

EDINBURGH TV FESTIVAL

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MACTAGGART LECTURE August 22nd 2018

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Please check against delivery

STRICTLY EMBARGOED UNTIL 18.30, WEDNESDAY, 22ND AUGUST 2018

Somehow I've found myself standing before you all, in front of this podium, to give a 'lecture'; ex-boyfriends have accused me of giving these; Universities have accused me of never attending them; but my relationship with this word has had a rebirth: The MacTaggart Lecture. Let's face it, I don't really know how it works in this house, unlike my wonderful predecessor Jon Snow, this whole reading things I haven't memorised from a screen for strangers, is brand new shit, but I'm so, so glad for this opportunity, this platform, and for the urgency it's instilled in me, to learn, but I'm really nervous. Who wouldn't be nervous. Maybe only like 5%? 95% of this room would be a wrack of nerves, it's a bit much innit?

Thank you again, for inviting me here to speak, as a creative, to you, our producers, our broadcasters, and those aspiring for careers in such fields today. As a creative, I'm going to do what I do best, I'm going to tell you a story. Maybe you can look for patterns.

I was born and raised in London. The Square Mile, sometimes considered Tower Hamlets, sometimes considered, "City of London"; home to both the Stock Exchange and the Bank of England.

Between its modern corporate skyscraper towers and medieval alleyways, exists a social housing estate. Right there, in plain sight, yet somehow unseen. It was originally built in 1977, with the aim to help homeless people in London, and that's my proud home. Even now, there may be someone rushing past it for the hundredth time, briefcase in hand, with no idea this council estate exists.

We lived directly opposite the Royal Bank of Scotland, which somehow felt, 'other' and slightly bizarre. Not the Scottish bit, the Royal bank bit.

At most, we were one of four black families there. Not something I thought anyone gave a damn about, until someone left a pile of shit on our doorstep. My Mum silently cleaned it up. But when we received a bag of shit through our *letter-box*, as an adult I had no choice but to take things into my seven-year-old hands. I walked around the estate, swung on the swings, desperate for transparency wondering, " who?"... "who are the enemies of my family?"

I figured it was Sam, so I'd call her an ugly wanker, then Sam would call me a dirty nigger. We would fight, that was just our way of expressing our mistrust and fear of those who were visually or culturally different from ourselves. But we also had fun. The same Sam would be at mine for Nintendo between scraps, my mum would make us scones.

The miracle of my estate was Noah, on the best of days, he'd lean out of his window and sprinkle halal penny sweets down. As they fell, *every* child of every colour and creed would scramble from the playground and scrabble for a sweet.

These sweets weren't wrapped or nothing; the tastebuds were fully *aware* of the pavement in the mix, but we didn't mind, the point was you got a sweet today and other people didn't. Are you chewing?; 'iss lit'. You're lit.

Not far from the square mile, there's a theatre, where you might say my route into TV started. Mother, a single, hardworking, immigrant to England, was a health and social sciences student and a weekend cleaner. She discovered a theatre would allow children from low income families to join their youth workshops for free: *free*, was cheaper than *childcare*, and at eight-years-old I was a part of Bridewell Youth Theatre. The only black person.

I loved it, we played from morning till noon, and we'd sometimes even appear as ensemble in their main plays. I didn't know or care what the plays were about, but I would cry for *weeks* when they ended 'coz it meant a cast were leaving that had just started to feel like family.

Later I joined a girls secondary school in my borough, where new bonds replaced lost ones. A crew of ten misfits mainly hailing from Africa and the Caribbean. I'll never forget our first IT class, pretending to listen to a teacher ramble on about modems and CD Roms then the sudden sound of glass shattering out of what was a window, just seconds before a girls head was smashed through it. Even more disturbing was the sound in the room that immediately followed; laughter.

We 10-year-olds learned the rules of the game quickly; from nine to three, laugh or be laughed *at*, and after three? Go home, to your room, and cry, whilst in my case, attaching my head-brace.

This was a Catholic School in which student prostitution wasn't a shock, but a gorgeous bit of gossip to spread; a school in which, you could, on weekends find the rare sighting of a teacher in the middle of an East London market slouched on a curb on the cusp of alcohol induced paralysis; and as one would a shooting star, you were lucky if you caught a glimpse.

This was 1999. We were the 12-year-olds with Nokia 3310's. The 121 network would malfunction, and calls would unintentionally be free. That's right, "Free calls!" the news would fly like Falcons through our communities and upon the wings of those Eastward Falcons? The *most important of news*: Janette sucked her own left tit. Clare had sex at the back of the bus with Bola, Martina's selling bagels out of a bin bag for 20p, 25p if you want ketchup.

