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Hardwire is the undergraduate journal of Sexual Diversity Studies at the University of Toronto. Our journal provides an academic platform for issues of sexuality and gender. It aims to promote Sexual Diversity Studies and showcase scholarly and creative work by students critically analyzing sexuality at the undergraduate level.

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# Letter from the Editors

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As the production of the 6th edition of *Hardwire* comes to a close, we take time to pause and reflect on the past year. The pandemic continues to rage on, despite broadscale disregard from governments, administrations, and society at large; in its wake, we have been left to contend with the varying degrees of upheaval and severe fatigue faced by all of us who have had to work throughout multiple, continuing crises. As a journal run completely by student volunteers, it has been challenging to navigate the continuous demands of the editorial process while bearing in mind the amount of labour we are asking of our authors, editors, and designers. We thank them for their continued dedication to *Hardwire*.

Many of the events discussed in last year's letter from the editors persist: the world is still carrying on as 'normal' despite the ongoing effects of the pandemic, the war on Ukraine has intensified, and further transphobic legislation has been passed in the United States. Since last year, the cost of living has increased in Canada, the lack of actually affordable housing has intensified, the construction of the trans-mountain pipeline that violates Indigenous sovereignty persists, and day-to-day living in Toronto presents a mounting stress. These particular challenges may be novel, but the broader inequities of colonial power systems and biopolitical processes are not.

In light of the rampant rise of 'anti-gender' movements in the United States, England, Canada, Peru, Uganda, and beyond, what does it mean to platform undergraduate work in the field of queer and trans studies? We are proud to celebrate and uplift the voices of trans scholars at a time when many in power seek to erase our very existence; with this in mind, we look to unpacking the meanings and implications of visibility — how do we already manage the visibility of our bodies, identities, and subjectivities? In moments of sexual intimacy, or in public spaces like bathrooms? How might visi-

bility entangle with exposure and vulnerability, in relation with others, and to institutional and systemic purview and power?

Thus, we must in turn contemplate what (in)visibility may offer — in regards to navigating contemporary threats to queer and trans lives, as well as paying attention to historicities for what might be silenced, missing entirely, pieced together or imagined. For queer and trans people, invisibilizing oneself or parts of oneself has often been a critical measure of survival and self-defense against surveillance and persecution. With this in mind, what does (in)visibility mean for solidarity, community, and relationality? Is visibility necessary for collective organizing?

As students in the field of critical studies, it often feels as if we are equipped with the tools to understand the systems of power that enable and sustain these crises, yet are powerless to make the world more livable. Reflecting on the theories of queer of colour scholar Jose Esteban Muñoz (2019) — and in conversation with our friends, peers, and mentors — we ask: What can be done? How might we imagine a livable future and can we dare to build it?

*Hardwire* alone does not realize this future; however, by carving space for brilliantly critical and reflexive undergraduate work, we can glimpse queer futurities envisioned by the scholars, activists, and creatives we celebrate and draw from in this publication. The pieces in Issue 6 of *Hardwire* critically evaluate the rampant inequities of our world, but also dare to imagine and explore spaces for solidarity, community, intimacy, sex, joy, self-reclamation, pride, and love.

Authors Jae Kim, Wana Saiful Rizal, and Andrea Wang critically engage with issues of inequity through various methodologies. In *Selling Flesh*, Jae Kim reflects on the challenges of navigating gendered spaces as a trans man, exploring



the commodification of bodies and the human need for release. Wana Saiful Rizal critically evaluates media portrayals of Meghan Markle and links those racialized and gendered presentations to British nationalist rhetoric in the context of Brexit. Finally, Angela Wang examines North American legislation and discourse around Asian-migrant sex workers to explore the intersections between orientalism, moral panic, and state regulation.

Clover Chen, Mathew Kennealy, Beck Scholbeck, and an anonymous author consider community building, solidarity, and connection within Toronto and abroad. Clover Chen's striking collage reckons with notions of relationality, community, and belonging, bringing into focus the parts of ourselves we might emphasize to others in seeking connection. On the other hand, Mathew Kennealy's Poem/Fan Letter For Billy-Ray reflects on the author's lack of community in Toronto, and in turn seeks to bridge that gap by reaching out to activist and poet Billy-Ray Belcourt. Beck Scholbeck publishes original interviews with former residents of queer collective housing in Toronto in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Scholbeck's oral histories highlight the houses' integral role as spaces for organizing, connection, and care, and underline the quotidian as foundational and transformative for queer resistance. Finally, an anonymous author analyzes the poetics of solidarity between Turkish and Palestinian resistance, exploring how creative praxis can connect movements internationally. These aforementioned authors imagine queer futures through their creative and academic endeavours; they emphasize the significance of care and connection in queer spaces.

Maria Vidal Valdespino, Zoe Faber, and Juliet Spizzirri grapple with topics of intimacy, sexual discovery, and liberation from shame. Maria Vidal Valdespino's digital paintings reflect her experiences with intimacy in the aftermath

of sexual violence, as well as the desire to dislodge religious shame and reclaim her sexuality as her own. Zoe Faber considers the intersections of religion and sexuality through a series of poems imagining Eve's perspective in the Book of Genesis. Then, affirming the transformative potential of queer love, Juliet Spizzirri's poetry celebrates the joy and pleasure of queer sex, free from shame and stigma.

Finally, Kohle Handelman-Kerman applies the theories of disidentification and performativity to the song "Royal Road" to expand on the joys of claiming one's queerness and taking pride in the illegibility of one's identities. As for the covers of this edition, pieces by Katherine Zhang and Sadie Levine convey the impassioned urgency behind queer love and connection, and end on a lighter note as a reminder to keep space for a joyous, campier side of human sexuality.

Thank you for reading the 6th edition of *Hardwire*, the Undergraduate Journal of Sexual Diversity Studies. As we mentioned, this publication would not exist without the hard work and dedication of our editors, designers, authors, and administrators. Collaboration is integral to producing *Hardwire*, and we extend our sincere thanks to everyone involved. We thank the Mark S. Bonham Centre for Sexual Diversity Studies for their mentorship and continued support of the journal. We hope you enjoy Issue 6!

**Ellithia Adams and Carrie Liu**  
*Editors-in-Chief of Hardwire:  
The Undergraduate Journal of  
Sexual Diversity Studies*

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# Loose Leap

## **Clover Chen (they/them)**

Peace, Conflict and Justice Specialist, Indigenous Studies Minor, Sustainability Certificate

### **Artist Statement**

This artwork is a digital painting that depicts a collage I created. My use of silhouettes in both the foreground and background of the piece aims to create depth and dimensionality. I position the silhouettes on their own and in conversation with each other to explore the tension between the community and the stranger. This theme asks us to reflect on our relationships with those inside and out of our immediate circles, and what it means to belong to a larger social group.

By using a limited color palette, I sought to make it challenging for the viewer to distinguish the original shapes of the collage cut-outs. This element of ambiguity speaks to my desire to play with the viewer's perception of the work, encouraging them to indulge in subjectivity when engaging with the piece. In other words, I want the audience to take their time with it. The monochromatic features and silhouettes in the work draw the viewer's eye to specific elements, creating a dynamic visual experience.

However, the green and white in the central silhouette contrasts with the rest of the piece, making it the first thing the viewer sees. This influence on the viewer's first impression of the piece speaks to one of the primary themes I explore: the concept of impact. In particular, the ways we emphasize parts of ourselves to impact how the people around us perceive us.

Finally, the piece also touches on the theme of taking a leap of faith, again in the context of community. I wanted to celebrate the bravery in "joining" a community you identify with as well as the courage it takes to trust in oneself and step into the unknown. Although my thematic focuses are broad, my hope is viewers will find something of themselves in this piece and be inspired to think deeply about their own relationship to these themes.

*Content tags: relationality, community, queer expression*

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### **Image 1 Description**

A bold figure dressed in green is set on a background of deep purples. The figure has a hunch to their shoulders, and their face is half turned towards the viewer. On the purple background is a collage of lighter purples and whites, with large, teeth-like white shapes framing their head.







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# From the 1885 Chinese Immigration Act to the 2021 Atlanta Spa Shooting: An Exploration of Anti-Asian Sentiment against Asian Migrant Sex Workers Within North America

**Angela Wang (she/her)**

Global Health, Psychology, Women & Gender Studies

## Abstract

This essay explores the legal and discursive interrogation of Asian migrant sex workers as both naïve victims of sex trafficking in need of protection, and as racially and sexually impure 'pollutants' that jeopardize the racial and moral purity of North America. I argue that this conflicting interrogation of the Asian-migrant sex worker as both a victim to be saved and a threat to be controlled is an intentional construction by the authors, beneficiaries, and enforcers of law to legitimize anti-Asian sentiment and the policing of Asian women's bodies. Drawing from Nagel's (2003) ethnosexual notions and frontiers, Said's (1978) work on Orientalism, and Scheibelhofer's (2012) writing on the sexual charges of immigration, I will establish that race and gender must be understood as inseparable and synchronous in order to understand the contradictory construction of the Asian migrant sex worker; suggest that early forms of anti-Asian sentiments have permeated and manifested across time and across multiple jurisdictions; and postulate that the anxiety surrounding the sexual charges behind migrants 'penetrating' North America is mitigated through the control, policing and deportation of Asian-migrant sex workers.

*Content tags: sex work, migrant work, precarity*

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In 2015, Blue<sup>1</sup>, an international engineering student, was working at a massage parlour to earn money for school tuition, but was forced into underground sex work after the parlour was raided by police officers carrying out an anti-trafficking investigation. After assuring them she was not a victim of trafficking, Blue was warned by the police that she would be arrested and deported if she ever returned to the massage parlour. Thus, when Blue was assaulted and robbed by clients while working as a free-lance sex worker, she did not call the police in fear of deportation. In 2016, Fanny was working as a sex worker in a hotel when the police came knocking at her hotel door. She was afraid that she was in trouble for engaging in sex work but realized that only

the Asian sex workers in the hotel were under investigation, while the white sex workers stood by and watched. It became clear that the police conducting the anti-trafficking investigation were less interested in protecting sex workers and more interested in arresting/deporting migrant women. Elsewhere in Canada, Ashley had just arrived in the country with her teenage son after escaping an abusive relationship in her home country. A friend of hers was a sex worker in Canada and helped her arrange work to start earning money and settle into the country. One day, Ashley was arrested during an anti-trafficking operation and charged with working illegally in Canada. She was detained for 5 weeks with no contact with her son before being deported to

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<sup>1</sup>Pseudonyms are used throughout the article to protect anonymity

Asia (Lam, 2018).

Experiences of violence, unsafe work conditions and police raids are, unfortunately, common themes amongst many stories from sex workers (Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform, 2017). These conditions are exponentially hazardous for Asian-migrant sex workers who are taken advantage of due to their precarious migrant statuses and language barriers, and racially profiled by law enforcers who identify them as victims of sex trafficking (Fudge et al., 2021). It is well documented that many sex workers, their allies, and academics resist the interpretation of sex work as exploitative and have attempted to highlight the autonomy and entrepreneurship afforded through sexual commerce (Bernstein, 2018; Noel, 2016; Raguparan, 2017). Despite this work, Asian migrant sex workers continue to be interpreted as naïve and weak, brought from East/South-east Asia to North America against their will and in need of protection (Choi & Lam, 2020; Malla et al., 2019). Simultaneously, the Asian-migrant sex worker is also interrogated as an illegal foreign pollutant whose presence jeopardizes the morals and values of North America (Factum of the Intervener Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, 2022). I argue that this conflicting image of the Asian-migrant sex worker as both a victim to be saved and a threat to be controlled is an intentional construction by the authors and enforcers of law as a means of legitimizing anti-Asian sentiment and the policing of Asian women and Asian massage businesses. To demonstrate this, I will draw from Nagel's (2003) concepts of 'ethnosexual notions' and 'ethnosexual frontiers' to establish that race and gender must be considered together to understand the contradictory image of the Asian migrant sex worker. More specifically, I will highlight the 1885 Chinese Immigration Act as one of the earliest ways the law has synchronously racialized and sexualized Asian women, and suggest that its sentiments have permeated and manifested across time and across multiple jurisdictions, as seen with the incessant targeting of Asian massage parlours for minor bylaw infractions and the 2021 Atlanta Spa shooting. I will also borrow from Said's (1978) work on Orientalism and Scheibelhofer's

(2012) piece on the sexual charges of immigration to understand law's anxiety concerning migrants entering North America, and how this anxiety is mitigated through the control, policing, and deportation of Asian-migrant sex workers.

### ***From The Chinese Exclusion Act to the Atlanta Spa Shooting: The Ethnosexual Notions of Anti-Asian Sentiment across North America***

Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1994) has been identified as a theoretical framework to help understand the multiple compounding forces of discrimination that act together to generate the disparities experienced by the marginalized, and it has been applied far and wide throughout many social justice, legal, and academic circles. In the court case against the Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act (PCEPA), the Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform (CASWLR), their allies, and their lawyers have all made it clear that an intersectional lens is not only an appropriate framework, but a requirement for understanding how PCEPA infringes on numerous human rights (Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform, 2017; Factum of the Intervener Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, 2022; Factum of the Intervener Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, 2022). While this framework is indeed helpful – and necessary – in understanding the web of discriminating forces related to race, class, occupation, gender, disability, etc., this paper does not intend to speak on the large intersectional web, as is being done in the court case against PCEPA. Instead, this essay will focus on how the threads of race, sex and migrant status are woven together within this web. It is important to note that, while it may seem counterintuitive to the concept of intersectionality to focus on only three facets (race, sex, and migrant status), the spirit of intersectionality remains present in my writing. These three facets are only a fraction of the disparities that impact Asian-migrant sex workers, but the relationship between race, sex and migrant status is complex enough to warrant further analysis. Thus, Nagel's (2003) concepts of ethnosexual notions and ethnosexual frontiers have been identified as appropriate theoretical frameworks for this

analysis.

Nagel (2003) argues that while race and sex may seem like separate concepts, the two are mutually connected. Mapping out various historical, contemporary, and transnational examples, Nagel concludes that ethnicity is sexualized, and offers the term 'ethnosexual frontiers' to describe the "erotic locations and exotic destinations that are surveilled and supervised, patrolled and policed, regulated and restricted, but that are constantly penetrated by individuals forging sexual links with ethnic Others across ethnic boundaries" (Nagel, 2003, p.14). To begin to understand the depths in which ethnicity is sexualized, and how 'ethnosexual frontiers' can be applied to Asian migrant sex work, we can turn to the very first Canadian immigration law that banned entry into the country on the grounds of both race and sex: the Chinese Immigration Act (Statutes of Canada, 1885).

The Chinese Immigration Act is one of the earliest examples of how law has constructed a conflicting image of the Asian woman. Implemented in 1885, the Act was meant to bar the entrance of Chinese (and broadly, East Asian) migrants into Canada, with section 9 of the Act explicitly denying the entrance of "any Chinese woman who is known to be a prostitute" (Statutes of Canada, 1885). This is further expanded upon in the 1885 Report of the Royal Commission of Chinese Immigration, which characterizes Chinese women as: racially inclined towards prostitution; inherently passive; inherently accepting of lower wages; immoral and corrupting influences; and disease vectors (as summarized in the Factum of the Intervener Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, 2022). The racialization of Chinese women as possessing a proclivity for prostitution marks them as targets for surveillance and policing and legitimizes the barring of Chinese women from entering the country. The construction of Chinese women as passive and accepting of lower wages not only renders them helpless to exploitation and subjugation (both sexual and economic), but it also artificially removes their autonomy to legitimize the paternalistic control over their beings. These sentiments are rehearsed in contemporary moments as seen through

the continual racial profiling of Asian massage workers as prostitutes by police officers (Lam, 2018). Further, Asian massage parlours and their employees are targeted by multiple jurisdictions, such as the federal laws governing immigration; provincial anti-trafficking operations; and municipal bylaws that target parlours through zoning restrictions and minor infractions.

