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STRANGE/RS TOGETHER: ARAB WOMEN ART,

DISPLACEMENT, AND NARRATIVE

A Dissertation in

Art Education and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

by

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I examine meanings of displacement through a process of re-collecting and re-narrating stories of Arab women, as well as examining the artwork of displaced Arab women artists. Displacement is regarded in both embodied and theoretical ways. I theorize the state of being displaced through art made by Arab women artists who have in different ways been displaced themselves. The Arab women discussed in this dissertation are Mona Hatoum, Ghada Amer, Ghadah Alkandari, Bahia Shehab, and Hanaa Malallah. The dissertation uses creative writing and multiple voices as a methodology of understanding the experiences of Arab women. I use writing as a way of knowing, and a way of constructing an alternative narrative about Arab women that goes beyond the reduction committed by global media stereotypes. I also use the art encounter (or lack of) as a way of knowing, and discuss limits of access that Arab bodies need to negotiate in our current historical moment, where Arab refugee bodies in specific are causing a global crisis.

My dissertation aims to shift the knowledge produced about Arab women from its historically Orientalist discourse towards an open-ended inquiry that regards situated knowledge and personal experience as its epistemic fuel. It is my own experience and identity as a postcolonial/transnational feminist that shapes my understanding of Arab women artists' lives, their experiences, and what they express in their work. As a stranger, as an artist, and as a researcher, I take this journey of knowledge production to try and open up a possibility for a new understanding of what it means to be an autonomous Arab woman artist, especially under the influence/constraint of displacement.

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Chapter One.

Strange/rs Together: Arab Women Art, Displacement, and Narrative

In this Chapter, I discuss the topic and methodology of this dissertation. I begin by introducing the scope of this dissertation and the women artists discussed within its pages. I unpack Arabness as an identity, and the paradoxical stereotype of Arab women in historical colonialism and global consciousness. In this Chapter, I also introduce multiplicity of voices as a performative way of writing, and the methodologies used in each of the Chapters to follow. Within Chapter One are poetic, performative interruptions. Please let yourself be lost, we will slowly find our way together, in this strangeness.

ghareeb - strange/stranger
ghorba - estrangement, expatriation, foreignness
gharb - West, "occident", where the sun sets

Dearest Stranger,

We are displaced.

We are strangers, in relation.

Foreign. How horrifying.

If we are strangers, then let us be strange/rs together.

Speak to me that word in a way I would understand. In Arabic it is saturated with its many meanings. Do you know them? Have you thought of each one of them, the way I have, here where we become foreign and strange?

Let us be all the selves and others we speak of. Let us give in to the intra-actions that create us, for within them we are constantly generated. We needn't fear standing still in one stereotype, one image, one self. Is there such a thing after all? A singular self is as much a human invention as the names we call it. So let us, the many yous and the many mes, tell many stories of us to us. I do not wish to deny you this entanglement of selves, for they are perhaps what move and drive you, as they are what move and drive me.

Ya Stranger,

Allow me to hear you, to re-tell you, to be you and be with you, and to enjoy the freedom to speak.

And let us be strangers, and strange, together.

Let There be Others

In this dissertation, I examine the meanings of displacement through a process of re-collecting and re-narrating stories of Arab women, as well as examining the artwork of displaced Arab women artists. The artists that I discuss in this dissertation are Mona Hatoum, Ghada Amer, Ghadah Alkandari, Bahia Shehab, and Hanaa Malallah. The work and experiences of these artists differ, yet they have three things in common: they are all women, they are all Arab, and lastly, they all have in one way or another experienced displacement. Whether it be a forced shift of context (Mona Hatoum, Hanaa Malallah), a chosen immigration (Ghada Amer), or an unfitting cultural identity within one's own place of origin (Ghadah Alkandari, Bahia Shehab), displacement is a fluid state of becoming, befitting the shifting and ever-changing identities of Arab women and their diaspora. Throughout the study, I approach Arab women identities carefully, so as not to romanticize them.

In this introductory chapter, I begin by addressing Arab identity, and introduce the idea of multiplicity of writing voices and what that means to me, as an Arab woman writer/artist. I then discuss the historically colonial nature of knowledge production, and issues of silence, both of which are triggers that fuel this dissertation—a work of resistance. I situate myself as a researcher, and make transparent my own investment in this work. I continue by exploring the historical/colonial image of Arab women, and Arab women bodies, as a victim/violent paradox. I introduce the concept of embodied knowledge production. I complicate language for an Arab woman writer. I discuss literature that inspired and shaped this project, and unpack the emergent methodology of this project. Finally, I offer readers a roadmap to the chapters of this dissertation, as well as a roadmap dedicated to Arab women readers in particular.

The Name is Arab

While a state of being/becoming displaced is my own reading of the artists' experiences, the artists themselves identify to varying degrees as Arab.¹ This Arab-ness is a theme important to this dissertation, for Arab-ness is a paradox; to be Arab in this moment in history marks us as both victim and dangerous. I do not address exhausted questions such as “what does it mean to be an Arab woman?” and so on. Instead, by bringing light to the complex experiences of the Arab women from my narratives, the varied experiences of the Arab women artists, as well as a theoretical/embodied reading of their art, I will attempt a conceptual unpacking of the complex state of being/becoming a displaced Arab, and especially a displaced Arab woman.

The Arabic speaking region of North Africa and West Asia is often referred to as the Arab World. I do not use this particular terminology of Arab World because it suggests a separation from the rest of the world. I simply use *Arab region*. Later in this dissertation I will discuss the term *Middle East*, and the political reasons I abandon its use.²

In the chapters of this dissertation, I will discuss Arab displacement, exile, the figure of the *new exile*, and Arab refugee representations in both situated examples and theoretical ways. I shift between abstract theorization and situated experiences, in a way that honors Geraldine Pratt and Victoria's Rosner's (2012) notion of the global and the intimate, which are “typically imaged as mutually exclusive spheres” yet are “profoundly intertwined” (p. 1). Pratt and Rosner stress the need for feminist methodologies to expose the assumptions of universalism, and argue that

¹ Hatoum identifies as Lebanese-Palestinian, Amer as Egyptian-American, Alkandari as Kuwaiti, Shehab as Egyptian-Lebanese, and Malallah as Iraqi-British.

² Abandoning the use of Middle East is a constant struggle because often the academic spaces granted to speaking about Arab and Muslim experiences use the term Middle East. For example, the Middle Eastern Studies Association (MESA) conference is one of the most prominent in featuring work on the Arab region and Palestine. This makes MESA one of the most befitting platforms to speak about my work.

intimacy, traditionally associated with the feminine and sidelined in scholarly inquiries, “does not reside solely in the private sphere; it is infused with worldliness” (p. 3). Pratt and Rosner believe that feminist methodologies seek to redress the exclusion, and include *feeling* and *affect* on the agenda of scholars, as well as value emotion “not in spite of variability and irrationality, but because of it” (p. 5). Pratt and Rosner’s *The Global and the Intimate* rings closely to affect and queer theory. Specifically, the work of Eve Sedgwick (2002) moves affect beyond the contours of the body, and stresses that feeling and touch are connected.

With new materialist feminist theories in mind,³ art here is the starting point, the conversation starter, the material thing that *does*. In other words, the material thing—art here—has an acting force of its own, beyond human subjectivity and human action, that allows it to affect as thing/object/material, without reducing it by anthropomorphizing the material *doing* to a human-like subjectivity. I use art throughout the dissertation to both question and understand, complicate and decolonialize the embodied state of being/becoming displaced.

Methodology: A Multiplicity of Voices

In this introduction, as well as in other parts of this dissertation, I use (at least) two voices. There are always multiple of *mes* at play, and here I let two of them take the center stage. First, there is the scholarly voice, enmeshed within the academic struggle of becoming a Ph.D. holder. Then, a second voice appears in a performative manner, disrupting the norms of academia. Perhaps it is the voice of the artist, who wants to prove the process of being immersed can be regarded as a work of art. This voice seeks intimacy with the reader, as well as simplicity

³ Here I specify new materialist work that highly influenced the writing of this dissertation: Diana Coole and Samantha Frost’s (2010) edited book, *New Materialism*. Jane Bennet’s (2010) *Vibrant Matter*, which continues to influence the way I think of *things* and how I write about encountering works of art. Elizabeth A. Wilson’s (2004) *Psychosomatic*, Karen Barad’s (2007) *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, Stacy Alaimo and Susan Heckman’s (2008) *Material Feminisms*, and Elizabeth’s Grosz’s (1994; 2008) *Volatile Bodies*—which influences my art practice continuously—and *Chaos, Territory, Art*.

in expression. She wants to speak to you without borders of language even if she cannot escape them. She wants to feel your fingers tracing her words in an embodied material reading. She wants the words to become less intrusive. The two voices sometimes converse as two authors. Here, then, I am making myself a stranger, in order to converse with her.

Knowledge Production: A Political Matter

As a young receiver of knowledge, I seldom questioned the political nature of knowledge production. This is problematic because as an Arab, the knowledge about myself and my history is often a product of colonizing theories and histories. A critical reassessment of what I know, and how I came to know it, is, thus, overdue. My work was first driven by a desire for self understanding in relation to the material world around me—a world in which I am displaced. But what can be a source for such an endeavor? How can one reevaluate knowledge when the very modes of reevaluation are inherited from colonial/colonizing discourses? How does one begin to venture on a new self-proclaimed narrative that both understands and refuses the colonial agenda and begins to take a step into a postcolonial self—and to do away with earlier notions of “self” even? This decolonial questioning is of course combined with a more confusing struggle, that of being a woman. When adding a critical inspection of gender hierarchies into the mix of attempting to understand what goes into knowledge production processes, I’m left with, well, something like this very sentence!

So let me take a moment of sanity here to try and name the things that cause me this intellectual struggle. Here, I will line them up in situated terms, from my own experience, in order not to commit the very epistemological crimes I am critiquing. This “I,” this writer is:

A “postcolonial subject” who finds a consciousness of herself being so.

A “woman” who is critical of the meaning of the word.

A woman writer, when language itself is sexist.

An Arab, and a Muslim, in a world that leans towards criminalizing both.

A person raised with essentialist thinking, who is trying to understand/live the world in feminist ways.

Working against epistemic violences historically and currently made against women, Arabs, Muslims, people of color, and disenfranchised people.

Working to deconstruct female/male binaries and hierarchies, in order not to make generalized assumptions towards specific genders, sexes, or sexualities.

Working within the conflicting hierarchies of power in academia, knowing that as a woman, a person of color, and a foreigner, there are spaces/roles already set up for me that I reject. Yet these spaces of difference help generate decolonial thinking.

These are not the tasks I set up myself to do, and not the problems I wish to solve.

Certainly that would be too much for one dissertation since many of these dilemmas have been long debated by cultural theorists. The very opposite, in fact. I do not wish to solve or do away with them because it is within these contradictions and paradoxes that my research becomes possible. For in order to reject the essentialist tendencies of knowledge production, I work within academia, perhaps not to undo them, but certainly to point out their fallacies and phallogentrism.

Women have struggled for inclusion for decades, in and out of academia. My attempt here is not to re-invent the wheel, for it has been already turning in many ways. Instead, feminism is the wind below this project’s wings, the ethic that drives its methodology, and the consciousness that allows it to exist. Here I must stress, however, that Imperial Feminism itself is not without fault. Historically, it was the ally of many Othering, colonial forces. For their inclusion, [Western]⁴ women have committed epistemological crimes against their Other sisters.

⁴ Throughout this dissertation, I am using what is referred to as the West as constructs. This construct is generalized and problematic because it helps set up a binary, an us/them. Therefore, I use [West] and [Western] instead, to point out that while I use this term, I am skeptical of it.

That being said, it is still within feminism that a postcolonial (or perhaps more accurately, a decolonial) consciousness has found the safe ground to grow. Thus, this project is part of the move away from a singular Feminism towards multiple *feminisms*. My research aims to shift the knowledge produced about Arab women from its historically Orientalizing discourse towards an open-ended inquiry that regards situated knowledge⁵ and personal experience as its epistemic fuel.

Violent Oppressed Bodies

The Arab region, colonized, *liberated*, divided, battered, and its *terrorism* exposed, made a *comeback* redeeming itself in what is now widely referred to as the Arab Spring (roughly between 2010 to 2014). Later—2014 and ongoing, and especially calcifying at this moment in 2017—however, the Arab region faithfully returned to its stereotype in global media,⁶ through monstrous depictions of what is referred to as Daesh.⁷ As Arab and Muslim regions invade global headlines yet again, what becomes of its “Woman”?

Since imperial times, Arab women have been referred to as a unified category, either stereotyped as veiled and oppressed, or as a brainwashed terrorist, and at times both. This depicted woman is cast aside in her black *Abaya*⁸ stereotyped, deproblematized, Othered, and at the same time feared. The veil here gains a dual symbolism. At times, it is regarded as the

⁵ My understanding of situated knowledge is influenced by Donna Haraway’s (1999) work on standpoint theory. Haraway’s situated knowledge emphasizes *locationality* and engaged, accountable positioning. I took into account this relation between knowledge making and space throughout the writing of this dissertation.

⁶ I will discuss this further in the fourth chapter of this dissertation, *Death in the Gut: Arab Women, Art, and the image of the Refugee-Terrorist-Other*.

⁷ Daesh (*Al-Dawla Al-Islamiya fi Al-Iraq wa Al-Sham*) is the Arabic abbreviation used to refer to ISIL—The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. Also commonly referred to in the U.S. as ISIS—The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

⁸ *Abaya* is the black headdress that covers the whole body. Common in Iran and Arab countries of the Persian Gulf such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. A more commonly used name in the [West] is *Chador*, a Farsi word.

visible tool of oppression, and a signifier of the lack of agency and individuality. Cast upon the woman against her will, she is passive and oppressed, whether aware of her oppression or not. At Other times, *Abaya* and *Burqa*⁹ are regarded as the mask that the Muslim woman terrorist hides behind. Therefore, the Arab “Woman” is a [Western] conceptual paradox: She is both victim *and* weapon, oppressed *and* terrorist, agency-lacking *and* criminal. She is both the *Daesh* soldier, and the victim of honor killings.

These stereotypes are visible in different moments of history. For example, during the two Algerian Wars,¹⁰ French media portrayed covered women as both oppressed victims to be liberated, and veiled terrorists to be dominated. Unveiling became the conscious fantasy of the imperial soldier, and his militant domination was often portrayed as sexual domination in literature and art (Scott, 2008). More recent depictions emerge in the aftermath of 9/11 (Puar and Rai, 2002). The veiled woman in the background of the terrorist caricature became the dominant representation of Arab women, with disregard to the complex diversity of this simplified category. This form of epistemic violence mirrors the imperial discourse of simplifying, classifying, and categorizing colonial subjects/bodies. When Arab women are (re)produced as passive participants of Islamist *terrorism*, the world in which the concrete bodies of Arab women (Muslim or not) navigate also changes. When multiple stories become one violent representation, complex voices are silenced. But how true is this image to the daily lives of women who identify as Arab? This shadow of a woman to the [Western] gaze, this feared and pitied Other, when does

⁹ *Burqa* (in some Arabic dialects *Niqab*) refers to a partial face cover worn by some women. In the U.S. the word *Burqa* is often used to refer to the full facial cover worn by some Afghani women, which is more accurately referred to as *Khimar* or *Boushiya* (depending on dialect).

¹⁰ The first is the fight for independence against French imperial rule (1954–1962) and the second is Algerian Civil War, highly portrayed as an Islamist revolution at the time (1991–2002).

she *speak*?¹¹ This dissertation aims to shift the focus and center the experiences of Arab women while minimizing comparisons.

As a result of imperialist epistemic discourses, postcolonial women are grappling with their stereotype as victimized/oppresed and are not *recognized as lives*.¹² Not only have Arab women been battered by representation, but a very limited space for scholarship in academia has been devoted to them. Even far less is devoted to contemporary Arab women artists, the topic of this dissertation. In Chapter Four, I discuss further erasures of Arab women's bodies and narrative.

In this dissertation, I am participating—with other Arab feminists who are perhaps doing similar theoretical projects¹³—in taking steps toward a serious body of feminist scholarship about the Arab region. In this dissertation, I also take an active role in speaking as an Arab woman, as well as listening to Arab women speak. The stories I re-collect and re-tell in this dissertation are indeed often veiled behind generalized assumptions caused by ignorance, misinformation, or by more purposeful colonial and neocolonial epistemic violences. Yet the women of my dissertation are sites of experience that challenge the neo-colonial unifying language used to refer to [Third World]¹⁴ women, for their experiences simply *do not fit* within the stereotype. So how do I approach such bodies?

¹¹ In reference to Spivak's (1988) essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?*

¹² Butler (2009)—continuing the ethical work of *Precarious Life* (2004)— asserts that “a life has to be intelligible as a life, has to conform to certain conceptions of what life is, in order to become recognizable. So just as norms of recognizability prepare the way for recognition, so schemas of intelligibility condition and produce norms of recognizability” (p. 7). In other words, a life has to assimilate to norms of recognizability in order for it to be grievable. These norms are seclusive. Too often have Arab women's lives fallen outside of what is normative life in Western/global consciousness.

¹³ I see alliances with the work of Nawar Al-Hassan Golley (2003; 2007) on Arab women writing.

¹⁴ In this dissertation, I reject the casual use of imperialist and colonial terms, I only mention [*Third World*], and [*Middle East*] to actively problematize them.

I approach you with the curiosity of someone who does not know. I will not come to her all-knowing. I will not assume her role, or assume familiarity.

I approach the narratives and artwork of Arab women with what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) refer to as nomadic processes of not-knowing.¹⁵ Similarly, Nancy Tuana (2006) suggests engaging with participants—though I do not have *participants* per se—with a *loving ignorance* that involves the desire to learn and understand their experiences without assuming prior knowledge of them, or the ability to fully grasp them. Tuana (2006) writes:

Loving ignorance, like loving perception, involves the realization that although much experience can be shared there will always be experiences that cannot. Alterity is not something we attempt to remove, difference is not something we can arrogate. (p. 16)

It is within a space of intimacy and vulnerability that this project took place. Arab women, displaced or not, have often been cast aside as strange/rs. This intimate and vulnerable space of strangeness is the culture that generates our (each woman with me) narratives. And, yet, I must not approach any Arab woman as though I know her, or *am* her.

Embodied Knowledge Production

Feminist knowledge production often puts women's lived experience at its center (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). But more importantly for this project, feminist standpoint epistemology requires the knowledge to be produced by first examining the concrete lived experience of

¹⁵ The early stages of writing this dissertation engaged heavily with theories of Deleuze and Guattari, yet as I continued to write/embroider the words of this dissertation, I found that I was de-centering them, and other theorists, who have been in the center stage of theoretical conversation. I told myself firmly: this is not a Deleuzian dissertation, and conversing with women, Others, and Other women needs to extend beyond the narratives of the work, and into the academic text itself. Part of the ethics of this dissertation is to undo a silencing, and therefore I took it upon myself to practice politics of citation that privileged the voices of women. Thus, in regard to nomadology in particular, I lean on the work of Rosi Braidotti. Enfranchised theory, however, continues to seep into the text, in slippage, I find myself returning to that language, unable to break free completely.

women. Abigail Brooks (2007) defines concrete experience as “what women do” (p. 56). This implies that in order to rectify the epistemological injustices done toward women, one must take into consideration women’s activities as a source of information about their experience. This source is an embodied and performative one, since what women *do* is performed through their bodies, already constructed and coded through society. Historically, women’s activities and labor have been trivialized and pushed to the side, as well as often limited to domesticity and the private sphere. Feminist work aims to change this perception by producing embodied knowledge.

Such a project, of course, can develop into a discussion of women’s autonomy. In this, I am interested in Elizabeth Grosz’s attempt to rethink concepts such as subjectivity and autonomy. Grosz (2010) considers freedom not only in terms of emancipation or a removal from constraint. Instead, Grosz (2010) develops a “concept of life, bare life, where freedom is conceived not only primarily as the elimination of constraint or coercion, but more positively as the condition of, or capacity for, action in life” (p. 140). This positive move towards understanding freedom as capacity for action makes possible my project of thinking of Arab women artists as autonomous in their capability of making/doing art, thus performing their agency through action. I link this concept of performance to Butler’s (1990) understanding of gender as performance. Butler argues that gender is performed through a stylized repetition of acts and that a constructed identity is a performative accomplishment. Thus it can be understood that identity itself is a becoming, constantly reshaping, not fixed. It is my hope that the women of this dissertation—artists and narrators—will induce self-reflexivity and complicate the reader’s understanding of what it means to be an Arab woman, whether the reader is Arab/woman or not.

This dissertation is an embodied one, and is not in any way removed from corporeality as I hope will be evident in my writing, which I carefully constructed to take into account the body

and does not erase its presence. A particular embodied aspect of this dissertation takes place in the narratives of Chapter Two; the movements and fidgeting that usually accompany the process of storytelling. The facial expressions, the pauses, the sighs and the deep breaths are as important to human understanding as the story being told verbally. This understanding itself is an embodied one, affected by the material experience of the remembering, or re-collecting, which I explore in Chapter Two. These embodied facet of knowledge are sometimes neglected or pushed to the side in research that marks itself as objective.

But not here.

Embodiment is a contested term. There are many ways in which embodiment has been theorized and inserted back into research. Here, I am interested in Erin Manning's (2007) understanding of embodiment in terms of a sensing body, which creates space and time through its movement. This destabilizing of time and space in accordance with the sensing body, as well as dis/placing the body in relation to the senses, is in line with my own work that aims to trouble a fixed understanding of Arab women's lives.

Now, let me interrupt...

On a Sunday afternoon, in the park under the sun, we were surrounded by beauty. There was grass stuck between your/my toes as we lay there. You/I asked me: “why do you busy yourself with so much theory?” and said that I see complexity where other people don’t, and torment myself with it.

For me, all of those theories are ways of understanding a complex and entangled world. They aid me in reimagining myself as something more than what I was/am. And they are a voice. You must see my need for a voice, when silence shadows so many of us. I need a strong voice, for my skin speaks loudly. It is not easy to ignore a woman when she speaks the language often used against her, even if she has a foreign and strange accent.

I could not escape theory,

so instead I i n f i l t r a t e it.

I use it against its Master. I swim in it so it does not drown me.

I access a world that rejects us.

I use the language forbidden us.

A Stranger to Language

Since language is a social construct, language is not a sterile nor objective means of communication. Language is problematic in multiple ways; It is both coded and gendered and continues to be used as a tool of oppression. Julia Kristeva (1991) touches upon this embodied facet of language in *Strangers to Ourselves*. For Kristeva, the foreigner, no matter how well s/he knows a dominant language, never fully grasps it. Something always remains missing, lost in translation, and simply *lacking*. Even when the foreigner mimics the dominant language, for Kristeva, it remains void.

Language!

What to say about language, when we cannot even escape it?

Is it not ironic that to criticize it, we must use it?

Julia Kristeva speaks of her status as a foreigner as a choked up rage, and discusses the foreigner as an orphan who has lost the motherland, and is in constant longing to return without the possibility to do so. Yet within this supposed dark place of strangeness and foreignness, Kristeva argues that recognizing the stranger/foreigner in oneself can help one learn to tolerate foreignness. Kristeva wonders: “how could one tolerate a foreigner if one did not know one was a stranger to oneself?” (p. 182). Within the foreignness is the theoretical space where I see narration taking place. Kristeva (1991) writes:

Let us not seek to solidify, to turn the otherness of the foreigner into a thing. Let us merely touch it, brush by it, without giving it permanent structure. Simply sketching out its perpetual motion through some of its variegated aspects spread out before our eyes

today, even some of its former, changing representations scattered throughout history. Let us also lighten that otherness by constantly coming back to it—but more and more swiftly. Let us escape its hatred, its burden, fleeing them not through leveling and forgetting, but through the *harmonious* repetition of the differences it implies and spreads. (p. 3, emphasis in original)

Indeed, if we—myself and the women of this dissertation—are strangers, if we *must* be, then let us be strange/rs together. It is perhaps within this space where we can re-tell our stories in our own terms. Our language is hybridized, and much is lost in translation, yet we courageously use the Master’s tools to disobey, and reject the limited portion being given to us.

Luce Irigaray (1985) similarly problematizes the use of dominant theoretical language by women, since it is constructed in a masculinist form that address maleness as the norm, or the standard, and the starting point, and that women were historically excluded from the use of language in its intellectual or creative forms.

Nevertheless, Irigaray suggests for women to *parler femme*—or to speak woman/speak (as) woman. Irigaray does not offer a thorough explanation of what this language is like. She admits she cannot know what does not yet exist. She, however, suggests that in order to *parler femme*, women must try to escape using the Master’s tool—the masculine language/logic—and find *disruptive excess* ways of expression and thinking that jam the theoretical machine from within. This masculine theoretical machine is what constructs women as a “lack, deficiency, or as imitation and negative image of the subject” (p. 78) and continues to produce patriarchal systems within academia. Nevertheless, if we as feminists are not able to change the dominant language altogether, at least we could point out its gendered, coded, and exclusionist tendencies.

A lot is at stake for us, women narrators, for speaking (as) woman is speaking (as)

difference. Also, speaking (as) woman is not an easy task, and perhaps not fully achievable. Irigaray (1985) writes: “There is no simple manageable way to leap to the outside of phallogentrism, nor any possible way to situate oneself there, that would result from the simple fact of being a woman” (p. 162).

Can I as an Arab woman in academia reclaim the right to narrate and disrupt the phallogentric nature of language? My thought was: *perhaps, if I were to parler femme throughout the dissertation*. Using this experimental process of speaking (as) woman through feminist narrative inquiry could disrupt the logic of the same,¹⁶ and produce a new logic where Otherness and difference become the starting point. Otherness, through speaking (as) woman could shift its position in academia from the sidelines to the center stage, so as in order to speak, one must first *become Other*. It is a question of language. A language of fluids, a language of excess, a language *of* the Other.

Is this the possible escape for a woman from a solid language that exiles her? Or must one change the ears of man, already “clogged with meaning(s), that they are closed to what does not in some way echo the already heard” (Irigaray, 1985, p. 113)? Perhaps the possibility of speaking (as) woman lies in how “women diffuse themselves according to modalities scarcely compatible with the framework of the ruling symbolics. Which doesn’t happen without causing some turbulence” (p. 106). It is this turbulence that formulates the Other/woman’s speech.

Assuring Voices in My Head

This work is largely influenced by Arab feminist/postcolonial writers such as Leila Ahmed (1992; 2011), Lila Abu-Lughod (1998), Fatema Mernissi (1987), and Nawal El Saadawi

¹⁶ *The same* is a philosophical construct derived from Lacanian psychoanalysis referring to the masculine as norm.

(2007). These writers have influenced me in two main ways; first, these are—as I aspire to be—Arab women writers who are writing within global academic contexts. Second, through the work of these women I was able to establish an understanding of feminisms of the Arab region beyond limited representations. These women have a complex understanding of what it means to be Arab/Muslim *and* feminists, and write about Islam in a profound ways.

