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THE FLÂNEUSERIE OF *IN TREATMENT*'S LAILA GREEN: WAYWARDNESS, WILLFULNESS, AND THE BLACKQUEER ART OF FAILURE

DOROTTYA MOZES

University of Debrecen, Hungary
mozes.dorottya@arts.unideb.hu

ABSTRACT. The Parisian flâneur is a figure whose indulgent urban loitering is shaped by straight white male privilege. In contrast, this essay introduces the concept of the *Blackqueer flâneuse*, highlighting the radical imagination's role in maneuvering through heavily surveilled and controlled spaces. By weaving together intersecting theories of waywardness (Hartman) and willfulness (Ahmed), it examines *Black flâneuserie* —both as an imaginative and tangible mode of mobility— that ingeniously subverts or sidesteps the violence of capture. Focusing on Laila Green, from the series *In Treatment* (2021), the essay unveils her outlaw imagination, her yearning for liberation, and her everyday practices of wandering as alternative expressions of flâneuserie. Employing the concept of *queer failur*e (Halberstam), the analysis frames Laila's persistent attempts at escape alongside her history of facing setbacks as a practice of *flâneuserie*. With the help of critical geography (de Certeau, Tuan, Cosgrove, Cosgrove and Dora) and Jungian theory, it conceptualizes Laila's passion for high places and mountains and ultimately the realization of her passion as evidence of her individuation. Akin to the paradoxes of white male *flânerie*, *Black flâneuserie* in Laila's case unfolds as a paradoxical journey of self-discovery, complicated by her privilege and the entanglements of her wanderings within the logic of racial capitalism.

Keywords: flâneuserie, waywardness, willfulness, queer art of failure, Black geographies, Black ecologies.

LA *FLÂNEUSERIE* DE LAILA GREEN DE *EN TERAPIA*: REBELDÍA, OBSTINACIÓN Y EL ARTE *BLACKQUEER* DEL FRACASO

RESUMEN. El autocomplaciente deambular urbano del flâneur parisino se conforma como figura masculina, blanca, privilegiada y heterosexual. Por contraste, este ensayo explora el concepto de *Blackqueer flâneuse*, enfatizando el papel radical de la imaginación para moverse por espacios fuertemente vigilados y controlados. Uniendo teorías entrecruzadas sobre rebeldía (Hartman) y obstinación (Ahmed), examino el deambular femenino y negro, *Black flâneuserie*, como una forma de movilidad a la vez imaginativa y tangible que ingeniosamente elude o trastoca la violencia de diferentes políticas de confinamiento y cautividad. Centrándonos en el personaje de Laila Green de la serie *En Terapia* (2021), este artículo muestra su imaginación proscrita, su anhelo de liberación y sus prácticas deambulantes cotidianas como expresiones alternativas de *flâneuserie*. A través del concepto de *queer failure* (Halberstam), mi análisis identifica como una práctica de *flâneuserie* los persistentes intentos de escapar por parte de Laila, así como su historial de superación de contratiempos. Con la ayuda de la geografía crítica (de Certeau, Tuan, Cosgrove, Cosgrove y Dora) y de la teoría de Carl Jung, se conceptualiza la pasión de Laila por lugares elevados y montañas, elementos que materializan una pasión que evidencia su individualización. De forma similar a las paradojas del *flânerie* masculino y blanco, en el caso de Laila Green, *Black flâneuserie* se nos presenta como un viaje paradójico de descubrimiento personal, que se complica por su situación privilegiada y por los enredos de vagabundear dentro de la lógica del capitalismo racial.

Palabras clave: flâneuserie, rebeldía, obstinación, queer art of failure, geografías negras, ecologías negras.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The TV series *In Treatment*, originally aired from 2008 to 2010 on HBO, centered around Gabriel Byrne's Dr. Paul Weston, a white male therapist who met with different patients each week.[1] In the 2021 reboot, the spotlight shifts to Dr. Brooke Taylor, Paul's protégée, played by Uzo Aduba, renowned for her role as "Crazy Eyes" in the Netflix hit show *Orange Is the New Black* (2013-19) and as a US Attorney's Office investigator Edie Flowers in the limited series *Painkiller* (2023) about America's opioid epidemic. As Uzo Aduba points out, "it's important to see a Black woman at the center of a story about mental health and therapy" (qtd. in Newman-Bremang). Furthermore, Dr. Taylor represents a shift in the portrayal of

[1] The author presented an initial draft of this paper at the 81st College Language Association Convention, with the backing of the University of Debrecen's Faculty of Humanities Scholarly Fund.

Black women in the role of therapists; she revises the trope of the wise "Black Lady Therapist," whose primary function is to guide (mostly white) protagonists through the messiness of life in shows like *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* (Newman-Bremang).

Set in post-lockdown Los Angeles in 2021, the series depicts a world still grappling with the pandemic's effects, including fear, precarity, grief, and the lingering isolation from quarantine. As vaccines begin to curb the coronavirus, Dr. Taylor opts to work from her magnificent multimillion-dollar home, designed by her recently deceased architect father. The revival is characterized by extended scenes set in her home, creating a theater-like experience on television, in which "the only action was talk, brimming with nuanced nonverbal cues, the teasing out of deceptions, the riverine routes that conversation takes to find its path. Each session was part ministration, part duel, part dance" (Colón-Zayas qtd. in Poniewozik). As Brooke processes her father's passing and confronts the trauma of giving up her son for adoption during her teenage years, she becomes entangled in a tumultuous affair with an ex-boyfriend with whom she used to drink. Despite the support of her Alcoholics Anonymous sponsor and friend, Rita, Brooke relapses. Throughout the six-week period covered in the series, Dr. Taylor takes on the responsibility of treating three new patients, each with their own mental health issues. These patients include Anthony Ramos from *Hamilton*, who plays Eladio, a sensitive Latino home health aide. Brooke harbors doubts about his manic depressive diagnosis and unearths within his sleep issues a complex web of emotions tied to his employers, who treat him as "family," but also as a disposable domestic worker. Then, there's Colin (John Benjamin Hickey), a wealthy white male tech entrepreneur who, after spending four years in prison, is ordered by the court to attend therapy sessions as a condition for his parole. Lastly, Laila Green (*Euphoria*'s Quintessa Swindell), a brilliant upper-class Black teenager, brought in by her grandmother for a "specific problem," namely, for "choosing to be lesbian" (Laila – Week 1 3:25, 3:38-3:42).[2] Laila's longing to escape from her home environment unfolds against the backdrop of the series' themes, which touch on the far-reaching effects of racial injustice, queerphobia, police violence, climate crisis, and mass incarceration. To the best of my knowledge, there exists no prior scholarly examination of *In Treatment*. There are, however, numerous reviews and interviews available, and I reference some in this essay.

This essay revolves around Laila's yearning to run away from home, casting her in the role of the contemporary imaginary flâneuse. Flânerie, a spatial practice tied to specific urban sites such as streets and the arcades has been notably influential. The flâneur, an idly strolling figure prominent in nineteenth-century Paris, symbolizes a relatively wealthy, anonymous individual with the luxury of wandering aimlessly through the city. Originally embodied by a bourgeois white straight male, the flâneur's leisurely pace and indifference allowed him to observe city life and

[2] To avoid burdening the characters' speech with ellipses and ungrammatical constructions inherent in oral speech, I have redacted brief pauses and repetitive phrases, except where used for emphasis.

revel in the traces of modernity. According to Walter Benjamin (*Arcades* 417), the flâneur's experience is marked by intoxication, where walking through the streets evokes a sense of euphoria: "An intoxication comes over the man who walks long and aimlessly through the streets." The indulgence of aimless wandering contributes to the pleasurable and poetic nature of his journey, emphasizing the freedom to follow inspiration wherever it leads (Benjamin, *Arcades* 436). The flâneur walking with a tortoise (Benjamin, *Arcades* 422) further illustrates the creative and transgressive nature of his idling, serving as a symbolic protest against "the division of labor" (Benjamin, *Arcades* 427) and highlighting the preciousness of "the fruits of idleness" versus the "fruits of labor" (Benjamin, *Arcades* 453).

Flânerie, however, encapsulates manifold ambivalences. It simultaneously adheres to privileged and oppressed ways of interacting with the modern city while at the same time challenging urban life and seeking something different (Martínez): "His eyes open, his ear ready, searching for something entirely different from what the crowd gathers to see" (Larousse qtd. in Benjamin, *Arcades* 453). This pedestrian mobility engages with the modern city in a critical, embodied, and pleasurable manner, embracing both sensuous and speculative elements. Flânerie is thus a practice with multiple layers of meaning and interpretation, making it both normative and transgressive, a paradoxical blend that intertwines knowledge as well as a lack of knowledge of the urban landscape. As noted before, the flâneur has traditionally been conceptualized as a white, heterosexual, bourgeois, able adult man. Susan Buck-Morss, a famed scholar of Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt school, confirms that Benjamin's politics did not incorporate feminism as an analytical frame (the same can be said of critical race, queer, or crip theory). Notably, within Benjamin's work, particularly *The Arcades*, the prominent female figure is the prostitute. Buck-Morss highlights the correlation between prostitution and female flânerie, noting that "all women who loitered risked being seen as whores" (119).

