



BRILL

MIDDLE EAST JOURNAL OF CULTURE AND
COMMUNICATION 8 (2015) 307–326



brill.com/mjcc

From Palestine to the Canadian Diaspora

The Multiple Social Biographies of the Musleh Family's Photographic Archive

*Nawal Musleh-Motut**

Simon Fraser University, School of Communication, Canada

nsmusleh@sfu.ca

Abstract

In this paper I trace the various social biographies of selected family photographs that traveled from Palestine to Canada and depict my parents' lives in pre-1948 Palestine, the West Bank and Jordan, and cover multiple generations from the 1930s to the present day. In this work I answer previously unattended questions; for instance, how and to what extent did the social and cultural meaning of these photographs change as they were removed from the photographic traditions of the Middle East where they were produced and relocated to Canada with my parents? What social and cultural value did these photographs hold for me and my siblings as members of the postmemory generation growing up in Canada and has this significance shifted now that we are adults? Finally, what importance might this photographic archive come to have for my siblings' children? Utilizing the photographic album that houses the bulk of the family's photographs produced in Palestine and Jordan as an instrument of social and oral performance, I analyze how the members of my family narrate the multiple and fluid memories, investments and realities that these photographs facilitate.

Keywords

Palestine – Canada – diaspora – family – photographs – albums

* I offer my deepest gratitude and love to my parents, Shawki and Samira, as well as my siblings, Husam and Suzan, for generously participating in this project. I am also indebted to Lucie Ryzova and the anonymous peer reviewers for their wonderful feedback and questions. Many thanks to Kirsten McAllister, as well as my mentors and colleagues at Simon Fraser University, for their continued support. Finally, thank you to my husband, Dan, who continually supported and encouraged me through the researching and writing of this article. All images are taken from my own family album.

In 'Negotiating Palestine Through the Familial Gaze: A (Post)memory Project' (2012) I interrogated my investment in a photograph of my father as a young boy in Jerusalem, Palestine taken around 1947. Ultimately I came to realize that this photograph mediates the intergenerational transaction between my father's deep traumatic memories of his youth in Palestine prior to the formation of the state of Israel in 1948 and my irreconcilable postmemories¹ (Hirsch 1997: 2012) of the pre-1948 intercommunal wars, the Palestinian Nakba and the June War of 1967 as I struggled growing up in Canada. However, this project also raised a number of significant and, at the time, unattended questions concerning our larger familial archive of photographs, which depicts my parents' lives in pre-1948 Palestine, the West Bank and Jordan before they immigrated to Canada in 1968. For instance, how and to what extent did the social and cultural meaning of these photographs change after they were removed from the photographic traditions and practices of the Middle East where they were produced and relocated to Canada with my parents? What social and cultural value did these photographs hold for my siblings and myself as members of the postmemory generation growing up in Canada and how has their significance shifted now that we are adults scattered throughout North America? Finally, what, if any, importance might this photographic archive come to have for my siblings' young children?

Building upon Elizabeth Edwards' argument that photographs are 'not merely passive and inert entities to which things happen and things are done ... [but] ... remain socially and historically active' as they shift between different contexts and are therefore open to 'multiple performances and the making of multiple meanings' (Edwards 2001: 13–14), this paper examines the various social biographies of a selection of my family's photographs that have traveled from Palestine to Canada and which span multiple generations from the 1930s to the present day. Utilizing the photographic album that houses the bulk of our family photographs produced in Palestine and Jordan as an instrument of social and oral performance (Langford 2001, 2006), I analyze how the members of my immediate family, myself included, narrate the multiple and fluid memories, investments and realities that these photographs facilitate.

Undertaking such an examination is crucial for two reasons. First, it expands our understanding of how family photographs allow for the intergenerational transfer of memory and postmemory by attending more directly to the ways

1 Hirsch defines postmemory as 'the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated memories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can neither be understood nor recreated' (Hirsch 1997: 22).

in which photographs facilitate this process as active agents—both as images that allow for phenomenological engagement and witnessing, and as material objects that take on endless meanings as they circulate and are performed across time and space (Edwards 2001; Edwards and Hart 2004; Guerin and Hallas 2007). Second, it makes a unique contribution to the current scholarly effort to document and analyze local photographic traditions and practices in the Middle East by addressing the dearth of information on how photographs produced in the region circulate and remain active in the diaspora.

