

~~EVERYTHING I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT~~
~~[THE DIASPOREANS]~~
~~IS IN THOSE OBJECTS~~

INTER [] SEEN



A DECOLONIAL MAGAZINE

MANIFESTO

FOR US, THE DECOLONIAL APPROACH MEANS ..

TO GIVE SPACE AND AGENCY TO OUR BODIES.

TO BE VULNERABLE IN ORDER TO BREAK WITH OUR INTERNALISED WESTERN GAZE.

TO DISMANTLE, DISEMPOWER, DISPOSSESS AND DIS-IDENTIFY OUR OWN INTERNAL OPPRESSOR, OUR COMPLICITY WITH WHITENESS.

TO CATER TO OURSELVES, NOT DISSOCIATING FROM OUR IDENTITIES, ALLOWING OUR “DIASPORIC SENSATIONS” TO COME TO THE FOREFRONT AND BE CHERISHED.

TO CREATE OUR OWN ARCHIVE OF HISTORIC AS WELL AS CONTEMPORARY MATERIAL TO FORM OWN PLACES AND THE VOCABULARY FOR SELF-UNDERSTANDING & AGAINST THE DOMINANT NARRATIVES OF THE COLONIAL/MODERN ORDER.

& TO UNDERSTAND THAT WE ARE ALL DIFFERENT, AS BIPOC CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS, AND THAT WE WILL ALL BE ABLE TO TRANS-CODE OUR SELF-TAUGHT TENDENCIES AND TOGETHER SUPPORT A COUNTER-DISOURSE.

WE NEED TO LEARN TO UNLEARN, AND UNLEARN TO RE-LEARN...

“Decolonial aesthesis is about the recovery of memories that have been silenced (...). It is about enabling them to take place again through embodiment and experience. It is the possibility of undoing that displacement from history, to redefine what can become history and what can become world.”

- Rolando Vazquez

“Theory happens at home, feminism is memory work, [a form of self-assembly].”

- Sara Ahmed

“Within this broadened understanding of diaspora, the concept is transformed from a term of temporal and spatial displacement focused on the past toward one of permanent productive dislocation directed at the future.”

- Fatima El-Tayeb

White space is for us to take.

For all the ‘Diaspor-eans’, (Hybrids) and Students of Decoloniality: Inter-Seen is an attempt at a decolonial zine - a self-reflective work in progress - in which six BPOC children of immigrants living in the European Diaspora gather to deal with similar experiences of trying to fit in & not being invisibilised as the ‘Other’ in a predominantly ‘White Space’.

Growing up in the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium, with parents from Sierra Leone, Nigeria, to Thailand, China and the Philippines - the norms in these Western societies, still heavily impacted by their heritage of colonialism, today disguised in the logics of modernity, have taken a toll on our bodies, and in turn we have internalised to silence and shame parts of ourselves and our cultures practiced at home. In light of the inspiring decolonial scholars like Vazquez*, Ahmed* and El-Tayeb*, we as Diasporeans questioned how we can encourage, affirm and acknowledge each other in our hybridity to reclaim our space - seeing both sides of the postcolonial lens imposed by the Western gaze.

In Picasso’s infamous statement on (African primitivist objects), illustrated on our cover, it goes to show how world cultures opposed to the West have perpetually been reduced to their mere aesthetic surfaces, and have been disregarded in their pluriversal ways of sensing the world. On these following pages however, we aim to break through the surface, see beyond the pages of the history we were taught and re-enable hidden memories stored in our bodies to be ----- inter-seen.

-ANGELA-EVELYN-TENG TENG-TIDA-JESS-MARCEL-

dis-identification: when you do not identify with what you see in front of you, but appropriate it for your own community
diasporic sensations: feelings that make you confused within your mixed identity

index

2	MANIFESTO
6	D-COLONI-EL-E-T AT HOME
9	INVISIBLE MOTHERLAND *ESSAY MARCEL*
13	()SEEN MOTHERS
20	KRIO LEARNING BOOK
25	*TENG TENG ESSAY*
29	FACE TO FACE *TIDA ESSAY*
	CONVERSATIONS WITH MY MOTHER *HAIR STORY*
	JESS ESSAY



D-coloni-eL-e-T

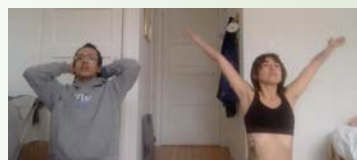
What we learn through experience is that our capacity to establish deep and profound connections in friendship strengthens all our intimate bonds.
- bell hooks -

The closeness between us as friends is beautiful, yet confronting, as our deepest vulnerabilities come to the forefront, especially when you live and study together. To establish sustainable relationships and create mutual respect for each other is something to learn, but how?

We have noticed that talking can be a form of transformative experience, especially when there is mutual understanding for the silenced parts of our histories. As we are also curious about our body-languages to identify needs, we were wondering what else in each one of us's life is an act of care-taking.

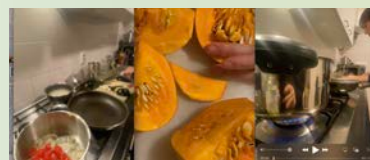
In D-coloni-eL-e-T@home, we gather for daily activities in which one of us is more experienced than the other — yoga, cooking and mukbang — to let connection happen, to practice vulnerability and to share embodied knowledge. We see these activities as acts of positioning, that manifest each one of us in who we are and encourage bodily engagement with position as well as a reflection that is of privilege.

yoga



Noticing an increase in anxiety since the pandemic hit, Jess started to exercise vinyasa yoga at home, usually in the morning. The smooth transitions between asanas paired with deep breathing releases tension and helps her to start the day. To share this experience of self-care, Marcel joins occasionally, because exercising together feels more motivating to him.

cooking



One of Marcel's practices to re-connect to his Filipinx heritage is through food. By remembering how his mother is cooking and letting his sensorial knowledge lead, he re-interprets traditional Filipinx dishes. This inspired Jess to share Chinese dishes in cooking them in her way, and to fuse all of them to represent the beauty of mixed heritage and hybridity.

mukbang



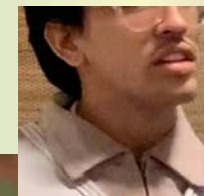
European manners have taught us to stay silent while eating, to maintain a straight posture when seated at the table, and that touching food with bare hands is dirty and uncivilised. By filming us while eating, sharing thoughts and breaking with those oppressive habits, we reclaim natural ways of dining and dinner as shared activity for storytelling; together with our friend and roommate Teng Teng.



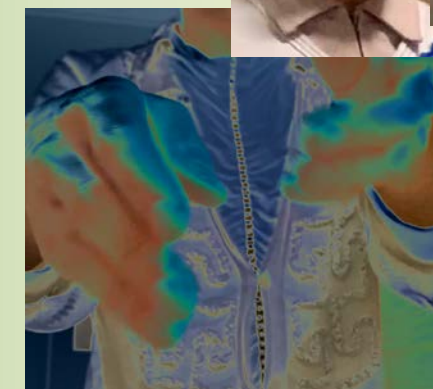
M: Lets put rice first in each plate
J: okay chef

M: no but we are all chefs. I can serve you
TT: seeeeerve me!
M: server: 10 out of 10

M: you are already eating.
J: I'm hungry, let's eat.



M: I want to get the same experience as my mom. When I was younger I always thought I will get dirty if I eat with my hands.



J: I'm also gonna eat with my hands, let's do it together.
TT: I want to get that experience as well.

M: aua
J: true you feel the heat my hands are really not trained for that.
M: See, it's really complicated. But it actually does work for me, just mix it with the rice.

TT: Marcel can you open it?
J: Why are you asking Marcel?
M: We know that you are not strong
J: Excuse me?
M: You can try.
TT: I'm sorry, of course you can try.
J [opens the jar of chiu chow]: See!
M: Sometimes you say I don't have any energy to do it
Sometimes I also feel I don't.
J [singing Black Eyed Peas - Hey Mama]: Come on now mama!
TT: we all did well.



M: You are your own host, your own colonial master.
The body is controlled in so many ways, that is
why I wanted to eat with my hands.



TT: I had that with chopsticks, when friends came over, I hate eating with fork and spoon. I thought „Let's not make a scene, let's not make a thing out of it.“ I almost felt uncomfortable eating with chopsticks.

M: The judgement is so up there. And when that comes out: when are you getting vulnerable?



J: Decolonial means, searching for the spots, because for me personally, it feels like a search, not something that I easily stumble upon, but a work thing to do. To become aware and search for the parts in my life which I silenced. And yea it's really hard, because I feel like, I try to remember, while I have some really present memories of my life. Maybe decolonial listening part would be seeing it from a different angle. Seeing the gaps in my life.

M: gaps in your memories or life?

J: Memories. With the language it's also a part of that, you have to question, what language am I using? Finding ways to express \ myself in ways, that are, not so much anymore from the colonial terminology, because we have so many words in there.

M: It is so hard to loose them, because we are so heavily influenced by them, with the city we live in and the structure of modern society in which we survive.

TT: That is also why it is a process. So you should also be tolerant towards yourself.

