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Visual Art as Language of Displacement:

How are the experiences of exile expressed through visual art?

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I declare that this **Critical Cultures Research Project** is all my own work and that all sources have been fully acknowledged.

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Introduction

Three visual artists who have made compelling works about their personal experiences are Mona Hatoum, Ana Mendieta, and Dragana Jurišić. These three women are connected not only by their practice, but by their life experiences. They share the commonality of displacement as they are all involuntary migrants, made exiles by the tumultuous circumstances of their homeland: Hatoum by the Lebanon civil war, Mendieta by Castro's regime in Cuba, and Jurišić by the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia.

The traumatic estrangement between human being and native place and the resulting psychological impact of that trauma acts as a poignant motif. It threads through the practice of each artist, uniting the three despite their distinct and individual modes of working. The effect of migration is the underlying sociological concern of this essay, specifically the intrapersonal repercussions. This essay will examine selected works of the three aforementioned artists for the purpose of investigating the conjunction of art and the experience of exile and the diaspora in recent decades. This understanding and construction of identity will be looked at in the framework of deterritorialisation, reterritorialisation, and diasporic intimacy. It will also investigate how the concepts of 'home' and 'belonging' are shaped within the context of visual art. It aims to ask how visual art can be used as a universal language to transcend borders, as well as how the creation of art can facilitate contemplation and further understanding of personal identity in the face of the depersonalising experience of exile.

Chapter One (i): Dual Identity of the Dispossessed Artist.

To understand the methods artists use to articulate their experiences of displacement we must first define the concept of home. Home can mean many things. It can be as simple as somewhere we are comfortable, where our friends and family live alongside us, or where our childhood took place. It can be more heavily tied with the circumstances in which one grows up. Many people define their country of origin as home for it is intrinsically tied to their culture, language, religion and history. John Berger outlines that home originally meant 'the centre of the world—not in a geographical, but in an ontological sense'. Home has since the beginning of humanity provided people with a sense of reality, identity and stability, and 'without a home at the centre of the real, one was not only shelterless but also lost in nonbeing, in unreality' (Berger, 1984, pp. 55–56). However you define it, home remains the one of conceptual centres by which we identify ourselves. Identity in the contemporary world derives from a multiplicity of sources including, but not limited to; nationality, ethnicity, social class, and gender. It marks the way in which we are the same as others who share those social signifiers, and the ways in which we are different from those who do not (Woodward, 1997, p. 1). An individual's concept of home is foundational to their sense of identity. Moreover, sense of identity is especially pivotal to an artist. It informs their artistic style, their techniques, the materials they use, and the subject matter specific to their work. The effect that an artist's concept of home has on their identity and therefore their art practice cannot be overstated.

Identity is generally regarded as inherent and 'only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty' (Mercer, 1990, p. 4). Such uncertainty can be seen in the case of locational displacement, such as exile or migration. Diasporas are formed

as the result of the 'scattering' of peoples, due to circumstances of war, poverty, oppression, enslavement or the search for better economic and social opportunities (Gilroy, 1997, p. 304). This dissipation across the globe produces in people conflicting identities which are shaped and located in and by the places they find themselves. The concept of diaspora provides a framework for understanding some of these new, often unsettled identities which are not located in any one particular 'home' and cannot be traced back simply to one source.

The experience of exile from one's country of origin 'enriches but also complicates the evolution or construction of one's identity; being uprooted from one's home either physically or psychologically, challenges not only one's visions of the world, but also the perception of one's self' (Josenhans, 2017, p. 6). According to Ranjit Guha, the exiled persons' struggle is, then, that the 'conditions in which that his first identity was formed are no longer available to him' (2011, p. 4). This struggle is indeed with the concept of identity, but also of belonging, the state of which has 'an essential relationship to involvement to a surrounding community' (Heidegger, 1987, p. 42). Guha addresses this question of 'belonging' as not only a spatial problem involving the geographic discrepancy between 'here' and 'there', but also the issue of 'temporal maladjustment' while switching communities, creating a 'disjunction' between past and present, especially in terms of personal identity (2011, p. 7).

