

TRANSLATION, ORAL HISTORY AND THE ANARCHIVE IN SAMIA HALABY'S *DRAWING THE KAFR QASEM MASSACRE*

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ABSTRACT: This article argues that translation can serve as a methodology for creating new embodied, affective, and experiential knowledge about the past. Using the concept of the 'anarchive', the article explores the creative-research translation practices artists engage in as they create historical documents that foreground the sensorial, material, and embodied dimensions of the past. To illustrate these arguments, the article analyses Samia Halaby's (2016) *Drawing the Kafr Qasem Massacre*. Based on her own oral history interviews with the survivors, the artist visualizes the 1956 massacre during which Israeli border police killed 49 Palestinians and wounded 13 others. In this multimodal publication, Halaby presents the reader with her visual documentation of the massacre, the English transcripts of the testimonies she collected, and a reflection on the anarchival translation process she engaged in throughout the project. The article contributes to emerging debates on translation of lived experience, oral history, archives, and decolonial knowledge.

KEYWORDS: Experiential Translation, Oral History, (An)Archive, Art, Translation and Decolonization

1. Introduction

Oral history refers to both the "process of conducting and recording interviews with people in order to elicit information from them about the past" (Abrams, 2016, p. 2) as well as the narrative account resulting from these interviews. As a methodology, it enables researchers to document the experiences of those who are often marginalized and suppressed in dominant historiography and archives, such as the working class, refugees, women, and the illiterate, offering in-depth insights onto not only how these individuals and their communities experienced specific events, but also how they remember and interpret these events from the perspective of the present (Frisch, 1990; Thompson, 2016). Oral history embraces the subjectivity of lived experience, and, to quote historian Alessandro Portelli, 2016, p. 52) "tell[s] us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did".

Beyond its subjectivity, Portelli (2016) argues that what sets oral history apart from other historical sources is its co-constructed and dialogic nature. The interview is a conversation that is shaped by the interaction between the interviewer and narrator. It is also a multimodal performance constructed by verbal and non-verbal signs. The narrator's gestures, facial expressions, silences, hesitations, cadence, rhythm, the tone and volume of their voice, and their use of non-standard language varieties are as instrumental to the construction of meaning in their account as their spoken words, revealing their emotions, attitudes, and how past events continue to affect them.

It is these unique characteristics that have made oral history a prevalent practice in documenting the experiences of survivors in the aftermath of mass atrocities, violence, and crises, both within and outside academic research (Cave and Sloan, 2014; Abrams, 2016).

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In the visual and performing arts, Desai and Hamlin (2010, p. 57) observe that oral history is increasingly employed “as a method to document the stories of people who are socially, culturally, economically, racially, or ethnically marginalised”. Incorporating oral history as part of their creative-research praxis enables artists to create multimodal historical records that foreground the gustatory, olfactory, tactile, aural, and visual dimensions of lived experience and advance alternative and multisensorial interpretations of the past. As such, their artworks and performances turn into “counter-archives” that capture “what is traditionally understood as non-archivable—affects, bodies, performances, and embodied events” (Springgay, Truman, and MacLean, 2019, p. 897) and “anarchives” (Massumi, 2016; Manning, 2020) that document the creative-research practices they engage in as they transform oral history across media.

Drawing on Campbell and Vidal's (2024a; 2025) understanding of translation as an experiential process, this article argues that such counter-archival and anarchival creative-research practices are underpinned by experiential translation. In line with Vidal Claramonte's (2025a) recent theorization of historical documents as translations of the past and the historian as a translator who offers one of many possible interpretations of sources and facts, this article will explore how experiential translation enables artists to create (an)archives that document the lived experiences of survivors of mass atrocities. The article asks: How can these (an)archives contribute to the construction of anti-colonial experiential knowledge about the past? How can they be reflexive of the processes behind their creation? How can they promote ethical and politically engaged encounters with the embodied oral histories they document? In addressing these questions, the article establishes new links between Translation Studies and Oral History, contributing to emerging debates on the role of experiential translation in generating new knowledge and countering systematic processes of epistemicide in (post)colonial contexts (e.g., Chambers and Demir, 2024; Vidal Claramonte, 2025b), as well as to recent scholarship on translation, multimodality, and the arts (e.g., Boria et al., 2020; De Francisci and Marinetti, 2025).

To this end, I will analyse Palestinian American artist Samia Halaby's (2016) *Drawing the Kafr Qasem Massacre* – a multimodal publication that documents the 1956 massacre in which Israeli border police killed 49 Palestinians in the eponymous village. Based on her own oral history interviews with survivors, Halaby created a series of drawings, sketches, and murals that visualize the stages through which the massacre was perpetrated. In this publication, the artist presents the reader with drafts of her sketches and drawings, the final visualizations she created, and an in-depth reflection on the creative-research process through which she – as she describes it – “translated the words of witnesses into pictures” (Halaby, 2016, p. 91). Finally, she includes her English translation of the Arabic oral histories she collected and other primary sources she relied on during her research.

