

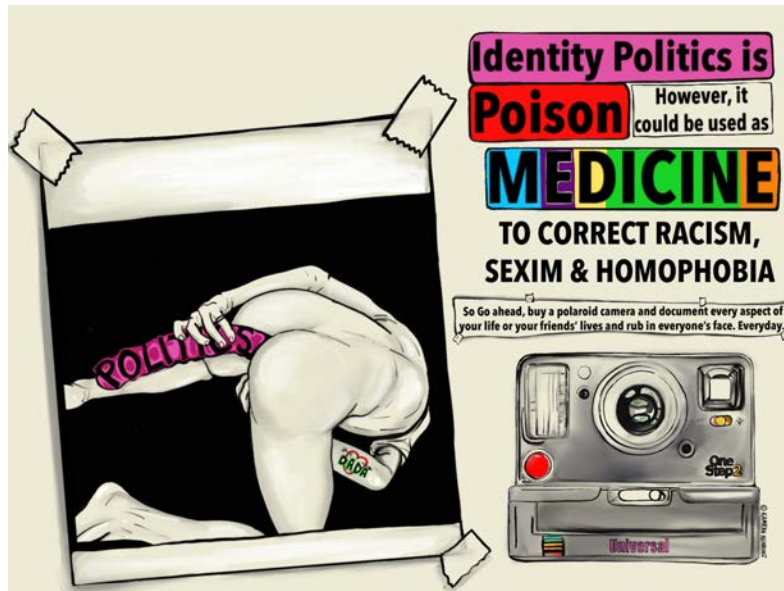
# Rejected Bodies

By Kamran Behrouz

The following essay is a hazardous attempt to break out of the bubble of identity politics<sup>1</sup> and investigate the fragments of micropolitics<sup>2</sup>, in order to connect the dots and trace the mismatches between the desire and the commodification of sexuality and pleasure within the Modern queer culture, a process which has been forged and enabled by capitalist structures. This essay includes a series of illustrations based on real images of either friends or people who I met or spoke to on dating apps, as a reflection on the mechanism of desire in our contemporary digital culture.<sup>3</sup> (Images: page.1,3,5,6,7,8)

In fact it's impossible to deny that the emergence of capitalism was beneficial for queer movements especially with how it helped to decode the notion of sexuality and heterosociality.

As we know, capitalism is a regime of decoding. Jonathan Roffe argues; *"For example, the coding of sexual relations through marriage, the church, morals and popular culture – which*



*in different societies locate the practice of sex in certain contexts, whether that is marriage, prostitution or youth culture – has been decoded in capitalist societies. This is first of all, for Deleuze and Guattari, a good thing, making possible new kinds of relations that were excluded by the coding regimes in question. In capitalism, however, a correlative axiomatization has taken place making possible the sale of sex as a*

*product (what Karl Marx called a 'commodity')"*<sup>4</sup> In capitalism desires, frustrations and identities, are commodified within the market which has clearly made our body as part of the chain of profit. Our bodies literally help to generate profits for shareholders.

The following essay forms part of an artistic research project and is an analytical endeavor to decode our queer-digital culture. The corner stone of queer politics was a protest against former codifications and binaries, a protest against the hegemony, then how come the queer culture has been re-coded again within the capitalist market?

<sup>1</sup>As a queer-gender/non-binary, multi-disciplinary, Nomadic artist, born in Tehran

<sup>2</sup> A thousands plateaus, capitalism and schizophrenia, Giles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, transl. by Brian Massumi, Bloomsbury academic, 2014, pp.208

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.365efcp.ch/boys-dont-cry/>

<sup>4</sup> Deleuze dictionary, Ed. by Adrienne Parr, Edinburgh University Press, 2010, pp.40

## Heterosociality of capitalist signifiers :

It has been more than couple of years since I started paying more attention to (or sometimes collect) the products related to male sexuality. I started to become really fascinated by how the language of advertisements are still echoing our patriarchal past, exactly where the notion of power lies: a power deeply structured and rooted in a patriarchal form of thinking—the core of fascism—which has been manifested in signifiers which have been used in advertisements (e.g. the image below, and use of the word "gun oil" for lubricant, which is a comic psychoanalytical slip I must say. The word "Gun oil" as lubricant reveals more than it wants about the rape culture and subconscious sexual position of power. It's not about pleasure, it's more about power.

