

Emily Carr University of Art & Design Fadwa Bouziane Thesis Draft Trauma, Diaspora and Storytelling- Craving Healing 2019 © Fadwa Bouziane

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* I am not a visitor I am not a guest I'm an intruder

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Acknowledgement / Position Statement

The land that I live in: I would like to acknowledge that the land on which we gather is the unceded territories of the Coast Salish people of the Səlilwəta (Tsleil-Waututh), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and x məθkwəyəm (Musqueam) Nations. It is with gratitude that I am here as an uninvited guest on these traditional territories, where I live, and on which my work is based.

The land on which I once lived: I was born in the East territories of Canada I would like to acknowledge these lands my parents took domicile in as long-term visitors. I would like to acknowledge that the land I was born and raised on is the traditional territories of Abenaki people. Wabenaki confederacy and of the Kanien'keha:ka (Mohawk), a place which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst nations.¹

These acknowledgements are important for my own understanding of my roots which include the land I was born in, as well as the land my mother (of Berber origin) was born in - Morocco, and the land of my father – Haiti. Three different soils. Three different ecosystems but yet with similar stories of colonialization, marginalization and enslavement.

Dear reader: as you move forward, remember, I request these stories be read with care. These are the kinds of stories we usually don't think are important, but they are alive, and need to be heard and thought through with patience and understanding. They breath. We need to ensure they survive through time because they form a source of knowledge. You might learn something about yourself or someone you know. These stories are about my family and maybe yours too, a blend of fictional and real-life experiences. They may trigger difficult memories in readers. They grapple with violence, abuse, discrimination, sexism, trauma, diaspora and migration, recounted through several narratives in discontinuous and non-linear ways. They raise questions about power, and power enacted on the body by others.

As a means of processing such inequity and aggression, and following in the footsteps of my ancestors, storytelling is the strategy I use to understand my roots or antecedents, as well as the histories and political realities I have inherited. This also helps me make sense of my contemporary context, as well as my Haitian and Moroccan ancestry. Each silence, each whisper, each pause, each bodily gesture is code for the audience to dissect. I break silence on personal pain and violence. I use storytelling to process traumatic events and gain the ability to create space to purge the weight that I'm carrying. Storytelling is how I make sense of and understand inherited and current suffering through my everyday life.

In the following text, I have made a conscious decision to find references that make sense to me, and which honour my (and my families) experiences. While I can respect scholarly research, I actively and consciously refused to relate to world views in which the non-Western world is relegated to a supporting role." Non-Western contributions to philosophy, psychology, anatomy, astronomy, medicines and mathematics are not credited by many colonial writers, leading me to wonder why so many Western historical sources take credit for what has been adapted or appropriated from other cultures. Moving forward, I prefer to find my own prism through which to view art and the world around me that reflects what is important to me. As the poet Aimé Césaire has noted: "Poetic knowledge is born in the great silence of scientific knowledge."²

¹ 2 <u>https://www.caut.ca/sites/default/files/caut-guide-to-acknowledging-first-peoples-and-traditional-territory-2017-09.pdf</u> Césaire aimé. "Poetry and Knowledge," in Lyric and Dramatic Poetry. Translated by Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith: Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990

List of Images

https://www.instagram.com/fadwa_bouziane/

I do not intend to put all of my documentation in this thesis. Some of these photographs are a catalysis for reproducing second wave trauma. It acts as a violent memory that brings back state of distress. I provided you with my Instagram website given above.

* Let me in Let me in Let me in

*

I <u>AM</u> A MAN.³

A young Haitian woman traveled to Port-au-Prince hoping to find a better life. She was intent on escaping the poverty of her parents who were most often in a situation of scarcity. But once there, she found the city overwhelming and realized that improving her life would be difficult after all. She found work as a servant for a rich Catholic family. She was an illiterate woman forced into servitude in return for a piece of bread. The family was cruel to all the servants. The young woman ended up getting pregnant by the brother of her mistress. She was forced to run every day from the market to the house with a basket on her head as a punishment. When the baby was born, she tried to drown herself and the newborn in the ocean without success⁴

I was adopted by a sister of my father when I was 2 months old. At the age of 4, we left to settle in the north-east. Pétionville is where I grew up. Since my earliest childhood, I was beaten by my adoptive mother a daily basis. This unrelenting physical violence is my earliest memory.

I started school at the age of eight at a Christian school run by priests. The day before my registration I was forced to memorize a text by heart. But I had never opened a book before that day. Registration was a failure. I entered the school the following year. Inside these walls, students were mistreated and violated on a regular basis. I spent four years in this institution witnessing and suffering physical attacks. The director, who was a priest himself, routinely abused young students. He used his office as a twilight zone, sheltered from witnesses. He brought one student back there at a time. Nobody talked about what was happening. Yet, each student came back in tears. One day I walked in and surprised him when he was with a young boy. It was a Wednesday. I was with one of my childhood friends. We saw the director with this young boy bent over towards the director's belt. The director opened his eyes. He saw us. We were terrified. My friend ran away. The director grabbed my arm and dragged me towards him. I was afraid. I resisted. He pushed my face down towards his hips. I punched him as hard as I could and pushed him against the wall. I laughed, probably because I was confused. Then I ran. The director went to my teacher and claimed that my classmate and I had assaulted him; but he never tried anything on me ever again.

I was the "lucky" one.

Over the next few years I suffered several nervous breakdowns, migraines and vomiting. Even when moving to a new school I brought with me the ghost of the priest.

After three years, I ended up leaving high school. Nothing stayed in my head. That same year my adoptive mother had health issues. She died after a year. My "father" had told her to leave me no good fortune. He sent me away, to Jamaica, but I jumped at the opportunity. I prepared everything without any help. I spent three miserable months over there—with almost no money in desperate conditions. I needed a plan B. I made friends with other Haitians in Jamaica. We talked about heading to French Guiana. We heard that there would be work for everybody. When I think about my "family" in Haiti and all this trouble to get rid of me, because of my aunt's fortune - it made me feel sick. In French Guiana, they were building a space ship. I filled my bag of food and some of my clothes.

Ten days at sea. Ten days at sea is so long. It's like time was stretching and didn't exist as we know it. Ten long days. Three days without seeing a fraction of land. This test was important. All of us Haitians were in the boat clandestinely. We ate cans of food and salty crackers. At the end, of the trip we were exhausted. I arrived in French Guiana. But again, things were not as easy as I had hoped.

Eventually, I got lucky and made my way to Canada. I worked in a restaurant-then a factory. I had no choice. No family, no money, you had to take what is in front of you to survive. Finally, I went to school and got a job as an electrician in the construction industry. I worked for two

³ Gregg Bordowitz, *Glenn Ligon*, *Untitled* (I Am a Man) (London: Afterall Books, 2018).