The main feature of exile is a double exposure of different times and spaces (Boym, 2001, p. 256). The resulting bicultural knowledge that manifests due to the in-between state of identity and belonging makes for a kind of dual identity'. W.E.B DuBois coined this feature 'double consciousness', and describes it as a 'sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that

looks on in amused contempt and pity' (1997, p. 615). When residing in a place that is not 'home' to you, there are inevitably difficulties involving translation between language and culture: 'One has to convey in a language that is not one's own, the spirit that is one's own' (Rao, cited in Walder, 1998, p. 43.). As language is the primary tool of communication for human beings and how express we our identity and opinions, not being able to use it to its full capacity can be dispiriting. However, 'visual language is far more transportable than the verbal kind' (Nochlin, 1996, p. 318). Therefore many artists, including those who will be discussed in this essay — Mona Hautom, Ana Mendieta, and Dragana Jurišić — take advantage of the universality of visual art to discuss their experiences with belonging and dispossession, stemming from the common source of exile.

Displacement and exile have been prevalent themes in recent culture to such a degree that Mufti argues that 'the most emblematic and ubiquitous figure in our own times is the stateless refugee' (2011, p. 175). Art history is only now catching up, asking questions and creating analyses around these themes, which initially came to light in the fields of literary criticism and cultural studies. Examining these concepts in conjunction with the global unfolding of art in the last century reveals that an unforeseen consequence of mass-migration has been the common recurrence of themes of displacement and exile in the visual art world (Mercer, 2008, p. 7). The philosopher Vilém Flusser, who went into exile in England and then Brazil after fleeing Nazi-occupied Prague in 1939, proposed a positive assessment of exile and its effect on artistic productivity. He observed that 'if [the expellee] is not to perish, the expellee must be creative' (Eckmann, 2013, n.p). This helps elucidate why there has been such an increase in art about statelessness in recent years. As a method of coping with the traumatic effects of being displaced, one may feel compelled to express themselves through visual art for catharsis, and many have.

Chapter One (ii): Liminal Identity in Mona Hatoum's Liminal Homes

Edward Said implores us to 'consider the door handle's place as you stand before the entrance to a room', indicating to how our 'hand will move unerringly to one side or another of the door. But then you don't encounter the handle, curl your fingers around it, push forward because... it has actually been placed two feet above your head' (2011, p. 10). This description of the strangeness of dislocation is in reference to the installation work *Homebound* (1999) by Mona Hatoum, who has directed her experience of geopolitical displacement into a 'postminimalist sculptural phenomenology of disjointed everyday spaces and uncanny domestic objects' (Demos, 2013, p. 6). Making the familiar uncanny has become the artist's signature language, and earning her the title of a 'latter-day surrealist' (Wolfe, n.p). Through her defamiliarisation of domestic spaces, Hatoum aims to articulate the fragmented sense of her dual identity and her dizzying feelings of "nonbeing" as a displaced and stateless artist (Berger, 1984, pp. 55–56).

Hatoum was born to a Palestinian Christian family in Beirut in 1952. Her family, like the families of many other Palestinian exiles in Lebanon, never managed to obtain Lebanese identity cards. This led to Hatoum growing up with a complex identity, as a Palestinian who had never lived in Palestine, now living in Lebanon, a place wherein her and her family were not officially recognised as citizens (Wolfe, n.p). On top of this, Hatoum ended up moving to London after her displacement from Lebanon due to the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975. It was in London where she trained at the Slade School of Fine Art and went on to exhibit installation and video art in the early 1980s. The themes of exile and migration are of utmost relevance in Hatoum's work, in which she explores the relationship between 'violence and oppression, expatriation and belongingness, and the

resilience and vulnerability of the human body' (MOMA, n.p).



Fig. 1. *Homebound*, Mona Hatoum, 1999

Homebound (1999) consists of a room in which you must enter sideways. As you further investigate the room, you stand on a carpet of frozen intestines. To your right is a kitchen, barred from entrance with minuscule steel wires. Through the wires you see a table covered with various appliances which are attached to one another by a wire connected to a buzzing lightbulb that flickers on and off in an unsettling manner at random intervals (Fig. 1). On the left of the room is the bed, mattress-less, legs disjointed grotesquely. A television blares a disjointed, scrambled sound. In this room, 'familiarity and strangeness are locked together in the oddest way, adjacent and irreconcilable at the same time' (Said, 2011, p. 11). While we know this room is not meant to be inhabited, it still reminds us of a

home — still provokes associations of a place where we might have once felt at ease. But how could we be at home in this space ‘where objects seem denuded of their conventional symbolic accretions and every inch of motion would require an assessment of peril?’ (Mufti, 2011, p. 175). We know the original uses and forms of these objects, and have memories surrounding them. It is hard to shake off this prior knowledge, even in the face of this disturbing deformity. It seems that even the most severe of her installations appear ‘to be shot through with longing. In Hatoum’s hands, a bed of nails brings with it an unfathomable ache, a curtain of barbed wire, a confounding hunger for an elsewhere that may no longer exist at all.’ (Cooke, 216). It is in this way, exile is ‘figured and plotted’ (Said, 2011, p. 14) in the objects she creates.

