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Interweaving Arab Queerness in Migratory Contexts: A Methodology of Bricolage

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Interweaving Arab queerness in migratory contexts: a methodology of bricolage

Abstract¹: This research paper foregrounds a bricolage methodology based on autoethnographic writing and analog collage technique to interweave Arab queerness in migratory contexts. By proceeding as such, the paper seeks to open a space for new modalities of crafting of knowledge; notably by bridging creative visual methodologies with critical theories. It also sketches problem-spaces (Grossberg, 2010) of Arab queerness by discussing the different nodal points that shape it.

Keywords: Arab queerness, migration, bricolage methodology, encounters, fragments, autoethnography, analog collage techniques.

1. Mapping a methodology of « encounters with »

To the question what do we encounter? Philosopher Gilles Deleuze goes beyond the « face to face » dimension to put forward a dynamic milieu composed of materials, objects, and events (Deleuze, 1975). Working with this dynamic and anti-essentialist theorization coined by Deleuze, critical cultural theorists (Ahmed, 2006; Probyn, 2016)² understand encounters as a contact that occurs in situated spaces. In *Eating the Ocean*, Elspeth Probyn (2016) follows oysters in a rhizomatic manner, that is in different directions without a necessary link with one another. For the author, her encounter with oysters is conceptualized as an entanglement of discursive, affective, scenic, and material dispositions (Probyn, 2016). These dispositions are intertwined and produce situated narratives.

¹ English is not my first language, therefore my apologies for any potential language problems.

² All the while acknowledging the specificity and divergence of the concepts coined by these different authors.

Conceptualizing encounters, through the notion of milieu enables us to recognize that we encounter what is rendered available for us. Sara Ahmed (2006) suggests a « field of objects » that acts as a regulating modality of encounters. Following this dynamic theorization of milieu as suggested in critical cultural theory, in the context of my research on Arab queer migration, I offer that milieu are created through distinct set of encounters. They are also composed of memories, of a past shared exchange, etc. We therefore encounter people, but also ideas, books, questions, statements, gestures as well as sceneries (Macgregor, 2000; Probyn, 2016).

When I say encountering, although one of the dimensions is physical - encountering people in a specific time and place - I do not mean encountering people's essence, as in I know them deeply more than anyone else. Rather, what is suggested here is encountering what goes on the surface, what is there, being made available for us in a specific time and place (Ahmed, 2006). Hence, the situatedness of narratives is crucial here. Thus, as mentioned above, an encounter can also be an exchange of a statement, a suggestion made by someone, a title of a book that came up during a conversation, or a reminiscence of a past memory. What matters is that in each contact, in each coming together of two or multiple elements; an affective intensity is produced or being generated (Deleuze, 1975; Probyn, 2016). This conceptualization of encounters renders the division between humans and objects obsolete. Moreover, this loose definition conveys that in conjunction with the physical un-easiness, we also *en-counter* dis-orienting ideas that can generate a beautiful ambivalence. Therefore, I use encounters as a moment of resonance. An enlightening moment that is made of different intensities and tensions.

I suggest operationalizing encounters through the modality of « with »: encounters with media fragments and encounters with the self. Following a « theory in the flesh » (Anzaldúa, 1987), the self is understood as relational (Probyn, 1993) and embedded in a migratory context which is

Montreal / Tiohtià:ke³, Canada. The « with » here is not simply a superfluous preposition as one might think. Rather, it functions as a mode of relation inscribed in the entanglements of several theoretical and methodological registers. This mode of relation is that of the co-presence of modes of writing never fully stabilized and never quite finished (Ahmed, 2006; Berlant, 2019; Probyn, 2016; Stewart, 2017): autoethnographic and academic. That is personal, social, political, and epistemological trajectories. Seized in this way, the « encounters with » allow the focus on the entanglements involving the co-presence of trajectories, identifications, conjunctures, and power relations. In this sense, throughout the text, I use the technique of writing through encounters.

2. Interweaving and collaging as feminist queer methods

2.1 Interweaving

When I suggest interweaving an Arab queerness in migratory contexts, I do not claim an already present Arab queerness made available to be revealed or uncovered. Rather, by interweaving I aim to make appear affective and discursive lines between and with the different encounters that take place and produce this Arab queerness. Interweaving allows the emergence of a relational space. A space whose set of relations are not giving in advance but rather «vary in accordance with the point of view adopted in interpreting them» (Brambilla, 2015, p.32). The act of interweaving a relational space is based on not knowing where one is going all the while accepting to be dis-oriented, directed throughout, by (and with) other fragments. Such refusal of departing and arriving at a location of certainty is grounded within the feminist argument of situatedness and partiality (Haraway, 1991; Harding, 1987, 2004). Indeed, the poststructuralist era as well as feminist postcolonial and queer cultural critiques have paved the way for new forms of sociological evidence (Probyn, 1992).

