

Taking a Dagger to Stereotypes: Palestinian Art, Arab Woman, and Oppression.

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Author's Declaration: I declare that all the material debated in this essay is my own work.

Introduction

“Man said: blessed are the birds in their cages for they, at least, know the limits of their prison. Mourid Barghouti”

The history of place and the people of those lands, are always a important factor to understand and dive into more context. Background information will always build a strong understanding for our knowledge towards a conflict that we are personally not attached too. The following essay will be a tackle and bring to light the ongoing problematic situations that has been occurring since 1948, which is slightly over 75 years. Palestine has been under occupation for 75 year and has faced tremendous ethics cleansing. It will mention artists from Palestinians background or who have lived in Isreal, and that are aware of the injustice that has been going on. Before hand lets define the dictionary meaning of what Semitic means.

“Of or connected with the language group that includes Hebrew and Arabic”(Oxford)

Therefore, being against anti-Semitic means to also be Pro-Palestinian, they both stand for the same humanitarian right. For decades we have read in history books the endless white supremacy of the West colonising indigenous countries all around the world. We would believe that those inhumane acts are long gone and in the past. However, proven to be false.

Chapter 1: Motherland

In *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* by Ariella Azoulay, the introduction of the book begins with a photograph. It appears to be a mother cradling her infant on her lap as shown in Figure 1. From their names and the mothers clothing this could tell us that she is from a Muslim background from a region in the Middle East. Her garment is known to be called; ‘abaya’, commonly worn by woman from countries found in North African, Horn of African, and Middle Eastern regions. This garment is a worn in the act to be modest, to cover the entire body apart from the face, hands, and feet. The child in her arms wears a short sleeve striped t-shirt which is a more modern contrast compared to the cloth wrapped to the rest of his body.

“Aisha al-Kurd, is the overt and covert interlocutor of this book. ... Aisha and her husband (whose name I do not know), the parents of five children, were held in administrative detention for months by the Israeli authorities in 1988, and their house was demolished.” (Azoullay, P. 2012).



Figure 1. Aisha al-Kurd and her son Yasser



Figure 2. Madonna and Child

In the portrait the woman's facial expression portrays a feeling of sorrow. Her forehead is slightly frowned with her eyebrows slanting inwards, her inner lip corners pulling downwards, and her eyes shut. It is told that the eyes are the most crucial aspect of recognising someone's facial expression and the spiritual symbolism.

“The open eye is symbolic of life and intelligence and, closed, of sleep and death.”(Fingesten, P. (1959).

Her right hand is placed gently on her son's head, representing the protectiveness of a mother's natural behaviour. Possibly reminding us to specific Renaissance as well Baroque oil paintings, from between 15th to 17th century, paintings of Virgin Mary and Baby Jesus. Commonly made as visual art of iconography found in Orthodox as well as Catholic Churches, both naturally have different techniques/style to portray their icons, yet one another hold almost same practices. As seen in Figure 2, from the Baroque period, shares many similarities with Figure 1. The mother and the son, a notable figure in history and today's world. Motherhood the birth womb of human life. The Holy Bible and Quran both indeed reference Jesus birthplace. The Bible directly states it, and on the other hand the Quran gives us geographical understanding of the place referencing a date palm after Mary gave birth.

“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,”(Matthew, 2:1).

“And shake the trunk of this palm tree towards you, it will drop fresh, ripe dates upon you.” (Quran, 19:25).

This reveals a universally relatable nature of human suffering. Iconography highlights the close ethnic and cultural proximity between people in the Levant, emphasising the cruel paradox of Isreal's brutal and exclusionary settler colonial violence.

Chapter 2: Identity

Mona Hatoum a multi-disciplinary artist who performs innovative dramatic artworks. She is most commonly known for composing live performances, creative mixture installations combined with sculpture. It is important to know her background origins as it plays a huge part in her making, Hatoum's parents originate from Haifa, Palestine where they were exiled after 1948 to Lebanon, Beirut is Hatoum's birthplace. However, like many other refugees who arrived into Lebanon she never attained a Lebanese identity card. Hatoum's work focus point is to mitigate social structure of oppression.