As such, I argue that Halaby's publication develops into both an oral history counter-archive and a translator's anarchival that allows the reader to engage with the creative-research process underpinning her reconstruction of the massacre and transformation of the survivor testimonies into art. The first part of the article offers a brief historical

overview of the Kafr Qasem massacre and its aftermath. The second section outlines the themes and topics explored in existing research on translation and oral history. After that, I define 'experiential translation' and the 'anarchival', identifying how they can intersect and enrich our understanding of history as translation. To illustrate my arguments, the following section analyses Halaby's experiential and anarchival translation process, drawing on examples from her visualization of the last stage of the massacre. The conclusion offers reflections on the theoretical and practical implications of approaching experiential translation as anarchival practice.

2. The Kafr Qasem massacre

On the eve of 29 October 1956, Israeli border police massacred 49 Palestinians and wounded 13 others in the village of Kafr Qasem. At that time, along with other Palestinian villages within the borders of the newly established Israeli state, the residents of Kafr Qasem lived under military rule, governed by a military administration that subjected them to severe restrictions on their freedom of movement, including curfews (Sa'di, 2016).

The massacre was perpetrated against the backdrop of the tripartite Israeli, British, and French attack on Egypt, with the aim of toppling Gamal Abdel Nasser and taking control of the Suez Canal, which Nasser had nationalized. The Israeli army command brought forward the curfew imposed on Kafr Qasem and other neighbouring villages from 9.00 p.m. to 5.00 pm. Colonel Issachar Shadmi – the commander of the area in which the village is located – ordered the soldiers in his sector to shoot and kill whoever violates this new curfew. The village's *mukhtar* was informed of the change in curfew around thirty minutes before it came into effect. As most of the villagers worked in the fields surrounding Kafr Qasem, it was not possible to warn them ahead of their return to the village at the end of the working day (Manna', 2011; Pappé, 2011, pp. 55-59).

Most of the killing took place at the western entrance of the village, where the soldiers had placed a checkpoint, stopping and shooting the villagers upon their arrival, in what Palestinian author Emile Habibi (1976) describes in one of the earliest publications on the massacre as 'the nine waves of killing', including attacks on groups of men, women and children returning on foot, donkeys, bicycles, carts and trucks. Other killings were documented within the village and at its northern field. In addition to that, the soldiers forced men from the neighbouring village of Jaljullia to dig a hole that would later serve as a mass grave for the bodies of those killed in Kafr Qasem (Robinson, 2003, p. 395).

A media blackout followed and the village was placed under siege. Nevertheless, on 9 November 1956, news of the massacre was published in the *Itihad* newspaper by Palestinian member of the Israeli Knesset and Communist Party Tawfik Toubi. The latter had been informed about the massacre by a journalist who had managed to bypass the roadblocks around the village but did not want to break the military gag order. On 20 November 1956, Toubi managed to find his way into the village and collected witness statements. Three days later, he published a press release in Arabic, English, and Hebrew exposing what had happened in the village. An inquiry into the massacre was launched

between 1957-1958, with eleven soldiers put on trial. By 1960, all of them had been acquitted. Shadmi was given a reprimand and fined one piastre for what the Israeli court perceived as a technical error (for an in-depth discussion of the massacre and its aftermath, see Habibi, 1976; Orbach, 2013; Sorek, 2015; Halaby, 2016, pp. 39-57). The State went as far as to enforce a 'reconciliation' between the villagers and perpetrators in an attempt to put an end to the trials (Robinson, 2003). It also tried to control how the massacre was commemorated, framing it as an isolated and exceptional event, rather than as part of the ongoing Nakba¹ and the structural violence of the Israeli settler colonial project (Barakat, 2022).

Over the years, the massacre has been the subject of some literary, artistic, and filmic treatments.² Yet, it was only when artist Samia Halaby began her project of visualizing the massacre that a creative project engaged with and foregrounded the lived experiences of the survivors. In the 1990s, Halaby was contacted by Aishy Amer – a young woman from Kafr Qasem – urging her to document the massacre through art (Halaby, 2016, p. 17). As the subsequent discussion will demonstrate, the project slowly grew beyond these initial aims, developing into an exploration into how experiential translation – with its material, embodied, and collaborative dimensions – can facilitate the co-construction of decolonial knowledge. Over the course of fourteen years, Halaby proceeded to create a series of sketches, drawings, and murals that visualize the stages through which the massacre unfolded. In doing so, the artist relied on three main sources of information: her own oral history interviews with the survivors; written transcripts of survivor testimonies published in the village's *Al-Shorok* magazine; and existing publications on the massacre, including Tawfik Toubi's press release, Emile Habibi's (1976) *Kafr Qasem: The Massacre – The Policy*, and the Israeli Communist Party's *Kafr Qasem: The Massacre and the Lesson* (1996). She also consulted maps of the village and passport pictures of the victims and survivors.

