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# Arabadabra

Intersections of  
cultural politics in  
imaginary times

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# I/M/D

# Graduation Thesis

Arabadabra is printed at the  
Koninklijke Academie van  
Beeldende Kunsten (KABK), Den  
Haag, Netherlands, on Biotop  
paper and typeset in Antique Olive.

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# Abstract

*"-Something is happening in Europe-"*

This thesis explores a budding phenomenon, imagining pockets of possibility in a synchronic and global way. It explores how its participants deal with internalised bias, practice pleasurable resistance and organize for future communities. We will see the generative and the destructive uses of memory, identity, and embodiment, and how these emergent methodologies engage with speculation.



*In the tram, a beautiful little sister, laughing so warmly the whole tram stopped shivering, doddled about at my stop. Her mother's voice, the round full voice of mine, guiding her out "yellah mamma", like my mother called me. You mother a mother in the most unspeakable way. Through eye glances, microscopic nostril flares and a whole lot of subcontext.<sup>1</sup>*

My family, my heart, my light, my fire, my home. I owe you every pore on my skin and character in my eye, my capacity for empathy and love, my thirst for justice and a kind world. I owe my mother, my sister, my aunts and grandmother all the strength I inherited, and that was nurtured to this day. Thank you.

# Acknowledgements

1. Words from a forgotten rainy day in The Hague. It's important to note that the use of the word motherhood, usually very exclusively gendered, in this thesis is more non-binary and fluid. It refers to qualities typically associated with this typical view but applicable to all gender identities. It is an active, therefore mutable and adaptive concept.

Malik Saïb-Mezgiche is my rock, my guide, my hero and my favorite co-conspirator. Thank you for getting me this far. Thank you Sydney Rahimtoola and Latisha Horstink for helping clear out the twisting paths of social justice research in this academy, and for gracefully extending that acquired knowledge to make mine a little easier. I cannot fully express all the wisdom and love both Fannie Sosa and Navild Acosta have graced me with over the course of my beautiful internship with them and beyond. Thank you for shining your light and blessing this undeserving planet with your existence, wisdom and expression.

It is similarly difficult to put into words how much Narges Mohammadi has inspired and encouraged me throughout this process and my time here in The Hague. This powerhouse of a human is bringing about change and collective advancement everyday, bringing minds and hearts together to the beat of her enchanting sets and the light of her incredible organizer powers.

Thank you to all of my friends and colleagues from Just This Place, for supporting me, my work and catching me when I was falling. Thank you Aya, my dedicated grammar specialist and first, loyal ally in this cold North.

Thank you Anna Arov for your empathetic steady guidance during these years. You have made a vital bubble of understanding, self confidence and hope in a sometimes harmful environment.

If this process has taught me anything, it is to trust in my intuition.

I feel like I've been waiting for years for some "legitimate" or "certified" proof that what I was observing, sensing, curious about, was actually happening. I was looking for permission. I learned not just to talk the talk but walk the walk of embodied knowledge as I embrace my marginal position and a nostalgia of the Sens I loved and that drove me since my adolescence : that sense of alternating between a set of eyes gazing at the world and finding unspoken ways to express that gaze and share what it's learned. I would now add every part of my sensing body, especially my heart, to my toolkit of observation and knowing.



This thesis is dedicated to my uncle, Nabil Berghout.



**What if?**

*What if we could rest?*

*What if we didn't need a third eye  
in the back of our heads?*

*What if we could speak, dance, breathe without  
worrying about misrepresenting our race?*

*What if the Turks had won?*

*What if the Romans were barbarians?*

*What if «universal» history started at the start?*

*Humans all come from Africa.*

*What if North Africa had no oil?*

*What if we still celebrated Algerian inde-  
pendance day with cheerleaders in mini  
skirts and laughing off fundamentalists?*

*What if we could still wear bikinis at the beach?*

*What if we could complain about not  
wearing bikinis without «betraying» our  
kind, without being understood as vali-  
dating the uncivilised narrative?*

*What if Algeria won over France in football?*

*What if they finally allowed the game to take place?*

*What if I stopped worrying about people getting hurt or dying around me for a moment?*

*What if I could play dress up with all my family in a big house in the countryside for a week if I pleased?*

*What if my dreams didn't have to wait?*

*What if I could just study like my friends can, without all the rest?*

*What if weed was covered by health insurance?*

*What if my health didn't have to wait?*

*What if I could be fully myself with all of my family?*

*What if people understood me when I spoke without filters?*

*What if I could sleep?*

*What if more black and brown people were in my school?*

*What if more black and brown femmes were in higher institutional and financial positions?*

*What if all history books looked more like wikipedia?*

*What if our premises for knowledge,  
myth and story were all different?*

*What if community building had more  
international power than finance?*

*What if I could actually work on my work?*

*What if all forms of (free) labor were recognised?*

*What if I was paid?*

*What if we were really decolonised?*

*What if steady effort took over urgency?*

*What if we could rest?*



# Preface

“Western” in particular holds so many connected yet contradictory definitions and associations that every instance of it may be translated to a different effect. Most often in this text it will be associated with the idea of whiteness and the historical line of western Europe (bleeding into Australia and North America) and of which the standardization is exported worldwide. However, as this definition is always changing and has done so for colonial discourse purposes it is defined here, so as not to be used in reverse : ‘North America is part of the Western world so the land belongs to white people first.’ An example of this purposeful change of definition is the frequent switch between claiming the Middle East as part of the Western culture and history (since this is where “civilization” was born, i.e. mesopotamia, the crescent?..) and portraying it as a polar opposite to everything the West represents.

*“The use of “-futurism” here is not intended to reference Futurism as movement, neither is it an explicit reference to the “futuristic”. Instead “-futurism” is anticipating a future, it signifies a defiant cultural break, a projection forward into what is, beyond ongoing eurocentric, hegemonic narratives. It is hoped that, by increasing deposits, digital or otherwise, these ideas can contribute to a growing counterculture of thought and action that through time will be found and used in the construction of alternative states of becoming.”<sup>2</sup>*

2. Sulaiman Majali, Towards a possible manifesto; proposing Arabfuturism/s(Conversation A), 2012-2015

# Introduction

*"-History?"*

*"Histories-"*

*"If the ultimate hegemonic power is the power to define and not the power to conquer; the map, the straight line, legitimacy and authenticity are questions that flutter between the virtualities and actualities of adopted identities."*

*"What are we proposing?"*

*"Arabfuturism is an impetus that seeks to accelerate the annihilation of the ideological apartheid walls, whose delusional hallucinations make us cower in fear at the deafening loudness of our indifference; whilst we dance to the silence of our differences."*

*"A continuous motion"*

*"Accelerate-"*

*"-Accelerating-"*

*"But there is something happening in Europe,-"*

*"-Dancing on the ruins of the post-orientalist stage; in the desert of the unreal; high on the opulence of emptiness."*

*"-Something is happening in Europe-"*

*"-The internet as a public square,-"*

*"Arabfuturism celebrates the temporalities of our colla-*

*borative genealogies-"*

*"Present tense. Mourns the immortality of our insular mythologies of selfhood."*

*"-an emergent cultural aesthetic; accelerating the transformation of representation;-"*

*"-beyond the logic of the state."<sup>3</sup>*

In this text, Sulaiman Majali reflects on the resulting alignment of diverse struggles protesting the "hegemonic stance on European people of colour" gaining exposure in recent global shifts. In a "growing discourse, within Europe, surrounding the policing and censoring of brown minds(...) the power to define has never been more contested."

This thesis is a collection of observations, dreams, theories and reflexions imagining the destructive but more importantly, the generative potentials of new media and the shifting paradigm, with an analysis informed by past cycles of oppression and its evolving tools.

To do so we will understand the origins and warped functions of processes of epistemicide within official structures and how its Orientalist fictions translate to cultural production. We will then explore alternative, informal spaces of imagination and how they can free targeted communities from those representations, before exploring further radical approaches to speculative fiction in socially active cultural politics.

3. Sulaiman Majall, Towards a possible manifesto; proposing Arabfuturism/s(Conversation A), 2012-2015

"-Arabfuturism is a re-examination and interrogation of narratives that surround oceans of historical fiction. It bulldozes cultural nostalgias that prop up a dubious political paralysis and works to solidify and progress a progressive force, towards being subjects and not objects of history-"





# Epistemicide: clearing the grounds for false narratives



Intentionally  
Forgotten Past

*«I spent the first part of my life learning what history's victors wanted to tell me to believe about the past, including the simple assumption that it was the past.»<sup>4</sup>*

The history most of us growing up in Western systems learn in school is biased and imagined. 1492, everyone knows, corresponds to the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus. Never mind that the Egyptians, the Phoenicians, the Carthaginians, the Chinese, the Japanese, hell even the Vikings had managed to “find” it before.<sup>5</sup> This is an example of what Boaventura de Sousa Santos<sup>6</sup> called epistemicide. This is the process by which, as Fatima Khemilat puts it, sciences and modes of knowledge die for a sole dominating type of science deemed legitimate. This process manifests in form, content, distribution, preservation and all types of tools for collective memory.

In the late 18th century, realism as an academic artistic practice was making its way into institutions such as the French Beaux Arts and

the French Society of Orientalist Painters made Orientalism go from dismissed to a distinct and “proper” branch of this movement. The Snake Charmer by G r me in the 1860s, is a classic example of how this intersection was used to shift towards culture participating in this epistemic erasure. As Linda Nochlin<sup>7</sup> pointed out, the painting may seem incredibly detailed, giving a strong sense of verisimilitude to the point of appearing as documentary evidence of life in the Ottoman court, but in reality it is just a Westerner’s view of a mysterious world. This is why Edward Said<sup>8</sup> critiques this academic Orientalism as skewed by the outsider view of the West. In this history telling, the colonized, the East, is passive.

This biased perception, the first phase of colonial power, presented as scientific truth then produces a number of new mechanisms by which the Orient will be represented, remembered, and remixed: the second phase of colonial power. Delacroix, inspired by Byron’s poetry, was

4. Adrienne Maree Brown, *Emergent Strategy : Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, AK Press, 2017

5. Fatima Khemilat, *Epistemicide TED X*, 2015

6. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South : Justice against epistemicide*, 2014

7. Linda Nochlin, *The Imaginary Orient*, 1983

8. Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Pantheon Books, 1978

drawn by the erotic violence possible in these representations and shocked the artistic sphere in 1827 with his infamous *The Death of Sardanapalus*. It is a graphic summary of how the West essentialized the East: violent masculinity, sexual deviance, colorful exoticism and general lassitude. The harems were also associated with erotic behaviors between the women themselves which, as you can imagine, sparked a lot of interest and fantasies, adding queer sexualisation to the fetish list. This second phase consists of creating narratives, links of causality and behaviors associated with the Orient.

*«Whatever I forget, I remember. Whatever I don't want to remember, I forget.»<sup>9</sup>*

The past we are allowed to remember is sometimes lacking or distorted to fit the dominant narrative. What we see as past sometimes isn't even past. Classifications like 'post' colonialism, 'post' racism, are suggestive: colonialism is still very active, as is racism. Dr Ramon Amaro<sup>10</sup> argues that perhaps 'post' modernism is arguable as well: were we ever

truly modernist to begin with? Universalism is a false construct which erases those it rejects and is used to justify supremacy, imperialism and colonialism. The Enlightenment is a colonial fiction in science and academia.

*"[...] 'civilized' knowledge. This form of global knowledge is generally referred to as "universal" knowledge, available to all and not really 'owned' by anyone, that is, until non-Western scholars make claims to it. When claims like that are made history is revised (again) so that the story of civilization remains the story of the West. For this purpose, the Mediterranean world, the basin of Arabic culture and the lands east of Constantinople are conveniently appropriated as part of the story of Western civilization/philosophy/knowledge. Through imperialism however these cultures, peoples and their nation states were re-positioned as "oriental", or "outsider" in order to legitimate the imposition of colonial rule."<sup>11</sup>*

Past successes and lessons of social justice and past alternative modes of organizing, knowing and creating are intentionally erased,

distorted, forgotten. The illusion of the blank slate is actively and conceitedly being deconstructed for white Western narrative purposes in dominant artistic institutions, film and cinema in the form of acceptable nostalgia. Meanwhile this illusion is being felt and told to people of color (POC) as an inhibition and a depleting tactic to stifle their revolutionary energy. The way its past knowledge is stored and transmitted plays a key role in this erasure. Archives of certain topics and cultures are lacking or disused. Others are disfigured or recontextualised, rendered devoid of content for mass reproduction.

