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**Margins Revisited: Locating Spaces of Radical Openness and Communities of  
Resistance within Contemporary Art**

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**Joint MAS Thesis submitted for the Postgraduate Programme in Curating 2021/22 to  
Ronald Kolb and Prof. Dr. Dorothee Richter**

**Zürcher Hochschule der Künste (ZHdK)  
May 2022**

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Curatorial Framework

The theoretical framework for the exhibition draws inspiration from bell hooks' 1989 essay and "call to arms" titled "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness", where she stakes her positionality within the 'margins' of society as a site of strength and power. She asserts:

"This is an intervention. A message from that space in the margin that is a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity to erase the category colonized/colonizer. Marginality as a site of resistance. Enter that space. Let us meet there. Enter that space. We greet you as liberators".<sup>1</sup>

hooks' text importantly establishes the margin as an alternative to the center, however for this exhibition and subsequent text, the margin is proposed as a third space rather than one part of a binary. It is not the center (central text), nor the edge of the page, but rather somewhere in the middle. The margin, as hooks argues, is not a pejorative (as often portrayed) site, but rather, "a site of creativity and power," which is restorative and generative. Similarly, writers like Homi K. Bhabha described the 'Third Space' as a realm and mode of articulating identities that acknowledge cultural hybridity instead of the polarities of insider/outsider, self/other as a truer reflection of a postcolonial society. Many artists from diasporic or postcolonial communities and contexts today speak from and operate within the margin that hooks establishes, working to, "move in solidarity to erase the category colonized/colonizer."

The issue of marginality is further complexified in today's globalized, networked world, where tools like the internet and social media appear to democratize visibility while also creating platforms that connect and cultivate communities, signaling the achievement of a type of equity. The definition of the margin is increasingly malleable and polyvalent, shifting positionality depending on context. However, rather than defining the margin as a condition from which to escape, this exhibition and its participants intentionally dwell there. Further questions emerge: How can we maintain positionality within the margins? How can we resist the urge to view marginality as a condition to be remedied? To turn the page, returning to status quo and resolution? The exhibition grapples with these questions through the lens of artists, writers and cultural practitioners working today and aims to give visibility to narratives obscured by hegemonic power.

Contending with experiences of migration, diaspora, and ongoing political unrest, these artists and thinkers reflect on past, present, and imagined acts of migration, the navigation and transmission of cultures and identities between home(lands), and the generative site of the para/between.

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<sup>1</sup> bell hooks, "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, no. 36 (1989): 15–23, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44111660>.

The exhibition explores how curatorial work and exhibitions can also enter and operate from this space to further amplify the work of those already dwelling there. An exhibition with artists operating within the margin can embody the “space of radical openness” and resistance that hooks conjures within her text. The exhibition examines topical threads that connect our individual engagements within the Global South, such as diasporic communities, nature and environment, class, and the effects of globalization.

Our individual research meets at the defining of the in-between, the alternative, as a site of creative resistance and generation. The margin is another in between site claimed as a place of power by writers like bell hooks, Anna Tsing, Trinh T. Minh-ha and Gloria Anzaldúa, who inform the basis of our curatorial framework and allow our research to explore the ways that artists and creative practitioners utilize and mobilize this space today through various formats, subject matter, and entry points in the accompanying publication and programming. The project does not seek to offer conclusions, resolution or ‘solve’ anything – it stands as a constant reminder of the amount of work to be done.

The exhibition will be accompanied by an open resource and library of sorts selected by curators to help visitors understand the discourse with more complexity and nuance. Visitors are encouraged to bring their own material and add to the library, either through recommendation or bringing physical copies to contribute to the constantly evolving and expanding resource list. The Reading Area will include a thematically curated section from the VOLUMES Archive, an extension of non-profit organization and collection VOLUMES, Zurich, which is a collection of zines, artist books and publications that exist thanks to many donations received annually through an international open call. Taking this library as a site of investigation, VOLUMES has been researching new forms for organizing and understanding the paradigm of the archive.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, a zine-like publication will bring together texts written by the co-curators, excerpts from artists and poets and visual and textual documentation of works in the exhibition to give visibility to discourses obscured by hegemonic powers.

## 1.2 Institutional Collaboration

The exhibition will take place at the OnCurating Project Space in Zurich, Switzerland from 30 September – 13 November, 2022.<sup>3</sup> We decided to organize the exhibition at OnCurating rather than approach a museum, larger institution or gallery because of its identity as an alternative “off-space” that is conceptually aligned with the marginality explored in the exhibition. Off-spaces like OnCurating form a content-rich strata of “dark matter” that present less-known or ignored practitioners, whose work does not fit within the parameters of predominant art institutions.<sup>4</sup> Though chronically underfunded, these spaces allow for more freedom to present politically engaged projects.

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<sup>2</sup> VOLUMES is a non-profit organization and collective created in 2013 in Zürich. It is run by Anne-Laure Franchette, Patrizia Mazzei and Gloria Wismer. The collective aims to support the various facets of international art publishing and introduce it to a larger audience in Switzerland through a series of events and an ongoing research agenda. “Archive,” VOLUMES, accessed May 15, 2022, <https://www.volumeszurich.ch/archive>.

<sup>3</sup> Dates are tentative.

<sup>4</sup> Dorothee Richter and Ronald Kolb, “Editorial,” *OnCurating Journal*, no. 48 (September 2020): 4–11, <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-48-reader/editorial-952.html#.YoGAlvPMJpQ>.

At present, the exhibition will take place independently of larger institutional collaborations, however we are in conversation with VOLUMES Zurich about including a thematic curation of their archive within the “reading area” of the exhibition.

### 1.3 Artists exploring and working within margins

Our combined and individual research, as well as past experience working with artists in Dubai and Miami has led us to bring a diverse perspective to the forefront. The artists selected for this project include individuals working across diverse media and themes to explore notions of the in-between and alternative as a site of creative resistance and generation. Their works are brought in conversation with Zurich-based artists and practitioners, who further contextualize the theoretical framework as individuals working against hegemonic positions in the financial, cultural and industrial center of Switzerland.

Zurich-based **Ishita Chakraborty**'s *Zwischen/Between* series works as a visual archive of stories that highlight a narrative of micro-histories not immediately visible in conventional history making and storytelling. The artist scratches the surface of the paper to reveal “subaltern voices affected by the emergence of nation-states and unalterable borders, partition, imperial persistence as epitomized by contemporary forced illegal migration and exile”<sup>5</sup>. The braille-like, tactile writings visible on the surface of the paper are in people’s mother tongue and inform a “quintessential element or tool against the anti-colonial struggle to understand people’s identity”<sup>6</sup>.

Chakraborty is an artist and poet born in West Bengal, India. She lives and works between Switzerland and India. Her artistic practice entails scratched drawings, installations, poetry, performance and sound. She investigates the strategies and the discourse of resistance narrated by individuals-often the subalterns. Their contexts are marked by the traces of displacement, the trauma of colonialism, their articulation in language, oral history and identity. Chakraborty received her MFA degree in 2021 from Zürcher Hochschule der Künste (ZHdK) and another MFA in 2013 from Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata. She taught Fine Arts as an assistant professor at Amity University, Kolkata.

**Quynh Dong** will present two works, *Hairwash* (2008) and *Photo Studio* (2008), which are emblematic of her early artistic practice. Both explore how the immigrant body performs and is imbued with identity in varying surroundings. *Hairwash* shows documentation of a performance in which the artist washes her wash using a tub and ladle in a street in Switzerland. A familiar act in her native Vietnam, when translated to the Swiss setting, this public bathing is intimate and nearing uncomfortable for the gathered audience. The video is devoid of locational signifiers except for the sound of the Swiss radio playing. *Photo Studio* is a photographic series where Dong reverses a common fixture of non-Western photo studios: a European, often Swiss backdrop, with a photoshoot of Vietnamese family members and acquaintances in Switzerland. Placing her subjects in front of photos of scenes captured in Vietnam, Dong permeates the aspirational dynamic of the photo studio with notions of memory, longing, and estrangement felt by diaspora communities.

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<sup>5</sup>Ishita Chakraborty, “Zwischen,” Ishita Chakraborty, accessed May 15, 2022, <https://www.ishitachakraborty.com/rust>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Dong creates hyper-real video works to provide an innate platform upon which she deliberately challenges cultural stereotypes. Her practice extends to also include performance, photography and sculpture. She studied Fine Arts at Bern University of the Arts, and completed her MA in Fine Arts at Zurich University of the Arts. Her work has been exhibited internationally, notably including the Kunsthalle Bern, Galerie Perotin in Paris, Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten in Amsterdam, and Galerie Bernhard Bischoff & Partner in Bern. She has further performed her works at Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique Paris; Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts Lausanne in Switzerland ; LISTE 17, the Young Art Fair in Basel, Switzerland; the Emily Harvey Foundation in New York, USA; and YAP'15, The Twinkle World, Exco 1F, Daegu, in South Korea.

**Alia Farid's** *At the time of the ebb* (2019) – originally commissioned for Sharjah Biennial 14 – saw the artist travel 100 nautical kilometers from the easternmost tip of the Arabian Peninsula to the Iranian island of Qeshm to film the annual celebration of Nowruz Sayadeen (or Fisherman's New Year).<sup>7</sup> By bringing Qeshm to Sharjah, the artist highlights the overlapping identity of Iran and the Gulf (specifically the United Arab Emirates), where the presence and influence of Iranian trade, tradition and customs, both historical and contemporary, are still very much felt today.

Farid lives and works in Puerto Rico and Kuwait. She has a Bachelor of Fine Arts from la Escuela de Artes Plásticas (San Juan, Puerto Rico), a Master of Science in Visual Studies from the Visual Arts Program at MIT (Cambridge, Massachusetts) and a Master of Arts in Museum Studies and Critical Theory from the MACBA Independent Studies Program (Barcelona, Spain). Through a multidisciplinary practice that ranges from writing and drawing to film, sculpture, and installation, her work explores the complex colonial histories of Kuwait and Puerto Rico, her two countries of origin and gives visibility to narratives that are obscured by hegemonic power.

**Monika Emmanuelle Kazi** examines questions of domesticity, body memory and emotions in her immersive, sensory installations and performances. For the exhibition, she will present *homeview 1* (2022), a sculptural work that evokes the nostalgia and alienation of the migration experience. Made of Congolese mahogany wood and brass chains, the window-like center panel is flanked by eaves that cut to form a Cameroonian or Congolese beachside vista. Hanging on the 'windowpanes' are delicate chain necklaces that reference tourist souvenirs and jewelry often sold by migrants outside of European landmarks. The contact between the two materials reveals the tensions between longing for a homeland left behind and aspirations for a better life in a new place that may not embrace you.

Kazi lives and works in Geneva. After studying interior design, she studied fine arts at HEAD-Genève and graduated with honors in 2021. From March to August this year, Kazi is participating in a residency at La Cité des Arts in Paris. She has presented several solo and duo exhibitions at Fri Art Kunsthalle Fribourg (Upcoming); WallStreet (Fribourg, 2021); sic! Elephanthouse (Lucerne, 2021) and at HIT (Geneva, 2019). She has participated in numerous group shows, such as at Futura (Prague, 2021); Limbo Space (Geneva, 2020) and

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<sup>7</sup> "At the Time of the Ebb (2019)," Sharjah Art Foundation, accessed May 15, 2022, <http://sharjahart.org/sharjah-art-foundation/projects/at-the-time-of-the-ebb-2019>.

at Le Kabinet (Brussels, 2018). In 2021, Kazi was the recipient of the Kiefer Hablitzel Prize and the HEAD-Galerie award.

**Amanda Linares'** *Between Islands and Peninsulas* is a sculptural installation made of three separate elements that come together as a table, accompanied by an artist book, that represents her journey from Havana to Miami in 2013. The tri-part table functions as a tangible representation of three distinct parts of Linares' journey: the island of Cuba, the ocean between, and the Florida peninsula. Using text, images, and found objects, Linares reflects on the immigrant experience and explores themes of identity, memory, displacement, absence, and reconnection.

Linares is a Cuban-born visual artist who currently lives and works in Miami. Her work expands like branches using an immense variety of media from design and illustration to installation and photography. Influenced by literature and spatial awareness, Amanda's work contains poetic language while exploring narration and/or space through the use of reflection, transparency, revelation, found objects, and typographical solutions. Although in constant change, her work intimately dances between many universal issues, such as identity, displacement, absence, and reconnection.