Furthermore, while not working within a specifically Arab context, related work by non-Arab feminist/postcolonial theorists such as Najmabadi (2007), Mahmood (2005), and Puar (2007) have also heavily influenced this work. The work of these women and others that will filter through the chapters de-stabilizes the stereotype of the Arab/Muslim woman or the women of the Global South as oppressed and silent. Such work cradles and nurtures my own project, and re-assures me of the ability to speak, and the importance of speaking.

Speak.

Speak my sister.

Speak those things we have learned to keep silent, private, intimate.

Speak to me yourself.

Speak as though never asked to only speak when spoken to.

I will listen.

I will take your stories, soft in my hands as newborns, and lace them with my own.

Your memories and mine, a collective, a movement, a disruption, a discontinuation in the pattern they have veiled us with.

Let me write you, and me, and other women. Other strange/rs.

Let the pages show our resistance to the One Woman they describe.

The innocent, and the temptress. The image of desire, and horror. Let us dishevel the cold and solid statue of Venus, and allow all of these women to escape it. Let us emerge fluid and resisting a logic of solidity.

I will not make repetitions of you, even though I am making embroidery patterns.

Our patterns are inconsistent. For there is always lines that will escape. And movements that will resist the fixedness of the mechanic repetitive pattern.

A Writing Woman/Nomad

Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989) discusses writing in the feminine as a distinct project from writing that is often considered neutral when it is in fact masculine. It is this very difficulty that intrigues me.

Yes I wish to write.

I wish to write about women. Not in generalized terms, but in situated ways, by taking into consideration their experiences, their lives, and their storytelling. I wish to write about women not as esteemed entities, or ancient goddesses, nor as simplified victims, but as living, struggling beings who in the mess of life find meaning and purpose.

No. No, no, no! Here you are doing the same mistakes again! Let me ask you this: Why write about women? What purpose could that possibly serve? And is this not a dated cause anyway?

Well, I could not agree more. Let me retrace my steps and say, I certainly do *not* wish to write *about* women. I do, however, wish to write *with* them. But what does that mean? Does it mean that she will hold my pen or place her fingers on my keyboard? No. Not for this dissertation, at least. For this dissertation, it means she will be there with me through the process. So that if I must write about her, represent her in words that I choose, she will be present in the representation, I will read to her how I write her, and use her words with mine to create what I

see as embroidery patterns¹⁷ that she agrees speak her. And represent in her own terms what it means to be an Arab woman/a displaced Arab woman/an Arab woman artist.

Let me just intervene here and say, I know that this category itself is problematic. Who is this “Arab” “woman” “artist”? I do it, over and over again, I simplify her, so let this dissertation be a mirror for a process of coming to terms with this complexity of position and an attempt to understanding this paradox I refer to as one woman when I know that there is no such thing: a universal woman. There is no one Arab woman. There are many ones, and I am here to converse with them. To speak with and not for Arab women.

As a researcher and writer I am a situated person, with a lens of my own even if I wish to overcome it—not that I try. Therefore, it is my own experience and identity that shapes my understanding of the narratives in this dissertation, artists’ experiences and their work. Knowing this, I make no attempt of doing away with my own lens. Instead, I will make it less transparent, and use the “I” whenever the “I” is due. Knowing, at the same time, that this “I” is always in a state of becoming. If it is constantly pulsing, changing, and shifting, then what/who is this “I”?

The postcolonial/transnational feminist?

The Arab?

The woman?

The displaced Palestinian or the privileged Kuwaiti?

¹⁷ Embroidery here has an obvious gesture towards women’s labor, yet for me it has a deeper meaning that I wish to expand on as metaphor in my dissertation. My own use of embroidery as metaphor is loosely referencing Marjane Satrapi’s comic *Embroideries*. The Persian author, most known for her *Persepolis*, highlights the multiplicity of Iranian women’s experiences and knowledge about sexuality with both wit and a casual air. *Embroideries*, here, is the intimate name commonly used between Iranian women to refer to hymenoplasty (hymen reconstruction surgery). Earlier in the PhD program I wrote a paper in an attempt to re-think the concept of the woman virgin in Arab countries and Iran—*Getting Away With It: Hymenoplasty and the Virgin Assemblage*— here, however, embroidery as a metaphor is used to refer to the delicacy of difference and repetition in experiences, as well as the intimacy of women’s homosocial spheres, which Satrapi so skillfully depicts in her comic.

No, all of them are constant becomings, and in constant re-creation that denies the possibility of an original, a one, a singular *I*. Perhaps the theoretical construct of the nomadic subject, as Rosi Braidotti (1994) states it, works best to describe what is commonly referred to as the “self” here. The nomadic subject is “a figuration for the kind of subject who has relinquished all idea, desire, or nostalgia for fixity. This figuration expresses the desire for an identity made of transitions, successive shifts, and coordinated changes, without and against an essential unity” (Braidotti, 1994, p. 22). This new self is no longer a unit, it is an assemblage of all that resists fixture, it is a fluidity with room for all the above voices of mine to converse—and write—together without the limits of a dualism.

A nomadic subject writes, according to Braidotti (2014), “as a variation on breathing” (p. 163), and does so to inscribe into life, with disregard to whether or not one has something to say, the act of writing is an end in itself. Braidotti’s (2014) notion of writing best describes my attempted work, for it prescribes a particular multiplicity onto not only the written work itself, but also the writing process. While I have discussed language in relation to Kristevan notions as oppressive and limiting and even horrific, Braidotti sees multilingualism as an ecology of belonging. Writing with an accent opens up for me a possibility of seeing my own writing as “traces of my multiple linguistic homes” (Braidotti, 2014, p. 167).

Inconsistent Patterns: Re-Collecting as a Methodology

There is a particular pleasure that I find only in writing.

It is a meditative activity.

An artistic experience.

My methodology—while informed by feminisms especially decolonial and feminisms of color,¹⁸ as well as arts-based research and narrative inquiry¹⁹—is emergent. I use a combination of performative writing, narratives, and visual and cultural analysis to unpack the difficulty of the displaced Arab body in representation, and undo the colonial silences inflicted upon Arab women. As a writing nomad, as an Arab woman, I infiltrate academic language, yet expose at the same time the injustices of language itself that deem me, as a non-native speaker, somehow a less than Other; language itself is a culprit. Yet through performative writing and the use of multiple voices, I disrupt language to make possible the speech of a subaltern.

To whom does writing appear fixed, mechanic, repetitive, and void of emotion? In my experience, writing is one of the most exciting academic activities. Writing about an encounter, or a re-collection, can be stirring and emotional, for it is affected by remembering that embodied encounter—with art, with other women, with other women’s art. I find and create patterns within my re-collected data, and the narratives, from within the words of Arab women. Is this possibly duplicable? How can it be when my own experience is laced within? I write stories, creating inconsistent patterns, for no matter how they may resemble each other, or repeat, they are always

¹⁸ I stress here the work of women of color comrades who have made it possible for me to write this dissertation in a U.S. context; bell hooks (1992; 1994; 2003) whose work on Other bodies, visual culture, race and representation, and education continues to give women of color a language within U.S. academia. The work of Leela Fernandes (2013) on transnational feminism within the U.S. and her understanding of knowledge as a “set of practices rather than a set of circulating texts or predetermined power relations” (p. 29). Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) for her continuous push to decolonize theory, and the need to re-configure solidarity, and rejecting the positioning of women of color within U.S. academia. Gayatri Spivak (1999) for being a decolonial force. The work of Denise Riley (1988) which continues to influence my own writing after being the first push into rejecting universalist categories. The work of Angela Davis (2016) which brings further solidarity between Palestinian and Black experiences and struggle.

¹⁹ Two specific works come to mind here: The work of Stephanie Springgay (2008) who brought affect theory and pedagogues of touch into the classroom, and the work of Laura M. Jewett (2008) who stressed intimacy as a way of knowing in autoethnography.

changing. There is always room for slippage, and it is within that slippage that the *juice* of this dissertation resides, as well as the open-ended connections that the reader is left to make.

Change will always occur in our memories, and in our storytelling. How many times have you told the same story without any change in the way you told it? Our memories cannot be fixed, therefore I consider the written narratives of this dissertation as fiction. For they shift and change during the moment of the encounter, the moment of re-telling and re-narrating experiences. In light of this understanding of narration, writing must somehow attempt to mirror that process, so that the resulting text consists of multiplicities, thus breaking free from the one narrative prevailing against Arab women.

An Arts-Based Emerging Methodology

When I proposed this dissertation I did not know what the result will look like. Yes, I had plans, I anticipated, I speculated, I dreamt. Yet I did not really know, for this work was emerging as I wrote. As I began, I had a loose outline for each chapter, and in many ways I have been true to that outline, the chapters focus on what I intended. Nevertheless, I was surprised by the unfolding of the writing process. The writing itself, here, is a way of knowing.

Since this dissertation uses narrative and fiction, I have benefited from narrative inquiry as a methodology, and feminist narrative inquiry in particular. While I stress that the writing was unpredictable, there are projects that have helped shape my work. An example is *Playing With Fire*, by Richa Nagar (2006) who wrote the collective stories of nine Indian women from a variety of sociopolitical backgrounds, their voices merged and intertwined. Similarly, Ann Fessler (2007) wrote the stories of over one hundred women who were forced to surrender their children for adoption in the United States in *The Girls Who Went Away*. These two examples inspired and legitimized my own work for myself as I wrote it.

Integral to this work was the work of Patricia Leavy. In *Method Meets Art*, Leavy (2009) makes a case for Arts-Based research, including narrative inquiry, as a “frame through which people make sense of their lives” (p. 27). In *Fiction as Research Practice*, Leavy (2013) stresses the historical necessity of blurring the lines of genres between fiction and nonfiction in feminist writing, especially in the work of women of color (p. 31). Leavy argues that fiction is important in developing empathy (p. 29) and self awareness for both the readers and the writer (p. 48).

Leavy (2013) writes:

Empathetic engagement, self-reflection, and social reflection are mutually reinforcing processes that can occur as we read (and write) fiction. As we come to understand the experiences of others and correspondingly develop empathy, we naturally look at ourselves as well. (p. 49)

The main reason I use fiction in this dissertation is the intimate and sensitive nature of the stories I re-tell, as well as to protect the identities and honor the privacy of the women who shared their stories with me.²⁰ I am reluctant, however, to simplify this as a quest for empathy—empathy, of course, is welcome, but it is not what I particularly seek. What I hope will develop in the reader is a relation to the women of this dissertation, so that the reader can develop a closeness to the stranger, to Otherness, to strangeness, to begin thinking of the world from difference, making it possible for us (reader + Arab women) to be/become strange/rs together. I believe that what is at work is a little more nuanced than simply empathy.

The writing of this dissertation is emergent, and nonlinear. To begin the writing, I conversed with *the thing*—artwork. I began by immersing myself with the art of Arab women. Encountering the art of Arab women artists is an embodied way of knowing. Art *does* something;

²⁰ I must admit here that because of my identity and religion—Arab/Muslim—I practice a great deal of self censorship in my writing, a notion I will come back to in the final and concluding chapter of this dissertation.

I let myself be *suspended*, I let art do what it does, and the words flowed. I also began this dissertation by thinking of the materiality of Arab women's freedom: the freedom to speak and to create. This way, I embroidered patterns, and moved in unexpected and unanticipated direction.

Grosz (2010) writes:

If women are not, in some sense, free, feminism could not be possible. The problem, rather, is how to expand the variety of activities, including the activities of knowledge-production, so that women and men may be able to act differently and open up activities to new interests, perspectives, and frameworks hitherto not adequately explored or invented. (p. 154)

It is this freedom that I in this dissertation engage with; To act, to produce knowledge, is a form of freedom. Therefore, the significance of this project lies in its process: the action—the writing. Uncertainty is part of the process. This space of not-knowing is where the work is generated. It is its culture. Too long have Arab women regarded as a unified category, reduced to stereotypes and grotesque figures. Let me, in this dissertation, challenge the reduction.

Let us then open up possibilities.

Let us consider new ways of being women, being Arab, being displaced.

Let us be strange/rs together.

Chapters and Chapter Methods: A Roadmap for Non Arab/Women Readers

Each chapter in this dissertation offers a different type of narrative and performative writing. Chapter Two: *Corrupt Women: A Reading of Corporeality, Displacement, and Memory Through the Work of Arab Women Artists*, uses the process of re-collecting and retelling. As themes emerged, I re-collected conversations with Arab women that have shaped my understanding of their complex experiences. The re-collections are written as fiction, but each of

these encounters took place. I differentiate the narratives by indenting the paragraphs that employ storytelling. I begin by declaring the chapter as a chapter of refusal, and theorize the construct of *corrupt women*, while discussing the displacement of women's bodies. The chapter is an embroidery of the narratives and the work of Arab women artists, and looks at the work of artists Bahia Shehab, Mona Hatoum, Hanaa Malallah, Ghada Amer, Ghadah Alkandari.

Chapter Three: *Fourteen [Restricted] Rooms: Hatoum and the Body of the New Exile*, explores the possibility of access in relation to Arab women art, border crossing, and language. Chapter Three is particularly autobiographical because I use personal narratives to highlight the experiences of the *new exile*. Chapter Three is a virtual walk into an exhibition of Mona Hatoum's work that I was unable to access.²¹ Chapter Three also employs interruptions and struck out words to complicate the reading, and honor the multiplicity and open-endedness of the text.

Chapter Four: *Death in Your Gut: Arab Women, Art, and the Image of the Refugee-Terrorist-Other*, discusses visual and popular culture appropriations of Arab and Muslim bodies. In particular, Chapter Four looks at representations of the Arab refugee in global media. Chapter Four uses visual and cultural analysis, as well as autobiographical excerpts to call attention to how death is haunting any discussion of the Arab body. Chapter Four also includes a collection of letters addressed as *dearest stranger* that make evident my own experience and art making process—in other words, I am the Arab woman artist. These letters are distinguished by being in white font, and highlighted in grey.

Chapter Five: *Radical Leaps: A Conclusion Resisting Closure* is a concluding chapter that summarizes what each chapter of this dissertation has discussed. Chapter Five also examines the

²¹ I did not have a United Kingdom visa and could not visit the exhibition.

radical leaps of this dissertation, such as the process of writing to know, writing an/other language, and writing to resist closure.

Chapters Roadmap for Arab Women Readers

Chapter Two, you realize your body is Other, different, and a site for difference. You are displaced and gendered, yet you are able to utter: no. Chapter Three, you negotiate the world with this Other body. Chapter Four, the world does not know what to do with you now that you are dead/death. Chapter Five, we leap.

Chapter Two.

Corrupt Women: A Reading of Corporeality, Displacement, and Memory Through the Work of Arab Women Artists

This chapter discusses the notion of corrupt women as those resisting women who say no. The chapter uses the method of re-collecting and re-telling of stories of Arab women as fiction to discuss complex experiences. The chapter also examines artwork by Arab women artists Bahia Shehab, Mona Hatoum, Hanaa Malallah, Ghada Amer, and Ghadah Alkandari.

Introduction

"S/he who writes, writes. In uncertainty, in necessity. And does not ask whether s/he is given the permission to do so or not" (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 8).

This is a chapter of “No”s.

A thousand times no. And perhaps more.

This chapter discusses how a body etched with the word “yes” can scream no.

First, we remember. In order to discuss the female “no” we also discuss the female *yes*. This chapter muses on how we as Arab women can, using our embodied knowledge and memory, displace our own bodies from that displacing “yes.” Not to “empower” or “liberate.” For in this work, I will not use the language of the colonizer, here is the promise: I WILL NOT COMPARE ARAB WOMEN TO [WESTERN] WOMEN. If that is what you wish to read, turn away.

Instead, I am writing because the discourse needs to catch up, to disrupt the stereotypes, to change the rhetoric. Strong women, women of resolve, women who have other women’s back; we are here! We have always been here, the discourse is simply silencing, making us unaware of our own strong core. History has denied us a just access to these strong Arab/Muslim women. In

specific, popular contemporary Islamic literature extends us the image of women from prophet Mohammed's time as docile, obedient, demure, and instructs us to follow suite. Yet that was not the case. These women, like you²² and I, and perhaps better,²³ spoke, argued, even interrupted. As a feminist literate in Arabic, I disrupt this image by going back to the original religious and historic texts, not the abbreviated ones, chopped up by male scholars for hundreds of years, displacing us from our women ancestors.

I will begin by invoking the figure of Shahrazad, one of the first refusing women in Muslim fiction, yet not the first in Muslim history. These refusing women disrupt (as indocile women) the stereotype often associated with Arab/Muslim women. The women I invoke are complex, argumentative, yet they are unapologetically femme in all of its complexity and inclusiveness. I encounter female/femme/woman—in all the personal ways these categories materialize—as a strength. A force.

I approach memory here in fictional and autobiographical ways. Memory seeps into the text, bringing together themes of one's²⁴ past that renders her displaced, moments of becoming that have stirred the patterns of life, creating endless ripples that affect the ways in which she encounters the world, continuously, as a nomad, and a displaced woman no longer content with the ways on which her body has been framed. I did not “collect” data for this chapter. I *re-collected*. While some of these stories come from history, most of them come from oral storytelling, from women I know. Women who have told me their stories, and I stored them in folds within me. I re-collect them, and unfold them here, weave them as fiction, with respect to

²² You here refers to Arab women readers.

²³ These women being *better* comes from the Islamic notion that humans are qualified by their degree of closeness to God.

²⁴ One here refers to the women you will encounter in the narratives of this chapters.

the women in question. These memories tell embodied stories, a story of the body, the becoming of women in sometimes violent, and sometimes gentle ways.

Yet this is also a chapter about art, not just in art's written form. In this chapter, I unfold specific life experiences of particular Arab women through fiction and examining the work of Arab women artists. Here, the work of artists Bahia Shehab, Mona Hatoum, Hanaa Malallah, Ghada Amer, and Ghadah Alkandari weave together the narrative. These are Arab women artists who have somehow made it into the [Western] gallery/museum. An Other body enfranchised, that paradox (Other *and* enfranchised) is juxtaposed alongside that of the Arab woman stereotype.²⁵

The women artists in this chapter are corrupt, are a corruption! In the best of terms. To corrupt/disrupt the metanarratives, often believed even by the Other/subaltern, is, as I discussed in Chapter One, plausible work. It is what I attempt to do as I speak in this chapter about women's bodies, women's memory, women's displacement, through the work of Arab women artists. It is my hope that I too, by writing this, can participate in the becoming of corrupt women.

Warning 1: This chapter is extremely private. When you reach a story, know you are reading a secret, adjust the way you are sitting, the tilt of your head, the expression on your face. Approach these women with loving ignorance, and do not fetishize them. For Nancy Tuana (2006), a loving ignorance "involves the realization that although much experience can be shared, there will always be experience that cannot. Alterity is not something we attempt to remove; difference is not something we can arrogate" (p. 16). This offers a possibility of communicating with the

²⁵ While I take it upon myself not to compare Arab women to [Western] women, I cannot escape comparing Arab women's concrete experiences with their stereotypes in [Western]/global consciousness. This is done in order to disrupt the stereotype itself, and *corrupt* the metanarrative.

Other without suffocating her/him/they with the oppressive nature of not-knowing, of stereotyping, of presupposing you know something and imposing it upon the Other. Tuana (2006) situates ignorance, in comparison to Donna Haraway's (1999) notion of knowledge as situated. I agree with Tuana that as feminists, it is important to understand patterns of situated ignorance and its intersections with power. I also write within Pratt and Rosner's (2013) notion of the intimate as a space of knowledge production, to "break out of established categories; [the intimate] creates an opening to think something new" (p. 22). This chapter, through intimacy, is an opening to think of the notion of *corrupt women*.

Warning 2: This chapter is extremely volatile. The *I* that writes becomes itself while writing, and the *I* is not always me. This *I* is a collection of fragments, each fragment another collection. Continuous dancing and pulsation takes place for this writing to exist and, therefore, it cannot ever be static. It always becomes, never finished, always a work in progress. Yet, this *I* that writes does not write from abstract theory. *I* is situated in intellectual and embodied ways. The *I* itself is in dance with the world around it.

Warning 3: This chapter is corrupt. Approach it knowing you might get corrupted. Now, let us meet/become these wonderfully corrupt women, and let us remember.

Horror + Desire = Paradox

Even in our postmodern moment, images and representations of Muslim and Arab women remain problematic and historically charged. As a theoretical construct and a physical space, the [Western] gallery, whether in the global North or in the global South, remains a pedestal of *good art*, classical notions of evaluation, as well as enfranchised bodies. Even while museums/galleries attempt to become inclusive or multicultural, it is often done by incorporating token artists of color, already enmeshed within [Western] art practices.

Arab bodies held a grotesque status in the European imperial consciousness. Arab bodies belong in particular ways: as curiosities and representations where both desire and horror are mapped. This is especially true for the female Arab body. Images of veiled and purposely unveiled Arab women haunt the gallery, and paintings of *Orientalist* (Said, 1979) depictions of the Arab World remain solidly hanging on museum walls. A brown breast peers here, a black buttocks there, and no one seems really pestered by it. You walk into a middle class home somewhere in the Arab World, and you might see similar images of brown women laying on cushioned and colorful sofas, surrounded by naked children and black bodies, and realize the extent of this influence. The so-called experts/masters Orientalize, and in turn, we, Arabs, self-Orientalize. The grotesque Arab body, the body of the stranger, the terrorist, the Other, is yet to be welcomed as peers to the enfranchised body.

Arab women bodies, Arab women art, I argue, is especially disruptive to the gallery. The [Western] gallery accepts Arab women bodies as objects of desire to be gazed upon. When these objects assert themselves as makers, as artists, this echoes the demure veiled body of the supposedly oppressed Arab/Muslim woman as it unveils an explosive belt; horror.

Islam, the most prevalent religion in the Arab region is regarded in the global consciousness as antiwomanist, antifeminist, even by [Western] feminism, a view which is not inherent to Muslim feminists themselves (Najmabadi, 2000). Eurocentricism and imperialist, colonial debris is at play here. The less than ideal relationship between popular [Western] feminism and Islam continues to articulate itself in the form of portraying the veil as a symbol of antiwomanism and patriarchal oppression (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Najmabadi, 2000; Scott, 2008). Muslim Women's veiling or unveiling become signifiers of her supposed oppression, denying her

any form of agency. Juxtapose this to images of the veil becoming a symbol of her vilification, especially post 9/11. In the U.S., visual culture reproduced a veil hysteria. Puar and Rai (2002) describe how we “see how the dominant media are using the figure of the *burka*-ed woman in what are often racist and certainly chauvinistic representations of the Middle East” (p. 127). A reductive category, Muslim woman, is now a veiled monster, a brainwashed terrorist, and, somehow, also a victim.

A Dangerous Body Walks In

She is here.

—Rest assured she *is* here. and how comforting it is to find her.—

Even when she is not. Not *in the flesh* as people say.

Because [we]²⁶ are left contemplating traces of her, markings.

Gesturing towards her presence, and perhaps her body making, what her body has made, are things she left behind in the gallery; art for others/Others, [us], to see.

Can you tell that a woman left this behind for you to see? Or are you not an Other? Can you see? If you are not-other, can you *see*?

Perhaps it is me who is seeing things. This presence haunting the gallery space may not be a gendered one, or that of a girl/woman/female. Nothing in the work *really* indicates gender. My encounter could be mirroring my own gender as fluidly female. I am a woman, politically speaking. Do I simply see women everywhere?

Suppose the gender of the artist is debatable or, for some, unimportant. We could move on, for the sake of being polite and playing nice. Yet there is another pressing thing I sense; the spectral body haunting the space is not of the enfranchised. It is an

²⁶ [we] here is a word disrupted. For who is to say who this “we” is. Let us now assume it to be you, the reader, and I.

Other, of those who are marked by difference, the rejects of the earth, the unwanted, the dangerous, (one group of which are women, and more specifically, immigrant/brown/Muslim/Muslim-appearing women). I can sense this body and its belonging to the unclassifiable, those who swim in the in-betweens, those who are not *proper*, those who are not docile. This body is abject... no no... not just that! This body is *corrupt*.

Why do I recognize this? I too am a “space invader” (Puwar, 2004). I too, enter—through writing—spaces not intended for me.

A brown body, displaced, often comes to a realization. This is what postcolonial theorists call a “postcolonial consciousness” where a body realizes it’s own colonization, it’s own historical violence(s), inflicted upon it, and inflicted by it in turn as a body existing in a space in which it does not belong. This displaced body in its new [Western] context belongs in the background, as a benign object, a part of the decor surrounding a White/male consciousness, but when that body asserts itself as a consciousness, it becomes a danger. What happens when the—not only the subaltern—but the abject speaks?²⁷ What happens when the Other is a speaking Other ... it is exactly what happens when a woman is no longer dependent, no longer docile. When the abject body gains a consciousness in becoming aware of its own abjection and Otherness, it becomes a speaking Other, a *corrupt* body, and a corrupting force.

Corrupt Women Who Corrupt

I use corruption here in the best of terms. For purposes of understanding this idea of corrupt women, the New Oxford American Dictionary definitions of “corrupt” are, ironically speaking, *lacking*. Here, I offer you a short definition of corrupt women. Please bare in mind that this here

²⁷ In reference to Spivak’s (1988) essay *Can the Subaltern Speak*.

is a theoretical construct I am playing with, much inspired from Sara Ahmed's (2014) feminist killjoys and willing subjects, Rossi Braidotti's (1994) rendering of the figure of the nomad, and in the spirit of Coco Fusco's (2008) *A Field Guide for Female Interrogators*.

Corrupt (adjective) women are women who are no longer emotionally or intellectually dependent. These women often talk back and are argumentative. They give phallogentric/Eurocentric folk a hard time. In the case of **Arab corrupt women**, they do not accept the end line "the Prophet said..." because they have once debated with the prophet himself. They no longer accept [you] as a guardian, though they may enjoy your guidance from time to time. They want your wisdom, not your sarcasm. They also want you to shut up when they speak, when they express. They want you to see when they make, and when they do not make. Corrupt women know that they are equal to men and also know that they live in a patriarchal world that doesn't quite see it that way. They are often feminist comrades, even though many don't identify this way, for their own reasons. Yet they will lift you, they will fight the fight with you. Struggle your struggle. So they, in turn, **corrupt (verb)**. To corrupt an unjust world is to discomfort it, shake it —to decolonize it.

* Arab women readers, if you do not recognize this figure, please consider: How is it that there are so many Arab women poets and writers, and somehow we are still silenced? How is it possible that there are so many women painters and artists, and we are still invisible? Systematic injustices of patriarchy have done their part. Let us corrupt them.

A Thousand and One Nights of Nos

Shahrazad²⁸ resorted to storytelling to delay her death. She would speak, tale after tale, tale within a tale, to distract her prince, to put him to sleep, to spend his energy in listening, until the night was over, a *Thousand and One Nights*. What Arab parents did not tell us is that this was her way of not consenting, that storytelling was her refusal. As she spoke, Shahrazad was desexualizing her self by becoming an intelligent body, using the Master's tool, language, to disrupt a purpose set for her as a pleasuring body. Every story, folded into another, was a no, folded into another, to create an embroidery of *nos*, woven together, into a thousand and one *nos*. Such violence. And what a terror these *nos* are.