By 2002 though, our perception of 'IT' was taking a strange turn. This wasn't a boring waste of time, this was a training ground, for the most powerful weapon a girl of 13 could have: the anonymous creation of webpages. What faster cheaper way to disseminate, implicate and destroy. A new age had begun; a sharper knife, a silent gun with limitless bullets, trigger puller unknown; delicious, until I found myself on the wrong end of it; as the "big lipped coconut who gave three blowjobs last week".

A coconut: an insult used to describe one who is black on the outside but white on the inside, as you would imagine a coconut. Or you could just imagine looking at the first black girl in the school's history to join in the Irish dance team; that's what I was. I performed, middle of the row, fuckin' smashed it.

But blow jobs? I was outraged. The only thing I was blowing was the clarinet. I'd been bullied about these lips for a while. As I'd fine-tuned my clarinet skills, alone in the music room, some of the older girls in my school would come in and block the door. They'd insult my lips, how big they were, how ugly they were, releasing me only when the tears became visible. Needless to say...I had a sturdy amount of baggage, that fuelled me...into creating my first ever webpage.

Although those sites were anonymous, I decided to sacrifice my anonymity by mentioning those unique insults thrown my way. What I threw back was an attack, not on them, but on their ideals, 'imma geek so what?'. 'my trainers ain't designer so what?' 'I love the Irish step dance, so what?'

I made it funny, I insulted myself. But also let it be known, I didn't give a fuck.

One day, the Queen sat next to me in Science. And she really was considered by all of us a real Queen; like Claire Foy. Soft, gentle, easily recognisable by her loud, brash laugh. I'd never spoken to her, hadn't dared I just felt this intrinsic desire to respect and keep distance. But she sat there, looked me in the eye, and whispered she was pregnant and breaking the news to me in advance so I'd keep her off my webpage. She let me feel her baby bump; the first I'd ever felt, in her 14-year-old belly; a baby having a baby. The webpages were brutal; print outs would pass around classes, we'd giggle at public destruction, the occasional laugh-snort marred with mania and misery heard. I respected her more than anyone I'd ever met, but even if I hadn't, even if I'd hated her, I'd no desire to put that information anywhere. May her soul rest in peace. I was passing my main bully in the corridor. She was on the phone, roaming back and forth, stressed, nonetheless she had a few seconds for me: "Look at your fat lip". I turned to her, and agreed, I added that it was the hardest

part of my Mum's pregnancy; pushing them out. I said she seemed stressed and asked if she wanted a hug. She never spoke to me again.

Coming from the tiny square mile, and a tiny family, what carried me through those five years, was the abundance of black girls, white girls, mixed girls; misfits, my friends were *all* misfits; a huge gang of commercially unattractive, beautiful misfits, who found the mainstream world unattractive.

From the outside; we were difficult to distinguish, but on the inside known by name, and nature. This isn't only what carried me through those years, those girls, made those the best five of my life.

New bonds replaced lost ones upon finding myself in a church. I fell in love with God, with 'Jesus'; his actions, his character. I read the Bible and loved its metaphors, its *hope*, it's what propelled me into becoming a poet.

It was clear I liked telling stories. I was told to apply for something called a drama school, so I dropped out of Uni, again. It was my second go at it, and in two years I'd been to only one English lecture. The lecture was fine, was good, but bumped into a friend on the way out and found out I'd just sat through a lecture for Law students. I'd no idea, I'd even taken notes. So I left, to "tell stories". My Mum was concerned, she was an NHS mental health nurse at the time and what could she do but watch my future fall into uncertainty? Where was I climbing to? Why was there no clear sign of safety at the end of the ladder?

I got in, to a drama school. In a year of only 23. A drama school in my square mile; I'd grown up walking past it my whole life not knowing what it was and now, I was a member of its family. I was told its theatre attracted agents from far and wide and during the final year they'd come, to see us perform, and sign the hottest talent. Like

kids scrabbling for a sweet from above. Silk Street Theatre; where the hottest talent, met the hottest agents, to partner with the hottest casting directors, to make the hottest period dramas.

I was the first black girl they'd accepted in five years, coined by the head of the school, as "the elephant in the room". This was my third attempt at a university, I'd still never been into a pub, to a festival, I just hadn't. I'd never watched *Fawlty Towers*, or *Red Dwarf*, or heard of the any festival in Edinburgh I just hadn't and struggled to converse on things I didn't know about. I was watching a lot of TV; *Seinfeld*, *Moesha*, *Golden Girls*, *Buffy*, shows no one really spoke about. So, I spent most of my time in the corridor, perched, like a falcon, and retreated into my hood.

