

What memory feels, what the body remembers, in liminal spaces Nesli Gül

There is always a song that reminds us of a place, a moment or of someone. A song takes us to the past, inspires, excites, transforms, or calms us down. A song drags our memory and body together, through our encounters with a space, through being lost or resilient. What does a song remind us of? Can a song reconcile, or heal us from a loss of someone or something? Does a song make it possible to reclaim a public space we have lost? Which song makes you feel comfortable or secure in a public space?

belit sađ's 3-screen work titled 'Şifa', which is a Turkish word that can roughly translate into English as 'healing', focuses on immigrant women's losses, grief, and isolation during the Covid-19 pandemic through narratives revisiting their experiences of migration, their hybrid identities, and senses of belonging.

In the first video, Hümeýra is seen singing songs in the park and people pass by the road behind her. Parks and green spaces become an extension of her body and feelings. In the second video, Maral is seen on the pavement in a street with buildings on both sides and a tram track on her left while singing a song. Maral holds a defiant posture contrasting with the built environment around her, and her narrative about her personal losses underlies the effect of her posture in this environment. In the third video, Rengin, like Hümeýra and Maral, sits on a chair and sings her song. Unlike others, we see Rengin in the underpass, an uncannier and more closed environment than others. In the videos, Hümeýra, Maral, and Rengin seem to be positioned in places where transitions in public space converge with their own personal experiences, memories, and feelings. Although every experience is individual, as we read in the videos, through sharing these experiences become communal and universal. All three women have a calm posture and expression while singing songs that convey powerful feelings. Hümeýra says "Singing makes me feel good", Maral underlines her feelings of refreshment, lightness, and relief through



Image 1,2,3: belit sađ, Şifa, 3-screen work, from top to bottom: Hümeýra, Maral, and Rengin, 2020, 7'41"

listening to songs of her childhood, Rengin talks about how a song she used to listen to in Turkey completely transformed its meaning once she started singing it during corona times in her migrant life in the Netherlands. Singing left profound effects on each woman's own emotional landscape while they were going through distinct personal experiences and transformations.

'Şifa', based on songs chosen by women and conversations around their losses during the pandemic, strikes the audience lost in a vivid body and memory to contemplate on reconnecting, belonging, and closeness with others in liminal spaces. Locations in the videos become courageous, brave, or even safe spaces to share these feelings of in-betweenness and loss.

"Liminality is a term used to describe the psychological process of transitioning across boundaries and borders. The term 'limen' comes from the Latin for threshold; it is literally the threshold separating one space from another. It is the place on the wall where people move from one room to another. Often a door is placed across the threshold to close up and restrict access between rooms. The concept was first applied to psychology as the technical name for the perceptual threshold, the degree of stimulus intensity that would just be noticed as audible or visible or detectable in any sensory mode."¹

Streets, underpasses, and public parks, as seen in Şifa videos, are sites of passage or They function as means of transition, as liminal spaces where thoughts flow and hybrid identities are underlined. In pandemic times, our perception of these spaces and the way they exist in their emptiness and fullness have transformed dramatically. Accordingly, Şifa brings together experiences of three immigrant women from different backgrounds through the concept of 'loss', while situating them metaphorically and physically in these in-between spaces. Throughout the videos, we notice people passing around women, making life seem "normal" in times of corona restrictions, life flows. And in these flows each woman develops a bond with their own situatedness wherein they question both physical and mental spaces in their own lives between cultures and territories.

Şifa goes beyond an encounter with a site of passage, it is a confrontation with a moment in the mind and in memory. A moment comes after moving to a new country in which you know where you are physically, but you may not be sure where you are as a person. Şifa invites people to participate in these captured moments both spatially and emotionally, through the body and mind. The songs chosen by the women in Şifa, connect to how these women feel on the threshold of their loss, grief, and isolation in life. The songs make room for these women to express the feelings that accompany their losses and extend their emotional landscapes beyond their bodies and minds towards public space at the time of corona. The most powerful part of the work is not only that emotions are expressed through the selected songs but also the emotions and songs intersect each other. This allows the work to open up new areas of discussion.

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¹Liminality, In K. Leeming, K. Madden & A. Marlan (Eds.), Encyclopedia of psychology and religion, New York, NY: Springer, 2010, p. 519.

As a concept, 'loss' refers to the loss of the routine, the losses embedded in transitions such as migration, growth, death, losses that happen as part of social rituals, losing bodies, spaces, memories, material, spiritual, mental or financial losses. Şifa, while questioning our losses during the pandemic, opens a space for women to express themselves and share their experiences with us on the other side of the screens. The videos focus on losing a loved one, the loss experienced during the transition from one country to another and losing social spaces and connections. However, when these personal experiences meet us through the videos, the loss becomes an expression of a shared experience. belit sağ's video installations mine the complexity of being an immigrant through how we —individually and collectively— experience loss, grief, and isolation during a pandemic.

In all three videos, women sing while sitting on a red chair. They are in the center of attention. Connections and boundaries are both physical as well as metaphorical in terms of both the personal and the common. Conflict arises from their positioning in spaces and an intimate atmosphere is created by singing quietly. Loss and its associated grief, from the bodies and inner worlds of immigrant women, turn into moments waiting to be shared with an outside world. Subsequently, these moments question the spaces they are in on a personal and collective, as well as on an emotional and physical level. The following question arises: How are we holding a space for ourselves in a time of social isolation and pandemic?

On the one hand, Şifa communicates the feelings of immigrant women while singing in public places to seek their interlocutors, to share their experiences and to reconcile with or heal their loss, grief, and isolation. On the other hand, common feelings and experiences that arise in corona times, like finding oneself and self-confrontation, are also instrumental for the audience to find themselves. It also triggers the audience to contemplate and share their own emotions and experiences. As such, Şifa is intimate and serene and at the same time bold and full of life.