Another Arab woman, in the midst of the Egyptian revolution, part of the now disappointing Arab Spring, spoke another *no*. Lebanese-Egyptian artist Bahia Shehab, began the artwork, *A Thousand Times NO*, as a static installation for an exhibition at the Haus Der Kunst museum in Munich. It was a wall that brought together a thousand *nos* from various historical Arabic calligraphies, that she found looking through museum Islamic art archives. This installation, however, rearticulated itself as activism and political graffiti in the streets of Egypt. Shehab spray painted her *nos* on walls, alongside other graffiti, rejecting military rule. Bahia Shehab *spoke* about the evolution of this work. She explains:

When the revolution began in January 2011, I forgot completely about the artwork and I became very immersed in the revolution. Then at some point, about nine months into it, I realized that every no has a reason. They're not a thousand

²⁸ Shahrazad is the female protagonist of the *A Thousand and One Nights*, folk tales compiled from the Islamic golden age, more specifically the Abbasid era. The "Western" reader might know this as *Arabian Nights*. The original Arabic is available in multiple bound books. A tale within a tale, a maze, a story told by a woman married to Shahrayar, a prince known for marrying women and murdering them soon after conceiving the marriage.

general nos. I can assign a purpose, a message, to each one of these nos. So: “No for a new pharaoh,” “No to beating women,” and so on. (Shehab, 2012, TED Talk)

Military rule in Egypt is going strong, after the 2013 Egyptian coup d'état, lead by the Egyptian army chief General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to remove from power the first elected Egyptian President after the revolution, Mohamed Morsi. Egyptians, and Egyptian women, still have a lot of nos to articulate.

//The First No//

[1995, re-telling O's narrative:] O took her two little sisters in the car. It was a small Honda, and it smelled like a Japanese car. If you sat in it without seeing, and just sniffed, you would still know it was Japanese, and if you were like one of the two little sisters, who navigated the world with a keen sense of smell, you would probably even know it was a Honda. She came to associate that particular smell with escape.

They had left behind, at home, a storm that smelled like cigarettes, hairspray, and strong perfume. Their mom was out, and they could go out too. The small car. The escape.

O's hijab was lopsided, whether from putting it on quickly, or from it being pulled and called a rag by their mother, the two little girls do not remember. They blocked these things, you see, because she was, after all, their mother: she had to be right. What they could not understand was if that “rag” was so ugly, so backwards, why did O hold on to it so strongly and defy their mama?

O did not speak of Allah to her sisters that day. It was a mercy. They could not take any more words. She drove quietly, they all still had the look of someone who has been

crying desperately. She drove them to *Elblokkat* without them asking, they could not believe their eyes. O hated shops, and crowded places, but that evening she took them, and she bought three matching necklaces from the accessories shop they loved, and she had disapproved of. The three necklaces, in two discreet small letters dangling from a silver chain, said: *no*.

The finality of that *no* opened up possibilities of small defiances. “Even if we do as she says, and say *enshallah Mama*, we know our hearts can say no” O said. Her gift was refusal, without naming those things to be refused. Her sisters knew this was an open-endedness she does not often extend. For her words would remain shaped in the way that religion speaks. As truth. A solid truth. No back and forth. Yet, that lesson of “no” is the one that sunk in most deeply.

All it takes is one no to unleash a song of *nos*.

The Displaced Body

Feminist, feminist-aligned, and women artists have employed the body as medium in art making and art practices.²⁹ The political female body disrupts the masculinist hegemonies of the art discipline, and power hierarchies of patriarchy and imperialism. Using and exposing one’s

²⁹ Feminist art during the 1960s and 1970s was heavily involved in performativity and embodiment. These performance artworks drew attention to a multiplicity of topics such as the political nature of the body, issues of representation, the objectification of the female body, the gendered nature of space in relation to bodies, issues of the surveyor and the surveyed, and ways of seeing and *not* seeing that controls the way we approach art (Berger, 1972). Later, however, more caution was paid when working with the body, for much of the later feminist embodied/performative work was regarded as re-establishing the fetishization of the naked female body, and re-inscribing the male gaze (Pollock, 1998). In fact, Elinor Fuchs (1989) creates a split between earlier feminist work that uses the body as medium in what she refers to as religious ways, producing a primitive nostalgia towards a past matriarchy (that was later critiqued of being constructed), and that of later feminist body work that to her is sacrilegious or even “vulgar.” These criticisms caused the embodied feminist art work to be pushed away from the “proper,” highly masculine art scene to the sidelines. Nowadays, however, a critical return to embodiment is taking place in a post 9-11 world, and feminists are hardly being credited for it.

own body re-articulates its sexualization and objectification. Within the work of Arab women artists that does not directly use the body as medium, such as installation and conceptual art, there is often a gesturing towards a body's absence, referencing a corporeal presence/absence, and engaging the viewer in extremely embodied ways. This complex artistic and theoretical examination of Power and body politics is a method I use to describe and deconstruct the female displaced body as a theoretical construct.

What about the materiality of the body, Judy? Judith Butler (1993) begins *Bodies that Matter* with a confession that the critique of *Gender Trouble* (Butler, 1990), is just. Somehow, she had left the materiality of the body behind. A whole other book to rectify, to reconsider the body, to add it back after theory has exiled it from the realm it thrives in. She asserts in her preface: "I could not fix bodies as simple objects of thought" (p. ix).

Bodies are complex. It is never simple to talk about the body even though humans have been doing this for a long time. Perhaps since time. We, humans, can try to detach ourselves, and speak about bodies in *scientific* or *objective* ways. But the material thing is this: bodies are there. They *are* in ways that cannot be simplified by language. That *objective* scientist or theorist writing/speaking about bodies is her/him/themselves quite *there, s/he/they is/are material*, that cannot be overlooked. What is objectively writing about the body when writing itself is so embodied? It is impossible, and I like to believe, undesirable.

As an Other, a woman of color, an Arab, I cannot accept a disembodied writing of the body. Disembodied writing is in itself an epistemic violence, available only for the enfranchised writer, and cannot begin to express the corporeal reality of a disenfranchised body. Certainly not the displaced body—the *displaced body*, as though the multiple bodies of the displaced and their multiplicities can be reduced to one singular abstract form. Well let me state this assertively: It

cannot. Just as the notion of *Woman*—a universal female being/entity—has been debunked and argued against by feminists for decades, here I argue that the displaced body as a theoretical construct does not aim to reduce multiplicities into stereotypes. In fact, I will continue to argue against global media appropriations of the displaced body of the refugee as an example of a reduction in Chapter Four.

Nevertheless, the displaced body is an embodied way of knowing. Here, I am thinking about this displacement in three ways. It is safe to say that the term displacement is a highly contested one, so in order to discuss this further, first I argue with Freud!

Freud (1989) speaks of displacement in terms of hysteria, a condition known historically to be linked to women. Freud sees that through displacement, traumatic events find different outlets for themselves to manifest in motor ways. In one woman's famous case, lust for a brother-in-law displaced and manifested itself as unexplainable pain in the hip. Freud also uses displacement in terms of behavior. For him, displacement operates within the unconscious, and in displaced behavior, an action is done instead of a different action that can only be suppressed.

Freud's displacement(s) are of interest only in terms of the external factor. The basic Arabic word used for displacement is *ezaha*. This word makes it clear to me that in order to be displaced, there is an implicit third factor, a displacing force, *muzeeh*/displacer. For Freud, that displacing force is the unconscious mind. For me, the displacing of the body happens gradually through a process of learning to become a woman in the most restrictive ways possible. In relation to Butler (1993), the displaced body for me is contingent to what she describes as "bodies which fail to materialize," which "provide the necessary 'outside,' if not the necessary support, for the bodies which, in materializing the norm, qualify as bodies that matter" (p. 16).

Butler describes these bodies as abjected bodies that fall out of the realm of life, a notion I will discuss further in Chapter Four.

Displacing the Body and the Making of Docile Females

Consider the trifold of displacement: a forced shift of context, a chosen immigration, or an unfitting cultural identity within one's own place of origin. In a sense, I am still writing about displacement geopolitically and culturally; the artists I write about are displaced in one way or another, and I myself am displaced as I write this. Yet the displacement that I am focusing on in this particular chapter is a different kind, it is in relation to what Judith Butler (1990) refers to as *the girling of the girl*. In other words, this displacement is one which happens within the bodies of women. Within a body that is female, when the discourse of the world is masculine, one becomes displaced in order to manage women into docile beings. I argue that the (*girling of the girl*) as well as the continuous restrictions cast on women's bodies are a series of displacing acts that shift women from the expanded edges of their bodies of excess towards the center of their bodies, keeping them in check, attempting to make them docile, making them *foreign to themselves*.³⁰

I began this chapter with many *nos*. The need to say no, however, arises from the female yes. We³¹ remember how the learned "yes" came to be in order to shed it of its godly meaning, to make it banal, to unearth the lies that make up this yes, and know ourselves as we are, beyond our docile femme masks. Displacing the female body often happens gently, kindly, implicitly. Yet corrupt women know that something about it is *just not right*.

³⁰ In relation to Kristeva's (1999) *Strangers to Ourselves*.

³¹ "We" here, may include you, reader, also, may not.

Embodied Memory and Limits of Language

Remembering itself is not simply the retelling of a story. When one remembers, there is more going on than language. Not all that one remembers can be put into words. Here language proves itself to be limited. Yet we can only try. How can you retell the patterns of light cast upon a wall in your memory. The lights that have made you stop, look, those very lights that stirred language within you, stirred poetry. After all, is poetry not that endeavor to capture the embodied in language? To write it, without fixing it into solid words. Is poetry not the fluid markings we³² make to pause for a brief moment those fleeting patterns of light? And do we³³ not again transform these words into an embodied understanding? The women I remember are no poets, but as they told their stories in the homosocial space between us, poetic language emerged, they all became their own Shahrazad, their words held more *nos* than one poem could.

//I was wearing this//

[1991, 2016, S Speaks:] We had finally found the shark tank, my mother spotted the biggest sea turtle, and was calling me from the crowd, S, come see, the turtle!

"Which one is S?" I heard his voice in the darkness. My gut was seized with a compulsion from disgust. How can you recognize a voice you have not heard for over twenty-five years? He wanted to see me, how I have changed, how I have turned out to be, the woman now, not the little girl.

He was with children.

Does he remember how he took away mine?

With every finger he lay on me, he took away a child.

³² Have you made these markings? Are you with me in this *we* or should I have written *I*?

³³ Are you with me in this *we*? Can you feel me standing beside you?

And he used all ten. And then some. I bled for days after in silence. And for years after, whenever feces came, blood came with it.

That is what I was wearing when I saw him with children. I look at the picture now, a year after I saw him in the aquarium. I realize that ever since I snapped that selfie, I had gradually gained weight. Ten Kilograms. One for each finger.

I put on the same clothes. The jumper still fits. Its tight on my arms, and my stomach. The trousers do too, but only because they have a stretch to them, they now stretch to the maximum. They used to fit loosely. Now I feel cramped in these clothes, I feel a surge of disgust, same as that day.

His mother used to call me [...], an endearing term she invented for me to describe my chubby cuteness. And he used to repeat it to me in his room. [...] you are beautiful. [...] you have a body like a woman. I was five, and I loved him for his attention, until it attended to more than praise.

My mother took more time realizing who he was. He had to introduce himself to her, by his mother's name. My mother pointed towards me and said, it's [...]. Look how thin she is now!

I said hello, and smiled.

I said hello... and smiled... while my gut was churning. I could smell his scent. I scanned his face, he did not look a lot like his early twenties self. But he felt like him. His eyes were praising. I took his hand as he extended it and shook it hello.

Was that not a yes? Was I being complicit with my own violation.

No.

Not at all. I performed that smile for my mother next to me. I extended the edges of my mouth meekly, but my eyes stared at him with a dull expression. If you don't smile with your eyes, and just force your mouth in the shape of a smile, the expression looks exactly how I felt; disgust. And as I did it. I looked from him to the children around him, three of them, and then back in his eyes.

Only he understood this, because only he knew what he did in that room.

I complied for my mother. That is what I have been taught.

As S fidgeted and told her story I kept thinking of its materiality. S remembered and spoke in an embodied way, even further than I re-tell here. She described her thighs in her trousers and touched them, she spoke of her gut, of the fuming feeling that accompanies thrusts of disgust shooting up her esophagus. She described how her stomach reacted to his voice before she even caught on, recognizing who she was hearing: my body knew it was him.

Memory here is material, and embodied. As S described her experience, I could sense, smell, touch, in my gut, her sensations, her thighs were my thighs, her arms were my arms. She framed her whole story by that bodily change and restriction, how the same set of clothes, before and after the encounter, changed, shrunk, shriveled, around an expanding body. Her weight gain was an embodied reaction to the trauma of coming face to face with shame.

Yes. Shame.

As S recalled the rest of that night. How she walked back to the car with her mother, engaging each other by the elbow, sharing an ice-cream cone. She described her mother's body, warm and soft, in close proximity to her own, and how that softness soothed her. But she never spoke a word to her mother. *What would I say? She spent my youth instructing me on how to keep my body shielded, how can I tell her now that it was not necessary, and that the shield was*

already broken?

What S describes here is the gentle process of (girling the girl) or displacing the female body from itself. *This part is not yours. This part is sealed away. This part is for your husband.*

A continuous hymn, long before the possibility of sex, mothers (and mother figures) construct the female sex as foreign to the female body, pleasure as delayed, entry forbidden.

S's silence can be better understood when considering another woman's narrative.

The Virgin Assemblage

[1985, L speaks:] She came in the house screaming, dragging her daughter in by the hair, both of their faces were covered in tears. I thought to myself she must have done something. This motherly rage is only caused by one thing... You know. If it were one of my daughters I would be in the same state. I could not comprehend what she wanted me to do, her words were muffled, her heart must have been beating so loud with fury and anguish that she could not hear herself speak. Her hijab fell to her shoulders, her ears were flashing red, and her hair stuck to her face, wet with sweat still pouring down her nose. I hurriedly asked her to sit down, addressing her and looking at her daughter questioningly, her eyes were full of despair and yet she did not utter a word. I hurried to bring water, and as soon as the mother gulped it down she began to speak in a broken voice. She spoke about wanting to see my late husband, he was asleep though, a storm would not have woken him. She wanted to ask him a favor for her daughter, did I tell you he was a gynecologist? She wanted to see if he could... Well, you know... Sew her up. Her wedding was in a couple of weeks or so. But I told her that my husband could not help her, he's too religious, too traditional, he would have gone off and told the father.

Honestly, I did not want him to know, to associate me with something like that, he would ask me to cut all ties with this neighbor. Saying her daughters will corrupt ours, or worse accusing our daughters of the same nasty things. I was worried too, Kuwait is so small, and people cherish gossip. I could not leave her without help though, I remembered the name of a doctor my husband always spoke ill of for doing unspeakable surgeries on young women. I told her that she should go see this doctor. So, she took her daughter and went out into the night again, but not before she thanked me. She was so thankful for what little I told her that she started kissing my forehead and hand, I was covered in her sweat. But honestly, I was sorry for the girl afterwards. Of course, it's her own fault, no respectable girl would do this. But that doctor, she really hurt her, not just physically, she even called her names while doing the procedure. The mother told me. She was so upset that the doctor said these words to her daughter, completely forgetting that she had grabbed her by the hair while walking over my threshold. The floor was covered with hair. I had to remove it by a small broom, the machine would wake my husband. It was disgusting. Anyway. This is how mothers are, you know. We protect our own, even when we are so angry. Still, someone else saying those nasty things to her daughter, I can't believe she kept her mouth shut. But she needed that doctor. It was the only choice.

In contemporary Arab societies, women's virginity is required when they marry. While it may be the direct assumption of a non-Arab reader that this requirement originates from conservative Islam, it is not the case. Virginity is a cultural requirement of both Muslim and non-Muslim Arab women. Since the signifier for this virginity is the bleeding of a bride on her wedding night, the tearing of the hymen is considered a husband's right and role, and a proof of a woman's piety. This virginity has arguably become obsolete in our historical moment with the methods available

to restore it. Fatima Mernissi (1982) refers to this virginity, restored by procedures such as hymenoplasty, as artificial. Fatima Mernissi also argues that “virginity is a matter between men, in which women merely play the role of silent intermediaries” (p. 183). There is an allure of Mernissi’s argument, pinning another violation onto the patriarchal pinboard, yet somehow it is a simplification of the experiences of Arab women. While men may be the penetrators that validate a woman’s chastity, women themselves are as active in the transcription of the virginal component into the construction of women’s sexuality. Maternal powers must not be disregarded as controlling and constructing a specific form of culturally accepted sexuality and sexual activity. The exaggerated focus on the hymen as a signifier of virginity, and its tearing by a man as a signifier of losing that virginity, is also what characterizes Arab women’s sexuality. Even with the restriction on women’s bodies, this Arab female sexuality resembles feminist theories of excess, as opposed to a Lacanian theory of lack. To demonstrate this claim, let us consider Luce Irigaray’s theory of sexuality and relate it to the hymen/Arabic female sexuality.

Like many feminist philosophers and psychoanalysts, Luce Irigaray (1985) describes classic masculine philosophies as alienating women from their bodies. To disrupt theories of lack, Irigaray proposes a counter concept, one that describes feminine identity as plural as opposed to lacking. Irigaray describes the female sexuality in visual terms: the shape of female genitals. Instead of missing a phallus, the female sex becomes composed of two lips, constantly embracing and caressing. Irigaray (1980) writes:

Between us, there is no rupture between virginal and nonvirginal. No event makes us women. Long before your birth, you touched yourself, innocently. Your/my body does not acquire a sex by some operation, by the act of some power, function, or organ. You are already a woman; you don’t need any special modification or intervention. (p. 74)

If a woman's genitals in Irigaray's description formulate a whole, then it is my addition to this that the culturally constructed virgin (with hymen intact) is the embodiment of an excess. When a woman loses her hymen however, does that return her to the whole? Or does her sexuality remain transcribed by a notion of excess? The virgin assemblage, reconstructed by the possibility of hymen reconstruction, is the embodiment of the eternal return, and then becomes the contemporary figure of excess. Bleed. Sew. Bleed. Sew. Bleed. Sew. And so on. A grotesque exaggeration.

Blood, Hair, Vomit, Feces: Abject as Memory

[1993, B speaks] It was difficult for her to understand my body, I don't blame her. She was white, delicate, petite, she resembled Shadia and Fatin Hamama,³⁴ and I took after my father, his sturdy build, his big feet, and his big hands. [B extends her palms for me to see] Farmer hands. The sheera³⁵ kept sticking to my knees, she huffed and puffed, she was teaching me how to wax my body for the first time. She was getting hot flashes, and fanned herself with a magazine, it had a woman who resembled her on the cover. I don't know how *all of you* came out of *me*, she said.

She finally was able to unstick the sheera from my leg. It was full of rough bristles of small black hair. The pure caramel color turned to a mixture of black and grey. You have skin like a *thab*,³⁶ she said to me. [B looked away from me, into the far corner of the cafe.] To this day, I never moisturize or sheera without thinking of *skin like a thab*. But it's not her fault, she didn't know what to do with my body, I was too hairy for her, even

³⁴ Shadia and Fatin Hamama are golden age stars from Egyptian Cinema.

³⁵ *Sheera* (or sometimes *sukkar* depending on the Arabic dialect) is an organic wax made mainly from sugar and lemon that Arab women use for removing unwanted bodily hair.

³⁶ A large desert lizard.

the hair on my head was an enigma. She brushed and blowdried. She soaked in olive oil. *Hennat*³⁷ in attempts to make it behave. Tried to make the hair presentable. How could someone like her know how to tame curls. She just *didn't know how!* Now she thinks they're beautiful... She didn't mean to make me feel ugly then. But she knew she did. I asked her once, when I was eight or nine, if she thought anyone might ever think I was beautiful. She said no.³⁸ She said I will have to find someone who will *really* love my personality. I wasn't even thinking of men. I was thinking of my friend M in school. She had soft legs that shone in gym class when she put on her shorts, I could not take my eyes off of her legs.

S remembers blood, feces, vomit. O the smell of cigarettes. L the hair on her floor. B remembers bodily hair, sticking on a used sheera.

Julia Kristeva (1982) associates the abject with all that the subject categorizes as filthy and polluting. In order for the subject to enter the symbolic order, it must define itself as independent. Abjection, however, disrupts this notion of independence by highlighting that control is always only partial, always incomplete. Food, blood, waste, bodily fluids and secretions, vomit, feces, and certainly in the case of the female body, menstruation are all examples of this abjection. The abject can also describe undesirable states, such as being wounded, weak, vulnerable or exposed, bodies of the old, sick, disabled, Othered, and, as I will expand on in Chapter Four, the terrorist, the refugee, the immigrant of color.

³⁷ Putting Henna in hair.

³⁸ This no is different that the *nos* of this chapter. This no it is not a refusal, but a conditioning, a girling. *No, you are not beautiful because beautiful looks like this particular impossibility that you must aspire to.*

Abjection and corruption go hand in hand. In order to be a corrupt woman, one must first recognize one's own abjection, lowered status, Otherness, foreigners, and strangeness. This recognition is one of the key reasons for choosing to look at the work of Arab women artists who are *displaced*. Geopolitical and cultural displacement *does* something. It brings you to that recognition of your self as Other, foreign, strange, as woman and as rejected and exiled social entity, an awareness critical for rejection, corruption, and this particular feminism.

Let us consider abjection in the work of Arab women artists. Employing abject materiality signifies a move from the enfranchised clean body towards an abjected, grotesque body. This takes into account all facets of this body and in turn rejects the particularly heightened status of the female body in classical Greek and Roman art as goddess, and later on in [Western] Christian art as mother and saint. *No*. Abjection is for the corrupt body. In *A Stranger in the Gallery: Conceptions of the Body Through Art and Theory*, I argued that encountering an Arab woman's body in the gallery is a form of abjection, her being an unwelcome stranger to the gallery (Abu Bakr, 2016). Arab women artists finding their way into a [Western] gallery using abject materiality to disrupt the viewer is, to put it plainly, my favorite kind of corruption.

Hanaa Malallah brought Baghdadi rubble into the London art scene. In *Mesopotamian Rhythm* (2011), a three shelved glass display cabinet, about average human height, contains assorted found objects from the streets of Baghdad. The objects include, at the bottom shelf, a pair of torn and withered sneakers, gesturing towards the possibility of this display cabinet of being a human glass coffin, containing the guts and remains of an Iraqi citizen, unraveled and undone. Compartmentalized. Here, see what your wars have done to this body... I hear Hanaa. Or was that me?

In *US Heritage Flag* (2010), Malallah had a similar pair of sneakers embroidered instead of the stars of a U.S. American flag. The world raised an eyebrow in confusion when Iraqi journalist Muntadhar al-Zaidi threw a shoe, and then the other, at George W. Bush, the then-United States President, during an Iraqi press conference in 2008. The Arab region, however, raised two eyebrows in shock, suppressing (or not suppressing) laughter. This was intended to humiliate Bush, who, culturally unfamiliar with the abject nature of shoes/feet to Arabs,³⁹ ducked twice and avoided being hit, and was hit nonetheless by the gesture's stigma. U.S. American media continuously criticizes Arab demonstrations for burning U.S. American and Israeli flags, an action that aided in the classification of Arabs as emotional and unreasonable people(s). I leave Malallah's flag for your own consideration, while arguing that it falls under abjection.

In more directly abject ways, Mona Hatoum displays a collection of work made using human remnants as medium. She disrupts the gallery's cleanliness by bringing into it hair, blood, or skin. For example, human hair is twirled into balls that dangle in a row from a neck-like structure resembling a pearl necklace, creating *Human Necklace* (Hatoum, 1995). Pearls are a strong Arab metaphor for purity, heightened status, and female virginity. Hatoum's *Keffiyeh* (1993–1999) uses long black strands of women's hair to sew what resembles a Palestinian scarf, traditionally worn by men.⁴⁰ Both of these women continuously corrupt and contaminate the gallery space through their work, orchestrating an encounter with the abject for the viewer.

Touch. Touch. Touch.

[2017] I remember...

³⁹ I will expand more on feet in Chapter Three.

⁴⁰ In Chapter Four, I expand on my own thinking of the use of hair as an artist.

With my whole body, I remember.

It is simply another way of saying, I exist. While the idea might be very attractive: I am not a floating spec in the flow of the universe, I am instead, a feminine seed, rooted within the soil of this earth, and the soil of my memory.

My body recalls touch, in all its forms and varying force.

I remember the tender touch, my mother's hand on my back, circling, weaving in sleep.

I remember the sudden force of a slap, and my failed attempt to back away from the quick gesture that lands with a thundering impact on my face.

And I remember even gentler things, while maybe more forceful than my mother's hands.

My body does not remove itself from this memory, my mind does not repel the body.

This binary is for this person (and I argue all persons) obsolete.

My mind and body are one. We need new vocabulary, but for now let us call it my *self*.

Let us rework this self, burdened with contested meanings through time and memory.

Self, here, is in the flux of the cosmos, it is flesh, it is often abject, never abstract, never object. Self is awareness and embodiment, whether self is awake or asleep. Dreams...

Are a different form of desire, let us stick to memory.

Remembering is displacing your self. Remembering is a displacement.

Like Erin Manning (2007) I understand embodiment in terms of a sensing body, a body that creates space and time through its movement. This understanding destabilizes time and space in accordance with the sensing body.

I walk into a gallery, come face to face with one of Hatoum's dangerous objects, a familiar made strange. And I feel. I remember a prick of a needle here, a cut of a knife there, and

without touching, I touch. She offers me this experience—her experience? Does it hurt to be a displaced Palestinian? Danger. Back away. Electric fences and sharp ends. Hatoum does not shy away from pain. Our dear corrupt woman. Her touch is dangerous. You might just get to sense the stranger’s pain.

Abject Arabness: A Name of My Own

Some years ago my ‘Arab identity’ was a fact of politics and culture and of life. Today it has become a taboo, a curse for those who insist on saying they are Arabs. Now a new identity has been coined for me by the global powers. Our region is ‘the Middle East’, refurbished to include Israel, Turkey, and perhaps a subdued Iran. (Nawal El Saadawi, 1997, p. 117)

They will have you believe that Arab is a dated identity, but you are no stranger to struggle. Struggle with it. You say “I am Arab” and they scan you. No black veil above your head, no camel beneath you. Yet you say it, again. I am Arab. Oh, from the Middle East? You shake your head. Arab. Meet me. Meet the abject. Did you think it looked like this? No. Be sure they will ask you: Do you cover? They will do that gesture around their heads, or sometimes put a palm on the bottom half of their faces. And it might happen, once or twice, that they casually ask you about female circumcision. Ask you casually about your clitoris. They want to save your clitoris, as White men save Brown women from Brown men, in Spivak terms.⁴¹

Yet I am Arab. It is a name of my own. To choose one’s own name, to assert it even at the current anti-Arab climate is a decolonizing act. Steering away from colonialist language is difficult when you are writing in the language of the colonizer, and using theory, the historically

⁴¹ Gayatri Spivak’s critiques the notion of the need for White men to save Brown women from Brown men (Spivak, 1988).

masculinist tool of the White master. Language is activism. Terms such as the *Middle East* are entangled in imperialist discourse, and are forms of colonialist slippage that make their way into critical and feminist texts even when we know better. One must actively choose to decolonize language. Have you noticed my use of the word [West]? It is disrupted, alongside my altogether quitting the Eurocentric term *Middle East*. My opposition to Eurocentrism is ironic, as I work under the umbrella of U.S. academia, and cannot escape having to contextualize my writing within its problematic categorizations. I keyword my papers *Middle East* as I oppose the term. The struggle of the minority scholar is undergone here, one ends up using the same colonialist language one critiques.