I was called a nigger twice in drama school. The first was by a teacher during a "walk in the space" improvisation that had nothing to do with race. "Oi, nigger, what you got for me?" We students continued walking in the space, the two black boys and I glancing at each other whenever we passed..." who's she talking to?" we'd whisper, "boy, not me" "nah that was for you" passing around responsibility like a hot potato, muffling our laugh-snorts. I wonder what the other students thought of our complicity. The second time was a girl in my own year. After class, myself and the same two boys found ourselves perched in the corridor; she passed and waved "see you later niggers!" ...We three blacks of Orient were posed with a dilemma; "niggers" ... plural. This hot potato belonged to us all. I chose to act, I called her back and calmly gave her sound advice. She smiled, continued her way, and never, said, sorry.

Drama school was problematic, in so many ways. As an Evangelical Christian, the plan was to teach the homosexuals about Jesus, but I accidentally ended up becoming best friends with some and learning from these other kind of misfits. Yes,

homosexual bonds replaced biblical ones. I still love the character of Jesus. I just started paying attention to the stuff written *around* Him, written by people who knew how to write and didn't care for what I read.

We were told at school, if we wanted to pursue this, we should be 'yes' people, and expect to be poor for the rest of our lives. *Climb* because you want to tell *stories*. I loved the concept! All of us united, climbing towards story-telling at the risk of poverty screaming "Yes!"

In a class exercise however, the teacher commanded we "run to point 'A' if our parents owned a home or to point B if they didn't" - when everybody else ran to point A, and I found myself isolated at point B, I was astounded, had land-owning taken over my blackness? Why did this class exercise even exist?

I thought. Then blogged about it. Not about how hard it was not owning a house; I wrote about the resilience born from having no safety net at all, having to climb ladders with no stable ground beneath you.

On top of it all our ladders were faulty, born climbing a ladder before we could walk and better climb *fast*, lest it snap beneath your feet! I told people to keep climbing, for love of it, whatever the craft, not because of financial profit, or safety, what *is* 'safety?' I wrote that such circumstances can leave you feeling destined for defeat, or, it could do something else; it could breed a determination, a relentless pursuit of one's dream that no safe man could ever replicate. I changed the narrative, by twisting it to my favour.

This idea of a profit ladder was producing such a desperate pursuit in some around me. For those who *had* no means of *getting* more they were arrested. I was aware even then, that the proportion of black people imprisoned in the UK was almost seven times our share of the population; seven times.

I blogged again.

One day an emergency meeting was scheduled between our year and the teachers. We gathered. Some students made small talk about the toilets not flushing, a teacher ensured they'd be fixed, then BANG 'Michaela, what are these blogs?'

I'd upset people, people who didn't see colour, or class. A year later, a friend saw me perched in the corridor. She apologised for going to the teachers back then and orchestrating a meeting that she, and many others *knew* would take place, long before it occurred. I also knew that already, because a homosexual gave me a tip-off in advance: Tribe.

I just loved the craft, I didn't mind the occasional 'nigger' slip or military coup I just wanted to be a lead on the Silk Street Stage, I had to get a lead part at least once. I'm the first black girl in half a decade! How could they *not*?

My ego's dreams came true. I was to play Lysistrata *in* Lysistrata, and my year were really happy for me. We only later found out, this performance wouldn't be on Silk Street, it would be in South London; a 35-minute drive across the river. My mates were sad. They hugged me. "No agent is going to come to this Michaela, not the hot ones, they simply won't cross the river."

I *lived* in E1, everyone who lives in E1 knows, we live *by* the river, but even we don't cross it. There was always an option to remove yourself from a main show to do a 15-minute solo piece; rarely did anyone do this as it wasn't on Silk Street, it was in the basement.

But this wasn't about agents anymore, it was a chance to create something that wasn't a period drama designed in period costumes. I wanted to make something for this period. I wrote a dark comedy called Chewing Gum Dreams. A title born from a poem; that poem born from an image in my mind.