As the historian Issam Nassar (2006) argues, it was the work of local Arab and Armenian professional photographers that can be credited with the formation of a distinctly Palestinian photographic tradition that began documenting, in the late nineteenth century, the social and private lives of area residents. In contrast to European photography that negated the subjectivity of the Arab population by constructing them as part of the biblical landscape and Zionist photography that wholly ignored them in the process of documenting the formation of the Yishuv,² 'in local [Palestinian] photography, the object of the picture was his or her own subject: it was they who decided to be photographed and chose the pose and image in which they would appear' (Nassar 2006: 147). While the work of these early photographers primarily focused on studio portraiture, the documentation of missionary work in the region, post-mortem photographs and war photography, these varied trends of self-representation and photographic agency were taken up and adapted by street and amateur photographers as more versatile and economical photographic technology became available. It is precisely because of its ability to facilitate and document various forms of Palestinian self-representation that photography has come to play such a pivotal role in the formation of Palestinian collective memory and national identity.

Regardless of whether they were taken by professional or amateur Palestinian photographers, the locally produced photographs that survived the Palestinians' displacement and dispossession in the 1948 Nakba, and later the June War of 1967, have come to hold tremendous social, cultural and political significance for Palestinians of multiple generations. On the one hand, they provide evidence of the social and cultural lives of Palestinians before, during and after these tragedies and, as such, have been used in various memorial and commemorative projects such as family histories, village memorial books, academic publications and online and traditional archival projects (Azoulay

2 The Hebrew word Yishuv refers to the Jewish community in Palestine prior to the formation of the state of Israel in 1948.

2011; Davis 2007, 2010; Khalidi 2004; Musleh-Motut 2012; PalestineRemembered.com). On the other hand, these photographs facilitate phenomenological engagement with and the witnessing of memories and postmemories of pre-1948 Palestine, the Nakba and the June War of 1967 (Azoulay 2011; Guerin and Hallas 2007; Khalidi 2004, 2006), as well as the 'imaginative geographies' (Schwartz and Ryan 2003: 6) by which those living in exile and/or the diaspora have come to perceive the Palestinian homeland and understand their relationship to and place within it (Davis 2007, 2010; Hammer 2005; Said 1986; Schulz 2003).

Yet, if subjective and embodied engagement with these photographs can produce multiple forms of memories, investments and realities, they do so both as visual images *and* as material objects. In other words, any critical analysis that links these photographs' evidentiary force with their capabilities for subjective meaning making must attend to *both* 'the content of the images themselves, as well as ... the contexts of their conception, production, dissemination, consumption and preservation' (Schwartz and Ryan 2003: 7; Edwards 2001; Edwards and Hart 2004). As Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart argue,

In shifting the methodological focus away from content alone, it can be seen that it is not merely the image *qua* image that is the site of meaning, but that its material and presentational forms and the uses to which they are put are central to the function of a photograph as a socially salient object. It can also be observed that these material forms exist in dialogue with the image itself to create the associative values placed on them.

EDWARDS and HART 2004: 2

Thus, it is not only the images of Palestinian social and cultural life captured in these photographs that create meaning, but also the social biographies of these material objects as they move through time and space as active agents allowing for the narrativization and performance of images in multiple contexts. In other words, '[m]aterial forms create very different embodied experiences of images and very different affective tones and theatres of consumption' (Edwards and Hart 2004: 6).

This need to attend to the materiality of photographs becomes even more pressing in regard to private photographs presented in family photo albums, for '[n]ot only do [albums] narrativise photographs ... but their materiality dictates the embodied conditions of viewing, literally performing the images in certain ways' (Edwards and Hart 2004: 11; Langford 2001, 2006). Thus, while the intention behind the conception, production, dissemination, consumption and preservation of family photo albums is often the construction and reproduction of stories a given family tells itself about itself (Hirsch 1997), diver-

gent and polysemous memories, postmemories and geographic imaginings will undoubtedly emerge depending on where, when and by whom an album is performed³ (Edwards and Hart 2004; Langford 2001, 2006). Thus, in order to critically assess the multiple forms of cultural work, particularly the memory work, that these photographs undertake, I asked the members of my immediate family to 'perform' one of our family albums.