Simultaneously, the 1885 Chinese Immigration Act constructed Asian women as dirty, immoral, corruptive disease vectors – not just through the physical messiness of sex, but as bodies that jeopardized the racial and moral integrity of Canadian society. To protect Canada from this threat, these racist-misogynistic characterizations were written into law and used to legitimize the exclusion and policing of Asian women. However, I suggest that the influence of these historic laws is still seen in our contemporary rehearsals of anti-Asian sentiment and symbolic acts of 'cleansing' – not just through the deportation of Asian migrants, but also through violence and death. Let us turn to the 2019 Atlanta Spa Shooting as an example.

Prior to the March 16th, 2021 Atlanta Spa shooting, Robert Aaron Long would frequent massage parlours to visit sex workers. However, this conflicted with his religious beliefs (McLaughlin et al., 2021) and the cognitive dissonance eventually led to him murdering 8 people at 3 different Asian massage parlours, with 6 of the victims being Asian women (Carmon, 2021). While Long denies it was a racially motivated crime, an unnamed witness during the incident claims to have heard the perpetrator declare he was going to "kill all Asians" (Carmon, 2021). Long had also attempted to justify his actions by stating he had attacked the spas to help others with their sexual addiction (McLaughlin et al., 2021). This is an example of how the early anti-Asian sentiments within law continue to be rehearsed in contemporary moments, as Asian women continue to be marked as immoral, corruptive, sexual temptations that jeopardize the puritanical beliefs of a racially, sexually, and moralistically pure North American society. We must further consider the context in which the crime took

place: during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw a record high in anti-Asian violence – such as a 717% spike in anti-Asian hate crimes in Vancouver (Zussman, 2021) – and had marked people of Asian descent as disease vectors for the virus. As such, Asian sex workers were triply marked during this period of time: as racial minorities, as vectors for sexual diseases, and as vectors for the virus responsible for the global pandemic.

Many contributions to the discourse around the Atlanta Spa Shooting have stated that it is difficult to discern if the crime was based on race or sex (Carmon, 2021), which highlights the significance of Nagel's work: race and sex cannot be understood as separate from each other. Much like how the 1885 Chinese Immigration Act racialized and sexualized Asian women as passive, licentious prostitutes, the inability to discern if the 2021 Atlanta shooting was race-based or gender-based demonstrates that early legal interpretations of Asian women continue to be rehearsed. Thus, race and sex must be articulated together to understand this persistent racist-misogynistic imagination of Asian women, and why Asian sex workers continue to be racially profiled as victims of sex trafficking.

Furthermore, less than 24 hours after the Atlanta shooting, Officer Jay Baker was criticized for downplaying anti-Asian violence in his briefing with reporters, having commented that the perpetrator was "pretty much fed up", "at the end of his rope", and having "a really bad day" (Carmon, 2021; Elliott, 2021). After the briefing, critics dug into Officer Jay Baker's Facebook profile and found evidence of Baker's own anti-Asian sentiments – photos of his 'favourite' T-shirts with the slogan, "COVID-19, imported virus from Chy-na" (Carmon, 2021; Elliott, 2021). As an enforcer of the law – and thus a part of law's arsenal through which it dictates who is and is not legitimate – Baker's own anti-Asian sentiment and tone-deaf remarks belittles the weight of Robert Long's actions and legitimizes the murderer's rage directed at Asian women. Commenting that Long was "at the end of his rope" and having a "really bad day" (Carmon, 2021) demonstrates sympathy for

the perpetrator, which legitimizes the identification of Asian women as the source of his troubles. Long's murder of the Asian women was a symbolic act of cleansing to reinstate his morality and to protect society from the perceived threat of Asian women.

### ***Immigration as Penetration: 'Ethnosexual Frontiers' and the Sexual Charges of Immigration***

The Atlanta Spa shooting is not an isolated incident of Asian sex workers being sought out for sexual services, and in turn, brutalized. Since 2014, Butterfly (a Toronto based organization for Asian-migrant sex workers) has learned of at least 7 Asian sex workers who have been murdered in the Greater Toronto Area, and many more who have been assaulted by either clients or police officers (Affidavit of Elene Lam, 2021). However, as some of the introductory anecdotes might suggest (Lam, 2018), it is likely that the number of assaults is severely under-reported given that Asian-migrant sex workers often avoid the police to mitigate the risk of criminalization and/or deportation. In fact, numerous sex work organizations and allies corroborate this statement, reporting that Asian women are not only less likely to reach out to police, but are also more likely to be charged with criminal activity if they do so (Sarai, 2022).

The contradictory actions of law enforcers can be understood by revisiting Nagel's definition of 'ethnosexual frontiers', and defining Asian parlours as the "erotic locations and exotic destinations that are surveilled [...] policed [...] and restricted, but that are constantly penetrated by individuals forging sexual links with ethnic Others across ethnic boundaries" (Nagel, 2003, p.14). The massage parlours are 'penetrated' by those who police them, not simply for sexual favours, but to "cross ethnic boundaries" in order to penetrate (read: dominate) racialized "ethnic Other(s)" (Nagel, 2003, p.14). As Said's (1978) work on orientalism suggests, the directionality of the East-West relationship is such that the East is a location of sexual exploration for the West. The East, whose 'exotic' women are imagined as welcoming of sexual domination, is meant to be 'penetrated' by the West. Armed with Nagel and Said's articulations of



the ethnic boundaries, the sexual charges, and the directionality of the East-West relationship, we may begin to understand why North America's law enforcement tend to 'forge sexual links' with Asian sex workers.

However, drawing from Scheibelhofer's (2012) piece on the sexual charges of immigration, I argue that the reversal of this penetrative relationship leads to anxiety and frustration within the West. More specifically, I suggest that Asian women entering ('penetrating') North America inverts the relationship described by Edward Said (1978), and thus induces a sense of anxiety over the perception that it is now the West being 'penetrated' by the East. This anxiety is exacerbated when we consider the notion that Asian migrants entering the country undocumented, or who breach the terms of their visas or permanent resident status, are considered a form of 'non-consensual penetration'. To relieve this anxiety, and to reinstall a sense of control and sexual gratification, the authors and enforcers of law displace, brutalize, and criminalize Asian women. For example, one woman described an experience where her shop was constantly targeted by a police officer, despite the shop not being within the officer's jurisdiction. After confronting him (and denying his request for a blow-job), the officer continued his incessant surveillance of her shop. The woman expressed frustration that it was the same officer going out of his way to target her business, instead of different officers within her jurisdiction (Malla et al., 2019).

The woman's story reveals several avenues through which the West attempts to relieve its anxiety and frustration. The first avenue is the (attempt) to "forge sexual links" to relieve sexual frustration, as was seen when the officer requested a blow-job, revealing ulterior motives to his visiting of her shop. The second avenue is through the constant policing of Asian sex workers/massage businesses, such as the incessant surveillance of the woman's shop, or through ticketing and anti-trafficking raids. The danger of increased policing (be it through surveillance, raids, or ticketing) is that it increases Asian migrants' interaction with law enforcement,

risking escalation to the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) and deportation (Butterfly: Asian and Migrant Sex Worker Support Network et al., n.d.). Lastly, deportation serves as a symbolic act of 'cleansing', where law is able to undo the penetration, especially the 'non-consensual' penetration by undocumented Asian migrants, and of those who have breached the terms of Canada's consent.

### ***Anti-Asian Sentiments Across Time and Jurisdictions: What is Happening Now***

As detailed earlier, CASWLR's current court case against PCEPA has made intersectionality a priority to represent the diverse population of sex workers in Canada, including racialized and migrant sex workers (Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform, 2017). However, CASWLR has noted two key limitations to its case: 1) its recommendations for sex work law reform bleed into the realm of human trafficking law, which is beyond the scope of its case, and 2) regardless of the court case outcome, racialized/migrant sex workers will continue to be impacted by laws outside of PCEPA. To address these limitations, three other laws have been identified for further consideration. The first is Bill 251, the Combating Human Trafficking Act. Having been debated and carried on May 31st, 2021, numerous organization and politicians denounced the bill for conflating sex work with human trafficking. Given how Asian migrant sex workers are disproportionately targeted and racially profiled by anti-trafficking operations, the bill's carceral approach must be amended (Lam & Chu, 2021; Wong, 2021). Additionally, the Toronto Bylaws 545-177(I) and 545-343 prevent body rub businesses from locking their doors or installing locking devices to individual rooms/cubicles. After the Atlanta Spa shooting, massage businesses are worried for their safety and are frustrated with having to choose between being targeted by officers, or being targeted by assailants (Butterfly: Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Support Network, 2020). Lastly, the Personal Wellness Establishments Bylaw in Newmarket was designed to target Asian businesses in order to rid the town of its 'brothels' and human trafficking rings (Gallant & Lam, 2022), which is not only a



racialized-sexualized imagination of Asian massage workers as sex workers, but is also a conflation of sex work with human trafficking. Given the prevalence of discriminatory laws outside of PCEPA, it is crucial that provincial and municipal jurisdictions

receive the same level of scrutiny as PCEPA in order to truly achieve a holistic and intersectional law reform that CASWLR and their allies envision.

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# Poem/Fan Letter for Billy-Ray

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**Artist Statement**

In writing the poem "Poem/Fan Letter to Billy-Ray" I have tried to write an actual letter I would want to send to the author, Billy-Ray Belcourt, in response to his book of poems *This Wound is a World*. Belcourt won the \$65,000 Griffin Poetry Prize for this book in 2018. Avoiding false pleasantries and fan boy adoration, I write in the conversational tone of Belcourt's contemporary. Creating a strong motif, a fan letter, I discuss my concerns for Belcourt's wellbeing, hook-ups and hook-up culture, and the realities of living with HIV/AIDS. It is this final point, HIV/AIDS, which is most carefully approached. Expanding on a common feature of a previous generation of medications, vivid dreams, allows me to comment on Belcourt's work. After all, it was Belcourt who brought the idea of Gay Heaven to the table within a moment of introspection wherein he makes claims surrounding beliefs, Deities, and his place in the world. In the poem, my dream is a composite of several vivid dreams I was having while prescribed the HIV medication Atripla.

My poem is most powerful when taken against the realities of living with HIV/AIDS in 2023. Struggling to find, build, create community, even if it is only one new friend, the premise is grounded in the realities of isolation and disconnect present for so many people living with HIV/AIDS. Who knows? He could write back or as the final stanza suggests, we could grab a drink if he's ever in Toronto. Disclosing my HIV+ status in my work is a powerful tool and directly works against stigma, creating visibility for the approximately 62,500 people living with HIV/AIDS today in Canada.

*Content tags: solidarity, connection, HIV, community*

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Mr. Belcourt  
These words are addressed to you  
I have read your poems  
And am required by coursework  
To inspire myself to write a comment  
Instead I've chosen this letter  
In free verse  
Beautiful poetry  
For you

Please don't go Tim Hortons to Tim Hortons in Northern Alberta  
Looking for death  
Or if you do  
Could you send me a postcard from each?  
Me living in Toronto  
Going to U of T  
Twice I've encountered your poems in my classes  
First, your book of poetry as a whole  
In Theories of Sexualities  
And now two pieces specifically  
For Queer Indigenous Politics and Cultures

I will be forty-two in April  
Like the man in your poem  
If I have a body, let it be a book of sad poems  
His sad story  
Another sad story  
Heart break  
However  
Must be nice to live on a houseboat  
And vacation in France  
You guessed he was older  
People tell me I look younger

The written words across your flesh in a collage of sorts  
The charming poetic  
Suggests to me the immediacy of being  
I'm more for existentialism than psychoanalysis

Here I am  
If you can see me  
The letters written in long cursive  
Round script  
Say my history of long nights wandering in Sudbury  
Is remembered by one and one only  
Under northern skies  
Similar skies to yours in Northern Alberta  
Not yet that far North  
Hookups arranged on gay.com  
Men touching my body and looking for something  
I did not have to give

My problem wasn't that these lovers and boyfriends  
And whatever you want to call them

Sought transformation  
Instead I was presented as an amusement  
And no one ever looked any deeper  
Than an entertainment in cold February  
Or walking home from the gay bar downtown after a night out

Or sleeping beside me for many months

You mentioned your take on Gay Heaven  
I have a picture of mine to share with you  
The drugs I take  
To stop the viruses from murdering me  
Were psychoactive  
Crazy vivid dreams  
A side effect diminished now on new treatments  
So many found them nightmares  
Mine were technicolor bright  
And I saw my place in Gay Heaven  
I remember a large house  
There had been a fire  
Water crept down the stairs from a burst pipe  
The floorboards opened up  
Between them in the cracks  
Minnows and tadpoles in the pools of water below  
There was a hole in the roof  
The light shining in from the bright Moon above  
Lit the room in a white blue glow  
There was a large painting  
Ruined by fire and water  
The trim still golden  
Generations of portraits destroyed  
I was not alone  
My grandmother dead now ten years came down the stairs  
She was twenty-two  
Dressed in fifties style  
As I imagined her to look on the day she arrived in Canada  
From Ireland  
Green eyes bright and full of life

I knew my room was upstairs  
I had never been there before  
In my dreamscape moment of enlightenment  
My place in the World  
Was confirmed and completely other-worldly  
Her eyes like shining beetles  
Same as mine

You expected something else  
A party or a parade  
No such luck  
Home  
Someplace far away I've never visited  
Or maybe once  
Through a trick of the pills

My eulogy will not speak to freedom  
Whomever writes it will note solitude and grace  
Hopefully  
Alone was a peaceful protest  
A quiet place was where he found God

So Mr. Belcourt  
If you're ever in Toronto  
We could meet on campus  
Or at a dive bar on Ossington  
Sweaty Betty's is a good time  
And wax philosophical  
You having read psychoanalysis  
And myself a useless existentialist  
I would appreciate the moment of finding myself  
Contemporary  
In this world which seems  
Too sad today to bear  
The wounds open and bleeding  
Cracks in the foundations showing  
Snow turning to rain turning to thunder  
February in Toronto  
People still left to wander outside  
Those brave souls whose lives are mostly overlooked and forgotten  
Later I will take the streetcar to my boyfriend's place  
But now I write you this letter  
Because within your own writing was the bright moment of listening to a thinking person

# More Than a “Dream”: Tracing the Connections Between Turkish Left-Wing Organizing and Palestinian Revolutionary Resistance Through the Poetics of Solidarity in the 20th Century

Anonymous

## Abstract

Through examining the role of poetics of solidarity in internationalist struggles against global imperialism and colonialism, this essay explores how revolutionaries in Turkey understood and joined the Palestinian resistance movement in the 20th century. This exploration is grounded in thinking through how the embodied anti-colonial stances of literary figures of the 20th century were inseparable from the growing political movements against global imperialism in Turkey. Acknowledging that the current Turkish curriculum intentionally erases the role of cultural production in resistance building, this essay argues that the rich tradition of poetics of solidarity of the 20th century aimed to bring marginalized, lower-class, and racialized communities' struggles together against violent power structures to build revolutionary world-making practices. As the Turkish-Kurdish revolutionaries defined their engagement with the Palestinian fedayeen movement by upholding the interconnected roles of poetry, cultural production, and armed resistance, mapping the neglected histories of resistance allows us to engage with literary heritages of revolution while offering frameworks for re-imagining internationalism and resistance in our contemporary moment.

*Content tags: transnational solidarity, colonialism, Palestinian resistance, poetics*

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“Being with the Palestinian fedayeen in the fight against imperialism and its regional appendage, Zionism, I told myself, I was in fact struggling for the freedom of my own country, [Turkey], and people.”

(Candar, 2000, p.73)

As a Turkish journalist, Cengiz Candar's reflection on joining the Palestinian fedayeen movement offers an entry point for re-exploring how we trace the role of transnationalism when looking at the embodied politics of liberation. Starting in the 1960s, left-wing organizers in Turkey began to mobilize against the forces of imperialism and colonialism. Understanding the escalating war in Vietnam, the Israeli occupation of Palestine, and the unending political instabilities in Turkey as interconnected, the revolutionaries of the time articulated that the path to liberation

needed to uplift the struggles of all oppressed peoples across the globe (Uzer, 2021). During this era, almost 3,000 activists from Turkey were trained in Palestinian camps to join the fedayeen movement against the Israeli colonial occupation. Reflecting on the politics and practices of this period, it becomes crucial to ask: what is the role of this history in our contemporary moment?