⁴ As Christina Sharpe evoke in her book "In The Wake: On Blackness And Being" she introduce similar case of infanticide rooted in hopelessness but yet in an American context.

years without immigrations papers. The scariest two years for sure. You think at night the government will come and pick you out of your bed and send you back where you are from. This fear of being deported is real. It exists in the bottom of your stomach. It is painful.

Then I fell in love with a Quebecoise. She was beautiful and funny. I was under her charm. We got married. For a while everything was so good. She gave me two beautiful daughters. But it didn't work out. At the end of ten years my wife asked me for a divorce. Years after I met a man from Morocco on my soccer team. His sister was visiting him at that time. We spent long days together. But soon she needed to head back to her country.

We kept in touch through letters. This is how I was able to build a new family. We have our ups and downs. It is hard sometimes and easier at other times.

But now I am more at peace with myself.

"La vie est faite ainsi, il faut toujours la prendre avec beaucoup d'optimisme. La colère est comme un soldat qui marche et qui n'arrive nulle part "5

⁵ My fathers' expression.

There is a piano in the room Nobody plays There was a before now it belongs to the past It is silenced but Time to time You can hear Distorted notes There is a piano in the room Beautiful to look at Not to play Not anymore

*

*

TRAUMA

Performance art⁶ enacted in a contemporary art context involves using the body in gesture, movement and dance. It allows me to explore highly charged and difficult issues regarding race, diaspora, trauma, and loss. Most of the performance artists I learned about at school were white female performers– Carolee Schneemann, Jana Sterbak Marina Abramovich– whose bodies and history of white feminism did not include my black/brown experiences. I try to push back against such institutional exclusion by exploring what it is like to perform as a black body. What does It mean for a black performer to perform their hypervisibility? My body is the vehicle for reenacting past trauma, while the audience bears witness.⁷ In creating a bond between myself and the viewer, it is possible to challenge the viewers' perspective. The audience member is compelled to acknowledge the difficult subject matter unfolding in front of them, to decide at what extent they would invest themselves emotionally or reject their involvement and leave the space.

Performance⁸ creates an environment of exchange. I use my body as a tool for resistance. There is a duality to it. On one hand, based on my gender and race I am viewed as a marginalized body through the lens of patriarchy, colonialism, and the histories of racism and inequity, with all the burdens inherent in those designations. At the same time, I am physically strong. In my practice, I use my body as a site of struggle and transformation. As I push through the physical challenges of the performance, the struggle faced by marginalized bodies in the aftermath of colonialism is highlighted. In his essay, "*Between the world and me*." ⁹ Ta-Nehisi Coates addresses the reality of "race" in current day USA. He writes about exploitation and the labor of black bodies. He details how your body will never belong to you. People who are considered elite will use and manipulate your body for their own purposes. The mainstream will attempt to determine your destiny, habits, and abilities. Like Coates, I recognize the institutionalized humiliation of black bodies which I attempt to reduce and destroy by using my own body to challenge the North American gaze. My body disrupts the viewers' potential complacency, while simultaneously altering the space in which it is performed.

The ideas for new performances find me–I don't find them. Some ideas can't be ignored. They can come from a sentence in a book, an instrumental piece, a movement of someone in the street triggering a particular emotion or feeling in me. Then, I need to repeat that experience,

⁶Harvey Young, *Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory, and the Black Body* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 119-166 and 167-208.

⁷ This act of witnessing takes place in a North American context, and within a contemporary art framework.

⁸ Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision; Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 105-145.

⁹ Ta-Nehisi Coates, " Une Colère; Noire Lettre à mon fils." (Éditions J'ai Lu 2015)

over and over, until my mind creates a movement in response to it. Usually the day before my performance, I take time for myself. I stretch and engage in physical activities and spend time with my body. It helps me focus on each muscle and flow of my breath. Then I go back home and sit for an hour in the dark. I need this time to concentrate. I don't talk. The next morning, I try to stay in a zone of emotional concentration. I always need 5 to 10 minutes right before the performance begins to gather my energy. I put my hands over my ears while I inhabit the space where the performance will take place. If it's outside, I will go somewhere quiet to visualize myself in that outdoor space. Silence is my secret. I prepare myself to re-live a traumatic event or emotion. With regards to the subject, my body is the aftermath of the performance event. I usually take time to process. I don't want to talk. I am exhausted and empty and want to go to sleep. By respecting the needs of my own body, I am respecting the subject.

When I find a space to perform in, I attempt to make it my own, by repeatedly visiting it and visualizing my body reacting with the wall, the floor, the noise, the coldness of the space. I acknowledge marks on walls and sources of light. The day before my performance I spend more time in my chosen space. I investigate, I touch the wall with my hands. I try to tame it by speaking to it in my mind and by moving through it. I clear the energy of others who have used the space before. My mother told me it is common in Morocco, when buying a new house, to put sheep or chicken blood in each corner on the outside of the house to neutralize past energy¹⁰. Spending time experiencing the space is my way of neutralizing it and making it my own. Through performance, my intention is not to return time and time again to those traumas that I have already expelled from my core. I know that traumatic events that lead to post-traumatic stress disorder¹¹can't be totally resolved. However, once a performance is completed, the emotions, which informed the practice, are transformed.

I don't want to perpetuate old wounds. That is why, for the moment, I will not re-enact performances. In fact, writing about past performances puts my mental state and physical body into extreme tension. As the writers William Aguiar and Regine Halseth have noted in relation to aboriginal peoples and historic suffering, trauma is often transmitted intergenerationally and perpetuated through familial stories and actions. In the stories I tell, it is possible to feel this reality, trauma as embedded and perpetuated through lived experience. In this way, storytelling¹²

 ¹⁰ Based on my mother's believe, passed on generation to generation. Each family has its own rituals.
¹¹ Desmarais Serge, Gerrig J.Richard, Ivanco Tammy, Zimbardo G. Philip : *Psychology And Life, second Canadian* Edition (Toronto: Pearson, 2012), 472

[&]quot;People experience post-traumatic stress decoder (PTSD), an anxiety disorder that is characterized by the persistent re-experience of traumatic events through distressing recollections, dreams, hallucinations, or flashbacks." (472) ¹²Colin Counsell, Laurie Wolf, *Performance Analysis: An Introductory coursebook* (New Fetter Lane, London 2001), 116-123. The Moroccan artist, Hajj Ahmed Ezzarghani, is well known by the citizen of Marrakech. He gives his ancestors' learning to the next generation through storytelling. In the link below, Sara Mouhyeddine,

is not meant to be seen as separate from but rather an extension of my practice. Individuals unable to resolve their trauma repeat it within social and intimate settings. Traumatic events or actions will be reinforced by these repetitive acts. My intention is to channel and disperse the trauma through a connection with the audience, to prevent it from becoming ritualistic and reoccurring. It is a working through that shifts traumas burdens to the audience and in this way, it become a form of distributive justice.¹³ whether the audience be those complicit, those who have benefitted from, or those who recognize the trauma.

