

A scenic view of a hillside town with terraced fields and stone walls under a clear blue sky. The town is built on a steep slope, with buildings of varying heights and colors. The foreground shows a field with a stone wall and some trees. The background shows a clear blue sky and distant hills.

## ***Soil- A homeland story in the Palestinian diaspora***

A study on the function of imagination and memory as narrative techniques in documentary storytelling.

***Lama Alshehaby***

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**AUTHOR**

Lama Alshehaby

**SUPERVISOR**

Turid Borgen

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## **Abstract**

Among the Palestinians in Sweden, homeland stories cross the frontiers of the diaspora through the memories of ancestors and the imagination of children. But how do these stories convert into documentaries that cross the spatio-temporal boundaries of the world?

This thesis examines how potential participants (social actors) in documentaries use their imagination and memory to tell homeland stories, and how imagination and memory are used in documentaries as narrative techniques. Through semi-structured qualitative interviews based on a literature review of documentary storytelling, as well as imagination and memory theories, ten interviews have been conducted; two with professional documentary makers: the filmmaker Mai Masri and the journalist Bernt Hermele. The results indicate that imagination and memory are the mainstays of documentary storytelling; memory provides documentaries with evidence of major events through the witnesses' experiences, while imagination is about their reflection of their own reality in these events in a poetic, emotional, and rational way. Imagination and memory stem from reality and collaborate to reform this reality through documentary storytelling, which works to process reality-based individual stories creatively. This study opens novel methods to establish the link that might be missed between imagination and memory as narrative techniques in documentary storytelling. Further, it gives insight into how real people use imagination and memory to tell personal stories, and raises the documentary makers' awareness of the potential that documentaries can implement. Future research is needed to investigate how imagination and memory are used in other completed documentary products, such as films.

## **Keywords**

Documentary storytelling. Narrative Techniques. Imagination. Memory. Identity. Diasporic Palestinians.

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# 1. Introduction

As a child raised in the Palestinian diaspora, I have continually heard stories about my homeland, at home, in kindergarten, in school, and at cultural activities. Homeland stories in the diaspora are immortal, not bound by either time or space. Oral history from grandparents to grandchildren is considered the core of the cultural memory, and is grounded on communication through media, such as, films, and radio (Erll, 2008, pp. 5–6). The representing of oral history in media platforms affects individual and collective memories by impacting people's perception about a certain reality (Erll, 2008 p. 389). Thereby, media expands the temporal and spatial scope of shared memories and arouses discussion on the social and national level about issues attached to the shared memories (Erll, 2008 p. 396). One of these powerful media platforms is documentary films and radio which function by processing individual memories into documentary stories. These fact-based stories represent how actually events change and the consequence through real people (Nichols, 2010, p. 10).

From my perspective, homeland stories of Palestine are based on a mutual relation between the memory of the elderly Palestinians who directly experienced Palestine in childhood, and the imagination of the diasporic children who transcend boundaries of reality and experience an imaginary Palestine. Thus, I consider that storytelling through memory and imagination is the cornerstone of identity formation among the Palestinians in the diaspora.

Based on this, my thesis aims to examine the function of imagination and memory as narrative vehicles in documentary storytelling. It also pays particular attention to the relationship between storytelling and identity formation. For this purpose, I attempt to study how Palestinian-Swedish children and elderly Palestinians narrate about Palestine, through imagination and memory. Additionally, how the documentary makers, Mai Masri and Bernt Hermele use imagination and memory as narrative techniques in documentaries will be investigated. The focus will be on how documentary storytelling handles yesterday's memories and shapes an imagery picture of the future. More details about the research method will be discussed in chapter three.

Documentary storytelling is a process based on the recollection of past life experiences that have been reconstructed and shaped into narrative stories. It provides the storyteller with an active voice to recall former experiences and narrate sociohistorical events that have been witnessed, seen, and experienced. This voice is the core of the documentary narrative (Wahlberg, 2017 pp. 4–5). Further, imagination is an active process that interacts with other psychological and cultural functions. This process cannot be created in isolation from rational

memory, oral thinking, and perception. Namely, the imaginary idea shapes into stories of symbols, codes, and characters that stem from the real world and unites with oral thinking (Gajdamaschko, 2005, p. 16). Hence, documentary storytelling is an art that opens the door for people to experience the world through authentic stories. It has a significant role in political domains since documentaries provide insight into socio-political issues through individual voices to affect public opinion and make alterations in society (Huysen, 2011, p. 617). Documentary makers convey meaning to real-life stories by recreating raw materials, such as voice recording, and images to a creative artwork of reality. This connection with sociological and psychological fields emphasizes the importance of studying documentary storytelling (Wahlberg, 2017, p.9). More about the theoretical framework will be raised in chapter two.

To the best of my knowledge, memory and imagination in documentary storytelling have been separately managed in previous research, for instance, Parin Dossa's (2019) study *Reimagining Home in the Wake of Displacement* that focuses on how displaced people preserve a sense of home through memory and storytelling (Dossa, 2019). Additionally, there is a lack of imagination research related to documentary storytelling. Previous imagination studies have been frequently related to how content is created. Namely, how directors and writers, deal with imagination and creativity in order to improve the constructive accomplishment of storytelling. An example of this is the essay *Shaping the Real: Directorial imagination and the visualization of evidence in the hybrid documentary* by Janet Merewether (2009), that studies the creative role of the documentary director in artistically reshaping reality.

Furthermore, documentary research is often concentrated on documentary makers and documentaries themselves as well as the relationship between documentary makers and participants. Consequently, in this thesis, I will focus on how the potential participants in documentaries use their imagination and memory to narrate about their homeland, and how documentary makers work with imagination and memory as narrative techniques in their documentaries. By analyzing the use of imagination and memory in documentary storytelling, make the documentary makers become aware of the use of these elements together in documentaries, intending to strengthen that link between imagination and memory that might be perceived as a missing link to some degree.

Further, I haven't found research on Palestinian-Swedish children in Sweden related to imagination and documentary storytelling. Previous studies about the diasporic Palestinian children, along with research about storytelling and imagination, revolve around few geographical areas, such as Victoria Mason's article Children of the "Idea of Palestine":



Negotiating, Identity, Belonging and Home in the Palestinian Diaspora” (2007) which concentrates on the Palestinians located in Australia. Likewise, *Maintaining culture, reclaiming identity: Palestinian lives in the diaspora* (Aoudé, 2007) discusses how the diasporic Palestinian, specifically, in Ecuador, Australia, and the United States, connect to their homeland. Thus, this thesis is required, to fill a gap in the field by examining the intertwined function of imagination and memory in documentary storytelling and its connection to identity formation among the diasporic Palestinians in Sweden.

### **1.1 Diaspora and the notion of identity and belonging**

Since this study essentially focuses on how the diasporic Palestinian elderly and Palestinian children depict Palestine based on imagination and memory, I intend to clarify to the notion of identity in a diaspora based on Victoria Mason’s article *Children of the “Idea of Palestine”*: *Negotiating, Identity, Belonging and Home in the Palestinian Diaspora* (2007) which examines the alteration of the notions of identity and belonging for future generations of Palestinians in the diaspora.

The notion of identity for the generations that were followed or born in exile is complex; the idea of a homeland for these generations who have never been in Palestine is considered central to the concept of identity and belonging, where the relation to the homeland has been inherited, by means of memory. By preserving the Palestinian cultural and social accomplishments, the recreation of the homeland has taken new roots in exile. This recreation of Palestine in the diaspora through ancestors’ memories provides children who were born in exile with an ability to conceptualize and visualize ancestral homes, the olive– and lemon trees for decades (Mason, 2007, p. 272). Thus, it should indicate that the feel of belonging or being rooted in a place where there is no need to clarify oneself to a non-native; this feeling is considered well needed for a human being. It gives rise to the so-called diasporic imagination; a fictional place in imagination which shapes a parallel relation between the home of the motherland and the inhabited reality for Palestinians in the diaspora (Mason, 2007, pp. 274–275).

## 1.2 Purpose & Research Questions

The major focus of the study is to analyze how the Palestinian-Swedish children and the diasporic Palestinian elderly who live in Sweden narrate stories about Palestine through imagination and memory, as well as how the documentary makers use imagination and memory to structure a documentary story. The intention is to understand the linkage between storytelling through imagination and memory with identity formation among the diasporic Palestinians in Sweden. To achieve the overarching objectives, this thesis raises the following question:

*How do imagination and memory function as narrative techniques in documentary storytelling, and what is the linkage between storytelling and identity formation?*

In the interest of answering the comprehensive research problem, the thesis focuses on three supplementary questions:

- How do the Palestinian-Swedish children narrate stories of Palestine through imagination?
- How do the Palestinian elderly narrate childhood stories of Palestine through memory?
- How do documentary makers use imagination and memory as narrative techniques in documentary storytelling?

The adopted method to answer the research problem is semi-structured qualitative interviews with ten respondents; three diasporic Palestinian elderly who live in Sweden and five Palestinian-Swedish children. Also, two interviews were conducted with the documentary filmmaker Mai Masri and the journalist Bernt Hermele. More details about the study's chosen practical methods are discussed in chapter three.

## 1.3 Thesis Outline

**Chapter one** introduces the overall goal of this thesis, its methods, and the research questions. It also expounds on the concept of identity to establish the basic meaning in this study, namely, how the first and fourth diasporic Palestinians in Sweden depict Palestine through storytelling. **Chapter two** is separated into three central topics to establish the theoretical framework. Firstly, documentary *storytelling* draws attention to the concept of documentary storytelling and its structure, and the role of imagination and memory as narrative techniques in

documentary storytelling. Secondly, *Imagination studies*, focus on imagination's connection to the conscious and subconscious and the role of imagination in storytelling. Lastly, *Memory studies*, concentrate on cinema/memory that addresses the mutual relationship between human memory and film. Additionally, it aims to explain the process of recollection and the linkage between inner world of humans with the surrounding world through individual and collective memory.

**Chapter three** begins by introducing the implemented methodological framework and a short presentation about the respondents. Thereafter, it looks at the adapted analysis methods of the research methods and its ethics and limitations.

**Chapter four** will present the results of the research interviews and a presentation of the ten respondents in depth. It is structured in the following order; children respondents, the filmmaker Mai Masri, the elderly Palestinians, and the journalist Bernt Hermele.

**Chapter five** will employ the empirical materials analysis and put forth the interpretation and evaluation of the results. To assist the reading, I have divided this chapter into six sections. I begin by analyzing the use of imagination among the children respondents, using theoretical studies about imagination and storytelling, followed by Mai Masri's methods to handle imagination in documentary films. Thereafter, I apply the knowledge based on memory and storytelling studies to investigate how the elderly Palestinians narrate childhood stories through memory, as well as, how Bernt Hermele deals with memory as a narrative technique in a documentary podcast.

**Chapter six** will conclude the thesis and present a discussion of the use of imagination and memory as narrative techniques in documentary storytelling and its interrelated relation with identity formation. The chapter ends by illuminating pertinent questions for future research.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

The following chapter reviews literature on documentary storytelling, imagination, and memory studies. The first section focuses on documentary storytelling and marks the integrated linkage between memory and imagination as narrative techniques. In the second section the study reviews imagination's connection with the conscious and subconscious, and its relationship to reality, emotions, and perception. The last part attempts to view memory studies and how the process of recollection works.

### **2.1 Documentary storytelling**

In the following sections, I attempt to acquire knowledge of storytelling in documentaries and its narrative techniques, especially through imagination and memory.

#### **2.1.1 Documentary storytelling: Definition and structure**

Storytelling from an extensive aspect does not mean an explanation of a specific event or action; rather, it is a confirmation of an idea that has been converted to action. It is a creative expression of authentic truth (McKee, 1997, p. 113). Documentary storytelling, in particular, as defined by John Grierson in the 1930s is the “creative treatment of actuality.” (Nichols, 2010, p. 6). Documentaries’ creative processing of reality is manufactured the deep understanding documentary makers have of the surrounding world, as well as the artistic methods they use. It requires compassion and creativity in order to represent reality in a captivating and poetic way (Corner, 1996, p. 13). From their standpoint, documentary makers portray the historical world from the original source, by constructing real people stories and describing their connecting with events and life situations as they are (Nichols, 2010, p. 14).

The expressive and metaphorical description of reality makes people empathize and understand difficult events and life situations without addressing solutions (Birkvad, 2014, p.473). It aims to arouse reactions, interest viewers, or listeners and engage them emotionally and intellectually with the given issue (Bernard, 2011, p.15). It contributes to educating the public and draws attention to crucial events in societies; and thereby reforms its strategies to enhance societies (Corner, 1996, p.15).

Through storytelling, documentary makers seek to understand major issues and reconstruct narratives by considering how participants compose and assess events (Nash, 2012, pp. 323). Documentaries present real people who deal with different life situations and express

themselves as they are, in public. Participants in documentaries don't play characteristic roles; instead, they play themselves and express their personality (Nichols, 2010, pp. 8–9). Therefore, documentary interviews have a broader intention than collecting facts; it is a conversation that concentrates on one's assumptions about a certain life action or experience. Conversations with participants gradually convey to a conscious relationship of common values and assumptions between documentary makers and participants (Nash, 2012, p. 325).

Furthermore, story structure is a selective process to assemble life events in a planned sequence based on personal life stories to evoke sensations and illuminate a certain aspect of life. These experiences carry multidimensional aspects that shift from one meaning to another, positive, negative, happiness, sadness; this constant change identifies so-called story values (McKee, 1997, pp. 33–34). This illustrates the meaning of a story crystallized in the story itself; namely, the story's action denotes the meaning beyond it. Another point is that the deep connection between the storytellers and their own story induces the so-called story's ripple effect, which means that the story itself mirrors the teller's soul in its creative narration (McKee, 1997, p. 118). The conclusion is that the meaning of storytelling remains invariably essential in human behavior; storytelling is regarded as an infinity activity that goes beyond generation's boundaries and facilitates an exchange of knowledge between people despite their age (Yorke, 2013).

### **2.1.2 Memory and imagination: A creative entity in documentary storytelling**

Memory and imagination are associated since they are engaged in the same intellectual process, rooted in the body and directed by sensations. They frequently shape a narrative structure; for example, people dwell in an imaginary world based on memories, experiences, and desires; they can also visualize themselves in the future. In this sense, memory and imagination, likewise, narrative, are considered essential intellectual activities for the human being. A narrator needs to name memory fragments, feelings, ideas and organize them in his/her mind in order to recall these memory fragments as stories. Thus, the recollection is a narrative process directed by desire and selects favorable experiences by focusing on the memory highlights (Hustvedt, 2011, pp. 187–188).

From this perspective one can draw the connection that storytelling by sharing individual experiences is connected to larger social contexts and causes people to evaluate their shared experiences. Sharing stories with other people and listening to others' stories make people aware of their identity (Danielson, 2016, p. 79). Therefore, the performance of storytelling makes individuals evaluate their shared experiences and thus visualize the future.

It denotes that a story is a reflection of the narrator (Hustvedt, 2011, pp. 190–191). In line with this, Danielson (2016) stresses that stories and how they are constructed represent the storyteller's way of dealing with issues and says a lot about the narrator's background, culture, and perception (Danielson, 2016, pp. 78).

