

## Homing and Bodies: Arab Queer Encounters

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### ABSTRACT

This article explores issues of homing, nostalgia, and queer Arab bodies by writing through encounters, precisely through encounters with the self and with others. Writing through encounters here is understood as a mode of co-presence of multiple registers of voices and perspectives, never fully stabilised and never quite finished (Ahmed, 2006; Berlant, 2019; Probyn, 2016; Stewart, 2017). Following a ‘theory in the flesh’ (Anzaldúa, 1987), the self is understood as relational (Probyn, 1996), and embedded in a migratory context, navigating streets in Montreal and two countries (Canada and Morocco). The article writing style is composed of heterogenous fragments, vignettes, personal narratives and academic paragraphs to interweave what it means to ‘make home’ for us—queer Arab migrants.

**Keywords:** Arab queer, migration, vignettes, home, encounters, autoethnography

### INTRODUCTION

In *It Must Be Heaven*, Palestinian filmmaker, Elia Suleiman, famous for inventing the ‘comedy conflict about Palestine’ subgenre and using silence in most of his movies, plays his alter ego. Suleiman travels from Palestine to France and New York City<sup>1</sup> in a quest for ‘home’ away from home. Suleiman proceeds to draw an image of fragmented Arabness, inhabited by different flux and intensities (with themes such as terrorism, love, violence, defiance, suspicion, militarisation). Indeed, through engaging in some physical, political and epistemological *flânage*; every movement is important as it points the viewer in the direction of a political situation (Ide, 2020). Deliberately lacking a punchline, the movie could be considered as an attempt to represent an Arabness that is not captured through a unitary master discourse.

Suleiman’s critics typically say that his films are ‘Not Palestinian Enough’, or that it could use more Palestinian elements (Ide, 2021). Oddly enough, throughout the whole movie, his alter-ego pronounces three sentences, one of them while in a cab in New York City, ‘I am Palestinian’ to answer the driver’s question who asks the director/actor where he is from (Kohn, 2019).

In the promotional movie poster, Elya is seen facing the ocean. Perhaps a metaphor for a fluid site holding the work of memory, a nostalgia of what has been and what will be, all at the same time.

Why am I talking about *It Must Be Heaven*? Because along its involvement with Arabness and home in migratory contexts, the way the movie is conceived has inspired my proceedings for my ongoing doctoral thesis, including this article. In this vein, I offer to weave together vignettes and personal narratives, in what I refer to as encounters with the self and with other queer Arab migrants; to interweave glimpses of homing and embodiment that does not aim to produce a unitary coherent discourse.

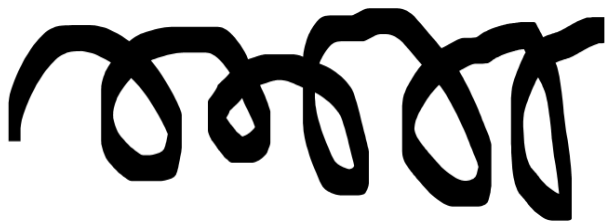
What if we imagine writing as a form of inquiry (St. Pierre, 2015)? That is, a writing which is not merely used as a way to convey findings, knowledge and methods of doing, but writings where, under multiple forms, fragments, vignettes, academic paragraphs, all collide and co-mingle. What if these different encounters became a way of generating knowledge by notably breaking with dominant and linear, progressive ways of structuring, doing and making research? This is the aim of the following article.

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<sup>1</sup> The filmmaker insists on specifying that the movement from one country to another is not touristic (Trembley, 2020).

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**Figure 1.** 'Looping'. Sketch by Lamiae Bouqentar

## WRITING THROUGH ENCOUNTERS

*Here in Quebec, I talk and write differently. I am the other. The other that nobody understands. The other who writes and talk in a weird way. the other who does not feel at home nowhere really. the other that might as well exist only through her dé-tours.<sup>2</sup>*

In engaging in such a creative practice, I draw from feminist and queer literary theories that have paved the way for situated, personal knowledges, as a way to resist and counter master narratives, that are white, male-centred, and heteronormative (Anzaldúa, 1987; Haraway, 1988; McRobbie, 1982; Nelson, 2015; Probyn, 1995).