M: But you are also very careful with your words and that is the aspect where you wanna focus on and I think it's also very beautiful that you focus on that aspect. Not everyone can do everything at the same time, People have different position of where there are: between race gender, sexuality.

[pause]

It is personal. But what can you actually do? Because it's about realizing what position you hold, with your own complicity, what power you hold, how you execute the power: do you just take a job that you get offered or how do you deal with these senses of power? That is what I thought is decolonisation: trying to humble my position.

How can I also realise it? Sometimes I think about it in moments of interaction, it's also hard to translate it into your interactions.

TT + J: HM HMM

TT: I do feel that as well with decolonisation. It is easy to blame someone or to feel misunderstood. But what you also said Marcel the other day by seeing each other as humans (as part of decoloniality): You get blinded by hate and your view. Colonisation also started with seeing people less than you, that your opinion has the upper hand, is superior.

M: Nobody can realize it with other people, so interconnectedness comes through. So thanks to you Jess, and also when we had talks and you just threw it at me, I realised I can only realise my position when I'm vulnerable with other people. With other people, it shows relationality: there are certain relationships you keep in life and they show the dynamics. So that's why I am not often vulnerable.

TT: I think we learn about auto-theory because it puts you in a reflective state of mind

J: There are different contexts where you can make yourself vulnerable, for example us in a close relationship: we talk vulnerable with each other by sharing our experiences, but with unfamiliar people it's different. You can also be vulnerable in your creative practice. It has multiple ways to express itself, not necessarily about words, but gestures.

M: Like body language.

TT: Also coming back to creative works, 'cause then you are automatically vulnerable without saying words. Because it speaks for you.

M: When you have the people who know your work, then you are.



TT: For example with the hot pot party: doing it was already a big step. Because there were so many people that did not even know what hot pot is. You two were eating with chopsticks, but nobody else.

J: It didn't seem you were adapting to the others.

M: For me neither. I was already excited about it.

TT: Yea that helped me tho.



M: It's the whole Nervosität when you have a lot of people coming over and have that responsibility. And when people come over, watching your place, white people can be so pressuring. For example when friends came over, I already knew how there place is like. And when we had the food I was like: is it messy here? Trying to think what their expectations were.

J: I had that as well in Bijlmer when I was living there. I felt comfortable there, but when I was thinking of inviting people. Oh when people come over, what do they think. Because the friends we know, they have high standards when it comes to living. All the designer things, having fancy wine.

M: At mine it was also unpractical to host, so I also barely invite people. So we shared maybe the same experience. Come to mine, I'll come to yours.

AN IMAGINARY MOTHERLAND

A place
it calls
calls whispers so loud so soft
only heard
when listened to
never understood.

Blood with traces of that place flows through me
traces of trees so luscious and green
of earth red and muddy
it sticks to my feet
of air hot heavy humid
of sounds loud passionate chaotic
and colours just the same.

I imagine
hearing feeling smelling seeing
experiencing unknown familiarity
invisible connections made visible
recognising strangers
aunties and uncles everywhere
surrounding me welcoming me:
'We love you, you were missed!'

'I love you you are missed'
is what i say to nigeria.
Because how do i recognise
make invisible visible
and unknown known?

Where lies the line
between imagination and truth
Where and when?
Will you even be the same
Feel the same?
Can i imagine you hard enough
to appear outside of my mind?

I will try.
I will keep imagining you.



A De-colonial Attempt to Rewrite my Memories, from the Filipinx* Diaspora

an never-ocasing essay by marcel ruben mander (deo. 2021)

[*I identify with and use the term Filipinx as a historic, linguistic effort and an inherently generational term, mostly used by the younger people from the diaspora, to refuse the gendered grammar in the traditional term Filipino/-a and its binary paradigm, that was inherited from the Spanish colonisation. I also make use of it to signal language decolonisation and support gender fluidity.]

„Nothing sorts out memories from ordinary moments. It is only later that they claim remembrance, when they show their scars.“ - Fictional Narrator in „Sans Soleil“ (1983), by Film Essayist, Chris Marker

I have always been particular with what I want to remember, trained myself to constantly tuck away and detach from moments in which I might have felt discomfort, unworthiness, or true vulnerability. I never thought too much about it, basically anything could pass me by. My mother used to tell me encouragingly: „Always be strong and smarter than anyone else around you,

Anako!“, whether we were in tennis tournaments together, or when I was immensely struggling with severe eczema at around twelve to fourteen. My Filipino mother has been a strong character in my life, and I took her lesson seriously. Who would have thought that this would come back to me, strike me to my core, in reversed effect? As the quote above from the poetically narrated film essay “Sans Soleil” attempts to illustrate: Maybe there has always been a reason that my memories did not claim their remembrance. Maybe it is related to my mother’s encouragement, maybe it has failed me, not fulfilling its intention, to protect me.

The past days, thunders of re-evaluations have been shivering down my body, opening scars; questions I always repressed, of how I have built up this entire frame around myself, carrying the canvas of my identity. Initially, my plan was to inquire into my mother’s Filipino heritage and revisit it anew from a de-colonial perspective. For most of my life, I have been feeling a sense of conflict and suspicion towards my Filipinx* side and its colonial history; coming from a place where I was personally affected by it and its distressing inflictions. In first wanting to analyse and dismantle the historic, sociological roots of these feelings of distress and unfairness, especially in visual memorabilia of my family and colonial photography, instead of facing the actual, self-experienced affects it had on me, I began to recognise a deeply carved-in pattern of mine. A pattern of escapism, fear of vulnerability, and self-torture; all set in motion by my mother’s words to be stronger than the others; internalised by the way my body has required of itself to gain dominance through the rational in knowledge. My mother’s words, amongst other things, to be unravelled, - without wanting to blame her or also my father who only had my best interest in mind - have fed me, to repress and resist anything that would disempower and suppress me. At first, I underestimated it, however now I question: What if it seeped through every layer of my psyche? What if it influenced me so much in the way my mind-body dichotomy functions? What if my controlling mind has perfected, out of an inherited instinct of survival, to hide what my body instinctively feels, in a way that it has become hidden even from myself?

From already a young age, I sensed that I was ‘different’ in other people’s eyes. I was a little flamboyant, mixed heritage boy, from early on obsessed with blonde, blue-eyed boys, with a quite rational-thinking German dad and a fashion-conscious Filipina mother, who has always wanted white children of her own. Due to the common stereotype of a submissive Filipina housewife for a white Western male (van Rosmalen, 2020), that I got familiar with through other interracial couples at Filipino gatherings in Germany, or in the Philippines, or even through the way I just experienced other white people eyeing us, I got sensitised to the concept of social reputation and my ‘racial Otherness’. These early feelings of judgment, of being ‘gazed at’, formed my first encounters with Othering, which due to my mother’s upbringing I internally learned to reject and needed to empower myself against.



my family and i ca. 2006

Something that has affected me many times and, in hindsight, has come as an epiphany for its underlying pattern, was the always recurring question of where I would originally come from. I would respond, “I am from Germany, and my mother is originally from the Philippines, BUT she has been quite ‘Germanized’, as she’s already immigrated when she was eighteen.” Answering like this to most people, I clearly wanted to avoid being labelled as half-Filipino and wanted to stress that my mother is well assimilated. Even if to some extent it might have been true, why is it that I consciously had to devalue the Filipino-ness in me and in effect not appreciate my mixed heritage background? I hid my ‘Bakit-ness’, a word my younger brother and I randomly invented from our repertoire of Tagalog, for how our two unique cultural sides, colliding, were practiced at home, especially embodied by our mother. Unaware in these instances,

I feel like I have disrespected her, but even worse I feel like I have dis-acknowledged a part of myself, my own “twoness”, as W.E.B. Du Bois (1868–1963) would formulate. In the cultural critic’s words, he describes the idea of “double-consciousness”, in which, according to him, the historically oppressed often only sees oneself “through the eyes of others (...), who loo(k) on in amused contempt and pity” (Meer, 2018). When I entered high school, it was less my ‘biracial-ness’ that affected me, but rather my queerness inside that I was warring with. Even though, I would mostly say that I enjoyed most of my time in high school, I cannot deny that there were people that bullied me, to whom I had to adapt my behaviour.



White space is for us to take.

Figure 1: Image from the American colonialist Dean C. Worcester’s photographic archive, documenting his „civilising mission“ on the Philippines

Maintaining my pattern of not letting myself be internally demeaned, I had a somewhat peculiar way of dealing with my bullies, that I up to now never questioned. Boys targeted me for my queerness, mocked my effeminate body gestures, and other rambunctious children made fun of my outer appearance, which was always stylishly put together sending out a well-behaved image, created by my mother and partly by my role as a tennis player. It just comes to my mind now, that there was actually one boy, that always in an attempt to poke fun at me used to call “Mama” after me, perhaps having heard gossip about my close relationship with my mother and labelling me as a mother’s boy. In these moments of confrontation, I remember that I didn’t want to appear bothered by them on the outside and played along with the bullies, later even befriended some of them, never addressing the bullying. Just recently, when I asked a high school friend of mine about how they perceived me in school, they argued that I never seemed to give a damn about anything and that they find it astonishing how I grew out of high school. Now, I know that I never wanted to truly show my hurt, to not make myself any more vulnerable, and bounced my experiences of bullying off by assimilating further and further into capitalist symbols of status and what was considered ‘coolness’, to participate in the popular circles and destabilise the way I was discriminated against. This power of brands, style and attitude,

I appropriated to overshadow my reality of oppression, while simultaneously it put my true, experienced feelings into the dark shadow of my consciousness. “The actions of those without power must always take the powerful into account”, says the scholar Nasar Meer (2018), reflecting on Du Bois.

