

# Negotiating Palestine through the Familial Gaze: A Photographic (Post)memory Project



*Fig. 1. Shawki George Musleh. Jerusalem, Palestine (Ca. 1947).  
Courtesy of Narwal Musleh-Motut.*

## ABSTRACT

This paper addresses a familial (post)memory project in which I interrogate my investment in a photograph of my father as a young boy in Jerusalem, Palestine. Taken in approximately 1947, during the British Mandate and the inter-communal wars that led to the creation of Israel in 1948, the photograph has fascinated me since childhood. But why has this been? What does the photograph demand of me, and what do I desire from it? As this paper illustrates, answering these questions becomes an exercise in intergenerational understanding and dialogue, as I am forced to negotiate both the burdensome Palestinian identity conferred on me by my parents and my ill-fitting Canadian identity. Ultimately, I realize that this photograph mediates my current reality. While it does not provide photographic evidence of the traumatic historical moments my father experienced in Palestine, it does strike me with conflicting familial gazes: one of loss and absence, the other of mirroring and self-recognition. By applying the theoretical concepts presented by Roland Barthes and Marianne Hirsch, I show that this photograph functions both as an object of my father's memory and as a mnemonic device of my postmemory.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article porte sur un projet familial de (poste-)mémoire dans lequel l'auteure s'interroge sur son investissement dans une photographie de son père comme jeune garçon à Jérusalem, Palestine. Prise aux alentours de 1947, à l'époque de la Palestine mandataire et les guerres intercommunales qui mèneront à la création d'Israël en 1948, la photographie a fasciné l'auteure depuis l'enfance. Mais pourquoi est-ce? Qu'est-ce que la photographie lui demande, et qu'est-ce qu'elle en désire? Comme le démontre cet article, répondre à ces questions est devenu un exercice de dialogue et de compréhension intergénérationnel lorsque l'auteure est obligée de négocier entre et l'identité palestinienne pesante confiée par ses parents, et son identité canadienne qui ne va pas de soi. En fin de compte, l'auteure comprend que cette photographie sert d'intermédiaire entre elle et sa réalité actuelle. Même si elle ne fournit pas la preuve photographique des moments historiques traumatiques vécus par son père en Palestine, l'auteure en est frappée par les « regards familiaux » contradictoires: l'un représentant la perte et l'absence, l'autre représentant le miroir et la reconnaissance de l'image de soi-même. En appliquant les concepts théoriques présentés par Roland Barthes et Marianne Hirsch, l'auteure montre que cette photographie fonctionne en même temps comme un objet du mémoire de son père ainsi qu'un outil mnémonique de sa « poste-mémoire. »

**KEYWORDS:** memory; postmemory; Palestine; family; photographs; trauma

At first glance, the photograph at the centre of this paper (Fig. 1) provides its spectator with little, if any, evidence concerning its context of production, the identity of its subject or its subject's surroundings; it could be a snapshot of any young boy, taken anywhere, at any time in the past. Yet, like most vintage photographs, what lies outside the confines of its seemingly innocent frame (Metz 1985: 87)—what is unseen (Cadava 2011: 9–10)—are complicated personal and familial stories. Taken in approximately 1947, during the British Mandate and the inter-communal wars that led to the creation of Israel in 1948, this is a photograph of my father as a small boy in Jerusalem, Palestine.<sup>1</sup> Although my father and I had never discussed this photograph until recently, it has fascinated me since childhood. But why has this been? What does the photograph demand of me, and what do I desire from it (Mitchell 2005: xv)? As I began to interrogate my investment in this photograph, answering these questions became an exercise in intergenerational understanding and dialogue (Kuhn and McAllister 2006: 5). Ultimately, I came to realize that this photograph not only mediates my current reality (Kuhn and McAllister 2006: 6), but also constitutes me within my family through the act of looking (Hirsch 1997: 9). As such, it functions both as an object of my father's memory and as a mnemonic device of my postmemory, defined by Marianne Hirsch (1997) as "the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can neither be understood nor recreated" (22). While this image may not provide photographic evidence of the traumatic historical moments my father experienced in Palestine, it does strike me with conflicting and interconnected familial gazes that speak to the absences that haunt both my life and my father's life.

The photograph is clearly worn from years of handling and seemingly careless storage.<sup>2</sup> Its most prominent physical feature is the large tear that runs diagonally from almost the middle of its left-hand side to its bottom-right corner. This deep crease not only takes up three quarters of the photograph's height and the whole of its width, it also rather aggressively decapitates its subject in the process. The left third of the photograph is torn, leaving the remainder of its length with the burden of keeping the picture from breaking in two. Four additional but less severe bends crease the photograph—three in the lower-left corner and one in the upper-right corners—though each section remains firmly attached. Were that not damage enough, a portion of the image has been erased by what appears to be a spill of some nature. The spill has robbed the subject of a good portion of his lower body, but has left his face, upper body and surroundings intact. The damage sustained by the photograph implies that it may have had many homes, some in which it was handled with little care. However, it is equally possible that the photograph simply could not physically withstand the multiple hands of concern it passed through from the time it was developed to when it came into my possession in the fall of 2010. At one time, the photograph must have been safely secured in a photo album

for viewing and safekeeping, as a piece of stained yellow tape runs straight across the image's top third, suggesting that it was never meant to be physically removed.