*“Past futurism, the hopes and dreams of our ancestors, act as important metaphysical tools that serve as agents to help one discover hidden information in the present time.”<sup>12</sup>*

The foundations for the structures of knowledge we live and navigate today are based off of faulty, untrue premises. It functions because we collectively accept these premises, sometimes unconsciously in the form of bias.

9. Sonia Sanchez, *Middle Passage*, 1994

10. “Dr. Amaro’s work emerges at the convergence of Blackness, psychopathology and the critique of computation reason. His ultimate aim is to develop new methodologies for the study of race and technology by drawing on the generative potential of non linearity in machine learning research.” <https://www.gold.ac.uk/visual-cultures/staff/amaro-ramon/>

11. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, ZED Books LTD, 1999

12. Rasheeda Phillips, *Black Quantum Futurism: Theory and Practice, The Afrofuturist Affair*/ House of Future Science Books, 2015





# Respectability Politics

The «if they gunned me down challenge» saw people posting side-by-sides of their authentic self representations and what the media would show to criminalize them in the face of police violence. This came in response to a series of mediatised cases of deadly poice brutality, which further showed victims are represented most with blame in the face of structural police impunity. It was a clear opposition to the claim that the roots of current day oppression and racism are founded solely in Black behavior. In a digital and social media space coded by this belief, it was also a reminder of its resulting necropolitics. Should this claim be condemned and considered a middle class form of racial control? Does a mere refusal of respectability politics enable radical progressive expression politically or sexually?

Respectability politics, a concept originally articulated by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham while observing the women's convention, is a Black feminist practice of demanding respectable behavior both as a moral mandate and a

political strategy. They sought approval and admiration for these respectable morals by the dominant public to engage them in their cause and gain upwards mobility, attributing institutional violence to the 'misconducts' of targeted communities.

Their discourses involved adhering to normative morals and manners while promoting traditional forms of resistance such as petitions and marches, thus oscillating between forms of conservatism as well as radicalism. In the post liberation movement era, Black rhetoric was developed and the narrative of structural racism was over and done with in the dominant narrative because "it's not as easy as pointing to Jim Crow"<sup>13</sup> or other laws enforcing racism that had 'disappeared', all that remained was behavior.

«Today's respectability politics lacks state demands in ending structural racism entirely. Instead it relies almost exclusively on the idea that appropriate Black behavior is the key to Black success. Behavior in this vision is the obstacle, and people who

13. Tricia Rose, Professor of Africana Studies and Director, Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in America, «Black Feminism, Popular Culture and Respectability Politics,» Lecture in Gender and Sexuality Studies, Annual Elizabeth Munves Sherman, 2016

exhibit this bad behavior are their own worst enemy.»<sup>14</sup>

It dictates a «behavioral entrance fee» to the right to respect and full citizenship. In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith describes the colonial process of “creating new indigenous elites” by sending them to metropolitan schooling to get a taste of privileges.

*“That elite status came about through the alignment of their cultural and economic interests with those of the colonizing group rather than with those of their own society(...) Schools simply reproduced domesticated versions of that knowledge for uncritical consumption(...) a sign that a colony and its settlers had ‘grown up’ ”*<sup>15</sup>

This is a critique coming more and more to light about Obama’s regular remarks in public events such as: «pull up your pants», «don’t feed your kids fried chicken for breakfast», «don’t act like a thug», « be a good father», «stop complaining about racism» etc... He is often the example used to explain the criteria of this behavio-

ral entrance fee, actively feeding a conservative, white coded, ‘good’ father public image, with a sense of authority over this demographic disguised as encouragement.

*«It is based in the belief that good behavior and stern chiding will convince white people that we are human and worthy of respect”*<sup>16</sup>

Before, this practice operated in successful or elite Black spheres, then became part of the mainstream news and entertainment industry which privileges those who support it. A clear example of this is Chris Rock’s routine «N\*\*\*\* vs. Black People» in the HBO special *Bring the Pain*<sup>17</sup> which Barack Obama directly referred to saying:

«Chris Rock had a routine. He said some—too many of our men, they’re proud, they brag about doing things they’re supposed to do. They say ‘Well, I—I’m not in jail.’ Well, you’re not supposed to be in jail!»<sup>18</sup>

The move from behavior is quick to expressive culture. What are creative articulations of Black life? The vernacular culture is not a random target. This instru-

mentalisation has perpetuated from the notorious 'immorality' of jazz discussed at the women's convention through to the belittling of hip hop and r'n'b.

«So more than culture generally, respectability politics focuses on vernacular style as a sign for broader deficiencies in everyday life, culture, clothing style and music.”<sup>19</sup>

For Black women, it not only links to desirability but also stylistic concerns, hairstyles, clothes, with a presumption of sexual excess and out of place sexuality. This involves curating every aspect of your self-image to fit these codes in public space or representations.

“ upwardly mobile young people of low socio-economic status in New York City manage impressions online (...) they present themselves on social media by self-censoring, curating a neutral image, segmenting content by platform, and avoiding content and contacts coded as lower class. (...)These strategies reinforce racist and sexist notions of appropriate behavior, simultaneously enabling and limiting participants’

ability to succeed. (...) digital media mediates the intersection of class, gender, and race.”<sup>20</sup>

These tactics are organically or sometimes intentionally updating to be relevant to the digital cultural paradigm shift<sup>21</sup> similarly to past mediatic and cultural spaces.

14. Idem

15. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, ZED Books LTD, 1999

16. Tricia Rose, «Black Feminism, Popular Culture and Respectability Politics.» Lecture in Gender and Sexuality Studies, Annual Elizabeth Munves Sherman, 2016

17. Chris Rock, «N\*\*\*\*\* vs. Black People», HBO special, *Bring the Pain*, HBO, 1996

18. while campaigning to be elected president during a Father's Day speech on June 15, 2008,

19. Tricia Rose, «Black Feminism, Popular Culture and Respectability Politics.» Lecture in Gender and Sexuality Studies, Annual Elizabeth Munves Sherman, 2016

20. Mikaela Pitcan, Alice E Marwick, danah boyd, *Performing a Vanilla Self: Respectability Politics, Social Class, and the Digital World*, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Volume 23, Issue 3, May 2018

21. Thomas Khun, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago :University of Chicago Press, 1970



What is the cost of them  
getting our attention?

Chris Rock later reflected on this time and the type of sinister humour he engaged in:

"There's an underlying sadness, probably, to all those specials,[...] I guess a routine like 'n\*\*\*\* and black people' is something a ghetto snob would write,"<sup>22</sup>

He links it to his parent's coming of age in the Civil Rights era and busing him off to a white school, far from his 'difficult' (deadly) neighborhood explaining:

«People from that era thought anything white was better, pretty much,» [...] It wasn't really a good experience. I was just getting called 'n-----' every day, and you'd get spit on and it's hard to make friends."<sup>23</sup>

The idea that a marginalised culture is itself pathological and reproduces itself protects those who don't recognise or work against structural racism and deeply harms the members of those communities, as was critiqued in the 'if they gunned me down' challenge.

*"Trayvon Martin and Mike Brown and Renisha McBride and so many others are dead because, in some white imagination, they were dangerous. And that imagination is so respected that those who kill, based on an imagined, racialized fear of Black people, are rarely held accountable."*<sup>24</sup>

In an era marked by rising inequality and declining economic mobility, it works to accommodate neoliberalism through this imagination. Professor Rose poses that the virtues of self care and self correction are framed as strategies to lift the Black poor out of their conditions by preparing them for the market economy. A very familiar narrative of meritocracy in the American dream.

What if we add the particular role of the culture industry as a part of the market economy and shift the gaze towards women, engage with the unit not as a worker but as a consumer? According to Tricia Rose, respectability politics have much less power there. Real Black mass culture currency is not decorum and

22. Rebecca Leung "Rock: Bring On Oscar 'Safety Net'; Ed Bradley Talks To Oscar Host About N----- Word", CBS, 2005 <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/rock-bring-on-oscar-safety-net/>

23. Idem

24. Adrienne Maree Brown, *Emergent Strategy : Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, AK Press, 2017

manners but the very opposite, the exact behavioral tropes respectability politics is bemoaning. So the cultural industry wing of the market economy is fueled by the performances of the failures of Black people and women in particular to meet 'respectable' standards. This performance of criminality, sexual excess, and more, are the most popular and most profitable for people who uphold the status quo. Rose cites Paris Hilton to exemplify an effect of this proliferation, the model of these tropes being propped up and used for market value through her calculated celebrity persona.

"A whole cottage industry has taken root, one that presents different Muslim products, sometimes literally in a matrix. A popular video of different Muslims saying «I'm Muslim but I'm not [insert generically Muslim quality]» is a good example of this genre of well-intentioned efforts that legitimize all the questions hanging over Muslims(...) reducing «empowerment» to lifestyle and perpetuating the trope of the good Muslim — a relatable,

relatively affluent creature whose identity enables a non-Muslim to neatly annotate and categorize in a manner that does not challenge any latent prejudices or preconceptions."<sup>25</sup>



25. Nesrine Malik, "I am not your muslim", NPR, 2017

26. Zebdettes: the Evolution of a Colonialist Cliché, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/zebdettes/videos/1900235920054490/>

27. The iconic Missy Elliott, in her completely afrofuturist beats and esthetics, magical realism and poetic word play, is a rare example of a widely recognized and awarded hip-hop femme artist who embodies the total refusal of this normative practice and silence.

I explored a form of this process, in collaboration with Sarah Khlifi, in the context of North-African diasporas in France and the 'beurette' in a documentary.<sup>26</sup> We observed a similar politico-cultural instrumentalisation of the binary between 'halal' or 'haram', 'bledarde' or 'beurette' with tentative subversions and day to day safety in the tomboy persona, reminiscent of the iconic Missy Elliot<sup>27</sup>, like Diam's before her return to faith (which we learned coined the term 'hlal 2.0').

*"It's important to note that this is all playing out predominantly in countries where Muslims are newly arrived immigrants or at most second generation. (...) This is one of the main reasons the plot was lost by Muslims so early on in this othering process. We simply did not have enough time to accrue social and economic capital in our new countries of settlement, and thus did not have the chance to forge an identity that could transcend the flattering effect of an unrepresentative popular culture convulsing with shock after the Sept. 11 attacks."*<sup>28</sup>

The binary posed by this practice becomes two sides of the same coin. Where thotty representations in the music industry don't invite conversation, some artists or reality tv personas actually use this as a gateway to political talk shows.

But Rose warns, while admiral of the queen of the industry, Beyonce, she says her "sexualisation claims to be subversive but actually is a prerequisite. Girls do not rule the world. It's a fake kind of post feminist, post racial party fantasy that is a lot of times mistaken for a political project in the place of real political projects that are likely to stay in the margin by the very fact of their subversion."<sup>29</sup> This process serves media corporation's laziness (at best) in diverse representation which feeds us more norms to adhere to for mediatic success.

28. Nesrine Malki, "I am not your muslim", NPR, 2017

29. Tricia Rose, Professor of Africana Studies and Director, Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in America. «Black Feminism, Popular Culture and Respectability Politics.» Lecture in Gender and Sexuality Studies, Annual Elizabeth Munves Sherman, 2016

“The angry radicalized youth, as exemplified by Omar Mateen, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, Tashfeen Malik and Rizwan Farouq join the subjugated woman in a burqa that Laura Bush and Cherie Blair came out in support of in Afghanistan in 2001. On the other end of the spectrum, there are the Mipsters, Muslim hipsters, and the latest entrants, the hijababes.”<sup>30</sup>

This year, Netflix released its first original series in arabic set in Jordan, *Jinn*. A type of “arab version of twilight” using djnouns (genies) as a base mythical background, it disappointed many.