In my double-consciousness, being mixed heritage and being queer, conceiving the world differently, I had to consider the place of the more powerful one in several incidents, and thus learned how to use ‘power’ to my own advantage, attempting to redeem the power dynamics that were imposed on me - however, with self-inflicted consequences.

A more intimate example, in which I internalised how to defend myself and combat disapproval in silent contemplation, was with the person I was in fact the closest to and in all other aspects of my life was the most comfortable with - my own mother. Although I always knew she would love me for who I was, her first born, she did confront me at a young age with a condition for our love that confused me. Without realising its impact on me, she bluntly asked me when I, in her eyes, didn’t behave like a man: “You are a boy, right? Because I bore you as my son, okay?” How does a child answer to that, except for nodding determinedly; pretty sure that I felt like a boy, and obviously like her son, but knowing that what she meant was her fear of who I in truth was - gay and gender nonconforming with more of a feminine sensibility. In front of my own mother, my body learned how to hide itself away, internalising the homophobia, that is inevitably ingrained in the colonial implications of her cultural, Christianised archive, passing it on to me. At some point, consistently receiving that question, I began to cheekily throw back at her, that of course I was a boy and that I wouldn’t mind showing her my genitals if she needed approval, pointing to the ridiculousness of her gender conception. Inside, just as in the occurrences of bullying in school, I evolved to become hyper-aware of the injustices that I couldn’t escape, but rather could only explain and dissect for myself. Steadily, I developed a sense of societal questioning, and in my thoughts always tried to unmask the societal power structures I had to face, beginning to position myself outside of my experiences to get rid of their effect on me. In perspective, this double-edged experience, in which I fought discrimination but at the same time cut wounds into myself, really has shaped me to this day. I constantly have an urge to censor my feelings and self-expression (van Rosmalen, 2020), in order to exceed them, as it was instilled in me to do as such regain a position of power, in over-thinking, - ineffectively over-analysing society as a whole, and building this wall of insecurity around my intuitive emotions and creativity.

My wandering mind can’t help but wonder: Who have I been catering to all this time? Have I assimilated so seamlessly to this form of code-switching - this language I consistently think and move in? Always wanting to pass by any means necessary and to be able to convince the oppressor, the historically self-planted, of their form of oppression, while thereby neglecting my own emotional needs? Have I thus been re-appropriating the position of the powerful one, protecting myself, (un-)looking from the outside at my experiences of invalidation, to repeat the history of anthropology all along - the one that set up the systems of oppression of me in the first place? These questions over questions, make me realise that I need to pose them now, not to become numbed to them at some point. I realise that in transformative interpersonal relations and conversations, thanking my beautiful friends Jessica and TengTeng, I can stumble upon these questions, and wounds, revealing the ways in which I am interwoven with the neo-colonial, imperialist systems of oppression myself and how I am indeed complicit in them. I would like to take this opportunity and manifest for myself that I can piece myself together, scattered in ‘diasporic sensations’, and start to recognise my identity fully. I might have not been successful at that before, abstracted myself from it, but it is not too late to understand and re-imagine my relevant identity and history anew - rewriting how my identity unfolds in hybridity between the “(historic) coloniser and colonised” (Bhabha, 1990), and how perpetually it has been dominated by my inherent “white supremacist gaze” (Smith, 2004).

SNOT, BUT NOT THE ONE IN
YOUR NOSE



[]seen Mothers

ARCHIVE

In mainstream media, literature and history, stories of immigrant womxn are mostly absent. The traditional immigrant narrative positions men as primary wage earners within a family wage system that ignores the role immigrant womxn play in supporting their families and communities. When visible, immigrant womxn are often represented as flat stereotypes. These stories do not represent them in a nuanced multidimensional way and reduce them to problematic caricatures of immigrant laboring bodies.

‘With archival images, we are highlighting our mother’s resilience and determination to build and accomplish a life of their own. We celebrate identity beyond immigrant characters by embracing their stories, individuality and uniqueness.’

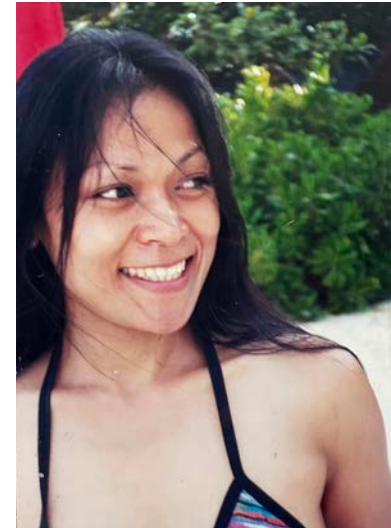


BOONSONG
บุญส่ง

"TO BRING LUCK"



My mom is a woman who always speaks her mind and never lets someone walk over her. She loved designing her own clothes and would bring me to the store to help her choose fabrics. Other days she would bring me to the mall, theater, beaches or floating markets. She's always there for her family and still has contact with her high school friends. She loves, as she would say, her 'paradise country Thailand' dearly. My life in Thailand was never a dull moment with her.



If it was up to her, we would still live there. We moved to the Netherlands, because she wanted me and my sister (who was living in Amsterdam with my dad) to grow up together. Seeing my mom's eyes light up every time she talks about Thailand, makes me realize how strong she is for leaving her stable and comfortable life behind. As the meaning of her name, บุญส่ง, indicates.. I'm truly lucky to have a mother like her.





晓平

美奴

聪明

穷追

好奇

用心

强劲

晓平 Xiǎo Píng opened her shop in 1991 in a small town in West Germany.

She sold everything Made in China
from porcelain
to silk wear
and traditional art works.

Her brothers back in Shanghai supported her
by buying all the goods in their free-time.

When I was little, I barely saw my mom because she was working non-stop.
She used to spend the weekends on markets across the
country to make a living with the goods that gave her a sense of home.

There is nothing to romanticize
about the hard-working reality of晓平 Xiǎo Píng

Yet, she is the most organized, persistent, responsible, and
care-taking person I know, and I am blessed that she loves and supports me.



晓平



晓平 美奴 聪明 穷追 好奇 用心 强劲 晓平 美奴 聪明 穷追 好奇 用心 强劲



MAMA MY BAKIT



...I know you don't like to be called this way, but this word has always been my way of coming to grips with our Filipinx lineage. 'Bakitness' - neither Filipino nor fully German. I admire how, for your family and your dream future, you early on took your narrative into your own hands, by boundless imagination, and learned to master the art of adaptability, never compromising on your unmatched temperament.

Because of you, I was handed the means to pass in any way necessary.
Because of you, no dream was ever too big, no judgement too relevant for my own uniqueness.

At first I might not have acknowledged the heritage you passed on to me - the food you had cooked, the dances you had taught, the mental strength you preserve or the style that you exude - but now your true work / your loving touch, smell, nurture and care / and the pricelessness of it all / could never leave me unrecognised, and will be carried on to be cherished.



KUNDIMAN



Schedule as a sign of love



Afhaal prijslijst

Tel: 03 - 384 05 54
Tel/Fax: 03 - 290 54 72

elichylei 150
venwezel

Website
www.honderdiaarwah.be

As I know we were never able to spend a lot of time together, I will never forget how you carried me when I needed you the most.



9:00: Mom wakes up
10:00 Mom in restaurant

00:00 Mom comes home

12:00 Restaurant opens
-
15:00 BREAK
-
17:30 Start Evening shift

11:00 Dad wakes up

21:00 Dad goes home



ACCENT NOT BROKEN.

Introduction.

Our language is the beauty of our survival and our treasure.

Krio is a lingua franca, or common language used as a means of communication between people who speak many different languages.

African words and grammar are significant in Krio. Some aspects of Krio grammar and phonology are also African; Awareness of the africanism in Krio often serves to distinguish Krio from English. And exactly that is what we are going to highlight today.

Some sounds change according to some variable patterns:

Short “u” (oh, a) - as in Butter becomes bohta and sun becomes san.

Long “i” (eh) - as in wife becomes wehf and time becomes tehm

Short “st” (t) - as in stick becomes tik

Final “nd” (n) - as in grind becomes grhn and mind becomes mehn

Tonal patterns in sentences also impart meaning:

Declarative sentence slowly falls:

A de go na os - (I am going to the house)

Declarative question slowly rises:

yu de go bo tide? (Are you going to bo today?)

