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ZAYTOUNA

Rooted Histories in Uprooted Memories



ZAYTOUNA

Rooted Histories in Uprooted Memories

NAIMA MONIF ALMAJDOBAH

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my parents, your unwavering love and support have been my rock through every high and low. Thank you for nurturing my deep connection to Palestine, which has been the driving force behind this work. Without you, none of this would be possible. To my sisters, your encouragement mean everything to me. Thank you for always being there.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my beloved grandfather, Jedo Abd, whose steadfastness in carrying the olive branch from Palestine ensured that our family's history and connection to our homeland remained tangible, even after 75 years.

Zaytouna is dedicated to the 14,300,000 Palestinians in the diaspora, a testament to our collective resilience in preserving our rich history and heritage for generations to come.

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Fig. 1

Like the olive trees, we will continue to grow in the diaspora, scattered around the world beautifully. We will grow and grow and our roots will continue to spread and spread, nothing and no one can stop us.

The real resistance is saying,
I am here and I am here to stay,
just like our olive trees.

-Excerpt from one of the collected stories, by Dana El-Tawil

ABSTRACT

Palestinians, whether living under occupation or—like myself—in the diaspora, experience a complex journey of displacement and dispossession stemming from the Nakba of 1948. This reality shapes our collective identity, rooted in our connection to our homeland.

Zaytouna explores an under-researched topic: the relationship between the olive tree and uprooted Palestinians. It reveals a rich tapestry of narratives that encompass the quintessential and everlasting relationship between a land and its people. The resulting interactive archival installation consists of two parts: audio recordings from Palestinians in the diaspora, which capture their memories and voices; and visuals, which represent the storytellers' places of origin, emphasizing the connectedness of memories, voices, and narratives.

This project highlights the olive tree's physical and metaphorical significance to Palestinian people in the diaspora and provides a compelling example of cultural preservation for endangered peoples in contexts well beyond Palestine.

INTRODUCTION

Zaytouna is derived from the Arabic word for “an olive.” My thesis title is inspired by a Quranic verse from Surah An-Nour, verse 35, in which Allah describes His light using the imagery of olive oil. The verse refers to the olive tree as a blessed tree, “شَجَرَةٍ مُّبَارَكَةٍ” (*shajaratin mubarakatin*), known in Arabic as “Zaytouna.” This name symbolizes not only the fundamental significance of the olive tree in various cultural and religious contexts but also the metaphorical potential inherent in even the smallest olive, reflecting the theme of growth and enlightenment central to this thesis. They are mythical and legendary, and some of them are the oldest trees in the world.

The olive tree, a cherished symbol of peace and prosperity, holds a special place in human history. Revered for its ability to bring joy and symbolize peace, it embodies a deep connection to the land. Cultivated since ancient times, olive trees feature prominently in literature, cultural symbols, and religious practices worldwide. Admired by poets, scientists, artists, and historians, the olive tree stands as a genuine icon.^[1]The olive tree’s significance is particularly profound in Palestine, where it is more than just a symbol of peace and prosperity. Its roots in Palestinian culture run deep, embodying resilience, heritage, and a profound connection to the land.



Fig. 2

At the heart of this thesis is a deep commitment to preserving the stories and traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation in uprooted Palestinian families. In today's fast-paced world, these cherished narratives are at risk of being forgotten. The ongoing occupation, with its deliberate efforts to erase Palestinian identity and history, poses a serious threat to these traditions. As older generations pass away, they take with them stories and memories that are not written down, leading to the gradual loss of our cultural traditions. This loss highlights the urgent need to archive these stories before they are lost forever. These narratives are not just stories; they are the essence of our identity and resilience as a people.

This thesis holds a dual significance. Firstly, it acknowledges the pivotal role of the olive tree in the lives of Palestinians in the diaspora, serving not just as a source of sustenance but also as a symbol of resilience, continuity, and cultural identity. By preserving these narratives, we honor the enduring spirit of the Palestinian people and their deep-rooted ties to their homeland. Secondly, this thesis underscores the importance of safeguarding these narratives for future generations.

This archival project is critical to the survival of Palestinian culture, especially in the diaspora, where ancestral stories form the foundation of identity. It stands as a protector of traditions, knowledge, and stories, bridging the gaps and preserving the legacy for posterity.

Ultimately, Zaytouna unpacks the depths of Palestinian culture, preserving the stories and traditions that form the essence of its identity. Through the innovative application of technology, it bridges the past, present, and future, creating a lasting legacy that not only fortifies the bond between individuals and the olive tree but also ensures that future generations can access their cultural roots and preserve them. In doing so, I honor people whose identity is intrinsically woven into the olive tree and its stories, safeguarding the narrative threads that have transcended time.

DELIMITATIONS

Though ambitious, this thesis has its boundaries. While recognizing the great diversity and complexity of the political, social, and economic contexts that influence the Palestinian experience, this research centers on the cultural and personal narratives related to the olive tree specifically, due to its tremendous symbolic and metaphoric value.

Palestinians have faced not only the challenges of occupation but also the complexities of a diasporic existence spanning generations. This has created a unique blend of connection and dislocation within our community. To maintain the authenticity and personal element of my project, and to ensure that my storytellers felt comfortable sharing their intimate narratives, which demand trust, I turned to social media and reached out to family and friends. Their support helped me extend the network to include their relatives and friends.

This approach not only mirrored the interconnected theme of my project but also made the process deeply personal. Hence, I chose to gather stories specifically from Qatar and Jordan, two places I am intimately connected to and where I experience my own Palestinian-ness outside of Palestine itself.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Olive Tree Significance

In the intricate context of the olive tree's significance, this exploration unravels the various dimensions of its deep-rooted cultural and historical importance. By looking into the olive tree's significance in Palestinian culture, the preservation of intangible cultural heritage, and the communal nature of rituals, this review sets the stage for these three sub-investigations that will weave their way through this project.

For centuries, the olive tree has silently borne witness to the unfolding narratives of generations, intertwining together to create a rich tapestry of traditions. It represents not just an agricultural commodity but also a symbol of cultural identity and unity. As the botanist, Robin Kimmerer beautifully captures in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, indigenous cultures often form deep connections with the natural world, and the olive tree is no exception.^[2]



Fig. 3

Olive groves are traditionally family properties in Palestine, passing from parents to children, across generations. They create a physical link to their ancestral roots. This cultural attachment to the olive tree fosters a sense of belonging and shared heritage among Palestinians, both within their homeland and in the diaspora. Despite generations growing up far from their motherland due to the mass dispossession caused by the occupation beginning in 1948, olive trees have emerged as literal “landmarks,” their ancient age serving as the only tangible evidence of Palestinians’ connection to the land. These trees stand as silent witnesses to history, spanning across human generations and embodying the Palestinian presence on the land.

Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO)

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) encompasses practices, expressions, and knowledge passed down through generations, such as oral traditions, performing arts, and traditional crafts. This living heritage evolves as communities interact with their environment and history. UNESCO stresses the need to safeguard ICH to preserve cultural identity, celebrate diversity,



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

and foster creativity, all crucial for sustainable development ^[3]. ICH encompasses local ecological knowledge, highlighting how communities interact with and understand their environment, fostering appreciation for nature, and sustaining cultural practices. Supported by UNESCO, ICH values these traditions for their role in conserving biodiversity, managing resources sustainably, and promoting harmony with nature. ^[4]

Zaytouna's purpose is to preserve ICH by capturing and physically translating memories directly linked to the Palestinian olive trees, celebrating and highlighting local ecological knowledge and the endangered intangible cultural heritage of the Palestinians in the diaspora.

Communal Nature of Rituals

Braiding Sweetgrass is a book that talks about the significance of sweetgrass to the indigenous Haudenosaunee people. It illustrates the impact of preserving culture and the value of rituals for endangered communities everywhere:

Of course, you can do it yourself...but the sweetest way is to have someone else hold the end so that you pull gently against each other, all the while leaning in, head-to-head, chatting and laughing, watching each other's hands, one holding steady while the other shifts the slim bundles over one another, each in its turn. Linked by sweetgrass, there is reciprocity between you, linked by sweetgrass, the holder as vital as the braider.^[5]

This quote emphasizes the beauty of collaboration and shared experiences, with individuals working together in a mutually beneficial manner. In the context of olive tree rituals, the braiding of sweetgrass is reminiscent of the communal nature of activities such as harvesting and processing olives. Before the season begins, Palestinians gather all the equipment needed, mats, ladders, and buckets to pick olives and picnic in orchards that have been passed down across generations. It is a cherished time of the year with extended family and friends coming together to help, drink tea, and share traditional food under the trees. ^[6]



Fig. 6

This symbolizes the interconnectedness between people and the olive trees they cultivate. It also underscores the significance of each participant's role in these rituals, promoting a sense of reciprocity and strengthening social bonds within communities. One of the most cherished Palestinian traditions is the olive oil-tasting ritual, a sensory experience that connects individuals to their heritage. If a ritual like this does not get passed down, how are we going to ensure that such rituals do not fade away?

