

The Tools and Methods towards Liberatory Joy - Research Through Faraoyść

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How do you imagine alternatives if you either don't have the space for it, or are being restrained from imagining? Faraoyść - the shared emotion of joy liberated from systems of oppression, which creates a portal towards possible new realities - is a method that facilitates the imagination of alternatives to our current reality currently determined by what is known, what is assumed, and what stops one from imagining. We created and developed tools to cultivate and evoke faraoyść that involved poetry writing, culturally-specific storytelling, music, co-design, and the action of naming the self and objects. These tools resulted in a collective emotional intelligence and emergent worldbuilding that helped participants materialize speculative objects and co-create stories. As researchers, our tools were developed through our design principles which require being invited by a community seeking to unlock their capacity to imagine alternatives, and co-designing with them. Faraoyść aims to empower, and gives specific tools for those who search for new ones. These methods co-create concrete utopias that are rooted in historically situated struggles, and are done through the lens of serious play. We share our process of developing these tools and methods in constant conversant collaboration around a roundtable.

Faraoyść, alternative worldbuilding, speculative design, imagining

Introduction

Anna:

Welcome to our roundtable discussion. We've chosen to go a bit unorthodox with our structure. We will be showing discussion about the tools and methods of liberated joy that we developed and discovered in our research into emergent collective worldbuilding, and layering that with quotes and examples of the tools themselves.

Julia:

This roundtable is a discursive exercise that we always do in our constant conversant collaborations¹. These moments, stored in our memories and our bodies, represent very important spaces. These are spaces where worldbuilding can be collective processes through the celebration of different worldviews, stories and situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988). They are spaces where imagination has emergent properties outside of the limits of time. What is on my mind right now are the tools we used in our world-building workshops in the past two years through a lenses of *faraoyść*², which forms the groundwork of everything we do.

Nour:

The word *faraoyść* came into life from our own conversations of feeling an emotion we didn't have a name for. These conversations turned into a praxis where we mash-up our languages, our cultures and our different ways of imagining. We employed a variety of efforts to evoke *faraoyść*, all stemming from the idea of "avra kehdavra" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2009), or, "I create as I speak". If we want to create the objects, the language, and communities necessary to change our world, we need to start by imagining *alternative* worlds from a place of liberated joy. Which is why we've created a recipe for a successful *faraoyść* approach to design?

Julia:

I love that recipe metaphor. I would even say that what is unique for the tools we collaboratively built is that they are not only design-led but also emotion-led. To be as specific as we can: *faraoyść*-led tools and methods, which are the feelings of liberatory farah, radość, joy, even if momentarily felt – is at core of every space we build, ingredient by ingredient.

Anna:

And these *faraoyść*-led methods allow us to develop tactics and strategies to bridge the imaginative worlds that our participants create. This shifts one's agency over their imagination, and puts the strategies and tactics developed in the practice of that imaginative act back into the hands of the participants. This surfaces and challenges "captive imaginations" which are imaginations that have been captured and oppressed through interlocking systems such as capitalism and colonization (Karuri-Sebina, G. et. al 2020). These tools and methods can contribute to the decolonial project because not only does it lay bare the ways colonization places limitations on the colonized person's ability to imagine alternatives, but it also allows the terms of struggle and liberation to be defined by those directly affected by colonization. We engaged in these methods as researchers who were able to create a space for co-imagination, not as "saviors" who were coming in with any sort of answer.

¹ Through talking to each other and constantly trying to communicate across cultures, languages and experiences – researchers developed a conversation space that leads to collaborations between them.

² *Faraoyść* (faw-row-she-tchi) is a portmanteau neologism that describes the moment when oppression appears to be coming to an end and a joyful, liberated world feels within reach. An exercise of translanguistic belonging combining elements from three of researchers languages: (Arabic: farah, English: joy, Polish: radość).

Nour:

It is important to note that a good chef always knows how to improvise while cooking, and therefore the facilitation of our workshops also comes with improvisation and reacting to the conversation we are having in-situ. This work is a piece of a larger project that we've been working on for the past two years. We are showing you our basic ingredients that support our work. We hope you'll get a taste of *faraoyśc*.