«Arguably the show’s biggest mistake is putting the focus on private school kids, missing their chance to capture the nuances that come with growing up with conservative parents that abide by Muslim moralistic guidelines. With the liberalism of the elitist classes associated with their Western education and alliances, *Jinn* is only left to be seen as an illusory tale not related to Arabism, with its perceived immorality a mere sign of Westernization»<sup>31</sup>

It attaches this language to some kind of consumer behavior that feeds our desire for polished political radicalism.

*“The interaction between the free market and the very narrow prism through which dominant establishment thinking is filtered has begun to treat Muslims like any other product. This is not to suggest that Muslims have some innate authenticity that should transcend the inevitable and highly competitive market of merchandise whose subjects have very little say in what is amplified and what is not, but some refuse to resign themselves to it. The grotesque prejudice and violence against Muslims has created a counter push where only positive, stylized, aspirational, attractive, overly feminized, bourgeoisie Islam has flooded the zone. It is at once too much and not enough. An exercise in erasure.”<sup>32</sup>*

So if we engage in radical critique and resistance in mass media culture, perhaps we shouldn’t begin with respectability politics.

30. Nesrine Malik, “I am not your muslim”, NPR, 2017  
31. Amina Kaabi, The Real Problem With Netflix’s *Jinn*: Not all Arab stories are moral, Milleworld, June 2019  
32. Nesrine Malik, “I am not your muslim”, NPR, 2017





On the imposter syndrome

The following is an anonymous reflection on love and interpersonal relations from the 'in-between' written in winter 2019.<sup>33</sup>

*"I give a lot, I've come to take all the love I've always felt had nowhere to go because social norms narratives made me think it was created to be devoured by a respectable man, and put that into my amicable love affairs, into my family, into other people through my focus on community building and mental health support in my work. It's gone off in so many directions, intensities and shapes that the lines between them blurred. My love goes straight into my work thought processes. My love for my mom goes into my love for all those who give me joy through mothering them and watching them fulfill their truths, see themselves as beautifully as I do and be as proud of themselves as I am to know them.*

*I feel like this excessive love mode is activated all the time and when I'm alone it keeps going. Sometimes I can't seem to turn it fully around to myself, the mirror turns but the love loses its way. I see myself for how they see me,*

*ask my reflection why they trust me. See all the ways in which I'm a terrible mother to myself, see how much of an imposter I am. I feel guilty because I realise I'm not a good giving person, I'm using people for my own distraction. I'm giving all this motherly, rational, effortful love to others to compensate not being consistent with myself, and of course to make up for all the times I was struggling and was far from a thoughtful, reliable, and all round good person to the ones who loved me. All the ways in which I am still incapable of giving love back to those I should be endlessly thanking for the person I am.*

*This is an example of what results from an intersection of pressures from being "the one who made it" (vis-à-vis the rest of my family and 'home' country), "the one who can make it" (vis-à-vis my privileges at large as a sometimes white-passing, wealthy, straight-passing, cis, able, European citizen) but also the pressure for being a worthy representative for all the others in the positions I have that make me oppressed (vis-à-vis queerness, arabness, muslimness, olive skin, immigrant, femme ...). "*

These societal pressures and biases can be deeply internalised, strongly affecting one's self esteem and silencing voices. In *White Privilege : Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*<sup>34</sup>, Peggy McIntosh lists what privileges accompany the white status:

*"I can swear, or dress in second hand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty or the illiteracy of my race."*

*"I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial."*

*"I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race."*

*"I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group."*

*"I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world's majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion."*

*"I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider."*

*"I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to the «person in charge»,*

*I will be facing a person of my race."*

*"I can easily buy posters, post-cards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys and children's magazines featuring people of my race."*

The full text is a must read for anyone.

Now, if you read that again, but this time imagine the reverse situation, persons of color asking to be humanized. Doesn't seem unreasonable does it? Yet how can it be experienced so strongly as an immutable societal code?

34. Peggy McIntosh, *White Privilege : Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*, Peace and Freedom Magazine, July/August, 1989



# Informality: A space to imagine legitimacy



Fuck You, Pay Me<sup>35</sup>:  
Free Extra Labor

Sosa: *"We've been raised through the hetero fiction to produce free labor, which produced generational trauma from being indebted after years of free labor to a hetero situation, and your kids are trapped in an unsafe space you invested in for the mythical safety."*

Navild : *"The hetero fiction and the nuclear family made me homeless"*<sup>36</sup>

We are socialised, from our diverse positions, to act and present ourselves in a dishonest way, adhering to certain expectations that reflect collectively accepted societal lies, and this serves to accommodate dominant culture in the name of preserving the comfort level of the structurally privileged.

«We begin learning to lie in intimate relationships at a very early age. Lie about the food your mother made, to avoid punishment, as you swallow your tears(...) heteropatriarchy 101: men love one way, women another, and we have to lie to impress and catch each other.»<sup>37</sup>

This curating of personas in the name of comfort (for the few), as we have seen with respectability politics is also an effort rarely valued at the right price and can prevent opening up to the healing effects of projects like *Black Power Naps*.

«Trauma is the common experience of most humans on this planet. Love too often perpetuates trauma, repeating the patterns of intimacy and pain so many of us experienced growing up in racist and/or hetero-patriarchal environments. Shame might be the only thing more prevalent, which leads to trauma being hidden, silenced, or relegated to a certain body of people.»<sup>38</sup>

Generational trauma as a genetic theory puts forth that these generation travelling, time travelling emotions and behaviors are ingrained in our DNA, posing this process and reflexion on healing as a legitimate form of knowing, especially relevant to those whose histories have been erased.

35. Chantelle Gallant, Adrienne Maree Brown, *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*, AK Press, 2019

36. Navild Acosta and Fannie Sosa in a Instagram story, November 2019

37. Adrienne Maree Brown, *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*, AK Press, 2019

38. Idem

«to refuse to be conscious of what we are feeling at any time, however comfortable that might seem, is to deny a large part of the experience, and to allow ourselves to be reduced to the pornographic, the abused, and the absurd.»<sup>39</sup>

Adrienne Maree Brown speaks of activists “working tirelessly with broken hearts.”<sup>40</sup> Once again, the personal is political. The privacy of intimacy replicates the curation of experiences, what we choose to remember and what we choose to forget, and can be observed in the stories we tell about sex work, revealing culture’s hidden realities.

«People obsess about how sex workers feel about sex - not how they feel about work.(...) many workers are expected to make someone happy, be pleasing, and look good while doing it. Inside and outside of the sex industry, sex is a tool for economic survival and mobility.(...) And don’t be fooled-we are all selling our bodies. If you sell your work, you’re selling the body that performs that work. And that body matters. If you have a body that’s not white , if you get too sick to stand for forty hours a week, if you have a body that’s fat, that’s femme, that’s trans, your body is considered less valuable.»<sup>41</sup>

That is, all labor is «embodied» labor. Or as Marx put it, labor power is the collection of «mental and physical capabilities existing in the physical form, the living personality, of a human being.»<sup>42</sup>

And mending those tired, broken hearts is often forgotten as a form of necessary (paid) labor for sustainability.

“Pleasure evokes change-perhaps more than shame.”<sup>43</sup>

39. Audre Lorde, *Uses of the erotic: the erotic as power*, Out & Out Books, 1978

40. Adrienne Maree Brown, *Emergent Strategy : Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, AK Press, 2017

41. Adrienne Maree Brown, *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*, AK Press, 2019

42. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, Toronto: Penguin Books, 1990

43. Adrienne Maree Brown, *Emergent Strategy : Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, AK Press, 2017



- I need rest
- I want to play video games and go to concerts
- I want to have fun
- I want to be happy to wake up

“Take a step back from being woke, take that Black power nap.” ©<sup>44</sup>

«*bruv, why does no one ever want to get caught sleeping?*»<sup>45</sup>

One of Fannie Sosa and Navild Acosta's pleasurable resistance strategies for reparation involves energetic reparations as well as financial ones. Through their shared project Black Power Naps, they challenge institutions to pay Black folks to rest.

«*The personal is political - and what is more personal than sleep?*»<sup>46</sup>

They study a generational sleep gap between racialized and white populations. This internalised process peeks through erasure now and again in grandmothers' continued alertness. Even if they are asleep in front of the television, you better not reach for that remote. Once again we see a pattern, this trauma is perpetuated through warped or incomplete perceptions and long lasting fictional narratives around POC behavior.

«The damaging stereotypes of black people being "slow" and "lazy" are wrapped in the racist pseudoscience of eugenics.(...) most of what we know about human biology, including sleep, is performed mostly on people of European descent, a minority of the world's population.(...) it would be very arrogant to assume that everybody's bodies are acting in the same way to white Europeans.»<sup>47</sup>

Frederick Douglass, a Black abolitionist noted that «More slaves are whipped for oversleeping than for any other fault.» He says «The ability to sleep for enslaved people was also gendered.»

«In the New World... Slaveholders systematically disallowed privacy as they attempted round-the-clock surveillance, and enslaved women were especially susceptible at night to sexual assault from white men.»<sup>48</sup>

44. Navild Acosta and Fannie Sosa, *Choir of the Slain*, Black Power Naps, Performance Space New York, 2019

<https://blackpowernaps.black/Choir-of-the-Slain>

45. Skepta, *No Sleep - Ignorance is Bliss*, 2019

46. Chanté Joseph, *Eternally woke*, *Gal-Dem: The Un/Rest Issue*, 2019

47. Joseph, Chanté, *Eternally woke*, *Gal-Dem: The Un/Rest Issue*, 2019

48. Benjamin Reiss, *Wild Nights: How Taming Sleep Created Our Restless World*, LA Times, 2017

Nesrine Malik notes that certain stereotyped views of holiday getaways, in «slow», «mellow» or «chilled» places and communities (spectres of 18th century Orientalism inviting themselves to 'oriental' style get-togethers), makes people from those communities desperate to avoid confirming the depiction by erasing the labor and actions of those communities that participate in this effortful and valuable hospitality. This participates in the erasure of the mechanisms of sleep deprivation at work today. In these extended periods of wakefulness, POC women are «more likely to get insomnia they are also less likely to get it diagnosed».<sup>49</sup>

Sleeplessness and insomnia are heavily attributed to POCs in Europe and, subsequently, the likelihood of dying from cardiovascular diseases because through racial geography, they are «more likely to live in overcrowded, noisy, polluted areas with ambient lights and high crime.»

«Noise aside, poor urban areas tend to have dangerously high levels of air pollution that lead to sleep-disordered breathing. (...) our 24/7, immediate-response cities have completely changed how we view rest and downtime. As well as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and memory loss, lack of sleep can make you delusional, less empathetic and more sensitive to pain.»<sup>50</sup>

Without rest we're «merely angry, grouchy zombies with failing organs and no friends.»

Discussions and interviews of people from those communities testify to a shared sense of having something to prove, working twice as hard to get noticed, due to this sleeper cell logic, and thus an impulse to sacrifice sleep to get extra marks.

«feeling dazed felt like my constant state.»

49. Joseph, Chanté, Eternally woke, Gal-Dem: The Un/Rest Issue, 2019

50. Idem

Interviewees experience loss of appetite and concentration. They can wear their bodies down to the point that the slightest stress makes them bedridden. This is happening in a market where competition over who's more unhealthy for instant gratification associates self worth to productivity, to exhaustion (ostensible) itself.

«I've spent a lot of time thinking about how every waking moment of my life can serve capitalism, how my hobbies can turn into side hustles, and it's destroyed my ability to truly rest.»<sup>51</sup>

In the scheme of the 40+ hour workweek, the shift work, and the nightwork, the most exploitative shifts are disproportionately taken up by people of color. Furthermore, in this digital entrepreneurship and hustle culture, turning hobbies into 'productive' sources of income assures no other form of rest than sleep make it to the party either.

«You can see this clearly when taking the subway late at night in metropolises like New York. It's mainly black and Hispanic people that line the corners and crevices of near-empty subway carriages. They've just finished their shifts and their eyes are fluttering to stay awake.»<sup>52</sup>

This behavior then takes a lot of (free) work and effort to unlearn and heal from. It can be very hard to find a position where this is not only a possible path, but the best possible path to follow.