³ Tiohtià:ke is the indigenous name of the city of Montreal.

Personal experience, positionality (Haraway, 1988) and new « low » (Hallberstam, 2011) fluid, dynamic, grounded writings were able to become valid legitimate modes of knowledge production. Thanks to this postmodern heritage, it is possible for me to claim a « methodological bricolage » (Pidduck, 2022; Rouleau, 2016; Yardley, 2008) based on an amalgam of tactics -autoethnography and collage- to interweave my object of research : Arab queerness in migratory contexts, that extend, unfold, and move in several directions, discursive and affective.

Such methodological proceedings do not come without major challenges. Challenges to articulate as clearly and concisely as possible the methodological approach to inscribe the object of research within what is done in our academic spaces. Chapman and Sawchuk (2015) argue that:

The theoretical, technical, and creative aspects of a research project are pursued in tandem, and quite often, scholarly form and decorum are broached and breeched in the name of experimentation (Chapman and Sawchuk, 2015, p. 49).

Indeed, engaging in art-based methods embedded in a bricolage approach does carry an institutional risk of not being recognized as rigorous coherent research form (Spiegel, 2019). Nonetheless, as Cultural Studies scholar Larry Grossberg has offered in his essay *We all want to change the world*, experimentation is « an invitation to experiment beyond the limits of the risks people appear willing to accept » (Grossberg 2015, p. 19). In this sense, I seek to embrace a messy aesthetic as an alternative and as a standpoint against linear ethnocentric ways of doing research (Kapchan & Strong, 1999; Young, 1995).

2.2 Collaging fragments: a glued-together patchwork

In western contexts, the practice of collage became popular in the twentieth century thanks to the cubist movement and the likes of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque that sought to undo conventional realist art representations (Morgaine, 2017; Raaberg, 1998).

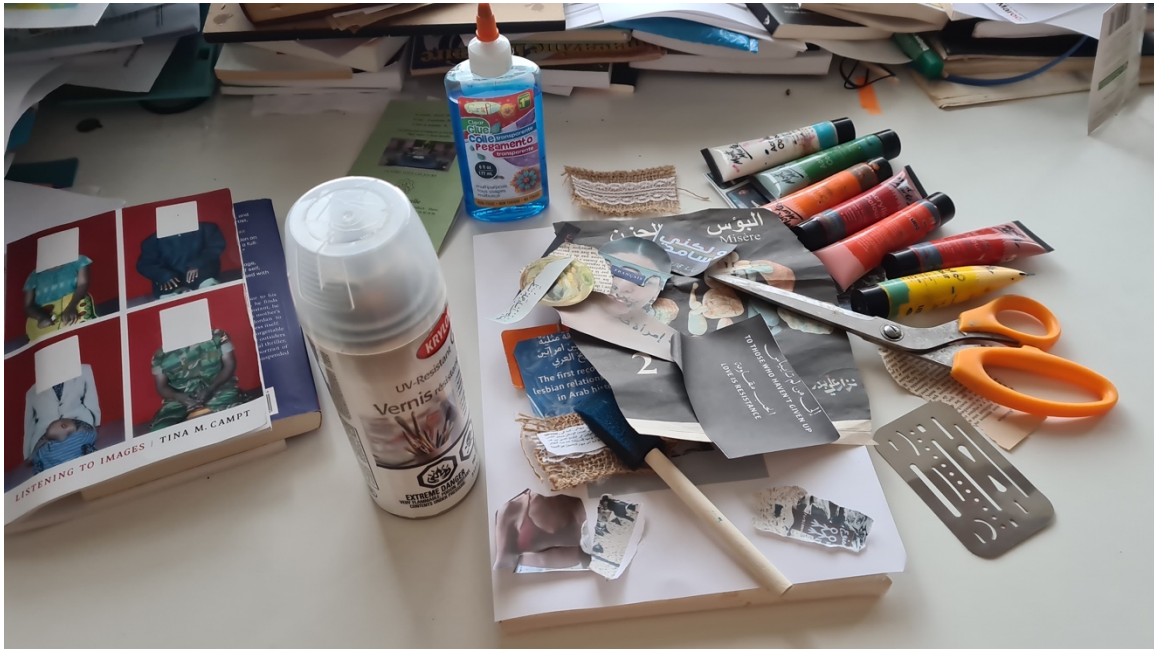


Figure 1. Picture of collage process/my desk.

