

# Waves of Movement Through Suspension Then Release Finding the Voice of Afro-Emiratis

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## Abstract

Since documented history was and still is viewed mainly as autonomous, this essay attempts to challenge history's formal, disciplined approach with a narrative from the history of enslaved people rather than viewing slavery as an isolated event. Indian Ocean slavery has not been documented as much as Atlantic slavery history, which has led to a gap within the histories of the Persian/Arabian Gulf countries. This essay explicitly examines my own family history as an artist, where the interest in documenting such history was to find ways to relate to and understand the afterlife of slavery. I raise questions regarding the reflection on the remembrance and presentation of enslaved peoples' histories as part of a process of amendment and as an attempt to fill the gaps in understanding history and the socio-political positioning of Afro-Emiratis. The essay unfolds with its suspension, and then release, in three main narratives that took place in the last century, titled "Fairuz", "Dalma", and "Zar". The methodology is based on interweaving narratives, events, and Afro-Emiratis' heritage into a stepping stone to document and present unspoken histories.



Figure 1. Ameena Aljerman Alali, *Toub, Toub*, 2023, still from video, 3 min. 42 sec

## Introduction

In this essay, I present myself as a narrator and researcher. I have positioned myself between the possibility of fiction in amending generational trauma and restoring the positioning of Afro-Emiratis.<sup>[1]</sup> There is little documented history of the slavery period in the United Arab Emirates, and what there is focuses on the pre-oil years, leading up to the discovery of oil in the 1930s.<sup>[2]</sup> I am keen to find sources that describe how Africans experienced slavery in the Arabian/Persian Gulf region, particularly from the perspective of the enslaved.

In my research into my own family's history, I found my grandfather Ismaeel's script in one of the archival books, which gave me a voice to start with. I then realised that, in addition to rituals and material culture, potential sources existed in oral traditions as well as in traditional African dances and songs.

My interest in the history of enslavement in the United Arab Emirates and the region of the Arabian/Persian Gulf was sparked by years of not being able to articulate the sense of inferiority within myself and my family. For so long, I couldn't pinpoint why my parents had to step aside from being who they wanted to be, or why it was acceptable for my niece's teacher to remove her from the UAE National Day dance because of her afro hair.

There is a reason why Liwa the traditional circle dancing adopted by Afro-Emiratis imitates the circulatory dynamics of waves; it is the suspension and release motion of continuations, of unspoken histories and traditions.

## Hiding Behind the Archives

I started as a historian, not as an artist. I hid behind the archives, the numbers and academic articles to prove a point of existence. I questioned whether bringing this history to Sweden and introducing such an experience

would be acknowledged. Would travelling to Sweden change it, or change my position as an artist and researcher? I have been documenting the oral history of family members for years, whether they intended to direct me on this journey or not. The slavery element was strongly present yet denied with its taboo attachment. The denial comes from underlying self-shame and accepting the afterlife of slavery and its effects.

In this essay, I have approached known history, archives and the oral history of my family members, utilising theories that offer a space for interplay between fiction and non-fiction. I have pointed out the gap in known history and attempted to create a movement of “in-betweenness”. I aim to represent an alternative historical method as a network of integration and fragmentation over time. I will also look at the anxiety of slavery memory, which presents the memory of slavery as it was, not as the memory of an event.

The latter is an attempt to challenge the norms of narrating history as an informative text and presenting the oral history of individuals instead of events. In three short chapters, I will refer to four individuals who were my family members, all of whom have become their own legends: Isameel Aljarman, my paternal grandfather; Tuffah Bilal, my great-grandmother; Ameena Fairuz, my maternal grandmother; and my maternal great-grandmother, Shaikha Bu Halga.

## Historical Background and Theory

The Indian Ocean slave trade was a multi-directional trade that evolved and expanded along established trade routes,<sup>[3]</sup> such as the Silk Road in the 8th century.<sup>[4]</sup> The history of Indian Ocean slavery has not received the same attention as Atlantic Ocean slavery. The lack of interest and attention in documenting numbers, profits and the afterlife of slavery have caused a severe gap in understanding the existence of Afro-Arab identity in the region.<sup>[5]</sup>

Several populations in present-day Arabian/Persian Gulf countries, Pakistan, India and others are believed to have descended from enslaved people, but their history itself remains largely undefined. It is important to note that upon the discovery of oil in the Arabian/Persian Gulf, British officials had already established relations with the political powers in the region and created agencies to distribute manumission certificates to slaves who sought their freedom.<sup>[6]</sup> However, the process and agenda for abolishing slavery in the Trucial States<sup>[7]</sup> at that time were not documented.<sup>[8]</sup> Much of what I found at the archives in the Emirate of Sharjah were letters written by enslaved people that had been translated into English. The documentation employed a different systematic approach, focusing merely on enslaved people as commodities rather than on history itself.<sup>[9]</sup>

There were strong elements of African presence in the UAE, but details of their voices vanished in the void of nationalism<sup>[10]</sup>, and the establishment of a sovereign state along with the teachings of Islam.<sup>[11]</sup> Thus, by setting aside the political and socio-economic aspects of that part of history, we are left with the most essential aspects of all: the enslaved people themselves and the intentional gaps in history. I therefore ask the question: what happens if we reflect on the remembrance of enslaved people's histories, not as an act of mesmerising events, but as an act to amend and present history anew?

