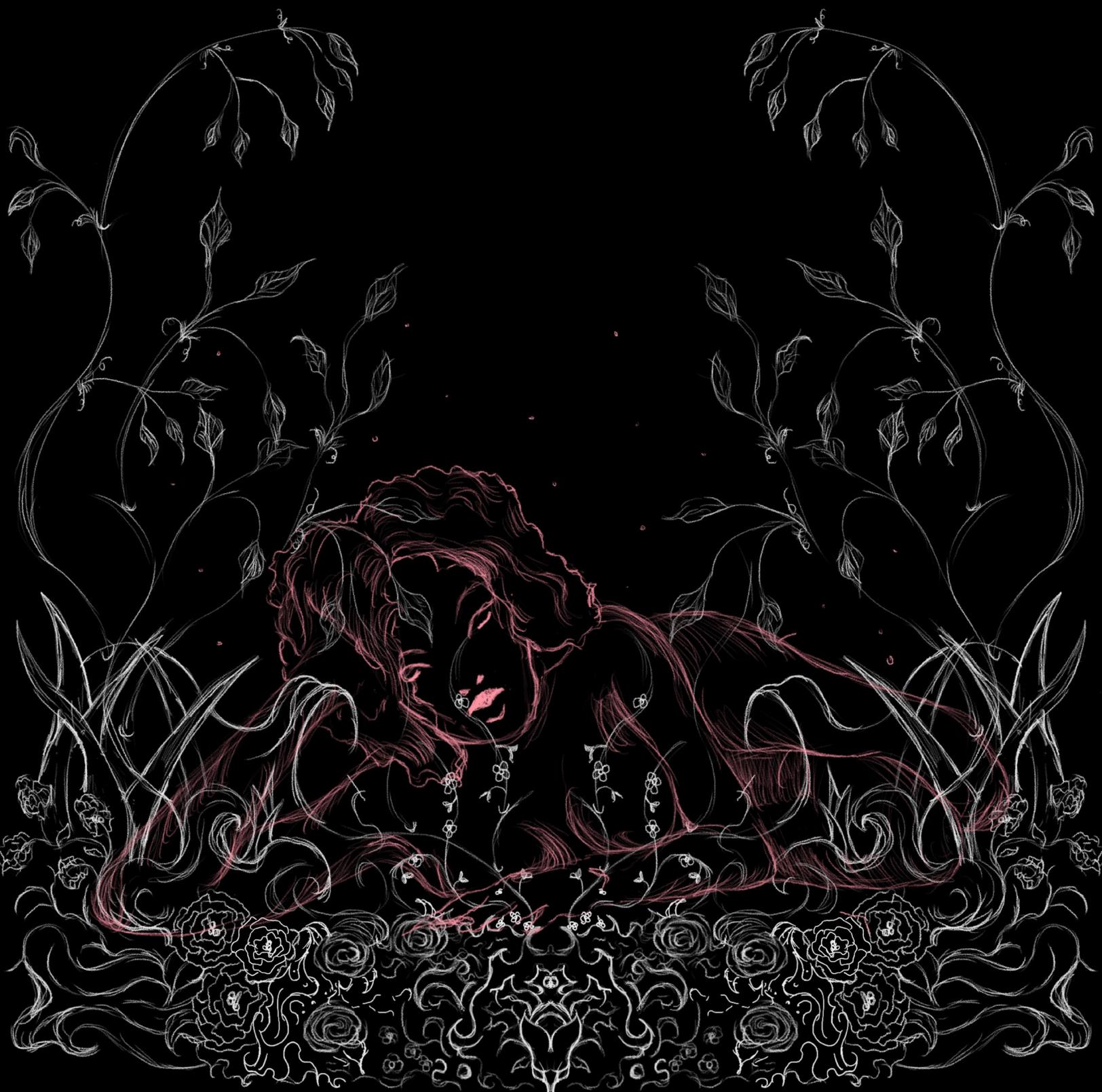


LEGACY

OXFORD WOMEN IN BUSINESS

insight magazine





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Oxford Women in Business



www.oxwib.com

LEGACY

editor's letter

Insight Magazine used to be a small product of OxWIB's Marketing Team, but they made the new role of Editor-in-Chief to elevate the magazine to excellence. A few days after my successful interview, I had one of my graphic nightmares, the kind I shouldn't detail. But after over-explaining every detail to a friend, they warned me that I was "selling [my] soul to the corporate world." I have always been very intimidated by OxWIB and cautious of its participation in a capitalist system, and so this felt like a prophecy for my involvement.

2020 was a wake up call for many of us to take social action. I've never really known how to do this meaningfully, but creating open-conversation sounded like a good start. Inspired by the relaxed setting of the Oxford Feminist Society's Liberation & Liquor discussions — where people aren't judged for their vocabulary, their ability to 'articulate' themselves or the facts and figures they can remember off the bat — I wanted to provide safe and accessible spaces for people to interact and learn from each other. And so I realised LEGACY, which is all about creating a better world for the next generation, without the incessant drive for immortalisation. There is a Greek proverb: 'A society grows great when old women plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in.'

It is not enough to envision utopia, we must build it ourselves. If you want an ethically sourced and fun wardrobe, you need time. Time to curate, time to experiment, time to grow. Likewise, it takes time to create a LEGACY. Whether culpable or blameless, we are ignorant, and always have more to learn. To grow our garden we must do the work. We must unlearn our discriminatory phobias and stigmas, our social constructs of gender and worth. If we want to do this, we must engage with others compassionately and keep an open mind.

OxWIB is a learning society, ready to listen, change, and act, wanting and willing to become more sustainable and empowering. I am wary of people who promise 'empowerment', as so often 'empowerment' is translated as academic, social, or financial achievement. But I have seen that OxWIB is more than creating 'equal job opportunity', and is ready to be even more so — what with the expansion of The Mentorship Scheme, that will focus on confidence building and encouraging contentment in all walks of life, rather than just focusing on building skill sets & seizing opportunities to 'climb the ladder'.

Learning is a constant state of being, and in this issue of Insight, there has been a proactive effort to eradicate gender exclusionary and ableist language. OxWIB invites all women (trans, cis and intersex) and non-binary people, including those with complex gender identities who associate in some way with the term woman, as well as those who feel they experience structural misogyny, into our community. My membership of Neurodiversity at Oxford has been fundamental in the genesis of LEGACY, as it showed me what a community should be like from the ground up. I have formed many special connections there and as such I am honoured to feature several contributions from fellow members, guests and leaders.

As a queer and neurodiverse British Indian woman, tired of the lack of representation and progression for marginalised peoples, I wanted to completely reinvent and revolutionise Insight, and purposefully give marginalised peoples the opportunity to articulate and express themselves on their own terms, not just amplifying, but also celebrating their unique voices which have been historically silenced. These voices were consciously sought out because we need to not just normalise our nonconformity and unconventionality, but celebrate it. Masculine-identifying people have contributed to this issue, to encourage allyship, and raise awareness about intersectional issues such as queer and race discrimination and persecution.

Choosing a font takes time and dedication. I had initially picked Afrah Light and paired it with Times New Roman, but I reconsidered, and fell in love with Century Gothic, an easy to read and dyslexic friendly font. After organising EXHIBITION001 with an acquaintance turned dear friend, Kesena Berry, it was only natural to ask her to create an illustration for LEGACY. Something which would visually encompass all the things this edition seeks to achieve, with elegance and sophistication. Kes' illustrations are simply beautiful, and invite you into the world I was hoping to build. I want this magazine to become its own living being, something that is outside of ourselves, something everlasting, a community where marginalised individuals can thrive creatively.

I've been working intimately with all our contributors and it has been a magical experience. A demanding and exhausting, but incredibly rewarding experience. Brought on for my creative vision, I had no prior experience in editing or

design. As such, I have had many, many breakdowns trying to figure out Adobe Indesign. But I am elated to present to you the final handiwork: a kaleidoscope of culture, a tapestry embroidered with diverse and unique stories, and a grimoire of international collaborations with creatives based in India, California, Barbados, Canada, Arizona and Brazil.

This intimate collaborative process will manifest in our relaxed environment launch event where contributors and readers will have a chance to connect and learn from one another.

Trying to pick just one piece out of our 45 incredible contributions was not an easy feat. But I am thrilled to announce that the winner of the Editor's Choice Award is Kelly Frost.

This magazine would not have been physically made without my small and sturdy network of support. Thank you Aminah for proofreading OxWIB interviews on investing, and certainly, thank you Clara, for being my constant source of help and encouragement. In the last five days, Clara has spent at least thirty-five hours as my sounding board: proofreading (which can be a tedious and tiring task), organising my time and priorities (which I never have in order), validating and assuring me when I felt overwhelmed (I felt incredibly overwhelmed), and cooking all of my meals (a lot).

And of course, I thank each contributor for playing an integral part in this project. I anticipate the blossoming of the garden we have created, perhaps in time for us to enjoy our flowers.

With love,
Eulalia Marie
Xx

You can find me on
Instagram @greetingsextraterrestrials
Instagram @u.lal.ya
Twitter @loopylalia



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Creation of the OxWIB Legacy: Our Presidents

by Dora Marshall

OxWIB was founded in 2008 by Sarah Ashby, a second year E&M student who held many of the same aims that we do today. She wanted to provide a space for women helping women in the world of business, to provide a platform for inspirational women to inspire the next generation of women leaders and broaden the meaning of business. OxWIB would not be the society it is today without the wonderful women who came before us.

Why did you set up OxWIB?

Firstly, there was an obvious gap in the market at the time for a society dedicated to supporting women interested in business. I was part of the Oxford Entrepreneurs committee in first year and even though I really enjoyed the events being run and networking opportunities, I felt a platform for aspiring women to connect and hear from other inspirational women was much needed. Secondly, I was interested in exploring different career opportunities and wanted to learn more about setting up and running a business. My first speaker for example was Essie Weingarten who founded Essie Cosmetics.

Sarah Ashby

(Founding President 2008—2009)



How did you go about getting started?

The idea came out of a conversation with the Oxford Entrepreneurs' president at the time, who was very supportive of creating a new society based around women and business. I quickly set about forming a small committee of like minded women and we spent lots of time brainstorming in cafes! I used the Oxford Entrepreneurs platform to launch the society and recruit new members.

What did you do in your time as OxWIB president?

Well, first and foremost, founded the society! The two key first steps were recruiting members and deciding on the right methods of engagement, whether that be networking drinks, guest talks, Q&A sessions etc.

What did you want your legacy to be?

The society itself is my legacy. I am so proud of what it has become and grateful to all the amazing women who have been a part in helping it grow.

What are you doing now and how did OxWIB help you get there?

I am a senior finance director at ASDA and oversee all of the clothing and general merchandise business. OxWIB helped me change my view on my career options after university and I turned down an M&A banking job to go to Procter and Gamble, where I started my career as a commercial finance manager for Gillette. I decided I wanted to learn how a business works from the inside and the people and companies I met through OxWIB helped me to form that view. I haven't looked back!

What advice would you give to our OxWIB members and committee?

Behind every successful woman is a tribe of women who have got her back. I put a lot of my success down to the women in my life: my mother, my friends, my mentors,

my women bosses and now my daughters. Women are amazing and the best thing you can do is support each other, instead of tearing each other down.

What do you think the future of OxWIB is?

I am excited to see where the society might go and how each new committee will drive it forward. I would love for OxWIB to play an even greater role with alumni in helping to connect women both at Oxford and after Oxford.

Three other OxWIB presidents have shared their experience and legacy from their OxWIB days. Emma Radford (2010), Rebecca Gingell (2010), and Carolyn Hou (2013).

What did you do in your time as OxWIB president?

Emma: As OxWIB president, building relationships with potential sponsors, growing the membership base of the still young society, and hosting valuable and interesting events for members were the key activities I focused on. Probably the most memorable event was a Panel Discussion that OxWIB hosted on the role of women in business journalism. We were lucky enough to have a formidable panel of Oxford alumnae join us for the evening, including Hannah Kuchler (an FT journalist) and Rowenna Davis (journalist & political commentator). I'd booked a lecture room in Brasenose College to host the event and hoped for decent attendance but was blown away by the crowd who showed up — we could have filled a room twice the size.

Rebecca: The term I was president went by in a blur of networking events, CV workshops and 'send-to-all' emails via groupspaces, the now-defunct system we used to manage members. OxWIB was growing

rapidly, and Michaelmas seemed to be the busiest term for companies descending on Oxford to recruit undergrads. We had more sponsors than we had ever had before, predominantly banks and consultancies, each wanting to host several events per term. These were popular, but we were still figuring out the right balance of sponsor vs 'home-grown' events to give members a balance in career insights.

Rebecca Gingell
(President Michaelmas 2010)



Carolyn: We already had an established speaker programme and social calendar, but I wanted to build onto that by offering practical skills workshops. For instance, we partnered with students in the Computer Science department and hosted a "Coding Bootcamp for Women" at the Jam Factory. We had anthropologists, political scientists, and historians spend half the day learning about the world of computer science.

What did you want your legacy to be?

Emma: In the early days, OxWIB was a small group of fantastic and driven Oxford women. I'd like to think that my time as President helped the society to find its feet and helped to set OxWIB up for the success it sees today. It's amazing to me to see how much the society has grown and I'm excited to watch the society and its committee continue to open doors for talented women at Oxford today who may not have previously considered a career in business.

Emma Radford
(President Hilary 2010)



Rebecca: I came to OxWIB as a member, to learn more about different jobs, and found the networking events and opportunities to chat with other members very helpful. As president, I wanted to ensure that all members had that experience, whatever their chosen career. This meant building up the society to offer a diverse range of events, and putting in place a committee that could cope with the increasing effort of running a society that was useful and, hopefully, fun to be part of.

Carolyn: I was inspired to help members develop new skill sets and interests outside of their studies to become more well-rounded individuals and have a broader understanding of the world around them. I'm thrilled to see that almost a decade later OxWIB is still hosting these workshops – I would have loved to join the "Storytelling" workshop!

What are you doing now and how did OxWIB help you get there?

Emma: I'm currently working in the tech industry as a Director of Product Management at Cambridge Mobile Telematics in Boston, MA. I started my career on the trading floor at Goldman Sachs in London before moving into tech startups and then pursuing an MBA at Harvard Business School. I believe my leadership experience at OxWIB was instrumental in my success in getting an offer from GS back in 2010 (when the 2008 Financial Crisis was still seriously impacting graduate recruitment), and then again played a crucial role in my admission to HBS (my interviewer even brought up

OxWIB). Attending HBS helped me accelerate my career, move countries and changed the course of my life — something I believe my involvement with OxWIB laid the foundations for all those years before.

Rebecca: I'm currently finance and operations director for Meshworks, an Oxford-based Orthopaedics startup making custom 3D-printed titanium implants. I took a circuitous route to get here, via several cities and industries including banking, commodities trading, strategy consulting, and engineering. OxWIB certainly helped me get my start — I interviewed for my first internship during my term as OxWIB president, and when I arrived at my interview, I realised I had met the interviewer the previous week at an event we had put on, which felt lucky!

Carolyn: I was a grad student in Social Anthropology and never took a business course or economics course as part of my studies. However, I always had an entrepreneurial drive and being part of OxWIB allowed me to bridge my two interests – the social sciences with business. Today, I have my own business providing research and strategy consulting for companies looking to create new products and services based on a deep understanding of people. My time at OxWIB was crucial for building my business savvy and for giving me the confidence to work as an anthropologist in the business world.

Carolyn Hou
(President Trinity 2013)



What do you think the future of OxWIB is?

Emma: OxWIB serves an important role in highlighting the range of possible career paths open to women. Having a space where ambitious women can meet, forge connections and support one another in their career journeys is important not only while at Oxford but beyond. I'm still in touch with several women who were involved in OxWIB at the same time and some were even at my wedding. I'm excited to see how OxWIB continues to grow its impact and find new ways to support and serve ambitious Oxford women thinking about what comes after their degree.

Rebecca: Careers societies like OxWIB play a huge role in helping students decide what direction to go as they leave university. Whilst your first job is unlikely to be the sector you end up in, it's still probably the biggest decision most students have made in their lives, and most jobs are difficult to comprehend without speaking to people who do them. Any society that connects students with people in the workplace willing to share their insights provides a valuable service, which will only become more important as the job landscape changes more rapidly and the types of work available begin to shift.

Additionally, OxWIB's focus on women's experiences in the workplace is still, sadly, an important one. Despite representing over half of university graduates, women remain a small minority of employees in many sectors, particularly at management level. The reasons for this are complex and systemic, and won't be solved by university societies alone; but for as long as this imbalance remains, the work that OxWIB does to connect senior women in various sectors with women just starting out in the careers to offer insights, tips, and reality checks for the wider world, will be vital and necessary.

Carolyn: I would love to see a stronger alumni network at OxWIB. There is a real opportunity for OxWIB to facilitate and strengthen these relationships especially as so many of us are international and

living outside of the U.K.

Our current president, Clara Marks, wanted her term to centre on social impact.

So Clara, what do you want your legacy to be and how are you making sure this turns into a reality?

When thinking about legacy, it was important for me to re-evaluate what OxWIB was created for, what it functions as now, and what it could be in the future. Sarah's initial aims for the society are still a point of focus for the committee today, but I hope we have also moved beyond that to become a community which is creating an impact locally and globally. The purpose of creating the new Outreach Team came from winning the UK Women's Society of the Year Award, and pitching to the judges for the overall Society of the Year Award. Whilst we didn't win the award; we placed third; we established a new dimension of OxWIB. The money we did receive is going to be invested into establishing a mentorship scheme with local schools. Our mentorship scheme for Oxford students has been a massive success, and we wanted to replicate this experience for children in Oxford. Establishing links with the local community will also help to narrow the "town-gown" divide. It will be a learning journey alongside the schools and charities we partner with, but our wish is that over time, this will become a formalised scheme delivered by OxWIB members in local state schools.

The last two years have been an opportunity for OxWIB to consider our position and privilege and I hope that it is evident we have been addressing the intersectionality of feminism. It is a reality that things are unequal for women in the workplace but there are other forms of discrimination which we must be aware of and advocate against: classism, racism, homophobia and transphobia being a non-exhaustive list. Our legacy must not be ignorant of those who also need help climbing up the ladder, or breaking the glass ceiling.

Another massive consideration within legacy is sustainability. In the past stash items have been poor-quality, cheap and largely disposable items. This term, with renewed focus and conversations on creating a sustainable legacy, we have decided to purchase our committee stash from SolidariTee and create custom illustrated cotton tote bags which will be cherished by our members. Moving forward, we will have to think about sustainability, including who we partner with and platform. To start off the process, we've put together a Sustainability Taskforce, headed by Dora Marshall, who will produce a set of goals and a timeline for implementation.

Creating a legacy takes time. It will probably be years before OxWIB is the community it could be, and by then, I'm sure there will be more considerations and changes to be made! The key is to listen, learn and relearn, in the hopes that we are on a trajectory which is heading in a sustainable, impact-driven and intersectional direction.

Clara Marks
(President Trinity 2022)



OxWIB Stands in SolidariTee

Photographed by Alex Boardman



Beth Molyneux, head representative of the SolidariTee Oxford team, reached out to OxWIB during the vacation, inviting us to participate in the 'Stand in SolidariTee' initiative. We thought this was an amazing opportunity to use our funding in a more socially impactful way and purchased all forty of our committee members a SolidariTee as our termly stash item.

SolidariTee is an entirely student-run, international charity which operates on regional teams at universities across the world (mostly focussed in the UK) to better uphold the rights of those forced to flee their homes and migrate in vulnerable situations. They fundraise for grants to NGOs and qualified experts working on legal aid and translation services, the most forms of support, with the potential to make an enormous long-term difference to the lives of those who have fled violence and persecution, enabling them to access the rights to work, housing and healthcare, and build lives in safety and peace in their new host country. SolidariTee raises awareness about global displacement and the 'refugee crisis' through events and campaigns, and the bulk of their fundraising is done via the sale of unique SolidariTees. The climate crisis disproportionately impacts refugees and directly causes displacement, so SolidariTee takes steps to minimise the carbon footprint and waste produced by our shirts, which are sustainably and ethically manufactured (100% organic since 2020) and feature designs based on artwork by refugees themselves.

Find out more about SolidariTee Oxford at <https://www.oxfordstudent.com/2022/05/02/interview-with-beth-molyneux-solidaritee-head-rep-for-oxford/>

Website www.solidaritee.org.uk
Regional Facebook Page @SolidariTeeOxford
National Facebook and Instagram Page @teesofsolidaritee

The Evolution of Our Mentorship Scheme

by Nirali Jain & Alexia Lowe

The role-model effect: seeing people of marginalised identities become leaders and take charge of their ambitions and futures in both their personal and professional lives statistically increases the likelihood for other adults and children of marginalised identities to follow suit.

We have recently begun to observe an increase in the representation of women in leadership positions. Mentorship is a key tool in empowering women and other marginalised individuals across all sectors. According to a 2021 Forbes article, “Women Need Mentors Now More Than Ever”, both mentees and mentors who have participated in a mentorship scheme increase their chances of being promoted in the workplace.

Oxford thrives on its traditions and history — it is home to numerous household names, key thinkers, innovators, and researchers. Our Mentorship Scheme aims to nurture our Oxford community by forging a connection between those who have already had the chance to lay down their legacy, and those who are just setting off on their journey. We are also expanding the community by inviting mentors from outside Oxford who are willing to support students and recent graduates.

The scheme allows students to connect with professionals across various sectors and international backgrounds. They will provide advice, share real-life experiences and help them gain their initial footing in the professional world. When asked about her experience with The Mentorship Scheme, Caitlin, a former mentee and the current President-Elect of OxWIB, replied, *“When going into The Mentorship Scheme, my main goal was just to get some advice on my CV and maybe make a good connection with someone in my industry of choice. At that point I had my heart set on a particular internship with a large company and so needed some advice getting into that industry. However, that all changed when I met my mentor, Lauren Murrell, CEO and Co-Founder of By Sarah London.”*

The Mentorship Scheme is a learning opportunity for both mentees and the mentors. Each round lasts eight weeks and is designed to encourage four regular meetings which allow the mentor-mentee pair to learn about each other’s backgrounds, discuss career ambitions, and then take key steps such as reviewing CVs and applications. Lauren Murrell said, *“I loved to see Caitlin’s confidence grow and showcase her skills more fully in her CV. It reminded me of how important it is to support others and hold a mirror to their skills and talents. [My favourite experience was] reading Caitlin’s report and presentation on a discrete research task I had set. I was so proud of her excellent work!”*

The regularity of our scheme allows mentees to learn from a new mentor each round, and for mentors to

guide several students as well. Several pairs forge relationships that outlive the duration of the scheme; Caitlin continues to stay in touch with her mentor stating, *“Since The Mentorship Scheme ended, I have been lucky enough to meet Lauren on a more casual basis whilst she has been in Oxford and will hopefully be doing so again in the near future. The scheme has helped me in so many ways. Not only did it open many doors into a career I never thought I’d be able to get into, but it gave me far more confidence in myself and in the knowledge that my passion is what matters most. I will forever be grateful for what this scheme has done for me and would encourage anyone and everyone to apply.”*

The Mentorship Scheme is one of OxWIB’s newer initiatives, launched in Trinity 2020 with Maia Salmon as President, it is now on its fifth cycle this Trinity 2022. While the initial rounds depended primarily on committee members seeking out mentors via social media platforms, OxWIB’s success across the UK has seen the scheme grow rapidly via word of mouth, our frequent networking events and many mentors participating in several rounds. We have gathered 74 mentors this fifth round, and have representation in a plethora of sectors ranging from finance, marketing and entrepreneurship to legal, social action and technology. This iteration of the scheme emphasises the importance of allyship, giving applicants the choice to opt-in to the possibility of a masculine-identifying mentor.

The majority of the mentorship scheme has taken place throughout the pandemic’s many lockdowns, meaning that it was developed to facilitate effective and long-lasting relationships regardless of the mentor’s location. Of course, with restrictions easing up, OxWIB has adapted the scheme to incorporate in-person events, giving a chance for mentees to interact with each other and even meet a few mentors in person. We also hope that such in person events will contribute to fostering longer-term relationships between mentors and mentees. The Mentorship Scheme will culminate in a networking opportunity which will provide mentors and mentees an opportunity to learn from one another and exchange insight.

As many of our mentors return for multiple rounds, current mentees will be able to connect with previous mentees who share interests in similar fields. This will allow current mentees to gain insight into the job application process as a graduate, as well as receiving advice from a more experienced professional who can provide a differing perspective on the job application process.

We are already starting to see the legacy of the OxWIB Mentorship Scheme and in the near future, we hope to expand and develop it, breaking glass ceilings, not just for ourselves but for others too.



The Future of Our Mentorship Scheme

by Hope Kelly

Illustrated by Haylee Cheam

At OxWIB we want to continue building the path towards real change. Real change, however, cannot be achieved without recognising our privileges as Oxford University students. To create a brighter future we must acknowledge the power we have and find ways to use it.

This term OxWIB created new roles. The Local Outreach Officer was among them, and I am the first to take it on. The role arose out an understanding that while the importance of supporting Oxford students cannot be underestimated, we can certainly expand that support; we must empower those less privileged than us. Oxford University is an incredible place, but it isn't for everyone. There's no reason why someone should not be afforded the opportunities OxWIB offers simply because they do not go to our university.

The moment I discovered this role, I knew it would be for me. As an individual who came from a poorly performing state-school, it was easy to notice the differences between myself and students from more privileged schools. They had an unfaltering confidence in their ability, as if they had some constant self-sufficient source of assurance that they deserved to be here and that they could achieve whatever they put their minds to. I want to enable disadvantaged students to feel that way too.

The purpose of my role is to find ways to provide to our local community the opportunities OxWIB creates for our members. This involves identifying

local state schools with the highest percentage of free school meals students and of children with English as a second language, and forming a long-lasting relationship with them. Starting this term, we will deliver mentoring and confidence workshops, ultimately empowering young and vulnerable students to recognise their power and be unafraid to dream. The delivery of this programme will be planned in collaboration with the schools we reach out to, and will be a constant learning journey. We acknowledge that empowerment looks different for everyone, our goal is to help young people feel confident irrespective of a job title, position or salary. We want to help students figure out what it is they want to do, and enable them to get there. By getting feedback from the school teachers and students we hope to create a structured programme which could be replicated by other societies in other schools.

As a society that is dedicated to addressing gender inequality, our scheme will naturally be a continuation of this work. There is no reason why gender inequality cannot be discussed with children. If anything, unlearning expectations and understanding allyship from masculine-presenting people *should* be discussed with children, because stereotypes and prejudices are taught from birth — just look at the toys children are given to play with! By addressing these issues with them, we aim to break down barriers, enabling and empowering these young people to imagine their own legacy.

Teaching, Performing Arts & Interfaith Dialogue with Pat Mason

by Eulalia Marie



my last day at Saint Thomas More Primary School (2012)

Pat Mason started teaching in September 1975. Her teaching career didn't finish until 2019, but she retired in December 2015, after 21 years as the headteacher of St Thomas More, a Catholic primary school in Leicester.

Eulalia Marie, Pat's former student, invited her to a conversation with Hope Kelly, Clara Marks and Caitlin MacClay, to discuss the legacy she hoped to leave behind in the culture of the schools she taught in and in the minds and hearts of her pupils and staff.

Eulalia: Why did you get into teaching?

Pat: Well, I'm one of these boring people, Eulalia, it's something I've always wanted to do. **When I was very young, it was a toss-up between a nun and a teacher.**

I remember telling my primary school teacher at the time and her eyebrows went up to her forehead. It wasn't long before I realised I didn't really want to be a nun.

For me, it's the privilege of personally working with young people. Teaching is a real passion. **It's not a job, it's a vocation.** I

always asked my staff to tell me about a teacher that was special to them. It's all about personal connection, feeling like the teacher really cared about them, wanting to have their qualities and characteristics. I enjoy the keenness and the enthusiasm young children bring. Everyday

they're full of energy, they've forgotten if you told them off the day before, they're ready to learn. You've got to want to engage and support them.

Eulalia: You've accomplished a lot, do you think teaching came naturally to you?

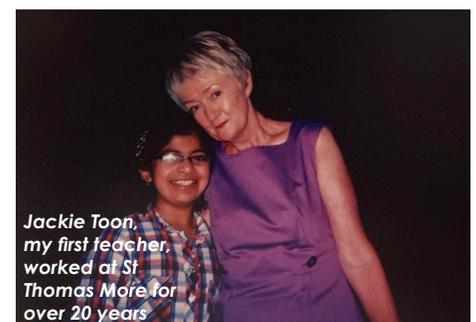
Pat: No, I think I must have been one of the worst teachers at first. I can always remember going into the chaotic dining hall and it remained chaotic, but when the deputy headteacher came in, there was silence. I thought, "How did she do that? How did she make that happen?"

Eulalia: As children, you spend most of your conscious life in school. I remember all of my teachers, and all the things they did for me as I slowly developed into an adult. My values definitely come from the way they selflessly stayed behind at breaktime to go over a maths question or

an essay together, who stayed behind after hometime to put on afterschool clubs, or who brought puppets into class every Friday for storytime because they genuinely just wanted us to have fun.

Pat: I've had teachers who haven't got those qualities, and I've thought, "Why are you in this job?" It's not a place to be if you don't really want to do it. There are bad days, when staff complain. I mean, there were days when we could all have easily said "Argh! I don't want to go back there again!" I had some tough schools sometimes. But I always knew that I loved it, and that teaching was the job for me. If you're complaining everyday then teaching is *not* the job for you. **You shouldn't be there trying to inspire people if you're not inspired yourself.** The children taught me as much as I taught them.

I really, honestly, loved the job, but it was all-time consuming. If you really want to teach well, then it occupies your life, and that's hard. It's hard on your partner and family, if you've got one. I know it was hard on my family. There are also times that you feel you've let the children down, when you couldn't give them the time that they really needed. But then I've got to remember that most of my pupils would say they had a really good experience.



Jackie Toon, my first teacher, worked at St Thomas More for over 20 years

Eulalia: I think teachers are really under-appreciated. Teaching isn't seen as a 'big' job, because it's not necessarily the most well-paid job. But teachers are definitely

the pillars of society. They need a raise.

Pat: A lot of people will say, "Well look at all the holidays you get." But, I didn't actually have much holiday, probably two weeks for the summer, because I spent the rest of the time preparing for the next year. There was always so much to do.

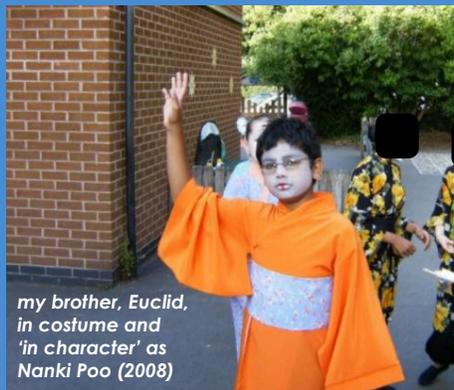
Eulalia: As a primary school, St Thomas More really thrived in performing arts. We had a production every year where our art teacher, Mrs Dunkley, and a classmate's parent would come and make a set from scratch. The stage was across from the dining hall so at lunchtimes we'd all be watching excitedly. It brought the whole school together. It was one of the things you anticipated as you went through the school years into Year 6: auditioning, being a part of the play, taking the script home.