In the project's earlier stages, the artist's translations of the massacre could be accessed either in museum and gallery exhibitions or online through a memorial website she had created. The project turned into a translator's anarchiving in 2012. After reviewing the material she had gathered and created over the years, the artist decided to publish a book featuring not only her visual documentation of the massacre, but also the oral histories and other sources she collected, as well as a reflection on her translation praxis through written essays and drafts of her drawings. In doing so, the artist wanted the project

¹ Between 1947-48, around 500 Palestinian villages were depopulated, 750,000 Palestinians were forcibly expelled from Palestine, becoming refugees, while thousands were massacred by Zionist militia in preparation for the establishment of Israel (Pappé, 2006; Masalha, 2012). This was accompanied by the looting of Palestinian documents, diaries, and family albums, many of which have been appropriated into Israeli archives (Sela, 2018). This period became known as the Nakba and is understood not as a past event, but an ongoing process that continues in the Israeli occupation of Palestine and the denial of the right of return for refugees (Manna', 2013).

² For instance, the massacre features in the poetry of Tawfiq Zayyad, Samih al-Qasem, Mahmoud Darwish, and Hanna Abu Hanna; the artworks of Abed al-Abedi and Abed al-Tamam; and Borhane Alaouié's (1975) film *The Massacre of Kafr Kassem*.

to “reach many hands and eyes” (2016, p. 18) serving as a primary historical source that is deeply reflective of the processes behind its creation.

3. Translation and oral history

While translation underpins different stages of oral history documentation, interpretation, and dissemination, its methodological and epistemological implications are often left unaddressed (Temple, 1997). In guidelines by leading oral history bodies (e.g., Oral History Association and Oral History Society) and key textbooks (e.g., Abrams, 2016), there is a notable absence of discussion concerning translation practice. Yet, translation informs “what is known, how it is known, and who is seen to tell” (Young and Temple, 2014, p. 130).

Although explicit dialogue between Translation Studies and Oral History remains rare (McDonough Dolmaya, 2015), some oral historians offer valuable reflections on the implications of using translation and interpreting as part of their research methodologies. For instance, studies discuss the impact of using interpreters on the dynamics of the oral history interview (e.g., Andrews, 1995; Wheeler, 2008; Jones-Gailani, 2013); the challenges of transcribing, translating and editing the recorded interview for publication in ethnographic and social research (e.g., Tedlock, 2011; Melian-Zamora and Behar, 2020; McCartney, Kritsch and Snowshoe, 2021); and the extent to which the translator's positionality and socialization impinge on their translation decisions (e.g., Temple, 2006, 2013; Temple and Koterba, 2009; Huynh Chau Nguyen, 2020).

In recognition of the materiality of oral history and its communication of embodied knowledge, some studies consider strategies for translating the verbal and non-verbal dimensions of the interview in written transcripts. Reeves-Ellington (1999) suggests the use of poetic transcription, creative punctuation, and the preservation of colloquial emphatics to reflect the idiosyncrasies of the interview, while Gawlewicz (2014) proposes providing explanations within square brackets for paralinguistic elements of the interview, implicit attitudes and values held by the narrators, the emotional connotations of their utterances, and any culture-bound terminology and grammatical structures they employ.

Such concerns are compounded in the translation of oral histories with survivors of mass atrocities which feature verbal and non-verbal markers of trauma. Drawing on her own experience of translating written oral histories by survivors of the Hiroshima bombing, Nicoll (2023) reflects on the significance of conveying such manifestations of trauma, including the survivor's use of metaphorical language, sensory imagery, and narrative pace. By adopting such an approach, Painca (2025) argues that the translator demonstrates an awareness of what historian Michael Frisch terms ‘shared authority’ – that is her positionality and the impact of her decisions on the co-creation of meaning in the translated testimony. At the same time, Müller's (2014) analysis of David Boder's English translations of his 1946 wire-recorded interviews with Holocaust survivors draws our attention to the potential risk of ‘over interpreting’ what we perceive as linguistic reflections of trauma. Müller notes that Boder attempted to convey such markers by rendering them into ‘awkward’ English language structures – a decision that was not always

effective. Müller also observes that the written transcripts do not convey the non-verbal dimensions of the interview – silences and hesitations – that are significant to meaning-making, pointing to a limitation resulting from a shift in the materiality of the interview during the translation process.

Another issue that is raised in relation to the translation of survivor oral histories lies in the safety and wellbeing of the translators, interpreters and transcribers involved in such projects (Abrams, 2016, p. 191). This topic remains largely unexplored, but studies like Bosseaux (2025) identify an absence of support and training on how to handle 'vicarious trauma'.

