



The Corrymeela Podcast - Season 3

Thanks so much for listening to The Corrymeela Podcast. You might like to discuss the episode and the accompanying questions with friends, family, or a discussion group, or just use them for your own writing and reflection.

If you're part of a group, be mindful and considerate of one another's willingness to engage in the discussion - leave space for people to keep their reflections to themselves if they want to. You might also want to agree on some general principles to stick to, like: everybody's invited to speak once before anyone speaks twice, and: try to assume that everybody is speaking with good intent.

In group discussions at Corrymeela, we seek to locate political and religious points of view within the story of the person speaking. If you're gathering as a group, consider how to create a sense of connectedness among you.

You might like to choose one or two of the Very Short Story questions that we like to put to guests at the end of each episode. Your answers to these can be one sentence long, or a few. Belongings are plural, as are identities and nationalities. So feel free to respond to these prompts in a way that reflects your own story.

- What's something important that you've changed your mind about?
- Are there books, poems, films, albums, works of art, etc that you've turned to again and again?
- Tell us about a time when your national identity felt important to you.
- Tell us about a time when you felt foreign.
- Is there a very short story you can tell us about a time when you said something that surprised you?
- Has anyone ever said that you were disloyal to one of your cultures or identities? Why?



Season 3, Episode 5. Dr. Yousif M. Qasmiyeh
reflection questions & episode transcript

1. Of the many stories that Yousif shared about his and his family's life experiences, which particularly stood out to you?
2. What are some of the complexities around ideas of people as 'subjects': of art, of research, of journalism? What are some of the ways in which these things can be done ethically, and whilst honouring the humanity of the individuals involved?
3. What are some of your own conceptions of time? How has your relationship to time changed throughout your life?
4. What do you think about Yousif's critique of the word 'empower'?
5. Yousif says: 'I think that we tend to assume that people are desperate for our help; in fact, people don't need our help, people need to be left alone' (page 14). What do you make of that?

Yousif M. Qasmiyeh is a poet and scholar whose work has appeared in publications including *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *Critical Quarterly*, *Cambridge Literary Review*, *New England Review*, and *Poetry London*. His collection *Writing the Camp* (Broken Sleep Books, 2021), was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation and was shortlisted for the 2022 Royal Society of Literature Ondaatje Prize. Yousif is Writer in Residence for Refugee Hosts - a research project at University College London. His latest collection, *Eating the Archive*, was published by Broken Sleep Books in 2023.

Welcome to The Corrymeela Podcast: exploring stories and ideas about conflict, peace, theology, and art.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Hello, my name is Pádraig Ó Tuama and you're listening to The Corrymeela Podcast, with me today is Yousif M. Qasmiyeh. Yousif is a poet and an academic and teacher whose work focuses on displacement and the field of refugee writing, and time, and translation. He's written two collections of poems, and he has been the Writer in Residence for the Refugee Hosts research project that was conducted at the University College London. He has also taught and convened writing workshops in refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan, and his second collection of poetry, Eating the Archive, was published by Broken Sleep Books in 2023. Yousif, you are very welcome to The Corrymeela Podcast.

Yousif M. Qasmiyeh:

Thank you very much for having me. It's a huge honour to be part of it.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

I want to ask you a question of: is there a particular experience or friendship in your childhood that you feel prepared you for the work you do now, Yousif?

Yousif M. Qasmiyeh:

My goodness, I mean this is, this is an extremely, I would say, important and rather archaeological question. I would perhaps say my Arabic language teacher at primary school. And when they used of course to set us assignments just to write a paragraph or what they used to refer to this piece of writing as composition. And from the beginning, in fact, I was encouraged by this individual who's sadly no longer with us. And he spotted that I, I can in fact write. Write, according to him, emotionally about the things within the refugee camp. I was born in Baddawi refugee camp, it's a camp in North Lebanon. And, as of course, as a primary-level student, when I was growing up, I never thought that people existed beyond the parameters of this space. So for me to write about this space, but also to imagine people, to imagine neighbours who are invisible, was the very pulse I would say, and it's thanks to this individual, to this teacher, who encouraged me and allowed me also to write beyond of course, the, the assignments that he used to give to, to my peers.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

What was his name?

