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The Art of Un-belonging

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Abstract

This practice-based research sets out to explore artistic strategies that destabilise fixed notions of belonging and identity in the context of globalisation and diasporic art. Drawing on Glissant's concept of Relation ([1990], 1997) in combination with feminist and new materialist theories (Braidotti, Haraway) and an "anthropology beyond the human" (Kohn, 2013), the research challenges a dualistic conception of self/Other and contributes to the decolonisation of contemporary art by opening and reinscribing the concept of belonging and identity beyond the human.

The practice element consists of three discrete yet interrelated artworks that challenge an ethnocentric and anthropocentric conception of belonging. The multilingual video-performance *Surya Namaz* (2018) is a personal investigation of yoga and namaz, the Muslim prayer ritual, exploring the potential of transcultural performance, opacity and multilingualism to undo fixed notions of belonging. *Kahvehane Kongresspark* (2016), a temporary café, ceramic cups/saucers and a site-specific performance in public space and *Trans Plantations* (2018), an installation of cups/saucers and coffee beans cast in porcelain in combination with an audio-visual element, are concerned with the colonial history and human entanglements with coffee, taking the exploration of belonging beyond the anthropocentric.

The written thesis is composed of three chapters. Chapter 1 contextualises the research by providing a brief overview on the globalisation of art and introduces Glissant's theory of Relation as guiding framework of the thesis. This part also reflects on feminist art and theory's relevance for current discourses concerned with belonging and identity, exploring the potential of feminist strategies for the complication of binary thinking. The subsequent chapters are guided by and complement the practice element of the thesis through ways of critical analysis and performative writing, addressing questions posed by the practice in addition to case studies of contemporary artworks. Based on the conception of identity as relational, the research argues that Relation is central to the re-thinking of belonging and identity.

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Accompanying material

Surya Namaz (2018)

– *Surya Namaz*: HDV, colour, 10 min 37 s

<https://vimeo.com/222953167> Password: suryanamaz

– *Ümit Hala on Namaz*: HDV, colour, 9 min 14 s

<https://vimeo.com/222943322> Password: namaz

– *Marisol Figueroa Reitze on Yoga*: HDV, colour, 11 min 53 s

<https://vimeo.com/218469531>

Supported by CREAM, University of Westminster London.

Kahvehane Kongresspark (2016)

– *Extracts of the performance*, video-documentation, 8 min 2 s

<https://vimeo.com/175368263>

Original duration of the performance: 25 min

Developed in collaboration with bharatanatyam artist Shane Shambhu

Commissioned by Soho in Ottakring, Urban Art Biennial, Vienna, 2016

Supported by CREAM, University of Westminster London.

Trans Plantations (2018)

Multilingual soundtrack, ca. 20 min 54 s

<https://soundcloud.com/user-530978425/trans-plantations-version-june-2018>

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Fig. 0.1 My beloved companion *Kando 'baba'*. London, 2014.

A note on language and translation

Édouard Glissant's work, which is the guiding framework of my research, was originally written in French. Where possible, I have used official translations of Glissant's work in the text. For citations from texts that are not available in English yet, I have provided my own translation. Honouring Glissant's concept of multilingualism, I have attempted to find ways to write and think in the presence of all the languages in the world (Glissant, 1996, p41) and as English is my third (additional) language, the syntax of other languages (German and Turkish) may occasionally play into the text. The original French citations have been included in footnotes and in exceptional cases (for instance, where the official translation proved inaccurate) in the text itself. While the reader who is familiar with French will certainly appreciate the poetics of the original prose, in times of increased English nationalism and the United Kingdom's imminent departure from the European Union (Brexit), my aim is to create awareness and appreciation for the existence of other languages aside from the global *lingua franca* that is English.

Verses from the Qur'an have been translated using official translations.

Hamdım piştim yandım.

(I was raw, I got cooked, now I am burnt).

Hz. Mevlana (1207-1273)

(Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi)

Author's declaration

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Every effort has been made to acknowledge correct copyright of images where applicable. No content from this thesis may be cited, copied or reproduced without the prior written consent of the author.

Introduction

This practice-based research sets out to investigate and develop artistic strategies that challenge fixed notions of belonging and identity in the context of globalisation and diasporic art. Traversing various artistic mediums and integrating concepts from postcolonial and critical art theory, feminism, philosophy and anthropological research based on Amerindian thinking, the study explores and develops new methods to destabilise binary conceptions of self and Other, which constitute the colonial legacy of modernity. Un-doing a binary conception of belonging, the research aims to shift the Eurocentric imaginary,¹ which has been shaped by dualisms such as self and Other, mind and body, culture and nature, etc. Taking my artistic practice as a driving force for my research, *The Art of Un-belonging* argues that Relation (Glissant, [1990], 1997) is central to re-imagine the notion of belonging and identity.

Following the world-wide expansion of contemporary art over the last decades we can observe an increasing number of exhibitions that critically explore the notion of identity and belonging in relation to globalisation, migration and the condition of diaspora. Yet, despite the advancements within the theoretical discourse, in practice artists still tend to be categorised according to their geographical, national and/or ethnic belonging(s) by the art world/market. This management of diversity could be described as a form of “multicultural managerialism” (Hall and Maharaj, 2001, p46). I borrow the term from Sarat Maharaj, who introduces it in *Modernity and Difference*,² to describe what he calls “pigeon-holing” or “the state’s ability to translate and slot a person into a set category of difference” (Hall and Maharaj, 2001, p46). As he elucidates, “when a government attempts to fix a person into a difference-box and

¹ Inspired by Glissant, I use the term ‘imaginary’ in the sense of “the collective unconscious, the way we see and feel the world” (*Édouard Glissant: One World in Relation*, 2010).

² A public conversation between Sarat Maharaj and Stuart Hall that took place at InIVA in 2000 and was published under the same title by InIVA in 2001.

then treats him or her according to a policy or programme of diversity, I call this pigeon-holing multicultural managerialism” (Hall and Maharaj, 2001, p46).³ The research departs from the observation that similar tendencies to manage diversity according to models of corporate internationalism can be detected in the art world (Maharaj, 2004). In spite of artists’ and curators’ continued efforts to decentre the Euro-centric framework of contemporary art, “exercises of cultural stereotyping”⁴ along with an uncritical celebration of hybridity and/or the categorisation and fetishisation of difference seem to remain a constant undercurrent present in the art market. While some individuals and institutions might profit from the turbo-capitalist marketing of difference, structural inequalities, institutional racism and discrimination persist (Mercer, 1999; Maharaj, 2004; Araeen, 2005; Haq, 2014 and Fusco, 2017).

Reinscribing the notion of belonging, *The Art of Un-belonging* seeks to formulate a critical response to the tendency in the arts to frame artists as representatives of a specific culture, nation, ethnicity or region (Foster, ([1996], 2012 and Haq, 2014), challenging essentialist conceptions of race, culture, ethnicity, and nationality. The research is mostly motivated by my growing frustration with the persistence of Euro-centric and predominantly anthropocentric frameworks that re-iterate and structurally reinforce (neo-) colonial hierarchies in the arts. Taking my own practice and position as ‘halfie’ (Abu-Lughod, 1991), ‘mestiza’ (Anzaldua, 1987) and diasporic⁵ artist as point of departure, *The Art of Un-belonging* is driven by an awareness of my

³ Also see Maharaj, 2004, p147.

⁴At the occasion of the open forum meeting about the future of InIVA which took place at Goldsmiths College on the 20th October 2014, Irit Rogoff claimed that the complex question of the “international” has been hijacked by major art institutions and criticised or rather defamed recent exhibitions of Non-Euro-American art as a “series of exercises in cultural stereotyping”, referring to exhibitions, such as *Indian Highway* (Serpentine Gallery 2009) or *Unveiled: New Art from the Middle East* (Saatchi Gallery 2009).

⁵ Following Brah, I propose to conceive of diaspora in relation to “processes of multi-locationality across geographical, cultural and psychic boundaries” (Brah, 1996, p194). Diasporic subjects are not affiliated to one nation state, but rather agents of trans-cultural relations. In this regard, the notion of the diasporic resonates with Abu-Lughod’s conception of the ‘halfie’ as “people whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage” (1991, p466). I would like to thank Prof. Carmen Mörsch for making me aware of this concept and for sharing Abu-Lughod’s (1991) inspirational article *Writing Against Culture* with me.

complicity with the very conditions I am seeking to critically examine (Rogoff, 2003), asking questions such as: How to avoid the trap of (mis-)representation and self-exoticisation? What strategies could diasporic and postcolonial artists use to challenge binary thinking and engage (more) critically with the notion of belonging and identity?

First, let me address what I mean by 'un-belonging'. It is important to note that the term 'un-belonging' does not equal *not* belonging. In my conception the notions of belonging and un-belonging do not suggest a fixed state. Rather, to me, belonging – as an 'ing-word' or a verb that functions as a noun – indicates doing: in other words, I imagine belonging and consequently un-belonging as a fluid concept that describes the constantly transforming and transformative processes of becoming. While un-belonging is not the opposite of belonging, it is directly related to belonging. I coined the term not *against* or *contra* belonging per se, but rather to describe processes of questioning, challenging, and for lack of a better word, 'un-doing' of fixed notions of belonging and identity, which I will examine in the light of current debates on globalisation and the politics of identity in contemporary (diasporic) art.

My choice to supplement the notion of 'belonging' with the controversial term 'identity' is strategic in order to account for the ways my argument relates to what has been coined as 'identity politics' in contemporary art. I am aware of the connotations of exclusion,⁶ oppression and the history of binary thinking that cannot be separated from the notion of 'identity' – which to borrow Amelia Jones' words, is "a modern concept of European origin after all" (2012, pxvii). In fact, many scholars have advocated the use of the term 'subjectivity' instead of 'identity'. For instance, Rosi Braidotti describes 'identity' as "a bounded, ego-indexed habit of fixing and capitalising on one's selfhood" in contrast to 'subjectivity,' which she defines as "a

⁶ Stuart Hall refers to these processes of exclusion that are inherent in identity formation as an "absent presence," stating that he cannot think of "any identity which, in establishing what it is, does not, at the very same moment, implicitly declare what it is not, what has to be left out, excluded. In that sense, identities are always constructed through power, even though we do not like to think that they are, because no identity can include everyone (Hall and Maharaj, 2001, p40).

socially mediated process of relations and negotiations with multiple others and with multi-layered social structures” (2011, p4). Setting out to undo such fixed notions of identity as described above I hope that *The Art of Un-belonging* will help to complicate and destabilise a narrow understanding of identity in the sense of a “singular, autonomous origin” (Britton, 1999, p18). Ultimately the research aims to deepen limited understandings of belonging and identity in the light of the Martinican writer and philosopher Édouard Glissant’s rhizomatic⁷ conception of Relation, arguing for identity to be seen “no longer as a unitary root but as a root reaching out to meet other roots” (1996, p23, my own translation).⁸

The concept of Relation is fundamental to Glissant’s complex œuvre – his philosophy and poetics – both of which are closely related. His theory, which emerged out of the specific context and history of the Caribbean – marked by slavery and the Plantation,⁹ has proved to be an important frame of reference for my research. In his native Martinique, an island in the Caribbean that belonged to the French colonies, slave labour had been transported from West Africa to produce colonial crops, such as cane sugar (Britton, 1999). Glissant’s theory of Relation is founded on a sustained analysis of the Creole¹⁰ language and its potential to resist the colonisers’

⁷ The rhizome as an anti-genealogical model of thought (based on the botanical rhizome) was introduced by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* ([1980], 2013). An introduction to the concept and its relevance for Glissant’s theory of Relation will follow in section 3.1 of chapter 1.

⁸ “l’identité non plus comme racine unique mais comme racine allant à la rencontre d’autres racines” (Glissant, 1996, p23).

⁹ Following Glissant, I capitalise the term in order to refer to the Plantation as a systemised colonial practice as opposed to an individual plantation.

¹⁰ The Creole, which is the language spoken by most Martinicans (Glissant, 1981, p315) is a composite language made up of heterogenous linguistic elements, that developed in the context of the Plantation. In Glissant’s words, “C’est une langue composite, née de la mise en contact d’éléments linguistiques absolument hétérogènes les uns par rapport aux autres” (1996, p20). Following Glissant’s analysis, the Creole language resulted from a combination “of both the uprooting of African languages and the deviance of French provincial idioms” ([1990], 1997, p97) – destabilising the supposed classicism and universality of ‘standardised’ French. More broadly, Creole refers to “the vernacular form of language which has developed in the colonies and become the ‘native tongue’ of the majority of its inhabitants, through the combining of elements of European (mainly French) and African languages” (Hall, 2003, p28). The term ‘Creole’ can be traced back to Spanish:

universalising ambition to standardise French as ‘secret code’ that had been formed in the Plantation (Glissant, [1981], 1992, p28). At the heart of his work is the contestation of an essentialist notion of identity – which he refers to as the ‘root-identity’ (*l’identité-racine*) – challenging the binary conception of self and Other and the mechanisms of Othering at the base of colonial dominance. As will become more evident throughout the course of my thesis, his anti-essentialist conception of identity as constructed in relation (*l’identité-relation*) and theorisation of creolisation “as a process, as a becoming, in opposition to fixed, essentialised identities” (Burns, 2009, p101) resonates far beyond the particular situation of Martinique and the Caribbean.

Fundamental to Glissant’s conception of Relation is the respect for the irreducible difference of the Other. Glissant’s theory of Relation envisions a conception of difference that defies the idea of the universal and the Western framework of dualistic thinking. Closely connected and constitutive of Relation is the concept of opacity. As a strategy that resists transparency, forced assimilation and the Western “project of knowledge” (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p56), opacity protects the difference of the Other as a difference that cannot be reduced or assimilated to the Same. Following Glissant, “Relation is made up of all the differences in the world and that we shouldn’t forget a single one of them, even the smallest” (Glissant to Diawara, [2009], 2013, p39). In the web of Relation, everything is connected to everything. In her illuminating analysis of Glissant’s work, Celia Britton describes Relation as “a fluid and unsystematic system whose elements are engaged in a radically nonhierarchical free play of interrelatedness” (1999, p11). Although this is a valuable approximation, it should be noted that any attempt to summarise Relation would prove inadequate and in fact goes completely against Glissant’s ([1990], 1997, p174) conception of the term in itself. I will introduce his theory and poetics of Relation in more depth in section 3 of chapter 1. Together with its key attributes, opacity and errantry, Glissant’s poetics of Relation will be central to my research and will form the guiding framework for *The Art of Un-belonging*.

criollo – a composite word derived from *criar* and *colono* – translating to “one native to the settlement” (Burns, 2009, p99). For a more in-depth analysis of the term, see Stuart Hall’s (2003) essay *Creolité and the Process of Creolization*.

The Practice

The practice is the driving motor for the research and takes the form of three discrete yet interrelated artworks that set out to question binary conceptions of self and Other through decolonising strategies that challenge static notions of belonging and identity. Following Glissant ([1990],1997, p17) I approach decolonisation (in the context of this project) in terms of overcoming the limitations of an oppositional assertion of identity and dualistic thought. To quote him at length:

For more than two centuries whole populations have had to assert their identity in opposition to the processes of identification or annihilation triggered by these invaders. Whereas the Western nation is first of all an 'opposite,' for colonized peoples' identity will be primarily 'opposed to' – that is, a limitation from the beginning. Decolonization will have done its real work when it goes beyond this limit.¹¹ (Glissant ([1990],1997, p17)

Aiming to destabilise the binary conception of self and Other, i.e. to dismantle “the duality of self-perception (one is citizen or foreigner)” (Glissant ([1990],1997, p17)¹² at the heart of the Western framework of binary thinking, my practice and the findings it engendered allowed me to explore and develop artistic strategies that challenge fixed notions of identity and question ethnocentric and anthropocentric conceptions of belonging. The incorporation of other artworks, which resonate with my own artistic practice as case studies, serves to further contextualise and develop my analysis.

The practice moves across various media and art forms, ranging from video, performance, ceramics, installation and art as intervention in public space. Departing from my mixed Turkish-and-Austrian heritage and hybrid subject position, the

¹¹ “Pendant une période historique de plus de deux siècles, l'identité affirmée des peuples devra se gagner contre les processus d'identification ou de néantisation déclenchés par ces envahisseurs. Si la nation en Occident est d'abord un “contraire***”, l'identité pour les peuples colonisés sera en premier lieu un “opposé à”, c'est-à-dire au principe une limitation. Le vrai travail de la décolonisation aura été d'outrepasser cette limite” (Glissant, 1990, p29).

¹² “La dualité de la pensée de soi (il y a le citoyen, et il y a l'étranger)” (Glissant, 1990, p29).

autobiographical and fictional narratives of the artworks explore infinite and unforeseen possibilities for our entanglement with each other – including the earth and non-human “‘earth’ others” (Braidotti, 2006, p265), i.e. plants, objects and plant-based matter such as coffee and clay/ceramics. Experimenting with transcultural performance, multilingual storytelling and collaborative processes of creative writing and artmaking, my practice presents a multiplicity of viewpoints and voices that question dualistic thought and re-imagine the notion of belonging – ultimately, beyond the human. Key strategies employed include multilingualism, (partial) translation and opacity. The artworks move from an anthropocentric exploration of the transcultural moving body and language in terms of cultural, ethnic and faith-based difference to an exploration of belonging beyond the human in terms of our entanglement with matter and “‘earth’ others” (Braidotti, 2006, p265).

Exhibited together as part of the solo-exhibition *The Art of Un-belonging* at London Gallery West (22 June – 2 July 2018), the artworks formed a triad – a group of three – in musical terms we could call them *movements* or variations of a theme. Exhibited together they formed the practice-element of this thesis (see the appendix for documentation of the viva exhibition). In what follows I will briefly describe the artworks, reflecting on their genealogies and the artistic strategies that are used and how they relate to the question of (un-doing) belonging. Subsequently, I will look at the ways the artworks are interconnected and relate to each other as a triad, considering the relation between practice and theory.

Surya Namaz (2018)

The multilingual video-performance *Surya Namaz* (2018) explores the practices of yoga and namaz, the Muslim prayer ritual, through a personal and multilingual narrative, destabilising fixed notions of belonging and identity through opacity, multilingualism and transcultural embodiment. I approach namaz, the Muslim prayer ritual and the yoga sequence *surya namaskar* as performances or “dynamically embodied signifying acts” (Farnell, 1999, p343), which make up culture and the self. By embodying these rituals, I am simultaneously performing different bodily practices

stemming from specific cultural or religious contexts, negotiating my transcultural, multiple selves through putting these practices into relation with each other. The main protagonists are my aunt Ümit Sözen, a devout Muslim woman who lives in Konya, Turkey and my New York-born Nigerian-Puerto-Rican yoga teacher Marisol Figueroa Reitze who is currently based in Solothurn, Switzerland. Alongside the multilingual voice-over (English, German, Turkish, Arabic and Sanskrit), filmic and sonic techniques, such as superimposition and partial translation are used to articulate the complexities of these trans-cultural encounters. The work is conceived as a video installation to be projected life-size onto a wall. In addition to the main projection, interviews with the main protagonists are presented on two monitors with sound played over headphones in order to further contextualise the work. The short documentary-style interviews introduce the individual perspectives of the main protagonists and their personal approach towards the distinct practices of yoga and namaz, the Muslim prayer ritual.

Kahvehane Kongresspark (2016)

Originally commissioned by the Urban Art Festival *Soho in Ottakring* in Vienna, *Kahvehane Kongresspark* comprises a ceramics installation, a temporary café and a site-specific performance in public space (2016). For the duration of two weeks a temporary coffeehouse, in Turkish *kahvehane*, was set up as an urban art intervention at the former milk hall in the Vienna Kongresspark. Organic and fair trade 'Turkish-style' coffee was served free of charge in one hundred specially designed glazed coffee cups and saucers (made from Kütahya ceramics), which I had prepared at the Ceramics Research Centre at the University of Westminster. The nine different designs, which I applied onto the coffee cups and saucers using ceramic transfer (decal) techniques, show fragments of old colonial maps and reflect coffee's colonial history and the globalisation of coffee. The temporary café at Vienna Kongresspark provided the open-air stage for an interactive lecture-performance, which I developed and performed in collaboration with the UK-based bharatanatyam artist Shane Shambhu. The lecture-performance explores the cultural history and migratory path of coffee from multiple angles presented as fragmented narrative, that

transgresses historical, spatial and linguistic boundaries. The performance proposes an alternative mode of knowledge transmission through a mix of dance, comedy, street theatre and roleplaying as a meditation on the naturecultural history of coffee in multiple languages.

Trans Plantations (2018)

Trans Plantations is a multi-part installation of one hundred handmade porcelain cups/saucers and coffee beans cast in porcelain, which are shown in combination with an audio-visual element. The project is concerned with the colonial history and human entanglements with coffee, taking the exploration of belonging further and ultimately beyond the anthropocentric. Fragmented images of old maps depicting former colonies, empires, and regions which were connected through the coffee trade, are projected onto the bisque (meaning unglazed) porcelain cups and saucers, which are installed in a grid-like formation on a low rectangular plinth. Installed in close proximity to this, placed at the centre of a dark cube-shaped plinth, the audience will encounter a heap of white bisque porcelain coffee beans, murmuring in different languages. The accompanying soundtrack consists of audio recordings of people from diverse backgrounds who speak as 'the voice of coffee' (the plant and/or the bean) in their respective mother tongues, offering different perspectives on coffee and its history in the form of first-person narratives. While a written English translation is available upon request, most of the multilingual soundtrack would be incomprehensible to a monolingual English-speaking audience. This project is a work-in-process in the sense that the archive of multilingual coffee stories and the number of coffee beans cast in porcelain could potentially grow in the future. In accordance with the location, the artwork's dimensions are variable, and the installation may take different shapes.

Writing *with* the practice

The written component of the thesis is guided by the practice and further contextualises *The Art of Un-belonging*, while the practice goes beyond this

conceptual framing. Research through art practice can generate other forms of knowledge: the aural, the retinal, the haptic, the verbal, the sensual, the corporeal. It engages the viewer and the world differently to the written word. Art can transcend the limits of language-based communication through the incorporation of non-or pre-verbal modes of knowledge generated by performative, audiovisual, spatial and material/object-based strategies. It can retain the incomprehensible, the unsayable, the things we will never be able to fully grasp or understand. The practice is what allows me to move beyond the binary of theory.

Glissant's theory and poetics are rooted in a practice that is language-based, whereas my multi-disciplinary practice extends to (moving) image, performance, sound and object-based installations. The experimental video *Surya Namaz* explores notions of hybridity, creolisation, diaspora and multiple belongings through a mix of different strategies: the video offers an auto-biographical first-person narrative, through multi-layered and superimposed video-sequences that bring together performances of culturally distinct practices (yoga and namaz), and a multilingual soundtrack. While the multi-part project and public art intervention *Kahvehane Kongresspark* also involves an element of multilingual performance (developed in collaboration with Shane Shambhu), the project shifts the focus from the human body to our entanglement with matter – coffee and ceramics. This movement from body to matter becomes even more evident in *Trans Plantations*. In contrast to the ceramics cups and saucers specially designed for the temporary coffeehouse in *Kahvehane Kongresspark*, the porcelain cups and saucers that form part of the installation *Trans Plantations* are unglazed and therefore not functional. Only fired once, the slip cast white porcelain cups and saucers form a canvas onto which fragmented images of colonial maps are projected. The porcelain coffee beans are made of the same material, unglazed porcelain, yet fired at a slightly higher temperature. In *Trans Plantations*, the objects and matter become 'theatrical' elements that immerse the viewer into a sensory experience, which is further enhanced through a video projection and a multilingual narrative/soundtrack. The voice recordings of 'coffee' speaking in various languages, would be mostly unintelligible to a mono-lingual English audience, challenging the universal

standardisation of Anglo-American English as the global *lingua franca* of contemporary art.

Crucially, all three artworks of the triad involve an element of language, translation and multilingualism: the multilingual soundtrack of *Surya Namaz* is only partially translated; the interactive performance which forms part of *Kahvehane Kongresspark* is performed in several languages including (exaggerated) accents and local dialects; and the scripts of the 'coffee stories' which form part of the sound installation *Trans Plantations* have been recorded in various languages, such as Amharic, Italian, (Egyptian) Arabic, (Cypriot) Greek, Turkish, (Brazilian) Portuguese, (Columbian) Spanish etc. Translation as one of the artforms, which following Glissant (1996, p45) inscribes the multiplicity of the world is key to my practice.

In sum, it could be said that what connects all three artworks in the exhibition is a recurrent exploration of translation, the untranslatable and opacity as artistic and aesthetic strategies. In recent years, Glissant's (literary) concept of opacity has received increased attention in art theory and practice, albeit mainly in relation to its potential as a (visual) strategy to resist representation and the gaze.¹³ In my research, I am more interested in the aural (sonic) aspect of opacity and its relation to multilingualism, which I believe is more closely related to Glissant's original conception of the term.

Yet, I would argue that the multilingual aesthetics of my practice differ from Glissant's conception of multilingualism. Following Glissant, multilingualism does not necessarily mean the coexistence of multiple languages, or the act of speaking/understanding several languages at the same time. As he emphasises in *Introduction à une Poétique du Divers* (1996, p41), multilingualism to him means first and foremost to practice (write, think, translate, create etc.) in the presence of (or with an awareness of) all the languages of the world. While I agree with this notion of multilingualism, to me as an artist the mere acknowledgement of other languages does not seem

¹³ Notable in this regard are: Blas, 2016, pp.149–153; Blas and Gaboury, 2016, pp. 155–165 and Demos, 2009, pp.113-128.

enough. How to translate their presence to the artwork and to the audience? The intention of creating in the presence of other languages may not become sufficiently evident in the work. Therefore, I argue that rendering the diversity (of languages and by extension difference) audible, visible and/or legible in contemporary (diasporic) art practice is key, if we want to generate a shift in the audiences' mono-cultural/lingual imaginary.

Writing about *Surya Namaz* in tandem to the editing of the video allowed me to experiment with forms of writing *from* or rather *with* the practice, reflecting on my artistic process and the conditions of making. The analysis in chapter 2, *Multilingual errantry: strategies of undoing belonging*, addresses contradictions in my relation to the filmed subjects and made me question my problematic position as 'Native Informant' (Spivak and Gunew, 1990, p66; Spivak 1999, p6).¹⁴ Was my engagement with the Muslim prayer ritual an example for self-othering – in other words, fetishising and exoticising my cultural heritage? I acknowledge that there remain many unresolved – and perhaps unresolvable – questions. For instance, I have not been able to resolve the ambivalence I feel towards my self-representation as veiled woman. It troubles me. As uncommented image, standing on its own, I would be inclined to read it as a splendid example of 'auto-Orientalism' (hence doing exactly what my thesis tries to oppose). Furthermore, I was anxious that the depiction of my aunt and myself wearing headscarves could potentially reinforce cliché images of Islam and the generalised assumption that Muslim women have to cover themselves.

¹⁴ This is a term Spivak borrows from ethnography in her critique of the perceived authenticity of "the self-marginalizing or self-consolidating migrant" or (postcolonial) Other who assumes the role of the 'Native Informant' by providing information regarding his or her culture of origin (1999, p6). According to Spivak, the figure of the 'Native Informant' exemplifies "the problem of autobiography: how subjective structures can, in fact, give objective truth" (Spivak and Gunew, 1990, p66). As she states, "the Native Informant, who was found in these other places, his stuff was unquestioningly treated as the objective evidence for the founding of so-called sciences like ethnography, ethno-linguistics, comparative religion, and so on. So that, once again, the theoretical problems only relate to the person who knows. The person who *knows* has all of the problems of selfhood. The person who is *known*, somehow seems not to have a problematic self. These days, it is the same kind of agenda that is at work" (Spivak and Gunew, 1990, p66).

In both instances, the voice-over narrative proved to be an important tool of resistance contra the pitfalls of misrepresentation. Through the multilingual voice-over, narrated by my voice(s) from the off and the disjunctions in the editing between the image and sound, I was able to destabilise the documentary-style images that might otherwise have reinforced the stereotypical and oversimplified representation of a 'Muslim woman' with regard to norms of dress. It is a little-known fact that there is no clear statement in the Qur'an that would prescribe women to cover their hair. Ironically, the bible is much more explicit about rules regarding the veil. While the question of veiling or covering my hair for prayer was not at the heart of this project, it is due to the stereotypical representations of Muslim women that dominate mainstream media and the ways the headscarf has been instrumentalised politically (particularly in the Turkish context), that I felt that this issue had to be addressed both within the work itself as well as in my written analysis (see my discussion in section 1 of chapter 2.)

The point of departure and inspiration for the video-performance *Surya Namaz* were memories inscribed on my own body: Images of *babaanne*, my paternal grandmother performing namaz, the Muslim prayer ritual, that had come to my mind, while I was practising yoga. Flashes of memory and feelings of confusion, belonging-not belonging, longing and dispersion that I have tried to re-create through filmic means. In retrospect the making of this project seems like a crazy undertaking. At least I am certain that my (secular minded) cousins in Turkey must have thought that I was completely out of my mind to be transporting huge daylight lamps, which I had rented from a shady private film-production company in Ankara by bus to my aunt's place in Karapınar in order to learn and practice the prayer ritual with her and record it on camera: and all of this as part of my doctoral studies in London! In any case, my aunt was thrilled about my visit and welcomed my interest to learn how to perform the namaz. (I discuss the arising ethical questions in section 1 of chapter 2.)

I am still surprised how much I liked performing the prayer ritual. It has a calming effect and made me feel very peaceful and relaxed. As a child that had been raised

with ‘no confession’ by secular parents from different faith groups (Sunni/Muslim and Protestant/Christian), I always felt an immense fascination with ‘religion’. It was a mysterious world to which I did not belong. Not being baptised I was a ‘heathen’ and I would go straight to hell, as one of my classmates in Austria assured me. As you might have guessed, therefore the baptism of my cat to which I refer in the soundtrack of the video is based on a true story. At least the cat will not go to hell. But I digress.



Fig. 0.2. My companion cat *Muschi*, who I ‘baptised’ in Eisenstadt in 1989.

With regard to the question of religion, I agree with Rosi Braidotti (2008) and Amelia Jones (2012) that questioning the perceived binary between secular and faith-based identities is absolutely crucial for our times. I did not have enough space for a more in-depth discussion of what Braidotti (2008) has referred to as “post-secular turn” in feminism in my written thesis, however I hope that *Surya Namaz* does succeed in (indirectly) addressing and critiquing related issues by putting into question the Western appropriation and secularisation of yoga (which I am part of).

In response to the dilemma I faced as diasporic artist with regard to my position of 'Native Informant' (Spivak and Gunew, 1990, p66; Spivak 1999, p6), it became evident that the next step was to explore the potential of Glissant's philosophy and poetics of Relation as strategy of resistance against assumptions of a singular root and as a tool to imagine belonging and identity differently, not based on roots but on Relation. As I will argue in section 2 of chapter 2 *Surya Namaz* combines the vertical movement of affiliation or 'root identity' – my return to Karapınar, the place where my father was born, and engagement with namaz – with the horizontal or diagonal movement of the relation – or route-identity, in the sense of "reaching out to meet other roots" (Glissant, 1996, p23; my own translation) by practising yoga with Marisol. Through putting the culturally distinct practices of yoga, namaz and Catholic Church rituals into relation with each other, the video simultaneously hybridises these ritualistic practices and interconnects them in rhizomatic ways, challenging dualistic thinking and assumptions of a singular root, by promoting a philosophy of multiple belongings.

Over the course of the research, there has been a significant shift in my practice. While the analysis of *Surya Namaz* in chapter 2 takes an anthropocentric approach by exploring the transcultural moving body and the question of belonging primarily from a language-centred perspective, reflecting on the potential of hybridity, opacity and multilingualism as critical strategies to destabilise the conception of a unitary root-identity, my artistic research exploring belonging in relation to ceramics and coffee – the materials and mediums I use in *Kahvehane Kongresspark* and *Trans Plantations* – instigated or rather demanded a different approach. Working with coffee and ceramics led to a major shift in my thinking: through my hands-on engagement with the material, I suddenly became aware of my interconnectedness with matter. This led an unexpected and sudden change of direction in my research.

Searching for ways to decolonise and transcend dualistic thinking, initially my project of un-doing belonging had envisaged the exploration of binary conceptions of self and other solely in relation to ethnic and cultural difference. Reflecting on the agency

of matter, I realised that I had to broaden the scope of my discussion with regard to belonging and expand the notion of the 'Other' to include what Rosi Braidotti (2006, p265) refers to as "non-human and 'earth' others." I quote her at length:

A sustainable ethics for a non-unitary subject proposes an enlarged sense of interconnection between self and others, including the non-human 'earth' others, by removing the obstacle of self-centred individualism. Far from entailing the loss of values and a free fall into relativism, this rather implies a new way of combining self-interest with the well-being of an enlarged sense of community, which includes one's territorial or environmental interconnections. It is a nomadic eco-philosophy of multiple belongings.
(Braidotti, 2006, pp. 265-266)

Adopting Braidotti's concept of nomadic thinking, which I propose to read in tandem with the Glissantian notion of errantry as "the thought of that which relates" ([1990], 1997, p20), I was able to develop a theoretical framework for the non-linear ways of how my research had evolved across multiple media and disciplines. Led by the practice, chapter 3 gradually moves from a language-based exploration of difference to a consideration of the possibilities of conceiving belonging beyond the human through the ways in which we relate to objects (material culture), plants and (edible) matter.

Chapter Outline

The written thesis is composed of three chapters. As the title indicates, chapter 1, *Contextualising the Art of Un-belonging*, provides the theoretical and contextual framework to my practice-based research. The chapter sets out with a brief overview of the globalisation of contemporary art and explores how the marginalisation of non-Western artists is discursively connected to the marginalisation of women in the arts. This is followed by a consideration of feminist strategies through an exploration of several artworks and a discussion of key theoretical concepts, such as *new materialism*,¹⁵ in regard to their potential to complicate and challenge binary thinking.

¹⁵ Rosi Braidotti (2000) and Manuel DeLanda (1996) introduced the term "'neo' or 'new' materialism" independently of one another in the late 1990s. Departing from the materiality of the body and foregrounding the agency of matter, neo/new materialism proposes a cultural theory and feminist research methodology that

Moving from the feminist notion of ‘relationality’ to Relation, in the last part of the chapter I introduce Glissant’s poetics and philosophy of Relation and its constitutive concepts, opacity and errantry as guiding framework for my research. Glissant’s theory subsequently informs my critical discussion of hybridity and (artistic) nomadism, as concepts which have shaped the discourse of identity and belonging in contemporary art from the 1990s onwards.

Through the analysis of my video-performance *Surya Namaz*, chapter 2, *Multilingual errantry: strategies of undoing belonging*, considers ways of writing *from* and *with* the practice. The first part of the chapter discusses the potentials and pitfalls of hybridity as artistic strategy. In my exploration of strategies that could help to avoid the pitfalls of mis-representation and self-othering, in particular in regard to diasporic artists’ tendency of assuming the problematic position of the ‘Native Informant’ (Spivak and Gunew, 1990, p66; Spivak 1999, p6), I turn to Glissant’s theory of Relation in the critical analysis of my practice. In addition to my reflections on *Surya Namaz*, chapter 2 considers Mona Hatoum’s seminal video *Measures of Distance* (1988) as case study for diasporic art. Guided by Glissant’s rhizomatic theory of identity, my close reading of the video’s soundtrack examines the critical potential of opacity as artistic strategy. Building on my discussion of opacity in section 3 of chapter 1, I propose to read opacity in accord with Sarat Maharaj’s proposition of “the untranslatability of the other” ([1994], 2001, pp.25-35). My analysis of *Measures of Distance* (1988) through the lens of opacity expands on previous interpretations of Hatoum’s video in the context of intercultural cinema that had centred on the aspect of “partial translation” (Marks, 2000, p37). Focusing the critical analysis on the video’s multilingual and partly unintelligible soundtrack, the chapter argues that opacity can serve as an aesthetic and political tool to resist the monolingual hegemony of a universalised

critically interrogates and counters the dualisms that dominated (post-)modern cultural theories, opposing the dualistic conception of nature and culture, matter and mind, the human and the non-human, etc. that are at the base of transcendental humanist traditions. See chapter 3 and chapter 5 in Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012 and the section *Neo/New Materialism* in the *Posthuman Glossary* (Van der Tuin, 2018, pp. 277-279).

Anglo-American English. I hope that my proposition of a different reading of *Measures of Distance* (1988) through the lens of Glissant's theory of Relation will further contribute to the critical reception of Mona Hatoum's work.

Chapter 3, *Trans-Plantations: towards a new vision of belonging*, sets out to challenge a binary conception of nature and culture by highlighting our inter-connectedness with "'earth' others" (Braidotti, 2006, p265) and ultimately the earth itself. In the first part of the chapter I introduce the conceptual framework, which consists of the "Western errantry of conquest" (Glissant, 1996, p88) and Columbus' 'discovery' of the so-called New World, the role of botanical taxonomy in relation to 'scientific' racism, 'human zoos' and the Western "project of knowledge" (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p56), i.e. the colonial legacy of anthropology, natural history, botany and ethnography. Following the question of how art could challenge ethnocentric and anthropocentric conceptions of belonging, my own practice is the driving motor of the research. In addition, Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña's seminal performance *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit...* (1992-1993), Mona Hatoum's *Present Tense* (1996) and *Jardin Suspendu* (2008) and Ai Wei Wei's *Sunflower Seeds* (2010) serve as case studies to further explore artistic strategies that challenge fixed notions of belonging and identity. In regard to my question of how we as humans are connected to what Braidotti (2006, p265) refers to as "'earth' others", the chapter re-considers the discipline of anthropology, exploring recent tendencies to decolonise and reform the discipline. Inspired by Glissant's affinity for Amerindian thinking, I turn to explore the possibilities of 'Amerindian perspectivism'¹⁶ (Viveiros de Castro, 1998; [2009], 2014) and an "anthropology beyond the human" (Kohn, 2013) as part of my project to question and destabilise binary conceptions of self/Other and

¹⁶ Based on ethnographic research, Viveiros de Castro (1998; [2009], 2014) introduces the concept of 'perspectivism' to describe indigenous Amerindian cosmologies and their distinct conception of the interrelation between human and nonhuman beings. 'Perspectivism' refers to the ways human and non-human subjects or 'persons' perceive each other from distinct 'perspectives' or points of view. It transcends the binary conception of nature and culture and cannot be reduced to a Western framework of thinking. For further discussion of the concept and its relevance for my research see section 1 in chapter 3.

nature/culture in diasporic art. Integrating different theories, the research contributes to the decolonisation of contemporary (diasporic) art by challenging binary conceptions of self and Other and exploring ways to open and reinscribe the concept of belonging and identity beyond the human.

1. Contextualising *The Art of Un-belonging*

This chapter will provide the context and introduce the guiding framework for my exploration of artistic strategies that destabilise fixed notions of belonging in the light of current discourses of the politics of identity¹⁷ or what is referred to (often negatively) as ‘identity politics’ in the arts.

Tracing how historical developments have influenced the current discourse on identity and belonging, the first section of this chapter will briefly sketch the questions raised by three seminal exhibitions in 1989, *The Other Story. Afro-Asian artists in Post-war Britain*, *Magiciens de la terre* in Paris and *the 3rd Havana Biennial*.¹⁸ These exhibitions have been widely influential in de-centring Eurocentric understandings of contemporary art. The inclusion of artists from differing geographical, ethnic or cultural backgrounds into the Western-dominated art circuit led to a paradigm shift towards a more global perspective on contemporary art.

Based on the importance of feminist theory and practices for the exploration of self and other, the second part of this chapter will look at ways in which feminist inquiries regarding the constitution of the subject and the self have influenced the advancement of representational strategies in relation to cultural identity and belonging. I will analyse some key works in relation to the feminist axiom ‘the personal is political,’ for instance Hatoum’s early video work *Measures of Distance* (1988). This artwork is especially relevant to this discussion, as it marks a shift in feminist art practices by introducing an intersectional understanding of belonging and

¹⁷ For a critical discussion of the different connotations of “politics of identity” and “identity politics,” see Smith (2011, p5).

¹⁸ *Magiciens de la terre* was curated by Jean-Hubert Martin and took place at the Centre Georges Pompidou and Grande Halle de la Vilette, Paris, from 18 May to 14 August 1989. *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Postwar Britain*, curated by Rasheed Araeen, was on view at the Hayward Gallery, London, from 29 November 1989 to 4 February 1990. *The Third Havana Biennial* took place from 1 November to 31 December 1989 and was curated by Gerardo Mosquera and the team of the Centro Wilfredo Lam, led by Lillian Llanes Godoy.

identity and destabilising binary categories of belonging. Different aspects of Hatoum's practice as 'global artist' (Brett, [1997], 2016) will be further explored in the chapters that follow.

In the final section of this chapter I will introduce Édouard Glissant's concepts of Relation, opacity and errantry, which will establish the guiding framework of my thesis. Building on my discussion of the globalisation of art and the impact of feminism on identity politics, I will provide an overview of key concepts to contextualise my artistic endeavour of undoing belonging, tracing the discourses around hybridity and (artistic) nomadism through the lens of Glissant's theory of Relation ([1990], 1997).

This brief historical overview will serve to contextualise and guide my practice-based exploration of artistic strategies that challenge fixed notions of belonging and identity in contemporary (diasporic) art. However, I want to be clear that by tracing these histories I do not intend to provide a chronology or a comprehensive survey of identity politics in the arts. On the contrary, I have quite deliberately chosen to adopt a non-linear approach towards history. Rather than working within the confines of a linear account of developments, this will allow me to discuss various discourses in relation to each other, tracing their influences upon each other. Following Amelia Jones, I believe that an engagement with the histories of identity politics in art and culture is vital for the imagination and development of new strategies in the future (Jones, 2012, p6).

1.1. The globalisation of contemporary art

As has been widely recognised, 1989 marked a paradigm shift towards internationalisation and globalisation of the art world (Orlando, 2013; Esche, 2011). In conjunction with the significant political, economic and technological changes which were to come after the end of socialism in 1989, the art world expanded, and its locations multiplied in the following decades (Esche, 2011). The three seminal exhibitions *The Other Story*, *Magiciens de la Terre*, and the 3rd *Havana Biennial*,

which coincidentally took place in the same year in London, Paris and Havana, initiated this paradigm shift and have ever since become important reference points for exhibitions and scholarly work on the subject worldwide. In what follows, I will briefly trace the history of these seminal exhibitions in order to gain a better understanding of the developments, which shaped the present discourse on the politics of identity in contemporary art.

1.1.1. 'Afro-Asian' art in London, 1989

The exhibition *The Other Story* was curated by the Karachi-born artist Rasheed Araeen and took place at the Hayward Gallery in London, 1989/90. The exhibition brought together twenty-four positions of British visual artists of African, Caribbean and Asian ancestry, in a group exhibition concerned with modernist aesthetics. The concept for the show was driven by Araeen's (ongoing) critique of institutional racism, structural ignorance and exclusion of 'Afro-Asian' artists from the history of modern art in post-imperial Britain.



Fig. 1.1 *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-war Britain*. Exterior view of Hayward Gallery, London, during the exhibition. Photo: Rasheed Araeen. Courtesy of Asia Art Archive

In contrast to prevailing stereotypical representations of immigrant artists as the exotic Other, Araeen's exhibition at the Hayward gallery set out to introduce a corrective narrative to mainstream Western art history. In retrospect the curatorial decision to limit the exhibition to works of 'Afro-Asian' artists, appears highly contradictory, as such an exclusive approach could potentially result in pre-determining and restricting possible meanings of the artworks and in promoting their reading in relation to a particular ethnic/racial constituency, in this case designated as 'Afro-Asian'.



Fig. 1.2 *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-war Britain*.
Mona Hatoum: *Over My Dead Body*, outside of Hayward Gallery.
Photo: Rasheed Araeen. Courtesy of Asia Art Archive.



Fig. 1.3 *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-war Britain*.
Lubaina Himid. Exhibition view at the Hayward Gallery.
Photo: Rasheed Araeen. Courtesy of Asia Art Archive.

Black artists affiliated with the Black Arts Movement (BAM) in the 1980s, a movement, which included Araeen himself, have repeatedly been accused of ‘self-ghettoization’ in “restrictive identity politics” (Fisher, 2014). However, as Jean Fisher argues, their exclusive concern with Black¹⁹ (British) identity could be interpreted as a form of ‘strategic essentialism’ (Spivak, 1988), which may have been subversive and highly necessary in the context of exclusion and structural racism reigning at the time (Fisher, 2014). The conception of ‘essentialism’ as ‘strategy’ (in the sense of a political tactic) which Fisher refers to here, was initially formulated by Gayatri C. Spivak in her account of the Subaltern Studies Group (1988, pp.197-221).²⁰ Spivak’s understanding of ‘strategic essentialism,’ which she originally developed in reference to the Subaltern Studies Group, implies that a marginalised or oppressed group can

¹⁹ I am adopting Eddie Chambers’ use of the upper-case B. (See Chambers, 2014, pix.) Following Chambers (2014), in Britain a trans-racial usage of ‘black/Black’ is widely accepted, referring to individuals and communities of African, African-Caribbean and South Asian background.

²⁰ For further discussion of the term in the context of feminist theory see Llyod, 2005, pp. 59-61; pp. 64-67.

empower themselves by claiming “a positive subject-position” (Spivak, 1988, p207), strategically uniting on the base of an “essentialist notion of consciousness” (Spivak, 1988, p206), through “refusing their actual historical subordination by appropriating for themselves the role of the subject of history” (Llyod, 2005, p65).

In uniting modernist artists on the base of the essentialist category ‘Afro-Asian,’ arguably *The Other Story* enabled these artists to tell ‘their stories,’ whilst transforming them into agents of change within the larger project of re-writing Euro-centric art history. The adoption of an identity position in relation to a specific form of difference mirrors feminist essentialist strategies of re-claiming a subject position based on gendered difference, to which I will return to in the next section of this chapter (section 1.2). What are the potentials and pitfalls of ‘strategic essentialism’ (Spivak, 1988) for artists today?

1.1.2. ‘Magic’ art in Paris, 1989

The Parisian exhibition *Magiciens de la terre*, which translates as ‘Magicians of the Earth’ in English, was curated by museum director Jean-Hubert Martin and took place at the Centre Georges Pompidou and La Villette in 1989. The kind of discourse proposed by this exhibition, whose stated main objective was to create a dialogue between ‘Western’ cultures and other cultures based on the “universal notion of aesthetic creativity” (Steeds, 2013, p27), proved to be highly problematic with regards to the politics of representation of ‘others’ in exhibitions of contemporary art in the so-called West.