**Yucef Merhi** will present *Soulless Security* (2017), a work containing intercepted data on paper. The wallpapered installation shows the full names and identity numbers of the officials of the PNB (Bolivarian National Police of Venezuela). The data was hacked by the artist from the PNB's Intranet and reveals the identity of those who became one of the greatest obstacles to restore democracy in Venezuela. The data is presented using a spatial ordering system initiated by the artist in 1998, known as datagram, a term coined from the basic protocol of data transfer on the Internet. Once the data is intercepted, the information is laser printed and organized using a mathematical-geometric pattern that fills the exhibition support with a dense textual mass. The result becomes an abstract landscape, an image that dialogues with a tradition initiated by Venezuelan artists during the 1950s. At the same time, *Soulless Security* highlights the act of hacking as an instrument for art production.

Merhi is an artist, coder, and academic researcher based in Miami. He is a pioneer of Digital Art and is known for exhibiting the first work of art that included a video game console, the Atari 2600. Since 1985, Merhi has produced a wide body of works that engage with poetry, facial recognition, AI, VR, and retro video game platforms, towards the formulation of dynamic linguistic experiences. In 1998, he developed his first "datagram", a concept he coined to visualize the movement of hacked information. Merhi holds a Master's from NYU's Interactive Telecommunications Program (ITP).

**Edison Peñafiel's** *Érase una vez [Once upon a time]* series develops a variety of filmic visual narratives with characters based on Peñafiel's personal and familial histories. In these narratives, Peñafiel weaves an alternative reality that reflects the results of migration, using indirect references to contemporary historical events. Filtering real stories through archetypal, nonspecific characters and backdrops, Peñafiel aims to transmute the personal into the universal.

Peñañiel migrated to the United States to leave the political and economic instability of his native Ecuador. His singular style integrates video and multimedia installation to create surreal echoes of our world, environments that translate experience. His work centers the migrant as a subject, informed by his own life.

**Larissa Sansour's** *Soup Over Bethlehem – Mloukhieh* (2006) depicts the story of an ordinary Palestinian family, played by the artist's own, sat around a dinner table on a rooftop overlooking the West Bank city of Bethlehem, majority of which has been occupied by Israel since the First Intifada in 1967. The dinner table conversation, which starts as a culinary discussion about *Mloukhieh* being served from a soup bowl evolves into a personal conversation about politics, highlighting the complex intertwining of food and politics indicative of the Palestinian experience.

Sansour's work is interdisciplinary, immersed in the current political dialogue and borrowing heavily from the language of film and pop culture. By using video, photography, experimental documentary and other new media, she approximates the nature, reality, and complexity of life in Palestine and the Middle East to visual forms normally associated with entertainment and televised pastime. Her grandiose and often humorous schemes clash with the gravity expected from works commenting on the region. References and details ranging from sci-fi and spaghetti westerns to horror films converge with Middle East politics and social issues to create intricate parallel universes in which a new value system can be decoded.

#### **1.4 Reading Area Practitioners**

The Reading Area within the exhibition space serves as an open resource and library, selected by curators to help visitors understand the discourse with more complexity and nuance. In addition to curator selection featured in this section of the paper, VOLUMES Zurich has been formally invited to present their thematic curation of the marginal archive within the reading area of the exhibition. This exercise will be completed over Summer 2022 through a series of ongoing discussions and workshops with artist **Anne-Laure Franchette** and colleagues at VOLUMES Zurich.

**Etel Adnan** (1925 – 2021) was arguably one of the most influential voices in contemporary Arab-American culture. She was known for her poetry, novels and plays, moving swiftly between the disciplines of writing and art. Her collection of stories about displacement, love, loss, poetry and war populated by filmmakers, poets, girls, professors, and prostitutes who live in Beirut, Paris, Sicily, California, Saddams Iraq, and New York in her book *Master of the Eclipse* will be included in the Reading Area. A second publication *In the Heart of the Heart of Another Country* is a deeply personal and political set against the turbulent backdrop of Arab/Western relationship. Adnan writes, "Contrary to what is usually believed, it is not general ideas and grandiose unfolding of great events that impress the mind during times of heightened historic upheavals, but rather the uninterrupted flow of little experiences, observations, disturbances, small ecstasies, or barely perceptible discouragements that make up day-to-day living."

**The Afghan** has been a crucial source of information on the recent crisis following the US government's decision to exit Afghanistan after a 20 year war, allowing the Taliban to surge



back into power. The social media account is an authentic resource of refugee aid, the atrocities of the Taliban-led government and the repercussions of American Imperialism in the region.

The Pakistani British artist **Rasheed Araeen** began writing in 1975 and wrote his own art journals including “Black Phoenix” (1978), which is a critical voice against colonial oppression that paved the way for British Black Arts Movement. Araeen has also published “Third Text” (1987) and “Third Text Asia” (2008), which has established itself as the leading international journal dedicated to the critical analysis of contemporary art in the global field. It has brought with that analysis a particular focus on both the impact of globalization on cultural practices and the lessons of postcolonial theory.<sup>8</sup>

**Homi K. Bhabha** is one of the leading figures of cultural theory and contemporary postcolonial criticism. The concepts he developed, such as hybridity, the third space, ambivalence and mimicry are long not only central to postcolonial theory but have become influential for broader debates on cultural migration, globalization, human rights, race, gender and the arts. The Reading Area includes his most influential collection of essays “The Location of Culture” (1994), in which Bhabha seeks to impair the polarizing effect that categorizing the world into opposing, hierarchical identities has.

From the mid-1970s until her death at age 31 in 1982, Korean-born artist **Theresa Hak Kyung Cha** created a rich body of conceptual art that explored displacement and loss. Informed by French psychoanalytic film theory, her video works use performance and text to explore interactions of language, meaning and memory. Cha's posthumously published book *Dictée*—an influential investigation of identity in the context of history, ethnicity and gender—will be included in the Reading Area.

**Aqwas Collective** comprised poet Khalid Al Budoor, artist, writer and filmmaker Nujoom Al Ghanem, writer Yousif Khalil and late conceptual artist Hassan Sharif from the United Arab Emirates. They published a photocopied zine with poetry, writing and drawing called *Silsilat Al Ramad* (Arabic for Chain of Ashes) in 1985 as a means to create an audience for contemporary art in the UAE. The Reading Area will include a display of all three issues, including the facsimile of the first issue, documentation of the second issue which was staged as a time-based exhibition in Sharjah’s Central Souq, as well as a reproduction of the unreleased third issue that remains in the archives of Al Ghanem.

American political activist, philosopher, academic, scholar, and author **Angela Davis** brings her critical perspective on struggles against state violence and oppression throughout history and around the world with her collection of essays in *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine and the Foundations of a Movement* (2015).

**The Slow Factory** is a school, knowledge partner and climate innovation lab focused on addressing the intersecting crises of climate justice and social inequity through narrative change and regenerative design.<sup>9</sup> One of their recent activities at MoMA PS1 (January – April, 2022) invited individuals to respond to prompts based on climate change, social

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<sup>8</sup> Third Text: Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Art and Culture, “Rasheed Araeen,” Third Text, accessed May 15, 2022, <http://thirdtext.org/rasheed-araeen>.

<sup>9</sup> Slow Factory, “Slow Factory,” accessed May 15, 2022, <https://slowfactory.earth/>.

justice and political revolution.<sup>10</sup> Their social media features commentary on the ongoing political and social climate through immediately recognizable didactic text and visuals.

**Trinh T. Minh-ha**'s survey of margins as a place of power is another crucial one and lays the foundation for the theoretical framework of the exhibition alongside that of hooks'. The Vietnamese filmmaker, writer, literary theorist, and composer's work challenges and deconstructs the interpretative claims of authoritarian forms. Her notable work *Elsewhere, Within Here: Immigration, Refugeeism and the Boundary Event* will be included as part of the Reading Area within the exhibition.

**Brown History** is a compendium of crowdsourced stories about the lives of those who migrated from South Asia in the past decades, told through scanned images with personal memories as captions, as well as material borrowed from media libraries and museum archives. The page is run by Montreal-based electrical engineer Ahsun Zafar to address a wide range of issues from colonialism, partition and racism through a number of platforms including an Instagram page, web shop and podcast hosted by Zafar<sup>11</sup>.

Informing the basis and inspiration of the curatorial framework is writer, professor, and social critic, **bell hooks**' essay "*Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness*" (1989). hooks is undeniably one of the most successful "cross-over" academics of the late twentieth century. Her books look at the function of race and gender in today's culture. The Reading Area also features *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (1995).

**Islandia Journal** is the primary output of Islandia Press, Inc. a 501(c)(3) organization with headquarters in Miami, Florida. They publish visual art and writing which deal with the themes of myth, folklore, ecology, history, paranormal activity, and cryptozoology as they pertain to Florida & the Caribbean.

Anti-caste author, poet, novelist **Meena Kandasamy**'s writing aims to deconstruct trauma and violence, while spotlighting the resistance against caste, gender, and ethnic oppressions. A selection of her notable poetry *Touch* (2006) and *Ms. Militancy* (2010) will be included as part of the Reading Area. The two compilation were written by Kandasamy in her 20s as a result of her anger towards the "very rigid caste system, which doesn't give acknowledgement to anyone except the Brahmin [high-caste] population, and even women are excluded from that"<sup>12</sup>.

**Stand With Kashmir** is a Kashmiri diaspora-driven independent, transnational, grassroots movement committed to standing in solidarity with the people of Indian occupied Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh (henceforth referred to as "occupied Kashmir" or "Kashmir") in ending the Indian occupation of their homeland and supporting the right to

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<sup>10</sup> Slow Factory, "Slow Factory at MoMA PS1," [slowfactory.earth](https://slowfactory.earth/moma-ps1), accessed May 15, 2022, <https://slowfactory.earth/moma-ps1>.

<sup>11</sup> Brown History Podcast, "Episodes," Brown History Podcast, accessed May 15, 2022, <https://www.brownhistorypodcast.com/episodes>.

<sup>12</sup> The Guardian, "Meena Kandasamy: 'If I Was Going to Write My Life Story, I Would Condense That Marriage to a Footnote,'" The Guardian, November 25, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/nov/25/meena-kandasamy-interview-exquisite-cadavers>.

self-determination of the pre-partition state of Jammu and Kashmir.<sup>13</sup> The Reading Area features books from the resource list compiled by the organization as well as their Instagram page that is a documentation of the ongoing events in Kashmir.

As co-curators of the exhibition, **Leilani Lynch** and **Maria Mumtaz** bring their research papers submitted as part of the CAS thesis that meets at the defining of the in-between and the alternative as a site of creative resistance and generation. The individual papers come together in this Reading Area to highlight how each one individually explores the ways artists and creative practitioners utilize and mobilize the third space today through various formats, subject matter and entry points, while bringing our research and case studies from the previous year into focus through this project.

**Ernesto Oroza's** practice channels the tradition of Radical Architecture into his own analytical employment of contemporary object typologies and productive forces. Oroza's *Tabloids* are a series of newspapers that are produced in relation to specific exhibitions. One side of the newspaper pages, patterns (usually determined by elements within the exhibitions) are printed. These are used as wallpapers to designate particular spaces within the exhibition sites. The rest of the newspapers are used to present materials that in some way expand or question the conceptual scope of the exhibition.<sup>14</sup>

**Augustine Paredes** is a Filipino artist and photographer based in Dubai. Paredes' lyrical, contemporary, and sensuous visual narratives are derived from his many-storied travels, South East Asian consciousness, and queer gaze. Two of his limited edition publications *Conversations at the end of the universe*<sup>15</sup> is a collection of poetry and photographs that examine the ephemerality of human existence and the second *Long Night Stands With Lonely, Lonely Boys*<sup>16</sup> began as a documentation of encounters with different people in different places turned out to be a journey of seeking home overseas, filling voids, and understanding love and longing.

**Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP)** is a left-wing activist organization in the United States that supports the boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign against Israel. The organisation opposes anti-Jewish, anti-Muslim, and anti-Arab bigotry and oppression. JVP seeks an end to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem; security and self-determination for Israelis and Palestinians; a just solution for Palestinian refugees based on principles established in international law; an end to violence against civilians; and peace and justice for all peoples of the Middle East.<sup>17</sup>

This open letter<sup>18</sup> by **ruangrupa** and curators of the failed forum *We Need to Talk! Art – Freedom – Solidarity* is a solid reminder about the lack of debate around antisemitism and

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<sup>13</sup> Stand With Kashmir, "Home," Stand With Kashmir, accessed May 15, 2022, <https://standwithkashmir.org/>.