Of a tall council flat, tall as the Tower of Babel, winged Falcons soaring round its highest floor in perpetual circles. Watching the jet planes and helicopters fly by, curious of life beyond their tower, but terrified of leaving it. Their wings were weighed down by gossip, dissemination, rivalry, fitting in, but also by love, passion, dreams. There's only so much a Falcon could carry, so we'd offload the things society taught *us* were most superfluous; dreams, love, and passion and down they'd descend; dreams, free-falling from our tower block, already forgotten before crashing into the pavement, trampled on by our newly-acquired designer trainers, squashed into the pavement like chewing gum; Chewing Gum Dreams. I played 11 parts. The response in that basement was something neither I nor they had ever experienced, and on that high I did what I do best: I dropped out.

A University graduate acquired land in Hackney, he'd turned it into a theatre and accepted my play for a four-day run despite my submission being late. Having read the script, he gave two notes; crucial notes. I listened. The rest however; direction, set design, costume, flyer design, marketing was down to me.

I advertised on social media that if you met me in Tinsel Town; I'd buy you a milkshake if you bought a ticket. The milkshake bought a lot of people to the yard. I sat there from 1pm till 1am; ticket sales increased. I did this while editing and rehearsing the script. It was exciting.

My show went up, and the audience went up with me, on my wings; responding, understanding, laughing and crying in every place I hoped they would. People came, who *looked* at things the way *I* did; and saw they didn't fit, some felt they'd spent most of their lives being judged and disempowered before even speaking. The misfits were inspired, to create.

So I continued speaking. As an actor, at the National Theatre, I remained there for a year playing and bonding in various plays; I even had a four-day run of Chewing Gum Dreams in The Shed; a temporary theatre. It was great. Many more misfits came.

The play was read by a production company that sat under the umbrella of a huge production company. They asked if I wanted to make a TV show 'yes of course holy shit sure'.

They suggested I omit "Dreams" from the title, I said 'yes of course holy shit sure'. First, I was to write and read a 20-minute version of what I imagined the TV show to look like and invite a small audience for a channel who were interested. I was then asked to write three, five-minute scenes of TV to be uploaded onto the internet, those were the first attempts at scenes I'd ever written for TV. I had no practice; obviously, I was an outsider.

Yes, *outsider*, not in a bad way, I wasn't out in the rain. I just wasn't here. When people mention 'diversity' I can guess we mean people who aren't watching, or making much of our telly; creatives 'outside of' this industry. I can't use the word diversity, because really I couldn't get clarity on it, I can't use 'outsider' because the in/out thing becomes reminiscent of Brexit so I'm gonna take on another existing word; 'misfit' and change the meaning of it just for this lecture:

I've already made my own website, with a dictionary definition. Here:

ON SCREEN (and I'll read)

The term misfits takes on dual notions; a misfit is one who looks at life differently. Many however, are made into misfits because life looks at them differently; the UK's black, Asian, and ginger communities for example. And there are, many other examples.

The term Misfits can be cross-generational and crosses concepts of gender or culture, simply by a desire for transparency, a desire to see another's point of view. Misfits who visibly fit in will sometimes find themselves merging with the mainstream, for a feeling of safety.

Synonyms; Outsider, Falcon.

I'm calling any challenge to my definition, Fake News.

Of late, channels, production companies, and online streaming services have found themselves scrabbling for misfits, like kids in a playground scrabbling for sweets, desperate for a chew. Not sure of the taste of these sweets, these dreams, just aware they might be very profitable.

The jet plane hovers over the tower, not sure where to land, *how* to land *if* at all.

In the quest for new *writers* the misfit *looking* people are instinctively sought after first. But instead of nurturing them to write for themselves, the last few years have seen an immediate coupling with writers before the process has begun. Writers more experienced, who fit in to this house more.

Is it important that voices, used to interruption, get the experience of writing something without interference at least once?

We seem unsure, unknowing of their world and therefore their stories. So maybe we're a little tentative; uploading three or four short scenes; or one full episode but *online*. The new creator uses social media platforms to tell their followers, the outsiders who don't watch telly, that finally, they've been able to make something for TV - online.

The channel and producers study the comments on social media, investigating the audience's response? Is that important? I think so. The fact that this year, *three* major US shows have been cancelled and revived by social media alone confirms that a medium *outside* of television, is beginning to take control of it. Do you let them in, to start making it with you, or do you block them out? Does it matter?

Social media has done great things for us. It's allowed some of us to feel more loved, encouraged, connected, to make, and share work but it's also raised anxiety, paranoia and loneliness in young people especially. Are we informing our young people of the possible negatives, or are we too busy capitalising on it?

I don't know, I already told you I'm new to this house, but after the misfits enjoyed my three scenes, a producer called to say the head of the head of the Head of the Channel greenlit my series. The feeling of "yes", I liken to the standing ovation at the end of my play.

