
Glasshouse as an Exhibition Space between Coloniality and Resistance
A Violent History And A Home For Diaspora Art

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The Glasshouse as an Exhibition Space between Coloniality and Resistance

A Violent History and a Home for Diaspora Art

Master Thesis
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Abstract (EN)

This thesis explores the history of the glasshouse as an exhibition space and focusses first on its colonial origins, from the theft and looting based on violence and exploitation of the land and people to the classification and curating of plants based on their origin. In a second step it takes this colonial condition as a given to highlight the parallel between the adaptation of plants in glasshouses and the resilience of contemporary diasporic artists in navigating new cultural landscapes. By analyzing the work of artists like Mona Hatoum, Farah Al Qasimi and Vanessa A. Opoku, the research asks how these artists use their practices to resist and redefine their identities in the context of displacement and colonial legacies. Through case studies, the thesis explores the representation of displacement, complex identities and resilience in both curatorial glasshouse projects and diasporic art. It argues that glasshouses exist as heterotopias, embodying the duality of colonial power and resistance, and therefore as reminders of imperial exploitation and platforms for artistic expression and resilience.

Abstract (DE)

In dieser Arbeit werden die Geschichte des Glashauses als Ausstellungsraum, wobeisie einen ersten Schwerpunkt auf seine kolonialen Ursprünge legt, von Plünderungen und Beutegut bis zur Klassifizierung und Kuratierung von Pflanzen auf der Grundlage ihrer Herkunft. In einem zweiten Schritt hebt sie die Parallele zwischen der Anpassung von Pflanzen in Glashäusern und der Widerstandsfähigkeit zeitgenössischer diasporischer Künstler*innen beim Umgang mit neuen kulturellen Landschaften hervor. In der Auseinandersetzung mit Arbeiten von Künstler*innen wie Mona Hatoum, Farah Al Qasimi und Vanessa A. Opoku wird deutlich, wie diese ihre Praktiken nutzen, um Widerstand zu leisten und ihre Identität im Kontext von Flucht und kolonialem Erbe neu zu definieren. Anhand von Fallstudien untersucht die Arbeit die Darstellung von Flucht, Komplexen Identitäten und Resilienz sowohl in der kuratorischen Arbeit mit Glashäusern als auch in der Diasporakunst. Es wird argumentiert, dass Glashäuser als Heterotopien fungieren, die die Gleichzeitigkeit von kolonialer Macht und Widerstand verkörpern und daher als Erinnerung an die imperiale Ausbeutung und als Plattformen für künstlerische Praxis und Resilienz dienen können.

Content

1. Introduction

"Plants are the most instrumentalized of all forms of life, degraded and overlooked – rethinking our relationship with them must be understood as part of a wider rethinking of our relationship with each other."[1]

In this paper, I aim to explore the history of the glasshouse as an exhibition space. Specifically, I am interested in why glasshouses were built and how plants, as living entities, were categorized and curated based on their origins and needs within these spaces. With this history of colonial and ideological violence in perspective, I will examine contemporary diasporic artists and analyze their practices. I will explore the representations and forms of knowledge production that diasporic art presents as a method of resistance by diasporic communities, tracing the related themes of displacement and multiple identities. This thesis explores the similarities between diasporic art and glasshouse cultivation, focusing on the topics of displacement, complex identities, and resilience.

I argue that, just as plants adapt to the new conditions of a glasshouse, diasporic artists respond to new cultural landscapes, where resilience is essential to establish their identity in a new environment. After a brief history of the glasshouse as an exhibition space, I will explore the curatorial and artistic forms, methodologies, and strategies related to the glasshouse and the plants within curated exhibition spaces. I will examine why and how these spaces become places, metaphors, and at the same time representations of resilience, resistance, and cultural identity.

[1] Sheikh and Gray, "The coloniality of planting: Legacies of racism and slavery in the practice of botany."

To explore the relations between glasshouses and diasporic art in contemporary practices, I will analyze three case studies to support my argument.

The final chapter relates the concept of heterotopia to the historical and contemporary functions of glasshouses. It argues that these structures represent the duality of colonial power and resistance, serving as both reminders of imperial exploitation and platforms for artistic production.

2. A brief history of glasshouses

One of the first attempts at cultivating the exotic plants from the colonies was in the form of orangeries which were brought to Northern Europe in the mid-16th century.[2] In the 17th century, the words Glasshouse and Conservatory began to be used for places and buildings that keep and conserve the "all year green" plants throughout the whole year and cold seasons. Another word used for what we know as Glasshouse nowadays is Stove house which refers to a heating system from the floor that was mostly used for keeping the citrus trees and exotic plants through the winter. Another important use of these buildings was for "aesthetic pleasure".[3]
The 18th century bore witness to a lot of experimental trial and error in the pursuit of cultivating different exotic plants in Europe. Many projects have not been successful due to the prevalence of a racist culture that fails to recognize and value indigenous culture and knowledge.

In my own field of research, you can see an imperialist view prevail. Scientists continue to report how new species are 'discovered' every year, species that are often already known and used by people in the region – and have been for

[2] Grant, *Glasshouses*
[3] Ibid.

thousands of years. Scientists have appropriated indigenous knowledge and downplayed its depth and complexity.[4]

Often not even the geographical circumstances have been considered. All of the techniques for cultivating foreign plants had to be developed through the upcoming scientific approach of botany. In this regard, the construction of the glasshouses, as scientific playgrounds, played a decisive role in the development of the botanical garden. In many cases, the scientific discoveries could be found in the indigenous knowledge but because of the racist ideology, facts had to be "(re)discovered" by the so-called "gentlemen". The same principles of not appreciating the labor, knowledge, and research of the least privileged could also be found in the hierarchical relationship between the "gentlemen" and the staff working for them. In late 17th and early 18th century England, being considered a "gentleman" was all about integrity. To be seen as a true "gentleman", a man needed to own land, receive a good education, and have enough money to pursue his hobbies and curiosities without depending on anyone else. The connection between integrity and identity was very important, especially in early modern botany, a field that relied heavily on cooperation and sharing knowledge.[5]

Botany at that time was a global effort. Many different people contributed to the knowledge of plants, including merchants, explorers, academics, and more. However, despite the teamwork involved, the credit for new discoveries often went to the "gentlemen", even if they weren't the ones doing most of the work. Take for example Mary Somerset and Robert Uvedale, who, although not fully recognized as

[4] Evans, *Cultivating Colonialism*.
[5] Arnold-Scerbo, *Collecting, Cultivating, Classifying*

“gentlemen”, used their social connections and influence to build impressive collections of plant specimens in their gardens. These gardens were like early museums, helping to classify and understand exotic plants by combining their aesthetic beauty with scientific study.[6]

Gardens and herbaria (collections of dried plants) were both very important for botanists. They allowed scientists to study plants closely and ensure the preservation of botanical knowledge for future generations. For example, Mary Somerset's herbarium consisted of twelve bound volumes filled with dried plants from her garden. This showed how important it was to preserve plants and botanical knowledge over time because plants themselves are temporary, but the knowledge about them should last forever.[7]

These places were usually open to the public and represented the power of the empire due to the size of the collections they had and the plants they brought from colonies all over the world. Similar to the development of the museums, this has started a race between the European powers in cities such as London, Amsterdam, Berlin, Vienna, and so on. As in many other fields of the imperialism era, also the building and construction of the glasshouses and the royal botanical garden were a way to express a nation's know-how in science and civil engineering. During this period many glasshouses were also built for private purposes, some of which were for aristocrats who could afford it. The exotic plants were objects of prestige in these societies. After the Industrial Revolution and with the beginning of the mass production of glass and iron, the bourgeoisie were also able to afford and build their own glasshouses, mostly for cultivation and aesthetic purposes.[8]

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[6] Arnold-Scerbo, *Collecting, Cultivating, Classifying*

[7] Ibid.

[8] Grant, *Glasshouses*.

Figure 1: Wardian cases preparing to leave the Buitenzorg Botanic Gardens, Dutch East Indies, Indonesia. Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, Amsterdam.[9]

Meanwhile the Wardian case was a type of sealed glass container used to transport plants over long distances, mainly in the 19th century, revolutionizing the movement of flora across continents. It was an accidental invention of Nathaniel Bagshaw Ward, an English physician and botanist, in 1829. The case allowed the safe transport of delicate plants by maintaining a controlled internal environment, protecting them from the harsh conditions of long sea voyages.

Ward discovered the principle behind the Wardian case when he observed a fern growing in a sealed glass jar originally used to observe insect behaviour. The fern

[9] Image Source: https://www.khi.fi.it/de/forschung/4a-laboratory/2019-20/luke-keogh-the-wardian-case.php

thrived in London's polluted air and inspired him to develop a larger, purpose-built container for transporting plants.[10]

The Wardian box quickly became popular for transporting live plants, protecting them from salt water, insects and extreme weather during long voyages.

Wardian boxes played a crucial role in the botanical exchange of the British Empire, carrying plants such as tea, rubber and cinchona between colonies and back to Europe. For example, in the case of the Wardian, tea plants were taken from China to India, helping to establish the Indian tea industry.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, advances in shipbuilding, refrigeration and global transport reduced the need for Wardian cases.

Figure 2: Louis Antoine Roussin (1819-1894), St-Denis Botanical Garden: Volier Walk

[10] Ward's own book detailing his experiments and findings with the Wardian case. In Ward, *On the Growth of Plants in Closely Glazed Cases*.