As Barthes stated: "all images are polysemous; they imply, a "floating chain" of signifieds, the reader is able to choose some and ignore others"<sup>5</sup>, so as we know, it is more than 100 years that market uses specific signifier/images to benefit from such hierarchical phallic structures of power. When did this become so radically normal ? And how do we consciously or unconsciously contribute to such market to perpetuate this chain?



*Image (left) is an assemblage of collected garbage out of Lubricants and condoms, popular amongst gay men. The language of the marketing and advertisements reflect on my further arguments.*

As "desiring machines" how did we re-planed to desire our own repression "again"? How has queer masculinity recoded itself based on heteronormative patterns? How did male fantasies expand into submissive forms and become a new digital culture, absolutely horrified by intimacy? A

digital culture fascinated and dominated by the image of a hyper-masculine strong man. Apparently, we are not only polymorphous perverse as Freud said<sup>6</sup>, but also capable of confusing what we want with what we really don't need, and by that, I mean our own repression.

If the remedy could not be another orgasmic fantasy of a Marxist revolution, then how do we stop ourselves from contributing to micro-fascist economical systems of thoughts? How do we create a state of permanent becoming-revolutionary, as artists, as academics or simply as citizens?

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<sup>5</sup> Rhetoric of image, Roland Barthes, 1964, pp.1

<sup>6</sup> Freud, Sigmund. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, ed. by Carrie Lee Rothgeb, U.S. Department of Health Education and Welfare, Rockville, Maryland, 1972