For example, for one of my performances, *Untitled 13*, at AHVA Gallery, I juxtaposed intimate and harsh gestures in order to make the viewer uncomfortable. I later received feedback that it was so distressing audience members wanted the piece to end. At first, I could hear people talking, but as I continued to move through the space, the viewers silenced themselves. Everybody had their gaze on me as I scratched my neck and torso with my nails. The violence of the gesture and the repetitive nature of my performance created abrasions on my skin. These repetitive acts represented personal past traumatic events embodied in my movement. My skin turned from brown to red and bruises slowly appeared. Under my nails, I could see the skin I had scratched off my neck.

It took me 13 minutes to get from one wall to the other. Despite a pervasive feeling of hopelessness permeated the space. For me, my performance recreates the repetitive loop through which trauma is perpetuated. After leaving the space, I felt exhausted. My whole body was shaking and sweating. The welts left on my neck were still there the next morning, recalling past trauma and memories. For this particular piece I did not include any pictures in this document as they remind me of the pain of the performance and the emotion expelled. Besides, I don't want to portray another black female body as victim and suffering for the viewers to consume¹⁴. It took one week for the bruises to disappear and my mind to fully recover. In this way, the performance continued for me beyond the duration of the piece itself.

As the marks dissolved, they transformed the performance into memory. Memories are a connection between what you feel and what you've experienced both in the present and in the past. The goal for the viewer is to understand the repetitive action, step by step until they combine their own subjective emotions with the performance piece even though they will only reach a fragmented understanding. I realize it will be impossible for the audience to fully

an important woman storyteller, speaks about her struggles but also demonstrates storytelling as empowering action linked to her own identity:

https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/witness/2015/01/marrakech-tale-150131120247912.html (accessed January 31, 2015)

¹³ I'm aware for someone who never lived these traumas it hard to understand the occurring change. Buy changing the performance method and aesthetic I prevent it from being reoccurring. On a personal level it helps me to tame these traumas.

¹⁴ Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision; Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011) 95-104.

understand the complexity of this piece without knowing my personal context. Yet, giving too much information upfront could close down further discussion. Performing is an attempt to find my own language to break the insidious circle of family trauma and to be able to disperse the pain to others through my bodily gestures. It's a plea for recognition to my audience. I aim to translate the complexity of traumatic experiences, like marginalization and discrimination, through the black body. Performance art is one strategy to make trauma visible, particularly when spoken or written language can't fully explain what is being conveyed. Movement can communicate what remains unspeakable through language. My body take over as a mediator. It serve to put words on the traumatic events.

In *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, And Contemporary Art*, Jill Bennett¹⁵ asks the question how can art draw forth complex reactions to tragic events such as abuse, trauma, and violence? She explains the difference between being affected by an image and being touched. Touch can make you feel sympathetic towards the performer, but affect, which exists outside of language and is situated in the body, allows the viewer to react on a deeper, emotional level. It allows for a radical intervention. It can shock and challenge the viewers but potentially change their perspectives when they bear witness to an action. I question how memories of events can be translated into an art piece and generate critical discourse on issues like forced migrations and child abuse. Bennett grapples with the emotions triggered in the viewer as a response to art, which at first may not be understood but can lead to deeper reflection over time.¹⁶ For me, performance art functions like storytelling as a precursor of narrations that need recognition and witnessing for them to exist.

¹⁵ Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vison; Affect, Trauma, And Contemporary Art.* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005) 47-69

¹⁶ Ibid 47

Other theorists, such as Freud have suggested that the subject is locked into a memory of the trauma which manifests as repetitious and compulsive memories, transformed into symbolic behavior and needing to be recognized by a witness. "In other words, affect can be recuperated only in the presence of empathetic witnesses.

THE UNSPOKEN "THING" 17

The unspoken" Thing⁻¹⁸ haunts me like past memories that have been absorbed since childhood. When I was young, I was conflicted, loving yet hating the man who was my father. As long as I can remember, I wasn't allowed to cry or to laugh too hard. This would show weakness to others which he would not permit, even in front of him.

My father knew only one way of loving. He had been treated, from the very beginning, like a stray dog. He was abandoned, physically abused and had witnessed unbearable violence. He never found a safe place, because he never knew what a safe place was supposed to be. The unspeakable trauma he lived on a daily basis directly affected the way he raised me. This has always been the elephant in the room. The "unspoken thing." For him it was everything he left behind and everything he brought with him: all the violence and pain, all the hopes, all his burden and dreams.

Demonic lands haunt him when he falls asleep. I can hear him moaning during the night, talking to his demons. They won't leave him alone. They come at night, those demons are intelligent. They wait till everybody else is asleep. I do not know what they say to my father, but I hear him muttering back.

He is fighting

He is fighting with them

With his demon

He is fighting

He is fighting with me

I don't think my father knew that he was perpetuating the violence he once lived: that the kind of love he was giving me was way too violent and lacked tenderness. Yet, I always knew it was the only way he could share his love. The thing was too complex. I nourished this unspoken thing with my own hate and rage. I felt I had to walk on egg shells to prevent some unpredictable bomb from exploding. It ate away at my safe space. When the unspoken thing wasn't there, my father was good company. He played with me, he taught me, he cared for me. We built our own little world. But it was destroyed each time his demons came back. Then we would rebuild.

¹⁷ The "Thing" is the term I apply to an emotion shared by two protagonists, but which they cannot name or fully understand.

I'm a guest in my own body I'm a guest in my own town I'm a guest in my own city I'm a guest in my own country

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A sense of security

One day I was walking to work. It was a beautiful morning. I walked this route every day, but it takes just one misstep to make you rethink your every decision. "Being safe" is not a given in Morocco. I felt safe when I was with my brothers or when I was at home. Outside of that, there was no safe place for me as a woman. I was wearing a beautiful mini skirt. I loved those European skirts—so sophisticated. It was a particularly warm day outside, like I said a beautiful day. A gang of five young men were walking on the other side of the road. They crossed the road while shouting slurs at me.