Botanical Diaspora

The Botany of Desire by Michael Pollan proposes how, contrary to popular belief, we might not be using plants as much as plants use us. This phenomenon occurs by getting humans to ensure a plant's survival, thanks to appealing to our desires.^[7] In this context, the olive tree "travels" through people, as olive oil is imported to various locations where Palestinians in the diaspora are located. This phenomenon suggests that the olive tree, much like its people, may have a desire to explore the world and participate in the diaspora, transcending borders.



Fig. 7

The Importance of Archiving to Palestinians

The article *Archiving Palestine and the Palestinians: The Patrimony of Ihsan Nimr*, written by Beshara Doumani, a Palestinian-American academic currently serving as the president of Birzeit University, sheds light on the growing interest among Palestinians worldwide in archiving their history, driven by a profound need to preserve their narratives and cultural heritage. Doumani notes a significant increase in archival activities, including collecting oral histories, genealogies, photographs, letters, textiles, and folk songs, and documenting historical sites and destroyed villages.

While this archival impulse is not unique, as it mirrors the efforts of many groups experiencing large-scale dispossession and displacement, what sets the Palestinian case apart is the sustained intensity of these activities over several decades, driven by two key developments.

The first is the rise of what we might call an “archival democracy,” made possible by digital technology and the internet. These advancements have made it easier for people and groups to share and access archival material from anywhere in the world. Research institutions and think tanks have also used these tools to digitize and share their collections. This has not only made archival material more accessible but has also helped create connections between different cultures.

The second key development that is driving the archival passion among Palestinians is a deep-seated pessimism about the future. This feeling is fueled by the ongoing loss of land, the daily erasure of cultural and social bonds, and the perceived ineffective leadership. These factors have intensified the need to document and preserve their heritage. This urgency extends beyond the past to encompass the present, as Palestinians seek to counteract the ongoing erasure of their identity and history. ^[8]



Fig. 8

Storytelling

The significance of ancestral ties to olive trees extends beyond mere ownership. These groves carry the weight of family histories, connecting individuals to their forebears. Almost as powerful in modern times is the way imported olive oil subtly conveyed a sense of identity to immigrants, satisfying their appetites for flavors from home, their nostalgia, and other intangible desires. ^[9] An illustrative example of this bond is how most Palestinians in the diaspora exclusively purchase Palestinian olive oil, underscoring that it is not just a culinary preference but a form of support, resistance, and a stance against occupation. Storytelling serves as a powerful medium for exploring the ancestral bonds with olive trees, weaving narratives around these timeless symbols. Through this narrative-rich approach, designers can breathe new life into the cultural importance of the olive tree within contemporary design.

Asmahan Qarjoui's research on Palestinian olive oil demonstrates how its connection to the olive tree is a profound source of history that links individuals to their homeland. ^[10]

These stories, deeply rooted in tradition and culture, serve as bridges between the past and the present, fostering a renewed appreciation for the olive tree's significance in both design and everyday life. In this contemporary world, where tradition and innovation often coexist, storytelling plays a pivotal role in bridging the gap, enabling the olive tree to remain a symbol of culture while adapting to the ever-changing landscape of contemporary living.



Fig. 9

Conclusion

Passed down across generations, the olive tree serves as a tangible link to ancestral roots, fostering a sense of belonging and shared legacies among Palestinians within their homeland and across the diaspora. As the quote from *Braiding Sweetgrass* aptly illustrates, collaboration and shared experiences are integral to building a sense of community. In a similar way, communal olive tree rituals, such as olive oil tasting, create both community and identity, connecting individuals with their heritage.

The olive tree's enduring legacy, deeply intertwined with human culture and history, continues to thrive as a symbol of heritage, unity, and cultural richness in the Palestinian narrative. This exploration delves into the olive tree's profound significance. It aims to unravel the multifaceted angles of the olive tree's effect, examining the olive tree's significance in Palestinian culture, the preservation of intangible cultural heritage, and the communal nature of rituals.

PRECEDENT STUDIES

This chapter presents a series of relevant design precedents, examining how other cultures and communities have integrated the olive tree into their rituals, and narratives, which then offers valuable insights for the development of a framework for the preservation of Palestinian cultural narratives.

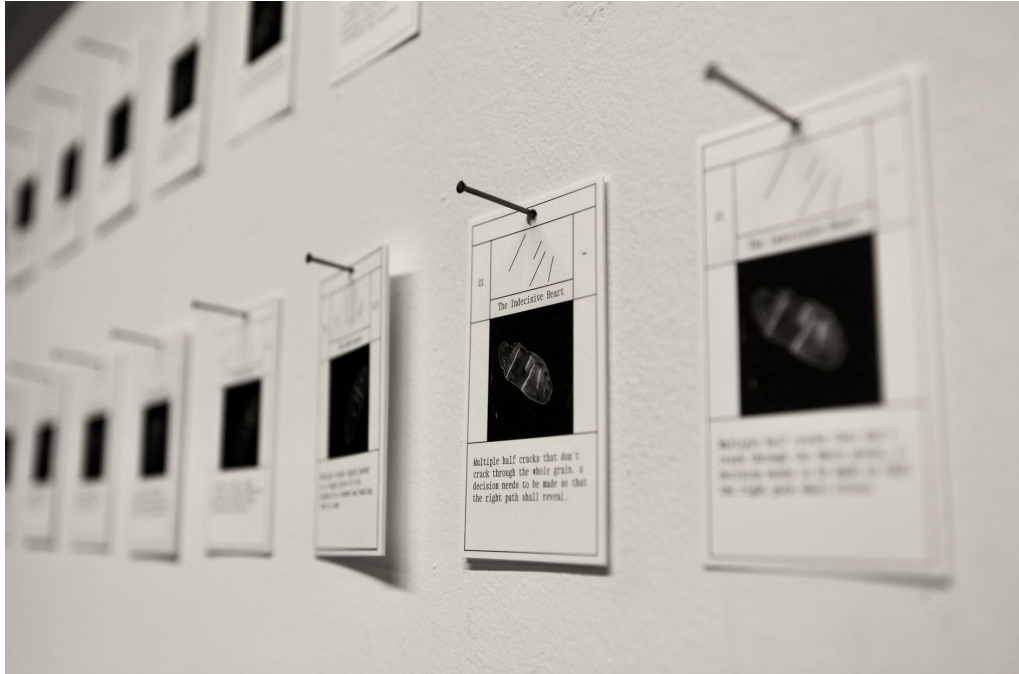


Fig. 10

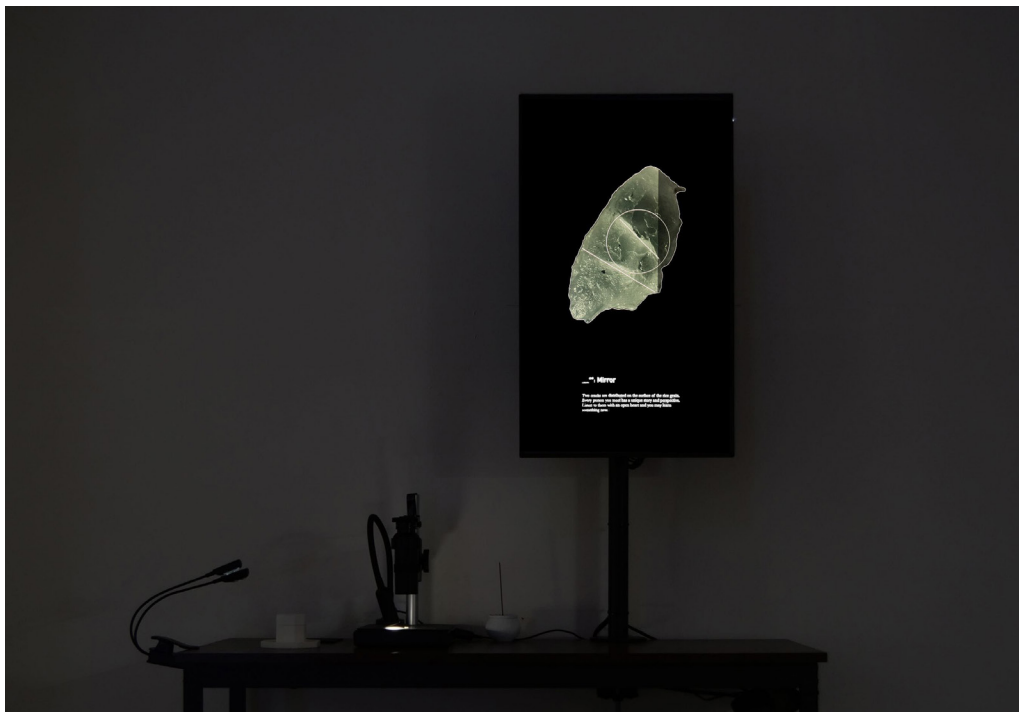


Fig. 11

A Message Lies Between the Cracks

The project "A Message Lies Between the Cracks" by Chinese designer Qianxun Chen explores the cultural importance of rice by combining traditional divination techniques using rice with cutting-edge technology. Chen achieved this by cooking five hundred grains of rice and allowing the heat and water to naturally create cracks on the rice grains. Subsequently, each cooked grain was dried and photographed, creating an extensive collection of unique cracked grain patterns. Using this dataset, a system was developed that utilized computer vision technology to reveal hidden messages within a single cooked rice grain.^[11]

My project, like Chen's, explores the cultural significance of their respective subjects, integrating modern technology with traditional practices. Chen's project revolves around a form of tasseography, a fortune-telling method that interprets patterns, in rice cracks, and this thesis creates personal connections through narratives, emphasizing the emotional and experiential aspects of the subject matter.



