

TIRMAZI

by

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## **Abstract**

TIRMAZI

Master of Fine Arts, 2019

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Documentary Media, Ryerson University

This paper has been written as an accompaniment to the 20- minute documentary, *Tirmazi*. The film explores the language and landscape of displacement, as told by my mother, Hanifa Shah and her experience with forced internal displacement in Pakistan, and migration to Canada. This paper examines the main differences between Ahmadi Muslims and mainstream Islam, as well as the history of Ahmadi persecution in Pakistan, in order to contextualize my mother's displacement within Pakistan. It also delves into the process and aesthetics used to create the film, including the use of archival imagery and animation. Finally, this paper examines *Tirmazi* within the broader context of documentary, placing it within a hybrid genre that combines elements of poetic and performative modes and essay and animation models.

## **Acknowledgements**

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And of course, my mother, Hanifa. Without her, I would not be where I am today.

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## Introduction

*Tirmazi* is a short documentary that examines the language and landscape of displacement. The film follows my mother, Hanifa Shah, throughout various stages of her life— from the idyllic childhood spent in a mountainous village in northern Pakistan, to the forced displacement she experienced due to religious persecution, to her experience immigrating to Canada. The story weaves voice-over narrative with footage shot in Canada alongside animation to denote a lost childhood home and landscape. By exploring both internal and external displacement, *Tirmazi* seeks to question notions of belonging and home, while also examining how landscape shapes our identities. On a more personal level, the film asks, “what is the landscape within my mother?” a question inspired by Agnes Varda’s *Beaches of Agnes* (2008). The film is a documentary hybrid, combining poetic and performative modes, with elements of essay, landscape, and animation, in order to depict my mother’s life through her own words.

This paper will explore various aspects of the film, from its historical and religious context, to the production and making of the film, and finally, its relevance to the documentary genre. First, I delve into Ahmadiyyat as a religion, to create an understanding of why religious persecution against the group started. From there, I explore the history of persecution against Ahmadis in Pakistan in particular, so as to create context for why my mother’s family was displaced in a Muslim majority country, despite identifying as such. I then discuss my mother’s journey in greater detail. This section is followed by the methodology and process of creating the film itself, where I discuss how and why audio-visual strategies were chosen, and how they contribute to the overall story. Finally, I discuss where and how *Tirmazi* fits into documentary traditions, where I expand upon the notion that *Tirmazi* is a hybrid film.

## I. Content and Context

### i. Ahmadi Muslims: Context

To understand the context behind my mother's displacement from her hometown, and furthermore, the history of Ahmadi persecution in Pakistan, it is important to understand the religious differences between Ahmadi Muslims and other Muslim sects. Why does a nation officially called the *Islamic* Republic of Pakistan discriminate against fellow Muslim populations? The answer to this question lies in a few key differences in belief that form the basis of anti-Ahmadi sentiment. While Ahmadis practice Islam much in the same way as mainstream Muslims, they hold a few crucial beliefs that are *perceived* as heretical or blasphemous by other sects.

Ahmadiyyat is a revival movement within Islam officially created in 1889 in Ludhiana, Qadian, India by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. Currently, the community, though headquartered in the United Kingdom, "spans over 200 countries with membership exceeding tens of millions."<sup>1</sup> The sect believes that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad is the promised messiah, the expected reformer, and the guided one for Muslims,<sup>2</sup> "whose advent was foretold by the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad."<sup>3</sup> This declaration, issued by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, resulted in a *fatwa* (declaration of heresy) by Muslim scholars at the time, and has yet to be rescinded.<sup>4</sup> However, Ahmadi Muslims "follow all the teachings of Islam, as contained in the Holy Quran, the Sunnah (practice) and Ahadith

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<sup>1</sup> "Ahmadiyya Muslim Community." Islam Ahmadiyya. Accessed December 12, 2018.

<https://www.alislam.org/library/ahmadiyya-muslim-community/>

<sup>2</sup> S.R. Valentine, "Prophecy After the Prophet, Albeit Lesser Prophets? the Ahmadiyya Jama'at in Pakistan," *Contemporary Islam*, 8, no. 2 (2014): 99-113. doi:10.1007/s11562-014-0293-z.

<sup>3</sup> "Ahmadiyya Muslim Community." Islam Ahmadiyya. Accessed December 12, 2018.

<https://www.alislam.org/library/ahmadiyya-muslim-community/>

<sup>4</sup> S.R. Valentine, "Prophecy After the Prophet, Albeit Lesser Prophets?" *Contemporary Islam*, 8, no. 2 (2014): 99-113. doi:10.1007/s11562-014-0293-z.

(sayings) of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).”<sup>5</sup> The core beliefs of Ahmadiyyat are virtually identical to mainstream Islam. For example, Ahmadis, as mainstream Sunnis, believe in the five pillars of Islam. That is, bearing witness that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger, observance of prayer (*salat*), giving to charity (*zakat*), fasting during Ramadhan, and pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*). Ahmadis also share similar beliefs and practices to mainstream Islam concerning *iman* (belief) and *amal* (deeds and practice).<sup>6</sup>

According to their official website, the community maintains that they endorse a complete separation of religion and state. Ahmadi belief asserts that followers of the religion should become loyal citizens to the countries in which they live, in addition to being righteous. Furthermore, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad “cautioned against irrational interpretations of Quranic pronouncements and misapplications of Islamic law.”<sup>7</sup> However, this does not imply that Ahmadis are removed from politics completely. In fact, Ahmadis were instrumental in the creation of Pakistan as a nation state in 1947, and Sir Zafrullah Khan, the country’s first foreign minister, was a key figure in promoting Pakistan’s international profile.<sup>8</sup> Despite this, due to current laws, Ahmadis today are unable to participate in elections, as Pakistani electoral ballots include sections in which citizens must sign that they are not associated with the Ahmadi community, and that they believe in fully in *Khataman Nabiyyeen*,<sup>9</sup> a concept that will be explored in the next section.

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<sup>5</sup> Aziz, A. Abdul. "Ahmadis Are True Muslims." Last modified February 20, 2017.  
<https://www.alislam.org/library/articles/ahmadis-true-muslims/>

<sup>6</sup> S.R. Valentine, "Prophecy After the Prophet, Albeit Lesser Prophets?" *Contemporary Islam*, 8, no. 2 (2014): 99-113.  
doi:10.1007/s11562-014-0293-z.

<sup>7</sup> "Ahmadiyya Muslim Community." Islam Ahmadiyya. Accessed December 12, 2018.  
<https://www.alislam.org/library/ahmadiyya-muslim-community/>.

<sup>8</sup> S.R. Valentine, "Prophecy After the Prophet, Albeit Lesser Prophets?" *Contemporary Islam*, 8, no. 2 (2014): 99-113.  
doi:10.1007/s11562-014-0293-z.

