



HARD
WIRE

ISSUE 4

Liberated For a Night

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Drawing and Painting at Ontario College of Art & Design University

Artist Statement

This painting had me thinking a lot about safe spaces. I started thinking about genders, specifically female presenting bodies and their interactions with public spaces. I've been thinking a lot about power dynamics, gender roles, and liberation in a hetero-patriarchal society. I've been thinking about what it means to be a woman and all the things that come into play when women are out in public spaces. Safe spaces are often hard to find when you present as a "women" or anything outside of a cis male. My idea for this work was a night on the town, where cis women, trans women, queer women, and non-binary people have one night a year, free of objectification, sexual harassment, and patriarchy. I depict these figures with a sense of disembodiment, their figures being deformed to reflect all the ways Western society has mutilated the female identity. Those who are marginalized or objectified in this colonialist, heteropatriarchal and heteropaternalist country desire to feel safe and liberated, and this piece tries to represent that freedom and safety. Figures roam the streets, drinking, partying, relaxing, socializing, reminiscing, and reflecting. The figures in the scene experience this night in a dream like state, filled with vibrant colours. The figures are abstract, depicting diversity with their versatile movements of expression. The figures do find safety in the presence of other women in these streets, but they are still haunted by oppressions that constrain true freedom in reality. The imagined scene is shadowed by a dark undertone, as this freedom is only that: imagined.

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Letter from the Editors

As we ready our fourth issue of *Hardwire* for publication at the end of the 2020-2021 school year, we the editors-in-chief find ourselves reflecting on a year of indescribable loss and violence, but also incredible mobilization and radical care. The COVID-19 pandemic has tested the very structures of our society in their ability to protect and preserve life, and as a journal whose mission is to identify and dismantle systems of oppression, we are unsurprised to see the failings of the North American settler states and the structures of racial capitalism they remain loyal to. For those of us who witness and experience routine marginalization in our lives and who dedicate our efforts to understanding and resisting relations of domination and exploitation, it may seem obvious that a country formed through the conquest of Black and Indigenous people and invested in a global system of capitalism and carcerality would now find the task of keeping its people alive insurmountable. However, we are reminded that, for many, this is new and unexpected information - particularly for those who unknowingly reap the rewards of systemic oppression.

It has indeed been a year of consciousness-raising for many; about the historic and ongoing relationship the Canadian settler state has to Indigenous life and land as Indigenous sovereignty and decolonization movements sparked coalitionary actions across the continent; about the embeddedness of white supremacy and anti-Blackness in our institutions and dominant culture in the wake of anti-Black police violence in both the US and Canada - most notably the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis and Regis Korchinski-Paquet here in Toronto; and about how deeply our society is structured by an exploitative and violent economic system, as multi-billion dollar corporations accumulate ever more wealth while millions of people lose work and their means of survival in the face of yet another economic crash and a global pandemic that requires certain people

to choose between sustaining their income or preserving their health. In the summer leading up to the 2020-2021 year and throughout the year itself, we saw a surge in activist organization and mobilization towards dismantling institutions built to maintain existing power structures, and while such work requires a life-long commitment in order to see its effects, these flashpoints can and do replenish our energy and drive to continue the substantive and material work that goes into resisting and dismantling systems of oppression.

Amongst what was undoubtedly a momentous year, punctuated frequently by death, loss, pain, and destruction, we were reminded that people care for one another in ways that are radical and substantive, and these reminders are absolutely crucial for continuing work needed for social change. It is incredibly reinvigorating to see people showing up to marches, rallies, and occupations demanding accountability from the institutions that govern and shape our society even with the risk of COVID-19 hanging over us. We saw mutual aid networks emerge and strengthen to support and meet the needs of certain communities our governments routinely neglect. This past year showed us that we have a fundamental capacity to care for one another in dark times, but we're also left wondering: can we maintain this energy and commitment to radical care beyond the pandemic?

It is important to remember that, while the overwhelming death and instability wrought by the virus seems "unprecedented" for many, routine neglect and violence is a pre-pandemic reality for certain communities among us. Our lived experiences grant each of us valuable insights into the world around us and how power moves through it. While academia - particularly the social sciences and humanities - markets itself as able to sensitize the individual student to these relationships implicitly such that academic study alone can reveal the full breadth of social relations of domination, we know this to be a fallacy. It

is only through a continued commitment to caring for and about the lives and experiences of those who are different from ourselves - and through revisiting our own changing relationships to power and harm - that we can truly remain sensitive to how power operates in our world. We also believe such an investment in relationality, in how we care for and connect with people and communities around us, may offer a way to maintain the momentum of abolitionist, coalitionary, and anti-oppressive movements that were spotlighted this past year.

The creators of the pieces published in the fourth issue of *Hardwire* each reflect on and consider the ways people relate to and engage with one another, with culture, and with power in their pieces, and we invite our readers to reflect on their own relationships as they read this issue.

Avneet Sharma, Grace Cameron, and Ryan Akler-Bishop explore how producing, experimenting with, and interacting with art and creative works can give insight into how creators and audiences relate to the world around them. Departing from a close-reading of two different media and blending personal experience in *Desire (for Zephyr's Nipple, for Belmondo's Ass)* in *The Birth of Venus and Breathless*, Avneet Sharma explores how the medium through which one engages with art shapes the experience of desire. Grace Cameron similarly engages in a close reading of a queer blog, exploring relationality, subjectivity, and the queering potential of creative works that resist mainstream legibility, and Ryan Akler-Bishop traces the historical emergence of *giallo* film in 1970s Italy to highlight how the sentiments and feelings borne out of particular context are communicated through new forms of art.

Several creative pieces in this issue meditate on the body as a site to explore and reflect on power, autonomy, expression, and interpretation, including the works of Micah Kalisch, Tif Fan, Kalliopé Anvar McCall, and Sarah Burns. Each of these creators reflect on their own relationships with their bodies - particularly with hair - and instances where they have been compelled to understand or value parts of their bodies in particular ways, considering the forces behind such compulsions. The cover of this issue, *Liberated for a Night* by Em-

erald Repard-Denniston, incorporates similar themes and explorations around freedom and bodily autonomy. These pieces remind us that the ways we come to know ourselves are inextricably tied to relations of domination such as white supremacy, cisheteropatriarchy, capitalism, ableism, and colonialism that hone in on the physical body as a medium to enforce norms and reify hegemonic relations.

The works of Iz Leitch, Nahar Amargi, and an Anonymous writer contemplate the task of finding oneself and making sense of one's self and relationships, within the mess of a reality where the parts of our multifaceted selves are at times in tension and conflict with one another. Nahar Amargi highlights the central role of relationships and relationality to trans migrant individuals and communities in *Home is Each Other: Transmigrant Homemaking in Body, Nation, and Community*. Both Iz Leitch and the Anonymous writer reflect on their own messy histories and experiences with religion, queerness, identity, and their personal relationships in order to make sense of and process the mess and tension that colour their lives, arriving at new insights throughout the iterative process of reflection and creation.

Finally, the works of Neel Desai, T. Fernando, and Katherine Burke explicitly deal with how individuals relate to structures of violence and power - how violent and powerful institutions structure the worlds individuals must engage in, and how these individuals align themselves with or against institutions for different reasons. These pieces remind us of the innovative and essential ways that subjects - especially marginalized subjects - contest, disidentify with, absorb, and dismantle structures of violence and power through their everyday existence.

We thank you for taking the time to read *Hardwire* Issue 4 and for supporting the work of undergraduate students published within this issue! We hope it inspires and invigorates you in ways that it has done for us.

Talia Devi Holy and Kendra Lynn Smith
 Editors-in-Chief
*Hardwire: The Undergraduate
 Journal of Sexual Diversity Studies*

Desire (for Zephyr's Nipple, for Belmondo's Ass) in *The Birth of Venus* and *Breathless*

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Cinema Studies and English

Abstract

This essay explores a queer method of spectatorship, specifically cinematic desire, through the lens of Stanley Cavell's (1971) claim that "a painting is a world; a photograph is of the world" (p. 24). I consider this distinction with regards to sexual desire towards subjects in the media of painting and cinema, focusing on attraction towards the figure of Zephyr in Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* and Jean-Paul Belmondo in Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless*. I argue that painting and film encourage distinct types of desire due to their isolated possibilities by recounting the desires I exhibit when viewing both works of art. Specifically, my desire to see Zephyr's obscured nipple functions distinctly from my desire to see Belmondo's obscured ass. If painting is a world, then it is impossible to see Zephyr's nipple. This representation of Zephyr does not extend beyond the world created in *The Birth of Venus* and, therefore, Zephyr's nipple does not exist. If a photograph (which Cavell likens to cinema) is of the world, then there are possibilities beyond what I see on the frame. Cavell (1971) writes; "You can always ask, pointing to an object in a photograph [...] what lies behind it, totally obscured by it" (p. 23). Unlike Zephyr's nipple, Belmondo's ass does exist outside of the world of *Breathless*, and it is therefore possible to see.

Being horny for a painting is different from being horny for a film. This is not because a figure depicted in the former is necessarily sexier than one in the latter, or vice versa. Rather, it is different because painting and film are not the same medium. A specific medium encourages distinct modes of engagement. In his book *The World Viewed*, Stanley Cavell (1971) defines medium by its "conditions of existence" (p. 72), which refers to the material basis through which the medium is brought to existence: paint on a canvas for painting or the succession of projections for film. Another aspect of medium that Cavell is concerned with is the conditions in which it can "survive" (p. 72). Cavell understands survival as the "isolated possibility of the art" (p. 73) in that the medium stands to exist distinctly from others. The medium itself must be able to exist with its

own isolated quality. According to Cavell, film differs from other media such as novels, theatre, and painting "in every way" (p. 73), yet we still understand different forms of media by comparing them to one another, as Cavell does in his claim that "a painting *is* a world; a photograph is *of* the world" (p. 24). He understands photography in relation to film, and furthermore understands film in relation to photography since "the basis of the medium of film is photographic" (p. 16). Notice how this statement illuminates how painting and photography function in connection to the world. Indeed, Cavell is concerned with art and its representations of the world we inhabit. If painting *is* a world but a photograph is only *of* the world, how does this affect the spectator's relationship to the representations depicted in said artwork? For example, when I view *The*



Figure 1.
Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*

Birth of Venus and *Breathless*, I experience sexual attraction - which then turns into desire - for the representations of bodies in both works. Yet my approach to this desire differs in the two instances due to the differences in medium. I therefore understand medium not only by its material basis but by the type of spectatorship I engage in. In this essay, I will explore the isolated possibilities of desire that are inherent in the distinct media of painting and film by analyzing my spectatorship of *The Birth of Venus* and *Breathless* through the lens of Cavell's *The World Viewed*.

Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* depicts Venus, the goddess of love and beauty, being blown to the shore by Zephyr and Aura, the gods of the winds. Venus stands nude atop a pearl on the shore with her hair obscuring her vagina, her hand obscuring her left breast, and her right breast exposed. To the right, a woman is about to cover the nude Venus with a cloth. To the left, Zephyr and Aura fly above Venus. They are both nude, though they wear tied cloths to strategically obscure Zephyr's genitalia and Aura's left breast, though her

right breast is exposed. Zephyr and Aura are surrounded by flowers floating in the air, one of which obscures Zephyr's nipple. When I view *The Birth of Venus*, my eyes are immediately drawn to Venus as the centerpiece of the action. I notice that she is in the midst of being draped in fabric, drawing attention to her partially nude state. My eye is drawn to her bare breast. *The Birth of Venus* is concerned with appreciating the female nude; the spectator's eyes are drawn to Venus's bare breast as the object of desire. Yet my gaze does not remain on the nude Venus, but on Zephyr and the parts of his body that are exposed (see figure 2). I admire his shoulder, the firmness of his stomach, and the suggestion of a nipple behind the flower. *The Birth of Venus* does not encourage my gaze towards Zephyr as evidenced by the exposure of both Venus and Aura's nipples contrasting the contrived obscuring of Zephyr's nipple. Although Zephyr is not the object in *The Birth of Venus* that is meant to be desired, he is in my spectatorship.

Breathless stars Jean-Paul Belmondo as Michel, a criminal who is being pursued



Figure 2.
Close-up of Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*

Note: Close-up of Zephyr, who is not the focal point of the painting but nevertheless captures the author's attention.

by the police for the murder of an officer, and Jean Seberg as Patricia, his love interest whose apartment he is staying in. In a lengthy sequence of *Breathless*, Patricia finds Michel sleeping in her apartment. They have a long conversation throughout the morning as Michel attempts to seduce Patricia. Michel is only wearing a pair of white boxers for the entire sequence while Patricia remains fully clothed. From the perspective of Michel, the main protagonist, *Breathless* positions Patricia as the object of desire. Twice, Michel attempts to lift Patricia's skirt and when Patricia hangs up a poster, the camera pans down to Michel feeling Patricia's ass before panning back up (see figure 3). While this shot does affirm that Patricia is the object of desire in *Breathless*, a side effect of the shot is that it also pans down to Michel's boxers. That Michel is willing to have sex with Patricia, but Patricia is not willing to have sex with Michel, results in Patricia being fully dressed in contrast with the nearly nude Michel. Michel is the person who is most exposed and is the object of desire in my viewing of *Breathless*. When watching the sequence, I find myself paying attention to Michel's body during the scene in which he leaves the bathroom and uses the telephone. He adjusts his boxers and then sits on the bed. Due to the way he is sitting and the camera

angle, I can see down the leg of his boxers, revealing part of his ass (see figure 4). The shot elicits both sexual attraction and a desire to see more of Michel's body.

I have identified how my spectatorship of *The Birth of Venus* and *Breathless* frames Zephyr and Michel as objects of desire. By viewing these representations of men as objects of desire, I must call attention to what it is that is being desired. In both *The Birth of Venus* and *Breathless*, I do not see the full nude, male or female, but suggestions of the full nude. Zephyr's nipple is covered by the flower and his genitals are covered by a cloth, though the rest of his body is exposed. Michel is wearing white boxers throughout the entire apartment sequence, though the rest of his body is exposed as well. When I view *The Birth of Venus* and *Breathless*, I do not only experience attraction to Zephyr and Michel, but also a desire to see more; what is not present but is suggested. I am enticed by the cloth on Zephyr that drapes his lower stomach, but is not quite low enough, as well as the sliver of Michel's skin that you can see under the leg of his boxers when he is sitting on Patricia's bed.

Although I am attracted to representations of Zephyr and Michel's bodies, my experience of desire differs due to my different forms of spectatorship in painting and film. I engage



Figure 3.
Screenshots from Godard's *Breathless*



Note: Notice how Jean Seberg is positioned as the object of desire yet it is Jean-Paul Belmondo who is mostly undressed.



Figure 4.

Note: The author realizes that part of the appeal of this image may also stem from the cigar in his mouth (as a phallus, smoking is not cool, kids).

with these forms of media differently because “a painting *is* a world; a photograph is *of* a world” (Cavell, p. 26). Since “the basis of the medium of film is photographic” (Cavell, p. 16), I understand film and photography as operating with the same function in this regard: representing part of the world. Cavell discusses the possibility of objects existing outside of the frame of the photograph, saying; “You can always ask, pointing to an object in a photograph [...] what lies behind it, totally obscured by it” (p. 23). He states that one “can ask these questions of objects in photographs because they have answers in reality” (p. 24). He argues that questions of what is obscured “generally makes no sense when asked of a painting” (p. 23) because “[t]he world of a painting is not continuous with the world of its frame; at its frame, a world finds its limits” (p. 24). Of course, the suggestion of Zephyr’s nipple in *The Birth of Venus* complicates Cavell’s argument. Notice I reference the suggestion of Zephyr’s nipple rather than Zephyr’s nipple itself; this is because the nipple does not exist. Zephyr’s nipple is only suggested due to the presence of Venus and Aura’s nipples. Since their nipples exist, I assume that Zephyr has the same anatomy. Yet, if a painting *is* a world, and finds its limits in the painting, I will never see Zephyr’s nipple because it does not exist: it has never been painted (see figure 5). Desire

for Michel in *Breathless* differs since my attraction to Michel is also an attraction to the actor Jean-Paul Belmondo. Belmondo’s body exists in reality and, therefore, it is possible to see the parts of his body that are obscured in the film.

Thus, desire operates differently between painting and film because desire ends within the frames of the painting whereas it extends beyond the film text. Although Zephyr is a figure who appears outside of *The Birth of Venus*, my desire for Zephyr only exists within the frame of the painting. I am not attracted to Zephyr in general, but only Zephyr as depicted in *The Birth of Venus*. I desire to see more of Zephyr, yet this is impossible as the obscured parts of his body do not exist in reality. While painting only gives us a likeness of the world but not the world itself, photography maintains the world. However, the spectator is absent from the world of a photograph. Cavell describes his experience of viewing a photograph, saying; “a photograph is present to me while I am not present to it; and a world I know, and see, but to which I am nevertheless not present [...], is a world past” (p. 23). We accept that we cannot interact with the world of a painting, but because photography is still entrenched in reality, we feel our absence from the photograph. When I desire Belmondo’s body in *Breathless*, I desire being present in the



Figure 5.
Close-up of Botticelli’s *The Birth of Venus*

Note: The flower concealing Zephyr’s nipple has been painted, but the nipple itself does not exist and never has.

film. I desire being Jean Seberg, who is present in the apartment where Belmondo is only clad in white boxers.

Desire in photography extends beyond the film because the framing of a photograph, being of the world, cuts out the rest of the world as a consequence and the “implied presence of the rest of the world, and its explicit rejection, are essential in the experience of a photograph as what it explicitly presents” (p. 24). Film, therefore, calls attention to the objects, which exist in reality, that are cut out or obscured. There is a sequence in *Breathless* where I notice an object that exists in reality but is obscured in the film: Belmondo’s ass. Michel arrives in Paris wearing only dress pants, a white button-up shirt, and a tie; no jacket. I notice the shape of his ass ever so slightly in his baggy pants as he walks down the Paris streets (see figure 6). Afterwards, he steals the keys to Patricia’s apartment from behind the concierge’s desk. To do so, he kneels over the desk and, due to how his pants stretch in this movement, I can see more clearly the shape of his ass through his pants, the seam being suggestive of a crack (see figure 7). Like Zephyr’s nipple, I do not see Belmondo’s ass in *Breathless*, but rather the suggestion of it. Belmondo’s ass differs from Zephyr’s nipple because it exists in real life: it is only obscured.

Since Zephyr’s nipple, and the rest of his obscured body, does not exist in *The Birth of Venus*, desire when viewing painting does not entail the same investment as desire when viewing film. While I am concerned with what is present in painting, I am concerned with what is obscured in film. My reaction to *The Birth of Venus* is not to look for representations of Zephyr in other paintings because I am only attracted to Zephyr as depicted in *The Birth of Venus*. Whereas my attraction to Belmondo in *Breathless* results in my investment in seeing Belmondo’s body outside of *Breathless*. My attraction to Belmondo takes on a more obsessive, occasionally feverish anticipation of seeing *more* of him. I re-watch *Breathless* multiple times just to see his pouty lips, smoulder, and the tease of his ass. I bother my friends and Twitter followers alike with photographs, screencaps, and musings about him. I have spent hours watching his filmography with very little interest in any other aspects of the films; I watched *Une femme est une femme* (1961)



Figure 6.
Screenshot from Godard's *Breathless*

Note: Michel (Belmondo) in the aforementioned outfit. The author shamelessly admits that Belmondo’s pouty lips and general smoulder contribute significantly to this eroticized reading of his character.



Figure 7.
Screenshot from Godard's *Breathless*

Note: Michel (Belmondo) reaching across the concierge’s desk for the keys.

in which Belmondo does not appear nude at all, I watched *Pierrot le Fou* (1965) in which Belmondo appears shirtless but he still does not appear nude, and I watched *À double tour* (1959) in which I finally see Belmondo's ass as his character Laszlo exits the shower. Though this film does offer a brief glimpse, my desire to see more is not lessened (see figure 8). As opposed to the confines of painting, film is of a world. This means that there will always be the rest of the world to see. Therefore, my approaches to desire in Botticelli's *The Birth of*

Venus and the 1960 film *Breathless* differ due to their inherent differences in medium. If we define medium by its "isolated possibilit[ies]" (p. 73), these distinct possibilities exist when engaging in acts of spectatorship involving sexual attraction and desire. The distinction between painting and film - that the former "is a world" and the latter "is of the world" (p. 24) - illuminates a universal reality; we will never see Zephyr's nipple, but we could potentially see Belmondo's ass.



Figure 8.
Screenshots from *À double tour*

Note: The scene where Belmondo's character Laszlo exits the shower, including a fleeting shot of his ass. The author supposes this is better than nothing.

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A Carceral Solution That Maintains Violence – Legal Regulation of Sex Work (Bill C-36)

Neel Desai (he/him)
Human Biology and Women & Gender Studies

Abstract

The debate around sex work, and the justifications to regulate the practice, has consistently maintained a narrative of inherent danger and harm within the occupation. Carceral and legal responses to prohibit and criminalize sex work, like Bill C-36, have been championed by legislators and carceral feminists as a vital tool in ending violence against women, sex trafficking and other forms of violence that sex work supposedly ensues. However, an intersectional, critical race, historical and structural analysis of Bill C-36, and the carceral system as a whole, articulate and exemplify how the government and the police both act as extensions of pre-existing structures, like white supremacy, colonialism, and slavery. As such, these structures do not exist as forms of the promised protection against gendered and sexualized violence. Rather, they work to regulate the sex and sexuality of namely Black, Indigenous, migrant sex workers. This article unpacks the various ways that the carceral system deploys state control as a means of regulating the bodies of women, trans and racialized sex workers by enacting the very violence the carceral state claims to condemn. The state's participation in violence illustrates how utilizing these same systems and structures that abuse and violate racialized bodies today as the first line of defense against gender based violence is ineffective. Instead, decriminalization actually provides racialized sex workers with greater control of their sex lives, bodies and levels of safety; more than Bill C-36 and the police think decriminalization provides.