Diana Dunkley, our art teacher, also worked at St Thomas More for over 20 years

Pat: To get excellence in academic subjects, you've got to have a creative curriculum. For me, that's what drives academic success. Children need such a broad and balanced curriculum, so at St Thomas More, alongside the academics, we prioritised music, art, drama and sports. We held those things as really important, and things every child should have the opportunity to be involved in. I took on the school productions myself, which was very difficult in the Summer Term, but the children got so much out of it. I saw so many blossom. You wouldn't have thought that they had those capabilities, on the stage, off the stage, they really came into their own. Look at your brother, playing his little guitar, he was Nanki Poo in Mikado!

Eulalia: He's still teased about that at Christmas!



my brother, Euclid, in costume and 'in character' as Nanki Poo (2008)

Pat: He was so shocked when I announced his name. It was so important to the children, they really took it seriously, it got boys singing and dancing. I remember one particular boy always thought he was so macho in Year 5. In Year 6, he came to me saying, "Mrs Mason, I want to be in the production this year. And if it's wearing makeup, wearing tights, singing? I'm your man." It was just hilarious. If you'd said to that child, "This is what we're going to do," in a normal lesson, he'd have said "No way." But with the production, everyone seized the opportunity to participate, to feel important. That was the feeling I wanted for the school: **everyone has gifts and talents, everyone has value. And as a school, we have to try and find what it is and celebrate it.**

Eulalia: Was it challenging to maintain a creative curriculum?

Pat: A lot of parents came to us enquiring about academic results. I had to make it very clear to them that while I was interested in SATs results, I was more interested in the child. If your child achieves a Level 1 and they worked really hard, then that's what's important; if they wanted the highest grades then they needed to check out Leicester Grammar. It was hard to maintain a creative curriculum when the National Curriculum was established because of the intense assessment and OFSTED critically reviewing everything.

When I came to St Thomas More I knew what OFSTED were looking for, but preparation was hard on the staff. In 2008 I got the school to Outstanding in every area, and then we were left alone. Then, I

could guide the curriculum I really wanted the children to have. Yet I was mentoring the headteacher at one school nearby where they were in Special Measures, and they had to teach a very tight curriculum of Maths & English, with very little thrown in.

Eulalia: At St Thomas More there was also a special focus on interfaith dialogue, an effort to learn about other religions and communities in a fun and interactive way. I cherish those memories, I've learned from them and utilise them in adulthood.

Pat: I thought that, in a multi-cultural and multi-faith city like Leicester, **we were doing the children a disadvantage if we didn't teach them about other faiths and cultures.** I had a friend who taught at Uplands School, which had approximately a 99.9% Muslim population. I said to her that my pupils could benefit from their friendship. She said, "Wouldn't it be good if we started an interfaith dialogue?" So we started with the Year 6 pupils, pairing them with a student from Uplands, to learn about each other's religion and culture through emails and school trips. We would visit each other's school, each other's local places of worship, and share meals.

Eulalia: Coming to Oxford was a weird experience, I'm not used to not having a culturally sensitive cohort. I didn't realise how much St Thomas More had emphasised this. LEGACY is about amplifying voices and stories that are essential for building a community. After your discussion on Pope Francis' TED Talk, which imagined the human race as an ecosystem, building a community has been my dream. Could you describe the community you worked to create?

Pat: It is encompassed in our mission statement, "Love one another as I have loved you." We're all equal in the eyes of God and everyone in our school community has an important part to play. To me, Gospel values mean love and care and respect for all. You might meet people of different cultures and you must respect them even if you

don't understand them. Every student we had, every member of staff, we made a point to get to know them, make them feel important and part of our school community. I wanted people to feel welcome, safe and secure, to feel comfortable to make mistakes and not fear judgement or humiliation. When I first arrived at St Thomas More, the environment was very different: children were put outside the staffroom door and every teacher who passed them would tell them off. There's no need for that. So I wanted to create a culture of trying to live out our Gospel values in action. It took years, it doesn't just happen overnight.

Clara: I feel like I could listen to you for hours; your values really resonate with me. Until this conversation, I didn't realise how much OxWIB is about teaching. We put on events and workshops, but this is all actually teaching. Now that you've retired, how do you leave things behind? **How do you detach yourself from the legacy you've created?** Especially when creating it can be so all-consuming.

Pat: I mentored at least 18 headteachers in my career. In one school, the headteacher I was mentoring was the 14th headteacher of their school in the time that I'd been at St Thomas More's. That was one of the problems in their school, there wasn't continuity. Each person came in wanting to change it, put their stamp on it, and move on. I was not only the longest serving primary school headteacher, I was also the oldest. In meetings they'd do that song and dance, "Anybody in their 50s, put your hands up." Lots of people put their hands up. "Anybody over 60?" I put my hand up and everybody stared at me. I don't think my staff believed I was ever going to retire.

I started mentally preparing myself for retirement two years before I retired. I knew I'd miss the children and the school. When I did retire, I got talked into an executive headteacher role, supporting other headteachers for two days a week at two schools. I absolutely loved it. One

of the schools had a completely different demographic to St Thomas More's; about 78% of students were on free school meals. It was a real eye opener. The head had just up and left abruptly, so the deputy had to take on the role. She had been dealing with it alone for two months when I came to help, and I stayed with her for two years. What was so sad was that children with special needs hadn't been helped, children with English as a second language weren't being helped, and there was nobody to help families with social problems. We had to start from scratch. There were teachers who shouldn't have been teaching — I was horrified with some of the lessons I saw, their attitudes to teaching and children. But with two days a week, it's so hard to really turn things around. One of the things we did was terminate contracts with three teachers. We employed a full-time social worker and I begged an educational psychologist from Leicester, one of my old pupil's parents, to visit one day a week. I hope the headteacher felt much more confident by the end: we'd got things in place and got people appointed; we'd started the road to improvement. She cried when I left, she was so grateful.

After that it was easier to say goodbye. But I continued mentoring headteachers until just before the lockdown. I'm still a governor of a school, so I haven't left teaching completely. **You don't leave things behind.**

Caitlin: I had a really strong connection with my teachers, I was really lucky. I try to lead very much like they taught. Now that I've acknowledged it, it's definitely going to be at the forefront of my mind. I can look back on my favourite leaders and think "How would they have solved this situation?" I take on their presence.

Pat: If you're a leader of anything you have to get involved with the day to day lives of the people you're leading. You have to find ways to help everyone to understand what you're teaching and feel understood themselves.

Hope: I went to a disadvantaged school similar to the one you described and I never really got to know any of my teachers, they weren't there for long. They would come, work, then go to a better school, to work there. It never felt like they were there for you. I had one teacher over five years who connected with me. He really helped me; I'm still in contact with him now. He taught my brothers too. Teachers have so much power to shape someone, and that's why I wanted to do the work I'm doing now with OxWIB. Is there anything you think that needs to be addressed in schools where, for example, there's a higher percentage of children on free school meals?

Pat: It's getting the culture right. So many heads want to change things but don't teach their staff the right mindset or have high enough expectations of what their children are capable of. People will make prejudiced judgements about children's backgrounds, but all children deserve a real chance.

One of the first things I did when I became executive head was put on an extended staff meeting. I asked them, "What's good? What do we need to improve? I'm not going to be offended." It was amazing. They all found things they wanted to change. You need to nurture a culture of working together and doing the best for the children. For adults, a couple years isn't a long time, but for children, a couple years are ages. A whole year being stuck with a teacher who isn't interested in you is soul destroying.

You can make a difference, but I fully understand how challenging that is, and how much easier it was in a school like St Thomas More with mainly professional parents, governors and a church community. In a disadvantaged school, sometimes the parents don't even care much. It's hard to change that culture. But any leader should come into that school thinking, "How can we make it better for the people here."

Eulalia: You're a parent and a grandparent too — what kind of



wisdom do you try to impart on your granddaughter?

Pat: With my granddaughter, I'm not a teacher anymore, I'm a grandparent. If I tried to teach her it wouldn't be very productive. Parents 'don't know anything'. But I try to tell my granddaughter that life is for living, and you have to be appreciative of everything you have, to be positive. But it's hard to remain positive if you haven't

had positive experiences. I always tell her to be kind to people, we never know what challenges people have experienced and are experiencing. She's in a school where there's a lot of mockery going on towards people who are different. Mocking and ridicule isn't the way forward. I also tell her to make mistakes, learn from them, and try and move on.



Eulalia: I think this conversation has been so enlightening for everybody.

Pat: All the best to you all. I hope this grows from a little seed to something quite big. That people will want to read it, learn from it and, in time, contribute to it.

Women as Role Models — An Era of New Milestones

by Saachi Jain

The modern obscenities of gender discrimination are not finely woven threads. They are absolutely traceable. Even so, what is the best way to push back against a society that tells you “No, you can't do it”? What is one of the purest forms of rebellion? Doing it anyway.

Equal opportunity is the overarching objective, and it is fair to say that gender equality has become a more achievable reality over the past century. While progress is evident in the decreasing fertility rates of high, middle, and low income countries where women are both granted and fighting for access to education and employment, there are undeniable actualities which undermine this feeling of progress, for example the extreme restrictions on reproductive rights recently re-introduced in eleven American states.

As the word 'equality' earns a place in more legislation, company policies, and campaigns, every sign of gender disparity seems to be played off as a red herring. Each gendered gap in income levels, literacy rates, and ratios in governing systems is

down-played as an exception until someone realises it's systematic degradation.

At 61%, Rwanda has the greatest percentage of women-occupied seats in its parliament in the world (Pulitzer Center, 2019). What does it mean for our 'progressive' contemporary society if the catalyst for this representation was genocide? After the genocide of 1994, which wiped out much of the population of men, the country needed to reconstruct its economy and society. The only way to do so was to redefine what it meant to be a working Rwandan woman. After living in a strict patriarchal society where they were restricted to household jobs and a 'duty' to serve their husbands, women emerged as political leaders, landowners, and innovators in agriculture, the primary sector of employment.

Documents such as the 1995 *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* — the fruit of the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women — are key moments in recognizing what is required to overcome gender inequality. Adopted unanimously

by 189 countries, it is a visionary agenda detailing twelve critical areas that must be addressed to achieve and maintain gender non-discrimination. Even without knowing how the Declaration would pan out over the following decades, nations were motivated to carry on the slow-paced uphill journey, hoping to scale the mountain peak of gender equality.

Across the world, different levels of progress can be seen in terms of eradicating gender disparities in income levels, ownership rights, and education. Higher-income countries are and have historically been at an advantage in addressing gender equality, not only because they have more economic and political security, but they are also less burdened by poverty, climate disasters, and reliance on agricultural employment sectors. It is important to consider the historical origins of these advantages, from colonisation to the industrial revolutions, and modern exploitation of lower-income countries (LICs). Deep-rooted inequalities in global power dynamics have fueled the pattern of suppressed progress for poorer countries at the hands of the wealthy and their lack of accountability. Even so, these LICs are home to strong and resilient women who, without the means to social progress readily available, must carve out their own legacy. To understand the 'role of a woman', one must look past governmental policies and search for cases where, despite rocky interactions in the past, women and societal systems have learned to work symbiotically through adaptation and evolution.

Take Mariam Chabi Talata, Benin's first woman Vice-President. As a former teacher and school inspector, she is but one of a growing number of women succeeding in reaching higher office positions across Sub-Saharan Africa. Intending to create a domino effect of women's empowerment across her country, Talata pinpoints educating girls as Benin's greatest challenge and opportunity. "An educated woman is able to defend herself," she explained. "An educated woman is able to take charge of her life. An educated woman is able to participate in the management of her country." The path she is clearing for future generations of girls is boldly positive and essential. Yet, the association of the word 'feminist', in other words, 'equality', with her actions and values continues to 'engender suspicion among many of her colleagues' (The Guardian, 2022).

Close to Benin, the women of Cameroon are fighting to get the attention of their government. However, by repeatedly disregarding their concerns, authorities are also losing out on new perspectives

of their ongoing conflicts. Women are taking on roles as political activists, community influencers, members of separatist militias, and peacemakers. Paradoxically, the patriarchal parameters that dissociate women from hardship and conflict have enabled women peacemakers to gather without protest. Despite being one of the most affected groups in Cameroon's ongoing Anglophone Crisis; subjected to forced displacement, the loss of basic necessities and employment, and sexual abuse; they have succeeded in pushing for relief measures. Unfortunately, as their prominence has grown, so has intolerance towards them from government and separatists alike. In Cameroon, those in control have yet to realise the potential that women's empowerment holds to help achieve national reconciliation, political settlements, and 'sustainable peace' (The Guardian, 2022).

A study conducted by MIT across villages in India produced a statistical representation of the role-model effect (Forbes, 2012). In villages without women political leaders, parents were 45% less likely to expect a professional future for their daughters past secondary school. The girls themselves were 32% less likely to consider further educational aspirations. Conversely, in villages with local women's representation, girls were 25% more likely to achieve the same education as their boy peers. So it's fair to say that observing and interacting with women in positions of power increases the likelihood for other women and girls to follow suit.

Depending on our actions, the role model effect can fall into either a positive or negative feedback loop. On the one hand, more women may be provided institutional means to work their way up, setting up a path for others to increase representation. On the other hand, the discriminatory ratio in politics may continue to grow off-balance. Nevertheless, the road ahead is lined with catalytic milestones as women take on roles as vice-presidents, CEOs, and leaders of school clubs.

Recommended Reading

National Public Radio. 2022. It's The No. 1 Country For Women In Politics — But Not In Daily Life. [online] Available at: <<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2016/07/29/487360094/invisibilia-no-one-thought-this-all-womans-debate-team-could-crush-it>>

Solnit, R., 2022. Rebecca Solnit: 'Younger feminists have shifted my understanding'. [online] The Guardian. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/29/rebecca-solnit-younger-feminists-shift-understanding-give-new-tools>>

The Muse

Illustrated by Kesena Berry

*A society grows great
when old women plant trees
whose shade they know
they shall never sit in.*

— Greek Proverb



Kalpana Fitzpatrick on Demythologising Investing

by Xixi Birkinshaw

Kalpana Fitzpatrick is a financial journalist with nearly 20 years of experience. It was clear early in her career that she wanted to make financial advice accessible to the general public. Her passion for helping people improve their financial literacy and money management has led her to work for notable media outlets such as Cosmo, Good Housekeeping, the BBC and more. Her current position as the editor of the Money Edit and the wealth editor for women's lifestyle titles at Future PLC sees her continue to push for greater financial literacy amongst women to address the gender gap in personal finance and investment.

In this interview, Kalpana takes us through the common myths and misconceptions that stop people from investing, how to start investing with your spare change, what an ISA is and how to utilise it.

Can you tell us a bit about your background?

I've been a financial journalist for almost twenty years. I wasn't trying to be a financial journalist, just a journalist. I started at the Financial Times Group and I ended up writing about pensions and investment. I got really into personal finance and wanted to do more to help everyday people - anything about pensions, investing, money management. For a few years after, I freelanced and did some TV, radio, and podcasting. I still do a lot of that, but now I mainly focus on women's titles and introducing finance in those titles: Cosmo, other Hearst magazines, and a couple of columns on Future. I also edit the Money Edit's website, which is fairly new, and brings a mix of news and evergreen content to help people get better with money. I'm passionate about putting finance into the mainstream arena, so that it is accessible to everyone and not just the money pages of newspapers.

Regarding increase in accessibility, do you think social media has helped push this forward?

A mixed bag answer on that one. You'll find that there's a growing trend of financial advice on social media, and there are some good resources, spreading the message about the importance of finance and providing financial education and literacy. However, you need to be very careful navigating these resources: social media is a great place for scammers to target people. There are people who'll lead you down the wrong path, or who are trying to plug products that they're getting a cut out of, or who simply just don't have the credentials. TikTok is especially bad with the 'do this and get rich' content. The likelihood is you'll lose your money.

What would you say was most important in helping you reach where you are today?

It sounds cliché, but not letting other people put you off and tell you that you're not good enough is vital. I was told by many people that journalism was

way too hard for me to get into and that I shouldn't want to do it, but I persisted and never gave up. Nowadays, compared to when I started, it is much easier to find inspiring role models.

What are some misconceptions about investing that are fundamental to unlearn?

Firstly, there are definitely some myths and misconceptions people need to unlearn. Some people say that investing is a bit like gambling. I can see where those impressions might come from, for example, the portrayals of investing in Wolf of Wall Street, but investing is not like gambling at all. Others put investing off and say 'I'll start when I have more money or confidence.' Stop telling yourself you need piles of cash; you can start with just a pound. Even if you're shy, you need to just start, because the younger you start, the more time your money has to grow and the better position you'll put yourself in for the future. Starting in your 20s is going to be a lot more lucrative than starting in your 40s and 50s, or even in your 30s. There's a saying: 'the best time to start was yesterday'. Even so, it's never too late. So don't put it off, you don't need to be rich, and remember that it's not gambling!

Secondly, a lot of people see investing as a boy's club, and think only they can be skilled investors. However, research shows that when women invest, we do it well because we are patient, and think about our choices whereas men sometimes make hasty decisions. Women do make really good investments, but we just don't make enough of them.

Thirdly, people believe that it's safer to put money into a bank account. However, our savings actually lose value over time as they can't keep up with the rate of inflation, unlike investing does. People need to understand why it is not always safe to put money in a cash account: although it doesn't necessarily go anywhere, the value of it is being depleted over the years.

Beyond misconceptions, what do you want people to know before they start investing?

When you invest, you have to invest looking forward, so you've got to be able to say 'This is money that I'm putting away, but I won't need it for at least 5 to 10 years,' so that you're investing in the long term. We're not talking about saving for your holiday or anything like that. Before you start investing you have to make sure you have some emergency money in running savings. This is money that you might need if you lose your job or need to repair the surprise broken boiler. I'm talking about those mean, real-life emergencies that play havoc on your finances. So, make sure you've got some sort of income saved as an emergency fund before you invest. If you've got debt, pay it off first because you don't want to be paying high interest on credit cards. I know a lot of people use the 'buy now, pay

later' scheme, which is essentially a very expensive trap. Focus on paying those first, to give yourself a clean slate.

What steps should people take if they are now ready to start investing?

Investment apps are a good way to start. The *Money Box* app rounds up your spare change; when you buy a £2.45 coffee, it will round the charge up to the nearest pound and put 55 pence into an investment; which over time will build up. Another app called *Wealthify* allows you to start with a pound and *Nutmeg* needs a £500 lump sum to start. While they all have different minimum limits, they are all easy starting points. Apps like these will take you through a little process and ask questions like: 'What's your attitude to risk?' and 'What's your goal and why are you saving?' Then they choose and do the investing for you. All you have to do is meet the minimum starting point requirement. As you progress over the years you might want to move to a different platform and start picking your funds for yourself.

Importantly, if you haven't used your ISA, which is £20,000 current tax year per adult, use it. That means when you make returns on the investment you won't pay any tax on it. That's up to £20,000, but you don't need £20,000 to start, so make use of your ISA!

What is an investment habit you think has the most impact on your life personally and how did you start this habit?

Overall, healthy investing habits are aligned with the principle of getting rich slowly, not getting rich fast. The key aspect is investing regularly. Don't try to buy when the market is low and sell when the market is high, as working this out isn't simple and won't work for most of us. If you invest in funds through those apps that I mentioned, you get exposure to all the top companies. However, if you buy just one stock, you're relying on the performance of that one stock and that's not necessarily the most sensible way to invest. I also read magazines I like, such as *Money Week*. It might seem quite high profile, but it's just about doing a little bit of good research and staying in the know, and doing it consistently is a good habit. Block out all the noise that promises you riches, like Bitcoin and NFTs, because these are high risk. Read the money pages in papers just to see what's happening and to stay up to date. People shy away from them, but they contain quite useful information.

You've recommended Money Week? Is that something that you regularly read?

It is quite nice to dip into. It can look intimidating, and it might not be something you want to read as a beginner, but overtime you might want to just have an occasional look. I edit a website called *The Money Edit*, which is a great place to start. The media are doing a great job at educating, in a way that the government and schools have not. We want to help people and we realise that this is what our readers want: not just the news, but to be taught about investing and finances as well.

Interviewing Anna-Sophie Hartvigsen, Co-Founder of Female Invest *by Georgia Flynn*

What is Female Invest?

Female Invest is an educational platform that teaches women how to make the most of their money and become financially independent, by giving them access to educational material covering everything they need to know about investing and personal finance. Nowadays, women are falling behind financially in every single country across the world, and out of all the reasons for this, only one can be impacted by women themselves: how they manage their money.

Why is there such a significant gender gap in the way men and women talk about money?

There are several different reasons for this. Firstly, women are not represented in any positions of power in the financial industry — it's heavily dominated by men. On account of this, the products that are made, communication, and culture within those companies do not come from a place that resonates with women. Secondly, there are still several stereotypes around women

and money. Traditionally, money has been seen as the man's area. Although women have progressed in many other ways, money is certainly not one of them. Research shows that the majority of women in relationships with men leave the biggest financial decisions to their partner, and women seeking financial advice are advised differently to men, for example, told to 'save' and be more conservative with their money.

Was there a particular moment or conversation which inspired you to start the company?

Yes. I come from a small city and a background where no-one invests or talks about money, but I always had an interest in the area. I started working when I was 13 and by the time I was 19, I realised the power of inflation and interest rates, and how the combination of the two meant my savings lost value over time. I started researching stocks, which was really fun but also very lonely and difficult to do. When I went to university, I met my two co-founders, Emma and Camilla, and the idea to start Female

Invest came up in our first conversation.

What is one crucial piece of advice you want to give women about Investing?

One very well-kept secret is that investing is not difficult at all. Often, when we talk about investing the topic is being confused in so many areas. There are two things you need to do to become a successful investor. Firstly, diversify, so you get the average market return. Research shows that you need at least ten different stocks or funds in the world market. Secondly, wait and give yourself a time horizon of at least five years. These two things will ensure investment success.

What is the most valuable lesson you have learned so far in developing your company?

If you are perfect at what you do when you start, then you have started too late.

What is the hardest challenge you have faced being a young woman entrepreneur?

The hardest challenge is being a woman. It is much harder to raise funding, for example, last year, only 0.7% of funding went toward companies founded by women and 95% of partners in Venture Capital companies globally were men. On account of this, when women pitch a company that solves a woman's problem, 95% of the time, we will pitch it to someone who is not in the target group. Moreover, it is much more difficult to be a part of the networks that exist as a woman, because you are simply not invited. Even now, we are still not taken seriously. Despite the fact we have raised around \$6 million, we have paying subscribers across 77 countries, and we won the world's largest start-up competition, I am still asked multiple times a week how things are going with my 'project'.

Did you ever feel you had to change yourself to be taken seriously?

Yes, definitely. Before pitching, my co-founders and I would change our looks depending on who we were pitching to. For example, I normally wear my blonde hair down but the stereotype around this means that when I pitch, I always try to wear my hair up. My team and I also try to wear less 'feminine' clothes to appear more 'masculine'. The sad thing is that it works superbly well.

Where do you see Female Invest in 5 years?

We want to be a household name equal in financial education, and thus equal to girl power. Right now, we have this educational platform which is growing super-fast. The next step for us is to build a trading platform so that women can trade through us. This will be the world's first trading platform by women for women. We want to incorporate all the elements our members say they lack in the current options out there, for example making sustainable investing

more accessible than it is today. Sustainable investing has the potential to be a powerhouse for girl power — women making money and channelling money into things that will make the world a better place.

Who is welcome to use the platform?

Everyone is welcome to use our platform. Currently, 8% of our users are men so although we target women - anyone can join!

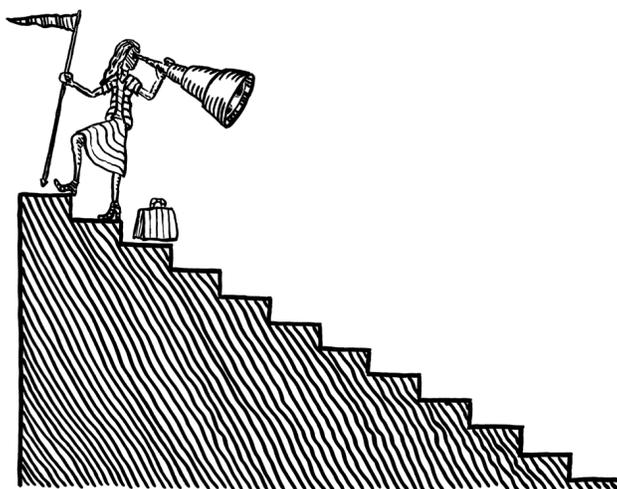
What are your thoughts on Crypto?

I have changed my opinion over time. When I first started hearing about it, I didn't really engage with it because it is very different from investing in stocks, where there is an underlying tangible value. However, I now see how a lot of the technology is being adopted by very large organisations, so I think it will play a large part in the future. I don't invest in it yet myself and for anyone who is a new investor, it is not where I would recommend starting out, but it is something I would definitely recommend watching.

What point is the company at right now and what achievements are you most proud of?

We started three years ago and we now have paying subscribers across 77 different countries, almost 250,000 followers on social media, and most notably, Emma Watson recently added and shared us! We have 23 full-time employees and have raised \$6 million in funding. We are part of Y-combinator, which is the world's most prestigious accelerator program, which started companies like DropBox and AirBnB. Moreover, we work with over 40 top tier companies like NASDAQ, UBS, Facebook, Google, and Mckinsey, educating their clients and employees. Overall, I am proud to have started a movement that finally puts financial gender equality on the agenda.

You can get three months of access completely free of charge to Female Invest with code 'OxWIB'.



An Introduction to Impact Investing

by Serrena Srithavarajah

The Covid-19 pandemic provided most with an opportunity for reflection and evolution, including consumers and businesses. Supply chains were having to be rebuilt and business practices were forced to change and adapt, with firms having to decide whether they wanted to 'build back better' or continue with unsustainable operations. At the same time, consumers had the time and space to reflect on what they want from the companies they support. As shown by the pandemic, the government alone cannot solve every pressing climate and social issue. This has triggered social expectations among consumers for businesses to move beyond profit and take greater responsibility for people and the planet, thus giving rise to impact investing.

Impact investments are investments made with the intention to generate positive, measurable, social and environmental impact alongside a financial return. These investments provide capital to address the world's most pressing issues in areas like developing renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, microfinance, and providing basic services like housing, healthcare and education.

Impact investing challenges the traditional practice and belief that investments should only focus on achieving financial returns and that there must be a trade-off between profits and environmental and social benefits. According to the Global Impact Investing Network, more than 88% of impact investors reported that their investments met or exceeded their expectations.

Impact investments use metrics agreed upon by the client and the financial institution acting on their behalf to decide the success of an investment. However, these metrics involve measuring the environmental and social benefits of an investment, which are inherently subjective and hard to quantitatively define. Because of this, green metrics have been developed and refined in recent years. For example, in 2020, the World Economic Forum released a set of 'stakeholder capitalism metrics' to be used as a guide in assessing sustainable business performance. These metrics are centred on four main pillars, incorporating a range of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) factors:

1. People: diversity reporting, wage gaps, worker health and safety
2. Planet: greenhouse gas emissions, water usage
3. Prosperity: employment and wealth generation, research and development

expenses

4. Principles of governance: strategy, accountability informing risk and ethical behaviour

These factors can be combined into a singular metric, with different weighting to enable a quantitative comparison of investments for clients. Many other sustainability indices operate in a similar way.

Impact investing is often associated with ESG's, which are guidelines investors can use to decide whether their investments are environmentally and socially responsible. Whilst impact investing comes under the umbrella of ESG, these two practices differ; impact investing looks to fund projects which will actively and positively contribute to society, whereas other types of ESG simply avoid funding projects which will have a negative impact. This contrast can be best demonstrated through an example of how these investors approach environmental issues. Impact investors might fund renewable energy, perhaps providing the capital for a project building a solar power plant, whereas other ESG investors may simply avoid investing in fossil fuels like coal.

Many investors have been looking to tackle the sustainable development goals. They have been fairly successful in funding and addressing environmental goals: the value of assets managed by sustainable funds increased twelve-fold over the pandemic, with \$51 billion being invested in ESG funds in 2020. However, Covid-19 highlighted many social inequalities within society that are yet to be addressed, and Beth Houghton of Palatine Private Equity has observed, 'We're not moving the needle on that social side quite as quickly as we are on the environmental side,' a pattern which will hopefully change in the future.

Masquerading damaging practices with labels like 'sustainable' or 'environmentally-friendly' (also known as 'greenwashing') is no longer an acceptable practice for firms to participate in. Stakeholders are now holding businesses accountable and expect to see them going above the minimum requirements of social responsibility. If companies do not act, they risk being boycotted by consumers. Going forward, we will likely see an increase in impact investing, as firms must choose their legacy: positively contributing to society or continuing to partake in bad practices.

Vumilia

by Kanengo Diallo

Before he died, Baba told me that numbers would be my undoing.

My fascination began when I was seven. When we would hear the secondary schoolboys at the Malambo river talk about their lessons from school. Back then, it was tradition for some of the Ilemera Secondary School boys to stop by our Malambo and smoke their 'Mala-boro' cigarettes before making their long walk home. Amina, Maisha, the twins, and I would hide behind the rocks when we knew their arrival was close. The boys always stood on the grass near the river's bend, competing to see how far each could hock spit into the water. They lit one cigarette with a matchstick (stolen from one of their mama's kitchens), then huffed and puffed it between the six of them. It was economical — yes — but now I know each boy must have only managed two puffs before they had to snuff it.

When we were seven, those Ilemera boys were as foreign as the mzungu missionaries — white teachers from England who came to plant clinical, brown-bricked churches and 'spread the gospel' at the primary and secondary schools surrounding our village. Oh, how my Bibi hated those mzungus! My grandmother, who was 95 years old, still clung to the world she knew before the White Man imposed himself on her. On us. Mama made her go to church once and Bibi heckled the nuns who stood outside, handing out small cups of sacramental wine and pieces of 'the host'. She yelled at the ones she could see from her vegetable field when they drove past in their black square cars. 'Rudi kwenu — go back, leave us alone!'

The missionaries came to our village in Ilemera in 1998, my seventh year. When the girls and I first saw them, we agreed that their skin was pink and not white. Amina's mama told us that mzungus don't like our hot seasons. 'That is why they wear those black glasses and hide in the shade — their skin is not made for our heat.' The mzungu women wore tan and pocketed trousers, like their men. The men wore hats as big as our winnowing baskets. The young ones, barely out of secondary school, would help deliver malnourished babies at the small clinic they built that year. I remember Maisha telling us about her mama and how she met those mzungu medical students when she gave birth to Maisha's little sister. They all carried smooth fat Bibles in their palms.

I felt that the mzungus were a thrilling addition to our landscape back then. Maisha once told me that there were many more of them in Dar es Salaam. There they had built bigger churches, orphanages, and expensive bank buildings. They drove Range Rovers, and our aunties were always scrambling to leave the village and go work as dadas — or

'housegirls', for those Dar es Salaam mzungus. The money was good, and our aunties who made it sent some of it back to their children and elderly relatives every month.