As they were coming nearer to me, I got scared but at the same time it was daylight. I tried to ignore them as if I was busy thinking about something else, pretending that I didn't understand what they were saying. We ended up crossing each other's paths. I was petrified. I gazed at the concrete. Their behavior became more and more violent. They pushed me. I pushed back. At least I tried. They called me "slut", dirty and so on. One of them grabbed me by the hair and threw me to the ground. They started hitting every part of my body. They hit me with their feet, their fists. They finally let go. I think someone interrupted the attack. I don't really know. Next thing I remember is the hospital and seeing my face the next day reflected in the mirror. It was ugly, I was ugly. They didn't leave any part of my sore body unscathed. I loved that kind of European skirt. It was a beautiful day, a warm day in Morocco. I felt humiliated less than human like a stray dog. I decided at that point that I had had enough.

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GESTURE 19

In my second performance art piece, Untitled 18, the viewer enters a small room, seeing me sitting on my knees facing them. In front of my body there is an old metal plate, filled with lemons, half of them cut into quarters and the other half untouched. The audience sits on the floor, at the same level as me. With one hand, I take my first piece of lemon, the other hand is on my thigh. As my right hand reaches my face, I lean my head backwards. My hand reaches the level of my eyes. I squeeze the cut lemon on my closed eyes. I can feel the liquid dripping on my closed eyes- it stings. I feel the juice running toward my cheekbones making tracks through my black shirt, in between my breasts. The fabric soaks up a part of the lemon liquid. I can feel the liquid traveling my whole body until it reached my thighs and finally the floor. I reach for the second piece of cut lemon and repetitively make the same gesture. Once again it hurts my eyes and the liquid snakes down my body making me feel cold. When I can't feel any more lemons on the plate, I pull out a knife. I open my eyes, which are burning from the lemons juice. I gaze at the viewers before looking at the plate in front of my body. I reach for the knife that I had previously hid from the audience and cut the rest of the whole lemons. When all of them are cut, I leave the knife on the metal plate. I stand up and exit the space leaving behind the remnants of my piece. I left the space with blurry eyes and tears snaking on my cheeks. My eyes burned. I finally found my way out through the audiences. The act of leaving the audience without a definitive conclusion was intended to encourage the performance to continue, hopeful that my energy might transfer, that someone from the audience might come to take my place.

Gesture is an intentional movement of the body, meant to convey information. It functions as a form of language, widely understood and communally shared.²⁰ In my practice, repetitive gestures and embodied experience become ways of pushing the communicative aspects of performance. It's about sharing the burden of the performer, the physical discomfort or trauma enacted on the body, with an audience. It forces the viewer to notice what is happening through the performer's body, functioning as a form of two-way communication that is not easily avoided or dismissed. By building meaningful gestures, I am reclaiming my self-possession from society - patriarchy, colonialism, the history of racism and inequity. The viewers, at times uncomfortable, respond through their bodies to the performance, by shifting their eyes or averting their gaze.

Strategies that I use, such as storytelling and performance art, are efforts to decolonize the mentality of western society by enabling the viewer to empathise with the plight of the performer. The semiotician and theorist Walter D. Migniolo see a liberatory potential in gesture,

¹⁹ Sarah Pierce, "Fragment, Mediality, Gag," Little Theatre of Gestures (Basel: Malmo Konstal/MKG Basel, 2009),

²⁰ David F. Armstrong, William C. Stokoe, Sherman E. Wilcox, *Gesture and the Nature of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

as a form of embodied action leading to critical reflexivity and thought.²¹ Calling this the 'decolonial gesture,' Mignolo argues that decolonial gesture is "a body movement which carries a decolonial sentiment or/and a decolonial intention." Gestures need to be embodied with this idea of subverting colonialism. That is, the gesture has an intention of decolonialization. It allows a delinking from colonialism, and implies a process of re-surgence, a move beyond the repression that colonialism impose. My body is perceived as black, nothing else. I define decolonial gesture as something that cannot be detached from my black body. Migniolo claim that not all gestures are made to be decolonial. Walking is not necessarily a decolonial act or going to the grocery store. Unlike the author, I strongly think that depends in which kind of body you live and need to move through public space as an individual- Transgender bodies, raced bodies, disable bodies. When I walk in public space interacting with the mainstream (white individuals) I know that I'm perceived differently. Walking becomes an act of decolonialization of the space- It is imposing my presence. When I wear my hair curled instead of straight, it is perceived as a statement gesture against beauty norm. Taking my place in this world, that was not constructed for my body, is imposing on the world my presence forcing people that I interact with to acknowledge my presence. The only way those gesture don't occur is when I'm in my room alone. All acts created by my body are an urge of decolonialization- registering myself for ballet dance, swimming lessons, figure skating, snowboarding, attending second degree courses are acts of decolonialization for me and my practice. Doing performance art is once again a strategy to be acknowledged in those shared space occupied with a majority of white bodies. Connecting this to my performance practice, centered on my body, a female body of colour, allows me to connect with broader social issues and to imagine a new surrounding that has been informed by pain and other emotions but is more hopeful in scope. It's a call for empowerment through repetitive movement and gesture.

Storytelling is an extension of my performance practice. Stories serve as a context and grounding for the performance piece. Like performance, storytelling externalizes images from the inside out, purging them like an exorcism.²²

My parents told me stories about exorcizing people possessed by demons. In Morocco, it is said that "Djinn" can takes possession of a person and a duel begins inside the body. You need to purge it with an exorcism, so it will not affect your actions in life. Both storytelling and gesture become a means of pushing back against the boundaries of patriarchal and colonial restrictions. Images that embody pain, trauma, migrations, misogyny and discriminations are embodied by committed gestures. Performance art and gesture are responses to what my body goes through

 ²¹ Walter D. Mignolo, "Looking for the Meaning of 'Decolonial Gesture'," E-MISERICA 11.1 (2014). Found at" http://hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/emisferica-111-decolonial-gesture/mignolo (accessed February 1, 2019).
²² Dr. Omar Al-Aachqar Souleiman, *Le Monde Des Djinns et Des Démons: La Fois Islamique a la lumière de Coran et de la Sunna* (Samo Press Group, 2007), 9-16.

every day facing the gaze of whiteness. Fatou Diome in her essay, "*Marianne porte plainte*"²³ engaged a critical discourse on the far-right rhetoric on minorities by calling it hypocritical. As she writes, Europeans continue to come to Africa to loot African wealth (diamonds, natural resources), while imposing European culture on brown and black bodies. Additionally, she considers the systemic racism of this system of inequity. She considers Islamophobia, racism, and the impact of globalization on mass migration. Diome questions the meaning of being a child of diaspora operating in a racialized body and with their own intergenerational trauma.