Much like Keith Tester in *The Flâneur*, I grapple not only with the challenge of defining flânerie but also with the aspiration to extend its significance. While the figure of the flâneur is undoubtedly rooted in a Parisian time and place, Tester argues that it also has the capacity to serve as "a figure to illuminate issues of city life irrespective of time and place" (16). In contrast to the original figure's limits, the figure of the flâneur can be redefined to encompass diverse identities, including the disabled (Serlin) and the Afropolitan (Leff) flâneur as well as the New Negro Flâneuse (Scheper). However, there has been a notable absence of exploration regarding the blackqueer flâneur/flâneuse/flâneux in contemporary Black cultural expression.[3] Thus, in this paper, I advocate for extending the traditional flâneur

[3] I use Ashon Crawley's term "blackqueer" to characterize Laila to highlight her critique of the normative structures and restless search for "ways of existence otherwise" (7). Laila identifies as a queer lesbian, even though this self-identification may be considered an "imperfect nominative." However, a case can be made for reading Laila as genderqueer, not only because Quintessa Swindell, the actor portraying the character, identifies as nonbinary (using they/he pronouns), but also because, as Marquis Bey argues, blackness initiates the failure of the *cis*tem, the cisgender binary system. Blackness invites an alternate space beyond or through

archetype by connecting it to Laila Green, a young Black queer woman navigating the post-pandemic landscapes of the Americas. My objective in stretching the flâneur beyond its traditional form is to assert "the inherent spatiality of Black life – the spatial imaginaries, space-making practices, and sense of place rooted in Black communities" (Hawthorne 5). Laila emphasizes the spatial dimensions of Black life in two main ways. First, she imagines movement even when physical mobility is constrained or interrupted, a common reality for Black women and people. Second, through her exploration of urban, suburban, and natural landscapes, Laila resists and defies the anti-black surveillance, discipline, and violence directed at racialized individuals and communities. This exploration is particularly significant as she moves through new routes toward and perspectives from elevated heights such as hills or mountains. The article uses spatial studies and Jungian theory to connect her proclivity for heights to her ambivalent inner journey of self-discovery.

Laila's imaginative and physical journeys echo the contradictions surrounding the original flâneur archetype, an affluent man who roamed Parisian streets in the 19th century. Like the original flâneur, Laila's social status is embroiled in the contradictions of racial capitalism: she seeks an alternative while being simultaneously advantaged and disadvantaged by its structures.[4] Despite her privileged background permitting her to "cast a lingering gaze onto the fleeting beauty of the post-colonial city," as a Black flâneuse, she "must also navigate the racialized [and gendered] dynamics of the gaze, i.e. the performative and normative regulation of space through the violent policing of who can look at whom, who can be seen and who remain invisible, who must look down and who cannot look away" (Hill qtd. in Sobande et al.). In this way, Laila's access to and experience within certain spaces are not only influenced by the intersections of racism, sexism, and homophobia, but also by privileges such as her US citizenship, class status, ability, light skin tone, beauty, and thinness. As a result, her advantages and disadvantages are always already entangled as she wanders in a manner akin to flânerie.[5]

To link Laila to the figure of the Black flâneuse, I enter into an already existing dialogue with waywardness (Hartman), willfulness (Ahmed), queerness and/or

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gender "where a new—and black—world, 'without border or boundaries,' might be instantiated" (xii).

[4] In his seminal work, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, Cedric Robinson critiques classical Marxism for its failure to theorize racism as a constitutive element of capitalism. He argues that capitalism has always been racial, inherently relying on the systematic devaluation and exploitation of non-white populations. This can be seen in slavery, imperialism, and settler colonialism, which have been foundational to capitalist development (116).

[5] Ultimately, I cannot isolate these factors or determine which one dominates in any given situation; they are embedded and tangled in specific contexts and unpredictable ways. All I can say is that Laila's ability to move in a particular way is situational and context-dependent. Even the same racialized subject can be noted, surveilled, and regulated by some, and not others.

queer failure (Halberstam). In *Wayward Lives*, *Beautiful Experiments* (2020), Saidiya Hartman offers an account of Black women's lines of flight and errant paths through Harlem from 1890 to 1935. She identifies the following set of words as kins of "wayward": "errant, fugitive, recalcitrant, anarchic, willful, reckless, troublesome, riotous, tumultuous, rebellious and wild" (227). As can be seen, willfulness in the general and in Ahmed's sense belongs to the same family. The first of a series of entries on waywardness reinforces this conceptual kinship: "To inhabit the world in ways inimical to those deemed proper and respectable, to be deeply aware of the gulf between where you stayed and how you might live" (227). Laila's willfulness is evident in her refusal to enroll and go straight to Berkeley University, and also by virtue of her queerness, which always already implies straying from straight paths. The word "queer" originally comes from the Indo-European root *-twerkw*, which also yields words like "transverse", "twist," and "athwart" (Sedgwick viii). As underscored by Ahmed, "queer" can be understood as a "willful word" (250), and Hartman notes that waywardness is a "queer resource of black survival" (227). Willfulness and waywardness intersect with flânerie in their emphasis on the persistence of seeking a different existence, "the untiring practice of trying to live when you were never meant to survive," as Hartman puts it (227). In Ahmed's words, "mere persistence can be an act of disobedience" (9). Laila's persistent attempts to break free and hike certainly cause Rhonda's unhappiness, who sees it as rebellious willfulness.

In addition, both waywardness and willfulness are linked to the possibilities of the Black radical imagination or the queer potential of the will. Both concepts strive to realize these possibilities in spite of the massive enclosure under which the dispossessed labor and suffer. Hartman defines waywardness as "a practice of possibility at a time when all roads, except the ones created by *smashing out*, are foreclosed" (228). Similarly, Ahmed frames willfulness as a structural problem misdiagnosed in individual terms, reflecting on difficult, sad experiences without seeking to resolve that difficulty (20). She adds, "When you stray from the official paths, you create desire lines, faint marks on the earth, as traces of where you or others have been" (Ahmed 20). Hartman's historical project parallels Ahmed's approach, aiming to "exhume open rebellion from the case file" and "to illuminate the radical imagination and everyday anarchy of ordinary colored girls, which has not only been overlooked, but is nearly unimaginable" (xiv). In a sense, both willfulness and waywardness express feminist longings to disrupt the world as we know it. Furthermore, both thinkers spatialize these practices of possibility. Ahmed describes "a willfulness archive" as "a wandering archive, an archive without a fixed abode," challenging the concept of trespass, "the idea that you can only travel with permission" (123). This applies to Laila, whom Rhonda sees as willful for travelling without adult permission. Ahmed notes, "To break free from duty is narrated as willfulness, wandering away from the right path" (116). As well, Hartman employs spatial imaginaries to articulate wayward methods of possibility:

> Wayward: the unregulated movement of drifting and wandering; sojourns without a fixed destination, ambulatory possibility, interminable migrations, rush and flight,

> black locomotion; the everyday struggle to live free. . . Waywardness articulates the paradox of cramped creation, the entanglement of escape and confinement, flight and captivity. Wayward: to wander, to be unmoored, adrift, rambling, roving, cruising, strolling, and seeking. (227)

Some wayward feminine and genderqueer rebels in Hartman's archive, such as Mattie Nelson, Mamie, and Gladys Bentley, can be read as flâneuse figures. Like these revolutionaries, Laila struggles to live freely, attempting to elude capture by wandering and seeking different experiences. My theorization of blackqueer flâneuserie thus engages with overlapping notions of waywardness, willfulness and, as discussed later, failure.

Unlike the Black women whose wanderings are confined by the oppressive boundaries of the Black ghetto, Laila is from the same affluent, historically Black community, Baldwin Hills, as Dr. Taylor, which had been devastated by fire in 1985 (fifty-three homes were destroyed and three people died).[6] Despite her privileged surroundings, Laila's flânerie, characterized by unregulated drifting and wandering, represents a paradoxical "entanglement of escape and confinement, flight and captivity" (Hartman 227). Her flights embody a relentless struggle against a myriad of oppressive forces, from intergenerational trauma and racial violence to corporeal punishment and emotional neglect. A sensitive high school senior, Laila longs for a life that strays from the predetermined, *straight* path of happiness. She rejects the idea of "success" defined solely by academic and professional achievements, material wealth, and a "good" life. Instead, she craves a genuine sense of freedom from the suffocating grasp of her grandmother and a society that seeks to straighten her out. Rhonda (played by Charlayne Woodard), Laila's grandmother, insists on therapy because the "gays and lesbians are at higher risk for everything. Failure, depression, addiction, failure" (Laila – Week 1 4:05-4:12). To prevent Laila from succumbing to what Rhonda essentially terms queer failure, Rhonda wants Laila to confront the real-world consequences of willfully "choosing" her lesbian identity. Laila's queerness can thus be seen both as failure in Halberstam's sense and as willfulness in Ahmed's sense, highlighting the will's queer potential (Ahmed 7).

Much like the traditional flâneur, Laila's character is multi-faceted, and she retains an elusive quality (Tester 1). In her intake session with Dr. Taylor, Laila pretends to be a sex addict. But Dr. Taylor recognizes the racialized gender performance of "promiscuity" as a test and a challenge, rising to the occasion with her culturally responsive approach. Notably, Dr. Taylor refrains from reducing Laila's everyday

[6] In her essay titled "Apartheid U.S.A." Audre Lorde (46) describes "the molotov cocktails that were hurled into the brush in Los Angeles, starting the conflagration that burned out well-to-do Black Baldwin Hills—fifty-three homes gone, three lives lost—to government sanctioned segregation and violence." This illustrates the precarity of any form of privilege or normalcy for Black people or other marginalized communities. Even when socioeconomic status appears to override blackness, individuals, and communities can be abruptly exposed to various forms of racism. Therefore, I interpret the Black flâneuse from an intersectional perspective, taking for granted the co-presence of multiple identities and identifications.

feelings and struggles to mere diagnostic labels. Instead, by providing Laila a safe space, Laila can access difficult feelings such as fear, despair, anger, grief, and loss. Rather than aiming for a "cure," Dr. Taylor guides Laila toward a spiritual healing journey that centers the body, feelings, autonomy, and authenticity. Dr. Taylor's culturally sensitive understanding of transgenerational loss and trauma connects Laila's struggles to historical and ongoing experiences. More specifically, Dr. Taylor refuses to pathologize Laila's blackqueer identity as deviance or criminality, to dismiss her trauma and other psychic effects of racism, sexism, and homophobia on Laila. As the Jungian therapy progresses, Dr. Taylor locates intergenerational trauma and a tendency towards fantasy in Laila's lineage; she strives to make connections between Laila's daydreaming, hopelessness, rage, sadness, disassociation, and other feelings and thoughts, and the ongoing violences and deprivations Laila is subjected to in the world. Dr. Taylor's affirms what Rhonda has deemed to be a propensity for failure and a "problem" of lesbian willfulness. This affirmation enables Laila to embark on her journey of self-discovery amidst racial capitalist forms of scrutiny and coercion.