The urgency of this matter can be approached by looking at the narrative theory of history. Learning from other representational forms and broadening the range of expression to incorporate “alternative” or “experimental” methods was essential to unfold such an untold history. The goal is to articulate history as a moving and evolving target, thereby improving our understanding of it by positioning myself between representations of time travel, archival findings, and oral history. This approach allows us to shed further light on the boundary between a

“proper history” and various kinds of fabulation. For Saidiya Hartman, critical fabulation is the intersection between fiction, critical theory and archival research.<sup>[12]</sup> Hartman also points out that it is impossible to “write” what has been resisted from being said, as the enslaved people were not able to speak. Since it is an unrecoverable history, “it is a narrative of what might have been or could have been; it is a history written with and against the archive.”<sup>[13]</sup> In this approach, archives not only present some histories of the past but also direct how the present exists, and how the positioning of time shifts our outlook towards reading and reflecting on histories. With that in mind, I approach oral history through the term *parahistory*, which was introduced by Roy Sorensen in 1987 to represent “the study of genuinely anachronistic artifacts delivered by time travel.”<sup>[14]</sup> This presentation of history reflects on what may be understood as the desire to find both the personal and the universal through the merging of time, history and the process of finding the archives. Although this essay only examines a limited number of representations, it does serve as a step towards further speculations and the fabulation of hidden histories. There is always the dilemma that undermines the value and the impact of pointing out the gaps and narratives. Still, an attempt to project historical rehabilitation means artists like me can subtly critique rather than pursue historical accuracy.<sup>[15]</sup>