The photograph was taken outside, with the subject, a young boy, half-seated on what appears to be a table. The boy is dressed in formal attire—tie, sweater, jacket and shorts—suggesting that the photograph may have been taken on a Sunday, before or after church, or on some other special occasion. The subject and the table on which he sits are positioned in front of a small tree with multiple branches. A decorative blanket hangs airing on a barely discernible clothesline strung from a stone house in the background; the clothesline crosses across the photograph and through the tree's bare branches to an unknown anchor outside of the picture's frame. Although the subject is wearing shorts, the gnarled and leafless tree suggests that the photograph was taken in the fall, early winter or early spring. Behind the subject and the tree stands a jagged handmade rock wall, and behind the wall is the back of the stone house, which takes up almost the entire background of the photograph. While the subject's attire is formal, his body language is casual, though posed. As noted, he is seated on the corner of a small, lopsided table. He leans slightly back on his left hand, while his right arm hangs by his side, his hand hidden under the spread of the spill. Although the spill almost wholly obscures his legs, it is possible to determine—from the position of his arms and his left foot—that his left leg, bent at the knee, hangs from the table, while his right leg seems to be stretched to the ground to balance himself. The enigmatic nature of the subject's facial expression is hard to read: not happy, yet not sad. The small curl of his lips combined with the determined and prideful look in his eyes seem to contradict the innocence and vulnerability of his young face.

Despite its seemingly ambiguous expression, the subject's face is one I know well. My father, Shawki George Musleh, was born on December 7, 1937, in Beit Sahour, Palestine, to George and Ma'zouzeh Musleh. The fifth of eight children, Shawki was born into what was then Mandate Palestine. At the end of World War I, the Ottoman Empire was dismantled and haphazardly divided into mandates that were administered by Western powers, the intention being to help these newly created states until they were able to govern themselves. Britain was awarded the mandate for Palestine in 1920; however, there were three main conflicts between 1945 and 1948 that brought an end to the British Mandate and ushered in the establishment of the state of Israel on May 14, 1948 (Cleveland 2004: 262).

The first conflict was the Yishuv's campaign against the British administration from 1945 to 1947.<sup>3</sup> Frustrated with the mandate power's unwillingness to support the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine and its continued restrictions on Jewish immigration to the region, Zionist leaders launched a campaign against the British that sought to make the mandate as unsustainable as possible. Although the paramilitary groups the Irgun and Lehi (also known as The Stern Gang) commenced initial attacks against British personnel as early as 1944, the

quasi-government of the Jewish community in Palestine (the Jewish Agency) did not join the conflict until the Haganah (the Jewish defence force) began sabotaging British communication in 1945 (Cleveland 2004: 263; Smith 2001: 175–76, 183–90).

The second conflict was the brief civil war between the Arab and Jewish communities in Palestine from 1947 to 1948. When it became clear in early 1947 that the mandate had in fact become untenable, the matter was referred to the United Nations (UN). Subsequently, the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) recommended that the mandate be terminated and Palestine divided into two states: one Arab and one Jewish, with Jerusalem designated as an international zone. Although Zionist leaders accepted these recommendations, the Arab leaders speaking on behalf of the Palestinian people, who at the time lacked efficient leadership, rejected them. For their part, the British refused to assist in the enforcement of the recommendations and instead announced their planned withdrawal from Palestine in May 1948.

From the time of this announcement until the actual day of British departure, the Jewish and Arab communities of Palestine were engulfed in an inter-communal war; Jewish forces sought to take control of the lands promised to them in the UN partition plan, which were then populated by an Arab majority. Amid this chaos, the British Mandate administration left Palestine on May 14, 1948, with no formal transfer of power. Within hours, the independence of the state of Israel, which consisted of the majority of land awarded to the Zionist leadership in the UN partition, was announced and endorsed by the United States and the Soviet Union (Cleveland 2004: 263–67; Smith 2001: 190–201).

The final conflict during this period was thus the 1948 war between the new state of Israel and the invading Arab countries of Egypt, Transjordan (now Jordan), Lebanon, Syria and Iraq. These countries entered the war amid their own political rivalries, however; Egypt, Syria and Iraq, for instance, were concerned with rallying domestic support, and all parties were suspicious of one another's territorial ambitions. Furthermore, these Arab armies were not prepared to face Israel's larger, better-equipped and better-led army, which was focused on the survival of the newly independent state. The result was a decisive Israeli victory, and by 1949 Israel had signed separate armistices with each of the Arab states. These agreements resulted in the partitioning of Palestine between Israel, Egypt (which occupied the Gaza Strip) and Transjordan (which occupied the old city of Jerusalem and the West Bank). It would be the events of 1948 that led to the Palestinian Nakba or "catastrophe," the displacement and dispossession of the Palestinian people (Cleveland 2004: 267–70; Smith 2001: 201–6).

