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nemesis

EDITORIAL

“No person, trying to take responsibility for her or his identity, should have to be so alone. There must be those among whom we can sit down and weep, and still be counted as warriors.”

— Adrienne Rich

We are beyond proud of the enthusiasm we have seen surrounding *nemesis* in this past year, and we are glad to be passing it on to Imaan Bari and Sophie Fitzpatrick, who have worked closely with us on our editorial team this year. Staff, students, and friends have been extremely supportive, and we would like to particularly thank everyone who drew attention to the journal and helped us to get set up. *nemesis* is a platform that we have seen people rally around significantly, and we hope it will continue to bring feminists together, to allow us to self-critique, and to open dialogues in the very capable hands of next year’s team. Love to all the weepers and all the warriors – Jenny and Laura

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The *nemesis* team would like to acknowledge and thank Trinity Publications and The Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) for making this issue possible.

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nemesis

TRINITY COLLEGE'S FEMINIST JOURNAL

VOLUME I, ISSUE I

Trinity College Dublin

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An Interview with Two Anonymous Women from Movement of Asylum Seekers in Ireland (MASI)

by Ellie Vardigans

CN: rights of asylum seekers, direct provision, abuse and discrimination, poverty, deportation, discussion of race and gender

Ellie: Would you mind telling us about yourself and your experiences while living in Mosney?

Anon A: I'm a mother of two girls and I've been in Ireland for over five years, and we are currently living in Mosney.

Living in direct provision is the most difficult thing that any human being can go through, because the system is created to make a person's life to be as miserable it can be. I'm not allowed to choose where to live, which school my children can attend, what food I want to eat or buy, I'm not allowed to have visitors. My children and I, we are subjected to so much abuse and discrimination by those who are making so much profit from us being in direct provision, and there's nothing I can do about it.

Anon B: I am a female with four kids, and I stay here in Mosney with my family. Mosney was supposed to be a better hostel than other accommodation centres, but its downsides are more depressing than others. Starting with the laundry: we are given 4 hours a day, 3 days in a week, to do our washes. If you miss picking up your clothes on a particular day, you get punished by losing one day from your wash week. Our clothes are searched on Saturdays. It is supposed to be a day to wash school uniforms, so to make sure that you have nothing other than uniforms, they search them.

The staff come to work with so much pain, ready to lash whatever hurt they have on you. For the GP, it is not a walk-in health centre: even if you are sick, you need to book an appointment before you can see the doctor, unless you demand to see him by force. And to add to the list, we don't have an internet connection, in comparison with other small hostels.

E: How did you come to be involved in Movement of Asylum Seekers in Ireland (MASI)?

B: I knew about MASI through a friend who lives in Mosney.

A: I became involved with MASI because I was so frustrated by the system. I've reached the point where I have to do something to raise awareness about how people are being treated in direct provision, and MASI provided me with the platform and support to do that.

E: MASI came together after protests in 2014. How do you see the act of protest as a form of collective resistance?

A: MASI used the protests as the last resort to get attention. We have been trying to raise issues with government in a formal way, but it resulted in people being victimised and being moved from one centre to another. So the protests were the only way to speak to those in power. I think protesting is the best way to get attention as long as it done peacefully and with respect to the law of the land.

B: I am new in MASI, so I only follow recent posts.

E: The direct provision system has been gaining some media attention recently. How do you feel about media representation of the system? Where can people look to find more reliable information?

B: For now, I will not be comfortable with the media, and would like to operate it anonymously. People can only get reliable information on direct provision if they talk directly to the asylum seekers who live in the centres, and probably if they visit centres other than Mosney.

A: I know many Irish people are starting to be aware of what is happening with people in direct provision due to a lot of work by different media platforms. People can go to the MASI Facebook page to get more information.

E: The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission recently reported that women in direct provision are some of the most marginalised in Ireland. What are the implications of being a woman within the system?

B: As a woman in direct provision, we have no say, we have less respect and we bear the grunt of every member of staff. Moods are easily transferred to us, no matter the weather. The major reason for this is because Mosney is designed in a way where, in everything we do, you will always meet a member of staff for that position. Of course, conversation is certain.

For laundry there will be 4-5 staff per day, an uncountable load of Kitchen staff, at least 2 staff for the mail, and the security run shifts for 24 hours, 7 days a week.

A: As a woman and a mother I found myself living in a so-called 'first world country' with so many opportunities, yet I'm not allowed to access them because of my status in the country. That brings me a lot of poverty, and as mother I feel like I have failed my children.

E: MASI are trying to create access to information for those in the system who might be disadvantaged as a result of the recent International Protection Act (IPA). Would you mind explaining what the IPA means for asylum seekers and what MASI are hoping to achieve?

A: IPA means rushed decisions on people's cases. We don't know how fair the process is going to be, because the government never tries to educate or inform the people involved about the new system. There are not enough resources in place to help us with all the questions we have on the IPA, so MASI with friends - people who are willing to give up their time for free - are trying to help by going to different centres, answering questions, and helping people to complete a 65 page questionnaire.

B: I don't know, as I am yet to receive the form, but I think the IPA is either a means to select people needed in the country - probably on the basis of gender and skin colour - or to just send people back home.

E: MASI has been taking incredible steps like this in resisting the disorders of direct provision. What else are you working towards? What do you do you hope will change?

A: My biggest fight is for allowing asylum seekers access to third level education, especially those children who have finished their leaving cert but are forced to stay at home. The right to work and all this will bring the end to direct provision, and the money can be used to help the country on other things, like building houses for people.

B: I am currently not working on anything in regards to direct provision, but I hope we gain freedom even while staying here. Remove the security men. Remove all the gates: let's be free. Let's be able to work and earn a little bit. We should be given some hours - 30 hours or so a week - to work.

They know how to make these laws. I just wish that they will make laws that would show just a glimpse of light at the end of the tunnel.

Comments on the Discourse of White Feminism

by Imaan Bari

CN: racism, Islamophobia, discussion of white feminism, microaggressions.

Verna St. Denis addressed white feminism well when she said “organizing women of the world against gender inequality under a banner of universal sisterhood both minimize[s] and erase[s] social, economic and political differences between vastly differently positioned women”.¹ This universal sisterhood seems like such a lovely idea, right? So warm and so fuzzy. This is not the reality, however. White feminism is currently dominating what is meant to be ‘feminist’ discourse, and all other women are forced to fight oppression within a movement that they were meant to call their own.

I feel that the perception of the marginalised women of the world has become so misinformed and distorted that it is almost impossible to identify who is actually oppressed and how they are oppressed. For example, take Malala Yousafzai, who is regarded as a voice for so many marginalised young girls and was made an example to showcase the state of affairs in Pakistan. The idea that she can somehow represent an entire nation is intangible and unproductive. In becoming a Nobel laureate, publishing books, and taking part in many UN campaigns, who is Yousafzai helping? Of course, she is doing excellent human rights work, that cannot be discounted here, but we must also look at the less explicit outcomes and the underlying tones of her position. When we do so, we very quickly recognise her position as becoming that of a commodity, where the value lies in informing the privileged. She exists to relieve the guilt of the west who take her on as a cultural project. Her narrative becomes an all-encompassing one and creates a false image of Pakistani women as victims in education, which leads people to assume that these women are not able to achieve academic success. In a way, they are stripped of their intellect and independence by the assumption that they must be oppressed, and suddenly it becomes unusual to see high-achieving women in hijab, because this narrative has not yet been allowed to become part of mainstream feminism.

I am not discounting that there are many problems in the world and that there are many women suffering. That would be unfounded. However, the current state of our feminist efforts are adding to the suffering in themselves. I am suggesting that we give non-mainstream issues the respect and dignity of being complex, and that in acknowledging problems we cannot let them lose their sense of personhood. We cannot approach these subjects as things that need solving. There needs to be a sense of humility and selflessness that is lacking in our world, and a willingness to confront how we see those who are othered, as well as how they see us. When we do consider western views, and try to analyse what they mean, do we do this because we are trying to help? Or is it rather just because we are placing ourselves at the centre of the dialogue? And if we are so concerned with ourselves within this dialogue, why do we not care what those who are othered think of us? Is it because we do not think their opinions matter? If this is the case, and it often is the case, we are not treating them as humans, but as subjects. We use them to see our own images reflected back at us.

This is where feminism becomes problematic. When feminism is defined from a privileged standpoint, and when the discourse is constructed in such a way that the lens through which we view the oppression of women becomes that of the eyes of the privileged, the privileged have the power to control the way in which “women of colour” are viewed, and what criteria are used to define them. The reason “women of colour” is in inverted commas is to show that it is an assigned term, not something that we can use as part of a generalised context. The term “women of colour” has been removed from its original context. It has become a part of the mainstream white feminist discourse to define any woman that is not white, as a way of creating a simple categorisation to umbrella all the forms of oppression together, which stifles and halts these women’s progressions.

The term “women of colour” was created during a National Women’s Conference in 1977. A group of black women from Washington DC brought an agenda titled, “*Black Women’s Agenda*”. Other marginalised women present similarly wanted to be a part of this agenda, as it voiced many of their own issues. “Women of colour” therefore was founded as a political term of solidarity and strength for marginalised women. However, over the next 30 years, it was adopted by white feminism as simply a describing term. Loretta Ross calls this “reducing a political designation to a biological destiny”, and makes the point that “that’s what white supremacy wants you to do.”² This is an example of the removal of power from the hands of the marginalised. This creates the framework in which white feminism gets to control the assignment of value.

White feminism is so demanding that the ‘white’ from the term has been dropped and it simply becomes feminism with an invisible presumption. Let us look at an example to illustrate this. Indigenous feminism is an umbrella term for theoretical and practical paradigms that link the issue of gender equality with that of decolonisation and sovereignty for indigenous people. Indigenous feminism is both a theory—closely related to feminist theory, but without the threads of oppression and exploitation that run through mainstream, western feminism—and an activist movement, with cultural, economic, and

¹ quoted in Katherine Fischer. “Feminism Is for Everybody: Aboriginal Women, Feminism, and Diversity.” *Gender and Women’s Studies in Canada: Critical Terrain*. Eds. Margaret Helen Hobbbs and Carla Rice. Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2013, pp. 16–28, <http://bit.ly/1ZbGgqI>. Accessed 15 Dec. 2015.

² Ross, Loretta. “The Origins of the phrase ‘Women of Color’”. *Youtube*, uploaded by Western States Center, 15 Feb. 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=82v134mi4Iw>.

political dimensions.³ In indigenous feminism, a large part of the discourse is set in rejecting 'feminism' as it is known by the mainstream. Indigenous feminists see 'feminism' as a largely white movement linked with colonialism, and therefore cannot engage with it. As a result, indigenous feminists are seen as a 'niche' branch of feminism. This form of exclusion is disappointing and unacceptable.

There is a problem with victimising women in other parts of the world. Through our assumption of them as victims, we impose a set of desires upon them, or, in other words, imagine that they wish they were able to live life the way we do. The idea that hijab-wearing Muslim women are oppressed is a clear example of this. There is this assumption that if you are a Muslim woman wearing a head covering, you are being oppressed. This is a western value being imposed upon Muslim women. Pressure is therefore placed upon hijab-wearing Muslim women to either submit to being seen as oppressed victims to satisfy the ideals of homogeneous feminism, or to explain themselves in a way which forces them to remove their own cultural norms from the discussion. Why should they have to do this? Considering there is such depth and variation in the decision to wear hijab, that it is so personal and requires an intimacy that cannot be universalised for all Muslim women, how could it possibly be a symbol for oppression for women? Acknowledge that the hijab is not a symbol of oppression, and that you simply do not understand, and will not be able to understand, and you cannot place the demand on them to make you understand, because yet again, feminism is catering only to the needs of the privileged woman.