‘No one has put the Palestinian experience in visual terms so austere and yet so playfully, so compellingly and at the same moment so allusively,’ wrote Edward Said of Hatoum (2011, p. 14). However, Hatoum herself isn’t so sure, resisting being typecast as a ‘Palestinian artist’. She rejects the search for political messages in her work, speaking instead of formal concerns and an interest in the concept of defamiliarisation (Mufti, 2011, p. 193): ‘I am focusing on the materials, on the aesthetic. In fact, I sometimes spend time trying to remove the content, the better to arrive at abstraction. The tension is between the work’s reduced form and the intensity of the possible associations’ (Cooke, 2017). She notes the hanging cube in her 2009 work *Impenetrable* as having ‘an ethereal quality’, in juxtaposition to the barbed wire rods it is made of, which transports the viewer into ‘war zones and disputed borders’ (Cooke, 2017).



Fig. 2. *Measures of Distance*, Mona Hatoum, 1988

'Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimension' (Said, 2000, p. 186). This awareness is evident in Hatoum's work *Measures of Distance* (1988), which shows a close-up of the artist's mother in the intimacy of her shower, directly reference to the painful distance of displacement (Fig. 2). Hatoum's video showcases her physically distanced relation to her mother, and the trauma that brings. The video is superimposed with the fragmented lines of Arabic writing taken from Hatoum's correspondence with her mother, and read aloud in English by the artist in her voice-over.

The images are obstructed by prolonged shots of abstract colours and intervals of darkness. Furthermore, Hatoum's mother's body is shrouded by the lines of text, which suggests a barbed wire preventing visual passage. The video poignantly connects homesickness and familial distance owing to the circumstance of exile and poetically translates them to screen (Demos, 2013, p. 15).

Jean Fisher and Gerardo Mosquera observe that the diasporan or immigrant is 'the figure of postmodernity with its decentered and deterritorialised subject' (Mercer, 2008, p. 8). However, projects such as *Measures of Distance* acted more as an oppositional force against the postmodern than as an uncritical expression of it, in fact, Hatoum's practice challenges 'the monologic exclusivity on which dominant versions of national identity and collective belonging are based' (Demos, 2013, p. 8). As diasporic experience is defined, not by purity or oneness, but by diversity, it models a 'conception of identity which lives in and through, not despite, difference' (Demos, 2013, p. 9). *Measures of Distance* mimics this by disrupting the purity of both film and language. It is therefore dependent on contextual determinations for its meaning and in doing so, defeats essentialism through its very structure even while it commits to the particularities of ethnicity, race, and gender that define the lived circumstances of Hatoum and her mother within their cultural frame.

It is perhaps more accurate to frame the experience of exile as a condition of post-existence than one of post-modernism, as it aims to describe the question of what it means to exist after a certain event (a separation, disaster, trauma, etc.). Central to this theory is not so much the question of what it means to exist after the event itself, but rather the sense of existing as an 'afterness' to the event (Schuback & Schuback, 2017, p.176). This 'afterness' is particularly present in Hatoum's work; it is in her obscured and melancholic vision of her mother, in the objects that have been removed and displaced

from their original functions. Schuback & Schuback describe 'afterness' as a condition that 'remains constantly separated, but also always near to that to which it has been separated without return' (2017, p. 176). To exist in this state of 'afterness' is to be situated in the immediacy of the present: this is because, from the exiled person's point of view, whatever is known about their past or future is absorbed in the occurrence of their arrival, mediated by neither what they were or will be (Guha, 2011, p. 5). Perhaps this intense disruption of chronology is the reason nostalgia is generally regarded as the primary sentiment and pathos of the exile, for in exile, 'habits of life, expression or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of those things in another environment' (Said, 2000, p. 186).