The primary research for this article is based on a series of interviews I conducted with my immediate family members over a two-week period in early 2014. These targeted interviews are in themselves the continuation of multiple informal conversations and organic moments of remembering that naturally extended from the aforementioned 2012 project concerning a photograph of my father as a child in Palestine.⁴ For the purpose of the present study, I started by simply handing each family member the album in question and asked him or her to orally walk me through it. Afterward I asked each of them a series of similar questions regarding how the significance of the photographs and the album has changed for them over time and in various places. I also asked them to reflect on how they thought their family members might respond to narrating the album and the follow-up questions.

The object at the center of this study is an 11 × 14 inch faux black leather photo album adorned with the word 'Memories' in gold script on its lower right hand corner. While this album currently houses the bulk of my immediate family's personal collection of photographs produced in Palestine and Jordan, these images originally inhabited a blue, green and gold fabric covered album that fell apart years ago due to overuse, multiple travel and poor storage. Of the new album's 48 jet-black pages only 34 have photographs adhered to them, leaving 14 pages unused. In total it contains 261 photographs: 198 are attached with poor quality and thus failing photo corners, 16 have become unattached and are now thoughtlessly crammed between random pages and 47 remain in a Ziploc bag hidden in the back recesses of the album. Given their age and the lengthy journeys they have endured, it is surprising that most of these photographs are either in near-perfect condition or scarred only by a few creases, stains and/or pieces of aged adhesive tape—only two or three are damaged beyond

3 Langford argues that '[t]he parallels between orality and photography are striking. The structure and content of oral tradition—the fabric of memory in oral consciousness—are met in the photographic condition ... Our photographic memories are nested in a performative oral tradition' (i). Thus, '[t]he showing and telling of an album is [an oral] performance' (Langford 2001: 5).

4 The photograph at the center of the 2012 project resides in the album currently under investigation.



FIGURE 1 *Some of the oldest photographs in the Musleh family photo album appear on this page*

repair. While a small number of the photographs in the album document my father's years studying at Morris Harvey College in Charleston, West Virginia from 1959 to 1962 and my parents' and siblings' first years in Canada from 1968 to approximately 1972, the vast majority were produced either in pre-1948 Palestine, the West Bank or Amman, Jordan.⁵ The oldest photograph, likely taken in the early to mid-1930s, is of my paternal grandmother, Ma'zouzeh, my Uncles Edward and Fuad, and my Aunt Hannah in Palestine prior to my father's birth in 1937 (figure 1, center image).⁶ This photograph appears in the album surrounded by photographs depicting my father's life in Jerusalem and

5 Although the album contains photographs of both my paternal and maternal families (the Muslehs and Sahourys, respectively), in multiple locations (pre-1948 Palestine, post-1948 and post-1967 West Bank and Amman, Jordan), over multiple times periods (early to mid-1930s to 1968), all of them were conceptualized, produced, disseminated, consumed and preserved by individuals who self-identified as Palestinian regardless of location, citizenship and/or time period.

6 This is the only image in the album that was not developed on photo paper. While my father is certain that the original is somewhere in our possession, only two print copies of the scanned image appear in this particular album. Regardless, these prints are some of the most highly prized objects in the album as they reproduce one of the only existing images of my paternal grandmother.



FIGURE 2 *Some of the most recent photographs in the Musleh family photo album appear on this page*

Beit Sahour⁷ from approximately the age of five until 1962 when he returned home from the United States after graduating college. Directly juxtaposing this page are the most recent photographs contained in the album. Taken between 1966 and 1967 in Beit Sahour, Beit Jala⁸ and Bethlehem, these photographs document the lives of my parents, Shawki and Samira, and my older brother, Husam, before they left Palestine for their new life in Canada in 1968 (figure 2).

Following the generic standard of a family photo album, ours documents momentous life events like graduations, engagements, weddings, births and baptisms, as well as cherished moments like family gatherings, vacations, and the sending off and welcoming home of loved ones. The photographs were taken by professional photography studios and candidly by amateur photographers. The album is not organized in any thematic or chronological manner, rather the photographs appear to have been placed in the album in a rush; several have not even made it out of the Ziploc bag in which they were temporarily housed (figure 3)—it is as though the compilation of the new album was abandoned midway through. Thus, while the photographs contained in

7 Beit Sahour is located in the Bethlehem Governorate, one and half kilometers east of Bethlehem City.

8 Beit Jala is located in the Bethlehem Governorate, two kilometers west of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem City.