Accordingly, memory and imagination are implements in documentary storytelling. Memory provides a cluster of life experiences, while imagination, as an active research process, collects fragments of memory together with inner desires and implants them into one artistic entity (McKee, 1997, p. 73). Converting stories derived from imagination and memory to documentaries is actualized by manufacturing reality in two phases. Firstly, documenting raw stories by recording real-based voices and images. Secondly, the creative work materializes by assembling raw stories, voices, and images together in a united timeline to produce the final documentary product; an audio-visual documentary story (Corner, 1996, p.18). The applied narrative method to produce the ultimate documentary product impacts the public's perception of the shared documentary story (Danielson, 2016, p. 78).

## **2.2 Imagination studies**

My purpose in the next sections is to comprehend how the imagination process transpires to actualize the research analysis, and to discover how documentary makers can take advantage of imagination in documentary storytelling.

### **2.2.1 Imagination: An action between the conscious and subconscious**

The psychologist Rosemary Gordon (1985) claims that imagination is associated with three other psychological procedures; image/imagery, phantasy, and perception; therefore, imagination is linked to art production through images. Imagination is a collection of numerous images that have been assembled in conjunction with a mental process, for instance, individual knowledge, life events, experienced memories, emotions, and thoughts. Thus, image/imagery are considered raw materials that serve the imagination. The imagery provides the human being with an ability to tolerate present frustration for future pleasure, by categorizing and recognizing past experiences with awareness. Hence, imagination relies on creating an innovative inner world through images to fulfill its function (Gordon, 1985, p. 11).

Furthermore, the main debate on imagination theories involves two groups: followers of Piaget and followers of Vygotsky. Piaget considers imagination as an unconscious and spontaneous process structure in childhood clashes. Vygotsky emphasizes imagination as a

conscious and aware process of meaning making that mainly has cultural and psychological purposes. For Piaget, imaginative thinking and realistic thinking differ; he argues that childhood imaginary thoughts are gradually assumed to be replaced by adult logical thoughts (Gajdamaschko, 2005, p. 15). In opposition to Piaget, Vygotsky stresses that imagination's process is bilateral, linked to emotional and intellectual functions, and precisely associated with meaning making. It is a creative re-creating process that intentionally involves imagination to reconstruct reality by creating something new. Furthermore, Vygotsky highlights the incorrect understanding of phantasy as distinct from imagination. He wrote:

This false interpretation of fantasy is due to it being viewed one-sidedly, as a function which is linked to emotional life, the life of drives and attitudes; but its other side, which is linked to intellectual life, remains in the shadow (Vygotsky 2003, as cited in Gajdamaschko 2005, p.16).

Gordon is consistent with the foregoing and accentuates that imagination and phantasy are dissimilar concepts that have often been incorrectly used. As opposed to the imagination, phantasy spelled with "ph" is an unconscious mental process. It defines psychological states as one-dimensional relates to a single reality; thus, the process of phantasy does not provoke to examine the actuality of phantasy's content. It is an emotional-based process that includes inborn and emotions such as worry, fear, happiness, surprise. Unlike phantasy, imagination is considered communication with conscious and unconscious processes that involve emotions and thoughts and evoke inner facts. In other words, imagination is an awareness process where we can move into a multidimensional world because we are conscious of the imaginary world we inhabit (Gordon, 1985 p. 12).

Consequently, the association between imagination and perception illustrates that the imagination as an active process involves the entire person, including one's perception and mindful thoughts. In other words, a human being is not a passive observant of the world since one's desire, experiences, needs, feelings, and memories have an impact on this observation. Thus, imagination is, indubitably, linked to perception since images themselves are changeable, undependable, and affected by perception (Gordon, 1985, p. 13).

The above-mentioned raises questions about how imagination emerges and its connection with reality. According to Vygotsky (2004), imagination cannot arise from unknown sources; it is a process inspired by events from real life such as, previous experiences, and fragments of memories from the reality. These gathered fragments undergo a re-creation process and are transformed into a new imaginary combination that stems from reality.

Wherefore, imagination and memory are also linked because imagination takes advantage of memories and re-establishes fragments from past experiences (Vygotsky, 2004, pp. 13–15). Another point to highlight is that imagination is associated with reality through emotions since every sensation and idea require the use imagery to be expressed. To illustrate, people express their inner state utilizing external expressions such as color-coding, where white illustrates happiness, black sorrow, blue calmness and peacefulness, red resistance, and insurrection. Thereby, the imaginary images are affected by one's state of mind. An emotional selection process is performed to put random fragments of images that stem from reality together to harmonize the person's inner state, regardless of the logic of the images. It conducts a combination of two different fragments that do not have any logical harmony other than that they induce similar moods, for instance, blue and cold, red and warm (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 18–20). The last link between imagination and reality is named the imagination cycle, which introduces the terminal products of imagination: the raw fragments taken by reality to reproduce an imaginary product. This product returns at the end of the journey to reality to reshape and change that reality. The imagination cycle emphasizes the importance of the act of creation in both the emotional and the intellectual elements (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 22).

### **2.2.2 Imagination: An active movement of creative meaning making**

Imagination connects us to our inner and outer world. It includes personal experiences and a point of view that measure the realism of imagination's contents, helping determine whether the experienced imagination is a delusion or real. An imaginative person must live the experience of imaginations, including their conflicts and obstacles (Gordon, 1985, pp. 13–14). Imagination signifies the suppleness of mind and the effectivity to think that anything is possible "possible thinking"; namely, an imaginative person is the one who is capable of thinking innovatively, authentically, and outside given frames of reality. Possible thinking is not merely abstract thinking; rather, it means the ability to juxtapose the inner thoughts; take for example, imagining going to the beach at the same time the person is doing school examination (Egan & Judson, 2009, p. 127).

Furthermore, imagination is the brain's ability to combine elements in a creative approach, which outlines the connection between imagination and thinking. This common relationship helps children to make sense of the world since the development of children's imagination is linked to the maturity of conscious thinking and meaning making. Additional aspect is that each imaginative idea or concept affects one's feelings, even if the imaginary idea



itself does not mirror reality, but those experienced emotions are real. It shows that children's development is multidimensional between emotional and imaginative development processes; emotional development is interconnected to imagination development. Children are broadly capable of imagining since they dominate their feelings less (Gajdamaschko, 2005, p. 15).

Furthermore, the function of imagination is considered an artistic movement that creates a pivotal infrastructure of cultural life (Vygotsky 2003, as cited in Gajdamaschko 2005, p.16). It is an essential function in human development and human behavior; in that respect, the double subordination appears. Imagination depends on experience and experience is based on imagination. Consequently, imagination can direct one either closer to reality or farther away from it. Through imagination one can escape from the real world into an imaginary one which brings satisfaction (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 37). Hustvedt, along with Vygotsky, pinpoints that people's imaginary realm is sometimes built to escape from the present moment into an imaginary world (Hustvedt, 2011, p.188).

### **2.2.3 Imagination: A paintbrush in documentary storytelling**

Imagination is a vital tool in storytelling and serves to engage children's imagination since stories are engraved in culture. A story includes a united component which structures sequences of events with a protagonist and antagonist. The combined elements in a story orient one's feelings about the story's essence (Gajdamaschko, 2005, p. 21).

Similarly, to Gajdamaschko, Kieran Egan & Gillian Judson (2009) affirm that imagination is considered a tool in storytelling; a story is defined as a narrative form linked to emotions and aims to bring the emotional significance to light in a creative approach. The chosen narrative method engages children's imaginations and tends to make sense of the world in narration. The formed story constructs of narrative events affect people and address their emotions towards the characters, events, and the narration content itself. Imagination allows children to form images in their mind; these images are imaginary and illustrative pictures of smells, tastes some of them emotionally attached to one and have a powerful impact (Egan & Judson, 2009, p. 127–129).

Subsequently, the essence of artwork is its capability to change the reality itself from the internal truth, which is characterized by the world of human perception, thoughts, and emotions. The creative work has a domino effect since it is conceptualized by reality and then affects reality itself. In other words, creative artwork sheds light on the real-world rich in contradictions; a place where there are complexities and differences simultaneously. The

artwork has a vital impact on human social awareness, and every imaginative producer intentionally builds artistic frames where those which are fragmentary and appropriated from reality combine in a creative imaginary context. These fragments correspond to the other fragments in the internal world and the external reality (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 24). The process of creative creation is multidimensional. It includes both desire and misery; the desire to shape emotions and thoughts that occupy us into a form to touch, influence, and impress others, and at the same time, the sense to face the fact that creativity creation cannot capture the flow of sensations and thoughts (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 39).

## **2.3 Memory Studies**

Inspired by the following quote by Luis Buñuel, I seek in the next sections to educate myself on how memory functions and why some memory particles are accessible more than others, for the purpose of examining how the research respondents treat memory.

You have to begin to lose your memory, if only in bits and pieces, to realize that memory is what makes our lives... Our memory is our coherence, our reason, our feeling, even our actions. Without it we are nothing (Buñuel, 1983, pp. 4–5).

### **2.3.1 Memory: A process of recalling the past**

Human sensations— vision, hearing, and touch depend on memory to interconnect to external world objects such as trees, flowers, colors, and houses, which build a system that merges the information from sensory sources with the surrounding world (Baddeley, 2017, p. 8). Based on that, the memory needs retrieval cues to be activated, namely, information from lived experiences. These experiences are recollected when given cues that serve to guide the memory because it is considered inaccessible to recall fragmentary information separately (Baddeley, 2017, p.153). Retrieval cues function to assemble a bunch or fragments of information from an existing experience, specifically the fragments that serve the memory to access certain information. In other words, we remember by using a fragment from a previous experience, which helps to recall the whole memory from that experience (Baddeley, 2017, pp.159–161). Thereafter, recollection is an active process that attempts to retrieve a piece of certain information from lived experience by searching for it in one’s mind, for example, when you see a familiar face, you, out of frustration or curiosity, keep searching for cues in your memory, trying to recall information about this face from former experiences (Baddeley, 2017, p.168). Thus, human memory is considered robust, able to recall essential details such as birthplace; it nourishes memory fragments to provoke the remainder of memory (Baddeley, 2017, p 171).

### **2.3.2 Memory: Individual and collective**

The human being is dominated by memories, which is a reason for the vast interest in memory studies. Orienting the future by understanding the past through so-called grand narratives offer the elderly who witnessed trauma and were deported from their history a chance to recall memories by storytelling. Memory studies are central in cultural research and are included in different fields, social, psychological, cultural, as well as in film and literary studies (Assmann, 2006, p. 211). In this sense, Erll asserts that memory occurs in a social context and is shaped by human experiences and communication with others or by media. This interaction with external factors highlights that no memory is completely individual, and the process of recollection converts the recalled experience to a new one. Human memory is both individual and collective since it is about shared experiences that occur through the same process, namely, recollection (Erll, 2008, p.4).

This process is fragmentary because the recalled moment is connected with what happened before and after; this moment is associated with a larger memory-network, namely, the memory of others. The smaller fragments of individual memory transform into stories that outline one's identity. However, the value of these memories, which have been interpreted and shaped into stories, is variable based on age and life circumstances. In contrast to the smaller fragments of individual memory, the large memory-network connected to others is triggered by external stimulants, such as memory clues (Assmann, 2006, pp. 212–213).

Human life is shared with others and connected to a broader social network; consequently, individual memory is grounded in individual experiences connected to a broader concept, called collective memory. Understanding the collective memory is to understand the collective identity, which clarifies individuals' identity and memory (Assmann, 2011, p. 223). In this context, Erll expounds:

Societies do not remember literally; but much of what is done to reconstruct a shared past bears some resemblance to the processes of individual memory, such as the selectivity and perspectivity inherent in the creation of versions of the past according to present knowledge and needs (Erll, 2008, p.5)

Based on this, “individual memory” is pivotal, has interpersonal relations and individual experiences that form one's identity, and leads to “social memory”. That is defined as generational memory. In other words, ancestor's memories are re-created by grandchildren who share these memories with internal and external social communities. For instance, friends, companions, and other family members. Thus, social and individual memory is personified and

grounded in life experiences; both are restricted to the process of selectivity and at risk of forgetting (Assmann, 2006, pp. 214–215).

Not only Assmann and Erll illustrate the interactive relation between individual and collective memory but also Erika Apfelbaum (2010) claims that recollection is an active process where the human selectivity chooses and re-constructs certain life experiences from personal reminiscences. These experiences are stored in memory and encircled by a sociohistorical environment; they are recollected alternately by other people, friends, family members or people in the public life. Each group is independent not only in determining which codes are used in a certain society, but also in establishing the given values for this particular group that outline the collective memory. Each collective memory is individual and differs from other groups. It follows that the collective and individual memory are associated since one's personal memory is formed by confrontations with the other's memory. Nevertheless, these memories are attached to shared thoughts and notions with the larger society, yet memory is personal and highlights what one has experienced or witnessed. We remember because we are surrounded by external memories that trigger our own; these refer to time, place, daily life experiences, as well as environmental, historical and political notions (Apfelbaum, 2010, pp. 85–86). Unlike the collective memory, the diasporic memory which increases in connection with migration, challenges the cultural consistency (Huysen, 2011, p. 615). Apfelbaum (2010) agrees with Huysen and emphasizes that the balance of the society itself is endangered when people separate and uproot from their ancestors' land and the social and cultural communities (Apfelbaum, 2010, p. 84).

### **2.3.3 Memory: An active voice in documentary storytelling**

The concept of cinema/memory in film theory considers cinema and memory as one consolidated world. This world is created by images, effects, and sounds and is placed between the interpersonal and cultural. The world of cinema/memory requires a deep understanding of individual memory to pinpoint the complex relationship between human identity, culture, and cinema, considering the audiovisual world is vastly attached to individual memory. Cinema/memory seeks to eliminate the inner and outer borders between the true and untrue, as well as the individual and cultural boundaries. Therefore, the inner world of cinema needs to be established aesthetically by combining and reconstructing both the individual and collective memory (Radstone & Schwarz, 2010, pp. 336–338).

In the article *Redefining Culture Through the Memories of Elderly Latinas* (1999), the author Irma M. Olmedo studies the reminiscences of the elderly as a narrative source for re-discovering and reforming the concept of culture and pays particular attention to group storytelling, which stresses the meaning of sharing stories. Oral storytelling is an achievement that influences and affects the listener with regard to the told story embracing events, personal experiences, memories, and testimonies that are wrapped into verbal and voiced form. This drives the active listener who becomes enthusiastically engaged and influenced by what is being told (Olmedo, 1999, p. 364). Consequently, it denotes that sharing stories has a deeper root than merely considered family stories; these stories are imprinted as an archive of profound cultural background that has been affected and altered by the narration of migration (Olmedo, 1999, p. 364).