Several commentators have criticised its Eurocentric framework (Araeen, 1989; Fisher, [1989], 2013) and the way the exhibition fetishised and projected (neo-) colonial phantasies of cultural authenticity (Buchloh [1989], 2012). The fallacies of Jean-Hubert Martin’s curatorial approach to ‘worldwide’ (*mondialisé*) art have generated a lot of debate, which in turn “has substantially influenced the discourse in subsequent exhibitions and has spawned numerous counter models” (Belting, 2013,

p67) – recent examples include *Documenta 11* (2002) and *Intense Proximity: An Anthology of the Near and the Far* (2012), curated by Okwui Enwezor.

More than twenty-five years on, it seems that the distinction between centre and periphery has been seriously questioned through the increase in migratory movements, the spread of new communication technologies and the proliferation of international biennials, which are popping up in every corner of the globe along with the neo-liberal expansion of the art market. However, some of the questions raised by *Magiciens de la terre* – for instance, “issues of locality and specificity in relation to the wider world” (Steeds, 2013, p25), and questions regarding the representation of the other, culture and power, translation and untranslatability still prevail and continue to challenge artists, curators and audiences alike. Jean Fisher’s ([1989], 2013) criticism regarding the curatorial framework of *Magiciens de la terre* seems to be most productive and still resonates more than a quarter century later:

Perhaps more dialogue would have been possible had the exhibition indeed given more space to artists who use transcultural codes. Then we might have seen how cultural intervention in the contemporary world has multiple pathways – not a one-way traffic from the West to the Rest, or the insularity of ‘cultural authenticity’. (Fisher, [1989], 2013, p256)

The repercussions of these questions for contemporary debates on the politics of identity in the arts will be central to my research.



Fig. 1.4 Barbara Kruger: *Qui sont les magiciens de la terre?* (1989)
 © Centre Pompidou, Bibliothèque Kandinsky Photothèque du Mnam / Cci, Paris.
 Photo: Béatrice Hatala.

1.1.3. 'Third world' art in Havana, 1989

Magiciens may be credited to be the first exhibition of 'world-wide' art in the West, however there had been an important precursor that served to initiate the globalisation of contemporary art in the Southern hemisphere: the Havana Biennial (*Bienal de la Habana*). The third edition of the Havana Biennial was curated by Cuban art historian and critic Gerardo Mosquera and by the Centro Wilfredo Lam's staff. In contrast to the aforementioned exhibitions in Paris and London, the Havana Biennial proposed for the first time a vision "towards the internationalisation of contemporary art" (Mosquera, 2011, p74) from outside of the 'Western centres' of the art system in Europe and North America. The Biennial brought together artworks of artists from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean and Latin America and provided a platform for works of 'Third World' artists, who would have been dismissed as 'westernised' by the Western art establishment.

In contrast to *Magiciens'* Eurocentric perspective, the curatorial team in Havana departed from the assumption that there was a shared language of modernism as commonality in the works of artists from the Third World (Weiss, 2011, p31). The adoption of this new model led to “a shift from the nation-based idea of culture (and of course, of traditional biennials) to a global perspective” (Weiss, 2011, p31). As Luis Camnitzer stated in a review of the exhibition, “Havana was not to be a forum for ‘otherness’ but for ‘thisness’, where ‘this’ is *what* defines us, and not *how* they define us” ([1990], 2011, p207).

It should be noted that the term ‘Third World’ had already become controversial by the end of the Cold War (Belting, 2013, p181; Buddensieg, 2013, p47) and the Biennial’s organisers did not mean to endorse or promote “a ‘Third World art’ as a distinct, ontological category opposed to a ‘Western art’” (Mosquera, 2011, p74). Following Mosquera (2011), the Biennial’s focus on artists from the Third World should be understood as an attempt to provide opportunities to communicate and interact in order to counter “a deficit in South-South linkage and interaction,” which according to him “persists as a postcolonial legacy” (2011, p74).

1.1.4. Global art?

Tracing the history of these three seminal exhibitions is useful to gain an understanding of the development of the discourse about the globalisation of contemporary art and the problematic of the essentialisation of artists as regional-cultural representatives. By latest since *documenta11* (2002, Kassel), curated by Nigerian-born Okwui Enwezor – who was the first non-European artistic director in the history of Germany’s most important international exhibition of contemporary art – globalisation has become a buzzword in the arts. As Peter Osborne claims, we could say, that “the globally transnational character of an art space has become the primary marker of its contemporaneity” (2013, p163).

Arguably, *documenta11* played a leading role in shifting the focus to postcolonial art practices, transnational dialogue and processes of creolisation, which formed the base for new approaches towards ‘global’ curating. The themes of diaspora, exile

and the space in-between were central to *documenta11*, which was accompanied by five transdisciplinary platforms in different locations. One of the platforms, *Créolité and Creolization* (St. Lucia, 13–15 January 2002), explored the impact of Glissant's theory of creolisation, to which I will return to in more detail in section 3 of this chapter. Departing from the context of the Caribbean, Glissant conceives of creolisation as a process of "cultural and linguistic mixing" (Hall, 2003, p30) with unforeseen consequences. The focal point for his theory is the Plantation, where (after the genocide of the indigenous Amerindian population) European colonisers, displaced and colonised Africans, Indians, and Chinese were forcefully brought into contact. Conceived as an infinite movement of becoming, creolisation is opposed to fixity and rejects the notion of pure and essential identities. Following Glissant, creolisation, understood in terms of the open-ended processes of cross-cultural entanglements that are foundational to his theory of Relation, operates on a world-wide scale and as such could be applied to various contexts.²¹ The processes of creolisation, i.e. the entanglements of different cultures in various geographical contexts, were at the heart of *documenta11*, which engaged with the complexities of the 'global' in contemporary art practices, emphasising themes of diaspora, exile and displacement.

Ten years after the highly influential *documenta11*, Okwui Enwezor was appointed artistic director of the Paris triennial. Building on his previous curatorial work, the exhibition *Intense Proximity* (2012) took the question of 'proximity' and "the state of relations between individuals in a globalized world" (Bouteloup, 2012, p35) as its starting point. The exhibition's catalogue assembles historical and contemporary texts engaging with the theme of the exhibition, with particular focus on the poetics

²¹ "La these que je défendrai auprès de vous est que *le monde se créolise*, c'est-à-dire que les cultures du monde mises en contact de manière foudroyante et absolument consciente aujourd'hui les unes avec les autres se changent en s'échangeant à travers des heurts irrémédiables, des guerres sans pitié mais aussi des avancées de conscience et d'espoir qui permettent de dire – sans qu'on soit utopiste, ou plutôt, en acceptant de l'être – que les humanités d'aujourd'hui abandonnent difficilement quelque chose à quoi elles s'obstinent depuis longtemps, à savoir que l'identité d'un être n'est valable et reconnaissable que si elle est exclusive de l'identité de tous les autres êtres possible" (Glissant, 1996, p15).

and politics of ethnography. Amongst them are key references for the discourse in relation to the 'ethnographic turn' in contemporary art, such as Hal Foster's (1996) essay *The Artist as Ethnographer*, which is of particular relevance to my study. In his analysis of artists' turn to ethnography, Foster ([1996], 2012) calls for caution against a perception of the Other as a site of authenticity and stresses reflexivity as a strategy to protect against an over-identification with the Other. At the same time, he expresses his concern that 'self-othering' may result in "ethnographic self-fashioning" (Clifford, cited by Foster, [1996], 2012, p347).

Echoing Foster's scepticism, the curator Nav Haq (2014) identifies the use of the artistic device of 'self-othering' as problematic tendency in the international art circuit. As he points out, "numerous artists today produce art in a way that is quite conscious and complicit with how the art system accommodates the politics of identity, which though successful, also highlight the problems" (Haq, 2014, p7). He is critical of the fact that artists today are expected to "act, or be framed, as socio-cultural representatives of the place/people they 'are from,'" and he registers how "the role of biography is used to essentialise individuals" (Haq, 2014, p6). Posing the question of whether 'identity politics' is still relevant or necessary for the arts, the curators Anders Kreuger and Nav Haq staged the exhibition *Don't You Know Who I Am? Art After Identity Politics* at M HKA – the Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp, bringing together around thirty artists whose work addressed issues of identification and subjectivity. Critical of the tendency for 'ethnic marketing' and 'post-colonialist self-othering' the exhibition proposed a 'new identity paradigm,' exploring the potential offered by abstraction, performativity and fiction in contemporary artistic practices.

Governmental policies in the UK and beyond that have responded to cultural diversity by implementing a set of 'multicultural' regulatory policies have been widely problematised in the field of cultural theory, as they have arguably led to further ghettoisation of minority communities. A parallel can be drawn to the workings of the art market, which tends to categorise artists and artforms according to 'regions' or national-cultural belonging. Echoing already mentioned critiques of 'multicultural managerialism' and marketable difference (Mercer, 1999; Maharaj, 2004; Araeen,

2005; Haq 2014), Coco Fusco (2017) aptly describes our current condition as “a status quo that perpetuates inequities: the polite veneer of ‘diversity’ packaged in ethnic heritage months, ‘global’ survey exhibitions or the tendency to equate the success of a few black artists with the elimination of institutional racism.” Just as the election of a Black president (unfortunately) did not lead to the improvement of race relations in the US under Obama,²² neither does the inclusion and celebration of a few Black artists signify the end of institutional racism. As Fusco (2017) writes, “there is also a marked disconnect between the abject economic and political conditions of ethnic minorities and peoples of the Global South, and the hyper-visibility of cultural difference in the realm of high and popular culture. The art market has made cultural difference a viable commodity and many artists of colour have benefitted financially.” The question of how artists could respond (more) critically to the neo-liberal appropriation of diversity will be central to my research.

Looking back in history, it appears that the discrimination and categorisation of artists based on cultural difference or ethnic heritage bears similarities to the history of systemic exclusion, marginalisation and the essentialising of women artists in the arts. With the global expansion of the art market, the categorisation and the process of essentialising artistic practices based on gender, has been replaced with what the curator Nav Haq describes as “regionalism – nationality, race and ethnicity rolled into one” (2014, p6). To understand how these discourses about the Other are interlinked, it seems important to consider the question of belonging and identity through the lens of feminism(s), which is what is proposed in the next section. In which ways have questions raised by feminist practices continued to influence contemporary artistic practices and current debates about the politics of identity in the arts?

²² See Danielle Fuentes Morgan’s (2017) article *Obama and Black Lives Matter: An Epilogue*.

1.2. Beyond the binary: tracing the impact of feminism(s) on the politics of identity

Memories within come out of the material that precedes and defines a person. When she creates, they are the subsoil of her work. (Trinh, 1991, p191)

Following the questions posed at the conclusion of the last section, I will go on to explore the impact of feminism(s) and feminist art practices on discourses around cultural identity and belonging in contemporary art. As the epitaph at the head of this section indicates, my exploration will be centred on the critical investigation of the personal and the gendered body as material in feminist art. Based on Amelia Jones (2012) critique of binary models of self and other in relation to gender, sexuality and race in 1970s identity politics in the arts, and the impact that these critiques had on the exploration of difference in terms of cultural identity in the 1990s, I will trace the development of transversal theories, such as Rosi Braidotti's 'new materialism' (or 'neo-materialism'), as example of more progressive approaches to identity that complicate binaries and emphasise relationality. Drawing on Deleuzean philosophy and the "embodied and embedded brand of materialism" of feminist thinkers, such as Simone de Beauvoir (Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012, p21), 'situated epistemology' (Haraway 1988), and 'the politics of location' (Rich, 1987) for Braidotti, "'neo-materialism'²³ emerges as a method, a conceptual frame and a political stand, which refuses the linguistic paradigm, stressing instead the concrete yet complex materiality of bodies immersed in social relations of power" (Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012, p21).

A starting point for my investigation is the feminist strategy of the politicisation of the personal and the feminist politics of location that has been influential for many artists. I will analyse some key works in relation to the feminist axiom 'the personal is political,' e.g. Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* (1973–79), Jo Spence's *Beyond*

²³ For a detailed genealogy of the term see *Interview with Rosi Braidotti* (Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012, pp.19-37).

the Family Album (1978-79) and Mona Hatoum's early video work *Measures of Distance* (1988). Hatoum's practice will be further explored as case study informing my research of artistic strategies of undoing belonging. I will provide a more in-depth analysis of specific aspects of Hatoum's practice as a 'global artist' (Brett, [1997], 2016) and explore her work through the lens of postcolonial theory and feminist new materialism in the chapters to come.

Looking back in history, questions about the constitution of the subject within social discourse and questions about the self were first addressed by artists and theorists affiliated to the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s. As Lucy Lippard observed, the autobiographical and narrative methods of feminist art, which had become wide-spread by the mid-1970s, "were in part inspired by women's activities, especially consciousness raising" (cited in Wark, 2006, p89). Feminism's profound influence on mainstream art, e.g. through the development of narrative and autobiographical methods alongside with the feminist proposition of art as political practice and the concern with audience, has been widely recognised by art historians. In the light of this, it is equally important to acknowledge how the Women's Movement learned from other 'others' struggles for equality, such as those of the as civil rights movement and 'black nationalism' (Smith, 2011, p134). The latter promoted the sharing of personal experiences in consciousness raising exercises that enabled people to realise their marginalisation and oppression was systemic and shared. Similarly, when feminists started to question the function of (sexual) difference in patriarchal societies and how this was reproduced in their marginalisation and/or exclusion as artists, it was their difference, which "became the 'essence' that united women in their struggle for emancipation" (Wark, 2006, p6). As Jayne Wark argues "a strategic form of essentialism was necessary at the time" (2006, p7). As already discussed in the previous section of this chapter, Gayatri C. Spivak (1988, p207), has advocated 'essentialism' as 'strategy' in terms of a political tactic of self-empowerment by marginalised or oppressed groups that could claim "a positive subject-position," by strategically uniting on the base of a shared identity and "essentialist notion of consciousness" (Spivak, 1988, p206). In the context of the Women's Movement, this meant the adoption of a unitary identity position based on

gendered difference as political tool for emancipatory struggles. This strategy subsequently influenced artistic practices, curatorial projects and theoretical discourses concerned with cultural identity.

The understanding of a unitary identity position based on gender has since been contested by ‘feminists of colour’ (e.g. hooks, 1984), who problematised the exclusion generated by the treatment of gender as separate from race and class, as well as poststructuralist theorists in favour of a “subject-in-process” (Llyod, 2005, p36). The latter is based on the understanding of subjectivity as “constituted (by language, discourse, or power), inessential and thus perpetually open to transformation” (Llyod, 2005, p1). Questions of essentialism versus non- or anti-essentialism, identity and difference have continued to be of central concern to feminists until the late 1990s (Llyod, 2005) and in fact still continue to trouble us until today. Looking at ways how artists have dealt with the aforementioned questions, I will go on to explore feminist art practices which foreground a critique of representation of the self/Other in relation to the premise that ‘the personal is political’. In what way do their practices negotiate identity and difference, essentialism versus non-essentialism?

1.2.1. The personal is political

A prime example of the feminist concern with the question of subjective experience and gender difference is Mary Kelly’s *Post-Partum Document* (1973–79), which explores motherhood and the relation to the artist’s son through conceptual art, breaking “the taboo surrounding maternity in contemporary, critical art practice” (Iversen, 1997, p48). Mary Kelly, who was critically engaged with feminism and psychoanalysis, started the project shortly after the birth of her son in 1973. *Post-Partum Document* started off as a series of works – which Kelly calls ‘documentations’ – and is concerned with her fantasies and desires as mother. The project, which was realised during a period of six years, initially took the form of a multi-part installation (part I–II were first exhibited at the ICA London in 1976), and the project was later published as a book. *Post-Partum Document* translates the highly

emotional relation between a mother and her son into a pseudo-scientific visual language. It draws upon the aesthetics of conceptual art, archival documentation, the diary and psychoanalysis. The work is divided into six sections: documentation I–VI; each is based “on a formative moment in her son’s mastery of language and her own sense of loss, moving between the voices of the mother, child and analytic observer“ (Kelly, no date).²⁴ The clinically displayed frames feature highly personal objects, such as stained nappy liners, handwritten diary entries and her son’s drawings, juxtaposed with psychoanalytical diagrams, statistical tables, typewritten letters and feeding charts. Unlike other feminist artists Mary Kelly refrained from representing her own body directly in the work. Reflecting on *Post-Partum Document* in relation to representation and the “liminal point of visibility” (Kelly, 2005, p237), Kelly writes:

In the first stage of *Post-Partum Document*, I did a photographic series that explored the mother’s subjective point of view. But as the project developed, I became more interested in representing the affective rather than literal form of the mother-child relationship. In the end, I moved away from the photograph to another mode of documentation, from the icon to the index. (Kelly, 2005, p239)

Concerned with the construction of the gendered subject through an exploration of motherhood, *Post-Partum Document* exemplifies a shift in the understanding of identity and the formation of the subject based on relation. As Margaret Iversen states “her (Mary Kelly’s) distinctive avoidance of iconic representations of women set a precedent for the ‘constructivist’ feminist position” (1997, p38).

In their exploration of identity and difference through autobiographical narratives feminist artists often placed their focus on the female body, which would often be the artist’s own body. To borrow Jayne Wark’s words, the “examination of the role of family” was particularly significant to feminist artists, who, “unlike their male peers, were concerned with the construction of the sexed subject” (2006, p100). An important example associated with this strand of feminist art in the 1970s and 1980s is Jo Spence. In contrast to Mary Kelly’s non-iconic approach towards

²⁴ Also see Tate (no date). *Post-Partum Document*. *Analysed Markings and Diary Perspective Schema* (Experimentum Mentis III: Weaning from the Dyad) 1975.

representation, Jo Spence explored the politics of representation through her own image by consciously staging her appearance in front of the camera. *Beyond the Family Album* (1978–79) was her first project to explore photography as a tool for auto-therapy and self-empowerment. *Beyond the Family Album* is composed of a series of panels that juxtapose autobiographical material (texts and photographs) with newspaper clippings. Spence subverts the popular genre of family photos by reconstructing traumatic events, which are usually left out in the family album—death, divorce, abuse, conflicts and illnesses. By being model and creator of the images Spence explores new approaches towards the representation of her self and challenges society's perception of the roles projected onto her. It was her involvement with feminism, which made her question how she had been represented by others. Reflecting on *Beyond the Family Album* in her autobiographical book *Putting Myself in the Picture* Spence (1986, p82) describes how feminism had made her more aware of her “own socialization as a ‘woman’” and led her to question representational regimes. Spence (1986, p82) states:

This was a starting point of a project on ‘my history’ which I began by tentatively examining photographs of myself and ended by taking control over how I wanted to be photographed. Thus I changed my role from being behind the camera to being in front of it and became at the same time an active rather than passive subject. Not only did I take more control over what I presented of myself to the camera, but I also decided what techniques I wanted used on me.

During this period, many artists affiliated to the feminist movement turned to video to explore representations of self and other, with particular focus on the subject of the family. In her analysis of these feminist works' relation to video, Jane Wark (2006) sees the artists' use of the medium as related to video's ability to “capture the narrative substance of this subject matter” and its associations with the “pseudo-documentary format associated with home movies” (2006, p100). According to her the ‘intimacy of the family’ provided a starting point for these works, as it allowed an exploration of “how the ideological values inscribed there have political connotations for gendered, classed, and raced relations of power and domination” (Wark, 2006, p109). With regards to “new autobiography” (Russell, 1999, p278), which developed as a form of experimental filmmaking in the 1970s, Chantal Akerman's autobiographical film *News from Home* (1977), a film concerned with the relation to

her mother, absence and displacement, is a notable example. Catherine Russell, who explores auto-ethnography as “an intercultural, cross-cultural method” (1999, p181), argues that “in the politicization of the personal, identities are frequently played out among several cultural discourses, be they ethnic, national, sexual, racial, and/or class based” (1999, p276). According to her, “autobiography becomes ethnographic at the point where the film- or video-maker understands his or her personal history implicated in larger social formations and historical processes” (Russell, 1999, p276).

Following Russell’s definition of the term, Mona Hatoum’s video *Measures of Distance* (1988) could be read as an ‘auto-ethnography’. The video demonstrates the politicisation of the personal and its implication in history, revealing how a personal narrative can reflect larger socio-political realities. As an audio-visual exploration of her relation to her mother and the family’s history as Palestinian exiles in Lebanon Hatoum’s *Measures of Distance* is an intimate reflection on belonging and displacement. In 1975, Mona Hatoum herself had been displaced, as she was stranded in the UK because of the civil war which then broke out in Lebanon. The fifteen-minute experimental video (based on footage that was recorded / photographed on her first visit back to Lebanon in 1981) is composed of multiple layers of sonic and visual material – close-up still images (originally slides) showing her mother nude under the shower are superimposed with extracts of letters her mother wrote to her in Arabic; the Arabic handwriting becomes an abstract signifier of cultural and lingual difference in an English-speaking context. The Arabic letters that seem to float on top of the blurred images depicting her mother’s naked body, through e.g. close shots of her voluptuous breasts, allow for multiple associations, ranging from a veil to barbed wire, evoking a sense of longing and distance.

The soundtrack opens with a tape-recorded conversation between mother and daughter: they speak about intimate subjects, such as her mother’s sexuality and relation to her father in Arabic (in a Palestinian dialect, to be precise) – there are no English subtitles provided; the intimacy, warmth and laughter of the lively conversation is abruptly disturbed by another sonic layer, which has been mixed in as an additional track: the artist’s voice reading her mother’s letters translated into

English. In contrast to the light-hearted conversation between mother and daughter, the letters are read out loud in a sad and monotonous voice. They speak of separation and loss, the hardship of exile and geographical separation. In Mona Hatoum's own description of the work, the video "is constructed visually in such a way that every frame speaks of literal closeness and implied distance" ([1997], 2016, p131). As Desa Philippi (1993) states, "the political circumstances as a set of specific causes for loss and the psycho-sexual determinations of loss in the mother-daughter relationship...are constantly interwoven and inseparable" in her work (Philippi cited in Brett, [1997], 2016, p57).

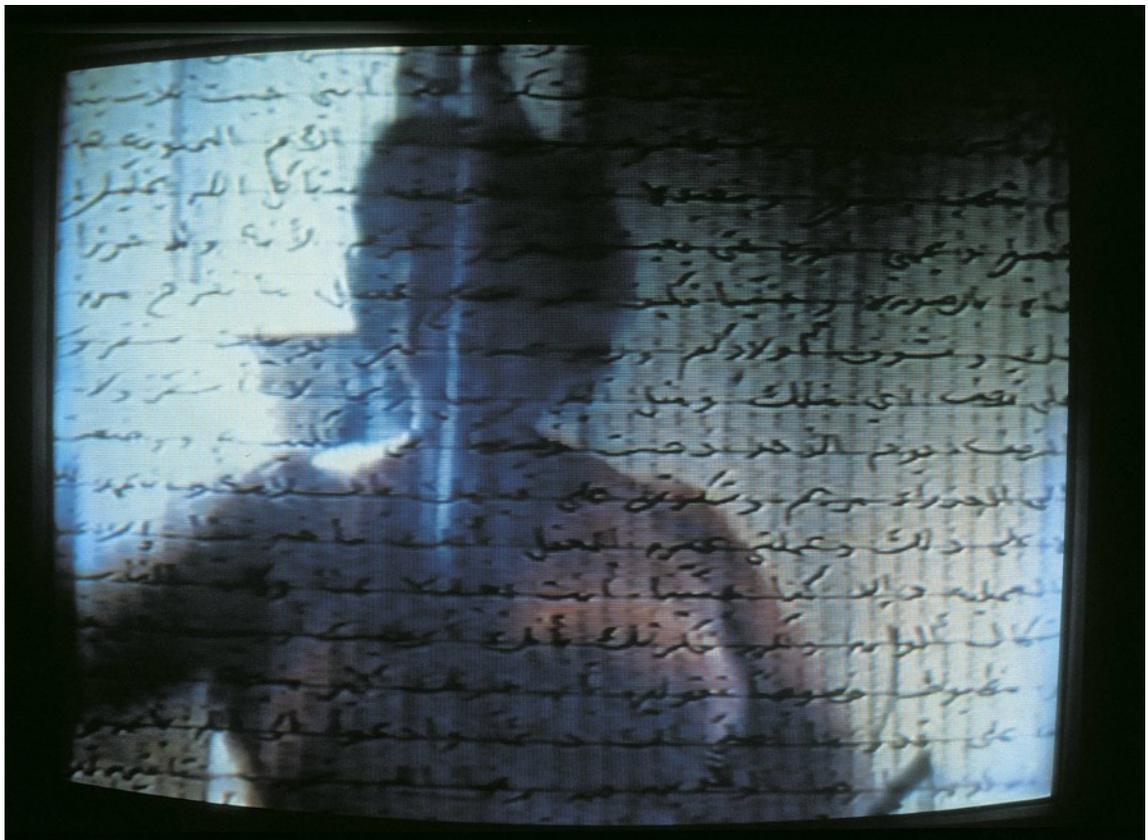


Fig. 1.5 Mona Hatoum: *Measures of Distance*. Colour video with sound, 15 min 35 s. A Western Front video production, Vancouver, 1988. © Mona Hatoum. Courtesy of the artist.

Reflecting about her work Hatoum explains how she was "trying to go against the fixed identity that is usually implied in the stereotype of Arab woman as passive, mother as non-sexual being" ([1997], 2016, p131). In an interview with Claudia Spinelli (1996), she describes how she consciously decided to "take a very personal point of view, to use autobiography as a resource" ([1997], 2016, p131). Her

motivation to adopt this feminist method partly derived from her frustration with the (Western) representation of Arabs in news reports about the Lebanon and the way “Arabs were always shown en masse with mostly hysterical women crying over dead bodies” (Hatoum, [1997], 2016, p131). As she points out, personal stories of loss and displacement were (and still are) rarely heard in mainstream media; rather “it is as if people from the Third World are seen as a mass or a herd and not as individuals” (Hatoum, [1997], 2016, p131). In the same interview Hatoum also discusses her relation to feminism, stating that she was “also influenced by the feminist slogan ‘the personal is political’” ([1997], 2016, p131).

Her choice to use autobiographical material, including close-up photographs of her mother in the shower, juxtaposed with taped conversations (in Arabic) between mother and daughter about very intimate topics, e.g. her mother’s sexuality, which are layered with her voice-over (in English) reading her mother’s letters, could be related to Trinh T. Minh-ha’s (1991) account of autobiographical strategies to “offer another example of ways of breaking with the chain of invisibility” (Trinh, 1991, p191). As Trinh (1991, p191) states,

diaries, memoirs, and recollections are widely used by marginalized people to gain a voice and to enter the arena of visibility. As formats, they are, with a few exceptions, often sent back to invisibility, since they easily fit into the drawers of the compartmentalized world of Western thought and its refined systems of classification. As strategies, again, they retain all their subverting potential.

Given that her practice shifted radically towards sculpture and installation in the 1990s *Measures of Distance* (1988) can be seen as a turning point for Mona Hatoum’s art. Without doubt this has become one of her most iconic works. The experimental video has been exhibited widely in various contexts, often under the umbrella of feminist art.²⁵ In the aforementioned interview with Claudia Spinelli (1996),

²⁵ For example, *Measures of Distance* (1988) was displayed in the section on feminism at the History Is Now: Seven Artists take on Britain exhibition at the Hayward gallery, 10 Feb 2015– 26 Apr 2015; curated by the artists John Akomfrah, Simon Fujiwara, Roger Hiorns, Hannah Starkey, Richard Wentworth and Jane and Louise Wilson.

Hatoum voices her disillusionment with (Western) feminism, which seemed to be Euro-American-centred and ignorant of other women's' struggles. She further states that due to aforementioned problems, feminism to her became more of "a jumping-board towards investigating power structures on a wider level as in the relationship between the Third World and the West and the issue of race" (Hatoum, [1997], 2016, p131). Hatoum's experience underlines the need for an intersectional understanding of identity, which attends to the intersections of race, class and gender in the struggle against a particular experience of oppression.

Tracing the trajectory of identity politics in the 1990s and 2000s, art historian Amelia Jones identifies a shift from "binary identity politics towards more dispersed theories and understandings of identification" (2012, p10). As she writes, "in the art domain, multiply identified artists began to challenge the binary" (Jones, 2012, p10), by further developing and building on past strategies, for instance through turning to autobiographical tropes, such as self-confessions to destabilise fixed identity categories (See Jones, 2012, p225). Mona Hatoum's *Measures of Distance* (1988) marks the beginning of this aforementioned shift in artistic practices that address feminist concerns with the gendered body in an intersectional way, acknowledging the interrelatedness with other markers of difference, such as race, ethnicity, nationality, class, religious identifications etc. A more detailed analysis of Hatoum's practice as a case study that casts new light on artistic strategies that defeat essentialist categories and binary conceptions of belonging and identity will follow in section 3 of chapter 2 and section 2 of chapter 3.

1.2.2. Feminist new materialism(s)

But for many women I knew, the need to begin with the female body – our own – was understood not as applying a Marxist principle to women, but as locating the grounds from which to speak with authority as women. Not to transcend this body, but to reclaim it. To reconnect our thinking and speaking with the body of this particular living human individual, a woman. Begin, we said, with the material, with matter, mma, madre, mutter, moeder, modder, etc. etc. (Adrienne Rich, 1987, p213)

An important shift that occurred within feminist theory in the late 1990s is the so-called *material turn*, which refers to the shift from a more discursive approach to a materialist understanding of the body (Alaimo and Hekman, 2008), shifting the emphasis from culture and language towards a non-dualist conception of nature and culture. The philosopher and feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti introduced the term *new materialism* or *neo-materialism* in the late 1990s in conjunction with, yet independent from Manuel DeLanda (Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012, p93). Following feminist thinkers, such as Simone de Beauvoir, Braidotti's nomadic philosophy is based on "the embodied and embedded brand of materialism" (Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012, p21). As Braidotti states, "the starting point for most feminist redefinitions of subjectivity is a new form of materialism, one that develops the notion of corporeal materiality by emphasising the embodied and therefore sexually differentiated structure of the speaking subject" (1994, p3). Her acknowledgement of the situated dimension of knowledge follows a feminist 'politics of location' (Rich, 1987), which is an important distinction to other approaches in object-oriented ontology.²⁶

In the light of my previous discussion of 'essentialism,' it is important to note that Braidotti (1994, p4) considers "the feminist emphasis on embodiment" coherent with a "radical rejection of essentialism." As she writes, "the body, or the embodiment, of the subject is to be understood as neither a biological nor a sociological category but rather as a point of overlapping between the physical, the symbolic, and the sociological" (Braidotti, 1994, p4). Emphasising relationality and promoting an intersectional, non-binary conception of identity, she conceives 'woman' as "the site of multiple, complex, and potentially contradictory sets of experiences, defined by

²⁶ Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO), introduced by Graham Harman in the early 2000s (and further developed by others, e.g. Bryant, 2011; Morton, 2013), conceives of an ontology based on objects. As Harman explains, "the object-oriented position rejects the idea that the human-world relation has some special privilege over all others" (Harman, 2014 p39). Briefly put, OOO rejects an anthropocentric position and does not distinguish between humans and non-humans – a point of convergence with the feminist new materialist rejection of binary thinking and Braidotti's non-dual conception of nature and culture. In Harman's words: "We warmly welcome trees, chairs, neutrons, armies, diamonds, and microbes to the world of unfulfillable desire, where humans have long labored in miserable solitude" (Harman, 2014, p41).

overlapping variables such as class, race, age, lifestyle, sexual preference and others” (Braidotti, 1994, p4). Departing from her acknowledgment of “difference as a force of sexual differing” (Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012, p15), she argues that it is necessary to move beyond this approach in order to arrive at “post-human, post-anthropocentric, and post-secular visions of sustainability and (intergenerational) justice” (Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012, p15).

Influenced by Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy of difference, Braidotti’s “new conceptualization of difference” (Dolphijn and van der Tuin, p115), is concerned with going beyond binary thinking by traversing dualistic conceptions (e.g. of the mind and body), that had been characteristic for modernity. The new materialist interrogation of the ontological divide between nature and culture and correlated binary oppositions, such as the human and the nonhuman/inhuman, that dominated modernity and Western philosophy, reflects similar developments in anthropology, feminist theory and science and technology studies – such as, for instance, Donna Haraway’s (2003) “naturecultures” concept.

The trained biologist, feminist theorist and philosopher of science Donna Haraway develops her conception of “naturecultures” in *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003) in response to her famous *Cyborg Manifesto* ([1985], 1990), merging the two terms ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ to form a hybrid concept named *naturecultures*. Turning from cyborgs to dogs, the question driving her exploration is what could be learnt from “taking doghuman relationships seriously” to develop an “ethics and politics committed to the flourishing of significant otherness” (Haraway, 2003, p3). Briefly put, her argument is that dogs and other companion species hold a similar potential to destabilise binary categories as cyborgs.²⁷ Thinking through the relation of humans and dogs, the manifesto questions dualistic concepts of nature and culture,

²⁷ In her words, “Cyborgs and companion species each bring together the human and non-human, the organic and technological, carbon and silicon, freedom and structure, history and myth, the rich and the poor, the state and the subject, diversity and depletion, modernity and postmodernity, and nature and culture in unexpected ways” (Haraway, 2003, p4).

proposing that this (perceived) divide can be bridged through human-nonhuman relationships.²⁸

Another point Haraway (2003) makes concerns the historical complexity of *naturecultures*, i.e. how stories of dogs and other nonhuman species are deeply entangled with the histories of human evolution. As she puts it: “Dogs are about the inescapable, contradictory story of relationships – co-constitutive relationships in which none of the partners pre-exist the relating, and the relating is never done once and for all. Historical specificity and contingent mutability rule all the way down, into nature and culture, into naturecultures” (2003, p12). The aspect of relationality is key here and resonates with Glissant’s theory of Relation, as we will see in the next section.

Haraway’s non-binary philosophy is influenced by feminist theory’s rejection of ‘typological thinking’ and ‘binary dualisms’ (Haraway, 2003, p6), but also draws largely upon theoretical developments in anthropology. She specifically acknowledges being influenced by Marilyn Strathern’s (1991) work, in particular, by her concept of ‘partial connections’ which she equals to her own conception of “relations of significant otherness” (Haraway, 2003, p8). Strathern developed her influential concept through researching and reflecting on the complexity of relations in Papua New Guinean societies in the Pacific. In her book *Partial Connections* (1991), she observes that Papua New Guinean societies do not differentiate “between a man and a bamboo pole, between a yam and a spirit” (Strathern, 1991, p118). As she writes, “the one ‘is’ the other, insofar as they evoke the perception of relations” (Strathern, 1991, p118). There is no difference between humans and nonhumans or spirits. There is no taxonomy, there are no opposites or generalisations. There is no ‘nature’ and there is no ‘culture’. Everything and everybody is – partially – connected. In Haraway’s (2003, p8) words, “patterns, in which the players are neither wholes nor parts.”

²⁸ Although her analysis is focused on dogs, Haraway is clear that the concept of “companion species” should be extended to other species, in order to “let the dog stand for all domestic plant and animal species” (Haraway, 2003, p28).

As already stated, the implosion of binaries is essential to my research concerned with strategies of undoing anthropocentric conceptions of belonging. I will come back to Haraway's theory in section 1 and section 2 of chapter 3, working through her approach in relation to particular case studies of contemporary artistic practices.

1.2.3. Challenging the binary

Strategies employed by feminist art, which were discussed in this section, have laid the foundation for much of the 'identity-based' art of the 1980s and 1990s, which dealt with issues of race and gender. Not only women, but also Black artists were and still are institutionally disadvantaged in the arts. Therefore, it has been important to look at the questions which arose from the application of a feminist perspective to the politics of representation in visual arts, in order to understand their significance in the light of contemporary debates concerning the politics of identity in contemporary art. Up until today the feminist strategy of the politicisation of the personal has continued to be highly influential for many artists. Mona Hatoum's video *Measures of Distance* (1988) is especially relevant to this discussion, as it marks a shift in feminist art practices by introducing an intersectional understanding of belonging and identity, and through destabilising binary categories of belonging.

Taking the feminist concern of complicating the binary as a starting point for my further research on artistic strategies of undoing static notions of belonging, this section has provided a brief introduction to the *material turn* in feminist theory, foregrounding Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway's non-dualistic and anti-essentialist philosophies and the emphasis on relationality in their writings. Departing from the feminist rejection of binary thinking in relation to gender, Braidotti's feminist new materialist theory argues that it is necessary to transcend concerns with sexual difference and to extend the critique of binary thinking, in order to challenge dualistic concepts of nature and culture, human and non-human, so that alternative visions of "sustainability and (intergenerational) justice" (Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012, p15) can be developed. As Braidotti's and Haraway's arguments inform my quest for new

creative strategies that imagine an expanded notion of belonging and identity beyond the human, their critical theories will be discussed in more detail in section 1 and section 2 of chapter 3.

1.3. Relation, opacity and errantry

J'écris en présence de toutes les langues du monde (Glissant, 2009, p80).²⁹

Continuing my search for strategies that destabilise binary conceptions of self/Other and challenge a Eurocentric imaginary, shaped by dualistic thinking, the final part of this chapter will introduce the work of Martinican writer and philosopher Édouard Glissant and his theory of Relation as guiding framework for my research. Situating *The Art of Un-belonging* within ongoing debates on the politics of identity in contemporary art, the concepts that are central to Glissant's thinking – Relation, opacity and errantry – will guide my discussion of hybridity and nomadism, the concepts which have shaped contemporary discourses of identity and belonging in contemporary art. Key texts for my research are *Poétique de la Relation* (Poetics of Relation), first published in French in 1990, *Introduction à une Poétique du Divers* (1996), and *Philosophie de la Relation* (2009) – a collection of interconnected essays that relay and relate Glissant's complex theory simultaneously as philosophy (or philosophies)³⁰ and as poetics of Relation. Another source that merits consideration is Manthia Diawara's (2010) documentary film on and with Glissant called *Édouard Glissant: One World in Relation*: this features the filmmaker's conversations with Glissant, who is accompanied by the filmmaker and his camera on a transatlantic journey aboard the RMS Queen Mary 2. This audio-visual encounter with Glissant on his journey crossing the Atlantic provides further insight into the particular context(s) out of which emerged Glissant's thinking and poetics. Now let me retrace this journey with some preliminary notes on Glissant's theory of Relation.

²⁹ "I write in the presence of all the languages in the world" (my own translation).

³⁰ In *Philosophie de la Relation* (2009), Glissant insists that his philosophy of Relation comprises multiple *philosophies*. He writes that his use of the term *philosophy* could be read and interpreted in its plurality, as *philosophies* of Relation (Glissant, 2009, p70).

1.3.1 Relation

Central to Glissant's complex theory is his conception of *la Relation* – a model of errant thought,³¹ that wanders across the disciplinary boundaries of philosophy and poetics, to affirm “the rhizome of a multiple relationship with the Other” (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p16).³² The notion of the ‘multiple’ inherent in the relationship to the Other is key here. It should be noted that Glissant's conception of Relation does not refer to individual, singular *relationships*, as would be suggested by the English term (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p27). Rather, *la Relation* is conceived as a fluid system whose elements change and are changed in processes of constant mutation, exchange and interrelation. From this emerges a philosophy and poetics of becoming that is based on multiplicity and a rhizomatic conception of identity.

The notion of the rhizome is borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari, who introduced this model of thought in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* ([1980], 2013, pp. 1-27) to criticize notions of the root and challenge the foregrounding of the tree as genealogical model for linear thought. In contrast to the unique root of a tree, the rhizome refers to a network of horizontal plant stems that spread underground (or at times in the air), constantly renewing themselves by producing new stems. Prominent examples from botany are ginger or potatoes.

According to Deleuze and Guattari's influential theory, among the rhizome's key principles are *connection*, *heterogeneity* and *multiplicity* – principles that are also at the heart of Glissant's conception of *la Relation*. Following Deleuze and Guattari, “any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order” ([1980], 2013, pp. 5-6). To summarise, the rhizome is a root (system) that connects and spreads infinitely in all directions. Following its opposition to the binary logic of a singular root,

³¹ Based on Glissant's conception of errantry, I understand errant thought as “the thought of that which relates” (Glissant, 1997, p20).

³² “le rhizome du rapport multiple à l'Autre” (Glissant, 1990, p28).

the rhizome is a useful model to counter the hierarchical model of arborescent, i.e. linear or genealogical systems of thought.

Appreciating its potential to maintain “the idea of rootedness” while challenging “that of a totalitarian root,”³³ Glissant appropriated the concept of the rhizome as the underlying principle of the poetics of Relation, “in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other” (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p11).³⁴ Following Glissant, Relation enables us to imagine the complexity of our ‘rhizome world’ – with “roots that intertwine, mix, and mutually assist each other” (Glissant to Diawara, [2009], 2013, p39). As he explains, “Relation cannot be ‘proved,’ because its totality is not approachable” (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p174). Any attempt to define or describe Relation, would only add to its rhizomatic web of relations. Calling on our imagination, Glissant likens *la Relation* to a chaotic web, that encompasses and recognizes “all the differences in the world” (Glissant, 2009, p42; my own translation),³⁵ as emphasised in the epigraph of this section. “Open, multi-lingual in intention and directly in contact with everything possible” (Glissant, 1997, p32),³⁶ Glissant’s poetics of Relation proposes an aesthetic and a poetics of multilingualism and the interconnection of everything with everything. As he emphasises in his writings and reiterates in Diawara’s (2010) film, his theory of Relation is not solely conceived for the Caribbean, it relates to the entire world (*Édouard Glissant: One World in Relation*, 2010).

Following this line of thought it needs to be noted that, for Glissant, Relation is not *rootless* – but neither is it *rooted*. His theory allows us to move beyond both notions and therein lies its significance for my project of undoing belonging. Considering the questions that arise from my artistic practice and proposed case studies, I will return

³³ “le fait de l’enracinement” and “l’idée d’une racine totalitaire” (Glissant, 1990, p23).

³⁴ To quote him at length: “La notion de rhizome maintiendrait donc le fait de l’enracinement, mais recuse l’idée d’une racine totalitaire. La pensée du rhizome serait au principe de ce que j’appelle une poétique de la Relation, selon laquelle toute identité s’étend dans un rapport à l’Autre” (Glissant, 1990, p23).

³⁵ “toutes les différences du monde” (Glissant, 2009, p42).

³⁶ “Poétique latente, ouverte, multilingue d’intention, en prise avec tout le possible” (Glissant, 1990, p44).

to explore the tension between the particularity of the local in relation to the global – the tension between *roots* and *routes*, challenging the notions of centre and periphery and binary modes of thinking throughout the course of my research.

1.3.1.1. The path of sugar

Searching and re-searching a path to enter Glissant's theory of *la Relation* takes me on a mental journey to his native Martinique – to the particular situation of *la Plantation*. The chapter *Closed Space, Open Word (Lieu Clos, Parole Ouverte)* in *Poetics of Relation (Poétique de la Relation)* introduces the Plantation as one of the prime locations or 'focal points' (*lieux focaux*) for our understanding of the development of current modes of Relation (Glissant, [1990], 1997, pp.63-75). How to even attempt to imagine this wretched place of forced encounters between brutally uprooted humans and plants?

In Martinique the hierarchical organisation of the Plantation involved slave masters, who were colonial settlers and planters of French origin and enslaved plantation workers who had been forcefully transplanted from various parts of Africa (later replaced by indentured labour from colonial India and an additional workforce from China) to plant (primarily) sugar cane. As Glissant ([1990], 1997) emphasises in *Poetics of Relation*, the supposed 'enclosed place' of the Plantation is in fact completely 'extrovert' and dependent on the outside world (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p67). This is the paradox of the Plantation – always in relation to another location – opening itself to the world through the import of labour, in other words through the horrors of the slave trade and the export of its colonial produce, be it sugar or coffee. I will return to the 'focal point' of the Plantation in my discussion of *Kahvehane Kongresspark* and *Trans Plantations*, reflecting on the relation between the Plantation and the darker side of modernity: slavery and capitalism (See section 1 and section 3 of chapter 3).

Glissant likens the enclosed place of the Plantation, where different cultures and languages were to meet involuntarily, to a laboratory of 'multilingualism' and its

process of formation and deformation, “organically forming and disintegrating” ([1990], 1997, p74). As he continues, “it is also within the Plantation that the meeting of cultures is most directly and clearly observable, though none of the inhabitants had the slightest hint that this was really about a clash of cultures. Here we are able to discover some of the formational laws of *métissage*³⁷ that concerns us all” (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p74).

The enslaved Africans had lost everything: their language, their culture, their songs, their rituals. They had to engage in an enormous effort of tracing and recreating, translating from the subcurrents of their memory to recompose “the echo of what Africa had for them” (Glissant to Diawara, [2009], 2013, p39).³⁸ Without minimising the enormous loss and trauma experienced in the process, Glissant’s philosophy embraces and theorises the dramatic rupture that resulted from the uprooting inflicted by the system of slavery and reinscribes the processes of cross-cultural encounters and mixing that took place in the act of colonisation as a creative force. The resulting impossibility of tracing an ancestral lineage and the suffering from the lack of roots is perceived, or better *conceived*, to generate a new conception of identity: an *identité-rhizome* (Glissant, 1996, p132), a rhizomatic identity that promotes multiplicity and Relation.

To summarise, Relation proposes an alternative concept of identity as rhizomatic in opposition to the root-identity based on affiliation (in terms of culture, language and ancestral lineage). Relation is the counter-model to the essentialist concept of identity based on genealogy and blood-lines, the binary thinking, categorisation and dehumanisation on which the colonial apparatus had rested its legitimacy. In

³⁷ *Métissage* translates to cross-breeding, miscegenation (Oxforddictionaries.com, no date) and resonates with the notion of hybridity. In the English translation of *Poétique de la Relation* (Poetics of Relation) the translator, Betsy Wing, opts to use the original term *métissage*, yet other theorists, such as Celia M. Britton (1999), have translated *métissage* using the English term *hybridity* in their analysis of Glissant’s work. I understand both terms to be almost analogous.

³⁸ Glissant (to Diawara, [2009], 2013, p39) discusses Jazz and Reggae as examples of what he calls “reconstruction within a distraught memory” referring to Black Americans’ and Caribbeans’ efforts to recreate “through memory and extraordinary suffering the echo of what Africa had for them.”

