



PROJECT UNSUNG

Volume 1
2021

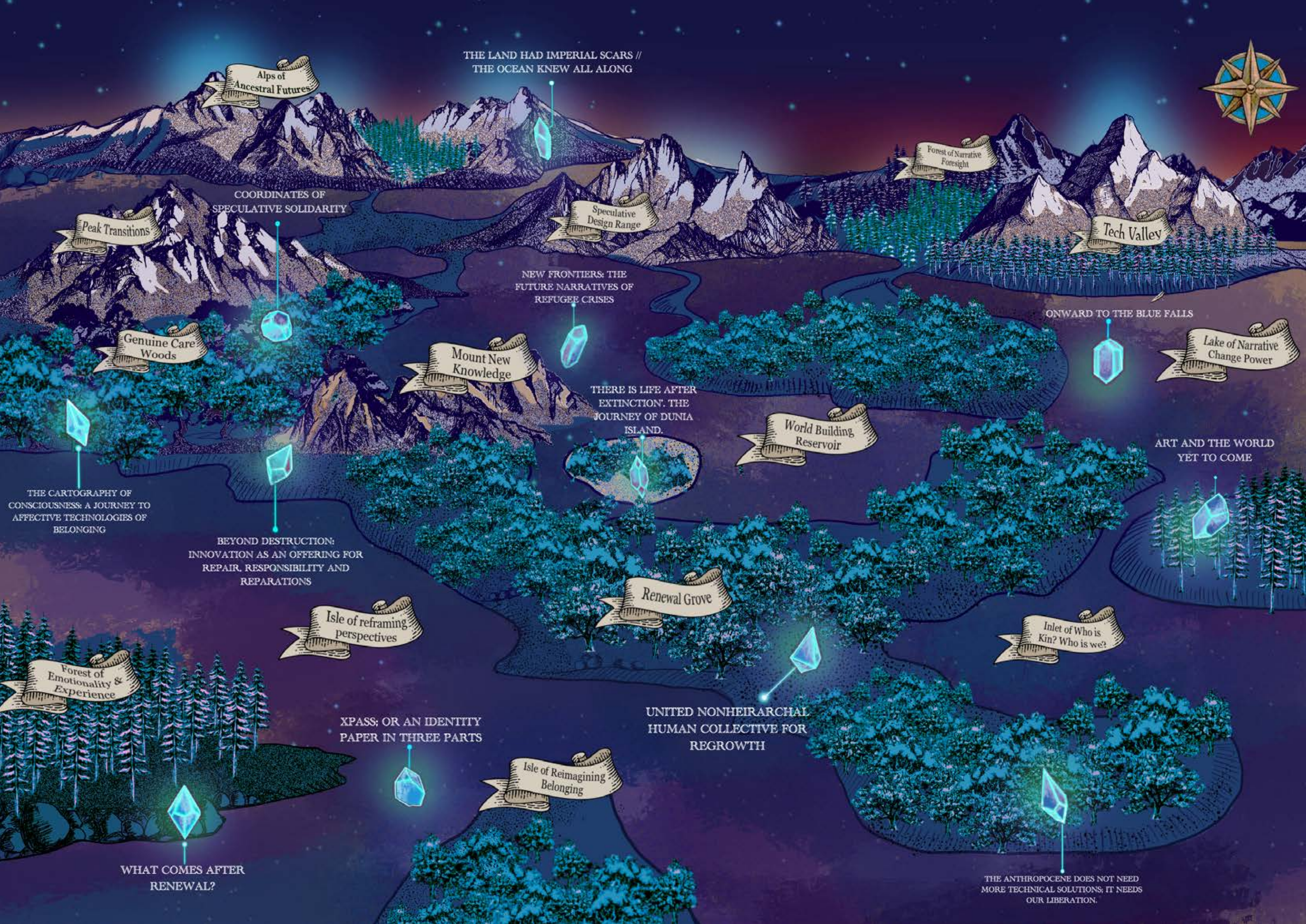
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THE LAND HAD IMPERIAL SCARS //
THE OCEAN KNEW ALL ALONG

Alps of
Ancestral Futures

Forest of Narrative
Foresight

Tech Valley

Speculative
Design Range

COORDINATES OF
SPECULATIVE SOLIDARITY

Peak Transitions

NEW FRONTIERS: THE
FUTURE NARRATIVES OF
REFUGEE CRISES

ONWARD TO THE BLUE FALLS

Lake of Narrative
Change Power

Mount New
Knowledge

THERE IS LIFE AFTER
EXTINCTION. THE
JOURNEY OF DUNIA
ISLAND.

World Building
Reservoir

ART AND THE WORLD
YET TO COME

THE CARTOGRAPHY OF
CONSCIOUSNESS: A JOURNEY TO
AFFECTIVE TECHNOLOGIES OF
BELONGING

BEYOND DESTRUCTION:
INNOVATION AS AN OFFERING FOR
REPAIR, RESPONSIBILITY AND
REPARATIONS

Isle of reframing
perspectives

Renewal Grove

Inlet of Who is
Kin? Who is we?

Forest of
Emotionality &
Experience

XPASS; OR AN IDENTITY
PAPER IN THREE PARTS

UNITED NONHEIRARCHAL
HUMAN COLLECTIVE FOR
REGROWTH

Isle of Reimagining
Belonging

WHAT COMES AFTER
RENEWAL?

THE ANTHROPOCENE DOES NOT NEED
MORE TECHNICAL SOLUTIONS; IT NEEDS
OUR LIBERATION.

CREATIVE COLLABORATORS

PROJECT UNSUNG, VOLUME 1, 2021

Barbara Adams

Barbara Adams is a sociologist whose interdisciplinary research looks at how knowledge is produced and political action is initiated through art and design projects. Barbara co-edited the book *Design as Future-Making* and is co-editor in chief of the journal *Design and Culture*. She is Assistant Professor of Design and Social Justice at Parsons School of Design and was previously a postdoctoral fellow at Wesleyan University.

Marion Atieno

Marion Atieno is an award-winning strategist and storyteller working to restore humanity's relationship with nature. She is currently the Global Strategist at WWF, leading the organisation's transformation to inclusive conservation. In 2021, Marion will launch *Black Earth* podcast to celebrate nature and the inspirational Black women addressing the environmental crisis. Marion has received numerous awards, including a WWF Legend Award for Integrity and 'Future Leader of International Co-operation and Development' by the European Commission. She's a University of Oxford alumna graduating in Global Governance and Diplomacy. Born in Nairobi, Kenya, Marion lives and loves in South London, UK.

Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay

Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay is Associate Professor in Global Culture Studies at the University of Oslo, Norway. He leads the international research group CoFUTURES. Chattopadhyay is the leader (PI) of two major research projects funded by the European and Norwegian Research Councils, which explore contemporary global futurisms movements from a transmedial perspective, including literature, film, visual arts, and games. Chattopadhyay is the recipient of numerous awards and prizes, including the World Fantasy Award (2020), the Johannes H Berg Memorial Prize (2019), the Foundation Essay Prize (2017), and the Strange Horizons Readers' Poll Award (2013).

Shanice Da Costa

Shanice is an artist and training environmental scientist. Having South Asian heritage and living as an immigrant in both UAE and Germany, she has a deep appreciation

for multicultural belonging (and multicultural cuisine). Professionally, she has an interest in intersectional climate justice and ecological art, and how the two are being addressed in climate change communication. She has been supporting the Innovation service on both design and environmental conversations since December 2020.

María Faciolince

María Faciolince is a Colombian-Curaçaoan communicator, anthropologist, ecofeminist activist and creative mind. Her current projects with Oxfam GB and Institute for Climate and Sustainable Cities (ICSC), as well as her community work from the Latin American diaspora in Spain, are guided by the need to reimagine and revolutionize narratives around justice and 'development'. In addition to her work in NGO and movement spaces, she has worked as a researcher with a focus on socio-environmental conflicts, displacement, and the intersections between gender and climate justice with the EJAtlas team at the Institute of Environmental Science and Technology and the Center for Latin American Research and Documentation at the University of Amsterdam.

Cian McAlone

Cian McAlone is Assistant Innovation Officer at the UN Refugee Agency, supporting the Innovation Service's Strategic Communications and Design portfolio. He is interested in the role of communication, narrative, and organizational strategy in serving the political, social and economic concerns of people forced to flee.

Ariana Monteiro

Brazilian cliché, Ariana Monteiro loves samba, soccer, and Carnaval. Her goal is to confuse and deconstruct certainties about emergent technologies, social justice, and human rights through future thinking methodologies. While also showcasing cultures, creativity, and bits of knowledge produced in the Global South.

Iz Nettare

Iz is a designer and sculptor in their second year of the MFA Design & Technology program at Parsons School of Design. Their work primarily explores material, identity, and ecology.

Hansel Obando

Hansel Obando is a Colombian collage artist living and working in Medellín, Colombia. His work focuses on the creation of what he describes as "microuniverses". Since 2015 he has devoted his work to analog and digital collage, in which he questions our consumerism of natural resources and advocates for the protection of the most vulnerable communities such as Colombia's Indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations. He is currently working on a body of work discussing cosmogony, storytelling and oral histories of Colombia's Indigenous peoples.

Deji Bryce Olukotun

Deji Bryce Olukotun is the author of two novels and his fiction has appeared in seven different book collections, including *Best American Science Fiction and Fantasy 2020* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt). His novel *After the Flare* won the 2018 Philip K. Dick special citation, and was chosen as one of the best books of 2017 by *The Guardian*, *The Washington Post*, *Syfy.com*, *Tor.com*, *Kirkus Reviews*, among others. He currently works for the audio technology company Sonos and he is a Future Tense Fellow at New America.

Jessica Olson

Jessica Olson (she/her) describes herself as a queer climate feminist. Involved in feminist organizing in UN climate processes since 2012, Jessica's work ranges from publishing a report on gender, climate, and human mobility dynamics with UN women and Zines with the Young Feminist For Climate Justice Coalition in her professional capacity at the Sierra Club, to facilitating gender justice and anti-racism workshops across the climate movement. Jessica is a dual-degree master's candidate at the University of Texas at Austin's LBJ School of Public Affairs and Center for Women & Gender Studies studying the connections between gender, race, disability, queerness, climate change, and migration/displacement.

Lauren Parater

Lauren Parater leads strategic communication and storytelling initiatives at the UN Refugee Agency's Innovation Service. Her current professional and personal explorations focus on the intersections of narrative change, displacement, climate justice, social innovation and design.

She has spent her career exploring how creativity and radical imagination can be used to communicate complex issues and spur alternative ways of seeing and being in the world. An immigrant in Switzerland, she can be found in the mountains or slowly working her way through the stack of books she bought at the beginning of the pandemic.

Jane Pirone

Jane Pirone is an Associate Professor of Design Ecologies at Parsons School of Design where they served as Dean of the School of Design Strategies from 2015-2019 and as Director of the Communication Design program from 2006-2011. Jane's creative and transdisciplinary practice engages with living systems, storytelling, participatory futures, and new technologies from critical, queer and post-human perspectives.

Vidushi Yadav

Vidushi Yadav is a South Asian young feminist activist, illustrator and designer. Her work revolves around gender justice, South Asian identity, access and rights-based content. She has been a communication and design consultant at multiple women rights organisations like FRIDA Fund, Urgent Action Fund and AWID. She works from her quaint studio in Jaipur, India with her team that includes disability rights activists, women of colour and queer folks passionate about making the world an inclusive place - one image at a time.

Leah Zaidi

Leah Zaidi is an award-winning futurist and worldbuilding expert who works with companies and countries to design their future. She is a Research Director at the Institute for the Future in Palo Alto, and the Founder of Multiverse Design, an art and design practice in Toronto. She specializes in strategic foresight, systems thinking, and science fiction. Leah is also an Associate Editor of the *World Futures Review* and is an International Advisor to Sitra Fund, the Finnish parliament's endowment for the future.

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Imagination is about articulating a desire for a better world, picturing a life beyond what you know, and understanding how we can use creative practices as part of building a better future. In the pursuit of building new worlds, others must be laid to rest, whilst constantly gesturing towards the interconnectedness of our pasts, presents, and futures.

Our seed of imagination at the UN Refugee Agency’s Innovation Service has manifested in Project Unsung. Project Unsung is an initiative to nurture the narratives, the stories, the relationships, and the values that we believe are required for the future of humanitarian work. Project Unsung is also our compost pile, it is where we layer different ways of being, different creative forms and mediums, different ways of seeing the world, and discovering where we can find connections among them to inform our work.

Within Project Unsung, we have used storytelling, design, and speculation to help us map a constellation of how our work might shift in the face of more complex and overlapping crises whilst intentionally working towards more just futures.

In the first iteration of this project, we focused on the theme of renewal, locating the initial ideas for possible and renewed understandings of our work in the ashes of a global pandemic, accelerating ecological loss and displacement, grasping for narratives to help us make meaning of the world we were encountering. We understood deeply that stories were one lens for sensemaking across this novel landscape and that they could help us better investigate patterns, cohere ideas, transform our worldviews and imagine something different.

“Displacement is a memory of violence that makes the future history to come.”

As you wind your way through the memories, histories, and futures in Project Unsung, the threads of analysis and imagination unveil new narratives for humanitarian action. The narrative visions supplant the myths of the benevolent saviour and the rational hero, to call for solidaristic relationships rooted in belonging and justice.

For this much is true: the stories we tell of humanitarian work have the imprint of history’s unravelling since the Second World War. Histories of colonialism and oppression, environmental exploitation and technological development manifest in subtle but irrefutable ways. The act of imagination presents a rupture with these realities, where tomorrow is conjured out of the speculation of today.

In Project Unsung, the stories of humanitarianism seek new origins. Through reconciliation with nature, through principles of plurality, renewal, and intergenerational responsibility, innovation opens into a fresh expanse. Poetry poses questions to whiteness. Science fiction elevates indigenous technologies. Essays account for our interdependence. The art and the artefacts have the unsung visions start to sing.

In navigating the work of this project, the reader should expect more questions than commands, more possibilities than policies. The collaborators demonstrate that our world is constantly in the making, and, as you return to your own place of action, we hope that you take this spirit of renewal with you. We hope you find the story of the world you wish to be.

Project Unsung is a beginning, a seed that will constantly need to be revisited, revalued, deconstructed, and challenged to understand if the assumptions and narratives it operates within make sense. Situated at this point, we know it has brought a precise compass to themes we need to continue to navigate in relation to futures we’re working towards, specifically: the role of power, belonging and the ecological crisis in the context of our work.

Ultimately, we believe that a new way of seeing the world can help us find a new way of valuing it. More than ever, we’re called to build something better, and this will require not only imagination but manifesting our desired futures into present practices. We welcome you to this invitation of possibility and imagining otherwise.

Lauren Parater and Cian McAlone
Co-editors, Project Unsung

LETTER ON THE ART DIRECTION

In the warm spring of 2021, amidst the heart of a pandemic, UNHCR’s Innovation Service explored the dimly lit edges of imagination and speculative storytelling. The Innovation Service refreshing dew also gathered hums of collaborating fireflies. These edges, defining what would become Project Unsung, reframed and reassessed so much of what was predefined and rarely questioned., As a representative firefly, I got to lead some of the visual language that interlocked fingers with some of the wonderful articles that sprouted from Unsung.

When I was first introduced to the collective, I was taken for what could only be described as an exploratory sailing adventure between these tiny islands that were created and overseen by the fireflies. Thus, the only logical way my heart could illustrate this journey was to draw a map (page 2) marked by lakes, isles, forests and mountain peaks, sprinkled with portals (as depicted by the crystals) to the different worlds created by Unsung’s fireflies. This map marked the central theme for the rest of the visuals. Reminiscent of the stories we read in our childhood and representative of our unapologetic imagination, the artwork that you’ll find in the nooks of this collective touches the fabrics of worldbuilding, belonging, loss, but also justice and hope.

The art direction of the publication however did not always touch upon some of the fantasy and science fiction imagery that dresses the final version. In the beginning, we assumed Unsung would be a little seedling, a small zine by a small group of creatives bringing their stories to perhaps a smaller audience. The design desire seemed to resonate with diary-keeping and scrapbooking, very personal and rich in individual depth. But just as marigolds bloom swiftly when given space and protection, so did Unsung bloom, rewinding the edges faster than the golden flowers

could a mountain. And so, the imagery evolved. Within the lines that define some of the illustrations, you will see fleeting themes of magical nature, of spaces between humans beings and within human beings, of interdimensional relationships and sometimes simply of clouds and birds (what better way to illustrate hope than to draw the things we see when we keep our eyes on the horizon). But there are two sides to every coin, and when we flip this one, you will also find vulnerability, grief and rupture. As fault lines are to our planet, so is deconstruction to growth, and the art is meant to reflect just that.

From fiction to nonfiction, from poetry to 3D provocations of unravelling, from collages to meditative drawings, imagination reveals itself in a multitude of forms, and the visuals for Unsung only scratch the surface on all of the contributing fireflies’ visions. My own vision for this edition is to invite you to see Unsung as a kaleidoscope that accesses multiple dimensions of discontinuity, histories and futures. To see and unsee, and to not just reimagine bridges but to reimagine staying put. Rupture, maintenance and repairing are required in the act of speculation, and art allows us to manifest these imagined paths. I hope you take the work curated here as a primer into the possibilities we believe can be tapped into if you’ll take inspiration from the lit pathways our fireflies drew on the edge of the present world.

Shanice Da Costa
Art Director, Project Unsung

THERE IS LIFE AFTER EXTINCTION

The journey of Dunia Island

What is our responsibility to the current and future generations of people and ecosystems experiencing ecosystem collapse? Members of Dunia Island and UNHCR's Unit for Intergenerational Responsibility reflect on their 14-year journey together.

12 January 2047

Upon their appointments as UNHCR Joint High Commissioners in 2030, Nyumba Mwendo and Fèpati Lakay, set up a unit on Intergenerational Responsibility. The Intergenerational Responsibility Unit works with communities at risk of extinction to steward this loss and make decisions about their futures.

“For some communities, extinction is inevitable,” says Lakay, “but it doesn’t have to be the end. We support communities to process the final effects of slow-onset environmental change that would lead to uninhabitable places such as Dunia island. Rather than wait until the island was 75 percent underwater to respond, we support them as they live with and through extinction.”

In 2003, members of the blind community in Dunia island noted that the Longota bird arrived later in the year from their seasonal migration to a neighbouring country, Ngiboleng, 5,000 kilometres away. “Longota were important members of our community,” Mwendo explains. “They brought microbes to prepare the soil, the seed of life for our island. The birds taught us how to revere the sacred nature and cycles of our living scapes.”

Mwendo, who was born in Dunia Island in 2000, witnessed these intense changes in her childhood and teenage years. The sea was gradually rising, creeping inwards inch

by inch. The monsoon seasons became erratic, arriving suddenly and unexpectedly throughout the year. Perpros Choonara, who served as the Island’s Earth Steward from 2009-2021, reflects, “So many things were happening at once. So much tension and anger between us...we couldn’t really articulate what was happening to us and nothing we did made a real difference in stopping these changes.”

By 2027, Dunia Island had been identified as a location at high risk of extinction. Increasing sea level rise and acidic rainfall would mean that by 2050, the islanders could no longer live on the island. They were living in a future where life was no longer possible.

Mwendo believed humanitarians had a unique offering to support communities responding to the effects of environmental change with dignity. She reflects, “We {humanitarians} use multiple lenses to define ‘place’ in our work, for example, place as natural geography, place as political territory, and place as an evolving experience shaped by individual and collective relationships to a location. These lenses are important tools we can share with communities as they make decisions about how to live with and through extinction.”

UNHCR’s Intergenerational Responsibility (IR) Unit first approached the islanders in 2032. Remcy Gonzalez from the



Illustration: Shanice Da Costa, 2021

IR unit explains, “To some, it was unusually early for humanitarians to intervene but it was super late for us already considering that environmental change in Dunia Island had been going on for nearly 30 years. Displacement, as in the physical separation from place, can happen suddenly but in the context of environmental change, displacement happens over a longer period of time. Through protracted changes in a place, communities are forced to give up ways of being, living and relating with their environment and with each other. They are forced to leave a place over and over again long before they leave a place for the last time.”

“The other reason we went in early was to make time for building trust with the communities,” Gonzalez recalls, “Without trust, we could risk distracting from the work they wanted and needed.”

In 2033, following a community-led voting process, the citizens of Dunia Island agreed to begin a 14-year renewal process with the Unit to develop long-term responses to the extinction of the island.

At the early stages of the renewal process, there had been discussions about the relocation of the islanders and what that would look like. To many citizens, however, relocation was the last option. In the meantime, they wanted to continue to adjust to the changes happening on the island, by leveraging the science and spiritualities cultivated over two thousand years, incorporating emerging knowledge from multiple disciplines, creating new structures of community decision-making to make choices about how to allocate resources, and investing in psychosocial support to address the eco-grief arising from the losses in the island.

RESILIENCE AS JUSTICE

An important discovery in the renewal process was defining what resilience in the Anthropocene really meant. Perpros Choonara from Dunia Island reflects, “Resilience is not something you do when faced with adversity. Resilience is who you are when you know how to live with nature. As a community that belongs to nature, resilience was part of us. We knew how to prepare, respond and adapt to the changing nature of nature, and had done so for thousands of years. We had strong networks on the island and abroad, we constantly deepened our knowledge of the Earth, and built intricate and interdependent ways to sustain us and Earth. The changes we were seeing... what was happening to nature...it was not nature; it was injustice.”

The changes the islanders were experiencing were effects of decisions taking place far away from Dunia Island. The islanders’ efforts to respond to these effects were helpful in the short-term but not effective in addressing the root causes of the changes.

Resilience in the Anthropocene meant addressing the drivers of climate change and ecological loss as well as helping those impacted by the injustice of climate change and ecological loss.

So the IR unit started to work in coalitions to reduce the incentives for high carbon-emitting and polluting activities, especially focusing on industrialised forms of production, such as monoculture plantations. They advocated for a shift in subsidies and concessions in the global financial and trade systems that incentivised these types of activities.

The IR unit also acknowledged that formal recognition of climate forced displacement in international humanitarian law would be effective insofar as it helped increase accountability for the countries and actors contributing most to environmental loss.

This discovery and novel framing about resilience also led the IR unit to work with the islanders in challenging labels such as ‘climate refugees’ and ‘trapped populations.’ These terms masked the locus of responsibility for the drivers of environment-related displacement. People were not displaced by climate, they were displaced by policies and decisions that caused climate change, often as the people who least contributed to it.

In the words of Choonara, the Island’s former Earth Commissioner, who said at the 2021 UN Climate Change Conference, “People come in with development projects, conservation programmes, disaster risk projects, with the aim of trying to ‘save us from ourselves.’ We do not want to be rescued. We want the waters and the soil and the Longota birds back. We want ourselves back.”

Shedding light on the real dangerous work of environmental action has been another important aspect of changing narratives of environmental action. For many communities around the world, preserving the environment is dangerous work because they are challenging people and actors with a strong interest in extracting natural resources for economic and political profit. In response, the IR unit has leveraged its diplomatic influence to advocate for greater legal protection of the environmental human rights defen

-ders who work to protect and sustain the integrity of ecosystems and their communities.

FROM DIVERGENCE OF KNOWLEDGE TO DIVERSITY IN KNOWLEDGE

The violence of colonialism and the industrial revolution inherently shaped ideas of humanity’s relationship with the environment: that nature was an infinite resource, that it could be extracted and used to fuel the perpetual growth of capital and that nature was void of any intelligence. It was a composition of dead things, resources, that were useful in their ability to help generate more capital.

For Dunia islanders, they knew that biological life had deep intelligence and that their community was not separate from nature but part of the larger web of connection. If one bird species disappeared, all of life changed forever. They also knew that it was not about selecting the most ‘productive’ plants and leaving the rest. Ecosystems were not a composition of individual things; they were the greater whole.

Choonara says, “When we first started the renewal process with the IR unit, we realised that we saw the world in a unique way. When members of the IR unit initially spoke of our land, they meant ‘our’ in the possessive sense, as if we owned the land. When we spoke of our land, we meant ‘our’ in the inclusive sense, identifying ourselves (humans and nature) as belonging together, to each other, to the living scape. Through the renewal process, we were able to unpack these diverging ways of seeing and being with the natural world.”

This experience influenced UNHCR’s approach to environmental-related displacement by embedding genuine dialogue and intellectual humility as essential practices in the way they worked. The divergence in worldviews became an opportunity for UNHCR to challenge and unlearn attitudes of cultural superiority within the environmental movement that devalued ‘non-scientific’ knowledge of Earth.

Currently, 60 percent of the living scape in Dunia island is underwater, and nearly 70 percent of the human citizens of Dunia island have relocated to other countries. The time scale of this renewal process, 14 years, proved to be enough time needed to support communities to create opportunities for life during and after extinction while simultaneously enabling international action that facilitat-

ed dignity and justice-centred responses to the effects of environmental change.

Through the renewal process in Dunia island, humanitarian practice has evolved from harm mitigation to fostering dignity in extremely challenging contexts. “Our journey with the Dunia islanders,” says Gonzalez, has given our work a forward-moving direction. This is no longer humanitarian work, it’s renewal work.”



ART AND THE YET TO COME

*Art and imagination in the
response to social crises.*

*"It is the task of the fabulating function
to invent a people" -Gilles Deleuze*

THE WORK OF THE IMAGINATION

It may seem unremarkable to note that creativity and imagination are essential and active capacities in world- and future-making. Although this seems obvious, we do not ordinarily turn to artists to address our most pressing social, political, and economic issues. Yet, over the past two decades, there has been a reinvigoration of socially engaged practices¹ that have situated artists as agents² in social and political fields. These creative practitioners make provocative assumptions about the kinds of knowledge and action art might initiate. They respond to contemporary crises and address large-scale issues such as the persistence of poverty, the marginalisation of social groups, the institutionalisation of inequalities, the commodification of culture, and the ways in which legacies of imperial exploitation continue to shape our world.

By generating situations and creating environments that offer a miniature vision of the sort of society we desire, these art projects embrace an ethos of world- and future-making- that nurtures participation and public discourse. Employing collective and creative practices that draw from artistic traditions based in abstraction and performance (among others), these works go beyond the limitations of representing or elaborating the world as it is—proposing something otherwise.

What if institutions and entities outside the realm of art embraced and exercised these practices? What if the gen-

erative quality of creativity that reaches beyond the limits of the individual imagination was adopted as a virtue in solving social and political problems on an organizational scale? What if organizations and institutions focused on the emergent and exploratory capacities of artistic practice versus the neoliberal framing³ of creativity as innovative and entrepreneurial, as something calculable, result-driven, and clearly defined?

How might we build on the limited but rich history of embedding artists (or their approaches) in agencies and organizations? Mierle Laderman Ukeles, for example, has been an artist in residence at the New York City Sanitation Department since 1976. The artist John Latham called artists embedded in businesses and organizations "incidental persons," with "incidental" specifically indicating activities based in not knowing and without predetermined intentions. Latham initiated the Artist Placement Group⁴ that, during the mid-1970s, placed artists in industrial, governmental, and administrative settings ranging from the fishing industry to mental healthcare settings to environmental agencies. The artists were brought in not to solve problems, but to offer other ways of seeing and framing the work of these organizations, interrupting existing institutional codes and creating opportunities for developing new patterns of action.





Thomas Hirschhorn, Gramsci Monument, 2013, Forest Houses, New York, part of a series of monuments the artist describes as time-limited projects requiring presence, production, and collaboration. These temporary structures, built by people from the neighborhood in residential areas, serve as community hubs that prompt encounters and discussions related to philosophy, art, and life. Credit: author.

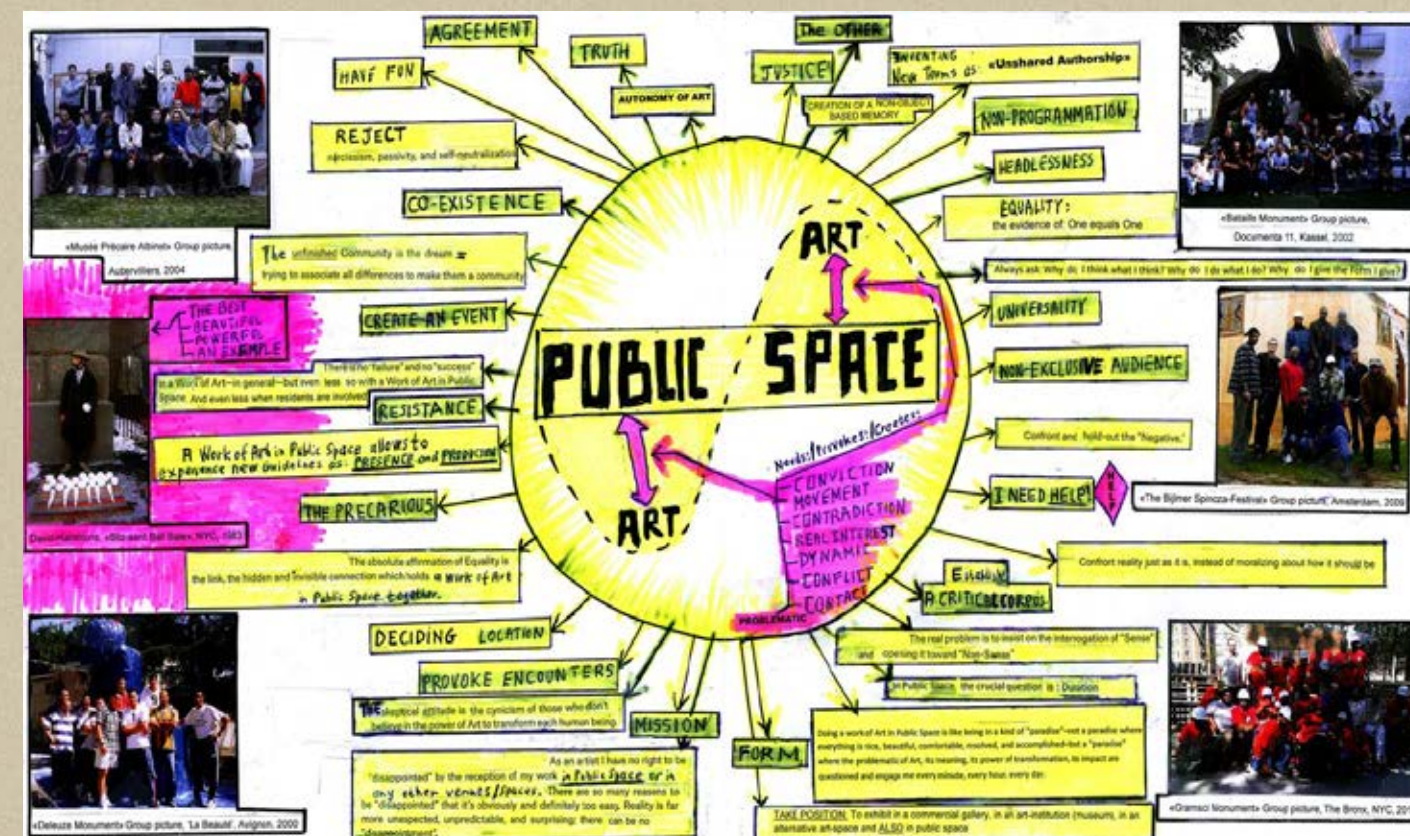
BEYOND THE GALLERY

Artists working in an expanded field that operates beyond the museum, the gallery, and object making, play a principal role in the ability of society to inaugurate new forms of itself. Taking people as their central medium, many contemporary artists anticipate changes in presence and create experimental scenarios where participants can rehearse alternate ways of being and acting. They recognize that art provides a forum for communication where people can come together to construct something otherwise—not only diagnosing the world in which we live, but

also acting as a dissenting force, offering perspectives and experiences that counter and exceed dominant social and cultural forms.

This type of socially-engaged art practice⁸ is propositional, speculative, and deeply tied to the sociological imagination. On its most basic level, the sociological imagination involves a disposition where we seek to understand the individual's relation to society by connecting personal biographies to larger, collective histories and individual troubles to broader social issues. According to C. Wright Mills, who coined the phrase "the sociological imagination,"⁹ this is a disposition that questions the given nature of society and actively pursues possibilities for change. Artists who engage the sociological imagination cultivate images and scenarios that explore what society might become, mobilizing people to recognize their power to collectively revise the terms that govern our lives. Societies and social groups imagine themselves as such through shared myths, stories, images, and other collective aesthetic significations. Because unity is established through these forms, artists are positioned as primary actors in creating the collective effervescence that promotes social cohesion.

As social sculpture¹⁰, artworks can engage public audiences and collaboratively propose other ways of living in the world and alternative means for addressing conflicts and power. This requires what anthropologist and globalization scholar Arjun Appadurai¹¹ calls “the work of the imagination”—a collective activity of imagining that can act as the impetus for social change, something he sets apart from the escapism of fantasy.



Thomas Hirschhorn, *Art and Public Space*, 2016. Credit: Tomas Hirschhorn⁷

When we frame creativity not as an individual capacity, but rather as “a socially distributed and participatory process,”¹² we underscore the potential of the sociological imagination to manifest change. This builds on Joseph Beuys’ claim¹³ that, “Every human being is an artist, a freedom being, called to participate in transforming and reshaping the conditions, thinking and structures that shape and inform our lives.” With this claim, Beuys moved creativity beyond the special realm of the art, not suggesting that everyone create artworks as we typically understand these, but arguing that creativity could manifest in all areas of specialization from farming to physics to politics to social work.

MAKING THE WORLD

Many artists leverage performative, experiential, and ambiguous scenarios, to develop transformative methods of social engagement. Invested in collaboration, these projects mobilize publics, foster communities, and build solidarity across difference. In creating material objects, such as stories, songs, public spaces, artworks—even policies and scientific experiments, meals and social events—we produce not just the artifacts themselves, but also the undeniable recognition that we share a world in common.



Ursula Biemann, Acoustic Ocean, 2018. Video still from the exhibition, Digital Dramatizations: Ecologies from the Future, 2019¹⁵. Biemann's larger body of work¹⁵ focuses on climate, border, and migration issues—their intersections and relations. Her work shows how we might move beyond the sociological imagination to one able to account for what Donna Haraway calls “nature-culture”¹⁶—the inseparability of nature and culture in the shaping of our world and its future. Credit: Ursula Biemann.

In materializing the world, artists, poets, historiographers, monument builders, writers, and other creative practitioners (including all of us, as *homo faber*¹⁷) provide a ‘home’ where we can gather to create a world and build a future. The public square, the library, the table, the museum, the garden, the sidewalk, and the neighborhood provide space where people can convene, collaborate, and create the worlds in which they would like to live.



16 Beaver¹⁸, Centre Parrhesia, Society of the Friends of the Virus, and the Friends to Come, Testing Assembling¹⁹, 2020-present. This virtual, weekly assembly, beginning in May 2020 initiated by Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri, brings together people from various locations and realms to explore how we might create the kinds of liberatory spaces we haven't yet experienced.

PROTOTYPING, PROPOSING, AND PERFORMING ALTERNATIVES

Because social practice-based art is not normally focused on objectives and ends but on experiences and means, these works can accommodate ambiguity, tension, and conflict in ways that other efforts that seek clear resolution or consensus cannot. Artists are given license and are encouraged to experiment and move beyond the given. There is a proliferation of projects in contemporary art that involve participants in scenarios and environments that are ambiguous. This is a particular sort of social practice—where artworks manage to inhabit a double status²⁰—where they are both a thing and a proposition of that thing.

Because the artwork is that which it purports to be, while also not that thing, it has the potential to destabilize norms and expectations. Being at a garage sale in the atrium of

New York's Museum of Modern Art is not the same as being at a tag sale in an actual garage. It is also not the same as most works showcased in the museum's atrium. Likewise, a Spanish language bookstore in a gallery that functions as both an art installation and an actual store, creates a sense of estrangement. As such, there is uncertainty in terms of how to act—"Are these things really for sale?" (yes); "Is this really art?" (also, yes). The ambiguity creates an odd situation where the terms of social interaction and behavior (even if only on a small scale) need to be explored through experimental means. The feeling that there are many possible ways to perform and interact can be simultaneously uncomfortable, festive, and mysterious. This alienation effect can prompt critical reflection and can produce novel modes of action.



Handing out fake copies of the Yes Men-produced New York Post on September 22, 2009 in downtown Manhattan. The paper focused on global warming and the contents were based entirely in fact and came in advance of a meeting at the United Nations focused on climate change. Because the newspaper itself was fictional, yet the contents were factual, it created a scenario where the debate about climate change might unfold under different terms. Credit: Chris Franko.



Martha Rosler's Meta-Monumental Garage Sale (2012)²¹ in the atrium at MoMA. Photo credit: MoMA

In some cases, these artistic efforts are exemplars of a prefigurative politics where they enact the very thing they (hope to) become. Prefigurative politics underscores the importance of transforming social relations as a precondition for broader structural change. Activist and social scientist Carl Boggs explains prefiguration²³ as the embodiment of "social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal." This is typically done by piloting, developing, and propagating counter-institutions and alternative procedures on a small scale, demonstrating through actual participation and social engagement, how things might be done differently.

In other cases, this form of artistic work introduces new variables, clearing space and inviting the not-yet-known and unanticipated. As operational, these works act as engines in making other possibilities sensible. They disrupt and unframe allowing other sorts of social performances to intrude and shake loose ossified practices and relationships, making room for different encounters and ways of behaving. These artworks play with codes, signs, expectations, and norms. They produce a sense of estrangement in proposing an imaginative framework that is similar to, yet differs from, reality. The ambiguity creates an odd situation where the terms of social interaction and behaviour need to be explored and reconsidered.

Without a clear script, people find it necessary to improvise. These projects are a bit like sociological breaching experiments²⁴ that intentionally violate social rules to understand how people will react and recalibrate. Sociologist and ethnomethodologist Harold Garfinkel made the



Pablo Helguera's Librería Donceles²², installation view (2015). Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle. Photo credit: Jonathan Vanderweil

case that disrupting everyday, expected activities—things like standing 'backwards' in an elevator—allows us to see how society maintains social norms and resists social change. The artistic realm affords a measure of liberation to breach norms and experiment. Displacing and decentring ways we would normally act in a given situation invites alternatives and can also solicit participation from people who might normally not be included. Broadening modes of action and widening participation, these artworks propagate the worlds they hope to bring into being.

Contemporary philosopher Jacques Rancière argues that social and political orders are founded on the distribution of the sensible²⁵. Some groups of people and their ideas can be sensed while others remain outside sensibility. Who can be seen and who can be heard, ultimately determines who gets to participate in decision-making processes. To see and to hear those normally rendered inaudible and invisible by current systems, we need to invent fictions²⁶ that demonstrate new alliances and forms of action—ultimately constructing new "communities of sense." Art can create fictions with a strong experiential dimension, and as Rancière compellingly argues in The Emancipated Spectator:

Aesthetic experience has a political effect to the extent that the loss of destination it presupposes disrupts the way in which bodies fit their functions and destinations. What it produces is not rhetorical persuasion about what must be done. Nor is it the framing of a collective body. It is a multiplication of connections and disconnections that reframe the relation between bodies, the world they

live in and the way in which they are ‘equipped’ to adapt to it. It is a multiplicity of folds and gaps in the fabric of common experience that change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible. As such, it allows for new modes of political construction of common objects and new possibilities of collective enunciation.

In producing counter forms that anticipate different reality principles, artworks can help us visualise something otherwise. This work interrupts the taken-for-granted and by clearing the way for alternatives, provides conditions for people to mobilise and act in ways that surpass the actual and reach into the possible—as evidenced in the two examples discussed below.