Regardless of whether one understands the events of 1948 and the resulting refugee problem as simply the unintended by-product of the first Arab-Israeli

War, as does Benny Morris (2004: 588–601), or as a planned program of ethnic cleansing, as does Ilan Pappé (2007: xi–xviii), the historical facts remain consistent: at least 418 Palestinian villages were destroyed and depopulated;<sup>4</sup> approximately a dozen major urban areas, including Jerusalem, were emptied of their populations, with their immovable and movable assets becoming the possessions of new Israeli citizens; between 700,000 and 800,000 Palestinians were displaced from their indigenous homes, the bulk becoming refugees and 160,000 being internally displaced within Israel; at least 10,000 Palestinians were killed, with approximately three times that many wounded; and at least thirty-one massacres of Palestinians have been confirmed and documented (Abu-Lughod and Sa'di 2007: 3; Cleveland 2004: 267–68; Khalidi 2004: 13; Khalidi 2006: xxxi–xxxiv; Masalha 2005: 1; Masalha 2008: 123–26; Morris 2004: 588–601; Pappé 2006: xi–xviii, 258; Smith 2001: 195–206).<sup>5</sup>

The aforementioned events, which span from 1945 to 1948, are crucial to the analysis of this photograph. They provide the historical and political context in which Shawki and his family were living when the photograph was produced. Although the handwritten inscription on its back, signed by the subject's second-oldest brother, Fuad, reads, "My brother Shawki at Jerusalem 1947," Shawki believes that the photograph was taken closer to 1945 (Musleh 2010). Regardless of the exact date, it is clear that this image was captured during a time of great conflict and war. As will be documented below, even as a middle-class urban family with access to resources that assisted them in avoiding death, injury and exile to refugee camps—a fate met by thousands of other Palestinians—the Muslehs were still unable to escape the displacement and dispossession that characterized the Nakba.

Photographs have played a significant role in the documentation and preservation of memories of pre-1948 Palestine and the Nakba (Nassar 2006: 141). Whether driven from their homes and lands by fear, military pressure or forced expulsion, Palestinians generally fled with few, if any, of their belongings, often leaving behind personal possessions such as photographs (Khalidi 2006: xxxii).<sup>6</sup> Needless to say, the photographs that did survive have become invaluable to Nakba survivors, their children and their grandchildren, many of whom have sought to document Palestinian life before and after the Nakba by way of village memorial books, familial histories, scholarly works, archival projects and, most recently, commemorative websites (Davis 2010: 38–43; Khalidi 2004: 16–18; Khalidi 2006: xxiv; Nassar 2006: 141; PalestineRemembered.com; Slyomovics 1998: 10–14). In this regard, the Muslehs were again luckier than most. As Shawki notes, the fact that images from this period appear in the photo albums of his and his siblings' families suggest to him that they must have been among the few necessary possessions the Muslehs took with them as they fled Jerusalem in 1948 for the safety of their hometown, Beit Sahour, in the district of Bethlehem (Musleh 2010; Musleh 2011).

The survival of the Musleh family photographs also gestures to the images' shifting currency within the family. For instance, while Shawki stresses that the photograph at the centre of this project gained even greater importance for him following the events of 1948, he admits that he knows very little, if anything, about its production or the journey it made before it came into his possession (Musleh 2010; Musleh 2011).<sup>7</sup> Given how young he was when this image was captured, as well as the fact that he does not remember the family owning a camera, Shawki is not certain who took the photograph. His best guess is that the eldest of the Musleh children, his brother Edward, had borrowed a camera from the Arab College, where he worked as a secretary before moving to Beirut, Lebanon, in 1948 (Musleh 2010). Is it possible that Edward took this photograph of his second-youngest brother as a keepsake before he left home to work in nearby Beirut? If so, might Shawki be wrong in assuming that this particular photograph accompanied him and the other members of his family in their flight from Jerusalem to Beit Sahour? Would knowing who carried the photograph out of Jerusalem shed light on the journey it made before coming into Shawki's possession? Unfortunately, Shawki does not remember this photograph being taken, and many of his elder family members have passed away, taking with them pieces of irreplaceable family memory. Unable to answer the questions that abound regarding the details of the photograph's production and early history, we must content ourselves with mere speculation; for Shawki, however, the frustrating inability to answer such questions is overshadowed by the sentimentality of this tactile object.<sup>8</sup> It not only serves as an invaluable material trace of the life he and his family led before their displacement and dispossession, but it is also through these images that Shawki has taught his children about his homeland (Musleh 2010; Musleh 2011).