Through encounters with autoethnographic literature, I have learned that autoethnography is designed to provide a sense of context. In this regard, it seeks to put forward a 'reflexive self-with' (Adams and Holman Jones, 2011) which is always and already involved in ethnographic fields: the streets, institutions and recreational and digital spaces that we dwell on and that we enact are all entangled in political and cultural relations (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2005; Probyn, 1995, 2016). The self, then, is always writing through encounters. Such statement would suggest that although autoethnographic techniques are based on self and personal oriented writing, it is never truly uniquely centred around the self. Indeed, this autoethnographic writing is based on a permanent relationship with other objects and humans. When I write myself, I recall with others. In other words, it's 'I / we write', I think, I exchange, I borrow, I / we do with others. The I of writing is then never alone, it is eminently more than one, constantly mediated (Ahmed, 1999; Atay, 2018; St. Pierre, 2005). During the creative process, we always write with other perspectives, readings, objects, snippets, other fragments from exchanges with others, humans and non-humans. We are constantly swimming in different oceans. So, during this self-narrativising process, we write of encounters with others, and even (non) humans.

Following these postulates, a writing created from such encounters is a practice that recognises that we produce meaning through life stories as well as through the ways in which we construct them, the discourses and affects that flow through them (Andrews, Squire and Tambokou, 2008; Trahar, 2009). I put forward a writing with memories from back home and strands of exchanges with Arab queer migrants encountered in Montreal. Borrowing from Adams and Jones (2011) who evoke 'a bearing witness together', I write 'making home together' that allows, for racially and sexually minoritised groups, to make room for new questions, new ambiguities - but also for new discomforts. In this regard, writing through encounters, inspired from an autoethnographic tradition, does provide pertinent ways for me, as an Arab queer researcher, to tell and show all the ways I experience such entanglements of identifications such as Arabness, queerness, migration and homing. I hope to find a way to reclaim space as a member of a community who has been in the margins (Figure 1).

## NOSTALGIC MODE: IMPOSSIBLE RETURNS

You appeared like a flash,  
A shooting star that promises to return  
And 1 and 2 and 3, there goes the shift of horizon  
Do you know my love that my heart has turned to yours?  
Of its own accord, or of the pull of desire, if one were to make Sara Ahmed speak  
In my native language we call this state the Qibla: القبلة  
Qibla comes from the word Kabala/ قابل: to encounter  
And you are the most euphoric and beautiful encounter

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout the manuscript, I adopt different font styles to distinguish between different writing forms. In this case the writing as quotation in italic corresponds to fragments of encounters with the self and with others.



**Figure 2.** 'Layers of nostalgia'. Photograph by Lamiae Bouqentar

*10 years now that I live in Montreal. I feel more and more at home. I make it more and more at home.*

*and each time I go for a walk, I can't help but think of the way, as a female, I did not have the opportunity to stroll in the streets, back home, totally escaping the male gaze.*

*I remember how the Moroccan street was a place of interesting, gendered encounters. Men frequenting the terraces of cafés in diverse neighbourhoods at all hours of the day. They dwelled in every corner of different streets, spoke loudly, made jokes among themselves or on female passers-by (veiled or not), making themselves seen. These [males] sported a proud and firm posture. Their gaze always turned towards the 'other': gendered, or racialised. Women, on the other hand, displayed a more timid, more discreet posture. Many of them walked with their eyes riveted on the ground, as if a weight was pulling them downwards.*

*'What is Home for me? I don't know, it's not Montreal or Canada for that matter, it's not Jordan either, when I go back there, I feel in some kind of décalage<sup>3</sup>... things are constantly changing, the vocabulary, the jokes...and I have a hard time keeping up with these changes (...),' Zak<sup>4</sup>, a 23-year-old Jordanian queer man living in Montreal.*

*'When I return here (in Montreal), I feel so torn, Yes I can live as a queer woman...yet I feel like I'm shrinking. I have been living here for 4 years, and it's not only the weather that is cold here....'*