2. IMAGINARY FLÂNEUSERIE AS THE QUEER ART OF FAILURE

The concept of failure is built into the figure of the flâneur from the outset. While Benjamin associates the impossibility of the flâneur with the contradictions of capitalism, signaling inevitable revolutionary crises, my vision of flânerie resonates with the negativities associated with queerness and blackness. More specifically, I argue that blackqueer flânerie identifies "potent avenues of failure" that challenge the prevailing logics of success rooted in racial capitalism (Halberstam 16). As well, Laila identifies blackness with the notion of failure. This is evident in her identification with overarching social and historical narratives about the perceived failure of her race. She contends that systemic racism in America ensures the failure of Blacks: "We're set up to fail. Everything is set up that way, so if you're the one-in-a-thousand person that doesn't, then that's fucking great" (Laila – Week 3 18:16-18:24). It is noteworthy that she harbors a sense of failure, even though she does not fail in any conventional sense: "I just keep on failing. And failing and failing and failing, even though I don't fail at anything because I can't! If I were to like fail a test or a quiz or like a class, everything would be worse. Everybody would freak out, and so, so I don't fail because... Because I can't" (Laila – Week 3 17:37-18:07). Her sense of failure is not tied to her academic achievements, but to her struggles with self-expression or self-realization, and perhaps her internalization of systematic racism. Paradoxically, in her pursuit of success, she assumes the role of a representative for her entire race, forcing herself to epitomize success. However, she is acutely aware that this racial capitalist conception of success is rooted in the dehumanization of her people. Despite her family's "success," she understands that white supremacy continues to deny them humanity, health, and happiness. As a result, she feels a mixture of grief and anger about their achievements: "My dad's a success, and he's miserable. I'm a success. I got into every single school that I applied to" (Laila – Week 3 18:08-18:41). In her subsequent rant, she highlights her

fury with the "choices" available to her: either achieve the capitalist ideal of "success" tied to "productivity," "profit," and "ownership," or suffer the repercussions of being/becoming the "loser" that America already thinks she is. She feels suffocated by this success/failure dichotomy. In what follows, I illustrate how her flânerie dismantles the capitalist logics of success and failure, revealing the benefits of not getting one's way.

Laila's struggles as a Black girl in a world fraught with dangers and constraints have led to repeated failures in her attempts to break free from the confines that surround her. The first time Laila ran away and was forcibly returned home was at the age of five. Her mother had already left, and her grandmother, Rhonda, had stepped in to assist her father, Jamal, in raising her. Fueled by a desperate attempt to find her absent mother, Laila packed her little suitcase and ventured to the end of the block. In her recollections shared with Brooke, she vividly remembers the scorching heat, the unkempt sidewalk, and the dying lawns in the neighborhood. When the suburban lawns, gardens, and sidewalks no longer mark wealth and success, portraying a sparkly dream of leisure and familial bliss, they function as ruins for the flâneur, insofar as they represent ecological loss, the decay of the commodity, and the art of failure. Hiding behind a barren bush, Laila reflects on its ruined state as a symbol of queer failure and ecological loss: "When I got to the end of the block, there was this bush. Just branches, so I guess there was, like, a drought or something. Now I realize, like, there weren't any leaves, so, obviously, people could see me. I must've looked so stupid. I just remember feeling like I had escaped this realm, you know?" (Laila – Week 3 8:51-9:18) She identifies this moment as an avenue of failure while emphasizing the way in which a sense of escaping from her reality emerged from it. She realizes how "stupid" she must have appeared, exposed in the midst of a drought-stricken landscape. For Jack Halberstam (11-12), however, "stupidity" does not refer to a deficiency in knowledge but rather counterintuitive ways of knowing such as "a refusal of mastery, a critique of the intuitive connections within capitalism between success and profit, and as a counterhegemonic discourse of losing." Despite her young age, Laila has an experience of stupidity and queer failure as forms of resistance and critique against dominance. The resistance emerges in her imagination, which tirelessly works to realize her dreams of escaping, ultimately turning her dream journey to Peru into reality. Although she fails this time, her failure will become the ground for imagining "other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being" (Halberstam 88).

Turning to the bush for protection, Laila unknowingly draws on the ancestral knowledge of maroon communities who sought refuge and constructed "homes in trees, tree stumps, treetops, swamps, caverns, and even underground caves known as 'dugouts'" (Diouf 98-99). Besides a site of ecological loss and catastrophe, the bush symbolizes a site of ancestral memory, invoking reservoirs of creative tactics that empower strength, resilience, and unforeseen joy. However, Laila's gesture of seeking sanctuary within the bush can also be seen as a failed expression of maroonage, a concept which entirely rejects dominant spatial arrangements and practices. Perhaps it is no accident that she instinctively draws on a tradition, which

can be considered a failure in the sense of not becoming dominant. Even so, maroonage offers a model of contestation, rupture, and discontinuity with plantation logics. While she yearns to merge with the vegetation, the destruction of Indigenous ecosystems with suburban lawns and the harsh reality of extreme heat events in the early twenty-first century leave the landscape devoid of its natural means of protection, stripping the bush of its foliage. The dried-up shrubbery serves as a stark reminder of the legacy of colonial land extraction that shapes the environments Californians inhabit today, contributing to rising temperatures and devastating wildfires. It serves as evidence of how racial capitalism and settler colonialism underpin both environmental destruction and gendered racial oppression. This moment exposes the persistence of plantation logic, which repeatedly reemerges in new spaces, despite attempts to envision alternative futures (McKittrick, "Plantation Futures" 9). This pivotal moment in Laila's early life thus reflects both her attempts to escape and failures to do so navigating the landscapes of the Americas. Her actions evoke the complexities of historical legacies and their impact on the present, highlighting the enduring quest for liberation, resistance, and a new world grounded in the wisdom of maroon communities.

Laila's most recent attempt at escape illustrates her struggle to embody the figure of the flâneuse. During her last endeavor, she had set her sights on reaching Seattle, determined to climb Mount Tacoma or Tahoma (colonially known as Mountain Rainier).[7] However, Laila never even embarked upon her journey toward the summit because her grandma intercepted her at the train station and returned her home. Laila, with her "privileged" socioeconomic status, initially appears to embody the position of the flâneuse in that she possesses the means to purchase train tickets, entrance passes, necessary equipment, and so on. She also shares the flâneur's appreciation for beauty, however, the forms of that beauty differ. Whereas Charles Baudelaire's (25-6) Constantin Guys admires "the eternal beauty and the astonishing harmony of life in the capital cities," Laila seeks refuge in natural beauty as an escape from urban racial capitalist modernity. Moreover, her choice to use the colonial name, Mountain Rainier, versus the Indigenous-derived names for the mountain — Tahoma, Tacobeh, Pooskaus, Tacomafor, and Ti'Swaq' — aligns with the imperial attitudes often associated with the flâneur. The mountain, held sacred by the Puyallup Tribe, is most commonly referred to as *təqʷuʔmaʔ/təqʷuʔbəd*, but that name was changed to Rainier after an Admiral in the British Navy who played a role in suppressing the American Revolution ("spuyaləpabš: syəcəb ʔə tiił ʔiišədčəł"). Importantly, Shields draws connections between the flâneur's exploration and control of urban landscapes and imperialism. "As a consumer of sights and goods," Shields (78) argues, "the flâneur is a vicarious conqueror, self-confirmed in his mastery of the empire of the gaze while losing himself in the commodified network of popular imperialism." Oblivious to the historical dispossession of Indigenous land

[7] Mount Tacoma is a volcanic peak, celebrated for being the most glaciated mountain on Turtle Island apart from those in Alaska. It stands at an impressive elevation of 14,410 feet (4,392 meters), making it not only the highest mountain in Washington but also the tallest peak in the entire Cascade Range ("Mountain Rainier" 2023).

and the colonial dynamics involved in its conversion into a national park, Laila's desire to view the land inadvertently mirrors the imperial gaze.