Greetings

Padi Kusheh-O - Hi friend

Aw di bohdi? - Hi

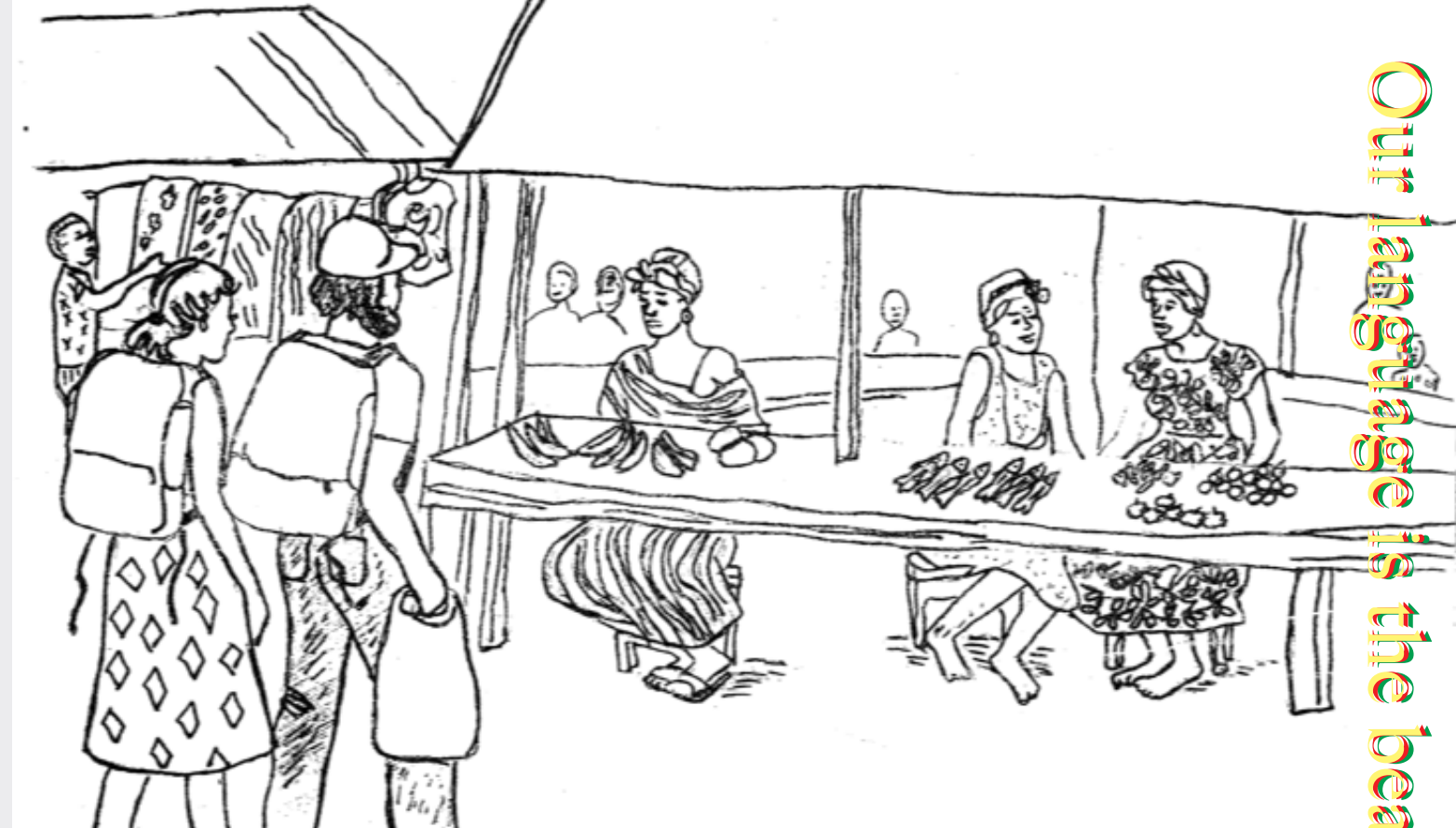
A wehm, aw yu sehf - How are you?

Misehf A wehl - I am fine too.

Una adu naya - A greeting to you all here

Gud ivin sa & Gud ivin ma - Good evening sir & Good evening madam

“You de tohk
smohl smohl
Krio?”



Popular phrases

We yu go Fritohng sehn foh mi kasada bred -

When/if you go to freetown send me some cassave bread.

Put some wata ni di injin bikohs wi noh go tap na rod so te wi rich Bo -

Put some water in the radiator, because we aren't going to stop until we reach Bo.

Yu no usai pa kamara tap?

Do you know where Mr. Kamara lives?

Tehl dehn fambul adu foh mi ya-

Say hello to your relatives for me.

Bin tap na kisi tohng rod -

He used to live on the kissi town road.

Wetin na dis?

Who is this?

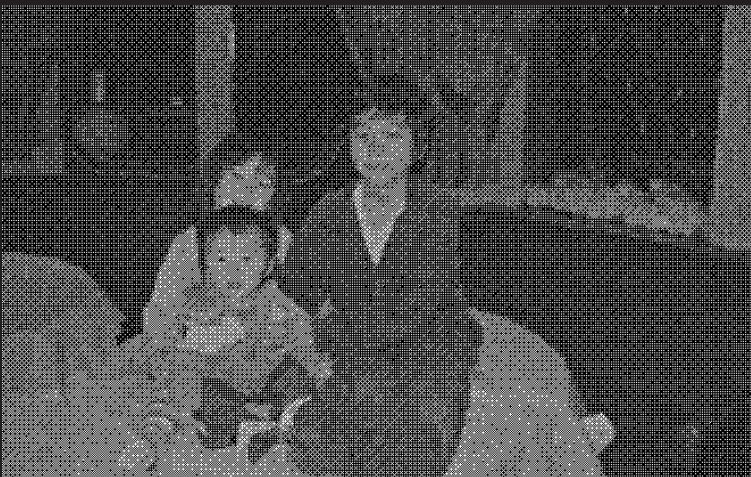
pronunciation practice narration

Na kasada dehn de tek mek fufu

ohmohs fufu jen bai?

Usai de makit uman put di drai bohl fufu?

Ohmohs fufu jen bai foh tehn sehnt?



PART ONE: 'SMILING TIGER'

by Teng Teng Ho

Working in the Chinese restaurant of my parents has always felt as this paradox of belonging, feeling at home was a fusion of my family in combination with the White, rich, middle-class. "Pick up the phone!" "Ask what they need!" "Quick, it's getting cold!"

These were vivid memories of my parents screaming at me while doing my homework behind the automatic doors of a greasy table which subsequently left oil stains on my paper sheets. In the weekends - no questions asked - was the whole day packing prawn crackers, boxing orders, preparing decorations on plates, peeling the spring roll wrappers, and giving up night outs in the Weekend to keep up the family business. In contrast to my non-Chinese friends, I had to schedule depending on my parents timetable. The lifestyle I grew up in was not the 'normal' White childhood and I witnessed very challenging times for my parents that hardened them to be survivalists...

... all so that one day we wouldn't have to.

The older I became, I started to work as a waitress and so much that you could say that I literally and figuratively was serving White people. Born and raised at the third time passed down family restaurant were my first encounters with patriarchal structures and racialization thus not only at public spaces but also in my own home. After encountering the White trash for years (by which I mean the yellow hunters and racist men), it had me on the verge of developing the 'smile mask syndrome' proposed by Makoto Natsume of Osaka Shoin Women's University, due to prolonged unnatural smiling caused by the containment of my own emotions. While it was a part of my job, it slowly became a habit in my daily life and made me want to please everybody with my smile. For a long time, my respond on the 'Have you ever eaten dog?' was a roar of laughter as a result how I have also mimicked my own parents behaviour dealing with these racial assaults. This form of denial made my parents also struggle to talk about their experiences as Jennifer Lee, a sociologist at Columbia University who studies Asian Americans, pointed out that Asian parents might not tell their children about racism because of the vulnerability it requires. "Your father [wished] to protect you from racism and xenophobia because you're his daughter, and obligations to protect typically run vertically from parents to children." Not telling them why it was painful and hurtful for me made me consequently the one protecting them.

ca 2008.
My two brothers and I in the
Chinese restaurant of my
parents, Hondert Jaar Wah.

Only recently, I started the first ever conversation about racism with both of my parents and never thought how uncomfortable and nervous it would make me. The interview was a very colleague-way of approach and had a certain emotional distance by cause of that two sides of the table were scared of being vulnerable to each other. The first thing I noticed, is how the Model Minority myth is very internalised in their thoughts on Asian racism which made them believe by hard-working and paying taxes they will get acknowledged and appreciated off their spot in the West. My whole life I saw how my parents were working hard for my future and I felt the need to achieve, not complain and work hard in order to continue their migration dreams. In the Chinese culture, especially as a child, to show any kind of contradictions is a big form of disrespect towards your parents, elderly and authority in general (Wu, 2019). This made me from a very young age never want to be any burden to other people and felt the obligation to rationalise my emotions to hold an appearance of indifference. The fear of being a weight on someone's life left me unequipped for a long time to cope and process my own Self.