In the same sense, Huyssen (2011) claims that humanitarian studies nurture the understanding of the historical trauma that embodies cultural memory in literature and art because it concentrates on the concept of testimony. This strong focus on past trauma and the deep understanding of histories do not merely spotlight the pain of others, but keep a focus on human rights, considering that art has a significant role that impacts the imagination to take a stand and create legal, political and ethical solutions against the spread of others' pain (Huyssen, 2011, p. 617). According to this, immigration is positioned between the foregoing and the upcoming, to clarify; immigration carries memories to lighten a future of rights. That underlines the need for artistic work to encounter the inhuman practices and pinpoint the essential issues of human, cultural, and individual rights in an aesthetic framework that can spot justice on such a complex situational map (Huyssen, 2011, p. 622).

### **3. The methodological framework, ethics, and limitations**

#### **3.1 Research design and respondents**

The main target of this section is to acquire knowledge of imagination and memory as narrative techniques in documentary storytelling. Also, the relationship between storytelling and identity formation, by focusing on how the Swedish-Palestinian children, who have never been in Palestine before, portray the ancestral land through imagination. Likewise, the methods the Palestinian elderly use to describe Palestine through childhood memories. For this purpose, the following criteria have been established to choose the appropriate respondents:

##### **1. Palestinian elderly**

- Live in Sweden.
- Spent childhood or adolescence in Palestine
- Born between 1930-1941

##### **2. Swedish-Palestinian children**

- Born in Sweden
- Never visited Palestine before
- 12–13 years old

##### **3. Documentary makers**

- Work with the imagination of Palestinian children in a documentary platform.
- Work with older people and the process of recollecting in a documentary platform.

In the interest of finding the appropriate children and elderly for this study, I have been in contact with non-religious and non-political organizations that work with migrants' questions in Sweden, specifically with the Palestinian community. The contact with the volunteer-based organization, Palestine groups of Sweden, has facilitated further contact with key people who helped find interviewees from all over Sweden. Despite this, it was difficult to find a group of respondents that corresponded with the study's criteria merely through organizations. Therefore, the key respondents were mediators to get access to other respondents to interview.

In this case study, the total conducted interviews are ten; three with Palestinian elderly, five with Palestinian-Swedish children, and two with documentary makers. The respondents have only been told in advance that the interview is about the imagination and memory in documentary storytelling. The interviewed elderly and children do not have a family bond

or personal relationship with each other in order to avoid the probability of a conversation about the research project between the respondents themselves, which might affect the children's spontaneous response to interview questions.

I have developed three different interview guides that overlap and are adapted to each group of informants. These guides have been organized based on the knowledge areas below and are based on qualitative semi-structured methods. The interviews with the elderly and children have a narrative focus, while the interviews with documentary makers concentrate on evaluating and assembling facts. Through the conducted interviews this thesis attempts to achieve three knowledge areas to examine the study's problem.

Firstly, conversation knowledge aims to produce descriptive knowledge about daily life stories through verbal communication with the respondents. Secondly, context knowledge regards the interview as an interpersonal context where the respondents' thoughts and expressions are linked to his/her context, namely, the personal background, which is connected to the time and space dimensions. Thirdly, narrative knowledge indicates storytelling as a vital tool in interviews because it allows the respondents to freely describe their life stories. Therefore, the shared stories become broad and comprehensible (Kvale & Brinkmann 2019, p.78–79).

The interviews pay particular attention to the respondents' broad description of an episodic life story or event, related to Palestine. Interviews with narrative focus consist of open questions about life events or experiences and help me to structure up a story by letting the respondents tell his/her story or an episodic part of it. This provides a broader perspective of a particular society and covers historical issues through individual stories (Kvale & Brinkmann 2019, pp. 194–196). Thus, the narrative focus is an appropriate technique for this research, especially regarding the interviews with the elderly and children. It creates a possibility for a deep connection with the respondents' personal stories without disturbance. Also, their connection with their own memories, experiences, emotions, and imaginations. Therefore, it facilitates the examination of the approach the children use to develop a depictive representation of their homeland, and how the elderly describe their memory from their time in Palestine.

Based on this, the interview questions have been developed to create a space that allows the respondents to tell stories and help them structure a sequence of events through imagination and memory rather than being restricted by traditional questions. Regarding the children's interviews, I asked them to imagine telling a story about Palestine, more precisely, about their hometown, for a younger child at the age of four. Then to describe this story in their own words.

In addition, the children were asked to imagine how they would draw Palestine if it had been a canvas painting. Based on the elements of the story that the child has implanted during the conversation, I have built upon it by asking about further details depending on what the child has said. Concerning the interviews with the elderly, I have created an interview frame dimensioned by a specific time and place. With this framework established, I asked them to recollect and depict a childhood story that is close to their heart which is related to that particular time and place. Also, to describe their hometown in detail. Then, I have followed up on the collected narrative fragments and elaborated on further fragments of what has been said by asking supplementary questions.

However, the interviews with the documentary makers are not based on the narrative interview technique. I have used traditional semi-structured qualitative interviews governed by decided questions and have a factual track. Since the interviews with the documentary makers are devoted to gathering information based on the respondents' broad experience and specialized occupation regarding the use of imagination and memory in documentary storytelling. (see appendix A for the interview guides)

I have specifically chosen to interview the documentary filmmaker Mai Masri who contributes with her achievements in children's imagination as an essential and necessary narrative technique in documentary storytelling. Masri has worked with Palestinian children's imagination in documentary films for three decades. In my view, her deep-rooted background of working with children's imagination is important to answer the study's questions. Likewise, to achieve its objective.

My second interview is with Bernt Hermele, a Swedish journalist and producer of the podcast Nakba- Palestinian voices from 1948 (Hermele, 2019). Based on his long experience working with documentary projects and preserving the memories of elderly people who have experienced crucial socio-historical events. Therefore, it seems that Hermele's experience regarding the documentation of life-stories of the elderly and working with memory as narrative technique in documentary storytelling is crucial to answer the thesis issues, likewise, to achieve the purposes of the research.

The interviews were mostly conducted in Arabic and Swedish with some English. I directly translated the citations below to English. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and considering the respondents' age and health conditions, I have chosen to conduct digital interviews through Zoom, and haven't experienced any technical or interpersonal problems by using this method. One interview was discarded after evaluating that the respondent's interactivity was impacted by other family members who present during the interview and have



discussed the interviewee's answers. Such a situation was difficult to control through a digital meeting. Two of the elderly respondents received practical help from a family member to connect to the meeting. Then, the interviewee was alone. Likewise, the interviews with children. The mother was beside and helped the child to connect to the interview.

After that, it is appropriate to discuss the children's chosen age in this research, namely 12–13. The decision is based on the guidelines of *Nesh– the Norwegian National Committee for The Research Ethics in Social Sciences and Humanities*. Children aged 12–13 can develop independent thoughts and feelings; they are conscious about what goes around in their inner and outer world. That emphasizes the importance of paying particular attention to what a child's utterance means (The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees, 2019). From my point of view, political statements and opinions do not impact children at this early age because their political knowledge has still not matured. Also, it is necessary to mention that the children themselves have agreed to participate in this research.

In this context, I aim to mention that this master's thesis is registered in *NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data*. All respondents have given oral or written consent to participate in this research on the basis of an information letter I have given them. The elderly and documentary creators have given oral consent, while the children's guardians have given a written one after I have confirmed that the children themselves are willing to participate. (see appendix B for the consent agreements)

### **3.2 Analysis methods**

All the interviews have been transcribed and categorized into central themes, considering the research main subject– documentary storytelling through imagination and memory and its linkage to identity formation. This has been the basis to comprehend how the respondents deal with imagination and memory to narrate stories about Palestine. Throughout the analyzing process, I have categorized the interviews according to these central topics; *nature* focuses on describing Palestine landscape. *Social* life deals with the respondents' depiction of the Palestinian people and community life. *Sensations* intend to understand how the respondents feel when they remember and imagine Palestine, in order to analyze their emotional bond to their homeland. *Identity* concerns how the respondents express their connection to Palestine throughout the stories they shape. Additionally, *methods*, where I have focused on Masri's approaches to encourage children's imagination, and how she takes advantage of their

imagination to make documentary films. Likewise, Hermele's methods to generate the elderly's memories and how he uses memory as a narrative tool in his documentary podcast.

My second phase in the analyzing process was the so-called meaning interpretation. I have concentrated on the meaning content of the respondents' answers, based on the categories that I have systematized: *nature, social life, sensations, identity* and *methods*. Through the meaning interpretation, I have highlighted the respondents' descriptions, especially the words they use, positive, negative, abstractive or descriptive. Also, the topics they speak about, such as interior or exterior places, family and friends, and how they express their feelings and opinions; above all, which elements they use to form stories about their homeland by means of imagination and memory.

In short, interview analysis that focuses on meaning interpretation is a profound investigation and evaluation of respondents' phrases. This meaning interpretation makes the text larger and expands the interview meaning (Kvale & Brinkmann 2019, p.249). Therefore, I have attempted to read between the lines by immersing in what was said to understand the context of the respondents' statements. Thereafter, I evaluated the gathered materials, analyzing how the respondents use imagination and memory in storytelling, and how documentary makers employ imagination and memory in documentaries.

### **3.3 Ethics and Limitations**

I should mention that I am Palestinian and a documentary filmmaker myself. My thesis discusses the use of imagination and memory as narrative techniques in documentary storytelling. The direct discourse is about the imaginary picture of the ancestral land through children's vision as well as narrating childhood stories from the villages where the respondents originally come from. This thesis focuses on children's imagination of Palestine as a homeland, not as a scene of political conflict, and storytelling of the respondents' memories from Palestine before the 1948 war.

I have chosen to use pseudonyms for the respondents to protect their identity, even though some respondents asked to be identified. For ethical reasons, the interviews with the children have not been recorded, but I took notes. Unlike interviews with the children and elderly respondents, I have chosen to identify the documentary makers after asking them for their consent, considering their experiences and knowledge are beneficial for future students and further research on documentary storytelling.

Besides, I consider that conducting research interviews is a method with restrictions and limitations compared to conducting conversations in a documentary film. There is a difference between the terms "dialogue" and "interview." Dialogue is a friendly conversation between people, raising questions, and negotiating compassionate attention about essential issues. Research interviews have an official formula, called a power relationship where the interviewer opens and closes the interview, asks questions, and interprets the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2019, p. 278). A research interview has a formal frame and is limited to one hour maximum two hours, and during this time, the researcher attempts to gather as much relevant information for the research project as possible. A failure at this stage in research studies cannot be rescued and could significantly impact its outcomes. In contrast, documentary film interviews differ from research interviews concerning the relationship that the documentary makers aim to establish by breaking the ice between the filmmaker and the social actor. The filmmaker has months or even years to follow a social actor in daily life, by observing, and trying to create a spatial and temporal environment that supports the project's purposes. The relation between the social actor and the filmmaker is informal somehow. With that mentioned, I have never felt that the interviews with the informants in this study have achieved the familiar formula I usually use when making documentaries.

Due to the study's physical limitation, no documentary analysis of Masri's trilogy about Palestinian children in refugee camps or Hermele's Nakba podcast about elderly Palestinians have been conducted. This research has also restricted the accessibility to meet Palestinian children living in refugee camps and study their imagination about Palestine before 1948, not either to examine memory among elderly Palestinians living in refugee camps around the world, especially in the Middle East. An additional point to highlight is that the interviewed respondents in this thesis have not participated in the documentary makers' previous works. However, this dilemma does not diminish the validity of this research, because the informants represent the society which they belong to.

### **3.4 Validity and Reliability**

I am aware that it is unmanageable to achieve an ideal level of objectivity, reliability, and validity in social and humanitarian studies. For instance, this thesis's research issues have been in continual progress throughout the research project, along with finding adequate respondents and evaluating the interviews. Therefore, I have been strictly accurate when interpreting the respondents' utterances and have analyzed their answers literally; for example, since I am an

Arabic and Swedish speaker myself, I have paid careful attention to not using synonyms that might be perceived as superlative phrases for a non-Arabic or Swedish speaker, in order to avoid any misinterpretation that might affect the research results. The interviews have also been transcribed and summarized after I repeatedly watched them with intervals to assess, calculate, and evaluate continually during the writing process. All the excerpts from the interviews are cited verbatim with pauses and stops. Since I did not record the children's interviews, I purely recited their exact phrases that I made sure to note during the interview and avoided relying on my own memory.

In this respect, reliability means that the study's results can be reproduced by other researchers and at other times and indicates that the consistency of the research and reliability (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2019, p.295). In my opinion, it is unlikely that other researchers can detect the same result since this is qualitative research that attends to the individual use of imagination, memory, and storytelling. However, using the same methodological procedures and the same criteria of choosing the respondents with a focus on diasporic Palestinians in Sweden can possibly infer the same findings.

In order to measure the validity of the study, which means that the applied research methods achieved what they claim (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2019, p. 296). I assess that the adopted methods in this research are valid because the thesis research questions have been answered. Additionally, the interview guides are regarded as valid since they were based on the study's theoretical grounds.

## 4. Results

In this chapter the research interviews are compiled, and the respondents' answers are categorized according to the following themes: nature and social life, feelings and identity.

### 4.1 Children

In this thesis, five children have been interviewed, three girls and two boys aged twelve to thirteen. The children are born and raised in Sweden, have Palestinian roots to parents with mixed identities, more specifically, Palestinian-Lebanese and Palestinian-Syrian. The children have never been to Palestine before, but one has been in Beirut, and one has visited Damascus. All of the children are Swedish speakers, and the citation below is directly translated by me. Since the children are guaranteed confidentiality, the names beneath are assumed.

**Alma** has always been interested in knowing where she comes from because it is exciting to talk about ancestral descent and birthplace to friends. She is twelve years old, originally from [Hebron], a southern West Bank city (Alma, personal communication, October 15, 2020).

**Zein** is a 12-year-old, determined boy, unsure which Palestinian city he stems from. Zein likes to tell stories about Palestine to friends and other people. That makes him delighted and enthusiastic. Palestine, through his eyes, is a place of contrasts where the sun is orange, and the sand is mixed with stones (Zein, personal communication, October 16, 2020).

**Julia** loves the calmness of the sea and Palestine in her view is a broken land but an attractive place. She is thirteen years old, does not know which Palestinian city she is originally from. According to her the multi-connection to different places in the world is something very remarkable (Julia, personal communication, October 16, 2020).

**Sama** is the youngest among the respondent, almost 12 years, born in Sweden to a Palestinian-Lebanese-Swedish mother and Palestinian-Syrian-Swedish father. Sama has heard from her grandparents that they come from [Akka] Acre in English, a city in the coastal plain region of the Northern District of historic Palestine (Israel today). She tells that she was in Beirut and can imagine that Palestine is as marvelous as Beirut. Glad people and the moon and star symbolize Palestine (Sama, personal communication, October 18, 2020).

**Rayan** is a 12-year-old from [Lubya], a town located in the west of Tiberias. Rayan told me that he was waiting for this Zoom-meeting because he loves talking about roots and heritage. Rayan believes that his friends would describe Palestine as a nicer place where children play around, but it isn't easy to turn blind-eyed on reality for him. He expresses that he would like

to visit Palestine, merely to see what the place looks like and if there is anything left (Rayan, personal communication, October 22, 2020).

