

A Past Not Yet Passed

Postmemory in the Work of Mona Hatoum

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What I, as the daughter of someone who lived through the Nakba, learned . . . was that for Palestinians, both memory and Postmemory have a special valence because the past is not yet passed.

—Lila Abu-Lughod

A man [shot] a bullet into the neck of my sister Salhiyeh who was nine months pregnant. Then he cut her stomach open with a butcher's knife.

—Testimony of Ms. Haleem Eid, 30, survivor of the Deir Yassin massacre

Mona Hatoum is one of the most internationally recognized and acclaimed Palestinian artists working today. Born in Lebanon and residing in the United Kingdom since 1975 (when she was unable to return to her home following the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war), Hatoum has produced an oeuvre marked not only by her personal experience of exile but also by the collective Palestinian experience of dispossession and occupation. Although it is clear that in her work Hatoum deals with what can be described as the ongoing “Nakbaization” facing Palestinians, she does so while actively evading didactic political narration. Yet, beneath the deliberate political opacity of Hatoum’s work, one can find traces of a form of “postmemory” particular to the Palestinian experience. Evidence of postmemory can be found in many works from across Hatoum’s career, and can in turn be seen as central to her emphasis on the broader issues of trauma, gender, orality, and corporeality.

Used to describe the relationship to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of previous generations, postmemory is characterized by a transmission of memory from previous generations that is invested in

and experienced so closely by a subsequent generation that these memories seem to constitute personal memories in their own right.¹ It can be argued that Hatoum's work exhibits the presence of postmemory because it is shaped by the memory of critical events in Palestinian history that the artist did not experience directly. The relationship between Mona Hatoum's work and postmemory can be seen perhaps most clearly in her now iconic *Measures of Distance* (1988).

Measures of Distance, one of Hatoum's most well-known works, is notable for operating in the interstice between film, art, and the documentary, thus making it the subject of analysis by scholars across various disciplines.² Based on a series of letters between the artist and her mother, the work explores the consequences of exile on multiple generations of Palestinian women, while challenging audiences to revise their assumptions around Palestinian identity and experience. A transfixing and repetitive work, the piece focuses on the testimonies of the artist and her mother, raising questions about the im/possibility of the narration of trauma and encouraging a spectatorial activity that draws attention to the inability to close the traumatic gaps generated by exile.³

The fifteen-minute video is a touching portrayal of Hatoum's and her mother's experience of exile. Static Arabic text, consisting of letters from Hatoum's mother, reflecting the pain of exile, is superimposed over the naked figure of the artist's mother. The text, translated into English, is read aloud by the artist, creating a fluid connection between the story and narration of both mother and daughter. The work also includes an overlapping sound track of a conversation between Hatoum and her mother. The visual distance between mother and daughter created by the fragmented text and the disorientating overlapping sound track serve to reinforce an overriding sense of distance between not only Hatoum and her subject but also Hatoum and us as the audience.

The impact of exile, displacement, and the experience of postmemory in *Measures of Distance* is perhaps nowhere more clearly articulated than in the section of the video in which Hatoum translates this letter from her mother:

Can you imagine us having to separate from all our loved ones, leaving everything behind and starting again from scratch, our family scattered all over the world. . . . And now that you and your sisters have left Lebanon, you are again living in another exile and in a culture that is totally different to your own. So, when you talk about a feeling of fragmentation and not knowing where you really belong, well, that has been the painful reality of all our people.⁴

The act of Hatoum narrating her mother's experience exposes an experience of postmemory by collapsing the divide between artist and

subject. As it remains unclear who is telling “their” story and therefore to whom the story belongs, the piece suggests both explicitly and implicitly that the memory and experience of exile is shared by both mother and daughter. This reinforces Lila Abu-Lughod’s suggestion that the exile brought about as a consequence of the Nakba (Arabic for the Catastrophe) is a history not yet passed for the generations of Palestinians born after the Nakba. Put differently, the artist’s experience of a double exile is indicative of Abu-Lughod’s suggestion that Palestinian offspring not only carry the surrogate postmemory recollections of their parents but also experience the consequences of these memories directly in their own reality.

Measures of Distance thus draws attention both to the shared points of connection in the experiences of both mother and daughter (and two generations) and to the multitude of distances between mother and daughter, including storytelling and narration, history and the present, writing and reading, Arabic and English, subject and artist. The Arabic text in the video is also reminiscent of barbed wire separating the bodies of mother and daughter and insinuates a sense of distance created with threat. This allusion to a corporeal peril created by lines of separative wire is reminiscent of Hatoum’s well-known work *Homebound* (2000), in which the audience is separated from a domestic environment, albeit a threatening *unheimlich* one, by threads of wire cables. Jill Bennett explains that the type of installation seen in *Homebound* “facilitates the carryover of an affective response from one piece to another; Hatoum’s incarcerative space engenders a certain bodily response . . . [in which] one is effectively assisted in a process of embodied perception.”⁵ The utilization of traumatic memory and experience and its facilitation in works of art by Hatoum serve to create an “empathic connection” between artwork and audience.⁶ As one views *Measures of Distance* from the perspective of the camera, and, as a consequence, the viewpoint of Hatoum, the audience is implicated in the intimate space captured and created by the work. One is, thus, empathically caught in the intimate space between mother and daughter. The separations between subject and artist, whether semantic, bodily, or visual, serve to highlight the notion that it is exile that binds Hatoum and her mother in *Measures of Distance*.⁷