“Defund the police” is a statement that has received enormous criticism within our contemporary moment, as those against this ambitious policy proposal question: who will protect vulnerable folks from gendered and sexualized violence, if not the police? Carceral feminists—those who advocate for increased incarceration as a means of solving gendered violence—argue the police and law are vital participants in maintaining and reinforcing safety and protection for those at risk of violence through criminalized responses. A clear

example of such a response is the current legal regulation of sex work, as it claims to “[protect] those who sell their sexual services from exploitation” (Department of Justice Canada, 2014). However, such an affirmation neglects how carceral surveillance and over policing of sex work can “pose further threats rather than promises of safety” (Law, 2014). This is due to the state’s historical and systematic¹ participation in gender-based and sexual violence, namely against Black, Indigenous, and migrant women. As such, the decriminalization of sex

¹ This term, as defined by Sylvanna Falcon, refers to the context of state-administered carceral violence as an ongoing pattern of violence subject to planning and coordination, rather than isolated occurrences that are random.

work, as the Black Lives Matter Movement continuously has emphasized, can actually provide safer, non-violent, non-criminal means of protection for racialized sex workers.

Canada's current regulation of sex work follows the *Nordic Model*, in which the law targets those who purchase sex instead of those who sell sex. This approach came forth through a legislation called Bill C-36: a response to the Supreme Court of Canada's decision in *Canada v. Bedford*, which stated Canada's sex work laws were unconstitutional and required reform. This new criminal law was introduced in an effort to "criminalize those who fuel and perpetuate the demand for prostitution" (Department of Justice Canada) instead of sex workers themselves. However, Bill C-36 shares many similarities to Pre-*Bedford* laws. For instance, this model still puts sex workers who choose to engage in sex work under the legal radar, as it assumes that prostitution is only a dangerous and exploitative practice instead of a valid means of income. In addition, Bill C-36 continues to assume that all sex workers are selling services against their will or consent, and thereby needs to be prohibited and legally regulated by the carceral state.

Whether it's Pre-*Bedford* laws or Bill C-36, these legal decisions and changes in criminal law do not exist in isolation, but rather as part of an uninterrupted line of violence conducted against racialized women. Intersectional, historical, and structural context is key to understanding why Black, Indigenous, and migrant women are disproportionately targeted by the legal regulation of sex work, and how the law has always been a site of violence. Upon evaluation of said contexts, it becomes clear as to why utilizing criminalized responses curated by the carceral system fails to provide the promised safety for sex workers, as the law and police commit "the very forms of violence they claim to condemn" (Mingus, 2019). As Black Lives Matter Canada (2021), an organization dedicated to Black liberation and dismantling colonial and anti-black systems, points out, "decriminalization of sex work will divert funds from its unsolicited and unwanted police presence"; a structure that historically

was never built for the safety and well-being of sex workers to begin with.

The historical and systematic relationship between the police state and sex workers has consistently upheld a narrative of dominance. As Pamela Palmater states: "the breaches of human rights go back decades" (para. 13) against marginalized women engaging in sex work. Subsequently, structures that regulate and control sex worker's bodies today, like the police, prisons, courts, criminal justice system and border patrol, exist as products of long withstanding colonial and patriarchal projects. Criminal, immigration, and municipal laws then exist to systematically maintain the violent practices of the past, through the unwanted and unsolicited presence of police and law enforcement in the lives of sex workers. Hence, the incarceration and criminalization of sex workers do not exist as forms of protection for vulnerable groups, but rather work to punish, villainize and dehumanize Black, Indigenous and migrant women, who are considered disposable and undesirable groups by the carceral system.

The history of slavery and anti-blackness within Canada has extended its presence onto contemporary Black lives; whether it's racial profiling or police brutality, systematic violence against Black folks has remained unchecked. In particular, through "re-articulations of slavery-era misogynoir"² (Maynard, 2017, p. 130), police-killings and sexual violence against Black women have been largely ignored because of pre-existing social constructions of Black women's bodies and sexualities. An example of such a historical construct is reflected within the colonial objectification of Saartje Baartman, a Black woman who was forced to partake in 19th-century European attractions that hypersexualized her body. Contextualizing the dehumanization of Saartje Baartman contributes to today's belief that Black women exhibit exaggerated features and practices that are inherently sexual in nature. As Robyn Maynard (2017) illustrates, Black women, particularly after the rise of slavery, were "defined by intersecting conditions of subjection, invisibility, disposability" (p. 129)

² Term used to describe misogyny directed specifically towards Black women.

and objectification. Due to this racist history, Black sex workers under Bill C-36 are more likely to be targeted, profiled, and presumed to be engaging in public sex work automatically, as the police and law view them “sexually deviant” (Maynard, 2017, p. 138), and “‘deserving’ victims of repression, criminalization and violence” (Maynard, 2017, p. 140) conducted by the state.

Indigenous people also endured a great deal of historical and systematic violence conducted by the police. As Palmater (2018) emphasizes, “Canada is guilty of having dispossessed Indigenous peoples of their lands and resources and committed grave acts of violence against them” (para. 9). Parallel to the historical experience of Black women, we see colonial dispositions illustrating Indigenous women’s bodies as “sexually deprived ‘squaws’” – [which] has been used to justify sexual violence toward Indigenous women and to normalize widespread violence against Indigenous women involved in the sex trade” (Maynard, 2017, p. 142). As a result, the hypersexualization of Black and Indigenous women shifts the blame back onto the bodies of sex workers, and renders the routine and systematic surveillance, incarceration and sexual abuse enacted by police officers as legitimate forms of regulation under Bill C-36.

Systematic forms of regulation and violence are vital to unpack, as their repetitive nature across various racialized groups indicate that such actions are not random, but hold a significant purpose (Falcon, 2006, p. 122). Indicated by patterns of “controlling images³” (Maynard, 2017, p. 131) being used in the victimization of Black and Indigenous sex workers, the carceral state capitalize on this by utilizing their power to dehumanize and violate these women with little to no consequences. The experience of the migrant sex worker illustrates said systematic violence, as heavy militarization, deportation and “rape is routinely and systematically used by the state”

(Falcon, 2006, p. 119) at the border as a form of punishment against undesirable groups. Since little has been done to “address the concerns of victims or prevent these offences from recurring” (Palmater, 2016, p. 279), these experiences demonstrate the ways in which migrant women crossing borders to engage in sex work are rendered disposable in the eyes of the state. These repeated narratives of violence reveal that Bill C-36 does not view sex work as the problem, but rather racialized women’s sexuality as the actual issue.

When connecting the historical and systematic nature in which violence against Black and Indigenous women continues via present day structures (prisons and police), many carceral feminists argue that slavery and colonialism are products of the past, and the current liberal state of the carceral system has moved beyond these racist practices. From the perspective of carceral feminists, Bill C-36 is considered to be a progressive law, as “increased policing, prosecution, and imprisonment [can act] as the primary solution to violence against women” (Law, 2014) and can protect vulnerable persons from the alleged harms caused by sex work. However, such an approach is non-intersectional, as the Bill ignores the various ways “race, class, gender identity, and immigration status leave certain women more vulnerable to violence” (Law, 2014), by exacerbating the already disproportionate harm faced by Black, Indigenous and migrant sex workers within the police and legal system.

When Maynard states Black women in Canada are subject to “re-articulations of slavery era misogynoir” (Maynard, 2017, p. 130), modern tropes of being a Black woman are reincarnated from the past, and are used to legitimatise the under-protection they face within violent structures like prisons. A prime example of such is the case of Moka Dawkins, a sex worker who is part of the “41 percent of Black trans women reported having been arrested or jailed because of their gender

³ An offensive derogatory English slur (historically) used to hypersexualize and exoticize North American Indigenous women.

⁴ As defined by Black feminist theorist Patrica Hill Collins, is a term used to describe the contemporary representations of Black women used within the context of slavery, but upgraded to fit modern day ideologies of Black women (e.g. describing Black women as “welfare queens” or “negligent, single mothers”).

identity” (Maynard, 2017, p. 139). As a Black trans sex worker, Dawkins was disproportionately targeted to face violence and abuse at the hands of correctional officials and police officers. By being incarcerated for four years in a men’s prison even though she is a woman, in addition to constantly being misgendered within courts (D’Amore, 2020), the case of Dawkins illustrates how the legal system still treats Black trans women as invisible. Carceral feminism fails to realize that prisons were never designed to protect sex workers, as Bill C-36 confidently proclaims, but rather work to target, exploit, and erase Black trans women’s lives.

MMIWG, the acronym for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, has been an on-going crisis and endemic that has been widely regarded as a systematic and reoccurring issue within Canada. Carceral feminists argue the issue of MMIWG is a direct result of exceptional individuals who engage in violence, and must be targeted and persecuted. However, Palmater (2016) asks, “But what if the rapists or killers are police?” (p. 282). When police officers and law enforcement in Canada have committed violent crimes against Indigenous women and girls with on-going impunity from these acts, it questions how Bill C-36 intrusts them to provide equitable protection for Indigenous sex workers. With more than 582 MMIWG cases in Canada (Palmater, 2016, p. 246), sex work is often used to justify why these numbers are so high, as the carceral feminists insist it is an “inherently dangerous activity” (Department of Justice Canada, 2014). However, both fail to “acknowledge that police are often purveyors of violence” (Law, 2014) against Indigenous sex workers and continuously endanger and harm the lives of Indigenous women.

Articulating on the idea of endangerment, sex work and anti-trafficking laws are often encapsulated together to curate vague definitions of sex trade. As a result, sex workers who cross borders are all labelled as trafficked victims in need of saving, and who hold no “agency to provide or withdraw consent” (Maynard, 2015, p. 46). As sex work and trafficking are then both viewed as forced labour and illegal in nature, this makes it “difficult for migrants to work and live legally in Canada” (Maynard, 2015, 41), in fear of being

isolated and deported. An example of this in Canada occurred in 2007, where a migrant sex worker who attempted to cross the border “was subsequently held in detention and then deported without being given the opportunity to meet with a lawyer” (Maynard, 2015, p. 50). Deporting migrant women wanting to obtain a form of income showcases how Bill C-36 and generalized trafficking laws further invalidate a sex worker’s income and endanger the financial and sexual autonomy of racialized women.

Upon investigating and providing contextual examples of the state’s participation and role within gendered and sexualized violence, it is clear that depending on the carceral system to enforce Bill C-36 is ineffective. Criminalization compounds the violent responses that are used to regulate the presence of sex work, such as incarceration and police violence, and works to perpetuate the state’s racist and misogynistic functions. Many anti-violent feminist movements like Black Lives Matter Canada have emphasized how the legal system must take down unnecessary laws like Bill C-36, “which contribute to sex workers’ isolation and vulnerability to violence” (Black Lives Matter Canada, 2021). Nevertheless, although decriminalization of sex work is a very important step in the process of maintaining safety and protection for racialized women participating in sex work, it is not the only step that needs to be taken.

Specifically, Robin Maynard (2017) writes that, “Black and Indigenous sex workers face far higher rates of police harassment and violence than white sex workers do, including racist and sexist language, public strip searches and death threats” (p. 139). As such, decriminalization of sex work will not automatically change this. Rather, changing our attitude and perspectives towards Black, Indigenous and migrant women, in addition to the enforcement of non-violent strategies that do not rely on the carceral state, is crucial to the safety of sex trade. Furthermore, it is important to not “isolate acts of state or individual violence from their larger contexts” (Incite! & Critical Resistance, 2003, p. 144) since patriarchy and racism will still exist even after decriminalization. This means additional interventions, including reduced police presence around sex trade hotspots, allowing sex workers to

be eligible for loans and public housing, and dropping prior convictions for sex work related offenses, all work to “transform the conditions which help to create acts of violence or make them possible” (Mingus, 2019). These interventions can also offer long-term solutions to end violence against marginalized sex workers.

Once it is understood that decriminalization is not enough, it also becomes clear that detaching completely from the carceral state is additionally not enough. Mia Mingus (2019) points out that “it is not enough to simply ‘not call the cops’” (para. 7) when sex workers are in dangerous situations and require medical assistance. Rather, it is important to understand what structures need to change and reform to better suit the needs of sex workers, and what structures need to relocate the attention away from violent counter measures and towards safer responses. This might mean having a social worker and a health professional knock on the door of a sex worker in-crisis instead of an armed cop (Black Lives Matter Canada, 2021). Transformative justice⁵ recognizes what solutions and responses need to be replaced and abolished, while in turn, understand that our futures do not simply exist with “the [complete] absence of the state and violence” (Mingus, 2019). Thus, “*defund the police*” means we must become less reliant on the carceral system and increase funding towards sustainable infrastructure that actually support the livelihood of racialized sex workers.

“Following the abolition of slavery, prostitution laws became one means of exerting state control over Black women’s sexuality and their access to public space, as well as an extension of colonial law over Indigenous women’s lives” (Maynard, 2017, p. 138). Connecting this history to the contemporary legal regulation of sex work, since Bill C-36 states individuals must leave sex work because it is inherently harmful, the law ignores how sex work is a valid form of work and income for many

racialized women. Many of these women do not want to leave sex work, but rather want the practice to be protected through labour rights, in addition to the assurance of less state-surveillance. As 171 sex workers were killed in Canada between 1994-2004, studies have demonstrated “that working in a criminalized context is highly dangerous for sex workers” (Maynard, 2015, p. 46). Instead of providing the promised protection, Bill C-36 only endangers, violates, and controls the bodies of Black, Indigenous, and migrant women. Alternatively, shifting the focus and energy towards pushing for a repeal of Bill C-36⁶, curating laws that prohibit the unwanted presence of law enforcement within sex work spaces, and understanding that sex work is an *actual* occupation can provide the needed acceptance of sex work into public spaces and provide safer working conditions as a whole. Actions an individual can engage in to support sex workers can be signing the aforementioned petition, speaking to friends and loved ones about how the legal prohibition of sex work is actually dangerous for sex worker, attending protests, or donating to support organizations like Maggie’s Toronto⁷. This can make all the difference for protecting sex workers; more than Bill C-36 ever will.

⁵ As described by Mia Mingus, is a political framework that exists to respond to violence without creating more violence. The framework emphasizes the harm in relying on violent countermeasures, like the carceral state, to reduce violence.

⁶ There are petitions that one can sign to contribute towards this push: <https://petitions.ourcommons.ca/en/Petition/Details?Petition=e-3132>

⁷ Maggie’s Toronto Sex Worker’s Action Project: <https://www.maggiesto.org/>

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I CAN'T LOVE YOU ANYMORE

Iz Leitch
(they/them)

Undecided



I LOVED YOU FIRST BECAUSE
I WAS ALONE, AND WHEN
YOU'RE THAT ALONE YOU
HATE EVERYONE AND THEN
YOU LOVE THEM



IT WAS A
BONUS THAT
EVERYONE
ELSE
LOVED
YOU
TOO.



WE DID A LOT OF GIRLFRIEND
SHIT. I'M MIXED S.E.A./WHITE
AND I WANTED TO GIVE YOU
ALL THE PRIVILEGE THAT
THAT AFFORDED ME. IN REALITY
ALL I COULD REALLY DO WAS
GIVE YOU GIFTS, AND
OPPORTUNITIES YOU COULDN'T
TAKE.

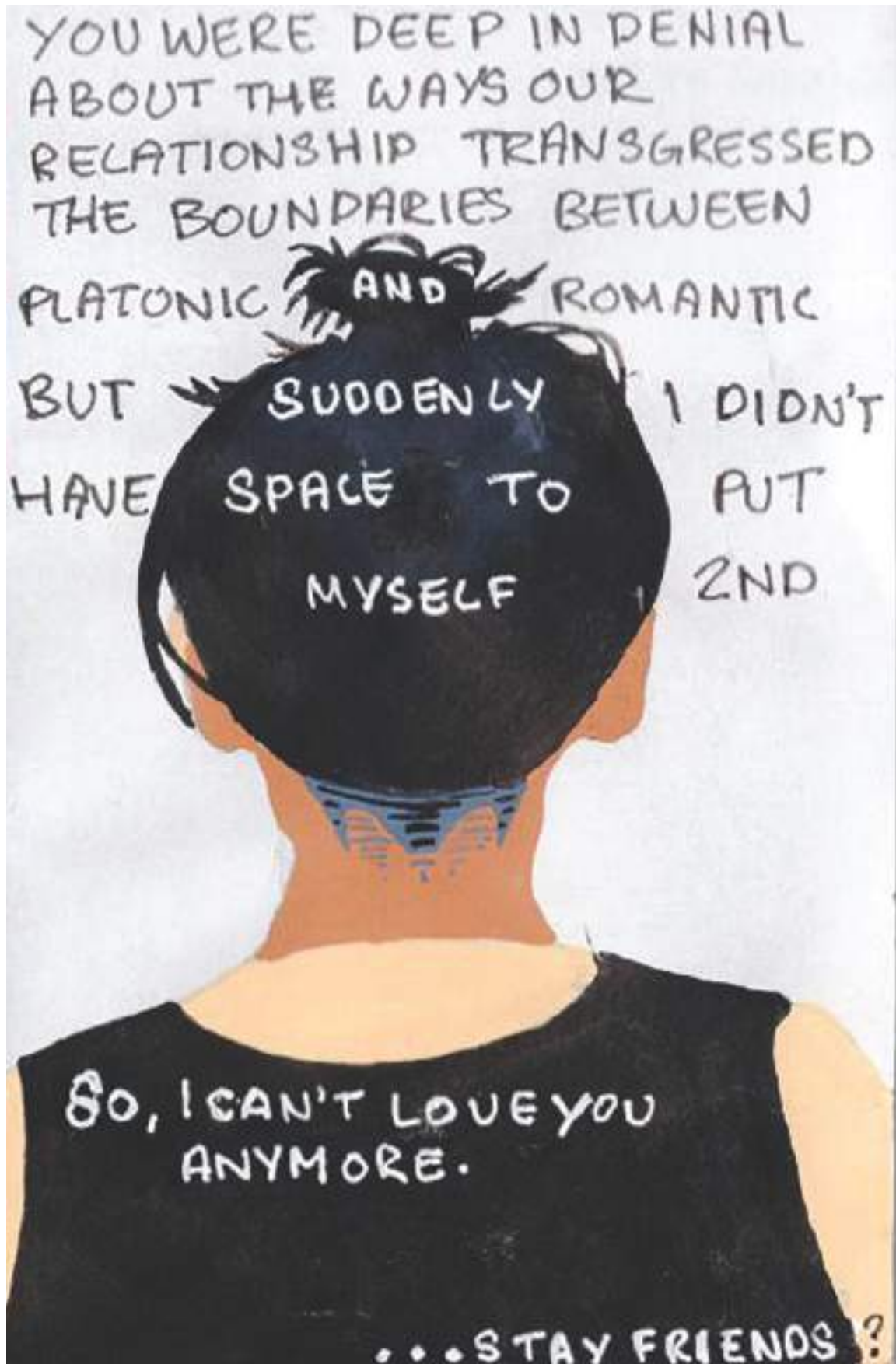


I HELD ONTO YOUR DREAMS
AS IF THEY WERE MY OWN,
AN EXTRA MATTRESS IN MY
ROOM RESERVED FOR YOU.

BUT THE TROUBLE WITH
TRAUMA IS IT FILLS THE SPACE
IN YOUR HEAD UNTIL IT'S ALL
THAT'S LEFT. I GOT BETTER, YOU
GOT
WORSE.







I CAN'T LOVE YOU
ANYMORE IS A ZINE
ABOUT TWO QUEER
GENDER FULKED
SOUTH EAST ASIANS
TRAUMA BONDING
AND LEARNING TO
STOP BEING TWO
HALVES AND START
BEING ONE WHOLE

Artist Statement

“I Can’t Love You Anymore” is a paint pen and printer paper zine. This piece is inspired by my traumatized Queer Catholic experience and by the resilience of my friends who will never be privileged enough to be in academia. This piece also exists because of the relative inaccessibility of mental healthcare; if it was an option I would have gone to therapy instead of creating this. This piece is shaped by all that I am, all that I was, and will shape all that I will be. I hope that it imparts to the reader the same sense of strength that I get from being part of my weird little group of first-gen Queer South East Asian friends.

This piece also deals with and explores questions such as, how do you grapple with becoming so intertwined with someone who is so afraid of intimacy that you aren’t even afforded the label of romance? How can we move towards being “just friends” when there was never any acknowledgement of anything else? Within the highly codependent social circumstance where everyone was a little bit together at one point or another, this zine deals solely with what I feel to be the most extended and most clear-cut if anything about this can be a clear-cut relationship. Through this one relationship I consider the place I was in, enmeshed within codependent relationships, and how our codependencies blurred the lines between purely platonic and mixed romantic/platonic relationships.

Autoethnography and Queer Headcanons: How *The Niche* Makes Theory for Five People

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Abstract

This essay examines a queer blog, The Niche, using autoethnography and queer theory. Capturing irreverent queer identities and commanding reinterpretations of heteronormative pop culture, the blog exemplifies real-life instances of the intersection of experience and theory. The Niche provides an example of a queer research method that is fully integrated into queer life. More broadly, it demonstrates how digital media projects eschew cohesive classification. Studying sexual and gender diversity through a blog like The Niche foregrounds the practice of understanding people on their own terms, through their own words. The Niche has potential as a research tool because it operates beyond normative paradigms of knowledge. The presumed heterosexuality of the Gilmore Girls protagonists, for instance, is of no consequence or relevance because everything is fodder for queer appropriation and interpretation.