They asked me if I'd like to write the show alone, I said: 'yes course, holy shit yes.' Patrons of the National Theatre who'd once heard me perform a poem, asked if I was writing anything else. They gave me the keys to their second home, in America, by a lake; to write in, for no personal gain at all. I didn't realise just how disconnected this part of America would be, however.

Where were the people, the sirens, the noise? Where was the WIFI? It was safe, so safe, too quiet.

I'd check the doors were locked repeatedly, check social media perpetually. After a few days I had no choice but to relax. In those two weeks I wrote drafts of all six episodes. How, had a Falcon never flown to a Lake?

Back in London my scripts were noted by the company. Notes were given on Friday nights and expected back redrafted by Monday. Calculating the hours easily, I saw I could reach my targets if I erased the concept of weekends, and saw sleeping as something you didn't do deeply, or every night, just *some* nights, like anal.

I still wasn't getting it right. The producer rang to say the commissioner thought I needed co-writers urgently. I got the call in Boots. I was picking up some tights, then found myself sobbing into the tights and discreetly leaving them there, for someone else to buy.

I was making a story about the world from my view, from the view of those misfits I'd grown up with, who looked at things a bit like I did. A view rarely found on TV. Did these co-writers know my world from the *inside*? Or was their view vague? Could they distinguish our nature from the outside? I don't know, the exec producer pushed the Head of Comedy to read my scripts, after which the search for emergency co-writers was terminated.

For creatives, there is a beauty in carving your own story, conceiving it, at least once, alone, *then* allowing others to assist in nurturing and maturing it. Particularly for unheard voices, the voices denied, or for those who, given the *opportunity* to speak, find themselves surrendering to immediate interruption: is co-writing immediate interruption? What would my scripts have been, had they been interfered with at such an embryonic stage? I was relieved.

However, after draft 29, a friend discovered my body, on the floor, in the dark. I was looking for my brain. He asked what my script editor was doing? I asked what a script editor was. I called the producers. They didn't want one, they wanted it to be my "baby". That's nice, but this is my first pregnancy, if we wanted this baby to be *cute*, instead of the pram the world wished it never peaked into, I couldn't do it alone and I needed a doctor.

"Things, have to be, episodic" said the script editor, I'd never heard that word before. "Episodic". "And you haven't factored in commercial breaks, when you finish the first half, give them a reason to come back". He drew a map of my storylines on a whiteboard, and simply rearranged them, almost mathematically. I was impressed, he had great tools. He thought I had great stories. We began shooting.

I was on set all day even when I wasn't in a scene. Doing rewrites in the trailer; assessing where I could save the producers money despite having no clue how much that money was. I'd rewrite scenes so they could take place in the same location, returning scripts to them with clever cuts. I liked this feeling, I felt like they wanted me there. But this want became more of a need. A fine example is what came to be known as.

Trailer-Gate

It was day one of the shoot. I approached the trailers to find five actors and actresses ranging in tones of brown and black, including the woman who plays my Mother, bound up in 1/3rd of a trailer. The second trailer was occupied by an actress, looking like privileged piggy in the middle, and the third was mine, the writer.

Prior to this, I wouldn't have dared enter the Production office, but I burst in through the door. The room fell silent, like a scene in EastEnders and I was fully in Kat Slater mode; "You know what that looks like doncha? Like a fuckin' slave ship!"

I know...I really did say that. "I'm not racist!" a producer screamed at me, she was red with rage, wet with tears. "I know you ain't racist! That's what makes this all so fuckin' bizarre!". I Kat Slatered the pub door.

Hours passed. There was a line, myself and the actors on one side, the producers on the other, and it wasn't crossed, for hours. We were even shooting. The mood... was moody.

The executive producer came to me, the outsider to production, and asked; "what do we do?" I suggested he apologise to everyone, buy my on-screen Mum some flowers, and get more trailers.

They did.

I asked the actors why they agreed to share. They just wanted it to work, their belief in the job only matched by their anxiety of losing it. I apologised. I told them we were working for a reputable channel, and a reputable production company and they wouldn't *dream* of recasting anyone for wanting a private space to prepare and change. I've often been told by people in our industry, that many producers, in many companies 'test the waters' to see what they can get away with. I told them the opposite of what I'd learned in drama school; that the *only* power we have, is the power to say 'no'. I apologised to the white actress too, I asked her to rid herself of her embarrassment; we shouldn't have let that happen we were sorry.