ESTRANGING HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT IMAGINARIES

How might we develop shared imaginaries that extend beyond those generated by the imperial and colonial logics that condition and limit what we envision? Our capacity to imagine, act, and create a world that is different from the one in which we are located, can be nurtured through artistic means.

1. Unlearning Imperialism: ‘Developing the First World’

When the Ghana Think Tank²⁷ “develops the first world” by setting up think tanks in the “third world” and asking participants to solve problems posed by those in the so-called “developed world,” they rework the notion of who is needy and who has expertise. This collective group of artists upturn dominant narratives. They reject the way that help has become professionalised and institutionalised, positioning people as “at-risk” and in need of diagnoses and intervention from the Global North. In opposition to discourses of colonialism, the Ghana Think Tank addresses histories of oppression and dispossession by shifting power dynamics through public art projects.

Challenging the notion of who can legitimately engage in inquiry, produce knowledge, and address the problems of others, the Ghana Think Tank collects problems from people and communities in North America and Europe and sends these to think tanks they set up in “developing” countries. Their work has been guided by think tanks in Ghana, El Salvador, and Iran, by Sudanese refugees seeking asylum in Israel and a group of incarcerated girls in Boston, among others. In challenging who is needy, they echo the findings of anthropologist Liisa Malkki. In



Credit: Ghana Think Tank.

her book, *The Need to Help*²⁸, Malkki draws from her ethnographic research with highly trained and experienced, international aid workers from the Finnish Red Cross. Shifting attention from the recipients of aid to humanitarian aid providers, Malkki’s inquiry found “an unmistakable neediness” on the part of humanitarians. These service providers expressed a strong desire to escape the mundane world of home for “the world outside”—a palpable neediness that giving and helping alleviated.

In “developing the first world,” the work of the Ghana Think Tank plays with the complex notion of need. They hold up a mirror to the paternalism of the Global North and its perceived role in providing expertise and aid. In collecting problems from communities in places such as the predominately white, upper-class town of Westport, Connecticut in the US. Residents of Westport shared concerns about a lack of diversity in their community, while researchers at the think tank in El Salvador found that Westport is actually quite diverse. In reality, the predominantly white, upper-class residents had little engagement with the diversity of the community, ignoring, in particular, the extensive wealth of experience and diversity found

in the people performing critical domestic labour in their neighbourhoods. Using this as their starting point, the think tank suggested Westport residents hire local day labourers, paying them their regular rate to attend social functions.

In response, workers were invited to parties to socialise, snack, and drink wine alongside Westport residents who were provided the opportunity to practice their Spanish. In following the recommendations of the think tanks, this performative artwork effectively manifests other possibilities and—to return to the passage above—“disrupts the ways in which bodies fit their functions,” multiplying connections and disconnections, reframing the fabric of common experience.

2. Exile as a Political Practice

For their art project, *Refugee Heritage*²⁹, DAAR (Decolonising Architecture Art Residency) prepared and submitted an application to UNESCO nominating Dheisheh Refugee Camp³⁰ in Palestine as a World Heritage Site. The project, “an attempt to imagine and practice refugeeeness beyond humanitarianism,” destabilises the status of both sites of exile and of heritage. It actively debates³¹ our understandings of sovereignty, culture, and aesthetics by acting “as if.” The application is both speculative and real, both a provocation and an actual application. In reframing the status of the camp, the project, “demands redefining the subject of the refugee itself as a being in exile and understanding exile as a political practice of the present capable of challenging the status quo.” It challenges us to, as Sandi Hilal from DAAR says, value refugees beyond misery. The application includes a dossier from architectural photographer Luca Capuano, whom UNESCO had commissioned to document forty-four sites in Italy inscribed on the World Heritage list. He was asked to document Dheisheh Refugee Camp with the same care, respect, and search for monumentality he uses when photographing historical sites in places like Venice or Rome.

DAAR frames the refugee camp³² as a place with a rich history, a wealth of stories, and an abundance of knowledge. Like the Ghana Think Tank, DAAR understands the ways in which knowledges, in the plural, are always located and partial—what Donna Haraway³³ calls “situated knowledges.” For over two years the implications for Dheisheh’s UNESCO nomination³⁴ were discussed with organizations, politicians, conservation experts, activists,

governmental and non-governmental representatives, and proximate residents.

In their project statement, DAAR notes that “the end goal of the project is not UNESCO’s approval, but to start a needed conversation about the permanent temporariness of camps, and the connection between rights and space.” By going through the process of nomination, participants point to an embodied shift and how this made future possibilities visible: “In filling out the form, we saw ourselves as new inhabitants entering an old architecture, transforming it to adapt to a different form of life.” This demonstrates an emergent form of “collective enunciation,” producing a fiction that monumentalises the people yet to come. In doing so, this project moves beyond the limited frameworks of humanitarian narratives, provocatively producing other possibilities for organising and mobilising, changing the cartography of the perceptible.



Credit: Photo: Luca Capuano, *Refugee Heritage*, 2016-2018.

FABULATING FUTURES, NAMING NEW NARRATIVES

Through deconstructing and reconstructing the dominant narrative, these artworks explore how we might imagine more expansive alternatives and possibilities, broadening and reframing the methods we use for speculation. As “critical fabulation,”³⁵ a method elaborated by writer and African American scholar Saidiya Hartman, these projects “illuminate the contested character of history, narrative, event, and fact, to topple the hierarchy of discourse, and to engulf authorised speech in the clash of voices.” Fabulation, broadly understood, involves the collaborative process of inventing the people yet to come through myth making and monumentalising the ‘not-yet.’ Art plays a powerful role in realising these future communities of sense, building social connections through artistic participation that emancipate us from the given universe of discourse and behaviour.

Art produces forms—words, spaces, rhythms, images, and so on—that allow us to act as if we already live in the future—making it clear that futures are not out there waiting, but manifest through creative and productive human

labour and action. Artistic practice is uniquely positioned to create platforms that, in establishing variables for interaction, can make room for things in the public imagination that would otherwise seem too remote or amorphous. This anticipatory quality proposes a way of prototyping, of bringing new social and political forms into being.

Like the examples above, the alternate reality established through a narrative and imaginative vernacular, makes other things seem possible. With qualities of both the ordinary and the extraordinary, the sincerity of these prototypes provides a context where we can experience the viability, necessity, and normalcy of things that would otherwise seem shockingly foreign or unreal.

Creativity is a generative practice that, rather than totalising, encourages a proliferation of possibilities. Contemporary art practice plays with both the representational and the abstract, providing an outline where the details are emergent and contingent, allowing us to consider how we might bring something into being that cannot yet be represented because it cannot yet be imagined.

¹ <https://www.arte-util.org/projects/>

² <https://creativetime.org/projects/social-practice-database/>

³ <https://libros.metabiblioteca.org/bitstream/001/226/8/978-1-906948-14-6.pdf>

⁴ <https://en.contextishalfthework.net/about-apg/artist-placement-group/>

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/22/arts/design/mierle-laderman-ukeles-new-york-city-sanitation-department.html>

⁶ <https://en.contextishalfthework.net/exhibition-archive/ocean-fleets-ltd-197475/>

⁷ <http://www.thomashirschhorn.com/maps-schemas/>

⁸ <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/s/socially-engaged-practice>

⁹ <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/the-sociological-imagination-9780195133738?cc=es&lang=en&>

¹⁰ <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/s/social-sculpture>

¹¹ <https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/modernity-at-large>

¹² <https://www.routledge.com/Participatory-Creativity-Introducing-Access-and-Equity-to-the-Creative/Clapp/p/book/9781138945265>

¹³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_qS2mCfAqM&ab_channel=BeuysTV

¹⁴ <http://digital-ecologies.arttoday.org/index.html>

¹⁵ <https://www.geobodies.org/art-and-videos>

¹⁶ http://xenopraxis.net/readings/haraway_companion.pdf

¹⁷ https://monoskop.org/images/e/2/Arendt_Hannah_The_Human_Condition_2nd_1998.pdf

¹⁸ <http://16beavergroup.org/about/>

¹⁹ <http://16beavergroup.org/assembling/>

²⁰ <https://www.arte-util.org/tools/lexicon/>

²¹ <https://www.moma.org/calendar/performance/1261>

²² <http://pablohelguera.net/2013/06/libreria-donceles-new-york-2013/>

²³ <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/carl-boggs-marxism-prefigurative-communism-and-the-problem-of-workers-control/bbselect?selected=pre-post>

²⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Breaching_experiment

²⁵ <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/politics-of-aesthetics-9781780935355>

²⁶ <https://www.versobooks.com/books/1029-the-emancipated-spectator>

²⁷ <http://www.ghanathinktank.org/>

²⁸ <https://www.dukeupress.edu/the-need-to-help>

²⁹ <http://www.decolonizing.ps/site/architecture-of-exile-iv-b/>

³⁰ https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/dheishseh_refugee_camp.pdf

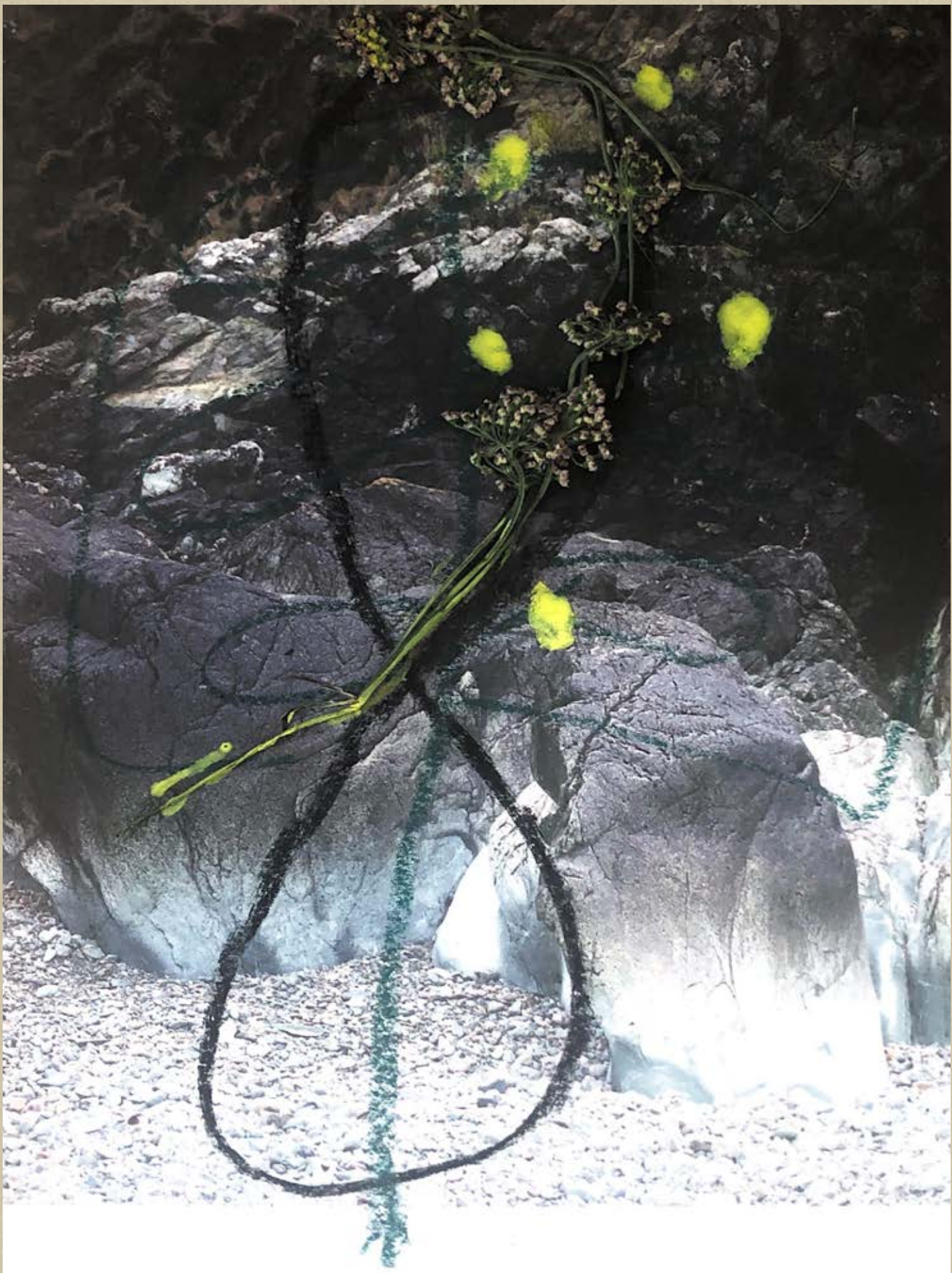
³¹ <https://refugeeheritage.org/>

³² <http://www.decolonizing.ps/site/iii-justification/>

³³ <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3178066>

³⁴ <http://whc.unesco.org/en/nominations/>

³⁵ <https://cpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/campuspress.yale.edu/dist/1/2296/files/2017/09/Saidiya-Hartman-Venus-in-Two-Acts-1a1v7bq.pdf>



Art: Lauren Parater (2021), UNHCR Innovation Service

BEYOND DESTRUCTION: INNOVATION AS AN OFFERING FOR REPAIR, RENEWAL AND REPARATIONS

A new altar of change

THE SLOW VIOLENCE OF INNOVATION

What narratives, stories and imaginaries shape how we see and value the world in a time of remarkable transformation? Where might these ways of seeing the world originate, and how do they influence our entanglements with each other; our histories, our presents and our futures? How do these narratives control our creativity and understanding of what is possible? Ultimately, narrative holds a subtle power in our imaginaries. And naturally, power asks for virtue.

For people working in the humanitarian and social innovation context, these entanglements don't surface merely as ghosts but as active participants in how we create and sustain worlds and work alongside communities. It's not a new story that our wellbeing is dependent on the wellbeing of others, or as author and scientist Robin Wall Kimmerer observes, "All flourishing is mutual."

We witness our mutual dependence in the slow violence of climate displacement, in the exhaust of natural resource extraction that has forcibly removed people from places and pasts, through the in-between identities and

liminal moments of belonging everywhere and belonging nowhere. This story of interconnection is one worth re-membering and re-imagining as we create and innovate in times of unravelling, turning, and transition. Interdependence is a complicated web of lines, never straight and rarely direct, within a constellation of opportunities to rethink what creativity means today, situated alongside loss and possibility.

In the article The Snarled Lines of Justice¹, the authors argue that knowing the crises we are living through:

"Requires attention to historically created assemblages in which violence, displacement, and dispossession have been critical to landscapes of livability and unlivability. Listening to the stories of all our relations is a central element of learning about these landscapes. The stories open doors of connection and disconnection through which we might both persist and resist."

I want to understand how we can be better listeners, better neighbours, better connectors, through reframing our narratives on possibility and bringing attention to the fault lines in the language we use to navigate our work, our lives and our worlds. Could arts-based explorations open

new windows to reframe these narratives when language fails? The natural starting place for me is how we think about the narrative of innovation, creativity and design that is weaved through our personal and professional endeavours, the histories and harm it currently carries with it, and how we might reframe innovation as a critical, disassembled tool for renewal, imagination and care.

Today, even in the midst of so much upheaval, the imaginary of progress or innovation is still bound up with the imaginary of putting something new into the world; without giving attention to the destruction, removal, and defuturing -- or the reduction of possible futures -- it creates in its wake. Is this innovation imaginary not manifestly unfit for today? Our current construction of innovation does not give attention to the histories of displacement and replacement - of systems, models, people, and place - on which the pursuit of the novel and new is built.

All of this begs the question of whether we are called to reframe our understanding of innovation and move toward a narrative that emphasises an endless interweaving of continuity, change and interconnection. A new narrative and a new way of seeing the world can catalyse a new way of valuing it.

If we shift innovation from the novel, the new, the destructive, the shackled techno-utopian visions, to a way of designing that ensures all flourishing is mutual - what borders and boundaries could be expanded? What else would we dream? What could nature teach us about innovation, designing for collaboration and scale, as imagined and practised by other species? What might we learn from this renewed landscape of creativity? What might be lost? What might be saved?

INNOVATION FOR WHAT? INNOVATION FOR WHOM?

Many people understand that innovation, or a creative process more broadly, is non-linear. And yet, the myths surrounding innovation are mired in teleological dreams of technology, profit and limitless growth. We are hell-bent on the story that human ingenuity will move through a series of linear steps, where everyone will be better off, the world will "develop", we will be bigger, richer, smarter, so much so that we'll finally start blasting ourselves to new worlds to continue the unending search for paradise. As we've soaked our planet in chemicals, as we do our disposable film, the clear vision arising from this "develop-

ment" is one fixed on unmaking our world and stripping it of our responsibility towards others.

When you think of the word innovation, what pops into your head? Is it the sleek and shiny phone you hold in your hand whilst you move through the latest digital newsletter that has landed in your stuffed inbox? Perhaps your mind wanders to the novelty of the typewriter or the invention of the world's first assembly line? Maybe, just maybe, a community-based solution to conflict joins the imagined innovation parade. Does it look like the repair and restoration of some of our most exploited ecosystems? Might we be surprised by witnessing innovation turn itself inside-out by moving beyond the logic of "bigger is better" to being draped in an idea of scale that is fractal, not linear.

Could we embrace nature's logic of emergence and shift from scaling to seeding change? Would something novel still be innovative if it was built slowly, over many generations and was decorated with our values rather than the capitalist logic of simply moving fast and breaking things? Would you give up efficiency and ease for mutual flourishing? No, really, would you?

I think it's important to give attention to what the word innovation conjures for most people. These questions are invitations to help us rethink whether innovation is even of use in building new worlds and new understandings of belonging. If I was to take a bet on how you might relate to the word, I think you would land on some moonshot, technological shift or product with a white man's name hovering over it. At least that's what it is for most people, including myself when I conjure the word in my mind, even if we don't truly believe that is what seeding innovation looks like in practice.

Why is it that our imaginaries of creativity, design, innovation and possibility are so locked into these techno-heroic archetypes? And when we begin to unpack the imaginaries of innovation's pasts, presents, and futures - I think we need to start critically asking ourselves, who is innovation really for in most cases and whose lives might be sacrificed in its current mission into the unknown?

BOOTSTRAP BILLIONAIRE BLASTS HIMSELF INTO SPACE ON THE BACKS OF THE POOR, CALLS IT PROGRESS

Many people across the world watched as bootstrap billionaires blasted themselves into space successively. One even wore - I kid you not - a very large, bright tan cowboy hat to truly embody the neoliberal capitalism driving his wealth as he buckled up for his inane flight. It was also widely reported² that these billionaire space ventures received more media coverage in one day than climate change had all last year. While taking their joyrides to the edge of the atmosphere, warehouses were simultaneously filled with successive lines of people stripped of labour rights, numbed into mirroring mechanical drones, retrieving products at inhuman speeds, broken bodies littered in pursuit of material wealth. Are these broken bodies and dreams worth such theatre?

Despite the world witnessing boundless devastation from everlasting humanitarian disasters, unceasing wildfires, relentless flooding and the hissing consequences of ecological collapse, these billionaires stole the gaze of many under wall-to-wall coverage. And in the midst of these vanity space flights, I couldn't help but ask myself, "Is this it? Is this mutual flourishing? Is this the apex of human ingenuity? Is our imagination truly this limited, sad and boring?" And if it is, I don't want much to do with the story of innovation and ingenuity we're telling ourselves anymore.

Surrounding the ongoing theatrics of billionaires taking joyrides into space, the 1970 song written by Gil Scott-Heron, titled aptly, "Whitey on the Moon", began percolating through the networks of people outraged by the endeavour. The lyrics cry:

*I can't pay no doctor bill.
(but Whitey's on the moon)
Ten years from now I'll be payin' still.
(while Whitey's on the moon)*

*The man jus' upped my rent las' night.
(cause Whitey's on the moon)
No hot water, no toilets, no lights.
(but Whitey's on the moon)*

*I wonder why he's uppi' me?
(cause Whitey's on the moon?)
I was already payin' 'im fifty a week.
(with Whitey on the moon)*

*Taxes takin' my whole damn check,
Junkies makin' me a nervous wreck,
The price of food is goin' up,
An' as if all that shit wasn't enough*

What I appreciate most about Scott-Heron's catchy tune is the unravelling his words do for this type of moonshot innovation and understanding of progress. Could this actually be progress when it is held up by so much hardship and harm? Scott-Heron's song also importantly acknowledges the intersection between race and class, and the unending convergence of injustices that impact marginalised communities. Those who continue to lack basic rights, access to water, energy and food, become but a mere dot, unseens and forgotten below, as the one-percenters of the world blast themselves towards another planet; refusing to acknowledge what was destroyed and left behind.

How might innovation be defined by the many unseen and made invisible? How might our narratives shift if we did weave in human rights, principles and intergenerational thinking into what we valued as "creative" or "novel" or "good"? What do you think? Do you even care?

And in the end, if we can't take care of our own children, our own communities, our own planet, our very own home, with care and intention, how dare we move our gaze to the stars? As if we were decent enough to place ourselves among them and call it innovation.

OUR INNOVATION IMAGINARIES ARE KILLING US

The linear narrative of innovation and progress has such an intense grip on our imagination and narratives surrounding creativity that the oppression, extraction, and destruction of people and planet that holds up this imaginary barely even registers as problematic. Is stripping the life systems of our world, denying the livable futures of generations to come, and our relationality with each other and the planet a price worth paying?

Innovation is also historically difficult to nail down with a general definition of what it could be and what it could serve across contexts. How can we even start reimagining innovation and the design process that supports it, if we can't agree on what it is? As Dr. Pierce Gordon, Ph.D, explains³ in his article, "How to Define Innovation", the confusion around what innovation looks like in practice,

and the values it carries, have allowed it to evolve into a buzzword. Through the lenses of economics, business, design, and indigenous worldviews, Gordan outlines how each archetype holds innovation uniquely in how they create, disrupt and imagine their work and worlds. Through his research alongside the Naro and San people in Botswana, and larger innovation conversations across Africa, Gordan observes that many cultures don't have a direct translation for innovation. During his research, he engaged with a University of Botswana Professor who notes, "*The reason why the term is so difficult to translate, is because a Motswana don't train to innovate, they train to preserve.... In this, traditional is seen as authentic. If something is innovated it won't be as authentic, and thus won't be as valuable.*" And the definition the Naro people use to describe this type of creativity? Gordan introduces us to the term "Sonkori," which means dreams. Sonkori moves us beyond visions of Silicon Valley innovation and allows our imaginaries to dip into the linkages between the past, present and future. It enables us to see innovation through different lenses, intimately revealing the values that underwrite the pervasive and narrow version that currently dominates.

What's clear is that innovation can be interpreted as a process for many things, in many different ways, across many understandings and perspectives. I've found the technology and solution-focused archetypes to be particularly harmful and limited in how we think about novelty and possibility in the making of new worlds and in serving others. The current rhetoric on design and innovation may well be unfit for the complex challenges in our systems. The common interpretations of modern innovation and design practices today are, in many ways, the tools being used to extract, destroy, and marginalise within our societies and territories. Below are a few of the imaginaries to which our innovation worlds are contributing.

INNOVATION AS DESTRUCTION AND EXTRACTION

When we reflect on much of the story of "progress" and "innovation" that coincided with the industrial revolution and the creation of the markets we operate in today, it is also important to recognise this story as a story of destruction - the destruction of ecological systems, the destruction of indigenous people's worlds, the destruction of relationships, of knowledge, and more. Many of the latest inventions in our societies - a mobile phone, the latest version of the Tesla, or Bitcoin - rely on the levelling

of ecologies, systems and often knowledge and communities.

Throughout my career of exploring and collaborating around design and innovation as methods to reimagine the humanitarian sector, I've never once heard the provocation of "What are we replacing or destroying through this solution or process?" or even "What has been lost through this invention?"

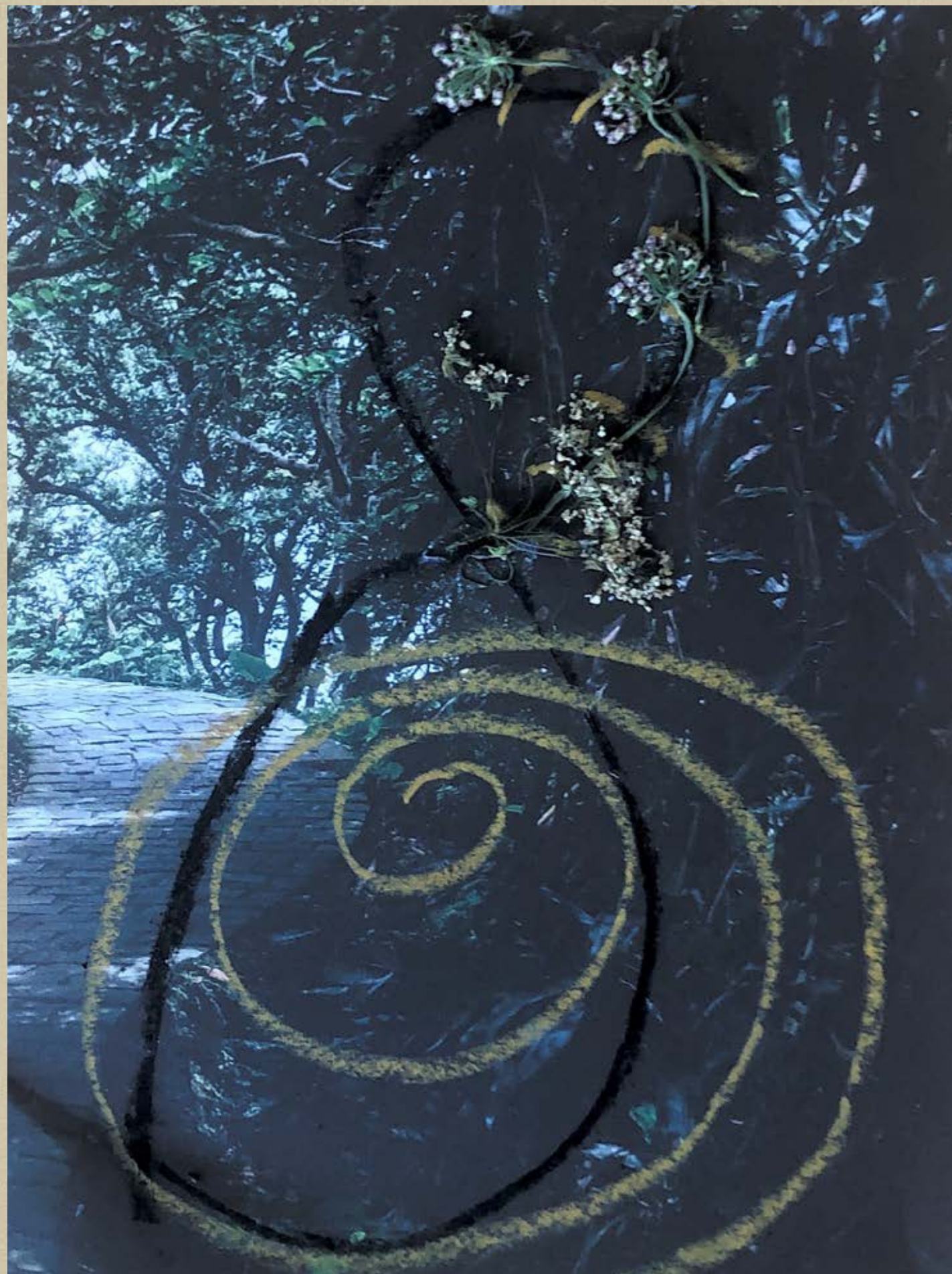
In many ways, innovation as we currently conceptualise it values a willful forgetting of the past, something that co-signs "pre-innovation" to a binary of "bad," "inefficient" or even "primitive". This is assuming there is even a pre-innovation moment, when in reality, of course, there is no such thing. This again highlights how our current innovation imaginaries are in service of particular values, interests and markets. It also eliminates space in which we can see the friction and removal of knowledge, place, and what came before that results from innovation.

As artist and author Jenny Odell outlines in *How To Do Nothing*:

"There is a deeper contradiction of destruction (e.g., of ecosystems) framed as construction (e.g., of dams). Nineteenth-century views of progress in the United States, of production, and innovation, relied on an image of the land as a blank slate where its current inhabitants and systems were like weeds in what was destined to become an American lawn. But if we sincerely recognise all that was already here, both culturally and ecologically, we start to understand that anything framed as construction was actually also destruction."

Odell highlights the curious tension that through creating the new, the past is banished as a mere shadow; ravaged and forgotten. Are we so ready to swallow our values and visions of just futures in the guise of innovation, while numbing our senses to destruction? I would argue that moving outside the capitalistic lens of progress and innovation, the myth of endless growth, will not only expand our space of care and attention to what we are putting into the world, but open up a space for emergence and other ways of being with and in service to each other.

- Questions to consider to avoid this logic:
1. What are we replacing, destroying, disrupting or removing through our innovation process?
 2. Who or what might be harmed today -- or in the future -- by what I am putting out into the world?
 3. What unintended destruction may manifest through my design, and how do I proactively mitigate it through a values-based design practice?



Art: Lauren Parater (2021), UNHCR Innovation Service

INNOVATION AS DEFUTURING

If destruction is left in the wake of many innovation projects and design processes, what would that mean for those witnessing the impact of such endeavours on present or future lives? In *Becoming Human by Design*, the design theorist and philosopher Tony Fry states, “We underestimate the extent to which we impose – that is, stamp – our self on virtually everything. The trace of our presence, the scars of our actions, the heritage of our neglect can be seen in every extant environment on the planet.”

Through examining our actions and decisions on what we plan to put out into the world, we can better understand what possible futures we may also be stripping away, even through so-called “social good” or social innovation practices. We can also discern that much of what we design contributes to the unsustainability of our worlds. Therefore, it’s important to recognise that design and the innovations that may be produced through it - from products to policies and norms - not only act as a “futuring” activity that extends the opportunities for prosperity on earth, but also as a “defuturing” activity that limits the possibilities for life, enacting extensive environmental and social damage.

In telling a new story of innovation, we can unearth an original understanding of how we can relate to making the worlds while also giving critical consideration to the harm and short-term decision-making that comes with purely human or user-centred approaches to innovation. These concepts require us to direct attention to what we are designing and creating, and how what we design continues to go on and design without us. What might our work look like if we relied on practices that also centred the futures of generations to come and non-human/more-than-human species in our decision making?

Questions to consider to avoid this logic:

1. Whose future may I be removing through the process of innovation -- including human, non-human/more-than-human species and ecosystems?
2. What might be the negative consequences of this design for the next seven generations?
3. What other perspectives or collaborations could I bring into my design process to better understand the many possible futures at stake?

INNOVATION AS PROBLEM-SOLVING

The innovation imaginary that frames the design process as one grounded in solving problems and developing solutions, while well-intentioned, has long been linked to the corporate sector, parked alongside patriarchal undertones and market-oriented approaches. The myth that design “for good” makes people’s lives better through expert-driven solutions is still pervasive across governments, companies and even the humanitarian and development sectors. This orientation upholds precisely the colonial, patriarchal, and neoliberal approaches that can lead to destruction, defuturing and the flattening of plurality.

Specifically, the notion that designers frame their relationship with communities as “users” or “clients” to deliver a solution, service or product is particularly problematic and narrow in its framing of our innovation practices and relationships with communities. This framework not only exacerbates power relations, white-saviour narratives, and practices aligned to market-driven approaches to creativity, but risks further injustices, harm and negative consequences. Even the most genuine and well-intentioned designers and innovators are often representing firmly ingrained colonial and development agendas that deny the plurality of practices, knowledges, experiences of the world, which no amount of empathy or design thinking exercises can replace.

In the book *Design Struggles: Intersecting Histories, Pedagogies, and Perspectives*, editors Claudia Mareis and Nina Paim eloquently outline the need to reflect on the historical discourses, pedagogies and practices of design that are complicit in current global crises and “its role as a motor of extractive capitalism, mass-industrialisation, and waste production.” Recognising the tension between design thinking and problem-solving methods and the pursuit of the common good, they write:

“In particular, the idea of design as a method for dealing with intricate, “wicked problems” (problems for which there are no standard solutions due to their uniqueness) gained momentum far beyond the previous bounds of the field. Today, supposedly universal “design thinking” methods are not only applied in management and business consulting, but also in the field of humanitarian aid, prompting the US-based author and professor Bruce Nussbaum to provocatively ask: “Is Humanitarian Design the New Imperialism?” Somewhat more cautiously and optimistically, but pointing in the same direction, this

concern was formulated as follows by Arturo Escobar: “is design not always about human projects and goal-oriented change, about an analytics and ethics of improvement and an inescapable ideology of the novum, that is, of development, progress, and the new?”

Design Struggles by Mareis and Paim is an urgent call to action to “think, teach, and practice design otherwise” with newfound portals to how we can reimagine and re-frame design for the twenty-first century. The current legacies of design for problem-solving cannot unhinge itself from its origins of simplicity, efficiency, “best practices”, destruction and loss. Problems are the consequence of an existing system, and through hastily plastering solutions onto these problems, we can recklessly reinforce the very systems we are trying to deconstruct or remake.

Through focusing design and innovation practices on problems and user needs, rather than desires or dreams, we are often reproducing the world as we know it, in all its faults and failures. While these attempts in addressing “needs” bid themselves as a pathway to reduce harm within communities, reducing this damage is not the same as creating opportunities for mutual flourishing.

The problem-solving paradigm carries with it an imaginary that denies the political nature of design and in that, posits a particular politics, despite an apparently neutral facade. It also refuses components of complexity theory and systems thinking that emphasizes newness or possibility through emergence rather than objective-focused or goal-oriented creation. One of the most innovative behaviours we can practice today is to move beyond problem-solving and understand design as a means to reorient how we relate to each other and build new worlds in the pursuit of justice, autonomy and mutual liberation.

Questions to consider to avoid this logic:

1. What if you weren’t trying to solve a problem but aiming to build a new world? What might change about how you approach your design practice?
2. Is it possible to move your innovation process from focusing on defining a problem or need to an exploration of desires or dreams?
3. If the “problem” you are designing for is not your own, can you radically de-centre your “expertise” and steward a space for others to creatively approach their own autonomy, liberation and justice?

INNOVATION AS TECHNOLOGICAL DISRUPTION

Innovation as only technology. Technology as disruption. Disruption as progress. This technological imaginary besieges almost every conversation on innovation and is weaponized as the quick-fix answer on how to solve those very “wicked problems”: the climate crisis, inequality, xenophobia, racism. You name it and someone has probably produced an Op-Ed on how technology can solve it. The problem is not the lens of technology as a means to create value, it’s that technology is situated as a saviour, often rejecting the intersectionality of the world’s complex challenges, and obscuring who (or what) is truly at fault for these rooted systemic problems. The narrative on technology and innovation is not neutral or without its wave of biases. We must change our relationship with technology and its relationship to innovation. Sure, technology is part of the solution, but it is also very much part of the problem.

This logic regurgitates the need for solutions almost constantly and denies the political nature of what we are designing into the world. This concept of “solutionism” was developed by Evgeny Morozov who writes that the solutions ideology holds because “there is no alternative (or time or funding), the best we can do is to apply digital plasters to the damage. Solutionists deploy technology to avoid politics; they advocate ‘post-ideological’ measures that keep the wheels of global capitalism turning.” For example, the geoengineering schemes that are often put forward as technological innovations in response to the climate crisis are, in reality, solving for the maintenance of the fossil fuel industry and the status quo, rather than solving for the exploitation of our current living systems and the systemic inequality it perpetuates.

While there is an immense opportunity to rethink our narratives and relationship with technology, and how that can be used in efforts to serve communities, decolonise our work, or restore what has been broken, positioning innovation as a technological pursuit limits the possibilities for how we understand creativity and how we design in complex systems.

The recently inherited features of Western political thought and Silicon Valley logic encourage band-aid approaches aligned with a modern, capitalistic model of creativity, rather than a method that opens up the questions and definitions of what is truly desirable or valuable, and by whom/for whom. Techno-fixes to the world’s problems don’t exemplify human ingenuity, but rather a failure of

imagination and a fantasy shackled to simplification, an extractive economy, and the myth of progress. We must move our collective imagination beyond the ideas that have delivered us, in many ways, to the cusp of catastrophe and perpetuate systems of harm and oppression.

Questions to consider to avoid this logic:

1. What if innovation was slow and nurtured at a pace that allowed for care and responsibility?
2. What if technology wasn’t available, what else could you utilise to reimagine the situation, challenge or desire? What would be the same? What would be different?
3. How might local knowledge or indigenous innovations be utilised instead of modern technology?

THE NESTEDNESS OF OUR CRISES AND THE ENTANGLEMENTS OF OUR CHALLENGES

In understanding many of our global crises, as crises of justice, solidarity and responsibility, we can begin to comprehend precisely why technological solutions and corporate innovation methodologies are not the right fit for navigating these challenges and the uncertainty it carries. Those most vulnerable to the impacts of the climate and ecological crisis are those who have contributed least to the very problem. The modern world lies at the feet of communities, cultures and lands all over the world that are suffering from its fragments of unending waste, harm and disquietude. A wave of colonial mechanisms such as constant political interference, the disruption of human relationships to place and environment, and the strategic abuse of development aid creates unsettledness and a hierarchy of bodies.

It’s not hard to see there are common factors responsible for challenges such as the ecological crisis, inequality, and conflict - where people are not only forced to leave their homes but are often faced with the immobility of their lives. People are slowly waking up to their own nestedness with one another and the entanglement of crises that colonial, racist, and patriarchal systems of oppression have fueled. We must grasp and lead fully with the concept that “No one is safe, unless everyone is safe” and ask ourselves where and how we are investing our resources and creativity.

Professor Anne McClintock animates the interconnectedness of our many crises today in the stunning article,

“Monster: A Fugue in Fire and Ice.”⁴ While unpacking the converging and accelerating crises of our time, she discusses the present unravelling, arguing:

“How do we record a history of forgetting?”

This essay enfolds, fugue-like, three great crises of our time: climate chaos, global militarization, and the mass displacement of people and other species. The established circuits that connect these crises have been ghosted. Origins are never originary. Something has always gone before. How can we account for the planetary upheavals of the Anthropocene unless we illuminate the long arc of their beginnings in the military geographies of European imperialism—the foundational violences of slavery, genocides of Indigenous peoples, and the centuries of ecocides and onslaughts on the environment that shaped—and are now undoing—the world? At the same time, how can we animate alternative histories of the past and thereby imagine alternative futures?”

McClintock’s essay emphasises the interdependence of our current crises cannot be locked into the present or into one wicked challenge. The many crises we hope to “solve” operate as consequences of the long term oppression of people, land and place and the entangled histories they are situated within. Innovating our way out of such complex entanglements is impossible while we continue to conceal and deny the violence our world has been built on. Could innovation assist in making the invisible visible? The unseen seen? The unthinkable real?

“Elsewhere is here.” McClintock states. *“The future is now. But the future has arrived at different times for different people.”*

Has the future arrived for you already?

INNOVATION AS THE OLD AND THE NEW

...Everything unpreventable and excited like mornings in the unknown future. Who shall repair this now. And how the future takes shape too quickly. The permanent is ebbing. Is leaving...

—Jorie Graham, “Sea Change”

What, then might innovation look like for our times? How



Art: Lauren Parater (2021), UNHCR Innovation Service

could it be driven by socio-ecological imaginaries and values? What awaits beyond the lurking destruction and disruption? A starting place is the discussion philosopher Bayo Akomolafe had on staying with grief without overwhelming ourselves and his acknowledgement that through worldbuilding, we will always be touching our histories and futures concurrently.