Fig. 12



Fig. 13

Funnelling Resistance

Designer Reema Abu Hassan interviewed many Palestinians as part of her research. These interviews showed how most of them have a practice of importing olive oil directly from their homeland in large tin containers, which they store in a dark, dry environment, pouring out small amounts as needed. In response to this tradition, Abu Hassan created a set of three vessels to commemorate her grandmother's ritual of dispensing Palestinian olive oil. These vessels are constructed from transparent glass to highlight the oil's clarity, with a central blue glass component serving as a double-sided funnel. Each vessel incorporates this funnel to facilitate the transfer of oil from the tin container into a smaller one. Additionally, the funnel can be inverted to become a nozzle, allowing for easy pouring from each vessel. The largest vessel is designated for oil storage, the medium-sized one for cooking, and the smallest one for cosmetic use.^[12] Much like the exploration of the cultural significance of the olive tree, this project commemorates specific rituals, underscoring the significance of cultural memory and rituals. Both projects, Abu Hassan's and this thesis, emphasize the importance of the use of material and design elements.

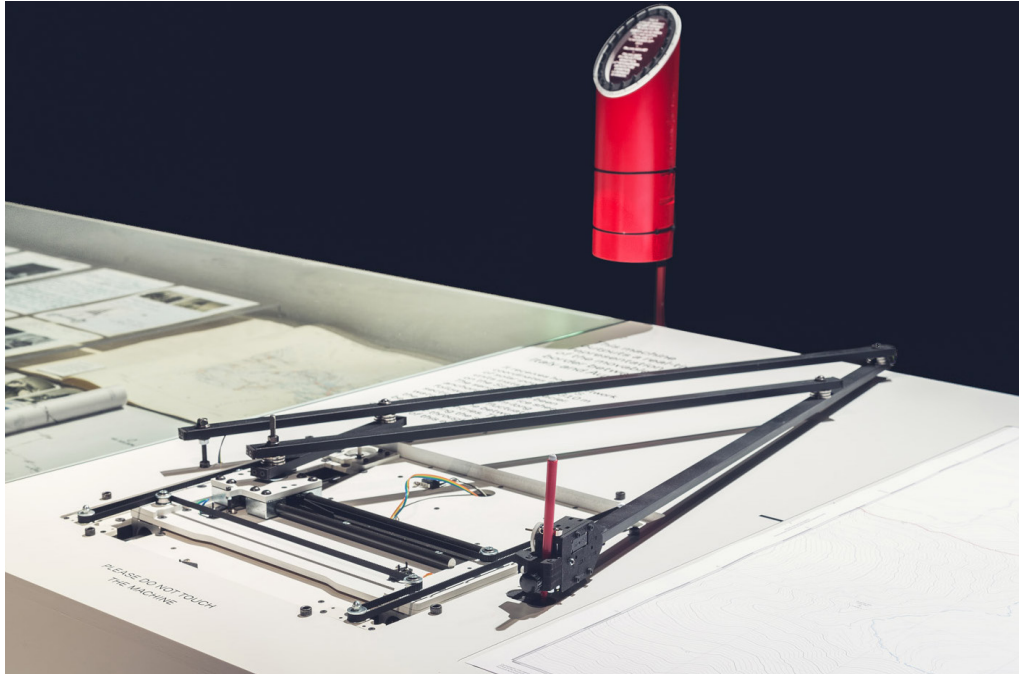


Fig. 14

Italian Limes

“Italian Limes” is an initiative established by Studio Folder that examines the idea that natural borders are shaped by intricate, long-term ecological forces, exposing the challenges of representing territories and the political ramifications of doing so. The project involves the creation of sensors installed on a glacier situated along the Italy-Austria border, actively tracking changes in the watershed’s structure.

The installation comprises three key components: a raised-relief model illustrating the specific case study, a collection of historical documents and maps from archives, and a drawing machine that visually portrays the real-time dynamics of the Austrian-Italian border. The drawing machine accomplishes this task using data gathered by the sensor over a designated time frame. The resulting drawing illustrates the shifting of borders determined by changes in sea level. Consequently, a single sheet of paper can display multiple lines, each representing the extent of sea level fluctuations during the given period.^[13]



Fig. 15

Both projects, Italian Limes and this thesis, underscore the importance of cultural and political context. Additionally, the current project and Italian Limes both focus on real-time data and data visualization techniques to represent their respective subjects, whether it’s the evolution of a watershed’s geometry or the stories and narratives related to the olive tree. This precedent beautifully showcases how design can tell rich stories, bringing to life the intricate cultural and political aspects they carry.

It vividly portrays the idea of a border with such historical significance, which has served as a separator for thousands of years and is always changing and moving, emphasizing how nature effortlessly ignores man-made borders.

Italian Limes is a powerful reminder that, deep down, we are all part of a shared natural tapestry, and design has this incredible ability to capture and express these meaningful connections.



Fig. 16

Rebirth Trauma as a Performative Process

The Rebirth Trauma art installation is paired with a performance that encourages a communal reconsideration of the connection between landscape and community. The performance serves to revive an olive harvest that has been lost to the area, reigniting memories that remain a vital part of the community's identity. Roberta Di Cosmo, the performance artist, achieves this by arranging green nets typically employed in olive harvesting and positioning ladders—two indispensable tools for the seasonal harvest. Once these elements are in place, Di Cosmo and her team of performers engage in a symbolic act of harvesting imaginary olives from trees intended for that specific location.

Through this approach, Di Cosmo explores methods for coping with trauma and harnessing mourning as a means of renewal. The installation itself is situated on a foundation of ashes strewn across the land in Puglia, southern Italy. These ashes represent the remains of olive trees that once thrived there but were devastated by the deadly Xylella bacterium.^[14]



Fig. 17

The project aligns with the collective engagement approach pursued in my thesis by encouraging a collective re-evaluation of the community's connection to the environment. Both projects share a focus on exploring the cultural significance of their subject, the olive tree, demonstrating the intrinsic relationship between culture and the environment. Additionally, they both explore themes of transformation and resilience, using environmental elements metaphorically to convey compelling narratives.

INVESTIGATIONS

In the investigations chapter of *Zaytouna*, the primordial and intricate relationship between the olive tree and uprooted Palestinians is explored in depth. This chapter serves as a comprehensive narrative, documenting the extensive research, experimentation, and challenges encountered throughout the creative process. As well, the evolution of ideas and the pivotal moments that shaped the approach are meticulously examined.

The thesis investigations were presented in the form of three exhibitions that helped develop the ideation of this project.

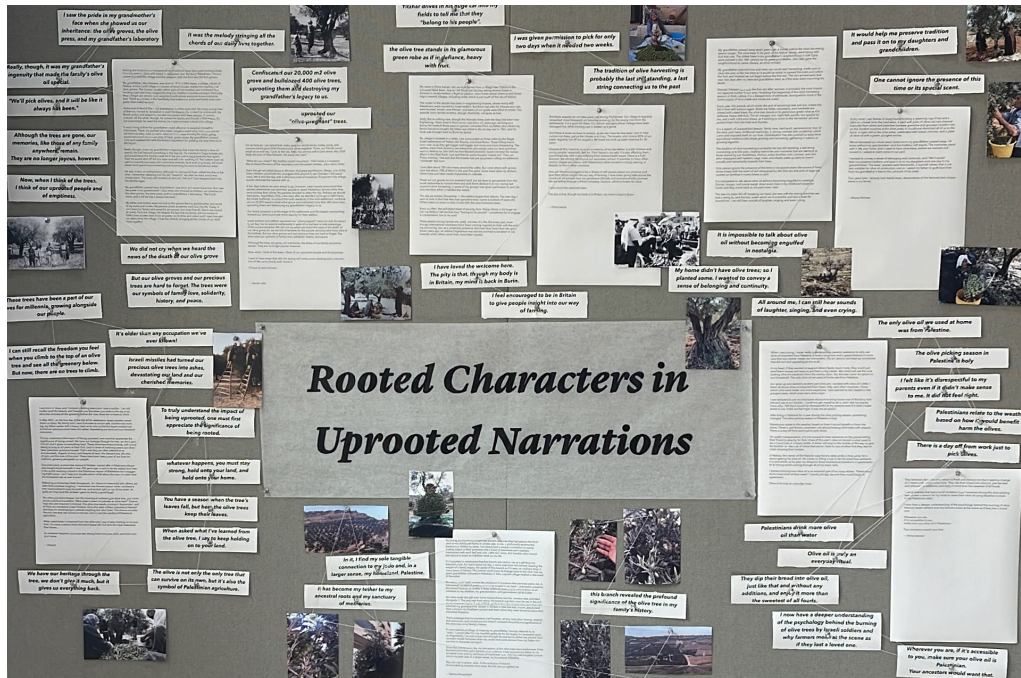


Fig. 20

Exhibition 2: Storytelling

The second exhibition aimed to explore specific areas I found intriguing following the initial exhibition. It was during this phase that I began conceptualizing a design idea and outlining my intentions and plans for the potential outcome.

