

Weaving Together: Narratives of Home, Exile and Belonging

Over the past decades, the Eastern Mediterranean region has experienced enduring wars and armed conflict that have resulted in a migration crisis and an increase in the security of borders. This chapter explores narratives of exile and the complexities of belonging, leaving and returning in Cyprus and Palestine. I have chosen to focus on these two countries because they share similarities in terms of their experience of leaving, returning and belonging. Both countries have experienced wars and are under military occupation – Palestine since 1948 when the Israeli army conducted a forced migration exercise and Cyprus since 1974 when Turkey invaded the island in response to a military coup, which was backed by the Greek government.¹ The two countries share similar socio-political specificities and have been physically and psychologically traumatised by these conflicts. The political conflict in Cyprus and Palestine resulted in a mass-population forced migration and still to this day refugees are not allowed to return to their homes.

Cyprus and Palestine share similar narratives in relation to their exilic conditions and attachment to the notion of homeland. They also share a powerful quest for return to their place of birth, home and roots. For people in Cyprus and Palestine, their lives and sense of belonging is complicated in similar ways. The geo-political division of their homeland is constituted by a series of checkpoints and roadblocks across their respective partition line. The aftermath of their internal displacement means that for many people their exilic condition is living at a close distance to their lost homes.

The experience of growing up and living under military occupation affected not only the generation who experienced the events but also of the following generations. Crossing to the other side requires passing through a border that separates them from what constitutes their identity: their place of birth, land, neighbourhood and home. For many, their crossing to visit what has been left behind is followed by the disappointment of finding out that someone else is occupying their ancestral homes.

My aim in this chapter is to bring together a set of debates concerning concepts of home, exile and belonging. In doing so, I will examine a few of the salient issues that are prominent in exilic experience and refugee narratives. This chapter builds on the knowledge that exile is 'inexorably tied to homeland and to the possibility of return'² and explores the ways in which politicised narrations of home engage in debates about exile and rootlessness. It addresses the issue of how internal exile is articulated in works by migrant artists. It focuses on the work of Greek Cypriot artist Vassia Vanezi and Palestinian artist Emily Jacir, who assert in their work on-going issues in relation to exile, borders, belonging and history of their respective homelands. I am interested in unpacking the projects where the two artists use powerful

metaphors to represent protracted exile. These projects, which I consider to be 'projects of belonging' are: *Weaving Together – The Grid of Memory* (Vanezi, 2017) and *Memorial to 418 Palestinian Villages Which Were Destroyed, Depopulated, and Occupied by Israel in 1948* (Jacir, 2000). Both artists have participated in the international art exhibition *documenta 14* and have invited communities to participate in the making of their projects. I chose to focus on the two works because the participatory element is very similar and the making of the works constitutes a significant event where people weaved together. In this chapter, I will weave together two different cities and two different artworks. What these two cities and artworks have in common is the ways in which the issues of internal exile, quest to return to homeland, and sense of belonging are mutually intertwined.

Learning from Athens

In April 2017, *documenta 14* opened in Athens, Greece, and two months later in its traditional home city Kassel, Germany. While previously *documenta* was staged exclusively in Kassel, the 2017 exhibition offered a new perspective by staging a series of art events in both venues. The curatorial team of *documenta 14* aimed for the exhibition to have a 'politicised, transversal reading of our present moment and its attendant histories.'³ Therefore, the works exhibited during *documenta 14* were able to engender a 'transformative insight into the artists' daily circumstances as part of the time of upheavals that came to be our own.'⁴

The theme of learning and the different processes of collective experience were visibly embedded into the exhibition's approach. This was also reflected in the exhibition's subtitle *Learning from Athens* that comprised of 160 artists across 40 venues. In Athens was the Victoria Square Project, a social sculpture initiative by artist Rick Lowe, which aimed to bring people together during the exhibition. Athens-based artist Vassia Vanezi staged her project *Weaving Together – The Grid of Memory* in the Victoria Square Project following Lowe's invitation to participate in *documenta 14* in Athens.