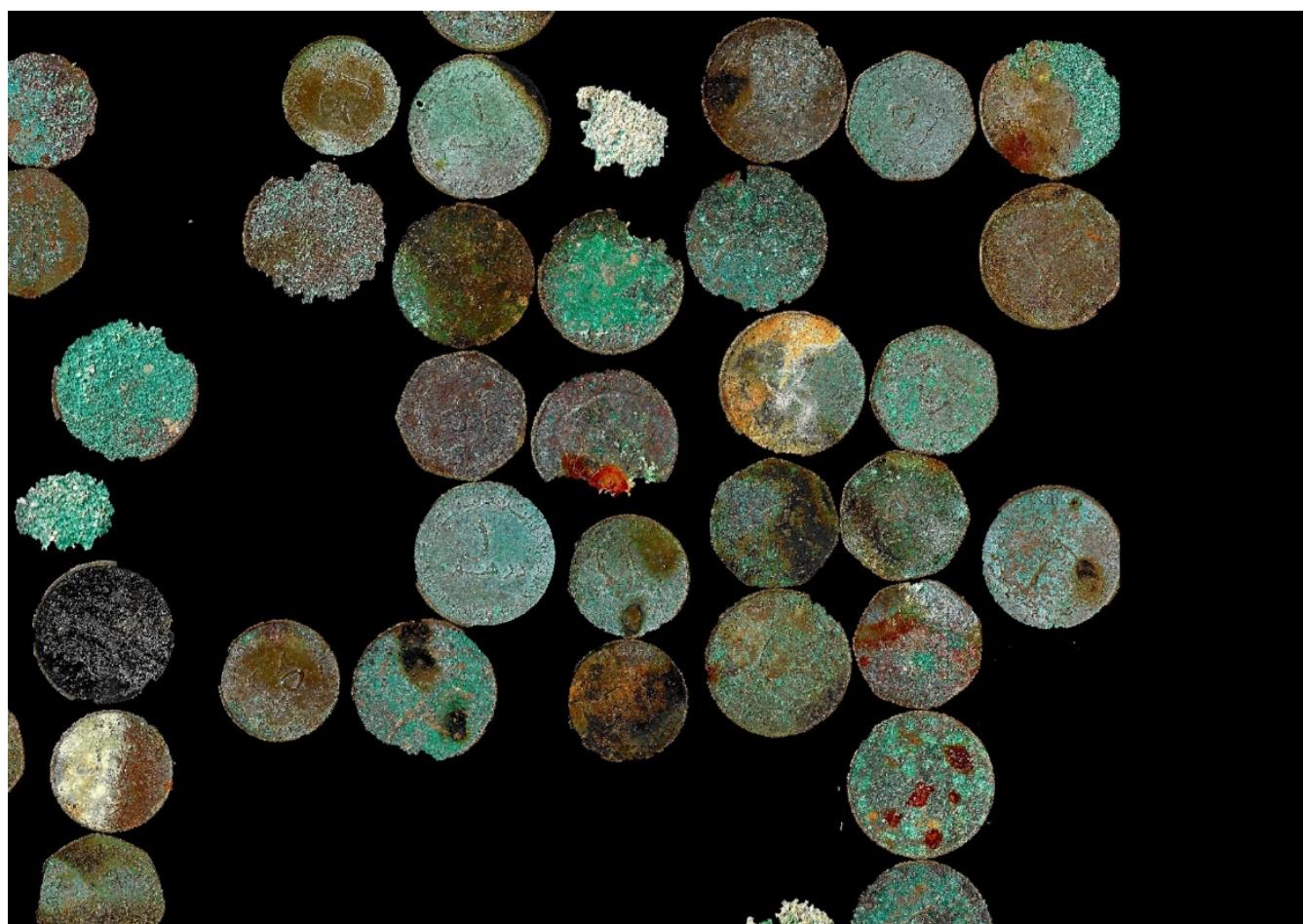


Figure 2. Ameena Aljerman Alali, *Sidreoh Series II*, 2019, scannography on metal plate

Chapter One: ***Fairuz***

**Ismael.**

Known as Aljarman, the son of the pearls, the one with the pants like the Germans.

Born by the shores of Ras Al Khaimah, holding onto his mother.

**Tuffaha** was her name.

Which translates as “apple” in Arabic.

The Apple of **Ismaeel’s** eyes, as he always referred to her.

**Ismaeel** had a wish to be one with the sea, transforming his arms and lungs into fins and gills, and finding his currents and tides through life.

**Tuffaha**, the calm, defeated soul from Zanzibar a Tanzanian island off the coast of East Africa.

**Tuffaha** was bought by Fatima Bint Sharif from Ras Al Khaimah in the early 1910s.<sup>[16]</sup>

**Tuffaha** also wanted to be held softly by the sea.

She had a long scar on her neck, crawling to her shoulder as a reminder.

She heard about the horrors of the other side, but she didn’t know there were two sides at the end of that tunnel  
East and West.

The tunnels looked similar but the journey on the waters wasn’t.<sup>[17]</sup>

**Tuffaha** sang along with others about Fairuz, the boy.

Fairuz translates as the colour “turquoise” in Arabic which is a male or family name popular among East African  
and Swahili cultures.<sup>[18]</sup>

As for female naming, it is Fairuza.

Fairuz was a boy who heard his mother’s callings through the waves while he jumped off the ship, freeing himself  
and others too. The tale of Fairuz lived as he died.

It continued to echo through the journeys of Indian Ocean waters and became a word of solidarity.

*Oh Yal Habib Fairuz Yabon yebe’onek; Dear Fairuz, they went to sell him.*

*Oh Yal Habib Fairuz, rabatouk ta’hat; Dear Fairuz, they chained him down.*

*Ya Allah, Khal el gharbi teshelah wa tred athamah ma’a almurjan; Oh Allah, let the western winds blow so  
his bones become coral.*<sup>[19]</sup>

Maybe **Tuffaha** believed that Ismaeel was her Fairuz, everyone wanted to have a Fairuz! She hoped he would

also be freed.

## In 1958

With the discovery of the black gold  
different types of boats sailed towards the Persian/Arabian Gulf.  
The slave owners became slaves themselves.  
The sand, pearls and dates dissolved into oil tankers and machinery.

## In 1959

**Isameel** handed his mother the Manumission certificate, with a blue-inked stamp that was smudged.  
This celebratory moment took a space in one of the archival books  
And in my memory  
And generations after.  
**Tuffaha** knew the rules.

Manumission doesn't erase Aldain payback, economy, dried fish, pearls, back to the sea.<sup>[20]</sup>

## In 1965

Back to the sea  
Last attempt to touch the pearl and the last air bubble.  
Ismaael returned to the sea.<sup>[21]</sup>  
As the sea did not fear Allah  
The women conversed and requested.

*Toub Toub ya Bahar; **redeem, redeem yourself O'sea.***

*Ma takhaf men Allah, Ya bahar?; **Aren't you afraid of Allah, O'sea?***

*Arba'ah, khames dekhal, yebhom; **Four months has passed, and the fifth is upon us, bring them back***

*Yebhom, ma tkhaf men Allah; I beg you, Aren't you afraid of Allah?*

*Yal lumi hat bin rumi; Oh Lime, bring Rumi back with the precious jewel*<sup>[22]</sup>

**Tuffah** knew while holding **Islameels** cloth

The debt

With fish, rice, jars, and the sun.

Back to the sea, **Tuffaha** surrenders.

