

Teaching Partition in Haifa

■
Ayelet Ben-Yishai

The excerpts below were taken from Ayelet Ben-Yishai's essay 'On the Practice, Pedagogy, and Politics of the Israel–India Comparative Project,' published in: "India / Israel," **Theory and Criticism** 44, Summer 2015, Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and Kibbutz Meuhad.

discourses that emerge from their works and prescribe the division of the exhibition space: **Politics of Division** and **Realms of the Archive**. **Politics of Division** consists of works that examine the physical borders between the states and the political, economic, and ideological systems that they serve and that serve them. The artists wish to examine the military and civilian infrastructures set in place around the border and offer a personal and artistic interpretation for them. They obscure and draw the borders, wishing to look at them as a real and physical object, and at the same time as a non-place – a fictitious system of man-made lines that relies on constant reiteration and reconstruction in order to continue to exist.

The artists who engage with the **Realms of the Archive** strive to push the boundaries of the national narrative beyond the familiar and common stories and events, and allow room for images and details that were left out of the canonical narrative as well as for those that linger between the two worlds. If the archive is a powerful tool that preserves and classifies texts, places, people, artifacts, and myths, then its boundaries are the locus of a constant negotiation as to which narratives and types of knowledge will be immortalized, and which will find their way to oblivion over time. The artistic creation in this realm wishes to give place to narratives, figures, and objects that often appear as though they are doomed to be forgotten, in the belief that they can tell a different, more complex and enriching story about society and the place at its center. This practice also holds the understanding, whether explicit or implied, that the very act of engaging with those figures and objects undermines the hierarchies of knowledge production and preservation.

What might the viewing experience of the exhibition, particularly of the works that touch on the issues of the partition and the complex reality in India and Pakistan, hold in store for those who view it from the political reality of the Middle East? Can

traumatic aspects of exile, separation, conflict, deliberate suppression of memory, and a strict borders policy, gain added or different meaning when they are experienced through the prism of a distant and detached reality? Is it possible that, like the encounters in a foreign country and a foreign language, these works could shed a new light on a fraught and at times desperate relationship? What could the encounter that they summon teach us about the mechanisms underlying the suppression of some narratives and the formation of others, and how can we recast our roles in them?

While the formation of a national narrative is essentially an act of delineating and focusing, a shift from the outside inside and from plurality to singularity, at the basis of this exhibition stands the attempt to provide a new modality for reading and writing these narratives. This model seeks to examine history from a multi centric perspective, through a process of expansion which turns its gaze outwards. It offers to think of a memory of a certain event as an element that can help in the formulation of the histories of other events, and in gaining a more profound understanding of them and of the reality they can shape.

in massacres, looting, and rapes, and from exhaustion and poverty that did not allow them to complete the long journey between the two countries.

The partition plan of South Asia had lasting consequences and impact on the territorial conflicts and the tension between India and Pakistan. And yet, for decades, both sides maintained a tradition of silence surrounding the partition events. To this day, almost 70 years later, and even though millions of men and women have lost their lives, were wounded, raped, and dispossessed from their homes and property on the road to the foundation of the two independent states, officials in India and Pakistan seldom mention or commemorate the events of the partition or the victims it claimed. How does the narrative of heroic and just emancipation from the British rule coincide with the fact that both sides took part in the violent events, casting the shadow of moral decline and unprecedented brutality against those who only a day earlier were still their neighbors? In many respects this question is pertinent not only to the formulation of India and Pakistan's national histories, but also to the reality in the State of Israel. A reality in which there is still a long way to go to the recognition that sometimes, on the other side of independence, redemption, and resurrection stand violence, expulsion, and the infliction of suffering.

From Intersection to Motion

"Vanishing Point" is a term taken from the field of art, which refers to the imaginary meeting point of receding parallel lines in a painting, creating an illusion of depth. However, as the name suggests, this intersection entails a risk, since the convergence point of the lines is also the point where they seem to disappear. To a large extent, this is also the danger held in juxtapositions like those that this exhibition wishes to bring about, since the attempt to contrast historical events and the traumas that they carry, may also turn into a reductive experience that erases or overlooks the

uniqueness and complexity of each individual case. Thus, one of the notable points in this context involves the way each of the partition plans had ended: while the former British India was split into independent nation-states, Mandatory Palestine eventually became only one nation-state - Israel, while the Palestinians are still awaiting their independence.