This exhibition primarily centered around stories and narratives I discovered online, highlighting the profound connection between the olive tree and Palestinians in the diaspora. In addition to collecting these narratives, I conducted materiality experiments involving olive oil on paper, exploring this pairing of physical media in unconventional ways. (Fig. 21)

There is a qualitative difference in hearing a story directly from a storyteller when compared to reading it on your own. Listening allows you to immerse yourself in the emotions and visualize the scenarios being described. This sparked my exploration into how I could connect the olive tree with these narratives, utilizing existing technologies to create an archive for these stories.

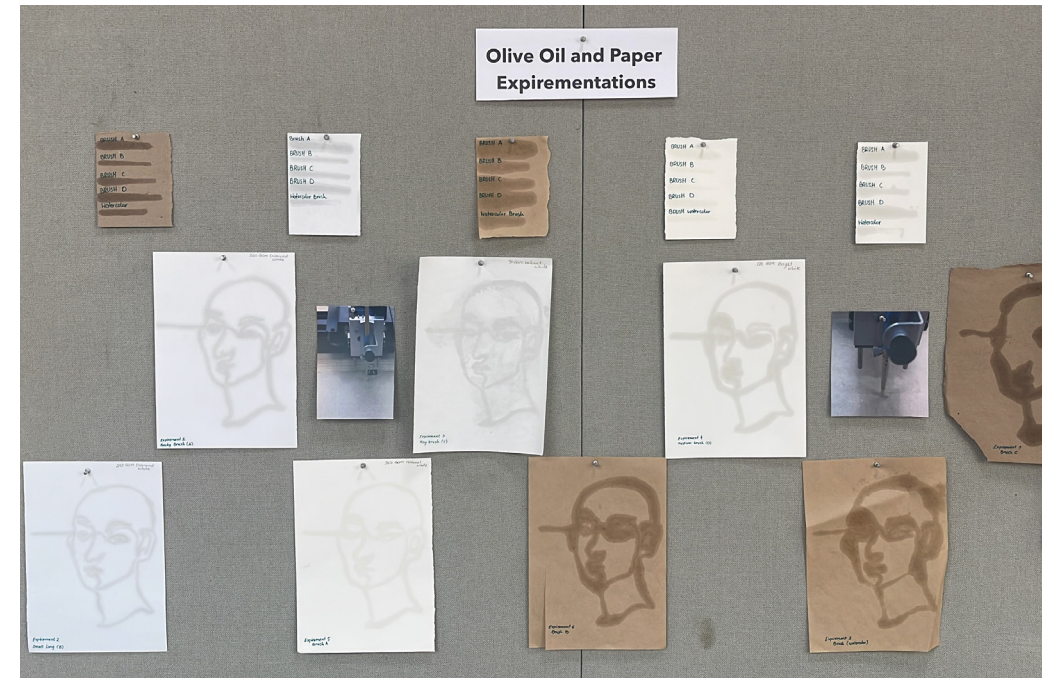


Fig. 21

I sought to enhance the interactive experience in order to immerse the audience in the storytelling. Inspired by the interactive nature of the precedent "A Message Lies Between the Cracks," I hoped to find similar ways to engage my audience with my exhibit.



Fig. 22

Exhibition 3: Idea Formation

At the third exhibition, I presented the initial prototype of my envisioned final thesis installation, which consisted of four key components: olive pits, a QR code reader, a screen, and a plotter.

This was a linear process where the olive pits activated the audio-recorded narratives using the QR code reader. The screen displayed the story and provided a translation, while the AxiDraw plotter created a portrait of the storyteller, creating an engaging and interactive experience for viewers.

Drawing inspiration from Chen's interactive exhibition "A Message Lies Between the Cracks," where she used rice as the interactive element for fortune-telling, I sought a similar interactive element for my project. The olive pits emerged as the perfect choice for this role, symbolizing the essence of the olive tree's existence.



Fig. 23

Just as the pits are the seeds that grow the tree, the stories I collect are the seeds of connection, the foundation of the deep bond with the tree. Furthermore, each olive pit is unique, akin to how every person and story is distinct, even if they originate from the same place or country. This choice underscores the human aspect of the project, highlighting the diversity and individuality of each narrative.



Fig. 24

QR Codes

The concept behind the olive pits was to have each pit represent a story, triggering a narrative when interacted with. I considered two options: either embedding RFIDs inside the pits or encapsulating them in a container that could house the technology. However, the small size of the pits made it challenging to fit RFIDs inside them. Given my limited coding knowledge, I opted for a more feasible approach, which involved creating QR codes instead.

The QR code reader is a crucial component of the installation, which links to the screen and opens the associated audio file when the code is scanned. The screen is equally vital because it provides visual context. Since the story was in Arabic, English subtitles were added to enable non-Arabic speakers to understand and engage with the narrative more deeply.

Accessibility Limitation

Each story is uniquely linked to its audio recording through a QR code. However, scanning the QR code using your phone will not grant access to the audio recording. The intentional limitation aligns with the project's goal of making each story special, honoring it and the intimate relationship between the storyteller and the olive tree, a relationship that should not be trivialized through mass consumption on social media. This restriction in accessibility creates a sense of exclusivity, signifying that this archive is a gift to humanity. By choosing a story and listening to it, you take on the responsibility of preserving and passing along this oral history.



Fig. 25

Resin

Encapsulating the olive pit served a crucial purpose; it imbued a sense of importance to the olive pits, transforming them from a discarded item to a vessel of history, narratives, and human lives. This idea led to the use of resin. After experimenting with various shapes, I chose the half-dome resin shape. This shape not only magnified the unique “fingerprint” of each olive pit but also provided a surface area for placing the QR codes. The encapsulation also addressed hygiene concerns such as handling an olive pit that had been in someone else’s mouth, which would naturally be off-putting.

The Plotter

As the audience listened to the story, a plotter simultaneously generated a portrait of the storyteller, using olive oil instead of ink. This innovative approach aimed to fill a gap in the narrative by providing a visual representation of the character. By using olive oil, a by-product of the tree, the plotter incorporated the theme of the olive tree into its function, similar to how each olive pit metaphorically sprouts into a narrative.

Like the olive oil and olive pits, the plotter also has a symbolic meaning in *Zaytouna*; it signifies the potential and importance of employing technology to preserve culture. It allows it to document, The plotter documents, in a tactile and tangible way, cultural heritage in a context where getting close to the original olive trees and the places associated with them is virtually impossible.

As all good storytelling captures its listeners' attention through physical sounds, gestures, and eye contact, the plotter similarly enhances the storytelling experience by engaging the audience visually,

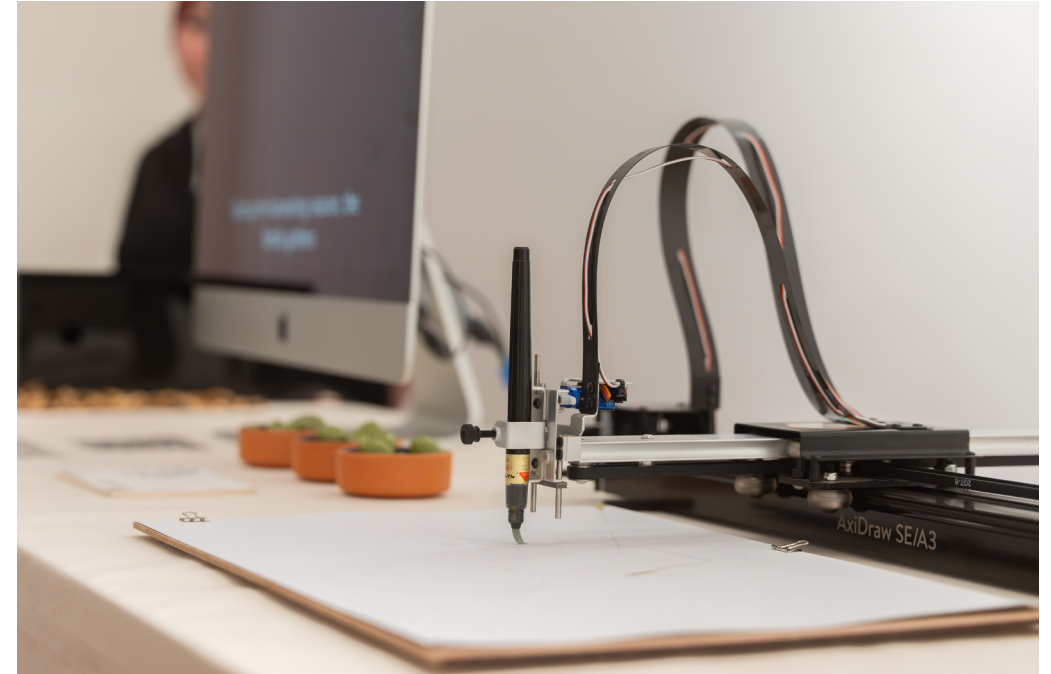


Fig. 26

sparking their curiosity and encouraging them to stay and listen to the entire story just to be able to see what the final illustration will look like. This interactive approach creates a synergy between what is heard and what is seen, enriching the audience's overall experience.