The mzungu spoke 'Ingirish' and taught it to the Ilemera schoolboys and girls. We would imitate the pinched words we heard Pastor John say at Mass on Sundays: Afurikan — African, bibol — Bible, congeri — congregation. At the Malambo, the Ilemera boys flourished their sentences with English words like fellars — fellas, teechea — teacher, and me I no — I know that.



Our youth gifted us with an invisibility that we exploited often. Stealing fruit from the market and bathing naked in the Malambo was something we would grow out of. We liked to think that the Ilemera boys could not see us — the five foolish girls who hid behind the millet rocks, listening to their 'Big Boy Talk'.

One day, after snuffing out their cigarette, the boys started discussing 'reproduction'. 'Imagine, Sir says that two cells make one whole! I am one whole!' said Jiti, the tall one. Instinctively, we knew that Jiti was the leader of the pack. At that age, boys start to show their proclivity for control. In small groups, only one can wield this power. He calls the others 'idiots' and then crowns himself the emperor of the idiots.

The dark one, whose name we never learnt, started picking up sticks, giving one to each of his friends. 'But fellars, the teechea failed to tell us about the sticks,' they all sniggered with their sticks in hand, giddy to discuss the forbidden in the privacy that only the Malambo could provide. Finally, the dark one yelled, 'The Form Six boys say that one stick must enter a small hole! That is real reproduction!' The giddiness dissolved and the boys collapsed into communal laughter, jumping, and shoving each other around like grasshoppers. We were entranced as they took off their clean white shirts and started driving their sticks deep into the muddy ground of the riverbank, over and over again.

That dry season of our seventh year, the twins no longer bathed with us. On the day of the sticks, it was just Amina, Maisha, and I at the Malambo. Doto and Kulwa were at home for the fourth day, washing clothes at their mother's request. For Doto and Kulwa, their womanhood commenced with those long days helping their mama around the house.

'We cannot come to the river tomorrow,' they would say, their eyes teeming with the first swells of pride.

'Mama wants us to wash the clothes again.' — Doto
'She said we rinse them very well and Baba is pleased!' — Kulwa
That dry season, Doto and Kulwa had left us behind and crawled beyond the threshold of girlhood. Maisha, Amina, and I still danced in the shallow pools of the Malambo, our chests as flat as the concave rocks that our mamas grounded millet on.

When the boys left, we walked over to the sticks in the mud and picked them up. What was this business about sticks and holes? At Sunday School we learnt about the soul. We knew the soul makes a person, not two cells and sticks. We were curious and resolved to ask our mamas when we returned home from bathing that evening.

When I grew older, I learnt what the boys meant by cells, sticks, and holes. They meant that a child is the biological union of two cells: one from their baba and their mama. Two halves that create a whole. At seven years old, I asked Mama, 'If there are two souls that make a child, how come I only have one?' She laughed a big belly laugh and pulled me onto her lap.

'Betty, you know before those Christians came, the traditional Sukuma said that we are begotten from eight people. Kibuta na Migongo — you have eight souls, a little bit from each of your ancestors.' I wriggled off her lap, displeased with the answer. 'Mama, why do the secondary school boys talk of two sticks then? That two sticks make one whole person?'

Mama pinched my cheek. 'Eh-eh! So, this is where you bring this nonsense from? You must stop listening to those rough-rough boys. When you go to secondary school, they will teach you the right things for girls. Two sticks!'

Baba was home from work that evening. He was a gardener for a mzungu family near Victoria and worked from dawn to sunset before returning home. That evening, Baba was sitting on the couch, and Mama pushed me off her lap so she could go fetch his millet beer from the kitchen.

Baba told Mama to stop telling me such things. 'Maria, do not feed our daughter those lies,' he told her. 'Betty will not go to school, no man will take a girl who reads books and does not know how to cook good ugali.'

For Baba, school was the most merciless thing that a girl could condemn herself. 'Why waste money and go to school when you should be at home, preparing to be a wife?' He wanted me to learn how to cook and brew millet beer to double my dowry. Education was for boys who could leave home for universities in Mwanza city or Dar es Salaam and elevate the family's name. When I turned 10, I still didn't understand this. My three older brothers were already in school for years and I

supposed it was my turn. I asked Baba when I would start. Baba threw his hands in the air and laughed. He laughed and laughed and laughed so hard that his wrap almost fell from his waist and his beer from his hand.

'Betty, do not kill me today! School? With what money? For what reason? No man will take a girl who reads books. Acha hayo mawazo — stop those silly thoughts today.'

'I want to learn numbers and letters, Baba.'

'Numbers? Those numbers of yours will not make you a good bride. Numbers will only make your head heavy!'

Baba drank from his beer and told me to go away with my nonsense.

I did not go to school until we found Baba dead in his bed, lying in his own urine.

It is fitting how he slipped out of my life with the same mystery that he came into it with. Mama would tell others that it was 'all that drinking' which killed him.

I started school two months later.



Baba said that numbers would be my undoing, but I know now that the real trouble was how men looked at me.

My 15th year began with the first trickle of April's long rains and my first signs of menstruation. Mama gathered me into her arms like a newborn and announced with theatrics: 'You are now a woman!'

That school year, the boys stopped stomping and hocking spit on the ground where my friends and I walked. They stopped pulling down my skirt whenever I turned my back on them for too long during break time. They even stopped segregating themselves from the girls of Form Nine. Some broke away from their large packs to share their maize and peanuts with the girls between classes.

It first properly happened to Amina. Towards the end of the year, a classmate, Obedi, had chased her down, and instead of pushing her or pulling her skirt, he asked her if he could carry her books. Amina accepted — all the Big Girls said this happened when boys wanted to 'take girls out'. Obedi never took Amina out (they did not know where 'out' was), but he always ferried her books from Mathematics to Religious Studies, and sometimes, he would pat her once on the bottom when she turned to walk away after thanking him. They became 'boyfriend and girlfriend', and they sometimes kissed, but only behind the restroom building and not while sitting in a tree, like the American song we all sang at them

described.

Then it was my turn. When I walked to the bus station alone after prep, I wasn't invisible because I became what the boys called a 'prime girl'. The type of girl they would wait for after lessons and follow around. At first, I welcomed their whistles. They felt like a choral initiation into the game of attraction. Those boys who whistled at me saw things that Mama and even my friends could not. The whistles were welcome until the sound started trailing me like a permanent stench. Until I turned every corner with their eyes attached to my body like parasites, searching me so hard I could feel them burrowing underneath my shirt, my vest, my skin. It was the year that I learnt to suppress the swing of my growing hips.

Teachers were looking as well. The sirs summoned me from the obscurity of shaved heads and pleated skirts to the front of their desks and asked me to return marked classwork to my peers. My Geography teacher, Mr Maharage, had a habit of ducking his eyes so low that they caressed my breasts and like a reflex, I hunched my shoulders forward to interrupt his view. The madams stared too, but their mouths did not curl with longing. Instead, they formed hard sneers that trembled with saliva — a sign of nausea.

'Look at the way that one moves her body,' I once overheard one madam say to another. 'You can tell she will be very easy; she is looking for trouble,' the other said.

I remember being confused. How else was I to move from point A to B?

Mama also looked at me in a certain way. When she welcomed me home, she would make my youngest brother, Charles, run to greet me at the door and collect my school things. When I entered the home, Mama stood up from her sewing machine, hugged me tight, then pulled me away and gasped, as though I had lost a limb on my way home or shapeshifted into a stranger bringing gifts.

'Everyday Betty, you are becoming finer and finer.' Once, she turned to my four brothers and yelled, 'Can you see how your sister is becoming so fine? Her skin is the sun! She is a real beauty, one day she will make a wonderful bride.'

Soon after arriving home, if everyone was occupied, like a ritual I would dash to our shared bedroom and look at my reflection in the small, cracked mirror. My image stared back at me. A girl twice removed. I tugged at the fat around my waist and pressed my resisting breasts flat against my chest. That school year, I found myself looking at all kinds of mirrors. In the pools of potholes, brown and unforgiving. In the bonnet of dark-coloured cars, short and warped. And when I was desperate, I found myself in the reflection of spoons speckled with porridge. If I stared too long, my heart stammered, and my head hurt. What is it that they see? I sometimes thought with hot tears pricking my eyes. What is it that makes men yell at my bottom and the madams kiss their teeth? Maybe it was for my sanity's sake, or whatever it was suddenly made itself apparent. But one day, it became completely noticeable because whenever I looked at myself in the mirror from then on, all I could see was the version of me that others desired and despised. In the potholes, car bonnets, and spoons, I saw a beauty that was made for me. And like other prime girls, I learnt how to contain, maintain, and use it.

untitled

by Chinda Smith



Inheritance

by *Cyndi Celeste*

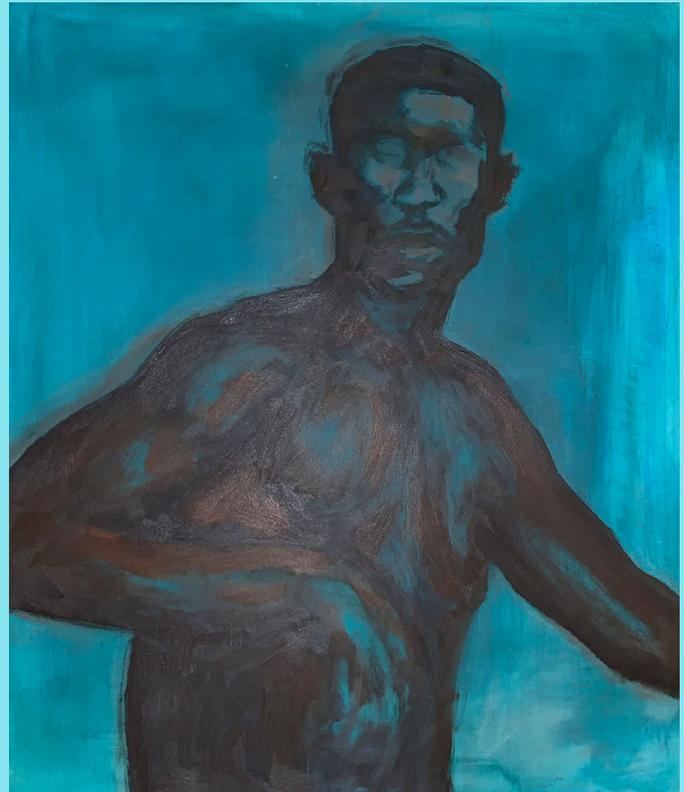
Illustrated by *Paul Majek*

Author's Bio

Cyndi is a talented poet based in Barbados. They have a spoken word album, *Cyndicated*, available on streaming services. Instagram: @cyndi.celeste

My inheritance
Is not given to me;
In this rat race I have only
My two front feet — my hind
Sight has a cataract
Blinding me to possibility
And potential
And poison
Look like family
When their scent
Sticks in the c a v i t y
Of my treasure
Chest
Locked with key
That dangles
From an out-of-reach

Line



FOR VIRGIL

by Caspar Meurisse



Virgil Abloh was a pluralist! A designer, artist, entrepreneur, and DJ. In November of 2021, he tragically passed away at the age of 41. My painting is a personal tribute. He was my biggest inspiration to get involved with art and design, due to his innovative and original approaches to blurring the boundaries between street and skate culture with high end fashion and art. His huge oeuvre of work and relentless creativity has taught me to disrupt, de-categorise and continue to re-evaluate the state of art and fashion. His legacy and influence will forever be embedded within our society and will continue to inspire many other young artists like me. If there was one thing I've learnt, it would be when creating, simply "QUESTION EVERYTHING."

The Rabbit and the Tiger

by Georgia Lin
Illustrated by Zuzu Gong

Artist bio

Zu is a digital artist and Illustrator Coordinator of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI), based in California, she speaks Mandarin and English. She connects with people through her healing stories and enthusiastic experiments with colours. Zu was introduced to Eulalia and Georgia through Dr. Di Wang, and hopes to bring joy to our community.
Instagram: @zuzu.draws.create

Watching my 奶奶 knit is like
sliding mosaic tiles together
and creating a diamond.

She breathes out whispers of numbers in Mandarin,

Counting each loop, fingers harnessing a strength otherwise not found in her body.

She is so small.

奶奶 holds my hand with a faded smile,

Happiness so pure I wish I could carve it into my bitter jaw

Her faint blue eyes that match the drapes of waterfalls on scrolls.

The jadeite protrudes from her bones

Her veins are made of a sage stone,

Forgotten in the stifling warmth of a Californian house

With terracotta roof tiles that hide her desires

Ones I hope she will leave me.

She is slow and precise, holding four wooden needles in her hands,

Like the chopsticks she taught me how to wield,

Like the balance she struck in our family

When she hid my vegetables and picked out the green onions from my congee.

She is wondrous and full, resting with yarn –

I cannot say if she would prefer to be in Taiwan,

In the apartment I spent every afternoon in,

with the corner knickknack store by her old building,

with grand, limitless mountains casting their reliable shadows.

My father's brashness bleeds onto her surfaces,

My grandmother's eyes stare into mine as her son prods her

to chew, brush, spit,

He says

She stares

And blanks.

We eat the entire damn fish in this house.

Crispy, whole, and waiting

She sucks each bone dry with spindly, wrinkled fingers

Nails healthier than mine.

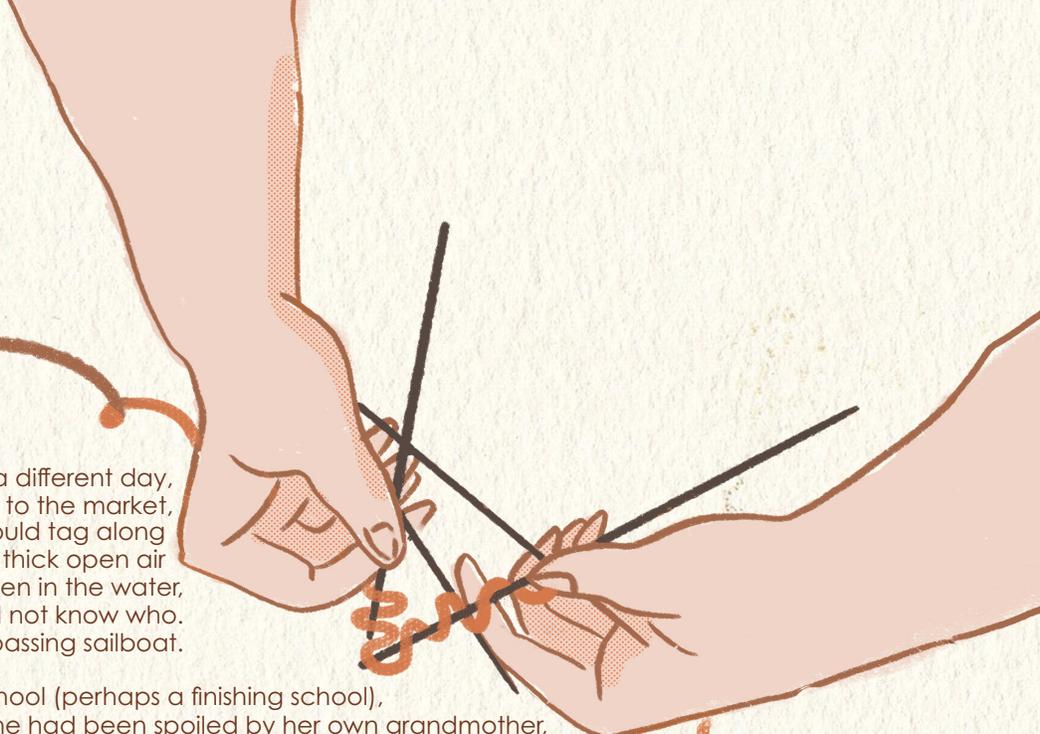
Chews its head and swallows its eyeball
Leaving a carnage of scales and
paper towel fragments coated
with oil, rice, and anatomy.

奶奶 begins to tell me story
upon story:

Like the time she fell into a lake,
clutching her history textbook
and backpack

Pulled to shore by friends
who had walked with her,
Fifteen-year-olds in
Guandong.





Her brother also fell in a lake, on a different day,
Her mother would go to the market,
and she would tag along
They heard in the thick open air
that a child had fallen in the water,
But did not know who.
He was rescued by a passing sailboat.

She attended a boarding school (perhaps a finishing school),
She hated living there because she had been spoiled by her own grandmother,
And she could do nothing alone.
She ate in the school cafeteria, but would go to local restaurants and buy tofu soup
For just one dollar.

Strings of our conversation are unthreaded by murmurs
and my incomprehension.

She asks me,
What are the past five dynasties of our Republic of China?
I was struck by her conviction,
Of a birthright – a pre and post-war assurance of what truth was.
When I told her I didn't have the answers, she paused
She remembered three out of five herself
I only knew them in translation.

I squeeze her warm, frail hands
In the hope that my gratitude will emanate through our bones.
She gave me grace and proverbs,
Rabbit's touch wrapped in a fragile body
Quiet, utter joy when the hands that bruised her heart
Lowered into the earth.

She says she doesn't have the audacity of her grandchildren.
I reply saying I think she's already brave.
When I am beside her, I ask her how she's doing,
She responds with small nods,
and a rare, toothy smile.

My 奶奶 taught me Chinese poetry,
Her love of rabbits,
Her fear of my tiger.

We watched Japanese cooking competitions on the television tucked into her wardrobe,
I would hide in the closet and wait for her to slide the door open,
Beaming that she had found me.

When we laugh about her life, my education, I think in Mandarin:
The rabbit and the tiger are not dissimilar.
Her smile is constantly mischievous
Now, she speaks in hush

This is a tenderness felt nowhere else.
The memories I keep here
Will be etched into the archives of my tangled diaspora.



Living Without Legacy

by Fiona Zeka

Photographs Taken in the National Archives of Kosovo



My country, Kosovo, is full of half-built houses. Driving through the country's motorways, you see them everywhere. Tall, built for a big family; windowless, doorless, family-less. I used to imagine how they would look complete, with the flower-potted balconies and neat lawns I saw in the West. But there they are, year after year — reminders of failed financial and familial projects filling the countryside.

In many ways, my country is a half-built house itself. As the youngest country in Europe, it is still finding its feet. The government changes almost with the seasons. Unemployment is high. The 'brain drain' of the younger generations to the West quiets the city streets. After the genocide of the Ethnic Albanian population Kosovo experienced in the late 90s, there are gaps everywhere. These gaps are material — burnt photos, stolen artefacts, stolen people. They are also immaterial — after the trauma of the genocide and war, who would want to revisit it? Who would want to pass on a legacy of trauma to their children? Why remember the past when you were barely granted the present?

The Kosovan diaspora are consequently left without country and memory. The oral legacies that are passed down are permeable. Over the dinner table, we may hear our parents speak of what they endured in poverty and war, but only in patches. Here and there we catch scraps of our history, in the form of moral didactics or political rhetoric. There's no history for history's sake. When I travelled to Kosovo this March for a personal research project

into my family's history, this was summed up by a surprised friend, who asked 'What history? There is no history'.

This historical self-negation is a result of centuries of colonialism, where Kosovo's self-identity has been systematically negated. I often say that my country is in a love-hate relationship with itself. Two interactions I had in Kosovo this March illustrate this. Interaction One is set in a dentist's waiting room. A silent, sterile white room. I was sitting next to my uncle, reading a book by one of my favourite Albanian authors, Ismail Kadare. Opposite me, there sat an elderly man. When he saw me reading Kadare, his face lit up, and he asked me what book of his I'm reading, told me all about how much he loves reading, how he has lots of books at home. I mentioned the fact that I was visiting from London, and in that split-second, the man put his hand to his face — He'd begun to cry.

In a sudden flood of emotion, the man said *Just don't forget your language*. This instruction was followed by statements on how the younger generations are fleeing Kosovo for the West, and how the native tongue is tied amongst the Kosovan diaspora. Evidently patriotic, the man was painfully in love with his country, and this love concealed the failures of his country's government from him, a government which has not provided the younger generations with enough incentive to stay.

Interaction Two is set in a cinema. I'm there with my younger cousin, who I took out to see a film as a

treat. We're the only people who showed up for the screening, so the cinema manager comes out and tells us that we should wait to see if more people show up, otherwise they can't afford to play the film. During this waiting game, he asks the classic questions — whereabouts in Europe my family are, whether I think the UK is better than Kosovo, whether I'm enjoying my time here. When I say that I love both the UK and Kosovo, he says that the UK has nothing that Kosovo doesn't. Yet when I told him of the research project I'm on, his face darkened, and he abruptly asked me what I was going to write about. Would I write about the men on the city streets, who wander unemployed? Would I write about the corruption? The mistreated women? In a split-second, his love for his country turned to hate. But I'm determined to find a legacy for my country which is not built on the extremities of faultlessness nor hate. I want to have a legacy of everyday life. Of life without conflict or corruption. I want to hear about the mornings where my ancestors woke up and felt the sun on their skin, and how they felt when they completed the harvest. I want to hear about their interests, how they spoke their words, where their favourite places to explore were. A history of these seemingly small things would be worth so much more to me than a History of Big Things, like war and conflict.

So, in March, I travelled to my country alone for the first time. There, I had the privilege to interview Bedri Zyberaj, the chief of the country's archives. When he told me that his library of 2,000 books was burnt during the war, it reminded me of my maternal grandfather, who was a librarian and a teacher in wartime Kosovo. I wish I could see the books he had in his library — all lost now — they would have helped me fill in my knowledge of him. I was reminded of my father's side of the family, who had left their photos in a storage depot which was destroyed in a fire. I was reminded of my mum, who brought her diaries to the UK, only for them to burn in a fire in our London council flat.

When she was my age, she had travelled through Kosovo with important photos strapped to her body underneath her clothes. The photos were of her uncles, who were important figures in the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). Carrying the photos for their preservation put her in immediate danger — if the Serbians selected her for a regular strip search, she would have been forced to show them where the KLA were, and likely killed afterwards. Yet she managed to carry the photos and her diaries successfully. She was conscious of the need to create a legacy, and in her motherhood and the artwork she creates, she reminds me of this need everyday.

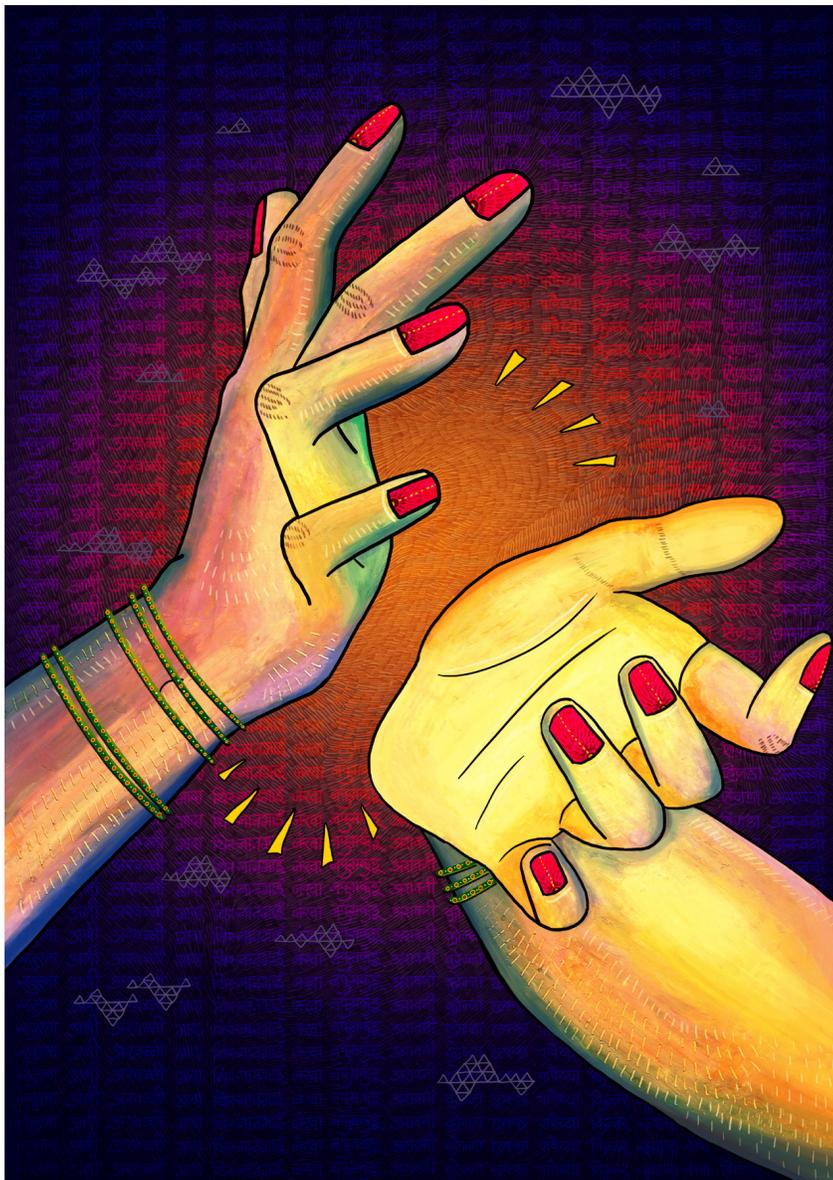
When I asked Bedri Zyberaj how I could possibly write a family history when there are still so many gaps, he replied 'There are excuses for not writing history in the past, but history will not forgive us if we don't start writing our histories for the future generations now.' Living without a whole family legacy is isolating, but it also makes you forget that you are living a personal legacy in your day to day, in your 'now'.



A History of the Hijra: An Ancient Queer Legacy

by Adam Pervez

Illustrated by Madhura Kamat



Hijra Claps.

Adorned with painted faces and garlands in their hair they sashay down the bustling city streets in the brightest saris. Tapping on passing car windows, dancing in street corners, singing songs of praise dedicated to their foremothers, or showering compliments to passers-by in an attempt to make a few rupees – it is impossible to ignore their presence, especially in cities like Karachi and Delhi. Defying stratified gender roles of the sub-continent and emitting a level of confidence and boldness seen nowhere else, these are the Hijras — an amalgamation of feminine beings of varying gender identities who belong to the oldest trans and third gender community in the world.

The term 'Hijra' when translated from Hindi, quite literally means 'Eunuch', and though eunuchs historically made up a percentage of Hijras, it is not hard to presume that this term was placed upon them as a whole in order to describe the phenomena of transitioning and transgenderism that many contemporary cisgender people could simply not fathom.

The term is now truly an umbrella used for many feminine gender identities that do not correspond with sex assigned at birth. Many Hijras would identify themselves as what the West would understand as trans women – women assigned male at birth. However, the complexity of the Hijra identity transcends anything that the Western lens can comprehend. Echoed through the words of Hijra activist Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, 'Am I both man and a woman? Am I neither man nor woman? I am a Hijra so I can access both states of being' (Tripathi 2015: 43). In layman's terms, many Hijra would identify themselves as belonging to a third gender, one resting somewhere on the gender spectrum - exceeding our traditional Western gender binary.

Hijras inherit over 3,000 years of history within the subcontinent and hold a divine place in Hinduism and subcontinental culture. This is perhaps best seen in the Hindu epic Mahabharata where the hero Arjuna takes on the form of a Hijra after exile to reassimilate into society. Or perhaps when Arjuna's son, Iravan, marries the Hindu god Krishna, who has taken a feminine form in order to consummate their marriage. In the Ramayana, whilst on his way to exile, Rama tells his followers that all 'men and women' should return to the city. Upon his return 14 years later, he finds that the Hijras, being neither men nor women, remained where he last left them. To reward them for their undying loyalty, Rama gifted them the ability to confer blessings on people during occasions such as childbirth and weddings. Not only do Hijras claim descent from Arjuna and Iravan, often calling themselves Aravanis, but the gift bestowed upon them by Rama formed their main role and purpose in ancient Indian society – bestowing blessings and acting as an extension of the divine (Michel, 2019).

For much of the subcontinent's precolonial history, Hijras continued this role given to them by Rama and acted as spiritual dancers, singers and blessing bestowers. This love for music and dance is reflected by the choice of many Hijras within Northern India to call themselves Kinnar — referring to the celestial mythological beings that excel at music and dance.



Rachana of Community.



The "Nirvan" Process.

From within India's rigid and restrictive caste system, their spiritual and divine-like status gave them the freedom to form their own caste and develop their own language. Much of their daily life was formed by travelling across areas of India, collecting alms, bestowing blessings and living within communities of other Hijras. Their influence and function in society grew under the spread of Islam in India when they served as military commanders, tax collectors, political advisors and guardians of royal women (Iyer, 2009: 421). Their third gender opened a space for them in all aspects of Islamic India — regardless of gender roles. Hijras bypassed the stratification of Islamic society and were no longer confined to their temples, they were active, working and respected members of society.

However, as with many examples of indigenous queer expression, the tide of colonisation saw a sudden and abrupt change in the role and position of Hijras within the sub-continent. For many colonial empire builders, colonisation of a territory involved the categorisation and management of a population by making them 'legible' — easy to understand through a Western lens and therefore easier to control and govern (Hinchy, 2019: 95). The Hijra community, incompatible with colonial Western ideals, were deemed ungovernable. Their way of life threatened the heterosexual patrilineal order of

succession that Britain wished to forcibly install in India. (Hinchy, 2019: 8). Hijras were the ultimate form of rebellion to British colonisation, simply through existing.

Britain identified the Hijra way of life as the 'Eunuch Problem' and declared their aims to exterminate the entire Hijra population under the 1871 Criminal Tribes Act. This act saw the naming of Hijras as criminals and the policing of all forms of their life: freedom of dress, collecting alms and performing at births, weddings and public events. Branded 'sodomites', thousands of years of Hijra tradition were outlawed. The law also ensured the removal of all young Hijras from the guardianship of older Hijras, placing them in heteronormative households to eradicate new generations of Hijras. The short-term aim of the law was to culturally eliminate Hijras through the erasure of their public presence; the long-term ambition was to extinguish their entire existence (Hinchy, 2019: 2).

Britain's colonisation of the subcontinent forever changed the Hijra community. Though the Criminal Tribes Act was repealed in 1952, almost two hundred years of persecution and fearmongering severely damaged the reputation and way of life of the Hijras. The community is slowly regaining its spiritual reputation: they are now frequently invited to auspicious occasions for blessings, but arrival to these events often results in raised eyebrows and



Haldi-Mehendi Ceremony.

gossip. Once respected for their ability to confer blessings, Hijras are now feared due to the post-colonial belief that they are able to place curses on people too. They can once again perform in public, but are usually confined to roadsides and marketplaces, instead of imperial courts and elite households, and crowds of onlookers mutter words of abuse to them. Colonial laws and the consequent prejudice caused also resulted in the exclusion of Hijras from formal education and occupation, pushing Third Gender individuals into the outskirts of society. Over 80% of Hijras are illiterate, often leaving school early and prevented from entering higher education, many Hijras resort to sex work for survival (Syed, 2002). Furthermore, 200 years of prejudice at the hands of the police means Hijras are frequently used as scapegoats for crimes and accused of kidnapping and sexual assault (Goel, 2016: 536).