With each performance, I create both a new environment for the viewer and a new method of communicating. Layer by layer, symbolic meanings are revealed. While the viewer may have a sense of the symbolism embedded in a gesture, it is only through time and a process of witnessing that a more specific or directed meaning becomes clear. In each piece, I aim to control my muscles. Each bodily expression is thought through before I perform. My interest in asserting the body through endurance is an attempt to push social boundaries which try to contain my racialized body in stereotypical ways. In fact, societal expectations of the black, female body have skewed its representation in popular culture, requiring another kind of performance from me. Naa Oyo A. Kwate and Shatema Threadcraft, both scholars of race and gender studies, have explained that such imagery has physical connotations for how the black female body is perceived, from the hyper maternal and overweight servant stereotype (Mammy character) to the angry and masculine images (Sapphire) of a black woman who emasculates specifically white men.²⁴ I'm conscious of my hypervisibility while performing which in turn diminishes the visibility of who I actually am as a three-dimensional person. The gaze of the viewer will intertwine with their loaded assumptions of what I must be. The witness is situated in a North American context where lives, in majority, the white male gaze. I aim to redirect their gaze by using repetitive movements so that it's not all about race or gender but about the intensity of the gesture, the process of performance, the sounds and emotions produced.

At that moment, I'm the one in control– in control of the time and the story I'm telling. I direct the viewer's gaze over my actions and manipulate what they experience. I perform stories of my family and translate them into bodily expressions which create tension between my own physical body and the spectators' bodies. If viewers are uncomfortable, they can explore where this discomfort comes from. I impose over the audience my own values such as empathy for others²⁵ in distress, recognition of suffering, and not turning away from others' pain.

²³Fatou Diome, *Marianne Porte Plainte*! (Paris : Café Voltaire, Flammarion, 2017).

²⁴ Naa Oyo A. Kwate and Shatema Threadcraft, "Perceiving the Black female body: Race and gender in police constructions of body weight," *Race and Social Problems* 7(3) (2015), 213-226.

²⁵ bell hooks, "Eating the other: Desire and resistance," *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 21-39.

In my work and cultural context of contemporary art practice, I am performing in front of the white gaze, a trope used by race theorists from WEB Du Bois to Toni Morrison to Ta-Nehisi Coates to signal the ways in which the black body and identity has been trapped, limited or fetishies through the white imagination.²⁶ The white gaze is described as a biased, and stereotypical box, made to diminish those black bodies.

In his book "Black skin/White masks" (1950), Franz Fanon breaks down the power relations between European and non-Western bodies. He explores the self-hatred inflicted on black bodies by Western culture. For Fanon, it is the legacy left over from colonializations, that englobes a belief system and socio-political points of view. It has been imposed through Christianity. Within institutional structures, we perpetuate these views as the only truth. It's this cultural heritage that is imposed as how we should see different communities as the same. I face it every day, This Western culture is everywhere-school, social-media, through Art and museums. Making myself visible through performance art is a way to force through my own invisibility. Franz Fanon questions the difficulty that minorities have in accepting themselves as non-white people, forced to choose between belonging and one's ancestry. The resulting shame of one's past comes from the gaze of the majority and the prevailing values in Western society. I know that not all racialized individuals have the same experiences I do. We experience the white gaze and structural inequality on different levels. Each of our experiences are valid and nuanced. Therefore, we all need to do our own research to best represent our stories.

By performing, I question norms that have been written onto discriminated bodies. These norms don't sufficiently recognize the complexity of social and cultural realities, specifically ones that deviate from the white majority. How will your body ever belong to you? Each gesture I make re-enacts stories of traumatic experiences and conjures up specific experiences and contexts. For example, when situating my work today, my female, black body happens to confront the viewer during the time of #metoo and Black Lives Matter. The philosopher and theorist Erin Manning have raised an awareness of the ways in which performers' bodies and movements evoke an emotional impact on the viewer and can connect to broader social and political concerns.²⁷ The 'minor gesture' might pass almost unperceived, but it has the ability to transform social relations by its affect on the viewers. These movements create an aura surrounding the piece, stemming from the energy provoked by the gestures when they are viewed in the performance space. Manning argues that aura, in this particular context, is the

²⁶ Toni Morrison's observation on black experience in an interview with the journalist Charlie Rose: "Our lives have no meaning, no depth without the white gaze. And I have spent my entire writing life trying to make sure that the white gaze was not the dominant one in any of my books." (January 19, 1998; found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Kgq3F8wbYA). ²⁷ Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

kinetic phenomenon created by movements in space that provoke affect. It's a form of energy wave created by the dancer gestures. It creates a palpable environment where the viewer and performer interact on many levels. Performers' bodies are the building blocks of a new method of communication based on movements. Time takes on a new meaning that breaks with our linear way of understanding. The mirroring gestures of everyday movements produced by the performers evoke similar movements that have been at some point performed by the viewers in their everyday life, creating an emotional response in the spectator.

First Nations artist Dana Claxton²⁸ works within a colonial context that has always shaped a fake identity of indigenous people. She unpacks the meaning of superiority within the Canadian nation-state and the power dynamics exercised over First Nations communities. Claxton highlights the functionality of gaze, or how the gaze of the colonizer creates biased ideas and stereotypes which are destructive to Indigenous culture. Those biases, which are intended to do harm, are translated into history and shape the way we interact with each other. It's a strategy those in power use to value and classify bodies in relation to the perceived superiority of Eurocentric thought. Her work and intervention in contemporary art practice is inspirational and important to me as a performer. More specifically, it functions to make visible indigenous communities inside the art world, to decolonialize the art gallery and its inherent biases and assumptions.

My practice, like Claxton's, considers how psychological distress stemming from the desire to attain society's norms (while being constantly rejected by the mainstream) fractures identity. I use the theory of Frantz Fanon²⁹ to raise the issue of mimicking the colonizers, norms and behaviors, yet never being fully accepted by them. My performance practice expresses in several forms the idea of our own enslavement to the concept of "whiteness" and the disenfranchisement this causes. Through Quebecois culture, I am reminded that I will never be "French" enough. Through anglophone culture, I am reminded that I will never be "English" enough. It's a reminder that blackness come first. When viewers see and react to my performance art piece, they acknowledge first this black body with its loaded history and signification. For some, they will look no further than this superficial symbolism. For others, they will try to decode the symbolism embedded into the props and gestures that I use, leading to a broader conversation regarding how marginalized bodies are objectified and manipulated.

²⁸ Dana Claxton, *Fringing the Cube* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2018).

²⁹ Like indicated earlier in the text.

I'm a ghost I woke up every morning wondering how my voice would be unheard I woke up every morning wondering how my body would be unseen I'm a ghost

*

*

The travel

Living in a third world country, Europe and America appear as the most beautiful places, where you can finally live free. You hope for a big house and land. You will travel the world to get there. You think that when you move, you will be provided with an easy life. I watched American movies and dreamt of my new life. White teeth sparkling on TV. Whiteness driving luxurious car.