My mother would always tell me while working :
'鬼佬 鍾意 鬼佬 鬼佬鬼佬'
[foreigners like foreigners]

Years of doing my homework behind the counter, I started to realise the core meaning of this phrase. My mother is emphasising how essential it is we need White people for our Chinese restaurant to let our White, rich, middle-class customers feel comfortable by showing the 'assimilation' and 'integration'. In other words, we are 'civilised' by the West now. One of the shared similarities that a lot of Chinese restaurants - including the one of my parents - that they are often located in small towns due to the competition in most big cities. This is how you see that most Chinese people are scattered around the country which often results to being the only Chinese kid at school. For me growing up in a White landscape in village Schilde had me experience a lot of peers trying to reassure me of not being 'Chinese Chinese' by saying how beautiful I was as an Asian, how my mentality is like theirs and how good my Flemish is. Once there was a peer who told me his experience of how his Chinese roommates were smacking while they were eating their food and confused how they have failed to the Western norms. In full glory, describing me how annoying and vulgar 'these people' are and therefore once again, comforting me that I am not like them because I assimilated myself to the Western norm. As Edward Said (1978) described that Orientalism is a "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. In the next chapter I will be connecting the confluence of Orientalism and Sexism: "[Orientalism] view[s] itself and its subject matter with sexist blinders.... [The local] women are usually the creatures of a male power-fantasy. They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing." (Said, 1978)

PART TWO: THE 'EXOTIC' OTHER.

Starting from my own embodied experiences, this made me the most uncomfortable to reflect about. That is due to the fact that I have been seeing how internalised the after-effects of these stereotypes are on my own identity. Displaying the female Asian body that in the West is seen as sensual, mysterious, passive, sweet, servicing (Nzume 2017) created a double consciousness in a way I have been constantly negotiating and inventing parts of my identity in order to be once again, 'strong'. A common pattern is that I distrust people's intentions and I am skeptical about their true intentions. I continuously wonder if it is about my race or personality and having the emotional labour of having a restless mind by continuously asking myself: Why is X attracted to me? Is this to check off a list? Would X only date people of my race? What if X had an Asian fetish? Is this the harsh reality that every BIPOX must face?

By pretending to not care made it easy for me to deal with these thoughts. Doing so by not assimilating with these stereotypes and being Asian, which peers reassured me for a long time, made me avoid any type of confrontation with myself and others. The traumatic consequences of men fetishising me, has only been striking me since I started having intimate relationships myself. Hall has written that these fantasies and fetishism came from the obsession of the embodiment of 'difference' (Hall, 1997). I became as my last boyfriend would describe me as someone emotionally unavailable for men close to me. The self-awareness about my body and the fetishised parts of it made me cold of any form of romance and outspoken love. I didn't see myself as someone to love but more as an experience in paradox to the fact that I am terrified of being one of these ridiculous stereotypes such as the 'China Doll' or the 'Lotus blossom baby'. The feeling of being owned by someone gives me immediately goosebumps because I feel the need to have full control, independency over my body and emotions. It has its foundation in wanting to resist the colonialization of the past where White sexual imperialism principle men claimed and dominated the female Asian body through a form of 'owning' (Woan, 2008). We see this until this day in the over-prevalence of Asian women in pornography, the mail-order bride phenomenon, the Asian fetish syndrome, and worst of all, sexual violence against Asian women. As I realised I heavily try to resist any form of stereotypes used on me it made me question: who would I be if I de-attach myself from these implications?

PART THREE: THE HYBRID.

I am a Chinese woman living in the diaspora in Europe, identifying myself as a hybrid neither truly Western nor feeling Asian - never fully able to embrace one of the two identities. The in-between made me displaced and disconnected between my intercultural identities. People told me I wasn't really Chinese in the West but also I understood this from multiple visits of going to China with my family. Every few years, we go back to visit family members and I would occasionally get an anxiety attack in the dinner room when someone would ask me something in my mother language. The fear of being judged for my 'Western' way of speaking Chinese is one of the factors that made me feel alienated from and not fully able to embrace my Chinese identity. As Ang (2001) argues 'not speaking Chinese', therefore, has become a personal political issue to me, an existential condition which goes beyond the particularities of an arbitrary personal history.

Not only the language had me going in-between my home and environment, but also having no feeling of community as I had throughout my life almost never had any encounters with Asians or people to relate with my body experiences. For the research of this project, I had a conversation with Faye Cheung, an ex-student of Willem de Kooning academy when I realised that I had one of my first encounters of sharing similar experiences with being an Asian woman and at the same time daughter of parents with a Chinese restaurant. These open-hearted conversations made me undergo recovering old-memories that have been silenced or blocked, which encouraged the healing process. Shortly afterwards I watched the short BBC stories of 'Meet the kids who grew up in Chinese takeaways' whereas six children of Chinese immigrants are sitting around the table to talk about their experiences of being 'Take-out children'. I saw how all their different hybrid identities has influenced them and this is also what Rolando Vázquez also states in an interview with Zoë Dankert about decolonial listening, 'how he would defend the power of relational thinking, of talking with others, of visiting other people in other places and engage in meaningful conversations'.

By having these conversation in framing my own identity as a woman from the Chinese diaspora in Europe, I started by not embracing the singular categorising colonialism is so fond of. Not giving into the social assigned identity and breaking the prison house of identity, I give myself the space to explore my own inclinations and to live in my own hybrid space. I agree with Ang that such notions need to be deconstructed to create a third space for hybridity. As Ien Ang (2001) mentions China, 'the mythic homeland, will then stop being the absolute norm for 'Chineseness' against which all other Chinese cultures of the diaspora are measured. Instead, Chineseness becomes an open signifier, which acquires its peculiar form and content in dialectical junction with the diverse local conditions in which ethnic Chinese people, wherever they are, construct new, hybrid identities and communities.

I feel a great deal of resistance for defining any fixed form regarding my diasporic identifications. What I do know, I am Chinese from descent, I am sometimes Chinese by my own choice. When and how is a matter of context.

'Feminism therefore
validates my
inclination to make sense
of Asian femininity by
drawing on my emotional
connectedness to being
Asian and female in a
Western location.'
(Matthews J, 2002, p216)



Living in a hybrid position and code-switch depending on my environment made me constantly proof a certain side of myself.

In mainstream media the in-between is portrayed as something mystical, romantic and sci-fi where I - as part of the diaspora - can reassure this is a faux.

Being in the in-between was not always the case. In my life, I assimilated myself rather with Whiteness and felt comfortable being in that position. Nevertheless, by

keeping to wear this mask, I faced my reflections. Being watched by the eyes of `stranger and friends, and looking at the family archives myself, made me want to verify my own identity.



MEMOIR

'Mom, can I have an surgery for the monoeylid and get my nose done?'

At that time I am 16 and feel deeply unhappy with the way I look. Besides that, I was convinced it wasn't based on the Western beauty standard and came from my own will. The response of my mom made me realise I had the wrong intentions for doing so. 'This is your choice, the nose is really something of your grandma and a lot of Asian people in the West are doing the eye-surgery, I will support you in every decision'

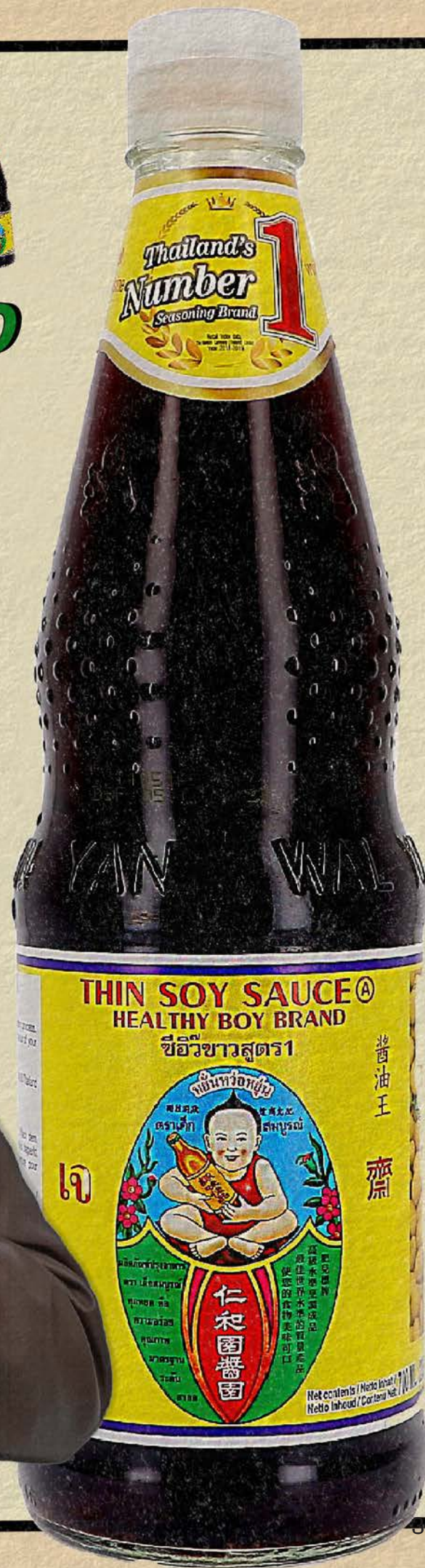
This is not a shame to anyone who gets their face done. What I am conveying, is to deeply and critically think why you are taking this decision. Eventually, I didnt do it and take pride in having the nose of my grandma. This was the beginning of taking proudness of my own heritage.