Glissant's words: "Within the space apart that it [the Plantation] comprised, the always multilingual and frequently multiracial tangle created inextricable knots in the web of filiations, thereby breaking the clear linear order to which Western thought had imparted such brilliance" ([1990], 1997, p71).³⁹

1.3.1.2. Creolisation and hybridity

United by the experience of colonisation and the Plantation, the Caribbean is put forward as a prime example for Relation, as a case study for processes of cultural mixing with unforeseen consequences – in short, what Glissant has described as creolisation. As Glissant emphasises: "What took place in the Caribbean, which could be summed up in the word creolization, approximates the idea of Relation for us as nearly as possible" ([1990], 1997, p34).⁴⁰ We cannot begin to envision Relation, without including at least a brief account of Glissant's conception of creolisation.

Glissant conceives creolisation as "a phenomenon of mixing, not only of individuals, but of cultures – with unforeseen and unpredictable results" (Glissant and Chamoiseau, 2009; my own translation).⁴¹ It is this element of unpredictability that distinguishes creolisation from other notions of hybridity. It is important to note that for Glissant, creolisation – as opposed to notions of the 'melting pot' – does not envision the dissolution of difference.⁴² Creolisation does not mean fusion. Creolisation, in the Glissantian sense, is not stable, it is a process that cannot be

³⁹ "Dans l'écart qu'elle (la Plantation) constituait, l'emmêlement toujours multilingue et souvent multiracial a noué de manière indémêlable le tissu des filiations et cassé par là l'ordonnance claire, linéaire, à laquelle les pensées de l'Occident avaient donné un tel éclat" (Glissant, 1990, p86).

⁴⁰ "Ce qui s'est passé dans la Caraïbe, et que nous pourrions résumer dans le mot de créolisation, nous en donne l'idée la plus approchée possible (de la Relation, my comment)" (Glissant, 1990, p46).

⁴¹ "Un phénomène de mélange, non seulement des individus, mais de cultures dont les conséquences sont imprévisibles, imprédictibles" (Glissant and Chamoiseau, 2009).

⁴² In *Philosophie de la Relation*, he writes: "La créolisation n'est pas ce mélange informe (uniforme) où chacun irait se perdre, mais une suite d'étonnantes résolutions, dont la maxime fluide se dirait ainsi: Je change, par échanger avec l'autre, sans me perdre pourtant ni me dénaturer" (Glissant, 2009, p65).

fixed⁴³ – as he suggests in *Philosophie de la Relation*, “it is process, and not fixity” (Glissant, 2009, p64; my own translation).⁴⁴ Creolisation passes through the process of *métissage* (hybridity) and yet transcends it. In *Philosophie de la Relation*, Glissant suggests that “there is an alchemy of creolisation, which goes beyond *métissages* (hybridisations), although it still passes through them” (Glissant, 2009, p64; my own translation).⁴⁵ Following Glissant, creolisation goes beyond the process of *métissage*, yet *métissage* – in its capacity of transcending the logic of either/or – is foundational to it. The crucial status of *métissage* within the Glissantian conception of Relation is already laid out in his earlier work, *Le Discours Antillais* (1981), where he states: “The poetics of *métissage* is the same as the poetics of Relation” (Glissant, 1981, p251; my own translation).⁴⁶

As already noted, Glissant’s ([1990], 1997, p34) definition of *métissage* – “the meeting and synthesis of two differences”⁴⁷ and creolisation (as an extreme, ‘limitless’ form of it)⁴⁸ bears similarity with the notion of hybridity, which is one of the key concepts, which emerged from 1990s postcolonial and cultural theory. One of the advocates of hybridity is cultural theorist Homi Bhabha, whose theory of hybridity has had a major influence on the thinking of postcolonial scholars, curators and artists. Following Glissant’s theory of Relation, this research will embark on a critical

⁴³ In this way creolisation differs from the concept of *la Créolité* which had been proposed by the three Martinican writers Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant’s (who are his former students) in their manifesto *Éloge de la Créolité* (1989; *In Praise of Creoleness*). Their affirmation of an essentialist Creole identity in their opening statement – “Neither Europeans, nor Africans, nor Asians, we proclaim ourselves Creoles” (Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant, 1990, p886) – seems to equate *la Créolité* with a fixed notion of Caribbeanness, which is at odds with Glissant’s philosophy of Relation.

⁴⁴ “c’est processus, et non pas fixé” (Glissant, 2009, p64).

⁴⁵ “Il y a une alchimie de la créolisation, qui outrecroise les métissages, et quand même elle passe par eux” (Glissant, 2009, p64).

⁴⁶ “La poétique du métissage est celle même de la Relation” (Glissant, 1981, p251), which Michael Dash translates as “The poetics of creolization is the same as a cross-cultural poetics” (Glissant, [1981], 1992, p142).

⁴⁷ “comme en général une rencontre et une synthèse entre deux différents” (Glissant, 1990, p46)

⁴⁸ Following Glissant, “creolization seems to be a limitless *métissage*, its elements diffracted and its consequences unforeseeable” (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p34).

inquiry of hybridity through a practice-based exploration of the concept. In my analysis of the video-performance *Surya Namaz* in chapter 2, I will re-visit Bhabha's theory and work through the concept of hybridity in more detail. As this is one of the central strategies that artists have employed in order to blur binary conceptions of self/Other and challenge static notions of identity, a critical investigation of the concept and its potential to counter "the ongoing colonizing of the mind" (Papastergiadis, 2000, p188), will be of further crucial importance to my research, addressing questions such as: What are the potentials, what are the pitfalls of hybridity? How might Relation (along with its key attributes opacity and errantry) be a useful strategy to transcend hybridity in order to avoid the pitfalls of self-othering and the dilution of difference through fusion?

To give some context and set the scene for what is to follow in chapter 2, let me briefly introduce the discourse and some of the criticisms of hybridity in the context of contemporary art (history) and how they resonate with Glissant's notion of *métissage*, which I understand to be more or less analogous to hybridity.⁴⁹ Glissant observes that *métissage* requires and is formed by two opposing categories, categories that are different, differ from each other in their essence.⁵⁰ In this sense, *métissage* is limited as it is based on the duality of self and other and we could say that it (re)-produces (from) a duality. Furthermore, Glissant writes, "the more *métissage* became realized, the more the idea of it faded" ([1990], 1997, p92).⁵¹ From my understanding, here Glissant seems to imply, that *métissage* itself could generate a new category and thereby erase the notion of *métissage* (hybridity) altogether.

⁴⁹ In *Introduction à une Poétique du Divers* Glissant defines *métissage* in the biogenetic sense, referring to cuttings in the cultivation of new plants and the crossbreeding of animals (1996, p19). To me, this strongly resonates with the etymology of hybridity designating "the offspring of two animals or plants of different breeds, varieties, species, or genera, especially as produced through human manipulation for specific genetic characteristics" or "a person or group of persons produced by the interaction or crossbreeding of two unlike cultures, traditions, etc" (Dictionary.com, no date).

⁵⁰ "Métissage exists in places where categories making their essences distinct were formerly in opposition" (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p92) – "Observons qu'il y a métissage là où auparavant s'opposaient des catégories, qui distinguaient leur essence" (Glissant, 1990, p106).

⁵¹ "Plus le métissage se réalise, plus la notion s'en efface" (Glissant, 1990, p106).

Sarat Maharaj ([1994], 2001) comes to a similar conclusion in his essay *Perfidious Fidelity. The Untranslatability and the Other*, which was first published in 1994 in *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*.⁵² In this essay, Maharaj proposes to approach hybridity as an act of translation ([1994], 2001, p26). On the one hand, he highlights the creative potential within hybridity in the sense of constructing new meaning “from in-between” languages (and cultures) through the process of translation (Maharaj, [1994], 2001, p27). In the context of Apartheid (which Maharaj has endured in South Africa) and the colonial apparatus in general, understandably hybridity at first seemed full of subversive potential. And yet, hybridity, if perceived as “the ‘optimistic’ flip side” of the imposed untranslatability under Apartheid, simply recreates a binary in the form of an “oppositional coupling” (Maharaj, [1994], 2001, p28). Furthermore, hybridity is at risk to being reduced to a new style, i.e. thereby creating a new category. Directing his analysis to the context of contemporary art, Maharaj compares hybridity to a “style of visual Esperanto” ([1994], 2001, p27). He questions whether there is “a danger of hybridity – the made-up lingo and style of visual Esperanto – becoming the privileged, prime term...” as it may simply “swap places with the notion of stylistic purity” (Maharaj, [1994], 2001, p27).

Following the paradigm shift and the ‘globalisation’ of contemporary art, instigated by exhibitions such as *Magiciens de la Terre* and *The Other Story* in 1989 (see my discussion in section 1 of this chapter), we can observe a tendency to (often uncritically) celebrate hybridity in contemporary art.⁵³ Consider, for instance, Yinka Shonibare’s neo-conceptual installation *Double Dutch* (1994). His work is often discussed in relation to hybridity⁵⁴ and put forward as an example how artists could

⁵² *Perfidious Fidelity: The Untranslatability and the Other* is based on a paper for the Iniva symposium *A New Internationalism* held at the Tate Gallery in London, April 1994.

⁵³ Tracing the shifts, which occurred in the discourse around cultural identity in the arts between *The Other Story* in 1989 and the foundation of InIVA in 1994, Kobena Mercer’s (1999) article entitled *Ethnicity and Internationality: New British Art and Diaspora-Based Blackness* provides a useful analysis.

⁵⁴ The artist reiterates and affirms this reading of his work in a recent interview: “My work addresses the idea of having this fusion or hybrid cultural identity and what that

subvert the “ethnic authenticity in official multiculturalism” (Mercer, 1999, p57) through shedding light on “intercultural stories” (Mercer, 1999, p57). Shonibare’s work *Double Dutch* (1994) offers a playful critique of the audience’s expectations and traditional categorisations of ‘authentic African art’ through the use of the ‘exotic’ and ‘African’ wax-print fabric. While we may associate the colourful patterns of the wax fabric with notions of African-ness, in fact there is nothing authentically African about it: the fabric that has become synonymous for Black African culture can be traced back to Indonesian batik and was introduced to West and Central Africa by Dutch colonialists and English textile industries venturing out to find new markets in the colonies. Shonibare’s subversive play on the assumed authenticity and exotic African-ness of the fabric highlights the constructed nature of identities and resonates with Stuart Hall’s conception of culture and identity as “constituted by an infinite, incomplete series of translations” (Hall and Maharaj, 2001, p37). As a product of colonial history, the Indonesian-Dutch-African fabric becomes a metaphor for the fabrication of identities (Downey, 2004) and postcolonial hybridity.

Shonibare’s solo exhibition *Double Dutch* at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam (2004) was shortlisted for the Turner Prize in 2004. Amongst his contemporaries, Anish Kapoor (1991), Chris Ofili (1998) and Steve McQueen (1999) are often cited as examples of Black artists who won the prestigious British art prize (Tawadros, 2005, p126). As Araeen (2005, p29) asks provocatively: “Is this what the Black Arts Movement wanted to achieve? If so, why was there talk about white oppression? Has the oppression ended?”

Araeen’s polemic question exemplifies the criticisms aimed at the new generation of Black artists emerging in the 1990s. Due to the “celebration of ethnocentrism” (Bailey et al., 2005, xviii), which was going hand-in-hand with the globalisation of the art market, Black artists gained more visibility, yet their artistic positions appear de-politicised in comparison with the previous generation (Mercer, 1999). Diversity

produces. People always want to categorize things: I’m much more interested in this idea of a hybrid” (Shonibare to Jagoe, 2017).

became incorporated into the establishment, “administered as a social and cultural norm of postmodernity” (Mercer, 1999, p57). As a result, many artists – including Shonibare – embraced the language of hybridity in their attempt to counter and subvert the art market’s tendency to categorise art based on ethnic and cultural difference.

In critical response to the art world’s tendency to categorise and market art based on (cultural, regional or ethnic) difference, the art historian and critic T.J. Demos urges artists to “continue to challenge static categories of subjectivity” (2013, p10). As I have briefly discussed in relation to Shonibare’s work, the concept of hybridity as infinite act of translation seemed useful to challenge notions of authenticity and essentialist views of identity in contemporary art. However, in our world ruled by the “difference engine” of advanced capitalism (Braidotti, 2007, p66), where “the consumption of ‘differences’ is a dominant cultural practice” (Braidotti, 2007, p66), hybridity appears to be at risk to lose its critical potential as it has become a palatable form of difference, in the sense of difference diluted through fusion, leading to what Maharaj describes as “flattening sameness” ([1994], 2001, p27).

Yet, rather than abandoning the concept altogether, Maharaj proposes to recharge and recode hybridity, “re-indexing hybridity as an unfinished, self-unthreading force, even as a concept against itself” ([1994], 2001, p28). Echoing the Glissantian conception of Relation, Maharaj’s re-coding of hybridity emphasises the infinite and unfixed nature of hybridity, which he reinscribes as an interdependent concept rather than a fixed category. To quote him at length:

A recoding would need to index hybridity as a site shot through and traced with the untranslatable which serves as its supplement and prop. The upshot of this is to dramatize the incomplete, unfixed nature of the category. We begin to see hybridity not so much as a self-standing, fixed term but as an interdependent one – changing and rechanging as it interacts with the aura of the untranslatable, with the remains and leftovers of the translation exercise.
(Maharaj, [1994], 2001, p33)

Here, the crucial aspect of his proposition to reinscribe the hybridity beyond notions of fixity is the untranslatable. I agree with Maharaj that (for aforementioned reasons) we must not romanticise hybridity as an “international visual Esperanto” (Maharaj,

[1994], 2001, p33). With this in mind, let me return to Maharaj's notion of the untranslatable, which he proposes as the supplement to re-index hybridity. As he explains in *Perfidious Fidelity: The Untranslatability and the Other*, the untranslatable is that which resists "translation as a 'transparent' passage from one idiom to another, from self to other" (Maharaj, [1994], 2001, p27). Briefly put, the untranslatable is that which resists transparency. In a more political sense, the untranslatable "refuses the state's ability to translate and slot a person into a set category of difference" (Maharaj, [1994], 2001 p46). Considering its potential to disrupt the (colonial) construction of the Other and the regulation and categorisation of difference – which Maharaj refers to as "multicultural managerialism" (Hall and Maharaj, 2001, p46), the untranslatable – or what Glissant refers to as *opacité* (opacity) – will be central to my project of undoing belonging. In what follows I will explore this concept further, introducing the Glissantian notion of opacity as guiding framework for my research.

1.3.2. Opacity (*Opacité*)

Opacity (*opacité*), which I propose to read in relation to Sarat Maharaj's (2001, pp.26-35) advocacy for "the untranslatability of the other," is one of Glissant's key theoretical concepts and foundational to his theory and poetics of Relation. Similar to Maharaj, Glissant initially developed his conception of opacity in relation to language, literature and translation. In *Poetics of Relation* Glissant posits language learning and translation as "two fundamental mechanisms of relational practice" ([1990], 1997, p115). If we look at it in the most basic terms, by learning a language or by engaging in the act of translation, we are trying to "give 'some transparency' back to a text" by overcoming the opacities of the text (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p116).

Exploring the potential of the Creole language to subvert the standardisation and universalisation of French as the *lingua franca* in the French Caribbean, Glissant conceives of opacity as (linguistic) strategy of resistance against transparency as a form of reductive universalism and (colonial) control (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p112). Crucially, as a strategy of resistance, Glissant's conception of opacity has to be primarily understood as "an ethical value and a political right" (Britton, 1999, p25).

This political dimension of opacity is already expressed in *Le discours Antillais* (1981),⁵⁵ Glissant's seminal work on Caribbean consciousness, and in many ways a precursor of *Poétique de la Relation* (1990):

D'abord, du point de vue du débat entre ces deux langues, le créole et le français, dont l'une a jusqu'ici subi la transcendance de l'autre, on peut affirmer que la seule pratique possible est de les rendre opaques l'une à l'autre. Développer partout, contre un humanisme universalisant et réducteur, la théorie des opacités particulières. Dans le monde de la Relation, qui prend le relais du système unifiant de l'Être, consentir à l'opacité c'est-à-dire la densité irréductible de l'autre, c'est accomplir véritablement, à travers le divers, l'humain. L'humain n'est peut-être pas l'«image de l'homme» mais aujourd'hui la trame sans cesse recommencée de ces opacités consenties.
(Glissant, 1981, p245)

First of all, from the perspective of the conflict between Creole and French, in which one has thus far evolved at the expense of the other, we can state that the only possible strategy is to make them opaque to each other. To develop everywhere, in defiance of a universalising and reductive humanism, the theory of specifically opaque structures. In the world of cross-cultural relationship, which takes over from the homogeneity of the single culture, to accept this opaqueness – that is, the irreducible density of the other – is to truly accomplish, through diversity, a human objective. Humanity is perhaps not the “image of man” but today the evergrowing network of recognized opaque structures.⁵⁶ (Glissant, [1981], 1992, p133)

Informed by his critical approach to the reductive universalising of vehicular languages, as illustrated in the conflict between French and *le créole*, Glissant's conception of opacity critically addresses the notion of transparency and understanding of the other in more political terms. Following Glissant, opacity protects the other's specificity and particularity in Relation from being reduced to the universalising tendencies of Western humanism. In his words, “Thus, that which protects the Diverse we call opacity” (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p62).⁵⁷

⁵⁵ The English translation *Caribbean Discourse*, translated by J. Michael Dash, was first published in 1989.

⁵⁶ Please note that Michael Dash's translation of *Relation* with *cross-cultural relationship and opacité* as *opaqueness* is not exact, which is why I opted to include the original French citation in the text.

⁵⁷ “Nous appelons donc opacité ce qui protège le Divers” (Glissant, 1990, p75).

Let me point out that Diversity, in the Glissantian sense, is not an abstract concept. In his conception, Diversity “means the human spirit’s striving for a cross-cultural relationship (in the original: *relation transversal*, my comment), without universalist transcendence. Diversity needs the presence of peoples, no longer as objects to be swallowed up, but with the intention of creating a new relationship” (Glissant, [1981], 1992, p98).⁵⁸

Following Glissant’s critique, the process of understanding and accepting the Other in Western thought is based on reducing the Other, by measuring, i.e. scaling, judging and comparing him or her to one’s own norms within the Western system of thinking.⁵⁹ Maharaj ([1994], 2001, p54) expresses similar concerns, when he asks, “How do we deal with difference without fixing it as a version of ourselves? How do we deal with difference without entirely reducing it to the terms and categories of our own language?” Therefore, acknowledging the right to difference is not sufficient, as Glissant ([1990], 1997) claims in the chapter *For Opacity (Pour l’Opacité)* in *Poetics of Relation (Poétique de la Relation)* – we need to go further and communally agree also “to the right to opacity” (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p194).⁶⁰

Glissant reiterates this point in the film *Édouard Glissant: One World in Relation* (2010):

There’s a basic injustice in the worldwide spread of the transparency and projection of Western thought. Why must we evaluate people on the scale of transparency of the ideas proposed by the West? I understand this, I understand that and the other – rationality. I said that as far as I’m concerned, a person has the right to be opaque. That doesn’t stop me from liking that person, it

⁵⁸ “Le Divers, (...), signifie l’effort de l’esprit humain vers une relation transversal, sans transcendence universaliste. Le Divers a besoin de la presence des peoples, non plus comme objet à sublimer, mais comme projet à mettre en relation” (Glissant, 1981, p190).

⁵⁹ As Glissant ([1990], 1997, p190). puts it, “in order to understand and thus accept you, I have to measure your solidity with the ideal scale providing me with grounds to make comparisons and, perhaps, judgements. I have to reduce.”

⁶⁰ “au droit à l’opacité” (Glissant, 1990, p204). Glissant already asserts the “right to opacity” in *Le discours antillais* (1981).

doesn't stop me from working with him, hanging out with him, etc. A racist is someone who refuses what he doesn't understand. I can accept what I don't understand. Opacity is a right we must have.

Glissant's conception of opacity challenges the framework of 'understanding' (people or ideas) that is based on "the ideal of transparent universality, imposed by the West" (Glissant, [1981], 1992, p2).⁶¹ In "multiple manifestations of Diversity" (Glissant, [1981], 1992, p2), opacity promotes our co-existence in difference, countering imposed forms of assimilation and the universalisation of Western norms.

In *Poetics of Relation* Glissant ([1990], 1997, p190) conceives of a textile metaphor to describe the irreducible singularity of opacity, which is the texture of Relation: "Opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics. To understand these truly one must focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components."⁶² The texture or fabric created by opacities is based on Relation. Each thread, each individual's singularity, is relational. Here, it is important to emphasise that opacity in the Glissantian sense is based on a mutually consensual relation founded on co-existence, sharing, exchange, discovery and respect. Opacity does not mean apartheid or disengagement.⁶³ On the contrary, in its irreducibility opacity in Glissantian terms is "the most perennial guarantee of participation and confluence" ([1990], 1997, p191). As Glissant emphasises, "in Relation, elements don't blend just like that, don't lose themselves just like that. Each element can keep, not just its autonomy, but also its essential quality, even as it accustoms itself to the essential qualities and differences of others" (*Édouard Glissant: One World in Relation*, 2010). In this sense, the right to opacity is conceived as the "real foundation of Relation" (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p190). Transposed to the context of contemporary art

⁶¹ "l'universel de la transparence, imposé par l'Occident" (Glissant, 1981, p11-12).

⁶² "Des opacités peuvent coexister, confluer, tramant des tissus dont la véritable compréhension porterait sur la texture de cette trame et non pas sur la nature des composantes" (Glissant, 1990, p204).

⁶³ As Glissant (2009, p69) explains in *Philosophie de la Relation, Poésie en étendue*, "La part d'opacité aménagée entre l'autre et moi, mutuellement consentie (ce n'est pas un apartheid), agrandit sa liberté, confirme aussi mon libre choix, dans une relation de pur partage, où échange et découverte et respect sont infinis, *allant de soi*."

practice, the exploration of opacity as an artistic strategy, will be central to *The Art of Un-belonging*. Its potential to challenge fixed notions of belonging and to destabilise binary conceptions of self and other in the context of contemporary (diasporic) art will be further explored in subsequent chapters.

1.3.3. Errantry (*Errance*)

At the heart of Glissant's theory and his proposal of a rhizomatic concept of identity (*l'identité rhizome*) based on relation is "the dimension of errantry, nomadic thought and the renunciation of linear thinking of cause and effect" (Glissant, 1998, my own translation).⁶⁴ In other words, errantry or nomadic thought posits an alternative framework, that is opposed to the linearity of thinking that formed the base of the vectorisation of the world through colonial conquest. Providing an alternative model of thinking opposed to "the project of knowledge and arrowlike nomadism" of colonisation (Glissant, 1997, p56), errantry strives to decolonise the Western model of the nation and the conception of identity based on affiliation and the 'intolerant root'.⁶⁵

In *Poetics of Relation* Glissant (1997) states that:

Most of the nations that gained freedom from colonization have tended to form around an idea of power – the totalitarian drive of a single, unique root – rather than around a fundamental relationship to the Other. Culture's self-conception was dualistic, pitting citizens against barbarians. Nothing has ever more solidly opposed the thought of errantry than this period in human history when Western nations were established and then made their impact on the world.⁶⁶ (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p14)

⁶⁴ "la dimension l'errance, de la pensée nomade et le renoncement à une pensée linéaire de cause à effet" (Glissant, 1998).

⁶⁵ As Glissant re-emphasises in *Philosophie de la Relation*, "Par la pensée de l'errance nous refusons les racines uniques et qui tuent autour d'elles: la pensée de l'errance est celle des enracinements solidaires et des racines en rhizome. Contre les maladies de l'identité racine unique, elle reste le conducteur infini de l'identité relation" (2009, p61).

⁶⁶ "La plupart des nations qui se sont libérées de la colonisation ont tendu à se former autour de l'idée de puissance, pulsion totalitaire de la racine unique, et non

Errantry proposes an alternative to this dualistic model of thought that has since been exported throughout the world. Errant thought contests the “principle of generalization” (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p49) and the binary conception of self and Other, according to which the Other is either assimilated or annihilated. As “the thought of that which relates” (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p20), errantry is closely connected to the idea of creolisation⁶⁷ and a key attribute of the Glissantian theory of Relation. As he states in *Poetics of Relation*, “the thought of errantry is also the thought of what is relative, the thing relayed, as well as the thing related” (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p18). In errantry and exile, “roots are lacking” (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p11). As decolonising methodology, errantry or *la pensée nomade* (nomadic thinking) strives to dismantle and deconstruct the Western conception of the nation and identity based on a “totalitarian root” (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p11),⁶⁸ affirming instead an identity based on relation. Errant thought recognises that “the Other is within us and affects how we evolve as well as the bulk of our conceptions and the development of our sensibility” (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p27). Searching for ways to advance critical artistic strategies that resist restrictive and limited categorisations of identity and fixed notions of belonging, the concept of errantry and nomadic thinking has proved key to the discursive framework of what I call *The Art of Un-belonging*.

With this in mind, let me briefly return to the context of contemporary art. As far as art practice and theory are concerned, a nomadic approach marked artistic expressions in the 1990s and 2000s – often in tandem with an emphasis on hybridity and the exploration of postcolonial diasporic identities. In his study of contemporary art through the lens of migration T.J. Demos (2013) provides an insightful discussion,

pas dans un rapport fondateur à l'Autre. La pensée culturelle de soi était duelle, opposant le citoyen au barbare. Il n'y eut rien de plus massivement opposé à la pensée de l'errance que cette période de l'histoire des humanités où les nations occidentales se sont constituées, puis ont répercuté sur le monde” (Glissant, 1990, pp.26-27).

⁶⁷ This connection is indicated in a footnote in *Poetics of Relation* (See Glissant, [1990], 1997, p224)

⁶⁸ When identity is exported as a value and “a person’s worth is determined by his root” (Glissant, 1997, p17), the notion of root crucially relates to language – “the first thing exported by the conqueror” (Glissant, 1997, p19).

exploring the emancipatory potential and problematic aspects of nomadism. As he states, on the one hand, theorists such as Hardt and Negri (2000), Jean-Pierre Criqui (1996), Achille Bonito Oliva (2008) have emphasised the positive and liberating aspect of 'artistic nomadism,' emphasising the nomadic artists "freedom to wander across the boundaries of various cultures, nations and media forms" (Bonito Oliva, 2008, p44), that would allow them to move beyond the fixity of identity and categories of belonging, overcoming the limitations of mediums and conventions. In this regard nomadism would present a tool of resistance against both the homogenising tendencies of capitalist globalisation and "the regressive returns to localism, tribalization, and essentialist identities" (Demos, 2013, p11) that followed as part of what could be perceived as a 'backlash' against globalisation. As Demos sums up, "nomadism embraced dislocation as a permanent home with lightness and joy, rejecting the postcolonial political commitments of the diasporic" (2013, p11). Amongst works by Gabriel Orozco and Francis Alys, Rirkrit Tiravanija's (1992) exhibition *Untitled (Free)*, is put forward as example for what has been coined 'lyrical' nomadism (Meyer, 2000, p11). Tiravanija, who currently lives and works between New York, Berlin and Chiang Mai, had initially presented this work at 303 Gallery in New York in 1992, converting the gallery into a kitchen and serving Thai rice and vegetable curry free of charge to gallery visitors. In 2012 Tiravanija's original concept was purchased by the MOMA in New York and replicated in an installation in the MOMA galleries.

According to T.J. Demos 'lyrical nomadism' is at risk to naively celebrate the contemporary artist's hypermobility that has become symptomatic of the neoliberal expansion of the art market, turning the nomad into "a role model for the transnational capitalist" (2013, p13). Following this critique, one could interpret Tiravanija's aforementioned work critically as a capitalist fetishisation of difference in the shape of Thai curry to be 'consumed' by art-affine and affluent middle-class audiences. This 'lyrical nomadism' or "mobility thematised as a random and poetic interaction with the objects and spaces of everyday life" (Meyer, 2000, p11), is contrasted with a more critical strand of artistic nomadism – one that takes into account the conditions of mobility and travel, reflecting on the violence of borders

and exclusions, a nomadic sensibility that is not 'free-floating' but affirms a politics and ethics of location and accountability.

The nomadic that I will be referring to in my study is not about romanticising the idea of mobility or that of a nomadic people. Rather, I will be concerned with the anti-essentialist and critical potential of errantry, as a form of nomadic thought advocated by Édouard Glissant. His conception of errantry resonates with the notion of the nomadic or nomadic consciousness developed by Deleuzean feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti and relates to what Meyer (2000) and Demos (2013) have described as *critical nomadism*. Inspired by Deleuze and Guattari's ([1980], 2013) nomadology,⁶⁹ Braidotti conceives of nomadism as "critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behaviour" (1994, p5). According to her theory, "it is the subversion of set conventions that defines the nomadic state" (Braidotti, 1994, p5). She stresses the situatedness of the nomadic subject, stating that "to be nomadic or in transition...does not place the thinking subject outside history or time" [...] "it does not make it ungrounded" (Braidotti, 2006, p29).

Braidotti's (2008) vision of the nomadic, non-unitary, multi-relational, connective subject and emphasis on "radical relationality" can be traced back to Deleuze's nomadic ethics that involves human as well as non-human actors. As anti-essentialist philosophy that resists universalised binary conventions, her nomadic theory complements Glissant's notion of errantry. Errantry's potential for *The Art of Unbelonging* will be explored in more depth in section 1 of chapter 3.

⁶⁹ See the chapter 1227: *Treatise on Nomadology – The War Machine* (Deleuze and Guattari, [1980], 2013, pp. 407-492.

1.4. Contextualising The Art of Un-belonging

Tracing a non-linear history of identity politics in the arts and introducing Glissant's theory of Relation as guiding framework for my research, this chapter has explored the theoretical and artistic context of what I have called *The Art of Un-belonging*, as well as provided historical grounding to my research. Re-visiting three seminal exhibitions that have been widely influential in de-centring the Eurocentric understanding of contemporary art – *The Other Story: Afro-Asian artists in Post-war Britain*, *Magiciens de la Terre* in Paris and *The 3rd Havana Biennial* (all of which took place in 1989) – allowed me to gain a deeper understanding how questions raised at the time are still relevant to current debates concerned with the politics of identity in the context of global and diasporic art, such as “issues of locality and specificity in relation to the wider world” (Steeds, 2013, p25).

With the proliferation and internationalisation of biennials and triennials (Havana and Cairo, 1984; Istanbul, 1987; more recently: Johannesburg, Gwangju, Queensland, Shanghai, APT, Sharjah a.o.) in our era of increased migratory movements and transnational trade, artists from various cultural backgrounds are now participating in international exhibitions and biennales worldwide. Clearly, this shift from exclusion towards inclusion can only be supported. However, the question of how to position oneself as an artist in relation to the politics of identity in the arts has become a complicated matter, since cultural and racial differences tend to be ‘managed’ by the art world following models of corporate internationalism, framing artists “as socio-cultural representatives of the place/people they ‘are from’” (Haq, 2014, p6).

Tracing their relevance for current discourses on identity politics in the arts, the second part of the chapter examined feminist strategies, such as the politicisation of the personal and the politics of location that have been influential for many artists. Following Amelia Jones' (2012) critique of binary models of self and other in relation to gender, sexuality and race in 1970s identity politics in the arts and their impact on discourses that dominated the 1990s, I traced the development of transversal

theories, such as Braidotti's feminist new materialism, as example of more progressive approaches to identity that complicate binaries and emphasise relationality.

Building on this relational approach, the last part of this chapter introduced Glissant's theory of Relation as the discursive framework for my artistic endeavour of undoing belonging. Re-evaluating conceptions of hybridity and artistic nomadism that marked the 1990s and 2000s through the lens of Glissant's theory of Relation, I propose his key concepts Relation, opacity and errantry as guiding framework for my research. Through a sustained engagement with Glissant's ([1990], 1997) theory of Relation in combination with feminist (and new materialist) theories (Braidotti, 1994, 2006, 2008; Haraway 2003, 2008, 2016, 2017), my research aims to contribute to the decolonisation of contemporary (diasporic) art through the exploration and development of new creative strategies that complicate binary thinking and 'undo' fixed notions of belonging and identity, ultimately opening and reinscribing the concept of belonging and identity beyond the human.

The following chapters are led by and complement the practice element of the thesis through ways of critical analysis and performative writing, addressing questions posed by the practice in addition to case studies of contemporary artworks. Read in tandem with Braidotti's "nomadic eco-philosophy of multiple belongings" (2006, p35), Glissant's theory of Relation will serve to inform the following research and the multilingual aesthetics of my practice.

2. Multilingual errantry: strategies of undoing belonging

The following chapter seeks to accompany the video-installation *Surya Namaz* (2018) through means of performative writing, exploring the potential (and pitfalls) of hybridity, multilingualism and opacity as artistic strategies of undoing fixed notions of identity and belonging. In the first part, which was conceived parallel to the editing process of *Surya Namaz* I attempt to locate my voice(s) in different languages, shifting positionalities, fantasies, memories and multiple perspectives as ‘halfie’ (Abu-Lughod, 1991) following the feminist emphasis on situated and embedded knowledge. Writing directly from practice, I also reflect on the ethics of my on-and off-screen relations to the main protagonists. Building on this, the second part of the chapter engages with the phenomenon of ‘going native’ in diasporic art and explores the potential of the Glissantian concept of Relation for *The Art of Un-belonging*. This is followed by a further exploration of the aesthetics and politics of decolonisation in terms of challenging the binary conception of self and Other in the context of diasporic art. Through my study of Mona Hatoum’s video *Measures of Distance* (1988), I discuss the Glissantian concept of opacity as artistic strategy to resist translation and challenge the universalisation and standardisation of Anglo-American English as global *lingua franca* of the art world. Digging deeper into Glissantian philosophy, I follow a rhizomatic path that leads me (back) to the Deleuzian feminist Rosi Braidotti’s nomadic theory. The last part of the chapter reflects on interconnections and “the irreducible (colonial) difference” (Mignolo, 2000, pp.77–78) between Glissant’s theory of Relation, in particular his notion of errantry and Braidotti’s feminist new materialist conception of the nomadic subject.⁷⁰ This intermezzo and introduction to nomadic philosophy will open a rhizomatic connection

⁷⁰ I borrow the term from Mignolo, who emphasises the “irreducible difference” between Glissant’s theory of creolisation and Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of the ‘nomadic’ or ‘minor science’ (2000, p77). According to Mignolo, we have to distinguish between a theory that emerged “from a local history of knowledge built from the perspective of modernity” (such as Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy) and a theory that also includes “the perspective of coloniality” (2000, p77). Therefore, he maintains that Glissant’s perspective is “irreducible to a nomadic universal history as the one proposed by Deleuze and Guattari” (Mignolo, 2000, p78).

to the next chapter: errantry or what Glissant (1998) refers to as *la pensée nomade* – nomadic thinking – will be central to the imagining of an *Art of Un-belonging*.

2.1. Sounding hybridity: writing from practice

*Sevgili Yasemin, dearest Yasemin*⁷¹

Many years have passed since I last wrote to you. Perhaps more than 25 years. I am writing to you in English, as these days it comes easier to me. I am still able to speak and write in Turkish though. Do you remember me at all? Beni hatırlıyor musun? I am often thinking of you and wondering what you are doing. Are you married? Do you have children? I quickly push away the thought that she may not be alive – who knows! Life is so fragile... Do you still live in Kaynarca, near the Black Sea – the place, where we met at school and became 'best friends'? I remember being fascinated by your eyes: one blue-green and one brown. And your hair: exceptionally blond for 'Turkish standards'. Blonder than my hair! Maybe that's why we became friends – Because we were both different, in different ways?

Do you remember how we used to write long letters to each other, after I moved to Austria? I tried to find you on Facebook a few years ago. There were many Yasemins but none of them was you. Imagine how different it would be if we had had Internet in those days. I often wonder what would have happened. Maybe we would have kept in touch a bit longer? Either way, I would have found it hard to explain my life in

⁷¹ I should share with the reader: Yasemin is not an imaginary friend, she is a real person. She was my closest friend during my primary school years in Turkey. After I moved to Austria in 1989/90 we continued writing letters to each other, but eventually lost touch. Only recently – after writing this chapter – she miraculously resurfaced and made contact through her sister who found me on Facebook. In fact I had searched for Yasemin a few years ago, but it proved impossible to track her down. She does not use Facebook or other social media and therefore she did not have a digital footprint, at least not under her real name. Recently we had our first phone conversation via WhatsApp. It felt very strange. I had not spoken to her for decades. Our lives have taken very different turns. I was able to connect to her through the way I remembered her as a child but not so much as an adult. Although Yasemin exists as a person in the here and now, strangely the ghost of her memory feels more real to me. So maybe she is an imaginary friend after all?

Austria to you. Inevitably our lives would have taken a very different course... Writing to you now makes me feel like a phantom: Like the ghost of the little girl who I left behind when I moved from Turkey to Austria.

My apologies to the reader, I have to interrupt myself here. I have to share my suspicion with you: I think she, the little girl, never left me. In a strange way she surfaced again in my video, where the narrator (is it me or is it her?) shares her experience of migration and encounters with religious practices – memories of priests, baptisms and the namaz, the Muslim prayer ritual – relating the latter to her yoga practice. I think she may be manifesting now – in this text. I am scared of her. I am scared of her because she is destabilised and destabilising. She does not belong to this world. She does not belong in the video either. Hers is a voice from the off. Whispering from the past into the present. I know her and at the same time I do not know her. She escapes me. I cannot locate her: Like a wave she wanders. If her body is here, her mind may be somewhere else.



Fig. 2.1 From left to right: Myself, our primary school teacher, Yasemin. Kaynarca, Turkey, 1989. Courtesy of family Sözen.

(Press play)

In the distance we hear the *Muezzin* chanting the Morning Prayer. The darkness refuses representation. Where are we?

Sound (in the distance):

Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar. Allah is the Greatest.

Voice from the off:

I wake up confused. I realize that I am at Ümit hala's place in Karapınar. It is still dark outside. I hear my aunt getting up for her morning namaz.

Evoking the darkness outside, mentioned in the voice-over, the video opens with a black frame. Initially I did not want to include any voice-over in this video. I wanted to mix up yoga and namaz, the Muslim prayer ritual, in a more abstract way, without any commentary from the off. But then *she* started to speak, and I could not silence her. Whispering to me from the off, she says: "Now, if you do not want to confuse your readers, you should probably introduce them to Karapınar and to Ümit hala".

Ümit halam, my aunt Ümit

Kızıl kızıl kıvrıkcık saçları çiçek desenli bir örtü altında saklanmış

Curly reddish hair hidden under the floral patterns of her scarf

The way she jokes about the chicken in her garden, boasting that *her* eggs are organic!

The spark and mischief in her eyes

Her wrinkly hand, slightly shaking

Holding the silver spoon, stirring the sugar in her cay

Ümit: Hope is her name



Fig. 2.2 Ümit *hala* at her house in Karapınar, video still.

Rising early every morning to the metallic sound of her alarm clock in synch with the muezzin's call to prayer

Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar...

She rolls out her prayer mat

Murmuring verses from the Qur'an

I hear her thick Turkish accent in Arabic

Ümit, the first-born daughter, married to her cousin

Her wrinkly hand, wearing a golden ring

Kissed by her grandchildren

The smell of naphthalene balls to kill off the moths

Neatly folded headscarves in a cardboard box

Karapınar:

Where the dark river dried up a long time ago

Karapınar:

Endless journeys on dusty roads

Karapınar:

The drought-stricken volcanic landscape your father left behind as a nine-teen-year old boy venturing into worlds unknown. Off to Germany to distribute newspapers in Berlin to pay for his German course. The long lost son... Who knew he would return with a 'sarı gelin' (blonde bride) from Vienna?

Karapınar:

All those colourful carpets *babaanne* (your paternal grandmother) weaved in her youth.

Karapınar:

The calls of the *muezzin*, which wake you up in the middle of the night...*Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar... Ashhadu anna la ila ill Allah. I testify that there is no God but Allah. I testify that there is no God but Allah. Ashhadu anna Muhammadan rasul Allah. I testify that Mohammed is God's Prophet. I testify that Mohammed is God's Prophet.*

I have been visiting Karapınar, a small rural town near Konya in Turkey, in the middle of Anatolia, where most of my paternal family lives, regularly since childhood: As "sarı kız", the "blonde girl" visiting with her equally blonde Austrian mother. In this video I return to this place, which is familiar and strange at the same time. A place I feel I belong and yet do not belong.



Fig. 2.3 *DENİZ DENİZ DENİZ* (blonde, brunette, dark-haired). Childhood drawing.

We have set up two daylight lamps and a camera in Ümit hala's living room. My friend Ülgen, a visual artist from Istanbul, is assisting me with camera and lighting. Apart from the hand-woven carpets with hallucinatory geometric designs, the room's most remarkable features are a calendar showing young girls praying in Mecca and a replica of the Kaaba placed on top of a cupboard. Each morning, before sunrise, I wake up to the *muezzin's* call and hear my aunt rising and washing herself in the prescribed fashion for the morning prayer. She performs *namaz*, as the obligatory Muslim prayer ritual is called in Farsi, Urdu and Turkish, five times a day. The ritualised Muslim prayer involves bodily postures as well as spoken prayers (See Katz, 2013, p12). Reza Aslan's condensed description of *namaz* describes the practice as "a series of *yogic* movements (emphasis mine) that include standing, bowing, rising, sitting, turning east and west, and falling prostrate, all repeated in cycles, and accompanied by specific verses from the Quran" (Aslan, 2006, p146). The Farsi word *namaz* linguistically relates to the Sanskrit word *nama*, "to bow".

Scene I: A woman in loose earth-brown yoga pants stands at the front of a green yoga mat facing the camera. Her legs are joined together, and she is standing

straight, her big toes and heels touching. She rolls her shoulders back to open her chest, arms by the side, her fingers pointing to the floor. She pushes her chest up and lowers her chin. She gazes at the tip of her nose.

This position is called *Samasthiti*: it derives from Sanskrit *sama* –same, equal and *sthiti*, to establish, to stand and means to establish an equal and steady stance (Vinyasa Yoga School, 2014). As opposed to what it sounds like, this is not an easy position.)

Yoga teacher Marisol (Sanskrit and New York style American accent):

Ekam. Inhale. *Dve*. Exhale. *Trīṇi*. Inhale. Look Up. *Catvāri*. Step back. Lower down.
Chaturanga. *Pañca*. Inhale. *Sat*. Exhale.

“Isn’t that a strange editing choice?” I suddenly hear a voice asking. “In transition from the black frame, hearing the call to prayer in Arabic in the distance, we are being told that *she* woke up confused at her aunt’s place in Karapınar, wherever that is, and the first image we see shows two women, a teacher and a student in yoga clothes, performing *surya namaskar* (sun salutations) in a yoga studio in an unknown location. We cannot tell where the women are from, but they definitely do not look Indian. Yet one of them speaks Sanskrit and English, while the other is performing a traditional yoga sequence.”

I will ignore her question (for now). Let me first introduce you to my Mysore yoga teacher – Marisol Figueroa-Reitze: I first started to practice Mysore style yoga with Marisol when I lived in Zurich several years ago. In the meantime, she moved to Solothurn, a small town in the German speaking part of Switzerland, where her husband’s family lives. I have since continued to practice on and off, but I have never encountered a teacher like her again. Only in retrospect I realise why I was drawn to her: Marisol is not Indian. Marisol is not Swiss. Marisol was born in New York City. She is of Nigerian and Puerto Rican mixed heritage and grew up in Spanish Harlem. Marisol was first raised as Yoruba and later attended a Catholic school. She

eventually renounced religion. Like other yoga teachers and practitioners whom I interviewed in preparation for my project, she had turned to yoga to overcome suffering. She started practicing yoga in the mid 1990s, primarily to recover from insomnia.

Struck by yoga's healing and transformative effects, she developed her practice further and went on to become a yoga teacher. Originally, her background is in dance. In the interview I conducted with her, she explained that at some point in her career she had become tired of other people choreographing her movement. That's why she was drawn to Mysore style yoga, which is a self-directed practice – and which is how *Astānga* yoga used to be taught in Mysore, India.



Fig. 2.4 My yoga teacher Marisol Figueroa-Reitze, video-still.

Is it her mixed-race background and nomadic life, her search and embrace of an identity beyond her 'root identity,' her personal trajectory and multiplicity of being that resonated with me? I cannot know for sure. I have encountered several yoga teachers before and after Marisol. While I have learnt something valuable from each one of them, for some reason, it is her whom I have felt most connected to. Her chanting of the invocation mantra felt raw and real and transported me into another world. I followed my intuition to ask her to participate in this video performance. Her

character and her personal trajectory – which could in itself be seen as a metaphor of hybridity and globalisation – adds another layer to this work.

Voice-over:

I clamber out of bed recalling how unpleasant it felt for me to get up for my Mysore yoga practice in London. I start to set up my camera. Light gradually fills the room. I love to watch the sun rise.

Whilst my aunt Ümit, or for that matter any orthodox Muslim, would strongly discourage any associations of namaz with pagan sun worship, to me it appears that the times of prayer stand in direct relation to the sun's trajectory: the morning prayer takes place between dawn and sunrise, the noon prayer just after the height of the midday sun, the afternoon prayer when the shadows become longer, the evening prayer just after sunset and the last prayer during darkness. The prayer times, which structure my aunt's day, correspond to the natural rhythm of our planet in relation to the sun.

When I ask her about the origins of the prayer ritual, my aunt tells me that the Prophet Mohammed received God's message for the Muslim community to perform namaz during his celestial journey to the heavens. Popular accounts of the story, which is referred to as Mohammed's *Mir'aj*, describe him guided by the angel Gabriel travelling at high speed from Mecca to Jerusalem on a fantastic hybrid horse-woman named *Burāq* in a spectacular night-journey, which then continued as his ascension through the seven heavens, with the story finding its climax in his encounter with Allah (Gruber and Colby, 2010).

Burāq: A hybrid creature; Half-horse, half-bird, half-woman, she is flying through air at the speed of lightning. *Burāq*, a white horse-woman flying high above the clouds, the prophet on her back, on her way towards the stars. Her peacock-feathered wings lit by sun and moonlight, her face beaming, she is transcending boundaries between heaven and earth, the body and spirit, human and animal, the sacred and physical, the here and there. *Burāq*: the immaterial prophet's angelic mount.

Connecting the internal and external worlds: breaking the binary. Going beyond.

Could we relate the hybridity of *Burāq*, the high-flying-half-horse-half-woman-mixed-other-celestial-being, transporting the prophet Mohammed from his bed in Mecca via al-Quds to the heavens and back to the hybridity of *A-U-M*, the eternal sound of *Brahman*, the sound of the cosmos?



Fig. 2.5 *Al-Buraq* (1975), Dakar, Senegal, signed: M'Beingue, painted on glass with gold metal frame. Brooklyn Museum New York.