This underscores further the need to consider and examine one's steps between the two cases, so as to make an informed use in them – one that wishes to ask what can this intersection summon and how can it serve as a space that engages in producing knowledge rather than eradicating it. Such space is capable of providing a fresh and more complex understanding of the local and the self, by learning about the narrative of the other and considering it in a contemporary and political context that is not necessarily bound by the limits of the nation-state.

The artists featured in this exhibition belong to the generations that did not experience the events of 1947-1948 in person. Their works offer a fresh and contemporary perspective on the conventions and narratives surrounding these formative events – narratives that shaped the ideological underpinnings of the societies in which the artists grew up and the historical chronologies that each society adopted in retrospect. Although there is little doubt that these events and their repercussions have had an impact on their work, and on the space in which they operate, the artworks in this exhibition do not claim to criticize them, recreate the traumas inherent in them, or judge those who took part in them. This is not because this project wishes to ignore these complex and painful histories, but rather stems from the aspiration of the artists to focus on the exposure, examination, and reconstruction of the mechanisms underlying these events.

The exhibition proposes to look at the gamut of the artists' practices, explorations, and activities through two possible

with their independence a bi-national partition plan. Learning of the many similarities between the local history and the history of the Indian subcontinent and its people was a thought provoking and captivating experience. How is it possible that in two remote areas such as these, in the exact same years, such similar events should take place and almost no thought is given to it? How curious it is that young Israelis flock to the Indian subcontinent to roam through its trails for months, and yet this common history repeatedly goes unnoticed. Is it not strange that we insist on thinking and teaching our histories in the context of Europe and the West and not in relation to other post-colonial countries and our surroundings? And how will we view these histories if we will look at them as an array of intertwining narratives, rather than as separate and unique events that anchor the past of a people in its territorial borders?

In order to try and understand the possible overlaps between the events and the new thinking they might engender, it is best to start by going back to the point in time to which most of the common timelines converge: 1947-1948. Towards the end of the British Raj in India (which dates back to the mid-19th century, and in some parts even as early as the 18th century), Britain drew a territorial partition plan to split British India on its hundreds of millions of residents into two nation-states: a Hindu-majority state (India) and a Muslim-majority state (Pakistan). In Mandatory Palestine, the Mandate was conceived as a temporary solution from its nascence. In 1947, after 30 years of British rule, the United Nations adopted the resolution to end the British Mandate for Palestine and divide the territory under its control into two nation-states – Jewish and Arab.

The underlying principles of both plans were remarkably similar: they were supposedly based on religious population concentrations, and therefore prescribed interrupted and at times completely non-contiguous territories. Pakistan and

Israel were in fact unique and singular cases of states founded on the basis of a religious rather than ethnic identity, in the assumption that with the declaration of independence, other members of the same faith will also migrate to them. Since the Muslim population in British India was concentrated in different areas, until 1971 Pakistan ruled over two separate territories and existed as a country without a territorial continuity: (West) Pakistan, which bordered on western India and included the capital at the time Karachi, and another enclave in the Bengal area of east India named East Pakistan (which would later become Bangladesh).

While the new territories allocated for the Arab and Jewish populations in the UN partition plan were also interrupted and fragmented, they all had crossing points that maintained relative territorial continuity. However, with its announcement, the plan was rejected by the Arab leadership in Palestine, since it gave the Arab population less than half of the territory. With the departure of the British in 1948, a war broke out between the two sides, resulting in the occupation of some 500 Arab villages, and turning approximately 700,000 people into refugees. After the war, the Arab population had found itself divided between disconnected territories surrounded from both east and west by the territory that was declared at the end of the battles as the State of Israel.

In the former British India, although the partition plan was carried out in accordance with the borders it outlined and the declaration of two independent states in August 1947, the outcomes of its enforcement were no less calamitous and bloody. As part of a population exchange on an unprecedented scale, about 12 million people have been displaced from their homes and homeland and became refugees in the territory of the nation-state that the plan designated for them (in the following two decades another six million have joined them). In the months after the declaration of the partition of British India, approximately one million people on both sides died

In 1947-1948, two series of fateful political events took place in two different and remote parts of the world, events that in many ways share a great deal in common. On August 14, 1947, the end of the British Raj (rule) in the Indian subcontinent was officially announced. Three months later, on November 29, 1947, the United Nation adopted a similar resolution concerning the end of the British Mandate for Palestine. The nature and duration of the British government in each case was different as were the circumstances of its termination. However, in both instances, its conclusion marked a decisive and formative moment in the history of four young nations - Indian, Pakistani, Israeli, and Palestinian.