Laila's potential to be a "real" flâneuse is fragile, highly constrained, and context dependent, whereas her imaginary flânerie is not bound by the limits of her surroundings. While Laila never reaches the mountain's summit due to her grandmother's intervention, her fantasy of the ascent holds significant meaning. In contrast to the Parisian flâneur, her intoxication feeds on imaginary sights. Describing Mount Tacoma, Laila emphasizes the sense of freedom it embodies: "It's not the tallest mountain, but the thing that makes it so special is that it's taller than any of the mountains surrounding it. So you get to the top of it and you can, like, see out forever. It's like the Overlook on steroids. You get that high up, and you're just, like untouchable" (Laila – Week 3 14:01-14:40). The prospect of being able to look out from such a vantage point conjures up a feeling of being untouchable, an elevated state of being beyond the reach of the cruel world below. For Laila, regardless of her ability to climb it, the mountain symbolizes an escape from her constraints, a different way of experiencing the landscape, and an affective encounter with freedom. Through her imagination, she accesses a limitless vision that grants her a momentary reprieve from the limitations of her reality. The act of envisioning the mountain allows Laila to assert her right to discover the world on her terms and experience an emotional release from the confines of her everyday life. Although Laila's grandmother thwarts her physical journey, Laila's imaginary climb signifies her desire for freedom. In the realm of her imagination, she finds a connection to God through the mountain.[8]

Laila's fascination with mountainous heights is evident in hankering after Mount Tacoma, the Overlook, and Machu Picchu. Eminent cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan points out that attitudes towards mountains have been conflicted since the medieval age, oscillating between reverence and fear (*Topophilia* 71). Humanity has responded emotionally to these "recalcitrant aspects of nature," viewing them "at one time as sublime, the abode of the gods, and at another as ugly, distasteful, the abode of demons" (*Topophilia* 70). The concept of the sublime encapsulates this blend of awe and terror, influencing perceptions of mountainous and polar regions during the era of Western exploration and colonization (Cosgrove and della Dora 2). In *Romantic Geography* Tuan notes the rising popularity of the sublime in the eighteenth century, a concept defined by Immanuel Kant through the towering Alpine peaks (46). This fascination led to the emergence of mountain climbing as a fashionable pursuit, with mountaineers seeking "to experience the mountains' eerie

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[8] According to a tribal member, the ancestral language Lushootseed is deeply intertwined with the land and can be heard in the sounds of nature—the animals, the water, and the rivers—revealing a profound connection between the Indigenous people and their sacred lands: "The word for river is *stolach*, so when you're listening to the river, it is *stolach, stolach, stolach, stolach, stolach*. . . It's in the land. Lushootseed is from the land" ("What's in a Name?" 0:12-0:56). Speculating about how Laila would have experienced Tacoma, she might have recognized its sacredness along with the Indigenous Title of the Puyallup over Tacoma, that is, their collective ownership and jurisdiction over the land and resources.

beauty, the thrill of danger, and the proximity of death" (47). Following Denis Cosgrove and Veronica della Dora in *High Places*, "nineteenth century exploration and colonialist discourse figured high places as spaces of muscular and masculine challenge, of competitive adventure, and unearthly, intense, sometimes even spiritual experience, as well as of intense scientific curiosity" (4). Unlike her girlfriend Cara, who is afraid of heights, Laila relishes the phrase *l'appel du vide*, the French term for the intense, irrational urge to jump from high places, and is drawn to the thrill and danger associated with such places. It should be emphasized that her preferred elevations are not the perilous, sparsely inhabited mountaintops like Mount Everest that pose extreme risks to the human body.[9] While mountain climbing has a history of imperial exploration and territorialization, it cannot be reduced to that history. Laila's desire to reach the peak indicates the complexity of climbing and hiking as activities, with imperial and liberatory overtones, always already implicated in racial capitalism and its ecological consequences. Accordingly, her experience of the physical landscape at high altitudes is likely to be exploitative, monotonous, and commodified, yet also authentic, transformative, and auratic.

While I attempted to summon the possibilities inherent in Laila's imaginary flânerie, it is equally important to revel in the limits and failures of it. Her inability to reach her destination prevents her from fully occupying the position of the flâneur. Laila's failure to take on the flâneur-like role underscores the challenges faced in Black flânerie. As Francesca Sobande notes in "Strolling with a Question: Is It Possible to Be a Black Flâneur?" the Black flâneur contends with "such significant risks and social disciplining which leaves [her] questioning whether they can ever fully occupy this transient position of the 'flâneur'." Indeed, the strict upbringing and deep involvement of her grandmother in Laila's life cast doubt on whether she can assume the role of the flâneuse.

Failure is a central theme in Laila's experience as a flâneuse. As a blackqueer flâneuse, Laila constantly envisions ways to break free from her constraints, despite the odds stacked against her. Even when she is behind the wheel, Laila is "somewhere else," often causing accidents due to her daydreaming (Laila – Week 2 13:18-13:20). Dr. Taylor recognizes her imagination as a healthy coping mechanism in a world filled with violence and hostility, particularly towards Black women (Laila – Week 2 18:09-18:23):

> You internalized violence from your family, from the culture at large, and if I understand it, you never felt like you had any options. Any say, any control. And that's why you've been so desperate to escape. Do I have that right? Okay, and you've tried many times. From the end of the block in Anaheim to the train in Seattle, and now

[9] Even if Laila is not likely to lose limbs or faculties due to climbing, as far as we know, she has had little to no experience hiking or climbing. Even relatively "safe" destinations such as Mount Tacoma or Machu Pichu are likely to place huge demands on her body, testing the limits of her mental and physical endurance.

> South America, but every time you'd get away, someone seems to bring you back. No escape you've attempted has been permanent. (Laila – Week 5 16:29-17:03)

Ultimately, Laila embraces the queer art of failure by attempting "the impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable" (Halberstam 88), conceiving of other ways of being and new models of living that lean into and feed off failure. Despite numerous setbacks, disappointments, and punishments, Laila retains a willful determination to escape. Her queer failures fuel her willfulness, as described by Ahmed, and vice versa. She is "unwilling to be seated at the table of happiness," "unwilling to get along, unwilling to preserve an idea of happiness" and success (Ahmed 2).

3. LAILA'S APOLLONIAN GAZE FROM THE OVERLOOK

Laila's life is tightly regimented and restricted by both societal control and the watchful eye of her grandmother, who oversees every aspect of her activities. Rhonda's strictness serves as a coping mechanism aimed at protecting her granddaughter from the harsh and vicious realities of American misogynoir.[10] The pressure of striving for admission to an Ivy League school further adds to her sense of discipline and constraint. In search of an escape from this suffocating environment, she finds solace in the nearby Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook, a place she frequents both with her girlfriend Cara and on her own. The project site was slated to become a 230-home gated development until the 57 acres of parkland was acquired for public use. Through its utilization of water-efficient native plants and the incorporation of a recycled concrete climbing trail, the park gestures toward another space and another space of being ("Baldwin Hills"). Within this natural environment, where Laila feels safe and her grandmother's concerns regarding safety are alleviated, she discovers the freedom to explore her creativity and her queerness, all the while challenging the norms that confine her. At the Overlook, Laila and Cara break free from their highly surveilled and regulated lives:

> Yeah. A few times, we figured out how to, like, meet up at the overlook. We'll just sit there and watch the city and come up with stories and poems and I mean, this girl is, like, so creative, Dr. Taylor. She has, like, notebooks of all of the stuff that we come up with, and sometimes it's funny, and we'll just, like, die laughing. And other times, it's just really, like, way out there. We'll just like let it flow. We'll create these whole lives and worlds and, sometimes, even make artwork to go along with it. (Laila – Week 2 9:24-10:00)

The Overlook grants her a sense of detachment from the pervasive modes of surveillance she encounters in her everyday life. This perspective allows her to

[10] Misogynoir is a term coined by Moya Bailey in 2008 to "describe the anti-Black racist misogyny that Black women experience" as "a result of their simultaneous and interlocking oppression at the intersection of racial and gender marginalization" (1). Importantly, Dr. Taylor thinks that Laila's imagination is a coping strategy to deal with misogynoir.

evade the watchful gaze of those who seek to curb and regulate her actions. In Simone Browne's (21) terms, the Overlook becomes a symbol of "dark sousveillance," tactics used "to render one's self out of sight" and plot "imaginaries that are oppositional and that are hopeful for another way of being." In historical contexts, strategies of dark sousveillance were crucial for individuals seeking to escape slavery, using tools of social control such as plantation surveillance or city lantern laws in subversive ways (Browne 21). The bird's-eye view of the city from the Overlook holds particular significance for Laila.

When Laila visits the Overlook alone, she experiences a profound sense of liberation and connection to something beyond herself. The role of her imagination becomes crucial in this experience, as she physically looks down on the city but envisions herself floating, unbound by the constraints of the built environment. Up there, she perceives an "out-of-reach feeling" that she associates with God:

> Sometimes, I go to the Overlook at night by myself to be there alone. And I just look at all of the lights across the city, the streetlights, house lights, lights of the cars on the 405, and, in a way, I feel like I've already hurled myself off of the Overlook. Except I'm not falling. I'm floating. And everything is so far away. Nothing can touch me. It's so intensely beautiful that I almost get too excited. Like, I can hear my heart beating in my ears, and I can feel it in my fingertips. It's both the feeling of being really high and deep underwater at the same time.[11] (Laila – Week 5 4:52- 5:39)

This act of floating represents her desire to escape from her regimented life and merge with the atmosphere, seeking a higher plane of existence. In the nighttime city, Laila finds an opportunity to shed "the creeping negative equity of the daytime and celebrate urban virtues, beauty in the ordinary" as well as to explore "the mysterious, the quiet, the secret and the itinerant" in all their glory (Dunn). While Nick Dunn's concept of nightwalking is usually associated with exploring the mysterious and secret aspects of the city, it is important to recognize that Laila's experience differs due to the racialized and gendered dynamics of her existence. Although she may not have the opportunity to stroll through the city streets at night due to safety concerns, at the Overlook, she can momentarily escape the restrictions of her daily life. From her vantage point at the Overlook, Laila feels unwatched and unencumbered by the surveillance and discipline placed upon her as a young Black woman. While her phone and credit card transactions may still trace her location, in that moment, she experiences a sense of detachment from the inequities of daily life under white supremacist heteropatriarchy. The beautifully illuminated cityscape fills her with joy, and she surrenders to the darkness while paradoxically basking in the

[11] The sensation of being immersed deep underwater evokes the marine mammals that Black feminist Alexis Gumbs studies and connects with. Similarly, it brings to mind the protagonist of Octavia Butler's *Wild Seed*, who transforms into a dolphin during her Middle Passage journey. Laila's ecstatic soaring recalls the euphoric "high" induced by intoxicants, but also that of the ancestors who flew back to Africa, and their descendants, who understood the profound truth that, "If you surrendered to the air, you could ride it," as articulated by Morrison (337).

lights. In this profound moment of self-exploration, Laila sheds the compulsion to conform or perform. The Overlook becomes a space of temporary liberation and self-discovery, allowing her to transcend the limitations and possessiveness of her everyday life.