FIGURE 3 A sample of the photographs contained in the Ziploc bag, which is stored in the back of the Musleh family photo album

this album document my family's life 'back home' prior to their departure for Canada in 1968, the less than organized and incomplete compilation of the album is indicative of the diasporic condition and immigrant experiences that have shaped my family's life in Canada from 1968 to the present.

While owning a camera was a luxury inaccessible to my parents' immediate families for a portion of the time period covered by this album, they stress that even then photography was always part of their lives, as someone they knew—either a relative or a neighbor—often had a camera on hand, providing them with a means by which to document significant milestones and keep distant family and friends apprised of their well-being. Thus, the vernacular photographs that they produced can be read 'as [both] sites of *articulation* and *aspiration*; as personal and social statements that express how [they] envisioned their sense of self, their subjectivity, and their social status; and as objects that capture[d] and preserve[d] those articulations in the present [moment] as well as for the future' (Campt 2012: 7). When compiled together the result is a photo album that, in its entirety, presents us with a snapshot of the joys, lifestyles and milestones of two urban middle-class Palestinian Christian families before and after their merging, as well as the subsequent growth of a young family following the birth of their first child.

As they perform these photographs, my parents laugh, smile, crack jokes, eagerly share their favorite memories and lean against each other affectionately, in the end thanking me for giving them the opportunity to relive such 'nice memories' of when they were young. However, this romanticized self-

representation of middle-class urban familial normalcy, which they once helped produce and now engage with, belies the chaos and trauma of events that took place outside the photographs' frames (Cadava 2011; Metz 1985): the Mandate era intercommunal wars, the Nakba and the June War of 1967.⁹ The beloved memories that my parents re-experience in the present moment are periodically disrupted by troubling recollections of war and the emotional and economic hardships of immigration that are triggered by a handful of seemingly benign photographs and quickly passed over with little comment, particularly by my father.¹⁰

These ordinary family photographs—generically similar to countless mid-twentieth-century middle-class family snapshots around the world—were thus imbued with new meanings and new demands as they traveled with my family to Canada in 1968 and were subsequently compiled into a single photo album. Determined to provide themselves, their young son and their future children with better lives than those that awaited them living under Israeli occupation, following the June War of 1967 my parents left Beit Sahour for Canada.¹¹ Wanting souvenirs of their homeland and the loved ones they were leaving behind, my parents brought many of the photographs that now reside

9 As Geoffrey Batchen et al. argue, '[e]veryday life goes on around atrocity, and this can also make up the content of photographs of atrocity. [As such], photographs of atrocity may be made up of ... photographs that appear to be taken for family albums, or as holiday snaps. Particularly with the viewer's retrospective knowledge, such ordinary photographs can become photographs of atrocity. The lack of transparency makes us produce more creative and engaged re-readings of photographs that have already been classified in other ways' (Batchen et al. 2012: 177). It is for this reason that our family photographs allow for the possibility of remembering the Mandate era intercommunal wars, the Nakba and the June War of 1967 even though these traumatic events and their consequences cannot be seen in them, and are thus missing from, the photographs' frames. Also see Hirsch and Spitzer (2010).

10 For a detailed account of my father's experiences of war and familial strife during his youth in pre-1948 Palestine, see Musleh-Motut (2012).

11 When my parents and brother left the West Bank they planned to return in five years, however, they did not actually attempt to return until 1975, when my mother traveled to the region with my siblings and myself (ahead of our father) to scout for schools and a home (note that the photo album in question remained in Canada during this time, along with our other belongings). However, after the first week it became apparent that we could not afford to stay given the increased price of living in the region that resulted from the influx of Lebanese citizens displaced by the Lebanese Civil War. Ultimately, my family never returned to the region to live and instead has spent the past 46 years moving between multiple locations in Canada in a constant state of rootlessness characteristic of the Palestinian diaspora.