The part of rebuilding my identity came with exposing my vulnerability and 'losing' my face. Throughout this whole process, I have been privileged to be surrounded with people who supported and loved me. To have the gateway for real interactions which removed my fear of showing myself. During this meditative performance by deactivating my sight, the ability to speak I learned to re-connect again not only with my surroundings but also with `my own body.



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LOOK LIKE A WHITE GIRL, ACT LIKE A BLACK GIRL

The experience of being a white passing mixed woman

Since the day I was born people questioned me, when my mom gave birth to me, the nurse thought I was blind since my eyes were so blue and a Black man like that could never have a baby with such blue eyes, right? My dad's friends made jokes about how he should get a DNA test. At school the kids asked me if I could really wear cornrows since I didn't really look Black. When the summer time came around white people would compare their tanned skin color with mine and laugh because now they were "Blacker" than me. When I am wearing wigs and talk about Black history people will joyfully tell me I'm so educated for a white woman! All of these things cheated me out of being who I am.

The first time I heard the term "white passing" my heart sunk to the bottom. I felt a very strong sense of guilt like I disrespected Black people by my existence.

At this point there is no turning back from being a white passing mixed woman but when the BLM movement came up. I realized that it will take a very long time before my experience of being Black is going to be acknowledged. Which isn't bad because I will forever stand beside Black people. But I do feel like I am being put through a third degree, just like Adrian Piper said in: "passing for white, passing for Black" (1992)

I would share some equally nightmarish experience along similar lines, and they then would explain to me why it wasn't really so bad, why it wasn't the same thing at all, or why I was stupid for allowing it to happen to me. So the aim of these conversations clearly was not mutual support or commiseration. That came only after I managed to prove myself by passing the Suffering Test of Blackness (if I did), usually by shouting down or destroying my acquaintance's objections with logic. (Adrian Piper "passing for white, passing for Black" 1992)

White passing isn't something new enslaved African-Americans would try to look white in attempt to escape enslavement. When slavery was outlawed lighter-skinned POC would try to pass for white for things like social gain, and sometimes to protect themselves kind off like a survival tactic. I have never passed on purpose. It's not a decision (most) people make consciously. The western world even really likes to brainwash you, into thinking that, you are blessed to be a white passing person! The only thing that this statement opens is a gate way to the racism they expose you to. They do it so slick and easy like it's nothing special and make you witness all of it. "You walk into a room, people assume you have the power of a White person in this country, you know? And that experience is not the same experience that most Black people have in this country." (Lise Funderburg October 24, 2021)

As a white passing person you come to this realization very fast. The privilege you hold will be brought to your attention even if you don't want it, the world will throw it in your face. Ever since I was fourteen I've liked make-up, at that age I've never been followed by security or was treated unfairly in the store. I was treated so good that I even started to steal since they never suspected me. I did this until I was Fifteen and then something changed for me. I walked into the store with my Black friend and as soon as we walked in the security started following us. I felt so uneasy that I changed my demeanor. I'm a very extroverted person but at that moment I felt like a young kid who lost his mother in the supermarket, it felt very uncomfortable. My friend just continued walking head held high. As soon as we entered the make-up aisle I was testing everything out like I always used to do. The security, shouted at me that I couldn't test it out. I told him: "I come here everyday and do this everyday, what do you mean? We walked out of the store and I was shocked by what just happend. My friend was unfazed and said to me that this has happend before. It's because we Black, she said"

"It's because we Black, she said"

"I'm not as interested in what people gained by being white, but rather in what they lost by not being Black," Hobbs said. "To understand passing we can't just look at the story of the person who passed, we have to look at their whole social world, because everyone is going to be impacted." (Allyson Hobbs, Stanford Report, December 18, 2013) As a woman you are very cautious of how men perceive you, also known as the male gaze. This has changed the relationship we have towards our selves. The surveyor of a woman's thought is men. In most visual thoughts of a woman there is always a men present. This makes a woman both the surveyor and the surveyed, since you are always watching your own demeanor and are watched by men because of your demeanor. The performance is always on. Even if you are alone, because when you are different, you try your hardest to

The N*gro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil and gifted with second-sight in this American world- a world which yields him no true self-consciousness but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. (The souls of Black folk W.E.B. Du Bois, 1903)

This showed me that for most Black people the performance that woman put on for being a woman they have to put on for being Black. You could say that this is a very comparable situation. You are always looking at yourself through the eyes of the others. (This is a men in the situation of a woman but for a Black person this can be a non Black person.) It's not true self-consciousness but consciousness of one self. You are mediating multiple identities as one but at the same time having to compromise for all of the ways you as a "person" don't fit in the construct.

This showed me that if we look at our "social world" (in terms of race) like Hobbs said. Indeed everybody is impacted. This is because minorities will always try to change their behavior in ways that are very foreign to them. Due to the surveyor of the person in question is always the other. Racialization plays a big role in the creation and reproduction of racial meanings. As a young mixed person I can barely phantom what it means. While the popularity of the terms race & racialization continues to grow. I as a white passing biracial likes to run as far away from it as possible. But what I can't seem to wrap my head around is why we as a society make critical biological theories about "race" when race is not biological, it's a social construct.

There is no gene or cluster of genes common to all Blacks or all whites. Where race is "real" in the genetic sense, racial classifications for individuals would remain constant across boundaries. Yet, a person who could be categorized as Black in the United States might be considered white in Brazil or colored in South Africa. (Angela Onwuachi-Willig, 2015)

Not everything in a social construct of race is fluid. The social, political and economic meanings have not been fluid. Racial meanings for non-European groups are still the same. So even if you are a white person with a Black name you get discriminated against because you have a "Black" name. (That's why a lot of Black people find peace with each other because they experience similar occurrences.) So since race is a social construct defined by things like eyes, hair, skin color and name. does not mean that racial classifications are free of judgements. I think a lot of people actually don't know this and that's why they have such a big disconnect with the word "race"

Where will we be 50 years from now? Need I answer that question? It definitely won't be in a post-racial society. (Angela Onwuachi-Willig, 2015)

My mom is white and my dad is Black. If you have an interracial relationship, where the woman is white and the man is Black. A lot of people will say those mixed kids are less Black than mixed kids with a Black mom and a white dad. It has always amazed me how race could be so subjective to people. Studies illustrate a group of people who struggle with questions of identity and where to fit in, often feeling external pressures to "choose" a side. (Christina Animashaun, 2021) This really hurt my self-esteem as young teen, people made me feel so invalidated, so I unconsciously always tried to overcompensate my Blackness. My room was full of Black art, I knew every afro beat song, I tried to gain as much knowledge as I could about Black rights. It was always a center point in my entire life. Not having a place in the Black community is tough for everyone no matter what u look like. But as soon as you hear "you not Black enough" it's a battle to just be you

"Being mixed is like a curse and a blessing, it's a curse because you don't really belong anywhere but it's a blessing because you can blend in anywhere." (light girls bill duke, 2015)

I never saw it like that. I felt like it was always a curse, I didn't like blending in, it made me feel like I lost every sense of myself. Now that I am older and realized the privilege I hold by even being able to thinking that. I came to the realization that a lot of people in this world will look at me subjectively and try to sniff everything out by just looking. I started to think that, if being perceived as white is lending me to some opportunities or chances for advancement, maybe I can pay them forward. I don't always have to look at white passing as a disadvantage. But I also do no longer feel the need to find all the right words that could describe my ethnicity to people.

At the end of the day I am Black enough and I am all the Black I need to be. I am allowed to reclaim my identity as my own.

All of these things make me who I am.

CONVERSATIONS WITH MY THAI MOTHER

การสนทนากับแม่คนไทยของฉัน

GESPREKKEN MET MIJN THAISE MOEDER



Growing up with an immigrant parent whose native language is different can be challenging. When you can't find the words to communicate your thoughts, day after day, simple conversations can quickly turn into an internal rage. Sometimes it feels like you will never understand each other because you can't fully express the nuances of your life.

To make our relationship work, my mother and I communicate in a linguistic code-switching style.

We use an incomplete mash-up of English, Thai and Dutch. As a child, I was ashamed of talking in public with my mother. Why can't we just talk in Dutch like other kids with their parents?

Now I realize that our mash-up language is valid and okay. We might not be able to communicate in just one language, but I would rather have that than live my whole life disconnected from my mother.

