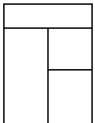


مُمتَلَكات

MUMTALAKAT



## ABOUT MUMTALAKAT

Meaning “belongings” in Arabic, the word *mumtalakat* is derived from the Arabic root to own, to govern. Thus, *Mumtalakat* has to do not only with the materiality of objects, but also with a phenomenology of dominance, of power. As a title, it considers the ways in which objects shape interaction, inviting reflection on their ability to hold multiple meanings and perform personal and cultural functions. It also engages various understandings of objects as conceptual entities that carry affective memories of the migration experience.

With an emphasis on process, each iteration of this multi-part oral history project functions as a site of encounter where new discourses can be articulated. The project as a whole considers the complexities of collaborative processes, questioning conventions of the researcher/educator as main author, prioritizing participants’ perspectives, and investigating how to negotiate these relations and viewpoints through an exhibition and public events.

This installment in the Gallery’s vestibule features personal objects belonging to five Arabic-speaking immigrants: an icon, teddy bear, identity cards, rescue tools, diaries, sewing notebooks, house key, rosary, book, Keffiyeh, school note, postcard, and travel souvenirs. As remnants of remote oversea experiences, these objects open a space in the here and now for looking and reflecting on notions of home, identity and belonging.

By placing personal objects and narratives under the category of the aesthetic, *Mumtalakat* considers visibility and its constraints. Prompting encounters between the public and the private, it questions how different forms and strategies of representation test the limits of the personal and how these approaches can extend the interpretive potential of oral narratives and embed objects in their larger cultural contexts.

Participants: Malaka Ackaoui, Alexandre Ackaoui Asselin, Wissam Assouad, M.B., Maher Kouraytem, Farah Mustafa

## **Interview with Farah Mustafa**

Interviewer: Emma Haraké

Date of Interview: November 11, 2017

Length of Interview: 21 min. 7 sec.

Place of interview: Coffee shop

Language of interview: Arabic (Palestinian Dialect)

Belongings: Keffiyeh, *Memory in the Flesh* novel by Ahlam Mosteghanemi, travel souvenirs from Dubai, Paris and Pisa

Transcription in Arabic: Emma Haraké

Translation into French: Chirine Chamsine

Translation into English: Emma Haraké

## **Comments**

There is a lot of background noise in the interview because it was conducted in a public space. The *italic* text indicates when the interviewee or interviewer communicated in English during the interview. Text in square brackets [ ] is used to identify non-verbal communication or add context.

## **Biographical details**

Farah Mustafa is a Palestinian born in Dubai in 1992. She grew up in Tyre, a coastal city southern Lebanon. Her family is originally from Saffuriyeh, a Palestinian village close to the city of Nazareth whose residents were expelled during Al-Nakba. As a Palestinian refugee living in Lebanon, Mustafa cannot visit her family's homeland. Mustafa worked as a journalist in Lebanon. She immigrated along with her family to Montreal in 2016.

My name is Farah Mustafa, Palestinian from Lebanon. I've been in Montreal for one year now and I'm working as a journalist *which is something I love so much* because I studied, graduated and I already worked in this domain. And now *I'm doing it*. What else?

**Why did you decide to come to Montreal?**

Honestly, I never thought that I would immigrate from Lebanon, but my dad left for Canada and we decided to reunite here. So, it was a family immigration. And *I like it here*.

**How long have you been here?**

One year and a couple of days.

**How old are you?**

Twenty-five years old.

**Is there anything you'd like to tell me about your life in Montreal?**

Something about my life in Montreal? I mean, anyone who moves here thinks about how to adapt. It's a new *culture*, a new life. I personally felt that adaptation was easy because I felt that there is a lot of respect for humans, I felt that it is safe, I felt that there is peace. I felt that Montreal brings together all the *cultures*, *which is* also something I like a lot. I like to know about other people's cultures and I've travelled and met people from different countries, so that is something that means a lot to me. And Montreal *is full of life* and it makes one feel that they are able to achieve their dreams. Of course, I have nostalgia for where I was raised, for my friends and family and I still miss them, but I feel that this is *the right place for me*.

