

# Omar Mouallem

books | journalism | tv and film | podcasting | education

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## FILM AND TELEVISION

### **The St. George Hotel (in development with Zaki Rose Corp.) - Co-producer/Writer**

Documentary adaptation of Saïd K. Aburish's nonfiction book *Beirut Spy: The St. George Hotel Bar*, about the assassination plots, wars, and revolutions planned inside a historic hotel bar patronized by the most powerful people in the Middle East. This adaptation includes expands the scope to tell the story of the hotel during and after the Lebanese civil war, and the current owner's attempt to resurrect it during an unprecedented economic crisis. (in collaboration with director/executive producer Wael Abou-Zaki and coproducer Hass Ghoussani)

### **Making Kayfabe - Director/Coproducer/Writer (2024)**

Back Road Productions/CBC Gem Originals - 44-min. documentary about the ordinary lives of indie pro wrestlers and my attempt to become a wrestler myself.

### **The Lebanese Burger Mafia (2023) - Director/Producer/Writer**

Back Road Productions/levelFilm/MAD Film & Distribution – feature film expansion of *The Last Baron* (see below).

- Canadian theatrical release and Paramount+ release
- **Official Selection:** Hot Docs (world premiere), NorthWest Fest, Toronto Arab Film Festival, Rotterdam Arab Film Festival, Windsor Int'l Film Festival, Calgary Int'l Film Fest, Cinefest Sudbury, Silk Road Int'l Film Festival (Dublin), Calgary Arab Film Nights, Whistler Int'l Film Festival, Devour! Food Film Festival; Arab American National Museum's Arab Film Festival; Belleville Doc Fest
- **Awards:** Edmonton Film Prize (finalist); James Beard Awards for Documentary Media (finalist); Rosies - Best Screenplay (winner) and Best Documentary and Best Documentary Sound Design (finalists); NorthWest Fest - Audience Choice, Best Doc; Silk Road - Best Documentary and Best Documentary Director; Toronto Arab Film Festival - Best Feature Honourable Mention; Rotterdam Arab Film Festival - Best Documentary (finalist)

### **Dance the Green (2023) - Script assistant**

Script assistant for feature film written by Academy Award winner Barry Morrow, produced by Prairie Dog Film & TV.

### **The Last Baron (2021) - Director/Producer/Writer**

Produced by Back Road Productions in association with CBC Gem/Absolutely Canadian,

with financial support from Edmonton Heritage Council.

- Awarded 2022 Foodie of the Year (*Western Living* magazine)
- Nominated for 5 Alberta TV & Film Awards in the long-form documentary division (Best Overall Production; Director; Screenwriter; Editing; Musical Score)

**Digging in the Dirt (2019) - Co-director/coproducer (with Dylan Rhys Howard)**

Back Road Productions documentary in association with CBC Gem/Absolutely Canadian about suicides in the Alberta oil sands.

- Selected for HotDocs Festival: Spotlight on Alberta (2021)
- Finalist, Best Documentary (Over 30 Minutes), Alberta Film & TV Awards (2020)
- Winner, Best Multimedia, Petroleum History Society Awards (2020)

**Untitled Miniseries Drama (pre-development) - Research and story development**

Scythia Films/Stellar Citizens biographical miniseries about Lisa Howard, a pioneering female journalist that is currently being shopped around.

- Shortlist, MIPTV's Drama Series Pitch
- Selected ACE Producers, Second Series Special

**Where Machines Go to Die (pre-development) - Research and story development**

Scythia Films/Stellar Citizens docuseries about industrial junkyards

**Educational Films (2006-2007) - Director and editor**

Created four short educational dramas in French, English, Cree, and Arabic for the Faculty of Family Medicine & Dentistry at the University of Alberta.