<sup>14</sup> Ernesto Oroza and Gean Moreno, "Tabloid," The Tabloid, 2009, <http://thetabloid.org/sample-page/>.

<sup>15</sup> "Conversations at the End of the Universe by Augustine Paredes - Augustine Paredes," Augustine Paredes, 2020, <https://www.augustineparedes.com/conversations-at-the-end-of-the-universe>.

<sup>16</sup> "Long Night Stands with Lonely, Lonely Boys - Augustine Paredes," Augustine Paredes, 2014, <https://www.augustineparedes.com/longnightstands>.

<sup>17</sup> "Jewish Voice for Peace | Justice • Equality • Dignity," Jewish Voice for Peace, accessed May 15, 2022, <https://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/>.

<sup>18</sup> ruangrupa, "Antisemitism Accusations against documenta: A Scandal about a Rumor," E-Flux, May 7, 2022, <https://www.e-flux.com/notes/467337/diversity-as-a-threat-a-scandal-about-a-rumor>.

the Palestinian struggle against Israeli occupation. Responding to the allegations of antisemitism, the artistic team and curators write, “Scholarly practice cannot exist without open debate. An effective fight against antisemitism needs this practice as a foundation. If this debate is made impossible, the real antisemitic threats of terror and violence are far harder to fight.”<sup>19</sup>

The cultural critic known for his book *Orientalism* (1978), **Edward Said**’s writings have informed the basis of postcolonial studies. Alongside his most notable writing, the Reading Area will also feature *The Question of Palestine* (1979) charting the changed status of Palestine and its people in light of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the Intifada, the Gulf War, and the Middle East peace initiative.

Best known for her work “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1985), **Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak**’s seminal essay argues for the fundamental difficulty in translation between two cultures, thought, and ideology through the position of the subaltern, a term that gained currency through Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci.

Giving key historical context to our research, ***Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*** (1990) is a seminal anthology of essays about the nature and intersections of marginality by some of the foremost thinkers of the era, including bell hooks, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Gloria Anzaldúa, Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, among many others. Edited by Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Cornel West.

As a political activist, social critic, actor, and public intellectual, **Cornel West**’s focus on the role of race, class and gender in American society is one of significance. His recently published interview in *The New Yorker*<sup>20</sup> discusses a range of topics from remembering bell hooks, Kanye West’s reimagination of Black History Month to Black Future Month, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, to the hypocrisy of the West towards Israel’s illegal occupation of Palestine, among others.

## 1.5 Schedule

| Timeline 2022 | Description   |
|---------------|---|
| January – May | Research, including studio visits, interviews and travel to engage with artists and local communities involved in the curatorial framework  |
| June – July   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Finalize checklist</li> <li>● Publication: Sourcing images and rights, writing and editorial, translations</li> <li>● Apply for additional fundings</li> </ul> |

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Cornel West, “Cornel West Sees a Spiritual Decay in the Culture,” *The New Yorker*, March 9, 2022, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-new-yorker-interview/cornel-west-sees-a-spiritual-decay-in-the-culture>.

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| August              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organize shipping and finalize local artwork production</li> <li>• Book artist and curator travel</li> </ul>  |
| September – October | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purchase and secure materials for exhibition and reading area installation</li> <li>• Publication: Proofreading and layout</li> <li>• Installation</li> <li>• Opening and public programme</li> </ul> |
| November            | Closing programme aligned with Zurich Art Weekend (11 – 13 November)   |

## 1.6 Budget

The project invites multidisciplinary artists, cultural practitioners, writers, curators and non-artists to come together in a pedagogical discussion. The components include:

- An exhibition at the OnCurating Project Space
- A Reading Area that gathers resources from the curators own research into the project, which also invites VOLUMES Zurich to present a margins archive selected by members of the Volume's team
- Opening talks programme
- Zine-like publication featuring texts and conversation between curators and images to supplement the exhibition

| <b>Exhibition</b>                                 | <b>Cost in CHF</b> |
|---|--------------------|
| Curators Flights (from Miami and Dubai to Zurich) | 2,200              |
| Curators Accommodation                            | 1,350              |
| Curators Per Diem                                 | 750                |
| Site-specific artwork production                  | 5,000              |
| Painting  | 500                |
| Wall text   | 500                |
| Gallery sitter (Thursday – Saturday) for 7 weeks  | 2,100              |
| Hospitality                                       | 1,500              |
| Installation                                      | 600                |
| Shipping  | 3,000              |
| Installation buildout/furniture                   | 500                |
| Purchasing material for The Reading Area          | 1,000              |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                      | <b>19,000</b>      |

| <b>Artist Fees</b>   | <b>Cost in CHF</b> |
|--|--------------------|
| Alia Farid   | 250                |
| Larissa Sansour  | 250                |
| Yucef Merhi  | 250                |
| Edison Peñafiel  | 250                |
| Amanda Linares   | 250                |
| Quynh Dong   | 250                |
| Monika E. Kazi   | 250                |
| Ishita Chakraborty   | 250                |
| Ramin Haerizadeh, Rokni Haerizadeh, Hesam Rahmanian<br>(Talks Programme) | 750                |
| Anne-Laure Franchette (Volumes Zurich)                                   | 250                |
| <b>TOTAL</b>   | <b>3,000</b>       |

| <b>Zine</b>      | <b>Cost in CHF</b> |
|------------------|--------------------|
| Graphic Designer | 1,600              |
| Printing         | 1,400              |
| <b>TOTAL</b>     | <b>3,000</b>       |

**Total spending: CHF 25,000**

| <b>INCOME</b>                       | <b>Cost in CHF</b> |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Pro Helvetia (request in July 2022) | 20,000             |
| Oolite Arts (requested)             | 5,000              |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                        | <b>25,000</b>      |

## Chapter 2: Theoretical Perspectives

### 2.1 Questions, Thesis, Methodologies

The core of our research interest lies in knowledge production and artistic activity that emerge from politically decentralized positions. Though these positions may connote subordination and powerlessness, alternative sites can constitute new and valuable perspectives within the field of art and beyond. Drawing from prior year's research on fluid yet potent categories of alterity, in-betweenness and para-sites, we decided to merge our trajectories and perform our MAS research collectively. Our study of these hybrid sites as tactical positions for asserting counter-hegemonic narratives continues with an exploration of how the margin can embody another alternative space of articulation. In today's interconnected, networked, yet politically fragmented world, how are these spaces of solidarity and resistance formed and sustained? This research aims to explore how artists and cultural practitioners have used literary and exhibitionary strategies to assert counter-narratives and 'othered' identities within the globalized art world.

Our theoretical approaches reflect on scholarship by feminist writers from the late 1980s-mid 90s that give formative definitions to terms for decentered spaces like 'margin' (bell hooks and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing), 'border' (Gloria Anzaldúa), 'elsewhere' (Trinh T. Minh Ha). Continuing an exploration of definition of margins, *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* provides historical context through a compendium of texts and reflections on the subject from over 25 writers from varying viewpoints and fields of expertise. Artist Félix González-Torres selected images that are interspersed throughout the text. Key to counter-hegemonic strategies of working in the margins is an understanding of the nuances between postcolonial and decolonial discourses. Gurminder K. Bhambra's summation of the similarities and differences between the two add context to the theoretical perspectives and subsequent case studies explored here.

The case studies in this paper move beyond efforts toward inclusion and visibility of marginalised communities, which emerged in the the art world in 1980s and 90s, making space within institutional exhibitions and academia for non-White, non-Western, diasporic and postcolonial perspectives. Through the case studies of *X Speaks* (2015), a performance by Nsenga Knight at the Sharjah Art Foundation's March Meeting, *Diaspora Pavilion* (2017 and 2022) at the Venice Biennale and a panel on *Decentralizing the Curatorial* (2022) at the Association of Art Museum Curator Conference, we explore how marginality is articulated and practiced today. In recent years, the margins have been redefined as a place of power, resistance, joy and home to new institutions, logics, forms and structures that do not seek validation from the center to exist. Nonetheless, many of the case studies reveal tensions between the desire to create autonomous, sustainable spaces in the margins or to gravitate toward the hegemonic centrality of an international biennale.

In itself, our decision to perform shared research, writing and curating resists predominant forms of authorship and knowledge production that valorise a singular author for theoretical texts and exhibitions. We see this paper as a continuation of the open, yet resistant form of marginality explored within our research and subsequent exhibition. Our hope is to enact hooks' assertion that, "[i]t is dialogue between comrades that is a gesture of love."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> hooks, "Choosing the Margin," 16.

## 2.2 History and Meaning

In “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness” (1989), bell hooks demarcates the margin as a space where oppressed peoples can “move in solidarity to erase the category colonized/colonizer.” To help dismantle these categories we must first understand the theories that aim to deconstruct them. In addition, the varying definitions of marginality and intersecting legacies of post- and decolonial thought that primarily emerged during the politically fraught decades of the 1980s and 90s, help visualize possible solidarities between communities, experiences and movements within the margins.

### *Postcoloniality and Decoloniality: “Connected Sociologies”*

In her 2014 essay on postcolonial and decolonial dialogues, Gurminder K. Bhambra defines and enmeshes the two theoretical discourses. According to Bhambra, these “connected sociologies”<sup>22</sup> share goals of altering and interrupting eurocentric discourses around political power, modernity, and epistemic supremacy. Both challenge the revisionist and eurocentric traditions of writing history, which ignored and silenced other systems of knowledge and memory from indigenous and colonized people.

The schools of thought primarily differ in geography and temporality. Postcolonial theory emerged from the South Asian and Middle Eastern regions, addressing the formation and articulation of social and material culture and identity. Decolonial theories arose predominantly from Latin America, focusing on sociological, epistemic, and economic entanglements with colonial legacies. Postcolonial theory refers to a more recent coloniality of the 19th-20th century, after the dissolution of many colonial occupations in the South Asian/Middle Eastern regions, whereas decolonial thought stems from much earlier, the 15th century, when the Southern European colonial project began to unfold in Latin America (and elsewhere). Though encompassing varying geographical and temporal specificities, it’s clear that post- and decolonial thinkers share broader connections as writers from the Global South.

Bhambra continues by summarizing key voices of postcolonial and decolonial thought. Interrupting notions of modernity that place Europe as the origination point, postcolonial thinkers like Edward Said and Homi Bhabha claim the existence of modernities that include the East and Global South by asserting, “other historical sites and other sites of annunciation.”<sup>23</sup> The demarking of alternative sites and histories is exemplified in Connie Bell’s work for *Decolonising the Archive* explored in the “Decentralizing the Curatorial” panel case study. Quoting important decolonial thinker Anibal Quijano, Bhambra argues that decolonial thought emerges with the rethinking of colonial time and coloniality’s inextricable link to modernity. Quijano marks the conquest of what’s now known as Latin America in the 15th century as the beginning of, “the constitution of a new world order, culminating, five hundred years later, in a global power covering the whole planet.”<sup>24</sup> Building a more layered understanding of coloniality/modernity to include racial, sexual, and gender consciousness, María Lugones more recently argued that, “colonization not only invented the colonized, it also disrupted the social patterns, gender relations and cosmological understandings of the

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<sup>22</sup> Gurminder K Bhambra, “Postcolonial and Decolonial Dialogues,” *Postcolonial Studies* 17, no. 2 (April 3, 2014): 115, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2014.966414>.

<sup>23</sup> Quoting Bhabha, Bhambra, “Postcolonial and Decolonial Dialogues,” 117.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*



communities and societies it invaded.”<sup>25</sup> The intersectional understanding of coloniality theorized by Lugones points to the potency of “coalitions of resistance as well as coalitions of understanding”<sup>26</sup> in decolonial work. These solidarities of resistance push against hegemonic narratives of knowledge and power offering, according to Lugones, “the possibility of a new geopolitics of knowledge.”<sup>27</sup>

### *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*

At the intersection between Lugones’ “geopolitics of knowledge” and hooks’ “politics of location” is the articulation of marginality in the present day. Postcolonial and decolonial discourses emerged alongside contemporary notions of marginality<sup>28</sup> in the 1980s and 90s, following the retreat of formal colonization in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, and in the during of the Cold War. An important predecessor and inspiration for our research, the seminal anthology *Out Here: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* (1990), co-published by the New Museum, NYC and MIT Press, drew connections between marginal theories and the sphere of art and culture. With over 25 contributions, textual and artistic, including each of the authors analyzed in the following chapter on Theoretical Perspectives, the publication encompasses a wide swath of knowledges and thinking on marginality from a diverse range of perspectives. Marcia Tucker, the New Museum’s founder and director at the time cited the book’s aim to, “deconstruct the problematic binary notions of center and periphery, inclusion and exclusion, majority and minority, as they operate in artistic and social practice.”<sup>29</sup> While new scholarship has entered the discourse about marginality in the 32 years since the anthology’s publication, the projects and discussions explored in our case studies suggests that questions of *how* to break down and disrupt binary categories of exclusion are still pertinent today.