The Niche is a blog, modelled after the popular and defunct site *The Toast*. Mixing pop culture commentary, queer theory, and personal essays, *The Niche* offers new possibilities for exploring queer identity. *The Niche* is made up of a complement of queer and trans contributors. Each piece on the blog is structured differently: a mix of lists, ruminations on niche media, and elaborate queer head-canons. A head-canon is a personal theory about the motivations, identities and emotions of characters in a piece of media. In one post a contributor, lamenting what could have been if Sony and Marvel had not legally codified Spiderman's heterosexuality (and whiteness)^[1], posts a feature length screenplay they wrote in which Peter Parker is bisexual ("I Went Ahead and Wrote a Spider-Man Movie Where Peter Parker is Bisexual Because Life is Short and God Knows Nobody Else was Going to Do it," Peyton, 2017d). The most transformative potential of the blog emerges from the posts that feature alternate endings, re-writes and re-imaginings of

movies, TV shows, art, and books. As a queer research method, *The Niche* foregrounds minor and opaque forms of knowledge to destabilize normative research paradigms. I read *the Niche* as an archive and a methodological framework that aims to prioritize subjective and specific knowledges in defiance of research prescriptions that demand generalization and objective truth. Studying gender and sexuality through *The Niche* and other localized queer digital communities allows researchers to privilege variety over cohesion and process over fixed conclusions. Queer theory is premised on a refusal of normativity; thus queer research should lean into mediums and methods like *The Niche* that challenge normative criteria of legibility.

Blogs like *The Niche* that include a variety of different contributors over a long period of time provide a unique opportunity to witness the growth and development of gender and sexual identities organically. Throughout the almost four years the website has been active, at least one regular

contributor has transitioned without feeling the need to make a post about coming out or about transitioning. Featuring a large and shifting cast of contributors that index the ongoing fluctuations of identity, *The Niche* epitomizes the inherent instability of online spaces. As such, it is a site that can be best understood through a methodology that emphasizes *techne* (Dadas, 2016). Caroline Dadas contrasts static, formal knowledge—*episteme*—with adaptive, experiential knowledge—*techne*. Posts on *The Niche* function as discursive representations of queer practices, both regarding queer genders and sexualities and the ephemeral nature of queer as theory and politics. The blog demonstrates a dynamic multivocality while maintaining a common thread across its posts: each evokes a specific and indefinable queer experience. By multivocality I mean that the blog’s writers express a variety of, sometimes conflicting, experiences and voices. *The Niche* insists that everything is fodder for queer appropriation and interpretation. Working from the non-canonical assumption that the character Paris Geller is a lesbian, “Top Ten Hate Crimes Committed by Gilmore Girls Creator Amy Sherman-Palladino” articulates Sherman-Palladino’s ‘crimes’ in what could be best described as a mix of autoethnography and multi-media collage (Peyton, 2017b). Autoethnography is a methodology prominent in queer theory, sociology, and feminist theory (to name a few) that involves analyzing one’s own experiences and feelings as a way of producing knowledge within broader theories or frameworks. This medium expands our approach to studying gender and sexuality by inviting the reader to consider gender and sexuality through a combination of reflections (personal essays), refractions that interpolate the self through media (queer head-cans), and abstractions (like the narrowly legible piece “What if Dale Cooper were the FBI Agent Investigating Tony Soprano? What then?”, Peyton, 2020). Studying sexual and gender diversity through a blog like *The Niche* foregrounds understanding people on their own terms, through their own words.

Analyzing *The Niche* as an index of a subset of queer identities carries a variety of advantages and disadvantages. The blog

can be understood as analogous to autoethnography and as such, *The Niche* contains similar pitfalls and benefits. Its emphasis on creative and personal interpretation of media aligns with Stacy Holman Jones and Tony E. Adams’s (2010) understanding that all bodies are immersed in, transformed by, and transform texts. Pieces that insist on queer identification like “Dan Humphrey was Trans and I’ll Prove it” (Peyton, 2017e), “Jo and Laurie are Trans and I’ll Prove it” (Ely, 2020), and “Don Draper was a Trans Man: a Niche interview with Jon Hamm” (Peyton, 2018) rewrite cultural texts in unexpected ways to counter the representative erasure experienced by so many queer people in normative media. Conversely, the fact that the blog is made up of so many different voices means that it is never truly cohesive in ways that autoethnography takes for granted. Pieces are often so individual and, for lack of a better word, niche, that their logical leaps and bounds can be difficult to trace and understand in relation to gender and sexuality. For example, “Five Influential Mustaches That, In Retrospect, Should Have Made Me Realize I’m Trans” (Neil, 2019) collects a group of cis male characters and people sourced from media that ranges from Harry Potter to *The Princess Bride* to a real-life video game reporter. Although these enactments of queer appropriation are entertaining, as a method of knowledge production queer appropriation remains difficult to grasp. I would argue, however, that the methodological disadvantage of queer appropriation is something of a double-edged sword; the blog’s slippery elusion of easy categorization embodies the quintessential defining feature of queer theory and politics. Understanding *The Niche* requires supplanting *episteme* with *techne* (Dadas, 2016). “American Girl Dolls Ranked in Order of Gayness” (Peyton, 2017c) is difficult to cogently analyze because, considering the fact that there are no officially recognized gay American Girl dolls, the piece can only index the author’s understanding of gay identity. The meaningful knowledge, in my opinion, comes through understanding the deep subjectivity of the blog and through analyzing the pieces both on their own terms and in relation to each other.

The Niche proffers unexpected

connections that challenge and widen the scope of how queer identification operates and intrudes into media and visual culture. Stacy Holman Jones and Tony E. Adams (2010) describe “the hinge” as the connection between seemingly disparate ideas or voices in order to explore the tensions and connections that arise in their proximity. The “hinge” acts as a localized bridge between cultural texts, a bridge that is built without a clear purpose or pre-existing border crossing demand. Implicitly creating a medium defined by what Jones and Adams would refer to as hinging, the blog offers glimpses of intangible truths that are only accessible through the confidence of being understood. This hinging underlies posts like Emily’s “Women in Mary Cassatt Paintings as Straight Girls You’ve Had Crushes On” (2017). The research possibilities within *The Niche* are predicated on the fact that analysis would be lateral and oblique, queering traditional empiricist or logical approaches to knowledge. Knowledges produced by the blog are not replicable and as such are removed from an epistemology of ‘objective’ truth. The qualities that empiricists would use to define objective truth are irrelevant to a site that dismisses text in favor of subtext like a child ripping off the wrapping to get to a present. The blog assumes in-group knowledge that, when considered as a possible research tool, deviates considerably from research tools like expository or observational documentaries. There is no F.A.Q., the About Page contains a mock screenplay, and there is no codified description of references or terminology available for new readers. Using *The Niche* as a research tool would queer traditional social scientific and humanistic research endeavors by making no reference to a paradigm in which the normative can exist. However, an accountable queer methodological practice demands an honest assessment of the benefits and harms that can accompany research. Moya Bailey’s (2016) discussion of digital media made by and for Black and brown trans and queer women highlights the importance of online spaces not geared towards respectability or engagement of the “out-group” (p. 72). ‘Translating’ in-group knowledge to wider, more privileged audiences runs the risk of replicating patterns of exploitation and appropriation^[2].

With this risk in mind, it behooves researchers conducting research using *The Niche* or platforms like *The Niche* to prioritize maintaining their elements of opacity and irreverence. *The Niche* is relatively small, typically garnering less than 10 comments on each post. The assumed audience for their posts is technologically literate, queer, and likely already a contributor or somehow connected to one. There is no attempt to water down outlandish claims, pander to straight or cis audiences, or treat it as an ‘educational tool.’ Using *The Niche* as a research tool would counter hegemonic ideals of knowledge that seek to generalize and universalize all findings in order to create the broadest possible application. Some things can be just for queer people and it is okay if they are oblique or alienating to the people they are not meant to affirm and entertain.

Endnotes

[1] In 2015 leaked Sony emails revealed that the Spiderman licensing agreement with Marvel stipulated that Peter Parker be white and straight.

[2] See the appropriation of African American Vernacular English by white women from trans and queer Black people.

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Indigenous Sexuality in Necropolitical States of Exception: *Extending Foucault's The History of Sexuality to the Settler Colonial Context*

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Political Science

Abstract

This essay extends Michel Foucault's theorization of sexuality in The History of Sexuality to the settler colonies. After providing a brief literature review of Post-Colonial critiques of Foucault's work, I explore a mode of governing sexuality in the settler colonies that is distinctly necropolitical: in this case, the sexualities of Indigenous people who are placed into a state of elimination and dispossession by the settler state. I explore Indigenous sexuality in necropolitical spaces within the work of Tanya Tagaq's novel Split Tooth, putting this innovative novel in conversation with Mark Rifkin's theorization of "The Erotics of Sovereignty." Next, I connect these understandings of Indigenous sexuality to the necropolitical regulation of queer and queer of colour sexuality, exploring the possibility of radical, coaltionary resistance between Indigenous people and settler queers in these necropolitical spaces.

Towering and sublime, the Northern Lights come closer. My eyelids are frozen open but Body grows warmer. I can't move. Light leaves Time and takes on physical form. The light morphs into faces and creatures, and then they begin to solidify into violent shards. This energy is not benign like that of the ocean dwellers; these are the Masters of Law and Nature. Face beats Time to my heart and it beats faster and faster because I am powerless now.

The Light glows too hard. I'm blind. The Light shapes itself into long shards and attaches to the surface of my eyes. It burns worse than anything I have ever felt. Like the cold freezes moisture, the light seems to sear my fluid.

My nostrils begin to burn as the glow grows down my face and cheeks. I groan as it travels up my nose and into my sinus cavities. My ears become plugged and filled. The backs of my eyeballs begin to melt from agony to ecstasy as a large shard of light is thrust down my throat. I can't breathe for an instance but the panic melts as my throat is opened; it is split vertically but not destroyed. I'm healed with torture.

The slitting continues down my belly, lighting up my liver and excavating my bladder. An impossible column of green light simultaneously impales my vagina and anus. My clit explodes and I am split in two from head to toe as the light from my throat joins the light in my womb and begins to make a giant fluid figure eight in my Body.

I am lifted off the ground and realize that this is the end of Life. Nobody can survive this. I can go forever now into the bliss. Join the light. Light in lung. Light in sole. Opening of holes.

Pain. I am naked and freezing. My skin almost tears off the ice as I stand up. My clothes are scattered around me. I am shaking violently. I put on my clothes and stagger home, bleeding from every orifice. My parents are at work. I was gone for twelve hours. At hot shower calms me and washes the shaking way. I can never tell anyone about this. Nobody would believe me. I wipe my pussy and green glow is left on the Kleenex. It squirms like larva.

-Tanya Tagaq, Split Tooth

Introduction

It is almost humorous to think of what Michel Foucault would have thought of this prior passage, written in 2018 by Inuk throat singer and writer Tanya Tagaq. Submerged in what appears through his writing to be almost solely the European metropole, Foucault's writing on sexuality in *The History of Sexuality Volume 1* made little connection to conceptions of sexuality that existed beyond the immediate perceptions of white Europeans. His discussions of sexuality in different countries, encompassed by his idea of "ars erotica," are laden with orientalist perceptions of sexuality that flatten reality and diminish considerations of how alternate sexualities can meaningfully interact with sexuality in the metropole (Foucault, 1978). I contend that Tagaq's work, and the work of theorists in Queer Indigenous Studies and Settler Colonial Studies that write about Indigenous sexuality, is highly applicable to Foucault's theorization and our understanding of sexuality today. As a queer person of colour living in Canada, a settler colonial state, my navigations of sexuality may in many ways be inapplicable to Foucault's insights due to his lack of analysis of the implications of settler colonialism and alternate political formations within his work. Thus, in writing this essay I take up *Split Tooth* and the theorization of scholars in Queer Indigenous Studies and Settler Colonial Studies to understand a more comprehensive picture of sexuality within the settler colonies. I do this to understand the ways in which sexuality exists as an apparatus within the settler colonies and to understand how we, as marginalized people, can contest the ways sexuality is deployed to police and subsume our own bodies, communities, and ways of existing.

Despite my criticisms, Michel Foucault's

The History of Sexuality Volume 1 was foundational in its reconceptualization of sexuality and the role it plays in relation to state power. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1978) argues that instead of holding innate characteristics, sexuality is a "historical construct" that underlies various formations of power and knowledge through its production of discourses that stem from the state, various institutions, and society. Central to Foucault's account of sexuality is its critical role as a tool of "biopower." Biopower maintains state sovereignty through a variety of political technologies that work to formulate, alter, subject, and manage human life and the population (Foucault, 1978). Importantly, *The History of Sexuality* argues that the deployment of sexuality—the proliferation of various discourses and productions of sexuality—is a critical tool of biopower because of its ability to control both the individual and the population as a whole. Foucault cautions against seeing sexuality as something innate or something that exists beyond state discourses, emphasizing that sexuality is a critical apparatus of the state and should not be relied on to resist state formations and power. Indeed, *The History of Sexuality's* discussion of resistance to the deployment of sexuality is limited. While Foucault argues that those who seek to challenge or resist the deployment of sexuality often end up reinforcing the power of sex, and renew the state's incitement to discourse on sexuality, he provides little instruction for resisting these formations successfully. On this subject, Foucault (1978) only alludes to the mobilization of "bodies and pleasures" (p. 157) rather than state discourses of sexuality. Thus, these explorations of the deployment of sexuality within settler colonial contexts may provide interesting insights not conceptualized by

Foucault within *The History of Sexuality*.

Foucault's theorization in *The History of Sexuality* is both influential and contentious. It has prompted theoretical discussions surrounding sexuality, power, and state control, and has been widely influential to social science and humanist disciplines (Faubion, 2020). Foucault's work has also been subject to scholarly criticism for its various omissions, especially its Eurocentric focus on the metropole as opposed to the colonies. As aforementioned, Foucault's work is strictly situated in Europe, with limited discussion of sexuality in the colonies or the colonies' effects on the European metropole. Theorists from Post-Colonial Studies have argued that Foucault does not conceptualize the ways subjects in the colonies are not biopolitically regulated, but are instead placed into necropolitical states of exception that use state power to kill, rather than regulate the life of, populations (Agamben, 1995; Mbembe & Meintjes, 2003). However, few theorists have explored the existence of sexuality within necropolitical states of exception. While theorists from Queer Indigenous Studies and Settler Colonial Studies have argued that Indigenous people within colonial states critically resist formations of state sovereignty through the articulation of sexuality and alternate sovereignties (Rifkin, 2011b), few scholars have theorized Indigenous sexuality in conversation with Mbembe's concept of necropolitical states of exception, nor related Indigenous sexuality to Foucault's theorization within *The History of Sexuality*.

The purpose of this essay is thus to understand how Indigenous articulations of sexuality within necropolitical states of exception challenge Foucault's theorization within *The History of Sexuality* and inform resistance to the Foucauldian deployment of sexuality. To complete this study, I engage with critical theory highlighting the absence of colonial and settler colonial analyses within Foucault's work. I mobilize scholar Mark Rifkin's (2011) theorization within "The Erotics of Sovereignty," which argues that Indigenous sexualities critically articulate formations of sovereignty not conceptualized by the state, in order to expand and challenge Foucault's theorization within *The History of Sexuality*. I ask: how does Rifkin's theorization of Indigenous sexualities within settler colonial states expand and critique Foucault's understanding of the deployment of sexuality? To explore this question, I will use the semi-fictional, semi-autobiographical work *Split*

Tooth by Tanya Tagaq (2018), which details the life of an Inuk woman in the settler colonial state of Canada. Importantly, *Split Tooth* differentiates itself from "The Erotics of Sovereignty" by locating Indigenous sexuality within a distinctly necropolitical state of exception, which I argue critically extends discussions of Indigenous sexuality towards radical alliances between Indigenous people and settlers of colour. As such, I use this work to expand Rifkin's theorization and further critique Foucault's understanding of the deployment of sexuality. I then explore the question of how these new understandings of sexuality in necropolitical states of exception inform Indigenous decolonization movements and non-Indigenous activist groups looking to resist the deployment of sexuality, focusing specifically on the shared existence of queer of colour and Indigenous populations within necropolitical states of exception.

Literature Review

I begin by summarizing the major literature that critiques Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* for its lack of engagement with formations of power and sexual deployment in the colonies and settler colonies, which I draw from and expand on throughout this essay. While Foucault (1978) argues in *The History of Sexuality* that biopower became a tool of sovereign rulers from the 17th century onwards, Giorgio Agamben (1995) responds in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, that biopower has always been present in articulations of modern state sovereignty, and stems from Roman Law. He also argues that biopower forms states of exception, in which law assumes the authority to define certain life as "bare life," which exists beyond the protection of law and basic human rights (Agamben, 1995). This critically extends Foucault's theory by highlighting the ways certain populations exist not within biopolitical regimes of the state but are instead relegated to death. In his article titled "Necropolitics," Achille Mbembe defines this sovereign application of death to certain populations as "necropolitics," identifying the colonies as an essentially necropolitical space (Mbembe & Meintjes, 2003). He argues that necropolitical power and its capacity to kill is the fundamental exercise of state sovereignty. Unlike state citizens, who are subject to biopolitical control, colonial Others are delegated to necropolitical states of exception in which law is replaced by "terror formations" and death regimes

that deliberately kill populations (Mbembe & Meintjes, 2003). Importantly, the lawlessness of the colonies “stems from the racial denial of any common bond between the conqueror and the native” (Mbembe & Meintjes, 2003, p. 22)—the colonized population is viewed as fundamentally different from the sovereign state and its colonizer population, and is thus not biopolitically regulated by the colonizing power. Agamben and Mbembe thus introduce a new component of sovereign power: the enactment of death onto certain populations. While Foucault emphasizes that sexuality is essential to the biopolitical regulation of populations within the metropole, neither Agamben nor Mbembe focus on the existence of sexuality within necropolitical states of exception. This compels me to consider how sexuality plays out in necropolitical states of exception, and I explore this idea further through my analysis of *Split Tooth*.

While Agamben and Mbembe theorize necropolitical states of exception as distinct from the metropole or the nation-state as a whole, Ann Laura Stoler (1995) argues in *Race and the Education of Desire*, that Foucault misunderstands the relationship between the colonies and the development of subjectivity, nationhood, and sexuality within the metropole. She explains that necropolitical states of exception created normative subjects of life in the metropole by defining Europeans in opposition to the racialized and sexualized populations in the colonies. Regimes of biopolitical sexuality that create normative subjects are thus fundamentally shaped by colonies and their necropolitical states of exception (Stoler, 1995). This dynamic suggests that necropolitical states of exception hold potential to affect or unsettle sovereign power, as that which occurs within these states of exception can affect the metropole and its colonizing populations.

While these theorists provide invaluable insights into the formation of necropolitical states of exception and their effects on the colonizing population, their analyses are limited to European states and franchise colonies, disregarding the specific positionality of settler colonies. Indeed, Critical Indigenous Studies scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2006) argues that most critiques of Foucault’s work “fail to pursue the specific ramifications of [its] limitations on our understanding of the issue of Indigenous sovereignty” (p. 387). Expanding on this, Mark Rifkin (2011b) argues in his novel *When Did*

Indians Become Straight? that, in the settler colonies, bourgeois settler sexuality supplanted Indigenous sovereignties and political modes of organizing, rendering them unintelligible as political processes. He explains that the colonization of Indigenous people in settler colonies has been punctuated by efforts to make Indigenous people “straight” and insert them into Western conceptualizations of “family, home, desire, and personal identity” (Rifkin, 2011b, p. 50). Though Rifkin’s work addresses the settler colonies, he situates Indigenous sexuality as subsumed, but existing within, the settler state and its *biopolitical* processes.

In summary, scholars assert two major critiques of Foucault’s work. First, *The History of Sexuality* does not account for the existence of necropolitical state processes, which are applied onto populations in the colonies and exist in relation to the metropole, enacting death instead of managing life. *The History of Sexuality* thus does not account for discussions of necropolitical states of exception and how these may affect or unsettle the deployment of sexuality within the metropole. Second, Settler Colonial Studies scholars assert that Indigenous people uniquely navigate biopolitical regulation and the deployment of sexuality within the settler colonies. However, there is little discussion on how Indigenous sexuality, theorized as existing within *necropolitical* states of exception, contends with and undermines Foucault’s theories in *The History of Sexuality*. Such a discussion is the focus of this next section.

Theoretical Framework

To address this gap in the literature, my study seeks to understand the specific existence of Indigenous sexualities within necropolitical states of exception, exploring how these sexualities’ articulate formations that expand and contest Michel Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality*. In his book *Spaces Between Us*, Scott Morgensen (2011) explains that the construction of the settler state and its accompanying settler sexuality—defined in opposition to Indigenous people—emerged simultaneously with a colonial necropolitics that marked Indigenous people for death. As aforementioned, those placed in necropolitical states of exception are marked as inhuman, and so while settler sexuality is subject to biopolitical regulation, the sexuality of those in necropolitical states is not biopolitically regulated; the state

instead aims to destroy it (Mbembe & Meintjes, 2003). Drawing from the work of Patrick Wolfe, Morgensen (2011) explains that Indigenous people exist in necropolitical states of exception because their elimination is necessary for the consolidation of settler state sovereignty over Indigenous land. This position within the settler state differs from other minority populations; certain queer and racialized populations' sexualities are negatively associated with Indigenous sexuality, but these populations are allowed to transverse this designation towards a more "normative path to citizenship" (Morgensen, 2011, p. 43). Though Indigenous people in Canada are subject to violent attempts to destroy their sexual and gender diversity, Morgensen (2010) reminds us that Indigenous people survive, "persistently troubling the boundaries of sexual colonization" (p. 117), through refusing the destruction of Indigenous gender and sexual expressions outside white settler society.