«Between having to navigate the feelings of people who don't care about mine, to worrying about whether someone will decide that my husband is too big and too Black and drives too nice a car to come home, unique stresses make sleep difficult. It's one of the reasons we're considering moving to a neighborhood that is a higher percentage of Black. I want to come home and be able to exhale.» - Jayce Ellis 39 (attorney and writer from Northern Virginia with severe insomnia)<sup>53</sup>

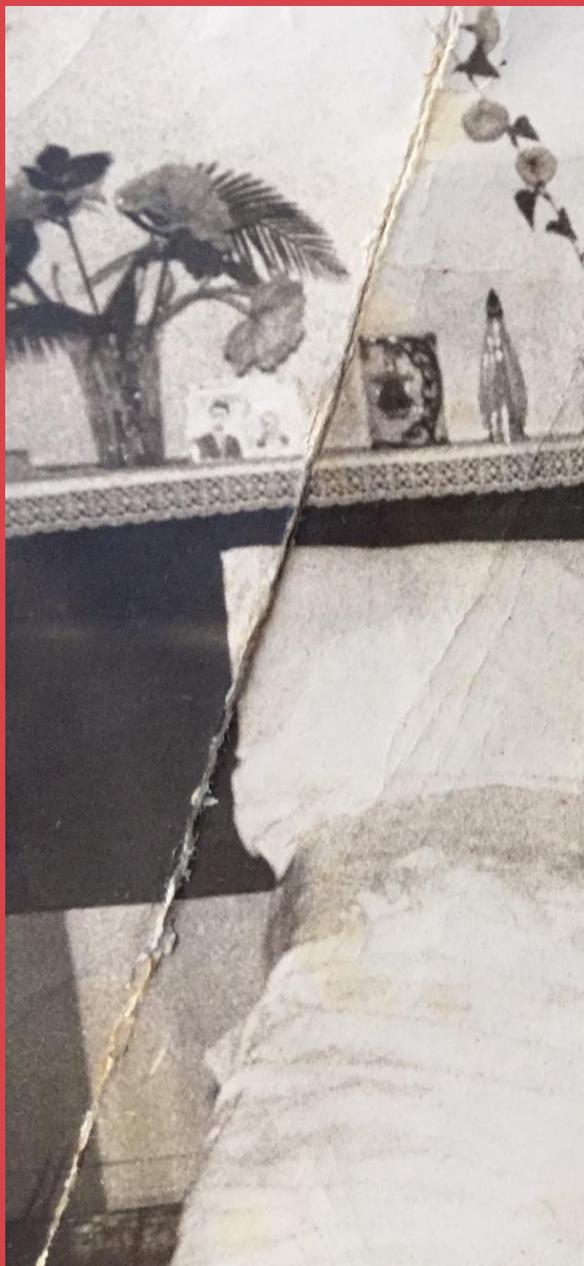
51. Idem

52. Idem

53. Idem

Centering rest, in all its forms (sleep, play, being free from responsibility...) is a key strategy for resistance and sustainability in social justice projects, so far as it adheres to a certain code of ethics. Fannie Sosa and Navild Acosta's approach is designed with panic attacks in mind.

*"Here's a tip: to center the sleep of Black folks, you must not economise, commodify, or extort it. Hand over the keys and leadership: allow the experts to guide."* <sup>54</sup>



54. Fannie Sosa, Navild Acosta, in a speech given at the Creative Capital Artist Retreat, 2019 <https://blackpowernaps.black/>

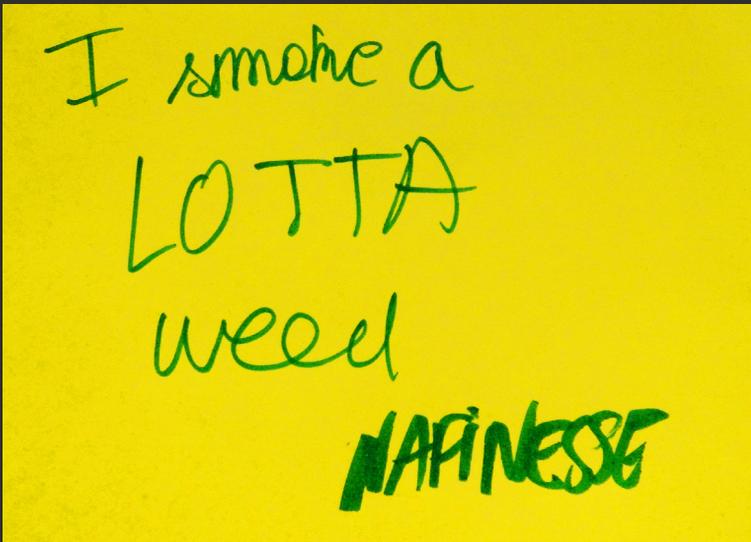


The 'War on Drugs' in the United States was a propaganda tactic popularized by the Nixon administration and employed by the Bush administration in the 80s to legitimize targeting Black communities and mass incarceration.

55. Malachi Garza, Adrienne Maree Brown, *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*, AK Press, 2019

*«I could see in my neighborhoods and then in cities, counties, states, regions across the whole country systematic forced economic isolation en masse-an outcome of criminalization that shapes the fabric of our communities and nation.»<sup>56</sup>*

56. Malachi Garza, Adrienne Maree Brown, *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*, AK Press, 2019



«The less one has, the less one has to do to get incarcerated.»<sup>56</sup>



This narrative has also prepared the recent landscape of spreading legalisation where still only a certain profile of person is allowed to consume the product, medically or recreationally, without suspicion of criminality, let alone sell it.

«For years I have known the therapeutic qualities of cannabis. I have seen it bring freedom to folks who suffer from anxiety, those who are trying to quit other medications, and those who have relief from the intensity of their pain.»<sup>57</sup>

Criminalization of drug use fuels the carceral state (80% of public monies is generated from cannabis) and legalization locks Black and Brown people out of ownership, jobs, and profits.

«What if dispensaries fund these organizations (of formerly incarcerated people) in the same geography of the dispensaries? (...) We can create opportunities for communities of color, people directly impacted by criminalization, to own these companies.

57. Malachi Garza, Adrienne Maree Brown, Experiments in Cannabis for the collective, Pleasure Activism:

Of course, to become a legal investor in a cannabis company, one must have hundreds of thousands of dollars lying around available to invest. Yet, as organizers know, barriers are for overcoming. There are ways to have those with wealth enter this market and then give over ownership to those with fewer resources. There are ways to create opportunities for «micro-investors» to get in the game. These strategies are moving forward, here and now. This is some lifting-all-boats type of ish.»<sup>58</sup>

Through iterations of these lower scale schemes, the entire carceral/drug-criminality system can be challenged in a fractal and decentralized way. The key is having these small investors and actors share a strong common value and motivation: in this case, it is obvious that strength lies in the collective bonds formed by those directly affected by this system.





In an interview with Desi kids<sup>59</sup>, Hasan Minhaj starts by asking to introduce themselves, stating their names but also the way people mistakenly call them. One girl says people call her Susu for short which in her language means Pipi, but she just rolled with it and didn't tell them. I remember having similar situations, also with song lyrics I just wouldn't say out loud and not explain why. This as a first question really opens up the conversation in an 'amongst ourselves' kind of way, while also revealing already things about each child's character and background. The conversation seamlessly follows on admitting to making up their own middle names because everyone else who had one guarded theirs and made it seem enviable. This too hit my soft spot as I also went through many different names explaining that just because my first name was composed, didn't mean I couldn't keep a secret identity too.

58. Idem

59. Hasan Minhaj, Hasan Learns What It's Like To Grow Up Desi in 2019 | Patriot Act with Hasan Minhaj | Netflix, <https://www.notion.so/Hasan-Minhaj-with-kids-a9612b09a7c14d1eb a2a062ef1d39373#8589fcde905d4f96811f78e741828983>

## POC Leadership as an emergent strategy

At some point, one adolescent is describing bullying and daily school harassment he deals with because of his Muslim faith, how he kind of just has to brush it off. Hassan almost reflexively replies «*hating Muslims is timeless*». You can really see his own emotions throughout the interview, that it's actually really tense for him to revisit these moments of childhood but also, I imagine, thinking of his own children and what they might not be sharing about their experiences and struggles.

Later on, he starts asking the question "what is the biggest secret you've ever kept from your parents?". He almost immediately sort of abandons it, and answers the question himself instead. He could have pushed it, in the way a journalist would traditionally push an interview, push an emotion, for the story. But the fact that he didn't actually creates more depth, story and content. The message isn't just the testimony of these children but the format. In this case it is an example of respecting boundaries and, through adaptation and sensitivity, creating an opportunity for something more. It is a wink and affirmation

to all the children, including the ones interviewed, who are in situations where it might be best to keep those secrets and be patient, hoping you will be able to say them some day (or not), but also a moment for Minhaj to share his experience and further acknowledge and mirror theirs. The episode also doesn't lose any of its entertainment value because of Hasan's comedic approach and training. making this moment worth a watch for all audiences. It is a beautiful example of how much these mediatised interactions and initiatives, and more generally socially active media, are impacted by who directs the action. Adrienne Maree Brown, in *Emergent Strategy*, argues that the most impactful and long lasting social justice movements and initiatives are those led by people directly impacted by the injustice concerned. I believe it is the same for discourse--communication, and therefore, media.

Another example of this sensitivity at play is when Minhaj disengages the heavy topics with a question about slang, giving the interviewees a breather and a moment to shine. To have a

sense of comfort and agency. Then he swiftly is able to get back in with the very vulnerable question of teenage body hair, a difficult subject for many but even more so for brown kids. He gets very enthusiastic, uninhibited and relatable responses, like jokes about “pedo-staches”. Talking about medical school:

*«Why do our dreams always have to be on the side?»*

Later on Minhaj asks : “Are you confused by your identity?” The youngest of the interviewees replies “Yes, please!”

The terms we’re defined as - arab, muslim, oriental - are so vague and hold so many contradicting definitions that we each have our own idea of what a «real» arab is, one that most of the time we don’t qualify enough for. A universal statement that has overlapped in all discussions I’ve had and podcasts I’ve heard is that we feel we are not enough: not arab enough, not muslim enough, not oriental enough, not respectable enough. This is one of the most efficient inhibitions arabo-diasporic youth experience.

It impedes communicating our stories to the outer world, but even more devastatingly, it stops us from relating and communicating to one another. If we could do that more naturally, free of self-inflicted judgement, we could find much needed validation of our experiences from our peers which could in turn trickle down to sharing those with the world.

This is where media and social media come into play. By being able to hijack a platform with a wide, anonymous audience and use it to circulate specific and true representations of this spectrum; along with the comments section and editing capacities (memes...) creating shared, relatable content and re-appropriating language, an enthusiastic community was able to form and start rewriting the narratives. You see it in the likes of wish fulfillment pop culture montages of Cheb Khaled, Michael Jackson and Tupac chillin’, the Depps and Pitts fully turbaned or the detailed portraits of Oum Kaltoum and Rachid Taha shared by self-taught digital archivists.





60. Idea articulated by Taj James in the cofacilitation of environmental justice resource redistribution initiative Building Enquiry and Alignment's inaugural meeting in 2013  
61. Adrienne Maree Brown, Emergent Strategy : Shaping Change, Changing Worlds, AK Press, 2017  
62. Adrienne Maree Brown, Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good, AK Press, 2019



There is a conversation in the room that only these people at this moment can have. Find it.<sup>60</sup>

In Audre Lorde's foundational essay, «The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House», Lorde uses the metaphor of «the master's tools» and «the master's house» to explain that Western feminism is failing to make positive change for third world women by using the same tools used by the patriarchy to oppress women. Lorde found that western feminist literature denied differences between women and discouraged embracing them. The differences between women, Lorde asserts, should be used as strengths to create a community in which women use their different strengths to support each other.

*«If the goal was to increase the love, rather than winning or dominating a constant opponent(...) We would see that there's no such thing as a blank canvas, an empty land or new idea(...) instead of starting up new ideas/organizations all the time, we would want to listen, support, collaborate, merge and grow through fusion, not competition.»<sup>61</sup>*

In the Netflix series *Sex Education* the culmination of the character

Amy's storyline, after a sexual assault in a bus, perfectly illustrates one of the guiding premises of emergent strategy, that in every room there is a conversation that can only be had in that space, with those people. Through a revised and reversed ode to films like *The Breakfast Club*, it illustrates the possibilities vulnerable and honest spaces, focused on mirroring rather than fixing a collective trauma, can bring for community building utilizing the full potential of our differences.