Born in Nicosia, Cyprus, Vanezi explores in her work themes of loss, displacement, history and the sense of belonging. A particular important element of her work is that she uses autobiographical experiences to represent the geo-political division of her homeland Cyprus. This formed a key part in her project *Weaving Together – The Grid of Memory*. For the project, Vanezi invited people to gather every Friday evening and weave together. Vanezi talks about the notion of weaving together:

Weaving together is a common work. It is about coming together, sitting together, talking together, eating and drinking together, making together, bringing our lives, our cultures together, sharing words

together, sharing our stories and history together, confessing our pain and fears, our hopes. It is about companionship. It is about gathering. It is about human condition.⁵

Participants who responded to Vanezi's call found themselves on a fascinating and intimate new journey. Over sixty people participated in the process of weaving and making the fabric: during the project, they were provided with multi-coloured threads and an artist book called *LEXICON/ΛΕΞΙΚΟΝ* with written words chosen by Vanezi. The participants were invited to choose words from the book, and in some cases they chose to stitch a word of their preference.⁶ An important element of the project is that it provided an opportunity for participants to reflect and form their own narrative in relation to the question of memory. During a recorded narration, Vanezi expressed what memory is for her:

Memory is a grid of words, images, sounds, smells. The objects of memory. They are dressed in words when they return to our consciousness. They sound when they are being spoken, when they become languages, when they turn into a story. A call, a coffee, words that we recall from memory, we knit them, we make them a story, a narrative.⁷

Memories of the physical and emotional departure are pivotal in *Weaving Together – The Grid of Memory*. The work becomes an instrument not only for the artist to transfer her own memories as a refugee but to also express her wish and ongoing hope in returning to the home she was forced to leave as a child:

I'm a refugee. The house I was born in is in occupied Nicosia. It was very nice my home. In the front there was a window and a bower and a lemon tree in the backyard. The last time I saw it was on July 20, 1974. On the day of the Turkish invasion. I left and I never went back. I was five years old. The sirens were blowing, the bombs were falling and the sky was black. I did not have the chance to take anything with me. Not even my favorite doll. We left with nothing but the clothes we wore. All I have is that little dress. A red treasure of memory. I do not forget and I expect to go back'.⁸

As a survivor of the 1974 Turkish invasion, Vanezi carries the burden of having a personal memory of the tragic event. Remembering the home she was forced to abandon is a haunting and intimate experience. Such memory becomes a powerful form of sharing the conditions of displacement and exile. I suggest that the project *Weaving Together* acts as a coping strategy to negotiate the past and the memories from the lost homeland. Storytelling can be a powerful survival tool, as 'telling stories about oneself, about one's life,

and about oneself in the world can be a way to help the individual negotiate a place in the wider world of society and culture'.⁹

The work becomes a site of memory that embodies not only the artist's experience of migration and exile but also reflects the experiences of the generation who experienced the 1974 events. The 1974 Turkish military invasion resulted in the displacement of 200,000 Greek Cypriots and the occupation of 40 per cent of Cyprus' territory in the north. Even today, Cyprus remains divided into two communities; Greek Cypriots in the South and Turkish Cypriots in the North of Cyprus.

The Politics of Belonging

Vanezi's narration in *Weaving Together* is a powerful chronicle of the 1974 Greek Cypriot displacement that reveals the complexities of belonging, leaving and returning. In *Weaving Together*, Vanezi begins her narration by saying '*I'm a refugee*'. This reflects a series of arrangements introduced by the Cypriot government in the post-1974 years. This included financial and government-built housing estates. Soon after the invasion, the new social formation of refugee identity was introduced as a result of the forced displacement. Consequently, refugee identity cards were issued to exiled persons whose primary residency or property was in a Turkish-occupied area. Usually, the term 'refugee' is used for people who found accommodation 'outside their country of origin'. In the case of the 200,000 Greek Cypriots who were 'internally displaced' in 1974, the term 'refugee' is used as a 'convenient and realistic designation of their social status and identity'.¹⁰ Greek Cypriots who fled in the South in advance of the Turkish army had to find accommodation in temporary refugee camps and later in refugee housing estates. The term *refugee* has a symbolic meaning that emphasises the alienation of the place they found accommodation and that they did not belong there. Nira Yuval-Davis describes belonging as an 'emotional attachment, about feeling at "home"' and 'about feeling "safe"'.¹¹ In the aftermath of 1974, refugees expressed a strong desire to return to the homes they were forced to abandon, the places they had felt at home and safe.