“an uncharacteristically autobiographical work which, Hatoum has said, speaks of displacement, disorientation and a tremendous sense of loss as a result of the separation caused by war.” (Mona Hatoum. measures of distance. 1988 | moma.)

Hatoum has presented in many places and countries, in public, personal, and private places. Which allowed artistic fluidity in adventurous mediums. Her artworks and her body are intertwined to one another, her electrical currents in a few of her installations can be portrayed as a connectivity symbol. Interrelation between all her pieces, herself even so her audience. Hatoum has a persistent use of material; light, metal, wires, and glass all that have a industrial structure to them. While she also improvises her bodily material, hair. The industrial elements have to do with foundation cities, towns and manmade areas are constructed. By contrast when Hatoum uses her hair or the human body, she is embodying a representation of her identity her DNA, of her origins.

“I choose materials in a very intuitive way and it's actually basically if those materials are seductive...if they resonate with me” (Tate)

Janine Antoni from BOMB Magazine, interviews Mona Hatoum, the conversation between both of these women address several contradictions and a deeper analysis on Hatoum's artworks. Measures of Distance, 1988 and Light Sentence, 1992 are two artworks where Hatoum explores power structures, within different aspects of day to day issues. However, Hatoum always allows her audience to interpret her work accordingly to their personal feeling towards it. She states that her work could stand for multiple interpretation.

“The movement of the light bulb causes the shadows of the wire mesh lockers to be in perpetual motion, ... When you enter the space you have the impression that the whole room is swaying and you have the disturbing feeling that the ground is shifting under your feet.” (Hatoum, BOMB Magazine, 1998).

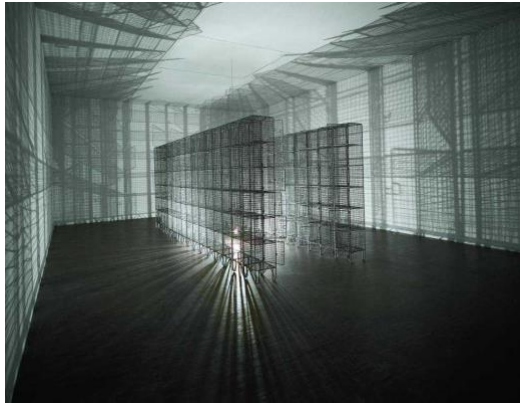


Figure 3. Light Sentence, 1992.

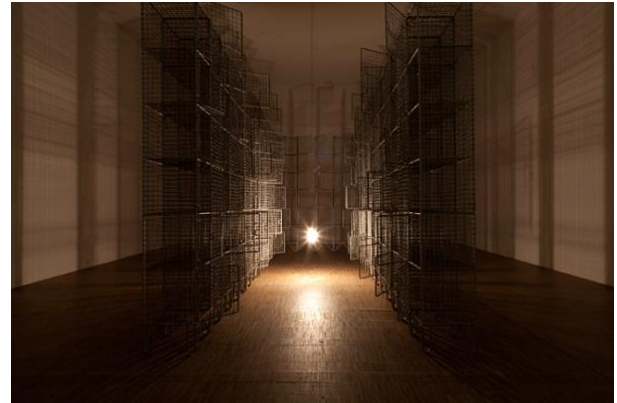


Figure 4. Light Sentence, 1992.

The room has a cold eerie mood to it, the bare metal cages stacked on one another, positioned in a U-shape. There is no source of natural light as the room does not consist of any windows which create an underground effect, and a form of blockage. Suspended from above the ceiling is a long cable light bulb, which floats in between the wire grids. The light source, not unexpectedly lays stretched shadows against the walls and ceiling of space. With the gradual manoeuvre of the light bulb the shadows embody a possessed attribute. The expansion that comes from the light, is impactful to the audience as it surpasses their bodily comfort form.