*When you<sup>5</sup> tell me 'I think of how our vacations will be delayed and my heart gets sad.' The return to my land, to the sea, represents a recharging of my battery, 'I need my Morocco' I would reply. This statement is an embodiment. You are from here and I am from here and there.*

*'Us Arabs are soo dramatic,' Kay, 22-year-old Egyptian female queer living in Montreal.*

*'Yes, بنافور<sup>6</sup> Kenzi, a 37 years old Egyptian female queer living in Montreal.*

*'We have experienced the Nakba<sup>7</sup> after all,' Jana, an 18-year-old Palestinian female queer living in Montreal.*

The famous Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwich has a poem called الحنين which means nostalgia in Arabic. الحنين is also related to حنان which means tenderness to something or someone. Marcel Khalifa, a famous Lebanese singer that I discovered as a child through the music tapes we listened to in the car, whilst traveling with my parents, hums in his most famous song أمي/ my mother: أحن إلى خبز أمي و قهوة أمي which would translate to 'I long for my mother's bread and my mother's coffee'. Fayrouz sings 'راجعين يا هوى': (we will be back my love) هوا/ هوى in

<sup>3</sup> 'Décalage' translates directly as 'gap' but has the wider connotation of being in limbo or in a liminal space.

<sup>4</sup> All names in this article have been anonymised.

<sup>5</sup> The 'you' being invoked here refers to my girlfriend.

<sup>6</sup> Egyptian slang for 'over the top'

<sup>7</sup> The 1948 war uprooted 700,000 Palestinians from their homes, producing a refugee crisis that is still not resolved. Palestinians call this mass eviction the Nakba — Arabic for 'catastrophe' (Sa'di and Abu-Lughod, 2007)

Arabic means air but also a state of love. Being enamoured. She also sings *يا جبل لي بعيد خلفك حبايبنا* / 'Oh distant mountain: our loved ones are behind you'.

With my mother, during our mother/daughter escapades, we listened to Amr Diab's songs over and over. 'Amr's songs hold all of my memories' she would share with me. When my parents would play those tapes of Arabic music, I couldn't wait for the songs to end so I could put on my Britney Spears and Celine Dion tapes. Throughout my adolescence and early adulthood, I promised myself to stay away from any Arabic music or art production, which I felt, at the time, was muzzled and stereotyped.

Oddly enough, I reconciled with Arab music when I came to Montreal and became a migrant experiencing *الغربة* -estrangement and *الحنين*: a longing. And so now, when comes the months of January, February, and winter has worn me out, the first thing I would do in the morning is listen to Amr Diab and Fayruz songs, as it makes me feel closer to my mother and my homeland.

The Moroccan gay writer Abdallah Taia writes in his book *Arab Melancholy* that his character is told 'you Arabs love sadness too much!'. Such evocations would give the impression that nostalgia is an Arab characteristic.

*It's purely an Arab thing, every Arab will tell you that,' Kenzi, a 27-year-old Egyptian queer woman would assert while we were walking in Côte des Neiges, a multi-ethnic neighbourhood in Montreal.*

*'Well maybe it's because of all the wars, the conflicts and the absurd politics happening in our region,' Zak, another participant would say.*

*'Montreal is where home is, but when I go back to Tunis I remember how it really feels like home,' Kareem, a 42 year old queer Tunisian man.*

*I go to Adonis, an Arab supermarket in the suburb of Montreal. Fayruz's song is playing in the background. Baklawa, Kebbe, foul, labne, I feel nostalgic and miss my home in Morocco. It's more than my hometown that I miss, I miss my Arabness. I go there with my [white] partner. Two interracial queer women coming from a queer friendly neighbourhood in Montreal, I feel the straight lines in this place (Ahmed, 2006). I find myself behaving a certain way, refraining from touching my girlfriend, refraining from kissing her on the mouth, refraining from displaying any out-of-line behaviour.*