For this research paper, I have specifically chosen to use the term « analog collage » to refer to the practice of collecting, printing, cutting, juxtaposing, gluing, and pasting excerpts, fragments (printed media images, written paragraphs, etc.) encountered in the digital sphere, as well as in the non-digital sphere. In other words, I refer to the practice of appropriating, decontextualizing, and recontextualizing mixed media content related to Arab queer migration issues to interweave an Arab queerness generated from minor ways of doings and crafting. Engaging In analog collage evokes a messy aesthetic of amateur-level skills and low ways of doing to borrow from Halberstam’s low theory (2011) which enables to challenge the expected citation canon and include everyday images in academic research. For Halberstam, low theory is a way to « push through the divisions between life and art, practice and theory, thinking and doing, and into a more chaotic realm of knowing and unknowing » (Halberstam, 2011, p. 2). Halberstam’s low theory can be described as collagelike in its approach.

Collage has the potential to craft texts that are characterized by indeterminacy, in which viewers can fill in the gaps, according to their positionality, and thus become coproducers of meaning. In this regard, collage fosters an anti-oppressive method of doing, in that it challenges single, unified, grand narrative, usually promoted by cis white male heteronormative research agendas. Indeed, with the rise of politically self-conscious art of women and minorities, collage has come to symbolize « the core image of post-modernity » (Lippard, 1995, p. 25). Nonetheless, Raaberg (1998) argues that there is no basis in claiming that collage possess a transcendental feature as a cultural critique tool, nor do gendered and racialized minorities have a natural relationship to collage since:

The relationship between artistic object and audience is too complex to presume a given effect or meaning, and interpretation is in continual process as it is constructed through artistic strategies, critical theories, and cultural institutions. (Raaberg, 1998, p. 156).

Moreover, this very same technique articulates a paradox, in that it is based on appropriating materials which is at odd with concerted ways of making and doing (Morgaine, 2018). Therefore, how do we engage in collage while fostering collaborative ways of doing research? How do we grapple with this aspect of appropriating images? How do we strive to deploy an anti-extractivist critical technique that dives on images encountered across sites of exclusion, without appropriating the materials? While there is no easy and clear answer to this methodological dilemma, it remains an ongoing struggle for those of us who seek to conduct research within an anti-oppressive and anti-colonial stance.

The following section put the bricolage method to work by incorporating analog collages that interweave « problem-spaces » (Grossberg, 2010) of Arab queerness in migratory contexts. That is spaces where productive tensions are enmeshed. The collages are analyzed following a blending of auto-ethnographic writing and academic analysis.

3. Putting methods to work: Interweaving Arab queerness



Figure 2. Analog mixed media Collage. Problem space: Border-ing On Canva 8inX10in.



Figure 3. Analog collage. Shredded Permanent residency card issued by the Canadian government, following my online citizenship ceremony.

My⁴ partner reminds me that two years ago, we were on our way to what was supposed to be my citizenship ceremony, which was cancelled the same day due to the spread of Covid virus (March 2020). The ceremony was rescheduled for a few months later via Zoom. After taking the oath, the immigration officer asked me to take a scissor and cut to pieces my permanent resident card. I became a Canadian citizen. Cutting to pass. Cutting to transition to another status. A status of more rights, more privileges.

"Welcome to the Canadian society", the immigration officer congratulated me with a smile.

I keep these cut pieces carefully in my wallet. Scattered, fragmented pieces hidden in the depths of a wallet that I carry everywhere I go. It reminds me of the cracks and gaps in my migratory journey.

*****⁵

I was a child. I must have been 11 years old. It was a sunny day; we were playing in the playground. I was proudly wearing my new white and pink sports outfit that Mom had bought me. My long hair always put in a bun. I can still feel the grass in my hands and the cool air caressing my cheek. I was feeling particularly cheerful and light that day.

"Girls! Looks like Lamiae is a tomboy!" Sofia whispered to the other girls as I was swinging back and forth.

- "Tomboy" - the violence of that term still rings in my ear to this day.

⁴ I use italic arial police 12, single spaced for autoethnographic fragments to distinguish from the academic paragraphs where I use times new roman 12, double spaced.