The success (or lack thereof) in implementing these resolutions still shadows the complex socio-political reality in the Indian subcontinent as well as in the strip of land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean. This is also the point of departure of this exhibition, which wishes to bring together these remote and parallel trajectories, and reflect on the possibilities held in this encounter from a contemporary perspective.

Seminal narratives tend to stress the singularity and importance of local national history and ground them in geographic affinity. With that in mind, the exhibition attempts to set in motion a reverse process. It strives to build on the similarities between historical circumstances (which include a colonial British government, partition plans, displacement, uprooting and territorial disputes that continue to this day) and ask in what way may the exposure and engagement with the memory of the other summon a fresh and more complex perspective on one's personal narrative.

1947-1948 Intersection Point

Like many of my Israeli contemporaries who traveled to India in their early twenties, equipped with a hiking backpack and excitement towards the "big trip," I too have had a defining first encounter with the Indian subcontinent in my early twenties. In contrast to most of these encounters, mine took place in late 2012 in London of all places, where I had come to complete my postgraduate degree in the Department of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths University. Although during that year my excursions were mostly between library shelves, in many respects, it was a "big trip."

During my studies, I became acquainted with the emerging field of Transcultural Memory, which concerns the encounters between memories of different cultures and their construction patterns in the global age, as well as the mapping and implementation of the transformation that these encounters can bring about. In the wake of my preoccupation with this field, I found myself returning time after time to the histories and narratives I carried from home: wondering how they were acquired and embedded in my identity, about the place that my own identity had in them, and about the mechanisms that prescribed the preservation and perpetuation of some and the dissolution of others. In many respects, grappling with these questions, in a study group that included fellow students from Germany, Korea, Britain, Ireland, Canada, the United States, India, Pakistan, and Israel, was in itself a Transcultural Memory laboratory.

It was in these circumstances that I encountered for the first time the complex history of the Indian subcontinent and its residents, who in 1947 gained independence from the British Empire, and who – like the Jewish and Arab residents of Mandatory Palestine in those years – have inherited along

Vanishing Point (n.)

The point at which receding parallel lines viewed in perspective appear to converge.

(Oxford Dictionary)



Or Tshuva



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בפטיסט קואלו

2009 ,If It Would Only End
וידאו 03:50 דק', סאונד
באדיבות האמן

באטיסט קוילهو

2009 ,If It Would Only End
פידיו 3:50 נפאנף, סוּט
בלטף מן הפנאן

Baptist Coelho

If It Would Only End, 2009
Video 03:50 min., sound
Courtesy of the artist

בפטיסט קואלו

2009 ,Beneath it All... I am Human
וידאו 09:51 דק', סאונד
באדיבות האמן

באטיסט קוילهو

2009 ,Beneath it All... I am Human
פידיו 09:51 נפיקה, סוּט
בלטף מן הפנאן

Baptist Coelho

Beneath it All... I am Human, 2009
Video 09:50 min., sound
Courtesy of the artist



Over the last nine years, the artist Baptist Coelho has been examining the lives of the soldiers posted at Siachen Glacier in the region of Ladakh. The glacier, which has been the subject of a territorial dispute between India and Pakistan for decades, is one of the world's highest and toughest battlefields. Due to the extreme weather conditions in the glacier (where the temperature can drop to -60°C) the soldiers who serve there cannot return to their homes or contact their families for weeks. Ironically, the number of soldiers who have found their death in the Siachen Glacier as a result of the extreme weather conditions dramatically exceeds that of combat casualties.

The artist draws inspiration from the everyday life of the soldiers in Siachen and the paradoxical reality that prescribes their daily conduct. He is interested in the diverse infrastructures, resources, and production mechanisms upheld by the ongoing tension in the glacier, which include thermal clothing manufacturing industries, efforts to open the blocked roads that lead to the glacier, and the goods transported through them. All these conjure up a puzzling reality of fighting over a cold and barren territory, while it is not always clear why it is even needed, what the fighting over it serves, and when will it come to an end.