The intimacy in *Measures of Distance* is further facilitated by the unclothed figure of Hatoum’s mother, and the naked body of an older Palestinian woman brings to the work a series of Western conceptions of gender and sexuality ascribed to Middle Eastern women. In recent years the Western gaze has focused its attention on issues of gender in the work of female Middle Eastern artists; importantly, this is an oversimplification of gender roles in the Middle East and is a projection of Western feminist ideology on the Arabic Other. Although Hatoum’s work is notable for engaging with issues of gender more broadly (and much has been written

about her work in this regard), it is vital to at least briefly consider how the representation of women in the history of Palestinian cultural output has an impact on the reading and analysis of Hatoum's work.⁸

In the Palestinian national narrative, Palestine is metamorphorized as a woman, and an abundance of Palestinian literature uses the metaphor of the woman as a symbol of Palestine. This is seen most clearly in the work of the national poet of Palestine, Mahmoud Darwish, especially in his well-known poem *A Lover from Palestine*. The Western essentializing perception of Middle Eastern women does not allow for the culturally diverse roles and perceptions of women in various Middle Eastern cultures. In the case of Palestinian women, this consideration disavows the specific significance of women's storytelling and the symbol of the female body as a metaphor for the land of Palestine. It is therefore significant that in *Measures of Distance* the mother's naked body is literally layered with stories of exile and the effects of the Nakba. The naked female figure in *Measures of Distance* is thus utilized twice as the nexus between Hatoum and the Palestinian homeland: Hatoum's mother is a conduit to the experience of the Nakba and historical Palestine, as well as a more universal Palestinian symbol of the lost homeland.

The emphasis in *Measures of Distance* on both testimony and memory signals a central concern evident in Palestinian cultural production more broadly in which the dispossession and exile brought by the foundation of Israel is highlighted as an ongoing event—a past not yet passed. The ongoing experience of occupation and exile is represented by artists not only through the use of archival history but also through an exploration of the role of memory as a tool in the validation and verification of experience. Edward Said explains that images associated with memory and aspiration are for Palestinians often the only symbolic substitute for their citizenship or relationship to place.⁹ Images are thus invested in as tools of historical, political, and cultural confirmation. As a language comprised of images, Palestinian visual art (along with other forms of art) is not only a crucial vehicle for the representation of the Palestinian experience but also a verification of it. Because Palestinian archival history has been placed in a subordinate position to that of the Jewish experience, and its documentation appears scant in comparison to the “monolith” of Jewish history, then memory and the oral tradition are often the most relied on conduits of history.¹⁰ As can be evidenced in the refugee camp art of the years following Al-Nakba, memory is a potent force in the facilitation of Palestinian art practice.¹¹ For the generations of Palestinians following the Nakba, even though the Catastrophe was not directly experienced, the aftereffects of the event continue to shape their everyday existence, and, as a result, the events often manifest themselves in contemporary Palestinian art.

Postmemory and the Nakba

It is without a doubt that the events of the Nakba play a paramount role in the collective memory of Palestinians. However, as a theoretical and analytical framework, collective memory, with its associations to nationalism and its frequent affiliation and manipulation as a tool of propaganda, is neither a sufficient term nor frame to describe the nuances and potency of memory in the Palestinian discourse. It is precisely the essentializing character of collective memory that renders it unable to suitably describe the Palestinian association to memory. The presence of memory in Palestinian art is not merely bound to the shared consciousness model of recollection found in collective memory. Collective memory in Palestinian art requires a more refined framework: not only one that is inclusive of the collective and often essentializing experience but one that also subsumes personal memory. It is the notion of postmemory that accommodates the personal association to collective recollection and is thus a more refined concept, one more suitable to the Palestinian understanding of memory.

The concept of postmemory is founded on Kaja Silverman's notion of heteropathic recollection. Silverman's theory is based on the concept that one is able to carry surrogate memories of another through a process of heteropathic identification, creating a method and relationship where an individual takes on to his or herself the memories of another.¹² Marianne Hirsch has elaborated on the concept of heteropathic recollection with the ensuing model of postmemory. Hirsch describes this model of memory as being a departure from preconceived ideas of memory and history as a result of its basis in generational distance and deep personal connection. She elaborates by explaining that "postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose belated stories are evoked by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated."¹³

Lila Abu-Lughod's theory that postmemory has a special valence for Palestinians reassesses the parameters of Hirsch's postmemory model that relies heavily on the idea of a disparity between the experience of Holocaust trauma survivors and their children. Hirsch's model cannot adhere to the contemporary Palestinian experience, as post-Nakba offspring are themselves subject to the ongoing trauma that has arisen as a result of the Catastrophe. Consequently, postmemory in the Palestinian experience is not only grounded in the surrogate memories of the Catastrophe but is also carried over into the contemporary experience of exile and dispossession. Memory in effect transcends generational and historical divides and makes its way into the present as a living history.¹⁴ It can be argued that the children of the survivors of the Nakba, comparable to the children of