"It's a simple one for me." Akomolafe remarks when reflecting on how we live in a time crisis. "Experimentation, which we're always at the edge of. Invention is the frothing edge of the future. Work is always a matter of dancing between the supposedly old and the supposedly new, right? There is nothing that is old, that is not already infected by the new, and there is nothing that is new, that is not already invaded by the old. As we're pressing towards the new it's easy to forget the historical instances around us. History is replete with stories about people who thought they were doing something new but were actually just moving around pieces that iterated the familiar."

In this sense, our understanding of innovation must never be without a gaze into the present and future, but also in the past. In light of this, how might our understanding of creativity and possibility evolve temporally? If the past and future should be at the heart of design practice, so too should the speed at which we navigate innovation's temporality.

Would it really be that bizarre for people to seek approval for innovations that would allow us to move at a slower pace? Can't innovation be patient, ecological, purposeful and counter rat-race ideologies - even when responding to emergencies and crises? Progress and alternative futures should be imagined beyond their bondage to speed, efficiency and time. In reality, there are a multiplicity of times, simultaneously active -- the time of crisis, planetary time, ancestral time, experiential time, bureaucratic and political time, and many more.

Questions to intentionally direct this practice and framing:

1. How can innovation respond to multiple temporalities? And what would that look like in your practice? What if your design practice embraced ancestrality and futurity at the same time?

INNOVATION AS MAINTENANCE

In offering and facilitating a different type of innovation, conscious of histories and temporalities, design can help make known what needs to be discontinued and maintained. Maintenance, alongside innovation, can act as an ultimate act of resistance and possibility. Maintenance, care and even rest in the context of creativity can shift our imaginaries to being more intentional and aware of what we are creating and also preserving. An ethos of innovation that prioritizes such nourishing values, behaviours and principles can begin to make room for what we are striving for and dreaming of rather than just what we are against.

In the article, Hail the maintainers⁵, authors Andrew Russell and Lee Vinsel argue that while capitalism may excel at invention, it fails in the worlds of maintenance, and for most lives, maintenance, not invention, is what counts. They argue that there is an urgent need to reckon with innovation as an ideology, and its "perverse reality", in way that gives critical attention to whether a design or its practices are good. They elaborate:

"Entire societies have come to talk about innovation as if it were an inherently desirable value, like love, fraternity, courage, beauty, dignity, or responsibility. Innovation-speak worships at the altar of change, but it rarely asks who benefits, to what end? A focus on maintenance provides opportunities to ask questions about what we really want out of technologies. What do we really care about? What kind of society do we want to live in? Will this help get us there? We must shift from means, including the technologies that underpin our everyday actions, to ends, including the many kinds of social beneficence and improvement that technology can offer. Our increasingly unequal and fearful world would be grateful."

Understanding if innovation is a desirable value is still to be determined. But in attempting to reframe the narrative of innovation to strategically serve a larger purpose, we can complement our inquiry into destruction by also asking what we hope to maintain and develop essential preservation practices around. Through the collective kaleidoscope of maintenance, there is an opportunity to bring the results of change and innovation in line with our visions, purposes and societal values.

Questions to intentionally direct this practice and framing:

1. What are your design and life practices maintaining?

Who benefits from what you are maintaining and why? Who might be harmed by what you are maintaining? What do you really care about? What would you fight to preserve?

INNOVATION AS RENEWAL AND A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS TO MEND OUR WORLD

Anthropologist Arturo Escobar emphasises the possibility for design to bring about social and ecological justice. His understanding of the pluriverse, described as a “world where many worlds fit”, a phrase borrowed from the Zapatista social movement, is a critical anchor for better locating the value of design and innovation in the context of our interconnected crises. The pluriverse refuses the “one-world world” of neoliberalism, globalisation, and colonialism, and favours the opening up of autonomy, agency, and liberation across communities.

In Escobar’s design praxis, design is not solely about the novel, the shiny, and the new, but acts as a collaborative practice of healing, renewing, and mending, inviting everyone to become “weavers and repairers of the mesh of life.” It also requires those of us who are acting as facilitators to move from a “needs-based” to a “desire-based” narrative of innovation and worldbuilding. In a world where many worlds fit, those who have been oppressed or suppressed by modernity or colonial mechanisms, have the opportunity to flourish, with each new centre contributing to this mesh of life and slowly renewing and reweaving what has been lost or damaged. The practice described by Escobar demands that we centre other types of world-making and reconsider what innovation truly means.

Ultimately the climate and ecological crisis, the crisis of conflicts, the crisis of inequality and the crises of displacement are all related to each other - individual threads of a knitted problem. Settler colonialism processes and extractive economies have continued to increase the vulnerability of humans and more-than-human species, displacing them into unfamiliar territories and ways of being in the world. If we think about the need for innovation in the times we are living, it must carry qualities of autonomous design, repair, responsibility, and world-making but also redressing and unravelling so many of the unsustainable worlds that have been built.

Innovation then becomes a means for designing otherwise in the face of our entanglement, a pursuit to renew and reimagine what is broken, and collaboratively explore

and build towards more just futures. Today, almost everything is up to be redone, repealed, rethought and reinvented.

Questions to intentionally direct this practice and framing:

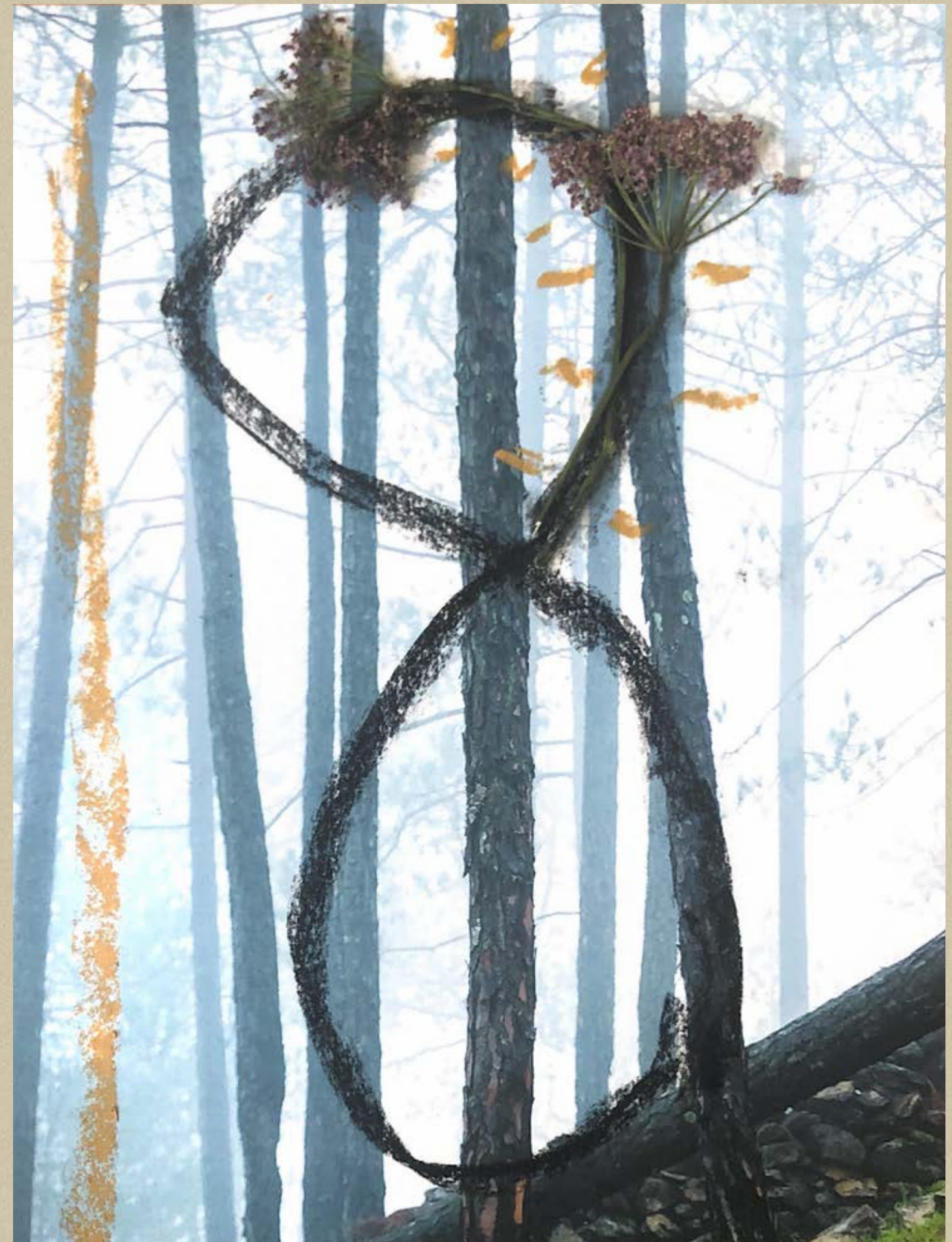
1. How might you contribute to a world calling out for mending? If you can only build futures based on what you know and what you’ve experienced, how can you intentionally bring plurality into your practice of world-building? Who (or what) are the co-designers in your process and how might you expand them beyond who (or what) you know?

INNOVATION AS HEALING AND REPAIR

Innovation as repair is a portal to mend, to nurture, to heal, to redesign, and reweave anew, whilst orchestrating attention to the oppressive structures that must also be dismantled. Innovation as repair invites the gaze to move away from the separation to the web of interconnectedness and entanglement in which the world moves. Opening up creativity and innovation beyond the subjugation of modernity and welcoming space to design alongside the dreams of communities.

Repair as innovation and innovation as repair can reveal practices of healing and sustainability and focus our attention on whose voices we’re elevating when we engage in social innovation activities. To repair our world, we must find envision other ways to live and be together, seeded by imagination, possibility and novel ways of being in relationship with each other (wouldn’t that be innovative?). As adrienne maree brown notes, *“We are all the protagonists of what might be called the great turning, the change, the new economy, the new world. And I think it is healing behaviour, to look at something so broken and see the possibility and wholeness in it. That’s how I work as a healer: when a body is between my hands, I let wholeness pour through. We are all healers too—we are creating possibilities, because we are seeing a future full of wholeness.”*

At the moment, the connected forms of oppression and ecological devastation have proven themselves over and over to be unsustainable practices, thus nearly every aspect of our lives is up to be renewed, repealed, redesigned and repaired. We can further question if we are failing to meet the needs and desires of others, who is responsible and what should we do about it? Even more critically we can unravel conversations about how we distribute responsibilities, resources, reparations and novel



Art: Lauren Parater (2021), UNHCR Innovation Service

forms of care through giving critical attention to healing the brokenness of the world.

Steven. J. Jackson attempts to reconcile contradictions between maintenance, brokenness, and repair in his book chapter Rethinking repair⁶. For Jackson, addressing repair in society is key to how we understand innovation, particularly in the case of technologies, however, his assertions are profoundly relevant for cultural and social innovation as well:

“At first glance, nothing could seem farther apart than the apparently separate questions of innovation and repair. Innovation, in the dominant coding, comes first: at the start of the technology chain, in moments of quasi-mythical origination, a creature of garage-turned-corporate engineers, operating with or without the benefits of market research and user experience operations. Repair comes later, when screens and buttons fail, firmware is corrupted, and the iPhone gets shipped back to wherever iPhones come from...In scientific computation and collaboration, the language of innovation is generally reserved for new and computationally intensive “bright and shiny tools,” while repair tends to disappear altogether, or at best is relegated to the mostly neglected story of people (researchers, information managers, beleaguered field technicians) working to fit such artefacts to the sticky realities of field-level practices and needs. In both cases, dominant productivist imaginings of technology locate innovation, with its unassailable standing, cultural cachet, and valorized economic value, at the top of some change or process, while repair lies somewhere else: lower, later, or after innovation in process and worth. But this is a false and partial representation of how worlds of technology actually work, when they work.”

Jackson advocates for a shift in perspectives from a modernist ideology to one he calls “broken world thinking” which asserts that breakdown, dissolution, and change are the critical challenges in the face of political, societal, ecological and planetary crises we are living through. The idea of “broken world thinking” implies that designing and innovating otherwise is required to ensure that just and equitable futures are possible, and that repair, healing, and recombinations must be recognised as creative pathways, centred in care, for necessary change.

This type of ethos also opens up space for bridging the past and future, where Jackson acknowledges, “repair inherits an old and laid world, making history but not in the circumstances of its choosing.” Through inheriting these

histories, repair stands at the aftermath, the crossroads where new worlds are built, and “order, value, and meaning gets woven, one tenuous thread at a time. And it does all this quietly, humbly, and all the time.” And it is ultimately through the breaking, composting and the humble art of repair, that much that is generative and productive can be birthed into the world. Through the lens of repair, conversations around concepts such as reparations also are given more direct representation as a possible avenue for creative reconciliation and direct acknowledgement of the historical assemblages that haunt present moments.

In *Repair: The Impulse to Restore in a Fragile World*, Elizabeth V. Spelman argues that, “Repair is the creative destruction of brokenness”. Could this “creative destruction of our brokenness” be a humble extension of creativity bending the arc towards justice? Innovation as repair offers a holistic and renewed sense of how novelty might be molded in the face of societal breakdown. Innovation as repair is about creating conditions for a good life, removing the brokenness that is perpetuating harm to people and the planet, and manifesting different types of realities.

Questions to intentionally direct this practice and framing:

1. How might we creatively nurture the brokenness in our world? How might we compost that brokenness into something else? Where does the humble act of repair fit into your practice? What if all the truly transformative solutions had to start with healing?

INNOVATION AS THE UNMAKING OF OLD [UNJUST] WORLDS

If innovation as repair can assist in remaking and mending of our worlds then creativity is not only orchestrating attention on the present or futures; but is firmly grounded in the past. In directing our innovation gaze towards an ethics of responsibility, we must recognise the relationships between the systems of harm we are trying to repair and the ramifications of their design.

Philosopher and professor Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò acknowledges this responsibility and ethics of care through distinguishing between harm-based repair and relationship repair, particularly in the case of climate reparations. He argues that relationship repair allows us to avoid some of the tricky questions surrounding harm-based repair which

is focused more on restitution or retribution. By contrast, relationship repair focuses on reparations as a project “in the service of reconciliatory justice” and mending injustice through our ongoing moral relationships with each other. Táíwò offers reparations as a worldbuilding project, rooted in questions such as “*How do we distribute the benefits and burdens of a new world? Who do we make do the hard things? Who do we make take on the sacrifices? Who gets the benefits of that transition?*”

Innovation as reparations can be understood as a future-oriented practice engaged in building a better world (via unmaking another); that also ensures that the costs associated with building a just world are taken on by those who have “inherited the moral liabilities of past injustices.” Particularly for those in the Global North who have assumed such injustices, innovation as reparations can be viewed as a creative process to not only take responsibility for wrongdoings and harm but to take a holistic approach to being in community and solidarity with those who have historically been marginalised and dispossessed. It allows us to acknowledge the many decisions and designs from that past still inhabit our present and continue to inflict pain and trauma, whilst recognising there is no “before” we can return to that is not touched by these harms.

Through projects that support reparations and relationship repair between people and planet, innovation can birth more just worlds and fix injustice in terms of our ongoing moral relationships with each other; while requiring an innate responsibility and distributive justice. Táíwò attests to the “incredibly messy and imperfect world of navigating reparations for world-making processes” but it offers itself as a critical provocation and shift in the definition of creativity. Innovation then would not operate without putting responsibility towards others at its centre.

This moral responsibility would manifest itself in an obligation to, for example, redistribute burdens and compensation, for those displaced by climate change due to the collective failure of those at fault for the majority of damage that greenhouse gas emissions have created. In particular, innovation would benefit significantly from a subtle reframing to emphasise the creativity required to repair injustices of the past. This shift in creativity must be embedded in an expanded ethics of care for generations still to come, igniting innovative policies around our responsibility towards each other and the remaking and unmaking of our present worlds.

Questions to intentionally direct this practice and framing:

1. How would your practice shift if it was focused on the unmaking of unjust worlds rather than building new ones? What new protections and rights can we imagine that work towards relationship repair? What are some non-dominant ways of worlding that promote responsibility towards each other and the planet?

LIMINALITY AND CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR A BETTER WORLD

As we continue to move into a crisis of crises and destruction continues to touch each human and other forms of kin on earth, innovation will continue to find its way into the conversation of solutions and possibilities.

Innovation could rest perpetually in the in-between, in the liminality, in the pursuit of carnage for some and justice for others. Or perhaps we can choose another path. Innovation will continue to be used in a myriad of different ways, based on damage and desire and, yes, technology too. Today, there still exists a possibility for its faults to be redressed and for us to embrace it with new understandings of creativity. And perhaps in this alterity, we can find ways to use innovative practices to help us lay to rest the parts of systems that are no longer serving us. As Arturo Escobar so eloquently articulates, “*Only strategies aiming to recreate and strengthen local and regional capabilities to heal and sustain the web of life seem to many any sense. It is imperative that humans regain their ability to see and make otherwise, so as to make plural futures again possible.*”

If we hope to reframe the narrative of innovation and creativity for our times, we will have to sit with the loss of what it has destroyed. We have to bear witness, remember and foster awareness of the consequences of erasing the futures of so many and put our resources and efforts into creative opportunities that not only make these crises more visible but orchestrate attention to the people and places displaced in the margins and the in-between. It will require that we change ourselves to recognise innovation in healing the ruptures we’ve created and mending the fabric of our societies and ecologies.

The conjoining of loss and repair, intertwined with the possibility of new worlds to come, births pathways for resurgence, regeneration and renewed obligations to future

generations and the earth. There is the opportunity to better understand how our work locks people into future indebtedness, and in understanding that, we must not turn away. New design and innovation orientations take on a new urgency, harnessing the speculative imagination, a rousing humility, and intergenerational activism required to lay down the outdated conditions of our societies and discover new ways of valuing the world. Through reimagining and reframing the narrative of innovation, I'm called back to Silvia Federici, Italian and American scholar and activist, who so beautifully stated:

"We must also broaden our conception of what it means to be creative. At its best, one of the most creative activities is being involved in a struggle with other people, breaking out of our isolation, seeing our relations with others change, discovering new dimensions in our lives."

Perhaps it is maybe that simple, that obvious, to merely look up at each other again and recognize our own relations with others change.

Could that be the most creative act of all?

And in recognising and remembering each other, perhaps we will land on a new vision for innovating and imagining better days to come, seeded in the incorruptible awe of our interconnectedness and responsibility towards others.

Note on Lauren Parater's artwork:

This artwork attempts to reimagine the narrative of innovation as one of renewal. Using the shape of the socio-ecological adaptive cycle as a base, realised through different charcoals, the images allude to how we might design for emergence. The mix of wild flowers, water colours and natural elements attempt to represent renewal thriving in cycles of transition, creating portals of possibility, beauty, and, of course, innovation. It is meant to bring to attention the natural patterns of change in ecosystems and how we might better work alongside those in the pursuit of innovation for social good.

Lauren Parater's art can also be found on pages 108-109.



Art: Lauren Parater (2021), UNHCR Innovation Service

¹<https://orionmagazine.org/article/the-snarled-lines-of-justice/>

²<https://gizmodo.com/jeff-bezos-got-as-much-morning-show-coverage-in-a-day-a-1847334966>

³<https://medium.com/designlimitsand/how-to-define-innovation-7d377b1d69b6>

⁴<https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/oceans/331865/monster-a-fugue-in-fire-and-ice/>

⁵<https://aeon.co/essays/innovation-is-overvalued-maintenance-often-matters-more>

⁶[http://sjackson.infosci.cornell.edu/RethinkingRepair-PROOFS\(reduced\)Aug2013.pdf](http://sjackson.infosci.cornell.edu/RethinkingRepair-PROOFS(reduced)Aug2013.pdf)

CARING INTERVENTIONS

In a community meeting for Project Unsung, we mused on an intervention letter to innovation work, as if innovation were a dear friend who had somewhat lost their way. We thought about a) the ways that innovation is holding itself back, and b) the ways, through new visions and values, that innovation could meet the needs of the future.

Here are some of the responses:

Dear Innovation, you have lots of potential, but you need to stop...

- | | |
|--|---|
| - Putting yourself before the planet and people. | - Being exclusive and disposable. |
| - Being an excuse to not have a plan. | - De-futuring possibilities in your wake. |
| - Thinking of yourself as something only future-oriented and top-down. Rather, innovation needs to be more sensitive to history and context. | - Bragging. |

Dear Innovation, to be future-fit, please commit to these visions and values...

- | | |
|--|---|
| - Unlearning imperialism. | - Understand that innovation is called different names in different places. |
| - Planetary sustainability, decolonization, democracy, and equality. | - Define the collective beyond the human species. |
| - Interconnectedness. | - Ask better questions. |
| - Operate from a place of joy, not cynicism. | |

How do you think you, your community or your organization’s practice could change? Write your own letter to innovation, and see where it takes you.

Dear Innovation, you have lots of potential, but you need to stop...

Dear Innovation, to be future-fit, please commit to these visions and values...



Illustrations: Hansel Obando
Curation/writing: María Faciolince
("Development": A visual story of shifting power" Published via Oxfam, 2021)

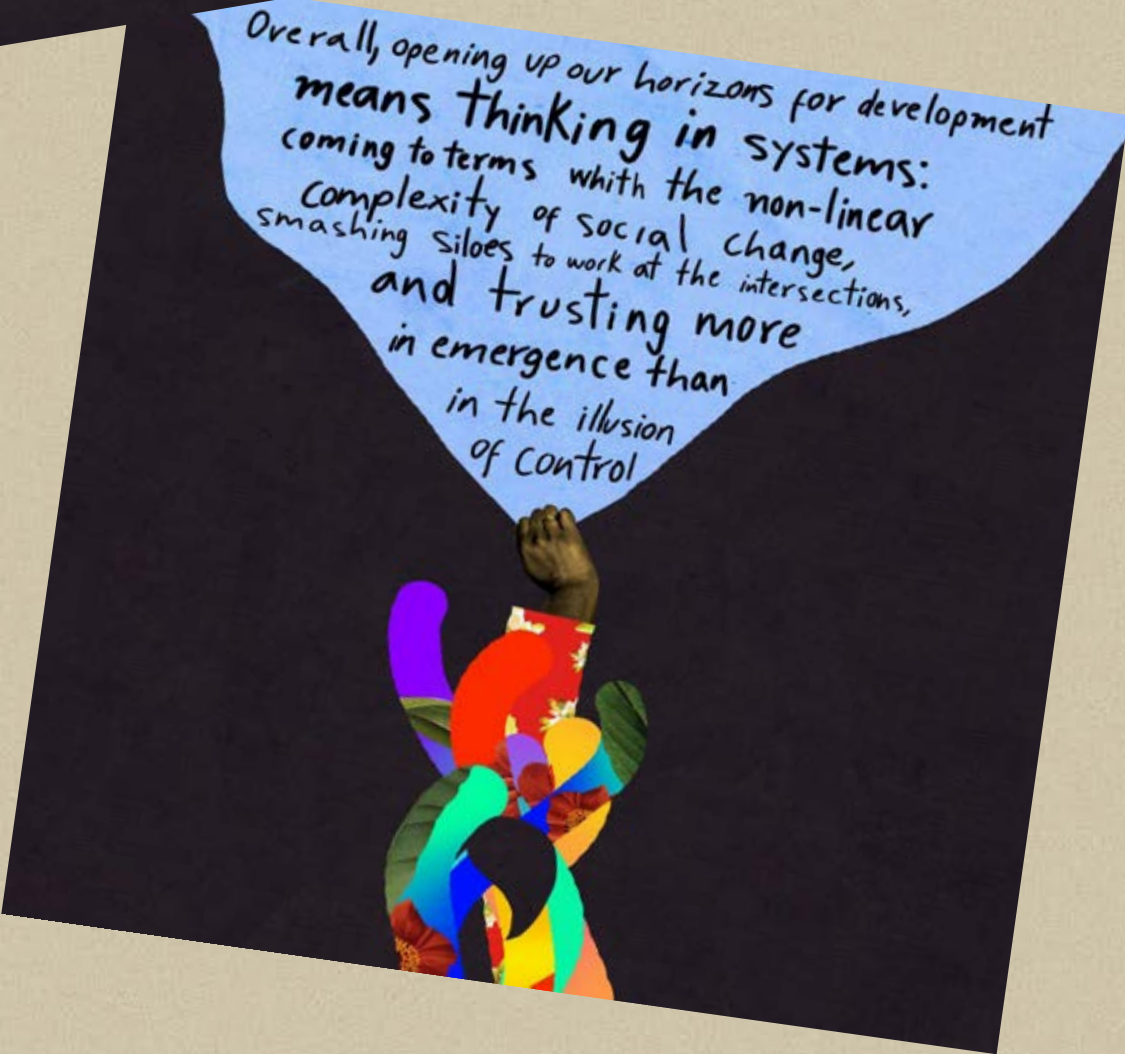




Illustration: Shanice Da Costa, 2021

Ariana Monterio

WHAT COMES AFTER RENEWAL?

Drifting through post-mortem encounters, world endings, and the state of emergency response

From my wanderings through the world, I had the opportunity to learn how life, death, and the meaning of existence vary immensely across cultures, borders, and communities. Yet, this is something that I could only understand while enjoying the journey in between, without any pre-conceived destination or expectations. Above all, I came to this understanding by recognizing and honoring the gift of the stories I was told in the many encounters along the way. But before we proceed, please keep in mind that, as I have said, many stories explain the world differently. Mine is just another one.

THE PERPETUAL WORLD-ENDING STATE

The rhythm of modern life has made us believe that qualities such as abstractness, sensibility, and spontaneity have no place in scientific knowledge. In order to thrive amid crises and emergencies, we are obliged to set ourselves apart from abstractions and any thought process that diverges from the norm. One can either embody the norm or become the 'Other' - whose ways of knowing and being are seen as unfit for modern society. As a result, instead of embracing diverse thinking spectrums that might offer a more comfortable and enjoyable journey in life, we're always searching for ways to survive apocalyptic scenarios and fantasies in which suffering is the standard rather than the exception. Let me explain.

At *The End of the Cognitive Empire*², Boaventura de Sousa Santos states that the world has been living in a permanent state of crisis. The problem that arises is that while an occasional crisis demands explanations and problem-solving, a permanent crisis explains and justifies the current state of affairs as being the only possible one, even if it means inflicting the most shameful and unjust forms of human suffering. Amid the scenario of permanent crisis, people are led to live and act in despair, but not to think and act critically upon the true root of systemic problems.

The science and the technologies sanctioned by western political thought have monopolized our social imaginary. It turns out that innovations have become constrained by metrics of economic profit as opposed to emancipatory practices for the common good. Somehow, the future has been co-opted by the state of despair that precedes disasters, and innovators from Silicon Valley seek ways to profit from this generalized anticipatory anxiety. For instance, think about the billionaire space race³ led by Elon Musk.

For this select group of tech-billionaires, Earth is doomed. Consequently, humanity's only chance of survival is to colonize the orbit of outer space. This is the perfect example of how empathy and awareness are left out of the development discourse. The choice of perpetuating a term such as colonization that echoes trauma and violence is never an innocent one. Actually, it's a choice that exposes how the white savior complex⁴ is being reimagined and updated to fit the contemporary world through a techno-colonialist mindset.

Now, more than ever, society is in the midst of an extremely urgent conversation about how we can benefit from better societal outcomes that truly tackle the contemporary turbulences of climate change, and the political, economic, and social crises in the context of globalization. Yet,

to succeed, it's imperative to stop any ongoing attempt to colonize the future through one size fits all solutions. Especially considering that we're still in the present-day, struggling to solve the disastrous effects of colonization in history, such as: cultural alienation, diminished self-esteem, confusion regarding ethnic and racial identity, inequities, xenophobia, and discrimination. The problem is: how can we push for more desirable futures instead of merely replicating the inequalities of the past?

What I propose here is to challenge the horizon of possibilities of humanitarian work and the very basis of the eurocentric development discourse by promoting what Shiv Visvanathan calls Cognitive Justice⁵. Through this lens, knowledge co-exists in different forms and has its place in a larger ecology. Each form of knowledge embodies a form of life, and each form of life has its own wisdom, value, epistemology, and cosmology. Recognizing this diversity implies challenging the interpretation of humanitarian science as universal, exclusive, and able to comprehend all that can be understood, while assuming that no form is superior to another. It also implies that people are not objects to be managed through aid mechanisms.

Insofar as the need and relevance of humanitarian agencies' work are undeniable, it is urgent to recognize some cultural deficits within aid organizations, such as disaster responses that are "not always informed by local realities." Instead, operations often elaborate plans "about people experiencing risk, rather than by, with and for them"⁶. Is it the creation of the othering all over again through practice and discourse? Just think about how in the current global context of economic and political uncertainty, migrants and refugees are usually portrayed in the media⁷. On one side lies dominant insider groups such as governments, elite donors and aid organizations⁸. In opposition, them, the outsiders, strangers trying to cross the borders of the status quo⁹.

In the following sections of this essay, aiming to avoid reproducing the pattern of uneven progress of the past¹⁰, I invite you to dive into history. Navigate the beautiful plurality of the world. Imagine different development practices¹¹ collectively. And maybe, even doubt universalizing principles of our institutions¹². Is humanitarian action really impartial, neutral, and independent? Why or why not? How might they do better and creatively reimagine their purpose? There are no easy solutions. Nonetheless, humanitarian organizations have the opportunity to experiment with innovative models of hybrid governance by respecting communities' agency and right to self-deter-

mination¹³. While simultaneously addressing questions of stereotypical discourses and the creation of otherness in knowledge production, "this means that we do not need alternatives so much as we need an alternative thinking of alternatives."¹⁴

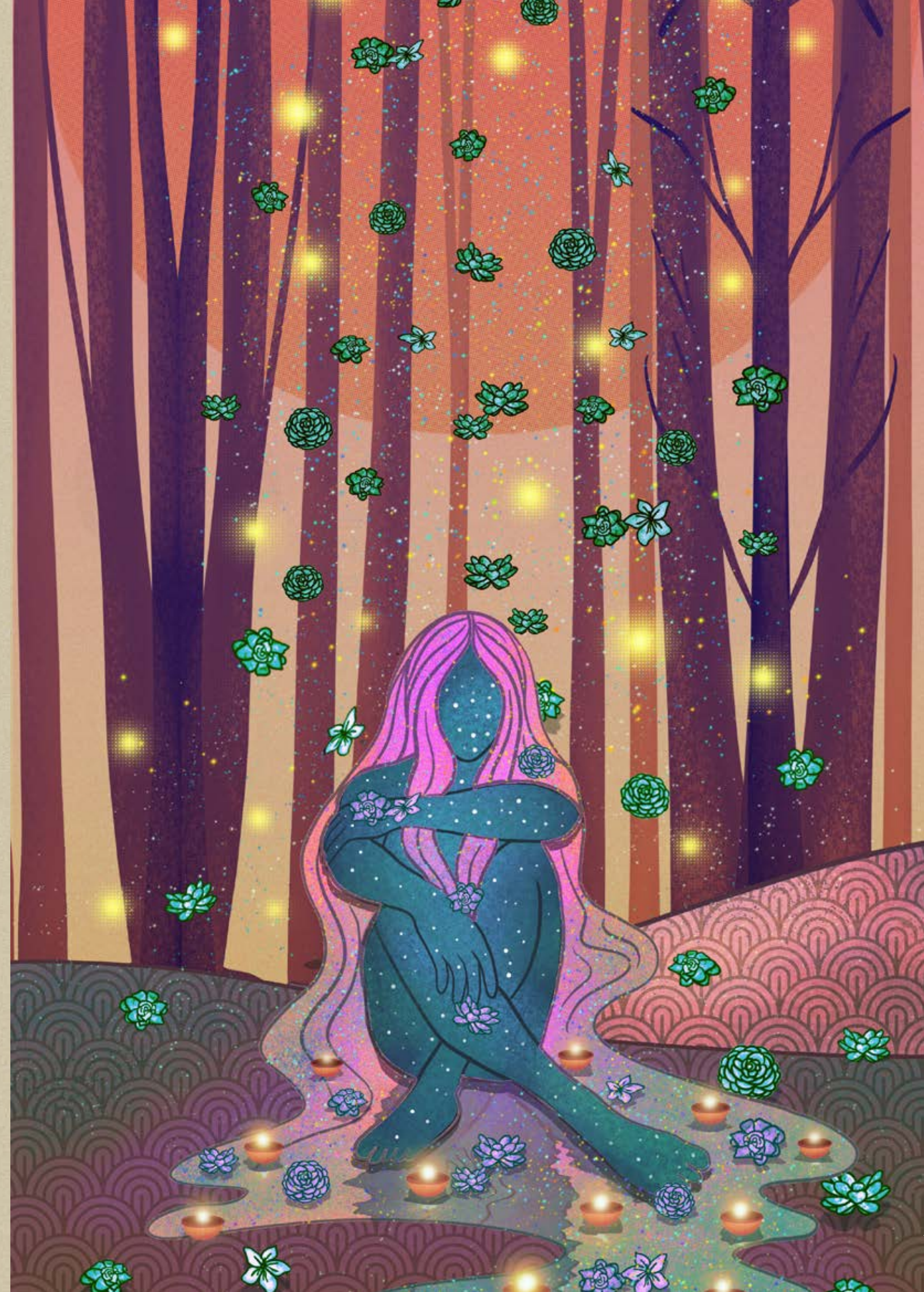
HOW MANY TIMES HAS YOUR WORLD ENDED?

There is something simply magical about watching the sunset. During one of these moments, while admiring the sun sinking over the Lompoul Desert in Senegal, my friend Abdoulaye explained how Senegalese society has its root in animist traditions. Drawing in the sand, he said, "Senegal is part Muslim, part Christian, but we were all Animists prior to that," finishing a circle in the sand. Nowadays, only a small percentage of Senegalese consider themselves animists, yet there are still countless animist practices¹⁵, customs, and symbols (such as talismans for spiritual protection) in everyday life. And he continued "I like to see myself as a Baye Fall, it's a way of life, a philosophy that comes from Senegal's Sufi Islam¹⁶. We practice a different type of Islam, one that goes beyond the Sharia. We took the most important part of it, and we blend that with ancient animist traditions through acts of devotion for the welfare of our brothers and sisters, humans and non-humans alike."



Sunset at Lompoul. Author's personal collection.

For Abdoulaye, all things have a soul, and ancestral gods, guides, and deities can be found anywhere, from our dreams to the soil of our lands. Thus, traditional animist healers¹⁷ and holy leaders are vital figures to safeguard nature¹⁸ and to maintain healthy communities. By the time the sun was almost setting, I told him how my



great-grandmother was a traditional healer of her community too. I have many memories of visiting her and joining a line in her garden with other children to wait my turn to be treated by the touch of her plants¹⁹ amid ritualist gestures and recited prayers. These women are known as Benzedeiras and hold an important place in their communities²⁰. This form of healing respects a family tradition passed on from generation to generation, from mouth to memory. When she passed away my mother inherited the responsibility of continuing her grandmother's legacy.

I was raised in a typical Brazilian household, which means a very religious one. Don't get me wrong, it wasn't the type of religiousness that demanded attention to sacred scriptures. Rather, it was based upon elders' storytelling, botanical knowledge²¹, superstitions, spells, blackmailing blessings, spiritual surgeries, chit-chat with the dead, and so on. Just like in many others, in my family home, it was possible to find huge crucifixes, Jesus imagery, monstrous figureheads, plant charms against evil, clay pots with coarse salt. On New Year's Eve, families wear white clothes, chew seven pomegranate seeds at the stroke of midnight, and right after that, head straight to the beach, to jump over seven waves, whilst throwing flowers and floating candles into the sea as offerings to the deity Yemojá²².

Yemojá is omnipresent in the islands and coastal areas of Cuba, Haiti, and Brazil, brought across the ocean by the Yoruba people²³ from western Africa who were kidnapped and enslaved during the European colonization of the Americas. On this side of the Atlantic, Europeans imposed their politics and religion on everyone else. For this reason, enforced cultural assimilation became paramount. Gradually enslaved communities, both Amerindian and African ethnic groups were not only familiar with the Catholic context, but deprived of their fundamental rights, they also became closer to each other due to the similarities of their own spiritual traditions. The interlocking oppression produced by slavery, colonialism, caused the formation of new belief systems such as Umbanda, Candomblé, Santería, and Voodoo, and the religious synthesis formed a path to survival, under the guise of Catholic figures.

It was during my conversation with Abdoulaye that I finally understood the religious particularity of my family and the reasons for its uniqueness. Just as his ancestors, my great-grandmother, and those who came before her bonded what made sense to them from the Roman Catholic sensibilities and Yoruba forms of religion to indige-

nous cosmologies. This created a tripartite expression that keeps their ancestral practices alive in the Americas.

The hybridization of different forms of knowledge channeled through spirituality was vital to overcoming what Achille Mbembe²⁴ describes as the loss of rights over their bodies, the loss of political status, and above all the end of their worlds. Therefore, religion becomes a practice of resistance to the terrors of colonization and the lack of belonging to a new world imposed on them.

DEATH, RENEWAL, AND THE AFTERLIFE

"World-endings have happened so many times before, marking the margins of the world like scars, but 'when you feel the sky is getting too low, all you have to do is to push it back and breathe'" Krenak, in *Ideas to Postpone the End of the World*.

For many communities across the Global South who suffered the ills of colonialism, existence became a form of death-in-life. Therefore, the complete death of the material or physical body also turned into an objective to be not only achieved but celebrated. This is the case in the yearly Festival of the Good Death at the Brazilian town of Cachoeira²⁵. By 1878, the Cachoeira's population was 7,000, from this total 2,000 were enslaved people. The festival was conceived by a sisterhood for female African slaves and former slaves as a celebration devoted to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. Yet, just beneath the surface of the good death of Mary lies major social and political subtexts. Back then, the role of the confraternity was to offer a slavery-free death to the enslaved community of the town either by helping them escape, by financing the release from slavery, or paying for decent funerals for its members. Nowadays the Festival celebrates ancestry and the coexistence of the hybridized beliefs of Brazilian culture. Over three days, the women of the sisterhood hold mass and processions enacting Mary's death. It is a time of mourning as well as a celebration of Mary's ascension into heaven, upon which she becomes Our Lady of Glory, in an open feast and festivities worshipping Orishás and Deities through ritual dancing and Rodas de Samba²⁶.