*Those brown brick buildings, functional, solid, staying firm at the face of the cold weather. Those brown buildings adjusting well to the gloomy weather, I stand outside of what I see, refusing to be devoured by this architecture. Feeling a stranger to these familiar streets. Will I live here forever? Can I? Would I? I look at the face of my partner and the sensation of discomfort dissipates... Maybe home is a person and not a place.*

The term nostalgia is derived from two Greek terms: *nóstos* (homecoming) and *álgos* (pain). Boym (2001) explains that in the Western context, the term nostalgia first appeared in Switzerland in the 16th century, in the medical field. Nostalgia made its entrance in the medical science as a problem that needs to be solved, since it was understood as a physical disease attacking the body in the same way as a virus. In other words, homesickness was then understood in its literal sense:

Just as today genetic researchers hope to identify genes coding for medical conditions, social behavior, and even sexual orientation, so the doctors in the 18th and 19th centuries looked for a single cause, for one 'pathological bone.' Yet they failed to find the locus of nostalgia in their patient's mind or body. One doctor claimed that nostalgia was a 'hypochondria of the heart,' which thrives on its symptoms. From a treatable sickness, nostalgia turned into an incurable disease. A provincial ailment, a *maladie du pays*, turned into a disease of the modern age, a *mal du siècle*. (Boym, 2001: 3)

Since then, its definition has evolved and is now found in several literary, poetic, philosophical, cinematographic fields, to an extent where it is very difficult to find a single definition. However, often its *nóstos* and *álgos* inscribes an affective dimension, pain and desire of returning home.

Conceived this way, the cultural and artistic expressions posed at the beginning of this article, would entail an uprooting of a point of origin where the subject was 'at home' in coherence (corresponding to him/her), content, amongst his community (his/her people) which shares his language, his culture and his reference marks. Home would then also be a space of warmth but also be friction-lessness (Fathi, 2020).

Nostalgia would be a desire for a home that has been, and has been lost in the present (Boym, 2001). It would also be characterised by an absence in a present time. Home would then be the homeland that we would have left behind, and that would haunt us through memories, places, songs, faces, perfumes, food and people and other human and non-human objects [that we had left behind]. The nostalgic subject has her eyes riveted to the past. She would be trapped in a past scenario. Her rear-view mirror shows only what is behind, lost, crumbled.

In this sense, the nostalgia to the homeland would be a nostalgia to something substantial, having a status of ground, a firm space through which the desire and suffering towards a localised home unfolds. Such a vision, Ahmed (1999) argues, implies the postulate that the 'original home' would be a static space conceived as authentic and uncontaminated.

Nevertheless, nostalgia here is not only conceived as a state that would refer to the homesickness or to the lack of assimilation in the host-society. Obviously, this is not about simply denying the affective dimension that accompanies the remembered past, rather it is about avoiding an essentialised conception of nostalgia, by pointing out to its situated characteristic. Boym explains that nostalgia in the cinematic image can only be a double-image superimposed on a present and a past, a home and an elsewhere - a double movement (Boym, 2001). For Boym (2001), nostalgia can be as much a moment of crisis as of progress, but also a movement that goes aside, astray. Keightley and Pickering (2012) conceptualise nostalgia 'as a composite framing of loss, lack and longing' (Keightley and Pickering, 2012: 116) with these three dimensions having different temporal orientations. Nostalgia would then involve dwelling in cross-temporal alienation where different temporal regimes get reworked to disturb any chronological ordering of life and being (Fathi, 2020; Probyn, 1995).

In 'Suspended Beginnings: Of Childhood and Nostalgia', Elspeth Probyn (1995) approached nostalgia in its temporal dimension, that of the return. It is the return to childhood that the author sought to problematise, and in particular the pure return to a childhood through the act of remembering, in order to offer a critique on the discourse of origin that would characterise this return. This last, is often seized, as linear (direct return to an 'intact' childhood, that is to say a pure return which would operate in particular through the nostalgia of the past. Instead, Probyn argues that memories 'are there and they are not there, they are beginnings that are constantly wiped out, forcing me to begin again and again' (Probyn, 1995: 445).