*«What we need is a culture where the common experience of trauma leads to a normalization of healing.»<sup>62</sup>*

In a filmed conversation, the sexuality specialist on set and Everyday Sexism founder Laura Bates describes the inspiration for this story in the experience she had with her online platform. It started out, before the #metoo moment, as a collection of sexual assault stories, to sort of prove the claims were legitimate. It blew up to become a huge data set, the first of its kind, which she shared, for example, with the British transport police officers to complete

their training. They realised why people wouldn't come forward about these incidents and worked at improving their structures.

«-Becca - What are you doing when you're having sex then?  
-Rita - Thinking about other things and wishing it would stop. You know, sometimes I just wanna watch the Daily Show without him entering me.» (Kristen Wiig and Annie Mumolo, *Bridesmaids* 2011)

That's supposed to be funny because our society thinks that women having unwanted sex is just one of the «inconveniences of marriage». In the interview with the creatives of *Sex Education*, they mention this use of humour as camouflage being used unconsciously as a self preservation coping tool for survivors. The director talks about how joking around with femme friends is often when they realise the gravity and reality of their experience, that they start off as jokes until someone says 'wait, that's actually terrible!'. But recent movements and reflexions on those move-

ments have emerged with the question: 'what if they were geared towards pleasure, towards rest, health, play and love?'

«The result of this kind of speech (on an interpersonal level) is that our lives begin to align with our longings, and our lives become a building block for authentic community and ultimately a society that is built around true need and real people, not fake news and bullshit norms.»

Cultivating and practicing repeated vulnerability, through a radically honest approach, is essential to this authenticity and (new) radicalism.<sup>63</sup>

*"This ancestral trauma is being repeated and only being seen from the margins because this is where living and breathing is disrupting this cycle."*

- Navild Acosta & Fannie Sosa

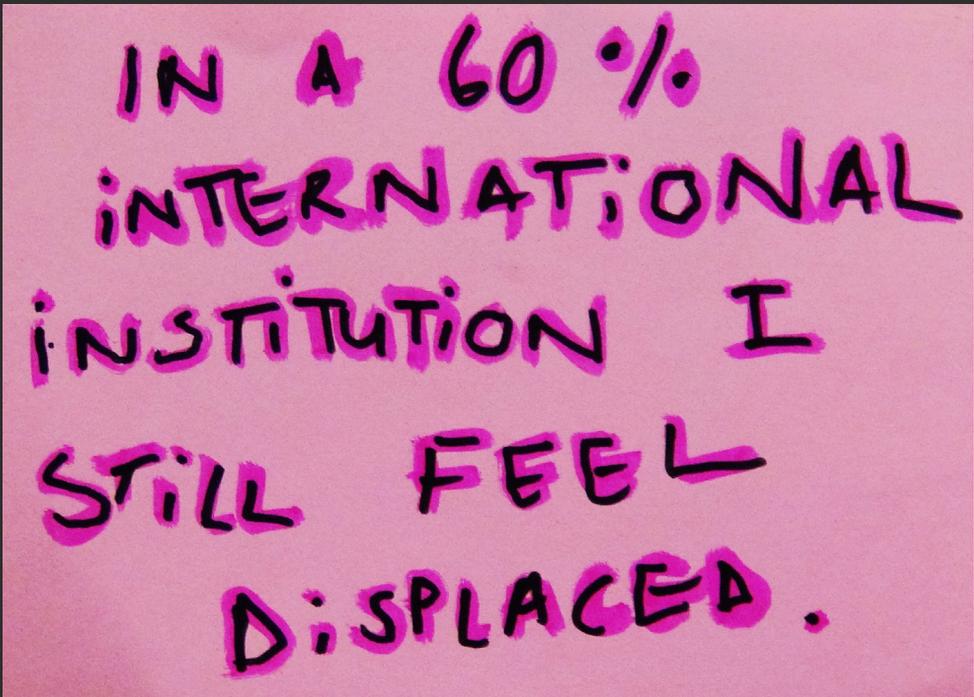
63. Radical simply means 'grasping at the root' - Angela Davis «Let us all rise together» address, Spelman College, reprinted in *women, culture and politics* (New York, Random House, 1989)



64. Nesrine Malik, I am not your muslim, NPR, 2017

65. Sarah Ahmed, Complaint as Diversity Work, Feminist Killjoys, November 2017  
<https://feministkilljoys.com/2017/11/10/complaint-as-diversity-work/>

66. Carly Rose Bedford & Gabriel A. Maher, Non-Performativity and the 'It's Just KABK', Queering Art & Design, December 6th 2019



Non-Performativity

*“Every time I speak to Americans, unless they are comprised of people of color, I need to presume that they’ve heard none of this, that they’ve been indoctrinated in the same ways that I was, though it could only colonize me halfway.”*<sup>64</sup>

The systems and mechanisms in place in institutions and authoritative structures, official, formalised paths, are as faulty and biased as we have seen their premises are. This makes for an almost impossible navigation towards social justice for all those it seeks to reject or reform.<sup>65</sup>

Excerpt from an anonymous student interview for a talk in the Fault Lines KABK Research Symposium<sup>66</sup>:

*Being a minority student (whichever margin that may be) in a mostly white, hetero, male, European historical institution, often means doing the extra free labor of educating your educators to educate you. It sounds fucked up because it is. You always expect it to a certain degree in your daily affairs, and are ready to accept the challenge when the person seems willing to hear you or refuse any unnecessary*

*hardship. When you are placed in a situation where you usually would have blocked off everyone, but you have to stay for your own academic success and well being (and financial stability), that’s the culture of Survival. I was more or less forced into this research, as I am daily forced into over/re explaining all of colonialism and things I have made the effort to learn and seek out on my own, because I found it was expected of me. That is all of my labor blown off for free. I feel better for it and more mentally sane but I really wish it hadn’t been so hard and that someone who actually trained to do this would take over the job. “Make it make sense.”*  
©Fannie Sosa and Navild Acosta

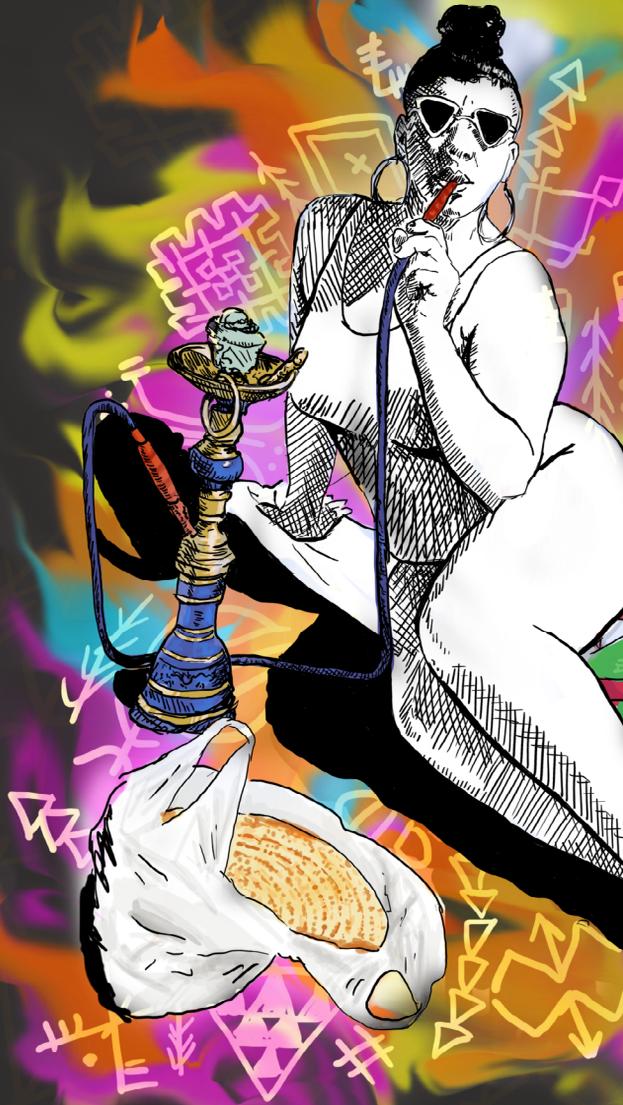
Arriving in institutions and academic environments where you are suddenly expected to know to and know how to accommodate this comfort, it becomes a very confusing and effortful process and research to form an identity. This process is often a very traumatising one for POCs in Western countries.

In the adolescent process of identity formation, ethnic iden-

tity can be particularly complicated in diasporas, surrounded by prejudice and discrimination.

“Children entering middle childhood have acquired an awareness of their ethnic identities to the extent that they know the labels and attributes that the dominant culture applies to their ethnic groups. Many researchers believe that during the middle childhood and adolescence, children in ethnic minority groups often engage in additional processes aimed at ethnic identity formation”<sup>67</sup>

The idea of of third culture kids (TCK) navigating in the generative space of in-betweens as “cultural brokers” can be used to flip this process around. This third culture being a synthesis serving as antithesis to the claim that its ingredient cultures were exclusionary, it gives way to certain mediation and cultural literacy skills which should be worked at and emphasized as a strength coming from our differences.



67. Michael Gazzaniga, Todd Heatherton, Diane Halpern, Psychological Sciences, W. W. Norton & Company; Fourth International Student edition, 2012



68. Jassem Hindi, Keith Hennessy, Arab Future Fiction: the Call for Interstellar Friend/Ship, COVEN BERLIN, July 21, 2015. <http://www.covenberlin.com/arab-future-fiction/>

69. At MONO Rotterdam for the New Radicalism Festival during Art Rotterdam 2020

70. Sofiane Si Merabet's artist name and very popular instagram handle with which he revisits nostalgia, archive and artefact to portray contemporary issues around the contested Arab identity <https://www.theconfusedarab.com/>

*«Haraway inspired a rigorous practice of transformation, drawing the first lines of what the politics of friendship might entail. She reminded us that the treasure of the Arab world was its sense of hospitality and generosity, that we were not afraid of hosting the stranger within our midst, that we were not afraid of claiming that we were of no country, and that we had always hosted all cultures. We think of ourselves as incapable of performing the simple gestures of hospitality. We invoke our wars, our misery, and our home in ruins. Every situation hides a series of impossible tasks. The fragile status of women, the aggressive meddling of imperial interests, the pressure of wild capitalism, the corruption, the prejudices, the lack of historical understanding... All these stones in our way have made it impossible to imagine a future.»<sup>68</sup>*

At a zine-making workshop organized by Azeema<sup>69</sup>, a girl showed me her dad's messages when she mentioned the work of The Confused Arab<sup>70</sup>, he seemed very upset: «are you confused?!? I'm not confused, your brother is not confused...»

## New Radicalism

Perhaps this shows a disparity between generations? Earlier that day, we had listened to two creatives discuss their positions as third culture kids (TCK) mentioning this disparity. A Moroccan mother admitting 'I didn't know I was getting a dutch daughter'. This is also relevant when it comes to social activism for example with the Black Lives Matter movement and African first generation immigrant parents.<sup>71</sup>

*"Arabfuturism/s, like most creative provocations, is born of counter-culture. Notions of belonging are constantly challenged by the strangers, the marginalised, the outsiders: workers, rebels, immigrants, artists who see from the margins – looking in – that there is no homogeneous culture or identity."*<sup>72</sup>

A third culture, a generative culture which is a synthesis acting as antithesis to theories and systems of the infamous 'clash of civilizations'. It is a space of imagination, imagination freed from these limits, these outlines, these maps.

People who are positioned at intersections of discriminated (racial, sexual, gendered, and class...) identities acquire skill sets that favor mediation, dialectic, cultural and social literacy. The intentionally veiled processes previously described are most visible from the margins, therefore leadership of people from those margins, in-betweens, cracks and intersections is essential to successful social activism and art projects. This is most possible in informality. In formality, with big institutions for example, consultancy is already a strong paradigm shifting tool. It is also sometimes a safe entry and position for POCs (which requires extra labor, unpaid as usual). It can also operate at any level of the hierarchy and therefore acts as a gateway to possibilities previously and formerly stifled.

