similar sounds to learn them faster I then went back to Italian and played with words with similar sounds through Rami's mouth:

> Rami nodded showing him that he understood, and mentally noted: *a fondo* means *bene bene*, well well. *Bene* was another word among the first ones Rami had learned. He learned it straight after *Come stai?* How are you? *Bene grazie.*
> While washing the dishes, Rami was going back and forth through the pages of his mental vocabulary to find a space to squeeze the new word in. *Ciao, mi chiamo, vengo da, a fondo, cosa?, come stai? Bene bene*. Rami stopped, and the rotating movement of the sponge stopped too.
> Was he fine? Was he fine for real? Yes, he was doing okay. Bene, yes, but not bene bene […]
>
> And then there was the embarrassing situation when he tried to express himself and nothing came out. Yes, he could say *come stai? Bene,* he could say where he was from, more or less, he could say what he was doing, he

> could go alone in the streets and survive, but he couldn't express himself deeply, *bene bene, a fondo*. (pp. 58-59)

Once again, thanks to embodiment, and this time an embodiment of language, I was able to cross my experience with Rami's, and explore an intergenerational hybrid identity. What Lerner does by expressing the inadequacy of his character confronted with a new language and playing across his mother tongue and Spanish, I had to enlarge and renegotiate so as to express multiple experiences of language-crossing across generations. To show better this multiplicity I reworked the passage above in Chapter 11 to talk about my own struggle for expression:

> And yes, I can say keef halak? Good. I can say where I am from, more or less, I can say what I am doing. I can try to go around alone, but I can't express myself deeply, bene bene, a fondo, mneeh mneeh. I can say that I am here to study Arabic, but I can't explain why, yes, and I can survive in the streets, ask for help, say what I need, but I can't really tell who I am. (p. 236)

The experience of Rami comes back in the narrative of the I, the past in the present, the dimension of fiction in the non-fiction research. Some of the techniques of phase 1, like the use of italics in Rami's version, disappear in the I's version, not only because the journey through languages becomes more complex, but also because the narrator and the reader are now more prepared to take on board the crossing of languages thanks to the development of the story and of the characters. The interplay of three languages offers a three-dimensional view of the outsider-insider identity and how it evolves through time and through the immigration history of the family.

As I have said, these three phases rather than displacing each other, create three layers of meaning and familiarity of language that I was able to tap into to convey different times and levels of my family's journey across cultures. The ability to use my family's two languages also allowed me to create a more confident use of

English: instead of shying away from the struggle of writing in a second language, I embraced it as part of yet another strand of the story. In this way I felt closer to my family and my communities, without however having to establish a fixed identity, for how mixed that could have been. As Aleksandar Hemon explains:

> The concept of a pure language can exist only in a monolingual mind, where the complexities of the world can be reduced to the simplicity of a dot. In a multilingual mind, on the other hand, there is constant chatter among various possibilities, because inside it, language is nothing if not endless negotiation. (2016)

Conclusion

In the previous chapters, I first looked at the development of my project, to then explain my use of performative as a theoretical framework, my working material, and my methodology in connection with Nelson's model of art praxis. That enabled me to demonstrate how my writing evolved around four main techniques which helped me express the transnational nature of my own and my characters' identity, as well as my community's struggle for recognition.

A sense of inadequacy pushed my project through its different phases and it was connected to three main aspects: the inadequacy of a first-person non-fiction narrative writing about an entire cultural group (what, using Pratt's definition, I have called the monarch-of-all-I-survey); the inadequacy of the narrative form as a place of objectification unable to convey the fluidity of identities in formation and hybrid identities; and finally, the inadequacy of narrating collective historical trauma from a personal perspective.

I demonstrated how the four techniques I worked with in my writing allowed me to address this sense of inadequacy, to transform it into a force of creation, and suggest a practice-based answer to my research questions. The proposed techniques – a metanarrative adoption of fiction and non-fiction, third-person narration compensating for first-person narration, the role of performative elements, and the use of multiple languages – are all about keeping negotiations open. From all these techniques a common motif emerged: the idea of crossing as a literary device. Taking inspiration from Butler's inextricability of the I and the You, and from the concept of transactive memory, as well as their connections with grief, I propose crossing as a way of researching and writing intergenerational and transnational embodied knowledge.

Crossing helped me avoid the settling of one identity over the other (even if that meant a mixed one), and a narrative over another. As a daughter of an interracial marriage, I have always been asked if I feel more one or the other, or whether I am both or neither. My answers were always given more to satisfy my interlocutor than to convey my identity. The reality is that transnational identities rarely belong to a specific definition, and, as we saw through Godden's words, they rather dwell in the unbelonging. This unbelonging is not a realm of nothingness, but a space where identities are shaped and performed constantly.

My refusal to reach a final, or even comfortable status is mirrored in *Wait for Her's* ending: the narrator, the I, avoids providing an outcome to the paradoxes encountered in the narrative and instead opts for suggesting ways these paradoxes can be navigated. There is no resolution to the process of grief, either personal or communal, if not in the hint that it can become a place of further crossing and understanding:

> I felt pity. For them, for the boy hiding in the caves, for us, my father and me, intoxicated by petrol and grief. My head became lighter. It was as if my body was floating over the car: I could envision those hills from up high, the crawling of cars and humans, the fires, the lights, the caves, the holes, the flashes of blue. Everything so small. (p. 327)

These themes of inadequacy, grief, un-belonging, and crossing enabled me to explore my own creative writing process, but I believe they can be useful more broadly and that the potential impacts of this work – the combination between the creative writing and the exegesis – can reach inside and outside academia.

First of all, this study can be of help for those who write towards an understanding of complex personal and collective identities. This of course means first and foremost transnational writers and writers who deal with transnational material, but it can be enlarged to all those who experience the bewilderment of cultural and political transformation.

Moreover, the four techniques explained here can be beneficial for non-fiction writing in general – from creative non-fiction to academic writing – especially when dealing with multi-layered performative knowledge.

I also believe that amid the rising of nationalism, a writing that focuses on multilingualism and cultural stratification can become an essential tool to revindicate a new space for a political conscience that looks at ways of building a post-national world.

Finally, I hope for *Wait for Her* to join the chorus of young Palestinian voices that are calling from all over the world asking to finally look at us. The title *Wait for Her* comes from an anaphoric line from Darwish's poem *Lessons from the Kama-Sutra* (2013: 115-116). The *her* of the poem is of course the loved woman, but as often happens in Palestinian literature and composition, the loved woman becomes a symbol of Palestine herself. When thinking about my title I was intrigued by this crossing, and I used it in my own interpretation of *her*, between my mother and my motherland, and the feeling of grief I feel for both. This work is therefore a hymn to all those of us who have kept waiting and waiting, hoping to finally see her.

Note on Transliteration

In this thesis I use a transliteration system that tries to replicate the spoken Arabic used every day in my family and community. For this reason, in the choice of how to render some of the phonetics of this language, I often asked relatives and friends to indicate how they would transliterate the words I needed. This meant sometimes using the same letter (for example the letter h) to transliterate two different sounds and letters in the spoken Arabic (h and ḥ in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* transliteration system). In this way, those who are not familiar with Arabic will have an easier entry point to a simplified transliteration, while people familiar with Arabic will be able to recognise the original sound from the full word and the general context of the sentence.

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