I chose Canada, I visited several times. One of my brothers was already there. I met a man and applied for immigration. Each time I visited Canada projected illusions of equality, freedom, wealth.

I was accepted for immigration because of my education and skills. They said I could work in my field, but that is not how it played out.

I bought my plane ticket. I was so excited. When I arrived, I tried to validate my diploma, but was told it told that it was not valid, and I needed to go back to school. Start over, study for a bachelor's degree once again. I was humiliated, but I gave it a shot. Then applying for work. Facing rejection. They see your name or hear your voice with its strong accent. They judge.³⁰ They speak to you very slowly, like you don't understand. But they are foolish to think that I am stupid. After several months of job searching, you give up and you work factory jobs. Even if you are educated. Meanwhile, you have trouble paying for food. You lose hope.

The process is an illness. First come the symptoms, "un malaise; " next comes the diagnosis. You try to swallow the bitter pills. You put your hopes and dreams on your children. You wish for them what you don't. This is the monster under your bed that wakes you. It haunts your children too. It morphs into the racist on the street. I thought, because my child was born in Canada, she would be spared. But then you realize the name of your child is not white enough, not "Quebecois Pure Laine". You are supposed to pull yourself up by your boot straps. But don't expect that the playing field is level.

I'm not here to make you feel comfortable. I need you to understand what it feels like to always be a stranger, even in your own country. It's hard to learn another language, it's hard to leave your home to travel to a strange land. Adapting is hard. It's even harder when the welcome is insincere. They accuse us of being lazy, of being unable to adapt. But the reality is that minorities have a harder time. If we are stuck in the past, we stagnate. To make up for their own insecurities, they push us around, and put us in ghettos. Like animals. Like monsters. They are afraid. I am afraid.

³⁰ Fatou Diome, *Marianne Porte Plainte*! (Paris : Café Voltaire, Flammarion, 2017)..

I'm dancing in the dark In my haunted house I'm dancing in the dark In my haunted house Alone in the dark

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*

REPETITION

Within my practice I use repetition to recall trauma. Repetitive gestures (verbal languages, movements, sounds, writing) transform the trauma embedded in my own body into narrative. These gestures are meant to provoke personal reactions from the audience who witness my storytelling. The movements I repeat create a ritualistic atmosphere, while drawing attention to a particular gesture that symbolizes generational trauma. Those experiencing trauma are often caught in a cycle of their own remembering, unable to escape hurtful memories. Repetition can help coping³¹ trauma, on a personal level, so I am no longer prisoner of this state of mind to a certain extent. The pain I inflict on myself is tangible for the viewer, I hope directing an audience through witnessing pain and trauma will produce empathetic responses, and that empathy leads to shifts in attitude and behaviour. Some may flinch or wince in response to what I'm doing. In spoken or written words, repetition mirrors grief in process. Being able to get through my own performance connects to the resilience needed to manage the grief. By being receptive to difficult emotions, we can move closer to healing.

For example, during one of my last performances, Untitled 20, I sprinkled the ground of the performance space with charcoal powder and flour. Then, I waited for the audience to enter, with my body in the center of the space. People gathered around me. I waited a few minutes and then started to move. I positioned my body close to the ground with my arms holding my body an inch from the ground. Then my arm pushed back till I was in a plank position. My back was arched forward, and I moved into the space in that position for one step. Then again, I reached the push-up position, bending my right leg, leaving some space for my face to press into the floor. I started in the middle of the space, then moved closer to the audience. Finally, the viewers had to stand with their backs against the wall to get out of my way. My intention was to make them uncomfortable by forcing them into a constricted space. I repeated this movement until my body was exhausted. When I could do no more, I stopped in front of one viewer. I stood up, gazing into the eyes of this spectator. I took his hand and brought him to the middle of the space, where the remains of my past gestures were imprinted like traces in the mixed charcoal and flour. I whispered into his ear " standing and watching the others disappear." I left the space with the chosen viewer in the center of the room, all eyes turned towards him. He was left with the decision of whether to share the secret I had given to him with others in the space.

Through long and repetitive performance pieces, I'm transforming and transcending pain. My body is the vehicle that connects the space, the audience and my pain. It is part of a self-healing process that positions the audience as witness. While everyday life may not provide witnesses on

³¹ Desmarais Serge, Gerrig J.Richard, Ivanco Tammy, Zimbardo G. Philip, *Psychology And Life* (Toronto : Pearson, 2012), 411.

Learning to take control over my one stressor caused by traumas, abled myself to reframe them and contained their power over my behaviour. Repetition helps me to consume the emotions' related with the trauma event.

demand, performance art does in the form of an audience, forced to observe, acknowledge, and witness pain. For the anthropologist Veena Das³², this give and take between audience and artist transforms this pain into something more bearable. It acts as a language that can create a bridge between the body of a performer and the viewer herself. Pain needs to be seen, recognized and externalized before it can lead to social change. This is a cultural concept that western cultures³³ have a hard time recognising. In Western society we are conditioned to repress our emotions; they are seen as weakness from an individual. Das thinks it's an instinctive urge to create a language that addresses pain. Art can be this language. For her, the absence of a language to express pain is symptomatic to a society. I force the viewers to witness my and family's pain and stories. They have the choice of rejecting this pain and being complicit with gestures of violence and confusion. I nourish my creativity from past emotional states. That's why each performance piece is meant to be performed only once. Performing these gestures in a rhythmic pattern focuses the audience's attention on each particular movement. These movements help externalize the inner psychological state I am exploring. It's up to the viewers to interpret and unpack the meaning of what they witness. It's a dance between what its private and what can be shared in public.

In her writing on suffering, Das considers the use of a new language, through gestures of mourning, in an attempt to conceptualize pain³⁴. This pain needs to undergo a translation from silence to expression in order to be heard. Using my body, I'm breaking down social silence by initiating a dialogue between performer and viewer. I offload some of my own burden when I capture the audience's attention. My gesture creates tension in the space. This combines with the meaning inherent in the gesture so that it transforms into something else, a shared experience. It gives me a certain relief and feeling of accomplishment when difficult emotions have been witnessed and shared. Through performance art, it is possible to externalize and express psychological states of trauma by making them visible. I am mostly interested in reflecting social issues routinely ignored by society. I'm attempting to create a space where I can provide a voice for marginalized peoples and groups not fully recognized by society. I use the stories of my parents and others to address these themes, and hopefully to produce empathy. But there are risks. Some viewers may refuse to engage on any level with empathy. Not everyone is interested in hearing what "others" have to say. My repetitive actions challenge the viewer. I want them to feel what it is like to be caught up in this cyclical thinking, social anxiety and isolation, intrusive thoughts that are brought on by trauma.