My mind jumps from my aunt's story of the hybrid steed-woman *Burāq* to the wild horses, which are said to represent our senses according to the ancient yoga philosophy of the *Katha Upanishad*.⁷² Islamic scholar Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi

⁷² The Hindu *Katha* (or *Kathaka*) *Upanishad* (ca. 5 BCE), the oldest *Upanishad* concerned with yoga (see Patañjali, 2008, p36), establishes a clear link between the practice of meditation and the metaphoric 'war chariot,' referring to a set of practices for controlling the body and breath in order to stabilize the mind. According to the scripture, "the disciplined practitioner who has 'yoked' the horses and 'chariot' of his body and senses (the senses being imagined as horses, my comment) with the

writes, “a celestial ascension can be considered a double helix dive into the depths of the soul. In a cosmos governed by harmonious conjunctions, an ascent through the celestial stages finds its match in a descent into the occult levels of the self” (Amir-Moezzi, 2010, pvii). Following this interpretation, I wonder if we could regard the prophet’s ascension through the ‘celestial stages’ as a metaphor for him attaining the aim of yoga, as getting to know the true nature of the Self in a deep state of meditation?

Voices whispering prayers and praising Allah in Arabic...

Scene 2: A medium close-up shot of an older woman, wearing glasses, her hair covered with a white embroidered headscarf, which some in the audience will decipher as *namaz örtüsü* – a specific type of headscarf, solely used for praying. Her hands are folded in front of her heart. She is murmuring *Subhaneke*, the opening supplication in the beginning of namaz.

A voice speaking from the off:

We are going to visit babaanne’s grave tomorrow. As a child I would watch her praying.

(Shouting in Turkish): *Sssht cocuklar, sakin olun!*

The video cuts to a wider shot and another, younger woman appears in the frame, next to the older woman. Her hair is covered in a blue scarf and her hands are folded in front of her chest. It is me, praying together with Ümit hala.

‘reins’ of his mind rises up to the world of the supreme god Vishnu.” (White, 2013, p36; *Katha Upanishad* I.iii, p153-160). This is attested in the following verse: “The man, however, who has, as his charioteer, a discriminating intellect, and who has under control the reins of the mind, attains the end of the road; and that is the highest place of Visnu” (*Katha Upanishad* I.iii, p159). As the commentary further explains, by reaching the supreme goal (Brahman or the supreme Self), one is liberated from the trans-migratory experience, “becomes free from all the worldly bondages” (*Katha Upanishad* I.iii, p159).

(Whispering): *We were not allowed to pass in front of her prayer rug.*

(Speaking): *I can still hear her soft voice mumbling verses from the Qur'an.*

My aunt, Ümit hala, and the-performer-me are standing at the back of our prayer rugs, facing the Qibla (Mecca) in her living room. Our right hand is placed over the left, in front of our hearts. I am gazing downward, fixing my gaze on the prayer rug, where I will soon place my forehead in prostration ('secde' in Turkish).

I pause the video. "Wait", a voice suddenly whispers: "You are going to perform the Muslim prayer ritual together with your aunt in front of the camera? But that is ridiculous. You have never been to a Qur'an course. Since when do you know how to pray? Are you even Muslim? And what are you wearing? Oh my God. I could hardly recognize you in this blue headscarf!" She breaks into hysterical laughter.

Where does this voice come from? What does she want? Maybe I am going crazy. "What is so weird about me trying to connect with my heritage?" I shout. "I might be secular, but I do identify culturally with Islam. I remember namaz from my childhood, from watching my grandmother and my aunts pray. You know very well that I would have probably learnt the prayers, if we had stayed in Turkey. I asked Ümit hala, if she would teach me how to do the namaz and she agreed."

Of course, I do not say that we had to perform *sabah namazi*, the morning prayer ritual around sixteen times to get the right take. Also, I do not want to admit how embarrassed I feel now, watching the footage. In fact, embarrassed does not quite capture it. This project has become far more personal and painful than I had expected it to be. Who am I? What is this project all about?



Fig 2.6 Surya Namaz (2018), video still

(Press play)

Scene 3: A side-shot shows a woman in yoga clothes standing on a yoga mat in a yoga studio. She stands still in *samasthiti*. A ghostlike frontal image of an older woman with an embroidered white headscarf floating over the image as superimposition – it is Ümit hala holding her hands up to the sky in a prayer position... she reminds me of a heavenly angel in a Persian miniature painting depicting the prophet's night journey.

A voice from the off, whispering the opening of the “Lords prayer” in German:

Im Namen des Vaters, und des Sohnes und des heiligen Geistes Amen. Im Namen des Vaters, und des Sohnes und des heiligen Geistes Amen.

The image shows me performing cycles of *surya namaskar*, the sun salutations. Footage showing my yoga teacher Marisol performing the very same sequence in the exact same location is superimposed. Here, the superimposition seems to suggest a lineage or tradition. A practice embodied by my teacher, which I follow, repeating the same yoga sequence after her ghost-like image or memory, on the same mat.

Performing *surya namaskar*, we literally ‘bow’ to *surya*, ‘the sun’. Whilst Vedic tradition honoured the sun as divine symbol, the existence of references to the sequence of *surya namaskar* in traditional yoga texts is subject of controversy (McGonigal, K., 2010). There are various speculations about the genealogy of this sequence.⁷³ Putting the questions of origins aside, it is generally agreed that Krishnamacharya, who is said to have instigated the revival of hatha yoga in India, introduced the sequence to his students, amongst them Shri K. Pattabhi Jois and B.K.S. Iyengar, who later would become internationally renowned yoga teachers. As a result of their teachings, *surya namaskar* has become an essential part of modern posture practice today.

The voice from the off continues:

I created my own religion when I moved from Turkey to Austria. I was nine. In school there was an old man wearing a long white robe, holding a chalice, a priest. At a religious service, he claimed that Jesus was out bread and wine. I was left speechless. It is then I secretly founded my own religion and baptised my cat. She did not like it. In school the songs we had to sing about Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost always made me cringe. I had the same feeling in my first yoga class when I had to chant the word: Aum (inserted recording of a group of people chanting Aum in a yoga studio in Vienna). The room was full of strangers, mostly skinny, Non-Asian, wearing elastic, colourful, tightfitting clothing and chanting in Sanskrit. But practising with Marisol, my Mysore yoga teacher, or as some would say guru, was a totally different experience. Her chanting of the invocation mantra and the way she guided me through the postures made me feel liberated and alive. I suddenly felt connected to something much larger than myself.

⁷³ See Singleton, M. (2010).



Fig 2.7 *Surya Namaz* (2018), video still

Scene 4: Close-up of the yoga teacher, Marisol. She is chanting *A-U-M* (OM). This close-up of her face is superimposed with a close-up of Ümit hala's face, reciting the Qur'an: *Allah Akbar* and *A-U-M* are heard simultaneously in the soundtrack. For a short moment, both faces are merged and become one.



A-U-M (OM)⁷⁴

Chanting, we come together and fall apart. Chanting, we come to the present and pass. Chanting, we are 'neither this nor that but...

Aum.⁷⁵

Neither this. Nor that. What vibrates in the space between? Call it inter- call it trans-? Hybridity, creolisation, mestiza consciousness:⁷⁶ Turkish or Austrian? East or West? Mind or body? Here or there? Local or global? Muslim or Christian? Religious or secular? Practice or theory? Video or performance?

Neither this. Nor that. I refuse to be one or the other. Refuse categorisation. Now, listen to your voice. Chating A-U-M. The AAAAAAAAAAAAA blurs into

⁷⁴ Swami Vivekananda (1901, p89) describes Om (Aum) as “the basis of all sounds.” As he explains: “The first letter, A, is the roots sound, the key, pronounced without touching any part of the tongue or palate; M represents the last sound in the series, being produced by the closed lips, and the U rolls from the very root to the end of the sounding board of the mouth. Thus, OM represents the whole phenomena of sound producing. As such, it must be the natural symbol, the matrix of all the various sounds. It denotes the whole range and possibility of all the words that can be made.”

Also see: “Om is the name and the symbol of Brahman” *Katha Upanisad*, I.ii.15

⁷⁵ Here I am quoting the title of the book *Neither this nor that but ... aum: One Hundred Meditations Based on Narayana Guru's Ātmōpadeśa Śatakam* (Nityacaitanya Yati and Narayana Guru, 1982).

⁷⁶ I am referring to the term proposed by Gloria Anzaldúa in her seminal article *La Conciencia de la Mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness* (Anzaldúa, 1987).

UUUUUUUUUUUU blurs into MMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM. Seamlessly. Vibrating on your lips until you get this tingling sensation. Where does this sound-wave take you? To India? Or to the universe? To your self? Beyond your self? Self and other? Another self?

A-U-M (OM)

Is this cultural appropriation? Are you a hippie? What is this all about?

When your mind becomes an echo chamber and uncomfortable questions bounce back and forth with increasingly loud volume in your head. Sit with them and breathe. Embrace the questions that arise. There is no “YES”. There is no “NO”. After all, truth is a matter of perspective.

Breathe. Inhale deeply. Exhale out. Listen to your breath. “Nefes al, nefes ver”: Take a breath. Give a breath. In the Turkish language the concept of breathing is conceived as give-and-take. There is no verb to describe “breathing”: this existential action is described as “taking” a breath and “giving” a breath. The Turkish word for breath *nefes* derives from Arabic *nafs*. The noun occurs 295 times in the Qur’an (Quran Dictionary, 2009-2017). As often the case in Arabic, the word *nafs* is polysemous. It has multiple meanings, ranging from breath to ego/self, consciousness and soul, both in the individual and collective sense. Similarly, the German word for breath, *Atem*, is connected to the Sanskrit *Atman*, which means “essence, breath and soul”. *Ein-atmen*. *Aus-atmen*: Breathe in. Breathe out. We are all connected through breath. Living in air. Living off air. Living with air: constantly (ex)-changing air. Being and becoming is breathing. Giving and taking: Taking our first breath after birth. Giving our last breath before death. Air is breath is being is consciousness ...an ode to Air...our “invisible Other” (Irigaray, cited by Nair, 2007, p44).



Fig 2.8 *Surya Namaz* (2018), video still

A-U-M (OM)

Sound travels. It travels far. It touches us to the core. We cannot escape sound. We can close our eyes and make reality disappear – at least on a visual plane. Temporarily, that is. Yet, it is so much harder to close our ears to something and to avoid hearing. We are able to hear even before we are born. We make sense of the world through sound, even before we are able to see. Waves of sound vibrate through air to touch our bodies, go through us and become language. Waves of sound leave our lips to speak to others. A-U-M: When breath, air and speech become a pair. We are transformed and transported by sound. Sound takes us somewhere else. There is no here and there is no there. Sound travels in-between. Chanting *Aum* with Marisol and *Allah Akbar* with my aunt Ümit, I express my being and belonging, yet I am dispersed, my selves are multiplied like sound waves in space. Neither this, nor that. Riding on sound waves, travelling from India to the United States of America, from Turkey to Vienna, from Nigeria and Puerto Rico to New York, from Mecca and Medina to Konya... echoing, vibrating in a yoga studio in Solothurn ...A-U-M, the sound of the cosmos, recorded in Switzerland, Allah Akbar, God is the Greatest, verses from the Qur'an, recited in Anatolia, now re-sounding through laptop speakers at my home in London.

Where are you from?

Are you from here? Or are you from there? I refuse to respond. What happens if you are from here AND there? If you are from here AND there AND going some where (else)? Some where else where? Where and what is else-where? Else-where is not every where. Elsewhere is not any where. Elsewhere is not no where. Where is this else where? I imagine it is not a place. It is a space: The space in-between. In-between here and there; This and that; self and Other.

“Isn’t this what Homi Bhabha was talking about when he came up with the concept of the third space?” a voice asks. “Are you asking me?” I say. This is a rhetoric question, because nobody except from myself can hear this voice, which only exists in my head. Yes, I know, I am going crazy... I know, I know, you are nodding your head and I can see you look at me with question marks in your eyes. “Why are you asking, if you already know the answer?” I say to this strangely disembodied voice. She clearly has sat too many hours in libraries reading works of postcolonial writers and now she thinks that she knows something. Rubbish. Life and art are your best teachers.

A Hybrid.

A Bastard.

I am

“White Asian Mixed Other”

I am

A ticked box in their ethnic monitoring forms

The Inappropriate Other

I am

Coming from two continents

Flooding their little island

With my invisible

Yet audible Otherness.

Hybrid.

From *Ibrida*, a cross-bred animal in Latin.

The offspring of a tame adult female swine and a wild boar?

A mongrel pup?

The offspring of a 'freeman' and a slave?⁷⁷

Hybrid. Potentially related to Greek *hybris*: "wanton violence, insolence, outrage," originally "presumption toward the gods;"⁷⁸

"One of the problems the term "hybridity" poses is its association with 19th century racist discourses," the voice lectures me. "The term was originally used to refer to "racial mixing in the biogenetic sense" (Hall, 2003, p192). During the era of European colonialism, the offspring of inter-racial mixing – the so-called 'hybrid' - was regarded as racially inferior." I know, I know. Aware of its negative connotations, being of mixed heritage myself, I have never felt quite comfortable with the term. "How about now?" I ask, "Are inter-racial and inter-cultural marriages socially accepted? Have we finally overcome racism?" The voice stays silent; she refuses to think in generalisations, hence she will not answer such questions. Then she whispers into my ear that my German grandmother (nearly) fainted in the lobby of the intercontinental hotel in Vienna when she heard that my mother was expecting a child from a Turkish and Muslim man. Perhaps she was picturing her daughter as sow and my father-to-be as wild boar? Oh no, let's not go there.

"In any case," the voice assures me, "'hybridity' has since been re-defined in cultural theory and there is a clear distinction between the cultural and biological usages of the term." "So, so..." I hear myself reply. You can probably hear the voices of Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall echoing in the distance. "So, what is the potential of hybridity

⁷⁷ Dictionary.com (no date). Hybrid. *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Douglas Harper, *Historian*. Available from <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/hybrid> [Accessed 22 November 2016]

⁷⁸ Dictionary.com (no date). Hubris. *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Douglas Harper, *Historian*. Available from <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/hubris> [Accessed 22 November 2016]

for my project of undoing fixed notions of belonging?” I ask the voice in my head.

“What do you mean by hybridity?” she says. I take a deep breath.

“First of all,” I respond, “I propose to distinguish between the figure of the hybrid, the concept of hybridity and the process of hybridisation.” In reality we may often not be able to differentiate between these. Yet, to me it seems important to make the effort to disentangle these terms and concepts first, in order to understand how they can be utilised and act together in the undoing of belonging. First of all, remember that hybridity in Bhabha’s sense does not refer to the mixed-race subject per se (Ahmed, 1999, p97). Rather, his concept of hybridity is conceived as a response to the structures put into place by the colonial apparatus for “the recognition and disavowal of racial and cultural and historical differences” (Bhabha, 1994, p100). By depicting the colonised as “a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin,” fundamentally different and inferior to themselves, the colonisers legitimised the conquest and ruling of other populations (Bhabha, 1994, p101). Through mimicking and copying and thus hybridising the coloniser, the colonised put into question these (perceived) differences which had been construed to justify the colonial discourse. It was through processes of hybridisation that those subjected to colonialism slowly began to erase the myth of cultural purity, which determined colonial authority and has now and historically been used to legitimise supremacy based on race, culture or history.

By placing the emphasis on cultural contact and mixing, hybridity seeks to undermine the fantasy of cultural purity and binary conceptions of self and other, on which the colonial discourse is based. Bhabha and others influenced by his writings re-appropriated and transposed the concept of hybridity from the context of colonialism to the theorisation of cultural difference in the context of (post-colonial) diasporic communities. While hybridity could be regarded as a condition, hybridisation puts the emphasis on the process of blending and mixing. (This differentiation seems to resonate with Glissant’s distinction between *métissage*, which I understand as analogous to hybridity, and his conception of creolisation, as infinite process of mixing. See my discussion in section 3 of the previous chapter).

“But ultimately these are very general notions, which could refer to various contexts, processes and modes of fusion, both subversive and hegemonic, no?” – Allah Allah, the voice has suddenly come back to interrupt my reasoning. What can I say? She is right. I do not think hybridity alone can be the answer. As Sara Ahmed, Sarat Maharaj, Paul Gilroy and other postcolonial writers have stated, we need to be cautious of an uncritical celebration of hybridity as inherently transgressive. (See my discussion of Maharaj’s ([1994], 2001) critique of hybridity in the previous chapter). Following Lila Abu-Lughod’s (1991) advocacy to engage in “ethnographies of the particular” I would therefore argue that these concepts and their potential of undoing fixed notions of belonging have to be examined in relation to specific applications and contexts.

As a voice from the off reminds me, hybridity and hybridisation is nothing new. We can encounter a vast number of examples of cultural hybridisation and syncretic practices throughout history in various geopolitical contexts, and this long before our planet became a globe in what has been described as the era of globalisation. With regards to the hybridisation of yoga and namaz, I am struck by an early Mughal painting (ca. 1590), which I saw at the Museum Rietberg in Zurich. It shows the Muslim emperor Akbar the Great, worshipping the sun – a spiritual activity, which would have been considered blasphemous by many of his orthodox Muslim contemporaries.



Fig. 2.9 Akbar Worshipping the Sun, Attributed to Manohar. Mughal, ca. 1590, Painting 13 x 6.3 cm. Courtesy of Francesca Galloway, London.

According to historical sources the Mughal emperor Akbar is said to have offered prayers at sunrise and sunset, reciting 1001 Sanskrit names in honour of the sun on formal occasions (Seyller and Seitz, 2011, p38). These rituals are considered to have formed part of his syncretic *Din-illahi* (Divine Faith), his invented religion mixing elements of Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism and Christianity with Islam (Seyller and Seitz, 2011, p38).

A myriad of old manuscripts, translations in Arabic, Urdu, Farsi and Turkish as well as visual documents testify to the history of Muslim interest in the practice and history of yoga, especially from the perspective of Sufism (Islamic mysticism). Departing from his observations of similarities between the two bodily and spiritual practices, the Indian Muslim author Nizami (1977) interpreted namaz as a simplified version of yoga, calling it “the yoga of Islam.”⁷⁹ Throughout history Muslims across the globe have expressed divergent views towards yoga: while some will embrace the practice, stating that yoga is compatible with the teachings of the Qur’ān on a spiritual level, others would see yoga as acceptable, as long as it is regarded as a purely physical activity, whereas a more orthodox standpoint fears that yoga would lead Muslims astray from their path due to its connection to Hinduism. Unfortunately, today accounts of cross-cultural influence are rarely acknowledged. As Ernst writes, “current ideological oppositions between Islam and Hinduism, which are strongly underpinned by nationalist agendas, leave no room for understanding the intercultural engagements that have taken place across religious lines over the centuries” (2013, p66). In a controversy with Muslim representatives about nationwide mandatory yoga performances in India, imposed by the Hindu-nationalist government on world yoga day 2015, notably a Hindu BJP MP publicly declared that “the prophet Mohammed was the biggest practitioner of yoga” and that everyone who objected to do *surya namaskar* “should jump into the sea” (The Times of India, 2015). Unmistakeably his speech addressed the Muslim minority, who had voiced their concerns regarding world yoga day. On the other hand, in Turkey, where yoga gained increased popularity in recent years, the government issued a ban on religious symbols in yoga studios in 2015, whereas Muslim authorities in Indonesia or Malaysia have issued fatwas against yoga.

⁷⁹ F.A Fazelbhoy (in Nizami, 1977, pvii), then president of ‘Friends of Yoga “Sunbeam” Jogeswari Bombay’ writes in his introduction to Nizami’s (1977) book: “Those who say their Namaz every day are unconsciously doing yoga and thus keeping themselves fit physically, mentally and morally. While those who do their Yoga every day are unconsciously following the principle of Namaz laid down by the Koran. In effect they are truly followers of the same God who controls the destiny of all human beings whether they be black, brown, white or yellow. Thus it is that daily practice of Namaz or Yoga that leads human beings to their spiritual destiny.”

How are the figure of the hybrid, hybridity and hybridisation at work in my video performance *Surya Namaz*? What are the potentials and pitfalls? What can I (we) learn from the practice?

Imagine dots of green and red, yellow and blue next to each other and the undefined space of flickering colour between the poles of this spectrum: A similar contrapuntual relation could be imagined between the main protagonists of my video: my yoga teacher Marisol and my aunt Ümit. In contrast to the New York-born, Switzerland-based bi-racial Marisol (from Spanish: sea and sun), who renounced her religious upbringing (Yoruba and Catholicism) to embrace contemporary dance and later adopt the spiritual practice of yoga, my aunt Ümit (from Farsi: hope), a devout Muslim woman, born and based in rural Anatolia, followed a more linear path aligned with her 'root identity' (ethnic Turkic and Sunni Muslim). One could argue that her character represents the fantasy of authenticity, cultural purity and traditionalism,⁸⁰ whereas Marisol's character could be seen as an embodiment of globalisation, hybridity and transcultural contact. Yellow and blue: in contrast to my aunt's character standing for part of my cultural heritage and 'root identity,' Marisol's multiplicity and hybridity functions as site of reflection and projection of my own hybrid subject position. The representations of my multiple selves vibrate at different wavelengths and frequencies between these two poles: local and global, vertical and horizontal, roots and routes. Neither this, nor that. Neither here, nor there. Flickering in the undefined coloured space between two sounds in different tonalities, vibrating between three letters: A-U-M.

The narrator's voice – my voice – in the video and the voice(s) in this text are speaking from a hybrid subject position, or to adopt a more humorous and auto-ironic term coined by the Palestinian-American anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod

⁸⁰ Considering that my aunt only began to cover her hair and to pray regularly after the age of forty, such a schematic view and simplification of a far more complex lived reality, besides ignoring the diversity and plurality existing within practices attributed to Islam would be problematic – hence my designation of authenticity, cultural purity and traditionalism as fantasy.

(1991) from the position of a 'halfie'⁸¹ in terms of national and cultural identity: 'Half' Austrian, 'Half' Turkish; 'Half' Christian, 'Half' Muslim: Neither this. Nor that. For 'halfies' like myself the distinction between self and other is collapsed: "the self is split, caught at the intersection of systems of difference" (Abu-Lughod, 1991, p140). Although I do not intend to fetishise my hybrid subject position, I would argue with Abu-Lughod, who posed similar questions about self and other in an anthropological context, that being of culturally mixed heritage can facilitate a heightened awareness about issues such as positionality, audience and power relations.

Speaking of questions of perspective, audience(s) and accountability, what about the ethics and politics of my representations? In the past I have at times questioned whether I am exploiting my subjects in the process of making a documentary style film with or about them. Similarly, in this work, the question of power is not resolved. An uncomfortable question hangs in the air: am I using or abusing other people to express my ideas and perceptions of the world? Like a postmodern cook creating a fancy fusion dish? These are difficult questions. It is complicated and I am hesitating in the attempt to formulate an answer. However, the question is too important to be sidestepped completely. If I had to defend myself as filmmaker, I would say that I have an on-going relation to both protagonists. They are not random subjects, these are people I love and care for. I had a relation to them before making the film and I will have a relation to them after completing the film: one is my aunt, the other my (former) yoga teacher. Ultimately the video is not about using them or myself to express my ideas, but about the articulation of (our) Relation. I will come back to this in the next section (section 2.2.).

It is important to note that as protagonists, my yoga teacher Marisol and my aunt Ümit also form part of my audience. While Marisol, my yoga teacher was aware of the political implications of my project and supportive of my experimental approach, ultimately *Surya Namaz* throws up many questions in relation to my relationship as filmmaker to my 'namaz-teacher,' my aunt as the filmed subject. Would she agree

⁸¹ Abu-Lughod (1991, p466) describes 'halfies' as "people whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage."

with the way I represented her and perhaps more importantly, how I portrayed namaz, the Muslim prayer ritual, which forms part of her religious practice and touches on her core cultural values? Am I betraying my aunt's trust by using the footage of us performing the prayer ritual in ways that she would never have imagined?



Fig. 2.10 Ümit *hala* and me, analogue photograph. Photo: Ülgen Semerci, 2016.

Guilt. Shame. Proximity. Distance. Longing. Love. Fear. Insecurity. Overwhelmed by irreconcilable emotions, I do not know what to say. Would I be comfortable to show the video to my aunt? I am not sure. I am afraid that she would not understand. First there is a language barrier. Ümit *hala* graduated from primary school. She does not speak English, or German, or Sanskrit. I could of course translate the voice-over into Turkish. That way my aunt and any other Turkish speaking audience would be able to follow my narration. Yet there remains the untranslatable. For instance, Ümit *hala* does not know about anything about yoga or Catholicism. She has never been to an art exhibition or seen an experimental film. Other than going on a pilgrimage to Mecca, she has never been abroad, and she rarely leaves the surroundings of her house in Karapınar. Ümit *hala* is a gentle and loving soul, open-minded, with a great sense of humour. Still, what matters most in the rural context of Karapınar is what

the neighbours might think. “Why are you not married yet? Who is this dark man next to you on your Facebook profile? Are you seeing him? [...] Be careful, my girl, these are big decisions. Running a household and raising a family are not easy,” the memory of her voice and the words she spoke to me during our last conversation, walking to my grandmother’s grave in Karapınar, echo in my head.

Ümit hala was not impressed with my choice of dress for recording the prayers: brown cotton yoga pants and a dark blue T-shirt. Instead she wanted me to wear a black nylon dress and a black veil she brought from her pilgrimage to Mecca. I declined politely. What would she make of this video? Would she feel embarrassed? Would she feel upset that I chose to wear trousers, would she object to the way I represented namaz, visualising it in relation to yoga? I personally do not think that my portrayal of namaz is any way blasphemous. But given my rather secular upbringing and exposure to multiple faiths I might be terribly wrong. Certainly, some orthodox and conservative viewers, whether Muslim or Hindu, might not agree with my hybrid representation and mixing of yoga and namaz. Also, fundamentalist Christians could be offended by the baptism-of-a-cat-story in the voice-over narration. Making work challenging mainstream perceptions of religion and spirituality, it seems impossible to avoid the risk of offending people. However, the relation I have to my aunt is very different to the relation I might have to a random audience member in an art space. As one of the protagonists of my video, I am indebted to her and I would not want to hurt her feelings. But maybe I am misconstruing her reaction. Maybe she would be proud to see herself on screen and happy about a record of us praying together. I do not think we have ever been so close.

I should say that my aunt Ümit gave me her permission to use the video footage in whichever way I wanted. However, under one condition: she asked me not to show the video ‘there’. I simply assumed that by ‘there’ she meant ‘in Turkey’. At first, I did not take this objection very seriously. Only gradually I realise that this private censorship will have troubling consequences: it exiles the work from the place it was made. Any potential regional impact or possible contribution to a critical discourse will be lost, if the video is condemned to a life outside of Turkey. Through this

copyright, the video will become an errant, lost in space, stripped from its homeland, an eternal migrant in exile. Wandering soundwaves and pixels exported from Turkey, circulating in the so-called West, with no right to return: the fate of much diasporic art, which loses most of its agency in the white cubes of the Western metropolis.⁸² What is to be done? Clearly, Ümit hala is most concerned with what the neighbours might think. This is not her taking issue with the representation of her religion – this is more about her social status as a pious and modest woman. Being in the limelight, performing namaz publicly on television (which apart from the cinema would be her only reference for watching moving images: as far as I know she has never been to a gallery space) could stain her reputation and social standing in Karapınar. She fears that she would become the subject of gossip by being televised. Of course, I respect her wish not to show the work ‘there’. But what exactly does that mean? Karapınar, Konya, Ankara, Turkish television? Would she mind if I presented the video in an off-space in Istanbul or another city in Turkey, far away from Karapınar and her Anatolian neighbours – based on the condition that the video would never find its way to YouTube, the newspapers or TV, I wonder...I will have to ask her during my next visit. In contrast to autocratic rulings of the Turkish state, there is a family bond, which means that there could be room for negotiations. However, because of political concerns and increased (arbitrary) state censorship against the arts, I fear that under the current government, it might prove difficult to find a platform willing to show this work in Turkey.⁸³

There is no re-turn.

My only movement is circular:

Dönmek in Turkish, to turn, equally signifies re-turn

Geri dön...come back...

Like a döner

⁸² See Alisa Lebow’s (2007-2008, pp.57-82) discussion of (self-)censorship and the reception of Kutlug Ataman’s work in Turkey and the politics of global art in her article *Worldwide Wigs: Kutluğ Ataman and the Globalized Art Documentary*.

⁸³ The group Siyah Bant (Black tape) has been documenting cases of censorship against the arts in Turkey: SiyahBant (2010). For a brief summary in English on increased government censorship see: *The Art Newspaper* (2016).

all I do is turn
Turn, turn, turn
Until I turn into...
My Self: the Other.

2.2. On root identity and Relation

The soundtrack of the video *Surya Namaz* ends with my voice from the off alluding to the feeling of dispersion, in a rhythmic staccato of multiple languages concluding with the statement that “my selves are multiplied like sound waves... travelling in space.” This state of dispersion and fragmentation is characteristic for the diasporic experience, which Stuart Hall has referred to as “*the* representative modern experience” (1987, p44). In fact, the term ‘diaspora,’ going back to the Greek – *dia*, ‘through,’ and *speirein*, ‘to scatter’ – already embodies the concept of dispersal. Referring to a ‘dispersal from’ the word simultaneously evokes the notion of a centre or a ‘home’ (Brah, 1996). The experience of dislocation and alienation in the diaspora can often lead to a nostalgic longing to return to an (imagined) ‘home’ and therefore enhance nationalistic and traditionalist discourses. However, as Avtar Brah (1996) insists, “not all diasporas sustain an ideology of ‘return’,” emphasising the distinction between a “homing desire” as opposed to the idea of a ‘homeland’” (Brah, 1996, p180). Following her, “the concept of diaspora offers a critique of discourses of fixed origins, while taking account of a homing desire which is not the same thing as desire for a ‘homeland’” (Brah, 1996, p180).

How is this ‘creative tension’ between discourses of ‘home’ and ‘dispersion’ (Brah, 1996, p193) at work in diasporic art practices, where the trope of the return to one’s ancestors’ homeland and engagement with one’s cultural heritage, has somewhat become a genre in itself?⁸⁴ As mentioned previously, this phenomenon of ‘going native’ to borrow an anthropological term, has been received critically as ‘self-othering’ or ‘ethnic marketing’ in the light of the art world’s tendency to frame artists as representatives of their place of origin (Haq, 2014 and Foster, ([1996], 2012).

⁸⁴ For a discussion of this tendency in the context of the Lebanese diaspora see Abdelhady, D. (2011, p142).

Diasporic artists that adopt the position of the 'Native Informant' (Spivak and Gunew, 1990, p66; Spivak 1999, p6) and attempt to translate non-Western origins to Western audiences have been accused of self-masquerade and opportunism, enforcing stereotypical representations of the cultures they claim to represent.⁸⁵ The journey to my aunt's place in Turkey and encounter with my Islamic heritage in *Surya Namaz* can be perceived as resonating with this genre of works exploring belonging and identity by engaging with one's family and cultural heritage, which is perceived as different or 'Other' from a Eurocentric perspective. Does embarking on a 'field trip' to my father's place of origin mean that I am essentialising and fetishising my Islamic heritage, if not the notion of culture and belonging in more general terms by adopting the position of the 'Native Informant' (Spivak and Gunew, 1990, p66; Spivak 1999, p6)? Am I reinforcing binary thinking and stereotypical images of 'Islam' through my artistic engagement with my aunt's namaz practice and representation of namaz? How to counter or avoid the pitfalls of mis-representation and self-othering?

Prompted by these unresolved (and perhaps unresolvable) questions, I intend to examine potential of the Glissantian concept of Relation ([1990], 1997) for what I have called *The Art of Un-belonging*. I will begin this endeavour through reflecting on my own practice, before moving on to an analysis of opacity– as one of the key concepts making up Glissant's poetics and ethics of Relation. For further analysis of this concept, I will return to explore Mona Hatoum's video *Measures of Distance* (1988), which I regard as one of the most profound artistic expressions of the diasporic experience that I have encountered so far.

The key questions are: How might the migrant or diasporic postcolonial artist engage (more) critically with the notion of 'home (-land)'? How to resist the neo-colonial complicity that we risk by assuming the role or adopting the perspective of the 'Native Informant' (Spivak and Gunew, 1990, p66; Spivak 1999, p6)? How could Glissant's rhizomatic conception of identity as Relation inform artistic strategies that

⁸⁵ A brief explanation of the 'Native Informant' is provided in the introduction. Abdelhady (2011) has discussed the problematic in the context of the Lebanese diaspora.

question the idea of a singular root or origin?

2.2.1. Root, rhizome, Relation

As outlined in section 3 of the previous chapter, the Martinican poet and philosopher Édouard Glissant developed a profound critique of the linear conception of identity as “*l’identité à racine unique*” (1996, p23) – as “a unitary⁸⁶ root identity” (my translation) in response to the history of forced dislocation and brutal colonisation of the Caribbean. This fixed notion of identity and belonging (“*l’identité à racine unique*”) was universalised in the supremacist, nativist, divisive narrative by the so-called West in the process of dominating the Other and has since been reproduced in nationalistic movements elsewhere. Countering this genealogical conception of identity based on affiliation through the rhizomatic conception of an identity based on relation is at the heart of Glissant’s theory of Relation.

The totalitarian concept of the root evokes fixity in the sense of “a singular autonomous origin” (Britton, 1999, p18), resonating with essentialist notions of identity that have been criticised by other postcolonial thinkers. Aware of its destructive potential as instrument of domination and exclusion in the colonial context of the Caribbean, Glissant in a very powerful image likens the root to “a stock taking all upon itself and killing all around it” ([1990], 1997, p11).⁸⁷ Thinking globally and moving beyond the regional context of the Caribbean, in *Introduction à une Poétique du Divers* he explicitly mentions the Bosnian and Rwandan genocide, which are standing in for more recent examples of the brutal destructive force of the root(-identity) (Glissant, 1996, pp.90–91).

Resisting the totalitarian root that destroys all that it perceives as different from itself while legitimising the genocide or forceful expulsion and oppression of the Other (or several others), Glissant conceives of another type of root, a root that is one and

⁸⁶ Unitary in the sense of unmixed, singular (unique) and restricted.

⁸⁷ “La racine est unique, c’est une souche qui prend tout sur elle et tue alentour” (Glissant, 1990, p23).

multiple at the same time. Appropriating the Deleuzian notion of the rhizome⁸⁸ in *Poetics of Relation*, he envisions a radically tolerant, interconnecting and relational kind of root as “an antidote for root thinking” (Headley, 2015, p74). Derived from the image of a multi-rooted plant, the model of the rhizome is able to express the interconnectedness, heterogeneity and multiplicity of being and becoming. Transposed to a theory of identity and belonging, this translates into thinking identity and belonging as rhizomatic: as always in motion and relation, being rootless, yet rooted in multiplicity, independent from the myth of an exclusive and unique origin, not bound by a blood-line, or “a single root in history, memory or place” (Headley, 2015, p74), interdependent and entangled with one and other in a ‘rhizome world’. As Glissant states in *Poetics of Relation*, “Rhizomatic thought is the principle behind what I call the Poetics of Relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other” ([1990], 1997, p11).⁸⁹

Thinking of roots, the gesture of return, my journey to Karapınar, to my paternal family’s place in Turkey is what I would like to call the ‘vertical movement’ I have embarked upon in the making of *Surya Namaz*: following the vertical ‘root’ of affiliation (in the Glissantian sense) and tradition. This brings us back to the troubling question: Am I re-iterating the colonial trope of ‘going native,’ going on a ‘field trip’ to my aunt’s home in Turkey and returning with audio-visual material documenting rituals, which are conceived as Other and foreign to the Western or Western-educated, presumably secular gallery visitor? Am I reinforcing the linear and binary thinking of the ‘root’? Presenting myself wearing Islamic dress – reason for phobia in mainstream media, but still highly marketable in the Western art circuit? What does it mean that I cover my hair with a headscarf, approximating the image of a Muslim woman, learning how to perform the Muslim prayer ritual following the instructions of my paternal aunt?

⁸⁸ See my discussion and introduction to the Deleuzian concept of the rhizome in section 3 of chapter 1.

⁸⁹ “La pensée du rhizome serait au principe de ce que j'appelle une poétique de la Relation, selon laquelle toute identité s'étend dans un rapport à l'Autre” (Glissant, 1990, p23).



Fig. 2.11 *Surya Namaz* (2018). Video still

On the one hand, given the current political climate, it felt necessary to re-claim an Islamic identity on my terms, in order to defend it against misrepresentations in the Western media and distortion from within by conservative clerics and fundamentalists. I concur with the cultural critic and theorist Hamid Dabashi (2013, p17) that “no one in particular can be exempted from responsibility to restore historical depth and moral imagination to the term ‘Islam’.” We need to break the binaries between secular and religious, East and West, self and other in order to revive “the historic cosmopolitanism of Islam as a worldly religion” (Dabashi, 2013, p17). This requires a new thinking based on Islam’s “inherent pluralism and hybridity” (Dabashi, 2013, p17).



Fig. 2.12 'Making Of' *Surya Namaz* (2016). Photo: Ülgen Semerci.

However, as far as I am concerned, my (partly) Islamic heritage does not give me any moral high ground or any more legitimacy to represent namaz in my art practice. The way I chose to represent myself as the Other, exploring the Other within myself in the performance of the ritualised Muslim prayer with my aunt could be seen as bordering on auto-Orientalism.⁹⁰ Ultimately, this is a risk I was willing to take. It provides the

⁹⁰ My conception of the term draws on Edward Said's (1977) critical reception of Orientalism as a discourse of making the Other based on perceived (and imaginary) divisions between the colonised 'East' and the dominating 'West'. Following his definition Orientalism can be understood as a form of discourse promoting the perception of the 'Orient' or the 'Oriental' as the Other as opposed to the

base for the further exploration of strategies that could be used to avoid and subvert the problematic and expected fetishisation of one's cultural heritage in the arts.⁹¹

Taking my dilemma as starting point for further reflection, I would argue that in order to undo fixed notions of belonging and to circumvent the danger of fetishising otherness, (diasporic) art has to highlight the processes of hybridisation and render the paradox of cultural identity –as imaginary construct– visible and audible. This is the work that this research sets out to do. Building on a critical exploration of hybridity, the practice aims to articulate the aforementioned paradox and proposes a rhizomatic conception of identity according to the Glissantian theory of Relation, as counter model to “the unitary root identity that is based on the exclusion of the Other” (Glissant, 1996, p23; my own translation).⁹² Countering the assumption of a pure and autonomous ‘root identity,’ Glissant’s theory of Relation suggests a rhizomatic conception of identity “no longer as a unitary root but as a root reaching out to meet other roots” (Glissant, 1996, p23; my own translation).⁹³ This is what I would call the horizontal or diagonal movement of the relation- or route-identity, which I follow by relating my practice of yoga to my aunt’s practice of the Muslim prayer ritual and Catholic Church rituals that I experienced at school in Austria. By putting these culturally distinct practices into relation with each other through my aural and embodied performances and the mixing of disjointed sound and images via audio-visual means, I aim to simultaneously hybridise both ritualistic practices and interconnect them in rhizomatic ways.

‘Occidental’. The discourse includes culture and visual representations through art, film and popular culture. Following Said’s conception of Orientalism as a form of othering, I use the notion of ‘auto-Orientalism’ to describe a specific form of self-othering, in the sense of orientalising myself or presenting myself as the ‘Oriental’.

⁹¹ See Areen (2007) and Kunze Takengny, C. (2008). Also see my discussion of this issue in the section 1 of chapter 1.

⁹² “*l’identité à racine unique et exclusive de l’autre*” (Glissant, 1996, p23).

⁹³ “non plus comme racine unique mais comme racine allant à la rencontre d’autres racines” (Glissant, 1996, p23).

Ultimately, I am painfully aware of the contradictions (if not the tragic absurdity) of any attempt to return and belong to an ancestral land or culture. It is impossible. Within my father's family and in Karapınar, the community living in his place of origin I am perceived as a local foreigner or foreign local: I belong yet do not belong. Being neither an insider nor an outsider, I seem somewhat to be able to destabilise both positions, the familiar and the foreign, through my multiple belongings: As a hybrid, diasporic, errant, I am the inappropriate Other.⁹⁴

2.3. Opacity as filmic strategy

Video editing allows for fluidity and experimentation: bringing disparate elements together in new ways. Mixing it up. Montage allows for expression of the contradictions and dispersion experienced by the diasporic subject: the paradox of being this and that, here and there at the same time: exploding the binary. Editing techniques such as superimposition and the use of multi-layered soundtracks allow for the creation of a multi-layered work that brings disparate elements into relation with each other aurally and visually. The software editing window can become a zone of contact, where different cultures can meet, change and exchange without completely dissolving or losing themselves. In the case of *Surya Namaz*, yoga and the Muslim prayer, Turkish, English, German, Sanskrit and Arabic come together to create a new texture – as the text of the film, that in the Glissantian sense protects their Diversity through opacity.

According to Catherine Russell's (1999) definition *Surya Namaz* could be considered an *experimental ethnography*. As she writes from a film theorist's perspective, "the utopian project of experimental ethnography is to overcome binary oppositions between us and them, self and other, along with the tension between the profilmic and the textual operations of aesthetic form" (Russell, 1999, p19). Significantly, she describes experimental ethnography as utopian: would this imply that my project of undoing belonging is itself utopian? What might be formal-aesthetic strategies that

⁹⁴ I borrow the term from Trinh T. Minh-ha (1991, p74) who defined the 'Inappropriate Other' as the subject whose intervention "is necessarily that of both a deceptive insider and a deceptive outsider."

could be used to overcome binaries? How can we decolonise representations of self and Other? What are the aesthetics, what are the politics of *The Art of Un-belonging*?

These questions in mind, I want to re-visit a video which has had a significant impact in shaping my thinking about experimental film and video's potential to articulate the diasporic experience: Mona Hatoum's *Measures of Distance* (1988).⁹⁵ The film opens in silence. Long, slow fades. Grainy, abstract, images are superimposed with fragments of handwritten letters in Arabic. Sudden laughter breaks the silence – this must be the artist's mother: a deep, lively, comforting voice, laughing from the heart. While we are trying to decipher the blurred images, the soundtrack exposes us to a conversation between mother and daughter in Arabic. Giggling voices. Warmth, Intimacy. I feel moved by their proximity, yet I do not understand the language. There are no subtitles. I am left out of this conversation. Then we hear a voice from the off: "Dear Mona...the apple of my eye..." A rather cold and distant voice has begun to read a letter in English addressed to the artist. Hatoum has translated her mother's letters and reads them out loud. The soundtrack of the Arabic conversation between mother and daughter overlaps with the English translation of the letters. Oscillating between Lebanon, Palestine and England. Gradually the blurred and grainy images begin to reveal themselves as that which is private and personal: we recognise a voluptuous woman, it is the artist's naked mother, in sensual close-ups showing her body under the shower. The rhythm of interchanging images makes me think of a slide show. Through the multiple visual layers and fragmented close-ups of the mother's body we can never see a clear image of her mother. She appears concealed behind a veil of Arabic handwriting. We feel touched yet cannot touch her. She is distanced and secluded from our sight.

The multiple layers of the bi-lingual soundtrack further disorient the spectator and can create a sense of frustration for those not able to understand the Arabic writing

⁹⁵ See my discussion of *Measures of Distance* (1988) in relation to the politicisation of the personal and Russell's (1999) definition of auto-ethnography in section 2 of chapter 1.

and dialogue between mother and daughter, waiting in vain for subtitles in English. In fact, the letters in Arabic, which are superimposed on images of her mother, Hatoum's voice-over in English and the conversation between mother and daughter are inter-textually related, but not translations of each other. For instance, the letters read by the artist refer to the taped conversation in the past tense (Shohat, 1997). How does this fragmented narration implicate different spectators differently? As Ella Shohat (1997) observed, "The Arabic speaker labors to focus on the Arabic conversation and read the Arabic scripts, while also listening to the English. If the non-Arabic-speaking spectator misses some of the film's textual registers, the Arabic-speaking spectator is overwhelmed by competing images and sounds." Hence, it seems to be the artist's intention that nobody, regardless of whether they are fluent in Arabic or not, would ever be able to fully comprehend the work. I would argue that through the fragmented multi-layered text and the artist's refusal to translate from Arabic into English the work questions the limits of representation and translation itself, which in turn destabilises any fixed notion of identity.

In her detailed analysis of *Measures of Distance* in relation to its aesthetics and its wider socio-political concerns, film scholar Ella Shohat (1997) wrote that the multiple layers enabled the artist "to capture the fluid, multiple identities of the diasporic subject." The filmic language of superimposition and the asynchronous sound allowed Hatoum to articulate the dispersion and fragmentation she experienced as artist in exile. Hatoum admitted that the soundtrack created "a difficult and alienating situation for a Western audience who have to strain to follow the narrative" ([1997], 2016, p131). According to Shohat (1997) "the strategic refusal to translate Arabic" makes the spectator experience the same alienation experienced by the displaced artist, "reminding us, through inversion, of the asymmetry in social power between exiles and their "host communities."



Fig. 2.13 Mona Hatoum: *Measures of Distance*. Colour video with sound, 15 min 35 s. A Western Front video production, Vancouver, 1988. © Mona Hatoum. Courtesy of the artist.

Laura Marks discusses *Measures of Distance* (1988) as being part of an international phenomenon, which she refers to as *intercultural cinema*: a specific type of (often experimental) audio-visual works created by practitioners of diasporic, migrant or indigenous background. In order to articulate the diasporic experience, marked by “violent disjunctions in space and time” (Marks, 2000, p1), intercultural cinema often draws on the “memory of the senses” (Marks, 2000, p195).⁹⁶ According to Marks’s analysis, the difficulty to represent the intercultural experience accounts for the experimentation with different filmic styles and techniques characteristic for intercultural cinema. By ways of formal experimentation intercultural cinema puts into question cinematic conventions and practices of representation, challenging assumptions of veracity as well as cinema’s ability to represent the complexity of reality (Marks, 2000, p1). Conventional strategies of ethnographic representation are subverted via the disjunction between sound and image, questioning the authenticity

⁹⁶ For further discussion, see the chapter *Memory of the Senses* in Marks, 2000, pp. 194-242.

of the Other.