## AUTHOR

***Back Where I Came From: On Culture, Identity and Home***, Anthology coeditor with Taslim Jaffer, Book\*hug, fall 2024

***How Muslims Shaped the Americas***

Simon & Schuster Canada, 2021 hardcover, 2024 paperback

- Independent Bookseller's Best Seller List (Retail Council of Canada)
- Globe and Mail Top 100 Books of 2021
- Winter of the Wilfrid Eggleston Prize for Nonfiction

***Undisclosed memoir (ghostwriter)*** Simon & Schuster Canada, 2019

- #1 on the *Globe & Mail* and *Toronto Star* Canadian bestsellers list

***Inside the Inferno: A Firefighter's Story of the Brotherhood that Saved Fort McMurray (with Damian Asher)*** Simon & Schuster Canada, 2017

- 10 weeks on the *Globe & Mail* National and Canadian Bestsellers list

## **"Motherland" in 40 Below Vol. 2: Alberta's Winter Anthology**

Wufniks Press, 2015 (short fiction)

### WRITING AND JOURNALISM

**Essays:** Literary Hub, Literary Review of Canada, *The Guardian*, *The Walrus*, *Eighteen Bridges*, *Reader's Digest*, *Canadian Geographic*, *Swerve*, *SHARP*, *The Globe and Mail*,

**Feature Writing and General News:** *Maclean's* (contributing editor), *The Guardian*, *RollingStone.com*, *VICE*, *NewYorker.com*, *WIRED*, *The Ringer*, *Toronto Star*, *Cottage Life*, *Reuters*, *Broadview*

**Food and Travel:** *Wall Street Journal*, *South China Morning Post*, *enRoute*, *WestJet Magazine*, *Canadian Geographic Travel*, *Azure*, *Maclean's*, *Metro Daily News*, *Avenue*

### BROADCAST MEDIA

#### **Podcasts and Radio**

**CANADALAND** - Guest host and regular guest commentator (2015–2018)

**The Yards Podcast** - Host (2014–2015)

**Alberta Magazines Podcast** - Host and editor (2015–2018)

**The Ryan Jespersen Show/Real Talk with R.J.** - Frequent guest (2016–present)

**CBC Radio One** - Edmonton civics commentator (2013–2017); theatre columnist (2011)

#### **Television Commentary (selected highlights)**

**Al Jazeera** - Debate guest on *The Stream* (2017)

**Alberta Primetime** - Pop Culture Panelist (2013-2018) and Political Panelist (2015-2016)

**Eddy's Kingdom (2020)** - expert interview for documentary feature

**"One Heart Two Homes" (2012)** - documentary about Lebanese–Canadian identity subject

### PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR

**Pandemic University School of Writing**, Founder and Owner (Apr. 2020–present)

A pop-up virtual school for, by, and in support of writers adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. PanU hires acclaimed authors, journalists, and screenwriters to teach affordable classes on craft and industry, attended by more than 4,000 people in 60 countries. I'm also teach a six-week course, "The Business of Freelancing Writing."

**University of King's College, Journalism, Writing & Publishing** (2021-present)

Creative nonfiction mentor to MFA students in King's prestigious nonfiction program.

**University of British Columbia, School of Creative Writing** (2022)

Adjunct Professor, Advanced Creative Nonfiction – 505K

**University of Alberta, Faculty of Extension (2020–2021)**

Journalism instructor (Business of Freelance Writing)

**Edmonton Digital Arts College**, Business Communications instructor (2013-2014)

**YouthWrite!**, Creative nonfiction camp instructor (2018 - present)

**Writer in Residence, Edmonton Public Library, 2013**

Full-time 12-month residency, dedicating 15 hours a week to community programming and outreach, and professional mentorship.

**Professional Workshops (since 2012)**

- *“Writing Cinematically”*
- *“Organized Chaos”*
- *“Surviving the Freelance Grind”*
- *“The Art of Storytelling”*
- *“Digital Tools for Writers”*
- *“Pitch Perfect”* (magazine pitching)
- *“How to Pitch”* (with Natasha Grzincic)
- *“Secrets of Narrative Nonfiction”*
- *“Researching Nonfiction”*
- *“Writing Fearless Profiles”*
- *“Writing for the Senses”*
- *“It Really Happened!”* (2- to 5-day youth workshop)

**Workshop audiences since 2012:** Iceland Writers Retreat, Canadian Association of Black Journalists, Canadian Journalists of Colour, PEN Canada Writers in Exile, Canadian University Press, Canadian Media Guild, Canadian Authors Association, LitFest, Writers Guild of Alberta, University of Alberta, Travel Media Association of Canada, Edmonton Public Library, Borderlines Writers Group, YouthWrite!, JustWrite!, AMPA, John Humphrey Centre, Pro Writing Aid, and Third Verb.