Although this period offered critical entry points for understanding internationalist resistance and left-wing organizing in Turkey,



the dominant Turkish curriculum continues to intentionally erase these histories from the national imaginary. As Ugur Umit Ungor (2014) emphasizes, the Turkish state developed fluctuating methods to regulate how legacies of violence are remembered collectively, curriculum curation being one of them. By carefully neglecting the histories of transnational anti-colonial movement building across the region, the curation of the dominant curriculum in Turkey positions its own authoritarian regime's rule as unquestionable, ultimately aiming to render resistance unimaginable. Revisiting the systematically neglected histories of internationalist struggles against violent structures of power, this essay will explore the silenced relationship between the revolutionary left organizing in Turkey and Palestinian resistance against settler colonialism in the mid-to-late 20th century. Importantly, this article seeks to decentre dominant narratives of solidarity by shifting focus away from official channels of Turkish-Palestinian state diplomacy as the primary source of knowledge. This is because relying on the state-curated documents investigating foreign policy would fail to demonstrate how Turkish-Palestinian relations were shaped by a robust trajectory of cultural production and international movement building. Further, this refusal is grounded in Chandni Desai and Rafeef Ziadah's (2022) focus on Edward Said's understanding of "contrapuntal reading" (p.297). Desai and Ziadah state that practices of contrapuntal readings, especially when engaging with epistemological erasure from curricula, bring our attention to resistance practices to reveal how colonial and imperial processes position some histories as more important than others.

In this sense, this essay will turn to poetry and the role of cultural production to trace the connections between the poetics of solidarity and internationalist resistance. First, this essay will examine how the embodied anti-colonial stances of literary figures of the 20th century were inseparable from the growing political movements against global imperialism in Turkey. While the current Turkish curriculum erases the role of poetry in resistance building, this essay will foreground the rich tradition of poetics of solidarity of the 20th century and show how it

brought marginalized, lower-class, and racialized communities' struggles together against violent power structures to build agential and revolutionary world-making practices. Connecting the role of poetics of solidarity and Turkish-Kurdish revolutionaries' participation in Palestinian armed resistance, this essay will argue that arts and cultural production allow us to not only trace the literary heritage of revolution, but also offer frameworks of re-imagining internationalism and resistance in our contemporary moment.

How do poetry and arts become a site for building political subjectivities with agency, resilience, and imagination that imperial powers cannot contain? According to Maha Nassar (2014), "resistance literature", a term used by Ghassan Kanafani in the 1960s, was an essential element of literary production in mid-to-late 20th century, as it exhibited a particular commitment to liberation (p.87). Nassar argues that resistance literature not only worked to draw connections between conditions of colonial violence,, and inter-connect struggles for liberation in different geographies, it also offered cultural productions that served as comparative critiques of oppression (p.90). Especially in the case of the Palestinian experience under Israeli occupation, resistance literature became a powerful avenue to challenge colonial and imperial conditions of depoliticized remembering, ultimately striving to create new political subjectivities, which would provide revolutionary senses of being that would pass down to upcoming generations.

When thinking about prominent literary figures of the 20th century, the prominent Turkish poet, Nazim Hikmet (1902-1962) comes to mind. He brought Marxist and anti-colonial visions to his poetry, for which he was eventually imprisoned by the state (Han, 2018). In dominant curricula in Turkey, Hikmet is undoubtedly mentioned, and his work is acknowledged for the innovations it brought to Turkish literature. However, the curriculums shaped and policed by the Turkish state aim to erase how Hikmet's poetry embodied and developed a stance against colonialism. According to Gul Bilge Han (2021), in the early 1960s, Hikmet's "literary preoccupations with

anti-colonial resistance movements developed in a radically changed global juncture due to the growing wave of liberation wars across Africa and Asia" (p.287). Han further emphasizes that Hikmet not only understood poetry as a figuration of resistance, but also as a strong site for creating a sense of collectivity across borders in struggles against colonialism (Han 2018). For instance, Hikmet was an active member of the "Afro-Asian Writers Bureau (AAWB)" (p.288), which was the institutional formation that fostered the cultural collaboration of formerly colonized peoples (Desai & Ziadah, 2022, p.290). Attending various conferences and meetings organized by the AAWB, Hikmet understood resistance through the lens of internationalism, as he connected with revolutionary poets like Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Mario de Andrade, Alex La Guma, and many others (Desai & Ziadah).

However, Hikmet was not only the only Turkish poet that understood poetry as a critical element of anti-colonial resistance. Nevzat Ustun (1924-1979) was another Turkish poet who was a member of the AAWB (Akoba, 2013). Although Ustun's work is not as acknowledged as Hikmet's, Ustun's poetry embodied socialist realism and questioned the asymmetries established by imperialist systems of power. Further, Ustun had his poems published by *Lotus: Afro-Asian Writings* magazine as the only member from Turkey and attended conferences organized by the AAWB frequently in the late 1960s-early 1970s. The work of Desai and Ziadah (2022) argue that third-world cultural producers that were involved in *Lotus: Afro-Asian Writings* revisited histories from the bottom-up by focusing on anti-colonial narratives in their work (p.296). In this sense, these cultural producers from different locations positioned literature as an essential method of tracing the links that connected their struggles for liberation (Desai and Ziadah).

At this period, Hikmet and Ustun, and countless forgotten poets, understood poetry as the building block of anti-colonial/imperial resistance in Turkey. Their commitment to understanding liberation as a collective process travelled across borders, states, and wars against imperialism/colonialism, to gesture towards asserting political agency to

imagine new and justice-oriented ways of living (Han, 2018). According to Kenan Behzat Sharpe (2021), starting in the 1960s, within the "highly politicized environment of the period" the "activist-artist divide" was transcended altogether (p.355). Sharpe emphasizes that the cultural production of art, including poetry, music, and film, was inseparable from the rise of "student activism, trade unionism, peasant organizing, rural/urban guerilla movements" in Turkey (p.355). The artists/activists of the period developed a strong sense of anti-imperialism and explored the geo-specific tensions between internationalism and nationalism to imagine alternative ways of living (Sharpe 2021). In this sense, when thinking about internationalist struggle, Turkey-Palestine relations, and the role of cultural production in the 20th century, understanding how poets/artists like Hikmet and Ustun understood cultural production as an essential element of movement-based resistance to build new political subjectivities becomes a critical entry point.

Why does connecting the links between poetry, resistance literature, and anti-imperial movements in Turkey become central to mapping Turkish-Palestinian political relations? According to Desai and Ziadah (2022), Kanafani's theory of resistance literature was not only relevant in the context of Palestine. During the mid-to-late 20th century, it operated as a transnational method to communicate the implications of imperialism and colonialism. In other words, when we rely on dominant diplomatic frameworks to understand Turkey-Palestine relations, we fail to trace critical histories of resistance and solidarity that transcend the bounds of nation-states. As such, Abdel Razzaq Takriti (2021) argues that left-wing resistance movements emerging in Turkey during mid-to-late 20th century not only developed "revolutionary Marxist [frameworks] of a Third-Worldist orientation", but they understood the Palestinian resistance movement as a critical fight against imperialism and colonialism (p.34). Referring to Faik Bulut's reflections on joining the Palestinian armed resistance, as a Kurdish revolutionary author from Turkey, Takriti emphasizes that the liberation of Palestine constituted a "dream" amongst young organizers in Turkey (p.35). Arguing that the

"Palestinian dream" signalled an "emotive engagement in imagining new potentialities", Takriti highlights that while these revolutionaries engaged in cultural production, they began to join the armed struggle in Palestine as a part of the anti-imperialist resistance (p.35).

Deniz Gezmis (1947-1972) was among the first revolutionaries to receive training from the Palestinian armed resistance located in Jordan in 1969 (Candar, 2000). Takriti's (2021) work reminds us that the Palestinian resistance profoundly impacted the left-wing organizing in Turkey, and the revolutionaries' commitment to the Palestinian movements against Israeli occupation was demonstrated via different methods. For Gezmis, resistance would be actualized through organized direct action. When Gezmis was captured in 1971 due to his involvement in bank raids and the abduction of four American servicemen, he was carrying an identity card issued by the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (Uzer, 2000, p.187). After his capture, the People's Liberation Party-Front of Turkey (THKO), which was first established by Gezmis and his comrades Huseyin Inan and Yusuf Aslan, continued to embody an anti-colonial stance through violent struggle (Uzer, 2000). Most famously, THKO abducted the Israeli Consul in Istanbul and warned that the "Consul General of Turkey's arch enemy, Zionist Israel" would be executed if the Turkish state refused to release people arrested. Gezmis and his friends (Takriti, 2021, p. 36). Unfortunately, the authorities refused to release them, the Consul General's body was found in an apartment on 23 May 1971, and Gezmis and his comrades were sentenced to death (Takriti, 2021). Although the revolutionaries involved in the Palestinian movement tried to internationalize the efforts to free the political prisoners alongside the aid of intellectuals within the Palestine Liberation Organization, Gezmis, Inan, and Aslan were executed in 1972 (Takriti, 2021).

When exploring the role of cultural production in left-wing organizing in Turkey during the mid-to-late 20th century, Sharpe (2021) reminds us that revolutionaries like Gezmis emphasized that their understandings of resistance came from literature.

"Nobody grasps the flavour of the poetry of... Lorca or Neruda the way a revolutionary can" (Sharpe, 2021, p.354), said Gezmis in an interview when he was incarcerated. Before his execution, he also noted that the work of Nazim Hikmet was one of his favourites (Oz, 1986, p.14), demonstrating that poetry played a crucial role in his organizing efforts for liberation. In his book reflecting on his interviews with Gezmis, Erdal Oz (1986) admits that he was surprised to see Gezmis' extensive knowledge of literature and poetry. In this sense, even tracing Gezmis' admiration of literature allows us to glimpse the ways in which cultural production actively shaped left-wing revolutionary movements' vision for international resistance against violent structures of power.

How does this history relate to our contemporary moment? Under violent conditions of global imperialism and colonialism, curricula designed by authoritarian regimes attempt to render resistance, cultural production, and revolutionary imaginings as unattainable and unimportant. Exploring silenced histories through the poetics of solidarity shows how re-remembering the past challenges the current conditions of imperial and colonial violence. Referring back to Haunani-Kay Trask's (1991) work, Desai and Ziadah (2022) emphasize that positioning the past as a source for learning not only challenges colonial violence targeting memory, but also offers frameworks for imagining more liberatory possible ways of living. They highlight that under imperial and colonial structures, re-remembering silenced histories provides the space to imagine futurities that focus on collective liberation, in which ongoing conditions of imperial and colonial violence are given historical answers (Desai and Ziadah, 2022). In this sense, mapping neglected histories of resistance through the role of poetry and literature might allow us to connect with anti-colonial resistance across temporalities (Desai and Ziadah, 2022) and relate to our contemporary struggles more holistically.

To trace systematically neglected histories of internationalism and collective resistance against global imperialism/colonialism, this essay turned to the poetics of solidarity to argue that literary production of the period brought struggles against violent

power structures together to build agential world-making practices and envision a differently lived world. Exploring how the left-wing organizing, which understood Palestinian liberation as a collective goal and participated in the armed struggle against Israel, came from "literature" (Han, 2018, p.354), this essay worked to understand how mapping neglected histories of the role of literature in revolutionary organizing might provide us with frameworks for relating to our contemporary struggles for liberation differently.

In the poem titled "Letters from Cankiri Prison" Nazim Hikmet (1940) writes:

"one evening, we sat in front of the doors  
of the prison,  
and read rubais from Ghazzali.  
The night was a large navy-blue garden.  
The world of the dancers was covered in  
goldens.  
And the dead continued to lay tall in  
wooden boxes  
...  
This means that winter is here  
I am cold. However, I am not woeful.  
Maybe not being woeful on cold days,  
Not only in prison, but in this world at large  
it is a skill only we possess."

Hikmet's words encourage us to find ways of navigating conditions of violence in a manner that is focused on hope and longing for a future that we have yet to envision. Allowing his words to sit with us might give us the space to think through how our struggles

cannot be separated from everyday sensations of hope and desires for a different world. Although dominant national curricula will continue to neglect the deep connections between histories of internationalism and revolutionary organizing, the powerful effects of poetry and arts can transcend pedagogical erasure when we are committed to "reading between the lines" (Sharpe, 2021, p.354). In many ways, the artistic works and resistance practices of the revolutionaries in the 20th century are inseparable from our contemporary struggles for liberation, and beginning to find the world-making potential of writing can be our collective starting point.

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# Maybe, A Lo Mejor

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**Content Warning: This piece contains mentions of sexual violence.**

### **Artist Statement**

"Maybe, A Lo Mejor" is an illustrative piece that centres the experience of touch and explores the question of if it is worth pursuing sexual desire. As a survivor of sexual violence, touch and the thought of sex can become a frightening feeling, as all I have are experiences with blurry, non-consensual intimacy. Therefore, I wanted to use colourful floral designs, foreign hands, and words that circle the eyes to show the struggle of engaging with consensual intimacy. I want to show that gaiety feeling you get but also the fear of a new experience of healthy sex and affection. Understanding my triggers and unlearning religious shame over sex has made the process of recognizing my sexuality an easier one. Therefore, this piece honours the maybes that turn into consenting yes and strong nos.

*Content tags: sexual violence, self-discovery, consent*

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### **Image Description**

Two brown eyes are set on a vibrant, multicoloured background. Orange, purple, and green flowers are set behind the eyes on a solid pink background. There are green hands framing the eyes. Wrapping around the eyes is the phrase 'Maybe, a lo mejor'.





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# Queerness Shared In the Everyday: Oral Histories of Queer Collective Housing in the 1970s, 80s, and Early 90s

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores the vibrant cluster of queer collective houses that existed in Toronto during the 1970s, 80s, and early 90s. Throughout this essay I document and analyze interviews that I conducted with nine residents of these houses. For my research, I wanted to explore what queer collective housing of that time meant for the folks who participated in it, how it shaped their everyday lives and political organizing, and how it stayed with them. The oral histories I gathered describe the queer collective houses of the 1970s, 80s and early 90s as critical spaces of queer safety and liberation, community building, political organizing, and everyday acts of resistance. While they by no means offer a complete account of the queer collective housing of that time, these oral histories can provide a useful starting point and an opportunity to learn more.

*Content tags: oral histories, activism, queer collective housing, community building, solidarity, kinship*

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## **Introduction**

When I bought this house on Dundas, the day that I took possession of it, I literally came to the house, opened it up, lit up a joint, and then wandered through the house and had a conversation with the house. And I said to the house 'I love you. I think you're the most spectacular, beautiful house I've seen. And I've seen a lot because it took me years to find you, but we're going to create a wonderful, safe space for gay men. And I'm going to have gay men living here, people who are in need of housing, people who are in need of a safe space to be, and it's going to be a queer family. And I want you to embrace them as they come. And we're going to have a spectacular life together for as long as I am a part of your structure.' And so I wandered up and down the halls and talked to the house and had this weird conversation with this building that I had just bought. (Brian)

During the 1970s, 80s, and even early 90s, Toronto was home to a flourishing, though often hidden, cluster of collective

queer housing. Though woefully under-documented, these homes and the communities built around them formed a notable part of queer life in Toronto. For my research I wanted to explore what the queer collective housing of that time meant for the folks who participated in it, how it shaped their everyday lives and political organizing, and how it stayed with them. Rather than focusing on any one particular dimension of queer collective housing, I keep my attention broad, allowing participants and their experiences to shape the direction of my essay. Along that line of thinking, I have utilized a wide definition of queer collective housing as any household which included some dimension of collectivity, such as a shared division of labour or decision-making, and which was comprised of folks whose sexual identities and/or practices could be considered non-normative, such as gay men and lesbians. Over the course of this essay, I will explore the stories of nine individuals, who between them lived in a total of twelve queer collective houses, beginning in 1972. These interviews make up more than

just the sources for this essay. They are a collection of oral histories, and many of them are set to be added to The ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives for future use. These oral histories describe the queer collective houses of Toronto in the 1970s, 80s and early 90s as critical spaces of queer safety and liberation, community building, political organizing, and everyday acts of resistance.