Mark Rifkin's conception of the erotics of sovereignty expands on the ways in which Indigenous sexuality inherently "[troubles] the boundaries of sexual colonization" by resisting and contesting settler state formations of sovereignty (Morgensen, 2010, p.117). Rifkin (2011a) argues that Indigenous erotics and sexual relations "bespeak the presence of unacknowledged political negotiations, historical trajectories, and social formations" (p. 173) through connecting Indigenous intimate feelings with the ongoing existence of Indigenous sovereignty and political formations. Erotics of sovereignty queer settler conceptions of sovereignty and assert specific Indigenous polities based on historical and ongoing feelings, sensations, and affective relations that speak to an intimate and ongoing connection with the land (Rifkin, 2011a). Indigenous people thus refuse hollow recognition of Indigenous sovereignty from the settler state and instead articulate an erotic, embodied, Indigenous sovereignty (Rifkin, 2011a).

Rifkin's work stems from Settler Colonial Studies, a discipline that is often critiqued by scholars in Indigenous Studies and Black Studies. Scholars argue that Settler Colonial Studies is a predominantly white, male field; that it was taken up to silence Indigenous Studies scholars; that it centres the white settler within its analyses; and that its absorption of Black people into the category of settler negates histories of enslavement key to the creation of settler colonial states and

white settler subjectivity (King, 2019, p. 29). Indigenous feminist Maile Arvin (2019) argues that Settler Colonial Studies' existence as a predominantly "white male theory" creates unnecessary conflict between Indigenous people and people of colour—who assert their experiences are not equivalent to that of white settlers—and therefore diminishing potential for alliances and relationality between these groups (p. 341). Further, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) echoes this critique in her discussions of alliance-building by arguing that Indigenous people should "not [center] white allyship but [build] relationships with [their] comrades in other communities" in order to create "constellations of co-resistance" (p. 32).

Importantly, Rifkin's work is limited by not addressing the distinctly necropolitical existence of Indigenous people. I contend that this oversight is not accidental, and stems from a key disciplinary limitation of Settler Colonial Studies. In her seminal work *The Black Shoals*, Tiffany Lethabo King (2019) argues that Settler Colonial Studies' focus on land and labour works to obscure Indigenous Feminist and Black Studies theorists who theorize the fungible aspects of colonization like genocide, murder, and conquest (p. 66). In doing so, Settler Colonial Studies renders other marginalized groups' experiences of colonization, enslavement, and conquest inapplicable to settler colonialism; inherently limiting these theorists cogent analyses of different formations of colonialism and diminishing the potential for radical and relational movements between Indigenous people, Black people, and people of colour (King, 2018, p. 66). To critically extend Rifkin's theorization into a place that allows for discussions of affective relationality between multiple marginalized groups within the settler colonies, I turn towards a key theorization of Indigenous sexuality by Tanya Tagaq.

I situate my analysis of Mark Rifkin's work within Tanya Tagaq's (2018) *Split Tooth*, which explores Indigenous erotic sovereign formations in specifically necropolitical contexts. *Split Tooth* tells the story of an Inuk woman experiencing life, death, and sexuality within the Canadian settler state. While "The Erotics of Sovereignty" is lacking in its analysis of necropolitics, Tagaq provides a visceral, first-hand account of existence within a necropolitical state of exception. Indeed, the narrator's experiences within the novel are punctuated by a constant juxtaposition

between everyday existence and death, with the narrator stating, “I crave to be/anything but me/I am thrashing/gasping for air” (Tagaq, 2018, p. 44). As *Split Tooth* is semi-fictional, certain events I discuss in the novel appear imaginative. However, I engage with these as real events, as they cogently articulate certain conceptions and orientations within Indigenous nations that are key to discussions of Indigenous sovereignty and resistance. In doing so, I follow Rifkin’s (2011a) imperative—articulated within his readings of Indigenous poetry—to analyze Indigenous literature as a “porous border between the literal and figurative” (p. 185), which compels non-Indigenous readers to engage in Indigenous work that may transverse the boundaries of fictional and non-fictional, but present more genuine forms of Indigenous experience. Thus, *Split Tooth*’s semi-fictional nature may allow me to engage more genuinely with Indigenous navigations of life within necropolitical states of exception, as processes of resistance created through sexuality and subjectivity are often not comprehensively described or understood in non-creative, non-fiction works.

My reading of *Split Tooth* focuses on three questions. First, how does Rifkin’s “The Erotics of Sovereignty” expand Foucauldian conceptions of the deployment of sexuality and resistance to sexuality? Second, what does reading this work alongside *Split Tooth*, which theorizes a distinctly necropolitical state of exception, do to critically extend Rifkin’s theorization and further challenge Foucault’s theorization? Third, how do these new understandings of sexuality in settler colonial states inform Indigenous decolonization movements and non-Indigenous groups looking to resist the deployment of sexuality? With the knowledge that Tagaq’s work provides an account of Indigenous sexuality within a distinctly necropolitical state of exception, I will explore three elements which define the narrator’s experience of necropolitics. From this, I will comment on how the narrator navigates sexuality through this necropolitical element, in reference to and expanding on Rifkin’s theorization in “The Erotics of Sovereignty.” Finally, I will put this experience of sexuality in conversation with Foucault’s theorization of the deployment of sexuality within *The History of Sexuality*. Throughout my analysis, I argue that the narrator’s experiences within *Split Tooth* showcase how Indigenous sexuality within necropolitical states of exception uniquely asserts

ongoing Indigenous life and sovereign polities constituting a critical contestation of the deployment of sexuality and settler state formations of power.

Analysis

I. Sexual Colonization

First, sexuality within the necropolitical state of exception explored within *Split Tooth* takes on a new, distinctly negative meaning. The narrator’s experiences of sexuality are framed by an onslaught of sexual abuse since childhood; her earliest memories of sex are her grade school teacher sexually assaulting her (Tagaq, 2018). Sexual assault in her town is not an isolated experience—in her article “Decolonizing Rape Law,” Sarah Deer (2009) argues that sexual colonization is a defining feature of settler colonialism, with sexual violence supplanting Indigenous sovereignty through the destruction of Indigenous people and their nations. As such, the sexual experiences of the narrator within *Split Tooth* exemplify the ways in which sexuality becomes a tool to continue the necropolitical mandate of eliminating Indigenous people and destroying their claims to sovereignty.

However, the narrator’s experience in *Split Tooth* reveals that, because of the violent and destructive nature of sexual colonization in necropolitical states of exception, sexuality outside colonial influences may hold critical potential for the reaffirmation of life. In *Split Tooth*, the narrator’s sex with humans is filled with violence and exploitation, but the narrator has multiple dream-like, fulfilling sexual experiences with animals (Tagaq, 2018). For example, the narrator has sex with a semi-humanoid fox, an interaction she explains resolves a historical dispute within “the parliament of the spirit law” (Tagaq, 2018, p. 69). Indeed, her sexual experience with the fox resolves a two-hundred-year curse placed upon the fox clan. Thus, her sexual encounter affirms and strengthens a specific Indigenous polity that, as Mark Rifkin (2011a) articulates, “remain[s] present, most viscerally, in the affective lives of Native people” (p. 173) and reminds Indigenous people of their ongoing existence within this sovereign political formation. Importantly, this experience is life affirming for the narrator. She states, “I knew if I swallowed his cum, it would change the lifeline of my clan for generations” (Tagaq, 2018, p. 72)—thus, this sexual encounter alters, guides, and sustains the narrator and

her descendants within a necropolitical state of exception. The Indigenous polity, represented by the fox, also invigorates the surrounding nature in ways that the current sovereign power does not. After their sexual encounter, the fox's semen falls onto the snow, immediately causing lichens and flowers to grow in a fifty-foot radius, alluding to the life force the narrator draws from the fox (Tagaq, 2018). As such, these explorations of sexuality, which exist beyond people and institutions of violence, affirm the narrator's life and bodily sovereignty in the face of sexual colonization and other necropolitical regimes.

Split Tooth thus extends Rifkin's theorization by revealing the critical role Indigenous sexuality plays in affirming life in ways free of colonial violence. While Rifkin theorizes within "The Erotics of Sovereignty" that Indigenous sexuality asserts the presence of polities that exist outside state conceptions of sovereignty, Tagaq's work showcases that Indigenous erotics also affirm Indigenous life, which is a fundamental first step to asserting sovereignty within a necropolitical state of exception. Rifkin theorizes sexuality as a space of contested sovereignty, but situating his theorization within *Split Tooth* showcases how this contestation is not solely over sovereignty, but over the life and death of Indigenous people, with sexuality being both a tool of sexual colonization and Indigenous resistance.

This exploration of sexuality that affirms Indigenous life in necropolitical states of exception critically challenges Foucault's conception of resistance within *The History of Sexuality*. Foucault (1978) argues that using sexuality to resist state power is futile, explaining that mobilizing sexuality as a form of resistance strengthens the incitement to discourse on sexuality created by the state. However, Foucault does not understand the ways in which sexuality is mobilized differently under necropolitical states of exception. Because of this failure, Foucault does not see how articulations of sexuality by these populations may critically resist necropower through affirming life and bodily sovereignty in the face of death regimes. Thus, Foucault's perception of resistance to the deployment of sexuality may be inapplicable to understanding sexuality and resistance within settler colonial states.

II. State of Exception

Split Tooth also highlights the ways in which necropolitical states of exception are stripped

of institutional or governmental supports, such that subjects lose basic human rights. Indeed, the narrator within *Split Tooth* speaks extensively about the ways her majority Inuit community is disadvantaged, as it exists in remote Northern Canada and receives little basic services or other affirmations of life from the Canadian government (Tagaq, 2018). The narrator works in a grocery store, in which she observes first-hand the lack of food shipped to her town, not enough to feed the families who shop at the store. This material lack of sustenance is punctuated by the narrator's ongoing relations to death at the grocery store, with news of suicides and deaths reaching her regularly on her otherwise mundane days at work (Tagaq, 2018). Importantly, this removal of basic human rights is a key way that the necropolitical state of exception works to kill its population (Agamben, 1995).

When faced with an absence of institutional support, however, the narrator in *Split Tooth* orients towards other forms of governance and sovereignty not conceptualized by the settler state. Within *Split Tooth*, the narrator explains that her major orientation is towards land, with land providing the basis of Indigenous history and futurity. She states: "Land protects and owns me. Land feeds me. My father and mother are land. My future children are the Land" (Tagaq, 2018, p.132). Thus, land provides a way for the narrator to sustain herself within a necropolitical state of exception that removes basic institutional supports from her community. Mark Rifkin (2011a) asserts that Indigenous relations to land like those of the narrator are unique to Indigenous people, as they differentiate from the legal geographies of the state which privatize land, and instead connect land with a somatic peoplehood that makes the "sensation and affect" of land inseparable from "self-determination" (p. 185). As such, the settler state does not conceptualize ways in which Indigenous polities exist through the land, sustaining Indigenous people even within necropolitical states of exception that remove institutional and governmental support.

This orientation towards land also allows the narrator to embody her sovereign subjectivity as an Indigenous person. Within *Split Tooth*, the narrator's major connection to nature and sexual encounter is with the Northern Lights, which she describes as a "fantastical and omnipotent" (Tagaq, 2018, p. 133) representation of land and nature. The narrator also conceptualizes the

Northern Lights as both human and non-human, as she sees the Northern Lights blur into faces which are “healing and death-dealing,” those of her “Aunties and Great-grandmothers... [and] Ancestors and future children” (p. 57). In addition to representing both prior and future generations of Indigenous people, the narrator states that the Northern Lights have the capacity to “cut off your head” (p. 57). Land and its Northern Lights thus articulate and encompass Indigenous sovereignty, representing multiple generations of Indigenous people and holding the sovereign power to kill. The narrator’s orientation towards the sovereign Northern Lights allows her to understand the prior generations and polities that she, as an Inuk woman, represents. Indeed, after a sexual encounter with the Northern Lights, the narrator is left with a “bright and glowing green substance” (p. 57) within her head. This bright and glowing green substance guides her throughout the rest of the novel, allowing her to recognize the alternate political orders and sovereign embodiments which she both encompasses and is oriented towards within the necropolitical state of exception. The narrator’s affiliation to Indigenous political orders exemplifies Rifkin’s (2011a) idea that Indigenous people feel a “collective connection to territory” (p. 178) through Indigenous erotic experiences, rather than through the institutional terms and limits of sovereignty defined by the settler state.

Tagaq’s work extends Rifkin’s conception of the erotics of sovereignty by showcasing that in necropolitical states of exception, institutional forms of recognition are often completely unattainable. The narrator’s town within Nunavut does not have the ability to assert sovereignty in institutional contexts, as it is cut off from Canadian government processes. However, by situating Indigenous erotics within necropolitical states of exception, Indigenous explorations of prior polities and connections to land are even more unhindered by settler colonial state formations and processes, as life becomes solely reliant on the existence of and connection to Indigenous polities.

Indigenous orientations towards and relations with differing polities within necropolitical states of exception also challenge Foucault’s conceptions of state sovereignty and resistance. While Foucault (1978) acknowledges the existence of different cultures and governance systems in *The History of Sexuality* through his

discussion of “ars erotica,” he assumes that these differing regimes exist far away, in what he sees as the Eastern Orient. Thus, he does not consider the ways in which differing regimes exist within and contest Western states, as exemplified by Indigenous polities within necropolitical states of exception. The existence of these alternate polities provides alternative ways of relating to and resisting the deployment of sexuality. For example, *Split Tooth* shows that an orientation towards land, as opposed to state institutions, may provide a critical way to resist the deployment of sexuality and connect with alternate sovereign political orders. This informs both Indigenous decolonization movements and non-Indigenous populations looking to resist the deployment of sexuality, an idea I explore further in the final section of this paper.

III. *Death Regimes*

Finally, the narrator’s experience of birth within *Split Tooth* reveals how, in necropolitical states of exception, sexuality takes on new importance as a form of reproduction. In his work “Necropolitics,” Mbembe (2003) argues that states of exceptions are placed onto colonized populations in order to destroy these populations for the sanctity and formation of the colonizing power. Similarly, Scott Morgensen (2011) argues that states of exception are placed onto Indigenous people to eliminate them, as the elimination of Indigenous people is required to legitimize the settlement of the sovereign power through the doctrine of *terra nullius*. Thus, reproductive sexuality within necropolitical states of exception challenges the explicit function of the necropolitical state of exception. Indeed, the narrator within *Split Tooth* has a sexual encounter with the Northern Lights: an embodiment of generations of Indigenous people and an articulation of Indigenous sovereignty. After being penetrated by “an impossible column of green light” (Tagaq, 2018, p. 114), the narrator carries and gives birth to twin babies, one with the power of healing and one with the power of killing. I see the power these babies hold as reminiscent of the biopolitical and necropolitical machinations of the Western state formation. Thus, the narrator’s sex with the Northern Lights and resulting reproduction articulates the ongoing existence of Indigenous life, and as such, asserts a form of legible Indigenous sovereignty. Interestingly, the narrator eventually kills her

children, realizing that their powers are too great and thus renouncing the cogent articulation of sovereignty they embody. This speaks to the ways in which Indigenous people have the ability to articulate sovereignty but may wish not to do so in ways legible to the settler state due to the exclusionary and violent nature of nation-state formations (Sharma, 2020).

Tagaq's work thus challenges and extends Rifkin's theorization by showcasing the ways in which Indigenous people within necropolitical states of exception can fundamentally challenge state sovereignty. While Rifkin contends that Indigenous articulations of sovereignty are often illegible to the settler state but greatly significant to Indigenous people, Tagaq's work reminds us that Indigenous people's ongoing reproduction of life within necropolitical states of exception can articulate a more traditional sovereignty legible to the settler state government. This is because, as explained by Michael Asch (1999), Indigenous existence presents a legitimate threat to the sovereignty of the Canadian state, given that Canadian legal sovereignty is reliant on the international legal doctrine of *terra nullius* to legitimize its settlement. Theorizing Indigenous sexuality within necropolitical states of exception allows for the realization that destroying Indigenous life is needed for the sovereign power's legitimacy. Thus, Indigenous reproductive sexuality within necropolitical states of exception holds critical potential to undermine formations of settler state sovereignty and legitimacy.

The existence of Indigenous sexuality that critically contests state sovereignty also fundamentally challenges Foucault's theorization within *The History of Sexuality*. As has been observed by scholars in Post-Colonial Studies, Foucault's theorization is distinctly Eurocentric and sees sovereign power as not only secure, but all-encompassing (Stoler, 1995). Thus, Foucault's theory cannot account for how sovereign power is unsettled within settler colonial states by the ongoing existence of Indigenous people within necropolitical states of exception. The contestedness of sovereignty within settler colonial states opens up significant possibility for resistance that Foucault does not foresee, as both the state and its deployment of sexuality exist on tenuous ground.

In sum, Indigenous sexuality within the necropolitical state of exception uniquely asserts Indigenous life and sovereign polities. First,

Indigenous articulations of sexuality, as embodied by the narrator within *Split Tooth*, reaffirm Indigenous life in the face of sexual colonization. Second, Indigenous articulations of sexuality reorient Indigenous people to alternate polities based on land or other formations not conceptualized by the settler state. Third, Indigenous sexuality critically articulates Indigenous sovereignty, challenging the functioning of necropolitical states of exception by articulating ongoing Indigenous sovereign life in the face of death processes. In this way, Indigenous sexuality and erotic embodiments showcase a clear way to assert ongoing existence within the necropolitical state of exception, an existence which fundamentally threatens the sanctity and legitimacy of settler state sovereignty. Indigenous sexuality and its articulations of sovereignty move far beyond Foucauldian conceptions of biopolitics and resistance to the deployment of sexuality, instead articulating sovereign erotics that challenge the settler state and all of its deployments.

Resisting the Deployment of Sexuality

I turn now to discuss what Indigenous sexuality within necropolitical states of exception—as explored in Tanya Tagaq's *Split Tooth*—reveals about resistance to the deployment of sexuality. I argue in the following sections that Indigenous sexuality within necropolitical states of exception provides a key orientation when creating coalitionary movements that fundamentally challenge the deployment of sexuality and its accompanying imperialist state machinations.

Understanding how we can create widespread movements that resist the deployment of sexuality has important stakes; in the Canadian settler colonial context, resisting the deployment of sexuality is essential to the existence of Indigenous nations. Scott Morgensen (2011) argues that settler sexuality was key to the creation of the settler colonial state and its ongoing existence. As the Canadian state has placed Indigenous people into a necropolitical state of exception, undermining the settler state and its formations of settler colonialism is key to the existence of Indigenous people and the creation of decolonial futurities. Mark Rifkin's analysis in the "Erotics of Sovereignty," and the explorations of Tanya Tagaq's *Split Tooth* within this paper showcase the ways in which Indigenous people resist the deployment of sexuality through critically articulating life and alternative sovereignties

within necropolitical states of exception. Due to my positionality as a settler, I will not speculate on further implications of theorizing sexuality within necropolitical states of exception for Indigenous decolonization movements, as these discussions are specific to Indigenous nations and their own formations of resistance and alternative futurities.

However, understanding how to resist the deployment of sexuality is significant for settler populations as well. As a queer settler of colour, I am personally aware of the ways in which sexuality is deployed within settler colonial states to discipline, and sometimes enact death on, certain queer and queer of colour populations. Indeed, scholars in Queer Studies and Queer of Colour Critique have argued extensively that queer populations are also regulated into necropolitical states of exception, expanding Foucault's theorization by showcasing the ways in which death, rather than biopolitical regulation, is enacted on certain queer populations (Butler, 2004). While the AIDS epidemic provided the most sensational example of queer population being exposed to death processes, the disproportionate murder of trans woman of colour today also clearly demonstrates ongoing queer existence within necropolitical states of exception.

Importantly, queer people's existence within necropolitical states of exception is a result of the deployment of sexuality within settler states. Jasbir Puar (2007) argues in her work *Terrorist Assemblages*, that in North America, the logic of "homonationalism" biopolitically regulates queer people, compelling them to perform a queerness that supports American nationalist identity and American imperialism. Scott Morgensen (2011) extends this analysis by defining this process as "settler homonationalism" (p. 92) in which queer people are associated with deviant Indigenous sexuality but allowed to transverse this designation and enter the body politic, reifying settlement and liberalizing the nation through its queer inclusion and settler modernity. Those queer people who do not align themselves with homonationalist and settler homonationalist formations, however, are placed into necropolitical states of exception, where they experience violent regulation and discipline by the state (Puar, 2007). As such, resisting the state-deployed discourses of biopolitical sexual regulation is critical for queer settlers who wish to live beyond state processes of homonationalism or settler

homonationalism, or who wish to create radical coalitions between settlers and Indigenous people.

Different Navigations

The existence of queer populations within necropolitical states of exception compels me to question whether queer populations navigate states of exception in the same ways that Indigenous people do. Answering this question is essential to knowing whether queer populations can resist the deployment of sexuality in similar ways to the narrator in *Split Tooth*. Critically, Puar (2007) argues in *Terrorist Assemblages* that homonationalist formations offer queer people the ability to align themselves with biopolitical deployments of sexuality and thus be absorbed into the nationalist body politic. Indeed, she explains that "in the face of daily necropolitical violence, suffering and death, the biopolitical will to live plows on" (Puar, 2007, p. 33), compelling queers to associate themselves with the biopolitical deployment of state sexuality in order to live free of the necropolitical state of exception. Thus, Puar argues that queer people are delegated into necropolitical states of exception that are specifically impermanent: queer people are offered the opportunity to be absorbed into state deployments of sexuality and leave the necropolitical state of exception, through asserting nationalist formations of queerness. This is most aptly observed by the celebration of queer veterans and military personnel, like Pete Buttigieg, whose queerness does not threaten but instead bolsters American nationalism. Though racialized queers are doubly relegated to the state of exception due to their racial and sexual identity, this state of exception is also not permanent for queers of colour. This is exemplified by the mainstream embrace of figures like RuPaul, who clearly articulates racialized gender and sexual deviance but aligns himself with formations of American empire and settler colonialism by bolstering ideas of American nationalism on *RuPaul's Drag Race* and owning 60,000 acres of unceded land in Wyoming for fracking purposes (Aratani, 2020). The necropolitical state of exception placed on queer populations, then, is impermanent, as queers are given the opportunity to attain normative citizenship through biopolitical regulation of their sexualities that produce nationalist, settler colonial articulations of queerness.