These recipes were created and tested in a series of workshops both at the UNESCO 2020 Futures Literacy Summit in and in collaboration with Negligence Refugees*³ from Lebanon.

Ingredient 01: Self-Renaming

*"Imagine me as Mango."*⁴

Nour:

I think the first tool we should talk about is self-renaming.

Anna:

Yes! This was a deceptively simple tool that we designed in response to using digitally mediated collaborative spaces due to both the COVID-19 pandemic and the fact that our participants were already globally distributed. I guess you could easily do self-renaming in-person with name tags, also. Maybe you could even incorporate symbols and images...you wouldn't be limited to an alphabet. How it works is that at the beginning of each workshop, we asked participants to change their Zoom names to their favorite food or to a word that warmed their heart. As facilitators we also renamed ourselves. We found that this act of renaming broke down power hierarchies because participants could no longer identify themselves by their institutional affiliation or their reputation in the field, which was a common observation at the UNESCO Futures Literacy Summit and other conferences we engaged in.

Julia:

Self-renaming also created these beautiful moments of connection between people. During our workshop, every time you had to call someone by the name they'd chosen for themselves, like "Mango", you knew something intimate about that person, and could feel the barriers melting.

Nour:

Name changing also added a layer of absurdity and humor to our intense conversation. Just like salt in chocolate, it allowed for some flavorful conversations to emerge. It acted as a threshold between reality and our alternative world. It brought laughter and vulnerability to our workshops, and therefore allowed conversations to flow more freely regardless of the intensity of the discussion. It evoked *serious play* which is one of our fundamental design principles (Kamara, 2021).

³ *Negligence Refugees* are a discrete part of the Lebanese diaspora who have immigrated from Lebanon due to systemic negligence and corruption in the current government. Definition by Nour Abou Jaoude, 2020.

⁴ Quote from one of the participants of UNESCO Futures Literacy Summit *faraoyśc* workshop held in 2020.

Julia:

If you think about it, naming is such a powerful tool that we use in our everyday lives. Words hold power. And the act of renaming yourself, the choice you make to surface what you want to surface in that moment through a particular word or sound – it shakes the linguistic barriers in the space, and transforms it. I truly think that *self-renaming* is one of the ingredients that made participants feel like they co-own the space, that they belong to it as we say in Polish “*na swoich własnych zasadach*”⁵.

Ingredient 02: Memory Recall Through Poetry

“Close your eyes. Think of a moment when you experienced the feeling of oppression possibly coming to an end. The feeling that maybe there would be change on the horizon, that possibly, even for a second, liberation was coming. For us, in these moments, we felt that the foundation of various systems of oppression in our lives were shaken, and made visible. We felt a liberated future on the horizon.

Now, think about your own memory of feeling that way. Find that feeling again within yourself. Open your eyes.

Take a few minutes. Play a song that you feel connected to. Write a poem about this moment in your memory for the duration of the song⁶. It doesn’t have to be complex, just try, as Audre Lorde would say, to name the nameless and formless feeling you felt (Lorde, 1984).”

Anna:

Another tool we developed enabled emergent collective worldbuilding, which was crucial for our process. We developed a memory recall technique that surfaced participants' individual memories of *faraoyść*. We then asked that they express these memories through poems and culturally-specific stories. After writing these individual stories, participants then broke out into groups and were tasked with creating an alternative world that had to incorporate elements from each of their individual stories in some way. In one experiment they created speculative words, in another they created speculative objects and names.

Julia:

Poetry can seem like a mystical, inaccessible world, accessible for only a few. But as Audre Lorde (1984) says “Poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action” (Lorde, 1984). Deconstructing and reconstructing your own joyful, liberated memory through the act of writing a poem to yourself allowed participants to take a moment for themselves, look inward and find the feeling of *faraoyść*, and materialize it in the words they wrote.

⁵ [Eng.] *on their own rules*.

⁶ During our workshops we played a song by Lebanese artists. “Al Thoulathy Al Mareh - الغلاطي المرح - Asmar Ya Sukkar (Radio Martiko RMLP005).” YouTube, YouTube, 20 Sept. 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=qF6t620jfSg.

Nour:

Memory recall was an essential element in the thinking and the continuity of the work. We answered the question: how can people and societies imagine collective and inclusive futures together if they do not know each other's past and memories? Once our participants shared their memories in the breakout rooms, it evoked a coming together which made the possibilities of imagining futures collectively more tolerable.