Despite continual persecution, the spirit of the Hijra is undying and the community has survived. Their unity in the face of oppression is nothing short of inspiring. Many Hijras find refuge in Hijra-only homes led by an older Hijra known as a 'Guru', enabling them to form familial bonds with other Hijras. These houses or 'dynasties' can be traced back through generations and special reverence is held for the 'Guru' who runs the house, providing them with a place to live and call home, in return for services — ranging from domestic tasks to producing income for the house, often through sex work. Though some may accuse this system and Hijra Gurus of being exploitative, it is no different to the 'House' system prevalent in the 1980s Trans Ballroom Scene in New York City (Goel, 2019). This system and its 'exploitative' nature are ultimately a product of the limitations placed upon trans and Third Gender communities through years of systematic oppression. Developments in Indian law through the activism of many Hijras and other queer activists mean that Hijras can gradually stop depending on sex work for income, especially dangerous sex work, and begin to safely reintegrate into society. In 2014, the Supreme Government



Offering Milk to Green Tree and Black Dog. Vidhi after Nirvaan.

of India recognised Hijras as a Third Gender. Led by Hijra activist Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, the bill passed meant freedom of self-identification for Hijra and Trans women, ensured that Hijras would be afforded all the same rights as other Indians and legislated for having the same protections as other minorities living within India. Schools, colleges, workplaces and hospitals are now required by the government to provide spaces for Third Gender people. In another victory for the Hijra and queer community, India revoked a colonial era law criminalizing homosexual sex. Other nations within the sub-continent are also beginning to change their attitude towards members of the Hijra community. Pakistan, which designated Hijras as a legal Third Gender in 2009, allowed Hijras and Trans people to self-identify on government records in 2018. Bangladesh has recently begun to open Hijra and Trans exclusive academic and religious schools, ensuring members of the Third Gender are provided an education which does not deny



Offering Milk to Sea. Blessings. Acceptance.

their religious freedom and gender expression, slowly reintegrating them into the nation's Islamic government and society (Chowdhury, 2020).

However, recent changes within the government and the rise of Hindu Nationalism have resulted in a step back for Hijra rights. A 2016 bill, introduced to allegedly 'protect' the Third Gender, has adversely brought in more problems for the community, stripping individuals of the freedom of self-identification; it is now required that self-identification be screened by a majority cisgendered committee to qualify. Under the false promise of easier access to welfare, it criminalises begging – one of the main forms of income for Hijras, ultimately pushing them further into sex work.

These setbacks have not silenced the Hijra community, who continue to protest the government and demand the rights they deserve. Hijra led protests and critiques of the bill resulted in a 2019 revision: decriminalising begging and removing the committee approval to self-identify. The problems are far from over, however, as the vague use of language in the bill implies that medical intervention and approval from a medical authority and district magistrate is required to self-identify. (Goel, 2019). Clauses within the bill show how discrimination against Hijras is still rampant within society: sexual assault against a Hijra results in a less harsh punishment than violence against a cis-woman (Ratnam, 2019).

Still, the Hijras persevere. Throughout the centuries they have proved that if the government does not listen to them or make space for them, they will protest to ensure that they are seen and their voices are heard. The revision of the 2016 Transgender Persons bill, though not achieving the results they wished, was a product of Hijra activism. Hijras have proven that, with or without government permission and assistance, they will create their own safe spaces and platforms to raise awareness and create change. Traditional Hijra festivals like Koovagan Festival have become a safe space for open discussions regarding safe sex and mental health (Pattabiraman, 2019). Notable Hijras such as Padmini Prakash and Kalki Subramaniam are household names, fronting news channels and popular TV series in India — slowly undoing years of colonial erasure and placing themselves firmly within the public's line of sight (Singh & Kumar, 2020: 86). Hijras have also found meaningful work within NGOs, raising awareness for safe sex amongst sex workers.

The Hijra of the subcontinent are refusing to give up their fight for freedom and self-expression. These descendants of Iravan and faithful followers of Rama are determined to regain the position in society which their ancestors enjoyed generations ago. The Hijra have outlived states, empires, and colonial powers, and will continue to do so. Governments and contemporary attitudes have consistently attempted to suppress Hijra, but



Divine.

their undying spirit shows that they do not need permission to identify in any way they choose. Unlike their ancestor Arjuna who quietly assimilated into society, the Hijras of today wear no disguise and will create as much noise as is required to continue fighting for their right to exist.

Recommended Reading

Tripathi, L. 2015. *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*. Karachi: Oxford.

Subramaniam, K, 2021. *We Are Not the Others: Reflections of a Transgender Artist*

Hinchy, J. 2019. *Governing Gender and Sexuality in*

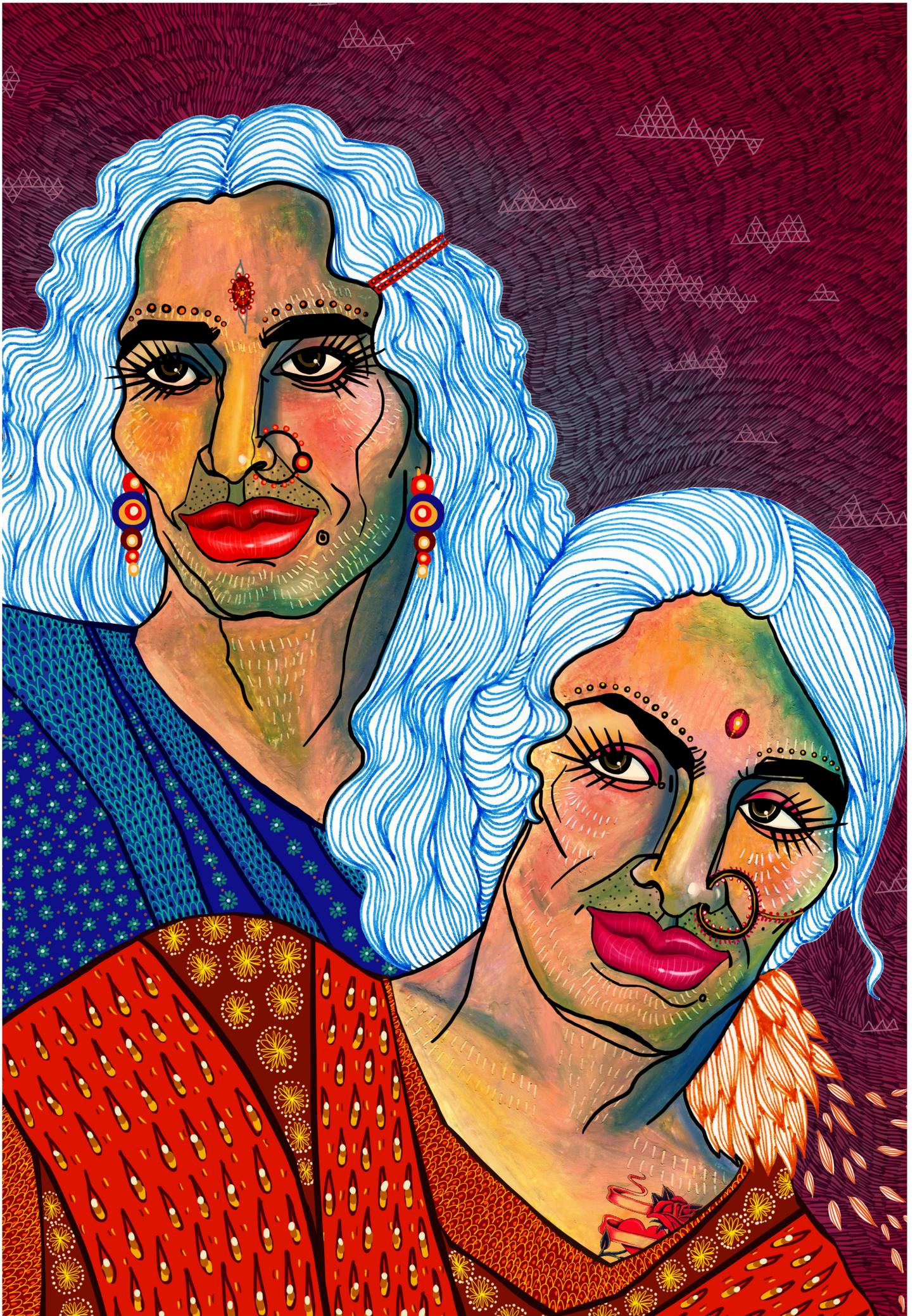
Colonial India. Cambridge and Singapore.

Artist Bio

Having worked for cafés, restaurants, commercial and residential places all over India, Madhura Kamat specialises in illustrating and graphic design, and works on theme illustrations, kids illustrations and painting murals on walls. Instagram @madhurartist

Artist Statement

Madhura believes that Hijra are divine and beautiful. If anyone wishes to become Hijra then they must undergo a spiritual process called Nirvan. Madhura's illustrations show the overall process of Nirvan.



Portrait.

one.



two.



three.



four.



Laxmi

by Anita Khemka

In 2003, I worked with Thomas Wartmann, a German filmmaker, on his documentary film, 'Between the Lines - India's Third Gender'. The film focused on three Hijras through the lens and narration of a photographer (myself), who entered the vibrant yet struggling Hijra communities, openly discussing many intimate details of their lives. Laxmi was one of the protagonists of the film, a young man who had been sexually abused by the men of his family from the ages of six to twelve. These experiences, he says, shaped his sexual identity: since his sexual experiences were with men, although forced, he was now only attracted to men. Yet he did not see himself as a homosexual but a Hijra, a person of the Third Gender. He says, "I am more than a woman and less than a man. I have the soul of a Hijra."

Hijras have existed as a subculture in the subcontinent for centuries. They live on the fringes of society and theirs is a secret, complex and ambiguous world. They live as a community in a hierarchy

system with a Guru (leader) at the top and chelas (subordinates) below. They make a living by singing and dancing at the birth of a child, by begging at traffic signal stops and by prostituting themselves. Laxmi, however, does none of this.

Laxmi defies the age-old custom of community living: she lives with her biological family, teaches Indian classical dance and owns nine dance schools, acts in films, and is a transgender rights activist. It is unheard of for a Hijra to enter a coffee shop, let alone sit in one for hours. Dressed as a woman, she sits in a coffee shop with as much élan as she does while walking down the steps of a mosque.

Her relationship with her biological family, her neighbourhood, and society at large has changed gradually over the past seventeen years I've known her. Whilst filming her for the documentary, she would never wear feminine apparel at home. Today, she is castrated; ordained as the head

of the Kinnar Akhada (a Hindu religious order) and believed by people to hold spiritual powers; a leader in the transgender rights movement in India; and working with the United Nations.

Laxmi is a concoction of profound warmth, intelligence, ambiguity, and tempestuous emotions. I spend time with her and hence I photograph her.

Artist's Bio

Anita Khemka lives in Nainital, Uttarakhand, with her partner and two daughters. Since 1996, her photographic praxis has been a constant endeavour to find meaning in the relations with the people in her life and their identities as people, ideas or communities. As a result, she has closely followed the lives of socially marginalised and excluded groups and communities: people with intellectual disabilities, addictions, HIV and AIDS; and people who are abandoned widows, political minorities, and sexual and gender minorities. Anita Khemka is represented by PHOTOINK.

five.



six.



seven.



eight.



nine.



ten.



eleven.



one. We spent hours in trains and taxi rides, opening up and sharing details of our lives. She told me once that each and every man in her family had raped her, barring her father and real brother, and how that had shaped her sexuality. I told her how and why I felt compelled to document people who lived dual lives. That's when we first bonded. It took us a while to start trusting each other. It's difficult to not be suspicious of photographers and 'eunuchs' — both come with a whole lot of baggage and agendas. But we both hung on and what has ensued has been this beautiful insight into her journey across so many membranes of social and personal edifices.

two. Laxmi getting ready for a scene in the film *Between the Lines* — India's Third Gender. This moment was defining for me as I saw her unwrapping herself — she was there in front of me as a man and a woman at the same time.

three. Soon after her breast implant.

four. Inside the Ajmer Sufi Shrine, a place where all Hijras find acceptance. Over the years, we have been to various Sufi shrines together and for me, those times have been quite memorable. Perhaps because of the special connection we both feel towards Islam and Sufism. However, it has been a

while since she made her annual visit to any of the Sufi shrines, and I miss that.

five. With her chelas. Shaheen and Muskan have since died due to AIDS.

six. & seven. Laxmi has many avatars — at Sufi shrines, collecting money on the streets as a Hijra, as an actress — all with equal élan.

eight. Sixteen years later, I am truly amazed at her transformation. She is undoubtedly smart, articulate, and very ambitious; it has been wonderful to see her evolve into an activist, campaigning in India and all over the world for her community's basic universal rights to dignity and identity. To see her make this shift into the politics of religion was totally unexpected, even for a personality such as Laxmi's.

nine. ten. & eleven. There is a special moment towards the end of the film *Between The Lines* when Laxmi gets emotional, she talks about the soul fighting with the physical body. She confides in me in private and says she will never get nirvana (castration) as that would mean a final cross over of sorts — something she is not willing to do. After all, she is the eldest son born into a Hindu Brahmin family. However, that was in 2003. She

twelve.



thirteen.



fourteen.



was still negotiating her place within her family, her neighbourhood, her community, and society at large. Her father was also still alive. The scenario was completely different in 2019.

She is now seen as a leader who can finally deliver her community and give it its place in the hierarchical structure of the enormous and complex Hindu fold and she can't do that with a dual identity. So, she decides to finally take nirvana and goes through a purification ceremony with turmeric being smeared all over her body — this is a final crossover of sorts, one more step towards gaining acceptance in the most orthodox Hijra fold and the power associated with it.

twelve. Meeting Ram Madhav, the National General Secretary of BJP at that time, the ruling party of India under Prime Minister, Mr. Narendra Modi.

thirteen. Dressed as Kali, the Hindu deity that represents strength, sexuality, and violence.

fourteen. India is a country of many contradictions. Hijras live on the fringes of society and are often ostracised. However, if you are able to redefine yourself in the context of popular belief, you can become a deity with a huge following. Laxmi is seen here as Acharya Mahamandaleshwar at the Ardh Kumbha Mela — one of the largest religious gatherings in the world that happens every 6 years and attracts about 120 million visitors.

Jewish Seeds and Queer roots

by Lily Sheldon

Illustrated by Sarah Heller



So why does your mum have a copy of Gustav Klimt's *The Tree of Life* hanging in your bathroom? Why did you plant trees instead of receiving presents on your birthday? Why do you have a festival dedicated to the environment, and specifically, trees? Why did your family friend give you a tree shaped earring holder for your Bat Mitzvah? Why does your Jewish youth movement, Noam, have a tree with different branches of ideology as their logo?

The rumours are true, these oxygen producing organisms are quite the big cheese in our religion.

But Judaism does not just randomly lend itself to dendrophilia. Trees have liturgical significance to us. In the Garden of Eden, there were two trees. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and the tree of life. Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat from the former, and, when they did, they suddenly became aware of themselves and their nakedness. For their disobedience, God punished them with the pain of childbirth, menstruation and having to toil the soil. The tree of life, on the other hand, was a symbol for our souls and the afterlife. We repeat this at synagogue through the song:

עץ חיים היא למחזיקים בה. ותמכה מאשר

It is a tree of life for those who hold fast to it, and those who uphold it are happy.

Beyond the liturgy, trees are symbolically crucial. Just like trees, the Jewish religion has relied on planting

seeds of tradition, over time growing a garden of ideas and communities. Oftentimes in history, these trees have been cut down by persecutors. But no one has been powerful enough to uproot us completely.

Judaism rests on masoret (tradition). It survives not because of greatness and beauty but because of ideas and politics. When the centralised temple was destroyed in 70 CE, there was population dispersal, and consequently, prayer, intellect and teaching suddenly became the nucleus of the religion. Judaism has now significantly grown and blossomed into many different varieties and schools of thought.

"Honi the Circle Maker" is just one of many rich folklore tales surrounding trees.

One day Honi was journeying on the road and he saw a man planting a carob tree. He asked, "How long does it take [for this tree] to bear fruit?" The man replied: "Seventy years." Honi then further asked him: "Are you certain that you will live another seventy years?" The man replied: "I found [already grown] carob trees in the world; as my forefathers planted those for me, so I too plant these for my children."

*Honi sat down to have a meal and sleep overcame him. As he slept a rocky formation enclosed upon him which hid him from sight and he slept for seventy years. When he awoke he saw a man gathering the fruit of the carob tree and Honi asked him, "Are you the man who planted the tree?" The man replied: "I am his grandson."
— Babylonian Talmud (Carob Tree story)*

Author's Note

This idea of continuity and sustenance is crucial to the ethos behind Yente Zine. Yente zine is a Jewish, Queer zine which seeks to platform the voices of those who have often been silenced by others. A few students set up this zine in January and our first edition, Vashti, has contributors from all over the world, with an age range between 16 and 40 years old. Each zine is named after a biblical figure and it is released at the same time of their festival.

Edition Vashti fell in line with Purim, a festival about disguise and survival. Using these prompts, we told the story of Purim through a modern and creative lens. Edition Vashti was featured at a zine fair and in the Adidas Creative Debuts exhibition in January. The final product represents the rich amalgamation of our identities. It's messy, it's random, it's not linear but it represents us adapting masoret to fit our modern lives.

We have now started collecting submissions for

edition Ruth and are amazed by the reach we have made. Each submission is unique and will fit together to tell a complex story of worship, betrayal, loss and trust.

We want to plant a seed within the framework of our religion and interpret it in a way which is inclusive of our modern day identities. We want to scatter seeds of networks and grow roots for people who have felt isolated and cut off from the community. We want to create something beyond ourselves, that others in the future can benefit from.

Yente zine is about art, it's about history, it's about queerness, it's about Judaism, it's about connection and so in many ways it's also about trees.

<https://yentezine.squarespace.com/>
@yentezine

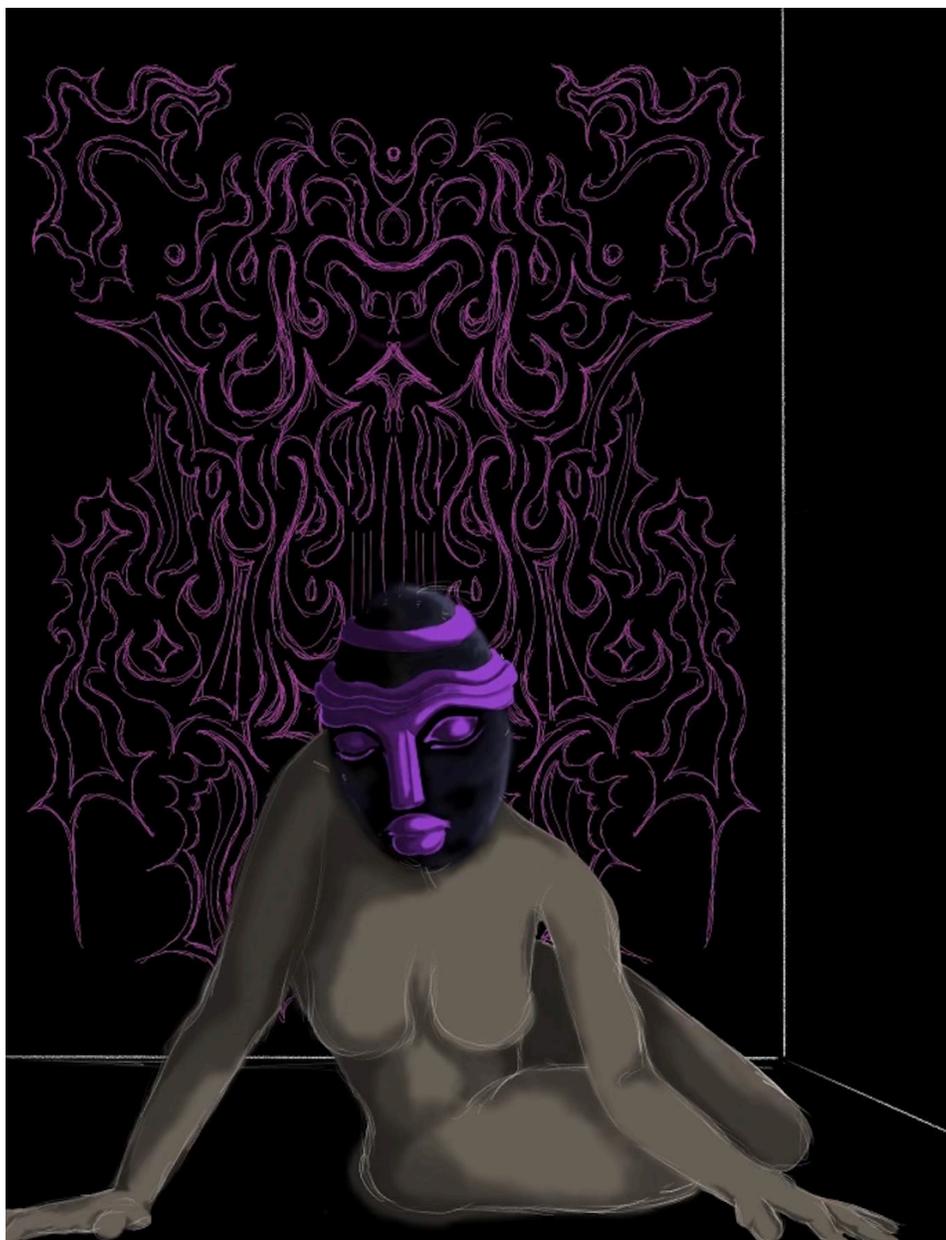
You can find Sarah Heller on Instagram:
@sheistheearthart



I Am a Third-Generation Immigrant and I Am Traumatized

by Kesena Berry

Illustrated by Kesena Berry



CW: racial persecution

All further quotations can be found in 'Growing up black: Dennis Morris's portrait of the 70s', a 2012 article by Gary Younge of The Guardian.

*[Intro + scratching]
You're quite hostile.
I got a right to be hostile
man. My people bein
persecuted!
— Prophets Of Rage,
Public Enemy*

Grandma immigrated to the UK when she was 18, after her father returned from aiding the British in WW2. As the oldest sibling, her whole life was spent in preparation for that moment; her father gave her the best education out of her siblings, she was taught English growing up, and a marriage had been arranged.

In colonial countries, going to Britain was seen as a great privilege. Leaving her affluent

family in Nigeria, where her father was the Chief, she arrived to learn that the hostile reality waiting to greet her was far from her expectations. Grandma was a Black woman living in the UK during the 60s.

She was unable to rent a house from white landlords, so she had to buy one. Grandma had entered a country that was rioting against the idea of minorities existing on 'their' (British) land. Signs reading "NO IRISH, NO BLACKS, NO DOGS." were often displayed outside properties by their landlords.

The government which had actively invited people from the colonies into Britain with open arms in the same breath, punished them for their arrival. When running her election campaign in 1978, Margaret Thatcher said, "We are a British nation with British characteristics." During the same interview, Thatcher warned of Britain being 'swamped': "Every country can take some small minorities, and in many ways, they add to the richness and variety of this country. The moment the minority threatens to become a big one, people get frightened."

Your existence is perceived as a threat and you are treated as a second class citizen. When the opportunities you were promised are always given to White Britons and never you, confusion starts. So you work three jobs, moving from council house to council house to make ends meet and you have to rely on yourself instead of the government who had sworn they'd protect you. No matter where you look there are people questioning your existence; questioning why you think you have the right to 'drain' their country's resources.

Grandma had four children to an abusive husband. She ran away when Mum was ten, when her husband had lost their house to his gambling addiction. My Uncles' moved back to Nigeria with my Grandfather, while my Auntie and my Mum grew up in London. Left alone for the majority of the day — while Grandma worked three jobs — she was brought up by her Sister.

In the 70s ethnic minorities were still treated atrociously and to combat this, education was seen as the only way out. We were taught that in order to get the same recognition, we have to work harder than our white counterparts. Every POC person I have spoken to has had this same conversation with their parents.

Mum had to embrace her Nigerian culture and navigate her Britishness at the same time. Britishness isn't confined to being white anymore; a new generation of Brits has been born and has the burden of "matching the colour of their skin with the crest on their passport". Today it's about creating a sustainable future where there is space for the next generations to not just survive, but thrive.

Mum grew up around the corner from where Stephen Lawrence was brutally murdered. This hate crime signalled how Britain's climate was becoming more hostile. Facing a number of political issues of its own (rising unemployment and inflation), for White Britain, the future was bleak. While, minority groups were dealing with these problems too, they were scapegoated as the cause for them. "At the very moment when black youths were trying to imagine new beginnings,

the very certainties on which the lives of many white working-class youths were founded — full employment, subsidised housing, state economic intervention — were coming to an end. That decade came to a close with the election of Thatcher, whose victory was aided in no small part by her crude appeal to white anxieties over immigration, heralding a more overtly antagonistic racial landscape for the 80s.". Even when Mum was well into her 20s, the effects of racist discrimination were still visible.

I'm a third-generation immigrant and I still feel discriminated against, as well as the impact of the trauma experienced by Grandma and Mum. We all carry the weight of my ancestors. There is no doubt that Britain is my home, but a new battle has begun.

Even though conscious racism within Britain is still very much alive, instead of having to fight for our place and constantly 'prove' that we belong, the battle now is to educate and inform, so that we deconstruct the oppressive structures we live under; they must crumble. We need to show what minorities are not here for: tokenism, being used to fill a quota, being scapegoated for the country's political and economic hardships, and only proudly shown off when Britain pretends to celebrate diversity. Our task is to create a new Britain: a multicultural country where diversity is always celebrated, where people access the same opportunities and have equal rights.

For centuries Britain has found ways to use Black and Brown

peoples as means to an end, in the form of slavery (the Royal African Company), labour shortage replacements (HMT Empire Windrush), soldiers (WW2), the list goes on. Britain told Nigerians to fight for their King and Country, and after the war was won, Nigerians were unwanted. Britain has a brutal, racially oppressive history which has all almost been swept under the rug: lie well, hide well, ignore, or even worse, celebrate. African American history is taught instead of Black British history in British schools, and when colonial history is taught, it is taught matter-of-factly and with perverse pleasure. People like John Hawkins, who developed the slave trade, are recognised as 'pioneers', while Queen Elizabeth's involvement has been treated like feminism ahead of its time. This denial and glorification leads people to think that Britain's racism isn't as abhorrent as America's. For a long time, the people living in the country you call home, wanted you enslaved, lynched, or imprisoned. You look at the world now and it doesn't feel any different. The present reflects the past. You're awakened by cruel reality and you turn cynical.

It's easy to lose your sense of self. Born into a world of oppression, you relive the trauma of your ancestors whilst intimately witnessing your people being persecuted on a global scale. As you grow, you realise that your community is connected through tyranny, compelled into solidarity and traumatised collectively. Passed down from generation to generation, your inheritance is an eternal sentence of oppression.

He hit me and wept... then he was the first to protest.

by Sharon Udott

CW: racial abuse

The Arab proverb I used to title my article was first quoted by Ruby Hamad, the author of *White Tears/Brown Scars*. Everything I am about to say she has probably said much more eloquently, so if you take anything away from this piece it should be to read her book. This article was inspired by the Feminist Society's Liberation and Liquor event I led last term, titled "Are white women detrimental to feminism?". The short answer to this question is yes, and for the reasons that this title hints at. White women, especially able bodied, middle-class, heterosexual white women, can have all the same privileges and entitlement as their men counterparts, but somehow remain blissfully unaware of their social standing. Privilege and ignorance are a deadly combination and in the case of white women it can often end with them hurting the people and the causes they so fervently (and somewhat foolishly) believe that they are helping. When called out on this they are usually the first to play the victim.

An incident I went through while in my first year at Oxford perfectly sums up how white women position themselves in ways that benefit them to the detriment of POC women and use their privilege to play the victim. Before I get into the details of what happened I'd like to clarify a few things. Firstly, what happened to me was not just a Black issue, it was a feminist issue. Feminism is all about the belief in equality for all, regardless of sex and gender but also other signifiers such as class, race, ethnicity, disability, and sexuality to name a few. This belief would qualify anyone as a feminist, but feminism is more than a title or a part of your moral compass, it is the way you live your life. As a feminist you are supposed to uphold those beliefs in your actions, in the way you stand up for yourself and for others. But when this incident happened to me in first year, I was failed. I was failed by the women around me who claimed to be feminists but whose feminism excludes women who look like me.

In Hilary of my first year, I was racially abused by the white, upper-class man who lived right next door to me. At the time my college still operated

a household system in accordance with Covid regulations, so I was stuck in a bubble of seven people, who I was forced to get along with, of which he was one. While I can't write out exactly what was said to me, it was along the lines of "Black people deserve whatever treatment they get in society," and that I was "simply jealous of the privilege [he yielded] as a white upper-class man." I reported the abuse to college, which led to a subsequent investigation, and the man in question proceeded to tell everyone in our household his patchy tale of events. But this story isn't about the failures of the college system (which deserves a piece on its own), or the lack of community that exists for victims of racial abuse at this institution — it's about the reactions of the two white women I lived with, upon hearing that their 'friend' had been racially abused.

The two girls, Olivia and Rose, were both middle-class white women who self-identified as feminists, and when the incident first happened — both came to the defence of the man who had racially abused me. Both never reached out to me to see if I was okay, or even get my side of the story; both considered writing statements in his defence for the case against him; and both concluded that an incident of clear racial abuse was simply a misunderstanding and that I was overreacting. Two white women, without knowing the details of what happened, decided that it was their right to determine the hurt that I was experiencing. Two white women decided that the incident did not justify the punishment being given and that it was their right to do something about it. These women denied me the right to be hurt and get justice against the person who abused me because I do not fit the profile of a woman who is able to be the victim of a man's abuse. In their eyes a Black woman could never be a damsel in distress.

Trinity term came around and with everyone back in college in-person for the first time since Michaelmas, Olivia and Rose would have to face me for the first time in months. When the face-off did eventually occur, Olivia started crying before I could even get a word out — to an outsider it would look like I was

the one who betrayed her. White women often weaponize their tears as a final plea of innocence to gain sympathy and avoid addressing the ignorance or bigotry that has got them into that position in the first place. It's the appearance of powerlessness, the ability to weaponize the stereotypes about women's nature as meek and needing protection that allows for them to gain sympathy, and completely shuts down the legitimate complaints of POC women against them. Before I ever got an apology from Olivia I was greeted by her tears, in the same way that tears are weaponized by 'Karen's' in internet meltdowns.

One year later, I don't think either Olivia or Rose realise the extent of their actions against me, which is partly why I wrote this piece. To any white women who can see a glimpse of themselves in these

two women, who have ever placed themselves in authoritative positions over someone else's pain, who excuse the actions of white middle class men and downplay their awareness of what they did, who weaponize their own identities when they realise what they have done wrong, you are not only detrimental to feminism, you have a significant role in the lives of the people who you hurt. If we look at the bigger picture, two white women betrayed a Black woman in the fight against an abusive man. If we look at the realities, two women betrayed their friend because they refused to understand her.

NB: 'POC' is used for lack of a better term that can act as a signifier for collective racialised experience. I refuse to use the term 'non-white' as it centres whiteness.

Fugitives **by Paul Majek** *Illustrated by Paul Majek*

CW: racial persecution, police brutality, and murder

I died, but I was reborn. I'm in the water which quenches your thirst, the air you inhale and exhale. I am you.