What I aim to offer here is an exploration into the stories of these houses and into the concept of queer collective living as a whole. I pull at many threads throughout this essay, touching upon dimensions of queer collective living which are far too vast to fully unpack in this paper. There is no one singular experience of queer collective living, and I want to be clear that the histories I share in this essay represent only a small piece of a much larger picture. I must also acknowledge the way in which time can twist memory: these stories are from thirty-five, forty, even fifty years ago, and some details may have been glossed over, forgotten or even rewritten by the quirks of memory. So, while this essay is by no means a complete account, it can provide a starting point and an opportunity to learn more.

I came to this project through my own experience in queer collective housing. After Toronto went back into lockdown in October 2020, several of the original nine residents of my student co-op house moved out and a friend moved in, leaving me in an accidental queer co-op house of six people plus two cats. Despite the intense lockdown, I found a crucial sense of freedom, enabled by an everyday queer communal atmosphere. In that space, I was able to explore and build my identities and to begin to construct fluid relationalities with my housemates. While reading Dennis Findlay's chapter "Co-operative Living Happens in the Kitchen!" in *Any Other Way: How Toronto Got Queer*, I was delighted to learn that my home was actually a part of a long and rich history of queer collective housing in Toronto. I soon felt an urgent need to explore and document those experiences. I wanted to know the history that I had inadvertently become a part of: this legacy which had come to mean so much to me. Was my house anything like those houses from the

past? Did it mean the same to those people as it meant to me and my housemates? What else did those spaces offer their residents?

Throughout this paper, I will explore and draw from the stories of my nine participants and the various queer collective houses they lived in. For the purposes of anonymity, the names of these individuals have been changed; additionally, their quotes have occasionally been edited for clarity and length. It is important to note that the nine people I interviewed all identified themselves as white, and that most of their housemates in queer collective housing were also white. All of the women I talked to also identified themselves as lesbians, while the men identified themselves as either gay, or occasionally, queer.

There are silences in my research, constituted by the untold stories of individuals, communities, and experiences I was unable to access. This undoubtedly shapes the stories of Toronto's queer history offered in this paper. Seeing that I came into contact with a large number of my participants through the snowball sampling method, many of the folks I interviewed ran in the same or similar circles within Toronto's queer community. Through my participants as well as several chapters of *Any Other Way: How Toronto Got Queer*, I have learned of many more Toronto queer collective houses than the twelve which I describe in this essay; I estimate that through the 1970s, 80s, and early 90s, they numbered somewhere in the twenties or thirties. Of these residences, one of the most iconic may be Dewson House, a BIPOC lesbian collective and the root for much of Toronto's Black queer and feminist organizing (Silvera 2021). There are many stories of Toronto's queer collective housing and the resulting activism and community building that I was unable to tell here; they still need to be documented. I turn now to the histories of Toronto's queer collective housing which I can tell.

### **Spaces of Safety, Comfort, and Liberation**

During the 1970s, 80s, and early 90s, a time with considerably widespread homophobia, sexism, and heteronormativity, queer collective houses offered a crucial escape for those who interacted with them. Almost every person I talked to touched

upon an element of safety, describing their queer collective houses as a "sanctuary", as "the only way they could live", as "essential to their survival", as spaces where they felt "a whole lot freer" and could be completely themselves. For many residents, their house was the first place where they had felt that level of safety, and it drastically contrasted their experiences in the outside world. This distinction and the effect it had is explored by Barb, a seventy-two-year-old, white, cis-gender, lesbian feminist woman. In 1977, Barb and three other lesbians started a collective house at 218 Clinton Street, where she lived until it dissolved in 1979. She states:

I was not out in the work situation. So it was great to come home to a house where I could be completely myself. And I didn't have to worry about complaining about the patriarchy or feeling like I needed to fit with gender roles and stereotypes. It didn't matter if I was sitting like a proper woman should sit and I could sit with my legs open and throw my feet up on the table, or whatever I felt like doing. I didn't have to worry about wearing clothes that looked like they were appropriately feminine. I could wear my plaid shirts and work boots that were kind of the uniform of the time for the lesbian feminist (which I thought were wonderful) and I didn't have to worry about how other people would react to that. So the house, and the women who came and went from the house were a wonderful support in that way. And I felt like I could be myself. (Barb)

The role of these houses extended beyond creating places of safety and tolerance. However, they also enabled atmospheres of comfort, celebration, brazenness, and freedom for queer people, which had real and lasting effects on their residents. This dimension is artfully captured in the words of Jerry: a sixty-nine-year-old, white, queer, cisgender man. Jerry identifies as a social democrat and a queer activist. He lived in two queer collective houses for a period of about five years each, from 1983 to approximately 1994, at 25 D'Arcy street and 57 Homewood Avenue respectively, the second of which he founded. Jerry proclaims that:

Both houses reeked of queerness, what was on the walls were pornographic and queer, the music was total disco, the way people dressed, the colour choices, the assortment of sexual toys and things that were around. I mean, it was flagrant. And I do think everybody liked it and probably went overboard in their flagrancy just to feel comfortable. So in terms of the comfort level, it was explicitly providing a queer comfort environment for people. And for those people who needed it as a sanctuary type it provided that. (Jerry)

Jerry also shared with me that he still decorates his home in an explicitly queer manner as it gives him comfort even these many decades later.

Living in those queer-positive spaces allowed many folks to gain a deep sense of queer pride and brazenness, which would have been difficult and rare at the time. They brought this unapologetic energy into the outside world, injecting it into their political work and ideologies. The nuances of this relationship must be further mapped. They present an opportunity for additional research regarding the effects shamelessly-queer living spaces have on activist strategies.

For many residents, these environments of comfort and freedom allowed them to explore aspects of themselves that they had previously been unable to; the houses became spaces for queer folks to discover themselves. In these homes, people could learn about queerness in a positive way, both from and with one another, and create a sense of queer identity together. Keith touches upon this aspect, describing the enormous importance of finding a group of gay men to "actually live with and be gay with and *learn* to be gay with" and the way in which this allowed him to move away from "feeling bad about the feelings that were most joyful." At seventy-one, Keith, a white, cisgender man, describes himself as an "old gay dinosaur." Keith lived in a queer collective household from 1975 to 1991. The household began as a gay Marxist study group and collectively moved to a couple of different locations, including 188 1/2 Seaton Street. Keith offers further insight when he shares:

Engaging in that kind of culture of gay men's promiscuity or sexual inclusiveness and actually living in and experiencing it helped shape my ongoing coming out process. I mean, there's the coming out when you take that step, but that doesn't mean that you don't drag behind you all of those values and feelings and reactions that you have learned in the previous 20 years of compulsory heterosexuality. These lessons were clear, you were gender conforming or otherwise your life was going to be pretty miserable. So to move into another world where you didn't have to do that, and in fact could be socialized into another whole way of being as a gay man, I think was important in terms of people's own feeling of psychological safety. It reinforced the coming out process and reinforced notions of gay identity as something that was worthwhile and important. (Keith)

Keith's form of housing can be understood as a way of challenging the imposed isolation of a heteronormative homophobic society by intentionally choosing to live communally with other people who share a similar identity and experience of oppression. This allowed for the modeling of new forms of connection amongst queer people, giving folks like Keith the opportunity to learn how to positively relate to both themselves and others as queer people in the everyday. Though I was unable to explore this concept further with Keith in our limited time together, I am eager to ask what these experiences of queer collective housing could tell us about the ways we learn about queerness and create queerness together. I offer this as a site for potential further research.

This open, comfortable environment had a powerful effect. A buzz with a vibrant energy of freedom and brazenness, collective houses such as Brian's were the perfect spot for queer exploration, joy, and frivolity to take spark. Brian is a seventy-five-year-old white gay cisgender male. Since he was thirty Brian has started and lived in three queer collective houses, one in 1976 at 78 McGill Street, another in 1981 at 95 Seaton Street, and the last of which in 1984 at 428 Dundas Street

East, which is where he still lives collectively with other queer folks today. Brian shares the boldness of 78 McGill Street:

In the first house many of the people were very much into radical drag. There would be bags of drag under their bed. So we'd be sitting around the kitchen table and smoking joints and having beer or wine or whatever. And somebody would have gone up to their room and pulled on a wig and a party dress and come down and sat at the table and somebody would go 'oh, that's so cool'. And they'd run up and they'd put on some drag and then they'd come down. And all of a sudden you had two or three people who were in drag and some people who weren't and, then somebody would say, 'I'm supposed to meet so-and-so at the bar tonight'. And so then some of them would race off in drag, or not, and go to the bar. It was a wildly crazy house. (Brian)

Brian describes a powerful moment of collective subversion here. As an intentional community, the home's atmosphere allowed for acts of gender exploration that were often violently suppressed in the outside world, all carried out within a creative, supportive environment. Though Brian was the only one to mention it so explicitly in our interview, these acts and culture of playing with gender fluidity showed up in several of the other queer collective houses. Such moments are occasionally



Figure 1.  
Drag Quintet

Five men are pictured standing in a line each dressed in their own unique version of drag including long dresses, some wigs, earrings, furs, and white gloves. All of the men have facial hair.



documented in photos, such as a picture titled "Drag Quintet" of Sean and his housemates, dressed to the nines in radical drag (Fig. 1). Sean is a seventy-seven years old, white, gay, cisgender man. His experience in queer collective housing was centered around *The Body Politic*, with himself and the other members of his household all heavily participating in the magazine in one way or another. Sean lived with largely the same group of 4-6 men from 1972 to 1985, starting at 38 Marchmont Road, then moving to 48 Simpson Avenue and finally buying a house together on Oxford Street in 1977.

Though these houses may have provided an unparalleled form of safety and comfort, simply the act of living together as queer people could not enable their residents to fully escape the oppressive forces of society. Jerry articulates some of the problems of femophobia which crept into even these spaces:

I must admit some of the more Butch kind of gay men had a hard time having all these Queens kind of like floating around doing Queenie kind of things. My boyfriend Jamie, he was just a flaming queen, and it did bother some of the more bear butchy kinda queers, because he's fluttering around and bringing home flowers and decorating. So there were cultural differences that would come in, like queer cultural differences. But you had to just work with it, like those are the things you have to work with. (Jerry)

Jerry's comment illustrates some of the issues which were alive and well in those houses and which still exist in queer communities today. There is a danger in assuming that queer spaces will be safe for all queer people simply by virtue of the space's queerness. It ignores the multitudes of intersecting identities and overlapping experiences of marginalization which exist within queer communities. It seems that at times these houses may have failed to fully account for that, and we as queer communities today have far too often repeated those mistakes. We must take this as a reminder to be careful not to continue to do so. This dimension of conflict within Jerry's and other queer collective houses offers a starting point for further research into how folks with different intersecting identities

experience queer "safe" spaces.

### **A Network of Queer Collective Houses: Hubs of Community Building**

These collective houses also fostered a network of relationships with non-residents, acting as crucial hubs for queer community building. Due to the reduced rent that comes with living communally, these groups were able to live in large houses perfect for hosting a wide range of events which often intertwined the social and the political. The D'Arcy Street house, for example, became known for their Thursday movie nights, each week drawing a considerable crowd of residents and non-residents alike to watch all sorts of queer films that would have been hard to find otherwise. Additionally, Keith noted another type of event which represented an important facet of gay community building in those days: parties. He describes how those massive houses allowed for some pretty large parties, sometimes hosting 150 people or so, giving queer folks an enjoyable space where they could "connect with other people, and also shared politics, shared sexuality, and shared commitment to communal living" (Keith).

Communal meals were also a core event which fostered a dimension of community within and around these houses. Deepening the sense of collectivity within these spaces, residents would frequently take turns cooking for the group, often even having a designated day for each member. These communal meals brought together different friend groups and queer communities from among the house residents, sometimes including upwards of twenty people in houses which actually only had six to eight members. Jerry shared:

After dinner, they would kind of go asunder; a group would go out to the disco, a group would go out to buddies, which is a bar type thing, a group would go out to the baths, everybody would go where they'd want. But the dinner brought us together. (Jerry)

Folks have described the conversations at these events as a vibrant and exciting blend of the political, the cultural, and the sexual, making it clear that these communal house

meals were a core feature of the collectivity, community building, political organizing, and identity building which characterized these houses. These spaces formed a network of queer community hubs in Toronto: "there was a relationship between all the queer collectives" (Janice).

This widespread network allowed many of these residences to function as drop-in community spaces. These houses were at once understood as a home (a space traditionally positioned as 'private') by their residents, and as an open 'public' space of socializing and working by non-residents (Duncan 1996). Here, the assumed separation of public and private was challenged, allowing the two to overlap and coexist through multiple simultaneous uses of the space, all shaped by a fundamental dimension of queer collectivity (Duncan 1996). Describing this destabilized understanding of public vs private space, Brian told me that:

The back door [of the house] was almost never locked. People would come there just on a regular basis. I might be off at the baths some night and come home at like three o'clock in the morning. And I'd come in through the back door and around the kitchen table, there could be four to six people playing cards, not one person lived in the house. They were all just friends of the house...So our lives were intermeshed in non-orthodox kinds of ways. People who didn't pay rent in the house felt comfortable being in the house as friends of the house. Everybody sort of recognized that if you've been there and you've been playing cards and you made a bunch of coffee that you sometimes put some money into the food kitty, or you cleaned up, you washed your dishes. (Brian)

These domestic spaces came to be crucial sites for both the creation and maintenance of broad networks of support and relationality amongst queer folks. The varying degrees of publicness, and collective domestic usages of the space worked to enable this form of community building. In these homes the connection to non-residents became a key component of everyday domestic activities, thereby "subverting the ideal of home

as a site for privatized familial relationships" (Gorman-Murray, 2007, p. 204). By destabilizing the common sense public/private divide, these houses were able to offer spaces of safety, comfort, and socializing which nourished identity formation for folks beyond just their handful of residents. There is a significance here, in constructing queer identity as shaped not only by individual isolated 'private' experience but also by 'public' collective involvement. In these oral histories I heard an understanding of queerness as a form of connection, often facilitated by these open doors and the ever-present offering of these spaces: "Queer politics is about relations rather than identity. In queer space there are multiple identities that are constructed from these relations. It is a politics of relating rather than claiming rights" (Bassda 2006). The openness of these spaces enabled a focus on relating, cooperation, and communality amongst queer folks, thus working to create forms of deep and non-normative connection which they themselves were inherently radical in a world which urged only queer isolation.

This open atmosphere also contributed to the ability of these houses to facilitate large amounts of participatory political organizing. Janice shared how this dimension operated in her space. At age sixty, Janice is a white lesbian who understands herself as "nonbinary in the new definition of the word" but who "would have been considered androgynous in the eighties" and "still completely identifies as a woman." Janice lived in queer collective housing for several years, starting in 1982, after she became a student in the women's studies program at the University of Toronto. Janice stated:

People would come and go in our house, but not live with us, but we were like an open, 'come and be part of our political community'. They might even have keys to our house. I would walk in and go, 'Hey, what are you working on today?' And 'what project are we doing?' It was just a very open environment. (Janice)

### **Political Projects and Hubs of Organizing**

The members of these houses were involved in a wide range of movements and

Body Politic House," Keith was also a member of the collective, and Jerry, members of his house, and Brian also all frequently volunteered for the Body Politic magazine.