Yousif M. Qasmiyeh:

Muhammad Loubani. Muhammad Loubani. Sadly, he had cancer. He had cancer not long ago and he passed away. He was an incredibly kind person, but also the way he dealt with the Arabic language made me realise that, that languages are so open, and languages are also an invitation to all of us to just go there and experiment and not feel at all restrained and restricted by of course by all these different rules and guidelines. I felt at ease, I loved his, of course, his classes. And I would cry, in fact, I would cry whenever I knew or I heard from friends that he was ill, or unwell, or not attending, because it was an emotional, but also linguistic and poetic bond. And he, at a very young age, in fact, I still remember at the age of eight in particular that he said to me: Yousif, you're going to be a writer. That really touched me and I did run home, telling my father, who wrote poetry, that this is what the teacher said. And my father was so wonderful, and he did say that this means that you have of course, you have to work incredibly hard on your Arabic language to match his, his expectations and also to make sure that you are in direct conversation with this teacher. And that was, I would say, the outlet and the entry point to this world of imagination and this poetic solidarity with the teacher.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

You mentioned the Baddawi refugee camp. I wonder if you could say a little bit about it 'cause I know that the population of that camp seems almost incredible when you consider the geographic size of the camp.

Yousif M. Qasmiyeh:

Er yes, it's er, first of all, in fact there are 13 what they call official refugee camps in Lebanon, and there are over 30 unofficial gatherings. And the refugee camp is a space where, by of course, refugees tend to live, reside, but also refugees in Lebanon, Palestinians here in this case, and I'll talk about also the diversification of Baddawi camp and how this very small camp has been hosting different refugee groups from, from the Middle East, in particular from Syria. But back to Baddawi, I was born in this space and I, from the beginning, I felt that we were in a place that belongs to itself, so to speak. Even to this day, when I fly from the UK to Lebanon, I say when I speak with friends, I say that I am going to Baddawi camp through Lebanon, so all of a sudden this specific refugee camp, a small place, overcrowded, sadly very miserable

and unkind conditions has become the place for us. Where of course memories emerge, but memories are also kept and preserved. And now we have refugees from Syria, Iraqis who used to live in Syria, and they've been displaced for the second or third time into Lebanon, and then now they ended up living with us and amongst us, which is of course incredible, but we have to understand that resources are very limited. So this hospitality also engenders hostility at the same time, and that's why it's a camp that is, I would say, in endless kind of tension, because of the scarcity of food, the scarcity of course of jobs, because these refugees can't perform other jobs beyond the, the borders of this camp.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

And the borders are very constrained, aren't they- it's a tiny size of a camp, the Baddawi camp.

Yousif M. Qasmiyeh:

It is very very very small. But also the size itself, this is really- it's fascinating how a camp that used to accommodate, let's say, 10,000 individuals perhaps 10/15 years ago, and now it's the home for over 50 (plus) thousand people. So you have- and, and the beauty of this place is, of course this is what I call the very ugly beauty because it touches on these individuals' vulnerabilities, and also the hypervisibility of the refugee, because the refugee enters a refugee camp, and the refugee tries to hide in such places because they don't want to pay entry and exit visas because they don't have the financial means to do so. So we feel that we belong to this place, and we know that this place is going to accommodate and welcome, I would say, more individuals and other groups, and, and now we have of course Lebanese individuals who are impoverished entering the camp. And we have people from the Roma community entering the camp. And we have of course, Iraqis, we have Kurds, we have Syrians. And it is, it is really fascinating to look at this place and to realise that we're looking at this refugee nation. Where of course different nationalities are collapsing into this space.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Um, it was established in 1955. And am I right that it's one square kilometre?