- A Mama, จะคีนอะไร van je order?
- M Just wait, let mama manage it first.
- A อ่าห์, okay.
- M ดู, Only three นะ.
- A Three things you don't keep?
- M ใช้ ที่เหลือก็ใช้ได้ครับ มีเพียงสามคนเท่านั้นที่จะกลับไป
- A And you like the jas?
- M Jaaa, echt mooi.
- A Welke?
- A All of them.
- M So you like EVERYTHING?
- A ใช่
- M How much you order?
- A Mama ซื้อ sale. ฉันไม่ pay full price. Everything is sale.
- M Echt waar?
- A Ja! You can check if you don't believe mama. I never pay the
- M full price!
- A ซื้อเท่าไรคะ
- M มากทุกอย่างเป็น cheap. I teach you toch. When you buy, you buy where there's discount. และไม่ต้องสั่ง in a hurry. Fashion ไม่ run away.
- A Can I try the jacket on?
- A Ja, sure. อันนี้เท่านั้น 17 euro. But the real price was 45.
- B Oh okay. ต้องตัดกระเป๋า open with de schaar. พวกเขา sew the pockets, ผู้คนจึงไม่สามารถใช้กระเป๋าสื่อได้จนกว่าจะเก็บเสื้อแจ็คเก็ตไว้
- A Oh okaaay. Mama คิดอยู่แล้วว่าทำไมเสื้อแจ็คเก็ตถึงไม่มี
- M กระเป๋า?
- A Yeah, หลายแบรนด์เย็บกระเป๋าสื่อ
- A You sure? ฉันไม่ต้องการให้คุณเปิดกระเป๋าในที่ที่ไม่มี ฉันไม่ต้องการให้มันเป็น kapot he.
- M Nee gaat niet kapot. I like the สีนํ้าตา jacket. The other one
- A ดู cheap. มันดู very goedkoop. The details are not nice. Better you bring back.

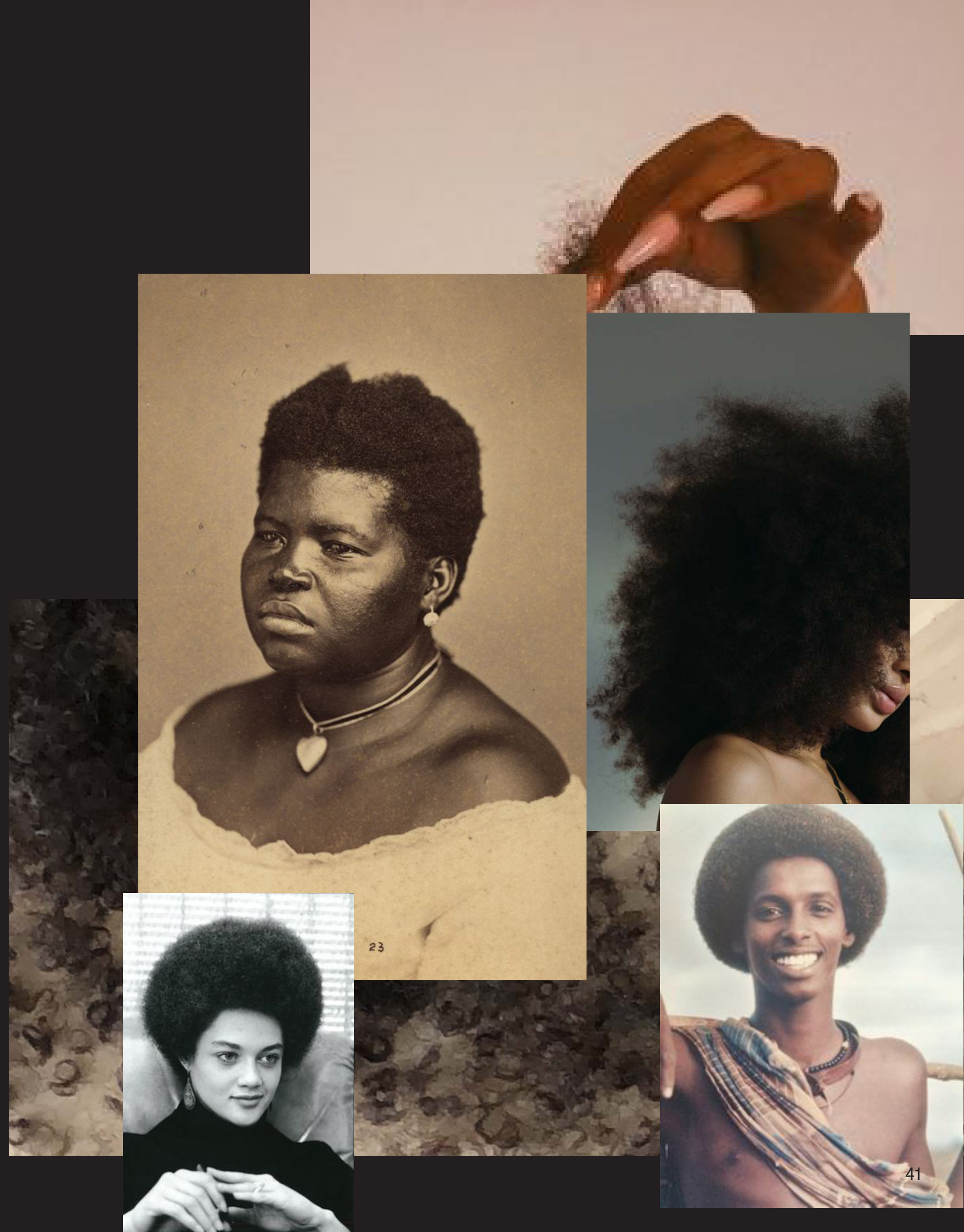
My hair is the feelings I wear

Wearing an afro is an act of resistance and beautiful in every way. The history of afro hair has both positive and negative parts, but a lot of that, more recent, history is linked to colonialism. With resistance the afro became a sign of power, community, heritage and even spirituality in our (Tida and Evelyn's) eyes. Ancient African communities believed that, because hair was the most elevated part of the body, it held a divine energy. This idea that hair has a deeper meaning is still alive for many black people today. Black hair is not just hair, it's a way to show our heritage to the world and that is a reason why afro hair also became a tool to oppress us with.

Enslaved Africans had their hair forcefully shaved off after being taken to America. After the abolishment of slavery, Afro-Americans had to start straightening their curly and kinky hair, since this made it easier for them to take part in the American society. In the 60's the civil rights movement set the "Black is Beautiful" movement in motion and that is when we began celebrating natural black features, including our hair, to rebel against white oppression. This celebration made way for black people in the west like us to wear their hair in their natural form.

Unfortunately, the movement couldn't take away the centuries of abuse that black people went through and couldn't stop western society from trying to oppress us with our hair. Black people were and are not able to participate in society with the hair that grows out of our hair naturally the way that white people do. And even within the black community and the natural hair movement traces of the oppression can still be found. The revolution that started in 1960's didn't get rid of all the oppression, but it didn't die down either.

Archiving our afro's and refusing the attempts at silencing them and honouring the power they hold are our way to keep that movement alive. We create a different narrative for ourselves and others like us to counter the appropriation, fetishization, microaggressions and institutionalised oppression of our hair and remind ourselves of the divinity of our hair like the ancient Africans before us. Kathleen Cleavers famously said "Ya dig, isn't it beautiful?" and we will not be confused by the question mark, because without a doubt, whatever shape or form it may come in, yes, it is ever so beautiful.



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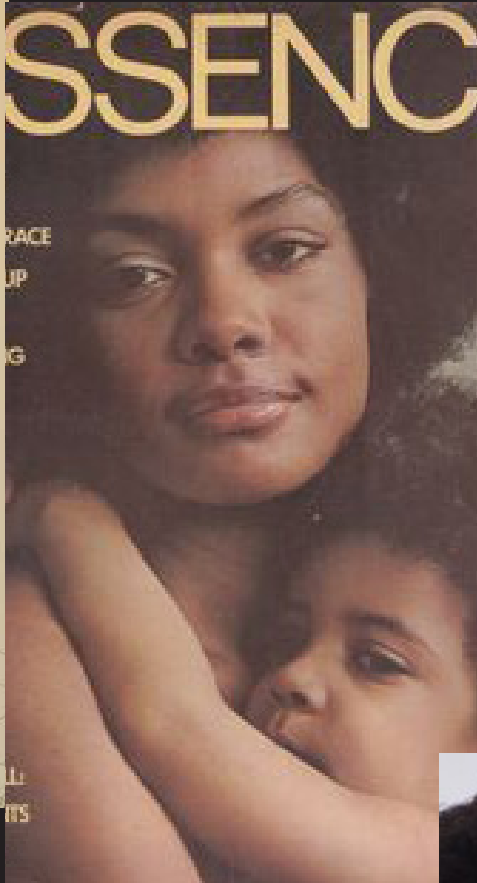


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HAIR STORY BY TIDA

Don't touch my hair, When it's the feelings I wear. Don't touch my soul, When it's the rhythm I know. Don't touch my crown They say the vision I've found, Don't touch what's there, When it's the feelings I wear.
-solange knowles

Ever since I was a little kid I've realized my hair was different. Instead of having sharp straight hair that falls down. I had bouncy curls that stood right up! As a young kid I never questioned my afro but i did realize that my hair was very different from all the disney princesses. My elementary school was very open and multicultural, I could really be myself and express my creativity in my outfits and wore my hair as big as possible. The second I reached highschool that changed for me. To me having an afro equaled to everybody watching me every second of the day. People on the street asking me if they can touch it. Or just touch it without asking and get all up in my personal space. I always compare it with being on a display in a zoo, as a freshly turned 12yo going into highschool, that felt really intimidating so I decided to tone it down.

My beautiful crown that was untouched and always worn head high. Ripped right away from me, by myself.

Next to that having an afro in my family came with rules. No coloring after my sister fucked that up. No chemicals like relaxing.