## Technology, Science and the distortion of desire:

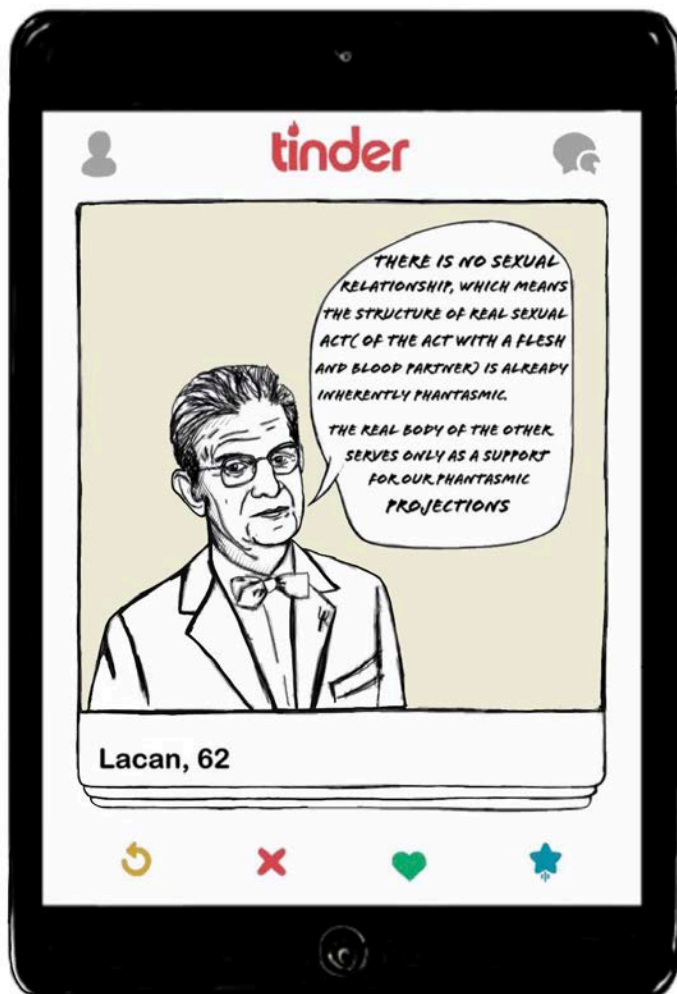
### I. The iPhone Generations

We, the generation of iPhone holders, roaming on Grindr (Tinder, etc.) looking for what we can't have, mainly because of the dichotomy between desire and satisfaction, the virtual and the real, and in this case; the "image" and the "body" (The flesh and blood body). We are the generation of "sex mads"<sup>7</sup>, with headless profile pictures and pumped up muscular normative bodies, completely individualized, desperately attempting to replace the lack of "real" intimacy with excessive numbers of sexual encounters.



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<sup>7</sup> I borrow the term "sex mad" from Adam Phillips, the term has been used in "On Balance", in a chapter with the same title. "Our desire for love and sex is insatiable. It's not the problem, it's the point."  
—On Balance, Adam Phillips, Hamilton, London, pp.24



On the one hand, there are achievements, both in terms of technology and science, related to queer visibility and health, compared to the 1940s or 1950s (unfortunately not in every country), when queer people were mostly oppressed by sovereignty, cultural rules, coded sexuality and norms, when there was no other choice than hiding a relationship or accepting the fear of authority/society. When there were no other places than risky underground gay bars, discreet cruising areas, or public toilets to meet other queer people, contact them, or possibly have sexual contacts with, when AIDS was associated as a stigma with homosexual men in the society. With the emergence of capitalism, both Technology and Science, could fight this discriminatory dichotomy and nuance this process into a very positive way, technology in this case fought the alienation of queer society as a marginalized and isolated minority.

Image. 365 Etudes for Celebrating Pleasure (Publication)<sup>8</sup>

Nowadays you can be an undetectable HIV positive<sup>9</sup> and living your life without being discriminated or harassed. On the other hand, technology, also distorted and mishmash the idea of pleasure into a virtuality, probably because as Lacan mentioned before, “sexual relationship is inherently Phantasmic”<sup>10</sup>, so it already has a potential for such misplacement. As a generation of iPhone holders (or in a more extreme version; the generation of Otaku<sup>11</sup> men/women with virtual partners)<sup>12</sup>, we trained to adapt our desires into this fast food forms

<sup>8</sup> [www.365efcp/book](http://www.365efcp/book)

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tyler-curry/hiv-positive-and-undetectable-what-does-it-really-mean\\_b\\_3332221.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tyler-curry/hiv-positive-and-undetectable-what-does-it-really-mean_b_3332221.html)