For as long as I can remember, this photograph, as well as the accompanying images of my parents' lives before they moved to Canada in 1968, inhabited a rather hideous green, gold and blue patterned, fabric-covered photo album. Indeed, it was through the vintage photographs held in this album that my parents taught me and my older siblings, Husam and Suzan, about our absent extended family living "back home," that mythic place called Palestine (McAllister 2010: 217). As the old album's binding began to crack and its precious treasures threatened to fall from its safe embrace, I purchased a new, simple black-leather album. Surprisingly, my parents placed these photographs in their new home just as they had arranged them in the old album, with no chronological or thematic order—rather, the images were adhered to the pages in a rush, as if left to be sorted and labelled at another time, by someone else (likely of the next generation). Perhaps feeling the pressure of time's rapid passing, over the past few years both of my parents have made some effort to organize these photographs, even starting, at one point, to electronically scan them for prosperity's sake. Although neither my mother nor my father ever completed these projects, the significance of the photographs and the memories they embody is clearly embodied by my parents' decision

to bring these images with them from Palestine when they started their new life in Canada, their disorderly yet loving preservation of the family photo albums over the years, and their repeatedly expressed desire to pass these family heirlooms on to their children and grandchildren (Musleh 2010; Musleh 2011). Furthermore, the fact that I have recently begun to share the responsibility of caring for these images, and that it will be through these same photographs that my siblings will teach their sons about Sedo's (grandpa's) and Tata's (grandma's) lives "back home," speaks to the significant impact that these images have had on our generation and will also have on the next.

Hirsch (1997) argues that photography serves as "the family's primary instrument of self-knowledge and representation—the means by which family memory would be continued and perpetuated, by which the family's story would henceforth be told" (6–7). This is true of my family, as well; however, Hirsch's statement became even more poignant to me once I realized that my father and I had never discussed this photograph of him as a small boy in Palestine. Even though my father had shown me his photographs from Palestine and told me numerous stories about his life there, he had never before spoken to me about the most personal experiences of his harrowing youth, and I had never bothered to ask. Was my father's silence a means of protecting himself from the still-raw tragedies of his youth, or was it his way of shielding his children from a troubled life that he had so far spared them? Was my silence the ignorance of a young daughter too consumed with her own life struggles to care about a past that preceded her, or was it the fear that Palestine, that mythic place of family roots and rich culture that I constructed in my mind as a child, would be violently transformed into a dark familial realm of injustice and lived experience of trauma (McAllister 2010: 217)? With unspoken yet clearly evident apprehension, my father and I began our journey into the past through memory work (Kuhn 1995: 6–9), the photograph opening a space that allowed for the transaction between a father's testimony and a child's struggle to understand.

When handed the photograph, Shawki's initial reaction is to sigh heavily and simply state that it brings up mixed emotions—a culmination of negative and positive memories, those tragic and burdensome tending to outweigh those joyful and sentimental (Musleh 2010; Musleh 2011). He stresses that as a physical object the photograph still holds great importance in his life, yet he is also quick to add that he is "not crazy about looking at it" because of the memories and emotions that it brings to the surface (Musleh 2010; Musleh 2011). For Shawki, it is what lurks "off-frame" (Metz 1985: 87), what is visually absent from this photograph (Cadava 2011: 9–10), that continues to haunt him today. As Cadava asserts:

...a photograph can never be thought of solely in terms of what is printed on photographic paper: it always bears the traces of a photographic event and, if we are obliged to reconstruct this event, this act of reconstruction requires more than simply identifying what is exhibited in the photograph.



It requires an act of engagement, an act of interpretation, which also responds to the several histories that, together, form the contexts within which the photograph was produced. (Cadava 2011: 9)

It quickly becomes evident that there are a small number of specific memories that Shawki cannot help but continually revisit during our discussion; their persistent reappearances undoubtedly speak to the enormous impact they have had on his life.

Thus, Shawki asserts that the seeds of his current uncertainty, fear and anxiety were first planted in his young psyche during a failed attempt by the Haganah to drive an explosives-laden vehicle from the Jewish quarter of Mushairim into a British army camp near Damascus Gate (both located in Jerusalem). Although the British were able to foil the Haganah's plans, the multiple bombs attached to the vehicle still needed to be detonated in a safe and controlled manner. Awakened in the night by British forces, Shawki and his family were warned about the planned explosions (which were to take place near their home) and then evacuated. While his father, uncle and older brothers remained behind with the rest of the neighbourhood to watch as the British detonated the bombs by gunfire, Shawki was sent to his cousins' godparents' home for shelter, along with his young cousin Alfred and his aunt Wadiah, both of whom lived with Shawki and his family. Uncertain of the fate of the family members who remained behind, Shawki was still hiding in his relatives' home when the bombs exploded. If being separated from his family during this moment of chaos and uncertainty was frightening, seeing and feeling the solid stone walls of the home in which he sought refuge sway violently from side to side during the bomb blasts was terrorizing. Immediately reacting to the ferocity of the explosion, Wadiah ran from the safety of the home to search for the men in the family, all of whom were thankfully found unharmed. Once it was safe, Shawki returned home to find that the family house had sustained only minimal damage; their neighbours, however, were not all so lucky. As Shawki recalls, one of the homes was so damaged that it collapsed, "just like an avalanche," after he and Alfred mischievously threw a tiny pebble at it while playing together the next day (Musleh 2010; Musleh 2011). Though no one was hurt, Shawki recalls this incident as the most terrifying night of his life.