⁵ This is to separate between the two autoethnographic fragments.

What made her say this about me? I asked myself while pretending I hadn't heard her. My outfit? My posture? Was it a Gesture that betrayed me, that suggested that I was not fully and sufficiently female? Was it something missing/lacking from my female body?



Figure 4. Analog mixed media collage. Female masculinities. Canva 8inX10in.

3.1 Transnational contexts: north American exceptionalism and the culturalization of homophobia

The events of September 11 helped forge a new image of the Arab world, which is often equated to extremism, terrorism, and sexism (Jamal and Naber, 2013; Jenicesk et al., 2009). A few years later, the *Time* magazine featured a photo of a disfigured young woman on its front page and headlined "What happens if we leave Afghanistan", justifying the war in the middle east to save women from the « savagery » of Muslim [brown] men (Spivak, 1985).



Figure 5. The cover of the Aug. 9. 2010 issue of *Time* magazine features a photo of Aisha, an 18-year-old Afghan woman with a mutilated nose. Source: <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2010/10/13/130527903/bibi-aisha-disfigured-afghan-woman-featured-on-time-cover-visits-u-s>

Jaspir Puar (2020) notes that the post 9/11 conjuncture crystallizes the close association of war rhetoric and minority rights. The « Arab-Muslim » now constitutes a terrorist threat not only to Western nations but also to gender minorities: women and non-heteronormative gender people. In this regard, « homosexuality and gay liberation are used as a newly changed endpoint of Western modernity, excluding the Middle East from ever reaching progress as defined by the global North » (Gayed, 2020, p. 47).

We met in 2015 at a presentation on gay men's public health organized by Helem, an organization serving Arab queer communities in Montreal, Canada. During the presentation, I was looking at the people around me and I saw a shy-looking person sitting with their arms crossed and their eyes looking down. Their posture caught my eye and I continued to look at them discreetly. As soon as the presentation was over, they got up and abruptly headed for the exit, I followed their steps, eager to catch up.

- Hey, I am Lamiae⁶

- Hey, nice to meet you Lamiae, I'm Momo, are you Moroccan?

- Yes, and you?

- Oh cool! I am Algerian

- Ha, we are neighbors! How are you? Did you like the presentation?

- Yeah, it was all right, the truth is, I was coming from the restaurant where I work, and I had a beer at the end of my shift, and so now I feel so sleepy!

I quickly recognized the French-Arabic accent marked by a strong Maghrebi tone. The [French] accent allows us, North Africans, to quickly pinpoint the [North African] person, in front of us, in the grid of the social hierarchy. To reproduce as faithfully as possible the language of the master, the French of France. The further one moved from this linguistic center, the more one was judged, marked by a lack.

[as I write these lines, I feel discomfort in my body, discomfort about how I was taught to judge, read, decipher, and categorize. How not queer is that!]

We had walked to the Sherbrooke metro station. During our exchange, I learned that Momo was an asylum seeker (not anymore), and that they were working under the table at a restaurant. They didn't mind.

When I arrived at Sherbrooke station, I took the subway to go home while Momo went back to the Village⁷ where they were renting a small one-bedroom apartment.

We saw each other a few times, mostly in nightlife contexts over drinks at queer and queer Arab parties. It took a few outings for Momo to tell me about their asylum hearing:

"The judge said to me, 'what are you going to do if your claim is denied, and you have to go back home?' I told him I would die, that my life is in danger. He said: welcome to Canada."

In contrast to Europe and its migration perceived as problematic in public discourse, especially Muslim and North African migration; non-governmental organizations and public discourse speak of « Canadian exceptionalism » in terms of Canada's immigration. That is, a Canada that better manages its immigration and its cohabitation with the other. Europe's borders are constantly

⁶ This conversation happened in the French language. I translated it for the purpose of this paper.

⁷ « Village » is the LGBTQIA+ neighborhood in Montreal/ Tiohtià:ke.

threatened by its Arab and Muslim African neighbor: Morocco, through which migrants from the South, from the « Third World » - black Africans and Moroccans - transit.