in this album with them; they supplemented the collection with additional family photographs after each subsequent visit 'back home'. To the best of my parents' knowledge, my mother compiled these photographs into the original blue, green and gold album shortly after they arrived in Canada and then moved them into the faux black leather album sometime during the last twelve years.¹² Today she is shocked by the apparent 'disorder' of the album and questions her intentions and choices, even admonishing herself for 'ruining' it. Yet when pushed further she acknowledges that in the midst of struggling with crippling homesickness, the challenges of immigrant life in a new country and the demands of daily life caring for her husband and young son while pregnant with my older sister Suzan, the simple preservation of the photographs as objects that connected them to 'back home' far exceeded any concern for the chronological or narrative order of the album. As physical mementoes of their now distant homeland and loved ones, these material objects came to function as part of an 'artefactual diaspora' in which photographs produced in the Middle East became 'the temporary physical location for the transmigration of ideas about identity and belonging in both local and global contexts' (Harris 2004: 139). Thus, much like the village memorial books compiled by Palestinian refugees to map their 'geographic nostalgia' (Davis 2007: 54) for the villages depopulated and destroyed in 1948, in the diaspora this family album served my parents as a material yet imaginative reconstruction of their lives 'back home' and it preserved 'virtual communities of intimacy' (Kroes 2010: 77) with those they had left behind.

Thus, my parents both adamantly stress that the social and cultural value of this album and the photographs it contains not only increased exponentially with their move from Palestine to Canada, but also with each new significant life event: my sister's birth in 1969; my birth in 1974; their failed attempt to return 'back home' in 1975; the death of various close family members, particularly those who appear in the album; my father's struggle with various health concerns over the past three decades; the birth of each of their three grandsons; as well as my own research and writing on Palestinian and familial history. These moments represent milestones through which these family photographs gain increasing significance as time goes by; the more so given my parents' emphatic

12 Given Kim's (2005) assertion that the matriarch of the family often takes on the task of compiling and preserving family photographs and albums, as well as Schulz's (2003) statement that it often falls to the mothers and women in Palestinian families to retain and pass on family history, it is not surprising that my mother was the one who took on this task.

assertions that while they rarely ever look at these photographs anymore they have never considered them more valuable.

Today my parents take and share thousands of digital photographs of their three grandsons as they grow and mature. They have said, however, that they intend to pass this album, along with the rest of our photographic archive, on to their children and grandchildren in the hopes that we will remain interested in their lives and the history of their families, and be proud of the Palestinian homeland and people to whom we are connected. Yet my parents are aware that, as Martha Langford argues, '[v]oices must be heard for memories to be preserved, for the album to fulfill its function' (Langford 2001: 5). In other words, without my parents' performance of the album and the knowledge that it elicits, the album's 'sustaining conversation' is suspended 'stripping [it] of its social function and meaning' (Langford 2001: 5). Because the 'immediate genealogical mapping' and accompanying stories of familial history available to my parents are almost completely inaccessible to my siblings or myself, '[t]he photographs [become] the faded effigies of relatives who themselves have faded from memory. No longer able to call forth a repertoire of anecdotes and stories and set in a context of silence, these photographs are not unlike weathered tombstones, the mute markers of family history' (Kroes 2010: 81).¹³ Although we each have vague memories from our youth of our parents showing us these old photographs and telling us stories about that all too distant place called Palestine, as my siblings and I perform the photo album in the present we each struggle to identify the relatives, events and locations which it depicts. Admittedly, the only images familiar to us are those marking significant milestones in our parents' lives, i.e., their wedding and the birth of their first child (figures 4 and 5), and/or those images of our parents that we find particularly aesthetically engaging (figures 6 and 7). While in our youth we may have tried to retain more of the images and stories that our parents shared with deep pride and longing, for my siblings and myself most of these have been displaced by our own direct memories of struggling with the exigencies of immigrant life and postmemory—experiences that we only now realize have deeply impacted our understanding of and relationship to these photographs.

13 It is because of our shared awareness that my parents are the only ones who truly have knowledge about these photographs and the album's compilation that each member of my immediate family agreed to participate in this project. Ultimately, we were all grateful that one of the byproducts of this project has been a video of my parents performing and narrating the album, which will now serve as a photograph-based oral history of my parents' lives 'back home'.



FIGURE 4 *One of my parents' wedding portraits taken and developed by photographer Abdilnour Ishaq in 1964 at Photo Star Studios in Nativity Square, Bethlehem. The studio's business stamp appears on the back of the photograph.*



FIGURE 5 *A studio portrait of my mother, father and brother taken in Bethlehem, c. 1966. Although there is not a studio business stamp on the back of this photograph, my parents believe that it was also taken and developed by photographer Abdilnour Ishaq at Photo Star Studios in Nativity Square, Bethlehem. The handwriting in Arabic that appears on the back of the photograph translates to “Shawki, Samira, Husam.”*



FIGURE 6 *My father in front of his father's house in Beit Sahour after returning home from college in the United States, c. 1963. The photograph was taken by his cousin George. Nothing appears on the back of this photograph.*