³² Veena Das, *Life And Words; Violence and The Descent Into The Ordinary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 39-74.

³³ Referred to predominant American and European culture

³⁴ Veena Das, *Life And Words; Violence and The Descent Into The Ordinary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007)39-74.

I choose to reference Sanford Biggers due to his relevant position on violence against black bodies. He created a video piece named "BAM" (2016). Here, wooden dolls are dipped in wax, which erases their identities, so they look all the same. The audience can't recognize any clear characteristics, only their darker skins. In the video, Biggers brings the dolls to a shooting range, shooting each sculpture and changing it into a new form. He then casts the remains in bronze. The new sculptures bear the scars of the gunshots embedded in their forms. Every gunshot represents police brutality against people of colour. By mirroring the daily trauma of black people, Biggers attempts to stimulate the viewer. Though all viewers will not have personal stories of police brutality, they still can make connections with the reality of others and experience empathy as a result. The viewer is left with sense memories, rather than memories of actual brutality. The dolls can be read in any context of historical trauma against black bodies. It doesn't relate only to police brutality; however, it claims any sort of violence perpetuated from birth to death in society. Every gun shot is a psychological and physical abuse provoked by authority-it's a repetitive story of injustice. Throughout European history, there is a tendency of erasing black bodies³⁵, as if they don't exist. The history of black bodies didn't start with the chain, there was history before slavery and exploitation. Only this history is not recorded in European historical annals. Due to this erasure, mainstream has an understanding of the black body as disposable. History led to this perverse perception of black bodies as dangerous, criminal, drug addicted and more. It allowed the mainstream to use excessive force over these marginalized communities. The repetition of the gestures is what makes Biggers piece "BAM", so powerful. To support this process in my own work, the material used in all my projects are selected with the aim of exploiting the tension between comfort and discomfort.

This discomfort, first felt by the performer, then conveyed to the viewer, is what makes the performance come alive, providing the framework through which the work is understood.

³⁵ Robyn Maynard, *Policing Black Lives: State Violence in Canada from Slavery to the Present* (Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing,2017).

Dominant dominé le no (wo)-men land

It must be 6 years since I came to Morocco. We took the train from Agezira (Spain) to Tanger (tangier), and then to Rabat. As I was sitting there, and I don't know why, I started to cry. I was silent as I didn't want my mom to notice. My heart was racing. I was stressed, scared and happy all at the same time. I have a love-hate relationship with Morocco. I wanted to be there, but not. Before I was able to think this through, a gang of young men came to sit near us. They started to get agitated, speaking and laughing loudly. Later on, these young men started harassing us, like "Girls, what are you doing here, it's late- Oh I see you're shy, Oh I see we are not good enough for you, Oh I see you are just bitches...": *hamar, hchouma, kahba*. To thwart any potential violence, we decided to leave the wagon and find another space to sit. We were scared. The men were shouting slurs at us. We found another compartment with a couple. Then I realized why my heart was racing, why my whole body reacted as it did.

By the time we found a bit of security in the train, my head was spinning. I was thinking about my mom and her exile overseas. How this trauma of violence against women's bodies was so relevant at this particular moment. The heritage of inequality between men and "girls" even within an openminded families. Women are always treated as "girls" even at 20, 40, or 80 years old -they take up so little space. Never fully independent. Always put back in their place. In this man's world, there is no space for a fully three-dimensional woman that deviates from convention. As an outsider, I experienced this as revolting. It was a source of constant frustration.

In this Morocco, men maintain their social privilege whereas women are silenced. In this public space, a woman's body is fair game for harassment by all men on the street. Woman's experiences are viewed through the male lens. Insults become practical jokes, manipulated in favour of men. If you wear a skirt, it's a problem. If you have tattoos or short hair, it's another problem. Don't think you'll be free in 2018. In Morocco we talk about inequality, but we don't try to solve it. The government knows about harassment and inequality in public spaces. If you shut down the voices of half the population you control public discourse in a way that is favourable to the other half. Men in power use the Quran to justify their repetitive use of violence upon women's bodies. However, in the Quran it's written to treat woman as an equal half of your own body. Fighting back means being against the Quran. All this power is superimposed on women's reality. In the theoretical pyramid of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, women in the Middle East are dealing with the most basic issues such as personal survival. Yet in the 1970's women where half naked on the beach, my aunt told me. Dark makeup around their eyes. Smoking on the street and dancing were considered normal. These are times that seem so far removed from the current reality faced by Moroccan women today³⁶.

Women's body are exposed in so many ways to violent acts. The court system is not an ally if a sexual assault complaint is even opened by the police. Women are treated as liars, disreputable, whores. Even registering such a complaint can be viewed as dishonorable to a woman's family. Like Eve, we are the embodiment of sin. Physical and psychological violence are kinds of trauma that woman perpetuate as well. For example, before the harassment in the train even happened, my body anticipated the harm and contempt that we would face. My muscle clenched, I was sweating, my heart was racing, and I felt dizzy. For the rest of the month and a half that I

³⁶ Sonia Mabrouk, *Le Monde Ne Tourne Pas Rond Ma Petite-Fille* (Paris : Edition Café Voltaire, Flammarion. 2017)This essay is based on real discussions between two generations of women- a young journalist in France, talking on the phone to her grand-mother in Tunisia. They talk every week about what it means to be a woman. They talk about the hijab, terrorism and sometimes there is a clash of generations. They talk about the impulse of integration, the language, the French language and how for migrants, language is the key to be accepted in their new country. It's a philosophy of thought and not just about being understood or successful verbal exchanges. It's an "art de vive". These two women unpack the relation between imperialism and organized religion, they about the terrorist attacks of the Bataclan and Charlie Hebdo. The grand-mother raises issues of mass media and its incapacity to represent alternates viewpoints. They talk about the complexity of being Muslim and how it's more like a spider web and less like a series of sequential steps.

spent in Morocco, I was angry and loud. Like the Egyptian, Mona Eltahawy³⁷ insists "Angry women are free women³⁸."