In Michel De Certeau's "Walking in the City," he distinguishes between the "ordinary practitioners of the city" and the urban voyeur. The former are the individuals who live "down below" and navigate the city's spaces through walking, creating an urban "text" with their movements without being able to read it (93). These individuals, normally associated with the flâneur, subvert the visual and theoretical constructions of urban space and make use of unseen spaces through their walking practices. The latter are the urban voyeurs who take pleasure in "seeing the whole" and "totalizing" the complexity of the city from a privileged vantage point, like the observation deck of the World Trade Center (De Certeau 92). Surprisingly, Laila's panorama of the city from the Overlook fits more the totalizing, voyeuristic gaze of the voyeur than that of the ordinary practitioner of the flâneur. However, it is no contradiction to think about the flâneur in terms of the dialectic of movement and stopping. From the writings of nineteenth century writers, it is not only clear that the flâneur moved at a tortoise-like speed but that he also stopped by to minutely examine the displays of goods or survey shoppers seated before the doors of cafés (Larousse qtd. in Benjamin *Arcades* 451). In his old age, Victor Hugo observed the city from the top of a public omnibus still reserved for men (Benjamin *Arcades* 432). Similarly, after climbing up the trail to the Overlook, Laila engages in a form of "panoramic pleasure of peripatetic flânerie" (Buck-Morss 102). She revels in the view of the cityscape without being subjected to its hustle and bustle, noisy crowds, or microaggressions.

As we mentioned previously, the fantasy of reaching the peak of Mount Tacoma symbolizes Laila's desire to see endlessly and feel untouchable. Now we see that the Overlook offers her a vantage point over the city, evoking a sense of invincibility and excitement from the beauty vibrating in the air. For Laila, heights such as the Overlook and mountain peaks represent a quest for romantic ideals of beauty, permanence, and love. Denis Cosgrove's concept of "Apollo's eye" captures the paradoxical nature of Laila's yearnings for heights: "Apollo embodies a desire for wholeness and a will to power, a dream of transcendence and an appeal to radiance. The Apollonian eye is synoptic and omniscient, intellectually detached" (2). While the Apollonian gaze (like that of the flâneur) is inscribed as male, western, imperial, global, and universalizing, I employ it here to characterize Laila's God's eye-view: "The Apollonian gaze, which pulls diverse life on earth into a vision of unity, is individualized, a divine and mastering view from a single perspective. That view is at once empowering and visionary, implying ascent from the terrestrial sphere into the zones of planets and stars" (Cosgrove 12). For Laila, this individualized, unified, visionary, divine view is empowering because it allows her to escape from a life and world where she is relegated to the role of the object, ordered and controlled. Laila's affinity for heights serves as a reprieve from such horizontally limited perspectives and inflicted violences. In one of her sessions, she recounts a recurring

fantasy where she must flee with her grandmother and drive her Cadillac Escalade through a barricade to save herself and her grandmother from a white militia guy, recalling the "panic of needing to get away" (Laila – Week 2 16:27-16:29). Earlier, she explains that though her schoolmates have not come up on her, "that psychotic bullshit is deeply embedded within their heart," "they constantly do it in every one of their actions." While no one has threatened or harassed her yet, she feels like the "world is like a fucking hate crime"; she expects racial violence all the time, suffering from the tension, the worrying, "the fucking stress" (Laila – Week 2 14:00-14:24). Contrary to the sciences of geometry or geography, visual arts or literature in service of the Apollonian vision, Laila's aim is not to master or colonize the globe (Cosgrove 22), but to remove herself from the stresses inflicted by racial capitalism and break the chains of objectification. Laila's "magic mountain" is the reverse of Thomas Mann's: for her, life down below means being "trapped in some never-ending capitalist, bullshit fucking parade" (Laila – Week 3 18:49-19:07). In contrast, the "high" of seeing the city below while remaining hidden from it brings her immense pleasure, placing her atop the world detached from its claims on her. In Cosgrove's words, "To achieve the global view is to lose the bonds of the earth, to escape the shackles of time, and to dissolve the contingencies of daily life for a universal moment of reverie and harmony" (20). Hers is not a "lust for material possession, power, and authority" but is driven by a desire for "metaphysical speculation, religious aspiration, or poetic sentiment" (Cosgrove 22). Like Octavia Butler's Lauren Olamina, who says that "the Destiny of Earthseed is to take root among the stars," Laila aspires to rise above the earth (77). Her distanced gaze is "thus placed in dialogue with cosmic harmony and transcendental vision" embraced by the Latin *somnium*, closest to the English reverie, "the sense of imaginative dreaming long associated with rising over the earth" (Cosgrove 45, 20). If Laila's Apollonian gaze is used for the purpose of practicing imaginative dreaming, it appears that the binary between the real and the fantasy has been transcended.

Her reverie linked to soaring above the earth allows her to transcend normative boundaries and discover new dimensions of her identity and relationship with Cara. When discussing Cara, she often avoids the embodied, sensory, and sexual aspects of love, favoring instead a connection rooted in asexual, idealized, and romantic notions of union. She characterizes their bond as an "us," invoking the non-sexual intimacy between blood siblings, asserting that their connection is "deeper than sex," "[p]arts that weren't supposed to touch, touch" (Laila – Week 2 20:30, 20:41-20:47). Seeking alternatives to the status quo, Laila turns to heights, finding that the Apollonian perspective provides her with a different sense of geographic possibility and practice. Climbing the Overlook, she experiences ascension: "From the Latin *ascendere*, to climb. To rise to a higher, more powerful position" (Laila – Week 5 5:42-5:54). This Apollonian ascent enables Laila to transcend her psychic and physical limitations, exploring her sexuality and Self (in Jungian terms) in new and liberating ways. For instance, when she imagines her train journey from Cusco to Machu Picchu, she envisions a "rushing river" and "incredible mountain vistas," leaning in to kiss Cara, and becoming "eternal" (Laila – Week 4 15:01-15:53). Whether real or imagined, the Apollonian gaze fosters a sense of geographic

possibility beyond the cramped spaces of control down below, opening up new avenues for imagining her own identity and place in the world.

4. THE QUEER FAILURE OF SELF-DISCOVERY: ASCENDING MACHU PICCHU IN THE AGE OF CAPITALISM

Laila's desire to ascend vertically is interrogated in her therapy sessions with Dr. Taylor. When Dr. Taylor tries to clarify the details of their planned trip, Laila becomes agitated, "You know, if you don't believe that I need to get the hell outta here, then one day, you're gonna wake up, and Cara and I? We're gonna be fucking gone" (Laila – Week 2 22:56-23:03). Laila feels misunderstood because she sees the trip as a concrete plan instead of just an illusion and takes pride in the level of preparation she has put into it. Laila explains that they plan to fly to Mexico City, spend a night at a Courtyard Marriott near the airport, then take a flight to Lima the next morning. From Lima, they will fly to Cusco, a smaller city where they will acclimatize to the altitude before taking a train to Aguascalientes, an even smaller town. Finally, they will proceed to Machu Picchu (Laila – Week 3 3:58-4:29). As explained previously, Laila's excitement stems from her love of heights and enchantment with the Apollonian gaze, which makes Machu Picchu an ideal destination for her. However, Dr. Taylor expresses concerns about the way Laila talks about leaving, couched as it is in so much "fantasy language" (Laila – Week 4 19:55-19:58). She worries about how Laila would react if their plans did not work out as expected, as Laila seems fixated on the "happily-ever-after of it all" (Laila – Week 4 19:59), indicating her focus on the climax of reaching the peak rather than the inevitable descent from it. Dr. Taylor wants to ensure that Laila is prepared for not only potential setbacks during their trip, as she senses that Laila's Apollonian vision of their journey may be idealized. Dr. Taylor's intuition proves correct when, the following week, Laila reveals the end of what she thought was a budding same-sex relationship. While Laila believed she and Cara shared a mutual vision for their trip to Peru, Cara laughed at her and dismissed the journey as mere fantasy. This failure enables Laila to break free from the restrictions of normative romance, and step "into the unregulated territories of failure, loss, and unbecoming" (Halberstam 7).

In what is perhaps their most powerful therapy session, Dr. Taylor helps Laila confront the internalized violence and control she has experienced from her family and culture at large. Significantly, Dr. Taylor tells Laila that, in spite of her lack of expertise in somatic therapy, "I can't help feeling this, this pull to keep you grounded. In the present, in your body, in this room" (Laila – Week 5 16:52-17:00). Contrary to ways of thinking about the Apollonian gaze as a means of evading infrastructures of racism, Dr. Taylor admonishes Laila not to soar, not to leave the ground. "Just be. Be here. Be you," she tells her patient (Laila – Week 5 7:54-7:58). The summoning is a call to be here, to surrender to the urgency of the here that, according to Kevin Quashie, may mirror or complement the urgency of the political but that is distinct from it ("The Matter of Black Sentences"). The urgency of this here, this now, this place and time, enables Laila to experience herself as an

individual and grapple with her inner life. Therefore, Dr. Taylor urges Laila to stop pretending and to be herself, which triggers a defensive reaction at first. Dr. Taylor asks Laila simple questions about her preferences, such as her favorite foods, color, or music. Laila says she doesn't know and "can't, like, sit down and, like, shoot the shit" (Laila – Week 5 8:48-8:52). At this point, Dr. Taylor directs Laila to get out of her head and to drop down into her body by walking around the room. As Laila begins circling, Brooke uses somatics to connect Laila with her body and through her body, engage her in her dreams, desires, feelings, and actions. As summarized by Afrofuturist writer, activist, and facilitator Adrienne Maree Brown (111-12), "Somatics is a practice of mind/body connection that explores internal and relational physical perception and experience. Somatics teaches us to center, to find a place within ourselves that we can return to no matter what condition we're in, a place from which to make intentional choices about how we want to show up, lead, and hold." The practice of being invited into a space free from harm helps Laila feel into her likes and dislikes, show different aspects of herself, and trust her gut feelings, even though her grandmother's control has made her doubt herself. At times, Laila pauses; when she stops moving, she gets in her head and struggles to speak her truth. However, Dr. Taylor urges her not to overthink, to keep moving and to lean into the sensations of her body. Then, Dr. Taylor challenges Laila with more profound questions, such as her best quality and biggest fear. Laila bravely admits that she considers herself "mystical" and fears not having what it takes to succeed in life: "I'm not built for this life somehow. I just like the places I go in my head in my head so much better. The escape" (Laila – Week 5 10:38-10:44). Here, Laila is intuitively making connections between capitalism, common sense, and success, and opting instead for the counterhegemonic failure, escape, and fantasy. When Dr. Taylor asks Laila what she would do if she knew she could not fail, Laila's response is enigmatic. She speaks of taking a risk and doing something *for herself* for once, but she remains vague about what that would entail. She mentions that she would quit, hinting at a desire to escape her current life and the constraints that have been imposed on her.