I argue that the necropolitical states of exception placed onto queer people are thus crucially different than the necropolitical states of exception placed onto Indigenous people. As argued by Settler Colonial Studies theorist Patrick Wolfe, Indigenous elimination is necessary for the sovereign legitimacy of settler colonial states (Morgensen, 2011). Other marginalized populations within the state, however, need only be excluded from normative citizenship, and can be included if it serves the purposes of the state; as with the establishment of a disenfranchised labour class or the creation of homonationalist and settler homonationalist formations that diversify and legitimize North American empires (Morgensen, 2011). The inclusion of Indigenous people into normative citizenship is conditional; Indigenous identity can only be absorbed as a national racial minority that has been excised from Indigenous articulations of nationhood and sovereignty distinct from political formations of the settler state.

I. *Ongoing Life*

Taking into account this differing application of necropolitical states of exception reveals three ways Indigenous sexuality within necropolitical states of exception, as articulated by the narrator in *Split Tooth*, provides an orientation for queer people to resist the deployment of sexuality. First, Indigenous sexuality within necropolitical states of exception allows queer people to orient towards alternate sovereignties, and therefore resist the biopolitical deployment of sexuality. As queer people's existence within necropolitical states of exception exposes them to violent processes of death, assimilating into state conceptions of sexuality may appear to be the sole choice for many people; queer people must choose whether to accept the biopolitical machinations of the settler state and their "will to live," or exist within a precarious "death world" in which one's body is violently disciplined (Puar, 2007). But, theorizing and understanding Indigenous sexuality within necropolitical states of exception provides queer populations with a newfound ability to resist the biopolitical deployment of sexuality through an orientation towards alternate Indigenous sovereignties. Indigenous sovereignties, as articulated through the narrator's erotic embodiments and reproduction of ongoing Indigenous life and politics within *Split Tooth*, critically challenge the state's unilateral assertions of sovereignty and

signal the possibility of dismantling the settler state that places deviant queers within necropolitical states of exception. Indigenous sovereignties, as articulated by the narrator's relations to land, also promise new political formations that differentiate themselves from the violence of the settler state (Tagaq, 2018). Orienting towards Indigenous nations and supporting their articulations of sovereignty thus provides a way for queers to exist outside biopolitical regimes of sexuality imposed by the settler state, while maintaining hope for ongoing life within the necropolitical state of exception.

II. *Queer Divestment*

Second, Indigenous sexuality within necropolitical states of exception compels queer people to divest from homonationalist and settler homonationalist formations, dramatically challenging the state's use of sexuality to control multiple populations. As aforementioned, homonationalism and settler homonationalism are key formations that use the state's biopolitical regulation of sexuality to enact imperialist formations, both abroad and at home in the settler colonies (Puar, 2007). As encompassed by the narrator in *Split Tooth's* articulations of alternate sovereignty within necropolitical states of exception, alternate sovereignties support queers in refusing the biopolitical regimes of sexuality offered to them, allowing queer people to further divest from formations of homonationalism and settler homonationalism. This is critical: queer people refusing to comply with the biopolitical regimes of the settler state significantly impacts the state, as state formations mobilize biopolitically regulated sexuality to enact control over multiple populations. Importantly, this also unsettles logics of US exceptionalism. By refusing to align with and instead actively challenging state logics of imperialism, queer populations can undermine exceptionalist discourses that posit the US empire as not an empire; indeed, "the denial and disavowal of empire has long served as the ideological cornerstone of US imperialism and ... exceptionalism" (Puar, 2007, p. 4). By exposing its imperialist machinations, queer populations can critically identify the US as an empire; which as Amy Kaplan argues, reveals that the US empire—like all other empires—can fall (Puar, 2007).

Queer divestment from formations of homonationalism and settler homonationalism

also creates material solidarity that may undo the functioning of necropolitical states of exception. Puar (2007) argues that it is through a state of “factioning, fractioning, and fractalizing” (p. 28) that states maintain their power; this is exemplified by homonationalist and settler homonationalist formations that work to divide alliances between marginalized groups, compelling subjects to embrace “axes of privilege” at the expense of those more marginalized. As such, queer refusal of biopolitical regimes of sexuality articulates a critical potential for material solidarity. Imagine for a moment: what would occur if all queer people refused to ally themselves with the state and against Indigenous people? How would death be resisted if all queers refused biopolitical regimes of sexuality? Personally, I am imagining a world where mutual aid and support between disenfranchised people provides a formidable force against the enactment of death within the necropolitical state of exception. Though this is just a thought experiment, I argue that it signals how state enactments of death in necropolitical states of exception are reliant on formations of biopolitics, which compel certain people to enter into normative citizenship at the expense of those more marginalized within their communities. Refusal to comply with the biopolitical deployment of sexuality could thus provide formations of material solidarity and support that challenge and undermine the materiality of necropolitics, thus signaling the potential for ongoing life within the necropolitical state of exception.

In sum, Indigenous sexuality within necropolitical states of exception that critically articulates ongoing life and sovereignty provides the basis and orientation for queer populations to divest from homonationalism and settler homonationalism. This allows queers to refuse the biopolitical regulation of the state that demands forms of queerness which enact settler colonial and imperialist formations, thereby creating materially solidarities with populations domestically and transnationally marginalized by homonationalist and settler homonationalist formations.

III. *Affective politics*

Third, through showcasing the ways that Indigenous affective formations—rather than articulations of identity—assert sovereignty, Indigenous sexuality in necropolitical states of exception compels us to center a politics of affect in our political coalitions and resistances to the

state over a politics of identity. Indigenous articulations of identity have often been limited by settler colonial formations: for example, Two-Spirit populations’ struggles to articulate identity in the face of colonial conceptions of “berdache,” and Indigenous populations’ struggles to articulate identity within state-centric frameworks that reinforce settler state sovereignty by presupposing Indigenous people to be a national minority (Morgensen, 2011). As such, the narrator within *Split Tooth* articulates an erotic sovereignty that is distinctly affective; it is through her feelings of erotic embodiment in relation to the Northern Lights and her sex with animals that the narrator understands and critically articulates Indigenous sovereignty within the necropolitical state of exception (Tagaq, 2018). Importantly, this turn towards the affective signals a way for queer people to leave behind the compulsions to embody an LGBTQ identity legible to the state, which Foucault (1978) marks in *The History of Sexuality* as a critical apparatus of state control. As argued by Puar (2007), a politics of affect, rather than identity, allows us to form coalitions based on shared affective experiences of living within necropolitical states of exception. This compels us to form solidarity with those who we may not identify with on the sole basis of identity—Puar suggests radical coalitions between the terrorist and the queer: subjects held together by a shared affective experience that may create “the ties that bind utopian community” (Puar, 2007, p. 208). Centering affect also critically differentiates Indigenous experience from non-Indigenous experience. While all populations within the necropolitical state of exception experience the affective relations caused by state processes of domination and death, Indigenous affects also signal the possibility of alternate political formations, as embodied by the narrator within *Split Tooth* and her articulations of erotic sovereignty. As such, political coalitions based on shared affective experiences within the necropolitical state of exception also necessitate the leadership of Indigenous people, whose affective relations signal a way forward for everyone beyond state processes of death.

Creating Accountable Frameworks

Importantly, Scott Morgensen contends that settlers’ orientations towards Indigenous political formations and sovereignties can enact settler homonationalist formations; a counter-argument

I recount and respond to. Morgensen (2011) explains that the Radical Faeries, a worldwide queer counter-cultural movement, used their anti-capitalist political stance to justify taking up Indigenous ways of “being with nature” and pre-colonial existence. In doing so, the Radical Faeries both aligned themselves with formations of Indigeneity and enacted settler homonationalist formations through “resolv[ing] their settler colonial inheritance by creating queer cultures that make [Indigenous] land their medium for liberating sexuality and gender” (Morgensen, 2011, p. 132). As such, the Radical Faeries exemplify the ways in which orientations to Indigenous people have the potential to reify settler colonial formations by associating settlers with Indigeneity but then appropriating this designation in order to legitimize settlement. This signals a problem for my argument as Morgensen indicates that settlers’ orientations towards Indigenous people within necropolitical states of exception has the potential to reify the settler homonationalist formations we aim to dismantle.

I respond to Morgensen’s point by arguing that centering Indigenous and settler sexualities within necropolitical states of exception can create differing power relations that refuse to play into settler homonationalist formations. As aforementioned, Indigenous affective experiences of violence are supplemented by the affective relations to and memories of Indigenous sovereign polities, while settler affective experiences do not articulate these alternate sovereignties. As such, these differential affective configurations necessitate that Indigenous people become leaders within coalitionary movements, undermining the disregard for Indigenous people that underpins settler homonationalist tendencies. Indeed, Morgensen (2011) contends that even the Radical Faeries became more accountable to their settler colonial tendencies when they formed relationships with Indigenous people, who held them accountable to their own positioning within settler states and prevented the settler homonationalist tendency to disregard Indigeneity entirely. As such, I contend that these proposed political formations do not reinforce settler homonationalist tendencies due to their location within a shared, but differential, experience of the necropolitical state of exception. Morgensen’s argument remains relevant, however, as it foregrounds our inclination as settlers to reinforce logics of possession and usurpation that legitimize our own settlement

when engaging with Indigenous people. These logics must always be addressed and materially worked through when forming solidarities with Indigenous people.

Conclusion

To conclude, this paper has sought to understand the ways in which Indigenous sexuality in necropolitical states of exception challenges Foucault’s theorization in *The History of Sexuality* and informs resistance to the deployment of sexuality. To complete my study, I took up the work of *Split Tooth* by Tanya Tagaq to expand Mark Rifkin’s theorization of the erotics of sovereignty by analyzing Indigenous articulations and embodiments of sexuality within necropolitical states of exception. Through this analysis, I argued that the narrator’s experiences in *Split Tooth* showcase how Indigenous sexuality in necropolitical states of exception uniquely asserts ongoing Indigenous life and sovereign polities that critically contest the deployment of sexuality and state formations of power. Next, I extended this analysis to discussions of queer resistance to the deployment of sexuality, focusing specifically on the shared existence of queer and Indigenous populations within necropolitical states of exception. This analysis revealed the ways that Indigenous sexuality in necropolitical states of exception provides a key orientation for queer populations when creating coalitionary movements that challenge the deployment of sexuality and its accompanying imperialist state machinations.

My analysis and my explorations center a few essential considerations to take forward when analyzing and resisting sexuality within settler colonial states. First, I observe the need to rethink analyses of sexuality, power, and resistance that do not take into account the specific formations of Indigeneity within settler colonial contexts, as Indigeneity renders settler colonial states distinct in their articulations of sovereignty and legitimacy. Second, I observe the need to create radical coalitions that look beyond state modes of inclusion and regulation and demand alternate political formations that allow us all to exist, free of state processes of control and death. I believe foregrounding these ideas provides ways forward that materially challenge the settler state and its multiple logics and processes of marginalization.

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Almari¹

Anonymous (she/her)
English

Artist Statement

In “Almari,” the protagonist yearns to escape to a community where queerness is celebrated. However, every time she feels at peace with who she is, she is yanked back to the reality of her religion. It is an actuality that she has spent her life attempting to ignore. “Almari” discusses the speaker’s inner juxtaposition between being a firm believer in God and not being able to learn the true extent of His love, for His love has made conditional the love of those that are most important to her. The protagonist is disheartened by her family and close friends’ conditional love, and between the lines of “Almari,” she is essentially asking, “If you can love me while I am religious, why can’t you love me while I am a religious queer person?” She criticizes God’s Paradise by recognizing that if all good people go to Paradise, then why do people who judge and dislike queer people—for simply existing—deserve this Paradise? What makes them more worthy of this so-called utopia? In an attempt to cope with her conflicting identity, she isolates herself. Not only does she isolate herself in her own queer opinions and existence, but also in the beliefs of those who weaponize religion to attack her queer existence. It’s an unending cycle that she constantly attempts to escape. Ultimately, the protagonist feels continuously entrapped because of her guilt of being a queer person that is religious, and a religious person that is queer.

“Almari,” was originally inspired by an article I read concerning a community founded by lesbian separatists (Raphael, 2019). This community, Womyn’s Land, was an area where lesbians resided away from civilization. I wrote this spoken word poem unaware of the histories of Womyn’s Land, particularly how the lesbian separatist movement was trans-exclusionary and biphobic. Learning more about the histories of Womyn’s Land allowed me to ponder the struggles I have faced as a religious Queer person. Specifically, the history of Womyn’s Land as an exclusionary community parallels the way I interpret God’s Paradise in “Almari” — both communities pose the question of what makes some people more worthy of this so-called utopia than others? This piece discusses the juxtaposition between the components of my identity and explains how I have come to understand, accept and embrace my sexuality over time.

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¹ ‘Almari’ (آراما) is a term in Urdu that translates to ‘wardrobe’

I hide behind these tall, tall walls
I dream a land that's not that far
A land where I am not ashamed
A land that's far from God's haven

The conflicts of my mind's disgrace
Heart too fragile to live this lie
I sink behind these racks of clothes
Weeping in the room of sinners

Lone opinions wrapped in a confined life
I hoped to pray the gay away
I lost myself in this dreadful lie
And the shame cycle begins

I dream of the gaiety away from this Land
Peace runs through my veins as I seclude myself
The wild flowers, deep ponds and woolly bushes
They are a paradise that keep me safe from His paradise

God's paradise

Lone opinions trapped in a confined life
I hoped to pray the gay away
I strayed away in this dreadful lie
And the shame cycle continues

I peak at them from the crack in my wardrobe
They're safe from the lack of God's protection
Oh lord, I'm tired of this hidden march
Oh lord, please smile at the Queer People of your world

Oh Lord, oh Lord, oh Lord!

I'm back again.
Here! Mama's conditional love
Here! Baba's disgusted gaze
Here! The constant denial

Here!
The ignominious actuality
The misunderstood
The unwanted existence

Lone opinions wrapped in a confined life
I hoped to pray the gay away
I found myself in this dreadful lie
And the guilt cycle starts again

It starts again.
Alone
I sit behind the tall, tall walls
Of my wardrobe.

BODYFOLDS

Micah Kalisch (*she/her, they/them*)
Women & Gender Studies and Sociology

Artist Statement

TW: Disordered Eating

My artwork takes a critical view on social, political, and cultural issues specific to bodies. Through my work, I often reference my own struggles with gender, sexuality, desirability, ability, and reflect on my own struggles with disordered eating, control, and body image. The colour composition of a grayscale image against the light soft pink background is intended to highlight and disrupt the norms associated between colour and gender.

*I enjoy photography and often frame it as fragments of reality, both able to highlight and hide. In fact, I often find what's missing in a photo to be of more interest than that which is seen. Missing from this photo is a face and an identity. The frame starts and stops below any part of the body that can be hypersexualized, objectified, racialized, or misgendered. The photo lacks any explicit tell of humanity at all; people often ask what this is a photo of without even recognizing it is human. Despite this ambiguity, there is a vulnerability present within the folds of the skin both soft and powerful. The lack of control over the folds of skin is something I have always feared and felt inferior to. *Body Folds* aims to disrupt popular discourses surrounding bodies and the immediate essentialist attributions, assumptions, and labels placed on different bodies. I aim to do this through ambiguity and fragmentation in a way that disrupts the ability to immediately gender, racialize, or assume aspects of the body. These assumptions include the able-bodied, essentialized, racialized, gendered, and sexed constructions of bodies. Such assumptions culminate in the collapsing of many bodies into assumptions of whiteness, cis gender, and heterosexuality, heterosexual body. I want to address these discourses while appreciating the ambiguity and fluidity of all humans and bodies.*



Dancing with the Don: Demimonde Women's Responses to Mob Violence in 1920s and 1930s New York City

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History, Equity Studies, and Environmental Biology

Abstract

This essay explores the responses of women involved in sex work and gambling economies to mob violence in 1920s and 1930s New York City. To do this, I examine case studies of three women: notorious madam Polly Adler, mafia-affiliated sex worker Florence "Cokey Flo" Brown, and the Queen of Harlem numbers gambling, Madame Stephanie St. Clair. My essay discusses how some women, like Stephanie St. Clair and Polly Adler, resisted the racism and gendered violence of mafias in an attempt to safeguard themselves and their communities. However, I also point out that many women who worked in demimonde (underground entertainment) economies, such as Florence Brown, accepted mob violence in order to protect themselves. Finally, I use the examples of Brown and Adler to illustrate how women - and particularly white women - could be complicit in mafia brutality to further their own economic interests. In short, these case studies illustrate that demimonde women's responses to mafia violence in this period were mediated by how their actions would affect personal - and, more rarely, communal - security and access to capital.

1920s and 1930s New York City was a place dominated by the mafia. During Prohibition, New Yorkers flocked to speakeasies supplied by mafia-affiliated bootleggers, and mobsters owned many prominent clubs themselves (Adler, 2006, p. 70-72). Mafia groups forced a wide variety of establishments to pay them fees in order to operate, and the public was fascinated by mob culture (Adler, 2006, p. 71). Mob hegemony continued into the 1930s as crime groups began to enter new industries and fought bloody battles with each other for control (Adler, 2006, p. 217; White et al., 2010, pp. 25, 180). Mobsters had extensive contacts among the police and politicians, and the city's anti-vice squad ironically operated quite like a mob themselves (Adler, 2006, pp. 176-180; White et al., 2010, pp. 182-183; Harris, 2008, pp. 182-183). In short, "it was the saloon, not the salon, that set the tone" (Adler, 2006, p. 72).

Certainly, New York City was no stranger to organized crime groups. However, Prohibition gave mafias unprecedented access to capital that allowed them to expand into new industries and bankroll their own lawyers, accountants, and clubs (Mob Museum, n.d.). Additionally, mob groups in this era grew to become much more bureaucratized and systematized in comparison to the more haphazard groups that predated them (Mob Museum, n.d.).

In addition to being a mafia hub, New York City was also home to a thriving demimonde. Although this term is sometimes used specifically to refer to sex work, I use it to refer to broader underground entertainment networks that fell outside of mainstream standards of respectability. This means that, in addition to sex workers, the demimonde also included dancers, musicians, people involved in gambling, drag artists,

club workers, and many others. In contrast to the strictly patriarchal mafia, the demimonde was an industry which heavily involved women. This was partially due to the demimonde's emphasis on aesthetic and emotional labour, two historically feminized domains of labour in the West. However, this representation was also linked to the relative scarcity of jobs available to women in the era, and the fact that working in the demimonde could (occasionally) bring wealth or fame unavailable in other industries.

It is important to consider that involvement in this sector looked very different for the various women within it. Notorious madam Polly Adler's bawdy houses were a destination of choice for the city's elite, and Adler herself became a bona fide celebrity (Rubin, 2006). Less wealthy citizens could patronize houses of sex workers like Florence "Cokey Flo" Brown, who would later engross journalists with her testimony at the trial of mafioso Lucky Luciano (Carter, 2010, p. 393). In Harlem, Madame Stephanie St. Clair was hailed as the 'Queen' of the numbers gambling circuit, using her capital and prominence to become a prominent community advocate (Harris, 2008, pp. 53-55). For all of these women, the attention and concomitant violence of organized crime was a fact of life. Yet, these demimondaines did not necessarily see this brutality as inevitable. St. Clair, Brown, and Adler all constantly weighed whether to resist or accept mob violence based on how it would affect the interests of themselves and their communities. On numerous occasions, these women fought back against the mob to avoid physical violence, sexual assault, theft of capital, and potential incarceration. When women failed to resist organized crime, it was often due both to fear of reprisal and desire for the resources the mob could offer. Demimonde women in 1920s and 1930s New York chose whether to resist the violence of organized crime by assessing how this resistance would affect personal (and, more rarely, communal) security and access to capital.

"As Ye Sow, So Shall Ye Reap": Madame Stephanie St Clair

One of the most prominent demi-mondaines in this period was Madame Stephanie St. Clair, also known as the "Queen of the Numbers," who ran one of the most significant numbers running networks in Harlem (Harris, 2008, pp. 53-54, 60; Carter, 2018, p. 532). As described by Harris (2008), the numbers game was a lottery in which

a different set of numbers were picked daily, either randomly or from bank data, and the players who correctly guessed them would win money (p. 56). These networks were headed by leaders known as bankers, who employed runners to collect and transport slips with participants' bets on them (pp. 56-57). St. Clair became very successful in this business, and was able to amass enough capital to live at 409 Edgecombe Avenue - one of the most prestigious addresses in Harlem (Harris, 2008, pp. 59-60; "Mme St. Clair Alleges Racketeer," 1932). Numbers running was generally a male-dominated business, and St. Clair was likely the only Black woman amongst the top numbers bankers in this period (Harris, 2008, p. 54; White et al., 2010, p. 160). Numbers running was illegal at the time, and so technically St. Clair's business was an organized crime network (White et al., 2010, pp. 22-23; Harris, 2008, p. 54), yet, as noted by mob lawyer Richard "Dixie" Davis, "the policy [numbers running] bankers were not mobsters" (White et al., 2010, p. 23). The numbers running networks of 1920s Harlem were not characterised by the kinds of extensive violence that was the hallmark of white mobs - rather, they more resembled other criminalized demimonde activities like sex work. St. Clair used the prominence and wealth she got from being a numbers banker to fuel community activism (Harris, 2008, p. 54). She wrote newspaper columns discussing political and judicial corruption, anti-Black racism, and economic issues (Harris, 2008, pp. 67-69). St. Clair noted that her 1929 arrest for numbers running was likely driven by the police being upset about her exposing their activities ("Mme. St Clair Fails to Appear," 1930).