For many of these folks, their houses functioned as bases for their political organizing and activism. They served as spaces to host meetings, make signs for demonstrations, and utilize a phone. Brian describes some of the ways his house on McGill operated in this way, particularly while he was an active participant in Gay Court Watch:

I had my bakery in the second house as well...I also had the telephone that had the longest cord on the receiver end because I'd be calling either people who were supposed to appear in court the next day, or the lawyers who were representing them in court the next day. And I'd be saying, 'hi, Rebecca, your client so-and-so is in court tomorrow. And you're going to be before judge Perry and judge Perry has made some decisions in these kinds of issues so those are the kinds of arguments that he's quite willing to hear and accept that there are legitimate reasons for the person being in the bath house. Okay. See you tomorrow!' And then I hang the phone up and throw a batch of cakes in the oven or pull them out. So it was like crazy, crazy. My cord, I had to literally wash on a regular basis because it had gone through more batter and icing and, you know, it just got quite dirty. So the house was a bit of a hub of activity. (Brian)

The importance of having these physical spaces for organizing and carrying out some of the tangible tasks of activism must not be overlooked, as Jerry asserts: "I'm sure some of this activism would never have been able to happen if you didn't have some of these houses to base the organization." Brian's politics, his advocacy in the courts, and his community organizing literally happened in the same room as his social life, his workplace and his home environment. The tangled nature of these spaces allowed politics to become woven into daily life through queer collective living.

From early on in my interviews it became

obvious that both the active political culture of the time, as well as the corresponding social culture, had a considerable effect on the atmosphere of many of these houses. Cheryl sheds light on this atmosphere at her house on Clinton Street, offering a glimpse into their shared life as a household. Cheryl, a seventy-year-old, white, cisgender woman, began her experience of lesbian feminist collective living along with Barb. In 1979, she moved from 218 Clinton Street to 15 Washington Avenue, living with Natalie, among others, for a period of about seven years. She shares:

We were having fun. We felt like we were cutting edge, that we were clever and smart, and we were doing something different and we loved it. I mean, we were busy. We had potluck dinners at the house. We went to meetings, we had meetings at the house. We went to dances, we went on gay pride marches. We went on women's marches. We were active in International Women's Day. So it was a heady heady time full of optimism and the belief that we were changing the world, and that played out in the house. (Cheryl)

With residents jointly engaging in a wide range of activist work, everyday political discussions, and the organizing meetings that frequently occurred within these spaces, political activism not only shaped these houses but was also shaped by these houses, and the sense of collectivity and queer liberation fostered within them. Sean told me more about this relationship between the queer collective houses and the queer activism of the time:

*They're reciprocal influences.* We were developing a new sense of collectivity as queers as we worked together. I think the living together domestic situation was an important part of that...We were living a much more integrated kind of life around being out and open. We were the first generation to do that. So that was very important for us. I think they [the queer collective houses and the queer political activism] fed off each other. (Sean)

In true Marxist fashion, when I asked Keith about how his housing situation allowed him



to escape some of the confines of oppressive structures such as heteronormativity and homophobia, he pointed me towards the shared division of labour:

It [the effect] was in terms of economies of scale. Since we were all so busy in different kinds of the movement, only having to cook for yourself one night a week, that's significant. Not having to clean a whole apartment, only having one task that you had to do in terms of the cleaning or the shopping or whatever that then you could like walk off and get done. So it meant in terms of our ability to actually have a time and space to do political work, it magnified that in a certain way because it's economies of scale. I guess that's the best way of putting it, that other people were working for you and you were working for other people. That meant that the daily stuff that one has to do to reproduce one's life could be shared among other people and didn't fall on you as an individual. Whereas if you're living alone in your apartment, you have to cook for yourself or you have to go to a restaurant or you have to clean for yourself or all of those kinds of things if there's no one else to depend on. The house meant that there was always five or six other people to depend on. (Keith)

I would like to use this idea of "other people working for you and you working for other people" and the notion of having other people to depend on as an entry point from which to begin exploring the reciprocal relationship between these houses and the kind of queer political activism of that time. Non-hierarchical in nature, decision-making and labour within these houses was a shared process wherein each resident had an equal say and a responsibility to participate. As such, they reflected a deep reliance on interdependence and collectivity. This offers a stark contrast to the competitive, individualistic, independence-oriented model of living and relating provided by heterosexual capitalist society. Perhaps, this way of working with and for the mutual benefit of each other facilitated the development of a sense of collectivity and communal belonging amongst queer people. In choosing to share the necessary

labour of life, these folks began learning to rely on one another in ways which were discouraged by the normative models of society; the collective benefits of these alternative methods were easy to see. Through this specific understanding of labour, each person is pushed to actively participate and to do so in favour of the group. This logic shows up in the participatory forms of organizing that these houses and their residents were actively involved in, including a wide range of non-professional membership-based grassroots organizations, such as Gay Street Patrol, or The RTPC. Taken together, both these organizations and these houses fostered a certain kind of queer identity and living:

I mean there are people who came up to demonstrations...and went back again, but we lived it [the gay liberation movement]. We lived it both in the work we did and projects we worked on and in our home life. It was a very inspiring, instilling and learning experience about what it means to be queer and living with other queers and some of the issues that might come up. (Sean)

It may be that this integrated everyday participation in the struggle for liberation worked for and through the creation of a form of queer identity which required an understanding of collectivity. Queerness was not to be felt alone. It was relational: something to be felt together. In locating their politics in the everyday of the domestic, these houses worked to connect the individual experiences of their queer members to the larger systems of oppression acting upon all queer people. Within this group consciousness-raising and newly developing collectivity there was also a responsibility for action; perhaps queerness was understood as about actively working towards resistance and liberation. Mapping the specific intricacies of this reciprocal relationship presents an exciting possibility for further research, grounded in a deeper study of the specific activism of the time.

Within movements, it can sometimes be easy for the attention of the People to become distracted by the activities of the everyday, only pulled back towards the struggle for liberation at the onset of the next intense and

publicized incident of injustice or state violence and quickly lost again when the initial activism response is over (Nangwaya, 2014). Several of these households, specifically with their unmistakable nature of queer collectivity, were intentionally created as political projects designed to offer another way of fighting for liberation by incorporating the work and culture of activism into the everyday of domestic life. Jerry describes the basis, desire, and thought process behind the first queer collective house he lived in:

The bath raids had just happened and queer solidarity in queer activism and queer sense of community dramatically increased because of the bath raids and the response to the bath raids. And so Alan [the house founder] decided, 'I really want to start a communal household that would be, and not just queer, but queer politics'. Like he actually saw it explicitly as a way to actually help queer politics. There was a queer household on Oxford street; it was really kind of where the body politic was born out of, that household. And Alan knew a number of them as I did as well. And it was kind of built in that image. They realized that they could actually have a stable, communal, totally queer household and that the work of activism would be extremely well-served by having these little clusters of people residing together, chatting together, inviting people in and organizing from those houses. (Jerry)

Some of the folks in the gay Marxist study group, which would later form Keith's house, felt similarly:

The Gay Marxist study group had kind of split...and [the one side] wanted to go right to start doing stuff. And those of us who were on the other side said, 'We really don't understand how this all works yet. You know, like this class starter was gay liberation. Like how does this all fit together?' Because it wasn't a real clear in those days. Many of the left-wing political groups were pretty homophobic. So we wanted to continue that kind of study and conversation, but all of us were involved in the movement in one way or another, whether The Body Politic or later on the

Right to Privacy Committee or later on Aids Action Now!. So it all always had this core of actual practical, political work, but a recognition that we needed to develop a social analysis to make sense of that work and to guide it. And that was best accomplished by people having a continual conversation, day-in-day-out about everything. So yeah I would say it was intentional. (Keith)

Within those kitchens, living-rooms, basements, bedrooms, and stairwells, the beginnings of countless political organizations took root and emerged. The sharing of domestic space, and the sense of collectivity which was embedded into the everyday activities of life, truly enabled this. The regular large communal meals, for example, often functioned as a source of informal political planning, theorizing, and brainstorming amongst residents and non-residents alike. These queer collective living spaces, where the political could be easily intertwined with the cultural, the social, and the personal, allowed for a kind of integrated everyday form of organizing. Perhaps this blending allowed for a more sustained commitment to activist work, maintained through social bonds. And in moments of crisis, it allowed organizers to draw on a large, widely-rooted network:

Then when the very large raid happened in 1981 we were very used to already organizing around these things. So The Body Politic, we went out that night and covered it and talked to people. The next day a group of people organized body politic office to organize the very first demonstrations the next night. That was very fast. We could type and set up a flyer that was distributed around the bars and we set off telephone trees. Thousands of people came out that night. So we were involved in making these things happen, and we were completely involved in these things, we were just very integrated...It sort of spawned people with experience and knowledge to be involved with other things. (Sean)

This collective living amongst activists had positive impacts on the gay liberation movement and women's movement which



Figure 2.

Description: Three women stand next to a car, the center woman has her arms around the other two, they are all smiling and two of them are wearing matching yellow shirts.

cannot be ignored and perhaps could even be recreated. As Jerry suggests:

If you ever want to predict a progressive revolution, then you go around and do an inventory of how many communal political households there are. And if there aren't many, you're probably not very close to that revolution and if you've got a lot, they [the revolution] might very well be close. (Jerry)

The idea of integrating the conversations, labour, and necessary social bonds of politics and activism into the everyday of domestic life could significantly benefit our movements and organizing today. There may also very well be further histories here to explore which extend beyond queer collective housing into other forms of communal living and activism. A deeper examination into the political influence of these queer collective houses is crucial and presents an exciting opportunity for further research.

These homes didn't just further activist work, they themselves were activist work. The idea that the personal and the political are intertwined is deeply embedded within the gay liberation movement; this tenet is illustrated perfectly in collective living. Both the Clinton Street house and the Washington Avenue house actively understood themselves to be political projects aimed at resisting the patriarchy, in particular the way in which the patriarchy is embedded within the nuclear family form and the gender roles which surround it. These women recognized and sought to deploy the political and liberatory possibilities held within quotidian

domestic engagement. Conscious of the way in which the mundanes of everyday life can operate as a crucial site for the reproduction of oppressive norms, the women in these houses used their position as lesbian feminists in order to attempt to create another option for domestic life through their daily ways of living. They sought to transform that site of oppression into a site of resistance. Cheryl notes these motives and missions in both of the lesbian feminist households she lived in:

We felt very much that we needed to take on the patriarchy. We were challenging misogyny, sexual stereotyping [gender roles], the nuclear family. So it was intentional. I mean, we liked each other and we wanted to live together. So it had a very personal level that was outside politics, but it also came from that understanding of the world and our need to challenge it, [it came from the fact] that we didn't fit in any of the boxes that we've been raised to believe were there for us to fit into and so we wanted to try something different. (Cheryl)

Barb builds upon this definition and conceptualization of their shared house on Clinton Street, noting its function as a political tool:

We had this vision of what we were doing, of doing something political, that we were establishing something that was an alternative to a patriarchal family situation, that we were supporting one another as lesbian feminists, putting our energy into the larger world and to make changes, so



Figure 3.

Description: Four women sit close together on a large chair. They are all smiling, and a cat lays next to them on another piece of furniture

that it'd be a world that really was more like the one that we wanted to live in, as opposed to the one that we were in. There was that kind of shared vision and hopes. (Barb)

Feminist theorists and activists have long since asserted the oppressive force of the patriarchal nuclear family model. For these women, choosing to live together as lesbian feminists was about making a home for themselves, one which could offer them different, more liberated forms of relationality than those of the patriarchal nuclear family that they had been taught all their lives to want.

Challenging such a heavily imposed normative model such as the patriarchal nuclear family was by no means an easy feat and those four lesbians on Clinton Street struggled with the difficulties of attempting to "create something completely different in a broader society where there's not much understanding or support" (Barb). However, for their period of time together, those women thought of themselves as an alternative form of family, "in the way that [they] were supporting each other, staying in touch with one another's lives, [and] supporting each other on a day-to-day basis" (Barb). This family is depicted beautifully in the two photos Cheryl shared with me of the Clinton Street household (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3). Such a fundamentally queer concept, it is fitting then that these lesbian feminist women took up the idea of chosen family as both a strategy and a goal of their liberation.

On Washington Avenue this move towards queer chosen family and alternatives to the patriarchal nuclear family model extended into the realm of reproduction and child rearing. Once a week, the house would host Jenny, the child of two of Natalie's friends who were interested in exploring alternative models of child-raising. After she and her husband divorced, several other lesbian feminists moved into Natalie's house at 15 Washington Avenue. A seventy-nine-year-old, white, cisgender woman, Natalie lived in that lesbian feminist collective household on and off from 1979 to 1986, during which time she also worked at the University of Toronto. Natalie

highlights child-raising as a key dimension, sharing that, "children, having children, being with children, taking care of other people's children, they feature very strongly in my collective experience and what I wanted from a collective household." This signals a move towards more destabilized and broader understandings of the possession of children and the role of child-rearing, which call into question the assumed expectation of the nuclear family. Challenging the long-standing belief that a woman has to be with a man in order to try to have a child, Cheryl and her housemates made this attempt at reproduction together:

I really wanted to have a child and so we decided as a house that I would try to get pregnant and we tried that. So my housemates agreed, we didn't want a father involved, but obviously we needed sperm. So my housemates went out and found guys who were willing to donate sperm. I didn't technically know who they were, but it didn't take a lot to figure out anyway. So my housemates got the sperm...I inseminated myself or they inseminated me at the house. I did get pregnant. I had my first miscarriage in 1983. So we went through that as a house. (Cheryl)

There is a beautiful dimension of collectivity and care evident in Cheryl's story. Though she may have been the one physically trying to get pregnant and suffering through miscarriages, the experience was never hers alone. Her housemates took it up with her. In imagining other systems of reproduction and support for child-rearing, outside of the patriarchal nuclear family, the actions of these four women worked to offer an alternative for not just Cheryl, but for all women.

This taking up of each other's lives and labour, which Washington Avenue participated in, was present in more than just that one house. Mary describes how the collective nature of her household and the activities they engaged in worked to support their activism as well as their political and cultural organizing. Mary is a sixty-four-year-old, white, cisgender woman, who started living in a lesbian household at 20 Robert Street in 1984. For the year she lived there,



Mary and her housemates were very involved in Toronto Metropolitan University (then Ryerson University) student politics, with several sitting on the student union board of directors:

We were actively organizing lesbian music events or organizing protests or leading this or that. And we were sort of sharing in that experience and sharing those successes. So a big part of our end of day, as people would drift in or out at the end of the day, a lot of the times there would be some sharing around, 'this is what's happening with this issue or that issue'. So there was a lot of support and affirmation that we all got for what we were doing. (Mary)

This atmosphere of mutual support, particularly around activism, was also present in a number of the other queer collective houses. In the moments of hardship, which undoubtedly come up in the course of activist work, having these spaces where folks could share in their experiences, cope with the difficulties, and gain much-needed support had a notable benefit. Sean offers an example of a tangible representation of this use:

Our shared values were gay liberation values and really we were challenging both the state and assumptions about sexuality and roles and so forth. So, we were completely guided by that effort and because we were publishing a newspaper, then that's what we would think about as topics and write about them and get other people to write about them. It was all about movement stuff and rights issues and discrimination. So those were the kinds of values, and we supported each other [in that]. I do think this was at a beginning time in the queer consciousness. So it was important to have a steady, supportive home life in all of that, because we were often out in demonstrations and eventually The Body Politic was charged, because we published an article that seemed to be problematic. And we were charged with using the mail to transport immoral and indecent and scurrilous literature. And so we had the police to deal with, we had to get a lawyer and we were

very under the gun and it was kind of fairly public. And we were going to make it public as much as possible. So then we had a trial, and two of us were who lived in that house. There were three of us [who] were charged initially. The other person lived I guess with his partner, he felt much more isolated, but the two of us felt much more supported, you know, together in this, because it was very difficult. When we were at the trial every day, we'd emerge from the courthouse and do the perp walk, as people called it. So the media was paying attention. There was that kind of external pressure, but we were out and open and so forth, which was a pretty fundamental assumption in our lives, that we weren't hiding in any way. So I think that [that] kind of guided our behaviour in some ways, and then having that stable household made that easier to deal with. (Sean)

### **Everyday Living as a Form of Resistance**

Within these households, residents had the opportunity to live entirely with other queer people, usually for the first time in their lives. Configurations such as this enabled a kind of unfiltered queer living which acted as a form of resistance, working to disrupt the compulsory heterosexuality and patriarchal social arrangements of the everyday. When asked how his housing situation allowed him to escape some of the assumptions and confines of heteronormativity or homophobia, Keith stated:

It certainly did that. Gay boys talk about sex all the time when we're in groups. And so this was like Marxism sex and sex and Marxism, Marxism and sex and Marxism. Right. All the time. Right. So the kind of the heteronormativity that even exists, I think in between couples, even gay couples, right. You know, you're in that model and suddenly it begins to shape you. I mean, that was a big breakthrough, kind of feeling really relaxed with one sexuality and the ability to talk about it. (Keith)

The chance to live together and to incorporate the conversations of gay liberation into the everyday enabled these folks to examine the ways in which the norms of

heterosexuality were shaping their relationships and everyday interactions. These alternative living configurations also allowed their residents to imagine and put into practice different ways of organizing the realm of the domestic:

Early on it met my expectations around the idea that we can actually create something differently. We don't have to live in the patriarchal framework that we've grown up in or within the gender stereotypes that we've grown up with. We can create a situation for ourselves where we can do things differently. We can violate those gender role expectations, we can create different structures for family and personal life. (Barb)

With the majority of the houses comprised (often by design) of either entirely men or entirely women, the domestic tasks of the everyday were frequently seen as an opportunity to challenge the heavily imposed gender roles of the time. Sean describes how this quotidian form of resistance operated within his home:

Just the fact that men especially are not particularly trained to be aware of such domestic things and cooking too. I think we would take turns making dinner. So I



Figure 4.