In order to survive, entire communities had to adapt their worldviews, renewing their beliefs and cosmologies to embody the historical events that crushed their worlds apart and universalized the European lifestyle. And they keep doing this every time their world bears the risk of

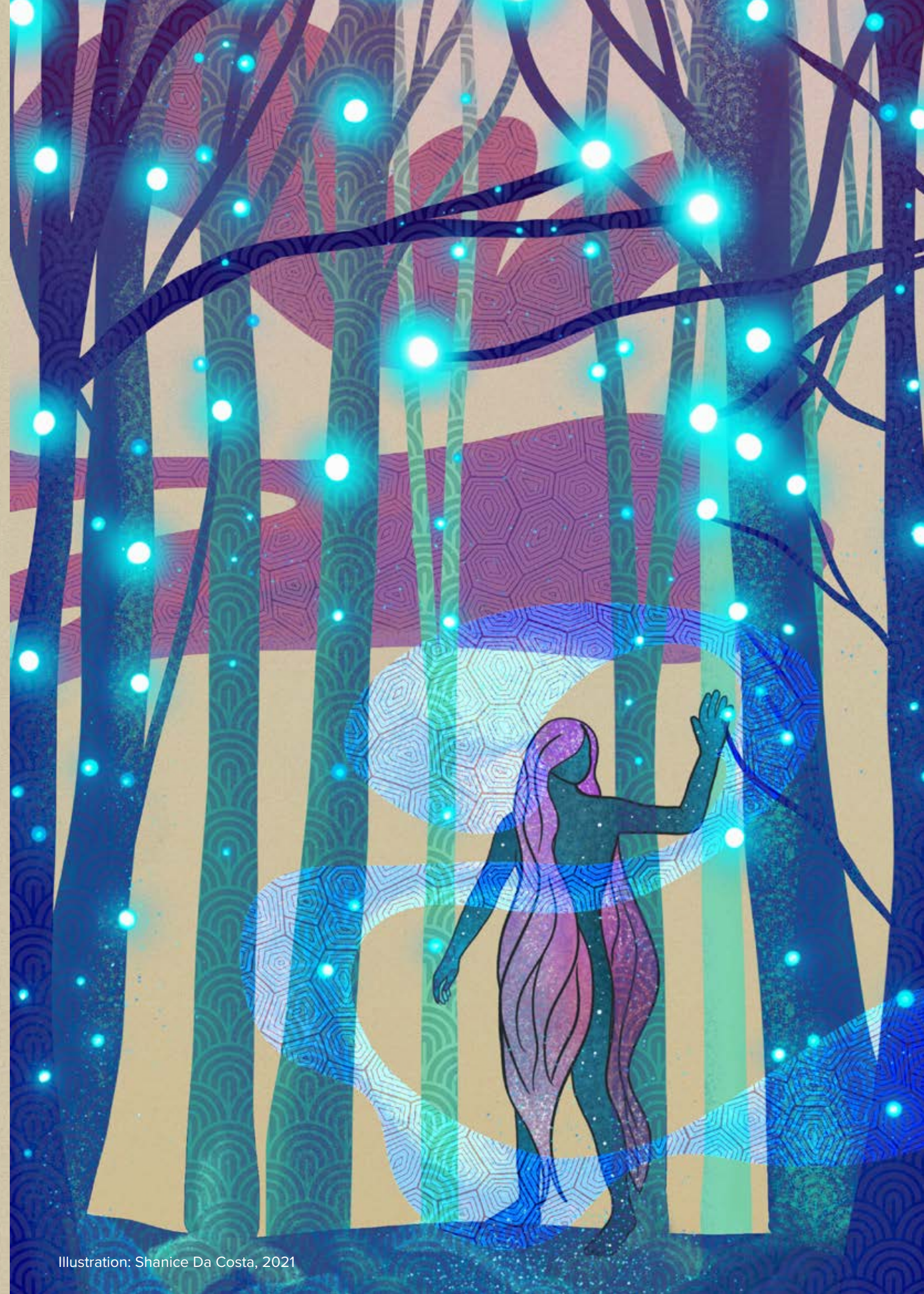


Illustration: Shanice Da Costa, 2021

ending again. According to the Yanomami people, the largest relatively isolated indigenous nation in South America distributed across both sides of the border between Brazil and Venezuela, the sky could fall any time - and it wouldn't be the first time. In this society, the Shamans occupy a central role in maintaining the web of life's balance on Earth and safeguarding the health and well-being of all things, thus it's their duty to protect the sky (that we all share) from falling above us.

As stated before, one of the central aspects of western political thought is the instrumentalization of nature and even human relations in many situations leading to the separation between society-culture and nature as distinct entities. The anthropocentric view of nature has no place in Yanomami culture. Instead, humans are just spiritual beings embedded in the social relations of nature. Everything is interdependent and eco-dependent. Until the end of the 19th century, the Yanomami only had contact with other neighboring indigenous groups. In the 20th century, the white people arrived as ghosts coming from their dwelling place on the shores of the sky. They come in the form of missionaries, prospectors, and road workers bringing with them ideas of good and evil, violence, epidemics, and destruction amid loud cracks in the sky's chest. The white people ignore the shamans' work to protect the earth, one last time. They eat the forest, throw up merchandise and flee to the city. Nonetheless, the Yanomami shaman and Brazilian Academy of Sciences Fellow, Davi Kopenawa have warned us all with a prophecy "If you destroy the forest all the shamans die, the sky will break apart for good, white people will not be spared any more than we will. That is why, for us, what the white people call 'future' is to protect the sky from the xawara epidemic fumes to keep it healthy and strongly fastened above us." ²⁷

Port-mortem encounters, UNHCR, and the state of emergency response

I have struggled with my cultural identity for as long as I can remember. It required a long journey to understand the destructive influence of collective trauma and face the supposed universal logic of modernity as an exception. It was only through the encounter with many other dead worlds, that I could see myself clearer and understand that my sense of belonging is 'settled in the movement' of death and renewal. In some weird way, UNHCR stands in the same position as I, settled between world-endings and beginnings, but constrained by the limits of the cartesian rationale, labeled worldviews, and prefabricated plans.

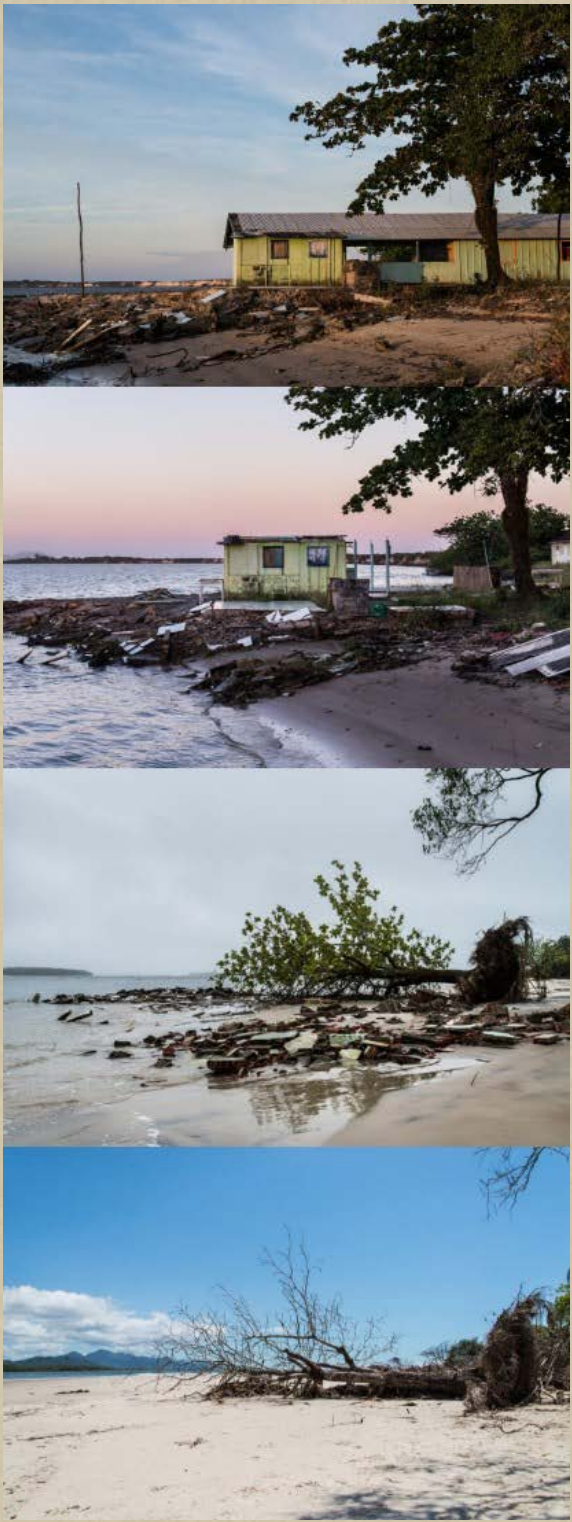
It is time now to change the content and the terms of the conversation. Up to this point and even after centuries of exploitation, in many communities spread across the world, the nature-culture cleavage does not make any sense. By transcending the cosmovision of the human as the center of all that exists, Amerindian cosmologies of Suma Qamaña, Swaraj in India, or even Ubuntu in South Africa are forms of knowledge as logical or rational as European thought but inspired by the ideas of commons, reciprocity, and solidarity. Humanitarian organizations must be attentive to the work being done by these populations and their organizations, to achieve sustainable economies, to learn, and to innovate.

In order to co-create better futures and extend the reach of aid, we must nurture awareness of the past and recognize the transformative capacity of deploying diverse thinking spectrums within action plans. And above all overcome the urge to innovate on behalf of others. Instead of being the saviors, humanitarian agencies can collaborate with civil society actors and act to provide communities with resources and means that allow them to be the agents of their own futures and adapt to systemic challenges on their terms.

Many lands are much more than soil; they can be intrinsically linked to identities, ways of living, values, culture, traditions, and histories. That is the case of the Nova Enseada community in Brazil, located amid the estuary and the sea. After years, the impact of human-related activities alongside the sea's tidal force changed the coastal landscape and jeopardized this community's existence by splitting their land in two and forcing a relocation. Due to the nature of the emergency that required an immediate response, fast solutions were found that failed to take the community's connectedness with their land into consideration. The options were integration with a different society or relocation to the urban area.

Nonetheless, both options meant the elimination of their culture and were rejected by its "beneficiaries". The community then began to seek ways to pursue a self-managed relocation model, focusing on finding a place with similar natural conditions and as close as possible to their original territory. During this process, they built their own network connected with different actors and organizations to defend their rights and support their cause. One of the encounters brought by these emergent connections came later with the South American Network for Environmental Migrations (RESAMA)²⁸. This independent organization began to mobilize human and technological

resources to grant visibility, support, and effective protection to communities at risk of displacement and/or trapped in vulnerable situations, by connecting the knowledge and expertise of affected communities to inform durable and culturally sensitive plans to cope with the effects of climate change.²⁹



Courtesy of the Nova Enseada community

The Nova Enseada community case is surely a clear example of how the adoption of general aid blueprints is not suitable for the local context they are intended to address. But above all, it's a case that calls for meaningful local participation in disaster studies. Humanitarian organizations must rely on affected communities' knowledge to find contextually appropriate responses and co-create multidimensional plans at the local level. Otherwise, such organizations risk seeing their relevance being questioned in the future. This can happen mainly due to the maintenance of outdated structures and procedures that have for a while now been blamed for "disempowering local perspectives by framing local populations' way of life as the vulnerable exotic other".³⁰

How do we move forward from here? First, recognizing the flaws of the humanitarian system is not enough. Effective action to fix the system, its everyday habits, and ways of working is what matters most, and this can be achieved by addressing the cultural deficits between international organizations engaged in disaster risk reduction and communities at risk. One major avenue is stimulating awareness within the organization about the value of uncertainty to life's renewal on Earth. The answer to the current challenges might be shifting the attention to marginalized narratives while seeking alternatives to promote cognitive justice³¹.

What can we learn from others? How can we understand our various realities as part of bigger and interconnected ecology? How can organizations overcome pragmatism in aid and properly ground wellbeing at the very heart of operations? Curiosity has its own raison d'être when we are trying to imagine a renewed world. In the years to come, these questions might lead to the new critical concepts and skills to build more inclusive and resilient futures. It's time to unlock humanitarian innovation as the bridge that connects worlds that, despite their differences, share the same sky and the same hope for better times.

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Symbiosis of Life

This colouring activity was developed by Jane Pirone and Barbara Adams for a series of speculative storytelling workshops titled “Collective Effervescence”. All artwork by Jane Pirone.

xPASS

or an Identity Paper in Three Parts

THE LAND HAD IMPERIAL SCARS // THE OCEAN KNEW ALL ALONG

Jessica Olson

To believe in whiteness. As our ancestors did.

Back when glaciers were pregnant with ice. Creeping, encroaching oceans were only beginning to rise. The people rose, too. The way things were kept us from being where and what we needed to be. The existence we consumed was in service of a draining, exploitative western capitalism and ways of being, functioning, processing. The idea that those with degrees and connections knew more about the needs of the people losing homes to the oceans. Islands swallowed whole. Of the people seeking food dehydrated by 1.0 degree. Imperial scars forged fault lines of homes lost and families separated. Fallen empires shrugged their accountability and demanded assimilation to their extractive ways. The culture of whiteness, individualism, consumption, bled the glaciers dry and unraveled the climate.

To believe in community. As our ancestors taught us.

Today when glaciers are relegated to history, their miscarried remains chiseling through coastal communities. Oceans abate as the people rise. Flowing, boundaryless rivers joined by people redefining home. Assimilation politics rejected, the worst impacts of a violently changing climate halted. The way things are now is a legacy of decolonial action, halted imperialism, the erasure of borders, the weaving of loving accountability. A commitment to community, family, and relational living. Scars healed by self determination, reparations. The antidote to the poisons of the bygone extractive era. Fossils are fossils once more, historic as the whiteness that ripped holes in our social and atmospheric fabrics. Fallen empires rejected and dissolved. Roots bind communities with the land, tracing the scars left on the planet and our fellow humans. The culture of community and resistance healed the climate.

PART 1: DISPLACEMENT

Some never arrived. Some came bruised. And some buried both.

It isn't that displacement isn't the norm. Our lives are a continual process of moving and temporary home making. The early 20th century philosopher Jorge Santayana speculated that travel, the ability to move, was the key to intelligence¹. But the apparent romance of his speculation had a dark undertone – that the movement was ultimately about survival. In distinguishing between plants and animals, including humans, Santayana made a simple argument for how plants were “rooted” and thus unable to move even when their local conditions became too harsh for survival, but animals could. While we have progressed further in scientific understanding of botanical life and see plant movement differently, the darker undertone remains instituted, that “survival” necessitates movement, and in conditions of extreme violence necessitates displacement, irrespective of its consequences on evolution or intelligence.

You went to sleep in one country, but without moving, without the land itself shaking itself loose and ejecting you, you still woke up in a foreign one. While you slept lines were drawn, oddly crooked, like a child trying to make a straight line without a ruler ending up with a squiggly line. You happened to fall on a side that was your own but in which you were asked to belong anew, to show your allegiance yet again, such that where you thought you belonged is now a foreign country. Years later, you still carry with you the papers that claim ancestry, ever unsure of who you really were, a stranger in a land that was yours to which you didn't belong, or a stranger in a land that you belonged to but which wasn't yours.

Nevertheless, Santayana was on to something, having lived much of his life as an émigré and exile between worlds and having to face head on the historical reality of two world wars. And that is the reality that displacement is the norm, and will continually be so in a world like ours unless we can rethink the world itself differently. And that while there may be positive examples of ingenuity born of the necessity to continually uproot oneself and find one's place in an ever desiccated world, the rhetoric of “resilience” elides the deeper structural problems that forced displacement by coating it in a sheen of managerial competence.

My grandparents were refugees of their own land. They were Indians when India split, and they escaped genocide to find their way in a new India that still carried the name, while their ancestral places became a new country. They never discussed these histories with their grandson, perhaps because it was too soon, and perhaps it was a reality they felt nobody should have to know or face. But in India, folks like them still carry a label that describes their affiliation to the old world, almost as if they are some kind of tribe (which they most certainly aren't), and renowned for their ingenuity and entrepreneurship. An ingenuity born of trauma that passes through generations, that makes them permanent hoarders, permanently insecure of their place in the world, deeply possessive, money and property-minded, and ultimately, those whose one sole logic of existence becomes rebuilding that lost world elsewhere. In the city where I grew up, the areas where these refugees were settled, “refugee colonies”, are now in the three-quarters of a century among the richest zones in the whole country, immersed in hyper-capitalist logic, whose economic prosperity as well as intellectual and cultural capital have meant that their own newest generations have fled to or are looking to flee to



other places, carrying with them the same spirits of disquiet that makes them entrepreneurs and builders, the buried yet psychologically integral generational trauma of being permanent refugees, who will never be at home anywhere because the world itself is never their home.

Displacement – the search for greener pastures, whether to flee genocide or to simply escape a hostile environment – is the norm. There is however another aspect to this. The belief that a better world does indeed lie elsewhere. But what if it didn't? What if displacement was the norm not because one place was worse than the other, but all places were equally horrifying. Where would one go?

Diaa Jubaili's 'The Worker' (2016), imagines a future Basra, a century after the Iraq invasion. In this world of extreme impoverishment, the politician makes a point to note that "history" is always worse:

"If you want, I could tell you shocking tales that happened during the great famines in China, the Soviet Union, Bangladesh, Ukraine, Ireland, Biafra, North Korea, Zimbabwe, Somalia ... And that's leaving out all the famines in Europe and all the other continents during the Middle Ages—but it would take too long! The questions that occur to me now seem to be as follows:

'Have any of you eaten your children? Have any of you defecated, then dried what came out to cook it and eat it? Have any of you reached the point where you're hungry enough to steal children, cook their flesh, and sell what's left to the starving at a discount?

'I therefore advise you all to look around and not complain, since complaining is the hallmark of the hypocrite. Give thanks that you have not yet reached such a terrifying level of hunger! As for eating cats and insects and stray dogs, I feel this is a sign of shortages the world over, and not in our country specifically.

'Think upon what has befallen others—and prepare yourselves!'

The flight of Middle Eastern and Iraqi refugees in the present is captured in a different slide of possibility a century from now, in a post-fossil fuel economy where everything has collapsed. Jubaili is keen to point out the structural nature of the exploitation that not only does not solve the problem of displacement, but which makes every country look the same, impoverished to extraordinary degrees, where the future does not lie anywhere, not even outside one's own land. This is the nature of displacement to come, one which is not containable by managerial tech-

niques born out of possibilities of benevolent paternalism, but that which has the nature of an inevitable slowly encroaching pandemic, where locking the doors and building walls won't help. The pandemic – and displacement is one – will be everywhere, unless one controls the underlying structures of violence and repetitions of trauma forcing displacement, controls that can make movement a matter of choice rather than a necessity for survival. Because as it stands, displacement is not a mere physical reality, one which can be contained in the logic of movement, tents and shelters where there is a better place to move to. It is a memory of violence that makes the future history to come.

PART 2: IDENTITY

Some took on new names, others cast off the pretense of newness.

Three kinds of identity, at the two ends of which lie apparent certitude of permanent belonging or permanent non-belonging, and in the middle, all kinds of hyphenated ones, serve as a continuum in the logic of integration. The citizen, the ambiguous citizen (whether the hyphenated "skilled-worker" migrant-resident, or the naturalized refugees or asylees), and the ever-temporary refugee, an unexpected, and somewhat uninvited and unwelcome non-guest who will one day return to wherever they came from. These categories shift, merge, and collide in times of external and internal conflict: their legal definitions do not necessarily correspond to their practical state of belonging. This shifting nature determines carceral politics as well as a nationalistic rhetoric of owners, settlers, and occupiers. It also determines, to a large extent, aid-politics and aid-tactics: who belongs, who doesn't, and who deserves aid, and who deserves their name, label, and nomenclature. In aid-politics, which is a framework for managing nationalism within the umbrella of internationalism/globalization, something as simple (or complex) as a name may determine everything from origin to destination, although the layers of complexity take on other tones depending on time and place, from language, food and clothing customs, skin-color, hair color, and many other facets which can be used to determine the levels, layers, and depths of belonging. Identity is a managerial task to determine, a bureaucratic problem to solve, and a legal imperative to regulate. Hence, within aid-politics – and politics more generally, the nature of belonging is considered national, in order to make internationalism manageable: if one can effectively determine who belongs where, non-belonging can be governed and regulated.

In the world of endless data, databases reign supreme. The parameters used to sort and classify data also structure the narrative of identity and belonging. As in the

most well-known example of Nazi Germany, where eugenics and ideas of racial purity were used to structure belonging, so it continues everywhere in the world. This is as connected to the histories of computing, database, and information science, as it is to current DNA database projects and global biodiversity maps. Pouring into an archive of colonial science and eugenics as a doctoral student of early science fiction and history of science more than a decade ago, I learnt of the endless connections between eugenic politics as it moved, transformed, and structured scientific racism between India, the UK, Nazi Germany, and the US. Early genetic science formulated divide-and-conquer at the cellular level for each organism. The history of “Aryanism” and, more generally, of bloodline purity, continues to rage as geopolitical history in much of the world. To this day, population genetics and migrations histories, structures the history of the subcontinent, with its effects rippling to the whole world. My first meeting with a Sri Lankan Tamil in Oslo, right after arriving here, became a strange experience: I celebrated meeting a South Asian and he mourned an ancient Aryan invasion and loss of home. It was as if his blood and mine, me as a skilled worker and economic migrant moving to a university, and his as a refugee turned citizen now driving a cab, now needed to spill over to an ideological conflict in this foreign land across time and space. It was a sharp contrast to another time and place, when living in Liverpool, I discovered that the restaurant 30 feet away from home had three owners, a Pakistani who managed the staff whose folks had moved in the 60s, an Indian, who tended the cash register whose folks had moved at the same time, and a Bangladeshi in charge of the kitchen, whose folks had come as refugees in the 70s. There, at a street corner in Liverpool, they worked happily together, berating the history of the Empire that separated them in their own homeland but that made them family in this distant one. There was no way to escape our unities just as there was no way of escaping our differences, depending on the burden of the histories we carried with us.

It is the narrative of belonging, mixed with the exercise of power, that determines the scale of the violence of displacement. Yet some refugees are more equal than others, more valuable than others, and considered more capable of integrating than others. Their worthiness for aid and support is proportional to their being the good refugee, just as in other contexts, state support is dependent on being the good immigrant. Determining who deserves to belong to a polity, howsoever temporarily or permanently, is a cultural judgement as much as a legal and political one. This being, as Adrienne Rich put it: “must remain eternally a guest, / Never to wear the birthmark of their ways. / He could be studying native all his days / And die a kind of minor alien still.” Because identity for this being is always determined by where they are not, they neither belong to the old place nor to the new one. With good luck, their identities reach a certain status to be hyphenated, without luck, they belong nowhere but to the lost.

Histories of migration layer modern political histories of belonging, but there is also the myth of original belonging. The logic that ultimately split our South Asia, which turned my ancestors into refugees, was not merely one of migration, it was also this other sense of belonging: cultural belonging. And cultural belonging was a religious one. This belonging was a double-edged sword: their identities determined their suitability for this new-old land called India. It determined their belonging, their resilience, their “entrepreneurial spirit”, and ability to grow and thrive. Yet their identity is also what made them refugees in the first place. Cultural belonging is tied to a history of conquest. In the South Asian region, cultural belonging is inseparable from questions of religion. Religion has followed and dictated the movement of empires weaving together much of Asia. It is this weaving that is now fuelling the Rohingya genocide and refugee crisis. But cultural belonging can also be inseparable from the question of ethnicity, bound to skin color or to caste. The violence of empires, like the violence of the bloodline rhetorics, operates perpetually as if following some invisible Newtonian law of motion: violence feeding violence, empires feeding empires. Here, the foundational narrative of displacement is trapped in the three myths: original belonging, original empire, and original violence. Who was first, who ruled first, and who invaded and cast the first stone? Who is the cause of displacement?

When working on speculative futures and science fiction, to me it is the politics of polities that determine the conditions of possibility for imagined possible futures, and how these fictions negotiate the historical archives as much as the pressures of their contemporary times. In early science fiction, possible futures were deeply intertwined with colonialism and scientific racism, and the vocabulary of the alien of outer space became the metaphor for those we considered aliens on the planet. In *The War of the Worlds* (1898), H. G. Wells modelled the Martian behaviour towards humans on European behaviour towards the Tasmanians: bent on genocide of those considered inferior. And this became the foundation story for the alien invasion in science fiction. The importance of this foundational moment can hardly be overemphasized: the trope of the invading alien is the lifeblood of much speculative thinking. From yellow peril to techno-orientalism, from strategic war games to space westerns, from vegetal horror to microbial invasion - casting other beings (including non-humans) that don't resemble oneself as the alien justifies the perpetuity of futuristic narratives of violence and conquest. All life that is not oneself becomes a threat, a symptom of forgetting that who one is, has been, and ever will be, is a multitude of histories, bodies, and beings.

The trope of the invading alien forces into existence the myths of displacement by becoming the threat to belonging. But if displacement is ever trapped in myths, perhaps it is better to first imagine radical unbelonging instead of belonging anywhere, and see one's future in a new state of being. In the entrails of the devastation of our histories



Illustration: Shanice Da Costa, 2021

lies the forgetting that we have always been the alien, and the alien has always been us.

PART 3: FUTURES AND HISTORIES

Our better world was home.

Ken Liu’s *The Man Who Ended History*⁵ is a history of two people who wish to deepen the sense of authenticity of history by using their time travel methods, but who cannot escape the geopolitical nature of their own identities. The main characters are entangled with the macro and micro-histories of their own senses of belonging to nation-states, to their ancestries, and to each other. The characters are Americans who are hyphenated Japanese and Chinese, and they seek to increase knowledge of Japanese war crimes in China, including human experimentation in concentration camps during the Sino-Japanese War (part of the larger Asian history of the Second World War) using their time travel methods. As they do so, however, the “objective” narrative of history that they wish to uncover becomes trapped in personal history, hence ancestral complicity in the same violence is secreted. The truth of one history becomes a casualty of the truth of another.

If one could indeed travel through time as much as one travels through space, where would one go? To what times and to what places in those times? To what origins and what histories will our destinations tend? And in doing so, what origins and what histories will lie unacknowledged? This history of the world, which is also a history of forgetting, is the backbone of the structures of continually erupting origins of belonging that violently force new narratives of displacement and emplacement.

We think with ourselves – and what we consider to be the future comes from our own conditioning of what futures are possible. Hence the limitations of human action, as well as often enough, whatever is considered collective vision. Without sufficient depth of historical knowledge and perception, solutions to local problems cannot be found in mere extrapolations and scenario buildings of the future, which sees it as a managerial task. The uniqueness of the local requires the historicity of the local to be addressed. At the same time, it is in their ability to resonate with other times and other places, the ability to resonate transhistorically, that can create any form of collective vision for a better world. My work on futures is a footnote to a familial, cultural, and national history of perpetual displacement and alien-ness, just as the history of some people is a footnote to the perpetual sense of

non-belonging. But if there is to be a future for people, it must be a future that acknowledges the violences of history and conflict, and then goes beyond it to locate oneself not in a perpetual trauma of non-belonging, but in a perpetual state of being at home, belonging with one-self, and belonging everywhere. The end-goal must not be a better future for refugees to lock them in hyphenated selves, as asylee and refugee success stories who ultimately transmute into the good immigrant, but a future where the term refugee itself no-longer make sense – in a world where everyone belongs, equally.

If there is a future to the future, it is in the many narratives of possibility that lie beyond the narratives of myth, myths of the nation-state and myths of management that underlie and bolster those myths. The human question has a resonance that is not a national or ethnic resonance, but a transhistorical one of many histories. In beginning to think futures, we have to begin to think in terms of what I have termed cofutures. In cofutures, the complexity of our many entangled histories through time are considered, just as their living existence here and now - their coevalness - within our bodies is as well. What futures will then arrive, and what futures may together be possible, i.e. be compossible, will serve as the opening for many possible futures. Cofutures – complex, coeval, compossible futures – is the collective name for the social technology of possibilities.

¹ Santayana, G. (1964). “The Philosophy of Travel.” *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 40(1), 1-10.
² Jubaili, D. (2016). “The Worker.” *Iraq + 100: Stories from a Century After the Invasion*, ed. Hassan Blasim. Comma Press.
³ Narasimhan, Vagheesh M., et al. 2019. “The Formation of Human Populations in South and Central Asia.” *Science*, vol. 365, no. 6457, p. eaat7487, doi:10.1126/science.aat7487.
⁴ Rich, A. (1950). “By No Means Native.” *A Change of World: Poems With a Foreword by W. H. Auden*. Yale University Press. 31.
⁵ Liu, Ken. 2011. “The Man Who Ended History: A Documentary.” *Panverse Three*, ed. Dario Ciriello. Panverse Publishing.



Illustration: Shanice Da Costa, 2021

HOW DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE FUTURE?

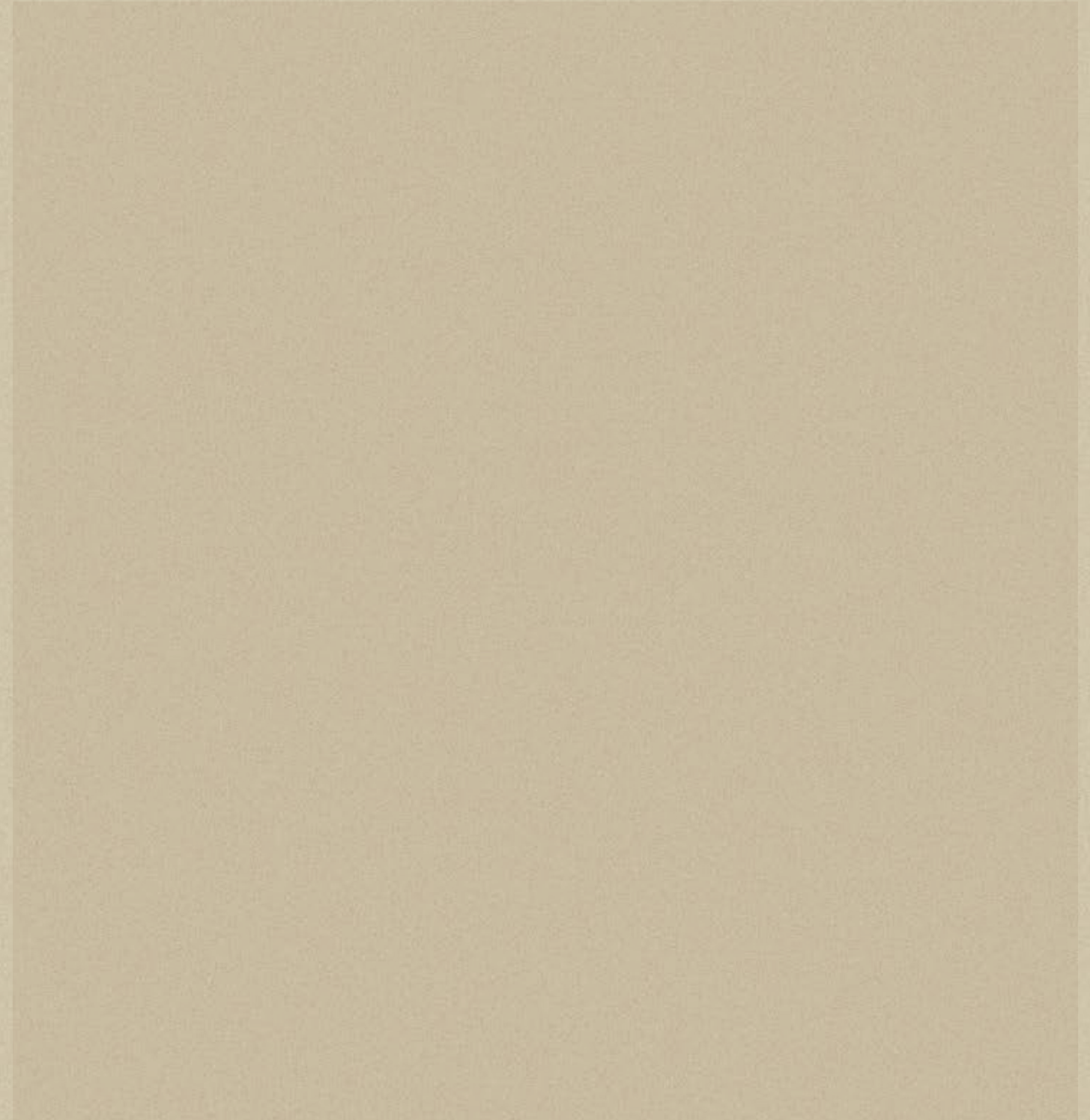


Haunting raises specters, and it alters the experience of being in linear time, alters the way we normally separate and sequence the past, the present and the future. These specters or ghosts appear when the trouble they represent and symtomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view...the whole essence. if you can use that word, of a ghost is that it has a real presence and demands its due, demands your attention.

To repeat, for me haunting is not about invisibility or unknowability per se, it refers us to what's living and breathing in the place hidden from view: people, places, histories, knowledge, memories, ways of life, ideas. To show what's there in the blind field, to bring it to life on its own terms (and not merely to light) is perhaps the radicalization of enlightenments with which i've been most engaged...haunting is an emergent state: the ghost arises, carrying the signs and portents of a repression in the past or the present that's no longer working.

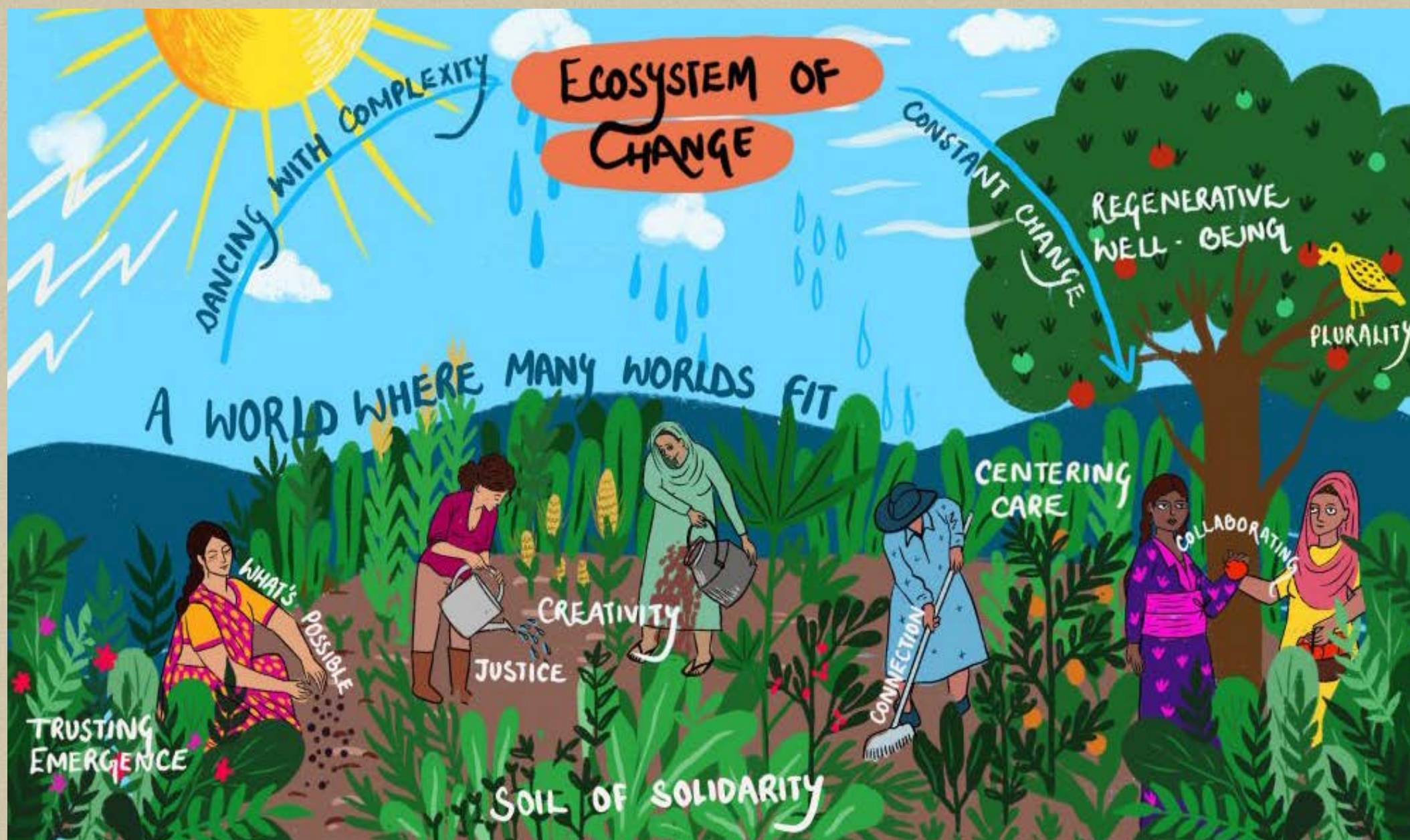
Avery Gordon from Haunting Futurity.

CONJURE A FUTURE...

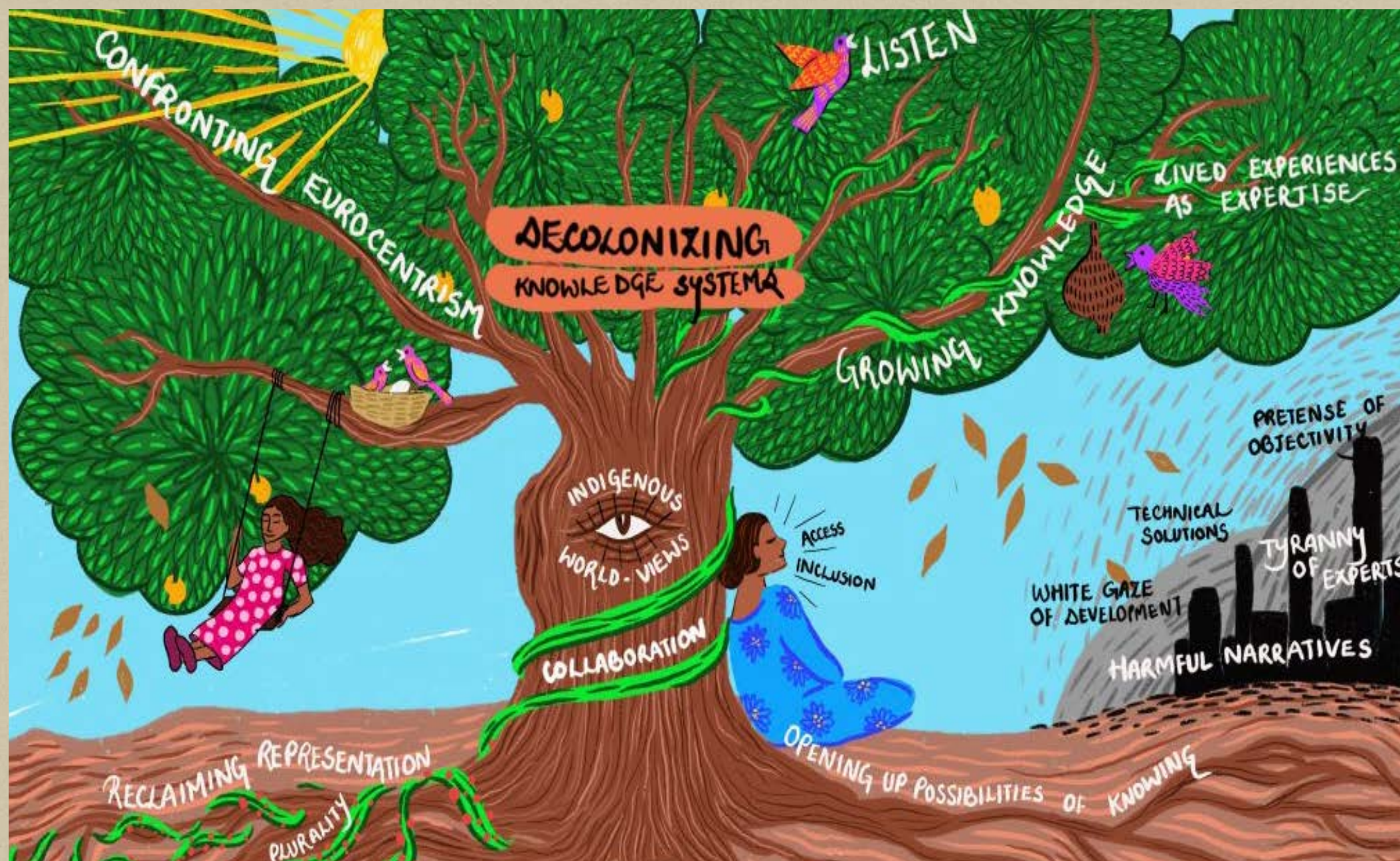


WHAT HAUNTS THIS FUTURE?

This activity was developed by Jane Pirone and Barbara Adams for a series of speculative storytelling workshops titled "Collective Effervescence". All artwork by Jane Pirone.