Given the dangerous environment in which they lived, it is surprising to learn that the Musleh family would not flee Jerusalem for their hometown of Beit Sahour in the Bethlehem area until later in 1948, following forty-eight hours of nonstop bombing. Now highly conditioned to the sound of warfare throughout the night, the Muslehs awoke one morning to find that they were the only family remaining in their neighbourhood. Needless to say, the decision was made to flee Jerusalem for Beit Sahour the same day. Although Shawki remembers little of this day and his family's subsequent flight, he does recall two details. First, as they fled Jerusalem, Shawki and his family were accompanied by two unknown armed men,

likely security guards who were working with the driver the family had hired to transport them and their few necessary belongings to Beit Sahour. Second, Shawki and his family took with them only what was necessary, as they assumed that they would be returning to this home in the near future (Musleh 2010; Musleh 2011). Sadly, the Musleh family would never return to live in this house or claim the belongings they had left behind.

It is significant to note that even though the Musleh family owned two other homes in Jerusalem, they rented the house in this photograph because it was located closer to the school where Shawki's father taught. Unfortunately, in 1948 both of the homes they owned were lost—the first destroyed and the second taken over by Jewish immigrants.<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, Shawki did not return to the rented home depicted in the photograph or the remaining home owned by his family until a visit to Jerusalem with his new wife, Samira, in 1967. Although they did not enter either building during their visit, Shawki notes that when his father returned separately in 1967 to visit their remaining home, it was occupied by an Israeli family who allowed him to pick fruit from the tree he had planted there years before. As Shawki painfully remembers, his father “died a thousand times” in that moment (Musleh 2010; Musleh 2011). To add insult to injury, his father was still required to pay the mortgage on the home even though he was refused access or claim to it from 1948 onward.

As a child whose world was suddenly transformed into chaos and fear, Shawki was forced to find ways to navigate the spaces of war that configured his daily environment. In this space, he witnessed others' trauma, primarily through the visual and physical absence of human bodies—these haunting absences mirroring those within the photograph itself. For instance, after the bombing of a British army truck by the Haganah, Shawki surprisingly notes that he ran toward the sound of the explosion with a child's naive curiosity. Although he was held back by British soldiers who had already covered the scattered flesh of the victims, their efforts could not conceal the full devastation of the attack, leaving the image of one of the victim's army boots hanging from the eavestroughs of a nearby church still burned in Shawki's mind (Musleh 2010; Musleh 2011). In another instance, British forces killed several Palestinian fighters when they came upon a battle between them and the Haganah. The five Palestinians killed in this incident happened to be relatives of the man who lived on the top level of the Musleh family home and, in the custom of the time, their bullet-ridden bodies were brought to the house and laid in the backyard until they could be buried—the very same backyard in which this photograph of Shawki was taken, where he had played children's games and spent time with family. Having been told of the gruesome state of the bodies lying just outside his door, Shawki was paralyzed with fear and even today still criticizes his younger self for not being “courageous enough” to look; to witness the material destruction of human life (Musleh 2010; Musleh 2011). But the instance of witnessing that had the most impact on Shawki occurred on a day in April 1948 while

he and Alfred visited Palestinian fighters at a military post near the boys' home. Suddenly, a small group of about ten to fifteen people came into view—all women except for one man. There were no children. As he watched this group's slow movement through the streets of Jerusalem, Shawki was told that these were survivors from Dayr Yassin, a nearby Palestinian village, which had been attacked by the Irgun and Stern Gang. With 245 to 254 Palestinians killed, this incident stands as the most notorious massacre of the Palestinian Nakba (Cleveland 2004: 266; Khalidi 2006: 289–92; Smith 2001: 199; Swedenburg 2003: 45–46). As they watched the survivors' slow departure from the site where their lives had been destroyed, Shawki and Alfred were told by the soldiers of the brutality of the attack in Dayr Yassin, in which children were said to have been murdered in their mothers' laps (Musleh 2010; Musleh 2011). As a child, Shawki registered this traumatic violence by witnessing the absence of Dayr Yassin's men, women and children. As his daughter, I register and thus witness each of these moments of traumatic absence through my intergenerational dialogue with my father, a transaction mediated by this photographic object from his past.