I borrow from these authors (Ahmed, 1999; Boym, 2001; Keightley and Pickering, 2012; Probyn, 1995) in order to think of nostalgia as an impossibility of being, rooted completely and entirely in a single home; it is a variation between bitter and sweet (Keightley and Pickering, 2012), two states that are not supposed to coincide. In choosing such lineage of theorising nostalgia, I seek to point to the incompleteness and the shift/décalage in the migratory nostalgic experience and at the same time deconstruct, a supposed linear return, which would be just impossible (since one never returns to a land of origin that would be static, unchanged, untouched, and already there). Understood in this way, nostalgia would be understood here as the impossibility of locating pure origins of home. The migrant subject is condemned to be placed in a movement (composed of human and non-human assemblages) of dis-continuous going back and forth between what is lost and re-created in this assemblage of human and non-human. I thus use such theorisations to reflect on ways of inhabiting and embodying/incorporating a home that always and already encounters a certain queerness - without necessarily attaching this home to a point of origin. So what would be the effects of this impossibility of returning on the conception of 'home'? Is it possible to conceive of ways of living and embodying / incorporating a home that always and already meets a certain queerness without necessarily attaching this home to a point of origin?

For example, to take a Deleuzian approach, nostalgia is not a static state but a force that embarks on lines of flight (Deleuze, 1975). It can be productive, generating new avenues, new arrangements, new orientations. Thus, nostalgia puts the subject in an unstoppable mode that goes beyond the past. It is embodied in as much a return between and towards the past, the present and the future. It is thus deployed like a practice which performs temporal identities, a remembered identity but also a present one (Borges, 2018; Fathi, 2020).

From then on, one could also ask how migrant subjects approach new places of attachment, of belonging and how previous belongings (back home) are reworked? How can this queer Arabic nostalgia composed of the multi-root, be understood as emancipatory?

In the next section, I argue that since homing is an embodied reality, then it cannot be conceived without bodies. Queer Arab bodies are inserted in a web of lines.

## QUEER BODIES AND HOMING AS RESISTANCE

*'You're so weird,' said a friend of mine when I confessed to her my dislike for national-religious holidays - Arab or Western.*

*These forced celebrations that a whole community should comply with, at a given moment. These celebrations that are supposed to outline happiness. It's like saying: ok today we put you in a celebratory mode! Get up and be happy! But what if today I feel sick, or simply not in the mood? Or what if I don't fit in? I don't feel in the norm? This is also what I mean by a queer encounter with self. The self does not fit a specific mode of getting together. This is because this get-together includes a specific way of orienting bodies, organically, a specific way of gendering them.*

*Those roles that follow us and haunt queer Arab bodies.*

*'The day I returned to Cairo with a shaved head, my mum thought that I've lost my mind,' Kay, a 22-year-old female Egyptian queer living in Montreal, tells me during our conversation at Parc Laurier, not far from where she lives, mile-end, a neighbourhood that she likes and refers to it as queer friendly. Kay chose to deliberately get rid of one crucial aspect of feminine performativity: long hair. We walk together Laurier Avenue and I tell her, in turn, how, at times, I have my own episodes of (mis)gender panics, with my parents. How I become disoriented in relation to certain norms of feminine performativity.*

*I remembered how I was supposed to take care of my body: apply creams, and wear makeup, pluck its hair, keep it smooth and soft. Butler (1990) would say that it was my duty to gender it (my body), to discipline it, to insert it into lines of subjectivation, but also out of my control since there is no doer behind it. 'Body', an inconsistent set of contradictory data that had to be reconciled in form. I remembered the folds in some clothes, too tight, making me feel claustrophobic and the immense relief that took hold of my skin when I took off dresses and layers of makeup. First queer expressions of gender: 'You have to suffer to be beautiful' my aunts and female friends in Morocco used to tell me.*

*Still, when I return to Morocco, I feminise myself. I return to a style of dress that performs a femininity that I have buried in Montreal. 'I was shopping the other day, and I found a lot of dresses that I thought would look really good on you' my mother shares with me during one of our daily Facetime™ calls. I hold my breath for a second, and find myself nodding:*

– 'Oh thanks Mom! I have enough clothes though, you know!'