While these studies mainly focus on the practicalities and challenges of translating oral history in and into written accounts, they clearly demonstrate that a Translation Studies lens is instrumental for helping us understand the impact of translation on reconstructing what Portelli (2016) and other historians identify as the unique features of the oral history encounter: its subjectivity, orality, narrativity, performativity, and shared authority. Building on these insights, this article will shift our attention to the equally important yet less-studied processes of experiential translation that underpin the transformation of lived experience into oral history accounts and their subsequent remediations into multimodal counter-archives and anarchives.

4. Experiential translation and the anarchive

The concept of the anarchive was introduced by philosophers Erin Manning and Brian Massumi in their exploration of how to capture the 'traces' resulting from collaborative research-creation practices. Their aim behind creating a "repertory of traces" (Manning, 2020, p. 92) is not to identify techniques for documenting past co-creative activities but to find ways for "harnessing the process" (p. 76) behind them in a manner that allows it to be reactivated in the future, continually generating new creative processes (pp. 92-93). As Massumi (2016, p. 6) puts it, the anarchive is "a feed-forward mechanism for lines of creative process, under continuing variation".

Unlike archives which are conventionally perceived as static repositories of past events, objects, or knowledge (Millei, Piattoeva and Silova, 2024, p. 8), the anarchive is a research-creation practice that "catches experience in the making" and that "catches us in our own becoming" (Manning, 2020, p. 84). It captures that which is usually considered 'unarchivable', such as ephemeral processes, affect, experiential knowledge and lived histories (Springgay, Truman, and MacLean, 2019), allowing us to "bin[d] together seemingly disparate fragments of 'missing' data" and thereby "opening new possibilities of seeing the world" (Millei, Piattoeva and Silova, 2024, p. 8).

When engaging with archives as part of creative-research practice, archival objects can be seen as the "springboard" for anarchiving, and the archive itself as the "waystation" through which the anarchival journey moves (Massumi, 2016, p. 6). Furthermore, Massumi argues that the anarchive itself is not a physical object; it is "a cross-platform phenomenon" (2016, p. 6) that requires materialization into different multimodal forms like artwork,

performances, museums exhibitions, and films, for it to be continually shared and engaged with. Every encounter with such forms is meant to prompt further new collaborative interactions that then produce further anarchival encounters and forms, allowing the traces of the creative process to proliferate in new and varied iterations.

From a Translation Studies perspective, it can be argued that anarchiving, with its continuous transformation of experiential knowledge across medial and (non)verbal forms, is underpinned by a process of experiential translation. Moving beyond lingua-centric conceptualizations of translation, Madeleine Campbell and Ricarda Vidal's two recent edited volumes *The Experience of Translation: Materiality and Play in Experiential Translation* (2024b) and *The Translation of Experience: Cultural Artefacts in Experiential Translation* (2025) prompt us to approach translation "as a meaning-making process which is in-the-moment, temporally contingent, relational, material, ludic and embodied" (Campbell and Vidal, 2025, p. 8). In this process, the source and target texts are revised to encompass sensory, (im)material, and (non)verbal signs. Rather than focusing on the relationship between source and target texts, experiential translation allows us to explain the 'how' of meaning-making, or what Piotr Blumczynski (2023, p. 82) refers to as "translationality" – that is the "experience of connecting, through material, sensory mediation, with another reality across space and time". It foregrounds the translator's subjective engagement with and interpretation of signs and is concerned with how "to make experiences translatable across the linguistic and sensory boundaries and media that together serve to generate, maintain or challenge cultural hegemonies" (Campbell and Vidal, 2024a, p. 2).

In other words, as anarchival practice, experiential translation is concerned with process. It allows us to capture the 'how' behind co-creative engagements with historical documents and lived experience. It opens the space for considering the sensorial, (im)material, corporeal and collaborative aspects of creating knowledge. The concern here is not on evaluating the correspondence between survivor oral histories and their intersemiotic translation into art, but on documenting traces of the process that enabled the generation of new, previously suppressed knowledge on the past. As the subsequent discussion will show, Halaby's drawings are but one of many possible manifestations of the experiential translation process, and the translator's anarchiving invites us to consider how we ourselves can continue to engage with the questions, methods, ethical concerns, and experiential knowledge her project generates.

5. Analysis

5.1 Making sense of the fragments

As a painter and art scholar specialized in abstract art,³ the Kafr Qasem project was Samia Halaby's first experience of creating 'documentary drawings' that present her visual

³ Samia Halaby is an art scholar and leading visual artist specialising in abstract painting. She was born in Jerusalem in 1936. Her family was forced to leave Palestine during the Nakba, fleeing to Lebanon, before immigrating to the US in 1951. The New York-based artist studied design and fine art and has held academic posts at several universities in the US. She has published books and articles on art history and her own

interpretation of this painful episode of Palestinian contemporary history. To achieve this goal, Halaby held that the aim of her project is to create “realistic” drawings that “accurately” represent the events of the massacre, perceiving herself as a “camera” that would capture the massacre in its entirety (2016, pp. 16, 158). Mirroring traditional instrumentalist conceptualizations of translation, the artist believed her task is to create an accurate rendition of a fixed and identifiable source text. Halaby states (2016, p. 57):

Research on this project absorbed me for a lot longer than expected. Reading the material first provided by Aishy Amer led to the first sketches. My thinking was that a few sketches and a final work on the subject would be enough. However, further opportunities to visit Kafr Qasem presented themselves... Gradually, I became rivetted by the compelling facts, and the project slowly grew beyond my expectation.