Holocaust survivors, experience an everyday reality that is overshadowed by the memory of a much significant past lived through by their parents.¹⁵

The presence of postmemory in the work of Mona Hatoum, particularly in artworks with reference to the repercussions and memories of the Nakba, can be said to exemplify traumatic memory. The differentiation between traumatic and narrative memory is a noteworthy one. Traumatic memory breaks the ongoing narrative and in so doing severs connections between the past, the present, and the future.¹⁶ The psychology of trauma argues widely that the clear linear narration of one's traumatic memories is a significant step in the process of recovery. This process of transformation from traumatic to linear memory is reliant on an audience.

Traumatic memory's lack of a coherent sequential order is reminiscent of Said's anxiety concerning the Palestinian story's lack of a coherent beginning, middle, and end. As a history that is to a large extent oral, and whose primary reference is traumatic memory, Palestinian history has an analogous configuration to traumatic memory, one absent of chronological succession. Brison's explanation of traumatic memory's reliance on an appreciative audience is also a notion that resonates with Said. An accepting appreciative audience is akin to a sense of acknowledgment. If an appreciative audience is suggested as a facilitating agent in overcoming trauma, this perhaps explains the popular assertion that violence and suffering will not cease for Palestinians until there has been an acknowledgment of their suffering.¹⁷

In contrast to traumatic memory, narrative memory is characterized by an individual's control over their memory and the recounting of their experience. In other words, "[it] is not passively endured; rather it is an act on the part of the narrator, a speech act that defuses traumatic memory, giving shape and temporal order to the events recalled."¹⁸ If one is to accept Brison's distinction between traumatic and narrative memory, her characterization resonates with models of memory transmission employed by Hatoum. In effect, one can come to understand the modes of memory recounting the Nakba and the process of exile utilized by Hatoum as defined by traumatic memory.

The memory and postmemory of the Nakba is of paramount importance in Palestinian history as a result of the absence of archival history on the subject. The destruction of the Palestinian presence in historical Palestine, and the Zionist ethos that disavows their existence entirely, serve to further the reliance on memory and postmemory as validation of the Palestinian presence and experience. Mahmoud Darwish describes Palestine, writing, "We are a country of words."¹⁹ Darwish, here, states that Palestine and Palestinianess are comprised of words and not the land itself nor text or visual forms. He clearly tells us that historical Palestine exists in the oral tradition. For, with the lack of archival and institutional

presence, it is the oral tradition, a tradition bound to memory, that records, interprets, and disseminates history.

The division of modes of memory between narrative and traumatic memory is one that is concomitant to the differences in emphasis found in the traditional Palestinian storytelling distinctions between the *hikayat* and the *qissa*. Oral history in traditional Palestinian culture is distributed on the basis of gender. The *hikayat* is traditionally the female domain, one that has a particular focus on fables and folktales. This type of storytelling is based on accounts of real happenings, either in history or in the speaker's experience but is prone to exaggeration and sentimentality. The *hikayat* stands in contrast to the *qissa*, and is traditionally often referred to by males as *kizb*, or lies.²⁰ The *qissa* is a linear narrative form of storytelling, one more akin to our Western conventional conception of the historical discourse. History, or *al tarikh*, is a discourse traditionally associated with a male teller. Under such a framework, as Susan Slyomovics explains, "counter-commentary" and "questions and oppositions become the domain of female utterance." As a result, the male voice is a conduit of official history, whilst the female voice is relegated to a reactive role, challenging official and archival history. Slyomovics goes further, referencing Mikhail Bakhtin's suggestion that hierarchies are intrinsic to language. As Bakhtin notes, the authoritative is one that is supported and maintained by the political, legal, and moral authorities that dominate public activities. In the case of Palestine, males are supported by what Bakhtin describes as the "prior discourse." They are conduits of what is seen as official history, while women, associated with domestic and oral history, are seen as separate to political history.²¹

The divide in emphasis between the *hikayat* and the *qissa* is, in cause and effect, a differentiation between the processes of oral and archival history. One must understand that oral history shares the importance of narrative and archival history and both are equally plagued with historical inaccuracy. Beyond existing in a dialectical relationship constantly competing for historical legitimacy, oral and archival history are also heavily reliant on one another. It can be said that history "need not be opposed to witness memories; rather, memory is a source for, indeed it propels, history by instigating the inquiry."²²

The coexistence of *hikayat* and *qissa* histories is woven into the fabric of Palestinian history, culture, and collective understanding. The most recognizable persona of the Palestinian resistance and strive toward nationhood is that of Yassir Arafat, leader of the Palestinian people. Arafat's almost permanent donning of the distinct *keffieh* cloth meant that it became an icon of Palestinianess.²³ Traditionally a symbol of masculinity, the black and white keffieh has since the 1970s become increasingly divorced from its gendered role, becoming instead a symbol of the Palestinian liberation movement.²⁴ The inclusion of the keffieh in the work of

Mona Hatoum is the most overt reference to the artist's cultural heritage to be found in her entire oeuvre.