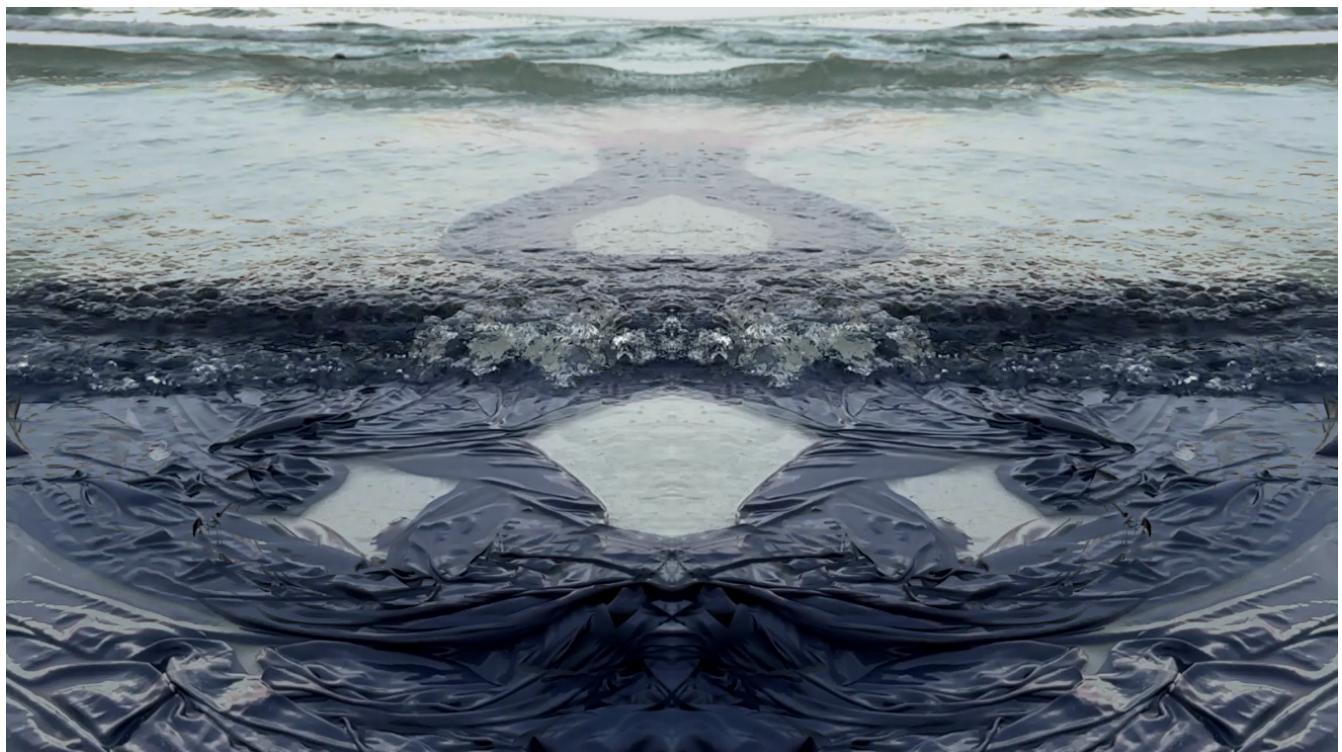


Figure 3. Ameena Aljerman Alali, *Toub, Toub*, 2023, still from video, 3 min. 42 sec.

Chapter Two: **Delma**

**Shaikha** <sup>[23]</sup>

The royal lady, the one with the wide eyes, and gentle hands.

**Shaikha** was kidnapped as a girl from her home in what is now the Stone Town in Zanzibar.

After several changes of ownership

**Shaikha** was sold to an Arab slaver in the Mecca slave market<sup>[24]</sup> and was brought to Abu Dhabi in 1925.<sup>[25]</sup>

**Shaikha** learned the crafts of Arab bridal preparations.

She served and served.

From Nelah <sup>[26]</sup> body mask, henna on hair, red ink on lips and sewing the wedding garments. <sup>[27]</sup>

**Shaikha** was famous for her mark.

She applied a mixture of rice water with the Nelah across the face.

While it was drying, applied her warm, gentle hands and rubbed it in until it shrunk and cleansed the skin.

**Shaikha** also learned how to weave cotton, dye it and make it into a beautiful fairuz thoub. <sup>[28]</sup>

In 1939

On Shaheen's Henna night, the women wore the golden ornaments which they displayed with some profusion on their arms and legs. <sup>[29]</sup>

They sang to the bride:

**Ameena fe Amani-ha; Ameena, faithful in her wishes**

**Maleha fe ma'aneha; Beautiful in her meanings**

**Tajlat wa injelat hata; It became clear and even clearer**

**Sa'alet Allah yehaneha; I asked God to bless her**

**Jabeenha kal Bader badhi; Her forehead is like the full moon**

**Wa reegha yeshfy amradhi; Her saliva heals my illness**

**Laha rab elsama radhi; The Lord of Heaven is satisfied with her**

**Wa ahsen fe ma'aneha; And better in its meanings. <sup>[30]</sup>**

**Shaikha** was carrying her own **Ameena**.

**Shaikha** knew, **Shaikha** refused.

To adhere, to serve and to continue.

“May you rot, or may you swell, or may a beast take you to Delma” <sup>[31]</sup>

Sliced tents and robes

**Shaikha** found herself in Delma, with Onaizah

Tied to a palm tree, and flogged.<sup>[32]</sup>

Flogged and whipped with Sa'af that was still green.<sup>[33]</sup>

Their thorns and spikes were still on them

Until their flesh was raw and bleeding

The boiling strained rice water was poured on the bleeding women.<sup>[34]</sup>

Cutting through their previous scars to new ones, deeper than the waves that lead them there.