Finally, I point to a recent example from my own experience. A burden that comes with looking different to the people around me can sometimes mean that I am put in a position of being made a fascination, for whatever reason, be it my hair texture or complexion. The most futile result that comes from this is when I am then put in a position where I must defend myself or tell the instigator that they are doing something wrong. In these situations, it is not my duty to remove myself from being the harassed party, and help the harasser. I do not and will not accept the burden of educating or bettering the instigator. This burden is often put on women of colour. It becomes the job of the marginalised to remind the privileged of their oppression, because they have no other option. You do not ask the disenfranchised to better the enfranchised. It is cruelty in its most convoluted form.

³ Fisher, Katherine. "Feminism Is for Everybody: Aboriginal Women, Feminism, and Diversity." *Gender and Women's Studies in Canada: Critical Terrain*. Eds. Margaret Helen Hobbbs and Carla Rice. Canadian Scholars' Press, 2013, pp. 16–28, <http://bit.ly/1ZbGgqI>. Accessed 15 Dec. 2015.

Where Meaning is Produced

by Sophie Fitzpatrick

CN: intersectionality, appropriation and exploitation, marginalisation of women of colour, autoethnography, mentions of terrorism and war, racism and elitism, patriarchy, exoticism

Intersectionality is an ambiguous term which, in general, refers to different experiences of exclusion resulting from the combination of a subject's multiple identities. Whether it should be viewed as a strategy, an analytical tool, a concept, or a theory is not entirely certain. However, it is clear that it is an idea which refuses to view the various aspects of a subject's identity- be it race, gender, age, ethnicity or anything else- in isolation and uses these categories as a means to understand the interaction between identity and exclusion.

On the 20th anniversary of intersectionality, a huge amount of papers and books were published to celebrate its influence and its ability to redefine a multitude of disciplines. Due to its ability to travel across the social sciences so successfully it has been both lauded and condemned. It is celebrated because of its power to make the basic idea of accounting for multiple identities easily understandable, and for presenting the possibility of applying this as a method. The basic concept is not so complex that one has to be a specialist to understand it, yet it still has a huge amount of power as a tool in the social sciences. In this way, it has been an immense success because of the appeal it holds for academics across a multitude of disciplines. In application to their work, it has expanded interest and research in feminist theory. The condemnation of intersectionality's ability to travel stems from the way in which it has been framed, as something innocent. The simple result being that more people know about it and influence it. However, in travelling, it has also been altered and misused as a mere label for organisations to appear progressive; 'Much like the language of diversity, the language of intersectionality, its very invocation, it seems, largely substitutes for intersectional analysis itself'.⁴

Intersectionality made its way into feminist discourse after two influential papers by Kimberlé Crenshaw were published, where she used the term to address certain differences that identity politics failed to take into account; "Because of their intersectional identity as both women and people of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, the interests and experiences of women of color are frequently marginalized within both."⁵ Essentially, both of her papers illustrated how differing sorts of oppression could impact the same person in a way that is fundamentally linked to the ways in which parts of their identity are combined, rather than viewing these forms of oppression as being in some way separable from each other. This was not a new idea at the time, yet Crenshaw's papers had more influence than others which had put forward the same idea before them.⁶ Kathy Davis argues that this is because of its open-ended nature, that it leaves room for elaboration in different disciplines, and that it presents a simple idea which dresses a fundamental concern in feminist theory: the recognition of differences among women. It allows for one to conceptualise identity as something which is shifting and multifaceted.⁷ Jennifer Nash has pointed out that the common use of the term 'travel' to talk about the movement of intersectionality clearly connects it with Edward Said's travelling theory, which emphasises that, as theories traverse borders, they are altered and re-made.⁸ This focus on travel, on these terms, ignores the very context in which intersectionality has travelled: "The language of 'travel' becomes a way of describing analytic's success, rather than theorising its institutional form."⁹ Crenshaw explained that she sometimes does not recognise it in the literature anymore.¹⁰ This change of the meaning and usage of intersectionality is not negative, but I will argue that the use of the ambiguity of the term has created the potential for it to be used in exploitative ways, under the pretence of being progressive. Not only this, but as it moves into more accessible spaces on the internet, the conception of 'being intersectional' has changed, with little being asked of the most privileged other than to 'understand' or 'learn' about diversity. This places a demand on the marginalised to produce content and reveal their narratives, which the privileged can then use to pat themselves on the back.

Nash argues that travelling of intersectionality should be understood within a context of the fetishisation of two terms in

⁴ Puar, Jasbir. 'I'd Rather be a Cyborg Than A Goddess', European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies [online], January 2011 <<http://eipcp.net/transversal/0811/puar/en>> [Accessed 27 March 2017].

⁵ Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color'. *Stanford Law Review* 43.6. 1991, pp. 1241-1299. www.jstor.org/stable/1229039.

⁶ Luft, Rachel and Ward, Jane. 'Toward and Intersectionality Just Out of Reach', *Perceiving Gender Locally, Globally and Intersectionally*. eds. Demos, Vasilikie and Texler Segal, Marcia. Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing, 2009. pp. 9-37, p 10.

⁷ Davis, Kathy. 'Intersectionality as a buzzword: A sociology of science perspective on what makes a feminist theory successful', *Feminist Theory* 9.1. 2008, pp. 68-71.

⁸ Nash, Jennifer. 'Feminist originalism: Intersectionality and the politics of reading', *Feminist Theory* 17.1. 2016, pp. 3-20. Nash refers to Edward Said. *The World, the Text and the Critic*. 1983.

⁹ Nash. 2016, p. 11.

¹⁰ Guidroz, Kathleen and Berger, Michele Tracy. 'A Conversation with Founding Scholars of Intersectionality: Kimberlé Crenshaw, Nira Yuval-Davis, and Michelle Fine', *The Intersectional Approach: Transforming the Academy Through Race, Class & Gender*. Eds. Berger, Michele Tracy and Guidroz, Kathleen. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009, pp. 61-80. p. 65.

particular; 'diversity' and 'interdisciplinarity'.¹¹ Rachel Luft and Jane Ward list the misidentification of intersectionality as diversity as one of their 'five challenges to sectional practice'. They point out that "some institutionally embedded diversity trainings and initiatives do deliver progressive and necessary forms of structural change", however they believe that "diversity initiatives do not meet our definition of intersectional justice if they are dependent on, and accountable to, institutions rather than grassroots movements."¹² The word itself has also travelled as a result of being intentionally misattributed by organisations: "When touted in advance - the espoused values of an organisation, for example, or of a research network - the appropriation has material rewards: it can open doors, earn funding, win members, or validate projects."¹³

It is also worth noting that the movement of intersectionality has largely been facilitated by the hegemony of the American universities.¹⁴ It is credited as being the most important contribution from women's studies, despite the fact that "every key figure in the history of the development of the concept is Black, with the exception of the Latina editors of *This Bridge Called My Back*".¹⁵ To situate it purely as an achievement of women's studies is to deny the critical role of Black race discourse in its creation and development. Part of the success of intersectionality is its ability to apply to all kinds of subjects beyond those of black women; however, Nash points out that this "often happens through the construction of new origin stories, narratives which produce distinctive intersectional genealogies."¹⁶ The expansion of intersectionality so that Black women are no longer the only subjects it deals with is testament to the power of the concept, but taking its historiography away from Black women is appropriative.

The issue with the synonymy of intersectionality and diversity is something that affects more than just the way in which organisations, without contributing to intersectional strategies, can appear virtuous. It also places an identification with 'intersectional feminism', as a term that does not necessarily put any burden on the identifier other than to consume what is branded as intersectional. Without questioning their role in the context that allows for intersectionality, it becomes exploitative. In other words, when one reads articles or papers that relate personal experiences by those who are marginalised, the reader has a means by which to understand diversity, which is important for having a firm grasp of intersectionality. Simply improving one's grasp on it, however, is not enough. This is not to be read as a call to action over learning, but as a process of learning that understanding is only one part of. Organisations that purport to be intersectional in their approach, who are in fact using the appearance of being intersectional to put a demand on marginalised contributors to create, disintegrate the demand on readers or spectators. Ultimately, I would like to put forward the argument that the demand needs to be placed on the spectator instead.

An example of a work that is widely read and viewed as something which deals with non-Western feminism is that of Fatema Mernissi, who was a prominent Moroccan sociologist. She also wrote non-academic books centred around her experience as a Muslim woman navigating European perceptions of her identity. Her work is viewed as a source of home-grown Arab-Muslim feminism and they are read in various classes at universities.¹⁷ While it may be beneficial to read her work as an education in the diversity of feminism and of women's experience, one should not neglect to take into account the historical moment in which it was published.

Her memoir, *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* describes her upbringing in a harem, and is clearly written with a Western audience in mind. The genre of autoethnography is used by Mary Louise Pratt to refer to "instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer's own terms",¹⁸ which Carine Bourget asserts that *Dreams* falls under.

This can also be seen in her book *Scheherazade Goes West*, which attempts to relate her experiences of being 'other' on her book tour for *Dreams* around Europe. The book relates several stories of her encounters with patriarchy in Europe which, she argues, controls women through time rather than space as in Arabic-speaking countries.¹⁹ Mernissi focusses on the topic of harems, which she was questioned on by interviewers on her book tour, as *Dreams* details the experience of her upbringing. *Scheherazade* focusses on perceptions of harems and attempts to explain how and why the reality of harems was altered for 'Western' audiences. The character Scheherazade is the narrator in *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights* and considered the

¹¹ Nash. 2016, p. 10.

¹² Luft & Ward. 2009, p. 14.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁴ Nash. 2016, p. 10.

¹⁵ Luft & Ward. 2009, p. 13.

¹⁶ Nash. 2016, p. 12.

¹⁷ Bourget, Carine. 'Complicity with Orientalism in Third-World Women's Writing: Fatima Mernissi's Fictive Memoirs.', *Research in African Literatures*, 44.3. 2013, pp. 30–49. See also footnote 3.

¹⁸ Bourget. 2013, p. 39. Bourget quotes Pratt, Mary Louise. 1992.

¹⁹ Mernissi, Fatema. *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems*. Washington Square Press, 2001. p. 91-95.

heroine of the book because, through intellect, she could keep the king from continuing to kill his wives out of a paranoia of being cuckolded.²⁰ Mernissi is successful in introducing a picture of a particular narrative of women in the Arabic-speaking world, a narrative that fails to express the aspects of their life which are not oppressive. It would seem to be so because what is viewed as liberating by Mernissi's readership is not the same as what they consider it to be. The book is extremely successful in articulating how European art has historically depicted Muslim women inaccurately and imposed the fantasies of European men onto, for example, harems. This success comes with a burden because, in order to be published and read, Mernissi altered her language to make a 'Western'-friendly version of her life story, giving her readership the luxury of learning about her life and culture without the question of their own position as a spectator or consumer of her story being asked by the text.