71. Evelyn From The Internets, How to tell your African parents that Black Lives Matter, Say It Loud, 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pa-3-z-kcmw>

72. An iteration of this text was published in a book compiled by artists, thinkers and internet activists under creative commons license, in memory of Bassel Khartabil, a Syrian-Palestinian open software developer, coder, thinker and founder of a Damascus hackerspace. Threatened by a free information movement and an open internet, the Syrian authorities arrested and detained him without trial in 2012. In October 2015, he was transferred to an undisclosed location and is rumoured to be sentenced to death.

This is why decolonial archiving has emerged as a community building and reparating method expanded by technological and social media advances. You can find it in the likes of The Confused Arab, using nostalgia as an empowering tool to rediscover, remember past strategies, stories and symbols. In his talk at the New Radicalism festival, he explained that there is a movement in MENAd<sup>73</sup> activity of looking to the past for a sense of modernity, perhaps in reaction to the seemingly regressing politics of the region and mentalities pushed forward. Empowering femme narratives are being celebrated for this purpose, like Oum Kaltoum's panafricanism, Sabah, Rimitti or Etab to name a few.

*«There are new strategies emerging, or being remembered-many would describe this as a shift from a masculine to feminine (or patriarchal to feminist) leadership. I see that, and I think it is also about something beyond all of our binaries- evolving in relationship with our hierarchical tendency.»<sup>74</sup>*

73. an abbreviation for 'Middle East(ern), North Africa(n) and it's diaspora('s)'

74. Adrienne Maree Brown, Emergent Strategy : Shaping Change, Changing Worlds, AK Press, 2017

75. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Breaching Towards Other Futures, Counterpulse, February 5, 2020. <http://counterpulse.org/breaching-towards-futures/>

76. Big Hit Entertainment's kings of international K-Pop have a cult following in North Africa, one of the band's biggest markets

Reconciling heritage with sub-culture in conversation with femme empowerment is also emerging as a practice of connecting and sharing from the inbetweens. Allahyari sees it "as a rebellion against Euro-centric concepts and demands for legibility, it is a re-owning of histories and ideas that are definitely not perfect – patriarchy finds its way into everything – but provide another way of seeing the world."<sup>75</sup>

Azeema is a publication using this as an active intentional methodology mirroring organic developments and observable phenomena on social media and in style (like the North African and diaspora obsession over BTS<sup>76</sup>). The visuals reflecting this mix, remix and synthesis of influences read very well with all types of audiences living in this multicultural landscape but especially rings true, striking and inspiring to those of us with links to any two of the multiple subcultures and heritages used as the ingredients for this representation, same goes, perhaps even more strongly, for musical creations.

These strategists/activists/artists have looked to technology for a way to rematerialise and renew this remembered knowledge and its fictions: restoring and creating artifacts, bringing immaterial into experienceable object, and the legitimacy of this knowledge -- this knowledge itself.

"Despite having all his records deleted, a group of online activists and archeologists subsequently released Bassel's #NewPalmyra project: an online collection of reconstructed 3-D models of the city. It is no surprise that instances and manifestations of #arab-futurism have happened simultaneously and independently around the globe, within European-Arab circles and other diasporic circles within and outwith the region."<sup>77</sup>

77. Sulaiman Majali, Towards a possible manifesto; proposing Arabfuturism/s(Conversation A)



## Against object, objectivity

DIY culture and open source methods have closely accompanied the explosion of digital tools. DIY is often a more accessible, informal word for self taught.

It is also a playful and powerful tool of resistance, if you consider the recent trend of DIY branded thrifted mix ups in the fashion influencers' wardrobes, this is a great example of the mechanisms described. It is reminiscent of the exuberant counterfeit Apple djelabas and Louis V babouches in the markets of Algiers but through the terminology associated with DIY culture, has rebranded itself away from the criminalized notion of counterfeit. The fashion industry isn't sure whether to endorse this as a kind of prosumer marketing for their brand because they lose dominion and power over the narrative of their brand as well as the value gained from their scarcity economics practices. But it can also elevate the value of having a 'real' Louis Vuitton and expand to more informal and curvy markets.

The women (usually) styling and posing in these get-ups are also heavily critiqued and targeted by an army of fervent fashion consumers and followed critics who dictate the rules of respectability and style in the formalised and 'legitimate' institution of fashion. They are usually written off as wannabe, vulgar coupon queens who's other qualities and creativity are erased by this portrayal.

But what this also does is give the average joe the power to destabilize these big corporations, change the rules of consumerism but also of respectability and crack open the gates. This constant game pushes the elite to constantly redefine codes of conduct and the criteria for access to its privileges. Meanwhile, DIY creates alternative codes and hierarchies within what the dominant narrative would want to be just subcultures or countercultures but which often seep into popular culture, shifting the scale entirely: a constant game of cat and mouse.

DIY is also based off of 'doing the best with what you've got', getting the most out of limited resources. This is why in a corporation's mind, these iterations devalue their product and weakens their economic power. When you can make your own, when you find out it can be more sustainable, durable, and better quality even than the pricy version, why buy? When you can distribute and share your craft or content to a huge network of people worldwide yourself, why not try to create an independent practice as more than just a side hustle?

This limited resources practice allows for more people to be active in these endeavors, to, despite the fact that everything in society is made to make your dreams and ambitions wait, start them on your own, often on the side, and slowly, with attention and in a fractal way, grow (and hopefully outgrow) the market.

The explosion of digital (art) tools has reshaped the rules of the popular narrative game, and diversified the narratives of arab contemporary art, for example.

Therefore, informal processes are where possibilities lie. These movements should focus more on building strong foundations and shared values, one to one connections, informal debates at a cigarette break etc.. What you put attention to grows, so this strong connection builds overtime a strong and sustainable network of trust and reliance.

This focus on trust allows for decentralized leadership which counters the typical leader isolation model and general myth that governs today's workforce and is taught to us in schools: that we should be self reliant and original in our endeavors, that we have to have sole ownership of an idea, business or structure for it to be legitimately worth pursuing and successful. This is not sustainable and not human. This leaves out not only the possibilities of adaptability, self reflection and remixing/collaging but also the very important and vital role of mental and physical health of those leading. This is why one of the major concerns of the results of the technological, economic and social paradigm shift is the risks of burnout.

*«We have lived through a good half century of individualistic linear organizing (led by charismatic individuals or budget-building institutions), which intends to reform or revolutionize society, but falls back into modeling the oppressive tendencies against which we claim to be pushing.»<sup>78</sup>*

Take turns being lead and giving leadership, «That give and take creates room for micro-hierarchies in a collaborative environment.»<sup>79</sup>

In Emergent Strategy, leadership is different than the traditional view of being (basically) superman, trying to live up to being worth the power and authority you are given, all on your own (especially in social movements). Emergent strategy engages leadership as transformation for each part of the system, group. It is an auto-poietic social practice. Everyone has to find their leadership skills to support each other and grow the whole: the "collective response was possible because no one person held the power.»

This is why an approach that centers rest and mental, emotional health is key to a sustainable social justice practice. Decentralisation favors this.

78. Adrienne Maree Brown, Emergent Strategy : Shaping Change, Changing Worlds, AK Press, 2017  
79. Adrienne Maree Brown, Emergent Strategy : Shaping Change, Changing Worlds, AK Press, 2017

# Code Quantum: Riding the Paradigm Shift

There is an unspoken allyship, no matter the internal rivalries and hatred, between the holy trinity of the Maghreb. *“An uncle, for love in the West, came about the wrong end of a moral dilemma. Woken up by a gun to his temple, he screamed “Ya yemma!” (oh mamma!) and was let go by the Tunisian gunman, reporting back that he hadn’t found him that night, allowing an escape out of the country.”*<sup>80</sup>

80. Anonymous interview of a person of Algerian descent

Mammas are life savers.  
So are unspoken cultural bonds.



## The Shining

*Today is the first time I see a hijabi woman in school. Far off in the corner of the canteen, eyes on the courtyard and the rest of the room, she was smiling.*

*I couldn't help but smile too as I was trying hard not to stare in awe. I knew why she was sitting in that dark corner, back to the wall, and I didn't want to cancel out that strategy. But I wanted to see so bad! To admire a confident, possibly artistic, professional and happy veil-rocking woman. I wanted to at least wink, make her take note somehow, that there was a supportive sister walking by.*

*I always think about a sketch of Key and Peele where a new Black worker is being shown around the office. As he is introduced to all the different departments, he encounters a few other Black coworkers who communicate with him through the shining (telepathy referencing the Kubrick classic). They are saying, in their minds, all the things they can't in front of their boss and other white coworkers. Firstly «Hey it's nice to see another brother in this shithole», also using unfiltered language and*

*accents. I sometimes think I am experiencing a similar situation but I've stopped assuming it happens with any hijabi I meet. They probably have their own shining going on between them which, justifiably, does not recognize me.»<sup>81</sup>*

We are not taught to have that generalised sense of belonging similar to this Shining that has been worked at for years in Black afro-diasporic communities. The spectrum is so varied and perceived rules of participation so strict, every one of us is just comparing and filling in blanks that make this telepathic relatedness difficult, but not impossible.

«While superstitions may seem silly, for the diaspora they're a way of connecting with our family's culture.»<sup>82</sup>

The trend of astrology linked, sometimes just aesthetically, with pleasurable activism can be seen as a connection and coping strategy for stress relief.

81. An anonymous note from a student, November 2019  
82. Ruchira Sharma, Very Superstitious, Gal-Dem: The Un/Rest Issue, 2019

«Within diaspora cultures such as my own Indian one, superstitions felt much weirder to me growing up, a bit embarrassing even, partly because of how seriously they were taken. If my mum told me about one it was because she truly believed it.(...) I grew up around these things as unquestioned facts, scared to share them with friends out of fear they would think i was strange. But there's comfort in these beliefs for diasporic families.»<sup>83</sup>

For first generation immigrants seen by their kids, these little bits might have been the peek in the closet, the tells that they were still functioning from their original culture, interpreting and acting in life using those premises but simply applying them to new circumstances. This sense of agency the rituals bring took on even more meaning as this circumstance shifted.

«Despite externally ridiculing it as a horribly angsty teenager, I still followed the ritual as it relinquishes some of my anxiety.(...)maybe she was onto something and I should have been less of a shit»<sup>84</sup>

In Cameroon someone is thinking of you if you sneeze. Some superstitions and ritual residues may seem macabre but some argue it is mainly because Western culture is in denial when it comes to death. In Filipino culture, if you dream of losing your teeth or other teeth involved things, this means someone you know died and your parents will likely start listing who it could be.

*«For diaspora cultures in the West, many [beliefs] have been adapted even further with the geographical shifts, incorporating elements of the new assimilated culture. However for some, unsettling superstitions are a map of family migration.»<sup>85</sup>*

One thing that was universal from speaking to a diverse group of people about their diaspora superstitions was the degree of overlap: most of them are attempts to protect from misfortune. You could argue diaspora superstitions are incredibly natural. Is it really surprising that our parents held onto rituals related to aspirational things such as money or job prospects, when

they were uprooted to the West, a place where the odds were already stacked against them?

*“If Haraway claimed to be “a cyborg rather than a motherly/earthy goddess”, I claim to be a jinn rather than a cyborg.”*<sup>86</sup>

How do you build on anything when the grounds for construction have never been cleared. When the construction site displaces week after week, to fully new undug terrains, independently of any of your organizational efforts?