Nostalgia and understanding of the past permeates identity. This is evident in the way in which identities establish their claims by appealing to historical antecedents. After the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, to defend and assert the separateness and distinctiveness of their national heritage, Serbians reasserted lost identities from the past by resurrecting and rediscovering the old Serbian culture of warriors and story-tellers, the *Guslars* of the Middle Ages, as a significant element in their history (Woodward, 1997, p. 10). This recovery of the past is part of the process of constructing identity, and is a key element in the work of Cuban artist Ana Mendieta, whose reconnection with the ancient and indigenous cultures of Mexico and Cuba through visual art were pivotal to how she understood and cultivated her relationship to her native homeland.

Chapter Two (i): Reconstituting Identity

A territory is a space established by borders which distinguish an inside from an outside and, in this way, set up at least two separated areas of reality: one inside the borders and one outside, this latter usually belonging to another territory (Aurora, 2014, p. 4).

Territories, in the context of this essay refer to countries or geographical regions, and can be said to produce identity as each different territory marks a particular identity-set. Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's notion of 'deterritorialisation', is a concept describing the 'displacement of identities, persons, or meanings' from their original territory or homeland, one 'that is endemic to the postmodern world system' (Viso, 2004, p. 30). They distinguished that relative deterritorialisation is always accompanied by reterritorialisation. Reterritorialisation is the restructuring of a place or the re-situating of a person that has experienced deterritorialisation; it is the design of the new power.

Art historian Iris Roscoff describes the essence of Mendieta's art as 'the abnegation of all forms of boundaries' (Viso, 2004, p. 30). In restructuring her relationship with her homeland, Mendieta looks to the earth as an ecological home, and situates herself within that framework. In juxtaposition to this, Jurišić orientates her exilic relationship with her now non-existent country of origin by reconstructing these territorial borders, tracing the remains of a state that once was. In both artist's reclaiming of 'home' through visual art, they in a sense take on the power of reterritorialisation.

Chapter Two (ii): Mendieta's Reterritorialisation of Self

Mendieta was born in 1948 to a country on the brink of a socialist revolution. After the revolution of 1959 led by Fidel Castro, growing concern with the country's future led the Mendieta family to send their children from Cuba to the United States under the auspices of Operation Peter Pan (Castillo, 2018). Mendieta was twelve years old when she arrived in the United States with only her older sister and no other family (Cabañas, 1999, p. 12). She moved through various orphanages and foster homes in Florida and then Iowa. While in Iowa, Mendieta was tormented by girls from the United States, who called her a "whore" and used racial slurs against her (Gonzenbach, 2011, p. 36). This traumatic experience would go on to greatly inform both her personal and professional development as 'the desire to come to terms with her bicultural identity become a central concern of her life and art' (Viso, 2004, p. 22).

Mendieta found refuge in art and went on to study at the University of Iowa where she worked in more unconventional art practices such as video and performance art. She used her body as both the subject and object of her performance, ranging from direct presentation to deeper exploration of issues surrounding identity, connectedness and exile. In 1973, she began to visit pre-Hispanic sites in Oaxaca, Mexico with the University of Iowa's summer programme. During this time the natural landscape took on increasing importance in her work (Trotman, n.d), and it was here she began her *Siluetas*, or Silhouette, series. This series 'encompassed ritual processes in which the artist placed her body in communion with various landscapes' (Cabañas, 1999, p. 14). She documented these works with film and photography.