<sup>9</sup> "Ahmadis barred from participation in national parliamentary elections." The Persecution of Ahmadis. Accessed December 12, 2018. <https://www.persecutionofahmadis.org/parliamentary-elections-%e2%80%93-ahmadis-barred/>

As aforementioned, Ahmadiyyat differs from mainstream beliefs in many crucial aspects, some of which are the main basis for persecution and declarations of heresy. In particular, the issue of *Khataman Nabiyyeen* is the source of much anti-Ahmadi sentiment. *Khataman Nabiyyeen* is an Arabic verse found in the Qur'an, Surah 33:41 which translates to "the seal of prophets" and concerns the finality of prophethood. Mainstream Islamic doctrine teaches that Muhammad is the seal of the prophets, the last message-bearing prophet of God.<sup>10</sup> While Ahmadis do indeed believe that Muhammad is the greatest and last law-bearing prophet, their interpretation of *Khataman Nabiyyeen* is not that Muhammad is the *last* of all prophets, but rather, the (metaphorical) father of all prophets. Moreover, they believe that "lesser, non-legislative, *zilli* (shadowy) prophets"<sup>11</sup> can still be appointed. Their founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad therefore, is seen by Ahmadis both as a *zilli* prophet, and the promised messiah that was prophesied by Muhammad. Such claims are seen by mainstream Sunni and Shi'a teachings as nothing less than blasphemous.

Ahmadiyyat also differs on its stance on Jesus. While mainstream Sunni belief proposes that Jesus was taken alive to heaven after being crucified, Ahmadi Muslims maintain that Jesus was removed from the cross unconscious by his followers and taken to a tomb where he recovered from his wounds. Ahmadis believe that this claim is backed by the Qur'an. According to their official website,

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<sup>10</sup> S.R. Valentine, "Prophecy After the Prophet, Albeit Lesser Prophets?" *Contemporary Islam*, 8, no. 2 (2014): 99-113. doi:10.1007/s11562-014-0293-z.

<sup>11</sup> S.R. Valentine, "Prophecy After the Prophet, Albeit Lesser Prophets?" *Contemporary Islam*, 8, no. 2 (2014): 102. doi:10.1007/s11562-014-0293-z.

“Ahmadi Muslims believe that the physical ascension of Jesus to Heaven is a later interpolation. The term “heaven” is used for spiritual bliss which the righteous enjoy after a mortal life.”<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, Ahmadis believe that Jesus migrated East, eventually settling in modern day Kashmir, where his tomb (the Tomb of Jesus), exists to this day. However, mainstream Muslims reject this interpretation of the Qur’an and see it instead as “a distortion of the faith itself.”<sup>13</sup>

Additionally, Ahmadis also have a well-established *Khalifat*, that is to say, an elected spiritual leader chosen to guide the community. *Khalifat*, meaning succession, was established in the Ahmadi community following the passing of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. Since then, each *Khalifa* has been elected after the passing of their predecessor. The main function of *Khalifat* in Ahmadiyyat is to continue the work of the predecessor and guide the community on both spiritual and worldly matters. The *Khalifa* works to resolve flaws and issues within the *Jama’at* (community),<sup>14</sup> ensuring that there is unity among the followers and imparting wisdom and teachings of the Qur’an and the prophets. And while the re-establishment of *Khalifat* before judgement day is an essential part of Islamic teachings, mainstream Muslims completely reject the Ahmadi *Khalifat*, labelling it instead as “profane and offensive.”<sup>15</sup>

Due to these interpretations, Ahmadi Muslims are the focus of persecution in not only Pakistan, but also other Muslim majority countries such as Saudi Arabia and Indonesia.<sup>16</sup> However, for this

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<sup>12</sup> "Jesus Son of Mary - Islamic Beliefs." Islam Ahmadiyya. Last modified February 17, 2017. <https://www.alislam.org/library/articles/jesus-son-of-mary-islamic-beliefs/>.

<sup>13</sup> S.R. Valentine, "Prophecy After the Prophet, Albeit Lesser Prophets?" *Contemporary Islam*, 8, no. 2 (2014): 103. doi:10.1007/s11562-014-0293-z.

<sup>14</sup> Mirza Bashirud-Din Mahmud Ahmad, *Blessings of Khilafat*. (Islamabad: Islam International Publications, 2013), 21

<sup>15</sup> S.R. Valentine, "Prophecy After the Prophet, Albeit Lesser Prophets?" *Contemporary Islam*, 8, no. 2 (2014): 103. doi:10.1007/s11562-014-0293-z.

<sup>16</sup> Usman Ahmad, "Ahmadi Persecution, A Global Issue," last modified June 21, 2017, <https://institute.global/insight/co-existence/ahmadi-persecution-global-issue>

project, the focus will be on Ahmadi persecution in Pakistan specifically, not only because the nation discriminates against Ahmadis at a governmental level, but also because this is where my mother's story originates.

## ii. History of Persecution Against Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan

The persecution of Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan predates its creation.<sup>17</sup> Right-wing religious groups such as *Majlis-i-Ahrar-i-Islam* (*Ahrar* for short) were among the most vocal opponents of Ahmadis. They campaigned against the community long before Pakistan declared independence, by proclaiming Ahmadis as heretics for their beliefs.<sup>18</sup> In the early years of the state, this right-wing thought was not codified at the governmental level. Indeed, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, widely recognized founder of Pakistan, set out to create a secular country, in which religious freedoms were protected. When the issue of Ahmadi's religious standing came to question in 1944, Jinnah stated, ““who am I to declare a person non-Muslim who calls himself a Muslim?”” and assured the Ahmadis that their rights as full citizens of Pakistan would be fully protected.”<sup>19</sup>

However, following the independence of Pakistan in 1947, groups such as *Ahrar* began to publicly demand that Ahmadis be declared non-Muslim as early as 1949,<sup>20</sup> which coincided with Pakistan's constituent assembly “declar[ing] the objective of Pakistan's constitution to be the creation of an Islamic State.”<sup>21</sup> The Objectives Resolution, passed in March 1949, enacted

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<sup>17</sup> Sadia Saeed, “Pakistani Nationalism and the State Marginalisation of the Ahmadiyya Community in Pakistan.” *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 7, no.3 (2007): 136-152. doi:[10.1111/j.1754-9469.2007.tb00166.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-9469.2007.tb00166.x)

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 136

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Farahnaz Ispahani, "Pakistan's Descent into Religious Intolerance." *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 21, no. 03, (2017): 71. <http://ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/docview/2048070897?accountid=13631>

resolutions that enabled Muslims to order their lives on the basis of Islamic teachings set out by the Holy Qur'an and *Sunnah*. While the resolution stated that religious freedoms for non-Muslims would be protected, the resolution was opposed by non-Muslim members of the Constituent Assembly, and amendments were proposed, and later rejected in favour of the original Resolution.<sup>22</sup> In Sadia Saeed's analysis of the persecution of Ahmadis in "Pakistani Nationalism and the State Marginalisation of the Ahmadiyya Community in Pakistan," she states, "the allegiance of the state to Islam at this crucial moment gave the *Ahrar* leadership impetus to make their anti-Ahmadiyya demands public."<sup>23</sup> While at the time the right to religious freedom for Ahmadis was protected by the state, the Resolution marked the beginning of a long and continued history of persecution not only by right-wing fundamentalist groups, but also the general population.