83. Idem

84. Idem

85. Idem

86. Bhutto, Zulfikar Ali, Breaching Towards Other Futures, Counterpulse, February 5, 2020. <http://counterpulse.org/breaching-towards-futures/>

*That truth telling story of silenced pain won't get them out of the water, so you build the world you only ever dared to peek at in uncontrolled dreams, behind a tiny door in the back of your neck, where that pain doesn't have any hold whatsoever on minds, on bodies. You build the spectrum of light reflecting your wide, tireless gaze that this alternate reality gave you.*



*"There is more to identity than identifying with one's culture or standing solidly against it. José Esteban Muñoz looks at how those outside the racial and sexual mainstream negotiate majority culture—not by aligning themselves with or against exclusionary works but rather by transforming these works for their own cultural purposes. Muñoz calls this process "disidentification" . Muñoz calls attention to the world-making properties found in performances by queers of color—in Carmelita Tropicana's "Camp/Choteo" style politics, Marga Gomez's performances of queer childhood, Vaginal Creme Davis's "Terrorist Drag..."<sup>87</sup>*

86. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers Of Color And The Performance Of Politics* (Cultural Studies of the Americas), Univ Of Minnesota Press, 1999

World building

An example of this process of remembering and remixing is Morehshin Allahyari's artistic practice merging Islamic esoteric practices and technology. For example her use of the art of Geomancy, a craft of precarious city dwellers", which is still active today and still subject to gendered persecution.

"It goes back to this notion of the witch, the mean old, ugly figure who is the deceiver, the woman is culturally so easily tied to this idea of monstrosity" (...)Allahyari's current long term project, She Who Sees the Unknown researches figures of Islamic mythology, primarily female and gender ambiguous jinns and demons, invisible spirits that live between our world and another. Through her research she "re-figures" these forgotten and shunned monstrous creatures through digital interventions, bringing them back to life and making their stories relevant to contemporary issues such as climate change and anti-immigrant rhetoric."<sup>88</sup>

There is also often an act of breaching, cracking, mediating possibilities, in geomancy, this relates to the opening of 16 doors that allow a certain type of time travel.

Aisha Qandisha is a fearsome female jinn known as the opener. Allahyari explains that "she has the power to possess people cracking their bodies and they become a traffic zone for other jinn and demons". (...)Most importantly, breaching is not a passive act, it is an active moment, a breaking through, pulling down walls of ignorance and forcing open multiple possibilities, past, present and future."<sup>89</sup>

Allahyari's concept of 're-figuring' is a digital update to this theory of disidentification which reveals its specific nuances only in the tools she uses: it "is a ficto-feminist and activist practice that reflects on the effects of historical and digital colonialism and other forms of oppression and catastrophe."<sup>90</sup>

88. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Breaching Towards Other Futures, Counterpulse, February 5, 2020. <http://counterpulse.org/breaching-towards-futures/>

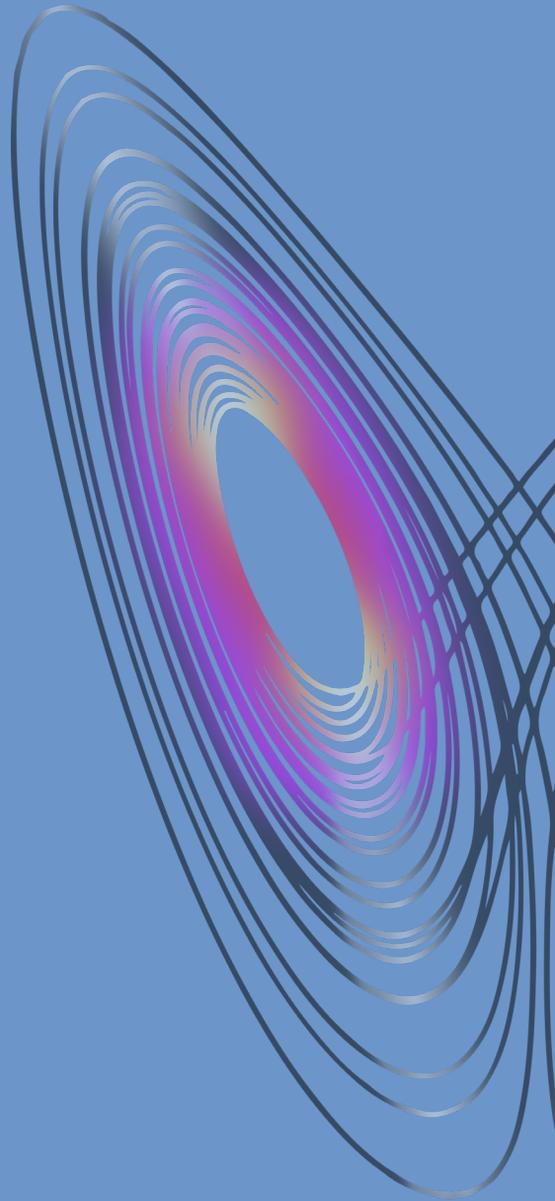
89. Shirin Fahimi performing in "Breaching Towards Other Futures" lecture-performance in collaboration with Morehshin Allahyari, part of Refiguring the Future conference, sponsored by Eyebeam and Refresh, Knockdown Center, New York, USA. 2019

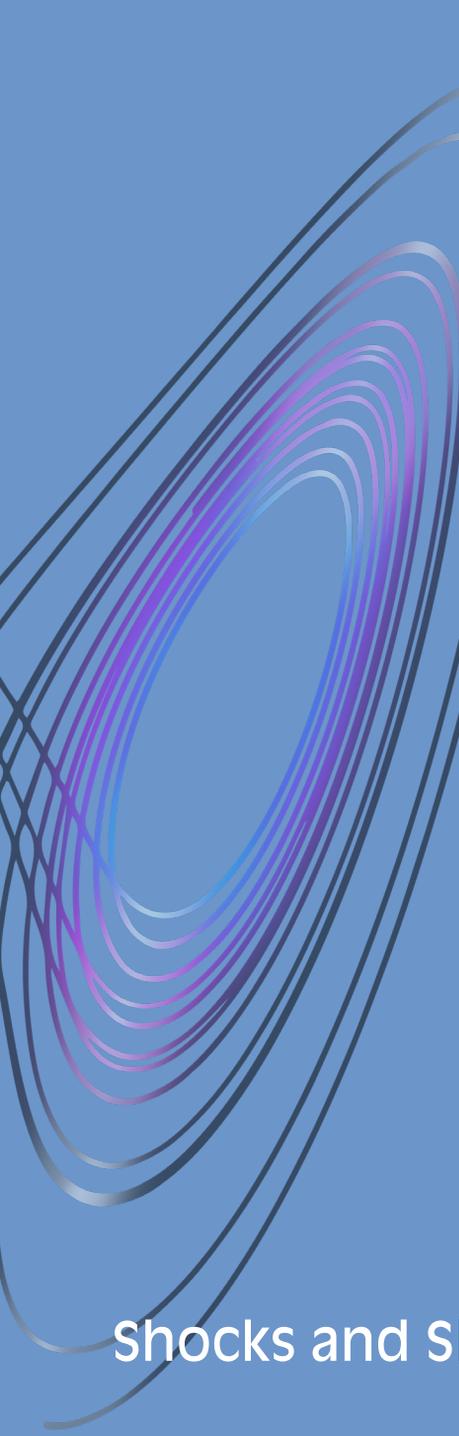
90. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Breaching Towards Other Futures, Counterpulse, February 5, 2020. <http://counterpulse.org/breaching-towards-futures/>

Allahyari's process can be broken down into distinct steps: archiving, e-digitized 3D rituals, visual story-telling (remixing the archives), performance/lectures (a coming together of fiction, theory and activism), and what she calls Ha'm-Neshini (Sitting Together) «a series of intimate public performances, events and discussions in relationship to my research in collaboration with artists, scientists, and activist women from the Middle East.» Ibrahim Nehme with the publication *The Outpost* and its journalistic experiment cafe in Amman, or Ari de B's *Decolonize the Dancefloor* series also flirt with combining different genres and formats to ge a more interactive and generative experiences.

«One of our key roles, as social movements, must be to harness the shocks and direct the slides-all towards achieving the systemic, cultural and psychic shifts we need to navigate the changes with the greatest equity, resilience, and ecological restoration possible.»<sup>91</sup>

91. Adrienne Maree Brown, *A Framework on Adaptation, Movement Generation, Emergent Strategy : Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, AK Press, 2017





There is always enough time for the right work. (Emergent Strategy)

«Instability has become a defining feature of our times. In many ways, this instability is the new landscape of social struggle. It is useful to classify the economic and ecological disruptions that make up this «new normal» of instability into two groups: shocks and slides. Shocks present themselves as acute moments of disruption. These are, for example, market crashes, huge disasters and uprisings. Slides, on the other hand, are incremental by nature. They can be catastrophic, but they are not experienced as acute. Sea level rise is a slide. Rising unemployment is a slide. The rising costs of food and energy are a slide.»<sup>92</sup>

92. Adrienne Maree Brown, Emergent Strategy : Shaping Change, Changing Worlds, AK Press, 2017

## Shocks and Slides

This resonates hard with the aura revolving around the MENA region and in its diasporas since the arab spring. It seems to run along multiple slides accumulated and instigated by several shocks which keep popping up each day in the news with varying effects. Many have already been attempting to ride this wave, harnessing and directing towards community action and new collective, inclusive possibilities.

«Briefly going back to the Lahore Bienalle, its theme is indicative of a global movement throughout the Muslim majority world and its diaspora, where the Muslim imagination and Islamic mystic practices are returning as a site of inquiry. It is worth noting that this is a largely queer and femme led investigation that includes artists such as North Carolina based Saba Taj and her series *Creatures From the Earth*, Helsinki based Abdullah Qureshi and his project, *Mythological Migrations* and many more.»<sup>93</sup>

Often these emerging MENA futurism artists and irl or digital communities are impressive in their diversity and combinations of nationalities sharing similar sentiments and drives.

“Fahimi and Allahyari have also made their research accessible to folks from South Asia, South West Asia and North Africa, something they see as a form of decolonization. This is most clearly manifested in Allahyari’s travelling Reading Room or MaktabKhaneh and a living online archive.”

Especially in diaspora and migrant art, this remembering also orients towards the mythical, fictional, imaginary with the same focus on gender-bending practices. Morehshin Allahyari ‘re-figures’ monstrous primarily female and gender ambiguous jinns that live between our world and the next, through digital interventions making their stories relevant to contemporary issues. She synthesises practices that look to the stars and use sand to open portals and cracks towards possibilities.

93. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, *Breaching Towards Other Futures*, Counterpulse, February 5, 2020. <http://counterpulse.org/breaching-towards-futures/>

*«Most of us resist changes we didn't spark. We feel victimized, so we try to hold tight to whatever we figure out as a way to survive. «It is time to learn Octavia Butler's lessons - both that «the only lasting truth is Change» and that we can, and must, «shape change».»<sup>95</sup>*

We have, in recent years, been experiencing a paradigm shift in popular media/fictional narratives, most ostensibly, a shift of tone. After delighting ourselves in the comedic cynicism, sarcasm and angry/hopeless critique and deconstruction of modernist tropes, references and structures, we now see and crave hopeful, earnest and generative stories. It differs from nostalgia seen in fan-service films. Instead it consists of revised modernist idealism informed by the waves and revelations of angry woke-ness. Metamodernists describe it as an oscillation between the two tones creating a third. This is similar to the TCK argument, that one individual raised in two cultures doesn't just shift from one to another but through this oscillation creates a third culture, it's own entity. In this there is the

idea of the remix, the collage, nostalgia to a degree, combined with the guiding principle that the only constant is change.

This movement can also explain the other key principle: non linearity. This is another gateway, an opening to intentionality, autonomy, time travel... To oscillate isn't quite to loop, it is dipping in and out of each high and low with advancement, each time changed. However this still somewhat implies a larger scale linearity and constant of 'advancement'.

*“We must give ourselves the space to make mistakes,” she continues, “we have to constantly question what we are doing, this is our burden.”<sup>96</sup>*

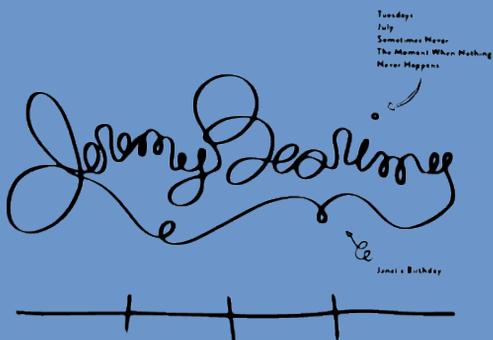
Brown references Rihanna's tattoo 'Never a failure, always a lesson' to describe another key concept in emergent strategy, which combined with the statement that there is 'always time to do the right work' gives comfort and freedom to explore a generative and iterative process freed from expectations and ready for change.