The first assumption to be revised was the translator's understanding of her role as that of the camera and the translation process as a linear transformation of one text into another. One of the challenges Halaby faced from the outset was the possibility of building a cohesive visual narrative of events amid a lack of photographic documentation of the massacre and an absence of detailed testimonies by its survivors. In a discussion of her book during the Palestine Writes Festival, Halaby explains that

It was very hard for me to put in my head the entire massacre and how it happened. I received bits of it from here and there... I could not completely comprehend the depth of what was being said to me. (Palestine Writes, 2020, 22:35-23:20)

Available written sources, such as Emile Habibi's (1976) description of how the massacre unfolded and publications by the Israeli Communist Party were informative but did not centre the survivors' embodied and emotional experiences, nor did they provide access to detailed witness statements. Similarly, Halaby found the court documents⁴ unreliable as they favoured the narrative of the perpetrator and any survivor statements featured within them were too brief (2016, p. 59).

A key development in the project was Halaby's decision to use oral history as the main methodology in her creative-research practice. Through the help of Aishy Amer and her friends and family, the artist was able to interview several survivors of and witnesses to the massacre during her visits to the village in 1999 and 2000, and later in 2012 and 2014. As explained earlier, oral history interviews “reveal unknown events or unknown aspects of known events”, shedding light on “unexplored areas of the daily life of the nonhegemonic classes” (Portelli, 2016, p. 52), while illustrating how narrators interpret and

theory of abstraction, and has exhibited her work in museums and galleries around the world (Winter, 2025).

⁴ This is in reference to details about the trials included in Israeli Communist Party publications. At the time of authoring *Drawing the Kafr Qasem Massacre*, official trial documents, such as photographs, evidence, police reports, and court transcripts, were classified. In 2019, some of these documents were published online in Hebrew by the Akevot Institute, while others remain classified and inaccessible to the public (see: <https://kafr-qasim-massacre.akevot.org.il/>).

understand these events from their position in the present. Seeking to better understand what the survivors saw, heard, felt, and thought as the massacre unfolded, and how it continues to affect the residents of the village (now town) decades later, Halaby resorted to oral history.

Oral history facilitates the artist's cognitive and emotional engagement with the lived experiences she seeks to translate. The oral history encounter is a live, situated performance (Abrams, 2016). It immerses the translator in how the survivor's body remembers and reconstructs events – using what Jeff Freidman (2014) describes as 'embodied channels of communication', like body language, movement, silences, and voice, allowing the artist to know and understand the events in a manner that is profoundly different from reading about them in written documents (i.e. Toubi's press release and Habibi's account).

Additionally, the oral history interview is not an unmediated monologue by the narrator; it is actively shaped by the questions the interviewer poses (Portelli, 2016, p. 56). Adopting oral history as part of her creative-research practice allows Halaby to elicit information about "the physical appearance of things" (2016, p. 58), key to a translation that foregrounds the materiality of lived experience, as will be discussed later.

After that, the artist found it difficult to transform the oral histories she conducted into drawings, owing to their traumatic content, and the limited visual descriptions they sometimes provided. This challenge necessitated further reappraisal of what it means to transform oral history and lived experience into art. Rather than perceiving the function of translation as that of "conveying meaning", Campbell and Vidal (2024a, p. 10) argue that translation is a process of (un)knowing, "a form of investigation or research and of embracing the unknown, with the potential to open up the space between words and indeed to access that which escapes language" (p. 11). As the following analysis will show, Halaby embarks on an almost two-decade research investigation aimed not only at reconstructing the massacre but at contemplating questions related to artistic practice and the visualization of trauma. As such, her translation develops into anarchival practice, a methodology through which she thinks and experiments, co-creating new knowledge on a historical event and on translation practice itself.

5.2 The ninth wave of killing: embrace in death

As explained earlier, one of the sources Halaby relied on during her research process was Emile Habibi's (1976) account of the massacre, in which he describes it as unfolding in 'nine waves'. Habibi employs this metaphor to indicate that the workers returned to the village in 'waves' rather than in one group, with each wave being killed upon their approach to the western entrance of the village. It also signifies that each stage of killing was more atrocious than the one preceding it, like waves gradually shattering a boat during a storm (Habibi, 1976, pp. 24, 36). Inspired by Habibi's metaphor, Halaby translates the oral histories she collected into visualizations of these nine waves.