Ann Stoler defines the concept of “imperial debris” She explains:

In identifying colonialism as the “rot” that “remains,” Walcott[11]’s metaphors take on a living valence. “Rot” opens to the psychic and material eating away of bodies, environment, and possibilities. “Rot” contains an active substance. It is hard to wipe out. Like debris, it is not where one always expects it to be. Nor is it always immediately visible. Such references have more than poetic purchase; they hold tight to the ongoing work of debris-making that we have sought to retain. Like ruins, debris is constructed, ruination is made. Debris speaks to something else. Leftovers are assigned as detritus because they are rendered into neglect or valorized for insistent remembrance.[12]

Ann Laura Stoler's concept of "imperial debris" is a critical framework she developed to understand the lingering effects and residuals of colonialism and imperialism. Evans argues that this concept can be connected with the botanical garden as places with an imperial history lasting long after the collapse of the colonial system.[13] From this perspective, botanical gardens could be considered a “living imperial formation” which fulfills the purpose of a museum. The history of botany as a scientific discipline is closely linked with the colonial history of glasshouses. In other words: botanical gardens and glasshouses are museums, and plants are the silenced witnesses. One of the central ideologies of the colonial and imperial periods, which is the “cultivation of nature” can be connected more or less directly with the method of how plants are cultivated and represented in the

[11] Derek Walcott (1930-2017) Saint Lucian poet, known for his work with topics of identity, post-colonialism, and the complexities of Caribbean history and culture.
[12] Stoler (ed.) *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination.*
[13] Evans, *Cultivating Colonialism*.

greenhouse[14].[15] Connected to the philosophy of the European enlightenment, the chaotic, destructive, and scary processes of nature should be restructured, controlled, and organized by humans through the development of culture and science. In this context, however, the function of the glasshouse is twofold: on the one hand, it serves as proof of how nature can be restrained. On the other hand, it is a performative romanticization of the idea of untouched nature. Therefore, the investigation on the history of glasshouses can deliver revealing insights on the topic of postcolonialism. The arrangement of the plants in glasshouses put a new meaning to them in their new environment. But given their origin and background, they remain a representation of the European history of exploitation and plunder during the colonial and imperial eras. According to David Lowenthal[16], the glasshouses highlight this heritage. They are factual places where culture and nature interconnect and this involvement becomes visible.[17]

Even though the traces of the history of colonialism in the history of glasshouses are very contextual and may contain several differences depending on the studied case, there are some similarities in the methods of colonization. The development and history of museums and glasshouses in European cities can be seen as an example of a common phenomenon.

[14] To my understanding, the terms "glasshouse" and "greenhouse" are often used as synonyms. In this essay I don't differentiate between them.
[15] Evans, *Cultivating Colonialism*.
[16] David Lowenthal (1923–2018), American historian and geographer, known for his contributions to heritage studies and historical geography.
[17] Evans, *Cultivating Colonialism*.

3. Diaspora Art

The phenomena and history of the diaspora are complex and discussed in many different scientific fields such as Sociology, Anthropology, and Cultural Studies.[18] An in-depth discussion on the topic of diaspora would go beyond the scope of this work.[19] Nevertheless, I would like to draw on some of the discussions in this section and discuss the diaspora in relation to art and artists who consider themselves members of diasporic communities.

3.1. A Brief History of Diaspora Art

Diaspora is a word used to describe a population moving from one country to another by choice or by force. It often simultaneously refers to identity and cultural identity. In culture, "diaspora art" refers to artists who moved from one place to another, or whose families did. These artists show their varied cultural experiences and identities in their work. They often share different stories based on their personal and individual experiences and constantly challenge the term cultural identity.[20]
However, art can be a method of understanding the complexities of diaspora, showing that it's about more than just moving from one place to another. It also involves deep connections between race, nationality, religion, gender, politics, and culture. Various artworks effectively capture and process these thoughts, often

[18] For interest for the topic see:
Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*.
Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*.
[19] For a general introduction to the topic of diaspora see:
Kenny, "Diaspora: A Very Short Introduction", Oxford University Press, 2013
[20] Hall, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora &*
Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora.*

through the experiences of the artists themselves, focusing on how displacement can affect culture and art over generations.[21]

"Diaspora is a term used to describe movements in population from one country to another and is often cited in discussions about identity. In relation to art, the term diaspora is used to discuss artists who have migrated from one part of the world to another, (or whose families have), and who express their diverse experiences of culture and identity in the work they make; often expressing alternative narratives, and challenging the ideas and structures of the established art world."[22]

3.2. Appropriation and Negotiations of Identity

In the "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" Stuart Hall presents two ways of thinking about diasporic identity. On the one hand, it defines a stable construct of a shared culture, a "one true self" of the members of the community, which they share with their history and their ancestors.

"Cultural identity [...] is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture, and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are

[21] Tate: Diaspora
https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/d/diaspora
[22] Ibid.

the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past."[23]

In the post-colonial era, this was often realized in the rediscovery of a collective identity during the struggles and fights for more rights i.e., in the civil rights movements. Reclaiming the shared commonalities is seen as crucial for marginalized groups seeking to recover their identity. The second approach to understanding diasporic identity, however, sees it as a "matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'.[24] "In contrast to the first approach, here identity is not a fixed construct but is always in flux, constantly transforming, and changed through performative cultures. Hall argues that this approach is necessary to understand the "traumatic character of the colonial experience", which positioned subalterns as others and subjected them to the norms of dominant Western culture. This second view reveals that cultural identity is always a product of negotiation within historical, cultural, and power dynamics. Western cultures represent colonial power and domination. Their influences are not only external but also internalized through colonial discourse and representation. This leads to "splitting and doubling" of identities.[25] Hall's analysis underscores that the diaspora experience is not rooted in a return to a sacred homeland but is characterized by heterogeneity and transformation. Identities are produced and reproduced through "transformation and difference", reflecting the interplay of similarity and difference.[26] By introducing Jacques Derrida's concept of *différance*, Hall illustrates the instability and creativity of identity formations, where meaning is always deferred and open to negotiations. He concludes by emphasizing

[23] Hall, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.

that cultural identity is not a reflection of an already existing reality but a production "constituted within representation".[27]

In simpler terms, Hall's understanding of cultural identity is like a story that is never fully written. Each time this story is told, it might focus on different details or introduce new elements, depending on the experiences and the audience. This makes identity fluid and flexible, constantly updated by new experiences, interpretations, and representations. For people living in diaspora—those who have moved from their country of origin to another—this idea is particularly relevant. This blending and shifting of cultural identities highlight Hall's point that identity is a production, always being made and remade in different contexts. It's not just about where you were born or what your passport says but about the experiences you have and the meanings you create from them in your daily life. Quoting Frantz Fanon, he reinforces that national culture is not just folklore or abstract populism but the "whole body of efforts" through which people create and sustain themselves. This requires interacting with cultural identity as a strategic and continuous positioning within the path of history, culture, and power.

Meanwhile Ranajit Guha, in his Essay, "The Migrant's Time", analyzes the complex issues of migration and living in a diaspora, focusing on the time-related and personal challenges that migrants face. He begins by questioning the sense of unity among members of the diasporic community, pointing out that people who have experienced migration often carry a sense of distance because of their experiences. In their new countries, migrants are sometimes seen as unwanted guests, while in their homelands, they are viewed as traitors who have left their families and cultures behind. Their migration can be seen as a betrayal by their peers, leading them to be treated as outsiders in both their new and old home countries. This puts a deep moral

[27] Hall, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*.

pressure on the norms of the community and causes a feeling of disconnection, temporal and spatial, time and space related. This pressure keeps the departing migrant stuck between their past in their homeland and their future in the hard-to-fit position in the new place.[28] The idea of nostalgia is understood not only as a mixture of thinking about the past but also as a way of dealing with the uncertainties of the present in the new life. The migrant's past is essential to shape a future-oriented present, helping them to adjust to their new surroundings. However, this leads to a complex identity and the possibility of a mismatch in the meaning of time and space. Guha describes this dilemma as a necessity to live in the present in the new community by a nostalgic misunderstanding of the past.[29]

In conclusion, Guha points out the difficulties that the first generation of a diaspora faces in combining their past and future with the present of their new community. They need to gain recognition by engaging in daily life, but their past and future often clash with the present. This conflict continues until the next generation comes along, introducing their own perspectives on time and changing the dynamics once again.

There are not just negative aspects of being a member of the diaspora discussed in the literature. Many theorists have considered diaspora or non-diaspora identity as a multi-layered and ever-changing concept. In 1990, Palestinian-American academic, political activist, and literary critic, Edward Said used the term 'contrapuntal' to reflect on a positive aspect of displacement from one's place of birth or ancestral origin:

[28] Guha, *The Migrants Time*.
[29] Ibid.

"Seeing 'the entire world as a foreign land' makes possible originality of vision. Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that - to borrow a phrase from music - is contrapuntal.... For an exile, habits of life, expression or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. Both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally."[30]

3.3. Artistic Strategies between Coloniality and Resilience

Over the past decades the displacement of objects, exchange of knowledge, and global discussions have resulted in a new cooperation of institutions to set the first steps in order to overcome the Eurocentric boundaries of fine art museums and art history. This process is known as establishing "world art".[31] World art's intention is to be global, despite the fact that this global dimension is predominately based on the facts and knowledge of European history in art and anthropology. But world art is being criticized for lacking the ability to separate the differences and contrasts of the concepts of modern art and humanity, like primitive and civilized. Despite the hard work of scientific research on many diverse objects, it is impossible to defeat the base of Western knowledge and its methods of categorization and to include the objects into the art theory and art history.

[30] Said, *Orientalism*.
[31] Abe, "Locating World Art", in: *The Migrant's Times*.

