

كرايت الغربة كرايت العودة

relatives of estrangement
intention of return

yusser
يسر
salih
صالح

ن و ي

(n-w-y)

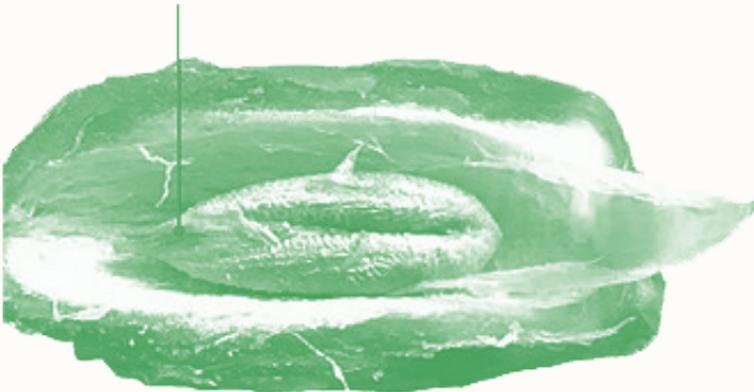
1. related to getting to a distant point

noun

نية

One's niyya is often silent, unuttered. Your niyya is what informs your practice, it is the will preceding it. The word niyya can be translated as intention, motive, will, desire. It comes from the root ن و ي • (n-w-y) which can be vaguely described as being related to getting to a distant point. But the word also carries the meaning of date pit, fruit kernel or a source from which something proceeds or grows.

نوى الثمر
(kernel, pit)



('-w-d)

1. related to returning, repetition, habituality

verb

عاد

1. to return, to go back, to come back
2. (copulative) to become
3. (with عَلَيَّ ('ala) or إِلَيَّ ('ila)) to refer to
4. (with إِلَيَّ ('ila)) to go back to; to have its origins in

noun

العودة

1. verbal and instance noun of عاد
2. return
3. repetition
4. habit
5. custom

noun

عيد

1. holiday, feast day, festival

To return to the homeland is to repeat, it is to continue returning again and again. It is to habitualize, to inhabit. So let us inhabit together, through the space of the kleicha which repeats and repeats and repeats. Accept this plate and repeat with me. Accept my plate and give it to your neighbour, forget which is mine and which is theirs and accidentally use my bowl to eat your soup. Repeat, return and inhabit.

I belong with you, we belong elsewhere. This elsewhere, the Iraq which we lost somewhere in time and space is recreated together through repeated habits, inhabited together through sharing. So I will knock on your door, hoping to find a longing soul and hungry mouth to feed my kleicha. My kleicha for which I took out the nuwa of the dates, to add the niya of return; to plant a seed of intention in order to satisfy our unrecognized hunger.

عيد

Kleicha, the edible marker of عيد [eid] and celebration can be traced to the Sumerian Qullupu, which is also a pastry filled with date paste and pressed into a mould, or قالب [qalab]. Ancient Mesopotamians made Qullupu, and many other types of decorated pastries to celebrate the Goddess Ishtar during the first new moon of spring which marks her spring festival. Since then, Qullupu has persisted, showing up with different names, around different moon related festivities. Continuing to be made with the intention of celebrating and sharing.

I want us to continue this ritual, with the added intention of return. Qullupu is derived from the Semitic roots kll and kly, meaning ‘to complete’, and kull, ‘whole’; and so Kleicha continues to carry the seed of this potential to complete, this potential to turn غرب [gharb] into قرب [qorb]. To turn our exile and estrangement into closeness.

غ ر ب

(g-r-b)

1. related to distantness, remoteness

verb

غرب

1. to go away, depart, withdraw, leave
2. to set (of the sun, moon, etc.)
3. to be a stranger
4. to be strange, odd, obscure, difficult to understand
5. to go away, depart, withdraw, leave
6. to go west, westward
7. to banish, exile, expatriate

noun

غريب

1. foreigner
2. outsider
3. stranger

noun

غربة

1. A feeling of longing for one's native land, of being a stranger.

noun

اغتراب

1. the state of being estranged

What is the meaning of the homeland, beyond the traces of the map which have been drawn for, or should I say against us. What is the meaning of Iraq for those who did not wish to leave, nor are able to return to it other than in their dreams? What is the meaning of homeland for those born into exile? It is only recently that I started considering my presence in the Netherlands as one of forced exile. This recognition now leaves me to struggle with its consequences. Iraq has become visible, present through its absence.

The homeland is left to me as a question and I am left longing to reach an Iraq which ultimately lies out of bounds.