“. . . the anglophone commercial book market “does not give much evidence of strong interest in literary fiction translated from Arabic, but such [media] outlets have eagerly sought English-language memoirs by 'ex-terrorists' (usually male) and women, whether from the Middle East or identified as European or American Muslims”... Although Mernissi's text predates the post-9/11 outpouring of books related to the Middle East, a previous political event that pitted the U.S. against parts of the Arab world impacted its writing. When asked why she wrote *Dreams* in English, Mernissi answered that it was because of the Gulf War.”²¹

The demand for narratives from women of non-Western countries has the potential for providing platforms, but only under the condition that difference is spoken of in a certain way. Clearly Mernissi's books provide a way of receiving differences; she criticises parts of American and European culture from a perspective that she could not have if she were not raised in a culture separate to them. However, the 'self' that Mernissi has to put forward to appeal to her readers is that of a naive woman, coming to Europe, who is confused by the reactions her interviewers have to the circumstances of her upbringing. She presents Arabic-speakers as hugely united in their conception of things like love and female beauty. The difference between her life and life for others in Morocco are never mentioned. This is a glaring problem in her memoir *Dreams*: it has come under criticism, and, in the French version, Mernissi includes a footnote explaining that her memory may not be completely accurate because she was so young at the times she is writing about; “To complicate things, one should remember that the version I presented coincided with a literary packaging I needed to seduce my reader.”²²

Essentially, Mernissi admits that her book is not entirely factual because she wanted to present a version of her life that would be more appealing to the audience it was directed at. Bourget points out that, in an interview, Mernissi admitted that two of her memoir's characters were fictitious, that she depicted her mother inaccurately by changing negative traits, and that elsewhere she gave anecdotes of conversations she had with a grocer - conversations which actually happened with someone else.²³ This not only leads to the question of whether or not many other parts of her memoir were fiction, but also what distortions of reality Mernissi gives to the reader. The united front she presents of women living in the harem, as well as the academic having casual conversations with a grocer give the reader a false impression of how the middle class and the working class interact in Morocco.

Mernissi had to alter her story to fit into the genre desired by her readership. The differences within are blocked from entering the genre of autoethnography. This funnels difference into an appropriative agenda which can slap 'intersectional' or 'diverse' onto its program, while maintaining fundamentally conservative beliefs. If a space is created to foster diversity and integration, it must be integration with the powerful. The space is one defined by its prioritisation of the specific identities that occupy it, and the marginalised other is allowed into the space if they follow its rules and speak as the marginalised other, as defined by the authority. It is the labour of the marginalised in altering their identity for the space that gives the space status in the first place; “the "marketing of 'victim' stories plays to a desire among the more privileged for the stories of 'authentic' sufferers, with whom they could feel empathy”.²⁴

The fact that Mernissi felt that she needed to 'seduce' her reader and that, to do so, she was required to make her life a fiction, speaks volumes about the conditions under which the privileged are willing to engage with a narrative like hers. This plays into another issue with how intersectionality can be taken as 'limited to understanding individual experiences'²⁵ where understanding can be construed as being enough. The reader is allowed to express their concern for the marginalised, without accounting for the labour which went into the construction and alteration of the narrative for an audience of authority. As musicians, writers and artists are continually lauded for work centred around identity, it becomes a luxury to be able to allow

²⁰ Mernissi. 2001, p. 39.

²¹ Bourget. 2013, p. 42. Footnotes found in original text.

²² *ibid.*, p. 33.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 34.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 42.

²⁵ Nash. 2016. Nash quotes Davis, Katy, p. 15. This is not what Davis argues for, but what she lists as being up for debate.

one's work to speak for itself; "exoticism can only be consumed when it is salvaged, that is, re-appropriated and translated into the Master's language of authenticity and otherness."²⁶

What the demand for voices in the context of publishing has shown is that often the way people empathise with others or take on movements of their own is through an acknowledgement of sameness in one form or another. There is a demand for the author to place themselves somewhere solid so that they may be understood, and the audience is never placed within the narrative. As a reader, one has the ability to interpret narratives in various ways, but what is excluded by the priority of 'diversity' is the idea that the spectator must be placed within the narrative.

Trinh T. Minh-ha is a filmmaker, writer, composer and feminist theorist whose work provides examples of how the spectator can be forced into their spectacle, thus removing the possibility to even conceive of themselves as a mere spectator understanding diversity. In the 1980s Trinh coined the term "the Inappropriate/d Other", who in the context of gender and ethnicity:

"... is that one always fares with at least four simultaneous gestures: that of affirming "I am like you" while persisting in one's difference; and that of insisting "I am different" while unsettling all definitions and practices of otherness arrived at. This is where inappropriate(d)ness takes form. Because when you talk about difference, there are many ways to receive it; if one simply understands it as a division between culture, between people, between entities, one can't go very far with it. But when that difference between entities is being worked out as a difference also within, things start opening up. Inside and outside are both expanded. Within each entity, there is a vast field and within each self is a multiplicity."²⁷

Her film *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* first appears as a documentary in which Trinh interviews several Vietnamese women. The interviews appear to occur in their own homes, often dimly lit, and the position of the speakers is sometimes created in such a way that their faces cannot be seen. This initially appears as a platform for these women to speak somewhat freely about their view of revolution, and views of womanhood in Vietnam. However, throughout the film, Trinh's position as the interviewer and the truth of the platform itself is revealed to the viewer. This is done through a series of strange effects which could be noticed by each viewer at different times. Although the interviews are conducted in English, there are subtitles in English to go with what the women say. Furthermore, the subtitles flash on the screen then disappear very quickly so often that it is difficult to read them, and they are also inaccurate: they rephrase what the women say and leave out some of their sentences. In her own words:

"Towards the beginning of you have interviews that seem rather 'discreet' in their staging, then after more than an hour or so, the staging becomes more and more obvious as you see a woman pacing back and forth, in and out of the camera frame while speaking, which is somewhat unusual in an interview situation."²⁸

The film is revealed to be a re-enactment of interviews which Trinh originally found in a book. According to Sumiko Higashi, the film asks the spectator whether "there [are] any cinematic strategies that women and ethnic peoples can devise to communicate with a wider audience without being appropriated?"²⁹ Even more worrying is the question of whether or not a wider audience is interested in listening to a narrative which has not been made easily accessible to them; "Since clarity is always ideological and reality always adaptive, such a demand for clear communication often proves to be nothing else but an intolerance for any language other than the one approved by the dominant ideology."³⁰

Higashi asks whether the debates Trinh inspires are mostly within academic institutions, and are therefore elitist and compromised. This question is embedded in the film. The fact that her work can raise this question about itself places a demand on the spectator to question their position in viewing the film. The difficulty an English speaking viewer will have in following her film and in hearing through the Vietnamese accents they are likely unfamiliar with, trying to read the subtitles before they disappear, as well as putting all of the short clips into a comprehensible whole, is sizeable. The discomfort in having to concentrate just to follow what is going on in a basic way is not something that people are used to doing when watching a film, and neither is the acknowledgement that they are watching women speak about themselves - in a language foreign to them - and to an audience who can only hear them while this is the case. The act of watching the film is creating the demand for this as a necessity, and the understanding that one gets from what they learn through watching it cannot be

²⁶ Trinh T. Minh-ha. 'She of the Interval', *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics*. Routledge, 1991. p. 96.

²⁷ Trinh. T Minh-ha. Innapropriate/d Artificiality with Marin Grzinic [interview]. <<http://trinhminhha.squarespace.com/inappropriated-artificiality/>> [accessed 10 April 2017]

²⁸ Trinh T. Minh-ha. 'Why a Fish Pond?', *Framer Framed*. New York: Routledge, 1992. p. 165.

²⁹ Higashi, Sumiko. Reviewed Work: *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* by Trinh T. Minh-ha. *The American Historical Review* 95.4. Oct., 1990, pp. 1124-1126. p. 1125.

³⁰ Trinh T. Minh-ha. 'She of the Interval'. p. 84.

done without acknowledging this.

This does not mean that work like Trinh's needs to be read by everyone, or that understanding more feminist theory is going to be the difference between oppression and liberation. Yet the questions - about the status one has as a consumer of a narrative, whether it is in a movie created by an intellectual or in a book, as well as the status the author must take in the context you place them in - must be acknowledged as stories become a prominent way of spreading or expressing intersectional approaches to feminism. The desire for more narratives is also a demand on some to create them, with no promise of improvement for their conditions; "No matter how plural and diverse the voices featured, one always has to point back to the apparatus and the site from which these voices are brought out and constructed, and so the notion of giving voice remains extremely paternalistic."³¹

As intersectionality has travelled it has also become a buzzword on the internet among bloggers, journalists and social media. For example, both Lindy West and Flavia Dzodan, who have contributed to *The Guardian* and speak in favour of an intersectional feminism, write about issues relating to various groups. Dzodan also keeps a well-read blog which relates personal experiences of hers and promotes intersectionality. Of course, this is true of the majority of feminist contributors to major news publications: they are women speaking about feminism, and how it affects them. A huge part of intersectional feminism online, and for the feminist who is not an academic, is done through story-telling and the relation of personal experiences. For many, the act of writing these articles is seen as necessary and vital to introducing more people to the idea that different women have different experiences, as well as to criticise elements of feminism which are complicit in racism and elitism.

Much of these articles are directed at those who already identify with feminism, perhaps even consider themselves to be intersectional feminists, and who want to learn through hearing personal stories. However there is not a demand placed on the reader to analyse their position in reading the content. The impetus to create content that will persuade more people of the importance of intersectionality sacrifices the ability for the narrative to pose questions to the reader, and makes them question their position as a spectator. The demand on those writing about personal experiences requires them to discuss their personal life publicly. It requires that they put it forth to be treated as something which is educational, though may not lead to any improvement of their circumstances. It also requires them to speak from a specific place as someone defined by the perspective associated with it, while also altering the idea people have of the label they are speaking on behalf of. This all happens with the goal of uniting a group while also splitting it into more subgroups, by the reader. How do they have to compromise themselves when they are speaking to an audience that has placed them as 'marginalised', which demands their story, the telling of which is vital to the alleviation of their oppression? "The task of inquiring into all the divisions of a culture remains exacting, for the moments when things take on a proper name can only be positional, hence transitional."³²

If the task of applying intersectionality through narrative is at least, in part, to inquire into different elements of kyriarchy, then one needs to use labels. The meanings of what one intended to learn about must become more complex. They must be situated in a context. It also means that one must understand that the stories one hears are never finished. There can never be a completeness in the stories or even in the collection of stories. Of course the representation of voices is hugely determined by economy and nationality, but it is also controlled by eye and ear. The identification of platforms and speakers as important is one step, the understanding of stories is another. But the third step, of construing the stories as connected through you when the context is occupied in general, is missed when learning, adhering and providing is seen as an ends in itself. A story which comes with the goal of the teller changing their identity in the eyes of the listener takes the initial stance of being told from a given perspective from where its value lies. But when this identity changes through telling, this change is not recognised as a change in the mark which gives them the position of the teller, only in the mark of their person.

As intersectionality moves into different spaces, the risk of taking it to be something which does the work for us, rather than something that takes work, is heightened. The increasing atmosphere, that understanding diversity is something that can come through reading narratives - without seeing them with a face - means that the work of the privileged who have time for 'understanding' is not being done. The publishing industry has a huge amount of power over what is produced for reading, and the representation of more voices in books is a good thing. The view of an organisation as intersectional, just because it provides a discursive platform with a diversity of voices or ideas, implies that being a consumer of what is produced by that organisation is practicing intersectional feminism. As technology becomes a means to create more platforms which perhaps ignores these problems, there is more of a demand for the material than there is on the reader to engage with their reading of the material. The problem is how to put the demand on the spectator to do more than simply read, understand or learn, but to answer to the text they are faced with.