*Out There* is segmented into three sections: “Other Questions: Critical Contexts”, “Wild Tongues: Affirming Identities” (named from Gloria Anzaldúa’s essay) and “Marginalia: Displacement and Resistance” (which include Trinh T. Minh-ha and bell hooks). Co-editor Russel Ferguson explains, “In the first, the critical context of contemporary cultural debates is explored in essays which draw on philosophy, literature, film, architecture, politics and art. The second addresses the questions of how to affirm cultural identities in a complex and often repressive society. The third deals with counter-movements of displacement and resistance to marginalization.”<sup>30</sup> The book also includes contributions from our CAS theoretical touchstones, Gayatri Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha, further connecting marginal theory to post- and decolonial theories. In addition to languaging the subjugation of formerly colonized, the essays in *Out There* discussed historically and systematically oppressed communities spanning race, gender, sexuality and class. Apropos to the early 1990s, many contributions, including Simon Watney and Douglas Crimp, spoke of the marginality of African and LGBTQ communities during the AIDS crisis.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 118.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 119.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 120.

<sup>28</sup> While Marginal Man theory emerged in the 1920s from American sociologist Robert Park, feminist and post-structuralist understandings of cultural marginality arose in the 80s and 90s. Adam Weisberger, “Marginality and Its Directions,” *Sociological Forum* 7, no. 3 (1992): 425–46, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/684659>.

<sup>29</sup> Russell Ferguson et al., *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Mit Press; New York, N.Y, 1990). 7

<sup>30</sup> Ferguson, *Out There*, 9.

In his introduction, Russell Ferguson cites the book's goal to, “open up spaces for new ways of thinking about the dynamics of cultural power,”<sup>31</sup> that not only recognize the powerful and excellent creative voices existent in the margins, but to expose the largely invisible (White) power of the center with hopes of challenging its authority. He notes, “If that authority breaks down, then there remains no point relative to which others can be defined as marginal. The perceived threat lies partly in the very process of becoming visible.”<sup>32</sup> In addition to naming the oppressive forces—namely whiteness, maleness and heterosexuality—many of the essays in *Out There*, reflect on strategies to foster solidarities across, what Ferguson calls, “parallel exclusions”<sup>33</sup> so as not to reinforce segregations between marginalized(x) and marginalized(y) peoples. These efforts resonate with Bhabra’s notion of “connected sociologies” and the collective work needed to expose the invisible central polemics of power that both she and Ferguson refer to.

*Out There*’s essay contributions are interspersed by images selected by Félix González-Torres, whose visually minimal works reflect an openness that allows viewers to transmute their own experiences and interpretations onto his artworks. González-Torres brings a series of three open-ended visual offerings to *Out There* that sample from a monument to American President Theodore Roosevelt, childhood photographs of the anthology’s authors and found images of aspirational advertising. The tripartite contribution asserts questions about the memorialization of authority and the power of visibility through images. By including images from the Roosevelt Monument outside the Museum of Natural History in New York, which inscribed 11 honorific descriptions of the former President<sup>34</sup> into marble, González-Torres, “metaphorically [opened] up even bigger gaps between the various elements of dominance, gaps in which other, alternative, identities could be inserted.”<sup>35</sup> González-Torres did just that by requesting childhood photos from each of the *Out There* contributors, which were inserted in two page spreads throughout the book. Pairing childhood photos of the diverse group of authors together exposed visible similarities like clothing, toys, and invisible commonalities, like the lack of childhood photos from authors that were refugees. Through these visual metaphors of sameness and difference, Ferguson reflects:

“the photographs articulated one of the themes of the entire anthology: the process that all children go through of finding a voice in which to speak prefigures the efforts of the adult writers to find their own authentic voices, and to make them heard in a culture whose dominant powers might prefer not to hear them.”<sup>36</sup>

Spanning disciplines and personal experiences, the writers in *Out There* focus on the interrogation and redefinition of, “the process through which cultural margins are created, defined and enforced.”<sup>37</sup> Ferguson’s summation can be interpreted as both the contributors’

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>34</sup> Carved in marble, the inscriptions have the words author, statesman, scholar, humanitarian, historian, patriot, ranchman, explorer, naturalist, scientist, and soldier.

<sup>35</sup> Russell Ferguson, “Authority Figure,” in Félix González-Torres, ed. Julie Ault (Gottingen, Germany: Steidl, 2006), 81–103.

<sup>36</sup> Ferguson, “Authority Figure.”

<sup>37</sup> Ferguson, *Out There*, 14.

wish to understand how cultural margins are established in order to dismantle their oppressive boundaries, but also reclaim them as spaces of power. It is the latter aim which we examine further in our theoretical perspectives.

### 2.3 Choosing the Margins as a Space for Radical Openness

In contemporary theory, margin can have a rather negative connotation, referring to marginal as one that is dominated by the oppressor, silenced by hegemony, or a position of powerlessness and restriction. For bell hooks, margin is a space for radical openness. Best known for her writings on feminism, race and class, hooks has critically informed the framework of our collective research for this exhibition project. Her seminal essay *Choosing the Margin as a Space for Radical Openness* (1989) is instrumental in not only identifying how to confront larger institutions, but also how a person, such as herself, is able to speak in a system that has been oppressive. In her essay, hooks asks a critical question, do you opt out completely or do you try to find space to speak within that oppressive structure? Using this negotiation as a starting point, we explore how artists and creative practitioners continue to challenge hegemonic structures. We aim to bring these counter-hegemonic discourses together as part of the exhibition format, reading area and accompanying zine.

The opening sentence of hooks' essay reads:

“As a radical standpoint, perspective, position, ‘the politics of location’ necessarily calls those of us who would participate in the formation of counter-hegemonic cultural practice to identify the spaces where we begin the process of revision.”<sup>38</sup>

This direct call for action invites us to rethink our location (or position) in our work against systems of power and control within cultural practice, leading us to identify a process of revision. The use of the term ‘revision’ is a particularly interesting one as it emphasizes that a language of such resistance is already in place, however, it needs to be revised. More simply, this call to action isn't about creating something new, but encourages us to work within a language that needs to be revisited in order for it to be radical and operational.

hooks' claims are strong, and fall against the idea of assimilation as she calls on “black folks coming from poor, underclass communities, who enter universities of other privileged cultural settings”<sup>39</sup> to retain their class and cultural background when presented in a culture of domination. According to hooks, this tension between the center and the margin allows for a radical, open space, one that isn't safe (the center is always trying to contain the margin), one that is challenging, but it is the position or location of radical openness. In other words, the margin becomes a position of strategy, not essence.

bell hooks proclaims, “Language is also a place of struggle” throughout her text.<sup>40</sup> Language plays a key role in the articulation of identity and a resistance to White, Western-centered world, contributing to our interdisciplinary lens of research, which spans performance, exhibitions, curatorial strategies, archival and discursive formats. The recent rise of terms like “People of the Global Majority”, which aim to decenter Whiteness, indicate how the

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<sup>38</sup> hooks, “Choosing the Margin,” 15.

<sup>39</sup> hooks, 19.

<sup>40</sup> hooks, “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness,” 15.

binaries of marginality continue to be questioned today. They complicate commonly used terms like BAME (UK) and BIPOC (US) that group ‘minorities’ in efforts towards solidarity, but in doing so can still reify Whiteness as central and normative.<sup>41</sup> Within a museum context, movements from predominantly Western countries in North America and Europe reform exclusionary institutional practices, priorities strategies to increase Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion (DEAI) through programming and staffing makeup and structures. While these efforts point to progress within the fields of art and culture, we must acknowledge that broader impact is needed within the realms of politics and economy that could work towards rectifying systemic imbalances and injustices throughout the world.

This understanding has been critical in identifying artists, creative practitioners and formats for the collective project. From Alia Farid’s conscious effort to give visibility to narrative obscured by hegemonic powers, to Larissa Sansour’s interdisciplinary practice immersed in the current political dialogue, Ishita Chakraborty’s compilation of narrations by individuals, or Quynh Dong and Edison Peñafiel’s poignant works with migrant as the subject, each discourse has been carefully selected to bring individual and collective resistance to the forefront. The title of the exhibition also draws from hooks’ call to arms, “Enter that space. We greet you as Liberators”, the *space* being the site of creativity and power, the *we* not just signifying the collaborators who inhabit physical space in the exhibition venue, but everyone who inhabits the marginal spaces as a place of resistance, who refute conversation of speaking about difference, but focus on how and what we speak.

#### **2.4 Margin, Borders, Elsewhere: Decentered Spaces (Tsing, Anzaldúa, Minh-ha)**

Critical writing about margins and other decentralized localities extends across disciplines of anthropologies, cultural studies, feminist theory and creative writing. Notably, many of these thinkers are women, suggesting the intersectional third-wave feminist context from much of their writing emerged. In addition to bell hooks, writers like Anna Lownhaupt Tsing, Trinh T. Minh-ha and Gloria Anzaldúa give further definitions to decentered spaces like margins, Borderlands, boundaries, and elsewhere. While differing in their personal racial and ethnic backgrounds, and their relationship to decentered spaces, these authors predominantly speak from the socio-political context of the United States, and its relationship to coloniality (as both a colonizing force and former colony), post-war migration dynamics and diasporic communities. However, because of the transnational networks that topics like migration, border politics, diaspora and refugeeism necessitate, these issues can be understood worldwide. Oscillating between local and global contexts, their writing gives necessary vocabularies to liminal sites where the marginalized can, and in many cases *must* negotiate their histories, meaning, culture and identity. Each speaks through semi-autobiographical writing to their particular contexts and experiences as outsiders, refugees, and *mestiza* (hybrid) women, resisting a homogenization of cultural experiences and practicing a “politics of location.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Global Majority, coined by Rosemary Campbell-Stephens MBE, is a collective term that first and foremost speaks to and encourages those so-called to think of themselves as belonging to the global majority. It refers to people who are Black, Asian, Brown, dual-heritage, indigenous to the global south, and or have been racialized as ‘ethnic minorities’. Rosemary Campbell-Stephens MBE, “Global Majority; Decolonising the Language and Reframing the Conversation about Race,” *Leeds Beckett University*, 2020, <https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/-/media/files/schools/school-of-education/final-leeds-beckett-1102-global-majority.pdf>.

<sup>42</sup> hooks, 15.

Each of these writers first establishes their own definitions of the decentered/marginalized realm. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing writes about margins from the perspective of an anthropologist with a desire to redefine and refresh anthropological practice. As a scientific discipline, anthropology focuses on the study of cultures, mainly through a process of immersion and observation (documentation with writing, photography, drawing). While these methods may be useful, they can create generalizations and stagnant identities. Tsing critiques the objectivity of the discipline and its archaic assumptions of culture as “fixed’ entities”. In her essay, “From the Margins”, Tsing defines margins as, “a conceptual site from which to explore the imaginative quality and the specificity of local/global cultural formation.”<sup>43</sup> Filmmaker, feminist, and postcolonial thinker Trinh T. Minh-ha defines boundaries and borders in her 2011 book “Elsewhere, Within Here: Immigration, Refugeeism, and the Boundary Event”. With texts written in a pre- and post-9/11, but pre-Trump era, she explores the enactment of boundaries and borders, “both as a material and immaterial event, where endings pass into beginnings.”<sup>44</sup> From her perspective as a refugee Minh-ha, underscores the boundary as an active and shifting entity that is deeply connected to conflict, nationalism, diaspora and globalization. She asserts that boundaries embody a double-sided desire to:

“free/to subject one practice, one culture, one national community from/to another, but also expose the extent to which cultures are products of the continuing struggle between official and unofficial narratives—those largely circulated in favor of the State and its policies of inclusion, incorporation and validation, as well as of exclusion, appropriation and dispossession.”<sup>45</sup>

Chicana author Gloria Anzaldúa’s writing about Borderlands similarly conceptualizes the border as both a nationalized, geographical location and an abstract entity. Growing up on the border between Texas, US and Mexico, where national borders separated many peoples descended from a singular Mexican culture. These often arbitrary divisions create Borderlands from “the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. [They are] in a constant state of transition.”<sup>46</sup> Though referring to this specific US/Mexico context, Anzaldúa universalizes her understand to Borderlands to encompass places where “two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy.”<sup>47</sup> For Anzaldúa, the Borderlands is a much an external boundary as it is an internalized struggle:

In the Borderlands  
you are the battleground  
where enemies are kin to each other;  
you are at home, a stranger<sup>48</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, “From the Margins,” *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (1994): 279, <https://doi.org/http://www.jstor.org/stable/656363>.