[1:55]

**Now, we can start talking about the objects you brought with you...**

*Ok.*

**Which object do you choose to...?**

I will choose... [takes three travel souvenirs out of a bag]. These, I keep them in the salon: the Eifel tower, Khalifa Tower [in Dubai] and Pisa tower. [smiles] Collecting towers is not a hobby of mine but I like to take something from countries I visit. Unfortunately, there were countries I couldn't take anything from, a *memory* I mean, but these stayed with me and I wanted to carry them with me. Khalifa tower: I love

Dubai very much because my family lives there and whenever I see this tower I remember all the times we spent in Dubai with them. I also visited Paris and loved it so much; I felt that it's a very *romantic* city, so I brought this [Eifel tower] from Paris. This [points to Pisa tower] I didn't bring myself. *My best friend* traveled to *Italy* and every time he travels, he always brings me something. So, he wanted to bring me Pisa tower, hence it is a memory from him, it reminds me of him. And so, I always put them in front of me, I feel they are *memories* in front of me and I love them very much. I brought them with me from Lebanon.

The *second object* is the Keffiyeh [takes Kuffiyyeh from the bag]. The Keffiyeh is one of the things people wear in Palestine. So, I feel it represents my identity to a great extent. And I like to wear it to national events, when I am attending a Palestinian event. I have affection for a country I never visited, I never saw, but I was raised to love and recognise its cause. *So*, I love this Keffiyeh very, very much. Sometimes when I travelled, I would take multiple ones with me and when I am speaking to people about the Palestinian cause I would give them one. And they always loved it and wore it. So for sure I didn't want to leave Lebanon without taking something to remind me of Palestine, even though it resides in my heart. *So*, I always wear it and I love it, I feel that it represents me and my identity *so*, this is *the second object*.

And this is the third *object* [takes Ahlam Mustghami's novel from bag]. I really love reading Arabic novels. I bought this novel in Lebanon, but I couldn't read it until I moved here. *So*, I read it first when I arrived in Montreal; in the winter, which was a good time for reading. *So*, I brought *Memory of the Flesh* and coincidentally—I didn't know what the book was about—coincidentally it talks about someone's memory of his country. *So*, I became very attached to the book and I felt that it appeared at the right time, I mean, I read it at the right time and I loved it a lot. It made me happy and made me cry, to the extent I communicated with Ahlam [the author] on twitter. I sent her [a tweet saying] that this book had a huge impact on me. And she saw my message and loved it a lot. This book means a lot to me and I love it dearly. And this is it, *that's it!* If you want to ask, go ahead.

[5:03]

**I will start with these three, the towers. These two you brought yourself and this one is a gift. When you look at Khalifa tower, do you remember your family in Dubai?**

Of course.

**And the Eifel tower reminds you of your trip to Paris?**

Yes.

### **How long did you stay in Paris?**

I stayed in France for three days. The whole trip was five days, three days in France because of the *workshop*. We weren't in Paris; we went into a region called *Nîmes*. My aunt was touring *Europe* [at the time] and went to Paris. She told me, "Say no more. I'll meet you there". So, I met with her the last day in France and we went to Paris and visited the *Eifel tower*. It was a lot of fun, very, very nice! And I became attached to this place, so I bought it [tower] before I left. It reminds me of how I impulsively met with her [my aunt], how we visited Paris in one day, so yeah.

### **It is a family member as well...**

A family member as well. I am very much attached to my family, a lot, a lot. Even though my family has always... I mean, the whole time I was in Lebanon; they were in Dubai. They would always travel and visit, travel and visit. But every time they come, even if it's been a long time, years or no matter how long, it feels as if we've just met the day before. We have a very strong relationship; I have a huge family, a lot of cousins so the memories are also plentiful. Every time someone visits, we always laugh, we always go out. So, you always find me talking about them and yeah.

### **Ok. This [Pisa tower] is from your friend?**

I've known him for nine years. We also met in a workshop and afterwards we became very dear *friends*. We both studied journalism at university. We graduated and worked in the same radio station and we did a *project* together with an organization. So, wherever we went, people saw us together. We even travelled together. I have many, many memories with him so *he's my best friend*. He always brings me something to show he remembers me, always brings me things. This is not the first object he has brought me; this is from him as well. And he really wants to come to Canada so *hopefully* he makes it.

[7:27]

### **Before you left, did you hesitate when you were deciding which *souvenirs* to bring or were you more decisive or...?**

There were many things I left behind, and I felt sad that I left them behind, because I'm the kind of person who... I mean, even mom at home always says, "Farah, what are all these things?" I've always liked to keep things. Even, for example, I will keep a note written to me years ago. You know? Every memory, I mean, everything, I always put them... I used to have a huge cupboard full of things. So, when it was time to leave, and you know we were travelling as a family so we had to take the essentials, and I let go of clothes, I gave up on photo *albums*, plenty of them, plenty, I left them there—but they are safe in my grandfather's home—and I left many similar things and couldn't take

anything. Every time I tried to bring something: "No, the weight and so on," you know stories like that! It annoyed me very much, *so I tried to pick* objects that are really *meaningful to me* and not heavy at the same time, so I'd be able to carry them along. I mean I tried to be reasonable. And I got few pictures from, from the albums. I selected some photographs and brought them, but honestly, I left many things behind.