Ingredient 03: Słowords Alchimie⁷ – Word Creation

*“Circle a line from your *faraoyść* poem and imagine a new reality that uses this line as its core. Think of an image, object, environment that you start seeing in your mind out of the sentence you wrote.*

Imagine an object that would exist in this world. One that doesn't yet exist in ours. What is it? What does it look like? What sounds does it make? Now create a name for it that doesn't yet exist in your language. A name that would make sense only in this new reality that you are imagining.”

Julia:

Creating new words aims to disrupt the methodological difficulties of existing language in Futures spaces. By creating sounds and making words that didn't exist for them before, participants challenge the current terminology for imagination and worldbuilding. By doing this, they engage in discourse with other disciplines and fields, as epistemological structures are collectively collapsed, re-negotiated and re-built in the action of *słowords alchemi*.

Nour:

It is common in the Lebanese spoken language to create neologisms that are influenced by French, English, Italian, and Arabic. The words that our participants created during the workshops married memories, cultures, futures, pasts, with their *faraoyść* emotions.

Anna:

The action of word creation also formed relational connections of translinguistic belonging amongst the participants (Canagarajah, 2017). The action of co-creating also created the conditions for emergent properties that became more than the sum of its parts. Here are some examples of the words and moments of translingualism that occurred in our workshops:

*“This is when surfers and seals love the same things. It looks like this....[video glitch skfzskz, sound of bubbles underwater, water, blub blub blub] multiple voices saying "**beluvial, beluvial, beluvial**", [sounds of being underwater, water crashing & glitch, the ocean] And you'll send me home with one more than I needed to witness the joy.” [sound of water]
(FUTURE-1)*

*“Our word is **Flowlam**. Which is the combination of the flow, following the flow, and Salaam in Arabic, peace. And we would like these are the core values of our future we want because*

⁷ Neologism from researchers' languages: Polish – słowo, English – words, and French – alchimie.

when you follow the flow, you can go up and down, but you're in the flow and whatever happens, you're there, and you're always at peace.” (FUTURE-8)

*“The future we decided on is one in which we're no longer counting the years. And the word that we came up with is **swivejam**. And it represents, kind of when you don't measure time anymore, and time is no longer transactional.” (FUTURE - 5)*

Julia:

Translinguistic belonging also contributed to the decolonial elements of our project by decentering and disrupting English-language supremacy in academic and development spaces. By creating new words, participants could draw from their own local experiences and knowledge. As Tyson Yunkaporta (2019) says: “English inevitably places settler worldviews at a center of every concept, obscuring true understanding. For example, explaining Aboriginal notions of time is an exercise in futility as you can only describe it as “non-linear” in English, which immediately slams a big line right across your synapses...” (p4-6).

Ingredient 04: Behavioral Mimicry

“Julia: Faraoyść is a portmanteau of the words fara[h]...Nour did I say that right?

Nour: Farah. Yes.

Julia: Perfect. It's a combination of the Arabic word: farah; the English word: joy; and the Polish word: radość...”

Nour:

We incorporated Chartrand's and Lakin's theories of behavioral mimicry and Brechtian performance theory into our workshop which allowed us to all co-create a space together (Chartrand & Lakin, 2013; Brecht & Bentley, 1961). We modeled certain behaviors in our facilitation, for example Julia saying “farah”, which is in Arabic (a language she doesn't speak), and then deliberately checking the pronunciation with me. This integrated humor into the workshop and word pronunciation and combated the shame that is associated with mispronunciation. It made participants realize that there is room for “mistakes”. By demonstrating our own blind spots and vulnerabilities, participants could mirror this behavior in their co-creative breakout rooms and be confident in questioning and visibilizing their own biases, fears, and vulnerabilities. This allowed participants to see existing constraints on their imaginations, which was the first step towards eventual questioning and expanding.

Julia:

This ingredient is an important part of creating a collective emotional intelligence together. Worldbuilding together is such a delicate process because of the constant power struggles that come with it. When the negotiation comes from our own expressed vulnerability as Nour said, it allows the process of building that is becoming full of known unknowns. I think this ingredient comes with a lot of care, and negotiation – how to be together without enforcing particular dynamics and hierarchies of ways to imagine.