Death, rebirth and the voyage are inseparable: the fugitive in search of the unknown, our souls. A fugitive practice: taking care of and listening to our ancestors, our spirits and our lineage. We know this world, they know the unknown. Mustakeem's 'Slavery at Sea' (2016) quotes Penny Dreadful: "Did you imagine that I was dead? That I could die?". These words remind us that death is not the end. The work of both Packer and Mustakeem explores the spiritual and the archival, attempting to honour the lost souls, connecting with an archive of the forgotten and unimaginable. "How are the dead remembered?" (Sharpe, 2016) — we remember through a fugitive art practice, through exploring our lineage and those who came before, through the archive. In 'Blessed Are Those Who Mourn (Breonna! Breonna!)' (2020), Packer attempts to reconcile with death and somehow find refuge, using images of the interior of a Louisville home to imagine the horrific scene of Breonna Taylor's murder. Sharpe refers to these scenes and spaces as "the wake, the shop, the hold, and the weather", common spaces where George Floyd and many other Black people have been murdered: in the streets, in the hold, in the ship, in institutional structures.



It's Calling For Snow

by Gabby Ibrahim
Illustrated by Auria Zhang



SCENE THREE.

The sun shines above. It's a beautiful day for a picnic in the park.

There is a basket with lunch and juice boxes inside. Sketchbooks and pencils are laid out on the blanket.

AMARA basks in the sun while MADISON reads a magazine.

MADISON: I don't understand what my favorite Beatle has to do with what Fall trend suits me best. Do you?

AMARA: Depends. Who'd you choose? And be wary: there is a right answer.

MADISON: None of them, obviously.

AMARA smiles. She tucks MADISON's hair behind her ear.

AMARA: You know those magazines are silly.

MADISON: I do.

AMARA: Why do you bother, then?

MADISON: I like to see how long we have left before humans completely ruin this planet.

AMARA: How's it looking?

MADISON: Well, I can't lie...not that good. I hate people.

AMARA laughs.

MADISON: What? What is it?

AMARA: You don't hate me.

MADISON: How do you know? Maybe I'm just good at hiding it.

AMARA inches closer to MADISON.

AMARA: Doubtful. You suck at hiding your true feelings. I can read you like a book.

MADISON: Yeah? Do it, then. Tell me. What am I thinking right now?

AMARA: Hey, I never claimed to be a psychic!

MADISON: Too bad. Read me.

AMARA: Hm.

AMARA traces her fingers along the skin of MADISON's arm.

AMARA: You want to kiss me.

MADISON: How bold.

AMARA: You want to make sweet love to me in this park, but you know we'd get caught because I'm a little too loud.

MADISON: I have a list of reasons as to why I should still do it, though.

AMARA: You have a list for everything.

MADISON: You don't even want to hear it?

AMARA: It won't convince me.

MADISON: Shame. You know what else I'm thinking about?

AMARA: Tell me.

MADISON: The way you'll look tomorrow onstage when you receive your diploma.

AMARA frowns. She returns to her original position.

MADISON: What? You aren't excited to get out of here?

AMARA: Not if it means leaving you for a year.

MADISON: We knew this was bound to happen. Perks of being a senior.

AMARA: You pronounced cons wrong.

MADISON playfully nudges AMARA.

MADISON: One year, Amara. One year until I join you out in the real world. Just 12 months until I get away from my pathetic excuse of a mother, and my nights alone cooking dinner for one, picking up the empty bottles, mopping the puke-stained floors. 365 days until I run far, far away from here, and I never look back. No more Madison. I'll change my name. Try something shorter. Ava. Eve. Cut my hair. Build a new wardrobe. The old me is gonna die here, and I'll be born again somewhere else.

AMARA: I'd rather you didn't die at all.

MADISON: It's a metaphor. I'll be reborn with you.

AMARA: I like who you are now. Can't you stay a little bit the same?

MADISON: I guess I can keep my jacket.

AMARA: What if I change, too?

MADISON: I'll still want you the same.

AMARA: *This* you will. What about 'new you'? And 'new me'?

MADISON: I...I don't know. Don't think about it like that.

AMARA: Like what?

MADISON: We'll grow together. No matter where we are.

AMARA: We can try.

MADISON: What does that mean?

AMARA: I don't know. I'm scared. One year is daunting.

MADISON: For most people, yeah. We're not most people, though. We're better.

AMARA: Better how?

MADISON: Like the way that iced coffee is better than regular coffee. Or how brownies taste better with ice cream. Or how holding hands with anyone else is nice, but it's not the same as holding hands with you – you squeeze my hand three times, and I know it's time to go; I trace circles into your skin when I'm anxious, and you kiss the crook of my neck. We're perfect, you know? You're always in my

future, even as life shifts and changes. You're always there, Amara.

MADISON places her hands on AMARA's.

MADISON: We'll make it. We'll make it because it's us. In one year's time, I'll be with you in our cozy little apartment that you'll have decorated with endless plants and flowers. We'll snuggle in bed all afternoon, you'll study for an upcoming architecture exam while I'll ink your back with a pen. Mitski will play in the background. In one year's time, we'll be taking walks around the city, grabbing sushi before we break away for classes, and we'll work part-time. I'll find an apprenticeship at an amazing tattoo shop, and you'll keep working at Starbucks. You'll bring me that drink I love, even though I can barely get through its name without cracking up. And we'll spend all night absorbing each other's presence, just so we can get through the next day again. In one year's time, we'll be carving out a world together. You'll have a head start, but that doesn't have to mean anything bad. In fact, you're the one good thing I can count on. I can't wait to take on life with you. Only you. Are you with me?

A beat.

AMARA looks MADISON in the eyes. She's crying.

MADISON wipes the tears away, whispering.

MADISON: Are you with me?

AMARA nods.

AMARA: I'm with you.

MADISON: I'll stay a little bit the same, okay? But I want to forget the rest. Or heal. I want to *heal*. Grow. Blossom.

AMARA: We'll grow together.

Author's Bio

Gabby Ibrahim is a queer artist and student of the University of Toronto in Canada. They have been writing since they were young and have always had a passion for bringing the lesser known stories of others to life, including theirs. Gabby enjoys writing prose and poetry, and has written a number of queer plays which have been performed or filmed. Gabby's main hope is that their work will help others in their community feel less alone, so they can inspire an optimistic outlook for queer individuals everywhere towards a more colourful future.

The Tidal Wave of Transition with Sarah Stephenson-Hunter

by Eulalia Marie

Illustrated by Clara Marks

Sarah Stephenson-Hunter is a blind & trans woman activist. She hosts the Simply Equality Podcast, celebrating the lived experience of disabled and trans people, and works as the Staff Disability Advisor for Oxford University and the LGBT+ Officer for Oxford Labour. Twitter: @sarahshequality

After hearing Sarah speak at the Oxford protest against the government's decision to not ban 'conversion therapy' for trans people, I invited her to speak more intimately with Kesena Berry and myself about her experiences.

Eulalia: I found the protest really emotional. It was so incredible to see such a high turnout of people, to witness people bravely and passionately resist the government's recent act of cowardice and cruelty, to celebrate trans joy at such a fearful time. You shared your story about your journey to transition and its conflicting relationship with your role as a church leader. Would you mind sharing it with us again?

Sarah: I grew up in a Christian household, but I never really engaged with Christianity until I went to university, when I joined the Christian Union. I got really involved, I went to the Church of Scotland. I got more and more involved, my ex-wife and I led a new non-denominational church plant called Coquet Community Church. A church for the unchurched. But at this point, I wasn't out as trans. I've always been trans but I couldn't understand that until I was in my early 40s, in 2012. I describe the turning point as my Tidal Wave Moment. A couple of things happened: I've always had problems with my vision, but I lost all my remaining vision in 2012, and not long before that, my dad died. That combination of events made me realise I couldn't hide anymore — I'd been running away from who I was for all my life. It was exhausting! So I began my exploration over my gender identity. I was married at the time, I had three children, I knew I had a lot to lose. I also knew that my church wouldn't respond favourably. To be fair to the leaders at the time, they were initially trying to understand. They were like, "Are you bisexual?" I don't know how that had anything to do with it!

Kesena: Trying to figure out what's going on with yourself at the same time as being a devoted Christian — it's hard. And you need that support system of people to tell you that it's going to be okay, to say, "We're here for you. No matter what." The church says all of that, but the second you go out of line, it seems you're just greeted with hostility.

Sarah: There was a transitioning church member in one of the churches I was part of previously. I didn't

know them that well, but I was very observant of the way they were being treated and talked about, and from my perspective, they were very much made to be an object of wariness, derision and mockery. I wasn't out at this point but I knew what was going on inside me and I observed that. A few times I asked for prayer, to take it away — I tried to resist, as they say. Funnily enough, it wouldn't work, because it was part of who I am. I would definitely say that my faith, my involvement in the church, and my disability, were real big factors in holding me back, and reasons why I didn't transition until I did.

Kesena: Transitioning within the English Church sounds like sending yourself to prison in a sense. Do you think it's changed your relationship with God?

Sarah: I still have my core beliefs, but I haven't been in the church now for eight years. I've gone from being a church leader with lots of Christian friends, to having no one — when I came out, everyone pretty much ditched me. I went to my youngest's daughter's Nativity Play, she was in a Church of England primary school. Most of the parents and teachers — Christians — people who I'd previously known really well and spent time with, none of them spoke to me. So there I was, as a blind parent, in the process of transitioning, going to my daughter's nativity play, at a Christian school, and I was ignored by pretty much everybody.

Kesena: And this is the moment where you needed people the most. You needed to feel included, you needed to feel safe, especially at your daughter's primary school. You needed all of that.

Sarah: I still have a belief. I don't really express it publicly, I don't go to Church, I don't really read the Bible anymore. I've only just started to engage with people in the fringes of church, people who are trying to make some changes. But I don't think I see myself ever having the same relationship with the church, with Christianity, that I did before.

Eulalia: I think experience with the church is so dependent on the area the church is in and the denomination.

Sarah: I was very involved with the Evangelicals, the Charismatic, the Vineyard, the Anglican and Baptist; I was very into modern Christianity. They said, "You're all welcome." But you're only really welcome if you follow their rules.

Kesena: That image is a microcosm of British society as a whole. If you're a smidgen different from anyone, they're so quick to judge, label you and treat you horribly. When I started discovering my

queerness, having people there, even just on the internet, in solidarity with me, was so important. But some people had no one there, like you. You don't know yourself, and one of the most important things is to know yourself first, and accept who you are. If you never discover who you are, then you're not living.

Sarah: I completely agree. That's what I was trying to do. I was a bit older, you know, there wasn't any help on the internet, or LGBT role models. When I was at uni in the 90s, I'd never really heard of the word 'trans'. So I was wanting to discover, but equally I was doing that in a framework of my religion and in my church, where if you deviated from the so-called norm, then, you would probably be treated with suspicion, caution, and ultimately you'd be told, which was the case for me, "You're either with us or against us." And it's still talked about as my 'lifestyle choice'. But this isn't my lifestyle choice, this is my identity, this is my life!

Eulalia: I was in the 'queer' group at church and we all had different ideas of what being queer meant to us. One of my friends fully believed that their identity was wrong. They would pray to be straight, and without knowing, prayer groups would pray for them to be straight too. They did an internship at the church and their contract included a clause about not engaging in any 'homosexual practices'. Even then, they still didn't have the capacity to see that the way they were being treated was wrong, it was cruel. But they were so used to it. That's one of the saddest things — if you don't have that community, you're just lost. And you obviously found this community, but at a much later stage in your life. It's so encouraging to know that your life isn't over when you hit 40 — I mean you were just getting started! But you were lost for a long period of your life. Would you mind telling us about your experience of finding a community, about your liberation and adjustment?

Sarah: When I finally understood who I was, and finally accepted that I was trans and that, for me, transition was the pathway which I needed to go down, it was bittersweet. I had that sense of liberation, and joy, but I very much had to start from scratch. I lost pretty much all of my so-called Christian friends. I had to move out of the family home — I don't blame my ex, she wanted a husband, she wanted someone I couldn't be. So there I was, as a totally blind person just beginning to navigate the world of gender transition, having to live on my own. At this point I was working at the University of Nottingham, and I luckily had some great support from colleagues. Most of them were women, so you know, contrary to belief, most women are not TERFs. Some of them helped me to buy clothes and things like that. I started to discover the queer community in Nottingham, and I slowly rebuilt my community. I lost the quantity, but I gained the quality. Over time, I've developed a really strong, vibrant, diverse, colourful community, which is fantastic, because I think beforehand, as much as I didn't set out to do so, my community was pretty much people who I thought were what I



needed to be: white, middle-class, straight, cis. But that is not my community now, and I love it.

I found my community within the LGBT community. That's not a bad thing, as long as you don't create cliques. But the reality is the LGBT community has so many different people and we're not all the same. We have different interests, hobbies and jobs. It can take a while before you find people you really connect to, but that's not to say that the community as a whole is unwelcome or uncomfortable at all. There's solidarity, then there's connection. As such a diverse community, we all need to learn from each

other, and diversity is something to celebrate rather than be divided by.

Kesena: You can see that the world is very slowly starting to change. There's a lot more awareness, but with awareness comes hate and resistance. What do you see the future of British society as?

Sarah: Whilst it's still tough to be LGBT, those of us who have gone through transition are the lucky ones. Whilst awareness is being raised, and exploration is more accessible, what it also means is that I have more concern for children who are LGBT or who are gender questioning, because the discussion being driven by the media is so toxic, ill-informed and ill-judged. Feminism is supposed to be about liberation, freedom and gender equality. Yet a small group of 'feminists' want to decide how a woman should look, act, be.

Kesena: It doesn't make sense. The media is fuelling fabricated narratives that have been statistically proven not to be the case. So the resistance has nothing to do with people being trans, but a lot to do with the government trying to create one group to hate on.

Sarah: Absolutely. If you're a child, teen, or adult, you have more role models and solidarity, but on the other hand, you have to face long waiting lists, prejudice within society, it's going to be terrifying.

Eulalia: There's a huge narrative about it being reckless to let children make this decision. But generally speaking, it's not really a decision that people have gone back on. And it's not like doctors are just handing out medication and the means to transition.

Sarah: Are they not?

Kesena: If only!

Sarah: It took me two years to get access, I feel lucky! Children are on waiting lists for much longer than that. It's not a rushed decision at all, nor a rushed process.

Eulalia: What I don't understand is the people who are so prejudiced when they aren't members of any institutionalised religion who unquestioningly or 'faithfully' follow their interpretation of their sacred texts. It makes no sense to me. They think that there's no afterlife, no God, no soul: why do they care so much about reducing and restricting humans to biological categories such as 'male' and 'female'? Your story shows how real transness is — it didn't just come out of nowhere. It's always been a thing. You had so much to lose and you made this decision in your early 40s. I think it shows how by finding community, you find yourself.

Kesena: Every day I am reminded of the power

of our communities and our allies, and I can feel assured that there is a brighter future.

Eulalia: Building a brighter future starts with finding strength from within the community. The history and legacy of the queer community is so beautiful, but so painful. People were willing to face hate crime and discrimination everyday in order to be true to themselves and their autonomous expression.

Sarah: My biggest act of resistance is being me. I completely understand and sympathise with LGBT people who can't truly express themselves because it would be dangerous to. But I made that decision to be me, which is a daily act of resistance. We need to remind ourselves to celebrate ourselves. There will always be pushback, but Screw Them! But again, you can only truly do that if you have a community to support you, to give you that bravery and strength.

Kesena: You find a new world, if you're queer, or of an ethnic minority. You go through that stage of wanting to conform, trying so hard, because you feel like you don't fit in and fitting in is something you've always craved. But when you realise you're not meant to, when you let go, and you find that real community, you find true support, you gain understanding, you get more smart about the world, you learn about people better. There's just so much in your head, when you're trying to figure out what's happening, when there's no one to lean on.

Eulalia: People don't have the words to vocalise thoughts, to articulate feelings. If you've not found that community, the thoughts and feelings remain bottled up, and there's no way to process them.

Sarah: You can only bottle it up for so long. That's why I got to the point I did — when other things happened in my life, I had to stop running from the Tidal Wave. I said, I'm just going to stand still, let that metaphorical wave crash over me, and if I fall in the process, so be it. I fell, and I was drenched, and broken, but before me was a new world that I could explore and build myself — who I wanted to be, not who society and religion and culture was telling me I needed to be.

Eulalia: That's a really beautiful picture.

Sarah: I know, it's quite poetic, isn't it?

Eulalia: We all sat in silence for a second, just deeping that.

Kesena: You should release a little poetry book.

Sarah: Absolutely.

Fruit Women

by Astyl



"Welcome. My name is Astyl Franklin. Most of my life I went by my middle name, Jonah, because I was afraid of how unique my first name was. Overtime, I began to appreciate my individuality & eventually became proud of that name. Now take a look at work that's meant to help individuals celebrate themselves." Boosting self confidence, self esteem, and self love..."
Instagram @artby_astyl



Breaking Generational Stigma Towards HIV

The dark history of the UK's approach to HIV, and how we can forge a more sympathetic understanding in the present day.

Of all current and recent global epidemics, the HIV/AIDS crisis has left perhaps the greatest of marks on society. Not only has it claimed the lives of over 36.3 million individuals since 1981 (representing the deadliest global epidemic since the Spanish Flu of 1918-20), but it has also ushered in a deeply embedded stain of stigma and shame within society. A shame and stigma that is still suffocatingly present.

Of course, perceptions have changed and are changing. Perhaps ironically, in just a few years, Netflix and BBC documentaries have achieved what organisations and events such as the Terrence Higgins Trust and World AIDS Day have been attempting for years: a wider and more sympathetic understanding of what has gone on and what is going on. This is not to undermine the phenomenal work, impact and support that such organisations and events have provided; they must be commended with the utmost praise for doing so. Perhaps, what this does perhaps represent is the ignorance that we, as a society, still hold towards HIV/AIDS and its deeply-embedded miseducation.

Of course, TV shows such as *It's A Sin* (depicting the lives of a group of gay men and their friends who lived during the HIV/AIDS crisis in the United Kingdom) have been momentous in shining a light on the stigmatisation of issues during the 1980s, and the degrading, discriminatory approach of government, authorities, medical professionals, and the public 'education'. The fact that 21st century British society requires cinematographic depiction to move public conscience from a place of ignorance into the foundational basis of understanding, reflects the dire need to unlearn the dark narrative Britain created. Perhaps more pressingly, cinematography is not where individuals should feel their educational understanding finishes, for this would represent the disaster that we have forged in our approach to dealing with marginalised groups and under-supported communities. At the most foundational level, we need to institute better sexual health education in schools, communities, and the workplace. Learning about sex and sexual health should not be a one-off event finishing at the ring of a school bell, but needs to become a lifelong educational endeavour that we learn and grow with, as people.

Countless conversations with friends seem to embody the very issue that I talk of here. For example, still prevalent is a lack of awareness surrounding how HIV spreads, and why it has affected certain marginalised groups more than others. Yes, there seems to be a heightened

awareness towards stigmatisation and practices associated with how HIV/AIDS in the UK was dealt with during the 1980s, but, there are many gaps in knowledge that remain — gaps that ought and need to be filled by matter of necessity. This, in essence, is the crux of this article: exposing how we are still so ignorant surrounding the matter in hand, and extending the current path of knowledge to ensure that a legacy of empathy, understanding and awareness is left for generations to come.

I do not seek to suggest that we must all become medical and historical experts on the virus and disease. What I am suggesting is that we must all bear witness to certain facts, in order to take truly progressive steps towards eradicating the virus and its effects. To unlearn our unjust attitudes and re-examine our dark history, we can begin with these next few points that, whilst not exhaustive, are a great place to start in tying our past to the present.

1. HIV in the UK is no longer always a death sentence. In fact, this reality is not something new but has been the case for years. There are many different medication options available, for example, antiretroviral drugs have made HIV a survivable condition that can be treated with a single tablet a day.
2. Not only that, but these antiretroviral drugs (taken correctly) mean that you can be HIV positive and not pass on the virus to another person. This is all to do with viral load: viral load is the amount of HIV in the blood which shows how much of the virus is in the body. Antiretroviral drugs reduce the amount of the virus in the blood to undetectable levels, at which point the virus cannot be passed on. As a result, 'U=U', 'Undetectable = Untransmittable'. With effective HIV medication, you can be HIV positive and not pass on the virus.
3. Preventative medicine is now freely available in the UK for those at risk of contracting HIV. This drug, known commonly as PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) is a daily tablet that reduces the risk of the virus establishing a permanent infection if you are infected. Of course, by taking this medication, you should still consider the necessary steps to ensure protected, safe and comfortable sex: the use of condoms/dental dams and with this water-based lubricants, as oil-based lubricants are not compatible with latex. PrEP is not 100% effective, and there are still other STIs and STDs that can be transmitted, alongside potential unwanted pregnancies. The benefits are nevertheless significant, and fundamentally reduce the risk of HIV infection from any form of transmission.
4. AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. It is a collection of illnesses (syndrome) that is caused by a virus you can pick up (acquire) that makes the immune system

weak (immune deficiency). You cannot 'catch' AIDS or be infected by it. You can only get an AIDS diagnosis if you are already HIV positive. Luckily, AIDS is now a very rare development in the UK, as a result of early HIV diagnosis and effective treatment.

5. Regular HIV testing is important for everyone. HIV is not a disease that only exists within the gay community. It isn't even something that just exists within the LGBTQ+ community. In fact, as of this year, HIV in the UK now infects more heterosexual people than homosexual or bisexual men. Not identifying as gay or bi man doesn't make you immune from the virus — a fact that we are slowly unlearning, but must continually emphasise is the case. HIV is transmitted through exchanges of certain bodily fluids (semen, vaginal fluids, breast milk, blood, anal lining fluid) into the bloodstream. This can happen through a variety of actions, such as oral and penetrative sex, breast-feeding, needle-sharing, exposed cuts and sores. Condoms are often freely available from sexual health clinics and educational institutions. Needles are also freely available in some NHS centres to prevent spread of infection and diseases through the sharing of needles. Even when using preventive measures, regular testing is still as important.

Of course, this is not an exhaustive checklist of what everyone needs to be aware of in order to become a more conscious individual functioning within a deeply stigmatic society. But with these five elements we can begin to rewrite our dark history. Going forward, it is our duty to ensure groups and individuals are not marginalised as a result of governmental, medical, and public shaming. It is our duty to ensure that we do not isolate marginalised communities, as was so common during the HIV/AIDS epidemic, with the banning of hospital visitations for patients with HIV/AIDS. The miseducation which persists to this day is part of the hangover from the dark legacy left to us. But, by beginning to change our depths and aspects of knowledge towards the issue at hand, we might just forge a better world for the next generation.

Resources for official information, advice, and testimony:

Terrence Higgins Website: <https://www.tht.org.uk>

World Aids Day: <https://www.worldaidsday.org>

NHS Website: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/hiv-and-aids/>

The author of this article has chosen not to attach their name to the piece, as they feel it is not constructed of their own authentic thoughts and experiences.

Queer Coding, Queerbaiting & Queer Fetishisation in Marvel

by Julia Leme & Eulalia Marie

INTRO

If you're an avid fan of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) and Marvel Comic Book Universe (Comicverse), it is only natural to end up exploring Marvel fanfiction, especially if you're from a marginalised community. Fanfiction gives you the one thing the MCU doesn't. Representation. Fanfiction doesn't just give more 'screen time' to LGBTQ+ characters, they present 'canonically' cis, straight characters as LGBTQ+. Within Marvel, the most frequent 'non-canonical' fanfiction characterisation is the portrayal of 'straight' men as gay men. Many — typically straight — fans believe this interpretation to be corruptive of the MCU canon. In this article we will explore the relationship between the representation of LGBTQ+ people, specifically gay men, in fanfiction versus 'canon', and question whether the majority of fanfiction being gay is problematic.

THE QUESTION

'Archive of Our Own' (Ao3), created nearly thirteen years ago, is a strictly non-commercial space that in 2020 recorded having 2.5 million users — not counting the guest users without official accounts, of which there are many — and almost 6 million works in over 36,700 fandoms (Ao3, 2020). The term 'ship' denotes a romantic, familial or platonic relationship pairing. Screenrant reviewed the most popular Ao3 ships, and following the romantic shipping of the protagonists from *Supernatural*, *BBC Sherlock* and *Teen Wolf*, the fourth most popular 'ship' in 2022 was the romantic pairing of Steve Rogers with Bucky Barnes, respectively Captain America and *The Winter Soldier*, and the sixth, Steve Rogers with Tony Stark, *Iron Man* (Screenrant, 2022). Some fanfiction has gained so much attention that in interviews and press tours, directors and producers have been indirectly forced into explaining their choices to continue portraying their characters as canonically straight. As cis, straight men themselves, these directors are unaware of their heteronormative assumptions, and believe that they are only staying faithful to 'canon' with their portrayals. Are their beliefs justified? We argue that they're not.

Something straight fans must understand first is that canon hasn't been 'corrupted' by gay fanfiction. In a heteronormative world, unless a person specifically 'comes out the closet', they are assumed to be straight. But Marvel characters don't tend to 'come out' as straight. Rather, their heterosexuality is assumed, and because no homosexual relationships or identities are explicitly explored, these heterosexual assumptions are taken as sacred 'canon', yet they remain just that, assumptions.

QUEER CODING

It is worth investigating whether the interpretation of 'straight' characters as gay and 'platonic'

relationships between men as romantic is actually so far-fetched. In the 1960s, the US government, along with a number of religious and conservative groups, became concerned with the effects of media on the public — especially on children. The Comics Code Authority (CCA) placed heavy regulations on comic books: no drugs, sex, depictions of violence — and while queer representation wasn't explicitly banned, it was massively discouraged. Because most comic book franchises depended on their CCA seal to market their product in stores, they obliged to these regulations. This caused characters' queer identities to exist in subtext, giving birth to 'queer coding': when a character isn't explicitly stated as queer but presents as so. In this context, queer coding has enabled queer stories to be shared in a less hostile environment, as people who weren't queer were unsuspecting (or more specifically, 'heteronormatively assuming') and wouldn't have noticed or picked up on this. Arguably then, people who make heteronormative assumptions might not be qualified to declare what is canon, as things really are subject to a person's interpretation. If a queer person feels that a character has been queer coded, how are they to argue with the non-queer person?

Before the regulations of the 1960s, the aforementioned groups also rallied behind Will Hays' Hollywood Production Code in 1930, and so it was self-imposed. Consisting of 36 rules prohibiting the depiction and normalisation of what was considered 'morally corrupt', the code banned the depiction of things like sexual assault, violence, crime, suggestive nudity and, most notably, the depiction of 'sexual perversion'. Decades later, the former prohibitions are no longer abided to, yet the depiction of 'sexual perversion' (considered as same gender attraction, and nonconformative gender identity and presentation), is still taboo. The 'sexually perverse' was only allowed to be depicted if the characters were wicked villains, or if they met demise. Thus, queer coding has also been used in a horribly perjorative sense. This treatment of gay characters is still very prevalent today and has come to be known as the 'bury your gays' trope: gay characters are 'killed off' disproportionately to straight characters, or depicted as experiencing only traumatic events (mainly 'caused' by their sexuality) and never finding happiness, often having a partner die — sometimes to AIDS, reinforcing its miseducation — or after a partner's death, coming to the 'realisation' that they are actually straight. It is clear to see that gay characters have not been treated 'fairly' in pop culture, in any sense of the word.

Avengers: Endgame, one of the biggest MCU blockbusters, presented Marvel's first on-screen gay character, through a cameo played by Joe Russo, one of the directors. His 'character' had a few lines in a group grief counselling session, where he spoke

of a depressing date he went on, that happened to be with a man. In 2019, this was considered by Marvel to be quite groundbreaking. Russo told Deadline: "Representation is really important... it was important to us [to have] a gay character somewhere in [one of the four films we directed]. We felt it was important that one of us play him, to ensure the integrity and show it is so important to the filmmakers that one of us is representing that. It is a perfect time, because one of the things that is compelling about the Marvel Universe moving forward is its focus on diversity." (Deadline, 2019). Russo went on to talk about how it was 'important' that the character was an average person, living an everyday life, to show how much the effect of Thanos' Snap affected people beyond the Avengers.

Valkyrie, an openly bi-sexual superhero in the Comicverse, had her bi-sexuality erased, or, made 'ambiguous', in *Thor: Ragnarok*. In the 2021 MCU Disney+ miniseries, *Loki*, Loki was revealed as bisexual and genderfluid, keeping consistent with the Comicverse and Norse mythology. Yet the 'groundbreaking' moment of the series which caused a 'nexus event' was when he fell in love with a 'conventional' (i.e. thin, blonde, fair, white) woman. It was 'groundbreaking' because she, Sylvie, was supposed to be a version of Loki from the multiverse, however, the fact that Sylvie was, well, Sylvie, and not Loki, seemed to completely undermine Loki's supposed character-arc of 'self-love'.

Russo considering his portrayal of an average gay man in a cinematic universe made up of at least two dozen blockbusters about superheroes, as groundbreaking, is a heartbreaking microcosm of the bigger reality. At this point, it is reasonable to conclude that straight creatives consider the portrayal of gay superheroes rebellious and morally corrupt, because the characters would cease to be superheroes if they were homosexual. Heroes are less than, if they're homosexual, as embodied by the American military act 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' which was only repealed in 2010.

QUEERBAITING

So Marvel arguably queer code their characters — it's subject to the consumer's interpretation. However, 'queerbaiting' is an inherently malicious practice, and if Marvel have 'queerbaited', well, then they wouldn't be as progressive as Joe Russo seemed to think.

When a creative 'queerbait', they deliberately lure in a queer audience to consume their content, using hints and suggestions that their content will represent queer people, only to not follow through. Ultimately 'queerbaiting' is a mode of exploitation, because creatives psychologically manipulate queer people into anticipating and paying for content which they know that they will be disappointed by.

What makes queerbaiting so cruel is that it's essentially a form of gaslighting. In the context of gay relationships between men superheroes, a straight audience would not necessarily notice the romantic hints and suggestions given, perceiving the queer

coding as a 'bromance' or 'deep friendship' because of their narrow-minded heterosexual assumptions. Producers keep both audiences satisfied. Gay fans, used to getting scraps of representation, see the hints and get excited, while the straight audience hardly notice and focus on the 'plot'.

When gay fans then anticipate the reveal or development of a gay character or relationship, they are left severely hurt and disappointed by the lack of it. Additionally, they can't discuss it properly with straight fans, as straight fans will question their interpretation of events and label them as 'corrupt' or 'non-canonical', making gay fans feel like they were 'reading into things', even though that's what they've had to do for decades — read into things, figure out who's queer coded.

It might be challenging for a straight person to recognise what queerbaiting is when heteronormative assumptions are taken as canon. Let's investigate the relationship between Steve Rogers and Bucky Barnes as portrayed through the Captain America Trilogy and The Avengers films.