I was taught, during the whole of my career "that's just the way it is"; producers negotiating with agents. But when negotiations are done, and in one of the producer's palms, sit actors *willing* to forego their right to privacy; and in the other, actors who said "no", should they have noticed a racial divide? Should they have seen the slave ship on their hands before we started sailing? If so, what then?

As the producer said, she wasn't racist. I knew that. I've never accused anyone at work of racism but I've been urged to understand someone "isn't racist" on every job I've acted in since, just by pointing out possible patterns, tendencies. When I agree they aren't racist, but suggest they may be *thoughtless* on the matter; it doesn't go down very well. But if you're not racist, or thoughtless *about* race, what other thing can you be?

After this, and many other occurrences, I was left unsure of my position on set. I wanted this 'other' work I was doing to be acknowledged. After negotiations I was made associate producer.

Chewing Gum aired, my baby had captured an audience: The misfits.

My euphoria from being liked made me so happy. I was suddenly *fitting in*, I went to press nights and parties, and tried cocaine! I had no job to wake up for in the daytime, so, I'd go to more parties in the night time! Where I'd have more cocaine. Oh, everybody wanted to be my friend. I'd see old friends, who I couldn't remember because *nothing* was more important than me, being an actor, on cocaine, with my actor friends.

Every snort masked the misery of losing my motherhood; Chewing Gum had graduated, I had nothing to focus on.

I saw my ex. "I hear you're struggling with fame," he said.

I sat alone, in silence. A question came to me; five years ago, is this who I imagined I would be? I thought about it, an answer came: "no". I grabbed someone, I asked for help. But we're not all that lucky.

Being a misfit hurts. I can recall rummaging through a gift bag for my first big mainstream award.

It contained dry shampoo, tanning lotion and a foundation even Kim Kardashian was too dark for.

A reminder: this isn't your house.

Over time some of us have adopted techniques to turn our feeling of alienation into humour, if you've forgotten the feeling alienation how can you laugh at it?

The lack of varied perspective among producers, the lack of misfits producing telly can have catastrophic consequences. I'll give you an example.

I got another job, after Chewing Gum, an acting one, to be filmed for three months, in a place far, far away. I was immediately anxious, I searched online "being a misfit like *me* in this place far, far away". My anxiety grew. I was told not to worry.

One day, whilst shooting in this place far, far away, was my birthday, another misfit and I were carrying groceries home. I started feeling something sharp on the back of my ankles. What was that? I turned around to see four men hurling stones at us, their brisk walking turning into light jogging, reloading from the ground whenever their hands emptied of stones. The producers told us to keep calm and carry on, just a few months left.

Could this have been managed better? Did it have to be on my birthday?

I call that a catastrophic consequence. The producers saw shooting in 'that place' as a low-cost haven. They didn't consider the experiences of the brown and black cast to meet the morals of their diversity compass, because they didn't think to see things from our point of view.

A white actress in the cast later contacted me. She also felt alienated; people were also pointing and staring at her. She hadn't felt that before and just wanted to talk. I asked her, what she thought the root of it was. After some silence she said, "I think it's the colour of my hair". I think it was too.

In the process of writing this lecture, I searched online what being 'an outsider like *her*' might be like 'in that place'. The website for a giant hair company, came up first, the specific page: "How To Bleach Hair; The Ideal Technique". And I quote: "Your hair is not really blond? This is true for "95 percent of all people...nature has given only very *few* of them blonde hair. All but these few women have spirited the natural pigments out of their hair. Among the colour treatments, bleaching is still number one on the list."

End quote. I wondered why if 95% of us didn't fit something, we would encourage each other to aspire to it, to emulate it?

Chewing Gum was offered a second season. My agent and I thought my being credited an exec producer would be simple. She called to say I would not be made an executive producer. Instead I was made 'creative co-producer'.

We began shooting.

There was a moment during the shoot...what was it? The location? The staging? The writing? Something just didn't feel right. I approached a producer: "Is this good? Why does this feel like shit?" I was visibly anxious. "It doesn't feel very good, is it good?" I was told by the producer it was "really funny", and "great".

During post-production, it became apparent the channel didn't like the look of that story sequence either. In fact, they despised it. We lost an episode. The channel said that they couldn't give us any more money however, which forced the umbrella company to make it rain.