Absence would play an additional and much more intimate role in Shawki's childhood. The photograph in question also brings to mind the death of Shawki's mother, Ma'zouzeh, when Shawki was only three or four years old. Immediately following Ma'zouzeh's death, which was caused by haemorrhaging during childbirth, her body was kept in the house awaiting burial. Unable to comprehend the gravity of the situation at his young age, Shawki was scolded by his aunt Wadiah for "laughing his head off" in the house while his mother's body lay nearby—his behaviour likely an innocent boy's unintentional yet hysterical embodiment of his and his family's grief (Musleh 2010; Musleh 2011). Sadly, this is the only memory Shawki has of his mother. Her death then became linked in his mind to the subsequent fracturing of his family. At the time of Ma'zouzeh's death, Shawki was the youngest of the children; as such, he grew extremely close to his father, George, who spoiled him endlessly. Sometime in 1948, shortly after this picture was taken, George would remarry, leaving Shawki to feel as though his father had abandoned their close relationship. For Shawki, this event was devastating—not only had his father found a new companion to shower attention and gifts on, but his new stepmother, Labibeh, and his aunt Wadiah, who was left with the task of raising him, fought constantly. In Shawki's words, "they spoiled the whole thing" (Musleh 2010; Musleh 2011). The loss he felt by the weakening of his relationship with his father was made worse as each of his older siblings (all from his father's first marriage) moved away to work and study, irreversibly damaging pre-existing sibling bonds as they left Shawki alone to renegotiate his place in this new family, particularly as additional half-siblings were born.

Thus, by the time this photograph was taken, Shawki had suffered numerous intimate losses and traumas in his life—many of which he had never disclosed to me

before. It is because of this knowledge that I am shocked when he states that, in hindsight, this photograph actually represents the best time of his life. This becomes clear as I realize that his recollections of his mother's death and the war-torn environment in which he spent his earliest years are peppered with laughter. He tells me about the mischief he and his cousin Alfred got into as they played with their firecrackers and cap guns, about how he relished in the fact that he and his friends were given both Christian and Muslim holidays off from school, and about how he was spoiled with gifts from his eldest brother, Edward, whom he idolized (Musleh 2010; Musleh 2011). The memories Shawki recounts oscillate between a child's recollection of paralyzing fear and perceived abandonment on one hand, and cherished tales of childhood play and familial love on the other. As such, his actual narrative threads are tangled and intertwined with one another, making it challenging to know where one thread ends and another begins. Some of his stories are told to conclusion, while others are abandoned part way through, but all are fragmentary and intersecting.

The seemingly chaotic intertwining of Shawki's narrative is symptomatic of the moment in which a witness's "deep memory" and "common memory" collide—a moment that Lawrence Langer (1991: 5–6) argues is exhibited in the testimonies of Holocaust survivors. As Langer explains in his analysis of their testimonials, deep memory tries to recall the self in the actual moment of trauma, as it was then, while common memory serves a dual function:

...it restores the self to its normal pre- and postcamp routines but also offers detached portraits, from the vantage point of today, of what it must have been like then. Deep memory thus suspects *and* depends on common memory, knowing what common memory cannot know but tries nevertheless to express. The witnesses in these testimonials...often appear troubled or exasperated (without knowing why) when the two kinds of memory intrude on each other, disrupting the smooth flow of their narratives. (Langer 1991: 6)

Thus while it is Shawki's common memory that safely allows him to speak of a life free of war before and after this photograph, and to express joy and laughter alongside the darkest moments of his testimonial, it is his deep memory that boils beneath the surface, threatening to rush forth and break through into the open—much like the creases, tears and spills that mar his younger self in the photograph. The confusion and frustration that Shawki experiences in the moments that his deep and common memory collide manifest themselves not only in his inability to tell of his life in the neatly chronological and detailed order that his daughter and readers of this paper may desire, but also in the recurrent uneasy, puzzled and distant expressions that accompany his periodical mental and emotional exit from the present moment, in which he is briefly taken back to the original moment of trauma. Possibly to protect me, himself or us both, Shawki's common memory ulti-

mately wins out during our discussions of this photograph, yet, despite his efforts, there are times when his deep memory breaks through. For instance, when noting that the internal fighting in Palestine prior to the Nakba haunted his childhood dreams, he also admits that today he still suffers from nightmares in which the worst moments and fears from his past are regrettably revisited and acted out (Musleh 2010; Musleh 2011).

As evidenced by the memories he shares, Shawki's childhood fear and anxiety came not only from witnessing political violence, but also from feeling its repercussions and seeing its cruel aftermath, never knowing when or how it would come again. Too young to fully comprehend the events that made up his daily reality and feeling as though he and his family had no control over their destiny, young Shawki was forced to simply accept his fate, to never think about anything beyond getting through the day and to practice avoidance when faced with the worst of his reality (Musleh 2010; Musleh 2011). Thankfully, he was able to escape the tragic fate of many other Palestinians, eventually making a safe and loving life for his wife and children in Canada. However, the anticipatory anxiety and scars of deep memory left from his childhood can still be heard in his words and felt in his actions. These are the memories that have marked and changed him forever.

I had always known that my father's life had been scarred by war and familial strife, but the details of his struggles had never before been disclosed to me in such detail. As his daughter, I had always been curious to learn more about this photograph and my father's life in Palestine, but was always too scared and uncertain to ask, never knowing what his response might be or whether I was strong enough to bear witness to his testimony or acknowledge the dark realms of the mythologized Palestine of my childhood. Somehow, I finally found the courage to ask, and he found the desire to share. With the photograph acting as mediator between my haunting postmemory and the disturbed unarticulated world of his deep memory, I came to realize that, although my father's traumas had previously remained unspoken, they have always been very much present in my own life.