In “*Under The Western Eye*” *Revisited*, Chandra Mohanty offers an alternative to the use of the Western/Third World binary. She refers to the vast regions in her scholarship as One Third World and Two Thirds World (Mohanty, 2003). Such a shift from the perspective of a student in my situation is ideal and vital. These new terms, however, are admittedly confusing and lengthy for a speaker of English as a second language.

As a woman growing up, being “Middle Eastern” to me was associated with complexity of being half Palestinian, half Kuwaiti, and neither of those identities separately, Middle Eastern was my comfort umbrella. I was fond of the term. I accepted the category Middle Eastern as my own, without knowing its origin or questioning its complications. In retrospect, I see my use of it as submissive and revolting, it’s sensual sound recontextualized and understood as tokenized. In relation to construct of the Middle East, Ella Shohat (2002)—an Arab-Jewish visual culture scholar—writes:

Any dialogue about the fictive unity called "Middle Eastern women" or "Latin American gays/ lesbians" —especially one that is taking place within a

transnational framework—has to begin from the premise that genders, sexualities, races, classes, nations, and even continents exist not as hermetically sealed entities but rather as part of a permeable interwoven relationality. (p. 68)

With Shohat's problematization of *fictive unities* in mind, I write about Arab women, and choose my artists Arab, not out of Arab supremacist tendencies, but out of respect for women from the region. Collapsing Iranian, Turkish, Pakistani, Afghani (and so on) women with Arabness is an epistemic violence. The Arab region encompasses countries in Asia and North Africa whose first language is Arabic. The term is not geographically relational and is free of an implied geopolitical hierarchy, therefore the reclaimed identity: Arab woman.

Embroidering Arabness

To be Arab is a difficulty. It is to exist as a problem. You exist alongside assumptions of violence. You exist in the realm of the abject, to the world, you are not quite human. Your loss is not a loss to be mourned, and your life is ungrievable. In relation to this, let us consider the work of Egyptian-born artist, Ghada Amer.

Amer is known for her search of an aesthetic language specific to women. Amer's work varies in medium, yet her *signature* work is done through a process of embroidery. This technique is not a stranger to feminist art. Feminist artists took up needle work such as in the 1970s to signify a resistance to the degraded status of woman's work. Embroidering here is a political tool. Amer chooses it for its historically woman-specificity. In her work, however, she allows the needle to *penetrate* the masculine surface of the canvas. This reactionary practice can be linked back to Amer's years studying in Ecole Pilote Internationale d'Art, when she was told painting classes were restricted to male students (Reilly & Amer, 2010).

Amer's work is affected and inspired by many sources, and can be read as a form of meditative repetition. Images of Disney princesses, women from magazines and pornography, and Arabic text from various sources peer out of her canvas in escaping threads. From these images, women's capacity for pleasure is asserted, yet problematized for these images are representations of women made for man's gaze. However, Amer's embroidering distorts and disrupts the pornographic material. The familiar performance, pose, penetration, and insertions become less familiar, they belong now in the realm of the critical corrupt woman. Displacement is occurring through repetition.

Would Amer's work be similar had she not been displaced to Europe and later the United States? Perhaps not. Amer has been having difficulty exhibiting this particular work (depicting pornographic material) in the Arab region, up to this day. The work itself is seen as pornographic and obscene by cultural authorities. Then it is a possibility that the distance from one's own culture offers a space for contemplation and evaluation. That being said, the evaluation here is made by an Arab woman to *her own culture*, and while it may be the result of gaining a global consciousness, I resist to abstract it as [Western] criticality, for there is more at play here. Amer's consciousness is not dualistic. She has not become [Western] or [Westernized], instead, she has come to inhabit the space of Arab and not Arab at the same time by the merit of exposure. Her critique of Arab cultural and religious authority comes from the liminal place of inbetween, and cannot be rejected as outsider's critique. Here, she is doing what Cixous (1976) refers to as writing herself, a strategy of resistance to the cultural expulsion of women. Next, I will discuss *The Definition of the Word Security in Arabic*, a work by Ghada Amer.

Arabic Security

Pop! Pop! Pop!

The words pop. And yet at the same time they seep from the canvas and formulate again. The thread hangs loose, one layer on top of another, like the hairs of a balding man's head, and from underneath the canvas is negative, the canvas never fully absorbs the words. They are sewn on its skin, forced to exist on its surface. How violent, how bizarre! That romanticized canvas, how could a woman mutilate it with her needle as such? She marks it, marks it, marks it, repeatedly. Words to the eyes of a stranger look like they are repeated again and again. To my eyes the words POP. One after the other they start to make sense. Here it is, the word *secure* in all its forms, to be safe, safety, to be offered safety, *aamin*, *ameen*, *aman*. Reading the words that pop is poetic, "aman" is often used for singing, with a slight change in the articulation of the vowels. I know this, and Ghada Amer knows this, but who else in this gallery could possibly know? To them, it is as Ghada states: *a definition of the word security in Arabic*. But is this invasion of Arab letters on a foreign canvas safe at all? Would not the canvas expel us eventually - me, and Ghada, and her definition? Do we belong here on this classical canvas? Also, what is security in Arabic? It does not really exist. Not translatable. Incommensurable. *Our* security is not *their* security. We can never be secure. The displaced shall never gain such a solid state.

Present Misbehaving Women

From Egypt/the U.S., let us shift and consider the work of a second Ghada(h). Ghadah Alkandari is a Kuwaiti artist known for her very stylized paintings often depicting women. She,

however, has created work that moves beyond painting. Alkandari is an artist who is constantly at work, she paints, draws, journals, and has made a lot of these personal processes of understanding herself available to an audience through social media spaces. Her blog, *prettygreenbullet*, is rich with content, and is layered, so that one can spend multiple hours becoming a *peeking other* into the life of this woman. This notion may not seem strange, but in a private society such as Kuwait, where posting images of oneself online is still frowned upon (if you are a woman), the extent to which Alkandari has opened up the intimate space of her home and self is extraordinary. With this in mind, we can begin to see the ways in which Alkandari performs her identity, and her agency, as an Arab woman artist. This very openness is what makes her culturally displaced in relatively traditional Kuwaiti society. Her transparency is a manifestation of her displacement.

In 2008 Alkandari temporarily put the canvas to the side to create her first installation, *heart & the gutting*. Alkandari (2008) explains the time-based process of creating this piece:

[The installation] was the culmination of seven months of writing a daily note and preparing a paper bag lunch for my college imaginary friend, Thomas. The bags were a result of a very traumatic and painful period in my life. They helped me cope and channel my energy into something aesthetically pleasing and tactile. The notes were extremely candid because when I started I hadn't intended on having anyone read them. The bags were not meant to be opened. I only decided a month before the exhibition to have people open the dated bags and tack the contents onto a corkboard (ghadahalkandari.com).

This installation marks a tactile affected move in Alkandari's work. Since then, Alkandari's women have begun to escape their canvas traps. They manifest themselves as cut-outs roaming

about her living room, and as attached to objects. I believe this to be a form of exhibition that takes fluidity into account, Alkandari did not leave the canvas behind, her objects and paintings are often in conversation, blurring the lines of life and art practice. She continues to create work that is personal and private, breaking the boundaries of intimacy. Alkandari has extended the homosocial sphere of her Eve into social media. Her women are present.

Conclusion: Corrupt Women Who Corrupt

Sara Ahmed (2017) writes, in *Living a Feminist Life*, how a feminist consciousness begins to formulate in women of color. She argues that her feminism was not realized by the outside influences of [Western] feminism as conservatives might have her believe. Instead, she speaks of her aunties and how they influenced that consciousness, and her own experience in the world as a woman, and how some encounters left her feeling wronged. Arab women who are feminist in particular are often told they are corrupted by [Western] women even when they are arguing against [Western] feminism. Somehow, even our feminism as Arab/brown women is considered displaced. As though it is too much for us to see our own displacement.

Ahmed argues that “feminism can begin with a body, a body in touch with the world, a body that is not at ease in a world; a body that fidgets and moves around. Things don’t seem right” (p. 22). That very figure, in this context, is a corrupt woman. A woman who began to think in terms other than what she has gained from the process of her girling. The process of displacing her from her own female body. The women in the stories of this chapter are an example of that figure, not at ease with the world. A body interrupted.

Stories, however, are not always on our side. We have been told stories that vilify us. Vilify our will and our choice. Myths of corrupt women are told as cautionary tales, Eve and her apple, Pandora and her box— But I as a corrupt woman ask: What did Pandora think? Can we

for once think of that suffering (she brought on the world) as hers, her own? Can we not flip the metaphor? It is my hope that this chapter began to do this.

Now, let the corrupt women reign, and see what they want.

See what they do. What they make.

Fear not this new displacement; Let it do what it does. Let it make what it makes.

Chapter Three.

Fourteen [Restricted] Rooms: Hatoum and the Body of the New Exile

“I dislike interviews. I’m often asked the same question: What in your work comes from your own culture? As if I have a recipe and I can actually isolate the Arab ingredient, the woman ingredient, the Palestinian ingredient. People often expect tidy definitions of otherness, as if identity is something fixed and easily definable” - Mana Hatoum in an interview with BOMB magazine (Antoni, 1998).

This chapter discusses displacement and the possibility of access in relation to Arab women art, border crossing, and language. The chapter autobiographically reflects on the displaced experience by theoretically looking at the work of artist **Mona Hatoum**. Autobiographical excerpts —and **interruptions**— highlight how a displaced identity is continuously shaped, as well as how one displaced woman is un/able to maneuver the limits of access. Striked out words are also used to further complicate things for the reader. ~~This is not a typo, please don't skip over while reading.~~

An Introduction to a Chapter Full of Interruptions and Suspended Disbelief

“A dangerous *Other* walks into a gallery...”

No, this is not the start of a joke, it is the start of this chapter.

/ / c o n f i d e n t / /

In 2016, the TATE Modern gallery held the most comprehensive exhibit of Mona Hatoum’s work yet, and named her “one of the most important artists working today” (tate.org). This statement bewilders me for two reasons: first, the TATE’s status as one of the most

influential galleries/museums in [Western] Europe, and second, Hatoum's evident enfranchisement that suggests a move beyond Arabness⁴². While I personally believe Hatoum as influential as the above quote claims, it was astonishing to have this legitimized by the TATE given its [Western] positioning.

//INTERRUPTION// *Why are you looking for legitimization from the TATE in the first place? Colonized much?* //INTERRUPTION OVER//

A comprehensive exhibit on Mona Hatoum while I am writing my dissertation? Of course I would go see it! Except, in two seconds I remember: I have no valid UK visa. //DOOR SLAMMING SOUNDS// This body is yet again restricted by paperwork.

In this chapter I explore the fourteen rooms of Mona Hatoum's 2016 exhibit by taking a virtual+imagined embodied walk through them. The TATE website provides highlights for each of the fourteen rooms. I use these as the roadmap for this chapter, stitching together embodied encounters (real and imagined) with the work, narratives of memory, as well as a reworking of the exile of Edward Said's (2000) *Reflections*⁴³.

On this imagined walk, my writing goes through a further restriction;⁴⁴ earlier versions of this chapter discussed works of art by Hatoum that spoke to me personally, I was choosing the artworks myself, aligning them with themes I speak about, making the artwork serve my purpose(s) as a writer. Now, however, I do not (fully) choose the artworks, for while I may choose between one or two from a room's display, I am still restricted by the curator(s)' choices.

⁴² The TATE's website and the exhibition catalog clearly identify Hatoum as a Lebanese born Palestinian. Yet here I am suggesting that the colonial residues are not evident—that's to say they are not emphasized — as they often are when exhibiting a Middle Eastern* artist.

⁴³ Referring to *Reflections on Exile* (2000) by Edward Said.

⁴⁴ All writing is restricted, to varying degrees; discourse restricts embodied knowledge, using one language restricts the polyglot, linear pages restricts the organic flow of ideas, and so on.

The curator(s), outsiders to this process, are now implicated in the choreographing of this writing; curating my walk, my process, and my re-writing of this writing.

Disclaimer: This chapter is written in a performative way, making apparent internal competing voices, from a complex set of selves at play. Often, Sarah (the *Other* Sarah) will interrupt, as she did earlier, between two forward slashes.⁴⁵ But it is not just Sarah and *Other* Sarah in conversation here with the artwork and your thoughts; there's the academic, the artist, the woman, the Muslim, the Palestinian, the Kuwaiti, the feminist, the sketcher, the performer, the postmodernist and even the shunned essentialist (who sometimes makes unwanted appearances) are in a large mess composing this writing.

Ok then. Suspend your disbelief.

Walk with me.

Room 1: Walk the Walk

Still confident, I walk into the gallery with a strut, almost. I swing my legs joyously, happy to be here, happy to be granted access to this particular location again. Until I confront *her* feet.

Artwork: Performance Still 1985/1995

Website Text: This photograph records a performance Hatoum carried out for *Roadworks*, a Brixton Artists Collective group exhibition organised by Stefan Szczelkun in 1985. Set against a background of London's inner-city race riots, the performance consisted of Hatoum walking barefoot through Brixton with Doc Marten boots (associated with both police and skinheads) attached to her ankles by their laces. (Tate, 2016)

⁴⁵ // is an element borrowed from Processing, a programming language where anything typed after two forwards slashes is not included in the coding of the program and do not effect the results when the code is run. They are usually traces and notes the programmer leaves.

*Sho ya*⁴⁶ *Mona*?

I thought I was confident, walking into this gallery, inflicting my body upon it. And yet here she is, walking, barefoot. Mona moves to London in 1975, is she by '85 confident enough to perform as cultural critic, no inhibition? Mona engages with a London struggle. She is in and with London. Refusal of being pushed to the side — was it intentional? I would have asked you that question ya Mona, if I were able to meet you.

There's something about feet in Arabic. *Aboos ejrak/ryoolik* I will kiss your feet is something you say when you are begging someone and in total desperation. Heaven is said to be under the feet of mothers, by no other than prophet Mohammed, who taught me to sit by my mother's feet. You never show anyone the bottom of your foot without apologizing. You never put your feet up on a dining table. If you are crossing your feet, you make sure you're pointing your foot downwards, not at someone's face. If you're dancing, you do the same, arch your foot, point your toes, and when with a beat, you kick, do it mindfully. You take off your shoes before entering mosques and homes. You wash your feet before you pray, five times a day. So many rules about feet. And yet they heal //my mother says to soak them in salt water when you're tired, and walk on the sand from time to time, it takes away your sorrow she says// and they sense, in an embodied way, they *know*. Take off your shoes/socks/slippers and walk on the surface below you, whatever it is. Are you in a cafe like me right now? It has rained a lot today, and I am looking outside the window at the floor before me, it is wet in places, muddy in places, and all of a sudden my feet are imagining these textures. My feet are knowing. And (back at the gallery) as

⁴⁶ Ya is used in Arabic to address someone directly. Ya always comes with a noun after it, either the person's name or a noun used to describe them. In Palestinian dialect, *sho* (what) *ya* [*person name/noun to describe them*]? is a common conversation starter, it is another way of saying: tell me about you, tell me your news. It suggests familiarity and intimacy.

I am looking at the image of Hatoum's feet, bare on the ground, my feet simply and immediately *know*.

Room 2: A Foreign Body (Swallowed by Seclusion)

//Oh no! Someone has finally caught up, they know I'm here. ~~Just kidding, that's just the name of the artwork.~~// I walk into this room and a recognition occurs. I know this artwork that beckons...

I have seen it before, had the luxury of encountering it, body to body, at *Centre Pompidou* in Paris.

Artwork: Corps étranger 1994

Website Text: Corps étranger means 'foreign body' in French. This installation developed from performances Hatoum made in the early 1980s which focused on ideas of surveillance. Specialist medical imaging procedures were used to probe and explore the artist's body, with the resulting video footage projected onto the floor. The camera acts like a scientific eye that surveys the body and invades its boundaries, mapping internal and external surfaces to the point where they become abstracted and unfamiliar. (TATE, 2016)

Once again, the body is present. //Has the body ever left anyway?// But here, it is undone.

Hatoum pulls herself apart, inside out, she exposes herself, her internal organs. I take a journey inwards by stepping into the corporeal abyss. I am *inside*. The foreigner is internalized, you have no choice, no matter who you are and what your privilege is //which you should totally be questioning right now by the way.// Now you are swallowed by the body of an Arab, Other, woman. How abject for you, how *homelike* for me. //See what I did just there?// I have created a divide, easily. A divide between me, over here, typing these words, and you, over there, reading them. I/you. Here/there. How sly Othering is. How crafty is this dualism, supposing itself

ahistorical, when it was fashioned by a masculine “One” who thought himself norm.⁴⁷ Let me assure you that I intend no such dishonesty. You too are welcome to feel at home or at horror, or an exquisite mixture of both, as we walk into/invade/trespass upon Hatoum. Do you feel repulsed? Julia Kristeva (1999) might agree with you; strangeness/foreignness is repulsive. You, and I, and the body, and the particles in the air made visible and less so as the video dims down and brightens up again. With us all are the words we did not learn how to say, for this is *embodied*, and words are *lacking*. Language, please keep up as we step towards another encounter.

Room 3: Here Comes a New Exile

Artwork: *Light Sentence* 1992

Website Text: The installation is made up of square wire mesh lockers which have been stacked to create a three-sided enclosure above human height. They resemble animal cages, and also relate to uniform and box-like architecture. The single lightbulb that hangs in the middle of the structure moves slowly up and down like a search light, casting constantly moving gridded shadows that create a sense that the room itself is moving. This is one of Hatoum’s earliest installations. Subverting the clean lines, industrial materials and grids of minimalist art, *Light Sentence* introduces traumatic and political themes. The title plays on the idea of a lenient term in prison.

We //me modernized!// have been educated in the art of looking at art. Somewhere along the way, someone has explained to us the proper behavior in a museum. What to do, what not to do, what to expect, what will get you kicked out, and what is preferable behavior. //Like standing in awe and tearing up?// The dignity granted the classic notion of a white cube gallery has somehow historically refused us the pleasure of play. I walk into this room and realize that my body rejects

⁴⁷ In relation to René Descartes (Descartes & Cress, 1993), often referred to father of modern [Western] philosophy, and *credited* for the mind-body (male-female) dualism that still haunts [Western] thought today.

the knowledge drilled into it, and curiously, instead of looking at the artwork, *Light Sentence*, I am looking at the walls, with the light from the artwork reflected on them. //is this part of the artwork, ya Mona?// These shadows of cage-like structures are arguably part of the artwork, but for me they are the most beckoning, and I hear a distant voice, tenderly describing lemon tree patterns dancing on walls.

My body is filled with joy. The student in me knows I'm viewing this artwork "the wrong way," but I am not seeing the solid structures that restrict, I am walking closer to the shadowy movement that offers a lenient chance for disruption: a non-solid cage, a disreputable pattern, my shadow is there too now, swaying with, and all of a sudden I see me, a *new exile*, in and out of imagined constrictions and seclusion.

In *Reflections on Exile*, Edward Said (2000) discusses the figure of the exile in literature and the literature of the exile her/him self. Said's exile is someone displaced from a home s/he grew up in, and is unable to return to. This exile reminisces and longs for that particular home. In Said's case, this home is Palestine //Which makes him one of my academic allies, and struggle comrades.// Said differentiates between the exile, the refugee, and the expatriate (2000, p. 181). According to this differentiation, the exile is someone who is unable to return home and therefore is a constant outsider, often thought of in solitude. In comparison, refugees as a political word often evokes images of masses of people displaced from their homes for reasons beyond their control, a group of people in need of aid. Finally, expatriates who may resemble the exile in terms of solitude, are voluntarily living in a country that is not home, and return is a possibility.

Said had the privilege of spending the first years of his life at his home (Jerusalem) in Palestine, and speaks of the Palestinian experience in relation to that forced movements/

displacements which affected him and other Palestinians 1948 onwards, rendering them into refugees and exiles. Yet there is a new group of Palestinians that challenges the distinctions that Said makes. I think of this category of displaced people as new, intergenerational exiles who, while have not lived portions of their lives at their Palestinian *home*, nevertheless have a strong longing for it. A longing that perhaps cannot be settled by the mere arrival at what remains of Palestinian lands. //Is this a light sentence?//

This intergenerational struggle that younger generations of Palestinians often embody, to many holds the power to keep the Palestinian struggle for autonomy alive. In his essay Said quotes a poem of the most prominent Palestinian poet (an exile himself) Mahmoud Darwish. The following is the segment Said uses in the essay:

But I am the exile.
 Seal me with your eyes.
 Take me wherever you are —
 Take me whatever you are.
 Restore to me the color of face
 And the warmth of body,
 The light of heart and eye,
 The salt of bread and rhythm,
 The taste of earth... the Motherland.
 Shield me with your eyes.
 Take me as a relic from the mansion of sorrow;
 Take me as a verse from my tragedy;
 Take me as a toy, a brick from the house
 So that our children will remember to return.⁴⁸ (p. 179)

The last line here speaks of the intergenerational longing. A longing that parents of my generation of Palestinians have willfully instilled in their children. I will return to this through my personal experience later, but first, let me purposefully translate the poem again, directly and line by line from Arabic to English.

⁴⁸ Darwish's (1974) collection of poetry in translated from Arabic to English by B.M. Bennani.

Darwish's last line (last line quoted in the essay, the Arabic poem goes further) invokes the imagery of birds returning in flight, often used in Arabic exile literature to poetically portray return. This poetic imagery is lost in the credited translation that Said uses.

Allow me to take a moment here to turn around from disrupt-able cages dancing on the wall, and face the structures I have been avoiding. I have seen two similar structure before. The first, on the roof of our neighbor's house in my childhood home, was beautiful and kind. It was made of wood, with round wide openings, and had a distinct smell, a pleasant mixture of feathered bodies, wet wood, and bird grains that my neighbor sprinkled generously for his pigeons. The second structure is neither kind looking, nor kind smelling. It was at a hen store where I went once as a teenager, and that particular structure looked almost exactly like the one I am standing before now, except it was filled with feathered bodies. These feathered bodies were not cooing in welcome of their beloved keeper, they were struggling against each other, perhaps sensing that they were there awaiting slaughter. Is this a light sentence?

So present is the metaphor of birds in cages or in flight.

Darwish speaks of the return of the next generation, what I am referring to as the new exiles, yet he uses the word "remember." This makes apparent that Darwish is aware of—and perhaps is part of—the initiation Palestinians go through in their youth; The stories they heard from grandparents and parents of *Falasteen elhelweh* (the beautiful Palestine), and homes, often made of stones not bricks (as the official translation projects). *I remember the house stone by stone* a Palestinian grandmother might say, before she would go on to describe the rooms, the way the light entered her chamber in different times of the day, and the patterns the lemon trees outside made on her walls as the wind tenderly touched them. *We had five olives*, she might say, referring to the olive trees in her back garden, trees she knew and tended. Loved and nourished.

These are familiar words for the new exile, we have different iterations of this woman, who was well educated, yet knew the best time to pick olives and pomegranates, and how to use lemons in every possible way so that nothing from the land is wasted.

A new exile is fashioned as an intensity of longing. New Palestinians, those who were born well after the 1948 *Nakba* (Catastrophe), and my generation of hybrids and halves, were still brought up with the thought of being robbed of a beautiful home. *Is that a light sentence?* With a mother's milk, a Palestinian's other nutrition is exile. So that a Palestinian state of being is that of waiting, longing, and continuous becoming, to be from a place other than that you were born. The task for a new exile is transcribed; to always remember a Palestine as it was (intergenerational memory), even though not born on its' soil—free or colonized. Return becomes an obsession. Thus longing is inherited, an ailment only soothed by a supposed becoming one with home. In relation to Palestinian author Ghassan Kanafani's (2000)—another exile!—*Returning to Haifa*⁴⁹ (published in Arabic in 1969), Marianne Hirsch (2012) writes that return “to place literally loosens the defensive walls against the sorrow of loss that refugees build up over decades and that they pass down to their children” (p. 148). Yet for those of us who cannot return, it is indeed not a *light sentence*.

Room 4: Mother(land) and the Becoming of New Exiles

I have dwelt long on birds and cages. Now I walk again, enter another room with a familiar stranger. A familiar accent and voice. A familiar body and vulnerability. A familiar familiarity.

Artwork: Measures of Distance 1988

⁴⁹ Ghassan Kanafani is one of the most prominent Palestinian fiction writers, and a leading member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. He was assassinated by the Israeli Mossad in 1972 at the age of 36.

Website Text: This video is constructed from images of Hatoum’s mother in the shower of the family home in Beirut. The Arabic writing overlaying these images like a curtain or veil //did they just say that?// represents her mother’s letters from Beirut to the artist in London. The soundtrack consists of an animated conversation between Hatoum and her mother overlaid with Hatoum’s voice reading a translation of the letters into English. For Hatoum, as much as the work portrays the emotional intimacy of the relationship between mother and daughter, ‘it also speaks of exile, displacement, disorientation and a tremendous sense of loss as a result of the separation caused by war’. (TATE, 2016)

/ / l o n g i n g / /

Hatoum invites us into the realm of intimacy, not only to her private life, but that of her mother as well. Two displaced women, two sets of experiences. Hatoum’s poetic reading of her mother’s letter (translated to English)⁵⁰ is accompanied by the carefree voice of her mother retelling stories of intimate nature. Familiar stories. Boundaries here no longer exist. We are in the homosocial sphere of a Palestinian-Lebanese household. We are the giggling women from the soundtrack, and from memories. We become Hatoum and her mother.

Measures of Distance is a reaction to displacement, and the manifestation of what displacement did *to* her. Over the years Hatoum’s work has shifted and changed. //Perhaps matured?// Yet for me, this video, my first encounter with Hatoum’s work remains the most affecting. At times it soothed my own longing; I first encountered it in London (2008) where exile and displacement began to manifest in me, and I began to understand myself as shifting; as never just/fully Palestinian and never just/fully Kuwaiti.

⁵⁰ The English reading upsets me a bit, I strain my ears but it denies me access to the sounds of storytelling in the background in Arabic—this was made for an international audience. I can hear fragments from the story, when Hatoum pauses, she allows the Arabic layer to seep in.

//Please use a children's book narrating voice in your head while reading the next section.//

Once upon a time, a single mother, a Kuwaiti woman, was invested in raising two Palestinian girls. From a very young age, Sirar and Sarah both had strong singing voices. "We sound better when we sing together" Sirar, the older of the two, proclaimed one day. Sarah nodded in agreement as she often did those days, though not fully convinced. To test Sirar's theory, they began to sing the chorus from Zahrat Al-Madaen. But Sarah couldn't finish. That song choked her up whenever she tried to sing it. //Still does, you know.//

Sirar stopped singing too, and did not make jokes about Sarah's tears as she often did when watching a sad cartoon. These were serious tears, fallen for a serious matter, and Sirar knew better than to ridicule them. Instead, she put an arm around Sarah's shoulder and said "you know we will return there someday." She was less convinced, and more hopeful. and the "we" was not a we for two. It was more like a collective we for all the Palestinian children who never saw this home but still believed in it, and swore by it, and sung to it, even if they spoke their mom's dialect most of the time, and even if they also teared up listening to songs about their other home(s).