³¹ Trinh. T. Minh-ha. 'Why a Fish Pond?'. p. 169.

³² Trinh. T. Minh-ha. 'She of the Interval'. p. 2.

Indigenizing Queer Theory: Reclaiming Two-Spirit Identity and the Transformative Power of Critical Theory

by Nicole Lam

CN: colonialism, racism, heteronormativity, cisnormativity, biopolitics, exoticization, racialised historicisation, necropolitics and murder, genocide, discussion of sexuality, white saviour narratives

Introduction

Queer theory has emerged as a critical lens for studying identity, nationhood, and post-colonial legacies in indigenous studies, particularly in Native American studies. I will argue throughout this essay that indigenizing queer theory is a political project that has the capacity for reasserting and reimagining notions of nationhood and identity. Firstly, I will explore Foucauldian ideas of biopower by extending its analysis to settler colonialism, to determine how colonial projections of categorical sexuality onto indigenous populations can impact their identity and autonomy. Furthermore, queer theorists argue that imposing a cis-gendered, heteropatriarchal monogamous structure onto indigenous peoples is a tool of colonization. This problem is evident in early works of anthropologists who restricted and exoticized indigenous bodies by using derogatory terms such as “berdache” or “Amazons”. These theories have important implications for practical engagement and disrupting norms within community organizing and academic tendencies. Finally, I will analyse the documentary *Gaycation* by using queer indigenous theory, thus emphasising the capacity of the theory as a critical approach to examining societal structures or the media, where one can often find contemporary examples of the projections of categorical sexuality onto non-western societies.

Queer and Indigenous Studies

Indigenous studies can incorporate many other perspectives in order to provide alternative methods of viewing concepts that regularly arise in the field such as sovereignty, identity, and nationhood. These words have contested meanings depending on the scholarship, but by broadening our ways of defining concepts, we are also expanding the methods in which we can re-assert sovereignty and Native identities in contemporary dialogues. By engaging with the intersections of queer theory and Native studies, we can develop new ways of imagining nationhood and how processes of imperialism arise. I will argue that settler colonialism relies on the reification of heteropatriarchy to naturalize many of the other processes used to subjugate the Native population by an imperial power. It also serves to justify Native genocide and the “disappearance” of Indigenous people.

Biopolitics is a concept that was popularized by Foucault, and is central to queer theory. Biopolitics refer to the processes and mechanisms by which groups assert authority over other human lives, especially in areas of knowledge and power.³³ Modern categories of sexualities, family practices, and norms that arise from heterosexuality in settler societies serve the function of biopolitics of settler colonialism. Some scholars argue that as a project of colonization in the United States, “white and national heteronormativity”³⁴ was imposed and used to regulate Native sexuality and gender. Colonial heteropatriarchy and hegemonic settler sexuality was imposed to eliminate Native sexuality and to force assimilation of indigeneity into settler modernity. By producing concepts of modernity that were inextricably tied with race and sexuality, imperial powers used biopower as a tool of colonialism.³⁵

Queer theory serves to disrupt the normativity imposed, by subverting the norms of not just sexual categories but defining “queer” as categories of deviant others according to the dominant state – alluding to the importance of biopolitics as a concept and tools of social control. “Queer” in indigenous studies can refer to Native sexual and gender identity but also Native nationhood, as abnormal categories under the biopolitics of settler colonialism. Morgensen refers to the process of oppression as the “queering of Native peoples,”³⁶ including imposed heterosexuality and racialized ideas about indigeneity as primitive or barbaric, justify white settlers and their projects of colonization.

Agamben extends the modes of biopower beyond the Foucauldian model of premodern to modern shift, but one that permits Western sovereignty to be exerted over other nations. Included in this definition of necropolitics is the sovereign right to utilise death as a form of punishment, enabling the dominant power to exert bodily control and the power to “make live” those who are deemed nationals and “let die” those who are queered in this political, life-deciding project.³⁷ Under this presumed logical process of elimination of queer and unworthy projects, Native Americans are described as uncivilised and a narrative of disappearance or a vanishing race is underpinned by the idea of letting die. It also supplants indigenous sovereignty by justifying the rightful taking of Native lands by Western powers. In this sense, modern sexuality and racial

³³ Scott Lauria Morgensen, *Spaces Between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011) 31-55.

³⁴ Morgensen, *Spaces Between Us*, 31.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

³⁷ Morgensen, *Spaces Between Us*, 33.

categories are arguably not the products of settler colonialism but rather the tools for producing settler colonialism and naturalising conquest of Western powers.³⁸

“Berdache” to Two-Spirit - Indigenous Resiliency

Sue Ellen Jacobs’ “*Is the “Berdache” a Phantom in Western Imagination?*” asks one to interrogate why Western cultures often consider trans identity and homosexuality to be synonymous with one another.³⁹ Since binarous homosexuality depends on constructions of sex and gender, it has spatial limitations. Cultures that recognise a myriad of gender identities, sexual orientations, and sex categories may broaden the definition of homosexuality to more inclusively encompass same-gender sexual relationships which are often excluded by definitions of queerness which are too rigid and therefore erasing, for example those of non-heterosexual trans people.

The origin of the now-avoided term “berdache”, however, which was used for Indigenous peoples who were neither exclusively homosexual, nor exclusively trans folks, is complicated. In fact, “berdache” was developed from a social status of being assigned male at birth but identifying as feminine. Berdaches worked in traditionally feminine jobs or wore feminine clothing, becoming a figure of exoticism for Westerners. Jacobs identifies the use of berdache as a way of masculinizing women who exhibited what white male writers deemed unfeminine qualities, or connecting the Native American women to mythical Amazonian women. Native American women became restricted to the categories imposed upon them by anthropologists, who would call Native American lesbian women and warrior women “Amazons”.⁴⁰ Berdaches are phantoms that disappear and reappear in literature, but more importantly they have emerged as icons for difference, embodying a Native otherness.

Not surprisingly, the term berdache has now been appropriately abandoned by many scholars for its problematic origins. Two-spirit is more commonly used now to refer to all trans or otherwise non-cis folks, while different nations have their own terms when discussing gender variance, such as *nadleebe* (Navajo), *winkte* (Lakota), and *warharmi* (Kamia).⁴¹ Lang contends that berdache was historically used not to denote sexual orientation but personality traits and an interest in occupations that were deemed feminine or masculine, but ultimately that the two-spirit and Native American construction of gender and sexuality is different to that of Western definitions.⁴² Hence, Western constructions of two-spirit people have included almost exclusively males who scholars consider homosexual. Yet surveys reveal that some so-called berdache have had sexual relations or lived with a woman, while indicating that they have never had sexual relations with a man, and in some cases berdache had no sexual relations at all.⁴³ Lang’s research reveals how Native American construction of gender and sexuality differs between nations given the diversity in cultural practices. A majority of Native American cultures indicate a construction of gender that is more fluid, allowing for more than two binary genders to exist and flourish. So-called “gender variance” refers to this fluidity as something that can change overtime and as part of one’s identity.⁴⁴ The Navajo term for gender variant individuals *nadleebe* refers to someone in a constant process of change, similarly to the Siouan word – *winkte*.

An important distinction must be drawn between gender, sex, and sexual orientation. Under Western constructions of sex and gender, one would categorise the relations between a “berdache” male and another male to be a homosexual relationship. However, within Native American cultures they would traditionally (before the permanence of Western imposition) consider it perhaps homosexual on a physical level but not a gendered difference, as two-spirit people exist as a category of gender on their own.

The impact of Western Christianization on the Native peoples of the Americas has drastically shifted attitudes regarding sexuality. The learning of new attitudes through forceful processes such as boarding schools, religiosity, and Western media, has renegaded “traditional” acceptance of gender variance to one that considers variance to be perverse.⁴⁵ Lang’s research indicated the lack of “true” two-spirit people, not implying that gender variance does not exist but that the social memory has been wiped out by whiteness and that the two-spirit people have lost their social significance through forced monogamous, “traditional” Western gender and sex roles. These heteronormative roles have destroyed not only the social significance of an accepted gender variant group, but the Native social order itself.⁴⁶ Many gender variant peoples or queer Natives now face rejection from family and community members because of the influence of white ideas and Christianity. Certain families will still embrace the gender variance in children, if older generations were gender variant or understand the ever-changing nature of sexual norms.

³⁸ Ibid., 42.

³⁹ Sue Ellen Jacobs, “Is the “North American Berdache” a Phantom in the Imagination of Western Social Scientists?,” in *Two Spirit People: Native American Gender Identity, Sexuality, and Spirituality*, ed. Sue-Ellen Jacobs et al. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 27.

⁴⁰ Jacobs, “Is the “Berdache” a Phantom in Western Imagination?,” 31.

⁴¹ Sabine Lang, “Various Kinds of Two-Spirit People: Gender Variance and Homosexuality in Native American Communities”, ed. Sue-Ellen Jacobs et al. (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1997), 100.

⁴² Ibid., 100.

⁴³ Lang, “Various Kinds of Two-Spirit People,” 102.

⁴⁴ Lang, “Various Kinds of Two-Spirit People,” 103.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 108.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 109.

The importance of two-spirit individuals in anti-imperial LGBTQ organizing has not waned, as they show great resiliency to the Western imposition of sexual categories onto their Native bodies. Gender variant individuals who have been overwhelmingly rejected by their families and community create new communities in urban areas. They rediscover the concept of two-spiritedness as a reclamation and celebration of their Native identity. As a result of this, the labels of “gay” and “lesbian” have been replaced by “two-spirit” or “two-spirited” in many of the names of queer Native organizations. Their organizing is vital to carving a space that they feel comfortable in, as many indicated the discomfort they felt in white urban LGBTQ communities, while being rejected by their Native communities.⁴⁷ Organizers often consider their Native or First Nations identity to be central to their sense of self while their sexual orientation or gender identity often has lesser impact.⁴⁸ As a project of reclamation, two-spirited-ness is not only vital for selfhood but it can also be interpreted as a larger project of reconnecting with memories and tradition that have been forgotten, not lost, through colonization.

Two-spirited peoples should not be the sole focus when attempting to indigenize queer theory, but it provides an important road map for political projects in theory. Firstly, the rejection of a colonial and racialized term “berdache” in favor of seeking out historical indigeneity to link to contemporary Native culture is integral to reclaiming sovereignty and nationhood. This builds towards efforts to decolonizing the language and ideas academics have about Native peoples.⁴⁹ Secondly, non-Native attempts to reimagine two-spirit narratives often reflect non-Native desires instead of allowing Native peoples to speak. The term “berdache” was used by Mead and Benedict, for example, who touted two-spirited-ness as an inspiration for “normal” white Americans to look towards in terms of fluidity and diversity in gender and sex.⁵⁰ This desire to be progressive instead reinforces colonial authority over Native people, with the claim that even “modern” societies could learn from “primitive” others; serving the persisting master narrative.⁵¹ Use of the term two-spirited should therefore be seen as not merely a replacement to “berdache”, but as a critique and destabilisation of the entire logic of the accounts and use of “berdache”, and as a challenge to non-Native accounts of indigeneity. Finally, two-spirited organizing has broad implications for wider social change and ways to challenge power relations in a settler colonial society. Non-Natives can learn from organizing and understand the historical power exerted through academia where non-Natives continue to retain control over Native knowledge. Through the reclamation of the term two-spirit, Native peoples have directed others to challenge the logic of settler society in academia. Decolonization should be of utmost importance for non-Natives when engaging in Native and queer theory.⁵²

Contemporary “Everyday” Imperialism

In a recent example of contemporary projections of sexual categories onto a Native population, I discovered the documentary *Gaycation*. It follows white, cisgendered, lesbian actor Ellen Page and her white, cisgendered, gay male friend Ian, who embark on a global mission to seek out “gay friendly areas” and narrate the travelogue in a tone that is steeped in white savior sentimentalism. They inform the audience that if we thought gay people did not exist all over the world then we are mistaken. This relates to the way Western ideas of sexuality have always been the dominant way to categorise sexuality and gender norms.