Illustrations: Vidushi Yadav
 Curation/writing: María Faciolince
 ("Creating new horizons: paths to shift power and imagination in development" Published via Oxfam, 2021)



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HOMECOMING MUSEUM

UN launches new museum to document humanity's reconciliation with the natural world.

Date: 21 February 2034

The joint High Commissioners of United Home for Collapse and Renewal (UNHCR), Nyumba Mwendo and Fèpati Lakay, have launched the Homecoming Museum. Opening in January 2035, the museum will be a living memory to document humanity's reconciliation with the natural world. The museum aims to do this by curating exhibitions that affirm the idea that humans can innately co-exist with the natural world.

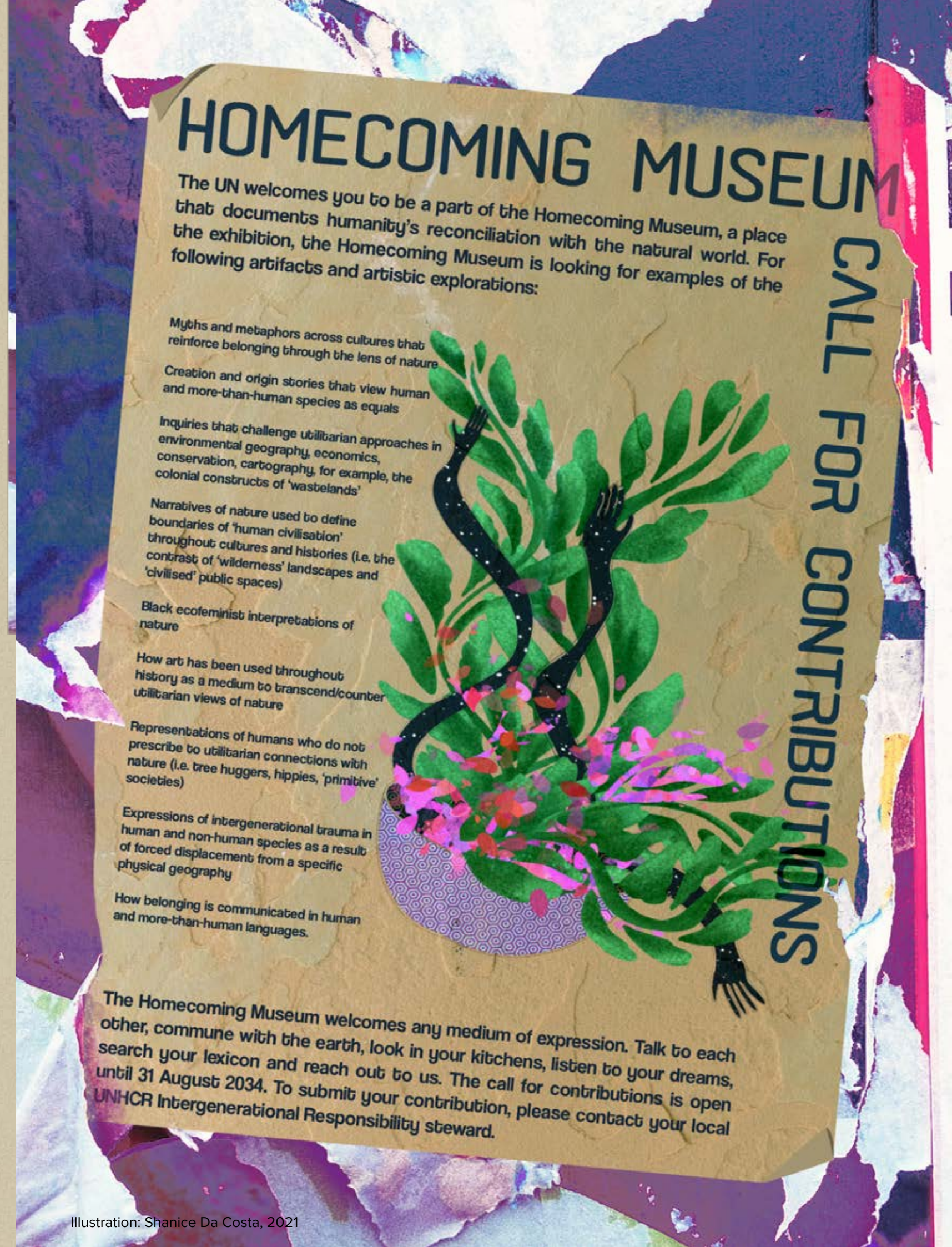
Commissioner Lakay explains, "The Homecoming Museum is our collective space to chip away at the mindset of separation from nature which positions us as fundamentally incompatible with the natural world. A worldview that has fueled the displacement of people and loss of place through extraction and exploitation. We must unlearn the psyches of oppression and violence we have inherited. This is a space to be good ancestors for future generations and the other 99 percent of life on earth. We can birth something new together."

Mwendo continues, "We don't have to struggle to be that which we already are - at one with nature. Whereas when we pillage the earth, we have to struggle to do that, really struggle...it is not our intrinsic way of being."

The valuing of nature according to its usefulness to human beings, is one expression of the culture of separation and individualism. In response to this, the first exhibition, Utility and Relationship, aims to explore this idea that nature has value because of its utility to human beings.

The Lead Curator, Lauret Madhier says, "Over the past 30 years, both environmental activists and actors willfully engaged in environmentally destructive activities have leveraged the narrative of nature's utility to human beings, as a way to influence their desired outcomes. Do we act to conserve nature because of its usefulness to human beings, because of the potential threat to humanity's survival if we don't? We want to delve deeper into this instrumental view of nature."

Through experiences of displacement, we have come to understand that humanity's connection to the natural environment is not rooted in utility but in relationship. We, as part of an ecosystem of life, affect and are affected by our more-than-human kin. When we see them as equals, as living beings like us, what else is there to explore in our relationship? How does that affect our understanding of belonging, identity, agency, and responsibility?"



NARRATIVE SHIFT: FROM SAVIORISM TO SOLIDARITY

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE COLLECTIVE ACTION:

WHO CONTROLS OUR PROJECT?

WHO MAKES DECISIONS ABOUT WHAT WE DO?

DOES ANY OF THE FUNDING WE RECEIVE COME WITH STRINGS ATTACHED THAT LIMIT WHO WE HELP OR HOW WE HELP?

DO ANY OF OUR GUIDELINES ABOUT WHO CAN PARTICIPATE IN OUR WORK CUT OUT STIGMA-TIZED AND VULNERABLE PEOPLE?

WHAT IS OUR RELATIONSHIP TO LAW ENFORCEMENT?

HOW DO WE INTRODUCE NEW PEOPLE IN OUR GROUP TO OUR APPROACH TO LAW ENFORCE-
MENT?

FROM MUTUAL AID BY DEAN SPADE

10 WAYS TO SUPPORT SOCIAL JUSTICE:

DEFINE A SET OF PRINCIPLES BY WHICH YOU WILL WORK

DISTANCE YOURSELF FROM THOSE WHO WORK AGAINST YOUR PRINCIPLES

RETHINK REPRESENTATION

CONSIDER YOUR NEGATIVE IMPACT

GET INVOLVED AND BUILD ON WORK THAT IS ALREADY HAPPENING

HUMBLE YOURSELF, DESIGN WITH, NOT FOR

LEARN ABOUT PRIVILEGE AND ANTI OPPRESSION

KNOW WHEN NOT TO DESIGN

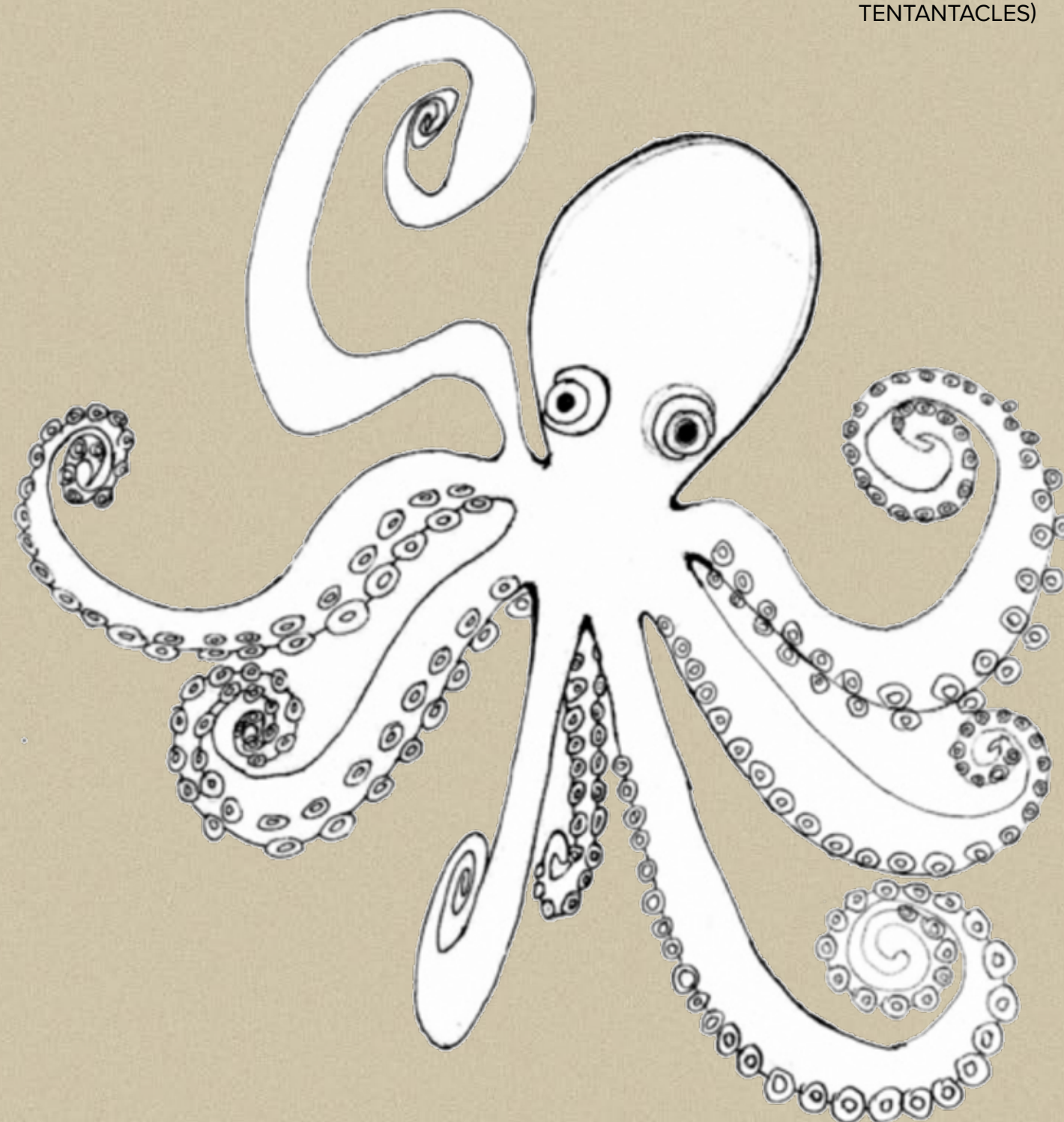
SHAPE ALTERNATE FUTURES

BEGIN BY LISTENING

FROM THE DESIGN JUSTICE NETWORK

HUMANITARIAN OCTOPUS

WHAT QUESTIONS AND VALUES
ORIENT AND SHAPE YOUR WORK?
(WRITE THEM ONTO THE
TENTANTACLES)



This activity was developed by Jane Pirone and Barbara Adams for a series of speculative storytelling workshops titled "Collective Effervescence". All artwork by Jane Pirone.

NEW FRONTIERS

The Future Narratives of Refugee Crises



Illustration: Shanice Da Costa, 2021

THE STORIES WE TELL OURSELVES

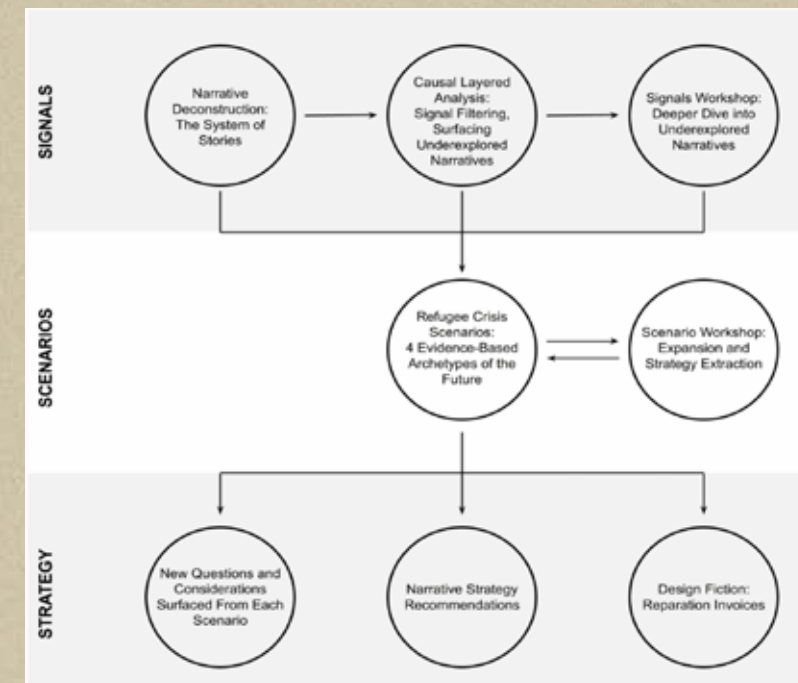
The stories we tell about refugees and the challenges they face are complicated. They are stories of great challenges, of loss, and of overcoming dystopic circumstances in search of a new home. The world of the refugee can be a harsh one. At times, it is a violent, destructive, and unwelcoming world.

What if we could change the story, the stories told of them, and reimagine the worlds that hold those stories? Stories can be rewritten and retold in new ways. Stories can be broken down and remade. And what is the future but a story we tell?

This report will explore existing and emerging narratives in order to identify untapped possibilities for UNHCR, underexplored questions, and grounds for further work. It will use strategic foresight methodology including signal mapping, causal layered analysis, and scenario archetypes to surface new stories and worlds to address refugee crises.

METHODOLOGY

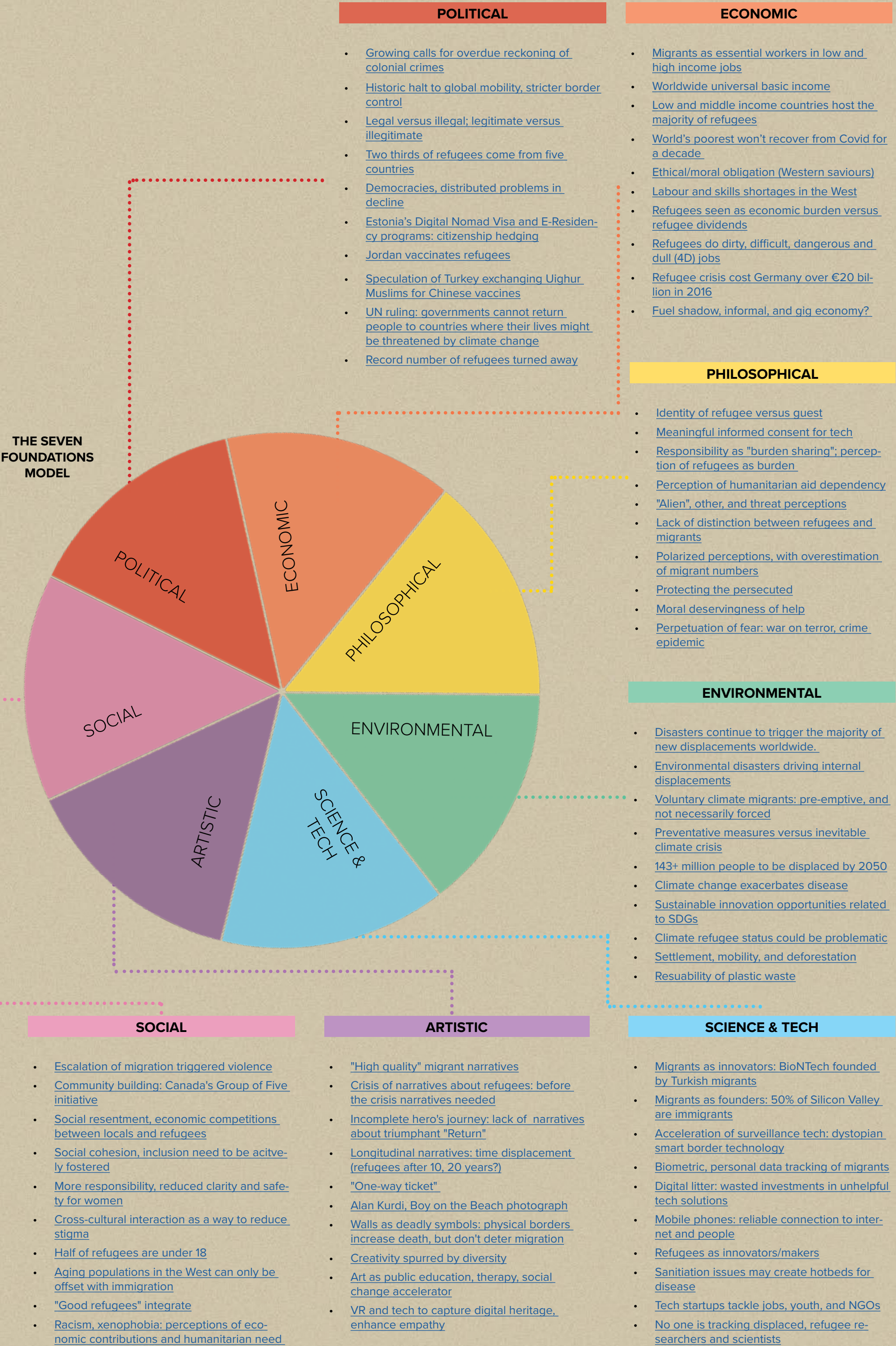
The material presented in this report is the culmination of an evidence-driven process that uses strategic foresight methodology. Consider this project “foresight-lite”. A more rigorous, comprehensive project that combines foresight and systemic design may yield further insights and recommendations for UNHCR.



A SYSTEM OF STORIES

Much of what we consider reality is a story – a construct that we have created for ourselves. Constructs can be deconstructed and reconstructed.

The following deconstruction looks at the systems of narratives surrounding refugees and the emerging realities of those systems. By using the Seven Foundations model and applying a worldbuilding lens to parse data, we may identify overlooked aspects of the refugee experience and the components of a given crisis.



CAUSAL LAYERED ANALYSIS

The root causes related to displacement are complex, the narratives related to which are deeply polarised. A number of negative myths and metaphors are associated with refugees and their long-term impacts on receiving countries. However, there are positives for countries that receive refugees that often go unexplored. This includes thinking beyond the economic value refugees may add to their host country.

The following Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) explores the current and possible narratives associated with a refugee crisis to surface new insights. It filters the signals and stories identified in the narrative deconstruction. By changing the story, perhaps we can alter perceptions and, therefore, reality.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|---------|---|----------|---|
| Problem | Current | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Compounding crisis• Economic expense, liability• Burdensome• Distorted numbers and facts• Perpetual fear, threat | Possible | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Opportunity• Economic assets, dividends• Distributed care• Community strengthening and building• Truth and stories |
| Causes | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Political instability, violence & warfare• Environmental displacement, further• Recieving countries already struggling• Deepening wealth inequality• 5 countries in crisis | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Refugees as essential workers, innovators• Recieving countries gain long-term benefits• Pre-emptive aid and peace building• Migration as environmental benefit• Policy rehabilitation |
| Worldview | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Migration as destruction, destabilisation• Moral deservingness• Unending dependancy• Xenophobia, racism• One-way ticket, no return | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Diversity as creativity, innovation• Cross-cultural and social cohesion• Commonality and similarity, not differences• Prevention and mitigation |
| Myths & Metaphors | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Good” versus “bad” refugees• “High” versus “low” quality refugees• Western and white saviours• “Alien”, “other” or “illegal”• Incomplete hero’s journey• Walls, border control, pertectionism | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Colonial correction• Global citizens• Re-inventing the hero’s return• Permeable boundaries and borders• Shaping the future by nurturing children |

Based on the CLA, some possible opportunities for rewriting and reimagining current narratives are as follows:

- Signal spotting: how might we identify the signs of a crisis long before it happens?
 - Displacement as a social and environmental positive: how might we create safer, sustainable journeys?
 - Pre-emptive intervention: how might we prevent a crisis by repositioning future refugees as present-day citizens?
 - Universal basic income: how might we establish a truly global income?
 - Diversity dividends: how might we emphasise the need for diversity to harness creativity and innovation?
 - Distributed care: how might we leverage new technologies to better share responsibilities towards communities?
- Models of peace: how might we preserve democracy without war?
 - Colonial correction: how might we redirect international resources to address entrenched inequalities through mechanisms such as climate reparations?
 - Nurturing children: how might we pursue intergenerational justice and protect children’s rights in the future?
 - Return-less journey: how might we facilitate a safe voluntary return to a stable home country?
 - Renew language: how might we clarify language related to forcibly displaced people to better communicate with the public?
 - Time travel: How might we better leverage time as a design medium to prevent and mitigate crises?

2040 SCENARIOS

What does the future hold? While it is difficult to predict how a complex challenge might unfold, we can explore the possibilities.

Insights from the narrative deconstruction and CLA were used to create a set of scenarios. These scenarios are not predictions of the future or descriptions of what might happen. They are evidence-based constructs we use to think about what else is possible and how we might change our approach in the present. Each sentence is embedded with signals, including emerging social issues and political realities. If signals are notes, then scenarios are songs.

Because the scenarios describe the world at large, they may be used by UNHCR and its partner organizations in other projects to provoke new thinking, challenge assumptions, and seek out new possibilities. Think of the scenarios as a playground to imagine different stories and innovations within.

CONTINUATION: GROWING GAPS

A continuation scenario explores the “business as usual” future, one in which economic growth persists.

Equality remains elusive. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer, and the world is more divided than ever. Humanity teeters on the edge of crisis, pulled back by feats of innovation that save us from social and environmental collapse. Countries conserve diminishing resources with less capacity for aid and foreign investment. We are caught in a vicious cycle of solving for symptoms. The more crises we encounter, the less money there is to help everyone else.

As the world becomes an increasingly unreliable place, digital worlds become the default. Reality can’t compare to the pristine worlds that many escape into. The more money individuals have, the better the experiences they can afford. Corporations take charge of the Metaverse¹ and NGOs become increasingly reliant on private wealth to support their efforts. Some begin to provide income, sponsorship, and dividends in exchange for digital labour, creativity, and intellectual property.

Algorithms sort and label us according to our potential. Individuals are ranked and evaluated according to their

Gross Domestic Potential, and not everyone has equal economic and social value in the present or the future. There are no more universal rights; only return on investments. Big tech puts undisclosed price tags on people. These algorithms are built by a few for the many, and not everyone agrees with their use or the balance of the formula. Some countries and companies create their own, while others aim for conformity and standardization, stifling diversity for the sake of universality.

The data collected creates a tiered system for refugees. Richer nations provide aid to poorer ones, as an efficient method to keep “low potentials” within their borders. Who gets to move and to where is determined by the Good Refugee algorithm, along with the level of care and support they qualify for. Some families are torn apart as high potential children are sent to a different host country from their parents. Others remain together because they are worth more together than on their own. Those who make missteps in the journey, deviations from the perfect path, are doomed to be data-driven off it.

Questions and Considerations

- How do we design systems that prevent the conditions for crises?
- How might humanitarian organizations better recognise and mitigate crisis before it occurs?
- How do we better balance private, social, and sovereign wealth?
- Does the informal economy supersede the formal one?
- How do we prevent privacy from becoming a commodity for the few?
- How do we prevent the creation and use of unethical algorithms?
- What are the consequences of deterministic algorithms for the public sector, international organizations, and local and international NGOs?
- How might biased and unethical algorithms undermine human rights?

Potential Strategies for UNHCR

- Form ethical relationships with corporations and governments to encourage slow, sustainable, and ethical innovation
- Develop principles for ethical, inclusive innovation alongside displaced communities
- Protect human dignity as economic exploitation escalates

- Diversify and protect UNHCR’s income sources
- Advocate and lobby for ethical algorithms
- Develop preventative aid and crisis mitigation programmes
- Develop and advocate for international and national metrics beyond GDP
- Advocate and communicate the UN’s role in cultural technology
- Design multigenerational solutions that keep families together
- Increase resources for local, and community-led efforts

DISCIPLINE: PERVASIVE WALLS

A discipline scenario explores bottom-up and/or top-down order and control.

Everything is rationed. Growing demands become harder to meet after a roaring 20s and a slow response to environmental degradation. Food, water, energy, and other basic necessities are in low supply. We learn to curb our needs and our vices, while living on less. Everything is calculated for us from the portions of our food to miles we can travel to the time we’re allowed online – all enforced by the algorithms that run our lives. Grids are carefully controlled. Even families are incentivised to have fewer children, with ample rewards offered to those who self-sterilise.

Pervasive surveillance technology tracks every aspect of our lives. What we do, where we go, and who we meet with. Smart walls and smart borders decide who gets in and who gets out of every conceivable space, including homes, companies, and countries. Smart drones and autonomous vehicles run interference on anyone who tries to break the rules. There is no mobility without permission and payment, both of which are unaffordable for most. Our paths and journeys are laid out before us, deviations from which can become a costly mistake and diminishes our rations. Hacking and manipulating rations become a way of life for some.

Our virtual worlds have borders too as corporations become digital governments. Staying plugged in and connected is a luxury, especially on energy rations. The lack of access paves the way for new inequality tensions as the splinternet creates digital tribes and ever-shifting identities. For many, digital escape is the new drug and, sometimes, the only relief. For some, going off-grid is

the new dream. Some refugees find solace in the digital worlds, giving up their real-world allegiances, exchanging privacy for protection. Others find themselves facing physical and digital walls, unable to navigate systems of control designed to keep them out.

War moves to cyberspace too, with most conflict and damage carried out online. Civilians are not off limits. Digital infrastructure and grids are insecure, and cybersecurity is a national priority for all countries. Peacekeeping and cooperation fall to the wayside as digital defence requires more attention and resources. Controlling information is key, as each entity fights to establish its version of the truth.

As war and conflict go digital, the real world is left to recover. Real-world violence tempers. The environment recovers though it does not return to its original state, with many species lost in the roaring years. All that restraint has trade-offs.

Questions and Considerations

- How might we ensure that digital worlds are safe, equitable, and inclusive?
- How do we protect marginalised communities in cyberwar?
- What forms of discipline can we enact in the present to curb the need for high discipline later?
- How might digital worlds change the concept of “field” work i.e. digitally displaced individuals?
- How might we respond to organizations that follow online and offline jurisdictions rather than national borders?
- How do we protect vulnerable populations from misinformation and disinformation campaigns?
- How might we protect identity and culture in the emerging digital world?

Potential Strategies for UNHCR

- Advocate for a body of the United Nations that addresses cyberwar and digital worlds
- Establish and communicate principles for digital borders and equality within the Metaverse (i.e. the summation of all virtual spaces and related constructs)
- Advocate for diversity and inclusion in the creation of digital worlds
- Advocate for data protection of vulnerable populations
- Advocate for universal digital human rights

- Develop safe and ethical guidelines for smart walls and borders
- Provide access to leisure for welfare and wellbeing
- Advocate for equal and secure access to energy, data, and the internet
- Consider the role of the UNHCR in de-digitalization and reality rehabilitation

COLLAPSE: DYING LANDS

A collapse scenario explores a systemic breakdown.

The Earth is dying. Erratic and extreme weather are the norm, ocean levels rise and swallow islands whole while eating away at our shores, and keystone species die-off at alarming rates. Biodiversity collapse seems all but imminent as our ecological systems hit their tipping points faster than we had anticipated.

Nations rush to secure precious little water and food supplies by any means necessary, even if those means are violent. Resources dwindle. Disease flourishes. Trust and diplomacy break down as each country fends for itself. Wealthier nations use their resources to protect their citizens and fortify their armies, grappling with fallout of mass internal displacement. Poverty, fear, and ongoing destruction become the great equalisers. We stay in small numbers to protect ourselves and what little resources we have left. The outside world is unsafe, and all we have left are our containers and our digital escapes.

As the Earth suffers, we suffer with it. Genocide becomes an everyday reality as more displaced people find themselves without a home. Our lands, and the worlds we once knew, are no longer habitable. Trauma is inherited from parent to child, compounding generational injustices. As millions begin to move within and between countries, democracy is destabilised. Fanatics and eco-fascists rise to power, promising safety from the “others”, claiming refugees will damage the social and environmental fabric or society. Authoritarian nations use the crisis to rid themselves of undesirable populations, blaming expulsions and mass deaths on environmental disasters. Some trade people like cattle, exchanging hard labour for aid and supplies. Borders become battlegrounds, keeping some locked in and others locked out. Few live through to reach the other side, only to find new wastelands waiting for them. Pre-emptive drone strikes are carried out against refugees to keep them from reaching their destinations, in the name of security. There is nowhere safe to run to.

Questions and Considerations

- How might we better communicate that climate change exacerbates existing and entrenched inequalities?
- How do we ensure we are not enabling the wrong future or defuturing other alternatives?
- How might we diversify the income streams of international aid organizations?
- How might we rethink long-term, unallocated funding?
- How might we better foster relationships between refugees and their host communities?
- How do we ensure the cost of aid does not escalate as climate change worsens?
- How might we enable agile, place-based and local response to crises?
- How might nature “seek refuge”?

Potential Strategies for UNHCR

- Advocate and work towards environmental flourishing to prevent future crises
- Communicate with and support countries to prepare for climate-driven internal displacement
- Engage in environmental protection to prevent future refugee crises
- Analyse and establish sustainable practices throughout UNHCR e.g. minimising employee flights
- Seek out and fund innovative Earth-centred and regenerative aid efforts
- Identify and improve opportunities for remote help
- Invest in and develop robust environmental degradation simulations
- Design mitigation and response strategies to the collapse of global food supply chains
- Identify and invest in land reclamation efforts that restore shorelines
- Anticipate future protocols and agreements that minimise eco-injustices
- Establish and iterate a global climate crisis plan

TRANSFORMATION: OPEN WORLDS

A transformation explores a high-tech and/or high-spirit scenario.

“Planet and people first” is the new paradigm. Climate

positive solutions become the economic and political standards of our world. Biophilic design, biomimicry, cleantech, and renewables are dominant technologies as we increasingly become a life-centric species that aims to maximise environmental and social health. Stewardship, connection, renewal and purpose are the values we cherish most. Once disparate aid organizations come together under a single banner and unified cause, providing holistic care and healing cycles of generational trauma.

A global Corporate Social Wealth tax is introduced as an investment in a brighter future, along with an Environmental Overuse tax to ensure no one operates outside the planet’s carrying capacity. We recognise that no person or entity is disconnected from the tree of life. What nourishes the tree, nourishes the branches and the leaves. The elimination of tax havens opens up new opportunities for wealth sharing. Health is a fundamental right that is redefined to include basic universal needs such as food, water, and housing. The active dismantling of people and planet-fearing organizations provides the funding needed for reparations.

The United Nations Stewardship Organization (UNSO) works towards creating a flourishing society by enacting models of peace. Employing artificial intelligence, digital twins, and climate simulations improve, we learn to spot the seeds of a crisis before it happens. Anticipation and early crisis intervention through data and design prove far more effective and less costly than the alternative, paying future social dividends on present monetary investments. With all those advancements, the online world paves the way for a Protoverse – a place where experimental science, policies, cultural realities, and more are imagined and simulated before they are brought into the real world to transform it. The Protoverse is built by all for all; a decentralised, plural world in which no one has more power or resources than anyone else.

People still migrate but not because we are in crisis. We migrate to exchange culture, knowledge, and wisdom, as ambassadors and keepers of community and cohesion. We recognise we are keystone species that can shape the world for the better. Migration paths are soulful, voluntary journeys – an honourable role that helps rewild the world and provide planetary care, undertaken with assistance and robotic aid. Our living world is our art.

Questions and Considerations

- How do we move beyond crisis to flourishing?

- How might we ensure digital worlds are built for the many by the many?
- Should we enshrine environmental rights as human rights?
- What environmentally friendly forms of conflict are we overlooking?
- How might we enable joyful migration?
- Who might be lost or underserved by transformation and/or transitions?
- What values should be deemed “keystone” values (foundational, life-centric values)?
- How do we unify disparate aid organisations under a single goal to eliminate the need for aid?
- How might we encourage and fund stewardship technology?

Potential Strategies for UNHCR

- Develop crisis anticipation and intervention models including criteria for pre-emptive action
- Invest in understanding how indigenous knowledge can contribute to ethical innovation and place-based design efforts
- Advocate for increased funding and venture capital for robust environmental simulations and models i.e. constructing a digital twin of the Earth and its critical ecosystems that update in real-time
- Improve the journey of migrants to make them safer and sustainable
- Improve communication and coordination between different organizations that assist refugees
 - ◊ Unified stewardship, and common resources
- Redefine the concept of home and relationship with land
- Provide “soul” aid: what are the conditions for long-term wellbeing?
- Educate the private sector on slow, planet-centred and ethical innovation
- Advocate for climate positive policies and innovations

NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

As we look to the future, UNHCR may journey into new frontiers that present both challenges and opportunities related to its mandate. The following recommendations are derived from the research and scenarios presented in this document and highlight areas that require further exploration.

HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE METAVERSE

The metaverse (our shared virtual worlds) is quickly emerging with all the inequalities present in the physical world. Digital human rights, digital borders, access, biased algorithms, exploitation of vulnerable populations, data privacy, etc. are all factors that UNHCR may need to address with more comprehensive efforts in the near future. It is important for the organization to take a proactive stance on shaping this emerging reality rather than reacting to its inequalities as they surface. We need a declaration of human digital rights and operating principles for an inclusive, open Metaverse.

This may include:

- A UN. charter of digital rights and freedoms, with specific sections pertaining to the rights of children
- An exploration of protocols on virtual land ownership, privatized virtual spaces, and digital borders
- A treaty advocating for fractional ownership of the Metaverse
- Designing parameters for a decolonised Metaverse

Additionally, stories about the Metaverse are dominated by cyberpunk narratives (which often explore themes of inequality and oppression). While these narratives serve as important warnings about the future, they are one side of the equation. We need positive stories of equality, inclusion, and flourishing in an open, thriving, and diverse world. These stories should include depictions of positive and altruistic behaviour in order to set an example of peace in virtual places.

BUSINESS MODELS OF PEACE

There are clear and easy to articulate business models and supply chains for war. It is much more difficult to iden-

tify the business models and supply chains for peace. The economics of peace must be mapped and communicated, with clear step-by-step guidelines for how to enact peace and engage in what can be called “peace-profiteering”. The collection and dissemination of stories that exemplify peace-profiteering may set a positive example of how to balance collective good and economic wealth.

Business models of peace may further benefit from a reimagining of economic models. Concepts such as degrowth, regeneration, and Kate Raworth’s doughnut economics might serve as seeds for new narratives.

REBUILDING AFTER THE CRISIS

Many dystopias end after a battle is fought and the hero wins. What we often do not see is the long and difficult process that comes after. We lack mainstream narratives that demonstrate how we rebuild and recover in the aftermath of a crisis, i.e. stories that show the challenges that come with transformation and change. It may benefit UNHCR to imagine stories of how nations and people recover, including the challenges they might encounter navigating peace and sustainability, how those challenges are overcome, and the actions and behaviors that are required to achieve success. In particular, it might be worthwhile to write and explore stories of how climate ravaged areas restore ecosystems and how war-torn nations heal and reconcile. This could include sharing existing stories of how nations have recovered from past crises to inspire change and healing.

SAFE, SUSTAINABLE JOURNEYS

Refugees make perilous journeys under immense emotional, psychological, and physical pain. While the ideal future is one in which there is no need to make such a journey, the present-day circumstances call for ensuring safer journeys. Designing and exploring refugee journeys of the future may help uncover novel ideas to improve current journeys.

Unlike other species, human migration can often have a negative impact on the environment. While it is the wealthy who are disproportionately responsible for climate change, ensuring that all migrations and journeys

are sustainable is a worthwhile pursuit given the implications of environmental degradation.^{2 3} UNHCR should consider supporting innovations that enable sustainable journeys and climate positive movement. Partnerships with organizations that explore renewables, biophilic design, biomimicry, and biodegradables may be worth exploring. For instance, how might we map future migration paths and transform them for future needs (e.g. planting seeds for future food sources)?

It might be helpful for UNHCR to develop a comprehensive systems map of existing sustainable technology and solutions that could be beneficial in current and future crises. Doing so might surface new uses for existing solutions while identifying gaps in innovation. Such an artefact might provide value to partner organizations and prospective innovators. For instance, how might other nations benefit from Japan’s use of waste to aid land reclamation efforts⁴?

Exploring speculative stories of safe, sustainable journeys might yield new insights and ideas for real-world journeys. It might also help to capture migrations of other species as narratives to better understand how humanity might serve as a climate positive keystone species. The system is missing Solarpunk narratives: stories that subvert the systems that prevent brighter futures from emerging. These stories feature sustainability, renewables, and environmental flourishing. Solarpunk has yet to become a mainstream genre of science fiction and may lend itself well to stories of refugees seeking brighter futures.

COLONIAL CORRECTIONS

Colonisation is a root problem, the cascading events of which have been felt through centuries. Advocating for ways of decolonising the aid sector and redirecting resources through reparations (such as climate reparations) may help mitigate future crises and curb current challenges. It is important to note that the world’s poorest may bear the brunt of climate change and consequent displacements, though the privileged are disproportionately responsible. Climate change is “a brutal act of injustice”.⁵

Reparations are long overdue with signals for a “colonial reckoning” emerging. How to facilitate reparations while maintaining global economic stability is an important and timely conversation. The role of the private sector and tax havens should be considered. Telling stories about repa-

rations and how it might be facilitated may be beneficial.

THE AMERICAN REFUGEE CRISIS

It is a mistake to think that any part of the world is safe from the consequences of climate change. Wildfires in California are creating the conditions for migration.⁶ A record-shattering heatwave in British Columbia, Canada killed 130 people.⁷ The Netherlands might disappear altogether.⁸

It is important for residents of wealthier nations to understand they may be displaced someday. If environmental degradation accelerates, there may be nowhere left to seek refuge. Telling evidence-based stories of future refugee crises and displacements may be critical in communicating the consequences of inaction. It may also help diminish harmful narratives of refugees and migrants as “others”.

TIME AS DESIGN DIMENSION

Time plays a significant role in a refugee crisis. Generational trauma plays out over decades, if not centuries. Almost half of all refugees are children, who may grow up with different relationships to the country of departure and host country than their parents.

Seeking early, anticipatory intervention opportunities in the present may mitigate the need for greater resources and efforts later. Identifying and documenting the signals of a crisis before it happens, pre-emptive and precautionary funding and aid for at-risk populations, and investments in children are solutions that may help minimise future crises. Communicating the implications and potential solutions as narratives rather than as facts may help create emotional urgency and desire to act.

OUR CHILDREN

“Refugee” is a loaded word that has long-term implications for anyone who bears it, including children. To foster a sense of collective responsibility and oneness, UNHCR should consider transitioning from the words “refugee children” to “children” in the stories it tells publicly (while ensuring children retain the protections afforded by a ref-

ugee status in formal documents). Language is soft power and can alter a system without antagonising the existing power structure. Language is the conduit between thought and action. New language enables new stories. Though it seems like a minor change, using language that suggests collective responsibility may help inspire collective action, particularly as we experience environmental degradation — a challenge all children will inherit tomorrow.