#### **4.1.1 Palestine: A tropical island with some fissures**

“This place is extraordinary where there are lots of birds– blue and white . . . . It seems like a tropical island with sunflowers, palm trees . . . fruits make Akka very special” (Sama, 12 years). The description of a colorful warm landscape is predominant in the children’s imagination of Palestine, whether when they imagine Palestine in general or, merely their villages. According to the children, what distinguishes Palestine is that the fruits and vegetables are unparalleled. The cultivated plants evoke Alma's inner sensations since it tastes better; she says: “It is a summer feeling, the fruits and vegetables are colorful, prettier, riper and more delicious.” The life in Palestine seems to be joyful, according to Rayan (12 years), and the beach is rich in lovely objects. He describes Palestine as following: “less homework there, everybody goes to the beach, warmer sand. There are lots of shells– green, pink, and blue. The water is crystal clear . . . . a lot of olives and olive oil.”

On the other hand, Palestine through Zein’s and Julia’s vision is a place of contrasts that is colored and uncolored, broken and unbroken at the same time. Julia visualizes (13 years): “Palestine is a broken but beautiful land. Houses are beige and achromatic . . . . There is verdant lawn, and leafy bushes . . . flowers are yellow dry and withered”. In accordance with Julia, Palestine is a safe place in Zein’s view, despite all the fractures and gaps. He imagines Palestine as a warm place where many farmers grow vegetables, good and fresh fruits. Zein (12 years) depicts that “There are cracks in the streets in Palestine, bushes, trees that don’t grow, fresh air that smells nothing . . . . Flowers are bright yellow, and the trees are without blossoms, merely, leaves.”

The image of Palestine and the Palestinian society is somehow sharper for Sama, who draws parallels with Lebanon. She mentions that she was in Beirut and can therefore imagine that Palestine is a wonderful land where people fish a lot, swim, and work together. Sama describes:

Akka is like Beirut, a city located by the beach where people sell fish and fine stuff; fish of all sorts– salmon and codfish. There are many happy people since Akka is a beautiful city and the weather is fine there. People are humble and kind-hearted.

Rayan’s imagination is incompatible with the other children; he is convinced that few people live there today and depicts Palestine as a war sphere with very few trees or bushes, where the stones are badly shaped. He portrays Palestine in the following meaning “A narrow way, grass

aside, weapons, lots of olive trees, and few people work as hard as they did once” Similarly, Zein clarifies that Palestine was a beautiful land before the war. People were happy, and the children could go to school. Now, they are sad and cannot be educated.

The insecure life situation in Palestine has a place in children's imagination and the stories they imagine. For example, Alma says that she imagines the war in Palestine, where many people die, and believes that her companions would describe the vulnerable situation and wounded people. However, she decides to shift the focus away from this miserable part of the story and concentrates on creating brighter episodes. In the same way, Julia expresses that her feelings when she imagines Palestine are contradictory; one moment she feels warm, the other moment she feels heartbroken because of the occupation.

#### **4.1.2 Imaging Home: A window on identity**

There is an apparent expressed desire among the five children to visit Palestine someday. Julia says, “It is about an opportunity that should be seized to visit a place where one is entrenched” The desire to visit Palestine is attached to the children’s want to examine if the imaginary picture of Palestine corresponds to real Palestine. For Alma, trying to describe something one hasn’t experienced before is very exciting, because it provides her with the opportunity to recall this moment of imagination and compare it with the reality, she is looking to experience when visiting Palestine someday. Likewise, Sama expressed the feeling of uneasiness when trying to generate her imagination to depict Palestine. It makes her feel excited about the day, she will see Palestine with her own eyes. Sama says, “I feel jittery . . . I would like to visit Akka to ensure that my imagination corresponds to reality and that I have the right thoughts about how my homeland looks. It is maybe not as beautiful”.

Unlike others, this craving is different for Zein, who expresses the wish to travel to Palestine immediately if it had been possible. Being in Palestine is a matter of course in his view, since Palestine is where his family tree is implanted. Zein expounds, “My real place where I should be in Palestine . . . this is where I feel home”. Furthermore, he became very enthusiastic when he was asked to describe his feelings and replied joyfully, “My body becomes warm, my heart mostly, I want to travel there.” Rayan’s desire to visit Palestine is similarly expressed, but, for him, it is not clear that Palestine remains. He means, “I would like to visit Palestine, just to see how it looks like if there is anything left.”

All five children have expressed a profound connection to Sweden– their home and the land where they dwell in and have relationships. A home for them is a warm, peaceful place, a

steady point where there are friends, family, sustenance, or other necessities for health and good living conditions. They are contented in Sweden– the only place they know.

Notwithstanding, the Palestinian identity has explicitly emerged through children’s imaginative depiction of their ancestral land. For instance, Alma says “Even though I have never been to Palestine, it cannot stop being my homeland. It’s in my blood”. The children’s connection to their identity has different shapes. A mutual expression among them is “Palestine is in my blood”. They mean that being a Palestinian is unrestrained neither to temporal nor to spatial dimensions or the boundaries of a citizenship. Julia illustrates that it is marvelous to be connected to more than one place and being Palestinian is not contingent on the citizenship one has– it is something in the blood. The Palestinian identity for Zein is something beyond one’s blood and is about the importance to keep narrating about Palestine. He means that the Palestinian identity is mirrored in good treatment for other people, showing love, and helping others. Sama makes a similar association with her identity and considers that Palestine will make her feel thrive. She explains that she belongs to Lebanon and Palestine, and for her, what makes the person a Palestinian is that one of the parents has roots in Palestine “I feel content very well in Lebanon, so I will for sure thrive in Palestine because it is my own land even though it is not built like here.”

For Rayan, it is all about resistance and perseverance to reach the awaited intentions, there is where the Palestinian identity is crystallized. He exemplifies that he doesn’t allow himself to give up if he struggles with something difficult, while others maybe give up. For him, it is worth the struggle, and that is what makes him Palestinian.

## **4.2 Mai Masri**

Mai Masri is a Palestinian filmmaker who aims the camera at crucial events in Palestine and Lebanon. For more than three decades, she has addressed pivotal issues through children’s eyes to mirror the distinctive realities from a poetic perspective. In all Masri’s documentaries, as well as her first fiction film, *3000 nights* (Masri, 2015), there are children and white doves– a symbol of an aware optimism. All the quotations below are taken from the interview with Mai Masri (personal communication, October 9, 2020)



#### 4.2.1 Imagination: A new reality of contrastive realities

Masri defines the imagination as follows:

Imagination is the image in the subconscious that freely carries all the dreams and thoughts that stems from restricted reality. Imagining is to be flying. The importance of imagination is that children always describe birds, which symbolize freedom. Imagination is freedom, image, and hope (M.M, personal communication, October 9, 2020).

Through her trilogy *Children of Fire* (Masri, 1990), *Children of Shatila*, (Masri, 1998), and *Frontiers of Dreams and Fears* (Masri, 2001), she addresses the life of Palestinian children in refugee camps in Beirut and Bethlehem. Masri has recognized that there are three elements the children usually use when they imagine Palestine, namely, a safe home, an arable land where people grow lentils and Mulukhiyah (an Arabic dish made by mallow leaf) and birds. The children frequently initiate by describing the house; they also imagined that birds in Palestine look different and have more distinctive colors than birds somewhere else. According to Masri, children's expression is a source of inspiration. She says: "This is another level to express the reality and the story of Palestine by using meaningful symbols inspired by children themselves." Masri means that children's imaginative world is surprising, filled with creativity and ingenuity. Children always generate something new compared to adults who become restrictive and hardened through the years. In Masri's words: "they (the children in her documentary films) always have something new; they are very unconventional different than adults, they are freer in the way of thinking, more spontaneous . . . they don't calculate in the same way; they are more intuitive" On that account, there is a mutual relation between Masri and the children she followed. The bedrock of this relation is the high confidence where they, through time, develop a friendship.

She views children's way of thinking as both inspiring and enriching. For this reason, it is a constructively, spontaneous manner to shed light on the Palestinian reality throughout children's eyes, especially the children who were born outside Palestine and living in exile. Masri explains:

It is to see visually through (children's) eyes but also see through their vision, imagination, and the world they live in. A reflection of their own worlds, their own vision . . . . as a filmmaker it's really how you tell . . . historic events through the children. . . and seeing through their eyes . . .

Seeing through children's eyes is to realize the ambivalence between their inner realm and the surrounding world. Referring to Masri's documentary film *Frontiers of Dreams and Fears* (Masri, 2001) she came to realize the huge contrast between children's imagination and the life

they dwell in. They use metaphors, like, butterfly and bird, and poetic expressions to depict their imagination, while the surrounding reality in the camp is dreadful. Masri's method is to follow children's intuition, and through their imagination and metaphoric storytelling she structures cinematic scenes. As an illustration, Issa in *Children of Shatila* (Masri, 1998) imagined himself as a prince on a white horse walking to the beach. Masri inspired by Issa's imagination and arranged a scene in the film, where Issa rode a white horse in the camp. According to her, this indicates children's tremendous capacity to transport themselves to another world through imagination. In this context, Masri points that the contrast exists in the reality itself and, telling a documentary story inspired by real-life requires spending time in the place to understand all these contradictions.

Talking about dreams is an additional inspiration to construct visual scenes inspired by children's imagination. These narratives also mirror disparities between imagination and the experienced reality. As stated by Masri: "there is a beautiful contradiction between dreams and reality. I love to work on contradictions to create a new meaning, a new reality. The cinematic reality and the imagined reality." Furthermore, Masri believes that focusing on details not facts is essential to generate perception and sensation in documentary storytelling. It helps the public to engage with each story held by a child. She expounds:

this is the secret . . . there are secret moments . . . all the elements assemble to create a cinematic moment bears all deep meanings in an artistic way that don't tell facts, rather, imagination and emotions . . . the kind of work I like that make you feel not merely think

Describing details and focusing on a determined angle in documentary storytelling is a powerful tool that has a greater effect than presenting data and information. Details stem from real voices, sounds, and pictures. Therefore, classic interviews, in Masri's view, are the backbone to structure up the story. Nevertheless, Masri stresses that she follows children's intuition, helps them concentrate on their inner world, and encourages them to release their thoughts and emotions by creating a framework for them to interact, express freely, and voice their opinions spontaneously. The emotional expressions are the foundation of documentary storytelling and are as important as other facts. She communicates:

I let them speak spontaneously, but I put them in a situation where they will speak about a certain subject that I'm interested in. I never try to interfere or guide them. If they do not say what I had in mind, they usually say something better.

#### **4.2.2 Imagination: A keystone of documentary storytelling and identity formation**

Children's interaction and their spontaneous expression about a particular theme, signify the connection between their imagination and identity. As expounded by Masri, the diasporic children search for their own identity within their imagination and through fragments of other people's memories, such as their relatives, as well as the collective memory of a certain Palestinian community. This indicates that imagination and memory work hand in hand to form the identity of the diasporic children, which is an essential issue in Masri's documentary films. The association with the identity through memory and imagination was initiated in her film *Children of Shatila* (Masri,1998) when Masri purposely gave the children cameras, because she wanted the film to be a reflection of the children's own world through their own vision. It was the first time they have seen their own reality, but through the camera frame. Masri states:

Video cameras were a new phenomenon at the time . . . I felt it is a very powerful way of looking at the Palestinian reality especially Palestinian living in exile the third and fourth generations; Palestinian were born outside their homeland . . . one of the first things they did was interview the elders in the camp, and ask them questions about Palestine and their memories . . . I felt there is a very strong connection between their own imagination (children's) and memory (children's ancestors).

Another example from the same film, is about the main character Issa, who lost his memory by an accident and throughout the film he was searching to recover it. By then Masri fingered the strong connection between memory, imagination and children's association with their identity through the collective memory of the Palestinians in the camp. She says:

This was a very symbolic idea connected with the collective relationship of Palestinians in exile with their own memory. Especially we are talking about people who were uprooted. With time memory changes, and I wanted to see how this was reflected through the search of these children for their own identity through fragments of memory, through play as well, phantasy, and through the camera.

In light of the contrasts between children's imagination and the surrounding world, Masri explains that this contrast inspired her to explore how the children imagine and express the homeland, given that they have never been to Palestine. Below, she highlights the link between imagination and identity:

Their words, their expression gave me another view that could express the whole society. As Palestinians live abroad, the story of the homeland is strongly related to the imagination because we do not live in our homeland - our identity is based on producing an imaginary picture of the homeland... children's imagination is deep and stunning... especially when we talk about

generations raised abroad. So, it is natural to see how the Palestinian identity still exists and why. It is deeply associated with memory, the process of preserving memory, and how it is inherited from generation to generation. Also, how with each generation, the idea of the homeland becomes rebuilt through imagination. This process becomes an identity.

According to that, Masri asserts that the world is full of historical events, and the documentary storyteller's responsibility is to preserve collective and oral memory. These memories are mostly underrepresented, misrepresented, or even forgotten by history. One of the methods is telling stories through children's imagination because, over time, films become documentation and a part of collective and oral history. Therefore, memory and cinema are strongly associated with the same purpose—safeguarding history throughout individual voices.

Additionally, storytelling is considered a human need since people seek to know and understand previous events (Yorke, 2013). In line with this, Masri explains that imagination is the keystone of storytelling:

People (the audience) need imagination, they need stories . . . cinema is a creative method that moves, and herein the responsibility is how to use cinema to tell the unwritten story and preserve the memory . . . it is my (Masri's) purpose.

The stories the children narrate about Palestine are inspired by what they have heard from others, such as stories spread by the elderly to grandchildren, as mentioned by Masri.

She notes that, above and beyond, there is a general atmosphere among the diasporic Palestinian communities who purposefully strive to increase knowledge of Palestine and transmit the stories to future generations. They urge children to safeguard memory since memory has a vital role in identity formation. Remembrance and sharing memories through generations play a role in identity formation (Erl, 2008 pp. 5–6).

Another point that Masri highlights is that the poetry in children's imaginations influence and make a difference. Thus, she aims to maintain the idea of homeland, identity, and freedom through children's imagination and storytelling. She expresses:

When you own the story, you can deeply express your story at all levels of realism and imagination. You possess your history. Memory and history are existence. I believe in the story of belonging and identity so we can continue.

### 4.3 Elderly

In this research, three diasporic elderly Palestinians have been interviewed. All the elderly respondents are born in Palestine between 1937–1941 and live in Sweden today. They underwent two crucial exoduses– Al-Nakba 1948 and the war in Syria in 2011.

The names below are assumed.

**Matar** has worked as a magistrate in Syria for more than 30 years. Now, he lives in southern Sweden and is learning Swedish at school for foreigners. His passion is to study the Swedish law to make changes for refugee rights in Sweden. Matar was born in 1937 in Tarshiha (a city located in the Northern District of historic Palestine) and lived there until the war in 1948 (Matar, personal communication, October 4, 2020).

**Jawad** is a retired history teacher. He too, was born in Tarshiha in 1941 and expelled to Syria during the mass expulsion of Palestinians during Al-Nakba 1948. In 2015 he fled to Sweden from the Syrian War to Sweden. The year 1966 was unforgettable for him because he visited Palestine and could embrace his childhood soil for the first time after 18 years in the exile (Jawad, personal communication, October 5, 2020).

