

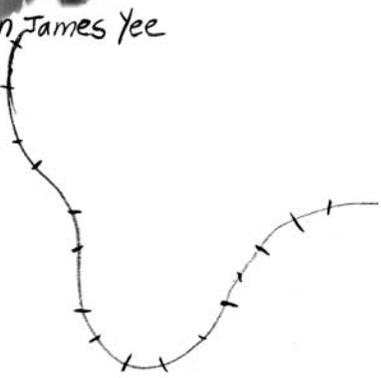
Notes on the Disappeared

Towards a Visual Language of Resistance

CHITRA GANESH + MARIAM GHANI



Dreaming, that might he disappeared?



HOW DO YOU SEE THE DISAPPEARED?

WHERE ARE YOU?

*The digest is delivered to me every day.
I read it with my morning coffee.
Reading my way with purpose
Out of the fog of sleep.*



In every email I look for clues.

*The weightless adjectives and nouns
that are meant
somehow to contain the arcs of lives.*

To Christine Shahab, a frezzled young woman with long hair and a baby face, no such reprieve seems in sight. Between runs to jail to see her husband and long days at the car audio shop they opened together, she finds herself thinking of what life would be like if he was deported to Afghanistan and she followed.

For someone who has spent her life on Long Island, in a pretty town with bungalows and backyards and American flags on the lawns, it is unimaginable. "I would follow him there," she said. Then, in the next instant, she wondered, "How could I live there with my daughter?"

She has known Mr. Shahab since she was 16.

"They were a perfect match," said her mother.

"He's the hardest-working kid I've ever seen," said her father.

After marrying, the family says, the couple went to the immigration service to apply for Mr. Shahab's permanent residency. Two years later, they were called for an interview. Mrs. Shahab says she told the officer about the deportation order. The officer, she says, told her she could still sponsor her husband for citizenship, and told her how to apply.

"Never for a day did we think there was a problem," Mrs. Shahab said. "We did everything they told us to do."

Just about every day now, their daughter, Savannah, pulls down their wedding album from the bedroom dresser. Mrs. Shahab says the little girl speaks to the photographs: "I miss you, Daddy. Where are you?"

<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/06/04/national/04DFP0.html?ex=-06bceb01c331648e>

I read between the lines as if

runs to jail to see her husband and long days at the car
audio shop they opened together, she finds herself thinking
of what life would be like if he was deported to
Afghanistan and she followed.

somewhere to be seen

pretty town with bungalows and backyards and American flags

are the traces of the disappeared

the hardest-working kid I've ever seen

the warm and buzzing outlines of vanished years

*trembling like phantom limbs
in the vast blanks of the unsaid.*

THE QUESTIONS

*The worst of it:
How random this
unmaking comes to feel,
How casual the knife that slips
between the stitches.*

*As if you were nothing more than
the number, nationality, religion
scrawled across a case file.*



*The double disappearances:
first your days as you lived them,
and the nights you slept becalmed,
Then all the rich and varied language
that once described them
Your many names
and sayings, words savored
on the tongue,
Reduced to this:*

Ms. Ali's father, a bookseller, was required to register dutifully reported to immigration authorities, she said, and deported last year. His family stayed behind.

law applies. In 2000, Garibaldy Mejia, a 54-year-old grandfather and livery cab driver, was stopped by immigration agents in the airport upon

he was in New York on a tourist visa when he fell in love

Anser Mehmood, 42, a Pakistani immigrant,

A former Boston cab driver

Chinese woman, detained

Where does it start?