Vanezi describes her ancestral house in her narration: '*the house I was born is in occupied Nicosia, Cyprus. It was very nice my home. In the front there was a window and a bower and a lemon tree in the backyard.*' Her narration reveals not only her longing for her home but also how her memory sustains material belongings e.g. the bower and the lemon tree. The abandoned house and the gardens with trees are crucial components for the majority of Greek Cypriot exilic narratives. Maria Roussou emphasises that Greek Cypriot women 'have lost their houses and with them the thing they valued the most: their homes.' Roussou also explains that for those women who came from

rural areas also lost 'the land bequeathed them by their fathers, land on which they had worked for years to make productive.'¹²

The houses they left behind, built after years and years of hard work from the parents, were the places they felt and still feel they belong. There is a strong attachment to the land as it was the land provided from the ancestral and trees were planted and nurtured by the family for decades. Rebecca Bryant writes about the relationship between land and rootedness in Cyprus:

The land is in the first instance the soil, the place where one's ancestors are buried, becoming part of its substance. One waters the land with one's sweat; one drinks the same water that runs through it. It has an odor as familiar as the scent of one's own child. [...] One dwells in places that have a historicity that is already given. [...] One many traces one's history, then, in the soil itself. At the same time, the land acquires a character in interaction with those who live there. There are weddings, there are holidays, and these are all celebrated in the "local" way, with the red figs that grow there and no where else. [...] The land has a language, one's own language, the language spoken by one's ancestors who always lived there.¹³

Vanezi's narration of the home and the yard reveals a sense of belonging to her childhood house. The narratives of the trees are highly significant, as the trees 'do not solely bear a "sensual" presence but also an existential one; they preserve the ownership, property, continuity, existence and analogy of the person'.¹⁴ Aybil Goker refers to 'being rooted' as a sign of belonging: the trees 'represent the rootedness to their home and, with the smell and taste of [lemons], create the wholeness of the memory in Cyprus'.¹⁵

The Politics of Leaving

The experience of the 1974 invasion is vital in Vanezi's narration: '*The sirens were blowing, the bombs were falling and the sky was black. I did not have the chance to take anything with me. Not even my favourite doll. We left with nothing but the clothes we wore.*' This reveals the terror of the flight and that Vanezi's family had to leave speedily and take nothing with them. Like every refugee Vanezi's family thought they would return back after the war. The abandoned house was a common cause of sorrow for all refugees, as it symbolizes the loss of familiar values, local traditions and the loss of community. Women's loss can be considered somewhat different to men's loss because they lost their dowry-house. This is of high importance when we consider that mid-1970 Cypriot society's custom required a dowry system, in which newly married couples had to have their own house, which should have been built by the bride's parents as a wedding gift. In losing their home, Greek

Cypriot women experienced both a 'material and symbolic deprivation': as Maria Roussou puts it

In short all the material world they were acquainted with and which was theirs had been taken away overnight. Their flight from the bombing and fighting was so sudden that none of them was able to take any of their most precious belongings.¹⁶

For Vanezi, at the time of the invasion, the most precious belonging was her favourite doll that she left behind. The only personal item she had from the pre-1974 years was the dress she wore on the day when she left her home in the occupied Nicosia. The little dress is the one thing that links Vanezi to her past life and is, as she calls it, a '*red treasure of memory*'. The actual red dress was displayed in the 2010 exhibition *50 Years of Artistic Creation*, organised by the Cyprus Chamber of Fine Arts in Nicosia, Cyprus. Vanezi participated in the exhibition with the installation titled *1974*. The installation was composed of a series of wooden hangers that were suspended from the ceiling. Three of the hangers carry the clothes she and her family wore on the day of their flight: her mother's dress, her brother's shirt and her own little red dress. Some other hangers hold her father's military uniform, her grandfather's *kompoloi*, two white dresses made of paper, a girl's school uniform, a doll and various label cards with the words 'points', 'mother', 'father', 'brother', 'grandfather', 'forever', 'never' and 'I do not forget'. By using old belongings (clothes from the day they left their home) together with items she obtains in post-1974 times (such as the doll that is alike to the one she left behind), Vanezi creates a site to explore the complexities of belonging, leaving and returning. These belongings become a powerful device through which Vanezi negotiates time, memory, remembrance, loss and trauma. Vanezi's evocative strategy is direct; she employs specific belongings from specific people (herself and her family) and transforms these into reminder-instruments that act as metaphors of loss, trauma and memory.