<sup>44</sup> Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Elsewhere, within Here: Immigration, Refugeeism and the Boundary Event* (London, UK: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2011): i.

<sup>45</sup> Minh-ha, *Elsewhere, within Here*, 45.

<sup>46</sup> Gloria E Anzaldúa, *La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco, California: Aunt Lute, 1999), 3.

<sup>47</sup> Anzaldúa, *La frontera: The New Mestiza*, Preface.

<sup>48</sup> Anzaldúa, 194.

Each of the authors point to the problematics of the margin/boundary/Borderland and its ability to be inclusionary and exclusionary, self-designated and imposed. The decentered space appears as a dialogic locale where cultures meet and collide, and where identity can be reimagined and negotiated.

Given that the margin/boundary/Borderlands, as sites of articulation, are linked to a politics of positioning and de-positioning<sup>49</sup>, the pronunciation of whose margin/boundary/Borderlands is described is an important distinction for Anzaldúa, Minh-ha and Tsing. Minh-ha's text focuses on the experiences of "traveling selves"—migrants, refugees and strangers—and the irreconcilable distances between here (foreign land) and home (there) and the spaces (elsewhere) created to fluctuate between. These "traveling selves" describe, not only the self that moves physically across geographies, but also "the self that embarks on an undetermined journeying practice, having constantly to negotiate between home and abroad, native culture and adopted culture, or more creatively speaking, between a here, a there, and an elsewhere."<sup>50</sup> Minh-ha describes how diasporic writers and thinkers often "take refuge" in the genre of autobiography, which allows a certain mobility to journey between memories of home and experiences in their current location. As travelers through "tale-telling", writers exercise powers of "adaptation and germination" across cultures and generations when reflecting on the complex physical journeys of exile and migration. Both types of movement, "are subject to the hazards of displacement, interaction and translation. Both, however, have the potential to widen the horizon of one's imagination and to shift the frontiers of reality and fantasy, or of Here and There."<sup>51</sup>

In a similar manner, Tsing uses the format of analytic and personal reflections on her encounters with the Meratus Dayak people of Indonesia, specifically an enigmatic female shaman-leader named Uma Adang, Anna Tsing explores and develops her notion of the margins. During an anthropological visit to the rural, mountainous locale in Indonesia, Tsing initially assumed geographically isolated Meratus Dayak peoples were consumed with their own cosmologies and rituals, and disengaged with contemporary state and national politics. However, through closer observation, dialogue with Uma Adang, Tsing realized her assumption had been incorrect. Amidst their local rituals, "there was a subtle transformation going on in which local people copied the rhetoric of the state only to exaggerate or misplace it just enough to confuse one's vision."<sup>52</sup> Reflecting on her own biases, Tsing identifies how new definitions of marginality can necessarily complicate anthropology's tendency to portray rural, indigenous (non-White) communities as pristine and 'authentic', generally not politically engaged. Tsing argues for the value of these "out-of-the-way places" (akin to elsewhere) which embody the margins as, "zones of unpredictability at the edges of discursive stability, where contradictory discourses overlap, or where discrepant kinds of meaning-making converge;"<sup>53</sup> Through conversation with Uma Adang, Tsing complexifies understandings of local as falsely equivalent to rural and Other, stressing the agency of the communities being "studied" in the formation and articulation of their own identity. In the

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<sup>49</sup> Minh-ha, *Elsewhere, within Here*, 54.

<sup>50</sup> Minh-ha, 27.

<sup>51</sup> Minh-ha, 28.

<sup>52</sup> Tsing, "From the Margins," 280.

<sup>53</sup> Tsing, 279.

case of Adang, her leadership position is exceptional because of her female identity, which she actively reifies through an imagined cosmology and historical lineage to the “Diamond Queen”. Through the communication of these mythologies to Tsing, Adang enacts the, “creative potential,” of margins, “rearticulating, enlivening, and rearranging the very social categories that peripheralized a group's existence.”<sup>54</sup>

Margins, Borderlands, and boundaries are inherently unstable sites shifting with context and factors like geographic region, urban/rural modalities, race, ethnicity, class, gender, and time period. However, while their slipperiness may make them difficult to understand and formulate epistemically, it is in the openness and pliability of their parameters that artists, writers, and thinkers may mobilize their power. Anzaldúa rearticulates Borderlands and their inhabitants, through linguistic “code-switching” between English, Castilian Spanish, North Mexican dialect, Tex-Mex, and Nahuatl. This “bastard language, Chicano Spanish ” reflects the new language of the Borderlands for Anzaldúa, which echoes the cross-pollination and revitalization of culture through dialogue and writing discussed by Minh-ha and Tsing.<sup>55</sup> Anzaldúa’s multilingual format constitutes a resistance to fully translate to colonial languages of English and Castellano, recalling hooks’ assertion about language. To assert a mixed, *mestiza* text, is to resist a totalized understanding of one’s identity and culture by colonizing forces. Tsing elucidates this in her description of the “blurred vision” exercised by the Meratus Dayak people through the co-option of state-espoused rhetoric in their tribal proceedings.<sup>56</sup> Minh-ha writes about the importance of this resistance to fixed positionality as a counter to “authorized marginality” where “the production of ‘difference’ can be supervised, hence recuperated, neutralized and depoliticized...[by] the Establishment only so long as the difference they offer proves to be locatable and evaluable within the ruling norms.”<sup>57</sup> Each of these authors indicates the potential to practice dis-location and unlocatability within the margin/boundary/Borderlands as a necessary means of protecting and asserting one’s agency to self-determine.

As Anzaldúa puts it:

“To survive the Borderlands  
you must live *sin fronteras*  
be a crossroads”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Tsing, 279.

<sup>55</sup> Anzaldúa, preface.

<sup>56</sup> Tsing, 280.

<sup>57</sup> Minh-ha, 51-52.

<sup>58</sup> Anzaldúa, 195.

## Chapter 3: Case Studies

### 3.1 X Speaks: Performing history, moving from margin to center and creating an autonomous Black American Muslim performance (cyber)space (2015)

In February 2015, for the anniversary of Malcom X's assassination and Black History Month in the US, Nsenga Knight invited Black American Muslims to collectively perform Malcolm X's final eight 1965 speeches via live-stream on the historically corresponding days leading up to the 50th anniversary of his death. This work saw the artist use the Internet as a tool to create a performance art project to build a community and engage audiences in cyberspace.

X is the mathematical symbol for the unknown, and in the early 20th century, thousands of Black people started to replace their last name with X to reject their slave names and to symbolize their identity as Muslims. Malcolm X being the most notable X in modern history. "He [Malcolm X] promoted unity amongst all people, and an increased international outlook to solve the human rights violations against Blacks in America. Because his death occurred when he was on the brink of his evolved philosophical and spiritual orientation, his later philosophy is less known. He has been called one of the greatest and most influential African Americans in history and his legacy holds a special place in the hearts and imaginations of Black Muslims for whom he stands as a model for leadership, social change, and community engagement. X Speaks collaborators embody Malcolm X's speech by activating it through performance in a disembodied digital form – the internet; bringing him into the present imaginations of diverse audiences via smartphones, tablets, laptops and desktop computers,<sup>59</sup>" writes Knight.

For her open call presentation as part of Sharjah Art Foundation's annual March Meeting in 2016, which was held under the theme of *Education, Engagement and Participation*, Knight presented this social practice project. The significance of March Meeting as a platform to present her works is also crucial. This edition concluded with presentations by four artists: Sandi Hilal from Decolonising Architecture from Palestine, Oscar Murillo, Farid Rakun from ruangrupa and Rick Lowe, all emphasizing collaborative and cooperative practices with and within communities through their artistic practice. The role and position of the Foundation is another significant aspect as the descriptive text reflects on the Foundation and its activities: "When describing the March Meeting, we [Sharjah Art Foundation] often find ourselves struggling with how to explain the event – neither a formal conference, nor strictly speaking a symposium – the nature of this now 9th annual occasion is still influenced and informed by the intentions of its first iteration in 2008. At that time, twenty-four participants were invited to join what was described as 'an encounter between a range of art organizations in the Arab world' with the express mission to 'address imperative issues that face artists and art organizations' while focusing 'on the need to organize encounters between artists, curators, producers and art professionals from around the world and to establish regular networking opportunities."<sup>60</sup>

In her presentation at Sharjah Art Foundation, Knight emphasizes on the connection between the past and present and the resonance of speaking to engage with contemporary political, social, racial and justice issues. For the artist, the performance was an exercise, a

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<sup>59</sup> "X Speaks," Nsenga Knight, accessed May 15, 2022, <https://nsengaknight.com/xspeaks/>.

<sup>60</sup> "March Meeting 2016," Sharjah Art Foundation, 2016, <http://sharjahart.org/march-meeting-2016>.



litmus test to check the relevance of Malcolm X's thoughts and an entry into a large conversation around built community and shared ideas. The performance also stems from the social movement Black Lives Matter that started in 2013 and seeks to highlight racism, discrimination and inequality experienced by the Black community. Through this engagement, Knight also sought to address questions of what it means to be Black and Muslim, following the racial profiling of Muslims after 9/11 attacks as well as ongoing police brutality and violence against the Black community, making them the most marginal community across the US.

Although Knight conceptualized this performance by engaging Black Muslim community from her network of friends, family and colleagues, several institutions approach her to collaborate and recreate versions of the performance to engage their communities, namely Ursinus College in Pennsylvania. If we are to deconstruct the title of the project into three modules: (i) Performing history (ii) moving from margin to center and (iii) creating an autonomous Black American Muslim performance (cyber)space, then Knight has visibly accomplished to bring a story of resistance to the forefront, especially through community engagement and following institutional collaboration, to create an autonomous and safe space for Black American Muslim to have their voice heard.

### 3.2 Diaspora Pavilions at the Venice Biennale

#### *Diaspora Pavilion (2017)*

London-based International Curator's Forum (ICF) founded by a group of artists and curators engages with diaspora across the UK, Europe, the Caribbean, Asia, the Middle East and Australia. "Through all aspects of our programme we engage with diaspora as a critical framework through which we can address and complicate public discussion, test and explore new innovative curatorial models, and create space for artistic and discursive interventions into historical narratives and systems of representation."<sup>61</sup>

For the 57th International Art Exhibition, titled *Viva Arte Viva*, ICF presented the Diaspora Pavilion programme in partnership with University of the Arts London, which was co-directed by David Bailey, Nicola Green, Peter Clayton and David Lammy and held at Palazzo Pisani a Santa Marina in Venice. Programme mentors included renowned names such as Sokari Douglas Camp, Ellen Gallagher, Nicola Green, Joy Gregory, Isaac Julien, Dave Lewis, Hew Locke, Vong Phaophanit & Claire Oboussier and Yinka Shonibare MBE and saw works by Larry Achiampong, Libita Clayton, Kimathi Donkor, Ray Fiasco, Michael Forbes, Susan Pui San Lok, Paul Maheke, Khadija Saye, Erika Tan, Barbara Walker and Abbas Zahedi. This edition was conceived to challenge the prevalence of national pavilions within the structure of an international art exhibition by "deliberately position itself in opposition to the very concept of a permanent national pavilion, yet adopting the term for a temporary exhibition, poses an intentional juxtaposition between the structures and modalities of this biennale and the transience of the diasporic condition."<sup>62</sup> The pavilion was formed as a result of a gross underrepresentation of black and minority artists (BAME) and saw 10 mentors and

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<sup>61</sup> "Who," ICF | International Curators Forum, accessed May 15, 2022, <https://www.internationalcuratorsforum.org/#who>.

<sup>62</sup> Diaspora Pavilion Catalog, accessed May 12, 2022, <https://www.internationalcuratorsforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Diaspora-Pavilion-Catalogue-Web-version.pdf>

12 emerging UK-based artists whose works engage with the topic of diaspora, come together in a 22-month professional development programme. Artists question what diaspora stands for as a mindset but also as a political reality in the globalized world. Through multidisciplinary works in the exhibition, they revisit forgotten or underrepresented figures, explore memory and nostalgia, and address migration by reflecting on current political climate, skilfully addressing and undermining Western notions of domination.