³⁷ Mona Eltahawy, "Why Do They Hate Is; The Real War On Women Is In The Middle East," *Foreign Policy* (May-June 2012): found at, <u>https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/04/23/why-do-they-hate-us/</u>. Accessed on February 17, 2019.Eltahawy is an outspoken activist regarding women's rights. In her article, she explains that women in Islamic countries such as Egypt don't own their bodies but their bodies belong to the regime. Men who attack women come from all parts of society. This includes rich, educated and privileged classes. Such regimes blame the survivors of sexual assault making it even more difficult for women to come out against their persecutors in a such society. ³⁸ <u>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BIjgrNMPqrk&index=9&list=PL-YV6PCoRhVtX0fjHAOA3aAPbsQaOa512</u> sister-hood interview with Mona Eltahawy. Feminist author and public speaker. <u>Fuuse</u>, (Published May 31), 2018

Last performance

As a performance artist I interpret and experience the world around me through my own physicality. With my body I am the embodiment of the stories of my great grand-mother, my grand-mother, my mother, myself, my aunts, my cousins, those girls who've been killed this July, and all others. I produced a performance for my graduate show Introspection/Extrospection MFA thesis show,2019 Emily Carr University, *Untitled 11*. I dyed a 15-meter fabric golden yellow, weeks before my performance. Preparing my fabric was important to me. Submitting my body to physical labor is a way to emphasize my subject matter and mentally prepare for my future performance. Taking time with the object brings a ritualistic and symbolic meaning to the fabric. For example, I slept with the yellow fabric for two weeks. Thus, the fabric became an extension of my own body. I studied its material and how my skin reacted to its texture. The fabric became indispensable, like a visceral need to be close to it.

The day of the opening, I installed the fabric outside at the East entrance of Emily Carr University. I settled on the grassy Knoll. I stood on the book with my bare feet. I put the fabric over my body. I pull the fabric over my head until it covered my shoulders down to my hips. I felt the wind move the delicate cloth - it caressed my skin. My arms were bent toward my chest, my palms facing the sky. Then, with slow gestures, my hands grabbed the golden yellow fabric as it covered my face. I pulled the fabric multiple times, using slow hands gestures. I pressed my face into the cloth. Viewers could make out the silhouette of my face through the semitransparent fabric which recalled a ghostly figure struggling to be seen. My hands were sailing within the fabric. A feeling of drowning and suffocation submerged me. Making it harder to move, the wind blew the golden yellow material as it billowed around my body. I had trouble moving freely. There was my body. The fabric. The book. And the wind.

Slowly, I navigated inside this restricted environment. With delicate movements, I held the fabric, my hands pushing it from inside. Trying to free myself, I grabbed one part of the cloth then dragged it firmly. After few minutes, I came out of the trap and freed my body from its grip. I unveiled my face and then dropped the golden yellow fabric on the floor. I took hold of the book underneath my feet. I leant down to the ground and dug with my hands a hole in the earth. I dug with both of my hands- desperately. I grabbed the book I was standing on and placed it inside the hole. I covered the book with the soil and put the grass back in place over it. It looks like I had never been there. I got up and placed myself over the book which was now under the ground. My bare feet were stamping the earth with little movements to compress it. I stopped, I stood without making eye contact and left the space. Subsequently, the viewers approached the remaining relics inside the circle of dirt.

CONCLUSION

Diverse stories inform my practice. These stories break with the conventional notions of how to research a thesis. I have started with personal and lived experience and moved out from there. It is my way to play with power relations within academic beliefs. I do this by embracing non-normative philosophies³⁹ that don't figure in western critical thoughts. I try to leave space for different discourses. Western world views are difficult to dismantle without perpetuating the same paradigms. We know that marginalized groups are already disempowered. According to Denise Ferreira da Silva, we alienate them even further when we refuse to accept non-western critiques of our own historical behavior. Ferreira da Silva wants us to think in a way that dilutes the normalized structure imposed upon minorities.⁴⁰ Storytelling is a powerful research strategy for including knowledges, bodies, experiences that have been generally suppressed or excluded. Stories, that I choose to share, are embodied with symbolism and meaning. By using words in French or in Arabic, I reserve a space for my own cultural identities within my thesis. It's a strategy to break the flow of the English reader. I choose to impose my cultural heritage on the reader just as Western culture was imposed on me. My practice exposes culturally-charged concepts concerned with identity, diaspora, displacement, race and immigration. My interaction with these concepts is based on experiences of my family and community members. In my work, these concepts emerge as performance art pieces and storytelling. The atmosphere of each work, the anxieties and desires provoked, are heightened through the proximity of the viewer to the art. By shifting back and forth between performance art and storytelling I am using different media to explore the same concepts.

Throughout, my work focuses on the stories and cultural weight that first-generation citizens have to carry as by-products of the diaspora, forced migration, and trauma. At its core, migration leaves cultural scars because it turns ethnicity and identity into hierarchical groupings, imposing a dominant culture assumed to be better than the minority one. First-generation citizens find themselves with no guideposts in navigating the complexities of such lived experiences, and the trauma and displacement they have inherited. Using trauma as a catalyst, and my body as a primary vehicle, I explore a new language manufactured from trauma, gestures and movements in space.

 ³⁹ For exemple: Al-Aachqar Souleiman, Fatou Diome, Franz Fanon, Sonia Mabrouk, Ta-Nehisi Coates
⁴⁰ Denise Da Silva Ferreira, "In The Raw," *E-Flux* 93 (September 2018): found at, <u>https://www.e-flux.com/journal/93/215795/in-the-raw/</u>. Accessed on February 17, 2019.

Untitled 29

The carpet under my feet is blue It's an old one how do I know, you'll ask? The soles of my feet brush against it I feel it, parched and dry burning my skin like cement in summer. My legs swing back and forth Back and forth My feet barely touch the ground

The carpet under my feet is blue A blue that pulls me in My vision blurs and blurs My palms sweat and sweat I try and try

The carpet under my feet is blue It's an old one My feet feel it parched and dry I feel my ears go numb

His voice is too loud So loud I feel the air splitting my face my brain is shutting down

I am staring at the carpet under my feet The carpet is blue A blue that pulls me in It's an old one my feet feel it parched and dry

The piano before me My hands are shaking My palms sweat and sweat I try and try

The carpet under my feet is blue It's an old one My feet feel it parched and dry it burns my skin like hot cement. My legs swing nervously back and forth My feet barely touch the ground

His thumb between my shoulder blades Insistent and demanding I arch my back against the pain I try and try I am here but I'm not I am here but I'm not I am but I'm not I am but I'm not

The carpet under my feet is blue it's an old one My feet feel it parched and dry It burns my skin like hot cement My legs swing nervously back and forth My feet barely touch the ground I try and try

The carpet under my feet is blue It's an old one How do I know, you'll ask? It's been burning the skin under my feet for years.



Untitled 18, Emily Carr University. Metal plate, hunting knife, lemons. 2018



Untitled 20, Emily Carr University. Charcoal, flour.2018



Untitled 20, Emily Carr University. Charcoal, flour.2018



Untitled 11, ,Emily Carr University. 15 Golden Yellow Fabric, Book.2019

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