1. Steve and Bucky have been best friends since their childhood in the 1920s; Bucky has always looked after Steve, who is very small and weak. Bucky often tells Steve, 'till the end of the line' to reassure him of their friendship.
2. Bucky goes off to war. Steve gets consensually experimented on, becomes Captain America, the first 'supersoldier', and joins the war too. He ends up saving Bucky from a POW camp, where Bucky was being tested on with 'super soldier serum' by 'HYDRA'. *At this point in history, soldiers who were gender segregated, often participated in same gender sex, but those who were caught as 'homosexual' were dishonourably discharged, with homosexuality being treated by psychiatrists as not just a criminal act, but a disease.*
3. Bucky, who after his imprisonment was encouraged to go home, decides to stay and join the fight against HYDRA with Steve. He 'dies' on one of their missions.
4. Steve is visibly inconsolable after Bucky's death, and tries to drink himself into oblivion (but literally can't, because of his 'supersoldier' metabolism). Shortly after, though in love with Peggy Carter (a woman), he knowingly goes on a suicide-mission, and ends up 'self-sacrificially' saving the world, crashing a plane loaded with about-to-explode missiles into the Arctic, instead of finding a way out of the situation like he normally does (*just swim, Steve, you're a supersoldier*).
5. Newly fished out and defrosted, Steve wakes up in the 2010s. When asked why he doesn't date, he explains that there is no one in this era who gets him. A few scenes later, he discovers that Bucky never died either, but had been recaptured by HYDRA, the terrorist organisation Steve thought he'd exterminated. Bucky had been experimented on, tortured and brainwashed all over

again to become 'The Winter Soldier', and cryogenically frozen when not on an active mission. Steve's mission changes dramatically as he wants to save Bucky, not just the world. Attempting to break through the brainwashing, he tries to remind Bucky of their vow of friendship 'till the end of the line', echoing the marriage vow 'till death do us part'.

6. Bucky partially breaks his brainwashing, and though unsure of himself, chooses to save Steve from death. When he runs away to figure things out, Steve looks for him, for years, and only finds Bucky when he is framed for acts of terrorism. Steve breaks many international laws to save him from being 'put down' or imprisoned again, and without difficulty, he forgives Bucky for all the things he did as 'The Winter Soldier', including the assassination of Tony Stark's parents.
7. With Thanos' Snap climaxing *Infinity War*, Bucky is blipped away. When he is blipped back into existence during *Endgame*, we see very little interaction between them. When all is resolved and the world has been saved again, Steve then leaves the present completely, going *back in time* to live with Peggy, and that's the end of that.

It makes sense why fans were hoping and anticipating that Steve and Bucky would end up together romantically. What are the chances that two 20th century soldiers would both be 'frozen' to death over several decades, to land in the 21st century, which, if they were gay, would give them the freedom to be together romantically? Instead, Marvel creatives felt so threatened by the queerness of it all that they shot hardly any scenes of them together in what would be their last film (due to actors' fulfilled contracts), and chose to undermine both Steve and Peggy's *canonical* character arcs of moving on from each other. After Steve's death, Peggy found love again and married a soldier who Steve had rescued from a POW camp, and after Steve's 'defrosting', he meets Peggy as an elderly woman, and he grieves — but accepts — the dramatically unlucky end of their romantic relationship.

Is this queerbaiting? Straight fans might be inclined to say that this discourse 'reaches', and that labelling a man's romantic time travel adventure as 'queerbaiting' is just a release of pent up frustration which shouldn't be taken out on sacred 'canon'. On second thought, it's incredibly plausible that if either Steve or Bucky were a woman, they would have most likely ended up romantically involved. The 'will they, won't they' relationship would have been immediately interpreted as romantic, and there would have been no debate among straight fans about any 'corruption'. In June 2009, a new universe and parallel reality was created in the Comicverse: Earth-3490. In this reality, Tony Stark is a woman named Natasha, whose partner and later husband is the one and only Steve Rogers. In September 2012, Montreal Comic-Con panelist Sophie Delmas famously said, "If your first instinct, after making Tony Stark a woman, is to

hook her up with Captain America, then they were probably already pretty gay to begin with."

QUEER FETISHISATION

While the mass of gay fanfiction appears to be a form of liberation for the gay community, most of its writers actually identify as cis-women. This raises the question of whether the fanfiction itself is problematic, because people who aren't gay men are centering gay men, indicating a preference and perhaps fetishisation of their relationships and sexuality. Of the top 100 pairings in the Ao3 stats, there were 66 gay pairings and only 5 lesbian. On the one hand, the lack of feminine identifying representation on the screen means that most canonically developed characters are men, and naturally, most canonically developed relationships are between men too. This explains why most fanfiction, which explores plot, character, and relationship development much more intimately, is written about masculine identifying characters. In itself, this is not problematic. However, as fanfiction tends to explore romantic relationships the most, this might have led to the preference of homoerotic fiction and, concerningly, perhaps its fetishisation. On-screen romantic relationships in Marvel are usually* only heterosexual, and the development of romance itself is often sidelined as the action scenes and 'plot' are prioritised. If women should only write about the gender and sexuality identities they have, they really don't have much to work with.

CONCLUSION

Though the MCU has continually let us down, the superheroes they have created remain comfort characters for many gay fans, especially if they have grown up with these characters from childhood.

Whereas blockbusters are always made with the view to making a huge monetary profit, fanfiction is written and shared with people for comfort and connection. Marvel fanfiction tends to be well thought-out pieces of work which explore the development of characters, relationships and plot which blockbusters don't seem to have time for. With over 800,000 clicks, the 'Not Easily Conquered' series is just one example of many masterpieces posted online for free, sparking personal connections between gay and ally fans. Perhaps fanfiction is rebellious, in choosing to break convention and portray straight 'presenting' superheroes as gay. But let's not get confused; fanfiction does not come from a place of corruption, rather, it is a composition of creativity, enthusiasm, and devotion.

*In 2021, *The Eternals* presented the first gay superhero and same-gender couple.

Author's Bio

Julia Leme is based in São Paulo, Brazil. For her university thesis, she wrote on the representation of LGBTQ+ people in the MCU, Comicverse and fanfiction, connecting with people all over the world in Germany, New Zealand and the US through her research and interviewing. Eulalia reached out to her on Twitter and Julia was honoured to collaborate on this piece.

UNTITLED (ALICE)

by Oliver Montgomery





Reflecting on WLW Relationships

by Libby Peet

Illustrated by Kesena Berry

I am so honoured to call myself a member of the LGBTQ+ community, a community that is able to step out of the shadows and embrace liberation in so many places today because of our brave queer predecessors. I am especially humbled and in awe of the perseverance and daring courageousness our trans and BIPOC siblings embodied. I can only hope to continue their legacy so boldly.

With such a rich history come many tropes and trends, experienced by each unique circle within the LGBTQ+ community. Some are fun and some, slightly less so. One tendency which I have both witnessed and partaken in, has been the pace at which WLW (women loving women) relationships advance. It has long been seen as a joke, found in countless Tik Toks and YouTube skits. WLW relationships can move incredibly fast and be incredibly intense — I think this comes down to a few things.

Firstly, for many queer individuals, finding solace in a person, especially a romantic interest, is rare when you have likely grown up feeling like an outsider and without many options. Thus, when presented with somebody who may have shared similar experiences — like internal and external homophobia, biphobia and transphobia — it doesn't take long to feel immediately and passionately invested. I must stress that this feeling is not born of desperation and settling, but relief. The chance to be vulnerable, be it physically or emotionally, when one might have kept up shields in spaces that didn't feel safe, is precious.

For first relationships or first experiences in the queer WLW dating scene, it often becomes natural to then 'trauma dump' on the first date. Conversation will quickly progress to deep and intimate topics around traumatic or difficult experiences. Either one or both individuals will divulge these personal details, and they are usually met with sympathy, compassion and maybe a shared experience. It is, overall, an intense exchange.

Admittedly, I have been on either end of the exchange, both divulging and listening. It can feel relieving and satisfying in the moment to get things off your chest that you might never have been able to share before, due to various potential factors such as the lack of mental health services for LGBTQ+

individuals, or poor support from family, friends and our education systems. This novelty, however, quickly wears off if you never see the person again, it's like a bad emotional hangover. It follows the same dopamine-hit pattern as Instagram likes and fast fashion; generally not providing long-term fulfilment. These behaviours are rife and increasingly hard to resist, especially amongst 'Gen Z' who grew up with the rise of consumerism. I found myself feeling vulnerable and exhausted when, after an exciting, but draining, first date, I never saw the person again, despite feeling like they got to know me inside out.

Secondly, at university, the two aforementioned factors are exacerbated by general hook-up culture. It can be so much easier to engage in fleeting sexual relations, especially here at Oxford — where unhealthy and often unsustainable workloads leave people with hardly enough vitality to just get some fresh air, let alone find the time and energy to foster a healthy and committed relationship, or maintain boundaries on a first date. Of course, for some, one-night stands or sex on the first date work great, and that's fine. But it doesn't suit everyone. The expectation of immediate sexual intimacy often sets a precedent for people to be 'experienced in bed', which can be overwhelming for those who haven't yet physically explored their sexuality. Additionally, the physically intimate nature of a one-night stand may leave people feeling used and discarded when the interaction is over.

Regardless of whether it is actually there, a feeling of security can understandably develop with these two types of intimacy, since one has 'bared all', or inversely, there can be a complete feeling of insecurity, if one has 'bared all' without knowing where the relationship will lead. Thus, there are some hurdles in the way of forming a 'healthy' WLW relationship. Another part of the issue is the minimal, monolithic and non diverse representation in the media. Mainstream media ignores our BIPOC and trans rich history.

Despite these observations, I know that our community will continue to explore queer love and realise boundaries for ourselves and each other. We will enjoy our each and every unique dating experience, be proud of our rich history, and relish our liberation.

I think I ruined our date

by Ellie-Jai Williams

As the train churns along the tracks I feel heavy and invisible, as aimless as small specks of dust that float in sunlit afternoon rooms, unnoticed.

(I always watched those specks as a child, thinking there was something beautiful but sad in their dance)

For a while I'm distracted, thinking about how sunlight at the right moment and the right angle can illuminate something invisible, communicate something unspoken. Sometimes I think I'm the only one who can see it.

The next station is London Charing Cross.
A schoolboy taps taps taps taps taps taps taps incessantly on the table next to me; the noise shatters the security of my sunlit afternoon thoughts.
It's a noise that sends that feeling to my stomach again, like butterflies rising, scrambling for a way out.

I try to be rational by telling myself facts. I'm okay; it's another ordinary Thursday afternoon; you've gone to the bathroom; I'm waiting for you to return. I look at the boy, at the other people on the train. I observe how nothing has changed with them.

But then you're taking too long to come back and the tapping keeps going on and the train keeps moving forward, and suddenly it's too late. The carriage swirls around me, at once claustrophobic and expansive.

(Everything keeps getting bigger and bigger whilst I only get smaller and smaller)
I keep waiting for the relief that washes over me whenever I see your face, whenever you hold me in your arms. But when you arrive all I can do is shout. Hot tears stream down my face, the

embarrassing kind, frustration bubbled over into explosion.

We sit out the rest of the journey in angry silence.

I'm too tired to protest, or to think, or to explain. When we get off the train I drink the coffee you buy me without tasting it, I let my body carry me where it will, like a puppet. It takes me down the stairs, along the corridor, on the tube, *mind the gap please up the escalator face coverings must be worn at all times unless exempt.* I follow you down Baker Street, two strides behind like a child. Bone-tired.

We watch the play in silence. I pretend to look engaged, and composed, and unbothered; I ignore your sideways glances and tentative attempts to hold my hand. A thousand eyes stare at our misery from the crowd above.

I watch Juliet slumped lifeless on the stage and think *that must feel nice*, to close your eyes and not have to move, or speak, or explain.

Thou canst not speak of that thou dost not feel! Romeo shouts angrily. I see myself in him, howling an incessant cry to be understood.

I look at you silently and I ache for language.

Author's Note

This poem explores the difficulty of feeling like you're burdening the people you love without meaning to. It describes anxiety which I couldn't explain at the time; re-reading the poem after being diagnosed as autistic, I now understand that anxiety as my experience of sensory overload.



Please Mind the Gap

Alice on the Platform
by Oliver Montgomery

eye cannot see
by Alice Williams

AW



Commentary on The Diagnostic Process

by Eulalia Marie

The Diagnostic Process is not just excruciatingly exhausting, but also degrading. In the winter of 2020, you star in a manic episode, and for the following half-year you exist as a lab-rat. Appointments with doctor after doctor, new face after new face and no one near to embrace. Medical students observe you make the most uncomfortable reports about yourself to patronising psychiatrists, and *take notes*. You lose count of the number of priestly professionals who hear your darkest confessions.

You are forced to share every little detail about your life, only for it to be typed inaccurately into a flimsy document and filed away with a detached haze. You are forced to seek attention with purpose and validate your symptoms, while confronting conflicting feelings about attention seeking, while resisting the urge to swallow your hollowness and fade away. When an appointment ends, you go back to wherever you call home, and you try to maintain a fully functioning life. Society cuts you little slack — without a diagnosis, your struggling and suffering has no excuse. *Maybe it was meant to be this way, you think. Natural selection.*

But then The Diagnosis comes. It seems to make sense of your whole life, but it also threatens doom. Another half-year follows, composed of panicked attempts to accept

the chronicity of your condition, scrambled experiments to advocate for yourself, and senseless adventures to seek the accommodation you need. You want to be a hero. You want to use your circumstances as an opportunity to overcome something. You want to be the main character everyone is rooting for — more productive and *carpe-dieming* than those mentally stable neurotypicals who never understood you your whole life. The plot thickens but the hero does not escape. Your family taught you that weakness is shame and weirdness is primitive. Your family learnt this from theirs. 'Rusticating' is not an option. You must do everything to please the white people and if you are unsuccessful then you have failed.

The storm comes before the calm. You take a step back and

Breathe. Reflect. Realise. You understand your quest to be someone more than yourself is empty and you bury the concept of superhuman in the sand. You are brown, mentally ill, and medicated. You accept your image, you start advocating for it, you become unafraid to ask for accommodation. And when you squash the stigmas, you search for a real place to call home. Community. Where people don't look at you funny or gossip about your craziness behind closed doors.

Afrotistic

by Kala Allen Omeiza

Chapter 3

My family decided to go last-minute back-to-school shopping at the Target superstore down the street from our neighborhood. My mom insisted on helping me with my Dean's Merit Society quest, probably as a reconciliation for moving across the country, which of course made this quest as inconvenient as it could. She also wanted to buy Ray school supplies early and speak with my godmother, Aunt Nene.

We needed all hands on deck for this conquest. My mom always recommended these agendas under the pretense of helping others, but we all knew it was more so under the pretense of her sanity.

Superstores were the worst, for all of us. We just all displayed our discomfort in different ways. My mom said that my dad, due to being autistic, despised grocery stores so much in Cambridge that he often refused to go unless it was a small boutique store.

"I never understood why..." she recalled to my brother and me on many occasions. "He's the perfect shopper. He goes in, gets what he wants, pays, and leaves. He just seems so efficient, no one would think anything is wrong."

My mom said she got into the habit of holding his hand whenever they had to shop together.

My dad didn't talk much about these superstores, other than flatly saying, "Everything's just too loud and judgmental in there."

As both Ray and I wanted to pick what we carried into our respective schools, and my mom wanted the cheapest prices, our family was left with no choice but to tough it out at Target together.

I completely agreed with my dad's description of these places. While exiting the parking lot and walking into Target, I could feel us all take one deep inhale, as if we were bracing for war. Our first two steps in Target had already struck me like a sword. The lights and the hum of shoppers bombarded my senses.

As if feeling the same, my brother squirmed. My dad picked him up, as Ray did not like riding in the shopping cart; he preferred being carried or walking on his own.

My dad continued to hold Ray with a firm, tight grip. My mom pulled out our shopping cart, my dad another, and away we went— through the aisles of clothes, backpacks, and everything in between. I was beginning to enjoy picking out my last-minute outfits and supplies that I almost forgot how much noise Target was making.

That is, until my mom said she wanted to pick up some vegetables to make stew later, and wanted me to go with her.

I froze.

"But we're only here for school," I protested. Changes to my current routine don't often yield great results to my psyche.

She insisted she wouldn't be gone too long, and asked me to come with her while my dad finished shopping with my brother.

I nodded, reminding myself of my age.

I can pick up some simple vegetables.

The walk to the grocery aisle felt like a half-mile, and it probably was! The store was huge. My mom knew I didn't like brushing against people, so I pushed our cart with her on my right side as she walked past the shoppers moving in the opposite direction. Once she thought I was comfortable, she

put her headset on to call my godmother.

“Yes, of course you're welcome to stay with us for lunch...okay... Maybe we'll even have some new Buffalo friends by then for you to meet... Yes... Nene, don't worry, I heard the pizza and chicken wings are great here...okay...” she said to Aunt Nene.

Almost instantly, the handle on my cart became uncomfortably stiff. Then wet from my sweat, I presumed. Shoppers, and even some guide dogs, abruptly popped out of the perpendicular aisles on my side. I flinched and swerved to my right impulsively, nearly tripping my mom on occasion.

To my mom's surprise, I abruptly stopped to put my headphones on; I couldn't take it all anymore. I always played Mozart when I started to feel a meltdown forming. At my old school, I noticed the “cool” people, or in this context, those with depth, had a mild affinity for “throwback” songs. I'm not sure if Mozart counted as a throwback. Unfortunately, I don't think it counted much towards my character depth in Orlando, as I was still ignored by said “cool kids”.

Probably a fun fact I shouldn't mention tomorrow during the introductions at school.

My mother gently nudged me as I started walking again, narrowing her eyes in a way to secretly ask me, “Are you okay?” I nodded, not because I was okay, but because I had no other choice but to be.

Adagio was in the background now on repeat, except Mozart was too late to be of much use. Adagio ended up playing humorously in the background as I began to feel everything judge me. The lights all around me became bright, as if I was staring directly at overcast clouds right when the sun burst through. Then the lights got so bright that they became *loud*. I can't even explain it, and I definitely can't explain how the lights became loud and

mean. I was *mad* at the lights, and they were mad at me.

Why am I mad at the lights?!

“Is she okay?”

“What's wrong with her?”

Curious older teens and young adults perpendicular to me asked among themselves. I could hear them. I could hear *everything* at this point.

What's wrong with me!?

The handle became way too wet. I briefly took my hands off the cart. I peered down, relieved that the “wetness” of the handle was just sweat, then cautiously put my hands back in place on the cart.

I wanted to run.

I wanted to scream.

I wanted to hide.

Suddenly, I heard a loud wail, followed by a piercing scream, all from a little kid.

“Ray!” I said, startled, getting my mom's attention.

Ray couldn't speak, but he could cry. And boy could this kid cry, and scream. It amazed me how I was the only one that could hear him at this distance.

“What's wrong?” my mom asked.

“I hear Ray! I think we should go back.”

“You're right,” my mom said. “Let's go.”

I quickly made a 180-degree turn, not caring about the judgmental murmurs around me. I was relieved that we had an excuse to leave Target much sooner. The relief was instantly engrossed by guilt that I was rejoicing over my brother's pain. Or rather, the only one of us with the boldness to voice such pain.

Ironically, I couldn't hear Adagio playing in the background. I imagined the string instruments nestled on humorously, as if to mock my mother and

I as we approached my brother. My mom crouched down to pick up my brother and then softly bounced him up and down on her hip, whispering to him in Krio.

I then went closer to my dad, but not *too* close—I'm not a young kid after all. Just close enough to wish I was a kid, burrowing in his chest. Nonetheless, standing a foot or two away, I looked up at him and whispered, "Can we go home now?"

My dad, picking up on how I didn't want to be too close to him, said his next statement while looking straight ahead at my mom and brother.

"I hope so," he said. He walked toward my mom, hugging her lightly while stroking Ray's head.

The judgment of Target then felt louder than ever. My jaw clenched and the tips of my feet were hurting from walking on them so quickly this entire endeavor. I wondered how I managed to do that while pushing my cart.

I smiled at myself. Despite all that chaos, a meltdown never fully came down on me that day. While I felt bad that Ray's meltdown had, it made more sense for it to be him this time. It's more socially acceptable to have a meltdown at his age.

Ms. Angela taught us what a "meltdown" was, and, in retrospect, when I have mine fully, I just meltdown on the inside.

Adagio started to slowly become more audible in the background as we began to check out our items. We were able to get everything I needed for Petersburg West High School, including some nice fall sweaters. We selected about 75% of Ray's supplies and clothes before he couldn't handle it. We weren't able to buy a single vegetable for my mom's stew. My mom didn't seem to mind though. She told Ray what a brave boy he was and assured us that she would pick up the rest of the school supplies and stew ingredients later.

I'm not sure when it happened, but

sometime after we finished checking out, my mom was holding Ray, and my dad somehow managed to grab my hand.

We all exhaled as the automatic doors finally welcomed us with the fresh evening air. Closer than ever to the safety of our home.

"That wasn't so bad, guys." My dad smiled as we approached our car. "I'm so proud of all of you for sticking it out with me today." He squeezed my hand slightly.

For a long time I used to think of my dad as brave, as invincible, as appearing *normal* in situations like this even when he didn't want to be. But as my brother was the brave one among us for voicing his pain, I wondered if my dad and I were weak for hiding ours the most.

As he held my hand, it felt cold and wet, the same feeling I felt when the fog almost overtook me.

For me, the fog rises inside of me as I hear the taps of people's shoes, the sounds people make from their mouths, and see the brightness of the lights around me. The lights mock me at eye level. The fog comes up slowly, slowly, and then all of a sudden, I'm consumed by it because of the bright lights and loud sounds. From the outside, it looks like I can still function at first, but on the inside, I can't breathe, I can't think, and I can't be. That is, until it all comes up so fluidly that I feel like I need to scream.

For me, the fog shouldn't be confused with a dark cloud, or something of the sort. I was not always sad or depressed, no matter what Ms. Angela thought. I really meant a dark fog.

The difference to me was that fogs generally form on the ground level—directly at the surface of my brain. When the fog appears, I can barely see, think, and even when I technically can, I feel like I can't breathe. Everything is too bright and loud to

even attempt to if I wanted to. All I want to do is scream, cry, or run.

In my opinion, clouds form high above the ground level. So those with dark clouds over their brain can still see, hear, and think for the most part, but what they can't do sometimes is *act*.

With dark clouds, they can hear their alarm, but they can't get up.

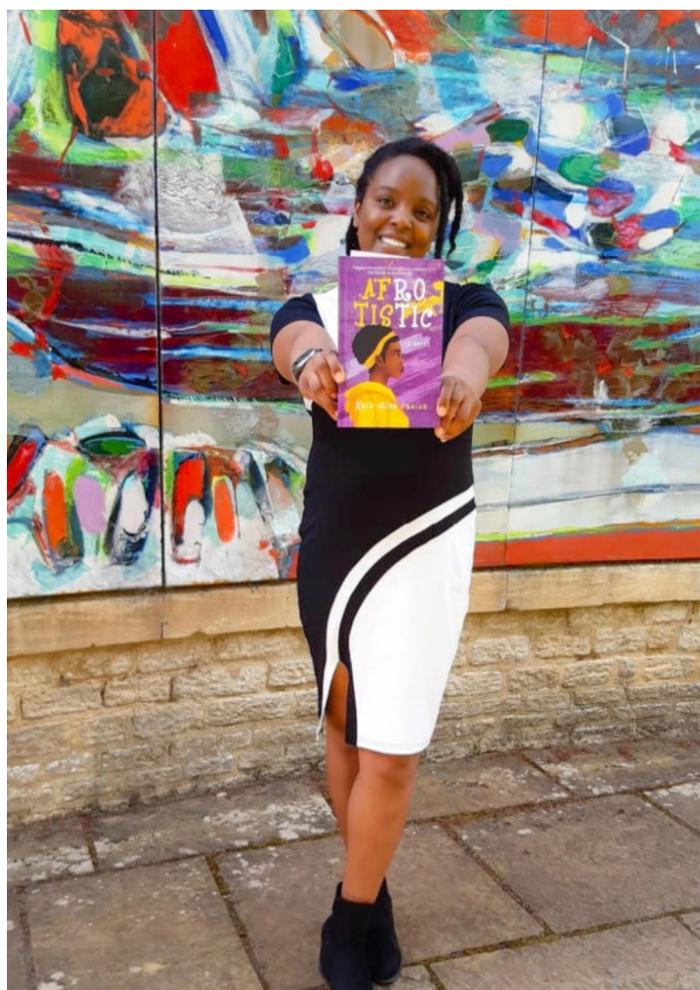
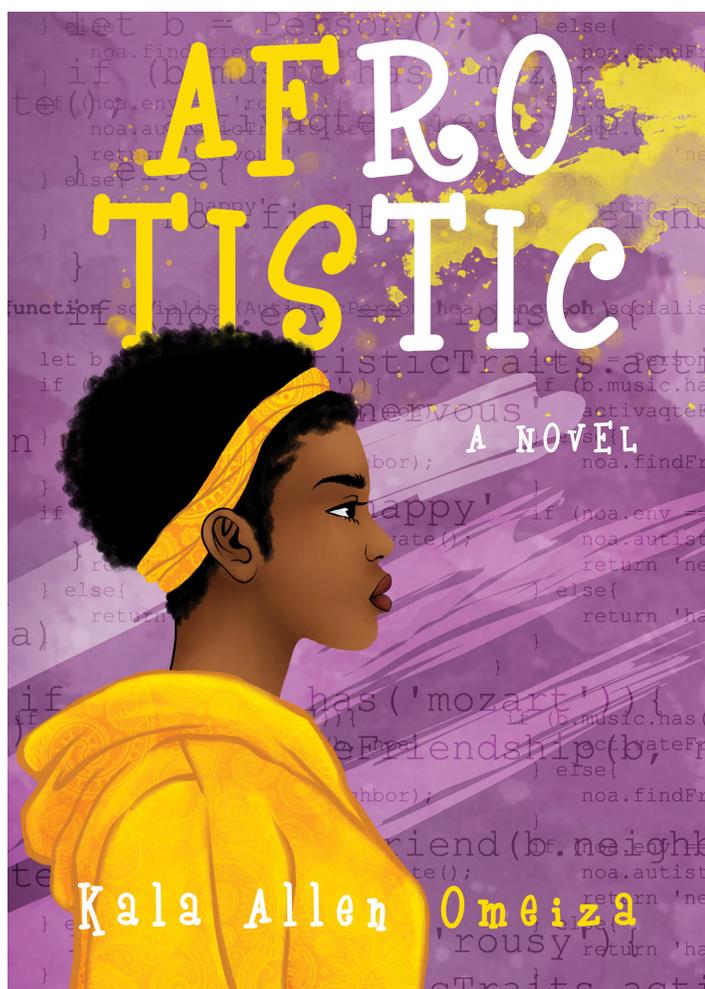
With dark fog, I can't hear my alarm, and can't breathe with the noise.

"There's a difference," I told Ms. Angela, my diagnosis assessor, at my assessment shortly before moving when she asked if I ever felt sad. She

nodded and briefly wrote in her notebook when I told her that I don't think I have a cloud. She did so as if she understood, but I'm not sure if she did.

At the target parking lot, I pulled my hand away from my dad, feigning annoyance. I'd hate for any of the Petersburg West kids to see me like this before I even got a chance to state my fun fact.

I wiped the remaining sweat from his hand off on the side of my sweater. I did this while secretly wishing a brave hand would always be there to hold mine if another fog occurred this school year. Even if the bravery of that hand was also just pretending.



Kala Allen Omeiza was diagnosed with autism at 24 years old. She has worked on various research projects on autism and mental health at Harvard, Duke, Harvard Medical, and as a US Fulbright scholar in Nigeria. An American citizen, she lives in Oxford with her husband Daniel and their eleven plants. *Afrotistic* is her first novel, and this excerpt is from her third chapter when the protagonist Noa goes back-to-school shopping with her neurotypical mother, autistic father, and her autistic nonverbal brother.

Memories IX

by Mahlia Amatina



Neurodivergent Visibility and Inclusivity

by Laura Seymour

We shouldn't just stop at enabling neurodivergent people to access Oxford academia. Rather, we should create an environment where neurodivergent people can flourish. A key part of this flourishing involves having neurodivergent people running things, setting the agenda, and crucially, being paid and visibly credited for what they do. In this article I discuss these issues and give some ideas about how to make events at Oxford more accessible.

One foundation for a neurodiverse legacy in Oxford is neurodiverse visibility. Introducing the edited collection *Lived Experiences of Ableism in Academia* (2021), Nicole Brown writes that reasonable adjustments are all too often put in place with the aim of rendering disability invisible and absent. Brown critiques the attempts to adjust the disabled bodymind to fit in with normality: 'this striving for the absent body needs to be challenged, as it merely perpetuates the image of particular kinds of workers and workings, and thus the ableism that is so prevalent in academia.' (Brown, N.

6.) For me, neurodiverse inclusivity at Oxford is not just about adjusting environments so that neurodivergent people can participate in classes and events (e.g. using dyslexia friendly fonts in lectures). We should make these adjustments as a matter of course, but we should not stop there. I do not want neurodivergent people to only be adjusted for, but to be positively visible rather than smoothed over and made palatable to ableist norms. I want us to flourish and develop *neurodivergently* rather than developing according to ableist goals, temporalities, and milestones. Neurodivergent people's potential to disrupt ableist ideas of what intelligence and scholarship look and sound like is precisely what is needed at Oxford University.

Neurodiversity at Oxford

With the excellent advice and assistance of Joel Casey and Dr Alvin Leung, my colleague Prof. Siân Grønlie and I organise a project called *Neurodiversity at Oxford*. Siân came up with the idea for this project,

having noticed that neurodivergent people at Oxford needed more of a connection with each other. So, the aim of our project is to create an empowered neurodiverse community of staff and students at Oxford, and to celebrate neurodivergent people's creativity, talents, and achievements. This is our priority rather than, for instance, awareness raising about specific conditions aimed at helping neurotypical people to understand us. Of course not every neurodivergent person wants to be a member of a 'neurodiverse community' and that is fine too. Our year-long programme includes various events: a poetry reading, a film screening, an art exhibition, a seminar on neurodiversity and intersectionality, career skills training, mentor training (so we can set up a network of neurodivergent mentors mentoring neurodivergent students), a talk on Shakespeare and Mad Activism, and a performance of G&T theatre company's show *Melonade* about dyslexia in higher education. Siân and I are also involved in adjacent events, like running mental health and neurodiversity teas in our college, St Anne's.

Our funded period will end this year – if we do not secure more funding, we hope to leave a legacy in the form of forging our neurodiverse community through the connections our members have made, our mentor network, and our social media accounts boosting the great things Oxford's neurodiverse community is saying and doing. We have already experienced the unfolding of this legacy through the new ideas and projects created by members of our community, for example, this magazine.

Ideas for making events more accessible to neurodivergent people

- Talk to attendees – ask them what they need. You might ask everyone attending three questions: What do we want this event to be like? If we want it to be like this, how do we need to behave? If we want it to be like this, and we want to behave like this, what support do we need?
- Make your event relaxed by encouraging people to move in and out of the room as they like, wear headphones, stim and tic whenever they want. You can offer items to fidget with (stress balls, pipe cleaners, string) and put elastic exercise bands on chair legs for people to bounce their legs against. Take agreed breaks at various points.
- Offer a quiet room where people can decompress (you can have a 'vacant/engaged' paper sign on it, so that nobody bursts in on anybody else).
- Use a traffic light system of stickers to aid communication: green sticker on a person's top means 'feel free to approach me and chat'; amber means 'don't approach me first, let me approach you'; red means 'I'm just here to listen, not chat'.
- Offer simple summaries of key ideas.
- Stream/record your events, and offer blogs describing what happened, so people can participate without having to leave home if that is overwhelming.
- Include photographs (with written descriptions) of the space where the event will happen, the route to the event, key people involved, and drinks/snacks that will be offered.
- Offer a buddy scheme where people who are

anxious about attending alone will get a buddy who might help them in various mutually-agreed ways, e.g. walking to the event with them and checking in with them at various points.