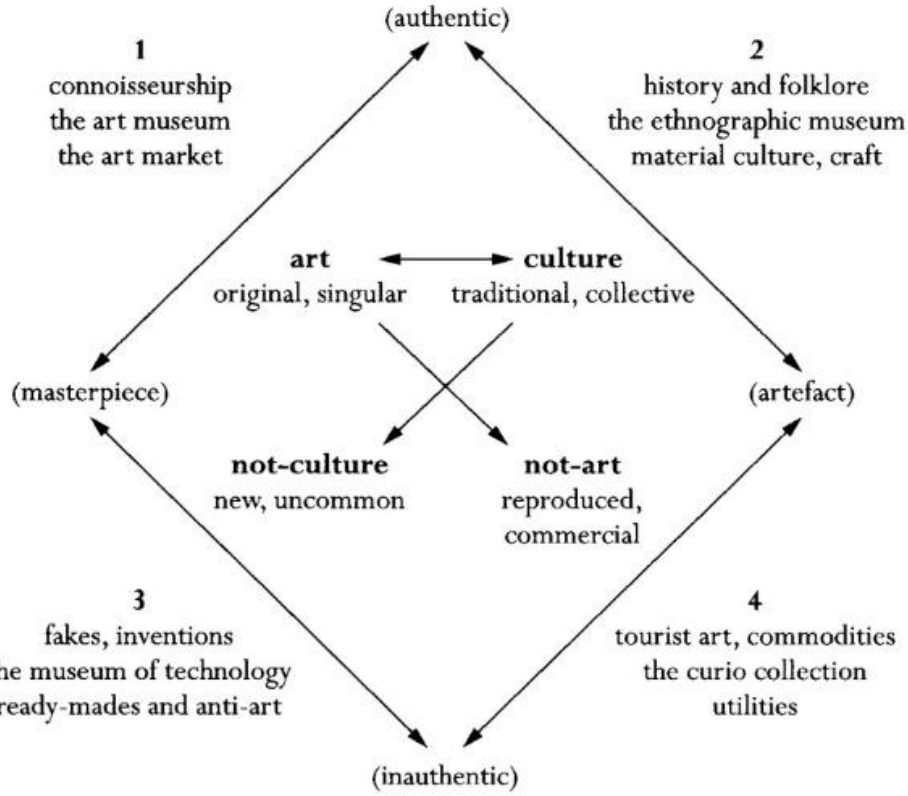

Figure 3: Clifford, James, "The Modern Art-Culture System," Diagrammatica, accessed October 15, 2024, https://diagrammatica.jrosborn.georgetown.domains/items/show/16.

In "Locating World Art", Stanley Abe[32] looks into the difficulties of defining and understanding it especially using the semiotic square and James Clifford's[33] "Art-Culture System". World art emerged as a response to the European-centered bias seen in art history and museums, aiming to adopt a more global perspective. Despite these efforts, Abe points out, that world art is still deeply rooted in a European framework and it struggles to break away from these origins.[34]

[32] Stanley Abe is an art historian and professor known for his contributions to the study of Chinese art and the critique of world art systems.
[33] Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*.
[34] Abe, "Locating World Art", in: *The Migrant's Times*.

Abe first discusses the “Art-Culture System”, which categorizes objects from non-Western sources into two main types: “scientific cultural artifacts” and “aesthetic works of art”. This system contains two axes. The vertical axis goes from inauthentic to authentic and the horizontal axis goes from masterpiece to artefact, dividing the square into four zones of: “authentic masterpieces” (top left), “authentic artifacts” (top right), “inauthentic masterpieces” (lower left), and “inauthentic artifacts” (lower right). It operates on binary distinctions and hierarchical structures, favoring art over culture. There is a significant inconsistency in valuing and authenticating the non-Western objects which are in the western museums. Abe also reviews the “semiotic square”, a concept developed by Algirdas Greimas[35], to dive deeper into Clifford’s system. He points out, that this framework reveals the ideological constraints of world art, which desires to be universal and global but yet is much limited by its Eurocentric origins. The semiotic square maps out these tensions between authentic/inauthentic and art/culture. The main problem remains the classification of the objects in this manner. In other words, there are always many inconsistencies in valuing and authenticating the non-Western objects within the western museums.[36]

Abe then examines how the idea of world art is applied in modern museums, using the Beijing World Art Museum and the Fowler Museum at UCLA as examples. These museums try to move beyond their ethnographic origins by including the concepts of world art. However, they continue to reflect Eurocentric values, revealing the ongoing struggle to align the global aspirations of world art with their Western-based historical and philosophical foundations. A significant challenge Abe discusses is the concept of “authenticity”, particularly in the context of non-western

[35] Algirdas Greimas, (1917-1992) Lithuanian-French linguist and semiotician, known for his contributions to semiotics and structural linguistics. He is best known for developing the "semiotic square," a tool for analyzing the relationships between concepts, and his work on narrative theory

[36] Abe, "Locating World Art", in: *The Migrant's Times*.

art. There is a strong drive in the West to label objects as either authentic or inauthentic, which influences the art market and museum practices. He argues that this obsession with authenticity creates anxiety about fakes, which are often seen as undesirable in the Art-Culture System. This obsession stands as an example of the limitations and contradictions rooted in the concept of world art. Nevertheless, it remains tied to traditional art and anthropology ideologies.

In conclusion, Abe recognizes the complex situation facing world art. While it attempts to address the issues of Eurocentrism in art history and anthropology, it cannot fully detach from its European knowledge roots. The semiotic square of world art ultimately merges back into the traditional art-culture distinctions. The drive for world art often reproduces colonial patterns of domination of knowledge and discourse. Furthermore, its attempts to surpass Eurocentrism are continuously disturbed by the issues of authenticity and fakeness. Abe's essay critically reflects on the notion of world art, its inherent ideological limitations, and the challenges it faces in forming a truly global and inclusive narrative.

In the 21st century, the history of exhibitions for people who were interested in presenting a new perspective of the world became necessary. These perspectives are generally based on a Western form of knowledge, colonialism, postcolonial studies, alternative art practices, and deconstruction of dominant centers.

Okwui Enwezor (1963–2019), a Nigerian curator and influential thinker, played a transformative role in reshaping how the global art world engages with colonial histories and diverse cultural narratives. Through his exhibitions and curatorial projects, Enwezor actively challenged the Eurocentric foundations of the art world, providing a platform for contemporary artists to address histories of colonialism and reframe historical narratives from non-Western perspectives. His approach sought to dismantle Western cultural hegemony by integrating global perspectives,

promoting genuine dialogues between Western and non-Western art practices, and establishing a curatorial model that valued multiplicity over hierarchy. Enwezor's vision encouraged the art community to reevaluate traditional narratives, creating spaces where non-Western perspectives were not only included but positioned as critical and equal voices in the global discourse on art and history.

Enwezor's contributions transformed conventional interpretations of history and culture, promoting artistic exchanges that moved beyond usual geographical and cultural limits.[37] One of Enwezor's notable exhibitions, "Postwar: Art Between the Pacific and the Atlantic, 1945–1965," redefined art history by adopting a global perspective on the aftermath of the Second World War, going beyond the typical focus on the Western European and U.S. discourse. This exhibition highlighted the diverse artistic responses, emphasizing how different cultures processed historical traumas and contributed to the global art narrative.[38]

His prior revolutionary exhibition The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945-1994, presented in Munich in 2001, concentrated on the history of Africa's independence movements. Enwezor pointed out that decolonization was one of the most remarkable events of the 20th century. By exploring African modernity during the post-war era, he opened new horizons for interpreting world art history. His methodology included linking civil rights movements in the U.S. with decolonization efforts worldwide, suggesting that these movements were interconnected and influenced each other significantly. This approach provided a more comprehensive and less Eurocentric understanding of global struggles for independence and social justice, reflecting on how these

[37] Zabunyan, „Decolonizing contemporary art exhibitions. Okwui Enwezor (1963-2019), the turning point of curatorship“, in: *The Migrant's Times*.
[38] Ibid.

movements impacted artistic expressions and themes.[39] The turning point in Enwezor's curatorial career came with Documenta11 in Kassel. For this monumental exhibition, he and his co-curators organized five platforms worldwide, including Lagos, Saint Lucia, and New Delhi. This format allowed diverse voices to be heard, moving away from traditional Western narratives. The Documenta11 exhibition brought together over 100 artists and collectives, mostly from non-Western countries or of non-Western origin. By creating this global perspective, Enwezor redefined the concept of democracy in contemporary art.

His vision continued with Intense Proximity, the 2012 Paris Triennial, which explored how closeness and distance shape contemporary multicultural societies. He focused on the importance of understanding migration, exile, and colonialism in shaping modern identity. This led to the 2015 Venice Biennale, All the World's Futures, where Enwezor emphasized the need to reflect the current state of the world in art. He highlighted the political struggles, violence, and humanitarian crises shaping contemporary artistic production. Okwui Enwezor transformed contemporary art exhibitions into platforms for decolonizing history and challenging dominant narratives. He created spaces where artists from around the world could present their work in equal positions, breaking down barriers and reshaping art history to reflect the global reality.[40]

In her publication “European Others - Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe", Fatima El-Tayeb explores the concept of ethnic minorities and their struggle for more acknowledgment in society. The main focus is on how these communities challenge the dominant national narratives that often leave them and their

[39] Ibid.