Hatoum's *Keffieh*, comprised of human hair on cotton, was created between 1993 and 1999. At first glance the work appears to be a traditional Palestinian keffieh, yet on closer inspection, one quickly notices strands of female human hair protruding from the cloth's boundary. The black-and-white cotton cloth has a simple black border woven into the textile. The human hair is woven into the cloth, extending beyond the border of the textile itself to repeat the organic wave and fence-like shapes found in the inner keffieh. The hair feminizes this traditionally masculine nationalist symbol. Homi Bhabha notes that the metonym of the female body embroidered into the fabric of Hatoum's *Keffieh* exposes the masculine nationalist symbol as one that directs its aggression both internally and externally. He explains that the macho style directs its aggression internally and is "poised against the presence and participation of women, whose voices are repressed or sublimated in the cause of the struggle."²⁵ For Bhabha, the artist's feminized headscarf is an act of re-insertion of the place of women in the nationalist struggle.

The use of hair in *Keffieh* may also be understood as a comment on the storytelling role of women in Palestinian culture. All linear shapes in Hatoum's cloth are woven with cotton into the textile and are securely placed within the cloth. It is the more organic shapes that are embroidered in female hair. The textile is of such thin cotton that visible beneath its surface are the clumps of female hair at the ends of the embroidery work. One might align Hatoum's decision to allow unruly hair to protrude from the boundaries of the cloth and to embroider with hair only the organic shapes in *Keffieh* as an allusion to the female Palestinian storytelling of the nationalist struggle. The unruly hair embroidery stands in contrast to the linear cotton weave of *Keffieh*; this contrast can be related to the traditional distinction between hikayat and qissa storytelling. It is narrative linear history that is fixed and firmly woven into history and ideology, and it is the personal and traumatic memory of women that lurks beneath the surface. Such an analysis is in keeping with Bhabha's interpretation of *Keffieh* as one that highlights the sublimated voice and participation of women in the Palestinian struggle.²⁶

With the exception of *Keffieh*, Hatoum has since the early 1990s increasingly disassociated herself from any overt references to her cultural background and the Palestinian struggle.²⁷ The departure from explicit associations to her "Palestinianess" is cited by Hatoum as being instigated by the completion of *Measures of Distance*. The work signaled a moment of catharsis for Hatoum, and she claims that after its completion she felt a burden being lifted: "[I could] get on with other kinds of work, where

every work did not necessarily have to tell the whole story, where I could just deal with one little aspect of my experience.”²⁸

“Postmembering” Deir Yassin

Although Hatoum’s oeuvre is both too rich and diverse for works to be looked at simply through the prism of her Palestinian background, it is crucial to understand the signifiers in her work that relate directly to events in Palestinian history. Of particular interest is the way in which many of her works refer to the narrative of the village named Deir Yassin. Although Deir Yassin is but one example of over four hundred villages depopulated and destroyed with the foundation of Israel, it remains as an emblematic event of the Nakba.

Destroyed by Zionist forces in 1948, Deir Yassin is at the center of Palestinian collective memory of Al-Nakba and in the last seven decades has been invested in as a symbol of the Palestinian experience of the Zionist occupation. Moreover, it is often cited by Palestinians as the event that instigated the mass exodus of 1948 and the consequent occupation of historical Palestine.²⁹ Deir Yassin can therefore be interpreted as a collective memory lens into the events of Al-Nakba. The fixation on the historical events of Deir Yassin by both Palestinians and Israelis signifies the fact that the village itself has become bait in the ideological and propaganda campaign of both Arabs and Israelis.³⁰ In 1948, both sides, Zionist and Arab, exaggerated the events of the Deir Yassin massacre for their own propagandistic purposes. For the Zionists, the massacre and capture of Deir Yassin signified the strength of their military and was publicized throughout the Palestinian population to incite an exodus and fear of Zionist forces. Their exaggerations were also mirrored by the Palestinians, who at the time numbered the dead at anywhere between 200 and 350 inhabitants to encourage international sympathy for their plight.³¹ Deir Yassin was not an isolated event or attack, but is merely the most notorious and well documented of the 1948 massacres of Palestinians by Zionist forces.³² News of the massacre and of the occupation of Deir Yassin spread throughout Arab communities like wildfire. Menachim Begin, former Israeli prime minister and leader of the Irgun forces who led the attack on Deir Yassin, writes, “Arabs throughout the country, induced to believe wild tales of ‘Irgun butchery’ were seized with limitless panic and started to flee for their lives. This mass flight soon developed into a mad-dened, uncontrollable stampede.”³³ The stories of “Irgun butchery” cited by Begin locate their focal point on Zionist attacks against women. Frances Hasso writes about the effects of gender politics in the 1948 Zionist victory, by citing Ted Swedenberg’s analysis that honor was for Palestinians intimately related to both the possession of land and the maintenance of

kin women's virginity or exclusive sexual availability.³⁴ The exaggerated reports of Deir Yassin focused on the brutality toward pregnant women, often claiming that they had been sliced open, disemboweled, and thrown into wells.³⁵ These reports have now been documented in research and archival projects such as *Deir Yassin Remembered* that chronicles the individual testimonies of the massacre, including that of Haleem Eid, who witnessed the disembowelment of her pregnant sister.³⁶ Importantly, the sexual and physical attacks at Deir Yassin, it can be argued, were acts of deliberate psychological warfare by the Zionist forces, since the Zionists were aware that such attacks on women would spread fear amongst the local population.³⁷