**Adam** was born in Safad (the highest city in the Galilee, located in the Northern District of historic Palestine) in 1941. Adam, like the other respondents, has undergone two appalling exiles. He lives in the southernmost county in Sweden (Adam, personal communication, October 5, 2020).

#### 4.3.1 Palestine: An aromatic paradise with tasty harvest

Matar, Jawad, and Adam’s childhood memories are anchored to nature and agricultural life in Palestine. Matar and Jawad were born in the same city, Tarshiha, which was, according to them, well-known for the tobacco cultivation, also, for the ancient olive trees, which are more than 2000-year-old. Matar summarizes his childhood memories in three words: fig trees, olive trees, and tobacco plants. He remembers, “In the summer, olive leaf shaped an umbrella and protected us from the sun . . . I [Matar] remember, especially, red and white fig trees. They were very delicious at sunrise, sweet as honey” (Matar, 83-year-old). In a similar manner, the seven decades in the diaspora could not affect Jawad’s memories of childhood years in Palestine and his exclusive relationship to fig-trees. He indicates that life in its simplicity between mountains and valleys was an indescribable pleasure. Jawad recalls: “no one knows that . . . we used to grill figs. It was delightful, sweet like baklava.”

Matar and Jawad concur that human memory is bizarre, and wonder how one can remember details, smells, tastes despite all these years. Remembering what happened a long time ago is accessible compared to recollecting something that occurred yesterday, because childhood memories are highly retentive. For Jawad, memory functions as a computer that switches on by a password. He illustrates that his reminiscences and inner thoughts related to Palestine are usually activated by external triggers, like when he is asked to tell about Palestine. Once his memory is activated it becomes impossible to stop the memory from recollecting the remains of the history. He explains:

It is an emotional link that stimulates the sensitive sensors in the human mind . . . These memories never die until the owner dies or affects by Alzheimer's . . . memory is the emotional link to Palestine . . . it hurts when I [Jawad] remember.

He indicates that the recollection disturbs the stability of the sensations and creates an uncertain moment of sadness and happiness. The reminiscences give him goosebumps. He reflects that soil, in fact, is not more than disturbing dirt; despite this, there is a special connection and feels of belonging to this soil. Jawad remembers his first visit to Palestine, 18 years after Al-Nakba:

In 1966, I [Jawad] went on a business trip from Syria to Ramallah with the teachers' union. Once I entered Palestine, I caught up a handful of soil, smelled it, and cried . . . I couldn't overcome my emotions . . . the aroma of home, of ancestral land . . . it is a human nature (Jawad, 79-year-old)

Adam remembers his childhood in the narrow streets of Safad; he was the boy who often went astray because he enjoyed observing people, cars, and the features of the city. He remembers: "I [Adam] used to walk around through the plains and valleys, and still, until today, have scars on my feet." (Adam, 79-year-old). The three respondents describe the carefree and uncomplicated life in Palestine. For instance, it was an artistic milieu where Adam and his companions enjoyed the Palestinian scouter music in Safad. Also, Jawad repetitively expresses: "Palestine is a paradise, a paradise . . . it is about the right to own your own trees and harvest whenever you want. I don't feel like I have this right anywhere else."

#### **4.3.2 Remembering Palestine: The compass**

"I really don't know why I have this connection to Palestine despite all these years . . . the motherland is invaluable" (Jawad, 79 years) Adam and Jawad don't often talk about Palestine to their grandchildren if the children themselves don't ask about old days. However, Adam states that Palestine is present in routine conversations, "narrating about Palestine never ends . . . I [Adam] still hope to return and engrave this idea into my grandchildren . . . the idea of not

forgetting the homeland.” On the other hand, Jawad is keen to not often dwell on the past reminiscences of Palestine because it is hurtful, and he doesn't want his grandchildren, who are curious and frequently asking about Palestine, to bear this suffering of hopelessness and yearning. Matar deals with memory differently and explains that ”it is a right that should be transmitted to future generations”. For this purpose, he now works on a project to safeguard the memories of Palestine through a continuous search for old documents, maps, pictures that maintain the heritage of Matar’s family, and keep his grandchildren updated about their right. Matar states: “Palestine is my [Matar’s] compass.... memory is the bond of belonging to Palestine”

The elderly’s memory is connected to their relatives' memories and memories of Palestine, which their parents had experienced directly. Adam visualizes that sharing Palestine stories with grandchildren resembles watering plants “you have to water the tree [refers to future generations] if you want to keep it alive. Otherwise, it withers and dies.” He means that storytelling will keep Palestine alive in future generations. Adam utters that the dispossession itself that caused a huge emptiness in the Palestinians and strengthens the connection with Palestine “I [Adam] remain attached to Palestine because I am deprived of it. Palestine remains in my memory; it is a part of me, a part of my thinking.” Likewise, Matar explains how his childhood memories have been rescued from oblivion notwithstanding the years in the diaspora: “I [Matar] will not say a home or land . . . I will say a car. Can [one] forget if someone steals [one’s] car?”

According to Matar, memory is associated with education and the thirst for knowledge which is characteristic for the Palestinians. He elucidates: “The more one starves for education, the stronger the band to Palestine becomes... education and earth are our primary link with Palestine.”

#### **4.4 Bernt Hermele**

Bernt Hermele is a Swedish journalist and documentary producer of the documentary podcast *The Nakba - Palestinian stories from 1948* (Hermele, 2019). Hermele has a long-established experience conversing with the elderly about Nakba, the Holocaust, Jews in Sweden, and anti-Semitism. About himself he says: “I don't like the pretentious, I like the simple, and I thrive best on the street corner, and this project [the Nakba podcast] takes place on the street corner, where I belong”. The quotation below refers to Bernt Hermele (H, B. personal communication October 7, 2020).

#### **4.4.1 Memory: stream of consciousness**

Hermele points out that he prefers to use the term “conversation” instead of “interview” and explaining that a conversation is based on strengthening each other. It is an informal communication between him as a documentary maker and the elderly interviewees where they exchange thoughts and emotions. He explains, “It is always more interesting if you convert it [the meeting with elderly] into a conversation. One gives and takes, laughs and cries, thinks a little, and is silent”.

This informal communication with the elderly participants (in Hermele’s documentary podcast) is built on trust and a constant confirmation, which means to listen carefully to the story the elderly person narrates. Especially the part derived from memory and converted to a story or a segment of a story. Hermele considers: “what they [the elderly participants in his podcast] say is more interesting than what I wanted to know, so it's just a gift.” He clarifies that the confirmation facilitates the connection with the elderly to open up and tell their stories. The best moment is when the elderly’s storytelling becomes a “stream of consciousness... where the story develops into a beautiful continuous flow”.

Based on this, Hermele doesn’t usually prepare a question guide in advance; however, he usually asks the elderly about night dreams, childhood memories, and about desires or yearning for something. His favorite question is “what happened next ... It is a moderate and surprising question which does not delimit the flow of storytelling”. The conversation is not limited by spatial or temporal linear sequence, each conversation contains spontaneous interchanges between different periods and geographical spheres, between the past, the present, and the future. He says that he commences asking when the elderly have finished telling their own story:

I try to break the chronological order to bring out the person [person’s memory], sometimes the story stands in the way of the person . . . the person has a definite opinion about his story, so he or she is not sensitive to a conversation . . . they do not want to be disturbed

In view of the foregoing, Hermele remarks that facts, information, and the extensive representation of the historical and political events are available everywhere in books, news, archives, research, and are not as interesting subjects in the context of documentary storytelling as the individual story. These sorts of historical and/or political data do not affect people emotionally. He expounds:

I [Hermele] not a philatelist, rather a documentary producer and journalist who thrives by giving the elderly who endured and persisted a platform to narrate their stories... For me, the political



goes through the personal story, not the other way around . . . every story is political because everything is politic.

Indeed, oral history lies in the interest in details, not in the whole picture Hermele expounds. For example, the elderly's experience of a certain event, their feelings. In his words, the core itself is the emotions in documentary storytelling.

I'm looking for genuine stories from a human . . . you want the person to be moved, if the interviewee gets touched, the chances increase that listeners will be touched too, and if you are touched, you can understand both these small events in this person's life but perhaps also the big political events . . . but above all, through the feeling of this person, you get in touch with something.

Therefore, a conversation is an occasion for sharing laughs and tears where Hermele seeks to shed light on the disregarded details which the elderly had not talked about before. For instance, he asks them to describe how the food tastes and how they found food to eat, how they feel, and where they slept when they fled Al-Nakba. These details are what make a story authentic, substantial, and leave an impression.

#### **4.4.2 Memory: the motor of documentary storytelling**

According to Hermele there is a difference between telling stories and recalling memories. Storytelling deals with utilizing memory by re-creating and reshaping reminiscences to a narration. He confirms that the elderly in his documentary podcast *The Nakba– Palestinian stories from 1948* (Hermele, 2019) narrate stories not reminiscences: “they re-create and reshape their memories to narration, which is a very individual process that differs from person to person and from one conversation to another”. In his podcast he aims to communicate with the Palestinian elderly where the essential focus is on the emotions behind the stories; what feels and what smells. He expresses:

For me [Hermele] it is not an art. It is a job where I [Hermele] mediate conversations, mediate emotions...It is documentation of a conversation not a re-creation.... I am [Hermele] the third person between those I interview, between me as an interviewer and I sit a little on the side and listen.

Furthermore, storytelling though memory is considered challenging for the elderly because recollecting events that happened a long time ago is demanding. However, he states that the conversation itself is regarded as a mediator and facilitates the access to the memory because the interaction with other people evokes memories (Erll, 2008, p.4). For this reason, Hermele encourages the elderly social actors (in his podcast) to narrate freely during the recording, so

they develop their memories from a stream of consciousness to stories by helping them with few but supporting questions. He points out that some social actors are occupied by the present moment, and some are broken-hearted. According to him, the elderly's yearning for the soil is expressive but incomprehensible:

They [the diasporic Palestinian elderly in his podcast– the Nakba] live in Sweden, have a good life, and have grandchildren, but they long for the soil. So, physically longing, and I [Bernt] cannot relate to it. I can listen to it. It sounds wonderful and even poetic, but after 70 years and knowing that they can lie awake at night and cry because they want to touch the Palestinian soil once again ...

Further, Hermele illustrates that storytelling activates the process of recollection, which acts as a motor to understand previous experiences through the elderly Palestinians' narratives:

...one reflects on life events when they convert to a memory. It is a process of examining what one had been through and trying to bring out something new from past experiences; perhaps, something good can emerge from terrible events.

Additionally, Hermele draws parallels between memory and identity formation and expresses that recollection and storytelling preserve one's roots. He expresses: "Memory is a part of the identity. My [Bernt] memory it what has shaped me to who I am... through memory one often recalls their parents ... so, memory is a way to water the roots one has"

## **5. Analysis & Discussion**

Against a backdrop of the research results, the collected empirical materials will be analyzed in this chapter, referring to the literature studies on documentary storytelling and theories of imagination and memory.

### **5.1 Storytelling through children's imagination**

This section is intended to answer the first research question of *how the Palestinian-Swedish children narrate stories of Palestine through imagination*, by analyzing the collected data in light of McKee's (1997) definition of story and its constructions. Also, analyzed are Rosemary Gordon (1985) and Vygotsky's (2004) imagination theories, which consider the broad relation between imagination and other psychological processes, while highlighting the connection between imagination and reality.

#### **5.1.1 Imaginative storytelling: a process of creating a new reality**

There is an obvious contrast in children's narratives that demonstrates their awareness of reality and their imagination. They produce new fragments taken from that reality and inspired by their inner vision in order to imagine Palestine in their own manner. For instance, in Julia's eyes, Palestine is monochrome, colorless. Yet, she describes it as a beautiful land and draws a connection to her favorite place, the ocean. Similarly, Zein depicts the fissures, wreckage, and scentless air in Palestine, but at the same time, he views it as a fascinating and wonderful land. This indicates that the children make a deliberate creation of positive narratives and shift the focus to the brighter side of reality. They shape their own framework inside the existed limitations of the real world in order to create a story about Palestine, based on the possible thinking (Egan & Judson, 2009, p. 127).

In other words, the children produce a new reality that corresponds with their own measures. This process is what I would call "an aware optimism" among the children respondents. Their imagination is an active search method where they attempt to explore new fragment stems from the real world to produce a valid and interesting story of their homeland (McKee 1997, p. 73). As Vygotsky (2004, p. 37) expounds, the human has a need for imagination because it is the mindset that helps the imaginative person (children) to reshape their own reality based on their inner desire.

Additionally, the children's narrative when they imagine Palestine affects their own thoughts and emotions toward the created story (Egan & Judson, 2009, pp. 127–129). Like,

Sama who associates Palestine with Beirut because she has access to Beirut's images in her mind. She re-creates these familiar images of Beirut and puts them in another context to structure a story in a new context. From this it can be explained that previous experiences assist Sama to imagine Palestine. Consequently, imagining Palestine is not a process of the present moment but a complete development of organized fragments from children's past experiences and memories. In this context, Vygotsky (2004, p. 13–15) illuminates that the link between imagination and memory arises because imagination is compelled to lean on the source of information to induce an imaginary story.

From the children's perspectives Palestine is a multicolored world with a tropical environment. Telling a story from a certain point of view is anchored in the so-called ripple effect of a story (McKee, 1997, p. 118), which means that the storyteller (the children in this case) have a deep relation to their own stories and aim to narrate stories that represent their creative thoughts and feelings. They are aware that the story they narrate represents their thoughts and emotions. For example, the respondents were keen to portray Palestine as a tropical island by using expressive descriptions and associating it with what they most love, despite having talked about the colonization, uprooting, and the terrible situation for the Palestinians. Like Zein, who wants to draw the sun in orange because he loves this color. Also, Sama draws parallels with Beirut– the city where she feels happy. For her, Palestine is as beautiful as Beirut.

Based on Vygotsky's and Gordon's conclusions, imagination is two-pronged; cognitive and emotional and is associated with the conscious and subconscious. Therefore, this innovative process the children produce to tell stories about a place they have never experienced is considered “imagination” not “phantasy”, because they are conscious of the reality of the longstanding conflict and the ongoing occupation. In spite of that, they are determined to produce a multifaceted world that correlates with more psychological procedures than only the emotional one. The children use their perception as well as their sensation to create an imaginative story about Palestine. Thus, their storytelling leans on the intellectual as well as on the emotional process.

From this perspective, stories based on children's imagination form a poetic layer to produce a documentary story from the children's interpretation of reality. Here, the documentary makers' role is to understand and interpret children's descriptions to convert real-based stories and structure a documentary story based on the children's interaction with the real world (corner, 1996, p. 13).

Additionally, the children have expressed that being interviewed in this research study made them feel uncomfortable and a bit nervous, because they had to perform and produce imagination. However, they have accentuated that it is worth tolerating this moment of frustration to produce imagination, because it makes them look forward to the day they will visit Palestine and put this imagination to the test in the real world. Accordingly, imagination makes the imaginative person tolerate today's disturbance in order to experience upcoming satisfaction (Gordon, 1985, p. 11).