95. Octavia Butler, *Parable Of The Sower*, Warner Books, 1993

Adrienne Maree Brown, *Emergent Strategy : Shaping Change*, Changing Worlds, AK Press, 2017

96. Adrienne Maree Brown, *Emergent Strategy : Shaping Change*, Changing Worlds, AK Press, 2017

Emergent Strategy's and BQF's interpretation of nonlinearity goes much more in a Jeremy Bearimy<sup>97</sup>.



Similarly to *The Good Place*, these theories/strategies move forward, back, feel the present, loop back around and just move in seemingly chaotic paths. On the show, each character's moral advancement swirls in the same way, by the person's own agency or situational nonsense but in the end the show argues for trying.

*«The crisis is everywhere, massive massive massive*

*And we are small.*

*But emergence notices the way small actions and connections create complex systems (...) Emergent strategy is how we intentionally change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for.»<sup>98</sup>*

In these worlds, terrestrial or celestial, the only constant is change and it operates completely non linearly. It argues that the only moral guiding principle for human behavior in the face of this is trying to do good, whatever that may be and this ultimately being a combination of felt and reflective knowledge: to do good, informed by our past experiences and aided by other people trying.

«Now, let us jump ahead to touch on a very subtle, very crucial premise-the principle of coolness or, as Thompson termed it, «an aesthetic of the cool». The Europeanist attitude suggests centeredness, control, linearity, directness, Energy is controlled by form. The Africanist mode suggests asymmetricality (that plays with falling off center), looseness (implying flexibility, vitality, and the possibility of improvisation, even danger), and directness of approach. Here energy dictates and controls the form.»<sup>99</sup>

This then fractals and goes on to be reflected in entire societal systems. This is also the basis of a decolonial approach to digital developments based off of auto-poietic social practices.

This describes somewhat of a butterfly effect represented in fractals and BQF's obsession with the spiral. What is microscopic is reflected in the macroscopic. What we pay attention to grows into a wider system. Black and Brown people must be in future narratives, or rather narratives of the future. Black and Brown centered Scifi is a moral obligation.

And not just in the future but also in the distance long long ago far far away. *Star Wars* did it, we should too, and have (in the likes of Octavia Butler's stories for example). Science fiction also opens the possibility for an imagined, rewritten or recontextualised past. (look to the phenomenon that was imagining Wakanda for recent pop cultural references of this narrative strategy).

Queer centered myths and narratives, giving back credit and responsibly, respectfully calling on that disidentification generative power of the queer imagination. The use of alter egos is a powerful tool for this generative imagination which can be seen borrowed for all types of purposes in the creative, music industry and others.

*«...and under starry nights, wrapped in blankets of unlikely friendship, in the middle of our imaginary oasis, we will rest and brew phantasmagoric teas made out of queer plants we'll have gathered on our adventures.»<sup>100</sup>*

97. The Good Place is a NBC show which first aired from 2016 to 2020. In it, time in the afterlife moves in a 'Jeremy Bearimy', meaning it twists and turns and loops back around to form a shape similar to the name Jeremy Bearimy written in cursive.

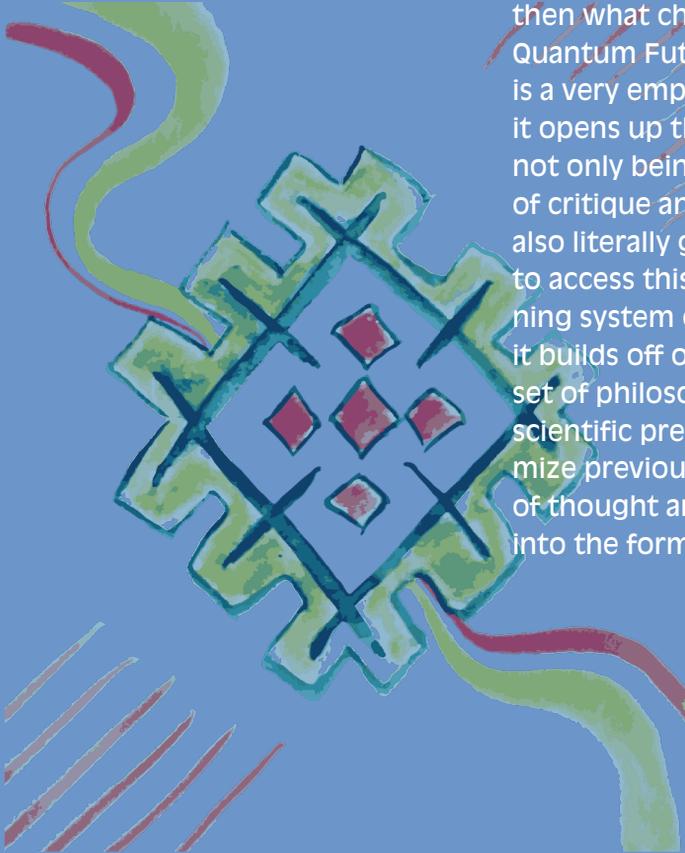
98. Adrienne Maree Brown, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, AK Press, 2017

99. Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *The Diaspora DanceBoom (Dance in the World and The World in Dance)*, available online, 2004

<https://bdixongottschild.com/published-articles/100>. Jassem Hindi, Keith Hennessy, *Arab Future Fiction: the Call for Interstellar Friend/Ship*, COVEN BERLIN, July 21, 2015. <http://www.covenberlin.com/arab-future-fiction/>

*«Time-travel for me: what is the most pleasurable possible future you can imagine?»<sup>102</sup>*

It's hard to imagine a utopia where all the problems are fixed if you don't even know there is a problem, what the problem specifically is, how it operates, what the goal of the change should be and then what changes to make. Black Quantum Futurism, for example, is a very empowering tool in that it opens up these possibilities by not only being an effective tool of critique and identification but also literally giving you a manual to access this imagined functioning system or universe. To do so, it builds off of a completely new set of philosophical, ethical and scientific premises which legitimize previously "irrational" modes of thought and action, diving deep into the formulas of time travel.



## Black Quantum Futurism and Time Travel

*“BQF is a new approach to living and experiencing reality by way of the manipulation of space-time in order to see into possible futures and/or collapse space-time into a desired future in order to bring about that future’s reality.”*<sup>103</sup>

This approach retroactively creates the narratives we should have had all along, and that’s a real point breaker: it’s not necessarily only about filling in the gaps of the history of violence, oppression and erasure, to uncover the veil of capitalism and white privilege through archives and magical realism.

“Blacks in America have been forced to continue to reinvent ourselves through spirituality, imagination, metaphysics and other forms outside of the notion of proven reality-based practices. We need to continue taking ownership of successful models of healing and transformation, and create surreal and horrific that we encounter on a daily basis.»<sup>104</sup>

It’s also about creating what would’ve been, could’ve been, and which narratives to base the future on, creating a different

perspective narrative that is no more false than the one that has organised our lives so far, the one that is still taught worldwide to a 10 year old in history class.

“quantum mapping (...) allowing the subject to reconfigure how one deals with cyclical trauma while understanding that neurological pathways set in one’s brain reflect the genetic trauma formed in one’s genes.»<sup>105</sup>

Phillips dives deep into scientific theory to produce a methodology for harnessing the strength of “how our present day experiences reach back to redefine the past.»<sup>106</sup>

*“We are using our African unconscious to predict future events/rhythms, to prepare for changes in one’s environment/universe, and to prevent the ongoing extermination of a people.(...) because linear mode of time, which dominates time consciousness in Western society does not allow access to information about the future and only limited information about the past.”*

103. Rasheeda Phillips, *Black Quantum Futurism: Theory and Practice, The Afrofuturist Affair/ House of Future Science Books*, 2015

104. Idem

105. Idem

106. Idem

This time travel translates in terms of wider access through science fiction.

«We believe that radical science fiction is actually better termed visionary fiction because it pulls from real life experience, inequalities and movement building to create innovative ways of understanding the world around us, paint visions of new worlds that could be, and teach us new ways of interacting with one another. Visionary fiction engages our imaginations and hearts, and guides our hands as organizers.»<sup>101</sup>

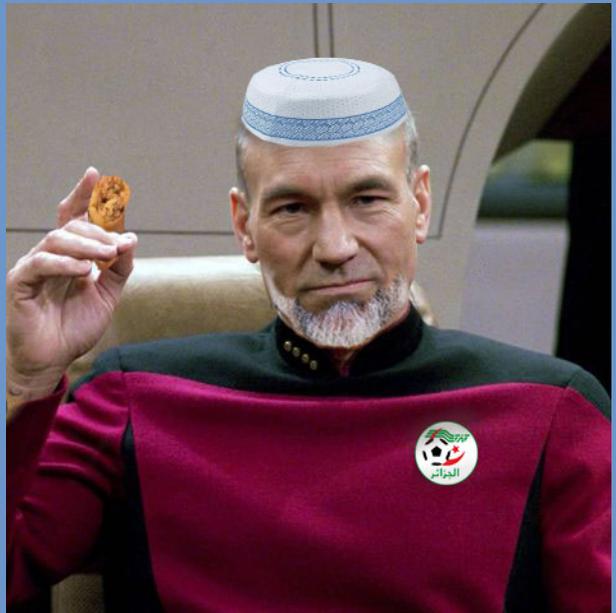
The radical potential of pop culture lies in its form as expressed by Stuart Hall : pop culture is not a genre nor a political position but rather a terrain of struggle between resistance and incorporation of politically radical challenges to dominant repressive ideas.

Media at large, through its focus on response, communication, imagination and fictional and sensory storytelling is a logical landscape for this struggle. And we can see a trend, since the post-honey-moon phase of the internet, in

pop-fanhood audiences (or youth culture) being attracted to very critical, sarcastic and sometimes sinister humour. As well as a focus on science fiction and the supernatural, with more recently a wish-fulfillment oriented, soothing, earnest and inspiring form of content. Imagining the realities we want to be happy in.

Remembering these science fiction strategies projects forward through the imagination battle to positive effects in reality. Nichelle Nichols is the embodiment of this hopeful strategy. She portrayed the first science fictional Black woman in the pop culture imaginary, a decision pushed forward in her conversation with none other than Martin Luther King himself, who saw the possibilities and importance of Black femme representation in this landscape. She went on to recruit the first Black femme astronaut, the very real Dr Sally Ride, and many other staff members of NASA.

*"Space: the final frontier. These are the voyages of the Arab friend/ship. Its eternal mission: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no one has gone before."<sup>102</sup>*



101. Walidah Imarisha, Adrienne Maree Brown, Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories From Social Justice Movements, 2015  
102. Remixed quote from Captain Picard in Star Trek Jassem Hindi and Keith Hennessy, Arab Future Fiction: the Call for Interstellar Friend/Ship,





# Conclusion

The revolution still chants each Friday in Algerian cities and many others, resonating in digital waves, pushing through a reality while simultaneously defining, challenging and changing it. Through embodied practices of repeated vulnerability, invited by spacial designs, or participative archival re-figuring, this approach will define itself further and further in an organic, fractal, decentralized, non-linear, adaptive and pleasurable way. I hope for this to become a feasible and attractive plan for those within formality and institutions to gravitate towards the evolution of 'woke' culture.

As for how I will approach my practice from now on, I will continue to explore and synthesize the methodologies and theories springing up each day using the very tools we have observed and reflected on thus far. I use spacial and digital forums as a stage for distributing and discussing this plan through various combinations of journalistic, movement and artistic practices in a generative collective setting. For example, tutorial type videos and publications will give you a toolkit for dealing with haters, internalised bias, practicing pleasurable resistance and organizing for community no matter where you are in the world or how much money you have. I hope that this form of co-design will make for inclusive methodologies that are relevant and useful to many different struggles and cultural backgrounds.

*«I collapse sound to create a frequency of discord and meditation, a fundamental paradox of pushing through a reality while simultaneously experiencing it.»<sup>102</sup>*

102. Rasheeda Philips, *Black Quantum Futurism: Theory and Practice*, The Afrofuturist Affair/House of Future Science Books, 2015

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