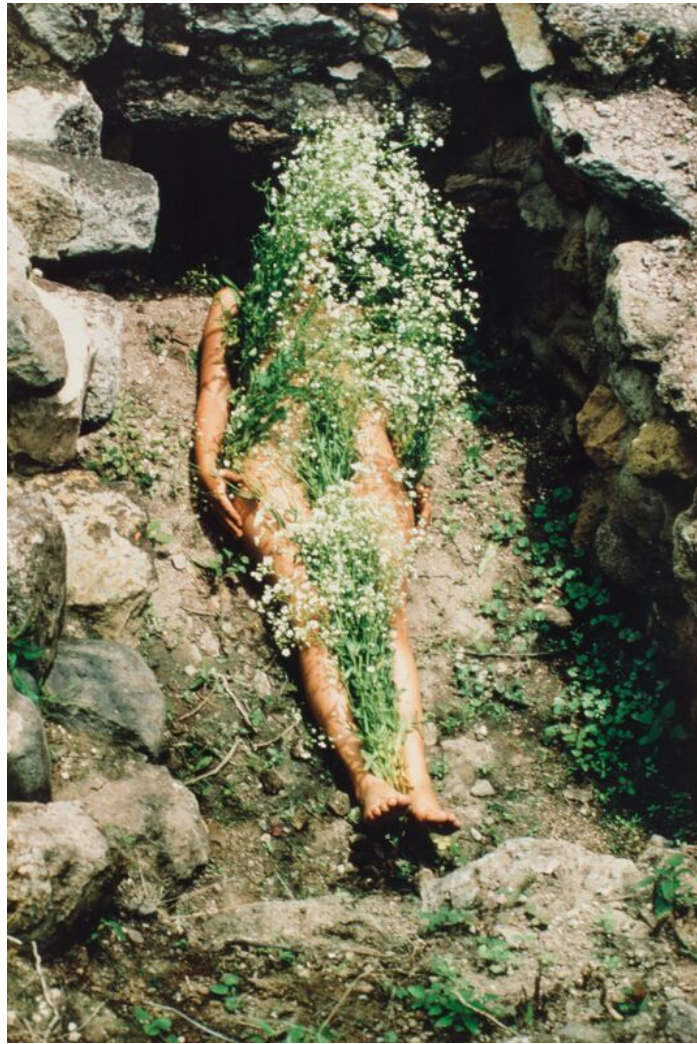


Fig. 3. *Imagen de Yagul*, as part of the *Siluetas* series, Ana Mendieta, 1973

The first and one of her best known *Siluetas*, *Imagen de Yagul* or Image from Yagul, 1973, was performed in Yagul, an ancient Zapotec tomb. This piece emerged from her knowledge of the Tree of Life, a symbol which emphasises strong ties to mother earth and relates to marital ceremonies of many indigenous Mexican cultures. (Viso, 2004, p. 52). In the piece, Mendieta is lying naked surrounded by white flowers which almost appear to be emerging from her body (Fig. 3). The *Siluetas* would end up comprising of over two hundred of these 'earth-body' works. They make tangible Mendieta's interest in earth as goddess, a belief rooted in the Afro-Cuban Santería practice of her homeland (Brough, 2020). In discussing these works, Mendieta noted that they are a

direct result of her having been 'torn away' from Cuba as an adolescent: 'I am overwhelmed by the feeling of having been cast from the womb (nature). My art is the way I reestablish the bonds that tie me to the universe' (Gonzenbach, 2011, p. 36).

It is through works like the *Siluetas* that Mendieta became associated with earth art. However, unlike many land artists she didn't change the natural environment she was working in, but rather attempted to integrate into it. The artist Nancy Spero has written that 'Ana did not rampage the earth to control or dominate or to create grandiose monuments of power or authority. She sought intimate, recessed spaces, protective habitats signalling a temporary respite of comfort and meditation' (Brett, 2004, p. 194). Her tender approach is evident in the sculptures she created when she finally visited Cuba in the 1980s. Mendieta began to make forms of ancient goddess carved into rock, shaped into sand and incised in clay. This group of work was the *Esculturas Rupestres* or Rupestrian Sculptures. Returning to Cuba for the first time in January 1980, Ana Mendieta confessed deep anxiety: "I was afraid before I went because I felt 'here I've been living my life with this obsessive thing in my mind – what if I find out it has nothing to do with me?' But the minute I got there it was this whole thing of belonging again" (Cabañas, 1999, p. 15). These fears are common amongst the exiled. Gloria Anzaldua talks about fear of returning home and 'of not being taken in. We're afraid of being abandoned by the mother, the culture, la Raza, for being unacceptable, faulty, damaged...' (1987, p. 20). Forced migration often works to undermine the migrant's claim to her home culture — or to any culture at all.



Fig. 4. *Bacayu*, as part of the *Esculturas Rupestres* series, Ana Mendieta, 1981

This longing to connect to a culture led to Mendieta forming an interest in the indigenous Taíno people of Cuba and developing an acute understanding of their history (Cabañas, 1999, p. 15). Mendieta did not identify as Taíno; she was White in Cuba and Brown in the U.S; a Third World woman,' in her own words. But the fact of change, discontinuity, and difference could not negate the fact of connection. She still saw herself as 'an inheritor of Taíno culture' (del Val Schorske, 2019). During her time there, she reconnected with the culture firsthand and created the *Esculturas Rupestres* in Jaruco Park outside of Havana, inspired by the Taíno. Rather than directly mimicking the representational practices of native religion, Mendieta drew inspiration from them and processed with her own creative vision in her carvings. She named several of them after

goddesses worshipped by the indigenous Taíno tribes, such as *Bacayu* for 'Light of Day' (Galerie Lelong & Co, 2019) (Fig. 4). The designs and titles evoke these ancient female deities while also referencing the artist's own body, showing her attempt to physically and symbolically reconnect with her native soil.