Vanezi negotiates in her practice her homeland's division and her wish to return to the occupied house. This is obvious in her narration in *Weaving Together*: '*I do not forget. And I expect to go back*'. Since 1974, the idea, or question, of return has been a dominant narrative for all Greek Cypriot refugees. Significant to this is what Roger Zetter describes as the 'myth of return': '[it] evoke[s] a familiar, idealised past and sustain[s] the memory of collective loss' while it associates the 'concreteness of a familiar home or "point fixed in place" (e.g. the villages, farms and houses in the north of Cyprus)'.¹⁷ Throughout the post-1974 years the government of the Republic of Cyprus sustained the myth of return and established the slogan 'I Don't Forget'¹⁸; the literature on Cyprus and refugees, the educational system and social media were all permeated by the slogan.

In *Weaving Together*, Vanezi uses the participatory event as a memorial for her homeland that 40 years later, still suffers from occupation and a complicated socio-political situation. The event provides a space for the telling of untold stories and experiences from a woman's perspective. Irini Savvides writes that, in terms of gender, there is 'a record of experience missing in current narratives' in relation to the 1974 war and its aftermath: 'one aspect of the "Cyprus problem" is that the stories of what women have suffered as a result of the continued occupations and violence have not been given equal voice in the available literature'.¹⁹ Women's loss can be considered different to men's loss due to their specific exilic conditions, as James Clifford points out: 'life for women in diasporic situations may be doubly painful – struggling with the material and spiritual insecurities of exile, with the demands of family and work, and with the claims of the old and new patriarchies'.²⁰

Central to the work *Weaving Together* is the evocation of an intimate subject matter, that of the home and the ways in which it is being developed with the public's participation. During the event, a series of photographs recorded people's efforts of decorating the fabric while sharing stories and memories. The completed work included multi-coloured threads of variously-shaped lines and different words stitched in Greek and English, such as 'gate', 'memory', 'power', 'pain', 'breath', 'together', 'alive', 'safe', 'life', 'dignity' and 'tears'. It is important to consider the relationship between weaving, text (words) and textile; as Victoria Mitchell points out 'text and textile share common association through the Latin *textere*, to weave. These fragile references suggest for textiles a kind of speaking and for language a form of making'.²¹

In this sense, the embroidery produced by the participants becomes a powerful metaphor for Vanezi's evocative narration. The structure of the collective textile can be seen as a visual memorial of Vanezi's homeland. The work features the word ΠΥΛΗ (Greek for gate) enclosed to what can be a reference to the territorial space of Nicosia and the walls that surround it. Another embroidery shows a little red handmade dress with the word *MEMORY*. Every single stitch conveys a powerful meaning in understanding Vanezi's image of home and sense of belonging. The work produced during *documenta 14* evokes the medium of personal life used by twenty first century feminist women artists (such as Louise Bourgeois and Tracey Emin). As Rozsika Parker writes '[women artists] employ embroidery as the prime medium of personal life not to proclaim that the personal is the *political*, but that the personal is the *universal*'.²²

The myth of homeland and the myth of return is a universal notion and are found among several exilic communities. The case of Palestinians is perhaps the closest to Greek Cypriot protracted exile and desire to return to their homeland. As William Safran argued:

They have memories of their homelands; their descendants cultivate a collective myth about it; and their ethnic communal consciousness is increasingly defined by – and their political mobilization has centered around – their desire to return to their homeland.²³

Remembering Palestine

The concept of homeland and the ways in which displacement is defined is pivotal in Emily Jacir's practice. Born in 1972 in Bethlehem, West Bank, Jacir engages in her work the 1948 Palestinian depopulation from West Jerusalem and the ongoing Palestinian occupation by Israel. This is obvious in her work titled *Memorial to 418 Palestinian Villages Which Were Destroyed, Depopulated, and Occupied by Israel in 1948*. This piece, which was also exhibited during *documenta 14*, consists of a direct approach in representing Palestine's socio-political conditions for a local and international audience. The work was the result of a three-month community-based project that Jacir prepared in 2000 when she was invited to participate at the Museum of Modern Art P.S.1 Studio Programme in New York. For the preparation of the project, Jacir bought a family-sized refugee-tent, similar to the ones distributed to refugees during crisis by the United Nations. She erected the tent in her New York studio and stencilled the names of 418 Palestinian villages on the tent's side and top; as the title indicates the villages were destroyed in 1948 following the forced migration exercise conducted by the Israeli army.²⁴