At this point, Dr. Taylor calls Laila's attention to the fact that she has been moving about in a pattern. Following Jungian methods, which encourage patients to externalize their fantasies through creative expression, Dr. Taylor invites Laila to draw the pattern she has been walking unconsciously. Laila, who has always had an active and creative imagination, closes her eyes as she goes inwards and easily sketches the pattern. This method resonates with Laila, allowing her to participate in her own healing process. In Jung's words, "The patient can make himself [or herself] creatively independent through this method… He [or she] is no longer dependent on his [or her] dreams or on his [or her] doctor's knowledge; instead, by painting himself [or herself] he [or she] gives shape to himself" (Jung qtd. in Stevens 376). As soon as Laila traces the pattern, however, she crumples up the paper and denigrates the exercise as "stupid." To dissolve Laila's resistance and facilitate the analysis, Dr. Taylor employs Jungian ideas about symbols as visual manifestations of the unconscious mind. For Jung, symbols are "indispensable to healing and to the individuation of the Self," and "creative work with symbols is, therefore, the key

to successful personal development and therapeutic practice" (Stevens 304-5, 305-6). After some hesitation, Laila relents and identifies the inward-moving spiral she drew as the symbol of Pachamama, the Mother Earth in Inca mythology: "It moves inwards. That's our inner journey that guides us" (Laila – Week 5 14:36-14:42). Laila, who worries that she likes the elsewhere and elsewhen better than the here and now, is being guided to the sacred place from which she will be able to relate to God. According to Cecilia Titizano's Indigenous feminist reading, Mama Pacha is "God the Mother, out of which multiplicity unfolds" (154); she embodies the principle of relationality and the vibrant force of life, giving and sustaining life. Through this realization, Laila's strolling becomes an act of creation, activating her inner knowing, agency, and will. Her connection to Mama Pacha and the sacred geometric pattern reflects Laila's spiritual process of awakening and helps Laila bring together fantasy and reality, allowing her to understand her attraction to Machu Picchu as "mystical materialism" (Titizano 151). While Cara saw Peru as just a made-up story, Laila perceives the Sacred Valley and Machu Picchu as inescapably real and spiritually healing geographic sites for her mindbody and spirit. As Arnaldo Quispe states (qtd. in Titizano 153), "[Mama Pacha] is a sacred entity, at the same time, a mediator and a harmonizer of life energies above and below." The guiding presence of Mama Pacha leads Laila deep inside herself, allowing her to understand her desire for an integrated mindbody/spirit.

In this captivating scene, the spatial nuances stemming from the gendered and racialized portrayal of the flâneur come to the fore. For the white male flâneur, the "private world of domestic life is dull" and confining (Tester 2). This feeling of confinement compels him to seek meaning in the public sphere. Nevertheless, his act of traversing the city streets assumes a privilege that eludes most Black women. The stark dichotomy drawn between interior and exterior realms, however, might be a product of imagining the flâneur as a white male traversing an urban landscape. Even the Parisian arcades or galleries—central to the flâneur's leisurely saunters—can be viewed as a fusion of interior and exterior spaces. In *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin (63) notes the "Similarity of the arcades to the indoor arenas in which one learned to ride a bicycle … [and in which] halls the figure of the woman assumed its most seductive aspect: as cyclist." In a similar defying of the division between inside and outside, Laila finds herself in search of meaning and transformation within the private world of her sessions, tracing pathways within Dr. Taylor's opulent, aesthetically vital living room. Laila's capacity to tread these trails as a Black flâneuse rests upon the safety and liberation she experiences in her therapist's presence. In the confines of a small therapist's office, Laila's ability to move freely would have been restricted. However, within the vast expanse of this sunlit space, where the atrium, living room, kitchen, and the adjoining outdoor deck seamlessly merge with one another, Laila accesses a flâneur-like experience. Reminiscent of many LA's ranch style residences, the house's design includes an entire wall of windows. Through this expansive glass expanse, viewers are treated to a breathtaking patio view, lush greenery, and the downtown LA skyline. The result is a powerful

dissolution of the boundaries between outdoors and indoors.[12] As Laila rises to take a walk, her motion dissolves the outdoors and indoors boundary. Laila's embodiment of the Black flâneuse within this Black space imparts a profound spatial dimension and depth both within and beyond the house. It carries significance that the vista aligns with that from the Overlook, located a mile to the west in a straight line. Her walking serves as a reclamation of spatial agency, effectively challenging the confines and constraints that have historically hindered the movements of Black women. Her improvisation encapsulates the inner and outer, the local and global, psychological and physical, coalescing into the spiraling geographic symbol of Pacha Mama. According to Shields (77), the "failure of flânerie is that it does not solve the alienation of the flâneur himself," a critique that does not fully apply to the transformative flâneuserie Laila enacts. Unlike the conventional flâneur, her act of walking does not perpetuate a façade of complete alienation; rather, within the safe confines of the interior space, it becomes a conduit for her authentic self to be revealed to her therapist and, ultimately, to herself.

In the paradoxical spirit of flânerie, this self-revelation is succeeded by the resurgence of her alienation, as Laila abruptly withdraws and shuts down at the conclusion of her session. Dr. Taylor's inquiry about her suicidal thoughts feels to Laila like a betrayal, causing her to dismiss therapy as "white nonsense" and walk out (Laila – Week 5 19:00). Still, it is safe to assume that treading the sacred path has already awakened the force of Mama Pacha within her, instilling in her the determination to make yet another attempt to transform her imaginative dreaming into reality. By the following session, Laila vanishes, and Rhonda visits Dr. Taylor in search of her granddaughter. It is soon discovered that Laila has left her cell behind, bidding farewell to the Overlook through a cryptic Instagram post with the Latin caption "*Ave atque vale*," meaning hail and farewell. Dr. Taylor initiates a welfare check, and relief washes over the two women as Laila calls Dr. Taylor from her Airbnb in Lima. Laila's desires have led her beyond confinement, away from racialized settler colonial US geographies. Laila's journey abroad differs from her distracted, detached, and leisurely strolling and driving in some of the priciest zip codes within the Los Angeles metropolitan areas. She is alone but intoxicated with newfound freedom in her dream city. This time, she leaves no traces in her wake. She has sold her elite, high-fashion brands to acquire cash and purchase a new iPhone, so her grandmother is unable to track her movements. Upon reaching Peru, she goes beyond the imaginary status of her getaways.

Her inescapable attraction pulls her towards the Inca civilization, making her exploration of the 15th-century Inca fortress a form of flâneuserie. Without a doubt, Machu Picchu stands as a prominent fixture within Peru's bustling tourist industry, attracting approximately 500,000 visitors and generating a substantial $40 million in

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[12] Production designer Catherine Smith highlights the team's search for the perfect view from Baldwin Hills. To enhance the authenticity of this view, they used actual footage of dynamic elements such as "the twinkling of the lights, the wind blowing, or an airplane going by" (qtd. in McHenry).

revenue annually. The site's transformation from a sacred space to an obligatory stop on the global tourist map epitomizes the "magical, mystical" branding of Peruvian identity, as orchestrated for the world stage (Shullenberger 317). The narrative of Hiram Bingham's "discovery" of the ancient Inca citadel, along with his imperial portrayal of Machu Picchu as the clandestine sanctuary of the Virgins of the Sun, has been widely disseminated and it captured the collective imagination. Nevertheless, as Shullenberger (325) points out, the core themes of "Bingham's Machu Picchu narrative – purity, preservation, concealment, and revelation" – harmonize with the fundamental tenets of both the Cuzco and Lima *indigenista* groups. Additionally, Machu Picchu emerges as a symbol of the opulence and purity of Inca culture, as well as Latin American identity, within the works of writers like Neruda and Guevara (Shullenberger). As we can see, there's no easy way to disentangle Machu Picchu's aura of mystery from its commercialization through ruin gazing. Its dual status as a symbol of pre-Columbian Indigenous heritage and Peruvian identity clashes with its role as a lucrative asset for both the state and private tourist industry interests. Much like the shop windows within Benjamin's descriptions of the Parisian arcades, Machu Picchu serves as the city street does for the flâneur. The ruins operate allegorically, narrating tales of abundance and its accompanying costs. They convey the cyclical nature of wealth and the perpetual flux of capital. They become "a fetish, a symbol of luxury" that transform for tourists the "space into a glittering dream of relaxation, leisure, recreation, and buoyancy" (Halberstam 111). Nevertheless, these ancient ruins embody "a perversion of desire, the decay of the commodity, the queerness of the disassociation of use from value … [becoming] available to queer signification as a symbolic site of failure, loss, rupture, disorder, incipient chaos, and the desire animated by these states nonetheless" (Halberstam 111).