The Cuban critic Gerardo Mosquera, in an essay on the *Esculturas Rupestres*, talks about the grottoes of the Stairs of Jaruco where they were carved. He discusses Mendieta's psychological relationship with this spot that was once used as a refuge by rebels during Cuba's fight for independence and proposes Mendieta as 'its last refugee' (Brett, 2004, p. 192). These works are an intimate reconnection to her heritage and a loving embrace to the very land she had been separated from since childhood. The status of exile has an analogous relation to the abject. Mendieta, situated as an 'outsider' from Cuba, exists as an abject object outside of Castro's political discourse. The relation of her deterritorialisation from dominant political discourse is noteworthy (Gonzenbach, 2011, p. 36). By oscillating between the ancestral past and present and citing lost narratives, Mendieta effectively "de-" and "re-territorialised" identity and history in her art (Viso, 2004, p. 30). Her work harks back to prehistory and the time that preceded identifications of difference based on nationality and ethnicity. Her heritage as a displaced Cuban, an individual whose 'own history and existence had been interrupted by outside forces', prompted her to tap into human history and our origins at large: 'I have thrown myself into the very elements that produced me. It is through my sculptures that I assert my emotional ties to the earth and conceptualise culture.' (Viso, 2004, p. 36)

Chapter Two (iii): Jurišić's Lost Nationality

Mendieta's lack of contemporary political struggles with national identity situate her displacement, and indeed her art practice, in contrast to the photographer Dragana Jurišić. Mendieta found herself physically separated from the land, whilst Jurišić was separated from the cultural significance of a shared citizenship. Jurišić's country of origin, Yugoslavia, disintegrated in 1991, and alongside it over one million five hundred thousand so-called 'Yugoslavs'. Today, in the countries that came into being after the fall of Yugoslavia, there is 'a total detail of the Yugoslav identity' (Jurišić, 2015). Jurišić therefore calls herself an exile rather than expatriate because she 'can't return "home" even if [she] wanted to' (Jurišić, 2015). It is this conflict of identity that led her to create 'YU: the Lost Country' over the course of 2011 to 2015.



Fig. 5. *YU: the lost country*. Dragana Jurišić, 2015

Central to this project is a work of an Anglo-Irish writer Rebecca West and her book *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, 1941, which West wrote about the journey she embarked on through Yugoslavia in 1937. This book ended up not only being a portrait of Yugoslavia, but also of Europe on the brink of the Second World War, and is widely regarded as one of the masterpieces of the 20th century. Jurišić set out to recreate this journey, and by doing so, recreate her lost homeland. Jurišić's photographs of this journey were published in a book format (Fig. 5). The act of recreation or 'art of imitation' is proposed by Boym as the perhaps the only 'temporary relief of the symptoms of homesickness' (2001, p. 252). In September 1991, Jurišić's childhood home was, alongside thousands of prints and negatives her father — an ardent amateur photographer — had accumulated, were destroyed by a fire during the Croatian War of Independence. It was the loss of these photos that made her realise the power photography has over memory. It was this tragic event that led her to start her practice, and she began use the camera as her visual language as she found that the act of 'looking at the world through the lens, helped provide a semblance of control over an otherwise unpredictable world' (Jurišić, 2015).

The fleetingness inherent in photography allows it to 'capture a sense of rootlessness and dislocation with relative ease' (Jurišić, 2015). Jurišić asserts that 'both exile and photography intensify our perception of the world' and that the concepts of memory and melancholy underlie them both. Indeed, memory is 'at the core of human sensibility, and its relationship to identity in the context of exile is crucial' (McCauley, 2016, p. 33). In the making of YU, Jurišić uncovers these memories with unease, feeling a sense of rejection and displacement 'stronger back 'home' than in the foreign place where [she] chose to live' (Jurišić, 2015). In this series of photographs, the viewer is guided through a

pilgrimage of the land that was once Yugoslavia. Jurišić shows us 'domesticity, townsfolk, dereliction and grandeur' (O'Hagan, 2015) and leaves moving diary notes of encounters she had alongside. While Rebecca West valiantly fought to believe in the future of Yugoslavia, Dragana Jurišić traces 'the effects and aftershocks of its disintegration' (Jurišić, 2015). The work is a deeply moving rumination on the notions of home and belonging.