- Make the event scent-free (no scented perfumes, shampoos etc.) for people with chemical sensitivities.
- Provide as much information as you can (e.g. handouts, slides) in advance.
- Caption videos and make sure speakers use a microphone.
- Ask people to tell each other their preferred communication styles so that we can adapt to each other (e.g. 'I prefer verbal communication to written communication'; 'unbroken blocks of text aren't accessible to me').
- Make events financially accessible as far as possible (not every institution is as rich as Oxford and funding applications take time). Neurodivergent people are disproportionately financially disadvantaged in our society. If possible, pay speakers a fee and expenses, and make events free to attend.

I am currently writing a book called *Shakespeare and Neurodiversity*, which is a guide to teaching Shakespeare in a neurodivergent-inclusive way. As I research for this book, I am asking questions like, why don't we take neurodivergent ways of learning and thinking as the norm, and then adjust our classrooms for neurotypical people so they can participate equally?

There are many things conspiring against us creating neurodivergent legacies at Oxford, from the ableist standards pervading academia (for instance the idea that intelligence equals being able to read a text aloud fluently and discuss it spontaneously), to job precarity which leaves academics in financial difficulty and don't get the chance to make lasting change when they're moving from institution to institution. I am reminded of the pun in Margaret Price's book *Mad at School*: there are mad/neurodivergent people studying at school, and we're also mad (in the sense of being angry) at our schools and the way they're run. I am inspired by neurodivergent people at Oxford and together, despite the odds, we will continue to create our legacy here at Oxford.

Author's Note

I'd like to thank Mary Robson, Anna Stenning, Jenny Bergenmar, Hamja Ahsan, and Louise Creechan, as well as all my neurodiverse students and colleagues (both neurodivergent and excellent allies) who teach me how to be more accessible.

Author's Bio

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Fighting My Eating Disorder During Ramadan

by Habiba Khanom

CW: eating disorders

Every year when Ramadan comes around, I find myself being placed in a vulnerable position with the tough decision I have to make. *Should I fast?*

Fasting during Ramadan is advised only for those who are healthy. Those who are sick in any way, shape, or form are exempt, which includes those who are mentally unwell. Anorexia and Bulimia have been a part of my life since I was 16, and I haven't properly participated in fasting for over ten years. At first I was medically advised not to fast. Five years down the non-linear line of recovery, I am responsible for making my own decision. This means I have to open up an exhausting dialogue with myself, and try to distinguish between my desire to worship and the temptation to satisfy the demon voices of my eating disorder.

Fasting in Ramadan is about so much more than just the physical act of refraining from eating. It is a religious duty, and so it is primarily about spirituality, getting closer to God. For those afflicted with eating disorders, spirituality is probably the last thing on their mind. Personally, I feel so damaged after years of satisfying the voice of my eating disorder — instructing me on how I should act, think and even feel — that now, I see the act of 'Not Eating' as something completely self-destructive, not what fasting is supposed to be: an act of devotion to God.

'Not Eating' has been ingrained into my head as an achievement. Something I am 'good' at. Something I can 'control'. The demon voices of my eating disorder tell me that Ramadan is the perfect opportunity to fall back into old habits, and without anyone noticing too, as my habits would seem to be the same as everybody else's, understood as

motivated by the desire to devote myself to God. However, because I think like this, I know that I am categorically not ready to fully participate. I understand that doing so would be dangerous; doing so would trigger a relapse. 'Not Eating' destroyed my life, and every day I try to persist against participating in it again.

Additionally, for those of us who come from a past of struggling with binge-purge behaviours, Iftar (the celebratory meal at dusk when the fast is broken) can be a really challenging activity, as the inclination to binge and purge resurfaces. The communal eating both at Suhoor (the meal before dawn) and Iftar can be just as overwhelming in their own right, as we might feel incredibly self-conscious and like we are being watched and judged.

Every year before the month of Ramadan begins, I am increasingly saddened by the lack of awareness made about Muslims with eating disorders and the lack of help offered to them. I want to be more well-equipped to deal with people making insensitive comments, triggers around meals — especially at Iftar, and social situations with fasting Muslims where food is the main topic of conversation.

I don't think I'll ever be mentally or physically well enough to fast in Ramadan again, not without relapsing. I'm still finding this reality really hard to accept; it's a very challenging time. I do want to fast for God but I know that I don't have the capacity to, not without it becoming something else. My awareness of this allows me to think more logically, showing that I am in a better place mentally, and how far I've come with recovery. It would feel like I'd be undoing all of my hard work if I was to go back to square one. But some people who struggle with disordered eating cannot see that for themselves yet. I was at that stage a few years ago, but I'm proud to say that I'm not anymore.

In Conversation with Muslim Dietician, Fareeha Jay

by Eulalia Marie



CW: eating disorders and body image

Fareeha Jay is a registered Dietician who has been working as a Diabetes Specialist in the NHS for the last five years. She desires to break the myths surrounding 'healthy eating' and food groups, and make this learning accessible by explaining scientific evidence in a very non-scientific way. Fareeha has a specialist interest in South Asian diets and provides professional advice to South Asians across the globe, leading her to develop the South Asian Eatwell Guide. She passionately avoids prescribing 'diet plans', but rather empowers people with the education to nourish their bodies independently for the rest of their lives.

In this open conversation, Fareeha and I discuss Ramadan and its relationship with contemporary society, focussing specifically on eating disorders (EDs) and disordered eating. The purpose of this conversation is to create a dialogue within the umma (Muslim community) about the purpose of Ramadan and the attitude of the umma towards mental illnesses. We want to shed light on the suffering of Muslims with EDs during Ramadan, provide understanding for the stigmas towards mental illnesses and EDs within the umma, and direct the umma to grow in compassion and support for Muslims suffering with disordered eating behaviours.

Eulalia: How would you describe Ramadan to someone who is not Muslim?

Fareeha: The five pillars of Islam are: declaration of faith (shahada), prayer (salah), alms giving (zakat), pilgrimage (hajj) and fasting (sawm). Fasting is done from dawn to dusk in the holiest month of the Islamic calendar, the ninth month, known as Ramadan or the Month of the Quran, when the Quran was first revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him - PBUH).

During Ramadan Muslims worldwide are called together to reflect on, renew and strengthen their spiritual relationship with God and their community. In this month, Muslims appreciate the blessings of God which may otherwise be taken for granted, reminding themselves of their dependence on God for sustenance. Muslims build a stronger relationship with Allah by praying, meditating and reading the Quran. They try to develop habits of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), for example, praying tarweeh (late hour Ramadan prayers) and tahajjud (voluntary late night prayer). All this month Muslims ask Allah for forgiveness and try to forgive people who might have hurt them in the past.

In this month, **Muslims not only fast but also practise self-discipline and self-restraint.** Between dawn and dusk Muslims abstain from eating, drinking, participating in sexual activity, and taking medication. They aim to curb negative thoughts and emotions like anger and jealousy, and quit bad habits and behaviours like lying, gossiping, complaining, and swearing, etcetera. Muslims focus on developing empathy for the less fortunate; helping the poor and the elderly, and distributing provision food boxes, clothing, and other items among those in need of them.

Ramadan is also a month of celebration and joy, when Muslims dedicate their time to their loved ones. Muslims will invite friends and family for Suhoor (the meal eaten before dawn) and Iftar (the meal eaten at sunset) and send iftars to their neighbours. They will attend Islamic discussions and meetings. **Participating in Ramadan as a communal activity is important, and bestows the opportunity for spiritual reflection and development.**

Eulalia: Trying to curb bad habits and abstaining from pleasurable activities like sexual intercourse during Ramadan draws some parallels with Lent, where people might give up watching television, for example. Some Christians fast during Lent too. Fasting for religious reasons has pretty much always been a thing, though I have to admit I'm not exactly sure why. In Islam, why is fasting practised alongside things like abstaining from pleasures?

Fareeha: When you fast you are making a declaration, not just to abstain from food and drink but to focus on prayer and move away from

worldly affairs. **The essence of fasting is developing compassion towards others.** This happens naturally over time but always consciously: when you restrict your food and drink intake, you become easily agitated and provoked. You might be more susceptible to things like road rage and poor decision making. The work is becoming aware of this and unlearning these behaviours.

Eulalia: I saw a TikTok which had the caption, 'POV: you (Caucasian female) just said Ramadan needs a content warning for "promoting disordered eating."' I thought this was incredibly problematic. First of all, the medium which this opinion was expressed through was satirical in nature, trivialising disordered eating and invalidating the suffering of those who struggle with it. Second, the caption illustrated a deeper, ignorant belief that there is only one form of disordered eating, and only one type of person who struggles with it, ultimately creating the narrative that it's that person's responsibility to ensure they are not triggered by the religious practice of fasting when they may feel obliged to participate. Are white women the problem here? What are your professional thoughts on contemporary society's attitude towards eating disorders?

Fareeha: Eating disorders are considered 'culturally bound' because they are thought to be less prevalent among the ethnic minorities. However, this is only a belief and there are studies suggesting that people from all cultures and ethnic backgrounds are affected by this illness.

A literature review on eating disorders in the Arab world suggested that individuals at high risk for eating disorders range from 2% to 54.8%. 'Curvier' or 'thicker' bodies have always been a part of Arab culture but over the years increased media use and disproportionate media representation of diverse body shapes has brought about sociocultural changes. Accompanied with the rise of commercialism — businesses exploiting unfair beauty standards for profit — the desire to have 'thinner' bodies has risen in both Western and Arab worlds. This has led to body dissatisfaction and disordered dieting behaviour putting many at risk of eating disorders.

An epidemiological study of eating disorders in Iran concluded that the prevalence of eating disorders in Tehran was comparable to the prevalence reported by studies in the West. Essentially, there are Muslim men and women of all ages who suffer with eating disorders. **The problem is that there is a misguided myth, upheld by the portrayal of people who suffer from eating disorders in the media and pop culture, that only young white women have EDs.**

Within the Muslim Community, Eating disorders are actually considered a 'Western disease'. There is a misconception that eating disorders are not a 'Muslim problem' and if anyone has the condition it's only because of weakness in their faith. It is believed that people who pray five times a day, recite the Quran and are 'good' Muslims will never get this condition. Physical conditions are generally validated, but as mental illnesses are not necessarily visible, they are not even considered as conditions, never mind

validated. Muslims with mental illness are thereby made to believe that they are suffering with mental illnesses because they have not been 'good enough' Muslims.

These myths have a cruel nature and can only be debunked by creating awareness around mental illnesses among Muslim communities.

Eulalia: I've come across resources providing tips for Muslims fasting in Ramadan. Most of these 'tips' were interchangeable with the 'rules' that structure specific disordered eating behaviours. To what extent does the contemporary Muslim attitude towards Ramadan 'promote disordered eating'?

Fareeha: Fasting is obligatory for all Muslims except those who are: ill; pregnant, nursing or menstruating; travelling; young children or elderly.

Because fasting has become a part of the Muslim culture, where it's used to gauge a person's religiosity, it is arguable that contemporary attitudes towards Ramadan 'promote disordered eating'. Mental illness is already a taboo topic in the Muslim community so if a person, due to their mental illness, decides not to fast, they are then further stigmatised. Not fasting due to a mental disorder is seen as a weakness in that person's faith.

Whilst there is a growing awareness about not fasting due to physical health problems, there is a lack of awareness when it comes to fasting for those with mental health problems. It is very rarely discussed, but Ramadan can be extremely challenging both mentally and physically for someone with an eating disorder. The lack of awareness for those with mental illnesses can be extremely debilitating when seeking support. Often they can come to believe that their disorders are not legitimate or valid, and feel guilty and ashamed for not fasting if they choose to not do so in an attempt to avoid relapse.

Fasting has therefore been turned into a cultural burden, where every person is required to fast, no matter what their health conditions are. If a person chooses not to fast for a reason beyond their control, they are made to feel like they are less of a Muslim and someone who is betraying their faith. This social and cultural pressure results in many people fasting in Ramadan when it's hazardous to their health.

Eulalia: So perhaps the practice of fasting is now focused on by Muslims disproportionately.

Fareeha: During Ramadan people focus just on the fasting element of the month. It is used as a gauge to assess a person's religiosity, and so 'tips' and 'rules' are sometimes shared as the goal of the fast becomes to restrict food and drink intake rather than develop spiritually. Other aspects of the month, like prayer, giving back to the community, learning how to control how you act upon your emotions, keeping calm while driving — things you can learn through fasting — have been completely forgotten. Muslims need a reminder that Ramadan is not simply a month of restricting food intake but a month of conscious reflection, introspection, and an opportunity for us to

become better human beings.

Eulalia: I wonder if this disproportionate focus on fasting has anything to do with an immigrant's effort to protect their cultural identity. Growing up in the diaspora, I've often found myself questioning my parent's beliefs and attitudes which they would hold onto with steadfast loyalty. I've then wondered if my questioning of these beliefs and attitudes was due to an indoctrination of colonialist, Western ideas, or whether my parents were so unmovable because they've never had the safe space and neutral ground to question and develop their beliefs for themselves, with an open mind. I think that the obligation to cherish your culture with pride, and sometimes ignorance, to the damaging extent where people who do not participate in practices are looked on with shame, develops unconsciously, and naturally. It's almost instinctive, when you've felt threatened by the blatantly racist spaces you've had to exist in. What do you think, Fareeha, is there a link specifically between the damaged attitude towards fasting and being in the diaspora?

Fareeha: Muslims in the diaspora are facing many challenges. Trying to fit into an often unwelcome space, for example, a space that bans Muslim dress in public, threatens their identity. Perhaps because of their fears of cultural assimilation and identity loss among popular Western culture, they try their best to find their authentic voice. They cherish their culture with pride by participating in all religious worship and making their children do the same. So the option to not fast because of a mental illness, something which cannot be seen, and is unknowingly invalidated by the Muslim community, is out of the question.

Acculturation also has an impact on eating disorders. Some might struggle with issues of eating, weight, and the shape of their body because of the clash between traditional and adopted culture. Observations from several studies show that intrafamilial and intracultural conflicts may lead to internal conflicts amongst those who are trying to establish their cultural and psychological identity. For example, people receiving the message from their culture to have a 'thick' or 'curvy' body while then listening to popular media messages that 'thin' is what's desirable might put susceptible individuals in a dilemma.

Eulalia: What advice can you give to the Muslim community to fashion a beautiful legacy for Ramadan?

Fareeha: **We need to encourage communal conversations about Ramadan, what it is and why as Muslims we participate.** We need to emphasise the significance of spiritual introspection, in turn helping people gain a better understanding of what Ramadan really means. The Muslim community needs to be educated about mental illnesses. This can only be done if we face our shame and talk about it. We need to learn that eating disorders are valid conditions just like paralysis, diabetes, heart disease, etcetera. Programmes should be initiated to train Imams on eating disorders, who can then kick start open conversations in Muslim communities and start

to reconcile stigma with truth. These discussions about Ramadan should be undertaken before Ramadan begins and should be approached with sensitivity, respect, and compassion. Imams should also remind people that **fasting is only for individuals who have the capacity.** Reaching out to Imams and getting them involved in such initiatives might be difficult, but it is something we can endeavour to achieve.

As nutritionists and dieticians we need to support our patients and clients with EDs by helping them to understand that their eating disorder really is an illness and is valid, and we need to encourage them to not feel ashamed and guilty about it. We need to encourage patients and clients to be compassionate towards themselves, and give them the courage to choose not to fast despite familial and peer pressure. We need to provide valid alternatives to fasting — and emphasise that Muslims also connect with God by reading the Quran and its translation, living by the lessons it teaches; actively helping their local community through volunteering or fundraising; spending more time in the remembrance of Allah (Dhikr) and attending Taraweeh prayers. These can all be very rewarding and fulfilling experiences, and blessings are promised for participating in them. Giving patients references from the Quran may also help, for example, it is stated in the Quran that if someone cannot fast due to illness, Fidyah can be given. Fidyah, or Fidyah, is a donation of food or money and is used to help those in need. Paying this compensation still deems one to be a practising Muslim and participating in Ramadan.

If our clients and patients decide to fast then the most important thing would be to involve someone close to them to provide support throughout Ramadan. We need to help make sure that they stick to their individual meal plan and focus on restoration of nutritional health, by structuring Suhoor and Iftar meals according to their needs and requirements. We must emphasise the importance of Suhoor and Iftar and make them aware and expecting of the feeling of fullness after the Iftar meal, so that they might be less inclined to purge.

Family members of people with EDs also need special advice and guidance, as family support can play a major role in recovery. This advice is not simple as every person with an ED is different, but generally speaking, family should consciously avoid critical remarks and comments; aim to include their loved one with an ED at Suhoor and Iftar even if they are not fasting; and not pressurise the loved one into eating more food than they want at Suhoor and Iftar. Most importantly, families should not make their loved ones feel bad if they choose not to fast.

Lastly, we must remind those who have EDs that it is extremely important to reach out for help. **Eating disorders are valid illnesses and certainly not a sign of weakness or lack of faith in or devotion to God.**

Convibrating Bed

by Kelly Frost

Illustrated by Kesena Berry



All further references can be found in Chapter 16, 'The Raphael Transcriptions', of Danis Rose's 'The Textual Diaries of James Joyce'.

James was particularly agitated today. Since the release of his little book – or, at least, that's what she liked to call it, because, as she kept reminding him, it had first come out in *The Little Review* – he had been stuck short of a cliff edge that was giving him lip and making it awfully difficult to climb back to the height he had been at before. Without much rhyme or reason (much like the critics had been saying about the snippets of his work in progress he had floated to press), he huffed over library books, scribbling out snatches in his notebook before thrusting the works away from him as if they smelled of barge-water. Then, he would go to work squinting at those words he had planted there mere moments ago. While he had taken to wearing white suits to reflect light onto the paper, while he had published 'the book of the century', while the seeds of his legacy were already sprouting, while he was a *genius*, he was a genius that could not read his own handwriting.

Late in 1933, Madame France Raphael, a Parisienne, began work as James Joyce's amanuensis. It was her task to prepare for him clean, readable transcriptions of the uncrossed and therefore unused entries in those primary, authorially inscribed notebooks given to her.

Raph had just stepped inside the door, holding onto the doorknob, threshold-bound, trying – and busting a lip in the process – not to laugh. He reminded her of Étienne, her little boy, when he was trying to spell; there was a dotty playfulness to James that made her wish to wipe his nose. He was having a tough day – a tough day, *creatively*. He would need cheering up. She was handing in her latest transcribed notebook.

She had grown to snatching them from him, and should he try and tell her what to do, giving him a piece of her mind. If she was in a rush – there were children to chaperone, meals to cook, husbands to feed (because apparently husbands could not feed themselves) – she would not wait at the door, a lingering lily, peace-bound, but push in, busy and darling, taking the notebook and plopping it into her grocery bag where it mixed with the tomatoes and bell-peppers. The first time she leaned over his shoulder to take it, the image that came to her was of a mother leaning over a small child to cut their meat.

They had been performing this contract for two years. Walking to pick the children up from school one day, she had heard an artist's groan from a window above the street, some little god deciding which struts of furniture he would rearrange into thunder. The neighbours were only too proud to tell her that they were housing *him*.

'James *who?*' she asked, a poppy kind of kid. Despite her terrible habit of being very appeasing,

she could still have fun.

Offering herself like meat, or a sacrifice to become meat – thinking about the *price* of meat these days – she slid a note under his door. The next day, a small envelope through her letter box, a humble offer to join the choo-choo train of posterity:

*Dear Mrs Raphael,
Many thanks
for your kind offer
of assistance and I
hope it may
lead to a good result.*

The note was underwhelming; she was expecting – from a *genius* – at least a pun. But he sent another note the following day that smelled like whining and made her speak more softly to the dog her children had asked for. And she had been there, a magnet-woman, without much on her mind other than the single-leafed paycheck.

In an ideal world, Madame Raphael would have accurately transcribed into her copy all of the unused material in the source notebooks. This did not happen, of course; errors of transmission and omission arose in all possible ways.

She was very dutiful at first. The position was a good one and she did not want to lose it. Étienne had recently had a tooth removed, and she calculated how much the dentist would cost as she wrote James's words into the new notebooks in her loopy lolly handwriting that her eye-wandering schoolmasters had beaten into her. Sometimes: yes, she became distracted. But she would always correct the mistakes that were unintentional. Only later would she indulge herself with intentional mistakes, thinking how far the shade of her pen could stretch, how many years it could umbrella.

Raph was not a bitter woman, no more than pepper blots the eyes or lemon the ears. She had a husband and tired hands. She had three children with mouths like sirens. She had to labour merely to stay awake. These were her leisure hours at work, the only hours clocked into payment, escaping the scary unclocked-clockness of all other time. With James's notebooks, she was neither mother, wife, nor woman, but a set of hands, a duct transporting words to paper and to thereafter's ever eternity. Here she was an instrument – corrupt and ducky – but an instrument and nothing else, nonetheless.

There was a hiatus in the transcriptions from the spring of 1934 to early 1935, presumably because she had been injured in an automobile accident.

She had been like both the birds hit by a stone.

A slam, then a dunk – first the metal bonnet and then the tarmac road. She rolled, and her backside went careening into a fruit stand, pelting her with oranges. No one would believe it, not even if you wrote it down. James had sent a wire to the Raphael apartment that morning with

Come quickly!

and she heltered across the city, considering the worst, knowing the reality – a rush for press, possibly.

In the hospital, Raph woke up not remembering how to wake up – slowly, with too much grog in her eyes. James was reluctant to give her leave. He said he would find someone else for now, *but it was really most inconvenient*. He meant well, but he was also mean. He was kind, but kind of rude too. She lied in bed, wondering what colour the ceiling was. Her eyes swam yellow. He did not send flowers. She remembered his words in her head – those odd jottings that seemed to live inside her like hundreds of embryos – and wondered if she would ever be remembered as the novel's incubator.

Stood outside Étienne's school, a walking stick keeping her upright, scars pulsing like radiators in her forehead, the creased note from James in her hand asking her,

If, Madame,

you could possibly start your transcriptions again,

she decided she did not like James very much. She would have her way with him.

'Don't go back,' Monsieur Raphael said that evening.

'It's good money.'

'If you dislike him that much, don't go back. He doesn't appreciate what you do for him, for his work... he didn't even send you flowers.'

'I don't care about flowers.'

Monsieur shrugged. She would have said, *I don't care about flowers, because flowers wilt and die. I would have preferred seeds*. But the conversation ended and he did not ask. Monsieur went to the living room to read the newspaper while she cooked dinner and Étienne cried about dead chickens and she conversed with the little girls about which hairbrush they wanted to marry.

Raph went back to work, not at all syphoned off fizz. She went back with alteration on her mind. The world had almost wiped her from the surface like a crumb. But she had stayed – and with a newfound hobby of thinking herself overly significant (near-death experiences will do that to

a middle-aged woman) – to do one thing: redirect the flow of his genius.

She played dumb, as others play dead – squinting, tongue-stuck, over the pages. She had the upper hand, because she was the hand. The Wake was in her hands, and she, the disembodied hand, had a disembodied mind that thought of Étienne, of meat, of dentists, of notes and puns and prunes.

Those inventions, which Madame France Raphael, straining to read, plucked as it were out of the blue, thereby unknowingly contributing to James Joyce's masterpiece.

James, straining to read, plucked, as it were, out of the blue, discombobulates of language to add to his masterpiece.

Meanwhile, Raph composed. Raph translated. Raph worked.

James played in the corner.

She deciphered his perfection into unruliness. She planted seeds among his words that she imagined might spring many years later. James was a real piece of work, and she worked his notes to pieces.

He would not tell her to stop.

He sought to restore the lost sense of manifestly defective elements.

'I know you're changing them,' he would say.

'Good.'

'I won't change them back.'

Any plan to subvert, to ruin, to defunct the Wake out of spite, had not gone unnoticed – and it had not worked. She saw these brags disseminated among his writing, lost forever; no one would know they were hers. James loved the inventive interventions, and these *little Raphs* – as he called them – gave him the inspiration to go on. They had an agreement now. Her legacy was his ability to write a single world. She was the dock that spat his boats into the world.

Some of Madame Raphael's inventions are exotic creatures whose prototypes could not be guessed at by even the most inspired of reconstructionists.

Raph had spent the previous night staring down at James's exotic disaster:

^ on vibrating bed

It was not difficult to read, because nonsense should make no sense at all. Something to do with one of his characters, a comment extracted from that book on sleep, the one with a garish turquoise cover the colour of fresh corpses.

She glanced at the bed of Madame and Monsieur Raphael. It was mid-evening, with prickly stars picking up the black sky. Her husband was using the study, and she was yet to clear the dinner table, which meant she was working at the little desk in the corner of their bedroom. James had requested the transcription for this particular notebook by tomorrow. Étienne screamed with his sisters in the other room. She looked at her hand, lying in her lap like a dead fish, before picking it up to write,

Convibrating bed

Neither here nor there, flitting out of existence and back into it, neither past nor future, true nor false, with her always and always fluttering away – a bed, *convibrating*. A flower-bed pulsating with sprout-gone seeds. She bedded herself convibratingly every night, jimmering with nerves about how to manage a family and feed it and cook for it without cooking it altogether. She jimmered until there was nothing left of her at all. She fed her worries about feeding into the word, pressing something onward. It meant nothing and it meant everything. It meant her word. The latest piece of her mind tumbled onto the paper. And it was beautiful, like chestnut-cherry jam.

He took Raphael's innocent-looking but erroneous element at face value and transferred it uncorrected into his text.

Finally, tired of watching him squint – and just plain tired – Raph let go of the doorknob and chucked the newly transcribed notebook onto his desk. He flicked through eagerly, a boy with the latest comic, pausing on *convibrating bed*.

'I like that one.' He had been salved, calmed, eased. Her odd creature jostled him forward. Because of her, he would continue writing today.

'Of course you do.' She moved to the window, smoking with a limp wrist, as if trying to be a muse.

'I think I'll put that one here.'

'Are you sure?'

'Where do you think?'

She came and looked over his shoulder.

'There.'

He nodded.

'Good idea.'

Joyce looked at the transcribed unit, appreciated that it was botched beyond recall and gave up.

'I could include your name. In

acknowledgements, or perhaps a dedication.'

'Don't make me laugh, James.'

'I've never seen you laugh.'

'I make others laugh. That's my job.'

She looked out of the window. What would Monsieur say? Of their convibrating bed? What good of it but the suggestion of a scandal? James and Raph in a convibrating bed. The only thing remaining was to decide how history would have its way with her: obscurity or mistress. These were her choices, and both made her want to swallow ash, deep down into her guts.

'Don't be silly. You'd never want to pollute your genius with another's influence.'

'That's true,' he thought aloud. 'I didn't want to, not at all. Just thought I'd offer.'

'I don't know why. Posterity won't know you offered.'

He turned back to the desk, humming a melody from Wagner.

'Alright, Raph, have it your way.'

James's temperamental wife pushed open the door with her backside and put a tea tray down on his desk. Raph shared a smile with her, as beggars share a piece of bread. James did not acknowledge his wife's entry, nor the tea she had brought. He simply kept on writing.

Author's Note

We know very little about Madame France Raphael, a secretary living in Paris and James Joyce's amanuensis intermittently from 1933 until 1937. During the composition of *Finnegans Wake* (1939), she transcribed 37 notebooks filled with his illegible handwriting. These were often from unusual and difficult sources, such as *Morpheus* or *the Future of Sleep* by D. S. Fraser-Harris. While Joyce's legacy is, of course, *Ulysses*, Madame Raphael's are these series of so-called 'mistakes' which occurred in her transcriptions. 'Convibrating bed' results from Joyce's coded note which suggests the character designated by '^' is lying on a 'vibrating bed', something from Fraser-Harris's book. This 'distortion' survives into Book II Episode 4 of *Finnegans Wake* as 'convibrational bed'. Instead of considering these interventions as errors, as scholars have dismissed them in the past, this story re-imagines their moment of creation, the circumstances Madame Raphael was working in, and the odd legacy left by her 'little Raphs'.

You're Not a Bagel, Jack.

by George Eustace

A HOUSE PARTY – NIGHT

JACK sits alone on a porch step in the garden. Tony finds JACK and sits next to him.

TONY: Hey, what are you doing out here?

JACK: (too quickly) Nothing.

JACK: (shrugging) Just thinking I guess.

TONY: You want some company?

JACK almost imperceptibly shakes his head and looks at his feet after taking a deep breath.

JACK: No I-, I don't think so. Thank you, though.

TONY sits down anyway.

TONY: (rhetorically) So I take it that's why you're hiding out here then, all alone in the cold?

JACK: (tentatively) I guess I am alone out here, aren't I?

TONY: (amused) Except for those two fornicating behind the bushes.

JACK's head jerks up in surprise.

JACK: Wait, what?

TONY laughs at JACK'S naivety.

TONY: Don't worry about it. What's up?

JACK reluctantly relaxes.

JACK: Nothing, don't worry about it. You should go back inside.

TONY: Okay.

TONY stays sat there anyway, looking up at the sky, content. After a while JACK breaks the silence.

JACK: Do you ever wonder what you're doing with your life?

TONY: No.

JACK: No?

TONY: No.

JACK: How?

TONY: I don't need to. I just look around, and that's it. That's what I'm doing with my life.

JACK: Come on, I'm serious. Don't you ever have a problem with what you're doing? Like, don't you ever feel like you're not doing enough?

TONY: Who would you say is doing enough?

JACK: (a little exasperated) I don't know.

A pause.

JACK: I mean, you always hear about those wonderkids who are so much younger than us and who have done so much more than us, and it's like we're being made obsolete before we even get a chance to peak.

TONY: There's no point wondering what your entire life will culminate to when you've barely lived any of it.

JACK: Come on, I'm serious.

TONY: So am I. Why is what they're doing any more or less important than what we're doing, right here, right now? So you aren't a billionaire or a genius extraordinaire, who cares? I happen to think that drinking yourself dizzy with us idiots is a far more fulfilling use of your time anyway.

JACK: Isn't that a waste?

TONY: I'll try not to take offence.

JACK: I didn't mean that, I just meant-

TONY: We haven't wasted our lives, Jack, and we're allowed to enjoy ourselves. I'm not even sure how we'd waste our lives, I mean, we don't have some sick kind of use-by-date, like a... bagel, or something. You're not a bagel, Jack.

JACK: I know I'm not a bagel, Tony, I-

TONY: Do you?

JACK: Yes, I do.

TONY: Good.

Short pause.

JACK: At least geniuses and billionaires have got something to leave behind, their mark on the world, their legacy. What am I going to leave behind when I'm gone? Nothing.

TONY: They don't leave a legacy, they leave a wikipedia page and material trophies.

JACK: Well they're better than nothing!

TONY: You won't leave nothing.

JACK: What have I got to leave behind? At least people with a Wikipedia page have a Wikipedia page.

TONY: Is that what this is all about? You know you can just make one, right? Like, they just give them out, it's so easy.

JACK: Come on, I'm serious.

TONY: So am I. Mine says that I'm 6'2" with an allergy to macadamia nuts.

JACK: Why macadamia nuts?