The state that I am in is not just a personal, but a collective one. Those who had been forced to leave Iraq during Baathi rule were sure of their return, were sure that their leave was a temporary one and they would soon go back to their home as it was present in their memories. They saw themselves as temporary visitors in a land which was hosting them.

غرب

2003, the year which for many marked the possibility of return, also marked the dropping of this illusion. My parents, who had set up an Arabic school providing Iraqi children with weekly Arabic lessons, told me that in 2003, the number of enrolled students dropped to zero. They were all getting ready to go back en masse. Of course the following year, the enrollment rate went up again. The Iraq they had left was not the one they came back to. I have heard multiple stories of exiled Iraqis who returned to their land full of hope and came back heartbroken, as they weren't able to recognize it as home anymore. The home of their memories was gone, and the land they so intimately knew had become unrecognizable.

The promise of physical return can no longer soothe our homesickness. The temporary visitor has become a permanent stranger. Our place is sealed in the **غرب** [gharb].

غريب

My siblings and I have all been born in exile. My sister in Tehran, my two brothers in Damascus, and me in Dordrecht. Technically, I have never been a refugee. I was born a Dordtenaar and grew up in a safe, albeit white environment. I felt a strong sense of belonging to the place I was born in and was always loud in proclaiming my Dutchness, up until the age of, let's say five, when I first became aware of the hostility of my white environment and how it was continuously asserting me as a stranger. The reality was that while I recognized my surroundings as home, my surroundings didn't recognize me back.

In an environment in which you are recognized as a stranger, it doesn't matter much from which exact strange land you are from; and so I started identifying with the label allochtoon. The term described how I functioned in dominant white Dutch culture, how I was subjected to otherization. The space of identification I naturally found myself in was an antagonistic one, my identity had been one rooted in an opposition, in reaction to the otherization by dominant white culture.

I think it was during the course Middle East Politics, when asked for the reason I was taking the course, that I fully realized the extent in which my life and identity was a product of political exile. I realized how my life in The Netherlands existed as a denial of our life in Iraq. Our presence here, established by being forced into absence there. I began to grasp the pain of exile, the ‘unhealable rift’ into which I had been born, the loss which I myself have no memory of, but which has created the conditions of my place in the غرب [gharb].

—Edward Said, p. 373 “Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile’s life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever.”

To be born into the rift, born in the loss of a land left behind, a collective state of estrangement becomes inhabited. The state of estrangement and alienation comes to fill the gap of the lost land. Loss is thus the productive force behind the position of the stranger. Of course, this is not a big discovery for those who’ve experienced the loss themselves (as opposed to those born into it), who first hand experienced loss of security, loss of safety, and loss of loved ones.

The Iraqi identity is marked by our collective condition of longing, by a melancholic state of loss. Loss marks us all. Its traces are carried with us and stick to everyday life. We carry Iraq with us as a present absence, in memory for some and in existence for all.

اغتراب

My grandmother lost her son before she lost her homeland. Her son was taken by the state, he just disappeared one day. Fearing for their own lives and the lives of their children, my grandparents fled by illegally crossing the border to Syria. The longer one stays in Iraq, the longer one is caught in an ongoing recurrence of losses. Leaving, however, initiates another sequence of losses. Being forced to choose exile, we enter a “condition of terminal loss”, as Said puts it (p. 373).

In *Ook Ik Ben Stukgewaaid*, Van Meyeren explains that in trauma theory the change in social relations within families when a relative passes away is called secondary loss. The primary loss is then the person that passed away, while the secondary loss is the loss of relationships and habits that are changed by the primary loss. “The loss of a person is also a loss of a world, or version of a world that isn’t the same without that person” (Van Meyeren, p. 46). In this light, the “condition of terminal loss” can be seen as an extremity of “the loss of a world”.

Although the concepts of primary and secondary loss help us understand and address the entanglement of physical and relational losses, in the context of exile, it is much harder to differentiate between ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ losses; maybe, because the secondary losses are more extreme, more central, less hidden, and thus more primary, than in a context of a loss of one individual.

Exile is an ongoing loss. As loss is ongoing, the obligation to mourn is extended more and more. It is only a formal extension, because the end of mourning was not there to begin with.

And a rock is not
a rock when it can
change into a totem
that you carry in your
bag and bring out as a
demonstration in your
lectures. The rock is
a rock when it can be
your neighbor, O friend
looking for a totem
that may serve as an
identity.