Yousif M. Qasmiyeh:

It is in fact, and I would argue that it's even smaller. It's even smaller. And, and the other day I was talking with, with a colleague of mine about death and dying in Baddawi, and it's a thematic that interests me, and I've written extensively on such things, scholarly, but also within my

poetic, I would say, practice, how, recently funded by the, by the Red Cross and, and the German government, they have established the fifth cemetery inside the camp. And I was telling this friend that, that these places of death and dying are in fact somewhat devouring the living. Because, because territorially they are expanding within the camp, and they are expanding in fact at the expense of the living, in order to accommodate the dead. So yes, it is a very, very small space. And, and now, even during the day, we can't see the sky, we can't- er, you walk through Baddawi and you don't know, without your watch, without somebody who knows the time, you wouldn't know what time of the day it is. It's a camp that is, again, that the space itself is caving in, and of course, understandably so because people need accommodation, people would like to live, and that's why they take advantage of the smallest of spaces, and they erect these sorts of makeshift things, and this is how they live.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Um, your mother was born on the way to the Baddawi refugee camp, isn't that right, when leaving Palestine, and it was set up initially for Palestinian refugees who were fleeing after the establishment of the state of Israel.

Yousif M. Qasmiyeh:

Yes, and in fact my mother was born en route: she was born during the Palestinian exodus, what we refer to as the Nakba, as the Palestinian catastrophe in 1948. And, and, of course, then there were no camps because the, the political dynamics during that period weren't in fact clear, people didn't know. And this is something that I heard from my grandparents, also my uncles and aunts, that people didn't know that they were exiting or fleeing Palestine forever. They thought that they would be outside Palestine for a while, and then they would be able to return. And this suspended return is the main, is the main concern for all these people, who were, in fact, who had hoped that in 1948, 1949, 1950, that they would be able to return to their places, to their farms, to their houses, etc. And my mother- my grandmother was heavily pregnant and she gave birth, she gave birth, according to my, to my grandfather, but also my grandmother who, who fainted, in fact, as she was giving birth to my mother, sort of, I would say, on the threshold in fact between Palestine then, and Lebanon. And so, so she, she was born in motion, my mother was born in motion, and then of course there were no camps. And, and my grandfather had to increase her age by two years, simply because they needed more rations from the United Nations. And, and of course, the kids, again, the newborns who were breastfed wouldn't ask for rations, but my grandfather wanted to maximise rations so their rations would

be sufficient for the entire family- uncles, aunts were young. And that's how in fact even, even her age was, was falsified: her age became in fact somewhat aged. And her naming was deferred, because my grandmother didn't think that my mother would survive the arduous journey, and the heat, and no food, and no water. And, and in fact, she was named in Lebanon- this is something that I refer to in my poems about her name, about deferring the name, how her, in fact, the deferral of the name was, was simply contingent on her survival, and because she survived, she was named and her name is in fact Kheizeran, and Kheizeran is the equivalent of bamboo, simply because of her malleability, her ability to survive. And of course to- it pains me to think of that time, it pains me to think what kind of time that was for my, for my grandparents, and also for my mother. Because it was really, even for them very openly - and this is something that we had, again, we did have many conversations about the birth of my mother - how they were, again, they simply said to themselves: we do not think that this girl would make it. And she made it. And she made it, and she gave birth to 11 individuals.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Yeah, I was gonna mention about how many siblings you have, and the extraordinary strength of your mother. We meet your mother a lot in your writing; erm, she occurs again and again in your first book of poetry, *Writing the Camp*. I wonder if you could read the poem 'Anthropologists', 'cause we meet your mother in that, and then we can talk a little bit about it.

Yousif M. Qasmiyeh:

I talk a lot about my mother, in fact, there is also, I refer to this act of co-seeing with her, and cowriting. My mother is illiterate, she was withdrawn from school at the age of six. To look after, in fact, a younger brother who, while she was meant to supervise this younger brother at the age of six, sadly this boy, my uncle, swallowed some dry beans, and he, he died. And that really impacted my mother's childhood. Only recently, she was able to talk in detail about that, that event, and how painful it was for her to relate education, in fact, to that very specific episode of trauma. Because, maybe after a week or so at the UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency) school, her parents, because they needed money and they needed to work, to work as farmers in other people's lands in Lebanon now as refugees, they had to withdraw her as the eldest girl, and, and so looking after a three-year-old boy sadly resulted in the death, the tragic death of my youngest uncle.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

What a terrible ageing for her, at the age of six, to have been put into the situation through the trauma of displacement and the trauma of camp and poverty, to, to then become a mother, in essence, to her younger brother, and then a grieving mother.