The 1948 war marks a national catastrophe for Palestinians, with over half of the population becoming refugees and several hundred Palestinian villages being abandoned and destroyed. Since then, 'the landscape of Palestine had been utterly transformed' with the Arabic names of the villages being removed and renamed into Hebrew; this was because Israel did not recognise 'the Arab's political proprietorship of the land' or the Arab's 'spiritual proprietorship and their names'.²⁵ The reinvented landscape had a twofold impact on Palestinians: not only had they lost their historic homeland but also their historic collective memory associated their birthplace.

The precise events of the 1948 war and its aftermath are often misleading when discussed in historic narratives. T.J. Demos discusses the erasure of the Palestinian history:

Because of the polemical terms of the political conflict, the violent origins of the creation of Israel have been subjected to much denial in Israel and in the West, in favour of a whitewashed narrative that claims, among other myths, that Palestinian villages "voluntarily" left their homeland during the conflict of 1948, a mythologization that minimizes Israeli responsibility for the violent events of the war.²⁶

The fact that Jacir chose to title her work *Memorial to 418 Palestinian Villages Which Were Destroyed, Depopulated, and Occupied by Israel in 1948* acts as a powerful strategy to prevent misinterpretation of the true meaning of the work: '[This] was because if they ever wrote about it ... they would have to put what it is, otherwise, with my experience with speaking about this issue, they always try to obscure what happened or change the history'.²⁷

By stitching the names of the 418 Palestinian villages, Jacir creates a visual intervention that prevails the erasure of the Palestinian narrative. Using the names of the villages recorded in Walid Khalidi's book *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948*, she transforms a historical record into a visual memento of those villages. It is fascinating that Jacir uses language as a dynamic strategy to address the Palestinian narrative for the international audiences. As the artist explained:

Our narrative, our story is absent from history books. When I made 'Memorial to 418 Palestinian Villages which were Destroyed, Depopulated and Occupied by Israel in 1948' I chose English not only because the piece was made with 140 people in New York but because I wanted people to be able to read the names and say them out loud and question why they had not heard them before and why that history is not in their books.²⁸

While for the first steps of the project Jacir was working alone, thinking that it would be feasible to stitch all the names of the Palestinian villages into the tent, she soon realised that she would not be able to complete the project in time for the opening of the PS1 exhibition in 2001.²⁹ A call for help with the project resulted in over 140 people visiting her studio in New York and assisting with the handwork of stitching the names onto the tent's fabric. The project brought together a diverse group of participants such as Palestinians, Israelis, Americans, Egyptians, Syrians, Yemenis, and Spaniards.³⁰

During the embroidery sessions, each time someone started stitching a new name onto the tent, they would read aloud the relevant passage from Walid Khalidi's book to learn the history of the village, who lived there and how the village was depopulated. What is significant with the making of the tent is that it became an act of collective remembrance for Palestinian history. Also important is that each of the stitched names acted as signifier of the village's history. The passage readings from Khalidi's book had a pedagogical aspect for all participants. For Palestinians who were originally from these villages it was an opportunity to find out more about their ancestral home, and for others it was an opportunity to understand the history of the villages associated with the tent and the people they met during the sessions: 'Where is this town exactly? Have you been there? Did you say that woman who was here yesterday had family there? Where did they all go?'³¹

The making of the tent happened during the Second Intifada, the Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories.³² For many of the participants it was a stressful time, as they were concerned with what could happen to their families who lived in Palestine. Therefore, even though participants were gathering to help with the handwork of the tent, at the same time they were also gathering to talk about what was happening during the Second Intifada:

You would get on a subway train in the morning, and there would be these horrible headlines, and you just didn't feel safe. So, even though we were sewing these names from what happened in '48, we were also gathering in a space where we could be together to deal with what was happening in the contemporary moment. And that was really important.³³

While the tent has names stencilled on its side and top panels, the space on the front two panels is completely empty. This is part of Jacir's evocative strategy, as she explains: 'the destruction of Palestine is a work in progress that's still going on, so [Jacir wanted] to imply that I would be adding more names later.'³⁴