In the first episode of this documentary they travel to Japan, and their interaction with the *fujoshi* or “rotten women” reveals that the two white presenters are uncomfortable in expressions of sexuality that differ from their own. Fujoshi are women who indulge in Yaoi, a type of manga that depict gay eroticism. These women, who never identify as “straight”, become part of the otherly subjects open for Western ontological discussion, and are dismissed as they do not adhere to the “progressive” or “liberal” ideals of the two hosts. Fujoshi is a term used to chastise women for indulging in seemingly “wrong” fantasies involving homoerotic and non-reproductive sex. Through the reclamation and embrace of Fujoshi, women have cultivated a sense of solidarity and cultural dissent, rejecting the shame they were subject to by their society. The two women show that their identity is a direct challenge to the societal norm that considers homosexuality to be shameful. The scene ends abruptly when Ellen claims “It feels like the Rotten Women are objectifying gay sex rather than understanding the reality of being gay. So what’s it like to just live your life as a gay person in Japan? That’s what I’m interested in finding out.”⁵³ The use of “gay” here exemplifies how Western classification of sexuality decries any other form of sexual affiliation as illegitimate. While Page’s intentions are to seek out gender variance and highlight those narratives, the documentary is distorted to serve her own personal narrative of what fits neatly into the Western, white narratives of “what it means to be gay”.⁵⁴

Essentially, *Gaycation* is reminiscent of Western travelogues of primitive land, as it constructs gay tourism as an exotic exploration of unknown territories. It is worthwhile to note how such processes of colonisation and white imperialism still

⁴⁷ Lang, “Various Kinds of Two-Spirit People,” 111.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁴⁹ Scott Lauria Morgensen, “Unsettling Queer Politics: What Can Non-Natives learn from Two-Spirit Organizing?,” in *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature*, ed. Qwo-Li Driskill et al., (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2011), 134.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁵¹ Morgensen, “Unsettling Queer Politics,” 139.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 143.

⁵³ *Gaycation*, viceland.com, directed by Niall Kenny (2016; Los Angeles, CA: Viceland, 2016).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

occur in our construction of sexuality. More importantly, indigenous queer theory as a concept can be used as a framework tool to deconstruct these processes to truly “decolonize” our institutions with new radicalization. Indigenous queer theory provides us with an important perspective in not only critiquing racialized, gendered, and sexualized norms, but how to challenge and disrupt these harmful imperialistic norms. Comparable to two-spirit organizing and the rejection of “berdache”, or engaging with texts or forms of media like *Gaycation*, understanding colonial processes is the first step to disrupting non-Native narratives about Native peoples and their identities.

Colonial oppression is a system that binds non-Native and non-white bodies with risk. Queer indigenous bodies in particular have been under surveillance and forceful assimilation since the imposition of the white colonial heteropatriarchy. Coming out is not an option for many Native individuals as it either poses the risk of being rejected as a Native or remaining “Native” but under the conditions of internalized colonialism.⁵⁵ As a non-Native, Chinese, cis woman, it is not my position to suggest that every Native gender identity is a political project. However, the assertion of gender variance simultaneously challenges the binary and exclusionary nature of LGBTQ organizing and the white normativity asserted by non-Native Westerners.

Attempts to understand the fluidity of Native identity and expressions outside these imposed rigid dichotomies allow us to “decolonize” our academia and social movements. Engaging in critiquing and denaturalizing heteropatriarchy can aid “subjectless” queer indigenous people to reclaim a narrative that was quashed by colonialism, and work to disrupt colonial conditions.⁵⁶ This engagement can be present not only in critical readings of literature, but in our classroom environments. In general, sound approach to critical queer and indigenous theory poses questions regarding identifiable dominant structures, and so we must question those questions without knowing the answers in advance.⁵⁷ Within a classroom setting, one can question what, why, and how something is assumed natural and invisible while pointing to the problem of the opposite and the lack of representation of such categories. It can also be an interesting student-led project to validate and amplify these under-represented narratives, fostering curiosity and critical engagement.

Conclusion

Through various institutions – including assimilated white education, the heteropatriarchal nuclear, monogamous family, codification through laws, and cultural outlets – the colonial systems that dictate identity permeated the Americas through the imposition of sexual classifications, use of blood quantum laws, racialized otherness, or narratives of barbarism and exoticism. Hence, I argue for the necessity of indigenous queer theory in engagements of critical intervention. Firstly, this inclusion would alter who produces the knowledge, and therefore would allow the intellectual power of Native peoples to be autonomous. Secondly, indigenous queer theory disrupts the colonial narrative and allows for the discovery of forgotten identities that may have been erased in the past. It is important that Native nations can critique heteronormative citizenship standards that prevent non-heteronormative Native identities to be affirmed. Finally, the discovery and reclamation of past Native ways of self-identification is a political project towards decolonization and towards contemporary ways of nation-building and self-determination within Native communities.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Qwo-Li Driskill, Chris Finley, Brian Joseph Gilley, and Scott Lauria Morgensen, “The Revolution is for Everyone: Imagining an Emancipatory Future through Queer Indigenous Theories”, in *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature*, ed. Qwo-Li Driskill et al., (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2011), 214.

⁵⁶ Driskill et al., “The Revolution is for Everyone,” 218.

⁵⁷ Frederick L. Greene, “Queer Theory into the Undergraduate Classroom: Abstractions and Practical Applications,” *English Education* (1996): 333, accessed March 21, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/40172908.pdf?acceptTC=true>.

⁵⁸ “Queering Resurgence: Taking On Heteropatriarchy in Indigenous Nation Building,” last modified June 1, 2012, <http://leannesimpson.ca/queering-resurgence-taking-on-heteropatriarchy-in-indigenous-nation-building/>.

Transitioning in Iran: An Analysis of the Perspectives of Same-Sex Desire and Trans Identity

by Rosie Agnew

CN: transphobia, homophobia, heteronormativity, bi/pan erasure, medical procedures, transitioning and gender presentations, mention of rape and victim blaming, mention of suicide

CN for quotations: use of MTF/TFM vocabulary, use of “hermaphrodite” for intersex

After Thailand, the Islamic Republic of Iran performs more sex reassignment surgeries (SRS's) than any other country in the world; with an average of 300 surgeries being performed per year, most of which are state-subsidised. This seems an unlikely achievement of human rights in a society which condemns all other nonheteronormative behaviours and identities. Homosexuality is explicitly forbidden, and at times punishable by death, yet transsexuality is a legal and accepted category of identity. It has been suggested that SRS's are being performed in order to heteronormalise Iranian society, that the religio-legal sanctioning of such surgeries amounts to a process of “suicidal homophobia”.⁵⁹ While I do not have the space to fully elucidate this possibility here, I will focus on Iran's emphasis on binary sexual relationships and its binarised definition of gender by exploring social pressures such as gender conformity, the marriage imperative, and perceptions of homosexuality, and how these might influence self-cognition as trans. The following is an abstract of my final-year dissertation, an analysis of how hegemonic power in Iran can influence a transpersons' decision to undergo or not undergo SRS: coercively, and/or because of the manipulation by nonheteronormative agents of the services and designations available to them.

To begin, it is important to recognise the complex context in which perceptions of sex, gender, and sexuality are being contested in Iran. Queer identity is criminalised, and being “out” or engaging in issues surrounding sexual orientation and identifying with a queer community are not familiar lifestyle choices for an Iranian in the Islamic Republic of Iran.⁶⁰ Furthermore, legal issues of marriage, divorce, child custody, inheritance, and so on, are all structured around the gender or sex of an individual. This discourse in Iran has become a domain in which the categorical distinction between male and female makes a significant difference in rights and obligations. Dominant discourse emphasises the “immutable difference between man and woman”, which is not only considered inherently natural but also socially necessary, legally normative, and divinely mandated.⁶¹ Therefore, when confronted with those persons that differ from normative expectations of gender/sex/sexuality; Iranian ulama have, as Afsaneh Najmabadi writes, “firmly coded any bodies outside what could be clearly defined as male or female as sexual malfunction and any person whose behaviour did not correspond to gender role definitions as suffering from the disease of gender identity disorder.”⁶²

Religious reasoning coincides with moral understandings of sexuality to create a complex nexus in which transpersons in Iran carry a “particular set of affiliations and disaffiliations, identifications and disidentifications” that are specific to this context.⁶³ Identifying as trans in this context means dis-identifying as homosexual, and affiliating oneself absolutely with the gender one identifies with. There is no possibility for gender ambiguity. Ayatollah Karimnia creates a disparity between homosexuals and transpeople, recognising that they are different: “The discussion is fundamentally separate from a discussion regarding homosexuals. Absolutely not related. Homosexuals are doing something unnatural and against religion. It is clearly stated in our Islamic law that such behaviour is not allowed because it disrupts the social order.”⁶⁴ What needs to be understood from this, therefore, is that homosexuality is categorised as deviant, sinful, and willed, while transsexuality is classified as an inherent illness with a religio-legally sanctioned cure: SRS.

Before engaging in a discussion of how socio-cultural factors also influence transpersons decisions to undergo SRS, I will briefly outline the history of the legality of trans identity in Iran. Ayotollah Khomeini was the first to bring the issue of trans identity to the forefront of Iranian social identity construction. In 1967, the exiled Khomeini issued a fatwa stating that there was no religious restriction on SRS for intersex individuals. This fatwa did not include transpeople suffering from gender dysphoria. In 1985, he issued an appendage to this fatwa to include transpeople suffering from gender dysphoria; in response to a plea from a transperson named Molkara. Molkara was speaking out on behalf of those transpeople who felt stigmatised by the aftermath of the 1979 revolution; where their behaviour and dress was attracting the attention of homophobic rhetoric and attacks. Prior to the Islamic revolution, the “spectacle of unmanly males” was not an uncommon phenomenon; nor was the presence of masculine-presenting-women.⁶⁵ However, post-1979, clothing, behaviour, and self-presentation all came under scrutiny of the new regime. Khomeini was reportedly moved by Molkara's

⁵⁹ Najmabadi, Afsaneh. *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Modern Iran*. USA: Duke University Press, 2014.

⁶⁰ Jafari, Farrah. “Transsexuality under Surveillance in Iran: Clerical Control of Khomeini's Fatwas”. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 2014.

⁶¹ *ibid*

⁶² Najmabadi, Afsaneh. “Transing and Transpassing across Sex-Gender Walls in Iran”. *Women's Studies Quarterly* 36:3/4. 2008, p 23 – 42.

⁶³ *ibid*

⁶⁴ Jafari, loc. cit.