The upcoming two sub-chapters will trace the project's evolution after the third exhibition. The first will detail the process of collecting the narratives and their development, while the second will showcase the evolution of the role of the plotter in this project and the final choice of illustrations.



Fig. 27

Rooted Narratives in Uprooted Characters

The foundation of this thesis stemmed from a personal bond I share with the olive tree planted in my backyard at home in Jordan. Growing up, my father often shared stories with us about the olive tree, its significance, and the rituals surrounding it, including the importation of olive oil. These stories left a lasting impression on me and inspired the direction of my research.

As Palestinians who have been displaced since 1948, it is our lifelong mission to preserve and transmit our history across generations. Just as my grandparents instilled in my parents a deep love for our homeland, I have undergone the same process. We pass on not just stories, but also rituals, traditions, and every aspect of our heritage. Our oral history is what keeps our Palestinian-ness firmly rooted within us.

“Rooted Narratives in Uprooted Characters” examines outreach efforts aimed at Palestinians in the diaspora, gathering stories and histories that they have experienced or inherited from their ancestors.

Mar 6, 2024, 5:19 PM

Hi Laila

I am reaching out to you because I am currently working on my thesis project, Zaytouna, and I need your help and contribution.

In a nutshell, my thesis is all about uncovering the relationship between the olive tree and Palestinians in the diaspora through narratives and stories. So I aim to design an immersive archival installation by using audio (stories) to chart these connections.

There is more to it, but I want to keep it short to not take much of your time. But if you are interested I can go into details of the project.

So what I am doing right now is I am collecting stories, from Palestinian people. The theme of these stories is the Olive Tree or any of its byproducts. They can be funny, sad, a specific scenario, or a general memory, it is totally up to you.

You don't need to have visited Palestine, it can be just a soul connection that you have built from previous stories your grandparents or parents told you. It can be you sharing their stories as well. It is totally up to you.

Would you like to contribute to this archive with a story?

Fig. 28

These narratives are curated to create an archive intended to preserve and disseminate these stories on a global scale.

To begin the collection process, I opted to utilize social media platforms such as Instagram to connect with Palestinians residing in Qatar. (Fig. 28) In my outreach, I tailored my message to explain the purpose of my project and the specific contributions I was seeking from them. Upon their agreement to participate, I proceeded to provide them with instructions about what was required of them. (See Appendix for details)

Given the intimate and emotional nature of these stories, I prioritized the storyteller's comfort and privacy by allowing them to record independently. This approach fostered a sense of trust between the storyteller and myself. To ensure consistency and sound quality, I provided the storytellers with tips and tricks to ensure a good recording.

NAME	AGREED	SCRIPT	TXT CIRCLE	TXT SVG	MP3	NOISE REDUCTION	MP4	CITY DRAWN	CITY LINE DRAWING	SVG	CITY LINE NO NAME	SVG	CITY LINE NAME	SVG	PLOT CITY	PLOT CT/STR
Samah Jabr		YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	Kifl Haris	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Khaled Ahmed		YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	GAZA	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Reema	YES							YAFFA	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	
Muzna Bishara		YES	YES	YES				Kafr qara	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Dima Seelawi		YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YAFFA	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Monif Almajdabah	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YALU	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Naima Almajdabah	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YALU	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Yasmeen Suleiman	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	ARRABEH	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES		YES
Ghaida Abduljaili	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NABLUS	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Ameera Einamla	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	ALRAMLAH	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES		YES
Maram Judia	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	BANE NA3EEM	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES		YES
Alaa Judia	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	KHALIL	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Othman Abuhejleh	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	DEIR ISTIYA	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Majdulin Nasrallah	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	ALBURIJ	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Noor Suleiman	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	JENIN	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Mahmoud Abbas	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	QUDS	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES		YES
Nadia Jabari 1	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	JANABTA	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES		YES
Nadia Jabari 2	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	KHALIL	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Laila Sawan	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	KABRI	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES		YES
Aya Salameh	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	TULKARM	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES		YES
Sara Madleh	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	SEBASTYA	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Hasan Shomar	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	GAZA	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Alaa Almajdabah	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	RAMALLAH	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES		YES
Rania Allouh	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	HAIFA	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Hala Ahmad	YES				YES	YES		YA3BED	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	
Haya Abdelmajeed	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YIBNA	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES		YES
Aisha Abdelmajeed	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YIBNA	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES		
Dana Habayeb(SF)	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	DEER GHAZALE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Dana El Tawil	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YIBNA / LID	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES		YES
Nabeel Samara (R)	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES		RAMALLAH	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES		
Mirna Barmieh 1	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES		YAFFA	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	
Mirna Barmieh 2	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES		GAZA	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	
Yasmeen AbuGhazaleh	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES		NABLUS	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Yameen leta	YES				YES	YES		NABLUS	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	
Hussam abughazale	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES		NABLUS	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	
Alya Al-Khdour	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YALU	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

Fig. 29

The recordings are exclusively audio files, departing from the typical interview format. This approach was chosen because many storytellers expressed a greater sense of comfort knowing that only audio, rather than visual recordings, were being used. This allowed them to share their stories more intimately, aligning with my goal of capturing a deeply personal connection. I emphasized the importance of uniqueness and personalization, aiming to highlight each storyteller's individual connection.

Among the 36 storytellers is my father, who shares a narrative about his grandfather's relationship with the olive tree, highlighting both their surface differences and underlying similarities. I am also one of the storytellers, and my story is deeply emotional and metaphorical. It unearths the connection between my olive tree and my homeland. (See Appendix for some samples of the stories)

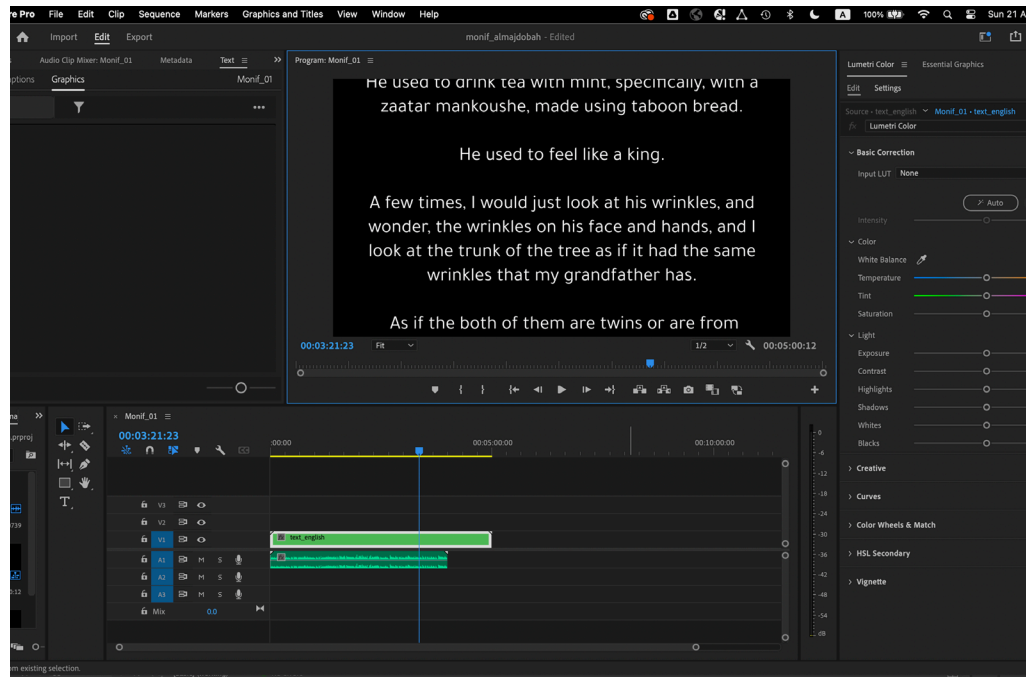


Fig. 30

Transcribing and Translating

Once I received the audio recordings from the storytellers, I transcribed them. Since the storytellers had the choice to narrate in Arabic or English, I transcribed each story in its original language. For the Arabic stories, I transcribed them in the Palestinian dialect to preserve the authenticity of the storytellers' emotions. The stories were then translated into the opposite language for the mp4 files, ensuring accessibility for non-Arabic and non-English speakers alike.

These mp4 files are text-only, without images or illustrations, to encourage the audience to use their imagination. The aim is for the audience to leave the installation with a metaphorical tree in their minds, cultivated from the stories, a tree unique to their imagination.

The effect of Gaza's Genocide on this project

As I was developing *Zaytouna*, the October 7 massacre occurred, underscoring the urgency of preserving Palestinian history in light of the Occupation Forces' massive response. A Washington Post article from March 25, 2024, reported that after five months of siege, over 31,000 people, including 13,000 children, had been killed according to the Gaza Health Ministry.^[15] These children were not just numbers; they were the future, the bearers of our history, the lineage of our families in Palestine.