Now I know you're wondering how Sirar and Sarah became so convinced of this return. Remember their mother? Laila was not playing games; the two girls had to know that to be born Palestinian meant that they must cultivate a continued sorrowful longing, and maintain an intergenerational struggle. Sarah remembers a particular videotape her Mama recorded from the news, with bold words written on it in red ink. "When you are a little older you must see this" she used to say, waving the tape, "and you must never forget." Sarah never watched this particular tape. Yet the nagging existence of the object itself had its influence on her. As Sarah grew older and learned to read, she was able to distinguish the red words Sabra and Shatila, and

that tape kept haunting her, whenever she opened the cabinet containing the VHS cassettes to pick out a cartoon, it glared at her, challenging her to pick it instead, and asking her angrily with its red letters: have you forgotten?

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait made Sarah's Mama less intense about Palestine, her patriotism was needed in a more urgent matter, and her struggle for freedom, abstract in its Palestinian form, became a reality in 1990. Nevertheless, while Sirar and Sarah grew up saturated with war, there was also an imagined-yet-real displacement. They knew that while their hearts felt at home in Kuwait, and the love for that other home grew stronger after the 1990 war, being there was somehow temporary, liminal, and never guaranteed. Especially after the 1990 war which made being half-Palestinian in Kuwait almost intolerable. Thus, the return to an original Home was always present, in kind and unkind ways. And accompanying that longing, a commitment to prove a loyalty to Kuwait without being Kuwaiti citizens, until that finally happened in 2012.

And, as Mama always wanted, till the present, Sarah never really forgot.

//Please lose children's book narrating voice here.//

Displacement—for me—never left Hatoum's work. Every piece one comes across can be read as displaced manifestation. Hatoum's ability to create works of art that resist closure and invite contemplation and an instant embodied reaction is perhaps achieved by her positioning in the liminal space. According to Edward Said (2000), "Hatoum's art is hard to bear (like the refugee's world, which is full of grotesque structures that bespeak excess as well as paucity), yet very necessary to see as an art that travesties the idea of a single homeland" (p. 17).

Room 5: ~~At the Present Tense~~, The New Exile is a Grotesque Displaced Creature

It's not just Darwish. //The poet from before. I know you forgot.// The pre-occupied Palestinian homeland is portrayed (remembered and remade) in beautiful words, often poetic and used in poetry. Yet we find a new exile to be a grotesque creature in comparison to her/his romanticized predecessor, the isolated and estranged exile Said describes. The new exile is a *creature* because s/he is often thought of as a disposable sub-human, her/his suffering is secondary in the larger globe. Certainly, her/his suffering is secondary to that of the Zionist settler, requiring protection from the longing creature—crouching in the dark and might pounce at any moment to snatch back. The “terrorist” Palestinian attacker who stabs randomly at bus stops is also the new exile who tattoos the word *falasteen* on her/his wrist or wears a Hanthala⁵¹ necklace. Both are dangerous, volatile, essentialist and emotionally-driven creatures who don't *quite* matter.

The new exile's stories of suffering are secondary to those of Zionism. One must only look at the 1982 *Sabra and Shatila* massacres that took place in Beirut by the Israeli army alongside Al-Kataeb Militia during the Lebanese Civil War. //Bold red ink words make an appearance here.// These massacres made it clear that the existence of Palestinians was intolerable even if in exile, dispelling yet again Palestinian refugees from their Lebanese homes and refugee camps. In relation to this, Said writes of the Zionist desire to eliminate a Palestinian presence, that Zionism “could not tolerate another story of dispossession and loss to exist alongside it” (p. 178). This same intolerance is extended to the identity of the new Palestinian exile, living in diaspora, and to varying degrees aware of her/his exodus from home.

⁵¹ Hanthala is a figure created by Naji Al-Ali (1938-1987), a Palestinian cartoonist. The child with his back to the viewer became a symbol of the Palestinian struggle, especially after Al-Ali's assassination in his exile in London.

The new exile is a *grotesque* creature because the enfranchised nationstate does not quite know what to do with it. The nationstate/Power constantly tries to push it into reasonable categories in order to understand it, but the creature repels closure, it surprises us by sprouting again as difference. The new exile, while perhaps is the embodiment of abjection to some, does not continuously live in misery, for that very space that resists closure creates ways of knowing unique to those who inhabit/visit it.

I shake my head as I walk into the fifth room. Images of home fall from my ears, like little birds made of marble, they fall and almost hit the floor to shatter. I try to collect them with my eyes, but immediately they disappear as I notice on the floor, the familiar made strange: 2,200 familiars. The white cubes omit a distinct smell, I am reminded of dewey bathtubs in my childhood, and scrubbing my underwear at ten, with these very cubes, to hide my shame, my blood, my red. I can smell them now... But I haven't... I have *not!*

Seeing images of this work when it was displayed in Jerusalem, I thought *I wish I could be there, even as a bar of soap. I wish I could be placed there. I could even pretend to be a red bead —a culprit to their borders! I could be pushed inside one of these familiar cubes, and sent in a paper package, back to the gallery in Jerusalem/Al-Quds.*

Artwork: Present Tense 1996

Website Text: First created for Gallery Anadiel in Jerusalem, Present Tense is made of 2,200 blocks of olive oil soap, a traditional Palestinian product from Nablus, a town north of Jerusalem. The drawing on the soap blocks, created by tiny red glass beads pushed into their surface, depicts the map of the 1993 Oslo Peace Accord between Israel and the Palestinian Authorities. The beads delineate the territories to be handed back to the

Palestinians but they appear like hundreds of separate islands with no continuity or territorial integrity between them. (TATE, 2016)

/ / h o t u n d e r t h e c o l l a r / /

~~Still at Room 5: At the Present Tense, We Desire/Name/Claim This Land~~

The wall, in its wide range of material and figural manifestations, remains actively ambivalent in its transgressive and regressive presence (Minh-ha, 2011, p. 3).

Should one provide a history of the land now known by many names (Palestine, Israel, Occupied territories, West Bank, *the inside*, inside the Green Line), whose history would prevail? They, Zionists, call 1948 the year of independence, a declaration of the State of Israel. We, Palestinians, call it the year of the *Nakba* (Catastrophe), to indicate the loss and pain caused by a combination of exile and genocide of the Palestinian people that calcified that same year. Can I really disrupt this binary? Now that I am present, and quite tense, let me try...

*This land had a name.
Then they wanted it,
made their desire known,
gave it an ancient name.*

*This land had a name.
Now it has many.
I don't know your Allensby,
but I have crossed the Jisr,
many times.*

*A forced removal,
committed by language,
produced the impossibility:
you and I.*

*Tel Aviv this/ Tel Abeeb that.
We are split into distinct two.
But if we were to meet on the tel,*

*At the month of Aviv,
What would we say?*

*“Settled” is a peaceful word,
I will not settle for it.
“Colonized” reeks of a shared space,
or a broken space,
in a contested place.*

*A removal of some, a return of some,
violence and celebration,
written on this land.*

Ever since 1948, the Palestinian map, known internationally as Israel and the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza, has undergone many alterations, the most violent yet is the separation wall built between 2003-2012. The post 9-11 war on terrorism was employed by the Israeli government to justify this separation wall. The Israeli occupation used a narrative of exceptionalism (Puar, 2007) to legitimize this new border of concrete and barbed wire. An exceptional border was needed to be built in relation to the exceptional dangers of the Palestinian terrorist bodies, and in turn is used to terrorize these bodies.

When a wall (*ha'et*), becomes a border (*hajiz*), becomes a crossing (*ma'bar*), language becomes an implicit culprit in restricting Palestinian bodies' access and movement. To exist as Palestinian in turn means to exist in relation to a choreographed border-self dance that is never ending. The borders shift and multiply, and so the self must change in relation, to make possible an endurance. //A soapy endurance of the land as belonging.// This dance is one of negotiation and subversiveness, that renders the state of being Palestinian to be a state of constantly becoming-Palestinian, never reaching consensus, and always resisting closure.

Let it be stressed then, that the displaced Palestinian, our own new exile, is a construction of hyphenated identities⁵², and if you tell a Palestinian(ate) person, like myself, that they are *not quite Palestinian*, that in itself is an epistemological violence, for the supposed you is trying—perhaps unknowingly, to give you the benefit of the doubt—to reduce the becoming of Palestinians, into a simple, digestible, controllable and often disposable, Other.

A new exile is always neither and both at the same time, and even Palestinians *inside* have complex hyphenated identities: Israeli-Palestinian (or the less acceptable term *Arabs of Israel*), Thaffeh-Palestinian (from the West Bank), Ghazzawi-Palestinian (from the Gaza strip), and so on. Palestinians have multiple selves that either can or cannot cross borders. This multiplicity is reduced to one manageable self (by nation-states like the Israeli occupation or even Arab and non-Arab nation-states and earlier by that supposed you) to control entry, and grant or limit access, or simply to *understand*. But please be generous when you encounter a new exile, and allow a complexity its complexity.

A manageable Other is one whose identity has been reduced to a singular category to facilitate the State's Power on the otherwise complex and hybrid self. For example, the complexities of the Palestinian identity is for the Israeli common discourse reduced to one category: Arab. //Remember Arabs of Israel? Oh they *hate* being called that, they prefer being called Arabs of '48. But the omission of an identity still takes place...// This reduction implicitly reinforces the depiction of pre-1948 Palestine as mostly a barren land with nomadic Arab tribes. A depiction that historical photographs kindly disrupt.⁵³

⁵² Palestinian-Lebanese, Palestinian-Kuwaiti, Palestinian-American, Palestinian-Jordanian, and so on

⁵³ Two collection of photographs in the form of published books must be credited here: Khalidi's (1991) *Before Their Diaspora* and Azoulay's (2011) *From Palestine to Israel*.

I do not know what being a Palestinian tomorrow resembles, because I do not know the borders I will need to cross, or the identities I need to negotiate, to survive as an exiled, displaced, and transnational Palestinian in a world very focused on a nationalist state. It is messy, this “becoming-Palestinian” with its constant deterritorialization/reterritorialization of the very nature of this becoming. It is far messier than the concrete state of being a State of Israel. The occupation is solid in comparison to the fluidity of resistance, and thus excess, thus the continuous movement in-between the dualisms borders create: Inside/outside, self/other, legitimate Israeli bodies, and Palestinian bodies of excess. //But if we can dissolve these borders...// Soap, yes, soap indeed. Imaginary borders have become solid with the occupation and have worked to alienate Palestinians from the land. Now they are more solidified with the West Bank barrier erect—another obstacle for my people, another border to cross or subvert. Their alienation and displacement breeds more resistance, and more extreme Israeli security measures in return.

I begin leaning down to pick up a bar of soap from the homeland, and then know better. Didn't I tell you how educated I was in the art of walking in the gallery? Let this brown body not fool you. //Is that sarcasm?//

Room 6: Homebound

//Imagine a dance inspired by border crossing// In order to be a Palestinian living within or out of the homeland, a negotiation with Israeli borders that are constantly reshaping, shifting, and multiplying is compulsory. Access for the Palestinian (exile or exile at home) continues to become an impossibility, and yet by subverting these very borders that restrain them, *borders of excess* are created. From limitations, to something more, these borders of excess are the physical

and theoretical spaces *inbetween* that make it possible for subaltern identities and freedoms to exist and function. These spaces and the people negotiating them are complex and creative, and are best described through the encounter with art that is as liminal, as complex, and as resisting of closure; the very enclosure I am face to face with right now.

Artwork: Homebound 2000

Website Text: *Homebound* consists of a combination of kitchen utensils and household furniture, connected to each other with electric wire, through which runs a live electric current. A programmed dimmer switch makes the bulbs flicker and fade up and down. The crackling, buzzing sound is the amplified hum of the fluctuating electric current which adds to the sense of threat. A barrier of steel wires protects the viewer from potentially lethal electricity and also creates a caged-in environment. The title plays on ideas of domestic confinement or house arrest. (TATE, 2016).

Familiar... Very familiar... and yet, so strange. The homebound, and the unable to access home. Who's body is on either side of this enclosure? And why did the catalog/website assume that the barrier of steel wires protects the viewer? What about those inside? The space gestures towards the invisible, the haunting, the spectral. The lethal potentiality may exist at either side.

Yet they long to return. They sing songs and repeat memories. The religious ones pray. Some place their noses on the floor—God's hands—and whisper "take me back home, let me see my pomegranate [tree] again, take me⁵⁴ from there!" Some with knees on the floor, gesturing on their chests, "take me back home, take me from my home, bury me next to the fig [tree]". I close my eyes in bed, and whisper "take me back, let this body feed the olive [tree]."

/ / f i d g e t y / /

We speak of a longing.

⁵⁴ *Take me* refers to dying. Praying to be *taken* within the land means the body will be buried in it.

This particular “we” here is collective, it provides a space to talk about so many possible groupings;

we the exiled/foreigners/displaced/dislocated

we who must speak in different tongues to be taken seriously

we the graduate students, living in transition, consumed by our work, doing it as it undoes us

we the Palestinians, we the hyphenated, we who do not really fit to a simple categorizable identity

Homebound mimics the language of borders, that space which is safe, and that which isn't, and therefore a wall (or fence) is built. What about that other language of borders; The language of longing, where the implied spaces are that which one wishes to access, and that which one wishes to leave. A home/homeland can be either of those places according to who the speaker is and their situated experience. As I have, throughout this chapter, been speaking from my own. Have you not nodded at all? Has the experience of the new exile not spoken to you, at least once? The personal and the global are interplaying here, but as a feminist, I speak only in specifics, I leave generalizing to those in Power.

Displaced Palestinians speak of a longing for a home, often an inaccessible space. For the new exile, this home is perhaps even imagined. We associate this abstract home with a land (homeland), a real physical place that our bodies could supposedly (with the right papers?) access. But what if we can't? What happens when the displaced return, and find that they cannot? *Falasteen elhelweh* is in fragments, and this fragmented home regenerates the longing, and in a way the identity of a Palestinian.

I have argued that being a Palestinian (even a hyphenated one) is a state of becoming. You never are fully Palestinian. You cannot solidify an identity. Yet the negotiation that we have with the world is what continuously makes this identity. A fragmented home is also a becoming, it never fully *is*.

And you cannot undo displacement.

You might have better luck undoing yourself.

Return does not only refer to me traveling to my father's village in the West Bank, but holds a larger metaphor that manifests itself in a plethora of cultural, intellectual, and artistic production that re-creates a real space that once existed, where Palestinians are legitimized as an aboriginal people of a land. Yet somehow this home is also imagined. A creation constructed by a collective intergenerational memory. What happens if you stop imagining this Palestine? //Sarah— Sit down, don't stress too much, you have come at the point I was dreading, the impossibility of return. Don't sing that song in your head, don't say the words *zay Elmaseeh ghareeb*.⁵⁵ Breathe, a little deeper than deep. Just don't pull up a chair, remember that they are electrified. There is no comfort for the homebound.// Home is impossible, even with (some) access to it. The trouble is not the inaccessibility of borders alone, because even when one relatively crosses, one is still not able to access *that* home.

Room 7: Mine are Seven Notebooks

Artwork: N/A

Website Text: This room displays some of Hatoum's smaller sculptures and editions along with notebooks, samples, models and source materials. These give a glimpse of the diverse working methods and media she has adopted and how particular concerns recur and interconnect. (TATE, 2016)

⁵⁵ This refers to the song *Elmaseeh* by Abdulhaleem Hafez that describes the Palestinian displacement and struggle in relation to the Messiah's. This line is *a stranger like the Messiah*.

//I wrote on seven notebooks, immersed at theory at times, in short remarks at others. In reflection on different exhibitions, and in Arabic at the margins. In longing for home. In missing my mother. I wrote. I write.//

When the new exile develops a critical awareness of her/his/their own displacement and political identity, s/he is able to function as an in-between living liminally (Bhabha, 1994). Someone able to negotiate different identities and worlds, and in possession of what Du Bois, in the case of Black Americans, refers to as double-consciousness (Du Bois, 1995). While this liminal space offers insight, the new exile living in diaspora remains a problematic figure in the logic of the modern nation-state, and is constantly being pushed into manageable identities. While existing as a complexity or disruption in the world, the new exile also functions as a native informer, often without choice. Take for example the following generic conversation I have had while living in London:

Person: This is Sarah, she is from Jordan.

Me: Actually I'm Palestinian. Only my passport is Jordanian.

Person: Oh so were you born in Jordan?

Me: No, I was born in Kuwait, my mom is Kuwaiti.

Person: So you're Kuwaiti?

Me: Well I'm Palestinian-Kuwaiti but I don't have the Kuwaiti nationality yet.

Person: But you lived in Jordan before London?

Me: No, I have a Jordanian passport because my father has one.

Person: Oh, so your father is Jordanian?

Me: Shall we order cheese on our fries?

Here let us go back to language. The world for home in Arabic does not have the same association in English between home and house. Arabic home, *watan*, refers to homeland yet the

word itself is abstract. Since early education we learn to associate *watan* with a physical place, a bordered land, a national identity, a cause... etc. The displaced have a myriad of created or remembered homes at their disposal, and yet at the same time, loss is experienced. Loss is an active ingredient in the lives of the displaced because in a sense it regenerates them as displaced continuously, as part of their continuous becoming.

Room 8: To Willingly Dispossess

Artwork: Hot Spot 2013

Website Text: The term ‘hot spot’ refers to a place of military or civil unrest. Using delicate red neon to outline the contours of the continents, this sculpture presents the entire globe as a danger zone – what Hatoum describes as a ‘world continually caught up in conflict and unrest.’ (TATE, 2016)

Said reflects on exile as state of being that generates creative impulses, he writes of poets, artists, and novelists who have in common exile and longing. He also discusses the exile as a knower who is able to function within multiple realities, while knowing that a content state of being is not possible for her/him, and perhaps not even desired. Said writes:

The exile knows that in a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional. Borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and new often beyond reason or necessity. Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience. (p. 185)

This notion is indeed extended to the displaced artist, where removal and dislocation (physical and not) affects the displaced knower. Here, however, Said also touches on notions of dispossession that an exile may aspire to in order to rid her or himself of a melancholic longing

— once without a home, should the exile/displaced cease to search for another? And if so, could one really extinguish the longing? Here, Said describes to us the allure and sweet release of dispossession as the cure of having one's heart torn by longing, so that *the entire world is a foreign land*.⁵⁶

The sphere before me does a better job of identifying the entirety of the world today. //I was asked once by a shop keeper in State College, Pennsylvania, where I was from. For simplicity I said Kuwait. The lady replied in a tone full of kindness: *Oh! You must be really happy you're here*, I was perplexed, I asked, frown and all, *why?* I regretted not telling her the longer, truer answer, and was—I will admit—taking a bit of pleasure in her bewilderment. She was taken aback by my disruptive question. She had offended me, suggesting that somehow I am safer here. Does she not know that the whole world is a hot spot? This conversation happened November, 2016, right after the U.S. elections and the Paris attacks. No I was not happy. I was utterly displeased.//

Decades after Said writes of exile, Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou (2013) write of dispossession, knowing both its allure and trouble. In fact they begin this theoretical book/ conversation by an apology to the dispossessed in the world. Is acknowledging the privilege of choosing dispossession enough though?

For the new exile, dispossession can be a desired way of life. //It certainly simplifies things, even as a simple “f**k it” attitude.// Yet I wonder whether dispossession is always guilt inducing for my lot. *Does not every new exile have their own Sabra and Shatila VHS tape?* How do you dispose of the haunting material reminder?

⁵⁶ Said here quotes Hugo of St. Victor, and later uses these words in his essay describing Hatoum's work in the TATE catalog, *the Entire World as a Foreign Ground* (Hatoum, 2000).

It certainly seems to be the case, at least in the question of Palestinian diaspora, that the heavy hearted longing for home continues despite of the lighthearted allure of dispossession. Yet the allure itself—even if not given into—speaks of something. Why would the displaced wish to dispossess, when s/he often suffers from denial of their existence? //I invite you here to consider alliances between dispossession and agnosticism without my participation.//

Room 9: Keffiyeh

Artwork: Keffiyeh 1993–9

Website Text: Based on the traditional Arab headscarf with its distinctive black and white pattern, *Keffiyeh* has been embroidered using long strands of human hair, creating a surreal object. The scarf's associations with masculinity are questioned here by the feminine connotations of its material and the use of embroidery. (TATE, 2016)

I walk into room 9, and am taken aback.. and taken back to the Summer of 2013.

I was hopeful. I have not yet seen the wall, nor the crossings. I noted a day earlier that there were less Israeli checkpoints from el-jisr to Ramallah than I was used to in the late nineties. This is a good sign... I whispered to myself at the back of the rocking taxi.

I was hopeful. In my father's living room in Ramallah, my eyes were on the small television screen. The final episode of Arab Idol was on, and I was rooting with all my heart for the Palestinian Mohammed Assaf, who later that night won the title. At that moment, he was singing his finale, the Palestinian folklore song Raise the Keffiyeh.

Such pleasure!

How could a song lift the burdens of years of occupation, exile, and displacement? My heart was soaring. I felt in the right place. Ramallah was filled with Assaf's photographs. My people having a happy moment to share does not come often. Certainly a thing to savor. And I was there to

savor it.

I was hopeful. I would see Al-Quds (Jerusalem) that week, and so present was the pleasure of stepping into the Old City, and praying where Mohammed greeted the Abrahamic prophets. I was filled with the desire to collapse the distance by placing my forehead on the floor of the Aqsa.⁵⁷ And so sure I was of this desire becoming a material reality, that I had already made plans to meet a U.S American friend⁵⁸ in an old tavern in Al-Quds (Jerusalem), twenty minutes away from baba's, save for the wall.

Baba knew he would not be able to convince me of the impossibility until I saw it for myself. One morning he turned the key to the battered car and drove to Qalandia crossing, the nearest from Ramallah to Al-Quds (Jerusalem). I was set to do what I came juwwa (inside) to do. I was going to cross the separation wall, to see the Holy City after fourteen years of longing.

That evening I tried to describe my feelings to Baba, and before long I was sobbing. I was surrounded by saltiness and sorrow. It was embarrassing to cry in front of a man I didn't grow up with, and spent the majority of my youth trying to impress. But I had turned from hopeful to overwhelmed. Crossing the barrier was indeed an impossibility that trip. No Aqsa. No walk on the stone steps of old Quds. On the other hand Baba could not contain a laugh, my emotional state must have looked ridiculous to someone juwwa (inside) for so long. He asked me tenderly: Why are you crying? The question, though provoking, was not seeking an answer. I was upset at him, until I looked up, and realized it was a heartening attempt.

⁵⁷ *Almasjid Al-Aqsa* literally means “the faraway mosque” and is the second most holy place in Islamic tradition after Mecca. It was named *Aqsa* in relation to Mecca itself, the prophet's birthplace.

⁵⁸ Sue Uhlig and her husband Ed were traveling to Jerusalem to visit a cousin married to a Palestinian. After the trip, Sue and I created a performance about that experience and the different border crossing negotiations we went through—from alienating to impossible. The performance itself uses the notion of birds as metaphor. A particular line is “I am not a bird—I could not fly over the wall” to which Sue replies “It is too high, my friend, and wings are made of paperwork.”

Why was I crying? I knew I could eventually cross. It is an unshakable belief. //An Arab stubbornness that does not succumb to the occupation by our Israeli cousins.// If not this trip, then the next, or the next. Baba's question was beaded with all the stories I have heard in my trip, from cousins and friends, about their crossings and their deterritorialization/reterritorialization of multiple borders.

Baba's question was a reminder: Palestinians are subverting the wall. From young musicians crossing on ladders to perform Beethoven in Jerusalem, to teenage girls using the sewage system to move between home and school without soldier harassment. My very own family is constantly engaged in social BBQs at the crossings' long waits.

I was hopeful. This new border would not break the Palestinians. It will not break me. My resistance that night was not to be broken.

To laugh with my father is resistance. To eat our Palestinian olives and Palestinian cheese is resistance. To engage in becoming-Palestinian is resistance. At that moment, his thundering laugh was shaking the occupation. Our stone throwing days, our legacy, our reality, were all within us and in-between us, and in the majestic and holy olives between our fingers. These very olives that were never weighed down by metaphors. They remain our material symbols of existence. Every Israeli-marked olive jar you pick up in a U.S. market was planted by Palestinian hands, hundreds of years and counting.

Like Hatoum's strands of hair haunting the keffiyeh, a Palestinian world exists in the in-between of borders, with shifting, flickering, and fading identities. Waiting is a big part of my life as a new exile. I waited to see the *inside* for the first time, and I waited to see it again after many years, and now I find myself waiting again for a chance to cross the wall, to kiss the stones of Al-Quds.

Waiting itself is a subtle form of resistance. To constantly engage in the Palestinian becoming in the now, and yet always wait for a return. There's a paradox here; this desire for a nationstate, a legitimate identity, and return is the desire of the fluid bodies for solidity. Yet the very same bodies that wait for a Palestinian solidity are the ones rejecting the solidity of the borders inflicted upon them by the Israeli state. Perhaps it is time that waiting becomes, as Mona Hatoum articulates it, *forbidden*⁵⁹.

Back here in the gallery, I stand before Hatoum's Keffiyeh and think of my own waiting body haunting it (Abu Bakr, 2016). Saturated, I walk into room ten.

Room 10: Topsy Turvy

Artwork: Interior/Exterior Landscape 2010

Website Text: This room-size installation contains altered household furniture including a bed frame threaded with hair, a hair-embroidered pillow that depicts flight routes between the artist's most visited cities, a conjoined table and chair, and a birdcage housing a single ball of hair. Hanging from a metal coat rack are two circular wire hangers that frame wall drawings of the Eastern and Western hemispheres and a market bag constructed from a cut-out print of a world map.

This work was made in Beirut where Hatoum grew up and its iconography is full of personal resonance. While the installation's cell-like dimensions and utilitarian furniture suggest restricted movement or even confinement, the references to flight routes and maps point to a wider world and the possibility of travel and exploration.

/ / n a u s e a t e d / /

⁵⁹ Refers to artwork *Waiting is Forbidden* by Mona Hatoum.

I run away from room ten... I am in no mood to encounter my/Mona's body, gutted and displayed. Here of all places.⁶⁰

Room 11: The Impenetrable Wall on My Mind

Artwork: *Impenetrable* 2009

Website Text: *Impenetrable* is a hanging three-metre cube, a light and airy structure that hovers just above the floor, as if levitating. On closer inspection, however, this simple form, which appears so delicate from a distance, reveals its materials: rods of barbed wire, heavy with connotations of conflict and exclusion. In the title *Impenetrable*, Hatoum makes reference to the Venezuelan artist Jesús Rafael Soto's series of *Penetrables*, hanging cubes made from colourful rubber tubes. (TATE, 2016)

Walls matter.

They are made of material things.

They exist in a material way in the world, and they affect some of its inhabitants in a material real way.