## PUBLIC SPEAKING AND READINGS

**Keynotes**

- *“Resisting the Culture Wars,”* NASH student journalism conference (2024)
- *“The Hidden History of Arab Traders on the Prairies,”* EPL Learn Downtown (2023)
- *“A Quiet History of the Islam in the Americas,”* MacEwan University, Atwater Library, University of Alberta, Airdrie Public Library
- *“A Foot in Two Worlds,”* Creative Non-fiction Collective Conference (2022)

- Edmonton Heritage Council AGM (2022)
- "How to Start an Event Company in a Pandemic," 2021, Alberta Magazine Association Business Boot-camp
- "Frank Lackteen: The Most Villainous of All Screen Villains," 2020 Lawrence Heritage State Park (Massachusetts)
- "The Weaponization of Free Speech," 2018 Peter Lougheed Leadership College Communications Lecture
- "The Myth of the Self-Made Man," 2018 Edmonton Immigrant Employment Council

### **Convention/Series Speaker**

- Creative Nonfiction Collective Conference, April 2024
- Festival of Literary Diversity, May 2022
- Creative Nonfiction Collective Conference, June 2022
- Writers Guild of Alberta, June 2022
- NASH - Canadian University Press (2014, 2021)
- National Magazine Awards, MC, June 2019
- Alberta Unbound: What it Means to Be Albertan Today (curated by Senator Paula Simons, 2020)
- Canadian Journalism Forum on Violence and Trauma (2019)
- Council for Canadian Urbanism (2016)

### **Author Readings**

- September–May 2021: Festival of Literary Diversity, Word Vancouver Festival, Kitchener Public Library, Calgary Public Library, Toronto Public Library, LitFest, Ottawa International Festival, StarFest Alberta, WordFest Calgary, Canadian Literary Centre, Indigo Live & In Conversation, Fall Feast of Words
- Writers Guild of Alberta/Alberta Literary Awards (Apr. 2013, Dec. 2014, Apr. 2017, May 2020, May 2022)
- WordFest (Sept 2020)
- LitFest (Oct. 2017, Oct. 2020)
- 40 Below: Edmonton Book Anthology Launch (Nov. 2015)

## PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP

**Radius of Arab American Writers** (2021–2023)

**Arab and Middle Eastern Journalists Association** (2022)

**Canadian Association of Journalists** (2021)

**PEN Canada** (2017–2022)

**Alberta Magazine Publishers Association** (2013–2016)

## AWARDS, GRANTS, AND OTHER HONOURS

- *James Beard Media Award finalist*

- *Edmonton Film Prize 2024 finalist*
- *Edmonton Arts Trust Fund Award (2023)*
- *Best Documentary and Best Documentary Director, Silk Road Int'l Film Festival, 2023*
- *Best Screenwriter (Documentary Over 30 Min.), Alberta TV & Film Awards, 2023*
- *Queen's Platinum Jubilee Medal, 2023*
- *Lt. Governor of Alberta Emerging Artist Award, 2021/22*
- *Alberta Literary Awards Wilfrid Eggleston n Nonfiction Book Award*
- *Western Living Foodie of the Year, 2022*
- *Alberta Film & Television Awards, 4 nominations since 2020*
- *Best Multimedia Project, Petroleum History Society of Canada, 2019*
- *Alberta Foundation for the Arts - Literary Grant, 2019; Film Grant, 2024*
- *Edmonton Arts Council - Individual Project Grant: 2019, 2021, 2023*
- *Edmonton Heritage Council travel and production grants: 2018, 2021, 2022, 2023*
- *Mindset Award for Workplace Mental Health Reporting (2018 recipient)*
- *Canadian Magazine Awards (Best Story – Celebrities and Entertainment), 2017*
- *Avenue magazine's Top 40 Under 40, 2014*
- *Professional Writer's Association of Canada (Gold, Features), 2014*
- *Alberta Literary Awards, 5 short nonfiction nominations since 2013*
- *National Magazine Awards, 11 nominations and 3 wins since 2012*
- *Alberta Magazine Awards, 28 nominations and 15 wins since 2012*