Many non-governmental organizations in their reports about immigration policies in Canada talk about the positive aspects of a scoring system allowing to filter immigrants and to select them according to their economic and social needs, etc. This « Canadian exceptionalism » translates into the admission of a high number of immigrants and a generalized consensus among different institutional actors that immigration is an asset for Canada (Adams and Neuman, 2018; Trebilcock, 2019). Since the 1990s, the United States and Canada have introduced the figure of the sex refugee into their legal arsenal. The notion of sexual refugee refers to any person persecuted, in their country of origin, by virtue of their gender, gender identity and/or sexual orientation. In 2016, amid the Syrian refugee crisis, Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau announced the prioritization of the selection of women and gay people for asylum. Such a political move crystallizes Canada as a champion of human rights and fosters « Canadian exceptionalism » (Boyd & Ly, 2021).

Yet while listening to Momo (excerpt included above), I was struck by the injunction of the Canadian immigration system to fit into a certain narrative of persecution and oppression. An injunction to perform a queer identity in a particular way, which is often white and Western.

Agier (2012) explains that:

It is a presentation of the suffering self that conditions the care (of refugees) by humanitarian organizations and confirms them in their symbolic domination of the humanitarian scene (...) But the obviousness of this too simple analysis of the 'co-production' of victimhood is all jostled and overtaken by the two closes but different 'scandals' that are strongly associated with it: that of the 'lying refugee' (or the 'fake refugee') (Agier, 2012, p. 62-63).

The overemphasis of certain elements inscribes these individuals and their trajectories into a particular and normative understanding of violence; thus, maintaining them in the figure of the persecuted queer refugee in need of rescue. Both the understanding of violence and percussionion

materializes through a normative visibility that is embedded in situated (not universal) codes. For example, one of the required proofs is showing pictures of oneself with a partner (Giametta, 2017; Lewis, 2012). But what if one is not in a relationship? Does it mean that one cannot be persecuted or be in danger? What about partners who do not have the possibility to be 'out' in court for fear of retaliation, shame, or other reasons? These very same technologies of queerness verification (Silva, 2010) which claim to save members of transnational minority groups can themselves serve to exclude racialized queer people, since these two categories of queerness and persecution are conceived as intrinsically linked in normative ways.

What about in contexts where the starting point is not the individual but the collective? What if we shift the debate on « freedom » from individual to collective conquest (Nelson, 2021)? That is, breaking with the premise of a heroic neo-liberal subject capable of freeing himself from all constraints, and rather understanding freedom as an entanglement of collective and individual practices?

Arab queer migrants are often caught between a double injunction of coming out to belong to mainstream [white] queer spaces and an injunction to adopt silence or stay in the closet to belong to a wider Arab diasporic community, often posed as heteronormative, which further complicates their negotiations of identifications (Bouqentar, 2018).

Thinking about these issues has forced an involuntary stop at identity politics. Unvoluntary because by by opting for a research-based method that privileges fugitivity and minor ways of doing research (Manning, 2016); I share a post-structural fatigue with representational theories and subject positioning. Nonetheless, drawing from Jaspir Puar in their essay *I'd rather be a cyborg than a goddess*, I offer that these paradigms do not need to « be oppositional but rather frictional » (Puar, 2020, p. 153).