### **5.1.2 Diasporic imagination and identity formation**

The interview materials show that the children through storytelling have reflected on their identity and background by releasing thoughts and emotions (Danielson, 2016, p. 79). For example, the five children have described their feelings toward the stories they have created: "I feel warm since I talk about a warm land," "my heart is warm," "very excited . . . would like to see Palestine with own eyes", "feel upset." It implies that the children's imaginative stories provide clues to help them orient their feelings toward their own reality (Gajdamaschko, 2005, p. 21). This orientation has generated a desire to examine the imaginary story of Palestine in reality. For example, two of the children have expressed that they would like to visit Palestine to examine if their imagination corresponds to real Palestine, which demonstrates that the children seek a connection to the outer world to investigate the inner imaginary world they have created (Hustvedt, 2011, pp. 190–191).

In addition to that, the children have repeated this phrase "Palestine is in my blood" which is a descriptive connection to the homeland through blood. It symbolizes the Palestinian blood as a precious article that can't be replaced even if the native people were uprooted and displaced. This metaphorical depiction is considered a culturally established idea based on transmitted stories through generations (Gajdamaschko 2005, p. 16). Using symbols to describe homeland is an action of the re-creation of Palestine in the diaspora, through ancestral memories, where the rebirth of the idea of a homeland is established anew in exile (Mason, 2007, pp. 272–275). Here, the function of the diasporic imagination emerges by creating a homelike imaginative sphere between the homeland and the land. To illustrate, the children have expressed their belonging to Sweden and have described it as the sole home they know. However, they have explained that one cannot be a native Swede or a native Palestinian.

Further, the children's method to shape a story of Palestine goes in a circle of emotions and experiences. This provides them with a connection to their homeland through imaginative

storytelling since it is the only way that the diasporic Palestinian children can form a picture of the homeland. Consequently, storytelling evokes children's imagination and provides a track to illuminate the notion of identity and orient children's thoughts of belonging and background (McKee, 1997, pp. 33–34). For this reason, they have expressed that they like to tell stories about Palestine to companions and younger relatives because they view storytelling as thrilling and inspiring. Also, they narrate about something they are related to.

## **5.2 The role of imagination in documentary film**

This episode deals with how imagination functions as a narrative technique in documentary storytelling, concretized by the methods the documentary filmmaker Mai Masri uses to work with imagination as a narrative technique in documentary films. It intends to answer the third research question of *how documentary makers use memory and imagination as narrative techniques in documentary storytelling*. By this point, it should be noted that even though Masri has not interviewed the same children as the respondents in this thesis, many of the adapted methods of documentary-making have been built on the same core concept, namely, the use of the children's imagination in documentary storytelling.

Imagination is considered an indispensable element in Masri's documentary films. She describes imagination and documentary storytelling as a unity: "there is no cinema without imagination." This creates a parallel view with the definition of documentaries by John Grierson from the 1930s, who proposed that documentary storytelling is a "creative treatment of actuality" (Nichols, 2010, p. 6). Therefore, the development of imagination in children is a method Masri uses to tell documentary stories through their eyes by creating a multi-dimensional framework, where the children spontaneously interact with a certain topic. Considering Vygotsky's theory (2004, pp. 18–20) this method escalates the ability of the children to interact with the surrounding situation; thereafter, it induces imagination based on knowledge and filled with emotions. Masri intends to inspect how the children interact mentally and emotionally with the addressed topic, with the purpose to construct a narrative structure for a documentary story that addresses a historic issue through children's vision and sight. From this perspective, documentaries are about how real people express themselves daily and interact with life events, rather than perform a role (Nichols, 2010, pp. 8–9). Masri states: "Filmmaker who knows the reality look for characters that maybe will speak for you (the filmmaker) or resemble you in somehow or the subject that you (the filmmaker) want to

address”. For this reason, Masri aims to work with children who have considerable experience that enriches their imagination. For instance, the girl Mona in the film *Frontiers of Dreams and Fears* (Masri, 2001) Masri explains:

She (Mona) has a very poetic view of her own life... the way she talks about her own reality ...the way she uses her words are full of imagination...and she uses like metaphors such as birds, butterflies. But when you (the audience) see the image where she was speaking, you see the difficult, really terrible conditions in the camp...

Over and above that, Masri highlights that children’s allegorical and symbolic expressions to depict and reflect on their life are the cornerstone of working with imagination in documentary storytelling. The reason for this is that the poetical representation of reality makes it possible for the public to assimilate crucial events (Birkvad, 2014, p.473). This concludes that focusing on details in every individual story has an effect that addresses huge historical events from children’s perspectives. And the visual depiction arises from the children who mirror their own reality through their own vision and voice (Gajdamaschko, 2005, p. 15).

Therefore, children’s oral thinking and how they interact inspire Masri to create visual stories around these historical events. For instance, in her film *Frontiers of Dreams and Fears* (Masri, 2001), the two unforgettable events that happened simultaneously– the liberation of south Lebanon and the second intifada in 2000 were captured through children’s eyes. According to Masri, the powerful moment in this film was filming on the borders when the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon could go to the borders and meet their relatives for the first time. This indicates that the significance of the story is anchored in the story itself and has developed the ripple effect, where the documentary maker (Masri) shows a deep engagement with the events and reflect on them through creative storytelling (McKee 1997, p. 118).

In light of the aforementioned, Masri explains that there are three layers of reality; the first one is the reality itself, where the story emanates. Secondly, children’s depiction of this reality. The third reality is the cinematic, creative audiovisual reality that is inspired by both the first layer “the reality itself,” and the second layer “children’s imagination” (Corner, 1996, p.15). Thus, the storytelling through imagination is powerfully capable of making changes in reality by affecting the reality itself which illuminates a real-world filled with contrasts (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 22).

Turning to an equally important argument which Masri focuses on is the linkage between memory, imagination, storytelling, and identity. She asserts that children’s imagination (the participants in her documentaries) is derived from the memory of other

people, namely, the stories they have heard from their relatives or through cultural memory among the Palestinian communities. This linkage is based on children's curiosity to seek knowledge about their ancestral land, including the desire to understand the inheritance, like language, food, and other cultural features. Such knowledge provides the diasporic children with new information about their homeland. Consequently, it facilitates the process of identity formation through storytelling (2011, pp. 187–188). With respect to this, documentary storytelling is considered a method for identity formation by highlighting the connection between children's imagination and the elderly's memory (McKee 1997, p. 73). As a case in point, Masri stresses that the essential function of documentary storytelling is actualized by preserving oral and collective memory. It fulfils people's needs to gain knowledge of socio-historical events, visualized through children's imagination. Hence, documentary stories open doors for discussions and arouse public interaction. The purpose is to cherish the future of justice by preserving representative stories of collective memory about individual people who witnessed crucial historical events (Huysen 2011, pp. 620– 622).

### **5.3 Imagination a narrative technique in documentary storytelling**

This section is intended to discuss the research problem of *how imagination functions as a narrative technique in documentary storytelling* established on the empirical data analysis with the Palestinian-Swedish children and the documentary filmmaker Mai Masri. It aims to examine how potential participants use imagination in storytelling and how Masri uses imagination as a narrative technique in her documentary films.

The function of imagination in documentary storytelling is exemplified by the use of meaning making among the respondents. Both Masri and the children use imagination to convert the contrast between imagination and reality in order to produce something new, namely, a new reality (Nichols, 2010, p. 6). For the children respondents, this means to build an imaginary inner world where they thrive. They shift the focus away from the terrible angle of reality and embroider the imaginary story they shape in mind. Similarly, Masri creates a third layer based on reality and the imagination of children (the participants in her films) to shape the new creative reality, “the cinematic reality” (Gajdamaschko, 2005, p. 15). Taking this into account can infer that the stories which the children create through imagination is the raw material that Masri uses to construct documentaries.



Hereby, *children use imagination to narrate stories about Palestine* by re-creating reality and making a new reality that conforms to their own desires. For instance, the children respondents have shaped an imaginary story of Palestine derived from reality, unaffected by the dispossession and the occupation. Their methods were to move into a multidimensional world in order to produce a compelling story of their homeland by expressing their imaginative stories in a metaphorical manner. This assisted them to release thoughts and emotions that reflect their belonging to the story itself. Narrating about Palestine by means of imagination is considered a mediator to direct and signpost children's cogitations about their background (Danielson, 2016, p.79).

Taking this into consideration can explain *how Masri uses imagination as narrative technique* in documentary storytelling. Masri's method is to create a versatile framework to activate children's imagination (the participants in Masri's documentary films). The given framework evokes the emotional and intellectual engagement of the participants with a certain topic that Masri aims to handle through children's eyes. This is the first phase in documentaries, embodied by documenting real action, voices and images through the participants' interactions with their reality (Corner, 1996, p.18). Following this, Masri highlights the importance of focusing on details that characterize how the children voice their opinions and interact in a certain social context, for instance, children's metaphors and how they spontaneously express feelings, opinions, and dreams. In line with this, Nichols (2010) stresses that documentaries aim to portray life situations and events actualized by real people who express their interpretation of these events by presenting themselves as they are (Nichols, 2010, p. 14)

By employing imagination in documentaries, Masri seeks to shed light on historical events and address issues about the Palestinians rights through children's vision and intuitive interpretation of reality (Corner, 1996, p.18). Using imagination in documentary storytelling is an artistic method that represents reality through children's vision. This method raises the public's awareness to understand the reason and consequences of pivotal events on an entire society (Nichols, 2010, p. 10). In other words, through her trilogy *Children of Fire* (Masri, 1990), *Children of Shatila* (Masri, 1998), and *Frontiers of Dreams and Fears* (Masri, 2001), she built a long-lasting relationship with the children she filmed. This mindful relationship progressively transformed into a friendship, relying on trust on common beliefs and feelings. This bond is considered the foundation of documentary storytelling since it orientates the documentary maker's and children's intellectual and emotional engagement to a mutual purpose (Nash, 2012, p. 323). Therefore, it is deduced that employing imagination in documentary storytelling has a far-reaching scope and more powerful authority to influence

and amend life situations than, merely, to artistically present historical and political events and information (Nichols, 2010, p. 14). Masri and the children take advantage of possible thinking; the ability to create a new reality corresponds with them, with their desires and calculations (Egan & Judson, 2009, p. 127). They intentionally choose to embody the stories of Palestine through a positive point of view using metaphorical descriptions. This creative processing of reality and converting reality-based stories into documentaries is the core function of documentary storytelling (Nichols, 2010, p. 6).

This viewpoint designates that the function of diasporic imagination is concretized when children develop an imaginative inner realm by creating a homelike compass between the homeland and the land they dwell in (Mason, 2007, p. 274–275). On the basis of this, storytelling provides this imagination with an active voice and orients the narrator's connection to her/his background (Danielson, 2016, pp.78–79). In this vein, Masri has asserted that imaginative narration is the only means the diasporic Palestinians possess to visualize the homeland. She recounted that her first visit to Palestine left a strong impression on her, her identity as a filmmaker, and as a Palestinian, and expressed “the idea of Palestine was merely a theoretical image, not the reality ... But when I came back, I discovered another thing... I felt that I belong.” Similarly, the interviewed children have expressed their desire to visit Palestine someday to examine these imaginary stories they produced in reality.

## **5.4 Storytelling through the elderly's memories**

The purpose of this section is to explore how the elderly respondents narrate childhood stories from their time in Palestine through memory. It purposes to answer the thesis second question of *how the Palestinian elderly* narrate childhood stories of Palestine through memory. The empirical data analysis is based on McKee's (1997) concepts of storytelling, and previous research studies such as individual and collective memory by Astrid Erll (2008), Erika Apfelbaum (2010), Aleida Assmann (2006) but also Siri Hustvedt's essay (2011).

### **5.4.1 Storytelling: A re-creating process through memory**

The research results demonstrate that elderly respondents rely upon generating fragments of childhood reminiscences and re-create them to stories about Palestine. This recollection process is narrative and aims to re-create and shape a new story derived from past experiences (McKee 1997, p. 73). It starts with orienting the process of recollection by identifying the recalled memory fragments before generating them into stories. For instance, Matar and Jawad

orientate their memories from childhood in the tobacco field at the first stage. Thereafter, they place the remaining fragments of memory from their childhood in Palestine in that place “the tobacco fields”. In order to narrate their memories from the tobacco field they assembled all the fragments related to that time and place and structure a story grounded in childhood memories from the tobacco fields in Palestine (Hustvedt, 2011, p. 187–188).

Additionally, the respondents’ re-creation of childhood memories to stories is shaped by metaphors and symbolic descriptions such as, “olive leaf like an umbrella,” “the aroma of home,” “Palestine is my compass”, and Adam who describes the marks that the streets of Safad had left on his feet until today. It is a symbolic description of Adam’s bond to his hometown Safad. The recollection corresponds to the respondents’ experienced reality from the time and place where the narrative occurred (Hustvedt, 2011, pp. 190–191).

This indicates that they narrate details of their personal experiences and express their emotional link to Palestine through metaphors. These details have a powerful role in documentaries since they make every individual story unique and impact the receiver of these stories (Birkvad, 2014, p.473). Regarding this, the Palestinian elderly recall details, such as tastes, fragrances, and feelings related to the recalled past, for example, the taste of fig fruits and goosebumps in summer nights. Their depiction of childhood memories is related to emotional sensations and is often associated with closeness to nature (Baddeley, 2017, p 171).

Thereafter, the empirical materials show that the elderly respondents need help to re-create stories from past life situations because memories do not arise by themselves (Erl, 2008 p. 5). For instance, Jawad likens the function of memory to a computer that switches on by a keyword, and that a certain piece of memory could bring him back to the recollected moment. Then, it becomes unmanageable to stop the recollection process from accessing the complete story (Baddeley, 2017, pp.159–161). This expounds how the elderly’s stream of consciousness assist them in remembering stories from past experiences. Consequently, some memory details are clearer than others depending on the importance of the recalled memory fragments to the respondent. In other words, the elderly Palestinians intuitively highlight exclusive memory fragments to place them in stories. These stories mirror the elderly's connection to the recalled Place and time with all the emotions that arise through the narration. These differences in preferred memory fragments awaken different emotions such as contentment and sorrow and establish the values of the stories (McKee, 1997, pp. 33–34).

Another point to discuss is that childhood memories demonstrate the common relation between the respondent’s individual memory to collective memory. This denotes that individual memories of the respondents are generated with a relationship to a broader social

context, namely, social community, family members, and friends (Erll, 2008, pp. 4–5). To exemplify, Adam describes memories of scouter music where friends gathered to enjoy and play. Jawad’s beloved memory was a fishing trip with family members, and Matar’s unforgettable childhood moment was spending summer days in the harvest field with family and companions.

Also, Jawad and Matar depict the connection to the tobacco field and fig trees given that they were born in the same city, Safad. The connection to tobacco fields and fig trees shapes the collective memory because it is attached to shared thoughts, as well as shared spatial and temporal spheres (Apfelbaum, 2010, pp. 85–86). Nevertheless, each of the respondents has personal reminiscences of Safad and tobacco fields. Jawad and Matar rebuild different stories of the same place based on different memory fragments, which identify the individual memory and how these fragments recreate a story that shapes their identity. This linkage is affected by their consideration and evaluation of their own relation to the homeland and their own identity (Assmann, 2006, pp. 212–215).