It seems that we are living in a time when people seem to side against or pro walls. A year ago my *wall* was in Palestine, the separation wall that I write and perform about. Today, it extends to my comrades: the others, the rejects, the disenfranchised, bodies that escape the logic of the state, bodies under constant harassment, policing, and attempted regulation. Such is my alliance. And today I am aware of you, of your struggle, more than last year, and less than tomorrow.

Walls/borders brings to mind an unnatural concrete structure. But there is nothing "unnatural" about it. It is made of this earth, of crushed rocks, of sand, of the familiar. But somehow

⁶⁰ Chapter Two and Chapter Four of this dissertation engage further with hair.

fashioned into this solid, imposing form. I put my hand in my pocket, take out and unfold a piece of paper.

In this paper is a spoof⁶¹ of an Ikea, easy to build, wall that circulated online when President Trump (campaigning then) regularly suggested building a wall in the U.S.-Mexican border. The image is powerful. Like Hatoum's work, it uses the familiar, and the mundane, to draw attention to, and ridicule, Trump's suggested wall. This outrageous call has become more and more familiar to the public. Will it be normalized and eventually actualized? Another "thing" to regret.

The image itself reads differently to different people. It certainly targets a privileged crowd, a particular group of people first capable of purchasing something from Ikea. Then from within that group of people, those who are physically able, and have had the experience of engaging with an Ikea catalog by building one of their products. This group knows the simplicity ironically gestured towards by this spoof. But we must not neglect this double privilege. What someone like me finds more ironic, however, is the wall-to-human scale, which perhaps better resembles the scale of the Berlin wall, than that of the Israel-West Bank separation wall, more than double in size. //Let us also acknowledge the figure and the racist reference please.// Of course the spoof news website does not ignore that scale, and has states: "The basic model of the wall is 33ft (10 m) tall and 1,954 miles (3,144 km) long, although the height and length can be extended as desired." Whether scale choice is dependent on degree of terrorist tendencies, however, the website does not specify.

⁶¹ Source: A spoof news website: (<http://www.the-postillon.com/2017/01/border-wall-ikea.html>)

Room 12: You are a 25 Year Old Israeli, Now What?

Artwork: Cellules 2012–13

Website Text: This installation consists of a group of eight cage-like structures made from steel rods. Inside each unit are one or two amorphous shapes made from deep red hand blown glass. The upright structures are slightly tilted giving them a sense of instability and the glass shapes, which look like bodily organs or ambiguous creatures, appear to be oozing or squeezing their way out. The title plays on the several meanings of ‘cell’, suggesting at once confinement, isolation and biology. (TATE, 2016)

/ / g e n e r a l d i s c o m f o r t / /

//Room twelve, you think you’re so smart? You think you can put me in those cages they ask us to co-exist in together?// I hate the sight of blood. So let me tell you this: We live in a world of multiple truths. Yes, we can say it, believe it, read about it, and repeat it, but actually *recognizing* that we live in a world of multiple truths and histories only comes from encounters that interrupts our comfort in our own lived experience(s) and truth(s). Encountering you right now is disrupting me. I stop before your gruesome cages, and look into them to see my guts and *his* guts.

February 2017.

D.C. area, in transition.

jet lagged. I went to a mall for a quick meal.

He was at a cosmetics stall, his accent and his complexion made me ask where he is from, and Israel he replied. I smiled and said I'm from Palestine //a little disruption never hurt no body// and started to walk away. I was not interested in any cosmetics, and all I could afford in my jet lag and sleepiness was that smile. He was determined, and pulled me back to sample a face cream of sorts. I was too tired to put up a strong fight. His familiarity reminded me of my family. I let him seat me on a chair, he sat opposite me.

Two hours later, the bit of cream he put on my left hand was dry and in a sad state, it was itchy and gunky, and we'd just had the longest exchange of disagreements I ever was part of. I tried to explain about his people and my people being closer than we like to admit, separated by **Power + Capitol Empire** more than difference. He thought I was using big words because I had no historical truth to back me up. I explained about soil under my grandfather's fingernails, and he spoke of the "only democracy in the Middle East." I poured my anger towards a displacing Eurocentric *Empire* and he snorted and reminded me that if Europe was so bad, Arab refugees would not be there in thousands. I spoke of Der Yaseen, and he stated with authority that the whole world agreed that there is nothing called Palestine, that it was never a "country" and casually added that it was out of the goodness of Israel's heart now to give the Palestinians some land in the West Bank. I spoke of injustice, of a mass exodus, and he spoke of children stabbing Israeli innocents with knives. To me he was offensive and unkind, to him my argument was weak, not backed up by "real history" and misinformed. He finally cast the last blow by saying: I

lived there for 25 years, you didn't, so I know the truth and you don't. And before saying we will never agree, and I do not wish to fight, I said my one accusation: I did not live there because of your one democracy in the Middle East, built on Palestinian blood.

It was a strange conversation, and with every moment I knew that I could not come across to him as anything but a silly Arab who is misinformed. We were parts of two worlds that have never learned to converse except with void mottos and machine guns. I wished him a more tender heart in the future, one that could at least sense a disenfranchised struggle even if it's on the other side of his legitimizing narrative.

To him I am an Arab, and an Other. He does not know or recognize the subtle characteristics that distinguish a Palestinian from a Jordanian from an Egyptian from a Kuwaiti etc... let alone the multiplicities within a Palestinian identity itself, the hyphenation, and the effects of exile. Nor does he know how we recognize each other in our diaspora, how we envy each other's different levels of access, and the curiosity and longing that I see in someone's eyes, someone from Haifa, who has never been, when I tell him about the beautiful sea, and the fishermen's nets laying to dry in the sun behind Arab houses in decay. How instead of reserving these homes, they are left to slowly fade, so that someone can believe that "truth" of an empty promised land.

//Now let me be. Let me be ya Mona.//

Room 13: Resuscitate - Undone

Artwork: Mona Hatoum with Inaash, Twelve Windows 2012–13

Website Text: These twelve pieces of embroidery are the work of Inaash, The Association for the Development of Palestinian Camps (a Lebanese NGO founded in 1969 to provide employment for Palestinian women in refugee camps in Lebanon).

Rigorously planned by Malak Hussein Abdulrahim, each ‘window’ represents a different region through its motifs, stitches, colours and patterns, meticulously embroidered by Inaash’s experienced craftswomen. The aim of the project was to preserve a traditional skill, at risk of extinction because of the dispersal of Palestinians across the region. Hatoum created an installation in which the ‘windows’ are displayed in a space criss-crossed by steel cables, making a visual metaphor for this divided territory. (TATE, 2016)

I walked into a homosocial space, in the presence of women’s work, I regain my confidence, and a sense of comfort, and I wonder: which one of these windows looks into my own home? I have no idea. My knowledge is lacking, I do not know what kind of patterns my home region used to make, or maybe still are making.

Perhaps I was learning the wrong things. I wanted to hear them speak, and found myself speaking to myself. Remembering. Becoming. Knowing and re-imagining. In my attempt to speak woman (Irigaray, 1977) and disrupt language I forgot to speak the language of these windows. I know now that my knowledge will always be lacking. How can I belong without knowing this and everything else?

/ / d e s p e r a t i o n / /

I imagine what the women would say, and I wonder if they would speak with me, even with this tongue that will not speak properly.

Even with all my privilege... Can *this* subaltern speak?⁶²

Lost in dialects, this tongue itself is hyphenated, it drops words in Kuwaiti when it tries to speak Palestinian, and the other way around. Why do I burden my tongue beyond its limit?⁶³ Let

⁶² References Spivak’s 1988 essay, *Can this subaltern speak?*

⁶³ Deriving from the Quranic verse لا يكلف الله نفسا الا وسعها ; Allah does not burden a soul beyond its limits. A verse that kept me strong during this process.

me speak, broken and fragmented if I must. I have been trying to tame the tongue, legitimize it, by speaking English. But still it will not willingly speak English. The words do not flow. From dialect to accent, the push back is strong... how can I speak without someone realizing I am a parody? “Onions” and “Omelets” //accent clear as day// words I cannot say. //I forget my English again.// And this tongue will not speak ~~Masculine~~ theory... Will simply *not* speak it! And I will not access—cannot access.

But here, *she* does! Hatoum is Palestinian here. Not half, not quarter, not an outsider. Hatoum is not universal, not enfranchised, she is an inbetween, between *Inaash* and the so-called [West], she is the narrator! One window, to tell twelve. The twelve windows of this artwork.

So perhaps,

We have yet to speak.

I may have worn the wrong shoes. My feet are ready to take a break. One more room.

Room 14: DANGER.

Artwork: Undercurrent (red) 2008

Website Text: Hatoum’s interest in craft and textiles, often explored in smaller-scale work, is realised dramatically here in a combination of traditional technique with unexpected materials. A square mat, woven from red electrical cable, forms the centre of this work. A long fringe snakes across the floor. At the end of each cable a 15-watt light bulb brightens and dims at what Hatoum describes as ‘breathing pace’, suggesting the object has a life force of its own. It hints at a malevolent presence underfoot. (TATE, 2016)

I remember waking up on my sofa one night, looking up at the map of the U.S. and it was all red. A few months after that, the President of the United States issued a ban on seven mostly Muslim //mostly terrorist?// countries, and my travel plans were interrupted. The red of *Undercurrent* is striking. I did not care for the sprouting light. All I wanted was to come closer to that red. Danger, it said to me, and I did not listen. An Arab woman's relationship to that bright red is not a pleasant one. That red is a proof of chastity. Here it is, spilling on the masculine floor in snake like forms, weaving itself together in the center. It is here, and it is dangerous. It *breathes*. You can almost hear it, it's not a trick of the light. It breathes and its slumber is interrupted by your presence at any moment, you have trespassed on the red. The danger here is a woman. A not so chaste woman perhaps? They have not left us much choice in being chaste. For if you speak out loud, you are not. And if—in defiance—you are silent, you are also not. The dangerous female body is pulling you in. You have entered its borders, and now it will swallow you whole.

Concourse/CONCLUSION

Artwork: Over My Dead Body 1988

Website Text: This billboard was commissioned by Projects UK as part of a series of artworks to be displayed on advertising hoardings on the Tyne & Wear Metro and in Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds, Derry, London, Glasgow and Middlesbrough. Hatoum depicts herself in profile glaring at the toy soldier on her nose. Playing with scale, she reverses conventional power relationships, in her words, 'reducing the symbol of masculinity to a small creature, like a fly, that one can flick off'. (TATE, 2016)

Shall I tell you about resistance? //What a cliché!// I much rather the poetic language of longing. Images of birds in flight and return... that delicious return. Has the new exile anything but those words?

We have walked together through the TATE. Room after room we saw the work, and got entangled in it. I spoke to you of my past, and my dreams. We have crossed borders of time and

space, to speak about borders, imaginary and real, and always material. I spoke of a home, a homeland, a house, in material and metaphoric terms.

We let the work do what it does.

And it did what it does.

Chapter Four.

Death in the Gut: Arab Women, Art, and the Image of the Refugee-Terrorist-Other

“No ‘we’ should be taken for granted when the subject is looking at other people’s pain” (Sontag, 2003, p.7).

This chapter discusses the metaphor of *death in the gut* as a way of knowing and sensing the world for Arab women. The chapter unpacks appropriations of Arab and Muslim bodies in visual and popular culture, the emerging image of the refugee as terrorist and victim, as well as the representation of a redeemed refugee. The chapter uses visual and cultural analysis, as well as autobiographical excerpt to call attention to how death is haunting any discussion of the Arab body.

Throughout the chapter I make evident the process of my own art making, in a collection of letters that disrupt the text. These letters were addressed to another Arab woman living in displacement, and honor the importance of homosociality and exchange between Arab women in displacement. I address my friend in these letters by *Dearest Stranger*. These letters—I do not include her letters, only mine—offer a look into privacy and intimacy between two *strangers*, who are not at all strange to each other. The chapter can be read as a whole without these letters, yet they offer a disruption to the flow of text, even narrative, and alongside it, can be read as the lived experience of *death in the gut*. In other words, in these letters, the metaphor is put on display. I offer you what I think and say to a woman friend in private, I unfold this homosocial privacy for you to find themes discussed in this chapter as well as earlier chapters; notions of a woman displaced from her own body, and a woman displaced, as well as a struggle with the

pressing feeling of death in the gut. These letters are distinguished from the rest of the text by being in white font, and highlighted in grey.

It is my hope that this chapter will trigger conversations, as well as offer personal insight into the lived experience of being a displaced Arab woman, and artist, in the current historical moment. The writing comes from the struggle of the rejected/abject/disenfranchised against Power, and systemic racism/sexism/militarism, and centers the experiences of women in particular.

Death in the Gut: Introducing a Metaphor

Arab women's bodies are weighed down with representation, like exquisite corpses⁶⁴ that were never unfolded to reveal their contents. Within the folds, assumed to be hidden are images and stereotypes assigned to Arab women. Juxtaposed as Other living within a [Western] context, displaced Arab women artists often live and produce in places that vilify and simplify them.⁶⁵ This chapter complicates representational images produced in [Western] contexts of Arabs/Muslims, Arab death, Arab pain, and Arab refugees, alongside abjection and ungrievability.

Far be it from being a generalization, death in the gut is a metaphor for the embodied, lived experience of Arab women, dealing with their historical and current stereotypes. The metaphor is my personal attempt to express and understand these complex experiences. I do not assume a unified shared experience by all Arab women living or passing through the [West]—a vicious generalizing construct that I have to return to because of the limits of language. I also do not assume the so-called [West] to be a unified category—not everyone living in the U.S. and

⁶⁴ A game I played as a child, where you draw a part of the body and fold, and switch with others, until a whole body is drawn. You unfold the paper and see the result of this collective drawing. Later I learned that the game has Surrealist associations.

⁶⁵ Consider, for example of Mona Hatoum, working in Berlin during the refugee crisis, and the 2016 new year eve rape incidents. Think of Hanaa Malallah working in London after the attacks of 2017.

Europe assumes all Arabs are terrorists, nor suffers from Islamophobia, of course. Yet it is an overarching *sensation* that an Arab gets—and sometimes even internalizes. As an Arab, you are a failed Other in comparison to a better self (Puar and Rai, 2002). In this chapter, I use specific examples of this encounter with representations of Arab bodies in order to illustrate this claim, and to avoid generalizations.

Death in the gut is a metaphor I reserve for women's bodies, and as such it evokes the abject notions of pregnancy. This metaphoric suggestion towards a failed pregnancy is reminiscent of Jasbin Puar's (2007) theorization of the failed queerness of the Other in relation to the homonationalism of U.S. queer subjects; the Arab female body is not barren, it kills, it houses death.

Embodied Colonialism

In Orientalist residues, racist and xenophobic systems of Power continue to reproduce global stereotypes of Arab womanhood, Arab terrorism, and Arab refugees. Orientalism is/was a instrument of colonization and colonialism, creating discourse on the Other to assert superiority, and condemn the Other as incapable of self-government (Said, 1979). These notions can still be seen in the discourse on the U.S.American war on terror (Shohat & Alsultany, 2013). Here, however, Orientalism and its residues are not only epistemological and discursive, but also embodied.

The Othered body senses its colonization, Orientalizing, Othering, and displacing in embodied ways. Imperialism used language against the Other, and marked the Other's body. The body senses its disfunction and its disenfranchisement. The body knows that it *simply does not fit*, it becomes an interruption. In other words, now that the [Western]/enfranchised world has marked the body of the Arab Other as death, it does not know what to do with it. From there stirs

the management and the representations, to attempt to undo this difficulty that is an Arab body, and more specifically, the bodies of Arab women.

Airport Terrorism

I wait for that sound. A sudden strike of stamp on paper that announces that this time—and this time only, don't get too comfortable—I am granted entry to the United States of America. My I-20⁶⁶ is present, signed, properly marked and I have not forgotten to bring it along in my backpack. My passport, blue since 2012, has the valid visa, and the valid dates. So why this worry? The few minutes before the relief of the stamp are worse than the 45-minute queue. My brain plays tricks on me. I recall the scene from *The Lord of the Rings*; Gandalf stomps the floor with his staff, and yells in a mighty wizard voice:

YOU

SHALL

NOT

PASS!

STAMP (Relief): Except this time, this time you shall pass. But—again—don't get too comfortable.

Only once before I was comfortable. I forgot to pack my I-20. At the U.S. border of Dulles International airport in Washington, DC, I found myself taken to another room, behind mirror glass that I often pass by on my way to baggage claim and never imagined the emotional horror that lay inside. The rows of plastic chairs suggest an uncomfortable waiting, yet it was only me who was gestured to wait after handing my passport to the

⁶⁶ The I-20 is a certificate of eligibility for nonimmigrant student status, for Academic and language international students in the United States. Alongside a passport with a valid U.S. visa, the I-20 form is needed to be able to enter the U.S. from any border point.

angry looking officer. I taken a ten-day vacation, and in my pleasure forgot that I need my I-20 to enter, the entry/access that must never be taken for granted. The room resembled rooms I have been in before, hospital waiting rooms, and a particular room in the border between the West Bank and Jordan, where Palestinians wait—often without reason to wait except for what it does to their morale—to be later called by number by an Israeli soldier. This soldier is often a White European male in his early twenties, and seems to have mastered his Arabic only in the tense used for giving orders. *Come. Go. Sit. Wait. Shut up.* I was not at the *jisr*⁶⁷ though. Yet the inability to enter/access was no stranger to this stranger body, my body.

I was in the United States, roughly four hours away from my material home: my sofa, my computer with my comprehensive exam drafts on it, my bed, my sheets, my car. It seemed very ridiculous for a moment that I might be flown back/deported to Kuwait, when my home, my *stuff*, was all waiting for me in Pennsylvania.

The officer was cross. Cross indeed. When I began trying to reason with him he resorted to speaking louder, and later to screaming at me. Anything I said was an insult, and a reason for him to use a louder voice, a harsher tone, a tone I recall only from scenes in my childhood I had wished to forget. And then it happened, the same reaction that my child body had: I felt a wave of diarrhea coming onto me. I said to him that he is scaring me with his threats and his loud voice, my eyes burnt as I admitted with shame that I need to use the bathroom.

Mission accomplished. I never forgot my I-20 again.

⁶⁷ Jisr literally means bridge. It is a term shortened by Palestinians to refer to King Hussein Bridge, the border between occupied Palestine and Jordan. The border connects Jordan with the West Bank, a Palestinian territory, yet is controlled by Israeli soldiers.

A little after diarrhea there was a stamp, and another officer helped me do breathing exercises to calm my heaving. The color of his skin soothed me more than anything else. It is us, the Others, once again standing together in unspoken solidarity.

Death in My Gut

Fear came in the form of the abject impulse to release an involuntary bowel movement. It was literally not *all in my head*—in fact, in that moment I did not realize that I was scared until my body reacted to it. It was not translated from verbal to physical. I did not think *I might get deported* and then reacted to that thought with an embodied reaction. There was no delay. The split is false. My body felt the threat of that tone. It was not deportation that my body remembered accompanying that tone.

This scene happened years ago, and yet with every access there is always that weight in my stomach—a weight felt throughout my body even. So what is that weight? What am I carrying with me? The terrorist. The refugee. The Other. I am carrying with me bodies deemed dangerous. Bodies in danger. Bodies marked as danger. And simply, *bodies*; Death. Because my name, my skin, my Arabness and my gender, to an Orientalist and colonial psyche (the officer, in this instance), are *of death*, and *are death* thus I carry with me—in the airport, in the gallery, and even in my writing—death. A haunting of death, a shadow of death, a promise of death. But fear not, dear reader, if you are of the enfranchised, this death is not yours. And if you are of the disenfranchised, if your death does not *really* matter, and is altogether *ungrievable*, then ask yourself: is the weight of death familiar? To exist as an Arab woman in our current historical moment, you are not really alive, and somehow, already dead. And with you, you carry *death in your gut*.

Letter 1

Dearest Stranger,

I was cleaning my apartment, and something popped in my head. I lifted the sofa cushions and found a collection of hair sneakily hidden underneath, and I remembered doing this with you once before, in your fathers's apartment in London.

It was our first trip together without parents, or family, just you and I, such rebels! It's well over ten years ago now. We cleaned so thoroughly before returning, looking out particularly for hair. At that time mine was long, and yours always is. At least, in my memory, it always is. You were worried about leaving hair behind, you said your father hated the sight of it. So does my mom.

A couple of years before we met I went to Haj. It's all in a haze now, I remember it like a rush of events, and lots of bodies crammed together, yet in harmony, they moved, and practiced, towards the same direction and at the same time. All of the rituals, and the spirituality, for me are collapsed in my memory.

Yet two things stand out. The most intimate of things. Sharing the small apartment with four women (three sisters and my mother) I remember being so careful with my own hair, after brushing, after showering, even after sleeping, I picked up after myself; trails of hair. Mine is distinct, curly, black. Yet it wasn't me who made the mistake. My mother's and sisters' hair is softer, lighter, more forgivable. I heard her faintly reproaching one of my older sisters. My sister had collected her hair from the shower drain, as we all did. She had thrown it in the trash, as we all did. But she did not fold it in a napkin. So my mother saw it in the bin. She did not want to see it.

It makes me wonder, stranger, what is it about hair that offends my mother so much? She had long hair too, and I am sure it shed when she brushed or showered, just like her daughters.

Why is hair so inherently dirty? We say *the beauty of a girl is her hair*, yet many are forced to cover it, and I am forced to retrace my steps, collecting curls, hiding them from sight, tucking them neatly in a napkin so that no end will show.

Imagine if we never cleaned away hair. If we used it in our living spaces, all the hair we shed. Imagine if women were raised to collect hair and keep it, to use in what looks like a bird's nest: the older you are, the bigger your nest; social capital! And after all of this, we are buried in it. Each one of us, buried in the hair nest she made throughout the years. Would not this be glorious? I will draw one for you here... I can almost feel it in my hands... Rolling and rolling strands of collected hair— a physical cartography of years. Of different textures and colors, coding the different phases, from the black hairs of my childhood, often straightened with a blowdryer, to the *hombre* home dye jobs of my youth, finally realizing my texture, my curls, meeting my hair anew, as curly, as mine. As beautiful! After all of these years of thinking of it as unmanageable, untamable, uncombable. Towards a grey, towards a white.. If I am lucky, I will live long enough so that my hair-nest-thing incorporates that white.

Wouldn't that be glorious, I ask you?

Are you icked-out a little? I will bet you are. That's how we were raised. To hide what we shed...

Love,

Sarah⁶⁸

Islamophobia as a Displacement

“The fetishism of the concept, Islam, in particular, obscures the living reality of the women and men subsumed under it” (Lazreg, 1988, p. 88).

As I begin to think and write about the figure of the refugee-terrorist-Other, it becomes clear that empathy is relational. I relate to the body of the refugee. I see myself in that body. It is

⁶⁸ Dearest Reader,

You may have thought: Oh, she will now speak of hair as medium in Arab women's art. It may have somehow seemed a bit familiar to you, this speaking of hair and abjectness. If you have been reading closely, I have indeed mentioned hair in earlier chapters—yet I will not make the connections for you. These letters I share with you are private and intimate interruptions, I choose to not qualify them, and trust that you are able to make the connections yourself.

unfortunate that in the case of the suffering of brown bodies, in the current Islamophobic moment as well as historically, global empathy tends to fail.⁶⁹

But what is Islamophobia? How can you evaluate or measure a sentiment, an affect? Islamophobia is not simply a matter of media representation, it is the lived experience of Arab women. Islamophobia affects not only Muslims or Arabs, but many disenfranchised bodies. It is fear of difference more than a fear of Islam as a religion (Beydoun, 2018). Therefore, Islamophobia and xenophobia go hand in hand, and are manifestations of the fear of Otherness and what looks like Otherness.

I do not wish, however, to commit to a singular definition of Islamophobia, and instead commit to sensing and calling it out in moments it arises; in hate speech against Muslims, in using Islam as a synonym for terrorism, in specifying Muslims in travel bans (CNN a, 2017) and limited movements.

Images as Culprits of War

Susan Sontag (2003), building on the work of Virginia Woolf (1938) in *Three Guineas*, implicates photographs themselves as instruments of war. Photographs of the victims of war, Sontag states, “are themselves species of rhetoric. They reiterate. They simplify. They agitate. They create the illusion of consensus” (p. 6). Images of the refugee crisis are essentially images of war, as were images from early twentieth century mass Jewish displacements also images of war. To discuss the refugee crisis in global media without discussing the ongoing global war on Islam (often collapsed with a war on ISIL) is a simplification and appropriation of the refugees experiences.

⁶⁹ This is reflected by the current struggles of people of color in the United States. Consider for examples the climate leading up to the Black Lives Matter movement (Black Lives Matter, 2017), the struggles of the DACA *Dreamers* (CNN b, 2017), and the Muslim ban (CNN a, 2017).

We must also take into consideration another notion Sontag (2003) alludes to, that it is possible for images of atrocity to influence different, even opposing reactions (p. 13). Sontag enforces this argument by discussing the famous/infamous photographs of Tyler Hicks taken in the early stages of the U.S. war in Afghanistan. Ask a nationalist Syrian about the refugee crisis and they will—perhaps—not name Bashar Al-Asad as villain. Ask an everyday U.S. American about Syria and they—may—name Al-Asad as an ISIL leader. Far away Muslim/Arab bodies are collapsed into simplified categories and regarded as danger. Islam itself has become an offense.

From Abu Bakr to Abu Ghraib

I winced. Not able to look at your/our body/bodies arranged in their assemblage of torture. You/we stood there, deprived of clothing, deprived of faces under your/our black hoods. I/you could not see you/me. *They* pointed, laughing, but we shielded our vision as our vision was shielded. Yet I/we/you remained accomplices in your/our torture. They speak of our supposed modesty, while they parade your photographs, a new era of terror. My kin. I am sorry, I have failed you. You may have seen me smiling as the statue of a tyrant was pulled down, to shatter into pieces in the streets of Baghdad. I did not know I was witnessing the start of a new terror, inflicted on your body, our body.

I tried not to look at your photographs. But I could not escape them. And when I finally saw your familiar skin, my skin, my body on yours. Terrorist bodies. Our bodies, being terrorized. Anger filled me, anguish filled my nostrils with salty tears. What have *they* done to our/your bodies? I am with you, part of you, in that pyramid assemblage, becomings of the east. Our shame, paraded, probed, critically examined, theorized. That shame, belongs only to their language. Our shame is displaced in their terms. And I carry us/you in my displacement. I carry us/you in my gut.

The Abu Ghraib prison images exposed in 2004 displaying U.S. military torture activities in Iraq caused a disconcerting slippage. These images broke out of the frame of war (Butler, 2009) as they told a different story than a liberation of a nation. These images exposed a failed framing; the terrorist body is no longer *just* dangerous. The terrorist body becomes a spectacle of victimization, when its own vulnerability is exposed. Jasbir Puar (2007) writes that “the actions of the U.S. military in Saddam’s former torture chambers certainly narrows the gap between us and them—between the patriot and the terrorist” (p. 80). But who is *us* and who is *them*?