## PRESS

### **Audio and TV Media (selected highlights)**

- **CBC Alberta@Noon with Judy Aldous** (Feb. 23/24)
- **Sports 1440**, The Lowdown with Lowetide (Feb. 22/24)
- **Global**, "Minute at the Movies" 4-star review of Burger Mafia (11/10/23)
- **CTV Saskatchewan**, Burger Mafia news segment (11/14/23)
- **CBC Calgary**, Burger Mafia news segment (9/23/23)
- **OMNI Arabic** Toronto Arab Film Festival News segment (6/12/23)
- **CBC As It Happens** (5/4/23)
- **CBC** The Secret Life of Canada: The Halifax Donair (9/6/22)
- **Frequency Network** The Big Story - The rise and fall of Canada's cannabis industry (10/5/22); How did a popular Calgary teacher get away with abuse over decades? (12/12/22)
- **Understood** How'd You Get THAT Job?!: ADHD hyperfocus brings this journalist's research to the next level (11/9/22)
- **The Bleeders Podcast** Omar Mouallem on Crafting Historical Travelogue Memoir (8/25/22)
- **NPR** Think with Krys Boyd (Nov. 18/21)
- **LitHub** Keen On Podcast (Nov. 5/21)
- **Jefferson Public Radio** The Jefferson Exchange (Oct. 29/21)
- **ProgressXM** The Signorile Show (Oct. 12/21)
- **Paternal podcast** (Episode 48)

- **CBC** Daybreak Alberta with Russell Bowers (book review by Angie Abdou; Oct. 17/21)
- **CBC** All in a Day (Oct. 15/21)
- **CTV** Your Morning (Oct. 15/21)
- **CTV** The Social (Sept. 21/21)
- **CBC** The Sunday Magazine with Piya Chattopadhyay (Sept. 12/21)
- The Decibel by Globe and Mail (Sept. 10/21)
- CANADALAND Commons: Real Estate #7 – The Ballad of Eddy Haymour (7/21/21)
- Further Reading Podcast: Artist profile interview (March 2021)
- Freelance Canada Podcast: Artist profile interview (March 2021)
- Cross-pollNation: Pandemic Pop-Up with Omar Mouallem Episode 33 (13/06/20)
- **CBC The Current** - guest (20/4/2020)
- **CTV** News Edmonton: Pandemic University interview (16/4/20)
- CANADALAND Commons: Dynasties #9: Professional wrestling commentator (2/2/20)
- **CTV** News Edmonton: Interview about Digging in the Dirt (10/9/19)
- **WNYC** The Takeaway: Middle Eastern film misrepresentation (commentator) (24/5/19)

### **Print (selected highlights)**

- *Peachz Film Blog*, 3.5/5 stars review for *The Lebanese Burger Mafia*
- *Slam*, "Making Kayfabe' turns journalist into wrestler," (Feb. 23/24)
- *Edmonton Journal*, "From Burger Baron to pro-wrestling" (Feb. 20/24)
- *Taproot*, "Filmmaker gets bruised to explore indie wrestling culture" (Feb. 21, 2024)
- *Read Alberta*, "How to Be a Successful Freelance Writer" (7/28/23)
- *CBC*, "How the son of a Burger Baron turned the chain's history into a 'surprisingly' successful documentary" (9/25/23)
- *Edify*, "Burgers, Wrestling, and University, too" (November 2023)
- *L'Orient-Le Jour*, "Au Canada, la mafia du burger a ses barons, et ils sont libanais" (6/20/23)
- *Variety*, "Western Canadian Filmmakers, Industry Professionals Up Their Game at Hot Docs (5/4/23)
- *The Gate*, "Hot Docs 2023 Review: The Lebanese Burger Mafia" (5/3/23)
- *Real Screen*, "The Lebanese Burger Mafia" takes a bite out of crowdfunding" (5/1/23)
- *POV Magazine*, "Barons on the Prairie" (Summer 2023 issue)
- *Legacy in Action*, "Son of a Baron" (Spring 2023 issue)
- *The Gateway*, "A fresh restart with old roots with Omar Mouallem" (29/6/22)
- *CBC Books*, Omar Mouallem, Jaspreet Singh and Glen Huser among winners of the 2022 Alberta Literary Awards (22/6/22)
- *Toronto Star*, "Five must-sees at Brampton's Festival of Literary Diversity" (2/5/22)
- *The New Arab*, "Uncovering Muslims' deep roots in the Americas" (Jan. 12/2022)
- *Alberta Views*, book review (Jan/Feb. 2022)
- *Globe and Mail* *Globe 100 Best Books of the Year* (Dec. 5 2021)
- *CBC Books* - 35 Best Canadian Nonfiction Books of the Year (Dec. 10, 2021)
- *Readers' Digest Canada*, "Book Club: The Season's Must-reads" (Dec. 2021)
- *Inside Arabia*, book review (Dec. 4 2021)