[40] Zabunyan, "Decolonizing contemporary art exhibitions. Okwui Enwezor (1963-2019), the turning point of curatorship", in: *The Migrants Times*.

achievements out of the discourse. She argues that European countries still see themselves as a unified body, leaving no space for an alternative ethnic, racial, or cultural narrative. Examples of how minority groups resist their exclusion through art, pop culture, and activism are analyzed by El-Tayeb. She argues that Pop music and poetry can serve as a powerful tool for building community, especially within the context of marginalized groups such as women of color.[41] Poetry which is deeply rooted in oral traditions, emerges in this context as a significant art form capable of strengthening resilience. But in European literary studies, this form of vernacular poetry is often regarded as "low culture". However, it provides a dynamic platform to challenge the existing exclusion. It allows for the delivery of a political message, expressing the experiences of groups often overlooked in the mainstream, in a language, which is spoken by the members themselves. El-Tayeb mentioned Audre Lorde, a queer black feminist poet and activist of Caribbean descent (1934-1992) who masterfully used poetry as a form of resistance. Like many other Black poets and novelists, Lorde argues against using poetry as the "master's tool", instead as a unique way of expressing survival in the political landscape.

Poetry and more general art forms such as hip-hop have become liberation tools for European minorities, challenging the binary view and inflexible construct of identity. They serve as a communal language for young people of color from various backgrounds, expressing their shared experiences of exclusion and injustice. Similarly, scientific disciplines like intersectional feminism provide women of color a voice, challenging the conditions of their marginalization within both the mainstream feminist movement and broader societal structures. El-Tayeb underlines the important role of arts and culture in these accomplishments. They offer the

[41] El-Tayeb, *European Others. Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe*.

possibility of transporting messages and reaching people in a very direct and personal way.[42] El-Tayeb also focuses on the role of performance art in redefining what it means to be European. By examining artists like the Turkish-German filmmaker Fatih Akin and French-Algerian rapper Diam, she shows how stereotypes can be challenged and alternative narratives can be offered. By merging cultural traditions and languages, these artists create new forms of expression that reflect a multicultural Europe. In conclusion, Fatima El-Tayeb offers a critical perspective on Europe's exclusionary narratives and shows how minorities are redefining the definition of being European. She points out the need to embrace diversity, queerness, and intersectionality to create a more inclusive and just Europe. Her work invites the readers to rethink national identities and recognize the continent's rich multicultural reality.[43]

The importance of queer feminist movements and the legacy of Black feminism as a symbol of resistance

The history of feminist movements has involved a wide range of identities, perspectives and struggles, which many of them were initially marginalized or neglected by mainstream feminism. Queer feminist movements, as well as early black feminist movements, are essential not only for understanding how the feminist movement has grown, but also for challenging the racial, gender and heteronormative biases that existed within earlier waves of feminism. Black feminists such as Audre Lorde, along with other activist-artists from the African diaspora, have played a central role in this process, resisting the barriers of European and patriarchal definitions of feminism while using their art as a form of activism.

[42] El-Tayeb, *European Others. Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe*.
[43] Ibid.

The contributions of Lorde especially, through works like Sister Outsider, provide key insights into how feminism must be intersectional, embracing race, sexuality, class and non-Western experiences as well.

The Intersectionality of Feminism: From Black Feminism to Queer Feminism

At the root of Black feminist movements is the understanding that feminist struggles cannot be dissociated from issues of race and class. as result, these movements have been instrumental in shaping the broader framework of intersectional feminism. Intersectionality, a term created by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw[44], refers to the ways in which different forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism and homophobia) intersect and reinforce one another. Before intersectionality achieved widespread recognition, black feminists had long argued for the importance of considering these multiple axes of identity and oppression.

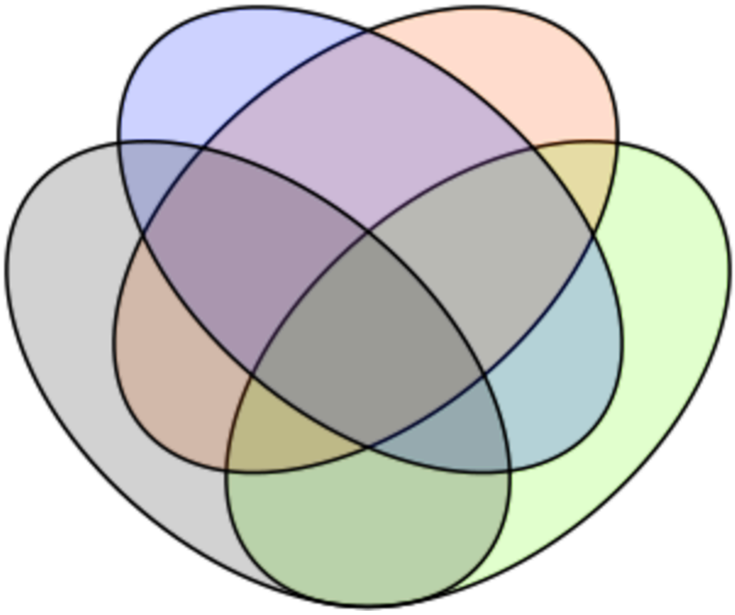

Figure 4: An intersectional analysis considers a collection of factors that affect a social individual in combination, rather than considering each factor in isolation, as illustrated here using a Venn diagram

44

Audre Lorde's work has been essential in articulating this dynamic. In her essay "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" from Sister Outsider, Lorde famously critiques white feminism for failing to account for the experiences of black women, women of color and queer women. She writes: "Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women ... know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to take our differences and turn them into strengths". (Sister Outsider, p. 112). Lorde here highlights the power of difference and the need for an intersectional approach to feminism - one that values diversity rather than seeking to homogenize women's experiences into a single narrative based on whiteness and heteronormativity.

Lorde, herself a black lesbian feminist, also embodies the shift from black feminist movements to the wider inclusion of queer feminist struggles. She highlights that mainstream feminism has often excluded queer women, just as it has excluded women of color. Queer feminist movements have therefore been significant in shifting the scope of feminism, challenging heteronormative assumptions, and standing for the rights of LGBTQ+ people within feminist discourse. Lorde's identity and writings provide an early example of how these movements are interconnected, demonstrating that feminism is not only about gender equality, but also about resisting all forms of oppression.

Feminism and the Diaspora: Art as a Form of Resistance

In addition to her contributions to feminist theory, Audre Lorde was a poet whose art was inseparable from her activism. Black feminists and diaspora artists have long used creative expression as a tool of resistance against oppressive structures,

particularly those rooted in European colonialism and white supremacy. This resistance, through both activism and art, challenges the marginalization of non-European voices in feminist movements and cultural discourses.

Lorde's poem "A Litany for Survival" in Sister Outsider exemplifies this use of art as resistance. In this poem, she speaks of the fear that marginalized people face every day, and how this fear is used to control and silence them. But the poem also highlights the power of speaking out in spite of fear, of resisting the forces that would silence them: Lorde's poem "A Litany for Survival" in Sister Outsider exemplifies this use of art as resistance. In this poem, she speaks of the fear that marginalized people face every day, and how this fear is used to control and silence them. But the poem also highlights the power of speaking out in spite of fear, of resisting the forces that would silence them:

> *"For those of us who live at the shoreline standing upon the constant edges of decision crucial and alone for those of us who cannot indulge the passing dreams of choice who love in doorways coming and going in the hours between dawns looking inward and outward at once before and after seeking a now that can breed futures like bread in our children's mouths so their dreams will not reflect the death of ours;"*[45]

[45] Lorde, *Sister Outsider.*

Here Lorde captures the experience of those who live on the margins of society - those whose identities do not conform to dominant norms. Her poem speaks directly to black women, queer women, and other marginalized groups, acknowledging the systematic forces that work to erase them, while also pointing to their strength, resilience, and the importance of resisting that erasure. Lorde's focus on survival through creativity and expression reflects the ways in which art becomes a mode of resistance, a way of claiming space in a society that seeks to marginalize.

This connection between feminist movements and artistic expression can also be seen more widely in the work of diaspora artists and activists. Whether through music, literature, visual art or performance, diaspora artists often resist colonial and Eurocentric narratives imposed on them and redefine feminism in their own terms. Feminist movements in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean have long incorporated creative expression into their activism, using art not only as a form of protest but also as a means of reclaiming culture, identity and power.

The legacy of queer and Black feminist movements in modern feminism

The influence of black feminist movements and artists such as Audre Lorde on contemporary feminism cannot be overstated. These movements were among the first to challenge the exclusionary practices of white, middle-class feminism and call for a more inclusive, intersectional approach. Queer feminist movements have built on these foundations, further challenging heteronormative biases and ensuring that feminism encompasses all women - whether black, queer, trans, disabled or otherwise marginalized.

Today, the legacy of these movements is evident in the ongoing struggle for intersectionality within feminist activism and theory. Feminist thinkers and activists now recognize that a feminism that does not address issues of race, class, sexuality and colonialism is incomplete. As Lorde writes in Sister Outsider: “It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept and celebrate those differences.“ (Sister Outsider, p. 115). This call to embrace difference as a strength rather than a source of division remains a central tenet of feminist movements today, and it is thanks to pioneers like Audre Lorde and the black and queer feminist movements that this understanding has become so deeply rooted.

4. Appropriating the Glasshouse as an Exhibition Space – Case Studies

This chapter builds a bridge between the broader context of the impacts of colonialism on botanical spaces and the specific artistic interpretations and practices that engage with these narratives. By following the line of how botanical gardens and glasshouses have been used to display and control nature, we can see how these spaces have become symbols of power and knowledge in the colonial world. This historical framework provides a platform for understanding how contemporary artists reinterpret these spaces.