<sup>10</sup> Slavoj Žižek, Mapping ideology, Verso, London, 1994, pp.5

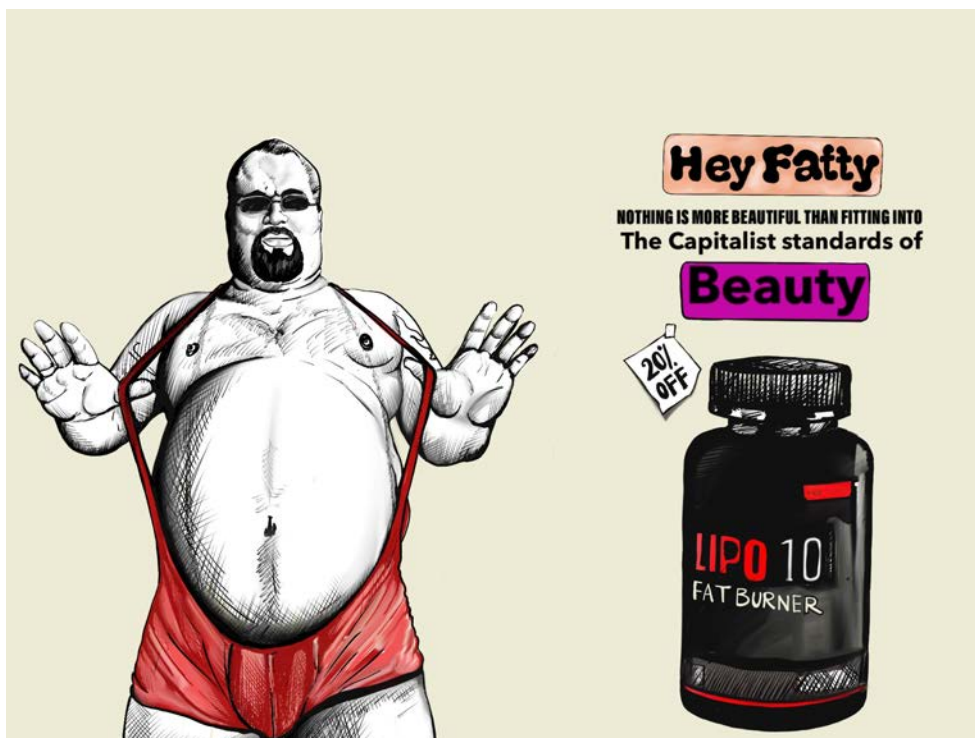
<sup>11</sup> (in Japan) a young person who is obsessed with computers or particular aspects of popular culture to the determine of their social skills

<sup>12</sup> [www.bbc.com/news/magazine-24614830](http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-24614830)

of commodified pleasure making within the market, as other objects that we bought in the capitalist market to fulfill our other lacks, because “*consumer capitalism has thought us to be phobic of frustration*”<sup>13</sup>. We are terrified of frustration nowadays, Virtual pleasure is still easier to handle than the trouble of staying with the frustration. On a platform, for example like Grindr, we buy sexual pleasure with virtual wherewithal.

It is similar to a supermarket, but instead of product and physical money one might pay with virtual wherewithal or simply by their “time”, by their smart phones, by commodification of the apps, by synchronization of algorithms and advertisements and of course by your “contribution” to this economic system, or even by adapting yourself to its economic rules and obligations.

Instead of the object of desire, one finds the image of pleasure (the selfies and nudes) and of course, the act of repetition is the key<sup>14</sup>, and there will be unwritten sets of laws and social-codes regarding to the representation of body in those images. There is a clear trend of body aesthetic and masculinity.



## II. Misogyny in Queer Scene

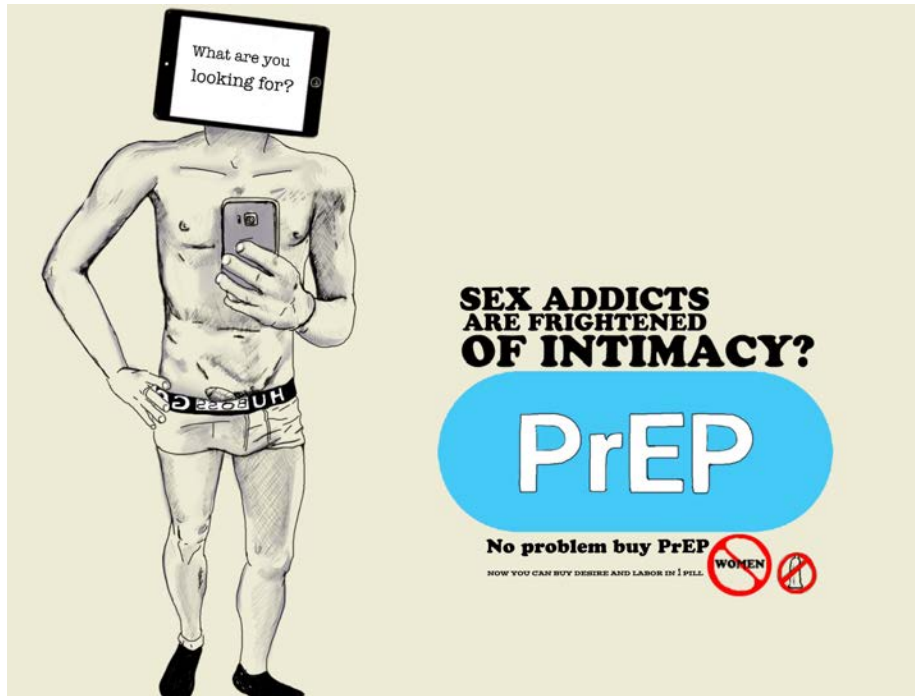
Surprisingly enough we are still misogynistic after all, even within the queer community. Separatism and white feminism, kept excluding queer-feminists and Trans activists from 70s till now. In addition to that a misogynistic view generated within gay culture led to an