⁶⁵ Najmabadi, 2014, loc. cit.

visit, and subsequently recognised this community as suffering from an ‘ailment’ and issued a fatwa recognising the legitimacy of transsexuality and declaring that there is no religious or legal restriction on SRS.⁶⁶ The fatwa reads as follows:

“Sex reassignment has no religious restriction if prescribed by a trusted doctor,” and, “Sex reassignment from man to woman or sex reassignment from woman to man and also sex reassignment of the neutral-sexed or hermaphrodites to man or woman is not forbidden”.⁶⁷

This became the crucial turning point in religio-legal discourse in Iran surrounding trans identity. One cleric states, “The view of Imam Khomeini in this book has become the most important jurisprudential source amongst post-revolutionary legal positions for the explanation of sex reassignment.”⁶⁸ The issuance of the fatwa and the success of Molkara’s plea is critical in a number of ways. Firstly, it sets a precedent permitting recognised transpeople to legally live as out and trans before their SRS. Secondly, it locates the originating impetus for current religiously sanctioned and medico-legal transition procedures in transactivism; as well as operating as a reference point for possibilities of successes in Iranian transactivism (as the fatwa was obtained by a transpeople’s demand on Iran’s supreme politico-religious authority). Finally, it prioritises trans needs and desires over what seemed to be an inflexible consequence of the policies of the newly founded Islamic republic.

Therefore, among the multiple discursive sites in which the nature of transsexuality is being contested, constructed, and constituted in Iran is the sphere of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). State powers acknowledge the legitimacy of trans identity as based on Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini’s fatwa in 1985. There are three instances in the Qur’an that unambiguously mention the sin of men approaching or penetrating each other, but it does not mention sexuality or sexual orientation; it discusses particular sexual acts and objects of desires, and the moral attitudes towards these acts and objects. Such instances inform the perception in religio-legal discourse of homosexuality, and result in institutional points of power withholding their acceptance of homosexual identification and insisting on reorganising one’s sense of being in social spaces or activities around a focus on the body. It is the crime of sodomy (*lavai*) that is morally loaded and considered sinful; not the sexual identity itself. Transsexuality is not explicitly mentioned, discussed, or forbidden in the Qur’an, and so (Khomeini’s reasoning went) there is no grounds for it to be considered religiously deplorable.

Despite this success of Molkara, it must be emphasised that concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality remain tightly intertwined in Iranian religio-legal discourse; delineations between them are virtually nonexistent. Sexual orientation and identity in Iran relies largely on somatic definitions of the sexes, and persons who do not fit the binarised definitions of male/female or even masculine/feminine can be fit into various other tightly spiralled categories of ‘deviancy’. So while it is the homosexual act that is condemned rather than the homosexual identity, the two remain compounded: the act indicates the sexual inclinations, the sexual inclinations indicate the gender/sex. This results in the over-simplification of sexed bodies and orientations, leaving no allowance for the concept of a spectrum of gender identity. For example, a woman falling in love with another woman necessarily equates to that woman being *not*-woman. This works to sharply heterogender/ heterosexualise patterns of perceived non-normative relations; the masculine-presenting woman and feminine-presenting man are necessarily viewed as practicing what is considered sexually masculine and feminine, even within same-sex partnerships.⁶⁹ This simplification is extremely pertinent when we are trying to understand the rigid dichotomy of gender in modern Iran; and how it transfigures sexual desires and gender subjectivities to structure one’s self-cognition as trans.

Arrival at the self-cognition of trans rather than any other nonheteronormative identity, therefore, requires working within the state-designated terms and activities of religious acceptability and appropriateness in Iran. However, the influence of normative expectations of gender in Iran cannot be entirely subsumed into Islamic jurisprudence. Normative social and cultural expectations of gender and perceptions of homosexuality also work to powerfully regulate what can/cannot be considered a legitimate identity in Iran. Let us now consider the differing perceptions of male and female homosexuality in Iran.

Since female sexuality is not at the centre of the discourse on heteronormative behaviour, lesbianism is treated, if at all, as a strange and almost trivial contribution to the academic discourse on homosexuality in Iran. This originates, ultimately, in the different social anxieties surrounding same-sex inclinations in males and females. In Persian, the word ‘kuni’ is designated to a range of male nonheteronormative behaviours. Kuni literally means ‘anal’, but in this context refers to being receptive of anal penetration. Najmabadi describes it as “the most derogatory word in the realm of sexuality.”⁷⁰ Penetration defines what can be counted as intercourse, and penetrability becomes the defining characteristic of non-masculinity within this framework. In fact, the Iranian legal system seeks to punish the passive agent in male homosexual relations; rather than the active, often even in cases of rape. Young male adolescents first become familiar with the word as

⁶⁶ Jafari, “Transsexuality under Surveillance in Iran”, 2014.

⁶⁷ Khomeini, Ayatollah Ruhollah. *Fatvay-i faqihī dar barey-i taḡhiri jinsiyat* [The Jurisprudential Fatwa regarding Sex Reassignment Surgery]. Islampedia, 1985. <http://islampedia.ir/fa/1389/>. Accessed on November 3, 2016.

⁶⁸ Jafari, loc. cit.

⁶⁹ Najmabadi, 2014, loc. cit.

⁷⁰ *ibid*

that which signals the edge of abjection and deviancy; it is used from an early age to discourage activities (such as dance, playing with dolls, experimenting with makeup and dress, etc.) that supposedly signify that which is non-masculine, to discourage from behaviours that indicate the potential of becoming or being kuni.

'Baruni' for females does similar disciplinary work but is less morally loaded. In general, jurists have historically designated a lighter punishment for lesbian sex than gay sex because, according to them, the absence of penetration renders it less sinful.⁷¹ While penetration remains the definitive aspect of what constitutes sexual relations in Iran, the behaviour of nonheteronormative males will come under closer scrutiny than that of females as it is seen as far more challenging to the perceived dichotomy of gender. It is the perpetual threat of becoming or being kuni that is shattering to a modern male Iranian's sense of self, above all.⁷² We can take from this, therefore, that social and cultural perceptions of homosexuality may influence one's decision to identify as trans, rather than gay or lesbian (and can also be considered as a factor contributing to the higher number of female gender reassignment surgery than male gender reassignment surgery.)

Perhaps the most critical factor influencing individuals' self-cognitions as trans in Iran is the marriage imperative. The marriage imperative remains the ultimate symbol of gender conformity in Iran. Najmabadi suggests that the marriage imperative pushes people who might otherwise define themselves as butch lesbians or effeminate gays towards transitioning, as it acts as a social, cultural, and religio-legal approval of one's life choices. While marriage remains a life-cycle social expectation in Iran, as well as a passage into adulthood, marriage can be seen not only as definitive of gender conformity, but as an ideal to aspire to, for both men and women. Furthermore, marriage creates a conjugal home for licit sex in Iran, and has acquired a heterosexual/gender dynamic that has taken over larger cultural domains. The opposite positing of sexes has worked to produce men and women more generally as opposites of each other in multiple domains (temperament, feelings, emotional needs, sexual drives...). Therefore, what can be taken from this is that while marriage remains a 'binarising dynamic' in Iran, it can work beyond marriage to pattern man/woman as necessarily opposite. Najmabadi writes:

"Marriage as a binarised heterosexualized contract thus not only has worked to define manhood and womanhood as opposite and clearly bordered categories, it also deeply impacts one's self-configuration as a trans person.... the pressure for marriage informs the dominant culture's deep investment in the proper performance of masculinity and femininity and contributes to perceptions of gender coded roles within same-sex partnerships."

A key imperative in decisions to transition, then, may not explicitly be the taboo of homosexuality or compulsory heterosexuality, but rather the marriage imperative; the pressure on women and men is not so much not to have sex with their own sex as to not become resistant to marriage. Transition means marriage is available to those who might otherwise not identify as trans.

In her detailed reconstruction of the narratives of multiple trans/homosexual persons in Iran, Najmabadi stresses that what we associate as a necessary part of a lesbian/gay relationship- i.e. the 'sameness'-cannot be taken for granted in this context; and indeed this presumed sameness comes under pressure from the distinct roles being played (for example, of either femme or butch in a lesbian relationship). This is extremely pertinent when we consider that many of those who identify as trans in Iran may do so in order to live 'liveable lives'. The rights denied to LGBTQ people contribute to this decision: as nonheteronormative people experience the frustrations of being denied certain aspects of life; changing sex might open up these opportunities while closing off access to other avenues. Once a trans self-cognition has been arrived at, previously impossible acts become imaginable. Having sex with one's partner, for example, is no longer a (socially perceived) shameful act. This nexus of religious, social, cultural, political, economic, and legal factors culminate in what, ultimately, amounts to the agency of the subject: what identification would make for an optimally 'liveable' life in Iran?

While it cannot be denied that Iranian officials may see the total heteronormalisation of society as ideal; subsuming the agency of individuals into the dominant narrative of a state-mandated attempt at eradication of homosexuals is reductive, and cannot totally account for the number of SRSs being performed in Iran.

Furthermore, despite the notion of 'suicidal homophobia' attributed to Iranian state institutions, the affiliation of feminine-presenting men with the larger world of nonheteronormative men has produced possibilities for living alternative lives with or without surgery. As Najmabadi states: "if some of the persons with same sex desire are after all not sinning deviants, then in principle all persons with same sex desire must be considered not necessarily sinning deviants. The once closed question of the forbiddenness of same sex practices has become open to ambiguous possibilities."⁷³

⁷¹ Kugle, Scott Siraj al-Haqq. *Homosexuality in Islam: Critical Reflection on Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Muslims*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2010.

⁷² Najmabadi, 2014, loc. cit.

⁷³ *ibid*

How Meaningful is Consent in a Patriarchal Society?

by Ciara Molloy

CN: detailed descriptions of rape, violence, victim blaming, discussion of consent, discussion of sexual identity, cishnormativity, heteronormativity

On 15 August 1973, senior RAF officer William Morgan informed three male drinking buddies that his wife Daphne derived sexual pleasure from being forced to have intercourse. He told the men that even though she might scream and struggle, this was merely her way of gaining ultimate enjoyment from the experience. That night, Morgan and the three men dragged Daphne from her bed and one by one they raped her. The defendants, according to their lawyers, genuinely believed that Daphne had been consenting even though she had cried, struggled and screamed no. The trial judge informed the jury that not only had they to be certain that the defendants believed Daphne was consenting, but they also had to be certain this belief was reasonable. An appeal was made by the defence to the House of Lords on the basis of this 'reasonable' requirement. The House of Lords upheld the sentences of the defendants, but agreed with the defence lawyers that a defendant's belief in consent does not have to be reasonable. The ruling of the *R v Morgan* [1976] case meant that objective evidence of non-consent such as saying no was not regarded as sufficient in a courtroom. Rather, whether or not consent occurred is solely based on the *mens rea*, namely state of mind, of the defendant. The experiences and autonomy of the rape survivor is ignored. Daphne had screamed no, but in the eyes of the law technically her 'no' was a 'yes' because her attackers had (unreasonably) believed it to be so.⁷⁴

Section 2 of the Criminal Law (Rape) Act 1981 in Ireland enshrined this Morgan principle, namely that a man can only be prosecuted for rape if he knows the woman is not consenting or is reckless as to whether or not she is consenting.⁷⁵ The jury is entitled to consider the presence or absence of reasonable grounds if they wish, but this is not a requirement and the trial judge does not have to direct them to consider this matter.⁷⁶ Under the law, rape is regarded as sex minus consent. But as the above demonstrates, the implication of consent is defined subjectively from the male perspective. Consent should mean that a woman has expressed her right to say no to unwanted sexual intercourse, but the courts define consent in a manner that places the defendant's experience above that of the victim. The right of a woman to say no to unwanted intercourse becomes a secondary matter. Instead, the male understanding of consent, no matter how flawed that might be, is regarded as the most important factor.