Yousif M. Qasmiyeh:

Absolutely, even, it's very... I sometimes tease my mother because we still have some photos, some photos of her as a young woman looking really beautiful, wearing even short skirts, and these loose headscarves and I- but also remembering that she must have had some happy moments, some happy intervals, and in fact, my mother is a happy individual generally, and she doesn't dwell on trauma and misery a lot; she is a worrier, she worries a lot and I've inherited this from her, and I think that it feeds into the writing as well.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Yeah, sure.

Yousif M. Qasmiyeh:

I'm going to read 'Anthropologists', but also for my mother here, as the person who's hosting, as the person who's being documented, as well.

Anthropologists

I know some of them.

Some of them are friends but the majority are enemies.

Upon the doorstep you observe what they observe with a lot of care.

You look at them the way they look at you, curiously and obliquely.

You suddenly develop a fear of imitating them whilst they imitate you.

You worry about relapsing into one of your minds while sharing mundane details with them.

Sometimes I dream of devouring all of them, and just once with no witnesses or written testimonies.

All of us wanted to greet her.

Even my illiterate mother who never spoke a word of English said: Welcome!

After spending hours with us, in the same room, she left with a jar of homemade pickles and three full cassettes with our voices.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

My name is Pádraig Ó Tuama and this is The Corrymeela Podcast. Today we're in conversation with Yousif M. Qasmiyeh, a poet and writer from the Palestinian refugee camp Baddawi in northern Lebanon, currently living in Britain. Yousif, you speak so powerfully about so many things in that poem 'Anthropologists', one of which is about your mother, about whom we've been hearing, but another of which is about being observed. Um, you count some of these anthropologists as friends, but others you hate, you want to devour them. And there's a way within which the seeming objectivity of being observed isn't: there's no such thing as objectivity in being an objective observer, or being objectively observed. I wonder if you could explore some of the dynamics of that poem and bring us into what it's like to be the item of research in a way where it causes such understandable pushback that we hear in the poem.

Yousif M. Qasmiyeh:

Yes, I think that this is, this is also, again, it's about the power of- I wouldn't say writing back, because this would make the writing itself a response, rather than an initiative in its own right. I think that here I'm writing afresh: my positionality is that yes of course, I'm a refugee, yes, of course, these individuals, very, I would say, huge part of these people come with the best of intentions to research and write and archive. But also, as you've said Pádraig, that this - or this so-called - objective knowledge tends to abuse in fact those who are presented as lacking this knowledge. And that's why in this poem what I'm trying to say, as a poet, as a writer, that I'm also a producer of knowledge, that my observations of these individuals are observations that are also critiquing, in fact, these acts of archiving; there is something very, very, I would say, very covert, very discreet about recording people's voices without their consent, about also these pickles preserved in these jars becoming the, the objective correlative perhaps, of our own voices and our own entities as refugees. Of course, on the one hand we acknowledge some of the work - the important work - that anthropology has, has done, but I also, in fact, try to discern and to critically observe how these individuals come to our places with their ready-made theories and we're there to be mainly used as supporting evidence.