—Mahmood Darwish,
in *Journal of an Ordinary Grief*

و الصخرة لا تكون صخرة
إذا كانت قابلة للانتقال
في زي تمثال تحمله في
حقيبتك و تخرجه حجة
في الحاضرات. الصخرة
تكون صخرة حين تجاورك
يا صديقي الباحث عن
تمثال ليكون هوية

—محمود درويش،
في يوميات الحزن العادي

ق ر ب

(q-r-b)

1. related to nearness

verb

قرب

1. to be near, to come near, to approach
[+ من (object)] or [+ إلى (object)]
2. to be related, to be of close relations,
3. to be kindred (especially on the maternal side)
4. to have relation to something, to be associated
5. to be engaged with, to be or become involved with
6. to cause or allow to be near
7. to make or let approach
8. to make close, to bring close

noun

قرب

1. nearness, presence near, in the vicinity of

There is no symbol for the homeland, there is only the neighbour.

A narrative is not a homeland. A homeland is not found in myth. You will not find elaborated here a well constructed grand ideology to ease the pain of our loss.

A homeland is not found in politics.

Politics is what has robbed the homeland from us, is what has asserted us as strangers both here and there. A homeland is not found in the nation. The nation is what has robbed the homeland from us, what has made us strangers in our own neighbourhoods and has necessitated us to leave.

I was made a stranger (to my land) before I was born. This is something that has been done to me. To be a stranger is not a choice. My distance to the land is not mine. It was there before I was...

Does he recognize you?
Your belonging depends
on the neighbour.

قرب

...closeness has also been there before I was. I want to return to closeness. Let us return to that which we never completely left. This distance is not ours.

Communal trauma creates a communal condition, with communally felt affects, stored and restored in the bodies of the traumatized and their descendants. When trauma is not worked through, it works through you. It can have you clinging to borders, both of the skin and the map. It can have you tightly holding on to a false sense of safety in order to protect yourself.

But this distance you are creating is not yours. Remember closeness? Do not let it tell you you don't desire it.

Western psychological theories on navigating grief have often been based on the belief that the grief must be transcended and overcome; it is only in recent years within western psychology that grief is acknowledged as something to learn to live with. The grieving do not want to “get over” their lost loved one, and they do not have to. Living with grief means to find ways to continue the relationship with the lost loved one(s).

In a way, this is what I aim to do. To find ways in which we can collectively continue our relationship with Iraq from whom we have become separated.

سنعيد و نعود

To position ourselves as exiled Iraqis, means to recognize our collective history and to reinscribe it in our lives. To create a continuum where we perceive a rift. To reinscribe and make present the specifics of the land that were lost. To not get lost in the loss. To recognize the loss in its specificity. To recognize our history in its specificity. To recognize ourselves not as derooted but as uprooted, and to partake in acts of rerooting. To save, retain and reclaim Iraqi culture To resist amnesia and to assure continuity. To make visible and partake in the rituals of remembrance that we have which tie us, so intimately, to our history and our neighbours. To repeat, again and again, to return.

I am not introducing something new here, I am only reintroducing that which I hope to not lose. I am sharing with you my نية [niyya], my desire in continuing Iraq. Describing it so you may share in it. So my نية [niyya] can travel, and so it might become a collective نية [niyya]; accompanying your rituals of remembrance, turning them into moments of عودة [return].

غرب

Rituals can play an important role in the mourning process. They can root our relation to the loss in the present. By engaging with the memories present within our bodies, somatic rituals allow us to experience the deceased as tactilely present. They allow us to not get lost in the loss and continue our relationship with the deceased.

Of course, even though we are dealing with loss and grief, the homeland is not actually deceased. We lost our own presence in the land, but leaving the land is not the same as abandoning the homeland. Through practices of remembrance we continue our relationship to the homeland. Just as the land carries us, we carry it and all its history. Together, our own bodies and the land's negotiate remembrance and forgetting. Remembrance is tactile. Repetitive practices of remembrance root our relation to the homeland in the present. Partaking in habitual practices of neighbouring and cooking traditional food is an act of homeland reproduction. The homeland is created in closeness to each other and the land, so let us continue to foster its presence rather than in absence.

قرب

Do we share closeness? If yes then I will call you my neighbour, I will bring you cookies, borrow your eggs and import you rice from Afghanistan. You will color my hair and thread my eyebrows. I attend your son's wedding and treat your daughter in law as my own. The neighbourhood was always where home could be found. In the diaspora, the neighbourhood is deterritorialized, neighbours are found spread out spatially. Its blurry borders no longer based on physical vicinity. Let us not leave the neighbourhood.

The practice of making kleicha is an ancient native celebratory practice. It is an extremely normal practice, in that, while it is not an every day practice, it is an everyone practice. Everyone in Iraq partakes in it, and has been partaking in it since before Iraq was Iraq. I am not interested in positioning kleicha making and sharing here as a mere metaphor. It is, quite literally, something that we do. Something that we have been doing. Something that we have not stopped doing, even in times of scarcity, even in the **غرب** [gharb]. The homeland is created in closeness to each other and the land, so allow me to share with you this kleicha oh neighbour.



