Declaration

I, Dana Ariel, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

All photographs are by the author, Dana Ariel, unless stated otherwise.
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Gebrochener Boden

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In the Arab village of Fasa'il and the Jewish settlement of Peza'el the doubling begins in the spoken and written name. Road signs in Israel are written in Hebrew, Arabic and English. In Arabic Fasa'il and Peza'el are identical, while English offers various options. The written word kept changing in my text, until deciding to return to the road sign version Peza'el. In speaking the English word as if it was German, and translating it back into Hebrew, Peza'el would be pronounced as Pe(t)za'el. In Hebrew, peza means wound and el means god.
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לחצות את הגבול עם רימון
to cross the border with a pomegranate

to cross the border with a grenade

to split the border with a grenade

to divide the border over a pomegranate

to halve the border with a grenade

to split a pomegranate on the border

to divide a grenade for the border

to cross the border for a pomegranate
Two pomegranates were offered to me on one of my visits to the village of Fasa’il and the settlement of Peza’el in the Jordan Valley. It was a token of hospitality when I feared to encounter hostility. The desire to take the precious gift back to London with me led to the writing of this text.

In the summer of 2015, August to be precise, I visited the Jordan Valley once more. It was 44 degrees that day. A cool down, the radio forecast declared. The week before registered a new record as it measured 51 degrees in my chosen site. Though one does not wish to yield to weather conditions, it has definitely restricted my visit to very short outings in the vicinity of my car. Midday presented acute danger. My negatives didn’t react well to these conditions either. In fact, black and white negatives shot that day revealed ghostly marks and stains, I suspected the heat might have played a role in this.

North of Peza’el, on route 90 heading north, we turned right at the sight of two trees. A palm tree and a cypress tree in a cultivated field situated on the border with Jordan. We stopped to photograph. I took a single shot of the trees as they stood there side by side. Galit was interested in the two trees for another reason and from another angle, at which they are concealing one another. This, I thought, resonated with her stubborn desire to photograph in Jordan: to see and photograph from Jordan looking towards Israel. She desired a reversal of the gaze, I thought, as I observed her observing the trees as she took her time to position the camera in the right place.

A blue car spotted us and was now driving towards us. I was afraid. Galit was out in the field and I felt helpless, not knowing how this encounter would unfold. My presence in this field presented a double intrusion. First, I could see that this belonged to someone, and even though
my intentions were not harmful I nonetheless questioned my right to stand there. Secondly, the ethical and political reality that shadows all my visits to the West Bank and is also the motivation for my visits, was now dominating this encounter. I feared being identified as hostile, I feared being identified as Israeli, in the occupied territories of the Jordan Valley, and I feared for being a woman.

All of these thoughts above could, to some degree, be diffused or deferred through reason. Nonetheless, in the fraction of the moment leading to that first encounter, these thoughts, grounded or not, were violently present.

In an attempt to release myself from them I decided to surrender any gestures that might seem hostile. I smiled and waited. It all proved to be incredibly silly and irrelevant as the man approached with a smile of greeting, no signs of suspicion as to my presence here. There was only hospitality. We spoke in Hebrew and he never asked for my name, only where I was from. Jerusalem, I said. I regret never asking for his. He told me of the fruits he was growing in his field, and that the field belonged to his father and his father's father before that. After a while he left, and I remained there, sweating from the heat and my shame at fearing everything I tried so hard to resist, still waiting for Galit.

Moments later he returned with palms full of dates and two pomegranates.

Back in Jerusalem, on the afternoon before my return flight to London, I decided to take the two pomegranates with me. They had become a precious souvenir and I couldn’t leave them behind. Fearing they might be confiscated at the airport I decided to photograph them in my parents’
I photographed in black and white because I was interested in the scarred surface, the marks and scratches. I placed them on an improvised set, covering my parents’ garden table with a white sheet of paper which, when lifted against the sun, provided a beautiful back light for the pomegranates. I took a few shots, each time rotating the pomegranates to reveal different marks. By the end of the film I paid more attention to the slightly faded colours of their skin, and to how different they were from one another. The colours, I thought, seemed to reveal their exposure to light, and differentiate between fresh marks and older scratches that had healed already. I decided to take a few photographs with colour negative as well, trying to retrace the previous positions and rotations.

I left for the airport with the two pomegranates and this sentence in Hebrew in my mind. When asked by the security officers at the airport if I had received any gifts I will have to say yes. When asked who gave them to me I will have to say that I don’t know the name of the person. Then, I will probably be asked where I got them from, and I will have to say, from the West Bank. I was crossing the border with a pomegranate, but in Hebrew, רימון means a pomegranate and a grenade, and the verb לחצות means to cross, to split, to divide, or to halve.
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שביל טשטוש
blurring a border begins with first light
each soldier is assigned a section of the border
this is a protective measure
the soldier’s duty is to know the border
to become familiar with its site and sight
to recognise and identify the land, the path, the rocks, the holes, the stains and scratches
to see it change through seasons of the year, from morning to dusk
to see the border fade in and out
to stand there at noon and be blinded by the sun reflecting from the bright dusty ground
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A Few Notes on Crossing a Minefield
A Few Notes on Crossing a Minefield

In a field, one might find mines against humans, not intending to kill but rather to injure, and mines against vessels that seek the destruction of moving targets. A simple, some might say primitive, method of crossing a minefield would be to use a metal rod with a handle. The person wishing to cross must tread carefully, feeling the ground by poking it with the rod. In such a case, the sound of clanging metal would undoubtedly indicate imminent danger. Another more advanced and efficient method would be to plough the field with an armoured vessel. This would efficiently remove any trace of hostile objects, but would permanently alter the features of the land. In this case, precise guidance notes must be issued to prevent any future confusion for those who wish to return. Please note that a detour may prove valuable in certain cases, but should only be considered after all other possibilities have been thoroughly exhausted.
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