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<sup>13</sup> Adam Phillips, *On balance*, penguin books, London, 2010, pp.25

<sup>14</sup> "When men have sex with women, they fall into the woman...it is gay men who, during sex, fall through their partners back into themselves, over and over again"  
- Daniel Mendelsohn, *The elusive embrace: desire and the riddle of identity*, A.A.Knopf, New York, 1999, pp.156

inability to embed other identities, which led to a toxic representation of identity politics. Historically speaking female sexuality was considered passive in Christian societies—unlike the Islamic doctrine which presumes the active female sexuality<sup>15</sup> which needs to be contained and controlled—and also in the work of psychoanalysis which reflects clearly on the market and its discriminatory language. Just look at the advertisements and their focuses, the language of the advertisements and the products themselves<sup>16</sup>. Just compare the number



of lesbian bars to the number of “men only” bars is each and every city?<sup>17</sup> To put it bluntly, ‘Universal Market’, barely consider the female sexuality and its pleasure (unless, when, it’s in favor of male sexuality), as our investigation shows the focus of market is very different when it comes to the notion of masculine

pleasure, even within the queer culture, and terrifyingly enough, it has been already normalized. One example is PrEP<sup>18</sup>, how many women are using it? How many women in your circle do even know what PrEP is? The effectivity of PrEP amongst women is still the subject of several studies<sup>19</sup>, however the language of advertisement and medical targeting groups are undeniably exclusionary.

Is it just another accidental slip from the medical market and their advertisements? Queer activists fought over the years to have such privilege today, but then suddenly such brilliant achievement slipped from our hands and ‘recoded’ itself and commodified in the market, a market run and designed by heteropatriarchal restraints. As I mentioned already, what is unique about our contemporary condition is the emergence of technology and scientific

<sup>15</sup> Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the veil : male-female dynamics in modern Muslim society*, Al Saqi Books, London, 1985, Chapter 1: The Muslim Concept of Active Female Sexuality, pp.22

<sup>16</sup> eg. unrealistic expectations and excessive amount of intimate feminine hygiene products, and their harming effects. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/04/180416121531.htm>  
<https://news.uoguelph.ca/2018/04/u-g-study-finds-concerning-connection-feminine-hygiene-products-infection/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/14/opinion/sunday/i-want-my-lesbian-bars-back.html>

<sup>18</sup> PrEP means Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis and it’s the use of anti-HIV medication that keeps HIV negative people from becoming infected. It is highly effective against HIV when taken a single pill every day.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.thebody.com/content/79459/women-and-prep-5-important-facts.html>

achievements in a broad sense, all made possible by capitalism. This is not the problem itself, but rather the re-codification and axiomatization of health and pleasure.

## PostHuman and PostGender

It is indeed a Posthuman<sup>20</sup> condition and inevitably we need to consider the invisible paradoxical shift in this process carefully.

In the process of queer liberation (a symbolic and somatic liberation from all the binaries of Gender and heteronormative forms of thoughts as well as cultural barriers), we achieved our civil Rights (not in every countries) which led to public discourses and collective realization of the performativity of gender, but we also slowly jumped back to the same old patriarchal fascist patterns of the Masculine sublime.

