

## **Almond trees, checkpoints and friendship: the dialectics of loss in Raja Shehadeh's life writing**

### Abstract

This paper explores a concern that is deeply ingrained in the works of life-writing that have been emerging from the Eastern Mediterranean region in the past two decades: the relation between the idea of those “lost worlds” of the Eastern Mediterranean as it stood more than a century ago, right before the European imperial powers’ strategic interventions, and those acts of re-remembering the “lost world” as a means of representing the current realities of individuals, families and communities born from the long-term effects of that moment. Such is the case with Palestinian authors, whose memory writing is dominated by the loss of land and the missed opportunity to establish their own nation-state, while underlining what it feels like to be living in the wake of a “lost” cultural, political and moral universe dating back to the turn of the twentieth century.

In line with this thought, this paper looks into the struggle of worlds lived and remembered, as a dialectical one — the lost world in a difficult relationship with the alterity of the present, in which tension arises between diverse political and cultural spaces by analysing Raja Shehadeh's *A Rift in Time: Travels with my Ottoman Uncle*, *Palestinian Walks: Notes on a Vanishing Landscape* and *Where the Line is Drawn: Crossing Boundaries in Occupied Palestine*. Thus, this paper explores how the memoir is itself a space of encounter that evokes the remnants of the old world – represented by geology, genealogy, borderlessness, geographical spaces, ruins and friendship – and Shehadeh's deliberate way of transmitting them to the present counter-world.