Throughout the 1950s and 60s, agitation against Ahmadi Muslims by right-wing groups continued, resulting in Pakistan's first Martial Law enacted over the city of Lahore in 1953. The turning point came in 1974, when the question of the validity of Ahmadis as Muslims came to national attention once again, following a skirmish near Rabwah, a predominantly Ahmadi town, between a group of Ahmadi and non-Ahmadi students.<sup>24</sup> The incident sparked widespread violence against the Ahmadiyya community, but was eventually curbed by the state. However, while the violence was limited, propaganda campaigns led to the boycott of the Ahmadiyya community in the social sphere. Furthermore, the campaigns demanded that Ahmadis be

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<sup>22</sup> Sadia Saeed, "Pakistani Nationalism and the State Marginalisation of the Ahmadiyya Community in Pakistan." *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 7, no.3 (2007): 136-152. doi:[10.1111/j.1754-9469.2007.tb00166.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-9469.2007.tb00166.x)

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 137

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

removed from state positions *and* declared non-Muslim.<sup>25</sup> The pressure on the government by fundamentalist groups eventually culminated in the Second Amendment to Pakistan's constitution. As a result, President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's government officially declared Ahmadis non-Muslim in September 1974.<sup>26</sup> This "moment of nationalist exclusion"<sup>27</sup> paved the way for future legislation that would criminalize the everyday life of Ahmadi Muslims and deny "their basic right to self-identity."<sup>28</sup>

The imposition of martial law and the Islamization of Pakistan led by General Zia-ul Haq in the late 1970s led to another period of intense persecution against Ahmadi Muslims.<sup>29</sup> Zia, in order to maintain popularity and support with the general population and with *mullahs* and religious leaders,<sup>30</sup> implemented the majority of laws that discriminate against Ahmadis to this day.

Among them was Ordinance XX, introduced in April 1984. This new legislation introduced two subsections to Pakistan's penal code. The first, section 298(b), barred Ahmadis from using the *azaan* (call to prayer), calling their places of worship mosques, praying according to Islamic custom, using the *kalimah* (declaration of faith), inscribing Quranic verses on their mosques. As well, the law forced Ahmadis to have separate burial grounds from other Muslims.<sup>31</sup> The second law, section 298(b), forbids Ahmadis from referring to themselves as Muslim, preaching their

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<sup>25</sup> Sadia Saeed, "Pakistani Nationalism and the State Marginalisation of the Ahmadiyya Community in Pakistan." *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 7, no.3 (2007): 136-152. doi:[10.1111/j.1754-9469.2007.tb00166.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-9469.2007.tb00166.x)

<sup>26</sup> S.R. Valentine, "Prophecy After the Prophet, Albeit Lesser Prophets?" *Contemporary Islam*, 8, no. 2 (2014): 99-113. doi:10.1007/s11562-014-0293-z.

<sup>27</sup> Sadia Saeed, "Pakistani Nationalism and the State Marginalisation of the Ahmadiyya Community in Pakistan." *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 7, no.3 (2007): 139. doi:[10.1111/j.1754-9469.2007.tb00166.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-9469.2007.tb00166.x)

<sup>28</sup> Kashif N. Chaudhry, "Pakistan's Second Amendment is Root Cause of Sectarianism." Huffington Post, last modified November 30, 2014, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/kashif-n-chaudhry/pakistans-second-amendment\\_b\\_5901148.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/kashif-n-chaudhry/pakistans-second-amendment_b_5901148.html)

<sup>29</sup> S.R. Valentine, "Prophecy After the Prophet, Albeit Lesser Prophets?" *Contemporary Islam*, 8, no. 2 (2014): 99-113. doi:10.1007/s11562-014-0293-z.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

beliefs and inviting others to join the faith, and “insulting the religious feelings of Muslims.”<sup>32</sup>

This section has been used not only against Ahmadi Muslims, but also other religious minorities in Pakistan. The punishment for violation against the legislation is imprisonment for up to three years and a fine.

The enactment of such laws “deny or interfere with practice of minority faiths”<sup>33</sup> in Pakistan and is not limited to Ahmadis. Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Shi’a Muslims, and other religious minorities in Pakistan face similar discrimination in social and legal spheres. Indeed, to this day, Pakistan remains hostile to religious minorities, and the Pew Research Centre reports it as “among the top five [countries] overall for restrictions on religion, singling out its anti-blasphemy statutes.”<sup>34</sup>

### **iii. Hanifa’s Journey**

Hanifa Shah, though born in Mansehra, Pakistan, grew up in a small village in Pakistan’s Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP, now referred to as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) called Phagla. Growing up with six siblings in a multi-generational house with grandparents, aunts, and uncles living alongside them, Hanifa describes her life in Phagla as “exactly like Adam and Eve, a heaven.”<sup>35</sup> Surrounded by mountains, lakes, and rivers, Hanifa grew up on family land that provided all of life’s essentials. Though not a farm as such, the family property included endless rows of orchards, from apple trees to pears and plums, to apricots and countless in between,

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<sup>32</sup> S.R. Valentine, "Prophecy After the Prophet, Albeit Lesser Prophets?" *Contemporary Islam*, 8, no. 2 (2014): 106. doi:10.1007/s11562-014-0293-z.

<sup>33</sup> Farahnaz Ispahani, "Pakistan's Descent into Religious Intolerance." *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 21, no. 03, (2017): 70. <http://ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/docview/2048070897?accountid=13631>

<sup>34</sup> Jaweed Kaleem, “Religious Minorities in Islamic Pakistan Struggle But Survive Amid Increasing Persecution.” Huffington Post, last modified December 6, 2017, [https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/religious-minorities-pakistan\\_n\\_4734016](https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/religious-minorities-pakistan_n_4734016)

<sup>35</sup> From an audio interview with Hanifa Shah, June 27, 2018, translated from Urdu and edited for clarity

lentils, wheat, corn, and farm animals such as cows and buffalo that provided milk and were used by workers to tend to the crops. This was a true place of abundance, an idyllic childhood landscape that my mother speaks of fondly to this day. However, following the Second Amendment to Pakistan's constitution in 1974, the idyllic landscape began to erode, as anti-Ahmadi sentiment in the village made life increasingly difficult. In reference to those days, Hanifa says, "a lot of persecution had started in Phagla, and they used to antagonize us in school and outside. We spent a lot of hard days in '74."<sup>36</sup>

Following the amendment in 1974, the family began to go back and forth between Phagla and Rabwah, a predominantly Ahmadi town, as the threat of violence increased. Bit by bit, the family began to relocate to Rabwah, starting with the youngest two siblings. Eventually, the boycott against their business and threats against their home and their bodies increased to the point that the family was forcibly displaced. Between the years 1976-1980, the entire family had to leave the village. In 1983, the anti-Ahmadi mob in Phagla finally acted on their promise to burn down the family home, resulting in the inescapable reality that there would be no permanent return to the village.

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<sup>36</sup>From an audio interview with Hanifa Shah, July 3, 2018, translated from Urdu and edited for clarity