There is a comic phrase in Digital Gay culture which is complimentary to my point here; “*MASC TO MASC*” it has been used by utterly masculine men who are looking for the same. There is no problem with such aesthetics of course, but the irony is when suddenly this



aesthetic becomes the normalized “perfect” form of representation as a way of discrimination against gender fluidity, feminine masculinity and non-binary people. It seems to me that, the anxiety of the modern queer man is still turning around the same old cultural pattern;

<sup>20</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, Cambridge : Polity , 2013

masking insecurity behind masculinity in order to fit into the homonormative standards of the society as byproducts of the perpetuated heteronormativity.

When going to the gym becomes a machinery collective ritual for being socially accepted, when ironically, acting “straight”<sup>21</sup> becomes the most acceptable form of behavior in queer community, and collectively (unconsciously) creates a platform for heteronormativity, homophobia and racism as a destructive forces against the multiplicity and diversity. Perhaps, the time has come, for queer community to reflect individually on their own fascist inside. No one is immune from fascist desire, not even leftist organizations as Deleuze and Guattari perfectly put in *A thousands plateaus*: "*Desire is never an undifferentiated instinctual energy, but itself results from a highly developed, engineered setup rich in interactions: a whole supple segmentarity that processes molecular energies and potentially gives desire a fascist determination.*"

*Leftist organizations will not be the last to secrete microfascisms. It's too easy to be antifascist on the molar level, and not even see the fascist inside you, the fascist you yourself sustain and nourish and cherish with molecules both personal and collective.*"<sup>22</sup>

In this case the desire of “perpetual Hyper-masculinity” suddenly cast a shade on the whole history of queer culture. Desires produce reality and homonormativity, as a caricature blueprint of a Heteronormative way of being a Homosexual.

When white, able, hyper masculine, muscular, “straight acting” gay men, became the measurements of beauty, body, and sexuality? Where are the camps and queers suddenly going? Why is it so normal to use phrases such as “No Asian, No Blacks” on a dating profiles without even noticing the micro-fascist desires?

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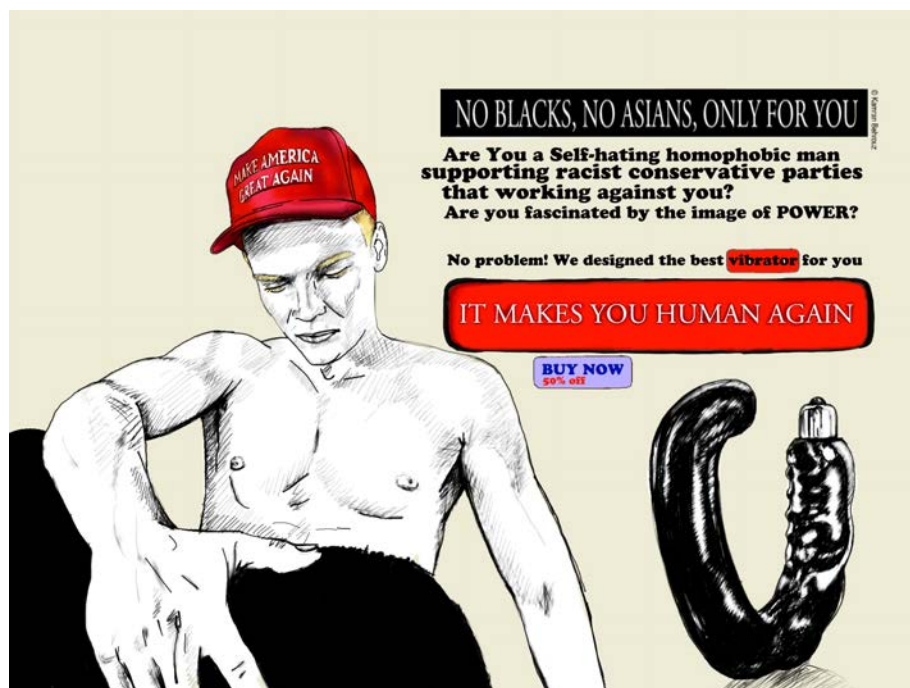
<sup>21</sup> “straight acting” is a very common slang related to Gay men who do not want to act feminine (opposite of Feminine Masculinity)