Exceptionalism

In her chapter, *Abu Ghraib and U.S. Sexual Exceptionalism*, Puar (2007) draws a comparison between the tortures of Abu Ghraib and what continually happens to the bodies of Palestinians by Israeli military guards (sanctioned by the U.S. Foreign policy) to destabilize the exceptional nature and singularity of the incident. What is implicit yet striking in Puar’s argument about the newly constructed bodies of *terrorists*⁷⁰ as torture objects is that it reproduces neo-colonial discourses, rendering the Arab body as prone to shaming, and extra sensitive to nudity and sexual humiliation. Such discourses neglect to acknowledge the existence of Arab public baths which sanction homosocial nudity. The exceptional nature of the humiliation is challenged by Puar herself, but in different terms. I find myself disagreeing with Puar as she challenges the Orientalist production of homosexuality as private in an Arab culture. Sexuality is indeed still considered part of the private realm by the majority of Arab cultures, but it is important that *all* forms of sexuality are private, even heteronormative forms of sexuality. The private nature of sexuality in Arab cultures, however, does not qualify the colonialist assumption

⁷⁰ The assumption that these Iraqi detainees are *terrorists* is almost never questioned within a [Western] discourse. Puar alludes to the lack of curiosity when it comes to the lives of these men beyond them just being tortured Iraqi bodies, the emphasis is always on the soldiers and the U.S. American implication.

that Arab/Muslim sexuality is repressed. Privacy and repression are not one and the same. In Islam, sexual pleasure, even if permitted exclusively within matrimony, is not condemned.⁷¹

Hidden Suffering

The bottom line—for me—in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, is when Sontag asks “what pictures, whose cruelties, whose deaths are *not* being shown” (p. 14). Consider images of Iraqi women prisoners missing from Abu Ghraib, photographs of women being raped and exposing their breasts at gunpoint. The focus of retelling the story of Abu Ghraib in global media was the male Other body and the torture inflicted upon it, women’s bodies are kept hidden. The photos threatened to disrupt the meta narrative that the United States in its wars was liberating Muslim women (Puar, 2007). These women’s sufferings are not being shown for strategic purposes.

While Puar’s work does not discuss anxieties about the female Muslim terrorist body, other work (Scott, 2008) have emphasized this complex and paradoxical figure of the monster/victim. Life and death, contingent upon each other, in unnerving proximity, is what exists within the body of the terrorist, and his/her counterpart. The terrorist body as assemblage, is both contained and contaminated, is the contemporary figure of abjection. It is, in the post 9/11 consciousness, an image of death. And we as Arab women carry it in our gut.

Letter 2

Dearest Stranger,

There was square package at my door today. I could not remember ordering something that might fit inside this strange-looking box. It was an unfamiliar thing, not having the usual smiley face on its side, and looked quite battered, like it had a rough journey, a lot like I felt that today to tell you the truth. I unlocked my door with difficulty, and gently kicked the box inside. I had to

⁷¹ Islam as a religion is sex positive, when examined beyond the fixations generated by popular misconceptions. This, however, is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

unearth myself from layers of warm garments, grocery bags, and a book bag. I took out a pair of scissors. The strange box was resting on the wooden floor. It looked lost, and dismayed by my cold reception.

I cut through the thick tape securing the mystery box with one edge of the scissors, and upon opening the lid, dusty bubble wrapping appeared stating willfully with a tired look that this was not its first trip. I lifted the tightly wrapped item and took it out of its snug space, revealing below it a faded printed page. "...*from the Holy Land.*"

I was no longer puzzled by the mysterious battered box. It did indeed travel a long way. How curious it is to have something come to me from a place I cannot travel to... I tell you, I was not considering my carbon footprint while ordering this particular thing!

I cut the bubble wrapping gently, inside it, the item was placed in a plastic bag that could have easily had *Walmart* or *Wegmans* printed on it, but instead had a Hebrew branding. Can you imagine how I felt? But this made me sure the box *did* come from *there*. I was skeptical before, but no one could fake this bag. I was able to feel *it* in my palms before unwrapping it. The thorns, here and there, cut through the bag, revealing their light brown tips. An earthy color. Why do they look so familiar? Have I seen these plants on the Olive Mountain in the days we took the back roads to get to Jerusalem from Ramallah? An ancient time. A time before that wall. Before you and I met. I didn't cut through the bag. I unwrapped its bunny-ear handles and put my hand inside it, carefully grasping the thorny thing and pulling it out. *What a beauty*. Delicate and dangerous, this crown of thorns.

Oh ya stranger, it is such a beauty. An organic beauty, and the majestic shape that was meant to ridicule the Messiah. A sentimental feeling swept over my body; this came from *there*! The feeling was so overwhelming. I carefully rotated the crown and looked at it from every angle.

The thorny vines closely entangled together. I wondered how anyone could have persuaded them to take this shape. Were they more tender when the branches were still alive, and bent willingly? Did they not always have this unyielding dry texture? I wonder if they had to wet them to bend them. I am convinced women made these crowns. In my hands it felt like women's labor.

Whose? Who were these women? I wish I could know.

The crown still haunts my sketches. Ever since I heard that "ban" speech. It kept appearing, it's been months now. On every head I drew. It appeared. Women... I drew many women, over and over again, clasping their limbs, covering their naked bodies, and on top of their heads were thorny crowns. Over and over again, I drew this woman: me? She had my face, my frown, my eyes, my generous shape. And without using color in these sketches, I could still see it, my olive skin. You will jokingly say here that I am egoistic or self involved, and I will reply to you as I usually do: Have you ever met a performance artist who wasn't? But there's more to it ya stranger.

Someone had once said to me *he probably looked like you, you know*. A thing I often wondered, a thing I questioned long before we learned to question the Eurocentric hierarchies of race. I remember asking my mom in a chapel in Rome: Why is *Sayyidna 'Esa* (Jesus) blonde? She reminded me of blonde Lebanese and Palestinians, my very own sister Sirar is considered an Arab *shaqra*/blonde. But I wasn't convinced. He was a particular kind of blonde; a *foreign* blonde. I did not have the right word for it then, but he was *white*.

The second question, in later years, I addressed to an Islamic Studies teacher in middle school: *why are the prophets all men?* She was tongue-tied. Yet I could see that she too, in that moment, was questioning. It still nags, this question. I can tell you though that I am not convinced that they were all men. The documented and remembered ones, yes certainly. You know who

documents. Who has monopoly on Islam. Men. They wanna tell us about our bodies and our souls, our *lacks*! Well, nevermind this now.

Know that somehow the sketches made me feel better. And I thought: *What if?* What if I were to put a crown of thorns on my head? What would that say? What would it mean? What does *this body* represent? A woman prophet... A stranger... A reject. And if I were to walk out in Central Pennsylvania with that crown upon my head. Would I offend young blond men devout to Jesus? What would I say, if let's say, someone asked me, why I have it over my head?

I know exactly what I would reply. It is a question that has been haunting me for a long time. It is the question I asked baba the day he drove me to Qalandya to see for myself, for the first time, the separation wall built to contain our terrorism. *Why did we not stop it?* I asked him. Why did we not stop them from building the wall? Why didn't you—or younger Palestinian men and women hold hands and block their bulldozers and bricks? Why did we watch injustice happening, and were not able to stop it? I would say to that supposed figure of the Christian youth in Pennsylvania: *why did they not stop it?* Why did it continue to the point of crucifixion? Death. It is the same question I ask myself about Syria. *Why did we not stop it?* All the refugees, drowning. Dying in cooling vans. Dying at *home*. Why did we not stop it in Iraq? Why did we not stop it in Yemen? Why did we not stop it in the U.S.? Why do we again and again allow the history of our life time to hold such horrors? Why did we not prevent the wall/war/death/and *and and and and* [...] from becoming a reality. Later, I pricked myself with a thorn. I sang to myself: "Don't pick the prickly pear by the paw. When you pick a pear try to use the claw." It hurt, woman! This beautiful thing in my hand is *dangerous*. And suddenly a sorrowful realization struck me: I have displaced it. And while it remains with me, it cannot yet return.

Be safe my sweet,

Ungrievable Bodies

Trauma is triggered by historical violence that reaches far into the self. It is connected with a pain that has not reached closure, that still deploys its incapacitating effects. The pain still demands to be rehearsed and returned to because something, in the event that caused it, eludes the possibility of once and for all naming it and putting it at a distance.

(Agnese Fidecaro, 2012, p. 97)

I must stress here that the horrors of Abu Ghraib and the images that came from it did not help in lifting the ungrievability of Arab/Muslim bodies. The lives and bodies of Arabs/Muslims remain to this day *less-than-quite-alive*. Butler (2009) explains that “specific lives cannot be apprehended as injured or lost if they are not first apprehended as living. If certain lives do not qualify as lives within certain epistemological frames, then these lives are never lived nor lost in the full sense” (p.1). Butler asserts that this framing allows the exploitation of targeted populations, the loss of whom in ungrievable and whose lives are not quite lives, in order to protect enfranchised lives. Both Butler and Puar assert this about the bodies of the *terrorists* of Abu Ghraib as well as the bodies of Palestinians, whose lives are disposable, ungrievable, lose-able. This is a critique of Imperial Power, and systematic violences inflicted upon the body of the Other. Yet for me, and for Others like me, it is my/our body that is pushed out of the frames of life. Thus, the metaphor of death rises, as a lived experience of being/becoming Other in a world where Other is disposable. Death is internalized.

Encountering Bodies Without Consent.

I refused to look at the images from Abu Ghraib for a long time, out of a personal belief that viewing them would be a form of trespass that re-generates the violences inflicted on these

bodies. Eventually, though, you have to, especially when you're writing about the construction of Arabness and Arab bodies. Images of Abu Ghraib have changed visual culture, the hooded figure of the Iraqi prisoner appears continuously, you cannot shun it away.

In April 2017, I found myself face to face with that figure once more. In a performance in the State Theatre of State College, Serap Erincin puts on a yellow raincoat, lifting the yellow hood upon her head, she carries a jumping rope, and gets up to stand on a chair, I begin to think, rather negatively: *too many props!* But before I finish that thought, the theatre lighting changes, her figure is dark, backlit; she becomes the hooded figure. I become part of a collective gasp. I cry. *Yes, Serap. Bring this figure to Central Pennsylvania, and to the center.*

A similar yet displeasing encounter took place in Laura Poitras' 2016 exhibition in the Whitney Museum in New York. Part of the installation of *O'Say Can You See* was a video of a *terrorist* Arab being interrogated by the U. S. military.

//Disruption// "How did I jump out of the screen and escape interrogation? I am sitting here seeing you/me... But when did we agree to this intrusion? Again, I found my body displayed in the gallery, and I refused to engage, got up and walked away. I refused to lay my eyes on a non-consenting terrorized Arab body. And I found myself asking: who has the right for consent, Sarah? (Perhaps I am asking myself or perhaps I am asking Sarah Baartman.⁷²) What bodies require consent? And what bodies remain spectacles [...]" (Abu Bakr, 2016).

Displaced and Misrepresented

The word refugee has come to mean something different today. It is almost immediately associated with the Syrian crisis, and rightly so. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, 2017) report issued in August 2017, there are

⁷² The naming of Sarah Baartman is a recognition, as well as a nudge towards a historical violence that goes beyond the scope of this dissertation.

now over five million Syrian refugees dispersed around the world, with millions more displaced internally.

In grand spectatorship the world has watched Arab/Syrian refugees in global and social media. In [Western] mainstream media, the body of the refugee is represented in particular ways that is designed for a [Western] viewing that often—even if showing empathy—does not identify with the refugees in embodied ways. The image of the refugee appears in three ways. Victim, violent, and redeemed. In what follows, I will discuss victim and violent representations, and finally the image of the redeemed refugee with the first two in mind. I use specific examples from mainstream global media so as to not generalize this claim.

The refugee figures/bodies are reiterated in global media for a non-Arab audience, perhaps to stir up world interventions, and perhaps to construct a prevailing narrative about the horrors of the so-called Islamic State. Yet as I write about them something unravels. When an Other looks at the image of another Other in suffering, something different, and *of difference*, is taking place.

Wretched Escapes

First, consider the figure of the Arab/brown refugee as a victim. This is evident in images that circulated heavily in the past four years of Syrian refugees escaping the war in Syria. With the heavy flow of images in both online and in printed media (globally and locally in Arab countries), two particular images stand out. The first image is of a drowned child who washed up on a Turkish shore, laying in a peaceful bundle on the sand. The image created a global disturbance. I was in Kuwait at the time and you could not escape it. On the news, printed in newspapers with devastating headlines about the Syrian crisis, and on store fronts with the words *Aghithou Sooria* (save/rescue Syria) scribbled underneath.

The little boy resembled my nephew Sulaiman. I could not escape him. Sulaiman was going through a phase Muslim children go through, playfully copying his parents in prayer positions, as he lay on the floor for *sujood*, he became a little bundle.

I see you. I say to him, another day, as he hides underneath a coffee table. *I see you and I am coming to eat you, I am hungry,* I rub my belly and say to the little bundle. He laughs. Runs. I catch him. I bite his belly. I kiss him. I see you and I am sorry.

One afternoon my mother looked at me with teary eyes. *Does he not look like that Syrian child when he does that?* She saw him too. Can we escape death?

The second image is of a group of 71 refugees. They were found dead in Austria, in the back of an abandoned freezer truck, and have suffocated to death including a number of children. This image and similar ones of refugee's deadly escape attempts are part of the global consciousness, yet a call for restricting the movement of asylum seekers is loud and clear because of the prevailing figure of the Muslim/Other/refugee as terrorist and dangerous.

Banned Violent Bodies and RAPEfugees

The second figure that vividly emerges in global media is the figure causing refugee anxiety; that of the violent Other, the terrorist-inclined Arab/Muslim refugee. This figure emerges in news broadcasting of terrorist attacks in Europe. There's always a delay in news networks to call an attack "terrorist," until they can trace it back to ISIL, or Islam, or a Muslim refugee body. While these attacks are often made by such a body, they are not complicated in the media, no one speaks of *why* the terrorists attack, but how to stop and identify them, making life for hundreds of refugees in Europe a suffocating reality, needing to constantly differentiate themselves from terrorists.

This particular figure was evoked regularly by the now president of the United States during his presidential campaign. The anxiety inducing figure of the Muslim/of color refugee was regularly deemed dangerous, leading up to the executive order issuing what is now referred to as the Muslim ban, barring

nationals of five majority Muslim countries from entering the United States, and legitimizing Islamophobia and hate speech against Muslims and refugees of color (CNN a, 2017).

The figure of the Arab/brown refugee as a violent Other is further calcified in the new year eve sexual assault incidents of Cologne, Germany. I must stress here that I do not dismiss the brutality of sexual assault in anyway, but complicate the emerging figure of the Syrian/Arab refugee as sexually depraved and a sexual predator, and how that figure then overarches and encompasses all refugees, causing anti-refugee demonstrations in Germany and parts of Europe. Protestors carried anti-refugee and anti-Islam signs, one of which stated *RAPEfugees Not Welcome* (CBS, 2016) with an image of a mosque striked through with a red line. These images collapse the despicable actions of the assaulting men with Islam, and adding fuel to the general Islamophobic climate of Europe and the United States. The language used to speak against these assaults rang too closely to colonialist discourse on Islam as a religion unfit for modernity (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Najmabadi, 2000; Scott, 2008), and constructed the figure of the male Arab refugee as sexually frenzied. It is also important to note here the absence of Arab/Muslim women refugees in the discussion of the predatory nature of Arab/Muslim men refugees. This absence gestures towards the victimization of Arab/Muslim women, and indirectly indicates a notion that *your women may put up with this, but European/White women will not*, creating yet another rift, another comparison, another set of assumptions about Arab/Muslim women being passive victims, *used to* incidents of sexual assault.⁷³

Letter 3

Dearest Stranger,

I miss your face. In an embodied, non-FaceTime way, I miss it! And your *kutla!*⁷⁴

⁷³ Here I must bring to the reader's attention the efforts of Egyptian women in particular during and after the Egyptian revolution in relation to sexual assault and sexual harassment in Egypt, and the continuous efforts of Egyptian feminist activists. Arab women are not passive.

⁷⁴ Kutla is the word for mass. It is a cute, not often used, word in Arabic, reminds me of Middle School and science class.

I've been thinking a lot about what to do with *Taj El-Shook* (crown of thorns). I feel a performance coming up, something physically straining, in a ritualistic sort of way. I think of the *Maseeh's* walk, and I don't have the language for it, but that exhibition of suffering. I think of it a lot. And how no one stopped it. What could the disenfranchised do to oppose the Empire! I am asking too much. I know that I want to incorporate walking. Not sure how yet. I think of the songs haunting me the past two weeks. *Zahrat Almadaen, Al-Maseeh, Al-Quds Al-Ateeqa*. Perhaps I could sing them on my walk. No good. I know my voice will fail me. And I think of *her*, of Mariam. Isn't it strange that the Quran has more about her than the bible? I think of her in terms of tenderness. Allah's tenderness speaking to her in the Quran during childbirth, and *Esa Elmaseeh*, speaking in her arms as a baby, to defend her, as she takes an oath of silence. Yes. Silence. No song, just silence. You know how difficult that is for me too.

I re-read that exile essay by Edward Said today and found myself completely overwhelmed. I could not look up at the crowded café anymore, I knew my nose was red, and my eyes were watery, and I hated that face on me, and the inability to hide behind a mask of calm.

I could not put my finger on it. What triggered all of these emotions? I had to leave. I had to go home. I had to shower. I felt that only putting my head under the flow of water could help calm down. And the tears flowed in the privacy of the shower. A double privacy almost, water concealed my tears. I made the strangest sound, it was almost a howl, I felt it coming from the sides of my chest, and out into the small bathroom, and it bounced around. My neighbors must think I'm crazy. I bent my head, looked at my feet. I pictured them in my walk, I thought about a "when". Maybe today? Or any warm day this week? And at that moment I remembered the words that jumped at me earlier that day, looking at my laptop calendar, thinking of a time to

defend my dissertation and return home. I saw it, *April 9th*, and in Arabic, a full-day event in a red box stated: *Deir Yaseen*, 1948. So I have my day.

Love always,

Sarah

Redeemed Figures

How is it possible that the Arab/brown refugee is both violent and victim? It is not a complexity, for the Arab/Muslim/Other is not given the courtesy of being a complex Other, and instead is a paradox. Alongside this paradoxical figure of the refugee, a new figure begins to emerge; the redeemed Other, the success story of the assimilated refugee. Yet it is clear that this assimilated refugee always exists alongside its own Other, it is *this* because it is not *that*, and we know the *that* very well, because it is the prevailing stereotype that politicians in places like France, Germany and the U.S. use to stir fear and win votes, to create anti-immigration (of color) hysterias.

Opposed to the figure of the violent refugee is the figure of the redeemed refugee as a success story, an *after* to the terrorist-inclined before, who has (in imperialist terms) experienced the fruits of modernity and was made better by it, converted into a functioning entity to happily assert: *Yes! We can tame the beast! We do not need to kill death!* In what follows I will discuss two particular instances that this figure of the redeemed refugee (and its own Other) appear.

She Shall not Drown/Swim

In the summer of 2016, the Olympic games saw for the first time the Refugee Olympic Team, an independent team consisting of refugees in support of the global refugee crisis (Olympic, 2016). In high definition, stories of the team members were heavily featured during the Olympic games taking place in Rio de Janeiro. Part of this team was swimmer Yusra

Mardini, a young Syrian who became an Olympics darling, and whose success story was publicized heavily. Yusra Mardini swam for three hours across the mediterranean after the boat she was onboard failed, to escape the horrors of Syria. She then swam in the Olympics, and in 2017 became the youngest UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador. The United Nations describes her as a “powerful voice for the forcibly displaced across the world and an example of their resilience and determination to rebuild lives and positively contribute to host communities” (UNHCR, 2017). Images of Mardini in her Olympics swimsuit floating in the chlorine water of the Olympics swimming pool are haunted by the salt water bodies of her counterparts; the image arises—drowned bodies, suffering bodies, and death. Mardini’s whole existence as a success story, as *an example of [the refugees] resilience and determination*, is haunted by death. Without her counterpart, Mardini would not have been chosen a Goodwill Ambassador. Thus, even Mardini—an enfranchised example of life and moving beyond the limits of the refugee crisis—carries death in her floating body, and her gut.

Mardini competed at the Olympics the same summer Muslim women’s bodies made other headlines in the world, in a *not-so-positive* way. In the summer of 2016, over thirty French towns issued what is referred to as the *Burkini Ban* (Keifer-Boyd & Smith-Shank, 2017; CNN c, 2016). The Burkini is the [Western] name for the modest swimming attire some Muslim women wear to the beach and public pools, covering the entire body except the face, hands, and feet. In Arab countries, the *Burkini* is referred to as *Mayoh Islami* (Islamic swimsuit) and is worn by women who wear the hijab (head cover), to be able to enjoy water sports and water activities, and is a common sight in Arab places with beach resorts (such as Sharm Al-Sheikh in Egypt). The reasoning behind the ban was the focus on French secularism and security.

The Burkini ban made worldwide headlines with an image of a woman being forced to remove her top on a public beach in Nice, France, surrounded by policemen. The image circulated social media with the hashtag #WTFFrance, and was highly protested as a violation of human rights, and a manifestation of French Islamophobia and a [Western] war on Islam (CNN c, 2016; Independent, 2016). No one was comparing the policed bodies of immigrant Muslim women on the French Riviera with Yusra Mardini, even though they all arguably *just* wanted to swim. Even if not in direct conversation, images of Mardini in her black swimsuit were followed by the images of Muslim women in their Burkinis harassed by police and security guards on my twitter feed consecutively. The focus was once again on Muslim women's bodies, a metaphor for the backwardness of Islam in relation to the construct of the [West]. The ban, as social media activists protested, did not enforce itself on nuns, swimmers wearing body suits, or even bikers wearing their full face helmets (as one image sarcastically circulated), just Muslim women. The historical French fixation on veiling and unveiling of Muslim women (Scott, 2007) reiterated itself yet again. Eventually, the French court dismissed the ban, deeming it unlawful (CNN c, 2016). Yet the French anti-veil sentiment remains. France has created for itself a legacy of harassing Muslim women's bodies, not for being the only European state that attempts this harassment, but for seeking legitimacy for this harassment from the law, beginning with the headscarf ban in 2004. The enfranchised Yusra Mardini and the disenfranchised women of the Burkini are all bodies in distress, bodies that are dangerous or in danger, and indeed, bodies that invoke death.

Not *That* Guy

The second redeemed figure is that of a Syrian man, Aktham Abulhusn, a refugee in Berlin. This story came to me in the form of a podcast, *The Refugee's Dating Coach*, part of

NPR's *Rough Translation* series. In particular, the story of Abulhusn is about navigating foreign terrains of relationships and sexuality. Yet this personal story about a man made evident silences in relation to refugee women's desires and sexualities, embodied by the young woman refugee's story in the same podcast, Raghd Hadid. Hadid is part of the same group Abulhusn is in, *Improv Without Borders*, a group dedicated to playful cultural interactions between Germans and refugees that helps "set aside the seriousness of language barriers and instead communicate with body language, emotions, images and humor" (Improv Without Borders, n.d.). This is indeed exciting and important work that—even if unintentionally—aligns with Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (1974), but what intrigues me for the purpose of this dissertation is how Abulhusn and Hadid are narrated in the podcast.

Abulhusn seeks more help from the *Improv Without Borders* leader, Sophia Lierenfeld, a self proclaimed dating coach, and in a sense that's what the main storyline of the podcast is about. Lierenfeld helps Abulhusn overcome his own personal barriers of timidness and—*I kid you not*—virginity, to be able to date, as he desires, German women. But what both Lierenfeld and Abulhusn are dealing with are the *Other*, the image of the Arab/brown refugee as a sexual predator. Lierenfeld teaches Abulhusn how to flirt with German women in role play that was very uncomfortable to hear. Lierenfeld's voice came to my ears through a large noise canceling headset as I walked one cold fall day to campus in State College. When she changed her voice during role play, my back began to sweat. It was unnerving. I examined my own experiences and discomfort. I felt compassion towards Abulhusn, who seemed to have a childlike innocence in this exchange, well set against his haunting Other, the new year eve predator. It was stressed several times in this podcast, however, that Abulhusn himself is not Muslim, and could not date

other refugees because he was a minority, a Durz. The podcast feeling inclined to disassociate Abulhusn from Islam so vocally, to me, is another form of implicit Islamophobia.

In contrast, the Muslim Syrian Raghd Hadid comes to class in distress—the podcast does not fail to mention her headscarf. Someone has verbally attacked and shoved Hadid on the subway. She was shook. Lierenfeld takes her to the side with another Arab young woman, and teaches them how to react to this situation; turn around and yell at him, defend yourself, be loud, she says, *you can even yell at him in Arabic*. Here’s what the podcast narrator says: “Raghd looks shocked at this. She’s come to Sophia the German coach, to give her the right German response to this confusing German situation, and Sophia is telling her, it doesn’t matter what language she says it in” (NPR, 2017, minute 18:30). Somehow, indirectly, the podcast assumes that yelling is innate to an Arab women being harassed. Nothing German about it, hence Hadid’s shock. The podcast is in fact a redeemed story about *him*— *Abulhusn*—, and not *her*—*Hadid*. Arab women refugees come up only as a side story of a body in distress. No one mentions this Arab woman refugee's desire. The podcast could have deliberately done this, for Hadid’s (and other possible Arab/Muslim women refugees) sake, for her supposed modesty or perhaps in an attempt to respect her own set boundaries—we will never really know, unless we ask Hadid herself. What is evident nevertheless is that the podcast tells of a silence about women’s bodies by this un-telling, and the foregrounding of Abulhusn’s sexuality and desire; a homonormative sexuality that desires a White/German body, casting aside other forms of *Other* sexualities, without any problematization. In relation to Puar’s queer homonationalist subjects, it is arguable here that Abulhusn is an image of a heteronormative refugee subject desirable by German standards, and is a redeemed refugee figure in contrast to the failed Other.

The Haunting of the Redeemed

These redeemed figures need to deal with their haunting, their collapse, their very own Other prescribed for them through systematic racism and xenophobia, as well as that Other that they may relate to in their own ways—I know I do.

Displaced/immigrant/exiled Arabs live knowing that Other narrative that someone else told. Arab women (artists or not) in displacement have a similar task at hand, needing to, even if not to disassociate, at least articulate themselves with knowledge of that haunting. As well as each woman's personal relationship with this haunting. This is not simply a matter of a displaced postcolonial consciousness, to articulate it this way is to perhaps simplify it, reduce it to an intellectual notion. Far from this reduction, the experiences of being Other are sensed in embodied ways and corporeal reality—what I am referring to here as *death in the gut*—as opposed to articulated in language, though we may try, as I do in this dissertation. This is why death in the gut is difficult to write about; it is *matter and affect*, not a matter of fact, death in the gut is a metaphor for lived experience.

Letter 4

Dearest Stranger,

Last night I had a conversation with a singer. I was listening, intently, as she spoke of her performance anxiety and overcoming it. And I told her about the *Other Sarah* who takes over when I perform. How the Other Sarah has to completely take over in order for the embarrassment to disappear, and nothing remains but the performance. I told her about my next performance plan. I don't think she knew anything about Palestine, or *Deir Yaseen*, I didn't mind. I was curious about her too, where does she get those eyes? She looked white, but at the

same time not, I don't know. I did not ask, I bet she gets that question a lot, I won't be an intruder.