Laila's position with respect to the site is equally contradictory and ambivalent. Her desire to visit the archaeological site is a far cry from mere touristic checklist fulfillment, at the same time, unquestionably, her financial resources position her within an exploitative dynamic with the site, akin to the spirit of bourgeois / imperial / global flânerie. Her capacity for recreational travel is predicated on financial resources; as she says to Brooke, "when we first get there, I just want it to be, like about exploring. About hiking. About Machu Picchu. About taking it in, taking each other in" (Laila – Week 4 19:31-19:41). Laila's engagement with tourism exists within a complex interplay with local communities and the environment, and unfortunately contributes to the deterioration of the site due to the impact of tourism. Even so, this failure to align with Indigenous ways of life while desiring just that aligns with the traditional concept of flânerie as "a harking back and a nostalgia for a slower and more definite world" (Tester 15). In resonance with Benjamin's theory of the aura, Laila's quest leads her toward the enchantment of distance and permanence, and the ceremonial essence of the aura within the unapproachable and distant ruins of ancient Indigeneity. For, approaching Laila's relationship with Machu Picchu from the perspective of the aura, the aura signifies the original, authentic, ritualistic presence of the work of art, eliminated in capitalism. Pertinent to this discussion is the link between the auratic experiences and mountains. Benjamin illustrates the

aura of natural objects through the example of mountains: "If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon …, you experience the aura of those mountains" (Benjamin, "Work of Art" 222-23). Flâneuserie for Laila is thus the residue and last refuge of that "primordial shudder in the age of reification" (Adorno 79) — what Theodor Adorno might call the longing for non-capitalist, relational forms of social life aligned with nature and Indigenous worldviews.

Given that the series' focus on therapy and Dr. Taylor's use of Jungian concepts and analysis, along with Laila's familiarity with *Man and his Symbols*, Laila's fascination with mountain heights is worth examining from a psychoanalytic perspective, particularly through a Jungian lens. As we have seen, the archetypal image of greatest significance in Laila's fantasies is the mountain. In Carl Jung's dreams and those of his patients, as well as in various mythologies and epics, "a mountain often symbolizes a place of revelation, where transformation and change may take place" (*Man and his Symbols* 293). In Jungian theory, climbing the mountain represents the first stage of the life journey, symbolizing an "ascent from the unconscious to an elevated point of view of the ego – i.e. to an increased consciousness" (*Man and his Symbols* 278). For instance, Jung analyzes the "traveler" in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, who searches for a path and climbs the mountain he encounters. In an archetypal sense, Laila's voyage to Peru represents her "individuation process," the ultimate goal of Jungian analysis (*Man and his Symbols* 277). Machu Pichu, quite literally a "city on the mountain," serves as an archetypal symbol. According to Jung, "The city, corresponding in its ground plan to a mandala, represents that 'region of the soul' in the middle of which the Self (the psyche's innermost center and totality) has its abode" (*Man and his Symbols* 293). In this way, Laila's aspiration to visit Machu Picchu can be seen as a pilgrimage towards the center of her own psyche, as confirmed by the symbol of the inward-moving spiral she traces with her feet and draws in Brooke's living room.

Having said all that, the series refrains from portraying Laila's actual movements in Lima, Cusco, the Sacred Valley, and eventually, the hidden city of Machu Picchu. The potential of these future modes of movement is, however, encapsulated in her presence during a FaceTime call with Brooke. Once more, the Benjaminian stroll into the uncharted territories of queer failure takes place within the interior. As previously, the interior space is not separate from the exterior public spaces of the city and the presence of the Andes. The windows in her Airbnb offer breathtaking views of the bustling city and the mountainous landscape. The sun's gentle embrace and the cool breeze infuse the scene with otherwise possibilities. As Laila moves around her room, adjusting her iPhone to share the view with Brooke, the self-consciousness of the poseur, the flâneur who "is out to see and be seen" dissipates (Shields 65). Laila stands authentic and grounded, her power rooted in self and connection, basking in the support flowing from the maternal figure before her. Similar to Brooke, Laila initially exudes an air of luxury, adorning herself in high-end fashion garments or eye-catching accessories from labels like Chanel and Balenciaga. Initially, her eclectic fashion sense embraces daring color palettes,

featuring statement pieces and hoop earrings, which express the unique style of the Black femme flâneur. However, as her therapy sessions become more intense and Laila faces her fears, there is a noticeable shift in her wardrobe. During weeks four and five of her therapy journey, she wears a simpler, all-black attire, mirroring her vulnerability and grief. In Lima, however, she opts for the comfort of a white, loose-fitting, genderless hemp shirt, symbolizing the birth of her authentic self, liberty, and courage.

A compelling connection emerges here between flâneuserie and fashion. Laila's penchant for flaunting the latest fashion can be seen as an expression of commodity fetishism. If the male flâneur's latest incarnation is the "sandwich-man," then the female counterpart can be envisioned as the fashionable woman-as-doll, eliciting the desire for exchange value, which lies at the core of capitalism (Benjamin, *Arcades* 448). As Benjamin aptly puts it, "Fashion always stands in opposition to the organic. Not the body but the corpse is the most perfect object for its art. It defends the rights of the corpse before the living being, which it couples to the inorganic world. The fetishism that succumbs to the sex appeal of the commodity is its vital nerve" (*Arcades* 894). Caught within the clutches of racial capitalism, alienated within her own femme body, and tortured by racial trauma, Laila utilizes transient fashion trends to construct utopian visions. Yet, even as her fashion choices epitomize the "eternal recurrence of the new," they manifest in the (mass reproduced) guise of "the ever-always-the-same" (Benjamin, "Central Park" 46, 48). This line of argument extends to Laila's fascination with luxury cars. The higher the price tag on the car, the more irresistible its allure, the more she revels in taking it for a ride – a contemporary version of the flâneur who took the concept of marketability itself on a stroll (Benjamin, *Arcades* 448). Laila's passion for driving, akin to her fashion, serves as a form of dialogue with her body, "even with putrefaction," as noted by Benjamin (*Arcades* 833), given her numerous and potentially perilous accidents behind the wheel. As she undergoes somatic therapy, Laila embarks on a journey to disentangle her identity from the capitalist notion of fashion. She abandons her Bentley by the roadside and sells some of her luxury items.[13] Symbolic of her transformed connection with objects, Laila's choice to carry her mother's ring reflects a shift from seeing it as a mere commodity to preserving its aura. Laila names her mother as a hero and acknowledges that her mother left when it was necessary. Although she claims to be getting rid of all physical things because she doesn't need them, of course, she does not discard everything. Visiting sites like Machu Pichu allows her to gain distance from capitalistic environments where fashion and labels dominate. Thus, Laila disengages from the inorganic world of commodities to immerse herself in the realm of living beings.

There is an inclination to interpret Laila's escape as endorsing a straight narrative of achievement, success, and personal realization. However, such an interpretation

[13] While I emphasize Laila's willful resistance to racial capitalism, it is equally true that her capacity to be a flâneuse is contingent on her family's prosperity, specifically, the sizable amount of cash she receives from selling her designer pieces.

would inadvertently overlook the role of capitalism in her journey of self-discovery, slighting the impossibility of such a climax and the inevitability of a certain amount of alienation in a racial capitalist world. It would also sever the intrinsic link between blackqueerness and its embrace of failure and negativity, leading to an overly optimistic and progressive understanding of queerness, as seen in cheerful portrayals of lesbians, gays, and queers in shows like *The L Word* (Halberstam 98) or *Queer Eye*. Moreover, this approach would ignore the intricate connections between blackness and failure, nothingness/non-being, or death. As Kevin Quashie puts it, "Today there is no reconciling the facts of our lives, which seem tethered to death, and the case for black aliveness. Both have to be true at the same time" (*Black Aliveness* 13). Following Quashie, the irreconcilability between Black life and death, also familiar to us in the form of a debate between Black optimism and pessimism, recommends the figure of the flâneur as a way to theorize this irreconcilability. When Laila decides to flee, she staunchly refuses to relinquish her failures and deviations, failing to comply with heteropatriarchal norms and white entitlements. Laila embraces Brooke's message that for her *nothing is impossible* as she attempts to reconstruct a blackqueer life along different lines. By deliberately refraining from explicitly depicting Laila's flâneur-like exploration along the Inca Trail, a potent statement is made about the futility of her pursuit and her quest for liberation in the world of racial capitalism. Fred Moten, in conversation with Saidiya Hartman, underscores the impossibility of escape: "[Escape] is an activity. It's not an achievement. . . You don't ever get escaped. . . And what that means is what you're escaping from is always after you. It's always on you" (32:59-33:15). While one might be tempted to interpret Laila's journey to Peru as the triumphant culmination of a series of setbacks, it better aligns with the ethos of (black)queer failure—an approach that finds significance in "the impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable" despite their inherent unattainability within the current status quo (Halberstam 88).

At that moment, in the season finale, Brooke mentions Laila to her partner while slicing a baguette. She mentions in passing that Laila sent her a selfie from Oropesa, the Peruvian city of bread just outside Cusco. Presumably *en route* to Machu Picchu from Cusco, Laila is deviating from the straight, probable tourist path, opting instead for losing herself on a less-travelled path. Her blackqueer flâneuserie is a practice that "revels in the detours, twists, and turns through knowing and confusion" (Halberstam 15). In Oropesa, she probably tastes *chuta*, a distinctive large round disc-shaped sweet bread infused with the scent of eucalyptus. This bread combines Andean mysticism with colonial traditions, irreplicable because it is made with water from the *Apu Pachutusan* and blessings from the Virgin of Carmen. Perhaps in anticipation of Machu Picchu's aura and its inevitable "loss," she embraces the queer art of failure, finding joy in the unexpected, the impromptu, and "the acceptance of the finite" (Halberstam 187).