After the three-month period, the tent was displayed for the P.S.1 exhibition, unfinished, with some villages remaining unstitched. Since then the work has been exhibited at various international art exhibitions including *document 14*. Significantly, the unfinished tent acts as a visual intervention to prevent the erasure of Palestinian history: as the artist explains 'for me, in each space it functions like a document, a photograph. Like a photograph, it shows the remains of something that happened'.³⁵

During *documenta 14* the tent was located in a large open space alongside the transparent windows. The large structure of the work (a reproduction of a refugee tent) invites the audience to walk around it and to go inside if they wish. Viewers thus encounter in this static installation a multi-sensory experience where they are invited to read the names of the villages that are stitched onto the tent. The act of reading the names enacts a knowledge practice where viewers (re)think their own awareness of the history of these villages. As explained earlier in this text, it is not coincidental that Jacir chose the extensive title for the project. In doing so, Jacir provides a significant agency on how the Palestinian narrative is remembered and how the past events and history are produced. This subtle strategy determinates what should be remembered: the 418 Palestinian villages, which were destroyed, depopulated, and occupied by Israel in 1948. This proved to be an effective strategy, because, when the work was displayed in an exhibition in New York, the description placed by the museum did not reflect the true meaning of the work.³⁶

Similar to Vanezi's project, this installation demonstrates its powerful format of communicating a historical event as well as the process of making the work. The record book of the names of the list of participants who helped in the making of the work was displayed alongside to the refugee tent. The physical presence of the record book encourages visitors of *documenta 14* to interact with it and read through its pages. In the record book for the making of the installation, the artist states that it was a 'record of the days spent sewing in my studio and the people who created this memorial... The majority of the people who came to my studio were people I did not know before.'³⁷

The collective embroidery effort is obvious when looking at the tent. At some parts the needlework is immaculate and methodical, whereas at other parts it has been done loosely. Rozsika Parker suggested that embroidery can 'provide a vehicle for dealing with highly ambivalent, complex feelings provoked by a significant other.'³⁸ Here, I consider as 'significant other' the erasure of the Palestinian history. The participatory practice of the stitched work provided a creative outlet in dealing with the historic and contemporary trauma. The repeated action of the embroidery provides a powerful mechanism in expressing how the idea of homeland can be performed in the Diaspora. Catherine De Zegher suggests that: 'the techniques of weaving allow a mobility of doing and undoing within the accumulative medium of textiles ..., thus increasing the meaning, power, value, and visual display.'³⁹

In her incisive installation, Jacir reinscribes the Palestinian disaster in a symbolic narration. Each of the village names call to us as a reminder of the past and become a crossing point of past and present, reality and mythologisation of local and global politics. The tent stands as a powerful visual reminder of a nation that still suffers from the ongoing occupation and conflict. The juxtaposition of the tent and text is critical to understanding the loss of ancestral home. Tents were transformed into housing at the Palestinian refugee camps in the years after the 1948 dispossession. The white tent exhibited at *documenta 14* is a living memorial that embodies the history of the Palestinian villages – a history that is told from one generation's memories to another. I would agree with Muhammad Siddiq that the Palestinian narratives constitute 'one sustained epic quest for return to home(land), self(hood), and nation(hood).' 40 This quest unfolds the Palestinian refugees right to return to their homes and the right of freedom of movement to their neighbourhoods and villages.

In negotiating this quest, Jacir sets up a powerful context for exploring exile and the politics of belonging. The making of the memorial acts as an evocative site of remembrance that articulates meaningful discourses in visualising exile and loss. Significant to this is John Peter's definition of the concept of exile as a 'painful or punitive banishment from one's homeland' and states that it 'implies a fact of trauma, an imminent danger, usually

political, that makes the home no longer safety habitable.⁴¹ Narratives of exile and displacement can be a powerful tool to claim ones right to return to their place of origins. In the case of Palestine, memories of 'the home villages and images of return, imbued with intense cultural meaning, are the stuff of many such Palestinian stories, told within families and refugee communities.'⁴²

As I discussed earlier in the chapter, women's loss can be considered different to men's loss due to their specific exilic conditions. Palestinian women's experiences recount the experiences of women who endured extended wars and displacement: 'They have lost home as a way of life, a way of being, a culture and a way of thinking linked to their deepest sense of identify.'⁴³ For Palestinians, their sense of identify has been marked by the experience of becoming a 'refugee nation': 'along with memories of the homeland left behind was often rekindled a desire to remake the abandoned way of life... an attempt to construct a meaningful identity in the context of life in alien... circumstances.'⁴⁴ In this context, Jacir's tent becomes a site of national remembrance, linking the 'memories of the homeland left behind' with the quest for a national 'meaningful identity'.