To illustrate Halaby's experiential and anarchival translation process, this section will draw on examples from her visualization of the 'ninth wave of killing', often described as one of the most harrowing stages of the massacre. A truck carrying fourteen women and girls returning from picking olives in the fields approached the western entrance of the village. Also onboard were the driver, two boys and a young man. Seeing the bodies of those killed earlier in the day scattered on the side of the road, the driver sped up, trying to escape. One of the women, Safa Sarsour, saw her son Jumaa's body among the dead and started to scream in horror. The rest of the women started to scream as well. The soldiers chased the truck, shot its tyres and gas tank, and forced everyone out. The men and boys were lined up and shot. Meanwhile, two girls who had run and hidden behind the truck rejoined the remainder of women in fear. As the soldiers start firing bullets at the women, they formed a circle, huddling together. Only one child survived despite being injured in her head, chest, stomach and leg: Hana Amer.

The artist's process of translating the killing of the women unfolded almost over a decade and underwent significant transformations over the duration of the project. When Halaby began researching the massacre, survivor Hana Amer was reluctant to give a personal testimony. In the absence of an oral history source, Halaby's initial sketches in 1999 were based on Emile Habibi's (1976, p. 39, my translation) description of the event:

Witnesses (survivors from previous waves) report that the 14 women and girls stuck to each other while bullets rained on them. They started rotating in a circle while stuck to each other. The circle turned into a dance of death challenging any great artist to express it... Hana Suleiman Amer (who was then 16 years old and survived)⁵ narrates that she found herself at the centre of this circle of death. The circle spun around her, and she turned with it. She heard a shot followed by a moan, then the sound of a body hitting the ground, then the sound of another shot, moan, and body hitting the ground, until she was left alone. She fell to the ground, unconscious.

Habibi also writes (1976, p. 35, my translation):

...Safa Mohammad Asas Sarsour saw her son's [Jumaa] still body on the side of the road and threw herself at him. They then killed her. Her other son Abdallah... was with her and fell dead in his mother's lap, next to his murdered brother.

Halaby's first sketch of the scene (Figure 1) portrays the women once they had descended from the truck, following Habibi's description. Some stand cowering in fear, while others look around in terror. To the right, the two girls who had found shelter behind the truck rejoin the other women, the men's bodies are crumpled on the ground, with Safa Sarsour holding the corpses of her two children. The name of each subject is inscribed at the bottom of the drawing, ensuring they can be identified. When the artist showed this

⁵ Earlier written accounts of the massacre reported that Hana Amer was sixteen years old in 1956. In her interview with Samia Halaby in 2012, she corrects this information: "They said that I was 16 but I was less than 15 years old. I was only recently out of school" (2016, p. 230).

drawing to friends in Kafr Qasem, it was met by criticism regarding the historical inaccuracy of the dresses worn by its subjects. Halaby recalls that (2016, p. 145):

Because I lacked information, I dressed them in the mountain village dress I am familiar with... The women looked stiff and lacked the body language that I came to know as that of Kafr Qasem women who possess a certain pride of posture and feminine coquettishness that is charmingly self-aware.

The artist's lack of knowledge led to a generic and emotionally detached portrayal that was perceived as falling short in conveying the bodily presence of the women and the cultural context in which they were embedded. The only way to deal with this failure was to engage in further experimentation and research through experiential translation. As anarchival practice, Halaby's translation process starts to shift away from questions of transforming a source text into a target text, developing into "an act of discovery, as a pathway to the acquisition, dissemination and, importantly, the production of knowledge" (Campbell and Vidal, 2024a, p. 10).



Figure 1. D2038 *Fourteen Women of the Ninth Wave*, Kafr Qasem Massacre series (1999)
conte crayon on paper, 12.75 x 19 5/8 in, (32 1/2 x 50 cm). Courtesy of Samia Halaby.

Halaby visualized this scene again into a sketch in 1999 and enlarged it into an exhibition mural in 2006 (see Figure 2). Inspired by Emile Habibi's choice to title this wave of the massacre "The dance of death" (1976, p. 39), Halaby portrays the women holding each other in a final embrace before they are killed. Her focus in this rendition turns to Khameesa Amer, the woman at the front of the circle with her back turned to the viewer

as she falls to the ground. After having interviewed Khameesa's son Muhammed Amer in 1999, the artist learned that he found his mother's shoes and grey *abaya* (coat) at the site of the massacre (2016, p. 199), details that the viewer can note in Khameesa's bare feet, discarded shoes, and clothing.



Figure 2. D2045 *The Women Embrace in Death, Ninth Wave of Killing, Kafr Qasem Massacre series (2006)* charcoal and acrylic on linen, 84 x 126 in, (188 x 250 cm). Courtesy of Samia Halaby.