5. THE BLACK FLÂNEUSE AS "ONE AMONG THE CHORUS"

While the series (and my essay) foregrounds Laila's seemingly individualistic flâneuserie, aligning with the classical conception of flâneur, I suggest that it also seeks to reimagine Black flâneuserie as inherently collective. Laila's final session underscores that the expression of flight through fantasy extends beyond individual narratives; it paints a collective portrait of Black women's waywardness. It leaves us with a portrait of what Hartman might call the "wayward chorus," namely, Black women's straying, erring, willful ways. The motives for these real and imaginary flights—the pursuit of mobility, the craving for liberation, the aspiration for more, and the need for a breathing space—are shared by Laila, her mother, her grandmother, and Brooke. As though by design, in Laila's absence, the therapy session turns into an exploration of her grandmother's distraught feelings and defense mechanisms. Dr. Taylor informs Rhonda that Laila is very much her grandmother's granddaughter, as she challenges Rhonda's notion of Black excellence, revealing it as a fantasy "that some abstract definition of excellence, defined by whiteness, no less, is the key to our freedom" (Laila – Week 6 6:00-6:08). Dr. Taylor lays bare the psychological toll this belief takes on Black individuals, the weight of the assumption that their excellence is the prerequisite for the recognition and respect for their humanity. Dr. Taylor presses Rhonda to release Laila from this definition of success, to give in to her granddaughter's willfulness and indulge her heart's wayward stirrings. Rhonda's anger towards Brooke for this revelation is countered by Dr. Taylor's insight that anger is easier to feel than fear—an insight that resonates with Rhonda, who is concerned for Laila's well-being, as she believes Laila has gone missing. Laila's incoming call shifts Rhonda's state from worry, anger, and resistance to a vulnerable stance, marked by a quest for guidance. Brooke's response, a simple yet powerful "Listen," holds the wisdom of Black feminist practices—a call to be present, to hear, and to engage with Laila's needs (Laila – Week 6 21:35). This call to "listen" echoes the one directed at Laila earlier, summoning her to be present and connect with the feelings arising in her body. At this pivotal point, the interconnectedness of Black women's healing becomes evident. Laila's wayward pursuit of flânerie aligns with Rhonda's need to actualize her dreams. The reconciliation between granddaughter and grandmother is paralleled by Laila's acceptance of her mother's need to leave her when she was only a child.

Among the trio of women, only Rhonda has lived experience of racialized poverty and thus a different kind of appreciation of generational wealth. Rhonda eloquently articulates the link between privilege and fantasy, highlighting that Jamal's success has bestowed upon his daughter the luxury of dreaming:

> Laila, being all in her head all the time. In some ways, that's success. She's not stuck somewhere thinking about where her next meal is coming from. Not counting the hours before the power's cut off. You think anybody ever asked me what my hopes were when I was growing up? They're gonna care what a half-starved little Black girl out of east Texas in the '60s wants out of life? (Laila – Week 6 13:34-13:57)

Rhonda excavates the "success" inherent in Laila's imaginative escapades; she points out that the "distracted observation and dream-like reverie" characteristic of Laila's flâneur-like stance hinge on privilege (Buck-Morss 103). While Laila's therapy ostensibly addresses her defiance against her controlling grandmother, the Green family's intergenerational trauma traces its roots to structurally mandated suffering. In turn, the reconciliation between Laila and Rhonda helps Brooke come to terms with her own fear and grief, related to her mother's alcoholism and premature death, and the loss of her son and father. Honoring Laila's willful desire for freedom and Rhonda's anguish, which stems from the intersection of poverty and misogynoir, empowers Brooke to find forgiveness for her parents' inability to love her well. In an episode beyond the scope of my current analysis, Dr. Taylor, the therapist, guides Brooke, the patient, toward reckoning and sitting with her pain.

Initially perceiving Laila as "the problem," surveilling and limiting her movements, her grandmother undergoes a transformation by the conclusion of the arc, revealing a newfound receptivity to Laila's geographic sojourns. I do not propose viewing all three women as flâneurs; for only Laila is engaged in ceaseless efforts to forge a physical escape, however, it is crucial to recognize each Black woman as a wayward one striving for freedom. Rhonda grapples with the repercussions of "economic exclusion, material deprivation, racial confinement, and social dispossession," while Brooke and Laila feel trapped by the constraints of Black excellence, respectability, and parental visions of success they do not fit into (Hartman xv). As observed by Brooke's boyfriend, Brooke identifies with Laila because both of them are always leaving: Brooke periodically abandons her partner and reality through alcohol, while Laila repeatedly escapes by physically walking away from home. Brooke recognizes Laila's rebellion and shares with Laila her teenage pregnancy, sensing a shared desire to defy social norms. However, it is only through Rhonda's words that Brooke can finally fathom her father's struggles and appreciate the Taylors' "success"—access to a good neighborhood, quality education and healthcare, and professional opportunities. While season four explicitly rejects the notion of a "cure" or a happily-ever-after ending for characters, the season finale culminates in Brooke's call to her sponsor announcing her readiness for rehab.

As we envision Laila, the flâneuse, enjoying herself in the throng, the bustle, the ebb and flow of city life and making her way towards the train station to secure her ticket to the next town, we sense that she is being propelled onward by a collective force—including not only her mother and grandmother, but also Brooke, and a multitude of other Black women who share her willful quest for freedom. In stark contrast to the white male flâneur's ambivalent rapport with the crowd, Laila, in the words of Hartman, assumes the role of "one among the chorus" (Hartman 301). Her individual existence intertwines with those of other Black women who shared her flights of fancy, craving for beauty, and lust for the temporary revelry of the Apollonian gaze, all while carving unconventional routes through the terrain. Unlike the self-indulgent meandering of the male flâneur—"the man *of* the crowd as opposed to the man *in* the crowd" (Tester 3)—the wayward ambitions that propel these women form a connective thread, enabling their movements to synchronize

into an assembly. Laila does not lose herself in the crowd; instead, she is uplifted and carried forward by the chorus's willful determination to wander, err and stray, and embrace the openness of its becoming. The chorus becomes the conduit for a different narrative about Black flâneuserie, disrupting the thoroughly individuated, alienated orientation of the male flâneur and suggesting the possibility of approaching Black flâneuserie from the standpoint of an individual and a collective. Echoing Hartman (348) once more, "The chorus propels transformation. It is an incubator of possibility, an assembly of sustaining dreams of otherwise." Thus, Black flâneuserie, even when practiced alone — such as by Laila in Peru — gestures towards what lies ahead, a gathering of visions and perspectives yet to fully materialize, a queer futurity that is yet to come: "the time and place better than here; a glimpse of the earth not owned by anyone" (Hartman 349).

6. CONCLUSION

The classical concept of flânerie is fundamentally transformed in the context of the contemporary blackqueer flâneuse, who navigates a landscape fraught with greater risks and vulnerabilities. Wolfgang Schivelbusch emphasizes that classical flânerie is only viable when the flâneur faces minimal risk. He notes the necessity of locations "where the flâneur would not be exposed to the sight of carriages" and that provide "refuges from the vehicular traffic on the regular streets" (Schivelbusch qtd. in Tester 15). In "Le Dernier Flâneur" (1936), Edmund Jaloux marks the end of flânerie with the introduction of danger into cities. He states that a man who goes for a walk "ought not to have to concern himself with any hazards." Jaloux laments the fate of the flâneur who cannot collect his whimsical thoughts or follow inspiration without confronting dangers or taking numerous precautions (qtd. in Benjamin, *Arcades* 435). For the contemporary Black flâneuse, the vulnerability is even greater when ambling down the sidewalk or stopping to enjoy the sights on the street, as there is a continuous risk of violence. While spaces of absolute refuge, safety, and protection do not exist within racial capitalism, Laila's flâneuserie is grounded in the pursuit of invincibility, safety, and freedom. The blackqueer flâneuse is linked to the differential production of both real and imagined spaces, experiments with living amidst ongoing threats of enclosure, surveillance, and harm. This involves "specifically, the seeking out of alternative geographic options, and the coupling of geography with black matters, histories, knowledges, experiences, and resistances" (McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds* 92). In the series, these alternative geographic options include the ongoing project of imagining a different existence, experimenting with that different existence within the safe space of Brooke's house, and seeking it out on mountain tops and heights inside and outside the US.

Building on the challenges faced by the contemporary blackqueer flâneuse in navigating spaces of refuge and safety, a serious challenge to the conceptualization of contemporary flânerie is Benjamin's argument that capitalism has commodified the city, leaving "no spaces of mystery for the flâneur to observe" (Tester 13). This commodification is readily apparent in popular shows like *Selling Sunset*,

showcasing how the real estate market has eliminated such mysterious spaces in LA, converting communal land into private property, which is sold for profit and market-defined success. Laila, seeking mysterious territories of failure, loss, and unlearning, turns to nature in various locations, including Anaheim, Seattle, Baldwin Hills, and Peru. In her pursuit of refuge from the dual oppressions of misogyny and the relentless machinery of racial capitalism, Laila's ambulatory journeys reveal traces of the aura—the mysterious, the faraway, and the unapproachable. Before escaping the empty, homogenous geographies of "success" in the US, she uses her imagination to travel differently, even within captivity. Ultimately, she abandons her predominantly (sub)urban environment of "excellence," "profit," "privilege," "private property," and "productivity" in the US. Her flânerie becomes "real" outside of the US, in the rugged Peruvian terrain, and particularly at the ancient ruins of Machu Picchu, evoking death, failure, and loss, but also the mystery, remembrance, and sociality of the Incas. The Peruvian hike becomes a profoundly embodied experience, a "pastoral return" to nature, recoded as a place of joy for the Black flâneuse, challenging historical environmental exclusion of African Americans (Dunning). At the same time, the paradoxes of Laila's privileged Black flâneuserie haunt the joys of her horizontal and vertical spatial wanderings, as her experience of the aura is enmeshed in capitalist tourism. While her flâneuserie forges possible paths to thrive in an unsafe and uninhabitable world (Brown), her privilege threatens to reduce it to a mere trip to a "mystical" location by an affluent person. Therefore, instead of resisting the contradictions and shortcomings of her blackqueer flâneuserie, let us embrace and celebrate all of Laila's "inevitable fantastic failures" (Halberstam 228).

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