And the question of devouring in fact is, is quite peculiar because I also wanted to, to invert this, cannibalistic let's say, relationality between the archetypal, let's say, ethnographer anthropologists who would go to these remote areas and of course interview and record these people who sadly weren't seen as complete human beings and as people who, who can speak for themselves. And this in itself, it troubles me because I, I even dislike words such as to give

voice, I dislike words such as empower, because I feel that these are really- structurally they demean me, they also reestablish and reassert these hierarchies of, of powers and power dynamics. And so through 'Anthropologists' I wanted to touch on these things, but also to say that my illiterate mother - and here I'm stressing the adjective, illiterate - in fact, was able to utter a word in English, in order to host and in order to host openly. And, and this unconditional, I would say, hospitality is something that normally people who are in need can offer, because they can share, and this is- so to share something that is minimal, I would say, and I've always seen it in this way, is in fact much more generous than offering in abundance what you already have. And that's why these are things also that I wanted to tease out and to, perhaps to put them forward in this poem which is separated by also by this void, because I needed also some space to catch my breath.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

You have spent a lot of your time as a scholar exploring how time is represented, in your own experience, but also then in this field known as refugee literature. And in preparing for this and reading some of your work - and even in hearing the stories of yours that I didn't know, some of the things you've said, I hadn't come across - I'm struck by the character of time, and how time moves fast and slow: people arrived in what became a refugee camp thinking they wouldn't be there for very long, your mother's age was exaggerated in order to get some food, and then kind of at six, also, a different burden of age was placed upon her also because of the circumstances. I wonder if you could share with us just some of your thoughts, because I know the thoughts are quite wide reaching, but some of the thoughts about the concept of time as you understand it, in experience and writing, regarding refugee literature.

Yousif M. Qasmiyeh:

Erm it is, I agree with you, Pádraig, that it's a character. But also it's a character that at times deserves to be killed. Because of how painful certain times have been. And also- and here I'm not, I'm not dwelling on a trauma really I tend to move away from the notion of suffering, and I worry a lot about indulging in these traumatic experiences and end up talking about things that, erm, respond only to the mental and overlook the physical and the, and the corporeal. For me, I- back to what you've said about time as a character, time as, as an entity, so to speak: in fact I, in one of my poems, I even, I even use private parts to describe time. Because, because I- the way this time grows, the way it diminishes, and in the process of course, it grows upon us, and the way it diminishes and it shrinks us, these are times that we have experienced; but

also there is this futural time, because in the hope of returning, returning to a Palestine that, of course, that has undergone changes, that has somewhat disappeared spatially and, and been altered, linguistically but also ethnographically, etc.

So, in that sense, I, I even question the ways in which a dreaming comes about in our heads, in our brains, and I, I'll tell you something Pádraig that also, that in fact refers but refers intimately to, to that time in Palestine. A neighbour of ours, a neighbour of ours, used to get up very, very early- an older woman. And she would just stuff her things in a small sort of piece of cloth and of course, tie it up, and then of course she would carry it on her back, and she would exit the camp, and try to stop taxi drivers, asking them - remember, she is in Baddawi camp - asking them to return her to Haifa where my father was born (then of course in Palestine) where she was born. And daily she would do that, daily, she would carry her pastimes with her in the hope that this time would take her to a future that is very, that is very vague, and very also diminished if we think about certain realities concerning territory and borders. So, and this woman, this is the other thing, was found dead in fact in the city outside the camp. She died alone on a bench in a park. And for over 10 years daily, she would simply beg taxi drivers to take her to Haifa. And of course, these taxi drivers also want to earn a living, so they would say of course, they would take her to the city, to Tripoli.

And this is it. So our in fact times are also subject to how we ourselves as refugees perceive our existence in these places which are called camps. And I'm not, really I am not here theorising, but I feel that the camp itself doesn't belong to Earth. I feel that the camp is somewhat higher. There is some, there is some- that's why for me, I feel that I cannot situate it; of course, physically it's there, territorially I would take you to it, and I would talk you through its borders. But also, in our imagination, it is a place that is suspended, suspended in various times, the times of course of the first-generation refugees, but also the times of the second and third and now fourth and fifth generations of refugees. And that's why the term even camp, which connotes the temporary construction of that space, is no longer valid conceptually. And this impermanence, and yet temporary, it's very, very, very complex and very confusing. And within that camp of course we can talk and we dwell on these things, but the moment you exit this space, you realise in fact that your siblings are behind, your parents are behind, you're able to exit because you own your time, but they are stuck and stranded in these spaces forever. Forever. The only fact and the only factual thing about these places is in fact death; not living, and not life. Because you can see the cemetery. And you can see that

they are building a new cemetery. And of course, to improve or to repair these houses, you do so illegally, and yet to build and to assign for example, or to demarcate a cemetery, you will do it within the law: isn't it fascinating? Just see how, how death, dying, the living, and life are also contested in that space.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