Through the case studies I will explore how these artists, through their unique perspectives, are challenging and transforming the sites of these environments. Their work reflects not only a critique of colonial systems, but also a creative reimagining of these structures, transforming spaces of control into platforms for resistance, identity and cultural re-claim.

4.1.Mona Hatoum

"The feeling of not being able to take anything for granted, even doubting the solidity of the ground you walk on."[46]

Mona Hatoum (1952) was born in Beirut to a Palestinian family. In 1975 she was in London for a short visit when the war broke out in Lebanon and she became an exile in the UK. She studied at art schools in London, specifically the Byam Shaw School of Art (1975-1979) and the Slade School of Art (1979-1981). Her artistic practice has been significantly influenced by her experience of cultural displacement and her

[46] Mona Hatoum

identity as a woman of Arab descent. As a result, her primary artistic focus is on issues of gender, power, and political consciousness. Her main body of work includes sculpture, installation, video, and performance art.

Figure 3 Mona Hatoum - Present Tense (1996)[47]

"Present Tense" (1996) is a sculpture by Mona Hatoum made from 2,200 small blocks of Nablus soap with red beads pressed into them. These beads form a map of the Middle East based on the Oslo Peace Agreement of 1993, showing areas meant to be returned to Palestine. The sculpture reflects both the temporary nature of political borders and the enduring history of the Palestinian people. The title, "Present Tense", plays on words to highlight the ongoing conflicts and political tensions in the region. Hatoum explains that the map symbolizes the division and

[47] Sources (from left to right):
https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hatoum-present-tense-t13867
https://www.plataformadeartecontemporaneo.com/pac/mona-hatoum-en-ivam/present-tense-1996/
https://www.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2015/october/29/the-art-of-the-map-mona-hatoum/

control of Palestinian territories by Israel, which often closes off areas, isolating and restricting Palestinians. The use of Palestinian soap in the artwork resonates with viewers familiar with its cultural significance. The grid structure of the soap blocks reflects Hatoum's interest in minimalist art, but the organic map lines introduce layers of meaning and ambiguity. Hatoum's personal history and the political situation in the Middle East heavily influence this work, making it a powerful statement on identity, resistance, and displacement. In her own words:

"Maybe instinctively I did it on soap so that the implication is it's a temporary material and eventually it will dissolve and with it all these borders will disappear. At the time we didn't think about conservation very much so it's all drying out and shrinking and going brown. So, now what we're doing with the fresh soap is we're covering it with Liquitex to seal the moisture in so that hopefully it will stay like this."[48]

This work was displayed in 1996 at the Anadiel Gallery in Jerusalem. Maps are a recurring theme in Hatoum's art, and "Present Tense" focuses on boundaries and political issues in the Middle East. Hatoum, a Palestinian exile, uses the sculpture to explore the complexities of power and oppression.

[48] Source: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/mona-hatoum-2365/mona-hatoum-studio-visit

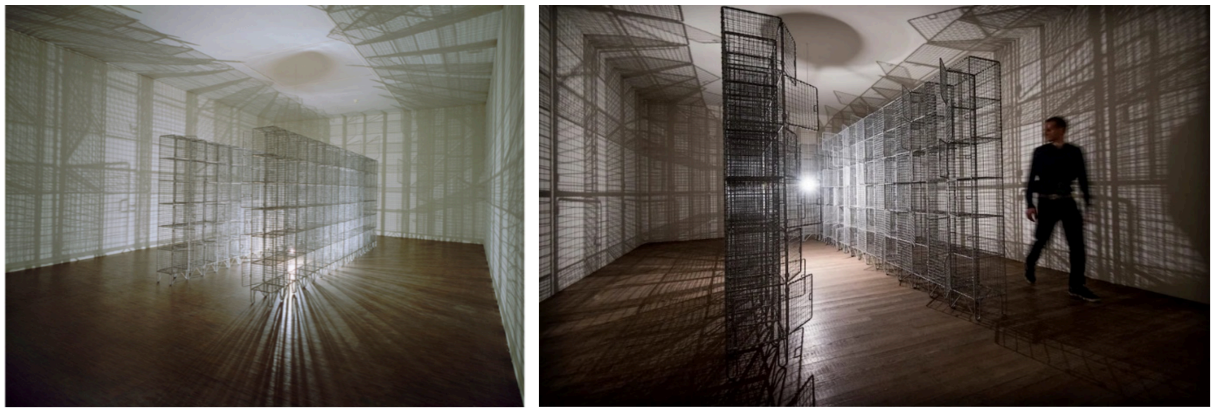

Figure 4 Mona Hatoum - Light Sentence (1992)[49]

In her artistic practice, Mona Hatoum gives voice to her experiences as an exiled artist, focusing on themes of oppression, dislocation, and identity. In this particular piece, she creates a profound impact using minimal materials. The installation comes to life through the interplay of light and shadows, generated by the slow movement of a light bulb. As the bulb moves up and down, it casts shadows on the surrounding walls and ceiling, forming architectural shapes that seem to engulf and imprison the viewer.

"Light Sentence" is an installation artwork created by Mona Hatoum in 1992. The piece consists of a large, rectangular arrangement of stacked wire mesh lockers, inspired by the industrial structures. The lockers are arranged in a grid, creating a cage-like structure filling the exhibition space. A light bulb hangs from the ceiling at the center of the installation, throwing shifting shadows as it moves. The bulb is motorized and slowly swings back and forth, causing the shadows to continuously change. The shifting shadows created by the moving light bulb generate a sense of instability and the grid-like structure of the lockers is visually disturbed. The

[49] Sources (from left to right):
https://www.artsy.net/artwork/mona-hatoum-light-sentence
https://www.telegraph.co.uk/art/what-to-see/mona-hatoum-tate-modern-review-one-of-the-shows-of-the-year/

interplay of light and shadow emphasizes themes of confinement, surveillance, and the fragility of human existence.[50]

The work's title, “Light Sentence”, plays on the dual meaning of the word “sentence”, suggesting both a punishment and a fragment of speech, thereby linking the visual experience to broader themes of language, control, and power. “Light Sentence” is a clever play on words, implying that justice is applied by light in a seemingly easy manner. The cage-like structure projected onto the walls becomes threatening or empowering depending on the position of the ever-changing light bulb. As the bulb begins to swing away, the sense of threat disappears, and the shadows yield to light. This dynamic interplay of light and shadow not only intrigues the viewer but also metaphorically represents the transient nature of confinement and liberation, reflecting Hatoum's exploration of her own sense of displacement and identity as an exiled artist. The simplicity of the materials contrasts with the complexity of the themes, demonstrating Hatoum's ability to communicate powerful messages through minimalist means.

[50] Jaleh Mansoor

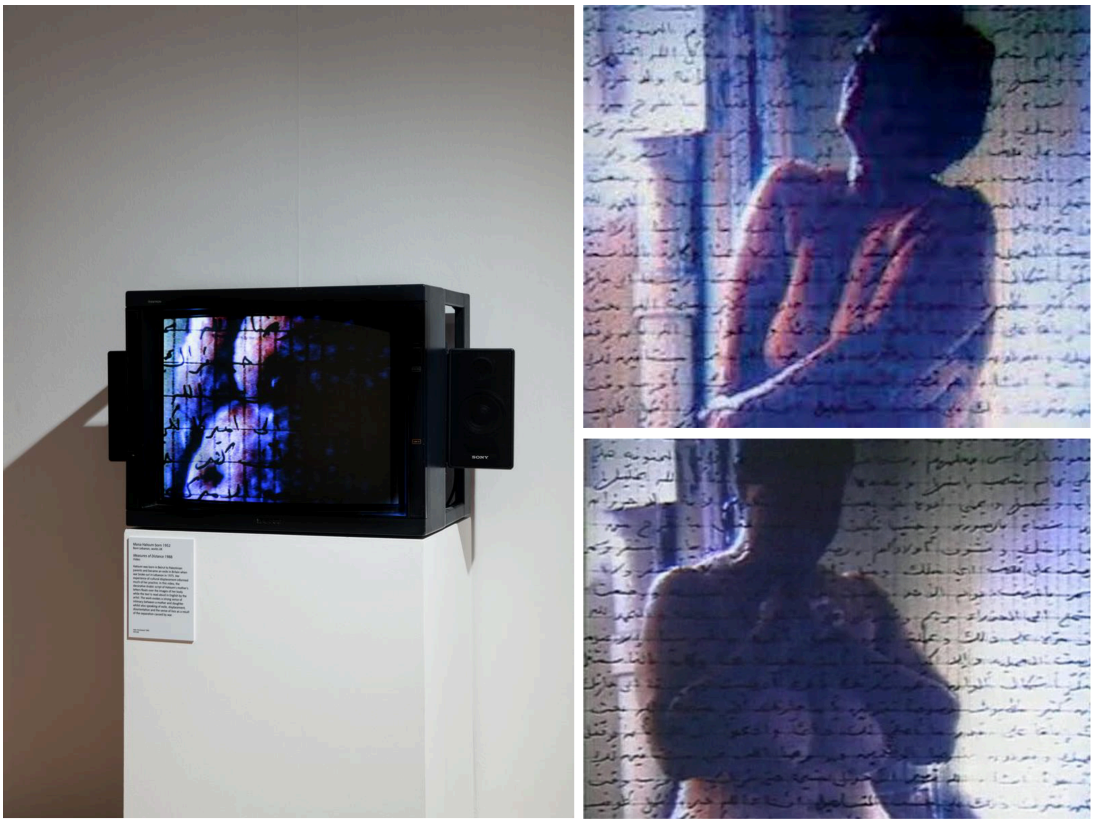

Figure 5 Mona Hatoum - Measures of Distance (1988)[51]