3.2 The necessity of identifying

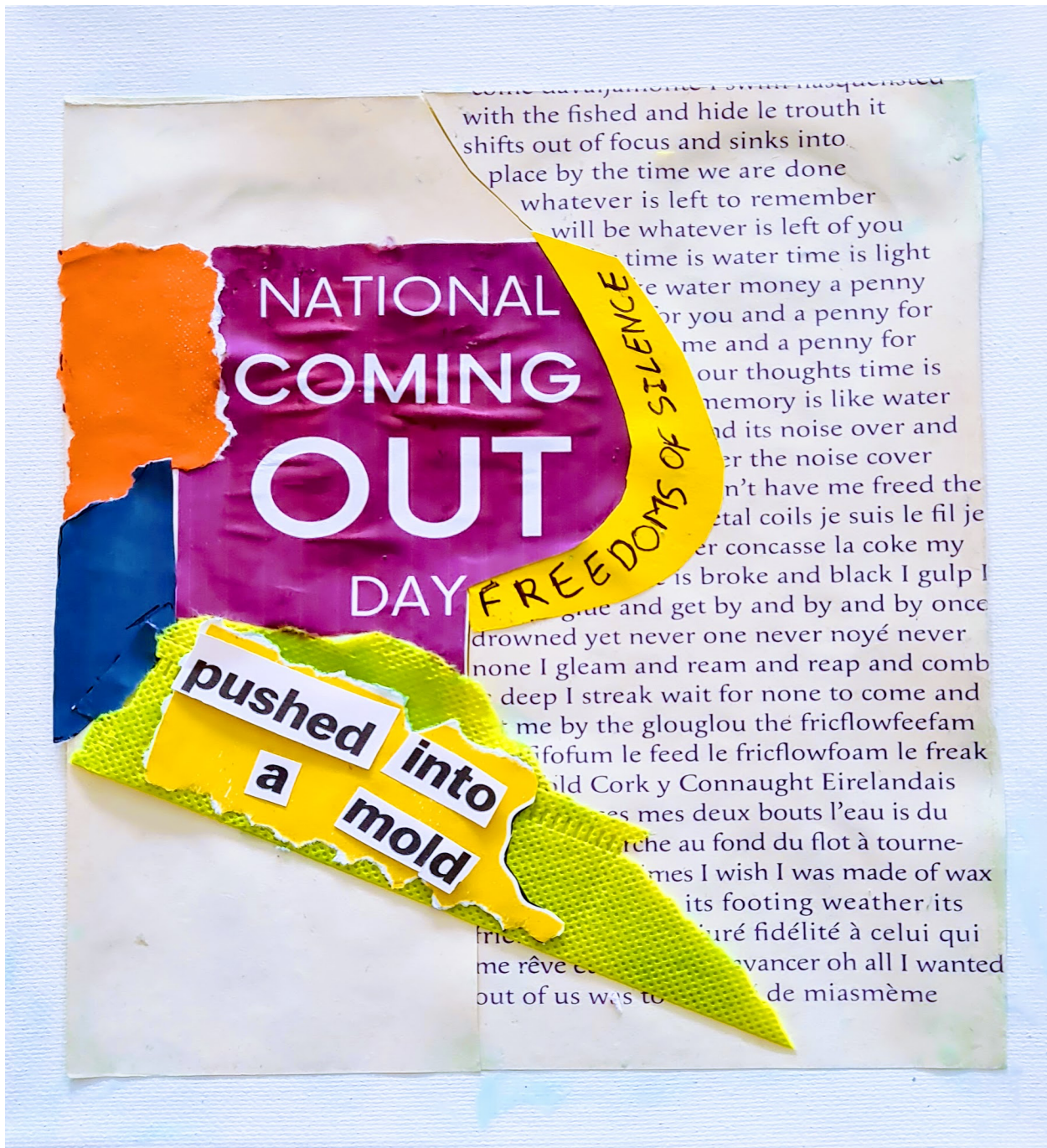


Figure 6. Analog mixed media Collage. Problem space: Identifying. Canva 8inX10in.

Identity is one of the most contested and problematic terms in the social field theoretical realm. Some theorists consider the concept obsolete because of the fixity and essentialism it might suggest, but also because of the vagueness of its content (Meintel, 2008). Overly used by various academic and political forces, the notion of identity has long been thought of as an immutable pre-determined set of elements revealing a true or authentic essence about the individuals and groups that would possess it (Woodward, 2007). These essentialist practices of identity formation have been deconstructed and overcome not to eject the notion itself, but rather to scrutinize it by questioning its foundations, its practices of production, to foreground new epistemological orientations.

I hesitated for quite a long time for the sake of this research project about how to identify and name the phenomenon that I want to reflect upon: queer Arabs, queer Arabness? Is it an identity? A community? A diaspora? And by naming it, am I assigning fixed identities to subjects? Am I presuming the existence of a community already given, already linked by a signifier – essentialized, and if so what signifier?

Although this work fully acknowledges and is in line with the theoretical understanding of identities as conceptualized in discourse theories including critical theorists like Stuart Hall (1997), Ernesto Laclau (2005) and Chantal Mouffe (2013); this research paper understands « queer » and « Arab » as identifications rather than identities. By identification I mean a situated movement, but also a strategy and positioning for political feasibility (Silva, 2010). In this sense, by referring to queer and Arab identification, I am not necessarily assuming an Arab queer identity that would imply a coming out based on a « truthful statement » that would reveal an authentic queer identity. Rather, I am implying an Arab queer identification that is understood following Hall's (1990) conception of identifications as an open process that is made and unmade and is thus subject to the contingency of the space in which it is embedded. In other words, although there are common signifiers and

effects of discourse that produce an « Arabness » of groups from countries in the « Arab world »; there are also significant differences, discontinuities, and regional particularities that would preclude the conception or evocation of a fixed, homogeneous queer Arab identity presumably shared by all migrant subjects. Therefore, it would be more accurate to evoke identifications that underline the changing and unstable dimension of what Gayatri Spivak (1993) has called a « necessary fiction ». In this regard, identifications are to be understood in a perspective of immanence where the specific contexts in which they take place participate in shaping them; and not as a category that would transcend spaces and temporalities. Understood through the lens of movement, ambiguity and constant becoming (Hall, 1990; Fortier, 2020); identifications in this research paper are « multiple and unfinished project, but also a site of power struggles » (Hall, 1990, p. 37). Following these theoretical approaches, one might ask how identifications themselves are shaped in and through encounters of multiple heterogeneous elements?

In Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject, feminist scholar Saba Mahmood (2011) offers a re-examination of the concept of agency that « clearly exposes the extent to which the project of liberal feminism is based on a normative conception of freedom and emancipation and aims in the end to make certain forms of life provisional, or even disappear » (p. 289). Indeed, liberal feminism traditions understand agency as the capacity to act of individuals which indissociably links the idea of self-realization to that of individual autonomy and choice. For Mahmood (2011), however, this definition reduces the understanding of Muslim subjects' experiences to a sterile dichotomy between resistance and submission. Instead, she suggests a broader definition, in which the meaning of agency is not be fixed in advance, since it is found « not only in acts of resistance to norms but also in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms (...) including [in the] desire to submit to recognized authority » (Mahmood, 2011, pp. 32-33). That

is, the debate on norms should not be restricted to subversion and reinforcement but rather one should pay attention to how they (norms) are enacted, inhabited, and lived in distinctive ways (Mahmoud, 2011). The obligation to speak about one's queerness, albeit emancipating and liberating to some, can also become highly normative, and thus generate other types of exclusions. Indeed, the practice of coming out, historically posed as freeing, enshrines a particular [white] idea of freedom (individual) that in many cases does not take into consideration other cultural and political conditions where subjects cannot be free in the same way (Ahmed, 2004). In *the Pleasures and Freedoms of Silence*, Wendy Brown (1996) intends to make of the category of silence not only an aesthetic value but also and especially a political one. She reckons that « maybe another feature of the appreciation of silence is related to the obligation of speaking » (Brown, 1996, p. 188).

In this sense, it is not a matter of contrasting silence and coming out. Rather, it is about approaching and reflecting on the implicit obligation to come out while ignoring that « there is an incompatibility between how diasporic subjects are socialized to become queer subjects in the West and the conflicting, often contradictory, values and understandings of their own sexual desires from a cultural perspective. » (Gayed, 2020, p. 43).

I seek to establish a distance from the freedom/repression dichotomy (Mahmood, 2011) by queering silence and asking how can the practice of silence shape Arab queerness? How can queerness shape practices of silence? In other words, how do we depart from Silence not so much to repress and hide but instead to imagine diverse ways of embodying, identifying, thinking, and talking about Arab queerness, not in terms of the coming out (or its lack of)?

3.3 Sarah Hegazy: the symbol of Arab queer oppression⁸

It is hard to reflect on the diasporic queer Arab imaginary without addressing Mashrou3 Leila, the Lebanese indie band, whose leader, Hamed Sinno, is openly queer. They [Hamed Sinno] are currently based in New York City.



Figure 7. A fan of holds a rainbow flag during Mashrou3 Leila's concert at the 2017 Ehdniyat International festival in Lebanon. Photograph: Jamal Said/Reuters. Source : <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2019/mar/07/mashrou-leila-lebanese-indie-band-britain-european-tour-lgbt-rights>

October 2017.

I go to the Mashrou3 leila's show in Montreal. I stand in line with a mostly queer-friendly Arab crowd: Lebanese, Egyptian, Tunisian, Moroccan, etc. It is perhaps the only Arab band whose leader is openly queer. The band has been highly active for queer Arab representation (displaying a gay flag in 2011 on stage in Jordan and causing them to be banned from performing on stage in that country).

When comes the song كلام: Words, Hamed, the leader of the band, explains that they wrote this song to imagine a cruising, taking place in a bar, in Arabic language outside the binary gendered language. We dance and sing كلام: Words with a crowd thirsty for freedom, and for a queer language. Together we dream. We are nostalgic to something that, perhaps, does not exist yet.

In addition to Western countries, Mashrou3 Leila have given concerts in Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco. It would be inaccurate to assert that they received the same

⁸ (A trigger warning would be included during the oral presentation of this section)

media and law enforcement treatment in all these countries. In Morocco and Tunisia, their concerts went on without any fuss from the local authorities.