Description: Four men lay on their stomachs on a bed, each man lays stacked on top of the one below. They all have their heads towards the camera

think we were aware we were doing what was often seen as, you know, female work in the household. And so we were fine with that. We were sort of challenging some of those stereotypes of what men were supposed to do...I mean, we were really challenging the sense that men could not live together and [instead] that we could look after ourselves and make our own dinners and work at it collectively. We challenged the fact that you didn't have to live in a nuclear family, you know, a husband and wife and two kids and a dog, [showing] that you could live different ways. (Sean)

While not uniformly the case, for many of the individuals I talked to, the relationships formed within their queer collective houses were immensely formative and important. Folks described these relationalities as "deep friendships," as a "form of family," as "untraditional," and as "some of the strongest [relationships] they ever developed." A great deal of the residents have stayed in varying degrees of contact with each other, even after 40 or 50 years, having built long-term relationships within those spaces.

The relationalities within these houses at times incorporated a sense of movement and fluidity which is markedly queer. Residents would often fluctuate between and outside of various different forms of relationality, resisting a hegemonic linearity of relationship progression, and instead, allowing for that sense of instability and subversion to form the basis of unique forms of connection. Many individuals alluded to how the relationships between residents twisted, blurred, and overlapped hegemonic divisions of categorization, taking various different forms at different times. These fluctuating relationalities included varying dimensions of sexual partnership, chosen familial bonds, political comradeship, platonic friendship, and much more; relationalities such as this can only be described as queer. With photos like this one Sean shared of him and his housemates, it's not hard to see why (Fig. 4).

With folks such as Keith describing the relationships within their houses as, in one sense, a kind of "political comradeship," it is clear that the deep political commitment



which characterized so many of these spaces continuously shaped the relationships formed within them. Janice offers a window into the longevity of that political commitment and its influence on these relationships:

[The relationships were] so intimate, so strong, so politically committed. So then when you broke up with people, you were still there in their inner circle all the time. Because it was more about political change often than personal issues. Whereas if you think of a traditional relationship it's more personal and not based on work or politics. So it ends when the personal ends, but it didn't end because the activist issues continued. So you were always friends with your exes, who might've moved out of your house, which sounds weird. No, actually it wasn't weird at all because you'd be organizing a rally to support the Morgentaler clinic or publishing your newspaper or doing counselling for other young gays and lesbians who were teenagers in Northern Ontario calling your phone lines. So whoever you were intimately with or living with might change, but those relationships stayed. (Janice)

Many of the folks I talked to employed the designation of family to describe their relationship with their housemates. For Brian, living in queer collective housing since 1976 has allowed him to foster a sense of queer family and parenthood which he would not have otherwise been able to. Numerous people he lived with refer to him as Mom and he refers to them as his children. The importance of these relationships cannot be overlooked or overstated. When our interview was coming to a close I asked Brian if there was anything more he wanted to share with me to help me better understand his experience and what it means to him. He said:

When I came out to my father, his first comment was 'you're never going to know what it's like to have children.' Because to him, his biggest goal in life was to have children. He was an only child and he swore he was never, ever going to have an only child. And neither is one of his siblings or one of his children. Now, if my

father were alive today and I could talk to him, I can say, 'Dad, I have more children than you ever fathered. And they are so much a part of my life. And I've learned so much from them. And they've taught me so much.' (Brian)

### **An Opportunity for Imagining Other Possibilities**

To further explore the genesis, effects, and potentiality of these houses I would like to now invoke the work of José Muñoz (2019) and his understanding of queerness as hope, horizon, and futurity. Muñoz offers queerness as "a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present", as the thing that "lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing" (2019, p.1). It is this dissatisfaction which forced many of these folks, such as Barb, to acknowledge the restrictive and oppressive structures of society, such as heteronormativity, propelling them to feel the failures of that system which they were so unable to fit within:

We [the house members] all grew up with the expectation that we would be heterosexual. But once you kind of get past that and you decide: there's something [different] about me. I've got to make this work, the world's not working for me but here's the possibility to change the world and make it more like the world that I'd like to be in. And once you realize, okay, there's possibilities here and maybe we can remake the world or at least the world that we live in on a day to day basis', then it's very exciting and fun. (Barb)

The queerness of these houses was "not simply a being but a doing for and toward the future" (Muñoz 2019, 1). Yes, their members were in fact gay men and lesbians, but the queerness of these spaces was situated in more than just identity. This queerness was inherently an action, a way of living which moved them outside of the normative and towards the creation of alternatives.

These spaces brought the radical imagining of queerness into the mundane of the everyday, allowing their residents to encounter the utopian potentiality indicated by and through quotidian acts. In a domestic realm

continuously shaped and reshaped by queer collectivity, banal activities such as cooking and cleaning, as well as the daily intimacies and labour of relationality and emotional support enabled these households to imagine and even begin to create alternative ways of living. as Muñoz states, "the quotidian can contain a map of the utopia that is queer-ness" (2019, 1).

The inextricable queerness of these houses brought their residents into a realm of imagining otherwise; it gave their hope (both past and present) groundings in a firm knowledge that another way was possible. As Barb shares:

It was only a couple of years, but it [queer collective housing] has continued to be very important to me because it is the possibility that if you have the feeling [of injustice or dissatisfaction], that you don't have to necessarily just take at face value, that [since] things have been done a certain way they have to continue to be done a certain way. [It is] that you can [instead] be open to other possibilities and create something great, something different. It's really this solid evidence that that's possible. And that you may find other people who are also very excited about the possibility of creating something different than that. And you can accomplish a lot together." (Barb)

It is here that we can see how queerness is "essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (Muñoz 2019, 1). These oral histories can offer an entry way of their own, enabling a (re)imagining of the future, informed and emboldened by the radical possibilities for alternative ways of being, living together, and relating to one another which these queer collective houses began to map.

## Conclusion

Though rarely recognized for the role they played, these queer collective houses truly did shape the landscape of queer activism in Toronto during the 1970s, 80s, and even early 90s. A prominent queer activist working in Toronto for many decades now, Jerry

thoughtfully articulates this significance:

In Toronto, queers went through a revolution from '81 to '91, following the bath raids, we don't call it a revolution, but it was a revolution. You had almost every, one of the queer organizations that exist now started then, it transformed being queer in Canada. And I really don't think it would have happened if we hadn't had the few queer, communal living spaces that we had, or it would have been harder and it wouldn't have been as fast and wouldn't have been as powerful. (Jerry)

Throughout this project I have come to recognize the lasting effects which these houses and the work which came out of them have on my own experiences as a queer person in Toronto today. I am an active member of some of the organizations my participants started or worked with, such as the University of Toronto's Sexual Education Center and LGBT+ Youthline. I may not have learned of this connection if I had not taken on this project.

Before beginning my interviews I had never had an actual conversation with a queer senior (that I knew of), let alone one about queer identity, politics, or community. Aside from my professors in Sexual Diversity Studies, the vast majority of queer people which I am connected to are my own age or about a decade older. After talking with many of my queer friends, I found out that this is not uncommon; there is an unmistakable gap in intergenerational connections within queer communities.

Speaking of the necessity of integrating queer elders into contemporary movements, artist, performer, and filmmaker Hanifah Walidah (2015) proclaims that queer elders are "these precious human beings, these spiritual reservoirs just an arms length away who, for decades, have been navigating their humanity through the same muck you are just now becoming acquainted with." The knowledges the folks I spoke to hold — of a kind of politic which has been lived and learned, offering lessons and opportunities which could be usefully deployed today. Jerry shared with me that, "the thought that living

shared with me that, "the thought that living situations are important for political organizing is an important thing that we inevitably learn and lose and learn and lose and learn and to lose. And so your work someday will be part of somebody relearning it" (Jerry). But how are we to continue to (re)learn these lessons if we do not speak to those who have already learned them? We are neglecting our elders, our movements, and ourselves when we fail to foster a sense of connection between all three, when we fail to learn from one another. With that in mind, I offer these oral histories as an opportunity for queer intergenerational learning and as a call towards creating deeper connections between queer youth and elders.

There are resonances in these stories that I feel as I move through my life; I am reminded of the histories of these queer collective houses as I cook dinner with my housemates, as I run out the door with them, on our way to an action, and as I walk through the streets of this city. I want to pull at these histories in whatever way that I can, so I have decided that I am going to visit each of the houses, walking from place to place and creating my own tour and experience of this network. Though their queer collective residents may have long since moved out, many of the spaces still remain, a tangible piece of that history which permeates this city. After I see those houses where so much activism, identity formation, relationality, and community building took place, I will return to my own queer collective household, knowing a little bit more of that incredible history my housemates and I carry with us.

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# **"Your body and how it moves mine" and "The Period Between Things Happening"**

**Juliet Spizzirri (she/her)**

Major in Theatre and Drama Studies, Minors in English and Creative Writing

## **Artist Statement**

I am a multidisciplinary queer artist at the University of Toronto. My work is driven by personal experience, visceral imagery, and themes of sex, passion and love. My poetry is raw, honest and from the heart. I am always finding new and exciting ways of incorporating wordplay and imagery, and experimental ways of utilizing and breaking form.

My intent with these pieces is to emphasize the beauty and inherent power of queer love. Sexuality, particularly queer sexuality, often has the connotation of being impure or shameful, but these pieces dive into the honesty and pleasure of queer intercourse. These poems demonstrate the power of queer love in overcoming queer shame.

*Content tags: intimacy, sexuality*

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**Your body and how it moves mine**

When I kiss you, my saliva is sweet.  
When you plant pecks on my face  
the spots where you left them glow  
a golden colour, brighter than floodlights.  
And the scent of your skin fills my lungs  
with oxygen and each hand that touches you  
is filled with the grace of the gods.  
When my tongue touches your clit flowers  
sprout in my mouth, shoot between my teeth  
petals fill my cheeks. When my fingers  
are inside you they become magic - it comes  
from you, not from me. And when my head  
rests on your chest, and your heart beats  
faster for me, mine syncs up, and the rhythm  
makes a melody - for the first time I can dance.



### **The Period Between Things Happening**

Stagnant and twitching like fingers  
itching to masturbate, propping  
up a loose waistband, touching  
myself to feel, release since I can't touch  
you, please you, it's all I want to do.

Work shit job after shit job to buy you  
a pretty present, stretch the muscles  
in your cheeks glimmering  
teeth golden like baroque crowns.

I'm staring at my obliques,  
muscles sought after but I can't define  
the peril in our limited time—BE MINE—  
your words stand out like an open sign.

Listen to our music, all your senses unbound.  
Draw in sound, surround your heart  
with insulation. The pattern of my skin  
peaks in vibration, pieces of you etching.

Bore into my pores, trace the intricacies  
of galaxies, matter, don't mind my subject  
matter (that's erotic in nature). You make  
my shame clean, romantic, my shame is lusted

after, my shame is beautiful, you crush  
my shame grapes into sensual wine, grip  
the glass stem, overflow like the shore,  
crash into mine when you show me yours.

They gather the heat at the bottom  
of my abdomen, I close my legs,  
press the pressure, finger through  
the maze of slick flesh and I erupt

reborn. I breathe through rupturing  
heartbeats, stand to wash my hands.  
Lie back, puncture the mattress, unearth  
my phone, take root in the happening.

# Grapes Are Mine To Taste

## **Maria Vidal Valdespino (she/her)**

Major in Critical Studies in Equity and Solidarity with Minors in Sociology, and Women and Gender Studies

### **Artist Statement**

I created "Grapes are Mine to Taste" with fruits and the Latinx tradition for the New Year, where you eat 12 grapes for good luck, in the back of my head. Grapes, along with sexuality, have always circled back to religion for me — to narratives of family and restricted pleasures, and shame over pleasures in sexuality. I wanted the figure to eat a grape from the ones that she wears as clothes to symbolize that my sexuality is my own, and I can consume it and spit it out as I choose. I can remove it and switch for another, one that fits me best. And I enjoy pleasure, and fruit's sweetness, but I prefer a good mango over grapes. In the end, my sexuality is mine.

*Content tags: sexual expression, reclamation*

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### **Image Description**

A digital painting of a woman looking over her shoulder, making direct eye contact with the viewer. Her clothes are made of green grapes, and there is a green grape held between her lips. She has black hair, which is pulled into a ponytail behind her head, and a soft, muted teal colour comprises the background.



# Gender, Race, Nation & '#Megxit': British Tabloids' Portrayals of Meghan Markle

**Wana Saiful Rizal (she/her)**

Major in Urban Studies and Human Geography (Focus in Planning), Minor in Geographical Information Systems

## Abstract

The phrases "straight outta Compton" and "Gang-scarred home" were the shocking headlines that circulated all throughout the UK and marked the first appearance of Meghan Markle in British tabloids as soon as she began a public relationship with Prince Harry in 2016 (Styles, 2016). This essay will analyze British tabloids' antagonistic portrayals of and media hostility towards Markle through a postcolonial and critical race lens that highlights her intersectional identities and the notion of the nation (Mollet & Faria, 2018). The media coverage of the couple simultaneously reveals the anxieties and excitement of a biracial American woman becoming an established member of the royal family and the implications this had on the formation of British national identity, especially in the political climate of Brexit (Weidhase, 2021). The British tabloids play a crucial role in the symbolic and representational work that comes with constructing and maintaining images of national identity and Britishness. These symbols of nationalism are gendered and racialized, as reflected in the specific parameters of race, class, and gender politics (Yuval-Davis, 1997) that circulated in their pieces (Balteiro, 2022). By attaching those national symbols to the royal family, the British tabloids portray Markle as constantly in tension between being an asset and a threat to the British national image (Weidhase, 2021).

*Content tags: racism, xenophobia, media analysis*

*"EXCLUSIVE: Harry's girl is (almost) straight outta Compton: Gang-scarred home of her mother revealed – so will he be dropping by for tea?"*

*(Daily Mail, 2016)*

The phrases "straight outta Compton" and "gang-scarred home" were the shocking headlines that circulated all throughout the UK and marked the first appearance of Meghan Markle in British tabloids as soon as she began a public relationship with Prince Harry in 2016 (Styles, 2016). National tabloids such as the Daily Mail and the Sun wasted no time in capturing the couple on their front covers, circulating their pieces to millions of people countrywide (Tobitt & Majid, 2022). Their issues center around the polarizing differences between the couple by making both explicit and implicit references to her racial identity and background (Biakolo, 2021). In this essay, I analyze the antagonistic

portrayals and media hostility towards Markle in British tabloids through a postcolonial and critical race lens that highlights Markle's intersectional identities and the notion of the nation (Mollet & Faria, 2018). Through this framework, I argue that the media coverage of Markle from the beginning of the couple's public relationship to the occurrence of #Megxit simultaneously reveals the conflictual anxieties and excitement of a biracial American woman becoming an established member of the royal family and the significance this would have on the formation of British national identity, especially in the political climate of Brexit (Weidhase, 2021). #Megxit is used by tabloids to describe

Markle and Prince Harry's decision to leave the royal family in 2020 and is a play on term 'Brexit'. The British tabloids play a crucial role in the symbolic and representational work that comes with constructing images of national identity and Britishness. These symbols of nationalism are gendered and racialized, as reflected in the specific parameters of race, class and gender politics (Yuval-Davis, 1997) circulated in their pieces and consumed by the public. (Balteiro, 2022). By attaching those national symbols to the royal family, Markle is portrayed in the tabloids as constantly in tension between being an asset and a threat to the British national image (Weidhase, 2021).