Admittedly, since the defendant is the individual on trial, this does appear a logical approach, even if the court's willingness to see 'no' as 'yes' proves slightly unsettling. However, matters become even more contentious when one considers that perhaps men are conditioned not to even notice what women want, and perhaps women are socialised into acting and behaving in a manner that men find desirable and arousing. Radical feminists such as Catherine MacKinnon and Susan Brownmiller convincingly argue that women are socialised into a state of beautiful passivity, whereby from an early age we are taught the values of docility and domesticity.⁷⁷ The way we dress, put on makeup, pout in selfies, behave on nights out are dictated by the male definition of what constitutes beauty. Sexual objectification of women in fashion and advertising remains one of the highest paid industries in the world, and we are constantly barraged with advice on how to achieve fuller lips, more defined brows, silkier hair, smoother legs; the messages are never-ending, overwhelming and insistent. We do not wear tight skirts and five-inch heels on a night out because they are comfortable. We wear them because we hope to attract the eye of a male suitor. But who are we really trying to please – him or ourselves? If consent entails freedom of choice, how can we make a truly free choice when we are taught that femininity entails beauty and passivity as defined from a male perspective?

This formulation of rape as sex minus consent means that in terms of their physical characteristics, rape and sex are synonymous. Both are inherently aggressive, entail an imbalance of power, and are premised on the roles of dominance and submission. MacKinnon argues that men are not conditioned to know the meaning of a violation of a female, because they violate women regularly through sex. Therefore to see what is wrong about rape, we have to see what is right about sex.⁷⁸ What do we consent to when we say yes to heterosexual sex? Are we consenting to our own sexual pleasure? Or are we consenting to a traditional version of sexual relations that women are conditioned to enjoy? Recent literature on the myth of the vaginal orgasm would seem to suggest that we are consenting to a male definition of what pleasurable intercourse should entail. Since Anne Koedht's pioneering research into this myth in 1968, which challenged the very basis

⁷⁴ Joanna Bourke, *Rape: A History from 1860 to the Present* (London, 2007), pp. 50-52; *DPP v Morgan* [1976] AC 182 House of Lords.

⁷⁵ Criminal Law (Rape) Act, 1981, No. 10.

⁷⁶ Thomas O'Malley, *Sexual Offences: Law, Policy and Punishment* (Dublin, 1996), pp. 54-55.

⁷⁷ Catherine MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 181; Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York, 1975), p. 310.

⁷⁸ MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory*, pp.173-175, p. 180.

of heterosexuality,⁷⁹ scientific studies have concluded that female sexual gratification does not lie in vaginal penetration.⁸⁰ Freudian theorists such as Helene Deutsch had regarded the vaginal orgasm as the ultimate expression of femininity, which reinforced the position of women as passive receptacles for male penetration. However, the liberation of the clitoris as a site for female sexual expression undermines the automatic assumption that heterosexual intercourse is ‘natural’,⁸¹ and instead casts it as merely another means by which an imbalanced gender ideology is perpetuated.

Minister for Justice and Equality Frances Fitzgerald announced in November 2016 that she would introduce a definition of consent under the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill 2015.⁸² The introduction of a definition of consent was first addressed by the Law Reform Commission in its 1988 report *Rape and Allied Offences*. Paragraph 17 of the report recommended the following definition;

1. Consent means a consent freely and voluntarily given and, without in any way affecting or limiting the meaning otherwise attributable to those words, a consent is not freely and voluntarily given if it is obtained by force, threat, intimidation, deception or fraudulent means.
2. A failure to offer physical resistance to a sexual assault does not of itself constitute consent to a sexual assault.⁸³

Fianna Fáil Ministers for Justice Gerry Collins and later Ray Burke accepted the negative definition of consent as provided by subsection 2 of paragraph 17 in the above report and included it under Section 9 of the Criminal Law (Rape) (Amendment) Act 1990.⁸⁴ Yet they failed to introduce the positive definition of consent as provided by subsection 1. Even though Frances Fitzgerald has signalled her intent to overcome the intransigence of her predecessors, if this definition is adopted, one must question if it is really going to make any difference in improving the experiences of a rape survivor in the courtroom. Granted, consent will be defined in a positive manner, but as the Morgan case demonstrated, courts are not so much interested in a woman’s consent as they are in the man’s interpretation of what consent entails. A statutory definition will not overcome this patriarchal bent of our criminal justice system. Furthermore, the issue of alcohol in particular is going to cast serious complications into this definition. According to a recent study in 2009, 66% of rape complainants and 88% of defendants had been binge-drinking prior to the occurrence of the alleged incident.⁸⁵ Yet juries are more likely to blame a complainant who has been drinking of precipitating the rape, while treating a defendant who has been drinking more sympathetically as he is deemed less responsible for his actions.⁸⁶ This adheres to the common rape myth that women are ‘asking for it’, which is never the case. A woman never asks for rape, and alcohol should never be an excuse for committing rape. However, it will be difficult to make this point clear in a definition of consent, and unless carefully considered this definition could cause more problems than solutions for complainants. In 2009, consent was used as the main defence in 18 of 28 rape cases.⁸⁷ The centrality of consent in rape trials means that we need to ensure we get this definition of consent right - if, that is, we decide that consent truly is the most important element of rape crime.

For it could be argued that the introduction of a definition of consent is nothing more than sticking a bandaid on a gaping wound, because it overlooks the reason why sexual violence happens. The real cause of rape in society is the imbalance of power between men and women. Rape is an act of violence as well as a sexual act, and is concerned with the exertion of power through degrading a victim. This power imbalance is expressed in various ways in society, such as through employment, politics and religion— through the continuing gender pay-gap, the lack of women in the Dáil and government bodies, the position of women as second-class citizens in the eyes of the church, but rape is its extreme expression. We live in a society where Article 41.2 of our Constitution still commits women to the role of a mother and housewife. There is nothing wrong with these roles, so long as they are roles we consciously choose and are not conditioned into adopting. To understand and eliminate rape crime, we need to address male socialisation into the role of a dominant aggressor, and female socialisation into the role of a submissive and physically attractive inferior. Trying to change this socialisation

⁷⁹ Jane Gerhard, ‘Revisiting “The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm”: The Female Orgasm in American Sexual Thought and Second Wave Feminism’, *Feminist Studies*, 26 (2000), pp. 449-476, at p. 449.

⁸⁰ Vincenzo Puppo and Giulia Puppo, ‘Anatomy of Sex: Revision of the New Anatomical Terms used for the Clitoris and the Female Orgasm by Sexologists’, *Clinical Anatomy*, 28 (2015), pp. 293-304.

⁸¹ Gerhard, ‘Revisiting “The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm”’, p. 450, p. 456.

⁸² ‘Frances Fitzgerald may define sexual consent in legislation for first time’, *Irish Independent Online*, 12 November 2016. Available at: <http://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/ireland/frances-fitzgerald-may-define-sexual-consent-in-legislation-for-first-time-763773.html> [accessed 1 December 2016].

⁸³ Law Reform Commission, *Rape and Allied Offences* (Dublin, 1988), paragraph 17, p. 9.

⁸⁴ Criminal Law (Rape) (Amendment) Act, 1990, No. 32.

⁸⁵ Conor Hanly, Deirdre Healy and Stacey Scriver, *Rape and Justice in Ireland: A National Study of Survivor, Prosecutor and Court Responses to Rape* (Dublin, 2009), p. xxix.

⁸⁶ Amy Grubb and Emily Turner, ‘Attribution of blame in rape cases: A review of the impact of rape myth acceptance, gender role conformity and substance use on victim blaming’, *Aggression and Violent Behaviour*, 17 (2012), pp. 443-452, at p. 448.

⁸⁷ Susan Leahy, ‘Reform of Irish Rape Law: The Need for a Legislative Definition of Consent’, *Common Law World Review*, 43 (2014), pp. 231-263, at p. 232.

process cannot occur overnight, and can only be achieved through an education process. As a recent powerful documentary by Louise O'Neill has argued, we need to teach people that consent is an ongoing and affirmative process and is connected with intimacy, respect, and mutual pleasure.⁸⁸ We need a frank, bare, no-holds discussion of what consent truly means, how female autonomy is manifested in a patriarchal society, and the ways in which the labels of femininity and masculinity can be negotiated and transcended. But the willingness of Frances Fitzgerald to conveniently insert a definition of consent into the Sexual Offences Bill is cause for concern. Unless we actually engage as a society in a debate about what consent truly entails, this legislative definition of consent is the equivalent of sticking a bandaid on the problem.

⁸⁸ Asking for it: Reality Bites. Available at: <http://www.rte.ie/player/ie/show/asking-for-it-reality-bites-30004323/10644044/> [accessed 25 November 2016].

Bodies Write Back: Writing as a Possibility of Change - Cixous and the REPEAL project

by Charlotte Amrouche

CN: abortion, rape, forced pregnancy, contraception, cisnormativity, phallogocentrism, discussion of class and poverty

In this paper I will unpack how the REPEAL project (Repeal, 2016) has created an atmosphere of change through the tool of writing. I focus on three primary elements of the project: their jumpers, their Instagram page, and the short film *We Face This Land*.⁸⁹ Coming back to Ireland in 2013 brought me straight into a resurgence of energy of the pro-choice movement. I am not a woman who has ever had to choose to have an abortion, but I am a woman who has grown up in a country with the realisation that *my body* is not as valued as my male counterparts. I am lucky: I have access to money to travel, friends in the UK to stay with, all my friends and family are pro-choice. These are not just things I am thinking of to *position myself* for this paper; evaluating our means is the thought-process of young women all over Ireland.

Throughout this paper I will explore Hélène Cixous's claim that "writing is precisely *the very possibility of change*".⁹⁰ How has the REPEAL project used the tools of embodied writing – *écriture féminine* – to further the conversation of change in Ireland? How can I cross the boundaries of academia and literature, of literature and activism? In order to explore these questions, I begin by mapping out the landscape of abortion in Ireland and outlining the REPEAL project. In section two I work closely with Cixous's texts, *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976) and *Coming to Write* (1991), to explore the ideas of embodied writing. In section three I explore the feminist figuration of the witch in *We Face This Land*. Lastly, I acknowledge intersections of class in the REPEAL project within the limited space of this paper.

I use the term woman/women throughout this paper. I recognise that abortion rights do not solely affect people who identify as woman, and I do not mean to silence their voices. I hope that Cixous's definition of woman might clarify what I mean: "When I say 'woman', I'm speaking of woman in her inevitable struggle against conventional man".⁹¹ I understand Cixous to be stating that she sees "woman" as the feminine in constant struggle with the effects of masculine dominant society, and importantly, masculine dominant writing. Throughout this text I will use the terms our/us/we as I consider myself as part of this group of women who are still struggling to have their voices heard. Furthermore, it is worth noting that this essay is not an overview of Cixous's work, or of *écriture féminine* in general, but an exploration of how the tools of Cixous's writing can be used to understand how the REPEAL project is using writing as a possibility of change.

I – Women of Ireland

The eighth amendment was added to the Irish Constitution in 1983 by referendum:

Admhaíonn an Stát ceart na mbeo gan breith chun a mbeatha agus, ag féachaint go cuí do chomhcheart na máthar chun a beatha, ráthaíonn sé gan cur isteach lena dhlíthe ar an gceart sin agus ráthaíonn fós an ceart sin a chosaint is a shuíomh lena dhlíthe sa mhéid gur féidir é.