White organized crime leaders initially paid little attention to the numbers game, due to the racist and classist assumption that there was not much money in it (Harris, 2008, p. 61). Their lack of attention ensured that the industry could be run largely by and for Black people, which was especially important given that white people controlled many of the other businesses in Harlem at the time (Harris, 2008, p. 61; White et al., 2010, pp. 23-24, 29). In the early 1930s, however, white mobsters saw the profits numbers bankers were making and attempted to take over the industry - the most prominent of these being Dutch Schultz, a white Jewish mobster seen as one of New York's most powerful criminals (Harris, 2008, p. 62; Adler, 2006, p. 206). Schultz's political contacts got police officers to arrest Black numbers bankers

and runners while leaving Schultz's employees alone (Harris, 2008, p. 61-62). Schultz also threatened many Black numbers bankers, telling them to either quit, work for him, or risk experiencing potentially lethal violence from his mob (Harris, 2008, p. 62). Most of Harlem's policy runners were thus coerced into working with Schultz (White et al., 2010, pp. 5-6). By this time, Mme. St. Clair was likely no longer running her own numbers organization and was therefore not directly targeted by Schultz (Harris, 2008, p. 61). Despite this, she led the resistance against his attempted takeover (Harris, 2008, p. 62); St. Clair organized smaller Black bankers ignored by Schultz, directly confronted white Harlem shop owners working with him, and asked Black numbers players to support Black-owned numbers businesses (Harris, 2008, p. 63). She gave information about Schultz to police, journalists, and even New York Special Prosecutor Thomas Dewey ("Mme. St. Clair Alleges," 1932; Harris, 2008, p. 63; White et al., 2010, p. 6). This information helped lead to a raid on Schultz's numbers running headquarters - spearheaded by Dewey's office - and to Schultz being forced into hiding to avoid charges of tax evasion (White et al., 2008, pp. 186, 189, 194). For St. Clair, this battle was deeply personal as "Queen of the Numbers," she felt a responsibility to defend the numbers industry (Harris, 2008, p. 62). Being such a vocal anti-mob advocate put St. Clair at serious risk- Dutch Schultz attempted to have St. Clair killed, forcing her to briefly leave the public eye, and St. Clair's battle with Schultz concluded only when Schultz was assassinated by fellow mobsters in 1935 (Carter, 2018, pp. 327-330; Harris, 2008, p. 63). Although St. Clair was uninvolved with his murder, she coincidentally sent Schultz a telegram a few hours before his death, which read "As ye sow, so shall ye reap" (Carter, 2018, p. 327; Harris, 2008, p. 63). St. Clair was one of the few people - and almost certainly the only demimondaine - who stood up to Schultz. Her resistance ensured that Dutch Schultz and his companions could not steal the numbers running industry and the wealth it brought with it from Black numbers bankers in Harlem.

"As long as I have to be punished I may as well": Florence "Cokey Flo" Brown

Unfortunately, Madame Stephanie St. Clair was something of an outlier in her tireless approach to resisting mafia brutality. Women, particularly

white women, often chose to accept mafia violence in order to access the resources the mob could offer them. A good example of this is white sex worker Florence "Cokey Flo" Brown, who was connected to the mafia of Lucky Luciano. After Al Capone, Charles "Lucky" Luciano was perhaps the most famous mobster in 1920s America. He gained incredible wealth during Prohibition, and eventually came to be hailed as the most powerful person in the New York mob (Mob Museum, n.d.). One of Luciano's more senior mobsters was Jimmy Fredericks, who was also Florence Brown's boyfriend ("Mammoth Vice Chain," 1936). Flo accompanied Fredericks to meetings with Luciano, where she was introduced only as his girlfriend and appears to have been largely ignored ("Mammoth Vice Chain," 1936). These kinds of interpersonal slights from Luciano's mafia were also accompanied by a more sinister structural sexism. The mob-affiliated group known as the Combination ran a "protection racket" on madams and sex workers, forcing them to pay a certain percentage of their earnings to the Combination in order to operate (Carter, 2018, p. 390). The Combination also committed extensive physical and sexual violence against sex workers, and some women said the organization had coerced them into the profession as well (Carter, 2018, p. 390). Nevertheless, Flo seemed to have felt genuine loyalty to the mob; when testifying at Luciano's trial, she spoke well of Fredericks, claiming (probably disingenuously) that he rejected the idea of committing violence against madams and had no idea he worked with mafiosos ("Mammoth Vice Chain," 1936). In letters, Brown also called Luciano's prosecutor Thomas Dewey a "louse" and stated that she wanted him to die of cancer ("Luciano Seen with Two Aids," 1936). Most damningly, the defense counsel in Luciano's trial asserted that Flo had clandestinely examined Luciano's indictment before being arrested herself, recording the names of the women who testified against him ("Mammoth Vice Chain," 1936). Flo never admitted to doing this, but if true, it would mean that she knowingly put other sex workers in harm's way to aid the mafia.

It is tempting to imagine women sex workers in this era as having a sort of feminist sisterhood, looking out for each other and going after trashy male mobsters. Certainly, many sex workers and madams did engage in critical practices of mutual aid. Polly Adler, for example, defended her workers from mafia violence and tried to administer

treatment to a worker who was dealing with drug addiction (Adler, 2006, 82-83, pp. 152-160). However, Flo Brown's case reveals that many sex workers were more loyal to powerful men than they were to each other. This trend was pervasive because male mafiosos held key resources they could offer individual sex workers, making it profitable for sex workers to turn on each other.

Much of Flo Brown's mafia loyalty was likely tied to how her mob connections could grant some safety. As noted previously, the Combination would physically assault sex workers and take their money, and having a boyfriend in the mafia and other mob connections may have shielded Flo from some of this violence. It was particularly crucial for Brown to be able to keep her capital given that she was living with a severe narcotics addiction and needed to have the funds to buy the several morphine doses she took per day ("Mammoth Vice Chain," 1936). It is important to note that Flo was only able to access these advantages because, as a white woman, she was viewed as an "acceptable" partner for Fredericks and was likely trusted more by the white male mafiosos in charge of the mob. Flo's decision to accept sexist violence in exchange for mafia resources also puts her in a long, ignominious line of white women who have accepted patriarchal dynamics in order to access the resources that come from white hegemony.

Brown's willingness to work for the mafia, however, declined after her arrest. On February 1st, 1936, Eunice Hunton Carter¹ and the other prosecutors at Thomas Dewey's office orchestrated a mass arrest of mafia-affiliated sex workers, including Brown (Carter, 2018, pp. 351-358). After spending time incarcerated, Brown informed Prosecutor Thomas Dewey that she had important intel on Luciano ("Luciano Seen With Two Aids," 1932). In court, Brown claimed that she did this due to anger at the mob's behaviour and a long-standing desire to "go straight" ("Mammoth Vice Chain," 1936). However, her motivation was more likely due to the fact that prosecutors had threatened her and others with significant jail time if they did not testify (Carter, 2018, pp. 393-396). Given Brown's direct meetings with Luciano, she became one of the central witnesses

in the trial, and the press avidly followed her appearances (Carter, 2018, pp. 395-396; "Chain Store Vice," 1936). Due in large part to the testimonies of Brown and two additional sex workers, Lucky Luciano was eventually convicted on the charge of compulsory prostitution (Carter, 2018, pp. 387, 406). This was a key victory for the state, which up until that point had not been able to convict a mobster of his stature (Carter, 2018, pp. 387, 406). This makes Flo Brown's decision to testify a significant act of anti-mafia resistance.

It is important to note, however, that Brown's decision to speak was motivated more by concern for her personal security than a wish to get back at the mob. Before Luciano's retrial, Flo recanted her testimony and skipped town - likely because the mob paid her to do so (Carter, 2018, pp. 439-440). While this move was partially meant to prevent mob reprisal, it seems to indicate that Flo was not as serious about opposing Luciano as she claimed. For many years, Flo Brown tolerated the sexist violence of mobsters to gain the capital and the protection that they could provide - only testifying against the mob when keeping their secrets put her physical and economic security at risk.

"Thumbs up with the Mob": Polly Adler

After the Lucky Luciano trial, Flo faded from the public eye. In stark contrast, white Jewish madam Polly Adler captivated the New York City public throughout the 1920s and 1930s, both celebrated and shamed for running an elite bawdy house (Rubin, 2006, ix-x). A significant section of Adler's (2006) memoir *A House is Not a Home* is centered around her experiences with violent mafiosos. The memoir reveals Adler to be a woman disgusted by mob cruelty, yet still willing to work with violent groups in pursuit of her own goals.

Throughout her memoir, Adler contrasts herself against exploitative male pimps by stressing how she cared for her employees (Adler, 2006, p. 138). One of the key facets of this support was Adler's commitment to defending sex workers from violent customers, who on many occasions were mobsters. Perhaps the best example of this was a night when one drunk mafioso began attacking one of Adler's sex workers after she refused

¹ Eunice Hunton Carter was a pioneering Black lawyer and the architect of the prosecution's successful strategy to prosecute Lucky Luciano. Much of the information about the Luciano case presented here is from a biography of Carter's life by historian Stephen L. Carter, who is also her grandson.

to denounce Polly (Adler, 2006, p. 82). Adler implored the man to stop, eventually getting the workers to pay attention to her and leave the other woman alone (Adler, 2006, pp. 82-83). Adler was also unwilling to bite her tongue around mafiosos, and frequently recounts taking violent men to task even when it put her at risk. She recounts calling one set of mafiosos “dirty sons of bitches” after they assaulted her, even though she notes that it would have been “smarter” to stay nothing (Adler, 2006, p. 83). She also later refused on principle to take the money they offered in apology for this (Adler, 2006, p. 83).

Despite this courage, however, Adler never publicly aligned herself against the mafia. Indeed, she failed to resist or even accepted mafia violence as much as - if not more - than she fought against it. In some cases, as with Dutch Schultz, she felt that this was necessary to protect herself. In the early 1930s, Schultz - the same man who tried to take over the Harlem numbers game - moved into Adler’s apartment and made it a mafia headquarters (Adler, 2006, pp. 209-211, 217). He ordered Adler around, physically assaulted her and her maid on several occasions and mused about making her accessory to a mob assassination (Adler, 2006, pp. 214-217, 221). From the beginning, Adler wanted nothing to do with Schultz, and was clearly resentful about his presence in her home, yet she clearly judged it to be too dangerous to tell him to leave (Adler, 2006, pp. 206-207, 213-222, 233). Adler also claimed that her decision to not testify at the Seabury Commission - a 1930-1931 investigation of corruption in the police and legal system - was motivated by a fear of reprisal (Adler, 2006, pp. 83, 168-72; Harris, 2008, p. 60). Adler fled New York upon hearing that she would be subpoenaed to testify at the Commission despite knowing that she personally was at no risk of arrest (Adler, 2006, pp. 185-195). When she was eventually forced to take the stand, she spent the entire time denying or claiming not to remember anything she was questioned about (Adler, 2006, p. 83). Adler’s stance that testifying at the Commission would be risky was not entirely unjustified; Vivian Gordon, a sex worker Polly Adler knew, was assassinated after being scheduled to testify (Adler, 2006, p. 173). As Adler notes, however, talking would also mean “hurting men who had done me numerous favours” (Adler, 2006, p. 180). For Adler, the decision not to testify at this commission was as much about preserving important business relationships as it was

about self-protection.

This hesitancy to talk extended throughout Adler’s career. In addition to preserving her contacts with corrupt officials, staying silent ensured that Adler could continually access the significant benefits that came with being “thumbs up with the mob” (Adler, 2006, p. 209). Polly got the start-up capital for her first bawdy house from low-level organized criminals, and Dutch Schultz’s money allowed her to get out of a “financial hole” following the Seabury Commission (Adler, 2006, pp. 58, 210). Adler’s mob contacts also got her eventual 1935 prison sentence for running a “disorderly house” shortened significantly, something that her legitimate contacts were unable to do (Adler, 2006, p. 259; “Adler Delays Trial in Vice Drive,” 1935). However, Adler also pursued mafia connections even when she was not as in need of mafia assistance. She procured sex workers and hosted a dinner for the “gentleman” Lucky Luciano, and attended a party hosted by the “very pleasant” Al Capone (Adler, 2006, pp. 102, 294). In short, Adler often consciously chose to ally herself with mafia groups to take advantage of the lucrative possibilities that they offered.

In some respects, Adler is an appealing personage. She rose to power in a business landscape dominated by rich white Anglo-Saxon men, foiling anti-sex work moralists at every turn. At the same time, however, Adler’s complicity with the mob makes her a deeply problematic character. By staying silent about the mafia, Adler was by proxy protecting the systems that led to the victimization of Black numbers bankers and less wealthy sex workers like Flo Brown. Rather than ally with other marginalized people, Adler instead insinuated herself within misogynistic and anti-Black mafia systems. Much as Flo Brown’s actions can be contextualized by looking at long-standing legacies of violence committed by white women, Adler’s can be situated in broader patterns of early 20th century white Jewish Americans seeking to assimilate into hegemonic whiteness through participation in discriminatory systems.

These three demimondaines active in the 1920s and 1930s constantly weighed how different approaches to mob violence would help secure safety and access to capital for themselves and their communities. Stephanie St. Clair fought the racist violence of mobster Dutch Schultz to ensure that Black numbers runners could stay safe and continue to access a key means of building wealth. Flo Brown allied herself with the mafia to

minimize the violence she faced from them, turning on the mob only when the law became a path to avoid incarceration. Polly Adler fought mafiosos' brutality to keep herself and her workers as safe as possible, while also ensuring that she had good relationships with mobsters in order to access the protection and wealth that the mafia offered. Each of their responses to the mob were influenced by their social locations of race, class, and business affiliation, and could differ as their circumstances shifted daily. However, none of these women were hapless victims, blithely accepting mob violence without a second thought. They were, in a sense, caught up in a dance with mafia dons, constantly calculating when to risk resistance and when to step back to ensure that the show could go on.

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Clippings

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Political Science and East Asian Studies

Artist Statement

Clippings is a short comic about my thick, East Asian hair. Hair is a major factor in my own presentation, as a boy-baobei¹-dyke, yet the commodification of these aesthetics in queer spaces and businesses usually cater to white theyfabs², the most visible representations of transness for mainstream capitalist consumption. My hair type is often a source of frustration for white hairdressers and barbers in Canada who frequently relate to me their preference for softer, thinner hair, and express distaste for my coarser “Asian hair.” While these valuations may purport to be merely aesthetic, they are differentiating and racist, embedded in crude Orientalism and explicitly expressing preference for whiteness, effectively policing the bodies of non-white individuals through colonial ideals.

In this semi-autobiographical piece, I recall a particular encounter with these beauty constructs, these insidious envoys of whiteness, within a vocally queer hair salon. This encounter reinforced my suspicions that white queer spaces are often sites of exclusion and traumatization of racialized folks. I explore my intersection of queerness and race, and the persistent categorization of racialized bodies as Other in many queer spaces in Canada, with the accompanying normative whiteness that exists in many of these spaces. An encounter with an unexpected mediator of whiteness, another Asian person, reminds me to cut my own hair with clippers. Held in my hands, clippers become vehicles for a racialized queer agency, as they pry open the beauty constructs and gendering impulses of my surroundings and allow for an exploration and reclamation of my gender presentation.

¹ Baobei is pinyin for “baby” in Chinese. As expressed by a “Kirby teaching” meme c.2018, “baby” is a revolutionary concept in a capitalist society that forces us to be constantly productive. I am not being serious, mostly baobei is a term of endearment between loved ones.

² Theyfab: referring to white, androgynous-presenting AFAB nonbinary queers that use they/them pronouns. This kind of queerness doesn’t challenge eurocentric beauty standards and instead upholds them, and thus limits radicality and takes up excessive space in mainstream media’s forays into queerness, often to the elision of Queers of Colour. The emergence of a “theyfab” queer normativity may continually undermine intersectional, racialized queer subjectivities that do not fit this palatable androgyny. We should challenge the creation of a normative subjectivity for queerness.

CLIPPINGS

by TIF FAN





AFTER PRESCRIBING BLONDENESS AS A FIX FOR MY UNRULY HAIR HE STARTS SHOWING HE WRITE CLIENTS' HAIR AS QUEER STANDARD



SINCE THEN, I'VE BEEN REFAMILIARIZING MYSELF WITH CLIPPERS.



Fluidity and Repression: The Ambiguity of Queerness in *Giallo*

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Abstract

*In this essay, I strive to make sense of the Italian giallo film's ideologically ambiguous representations of queerness, illuminating how giallo functions as a reflection of 1970s cultural anxieties surrounding new discourses on sexual fluidity. Giallo was an Italian film cycle popular in the 1970s. It remains famous for its flashy aesthetics, depictions of taboo sexuality, and sadistic violence. With this essay, I focus on the relationship between queerness in giallo and violence as a form of repression. I first trace the historical lineage of Italian queer Marxism, which developed shortly after the largely unsuccessful protest movement of 1968. I devote particular attention to Mario Mieli, who introduced revolutionary ideas of innate sexual fluidity into Italian discourse. Then, I analyze how perspectives on sexual fluidity are represented, and matched with forces of repression in giallo cinema. I focus on the interplay between sexual fluidity and repression specifically in two movies: Fernando Di Leo's *Slaughter Hotel/La bestia uccide a sangue freddo* (1971) and Dario Argento's *The Cat o' Nine Tails/Il gatto a nove code* (1971). Ultimately, I contextualize the films within the Italian discourse on sexual fluidity and sexual experimentation, interpreting the ideological ambiguity of giallo as a manifestation of cultural anxieties provoked by new conceptions of sexuality.*

Introduction

In an interview with Stephane Derderian, Dario Argento, the most renowned practitioner of the Italian *giallo* film, remarked that “homosexuals are part of our everyday life. In my profession, I work with homosexuals. I also have homosexual friends. I think they logically have a place in my films. They are part of our society” (quoted in Cooper 153). For Argento, *giallo* is a reflection of modernity, and queerness is an undeniable aspect of said modernity. He interprets *giallo* as something honest: a mirror to the culture that produces it.

Emerging alongside a new Italian discourse on sexual fluidity, *giallo* often depicts a clash between queerness and hegemonic norms. While the films feature frequent representations of both queer characters and queer spaces, sexual transgressors often receive gruesome fates: punishments for their non-normative sexualities. In this essay, I strive to make sense of the *giallo*'s ideologically ambiguous representations of queerness

and fluidity. Rather than attempt to determine whether the *giallo*'s politics are progressive or regressive — an impossible and not particularly worthwhile endeavor — I plan to illuminate how *giallo* functions as a reflection of cultural anxieties. In this paper, I will argue that *giallo* embodies the anxieties heteronormative Italian society faced with the rising discourse on sexual fluidity, which radically defied the nation's normative views on sexuality. First, I will trace the historical lineage that lead to the birth of queer discourses in Italy, developing shortly after the largely unsuccessful protest movement of 1968. I will devote particular attention to Mario Mieli, who introduced revolutionary ideas of innate sexual fluidity into Italian discourse. Next, I will explore how perspectives on sexual fluidity are represented and matched with forces of repression in *giallo* cinema. I will focus on the interplay between sexual fluidity and repression in two movies: Fernando Di Leo's *Slaughter Hotel/La bestia uccide a sangue freddo* (1971) and Dario Argento's *The Cat o' Nine*

Tails! Il gatto a nove code (1971). Then, I will contextualize the films within the Italian discourse on sexual fluidity and sexual experimentation, interpreting the ideological ambiguity of *giallo* as a manifestation of cultural anxieties provoked by new conceptions of sexuality.

Failed Revolution and the Rising Discourse of Sexual Fluidity

In 1968, protests erupted across the globe against the influence of right-wing, authoritarian leaderships. Different populations protested different conflicts on their home soil. In America, protests escalated from the Civil Rights Movement, taking radical strides to combat a culture of violent white supremacy. In France, students and workers assembled in a wide-scale, revolutionary general strike against President Charles de Gaulle and the exploitation of the working class. Italy's protest movements sparked from much of the same conflicts that inspired bloody Parisian street battles between protestors and police. Italian protestors aimed to combat the general complacency in consumerism and the *cocacolonization* of Italy: a product of globalization. Italy's industrial boom — the “economic miracle” of 1958-1963 — incited faith in individualism and loyalty to the status quo (Ginsborg 342). However, this unwavering faith met challenges in the 1960s, as the accumulated hopes of the economic miracle never came into fruition for the working class. Over the course of his 1964-1971 presidency, Giuseppe Saragat's centre-left government failed to deliver promised reforms to education and the workforce, sparking opposition and disillusionment among students and the working class (300). The Italian protest movement of 1968 strove to combat both the material and ideological structure of the country, re-imagining Italy as a modern nation built on a collectivist philosophy.

The protests were a left-wing, anti-authoritarian movement rejecting traditional understandings of Marxism. As Paul Ginsborg explains, protestors “were broadly Marxist [...] but theirs was a libertarian and iconoclastic reading of historical materialism” (308). Protestors considered the Italian Communist Party (PCI) just another oppressive institution and attempted to create new forms of revolutionary power (305). As a student-led movement, protests were motivated by a distrust in established power. They disapproved of the dominant, individual family

unit, advocating instead for a communal vision of society (305). The protesters also believed in sexual liberation, envisioning sex as something beyond the constraints of marriage and monogamy. They aimed to reject Italy's social values, which remained entrenched in tradition.

Collective action began with student sit-ins and assemblies (302), mid-lecture disruptions and confrontations of professors (303), and escalated into violent skirmishes with police (304). Though brief, the movement triggered a moral panic among the Italian bourgeoisie. In most local media, protestors were represented as nihilistic anarchists, introducing chaos into a highly-functional and organized society. However, the movement's intensity subsided later in the spring as its vigor became co-opted by the general election (304).