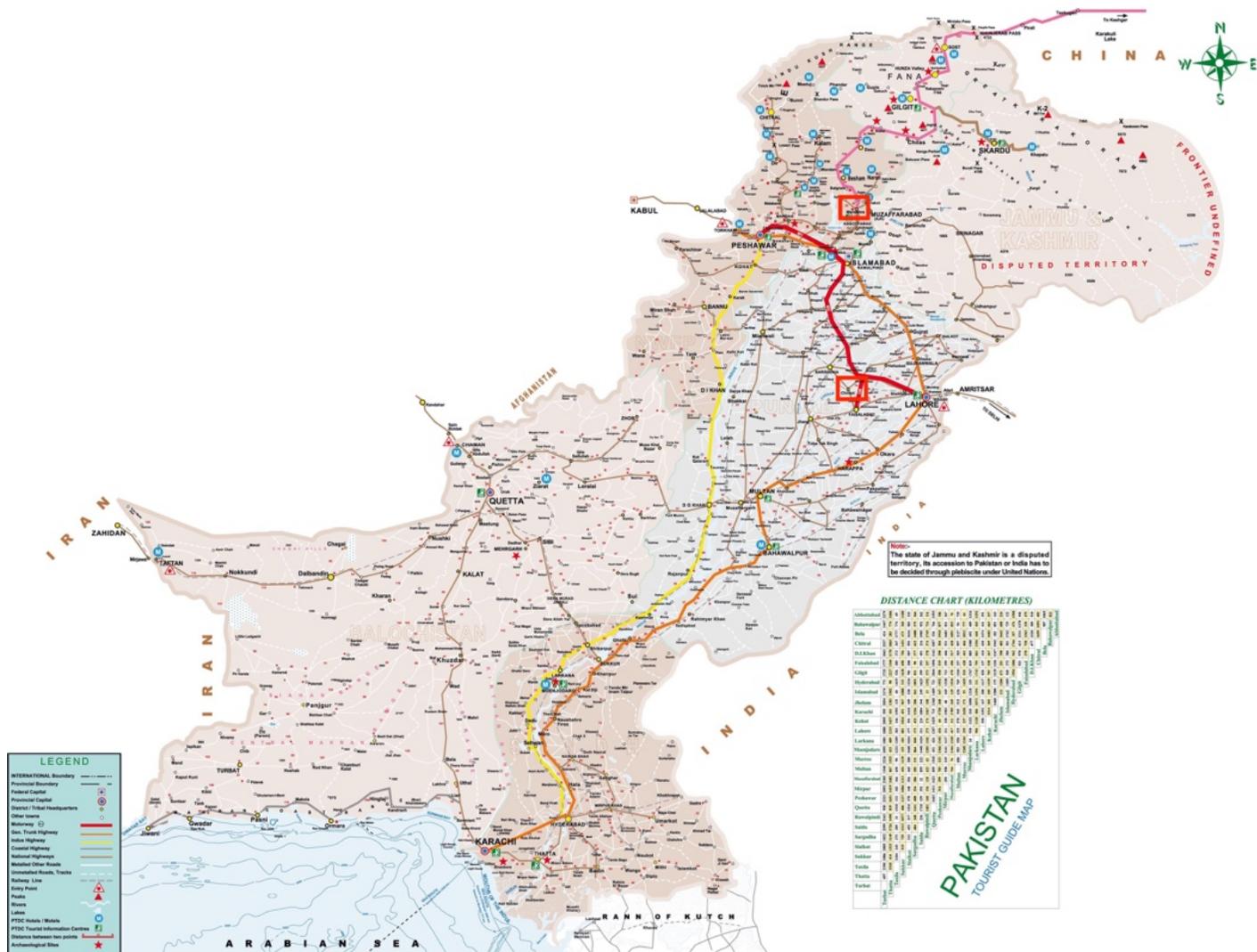


Figure 1. Detailed Map of Pakistan. Areas in red boxes denote the approximate location of Phagla, Mansehra, and Rabwah<sup>37</sup>

Once in Rabwah, the family began to rebuild their lives. Hanifa especially, had a hard time acclimatizing to her new environment, as it was so different to the mountainous landscape she was used to. In an interview with Hanifa, she states that she had nothing good to say about Rabwah, that “it literally felt like we were being punished for something.”<sup>38</sup> As one of the

<sup>37</sup> “Large detailed tourist guide map of Pakistan,” Maps of the World, accessed June 3, 2019, <http://www.maps-of-the-world.net/maps/maps-of-asia/maps-of-pakistan/large-detailed-tourist-guide-map-of-pakistan.jpg>

<sup>38</sup> From an audio interview with Hanifa Shah, June 4, 2018, translated from Urdu and edited for clarity

official headquarters of the Ahmadiyya community and the only Ahmadi-majority city in Pakistan, the town was a refuge from persecution. However, given its arid landscape and the town's developing infrastructure, Hanifa says that dust storms would often interrupt their lives, bringing dust into the house and in their eyes. At school and with the people around them, the family also had to switch from speaking their native Hindko to Urdu. Eventually, once they had started school and integrated into their new home, Hanifa says that they settled, but that the memories of their childhood became painful.

In 1983, Hanifa married Shabber Shah and migrated to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan with her sister, Bushra and her husband Tanveer. She says it was March when they arrived, and very cold, and they were taken to the house of a friend, where they lived for the next two to three months. According to Hanifa, her and her twin sister found this very strange and it contributed to the sadness they felt at leaving their home. Eventually, they found a community of other Pakistani immigrants to connect with, and with English language classes and the birth of their children, Hanifa and her sister found it easier to build their new home.

In 1992, Hanifa and her family relocated to Calgary, Alberta. Situated at the foot of the Rockies, in Calgary, Hanifa found herself once again, surrounded by a mountain landscape. On family trips to places such as Banff and Lake Louise, Hanifa often recalled her childhood home, stating that she had seen places like this before, that it was nothing new to her. She frequently spoke about how the landscape reminded her of her home, the lakes and mountains of Canada reminiscent of the ones she left behind in Phagla. In Canada, Hanifa found a new home, her children all born and raised in the country with no threat of violence or persecution based on

their religious beliefs. Now, having spent the majority of her life in Canada, Hanifa said, “obviously Canada felt more like home. There [Pakistan], it became a visitor-like situation, in your own home.”<sup>39</sup>



*Figure 2. My mother and I in Pakistan, 1997*

#### **iv. Landscape and Memory**

*Tirmazi* is not a landscape documentary in the traditional sense, as it does not focus on single, fixed landscape. Rather, it questions how ever-changing landscapes shape who we are as people, and in doing so, reflects on place and memory. In “Spirit of Place: Letters and Essays on Travel,” Lawrence Durrell writes, “human beings are expressions of their landscapes.”<sup>40</sup> While the landscape acts as secondary character of sorts in *Tirmazi*, Hanifa’s own thoughts and perceptions seem to contradict the idea of fixed landscapes as home. Rather, she ruminates about the inherent

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<sup>39</sup>From an audio interview with Hanifa Shah, June 27, 2018, translated from Urdu and edited for clarity

<sup>40</sup>Lawrence Durrell, *Spirit of Place: Letters and Essays on Travel*, ed. Alan. G Thomas (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), 157

fluidity of home in her life, stating that her home is “her airplanes, her streets, her buses.”<sup>41</sup> As such, my mother’s memories of childhood, which feature landscapes so heavily, are tied to her own identity. The displacement she experienced at various stages shaped her perception of home as a fluid entity. Indeed, even within the context of cultural geography, as Jon Anderson asserts, “place, and our belonging to it, is [...] not fixed in a real sense; it is dynamic evolving: places are ongoing compositions of traces.”<sup>42</sup>

However, as aforementioned, my mother’s idea that home is fluid shows that even when landscape and place is varied, it is nevertheless instrumental in shaping the thoughts and perceptions of an individual. Even if time spent in a geographic location is minimal, “a relationship is inevitably developed.”<sup>43</sup> While my mother’s house in Phagla was destroyed, its landscape— the mountains, rivers, and orchards that surround it, have left traces in my mother’s life. The physical aspects of that place are imbued with memory, and therefore, when my mother comes in contact with other locations that share similarities, Calgary, for example, she sees the traces of her childhood. Her childhood landscape, and that of her adulthood, including displacement, whether forced or voluntary, have inevitably influenced her outlook on life. As Anderson suggests, “places then are crucial for understanding who we are and where we fit into the culture and geography of our lives.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> From an audio interview with Hanifa Shah, January 8, 2019, translated from Urdu and edited for clarity

<sup>42</sup> Jon Anderson, *Understanding Cultural Geography: Places and Traces* (Florence: Taylor & Francis Group, 2009), 51. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/lib/ryerson/detail.action?docID=453730#>

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 41

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 37

Moreover, Janet Donohoe, in “Remembering Places: A Phenomenological Study of the Relationship between Memory and Place” writes, “memory and tradition are written on the landscape itself,”<sup>45</sup> and furthermore, that “the childhood home is foundational in its organization of bodily movement, development of habit, and normative function for all other places of experience.”<sup>46</sup> As such, Hanifa’s childhood landscape was seminal in the formation of not only her identity, but also acted as a reference point for all other places she has lived. Growing up in Calgary, near the Rocky Mountains, I saw this in the ways in which my mother used that landscape to reference childhood memories. Though an entirely different country, her recollections of Phagla were reflected in the similarities she saw between the two locations. Therefore, the relationships created between humans and their geographies<sup>47</sup> directly influence their sense of belonging, their notion of home, and the formation of their identity.

