



A community of public scholars demanding and embodying liberation

Newsletter May 2024



Entrance to *Starry, Starry Night*, an installation based on Azeizat's blog [Starry Nights](#) and part of the [How We Build Home](#) exhibition

Image description: a video still: close-up of a multicoloured curtain of beads and material strands hanging at the entrance to a dark room; the shape of a cushioned seat can be vaguely seen through the curtain, and dots of green light prick the darkness.

Dear friends,

As we live through the necessary witnessing of multiple and ongoing genocides, oppressions and the distressingly familiar and brutal state violence in response to dissent and protest, we stand firm on resisting in any way we are able. And even within all this and more, we make space for softness and care – this too can be a necessary part of resistance. We hope you are able to find the balance you need to keep going.

With love and solidarity, GEM Collective



# “So much heart and soul”



Azeezat speaking at an event (London, 2017, Oluwatosin Daniju)

“I promise to not quit on myself.

To remember that I'm Azeezat Johnson,  
and I've come so far, done so much.

I give so much heart and soul in all I do.”

- excerpt from *A Promise*, Azeezat Johnson

Image description: Azeezat is sitting on a chair, seen from the waist up. She holds a microphone in her right hand, and a paper cup on her lap in her left hand. She is wearing a blue headwrap, black cardigan over a white t-shirt whose partially obscured text reads “Maybe she’s born with it...Maybe it’s melanin.” Azeezat is smiling and looking over at someone off-camera.

On Thursday 26th April, GEM members joined family, friends, former colleagues, mentors and mentees of Azeezat at Queen Mary University to commemorate the brilliance and impact of her scholarship and reflect on her life and how her legacy lives on. We remembered not only her work and its significant impact academically and beyond, but also the many lives she touched and changed, and the ongoing transformations for which she is responsible.

As those in attendance shared their experiences of knowing Azeezat, a clear thread emerged – of her excellence and incredible knowledge, and also her kindness, generosity and care for others, qualities that inevitably shaped the way that she worked and moved through the world.

After an afternoon of sharing and focus that centred Azeezat’s academic scholarship and connections, with a loving tone throughout, GEM led a session of reflection, free-writing and further sharing, based on some of Azeezat’s more personal writing. In a perfect embodiment of memorial, everyone in the space took part with the same kindness, generosity and care that Azeezat personified for us. Alongside tears, sadness and ongoing grief, there was also laughter, joyful memories and inspiration, and the beauty of coming together with such vulnerability to hold space that allowed for all these things and more. Azeezat’s mum reflected “Dare we believe, things can get better”, and despite the loss we continue to feel, it felt reasonable, even fitting, that we do dare to believe things really can get better.



# A moment to pause On Being (Together)

## Slow

Time outside  
time.

Cooking up something.

Planting some seeds.

*On Being (Together)* is a set of poems by Francesca Sobande that “were shaped by writing time during GEM gatherings, including the sense of encouragement and openness that are part of them.”

Read the full set of poems on the [\*\*Black Presence\*\*](#) page of the GEM website.



# Resources - country primers

Early in the event that has become the current genocide on Palestine, GEM pulled together [an extensive resource on Palestine](#), in response to voices we heard who felt they did not know enough about Palestine to speak up or take action.

We recognise the resource may actually be too much to take in for various reasons, but especially for those looking for something more introductory, concise or manageable.

We also recognise that there are so many more genocides and ongoing atrocities that we could and should raise awareness on, and as such are currently pulling together resources from various sources that we hope will be of use. So much is already out there - our hope is just to present brief primers compiling available information in an accessible manner.

We will share each primer as it is completed, and intend to have them available [here, on this resources page](#) on our website. Please keep checking back for updates.

# Things that have struck us

**The Digital Sisterhood** is “a platform that aims to unite women of color [sic] and counter the pre-existing narrative on what it means to be a Muslim woman”. Their podcast shares personal stories and believes “[s]torytelling has the power to not only create connections but provide universal truths about ourselves and the world.”



The current series of the podcast includes episodes which provide an insight into:

- Palestine - *If I Must Die*
- Sudan - *Sudan's Collective Grief is Never Ending*
- Uyghur Muslims - *Dada, I Won't Forget Who We Are*



**Captain Support (UK)** is “a grassroots organisation which works in solidarity with all people criminalised for crossing borders or facilitating freedom of movement. The collective provides practical solidarity to people in prison and post-release as well as campaigning for systemic change against criminalisation of migration in the UK, alongside Captain Support International.”

They have an upcoming fundraising event on Sunday 19th May in Bethnal Green, with SOAS Detainee support and others, a discussion on “our collective fight against borders, policing, and genocide” - [tickets available at this link](#).

# GEM Members' updates

## **Nejma Collective**

Nejma Collective is “a UK-based collective of Muslim volunteers working in solidarity with people in prison by sharing resources and mutual support, motivated by Islamic justice.”

Over the past few months, they raised over £10,000 to provide Muslims in prison with “money to buy food, clothing and phone credit to speak to their loved ones”; hosted an in-person event on policing in Palestine; and an online event which focused on the experiences of Palestinian men and boys in the Israeli prison system (live tweet threads here and here).

Nejma are currently raising funds for three Palestinian organisations that provide support and defend the rights of Palestinians in prison – support them here.

Remember you can join Nejma’s mailing list to keep up to date with their latest projects and strategies around working with our friends in prison.

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## **Statement from ASRA Club – a call out to community on safe spaces and the erasure of Black Muslim women**

ASRA Club, founded by GEM member Sahra-Isha, is “a community space centring Muslim women in sports, wellness and sisterhood”. Earlier this year, they made a statement calling out Islamophobia, misogynoir, sexist and anti-Black abuses members have been subjected to and the changes needed at a community level to address these.

Read ASRA’s statement on the GEM site, and get in touch with ASRA if you can support.

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## **Big Brands Are Watching You: Marketing Social Justice and Digital Culture**

In January, GEM member, Francesca Sobande, released *Big Brands Are Watching You* which “investigates corporate culture, from the branding of companies and nations to television portrayals of big business and the workplace”.

Francesca introduces some of *Big Brands’* ideas in her blogpost, *Moving in Silence and the Business of Being “Anti-Social Media”*, and chapter 1 of the book (*Setting the Scene: Social Justice for Sale*) is freely accessible here on the UC Press website.