#### **5.4.2 Diasporic memory and preserving identity**

Both the elderly and the children respondents in this research have depicted their relation to nature, especially the connection to the soil. In this regard, it can be concluded that soil is the basic element of stories about Palestine, which embodies the Palestinian identity in the diaspora. This narrative element has been transmitted through generations. Through the soil, the respondents create a bond with Palestine and root themselves in their homeland. What explains and nourishes this connection is that the deprivation of this missing piece is what is most desired. Hence, soil as a narrative element defines the so-called collective memory.

Therefore, understanding the respondents’ individual descriptions of soil in the narrative of Palestine results in understanding why soil is a symbol of the connection with the homeland among the diasporic Palestinians. In other words, the awareness of individual memory leads to the understanding of collective memory and collective identity (Assmann, 2011, p. 223). Thus, documentaries can illuminate the collective memory of societies through individual stories of real people who experienced the changing of the historical world (Nichols, 2010, p. 14).

Nevertheless, the stability of collective memory and togetherness is damaged due to displacement and altered in the diasporic memory (Huysen, 2011, p. 615). For this reason, Jawad views that passing down stories of Palestine is painful, and he does not want his

grandchildren to deal with this heartbreak. Despite this, he still tells stories when grandchildren themselves ask for that. The respondents emphasize that through storytelling, the memories of Palestine have been saved from being relegated to forgetfulness. It means that they can handle the feeling of deprivation by transmitting homeland stories (Huysen, 2011, p. 618). In this case, the respondents' storytelling makes it evident that memories stem from their feelings of being deprived of their own land, which indicates their need for storytelling to fulfil the feeling of belonging (Apfelbaum, 2010, pp. 85–86).

In addition, diasporic storytelling goes beyond the concept of family stories, since these stories have cultural background and have been transmitted through generations. This is concretized by Adam who points that memories from Palestine are an endless dialogue and the desire to visit remains in ordinary conversation (Olmedo, 1999, p. 364). The elderly mention that they have inherited homeland stories from their relatives. It shows that communicating through storytelling among the Palestinians has been a profound legacy for many decades. Hence, the collective memory derived from the foregoing Palestinian generations is the source of how future generations in the Palestinian diaspora form their identity and build a relationship to the homeland (Mason, 2007, p. 272).

With this in mind, the elderly Palestinians are mindful of their experienced trauma of uprooting. Thus, they wrestle with protecting future generations from being disappointed and grapple with the importance of passing on stories to safeguard the right to preserve their own roots. They use memory as a foundation to re-create Palestine and the idea of a homeland in exile and transmit stories of Palestine to future generations in order to maintain the right to remain (Huysen, 2011, p. 617).

## **5.5 The role of memory in documentary podcast**

This section examines how memory functions as a narrative technique in documentary podcast exemplified by the methods the journalist Bernt Hermele uses to deal with memory as a narrative technique in his documentary podcast. It concentrates on the third thesis question about *how documentary makers use imagination and memory as narrative techniques in documentary storytelling*.

Hermele considers that storytelling provides the elderly, who have undergone unpleasant experiences, a platform to release their memories, and indicates that individual memory is used to shed light on major historical and political events. Accordingly, documentary storytelling

creates a bridge between the past and the future by understanding individual memory (Huyssen 2011, p. 622). Documentary storytelling creates an occasion that provides those who have socio-historical memories an active voice to recall crucial issues and serve the future by revealing the cover of the past (Assmann, 2006, p. 211).

Based on this, Hermele's method to structure a documentary story through memory consists of exposing ignored details of the elderly's past experiences. For example, he brings to focus details about how the life for Palestinians was during Al-Nakba, what they did to survive the war in 1948, and how they did find sleeping accommodation and nutritious substances. Through this narrative method by representing memory details Hermele aims to create an emotional link between the participants' stories in his documentary podcast and the public (Danielson, 2016, p.78). This shows that describing details related to the human fundamental conditions and needs are essential narrative elements in documentary storytelling.

McKee (1997, p. 113) and Bernard (2011, p.15) concur that documentary storytelling aims to give raise to socio-historical issues that lead people to believe and feel in the story, by describing details not overall facts. Paying particular attention to details signifies that Hermele observes and assesses these details to illuminate the broader aspect of the individual story, namely, the collective aspects. This defines the so-called individual memory, which forms one's identity. In other words, how the participants' stories of surviving Al-Nakba are designed and expressed, have an impact on their identity formation (Assmann, 2006, pp. 212–213). Given this, the purpose of documentary storytelling is to share stories in order to maintain inherited narratives of social backgrounds that have been affected through migration (Olmedo, 1999, p. 364).

Considering that, Hermele doesn't view his job as creative because he does not edit or reconstruct participants' post-production stories. He describes his work as an oral storyteller who documents oral stories through individual voices that together form a collective history. He doesn't reconstruct the elderly's stories through a creative editing process. Instead, he establishes it in the first phase in documentary storytelling by recording raw stories and publishing them as they are (Corner, 1996, s.18). Therefore, he creates an informal conversation space based on mutual trust and helps the participants connect to their memory fields through descriptive questions, like depicting dreams and desires (Nash, 2012, p. 325). This provides access to the elderly's stream of consciousness, where they fluently convert memory fragments filled with thoughts and emotions into harmonized personal stories that represent personal experiences (Hustvedt, 2011, p.188).

By relying on these individual stories through shared memories, Hermele structures documentary stories, with memory being the primary layer to shape them. The process of assembling memory fragments into stories defines memory function in documentary storytelling (McKee, 1997, p. 73). Hermele exemplifies that the re-creation of memories into new stories can result in a new insight from terrible experiences.

## **5.6 Memory: A narrative technique in documentary storytelling**

The purpose of this part is to discuss *how memory functions as a narrative technique in documentary storytelling* in view of the empirical data analysis with the Palestinian elderly respondents and the journalist Bernt Hermele. It intends to investigate how the potential participants use memory, and how Hermele works with memory as a narrative technique in his documentary podcast.

The conducted analysis demonstrates that Hermele and the elderly respondents pay particular attention to recounting details, such as describing sensations that personalize individual experiences. The elderly respondents re-create memory fragments to narrate reality-based stories of Palestine. These stories are the basis that Hermele depends on to structure documentary stories (Nash, 2012, p. 323). According to the above mentioned, it is clear that the Palestinian elderly narrate childhood stories of Palestine through memory by searching for favorite fragments in their memory fields, where all the reminiscences of childhood years in Palestine are located. They have intuitively chosen which memory fragments they wanted to recall and convert to a story, based on their desires; for instance, a tobacco field, Safad streets, fig trees and soil (Hustvedt, 2011, p.187). By means of these elements they have created stories of Palestine by gathering various memory fragments from different events and places in childhood (McKee, 1997, pp. 33–34). The elderly respondents have used metaphors and symbolic descriptions to depict their stories and using these, they have expressed sensations and thoughts towards their personal experiences (Hustvedt, 2011, p.188). These poetic descriptions help documentary storytelling creator to produce authentic stories and make the public sympathize with significant stories (Birkvad, 2014, p. 473).

Taking this into account can explain that Hermele uses memory as narrative technique in documentary storytelling to reveal pivotal issues in human history; for instance, stories of the displacement of the first-generation Palestinian in 1948, since the overall intention of documentaries is to raise social questions in order to bring about changes in societies (Corner, 1996, s.15). Through memories of the Palestinian elderly (the participants in his documentary

podcast), Hermele structures documentary stories that describe how the Palestinians lived during the war years and the mass immigration, by narrating details that characterize individual experiences. Through these details of every shared story, Hermele provides insight into the Palestinian collective memory from Al-Nakba (Nichols, 2010, p. 10). The only device that Hermele uses to activate memory is to let the memory stream spontaneously by asking descriptive questions about reminiscences, dreams, desires, and longing, without following a determined temporal direction.

By using Hermele's techniques, the elderly respondents construct stories of Palestine by re-creating past experiences and putting memory fragments from the childhood years in Palestine in a new storytelling context. They convert memories into stories for the present time. However, the elderly's memories don't arise by themselves and need to be triggered by external stimulants from the surrounding world, such as a conversation about old days (Apfelbaum, 2010, pp. 85–86). In this vein, Hermele draws attention that the recollection is challenging for the elderly participants in his documentary podcast, but social communication evokes memories and contributes to structure stories from the elderly's past experiences (Erll, 2008, p.4). For example, the elderly respondents express that telling Palestine stories during the research interview has awakened their childhood memories. Once they access a memory fragment, then they could not stop generating other fragments, which is, in Hermele's opinion, defined as a stream of consciousness. He takes advantage of this chain of thoughts and free association because it contains details described by a flow of the thoughts and emotions towards the narrated stories. For this reason, the stream of consciousness doesn't contradict with the elderly's choice of memory highlights because the selective process is intuitively based on personal inclinations.

Furthermore, the elderly's storytelling about Palestine is most often associated with the soil. Not only that, but even Hermele points that the Palestinian elderly whom he has interviewed in his podcast express this "incomprehensible" connection to the soil. This concludes that the relation to the soil is a central narrative element that describes the meaning of the collective memory among the diasporic Palestinians. Soil is deemed a significant narrative part of the diasporic memory about homeland stories and considered essential in establishing the collective identity of the Palestinians in the diaspora. To exemplify, the soil is regarded as a metaphoric symbol that anchored the Palestinians who were dispossessed in their roots. However, each of the elderly respondents describes the relation to the homeland differently, and these individual descriptions characterize their identity (Danielson, 2016, pp.78–79).



In the opinion of the elderly respondents, the identity is nourished by a constant hunger for education and a robust connection to the soil and exemplified through oral storytelling and the passing on of Palestine stories.

Another issue to highlight is that the diasporic memory among the elderly respondents is inherited from their ancestral memories. Therefore, storytelling is implanted in the Palestinian culture, and passing on stories of Palestine exists in daily life conversations, even if some of the elderly do not purposely tell stories of Palestine to future generations. Hermele stresses that memory significantly contributes to identity formation, and the roots remain strong by employing remembrance and storytelling. Hence, the pivotal responsibility of documentary storytelling is to document individual voices that have historical echoes, where the individual voices convey the political message.

## **6. Conclusion**

This thesis is meant to examine the role of imagination and memory as narrative vehicles in documentary storytelling. I have also devoted special attention to surveying the connection between storytelling and identity formation. Through qualitative interviews, the applied research design has studied how potential participants who could participate in documentaries use imagination and memory to narrate stories about their homeland, exemplified by how the diasporic Palestinian-Swedish children use imagination and how the elderly Palestinians use memory to describe Palestine. Additionally, the methods that professional documentary makers use to structure documentary stories through imagination and memory, concretized by the filmmaker Mai Masri and the journalist Bernt Hermele have been scrutinized. The empirical data analyses were based on the theoretical framework of documentary storytelling, its definition, as well as the connection between imagination and memory as narrative techniques. I have also focused on the imagination concept, specifically, the process of imagination as a conscious and subconscious procedure and its association with reality. A profound understanding of individual and collective memory and its function as a narrative technique in documentary storytelling has been established in this research as well.

Based on the respondents' stories, I argue that children's imagination and the elderly's memories are two different storytelling processes about Palestine. Even though the respondents' narratives have some resemblances and that children's imagination in great measure relies on other people's memories to structure an imaginary story about their homeland. In light of this, I deduce that the Palestinian-Swedish children narrate stories of

Palestine through imagination by creating a new narrative, namely, an “imaginary Palestine” based on assembling other people’s memories, as well as their own experiences. The children don’t re-create homeland stories as the elderly respondents do, because they have not directly experienced Palestine.

Hence, imagination is regarded as the children’s mediator to visualize and shape stories of Palestine characterized by their thoughts and emotions and expressed by using metaphors, to interpret the contradictions between their inner imaginative world and reality. Imagination raises children’s awareness of reality and drives them to convert terrible situations into something better, through meaning-making and aware optimism. Therefore, children’s imaginative stories form the layer that serves documentary makers to conceptualize and restructure reality in a poetic manner. Using imagination inspired by real people’s interpretation of their own reality, has a far-reaching range to influence the public’s engagement with major events, and situations in documentary storytelling.

Another point to deduce is that *the Palestinian elderly narrate childhood stories of Palestine through memory* by re-creating childhood memories of their homeland and converting them into stories based on direct experience of Palestine. The elderly Palestinians have the source of the story, their own memories from the time in Palestine, connected with a chain of their relatives’ memories. Although the elderly Palestinians make an intuitive choice of what to recall and what to transform into stories, the memories are formed to stories in a stream of consciousness style. Similar to the children’s stories, the elderly’s memory-based stories are represented from the brighter side of reality. They make meaning of old days and construct stories, by adapting positive memories and representing them in a new narrative context.

With this regard, I can conclude that memory is the foundation of storytelling, whether it stems from individual direct experience or is passed on by other people’s memories, namely, the collective memory. Accordingly, storytelling provides the diasporic Palestinians' memory in Sweden an active voice to re-create memories into stories and speak about significant situations in the historical world. These memory-based stories are the absolute first layer which documentaries rely on to deal with pivotal socio-historical issues. Memory as a narrative technique in documentary storytelling is an essential testimony and documentation of major events in the human life history.

In my opinion, the storytelling reinforces the respondents’ connections to their homeland because it activates the diasporic memory that recalls homeland reminiscences. Also, it triggers the diasporic imagination, which visualizes a homelike home in the diaspora. It

demonstrates the linkage between storytelling through imagination and memory to identity formation and clarifies why homeland stories in exile are imperishable, not bound by either time or space. Concisely, sharing stories and listening to other stories fulfil the behavior of social communication and make people become conscious of their own identity.

Furthermore, the research finds that *documentary makers use imagination and memory as narrative techniques in documentary storytelling* to shed light on major socio-historical and political issues by focusing on details of imagination and memory from individual stories. These details have great authority in documentary storytelling and give insight into people's individual experiences. Imagination and memory in documentary storytelling function as mediators to conceptualize historical events, where the political message is transmitted through individual voices. Another matter to pinpoint is that the source of imagination and memory is identical for Masri and Hermele, engrained in dreams, yearning, and wishes.

However, I have come to the conclusion that imagination and memory as narrative techniques are used differently since they are employed in diverse documentary platforms, namely, documentary film and documentary podcast. Imagination in documentary films contributes to portraying reality in a poetic matter through children's vision. It is implemented through the shooting and editing processes, where documentary makers create a visual story inspired by the participants' expressions and their perception of their reality. Throughout the editing phase, which is a creative process as well, all these elements are collected to structure a documentary story that is defined as a creative processing of the real-world. In other words, imagination as a narrative technique exists in the entire documentary process, where the participants' intuitive expression of themselves and the surrounding reality are the basis of the process.

On the other hand, memory in Hermele's documentary podcast is used to establish the foundation of storytelling and create an emotional link with the listener, by sharing real life stories purely as they are, where no creative processing of reality occurs. Hermele does not implement artistic editing work. He provides the elderly Palestinians who experienced Al-Nakba in 1948 a platform to share their stories in the documentary podcast, by recording the elderly's seemingly unedited stories in order to represent their inner states about themselves and their experiences from the historical world events; namely, the stream of consciousness technique. It should be pointed out that this cannot be generalized because other documentary podcasts might implement an editing process and create a story atmosphere by using music or other audio effects.