Their tragic loss highlights the constant threat to oral history in Palestine, where generations are wiped out, erasing vital connections to our past. This reinforces the crucial need to create archives like this one, now more than ever, to ensure that our stories and heritage endure.^[15]



Fig. 32

Cities of Origin

The idea of plotting the city of origin emerged during the study of patterns in the storytellers' narratives, revealing that almost all of them mentioned their city or village of origin in Palestine. This recurring theme underscored the significance of place in their stories, inspiring the concept of visually representing these locations.

Palestinians in the diaspora often share their roots as a way to connect with other Palestinians, which highlights the importance of their homeland in their identities. The plotting of these cities not only adds a visual element to the stories but also grounds and roots them in a specific place.

36 stories were recorded, featuring individuals from 25 different cities and villages in Palestine. The diversity of these locations reflects the multiplicity of experiences within the diaspora. Some storytellers come from cities or villages that have been entirely erased from modern maps.

The maps used in this thesis were sourced from Google Maps, offering the most current depiction of Palestine. While a 1948 map of Palestine was found, its accuracy was challenging to verify. Given the modern context of *Zaytouna*, the decision was made to utilize the maps that represent Palestine as it exists today. (Fig. 32)

Circular Theme

The circular theme serves as a metaphor for the enduring resilience and interconnectedness of the Palestinian people. Just as the circle has no beginning or end, the Palestinian narrative is one of continuous sharing, storytelling, and preservation of history. The circle symbolizes the unbroken bonds that tie Palestinians together, despite geographical and political divides.

It signifies a collective determination to keep the cultural heritage alive, passing it down across generations. The circular motif is not merely a visual element but a representation of the infinite nature of Palestinian identity and the timeless stories that define it.

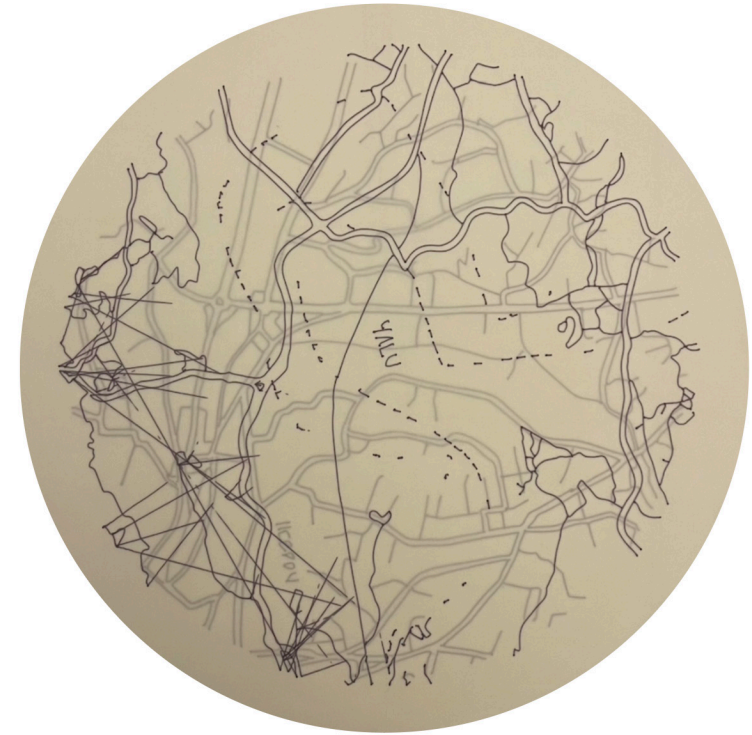


Fig. 33

Oil on Paper

Experimenting with olive oil outside of its conventional use was intriguing and aligned with many rituals in Palestine. In my grandparents' time, olive oil was a remedy used for various ailments and conditions, and not just for cooking. They used it for hair, stomach aches, scars, and more, reflecting deep-rooted traditions. Using olive oil on paper resonates with these practices, connecting my project back to its cultural roots.

One intriguing aspect of this technique is the unique translucency it lends to the paper, a quality not achieved with water, for example. While water tends to weaken and tear paper, the addition of oil maintains the paper's strength without any adverse effects. The olive oil's enhancement of the quality of the paper symbolizes a deeper metaphor, reflecting how olive oil strengthens the resilience and endurance of Palestinian narratives and their connection to the land. By layering the oiled papers (Fig. 33), the outcome visually represents the interconnectedness of these stories, mirroring the layers of history, memory, and identity that bind Palestinians to their homeland.



Significance of the piece

In the Palestinian dialect the word “Al-Blad” has two different but similar meanings, one refers to my country, and the other means “my home.”Palestinians in the diaspora will almost always refer to where they are really from, whether it is the city or the actual specific village they come from. It is something that we carry deeply in our hearts wherever we go, hoping that one day we will meet someone who comes from the same small village that we come from.

Mapping the geographical areas of the storytellers’ origins serves as a powerful tool to visually and emotionally reconnect with their roots. It is a poignant act of resistance and resilience for diasporic Palestinians, grounding them in their heritage, affirming their identity, and preserving their stories against the forces of displacement and erasure. For Palestinians scattered across the globe, these visual representations serve as a bridge to their homeland, fostering a sense of belonging and connection that transcends physical distance and political boundaries.

OUTCOMES

This chapter focuses on the outcomes of the installation that explore the relationship between the olive tree and uprooted Palestinians, revealing a rich tapestry of narratives that embody the enduring connection between a land and its people.

The interactive archival installation includes audio recordings from Palestinians in the diaspora, capturing their memories and voices, and visuals representing their places of origin, emphasizing the interconnectedness of memories, voices, and narratives.



Fig. 35



Fig. 36

Innovative Use of Olive Pits

The installation utilizes olive pits to activate audio-recorded stories, symbolizing the deep-rooted connection between Palestinians and their homeland. Each olive pit, selected from 36 stories, corresponds to a unique audio file that is activated when the audience scans the QR code using a reader. This interactive experience allows the audience to engage directly with the storytellers' narratives, bridging the physical and narrative elements of the installation.

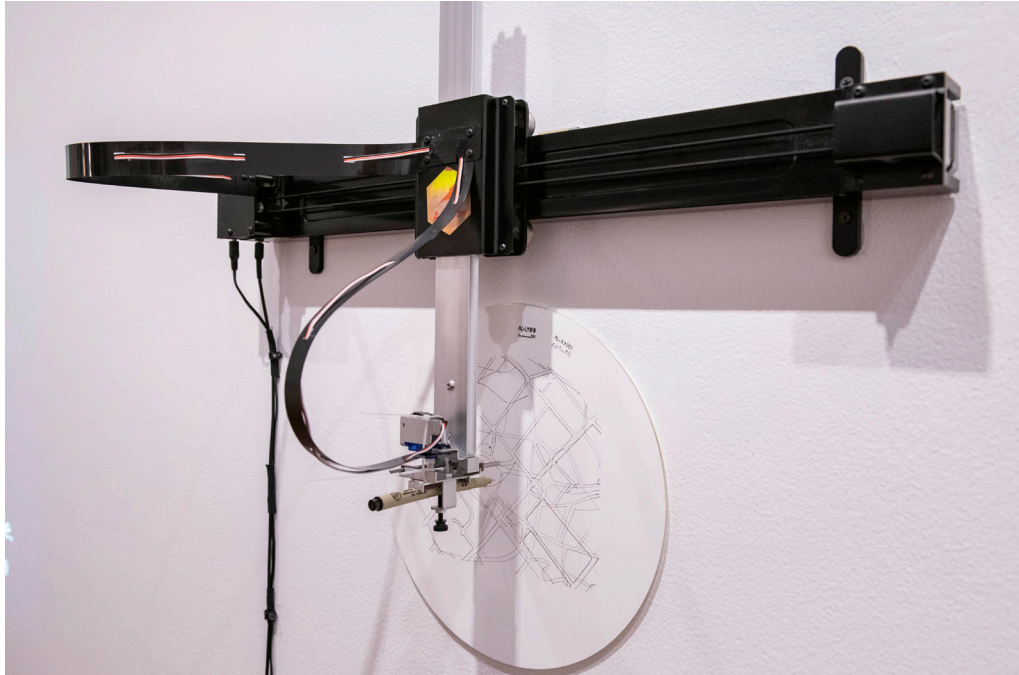


Fig. 37

Plotter Mapping Geographical Origins

Complementing the narratives is a plotter that maps the geographical areas of the storytellers' origins. This visual representation adds a layer of depth to the stories, connecting the audience to the places that hold significance in the storytellers' lives.

Reconnection with Roots

The installation offers Palestinians in the diaspora a unique opportunity to visually and emotionally reconnect with their roots. By engaging with the stories and witnessing the visual representation of their origins, the audience is invited to reflect on the significance of maintaining a connection to their homeland and preserving their cultural identity.



Fig. 38

The Symbolism of Continuous Performance

The continuous performance of the plotter symbolizes the ongoing resistance and endurance of Palestinians. Their determination and perseverance remain steadfast, despite the challenges they face.

This metaphorical representation highlights the resilience of the Palestinian people and their unwavering commitment to their heritage. That's why it's essential for the plotter to keep running; it's akin to preserving memories, ensuring they remain fresh and vibrant.