“The Diaspora Pavilion grew out of the desire to provide a space for artists to present counter-narratives that interrogate the critical capacity of diaspora as a notion, through an array of artistic media and across multiple generations. The thinking around this exhibition stems from a topical interest in the impact of increased global mobility, displacement, and migration on culture, and aims to approach art as what Ute Meta Bauer has described as “a space of refuge – an in-between space of transition and of diasporic passage” for art practitioners. In light of this, the notion of diaspora here functions as a tool with which we can explore how art and curating have been influenced by cross-cultural exchange and how the globalized art world has reacted to these new networks, flows and their dispersal.”<sup>63</sup> In OnCurating Issue 41, Marco Meuli discusses Claire Bishop’s book *Installation Art* (2017) in his essay, *Curating Otherness: A Selective Reading of the Diaspora Pavilion at the 2017 Venice Biennale* (2019) to deconstruct the political demands of the Diaspora Pavilion. Taking Bishop’s idea forward, Meuli argues that installations in their very nature are the means to “problematize, decentralize or bypass Western subjects”.<sup>64</sup>

Through works featured in the exhibition, the subject matter is no longer solely about crimes committed against people of color, but also talks of their resistance in the face of adversity. British-Gambian artist Khadija Saye, who died in the Grenfell Tower fire (2017), shows poignant works *Dwelling: in this space we breathe*, which ironically talks about the questionable conditions in which her and other working class (mainly Black and people of color) lived. Hew Locke’s ships hanging on the ground floor of the exhibition venue featured cut-outs of Portuguese mercenaries made by 16th century Benin sculptor that referenced how European borders patrol the sea to block immigrants who risk their lives for relative safety. In the wider world, the question of how (and which) people fit in has become a political and social issue. The use and popularization of the term ‘European migrant crisis’ (2015) as a result of Syrian refugees fleeing US-led war and destabilization in the region also displays racist and anti-immigrant sentiments in the uses of the term ‘migrant’ and ‘crisis’ when referring to non-White refugees seeking relief elsewhere. Yinka Shonibare’s wonderful installation of a library referencing a traditional English library through its wooden bookshelves, featured books by first and second generation immigrants, as well by people who opposed immigration. All books were covered in traditional African designs rendering the library a decorative, yet political feel to it. The dialogue between different cultural heritages was integral to this pavilion and stood out as one walked out of the exhibition. As Salman Rushdie said, “Sometimes we feel we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools”.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 8

<sup>64</sup> Marco Meuli, “Curating Otherness: A Selective Reading of the Diaspora Pavilion at the 2017 Venice Biennale,” OnCurating 41 (2019): 37

### *Diaspora Pavilion 2: Venice (2022)*

The recent edition *Diaspora Pavilion 2: Venice (2022)*, curated by Jessica Taylor for the 59th International Art Exhibition entitled *The Milk of Dreams*, was held in partnership with VeniceArtFactory and Contemporis ets at the Teatrino Groggia and featured a performance and installation by Shiraz Bayjoo in collaboration with Nicolas Faubert and Siyabonga Mthembu for the vernissage. Conceived by Bayjoo, the commission entitled *Zot Konn – Yeman*, featured moving images, sculptural installation, choreographed movement enacted by Faubert and vocal performances by Mthembu. The performance sees the artists bring together Mauritian Creole and the Bantu language Fang, merging the two African languages spoken by Bayjoo and Faubert’s ancestors. The two artists also developed a five-chapter dance performance, which is an unfolding bodily engagement with plants that Bayjoo photographed at the Kew Gardens in London “during a period of research that sought to interrogate the transplantation of species from Mauritius to the UK during colonial rule and their current place in the nation’s archives.”<sup>65</sup> The presentation of *Zot Konn – Yeman* highlights the “relationships between entertainment, the act of collecting, and the circulation of knowledge in the formation and preservation of Empires.”<sup>66</sup>

In bell hooks' text, “Language is also a place of struggle,”<sup>67</sup> makes a literal yet significant nod to how Bayjoo and Faubert bring together the language of their respective fathers to open the pavilion to VIPs who flocked to the highly popularized International Art Exhibition that is very much within the center of Western art historical discourse. hooks says, “The oppressed struggle in language to recover ourselves, to reconcile, to reunite, to renew. Our words are not without meaning, they are an action, a resistance.”<sup>68</sup> She argues that it is not an easy task to find ways to integrate our language and our voice in the many ways we create in film, poetry and art because this is the language that the mainstream finds hard to understand. Bayjoo and Faubert find resistance in their margins and push through to bring their narrative to the center for the opening week of the Biennale as the crème de la crème navigate their way through the exhibition in the narrow streets of Venice.

Bayjoo’s research-based practice focuses on personal and public archives that address memory and postcolonial nationalism. Through his multidisciplinary practice in film, painting, photography, performance and installation, the artist constantly challenges dominant cultural narratives. Bayjoo has exhibited at significant exhibitions and venues including the Institute of International Visual Arts London; New Art Exchange, Nottingham; 5th Edition Dhaka Art Summit; 14th Biennale of Sharjah; 13th Biennale of Dakar; and 21st Biennale of Sydney. He was an artist in residence at the Delfina Foundation (2021), recipient of the Gasworks Fellowship and the Arts Council of England, and has recently been awarded the Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship.

Libreville-born Faubert is a Paris-based dancer and performer with a visual impairment. He has developed signature engagements with movement and space to allow him to explore the limits of consciousness. His hybrid performances bring together classical dance with

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<sup>65</sup> “Diaspora Pavilion 2: Venice,” ICF | International Curators Forum, March 29, 2022, <https://www.internationalcuratorsforum.org/diaspora-pavilion-2-venice/>.

<sup>66</sup> “Diaspora Pavilion 2: Venice,” ICF | International Curators Forum, March 29, 2022, <https://www.internationalcuratorsforum.org/diaspora-pavilion-2-venice/>.

<sup>67</sup> hooks, “Choosing the Margin,” 15.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

Hip-Hop, Popping, B-Boying and Freestyle movements to break down the distinction between various disciplines such as dance, visual arts, sound, and photography. In 2019, Laure Prouvost selected Faubert to perform in the French Pavilion for the duration of the 58th Venice Biennale.

Mthembu is the lead vocalist of The Brother Moves On (TBMO), a band and performance art ensemble that he created with his late brother Nkululeko and cousin Zelizwe in 2009 to question what it means to be rhythmically South African. TBMO seeks to reinforce the understanding of jazz as an indigenous knowledge system of consciousness across the American and African continents. Mthembu is co-curator of Indaba Is, which is a compilation of South African improvised music in the realm of kinship and communal ties as an established form of ancestral knowledge passed down through generations.

### 3.3 Decentralizing the Curatorial Panel (2022)

Reflecting on how institutional curatorial practices can exist and thrive in the margins, the panel “Decentralizing the Curatorial” took place on May 2, 2022, during the Association of Art Museum Curators conference in New York. There, amongst an audience (including Leilani) of museum and independent curators, the moderator, Beatriz Lobo Britto, spoke to three panelists: Jasmine Wahi, Niomi Fairweather, and Connie Bell about how their curatorial practices incorporate decentralized methods. The panel aimed to discuss varying perspectives, from, “artist-led, community and global,” practitioners that, “explore experimental models of curating, aiming to open up institutions for critique and collective change, reevaluating its program, collection and, ultimately, governance.”<sup>69</sup> Acknowledging the inherent power of the curator figure within institutional and broader art world structures, each panelist reflected on their own strategies for decentralizing the singular curatorial voice. Further, “through an honest conversation, challenging topics [were] explored, such as how the panel participants approach their boards of trustees, how to manage their communities' expectations and how to be empathetic, self-reflective curators.”<sup>70</sup> Although the hour-long format did not allow enough time to fully unpack the questions and goals of the panel, the conversation served as a launchpad to further explore the three speakers' work/organizations as case studies of practice in marginal spaces. During the conversation, each panelist spoke about curating in the UK and US and implementing varying approaches to decentralizing, from non-hierarchical community-led decision-making structures, to site-responsive programming, and activating archives through community storytelling.

#### *NewBridge Project*

Hailing from the North East of England, Niomi Fairweather spoke of her time as Programme Director at NewBridge Project, in Newcastle, UK. NewBridge was founded in 2010 by two artists, the organization has evolved from a freeform, artist-run space into an Arts Council National Portfolio member (receiving annual funding) and a registered charity. Operating in a region with one of the highest poverty rates of the UK<sup>71</sup> NewBridge serves an area that has

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<sup>69</sup> “Annual Meeting: Schedule in Brief,” AAMC (Association of Art Museum Curators, 2022), [https://www.artcurators.org/page/Annual\\_Meeting#Schedule%20in%20Brief](https://www.artcurators.org/page/Annual_Meeting#Schedule%20in%20Brief).

<sup>70</sup> “Annual Meeting: Schedule in Brief,” AAMC.

<sup>71</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation, “UK POVERTY 2022: The Essential Guide to Understanding Poverty in the UK,” *Joseph Rowntree Foundation*, January 2022, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2022>.

below average engagement with the arts and culture, which has shown to be correlated with socio-economic level.<sup>72</sup> Their mission is to support, “an active artist-led community that supports artists, curators and communities through the provision of space for creative practice, curatorial opportunities and an ambitious artist-led programme of exhibitions, commissions, artist development and events.”<sup>73</sup> Central to their programming structure is a Programme Committee, composed of locally-based artists and curators, which collectively determine exhibitions and programs for the organization. The Programme Committee exists to, “create a programme that reflects the diversity of contemporary artistic practice, through a process that supports members to have a hands-on, curatorial learning and development experience.”<sup>74</sup> Not only does this approach flatten leadership hierarchies by spreading curatorial power to the community, it provides practical experience for emerging artists and curators, acting as both a decision-making and educational platform. Another program called For Solidarity facilitates group meetings between arts, political advocacy, humanitarian, environmental, social organizations throughout the region with aims of resource sharing, collaboration and fostering solidarities between people and causes. These programs suggest the significant role that arts organizations play in fostering dialogue, especially within under-resourced, marginalized communities.

Now working for a much larger organization in the same region, BALTIC Center for Contemporary Art, Niomi has continued rooting her curatorial practice in local audiences and artists through her new role as Curator (Local). This specific titling indicates a concerted effort on the institution’s side to dedicate curatorial efforts toward cultivating the local artistic community and ensuring that neighboring audiences feel satiated by their programs.

### *Project for Empty Space*

Project for Empty Space (PES) was initiated in 2010 by Jasmine Wahi and Meenakshi Thirukode as a series of temporary interventions in vacant spaces in New York City that currently has a brick-and-mortar location in Newark, NJ for exhibitions, artist studios and programming. PES staged its first projects in an empty lot in NYC’s Lower East Side neighborhood, selecting projects through open calls that asked artists to respond to the history of the area. Their first project was with Tehniyet Masood, a Pakistani American artist who created a “historic playground” of Lower East Side histories informed by resident stories, showing its transition from a tenement district, through the Great Depression, to the market crash of the 1980s to the present.<sup>75</sup> These site-responsive projects continued even as PES gained a brick-and-mortar space in 2015 in neighboring New Jersey. Today, PES is, “woman-run, femme-powered, People of the Global Majority/BIPOC, Queer, and unapologetically radical ecosystem for creatives.”<sup>76</sup> The transition from nomadic project to established art center has ironic tensions with the organization’s name, but implies a desire

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<sup>72</sup> H.W. Mak, R. Coulter, and D. Fancourt, “Does Arts and Cultural Engagement Vary Geographically? Evidence from the UK Household Longitudinal Study,” *Public Health* 185 (August 2020): 119–26, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2020.04.029>.

<sup>73</sup> “About Us,” The NewBridge Project, accessed May 15, 2022, <https://thenewbridgeproject.com/about/about-us/>.

<sup>74</sup> “What Is the Programme Committee?,” The NewBridge Project, accessed May 16, 2022, <https://thenewbridgeproject.com/events/what-is-the-programme-committee/>.

<sup>75</sup> “Project for Empty Space,” Newark Arts Journal, n.d., <https://www.newarkartsjournal.org/project-for-empty-space#:~:text=Project%20for%20Empty%20Space%20didn>.