**Shaikha** and Onaizah couldn't take it

Onizah rested at the age of 14

And **Shaikha** was released after the birth of Ameena.

In 1945

Shaikha had Saleh

Um Alwalad<sup>[35]</sup> is free, they said, not the boy.

Saleh went west to serve.

Ameena went East to trade Henna and spices, and wooden elephants and bangles.

Debts were paid and **Shaikha** finally rested her gentle hands on her chest



Figure 4. Ameena Aljerman Alali, *Fiaroza. The passage*, 2021, still from video, 1 min. 20 sec.

### Chapter Three: **Zar**

**Ameena**, the trustworthy, the faithful one, the truth.

**Ameena** was taken to sail through the Indian Ocean<sup>[36]</sup> with her mother's Fairuz thoub.<sup>[37]</sup>

Worked, sold and carried through several places.

She acquired three tongues: Arabic, Hindi and Persian.

**Ameena**, unlike her mother Shaikha, was strong, tall, and stubborn.

She was her own Fairuzah.<sup>[38]</sup>

**Ameena** was sold for one hundred and seventy-two Rupees<sup>[39]</sup> in a town called Rajasthan.<sup>[40]</sup>

She was gifted to Siva, a wealthy widow priest.<sup>[41]</sup>

Ameena was amazed by women priests.

They were held in great reverence by the captured ones.

Women priests could calculate time, foretold events and hosted Zar.<sup>[42]</sup>

**Ameena** desired, but she was kept afar.

“Childless you become, Alshaikha<sup>[43]</sup> has only herself and her shaitan”.<sup>[44]</sup>

**Ameena** only prepared the pipes, hashish<sup>[45]</sup> and the animal offerings, she was trusted to perform, to dedicate, to serve.

Sacrifice for protection. Sacrifice for a return.

Sacrifice for a payment.

Then the Zar finally chose **Ameena**.<sup>[46]</sup>

She accepted.

Sat sang and sorrowed between the Shadows.

Daf,<sup>[47]</sup> Bukhoor,<sup>[48]</sup> verses and blood

**Ameena** knew there was no return.

Knives under the pillows, goat blood on the feet

**Ameena** became a priest herself.<sup>[49]</sup>

In 1971

While slavery was officially abolished, greedy hands were looking for the Aa'beed.<sup>[50]</sup>

**Ameena** was a Khadamah<sup>[51]</sup> at neighbourhood.

A nanny at James's house and a Zar priest in Rashidiyah<sup>[52]</sup>

**Ameena** always believed in good omens

Goat blood, Ameenas,<sup>[53]</sup> a knife under the pillow and sugar on the graves of loved ones.<sup>[54]</sup>

In 1998

At **Ameena's** feet

I was filled with stories of her sorrows and triumphs

Many of which I have documented and others forgotten.

**Ameena** thought I would accept my fate, and the omens.

I didn't, for they were quite harmless. Yet I could see the troubling eyes.

I couldn't find myself while she carried me to her house entrance.

Where she just slaughtered the goat<sup>[55]</sup>

Dipped my feet and hands into the running blood.

An imperfect sketch

My memory has furnished me with the manners and customs of a people among whom I first drew my breath.

But I carried on.

Stories.

Everything was a story to me then, though I couldn't think beyond myself.

I have always pictured her at the docks, about to get on a ship to India, to Iran, to Doha, to Dubai.

It took me years to understand, to observe and to admit.

Circulating until I hit the point of breaking.

And to the point of her departure, **Ameena** is my Fairuza.



Figure 5. Ameena Aljerman Alali, *Grandma Ameena's Wishes*, 2021, still from video, 2 min.

## Conclusion

In this experimental format I have tried to consider how critical fabulation can be used in the narrative creation process of my family members' histories, which function as a critique of slavery as an event rather than being about the enslaved people themselves. The collective movement of memories, narratives, historical events and archives reveals how interdependency and vulnerability are maintained, and time travel occurs through suspension, then release. This is how past conditions and also future reactions are remembered. In a way, reimagining my family members' riotous lives is an act of intervention that allows me to access the past through certain layers of fiction. As an artist and a researcher, I approach the memory-making and memory-keeping process as a disturbance to the political existence of Afro-Emiratis.

The chapters "Fairuz", "Delma" and "Zar" voice a revolution that ties the ruptured and the remaining slave memories, a resistance that moves through vulnerability and interdependency. I believe that oral history offers messages from past generations, which are not always remembered and conveyed because of their historical content; it is the moral aspect of it, as the critical fabulation concepts rely on storytelling to understand and imagine not only what was then, but also what could be.

In addition, it is essential to mention that the memories of enslavement and life in slavery disturb the social alignments in Emirati society by reopening the wounds of past violence and suffering. Therefore, it made Afro-Emiratis extremely selective about what they deemed worthy of narration.