NON-EXISTENCE

Charitable and aid organizations have not previously identified a single purpose that drives their strategy and operations, though one exists. The purpose of any given charity and aid organization should be to address its cause so effectively, its existence is no longer required. Systemic reform that eliminates root problems should be the desired outcome.

Rather than addressing a crisis once it has begun, UNHCR should seek opportunities and innovations that alleviate a crisis before it begins.

DESIGN FICTION: REPARATION INVOICES

Creating an artefact from the future can make an abstract future more tangible and visceral. Design fiction allows us to explore and critique the present and future by challenging our assumptions, shifting our perspective, and provoking conversations.

The following artefacts (pages 72-73) are invoices issued by the fictional “United Nations Office of Reparations”.

THE NEXT CHAPTER

As we look ahead to the impending challenges the future might bring, it is important to remember that change is possible though it is not always easy or simple. The future is shaped by our present-day actions. The purpose of looking ahead is to determine what we should and must do now — to pull the future into the present and make it our reality.

We stand on the precipice of a new, uncertain world. Together, we can build a better one.

¹The Metaverse is a portmanteau “beyond” and “universe”. It refers to a collective virtual world that encompasses all virtual spaces and constructs such as virtually enhanced physical reality and the internet.

²Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/nov/17/people-cause-global-aviation-emissions-study-covid-19>

³Retrieved from <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/environment/3b-039f3c4/refugees-environment.html>

⁴Retrieved from <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2017/02/18/environment/wasteland-tokyo-grows-trash/>

⁵Retrieved from <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/climate-change-is-connected-to-poverty/?template=next>

⁶Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/oct/02/climate-change-migration-us-wildfires>

⁷ Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-57654133>

⁸Retrieved from <https://www.politico.eu/article/when-will-the-netherlands-disappear-climate-change/>



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF REPARATIONS INVOICE

United Nations Office of Reparations
Palais des Nations
1211 Genève
Switzerland

Invoice #: 001

Invoice Date: February 1, 2022

Due Date: February 1, 2023

Bill To:

China Petroleum & Chemical Corporation
Royal Dutch Shell
Exxon Mobil
BP
Saudi Arabian Oil

| Description | Amount |
|---|---------------------------------|
| Climate change inaction that leads to 2 °C global warming | \$150 Trillion USD ¹ |

¹ According to Sanderson and O'Neill, "for a 1980 start, total discounted post-1980 costs for meeting 2C would range from 40 to 150 trillion 2015 dollars (10th and 90th percentiles)". Retrieved from <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-020-66275-4>



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF REPARATIONS INVOICE

United Nations Office of Reparations
Palais des Nations
1211 Genève
Switzerland

Invoice #: 002

Invoice Date: February 1, 2022

Due Date: April 30, 2022

Recurring: Annually

Bill To:

Museums of the Global North

| Description | Annual Amount |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Various artefacts of from from the continent of Africa | \$7.7 Trillion USD ¹ |

* Invoice will be rescinded if all items are returned by the due date.

¹ \$7.7 Trillion is the annual GDP of Africa. Retrieve from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/may/24/world-is-plundering-africa-wealth-billions-of-dollars-a-year>

ONWARD TO THE BLUE FALLS

EVELINA CYCLES INTO THE PATH OF FUTURE HUMANITARIAN INFRASTRUCTURES

Illustration: Shanice Da Costa, 2021

She liked a rough climb up a squeezed-in switchback. The feel of the wild grasses beneath the pedals, the rhythm of the river stones jolting her shoulders, and the plunge into the cool waters. She needed to touch the earth to probe her limits and then to push beyond, to move faster, cleaner, to reinvent herself with each ride. This striving for perfection was how she earned her living, and it was what was expected of her, even if most cyclists couldn't keep up.

Evelina Magalhães had received numerous offers from global outfitters to soften her ride: to outfit her bike with a carbon fibre frame, hydraulic shocks, even a titanium water bottle cage. She turned down all of these offers because it would dull the sensation of being connected to the earth that drove her forward. She had learned to ride on steel and still trusted it, her bike frame glinting hot pink and lime green because she liked the sparkle. She accepted a sponsorship for tubeless synthetic tires that were so fat they absorbed most jolts. By the end of her rides, after the last rider had typically dropped out, slime would be oozing over punctures in the tires from the trail. She called it the Blood of Joy.

She called riding her trabalho – her job. Today Evelina would take her riders through a part of the Serra da Canastra national park that had never been uploaded before. (She knew because she searched the internet for it.) Five hundred thousand mountain bikers around the world would be riding their Mouventure machines along with

her, physically connected to Evelina's bike in what was considered one of the most exhilarating and dangerous workout experiences in the world. When Evelina climbed a hill, her riders climbed a hill, their bikes tilting backward and the resistance increasing; when she bunny-hopped over a fallen log, their machine hopped too; when she fish-tailed through mud, the machine did too. The riders were virtually connected to her in the comfort of their own homes. Every Mouventure machine came equipped with a ten centimetre thick pad for when riders bucked off like a wild bronco. The riders paid handsomely for it, a hefty cut going to the Mouventure platform, of course, but enough for Evelina to support herself and much of her extended family. The Mouventure device affixed to her own machine was surprisingly small – no larger than a magic marker – and containing the radio frequency chips and U-band uplink. Small green sensors the size of ladybugs dotted her machine and relayed precise information to the device itself, and then all over the world via internet satellite. She could view live information about her audience through the Heads-up-Display in her visor, which looked like wraparound sunglasses.

Evelina's thick legs were knotted with muscles that rippled as she pedaled, revealing her almost Olympian strength. But the riders mostly couldn't see the muscles. They saw one of many standard avatars offered by Mouventure to provide their instructors with anonymity, altering her body in real-time. The only feature she refused to alter was her deep ebony skin. This part of her would remain, no matter

how much trouble it gave her.

Anyway, she didn't care, she rode them all into the ground.

Serra da Canastra national park was several hundred square kilometres of pristine semi arid hills and mountains, crisscrossed by dozens of rivulets and streams that swelled with the rains. To enter the park, tourists paid guides to take them in 4x4's along dirt roads to the most famous waterfalls and ponds.

But like many of Brazil's national parks, people had different understandings of what should be done with the land. The government permitted a few families to live in their ancestral dwellings and sell food to tourists, all specialties of Minas Gerais, the country's most famous region for mining minerals. The park was also a known migration route for people fleeing the flooded coastal cities to go west in search of work. Evelina had been noticing more of these migrants in recent weeks, their bags packed with their meager possessions, as beach towns became flood lands.

But now was the time to focus.

"Let's go look for little Totinho," she announced in her husky Portuguese. Her words were translated in near real-time in some sixty countries around the world, connected by low-Earth orbit satellite to Mouventure machines. Her visor, which doubled as sunglasses, allowed her to talk to her riders and see their status.

Yes! words in her visor read.

Let's get him!

*I'm f*** ready!*

Not going to drop me this time! another said, but this was followed by sarcastic comments and emojis.

Evelina dropped everyone on her rides. Everyone. That's why her thighs flared like tree trunks and why the riders paid for the experience. She pedaled over to a small bush where she found the bird patiently waiting for her. Totinha was a rhea, a flightless bird about half the size of an ostrich that was endemic to the region, and fast as hell. As soon she pulled up alongside her, the bird bolted forward. This marked the beginning of the ride – a full on out-of-the-saddle half-kilometre sprint along a potholed red-dirt access road. The bird's pace always caught her by surprise, but Evelina dropped into a lower gear and caught up with it. Totinha kicked forward for another hundred yards effortlessly – she knew that if it was in any real danger she never would have caught it – then it veered away to nibble on the prize she left hidden in the bushes, some scraps of lettuce and cheese. Her followers never saw the food, of course. It was part of the Mouventure fantasy.

She checked her rider count. Five hundred thousand had dropped to 350,000 over the course of the sprint, about normal. They all had to pay a minimum fee to participate and dropouts were common and part of the economics. Many more would drop out soon enough by the time she was finished with them.

"Thanks, Totinha!" Evelina said, "Warm up is finished. Time to do some real riding."

Love that Totinha!

Beautiful bird!

Can we buy one somewhere?

*F*** you Totinha!*

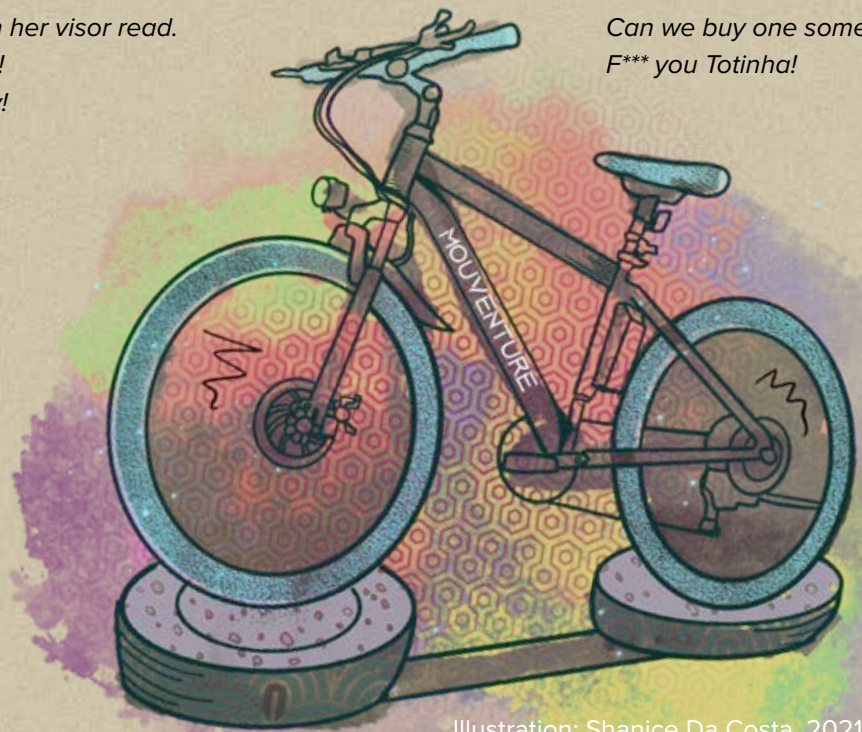


Illustration: Shanice Da Costa, 2021

Every single ride someone tried to buy Totinha or cursed the bird out. It was a little ritual. Evelina cycled over the main road that ringed the park and it was damp from rain two days before, but manageable. She didn't see any mudslides or collapses in her path, which meant the ground would be firm. During heavy rains anything was possible, but Serra da Canastra could be trusted once its soils had settled. She couldn't take more risks now that her aunt had fallen sick again because each ride paid for a home health aide for six months. But Evelina never let on to her riders that this was anything other than a workout.

The road squeezed into a narrow canyon and then opened up onto a wide valley below, where smoke was pouring from the chimney of the German pub. A white waterfall arced behind it in the distance, sending prisms of colour through the mist.

Beautiful! a rider said.

Hot!

Evelina suspected something was wrong when she heard the wheezing grind of an old hybrid engine clawing up the ring road. It was a large truck carrying thirty or so garimpeiros who were clustered together, some hanging off the sides of the truck like a trolley car. The faces of the miners were caked with mud and they had the tired look of men – they were all men – who had put in a hard day's work and had counted their wages and already determined it would not be enough.

She never talked about the garimpeiros to her riders. Once, when Evelina had first started her Mouventure workouts, as a lowly freelance instructor with no guaranteed royalties, she had paid half of her meager earnings to a "consultant," a man who gave workout specialists advice about how to improve their routes and attract more riders. The first thing he said was: "You need to avoid the miners. They take away from the experience."

"They're part of the experience," she objected.

"Experience is fantasy. Your riders are pretending they're you. They want to escape their lives, not see other people's problems."

"I thought our mission was to help them exercise in the comfort of their own homes."

"Our mission is to help them live their best life."

"And that life does not involve miners?"

"You don't understand this at all."

She fired him. The garimpeiros needed this land as much as she did. Sometimes they shot a bush pig just to eat a meal. She did not condone the hunting, but she wouldn't

tell them to go hungry instead. Totinha was off limits – and their foreman had sworn a solemn pact never to touch the strange little bird.

When times were desperate, Evelina would eat an energy bar from a sponsor or slurp a power drink, but she refused to put anything in her mouth that tasted bad. Her stubbornness had actually gained her more riders, who appreciated the headstrong dark woman from Brazil.

Normally, the garimpeiros would catcall playfully. Da-lhe Evelina! they would say. Show them what you got! Or they might even break into a bawdy song.

Not this time. This time she saw fear in their eyes as they hunched over bodies sprawled out on the floor, their clothes covered in mud and dark blood. Their faces were crudely blanketed with garbage bags. There were bullet holes in the licence plate of the truck, and the muffler dangled like a damaged limb.

What happened???

Who are those dudes?

One of Mouventure's rules for instructors was that you never had to reply to any question a rider asked you, unless they were experiencing a medical emergency. So Evelina did not reply. But her riders were right to ask questions today. Despite their fearsome appearance, most garimpeiros were softies who had been dealt a difficult life. Something bad must have happened.

"Now the real ride begins!" she said cheerfully, trying to shake it off. "Today we're going to the Cachoeira Azul. The Blue Waterfall!"

Whoa!

What is that?

Where is the blue waterfall?

Hot!

"If one hundred riders make it to the top with me, I promise to jump in!"

Hell yeah!

Let's do it!

She pedaled hard up a narrow switchback, where weeds leaned over the path from the recent rains. Her bike jolted over rocks – shaking her fellow riders – before memory took over and she recalled the nuances of the trail from when she used to ride in the Canastra to peddle trinkets and snacks to dusty tourists. The trail climbed almost four hundred metres in three kilometres through brush and bramble. She approached a swift moving stream and hopped over it, landing with a thud and continuing on.

That’s when the first alert popped up in her visor.

Emergency in Serra da Canastra national park. Paramilitary movements. Do you need help?

She looked at the message: bright red text with a double-lined border around it, blinking for her attention. She tried to clear her notifications but the message wouldn’t go away. It was on an emergency channel, meaning none of her followers would see it.

She re-read the question: *Do you need help?*

to make her living in a place which was so inaccessible and dangerous. If everyone could ride in the Canastra her Mouventure riders wouldn’t pay her to join. Her bike was connected to the internet by satellite, but she suffered no illusions that anyone would come to her rescue if she broke a leg.

“Water break!” she said.

I’m not sure I can go on.

So cool!

I’m going to puke.

The device on her bike was a walled garden that only allowed her to use the Mouventure platform. She could choose the music to stream to her riders, look up the

weather, and read company-wide messages to instructors. The only person she could communicate with directly was her account manager, who made sure she got paid and tried to increase her rider numbers.

A message was waiting for her:

Evelina, you alright? We registered some concern in the group chat from your riders.

Mouventure regularly scanned rider chats to log emotional response to routes. Evelina normally found this practice unnecessarily invasive of her riders, preferring to think of them as a trusted family, but this time she appreciated her manager’s concern.

I’m okay, Evelina replied. Check out my route? Heard something about paramilitary.

Over the past few years, different global firms had been buying up the rights to mines that surrounded Serra da Canastra, all in search of precious minerals. Freelance garimpeiros had clashed with some of these companies over low wages and unsafe working conditions. Evelina had noticed visitors to the park who weren’t quite tourists: trucks packed with executives in black suits, gingerly stepping in their fancy loafers through the mud. These were Brazilians. The international executives knew to dress casual and wore hard hats and hiking boots: Chinese, Americans, Russians, Australians, Guyanese, or Venezuelans. When they looked at the Canastra their eyes greedily

carved up the land like the cheese they made in the valley.

She hopped back on her bike and pedaled for several more kilometres along rolling hills, trying to get a glimpse of the ring road.

“Time to go!” she said. “Remember -- all we need is for one hundred of you to make it to the Cachoeira!”

I’m in!

We’re there with you!

How far is it?

“Just five more kilometres. Alright, go!”

She stood out of the saddle now and began the gruelling climb to the top of a jagged peak, where she spooked an anteater from the undergrowth. The trail narrowed so that she had to weave and duck her shoulders to avoid the sharp branches that scratched at her chest. She rolled down into a valley shaded with trees, cycling very fast. On the steep switchbacks, she used her front brake to shift her weight forward, swinging her rear tire around, a feat of balancing that threw hundreds of riders from their Mouventure machines. The stream at the base of the valley was swollen with chilly water but crossable at speed. She tore through it and climbed again.

The Cachoeira Azul was rarely visited by tourists because it was so inaccessible. In fact, few tour operators even knew about the waterfall and most didn’t bother because there were a dozen other cascades that were even more breathtaking. She checked her visor to find that she had lost almost all the other riders already; she was down to two hundred. By the time she got to the lip of the falls, only fifty riders had stayed with her, although ten thousand had given up and waited to watch the end in a kind of waiting room that allowed them to observe her progress.

She skidded to a halt on the limestone slab that teetered over the edge of the falls. The beauty in the Cachoeira Azul was in its height, plunging some twenty metres below into a small crystalline pool of blue-gray water. She was secretly glad she didn’t have to get wet because the wind had picked up – the falls were spring-fed and always frigid.

“Fifty of you made it! Fantastic! You are all my friends today!”

Yes!

Bring it on!

“But we didn’t make it to one hundred so I won’t be jumping in.”

No!

But we worked so hard!

“We’ll try again next time. Remember, the ride is the adventure. Time to head to Oswaldo’s, my friends! I’ll see you on the next ride!”

She signed off from the ride.

It was time to head to the pub. If Evelina had anything approaching a sponsorship, this was probably it, because she drove business to Oswaldo’s, which was a German-style eatery. Canastra cheese was first made by immigrants to the region who cultivated its creamy, nutty flavour. Her reward for ending every Mouventure ride at Oswaldo’s was a few hefty slices of cheese on the house along with some fresh baked bread. (Evelina was strictly vegetarian.)

First, she checked her private messages and her Mouventure manager had written her back.

Nothing in the news. What’s going on, Evelina? Are you okay?

A thunderclap pealed across the valley and heavy drops of rain splattered the trail.

Evelina wrote back: Fine. Rain coming. Talk soon. How were my numbers today?

She picked her way from the waterfall down onto the ring road and pedaled along at a gentle, cool-down clip. She felt tired but energised deep within soul. She genuinely enjoyed pushing her limits and felt cleansed by the rigour of a mountain-side climb. She would enjoy her meal at the pub.

She heard an engine roaring along the road and a 4x4 careened by her at a reckless speed, the driver shouting something unintelligible as he drove by.

The warning flashed again in her visor:

Emergency in Serra da Canastra. Paramilitary movements. Do you need help?

She read the message more closely, but how did she know she could trust whoever was sending the message? It could be the paramilitary themselves, for all she knew, directing her to a roundup.

By now the rain had started in earnest, and the road was growing more slippery. Her thick knobby tires managed the roadway just fine as she scanned for more vehicles. The light rain muffled the sounds about her and the rest of the way to the pub was simple, a smooth downhill glide. She normally approached from the front of the building to show her riders the immaculate façade of the pub – a half-timbred building constructed of wattle and daub – but the message had made her suspicious, so she pedaled to a warehouse in the rear. She opened the door quietly to find curdled milk spilling over the side of a cheese vat. No one else was in sight. The building was completely abandoned.



Illustration: Shanice Da Costa, 2021

Over the thrum of the cheese vat she heard a child whimpering.

The girl was hunched in the corner of the warehouse. Her clothing was disheveled and she had been crying for some time, her eyes puffy and red. She had brown curly hair, bleached at the tips by the sun, and light mocha skin. The girl tried to scuttle deeper into the warehouse behind some wheels of cheese, but Evelina quickly caught her.

“¡No me hagas daño!” the girl said.

“I won’t hurt you.”
“ ¡No me hagas daño!”
“Where are your parents?”
“The men took them in their truck.”
“They didn’t take you with them?”
“I ran away.”

Evelina guessed the girl was about six or seven, the same age as her niece. She was wearing a starched white collar shirt with pink flower prints, the kind of expensive dress of a well-to-do-tourist. She spoke Spanish with a precise inflection, even if Evelina couldn’t understand it very well.

Evelina fished in her pouch and handed her an energy bar. The girl swallowed it down ravenously. She touched her visor to call the police but found she didn’t have a satellite signal inside the building.

“Are the men still here?” Evelina asked. The girl nodded. “I’ll be right back. Keep quiet.” She cautiously peeked out of a window and saw that a truck was still posted outside the front of the pub. It wasn’t a paramilitary truck. It was a truck used by mercenaries that executives hired when they visited the park. The message had been wrong. She didn’t see any of the employees – they must have also been carted away – to where and by whom, she had no idea. Confronting whoever was inside the pub was out of the question. If they kidnapped tourists, she would be completely expendable to them. They wouldn’t care how many Mouventure riders she had.

“Stay here,” she said to the girl. “I’ll come back with help.”

“No!” the girl cried. “Don’t leave me! They’ll hurt me!”

Evelina tried to shrug her off, knowing how much more difficult it would be to ride with a burden like her, but the

child was right. She would have no protection if she was caught. The mercenaries answered to no one but those who paid them, and they had a reputation for cruelty.

There was food here at the warehouse, and water if they needed it, but she expected the kidnappers to return and if they had basic common sense they would search the building for stragglers. She did not have much time.

As the girl watched, Evelina stuffed her backpack with cheese, a small bottle of water, and a waxed bag of steamed peanuts she found on a shelf. Then she removed her saddle bags to make space for the child.

“Hold on to my back,” she said. The girl didn’t protest when she hoisted her onto the back of her bike. Thankfully the kid was still slight, maybe twenty-five kilos at the most. Evelina could handle that kind of weight.

“We will get out of here soon,” she said. “Hold on, little one.”

The shortest distance out of the park was still the main ring road. Parts of it had been recently paved and the dirt sections were easily navigable, even with the girl on the bike. She cycled out of the valley and the child did not complain.

Paramilitary troop increase on the northeast end of Serra da Canastra. Avoid all roads and rest sites. Seek refuge is in the southwest.

Do you need help?

She cursed at the message because the ring road headed northeast. But she hoped that the message was wrong. Ahead of her she spied a dark lump in the middle of the road. It was Totinha, his beautiful frizzy-gray feathers shot through with bullets. He was a feathered corpse. The bastards had not even bothered to eat him. They had shot the bird for sport. Evelina swallowed hard.

“Ai!” the girl shouted. Half a kilometre away, Evelina could see another truck barreling towards her, filled with armed men. There was a trail that roughly followed the ring road, an easier path that she had traversed many times, but it also headed in a northeast direction.

Paramilitary troop increase on the northeast end of Serra da Canastra. Avoid all roads and rest sites. This is likely to become a conflict zone. Seek refuge is in the southwest.

Do you need help?

This time Evelina responded “yes”, figuring she had nothing to lose.

My name is Esperanza. I am a bot (not a real person.) I can help guide you to safety. Where are you?

“I won’t tell you that,” Evelina said aloud.

That’s okay, you do not need to tell me. I will not reveal your location to anyone without your permission. Here is the place of refuge. You will receive medical assistance and legal assistance there. Do you need me to show you a route?

A dot began glowing in her display. The location was at least twenty kilometres away, and Evelina knew it was through some of the most difficult territory to cross -- overgrown, snake ridden, and prone to wash-outs.

“How do you know this?” Evelina asked.

We believe the region is at elevated risk because of four predictive factors: increased energy usage from EV charging stations along highway BR-146 / the price of neodymium isotope has risen 400% in the past 48 hours / an increase in small arms sales in Belo Horizonte / and a 29% increase in consumer electronics sales during the off season. We believe this means a heightened risk of local conflict over mining resources. Would you like to look at our predictive model?

“No,” Evelina said.

She wouldn’t be able to understand the model, even if she had done passably well in statistics at university before she dropped out to take care of her aunt. The rest made sense to her. She knew the garimpeiros mined in the park, but at subsistence levels – enough to pay for their next meal. An increase in guns usually did mean something bad was afoot, typically gang warfare. She did not understand the part about consumer electronics, but she didn’t need to because the rest of the information had convinced her that the bot could be right, or at any rate was probably not lying to her.

“One more thing,” Evelina said.

What is it?

“They are not paramilitary,” Evelina corrected. “They are mercenaries. Hired by corporations when they visit the park.”

Thank you. I will update my model accordingly.

“Who are you talking to?” the girl asked over her shoulder.

“A friend.”

Evelina hoped it was true. The truck would be upon them soon but the men hadn’t yet spotted them. She swung the bike off the road and darted up a switchback as fast as her legs could climb, the girl clutching on desperately on her back. She managed to duck behind some small boulders, panting heavily.

“Did they see us?” she asked.
“I don’t think so,” the girl said.
They waited.

“Esperanza,” Evelina asked, muting her channel to her followers. “Are you still there?”

I am here to help.

“Who operates the place of refuge?”

Socorro MG, an implementing partner of UNHCR. Would you like me to notify them you are at risk?
“Yes.”

Can you tell me your name? “Paulo Cardoso,” she lied.

Are you travelling with anyone else? “A young girl aged six.”

“Tengo ocho años,” the girl chimed in, indignantly. “No tiene seis años.”

“Correction. A young girl aged eight.”

Thank you, Paulo. We have recorded an adult male and a young girl aged eight. I will alert Socorro MG to prepare for your arrival. Proceed to the Southwest. We have people stationed one kilometre from the entrance to Serra da Canastra.

Behind her, the girl was shivering in the rain. Evelina handed her a sliced of cheese and the bag of peanuts, and told her to hold on tight again. She would be warming up

soon. Very soon. The ride ahead would be gruelling.

And it was. The rain held off, sheeting a fine mist over the land that helped obscure any line of sight the mercenaries might have had. The rivers, which could burst forth with frightening power during torrential rainstorms, never raised higher than her ankles. She rode through a vicious patch of succulents that slashed her tire tread, forcing her to stop to refill it with patching gel and pump it up with a CO2 canister. Somehow it held. After ten kilometres, her visor told her she had burned ten thousand calories, a personal record. She ravenously ate through half a block of cheese, slurped down water, and continued pedaling. When she hit a flat stretch of the trail, Evelina called a break and they passed a filtered straw back and forth to drink directly from an amber coloured stream. She disliked how hard she had to suck to get any liquid into her mouth, but it quenched her thirst. She didn't see any of the snub-nosed poisonous snakes because the cold rain kept the vipers hidden in their burrows.

She nearly rode straight into the mercenaries an hour later. After navigating a particularly steep bend, she fish-tailed around a sifting pan and a couple of abandoned shovels. Further along, she heard men shouting and stumbled upon the entrance to a wildcat mine. It was flanked by a dozen heavily armed men and a bulldozer was clearing earth around the entrance. She hissed the child silent and portaged her bike around the mine, slipping here and there while staying on their feet. As they climbed out of view on a small hill, they felt a plug of dynamite explode deep within the mine, shaking the earth. Their overland route meant Evelina had to cross the ring road again and she did so swiftly, avoiding the temptation to follow the road to save herself hours of exertion. She still had eight kilometres to pedal with no shelter in sight by the time the sky grew purple. This part of the national park lacked any sort of shelter to protect them from the chill wind, but she feared starting a fire because it could draw attention. They huddled against each other through the night, the girl crying out softly for her mother. The child's white teeth and manicured nails seemed dainty to Evelina, who normally scoffed at such fineries, but the girl never once complained.

By morning, the thin child was convulsing from the cold and the sun did not appear with the light, just a pale haze on the horizon. Evelina's legs ached and her hamstring felt like a rubber band that was about to snap. They ate tidbits of cheese for breakfast and sipped thirstily through the straw at a little brook. The only thing she could do was ride to warm them up. But the tire she had repaired was now flat. CO2 cartridges were designed to be a tempo-

rary fix to get you to a pump for air – the gas had dissipated by morning. She fished in her sack and couldn't find another cartridge. She had forgotten that she had used it on her last ride.

There was little she could do. She refused to leave the bike behind – it was her life, the way she made her living, her joy and livelihood.

She carried the girl on her back and wheeled the bike beside her. The GPS showed that she was drawing close to the spot the bot had shown her. This path had not been used in six months and it was so overgrown with bramble that cried from pain as the thorns cut into her skin. Finally, she came to the crest of a hill that gave her a view of the land below. She could see blue tarpaulin shelters and a cluster of tiny vehicles beside it. Smoke was pouring from a fire. It was impossible to tell from a distance whether it was the mercenaries or the refugee agency. The girl had held up well through the jarring passage across the park, but she had now spiked a fever, and Evelina knew she needed medical treatment. Evelina herself was so exhausted that she did not think she herself would have the strength to flee even if it was all a trick.

She stumbled down the hill, picking her way along an animal trail that wended almost randomly over rocks and followed a dry stream bed for a hundred metres before reappearing. She saw two flags flapping in the wind, the green national "Ordem e Progresso" flag, with its yellow sash, and next to that another, a pale blue crest of the continents encircled by a grid of navigational lines. A young woman waved her down at the boom gate.

"This is Socorro. Do you need our help?"

"Are you blind, menina? Of course we do."

"I have to ask that question. I'm sorry. It's a formality. What's your name?"
"Paulo Cardoso," Evelina said.

"And this must be the girl you traveled with," she said, beckoning to an orderly. The nurse ran over to help.

Wait," Evelina said. "She stays with me."

They put a stethoscope to the child's chest and checked her eyes. "She's in shock. She should lay down. Come on, we'll take the bike for you."
"It stays with me, too."

"You should be examined."
"It stays with me."
"Of course, Paulo. Do you identify as male?"
"Female. It's Evelina."
"Most people give false names when they chat with our bot. We need to work on that."

Evelina was starting to feel thirsty – deeply thirsty -- and welcomed a cup of hot tea when it was offered. She turned down grilled beef, nearly retching when she smelled it, but scarfed down a loaf of bread with guava jam. In the tent, dozens of other tired-looking people were receiving treatment, some clearly tourists, others miners or locals. She didn't recognise anyone and she hoped that meant her friends had made it safely out of the park. The orderlies hooked up the child to an intravenous needle to rehydrate her body.

"You know that's why this all started," a young man said, pointing at her ride.

"My bike?"

"Not your bike. The servomotors that all your riders use in their homes. Neodymium isotope. There's a global shortage. That's what they're fighting over in the Canastra."

"How do you know that?"

"Worked at the mine," he shrugged.

Evelina rested in the camp overnight and took a UN transporter that was waved through police checkpoints that stretched all the way to Belo Horizonte. She stayed with a cousin. The news showed violence escalating within the park as the wildcat miners staged a counteroffensive, even though they were severely outgunned by the mercenaries. The death toll was frightening – dozens killed. Many of the miners were boys sent by their families from far away.

Mouventure invited her to travel around the world with all expenses paid, heralding her bravery and fortitude in the face of danger. She had cycled through a conflict zone and saved the life of a young girl, they said. She was a model for all Mouventure instructors. People assumed this was what she wanted -- to become a global Mouventure ambassador. They were wrong.

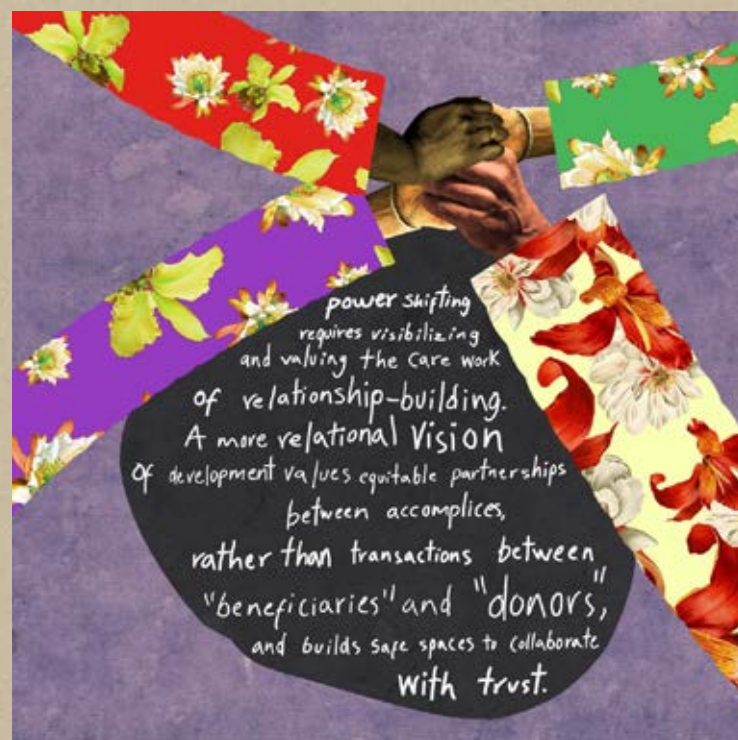
"You're giving up riding?" her aunt asked, when she refused the offer. "But it's your job! To cycle around the

world."
"What about you? You need help here."
"I will be fine. This is your dream!"
"I'm not giving up riding."

What her aunt didn't understand was that Evelina didn't want to leave. She had spent the last fifteen years of her life in the Serra da Canastra, surviving on its beauty in her own way. She wanted to ride again through its tranquil rivers. She wanted the life she had made for herself, with all its flaws. That land, owned by everyone and no one, was her home. To abandon the Canastra would be to abandon herself.



Illustrations: Hansel Obando
Curation/writing: María Faciolince
("Development": A visual story of shifting power" Published via Oxfam, 2021)



Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. Only then does the necessity for interdependency become unthreatening. Only within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters. Within the interdependence of mutual (nondominant) differences lies that security which enables us to descend into the chaos of knowledge and return with true visions of our future, along with the concomitant power to effect those changes which can bring that future into being. Difference is that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged. As women, we have been taught either to ignore our differences, or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion rather than as forces for change.

Excerpts From:
Sister Outsider
(Audre Lorde, 1984).



This featured page was developed by Jane Pirone and Barbara Adams for a series of speculative storytelling workshops titled "Collective Effervescence"



Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay

CHZ

IN EXILE IN SPACE HAVING FLED EARTH, FRIENDS EXCHANGE LETTERS.

Dear V_,

I am waiting here for the window to appear again. It hasn't appeared for the past few weeks. Sorry for not communicating these previous few months. Things have been pretty crazy over here. I have so much to tell you. I wish this window would appear, and I could see outside, even though it always is only an illusion of closeness. She even promised she would look into it, and that was several weeks ago. How odd it is not to have a window. Still, hey, there are more important things than a window. The school roof collapsed three weeks ago. It just fell. No one was injured since it just hung there, suspended in the air, floating. It was so beautiful. Mom is so stressed these days. I even hear her swear and curse at times in our presence. She says the mycogrid is taking over the nanfiber frame, so it no longer responds appropriately to our programming. I mean, the LEOs were supposed to be resilient, the arks for dying humanity. None of this should stop working. At least that's what they teach us about the UN-ERA. I can imagine you laughing now. Don't. This is serious.

But anyway, the roof came back up on its own. It just looks very different. There are these zig-zagging red lines, and the surface is quite rough, like it might be some strange geological deposit instead of the usual shiny monochrome. It looks a bit like that fuchsite rock I saw at the Homecoming Museum. They are not using the school premises, though. We have all been moved to Rhine Hall instead. That place is off limits now, and I only saw it afterwards because mom is working there. But things have been happening throughout LEO. This is just one thing out of many. That's why I didn't get a chance to write to you. What happens if this happens at Rhine Hall. Where do we move? Where do we keep moving? I am not sure they know any better. You can't have true resilience if

you think short term, to be honest. You must operate on oversized clocks. Thousands of years. I mean, just think about it. They believed humans belong to one space and not to another, yet the same space looks so different just ten-twenty-fifty years apart, not to speak of 500 or 5000 years. I don't even need to think science fiction these days, we are in it. The UN-ERA was supposed to be just 10 years, and yet, here we are, 27 years in.

Mom says that we are condemned to live and die here in this space mausoleum. I am not so pessimistic. Anyway, they think they want to take us below. I don't know if that is even possible. We all have to vote on something in a month or two – not me, but you know what I mean. I don't know what I would be more excited about, seeing new people, or stepping foot on dirt that is held up by dirt, without fearing that the soil might suddenly give way and change shape. Soil all the way down. They don't even tell us what it actually is like, to be honest. We only see it in the screen, and through our windows. But I think the window in my room will come back. Or maybe I won't need it anymore. Do message.

Your friend,
M.

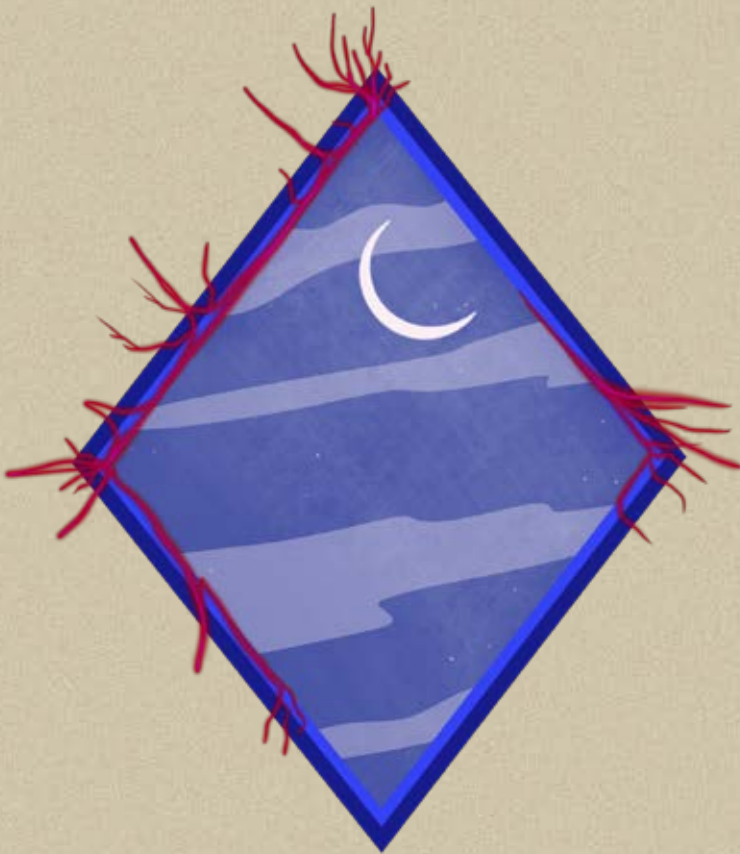
M,

I have been worried sick about you. They haven't heard from LEOs 2, 5, and 6 for six months now. We can see them, but 1 and 3 are the only ones that still look somewhat intact. 2, 4, 5, and 6 – it's such a sight. They always looked like shapeless clouds, but now they look like a red shell, a rock suspended in the sky. We have heard from LEO-4 and it seems like it is collapsing all over inside, just like the school roof. Your mom might be right, we think the same thing down below. The nanites are failing because the fungus is playing with us. We have been trying to replicate the same experiments on a small scale here below, but the programmable matter just doesn't "survive" beyond a point.

We know about the vote. LEO-3 is voting too. But I don't think their voting is worth anything. I'm feeling more gloomy these days, to be honest. The feed is enough to make anyone cynical. They say you are the ones who chose to leave us here below, living with the illusion that you were the gods who could look down upon us through your windows, while we were the wretched so it was our job to clean up the earth while you lived pleasant lives up there. They say the UN-ERA was just a sham to keep the poor here on earth gathering resources just so you could have larger bedrooms up there. And that it was really all stolen tech much like stolen land. And that when you gave us the land back it was only because there was nothing left on it to exploit. After all, even the mycogrid is just indigenous tech. Our tech. It was archaeological material recovered in old North Africa that first suggested the prevalence of fungal architecture in the ancient world. Their use in space research only came later. Instead of trying to use the tech to build more habzones here on earth, we spent our resources building LEOs as the scalable intermediate solution. Reality's much more complicated, I know, but what can you do with politicians. They say you won't be welcome here, there isn't enough space, and we have a hard enough time keeping the habitation zones habitable with the population we have, most of the earth is still uninhabitable, how will we sustain life, etc. The usual.