Though the stories of brutality that occurred there are disseminated through oral history, Deir Yassin is exceptional in that only 4 of its 144 houses were destroyed in 1948. The village itself is still largely intact and is now located in the Har Nof district of West Jerusalem and has been converted into an Israeli mental hospital. Deir Yassin has, however problematically, achieved a place in archival history. A covering up of the massacre was impossible, since reports of the killings surfaced immediately.³⁸ As such, Deir Yassin is an exception among villages depopulated in 1948, which, in contrast, rely almost exclusively on oral history to record the events and experiences of the Nakba. It is fitting that Deir Yassin, a place that remains emblematic of the Palestinian experience of the Nakba, repeatedly finds its way into the work of Hatoum, who is arguably the most well-known Palestinian artist in the international art world. Rather than focusing on the archival documents and history of the village, however, the references to Deir Yassin in Hatoum's work rely instead on the transmission of a traumatic postmemory.

In the aftermath of the Sabra and Shatila massacres on Palestinian refugees in 1982 during the Lebanese civil war, Hatoum recounted a dream relating to the Nakba and the massacre of Deir Yassin:

I went to Beirut looking for my parents and in the wreckage of their home I found two plastic boxes—a pink one and a blue one. I opened the blue box and it was full of tiny toy soldiers that exploded out into the air around me becoming a cloud of flies that took on the shape of a black gravestone—“We were only obeying orders!” I heard them say. . . . When I turned back to the pink box, the lid was open disgorging human entrails in an endless stream. I heard my mother's voice saying, “They were disembowelling pregnant women, that's why we had to leave.”³⁹

The blue and pink boxes of Hatoum's dream are representative of a gendered Palestinian differentiation as to the reasons for the 1948 mass exodus. The pink box, one might understand as being symbolic of the female experience. It is significant that Hatoum claims to have had

this dream at the time of the Lebanese civil war. Her own experience of violence, oppression, and massacre of Palestinians is indicated through this dream to be subconsciously bound to the events of the Nakba. This collapsed connection between the Nakba and contemporary events experienced by Hatoum is indicative of postmemory. The trauma of the Nakba passed down through her parents and, in the case of her dream, literally residing with them is carried over into her own experience. Thus, as Abu-Lughod suggests, as a Palestinian, Mona Hatoum's cultural past is not yet passed, and its trauma carries itself into the present. The postmemory trauma of Deir Yassin is one that is frequently evidenced and referenced in Hatoum's art. The most obvious of such references are her works *The Negotiating Table* (1983), *Socle du Monde* (1992–93), and *Entrails Carpet* (1995).

Hatoum describes the Israeli invasion and the attacks on refugees in camps during the Lebanese civil war as the most shattering experience of her life. It was in response to the events of that war that the artist conceived of and performed *The Negotiating Table*.⁴⁰ Presented five times, the performance consisted of Hatoum lying motionless on a table with empty chairs on either side. The artist's body was covered in beef entrails—bloodstained, wrapped in plastic—and her head was covered in surgical gauze, while talks of peace by Western leaders and reports of the events of the war were playing in the background.

The juxtaposition of the media reports of the events, the peace discussions by Western leaders, and the seemingly brutalized body of the artist highlighted the chasm between the physical experiences of war and brutality and those that are reported and discussed. It is here that Hatoum's decision to use animal entrails becomes a point of significant import. Her recounting of her dream of Deir Yassin and her mention of entrails were made within the same year she performed *The Negotiating Table*. Beyond being an indication of her postmemory of the Nakba, references to the haunting nightmares of Deir Yassin in *The Negotiating Table* bring to the surface issues surrounding the controversy between archival and oral accounts of the massacre. The disembowelment of women at Deir Yassin features prominently in oral history of the massacre and is almost entirely absent in archival accounts of the event.⁴¹

The visual references to the massacre of Deir Yassin become less invested with political rhetoric and obvious allusions to Palestinian history in the latter years of Hatoum's oeuvre. The departure from overt political reference and rhetoric coincides with Hatoum's conscious move to do so after the completion of *Measures of Distance*. Nonetheless, when one becomes aware of the significance of the imagery of entrails and their reference to Deir Yassin, Hatoum's recurrent employment of them begins to take on a different significance. Take, for example, *Entrails Carpet*, a

work from 1995. In contrast to the literal use of entrails in the 1983 *The Negotiating Table*, the artist's use of the entrails motif in the later work is accomplished with silicone rubber. Despite the abandonment of real entrails, the silicone substitutes still provoke the same visceral response in the viewer, a response promoted by a sense of shock when one looks more closely at the piece, or indeed even at the title, and the luminous carpet is transformed into an object of repulsion.