"Measures of Distance" is a video artwork of 15 minutes and 26 seconds by Mona Hatoum that combines several elements. The piece features letters from Hatoum's mother in Beirut, displayed as Arabic text on the screen and read by Hatoum in English. Background slides show her mother in the shower, shot by Hatoum during a visit to Lebanon. The video includes recorded Arabic conversations between the mother and daughter, discussing personal issues such as her mother's sexuality and her husband's concerns about Hatoum's intimate photography. The video explores themes of exile, displacement, and the deep bond between mother and daughter. It challenges stereotypes of Arab women by presenting the mother as a complex,

[51] Sources (from left to right):
https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hatoum-measures-of-distance-t07538
https://mcam.mills.edu/publications/shiftingperspectives/catalogue/melika.html
https://lux.org.uk/work/measures-of-distance/

thinking-and-feeling individual. The Arabic script overlays the images like a veil, symbolizing both the literal and metaphorical distances between mother and daughter, and between Eastern and Western perspectives. This work emphasizes the intimate and transformative relationship between mother and daughter, breaking taboos surrounding the female body. It shows the mother's freedom to express herself through her daughter's art, free from colonial and patriarchal restrictions.[52]

"Present Tense" consists of blocks of Palestinian soap embedded with red glass beads outlining the 1993 Oslo Accords map. This installation critiques the political promises of peace that fail to address deeper issues of occupation and displacement. "Light Sentence" features a wire mesh cage with a light bulb casting shifting shadows, evoking sensations of imprisonment and surveillance. The installation critiques mechanisms of power and control, with the cage symbolizing both physical and psychological imprisonment. The moving light suggests instability, implying that surveillance is extensive yet temporary. Hatoum appropriates the gallery space to transform it into a site of discomfort and reflection, challenging viewers to consider the broader implications of surveillance. The resilience in this piece is embodied in the interplay of light and shadow, symbolizing the potential for resistance and transformation despite oppressive forces.

In "Measures of Distance," Hatoum uses video to layer images of her mother’s body with handwritten Arabic letters. This piece critiques the boundaries created by geopolitical conflicts and personal exile, presenting an affective narrative of separation and longing. Through these works, Hatoum connects personal narratives to wider political contexts, challenging viewers to confront socio-political realities while celebrating the ongoing resilience of those affected.

[52] Tate, “Measures of Distance”

Her innovative use of materials and forms not only critiques existing power structures but also underscores the resilient spirit that persists in the face of adversity.

4.2. Farah Al Qasimi

Figure 6 Farah Al Qasimi – Um Al Naar (2019)[53]

Farah Al Qasimi is a young artist and musician from the United Arab Emirates. She studied in the United States, 2012 BA in Art Major, Yale University and 2017 MFA, Yale School of Art & Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. The movie "Um Al Naar" (Mother of Fire) is her first feature film, combining horror and comedy to

[53] Source: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/al-qasimi-um-al-naar-mother-of-fire-t15937

explore colonial histories and gender identities in the Gulf Arabic culture. The film is set up like a reality TV show featuring an interview with a jinn[54] whose name is "Um Al Naar".

The film critically looks at the UAE's past, from Portuguese and British rule to modern nation-building. Throughout the jinn's story, Al Qasimi reviews how colonialism has affected cultural and gender dynamics in the region. The jinn, shown as a colorful and humorous character, talks about losing her powers as belief in her fades and reveals that her possession of people is meant to release their inner spirit.

Figure 7 Farah Al Qasimi – Um An Naar (2019)[55]

Footage of real exorcisms and stories about jinn's encounters are included in the video, highlighting how these practices are affected by gender and colonial history. The film ends on a positive note with dancing and music, celebrating women's expressions of culture.

Al Qasimi's film is visually aligned with her photography style, featuring bright colors and decorated settings, some of which are in her relatives' homes in the UAE.

[54] A pre-Islamic spirit from Middle Eastern folklore

[55] Sources (from left to right):
https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/al-qasimi-um-al-naar-mother-of-fire-t15937
https://farahalqasimi.com/Um-Al-Naar-1

By identifying with “Um Al Naar”, Al Qasimi invites viewers to see the world from both her and the jinn's perspectives.

“Um Al Naar” connects traditional beliefs with contemporary digital culture, showing how oral histories are kept by younger generations. By juxtaposing modern digital influences with traditional oral histories, “Um Al Naar” Points out the continuing effect of colonial influences and changing expressions of gender in the UAE.[56]

Farah Al Qasimi's project "Um Al Naar" (Mother of Fire) explores themes of critique, appropriation, and resilience through a blend of horror-comedy and cultural commentary. A jinn named Um Al Naar narrates the historical and cultural transformations of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), from its Bedouin roots to colonial influences to modern-day changes. The critique in "Um Al Naar" is multi-layered. Al Qasimi challenges the continuing effects of colonialism by highlighting how the Portuguese and British occupations left a lasting impact on the Persian Gulf region. From the perspective of the jinn, she addresses the commercialization and Westernization of Emirati culture, pointing to the loss of traditional values and practices. This critique is presented with a comedic sensibility, reflecting the absurdity and contradictions within the rapid modernization of the Gulf region.

Al Qasimi appropriates elements of traditional Emirati folklore and contemporary media formats to create a dialogue between past and present. Through the use of the jinn - a pre-Islamic spirit from local mythology - she bridges ancient spiritual beliefs with modern social issues. This appropriation is not just for artistic effect, but to question and critique how cultural narratives are adapted and sometimes commercialized in the process of globalization and modernization.

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[56] Tate, “Um Al Naar”
interview by Cynthia Leung: youtube interview - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ymL6J5m3JWM

Resilience is a central focus of "Um Al Naar," embodied by the jinn herself. Despite feeling weaker and more isolated as modernity interferes with traditional spiritual practices, Um Al Naar persists, symbolizing the long-lasting spirit of cultural identity in the face of change. The character's struggle reflects broader themes of cultural resilience, highlighting how communities adapt and resist the loss of their heritage even as they experience significant change.

Through "Um Al Naar," Farah Al Qasimi effectively critiques the impact of colonial and modern influences on the UAE, appropriates traditional and contemporary cultural elements to create a powerful narrative, and highlights the resilience of cultural identity in the face of constant change. Her work invites viewers to reflect on the complexities of cultural evolution and the importance of preserving heritage while adapting to new realities.

4.3.Vanessa A. Opoku

Figure 8 Vanessa A. Opoku – Rooted Resurgence (2023-Ongoing)[57]

Vanessa A. Opoku, born in 1992 in Germany, is an interdisciplinary artist based in Berlin. Her work intersects history, technology, and marginalized narratives within mixed realities. Opoku studied Book Art and Graphic Design, Art and Digital Media, and Photography at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem, and received her diploma in Fine Arts from the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig in 2021.

"Rooted Resurgence" by Vanessa A. Opoku is a mixed-media piece that explores the topics of history, technology, and marginalized narratives. She uses point cloud scans to transform mainly plants into 3D objects. Scans are presented both in virtual reality and printed on acrylic glass. This work demonstrates Opoku's innovative approach to combining traditional and contemporary artistic techniques. This

[57] Source
https://vanessaopoku.com/Rooted-Resurgence-1

displacement of the plants in virtual space represents their violent history. This work is part of her broader exploration of how alliances between art, science, and technology can reshape our perceptions of reality and the living world.[58]

Vanessa A. Opoku's "Rooted Resurgence" is an expressive mixed media artwork that explores historical narratives, reclaims cultural elements, and embodies the strength of marginalized identities.

Opoku's "Rooted Resurgence" critiques the socio-political conditions that lead to the marginalization of cultural histories. Combining UV prints on acrylic glass, the piece visually overlays historical and contemporary elements, creating a dialogue between past and present that challenges the viewer to consider how history is constructed and whose stories are told. The critique is not only historical but also of the ongoing marginalization that many cultures face in the contemporary world. In her work, Opoku appropriates traditional narratives and visual elements and repurposes them in a modern context, using digital media and 3D point cloud scans to create a virtual dimension for the object to have another life and a personal archive that preserves elements and cultural manifestations that might otherwise be forgotten.

Resilience is a central theme in 'Rooted Resurgence', reflected in both the subject matter and the artistic process, Opoku navigates and bridges different spaces - physical, intermediate and virtual - symbolizing the adaptability and resilience of marginalized cultures in maintaining their presence and relevance in different contexts.

During the interview I had the opportunity to ask the artist about her project Rooted Resurgence. One of the things that really caught my attention was her story about visiting the Botanical Gardens in Palermo. While there for an exhibition, she took

[58] Lina Brion, https://vanessaopoku.com/Rooted-Resurgence-1

the time to explore the garden and scan the plants. What was interesting was how she gave these plants a new 'life' outside the garden, in virtual reality. This act of taking something from the physical world and giving it a presence in a virtual space added a new dimension to the concept of the project, especially in the context of colonial history and the current impact of colonialism.

She explained that she loves to visit botanical gardens when she travels, and that her experience in Palermo was linked to her previous work on ethnological collections for the Grassi Museum in Leipzig. As she reflected on the historical role of botanical gardens in colonial times, she began to think about questions like who collected the plants, from where and when. This led her to explore the idea of collections being 'authorised' as scientific, and the limitations that surround them, for example, visitors aren't allowed to take anything from these gardens. In response, she began making point cloud scans of the plants as a kind of intervention or critique of these institutional collections.