Besides reopening the wounds, the guilt and shame associated with the time-travelling aspect are not yet acceptable due to political and security reasons. Therefore, I decided to write about it while residing in Sweden. However, this essay has far from exhausted the means of memories and narratives on a linear timeline. I conclude instead with the proposal to continue enquiring into the narratives of enslaved people in resistance: an ongoing artistic and visual research project that challenges the selectivity of historical narration.



Figure 6. Ameena Aljerman Alali, *Untitled*, 2023, still from video, 5 min.

## Footnotes

1. An uncommon description referring to Emiratis of African descent has been used by Aisha Bel Khair (2013) in her research article about the influence of the African diaspora on music in the Gulf. Aisha Bilkhair Khalifa (2006). "African Influence on Culture and Music in Dubai." *International Social Science Journal*, 58(188), pp. 227–235. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2451.2006.00614.
2. The official search for oil began in the 1920s by geologists from the British Petroleum Company. It continued until 1939, when a concession agreement, which was valid for 75 years, was signed between the elite Arab tribe and the British company upon the discovery of oil fields onshore. In 1958, the first commercial oil was discovered offshore.
3. Also known as the East African slave trade or Arab slave trade.
4. Gilbert, Erik. "Coastal East Africa and the Western Indian Ocean: Long-Distance Trade, Empire, Migration, and Regional Unity, 1750–1970". *The History Teacher*, vol. 36. no. 1. 2002. pp. 7–34. doi: 10.2307/1512492.
5. On 25 March 1807, when it passed the Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, the British Parliament transformed Britain from the world's leading slave trade nation to the world's leading crusader against the slave trade when it passed the Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. With its diplomatic initiatives failing to stop the Atlantic slave trade, Britain then shifted to the Indian Ocean slave trade to establish political and economic dominance.
6. Gilbert, "Coastal East Africa and the Western Indian Ocean".
7. The Trucial States, also known as the Trucial Coast, the Trucial Sheikdoms, and Trucial Oman. A group of tribal confederations located on the Arabian/Persian Gulf. The leaders of the Trucial States had signed protective treaties and truces with the United Kingdom for political and economic benefits.

8. Joyce, Miriam. "On the Road towards Unity: The Trucial States from a British Perspective, 1960--66". *Middle Eastern Studies*. vol. 35. no. 2. 1999. pp. 45–60. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4284003>.
9. The book *Slavery and Manumission: British Policy in the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf in the first half of the 20th Century* by Jerzy Zdanowski (Ithca Press, 2013) only presented an English translation of the information and an external point of view of slavery and enslaved people as a political agency to the British political agenda.
10. U.A.E started forming a Nationalism campaign that was heavily focused on Arab national identity, along with other practices and social associations with the deserts, falconry, and ritualistic traditions related to Arab tribes.
11. The unification process led to the abolition of slavery and the formation of a modern Arab national identity and heritage, which centred on the oil industry and advancements in infrastructure.
12. Saidiya Hartman, an African American historian and cultural scholar, defines the term "critical fabulation" as a method of historical writing that combines both creative and semi-non-fictional elements. Moreover, it focuses on the afterlife of slavery in response to the limitations of official archives and directs to redressing history's errors.
13. Wendt Höjer, F. "The Past Isn't What It Used to Be: Critical Fabulation and Remembering Revolt". *Journal of Literary Science*. vol. 50. nos. 2–3. 2020. <https://doi.org/10.54797/tfl.v50i2-3.6109>
14. Richmond, Alasdair. "Time Travel, Parahistory and the Past Artefact Dilemma". *Philosophy*. vol. 85. no. 3. 2010. pp. 369–73. doi:10.1017/S0031819110000197.
15. Richmond discusses the historical rehabilitation process of reparation, or the reconstruction of history by going back and forth with time, events, people and artefacts in the process of rehabilitation.
16. Referring to the manumission description and text about my grandfather Ismaeel and his mother Tuffah, see Zdanowski, Jerzy. *Speaking with Their Own Voices: The Stories of Slaves in the Persian Gulf in the 20th century*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2014. The description indicated that Ismaeel escaped the city upon hearing about "the document". Around that year, British officials were working to exert influence in establishing relations with the Arab tribes that owned the lands with oil fields. Some tribes refused the notion of slavery abolishment which led to the further restriction of movement of the enslaved people.
17. The two tunnels were located at the Old Palace in Dar Alsalam, Zanzibar, and were part of a cave with natural underground chambers, which eventually led to the sea where the enslaved people could be secreted away without being seen; one tunnel led to the Atlantic Ocean ships and one to the Indian ocean ships.
18. A note on the influence of Zanzibar/Omani relations and social structure, Arabic names were common in Zanzibar, and due to the disruptive climate—western winds that made it impossible to travel during certain times of the year—many Arab traders had formed communities in Zanzibar. See Fair, Laura. "Dressing up: Clothing, Class and Gender in Post-Abolition Zanzibar". *The Journal of African History*. vol. 39. no. 1. 1998. pp. 63–94. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/183330>.
19. Field Notes on the TV programme *Music and the Sea Rhythms*. Episode 12. Mubarak and Aal-Nassay. 2002. The song was originally in the Swahili language, with a few Arabic words added. It was first brought by enslaved people who were still in transition to the Arabian/Persian Gulf, after which it was used as a sea shanty to motivate crew members to continue working hard and not fear the sea. It was mentioned that the lyrics changed, and Fairuz became a hero of the pearl divers instead of the little boy who returned to the sea.
20. Aldain translates as debt and relates to the systemic ownership of the enslaved people and their families' resources. Debt could sometimes be paid back by money, labour, work or selling one of the slave children to another family, etc., or never. Debt was one of the most problematic social and economic