The emphasis on materiality in the work is also significant, since silicone is now a medium we associate with the imitation of the real. It makes sense as a progression for Hatoum, when abandoning performance and the use of real entrails to choose silicone, the closest artificial medium, as her substitute. Frozen in their "plastic stillness," the entrails in the artist's carpet are transparent.⁴² The audience can look through them directly to the floor; our glimpse of the floor beneath the carpet is veiled by undulating curved entrails. Thus they become the lens through which we see the ground beneath us. To choose a carpet covered in entrails is to suggest that they literally sit on the surface, and on the place in which we find our grounding and our foundations—our home. Hatoum's recounting of her dream involving entrails takes place in her parent's home in her place of birth, Lebanon. The *unheimlich* response triggered by a domestic object in *Entrails Carpet* may be understood as an allusion to the presence of the story of Deir Yassin in Hatoum's home.

The entrails motif also finds itself in Hatoum's *Socle du Monde*, a large minimalist cube that references Piero Manzoni's influential work from 1961 of the same title. *Socle du Monde* translates to "pedestal of the world," and, as such, Manzoni's version—a sculpture or pedestal placed outside—is suggestive of the notion that everything in the world, all vegetable, animal, and mineral forms, are works of art. The line between what constitutes the work of art and what structures support or influence it becomes bound in Manzoni's work. Hatoum's appropriation of *Socle du Monde* is covered in iron fillings that are evocative of entrails, and suggests that her foundation, or pedestal of the world, is literally covered in entrails. As we have come to understand, for Mona Hatoum, entrails are a reference to Deir Yassin, and it is Deir Yassin that is cited, in her 1982 dream, to be the instigator of exodus. Since exile can be described as the determining state of being in the Palestinian experience and therefore their world, it is reasonable that Hatoum chooses the motif of entrails to cover her pedestal to the world. In doing so, she suggests that her world literally has its foundations in exile. If we are to accept the analysis that Manzoni's work binds the work of art to its influences in the world, then Hatoum's version takes on a new meaning. *Socle du Monde* exemplifies Hatoum's perception of the "entire world . . . as foreign land."⁴³

The historical debate surrounding the massacre of Deir Yassin and

the various attempts at creating a memorial museum commemorating the event are indicative of the Palestinian anxiety toward archival historical presence.⁴⁴ Hatoum's *Self-Erasing Drawing* (1979) and *+ and -* (1994) can both be interpreted as a reflection of Said's anxiety concerning the erasure and exclusion of the Palestinian presence and history. The earlier of these two works, *Self-Erasing Drawing*, was made during Hatoum's student years and is conceptual and minimalist in style. The work is a small 28-by-28-cm square filled with sand. The kinetic object consists of a small rotating arm that concurrently draws lines in the sand with one side of its arm and then proceeds to erase them with the other. This process of mark making and consequent erasure results in an anticipation of the sand drawing's inevitable disappearance. The expression "to draw a line in the sand" is to imply that a particular idea or activity will not be supported or tolerated. To actively erase or refute this idea is to suggest that steadfastness can be overridden, and in the case of Hatoum's work, literally overwritten. The kinetic arm's process of erasure thus forges "a sense of existence accentuated by a fear of disappearance."⁴⁵

The latter version of Hatoum's sand drawing, the much larger *+ and -* from 1994, is, largely by virtue of its title, more actively connotative of Palestinian history and experience. When one decides to approach *+ and -* under what might be described as a Palestinian lens, the work becomes, as implied by its title, a discussion and representation of presence and absence. The dialectic between absence and presence is articulated through Said's many remarks about the archival absence of the Palestinian presence and history, just as it informs Carol Bardenstein's studies on the systematic Israeli campaign to erase the Palestinian physical and environmental presence. When one considers Bardenstein's studies in relation to Hatoum's *Self-Erasing Drawing* and *+ and -*, the marks made in both of Hatoum's kinetic works appear as though they are plow lines, in land made ready for the planting of seeds, only to be swiftly erased as soon as they're created.

The Palestinian presence in historical Palestine is actively erased within the Israeli landscape. As an ideological and physical war over the land, the collective memories of both Palestinians and Israelis are bound to the landscape. Consequently, there is constant antagonism between both their collective memories of and about the land. The omissive and destructive qualities of Jewish collective memory of the land over its Other (that is to say, the Palestinian collective memory) have been widely written about by Bardenstein. Her studies focus on the landscape of Israel and the way it has been systematically manipulated by both Israelis and Palestinians as a repository of both their collective memories.