I really don't know what to say M. All we talk about these days it seems is who belongs where. I don't know whether we were your refugees, or you are ours. All I have is the gut feeling that it doesn't really matter, at the end of the day. All I believe is that the earth has been big enough for all of us, and we have to be big enough for the earth. All I hope is that the window will come back.

Yours,
V_.



Dear V_.

They voted last week, 298-2, to try and attempt a return. Like you wrote to me last, none of us are sure if they can. The Earth Restoration Agency might give us clearance to land. In the meantime, things have only become much worse. There was a grid blackout just the other day, and for four hours we were told to preserve oxygen. I don't know if it's better to die of asphyxiation in the dark, or being slowly crushed under a falling roof in the light – yes, the roof fell again. Many roofs in fact. Rhine Hall too.

Sorry I don't mean to sound all complainy. We only get to transmit 3000 characters these days so I don't want to spend all my time talking about everything that's going wrong. There's no window (yet) but things could be worse. We have returned to some semblance of normality this last week though. While the nanfiber frame is still beyond our programming, it seems the mycogrid has partially stabilised. There are jokes that the fungus has achieved sentience, now that we have finally voted to return it is leaving us alone to plan our exit. All the other LEOs are gone, it seems. 87% of space humanity wiped out in two years. If it is true that the mycogrid is sentient, what mistake did those LEOs make, I wonder.

Mom says we should prepare for a swift descent, if things came to that, and that we would land somewhere in the vicinity of habzone 9, the old Australia. All I know about old Australia is that by the time of the UN-ERA it was too hot and that with the seventh extinction it had lost nearly 93% of all its life. I don't know why I am so obsessed with numbers these days. I think of everything in terms of numbers. Maybe it's because numbers are everywhere. Our population is 12,198,767. Earth population is 791,278,666. If we collapse, the loss of 12, 198, 767 people already in exile is insignificant in terms of the overall numbers. Don't you think?

Your friend,
M

298-2
12198767
87%
791278666
93%
3000

THE CARTOGRAPHY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

A journey to affective technologies of belonging

"Invented histories, invented biologies, invented cultural affinities come with every identity; each is a kind of role that has to be scripted, structured by conventions of narrative."— Kwame Anthony Appiah

WHO ARE YOU?

No offence, but I'm not interested in your surname or your national identification number. I know that this might be too personal, but I'm asking about the real you. I bet that in order to find the best way of answering my question, you are now navigating many of your life experiences. I also bet the experiences you're turning to at this moment are connected to special memories of people and places. Am I right? I made all these assumptions because however unique the background of your own existence may be – it always comprises social and emotional dimensions. Identity is a relational construct intrinsic to community bonds. By observing, learning, connecting, or talking with others, we start to understand a little bit more about our own minds, expectations, and emotions.

From the day we were born to our last moments in life, these connections are woven through us in many different ways. Identity, therefore, is not a fixed condition. It is a sort of in-motion puzzle driven by strands of desire and history. Motions, emotions, and effects often combine several pieces of nostalgia, belonging, and attachment according to a given context, granting us our sense of self through bonding experiences. Identity combines numerous configurations from the past, notions of the present, and expectations for the future¹.

As beautiful as it sounds, the emotional bonding of identity formation can also be tricky. We tend to think that emotions are harmless since they inhabit the realm of ideas rather than what we call the physical world. The thing is,

while we intimately rely on identification processes with others, we are also subject to others' political perceptions about ourselves.

In some configurations, this means that others can vocalise their thoughts about us and act upon these perceptions. For instance, the emotions someone might hold towards you can manifest in the physical world through experiences of inclusion or exclusion and determine which places and groups you can access and belong to, and which ones you can't. Therefore affect, disaffection and emotions impact not only your self-image but your selfhood, your body, and even your capability to imagine the future. The interdependence between emotions and politics may open our political imaginaries to new possibilities of attachment, filiation, and articulation of better tomorrows by leaving a mark wherever we go.

CATEGORIES WE LIVE BY OR LIVE IN?

So if emotions and even our identity gain life through the action of our body in the physical world, what does really means to have a body? What are the implications of it? From the moment of our very first breath, our bodies are threaded by the politics, values, and cultures of our environment. All sorts of technologies place individuals in social categories that frame one's actions, self-understanding, and opportunities in life. The categories we belong to are neither metaphors nor phenomena. Instead, they represent the physical reality of many emotional perceptions that attach reductionist labels to many lives². Black,



Illustration: Shanice Da Costa, 2021

straight, white, lazy, smart, lesbian, clumsy, wealthy, yellow, vulnerable, poor, refugee.

Being labelled under a category, it’s not necessarily a bad thing. Until it is. As an illustration of this, we can think about the procedures many companies have to profile and rate consumers. The American Congress and federal regulators found highly biased categories among data brokers³ such as “Established Elite,” “Rural and Barely Making It,” “Tough Start: Young Single Parents,” or “Ethnic Second-City Strugglers”. With this data handy, data brokers sell products that identify financially vulnerable consumers and sell them high-cost loans and other financially risky products. In a society model where everyone and everything is for sale, a category can quickly become a target. Like nations can dispute territories, companies can dispute humans based on their different conditions as if the body was the battleground of economic elites.

The disruption of information brought by digital technologies goes even further than techniques of consumer classification online. Governments now embrace the same classificatory mechanism as companies, relying on citizens’ digital traces for the distribution of rights and public services and security measures. Through the usage of Big Data and AI, real-time monitoring shows relevant insights to aid the public decision-making process. However, this does not mean that the state of technological development is immune to giving advantages to one form of political or economic organization to the detriment of others.

Actually, recent experiences have shown that the deployment of these tools are replicating or even amplifying human bias, impacting the quality and fairness of decision-making, as seen in the case of UK Visas and Immigration, which proved that automation caused African applicants to be rejected twice as much as those from any other part of the world [4]. Under the populist narrative, surveillance technologies could be weaponised against marginalised groups, widening societal tensions. For a while now, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers in New York have been using a rigged algorithm to keep virtually all arrestees in detention, since the Trump administration recommended detention without bond for “low risk” individuals exploded to 97 percent [5]. Being labelled under a category in many cases can mean a threat.

But this is just the tip of the iceberg. Worldwide, we are witnessing a dramatic shift from “over the skin” to “under the skin” surveillance [6]. Countries are already deploying tools on citizens that are normally reserved for tracking terrorists [7], controlling resources and borders, and regulating the flow of people and goods within territories [8]. But there’s a differ-

ence though. While the territory can be perceived as a piece of land that we can choose to cross or dwell in, the ultimate territory we live in is our body. Just like territories, people are being scanned, screened, and monitored. From movements to feelings, ubiquitous sensors and powerful algorithms are now actively measuring, quantifying, and analysing how one walks, speaks, or smiles. The problem is, when your body turns into your main credential to navigate through the world, there’s literally no place to hide. As poet and author Luisa A. Igloria says: “I am the shore I left behind as well as the home I return to every evening. The voyage cannot proceed without me.”

PEOPLE, PLACES, AND TECHNOLOGY

As seen up to this point, our identity is a constructed idea that gains life in the physical world through the movement of our bodies. The places we visit, the people we meet, the connections created along the way. The feelings we feel during life’s journey are so significant that they can be inscribed in our DNA. For instance, emergent scientific evidence states that experiences of hardship or violence such as those seen in forced displacement cases can change our genetic expression [9] as a biological mark of traumatic legacies passed from one generation to the next, no matter what. Knowing that should be more than enough to inspire us to pursue paths that provide better experiences to be inherited by the next generations.

In one sense, globalisation has delocalised identity into multiple forms of diasporic belonging. That means one can be the first generation of their family living abroad, and so their connections, originating in the same place, are dispersed across different locations. Thus, like identity itself, diaspora is somewhat akin to the notion of the self, built upon community bonds, along ancestral migration routes. When placed side-by-side, both terms altogether prepare the soil to grow a different type of belonging, sustained by the displaced body and its links with a remembered homeland, whether real or imagined. Diasporic identities touch narratives of contact curated and reworked over time across generations separated by time, geography, language, and culture.

Through emotional exchanges occurring in the nodes of diasporic networks, one’s body can feel welcomed and understood. As a result, diasporic cultures are conceived by questioning the virtuality of matter, life, body, and the self; the very same basis that supports the spread of global digitalisation. Just think how the rapid digitisation of human experiences made it possible to connect, engage and share experiences with others without being constrained within geographical

borders but across the virtual spaces of the Internet [10].

Yet, as previously mentioned, tech-assisted solutions can either reproduce the patterns of the past and further entrench emergent inequalities, or they can be an equaliser if recognised in terms of human rights, and track systemic inequalities to target better public policies. Its impact and who gets to share its potential benefits are grounded in political choices and the reconfiguration of economic forces that drive society towards an unbalanced distribution of resources and opportunities.

So, my political curiosity would be: If the body is the territory of our experiences, which resources and tools can we use to map it accordingly? How can we build a sustainable infrastructure for the agency of the body on the move? With these questions in mind, I invited a small group to a foresight exercise with the objective of exploring the triangular relationship between people, places, and technology while also gathering all sorts of emotions that could arise along the way.

The group was composed of colleagues from UNHCR’s Innovation Service and also from Envisioning, an intelligence

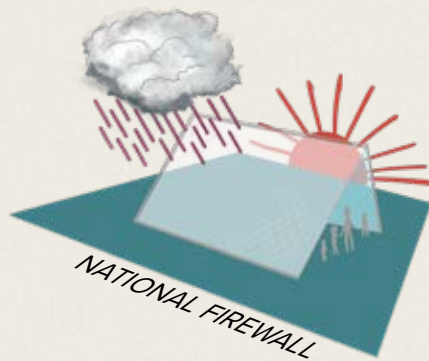
1. THE CYBERNETIC WAR SOLUTION

Chosen technologies:

DATA ENCLAVE - This technology shares information derived from data rather than sharing the actual data itself. It provides a confidential, protected environment in which authorised researchers can remotely access sensitive content.

COLLABORATIVE CULTURE-SENSITIVE AI - Collaborative algorithmic structures trained with inputs derived from minority communities as a means to preserve traditional cultural heritage, endangered languages, and customs.

NATIONAL FIREWALL - A combination of cyber policies and software to regulate the World Wide Web inside a country. These firewalls block or limit access to foreign websites, throttle international internet traffic, and provide benefits to national digital services.



platform for emerging technology. Thanks to their cooperation, resources, and inputs, it was possible to develop a map of present-day technological elements to discuss UNHCR’s probable futures. After long hours of conversations and tons of exchanged knowledge, I could assess 75 emergent technologies from Envisioning’s database [11] according to their potential impact on challenges UNHCR faces today in aid operations for refugees, forcibly displaced communities, and stateless people. After these phases, we were ready for the foresight exercise in which the participants were invited to imagine the future of the movement from a fictional migration situation. In this scenario, the groups had to deal with a cybernetic war situation triggering migration flows amid rising oceans issues; the preparation of temporary shelters to receive displaced populations; and finally, the construction of a new island built from the ground-up. The goal was to narrow down the long list of technologies as much as possible and to come up with three durable tech-assisted solutions. The decisions from the teams and chosen technologies were chosen to encompass the following characteristics and qualities:

2. THE NEW ISLAND SOLUTION

Chosen technologies:

FLOATING WIND TURBINE - An offshore wind turbine mounted on a floating structure that generates electricity in water depths where fixed-foundation turbines are not feasible.

DIGITAL DEBATE COUNCIL - Digital spaces in which citizens are able to arrange online meetings with each other, present their opinions, and vote on various management issues. The output is recorded securely via blockchain and recognised as an official meeting.

DECENTRALISED WASTEWATER TREATMENT - A facility that manages smaller quantities of wastewater from decentralised communities, enabling the treatment of water at the point of use.



3. THE TEMPORARY SHELTER SOLUTIONS

Chosen technologies:

PORTABLE FACTORY - Instead of rigid and geographically fixed structures, portable and autonomous manufacturing sites can be placed in freight containers to produce on the go.

SELF-SOVEREIGN IDENTITY - Cryptographically secure identification records that allow users to control third-party transmissions and visibility of personal data. Based on the blockchain, this solution could help individuals to regain ownership of their own data, as it would serve as a single personal identity.

DECENTRALISED ENERGY GRID - Decentralised energy distribution points located nearer to consumers that are able to supply energy to local communities independently of large-scale energy plants.



EARNINGS BROUGHT FROM THE FUTURE OF MOVEMENT

Even though technologies have shaped our habitat for such a long time, technology itself is not a force of nature. Thus, it's vital to avoid techno-determinist assumptions that usually come side by side with narratives of modernist progress by “untangling the social content of technologies”[12]. Perhaps that is why the final technology list narrowed through exercise, reveals a growing awareness of how diffused forms of power and authority can secure “some sort of order” even in the absence of state activity - rather than the technical aspect of such innovations. When looking at these technologies amid a crisis scenario, we're talking about emotion and actions they can unleash.

Diffused power can also mean higher levels of autonomy and self-determination (essential pieces of psychological well-being) to facilitate collaboration where it is most needed. Combined, these technologies may cede the required conditions to embody autonomy, competencies, and connections from virtually anywhere, since they are either portable, adaptable or dematerialized through the web. When looking at their future potentials we're not talking about things that can be broken and fixed. Alternatively, we are talking about tools that can assist the journey of a conscious, complex, and emotional body on the move. A body that carries its belongings, its legacies, and its expectations for the future.

Understanding this is vital since the emotional responses that follow a disaster or other traumatic event can either help us cope with traumas or stimulate memories of the disaster creating heightened anxiety. Whenever a disaster hits, society is affected by a reality shock in which time and space seem suspended. We see ourselves floating in the void of emotions. Grief, helplessness, solidarity, empathy, indifference, or apathy are just a few examples of the multiplicity of sensations that can inhabit the same social void. Different groups of people can simultaneously carry out divergent agendas and ideas to cope with a unique event. Nevertheless, emotions have mostly been absent in crisis response mechanisms while over-represented in media, which usually frame these events like a movie screen.

Headlines, captions, and soundtracks are orchestrated with degrees of reality that everyone finds moving when on the outside looking in and safely distanced. Sensations are produced from the catharsis of the media. Catharsis is a Greek word meaning purgation, cleansing, or purification. In Politics (1342a 8–10), Aristotle used this concept to signify a cleansing of passions such as fear and piety [13]. Many others tried to reappropriate the term and go further into its meaning, mainly in psychological and therapeutic domains. Freud and Breuer defined catharsis as “the process of reducing or eliminating a complex by recalling it to conscious awareness and allowing it to be expressed” in Studies on Hysteria.

Reading Reinventing Intimacy – the Politics of Daily Suffering by the psychoanalyst Christian Dunker, I learned that disasters can trigger two types of catharsis. One operates in a vague terrain, disseminating sensations and integrating them into the social imaginary without really addressing them - a kind of survivor guilt that aims to control the narrative by spurring the urge to take care of others

without actually doing it. The other is based on disintegration, which means detangling emotions and feelings and innovating from them to transform the tragedy. “The first doesn't teach us any more than we don't know now; the second opens us all to an unpredictable future - a common one” [14].

The problem is that we usually operate on the first type only. In a vicious cycle, we use narratives of care to promote control over our own feelings and other's destiny. In the face of tragedy, we have the bad habit of responding in the same way to events that should be treated as singular and unique such as crisis settings, including war and natural disaster settings, each has its own contexts and situations that requires adaptable ways of providing care. Yet, to avoid handling our emotions, we choose to close our eyes and follow the protocol. The solutions and aid plans that emerge from this tragic scenario reflect that. The same goes for the way we deploy certain technologies on-field. What grants legitimacy to many institutional operations is the trust citizens bestow on individuals chosen to make decisions on their behalf, the trust that they will be taken care of.

Technologies can strengthen humanitarian operations' legitimacy through a series of commitments accomplished throughout time, but only if a new mindset is put in place. We must take care of ourselves as fully biological creatures. Our body is equipped with exceptional technologies, we sense, monitor, and adapt ourselves to the situations we find ourselves in, through different types of emotional catharsis. We should innovate, taking that into account; otherwise, we merely ignore a vital part of the equation. And maybe that way, we'll be able to design better future social tools that can empower us to move away towards happier times instead of trying to control whatever traumatic events happen in-between.

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⁴ Visa Problems For African Visitors To The Uk. A joint All-Party Parliamentary Group Report by the APPG for Africa, the APPG for Diaspora, Development & Migration and the APPG for Malawi. 2019. Available from: https://royalafricansociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/APPG-Report-on-Visa-problems-for-African-visitors-to-the-UK_v1.58web.pdf

⁵ Robertson, Adi. ICE rigged its algorithms to keep immigrants in jail, claims lawsuit. 2020. Available from <https://www.theverge.com/2020/3/3/21163013/ice-new-york-risk-assessment-algorithm-rigged-lawsuit-nyclu-jose-velesaca>

⁶ Harari, Yuval Noah. The world after coronavirus. 2020. Available from: https://www.ft.com/content/19d90308-6858-11ea-a3c9-1fe6fedc-ca75?segmentid=acee4131-99c2-09d3-a635-873e61754ec6&fbclid=IwAR3eo_sfLFp-NLgUJ43C9YQFad2-WKD09q7dEo9c0J1kICn2CEcP-W7I4Bbw

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¹⁰ Macfadyen, Leah P. Virtual Ethnicity: The new digitization of place, body, language, and memory. 2006. Available from: <https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/ubccommunityandpartnerspublicati/52387/items/10058425>

¹¹ The Future of Movement. 2021. Available from: <https://radarenvisioning.io/unhcr/innovationservice/?pg=welcome>

¹² MacKenzie and Wajcman. The Social Shaping of Technology. 1985. Available from: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/08109028508629013>

¹³ Aristotle. (2013). Politics. The project Gutenberg ebook of politics by Aristotle, EBook #6762. Available, from <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/6762/6762-h/6762-h.htm>

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COORDINATES OF SPECULATIVE SOLIDARITY

EMPATHY, CARE AND HELP NARRATIVES IN THE HUMANITARIAN SECTOR.

GENERATING FUTURES OF BELONGING

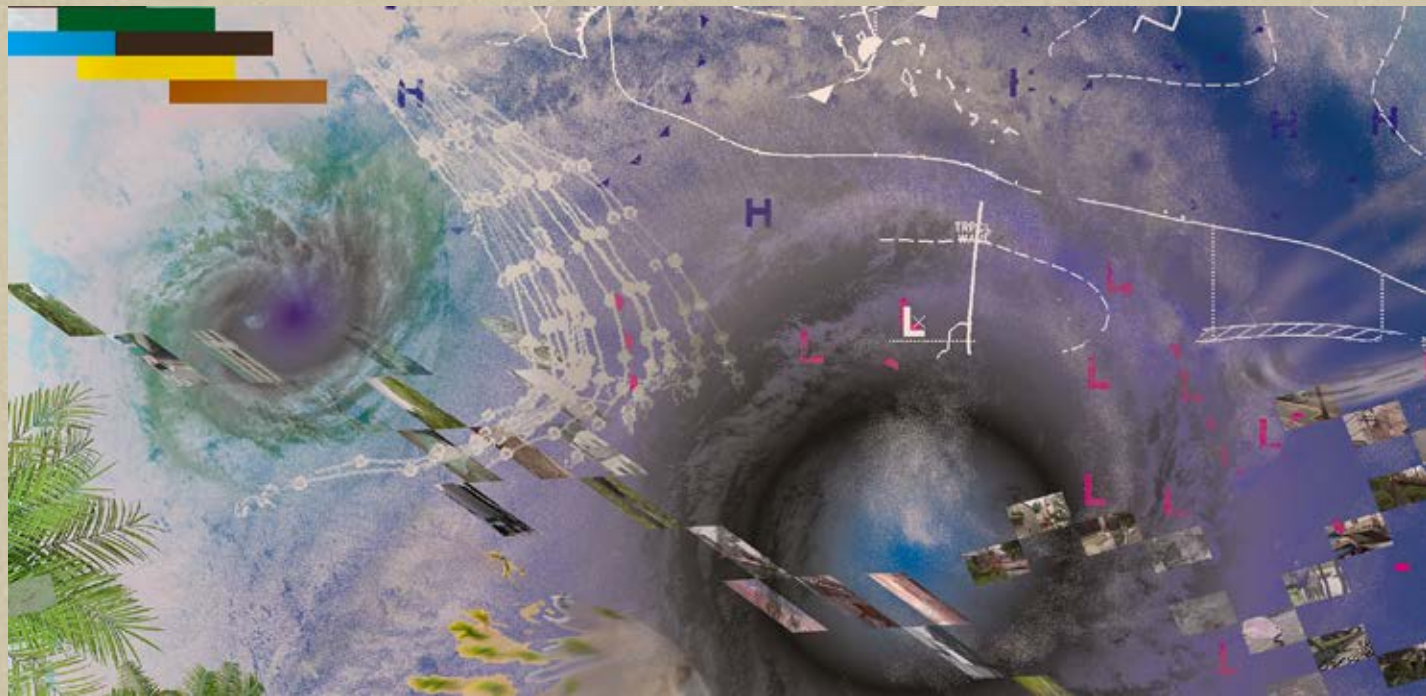
Empathy, helping, care, and resilience have been championed as strategies to repair our world and to renew and strengthen our relations with one another and with other living things. Yet, these approaches are less likely to transform alliances than they are to maintain existing conditions. The ideology of practice that guides humanitarian aid embraces these compassionate forms of helping along with an ethos of neutrality and impartiality, adopting an apolitical position that conceals how crises develop out of imperial and colonial legacies.

Moving from the inequity embedded in aid to the reciprocity and mutuality of solidarity would require disentangling a web of deep-set and seemingly immutable policies and practices. Storytelling, as a potent discursive force in shaping our perception of the world, can play a vital role in destabilising these views and the power asymmetries that characterise these orientations. Whereas some stories and myths establish and entrench dominant perspectives—maintaining and validating the way things are—others imagine alternative possibilities that reach beyond the given. In moving beyond the stories of damage, resilience, and heroism that characterise humanitarian aid, how might speculative storytelling based in solidarity play a role in initiating change and generating futures based in justice and belonging?

Haegue Yang's *Coordinates of Speculative Solidarity*, from which this essay takes its title, understands extreme climate events not only as forces that fracture, but also as those that bind. This large-scale, digital collage, com-

prised of satellite photos, storm-tracking symbols, and palm leaves, maps the chaos of severe weather activity and explores how this, in necessitating alliances and interdependence, can prompt unusual forms of belonging and community. Crisis situations often create estuaries of concentrated and diverse stranger-based accumulations of people, and this heterogeneity along with the temporariness of emergencies, can both challenge and foster the formation of solidaristic relationships. In Greek, the term *krisis* (or κρίσις) marks the turning point in a disease resulting in either recovery or death. This inflection point provides the occasion for change where possibilities previously overlooked or occluded, might emerge. In upending taken-for-granted systems, crises rupture temporal continuity and our ideas of what is possible. These situations ask for something to be done. Responses aiming to alleviate the effects of crises range from help to mutual aid, and although these varying responses seem to have shared goals, they mark the difference between stasis and change, between triage and transformation. Crisis, as anthropologist Janet Roitman¹ notes, is a narrative device that allows us to ask some questions while it forecloses others.

We are much more inclined to link crises to suffering than to solidarity. When witnessing suffering, we feel impelled to act swiftly to quickly alleviate distress. As the political theorist Hannah Arendt² argues, this response, driven by compassion, addresses the immediacy of the situation but does nothing to alter the underlying forces. Compassion, she points out, is a sentiment, while solidarity is grounded in reason. Whereas solidaristic relationships have sights set on an imaginative horizon of creating a different future,



Haegue Yang, *Coordinates of Speculative Solidarity*³, 2019.

relations built on compassion obscure a view of transformation. With compassion, people exercise care, but they do not engage the wearisome processes of persuasion, negotiation, and compromise which are essential processes of political change. Hierarchies remain and divides deepen. Framed as ‘misfortune,’ we avoid reckoning with root causes. Those who suffer are seen as unlucky while those not affected feel compassion (or its perversion, pity) for those who are. Pity deprives people of their public, political identity. It is only out of solidarity, that communities of interest can be deliberately and dispassionately established so they can meet as equals. Helping, in contrast to solidarity, does little to alter the status quo or to make significant changes to the ways in which power and agency are distributed on a structural level. As social scientist, physician, and former Vice President of Doctors without Borders Didier Fassin⁴ succinctly puts it: “the politics of compassion is a politics of inequality” where “domination is transformed into misfortune, injustice is articulated as suffering, violence is expressed in terms of trauma.”

BEYOND EMPATHY

Western culture commonly invites the ‘lucky’ to imagine and experience the suffering of ‘others’ through the use of empathetic technologies. That participation, in itself, can lead to action and social change is a widely held notion in

design, humanitarian aid, and broader cultural platforms and there has been a proliferation of participatory activities that simulate crises. In Davos at the World Economic Forum’s annual meeting, Refugee Run: A Day in the Life of a Refugee⁵, one of the most popular events at the summit, simulates the experience of living in a refugee camp. Organised by the Crossroads Foundation, this exercise provides an embodied and immersive “x-perience” of daily life in a camp for displaced persons. The foundation’s website promotes the activity as a way for world and industry leaders to develop empathy (ignoring the ways in which they may be potentially complicit in creating crises): “Participants face simulated attacks, mine fields...hunger, illness, lack of education, corruption and uncertain shelter or safety. Participants may also be marched under guard, subjected to ambush and, ultimately, offered a chance of re-settlement where they must re-build their lives.” Actors in military costumes storm the room while elite CEOs and executives cower on the floor, reacting to an experience they are unlikely to ever encounter in their daily lives.

These simulations leverage role play as a tactic in understanding the plight of the misfortunate, asking participants to occupy the status of the other. Simulating the experience of a refugee camp⁶, the journeys⁷ and arrivals⁸ of displaced people, and militarised challenges to citizenship and belonging⁸ is a surprisingly common motif. Although well-intentioned efforts that aim to generate empathy, it is absurd to think that the persistent uncertainty, loss, and

fear that accompany displacement could be captured or conveyed through these activities. Even if these efforts succeed in generating feelings of empathy, what sorts of relations emerge from this emotion?⁹ Can empathy move us from caring about, as a sentiment, to caring for, as action? Can it move us to a position of caring with, where we act together to address the ways in which we are all implicated in the complex issues that more deeply entrench systemic inequities?



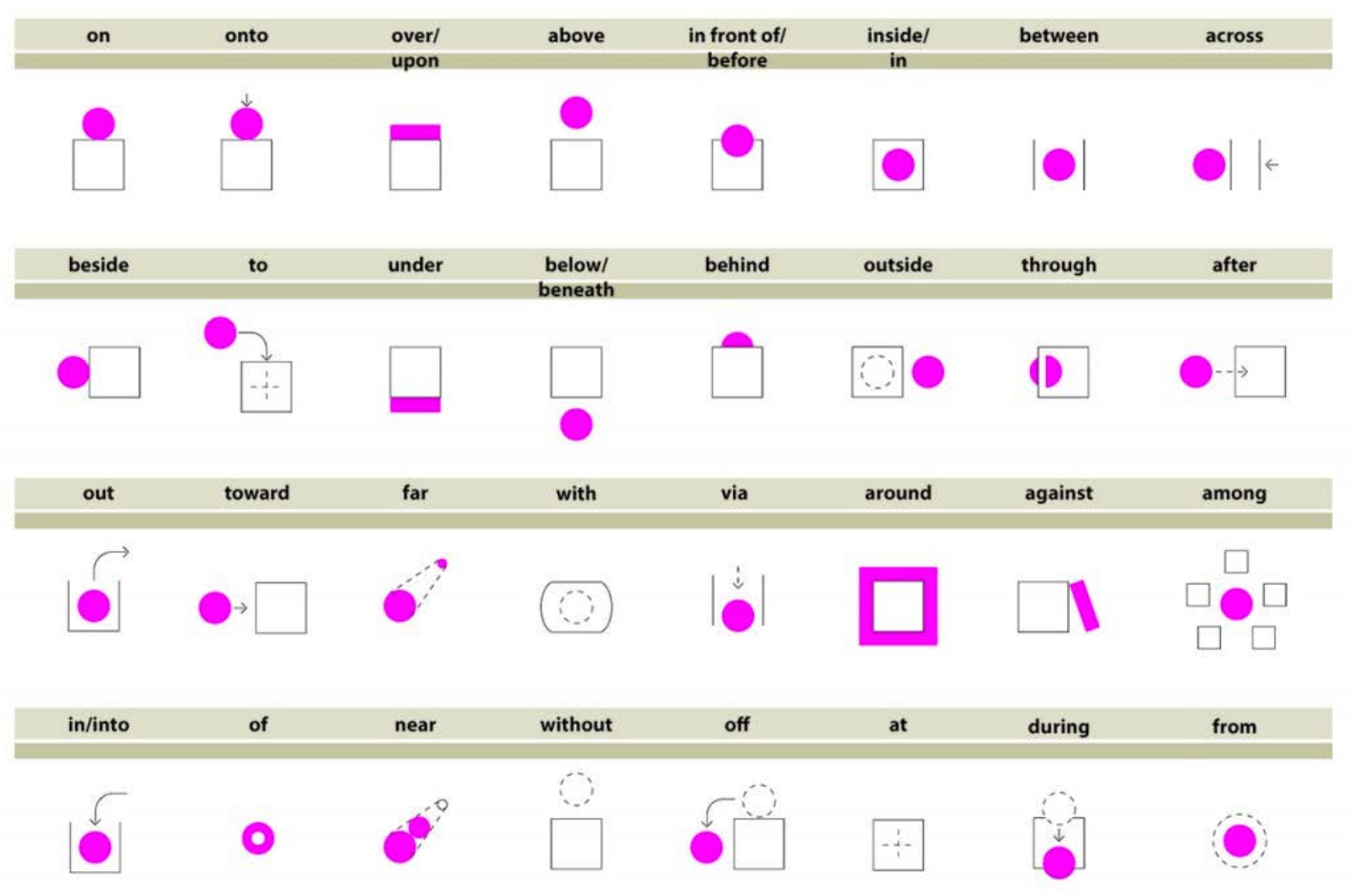
In 2009, at Doctors without Borders’ Refugee Camp in the Heart of the City¹⁰, in Prospect Park, Brooklyn, visitors were asked to imagine they were “among the millions of people fleeing violence and persecution.” The only person in our tour who experienced this in any visceral way, was a young boy who burst into tears when he learned displaced children are often separated from their parents. Immediately, he was surrounded by his mother, sister, and others from our group who assured him that this could never happen here, never to someone like him.

In these cultural projects, the lives of actual people are typically flattened and assigned a generalised profile that cannot provide the basis for solidarity or meaningful association. The rhetoric that aid and protection help rebuild lives shattered by unfortunate circumstances fails to acknowledge how this form of support also reduces the unique complexities of people’s lives. This might be dismissed as unimportant in emergency relief contexts, yet it is in these settings where people most need to be seen and heard and recognised. The erasure of complex per-

sonhood is a byproduct of humanitarian aid—something that holds true for both those who provide and those who receive aid. While beneficiaries are often reduced to their suffering, stripped of their public and political identity, and positioned as noble sufferers, the humanitarian, as a delegate, is elevated to the position of an oracle or hero. This dynamic involves a transfer of power, establishing a relationship of reliance. As sociologist Pierre Bourdieu notes, “the more people are dispossessed...the more they are constrained and inclined to put themselves into the hands of representatives in order to have a political voice.”¹¹ A delegate or representative is often necessary for a group to articulate its position—yet speaking in place of someone always involves symbolic violence, no matter how elegantly this is exercised. Speaking on behalf of others is a flawed theory of change that maintains the status quo and acts as a barrier to transforming underlying conditions.

COMPLEXITIES OF CARE

Recent calls¹² to put care at the centre of life ask us to “acknowledge the challenges of our shared dependence as human beings—as well as our vulnerability and irreducible differences.”¹³ Care, depending on how it is understood and enacted, operates on a spectrum and can be an expression of compassion, an act of solidarity, or something in between. For example, the anthropologist Miriam Ticktin shows how regimes of care demand that migrants and displaced people foreground their suffering in order to be heard, becoming “casualties of care,”¹⁴ subject to paternalistic forms of protection. Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, unpacks the varying dimensions of care as moral obligation, as maintenance work, as a tool of oppression, and as vital politics, noting: “To care can feel good; it can also feel awful. It can do good; it can oppress. Its essential character to humans and countless living beings makes it all the more susceptible to convey control.”¹⁵ Feminist thinkers Joan Tronto and Bernice Fisher¹⁶, characterise caring “as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair our ‘world’...[as] a complex, life sustaining web.” In this understanding, our inevitable interdependency, as a condition of living together, is simply a fact—something that cannot be quantified or denied. It would be impossible to evaluate (although surely people have tried) how much we need other beings, whether human or nonhuman. This notion of care departs from compassionate forms of caring about and from aid-based models of caring for, in favour of the mutuality of caring with.



Martin Ávila, *prepositiontools*, 2009. “Through the use of preposition tools¹⁷, one might playfully challenge assumptions by thinking not only what is, but also what can be. This could be performed by asking “what if?”. What if this (x) was... without, beside, etc.”

BARRIERS TO CHANGE IN A SHIFTING LANDSCAPE

In actionable terms, this shift in prepositions from caring for to caring with, is not easily accomplished. In the context of humanitarian aid, the barriers to change are formidable. Meaningful and deep transformation jeopardises the very existence of humanitarian organizations since aid is contingent on a relationship of inequity. Hierarchical power permeates all scales of aid organizations and the labour of socially reproducing this unequal structure is embedded in aid work itself. This is evidenced, for example, when aid organizations celebrate their longevity. The perversity of this is only recently being recognised—notably in an op-ed¹⁸ from UNHCR’s High Commissioner, Filippo Grandi where at the close of 2020, on the 70th anniversary of the organization, he challenged the international community to put him out of a job: “Make it your goal to build a world in which there is truly no need for a UN refugee agency because nobody is compelled to flee.” In another example, the World Humanitarian Summit

¹⁹ called on aid organizations to: “recognise that affected people are the central actors in their own survival and recovery, and put them at the heart of humanitarian action. This requires a fundamental change in the humanitarian enterprise, from one driven by the impulses of charity to one driven by the imperative of solidarity.”

Yet, in spite of these recent outliers, shifting the existing culture and power asymmetries appears insurmountable. With an organizational culture that is resistant to change), efforts for transformation are met with incrementalism at best. Although the humanitarian sector may easily embrace²⁰ new technologies and tools, these forms of innovation leave the underlying infrastructure intact, and avoid challenging the entrenched structures and assumptions upon which aid operates. Perhaps the most innovative path would be to address these structural issues and commit to their repair.

IMAGINING AND FORGING SOLIDARITY

In Emergent Strategy²¹, adrienne maree brown positions the imagination as one of the spoils of colonialism where the few imagine futures for all. This results from exclusionary practices and reflects broader social inequities where some groups are not afforded the autonomy, time, or agency to contribute to collective imaginaries. In avoiding difficult but rewarding negotiations across difference—those that address deep seated and taken-for-granted hierarchies—we miss opportunities to connect around shared interests, not just in struggle but also in ways that are joyous.

We imagine that connection across differences is more difficult than relating to those we perceive as similar to ourselves, seeing the world through the lenses of “here” and “there,” “us” and “them.” Our inability to imagine a common horizon of action also involves a question of scale. Two dominant tendencies, according to Jodi Dean²², obscure our capacity to engage in struggle for a common project: survivors and systems. In the first, individuals struggle to survive, fighting unassisted against the odds. Based on the values of resilience and self-reliance, people become mired in the pain and trauma of their struggles. Fighting for their individual survival, they are unable to grasp or transform the conditions in which they find themselves. In the second, the vast and complex nature of systems leaves people overwhelmed and unable to act as they lose sight of the local and the specific. Dean poses solidarity as a middle ground enabling us to recognise the necessity of interdependence in responding to situations that would seem daunting if faced alone.

To what degree are humanitarian aid workers able to create solidarity with the groups with whom they collaborate? Professional humanitarians define their work in terms of service to “beneficiaries”, while solidarians are guided by egalitarian and anti-hierarchical principles. In contrast to bureaucratic frameworks, those invested in solidarity emphasise (and importantly, practice) modes of collective association and recognition based in reciprocity. Whereas one model uses the language of suffering, the other uses that of liberation. On the one hand, practising solidarity—given its incompatibility—would necessitate the very demise of aid organizations. While on the other hand, power-sharing, collaboration, and distributed forms of collective agency are already active in these spaces as small-scale²³, sporadic, and disobedient alternatives²⁴ to hierarchical social relations and Western styled humanism. These situations might be understood as what cul-

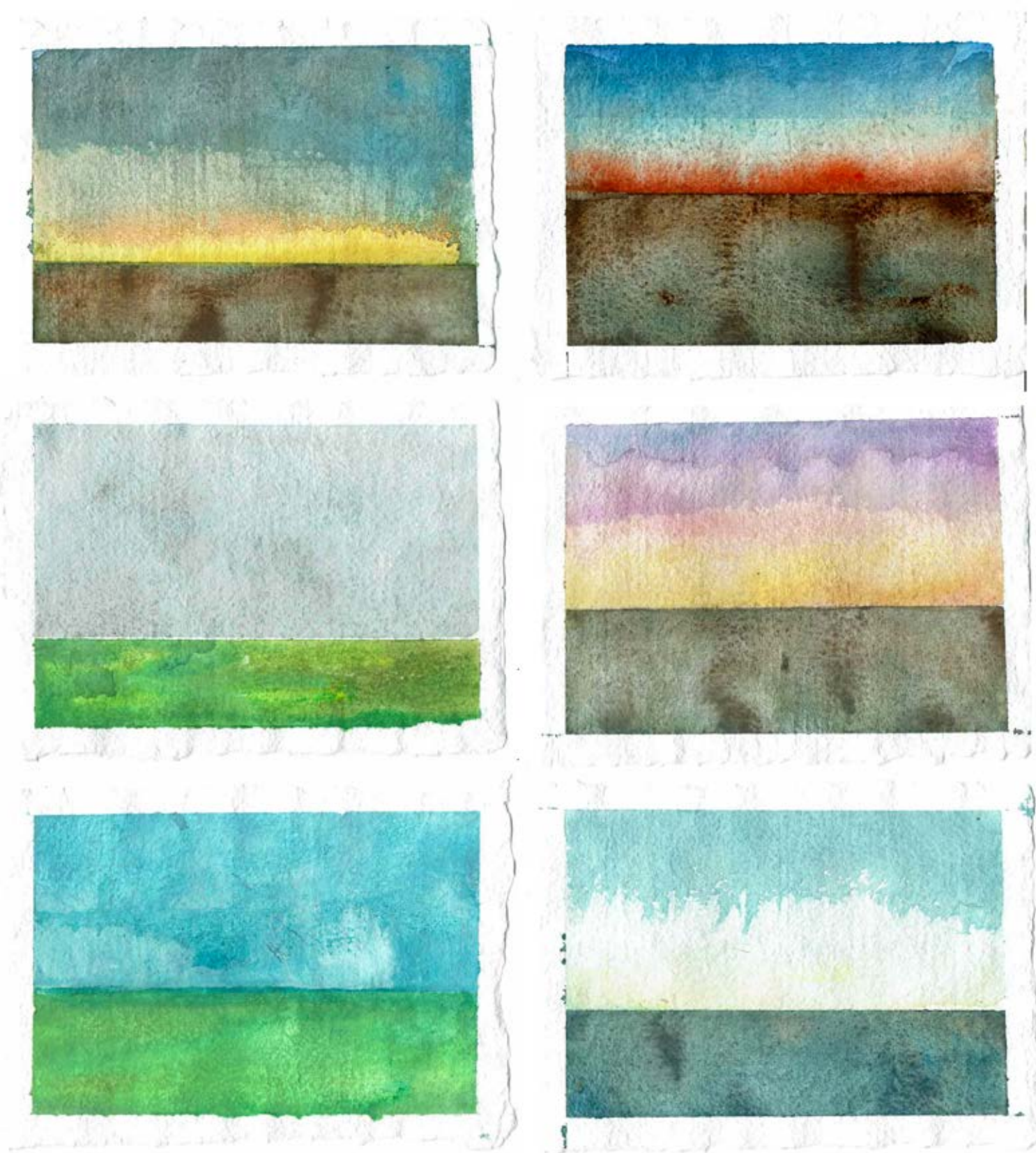
tural theorist Raymond Williams calls “structures of feeling”²⁵—those rhythms and sentiments that hover at the edge of semantic availability. Having not yet realised their social character, they are positioned at junctures where society experiences changes in presence.