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<sup>45</sup> Janet Donohoe, *Remembering Places: A Phenomenological Study of the Relationship between Memory and Place* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), 13. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/lib/ryerson/reader.action?docID=1727521&ppg=1>

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8

<sup>47</sup> Jon Anderson, *Understanding Cultural Geography: Places and Traces* (Florence: Taylor & Francis Group, 2009). <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/lib/ryerson/detail.action?docID=453730#>

## II. Process and aesthetics

### i. Telling the story

My mother has always spoken about her childhood, in particular, her family's displacement from Phagla to Rabwah and the sacrifices they made to be able to practice their religion freely. These stories often came naturally in places like Banff and Lake Louise, where the mountainous landscape reminded her of her hometown. At the start of the MFA program, I began to consider more seriously the place of family archives as a form of expression in my work. From there, I began to think about how I could tell my mother's story visually, as I previously only considered writing it in long form. As such, when I first began to develop the project, I worked more on establishing and researching the story itself and had more of a loose idea of the aesthetics and visuals.

Additionally, the film was originally going to place more of an emphasis on linguistic differences between regions in Pakistan. My mother, from NWFP, spoke a dialect called Hindko growing up, while the official language of Pakistan is Urdu. The first versions of the film included passages where my mother spoke about how they had to switch languages after moving to Rabwah, and later, learn English after they had migrated to Canada. As such, the initial title for the film was *Tusi Kithako Juldeoh?* a phrase in Hindko which translates to "where are you going?" that my mother and I came up with together based on stories she shared with me.

However, while editing, I decided to emphasize the language aspect less, and felt that the Hindko phrase no longer encapsulated the story. In the end, I chose *Tirmazi* for several reasons. *Tirmazi* is my mother's ancestral family name. According to family history, our ancestors migrated to the Persian region of Termez (now in modern Uzbekistan), and eventually settled in what is modern-

day Pakistan. *Tirmazi* therefore, is not a surname, but rather, an indication of ancestral ties and background. Furthermore, while visiting Calgary, I found a letter my grandfather had written to my mother, upon which his custom letterhead read, “Sayeed Muhammad Basheer Shah, Tirmazi.” *Tirmazi* felt like a natural title for the film, as well as a small dedication to my grandparents.

For the interview process, I wanted to avoid formal interviews and felt that my mother would be more comfortable in a casual setting. Drawing inspiration from Francesco Carrozzini’s *Franca: Chaos and Creation* (2016), I sought to record interviews that were conversations between mother and daughter, informed by questions flowing naturally based on previous answers and knowledge. I also decided to record interviews with minimal equipment, opting to interview her with only a mic, rather than on camera. I only made one exception to this and found that the former strategy was more effective as my mother appeared nervous when I filmed her directly. As such, the final film relies solely on voice-over, with no talking heads. This follows in the tradition of essay filmmakers such as Jonas Mekas, whose work, including *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* (1972), was a reference point throughout the making of *Tirmazi*. However, working only from voice-over did pose some visual challenges. Since my audio and video were recorded completely separately, I struggled at times during post-production to find images to attach to the audio. Rather, I had to think of my film in more poetic terms: how the concepts could be depicted without being banal or too illustrative, while also having some meaning to what was shown on-screen.

During the initial planning for the project, I had envisioned several locations to film. First, in Calgary, where my mother has spent the majority of her life, and where the landscape reminded her of her childhood home. From there, I planned to drive to Saskatoon, as her first point of entry following her migration to Canada. Finally, I intended to travel to Pakistan with my mother, in the hopes of visiting her hometown and shooting the landscape there as a comparison to that of Canada's. However, I quickly realized given timeline and budget that travelling to Pakistan would not be possible. Instead, I filmed in Calgary for about two weeks, documenting places around the city, our house, and the Rocky Mountains. Following that, I also spent some time in Kelowna, BC, where I had the chance to film the mountains and lakes around the area, as well as in an orchard, which became a central image in my film. In order to fill gaps left by the Pakistan imagery, I worked with animation, but was also able to include short cellphone videos shot by my sister during a trip she took to Pakistan earlier this year. As such, the final film included landscapes in Canada, both as stand-ins for Pakistan and as present-day imagery, cellphone footage, and imagined landscapes made through animation.

Once interviews were completed, I did several paper edits, pulling out sections of interviews I felt were relevant to the story. They were broadly separated into three main periods in my mother's life: the idyllic childhood, her displacement within Pakistan, and her migration to Canada. From there, I narrowed down scenes further, focusing mainly on audio-only edits to further tighten the story. Throughout the editing process, I asked myself whether the sections I had chosen spoke to notions of displacement, home, and landscape. Once I had the main story structure complete, I began to add images to the audio. I started by asking myself what visual material best represented each section of the story. For the childhood section, I wanted to convey

a strong natural landscape, focusing on the orchard and mountains. The displacement section was, from the beginning, going to be entirely animated. Finally, the immigration section was to be represented by images around Calgary and our home.

However, when I began to add images to the audio, I struggled with finding a visual flow that made sense. I felt as though there were sections where the visuals seemed more like placeholders rather than holding meaning. For example, in early versions of the film, I used longer static landscape shots of the mountains in Banff. However, these shots lacked a human aspect, and did not pair well with a deeply personal story. To figure out a visual narrative, I started working on visual-only edit, focusing on sequencing images I felt most represented the story. From there, I decided to emphasize the family photos and documents I had, scanning them in high-resolution so I could bring them into focus. Furthermore, on a second trip to Calgary, I discovered an old journal of my mother's that she had written in from 1976—when she was 16 years old, and as the events in Pakistan were unfolding. Apart from the rich visual material I found in the journal, it also became a big source of inspiration for me generally: I had in my hands a piece of history that belonged to the era. As such, archival material, both images and documents, became part of the main visual treatment of the film.

## **ii. Animation**

After I realized that travelling to Pakistan was not possible, I began to consider alternative methods to represent my mother's childhood and the internal displacement she experienced within the country. I had a collection of archival images of my mother as a young adult in Pakistan but felt that the story needed another element to visually represent a very difficult time

in her life. Having an interest in animation, I began to consider how I could use it in my documentary in place of actual footage of Pakistan. I spoke to my sister, a visual artist, about how we could represent my mother's childhood and displacement through animation, and we began to work on rough sketches based on the audio interviews I had completed. As I progressed in the audio-only edit, I decided that the best parts to animate would be scenes from Pakistan that would be difficult to represent as live footage. In the end, this strategy acts both as a stand-in and a representation of the home that was lost, both literally and figuratively.