Under Bardenstein's analysis, the Zionist ethos "a land without people for a people without land" has been projected onto the landscape of historical Palestine by the Jewish National Fund (JNF) in a clear attempt

to expunge the presence of the Other. The JNF is responsible for the plantation of several hundred million trees in Israel and in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.⁴⁶ These JNF forests are a symbol of return for the Jewish people to their promised land of Israel, and the transformation of the landscape is an assertion of their presence and return after generations in exile. As sites of cultural commemoration and memory, forests are transformed into an ideological battleground between Israelis and Palestinians over presence and remembrance in Israel. As a result of its tree-planting activities over the sites of villages destroyed by the Zionist forces between 1947 and 1948, the JNF is a facilitator of a historical cover-up. The fund's widespread planting is an act that attempts to erase Palestinian collective memory of the landscape. Though pared back and minimal, Hatoum's self-erasing sand works seem to tap into the history of Palestinian erasure within the landscape and may be interpreted as loaded minimal and conceptual works, operating and discussing in a sophisticated aesthetic language the process of erasure of the Palestinian presence. Further still, it is as if Hatoum's kinetic machines concurrently reveal and erase Palestinian *sumud*.⁴⁷ The Palestinian steadfastness in the face of adversity, their metaphorical line in the sand, is repeatedly destroyed and erased only, like the prickly pear, to resurface over and over again.

The concern over the erasure of the Palestinian presence is also implicated in Hatoum's 1995 *You Are Still Here*. The piece is a portrait-sized mirror with the words "you are still here" etched into it. Curiously, when one looks at the work, there is a feeling of impossibility. Like an optical illusion, one cannot simultaneously look at one's reflection and read the text inscribed on the mirror. Our perceptions allow us to do only one or the other. Both activities, reading and viewing, nonetheless strive toward the same affirmation: a verification and assertion of presence. The subtle contours of the inscribed text are not boldly visible. Verification and validation of presence, though achieved, is done with an element of strain and difficulty.

One might imagine Mona Hatoum looking into *You Are Still Here* and viewing her own reflection. One wonders what propels the artist to inscribe such a statement in her work. One might go so far as to ask, Where is *here*? And why would my place and presence *here* ever be in such question that it requires to be stated and asserted? It is when one begins to ask these questions in reference to Hatoum's motivation for creating the work that her background as a Palestinian begins to rise to the surface. Assuming Hatoum etched the mirror herself, one imagines the artist inscribing the four simple words into the glass, all the while faced with her own reflection. Like so many of Hatoum's works, *You Are Still Here* take its cue from Edward Said's seminal text, and is in itself a reflection on exile.

Notes

1. Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 5.
2. Notable examples include the work of Kamal Boullata, Laura Marks, and Ella Shohat. See Kamal Boullata, *Palestinian Art: From 1850 to the Present* (London: Saqi, 2009), 176–78; Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film, Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 153–56; and Ella Shohat, *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 308–12.
3. Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 114.
4. Mona Hatoum, quoted in Gannit Ankori, *Palestinian Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), 123.
5. Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 143.
6. *Ibid.*, 143.
7. Amal Amireh, “Between Complicity and Subversion: Body Politics in Palestinian National Narrative,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, no. 4 (2003): 750.
8. Notable examples include the work of Kamal Boullata, Amelia Jones, and Marsha Meskimmon. See Boullata, *Palestinian Art*; Amelia Jones, ed., *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003); and Marsha Meskimmon, *Women Making Art: History, Subjectivity, Aesthetics* (New York: Routledge, 2003).
9. Edward Said, “Emily Jacir: Where We Come From,” in *Emily Jacir: Belongings*, by Christian Kravagna, John Menick, Stella Rollig, and Edward Said (Vienna: Folio, 2003), 47–48; and Edward Said, “Slow Death: Punishment by Detail,” in *From Oslo to Iraq and the Roadmap* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), 94.
10. Alon Confino, “Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method,” *American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 (1997): 1397.
11. Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 123–60.
12. Kaja Silverman, cited in Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 22.
13. Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 22.
14. Karl Mannheim, cited in Ruben Rumbaut, “Ages, Life Stages, and Generational Cohorts: Decomposing the Immigrant First and Second Generations in the United States,” *International Migration Review* 38, no. 3 (2004): 1162; and Rosemary Sayigh, “Palestinian Camp Women as Tellers of History,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 27, no. 2 (1998): 45.
15. Lila Abu-Lughod, “Return to Half Ruins: Memory, Postmemory, and Living History in Palestine,” in *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*, ed. Ahmad H. Sa’adi and Lila Abu-Lughod (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 79.
16. Susan J. Brison, “Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self,” in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, ed. Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), 40.
17. Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), xx; Tony Judt, introduction to Said, *From Oslo to Iraq and the Roadmap*, xviii; and Daniel McGowan and Marc H. Ellis, *Remembering Deir Yassin: The Future of Israel and Palestine* (New York: Olive Branch, 1998), ix.
18. Brison, “Trauma Narratives,” 40.