בפטיסט קואלו
באטיסט קוילهو
Baptist Coelho

נולד בגואה, הודו, 1977
חי ויוצר במומבאי, הודו
ולד פי גוא, הודו 1977

يعيش ويعمل في مومباي, الهند

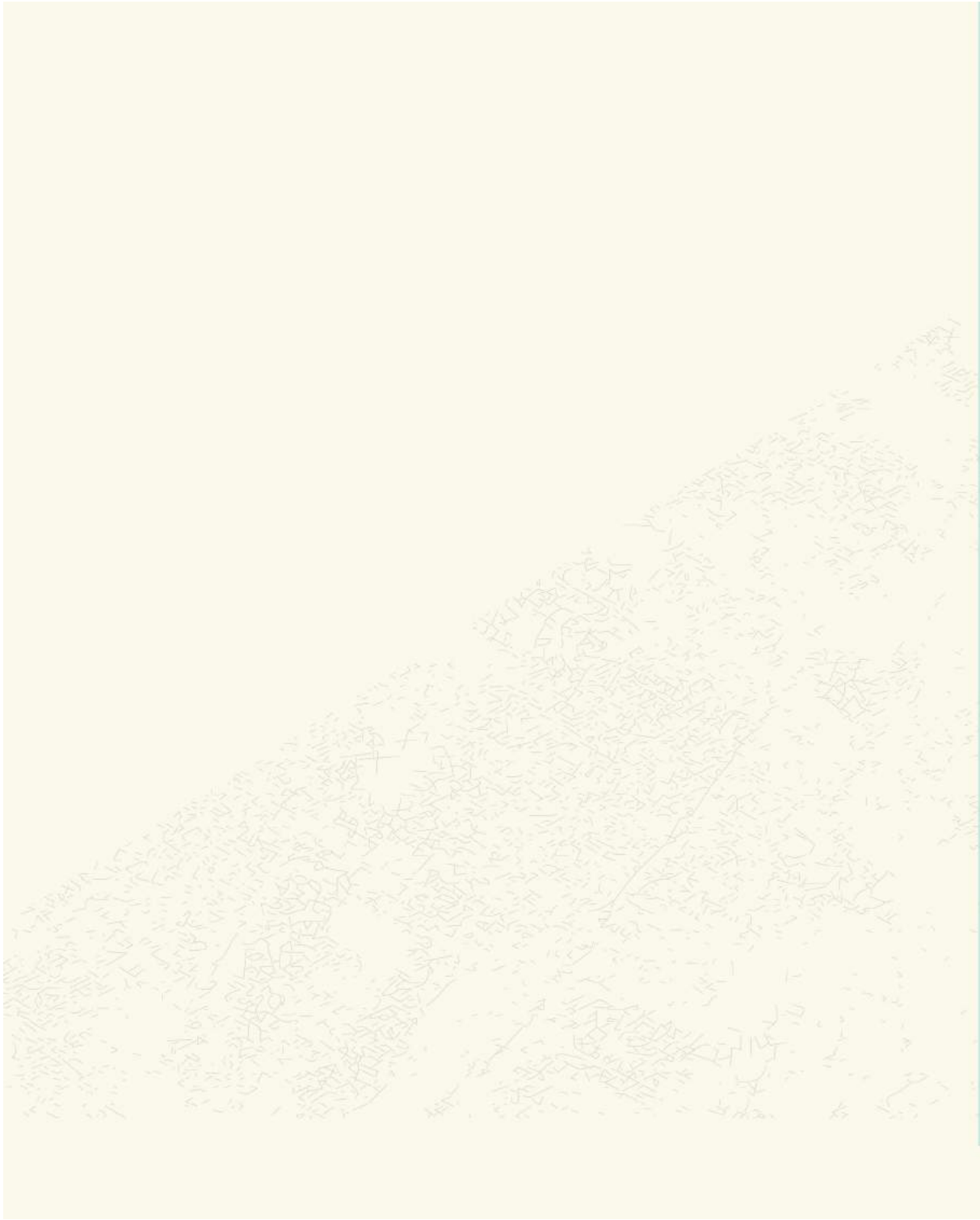
Born in 1977 in Goa, India
Lives and works in Mumbai, India

במהלך תשע השנים האחרונות ערך האמן בפטיסט קואלו מחקר מקיף על חיי החיילים המוצבים בקרחון סיאצ'ין (Siachen) שבמחוז לדאק (Ladakh). הקרחון, שמזה עשרות שנים נמצא סכסוך טריטוריאלי בין הודו לפקיסטן, הוא למעשה אחת מזירות הקרב הגבוהות והקשות בעולם. בשל תנאי מזג האוויר הקיצוניים השוררים בו (הטמפרטורה עשויה לצנוח עד ל-60 מעלות צלזיוס מתחת לאפס), החיילים המשרתים במקום מנועים מלחזור לביתם או ליצור קשר עם משפחותיהם במשך שבועות. באופן אירוני, מספר החיילים אשר מצאו את מותם בקרחון סיאצ'ין בגין תנאי מזג האוויר גבוה בהרבה מזה של ההרוגים בקרבות.