systems in the Arabian/Persian Gulf social fabric. There were documented incidents of enslaved people freeing themselves by paying or attempting to free themselves by escaping to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. Still, the owners asked other enslaved people to haunt them or force them to return. The manumission provided by the British Agency did not provide any protection whatsoever until the UAE was established as a sovereign state, but even then it was still unclear how manumission had any legal value.

21. Most of the enslaved in the Arabian/Persian Gulf worked as pearl divers and palm tree farmers in which they worked in hard conditions.
22. Field Notes from the TV program *Music and the Sea Rhythms*. Episode 12. Mubarak and Aal-Nassay. 2002. Toub Toub was a ceremonial practice done by women, mainly enslaved people. The act is performed to converse with the sea as if it were a person, to form a power play with the spirit world to bring back the pearl divers from the depths of the sea realm. The women would perform the ritual on the fourth month during the pearl diving season; they would gather and walk in rhythmic movement into the sea, some would sing, some would play the drums, and others performed repetitive, ritualistic acts, like dipping a cat into the water to communicate with the sea, burning the sea with a hot iron or a wood. Others would throw sharp items to cut the sea open, and lastly they would perform a cleansing act by pouring a laxative herb into the water. The sea became the rival and the only way to its salvation was to redeem itself.
23. A common name in the region, from the word Shaikh, meaning royal, Shaikha for a female royalty or the leader and used in Sheikdoms in Arabian/Persian Gulf countries.
24. The annual pilgrimage to Mecca, the Hajj, was the biggest vehicle for enslavement. When the open Trans-Saharan slave trade died out, Muslim-African Hajj pilgrims across the Sahara were deceived or given low-cost travel expenses by tribal leaders; when they arrived at the East Coast, they were trafficked across the Red Sea in the dhows and discovered upon arrival in Saudi Arabia that they were to be sold on the slave market rather than to perform the Hajj.
25. During that time, Abu Dhabi was the capital of the Bani Yas tribal confederation under the supervision of official British representatives.
26. Nelah is an Indigo dye—an organic compound with a distinctive blue color. Indigo is a natural dye extracted from the leaves of certain plants in the Indigofera genus, which are grown and used worldwide, particularly in India. Nelah is used as a scrub to whiten the skin and moisturize it. It is also used to brighten dark spots around the neck, knees, and elbows.
27. Henna is a black dye prepared from the dried and powdered leaves of the henna tree. The practice of applying henna to hands and feet is widespread today in Arabian/ Persian Gulf countries as a celebratory act for women, especially brides.
28. Thoub is a long-sleeved, ankle-length traditional dress featuring embroidery on the chest and at the end of the sleeves. It is a common clothing piece in Arabian/ Persian Gulf countries as it follows Islamic traditions. It is also heavily influenced by the Indian Salwar Kameez design, originating from India and Pakistan.
29. Henna Night is a gathering held before the wedding ceremony among South Asian and Middle Eastern Muslim communities. During a Henna party, the bride-to-be, her female family members and friends gather to apply intricate henna designs on their hands and feet, a ritual that symbolises the start of a blissful marriage.
30. Ramdan, Mutar. *Folklore and instruments, from the Emirati and Kuwait House of Music*. UAE Department of Antiquities and Museums. The Ameena Fe Amaneha song is part of the Yalwah folklore gathering for the bride-to-be. The bride either sits on the floor or a chair in the middle of the hall or yard, and women surround her in two lines, holding a green fabric above the bride's head and moving it in a steady motion. Alternatively, the women stand with soft, leaning movements, moving forwards and back towards the bride. Then, after the song is done, the bride walks to her husband, and it is said that they rub their feet

together for good luck and she offers the husband water to drink as a sign of partnership and prosperity.