The answer to why she used point cloud scans instead of regular 3D scans, She explained that she was using an application called SiteScape, which is normally used to measure space on construction sites. By using this technology, she is playing with the idea of mapping and measuring space, which is itself an imperial gesture, to create something poetic. The limitations of the app are also part of the meaning - the scans are fragmented and can't create a perfect copy of the physical object. For her, this represents how she experiences reality: Fragile, fragmented, incoherent, beautiful, sensual, dynamic, dense and constantly changing.

Then by discussing how her work relates to the themes of diaspora and identity that are central to my research. I was curious if she saw the complexity of identity in her work, particularly in Rooted Resurgence. She told me that her work is deeply influenced by the legacies of colonialism, capitalism and migration that shape not

only the world around us, but also her own existence. For her, the diasporic experience is not about appropriating cultural elements, but developing them from a diasporic point of view. She emphasised how people in diaspora, regardless of their specific cultural backgrounds, share common experiences of displacement, struggle and connection. This shared existence is like a 'superpower' that links diaspora communities through their collective experience.

we discussed the metaphor of the greenhouse, which relates directly to my thesis. She explained about the ambivalence in her work - there is never a clear or happy ending, but rather a continuous process of experimentation.

This ambivalence reflects the way we deal with history, especially violent history, which should never be forgotten, no matter how painful. For her, making art is itself an act full of contradictions. She discussed the challenges of who gets to make art, how it's treated as a profession, and how it's received by audiences, especially in spaces dominated by Western or 'white' perspectives. These complexities, she said, make the act of making art feel like working in a greenhouse - open and transparent, but also constrained by invisible boundaries.

Through this conversation I was able to get a much deeper understanding of the complex themes in her work and how they resonate with the concepts of colonial history, diaspora and identity that I'm exploring in my thesis. Her insights on ambivalence and resilience were very helpful, as they helped me to frame my thoughts on how we can use art to confront, challenge and reshape the legacies of colonialism.

5. Conclusion

After exploring the historical context and examining specific case studies, the thesis now moves towards linking these findings within the concept of heterotopia. The historical analysis has shown how spaces like the Glasshouse have been used to maintain colonial control over nature, while the case studies show how contemporary artists engage with these spaces to challenge and reinterpret this legacy. Bringing these two perspectives together, the thesis argues that the glasshouse serves as a heterotopic space - a place that holds multiple layers of meaning, where colonial histories coexist with acts of resistance and reinterpretation. This section explores how these elements interact, showing how heterotopia allows us to understand the glasshouse as both a symbol of oppression and a site for empowered narratives.

5.1. Heterotopia

As Michel Foucault explains, spaces we live in, shape our lives, our time, and our history. They are complex and take us in different directions. We don't live in an empty void that we can fill with people and things. Instead, we live within a network of relationships that define unique and distinct spaces. For example, cafes, cinemas, and beaches are places for temporary relaxation. Houses, bedrooms, and beds are sites of rest. But there are certain special spaces that relate to all others, while at the same time mirroring, challenging, or reinventing them.[59]

These special places are known as Heterotopias, which are different from all other spaces. They are real places that exist in society but serve as "counter-sites" where

[59] Foucault, *Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias*.

the usual norms are challenged or reversed. For instance, the garden, and in my arguments also the glasshouse, can act as a heterotopia by representing a miniature version of the world that contains plants from different regions, cultures, and nature. Foucault used the mirror to explain this concept. When you look in the mirror, it reflects the real world but is not itself a real space. It creates a "place" that isn't physically there but still relates to the reality around it. In this context, the glasshouse represents a romanticized, nature-infused atmosphere. However, a closer examination reveals a reflection of its colonial history.[60]

According to Michel Foucault's third principle, heterotopias bring together different spaces in one location, which would otherwise be incompatible. For instance, gardens often combine plants from various parts of the world into a harmonious microcosm. The fourth principle states that heterotopias are connected to slices of time, known as heterochronies. Museums and libraries collect and preserve the accumulation of time, but gardens and glasshouses also play a role in preserving botanical diversity over time. Mary Somerset's herbarium, for example, contained twelve volumes of dried plants that were carefully preserved to capture the temporal nature of plants. The fifth principle highlights that heterotopias have systems of opening and closing that isolate them while making them accessible. Gardens and glasshouses are often enclosed spaces with entry requirements, like special tickets or opening hours. Although they seem open to all, their exclusivity creates a curious illusion, where visitors think they're part of the space, yet they remain outsiders. From a different perspective, the plants inside the glasshouse are also isolated, accessible only to visit and scientific research. The context of their natural environment and the indigenous knowledge of their use and cultural significance are

[60] Foucault, *Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias.*

absent. Meanwhile what is present is the recreation of an approximate atmosphere necessary for their survival.[61]

As in the sixth principle, he explains that brothels and colonies are two extreme types of heterotopias. Let us consider, after all, that the boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself, and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea. It travels from port to port and all the way to the colonies to find the most valuable treasures hidden in their gardens. This is why, from the 16th century to today, the boat has been a key instrument for economic growth in our civilization.[62]

In conclusion, based on my understanding of heterotopia and its principles, glasshouses are heterotopias. They encapsulate multiple spaces and relationships involving nature, economy, botany, the hierarchy of Western knowledge and colonial history. Glasshouses are spaces that preserve the memory of historical periods and present them through the romanticized lens of peaceful, exotic nature. These glass structures reflect scenes of exile, diaspora, identity complexities and the classifying methods of Western knowledge. Practically and metaphorically, they serve as curated exhibitions of definitions, diasporic histories and coloniality. with the plants representing the inhabitants of this microcosm, not unlike diasporic artworks in the exhibition space.

Heterotopia has always been an ambivalent term between police regimes and resistant energies. Following the long violent history and the artistic counter-appropriation of the glasshouse I have tried to retrace this ambivalence to an exhibitionary form.

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[61] Foucault, *Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias*.

[62] Ibid.

In conclusion of this thesis, I explore the resilience of three artists whose work deals with themes of power and violence, both in their personal lives and in historical contexts. These artists challenge Western cultural ignorance and bias, navigate identity and appropriation in the art world, and confront gender discrimination. The context and history of the glasshouse as an exhibition space, and the diasporic art, reflect the plants of resistance that have been captured and grown, while adapting to displacement and barriers, to fit in and feel at home in an unwelcoming atmosphere.

Mona Hatoum's work "Measures of Distance" uses her experience of displacement and exile to discuss her mother-daughter relationship, political issues, and her mother's sexuality. The piece shows her mother in the shower having private conversations about her father's objections to her intimate photography. These conversations are set against letters from her mother from Lebanon, written in Arabic and read aloud in English. This multi-layered video explores gender stereotypes and discrimination and highlights the experience of exile and diaspora.

Farah Al Qasimi's video "Um Al Naar" uses humor to address the colonial impact on gender dynamics and stereotypes of Arab women in traditional cultural practices and a society increasingly influenced by digital media. These artists use their work to highlight the ongoing effects of colonial legacies and the complex nature of cultural resilience.

Vanessa A. Opoku’s project "Rooted Resurgence" explores the reimagining of historical narratives and the resilience of cultural identities through mixed media and UV prints on acrylic glass. Opoku's interdisciplinary approach merges the history, technology, and marginalized narratives, challenging dominant cultural narratives and highlighting the resilience of displaced identities.

The term heterotopia, created by Michel Foucault, encapsulates the ambivalent nature of certain spaces that simultaneously represent, contest, and invert common norms and structures. Heterotopias are especially related in the context of glasshouses and exhibition spaces, which have historically embodied both the power of colonial regimes and the potential for resistant artistic energies.

In this thesis, I have explored how these spaces function as heterotopias in the works of artists addressing themes of diaspora, coloniality, and resistance. Glasshouses, with their origins in the colonial era, were symbols of imperial power and scientific advancement. They displayed exotic plants collected from colonies, reinforcing the narrative of Western dominance over nature and other cultures. However, these spaces also have an essential ambivalence, serving as sites of both control and subversion.

The artistic appropriation of glasshouses transforms them into spaces of resistance. By repurposing these structures, artists challenge their historical associations with colonial exploitation. The glasshouse becomes a site where the legacies of colonialism are questioned and reimagined. Exhibition spaces, like glasshouses, can also function as heterotopias. They are places where different realities connect, allowing for the representation of multiple perspectives. In the context of diaspora art, these spaces become fields for challenging dominant cultural narratives and highlighting marginalized voices.

Heterotopias are fundamentally conflicted, embodying both the potential for power and control and resistance. Glasshouses and exhibition spaces, as heterotopias, reflect this duality. They can reinforce colonial power structures or serve as sites of destruction and critique.

In the works of Hatoum, Al Qasimi, and Opoku, these spaces are repurposed to challenge colonial legacies and highlight the resilience of diasporic identities. The dual nature of heterotopias is visible in their ability to both uphold and challenge common cultural narratives.

The examples and case studies featured in the thesis were chosen based on their direct engagement with the overarching theme of coloniality and resistance within the context of exhibition spaces. The glasshouse, historically linked to colonialism, serves as a powerful metaphor for displacement and control, while contemporary diasporic art engages with themes of migration, hybridity, and resilience. The case studies are form **Mona Hatoum**, **Farah Al Qasimi**, and **Vanessa A. Opoku** .

The historical use of greenhouses as a space for scientific experimentation and imperial domination forms the basis also for their symbolic role in the thesis. Built primarily to house exotic plants from colonised regions, glasshouses are a spatial and epistemological representation of colonial power. This history is reflected in the contemporary global art scene, where diasporic artists navigate similar themes of displacement and cultural appropriation. The artists selected for this thesis respond to this legacy by creating art that challenges these power structures.