**What is the thing you feel you miss the most from what you left behind?**

The most... maybe mostly the photo albums.

**Photographs of you as a child? Or...?**

Photographs of me as a child, photographs with my friends, photographs, ... we used to take lots of photographs back then. *So*, those are... I wanted to bring them with me.

**Is there anything more you'd like to tell me about these three towers?**

Like I already told you, I keep them in the salon and I see them every time I sit there in the evening. And so, you have like a *flash back*, like a tape for all that happened, whether it's with the person, the country or the city that reminds you of something. *Too bad* I couldn't bring anything that reminds me of Tyre [Lebanese coastal city], because it is also *one of my favorite cities*... I love Tyre a lot, a lot, a lot. I mean whenever I watch a video of Tyre's beach, oh my heart... you know what I mean? But God willing, I will ask mom, since she's visiting Lebanon to bring me a memory.

**And... you put them in the salon?**

Yes.

**Which of the three is your favorite?**

I think Dubai Tower because I see my whole family in it.

**The close family or...?**

Yes, close family. *Literally*, all of them live there. I was born in Dubai but I lived in Lebanon, *so I would pick it*.

[10:20]

**Now, let's talk about the keffiyeh. This was the second object?**

Yes, the second object. True.

### **Did you buy it or was it a gift from someone or...?**

Honestly, no matter how much... as I said, I used to carry many keffiyehs with me whenever I travelled so I don't know which one mine is, which one I own, which one I bought. But I remember that this is the last one left. But I... the organization where I volunteered used to bring them for us. *So, I think it's one of them*, I mean they gave it to me. I believe this is the one that is left.

### **What is the organization?**

It is an organization that helps Palestinian children and spreads information about the Palestinian cause. And they contribute to cultural events in other countries.

### **How long did you work with them?**

I enrolled with them in kindergarten. Next, when I was older, I joined the Scouts, then I started attending summer activities. When I was older and turned sixteen years old, I *got nominated* to represent them in Belgium with the friend I told you about. So, this is when I began meeting more people, gaining *experience* and speaking more. Over there, I started to know that I wanted to be a *journalist*, you know. So, I started travelling with them frequently, representing them, talking about Palestine—talking about Palestinian's struggles in Lebanon, in the [refugee] camps and stuff like that. I used to enjoy travelling to talk a lot; I was like, "Just give me a chance to speak" [laughter]. *So yeah*. And I used to give people the keffiyeh, the Palestinian keffiyeh.

### **So, when you look at it at home or here...?**

Honestly, *speechless*. I truly don't know. I feel it is very precious to me and... But if someone asks for it, for the love of Palestine, I would give it because I want them to feel like this. I want them to feel the suffering that is happening, feel what is right. I mean many people ask, "How do you love a country that you do not know?" You know what I mean? Since I was born, I have been listening to my grandparents' stories... I mean, I currently feel as if I know the place where they lived, because of how much they told me about it. I mean, how the home was, where they lived, what kinds of animals they raised; I mean, I know all the details. And I want to visit it so much, God willing.

### **Where from Palestine?**



From An-Nasira [Nazareth], Saffuriyeh to be exact, which is north of Palestine, very close to Lebanon. I see images on the Internet, but I can't go for a visit!. God willing, when I can, I will be able to visit after few years.

### **Is there any family left there?**

No. There maybe be some far relatives, but my parents don't know of any who stayed, you know? But back then [the 1948 Palestinian exodus, also known as the Nakba], my grandfather and grandmother, they all left then. They left everything behind. [Nowadays] all of them are in Lebanon, they left and migrated to Lebanon and lived there. So no, I don't think anyone is still there, I mean, there might be some far relatives from my mom's side living there. I feel it is so difficult to talk about. No matter how much I speak, I honestly always feel like I fall short. But sometimes I'm happy that I'm able to do something – no matter how small. [One time] for example, there were some French or Italian people, who had no idea about the Palestinian cause... I remember the last *workshop* I attended in France, when I was sharing my final thoughts and I said, "Thank you for allowing me to meet people from my homeland, whom I can't visit there," they were coming from Palestine to participate in the *workshop*. So eventually a foreigner who didn't know anything said, "*Viva Palestine.*" He *literally* didn't know anything, so I was very happy that *at least* now he knows, *at least* now he knows a little. Because as you know, nothing is mentioned in the media so when you feel that you impacted one person, *it makes you feel kind of proud.*

### **I really like the fact that you give it away to people...**

I like... I went to a Mohammad Assaf concert [Palestinian pop singer well known for being the winner of the second season of *Arab Idol*] one month ago and all people were wearing and waving it, even during the Dabke [native Levantine folk dance]. Even older people wear it on their heads. So, it is really worn a lot, and it is very beautiful.