For Marks, an important strategy of intercultural cinema is “partial translation” (2000, p37), which is one of the strategies at work in Mona Hatoum’s experimental video *Measures of Distance*. However, in my view there is more at stake here than the articulation of a fragmented, diasporic identity. I would argue that the artist’s decision not to provide subtitles has to be acknowledged as an act of resistance against the vehicular language, namely the universalised standardisation of Anglo-American English, which dominates practically everywhere in our global sphere.⁹⁷ In light of her strategic resistance to transparency through the layering of multiple languages, English and Arabic, and the artist’s refusal to provide subtitles, I propose to look at Hatoum’s work through the lens of the Glissantian concept of opacity. As introduced earlier in section 3.2 of chapter 1, opacity is one of the key attributes of the Glissantian conception of the relationship with the Other and – as I will argue – an important strategy for the artistic endeavour of undoing belonging.

Glissant developed the concept of opacity to counter transparency as a colonial tool of control and domination (See section 3.2 of chapter 1). His essay *For Opacity in Poetics of Relation* ([1990], 1997, pp. 189-194) clearly outlines his critical approach, making a passionate case for “the right to opacity” as the right of the Other not to be reduced and assimilated according to universalised (Western) values and norms. Following Glissant, we need to combat this requirement of transparency at the base of “the process of ‘understanding’ people and ideas from the perspective of Western thought” ([1990], 1997, p190).

If we consider opacity and transparency in filmic terms, transparency in the Glissantian sense would mean a clear, well-lit and focused image, crisp and clear sound, legible subtitles – in other words, a ‘realistic’ representation to facilitate the viewers’ ‘understanding’ of the filmed subject, often presented as ‘absolute truth’. As

⁹⁷ With regard to the context of contemporary art, the Croatian artist Mladen Stilinović’s (1994) provocative banner, stating that “an artist who cannot speak English is no artist” provides an ironic commentary to the hegemony of English in a seemingly global art world.

discussed above, *Measures of Distance* (1988) destabilises the conventional aesthetics of documentary and ethnographic filmmaking. Its multiple layers render the film dense and opaque. In confronting us with our incomprehension, articulating the untranslatable through aural and visual means, Hatoum's work invites us to accept what is beyond our understanding, to valorise difference and respect the opacity of the Other. As Glissant writes, "Opacity requires an understanding that it is impossible to reduce anyone, no matter who, to a truth he would not have generated on his own" ([1990], 1997, p194).⁹⁸

As put forward in section 3 of the previous chapter, Glissant's concept of opacity has to be understood in its political dimension, as a tool to counter Western humanism, which constructed the Other "as an *object* of knowledge" (Britton, 1999, p19). Critical of the reduction inherent in this process of 'understanding' and thereby objectifying the Other, Glissant proposes the right to opacity as "irreducible singularity" ([1990], 1997, p190). I quote him at length:

I am thus able to conceive of the opacity of the other for me, without reproach for my opacity for him. To feel in solidarity with him or build with him or to like what he does, it is not necessary for me to grasp him. It is not necessary to try to become the other (or become other) nor to "make" him in my image.⁹⁹
(Glissant, [1990], 1997, p193)

I argue that opacity, which I read in relation to Sarat Maharaj's ([1994], 2001) advocacy for "the untranslatability of the other" could be a fertile supplement to hybridity and an important strategy in destabilising essentialist representations of identity and belonging. As artistic strategy, opacity differs from hybridity in that it protects the "irreducible singularity" (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p190) and difference of each element. The process of change and exchange through the cross-cultural

⁹⁸ "Seulement en concevant qu'il est impossible de réduire qui que ce soit à une vérité qu'il n'aurait pas générée de lui-même" (Glissant, 1990, p208).

⁹⁹ "Je puis donc concevoir l'opacité de l'autre pour moi, sans que je lui reproche mon opacité pour lui. Il ne m'est pas nécessaire que je le "comprenne" pour me sentir solidaire de lui, pour bâtir avec lui, pour aimer ce qu'il fait. Il ne m'est pas nécessaire de tenter de devenir l'autre (de devenir autre) ni de le "faire" à mon image (Glissant, 1990, p207).

mixing in the network of Relation does not lead to fusion. Relation is not about creating a mish-mash or what Glissant ([1990], 1997, p192) refers to as *amalgam*. In its capacity to resist both a flattening fusion in terms of an uncritical celebration of hybridity, as well as essentialist identity politics, I propose opacity as artistic methodology for the decolonisation of a universalised Euro-centric perspective, in order to resist the commodification and regulation of (cultural) difference in the contemporary art circuit. As “one of the laws of Relation” (Glissant to Diawara, [2009], 2013, p40), opacity is key for *The Art of Un-belonging*.

While respecting the specificity of Glissant’s theory of Relation and creolisation as rooted in the Caribbean,¹⁰⁰ I propose that we could perceive his conception of the world as unpredictable ‘chaos-monde’:¹⁰¹ as an invitation to think identity differently on a global scale – to think identity in a way that “current notions of geographical, cultural and political boundaries will give way to new challenges grounded in infinite gradations of intersection and exchange” (Murdoch, 2015, p25). In the era of globalisation and increased migration, opacity demands the recognition or rather a radical embrace of otherness as untranslatable, in order to overcome the colonial desire and multicultural obsession to understand and to translate alterity. Glissant concludes his essay as follows:

¹⁰⁰ As outlined in section 3 of chapter 1, Glissant (1996) argues that his theory of creolisation applies to the entire world. Nonetheless, the question of whether Glissant’s theory of Relation and creolisation should be regarded as exclusive to the Caribbean or whether the concept of creolisation could be appropriated to describe other processes of cultural entanglement and intermixing in the context of globalisation and the current conditions of migration and diaspora has generated a significant amount of debate and controversy. A workshop concerned with ‘Creolité and Creolization’ was held in St. Lucia in 2002 as the third platform of *documenta 11*, curated by Okwui Enwezor. The resulting publication (Enwezor et al, 2003) gives insight in the resulting debates and differing approaches towards the applicability of ‘creolisation’ to contexts beyond the Caribbean.

¹⁰¹ “What I call ‘chaos-monde’ does not mean a world in disorder. It can be in disorder, that is a possibility, but that is not essential. It is an unpredictable world, one that is difficult to accept, because we fear unpredictability. All Western thinking was based on predictability” (Glissant, 1998; my own translation) – “Ce que j'appelle chaos-monde ce n'est pas un monde en désordre. Il peut être en désordre, c'est possible, mais ce n'est pas l'essentiel. C'est un monde imprévisible, c'est-à-dire difficile à accepter, parce qu'on a peur de l'imprévisible. Toute la pensée occidentale était basée sur la prévisibilité” See Glissant and Schwieger Hiepkko, 1998.

This same opacity is also the force that drives every community: the thing that would bring us together forever and make us permanently distinctive. Widespread consent to specific opacities is the most straightforward equivalent of nonbarbarism. We clamor for the right to opacity for everyone.¹⁰² (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p194)

2.4. Nomadic thinking

Through ways of performative writing or what I have described as “writing *from* or writing *with* practice” combined with analytical sections and a case study of Mona Hatoum’s work *Measures of Distance* (1988) this chapter set out to explore critical and creative strategies that defy “the illusion of a single cultural and linguistic root” (Braidotti, 2006, p68), aiming to formulate an aesthetics and politics of *The Art of Un-belonging*. Re-sounding my practice, I departed from the notion of hybridity, transposing this concept to sound through an artistic exploration of the vibrations and echoes created by the articulations of my multiple and interconnected belongings in *Surya Namaz* (2018). Locating my practice within the genre of diasporic art, I reflected on the problematic of my position as ‘Native Informant’ (Spivak and Gunew, 1990, p66; Spivak 1999) and the question of roots, ancestry or lineage that arose in the making of my video. Looking for ways how to overcome the binary of ‘root identity,’ I followed the path of rhizomatic thinking at the heart of Glissant’s conception of Relation. Challenging assumptions of a singular predatory root or language, advocating heterogeneity and “the rhizome of a multiple relation with the Other” (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p16), Glissant’s philosophy allows us to imagine belonging and identity differently – beyond the binary. Central to his visionary ethics of Relation is what he calls opacity – a concept that I proposed to read in accord with Sarat Maharaj’s ([1994], 2001) advocacy for “the untranslatability of the other”. As I have shown through my analysis of Mona Hatoum’s video *Measures of Distance* (1988), opacity is an essential tool for *The Art of Un-belonging*.

¹⁰² C'est aussi que cette même opacité anime toute communauté: ce qui nous assemblerait à jamais, nous singularisant pour toujours. Le consentement général aux opacités particulières est le plus simple équivalent de la non-barbarie. Nous réclamons pour tous le droit à l'opacité (Glissant, 1990, pp.208-209).

Inscribed in the Deleuzian notion of the rhizome and the *Poetics of Relation* is the nomadic, which resonates with what Glissant ([1990], 1997) has described as 'errantry'. He conceives of the errant or errantry as opposed to the "arrow-like nomadism", which is embodied by the traveller, discoverer, or conqueror (See Glissant, [1990], 1997, p20) and forms the base of the colonial project. Contrary to the conqueror, the errant does not wish to dominate or understand and *trans-late* the other (in order to dominate). Rather, the errant *re-lates* and respects the other's opacity. By giving value to difference, "he [or she] challenges and discards the universal [...] plunges into the opacities of that part of the world to which he has access" (Glissant, 1997, p20). Taking errantry as a model for philosophy, Glissant describes the thought of errantry as "the thought of that which relates" ([1990], 1997, p20), which resonates with the rhizomatic and nomadic form of thinking that has been advocated by Deleuzian feminist Rosi Braidotti.

Although both thinkers acknowledge their indebtedness to Deleuze and Guattari, it is important to note the "irreducible colonial difference" (Mignolo, 2000, p77) between Braidotti's and Glissant's Deleuzian approach to nomadism. Whereas Deleuze and Guattari developed their theory of nomadology through a Euro-centric lens, or in Mignolo's words "from a local history of knowledge, built from the perspective of modernity" (2000, p77), Glissant arrived at similar conclusions by taking into account "the perspective of coloniality" and developed his theory in response to the specific context of the Caribbean (Mignolo, 2000, p77). This decolonial perspective is arguably missing in the European genealogy and locatedness of Braidotti's nomadic philosophy. Similarly, one could argue that Glissant's theory could benefit from a feminist perspective.¹⁰³ Aware of the "irreducible colonial difference" (Mignolo, 2000, p77) that separates them, I propose to read both theories in tandem.

Echoing Deleuzian rhizomatic nomadic thought and Glissant's theory of Relation, Braidotti conceives of nomadic becoming as "emphatic proximity, intense

¹⁰³ For a further discussion of sexual difference and the theory of creolisation see Hantel (2015).

interconnectedness” (1994, p5). As she writes: “Politically, nomadic thought is the expression of a nonunitary vision of the subject, defined by motion in a complex manner that is densely material” (Braidotti, 2011, p3). *The Art of Un-belonging* endorses this “dispersed, fragmented vision” of “non-unitary subjectivity,” that is nomadic, yet still “accountable,” “embedded and embodied” (Braidotti, 2006, p4).

Inspired by the figure of the nomad as the one who wanders from place to place defying the idea of “a totalitarian root” (Glissant, 1997, p11), nomadic theory is a moving theory or thinking in movement, trans-disciplinary and transversal, like a rhizome with no beginning and no end, connecting various schools of thought. Transposed to art practice, a nomadic sensibility, or in Glissant’s words *errantry*, can take the shape of experimentation across various media and art forms, as will become more evident in the next chapter. Central to nomadic thinking and the re-inscription of belonging beyond binaries is thinking transversally. For an *Art of Un-belonging* that challenges essentialist and reductive concepts of identity this means to embrace a wider notion of belonging, or as Braidotti puts it, “an enlarged sense of interconnection between self and others, including the non-human and ‘earth’ others” (2006, p35).

Following rhizomatic connections between different theories in my search for ways to critically re-imagine belonging, my analysis of our entanglement with ‘earth’ others (Braidotti, 2006, p35) will be drawing on methods of multispecies ethnography (Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010) combined with Eduardo Kohn’s corresponding project, which he calls “anthropology of life” — “an anthropology that is not just confined to the human but is concerned with the effects of our entanglements with other kinds of living selves” (Kohn, 2007, p4). Following her emphasis on relationality, an important reference is Donna Haraway’s (2008) work, which has been associated with the ‘species’ or ‘animal turn’ in anthropology. Critical of human exceptionalism, Haraway conceptualises becoming as “always becoming *with*” (2008, p244). According to Haraway “beings do not pre-exist their relatings” (2003, p6). Following her thinking, I will approach the history of our species as a shared history of ‘becoming *with*’ our (Braidottian) ‘*earth*’ others: thinking through coffee, olive trees, soap, water,

sunflower seeds, porcelain, clay, mud and the earth itself. Widening the scope of *The Art of Un-belonging* following Braidotti's (2006) conception of the non-unitary, nomadic subject, the notion of Relation will continue to be central to the re-imagining of belonging beyond the human.

3. Trans-Plantations: towards a new vision of belonging

This chapter builds on the previous one, intending to expand on and complicate the discussion of belonging. The previous chapter looked at belonging from a language-centred perspective, exploring concepts such as hybridity, multilingualism and opacity as strategies of un-doing belonging. Following my ongoing research on what a new vision of belonging could mean, here my concern will gradually shift to how we are connected and related not just to each-other but to matter and to what Braidotti refers to as *'earth' others* (2006, p265). My argument is that the question of belonging should not and cannot be centred solely on one species: the human. Applying the method of transversal, nomadic thought, by addressing cross-fertilisations between Braidotti's "nomadic eco-philosophy of multiple belongings" (2006, p35) and the anthropologist Eduardo Kohn's (2013) proposition to rethink the human and relationality in terms of "an anthropology beyond the human," this chapter aims to challenge an anthropocentric (and ethnocentric) conception of belonging by asking how we, as humans, are connected to *'earth' others* and to a "broader world of life" (Kohn, 2013, p6).

3.1. Setting the terrain

If we want to rethink belonging beyond the human and move beyond the limitations of ethnocentric assumptions towards the human, the supposedly less-than-human and non-human Other, we must first confront the legacy of colonialism within the discourse of alterity, that is at the base of anthropology: in what follows I will give a brief outline how the disciplines of anthropology, ethnography and natural history are deeply intertwined with one another, as well as with the history of the European Enlightenment. Travelling back in a spiral of errant thought, inspired by Édouard Glissant's trans-Atlantic comeback to Christopher Columbus, following the relays of the story of two artists of colour who (dis-)played themselves as 'two undiscovered Amerindians' in a golden, transportable, local yet global cage at Columbus Plaza in

Madrid,¹⁰⁴ I am going to trace how the project of Western science, as “the project of knowledge” (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p57) was used to legitimise the voyages of “discovery” and linear conquest – which Glissant refers to as “arrowlike nomadism” ([1990], 1997, p19).

Columbus’ ‘discovery’ of the island in 1502 marks the beginning of the Eurocentric history of Martinique – a “chronological illusion,” as Glissant writes in *Caribbean Discourse* ([1981], 1992, p13). Traversing the Atlantic on board of the *RMS Queen Mary 2* while pondering the abyss of the Atlantic and meditating on the ocean’s silent testimony of the history of modernity and its “enslaving, colonialist set-up” (Glissant to Diawara, [2009], 2013, p35), Glissant is acutely aware of the irony in the inverted direction of his journey. “Christopher Columbus had left for what was called the New World and I’m the one who returned from it,” he says (to Diawara, [2009], 2013, p35). Like every diaspora, the diaspora that was imposed on Africans through the slave trade, implies the gesture of return. Yet, crucially to Glissant, the return does not mean to return in a literal sense. Rather, “the return occurs when slavery and domination disappear” (Glissant to Diawara, [2009], 2013, p35). Countering “the unity of the enslaving will” through the “multiplicity of the antislavery will” is the true return (Glissant to Diawara, [2009], 2013, p35). In this sense, the poetics of Relation, multiplicity and Diversity are conceived as counter-model to the vectorisation and translation of the world based on a universalised and generalising Eurocentric worldview. This is Glissant’s response to the world’s most infamous colonialist, Christopher Columbus.

The territorial conquest or what Glissant refers to as “the project of knowledge” ([1990], 1997, p57), went hand in hand with the classification of the world, the converting of the unknown into the known, the justification of the subjugation of others through supposedly objective sciences that served the imperial thirst for

¹⁰⁴ I am referring to Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s seminal performance *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit...* (1992–1993) and the international tour of the work during the 500-year anniversary of Columbus’ ‘discovery’ journey of the so-called New World.

expansion. Once the world had been ‘discovered,’ explored and the globe mapped out in the geographical sense, the European voyagers intensified their quest towards the ‘discovery’ of people, animals and plants. Naturalists, botanist, physicians, artists, anthropologists, missionaries, cartographers and ethnologists joined these voyages of ‘discovery’ in the name of science, religion, knowledge production – and profit. According to the herbalist and anthropologist Jason T.W. Irving, the search for new biological resources, such as crops or plants and the appropriation of local and indigenous knowledge, which could be commodified (a practice which is called bioprospecting),¹⁰⁵ was “a fundamental part of European colonial expansion” (2018, p131). Through the economic promise of lucrative trade in plants, botanists became “the agents of empire” (David Mackay, cited by Schiebinger, 2004, p11) and as Sita Balani states in her essay *From Botany to Community: A Legacy of Classification*, the imperial science of botany became key to the development of “a taxonomic imagination” in Europe (2018, p231).

Ironically, the male, white European scholar, who set out to classify and ‘baptise’ the entire world of plants and animals in Latin (disregarding any names they may have had in other languages as *barbarous*),¹⁰⁶ never left Europe and thanks to a vast network of contacts, conducted most of his research as “armchair”- and “cabinet-botanist” (Schiebinger, 2004, p57). I am referring here to Carl Linnaeus, the Swedish botanist and physician, whose binominal nomenclature established the principles of modern botanical taxonomy. Lesser known perhaps is how Linnaeus’ (1735) classification of humans according to their skin colour (which he linked to specific moral attributes)¹⁰⁷ reinforced the rise of scientific racism (Irving, 2018, p79), which

¹⁰⁵ According to Londa Schiebinger, “Much bioprospecting in this period centered on *materia alimentaria*, *materia luxuria*, and *materia medica* (materials for foods, luxuries, and medicines)” (2004, p16).

¹⁰⁶ See in this regard the chapter *Linguistic Imperialism* in Schiebinger, 2004, pp. 194–225.

¹⁰⁷ In his publication *Systema Naturae* (1735), Linnaeus distinguished four distinct groups of humans: *Europaeus albesc[ens]*, *Americanus rubesc[ens]*, *Asiaticus fuscus*, *Africanus nigr[iculus]* (cited in Müller-Wille, 2014). For a more detailed discussion of “the invention of race” and Linnaeus’ taxonomy, see: Müller-Wille, 2014.

endorsed by anthropology and ethnography, helped to legitimise the classification of certain humans as less than others.

To build continued support for the colonial enterprise in the metropolises of empire, the scientific racism that fuelled the colonial imaginary had to be made accessible to large audiences. Ethnographic exhibitions and museums played a major role in facilitating the shift from this 'scientific racism' to what Anne McClintock refers to as "commodity racism" (1995, p33). For the entertainment of the masses, indigenous 'specimen' from the colonies were displayed in exhibitions and 'human zoos' all over Europe, often in par with pseudo-scientific experiments, with the objective to further promote the perception of the racial inferiority and primitivity of the commodified non-European Other. This practice of stereotyping non-European Others as primitive and racially inferior to Europeans was foundational to the colonial enterprise and to modernity. Over the course of the 19th century, these exhibitions gradually became "mass-produced *consumer spectacles*" (McClintock, 1995, p33) – before the spectacle of Otherness was continued through new voyeuristic media, such as (ethnographic) film, cinema, photography and television.

As Fusco (1994) notes in her article *The Other History of Intercultural Performance*, the practice of transporting human beings in order to exhibit them in Europe, goes back to Christopher Columbus, who returned from his first voyage in 1493 with several *Arawaks*. Confronting the legacy of the colonial imaginary, Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña's seminal performance *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit...* (1992-1993)¹⁰⁸ set out to critically address the history of ethnographic exhibitions of human beings, with the intention "to create a satirical commentary on Western concepts of the exotic, primitive Other" (Fusco, 1994, p143). In critical response to the quin-centenary celebrations of Columbus' 'discovery' of the so-called New World (1492), the artists ridiculed the Eurocentric concept of 'discovery,'

¹⁰⁸ Also see Coco Fusco's and Paula Heredia's video *The Couple in the Cage: A Guatınai Odyssey* (Authentic Documentary Productions, 1993), which documents the *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit...* international tour.

by presenting themselves as ‘undiscovered Amerindians’ of the fictional tribe of the *Guatinauis*. Emulating the Latin American format of the “satiric spectacle” (Fusco, 1994, p145), their interactive performance as fictional *Guatinauis* performing presumably ‘authentic’ tasks in a golden cage sought to explore the links between “the racism implicit in ethnographic paradigms of discovery” and discourses about cultural identity at the time (Fusco, 1994, p145).



Fig. 3.1 Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Coco Fusco perform *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West*, part of the exhibition *The Year of the White Bear*, in the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden, September 12, 1992. Photo courtesy the Walker Art Center Archives.

Departing from their own position as artists of colour, Fusco and Gómez-Peña’s performance posited a sharp critique of the dominant Eurocentric framework, the lack of diversity and the tendency to exoticise Otherness in the context of cultural institutions in Europe and the United States (Fusco, 1994, p145). In contrast to their individual artistic practices (such as writing, speaking in public and text-based performance) which tend to rely on clear and transparent forms of communication, in *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit...* (1992-1993), Fusco and Gómez-Peña strategically chose to renounce comprehension by speaking solely in a made-up

“nonsensical language” (Fusco, 1994, p145). Asserting their “right to opacity” (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p194) by speaking in an unintelligible fictional language, the artists resisted the mechanisms of Othering, by exposing and confronting the (majority white) audience with their desire to either silence or ‘understand’ and translate the Other.

Along with its opaque poetics, it is crucial to note that the performance also incorporated educational elements, such as a didactic panel, which listed “highlights from the history of exhibiting non-Western peoples” in chronological order under the heading “intercultural performance” (Fusco, 1994, pp.145-46), thereby providing a historical contextualisation to what was happening in the cage. Among the distressing and shocking examples of human exhibits that are listed on the panel is the “Hottentot Venus” (Saartje Benjamin),¹⁰⁹ a South-African woman, whose genitalia were pathologised and used to fuel racist stereotypes about the Africans’ excessive sexuality in general (Cusco, 1994, p146). She was first brought to London and then exhibited and exoticised in mass spectacles throughout Europe for several years at the beginning of the 19th century.¹¹⁰ Her remains were later dissected for ‘medical research’ and exhibited in anatomical and anthropological sections of the *Musée de l’Homme* in Paris.

Not listed on the panel, yet relevant to the context of Vienna, where the discussion of my art practice will take us shortly, would be the fate of the so-called court-moor Angelo Soliman, who was displayed in “oriental-looking outfits” as his master’s noble servant at gala events throughout Europe (Morrison, 2011, p364). After his death in 1796 his body was stuffed and exhibited (despite his daughter’s protests) as part of the *k.u.k. Naturalienkabinett*, the imperial cabinet of natural curiosities in Vienna,

¹⁰⁹ Other sources, such as the *Musée de l’Homme* in Paris, give her name as Sarah Baartman (Musée de l’Homme, 2013).

¹¹⁰ For further discussion of the stereotypical and highly sexualised representation of African bodies in the context of Victorian racism, see McClintock, 1995, p42.

where he was displayed as “half-naked ‘savage’”¹¹¹ in a fake natural habitat – yet another assertion of Linneaus’ aforementioned taxonomic order, which introduced race as part of the hierarchical systemisation of nature. As we will see over the course of this chapter, the transplantation and exploitation of humans and nonhuman ‘goods,’ such as plants, and the Othering of nature and culture are inextricably linked and constitutive to the “arrowlike nomadism” (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p19) of modernity and globalisation.

The search for ways to counter the thinking in binaries and the processes of Othering that constitute the Western “project of knowledge” (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p57), is at the heart of my artistic practice, which is the driving motor of this research. In this chapter I am going to consider the colonial practice of transplantation in relation to the questions raised by *Kahvehane Kongresspark (2016)*, a temporary café featuring specially designed ceramic cups/saucers and a site-specific performance in public space, and *Trans Plantations (2018)*, an installation of cups/saucers and coffee beans cast in porcelain in combination with an audio-visual element. Aiming to reinscribe the notion of belonging beyond the anthropocentric, these two self-contained yet interrelated projects examine the colonial history and human entanglements with coffee, exploring the potential of Relation to transcend the logic of either/or, self/Other, human/non-human, nature/culture, etc.

Kahvehane Kongresspark was commissioned and presented at an urban art festival called *Soho in Ottakring* in Vienna in June 2016. For the duration of two weeks a temporary coffeehouse, in Turkish *Kahvehane*, was set up as public art intervention at the former milk hall in the Vienna Kongresspark. Organic and fair trade “Turkish-style” coffee was served free of charge in specially designed cups and saucers, which I had prepared at the Ceramics Research Centre at the University of Westminster. The designs on the coffee cups and saucers showed fragments of old colonial maps as representations of “arrowlike nomadism” (Glissant, [1990], 1997,

¹¹¹ I am citing from the online press release of *Angelo Soliman: An African in Vienna*, an exhibition about Angelo Soliman that took place at the Wien Museum in Vienna in 2012. See Wien Museum (2012).

p19), referring to coffee's colonial history and the globalisation of coffee. The temporary café provided the open-air stage for a multilingual lecture-performance which I conceived and performed in collaboration with the bharatanatyam artist, actor and director Shane Shambhu. In response to the festival's theme "Hm, Luscious! On Food and its Delicate Ties to the World" the lecture-performance explored the many legends about the origins of coffee tracing its journey from Ethiopia, through the Arabian Peninsula and the Ottoman Empire, and across the entire globe. While adopting a humorous take on the globalisation of coffee, the performance shed light on the history of colonialism and questioned the conditions of contemporary trade. The performance was delivered in German, English and Turkish, proposing an alternative mode of knowledge transmission through a mix of dance, comedy, street theatre and roleplaying as a meditation on history in multiple languages.¹¹² A more detailed discussion of this work will follow in section 3 of this chapter.

¹¹² A full transcript of the performance is provided in the appendix.



Fig. 3.2 *Kahvehane Kongresspark* (2016). Temporary Coffeehouse. Soho in Ottakring. Old Milk Hall, Vienna. Photo: Yeliz Palak.



Fig. 3.3 *Kahvehane Kongresspark* (2016). Temporary Coffeehouse. Soho in Ottakring. Old Milk Hall, Vienna. Photo: Rosika van Maldegem.



Fig. 3.4 *Kahvehane Kongresspark* (2016). Edition of 100 glazed Kütahya ceramic cups and saucers and nine ceramic decal designs. Photo: Deniz Soezen.



Fig. 3.5 *Kahvehane Kongresspark* (2016). Temporary Coffeehouse. Soho in Ottakring. Old Milk Hall, Vienna. Photo: Rosika van Maldegem.



Fig. 3.6 *Kahvehane Kongresspark* (2016). Temporary Coffeehouse. Soho in Ottakring. Old Milk Hall, Vienna. Photo: Deniz Soezen.

Out of this project grew another incarnation of my artistic exploration of coffee: the multi-part installation *Trans Plantations* (2018), which combines an installation of unglazed 'Turkish' coffee cups and saucers with a silent video loop of colonial maps that is projected onto the cups alongside a discrete, yet related, installation of coffee beans cast in porcelain, accompanied by a multi-lingual soundtrack. Unlike *Kahvehane Kongresspark*, this project was conceived for an interior space, although not necessarily for a gallery environment. Approaching the heap of white coffee beans cast in porcelain placed at the centre of a dark cubic plinth, the onlooker hears voices murmuring in multiple languages. This is the voice of coffee – of the plant and the bean – speaking in the first person, in his or her respective mother tongue, evoking memories of the plantation, his or her relation to the soil and climate (change), interactions with humans, observations about conditions of labour, trade, transportation and different culturally specific ways of production and consumption.

The scripts were written in collaboration with people from diverse backgrounds in London and recorded in the first-person as fictional narratives of coffee speaking in their respective mother tongues, such as Amharic, Italian, (Egyptian) Arabic, (Cypriot) Greek, Turkish, (Brazilian) Portuguese, (Columbian) Spanish etc. While a written translation of the scripts into English was available upon request in the exhibition, the soundtrack itself would have been mostly incomprehensible to those whose only language is English, thereby asserting the coffee bean's "right to opacity" (Glissant, [1994], 1997, p194).¹¹³



Fig. 3.7 *Trans Plantations* (2018). Coffee beans cast in porcelain. Photo: Deniz Soezen.

Although I am intrigued by the idea that the multilingual soundtrack is a work in process, in the sense that there could be an infinite archive of coffee stories in various languages, the work does not strive to become a comprehensive archive of all the languages or stories that are related to coffee's naturecultural and colonial history. Following Glissant, a multilingual sensibility does not necessarily involve

¹¹³ The English translation of the scripts is provided in the appendix.

speaking several languages or knowing all the languages of the world; it rather suggests that we ought to write and create with an awareness of their existence and strive to protect every language – and that no language is less or more important than any other.¹¹⁴ Following this approach, I would like to think that listening to coffee speaking in multiple languages could propose to transform a Eurocentric imaginary and generate an appreciation of difference and Diversity.



Fig. 3.8 *Trans Plantations* (2018). Porcelain cups and saucers and video projection. Photo: Deniz Soezen.

Evoking “the irreducible difference of the Other” (Britton, 1999, p11) the opacity of the coffee bean enables us to grasp the “threatened beauty of the world” in the acknowledgement that we will never be able to grasp it in its totality (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p20) – honouring each other’s (to which I would add the non-human others’) opacity in the fluid web of Relation: an infinite process of becoming in a Relation that

¹¹⁴ For a more detailed discussion of Glissant’s conception of multilingualism, see Glissant, 1996, p41; p49.

“is made up of all the differences in the world” (Glissant to Diawara, [2009], 2013, p39). To re-emphasise how opacity connects to “the multiplicity of the antislavery will” (Glissant to Diawara, [2009], 2013, p35) and to errantry, countering the “arrowlike nomadism” (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p19) of modernity and the universalising ambition of the Western “project of knowledge” (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p57), it is worth to return to Glissant. I quote him here at length:

One who is errant (who is no longer traveller, discoverer, or conqueror) strives to know the totality of the world yet already knows he will never accomplish this – and knows that is precisely where the threatened beauty of the world resides.

Errant, he challenges and discards the universal – this generalizing edict that summarized the world as something obvious and transparent, claiming for it one presupposed sense and one destiny. He plunges into the opacities of that part of the world to which he has access. Generalization is totalitarian: from the world it chooses one side of the reports, one set of ideas, which it sets apart from others and tries to impose by exporting as a model. The thinking of errantry conceives of totality, but willingly renounces any claims to sum it up or to possess it.¹¹⁵ (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p20)

Or, as Gómez-Peña (1992) wrote on his body in a decolonising riposte to Columbus, to come back to this historical figure who embodies “the Western errantry of conquest” (Glissant, 1996, p88): “Please, don’t discover me!” (Gómez-Peña cited in Robles-Moreno, 2018).

¹¹⁵ “l’errant, qui n’est plus le voyageur ni le découvreur ni le conquérant, cherche à connaître la totalité du monde et sait déjà qu’il ne l’accomplira jamais - et qu’en cela réside la beauté menacée du monde. L’errant récuse l’édit universel, généralisant, qui résumait le monde en une évidence transparente, lui prétendant un sens et une finalité présumés. Il plonge aux opacités de la part du monde à quoi il accède. La généralisation est totalitaire: elle élit du monde un pan d’idées ou de constats qu’elle excepte et qu’elle tâche d’imposer en faisant voyager des modèles. La pensée de l’errance conçoit la totalité, mais renonce volontiers à la prétention de la sommer ou de la posséder” (Glissant, 1990, p33).

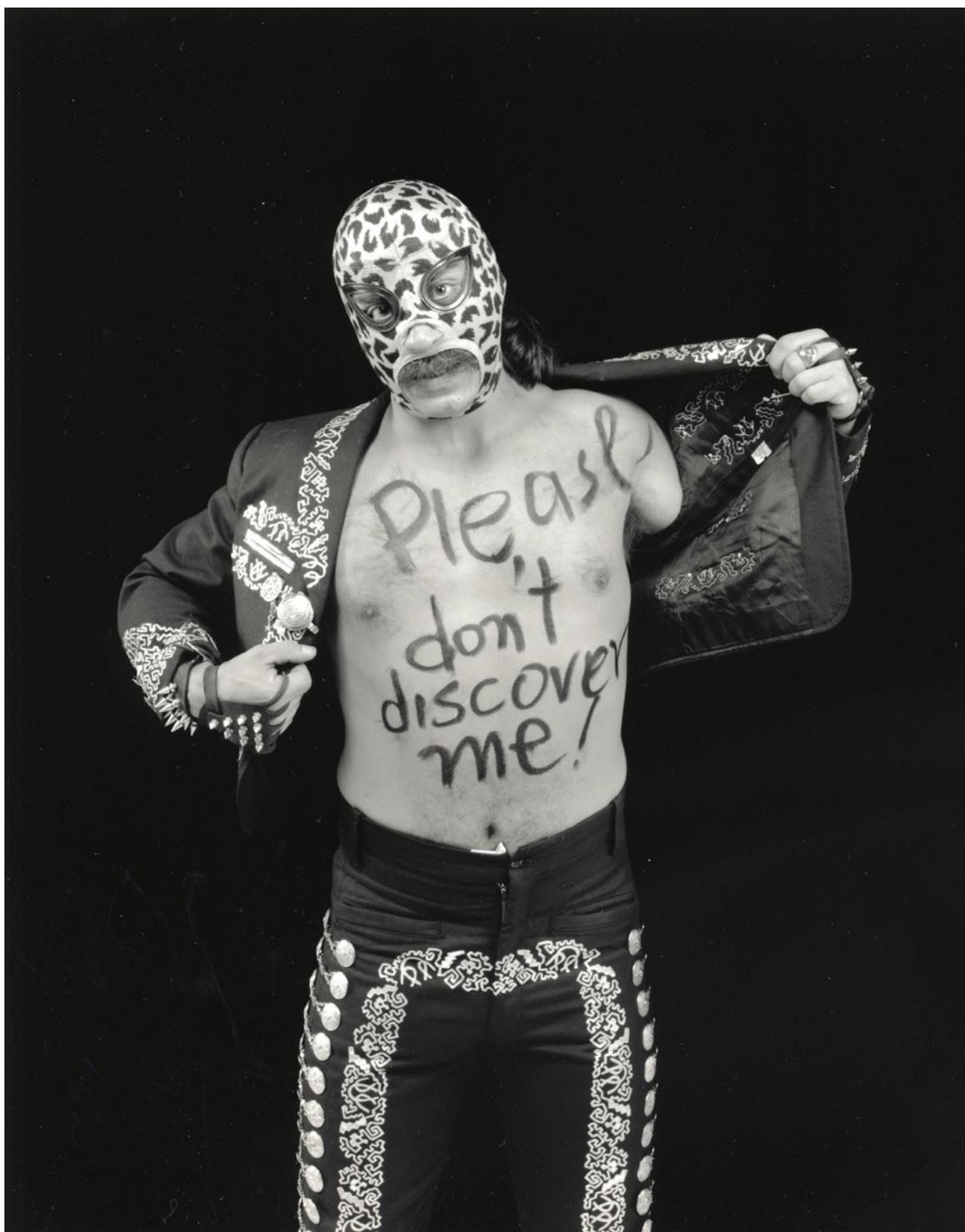


Fig. 3.9 Guillermo Gómez-Peña in a staged portrait for *The Year of the White Bear*, Walker Art Center, 1992. Photo courtesy the Walker Art Center Archives.

My choice to name the artwork and this chapter *Trans-Plantations*¹¹⁶ resonates with coffee's migratory and colonial trajectory and situates my practice in our current "time-space" (Haraway, 2017), which Donna Haraway proposes to call the 'Plantationocene' (Haraway et al, 2016). In a conversation for *Ethnos* in 2014, which was recorded and later published as *Anthropologists Are Talking About the Anthropocene*, Haraway and other participants from varying disciplines, came together to debate the concept of the 'Anthropocene' and collectively conceived of a new term to describe this troubling epoch: the 'Plantationocene' (Haraway et al, 2016).¹¹⁷

In order to trace the genesis of this term, let me first consider its precursors, the 'Anthropocene' and the 'Capitalocene'. The term 'Anthropocene' was originally coined by Nobel Laureate Paul Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer (2000). Along with other scientists, Crutzen (2002) suggested that due to the impact of changes that humans induced on the planet's system starting with the invention of the steam engine, we could say that we have entered the 'Anthropocene' – a new epoch in Earth's history.¹¹⁸ Expressing a similar line of thought, the Brazilian anthropologist Viveiros de Castro (2014) describes the 'Anthropocene' as a "geological epoch," when our species, the human, has become a "significant geophysical force," that causes changes to "the planet's bio-thermodynamic conditions," i.e. climate change (The Thousand Names of Gaia, 2014). In short, the 'Anthropocene' implies that the we have entered a new era in human (and non-human) history, caused by human intervention.

Dissatisfied with the generalising notion of the 'human' ('anthropos') implied in the term 'Anthropocene,' Haraway (et al., 2016) proposes to generate more appropriate names for this troublesome era that we are currently living in, searching for terms that would describe a "historically situated set of practices of historically situated human

¹¹⁶ Please note that contrary to the title of this chapter, the title of the artwork *Trans Plantations* (2018) does not contain a hyphen.

¹¹⁷ For further discussion of the term, see the video-documentation of following talk: Stedelijk Museum (2017). Talk: Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti - March 25, 2017.

¹¹⁸ See: Crutzen and Stoermer (2000); Crutzen (2002).

beings,” rather than framing this era as “a species act,” as she emphasises in a recent talk with Rosi Braidotti hosted by The Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam (Stedelijk Museum, 2017). Following Haraway, a more historically rooted and therefore more appropriate term would be the ‘Capitalocene’ (Stedelijk Museum, 2017). However, contrary to previous discussions that situate the term in the context of “the industrial revolution,” “fossil fuel” or “coal” (Haraway et al., 2016, p555), in other words as historically rooted in the mid-eighteenth century, Haraway argues that “the Capitalocene suggests a longer history” (Haraway et al., 2016, p555).

In the aforementioned publication *Anthropologists Are Talking About the Anthropocene*, Haraway (2016 et al., p555) emphasises that the capitalist system and the transition into the ‘Capitalocene’ go back to “slave agriculture,” i.e. is deeply rooted in the system of the Plantation. She thereupon suggests that the term ‘Plantationocene’ may be more apt to describe this era (Haraway et al., 2016).¹¹⁹ Starting with the cultivation of sugar cane (which proved to be one of the most profitable crops) in the Caribbean from the late 17th century onwards, the Plantation was a system that was replicated widely throughout the Americas, “following the same structural principles, throughout the southern United States, the Caribbean islands, the Caribbean coast of Latin America, and the northeastern portion of Brazil,” as Glissant observes in *Poetics of Relation* ([1990], 1997, p63).

In her insightful book *Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization*, the art historian Jill H. Casid (2005) reminds us that the construction of the Plantation required the clearing and removal of native trees and forests in order to make room for the colonisers to cultivate transplanted cash crops, such as sugar cane. As she states, “ideologically and discursively, *plantation* was often used as a synonym for *colony*” (Casid, 2005, p7). The Plantation system, which constitutes what Mignolo (2011) has called “the darker side of Western Modernity” going hand in hand with “the project of knowledge” (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p57) and “the Western errantry of conquest”

¹¹⁹ To which she adds the ‘Chtulucene’ in following talk: Stedelijk Museum (2017). Talk: Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti - March 25, 2017.

(Glissant, 1996, p88), was based on the transplantation of plants,¹²⁰ humans (and animals), who were uprooted and exploited as ‘resources’ that could be turned into profit, generating a new global market that was based on the enslavement of humans (and plants) and the import and export of human and non-human goods. As Mignolo (2011, p12) observes, “this transformation resulted in extensive enslaved trade that transformed human life into a commodity – for the owner of the plantation, of the mine, and, later on, of the industry.” In this sense, the Plantation could be seen as a precursor to industrial capitalism – an observation that is shared by Haraway (et al., 2016) and expressed in the concept of the ‘Plantationocene’.

In her talk with Braidotti, Haraway reiterates that capitalism or “what(ever) it is that we call modernity” was shaped by and firmly rests on the practice of plantations – historically we may think of sugar, coffee and tobacco; among more recent examples would be palm oil, soya, corn, etc. (Stedelijk Museum, 2017). Not only people, but also plants were enslaved and commodified in these monocultural plantations, which Haraway describes as “bio-diversity destroying apparatuses” (Stedelijk Museum, 2017). And yet, as Glissant observes, “within this universe of domination and oppression, of silent and professed dehumanisation, forms of humanity stubbornly persisted” ([1990], 1997, p65).¹²¹ This brings us to a little-known secret strategy of survival and resistance, which not only provided vital sustenance for famished slaves, but also defended the biodiversity of plants and ‘*earth*’ others from the oppressive and generalising force of the monocultural Plantation: the creole garden.

In Manthia Diawara’s film *Édouard Glissant: One World in Relation* (2010), Glissant introduces the creole garden as a clandestine type of garden, which the slaves secretly cultivated at night, in order to survive the harsh conditions and the malnourishment they suffered at the plantations in Martinique. As Glissant narrates:

¹²⁰ To give an example of the colonial practice of transplantation: a specific type of sugar cane from Tahiti that had been transferred to the royal botanical garden in Paris in the late eighteen-hundreds was subsequently transplanted and cultivated as cash crop in the French colonies of Mauritius, the Réunion islands, French Guiana, Martinique, etc. (see Casid, 2005, p33).

¹²¹ “Dans cet univers de domination et d’oppression, de déshumanisation sourde ou déclarée, des humanités se sont puissamment obstinées” (Glissant, 1990, p79).

One of the characteristics of these creole gardens, which they had invented, and which we have since lost, was that in a very narrow space, they were able to grow dozens of different types of trees, different scents, coconuts, yams, oranges, pines, [...]. They did it in such a way that the plants mutually protected each other. It was the essence of the creole garden. This principle of the creole garden is the same as the principle of rhizomes. [...] It is the principle of distribution. [...] It was these creole gardens that enabled them to survive. (*Édouard Glissant: One World in Relation*, 2010)

In Glissant's imagination, the creole garden is a rhizomatic coming-together of diverse plants that mutually assist each other in their growth, by establishing a network of subterranean root-relations, protecting one and other in an interdependent web of becoming with their clandestine gardeners – the enslaved and transplanted humans – who they secretly provide with crucial life-sustaining alimentation.¹²² This poetic image of the creole garden is the counterimage to the monocultural Plantation. It resonates with what Glissant (to Diawara, [2009], 2013, p35) calls “the antislavery will,” the multiplicity and Diversity that is gained in Relation. The creole garden transposes the process of creolisation into the vegetal world, proposing, in Mamadou Moustapha Ly's words, “a sort of ‘vegetal creolization’” (2014, p67). To me, this signals an openness to possibilities for conceiving of the theory of Relation and the poetics of Diversity beyond the human.

Although the landscape and the environment, in images of the forest, the sea, rocks, hills, the beach, trees, and gardens, play an important role in Glissant's writings, apart from fleeting references to Darwin and the natural sciences in *Poetics of Relation* ([1990], 1997), he does not explicitly theorise about ‘nature’ as a concept. However, in *Introduction à une Poétique du Divers* (1996) Glissant seems to suggest that current discourses of ecological thinking are closely related and resonate with his conception of Relation, referring to the ecologists' ideal of an interconnected world, which according to Glissant, is evidenced in following quote: “*Si tu tues la rivière, si tu tues l'arbre, si tu tues le ciel, si tu tues la terre, tu tues l'homme*” (Glissant, 1996, p30) – “If you kill the river, if you kill the tree, if you kill the sky, if you kill the earth, you kill the human” (my own translation). This anonymous quote which

¹²² In this context also see Haraway's mention of “slave gardens” (2015, p162).

Glissant assigns to an unidentified ecologist, articulates the interdependence of humans and their environment and their interconnection in a network of relations, thereby alluding to a possible inclusion of “the non-human ‘earth’ others” (Braidotti, 2006, p265) in Glissant’s conception of Relation.

The interview *L’Europe et les Antilles (Europe and the Antilles)*, conducted by Andrea Schwieger Hiepko (1998), offers further insight in Glissant’s approach to our relation to the earth. Here, he explains how the drive for racism and intolerance is connected to a particular imaginary – an imaginary which reinforces belief in the legitimacy of territory as a space that excludes the Other. Glissant (to Schwieger Hiepko, [1998], 2011, p258) insists that “the relationship to one’s territory, to the earth seems much more complex.”¹²³ Searching for a counter-model or an alternative imaginary that would shift the aforementioned territorialism and racist intolerance, he draws attention to his fondness of Amerindian cultures’ inclusive attitude towards the Other. He cites that according to the Amerindian cultures’ imaginary of territory and the earth, “we are not the owners of the earth, we are the custodians of the earth” (Glissant to Schwieger Hiepko, [1998], 2011, p258)¹²⁴ – an approach that he maintains would be central in a consideration of the current debate, if we want to avoid the resurfacing of ethnic violence, racism and genocide, as happened in former Yugoslavia. Guided by Glissant’s conception of errantry, I propose to follow this line of thought, which inspires me to explore the possibilities of Amerindian thinking for the *The Art of Un-belonging*.

As outlined at the beginning of this chapter, in order to imagine a new conception of belonging – as belonging beyond the human – we must first interrogate the colonial legacy in discourses that have influenced our understanding of ‘the human’ and ‘nature’. Hence, the first part of this chapter traced the connection between “arrowlike nomadism” (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p19) and Western sciences such as

¹²³ “Le rapport à la terre me paraît beaucoup plus complexe” (Glissant to Schwieger Hiepko, 1998).

¹²⁴ “Nous ne sommes pas les propriétaires de la terre, nous sommes les gardiens de la terre” (Glissant to Schwieger Hiepko, 1998).

natural history, ethnography and anthropology, exploring the links between botanical taxonomy and scientific racism. As we have seen, the Western 'project of knowledge' was instrumental in legitimising the theft of land, slavery and the genocide of indigenous people in the colonies.