At their core, the protests were a failure. Ginsborg argues “[t]he very nature of [the protestors'] critique and of their organization — radical, decentralized, Utopian — militated against them becoming an effective pressure group” (309). Indeed, the anarchistic dismissal of all structures and authorities resulted in a disorganized movement which, under strain, quickly deflated. Furthermore, the movement's support of sexual liberation was hardly inclusive or radical. Sexual relations, though liberated from monogamy and the confines of marital sex, were nonetheless still patriarchal; centered predominantly around the desires of heterosexual men (306). Despite their claimed ambitions, the Italian protests of 1968 failed to rethink the dominant power structures of the time. Naturally, the radical ethos of the movement dissipated from mainstream discourse as Italy continued on its trajectory into the 1970s, becoming an increasingly individualistic state ruled by capital (342). However, a truly revolutionary spirit does not simply die overnight. Radical ideas and action lived on throughout 1970s Italy in various revolutionary groups.

The years following 1968 witnessed a partial synthesis between gay liberation and revolutionary Marxist movements: two ideals formerly treated as distinct from one another. This synthesis opened a critique of the heterosexist and patriarchal attitudes that defined both the 1968 protests' approach to sexual liberation and also much of Italian communism over the past decades. Since its foundation in 1921, the PCI was uncommitted to gay rights and even blatantly homophobic. Italian film scholar Mauro Giori notes how PCI

leader Pietro Ingrao believed “being a homosexual and having an anti-fascist conscience (or just being positive) are conceived as oppositional and irreconcilable” (14). Generally, the PCI abided by the widespread moral code of what Herbert Marcuse calls *repressive tolerance*, manifesting in “a ‘tacit social pact’ [designating homosexuality to silence and] according to which only infractions of the silence were prosecuted” (16). However, with increasingly vocal gay figures gaining public prominence and the frequent appearance of gay characters (admittedly often as punchlines) in the raunchy Italian comedies of the 1960s¹, the standard of silence was gradually challenged.

The 1970s introduced numerous new Italian gay rights organizations. While most centred around liberal reform and promoted the assimilation of homosexuality into mainstream culture, the decade also ushered in radical voices who applied Marxist thought to advocate for gay liberation. The most notable gay Italian Marxist of the era was the filmmaker, poet, and essayist Pier Paolo Pasolini. Pasolini was openly gay throughout his career, which began in the early 1940s (Ehrenstein). Throughout the 1960s, he established himself as a major radical voice of the counterculture, offering impassioned critiques of heteronormativity and capitalism. Pasolini believed homosexuality wielded a potential to restructure society and redefine labour relations:

The taboo of homosexuality is one of the finest moral latches of the consumer-capital productive society. Homosexuality remains a way to live one’s sexuality that disturbs and threatens (potentially) to destroy the sexual order, the libidinal repressive

economy on which the entire construction of our industrial societies rests [...] homosexuality is totally detached from purely human productivity, that of the species, in the sense that if it is generalized, it would influence rather negatively the demographic development. (Quoted in Maggi and West 176)

For Pasolini, homosexuality is a threat to hegemonic order because capitalist society is contingent on reproduction. Reproductive sex ensures a steady flow of new consumers and new laborers. Gay sex² eschews the potential of feeding the capitalist system new workers, reclaiming sex as a force of pleasure rather than productivity. For Pasolini, being gay in a capitalist society is inherently a radical act, combatting the influence of capitalism over sex.

Pasolini queers Marxist theory, rejecting the PCI’s heteronormative and masculinist form of Marxism. His form of queer Marxism influenced various other Italian thinkers in the 1970s. Most prominent was Mario Mieli, a co-founder of FUORI! (the Italian Revolutionary Homosexual United Front). Mieli was a writer, actor, and perhaps most of all, a provocateur. In his art, he attempted to deconstruct and offend bourgeois taste through such varied means as drag performances and public consumption of feces (Zundel 31). He rejected the idea of gay *assimilation*, instead advocating for gay *liberation*. His controversial book *Homosexuality & Liberation: Elements of a Gay Critique* offers a radical reconceptualization of gender and sexuality, describing an innate human fluidity.

Mieli uses the term *trans-sexuality*³ to describe

¹ Commonly, these films included gags where cisgender, heterosexual men are mistakenly attracted to trans women or men in drag. For instance, Antonio Pietrangeli’s *Ghosts of Romel Fantasma a Roma* (1961) features a joke where a flirtatious specter (played by Marcello Mastroianni) attempts to seduce a stripper, only to be shocked when the subject of his attraction removes a wig, revealing themselves to be in drag.

² Pasolini’s understanding of gay sex seems to only include sex between cisgender people, a conception which is a product of his era’s understanding of gender and sexuality.

³ Mieli’s understanding of *trans-sexuality* differs from the word’s common usage today.

a plurality of sexuality: fluid and multi-directional. Our innate state of *trans-sexuality* is repressed in childhood through a process he dubs *educastration*: “the transformation of the infant, in tendency polymorphous and ‘perverse’, into a heterosexual adult, erotically mutilated but conforming to the Norm” (Mieli 24). Notably, however, *educastration* is not merely the repression of homosexuality, but the repression of *trans-sexuality* and the forced acceptance of monosexuality. *Educastration* encompasses the process of rendering a sexually complex and fluid being into sexual uniformity.

Mieli’s power stems from his ability to provoke, creating far-reaching claims that encompass the whole of Italian society. He declares that “we are all, deep down, trans-sexuals” (27). Mieli denaturalizes both heterosexuality and monosexuality, proposing a queer sexual matrix that defines *all* human sexuality. Controversially, he interprets heterosexuality as “the projection of the other sex that is latent within us onto persons of the ‘opposite’ sex” (36-37). For Mieli, even homophobia is an expression of homosexuality, where heterosexuals “deny the homosexuality that is latent within them sublimating it and/or converting it into aggression” (165). Queerness is not a question of the individual, but instead, the collective. As Mieli proudly declares: “My homosexuality is your homosexuality” (214).

To a dominantly patriarchal and conservative Italian society often unwilling to engage in frank discourses on sexuality (as Pasolini observes in his 1965 film *Love Meetings/Comizi d’amore*), Mieli’s ideas were destined for controversy⁴. Using shock and provocation, he strove to dismantle normative views on sexuality. Mieli describes a universal queerness that would apply to even the most bigoted Italian patriarch. While Mieli was never a household name, his ideas represent a crucial change in Italy’s sexual discourse, rejecting compulsory monosexuality and embracing fluidity. His work opens up a space to exist beyond binaries. Mieli’s radical new ideas on sexuality inform

the cultural space *giallo* emerged into, as new conceptions of sexuality gained increased visibility in Italian society.

Giallo, Fluidity, and Repression

Around the same period as Mieli’s writing, Italy also witnessed the rise of the *giallo* film. *Giallo*⁵ was a *filone*⁶ popular in Italy’s early-to-mid 1970s. *Giallo* spun influences from murder mystery literature and gothic horror into the shape of exploitation films, complete with ample sex and violence. *Giallo* style is typically very flashy, full of vibrant colour, elaborate and hyper-kinetic camera motion, and eclectic scores. Most of the time, the films were cheaply produced and subject to shoddy dubbing. Though proto-*gialli*⁷ films arrived as early as Mario Bava’s *The Girl Who Knew Too Much/La ragazza che sapeva troppo* (1963), the *filone* came into full fruition shortly after the protest movement of 1968 with Dario Argento’s *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage/L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo* (1970), launching a short-lived yet rich body of texts.

In his book *La Dolce Morte: Vernacular Cinema and the Italian Giallo Film*, a text which essentially initiated *giallo* scholarship, Mikel J. Koven describes *giallo* as vernacular cinema. For Koven, the label of vernacular cinema encapsulates *giallo* as a popular cinema demanding an exploration “not for how it might (or might not) conform to the precepts of high-art/modernist cinema, but for what it does in its own right” (Koven v). While his approach often reads as elitist and diminishes the aesthetic ingenuity of *giallo*, Koven effectively describes the *filone*’s ability to engage with some of the era’s social conflicts and changes. In Koven’s argument, *giallo* is an absolute embodiment of Italian modernity: a term that describes a culture in flux, re-evaluating the relationship between the state and private bodies.

Significantly, *giallo* often features frequent representations of taboo sexuality, queer characters, and queer spaces. Generally, though not

⁴ Mieli was famously criticized and described as perverse by Silvana De Mari, an Italian children’s author, on the political talk show *Eight and a Half Otto e Mezzo* (Zundel 31).

⁵ *Giallo* is the Italian word for “yellow.” The name stems from cheap, popular mystery paperbacks which were printed with yellow covers and emerged into popularity during Italy’s 1930s (Needham).

⁶ *Filone* is an Italian term referring to a brief film cycle or trend.

⁷ *Gialli* is the plural of *giallo*.

exclusively, these characters and spaces exist in the periphery, outside of the heteronormative lifestyle of the protagonist. Yet, *giallo* is fascinated with ideas of queerness and sexual fluidity. While it would be an absurd over-extrapolation to interpret *giallo* as a direct response to Mieli's views on sexuality, the *filone* nonetheless represents an engagement with the notions of fluidity which Mieli introduced into Italian discourse.

In his thesis on *giallo*, Michael Mackenzie argues there are three forms of *gialli*: the M-*giallo* (*gialli* with male protagonists), the F-*giallo* (*gialli* with female protagonists), and the ensemble *giallo* (*gialli* with no singular protagonist) (Mackenzie 34). His study focuses on the gendered dynamics of the first two categories, largely ignoring the intriguing nuances of the ensemble *giallo*. The ensemble *giallo* is a subcategory of the *filone*, eschewing conventional forms of narrative development and singular identification. In his book *Euro Horror: Classic European Horror Cinema in Contemporary American Culture*, Ian Ontley observes how "*giallo* reaffirms the potentially radical, transformative nature of spectatorship, allowing us to adopt multiple viewing positions and experiment with a range of subjectivities generally proscribed by mainstream cinema and the dominant order" (141). Ontley's concept is most visible in the ensemble *giallo*. For instance, Fernando Di Leo's *Slaughter Hotel* follows a group of women rehabilitating in a countryside hospital-castle for mentally-ill women: a space decorated with medieval weapons and torture devices, including an iron maiden. The movie revolves around a variety of characters of different genders and sexual orientations: an interracial nurse-patient lesbian couple, a nymphomaniac, a clinic director who sleeps with patients, and many others. The film allows the spectator to experience these various sexualities and genders, rejecting a binary, monosexual identity. In this sense, the ensemble *giallo* embraces fluidity through its structure, destabilizing the monosexual self for the kind of multi-directional, fluid collective self Mieli describes.

Simultaneously, *giallo* occupies a space of violent repression. The antagonist killers turn to violence often as a means of combating sexual liberation. For instance, the killer from Giuliano Carnimeo's *The Case of the Bloody Iris/Perché*

quelle strane gocce di sangue sul corpo di Jennifer? (1972) murders the women in his apartment complex who, according to him, turned his daughter into a lesbian. Murder becomes a means to restrict non-normative expressions of sexuality from "spreading." In Lucio Fulci's *A Lizard in a Woman's Skin/Una lucertola con la pelle di donna* (1971), Carol, the killer, murders to conceal the secret of her own lesbian affair. Ultimately, her violence functions as an attempt to repress her own non-normative sexual desires. *Giallo* violence as a force of repressive tradition against sexual liberation is perhaps best illustrated through the *filone's* frequent use of killer priests. Fulci's *Don't Torture a Duckling/Non si sevizia un pape-rino* (1972), Aldo Lado's *Who Saw Her Die?/Chi l'ha vista morire?*, Antonio Margheriti's *Seven Deaths in the Cat's Eye/La morte negli occhi del gatto* (1973), and Antonio Bido's *The Bloodstained Shadow/Solamente nero* (1978), among many others, all feature murderous priests or killers disguised as priests. The priest, a symbol of Italy's Catholic tradition, is corrupted into an image of violence. *Giallo* represents a space where sexual fluidity exists in close proximity to violent repression, exhibiting the tensions between the two contradictory forces.

As a form of exploitation cinema, *giallo's* representations of fluidity often manifest through graphic sex scenes. Towards the end of *Slaughter Hotel*, Nurse Helen and her patient Mara (whose sexual tensions developed in previous massage and bathtub scenes) have sex. Significantly, this seems to be a first lesbian relationship for both parties. They are experimenting with their sexuality, finding a fluidity beyond expected monosexuality. The scene is lengthy, shot with long takes and slow camera movements. Di Leo's camera maximizes the visibility of the erotic action, a technique that evokes the cinematography of pornographic cinema, where the camera is merely a scopophilic device to document erotic images. This stylistic parallel raises a crucial question: does *Slaughter Hotel* treat lesbian sex as merely a spectacle? Is the explicit representation just another form of exploitation, or does it manage to rebuke the heteronormative standards of sex in cinema? Notably, the scene avoids the conventional phallocentrism that dominates most 1970s exploitation movie lesbian sex scenes⁸. Di

⁸ Most 1970s sexploitation films avoid graphic depictions of female genitalia in lesbian sex scenes. Even a subversive

Leo's camera, in this scene and others, focuses in extreme close-up on a character's vagina: something other exploitation films tend to omit to represent lesbian sex in terms that cater to the male gaze. Similarly, as Helen's kisses move down Mara's body, the camera follows Helen's gaze, also traversing down Mara's body. This motion situates the action through Helen's eyes, rather than a hypothetical third-party male spectator. The film avoids conventional fetishization of queerness by representing lesbian sex without emphasis on signifiers of phallogocentric male pleasure, effectively grounding the sex in the women's perspectives.

This burst of liberation is short-lived, however. After sex, Mara stands up and walks to the window. As she gazes outside, the crossbow-wielding killer launches an arrow at her, penetrating her neck. She dies instantly, the camera zooming into her wound. *Giallo* often displays a fetishistic attraction to the penetration of human flesh. This idea of murder as penetration links sex and violence in a complex and morbid union. In *Slaughter Hotel*, like many other *gialli*, lesbian sex is directly succeeded with murder: a parallel that reveals *giallo* violence as a repressive force, punishing sexual transgressors. Mara defies hegemonic order, searching for pleasure outside of normative sexuality (both as a woman sleeping with another woman, and as a black woman sleeping with a white woman). The killer, as an embodiment of tradition, slays her in an attempt to deny a world of undefined sexuality. It is fitting that the killer's weapon of choice here is a crossbow: an archaic weapon that situates the violence in the context of tradition. Fluidity and repression are directly connected in *Slaughter Hotel*. They exist in conflict, as though the film was torn between two opposing ideals.

Dario Argento's *The Cat o' Nine Tails* offers a similar ambivalence in its representation of queer spaces. In one scene, Carlo, a straight, cisgender news reporter, searches for Professor Braun in the St. Peter's Club, a gay bar. He arrives at the club uncomfortable yet undeniably curious. The St. Peter's Club represents a foreign environment for Carlo. It is a space where queer bodies, designated the Other in almost every other part of Italy, assemble to feel a sense of community and

to experience life outside of Othering. The start of the scene is comprised mostly of two different camera set-ups: one pushing forward through the bar, mimicking Carlo's gaze as he eyes various figures, and a second broadcasting Carlo's facial reactions. As he enters, his eyes lock on a long-haired brunette from behind. They spin around, and Carlo realizes they are, to his muted shock, not a cis woman. The camera follows his gaze upon this revelation, as he instantly focuses on other parts of the room, trying to distract himself from a confrontation with his sexuality. This moment represents a conflict for Carlo; his attraction to the brunette reveals his potential for a sexuality beyond the monosexual heterosexual desire for cis bodies which *educastration* instilled within him. This incident of misidentification is similar to the homophobic and transphobic gags of the 1960s Italian sex comedies, where mistaken genders become punchlines. However, in *The Cat o' Nine Tails*, Carlo's encounter with his sexuality is more than a mere joke. Argento explores both the significance of the encounter and the response it registers from Carlo.

Carlo tries to repress this encounter with his own potential sexual fluidity by redirecting his gaze. As he walks through the room, he passes various queer bodies, even once stopping in repulsion to watch someone apply make-up. Argento uses shot/reverse shots to center the action around Carlo's response to these bodies openly displaying non-normative gender performativity and sexuality. His actions are disturbing. Carlo enters a space intended to let queer people exist free from the Othering they experience day-to-day and, instead of respecting that desire, implements his own form of Othering through his judgmental gaze. His gaze is a force of repression, bringing normative values of sexuality to a rare space that exists outside of heteronormativity.

Much like *Slaughter Hotel*, *The Cat o' Nine Tails* depicts an encounter with sexual fluidity abruptly followed by an act of repression. Carlo witnesses the possibility of his own multi-directional fluid sexuality when he is, for a moment, attracted to a body of someone other than a cis woman. This revelation, counteracting what *educastration* has taught Carlo, triggers a period of

exploitation maestro like Doris Wishman uses careful framing and blocking to avoid showing female genitalia in her lesbian sex scenes, as seen in the climax of *Love Toy* (1971).

denial, where he openly sneers at all of the queer bodies he passes. Carlo encounters both his own sexual fluidity and his repression over the course of the scene. Unlike *Slaughter Hotel*, Carlo is both the figure experimenting with sexual fluidity and the figure repressing it (much like Carol in *A Lizard in a Woman's Skin*). *The Cat o' Nine Tails* exposes the dynamic interplay between fluidity and repression, where the latter is often internalized to combat the desire to return to the fluid sexuality of adolescence.

Giallo as a Reflection of Cultural Anxieties

Giallo is a *filone* of contradictions. Mauro Giori describes a *double moral* in *giallo*, “capable of both exploiting sexual freedom and blaming it for being the premise of crime” (196). He addresses a common trend in *giallo*, where the films oscillate between attraction and punishment in their representation of queer sex and queer characters. *Giallo* is an ideologically incoherent *filone*, demanding close interrogation and engagement with its ambiguity. Mikel J. Koven interprets *giallo* as “a cinema of ambivalence, specifically, ambivalence toward modernity. It neither praises nor condemns traditional hegemonic beliefs or modernity's demands on Italy's role as a member of the European community” (58). *Giallo* is deeply connected with modern discourses, including discourses on sexuality. Yet the *filone* remains ambivalent, uncommitted to either polar opposite of sexual freedom or repressive punishment. Synthesizing Giori's idea of the *giallo's double moral* with Koven's writing on *giallo* ambivalence reveals a *filone* in conflict, torn between forces. *Giallo* exists within the Italy of Mario Mieli, striving to liberate a repressed sexuality. Yet *giallo* also occupies the Italy of patriarchal, heteronormative hegemony, centered around tradition. Ultimately, *giallo* is stuck, often simultaneously, between a desire for fluidity and internalized repression.

Giallo is synchronous with the emergence of a queer subculture in Italy, depicting relationships and social environments that defy normative sexuality. The *filone* is replete with depictions of queer spaces (e.g. the gay bar in *The Cat o' Nine*

Tails), underground sexual communities (e.g. the sex club in Luigi Bazzoni's *The Fifth Cord/ Giornata nera per l'ariete* (1971)), and non-mogamous sexual arrangements (e.g. the hippie sex commune in *The Case of the Bloody Iris*). These spaces are represented as part of everyday, contemporary Italian life: a vision of Italian sexuality largely undocumented before, even in the risqué Italian sex comedies of the 1960s. Admittedly, these representations of such spaces may exist to satisfy spectators' curiosity of taboo sex. *Giallo* offers heteronormative culture a glimpse into spaces and sexual practices they know exist, but are uncomfortable to experience first-hand. Yet, there is an underlying desire for honesty behind these depictions. *Giallo* offers a full representation of Italian sexual cultures. As Argento argued in his interview with Stephane Derderian, *giallo* is a reflection of modernity; it showcases a contemporary social reality. *Giallo* depicts characters and communities unlearning the repressive teachings of *educastration*. Fluidity, once relegated to complete silence, begins to make noise and establish its own presence in Italian culture. This change represents a threat to hegemonic order. The polymorphous desire of sexual fluidity, free from the reproduction-based productivity of heterosexuality, as Pasolini argues, challenges the dominance of capitalism. Homosexuality offers a version of sexuality based around pleasure rather than capital⁹.

This shift in culture, gradually starting to embrace fluidity, is represented in *giallo*, which often features experimentations with sexuality. Mieli highlights the importance of experimentation in the fight for sexual liberation and fluidity:

*It may well be that
the growth of our [gay
liberation] movement
has not yet led us to
a complete unfixing of
the internalised models
and the compulsion to
repeat and pursue them.
But it has at least led
us to question them,
developing in us the*

⁹ This is, of course, an over-simplification. In *Homosexuality & Liberation*, Mieli notes how capitalism can also exploit queerness, citing how various bodybuilding and fashion publications have begun to use the aesthetics of queerness as a trend (124-125).

*desire to experiment,
and suggesting new
and different behaviours
alongside and as a
gradual replacement
for the repetitive and
coerced ones. (225)*

Though experimentation with queerness was a common element of the raunchy Italian sex comedies in the 1960s, its representation is much more serious in *giallo*, demonstrating a genuine interest in queerness as a *reality* rather than merely a *punchline*.

Sexual experimentation appears repeatedly in *giallo*. In Fulci's *A Lizard in a Woman's Skin*, Carol desires her young, hedonistic neighbor Julia. Despite her strict and conservative lifestyle, Carol yearns to experiment with her sexuality, and so the two become entangled in a passionate lesbian relationship. Yet normative sexual values tell Carol her desires are wrong. *Educastration* instills her with a sense of shame. Carol murders Julia, attempting to conceal her experimentations with homosexuality from the public. Her desires extend beyond normative sexual practices, which ultimately incites violence: a classic *giallo* trope. In Renato Polselli's *Delirium/Delirio caldo* (1972), Marzia, the sexually-frustrated wife of an impotent serial killer turns to dreams to satisfy her desires¹⁰. In her dreams, she engages in violent BDSM fantasies. Since *educastration* teaches the repression of non-normative sexual desires in society, dreams can be an outlet to experiment with a sexuality socially inscribed as "wrong." Similarly, in Sergio Martino's *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh/Lo strano vizio della Signora Wardh* (1971), the titular Julie Wardh harbors a secret fetish for blood and S&M. She hides her past fetishistic experimentations from both her social community and her husband. Yet she is haunted by memories of past fetishistic acts; in a flashback scored by a choir of romantic humming, her lover shatters glass across her torso and then they make love, the shards penetrating into their bare flesh. Martino depicts how normative views on sexuality oppose Julie's desires. Her fetish (or "strange vice," as the title calls it) are restricted to the world of memory and perceived as too

destructive to take any other form. *Giallo* characters desire sexual expressions beyond what society allows. Therefore, they turn to experimentation. *Giallo* represents an Italy questioning the validity of monosexual heteronormativity through the act of sexual experimentation.