Chapter Three: Diasporic Intimacy



Fig. 6. Ola's Iro, as part of *Something From There*, 2021

Dragana Jurišić's recent work, *Something From There* (2021), takes a diverse look at the idea of home through the objects we choose to keep. In this project, she worked with a group of people seeking asylum in Ireland. She worked alongside the group in collaborative sessions in the National Gallery, sharing stories and experiences of leaving their country and coming to Ireland. Each person chose an object they felt represented 'home' to them and told its story, as 'sharing the meaning of these humble objects is a way to demonstrate the connections between us. It gives a face and voice to the many people waiting to find a home again.' (Pigott, 2021). One example is Owodunni Ola Mustapha's iro (Fig. 6), which she describes as "a tiny bit of where I come from, it acknowledges my origins and my existence. Bittersweet memories of places long forgotten, or just hidden in tiny faraway places in my mind, raw and rusty places" (Pigott,

2021). These possessions are regarded as precious and treasured, as the diasporian is all too aware that objects and places 'were lost in the past' and 'can be lost again' — the illusion of complete belonging has been shattered (Boym, 2001, p. 255). The objects that Owodunni Ola Mustapha and her contemporaries chose to keep are souvenirs of transient, exilic intimacy.

The notion of intimacy is one that is highly personal and pertaining to one's deepest self. Today, millions of people like these asylum seekers find themselves displaced from their home, 'their intimate experiences occurring against a foreign background' (Boym, 2001, p. 255). *Something From There* is an insightful look into how we define 'home' and what makes a home, as elaborated on in chapter one (i). Leaving one's birthplace and loved ones behind is one of the hardest choices that a person has to make, even when their own lives and safety are at stake. It means leaving behind not only tangible things, but also part of their identity, stories, traditions, dreams and plans. While Hatoum, Mendieta and Jurišić are artists in the literal sense, the exiled person also becomes in a way an artist of their own lives, re-making and re-constructing their identity. According to Boym, to feel at home is 'to know that things are in their places and so are you; it is a state of mind that doesn't depend on an actual location. The object of longing, then, is not really a place called home but this sense of intimacy in the world' (2001, p. 251).

This sense of intimacy in the world harks back to Edward Said's 2001 essay *Reflections on Exile*, in which he quotes from Hugh of Saint Victor, the twelfth-century theologian and philosopher associated with the Abbey of Saint Victor in Paris: 'The person who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native place is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign land' (cited in Mufti, 2011, p. 178). This passage is a 'model for anyone wishing to

transcend national or provincial limits' (Said, 2011, p. 185), and it was inspiration for the naming of Mona Hautom's show *The Entire World is as a Foreign Land* at the Tate Britain. This title is very befitting of Hautom's work with its strange dislocation that assaults the memory of what was once versus what is, and its refusal of identitarian structures. In contrast, Mendieta and Jurišić's practices have a keen sense of nostalgia imbuing them, letting the history of their respective homelands permeate their work. Here we see the multitude of complex expression that the medium of visual art allows an artist to consider their experiences of exile and displacement.

Conclusion

This essay has analysed how the theme of displacement is addressed in visual art in a diversity of ways. It investigated how for many people forced to depart their native or adopted country, there is no return to the known — only a departure for the unknown. ‘Home’ ceases to exist as a physical space, and, as a result, exiles are compelled to create a sense of belonging in a new place, grappling with dual identity, or to seek a renewed or continued connection to the one left behind. Artists such as Ana Mendieta left their native countries at a young age and returned as adults, and their work reflects this reexamination of their lost culture and history.

This essay discussed how the theme of nostalgia illustrates the ways in which exiled artists engage with feelings of homesickness or longing by selecting subjects for their artwork that relate to their past — Mona Hatoum with her geographically estranged mother, and Dragana Jurišić through collaboration with other asylum seekers.

All these engagements with the theme of displacement occur within the increasingly globalised dimension of visual art. This essay demonstrated the diverse ways in which visual art can be utilised by artists to discuss their experiences of exile and its psychological effects. As Gillian Rose explains in her analysis of visual methods, ‘images are never transparent windows onto the world: they interpret the world; they display it in a very particular way, they represent it’ (2012, p.2). This essay came to the conclusion that visual art is an pertinent and felicitous medium to verbalise these circumstances.

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