FIGURE 7 *My mother posing for a snapshot on a road in Beit Sahour while accompanying American tourists on a tour of the city guided by my father's brother-in-law, c. 1964. My parents owned their own camera by this time and, as such, my father believes he took this photograph. Nothing appears on the back of this photograph.*

In her study of the Palestinian diaspora, Helena Lindholm Schulz maintains that '[d]espite the weight bestowed upon family [in Palestinian culture], the family as an institution [has undergone] dramatic changes as a result of the diaspora, social fragmentation and wars' (Schulz 2003: 174). Of particular relevance is her assertion that,

Dispersal affects everyday life and everyday concerns in the sense that family members are leading very different lives ... [S]ince all the members of a dispersed family are affected in different ways by their lives in host societies, time and energy simply go into processes of coping with present surroundings. Everyday life and concerns eventually (to an extent) replace both the dream place of Palestine and social relations defined by that place.

SCHULZ 2003: 175

Although this process, which characterizes the diasporic condition of Palestinians, undoubtedly affected each of the members of my immediate family, it did not shape us in the same way. There is no doubt that leaving the Middle East

and immigrating to Canada impacted our parents the most, for they were the ones who gave up everything for the well being of their young and growing family. However, my siblings and I also felt the repercussions of this dispersal and fragmentation, albeit in different ways and to varying degrees. Of greatest concern to this analysis is my sister's astute observation that each of us grew up in a different 'family' based on the correlation between our dates of birth and our parents' immigration.

First, being born in Bethlehem in 1965, my brother, Husam, was the only one of the children who immigrated to Canada and, as such, bore the brunt of the trauma associated with trying to adapt to a new land, culture and language directly alongside our parents. In keeping with Schulz's analysis above, my brother asserts that the burden of simply adapting to the daily struggles of immigrant life as a young child who merely wanted to fit in, combined with our parents' seemingly unrealistic insistence that the family constantly maintain Palestinian traditions both inside and outside the home, caused him to not only eventually quit speaking Arabic, but also to resent and dismiss the culture and extended family that he had recently been torn away from.

Second, although my sister, Suzan, was born in Shaunavon, Saskatchewan only one year after our parents and brother immigrated, her younger years were dominated by a perplexing contradiction in which she felt as though she had to mediate and/or endure family tensions caused by the economic and emotional realities of immigration, ever lingering homesickness and the unrelenting demands of raising a young family without the support of extended family. At the same time she also felt as though she was part of a culture and familial circle that existed on the other side of the world.

Finally, having been born in Moosomin, Saskatchewan in 1974, I was the most removed from life 'back home' and our family's initial immigration experience, yet I expressed the greatest sense of cultural and familial loss; this loss ignited in me an appetite for Palestinian and family history. While I was undoubtedly raised in an immigrant household and, as such, felt the effects of my parents' and siblings' struggles, my youth was preoccupied by my own need to negotiate the burdensome Palestinian identity conferred on me by my parents with the ill-fitting Canadian identity I acquired as a result of being born and raised in the diaspora (Musleh-Motut 2012).

The differences between our childhood experiences growing up in the Canadian diaspora are reflected in, and inform, our different individual interests and levels of engagement with our family photographs, both in the past and present. Although Husam was born in Bethlehem and appears as a baby in many of these images, he has always had the least interest in and knowledge of these photographs. I, on the other hand, was born in Canada and thus do

not appear in any of these images and yet have always been completely fascinated by them—a fascination that eventually led me to make them the object of my academic studies. Being the middle child, my sister Suzan's interest and knowledge characteristically falls somewhere in between Husam's and mine.¹⁴

Moreover, as we each perform our family album in the present it becomes apparent that, while all three of us are part of the Nakba and 1967 postmemory generations,¹⁵ Husam and Suzan's narrativization is dominated by their direct memories of our family's immigrant experience. Thus, my siblings' engagement with these images vacillates between an emotionally removed but generally enthusiastic curiosity about our family's past and a form of affective and thus piercing backshadowing in which they project onto these images their own needs and desires (Barthes 1981; Hirsch 2012; Hirsh and Spitzer 2010). In other words, coming to these images with their present-day knowledge, Husam and Suzan express, to varying degrees, both an empathy for our parents' difficult pasts and gratitude for their sacrifices, alongside resentments that they could have been more conscious of and responsive to how hard the early years in the diaspora were on their children.¹⁶

Somewhat disconnected from the most harrowing of my family's immigrant experiences, my own empathy and gratitude toward my parents is instead wrapped up with my struggles to imaginatively wrestle with the postmemories of pre-1948 Palestine, the Nakba and the June War of 1967 that I am unable to reconcile but which nonetheless continue to haunt my life (Cho 2008; Musleh-Motut 2012).