### **When you wear it here, do you feel different than you do in Lebanon? I mean how do...?**

Honestly, I don't wear it a lot here. And of course, it feels different than Lebanon, for sure! I mean in Lebanon *at least* people know what it is. But here, when you wear it, you might have an apprehension from people's reactions sometimes. I mean some people like it, some people don't. So, I don't prefer *to show off*. When I feel I want to wear it, that there is a need to wear it [I do]. But not always.

### **Where do you keep it? Stored? Hung?**

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<sup>1</sup> Lebanon has no diplomatic relations with Israel. Holders of Lebanese passports or travel documents (*Titre de Voyage*) issued by the Republic of Lebanon to stateless persons and refugees may be subject to arrest and/or detention if their travel documents bear stamps, visas, or seals issued by Israel.

I hang it at home. I have a hanger on the closet door; it's hung there. When I want to wear it, I do but it's always facing me.

[16:11]

[Holds novel in her hand] I kept hearing people say, "Memory of the senses! Memory of the senses!" and they would ask, "How come you read these and left this one out?" I finally said, "That's it, I'm reading it." But I didn't have a chance to read it in Lebanon, so I brought it with me. *It was hard to pick from the books.* I mean, I distributed some books to my friends and cousins but I thought that since I hadn't read this one, I would bring it over. And I brought another book by Ghada al-Samman [Syrian novelist]. So, this book is really incredible in every sense of the word. Unbelievable.

### **Which part of the novel left the most impact?**

There is one sentence that stuck in my head and whenever I read the book I swear, I'd cry, I'd cry every time I see it. Hang on, I'll tell you... [leafs through the book] now, certainly... Have you read it?

**[head nod, yes]**

When he... despite everything he [protagonist] went through, you can tell much he loves his homeland and is attached to his country. When he got older and had to return to Algeria, he describes how he was searched at the airport... in a way... I mean... they were searching his hands and so and so and telling him... an airport [customs agent] asks, "Do you have anything to declare?" So he sheds a tear and replies, "I declare memory, my son." I don't know. This sentence made a huge impact on me and it may be the sentence I remember the most from the book, in the book, because it made me cry a lot, and I felt it was *so meaningful*. So, this is what I remember the most.

### **Why did you choose this book despite having not read it?**

When I had a library at home, it wasn't a big library to be honest, but I had read most of the books in it. So I said to myself, "No, *let me pick something* that I haven't read." This way, I can benefit from it and it stays with me. So, *I picked two books*: this one and *A Loaf of Bread Beats Like a Heart* by Ghada al-Samman, I still haven't read that one. I said that's it, "I'll take something I haven't read," and of course I chose the book that impacted everyone where they keep saying it's the best book written by Ahlam [Mustghanemi] and... Look, I mean, it's the twenty-fourth edition... it was adapted into a series and [won] prizes, you know. So, I said that's it, "*I should read it,*" and this why I chose it.

[18:52]

**If you have to choose between the three things, which one would you pick?**

I choose the keffiyeh because it also reminds me of my friends and family, so I don't feel like I gave up anything. I feel that they [travel souvenirs] are always [represented] in [the Keffiyeh], you know. I mean, they exist in there. I can buy the book anytime, but I can't find this [keffiyeh] everywhere. Even these [souvenirs], I can ... they are meaningful but, for me, they are still objects though. However, this [keffiyeh] doesn't feel like clothes. I feel it's a part of me; it represents me. I would pick it, yes, I would pick it.

**Did you consult with family or friends when choosing the objects?**

No, I like to choose on my own. I may consult my parents and sister on other issues, for example on what clothes to pack, if I can't choose the best. But something like this, concerning Farha's core, her heart, her mind, I don't consult them. I prefer to choose by myself. I make the decision.

**During the past year and few days, is there anything you bought in Montreal and feel like if you're traveling you might...?**

Something I got from here, and I would take with me?

**Yes.**

What did I bring from here? Honestly, I can't remember that I brought anything but there is something that somebody gave to me, like... I like this symbol the *dream catchers*. I feel myself *I am a dreamer*. He said he'll bring it to me because I like it as a shape. I keep it in the house. So, if I travelled, I might take this, it's lovely.

**Is there anything else you'd like to share?**

[head nod, no]

[21:07]

Translation to English: Emma Haraké

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