You're listening to The Corrymeela Podcast, and my name is Pádraig Ó Tuama. With me today is the poet and writer Yousif M. Qasmiyeh. Yousif, these are very difficult times that we're living in. Um, and lots of people maybe in the last number of years might have- well, lots of people in some populations might have forgotten who UNRWA were. Now, of course, hearing reports from UNRWA, hearing what's happening in Gaza, I wonder what are some of the things that occur to you regarding the question of time as you pay attention to what's happening?

Yousif M. Qasmiyeh:

I think that these are, I would say, unprecedented times. I would also go as far as saying that these are really and - I rarely use this word - uniquely, Palestinian times. Because Palestinians aren't part of this representation when it comes to refugeedom. We're either seen overrepresented in the discourse of refugee studies, or, in fact, underrepresented when it comes to policies and also international support. And here I'm not talking about popular support, I'm not talking about individuals supporting the Palestinian individual trying, in fact, to simply forge something real out of this mess, and also respond to a decades long occupation. The time that I- of course, we have relatives and friends who have been, who've lost their lives in Gaza, who've been killed in Gaza. And, and when I was talking with a colleague the other day, his question was: how many? So I really, I couldn't respond to that question, and I couldn't come up with a figure, because I felt that these numbers are really... are stripped of their mass and flesh. And they, they, yes, of course they exist statistically, but in fact, there are certain political powers who don't want to believe that these are real numbers. And these are real people also numbered in that sense.

And I, erm, individually I feel very, very powerless and I feel also unable to write about the enormity of what's going on in Gaza in particular, because I can't, I can't react to a situation: this is not how at least my writing works and manifests itself. I need really a bit of time to process and absorb, to at least say to myself: here I am writing about, in fact, loss. Some is

personal, but also in fact the loss of a humanity because, because of some of the, of the images that we've seen, some of the things that we've heard, and also, you say: is tomorrow going to come, but you know what, the future is saturated with misery now, because this tomorrow is going to bring even more carnage, more annihilation, and more death. That's why I have stopped even hoping for a future, I just stopped even thinking about the next steps and the next even figures in my head. I wish - this is my only wish - that these numbers would stabilise, which is such a ruthless thing to say, just to at least know that, that death has stopped, and dying has stopped.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Erm, I have many other questions, Yousif, but it is so difficult to know what to say in, in, bearing witness to what's happening, in hearing what you're saying. Yeah, there's, there's an experience of shock, and disempowerment. That, in fact, was where I was going to go, was to ask you to say a little bit more about your critique of the word empower. If I understood rightly I heard you say that you weren't a fan of the word empower, 'cause it implies that a population of people don't already have power. Is that at the heart of your critique, or did I misunderstand?

Yousif M. Qasmiyeh:

Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. But also straight away it, in fact, it represents a hierarchical framework that should be, should be rejected at once. I think that we tend to, to assume at times that people are desperate for our help; in fact, people don't need our help, people need to be left alone. People need just to be able to do their thing. This is really- er, there's a brilliant anthropologist, Liisa, Liisa Malkki. They talk about also about the urge to help, because sometimes people don't want to be helped, and really, they don't want to be assisted, because to assume that people are in need is also a ridiculous, in fact, way of entering these people's hearts and minds, because we're entering hearts and minds through food, which is somewhat, somewhat, in fact, opportunistic, and it doesn't in fact value the food itself, but rather, in fact, my position as somebody who's capable of helping and, and also the other person receiving my help, and this, that's why I take issue with the word empower, but I also take issue with the word, or with words such as - and expressions - to give voice. And I've written, I've written in fact about this and I've written, I've written about embroidering the voice with its own needle, that the voice isn't something that isn't there. And be it a domain, be it an apparatus, being an organ, being something: it is, in fact, it belongs to these individuals. And they don't want to be given voice, they want simply to, to have their space where they can express themselves and

to voice these concerns without being censored and restricted, and also dominated and controlled. And so embroidering this voice is also an act that comes from within- the embroiderer is the person who's in charge of the, of the thread: he's in charge - or she's in charge - of the needle, so again, it's up to them. It's up to them to embroider it. And it's up to them also to create and formulate these different vocal and linguistic fabrics. It's up to them.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

