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PERSONAL
ISSUES
SURROUNDING
NOTIONS
OF STATUS

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Authority, or in other words, what Bell hooks would describe as 'Imperialist, *White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy*' is conveyed through either the total invisibility, or fetishization, of 'the other'. The recurring dehumanisation of marginalised people is conveyed through the media sphere via the lens of visual language as a spectacle, most people see this portrayal of 'power' as a 'matter of fact'. Power is executed over humans and their interests, yet individuals have a moral obligation to treat others fairly. This obligation is seldom met due to the desire to sustain 'privilege', as a result of insecurity and fear.

Personal experience is a reflection of the society that we live in, we are all a product of our environment. We have become overstimulated with information, TV, adverts, cyberspace – these are all tools of the status quo which are merging with our identities more intimately than ever before. It is no coincidence that as marginalised people, our notion of the self has been affected by visual language, what we see in popular culture is orchestrated to such an extent that images presented to us become a new mode of reality. The status quo is enforced through





patriarchal violence; this particular visualization of otherness within popular culture has a considerable effect on how we view 'the other' and ourselves as a result.

Iconographic imagery saturates our memories in both a political and personal sense, these constructs are normalized within our interpretations of realism. Media based iconography is a reflection of capitalism being manifest in the way that we see ourselves and one another, where reality becomes unreality and effectively a mirage. In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord says, 'The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a societal relation among people mediated by images.' An example of this is the repetitive visualisation of women as objects, the fetishization of women in the media is effectively the male gaze which is prevalent in society today. We can see this in daily life, a mechanism used on the streets, domestically and in the professional industries - a tool for the systematic oppression of the opposite sex.

'Détournement', a term created by Letterist International (and then later adapted by the Situationist International) is about 'hijacking' a concept and

flipping on its side, effectively - disrupting the flow of the spectacle. I'm an image maker and through photojournalism and photography I subvert the male gaze by shedding light on the need for radical feminist empowerment. My portraits in essence are collaborative, through intimacy and respect we are able to celebrate one another and create images that are unapologetic. Many photographers, including myself, see themselves in their subjects, and what they choose to capture in general. I am invested in queer sub-culture, I believe that visual representation is crucial because of the constant fetishization of othered bodies through the media sphere. Especially now that this spectacle is being channelled online, through social media; the commodification of marginalised people leads to political airbrushing, feeding into our sense of reality. I believe that now is the time to harness the defiance that I see in my community. I want to create a new narrative that celebrates alternative communities, both in London and abroad.

I'm interested in considering the personal issues that surround the notions of 'status' in my life and how individuality can be obscured as a result of





hierarchies situated within the capitalist, neo-liberal framework that we navigate in this day and age. As a mixed-race womxn, growing up on benefits, in a council house, I have dealt with intersections of prejudice throughout my life. From a young age I was exposed to the grim realities of life on the breadline – where crime is literally the only option. In my teenage years, my Dad’s anger issues worsened, and my Mum was in a dark place in terms of her mental health. Sadly, they were both in a cyclical state of abuse due to their own backgrounds.

My Mother bravely had me when she was eighteen, my Father was nineteen. She broke up with my Dad when I was a baby and as a Black British woman of Nigerian descent, she was very keen on discipline and making sure that I was on top of my studies. She would take me to see plays, make sure I read and we would have day trips to museums on a frequent basis.

My Dad is white British and from Bognor Regis, an old fashioned, rundown seaside town in West Sussex on the south coast. Bognor is a typically English area, with a tight knit working class community, it is also a tourist destination for a lot of English families

because of Butlin’s family resort (this is also used as a location for trendy music festivals these days), I used to go there every summer and remember being stared at a lot as many people hadn’t seen a mixed race child before. My dad grew up as a big fish in a small pond and decided to move to London where he met my Mothers brothers, he used to be a mod and they were soul boys in the 80’s. I love this about him – although he was a great parent, a funny character – full of life, he had a much shorter patience level when it came to helping with homework.

When I was sixteen, My Dad asked me why I was going to college when I could have got a job, he literally said ‘You’re working class Yas, stop dassing around and get a job like everyone else!...’ I wasn’t perfect but I had ambitions and he was embittered by this, calling me ‘too stupid for college’. That comment has always affected me, and I am trying to uncover and move past this self-hatred.

I believe it is extremely important to discuss how working class families have intergenerational trauma when it comes to higher education, the statement my Dad made was a reflection on how he





felt about himself. Unfortunately, he had to endure borstal, an unimaginable trauma for a child, borstals were youth detention centres, a perverse schooling system run by HM Prison centre in the United Kingdom and Commonwealth. Fortunately, they were officially eliminated as a result of the 1982 Criminal Justice Act, and replaced by youth custody centres. The idea was to 'reform' young people, but sadly there was a lot of abuse inflicted on the youth of this era from the guards in these institutions, which my Dad has told me first hand, inevitably causing more problems. *Scum*, a once banned film featuring the young Ray Winstone, depicts the audacities and misuse of power towards young people who were often a part of the care system.

This led him to feel institutionalised and unable to earn an 'honest' living, he ended up in prison as an adult, it is clear why he didn't see university as a viable option, besides - he had started providing for a family at the tender age of nineteen. When I was graduating from university, instead of giving me a pat on the back he asked me - 'Do you think that you're better than us now?' Little did he know about my social alienation at university because of how

different I was compared to everyone at art school, because of how I look and come across. There were literally about four other people of colour in my year, and all of my tutors were white. My Dad loves me but fails to see that he has no idea what it is like to be black. Yes, it is hard to be poor, but it is even harder when you are a person of colour as well.