Hirsch argues that family photographs "are composite, heterogeneous, 'image-texts': visual texts, that is, whose readings are narrative and contextual but which also, in some ways, resist and circumvent narration" (1997: 271). Hirsch's distinction is important, as family photographs, particularly those associated with trauma, are far from being benign material objects that project homogenous narratives understood, accepted and uncontested by all who see them. Rather, she notes that one of the often-ignored capacities of the photograph is the way in which it can constitute an individual within the family through looking. Hirsch notes that it is this "series of intersecting and mutually confirming looks that tell the story of this nonverbal form of familial relationship" (9). Accordingly we must understand each instance of the familial gaze not as a subject looking at an object, but rather as "a

mutual look of a subject looking at an object who is a subject looking (back) at an object” (9).

Roland Barthes (1981) also speaks to this unique distinction between the narrative and intimate capabilities of the photographic medium when he distinguishes between the “studium” and the “punctum.” Barthes defines the studium as a narrative reading of a photograph that is characterized by “a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment...but without special acuity” (26). He notes that:

[i]t is by studium that I am interested in so many photographs, whether I receive them as political testimony or enjoy them as good historical scenes: for it is culturally...that I participate in the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the action. (Barthes 1981: 26)

The studium stands in opposition to that of the punctum; the punctum breaks and punctuates the studium. Whereas Barthes notes that he is consciously engaged with the studium of the photograph, the punctum is not sought out; rather, it is the “element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me.... A photograph’s punctum is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (26–27). It is this “wound,” this personal and unique response or prick of recognition that draws one to a photograph, often for reasons that they cannot fully comprehend. Unexpectedly, while looking at this photograph of my father, I am struck by conflicting, dual familial gazes: one of loss and absence, the other of approval and self-recognition.

Much in the same way that Barthes looked at a photo of his mother as a young child and read his non-existence in the clothes she wore before he was born, I too see my absence in my father’s eyes, which gaze back at me more than twenty-five years before my birth. Strangely, there is my father as a small boy living out historical moments that I can only read about in history books. There he is in Jerusalem during the dangerous and uncertain time of the Mandate, not knowing the catastrophes that would befall his people in the forthcoming Nakba and the June War of 1967. When I look at this image, I hear my thoughts and how I mythologized this photograph translated into the words of Barthes: “this has been,” he said, for “[t]he photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here...[a] sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze” (80–81). With the photograph acting as an intergenerational object of transaction, I finally asked my father to recount the details of this period of his life. In doing so, I realized that he was “there” witnessing many of these events through absence, much like myself. Thus, for me, this photograph does not recall the past, but rather ties me to my father’s trauma, which is certified as truth, as authentic, by the deep memory that this photographic record reveals. It is this “magic” (88), intrinsic to the photograph, which allows it to serve as both an object of my father’s memory and my postmemory.

As a mnemonic device of my postmemory, this photograph speaks to the traumatic events that both of my parents experienced at a young age, as well as those that they experienced as married adults—events shrouded in mystery and never fully accessible to me, but which I nonetheless struggle to comprehend. The stories of the Mandate conflicts, the Nakba and the June War of 1967 have haunted my family here in Canada. These disturbing, almost unreal, tales not only dominated our family narrative and shaped our familial and personal identities; as children, my siblings and I witnessed the after-effects of such trauma, as our parents tried to negotiate their existences in Canada while seemingly lost in time and space.

Locating myself, or rather the absence of myself, in this photograph speaks to the losses that I feel. On the one hand, there is the loss of a homeland I do not know, that I have not visited, and that for some reason I long to “return” to (Hammer 2005: 2–6).<sup>10</sup> As Juliane Hammer notes, many young people of Palestinian heritage born and raised in diaspora share this desire to “return” to Palestine, even though many have never been there before. Although Hammer does not directly address Hirsch’s concept of postmemory, she does state that to the subjects of her study:

...the very notion of return must be symbolic, and what they know about Palestine—how much attachment they feel to the country, the people, the nation, or the culture—is based on learning, on the transmission and re-creation of memories, images and history. (Hammer 2005: 5)

On the other hand, I feel the loss of an enormous extended family that I am either slowly forgetting or have yet to meet. These losses mark in me a disconnect, a slip-page, between the burdensome Palestinian identity conferred onto me by my parents before my existence (Kuhn 1995: 1) and the ill-fitting Canadian identity I developed while being born and raised in Canada as a child of Palestinians in diaspora. Not only was I not raised “back home” with our extended family, but I spent the bulk of my first eighteen years in a small town in Saskatchewan—a community unfamiliar with cultural, political and racial diversity and sensitivity. As a consequence, I had no idea what I was, who I was, where I fit in or what was expected of me, and I struggled constantly to negotiate some form, any form, of authentic grounding. I suppose it is because of this that I shockingly find myself jealous of the young boy in the photograph. Although my siblings and I are eternally grateful to our parents for the life they have given us, looking at this photograph I find myself longing to walk in Palestine as my father has, to speak the language as he can, to know our family in the way that he does and to be as unwavering in my certainty of who I am and where I came from as he is. For even though his life in Palestine may have been marred by violence and absence—traumas that continue to haunt him today—my father still proudly and confidently proclaims that he is Palestinian.