Searching for strategies to counter the Eurocentric imaginary that has been shaped by dualistic thought, my aim to further complicate and re-imagine the notion of belonging beyond the human has demanded a further investigation into tools and concepts that could be used to destabilise binaries such as 'nature' and 'culture'. Led by the concerns of my practice (instigated through my work with coffee and clay), the question of how we as humans are connected to '*earth*' *others* (Braidotti, 2006, p265) became central to my research. This question has also been investigated by new critical anthropology, based on Amerindian thinking. In the light of postcolonial and feminist critique and discourses of the Anthropocene, there have been major shifts and efforts to decolonise the discipline over the last decades. Notable here are Viveiros de Castro's ([2009], 2014) influential theory of 'Amerindian perspectivism,' and Eduardo Kohn's (2013) related work, published as *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology beyond the Human*, which have emerged from the anthropologists' direct engagement with the thinking and imaginations of Amerindian peoples. What interests me here in relation to *The Art of Un-belonging* is the potential of Amerindian thinking to decolonise what Glissant refers to as the 'root-identity' and challenge dual conceptions of self and Other, i.e. the Western framework of binary thinking, which manifests itself in the binary conception and categorisation of 'nature' as opposed to 'culture'. In what follows, I will give a brief introduction to the most relevant concepts of Amerindian thinking: 'perspectivism' and 'multinaturalism'.

As mentioned above, the notion of 'Amerindian perspectivism' was coined by the Brazilian anthropologist Viveiros de Castro (1998) and is based on his research related to the thinking and imaginations of Amazonian and other Amerindian peoples.

Building on ethnographic research,¹²⁵ Viveiros de Castro (1998) introduces the concept of ‘perspectivism’ in the article *Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism*, which he expands on in his book *Cannibal Metaphysics* ([2009], 2014), as a concept that is derived from indigenous Amerindian cosmologies and their distinct conception of ways in which humans and non-humans, meaning “animals and other subjectivities that inhabit the world” (1998, p470), perceive each other from distinct ‘perspectives’ or points of view. Following Viveiros de Castro, Amerindian cosmologies conceive of ways in which humans perceive animals and other beings as significantly different to how these non-human subjectivities or persons, such as “gods, spirits, the dead, inhabitants of other cosmic levels, meteorological phenomena, plants, occasionally even objects and artefacts” see humans and each other (1998, p470). To illustrate this point, let me quote him at length here:

[H]umans will, under normal conditions, see humans as humans, and animals as animals, [...]. Predatory animals for their part, see humans as prey, while prey see humans as spirits or predators” [...] In seeing *us* as nonhumans, animals and spirits regard themselves (their own species) as human. (Viveiros de Castro, [2009], 2014, pp.56-57).

Although ‘perspectivism’ is usually applied to specific animals, often foregrounding relations between predator and prey, all beings could potentially be or rather become and “reveal themselves to be (transformed into) persons” (Viveiros de Castro [2009], 2014, p57). It is crucial to underline that, as Viveiros de Castro insists, the Amerindians’ distinct conception of the world as “inhabited by different sorts of subjects or persons, human and non-human, which apprehend reality from distinct points of view” is irreducible, meaning that it cannot be reduced to the (Western) concept of (cultural) relativism (1998, p469). According to Viveiros de Castro ([2009] 2014, p56), Amerindian thinking resists the translation into a Western framework of thinking, as certain aspects of indigenous cosmologies cannot be described using the classic distinction between nature and culture and require a different ‘conceptual

¹²⁵ Please note that in *Cannibal Metaphysics: For a Post-Structural Anthropology* ([2009], 2014) Viveiros de Castro credits Tânia Stolze Lima (1996) with initial formulations of the idea.

map'. This is precisely why Amerindian thinking is of relevance to my research and *The Art of Un-belonging*.

Recognising the necessity to develop a new conceptual scheme, Viveiros de Castro proposes the term 'multinaturalism' to describe the Amerindians' conception of "a unity of mind and a diversity of bodies" (1998; [2009], 2014, p56). He conceives of 'multinaturalism' as an inversion of the Western 'multiculturalist' cosmologies, which as he elucidates are based "on the mutual implication between the unicity of nature and the multiplicity of cultures" (Viveiros de Castro, [2009], 2014, p56). In contrast, the Amerindian conception of 'multinaturalism' assumes a "unity of mind" and a corporeal diversity (Viveiros de Castro, [2009], 2014, p56). In other words, 'multinaturalism' assumes "'culture' or subject as the form of the universal, and 'nature' or object as the particular" (Viveiros de Castro, [2009], 2014, p56). Contrary to the Western conception of 'nature' as one entity and the multiplicity of many (human) cultures, Viveiros de Castro ([2009], 2014, p50) suggests that the Amerindian concepts of 'perspectivism' and 'multinaturalism' would enable us to conceive of an "an indigenous alter-anthropology": the notion that every being belongs to one culture which would unite all beings (including plants and animals), yet is distinguished by different, multiple natures, which would be our particular bodies and viewpoints. To paraphrase Viveiros de Castro, the Amerindians' distinct conception of the relation between humans and non-humans, is founded on the common principle of 'humanity' and the diversity of the body. As Peter Skafish (2014, p12) points out in his introduction to *Cannibal Metaphysics*, as a result, "the idea that culture is universal to human beings and distinguishes them from the rest of nature falls apart."

Arguing that the Amerindian conception of the interrelation between human and nonhuman beings should be credited for its philosophical merit and given equal status to 'Western concepts,' Viveiros de Castro strives to advance anthropology's culturally limited form of perspectivism as part of his project of transforming anthropology into "the theory/practice of permanent decolonization of thought"

([2009], 2014, p40). Anthropologists influenced by his work, such as Eduardo Kohn, have since built on his theories, engaging with the practical and semiotic conditions of perspectivism (Skafish, 2014, pp.11-12).

Building on Viveiros de Castro's ambition to decolonise thought and advance anthropology as a discipline, Kohn's inspirational project *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology beyond the Human* (2013) formulates an anthropological practice that goes beyond the human, thereby challenging the very foundations of the discipline. Based on ethnographic field research he conducted among the quichua-speaking *Runa* of Ávila in the Upper Amazon (in Ecuador), in *How Forests Think* Kohn proposes a new conception of an anthropology "beyond the human." An anthropology that no longer foregrounds the human as its object, instead shifting its focus to particular relations between humans and nonhuman beings, challenges the discipline's dualistic conceptions of nature versus culture/society, mind versus body etc. Following Kohn (2013, p21), "we are colonized by certain ways of thinking about relationality." Through his ethnographic engagement with the *Runa* and their "other-than-human encounters" (Kohn, 2013, p6), Kohn intends to shift and expand our understanding of what being human means, putting into question whether 'knowing' or 'thinking' are exclusive and limited to the human species. Fundamental to his theory is a rethinking of representation beyond language, founded in the *Runas'* interpretation of their entanglement within the complex eco-system of the Amazonian forest. Drawing on semiotic theory (in particular Charles Peirce's work), Kohn concludes that, what we humans have in common with nonhuman beings is "the fact that we all live with and through signs" (2013, p9). Based on Amerindian (more specifically the *Runas'*) thinking and their conception of the relations between humans and nonhuman beings, Kohn suggests that "all beings, and not just humans, engage with the world and with each other as selves, that is, as beings that have a point of view" (2013, p132). Throughout the book he maintains that his claim that forests think is to be taken seriously, and not least in terms of an adequate response to the Anthropocene. As he writes, "if 'we' are to survive the Anthropocene – [...] – we will have to actively cultivate these ways of thinking with and like forests" (Kohn, 2013, p227).

As we will see, Kohn's conception of thinking forests resonates with my practice-based exploration of thinking (through) clay, coffee and (olive oil) soap, which will be discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter. How could a new understanding of materials and objects through the lens of multispecies histories, integrating concepts of (feminist) new materialism (Braidotti) and Amerindian 'perspectivism,' inform the development of artistic strategies of undoing belonging? How to decolonise our thinking about belonging with regard to objects (material culture)? What happens if we approach matter itself as an agent of knowledge?

So far, I have analysed aspects related to language, in particular opacity and multilingualism, as strategies that can be employed to challenge fixed notions of belonging and identity. In my artistic exploration of the entanglements of humans and coffee, I have taken my project of destabilising binaries a step further: for instance, by impersonating a goat and 'becoming animal' in the staging of a scene about the origin of coffee as part of *Kahvehane Kongresspark* (2016): In the highlands of Kaffa, in a region, which is currently known as Ethiopia, a goatherd named Kaldi is said to have discovered coffee by observing the animals' transformed behaviour (– it is said that his goats were "dancing" –) after the consumption of the red coffee cherries.¹²⁶ The legend of coffee's incidental use by animals and its subsequent appropriation and cultivation by humans gives powerful testimony to our interdependence with other species and suggests what could be learned from 'earth' others, if we were to suspend our hierarchical and dualistic thinking. As Donna Haraway (2008, p19) observes, "species interdependence is the name of the worlding game on earth, and that game must be one of response and respect."

The implosion of binaries, as proposed by Braidotti's nomadic philosophy and Haraway's (2003) *naturecultures* concept is essential to my project of undoing an anthropocentric conception of belonging. As outlined in my introduction to

¹²⁶ A full account of the legend is offered in the book *Uncommon Grounds: The History of Coffee and How it Transformed our World* by Mark Pendergrast. See Pendergrast, 2010, pp. 3–5.

Haraway's theory in section 2 of chapter 1, she merges the two terms *nature* and *culture* to form a hybrid concept named *naturecultures*. Her colleague in Science and Technology Studies, Bruno Latour ([1991], 1993, p107), uses a hyphen to indicate a continuum between nature and culture in his conception of *natures-cultures* or what he prefers to refer to as *collective(s)*.¹²⁷

Like Haraway, who acknowledges the importance of the anthropological concept of "partial connections" (Strathern, 1991) for the development of her thinking, Bruno Latour ([1991], 1993) also turns to anthropology in his critical analysis of modernity in his seminal book *We Have Never Been Modern*. He argues that in contrast to sociology, philosophy or the natural sciences, which are central to his investigation, anthropology has always recognised that society, science, nature, culture, religion, technology, politics, the human and nonhuman have had to be approached and studied as interconnected narratives (Latour, [1991], 1993, p7). Taking an anthropological approach in his analysis of modernity and the natural sciences, Latour ([1991], 1993, p107) deconstructs the modernist divide between nature and culture, proposing to re-interpret nature and culture as hybrid *natures-cultures* or *collectives*. To unpack this concept further, I will quote him here at length:

We now find ourselves confronting productions of natures-cultures that I am calling collectives – as different, it should be recalled, from the society construed by sociologists – men-among-themselves – as they are from the Nature imagined by epistemologists – things-in-themselves. In the view of comparative anthropology these collectives are all alike, as I have said, in that they distribute both what will later, after stabilization, become elements of Nature and elements of the social world. No one has ever heard of a collective that did not mobilize heaven and earth in its composition, along with bodies and souls, property and law, gods and ancestors, powers and beliefs, beasts and fictional beings.... Such is the ancient anthropological matrix, the one we have never abandoned. (Latour, [1991], 1993, pp106-107)

Ultimately, Latour's interrogation of the binary logic in the perceived separation of nature and society/culture destabilises the definition and constitution of modernity

¹²⁷ For a critical analysis of shortcomings in Bruno Latour's *natures-cultures* concept see Kohn, 2013, pp.40-41; pp.91-92.

itself.

As “a philosophy of difference” (Dolphijn and van der Tuin, p86) influenced by Deleuzean thinking, new materialism traverses the dualisms at the centre of modernist thought in what could be described as a form of rewriting modernity (Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012, p117). As already introduced in section 2 of chapter 1, Braidotti (like Haraway) departs from the concept of sexual difference in her conception of difference and matter that lies at the heart of the development of her nomadic thinking. Her new-materialist (feminist) philosophy shows that it is necessary to develop an affinity for *zoe*,¹²⁸ as “the generative vitality of non- or prehuman or animal life” (Braidotti, 2006, p37), in order to overcome an anthropocentric approach (Braidotti, 1994, p97). Key to her posthumanist theory is the transcendence of categorical divides, such as those between mind and body or *bios* and *zoe* in order to affirm what she refers to as “nomadic eco-philosophy of multiple belongings” (Braidotti, 2006, p266).

In terms of thinking about or rather with art, Dolphijn and van der Tuin write that a new materialist perspective emphasises the entanglement of matter and meaning. Following a new materialist understanding of the (art) object, “the material dimension creates and gives form to the discursive, and vice versa” (Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012, p91). Rather than engaging with the material and discursive aspects separately, in this chapter I propose to depart from the questions posed by the materials themselves – for instance, in terms of my own practice, thinking through coffee and ceramics/clay; or with regard to Mona Hatoum’s installation art, thinking through olive trees, olive oil soap, and earth itself. Through thinking (through) olive oil soap, thinking (through) coffee, thinking (through) clay I will explore what can we learn from the material based on the analysis of art practice. How could we transcend and

¹²⁸ Braidotti (2006, p37) explains the difference between *zoe* and *bios* as follows: “Zoe stands for the mindless vitality of Life carrying on independently of and regardless of rational control. This is the dubious privilege attributed to the non-humans and to all the ‘others’ of Man, whereas *bios* refers to the specific social nexus of humans.”

go beyond a human perspective on the world and honour our co-dependence with every form of (perceived) Other as planetary¹²⁹ beings (Spivak, 1999)?

Following Braidotti's (2006, p4) post-anthropocentric ethics, my approach will be based on a "materialist, nomadic philosophy of becoming." Drawing on anthropological research, I intend to investigate in which ways artists can challenge the nature/culture, object/subject divide, exploring the possibilities of Amerindian thinking for *The Art of Un-belonging*. Integrating Braidotti's nomadic philosophy that complements Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, I propose to approach the "philosophy of difference" as a "philosophy of relation" (Viveiros de Castro, [2009], 2014, p112) – ultimately pushing the boundaries of anthropocentric consciousness.

3.2. From site-specific/local to transversal/global

In this section I will explore the potential of objects and 'earth' others as medium of artistic practice to imagine new ways and develop an alternative framework of approaching the question of belonging and identity. My investigation will focus on the role and agency of (organic) materials and objects in art practices that engage with specific places/localities yet transcend the individual and local to address issues of global and universal concern. In the previous chapters I have explored the feminist premise that the personal is political. Expanding on this concept, here I will posit that the planetary is personal – and ultimately political.

In her essay *The Imperative to Re-Imagine the Planet*, Spivak proposes the planetary as an intervention "to control globalization interruptively, to locate the imperative in the indefinite radical alterity of the other space of the planet, to deflect the rational imperative of capitalist globalization" ([1999], 2011, p348). In this sense, the planetary can be understood as a conceptual tool to critique the capitalist motor of globalisation. In the chapter *Planetaryity in Death of a Discipline*, Spivak's (2003, p73)

¹²⁹ In my use of the term planetary I am drawing on Spivak's (1999; 2003) conception of *planetaryity* and *the planetary*, which I will explain in more depth in the next section (section 3.2.).

“planet-thought” is developed further, proposing the possibility of “the planet to overwrite the globe” (2003, p72). Echoing Glissant’s ([1990], 1997, p19) critique of “arrowlike nomadism” and the generalising universalism of the West, Spivak voices her critique of globalisation in line with her persistent critique of the Eurocentric framework in the humanities as “the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere” (2003, p72). Following her, the globe stands for the profit-driven vectorisation of the world¹³⁰ in contrast to “the planetarity” – which, following Spivak (2003, p101) “is perhaps best imagined from the pre-capitalist cultures of the planet.” What we call the globe comes along with the illusion that we humans own it or may be able control it. While planetarity may not be able to abolish this “abstract ball” (Spivak, 2003, p72), it offers the promise of a planetary consciousness as an alternative imaginary or “planet-thought” that goes beyond our fixation with ethnic difference and nationalism. Following Spivak (2003, p72), “the planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan.” In other words, the planet does not belong to us. The planet is our host, we live on it and through it, yet according to Spivak’s ethical conception of its alterity, we *are* it, but it is not *ours*. Through generating new “imperatives that structure all of us, as giver and taker, female and male, planetary human beings” (Spivak, [1999], 2011, p350), Spivak’s conception of the planet invites us to imagine a world based on equal exchange transcending the borders of nation-states. As such, planetarity is deeply connected to the concept of the Earth (as opposed to the mapping of the globe). As Spivak explains, “the Earth is a paranational image that can substitute for international and can perhaps provide, today, a displaced site for the imagination of planetarity” (2003, p95).¹³¹

This line of thought, or rather “the track of planetarity” to borrow Spivak’s words (2003, p97), leads me back to Mona Hatoum, an artist I have already introduced as part of my discussion of feminist art, intercultural cinema and artistic strategies of decolonising representations of alterity. Following the questions that I raised in the

¹³⁰ In Spivak’s (2003, p72) words, “in the gridwork of electronic capital, we achieve that abstract ball covered in latitudes and longitudes, cut by virtual lines.”

¹³¹ Also see Spivak, 2015, pp.290-292.

introduction, in this chapter I will shift the focus on Hatoum's object-based practice to which she turned to in the early 1990s. After a decade of experimenting with predominantly performance-and moving image-based work, the turn to objects and materials marked a significant shift in Hatoum's artistic practice. Throughout this chapter I will be focusing on the works *Present Tense* (1996) and *Jardin suspendu* (2008). How do Hatoum's installations and sculptures, which often derive from her engagement with particular locations and specific political contexts relate to wider, global concerns and a "broader world of life" (Kohn, 2013, p6)?

3.2.1. Thinking (through) olive oil soap

Water, oil from locally grown olive trees and *al-quali* or *al-qili* – ashes from the saltwort plant collected by the Bedouins along the banks of the River Jordan: these are the main ingredients of the traditional Nabulsi olive oil soap¹³² – the material Mona Hatoum (re-)turned to in her iconic installation piece *Present Tense* (1996). For the installation, which she originally conceived during a residency at Anadiel Gallery in Jerusalem, she used over two thousand blocks of the ivory-coloured olive oil soap, sourced from a factory in Nablus.¹³³ The soap blocks have been laid out as a grid and form a continuous surface on the ground. Lentil-sized red glass beads inserted into the surface of the soap blocks retrace the borders of a fractured and partitioned future Palestinian state, based on the Oslo Agreement (1993) negotiated between the Israeli government and the PLO. The curator of the show, Jack Persekian (2003), recounts how Hatoum had abandoned her original concept and within a week developed a completely new exhibition upon encountering blocks of Nabulsi olive oil soap sold at the markets in Jerusalem. Here it is important to note that the residency coincided with Hatoum's first visit to Palestine, the place her parents had been forced to leave during the Nakba in 1948, before finding refuge in Lebanon. She

¹³² It is believed that Alkali derives from *al-quali* or *al-qili*, an Arabic term for the ashes of the saltwort plant, which provides the alkaline sodium compound required for soapification. Its trade used to be controlled by Bedouins (Enghag, 2004, p268; Abu-Rabia, 2001, p47).

¹³³ In regard to contemporary art, Otobong Nkanga's *Carved to Flow* (2017) is a notable example for the artistic exploration of soap, its history and its material entanglements across the mediums of installation, performance and a participatory soap making lab. See Nkanga (2017).

remembered the cube-shaped hand-cut blocks of Nabulsi olive oil soap from her childhood. From this perspective, it seems apparent that a block of olive oil soap, an ordinary everyday object from Palestine, may hold extra-ordinary powers for refugees and exiles in the diaspora, connecting them to a lost home (-land). A connection that is intrinsic to the material (of olive oil soap) that is made up of the remaining '*earth*' *others* in the land they had to leave behind: olive trees, saltwort plants and water.

As Hatoum's title aptly suggests, the present (in occupied Palestine) is tense.¹³⁴ This tension is palpable and evident in the paradoxical relation between form and material: red glass beads pushed into the soap form the contours of the boundaries of a fractured Palestinian state, which had been conceived at the Oslo Agreement (1993). The colour red creates a beautiful yet aggressive contrast – it resonates with blood and violence. Yet, there is a dimension of softness, instability, the potentiality of becoming intangible inherent in soap's ability to transform or perish through contact with water. In fact, through the material's intrinsic qualities, the outlines of the future Palestinian state embedded in the surface of the soap blocks could dissolve at any given moment, thereby highlighting the artificiality and ephemerality of borders.

¹³⁴ I am referring to the political tension in occupied Palestine



Fig. 3.10 Mona Hatoum: *Present Tense* (1996).
Soap and glass beads. 4.5 x 299 x 241 cm.
Installation view at Gallery Anadiel, Jerusalem.
© Mona Hatoum. Courtesy Gallery Anadiel, Jerusalem (Photo: Issa Freij).

3.2.2. The history of natural things

As I already discussed in section 1 of this chapter, natural history is deeply intertwined with the history of colonialism. The divide between nature and culture was constitutive of modernity and “the Western errantry of conquest” (Glissant, 1996, p88) and as such foundational to the discipline of anthropology. Through colonisation and the spreading of the Plantation, nature became a resource, to be “appropriated, preserved, enslaved, exalted or otherwise made flexible for disposal by culture in the logic of capitalist colonialism” as Haraway (1989, p13) writes in *Primate Visions*.

Based as it is on the binary conception of nature as opposed to culture (along with the conception of indigenous and Non-European people as less than human, or as 'the people of nature,' as evidenced in the German term *Naturvölker*), it is not surprising that the discourse of modernity, would ignore our species' interdependency and shared histories with nature. Following Latour, "in the world of the Copernican revolution," i.e. in the 16th century, history was "for humans alone, detached from the necessity of natural things" ([1991], 1993, p81). Challenging the dualism of nature/society at the base of an anthropocentric approach to history, Latour proposes to "grant historicity to all the actors" ([1991], 1993, p85). Exploring the notion of belonging beyond the human, the following analysis will consider thinking (through) olive oil soap and by extension the olive tree as actors with agency in history, proposing to look at Hatoum's *Present Tense* (1996) from the perspective of planetarity (Spivak, 2003) and human-nonhuman relationships.

Blessed with many olive trees, the town of Nablus in Palestine had become an important centre for olive oil soap production from the Middle Ages onwards, with its reputation reaching far beyond the Mediterranean by the 19th century. Yet, from the 1930s onwards, soap manufacturing experienced a decline; several once flourishing factories closed down. Apart from the lack of protection by a state and the political shifts following the end of the British mandate and the creation of the state of Israel, the increased popularity of industrially fabricated soaps, detergents and washing lotions are cited as main causes for the decline. Also, periodically the destruction of olive trees led to a shortage of locally sourced olive oil, which made imports from Syria and other places necessary. Many remaining soap factories closed in the 1990s, after the first intifada and the economic siege imposed by the Israeli government through military control. With only two factories reported to be currently operating in Nablus (Bontemps, no date), the olive oil soap may soon become a museum object, storing the memory and history of Palestinian crafts and culture prior to the Israeli occupation.

Once an everyday object, a commodity exported all over the Levant, a block of Nabulsi olive oil soap has become a relic of a lost (home-) land. The olive oil soap does not speak, yet its story is audible to those who are willing or able to adopt its perspective. As an *'earth' other*, an amalgamation of virgin olive oil, water and ashes from a semi-desert plant traditionally sourced by nomadic Bedouin tribes, the olive oil soap also is a witness to history. A history, which according to Latour ([1991], 1993, p82), "is no longer simply the history of people," but "the history of natural things as well." Olive trees and related matter, such as olive oil or olive oil soap all carry the memory of the Nakba, or "the catastrophe of 1948, when over a half of the population of Palestine was uprooted from their homes" (Mikdadi, 2008, p65). Reading Hatoum's work through the lens of the Nakba and in relation to the unresolved question of Palestinian statehood, Mikdadi recalls Mahmoud Darwish's (quoted by Mikdadi, 2008, p67) statement regarding the Oslo agreement and the resulting delusional peace process:

[U]nder the cover of an elusive peace process, to dispossess the Palestinians of their land and the source of their livelihood, and to restrict them to isolated reservations besieged by settlements and by-passes, until the day comes when, after consenting to end their demands and their struggle, they are allowed to call their cages a state.

Sharing Darwish's scepticism with regard to the division of Palestine into fragmented territories by the "Oslo map," curator Jack Persekian (2013) interprets Hatoum's choice of presenting the deformed map of Palestine on a perishable material such as soap, as an "allusion to the unsustainability of the Accords."

While *Present Tense* (1996) clearly draws on a very specific political context, the history and locality of Palestine, its materiality resonates with other bodies, far beyond the (so-called) Middle East. Soap is a 'soft' and perishable material evoking domestic and intimate scenes in the bathroom. It carries associations of purity, cleaning and dissolution.¹³⁵ Soap alludes to our sense of touch. Its sensuality speaks

¹³⁵ For a discussion of soap, cleanliness and 'commodity racism' in the context of empire, see McClintock, 1995; in particular the chapter *Soft Soaping Empire: Commodity Racism and Imperial Advertising* (McClintock, 1995, pp. 207-231).

of intimacy. By coming in contact with our skin, touching and rubbing our bodies, its foam is covering us with the scent and memory of the earth.¹³⁶ The use of olive oil soap as surface for the depiction of a map leads to the subversion of cartography's original function of demarcating a territory: the boundaries of the drawing could dissolve at anytime if the soap blocks came into contact with water and dematerialised. Here the object's intrinsic quality and everyday function "to wash away and dissolve" gives it power and agency to erase the borders of the map representing "the contested arena of disputes over boundaries, territories or national identity" (Bell, 2012, p111). As Kirsty Bell puts it, a map is "stable and trustworthy" yet at the same time "unreliable, politically motivated, subject to change and open to interpretation" (2012, p111). Despite being site- or rather Palestine-specific, *Present Tense* (1996) touches on wider issues, raising questions about the violence of (colonial) cartographies and nationalism in general. Hatoum's subversive approach in regard to national borders articulated in the perishable materiality of soap resonates with Benedict Anderson's concept of the nation as "cultural artefact" (1991, p11) and "imagined political community" (1991, p15). By criticising the violent cartographies of colonialism and nationalism and stretching beyond the regional context, the materiality of *Present Tense* seems to evoke a desire to undo borders, to let go of nationalistic narratives, to question and transcend man-made perspectives of the world, evoking a 'paranational image' of the Earth, i.e. planetarity (Spivak, 2003, p95).

¹³⁶ These associations only refer to organic olive oil soap. As Jack Persekian (2013) recounts Mona Hatoum at the time was unaware of other meanings soap as material might have in different contexts, e.g. the traumatic memory soap could evoke for a Jewish (Israeli) audience. Persekian recalls how a Jewish Israeli audience member associated the use of soap with accounts of Nazis' attempts to manufacture soap from the human remains of their victims. (Until today these allegations are disputed by Holocaust historians. Regardless of the ongoing controversy, the traumatic associations of soap for descendants of victims and survivors are real.)

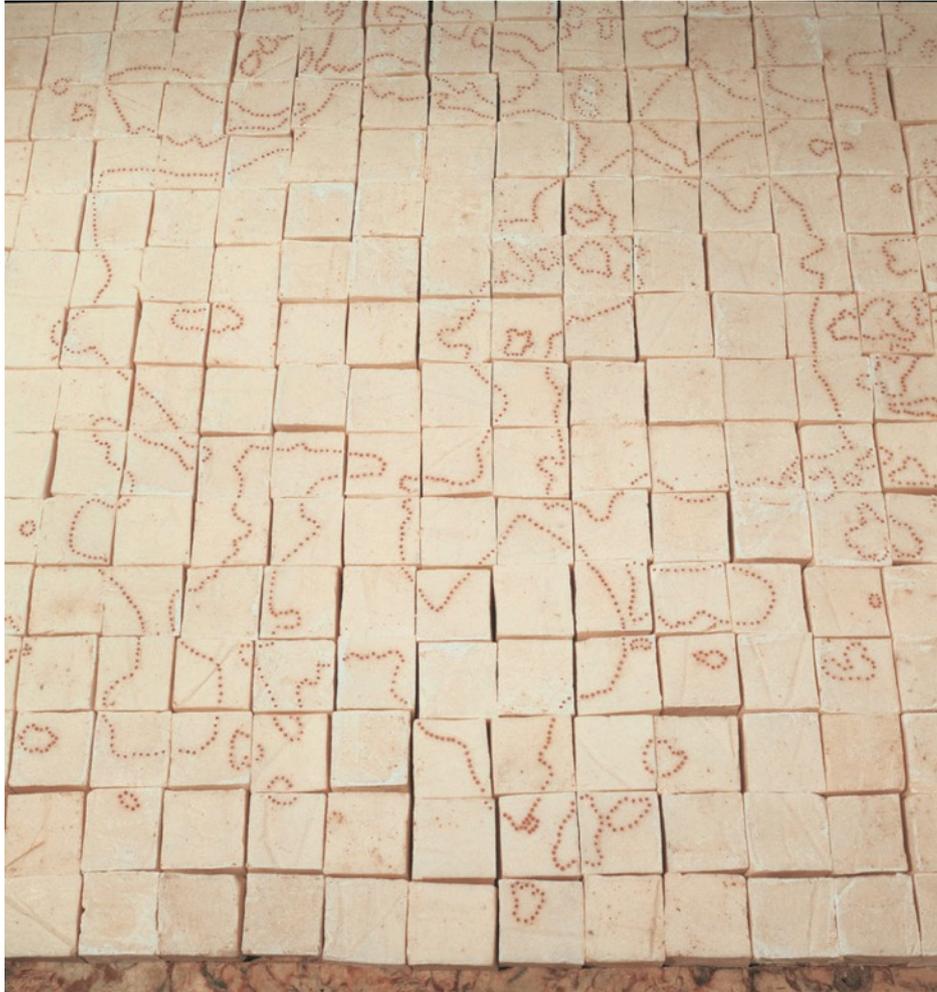


Fig. 3.11 Mona Hatoum: *Present Tense* (detail) 1996.
Soap and glass beads. 4.5 x 299 x 241 cm.
Installation view at Gallery Anadiel, Jerusalem. © Mona Hatoum.
Courtesy Gallery Anadiel, Jerusalem (Photo: Issa Freij).

The conjoining of the soap blocks to form one continuous surface on the floor emphasises the aforementioned aspects of earth, land and nature-cultures or collectives. The meaning of the material traverses not only regional, national or cultural but also human horizons, destabilising the boundaries between mind and body, material and meaning, nature and culture, earth and nation. As Marja Sakari (2016, p152) observes, in Hatoum's art "the personal *is* political – yet the personal also becomes universal, something shared by us all." Inspired by Spivak's (2003) concept of the planetarity as a form of (untranslatable) environmentalism and feminist new materialist thinking, I insist to add that our understanding of "us all" should include all 'earth' others. As Jane Bennett (2010, p13) writes, the "attentiveness to matter and its powers will not solve the problem of human exploitation or oppression,

but it can inspire a greater sense of the extent to which all bodies are kin in the sense of inextricably enmeshed in a network of relations.”

3.2.3. Belonging beyond the human

When thinking of belonging, we are inclined to put our species, the human, at the centre stage of the investigation. Within our species, we categorise identity and belonging according to gender, language, nationality, religion, ethnicity, race, class/wealth, ability and so forth. The category of the human and our self-centred obsession with our species is rarely questioned in critical discussions which revolve around the notion of belonging. Mona Hatoum’s work is frequently interpreted in relation to of exile, migration and diaspora, and while many critics have emphasised the essential role of materiality in her practice, the discussion of materialist aspects in her works seems often limited to discourses of (post-) minimalism and the history of conceptual art.¹³⁷ In my view, her practice invites or rather demands a much deeper and more rigorous analysis of the meaning of matter, in particular in regard to the notion of belonging and agency. With my analysis of Hatoum’s work, I hope to contribute to art-historical explorations of the material aspect of her art practice, albeit from a different perspective, approaching the matter from a post-humanist angle. A combination of “anthropology beyond the human” (Kohn, 2013, p7) and (feminist) new materialism might help us to arrive at a new understanding of the meaning of matter in Hatoum’s practice and in art in general. How could we approach *Present Tense* through the lens of new materialist theories, and in which way could we apply a non-anthropocentric analysis of belonging?

As mentioned before, soap evokes associations with human habits such as washing and cleaning. We use soap to cleanse our bodies – our skin carries the memory and scent of its touch. In this way soap is firmly associated with the everyday. Soap is inherently transformative: it transforms us in the act of cleansing our skin, washing away germs, and it transforms itself as it dissolves and perishes through the contact with another material: water. Rather than simply being a thing, soap as matter is

¹³⁷ For instance, see Hatoum, 2015.

more connected to becoming.¹³⁸ Although water is absent in Hatoum's installation, I would argue that its presence and agency is felt even more intensely through its absence due to the material memory and transformative qualities intrinsic to soap. Here, the absent element of water becomes a menace, but also a promise: it could potentially dissolve the blocks of olive oil soap and more importantly lead to the dissolution of the borders, which have been inscribed onto them.

An olive tree and olive oil soap as the matter that derives from it do not have a concept of national borders. An olive tree's borders are the earth, the sky and the sea. Resistant to draughts and fire, an olive tree can live and bear fruit for over a thousand years. An olive tree bears witness to a history that exceeds a human life span: a history of relation and interdependence stretching over many generations. Returning to the geopolitical context of *Present Tense*, it is worth noting that olive trees in Palestine have pre-existed and (partially) outlived the Nakba. In terms of species interdependence (Haraway, 2008) it seems essential to note that the cultivation of olive trees (including the production of derivative products such as olive oil soap) contributes to the livelihood of over 80.000 Palestinians (Miftah, 2012). However, depending on the location or 'areas' where their trees are planted, olive farmers can face many challenges: specific areas require permits issued from the Israeli authorities. The occupying army controls the olive farmers' access to their land in those 'areas' which, according to the Oslo agreement (1993), are under Israeli control. The resilience of the olive trees, which can survive in dry climates with little care, helps the farmers to maintain their land, even if they face many obstacles to tend to their trees. In this sense, the olive tree has become a vital agent and sign of indigenous resistance and as such is frequently attacked or destroyed by settlers.

As many examples throughout history have shown in other geo-political contexts, there is a structural analogy between the oppression and colonial violence directed towards indigenous communities and the disregard or lack of empathy and

¹³⁸ My observation is inspired by Diana Coole and Samantha Frost's more general conclusion that "'matter becomes' rather than 'matter is'" (Coole and Frost, 2010, p10).

responsibility towards other living matter or earth others – just think of the protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline at Standing Rock as recent example of Native American struggles against on-going colonisation and violation of their rights: the construction of the Pipeline means a potentially irreversible intervention in the ecosystem and as such poses an imminent threat to not only Native Americans but to all humans and other ‘*earth*’ others.

Reflecting on Mona Hatoum’s use of olive oil soap in *Present Tense*, one could question whether a block of soap should be perceived as a cultural artefact or as a natural residue. I do not think of it of it as either one or the other.¹³⁹ From a feminist new materialist standpoint, driven by the desire to undo and transcend thinking in dualities such as ‘nature’ and ‘culture,’ I would question this distinction and challenge attempts to categorise the object in that manner. Instead, I would propose to approach a block of handcrafted olive oil soap as the materialisation of human interaction with the fruits of the olive tree and therefore as an embodiment of *naturecultures* (Haraway, 2003) that speaks first and foremost of their – or rather, *our* relation. Taking this approach, I am following the Deleuze-influenced theories by feminist and new materialist theorists Rosi Braidotti and Jane Bennett, who remind us to direct our attention to relations and interactions between bodies. As Braidotti (2006, p108) writes, “the point is to see the inter-relation human/animal as constitutive of the identity of each.” It seems logical to expand or rather transpose – to apply Braidotti’s own music-derived terminology – the aforementioned inter-relations between human/animal to the entanglement of humans and plants and other (Braidottian) ‘*earth*’ others.

Following this proposition, which implies a broader understanding of relationality, demands the expansion of our notion of selfhood and agency, or even of the act of

¹³⁹ Karl Marx ([1907] 2007) articulated this ambiguity inherent in (hand-crafted) matter in his famous paragraph on the table: “It is as clear as noon-day, that man, by his industry, changes the forms of the materials furnished by Nature, in such a way as to make them useful to him. The form of wood, for instance, is altered, by making a table out of it. Yet, for all that, the table continues to be that common, every-day thing, wood” (Marx and Engels, [1907], 2007, pp. 81-82).

or ability for thought, as not something limited or exclusive to the human species. Here, the anthropologist Eduardo Kohn's work *How forests think* (2013) provides further illumination to my thinking about or rather with and through plants. As Kohn (2013, p75) boldly proposes, "selfhood is not limited to animals with brains [...]. Plants are also selves." Pondering the idea of 'nonhuman selves,' we must rethink what 'selfhood' and 'thinking' means. Learning from the Runa people and the ecology of Ecuador's Amazon, that is the Runa's relations to other beings in the forest, Kohn links the notion of selfhood to the ability to interpret the world. If one were to ask how this may apply to plants, just think how plants too are constantly interpreting their environment in the process of their growth and existence: how do they relate and react to the sun, the rain, the soil, the seasons, the shade, the humidity, the heat, the frost, the minerals, insects, animals, parasites, humans and other plants.

3.3. The fluid matter of belonging

Thinking through olive oil soap, I shifted my focus to the relation between bodies and matter, exploring how generating an awareness of our entanglement and interdependence with matter and 'earth' others could be a useful strategy to destabilise binary thinking and challenge fixed notions of belonging. Looking at questions that arose in relation to my trans-disciplinary project *Kahvehane Kongresspark*, it became clear that I had to address the question of belonging through an analysis of our intimate relation and 'becoming with' edible, or rather drinkable matter. Taking my own practice as driving force for the research, in this section I will therefore focus my investigation on our shared histories with the plant-derived substance called coffee.

Our consumption of food and drink is blurring the distinction between outside and inside. What is outside becomes inside. It trans-forms us. The habits of food and drink and how we go about our daily practice of eating and drinking are culturally specific and yet the need to eat and drink is universal. I concur with Jane Bennett who writes that "edible matter is the most powerful agent, as stuff that modifies the human matter with which it comes into contact" (2010, p 44). Following her

description, food can be perceived as “self altering, dissipative materiality” (Bennett, 2010, p51) As such, edible and drinkable matter have to be acknowledged as key player in the assemblage¹⁴⁰ of being, becoming and belonging.

The substance we call coffee, which will be at the heart of my investigation, is a very specific type of food, or rather drink: one which could in fact be classified as ‘narcotic’. In other words, coffee is not considered essential in terms of what the human body needs in order to sustain its existence, unlike, for instance, water. Hence, alluding to caffeine’s addictive qualities, in the German language coffee (like wine, chocolate or nicotine-based products) would fall into the category of *Genusmittel*: ‘medium(s) of pleasure or enjoyment,’ rather than *Lebensmittel*, ‘medium(s) of life’ (which would translate to food).

¹⁴⁰ In my use of the term I refer to Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of assemblage, which allows us to transcend the (perceived) distinction between disparate elements, such as organic and nonorganic life, i.e. nature and culture. Following Deleuze, “in assemblages you find states of things, bodies, various combinations of bodies, hodgepodes; but you also find utterances, modes of expression, and whole regimes of signs” (Deleuze, [1980], 2006, p177) – in other words, an assemblage is “what keeps very heterogeneous elements together” (Deleuze, [1980], 2006, p179).



Fig. 3.12 *Kahvehane Kongresspark* (2016). Poster. Photo: Deniz Soezen.

Coffee belongs to certain types of plant-derived foods – or rather drinks – that promote and enhance particular states of mind. Like beer, wine, whisky, tobacco, etc., coffee is not considered a substance to be consumed by children. In fact, it seems that human beings have to reach a certain age to appreciate coffee's bitterness together with its mood- and mind-altering qualities. Until today, there is no consensus on whether coffee is healthy or not: throughout history and in differing geographical contexts, while some considered coffee to be medicine and revered its healing qualities, others considered it poisonous or associated it with Satan.¹⁴¹ I am alluding here to the long history of the Catholic Church's contempt for coffee as a drink, which they perceived as 'Muslim' and 'Other' and therefore as threatening. Christianity's historical fear of coffee as it was identified with the Muslim Other, manifests itself in the following German folk song about coffee, which three generations of the maternal side in my family, including myself, were taught in music education at school:

*K-a-f-f-e-e
K-a-f-f-e-e
trink nicht so viel Kaffee!
Nicht für Kinder ist der Türkentrank
schwächt die Nerven, macht dich blass und krank
Sei doch kein Muselmann,
der ihn nicht lassen kann!*

*C-o-f-f-e-e
C-o-f-f-e-e
Don't drink so much coffee!
The Turk's Drink is not for children,
It weakens the nerves and makes you pale and sick.
Don't be a Muslim
Who can't help it!* ¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ For accounts on the controversy regarding coffee's health benefits, see Pendergrast, 2010.

¹⁴² For a more detailed discussion and English translation of the lyrics see Anidjar, 2007. The German lyrics are available from Cazoo (2003).



Fig. 3.13 *Kahvehane Kongresspark* (2016). Lecture Performance. Photo: Alex Simmel.

The German song issues an explicit warning against the consumption of coffee, which is denounced as the “Turk’s drink”. According to the song, Muslims cannot help but drink coffee and anyone who drinks it risks to becoming ‘Turkicised’. Hence, one should be careful not to drink too much of it, as it “makes you pale and sick” – attributes of weakness assigned to the Ottoman Turks, who had tried but failed to conquer Europe in the 17th century. The Turks were defeated at the gates of Vienna in 1683 but coffee, which they left behind when they fled the battlefield,¹⁴³ was to become the most popular drink in the world. Today coffee is consumed on a daily basis by millions of people and the demand for coffee beans is increasing worldwide. How does the consumption of coffee position us in relation to belonging and notions of the local and the global? Or, to return to the German folk song: How ‘Turkish’ is your coffee?

¹⁴³ For a more detailed account, see Koz and Kuzucu (2013).

3.3.1. The story of a global trans-plant

The majority of coffee-drinkers today are most likely unaware of coffee's origins and its complex and at times contradictory *naturecultural* histories. Most people, including myself on many occasions, do not question where their food and drink comes from. As long as the price is alright and it tastes good, the conditions of production and distribution and the history of human entanglements with the substances our bodies engage with are of minor interest to most people (although these attitudes seem to be shifting slowly due to the hype of organically produced food and various health crazes).

As a child who mostly grew up in cities and for a significant portion of her youth imagined carrots to grow on trees, it took me a long time to develop an appreciation of the complex web of relations we enter into when we perform the daily rituals of eating and drinking. As Elsbeth Probyn (2000, p12) writes, “eating continually performs different connections and disconnections. Increasingly the attention to what we eat is seen as immediately connecting us, our bodies, to large social questions.” Inspired and irritated by the aforementioned German folk song about coffee, I became interested in thinking about the web of relations I enter into when I consuming my daily caffeinated drink: What is coffee’s agency in history and more specifically, its potential to heighten our awareness of our relation and interconnection with nonhuman ‘*earth*’ others? What could we learn from (the history of) coffee in terms of our understanding of relations between the local and the global and our approach towards belonging?

Honduras, Brazil, Java, Columbia?

The label says coffee comes from Latin America.

Is coffee a she, like the plant in German: Die Pflanze, die Bohne.

Or a he? As, der Samen.

Is coffee a seed or a fruit?

A cherry, a berry or a bean?

Where does coffee come from?

Africa? Mocha? India?

Peru? Guatemala? Nicaragua?

The label says: Latin America.

If coffee is Brazilian, why is she called Arabica?

Is coffee a migrant? A Muslim? A trans-plant?

As we follow the path of coffee, we embark on a journey that takes us around the world: travelling through time and space. The lecture-performance as part of *Kahvehane* does not tell a linear story of coffee. It starts here and now: in the middle or perhaps towards the end of the ‘Anthropocene’ or, in Haraway’s (et al., 2016) words, the ‘Plantationocene’. Aiming to bring awareness to this relation, our narration of coffee’s trans-plantation trajectory begins right there: at a coffee plantation in Minas Gerais, Brazil.

(Music)

Way down among the Brazillians, coffee beans sell by the billions

So they have to find those extra cups to fill

They've got an awful lot of coffee in Brazil

The lecture-performance opens with “The Coffee Song” (1976) by Osibisa¹⁴⁴ – a band, which was formed in London in 1969 by Ghanaian and Caribbean musicians. Blending rhythms and melodies from Africa and the Caribbean with electronic music, Osibisa was pivotal in promoting African and ‘world’ music in Europe and the US in the 1970s.¹⁴⁵ The song reflects on the over-production of coffee in Brazil and serves as introduction to the first scene.

¹⁴⁴ The song was written by Bob Hilliard and Dick Miles and first recorded by Frank Sinatra in 1946. It is alternatively known as *They've Got an Awful Lot of Coffee in Brazil*. For further information see Songfacts (no date).

¹⁴⁵ The marketing of cultural difference by the turbo-capitalist “difference engine” (Braidotti, 2007) within the acoustic realm of “world music” is mirrored in the packaging and marketing of exotic food and drink in supermarket shelves.



Fig. 3.14 *Kahvehane Kongresspark* (2016). Lecture Performance. Photo: Alex Simmel

This scene, which is set in Brazil, aims to shed light to the entanglement of coffee and colonialism, i.e. the history of slavery and plantations as part of the colonial enterprise. Bharatanatyam artist and actor Shane Shambhu plays a coffee plantation worker named Ramiro, while I impersonate the plantation owner and CEO of a multinational coffee company exploiting its coffee workers in Brazil. The script is based on factual information: numerous scandals have exposed the exploitation and abuse of coffee workers in Brazil (Hodal, 2016). Due to the legacy of slavery and colonialism, today Brazil is the largest exporter of coffee, accounting for about one-third of the global market.

Drinking coffee connects our bodies to larger socio-political and ecological questions, of which we are often not aware as we go about our daily routine of coffee consumption. Through the consumption of coffee, we enter an enormous and complex web of interconnections: the history of globalisation and transnational trade, the history of slavery, bad labour conditions, exploitation and climate change: in short, the era of the 'Plantationocene' (Haraway et al., 2016).



Fig. 3.15 *Kahvehane Kongresspark* (2016). Edition of 100 glazed Kütahya ceramic cups and saucers and nine ceramic decal designs. Photo: Deniz Soezen.