<sup>22</sup> *A thousands plateaus, capitalism and schizophrenia*, Giles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, transl. by Brian Massumi, Bloomsburry academic, 2014, pp.206



## Post-Nationality

“Where are you from”, the most popular question both in reality or on dating apps, especially if you look a bit different and ironically ‘queer’ in its literal sense. You should be always ready to answer it. As Sara Ahmed argues that "where are you from is a familiar question but an uncomfortable familiarity"<sup>23</sup>. Everyone who is familiar to this digital world and slightly had a different shade of skin, race or anything different than a white masculine normal man, knows and probably been shocked by the normalized racial phrases and behaviors on Grindr (or other gay apps), the phrase “No Asian No Black” is just a simple visible example. There



are several researchers questioning, whether gay men are more racist on dating apps?<sup>24</sup> Most of them suggest a positive answer to this question. For example, a couple of articles<sup>25</sup>, concluded that the popular phrase: ‘No Asian, No Blacks’, isn’t associated with any form of sexual preferences but rather racial discrimination clichés.

As a queer-national/post-nationalist/(post)cosmopolitan or even simply born as a multi-cultural human being (due to the nationality of parents and the country of birth) answering the question of “where are you from” might become a dilemma. I think there is never enough time to describe where I am really coming from, all the experiences and my whole ongoing process of becoming is where I am coming from (and going to) which hardly could be contained in a tiny illusive box of a "country". Salasi perfectly puts it; “*History is real, Culture is real but the concept of Country was invented. Country is a power structure. All*

<sup>23</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Living a feminist life*, Duke University Press, Durham, pp.119

<sup>24</sup> Refer to the article „No Blacks” is not a sexual preference. It is racism written by Samantha Allen (Dailybeast.com) <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/nov/24/no-asians-no-blacks-gay-people-racism>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.sbs.com.au/topics/life/relationships/article/2017/02/27/comment-do-you-have-type-or-are-you-just-racist>  
<https://www.them.us/story/racism-is-not-a-preference>

*identity is experience therefore our experience is where we are from. The question of where are you from or where are you (really) from, is in place of Why are you here? “. 26*

How is it possible to practice post-nationality and construct a new political vision based on flexible ethics of multiple ways of thinking? Or to say “staying with the trouble”<sup>27</sup>, The trouble of a complex world. How do we stay with the trouble of the complexity of living a non-fascist life within a phallic patriarchal heteronormative power constructions of an institutionalized market, perpetuated by fascist desires? Where is the location of my own body? Who has been already excluded? Where are you standing in this market of thoughts?



I don't know,  
where did you  
find this essay?  
You might find  
it accidentally in a  
public toilet or a  
museum wall, or  
simply on the  
internet. I just  
wanted to decode  
my role in this  
market, to ask  
again: What  
should or  
shouldn't be in the  
public? Which  
colors? Which  
forms? Which  
barcode? who has  
been excluded  
from the public

gaze? Already and why? and what do we really mean by "public" anyway? I just thought, it would be fine to break the monotony of my own normality, to create kinship, to practice Non-Fascist life, collectively and affirmatively. If "*For politics to take place, the body must appear*"<sup>28</sup>, therefore, this work is an invitation for your corporeality!

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<sup>26</sup> Taiye Selasi, Do not ask me where I am from, ask where I am local", Ted Talk, October 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYCKzpXEW6E>

<sup>27</sup> Donna Haraway, staying with the trouble: making Kin in the Chthulucene, Duke University Press, London, 2016

<sup>28</sup>Judith Butler, Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street, 2011, pp.3