The specific work ask us to (re)consider the complexity of the meaning of home and the trauma and insecurity of the lost homeland. I would agree with Griselda Pollock that the encounter created by contemporary art practices 'can open up the borderspace to become a threshold between now and then, us and them, to create a shared borderspace that acknowledges the gap between different beings, times and places.'⁴⁵

Conclusion: Weaving Together and the Politics of Belonging

Documenta 14 audience participated in a 'journey in time and space – both present and historical, both political and personal.'⁴⁶ As I have argued in this chapter, the two works acted as 'projects of belonging'. By asking others to participate and weave together in the making of their works, Vanezi and Jacir constructed a highly symbolic constellation of narrations that are charged with references to the past historical events and the on-going occupation of their respective homeland.

The two works contain intertwined references of historical and present events and personal and collective narrations. These references are pivotal in establishing a platform to expose untold stories and experiences. By inviting the audience to participate in their artistic projects, each artist enables a dialogue to share memories and stories. The making of the works is fascinating, as it possesses the ability to embody individual emotions and collective experiences. Using the textile medium as a metaphorical expression, the projects become the site of national remembrance for the lost homeland.

The powerful metaphors in Vanezi's and Jacir's projects introduce audiences to untold histories and experiences. Their participatory projects have embodied the exilic narration as a subject-theme, voicing in this way their own experience of loss and sense of belonging. The two works, as constructions of belonging, reflect 'emotional investments and desire for attachments' to specific places.⁴⁷ Both works embody powerful connotations of 'being and becoming, belonging and longing to belong'.⁴⁸ Following Nira's Yuval-Davis point that 'belonging tends to be naturalized, and becomes articulated and politicised only when it is threatened in some way',⁴⁹ I suggest that the two works act as politicised projects of belonging. This is obvious in both the making of the works and during their exhibition at *documenta 14*. By enacting on personal narratives, the two works become allegories of the complexities of belonging, leaving and returning in Cyprus and Palestine. What the two works also have in common is that they act as bridging projects that connect the past (memories and belongings) and the present (gathering of shared narratives).

Both works provide a significant agency of how historical, political and personal narratives should be remembered. They underline the importance of making visible absent narratives – in particular, how the places were depopulated and occupied by strangers and the enduring desire to return back. This desire is fuelled by the yearning of belonging and feeling of being 'at home' and feeling 'safe'. As projects of belonging, the two works disclose the negotiations and struggles of exiled nations who claim a particular place as home and are transmitted over generations. As Edward Said pointed out, there is an intertwined connection between exile and nationalism:

Nationalism is an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture, and customs; and by doing so, it fends off exile, fights to prevent its ravages. [...] Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past. [...] Exiles feel, therefore, an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people.⁵⁰

Vanezi's and Jacir's approach of inviting the audience to weave together becomes an innovative mechanism to record valuable narratives of exile and the sense of belonging. The making of the works provides an innovative outlet for the making and recording of oral histories of post-war trauma. As portable structures, the two works call attention not only to the forced displacement of people but also of their memories and the desire to return to one's place of belonging.

¹ In 1947, the United Nations proposed a resolution for the creation of independent Arab and Jewish States and the Special International Regime for the City of Jerusalem. Soon after the adoption of the resolution by the General Assembly, the war broke out and hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forced to leave their homes.

² Hamid Naficy, *Home, Exile, Homeland* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.3.

³ Quinn Latimer and Adam Szymczyk, *documenta 14 Daybook* (Prestel, 2017), Wednesday 12 April.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Vassia Vanezi, *Weaving Together – The Grid of Memory*. Available at <https://www.vanezi.com/documenta-14-weaving-together-epsilon943nuomicronnutaualphasigmaf-mualphazeta943.html> (accessed 8 June 2018).

⁶ Communication with Vassia Vanezi, 2018.

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