Another detail with which the artist was occupied at the outset of the project was Safa Sarsour's reaction to losing both her children before getting killed herself. Following Habibi's description (see above), the artist portrays Safa throwing herself at her son's dead body (see Figure 3). We can also observe a woman behind Safa, either pulling her back or consoling her, and to the right, the bodies of the slain men and the two girls hiding behind the truck. However, it was only through the translation process that Halaby discovered that this detail in Habibi's account was inaccurate, and Safa "did not have a chance to descend from the truck and hold him" (Halaby, 2016, p. 147).

In 2012, Halaby gained access to a written statement by Hana Amer given in 1960 to a historian in the village. Amer also agreed to be interviewed by the artist. Her two testimonies revealed harrowing details that were missing from Habibi's account, and thus Halaby's initial portrayals of the women. Hana Amer's testimony appears in Halaby's (2016, p. 228) English translation as follows:

We descended and stood glued to each other in a kind of circle... Each of us tried to hide behind the other and we spun in a circle trying to avoid the bullets. My co-workers began to

fall one after the other, but I was in the middle and was turning as they were all turning until my last friend fell to the ground, then I also fell.



Figure 3. D2037 *Safa Reaches to Her Son*, Kafr Qasem Massacre series (1999)
conte crayon on paper, 9 5/8 x 12 3/4 in (25 x 35 cm). Courtesy of Samia Halaby.

Beyond relating how the women were shot, Amer's testimony allows us a glimpse into the emotions she and the women experienced as the truck approached the village: "I was very fearful"; upon seeing the piles of dead bodies: "...we all screamed in our loudest voices. We lost all ability to think or judge. We could not feel where we were..."; and as she was shot and left alone among the dead bodies: "my soul left me" (Halaby, 2016, pp. 228, 229).

Also of significance to Halaby's translation of the massacre were visual descriptions that Amer provided about the physical site of the massacre: "... the area where they stopped us was full of olive trees and a small bit of cactus fence. They shot us on the gravel of the unpaved roadbed" and "it was extremely dark"; the build of the truck: "[it] had no seats like today and it had no top; it was not covered"; and the clothes adorned by the women: "We used to wear pants. It was the older women who wore *saraweal* [ankle-length bloomers] ... Most women wore a *ksiyye* [long shawl] or a *mandeel* [headscarf]..." (Halaby, 2016, pp. 229, 230).

Dissatisfied with her 1999 and 2006 portrayals, Halaby experienced a pressing urge to draw a group portrait of the women and girls to "contemplate them and understand their relationships" (2016, p.145) before she reworked the visualization of their killing (see Figure 4), a process in which the artist immersed herself into the very bodies of the women,

appropriating their feelings, memories, and even body postures. In that, she relied on the oral histories she collected, the women's passport pictures, and the new information she had gained on their mode of dress, the physical and emotional reactions they experienced, and the spatial and temporal setting in which their experiences were situated, as described in Amer's statement above. This deep sensorial entanglement with her sources is what allows the artist to embrace the unknown and generate new knowledge. It enables her to experience 'translationality' and connect cognitively and bodily with these women from whom she is temporally, spatially and experientially distant (Blumczynski, 2023). This is evident in Halaby's reflection (2016, p. 146, my emphasis):

As I drew the women and studied the existing passport pictures, I began to feel that I had become acquainted with them. I wanted to ask them how they felt, what they thought, how they stood next to each other, their body language, at the moments before the shooting began. I could almost communicate with them as a feeling overcame me... A channel seems to open between my eyes and theirs and all else recedes. But what remains during such creative moments is unclear, a visual impulse, a *sensation of knowledge* outside the realm of words.