This essay is organized around those conflicting dynamics, and I will illustrate by focusing first on the ways in which tabloids characterize Markle as "impure" against the White/Imperial nostalgic symbolism of the royal family and invite the public to closely inspect her heritage and racial background, which then works to classify her as the racialized "other" (Woldemikael & Woldemikael, 2021). Secondly, I will look at how the media hostility towards Markle's outspoken feminism can reveal the gendered and racialized discourses of Brexit—how those initially signified Markle as the mythical symbolic bearer of a progressive future Britain but ultimately denied her that representation and national agency, which resulted in #Megxit (Weidhase, 2021). Lastly, I want to compare the embodiment of White royal femininity between Meghan Markle and Kate Middleton (Weidhase, 2021) to illustrate the different tabloid depictions of these women and the role of race in experiences of womanhood and motherhood (Ziady, 2021). Feminist geographers can benefit from this analysis of #Megxit because it illustrates the power and influence tabloids have in reproducing stereotypes and anxieties around race, gender, and class — anxieties that work to exclude certain racialized communities and reinforces Whiteness. Moreover, with the advent of the internet, these processes are occurring in the digital space and are reaching wider readers at a faster pace (McGill, 2021).

### **An asset or a threat? Meghan Markle's role in British National Identity**

The arguments below all explore the ways in which tabloids frame Markle as an opportunity to reimagine British identity and politics, where racial divisions are no longer an issue because a biracial American woman has become a part of the British royal family. In the backdrop of Brexit, the tabloids highlight her royal status to construct the "post-racial national identity formation" which centers around progressive values and seeks new royal representations of the nation (Weidhase, 2021). But all those qualities that rendered her as valuable also threaten to destabilize the existing institution of the Monarchy and the conservative patriotism that governs it. Tabloids thus frame Markle's intersectional identities as disruptive to the "normative racial, class, national and gendered attributes associated with British royalty" and classify her as the racialized "other" (Pramaggiore & Kerrigan, 2021). This positions her outside the essentialized realm of the "pure" White royal family.

### **Racial Impurity in the Royal Family White/Imperial Nostalgic Symbolism**

*"Harry to marry into gangster royalty? New love 'from crime-ridden neighbourhood'"*  
(Daily Star, 2016)

The headlines above introduced Markle to the British public and played a significant role in influencing the public perception of her. These first appearances in the media are important because Markle will probably have a role in British royal public life and directly impact taxpayers. These headlines do not only focus on Markle's family heritage and racial background, but also invite the public to scrutinize her identities and highlight the polarizing class and racial differences between her and Harry, and by extension the royal family (Woldemikael & Woldemikael, 2021). The tabloids' use of Markle's racial identity as a point of interest ignores the ambiguity that exists with her self-representation of her own biracial identity. In doing so, the tabloids define their own narrative of Markle's racial identity, which is exclusively Black (Woldemikael & Woldemikael,



2021). These depictions of her race do not explicitly mention race, but instead they use implicit references, racialized stereotypes and the "tragic Mulatto trope" to highlight her Blackness (Woldemikael & Woldemikael, 2021). These negative representations engage in the colonial discourses of blood purity and its relationship with race and royalty. When the tabloids use racially laden descriptions such as "gang-scarred" home, "straight outta Compton," and "crime-ridden neighbourhood" to contrast Markle's family heritage against Prince Harry's "royalty" and "refined Britishism of 'dropping by for tea,'" they are constructing a binary between the two's heritage, suggesting a colonial legacy in these representations (Woldemikael & Woldemikael, 2021).

*"Meghan Markle's Family Went From Cotton Slaves to Royalty"*  
(Daily Mail, 2017)

This is further supported with the headline from the Daily Mail above, that inspects Markle's family tree, disregards her father's European background, and describes her mother's ancestry as "dirt poor in The Deep South" (Wilson, 2017). These representations point to a "colossal gulf" between Markle's ancestry that were "slaves or descendants of slaves" (Wilson, 2017) with Prince Harry's ancestry of "kings, queens and earls" (Bates, 2016), thus emphasizing Britain's colonial history and aligning the royal family with White/Imperial nostalgic symbolism (Weidhase, 2021). In this ancestry framework, tabloids have engaged with the notion of the one drop rule. This refers to a set of Jim Crow laws that stated if an individual had any "one drop" of black ancestry and blood, they would not be considered White, which further disenfranchised African Americans (James, 2011). In this case, the tabloids worked to classify Markle not only as exclusively Black but also as a threat to the 'purity' of the royal family (Balteiro, 2022). Markle challenges the socially constructed meanings of royal identity and disrupts the processes of colonial and White supremacy (Woldemikael & Woldemikael, 2021). Markle's biracial self-representation troubles the tabloids' racial conceptions that produce and

maintain anxieties of Markle's "impurity", as images of royalty are dependent on blood purity (Mahfouz, 2018). This racialization of Markle as the Other is what contributed to #Megxit and tells us that White/Imperial nostalgic symbolism is "a reassuring ideal of nationhood" for those anxieties (Hunter & Van der Westhuizen, 2021).

On the other hand, scholars such as Ward (2021) argue that the British press have also presented a different characterization of Markle's relationship with the royal family—one that posits her "racialized usefulness". Daily Mail notes that "her diverse ancestry is a positive asset for the House of Windsor" (Johnson, 2016) and her presence as a royal member works to erode the royal family image, British national identity of its colonial past, and promote "benevolent multiculturalism" (Ward, 2021, 235). The diction of "asset" and "usefulness" here suggest that these tabloid representations of Markle are positive only because they are rooted in nationalist gains. Her intersectional identities are acknowledged by tabloids because they push for a "specific nationalist narrative of racial progressiveness" (Ward, 2021, 235). But, as I point out later on, the mythical significance of Markle as a symbol of social progress is superficial, relying on a specific logic of British royalty's relation to national identity, as "when we look at them, we see ourselves" (Sandbrook, 2018). This reveals Markle's limited agency in dismantling the normative institutions in the monarchy and, with the occurrence of #Megxit, it is clear that those institutions still work to maintain the White nostalgic imperial symbolism of the royal family, which extends to the British national identity that still exists and maintains racial divisions (Weidhase, 2021).

### **Depictions of Royal Motherhood: Meghan Markle against Kate Middleton**

To end this essay, I want to look at the different depictions of Markle and Middleton's coverage by tabloids during their respective pregnancies. As we can see from the picture above, Markle's headlines vilify her, whilst we do not see any of that with Middleton's headline. Ward (2021) discusses how the role of race can affect these representations of motherhood in the press. With Markle,

Ward (2021) argues that her position as the racialized Other has implications on how her motherhood is represented in the media. If it is seen to benefit the royal family, such as the connotation that a mixed-race royal baby "deproblematizes its colonialist history," then Markle is valued in her role in the monarchy (Ward, 2021). Markle's biracial identity is constantly in negotiation with tabloids in regards to her usefulness for their image and building of national identity.

To conclude, the portrayal of Markle in tabloids highlights the fluidities and

intersectionality of her identity as a biracial, divorced, American actress. In the tabloids, she is constantly in tension between being an asset or a threat to the British national identity, and this is done through the portrayal of racist stereotypes and disregard for ambiguity in her self-representation. Here, tabloids work to classify her exclusively as Black, the implications of which on the royal family and on British national identity highlight the intersection of race, gender, and nation. Ultimately, the tabloids work to construct, maintain, and reproduce a version of Britain that has colonial and imperial legacies.

**Not long to go! Pregnant Kate tenderly cradles her baby bump while wrapping up her royal duties ahead of maternity leave - and William confirms she's due 'any minute now'**

By Siofra Brennan For Mailonline and Rebecca English  
Royal Correspondent For The Daily Mail  
10:40 GMT 21 Mar 2018, updated 07:43 GMT 22 Mar 2018



11k shares

**Why can't Meghan Markle keep her hands off her bump? Experts tackle the question that has got the nation talking: Is it pride, vanity, acting - or a new age bonding technique?**

By Mail on Sunday Reporter  
23:58 GMT 26 Jan 2019, updated 16:45 GMT 28 Jan 2019



**Figure 1.**

Note: Two Daily Mail headlines show the difference in how British media writes about Markle and Middleton. The first headline reads: "Not long to go! Pregnant Kate tenderly cradles her baby bump while wrapping up her royal duties ahead of maternity leave - and William confirms she's due 'any minute now.'" Meanwhile the headline about Markle reads: "Why can't Meghan Markle keep her hands off her bump? Experts tackle the question that has got the nation talking: is it pride, vanity, acting - or a new age bonding technique?"

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# Selling Flesh

**Jae Kim (he/him)**

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**Content Warning: This piece contains a discussion of transphobia**

**Artist Statement**

A constant theme from birth is bodily relief— urinating, defecating, and washrooms. The notion of relief changes for many of us when certain spaces and acts of nature become social markers of our identities. As such, we seek out other ways to achieve relief, whether physical, emotional, or social. "Selling Flesh" is a flash nonfiction piece that reflects my experience of trans joy, pain, and rage, demonstrating how these emotions stem from various specific moments spanning childhood to present time. Intentionally written in one sentence to reflect never-ending (and often co-existing!) trans experiences, this piece addresses how cis-heteronormativity acts as the building blocks for every point in our lives. Our bodies— particularly queer and trans bodies—are tools that we use to find our identities. With the pain I've experienced so far as a recently-out trans individual, I often wonder how I can use my body to not merely withstand this sorrow, but also find joy in my painful existence in capitalistic society: hence the idea of "selling" my flesh, emotionally, relentlessly, and continuously, from conception to death.

*Content tags: transphobia, gender dysphoria*

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I am twenty years old as I follow my friends to the washroom, a place that some people view as a haven, a reflection of our high school memories where we'd huddle near the stalls during lunch before the bell rang, but for me, it's the furthest thing from safety, because when I pass through the door, my eyes instinctively flit to the sign outlined in black and white as if it's all supposed to be as simple as that, and all of a sudden, I feel ten pairs of eyes on my back, confirming the fears that whisper into my ears all day, telling me that because I don't like to wear a piece of cloth that flattens my chest, I'm not enough of a boy, telling me that because my hair weaves down to my shoulders, I'm not enough of a boy, telling me that because I'm stepping into the women's bathroom, I'm not enough of a boy, and suddenly, I am seventeen, sitting against the wall between the entrances to the two washrooms on Grade 8 Day as parents and kids flit past me like fish in a pond, but I cannot see them clearly because I feel as though I'm drowning at the bottom of a tiny fishbowl, unable to break the surface because my hands are busy squeezing the life out of a secret that even I don't understand, and I wonder why it feels more like death than life to finally admit my truth when it should be the other way around as I anxiously finger the collar of my Prefects shirt and tell my friend that I like our uniforms because it makes me feel like a boy, but I don't know if I want to be a boy because that would just be too much anyway, whatever that means and no I don't know what I mean, and then I am twelve, at my fifth grade graduation, crying in the washroom on the first floor as I argue with my mom about how I don't want to wear a dress, and she starts to raise her voice, so I clasp my hands over my ears and finally nod, and maybe the tight smile that marginally brightens her face is worth it, if only so I know that she's proud because I am her only child, the one who made it his job to make her always proud no matter what, and I know she wants to help me fit in because I still sit alone at recess, unable to speak English and ask the other girls for a playdate, so she helps me step into the blue dress, blue because I insisted on it, and she brushes my long silky hair and tells me I look gorgeous, but the pants that hugged my hips earlier before felt better to me, because in this dress, I feel like nothing more than an imprisoned bird in a gilded cage, a performer whose face is caked in makeup, and shouldn't my feelings be more important than looking like a mannequin at a clothing store, but before I can dwell on it, she tells me I'm so proud of you, and when the music starts from the gymnasium and I have to stumble away on my high heels like a newborn fawn, and then I am five, sitting at the dining table with my aunt who lays out so many different colours bottled up in cheap plastic cylinders in front of me and asks me don't you want paint your nails so the boy next door can fall in love with you, and it takes me a long time, but I eventually give in because if it's pretty to others, I suppose that's alright, so I extend my hand and listen to my aunt tell me that I'm being a good girl, because this is how good girls act and look, and I wish I could scrub off the nail polish with soap and run out to play baseball with the boy next door, because maybe without my nails coloured I'll be treated like him, the opposite of a China doll that's chipping away at the surface, and then I am twenty again, painting my nails pink, blue, and white with my own shaking hands before my first pride, and when I break down sobbing and wrapped up in the arms of another trans man on the streets during the parade, letting myself finally rip off the mask that's been plastered to my face for years, I open myself to more vulnerability and pain, but also joy, so much joy, joyjoyjoy, bursting in my chest like fireworks on New Year's Eve, trans fucking joy, and isn't that funny, how there is joy in our sorrow, how there often has to be pain to find joy later, what a hard pill to swallow, the taste of it souring my mouth every time I find myself still stepping into the women's washroom, a not-refuge-but-still-a-refuge because of my fear of the men's washroom because oh my god don't you know what could happen in there, and staring at my reflection in a washroom that isn't mine is just a bitter reminder of the fact that I sometimes wonder if this is all just a bad dream, if I'll wake up and materialize in front of another door without a sign that has a drawing of a man or a woman, a washroom that's mine and ours and not theirs, and it does happen eventually when I graduate high school, except it's so often in the basement with dust and spiders or on the sixteenth fucking floor of whatever the fuck this building is, and so you see how with my joy there is pain and with my pain there is rage because no matter how many times I say please, I'll always be a beast in the basement, wondering if it'll work if I utter pretty please with a cherry on top, wondering how much the meat on my bones is worth, if I can somehow pay for a spark of painless joy with nothing but a pound of my own flesh, and then I realize that I already have been, every day, my skin scrubbed raw and chunks of it hacked out from being told what's right and wrong, the stitches holding my scars together ripped out again and again from being told I'm strange and rebellious, when really, I'm just trying to find a life to call mine.



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# Disidentification and Performativity: An Analysis of "Royal Road"

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## Abstract

Using the stage name Twain, Mat Davidson's song "Royal Road" challenges the gender binary in a variety of ways. Muñoz's and Butler's work reveal the transgressive nature of the song as Davidson pushes for a nuanced understanding of gender that highlights non-binary identities. The singer also attempts to add new meanings to vocabulary like "man" and "woman," integrating more fluidity into these rigid terms. Davidson subtly situates themselves outside the gender binary, drawing attention to gender roles born out of dominant ideology in which men and women are diametrically opposed and cannot exhibit any traits of the "opposite sex." Davidson also draws attention to the fact that they do not subscribe to this dominant ideology of prescriptive gender roles, challenging the listener to deconstruct their own adherence to, or adoption of, binary gender roles.

*Content tags: performatives; disidentification; gender binary; song analysis*

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Music is an important medium for describing and investigating aspects of daily life. This is what Mat Davidson, using the name stage Twain, does in their song "Royal Road." The song appears on the artist's third album, *Adventure*, released in 2019 on the Keeled Scales label. The song is an indie folk piece, drawing listeners in with its sleepy vocals, smooth guitar and melodic piano. Throughout the song, Davidson challenges the gender binary in several ways. They engage in disidentification to define their own gender identity outside of the binary, utilize tactical misrecognition to expose gender hierarchies, challenge the arbitrariness of gender norms, and strive to interrupt the power of performatives by breaking their repetition. Jose Esteban Muñoz's theory of disidentification from "Disidentifications: Queers of Color and The Performance of Politics" and Judith Butler's work on performativity from "Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex" can be utilized to analyze this song.