- Religion News Network, "'Praying to the West' offers look at America's diverse Muslim communities" (Nov. 25/ 21)
- The Tyee, "Islamic History as American History" (Nov. 10/21)
- *Edify*, "All-American Islam" (Nov. 2021)
- *Chatelaine*, "10 Buzzy New Books To Read This Fall" (Oct. 21)
- *Publishers Weekly*, "Omar Mouallem on His Journey as a Muslim Reader" (Oct. 2021)
- BookPage starred book review (Oct. 2021)
- National Book Review, "How Muslims Shaped the Americas -- and How the Americas Shaped Muslims" (Oct. 21/21)
- Quill & Quire book review (Oct. 2021)
- *Maclean's*, "Three new books to read in October" (Oct. 2021)
- *Winnipeg Free Press* book review (Oct. 2/21)
- New Age Islam, "Yes, There Are 2.0 Billion Muslims" (Oct. 19/21)
- *The Walrus*, "From the Arctic to Brazil: the Deep Roots of Islam in the Americas" (Sept. 29/21)
- *Wall Street Journal* book review (Sept. 21/21)
- Literary Hub, book excerpt (Sept. 30/21)
- *Globe and Mail*, "Fall 2021 books preview" (Sept. 17/21)
- *Toronto Star*, "35 books you need to know about in fall 2021" (Sept. 2/21)
- *Edmonton Journal*, "Praying to the West illuminates Islam in the Americas with glorious care" (Sept. 17/21)
- Publishers Lunch, "Buzz Books Fall/Winter Preview: Nonfiction" (May 18, 2021)
- *Longreads*, "The Top 5 Longreads of the Week," Oct. 10, 2020
- *Toronto Star*, "Trump's COVID-19 diagnosis offers us a study in schadenfreude: Why 'the misfortune of others tastes like honey,'" Oct. 2, 2020
- *Barron's Penta*, "Great Escapes: How 'Pandemic University' Founder Omar Mouallem Spends His Free Time," Sep. 18, 2020
- *Ryerson Review of Journalism*, Not From Concentrate: The struggles and triumphs of journalists who live with ADHD, Jun. 6, 2020
- *Luma Film & Media Art Quarterly*, "Uncovering the Silent Epidemic Among Albertan Oil Workers," Spring 2020
- Canadian Art, "Canadian Art School Guide: Omar Mouallem," Winter 2020
- *Inside Arabia*, "Years After his Death, Frank Lackteen is Finally Being Recognized," Oct. 13, 2019
- *L'Orient Le Jour*, "Mohammad Yachteen, l'un des premiers "méchants arabes" de Hollywood" (Mohammad Yachteen: one of Hollywood's first "Arab villains), Oct. 10, 2019
- Front Burner Podcast: Mental health in Alberta's oilpatch, Sept. 18, 2019
- *The Narwhal*, "'Boys don't cry,'" Sep. 12, 2019
- WNYC, "The The History of Middle Eastern and North African Representation in Hollywood," May 28, 2019
- *Insight Into Diversity*, "Professional Journalists Share Advice for Success," Mar. 19, 2019
- *National Post*, "'Weaponization' of free speech prompts talk of a new hate law," Feb. 8, 2018
- "Homeland for the Holidays" in *The Best Canadian Essays 2018*



- "Dark Science" in The Best American Science and Nature Writing 2017
- "The Fight of His Life" in Best Canadian Sports Writing (2017)
- J-Source, "Omar Mouallem on the Art of Reflection," May 24, 2017
- *Winnipeg Free Press*, "Alberta ablaze: Firefighter recalls massive mobilization to fight Fort McMurray fire," Jul., 8, 2017
- *J: Jazeera Airways*, "The Book, the CD, the Film: Recommended by Omar Mouallem," Feb./Mar. 2009
- *Daily Star*, "The Great White North's lone voice of bling-free Lebanese rap," Sep. 09, 2008

## NONPROFIT BOARDS

### **National Magazine Awards Foundation (2024–present)**

Board member

### **PEN Canada (2017–2022)**

The national branch of the leading international organization advocating for persecuted writers and free expression.

### **LitFest - Canada's Original Nonfiction Festival (2013–2022)**

Served in position of secretary for four years.

### **Eighteen Bridges Society (2014–2016)**

Acclaimed literary magazine founded by Curtis Gillespie and Lynn Coady.