Due to time constraints, my sister and I tried to figure out the simplest way we could animate. From the beginning, the animation was going to be simple black and white drawings that focused on one image, with singular parts animated to show movement. However, finding a strategy that was both time efficient and visually interesting took a lot of rework, going back and forth between different drawing styles and ways to animate. After a suggestion from a classmate during a presentation, we decided to create a singular line drawing to represent a scene, with the animation following the path of the lines. This allowed us to draw out the images as the voiceover progressed, lending to the simplicity we initially wanted to go for, alongside visually interesting imagery. Furthermore, it allowed me to add another layer of meaning to the animation itself, as lines in specific scenes unravel and fade, denoting how the home was lost slowly,

eventually fading to a place that is no longer physically accessible.



*Figure 3. Early and final animation sketches respectively*

### **iii. Landscape**

While my mother was enthusiastic about telling me her story, she expressed some reluctance to being on-screen. As such, I had to find ways to work around this and create a documentary without relying on talking heads. From its inception, the landscape was its own entity, acting as a character of sorts in the film. As such, I decided to focus on filming around the mountains and using landscape shots for the majority of the film. I also tried to film my mother in the landscape without her face on-screen, by showing only the back of her head. However, on the first day we went to film in the mountains, my mother sprained her ankle, and I was unable to take a lot of the walking shots I wanted to collect before filming started.

One of the techniques I used was to film long static shots of landscape in the mountains and around Calgary. Part of my reasoning for having long static shots was to give the viewer time to read the subtitles and absorb the information without being distracted by too much movement in

the images. I wanted to achieve a poetic, meditative quality to the documentary, similar to the works of Agnes Varda and Jonas Mekas. However, while these static shots were useful, in post-production I realized that filming different shot types and including more variety in the same location would have been more effective for putting together sequences. I ran into some trouble sequencing locations as I felt that the shots needed to be more dynamic to create visual interest alongside the actual story.

#### **iv. Archival images and documents**

In the final edit of the film, personal and family archival images and documents feature heavily. Their function is twofold. First, they allowed me to bring faces into the film, as my mother was comfortable with archival images being shown. In addition, using archival material gave representation to the otherwise disembodied voice of the narrator. Secondly, the family images and documents also signal an absence. While the photographs depict times of joy spent as a family, they simultaneously “conjure up vulnerability, disappearance and melancholia,”<sup>48</sup> as they signal to the absence of a home and landscape that no longer exists, that can only be accessed in memory. For example, the film features several photographs taken in Phagla. However, each picture shown was taken after my mother’s family was displaced, on subsequent trips. While the family photos seen in Tirmazi are highly personal, they do not seek to make truth claims or to isolate the story within only a family narrative. Rather, the audience is asked to “absorb [the family archive] as a component of a larger narrative,”<sup>49</sup> particularly in the context of displacement. The pictures represent my mother’s life in different phases, from being a young

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<sup>48</sup> Giovanna Zapperi, "Woman's Reappearance: Rethinking the Archive in Contemporary Art—feminist Perspectives." *Feminist Review*, no. 105 (2013): 33, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24571897>

<sup>49</sup> Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction*. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 21

adult in Pakistan, to immigrating to Canada, to revisiting Pakistan with her children, and her life in Canada generally. These photos depict not only the places she calls home, but also the changing landscapes throughout her life.

As previously stated, the archive also signals an absence, in tandem with the animation. It acts as a “mediator for the impossible return to the places of origin.”<sup>50</sup> Therefore, the personal archive has the “capacity ‘to signal absence and loss and, at the same time, to make present, rebuild, reconnect, bring back to life.’”<sup>51</sup> Given the political situation of Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan, and the state sponsored discrimination against them, *Tirmazi* acts as a historical document,<sup>52</sup> a way to archive a history that is not included in mainstream Pakistani perspectives. Consequently, the archival pictures and documents in *Tirmazi* “play an important role within the wider landscape of memory and history.”<sup>53</sup>

In Calgary, I also discovered a suitcase containing letters and certificates that serve similar functions as the family photo archive. Among them was my mother’s diary from 1976, which included her writing, images she had glued in from greeting cards, and a map of Pakistan. To add historical context to the film, I was intending to animate a map using line drawing, however, upon finding the diary map, I decided that using a document that was written at the time this history was occurring would add significance. Furthermore, the letters and documents I found included letters written by my grandparents after my mother’s marriage and immigration,

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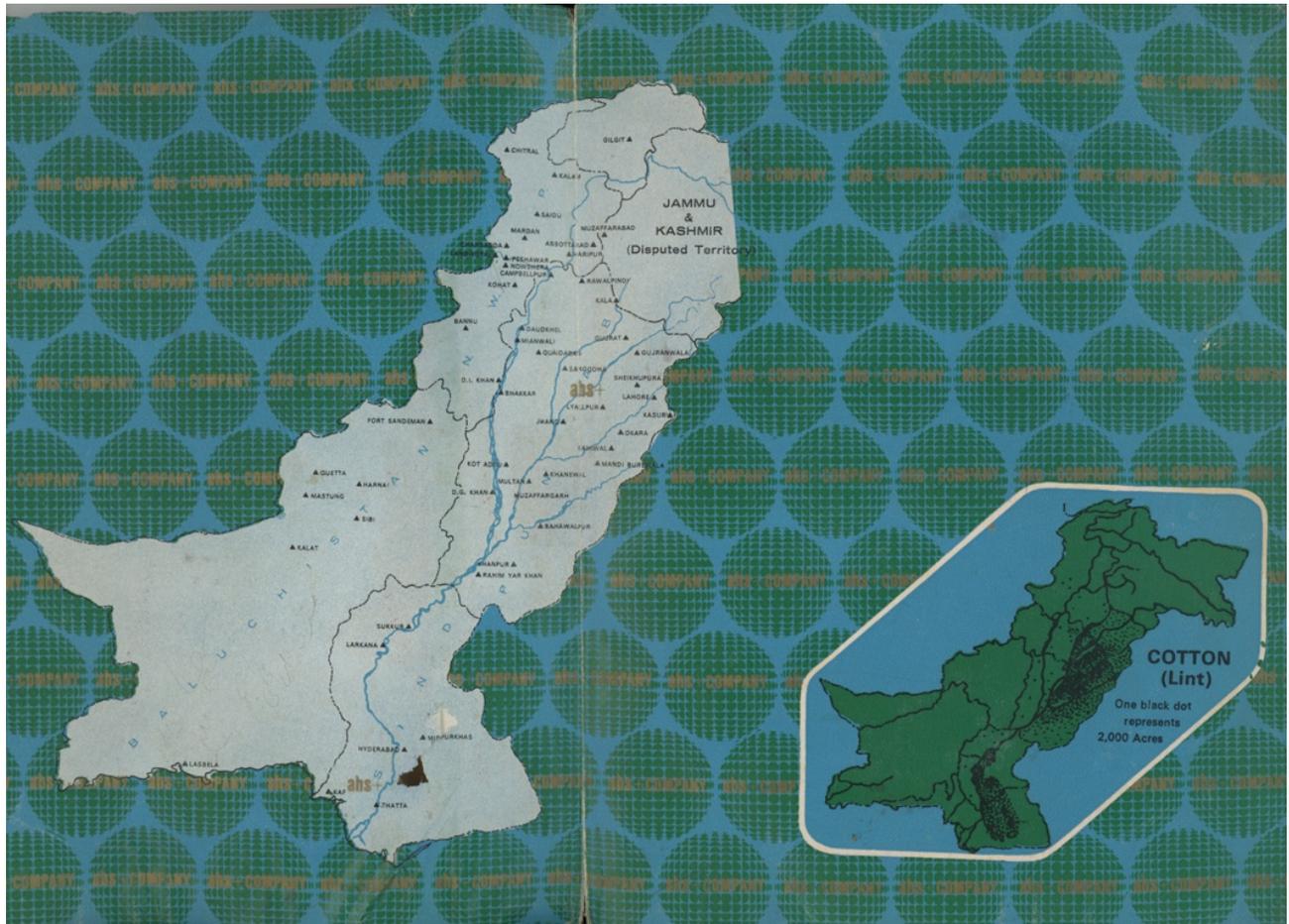
<sup>50</sup> Efrén Cuevas, "Home Movies as Personal Archives in Autobiographical Documentaries." *Studies in Documentary Film*, 7, no. 1 (2013): 19. doi:10.1386/sdf.7.1.17\_1.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 24