– 'Yes, I know, but it's going to fit you so well! I miss you, we miss you and I've already pictured you in these dresses, you know!'

– 'Ok, perfect mom, I can't wait to wear it'.

*How did I end up telling her such lies? My family perceives me as someone who has strong opinions and who is not influenced by societal expectations. Through this gesture of buying dresses, it was her way of making me understand that she was still thinking about me, that even if a whole ocean separated us, nothing had changed. That I am still here, by her side. So how can I decline her gendered gifts?*

*To give in, to leave a part of yourself for love.*

*To repeat and repeat, but not without change.*

*Last summer, I wore this green dress that she (my mother) sewed for me. We went out for a coffee. While in the car, I look at myself in a make-up mirror (which my mother always leaves in the car). I don't recognise myself. Who is this feminised girl? I quickly let go of this mirror which distorts me. We stop at the red light; I look the other way and find myself looking at the black car next to ours. My gaze meets that of a man, sitting in that same car. He rolls down the window, sticks out his tongue in an attempt to bit on me. The whole thing happens in less than two minutes. I am stuck between a desire to curl up on myself but also an impulse to spread my legs to tear up this piece of fabric that was suffocating me.*

– 'I HATE this dress, why do you insist on making me wear it? I hate all dresses!'

– 'Oh my god, what's going on? I thought you wanted to wear it. It's okay now I get it.' My mother replied.

In spite of all my efforts to perform femininity, the belonging is never complete. During the family gathering of *al aid* last summer, I perceive snatches of inquisitive glances from family members, aunts, cousins, when their eyes meet my tattoos. As for me, I sit there politely and notice how each guest occupies the space, each one puts their body around the dinner table. With, on the one hand, masculine bodies, spreading out, taking space, and on the other hand other feminine ones (feminising themselves through make-up and high heels) inhabiting constraint. Where do I fit in this strict binary gender expression that I am witnessing and taking part in?

The hostess (my mother) spends her time going back and forth between her 'kingdom'<sup>8</sup> and the dining table. Their insistent looks penetrate me, even when I try to resist it.

When I came back from my trip back home, I attended a creative writing workshop on Zoom™ destined for Arab queer migrants in Toronto and Montreal. A total of twelve Arab queer people gathered online to write and share their writing, be it poetry, prose or interrogations.

It was previously decided to conduct the workshop in an immanent/embodied fashion where we would write about any topic/story that we reckoned relevant for our practice and see what would emerge. Yet, most of us ended up writing about what it meant for us to be Arab and queer at the same time, and how it does translate for

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<sup>8</sup> I borrow the word from Fatima Daas in her book *La Petite Dernière* when describing her mother's space--the kitchen.

us in everyday life. Terms like homeland, experiences with family (nuclear but also chosen), and Nostalgia emerged and ended up reshaping our writings and conversations.

*For me, "home" is Montreal, Casablanca, my books, my French, Moroccan and Arab culture. It is also my music, my son and my girlfriend' (Sara)*

*'Seriously, guys I just want say how glad I am to be among all of you today, (even though it's only virtual... the raw sharing of vulnerabilities and struggles makes me feel at home! So again thank you' (Sana)*

During this three-hour Zoom™ encounter, we engaged in a reflexive creative writing practice in order to talk about our bodies, and our experiences as queer Arab migrants living abroad. Throughout it all, we were also creating a sense of homemaking. That is weaving a breathing space where fear, struggles and love can be shared in all safety (Atay, 2018). Homing is an active process that certainly involve nostalgia, but also can look towards the future. Making, reaching out, to meet, to forge new connections with people, but also with objects.

*On a video call, Nour, a 33-year-old non-binary Arab migrant living in Montreal, tells us about their return to Lebanon but not to their small hometown. They tell us about their rediscovery of Beirut since they started hanging out with queer people in Beirut 'I discovered bars, private parties, and there I started to reapprciate Lebanon. Before migrating, Lebanon was for me my small village-too narrow-too religious (...)*

While listening to Nour, I realised that through new encounters in a new space, Nour is recreating a new home along with a home in Montreal.