I was to write a new episode of Chewing Gum that could only take place in one location, with a maximum of two leads, and one series regular as cast. It was to be inserted as the new episode four with Episode Two becoming Episode One, episode this, that, ligaments and limbs of storylines just tossed around to make a version, that did look fucked, but, was still semi-recognisable as a TV Show. They said I didn't have much time as the TX may not change. I went to write in Zurich. I got thrush, and only when I couldn't afford to buy Canesten it became clear I'd accidentally travelled to the third most expensive city in the world. Another birthday passed out there. I got so hungry I went into McDonalds and asked them for fries, they gave me fries. This is a real-life story.

Somebody gave me something, for nothing in return. I wrote that episode in three days.

I realised the show may look more human if we made *the new* Ep- Episode 1, moved a ligament here, swapped the right tit with a testicle and boom, I proposed a version of my child that seemed more 'her', which we all agreed worked better.

My exec offered me a production company under his umbrella. He offered this through tears, I'd never seen him cry. I wondered if he really wanted to offer me this and was emulating a boss above *him*, whoever that was and whether that boss was emulating *his* boss. I used the only power I had; and declined.

Chewing Gum 2 aired, I don't know anything about the online acquisition I wasn't part of those negotiations, I was just told all rights had been sold to them. Kinda like your Dad coming home saying 'this is my new wife Netanya' and Netanya has no face,' that's how impossible transparency seemed.

This year, Netanya heard I was pregnant again and wanted to acquire my new unborn for 1 million Dollars, wow.

I've no mortgage, no credit card, no *real* kids, no car, happy with my bicycle; money's nice, but I prefer transparency. My stories are my babies, I wanna look after them, so I asked to reserve a portion of my parental rights; my copyright. "No, that's not the way it is", said No-Face Netanya. I used the only power I had; and declined.

New writers aren't often made executive producers in the U.K. I understand, 'that's the way it is', that we're not experienced enough to know the budgets, so when and how do we become more experienced? This isn't about me, luckily, I've learned, this is for the new writers coming after me, so the process of learning isn't harder than it should be. Why not be transparent about the budgets, the figures, the Netanyas. Be more transparent with them about the health and life of the child they're having. Or they're in the dark. As they enlighten *you*, with TV stories you can't film or write without them, enlighten *them*; shine a torch on the figures and budgets they can't see.

Whilst researching for this Lecture, I offered my first ever contract to a few writers and some sent theirs in return. It was nice, to be transparent. I spoke to Heads of channels, old and new Heads of production companies, Heads of Heads, more Heads, loadsa Heads. It was interesting, to be transparent, to observe how people ramble, safeguard themselves, then fall silent...just before becoming transparent with you. Couldn't get contact information for any board members. Oh well, they probably only make up about 5% of our industry anyway.

My research raised questions: I wondered whether someone should investigate how the shows of *new* writers are budgeted each year, within channels, to look for patterns. It may be that 'Business Affairs' have found it easier to get away with more on certain shows, sometimes budgeting way below what is commonly held as acceptable. When a budget is lower than standard it leaves production companies saving and scrimping and that save is often taken out on the writer; for example the erasure of script editors. I was told while researching for this 'that's the way it is, you wanna put as much money as you can on the screen'. Without a healthy writing team, and a great story, what do you have on the screen to inspire misfits? Oh, Love Island.

Being more transparent in our industry has led those accused of misconduct to courts. We know this because they're powerful people, who generate click bait, it makes the papers. Are we protecting those abused by these producers?

Some say our industry is a microcosm of the world. It's a delicate dance, isn't it; the world reflecting us, we in turn, the world. We have to remember that there are people; outsiders to this industry, being raped by men and women, who lack any celebrity status to snatch, or public power to dissolve.

I'm going to share two experiences simply and only to discuss their effect on our industry, our house.

I won an award, for writing. At the after party, a London producer introduced himself to me. I said, 'oh yes, nice to meet you'. "Do you know how much I want to fuck you right now?" was his immediate choice of response. I turned from him and went home so quickly I left my plus one. He called, upset. Someone called him a nigger.

It was the same man. Could my silence have encouraged this producer to push boundaries with women and black people further? This thought is uncomfortable, but I cannot block it out. I have to face it.

The other experience was a bit more life-changing. I was working overnight in the company's offices; I had an episode due at 7am. I took a break and had a drink with a good friend who was nearby. I emerged into consciousness typing season two, many hours later. I was lucky. I had a flashback. It turned out I'd been sexually assaulted by strangers. The first people I called after the police, before my own family, were the producers.

How do we operate in this family of television when there is in an emergency? Overnight I saw them morph into an anxious team of employers and employees alike; teetering back and forth between the line of knowing what normal human empathy is and not knowing what empathy is at all.