Solidarity has a speculative character and is fundamentally a horizontal activity with its focus on liberation, justice, and the creative processes of world- and future-building—projects that are never complete. The horizon is always present in the landscape, reminding us that there are things beyond what is visible from a particular location. As a coordinate central to perspective and orientation, the horizon is vital to successful navigation. As we move toward the horizon it remains “over there,” showing us that there are limits to what we can know in advance. However, rather than frustrating our efforts, horizons represent possibilities.

SPECULATIVE, SOLIDARIAN STORYTELLING

We speak very casually and confidently about humanitarianism, borders, nations, and so on as if they have always existed, and we imagine these structures will endure. This is a story we have been told. We make this durable, mythical even, in its regular retelling. Like any social construction, it takes on a material and enduring quality the more it is accepted as something real and unchangeable. How might we reimagine stories of stasis as those of transformation and metamorphosis by asking what else is possible? What do future stories of mutuality, interdependence, and belonging look like?

Speculative and visionary fiction²⁶ offer alternatives to stories of dependency and structural vulnerability. In finding that precarious balance between hubris and humility, these modes, according to Walidah Imarisha²⁷, “imagine paths to creating more just futures.” In these stories, change is understood as relational, and transformation is led by those who have been marginalised, living at the intersections of identities and oppressions. In posing alternatives to how we live now, these stories, which centre people and are often communally generated, allow us to see, sense, and explore a world beyond that which is given. These articulations collectively practice and propose justice-based futures, and visionary fiction marks a sharp departure from the dominant Western template of the hero’s journey.



Jane Pirone, *Horizons*, 2021

Monomythic narratives of the hero show us a path to inner transformation that does not necessarily involve (deep) social change. In this familiar trope, we follow the emotional, psychological, and physical journey of an individual who is called to leave their ordinary life to embark on a high stakes adventure. After some initial resistance and in spite of the risks involved, the hero eventually sets out on the journey, leaving home and the known. Although a relatively solitary endeavour, the hero normally encounters a mentor who assists in acquiring the necessary confidence, knowledge, and skills. Facing a series of tests with no possibility of turning back, the protagonist engages allies and enemies oscillating between failure and success. He (and although this might not be a “he,” it most often is) eventually triumphs and is reborn with a special wisdom and mastery of both the ordinary and special worlds. Upon the return home, he is welcomed as a victorious hero who has transcended to a higher plane.

The hero’s journey is such a common and familiar trope that we rarely question its logic. We identify with the alienation felt by the hero—estrangement from the self, from others, from nature, from the agency needed to change the world. We embrace the notion that suffering leads to redemption and personal resilience marks the path to expertise. The values embedded in this mode of storytelling mesh perfectly with the rhetoric of perseverance and individualism that characterise the bootstrap ideologies of capitalism and the paternalism and saviourism of colonialism. Individual change as a path to salvation confers deservingness. Although touted as universal, the monomythic hero’s journey is culturally specific, deeply rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In the hero’s journey, precarity, vulnerability, fragility, and frailty are understood as individual shortcomings—something to remedy independently. Principles derived from the hero’s journey are evident in a range of fields from social work to urban planning to insurance to humanitarianism. In particular, there has been a growing preoccupation with resilience, a ‘virtue’ underscored in the hero’s journey. Resilience models ask individuals to bear the burden in adapting to stress, crisis, and adversity. In addressing the symptoms rather than underlying causes, resilience preserves the conditions that create hardship. In its reverence of personal grit and fortitude, resilience valorises individual achievement, pliability, expertise, and authority rather than collective efforts to institute structural change.

While hero narratives chart the conquest of adversity, damage narratives fixate on harm and injury as a way of achieving reparation. Eve Tuck²⁸, in “Suspending Dam-

age: A Letter to Communities,” points to the oppression inherent in narratives based in deficit models that only document pain and suffering. Singularly defining communities based on their distress pathologises and further inflicts injury, and according to Tuck: “Native communities, poor communities, communities of colour, and disenfranchised communities tolerate this...because there is an implicit and sometimes explicit assurance that stories of damage pay off in material, sovereign, and political wins.” In being reduced to victims, the subjects of these stories are diminished and objectified. They bear the burden of testimony with their lives reduced to determinant power relations. Tuck proposes a desire-based framework as an antidote to shift the focus away from damage to acknowledge the “complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives...so that people are seen as more than broken and conquered.” Incomplete stories that underscore only pain and damage are, Tuck asserts, acts of aggression. Desire-based narratives focus on what Gerald Vizenor²⁹ calls “survivance” which involves “active resistance and repudiation of dominance, obtrusive themes of tragedy, nihilism, and victimry.” Whereas stories fixed on damage truncate the richness of actual lives and their futures, those based in desire generate agency and the conditions for speculating and dreaming.

By focusing on oppression and dispossession, stories that centre resilience and damage socialise people to act as either victims or as “privileged subjects who can afford to care about what is done to others, thus reproducing the radical difference between them, rather than as cocitizens who care for the common world they share.”³⁰ Ariella Aisha Azoulay highlights the necessity of unlearning imperialism to move beyond helping and aid, “understanding that what was taken by the unstoppable imperial movement, and held as if naturally owned by Western institutions, cannot be parsimoniously redistributed through charity, educational uplift, or humanitarian relief.” Without repairing the profound and lasting effects of imperialism, she argues, there is no possibility of realising futures based in justice.

Like Azoulay, Ursula LeGuin understands the power of stories as forces active in reevaluating the past so we can build worlds and futures based in mutual care. Lived experiences are dense and complicated, with pasts, presents, and futures weaving complex patterns. LeGuin begins with the premise that our first cultural artifacts were containers and she celebrates “the carrier bag theory of fiction,”³¹ as an approach that “cannot be characterised either as conflict or as harmony, since its purpose is nei-

ther resolution nor stasis but continuing process.” These are stories that are “full of beginnings without ends, of initiations, of losses, of transformations and translations, and far more tricks than conflicts, far fewer triumphs than snares and delusions, full of...missions that fail, and people who don’t understand.” LeGuin offers a mode of storytelling focused on people going about their daily lives rather than those featuring heroes. Stories with heroes might be more gripping than the everyday experiences and negotiations that constitute the bulk of people’s lives, yet small quotidian actions provide the foundation for solidarity. The carrier bag theory has the capacity to encompass multiple worldviews simultaneously and can incorporate both human and nonhuman protagonists as significant actors.

In these stories, relationships are established that extend beyond kith and kin, leaving little room for saviours or victims. Grounded in human culture, people understand the necessity and delight of interdependence—a sort of collective effervescence where we desire to belong and enjoy welcoming others. The alien kinship and xeno-hospitality that characterise LeGuin’s fiction propose convivial futures. In pointing to the likelihood that the first objects humans designed were those for carrying, LeGuin speaks to the affordances of sharing and caring. With the capacity to carry things—from babies to seeds to water to curious and beautiful objects—people develop the ability to create futures that are interdependent and robust. In being able to carry things, we can collect more than we alone need so that we can share with others. Through sharing, we build and strengthen social bonds. Robin Wall Kimmerer extends this notion in her exploration of the ethic of reciprocity³² where nature teaches us how³³ to share rather than accumulate. As a biologist and chronicler of North American indigenous stories, Kimmerer highlights how the natural world can teach us about mutual aid, recovery, and restoration. Through storytelling, she urges us to confront the dominance of systems that frame our world according to scarcity, instead focusing on abundance and “restorative reciprocity,” understanding that “all flourishing is mutual.”

What other forms of storytelling can guide us in recognising our interdependence, shifting power dynamics and fostering belonging? The discursive and performative power of stories can help in overcoming obstacles to collaboration, cultivating models of action that rearrange the coordinates that frame our understandings of the world—in its past, present, and future forms. Solidarian storytelling prioritises mutuality and justice over empathy

and aid. Rather than maintaining existing conditions and their inherent power dynamics, stories of solidarity seek transformation through conviviality. This is something particularly salient in the realm of humanitarian aid where heroic myths, damage narratives, and tales of resilience dominate the discourse.

“Strivings and failures shape the stories we tell. What we recall has as much to do with the terrible things we hope to avoid as with the good life for which we yearn. But when does one decide to stop looking to the past and instead conceive of a new order? When is it time to dream of another country or to embrace other strangers as allies or to make an opening, an overture, where there is none? When is it clear that the old life is over, a new one has begun, and there is no looking back? From the holding cell was it possible to see beyond the end of the world and to imagine living and breathing again?”
Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route*³⁴

“Only when home has vanished and humanity is no longer territorialised, only then, there will be a chance for humanity”.
Shahram Khosravi *‘Illegal’ Traveller: An Auto-Ethnography of Borders*³⁵

“This is the time to be unrealistic in our demands for change. We are told repeatedly we need to be realistic, but that is just another method of social control. We are told true liberation is an impossible dream by the powers that be, over and over again, because us believing that it is an impossible dream is the only thing between here and the new, just futures we want”.
Walidah Imarisha³⁶

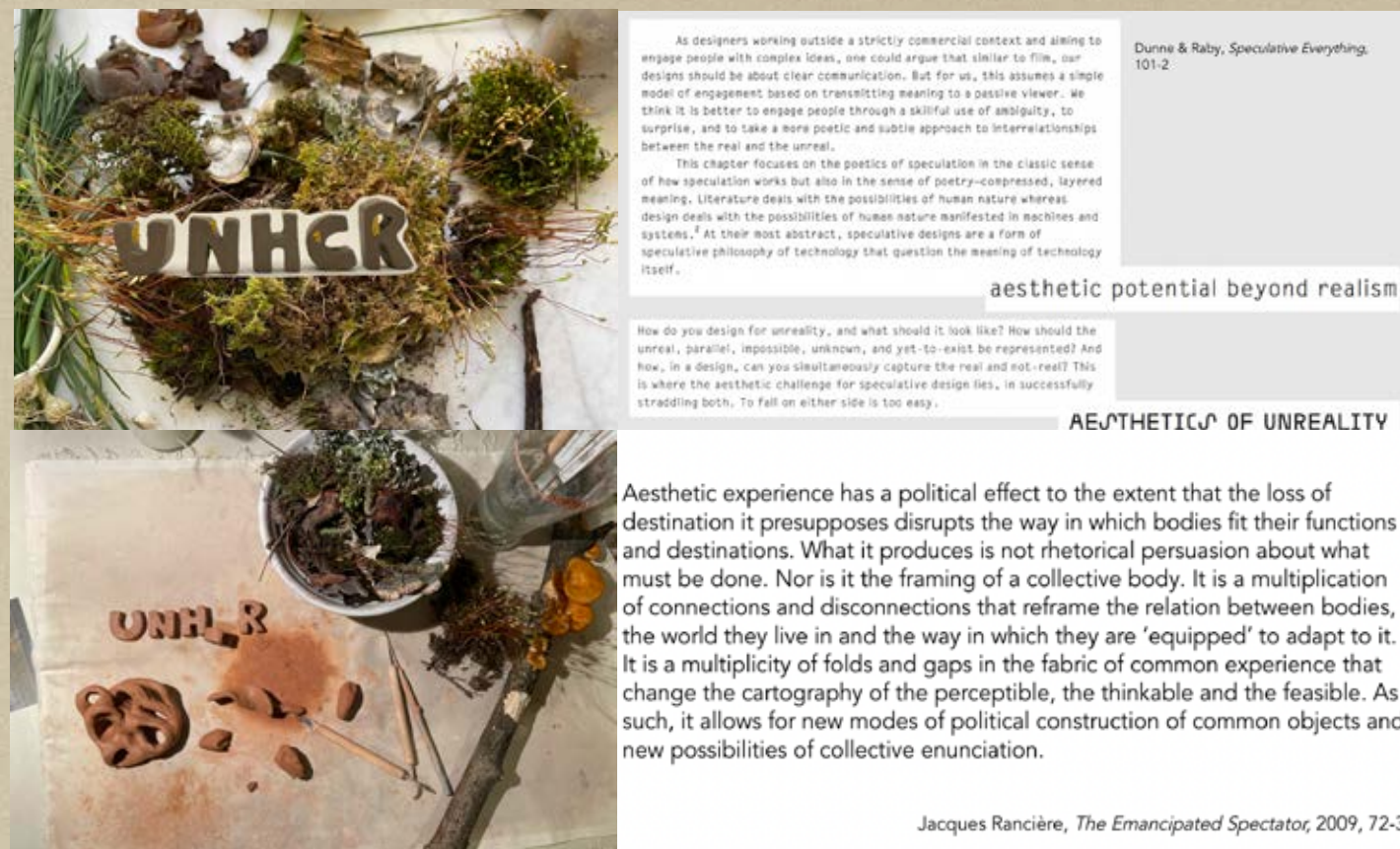
¹<https://www.dukeupress.edu/anti-crisis>
² Arendt, Hannah. *On Revolution*. 1963. Penguin Random House.
³<https://thebass.org/art/haegue-yang/>
⁴ Fassin, Didier. *Humanitarian Reason: A moral history of the present*. 2011. University of California Press.
⁵<https://www.refugee-run.org/>
⁶<https://www.forcedfromhome.com/about/>
⁷<https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2016/10/15/refugees-journey-recreated-boston-harbor/nuYGybfZcH5BX4gb9SJK4O/story.html>
⁸<https://creativetime.org/projects/doomocracy/>
⁹ <https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-02-16/story-behind-rwandan-refugee-camp-inspired-kanye-s-yeezy-season-3>
¹⁰ <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/what-we-do/news-stories/news/uprooted-violence-and-persecution-33-million-people-world-wide-face>
¹¹ Bourdieu, Pierre. *La délégation et le fétichisme politique*. 1984. *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, 52-53.
¹² The Care Collective. *The Care Manifesto: The politics of interdependence*. 2020. Verso Books.
¹³ <https://www.gold.ac.uk/goldsmiths-press/features/what-is-care/>
¹⁴ Ticktin, Mariam I. *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France*. 2011. University of California Press.
¹⁵ Puig de la Bellacasa, Maria. *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*. 2017. University of Minnesota Press.
¹⁶ <https://precaritypilot.net/ethics-of-care/>
¹⁷ <https://www.martinavila.com/projects/prepositiontools/>
¹⁸ <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2020/12/5fd327344/unhcr-70-proud-work-mood-celebrate.html>
¹⁹ <https://www.icvanetwork.org/system/files/versions/Restoring%20Humanity-%20Synthesis%20of%20the%20Consultation%20Process%20for%20the%20World%20Humanitarian%20Summit.pdf>
²⁰ <https://odi.org/en/publications/time-to-let-go-remaking-humanitarian-action-for-the-modern-era/>
²¹ <http://adriennemareebrown.net/tag/emergent-strategy/>
²² <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/86/160585/four-theses-on-the-comrade/>
²³ <https://medium.com/unhcr-innovation-service/collaborative-approaches-to-creating-community-based-solutions-96137b0870b5>
²⁴ <https://spheres-journal.org/contribution/disobedient-sensing-and-border-struggles-at-the-maritime-frontier-of-europe/>
²⁵ https://www.uib.no/sites/w3.uib.no/files/attachments/15_williams-structures.pdf
²⁶ <https://www.walidah.com/blog?category=Essays>
²⁷ <https://exterminatingangel.com/what-is-visionary-fiction-an-interview-with-walidah-imarisha/>
²⁸ Tuck, Eve. *Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities*. 2009.
²⁹ Vizenor, Gerald. *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survival*. 2009. University of Nebraska Press.
³⁰ Azoulay, Ariella Aisha. *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*. 2019. Verso Books.
³¹ <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/ursula-k-le-guin-the-carrier-bag-theory-of-fiction>
³² <https://emergencemagazine.org/essay/the-serviceberry/>
³³ <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/may/23/robin-wall-kimmerer-people-cant-understand-the-world-as-a-gift-unless-someone-shows-them-how>
³⁴ <https://us.macmillan.com/books/9780374531157>
³⁵ <https://www.palgrave.com/gp/book/9780230230798>
³⁶ <https://onezero.medium.com/black-lives-matter-is-science-fiction-how-envisioning-a-better-future-makes-it-possible-5e14d35154e3>

Iz Nettare (They / Them) is a designer and sculptor in their second year of the MFA Design & Technology program at Parsons School of Design. Their work primarily explores material, identity, and ecology. The following sculpture was undertaken by Iz to give life to a fabricated future for the UNHCR. Notes that evolved around the creative process for this project were:

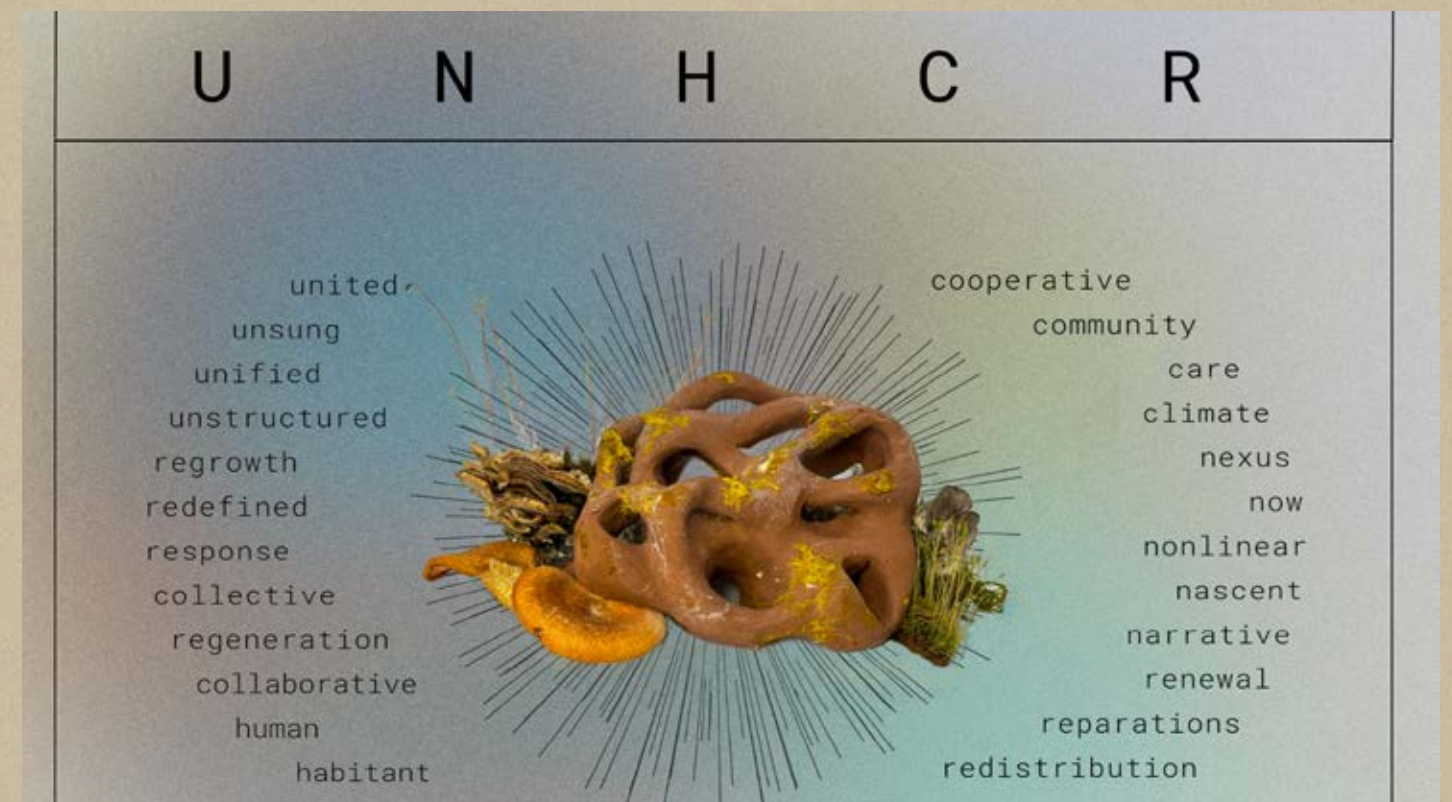
1. Decomposing, generative, breaking down, emergence
2. Fabulation rather than speculative/futuring - time linear, woven present, past, future, Gilles Deleuze, totipotent/quantum
3. Not a specific future/speculative artifact but a *totipotent shape of plural futures*

Below are snippets of Iz's process and inspiration. On the bottom right, we are presented with the final piece, meant to probe and provide a space where the viewer's beliefs about the present and hopes for the future can be reconstructed and refolded to allow for a United Non-heirarchal Human Collective for Regrowth.

Iz's whole process for this project can be found [here](#).



UNITED NON-HIERARCHICAL HUMAN
COLLECTIVE FOR REGROWTH



A VISIONING SPELL

from the world and mind of Adrienne Maree Brown

Words are energy, so choose them wisely. Spells are a set of words to generate magic for yourself – to call in what you are longing for or transitioning towards. You can use the below structure to create a spell for the future you are trying to envision or create in your professional or personal life, guided by values and principles which underpin that future.

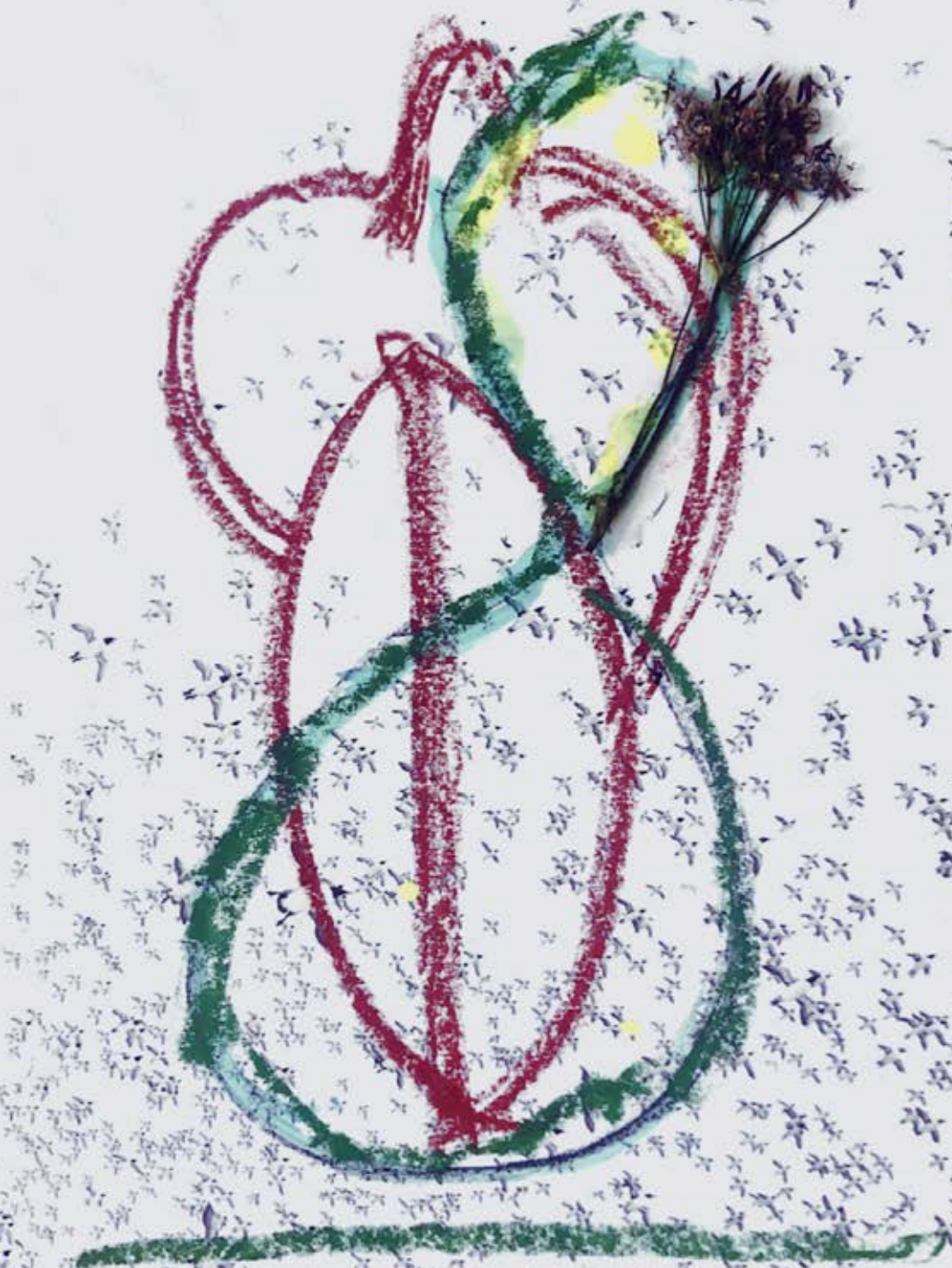
1st stanza: What you're letting go of and what lessons you're carrying forward

2nd stanza: The power you're standing in and what you want to lean into more

3rd stanza: With your eyes on liberation, what are you going to practice?

Stanzas often encompass 3 - 4 lines but feel free to be creative with your work and outside the boundaries of the stanzas.

Art: :Lauren Parater, 2021



Harmony, a dancing God

Harmony bathed their bare feet into the skin of the Earth,
their nerves a litany of manifesting and melting spirits

Their tanned toes tickled from the fragments
of history withered on the fertile surface.

Harmony twirled and their lips kissed the Wind,
whispering melodies, mingling breath with breeze

The Sun waltzed behind Canopies of wisdom,
sparkling and crystallizing crevices
of parachuting futures.

They grazed one another,
harvesting magic within their veins,
a regenerative religion restoring respite.

Harmony serenaded songs of souls,
songs of sapling saints and
songs of seismic sculptures.

They mirrored the Ocean that held their reflection,
slicing the stillness upon caressing leaves.

They sweetened the Fruit
whose nectar quenched hunger
as they pined for the Mist that lingered in their gentle desire.

They were consumed as they overflowed,
their kinship woven like vines from their core.

A quest for belonging, bellowing blues of a Home that emerged from molten
shaped at the dawn of their bones.

Harmony danced with Earth, with Wind, with Sun, with Ocean, with Kin
and Home, as they too danced for Harmony.



Shanice Da Costa

Art: :Lauren Parater, 2021

THE ANTHROPOCENE DOES NOT NEED MORE TECHNICAL SOLUTIONS; IT NEEDS OUR LIBERATION.

A personal reflection on creativity and social justice.



2020 was a great awakening for me. The pandemic, the collective response to the murder of George Floyd and the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on communities of colour, including my community, was complex for me to process and experience. Last year posed a question for me that I believe is the creative calling of the Anthropocene: What does it mean to be human to another and to all life on Earth?

My creative collaboration with Project Unsong has been an invitation for me to explore this question through the creative medium. Project Unsong is a collaboration between UNHCR Innovation Service and six creative collaborators to create products that explore dominant narratives and assumptions in the innovation and humanitarian space, and inspire strategic thinking on prominent or emerging global issues. One of the main insights for me has been to explore what creative imagination means in my practice as an environmentalist. These are some insights I'm becoming aware of.



ON CREATIVE IMAGINATION

People and natural ecosystems, that strive to live in the face of oppressive societies, express a level of creative ingenuity that can go unnoticed because the end goal is survival.

Creativity is putting food on your children's plate with no means of income. It's surviving one more day without deportation. It's playing a podcast out loud as you walk home at night, to give an unwelcome stranger the illusion that you are not alone (i.e. protected). It's adapting to life in an acidic ocean whenw members of your species continue to die. Creative survival is how one attempts to thrive within a system fundamentally designed to oppress or harm you.

People and natural ecosystems are not lacking ingenuity, they are lacking opportunity - essentially the opportunity to be and to live. I believe the Anthropocene calls for an other space of creativity, beyond creative survival, what I call creative imagination.

Creative imagination in the face of oppressive systems is refusing to give up your hope and actively nourish -ing your capacity to be hopeful. It is what Desmond Tutu calls to be a 'prisoner of hope' and Toni Morrison refers to it as the 'cultivation of goodness.'

There is a stubbornness to hope that eventually bends reality to its will. Even if I cannot perceive it, I know that society is capable of nurturing community, wellness, and equality within ourselves and all life on Earth. My work is nourishing that capacity to be hopeful in myself and cultivating expressions of hope in my work, relationships, and communities.

CREATIVITY AND GRIEVING

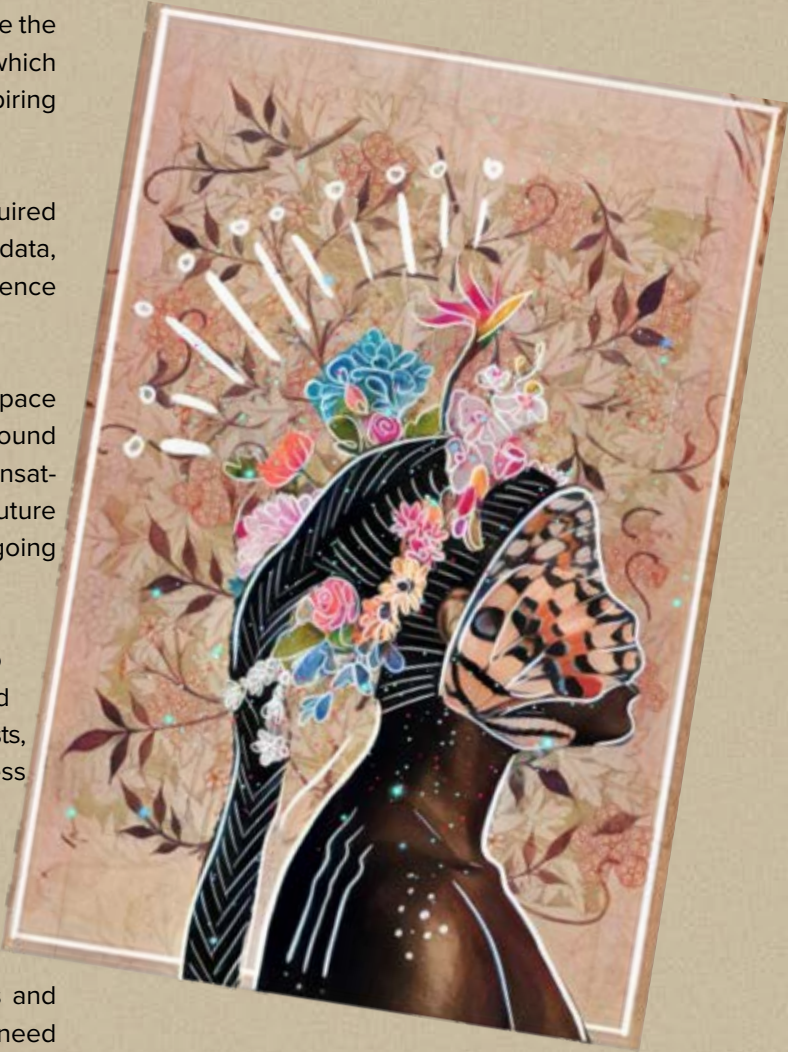
My creative practices as part of Project Unsung and in creating my new podcast, Black Earth, has allowed me the time to grieve. In 2021, I am launching Black Earth which is an interview podcast celebrating nature and inspiring Black women environmentalists around the world.

Working in sustainable development policy, I had acquired the collective practice of numbing myself from the data, the projected trends of collapse, extinction, and violence in our relationship with the earth.

This project and Black Earth podcast has given me space to grieve the ongoing experiences of communities around the world and the histories of my ancestors in the transatlantic slave trade. What some people speculate as future scenarios of the apocalypse are the histories and ongoing realities of other people and ecosystems.

To create these two projects, I had to allow myself to feel it, to really process these complex emotions, and to create spaces (listening circles) with other ecologists, where we could grieve what is happening and express gratitude for what is still possible.

It's possible to develop technical solutions to the symptoms of the ecological crisis while still numbing yourself, but I don't think it's possible to truly create new futures while numbing yourself to the realities and futures unfolding. If we want to create futures, we need collective practices for grieving what we might encounter in the creation process. The Anthropocene does not need more technical solutions, it needs our liberation.



ON CREATIVITY AND TIME

There is a culture of 'running out of time' in both the conservation and humanitarian sectors. This is different from the urgent attention required of us to attend to the events we face in our work. The 'running out of time' culture, I'm referring to, necessitates that we have the answers before we go to work and I wonder how this affects our ability to create.

Creation needs time to attend to others, to the present moment, to explore alternative paths with openness, humility, and determination. It requires time to reflect with others, question our assumptions, expectations, and conclusions. Creation needs time for us to 'not know'. It requires time to suspend judgments, and renege on conclusions that you cling to for order, security, esteem. The facilitators of Project Unsung gave me space to 'not know' and I think through the artefacts created, I had time to explore questions that I may not have otherwise explored because I didn't give myself the time to not know.

When we act from a place of 'running out of time', we relinquish the possibility of not knowing. We have to reclaim this time back. We have to reclaim our time of not knowing so we can leave our own ideological islands in search of real answers.



ON RENEWAL

My initial response to the question of imagining the futures of displacement and ecological change, was one of fatalistic doom. I tried to imagine ways out of the projected trends of sea level-rise, droughts, and water scarcity. I tried to imagine solutions to get us out of the sixth mass extinction. This effort limited me because there are infinite ways our futures could unfold as a result of interactions we choose and events that happen.

So, I decided to remain committed to the project theme of renewal and through these articles, and explore what renewal might mean for us in the Anthropocene. Rather than explore the infinite pathways to avert the ongoing ecological changes, I started to ask a new question, which I referred to earlier; What does it mean to be human to another and to all life on Earth?

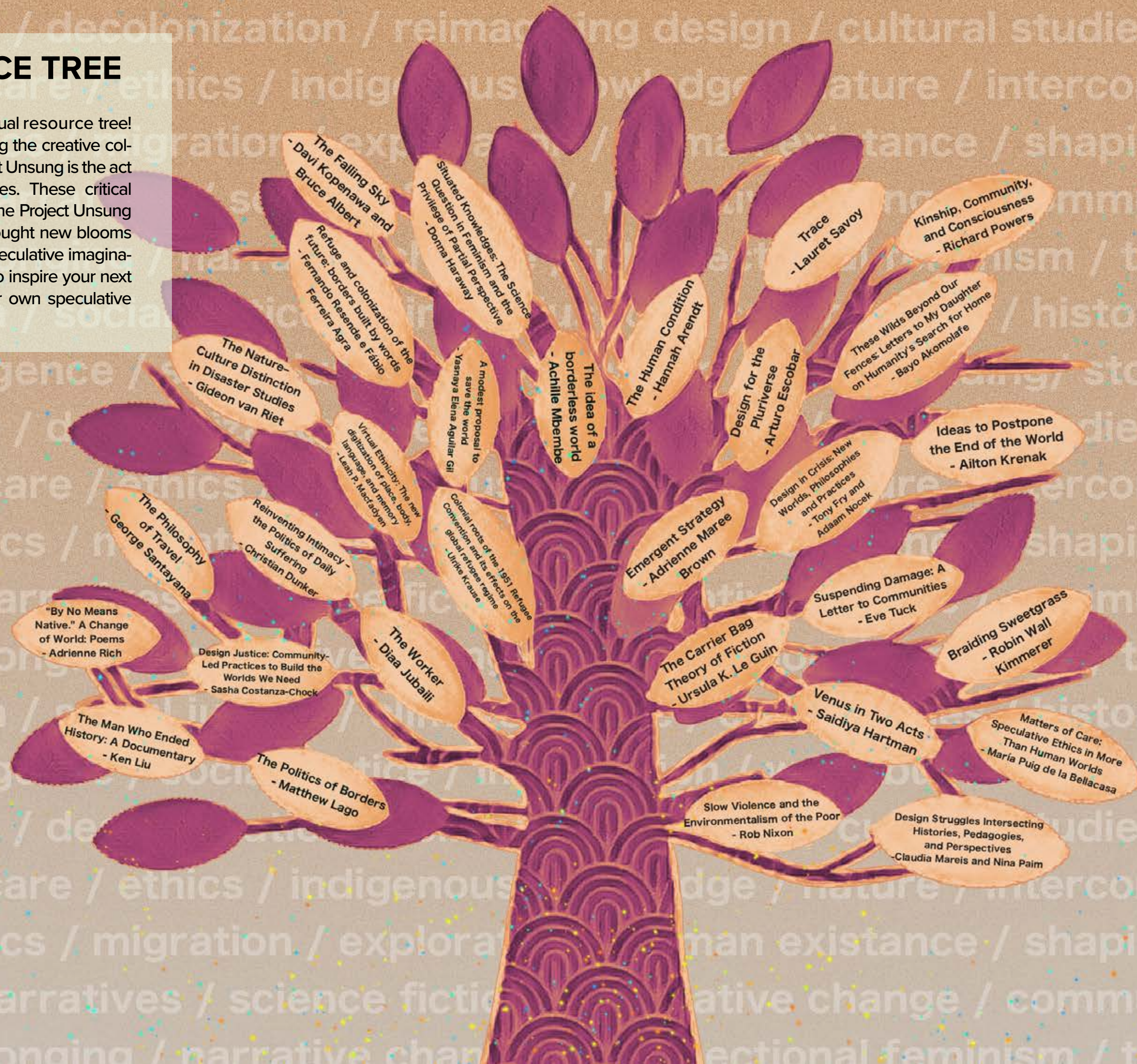
Even if the current projected drivers of ecological loss had no remarkable impact on life on Earth, would it make it ok for us to be and live the human experience this way? Would infinite economic growth, and a throwaway culture be the most life-giving ways to be human?

Through this question, this is where I found the most creative potential. To be human in the Anthropocene is to create new narratives of humanity's relationship with all life on Earth that goes beyond treating this living planet as an inanimate place that exists to serve our survival and self-actualisation needs. It is to amplify stories which affirm our relationship with the natural environment as an essential component of all expressions of human dignity - safety, belonging, identity, agency, solidarity, justice, and, of course, creativity. We cannot be fully human while nature is degraded and violated and nature cannot thrive if human beings continue to be degraded and violated. It is to live daily with the awareness that we are one percent of all life on Earth and to allow that awareness to inspire us to greater humility and reverence for the planet.



RESOURCE TREE

Welcome to our virtual resource tree! A core value uniting the creative collaborators of Project Unsung is the act of sharing resources. These critical resources shaped the Project Unsung community and brought new blooms to a garden of speculative imagination. Use this tree to inspire your next read and sow your own speculative seeds!





Cover Art: Lauren Parater, 2021