With the lists

	POB	Charge	Date of Charge
1	Pakistan	212(a)(1)(C)(i) POB	2/29/00
2	Pakistan	212(a)(1)(A)(i) No Visa	2/22/00
3	Jordan	212(a)(1)(A)(i) WVR/ KIB/REP of entry	4/14/00
4	Pakistan	212(a)(1)(C)(i) & (7)(A)(X)(i) WVR/ KIB/REP of entry	3/28/00
5	Pakistan	237(a)(1)(C)(i) NON/IMM status VIO	2/8/01
6	Jordan	212(a)(1)(C)(i) & 212(a)(1)(A)(i) Non/Imm No Visa	7/20/01
7	Pakistan	237(a)(1)(C)(i) Non/Imm Status VIO	7/28/01
8	Pakistan	212(a)(1)(B)(X)(i) present who being admitted	8/24/01
9	Pakistan	212(a)(1)(B)(X)(i) POB	8/30/01
10	Pakistan	212(a)(1)(A)(i) C/MLY	8/30/01
11	Pakistan	148 USC (1)(a)(1)	8/7/01
12	Jordan	237(a)(1)(B)(i) Overstay	8/17/01
13	Algeria	237(a)(1)(B)(i)	8/17/01
14	Morocco	237(a)(1)(B)(i) Present in US in Viol/Law - Overstay	8/17/01
15	India	212(a)(1)(C)(i)	8/17/01
16	Egypt	237(a)(1)(C)(i) NON/IMM status VIO	8/17/01
17	India	237(a)(1)(B)(i) Overstay	8/17/01
18	Pakistan	237(a)(1)(A)(i) Present in US in VIOL/LAW	8/17/01
19	Saudi Arabia	237(a)(1)(B)(X)(i) Out of Status	8/17/01
20	Jordan	14-2 overstay	8/17/01
21	Egypt	212(a)(1)(A)(i) Chairman	8/17/01
22	Egypt	212(a)(1)(B)(1)(A)(i) POB	8/17/01
23	Egypt	212(a)(1)(A)(i) POB	8/17/01
24	Morocco	237(a)(1)(B)(i) C	8/17/01
25	Egypt	237(a)(1)(B)(i) B-1 Overstay	8/17/01
26	Saudi Arabia	237(a)(1)(B)(i) B-2 Overstay	8/17/01
27	Jordan	237(a)(1)(B)(i) Overstay	8/17/01
28	Saudi Arabia	237(a)(1)(B)(i) B-2 Overstay	8/17/01
29	Pakistan	212(a)(1)(A)(i) Overstay	8/17/01
30	Egypt	212(a)(1)(A)(i) POB	8/17/01
31	Saudi Arabia	237(a)(1)(B)(i) B-2 Overstay	8/17/01
32	Iran	237(a)(1)(B)(i) overstay	8/17/01
33	Egypt	237(a)(1)(B)(i) overstay	8/17/01
34	Pakistan	212(a)(1)(A)(i) Non/Imm not in Poss/PP/Visa	8/17/01

Immigration officials in investigations perform the enforcement function—they are the people who will ask additional questions, initiate deportation proceedings, and raid people's homes. Of respondents who were questioned in investigations, 47% were asked about their criminal history, 37% were asked about their marital relationship, and 37% were asked about the immigration status of family members. Only 11% were asked questions about connections to terrorism. Again, these are disturbing signs that catching people on immigration violations was a focus of Special Registration. In investigations, 26%

INS Special Interest List
Joint Terrorism Task Force Working Group
IMMIGRATION OFFICIALS—LAW ENFORCEMENT IDENTITIES

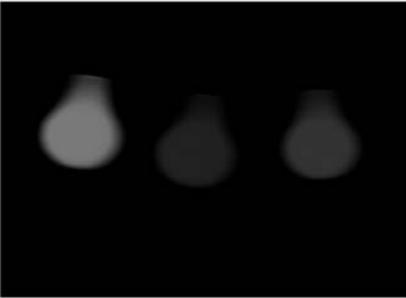
(b)(7)(F) (b)(7)(C)

A Number	Name	POB	Agency	Employer	Employment Dates	Investigation Dates	Investigation Title	Classification	Agency
(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)
(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)
(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)
(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)	(b)(7)(F)
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Or the questions?

- SPECIAL REGISTRATION INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**
- What is your last (family) name?
 - What is your first (given) name?
 - What is your middle name?
 - What is your Nationality (list both if dual national and list first the nationality that the alien is using to apply for admission)?
 - What is your place of birth (country & city/province)?
 - What is your sex?
 - What is your birth date?
 - What is your height?
 - What is your weight?
 - What is your hair color?
 - What is your eye color?
 - What is the purpose of your visit?
 - What are the names of your Father and your Mother?
 - What is your father's address?
 - What is your father's telephone number?
 - What is your mother's telephone number?
 - What is your mother's address?
 - List at least one point of contact (example: friend or relative) for you in your country of origin:
 - What is the address of each point of contact in your country of origin?
 - List at least one point of contact here in the United States (example: friend or relative).
 - What is the address of the point of contact in the United States?
 - What will your address be while you are in the United States?
 - What is the phone number?
 - What miscellaneous numbers can you supply (I-94#, SSN, A-file, perforated document #, overseas Driver's License number)?