TONY: Peanuts have gotten too cocky since they got that obnoxious jerk in the top hat for a mascot.

JACK: You mean Mr. Peanut?

TONY: Don't say his name! I hate that goddamn peanut...

Unsure how to respond and unsure how they reached this point, JACK sits in silence.

TONY: Look, I understand how you're feeling. It's normal to compare yourself to other people, but you shouldn't get caught up comparing yourself to fame-addled superstars or kid wonders. At the end of the day, that's all they'll be remembered for - their status and achievements. But you? You'll be remembered for being a good person. A kind person. You'll be remembered by the people who love you, not by the faceless masses of people who have never even been in the same room as you. Take that one you like for example, you know, the one with the face.

JACK: Who?

TONY: The face, the face! The one with the face!

JACK: Willem Dafoe?

TONY: That's what I said, take him for example. Don't get me wrong, he's a great actor. But is he a good person? I can't

be sure. For all any of us know, he could be an axe murderer! On the other hand, you can't act if it saved your life. But I know you aren't an axe murderer because you faint at a nosebleed.

JACK: What's that got to do with anything?

TONY: I'm saying that the people who really know you, the people who really love you, they'll remember you when you're gone and that's all that matters. And when those people think of you they'll think of how they were better off having known you. And that's got to be more meaningful than hollow adoration.

JACK: But there are also people who are worse off having known me, people I've hurt.

TONY: Everybody messes up, but it's okay, if you learn, if you grow. You don't need recognition to be a good person, Jack. Awards and trophies are just ego, the only person you really help by winning them is yourself. People who fear being unimportant will do just about anything to win them. A fear like that will turn fair people biassed, good people cruel, and just people unjust. Better just to stick with this I think, it's less confusing at least.

They sit in silence for a bit, eventually JACK looks at TONY.

JACK: Thank you, Tony.

TONY muses to himself as JACK watches him.

JACK: Are you going to remember this tomorrow?

TONY: I'm not sure I remember it now.

JACK: We'll have to have this conversation again sometime then.

TONY: Yeah?

JACK: Yeah.

TONY: Do you think we've already had it?

JACK: Maybe.

TONY: I think so, I think I was funnier last time.

JACK smiles.

JACK: I'm sure you were.



from the sequinned seabed

by Anna Coates

Photographed by Anna Coates

We the fish, in our water bottle aquarium
declare autonomy so last year.
We'd sell it to pay rent on the fishnets
that keep it all in.

Not to be a moaning Mary but we could do
with a break
from glitter clogging our grated gills,
inside fleshed out, it's full of pennies moulded
to the shape of our lilac bones.

Life Crafting

by Anna Seidel

Don't trust those who live half-lives,
who shut all windows and lock doors.
Embrace those who welcome in a storm,
the dark stranger, the shivering figure,
caped against the rain,
whose foul light you can breathe in,
streaming down your throat,
all senses ablaze.
Filling what seemed a monstrous void,
with melodies of suffering
moulded to compositions of compassion.

Author's Note

This poem is inspired by Theodore Roosevelt's celebrated speech on Citizenship in a Republic, which would come to be known as The Man in the Arena. In addition to highlighting the responsibilities of citizenship, Roosevelt railed against cynics who looked down on men trying to make the world a better place.

'The poorest way to face life is to face it with a sneer,' he said. 'A cynical habit of thought and speech, a readiness to criticise work which the critic himself never tries to perform, an intellectual aloofness which will not accept contact with life's realities—all these are marks, not ... of superiority but of weakness.'

He continued to deliver an impassioned message: 'It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.'

a flood of living water

by Eulalia Marie

16

spontaneous Love burst out of the orange
She was so vibrant and so lovely
She looked like the ladder
climbing up to heavenly

i've never been a
spontaneous person
but when i was a child
i grew flowers out of hurtful
and i would have done anything
to break free from those manacles
i let them cross my arms into diagonals
rest my hands upon my shoulders
submerge me under cold water
they laid me like a corpse
and i had one thought
~ i do ~

til death do us part
you have to die to restart
my purpose never seemed clearer
Love like God Loves and
find truth in the mirror

*unlimited
unmotivated
uncalculated
unconditional*

if you Love like God Loves
Love is a practice
not just propositional.

18

it's been two years
since my baptism
i've become more
agnostic than christian
i reflect on the world
and i see crystals
radiating so much
wonder it lulls
me out of sleep
calls me to face the
mysterium whom i seek

the vibrant orange
makes me think
it's impossible
to define our
experience
so simply

even trying is
irresponsible

in fact i'd go as far as to say
that humans who assert one solitary way

of describing divine wisdom
are simply dumbfounded christians:

insular
intolerant
exclusivists
who are actually just
scared and faithless.

19

more often than not
i feel depressed and hopeless

though there is sparkle
i have to squint so hard
to see it beyond the darkness

there is light at the end of the tunnel

but the tunnel is never-ending
and there is harm in pretending
that the underground's fertile soils
do not nurture our deep rooted toils

economic disparity
social polarity
because beauty got all
chewed up by vanity
and the world
swallowed by vulgarity

who spat on the ground
absolute disregard for human life
and made mud with the saliva
then carved with a knife
the grand palace of privation
malice founded civilisation

bricks of discrimination
layers of exploitation
the tower of babel:

a mosaic of
subordination

colonisation
terrorisation
dictators' domination
and the war for world peace
civilians' search for liberty
is a chase for mad geese

we're God's sinners
we cage inhabitants
and make them prisoners
we say we have no cruel intentions
but watch idly as our cruel
hegemons
control our neighbour's expression
and state lines through suppression:

conversion 'therapy'
and public funded
military aggression

some of us woke up in twenty-twenty
but the glass seems to have always been half-empty

i can trace Chaos back
to the market crash
of oh eight
nine eleven
the war on drugs
the holocaust
slavery

if i were a creationist
i could trace Chaos back to genesis.

0

*Beauty formed in a womb formless and empty,
God smiled at her creation and called her Earth.
Then God breathed life into a girl she made of dust,
They walked together in the garden, alive with mirth.*

*God created womankind in her own image,
And God loved them so they acquired worth.
But when reckless neglect wrecked her daughter,
God deeply regretted ever giving birth.*

*Sacred ground of sacred perfection, God saw
All that she had made, and it was very good.
But when God's heart became deeply troubled,
She told Noah to make an ark of cypress wood.*

*God created humans in her own image,
And then she destroyed them all with a flood.
How else could she annihilate corruption,
But use cold water to spill cold blood?*

20

a Sorceress casting spells with chaos magic
all Her designs were destined for dark and tragic
perhaps Chaos is Order beyond our understanding
but Loving the unlovable is a venture too demanding

i search for eternal rest
but i fear i will succumb
to the self-interest of the careless
and the disinterest of the numb

we can't be saved
the human condition
is wild and crazed
we're beyond redemption
if you don't believe me
just pay attention
single use plastics
one-night stands
love one another
a forgotten command

we forge friendships
that never last
bygones be bygones
we tell history
goodbye

be gone to the past
at funerals we'll fly
their flags at half mast
then on the third day
we'll move on and recast
our nets into the sea
because there are plenty
more fish we can eat

we're consumers at heart
we use and discard
we view humans as parts
reduce them to numbers and charts

without a moment of hesitation
we abuse humans as means
to the end of our gratification

we're cold-blooded
we pursue pleasure with our own hands

we're cold-blooded
we turn wonders into wastelands

we take and we break
and we allocate rations

we kill for the thrill
and become slaves to our passions

we bully and we burn
and we turn a blind eye
then we question how hitler
could industrialise genocide

wearing a dress drenched
in ignorance
we delicately embroider
the threads of our innocence

the theodicies we create to escape self-hate
reveal who we are at our core

*i used to pray but
i don't know how to pray anymore*

i would start my one-way conversations
with praise and grateful affirmations
but my anchor lost its grip on gratitude
and sinks in the quicksand of solitude

if i praise God for giving me
all the things i take for granted
then i'm praising God for
my neighbour's status as branded

privation exists because of man
not God's plan
still the comfortable will say
God wove adversity into the universe
like corruption's some beautiful curse
how perverse!

the truth is it's all down to our chances and choices
we recycle cruelty with our advances and voices

to put it simply:
humans fuck up
every single day
humans fuck up
in every single way

we choose ourselves over others
all our sisters and brothers
all our fathers and mothers
die forgotten because we're rotten

we poison and pollute with a force so brute
that maybe brute can only be annihilated with brute
maybe brute is the seed for producing good fruit

i yearn for a neighbourhood of givers not takers
i yearn for a family of Lovers not haters

with motivated Love
i'd kill everyone
but the elected few

with motivated Love
i'd wash this world of her iniquity
and make her new

yes it's true
sometimes i wish for a flood
for God to meddle in our mess once again
and make a new genesis from the mud

i want to do everything i can to change this universe
build a community of carers not consumers
so i can stop prophesying the worst

but ultimately i am just
a small speck of dust
and more than that
i am hopeless
everything i do
feels completely
meaningless

i used to pray for the cruellest of monsters
i used to see the good in everyone
but i gave myself away to the monsters
like icarus: i flew too close to the sun

i'll fold my arms into diagonals
try to break free from these manacles
but this violation's terminal
it's turned me narrow-minded and cynical

my neighbour's not a murderer
but she's a complacent bystander
who doesn't even look the other way

she meets your eyes and shrugs
indifferent as long as she gets paid

and it's crazy because currency is some made
up thing
and yet it's the only tangible reality to which we
cling

it's what consumers need to feed their greed
you can't stop the flow of an internal bleed

if i were a heroine
what would it mean
if i anointed with myrrh?
would i cleanse the world
or destroy her?

would i be a savage or a saviour?
would God commend my brave behaviour?
if it caused our blemishes to perish
would She cherish it?

the cosmic battle between hope and bliss
launched a lunar eclipse
if you kissed my lips
would you taste the bitterness?

an image is a reflection of light
and trauma: an infection of sight

pain disconcerts the waves
turns cribs into graves
a violation of the highest degree
why can't you see?
my antagonism is composed of
shattered assumptions
which means
if this worldview belongs
to the traumatised and blue
do you think our unchangeable God
has ptsd too?

She should have been sectioned
silenced and detained
for Her mind's maimed state
and the apocalyptic risk
She posed to herself and others
all our sisters and brothers
all our fathers and mothers
everyone but the elected few

*like the deer who yearns for living water
so my soul yearns for You
oh God*

i yearn to feel the silk petals when
they glisten with the morning dew
i yearn to see the 5am sunrise
dance on the lake in pink hues
in the name of spontaneous Love
She will baptise my spirit with a deluge
She will destroy and renew
my dark and twisted worldview
i'll float on the water like a corpse
nothing in my head but one thought
i do.



A November in Venice
by Brenna Angseesing

After Hours: Getting Intimate with the Editor

by Yaz Khaliq



Over a packet of Tesco strawberries, Eulalia and I conversed about her vision for the magazine, the intrinsically exploitative nature of capitalism, hopelessness and meaningful social action, and our 'choices'.

[laughter]

Yaz: I love what you've done with this magazine!

Eulalia: [laughs] Aw, thanks man. *blushing emoji*

Yaz: Tell us about your vision.

Eulalia: think... I'm using a platform I would never have thought to use, to amplify the voices that I've always wanted to.

Yaz: Why would you have never thought to use it?

Eulalia: I have such a black and white mindset. I hate capitalism, fiercely, and by association I've kept away from any organisation that participates in it. I won't care if I can see that organisation doing some 'good', it won't be truly good to me unless it's completely anti-capitalist. That kind of mindset makes taking action feel really challenging. I think I said it in Femsoc L&L once: **I can envision the utopia I want to build, but I have no idea how to build it.** You get me?

Yaz: I get you! But I feel like you have really managed to stay true to what you believe and bring nuance to the magazine in the process. The work you've curated is really acknowledging all sides of OxWIB and societies

like it — ones designed to advance people from underrepresented and overlooked backgrounds. Obviously these programmes are doing a lot of good — they're helping individuals enter previously exclusive spaces, get respected employment and support themselves when existing structures have historically been inimical to this. But all these things can be acknowledged alongside a critique of capitalism. I feel like you're doing that — displaying critical ideas about the system people are entering through these programmes and not sugarcoating it. I feel like we both share similar thoughts on capitalist society, in that it isn't our ideal world.

Eulalia: Have I told you about Mr. Robot? It's this TV Show I'm still possessed by. The main character, Elliot, views the world pessimistically like us, and he's always daydreaming about changing it. But he's a genius hacker, and he plans on taking down the biggest conglomerate of his world and globally redistributing all wealth. I mean, that's not the route I would go down if I could save the world. **I think I would just get rid of currency altogether.** Industrialisation and globalisation made exploitation our mode of living. We can't undo it now, everything is structured on the ability to generate the most money. For your country, for yourself. If you want to go on holiday, you need money. If you want somewhere to live, you need money. If you want to put a meal on the table, you need money. Everything is dependent on money, and I hate that, because money is literally made up. So when financially oppressed people get the big jobs, they're not changing the system, they're changing the components of the system. Diversifying it, not deconstructing it.

Yaz: I agree. I don't believe in the idea that diversifying and getting more representation in top roles is good for everybody. There has kind of been a wave of women celebrities becoming CEOs and creating large fashion lines, makeup brands, etcetera. and then becoming multi-millionaires or billionaires. They're often marketed as really liberal because they'll diversify their products to appeal to more people and pay attention to hiring an inclusive cast of models. Socially, fine, that's great for representation. Economically, though, they are going to be using the same exploitative practices as all large companies — outsourcing cheap labour.

Eulalia: I agree; **small businesses stay small for a reason.** Everything these days is looking towards making the most profit, even hobbies are deemed pointless unless you monetise them. It

feels like every startup has the view of becoming a conglomerate of sorts, or a huge company. Even tik-tokers who crochet end up collaborating with some fast-fashion company at some point. And then once you get to that size, exploitation is often inevitable.

Yaz: And what's worse is that you can see Western governments catering to this process of extreme profetisation through structures like the prison industrial complex.

Eulalia: Honestly. What rehabilitation can really be made from penal colonies and industrial prisons? Devil's Island didn't shut down till 1953. **Slavery was abolished, but what replaced it was still founded upon it.**

Yaz: It's its successor.

Eulalia: In terms of capitalism in general, what I don't like is that at the end of the day **you're being paid for your 'productivity' with money.** What should be basic human rights; food, water, shelter, education; you have to 'earn' money to pay for. But who actually 'earns' money — it's all down to chance and connections, really. I was lucky enough to be born into a family that had a house, I didn't 'earn' my shelter. When I'm lazy, when I don't do my work or I'm unproductive, I'm not kicked out of my house, I'm still given a bed to sleep on and food to eat.

Poor people are generally villanised and prejudiced against — they're believed to be 'lazy', when many work hard hours, for little to nothing, all for a boss or manager who reaps riches. Those managers — masters, even — they're the lazy ones. They're greedy and they exploit because they can. **If the capitalists think the poor are poor because they're 'lazy', I wonder if they think we're lazy for having not changed the world already.**

People who are 'unhoused', they aren't really any different to us. Sure, some of them might be violent, or abusive, or struggle with substance abuse or addiction — that last one is very complex. But does that really make them void of the right to have a place to live? I know people who are addicts, or who abuse substances, they haven't been unhoused. Some of them even go to this uni! Substance abuse is romanticised here, 'work hard, play hard'. Anyway, I saw a 'radical' Tumblr post, it said that housing is a human right, and even if you're a horrible person, you deserve to be a horrible person with a roof over your head. We need to unlearn the idea that people 'belong' on the streets. Do we 'belong' in houses, or did we just happen to be born in one, and happen to have people able to pick us up when we fall?

Yaz: Yeah, **the two ideas of a really hardcore capitalist mentality: first, that your worth as a person is based on your ability to participate in this system. Second, no matter what background, everyone can climb the ladder if they just 'try hard enough', 'everyone has the same twenty-four hours in a day'. The two combined are toxic.**

Eulalia: Ah, the 'American Dream'. The myth of meritocracy. 'Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness' is about the only phrase I know from the US' Declaration of Independence. Your circumstances aren't taken away, you have to work yourself out of your harsh conditions. And then, you'll be a hero, though those conditions will remain for others.

Yaz: Yep.

Eulalia: I never used to be able to imagine my utopia, it was too difficult. But I went to this interfaith dialogue event a few years ago, and it was based on Pope Francis' TED talk. He spoke of humanity working as an ecosystem, and it made me realise that **building utopia means building community.** The bees pollinate our flowers, and the rabbits eat our flowers, and there are no issues among them, it's just natural. I don't know if it can be natural with humanity, but I imagine that in a community, people do what they can, when they can, and it's not about money at all — it wouldn't be a case of 'working to live' or 'living to work' — you'd *live*. Community centres would be many rather than few, and instead of grafting to put a meal on the table, you'd do your bit, and have the time and capacity to learn how to swim, do arts and crafts, go see a show, or two, go to therapy, you get the idea.

Yaz: I love that, and I think that community idea is what mutual aid spaces on Twitter are trying to curate, but it would be nice to have it in an actual, physical community. It would be nice to imagine a world where work wasn't such a massive aspect of our entire lives, because I doubt many people are actually finding it fulfilling — especially thinking of how much of the population are doing labour intensive, repetitive jobs.

Eulalia: Well, at the least, we're not [finding it fulfilling]. But I don't think we're a minority feeling this. I think most people might feel this way but be unaware of it, because it's so normalised, because there is no other way to live if you want to survive. We are born into the system.

Yaz: Yep, we really have just all been thrown into the system. And then even the idea of living a happy and fulfilled life is completely shaped and biassed by the system —our ideas of success and failure. I think this is extremely pointed for POCs and individuals from immigrant backgrounds.

Eulalia: We've been told our whole lives that we need to be 'successful'. We need to go to Oxford University, we need to achieve academically, financially, socially. Our worth as students a lot of the time feels dependent on the grades we achieve. When there's pressure on you from the institution as well as the expectations you have to meet for your 'ethnic' family, it gets intense, and the joy you once found in learning is sucked away really quickly. There are all these programmes and scholarships that get marginalised people of colour into these institutions, but I feel like there's this underlying message: you're only valued for what you can achieve. Your identity and existence isn't protected or valued unless you can achieve.

Yaz: Honestly, I feel like the racist reaction to Rashford, Sancho, and Saka after the Euros final was the perfect representation of what you've just said. It's all well and good for them to be part of England as long as they are consistently winning and 'achieving'. As soon as they trip up they have absolutely no value.

Eulalia: So often I've observed journalism purposefully mythologise marginalised folk, to the extent of making them out to be heroes, just for them to be seen as human. When the press print headlines about hate crime and lives being abhorrently taken, there's always something extra to humanise the victim, job titles like 'fireman' and 'university professor', or familial titles like 'mother' and 'son'. What if the victim was a complete 'nobody'? Would they still deserve to exist? It's a really reckless approach, and makes it clear that marginalised people have to be brilliant or loved for bystanders to be moved to protect them, or, after a hate crime, call for justice.

Yaz: I kept thinking of this during the coverage of 'Central Park Karen', Amy Cooper. The media kept contrasting her call to the police with the fact that Christian Cooper, a Black man, was actually a Harvard graduate and an established comics writer. In my head it just sounded like they were calling him 'one of the good ones' — using this as a reason as to why he shouldn't have experienced that treatment. Obviously it would have been just as racist and dangerous whatever 'walk of life' he was from.

Eulalia: Exactly. And, beyond 'humanising', there's the 'dramatising' or I guess more specifically, 'romanticising'. There's this narrative in journalism and pop culture of only validating a marginalised person's existence if they're some sort of hero that an audience can root for. On the one hand, some of the things I've created when I was manic, depressed, or overwhelmed with emotion, are masterpieces. These fits of passion, wonder and sadness produce works nothing like what I am capable of writing when

I'm 'stable'. These states of being unlock gates to a new realm, and the creative process becomes so unconscious that it feels like the disorders are really superpowers.

On the other hand, I think that there's an unproportional focus on this creativity. Neurodivergent and mentally ill people are barely represented in pop culture, and when we are, the illustrations are either caricatures, or dramatised realities. Of course being neurodivergent and mentally ill is not just about suffering — the things we think and feel and create can be very magical, and I sometimes think 'normal' people are actually missing out. But the reckless romanticism of our creativity makes me feel like if I'm not a genius extraordinaire, then I am less than. But I should be allowed to exist — in peace — without having to prove anything.

I won't lie, this year I have been given so much academic support, but I feel a bit unsettled by it all. If it weren't for these 'diagnoses', I wouldn't receive any of it. Getting them took the better part of a year, and it was not an easy process. So many people who haven't been diagnosed are forced to just 'carry on' because there's literally *no other way*, they must subject themselves to be exploited at a tedious and tiring employment, or they will not have food to eat and no bed to sleep on. There are people on the streets who need to be looked after, but instead they are treated like dirt. They haven't got a choice either, they can't just 'get' a job, it's not that easy — they're forced to stay on the streets. Society itself just seems to be so opposed to the most vulnerable at every turn.

Yaz: It really is, especially with the cashless direction that society is going in now. You have no choice but to join, but some people literally can't join. Have you seen the new 'contactless' stores that quite a few companies are now opening up? There's a new supermarket near me following the model, and I went in with my dad. The only way you can bypass the barriers to the store is by scanning an app which is connected to an online account with a bank card attached. When you're in the store you just pick up items from the shelf, and through a mixture of weight sensors and cameras, the store recognizes what you've taken. Then when you leave you have to go through another barrier where it scans your account and charges you. So to go to the store to just get basic things like food, plasters, whatever, you need a phone sophisticated enough to allow the appropriate apps and a bank account to tap into. What are you supposed to do if you don't have these things?

Eulalia: That's terrifying.

Yaz: The thing is that in a perfect society the

move to contactless wouldn't matter because everybody would be able to participate — it would just be convenient. But society is so far from perfect; people are unhoused and without income. So for the most vulnerable individuals in society who don't have a phone and/or are only able to accumulate cash, this is just another thing that they are being denied access to, except it's literally basic items of survival. And I think it seems so wrong, but then remember that these organisations, even the supermarkets, are just private companies too. Their objective is the accumulation of profit — they don't have any obligation to care about vulnerable peoples' welfare or survival so why blame them? Then I go back to hating capitalism. LOL!

Eulalia: There seems to be no way around participating in capitalism, is there a way to not participate?

Yaz: There are jobs that are less intrinsically connected to it. But it's also not fair to ask people who are making their way out of poverty through the system to just stop. **It's not fair to judge people for making the choice to participate in capitalism rather than be exploited by it.**

Eulalia: I think there's a general lack of awareness, or if not awareness, willingness to enact change. It's simply easier to go along with the system, if you're privileged enough to have some kind of value to it, it's easier to just join it, than to rebel. You want a comfortable living. I don't know if this links to the idea of freedom being just that, an idea. We're increasingly being given the choice to express ourselves how we like, but simultaneously, we don't really have the freedom to not join the capitalist system, or build the society we want to see.

Yaz: As a consumer I know that I am extremely hypocritical. I don't always shop second hand. I buy takeaways from companies that probably pay their workers minimum wage when I could cook, just because I'm having an essay crisis. I can definitely do more, (and will try to!) but it'll still be on a small scale and realistically won't be revolutionising anything any time soon.

Eulalia: I can't be bothered anymore, with trying to revolutionise the world, because it's such an aimless activity. It's just sad and genuinely depressing. I'll 'do my bit' — I'll shop in a charity shop, then I'll come home — or to my accommodation — and just cry about the state of the world and how hopeless I feel. It's partly to do with this 'black and white' mindset, but it's also just exhaustion. My whole worldview has completely changed, I grew up as an optimist, but now I identify as a cynic. My psychiatrist told me this change in worldview was a symptom

of PTSD, but I think it's a symptom of collective trauma, too. You grow up wanting to change the world, and it's not because you were thinking too big or unrealistically, but when you see the world for what it is, when you start to really understand how things work, any action, small or big, it all seems meaningless. And then you're villainised for sitting on the sidelines, for not doing the most. Obviously there's a different conversation within that, about the relationship between social responsibility, self-sacrifice, self-care, and burning out, but I'm talking about what leads to pure hopelessness. It's not that we're unwilling or too lazy to act, it's that we don't think our action means anything. One of my favourite scenes from Mr. Robot is when Elliot talks about making a difference. He says:

My father picked me up from school one day and we played hookey and went to the beach. It was too cold to go in the water so we sat on a blanket and ate pizza. When I got home my sneakers were full of sand and I dumped them on my bedroom floor. I didn't know the difference, I was six. My mother screamed at me for the mess but he wasn't mad. He said that billions of years ago the world's shifting and ocean moving brought that sand to that spot on the beach and then I took it away. Every day, he said, we change the world. Which is a nice thought until I think about how many days and lifetimes I would need to bring a shoe full of sand home until there is no beach. Until it made a difference to anyone. Every day we change the world. But to change the world in a way that means anything that takes more time than most people have, it never happens all at once. It's slow. It's methodical. It's exhausting. We don't all have the stomach for it.

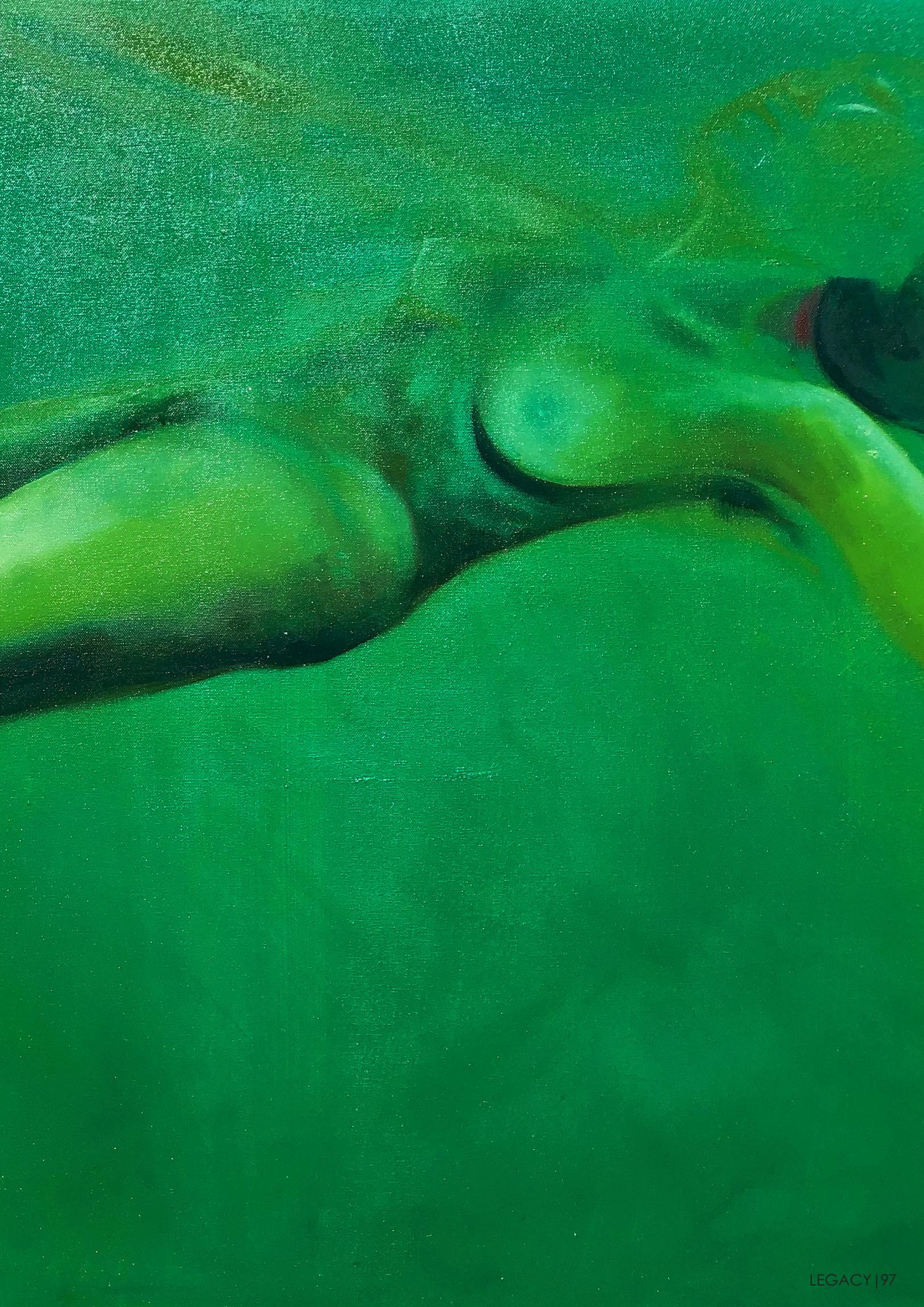
It's so hard to figure out how to build the utopia you envision, when action feels meaningless, when you *have* to participate in the system, when you want nice things like a thick duvet and a holiday. I know that my solution would be to just take everything down and start again, but that's not realistic.

Yaz: No.

Eulalia: **We're just two university students, we're just having a conversation. But I kind of hate that. Change starts with reflection, with conversation, but it happens with action.**

Swimming in the Sky, Nesting in the Sea
by Chinda Smith





Accounts to Follow on Instagram

We want you to not just normalise the unconventional, but celebrate it, and accessibly unlearn stigmas. If you use Instagram, a great place to start would be diversifying your feed.

Alok Vaid Menon (@alokvmenon)

Alok is an author, poet, comedian and speaker who will not be contained within the gender binary. Alok helps people unlearn their deep-rooted attitudes towards body hair and gendered fashion, challenging our social constructs so that they may be *deconstructed*.

Munroe Bergdorf (@munroebergdorf)

Munroe is a globally recognised model and activist. She talks passionately about rejecting public shaming, preferring that we embrace accountability. She advocates for political reform and especially for protecting trans children.

Dr. Colleen Reichmann (@drcolleenreichmann)

Colleen is a clinical psychologist who specialises in body image and eating disorders. She finds creative ways to validate feelings of insecurity and no control while providing ways to reframe thinking and grow. While her account is not a replacement for therapy, her prompts of self-reflection help break intergenerational trauma.

Maxine Williams (@lookingformothermax)

Maxine is a passionate anti-racism activist and mental health advocate. Their work deconstructs mental illness stigmas and exposes the damaging effects that western beauty standards have. Maxine campaigns for change to the public narrative and school curriculums at the intersection of consent, mental health, race, gender and sexuality.

Todd Baratz (@yourdiagnonsense)

Todd is a psychotherapist, certified sex therapist, and relationship expert. His work enables you to take responsibility over your feelings without invalidating them.

I Weigh (@i_weigh)

I Weigh is an account created by activist and actress Jameela Jamil which has grown into a radically inclusive community. I Weigh highlights and platforms new voices, artists, activists and movements embodying brick-by-brick activism.

Peaches (@bopopeaches)

Peaches shares her experience as a young plus-sized woman of colour. Celebrating her body and challenging diet culture, peaches' account brings a a fresh and humorous perspective.

Cindy Gallop (@cindygallop)

Cindy is the founder of Make Love Not Porn and raises awareness of the effects of porn on young people's views of sex. She encourages people to embrace what she calls 'real world sex' in all its messy glory and is outspoken on ageism and 'anti-ageing' products.