Indicated from the presented research data, I argue that the mainstay of documentary storytelling is established by the collaboration between memory, which holds life events, and

imagination, which arranges, assembles and converts reality into creative documentary stories. This is *how imagination and memory function as narrative techniques in documentary storytelling*; they are two different phases that perform their functions in documentary storytelling by preserving and remaking real stories into documentary stories. Through imagination and memory, the children and elderly respondents have shaped narratives about Palestine, which creates a form of storytelling. These narratives created by potential participants are the basis stories that documentary makers can adapt to make documentaries. Based on this, the documentary makers' role is to convert reality that is interpreted by participants' involvement and perspectives of their lives into documentaries. Therefore, I conclude that imagination and memory as narrative techniques are used to visualize and conceptualize real stories creatively, to provide the public a direct experience of the historical world, its changes, and consequences. This alludes to the power of documentary storytelling.

Drawing from of the discussion above to expound *the linkage between storytelling and identity formation*, I found that sharing narratives about Palestine made the respondents reflect on their identity and evaluate the stories they narrate. For instance, they were keen to picture Palestine as a compass and a safe home, by using metaphors related to nature; especially the description of soil which was a fundamental narrative element in the stories among all respondents. Storytelling has provided the respondents with an opportunity to release their thoughts and sensations about their homeland, and thereby, orienting themselves to their home base. In closing, I assert that documentary storytelling and identity formation are associated with how the documentary makers treat reality stories, considering that the ultimate documentary product reflects an image of the documentary maker's background and identity. Finally, this thesis has been limited to study the use of imagination and memory among diasporic Palestinians in Sweden, and how professional documentary makers' employ imagination and memory in documentaries. Therefore, I contend that it is essential for future research to apply theoretical approaches to analyze documentaries that use imagination and memory as narrative techniques and compare the function of these narrative methods in different documentary platforms; film, and radio documentaries.

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## Filmography

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- Masri, M. (Director). (1998). *Children of Shatila* [Film]. Nour Productions
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## Audio podcast

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## **Appendix**

### **Appendix A – Interview guides**

#### **Children**

1. Do you know which city or village in Palestine you come from? How did you know that?
2. How do you imagine this Place?
3. How would you draw Palestine as a canvas painting?
4. Where these images about Palestine come from?
5. How would you describe Palestine as a bedtime story for a younger child?
6. What do you feel when you talk about Palestine? Why do you feel so?
7. What does it mean to be Palestinian, do you think? How can a person become Palestinian?
8. How would you describe the word homeland?
9. What does that mean to you?

#### **Mai Masri**

1. Do you remember once you filmed a child that left a strong impression on you?
2. Can you describe what happened? Where were you? Describe the place, the conversation with the child?
3. What kind of conversation do you have with children when you follow them with the camera?
4. 4. What is your process of casting children to a documentary film" Do you look for specific criteria, such as a creative writing capacity or drawing..?
5. How do you think the imagination in children you had filmed is related to their identity?
6. what does "imagination" mean according to you? Give me an example.
7. How do you work with imagination in your documentaries?
8. Do you think there is a relationship between children's imagination and the stories they heard from their ancestors?
9. What are you looking for in children's imagination?



## **Elderly**

1. Where are you born?
2. Do you remember a story from that place, something remarkable happened?
3. Describe what happened!
4. What did you do? How did you feel about it?
5. How do you think other elderly Palestinians remember Palestine before 1948?
6. How do you remember Palestine? Describe your life there
7. How can you remember? What helps you to keep the memories alive?
8. Have you told stories about Palestine to your grandchildren?
9. Which story have you told the most? Why that particular part?
10. How do you think the Swedish Palestinian children imagine Palestine?
11. Do you think other Palestinian elderly still tell stories about Palestine until now? Why do you think so?

## **Bernt Hermele**

1. Can you tell me about an interview you did with an elderly person from the Nakba podcast that left a strong impression on you? Can you give me more details? How did you react?
2. Do you remember a problematic interview where an elderly person did not interact with you? What happened? What did you do? Which methods did you use to bring the person back to a memory trace from a specific area and time?
3. Can you give me more examples of similar situations?
4. Which methods do you use to get the elderly to recollect their life stories?
5. How do you think about how people handle their memories?
6. what does "memory" mean according to you? Give me an example.
7. How do you work with memories in your documentaries?
8. Do you think there is a relationship between memory and imagination in the elderly?
9. what are you looking for in the elderly's memories?

## **Appendix B – Consent Agreement**

### **Documentary Makers and Elderly**

Are you interested in taking part in the research project  
*"Soil- A Homeland Story in The Palestinian Diaspora"*

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to *examine the use of memory and imagination as a narrative technique in documentary production*. In this letter, we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

#### **Purpose of the project**

This thesis examines the use of memory and imagination as narrative techniques in documentary storytelling. Where the major foci of the study are to discuss how Palestinian elderlies and Palestinian children who live in Sweden depict their homeland Palestine through imagination and memories, besides, how documentary creators shape these fragmentary pieces which are produced by memory and imagination into a story from sound and image.

#### **Who is responsible for the research project?**

University of Stavanger is the institution responsible for the project.

#### **Why are you being asked to participate?**

You are asked to participate because you have knowledge and experience of the questions the project investigates.

#### **What does participation involve for you?**

If you choose to participate, it means an interview of 1 hour. The interview is recorded, encrypted, transcribed and processed in accordance with the University of Stavanger's guidelines for privacy in connection with student assignments. I will collect information about the participant from other sources – such as TV-interviews, records/journals, educational records... etc. I will use direct quotations and statements from the interview in the master's thesis. Your name will be identified.

#### **Participation is voluntary**

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made

anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

We will only use the information about you for the purposes we have described in this letter.

We treat the information confidentially and in accordance with the privacy regulations.

- Access to the interview material will be limited to Lama Alshehaby, supervisor Turid Borgen and project manager Terje Hillesund.
- Audio recordings and transcribed interviews will be stored in encrypted areas on own hard drive. Information about you such as your name and occupation will be recognizable in publications.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The project is scheduled to end on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2020. Audio recordings and transcribed interviews will be deleted at the end of the project in February / March 2021 (after the evaluation process has ended).

### **Your rights**

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

access the personal data that is being processed about you

request that your personal data is deleted

request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified

receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and

send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with University of Stavanger, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

### Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the study or want to exercise your rights, please contact:

- University of Stavanger by Professor Terje Hillesund, [terje.hillesund@uis.no](mailto:terje.hillesund@uis.no) (tel. +47 51831641)
- Our privacy representative: Rolf Jegervatn, [rolf.jegervatn@uis.no](mailto:rolf.jegervatn@uis.no), (tel: +47 51833081)
- NSD - Norwegian Center for Research Data AS, by email ([personverntjenester@nsd.no](mailto:personverntjenester@nsd.no)) or telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,

Project Leader

Student

Terje Hillesund  
(Professor)

Lama Alshehaby

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-----  
I have received and understood information about the project *Palestine in ancestor's memories and children's imagination* and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

to participate in an interview

for information about me/myself to be published in a way that I can be recognized

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx.  
February / March 2021

-----  
(Signed by participant, date)

### Children

Are you interested in taking part in the research project?

***"Soil- A Homeland Story in The Palestinian Diaspora"***

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to examine *the use of memory and imagination as a narrative technique in documentary production.*

In this letter, we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

#### **Purpose of the project**

This thesis examines the use of memory and imagination as narrative techniques in documentary storytelling. Where the major foci of the study are to discuss how Palestinian elderlies and Palestinian children who live in Sweden depict their homeland Palestine through imagination and memories, besides, how documentary creators shape these fragmentary pieces which are produced by memory and imagination into a story from sound and image.

#### **Who is responsible for the research project?**

University of Stavanger is the institution responsible for the project.

#### **Why are you being asked to participate?**

You are asked to participate because you have knowledge and experience of the questions the project investigates.

#### **What does participation involve for your child?**

If your child chose to take part in the project, this will involve that the child will answer questions. It will take approx. 45 minutes. The interview won't be recorded, but I will take notes.

I will use direct quotations and statements from the interview in the master's thesis.

#### **Participation is voluntary**

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be **made** anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

#### **Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data**

We will only use the information about you for the purposes we have described in this letter. We treat the information confidentially and in accordance with the privacy regulations.

- Access to the interview material will be limited to Lama Alshehaby, supervisor Turid Borgen and project manager Terje Hillesund.
- Audio recordings and transcribed interviews will be stored in encrypted areas on own hard drive.

- I will replace your child name and contact details with a code. The list of names contact details and respective codes will be stored separately from the rest of the collected data.

### **What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?**

The project is scheduled to end on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2020. Audio recordings and transcribed interviews will be deleted at the end of the project in February / March 2021 (after the evaluation process has ended).

### **Your rights**

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
  - request that your personal data is deleted
  - request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
  - receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

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- Our privacy representative: Rolf Jegervatn, [rolf.jegervatn@uis.no](mailto:rolf.jegervatn@uis.no), (tel: +47 51833081)
- NSD - Norwegian Center for Research Data AS, by email ([personverntjenester@nsd.no](mailto:personverntjenester@nsd.no)) or telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,

Project Leader

Terje Hillesund

Student

Lama Alshehaby

(Professor)

-----

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I have received and understood information about the project *Palestine in ancestor's memories and children's imagination* and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

- to participate in an interview
- for information about me/myself to be published in a way that I can be recognized

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. February / March 2021

(Signed by participant, date)

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## Consent Agreement, Arabic version

### Elderly

هل أنت مهتم بالمشاركة في مشروع البحث *تراب قصة وطن في الشتات الفلسطيني*

هذا استفسار حول المشاركة في مشروع بحثي حيث الهدف الرئيسي هو دراسة كيفية استخدام الذاكرة والخيال كأسلوب سردي في الإنتاج الوثائقي

في هذه الرسالة، سنقدم لك معلومات حول الغرض من المشروع وما ستشمله مشاركتك.

#### الغرض من المشروع

تتناول هذه الأطروحة كيفية استخدام الذاكرة والخيال كتقنيات سردية في رواية القصص الوثائقية. حيث تكمن المحاور الرئيسية للدراسة في مناقشة كيف يصور كبار السن والأطفال الفلسطينيين الذين يعيشون في السويد وطنهم فلسطين من خلال الخيال والذكريات. إلى جانب ذلك، كيف يصوغ صانعي الأفلام الوثائقية هذه القطع المتناثرة من الذاكرة والخيال إلى قصص إبداعية من صوت وصورة.

#### من المسؤول عن مشروع البحث؟

جامعة ستافنجر في النرويج هي المؤسسة المسؤولة عن المشروع.

#### لماذا يطلب منك المشاركة؟

يُطلب منك المشاركة لأن لديك معرفة وخبرة بالأسئلة التي يبحث فيها المشروع.

## ماذا تعني المشاركة بالنسبة لك؟

إذا اخترت المشاركة، فهذا يعني مقابلة مدتها ساعة واحدة. يتم تسجيل المقابلة وتشفيرها ونسخها ومعالجتها وفقاً لإرشادات جامعة ستافانجر للخصوصية فيما يتعلق بمهام الطلاب. سأستخدم الاقتباسات والبيانات المباشرة من المقابلة في أطروحة الماجستير. سيتم تبديل اسمك إلى اسم مستعار في الأطروحة.

## المشاركة طوعية

المشاركة في المشروع طوعية. إذا اخترت المشاركة، يمكنك سحب موافقتك في أي وقت دون إبداء الأسباب. سيتم بعد ذلك جعل جميع المعلومات المتعلقة بك مجهولة. لن تكون هناك عواقب سلبية بالنسبة لك إذا اخترت عدم المشاركة أو قررت الانسحاب لاحقاً.

## خصوصيتك الشخصية - كيف سنخزن بياناتك الشخصية ونستخدمها

سنستخدم المعلومات الخاصة بك فقط للأغراض التي وصفناها في هذه الرسالة. نتعامل مع المعلومات بسرية ووفقاً للوائح الخصوصية.

سيقتصر الوصول إلى مواد المقابلة على لى الشهابي والمشرّف توريد بورغن ومدير المشروع تيرجي هيلسوند سيتم تخزين التسجيلات الصوتية والمقابلات المكتوبة في مناطق مشفرة على القرص الصلب الخاص بالباحثة لى الشهابي.

## ماذا سيحدث لبياناتك الشخصية في نهاية مشروع البحث؟

من المقرر أن ينتهي المشروع في 15 كانون الأول 2020. سيتم حذف التسجيلات الصوتية والمقابلات المكتوبة في نهاية المشروع في شباط/ آذار 2021 (بعد انتهاء عملية التقييم)

## حقوقك

طالما أنه يمكن التعرف عليك في البيانات التي تم جمعها، يحق لك.

الوصول إلى البيانات الشخصية التي تتم معالجتها عنك

طلب حذف بياناتك الشخصية

طلب تصحيح / تصحيح بياناتك الشخصية غير الصحيحة

تلقي نسخة من بياناتك الشخصية (قابلية نقل البيانات)، وإرسال شكوى إلى مسؤول حماية البيانات أو هيئة حماية البيانات النرويجية بخصوص معالجة بياناتك الشخصية.

## ما الذي يمنحنا الحق في معالجة بياناتك الشخصية؟

سنعالج بياناتك الشخصية بناءً على موافقتك



بتقييم أن معالجة البيانات AS قام المركز النرويجي لبيانات البحث - NSD بناءً على اتفاقية مع جامعة ستافنجر، الشخصية في هذا المشروع تتوافق مع تشريعات حماية البيانات.

أين يمكنني معرفة المزيد؟

إذا كانت لديك أسئلة حول الدراسة أو تريد ممارسة حقوقك، فيرجى الاتصال بـ:

جامعة ستافنجر للبروفيسور تيري هيلسوند (هاتف +47 51831641) [terje.hillesund@uis.no](mailto:terje.hillesund@uis.no)

ممثل الخصوصية لدينا Rolf Jegervatn (هاتف: +47 51833081) [rolf.jegervatn@uis.no](mailto:rolf.jegervatn@uis.no)

• أو (personverntjenester@nsd.no) ، عبر البريد الإلكتروني AS المركز النرويجي لبيانات البحث - NSD

.الهاتف: +47 58 55 17 21

تفضلوا بقبول فائق الاحترام،

الباحثة

لمى الشهابي

قائد المشروع: البروفيسور

Terje Hillesund

نموذج الموافقة

لقد تلقيت وفهمت معلومات حول مشروع فلسطين في ذكريات الأجداد وخيال الأطفال وأتحت لي الفرصة لطرح الأسئلة.

أوافق على

..... للمشاركة في مقابلة

..... نشر معلومات عني بطريقة يمكن التعرف عليها

أوافق على معالجة بياناتي الشخصية حتى تاريخ انتهاء المشروع، تقريبًا شباط/آذار 2021

(توقيع المشارك، التاريخ)