There is an inextricable link between capitalism, and therefore the class system, and mental health – the rise of depression within the younger generation in particular is highly political. As Jiddu Krishnamurti says, ‘It is no measure of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society.’ Children and adults living in households in the lowest 20% income bracket in Great Britain are two to three times more likely to develop mental health problems than those in the highest. If you are not well, you are not able to work, meaning that you are not able to support yourself and your family, making things even worse. Moreover, even more worrying than the sheer neglect, the actual treatment of severe mental health issues is tainted due to racial bias, I know this first hand because of how my family members and loved ones have been treated by ‘healthcare professionals’.

An example of this is when [REDACTED] had a public breakdown and was arrested by the police, as she was seen as violent, a threat, rather than given the help that she needed as someone who was mentally unstable. This would not have happened if she was white, the police are racist. Another example is the fact that she was given the wrong medication, she was over medicated whilst having an episode, resulting in even more serious issues, I love the NHS, don’t get me wrong – but to this day I am so devastated and jaded by the mental health system in the UK as they treat black patients differently, leading to more long term complications. This is a societal issue which needs to be destigmatised. I have battled with depression since I was about twenty years old, and it is nothing to be ashamed of.

I have had the privilege of getting an education and feeling empowered within my creative expression, yet I still struggle with ‘imposter syndrome’. When things are going well, and in financial anxiety when they are not, abjection is a running theme, a situation that I constantly find myself in. Not knowing how to move forwards, as I find myself looking



backwards in a way that is subconsciously destructive, is a frustrating trap which is not just unique to my experience. When people face systemic oppression throughout their lives, it makes them feel unworthy of success – even when you are consistent there is a psychological burden where one doubts their achievements and has a paranoid, internalised complex about never being ‘enough’. Imposter syndrome usually reveals itself in academic or professional environments, it is more likely to affect women, black women in particular, and of course the LGBTQI+ community. Staying authentic has helped me through this issue, as someone who is othered in one way or another, knowing yourself is the best advice that anyone could give you, as Elizabeth Uviebinené says in her book (with co-author Yomi Adegoke) *Slay in Your Lane*, ‘We don’t need to get over a bar of excellence we didn’t create. Instead, we have to create our *own* lane and our *own* version of success, our *own* version of good.’

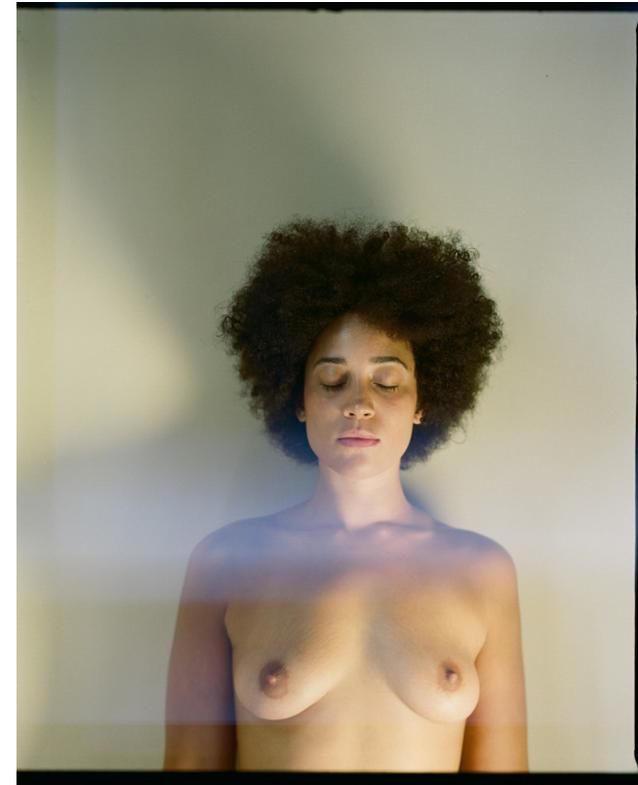
I have always been interested in documenting queer subculture; I take portraits of friends and loved ones, I usually focus on people in a comfortable environment, often photographing them in their homes.

I was previously a part of HYSTERIA, a radical feminist collective, where I covered events and documented performance art. I have exhibited her work at Autograph ABP as a part of ‘The Missing Chapter Collective’, The Horse Hospital & Ditto Press my Feminist photo zine ‘Vagina Dentata’ is a photo essay consisting of portraits of inspiring womxn.

Photography as a practice has always provoked curiosity within me, I have always been obsessed with images, storytelling and preserving memories – photographs are effectively time machines. My curiosity broadened when I became more engaged with critical thinking in general as a teenager, my passion for feminist photography emerged, I saw it as a way of expressing a new means of representation in a society that it affected so much by a constant stream of images, depicting othered people as inferior. As an art practice, it can be used as a way of interpreting your personal perspective of reality; I believe that there are ways of expanding and seeing certain insecurities as something that needs to be revealed for what it is, kind of like an exorcism that must take place from within.



Empowering photography is collaborative, if one looks closely it allows the viewer to make their own mind up about a person for who they truly are (as well as the photographer). I want to create new realities as an image maker, using art as a form of therapy. I am interested in agency as a means of self-love, acceptance, care and how to create new frameworks that empower marginalised people by shedding light on authenticity, rather than a stereotypical commodified subject, which is there for consumption and that alone.



Images: *Self-portraits*, Yasmine Akim, 2020