<sup>76</sup> Project for Empty Space, n.d., <https://www.projectforemptyspace.org>.

to more permanently occupy space as a means to sustain a thriving ecosystem. With a fixed location and expanded program, PES has cultivated a more focused mission, “dedicated to creating safe and equitable spaces for social discourse...through the lens of contemporary art and intersectional frameworks.”<sup>77</sup> Through its exhibitions, artist-in-residence programs, a Feminist Incubator Program and annual “Badass Art Woman Awards”, PES supports artists in the margins whose work has, “social impact and activism; and to initiate conversations that engage issues of marginality, intersectionality, and paradigmatic cultural shifts.”<sup>78</sup> Like NewBridge, PES is called to be an active advocate for social justice within its community and beyond, with efforts like offering free, downloadable “Abortion Is Normal” posters for the campaign for reproductive freedom in the US. In tandem with the artists that they engage and present, PES’ shifting mission implies a response to timely cultural shifts and their context in the diverse Newark/Tri-State area.

### *Decolonising the Archive*

The final speaker, Connie Bell, is a UK based cultural producer who co-founded Decolonising the Archive, a predominantly web-based project that endeavors to build and enliven a Pan-African Archive. Envisioning the archive as an active space, DTA asks, “What does the Pan-African archive look like? Sound Like? Feel like? Where does it begin and where are its limits? How is the archive expressed within our own cultural frameworks?”<sup>79</sup> These core organizational questions speak not only to the open-ended rather than declarative ethos of their mission, but of hooks’ notion of “revisionist” work like engaging with archives. Never objective or comprehensive, but widely accepted as such, archives are an important site for marginalized and oppressed communities to reclaim and recast histories, and exercise agency over future narratives. DTA’s mission continues, “We cannot decolonise what was never ours to begin with – but we can always create. When we face the past we understand the present. In understanding the present, we shape our future.”<sup>80</sup> They practice this work using a methodology of selecting, sampling, sharing by producing radio programs, podcasts, and featuring artists on their online “DTA Space” platform. Through conversations with living community elders, experts and local community (generally African Diasporic community in London, but not exclusively), DTA uses the archive as a space to document and (re)write histories, presents, and futures that were previously intentionally undocumented and unwritten. This orientation not only to the past, but the present and future of the Pan-African community signals a sort of archival “liberation” from the margins.

The panelists reflected on the issue of how to sustain a curatorial practice in the margins—the context of which defines marginality differently for each. While sustainability has varying definitions, the speakers touched on the financial aspect and continued social impact and relevance of their curatorial work. While Fairweather noted the success of the artist-led Programme Committee in decentralizing curatorial authority within NewBridge, she pointed out that the organization’s minimal funding (one of the lowest funded NP in the UK),

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<sup>77</sup> Project for Empty Space, “Mission,” Project for Empty Space, n.d., <https://www.projectforemptyspace.org/mission>.

<sup>78</sup> Project for Empty Space, “Mission,” Project for Empty Space, n.d., <https://www.projectforemptyspace.org/mission>.

<sup>79</sup> “Decolonising the Archive (DTA),” Decolonising The Archive (DTA), accessed May 15, 2022, <https://www.decolonisingthearchive.com/>.

<sup>80</sup> “Decolonising the Archive (DTA)”.

imposed limitations on what programs could be realized annually.<sup>81</sup> Concurring, Jasmine Wahi posed questions about, “pivoting from a place of scarcity to abundance” when producing projects in and for the margins.<sup>82</sup> While no concrete solutions could be offered, the speakers’ responses exposed the limitations of the curator’s role in solving systemic issues like financial sustainability. They could, however, posit that to maintain social relevance and impact, curators and organizations needed committed dialogue with the community and locations (or events) rooted in the community that they serve. Coalescing ideas from Minh-ha and Anzaldúa, these community-based approaches to curatorial “tale telling” survive by positioning at the “crossroads”.

#### *Moderator/Speaker Biographies*<sup>83</sup>

Beatriz Lobo Britto (b. Brazil, 1994) is a curator and researcher. Currently working as the Curator for the Institute of International Visual Arts – iniva, and Exhibition Curator for ÚNA Festival (art and ecology platform facilitating exchanges between Scottish & Gaelic culture in the UK and Indigenous Peoples & climate activists in Latin America).

Niomi Fairweather recently joined BALTIC as Curator (Local) in November 2021, having previously spent three years as Programme Director at The NewBridge Project. Her practice imagines alternative modes of commissioning and creates platforms and opportunities for emerging and early career artists in the North East, England. Niomi has curatorial experience from large organizations and artist-run initiatives and synergises these insights to cultivate environments of experimentation, collaboration, enterprise, and ambition. Niomi uses innovative programming to foster links with local communities and nurture networks of dialogue amongst a plurality of voices and perspectives.

Jasmine Wahi is a multi-hyphenate cultural worker. She is the Founder and Co-Director of Project for Empty Space, woman-run, femme-powered, People of the Global Majority/BIPOC, Queer, and unapologetically radical organization. Ms. Wahi’s practice predominantly focuses on issues of femme empowerment, complicating binary structures within social discourses, and exploring multipositional cultural identities through the lens of intersectional feminism.

Connie Bell's vision is to play her part in the welfare of futurity and self-healing for people of African descent. Bell is one of the founding members of Decolonising The Archive. As a Consultant, Memory Worker and Cultural Producer her work explores decolonial methodologies, memory as technology.

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<sup>81</sup> Connie Bell, and Beatriz Lobo Britto, Niomi Fairweather, Jasmine Wahi, “Decentralizing the Curatorial” (panel, Association of Art Museum Curators Conference, New York, NY, May 2, 2022).

<sup>82</sup> Bell, et al, “Decentralizing the Curatorial.”

<sup>83</sup> “Annual Meeting: Schedule in Brief,” AAMC (Association of Art Museum Curators, 2022), [https://www.artcurators.org/page/Annual\\_Meeting#Schedule%20in%20Brief](https://www.artcurators.org/page/Annual_Meeting#Schedule%20in%20Brief).

## Chapter 4: Discussion and Conclusion

We began this research with questions about the relevance and viability of enunciating and practicing within decentralized spaces, like the margins, today. It is not just a question of if marginality still exists today—myriad global events within and outside of the artistic realm prove that it absolutely does—but what sorts of artistic and creative practices exist there today? What are they accomplishing? For whom? And how do they sustain themselves? Acknowledging the legacies of colonialism, slavery, world war and religious/racial/ethnic persecution are such that their traces can never be erased. Instead of examining how art practices may attempt to completely dismantle binary notions of center/periphery, we chose to explore how artists and curators use the margins as spaces to establish other centers and other peripheries that can shift based on context. Rather than attempting to abolish the center, these practitioners reify and place value on the creative outputs and knowledge emanating from the margins, and foster their mobility between central and marginal positions as “tale-tellers”.

The importance of language as a battleground, as stated in hooks' essay, surfaces at multiple points throughout this paper in our theoretical examples, case studies and exhibition description. As spaces of articulation and action, language (in the margins) is a potent site for counter-hegemonic strategies. For Minh-ha, Tsing and Anzaldúa, the use of non-English and *mestiza* language, co-option of hegemonic rhetoric, and expression of auto-biographical narratives serve as sites of resistance, decolonial strategy and personal agency. We see this in practice with Nsenga Knight's “X Speaks”, the most recent Diaspora Pavilion with Shiraz Bayjoo, Nicolas Faubert and Siyabonga Mthembuand, Larissa Sansour's work in our forthcoming exhibition, as well as Connie Bell's efforts with Decolonise the Archive.

From our case studies and our exhibition, we have seen that projects and work in the margins are generally interdisciplinary, suggesting the need for multiple formats to express and respond to the diversity of experiences shown. Language still remains a place of struggle, as artists continue to grapple with the question of margin and center. It was integral for us to evaluate how selected case studies address and normalize communicating in non-English language, while holding space for emotional, political and social discourses that emerge from these interactions.

### 4.1 Shifting Margins: Between Mobile Practices and Authorized Marginality

Through our explorations of key texts by critical writers like bell hooks, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Anna Tsing and Gloria Anzaldúa, we could conceptualize varying definitions and formations of margins, borderlands, and elsewhere, all decentralized spaces, from historical perspectives. These sites can be inherently flexible, which artists today use to their advantage. Establishing a mobile practice in the margins means artists exercise a type of unlocatability that resists full definition and control. We see this play out through nomadic practices, with Project for Empty Space and Decolonize the Archive (digitally), temporary events, with X Speaks and the Diaspora Pavilions in Venice, or within the content of their work, as with Quynh Dong and Edison Peñafiel's work in our forthcoming exhibition.

In recent years, art institutions have embraced marginal practices, with limitations. In some cases, marginalized artists have been welcomed in historical pavilions, like at the Venice Biennale (Romani artist Małgorzata Mirga-Tas for Poland in 2022), or sanctioned



satellite events like the Diaspora Pavilion (2017/2022). However, the biennale's traditionally single-artist format prevents a multifaceted conversation. Countering this, efforts to foster solidarity and multiplicity through collective curating and dialogue, as with ruangrupa's documenta fifteen, become unfortunately reduced to conversations of who is more oppressed/privileged? Whose margins matter the most? As we see in ruangrupa's case, their efforts to engage in earnest, sometimes contentious, dialogue is sabotaged by governmental bodies and racist local/national communities. The cancellation and critique of ruangrupa's panel discussion "We Need to Talk! Art - Freedom - Solidarity" reveals the extent to which the "invisible center" of power can be exposed before being silenced (recalling Ferguson).

We also see how, in recent events, marginal practices that germinate with the center can fall back into the "authorized marginality" that Minh-ha discusses, where, "difference they offer proves to be locatable and evaluable within the ruling norms." Following the criticism from Josef Schuster, the president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, over the makeup of the forum led to participants withdrawing from the panel. This coerced the organizers to suspend the highly anticipated forum that was set up in response to accusations of antisemitism directed at participants in documenta fifteen. In a carefully put together open letter "*Antisemitism Accusations against documenta: A Scandal about a Rumor*" published earlier this month in *Berliner Zeitung* (German) and *e-flux Notes* (English), ruangrupa note, "After intensive discussions with the forum participants, it became clear that the accusations made against documenta fifteen and the forum itself currently render a free and productive discussion impossible." Bringing us back to Minh-ha's concept of "authorized marginality" and how far does the center "allow" the margin to push their narrative without becoming an imminent threat to the center? Is ruangrupa's concept of Lumbung only acceptable as long as it remains within the limits of what the center deems as an interesting, exotic concept to further their narrow understanding of diversity and inclusion? Or is there room for these ideas to seep through the peripheries to engage in a more robust and engaging discussion around the West's long-standing history of snubbing narratives of resilience and freedom from the Global South at major art exhibitions and festivals? Why has the reaction towards the resignation of curator and artists of the Russian Pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale (2022) following Russian aggression against Ukraine been of support and solidarity, but ruangrupa continue to grapple with accusations of antisemitism for inviting Palestinian collective The Question of Funding and Khalil Sakakini Center to a German institution, when the Khalil Sakakini Center, named after a progressive Palestinian educator of the first half of the twentieth century, continues to host several regular cultural programming organized by German institutions such as the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation.

As we discuss our hopes and desires from this research paper and the subsequent exhibition at the OnCurating Project Space later this year, we hear the news of New York and Ramallah-based artists Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou Rahme's first solo exhibition in Switzerland at the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst. Using sound- and image-based multi-channel installations and live performances, Abbas and Abou-Rahme's projects revolve around witnessing, archiving, and exhibiting recordings of violence and loss. Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst co-commissioned their ongoing body of work *May amnesia never kiss us on the mouth* which sees the artist "assemble a large body of knowledge: the material captures everyday people singing, dancing, performing, and protesting in Palestine,

Syria and Iraq.”<sup>84</sup> Is there hope or is it another doomed project? Are terms and expressions such as restitution of looted objects, postcolonial and decolonial only keywords that Western institutions use to justify new ways of presenting works in their collection or is there conscious effort being done to acknowledge and repair the damage? Within these uncertainties, how does one continue to navigate these spaces from the margins? Is the entire onus on the margin or is the center also going to move a bit to accommodate a more robust discussion?

## 4.2 Utopia Meets Realities

Margins are vast, yet too often artists and organizations existing in the margins are met with structural resistance, with limitations on funding because of locality, diasporic identities and nationalistic quotas for grant support. Off-spaces OnCurating and NewBridge Project exist as alternatives to hegemonic art institutions, but have noted the difficulties sustaining programmatic goals when confronted with lack of funding. We personally have experienced difficulty raising funds for our MAS exhibition due to insufficient artists of South Asian descent (ASAP), from Swiss partner countries of international development cooperation (SüdKulturFonds), or of Swiss nationality (ProHelvetia) nationality participating in the exhibition. In the case of SüdKulturFonds, while many of the artists were from funded countries many were diasporic, and no longer residing in those countries, therefore could not qualify. While dedicated efforts to giving financial support to artists from marginalized or underrecognized communities is valuable, it appears that the narrow parameters of funding initiatives inadvertently limit the possibility of exhibitions and programs that explore the multiplicity of voices that exist in the margin.