It was a long, good and deep conversation. The kind that stays with you for days. I told her about the different ideas I had and dismissed, like carrying a sign, or maybe cards with a webpage *for more info* in case someone asks me what the walk is about. I dismissed all of these ideas when I decided on the silence. It's not a march, or an activist walk, even if it may have an activist aspect, its a performance, it follows the lineage of performance art, so no hashtags or webpages or signs. Anyway... I keep thinking of *Taj El-Shook* (crown of thorns) as a metaphor for the struggle of the rejected/object/disenfranchised against Power, and systemic racism/sexism/militarism. And I get excited about the work. I am writing the chapter about borders right now, and I find myself thinking of other ways of resembling the crown... Like barbed wire. Did you know you could get those on Amazon?! Isn't that crazy?! I wouldn't though, I don't think it would look good on my cyber print!

I met with Karen earlier today. She mentioned that I could get barbed wire from Home Depot — I'll look into it. I'd actually like to touch it. To feel it. I don't have to necessarily buy it. I got some wire from the art store. It's been sitting in my desk drawer for a while. I wanna try to make my own barbed wire. We'll see where this goes.

Love,
Sarah

Conclusion: What of Death?

As I wrote this chapter I took walks to clear my head. Every day I took the same route that winds behind my home, to a country road with a view on the mountains that surround State College, PA. One day, I noticed a small grey body on the floor a few steps ahead. My steps

became more careful, I have heard somewhere that raccoons can be vicious. But this little fellow was laying on his side, and as I approached the raccoon appeared unmistakably dead. About a meter away from where I was standing, I could see the raccoon clearly, a lovely animal always zooming past is laying here immobile, with a calm facial expression. For weeks, everyday, since that day, I saw the raccoon as its body collapsed with the grass below it. The more deteriorated, the calmer the body looked, till it was almost one with the ground beneath it, and flies and larvae left it, the stench left too, and eventually, the body was unrecognizable, it could have been a patch of brown grass. The horror was calmed. This process and daily encounter with death somehow soothed me to the idea. It was not really that horrifying to end up as a patch of grass, or one with the earth my own body will be buried in, in white cloth, a naked body put to rest.

Have we over vilified death? Can we perhaps think of death as redeemed, make it familiar? In a talk she gave at Penn State, Rosa Braidotti expressed a new found calm about death—a similar calm than the one I felt as I watched the raccoon. Braidotti had said that should we come to accept death as a process, a process of dying since birth, could we perhaps move on from the distress?

It is this kind of death that I would like you to take away from this chapter as I discussed the death in the gut. It is not a negative metaphor, instead, consider death as a familiar unknown, a space where possibilities may still exist, an experience that begins with difference, thus better articulates the experiences of the disenfranchised. Life is great, yes. But so is death.

The body is a site for knowledge, and death in the gut is a sensational awareness. It is a way of knowing. This weight that Arab women carry—as they exist, as they make art, they write letters, and as they move on with their day—is a way of knowing difference by sensing difference.

Chapter Five.

Radical Leaps: A Conclusion Resisting Closure

In this concluding chapter, I take a final critical view at what what is written within the pages of this dissertation, to recap on main thoughts, and stress the fruitful failures that made this final work possible. I introduced intimacy as the feminist theoretical framework used in this dissertation in Chapter One, and relied on the work of Pratt and Rosner (2012) in understanding a particularly feminist notion of intimacy. Furthermore, Pratt and Rosner (2012) believe that intimacy “suggests something hidden away from the larger world, apparent only to the one or few on the inside” (p. 4). This concluding chapter makes intimacies of this dissertation evident.

I begin with three intimacies; of failure, research, and anxiety. Next, I discuss the form of the dissertation. I conclude with radical leaps of writing to defy, an/other language, and discussing the shortcoming of the dissertation, and how I plan to take the work done forward.

An Intimate Failure

I began the journey of writing this dissertation with an assumption of access—this very dissertation that complicates access of Arab women bodies, including my own. I had the desire for intimate encounters with a group of Arab women artists, to know them closely, to live in their homes and be involved in their daily lives. I wanted—I see it now—to trespass on their lives. I hoped it would be a welcomed trespass, one of a familiar stranger, for I somehow saw myself reflected in them, my life in their lives. After all, they, the Arab women artists of this dissertation—like me—, have in one way or another experienced displacement. I saw these displacements, as I was exposed to their art, and I wondered if such experiences as they vary has affected their work directly, or if it was I who saw remnants of exile wherever I looked. I wished to know more—to know if this affect that I saw was intentional. Did they mean it? And how did they

experience displacement, exile, and Otherness/foreignness in their daily lives. I wanted to be the fly on their walls and watch them as they go along with their day, and to have specific times set aside for conversations, close encounters. I wanted too much. I assumed too much.

The dissertation, however, did not go in that direction. I am thankful for that now, I do not wish to commit a forced intimacy. I would have been, Arab or not, a *foreign body* inserted in their lives. With that failure I realized that the intimacy I was seeking, I already had. I just did not know where to look. I was part of a world system that does not value what Sara Ahmed (2017) refers to as *homework*, the physical and intellectual labor women do in the privacy of their homes. I realized as I wrote this dissertation that the women of my life who have made me the feminist that I am were beckoning me to remember our encounters, to re-collect our lived experiences, and the stories which they have entrusted me with, in the privacy of our homosocial spheres.

There they were, the strong and resolute women of my life, appearing to me as I read of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) *rhizome*, of Homi Bhabha's (2012) *liminality*, of Edward Said's (1979) *Orientalism*. I wondered why when women from my childhood described their lives and experiences in similar terms no one took them seriously. I remembered a distinct voice from a woman complaining when she felt unheard: I am planted in the wrong soil! A description fit for the displaced Palestinian, from the generation of the *Nakba*⁷⁵, that she was, may God rest her soul. She did not know that I was listening. She did not know that her words are fuel to this work, and hopefully all work to come. These women are the reason I value what the world may disregard. As a political and ethical choice I read women, and thus, I found my own voice as a woman.

⁷⁵ The Palasteninan Nakba (Catastrophe) of 1948.

An Intimate Research

Intimacy has not left this dissertation. Instead of a forced intimacy with artists I did not know, an organic intimacy flowed in several different ways. First, there is the intimacy of encountering a work of art, so while I was not personally able to meet the artists, I have made myself vulnerable in relation to their work, and let it affect me with no reservations. I suspended myself to the art, thought of pieces of days. Sometimes an artwork would affect me to the point of tears. Malallah's installation *Mesopotamian Rhythm*, in particular, stayed with me for days, and is probably what inspired the entirety of Chapter Four, that sense of *death in the gut*. I could not shake the feelings the installation gave me, a complex set of sadness and agitation. In *Mesopotamian Rhythm*, I saw Bahia Shehab's *Thousand Times No* repeated; *No, I will not forget the distress you have caused the Iraqi people. No it is not freedom that operated. No... No... No.* And in those *nos*, I re-collected another set of *nos* from an earlier project. I was listening to a recording of a conversation with a friend, who for the sake of the article I gave the name Salwa. I (Abu Bakr, 2014) describe this encounter with two of her *nos* as follows:

“I kept rewinding and forwarding the audio. I was hearing the two nos side by side. I want to write them, to describe them, to bring to my writing the meaning. No, the written text can never really portray *this* difference. It must be heard. And yet more enigmatic is Salwa's face, a thousand differences happened, a thousand stories told. Between the no, the pause, and the second no. A thousand different Salwas were in a state of becoming” (p. 11).

A thousand *nos* indeed. The stories and experiences interact, you do not even need to *make* them. Writing flows, writing *does*, just watch it happen. For me, there is no rift between experiencing an artwork and writing about it. Writing was an extension of that experience, a delightful—even if often painful—intimate immersion.

Second is the intimacy of the stories of the women from the narratives of this dissertation. Stories I have held close through the span of my life, and now entrust to the pages of this dissertation to take new forms, as they are read and experienced yet again. It is my hope that when these stories are read, they are at work again. A new intimacy, between you—the reader—and the pages of this dissertation may take place. For a writer, that is the best case scenario, indeed.

Anxious Intimacies

The final intimacy I will touch upon here is the process of writing a dissertation so personal, with so much at stake. I have made myself explicit. I thought, as I wrote, *I am working within an intellectual minefield*. Unfortunately, in my experience, when you speak of/with Islam, there are many who are ready to be offended before engaging with what you say. Often people assumed what I believe or do not believe, and I was criticized for being *Westernized*. I hope that it is clear for anyone who read this dissertation how infuriating this adjective is for me. There is also the other prejudice, when some Arab men I converse with found out I was a *feminist*—the worst F word (from their perspective). These educated men assumed women have all their rights and now have to be satisfied and quiet. *What do women want?* I would be asked, as though I could represent all women. One of these men had the audacity of explaining feminism to me, and expecting a thank you. Dealing with these encounters and being a supposed *Westernized feminist*, I used to get into draining arguments, pointlessly. Sometimes I had to smile, or ignore misogynist language so internalized within spoken Arabic, to move on with the day. Later I would write of/with *corrupt women*, and feel at ease with the world. Yet this anxiety has stopped me from writing of Our Mother Khadeeja (Prophet Mohammed's wife), and omit sections on Hend Bint Otba, a prominent and controversial Muslim woman from Prophet times, as I would

be stepping on monstrous toes if I referred to either as *corrupt*—perhaps I will write about these women in a future project that uses less debatable language.

On the other hand was another anxiety, especially when writing Chapter Four. I often sent paragraphs to a close Arab woman friend also living in the U.S. and asked: *Will this get me deported?* Sometimes I was being humorous, but at other times it was a real, pressing, anxious feeling, that manifested itself even more strongly as I continued to write in 2017.

Thus I have made myself vulnerable, and at every page turned—or scrolled—I let myself be with the words, with the language, and in turn, with *you*. That being said, know that what might sometimes seem to a non Arab to be a small step in this writing, is a radical leap for an Arab woman. I am so enmeshed in minding my choice of words that I have admittedly internalized self censorship. Yet I will not call this a failure, I will call it self preservation.

Yes, I have failed to meet the artists. Yet what came of that failure is that this dissertation, which I am very invested in, took a form; a written form.

Telling Tales: Fiction Narratives as a Way of Knowing

Throughout the dissertation, I have acted as my own version of Shahrazad,⁷⁶ and entrusted readers to find their way through performative, embodied, and embroidered writing. I have given you, reader, no simple task. Did you feel up to the challenge? Did this dissertation *speak* to you? Did you get—to any degree—corrupted? Did you encounter the *new exile*? Did you feel a bit of *death in your gut*?

I began Chapter One, *Strangers Together: Arab Women Art, Displacement, and Narrative* by a disruption; a page addressed *Dearest Stranger*, a notion I do not touch upon again until Chapter Four. I threw you in the mix without warning, yet I stress that one of this

⁷⁶ I have expanded on the figure of Shahrazad in Chapter Two.

dissertation's main objectives is to disrupt. To ease you in comfortably would have been out of character of this writing.

In Chapter One I introduced the work done in this dissertation. I spoke of Arabness, and why Arab prevails over taking on a colonialist signifier; *Middle Eastern*. Then I introduced how I wrote this dissertation: the form of writing with a multiplicity of voices, and using language to disrupt itself, in order to continuously resist closure. I then established that my approach to knowledge production is political, situated, and embodied while taking into account colonial and patriarchal histories. For an Arab Muslim woman to endeavor into producing knowledge is an act of resistance; resisting colonialist discourses that deemed women's place in the private spheres, and Arab's/Muslim's appropriation of this idea. Decentering women's lives and bodies using Islam as a justification is an injustice that reeks of historical amnesia. Muslim women from the Prophet's time—as I argued in Chapter Two—were strong willed and outspoken.

In chapter One, I also explored the paradox of being an Arab woman in terms of being an embodiment of both violence and oppression, and discussed the veil as a double signifier for both of these paradoxical stereotypes. The fixation on the veil for me as an Arab feminist living in the U.S. is at best an annoyance. Therefore, the symbolism of the veil had to be addressed so I could move on to speak about other, more pressing matters that transcend curiosity towards the Other's body. One of those pressing matters is the relationship of an Arab woman, a foreigner, to language—especially academic language, as well as the status of women of color within U.S. academia. I introduced my leaning towards nomadic writing (Braidotti, 2014) and embodied writing in relation to my emergent arts-based methodology. Finally, I ended the chapter by providing two roadmaps to the dissertation chapters; one for general readers, and another, rather ironic one, for Arab women readers.

In Chapter Two, *Corrupt Women: A Reading of Corporeality, Displacement, and Memory Through the Work of Arab Women Artists*, I discussed the idea of women's refusal as corruption. In Chapter Two I utilized re-collecting and re-telling (as fiction) of stories of Arab women that highlight complex experiences. I provided a further reading of these experiences by looking at Arab women art as a way of knowing, in relation to the narratives re-told. This is a purposeful contiguity between the artwork and narratives of Arab women that stirs open-ended connections. By no means are the artwork and narratives distinct, for each can be read as either.

In Chapter Two, I also discussed the notion of a displaced woman's body in relation to Butler's (1990) notion of the *girling of the girl*. Using fiction, I grappled with difficult issues often hushed in the Arab region; sexual assault, women's sexuality, women's love, and women's pleasure.

Furthermore, in Chapter Two, I introduced my women comrades through the concept of *corrupt women*. I count myself among them, the women who say no, who are not afraid of speaking, and speaking back. These *corrupt women* have gained a consciousness from lived experiences, as I have made clear from the narratives of such women. I have been entrusted with these narratives, these stories, and I am honored to have re-collected and re-told them. I re-narrated, and as I did, I encountered the experiences of these women again and again, as I remember, write, read, re-write, edit, and so on. The narratives were embroidered with the artwork of Arab women artists, together they spoke a tapestry of lived experiences. In other words, it is not this and that (*this* being the narratives and *that* being the artwork), it is this embroidered with that so that through the delicate process they become a multiple-one. This rings closely to Irigaray's (1985) theorization of women's anatomy, which I also discussed in

Chapter Two. Finally, in Chapter Two, I discussed artwork by Arab women artists Bahia Shehab, Mona Hatoum, Hanaa Malallah, Ghada Amer, and Ghadah Alkandari.

In Chapter Three, *Fourteen [Restricted] Rooms: Hatoum and the Body of the New Exile*, I discussed displacement, exile and the impossibility of access for some bodies, by taking an imagined/virtual walk through a London-based Mona Hatoum exhibition. The chapter is theoretical; I introduced the construct of the *new exile*, my re-working of figure of the Palestinian exile as described by Edward Said (2000), an exile himself. I wrote Chapter Three by employing autobiographical narratives using my own hybrid Palestinian experience. I used performative writing, and employed language interruptions to disrupt the flow of academic text. I restricted the artwork discussed by Chapter Three to the virtual exhibition tour provided by the TATE gallery website, as a metaphor for the restrictions cast on Palestinian and exiled bodies. Therefore, it focuses on the artwork of Mona Hatoum, a Lebanese-Palestinian currently living between London and Berlin.

In Chapter Four, *Death in the Gut: Arab Women, Art, and the image of the Refugee-Terrorist-Other*, I stepped into the realm of the abject (Kristeva, 1982). Or rather, I made the abject evident by describing the state of the constant sensing of *death in the gut*. A state that is, I argued, a way of knowing and sensing the world for Arab women.

Chapter Four—while triggered by the artwork of Hanaa Malallah that I discussed earlier in this chapter—came to be written as it is presented in this dissertation as a result of questions I received after presenting in the 2016 National Art Education Association (NAEA) conference. These questions ran along the lines of: How can we, as art teachers, approach the experiences of our Muslim students? How can we, as art teachers, engage with the experiences of students wearing the hijab without regenerating the fixation on Muslim women's dress? To me, these are

caring questions of care. Therefore, Chapter Four, though speaking of death, terrorism, the refugee crisis, otherness and global media appropriations and stereotyping of Muslim bodies, is a chapter of *hope*. A hope similar to the educational approach of bell hooks (2003).

In Chapter Four, I make evident my own art making processes by sharing letters sent to a close friend, addressed *Dearest Stranger*. In these intimate letters readers are exposed to a foreign vulnerability. The letters reveal how, within the enmeshment in the current historical moment of Islamophobia and refugee crisis, ideas of artwork begin to emerge and develop. These artworks are left in the chapter as a work in process, following the ethics of this dissertation: resisting closure. Theoretically, Chapter Four is in conversation with Susan Sontag's (2003) and Judith Butler's (2009) writings on pain of others, empathy, grievability and representation.

The Body is Present: In Praise of Art/Education and Feminism

The body, injured imaginatively and actually, testifies to historical violence, but it also is a site for resistance to coercive and deforming forces and a place for self-actualization or, at the least, a place from which to negotiate with social norms. (Pratt & Rosner, 2012, p. 10)

In all of the chapters of this dissertation, I begin and end with the body. The body is present, within and through the writing. I write of the material body, and the material body writes, with all of its materiality, abject and not.

There is no better space for this embodied writing to take shelter than the realms of art/education and feminist, women's, gender, and sexuality studies, as these disciplines are able to encompass contradictions. Both art and feminism are epistemic and pedagogical spaces where important work in regard to the material body takes place, yet they both often have the need to

justify their existence. Both disciplines inhabit a precarious position in academia, and have a history of dealing with criticism and resistance. In regard to my own work and ethic, however, these are not faults. Instead, it is this precarity that make art and feminism spaces that can encompass the critical issues that I discussed in this dissertation. For the two disciplines, each of which is a multiplicity, are able to deal with contradictions, and dissertations that resist closure and reject universal categories and readymade solutions *per se*. The two disciplines offer spaces without finality, without the necessity of sectioning off, that violence which borders do.

Radical Leaps

If I cannot—for the sake of my decolonial ethics—offer you solutions in this dissertation, then what *can* I offer? What wisdom can you take away from this three years and more worth of work? A wisdom, I hope, that is unfit for prepackaged, easy-to-digest, *how-tos*. A wisdom that can perhaps help you make peace with the very word *perhaps*. For *perhaps* itself resists closure. It is and it is not. It *can be*, and it may not. Yet here it is; perhaps. Perhaps, then, instead of giving you wisdom, I could share with you my own radical leaps of this dissertation—for what may seem to be pushing the boundaries of society gently, is in fact a large radical leap—and hope that in turn you will find meaning in what I find meaningful, and strength in my own resistance.

Radical Leap One: Writing to Defy

I have mentioned earlier in this chapter that I see myself as working within an intellectual minefield. I expand on this note because it may not make immediate sense to all readers, especially those not first hand familiar with Arab cultures, and what they expect from their women. While discussing issues of sexuality and sexual violence, freedom and freedom of speech, movement and displacement both culturally and intellectually, this dissertation is sensitive to the privacy of Arab women. Even with the relative safety that anonymity provides,

and without declaring names, one must be sensitive while writing about Arab women from her own life as someone might venture a guess as to who she is. Because of this, as well as for the sake of self preservation, I have practiced a high degree of self-censorship while keeping true to the ethics and purpose of this dissertation. I have, therefore, subtly at times nudged the reader to consider unmentionables without mention. Writing, especially writing without self-censorship, is indeed a privilege and a luxury. Thus, nudging, here, is also a corruption. This method of writing in itself is a corruption; a writing to defy.

Even while practicing self-censorship, the Other *can* write, and can write radically. Writing itself is a resistance, an act of defiance, a corruption. Writing, in the spirit of Chapter Two, is a *no*. Writing, in accordance with Chapter Three, is a trespassing on unfamiliar grounds that have often rejected a writing woman. Writing, in the spirit of Chapter Four, is a way of knowing, and becoming. Therefore, the process of writing this dissertation was one of unfolding experiences—mine and other women’s—and beginning to understand them, without closure, without tying loose ends, or establishing new reductive categories.

Writing to know has shown me that I too, as a woman of color, a Muslim, an Arab woman in particular, have a voice. Writing to know has proven to me that while the world may view me as a submissive subaltern on one end, or a [Westernized] corrupting villain on the other, one can write to defy within the liminality of this paradox, and utter: This woman will not be silenced. So let this work be a beginning to my own Shahrazadic *nos*. And if language should be regarded as my historical enemy—in both colonial and sexist ways—and if I am out of the bounds of language as it exists in a situated and non-ahistorical ways, then perhaps—yes, *perhaps*—a new language is in order. A decolonized/decolonizing language. A language that does not tolerate difference, but begins from, and is of difference.

Radical Leap Two: An/Other Language

As a writing woman, and especially a woman of color, I was trained to believe that in order to be taken seriously within an academic institution, as well as intellectual spheres in general, a mastery of a particular kind of language is in order. To an extent, in my own experience, this notion is true. Yet I am an Arabic speaker who grew up with writers and poets, rebels, outcasts, and revolutionaries, their language (academic, poetic, full of radical thought) became a language that tastes the most *at home* on my tongue, the flavor of speech that suits my disposition best. Yet what may come naturally to me in Arabic is twice removed in English, first by language and then by jargon. Therefore, during my Masters degree I had to work on my writing to be less *conversational* as it was critiqued, and more academic and scholarly. I had to catch up, and in my attempt to catch up with language, I missed the subtle assumptions that I was a postcolonial subject with an inferior education. I made no such mistake in the work done during the years of pursuing my PhD. I made sure that difference and embodiment is where my words came from. I here must thank professor Karen Keifer-Boyd as the chair of my dissertation committee for putting up with yet another anxiety: me worrying that my work is too personal, too different, too emotional. Every step of the way I was re-assured that the personal is relevant. In turn, I have made the personal explicit through this Other language.

In this dissertation, I have produced academic work that disrupts itself by making evident the Other, using multiple voices, narrative, and interruptions, quite literally. This is my form of feminist writing, and my form of *speaking woman* (Irigaray, 1985) as apposed to parroting the masculinist language of the Master.

In this language I am a nomad. For in this language I am not fully at home. I found that one must remove oneself a tad, a bit, a touch, beyond the comfort of language to produce another — An/other language fit to speak of and with women, and as women. An/other language that does not simply *accept* narrative, embodiment, and experience as removable additions, but is *of* narrative, embodiment, and experience, and is not much without. A language that does not disregard affect or emotion, and disrupts evil boundaries, especially those much instilled within the Master's language; between the global and the intimate, woman and man, female and male, private and public, East and West, and so on.

In regard to Chapter Three, a disrupted/disruptive language is one that is fit to speak/write about the Palestinian experience because it performs the Palestinian disrupted self. A disrupted/disruptive language refuses gender and identity boundaries that are seeped in reductions, assumptions, and Othering Orientalist stereotypes.

I am not the first to write *like* this. Luce Irigaray (1985) did not simply influence the methodology of writing this dissertation. Her own theoretical writing is poetic and performative. I am also influenced heavily in my writing by Arab women authors—perhaps a next project—including my mother, Kuwaiti Laila Al-Othman, Kuwaiti Buthayna Al-Esa, Algerian Ahlam Mustaghamni, Palestinian Huzama Habayib, and many others. These Arab women wrote of intimacy and exile hand in hand, of revolutions and wars, and each in her own way have included the figure of the exile.

A Nomad Writer: In Praise of Writing in Cafés

Rosi Braidotti (2014), in *Writing as a Nomadic Subject*, writes of her own writing process. She finds that writing she does in places of transit—airports, terminal buildings, trains,

and such—is her best. This nomadic way of writing is the one where I found my writing home. Yet for me it is cafés.

Writing itself can be secluding. As I wrote at home for days I found myself sinking into a sadness that could not be assuaged but by the company of others. My body was longing for community. Cafes provided a space of constant activity to surround me. The bustle made re-telling flow. After all I have heard most of the stories of the women of this dissertation in cafes.

At Saints cafe in State College, I lift my head from writing a particularly difficult situation. I pause to remove myself momentarily from the difficulty, to recompose myself and recompose my thoughts. To make connections, to allow for the lines of flight to occur.

At that moment I realize that I am looking at a familiar, and exchange looks with a comrade, a writing companion, a strong woman practicing the defying act of knowledge production. I get up and have a conversation, a renewed burst of energy is within me now, as I realize I am not alone in this struggle to produce.

These women comrades in academia are one of the reasons this dissertation is a finished dissertation. Speak to any graduate student and they will tell you of the grueling, alienating, and often depressing process of graduate school. Therefore, for writing large portions of this dissertation in writing sessions (in cafes) with strong women, I am thankful. Thus I have learned that writing of and with women need not be a writing in seclusion.

Intimate Shortcomings

While I am fully invested in the work of this dissertation, I am aware that there is a particular jarring shortcoming within that writing. While I have written on the meaning of Arab, I have failed to do the same in terms of Muslim. I have assumed this general category of Muslim without complicating it, for two reasons. First, it is beyond the scope of this work. I have not

chosen my artists as Muslim, in fact I am not sure if they all are, I have no interest in looking that up, it is not a factor in this dissertation. The second reason is lack of knowledge, as I cannot assume I am able to understand or even research all that is Muslim. I have spoken of the Muslim experience from my own situated knowledge, taken into consideration what I personally understand as mainstream Islam. I must, therefore, take a moment to acknowledge that a reduction may have taken place, and that in my quest to escape generalizations, a generalization has indeed escaped me.

Another shortcoming is that I may, in the writing this dissertation, appear to have taken on an Arab nationalism. Let me state then that I do not privilege Arabness and Arab identity in any way except that is my own, and that I use it here because of the situated nature of this dissertation. Hybrid identities—including my own as Palestinian-Kuwaiti—have often suffered from nationalisms, and imagined unity of identities. I in no means wish to reproduce this suffering, nor this disinclusion, and, therefore, must state that I wish that readers—with disregard to their own identities—would find something to relate to and converse with in this work.

Restless Bodies: Taking This Dissertation Further

I cannot, however, deny my desire that Arab women in particular will read this writing. In this dissertation I have conversed with Arab women, it is my hope that the conversation continues.

In order to take this work further and make it better accessible for Arab women, I hope to re-write Chapter Two: *Corrupt Women: A Reading of Corporeality, Displacement, and Memory Through the Work of Arab Women Artists*, and publish it as an Arabic article in a magazine dedicated to women readers. I also wish to publish two books from this dissertation. One

academic, and one fiction. In the fiction book, I wish to include more narratives and retold stories that did not make it into the final edit of this dissertation.

I believe that corrupt women, exiles, refugees, hybrids, Others, are restless bodies, always in a state of becoming. I wish to continue to honor this nomadic restlessness of these strange/r bodies in future work, whether it be derived from this dissertation or not. It is my concluding wish that you, reader, have made yourself vulnerable while reading this dissertation, so that we have, perhaps, become strange/rs together.

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(2014) Institute for the Arts and Humanities Graduate Assistant

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Digital Content and Social Media Manager

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Penn State University, School of Visual Arts, Art Education.

(2011) Teaching Assistant in Kuwait University, Department of Art and Design

SELECT EXHIBITIONS

(2014) Exhibited */the last wound/* and */all you can carry/* , Borland Gallery, PSU

(2012) Exhibited *FOREIGN POLICE(Y)*, Borland Gallery, PSU as part of the
collective *Committing Humor* show

(2010) Exhibited in the Centre for Creative Collaboration, London
Project *five.five.five*. A time-specific digital video performance

(2009) Exhibited in the Goldsmiths Digital Studios, London (2009)
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