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Liz Gloyn et al. "The Ties that Bind: Materiality, Identity, and the Life Course in the “Things” Families Keep." *Journal of Family History* 43, no 2 (2018): 157, doi:10.1177/0363199017746451.

envelopes to their home in Saskatoon, and citizenship papers. These documents signalled the ways in which immigrants collect both the formal and informal, pieces of the past and present, as they move from one landscape to the next.



*Figure 4. Map of Pakistan, found in my mother's diary from 1976*

However, the function of showing official documents is not to depict facts or objective truth. Rather, documents like citizenship papers act as an archive of immigrant life, of the various stages in their journey that speak to the places they have been. Furthermore, they are physical representations of both notions of belonging and home. For example, though my mother rejects the concept of home as a fixed place, she nonetheless considers Canada as a whole her home, a

place where she feels a sense of belonging, and indeed, a sense of pride at belonging. Her citizenship papers, therefore, are a physical manifestation of that feeling.

### III. Documentary Relevance

#### i. Poetic and Performative Modes

If we were to examine *Tirmazi* on the basis of classic documentary modes, it does not fit neatly into one genre. For example, based on Bill Nichols' definition of documentary modes, *Tirmazi* borrows from poetic and performative modes, while also fitting into models including history, testimony, and individual biography. Furthermore, *Tirmazi* also adopts elements from essay and animation films, which will be discussed further in the following sections. However, as Nichols suggests, this mode blending is not to say that genres are ineffectual or unimportant. Rather, in making *Tirmazi*, I adopted "a fluid, pragmatic approach to [the] material, blending different models and modes to achieve a distinct result,"<sup>54</sup> in order to tell my mother's story in a visually meaningful way.

Nichols describes the poetic mode of documentary as "adept at opening up the possibility of alternative forms of knowledge,"<sup>55</sup> by which we learn by affect or feeling, "gaining a sense of what it feels like to see and experience the world in a particular, poetic way."<sup>56</sup> The voiceover narration by my mother in *Tirmazi* speaks to this mode, as her words illustrate a picture of not only of her life through its various stages, but also the feeling associated with the events. For example, we gain insight into the experience of a person who has faced forced displacement, but we also gain an idea of what that incident meant at a more human level. When describing the events unfolding in 1974, my mother begins not by listing factual evidence or a chronology of

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<sup>54</sup> Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*. (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2017), 110

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 116

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 117

events, but rather, by stating, “sometimes giving the description of something can be difficult.”<sup>57</sup> This introduction asks the audience to consider how the retelling of events can be challenging for those who have lived through them. In short, we reflect not on objective events, but their individual affect.

Drawing again from Nichols’ modes, *Tirmazi* also adopts elements of the performative documentary mode in various ways. It gives “emphasis to the subjective qualities of experience and memory,”<sup>58</sup> while also demonstrating how “embodied knowledge provides entry into an understanding of the more general processes at work in society.”<sup>59</sup> Similar to *Tirmazi*’s use of the poetic mode, the emphasis on subjective and affective aspects of knowledge in the performative mode is demonstrated by way of prioritizing my mother’s story, rather than factual evidence. However, performance can also be seen in the animation in *Tirmazi*. While animation is used to illustrate memories—places in time and in the real world that can no longer be accessed, it is also a performance of sorts, one in which my sister and I “perform” animations based on my mother’s narrative.

In her analysis of performative documentaries in “New Documentary: A Critical Introduction” Stella Bruzzi explores performative documentaries in the tradition of Judith Butler and others, stating that documentaries that utilize the performative mode “function as utterances that simultaneously both describe and perform an action.”<sup>60</sup> Based on this, *Tirmazi* has several performative aspects. During the interview process, I allowed my mother to talk continuously,

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<sup>57</sup> From an audio interview with Hanifa Shah, June 4, 2018, translated from Urdu and edited for clarity

<sup>58</sup> Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*. (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2017), 150

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 149

<sup>60</sup> Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction*. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 154

rarely stopping her to interrupt until she had finished speaking. Additionally, I asked broad questions, asking her to describe things and recording her narrative as it flowed. Questions such as “describe what the house looked like” led to my mother “performing” her childhood, in the sense that she described places and actions for me in a way that painted a picture of Phagla and her life there. I then took these interviews and collaborated with my sister, in order to create drawings and animations based on descriptions my mother had given us. This allowed us not only to interpret the scenery as we imagined it, but also to perform the actions my mother described through the animation. As such, the final version of *Tirmazi* was blend of different modes and models, suited to the unique story.

## ii. Essay Films in Documentary

*Tirmazi* partly fits into an essay model of filmmaking, as it features a personal point of view told through the observations and reflections<sup>61</sup> that my mother makes about her life. By visualizing the various periods in my mother’s life and questioning the interplay between different versions of the self, *Tirmazi* is “an inter-view that takes place between two or more views of [the] self.”<sup>62</sup> The film draws from documentarians such as Agnes Varda and Jonas Mekas, who have used essayist forms in their autobiographical works.

Agnes Varda opens *Beaches of Agnes* (2008) with the statement that if you opened people up you would find landscapes. Since hearing this, I have spent a considerable amount of time wondering, “what is the landscape within my mother?” This is a central question I explore

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<sup>61</sup> Timothy Corrigan, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011)

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 81

throughout the film and through my research. I was first inclined to say that my mother's landscape was a lake at the foot of mountains, having spent so much time with her in Lake Louise, and feeling a sense of calm and comfort from it. However, the longer I spend reflecting on it, the more I feel it is an orchard fragrant with the scent of fruit, abundant and life-giving. In the way that Varda presents a self-portrait that questions the role of memory while also narrating various periods of her life, *Tirmazi* follows a similar narrative. *Beaches of Agnes* is significant to me as it is a reflection on Varda's life from childhood to the present day, and I am similarly capturing my mother's life from childhood to present. Using archival family photos, I spent a considerable amount of time with my mother reflecting on her childhood, as Varda does in the beginning of her film.

While *Tirmazi* is not autobiographical, it also follows in the tradition of diary filmmakers such as Jonas Mekas. In particular, like Mekas, *Tirmazi* focuses on space and "the interplay between the diary format and the immigrant experience."<sup>63</sup> Mekas' questions of belonging and longing for a place left behind in *Reminiscence of a Journey to Lithuania* (1972) has been an example for me in terms of thematic issues in my documentary. I was also drawn to the way that Mekas paired footage of every day events with his thoughts on displacement. As such, Mekas' visual treatment has greatly influenced the way I shot my documentary. His ability to make the mundane compelling is something I have reflected on both while sequencing and as part of my process. Additionally, the ways in which Mekas reflects on his experienced as a displaced person has informed the questions that I have asked my mother during interviews.