I'm not sure I ever told you this Yousif in other times that we've met, but, my aunt, my mother's sister - who's also my godmother - is a fairly renowned lacemaker. And she was involved in starting off an exchange of lacemaking between women in Cork, where she lives, where I grew up. And it was women who were born and grew up in Ireland, and then women who came to Ireland for all kinds of reasons - economic reasons, refugee reasons - and there wasn't necessarily a shared language between them. But the idea was simply a skills exchange regarding lacework. Because you find embroidery and lacework in almost every culture. In fact, every culture, 'cause, you know, it isn't just an art form, it's also about, it's also about your clothing. And so as you speak about embroidery, I'm immediately brought into the story of that group that my aunt was involved in setting up. I'll introduce you to her sometime.

Yousif M. Qasmiyeh:

I would love to, and I think that this, once again, it takes us to this, to this really historical as well, and cultural correspondence that binds these different groups, citizens and refugees, and you've mentioned the word skill, or skills. This is it. It's really these individuals are skilled, of course, it's about idealising these situations. But also to assume that these people are producers of knowledge. These are really people who can do something and do something for themselves before of course sharing the product itself with other people. This is exactly the very definition in fact of autonomy, independence, but also of being able to state your position as a productive entity. And this is what's missing, sadly, in the ways of course refugees in particular are represented. You have the poem, produced by the refugee, which is seen as a lack, somewhat. And yet you have the introduction that belongs to the scholar, for instance, that is seen as the complete. And this is something- and this correspondence needs to undergo different stages, to feel that the creative in fact, whether it's, whether it's a profession, whether it's the writing exercise, these are all different kinds of knowledge. And they should be acknowledged as such. And when they are cited, they should be cited, as in fact, again, knowledge and complete citations.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Yousif M. Qasmiyeh, thank you very much for coming on The Corrymeela Podcast, I want to say, erm, coming on The Corrymeela Podcast for the first time because I got through about a quarter of the things I wanted to talk to you about. So I would love to talk to you further some other time. But thank you so much for giving us your time for this conversation.

Yousif M. Qasmiyeh:

Thank you so much, Pádraig, for having me.

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Pádraig Ó Tuama:

So, Yousif M. Qasmiyeh, what is something important that you've changed your mind about?

Yousif M. Qasmiyeh:

I would say living. Last year was incredibly, incredibly hard for me. And when I say living here, it doesn't mean that I'm deserting living. But also to remember that living takes different forms. And in order to live, we have of course, to live on. That was in fact missing in my understanding. So I would say living.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

And are there books or poems or pieces of music or other works of art that have- that you've turned to again and again, Yousif?

Yousif M. Qasmiyeh:

I don't return to poetry, I return to philosophy. Always. And I, I would say the last maybe four or five months, I've been returning a lot to *Cinders* by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida. Why? Because it also, it shows us the, both the fragility and resilience of cinders and ashes. It is, it is the most profound poetic self-analysis written by Derrida. And it is this kind of

philosophy that makes you at least feel that you're at ease with philosophy, the philosophy that can be accessed and understood and be processed.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Could you tell us about a time when your national identity felt important to yer?

Yousif M. Qasmiyeh:

These days, these days and I, and here of course I'm using national identity loosely, because I worry about such labels. But I would say Gaza. I would say Palestine. I would say Palestinians, because it is a question of humanity and how humanity also represents itself and acknowledges those who are oppressed and have been oppressed. So I would say now. These days.