Fig. 39



Fig. 40

Interactive Experience and Takeaway Piece

After experiencing the storytelling and plotter performance, the audience has the opportunity to take a piece of the installation with them. The stories are plotted on circular paper coated with Palestinian olive oil, with English stories available in English and Arabic stories available in the Palestinian dialect. The paper is immersed in olive oil, just as the stories are immersed in the olive.

This tangible takeaway allows the audience to carry a piece of the installation's narrative and symbolism with them, extending the impact of the installation beyond the exhibition space. When handling the paper, the audience's hands may become slightly oily. This serves as a metaphor for the impact and influence of cultural preservation, as you are literally touched by the connections being made.



Fig. 41



Fig. 42

Installation

In conclusion, the installation offers a multifaceted exploration of Palestinian identity and heritage, blending storytelling, geography, and aesthetics to create an interactive experience. By bridging the gap between Palestinians in the diaspora and their cultural heritage, the installation emphasizes the importance of preserving stories and maintaining a connection to Palestine.

CONCLUSION

In *Zaytouna*, I explored and preserved the intricate bond between the olive tree and Palestinians in the diaspora. Drawing inspiration from the symbolic significance of the olive tree, this thesis investigated the cultural, historical, and personal narratives that underscored the olive tree's importance in Palestinian culture.

The exploration began with a literature review that highlighted the olive tree's role as a symbol of cultural identity and unity, the importance of intangible cultural heritage in preserving narratives, and the communal nature of rituals associated with olive cultivation. Through this review, I gained insights into the deep-rooted connections between Palestinians and the olive tree, revealing how these connections transcend physical boundaries and serve as a source of resilience and continuity for Palestinians worldwide.

Building upon this foundation, the outcome showcased an interactive installation that used olive pits to activate audio-recorded stories, creating an experience for the audience.

This installation, complemented by a plotter mapping the geographical origins of the storytellers, offers Palestinians in the diaspora a visual and emotional reconnection with their roots, emphasizing the significance of maintaining a connection to Palestine and preserving their cultural identity.

The installation's symbolism extends beyond its physical manifestation, symbolizing the ongoing endurance of Palestinians in the face of challenges. Through its tangible takeaway pieces, the installation bridges the gap between Palestinians in the diaspora and their heritage, highlighting the importance of storytelling and preserving narratives.

In conclusion, *Zaytouna* represents not just a thesis, but a testament to the enduring spirit and cultural richness of the Palestinian people. It underscores the importance of preserving stories, traditions, and cultural identity in the face of adversity, serving as a beacon of hope for Palestinians and endangered peoples worldwide. Through a deep commitment to cultural preservation, this thesis ensures that these narratives remain vibrant and alive for generations to come.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

During my work on Zaytouna, I encountered numerous personal narratives and stories shared by Palestinians in the diaspora in Qatar. This experience made me realize the extensive nature of the Palestinian community in Qatar and sparked my curiosity about how many Palestinians worldwide in the diaspora might have stories about olive trees, along with potential methods for preserving their narratives. Given more time, the theoretical framework could be broadened to include more diaspora stories.

In envisioning the expansion of this project into a digital platform, I am compelled to incorporate more visual elements from the storytellers. Alongside audio recordings of their narratives, the installation could showcase photographs, artwork, and videos that enrich the storytelling experience. By intertwining audio and visual components, this archive becomes not only a repository of stories but also a vibrant tapestry of Palestinian heritage, capturing the essence of the diaspora experience in a multi-dimensional way. Through the integration of visual elements, users can immerse themselves fully in the narratives, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of the rich cultural tapestry of Palestinians in the global diaspora.

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LIST OF FIGURES

[All Images belong to the author, unless otherwise stated]

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APPENDIX

This chapter presents the messages that were tailored and sent to the storytellers, as well as, four sample stories by the storytellers in Arabic and English to present the kind of stories that were collected for this project.

Instructions sent to storytellers:

First message:

Hi,
How are you,
I hope you are doing well inshallah and that your family is safe and sound.
I am reaching out to you because I am currently working on my thesis project, Zaytouna, and I need your help and contribution.

In a nutshell, my thesis is all about uncovering the relationship between the olive tree and Palestinians in the diaspora through narratives and stories. So I aim to design an immersive archival installation by using audio (stories) to chart these connections.

There is more to it, but I want to keep it short to not take much of your time. But if you are interested I can go into details of the project.

So what I am doing right now is I am collecting stories, from Palestinian people. The theme of these stories is the Olive Tree or any of its byproducts. They can be funny, sad, a specific scenario, or a general memory, it is totally up to you.

You don't need to have visited Palestine, it can be just a soul connection that you have built from previous stories your grandparents or parents told you. It can be you sharing their stories as well. It is totally up to you.

If you are interested, please do let me know and I can share further with you what will be your role exactly.

Second message:

Thank you for getting back to me!

What is needed from your side is the following:

I will share with you a list of questions that will help you write a script. You don't have to use them if you know exactly what you will write about, they are just there to help you brainstorm.

You will then record yourself (only voice recording) reading the script you wrote. You can use your phone or your laptop, whatever you are comfortable with.

You will share the audio file with me via email.

You need to make sure that when you record yourself it sounds as if you are narrating it to someone.

The script or story you write should have a duration of 3 to 3:30 minutes when recorded maximum.

Feel free to write or record it in any language you find most comfortable. Either Arabic or English.

Once your script is ready, I would be delighted to share instructions on how to record it, so we can ensure that it is the best quality.

If you like, I can share with you a ready example of what the audio file will end up being and how it will be used in my project.

Questions to help with recording:

Below are questions that aim to tap into your personal experiences, emotions, and reflections related to the olive trees to help you write your script or story:

Can you recall the first time you encountered an olive tree? What emotions or sensations does that memory evoke for you?

Describe a specific moment or experience with an olive tree that left a lasting impression on you. How has it stayed with you over the years?

Olive trees are often associated with symbolism and cultural significance. Can you share a personal story where an olive tree played a meaningful role in your life or the lives of those around you?

Reflecting on your memories with olive trees, are there any unique traditions, rituals, or stories passed down through generations in your family or community?

Olive trees are known for their resilience and longevity. How do you see these qualities reflected in your own life or the lives of people you know?

The process of harvesting olives is often a communal activity. Can you recount an experience where olive picking became a shared moment of connection or celebration with others?

Consider the changing seasons and cycles of olive trees. Can you share a story that revolves around the passage of time and growth, either personally or within your community?

Olive oil is a staple in many cuisines. Can you recall a memorable meal or gathering where the presence of olive oil and its connection to olive trees enhanced the overall experience?

Some tips and tricks to achieving the best recording:

Make sure your script is not being read from a paper, to avoid the sound of the paper.

If you have an iPhone, you can use the Voice Memo app to record.

Make sure when you are recording in your room that there is no echo, no AC and that the door is closed.

I would prefer you record under a blanket because it helps remove any background noise, but if you don't feel comfortable no worries at all.

Do not move the phone, or hold it by hand, put it on a surface and make sure nothing moves around this surface.

Make sure your voice is loud, that you talk slowly, and that all the words come out clearly. You have 3:30 minutes, so don't rush.

Imagine yourself talking to someone, and don't just read off of the script.

Remember that the audience of the project will be just hearing your voice and reminiscing with your memories.

Sample Stories

Monif Almajdobah:

أنتو بتعرفوا أن موسم قطف الزيتون في بلاد الشام يبدأ بأواخر شهر عشر. وكنا دائماً في هي الفترة نكون في بيت جدي عشان نساعد في قطف الزيتون. كان جدي رحمة الله عليه يصير أننا ما نكطف الزيتون إلا بعد ما يتغير. وهذا معناه أن الدنيا تشتي عليه أو تمطر عليه. عادةً هي بتكون أول شتوى.

طبعاً قطف الزيتون إله طقوس وتخضيرات وتجهيزات كثيرة. وبذكر أن جدي كان دائماً يكون حريص أن يجهز كل شيء قبل هذه الشتوية. عشان مباشرة بعد الشتوية نطلع للقطف. كان ينظف الأرض حولين الشجر ويجهز السلالم والحصير وعصي الخيزران عشان ينجد الزيتونات.

آخر مرة قطفنا الزيتون مع جدي قبل ما يتوفى بكام يوم بذكر لما بلشت الدنيا تمطر كان ميسوط وتشوف عينيه بتلمع من الفرح لأنه اقترب موعد القطف. كان يحكي لي يا سيدي السنة الزيتونات حاملات كويس والحمد لله هيها شنتت يعني رح يكون الزيت كثير وعالي العال. الله يرحم تراك يا سيدي. كل سنة بموسم القطف كان يجي على بالي هاي السيرة والقصص والحكايات اللي كان يحكيها إياها عن الزيتونات.

كان الله يرحمه مسمي الشجرات ومعلمهم بشغلات وامور معينة. يعني مثلاً الشجرة اللي وقع عنها محمد اللي هو عمي والشجرة اللي عليها المرجيحة اللي كان عاملها لعماتي. وشجرة القعدة هاي الشجرة لوحدها قصة. كانت شجرة زيتون كثير كثير كبيرة لدرجة إنه كانت كل عيلتنا تتجمع تحتها.

