

Polycultural Dreamin'.
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From Dr. Tasneem Mandviwala

Advisory Council Coordinator, Polycultural Institute

For the past six months, I have had the pleasure of serving as the Advisory Council Coordinator for Silk Road Rising's think-and-create tank, Polycultural Institute. My backgrounds in cultural psychology, intersectional feminism, and literary and visual art all greatly inform my approach to polyculturalism. Practices of cultural interchange are central to my work in the humanities and social sciences, a knowledge that speaks quite directly to polyculturalism itself.



directly and indirectly. It allows space for lived human realities to breathe, grow, and transform in relation to those around them. I see polyculturalism as an ideological tool that can advance both cultural production and social justice.

In my capacity as Advisory Council Coordinator, I have had the opportunity to help solidify the Polycultural Institute Advisory Council, a community of over thirty professional artists, thinkers, academics, and activists to engage in conversations about polyculturalism and gather invaluable suggestions regarding the future directions of our institute. The contributions of Advisory Council members help ensure that we are not simply an echo chamber, but an open intellectual space that does not shy away from engaging thought from across the political and social spectrums.



Our work is variously intentional: intentionally anti-racist, intentionally feminist, intentionally polycultural. While we recognize that impact should be prioritized over intent when engaging in justice-oriented work, we also aim to make Polycultural Institute a space of learning, something that requires active examination of our intentions. None of us have all the answers, but if we speak with radical kindness to one another and engage in critical self-reflection, we might just be able to craft a few.

I am thrilled to be in the midst of this journey of development with Silk Road Rising, and I look forward with confidence to the many contributions



Polycultural
Institute

Excerpt from

***The Case for
Polyculturalism***

**A new essay-in-progress
by Jamil Khoury**

When it comes to conversations around race, ethnicity, and demography, I find that I have a particular aversion to the word “minority.” In fact, it’s a word I rarely use. Minority implies inferior status or marginal significance, a quality of being less important, less relevant, less than. It reinforces the dominance and superiority of the presumed “majority.” And while there are plenty of contexts in which it behooves us to reference majorities and minorities (a majority of voters, for example), when it comes to race and ethnicity we need to discard our majority/minority binaries (with their quantifying, judgment-laden assumptions) and instead start referencing intentionally plural “communities,” “peoples,” and “cultures.”

The language of demography is inherently political. Typically, it’s either an

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an indicator of powerlessness and despised caste. “More of us, less of you; we therefore matter more,” or relatedly, “We have more, you have less; we therefore make the rules.” Compare and contrast “Asian American minority” with “Asian American communities.” The former evokes something peripheral and even vulnerable whereas the latter conveys something robust, dynamic, and diverse. While the former concedes full “Americanness,” the latter expands upon it. A minority evokes scarcity, but communities exude abundance.



On a personal level, the “minoritization” of various aspects of my identity have highlighted just how ill-fitting the term can be. In a Syrian context, I’ve long rejected the idea that Syrian Christians comprise a “religious minority.” Instead we comprise an ancient, integral part of a rich religious mosaic. Syria without its religious and ethnic communities is no longer Syria. And in a Queer context, I’m old enough to remember the term “sexual minorities” (thankfully, no longer much in use). It sounds rather distancing and almost clinical. Sexuality is part of one big human continuum. Do sheer numbers determine what is natural, moral, or better? I think not.

Demographers tell us that in the next twenty years the United States will become a nation with no racial or ethnic majority; we will all be “minorities.” And since multiracial democracy is the most viable alternative to “Balkanization” or complete dissolution, we need to swap the vertical for the horizontal and think polyculturally: a nation of cultures, communities, and individuals continuously interchanging. This would replace the imperative of a dominant or majority culture and create something infinitely more interesting and elastic. Demography is destiny only insofar as we confine

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one in which we all win, we need to stop counting ourselves as minorities and stop allowing power to minoritize us. After all, majorities are fleeting. We people keep evolving.



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“The stories of Palestinians under occupation and in the diaspora are diverse, and there is no better place to showcase these stories than in our festival lineup.”

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