19. Mahmoud Darwish, "We Walk towards a Land," in *Sand and Other Poems*, trans. Rana Kabbani (New York: Routledge, 1986), 3.
20. Rosemary Sayigh, "Women's Nakba Stories: Between Being and Knowing," in Sa'adi and Abu-Lughod, *Nakba*, 137.
21. Susan Slyomovics, *The Object of Memory: Arab and Jew Narrate the Palestinian Village* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 207. Slyomovics cites Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 342.
22. Susan Slyomovics, "The Rape of Qula," in Sa'adi and Abu-Lughod, *Nakba*, 32.
23. Said K. Aburish, *Arafat: From Defender to Dictator* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), 31.
24. Brigitte L. Nacos, "The Portrayal of Female Terrorists in the Media: Similar Framing Patterns in the News Coverage of Women in Politics and Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 28, no. 5 (2005): 439. The individual most notably responsible for subverting the masculinity of the *keffiyeh* is the Palestinian female icon Leila Khaled.
25. Homi Bhabha, "Another Country," in *Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking*, ed. Fereshteh Daftari (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2006), 34.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Mona Hatoum, quoted in *Mona Hatoum: Domestic Disturbance*, ed. Laura Steward Heon (North Adams, MA: Storey Books, 2001), 32.
28. Ankori, *Palestinian Art*, 137.
29. McGowan and Ellis, *Remembering Deir Yassin*, vii.
30. Majid Al-Haj, "National Ethos, Multicultural Education and the New History Textbooks in Israel," *Curriculum Inquiry* 35, no. 1 (2005): 64. Al-Haj's study of history textbooks in Israeli schools documents the ways Israeli history textbooks differ from the Palestinian narrative of the event.
31. Meir Pa'il, quoted in McGowan and Ellis, *Remembering Deir Yassin*, 38. In an interview with Daniel McGowan, Colonial Meir Pa'il, Israeli military historian and retired member of the Israeli Defence Force, discusses his involvement with the Hagana at the massacre of Deir Yassin.
32. Pappe, *A History of Modern Palestine*, 128–30; and Nur-eldeen Masalha, "On Recent Hebrew and Israeli Sources for the Palestinian Exodus, 1947–1949," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 18, no. 1 (1998): 124. Deir Yassin was a consequence of Plan Dalet, a military blueprint coordinated by the Hagana (the Zionist military that eventually became the Israeli Defence Force), in anticipation of clashes with Arab forces in Palestine both before and after the foundation of Israel. As Plan Dalet was realized between April and May 1948, Deir Yassin was one of the first villages to be destroyed under the new military plan.
33. Menachim Begin, quoted in McGowan and Ellis, *Remembering Deir Yassin*, 3.
34. Frances Hasso, "Modernity and Gender in Arab Accounts of the 1948 and 1967 Defeats," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32, no. 4 (2000): 495. Hasso cites Ted Swedenberg, *Memories of Revolt: The 1936–1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 78–79.
35. Hasso, "Modernity and Gender," 495. Hasso notes that stories of Zionist attacks against women held particular pertinence to Muslim Palestinians, who viewed women's bodies as especially vulnerable. The Muslim population considered sexual and physical attacks against women as prohibited, even in warfare.

36. Haleem Eid, in "Survivors' Accounts," Deir Yassin Remembered, www.deiryassin.org/survivors.html (accessed 29 April 2012)

37. Hasso, "Modernity and Gender," 495. The focus on the female body in the exodus of 1948 also extended to the nationalist movement in the early years following the Nakba. Historical Palestine was in these years often symbolized using the female figure. Importantly, as the loss of honor was seen as the instigator of the Palestinian exodus of 1948, the nationalist movement in the 1970s employed the new catchphrase "Land before honour" in order to counterweigh the effect of warfare tactics that would compromise honor.

38. Samera Esmeir, "Memories of Conquest: Witnessing Death in Tantura," in Sa'adi and Abu-Lughod, *Nakba*, 243.

39. Mona Hatoum, quoted in Michael Archer, Guy Brett, and Catherine de Zegher, *Mona Hatoum* (London: Phaidon, 1997), 122.

40. *Ibid.*, 127

41. Benny Morris, "The Historiography of Deir Yassin," *Journal of Israeli History* 24, no. 1 (2005): 97.

42. Edward Said, "The Art of Displacement: Mona Hatoum's Logic of Irreconcilables," in *Mona Hatoum: The Entire World as Foreign Land*, ed. Edward Said and Sheena Wagstaff (London: Tate Gallery, 2000), 7.

43. Yuko Hasegawa, *De-genderism détruire dit-elle/ill*, cited in Michael Brett, "Itinerary," in Archer, Brett, and de Zegher, *Mona Hatoum*, 38.

44. McGowan and Ellis, *Remembering Deir Yassin*, v-vi.

45. Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile," in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 186. In this seminal essay, Said argues that it is the exile's awareness of simultaneous dimensions and his or her ability to move between cultures that informs his or her view of "the entire world . . . as a foreign land" (185).

46. Carol Bardenstein, "Trees Forests and the Shaping of Palestinian and Israeli Collective Memory," in Bal, Crewe, and Spitzer, *Acts of Memory*, 158.

47. Translating from the Arabic to mean "steadfastness" or "doggedness," *sumud* is used to describe the steadfastness of Palestinians against the adversity of exile, occupation, and dispossession.