It was in September 2017, during the concert of Mashrou3 Leila in Cairo, Egypt, a young woman with short hair, smiling, wearing a light and nonchalant attitude, appearing to be hypnotized by the bewitching melodies of the band. She raised the Rainbow flag in the middle of the concert, showing her belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community. A few other people at the concert lifted her on their shoulders to make her more visible. They passed the flag between them. The scene lasted a few minutes (Sinno, 2022).



Figure 8. Sarah Hegazy holding the rainbow flag at Mashrou3 Leila concert In Cairo- Egypt. September 22nd, 2017. Source: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/sarah-hegazy-death-1.5614698>.

The next day, this seemingly innocuous act found its way onto several Egyptian news channels with titles that read 'satanic act', 'incitement to debauchery' (El Nahar, 2018). We learned that her name is Sarah Hegazy and that she is a « communist and LGBTQ activist who is funded by foreign spies » (El Nahar, 2017). The space of freedom and stealthy expression that Mashrou3 Leila offered soon turned into a tragedy. The show was quickly followed by the arrest of 100 people present at the concert whom, according to local authorities, had participated in raising the LGBTQIA+ flag. While watching the documentary *Beirut dreams in colors*⁹, we learned from her best friend, Alae, that Sarah Hegazy panicked, because she knew that her arrest was imminent. In fact, she spent three months in Egyptian prison where, according to Hegazy herself, she was tortured. Upon her release from prison, Hegazy applied for political asylum and landed in Toronto, Canada, as a sexual refugee persecuted by the Egyptian regime because of her sexual orientation. Many would have thought that this new chapter in Toronto would be full of promises and hope for a better future. It was not the case. Hegazy crossed the Atlantic and carried the torture and heartbreak of leaving friends and family that she had not chosen to leave behind. According to her best friend, Alae, Sarah found it very difficult to adapt to her new life and to heal her wounds. A year and a few months after arriving to Toronto, she ended her life by leaving a note that read « اسامح لكني و But I forgive ».

⁹ Source : <https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2022/jun/22/one-good-song-can-do-more-than-5000-protests-the-queer-revolution-in-the-middle-east>

The Arab queer diaspora was stirred, and vigils were held in Canadian, American, and European cities in commemoration of this activist who has come to symbolize the injustice and repression faced by the Arab queer community.



Figure 9. Vigil held at Laurier Park - Montreal. June 17th, 2020.
Source: Page Facebook Queer Swana MTL

How to write about the suicide of Sarah Hegazy? As a member of the [Arab] [queer] [migrant] community? As a researcher? As a queer migrant Arab person grappling with mental health issues? How to write ethically about her? And how to stand in solidarity without instrumentalizing her? how to honor her?

In *Speaking Nearby*, cultural theorist and critic Trinh T. Minh-Ha reflects on the question of speaking about a group with whom we share similarities all the while holding differences. The question arises for me since I share identifications with Sarah Hegazy, yet without being a refugee, nor having gone through the atrocities of the carceral system. How can I avoid reducing her experience whose complexity, suffering and layers I cannot grasp and uncover? It remains a duty to tell [not the essence of] her story (which I would never know fully) but rather to illuminate the « death worlds » (Haritaworn et al., 2014) that threatens Arab queer communities.

Minh-ha (1992) suggests speaking alongside, instead of about. The alongside implies a mediating relationship, a gap that distance itself from a logic of aboutness (Ramos, 2017). Such an approach prevents the event from being reduced to an object of discourse.

Conclusion:

By blending excerpts, auto-ethnographic narratives, collage, and academic analysis of issues pertaining to Arab queer migration; I have attempted to interweave a fragmentary queer Arabness that is not captured by a unitary discourse. In proceeding as such, I sought to argue that bricolage approaches open new methodological possibilities for engaging creatively with Arab queerness in migratory contexts. An object largely invisible in dominant discourses and archives. Indeed, despite the institutional challenges caused by such crafting methods which its critics point to a lack of coherence (Gobo, 2023); I offer that bricolage foregrounds the complexity and indeterminacy of the research phenomenon by linking and generating different scales pertaining to the object with no essential link to one another. Likewise, this process of crafting draws on the everyday life materials rendering it a practice of micro-resistance against the strategies deployed by power (De Certeau & Rendall, 2004; Pidduck, 2022). By incorporating autoethnographic writing, bricolage also becomes a form of experimental ways of making that blurs the rigid lines between the researcher and the researched making the former both a subject and object (Yardley, 2008).

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