

VALERIE ALIA

June 30, 1992. (The morning after my mother died)

They took away your name
at the border

Forsaking borders,
You gave away your names.

Rebecca Rivke not yours to give
Bertha not yours to take

Surnames middlenames
Hungarianized Jewish names
Yiddishized Hungarian names
Unnamed renamed
remained

My mother
who shall remain
nameless
would not name
my children
did not know
her daughter's name
mis-naming me,
un-named herself.

Cruel and unusual punishment
inflicted on
daughters
grandsons
granddaughter ...
even the chosen ones injured
by unreasoned distinction
child
after child
after child
abuses of
body
mind
trust

The cycle of trust
begun again
in sisters
sisters' children
children's hope.

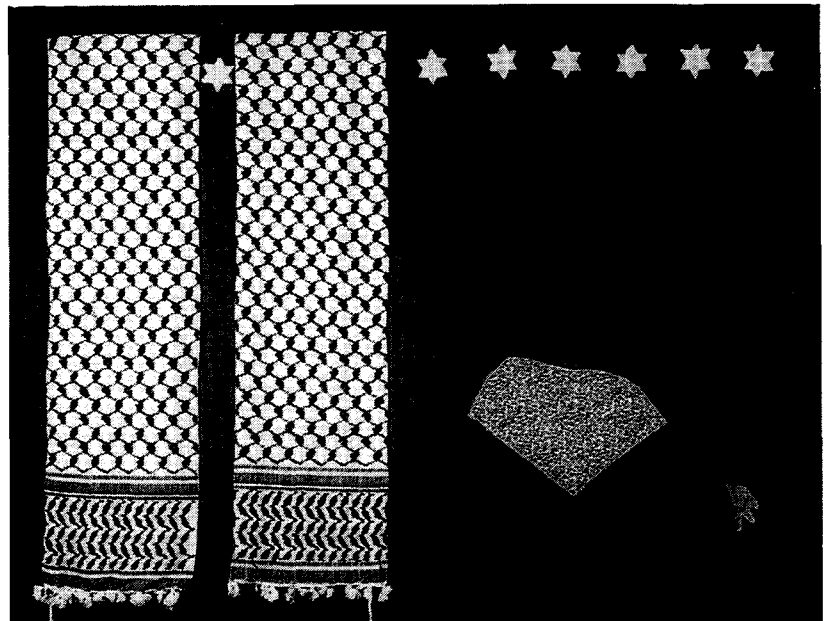
What was lost:

mothering and
motherlove
acceptance and
resolution
kindness and
peace

What we have:

names
our own names
our owned names
love
and hope
and children.

Valerie Alia is an award-winning writer, photographer, and scholar with a PhD in Social and Political Thought from York University. She is the author of Names, Numbers, and Northern Policy: Inuit, Project Surname, and the Politics of Identity and the CBC documentary "Nunavut: Where Names Never Die." In 1995, she was a Poetry Finalist in the Tilden/CBC/Saturday Night National Literary Awards.



Sima Elizabeth Shefrin, "Places of Hope," fabric appliqué and quilting, 30" x 41", 1994/5754. Photo: Brenda Hemsing