Nevertheless, we persist and continue to find alternative economic structures that can resist physical and geographical boundaries working against diasporic communities. Thinking about our exhibition space at OnCurating, we broaden the discussion from how artists born or living in the margins can rise up and utilize the margin as a place of resistance to binary politics of representation, but also to think about how to decentralize and unlearn inclinations toward hierarchy, especially in curatorial practice. Encountering difficulties with conventional funding sources has prompted us to rethink exhibition strategies and formats.

As both an imaginative and dialogic site, the exhibition can embody both a utopian space and lived reality for artists and practitioners involved. It is a space for reimagining narratives, reifying experiences and affirming truths, which recognizes that these stories are plural and possibly conflicting. Our goal is to hold space for these realities to exist without enforcing borders around narrative, experience or nationality—to be a crossroads, or perhaps, liberators.

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<sup>84</sup> “Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abu-Rahme: May amnesia never kiss us on the mouth”, Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, accessed May 16, 2022, <https://migrosmuseum.ch/en/exhibitions/basel-abbas-ruanne-abou-rahme>

## Chapter 5: Attachments

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## 5.2: Images

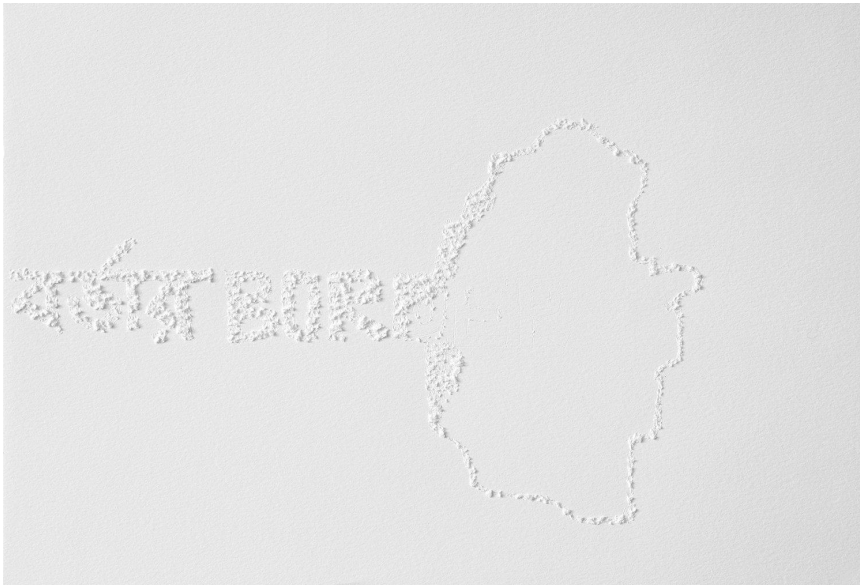


Figure 1: Ishita Chakraborty, *Zwischen/Between*, Installation view at Jacobs Museum (2017); Detail of *Zwischen/Between* (2017).



Figure 2: Quynh Dong, *Photo Studio* (2008), photo series; *Hairwash* (2008), video and performance, 7 min 48 sec.



Figure 3: Alia Farid, *At the Time of the Ebb*, 2019, video loop, stereo, master 4K, 21 minutes. Installation view: Sharjah Biennial 14: 'Leaving the Echo Chamber'. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Imane Farès, Paris. Commissioned by Sharjah Art Foundation.



Figure 4: Monika Emmanuelle Kazi, *homeview 1*, Photo: Conradin Frei. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Philipp Zollinger.



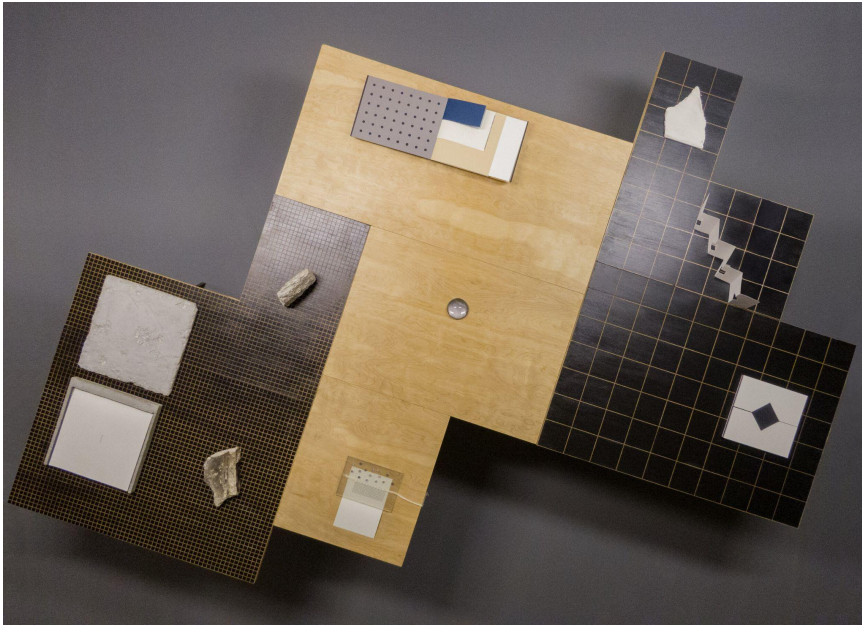


Figure 5: Amanda Linares, *Between Islands and Peninsulas*, 2021. Photo by Pedro Wazzan. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 6: Yucef Merhi, *Soulless Security*, 2017, Intercepted data on paper, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 7: Edison Peñafiel, *Érase una vez [Once upon a time]*, 2021, Archival pigment print, 63 x 42 inches. Courtesy of the artist



Figure 8: Larissa Sansour, *Soup Over Bethlehem*, 2006, film, 9 minutes. Courtesy of the artist.

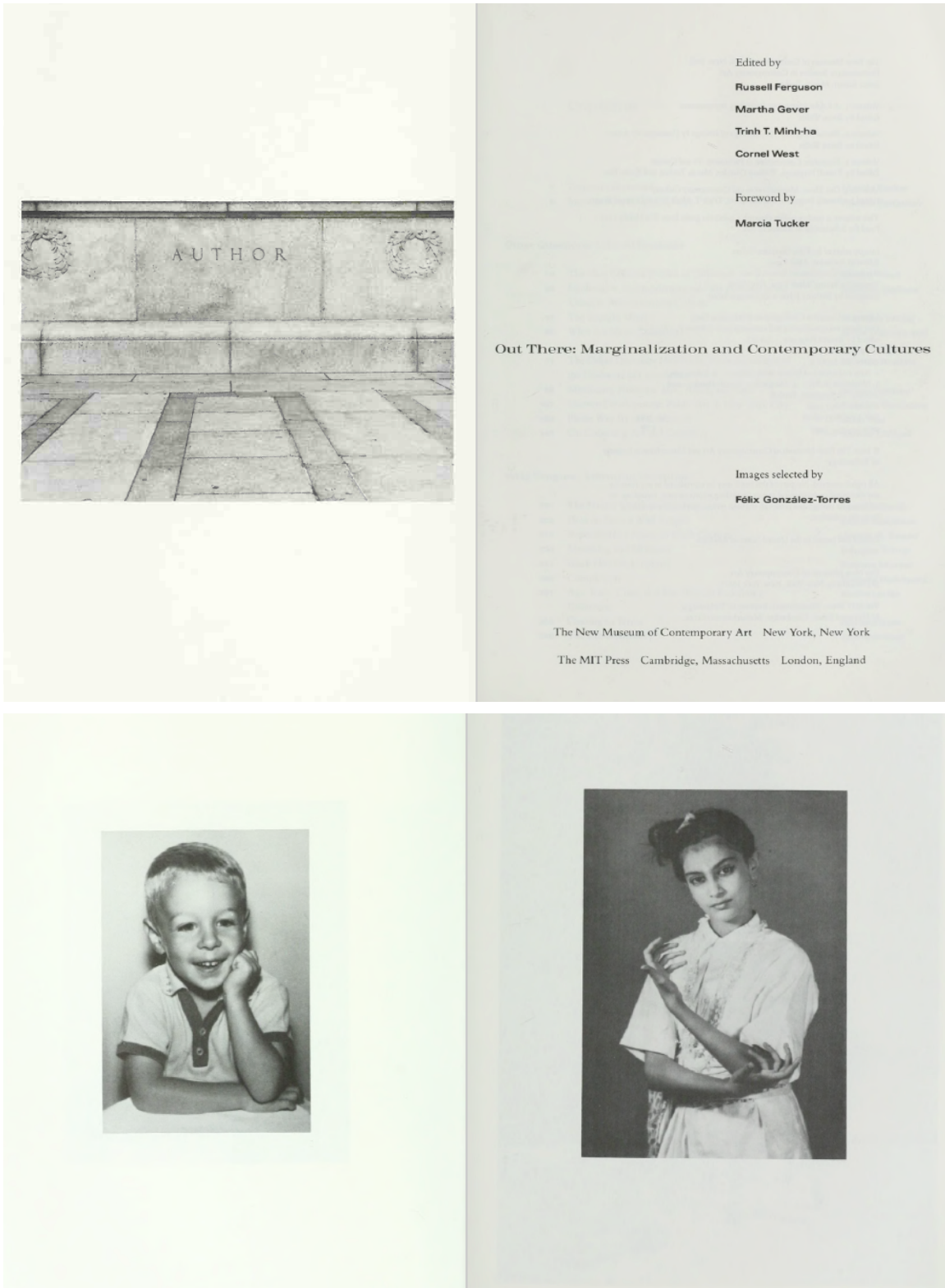


Figure 9: Félix González-Torres, “Untitled” (*I Think I Know Who You Are*), 1990, found images; Childhood images of authors selected and arranged by Félix González-Torres. From *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*.

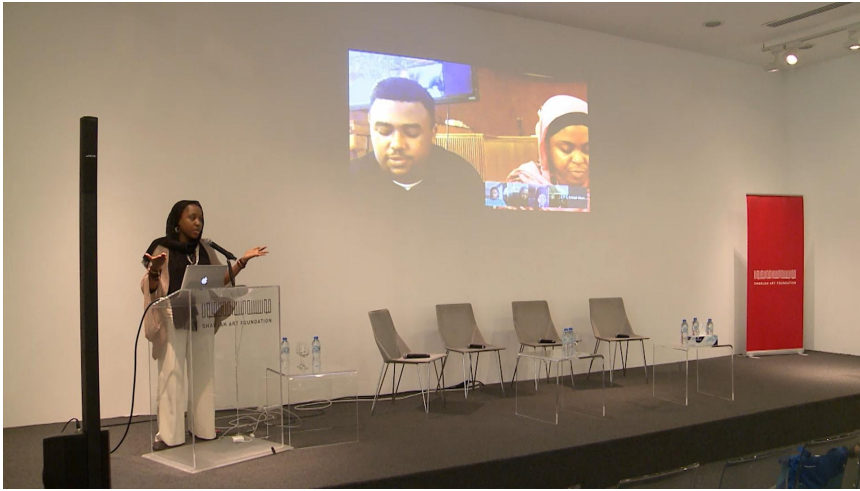


Figure 10: *X Speaks: Performing history, moving from margin to center and creating an autonomous Black American Muslim performance (cyber)space* at Sharjah Art Foundation's March Meeting 2016: Education, Engagement, and Participation.



Figure 11: Khadija Saye, *Dwelling: in this space we breathe*, wet plate collodion tintypes, 25 x 20 cm, installation view at Diaspora Pavilion, Venice (2017).



Figure 12: Yinka Shonibare, *The British Library*, 2017, Hardback books, Dutch wax printed cotton textile, gold foiled names, four wooden chairs, four iPads, headphones, interactive Application and antique wind-up clock, installation view at Diaspora Pavilion, Venice (2017).



Figure 13: Shiraz Bayjoo in collaboration with Nicolas Faubert and Siyabonga Mthembu, performance view of Diaspora Pavilion, Venice (2022).



Figure 14: “For Solidarity Social” at NewBridge Project (2021).



Figure 14: Tehniyet Masood, *Project For Empty Space*, 2010, installation views from inaugural Project for Empty Space (2010).

# PRESS PLAY:



# LIVING THE ARCHIVE.

Figure 14: Screenshot of web-based radio programming on Decolonizing the Archive (2022).



Figure 15: ruangrupa, “We Need to Talk”, 2022, graphic from @documentafifteen social media.