31. A famous saying, as per Shaikha and Ameena's notes, regarding enslaved people who refuse to work. Delma is an area between Doha, the capital of Qatar, and Abu Dhabi, the capital of the UAE, where enslaved people were taken to be tortured and disciplined. Additional information and mention of the Delma area can be found in the Bin Jalmound House museum in Doha.
32. Onaizah is a derogatory name for Anzah, which translates as a goat, indicating that enslaved people were given derogatory names to differentiate between slaved and non-slaved persons.
33. Sa'af, which translates as palm tree fronds or branches. Date palm trees are a symbol of social and religious prosperity, fertility and generosity in the region. On the other hand, it is associated with punishment as it was used to tie enslaved people or any disobedient person under the sun, and the fronds were used to create robes, whips and rods to flog.
34. This was a common practice in Delma to discipline enslaved people. Rice is one of the most common grains used in the region, imported from India and Pakistan, and the rice water would typically be thrown away after cooking the meal, yet it was used to torture the enslaved people.
35. Um Alwalad translates as mother of the child, and the phrase was used for an enslaved person who had given birth to her master's child. As a result, she possessed a special legal status that allowed her release upon the death of her master, but not her children.
36. Ameena was a slave to a Bahraini trader who regularly travelled to India, Iran and Zanzibar. She had a strong build and oversaw cooking and serving on the ships due to her ability to endure in harsh environments. Due to their strategic locations and the economic advantages they had at that time, it was common in Bahrain and Kuwait to travel across the Indian Ocean. Both the UAE and Qatar, as well as areas in Oman, were not as prosperous as Kuwait and Bahrain.
37. Fairuz thoub means a turquoise dress, which her mother, Shaikha, made, and it influenced her to call herself Fairuzah as her second name and nickname in the family, symbolising strong-headed women. The dress is currently kept in my mother's chest of drawers.
38. Referencing the legend of Fairuz, the symbol of resistance. Addressing the legend of Fairuz, the boy who jumped out of the ship after hearing his mother's callings. See note 19.
39. 172 Indian Rupees equal €1.90, US\$ 2.06. Ameena Fairuz, audio notes, 2012.
40. Rajasthan is a state in northwest India. The slave traders established several slave trade centres, especially in a city called Mandor in Rajasthan. It was a hub of Muslim, European and African slave traders, along with spices, meat and gold.
41. Siva was an Ethiopian merchant who, according to Ameena, was married to an Indian merchant from whom she inherited all her wealth. She was also enslaved, but they had a different hierarchy of enslaved people, which allowed her to be free as long as she remained a widow of her master and never re-married.
42. Zar is a music and dance ritual with centuries-old roots in Ethiopia and Sudan, traditionally performed by a lead woman to exorcise Jinn or evil spirits. There are different types of Zar sessions depending on the region; however, in the Arabian/Persian Gulf countries, it is practised mainly as Jinn exorcism, the practice of reconciling the Jinn and the possessed person using Quran verses and a Daf. Possession by Zar is expressed by a range of behaviours, such as involuntary movements, similar to epilepsy and an inability or unwillingness to speak or using very vague language. Nowadays, Zar is illegal in most of Arabian/Persian Gulf countries.
43. Alskhaika, from the word Shaikha, means royalty or leader of a group. In the context of Zar, the Shaikha is the person who leads the session and performs the exorcism.
44. Shaitan translates as devil or Satan. The quote is presumably said by Siva, who refused Ameena's participation in Zar since she was still young and unmarried, according to Ameena Fairuz's recorded

audio notes from 2012. It was believed that either the Zar chooses you or you enter the Zar and sacrifice your soul and the ability to bear children.

45. Hashish, shortened to hash, is an oleoresin made by compressing and processing parts of the cannabis plant, commonly used in the region, especially by women during Zar sessions, and was made illegal when the UAE was established in 1971.
46. It was believed that the Zar chooses the person to embody.
47. Daf is a Middle Eastern frame drum musical instrument, used heavily as the main instrument in Zar sessions and believed to be the only acceptable musical instrument in Islam teachings. It traditionally has a round wooden frame, jingles, and a thin, translucent top cover made of fish or goat skin.
48. Bukhor or frankincense is a perfume that contains a type of incense that consists of wood scraps infused with scented oil. It is believed that a specific kind of incense attracts the jinn and aids in exorcism.
49. Ameena worked as a Zar priest in Rajasthan until she could afford to free herself. She continued the practise in Bahrain and Dubai to afford to live with her husband and children.
50. Aa'beed, plural, and Abd, singular, translates as enslaved people. It is a socially unacceptable word that is, however, still used to describe Afro-Emiratis or any person of African descent in the region. Other words, such as Khal, which translates as uncle or "dark spot on the skin", and the word Khadam, which translates as servant, are used to this day to describe Afro-Emiratis in the context of their slavery history.
51. Referencing the word: Khadam means a servant. Ameena referred to herself as Khadamah multiple times. The word can be used in different contexts, including as reference to a housemaid, but it is usually associated with a person of African descent.
52. Rashidiyah is one of the major areas in Dubai city that hosted Zar sessions and is still popular.
53. Ameena believed that the only way not to be cursed as a Zar priest was to extend her legacy by naming all her granddaughters Ameena. Currently, there are five people named Ameena in the family and I'm the eldest. We were given special treatment and additional protection during the rituals back then.
54. Spreading sugar on the graves of loved ones was an uncommon yet practised ritual among Zar attendees and priests. It was believed that it helped to make the dead's time sweeter.
55. Slaughtering a goat in front of a new house or the entrance of any building used to be a common blessing practice, a sacrifice for good luck. The meat would be distributed to people in the neighbourhood or the poor to protect the new house/building from the evil eye.