Just leave it alone & free

That felt like a burden to me, always having to live with the same hair. So I started looking into pictures of Beyonce and Rihanna and wondered why they could do everything with their hair and I couldn't. At that moment my hair felt like an obligation, an obligation to please other people with. My afro was the only interesting thing about me, especially in the white area I grew up in. That feeling stayed until i was 17.

I'm 19 now and in the beginning of this year I dyed my hair for the first time. That experience was so liberating for me!

It felt like I finally had a taste of the forbidden fruit. I came to the realization that my afro does not define me as a person. It is an extension of me. I can do whatever I want with it and dye it every color of the rainbow if that is what makes me happy. To me my hair has a spiritual energy, whenever i feel good my hair flourishes and for a long time that feeling was gone. So to me my hair looked dull and lifeless. Eventhough for the outside world my afro was exhilarating. Life is all about expressing yourself in ways that fulfill you. I never want to look at my afro and feel like it is something pretty for other people to look at. It is an extension of my personality, my afro is not just hair it is me in every way & form.

So like solange said:
Don't touch my hair, When it's the feelings I wear. Don't touch my soul, When it's the rhythm I know.



Feeling scared of getting closer to you

—Fearing of having the same fate as you

by Jessia Bilarski

In the Chinese tradition, the living and the dead locate the individual in [her] culture and history — the migrant carried the family phantom with [her] and [her] responsibility would always be familial rather than personal. (Chan, Chiang 1994, p. 166)

Dear Mom,

I always wished we would be able to speak to each other without language barriers. Understanding and speaking the same language on a similar advanced level makes it at least easier to start a conversation on common ground, like in other white families, I thought while growing up on the German countryside. As most of my peers, including dad, grandma and grandpa, have been white, I always compared our family to my friends' families. My whole upbringing I was confused about my mixed heritage as people told me that I look more like dad than like you, or when people (wether white, Chinese or other mixed heritage people) denied me of my Chinese ethnicity. The confusion made me choose Whiteness over figuring out a hybrid position from a younger age, because it came with less conflicting situations in a mostly white environment. The price of our relationship seemed reasonable back then for what I understood as freedom. Freedom meant for me meeting friends whenever I want, sleeping over and reading fan-fiction about Twilight until 2a.m. on school days. One of the most common comments I get after I tell other people about my ethnicity is: .Oh, I would never have guessed. But now that you say it, I can see it in your eyes'.

I wonder if they thought of this as a way to comfort me. Guessed, as if categorising people would be a game that can be won by whom who got the ethnicity check correct. It is as if Chineseness would be the mysterious exotic prop I carry with me. I still laugh it away avoiding uncomfortable conversations. How can I react to this comment without killing the whole vibe, especially with friends of friends? Even asking this questions makes me feel ashamed of myself trying to please other people. Shouldn't I see the differences? Why should I please someone who assumes that this would be an appropriate reaction to my ethnicity? It never occurred to share this personal experience with you. First, because my encounters with racism seem so small compared to your experiences. Small because I assimilated to German culture so much that people could not identify me as a Person of Colour. The personal encounters with racism I can recall are when other kids made Ching Chang Chong jokes, them orientalising your Chinese last name and how cool it would be if I had that name because it sounds like the English word who, and my ex making fun of China (ironically he studied Mandarin later-on). During childhood, I therefore suppressed my mixed identity and performed the white European girl. Decolonial scholar Dr. Rolando Vázquez mentions in Future Talks: Counter-narrative that performance is a matter of privilege (2021, 1:29:49). In my case, the privilege is that I am mostly viewed as white-passing heterosexual cis-woman from the middle class, which includes benefits such as housing and financially secure job opportunities, credit approval or an empty police record, despite the fact that I had to do community service due to shoplifting. I swallowed Whiteness like an antidote against exclusion, little that I knew of the after-affects that would cause identity crises throughout my twenties. My appearance as an alternative emo-girl with an opinion, and later on hyper-feminine gave people already enough to gossip about.

You might wonder how else I assimilated myself to Whiteness then.

American poet, essayist, teacher and activist Jane Jordan wrote about growing up in the West as a Black Person or Person of Colour that "we approach our maturity inside a larger social body that will not support our efforts to become anything other than the clones of those who are neither our mothers nor our fathers" (1985, p. 123). Besides living a westernised lifestyle, I learned how cis-straight Germans with a middle-class academic background talk verbally as well as bodily, how numbing my feelings is necessary to survive within a capitalist society and that I should deny myself from spirituality as the only people practicing spirituality shown in media have been either framed as out of touch with reality (mostly white practitioners) or Asian Buddhists, both groups I could not identify myself with. One of the few spaces where we connect is the Confucianist way of looking up to teachers, which taught us to be submissive to authority and elderlies. Being submissive fits into heteronormative nuclear-family-orientated expectations as well as the Confucianism-branded role of a woman. Realising this makes me sad, but also wonder how we can connect in an empowering way, growing from the pain that has been caused by heteronormative dependency.

So I wonder, what does caretaking actually mean?

bell hooks wrote about care that it "is a dimension of love, but simply giving care does not mean we are loving" (2000, p. 8). Further, she writes that she, as many other adults who experienced verbal or physical abuse while growing up, cling to the positive moments of experienced care (2000, p. 8). It is "all too often women believe it is a sign of commitment, an expression of love, to endure unkindness or cruelty, to forgive and forget. In actuality, when we love rightly we know that the healthy, loving response to cruelty and abuse is putting ourselves out of harm's way". As you love me so much, you did not want me to grow up without a father. Also thinking of raising me without any support gave you anxiety, as you wanted me to have as many opportunities as any other (white) middle-class child in Germany. Therefore, you paid the price with your sanity, always hoping he would change some day. It seems almost cruel to criticise you after what you gave up for me. I owe you, big time. Nevertheless, I have to, because it is part of humanising and healing our relationship, to see you and me as individuals. And writing it down is less confrontational, it helps me to understand the different notions first. Sara Ahmed speaks of care in relation to being careful. In that sense, I have to say to you, mom, that ,you are taught to be careful: to be full of care as to become anxious about the potential to be broken" (2017, p. 22). That sentence hit me, because you are so afraid of changes in your life that you do not tolerate mistakes. When I do not message you before 10 p.m. for example, you think of the worst that could happen to me. You get so anxious that it seems like a tiny part of yourself just broke. Then you blame me for not letting you know what I was up to. Instead of guilt I feel anger. This scenario happens too many times.

As we get older, so does the time come closer when I will take care of you. "The willingness to sacrifice is a necessary dimension of love practice and living in community (...). Our willingness to make sacrifices reflect our awareness of interdependency" (hooks 2000, p.141-142). You know that I would never leave you in a nursing home as I want you to be safe. We both picture nursing homes filled with grumpy racist Germans and revised nurses, as media portrays it this way and as we neither know nor have heard of any Person of Colour living in a German nursing home.

Risking your peace does not bring me peace.
You are a part of me as I am a part of you.

But please,
stop shaming me for every little mistake I make;
stop shaming yourself for every mistake you make.

Shame exposes one's failure in the eyes of the other. It triggers a desire to hide and cover the addressed failure. As textile artist AmySuo Wu writes the point about shame, is that "it spreads when one feels entitled to police and intimidate others with shame" (2020, p.31). It stops us from our emotional growth and makes us question our own capabilities. "The difficulty of moving beyond shame is assign of the power of the normative, and the role of loving others in enforcing social ideals" (Ahmed 2017, p. 107). To me, the social ideals you try to enforce are respecting ones property by handling it with care, having a male partner who takes care of me and having kids as, to quote you, "a life without kids has no meaning". I understand where you are coming from mom. I understand that your ideals of an 'intact' life are shaped by families we know personally and heteronormative mainstream media. In order to mend our relationship, I also have to stop blaming you for not being curious beyond your gaze as you have lacked of access to knowledge.

On the other side, I am also not able to speak fluently in your mother tongue as well as I am unfamiliar with contemporary China, which makes it hard then to share sources we both can understand. So, how can I make you understand the abundance that sprouts behind that wall of shame? I guess I cannot escape my past. I am a reflection of you as I am a part of you. Your will to never give up taught me persistence. Seeingyou managing a business and a hell a clean house while keeping your eyes on me taught me a great sense for taking responsibility. Now I understand that it is not that I do not want to be like you, but that I am scared of slipping into the same situation as you; a life that is so oppressed by and dependent on a family that drains all my energy to identify and pursue my own will. Your life has been so hard on you that your will became for me to be safe, healthy and happy, that I will have it better than you.

I see that you are caring so much about me as it gives us a sense of belonging.
I see that you have to do the things you do around the house to not feel entirely powerless.
I see that you are able to remember past experiences with such a sharp mind that I sometimes wonder how you can keep track of all the details.
I see you.

I want for us to become more compassionate with each other, to become able to let go of one another so that you do you, and I do me, to become less skeptical of one another so that we share our stories with curiosity, and to become able to work through conflicts between us so that we have a better understanding for each other. As much as you sometimes annoy me, thinking of letting you alone breaks my heart. I realised that mending our relationship is needed

to heal myself,
to heal yourself,
to heal ourselves.

PERFECT FOR
YOUR NEXT
HALLOWEEN
COSTUME!

SCARY &
EXOTIC



White space is for us to take.

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