المهم بموسم القطف بتتجمع العيلة. هو موسم للعمل الجاد هو موسم للجمال والريحة الطيبة والألفة. هو موسم للتعبير عن حبنا للأرض وحب الأرض لنا. كنت تشم ريحة الزيتون وانت ماشي بالشارع من جنب حقول الزيتون. فعلاً كان هذا الحكي يميز موسم الزيتون.

طبعاً كان جدي ما يرضى يشرب شاي الصباح إلا تحت الزيتون. زيتونة القعدة. كان إله كرسي دائماً موجود عندها. وكان جدي يشرب الشاي. شاي بالنعنع على ساعة الصباح ويأكل منقوشة الزعتر. بخبز الطابون. كان يحس حاله ملك.

كذا مرة كنت أسرح وأنا بطلع على جدي وأشوف تجاعيد اللي على وجهه وعلى إيديه. وأشوف ساق الزيتون وكأنه عليها نفس التجاعيد اللي عند جدي. وكأنهم الاثنين توم أو من جيل واحد. بالسنة اللي توفى فيها جدي بذكرها تماماً. شجرة القعدة بالذات زيتوناتها ما أعطت زيت كويس. ولا الكمية المناسبة. وكأنها افتقدت صاحبها اللي عاشت معه فوق الخمسة وثمانين سنة أو إنها كانت حد عليه.

مزبوط تغيرت الأيام وتغيرت الظروف وتبدلت لكن ما زالت شجرات الزيتون بالذات بتجمعنا. وبترجعنا ذكرياتنا الحلوة وأوقات الزمن الجميل.

Noor Suleiman:

أنا ما كنت أحب زيت الزيتون وأنا صغيرة. هذا الكلام طالع من تم واحدة أهلها وأجدادها بيتنفسوا وبيتغللوا وبيحلفوا بحياة الزيتون. بتذكر لما كنت صغيرة، شي ستة أو سبع سنين يعني، كنت قاعدة مع ماما عم ناكل هيك لقمة عشوة خفيفة، لبنة وزيت وزيتون يعني المعتاد.

فماما تاخذ لقمة الخبزة وتقول لي ها تفرجي هيك بتغمس الزيت. طبعا كانت تغرق اللقمة تغريق بالزيت يعني ما أقولكم، أروح أنا ما أخدي لقمة خبزة عشان أغيظها وأغمسها بمي بعدين أحطها بالزعتر وأقول لها ممم شو زكي. عليتها طبعا يعني عليتها لأمي بصبري.

بابا كان دائماً أصلاً يتخوت علي ويقول لي انتي مستحيلة تكوني بنتي. ولك انتي بنت زيت. بس لما كبرت عرفت شو يعني زيت زيتون وعرفت شو قيمته عند بابا وأهلي. شجر الزيتون لبابا هو إرث العيلة. تتوارثه الأجيال جيل بعد جيل. وبيعمر مئات السنين. بالتالي احنا متجذرين بالأرض تجذير.

وبابا كان كثير يحن لذكريات الطفولة وهو يلعب بسروج الزيتون وهو صغير. العيلة رجال وستات يقعدوا يلقتوا زيتون ويغنوا ويهيسوا ويرقصوا. وأكد لازم أكلة المقلوبة تكون حاضرة بنص الأرض. كانت تيتا تطبخها وقت لما يجي وقت الغداء تقلبها على السدر. وهي هو دائماً شعائر. طلقية الزيتون كل سنة.

كل موسم في آخر تشرين الأول بعد ما الزيتون يتشرب أمطار تشرين الموسمية كان ينزل بابا على البلاد عشان يشرف بنفسه كل سنة على طلقية الزيتون بالأرض وعصره بالعصارة. كان دائماً يقول هذا ذهب بابا ذهب. كل سنة لما كانت توصلنا المونة بابا كان يجمعنا احنا ماما وخواتي على فتحة أول تنكة زيتون. وشو ريحت الزيت تهف بالدار ما شاء الله.

ماما كانت تعزم العيلة اللي متواجدين بالبلد بنات عمتي عمتي على أكلة مسخن احتفالاً بالمونة وخير السنة. طبعا الأرض سنة إلك وسنة عليك بس شو ما طلعت خير وبركة. أكلة المسخن هاي أكلة كثير معروفة ببلدي لأم جينين. عبارة عن خبز طابون مغطس بزيت الزيتون ومحطوط عليه بصل مقلب بالسماق وجاج مشوي ومرشوش رش هيك رشة لوز مقلي. هاي الأكلة كانت يعني الاحتفال الرسمي لخير السنة وشعائر مقدسة يعني عندنا بالبيت.

وسبحان الله بآخر أيامه كان بابا يحلم انه بياكل مسخن مع تيتا. وآخر فطور إلو فعليا كانت لقمة لبنة وزيت زيتون. وروحه راحت من هالدنيا بالوقت اللي الزيتون كان عم بتلقت بالأرض بجينين. وسبحانه زي اللي بابا عم بيعطينا العصا لنكمل الطريق. والتوقيت هذا بالنسبة لألي مش صدفة.

هاي ذكرة جميلة راح أتذكرها طول عمري. انه بابا حبيبي طلعت روحه من هالدنيا بنص موسم الزيتون. الحمد لله.

Hasan Shomar:

2011, I'm six years old, it's my second time in Palestine. I mean, technically, the first time didn't count, I was just like five months old. But we arrived in Palestine after a very long two days of traveling, and I remember my two-year-old brother wouldn't stop crying because it was really hot that summer. We visited both my mom's and my dad's family in Gaza. First, staying at my mom's childhood house for like two weeks, and then my grandpa, from my dad's side, insisted we spend another two weeks with him before we leave, and that's where the olive tree comes in.

Transportation in Palestine at the time wasn't a luxury. Everyone had the same way that we're used to it in Qatar, Germany, or anywhere else in the world. You had two options, car or donkey. So for the fun of it and the experience, my mom asked her brothers to let us go to my dad's house by donkey and it was a very funny experience that I won't ever forget.

After 30 minutes, we were finally there. The house had a front yard, with an Arabic seating area leading into a small garden, before you actually stepped into the house. And there it was, an image so memorable, I don't think I'll ever get it out of my head. With a hot cup of tea in his hand, my grandpa Hassan, whom my parents named me after, the magnet of our family, the ground stone of a very, big family, sat under a large and the only olive tree in this garden. The next two weeks we spent, countless stories were told right about my dad, about my parents when they were younger, about life in Palestine. They all had the same format, it was my grandpa sitting in his spot under the tree and us kids surrounding him in a circle, taken away by his unique storytelling style.

Jumping to nine years later, 2020. We're sitting at home in Qatar. It was a few months into COVID. We get a picture of my grandpa, still wearing the same thobe he had always worn, still holding the same hot cup of tea, and still very comfortably sitting under his olive tree.

2 hours later, the same day, we received the news. He passed away in his sleep. It was a very rough couple of days, especially for my dad, because he hadn't seen him in over 15 years. He couldn't come with us at the time because of passport difficulties. But my dad's words were how Subhanallah, the final recorded image of his father was in such a distinguished position, under a tree they now call Hassan's tree, or شجرة حسن.

Nadia Jabari:

I believe I was as young as 14 years of age when I first touched, smelled, and plucked an olive tree. It was the summer trip to Jordan that me and my family always had. My grandfather has a few farmlands across the country in Jordan, and it was the first time we visited one specific farm that was the motherland of harvesting all of our vegetables, fruits, meat, and oils.

On one Friday, our parents took us on a trip to the farm in Abu Ruman in Jordan to spend the day and play with the animals. It was that trip when I saw an olive tree, or shall I say, an army of olive trees. It was the first time I was aware to realize the hope in my grandfather's eyes as he wandered around each branch and held onto it with so much strength. Being surrounded by olive trees is like entering a sanctuary of tranquility, and an earthy aroma. The scent of fresh leaves mingled with the rich, fruity fragrance of olive fills the air creating an immersive sensory experience. The gentle rustle of leaves in the breeze, the warmth of the sun on my skin, and the sight of endless rows of ancient trees evoke a sense of peace and nostalgia. And yes, I said nostalgia because I will forever imagine myself in the lands of Palestine and the sense of home it brings from passed-down stories and memories.

One vivid memory that comes to my mind is a time when my family and I gathered for olive picking during the harvest season in October. Although it brings so much joy to this day, it brings so much sadness at the same time. Olive picking is olive picking when we sing our Nasheeds and hear the folklore of women recorded in the past.

My grandparents had to make the toughest decision and migrate for the sake of their own lives and their children. They never believed in giving up one's land to an occupier. And if you ask any Palestinian from the older generations, you'll soon realize what the staple of being a Falahe is.

It wasn't just about collecting olives. It was a tradition that brought us together, fostering deep bonds and shared tears, unfortunately. It's unfortunate because it recalled all of the memories that they had in Palestine and of Palestine. We listened to Aghani Zaytoun, like Alyade Ilyade or Dalounet Al Zaytoun. Olives are a representation of Palestinians. We are scattered around the world, but we have hands reaching out to every single one, holding one another, with a very tight grip. We don't let go and we do not give up. Like an olive tree.