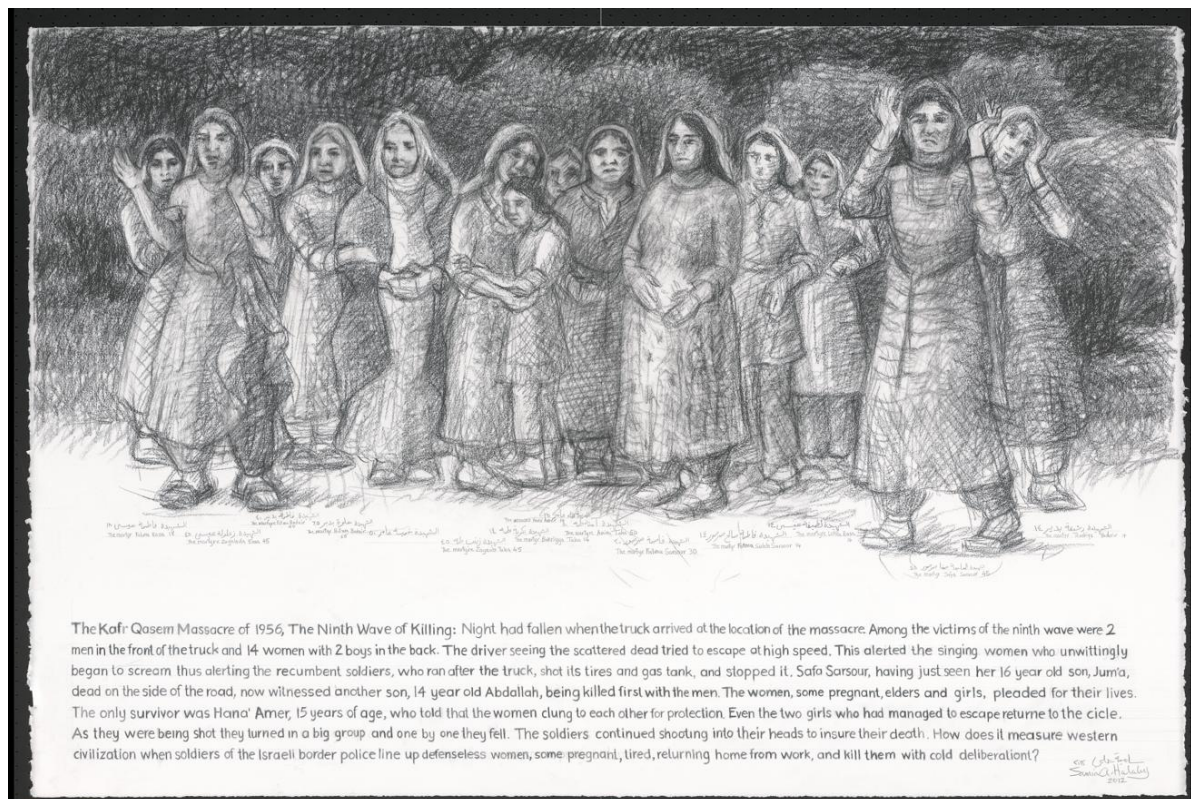


Figure 4. D2154 *The Ninth Wave of Killing, All of the Women, Kafr Qasem Massacre series* (2012) charcoal on paper, 30 x 44 ½ in, (96.5 x 113 cm). Courtesy of Samia Halaby.

The artist's experiential translation process and its resulting 'sensation of knowledge' bring an added layer of discovery: she realizes that in their moment of killing, the women did not embrace or dance. Rather, they imploded, collapsing onto each other as they were shot, resulting in Hana Amer falling under the bodies encircling her, as she related in her testimony. As Figure 5 shows, Halaby illustrates the women "huddled facing their assailants" (2016, p. 144) – their direct gaze, unlike earlier renditions of their killing, defies their killer and shifts the viewer from a detached onlooker to a morally implicated witness.



Figure 5. D2155 *The Ninth Wave of Killing, Implosion, Kafr Qasem Massacre series* (2012)
charcoal on paper, 30 x 44 ½ in, (76 x 113 cm). Courtesy of Samia Halaby.

6. Concluding remarks

Why does Halaby insist on taking us along her journey of translating the massacre? Why does she record the 'traces' of her research-creative process, turning her project from that of historical documentation via translation into anarchival practice? At the outset of the project, Halaby imagined that she would be able to create 'photographic' drawings that visualize the massacre objectively and accurately. In the conclusion to her book, she reflects on the impossibility of this task, revising her role to creating documentary visualizations that (re)story the fragmented past into a narrative that engenders new ways of seeing and knowing it in and for the present. One may argue that this aim could have been achieved by publishing the oral histories and their visualizations on their own. However, what this article demonstrates is that by exposing the audience to her creative-research practice, the artist shows that the process of translation is indivisible from its resulting visualizations.

As this article argues, experiential translation is a powerful methodology for the (co)generation of new embodied, experiential, and affective knowledge about the past.

Translation enables artists and cultural practitioners to create multimodal historical documents that foreground the felt, smelt, heard, seen and tactile aspects of memory and lived experience. By adopting a process rather than a product-oriented understanding of translation, anarchival practice allows us to appreciate the significance of what would normally be perceived as failed, aborted or discarded translations (Blumczynski, 2022), and their significance to the production of decolonial knowledge, the rectification of facts, or the development of a translator's skills and practice, as seen in Halaby's project.

As Halaby reminds us, her drawings and other historical documents resulting from experiential translation processes "are an accumulation of knowledge poured into visual form and thus the life experience of the one who makes [them] affects the result" (2016, p. 147). Thus, any interpretation the audience themselves make of such historical documents cannot be abstracted from the translator, her creative-research journey, and the memories and experiences of survivors and victims.

The anarchival, as Andrew Murphie (2016, p. 41, emphasis in original) writes, "is not just about how we store the past" but "also about how we organize *possible actions* for the future". Translation as anarchival practice in this oral history documentation project distills both the artist's and massacre survivors' experiential knowledge into multimodal artworks, as well as providing us with a 'waystation' that invites further investigations, creative encounters, and remediations of the massacre as a lived and living historical event.

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