The coffee beans grow on a plant which its prime consumers in Europe and North America will never have seen in its natural habitat. Wrongly assuming that the coffee plant was an indigenous ‘earth’ other of the Arabian peninsula, the Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus (1707-78) classified the plant as *Coffea Arabica*.¹⁴⁶ However, genetically coffee or, to be more specific, the qualitatively superior and (in relation to *Robusta* coffee) more expensive *Arabica* variety can be traced back to a small tree or scrub growing in the rain forest canopies of a region that today is known as Ethiopia (formerly Abyssinia). Even though exact dates and circumstances remain obscure, it is now widely agreed that from there coffee was transported across the Red Sea to Yemen, where its cultivation is well documented. In Yemen, Sufi Monks, who discovered that drinking coffee helped them to stay up for their midnight prayers, quickly appropriated the ‘African drink,’ naming it *al-qahwa* after an Arabic word for wine (See Pendergrast, 2010, p6). It is highly likely that the name ‘coffee’ derives

¹⁴⁶ As already established, Linnaeus’ nomenclature of plants is regarded as an important mechanism of the colonial enterprise (Schiebinger and Swan, 2005)

from Arabic *al-qahwa*,¹⁴⁷ which later transformed to *kahve* in Turkish.



Fig. 3.16 Scan of a handful of green, unroasted coffee beans from Ethiopia.

While the beverage was first mainly considered to be for medical or religious use, it soon gained wider popularity and became an integral part of everyday life in Yemen and beyond. Thanks to Muslim pilgrims who would pass via the Yemenite port of Mocha, coffee quickly spread all across the 'Islamic world'. After the occupation of Yemen in 1536, for a long time, the Ottomans held a monopoly over coffee's

¹⁴⁷ As the coffee historian Mark Pendergrast (2010) points out, amongst other possibilities, it has also been suggested that the name 'coffee' could equally be connected to *Kaffa*, a region in Ethiopia or *quwwa*, Arabic for power.

cultivation and controlled its trade across the Empire. As Anthony Wild (2005, p71) points out, “it was in many ways a classic colonialist venture: cultivated in a conquered country, coffee was principally consumed in the main cities of the conqueror.” However, according to coffee historian Steven Topik (2004), the Yemenite or Turkish Ottoman coffee production and trade could still be considered as “pre-capitalist.” In relation to my previous discussion of the ‘Plantationocene’ (Haraway et al., 2016) it is worth noting that, contrary to the agriculture of subsequent European colonial coffee plantations which were often established at the expense of subsistence crops and resulted in local food shortages, farmers in Yemen would grow coffee in small gardens alongside their food crops (Topik, 2004).



Fig. 3.17 *Kahvehane Kongresspark* (2016). Temporary coffeehouse. Ceramic coffee cup and saucer (decal design: Port of Mocha) Photo: Deniz Soezen.

With the spread of coffee, which was at the time still considered to be an exotic luxury in Europe, demand increased throughout the Ottoman Empire and coffee proved a lucrative business. A vibrant *kahvehane* (coffee house) culture developed in Mecca, Cairo, Istanbul and the cosmopolitan city of Aleppo. Coffee houses quickly

became an important centre for the exchange of information, and for intellectual and artistic activities. As a result of increasing popularity and trade, Mocha, the name of the legendary harbour city in Yemen – at the time the major hub for the worldwide export of coffee – gradually became synonymous with coffee itself. At first the clerics condemned coffee as “devil’s drink” when it arrived in Venice in 1615, but eventually coffee was accepted with the pope’s approval (Pendergrast, 2010, p8). *Al-qahwa*, “the wine of Islam”, became known as coffee or café to Europeans. By the end of the 17th century, coffee had become increasingly popular all across Europe. Here too, coffee houses were quickly becoming centres of social activity and communication. As demand for the beverage continued to spread, there was increased competition to cultivate coffee outside of Arabia.

Trying to hold on to their monopoly, the Turkish Ottoman authorities had banned the export of live coffee beans or coffee trees from Yemen. According to legend, the first successful attempt to smuggle coffee beans out of Yemen was undertaken in the 1600s by a Muslim pilgrim from India named Baba Budan. As the legend goes, he taped seven seeds to his chest to try and smuggle them out of the country, and on his return initiated the cultivation of coffee in the South of India, in the mountains of Karnataka (Pendergrast, 2010, p7). The coffee seeds he planted in his backyard grew and later spread all over the hills, which have been named ‘Baba Budan Hills’ after him (India Brand Equity Foundation, no date). Until today, Baba Budan is revered for his initiative of ‘trans-planting’ coffee to India and is worshipped as Sufi saint by Hindus and Muslims in the region. Taking notice of the favourable climatic conditions for coffee, the British later established big commercial coffee plantations in Southern India during their colonial rule. The cultivation of coffee in India has since increased and spread to other regions, and currently India is home to the world’s seventh-largest coffee industry (Wild, 2005, p98).

The Dutch are said to have transported a coffee tree from Yemen to Holland as early as 1616. It is through seeds of this tree that they began the cultivation of coffee in Ceylon in the latter part of the 17th century. This was followed by the transplantation of coffee trees to Sumatra, Bali and other islands, which were part of the Dutch

colonies. The coffee production in Java eventually surpassed the Turkish Ottoman trade via Mocha: Like *Mocha* before, *Java* became synonymous for coffee. For many years to come, the Dutch East India Company (VOR) controlled the trade of coffee. In an early example of exploitation under European colonialism, “they introduced an expensive commodity to a suitable territory under their control, cultivated it intensively, and had the plantations worked by locals at the lowest possible rate – in the Dutch case, for nothing, through a quota system imposed on the islanders.”¹⁴⁸ (Wild, 2005, p99). According to the historian Mark Pendergrast (2010, p17), “by 1750 the coffee tree grew on five continents.”

Following the Dutch example, the French and British also started to experiment with cultivation of coffee and (more or less successfully) established coffee plantations in the Caribbean. Coffee cultivation in the colonies required intensive labour. In instances where indigenous labour did not prove sufficient, the transplantation and enslavement of plants was followed by the forced displacement of humans, i.e. the import of African slaves. By the mid-18th century, coffee cultivation had become an important part of the colonial enterprise in the Southern hemisphere. The following quote by Karl Marx ([1848], cited in Pendergrast, 2010, p21) is a telling illustration of the intricate relations between capitalism and the plantation system: “You believe perhaps, gentlemen, that the production of coffee or sugar is the natural destiny of the West Indies. Two centuries ago, nature, which does not trouble herself about commerce, had planted neither sugarcane nor coffee trees there.” Despite its anthropocentric undertones, this quote shows Marx’s concern with the natural environment in capitalist configurations such as coffee or sugarcane plantations.

Coffee production in Brazil quickly grew to be the most successful in the world, while relying largely on slave labour. Arguably, it was due to the economic force of the coffee bean that Brazil was to be the last country in Latin America to abolish slavery in 1888. Building on its profits through slavery (followed by the import of cheap

¹⁴⁸ The widely acclaimed autobiographical novel *Max Havelaar* by Eduard Douwes Dekker, first published in 1860 (under the pseudonym Multatuli), sheds light onto the exploitation of indigenous labour by the Dutch coffee traders.

labour from Europe), today Brazil has remained one of the largest coffee-exporting countries. While multinational corporations have replaced plantations, precarious working conditions and labour exploitation persist. Coffee is currently the second most traded commodity in the world and is rarely traded fairly.¹⁴⁹

In a similar vein to the rhizomatic structure of the lecture-performance (see appendix), I have now provided a fragmented account of coffee's dispersal through its trans-plantation across the globe. Following coffee's migratory trajectory, I briefly traced its trade as commodity, which exposes the link between coffee cultivation, slavery, the plantation system and industrial capitalism. That being said, I have to state that the *naturecultural* history or rather histories of coffee are far more complex than I would be able to discuss in the framework of this study. I hope that this brief historical outline has sufficed to give an idea of coffee's role within the complex relation "between the microlevel or everyday, and the macrolevel or structural" (Coole and Frost, 2010, p32). Reflecting on the lecture-performance *Kahvehane*, this section aimed to take the reader on a journey alongside coffee, exploring its cultural history from the spatio-temporal perspective of the 'here and now' in relation to the 'there and then,' moving across the oceans, around the world and in-between being, becoming and belonging.

3.3.2. Thinking (through) coffee

As we have seen, coffee's history is the history of a trans-plant: a history marked by processes of alienation and de-territorialisation. This phenomenon of long-distance relationships between localities of production and consumption, i.e. the local and the global, is characteristic of the impact of globalisation, which according to John Tomlinson (1999, p123) "does clearly undermine a close *material* relationship between the provenance of food and locality."¹⁵⁰ Coming back to the 'Turk's drink' in the German folksong and associations of coffee with Turkish-ness and coffee's

¹⁴⁹ There are notable exceptions including self-sufficient coffee farmers and fairtrade initiatives.

¹⁵⁰ Also see Probyn, 2000, p13.

appropriation by Turkish nationalism, it seems ironic that currently most ‘Turkish’ coffee brands are in fact made from coffee beans grown in Brazil.

At this point I should probably out myself as a ‘Turkish coffee’ drinker. Here in London I usually buy a common brand, such as *Kuru Kahveci Mehmet efendi*, vacuum-packed, in a Turkish, Cypriot or Greek grocery store. It is the extremely fine grind that makes this style of coffee differ from other types of coffee powder.

‘Turkish’ coffee is prepared in a *cezve*, or in Arabic *ibrik*, which is a small pot, usually of copper, with a long handle. When I moved to London, I brought my *cezve* with me from Austria. This handmade copper *cezve* has travelled with me for more than a decade. I think I might have bought it somewhere at a market in Turkey, or perhaps in a Turkish shop in Vienna.

Everyday rituals relating to food and drink enable people living in the diaspora to perform and embody their sense of belonging to a specific culture of origin. Similar to other edible or drinkable matter, coffee too is intensely linked to memory and identity – individual and collective. As a popular Turkish folk saying goes, “a cup of coffee will be remembered for forty years”. Clearly, it is not the coffee per se which will be remembered, but rather the relation to those we are sharing the coffee with. Considering this relational aspect, isn’t it strange that the coffee-plant itself or those who planted, picked and processed the coffee will rarely enter our consciousness? If we became more aware how “our bodies as complex assemblages [are] connected to a wide range of other assemblages” (Probyn, 2000, p17), perhaps we could look beyond an ethnocentric and anthropocentric approach to belonging. I will come back to this.

For now, let me briefly return to the process of making Turkish coffee: To prepare the coffee *à la turca*, you measure the quantity of water with a small ceramic coffee cup, called *fincan* – one cup per two spoons of coffee powder will do. You can add sugar, according to your taste. You then stir the mixture of coffee powder, cold water and (optional) sugar in the *cezve*, and heat it, preferably on a gas cooker. As the foam comes up, just before boiling point, you take the *cezve* off the stove. You equally

distribute the foam to the coffee cups, before you pour the remaining coffee. The thickness of the foam and the colour of the coffee are seen as indicators of its quality.

The designation for the colour brown in Turkish is testimony to coffee's important role in history and its firm integration into everyday life: brown literally translates to *kahve-rengi*: "coffee-coloured". Coffee is also a prominent aspect of Turkish hospitality, mirrored in various rituals. For instance, a woman has to prepare coffee for the suitor who comes to her family's house to ask for her hand. According to custom she has to then secretly put some salt into his coffee and serve it to him. Depending on how this situation unfolds their marriage may be agreed upon or not. If this description was too obscure and I assume that it was, this means that he has to pretend to enjoy drinking the gruesome salty coffee broth. Smile and compliment on the coffee despite of the salty taste. Do not puke. Swallow it and smile. This humiliating and painful performance in front of the entire family (his and hers) gives a sense of the commitment the groom would be ready to undertake. How much is he prepared to suffer and endure the salty sides of the relationship? In contrast, the 'daughter of the house' and his potential future bride has to show off her hospitality skills, the knowledge how to entertain and serve guests: The etiquette how to prepare and serve coffee.¹⁵¹

As becomes evident through this example as in the turns and twists in coffee's colonial history of trans-plantation, coffee is not just a substance to be consumed. Coffee has the power to influence or alter the course of events on the macro as on the micro level: for instance, in this case, coffee (and salt, as I should add) and the way it is served and consumed, can have direct effect on the possibility of an engagement. To zoom out into a larger picture, as I have briefly outlined in the previous section, the establishment of coffee plantations has had severe consequences for the biodiversity and for humans who were colonised and enslaved

¹⁵¹ The scope of this study does not allow me to explore or critique the heteronormative and patriarchal gender dynamics further; to put it briefly: as much as I am fond of the underlying symbolism, I think this tradition could do with a reform.

as plantation workers; as Donna Haraway (Stedelijk Museum, 2017) reminds us, the 'Plantationocene' is not a thing of the past, it is on-going.

As "drinkable matter" coffee operates "inside and alongside humankind" (Bennett, 2010, pxii). Already the Sufis in Yemen appreciated the power of coffee. Everyone who drinks coffee can relate to its power, through how our bodies and mind feel more energised from the impact of caffeine on our nervous system. As such, coffee could be regarded as an *actant* in Latour's sense (Bennett, 2010, pviii). The "Prince of Networks," as he has been called by Graham Harman (2009), the theorist credited with the "invention" of object-oriented philosophy, Latour (2004, p237) defines *actant* as "a term from semiotics covering both humans and nonhumans." His concept of *actant* derives from or at times is used interchangeably with the term *actor* which he describes as "any entity that modifies another entity in a trial" (Latour, 2004, p237). In Jane Bennett's (2010, p9) interpretation, an actant is "neither a subject nor an object but an 'intervener'." Translated from Latin, *intervener* would mean something like 'the one who comes in-between' – the composition of words signals a movement (*venire* – coming) and a spatial disposition (*inter* – in between). Food and drink – 'edible matter' – is a prime example of an *actant*, i.e. an *intervener* or what I would call a *trans-formant*. What is outside becomes inside, before it becomes outside again. Every *body* and every *thing* is trans-formed in this process of consumption and subsequent digestion/defecation/elimination. This may sound banal, but this assemblage forms the basis of our existence: I am not I. I only exist in relation with the Other. As we have already seen in the last chapter, the most fundamental relation we enter with another actant is created through breathing. Air: our invisible Other.¹⁵²

The notion of agency and vitality is central to this understanding of matter. If following this approach, we acknowledge the agency of nonhuman matter, we have to develop a new understanding of what it means to be human and what it means to live not on this planet but with, through and in relation to our planet: the earth. Expanding this vitalist approach from humans to '*earth*' others and matter demands

¹⁵² See section 1 of chapter 2.

that we shift our emphasis from the agency of our own species, the human, to relation: to understand and acknowledge that we are all entangled in a web of relations or 'networks,' whether or not we are human or not; to acknowledge that "the locus of political responsibility is a human-non human assemblage" (Bennett, 2010, p36): we belong to the earth, but the earth does not belong to us.



Fig. 3.18 'Making Of' *Trans Plantations* (2017-18). Clare Twomey teaching me how to make a press-mould to cast coffee beans in porcelain.



Fig. 3.19 'Making Of' *Trans Plantations* (2017-18). Press-mould to cast coffee beans in porcelain.



Fig. 3.20 'Making Of' *Trans Plantations* (2017-18). Press-mould to cast coffee beans in porcelain.

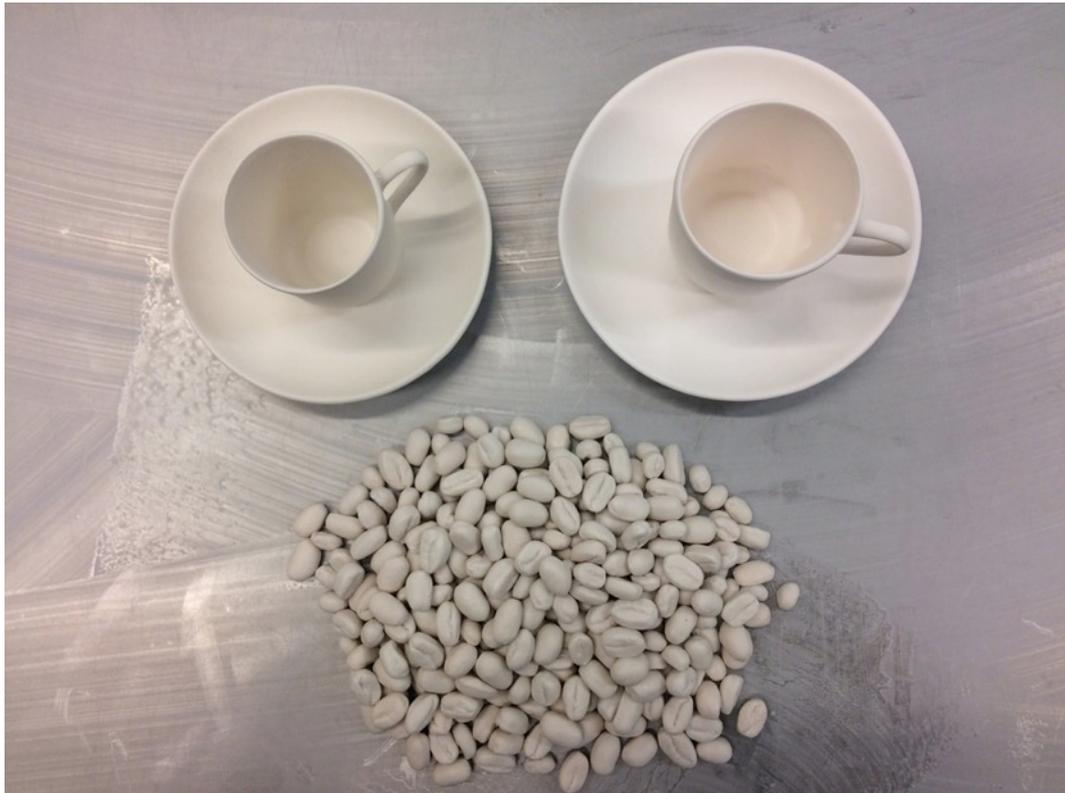


Fig. 3.21 'Making Of' *Trans Plantations* (2017-18).



Fig 3.22 'Making Of' *Trans Plantations*. Slip cast porcelain cups and saucers.

3.4. The secret of the earth

Approaching belonging as movement between being and longing, nature and culture, traversing the local and the global in a nomadic becoming-planetary, I have proposed to look at objects or matter as embodiments of memories in the context of diasporic art. Objects and materials travel with us when we move from one place or country to another. In turn, we are moved by them as they remind us of and connect us to other times and places. As Laura Marks (2000, p80) puts it “objects are not inert and mute but they tell stories and describe trajectories.” This resonates with Michael Dash’s (in Glissant, 1992, pxxxv) interpretation of the role of objects and memory in Glissant’s literary œuvre – as he writes, “it is not the rational mind that restores the past, [but rather] the past resides within material objects that only release their hidden meanings when encountered imaginatively or sensuously.” Connecting these thoughts to my previous discussions of matter, in this section I set out to explore the meaning and agency of ceramics as material in the context of diasporic and global contemporary art. Alongside an exploration of my own practice, Ai Weiwei’s iconic installation *Sunflower Seeds* (2010) will serve as case study to further develop my analysis of our relation to ‘earth’ others and the earth itself.

Similar to Mona Hatoum, who recently collaborated with Palestinian embroiderers in the making of her installation piece *Twelve Windows* (2012–13), the Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei has reclaimed craft as material for contemporary art practice. Hatoum is based in London, yet she travels extensively for international exhibitions and residencies. Apart from her more recent engagement with her Palestinian heritage through a collaboration with Palestinian refugee women in Lebanon,¹⁵³ she has also worked on crafts projects with local women in various other contexts and realised collaborative pieces in Egypt, Jordan and Brazil.¹⁵⁴ In contrast, Chinese-born artist Ai Weiwei, who spent his formative years in New York, does not

¹⁵³ The collaboration was facilitated by the NGO Inaash, the Association for the Development of Palestinian Camps, which provides work for Palestinian refugee women who live in camps in Lebanon (Assche, 2016, p28).

¹⁵⁴ Collaborative works include: *Variations of a Theme* (2006), *Still Life* (2008), and more recently *Sonhando Acordado* (2014) which was presented at her solo exhibition *Mona Hatoum* (2014-15) at the Estação Pinacoteca in São Paulo.

live in the diaspora but has developed a fascination with Chinese traditional arts and crafts upon his return from the US to China in the early 1990s (Bingham, 2010, p22). He had to become a “local foreigner”¹⁵⁵ in order to appreciate what he would call ‘Chinese culture’.

Upon his return to Beijing, Ai’s growing interest in the cultural significance of ceramics and in the meaning of traditional Chinese arts and crafts for the contemporary context led to the realization of a number of ceramics-related works, such as the photographic documentation of his act of smashing an antique object *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* (1995), or his manipulation of an antique artefact in *Han Dynasty Urn With Coca-Cola Logo* (1994). In these artworks, he employed Chinese culture in the form of cultural artefacts or antiques as ‘readymades’ for his acts of manipulation or destruction, aiming to challenge and question their meaning for contemporary Chinese society (Bingham, 2010, p14). While these works are rather provocative, bold and simple in their message, his monumental installation *Sunflower Seeds* (2010), a Tate Turbine Hall commission, in comparison comes across as a more respectful and subtle engagement with the ancient artistic tradition of porcelain craft in China, conjuring up multiple layers of meaning.

3.4.1. From China to the world

For the Tate Turbine Hall commission, Ai Weiwei proposed to cover the entire floor of this gigantic space with tons of tiny objects: reproductions of sunflower seeds cast in porcelain, (hand-) made in China. Initially visitors were allowed to enter the monumental installation of over one hundred million porcelain sunflower seeds. They could physically interact with the exhibition; touch the objects and walk, sit or even roll their bodies in midst of the vast ocean of tiny porcelain objects, which looked like real life-size sunflower seeds.¹⁵⁶ Through this direct tactile engagement, the

¹⁵⁵ I borrow the expression from Shabnam Shabazi (personal communication).

¹⁵⁶ Soon after the opening however the direct access to the exhibition had to be closed due to the development of ceramic dust, which led to health and safety concerns. For further information see Chayka, 2010.

handcrafted porcelain seeds physically connected visitors in London to their place of fabrication and provenance: China, or to be more specific, the Chinese porcelain capital Jingdezhen, in Southern China.



Fig. 3.23 The Unilever Series: Ai Weiwei. *Sunflower Seeds*. Tate Modern (2010). Photo: Dominic Alves. Dominic's pics, flickr.com (CC BY 2.0).

Ai, who regularly employs a fixed number of specialist assistants and craftspeople in his studio, had hired over 1,600 people in Jingdezhen for the realization of this enormous project for the Turbine Hall commission. Using hundreds of moulds, skilled artisans cast and reproduced over a hundred million life-size sunflower seeds using locally sourced porcelain. Specialists in ceramics painting subsequently decorated the unglazed objects in small-scale workshops. Through their masterful application of four precise brushstrokes in dark grey colour, one on each side, the appearance of the translucent porcelain seeds was transformed to resemble that of real sunflower seeds. The entire process of production took place in Jingdezhen: beginning with the sourcing of the raw material – porcelain, continuing with mould-making, casting, firing, and finally decorating and packaging. According to the artist, the entire project took approximately two and a half years to complete.

The traditional techniques of manufacturing employed in the production of Ai's *Sunflower Seeds* have a long history in China. It seems poignant that the location of production, Jingdezhen, has been the centre of ceramic manufacturing for more than 1,500 years. Ai Weiwei has described porcelain production, which is regarded as "the highest art form" in China, as "almost synonymous with Chinese culture" (Ai to O'Neill-Butler, L., 2008). I would argue that due to past trade relations between Europe and Asia, the association of porcelain with China and its admiration as the highest form of Chinese art is even stronger outside of China. The massive scale of Ai's installation feels like a monument (albeit composed of millions of tiny fragments) to the enormous quantities of porcelain which were exported from China to the West in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Bingham, 2010, p23) and as such the piece could be perceived as a monumental sculpture that re-traces the relation between China and the world: in other words, a gigantic assemblage.

Before the fashion for fine porcelain spread to Europe, China had already been exporting porcelain to the then Ottoman Empire via the silk route. Porcelain became so popular that the Ottoman Court commanded local artisans and ceramics manufacturers to imitate Chinese porcelain (which proved impossible but led to some interesting results). The trend for porcelain soon also reached Europe following the establishment of trade routes with Asia, and as a consequence of the East India Company's imports of tea. By the 18th century, porcelain ware from China had become increasingly popular and sought after in Europe too. Similar to ceramics workshops in the Ottoman Empire, potters in post-Renaissance Europe were desperately aspiring to create materials that would rival the condition of fine white porcelain from China (See Rawson, [1971], 1984, p26). However, the exact ingredients of porcelain were kept secret by the Chinese, who dominated the market with products that were especially designed for export to the West (Munger and Frelinghuysen, 2003). The etymology of *China*, which has since become synonymous for porcelain in English, and *Çini*, the word designating ceramics in the Turkish language, gives testimony to this historical connection: *Çin* – meaning China in Turkish.

The transportation of tons of porcelain ware in container ships from China to London for the Turbine Hall commission clearly evokes these historical trade connections, as well as pointing to the contemporary context of (industrial) mass production in China – the largest export economy in the world. At the same time, the lengthy process of production calls into question currently pervasive associations connected with the label “made in China”: like most electronics, textiles and apparel one would find at any market, the millions of sunflower seeds covering the floor of the Turbine Hall have been mass-produced by cheap labour in China, a location far away from London. Yet, in contrast to industrially fabricated ware, each sunflower seed is a unique object that was individually handcrafted, using traditional Chinese artisan technique.

In my view, the aspect of craft and skilled specialist labour seems to indicate a critique of modernity. I can also sense an underlying ironic commentary on Europeans’ preconceived ideas of the label “made in China” as a signifier of industrially mass-produced junk ware. As I already mentioned, in terms of material the installation evokes the significance of porcelain for Chinese material culture. It feels like a monument composed of tiny fragments, which carry porcelain’s memory and relation to its locality of provenance. Through their shipment to the UK they re-trace porcelain’s historic role in the formation of China’s relation to the rest of the world.

While I have engaged with the meaning of porcelain as material, I have not yet considered the meaning of the form it was given by the artist: Why sunflower seeds? Why millions of them? In the exhibition catalogue we learn that sunflower seeds have a special significance for the artist, evoking memories of his childhood. Following his accounts, snacking on sunflower seeds was one of the few pleasures he had growing up in deprivation and poverty under Mao’s regime (Bingham, 2010, p20). We learn that in China in-shell sunflower seeds are popular street food. The seeds are roasted in salt and sold as a snack. I remember this snack from my childhood in Turkey: the repetitive activity of cracking the shells with your teeth, eating the seed and spitting out the hull is a pleasant pastime while you sit together and chat to neighbours or friends. A pile of empty shells is all that remains of the snack – I like

Ai's description of the empty shells as "ephemeral traces of social activity".¹⁵⁷ In a similar manner, the seeds cast in porcelain could be regarded as a trace of the 'real thing,' that is of 'real' sunflower seeds. Although the objects are 'fake' naturalistic imitations of plant-derived matter, they bear the trace of the real object and as such evoke memories: in the Chinese context individual and collective memories of snacking, linked to rare moments of pleasure in the context of poverty, in particular under Mao's regime.

Each tiny porcelain seed has been through a process of transformation: porcelain cast into a mould that was formed after the shape of a sunflower seed. The porcelain object, which was created through the mould, was then fired at 1,300 degrees C in order to achieve the strength and durability, which is characteristic for porcelain. The aspect of durability is most important in terms of functionality. However, functionality does not seem to be important for this piece. On the contrary, a reproduction of a sunflower seed in porcelain could be considered to be a completely useless object. It is too small to be decorative and, unlike fake plastic flowers from China, it does not have any practical function. Is it this lack of functionality that would distinguish it from craft and make it into an art object?

To me, it seems that rather than seeking to distinguish art from craft, Ai Weiwei's work resists this stereotypical categorisation of art versus craft altogether. Reclaiming craft, i.e. traditional skill-based practices, such as ceramics, which used be marginalised as 'craft' in a contemporary art context (Buszek, 2011; Roberts, 2011), *Sunflower Seeds* explores the possibilities and potential meanings of ceramics as material in relation to the history of capitalism and global trade. By responding to audiences' preconceived notions of China (in its double sense, referring both to the country and to porcelain), the work opens up new ways to engage with what we

¹⁵⁷ Ai Weiwei, unpublished proposal for Tate Modern Unilever Series, March 2010. Cited in Tate (no date). Ai WeiWei: Sunflower Seeds 2010.

could call 'Chinese material culture'. Being reclaimed in that way, ceramics has the agency to challenge conventional ways of classifying material and makers.¹⁵⁸

3.4.2. Thinking (through) clay

Compared to other types of clay, such as earthenware or stoneware, porcelain substance is regarded as precious material. As we have seen, it is historically associated with luxury, linked to trade with China, to financial value and to wealth. Its white colour derives from its high kaolin content. Porcelain is the purest, most durable and strongest of all clay bodies. It is fired at very high temperatures, which raises the financial costs of its production. Due to its symbolism and connotations with luxury, it is easy to forget that ultimately porcelain is just another type of clay. As such it is related to the earth, from which all clay ultimately derives (Rawson, [1971], 1984, p14).

Clay is composed of particles of dirt or mud, which can often be found along riverbanks and valleys. In short, the material derives from weathering rocks and organic material. Besides aluminium silicate, and other particles, feldspar is counted as the essential component of the decomposed "mother rocks", from which clay derives (Rawson, [1971], 1984, p23). According to Philip Rawson's book on ceramics, the granite and gneiss rocks "constitute about 85% of the earth's surface" ([1971],1984, p23). In other words, most of the earth's crust is clay. Hence, working with or engaging with the squishy and malleable material that we call clay connects us directly to the earth. In fact, pottery is said to be one of the oldest crafts; clay is at the base of various (religious) myths about the creation of mankind and life. Clay has been used to make pots, containers, artefacts, urns, pipes, plates, tiles, cups, bowls, vases, pipes, bricks, toys – and on could include almost any object which would be

¹⁵⁸ Lacey Jane Roberts (2011) essay *Put Your Thing Down, Flip It, and Reverse It: Reimagining Craft Identities Using Tactics of Queer Theory* provides a more in-depth discussion of the potential of using queer strategies to reinvent and advance craft and its criticism. She states that "[t]hrough the dismantling and reconfiguration of its own stereotypes, craft is positioned as a potent agent to challenge the very systems that create and proliferate stereotypes to maintain hierarchies of visual and material culture" (Roberts, 2011, pp.247-248).

made from plastic today – since prehistoric times. Most of us are still very much connected to clay through the daily rituals of eating and drinking. As ceramicist Claudia Clare writes, as such clay “can be a powerfully resonant material” (2016, p107).

Similar to coffee, which undergoes a series of transformations culminating in the process of roasting, clay too is a shape shifter: organic material that is transformed through interaction with heat. Ceramic ware is usually fired twice. The first stage is called *bisque*. In a second firing the ware is glazed. Through glazing the ware is made waterproof. Before glazing, the fired body is raw and porous: baked earth, *terra cotta* in Italian. The glaze seals the surface. Depending on the variety, mixture and firing temperature, the glaze will have a glossy or matte finish. Glaze, from late Middle English, *glase*, is linguistically and materially related to glass. The quality, aesthetics and functionality of ceramic ware largely depends on the glaze, which is why potters and ceramics workshops used to keep their glaze recipes secret.

The cups and saucers I imported for *Kahvehane* were made from low-firing locally sourced clay in Kütahya. Kütahya is known to have been one of the leading centres for ceramics production in the Ottoman Empire. Amongst famous pieces from the area, which are today part of the V&A Museum’s ceramics collection, are coffee cups and saucers. As innovations in material culture are often influenced by changes in consumption and lifestyle, unsurprisingly the production of coffee cups and saucers went hand in hand with the discovery and import of coffee beans from Yemen and the increasing popularity of coffee throughout the Ottoman Empire and Europe (Crowe, 2011).

Today, the hand-painted tiles or pottery which have a tradition dating back several centuries in Kütahya, are mainly produced for the tourist market. By chance I found a company in Kütahya that produced *bisque* ware. Their coffee cups and saucers were very reasonably priced, probably intended for hobby ceramicists. After a series of negotiations, I could convince the company, which normally did not embark in international trade, to ship them to the UK. The ware arrived in four cardboard boxes.

The “fragile” stickers in Turkish pointed to the delicate ware. The boxes contained 120 bisque cups and saucers, made in Kütahya, Turkey.

By importing these cups from Turkey, I imported part of its soil to the United Kingdom. The ‘Turkish’ clay particles resisted my attempts to seal them. Multiple attempts to glaze the cups with English, Italian or French glazes failed miserably. The materials proved incompatible: the ware cracked in the kiln. Desperate to find a solution, I called the manufacturer in Kütahya, who had supplied the cups and saucers. He agreed to send me a list of ingredients, however he was reluctant to share the glaze recipe with me. He insisted that the glaze (recipe) was a regional secret. As last resort, I had to go to Turkey myself, to purchase the original glaze as ready-mixed powder by the same manufacturer. Carrying seven kilos of white powder in my suitcase, I was lucky not to be stopped at the airport. In possession of the right (secret) mix of matter, upon my return I was able to glaze the cups and completed my project without further complications.



Fig. 3.24 'Making Of' *Kahvehane Kongresspark* (2016). Kütahya ceramic ware cracked in kiln due to glaze incompatibility.

Through this experience, it suddenly dawned on me why the word for glaze in Turkish is *sır* – which has a double meaning and also signifies 'the secret'. A ceramicist's skill and success mostly depend on his (or her) knowledge of the behaviour of materials. It takes a lot of effort and countless experiments based on trial and error to learn how specific materials interact with each other: for instance, to find out, which glaze would be the best fit for what type of clay fired at what temperature, etc. Considering this, it is not surprising that local craftspeople in Kütahya refused to share their recipe for *sır*, i.e. their recipe for glaze – their secret – with me. De-centring this anthropocentric approach, I would propose that ultimately the specific composition of ingredients in the glaze could be called 'the secret of the earth'.



Fig. 3.25 'Making Of' *Kahvehane Kongresspark* (2016). Edition of 100 glazed Kütahya ceramic cups and saucers and nine ceramic decal designs. Photo: Deniz Soezen.

3.5. Becoming earth

While I am pondering what clay has taught me about the secrets of the earth, both as matter and the planet I happen to be born into and belong to as earthling, a group of seagulls suddenly disrupts the calm, chatting excitedly. *Ke-oh keee-oh keee-oh kah kaaaah kaah kaah kaaaah*. In fact, I am not sure whether chatting is the right term. According to Google, in literary English they would 'screech' or 'squawk'. In German, we would say that they are 'laughing' and, if I remember correctly, in Turkish they 'scream'. Whatever we may choose to call the sounds they produce, I feel as if they are trying to warn me (or rather each other) of something. Probably this is an alarm about the coming rain. Something in the composition of the skies and wind must have told them that the weather is shifting.

If following Kohn (2013), we regard the ability to interpret the world, as a marker of selfhood, we could say that in the act of producing these sounds, the seagulls are expressing their selves. In turn, my 'self' is connecting to them and to the broader world, by interpreting their self-expression. This understanding of life as "a sign process" (Kohn, 2013, p74), with the self "both the origin and the product of an

interpretive process” (Kohn, 2013, p75) enables us to approach our relation to other species as based on the fact that “we all live with and through signs” (Kohn, 2013, p9). As I have shown in this chapter, this understanding is crucial to overcome the anthropocentric approach and dualistic thinking which conceives us, the humans, as separate and distinct from nonhumans.

Inspired by different lines of thinking the world beyond established categories, such as nature and culture, human and nonhuman, the ideas put forward in this chapter have sought to open and reinscribe the concept of belonging beyond our human species. Aiming to decolonise the anthropocentric approach towards belonging through a discussion of the way we relate to objects (material culture), plants and (edible) matter, I have combined feminist and (new) materialist critiques of binary concepts with ‘Amerindian thinking’ and Kohn’s (2013) “anthropology beyond the human” in my analysis of contemporary art practices.

The point of departure was my own practice and research regarding the *naturecultural* history of coffee and ceramics/clay. However, given the vast array of artistic mediums and differing implications of different matter, it seemed important to extend my research to other artworks, which allowed me to explore the issue from different directions. Hence, after an extensive introduction to the conceptual framework in the first section, the chapter has continued in three movements, or sections; each of them developing an analysis of art through the lens of the aforementioned theoretical frameworks, proposing to extend our thinking of belonging beyond the human. My own practice was the driving force for the research. In addition to this, Mona Hatoum’s *Present Tense* (1996), and Ai Weiwei’s *Sunflower Seeds* (2010) served as case studies for my investigation of the agency of matter, exploring different ways of how art could challenge an anthropocentric conception of belonging. The analysis of the artworks with regards to the aspect of materiality – thinking (through) olive oil soap, thinking (through) coffee and thinking (through) ceramics/clay – aimed to shift our awareness from an anthropocentric approach to belonging towards thinking beyond dualities and an appreciation of our inter-connectedness with ‘*earth*’ *others* and the earth itself.

This explorative journey began with an analysis of Mona Hatoum's use of olive oil soap in *Present Tense* (1996). Thinking through olive oil soap, I explored the multiple meanings of this particular plant-derived object, which I proposed to regard as a historical witness, an agent of resistance (in the shape of an olive tree) and a relic in the context of the Palestinian diaspora and, in more general terms, as a product of our species', i.e. humans' relation to plants. Focusing my analysis on the material aspect of the installation, I made a case for how Hatoum's work traverses the site-specific context of Palestine, tracing the connections between our personal, planetary and ultimately political relation to Braidottian 'earth' others and the earth.

Building on this post-human and multi-species approach to belonging, this section was followed by an investigation of the agency and vitality of edible and drinkable matter as culturally specific, yet universal *actant* (Latour, 2004). Based on my own work, *Kahvehane Kongresspark* (2016), I re-traced coffee's history as global transplant, which I discussed in relation to the 'Plantationocene' (Haraway et al., 2016). Through the reflection of my practice, which was based on my investigation of coffee's complex *naturecultural* histories, and the re-visiting of certain rituals of coffee consumption, I considered coffee's agency in the micro and macro scales. The research has enabled me to come to a deeper understanding of our entanglement with nonhuman matter and co-dependence with 'earth' others through our daily consumption of food and drink. Through the example of coffee, I demonstrated how edible matter connects us emotionally and physically through our bodies to a wider network of assemblages, transcending time and space.

The aspect of relation and our material connection to the earth was further developed in my analysis of the meaning of porcelain in Ai Weiwei's *Sunflower Seeds* (2010) and the related research about ceramics/clay as an artistic medium. Discussing Ai's work with regards to craft and in relation to the history and reception of porcelain as the "highest form of Chinese art," I proposed to read his installation of millions of sunflower seeds as a monument to China's (trade) relations to the rest of the world. With regards to the aspect of form, I discussed how the porcelain copy or trace of 'real' sunflower seeds seemed to evoke another assemblage: the one we

enter through our interaction with edible matter. This, in turn, implied that the porcelain seeds have the agency to re-activate individual as well as collective memories standing for a more intimate relation between humans and matter.

Ultimately my engagement with porcelain and clay as a type of mud, led me back to the source: the earth. Reflecting on my own experiences gained in the process of glazing ceramics, in particular my encounter of the incompatibility of certain materials, I shared how I came to appreciate what I would call “the secret of the earth”: the knowledge about the vital force of matter and the complex web of relations in ecological assemblages. My failed attempts of glazing the cups and saucers which I had imported from Turkey, made me come to an understanding of the world “as active subject”, rather than “a resource to be mapped and appropriated” (Haraway, 1999, p184).

When the ware cracked and imploded in the kiln as a result of my attempts to seal the ceramic material with incompatible glaze powder particles, this implied that there was a force at work which was larger than myself. Similarly, the development of potentially toxic quantities of ceramic dust in Ai Weiwei’s exhibition that led to the Tate’s decision to close public access to *Sunflower Seeds* seems to point to an agency of matter beyond the human. Inspired by Haraway’s (1999, p184) thinking, I would propose to read both instances as a manifestation of “the world’s independent sense of humour.” In other words, acknowledging the agency of nonhuman actors may help us to arrive at an understanding that “we are not in charge of the world” (Haraway, 1999, p184).

This thought beautifully manifests itself in Mona Hatoum’s work *Jardin Suspendu* (2008). The title of the work translates to ‘Hanging Garden’ in reference to the ‘Hanging Gardens of Babylon’ in what is today’s Iraq. The installation is made up of a structure of hundreds of sandbags, which are stacked together to resemble barricades in warzones. The association with “temporary wartime architecture” (Tate, no date) is subverted by the fact that the jute sacks have been filled with earth and

seeds.¹⁵⁹ As the seeds begin to sprout, the grass and weeds slowly transform the eight-meter-long structure of sandbags into a wild garden, highlighting the agency of plants, their power to take over – signalling renewal and hope for the future of our planet.



Fig. 3.26 Mona Hatoum: *Hanging Garden* (2008) Jute bags, earth and grass. Installation Kunsthalle Wien public space Karlsplatz, Vienna 2009. Dimensions variable © Mona Hatoum. Courtesy KÖR and Kunsthalle Wien. Photo: Silke Eberspächer.

By proposing to approach the issue of belonging from a non-anthropocentric perspective, I do not wish to disavow or reject my or our belonging to the human species per se. Rather, I have proposed to re-think our approach towards belonging with regards to our relation to ‘*earth*’ others. In my quest for strategies that challenge binary thinking, I (re-)turned to anthropology in regard to recent efforts to decolonise the discipline. Considering Viveiros de Castro’s ([2009], 2014) notion of ‘Amerindian perspectivism,’ and Kohn’s (2013) related project of developing an “anthropology beyond the human,” I asked what we could learn from indigenous ways of imagining

¹⁵⁹ Please note that while the Tate’s website dates the work 2008-2010, Mona Hatoum confirmed the correct date of the artwork as 2008.

and thinking the world, to decentre an anthropocentric approach and to arrive at an understanding of the fundamental connection and similarity between our self and other selves, as differing in 'nature' but united by 'culture'.

Integrating different theories, I have argued that we need to shift our focus to relation, in order to transcend a dualistic conception of nature/culture, human/non-human, self and world so as to understand and appreciate our connection and co-dependence with other '*earth*' *others*, animals, plants and other organic or inorganic matter. Following Braidotti's nomadic philosophy of becoming, this "introduces the issue of becoming into a planetary or worldwide dimension, the earth being not one element among others, but rather that which brings them all together" (Braidotti, 2006, p97). Once we pass and transform to another state, which we call death, we will ultimately merge with "this eternal flow of becomings" (Braidotti, 2006, p252) – the eternity of life: becoming earth.

4. The Art of Un-belonging: momentary conclusions

Embarking on this practice-based research has been a veritable journey. A journey that has taken me physically to different geographical places and mentally opened up theoretical terrains I had only heard of from afar. My research strongly built on my previous work and artistic engagement with the question of belonging. When I conceived of the project, I thought I already knew where the journey as artist-researcher of 'the Art of Un-belonging' would eventually take me. I am grateful to say that I was proved wrong, as otherwise this could have been quite a dull exercise, comparable to an all-inclusive round-trip on a quiet lake with fixed itinerary and pre-ordered menus. Although my research journey started off a bit like that, steering in safe and familiar waters, approximately half way through, the research changed its course and my expedition became more akin to a voyage into the open seas, where I dared to take a leap into the unknown: it became an exploration with no beginning and no end, akin to the errantry of a nomad with no land in sight...a voyage taking me through unknown waters, until I eventually washed up on the most beautiful shore, only to be swallowed (again) by another wave that dragged me back into the sea...(and the journey continues...). Yet although I abolished my initial route plan and preconceived linear trajectory half way through the journey to navigate new routes in deeper waters, there was always a compass: the practice. The practice became the guide for my research. Its course in turn was informed by my theoretical findings. But before we drown in these nautical metaphors: Let me go back and start at the beginning, even if there is no end in sight...

Taking my position as 'halfie' (Abu-Lughod, 1991) and diasporic artist as point of departure, the thesis posed the question how artists could respond (more) critically to the pigeon-holing of artists according to their regional, cultural or ethnic backgrounds and the turbo-capitalist marketing of difference ((Mercer, 1999; Maharaj, 2004; Araeen, 2005; Haq, 2014 and Fusco, 2017) in contemporary art. Following this question, the practice-based research set out to explore and develop artistic strategies that destabilise fixed notions of belonging and identity and challenge the Western framework of binary thinking, which manifests itself in the

binary conception of self/Other and the categorisation of 'nature' as opposed to 'culture'.

The research's objective to develop new artistic strategies that instigate new ways of conceiving belonging entailed looking back at the history of identity politics in order to learn from and further develop existing strategies. In chapter 1 I briefly sketch the history of identity politics in the arts in the light of current debates. To gain a deeper understanding how different discourses are interconnected, it was important to look into theories and practices that had emerged from the feminist concern with sexual difference, which in turn had influenced the critique of binary models of self and Other in postcolonial art and theory. However, looking back I will admit that at the time of conceiving the first chapter that would situate my research in a larger context, I had no idea how central feminist theory was to become for the further development of my thesis. It was halfway through my research, when I was thinking through coffee and clay that the direction of my research was turned upside down through my encounter with the 'material turn' in feminist theory. Read in tandem with anthropological research based on Amerindian thinking, my engagement with Braidotti's feminist new materialism and Haraway's (2003) *naturecultures* concept, instigated a major shift in my thinking. Guided by the practice, which involved hands-on engagement with clay and ceramics alongside my artistic exploration of coffee in *Kahvehane Kongresspark* and *Trans Plantations*, I gradually began to question the anthropocentric direction of my research.

Oblivious to non-human and 'earth' others initially my approach towards belonging had solely centred on the human. Investigating ways how to resist the self/Other paradigm and dualistic conception of belonging in relation to ethnic, cultural and faith-based identities, I set out to explore concepts such as hybridity, multilingualism and opacity as strategies of 'un-doing' belonging, looking at belonging primarily from a language-centred perspective. My analysis of these strategies in terms of their aesthetics and politics was led and developed through reflections on contemporary art practice. Guided by and written simultaneously with the creation of the practice, chapter 2 was guided by the questions raised by my experimental video-

performance *Surya Namaz* (2018) and complemented by an analysis of Mona Hatoum's video *Measures of Distance* (1988) as case study for diasporic art.

Reflecting on my position as diasporic artist and writing in multiple voices from the vantage point of a 'halfie' (Abu-Lughod, 1991)-artist and experimenting with what I call writing *from* or *with* the practice, my personal involvement in the video-performance led me to explore the concept of hybridity in terms of its potential for *The Art of Un-belonging*. Flirting with it, yet careful not to romanticise it, the chapter adopts a critical and sceptical approach to Bhabha's (1994) concept in form of an interior polylogue, questioning the potentials and the pitfalls of hybridity as artistic strategy. I came to the conclusion that while hybridity may (temporarily) be able to subvert binary categories, it would be naïve to assume that hybridity alone could solve the problem of racism, nationalism and structural inequality (in the arts and beyond).