The Final Recipe

Julia:

Through our *faraoyść* workshops both at UNESCO Futures Summit and with Negligence Refugees from Lebanon, our findings demonstrated a sense of liberation, a desire for self-organized, self-determined societies, a world that operates in queer time, and a sense of BEING-WITH. Our research found that by centering the workshops through a collective feeling of *faraoyść*, people from different backgrounds: Lebanese, Polish, American, refugee, diaspora, etc, were able to find communal connection. They created concrete, materialized utopian realities that challenged dystopia (Muñoz, 2009). This work builds capacity to imagine, and imagine through a lens of liberated joy.

Anna:

Each tool was co-designed and responsive to the people in the room. When we combined our ingredients:

- One pinch of self-renaming for spark and hierarchy disruption
- 1 cup of memory recall and poetry to add the depth of lived history
- Several spoonfuls of new words to create never-before-known flavors
- Three whole mirrors to create a space for vulnerability, questioning, and turbulent exploration

We found that people were capable of not just imagining new worlds that addressed the systemic oppressions they were experiencing, but create collective tactics that would bridge the current and the alternative. We're in a moment where new strategies and tactics are desperately needed.

Nour:

And as we said, we believe this can contribute to the global de-colonial project because it allows communities to imagine their own alternatives by centering their own definitions of *faraoyść*, and their own memories of feeling liberatory joy as a seed for liberatory futures. Participants can identify the extent to which their imaginings have been colonized, and break out of those frameworks by placing themselves in the alternative.

And don't forget, for this recipe to be a success, it needs a splash of disco, funk music⁸, and groove to get yourself in the right mind to cook some futures.

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About the Authors

Nour Abou-Jaoude is an experienced freelance creative strategist, with a deep commitment to systems change and the futures of our societies. Growing up in Lebanon, she had to learn from a young age how to inspire and create with limited resources in innovative and efficient ways. Throughout her life and career, she learned to navigate multiple barriers and boundaries through storytelling. Her unique experience gives her room to design for the complexity of societies in a compassionate way. During her time as an Art Director in Leo Burnett Beirut, Nour successfully led an integrated, 360-degree campaign to abolish article 522 of the Lebanese Penal Code, which stated that a rapist was exonerated if they marry their victim. As a result of the media pressure exerted on parliament by her campaign, the code was abolished. She graduated in 2021 with an MFA from Parsons, in Transdisciplinary Design and acquired skills such as service design, and speculative design. She speaks three languages fluently (French, Arabic and English) and found that the act of translation between these three languages reveals hiccups and dislocations in the systems that surround her and therefore gives her room to design for change accordingly.

Julia W. Szagdaj is an experimentalist, transmedia artist, and researcher who believes imagination should start from the heart. An immigrant in the English language. Selected as YICCA 2020 finalist with her speculative work "Accentful American Anthem" which imagined a world where speech becomes more multicultural and inclusive, representing various linguistic patterns, poetic irregularities, ways of story-singing, and emotions. She has a background in non-profits, humanitarian organizations, and social businesses focusing on children's education. She graduated in 2021 from Parsons School of Design with an MFA in Transdisciplinary Design and presented at UNESCO Futures Literacy Summit, ADX 2021 Conference, Core77. Currently, she works as a learning scientist and systems transformation consultant at UNDP and is involved with other activists in fighting for women's rights in Poland.

Anna Lathrop is a futurist and transdisciplinary artist whose work lies at the intersection of alternative world-building and justice. She also works in theatre as a director and producer, and the co-founder of Groundwater Arts - a citizen-artist collective working to reenvision American arts and entertainment through a climate-justice lens. When not doing any of the above, she is also a painter. She has consulted and presented at UNESCO Futures Literacy Summit, Patagonia, ADX 2021 Conference, and is a mentor in the Emerging Scholars program at Design and Culture Journal. She is also a teacher in the Strategic Design and Management (BBA) program at The New School. She received her MFA in Transdisciplinary Design from Parsons School of Design at the New School in 2021, is a member of the Impact Entrepreneur Fellowship, and a recipient of the John L. Tishman scholarship.