These sexual experimentations, however, always end in bloodshed (or, at least, involve violence *inherently*, such as the violent fetish in *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh*). The internalized repressive values of *educastration* come to life through *giallo* violence, punishing sexual transgressors. Significantly, *giallo* is equally devoted to exploring experimentations with fluidity as it is dedicated to capturing their subsequent repression. As Giori's idea of *giallo's double moral* reveals, the *filone* does not choose a side. *Giallo* fully supports neither the liberation of fluid sexuality nor its repression. It stands in-between, fascinated by the freedom of embracing fluidity, yet also adhering to the repressive values of *educastration*.

Conclusion

Giallo represents the anxiety heteronormative Italian society faced with the rising discourse of fluidity, which firmly rejects the principles of fixedness instilled through *educastration*. It is a *filone* of contradictions, experimenting with (yet never surrendering to) the possibilities of a fluid sexuality. *Giallo* exists in the center of a dramatically shifting culture. It embodies the anxieties of Italian culture, overwhelmed by yearnings that society deems incorrect. This anxiety is then recorded through *giallo*, and held as a cultural artifact.

Giallo is a reflection of 1970s heteronormative Italian culture's anxieties and confictions. It functions as a historical record, revealing how social perspectives manifest in a culture's art. The *filone* is a testament to the importance of popular entertainment. *Gialli* are, among other merits, historical objects, embodying complex and nuanced social anxieties that often defy easy verbal communication. As *giallo* proves, cinema can function as a vehicle for the inarticulable. Movies wield the capacity to weave together a history of cultural affect, capturing a culture's anxieties through images: artifacts of feelings.

¹⁰ As a form of what Cynthia Freeland calls "realist horror," (181) *gialli* generally avoid the surreal world of dreams, though not without notable exceptions like *Delirium*.

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Hair

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Artist Statement

Hair is a multimedia piece, incorporating self-portrait photography overlaid with free verse poetry, dedicated to my body hair. My relationship to hair is complex and ever-changing. It is a source of pride and love, as it reflects my Middle-Eastern and French heritage, but also hatred, frustration and disgust. I have countless stories about my hirsuteness; I have grown from them, as my hair grows from me. I was in the changing room at my neighbourhood's public swimming pool, age 8, when I realized I had much more hair, thicker and darker hair, than my friends. I started shaving at age 12, after an intrusive comment from a male cousin at the beach. Thus began my years of furious hair removal; I tried everything from razors, to wax, to arts-and-crafts scissors and toxic cream to conform to the beauty standards imposed on me. Things only got worse in my teen years when I started having sex. I vividly remember being fingered for the first time by a boy I liked when I was 16. Feeling his fingers down my pants, touching my hairy crotch; the fear of him seeing me as gross or dirty made me so anxious I almost threw up. But this summer, aged 19, with the pandemic preventing me from seeing many people, I decided to let the hair on my body grow out. It was hard at first, but by the end I was comfortable and even felt beautiful, wearing a skimpy bikini that showed off my pubic hair at the pool. It is this feeling of beauty and love that I wish to portray in this piece. In the photographs, the soft lens of the camera and the use of black and white capture the landscape of my body and the hair that grows from it in a romantic, deeply self-loving way. The overlaid poetry portrays my body as a site of my experience, as a canvas unto which I inscribe my love. This piece is a love letter to my hair, my body and my sexuality.*

**Hirsuteness: the state of being covered in hair.*

In French, my first language, the word for hate, hair, is very similar to the word hair.



Though this may be a linguistic coincidence, femmes are often taught to associate the two in their minds. From a young age, we learn that the hair on our arms, legs, nipples, genitals, armpits, fingers, mustache, butt and face is ugly, dirty, gross, unsanitary, wrong, abnormal, shocking. We are told, take it off.

Shave it.

Wax it.

Laser it.

It does not matter how, just do it.

We are told to hate it.

Je hais mon hair. Hair. HATE.

Hair is hate. Hate hair.

I

hate

my

HAIR. %* & #

Well, removal could be quite simple, but our hair has a nasty habit of coming back.

Just like us.

Very quickly, it grows back. Very quickly, we come back. We say, stop telling us what to like and what to dislike. We say, stop controlling our hair. We say, we will learn to love it. We will teach all femmes that hair means love.

J'aime mon hair. Hair. Love. Hair is Love. Love Hair.

I

love

HAIR.

my

Haircut

Sarah Burns (she/her)

English, Women & Gender Studies, and Drama, Theatre, & Performance Studies

Artist Statement

I wrote this poem as an examination of how I am able to lose and acquire power over my body and my overall sense of self in a heteropatriarchal society. I want to problematize certain power relations that manifest between some men and women throughout their romantic and sexual relations, and investigate through this poem whether we are irrevocably bound to these relations and in what ways. In asking whether I can maintain power over my body throughout these fraught power dynamics, I think hair is an interesting thing to compare bodies to. It is questionable whether our hair is really a part of our bodies when we can get rid of it so easily. Is hair something we truly own when we can be so quickly and effortlessly alienated from it? Even when I treat my hair as my own and make conscious decisions about how I will wear it, how much am I influenced by the will of others, by their power over me? Do I yield ownership over my body by using it in ways that others want, even if I only do so to acquire new forms of power? I wonder if it is possible to be relieved in some ways of the meanings that come with inhabiting certain bodies. However, just as a haircut might remove what we no longer wish to identify with, it also attaches new meanings to ourselves, which can be oppressive in new ways. My body carries meanings that are completely fabricated but binding, and others that are inherent but elusive. Whether I possess sufficient power to change these meanings or not, the implications they carry cannot be downplayed: to quote Phoebe Waller-Bridge, the great writer of our time, “Hair is everything. We wish it wasn’t so we could actually think about something else occasionally. But it is.”

Burns

If cement were fragile I would be that-
Made of stone I crumble
Stumble through his night terrors,
Just a sensitive girl the world loses me
to the outskirts of his eyes.
I would like a pixie cut-
Something slender take a greedy cut out of me
Like a cut of linen fabric make a short dress white and tempting
A delicate snowflake pried from thick cardstock cut this hair out
Unveil my soft roots like naked arteries
Unshackle me make me something beautiful
Ethereal let me float over myself.
My life is all messed up it's frozen like that now
But my hair is a snow that will melt one day-
Let it pass by me like time these scissors are a hot unnatural climate change
Trim it up and down and inside and out make it leave with the seasons too
The freezing water gush over me make me numb
The ends fall like cards
Right into place.
Fit for his shiny daydream
I would like to be that shiny girl
Disappear me like a pot of happy glitter embrace me
Pretty weaponless sparkles like affectionate prickles on his lips
Make his heart go ah
Ah she's my girl he breathes me in.
My hair is so long I think it's alive-
In the black I see yellow eyes glow on every tress
Long and matted my neck aches with the weight of it-
Being his girl
Not knowing how to be,
Girl though I may be.
So keep your scissors low
This hair is older than what happened yesterday
And the day before
Just a trim a minor snip of the rim
But the length is grotesque it saw everything
I am too heavy to float.
Dryer and sicker it sticks to my shoulders runs down my collar
I think I can feel it linger forever
But the weight of it is stronger
Does not leave my shoulders though it flutters
Rises up
Like I always wanted to
My hair that is mine
But not his own
Crumbles him into unyielding stone.
You ask me if I would still like the pixie cut-
I tell you I do
But at the same time I don't.
Isn't it fun,
That you can chop it all off?
That it's always there
to be chopped off

Home is Each Other: Transmigrant Homemaking in Body, Nation, and Community

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Abstract

Drawing from the disciplines of trans studies and diaspora studies, this paper proposes a vision of trans migrant homemaking that encompasses the tensions forcibly displaced trans migrants experience when building a sense of home within themselves and their surroundings. Drawing from Tai Jacob's (2020) interviews with refugee claimants in Canada, I respond to J. Horncastle's (2018) "poetics of homing," whereby poetic conceptualizations allow trans individuals to find home within their bodies. My response is structured through three conceptualizations of home: body, nation, and community. I argue that, for trans migrants, a sense of home is not found internally but rather communally through an individual's relation to both ancestral and trans migrant communities that allow space for the re-storying of personal narratives and the re-creation of language. To illustrate how home is not internally negotiated but rather assembled, collage-like, amongst community members and across border lines, I delve into the ways in which trans migrant homemaking is intricately interwoven with Western progress narratives and state-enacted violence. Considering the fact that forcibly displaced migrants often flee due to the widespread effects of colonialism and imperialism, the final section of this essay will draw on Saylesh Wesley's (2014) operationalization of "story work methodology" to demonstrate how a sense of belonging may be co-constructed even if the individual's relationship with their ancestral community is tenuous. This piece aims to sit with the discomfort and instability of homemaking, and remind readers that what lies behind us can often have the answers we need to move forward.

*what is the word beyond. home.
after home.
where is it. this word.
why can i not remember how to say this
thing. this feeling that is my whole body.*

(Waheed, 2014, p. 154)

Introduction

I have spent much of my academic career searching for home. Over the years, in an effort to reconcile my embodied experiences and poetic tendencies with theoretical frameworks

and academic standards, I have sifted through countless conceptualizations on the definition of "home." It is only recently, however, that I have come to understand such questions of belonging, border-crossing and homemaking

as situated not only within my experience as a migrant, but also as a central negotiation of my transness. This essay will assert that many forcibly displaced trans migrants, as people who do not have a stable sense of home, are not able to build “home” within their bodies, but rather relationally through communal re-storying.

This stance will be positioned in response to “Busting Out: Happenstance Surgery, Clinic Effects, and the Poetics of Genderqueer Subjectivity,” where J. Horncastle (2018) proposes a “poetics of homing” as an internal stabilizing force, through which the individual negotiates their trans-ness within themselves. Leaning primarily on Tai Jacob’s (2020) interviews of refugee claimants in Canada, I will argue that a stable sense of home is instead found through an individual’s relation to both ancestral and trans migrant communities that allow space for the re-storying of personal narratives and the re-creation of language. Drawing from the disciplines of trans studies and diaspora studies, I will propose a vision of trans migrant homemaking that encompasses the tensions forcibly displaced trans migrants experience when “homing” themselves and their surroundings. Considering the fact that forcibly displaced migrants often flee due to the widespread effects of colonialism and imperialism, the following section will draw on Saylesh Wesley’s (2014) operationalization of “story work methodology” to demonstrate how a sense of belonging may be co-constructed even if the individual’s relationship with their ancestral community is tenuous. In a world where crossing both national and gendered borders comes with the assumption that one is “ultimately [moving] towards a more settled ‘home’ across the border” (Brett, 2019, p. 169), this piece aims to sit with the discomfort and instability of homemaking, and remind readers that what lies behind us can often have the answers we need to move forward.

Body as Home

In “Busting Out,” Horncastle (2018) negotiates the impacts of surgery on gender non-conforming bodies. In this context of surgical transition, Horncastle introduces the concept of poetics as homing, where poetics (both poetry itself and lived contexts that lend

themselves to poetic conceptualizations) act as a stabilizing force for trans subjectivity and selfhood.

At its core, the poetics of homing is about creating a space in which the beauty of transness can be fully felt, and these poetics come in many forms. Expressing deep and complex emotions through writing poetry allows trans people to heal internal rifts and ruptures. Additionally, poetry’s adaptable form allows it to keep up with the experiences of trans people as their conceptions of themselves shift. Beyond the written form, a “lived context” that lends itself to poetic conceptualization can be found in Horncastle’s (2018) example of their plans to tattoo their chest. A tattooed trans chest becomes a poetic form of emotional expression, as it matches the individual’s “feeling of gender” (Horncastle, 2018, p. 263). Poetics of homing are therefore not simply about writing and reading poetry as a way of negotiating one’s sense of self, but also about trans people describing their bodies to themselves in language that matches their feelings of gender. Such descriptions could be expressed through written words, but also through clothing, artistic creation, music, and tattoos. While poetic homemaking is motivated by the pleasure and beauty of transness, it is also built with the painful complexities of trans life in mind. For many people, it is through processing their pain that they begin to recognize themselves again (Horncastle, 2018, p. 262). Engaging in the poetics of homing allows rage and joy and pleasure and pain to live side by side.

According to Horncastle (2018), poetry’s non-normative language, and its ability to create space for self description beyond the realm of medical perceptions, allow trans people to find home within themselves. Horncastle’s work is rooted in their trans and gender non-conforming (TGNC) experience of surgery, where the gender non-conforming body, in response to the violence of the medical system, becomes the central site of homemaking. As Horncastle suggests, within the body poetic conceptualization allows one to move in, build a new room, and come into one’s sense of belonging as a trans person. However, such an individualistic understanding of poetic conceptualizations does not apply to the trans migrant experience, where non-normative

language is built through ancestral and communal knowledge. While Horncastle's conceptualization of "feeling one's way into home" is grounded in "a thriving or comfortable sense of self" (p. 265), this definition only stands strong when trans people already experience stability outside of their bodies.

Nation as Home

For forcibly displaced trans migrants, negotiating a stable sense of self does not become possible until external stability is found. Within Tai Jacob's (2020) "Embodied Migrations: Mapping Trans and Gender Non-Conforming Refugee Narratives in Canada's Refugee Regime," interviewed refugees express that a sense of home only comes after they have established a sense of stability and security in the nation. Thus, even the embodied quality of Horncastle's "homing" cannot apply to the experiences of TGNC migrants, who may be forced to navigate prohibitive hormone replacement therapy costs and physicians who refuse to treat them or accept Interim Federal Healthcare Program (IFHP) coverage (Jacob, 2020, p. 68). Additionally, in the case of refugee claimants, funding for transition-related surgeries is not accessible until they are accepted as Convention Refugees and Permanent Residents (Jacob, 2020, p. 70). As wait times in claims processes extend, so do wait times for medical transition. Accessing "home," then, requires refugees to be "comfortably folded into the nation state" (Jacob, 2020, p. 88). This "trans-specific violence" leaves TGNC people in a "seemingly eternal waiting room" (Jacob, 2020, p. 70) where they are unable to move forward with their lives, let alone begin to build a stable sense of home.

Migrant experiences reveal that Horncastle's imaginary of trans homemaking not only lacks consideration for trans people who struggle for material stability, but also fails to address the nationalist narratives that define the experiences of trans migrants. By shedding notions of nationalism, ownership, and settler colonialism, Horncastle's poetics of homing overlook a central tension of "home." The manner in which colonial forces dictated the flow of transgender migrants from the Global South into Western nation-states gave rise to a progress narrative that frames the movement of trans migrants to the West

as a "migration [from oppression] into liberation" (Jacob, 2020, p. 20). Along with the "transphobia, xenophobia, classism [and] racism" (Jacob, 2020, p. 60) that complicate the search for housing and income, the heterocisnormative processes embedded within Canada's immigration regime are so violently re-traumatizing that Canada's nationalist myth is challenged before trans migrants even cross the border (Lee, 2019, p. 84). Canada purports itself to be a safe haven for trans migrants, yet simultaneously perpetuates violence towards trans migrants.

The complexity of trans migrant "homing" in a settler-colonial state necessitates a conceptualization of homemaking that is conscious of nationalist imaginaries. Within the discipline of diaspora studies, the process of homemaking is understood as building the feeling of being "at home." This affective state involves feelings of security, familiarity, community, and a "sense of possibility" where one can perceive opportunities for a better life" (Hage, 1997, p. 2). Such a definition encompasses sentiments of security and possibility that I have already discussed, but also extends the scope of homemaking beyond the individual body. "Home" too, must be framed with aspects of both embodied affect and external conditions in mind.

Tai Jacob (2020) defines home as the relation between a "site in which we live, [and] an idea and an imaginary that is imbued with... feelings of belonging and intimacy" (p. 80). In this sense, home and homemaking not only become inherently relational, but also only discernible when the individual in question has an external sense of permanence and stability.

Community as Home

Thus, I am led to ask: if both the body and the nation are unable to allow for a trans migrant engagement with the poetics of homing, what space *does* allow for homemaking? For many, community support from fellow trans migrants is where home building begins. Isabel, a trans woman who grew up in Egypt, describes home as a place where one can "be held by a community that [cares for them] and [provides them] the space to be fully [themselves] without fear" (Jacob, 2020, p. 84). Isabel's sentiment is echoed by Ashriel, who "ultimately [feels] the

most comfortable with people who [have had] similar experiences to them” (Jacob, 2020, p. 72). Trans migrant community creates a space that allows migrants to better situate themselves in their surroundings, as people interact and learn that the barriers they face are systemic in nature. Negotiating the tensions of homemaking cannot be done internally or within state systems, instead it is within trans communities that migrants see their experiences reflected, and are able to access and nourish the support systems that oftentimes make the difference between life or death.

However, strong support systems are often not enough for TGNC migrants to feel the sense of familiarity and community that Hage (1997) describes in his definition of the affect of home. While trans migrants feel safe in their host country, the sense that their new communities are incomplete persists. It is here that I turn to Saylesh Wesley’s (2014) “story-work methodology. . . whereby personal experience is considered in relation to stories of the elders” (p. 339) as a site where trans migrants are able to access a relationally based poetics of homing. Drawing from her experience as a two-spirit member of the Indigenous Sto:lo˘ nation, Wesley writes from a deeply rooted awareness of the impacts that colonialism and ethno-cultural genocide have on the stories told about transness. As I make the connection between Indigenous people and migrants as both forcibly uprooted groups, it is vital to acknowledge the unique histories of Indigenous communities and their ongoing fight for sovereignty. While I will be focusing on how trans migrant communities may draw from Indigenous story-work methodologies in the process of homemaking, this is not to suggest a co-option of Indigenous practices. Rather, I would like to propose the creation of a collage that simultaneously recognizes how trans migrants benefit from the Canadian nation state and are harmed by it.

As opposed to Horncastle’s understanding of poetic conceptualizations as individually experienced and constructed, Wesley has begun the process of recreating language together with her grandmother, who was the first to create a Halq’emylem term “Striyo’ye smesti’yexw” for the author’s trans identity (Wesley, 2014, p. 339). Wesley firmly states that reaching a point where the communal

recreation of language could occur was only made possible by her work to re-story the two-spirit people stripped from her grandmother’s memory and replaced with an “instinctual transphobia... [that] is the ‘good work’...of the colonial project” (Wesley, 2014, p. 343). Through this re-storying, her grandmother gained a renewed understanding of two-spirit people intimately tied to her relationship with her grandchild and her ancestral language. The fluidity of her mother tongue in comparison with English is emphasized by Wesley, who finds joy in how the term her grandmother created could “wield various contexts and concepts depending on the discussion” (Wesley, 2014, p. 343).

When responding to trans migrant experiences, such nourishment of intergenerational relationships opens up a new world of poetic conceptualizations. Looking back to the knowledge of our elders and the histories of our respective ethno-cultural communities is not a painless process by any means. This intimacy is built through knowing one’s environment and self through other people - an especially important practice for trans migrants whose histories have been erased and retold in colonial tongues. Beginning the project of relationally re-storying the existing narratives on transness within their communities would allow trans migrants to situate themselves within an ancestral story, where transness is understood beyond the confines of colonial thought. Here, through discussions with community members across gender, nation, and age lines, there grows a more cohesive understanding of oneself, where being trans and being a migrant are indivisible from each other. This is not to claim that trans migrants only begin “homing” once they re-engage with the (often violent) spaces they have left behind, but rather to point out that familiarity and intimacy is built through a historical understanding of oneself.

Re-creating language grows out of the groundwork laid by the poetics of re-storying. For migrants who are tied to languages other than English, creating or reclaiming terms allows for conceptualizations of oneself and “home” that “western systems of sexual and gendered categorization” (Jacob, 2020, p. 11) fail to encompass. Like home, language is relationally formed and maintained. For trans

migrants, being unable to fit themselves into the language of their communities or having to settle for the shortcomings of translation can have significant impacts on relation and home building. When meaningful kinship is cultivated and people are able to draw from multiple sets of knowledge and modes of storytelling, non-normative ways of using and constructing language become more easily accessible. Re-storying and re-creating language both make space for trans migrant homemaking in ways that honour all that lies beyond, behind, and between borders.

Conclusion

Thus, it becomes clear that home is not internally negotiated, but rather assemblage and collage-like, amongst community members and across border lines. Trans migrant homemaking, as a process intricately interwoven with Western progress narratives and the institutional violence of the nation-state, is not simple by any means. This complexity is revealed through my assertion, in response to Horncastle's (2018) poetics of homing, that

home for transgender migrants is not built internally, through *individual* poetics, but rather through the *relational* poetics of re-storying and re-creation of language. As supported by Jacob's (2020) interviews of refugees in Canada, trans migrants constantly negotiate the tensions of building a home without stability, safety, or access to surgery (p. 67). In a nation-state that is actively violent, xenophobic, transphobic, and racist, community care is how trans migrants "respond to and resist the structural violence integral to the Canadian state's production of precarious status" (Lee, 2019, p. 72).

I have spent much of my academic career searching for home. In writing this paper, I imagine a future where the stories we retell and the languages we recreate are passed down, up, and through generations and communities. I imagine a future where trans migrants are not perpetually untethered but firmly rooted; to ourselves, to our histories, and to the inherent intimacy of building a home together with those we love.

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