Considering Maharaj's ([1994], 2001) critique of hybridity, I caution against an uncritical celebration of the concept as inherently transgressive. Guided by Glissant's conception of *métissage* (hybridity), which is fundamental to the poetics of Relation (as discussed in section 3 of chapter 1), one of the conclusions is that *The Art of Un-belonging* has to pass through hybridity. Yet, for reasons discussed in chapter 1 and chapter 2 in order to truly transcend the binary hybridity alone is not enough. We have to go beyond.

In order to resolve this impasse, the chapter proposed to read Maharaj's ([1994], 2001) idea to supplement and re-index hybridity with the 'untranslatable' through the lens of or rather in tandem with Glissant's concept of opacity. Following Glissant, opacity is that which protects Diversity ([1990], 1997, p62) and Relation is "made up of all the differences in the world" (Glissant to Diawara, [2009], 2013, p39). *The Art of Un-belonging* endorses opacity as a tool to resist categorisation, forced assimilation, fusion, fixity and generalisation. As my work is mostly concerned with resisting *linguistic imperialism*, or in Glissant's words, "the totalitarianism of any monolingual intent" (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p19), I chose to focus on opacity in terms of language

and multilingualism – as an aural rather than visual (filmic) strategy. In this sense, I would argue that my work adds a new dimension to existing experiments with opacity (which have mainly focused on the visual aspects of representation and the gaze) in the realm of contemporary art.

One of the undercurrents of the research proved to be anthropology – chapter 3 briefly introduces its colonial legacy as part of the Western “project of knowledge” (Glissant, [1990], 1997, p56) and the “errantry of conquest” (Glissant, 1996, p88). While the scope of my research did not allow me to go into more depth, I would argue that contemporary art could learn from the efforts to decolonise the discipline, i.e. the development of concepts such as ‘Amerindian perspectivism’ and ‘thinking forests’ in terms of shifting our imaginary of belonging and identity beyond the human. Indirectly implied by Glissant (1998) in the interview *L’Europe et les Antilles*, Amerindian thinking could be considered along with or as an extension of his poetics of Relation in order to question our affiliation with ‘territory’ as opposed to the concept of belonging to the earth. However, I have to caution that while it proved useful in shifting the anthropocentric framework of my research, I fear that an engagement with Amerindian thinking (alone) would (unfortunately) not solve the problem of ethnocentrism, as in “belonging to a tribe” – which is another conundrum.

While the thesis has identified and discussed a number of critical strategies that reinscribe the notion of belonging by emphasising *Relation* and interconnectedness, clearly, there is no “one-size-fits-all recipe” of how to ‘undo’ belonging. I will emphasise that the thesis has not been conceived as a catalogue or encyclopedia of strategies that resist fixed notions of belonging. As the project was developed in response to concerns at the heart of my own practice, the scope of the research was limited by the findings engendered by the artworks that form the practice element of the thesis. The questions that arose from my practice guided the exploration of artistic strategies that question a binary conception of self and Other and challenge ethnocentric and anthropocentric conceptions of belonging and identity. While Glissant’s theory of Relation provided a useful framework to think of ways to counter essentialist notions of belonging and identity, the triad of inter-

related artworks which form the practice element of *The Art of Un-belonging* allowed me to move beyond the conceptual framing and develop decolonising strategies that question dualistic thinking through my artistic practice.

Surya Namaz guided me to explore video as a medium for autobiographical exploration in the feminist tradition of 'selfconfessions' which following Jones (2012, p225) is a key strategy "of making the 'personal' clearly relevant as 'political'" in feminist art practices. The multilingual voiceover relays the narrator's feeling of disorientation to the viewer, who begins to watch the video in complete darkness, while listening to the muezzin's call to prayer. The sound transports the viewer elsewhere and through its complex layering creates another space: one that transcends the binary between 'here' and 'there,' expressing what Glissant has called "the passage from unity to multiplicity" (Glissant to Diawara, [2009], 2013, p36) characteristic for the diasporic experience. The superimposed video-sequences showing my aunt, my yoga teacher and myself performing *surya namaskar* (a specific yoga sequence, which translates as 'sun salutations') and *namaz*, the Muslim prayer ritual, along with the complex layering of the multilingual voiceover and autobiographical modes of storytelling, further hybridise notions of pure and autonomous origins. The density of the multilingual soundtrack, which combines the invocation of a Sanskrit mantra, with recitations of verses from the Qur'an (in Arabic) and a whispered recital of the (German) *Vaterunser* (The Lord's prayer), proposes opacity as artistic strategy to counter binary conceptions of belonging and identity.

The carefully crafted disjunctions between the multi-layered soundtrack and the video recordings of me performing yoga and *namaz* proved to be a key strategy to question the perceived division between secular and faith-based identities and allowed me to destabilise the meaning of the visual representations, including the Orientalist cliché image of the veiled woman as the Muslim Other. Emphasising interconnection and exploring cross-cultural contact in relation to translation and the untranslatable, the audiovisual strategies employed in the video enabled me to move beyond hybridity and transcend the binary of my 'root-identities' (Turkish and Austrian) in order to articulate the complexity and fluidity of Relation. Incorporating

intuition and departing from memories that were stored in my body, I would conclude that the work also proposes to question the perceived divisions between mind (spirit) and body.

Similar to *Surya Namaz*, *Kahvehane Kongresspark* (2016) and *Trans Plantations* (2018) have been inspired by memories linked to my experience of migration: ceramic coffee cups and saucers (which have moved across borders with my family) and coffee form part of my cultural heritage and hold personal memory. The prototype of the 'Turkish' coffee cup/saucer set which I reproduced one hundred times through slip casting in the studio is an object which connects me emotionally and physically to my Turkish ancestry and 'root identity'. Yet, through the incorporation of multiple languages, translation and opacity both projects propose ways that transcend a limited interpretation in terms of cultural *affiliation*, re-imagining a conception of belonging and identity which is no longer based on *roots* but forms itself in *Relation*.

Embarking on research about coffee's colonial and *naturecultural* history, which informed the writing of the scripts for the lecture-performance *Kahvehane Kongresspark* and the voice-over of *Trans Plantations*, made me aware of coffee's agency as a global *trans-plant* and instigated further research in relation to colonial practices of transplantation and classification. The experimentation with ceramics and clay in my studio practice, instigated a shift in my research and guided me to consider our interconnectedness with matter and non-human '*earth*' *others* – shifting the focus to our entanglement with objects and matter and ultimately reinscribing the notion of belonging beyond the human.

Driven by my practice, the research has developed through reading, thinking, listening, looking, feeling, (art) making and writing with and through this particular body that I inhabit or for the lack of a better word – am. In other words, my research is embedded in the historical present and reflects 'the situatedness' of my knowledge (Abu-Lughod, 1991, p468). While I am writing this, new artworks are being made, new exhibitions open, new books are being published, more

endangered species disappear from our planet, the climate is changing, and new wars are being started. Everything is in permanent flux. While this thesis was never intended to become a 'how-to' manual, I hope that the findings of my research will inspire other arts practitioners to take up the challenge and develop their own methods to undo belonging: to challenge the status quo and imagine new ways of conceiving belonging that resist the turbo-capitalist marketing and management of difference and at the same time formulate a critical response to what Donna Haraway has called the 'Plantationocene' (Haraway et al, 2016).

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Appendix

Documentation of the VIVA exhibition at London Gallery West

The Art of Un-belonging (22 June to 2 July 2018)



Surya Namaz. Photo: David Freeman.



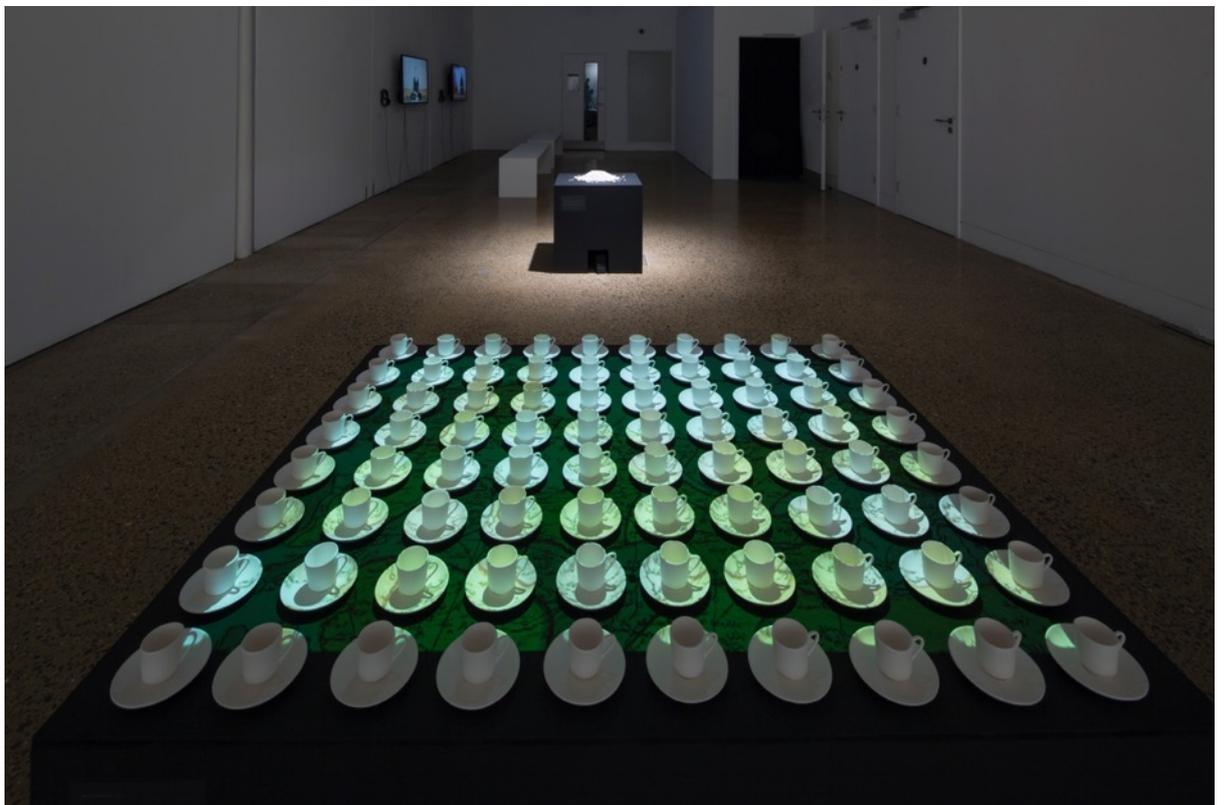
Surya Namaz. Photo: David Freeman.



Trans Plantations. Photo: David Freeman.



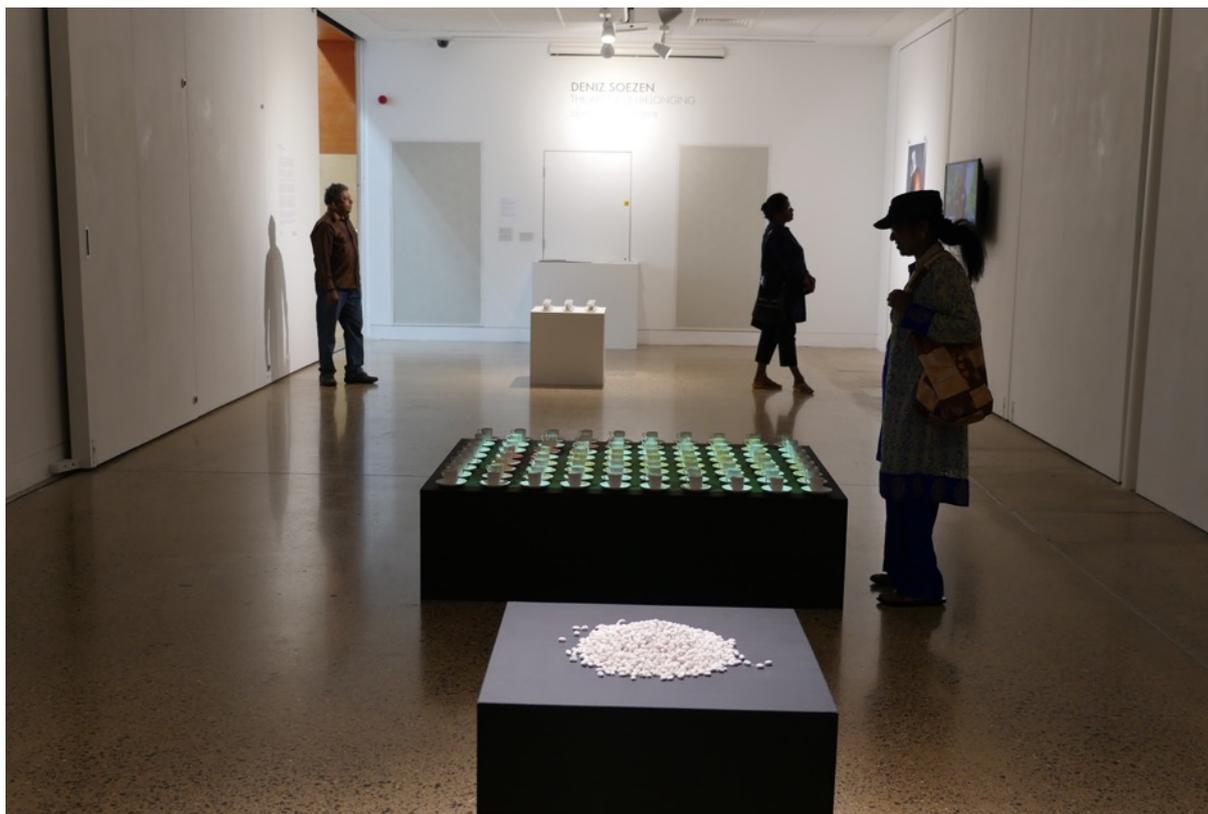
Trans Plantations. Photo: David Freeman.



Trans Plantations. Photo: David Freeman.



Trans Plantations. Photo: David Freeman.



Trans Plantations. Photo: Deniz Soezen.



Kahvehane Kongresspark. Photo: David Freeman.



Kahvehane Kongresspark. Photo: David Freeman.

The Invocation Mantra of Ashtanga Yoga¹⁶⁰

Om (A-U-M)

*vande gurūnām caranâravinde
sandarśita-svâtma-sukhâvobodhe
nihśreyase jangalikâyamâne
samsâra-hâlaâhala-moha-śantyai*

*âbhâhu purusâkâram
śankha-cakrâsi-dhârinam
sahasra-śirasam śvetam
pranamâmi patañjalim
Om (A-U-M)*

Om (A-U-M)

*I honour the lotus-feet of the gurus,
those peerless feet through which the understanding of the delight of one's self is
manifested,
performing like a snake charmer,
for the quelling of the delusions from the poison of worldly existence.*

*I bow to the white thousand-headed Patañjali,
who has the form of a man up to the arms,
and who is bearing a conch, a discus, and a sword.
Om (A-U-M)*

¹⁶⁰ See: Berkeley Mysore (no date).

Al-Fātiha – the opening chapter of the Qur'an¹⁶¹

*In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy!
Praise belongs to God, Lord of all worlds,
the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy,
Master of the Day of Judgement.
It is You we worship; it is You we ask for help.
Guide us to the straight path:
the path of those You have blessed,
those who incur no anger and who have not gone astray.*

Abundance (Surah 108)¹⁶²

*In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy
We have truly given abundance to you [Prophet] –
So pray to your Lord and make your sacrifice to Him alone –
it is the one who hates you who has been cut off.*

¹⁶¹ For further information and commentary on *Al-Fātiha* see Neuwirth, 2014 and Nasr, 2015.

¹⁶² For an informative commentary see Nasr, 2015.

Kahvehane Kongresspark: performance transcript

Scene 1: Coffee Plantation in Brazil

Music (from speakers): “The Coffee Song” by Osibisa

Shane (Ramiro) walks back and forth placing coffee sacks in different places. He gives out coffee beans to the audience.

Shane: (in English with Brazilian accent; wearing a baseball cap)

I am Ramiro. I was born in Brazil, in Minas Gerais. My people were brought to Brazil from Africa several hundred years ago. I have been working on a coffee plantation all my life.

Deniz (wearing sunglasses and a cowboy hat) steps onto the table, which serves as a stage. She commands Ramiro to pick up the coffee sack.

Deniz (In German with American accent):

Ramiro arbeitet auf meiner Kaffeeplantage in Minas Gerais in Brazil. Ich bin sehr stolz zu sagen, dass “Brazil” der grösste Kaffee-Exporteur ist, mit einem Drittel von dem globalen Markt. Es gibt Leute die sagen, dass wir “international and Brazilian law” brechen. Behauptungen, dass die Kaffee-arbeiter Schulden und keine Verträge haben, Pestiziden ausgesetzt sind, schlechte Unterkünfte und kein Trinkwasser. Aber die Wahrheit ist, wie können wir gute Arbeitsbedingungen in der “supply chain” garantieren, wenn wir gar nicht die Namen der Plantagen wissen, die unseren “coffee” anbauen?

Wake up and smell the coffee! Wie viel würden Sie für eine Tasse Kaffee bezahlen?

Wir bezahlen Ramiro \$2 um einen 60 liter Sack "of coffee" zu füllen. Das ist weniger als "two percent of the retail price". Deswegen können Sie, Sir, Ihren "coffee" so billig in den Supermärkten bekommen... because we provide a valuable service to this world!

(English Translation: Ramiro is working on my coffee plantation in Minas Gerais, in Brazil. I am very proud to say that Brazil is the largest exporter of coffee, accounting for about one-third of the global market. There are people who claim that we are breaking Brazilian and international law. Claims that the coffee workers face debt bondage, no work contracts, exposure to pesticides, the lack of protective equipment, bad housing conditions and no drinking water. But the truth is, how can we guarantee good working conditions in the supply chain, if we do not even know the names of the plantations where our coffee is grown?)

Wake up and smell the coffee! How much did you pay for your coffee sir? We pay Ramiro \$2 to fill a sixty liter sack of coffee. That is less than two percent of the retail price, which is why, you, Sir, can get coffee so cheap in the supermarkets. Because we provide a valuable service to this world!)

Shane: (in English with Brazilian accent; wearing a baseball cap)

I am paid \$2 to fill a 60 litre sack of coffee, which is 600,000 coffee beans. This takes me many many hours to do. I pick coffee to buy food for my family, but the pay is too low. The money I earn filling one sack of coffee does not even afford me to buy one cup of coffee. Everybody thinks that the inhumanity of slavery ended in 1888 in Brazil. Coffee is our national tragedy. It is because of me, minha familia, my parents, my grandparents, my great grandparents, my great great grandparents and my great great grandparents parents that Brazil is the leading country for coffee. My great great great grand parents parents were one of the 4.5 million people to be taken from Africa.

Scene 2: The legend of coffee's origin

Deniz (embodying a goat; on all fours):

Goat bleats (several times)

Deniz (mimicking a goat) follows Shane, who embodies the goat herd Kaldi.

Shane (holding a flute):

In Africa, (goat bleet), in Abyssinia, which is now known as Ethiopia (goat bleet), in the south west highlands of Kaffa, coffee trees grew wild in the forests. There was a young poet named Kaldi and he would gather his goats together by playing his flute. (Shane plays flute. Deniz follows him and bleats) Sometimes he played his flute very badly. One day Kaldi played his flute to gather his goats together but the goats did not turn up.

Deniz goes to the coffee tree and pretends to eat the berries.

Music (from speakers): Ethiopian classical folk music (percussion)

Deniz does the "goat dance"

Shane:

When Kaldi finally found the goat, it was dancing madly. And then Kaldi noticed the green leaves and red berries that the goats were eating. So Kaldi decided to try it.

Shane goes to the coffee-tree and pretends to pluck a berry and eat it.

Shane:

It tasted really really bitter. And suddenly he felt a warm tingling streaming through his body.

“Kaldi’s coffee dance” begins.

Shane:

Poetry and song spilled out of Kaldi. Kaldi thought he would never be tired or grouchy ever again.

Deniz:

Kaldi went to his father and told him about the magical coffee trees. And soon coffee spread and became an integral part of Ethiopian culture.

Scene 3: Coffee in Sufi Ritualistic Practice in Yemen

Music (from speakers) traditional Islamic music from Yemen

Shane moves into the “whirling dervish moving-sequence” wearing a Sufi-hat and holding a coffee cup.

Deniz turns the music down. Shane sits down and starts with recitation of ‘Ya Qahwi’

Deniz (in German):

Wir nehmen an, dass Kaffee im 15. Jhdt. aus Äthiopien in den Jemen gelangte.
(Tr.: We assume that coffee was introduced to Yemen from Ethiopia in the 15th century)

Deniz & Shane (kneeling next to each other on the table; shaking their heads to left and right; reciting a Sufi prayer in Arabic):

'Ya Qahwi' 'Ya Qahwi' 'Ya Qahwi' 'Ya Qahwi' 'Ya Qahwi' 'Ya Qahwi' 'Ya Qahwi' 'Ya
Qahwi'

Deniz:

Im Jemen wurde Kaffee "Al-Qahwa" genannt. Qahwa war ursprünglich eine
romantische Bezeichnung für Wein auf Arabisch.

(Tr.: In Yemen coffee earned the name qahwah, which was originally a romantic term
for wine in Arabic.)

Deniz & Shane (shaking their heads to left and right):

'Ya Qahwi' 'Ya Qahwi' 'Ya Qahwi' 'Ya Qahwi' 'Ya Qahwi' 'Ya Qahwi' 'Ya Qahwi' 'Ya
Qahwi'

Deniz (in German):

Die Sufis tranken Qahwa, den Wein des Islam, um für ihre Mitternachtsgebete wach
zu bleiben.

(Tr.: The Sufis drank al-qahwa, the wine of Islam, in order to stay awake for their mid-
night prayers.)

Deniz & Shane (shaking their heads to left and right):

'Ya Qahwi' 'Ya Qahwi' 'Ya Qahwi' 'Ya Qahwi' 'Ya Qahwi' 'Ya Qahwi' 'Ya Qahwi' 'Ya
Qahwi'

Deniz (in German):

Das Sufi-Ritual des Kaffeetrinkens wurde durch den Lobgesang auf den göttlichen Namen – ‘Ya Qahwi’ – ‘Oh Besitzer aller Kraft’ – begleitet.

(Tr.: The sufi-devotional ritual involved coffee drinking accompanied by reciting the divine name “ya Qahwi” – oh possessor of all strength.)

Deniz continues (shaking her head to left and right):

‘Ya Qahwi’ ‘Ya Qahwi’ ‘Ya Qahwi’ ‘Ya Qahwi’ ‘Ya Qahwi’ ‘Ya Qahwi’ ‘Ya Qahwi’ ‘Ya Qahwi’

Scene 4: Coffee’s migratory path to Europe

Shane:

Das Klima im südlichen Arabien war für den Kaffee-Anbau ideal und Kaffee wurde rasch zu einem beliebten Getränk. (Tr.: The climate in Southern Arabia was ideal for the cultivation of coffee and coffee quickly became a popular drink) Im sechzehnten Jahrhundert (Tr. In the sixteenth century) the Ottomans took control of the coffee trade, when they conquered Yemen.

Shane shuts Deniz up and puts Fez on her head. She starts speaking in Turkish. Shane performs movements with the coffee cup, emphasising Deniz’ narration in the background.

Deniz (in Turkish):

Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nda kahve giderek daha popüler olmaya başladı ve Mekke , Kahire , Şam, Halep , İran ve Kuzey Afrika'ya yayıldı.

(Tr.: Throughout the Ottoman empire coffee became increasingly popular and spread to Mecca, Cairo, Damascus, Aleppo, Iran and North Africa.)

Shane passes coffee cup to Deniz who starts the same movement sequence, while he translates what Deniz said in Turkish into German.

Shane (in German):

Kaffee wurde mimer beliebter l'm Osmanischen Reich ind verbreitete such nach
Mekka, Kairo, Damaskus, Aleppo, Iran ind Nord Afrika.

Deniz passes cup back to Shane who starts to dance with the cup, while she continues to speak in Turkish.

Deniz (in Turkish):

Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun bas kenti İstanbul'da da, Afrika'dan gelen bu içki, hem sarayda hem halk ta moda olmuş ve heryer de sevilerek iciliyordu.

(Tr.: In Istanbul, the heart of the Ottoman empire, this drink of African origin became the latest craze amongst all sectors of society from the palaces through to the lowest classes.)

Shane passes coffee cup back to Deniz.

Shane (translates what Deniz said into German):

In Istanbul, dem Herzen des Osmanischen Reiches, wurde dieses Getränk afrikanischer Herkunft der letzten Schrei. In allen Bereichen der Gesellschaft, vom Palast bis zu den untersten Klassen.

Deniz passes the coffee cup to Shane. He goes to the audience and starts shaking hands while Deniz continues to speak in Turkish.

Deniz:

Kahvehane'ler de her kitleden insanlar bir araya gelip yabancilarla tanisip, degisik konular üzerine sohbet ediyorlardi. Dolayisiyla Kahvehanelerin temel sosyal fonksiyonu olmustur.

(Tr.: The coffee houses, Kahvehanes, soon became an essential social institution, where people of all walks of life could meet strangers and engage in various debates.)

Shane passes the cup back to Deniz. Deniz walks up to the audience and shakes their hands, while Shane translates what she just said into German.

Shane:

Die Kaffeehäuser oder Kahvehanes wurden bald zu einer wichtigen sozialen Institution, wo sich Menschen unterschiedlicher Herkunft begegnen und miteinander ins Gespräch kommen konnten.

Deniz passes cup back to Shane, who starts to dance with it.

Deniz steps onto the table.

Deniz (in German):

Kaffee wurde bald zu einer sehr lukrativen Einkommensquelle und die Osmanen achteten sorgsam darauf, dass ihr Monopol im Kaffee-anbau im Jemen erhalten blieb. Der Hafen von Mokka im Südwesten Jemens wurde zum weltweit wichtigsten Handelsplatz für Kaffee – so kam es dass Kaffee damals nach dieser Hafenstadt "Mokka" benannt wurde. Es war verboten, lebende Kaffeebohnen auszuführen. Im

17. Jahrhundert kam ein Mekka-Pilger aus Indien, Baba Budan, auf seiner Heimreise durch den Hafen von Mokka.

(Tr.: Coffee had soon become a profitable source of income and the Ottomans took great care to protect their monopoly of coffee cultivation in Yemen. The harbour of Mocha (or Mokha) in the Southeast of Yemen became the main hub for the global trade of coffee – which is why coffee was named “Mocha” after the harbour. The exportation of live coffee beans was forbidden. In the 17th century, Baba Budan, a pilgrim from India passed through the harbour town of Mocha on his way home, returning from the Hajj.)

Shane transforms into the Indian pilgrim Baba Budan. He puts on a Muslim prayer hat. Deniz sits down at the bench.

Music (from speakers): Quawali music

Shane (English with Indian accent; wearing a Muslim prayer hat):

Asalaam Alaikkum, Meera nam Baba Budan. I am Baba Budan from India. Do you know India, Sir? Do you know India – very big place, hahaha. In South India, where I come from, it is a place called Mysore. Do you know Mysore? No you don't know...I have travelled very far today (starts dancing) I have travelled across the raging ocean of Arabia, for my pilgrimage, my Hajj to Mecca.

(Shane performing “Baba Budan dance”)

Shane (English with Indian accent; wearing a Muslim prayer hat):

I am now here in the port of Mocha, in Yemen. I am about to catch my ship to go back to India, because I want to see my wife. (He looks around and touches his nose) I can smell something funny. Can you smell? Can you smell something? (He walks around asking audience about the funny smell. He then approaches the coffee

tree) By Allah, this is so nice. I think I wan to take it to India with me. But I cannot take it to India...shhht... (pretends to pluck coffee berries from the tree... starts placing/taping the beans to his chest.)

Deniz:

Baba Budan was so determined to take coffee back to India that he taped seven seeds to his chest and smuggled them successfully across the ocean.

(In German): Der Kaffeeanbau in Südindien geht also auf Baba Budan zurück.

(In Turkish) Dolayisiyla Baba Budan sayesinde Kahve Hindistan'a gelmis.

Shane: (spreading empty coffee bags on the floor)

The Ottoman Empire continued their expansion and stronghold over coffee. In 1683 the Turkish Ottoman army threatened to invade Europe. They were gathered outside Vienna for a prolonged siege. The siege failed and the soldiers fled the battlefield leaving behind all their provisions. The Viennese found five hundred huge sacks filled with what they thought was camel fodder and so they decided to... (makes gesture of burning them)

Deniz steps onto the table. She puts on a tweed flat-cap.

Deniz (in Viennese dialect; wearing a flatcap):

Jessas Maria! Seid Ihr denn deppert geworden? Das ist Kaffee, den ihr da verbrennt! Kaffee! Wie kamma denn so deppert sein! Wenn ihr ned wisst's, was des is – gibts her den Kaffee - Ich kann ihn gut gebrauchen!

Guten Tag Allerseits!! Merhaba. Ich bin Franz Georg Kolschitzky und ich habe eines der ersten Kaffeehäuser in Wien eröffnet. Ich habe lange Jahre als Übersetzer im Osmanischen Reich gearbeitet und kenne daher die Bräuche der Türken gut. Kaffee

ist so etwas Grossartiges, ich kann es nicht fassen dass diese Deppen Kaffee
verbrennen wollten.

(Tr.: Jesus. Holy Mary! Are you insane? That is coffee, that you are burning! Coffee.
How can one be so stupid? If you do not know what this is – hand the coffee over to
me – I can use it.

Hello everybody. Greetings. I am Franz Georg Kolschitzky. I opened one of the first
coffeeshouses in Vienna. I used to work as a translator in the Ottoman Empire and
therefore I know Turkish customs very well. Coffee is something so extraordinary. I
cannot comprehend that these idiots wanted to burn coffee.)

Shane (Turkish, English and German):

Bin yediyüz yıllarında Viyana kahvehanelerle dolu idi. By the 1700s the city of Vienna
was filled with coffee houses. Um 1700 war Wien voller Kaffeehäuser. The Ottoman
bid to take Vienna did not succeed ancak bunun yerine Türk kahvesi Avrupa'yı
fethetti, sondern türkischer Kaffee eroberte Europa, but instead Turkish coffee
conquered Europe.

Deniz steps on top of the table and starts to sing.

Deniz (singing in German):

C-A-F-F-E-E trink nicht so viel Kaffee
Nicht für Kinder ist der Türkenrank,
Schwächt die Nerven, macht dich blaß und krank
Sei doch kein Muselman, der ihn nicht lassen kann.

Scene 5: Coffee the Satan's drink

Shane puts on the pope's hat.

Deniz:

Lange Zeit galt Kaffee in Europa als muslimisches Getränk.
Priester, die ein Kaffee-Verbot erlassen wollten, baten Papst Clemens der VII das muslimische Getränk zu kosten, um es dann zu verbieten.

(Tr.: For a long time coffee was considered a Muslim drink in Europe. Priests who wanted to instigate the banning of coffee asked Pope Clemens VII to taste the Muslim beverage in order to ban it.)

Deniz passes Shane the coffee cup.

The pope smells and drinks the coffee.

Shane (English with Italian accent): Bellissimo, this devil's drink is so delicious. It is a shame that only the Muslims get to drink this coffee. (The priest crucifies himself) I have a plan. We can fool the devil. We can baptise the drink. I make it a truly Christian drink. Hahaha... (He crucifies himself.)

Both stand up on the table and start to sing C-A-F-F-E-E; Shane translates the lyrics into English.

Shane and Deniz together (singing in German and English):

C-A-F-F-E-E trink nicht so viel Kaffee
C-O-F-F-E-E. Don't drink so much coffee
Nicht für Kinder ist der Türkentrunk
The Turk's drink is not for children
Schwächt die Nerven, macht dich blaß und krank
It weakens the nerves and makes you pale and sick
Sei doch kein Muselman, der ihn nicht lassen kann

Don't be a Muslim who can't help it.

Scene 6: Coffee as colonial commodity

Shane:

There was a coffee shortage for the Ottomans after being defeated in Vienna and exports from Yemen to Europe were prohibited. Europeans soon began investigating ways of growing their own coffee and turned to their colonies.

Shane steps down from the table and pick the coffee tree up.

Deniz:

The Dutch, who dominated the world's shipping trade, managed to transport a tree to Holland from Yemen.

Shane is moving the coffee tree, dis-placing in various locations in midst of the audience.

Deniz:

From its offspring the Dutch began growing coffee in Ceylon, Java, Bali or what we know as Indonesia today. The Dutch determined the price for coffee for many years to come.

Shane transforms to Ramiro (putting on a baseball cap) and starts to collect the empty coffee bags.

Shane:

I am paid 2 dollars for a sixty Litre sack of coffee. Coffee is our national tragedy.

Deniz transforms into CEO (with cowboy hat and sunglasses).

Deniz (in German with American accent):

Aber unser grösster Erfolg war in Brazil: "The world's largest coffee producer", wo "coffee" schon 1727 angebaut wurde. Ich bin sehr stolz zu sagen, dass was Sie heute als "Turkish coffee" trinken, eigentlich kommt aus Brazil. There is an awful lot of coffee in Brazil!

(Tr. But greatest success was in Brazil - the largest coffee producer in the world - where coffee was first grown in 1727. What you drink as "Turkish coffee" today actually comes from Brazil.)

Music (from speakers): "The Coffee Song" by Osibisa

Deniz picks the coffee tree up and exits the space, dancing to the "coffee song" ...

The helpers collect and remove all the props from the performance space. The café opens and coffee is being served free of charge to the public.

Trans Plantations: English translations

Amharic

Voice: Mesfin Ali

You ask me where I come from. I come from the Earth. I am coffee. I grow on what you call a plant anywhere in a forest area. Where I come from, they used to call me Buna before. So, I am growing in the forest as a wild coffee. If you go to some places in Kaffa, where coffee came from, you can still find me in the forest. People from various parts of the country they travel long distances and they come to pick me during the picking season, because you know there are seasons when I am ready to be picked. They come and they put me in a bag, and they take me somewhere. They wash me, they clean me, and they drink me. They sell me to other countries as well. That particular area is called Sheko, in Kaffa and Kepi, these places are known for their coffee plantations. They have big farms.

Outside of these farms, there is plenty of coffee in the forest, which is not owned by any farmer. So that is wild coffee, anybody can come and pick it. I am sure you have seen how the ladies prepare me. I am not being drunk by a person on their own, but I am always consumed in a group, with family, friends or neighbors. For any celebrations, Christmas, New Year, Funerals and Weddings – it is an expression of togetherness, bringing people together. I could also tell you the story how I have been discovered. A shepherd was looking after his goats and observed how a goat reacted after she ate me (the coffee plant). So, he told his father and others, and they tasted me. After that I became known to other people as well. Now I am consumed all over the world, even in rural areas.

Italian

Voice: Ileana Di Peri

Here they call me coffee. In Italy, they call me *caffè*. I have many names. Most people think I am Italian. But I am Arabica. I do not know where I have come from. I was dropped here in a huge sack amongst many others after a long journey. Then I was transferred into a cylinder next to a loud machine. People queue here impatiently in the morning, while I am here poured into a disposable cup. It is very busy. I am crushed into small pieces and boiled. They mix me with frothy milk, sugar and caramel. I really do not enjoy being mixed with sugar and milk to become a latte. In Italy I am mostly consumed as espresso. Pure and black. I feel stronger like that. People never take me away in a cup on the street. They would stand at the bar or sit down to have a chat. Would you like to taste me? I think I am very addictive...but I am not sure why.

(Egyptian) Arabic

Voice: Kegham Djeghalian

I come from a tree, which most of you will never have seen in nature. A Swedish botanist classified me as *Coffea arabica*. However, he is wrong! I am in fact not at all indigenous to Arabia: I am an “African drink”! Genetically I can be traced back to a small tree growing in the rain forest in a region that today is known as Ethiopia. It is after an uncomfortable journey being squashed in a big bag with many others on a rocky boat across the Red Sea that I got to Yemen...ever since I have been mistaken to be Arabic.

When I came to Yemen, Sufi Monks discovered that drinking me helped them to stay up for their midnight prayers. I remember how I blushed, when they named me *al-qahwa* after an Arabic word for wine. “Ya Qawwi” – I am the possessor of all strength! First, I was mainly consumed for medical or religious use, but soon I became very popular and a part of everyday life in Yemen. Thanks to Muslim

pilgrims, who passed through the port of Mocha, I quickly spread all across the “Ottoman Empire”.

I remember farmers in Yemen would grow me in small gardens alongside their food crops and hand-pick me and later on roast me.... Oh...the smell...how I miss those times! At the time, I was still considered an exotic luxury in Europe...(laughing) the Christian priests did not quite know what to make of me....and they thought I was the devil’s drink! At the same time, demands for me increased throughout the Ottoman empire... For a long time, the Ottomans held a monopoly over me and controlled my trade across the Empire. The houses where people came to drink me used to be called *Zahwa-khana*... These *kahwa-khanas* popped up everywhere in Mecca and Cairo – where I have lived for a long time – and also Istanbul and the cosmopolitan city of Aleppo. They became hubs for artists and intellectuals to gather there...energised by consuming me they discussed arts, poetry....and politics. So, no wonder, I was banned several times by many rulers! For a long time, I was considered a Muslim drink in Europe. Priests who wanted to instigate my banning asked Pope Clemens VII to taste me in order to ban me...but instead he baptised me! And now they drink me everywhere!

Turkish

Voice: Özlem Ceylan

Here they call me Turkish coffee...it always makes me laugh, because in fact I come from Brazil! Either way, I am very significant for the people here...they even named a color after me...brown literally translates to coffee colour, *kahverengi*, or my color. Although, mind you, I come in many shades...so this is a crude generalization, of course, I can be light brown, dark brown and so forth. But I still feel flattered that they have named a color after me.

The way they prepare me here is very special, maybe that is what is Turkish about it, I am not sure: traditionally I am ground into a very fine powder and then put into a copper vessel and mixed with water and sometimes with sugar too. In fact, I have

become really good friends with sugar...and we both like to mix just the water splashing on us is a bit cold, but gradually we all mix and become very hot... Just before reaching boiling point in my liquid form, they take me off the stove and I am filled into a small porcelain cup. Ah... the smell...I love the moment when I touch their lips...

When you asked me where I am from, I know I said that I come from Brazil...but well...it is more complicated than that, you see...there were times, when I used to grow elsewhere...in a land called Yemen...the farmers there used to plant me next to their food crops...it was such a pleasant life. Then, with the expansion of the Ottoman Empire, I have travelled everywhere...oh these long journeys in the dark, crossing oceans...it was an adventure, you know, but also very uncomfortable...many hundreds of thousands of us would travel together in a bag of cloth, being squashed, on the rocky sea... And then in those days, they would still grind us by hand...what a weird sensation that is, to be ground into powder. It does not hurt, but it always surprises me how small I can become. Even smaller than my friend sugar!

I am fascinated that I am so important to them, I even rule their destiny. Can you imagine, they claim to decipher their future through me... See these old ladies sitting in the shade and drinking me while chatting. Soon they will turn the cup around, and my remains will stain the cups and saucers. I create strange shapes when I am drying (laughing) Funny enough they really seem to believe that they can predict the future by reading the images that I create on the cup.... But then... maybe they are right...who knows, what the future holds..."The soul needs not coffee, nor a coffee shop. The soul needs fondness, coffee is just an excuse"...

(Cypriot) Greek

Voice: Rachel Eleftheriou

Everybody knows me on this island, most grown-ups would have tasted me... I am delicious you know...some are addicted to me! Sometimes I feel that I am not as popular as I used to be, but especially the older people here still enjoy drinking me in my original form, very finely ground and unfiltered. I believe they have done so for centuries. In fact, I cannot even remember how I got here. See these old ladies sitting in the shade and drinking me while chatting. Soon they will turn the cup around, and my remains will stain the saucer. I create strange shapes when I am dried (laughing) Funny enough they really seem to believe that they can predict the future by reading the images that I create.

The way they prepare me here is very special: I am ground into a very fine powder and then put into a copper vessel and mixed with water and sometimes with sugar too. In fact, I am really good friends with sugar...and (cheerful) we both like to mix Just the water splashing on us is a bit cold, but gradually we all mix and become very hot... Just before reaching boiling point in my liquid form, they take me off the stove and I am filled into a small porcelain cup. Ah... the smell...I love the moment when I touch their lips... You know what is really confusing me? Some visitors here have mistaken me for Turkish... But then, I was told that I was Greek. Well...it is a long story...maybe there was a time when I was considered a Turkish drink...but many bad things happened, you know...so anyway, I think I am Greek now. Or maybe I am Cypriot...or maybe I am both...or Mediterranean...or...maybe I do not belong to anyone.... I come from the earth...I belong everywhere... to everyone.

Brazilian Portuguese

Voice: Alicia Bastos

I have been here for as long as I remember. I grew up in Minas Gerais. I like the weather here: the fertile soil makes me feel good and I give more cherries...

I have not always lived here though. Some people call me Arabica. Others say I am from Africa. Maybe the Portuguese brought me here...in fact, I once heard a story that I was smuggled here from French Guyana by a man called Francisco de Melo Palheta. He apparently seduced a Governor's wife there to obtain my seeds and smuggle them over the border. Well, I guess I have always been desirable, but my popularity has just been increasing ever since!

To be honest, I have blurred memories of all this...but I remember that in the early days they planted an awful lot of us next to each other. We were so many that they had to bring in foreign work force to plant and pick us. Oh boy... how I felt sorry for these folks. It still makes me angry, when I think about it. (outraged) They kidnapped these people from their homeland, from a place they call Africa and then forced them to work here on the plantations. Almost five million of them... can you imagine!

You know, as I told you, the climate is nice here, so we grew quickly... the white folks trans-planted us here and now there is an awful, awful lot of us! Look at all these rows. And they still discover new corners of the land, where we could flourish... It is a funny sensation to be picked from the scrub. It tickles me. Often, they will pick a lot of us at the same time, stripping us from the branch. Initially, I was screaming in fear, rolling around squashed into a bag with thousands of others... but I got used to it. After picking they lay us out on patios in the sun to dry...I enjoy that. It gives me a nutty and creamy flavour later on. My smell is very strong...It makes people all over the world fall madly in love with me.

Most people here like me cheap and strong. Black. But sometimes they mix me with that disgusting white liquid, you know what they pump from the cows' breast, then they call me "media". Hmm... I do not think that the people who pick me actually

drink me...I am probably too expensive for them... Sometimes, after they pack me in huge bags together with hundreds of thousands of others... it will be dark and cold for a very long time... and I get very confused of where I am. It feels like a long coma and I suffocate, until I suddenly get unpacked by a pair of hands. (...)

Colombian Spanish

Voice: Maria Campuzano Perez

They say that I have a rich and full-bodied flavor with fruity notes...My taste is lovely, I am mild and well-balanced. I have grown up here in the mountains of Quimbaya... ..you know, before they planted me here, I used to grow in a place across the oceans, far, far away...in a place they call Africa...ah, what beautiful and lush mountains...ah, those long-gone days...it all feels like a distant dream now...these curious goats used to snack on my berries and start to dance around and go crazy...Well, in fact, that's how the humans recognised how special I was...and now, they cannot live without me...isn't it amazing, how with time I have spread everywhere?

You see, I am quite fussy ...I do not like it everywhere... the weather and wind...the sun, the rain, the soil...everything needs to be perfect. But it did not take long until I began to enjoy growing here...I have to admit, I really like the soil. It is very special and fertile, nourishing my body and soul.... But more recently the weather has been strange...I do not know what is going on...but something is not right...sometimes I feel anxious...the weather is changing quickly...I have never experienced this before... Anyway, ...When I am happy, I flower from January to March and then I bloom again from July to September.... When they come to pick me, there is a lot of excitement. I am proud of my beans, they are part of me, and through them I can travel and see the world...

Glossary

Astānga yoga

Astānga yoga is a physically demanding vigorous style of yoga, which was first introduced to the West by the legendary teacher Sri K. Patthabi Jois (1915-2009) in the 1960s. Like the equally prominent B.K.S Iyengar, who later founded the Iyengar Yoga System, Sri K. Patthabi Jois was a student of Sri T. Krishnamacharya (1888-1989), who used to teach yoga under the patronage of the king at the palace in Mysore, Southern India from the 1920ies up to the late 1940s.

Patañjali identifies eight limbs of yoga (Astānga meaning eight limbs) as “a systematic and sequential elaboration of the practice of yoga, geared to the moral constraint of the mind” (Yogasūtra; Ranganathan, 2008, p165). The eight limbs or aspects of yoga are: 1. Yama, moral conduct, 2. Niyama, observances, 3. Āsana, posture, 4. Prānāyāma, control of the breath, 5. Pratyāhāra, withdrawal of the senses from their objects, 6. Dhāranā, fixed concentration, 7. Dhyāna, abstract spiritual meditation and 8. Samādhi, trance states of absolute absorption (Yogasūtra; Ranganathan, 2008, p165).

Mysore style yoga

Mysore (style) yoga is named after the city of Mysore in India and refers to the way Astānga yoga has been taught there. Unlike in led classes, the teacher does not talk you through the sequence; he or she is only there to supervise you practising a fixed series of movements and will adjust you if necessary.

Patañjali

The sage Patañjali is said to be the author of the Yogasūtras, dating from ca. 250 CE (Singleton, 2010). Patañjali's sūtras could be described as a combination of yoga philosophy and yoga manual, yoga as a science of the mind, yoga as a precursor of psychoanalysis and the way to salvation, as affirmed in the following sutra:

“Yogaś-citta-vrtti-nirodhah” (Patañjali, Yogasūtra 1.2)

Yoga is the control of the (moral) character of thought

Yoga

The word yoga derives from Sanskrit and literally means ‘union’ or ‘joining’. In fact, the English word ‘yoke’ or German ‘das Joch’ derive from the same Indo-European root. One of the earliest literary mentions of yoga can be found in the ca. fifteenth-century BCE Rig Veda. Here the word yoga refers to a war chariot (See White, 2013, p36).

Yogasūtras

The Yogasūtras, attributed to the sage Patañjali, are a collection of aphorisms describing various methods of attaining yoga, the union with the Supreme (Self), as the ultimate goal of yoga practice. Due to Swami Vivekananda’s popularisation of the sūtras in the US via his free translation and commentary named ‘Raja Yoga’ (1896), Patañjali’s text has become a prime reference for Anglophone yoga practitioners in the twentieth century (Singleton, 2010, pp. 26-27).