“While the title *Light Sentence*, which sounds like ‘life sentence’, suggests a punishment less severe, the word ‘light’, like its use in *The Light at the End*, refers to the very energy that makes vision possible. Thus, it is through our sense of seeing that we grasp how Hatoum’s work implies that not only those who are incarcerated are sentenced but also those who have eyes to see, when they experience – for a flashing second – what it feels like to be sentenced to life in prison.” (Boullata, K. (2009). *Palestinian art 1850-2005*. Saqi. Page.176)

Measures of Distance, 1988. A 15-minute-long film formation of compiled components of photos, writing projection, and a double audio track. The film begins with laughter between

the Hatoum and her mother, as the background sound they speak/gossip about their family members, sexuality, and the displacement result of the oppression. Hatoum's mother is having the conversation with her daughter while she is showering. We can hear drizzling water from the shower head. Hatoum does this while taking photographs of her mother. Being naked unveils, it frees, removing restrictions between both and connecting in a cleansed spiritual way. They have their conversation in their mother tongue, Arabic. Overlapped with Hatoum's English translations of letters her mother sent during the Lebanon war. Hatoum reads them out loud in English overlapping the Arabic girl talk in the background. For example, in a letter Hatoum's mother says the following;

“So, if I seem to be always irritable and impatient it's because life was very hard, when we first left Palestine. Can you imagine us having to separate from all our loved ones leaving everything behind and starting again from scratch” (Measures of Distance, 11:08-11:31)

In the final film Hatoum places the phrases from her mother's written Arabic letters over the images of her mother's nude body. The cursive motion of the Arabic words and the grid paper outline, resembles barbed wires. It forms a restriction to us as the audience watching as an outsider. Could be seen as barrier or protection Haroun is producing, perhaps reclaiming authority over the motherland.



Figure 5.



Figure 7.



Figure 6.

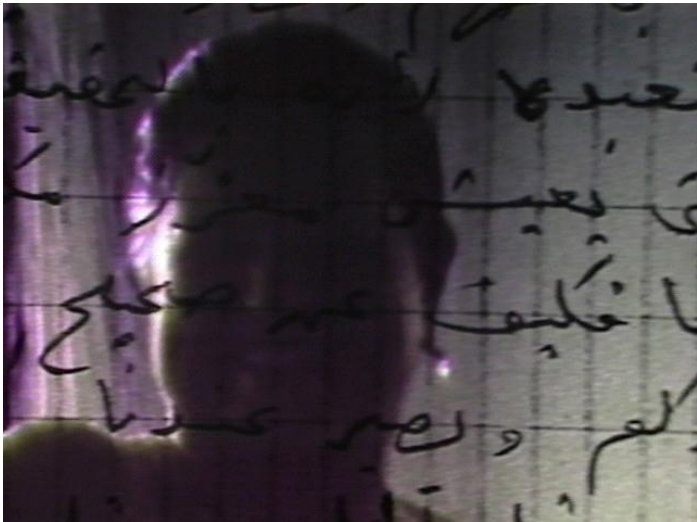


Figure 8.

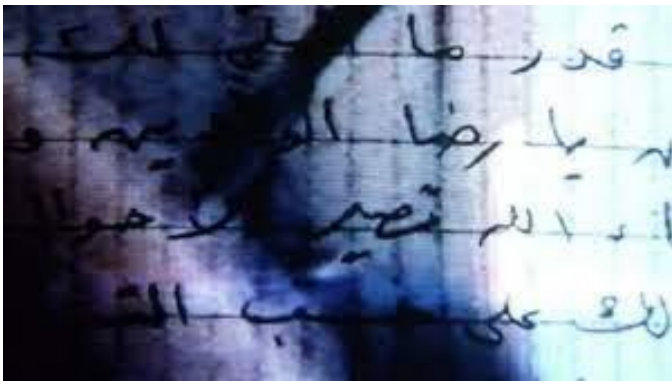


Figure 9.

Chapter 3: Class

“The photograph on the following page was filed in the archive under the laconic caption “Afula. Arab civilians harvesting a field, Haganah members standing guard over them.”

Based on the evidence of the landscape depicted in the photograph as well as the presence of the many Palestinians here, it is more likely that the photography was taken in one of the Arab villages in the vicinity, Zir'in or al-Lajjun, rather than in the Hebrew town of Afula, established on the site of the village of al'Fula after the eviction of its inhabitants in 1925.

This is not a classical snapshot but rather a deliberate instance of framing, a studied allusion to art history that clearly evokes Jean-François Millet's *The Gleaners* (1857).” (Azoulay, 2012, page. 220).