Nevertheless, if as images these photographs become screens on which Husam, Suzan and myself project our own unique emotions and needs (Hirsch 1997, 2012; Hirsch and Spitzer 2010), as material objects they have become invaluable familial heirlooms that connect us to our parents and their loved ones—albeit, crucially, in different ways. The photographs that we gaze at

14 While Suzan does not appear in any of the photographs produced in the Middle East, she does appear in the photographs produced in Canada, which are also housed in this album.

15 Although my brother has no conscious recollection of the events of the June War of 1967 which he lived through at the age of two, he can also be considered part of this postmemory generation for, as Hirsch argues, child survivors of traumatic historical events, the '1.5 generation' (2012: 15), also often struggle with postmemory.

16 During their performances of the album, Husam noted that he felt inhibited when looking at these photographs and thus could only engage with them intellectually and Suzan stated that looking through the album was a humbling experience which 'put her in her place' as she was reminded that our parents were simply a young couple doing what they thought was best, much like she and her husband are doing now.

and touch in the present moment are the very same objects that once passed through our grandparents' hands in Palestine and caught our parents' tears of homesickness and joy in the diaspora.

Thus, from the 1930s to the present, these photographs, which were initially produced in the Middle East and are now assembled in our family album in the Canadian diaspora, have assumed multiple social and cultural lives. As images, they have elicited a diverse and fluid range of memories, investments and realities; as objects, their multiple trajectories and presentational forms have determined the conditions of their viewing and performance. Nonetheless, their work as active agents is far from complete. As the future heirs to the Musleh family's photographic archive, my siblings' children will determine these photographs' future trajectories. At present, my nephews—all of whom are under the age of ten—are simply too young to comprehend the content and value of these photographs. While my siblings and I share our parents' hope that the boys will one day be interested in these photographs and proud of our family history, we all recognize that the fulfillment of this desire will undoubtedly depend on the boys' individual personalities and the extent to which their connections to extended family are nurtured.

Yet a fascinating chance moment of intergenerational connection provides a glimpse of the boys' possible future engagement with these photographs. Within the aforementioned Ziploc bag hide two photographs of my mother, her parents and seven of her soon-to-be eleven siblings on vacation in Lebanon in 1954 (figure 3, bottom left-hand and right-hand images).¹⁷ As my brother examines these photographs during our interview he comments on how much our sister's son looks like our Uncle Jamil.¹⁸ I cannot help but agree—the similarity is so striking that both my sister and parents note it in our subsequent interviews. Fascinated by seeing her young son's features in the face of her uncle sixty years earlier, my sister snaps a quick photograph of the left-hand image with her cellphone. The next day she shows the digital photograph to her son, points to our Uncle Jamil and asks, "Who's this?" Without hesitation my nephew enthusiastically responds, "That's me!"

My family's assumption that the boys are still too young to truly comprehend and engage with these photographs is evidenced by my nephew's obvious confusion over his mother's and aunt's emphatic reaction to his response. Still, my nephew's ability to recognize himself in an image of his great-uncle

17 In the left-hand image, my mother is seated second from the right and in the right-hand image she is standing furthest to the left.

18 In the left-hand image, my Uncle Jamil is seated second from the left and in the right-hand image he is standing in the front row furthest to the right.

six decades earlier raises multiple questions about the boys' future interest and/or engagement with this photographic archive: Will they be interested in these old photographs which were produced decades before their births and in a land they may never visit? Will they be curious about their Palestinian roots and, if so, how might they reconcile this legacy with their other parents' family histories, neither of which originate in the Middle East? Will they cherish these photographs both as images and objects tying them to the lives of their grandparents, parents and/or extended family? If they do express an interest in and/or feel a connection to these photographs, will they eventually take on the responsibility of preserving them? If so, how will having grown up inundated with digital photography affect their understanding of and appreciation for these photographs? Will they recognize the uniqueness of their materiality and thus continue to preserve the album and the objects it contains and/or will they digitize the archive so that the images can be accessible for generations to come? If the latter, what will happen to these material photographs that our family has treasured for decades? It will be years before we will know the answers to these questions and, as such, this latest family project concludes with a new list of unattended questions. Ultimately, the only thing that we can truly be certain of is that the Musleh family's photographic archive has multiple future social biographies that remain to be lived and written.