Positioning the act of making and sharing kleicha as an act of return is my attempt at recovering the homeland. In this collective practice of ancient remembrance, in these moments of making and sharing, space and time is transgressed and our ties to the land become manifest. There is recognition of spatiality in the very root of the Arabic word for intention. A recognition that the intention travels further than the directly visible effect of the act. An intention is a manifestation in its own form. It is the beyond to the act itself. The horizon in the distance which we aim to reach.

Through my نية [niyya] I intend for us to return to the distant point of the homeland. We run towards it even if its physical presence remains out of bounds. Through this somatic ritual, I wish to mend the discontinuity of our state of being, not by establishing a new nation, but by sharing amongst ourselves the intention to turn the غرب [gharb] into قرب [qorb].



What is the distance I need to cross to arrive at a state of closeness, قرب, instead of غرب [gharb]? To come close to home means arriving at your door, my dear neighbour. With you, I am sharing the desire of turning the غ into a ق. With you, I am recovering our homeland. Together, we are returning incessantly in these acts.

العودة

return

So make kleicha, and share it with your neighbours.
And if you lost all neighbours, there is still the moon to
share your Kleicha with.

As Fairuz sings:

نحننا و القمر جيران

[we and the moon are neighbours]

And as Darwish writes:

رافقنا القمر إلى طريق عرفت فيما بعد أنها طريق المنفى

[the moon was our companion on a road that later I
understood was the road of exile]

(Journal of an Ordinary Grief, p. ٤).

for the dough

- 340 grams of plain flour
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon ground cardamom
- ½ teaspoon ground aniseed
- ¼ teaspoon cinnamon
- 190 ml oil (or half melted
butter half oil)
- 160 ml water

for the filling

- 300 grams of pitted Iraqi dates
- 50 ml water
- 30 grams of butter
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground
cardamom
- ½ teaspoon ground aniseed
- 1 teaspoon orange blossom
water

Combine all the dry ingredients (opt out of the baking powder if you want the imprint of the mould to be more defined) and mix with your hand. Slowly pour in the oil and start rubbing it together, until the mixture comes to a crumbly whole. Add warm water and stir, stir, stir. After a little, the water is properly mixed into the dough and you can start kneading. Knead for about 5 minutes.

Combine all ingredients in a heavy medium pot. Mash the dates with a wooden spoon over low heat. Allow the date mixture to form into a soft paste. Transfer to a plate and let it cool.

to shape hands
to a mould

Take a small piece of dough and flatten it with your hands, add the date paste in the middle using a teaspoon and gather the edges of the dough to seal the date paste. You should be left with a small ball that you can now place in the قالب [qalab]. Use your fingers and palm to firmly press the dough at the bottom of the mould. Finally, press the kleicha out over a baking paper lined baking tray.

Now, bake at 190° C for about 15 to 20 minutes, until left with golden discs "or bodies of the sun or moon", and offer them to your neighbours.

...the first of these is the fact that the ...

...the second of these is the fact that the ...

...the third of these is the fact that the ...

...the fourth of these is the fact that the ...

...the fifth of these is the fact that the ...

...the sixth of these is the fact that the ...



Indebted to

Books:

In Presence of Absence
Journal of an Ordinary Grief
Notes on Exile and Other Short
Essays
Ook Ik Ben Stukgewaaid
We Are Iraqis: Aesthetics
and Politics in a Time of War

Mahmoud Darwish

Mahmoud Darwish

Edward Said

Emma van Meyeren

Nadje Al-Ali, Deborah Al-Najjar

Article:

The Iraqi Cookie, Kleicha,
And the Search For Identity

Nawal Nasrallah

Dates:

Khestawi, Shukar & Zandi.

Hands:

Alireza Abbasy, Ameneh Solati,

Arvand Pourabbasi, Golnar

Abbasi, Shatha Ahmadi, Yusser

Salih.

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A very special thanks to **Sarmad**, who thoroughly guided me in the process of developing this publication. **Golnar, Ali** and **Arvand's** hands have shaped this project with me just as they shaped the kleicha with me, their care allowed my niyya to imprint. I am extremely grateful for the potential they saw in me, and the patience they had with me.

On November 2nd 2021, members of Sarmad came together in Yusser's family home to bake an estimated 180 kleichas. Each kleicha is, by use of the 3d printed kleicha mould, imprinted with the intention of turning the gharb into qorb. On the 12th of November, the first batch of the publication was distributed by Yusser amongst her neighbours in exile as a practice of homeland fostering and as a ritual of return. What you have in your hand is the first reprint since then; printed February 2023.