Somewhere between the cold, hard facts approved for entry into your secret file and the stark, anonymous light that shines on the story of your dealings with the system lies the unprovable truth of who you were Perhaps who you still are

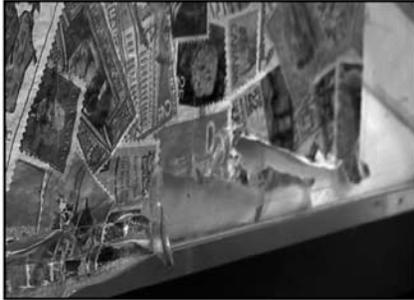


The one truth you have not testified

*What would be the questions to ask?
To give that phantom form
To crowd the lines with words
adjectives and nouns and adverbs
and verbs even
beyond the power of reporters to reduce?
To translate image, sound, music, touch
from the speech passed through the wires?*

Describe a place you see
when you close your eyes at night:
Name a piece of music that is
always running through your head:
Describe your favorite piece of clothing
you've ever owned:
If all the sights, sounds, sensations, and activities
that have disappeared from your life
since you entered the system,
which do you miss the most?
How long do you think it will be

*I want to trade in your everyday
The forgotten banalities of forgotten days
Memories that seep from beneath the corners
of peeling picture-postcards.*



*How else to understand, I think,
how much alike we were?
You smiling, a little tired,
as you handed me
the smiling coffee
Me smiling, a little tired,
as I handed you
the stern dollar bill.*



Mariam Ghani - Brooklyn, NY - 2004

By proposing new terms through which stories can be told and issues framed, our collaborative visual project – drawing from an ongoing collaborative inquiry into the human cost of US immigration policy – aims to make critical interventions in how narratives of disappearance are produced on all sides of the US immigration debate. We explore two key features of disappearance: the mass immigrant detentions and deportations sweeping the US since 9/11/01, and the radical limitation of representation, by both law and mass media, of the immigrants who are caught in the system.

Over the past few years, immigrants and their advocates have come to understand how gag orders, media stereotypes and convenient abstractions hang like a veil between people directly impacted by detention and deportation, and the majority whose silence consents to the disappearances. The struggle to generate a collective history of individual disappearances has therefore been at the core of activist initiatives addressing this crisis.

However, much of the advocacy work around detention and deportation is mobilised through the law or mass media itself. Thus, narratives of resistance assembled by that advocacy risk being subjected to the very codes and language they seek to contest. For example, the recurring use of directed testimony, statistics and expert witnesses in activist documentaries about detention and deportation both recall courtroom dynamics, and reiterate the pundit-driven rhythms of network news. Our work departs from this understanding of the situation of post-9/11 disappearance, where individuals are 'disappeared' for a second time in the scarce and troubling visual representation offered as their history in mass-mediated and legal domains. Our artistic inquiry thus exists in continual tension between collaboration with the activist movement towards a collective history, and an effort to reconceptualise the terms through which that history is now addressed.

We seek to mine the rich possibilities of the visual as a site where audiences come face to face with the specific details of lives that are impacted by post-9/11 disappearance, but must also engage with the core cultural and systemic breakdowns that lie beneath current events. Our common belief is that this deeper awareness can be activated by a commitment to form as content, and a profound engagement with the medium and materials through which the ideas of political art are communicated. Through transmutations and deconstructions that re-orient viewers' perspectives, we hope to produce unexpected visual experiences that trigger a reconsideration of social codes and histories.

In this project, we collect from the everyday past lives of the disappeared the unquantifiable data which otherwise goes unnoticed. We create a space for this information to be read and considered without being reduced; we do so by framing it within intersecting nonlinear narratives where meaning is produced in both the convergence and disjuncture between text and image. This project shares concerns that are at the heart of our practices: an interest in exploring how memories and their repression shape moments of personal and social crisis, and the mapping of contrapuntal narratives that emerge in the border zones between cultures in conflict.

Through this active translation of 'raw data' and formal choices that disrupt conventional modes of seeing, the *Disappeared* project aims to elaborate a visual language that truly resists the descriptive and narrative conventions and one-to-one relationships accumulated in the legal and media treatment of detention and deportation cases. Our belief is that only through a visual language of resistance can a more nuanced representation and sharper analysis be articulated.