Figure 10. Afula. Photograph by Fred Chesnik. IDF and Defense Archive, 1948.

The photograph, Figure 10., amongst many others were kept in a archive too be forgotten. Hidden away from the public, veiled to not be seen as an evidence to the mass ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians from the year 1948. Additionally, the photograph was falsely



Figure 11. Jean François Millet, *The Gleaners*, 1857

The author references a well-known oil painting of *The Gleaners* (1857) by Jean Francois Millet. Seen as Figure 11. Millet, studied the lower-class woman who would come to collect labelled with the context of trying to portray this image of Palestinians farmers harvesting. the remaining left-over grains after a harvest. During the period the painting was shown, it received many criticisms from the Upper and Middle classes. This is a similarity that is showcased between the photograph and the painting, social classes around the world and unequal distribution of wealth/power. Which applies to the current conflict at the heart of this essay's discussion because Isreal not only has one of the most powerfully funded military force, as well they have control over whom enters/exits Palestinian Territories. As well have hand over their food supplies and water sources.

“It is not heaps of harvested crops that are visible at the premier of the circle they form: the field they are supposedly harvesting is not cultivated but barren.” Page 221

A head count of 18 of them are labelled as ‘farmers’, though a unusual act is accusing. No ordinary farming is shown if observed carefully. The men are indeed knee bent with most dire

tied their gaze to the ground. Even so these civilians are at some type of work, they are surrounded by visibly 5 armed soldiers, standing firmly with rifles that are aimed at the working men. The frame of the photo has its borders, limits of which we can only see through the lens of the photographer has captured. A glimpse from only one perspective. Azoulay states that for no certainty we are knowledges if the photographer was there with permission. Although from the distant angle the photo has been taken, and as well the direct eye contact of the soldier standing at the rear front. Could possibly portray a entitled power to keep the photographer where he stands, almost as if the soldier was also guarding the photographer to not approach closer. That soldier and two others in the picture are wearing their uniform, on the other hand there is a forge in element to it. A white cloth around their nose and mouth, used as a mask. It does not seem to be a professional component of their uniform. Looking at our current time we have been starting to portray a facial mask as a protection against illness. After the pandemic of Covid-19, we have had more awareness on the priority of health, and most importantly have fixated an image for facial masks. Shifting to professional career paths that wear frequently facial masks, a few examples are the following; nurses, doctors, surgeons, morgue practitioners, and dentists.

“The armed soldiers overseeing the work of the Arabs protect their mouths and noses from some powerful stench using strips of white cloth” (Azoulay, Page 221).

With further analysis of the picture we can observe that to the left, we notice two visible shovels help by two of the working civilians. A shovel is not needed when harvesting. The civilians are digging a pit, a knee-deep long length pit. The soil is visibly turned over to prepare the burial of murdered Palestinians. Additionally, near the right corner by the one of soldiers' feet, there's a dark coloured fabric that is wrapped around what seems to be a body. A corpse wrapped to be buried. Now we may understand to why and from which the soldiers were protecting their olfactory sense from. The date that the photograph plays a key factor, in information us on what period in Palestine this was. Many villagers lost their homes and family. This was during the catastrophic year in Palestine in 1948 known as the 'Nakba', where 750,000,000 Palestinian civilians were expelled from villages, towns and some cities. There many 'mayrts'

Conclusion

By surfacing these artists, artworks and literature information on a current issue sheds a understanding. An understating of what others experience. We need to emphasis on our humanity and empathy towards those whose pain are endured in silence. The reaped cycle of colonial dehumanisation needs to end, no matter what their 'labeled' difference is. We have reached a point where people are becoming aware. Therefore, use this unit to oppose colonial exclusion. Settler colonialism works by legitimising violoncello with dehumanisation and forced removal, so by forcibly populating our artistic landscape and cultural consciousness we can bring7 injustice to the horrific events happening in our current time. We can not let another mass mass massacre happen to a ethnic group. The indigenious of America, The Jews of A, black slaves dbbncb

As an artist with a grateful privileged position, we need to use our voices for those being silenced in this system of facist and white supremacy.

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