Unfortunately, knowledge of the time “before” the trauma, the place called “back home,” and one’s native language is all too often lost to those second generations that struggle to define themselves in the shadow of their parents’ haunting traumas while also trying to conform to the standards of their peers (Miki 1998: 17–24; Miki 2011: 313–14). Yet, surprisingly, in my father’s return gaze I also find proof of my existence, my “Palestinian-ness.” Gazing at my father as a boy, I can physically recognize myself: I see my awkward half-smile, my naturally curly hair and my full cheeks—I am mirrored back to myself, this is me. Thus, for me, the punctum of this photograph is twofold: it is not only the acknowledgement of my non-existence and the losses that I feel captured in this moment of “this has been,” but also what has been granted to me, my current existence, visible only in this photograph as “this will be” (Barthes 1981: 96).

Recognizing myself as I gaze at this photograph cannot heal the wounds of absence and postmemory, however. In fact, the contradictory yet intersecting familial gazes that strike me speak to the incongruent nature of postmemory itself, for they emphasize both “incomprehensibility and presence, a past that will neither fade away nor be integrated into the present” (Hirsch 1997: 40). It is this unrelenting haunting of my postmemory that I have spent my life clumsily trying to negotiate; the teen years I spent battling against my parents and their expectations, which originated in another time and place, and, conversely, the number of school projects I dedicated over the years to my heritage and “back home” speak boldly to this. Once in university, my curiosity in my family’s history grew, and led me to the study of the Middle East and, more recently, to memory and trauma studies. Although studying and writing about these issues cannot reconcile my postmemory, it has oddly enough brought me the comfort of understanding both my parents and how their experience of being out of time and place has been passed down to me. It is this comfort that I feel when I look at this picture of my father and see his reassuring eyes looking back at me, seeing me, acknowledging me, approving of me—for I realize that neither of us are alone on this treacherous journey; we are travelling together. In this picture, a parent’s memory and a child’s postmemory meet, for as Barthes astutely notes, the punctum “is an addition: it is what I add to the photograph and *what is nonetheless already there*” (1981: 55).

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## Notes

1. For a discussion of how photographs enable civic negotiations between a photograph's subject, photographer and spectators, particularly between Israelis and Palestinian noncitizens of Israel, see Ariella Azoulay's *The Civil Contract of Photography* (2008).
2. The following analysis of this family photograph, which includes a physical description of both it and its subject, as well as a discussion of its context of production and currency within the family, takes the bulk of its structure from the memory-work protocol laid out by Annette Kuhn in *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (1995: 6–9).
3. The Hebrew word “Yishuv” refers to the Jewish community in Palestine prior to the formation of the state of Israel.
4. For detailed information regarding the bulk of these villages, see Walid Khalidi's *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (2006). Following extensive field research, Khalidi and his team were able to provide the following data for each of the 418 villages covered in the book: a map showing the location of the village in Palestine/Israel; statistical information concerning the village and its inhabitants; the circumstance of the village before 1948; the village's occupation and depopulation; the Israeli settlements created on the village's land; use of the village in the present; and, when available, pictures of the village and/or its land before 1948 and at the time of research.
5. For a detailed history of the causes of the 1948 Palestinian refugee crisis as based on, at the time, newly released Israeli military and intelligence documents, see Benny Morris's *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (2004). For essays concerning the significance of the Nakba in Palestinian culture, as well as how memories of this event function in the present through various media, see Ahmad H. Sa'di's and Lila Abu-Lughod's edited volume *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims to Memory* (2007). For photographic histories of Palestine and the Palestinians before and after 1948, see Walid Khalidi's *Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians 1876–1948* (2004) and Edward Said and Jean Mohr's *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (1986).
6. For information regarding the introduction of photography to Palestine, as well as the early development of a local photographic tradition, see Issam Nassar's “Familial Snapshots: Remembering Palestine in the Work of the First Local Photographers” (2006).
7. Shawki believes that he took the photograph from Fuad's collection once he married my mother, Samira, in Beit Sahour in 1964. The photograph had been in my parents' possession from that time until this past year, when I took a number of family photo albums to my home in Maple Ridge, BC (Musleh 2010).
8. Whether dealing with their own family photographs or those of strangers, researchers undertaking memory work often know little to nothing about the image's context, production, currency and/or subjects. In this instance, I had the opportunity to speak with the photograph's subject; however, this is not always possible. For divergent treatments of such memory work, see the writings of Kirsten McAllister (2006), Martha Langford (2006) and Marianne Hirsch (1997).

9. Shawki and his family do not know how this home was destroyed, given that they fled Jerusalem for Beit Sahour in 1948 and did not return to Jerusalem until 1967.

10. For varied accounts of later generations' return to the sites of family trauma, see Juliane Hammer (2005), Leo Spitzer (1998) and the latter's work with Marianne Hirsch (2006).

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