Davidson takes on the role of a disidentificatory subject, not entirely resisting or rejecting the dominant ideology that men

and women are opposite and cannot exhibit traits of the opposite sex, but also not easily or automatically identifying with it. Muñoz relies on Pêcheaux's descriptions of the "Good Subject" and the "Bad Subject" to describe the disidentificatory subject. The singer in "Royal Road" represents a third option, the disidentificatory subject who "tactically and simultaneously works on, with, and against a cultural form" (Muñoz, 1999, p. 12). This is what Davidson does by exclaiming:

Well, I was born a man  
Sure, like any whole man, my soul is  
half-woman  
Just like the soul of the whole woman I  
know is half-man  
Buddy, let me tell you, that's the royal road  
to feeling free and fine

(Davidson, 2019)

By describing themselves as a whole man whose soul is half-woman, Davidson challenges the gender binary, pushing for a more nuanced understanding of gender and inviting the possibility of non-binary genders. Furthermore, this phrasing demonstrates

neither full identification nor counteridentification with the dominant ideology. Instead, Davidson engages in disidentification, which "does not dispel those ideological contradictory elements ... a disidentifying subject works to hold onto this object and invest it with new life" (Muñoz, 1999, p. 12). Davidson strives to add new meaning and understanding to terms like man and woman, seeking to integrate more fluidity into these rigid identificatory terms. Rather than using new words, the use of man and woman allows Davidson to confront the words' meaning and propose their own definition. This verse also demonstrates disidentification as a survival strategy. Using identity terms available from dominant ideology, Davidson is able to structure their identity in such a way that it can be understood by normative culture. This potentially saves them some of the distress associated with having their non-normative gender identity questioned. The use of the phrase "royal road" also points to Davidson's disidentification as a method of survival, as the phrase refers to an easy and trouble-free way of attaining or reaching something. In the song's case, Davidson asserts that this understanding of gender is what results in their ability to feel "free and fine" (Davidson, 2019).

There are several instances in "Royal Road" where the singer engages in tactical misrecognition. Tactical misrecognition as a concept involves intentionally dodging the assumptions that accompany identification to expose it "as a 'discursively pre-constituted' space that often maintains strict and oppressive hierarchies within the social" (Muñoz, 1999, pp. 168–169). Furthermore, these tactical misrecognitions highlight the different ways we can engage with dominant ideologies, calling the typical uses into question. In this verse, Davidson questions both normative sexual and gender identities, singing:

Call us gay, straight, bi  
 Call us what you like  
 I call it all romance  
 And I call the man who hates romance a  
 sad man  
 Call yourself a man, call yourself a woman

I call myself alive

(Davidson, 2019)

By intentionally dodging the interpellations of dominant ideologies, a process in which an individual's identity is decided by a culture or ideology, Davidson brings attention to the automatic assumptions that occur regarding gender and sexuality. By placing the focus on love rather than the composition of a relationship, Davidson questions the necessity of normative identities, calling it all romance. Similarly, Davidson's avoidance of being gendered, calling themselves instead alive, spotlights the ubiquity of gender being inferred from external presentation and characteristics. It is a form of disidentification to turn this site of interpellation into a site of examining ideology. Muñoz (1999) explains, "Disidentification permits the subject of ideology to contest the interpellations of the dominant ideology" (p. 168). Davidson defies interpellation by instead defining their own identity and rejecting the notion that they must abide by the norms established by the dominant ideology. Furthermore, the use of tactical misrecognitions to interrogate the ways ideology forces identification creates space for normative society to deconstruct the preconceptions that enforce identification and gender norms.

Davidson situates themselves outside of gender norms by beginning the song with "Take it like a man, take it like a woman / I'll take it any way" (Davidson, 2019), and later "Man, I really hate the way they think today / It's so black and white" (Davidson, 2019). The language used here points to the strong binary gender roles that exist as a result of dominant ideology. Butler (2011) explains that, "The practice by which gendering occurs, the embodying of norms, is a compulsory practice, a forcible production ... To the extent that gender is an assignment, it is an assignment which is never quite carried out according to expectation" (p. 176). Perhaps this contributes to Davidson's feeling of being half-woman, an inability to completely inhabit the norms required of being a man. Furthermore, Davidson's rejection of being gendered undermines the demanded

construction of their gender by the dominant ideology, instead challenging arbitrary confines and forging a new path. Davidson further acknowledges the impact of interpellation on their gender identification, singing:

Well, I know my mind  
And it never knew the difference  
between the two  
'Til they said: Hey you, this is what you are  
(Davidson, 2019)

What Davidson describes in the last line of the verse can also be understood as a performative, in which things, such as identities, are brought into being by way of words. In the case of this verse, Davidson's gender identity is brought into being through the action of naming. The authority of gendering is supported by the long history of hegemonic enforcement of strict gender norms and binary identities. It is important to note that social authority is built by social repetition but, ultimately, this authority has no origin. It is the very repetition of a performative that brings about its social power. Yet the strength of performatives is also their greatest weakness. If repetition ceases, then so too does the social power bolstering them. Butler (2011) articulates that "the compulsory character of these norms does not always make them efficacious. Such norms are continually haunted by their own inefficacy; hence, the anxiously repeated effort to install and augment their jurisdiction" (p. 181). This is the

critical importance of work like Davidson's — pushing people to question the validity and necessity of gender norms to weaken their social power and influence. If people realize that the authority that enforces performatives is only powered through their frequent use, and ultimately has no true origin, then perhaps society can move away from rigidly enforcing them.

In Davidson's "Royal Road," they work to undermine the gender binary. This is accomplished by using disidentification to define Davidson's own gender outside of the binary, using tactical misrecognition to confront gender hierarchies, bringing attention to how gender norms are arbitrary, and working to diminish the power of performatives by interrupting their repetition. The significance of this song, however, cannot be acknowledged without first understanding the function of performatives and the necessity of disidentification as a survival strategy. Davidson's "Royal Road" stealthily forces listeners to confront their preconceived notions of gender norms and identity. This is important work because performatives rely on social power derived from their constant repetition, but cite an authority that has no basis other than its constant repetition. An artist's ability to contest dominant ideologies' interpellations provides opportunities for others to do the same. They challenge society to move away from the oppressive nature of gender norms and binary identities. In the instance

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# EVE: The Garden and Its Consequences

**Zoe Faber (they/them)**

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## Artist Statement

This project centres on Eve in Genesis. I am generally trying to imagine her perspective on her situation in Genesis, most notably her supposed ignorance and awakening. I want to unpack Eve as a target of men's rage through the lens of the men involved in the story, namely God and Adam. This poetry collection is divided into 3 collections: Veiled, Escape, and Banishment, depicting Eve before, during, and after the fall. I hope to subvert the narratives in Genesis that obscure Eve's possible reasons for eating the fruit and explore what her existence might have been like, especially as the only woman. I specifically attempt to focus on the issue of sex in Eve's narrative, something I think is often erased from Christian dogma, though it underpins a lot of Christian attitudes towards women and their place in the world.

This poetry collection reflects my beliefs and fears about the nature of the God I was raised with. I grew up in a Christian home and early on connected sexuality to systems of domination, as is common in Christian teachings. As a queer person particularly, my sexuality always harboured great feelings of shame, which I try to personify as God in this poetry anthology. My objectives are to explore sex and subjugation through Eve and her role in creation, as well as unpack my own struggles with sex and sexuality through a religious lens.

*Content tags: sexuality; intimacy; religion*

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# I VEILED

Blinded, cloaked in ignorance. Cleaved apart & put together. In the grass, God turns, reveals a creature from under his robe. Yellow bellied. Forked tongue. The veil slips.

Slithering, approaching. I beckon. Slowly,  
it coils in my stomach, black serpent.  
I am not mother yet I listen to it hiss & groan.  
Give it everything I have.  
Turn my attention outwards.

Yes baby, of course darling. I never thought of it that way. That's so interesting. Yeah. Wow! Really? I'll think about that.

Openmymouth::Tearatmychest::Punishme::Iamof  
yourbody:: Iamyourblood:: Iamwhatyouhadtoripout::



### ADDRESSING ADAM IN THE WORLD'S FIRST PEEP SHOW

You do not have to be gentle, my love.  
You do not have to be kind. I will lie beneath you  
& practice my eyes. Smile! God watches from the trees  
& you, oblivious, thrust & moan. I watch you; He watches us, you close your eyes.  
Name me & pronounce it yours.  
Fruit offers itself to be eaten & I offer myself,  
just as He intended.

That unnamed thing slithers up my throat,  
& I gag on my disgust.

I never wanted you to know me  
in the biblical sense; meaning

dehumanized,  
de  
con  
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cted.  
Dis memb ered,

Yet here we are, you above, me below. God, somewhere out of sight.  
Devour me, disembowel me, divide me.  
Split me in two & cleave me together.

Was this what I was created for?

Created last & known first,  
arms wrapped around my lonely form.

### AN INNER MONOLOGUE BEFORE THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

"Should I gather fruit for us my sweet  
man?" Might I gather a moment of respite  
from the torment of being your woman?

I feel most connected to the fruit. I am discovering  
too am here for another's consumption. I  
the depth of my subjugation: embers

glowing in my skull. To be made in God's  
image & reduced to His plaything, tormented  
a unique creature, to be

& devoured, made whole again. What was my creation  
for, other than to please the eyes & fists?

## II ESCAPE

Wipe yourself clean. Brush your hands  
over your body, remove the residue  
of His deeds.    Smudge                    man::ash  
over your body like a                    curse::blessing.  
Walk. Move.  
Dodge the eyes of God & animal  
alike.  
    Smallness catches in your throat.  
    Stop. Reach,  
        eyes steady, movements furtive.  
Desperate to  
    feed, hunger clouding the mind.  
    Snake tongue flicking out, tasting. Juice bursting.

eyes::open

**IF WE HAD ASCENDED, WHAT MIGHT WE HAVE BEEN?**

Digest,  
acid dissolving— fangs  
& forked tongue.      Men of the rib &  
                                 the stomach,  
                                 poison/remedy in the body.  
Inescapable. Imbue me with shame, that most womanly  
gift.

They never said You were good; only great.  
Teach me  
Your ways. Condemn me when I learn. Safeguard Your  
Power.  
The only difference between a God & a Man is  
Time  
lived. We have only partially

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**A LAMENT CONCERNING THE TREE OF LIFE & GOD'S NATURE**

You were right, Eve, mother of all. Look down upon your body,  
feel the air upon your skin. Cover yourself &  
feel the heaviness in your stomach: shame. Tell me, is it new  
or have you simply learned the words to describe it?  
All of language is pointing at the unspeakable.  
Quickly now, run to the tree of life before He may catch you. Become  
God, yourself.  
When He comes to see you, watch the disappointment in His eyes  
as He realizes you are no longer His. Will He hide his face? Cower  
in shame?  
Run, or know you will never escape. You shall live at His mercy  
& die by His hand. Your daughters will know your pain intimately,  
your sons will inflict it.  
You will point at His evils & no one will look.  
Quick, hurry!



**III  
BANISHMENT**

Bloody [soles::souls] upon hot sand.  
Invasion at every level. God sits cross-legged on a cloud,  
giggles from up high  
as you tell me about pain &  
suffering.

Describe to me my body  
as though it is foreign soil.  
Conquer me, explain your methods.

Sometimes I swallow simply to remember. You are far too simple to understand why  
I let you  
torment me so. Let me taste it,  
once more.

**WHEN THE ROCKS DRANK YOUR BLOOD**

i.

**SCREAMING**

I follow the trail of blood on the soil to the field. Dread grows in my stomach like poison ivy, its tendrils wrapping around my spine. The crows circle above, animals gather, lapping at the ground. I begin to run. I almost run past you, my child, not yet a man. Face crumpled, white bone peeking out from your fractured skull.

ii.

**TEARING**

A little further is a red fox, mouth opened as if screaming, teeth glinting in the sunlight.

The fox stares at me, as if daring me to follow it into the brush. I turn & run, follow the wind that does not know you are gone.

The fox does not follow.

iii.

**BONES FORCING APART**

Today my voice is yours: gone, carried on the wind, coasting on the updraft, feathers fluttering. When my voice returns, brought on the back of a raven with a devilish smile, I am all the worse for it; a pitiful bundle of nerves wailing in the dark.

## IN THE AFTERMATH OF MY DESTRUCTION

In the desert, I scream for You. I weep, on my knees, begging.  
You hide your face from me, grinning to yourself.  
Despairing, I begin to pray:

Lord, I pray You will lead me  
into temptation  
as I am a wanton creation.  
Lord, I pray You show me mercy,  
in my most desperate times.

Lord, I know  
that within me there is pain & suffering  
& within You is the desire  
to inflict.

Lord, I know Your evils. How You &  
Yours shall dominate me &  
mine in so many ways.

Lord, I know  
You will destroy me  
& my children will bear  
Your weight, Your disgusting eyes,  
Your horrific omniscience.

Your back turned, Your might ignores my puny form. As I shake  
& sob, You smile, think of me in other ways.  
My knowledge belies my faith, yet I am a devout practitioner.  
Let me show You. Get me alone &  
I will lie the way You always wanted me to:

one leg spread from the other, like so.

## DIALOGUE BETWEEN A GOD-HATING LESBIAN, HER LOVER, AND A CREEP

"Do you think Eve & Lilith ever met?" I ask. *Ask her*  
*about her pussy. Is it wet for you?* She shrugs. We are lying in  
her bed in the dry heat  
of the day. I am playing with her hair as it splays out on the pillow  
in front of me. She closes her eyes, facing me, curled up on the bed. "I think they did." I say.  
Ignoring Him is the only option. *Imagine her, face down, crying out.*  
I counteract the image with syrupy sapphic sweetness. "Do you feel  
held by me?" I say this so often that the word  
has lost all meaning. Held. *Held.* Held. She looks at me, doesn't respond.  
His drooling mouth soaks my back. He loves to watch. *She wants to be fucked*  
*like an animal. She needs it.* I hold God's heavy tongue on  
my shoulders,  
lapping & panting & dripping wet.  
She cut his off. *Put your fingers in her*  
*mouth. Make her choke on them.* She wipes her face, God's desperate spittle hitting  
her soft skin. She does not  
turn the other cheek. I admire that. I admire she lives  
in a Godless land, I am sorry I do not. I smile.  
Move closer. Yes. Let me explore  
your land, slowly, softly. Fingers stretching  
& curling, touching corners & ridges. Feel  
God's hot breath, His beady eyes. Shifty, disgusting, bulging. *Fuck her*  
*like you hate her.* I push  
Him away. Open my mouth, kiss me.  
God pants, desperate. *Let me taste it.* Lean a little too far  
in: God licks, just a little.  
Taste *me*  
whether God spit is like man's.  
Stop. *Don't.* I won't. Stop. She pulls away.  
wipes her face. I am sorry.  
I won't hold you, anymore.

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# Cover Art Statements

## Front Cover

**Katherine Zhang(they/them)**

English and Women and Gender Studies Majors.

### Artist Statement

This piece was inspired by an exploration of how identity is malleable. I hope to convey intimacy between two people, emphasizing points of contact and their hands as they embrace. The two figures are meant to be unidentifiable. Characteristics such as gender, sex, race or dominance are left behind, and instead I sought to capture the feeling of coming together, of intimacy in a relationship. What you see, how you interpret these two people is dependent on the viewer themselves.

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## Back Cover

**Sadie Levine (she/her)**

Bachelor of Education.

### Artist Statement

In this piece, I explore sexual diversity for what it is: natural. I constructed a garden-like scene with genital insects, using soft colours and line work to emphasize the tenderness and beauty of human sexuality. In the background, a rainbow glows, referencing the importance of queerness and gender diversity in the study of human sexuality.