For some home is a threat characterised by a fear of a return to the homeland as it is a space of systemic and familial violence:

*'If you don't behave I am going to send you back home, my father would threaten each time he reckoned I was out of line,' recalls Ghina.*

*'Yeah, this fear of going back, I know what it is.' Joe replies.*

*'Yet there are many things that we miss back there,' Soundous adds.*

*I share that I have this recurring dream, where I am back to Morocco, either to my home university or to the house that I grew up in. Should I call it 'home'? I should probably mention that whenever I dream of 'home', it's my childhood home and its surrounding that pops up and not my actual [Moroccan] house that we moved to 15 years ago. I dream that I am back to my homeland, and the images, albeit varied, are almost always accompanied by a fear of a permanent return, a fear of being stuck there-here forever and not being able to move beyond what is made available to me. The ocean is also always a part of this reverie.*

*'I try to work on my walk, adopt a more fem posture back home, and to be less manly,' Hajar adds.*

Such gender-performing strategies are representative of our survival, our resistance and negotiation of homing. Yet, if some bodies can and do pass, others cannot. Some simply do not have the privilege of passing, since they are too marked, deemed as unworthy, undesirable. They simply cannot be inserted within a straight line (Ahmed, 2006).

*'Unlike you guys, I do not have the choice. My body betrays me, it cannot act other ways,' Momo, a 37-year-old non-binary Tunisian refugee, reminds us during our collective sharing of strategies we deploy to function safely back home.*

This oppositional statement from Momo is illuminating and got me thinking of how Judith Butler's (1990) concept of performativity is misread by some liberal queers who believe that one can perform gender voluntarily, as if one can simply wake up, each day, and choose which gender to perform or to pick, just the way we pick our clothing (Salih, 2002). Such liberal individualistic readings would infer that there is a mastermind behind the expression of gender, while Butler stresses out that *there's no doer behind the doing*. That is: gender agency works within the realm of subjectivation (Butler, 1990).

We close up on our online video encounter with me stating:

*Let's toast to those days when embodiment fails us. Let's toast to those moments of non-correspondence. Not being able to meet, not coinciding, not corresponding. This is also what I mean by a queer encounter.*

## CONCLUSION

Throughout this article, I have argued that writing through encounters fosters particular modes of inscriptions that contribute to narrate us, to situate us, to orient us socio-historically. I have suggested that such proceeding can be understood as a performative and meaningful practices that open up new possibilities for self-representation in the cultural field (Boucher and Digrazia, 2005).

My encounters with Arab queer migrants in Montreal and our conversations about 'home' were the hardest ones to grasp. Engaging in recreating and negotiating multiple levels of homing and embodiment, multitudes of nuanced, diverse answers about what it means for us to feel at home. Some would refer to home as 'the homeland that will always remain (...)' emphasising the nostalgic appeal of home. Others described it as a feeling, some as both Canada/Montreal and the country of origin, others as 'nowhere really', 'in-between', 'not belonging anywhere really'. 'I go back there [homeland] as much as I can, and each time I can't help but feel some kind of *décalage* with regard to my surroundings, the jokes they make, the issues they raise, the topics they address (...)'. I argued that the movement of migrant subjects not only deconstructs the home as something static, but something which also reconfigures the borders and spatiality of the homes. It is also worth noting that the processes of homing are perhaps never-ending, for racialised migrants who embody marginalised genders and sexualities (Fathi, 2020; Borges, 2021); we face multiple struggles but also multiple hopes.

Since home can be conceived as more of a lived locality (Ahmed, 1999), it would then be more relevant to reflect and discuss Arab queerness not in terms of essential fixed points of origin that would be locatable in an [Arab] country more than another, but rather in terms of the plurality of meeting places, times, and belonging. Nevertheless, an issue remains: as an Arab queer migrant researcher doing research on Arab queer migration: how do I articulate my own privileges (being within academia and not an asylum seeker living in destitution)—with the community of Arab queer migrants (here in Montreal), a community that is far from being homogeneous?

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