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Beit Bibi

I have grown up with stories of war, of destruction, but also of love and longing. Of an insatiable longing, one for *al watan*. Where does this watan that my parents and grandparents speak so fondly of lie? Where can I find that place that they describe with such tenderness and pain?

Al watan is Arabic for the homeland, but it is also much more than that. The depth of the sentiment it carries is much stronger. Why? Because the watan lies precisely in that place where pain and warmth meet. Longing is not separable from fleeing. Al watan is their burning house. It has no physical site. It bears resemblance to the space hooks described in "Choosing the Margins as a Space of Radical Openness".

I enter the homeland through the stories of my father, through the stories of my grandmother, through these moments in which they reconstruct it for me and themselves. I enter through these moments in which they temporarily rebuild the house. The stories of my grandmother are valuable. Having been born in Holland, the stories of my grandma mend my fractured experience of home.

Building a house is a skill. My grandmother is a talented narrator, and she should be treated as such. In *On Being*, Ocean Vuong shares about how he first came in touch with narrative and literary techniques not in the classroom, but in listening to the stories of his mother. Vuong continues: "stories are carried in the bodies and are edited each time the person tells it" (Vuong). I am never experiencing al watan directly, I am experiencing its composed story. My watan is not a burning house, it is a fractured house.

I don't see this project as straightforwardly sharing my grandma's story. Just as my grandma edits her story so am I editing her story. Her story goes through another translation, and so it is that translation that I am publishing.

Thus, for this project my focus is not only the stories of my grandma herself, but even more the experience of listening to the story of my grandma. This is simultaneously an exercise in listening itself, in practicing care and gratitude, in actually valuing the presence of my grandmother. Listening for us is more than just hearing. Listening is an activity itself. This is the broader group theme which binds us all together. Our methods are the same, we practice attentive listening through recording the people close to us. In my personal project I use film and audio for this recording. Through the lens of the camera I get to pay attention to enjoy the atmosphere of my grandma's home here, while through her voice she shares a glimpse of her watan.

Through this project I hope to tell my own story of the watan, of a watan which lies fractured in the stories I listen to. As diaspora is a collective condition, I believe this is a collective experience. Hopefully, in sharing these stories, in sharing these moments of storytelling, they can mend the fractured experiences of home in others. My watan is not a burning house, it is my grandmother's home.

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