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<sup>63</sup> Efrén Cuevas, "The Immigrant Experience in Jonas Mekas's Diary Films: A Chronotopic Analysis of Lost, Lost, Lost." *Biography* 29, no. 1 (2006): 59, <https://doi.org/10.1353/bio.2006.0019>

Following in the tradition of biographical, essayistic films, *Franca: Chaos and Creation* (2016) by director Francesco Carrozzini is another influence for *Tirmazi*. Though the film focuses on Franca Carrozzini and her career at Vogue Italia, it is also an intimate look at her personal life, told through her interactions not only with the industry, but also her son. Carrozzini's use of archival images and film, combined with present day footage of his mother created a captivating portrait of a woman in control of her craft, while also depicting a mother and a human with flaws and shortcomings. Though the story was about his mother, Carrozzini was present throughout the film in a way that brought out facets of his mother's personality and their relationship. In particular, his interview style, conducted entirely in the back of a car, lent an intimacy and playfulness to the documentary. During my shooting, I attempted to emulate a similar feeling, opting to record conversations off camera, in casual settings, including over breakfast and tea.

As such, *Tirmazi* follows in the tradition of essay films for several reasons. As Laura Rascaroli (2009) posits, essays are “the expression of a personal, critical reflection on a problem or a set of problems,”<sup>64</sup> from a single authorial presence, with a structure that opens up the problem and calls upon the audience to engage with and participate in the voice's reflections.<sup>65</sup> Rascaroli goes on to write,

“The meaning of the film is created via this dialogue, in which the spectator has an important part to play; meanings are presented by the speaking subject as a personal subjective meditation, rather than as objective truths.”<sup>66</sup>

While *Tirmazi* could have included far more “factual” information, particularly surrounding the anti-Ahmadi laws in Pakistan, I chose instead to focus on the story that naturally came from my

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<sup>64</sup> Laura Rascaroli, “The Essay Film” in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M. Alter and Timothy Corrigan. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 183.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 187

mother, inviting the audience to reflect on notions of home, belonging, and landscape, in more abstract terms. Furthermore, rather than attempting to convey objective truths using facts and statistics, the narrative calls attention to the ways in which religious persecution, and displacement more broadly, continues to affect the lives of millions around the world.

### **iii. Animation in Documentary**

In animating parts of the documentary, I was able to explore different modes of meaning and “[fill] gaps left by [the] absence of archival footage.”<sup>67</sup> The animation in *Tirmazi* calls to attention in part, the elusiveness of memory and how recall is imperfect and often fabricated in the mind based on memory that may not be accurate. Furthermore, by animating the documentary alongside my sister, I call attention to how family histories are passed down from one generation to the next, to be interpreted and re-interpreted by future generations. As such, animation in *Tirmazi* can be seen as a form of performance, one in which the animator performs actions in “order to interpret factual material,”<sup>68</sup> and fits within the unique genre of documentary animation as much as it does essay films.

While childhood exists as a space that can only be accessed in memory generally, when the location in which—in the case of *Tirmazi*, the home and land, cannot be accessed due to its destruction, the literal locations in which the memories take place also cannot be accessed. Therefore, animation in *Tirmazi* is used “as a way of representing real things—emotions, memories, ‘ways of seeing’—that are not readily visible.”<sup>69</sup> In “Animating with Facts: The

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<sup>67</sup> Annabelle Honess Roe, “Interjections and Connections: The Critical Potential of Animated Segments in Live Action Documentary.” *Animation*, 12, no.3 (2017): 273. doi:10.1177/1746847717729552

<sup>68</sup> Paul Ward, “Animating with Facts: The Performative Process of Documentary Animation in *the ten mark* (2010).” *Animation* 6, no. 3 (2011): 293. doi:10.1177/1746847711420555.

<sup>69</sup> Paul Ward, “Animating with Facts: The Performative Process of Documentary Animation in *the ten mark* (2010).” *Animation* 6, no. 3 (2011): 295. doi:10.1177/1746847711420555.

Performative Process of Documentary Animation in *the ten mark* (2010),” Paul Ward describes animation as “another *kind* of reconstruction, but one that arguably draws more direct and specific *attention* to itself *as* a reconstruction”<sup>70</sup> (italics used in original). In a similar fashion, animation in *Tirmazi* is used not only to illustrate a lost childhood, but as a way to deliberately call to attention the fact that it is a location that can never be accessed.

Film scholar Annabelle Honess Roe suggests that animation in documentary film functions in two different ways, regardless of the aesthetic used in the film. Whether the animation is used as a ‘connective tissue’ or a ‘disruptive interjection,’ she argues, depends on other narrative and rhetorical devices.<sup>71</sup> While animation used as ‘connective tissue’ fills in gaps and “works to establish parity”<sup>72</sup> between images, a ‘disruptive interjection’ works similar to the way interjections are used in grammar—that is to say, the interjection creates emphasis and draws attention to what is being said.<sup>73</sup> Animation in *Tirmazi*, I argue, uses both methods to call to attention different aspects of the story. When using animation paired with archival imagery of my mother as a young adult, it acts as a connective tissue— a way to bridge memory and present day. By animating existing images, I connect memories together, weaving between past and present.

However, animation in *Tirmazi* is also used as an interjection, a method used to highlight the absence of the family home in Phagla. It is used in part, as a way to emphasize the extent to

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 296

<sup>71</sup> Annabelle Honess Roe, "Interjections and Connections: The Critical Potential of Animated Segments in Live Action Documentary." *Animation*, 12, no.3 (2017): 272-286. doi:10.1177/1746847717729552

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 273

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

which persecution has impacted the family. Indeed, Honess Roe states that animated interjections are often used in documentaries with political and activist messages, as they “carry the potential of critical, political impact by virtue of disrupting the flow of the realist imagery that is the standard means of representation in documentary.”<sup>74</sup> While *Tirmazi* is a family archive, it is as much an activist film that calls to attention the continued political persecution of religious minorities not only in Pakistan, but around the world, and the effects that displacement has on identity creation.

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<sup>74</sup> Annabelle Honess Roe, "Interjections and Connections: The Critical Potential of Animated Segments in Live Action Documentary." *Animation*, 12, no.3 (2017): 283. doi:10.1177/1746847717729552

## Conclusion

My mother's story is one of strength and resilience, of carving out spaces of belonging despite—at times turbulent, shifts in landscape. *Tirmazi* aims to illustrate this resilience, through my mother's own words and narrative. It does not attempt to make truth claims about the effects of displacement on identity, but rather, reflects on how our landscapes are so closely tied to who we are as people, and how we interact with the world around us. Through her story, from the forced displacement she experienced in her childhood, to her migration to Canada, my mother shows how difficult losing one's home is and facets of the immigrant experience. Moreover, she explores how notions of home have become a fluid concept in her own life. Though a highly personal family archive, *Tirmazi* speaks to larger issues in society, including religious persecution and displacement.

*Tirmazi* combines various visual elements—landscape shots, archival material, cellphone footage, and animation to illustrate the periods of my mother's life that have shaped who she is, in addition to her worldview. As a hybrid documentary, *Tirmazi* does not fit neatly into one genre or tradition. Rather, it combines elements of poetic and performative modes, and fits essay and animation models, resulting in a unique experimental film. *Tirmazi* asks the audience to follow along with my mother's voice, to reflect on how the narrative speaks to issues of home, belonging, displacement, and identity.

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