Mona Hatoum, in particular, engages with the politics of space and identity, echoing colonial practices of classification and displacement, but through the lens of personal exile. Her work acts as a bridge between the physical and metaphorical constraints of coloniality, making her an ideal case study for this thesis.

5.2. Representation of Displacement and Identity

Diasporic artists such as Mona Hatoum, Farah Al Qasimi and Vanessa A. Opoku were selected for their ability to visually and conceptually explore the themes of displacement and identity that are central to the thesis. Each artist's work encapsulates the struggles of navigating cultural hybridity, which mirrors the adaptation of plants in the artificial environments of glasshouses.

- Mona Hatoum's works, such as Present Tense and Measures of Distance, directly address issues of exile, identity and political oppression. Her use of personal and political narratives, as well as her engagement with spatial metaphors, resonates with the dual role of the glasshouse as a site of control and resistance.

- Farah Al Qasimi's work, particularly her film Um Al Naar, was selected for its exploration of cultural transformation under the oppression of colonial histories and globalisation. Her juxtaposition of traditional and modern imagery critiques the continuing colonial impact on gender and identity in the Gulf region. This reflects the thesis' focus on how diasporic artists use their platforms to resist and reshape narratives of their cultural pasts.

- Vanessa A. Opoku's Rooted Resurgence was included for its innovative approach to blending digital media with traditional narratives, highlighting the resilience of marginalised identities. Her exploration of technology, history and the botanical world aligns with the work's interest in how glasshouses - as curated, controlled environments - can be appropriated and reimagined as sites of resistance.

5.3. Artistic strategies of resistance

The artists are chosen for their unique approaches to resisting colonial narratives and reclaiming their identities. Through their mediums - sculpture, film and digital art - they engage with the cultural complexities of post-colonialism and displacement.

Mona Hatoum employs minimalist and conceptual strategies that challenge viewers to confront issues of surveillance, confinement, and personal versus collective histories. Her installation Light Sentence, for example, uses light and shadow to evoke themes of imprisonment and resilience, drawing parallels with the controlled environments of greenhouses and the resilience of the plants (and people) that adapt within them.

Farah Al Qasimi's blend of horror, comedy and documentary styles in Um Al Naar offers a critical perspective on how traditional practices and folklore are shaped by colonial and post-colonial influences. Her use of a jinn as a central figure cleverly regains the power of the region's mythologies while criticising the impact of Western modernity on the region's culture.

- Vanessa A. Opoku's work in Rooted Resurgence usespoint cloud scans to interrogate the violence of cultural displacement. Her use of botanical imagery as a metaphor for survival under oppression speaks directly to the role of the glasshouse in the imperial narrative, where plants - and cultures - are uprooted and transplanted into foreign contexts.

5.4. Heterotopia and paradox in exhibition spaces

A decisive reason for the selection of these case studies lies in the concept of heterotopia, as defined by Michel Foucault, which forms a key theoretical context for the thesis. Heterotopias are spaces that are at simultaneously real and symbolic, reflecting the world while existing as counter-sites that challenge social norms. Glasshouses, as exhibition spaces, are presented as heterotopias because they reflect colonial histories while also serving as sites of resistance.

The works of Hatoum, Al Qasimi and Opoku transform their exhibition spaces into heterotopias of resistance. By appropriating these spaces, they challenge the historical narrative of colonial exploitation, turning sites of control into sites of resistance. Each artist's work, by being placed in the context of a European-based exhibition space, aims to critique the very structures that have historically marginalised non-European cultures.

This summary highlights the thematic links between the artists' artworks and the thesis' exploration of glasshouses as both symbols of colonial power and spaces for artistic resistance. Each case study has been chosen to highlight the themes of displacement, resilience and identity reclamation in a post-colonial world.

6. Restitution in Diaspora Art and the Context of Plant Restitution

The concept of restitution has become a major topic in contemporary debates around decolonisation, focusing on the return of cultural objects taken during colonial times to their countries of origin. More recently, questions about the intersections of colonial history, ecological exploitation and resilience have expanded this discourse to include the restitution of botanical specimens. This section explores whether and how restitution can be applied to the world of plants and botanical collections, while also exploring the history and relevance of restitution in diaspora art, with a strong focus on the contributions of Bénédicte Savoy.Restitution refers to more than the physical return of stolen objects. It encompasses the restoration of cultural identity, memory and knowledge that has been disrupted or erased by colonial power. Artists from diasporic backgrounds often explore their heritage and use their work to navigate the tensions between personal identity and collective memory. These artists often engage in a process of reclaiming and recontextualising histories that have been marginalised or suppressed, making restitution an essential part of their practice. One of the leading voices in the restitution discourse is Bénédicte Savoy, a French art historian whose work has been central to shaping current discussions on the return of cultural artefacts. In her influential 2018 report, co-authored with Felwine Sarr, The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Towards a New Relational Ethics," Savoy highlights the moral and ethical necessity of returning stolen cultural objects to their original communities. Savoy and Sarr argue that restitution is not just a symbolic gesture, but a necessary step in acknowledging the violent history of colonialism and building a new relationship between former colonial powers and the cultures they exploited.

Savoy's work is particularly relevant to diaspora artists because it opens up conversations about the recovery of cultural heritage and identity. For many artists, the concept of restitution goes beyond the physical object; it also includes the restoration of cultural agency, in which art serves as a tool for reclaiming narratives and challenging colonial ideologies. The artistic practices of diasporic communities often reflect this desire for restitution, using creative forms to address the losses caused by displacement and to address the harms caused by colonialism.

The complexities of plant restitution While the restitution of cultural artefacts has been a central focus of decolonial discourse, the idea of plant restitution introduces new layers of complexity. During the colonial era, plants from colonised regions were often taken to Europe for study, cultivation and display in botanical gardens. These gardens served as symbols of imperial power and scientific progress, reinforcing the idea that European powers could control and classify nature as they did colonised peoples. However, these plants were often removed from their native ecosystems, stripped of the local knowledge that sustained them, and subjected to new, alien environments.

The idea of returning plants to their places of origin raises challenging questions. Unlike cultural objects, plants are living entities that adapt, grow and evolve over time. Some of these plants have become naturalised in their new environments, and returning them to their native ecosystems could upset the balance of those ecosystems. In practice, the very idea of returning plants can be difficult: Who would oversee such a process? And how do we account for the vast ecological changes that have occurred in both the plants' original and current environments?

Nevertheless, the symbolic value of plant restitution is significant. Just as the restitution of cultural objects aims to restore relationships between communities and their heritage.

6.1. Restitution and Resilience: The intersection of art and botany

The concept of restitution in diaspora art and in the field of botanical collections intersect in important ways, particularly when viewed through the lens of resilience. Both fields are concerned with how communities and ecosystems respond to the disruptions caused by colonialism. In diasporic art, artists often draw on fragmented cultural histories to create new forms of expression that challenge colonial narratives of their heritage. Similarly, the restitution of plants could be seen as a way of acknowledging the colonial legacy of botanical exploitation and acknowledging the indigenous knowledge systems that were marginalised in the interests of European scientific categorisation.

Restitution, whether of art or plants, is fundamentally about restoring balance and acknowledging past wrongs. It is also about resilience - the ability of both cultures and ecosystems to adapt to the violent disturbances they have experienced. In diasporic art, this resilience is seen in the way artists transform their displacement and cultural fragmentation into powerful acts of reclamation and redefinition. In the case of plants, resilience is evident in the survival and adaptation of species transported across continents, but the question remains: Is it possible or ethical to reverse this process?

One approach to plant restitution might involve the restoration of knowledge systems rather than the literal return of plants.

Colonialism not only took plants from their native lands, but also attempted to erase the indigenous knowledge that regulated their growth and use. A more meaningful form of restitution might involve collaborating with indigenous and local communities to recover and preserve these knowledge systems, ensuring that they play a central role in modern botanical research and conservation practices.

This would be in line with Bénédicte Savoy's call for a 'relational ethics' of restitution, where the return of objects (or plants) is part of a broader process of repairing relationships and recognising the value of non-Western knowledge systems.

To conclude the thesis, this final section brings together the journey from the historical foundations of the Glasshouse and its colonial roots to the transformative work of contemporary artists reinterpreting this space. By examining the glasshouse as both a symbol and a site, we have seen how it embodies a complex duality as an instrument of colonial control and a platform for questioning, resistance and identity reclamation. The case studies of diasporic artists further highlight how the glasshouse, as a heterotopic space, can be reimagined as a place where multiple histories and identities intersect, allowing for a dialogue between past and present.

By reconsidering the glasshouse as a 'heterotopia', we show how it is no longer just a space for plants, but also a site for layered cultural meanings. These artistic interventions challenge and reframe its legacy, transforming it into a site of resilience and adaptability rather than one of control. Through this reappropriation, the thesis highlights the potential for exhibition spaces to become powerful spaces for reflecting on and re-shaping historical narratives.

As we look to the future, an important question is whether these exhibition spaces - and perhaps botanical collections themselves - can play a role in the larger discussion of restitution? Could they actively work to re-build cultural and ecological connections damaged by colonial histories, not only by returning cultural objects, but also by recognising indigenous knowledge and acknowledging the origins of plants and artefacts? This vision suggests a future in which exhibition spaces meaningfully engage with the concept of restitution, transforming themselves into places of un-learning and dialogue where historical narratives are not just displayed, but reconnected to their rightful cultural contexts. Such spaces would truly embody heterotopia, embracing complexity, fostering resilience and serving as sites of active decolonisation.

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