האמן שואב השראה מחיי היומיום של החיילים בסיאצ'ין ומהמציאות הפרדוקסלית המכתבה את אורחות חייהם. הוא מתעניין במגוון התשתיות, המשאבים ומערכות הייצור המתחזקים בידי המתנחלים המתמשכת בקרחון, עליהם נמנים תעשיית ייצור מערכות הביגוד התרמי, המאמצים לפתיחת דרכי התחבורה החסומות המובילות לקרחון והסחורות המובלות דרכו. מכל אלה מצטיירת מציאות תמוהה של לחימה על טריטוריה קרה ועקרה, שלא תמיד ברור מה הצורך בה, מה משרתת הלחימה עליה ומתי יז תגיע לקיצה.

أجرى الفنان باپتيسٲ كويلهو خلال السنوات الأخيرة بحثًا واسعًا حول حياة الجنود المرابطين في الجبل الجليدي سياتشين (Siachen) في مقاطعة لاداك (Ladakh). الجبل الجليدي الذي يدور حوله منذ عشرات السنين صراع إقليمي بين الهند وباكستان هو، عمليًا إحدى حلقات المعارك الاعنف والأشد في العالم. وبفعل ظروف المناخ الشديدة التي تسوده (يمكن لدرجة الحرارة أن تصل إلى 60 درجة تحت الصفر)، فإن الجنود الذين يرابطون في الموقع ممنوعون من العودة إلى بيوتهم وعائلاتهم أو الاتصال بها لمدة أسابيع. وعلى نحو عيبي، فإن عدد الجنود الذين لاقوا حتفهم في الجبل الجليدي سياتشين بسبب ظروف المناخ هو أعلى بكثير من عدد القتلى في المعارك.

يستلهم الفنان عمله من حياة الجنود اليومية في سياتشين ومن الواقع المتناقض الذي يملأ أنماط حياتهم. وهو يلفت باهتمام إلى مختلف البنى التحتية، الموارد وأجهزة الإنتاج في ظل التوتر المتواصل في الجبل الجليدي، ومنها صناعة إنتاج منظومات اللباس الجراي. جهود فتح طرق المواصلات المقفلة الموصلة إلى الجبل الجليدي والسلع التي يتم توصيلها عبرها. ويرتسم من هذا كله واقع مستهجن مؤلف من الحرب على منطقة باردة وحدهاء، ليس واضحًا دائمًا ما الحاجة ملها، وما الذي تخدمه الحرب عليها ومنح سننتهي.



The Holiday of Holidays festival – a 22-year long Haifaite tradition, symbolizes the aspiration and belief in our ability to live together in a shared society in Haifa – and in Israel. The last months remind us that there is still a long way ahead of us, and at the same time strengthens our pride, as Haifaite, in the city whose residents respect one another and choose a dialogue over violence.

The events of the last months underscore the importance of this year's exhibition – **Vanishing Point** – which offers the visitors a contemporary perspective on narratives that unfolded in four different societies that experienced similar processes. The exhibition corresponds with Beit HaGefen's credo and the principles that guide our numerous and diverse activities, propelled by the aspiration to create a shared, equal, and safe space for a narrative discourse that acknowledges the gamut of stories that comprise the Israeli society, their complexity, and our geographic sphere. These are rooted in the conviction that we cannot promote a significant political discourse without forming a solid human and interpersonal foundation – a foundation that consists in the acceptance of the other, in respecting his feelings and his perspective on historical events, and in letting go of fears and stereotypes that dominate the image of "the other" this days.

Like the complexity of Israel and the Middle Eastern reality, the visit to the Holiday of Holidays festival also invites the visitor to engage in a profound and critical reflection on historical events and narratives, while enjoying an experience of scents, flavors, and diverse cultural events whose goal is so simple yet so complex: to offer an intercultural exposure and connection, and to give a platform to the Haifaite story, a story of residents and of a city that chooses to live together.

Asaf Ron

General Director
Beit HaGefen



The Holiday of Holidays
Beit HaGefen - Arab-Jewish Culture Center, Haifa | Haifa Municipality Culture Department

December 2015 - February 2015

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