When there are police involved, and footage, of people carrying your sleeping writer into dangerous places, when cuts are found, when there's blood...what is your job?

Writing felt as though I was cramped in a third of a trailer, a mind overcrowded by flashbacks. I needed to push back the deadline, it was already tight, but just like those actors, I wasn't sure how damaging it would be to the company so couldn't ask. I was lucky, someone was transparent with me: "They won't offer you the break," a colleague said, "that's not the way it is, you have to take it."

I asked to push the deadline back and for the channel to be informed as to why. The deadline was pushed back, but the Head of Comedy never found out why. I've been invited here to speak to you as producers, from a creative perspective. As I've only made one TV show as a creator/actor and acted in some other roles, I can only speak from my experience – I'm not intending to single anyone out.

I would also like to add to that this company *did* send me to a private clinic; a service they offer to staff when in need. The company funded my therapy there until the end of the shoot. I would like to stress: I was *not* raped within the offices of the company and I have never been raped by anyone at the company.

For survivors of such trauma, therapy's great. And you can get it for free. There are many specialist centres; like The Havens in London, and Survivors Trust UK, an inclusive service for sexual assault survivors who welcome those who identify as male, trans, non-binary. Anyone who feels like they're struggling can get free therapy on the NHS. My Mum has been a mental health *specialist* there for a decade, that's why I know. It's good to talk, and engage with someone else, transparently. I believe in treating our minds like we treat cars for MOT's, it's probably fine but check in, *just in case*.

Like any other experience I've found traumatic, it's been therapeutic to write about it, and actively twist a narrative of pain into one of hope, and even humour. And be able to share it with you, as part of a fictional drama on television, because I think transparency helps.

Many of us in this industry, this world, are on creaking ladders, climbing, surrounded by noise, stress, and nothing real, not even the ladder itself; it can make the future feel bleak and devoid of peace, leaving some feeling isolated to the point of suicide. I think of Antony Bordain who ended his life on June 8th while shooting a series. I think of Alex Becket, an actor who ended his life April 12th mid a theatre run, I'd worked with him, in that place far away. Is there care for *anyone's* mind?

Some find themselves so high their photographs are showcased at prestigious exhibitions in Venice. A queen was recognised last year: Queen Khadija Saye. But when the narrative of climbing makes others put profits before people; fitting cheap cladding into their tower blocks, what then? How many other potential artists with stories we want and need, have we lost for the sake of financial profit, have we lost to thoughtless education systems, thoughtless nurturing, thoughtlessness? Why are we platforming misfits, heralding them as newly rich successes whilst they balance on creaking ladders with little chance of social mobility? I can't help usher them into this house if there's doors within it they can't open, it feels complicit. What I can do is be transparent about my experiences, because transparency helps.

The misfit doesn't climb in pursuit of safety, or profit, she climbs to tell stories, she gets off the ladder and onto the swings; swinging back and forth, sometimes aggressively, sometimes standing up on the swing, back and forth, in pursuit of only transparency, observing the changes, but wonders if these changes are taking place within a faulty system.

How can we help each other to fix a faulty system? Surely, we can help each other to fix a faulty house.

Being a producer, being head of department, head of the house, being a human, is a noisy job; everything coming at you, from all angles, at all hours. I think it's important to make silence for yourself, five minutes. To check, if you're okay. And interrogate your own morals and beliefs in relation to how you operate. Even if you do think about these things already, why not think a little more, a little deeper?

Accepting I'm wrong is hard. I recall a phone call from an exec during season two of Chewing Gum.

I'd written a part for a Malaysian woman and one auditionee thought my story was two-dimensional so emailed her feelings. I flailed around like an idiot "This isn't my department! I'm an artist not a politician! It's finished anyway, I'm not even writing that episode anymore!" I Kat Slattered the phone.

And in that small gap of silence, I realised she was right, and rewrote the part, I changed the narrative. And on reflection, I wished I just listened, I wished I'd spent more time thinking before I'd acted.

I recall a quote from a book called 'Act Accordingly' by Colin Wright. He said: "There are as many perspectives as there are people." I'll always remember that.

I've decided to embrace as many as I can, and be brave enough to update my beliefs, and discover I'm not always right. What a brilliant thing, to discover we've been wrong about some things, what a brilliant thing it is to grow. We're all gonna die. Instead of standing here, wishing for the good ol' glory days, about the way life used to be before Mark Zuckerberg graduated, I'm going to try to be my best; to be transparent; and to play whatever part I can, to help fix this house. What part will you play?

ENDS