References

Primary Sources

- Musleh, Husam (26 January 2014). Interview. Roseville, California.
 Musleh, Samira and Shawki Musleh. (9 February 2014). Interview. Abbotsford, British Columbia.
 Musleh, Suzan (1 February 2014). Interview. Kelowna, British Columbia.

Secondary Sources

- Azoulay, Ariella (2011). *From Palestine to Israel: A Photographic Record of Destruction and State Formation, 1947–1950*. London: Pluto Press.
 Barthes, Roland (1981). *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang.
 Batchen, Geoffrey, et al. (eds.) (2012). *Picturing Atrocity: Photography in Crisis*. London: Reaktion Books.
 Cadava, Eduardo (2011). Trees, Hands, Stars, and Veils: The Portrait in Ruins. In Fazal Sheikh (photographer), *Portraits*, pp. 5–43. Göttingen: Steidl.

- Campt, Tina M. (2012). *Image Matters: Archive, Photography, and the African Diaspora in Europe*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Cho, Grace (2008). *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Davis, Rochelle (2007). Mapping the Past: Re-creating the Homeland. In Lila Abu-Lughod and Ahmad H. Sa'di (eds.), *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*, pp. 52–75. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Davis, Rochelle (2010). *Palestinian Village Histories: Geographies of the Displaced*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Edwards, Elizabeth (2001). *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums*. Oxford: Berg.
- Edwards, Elizabeth and Janice Hart (eds.) (2004). *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images*. London: Routledge.
- Guerin, Frances and Roger Hallas (eds.) (2007). *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture*. New York: Wallflower Press.
- Hammer, Juliane (2005). *Palestinians Born in Exile: Diaspora and the Search for a Homeland*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Harris, Clare (2004). The Photograph Reincarnate: The Dynamics of Tibetan Relationships with Photography. In Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (eds.), *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, pp. 139–155. London: Routledge.
- Hirsch, Marianne (1997). *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Hirsch, Marianne (2012). *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hirsch, Marianne and Leo Spitzer (2010). Incongruous Images: “Before, During, and After” the Holocaust. In Zsófia Bán and Hedvig Turai (eds.), *Exposed Memories: Family Pictures in Private and Collective Memory*, pp. 3–28. Budapest: Central European University Press.
- Khalidi, Walid (2004). *Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians 1876–1948*. Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies.
- Khalidi, Walid (2006). *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948*. Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies.
- Kim, Yeon-Soo (2005). *The Family Album: Histories, Subjectivities, and Immigration in Contemporary Spanish Culture*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press.
- Kroes, Rob (2010). Virtual Communities of Intimacy: Photography and Immigration. In Zsófia Bán and Hedvig Turai (eds.), *Exposed Memories: Family Pictures in Private and Collective Memory*, pp. 77–87. Budapest: Central European University Press.
- Langford, Martha (2001). *Suspended Conversations: The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Langford, Martha (2006). *Speaking the Album: An Application of the Oral-Photograph-*

- ic Framework. In Annette Kuhn and Kirsten Emiko McAllister (eds.), *Locating Memory: Photographic Acts*, pp. 223–246. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Metz, Christian (1985). Photography and Fetish. *October* 34: 81–90.
- Musleh-Motut, Nawal (2012). Negotiating Palestine Through the Familial Gaze: A Photographic (Post)memory Project. *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 27: 133–152.
- Nassar, Issam (2006). Familial Snapshots: Representing Palestine in the Work of the First Local Photographers. *History & Memory* 18 (2): 139–155.
- PalestineRemembered.com. *Pictures For Palestine Before and After Nakba*. PalestineRemembered.com. <http://www.palestineremembered.com/OldNewPictures.html>.
- Said, Edward W. (1986). *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*. Photographs by Jean Mohr. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Schulz, Helena Lindholm with Juliane Hammer (2003). *The Palestinian Diaspora: Formations of Identities and Politics of Homeland*. New York: Routledge.
- Schwartz, Joan M. and James R. Ryan (eds.) (2003). *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination*. London: I.B. Tauris.