The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right.⁹²

Myth: a folklore or misconception

It is not the brave tales of Cúchulainn which haunt my Ireland, but the stories of women alone, accused, unheard. My myths are made up of the shadows of women – Ann, Joanne, Miss X, Savita, Ms Y⁹³: died alone giving birth by a grotto; erroneously

⁸⁹ Project Repeal. *We Face This Land* [online], 15 September 2016 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=571vnkdrWC0>> [Accessed 1 November 2016].

⁹⁰ Cixous, H. 'The Laugh of the Medusa'. *Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1.4. 1976, pp. 875-893, p. 879. Italics in text.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, p. 875.

⁹² Eight Amendment of the Constitution Act (1983), e:ISB [online] <<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1983/ca/8/schedule/enacted/en/html#sched-part1>> [Accessed 31 October 2016].

⁹³ For more information on Ann Lovett, see Ingle, R. 'The Ann Lovett letters: sorrow, shame, anger and indignation', *Irish Times* [online], 31 January 2017 <<http://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/the-ann-lovett-letters-sorrow-shame-anger-and-indignation-1.1673920>> [Accessed 9 October 2017].

For Joanna Hayes and the 'Kerry babies', see O'Regan, M. 'The case of the Kerry babies', *Irish Times* [online], 12 April 2014 <<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/the-case-of-the-kerry-babies-1.1759242?mode=sample&auth-failed=1&pw-origin=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.irishtimes.com%2Fnews%2Fsocial-affairs%2Fthe-case-of-the-kerry-babies-1.1759242>> [Accessed 3 November 2016].

For Miss X, see *The Journal*. 'Twenty years on: a timeline of the X case', *The Journal* [online], 6 February 2012 <<http://www.thejournal.ie/twenty-years-on-a-timeline-of-the-x-case-347359-Feb2012/>> [Accessed 3 November 2016].

accused of infanticide; raped at 14 and prevented from travelling; forced to die in a hospital after asking for help; raped and in a new country which forced her to give birth. These women's experiences grow out of the uncertainty that comes from growing up without knowledge of our bodies, our strength. When the body itself *is shame*, it *is silence*. The recent refused abortions of Savita and of Ms Y have encouraged a burst of rage over the last five years. But the death and destruction of women who dare to be "deviant" is not new in Ireland, a whole institution was built around them.⁹⁴ These stories have always occurred; these are my myths.

*Get Your Rosaries Off My Ovaries*⁹⁵

The church and state has written our bodies for us: with stethoscopes,⁹⁶ with rosaries, with the eighth, with masculinity. Our bodies are not ours: not to discuss, not to know, not to *speak from*. However, the tide has visibly begun to change. High-profile women have spoken publicly about their abortions;⁹⁷ the yearly march has grown. When I first moved back to Dublin in 2013 I was shyly pro-choice, now it is part of my identity as Irish: **I believe women**. *We Face This Land* illustrates a turning point where women's stories of travelling are not dirty little secrets but something to make art of, to plaster on social media, to wear on your chest. We can feel the tide turning, the sand between our toes.

The REPEAL project emerged in the summer of 2016. Launching a line of black jumpers with the word REPEAL emblazoned on them, this project made 'outerwear to give a voice to a hidden problem'.⁹⁸ Their Instagram page was filled with the stories of women who had abortions, these were my inspiration for exploring how *écriture féminine* applies to the world of activism. The REPEAL project also released the short film *We Face This Land*, based on the poem by Sarah Maria Griffin. This film exemplifies the "passionate writing of female bodily difference into text",⁹⁹ it captures the voice of Irish women and plays on the boundaries of masculine rationality and feminine passion:

A body is a body is a body is a body is a body is a body is a body
Not a house. Not a city. Not a vessel, not a country¹⁰⁰

II - *Écriture Féminine* Takes Up Space

We Are Stormy

"Write! Writing is for you, you are you; your body is yours, take it."¹⁰¹ In this phrase Cixous points towards the intrinsic link between writing and the body, writing is an embodied action, "Writing to touch with letters, with lips, with breath..."¹⁰² Cixous urges us to write from a self-expression which differs from repressive masculine history,¹⁰³ and to therefore unleash "an exhilarating and unbounded energy that shatters masculine institutions and values".¹⁰⁴ According to Cixous the act of

For Savita Halappanavar, see Enright, M. 'Savita Halappanavar: Ireland, abortion and the politics of death and grief', Human Rights in Ireland [online], 14 November 2012 <<http://humanrights.ie/gender-sexuality-and-the-law/savita-halappanavar-ireland-abortion-and-the-politics-of-death-and-grief/>> [Accessed 31 October 2016].

For Ms Y, see Holland, K. 'Timeline of Ms Y case', Irish Times [online], 4 October 2014 <<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/timeline-of-ms-y-case-1.1951699?mode=sample&auth-failed=1&pw-origin=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.irishtimes.com%2Fnews%2Fsocial-affairs%2Ftimeline-of-ms-y-case-1.1951699>> [Accessed 3 November 2016].

⁹⁴ The Magdalene Laundries.

⁹⁵ "Get your rosaries off my ovaries" is a popular protest chant at the March for Choice, and also one of my personal favourites.

⁹⁶ Griffin, S. M. 'We Face This Land: a poem by Sarah Maria Griffin', Irish Times [online], 21 September 2016 <<http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/we-face-this-land-a-poem-by-sarah-maria-griffin-1.2799708>> [Accessed 1 November 2016].

⁹⁷ Flynn, T. 'Tara Flynn: You don't talk about abortion in Ireland. But I have to.', Irish Times [online], 14 September 2015 <<http://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/tara-flynn-you-don-t-talk-about-abortion-in-ireland-but-i-have-to-1.2344617>> [Accessed 3 November 2016]; Ingle, R. 'Róisín Ingle: Why I need to tell my abortion story', Irish Times, 21 September 2015 <<http://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/r%C3%B3is%C3%ADn-ingle-why-i-need-to-tell-my-abortion-story-1.2348822/>> [Accessed 3 November 2016].

⁹⁸ Repeal. 'REPEAL: Outerwear To Give a Voice to a Hidden Problem' [online], 2016 <<http://www.repeal.ie/>> [Accessed 3 November 2016].

⁹⁹ Lykke, N. 'Shifting Boundaries Between Academic and Creative Writing Practices', *Feminist Studies*. London: Routledge. 2010, pp. 163-83, p. 180.

¹⁰⁰ Griffin. 2016.

¹⁰¹ Cixous. 1976, p. 876.

¹⁰² Cixous, H. 'Coming to Writing'. "Coming to Write" and Other Essays. Ed. Jenson, D. Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1991. pp. 1-58, p. 4.

¹⁰³ Jones, A. R. 'Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of 'L'Écriture Feminine'', *Feminist Studies* 7.2. 1981, 247-263, p. 252.

¹⁰⁴ Cavallaro, D. *French Feminist Theory: An Introduction*. London, New York: Continuum, 2003. p. 120. Cavallaro quotes Nead. 1992, p. 30.

writing ourselves and our bodies will be an immense resource: “Our naphtha will spread, throughout the world, without dollars – black or gold – nonassessed values that will change the rules of the old game”.¹⁰⁵

Cixous argues that women’s writing is considered to be motivated by the ‘wrong’ reasons, motivations forbidden by the rationale of masculine writing. The forbidden reasons are “passion, something shameful – and disturbing”.¹⁰⁶ In the pattern of “laws” subjected on women, we are taught, among many things, that: “[y]ou will not write. You will learn to calculate. You will not touch.”¹⁰⁷ By writing from the body, women fail to write to the standards of a rational, calculated voice. These “laws” are self-imposed as well, by the double-ness of the fear of doubt/doubt that you fear; Cixous asks us, who is the woman who has been spared of questioning, spared of uncertainty, of trembling doubt?¹⁰⁸ Cixous is not afraid to unpack the troubles of writing as woman, woman that has never had her turn to speak, and show us that by writing from the body of woman change is possible.¹⁰⁹

I return to the “laws”¹¹⁰ – whose laws are these, masculine laws? feminine laws which have been internalised? – which resonate through the conversation of abortion in Ireland. *Here are Ireland’s laws:*

You will not kill, *you will not abort,*
you will be killed, *the state acknowledges the right to life of the unborn,*¹¹¹ *Savita,*
you will not be sick or crazy, *you are a vessel for the unborn,* *Michelle,*
you will not write, *you will stay silent – shame, stigma,* *Ann,*
you will learn to calculate, *calculate the weeks missed, calculate the cost of crossing the sea, calculate the fear of telling your story.*¹¹²

The doubt and questioning Cixous mentions is one of the only accepted forms of abortion-talk in Ireland: do you regret it? did you question whether you shouldn’t do it? didn’t you *think* about this [unborn] life? Women’s reproductive decisions are constantly undervalued, under-respected; we are taught to doubt ourselves, we are taught to silence ourselves, “they sat me down and told me never ever tell anyone”.¹¹³ This questioning spreads beyond decisions around crisis pregnancies to all women’s reproductive health choices: I went to an Irish doctor for the contraceptive pill and was asked if I *really* needed it. In a climate where women are taught we have all of the wrong reasons to make decisions, to think, to write, it is moving to see the REPEAL project and women rising, women writing their stories, women’s naphtha spreading throughout the world.

The REPEAL project has opened up a space where women tell/write their stories of abortion, many of them speak of not regretting the abortion, but regretting keeping it to themselves for so long. The following three stories show how Irish shame affected women differently, how Ireland keeps them silent, and the stigma that remains in the name “anonymous”. These stories show the opportunity of change stemming from embodied writing, stemming from the community of voices REPEAL has supported and nourished:

“I have never regret[ed] my decision, even for a moment. [...] That said [...] my abortion was the most traumatic event of my life; I have never experienced such isolation, fear and anguish before. [...] The experience has marked me, not with shame (as some want me to feel), but with anger and yearning for change” - Anonymous.¹¹⁴

“Even though I was 100% confident about the decision I was making at the time, even though I knew I could not become a good mother at 17, even though I knew that my future was more important to me, I still felt a deep shame and disgust with myself” - Fabiana Mizzoni.¹¹⁵

“I don’t know why I couldn’t tell them [her family]. I do know why I didn’t tell them. Ireland.”- Susan Cahill.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁵ Cavallaro. 2003, p. 122. Cavallaro quotes Cixous. 2000, p. 262.

¹⁰⁶ Cixous. 1991, p. 9.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p. 7, 6.

¹⁰⁹ Cixous. 1976, p. 879.

¹¹⁰ Cixous. 1991, p. 15-16.

¹¹¹ Eighth Amendment of the Constitution Act, 1983.

¹¹² Here I quote from Cixous. 1991, p. 15-16. in normal text, the italics are my words; For more information on Michelle Harte, see O’Brien, C. ‘Woman with cancer tells of her abortion ordeal’, Irish Times [online], 21 December 2010

<<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/woman-with-cancer-tells-of-her-abortion-ordeal-1.688500>> [Accessed 31 October 2016].

¹¹³ repealproject [instagram]. ‘Throat choked and eyes bulged with tears [...]’, 2016.

<<https://www.instagram.com/p/BJXXdXyhZ6F/?hl=en>> [Accessed 31 October 2016].

¹¹⁴ Anonymous, repealproject [instagram]. ‘Up to 12 women leave our shores daily [...]’, 2016.

<<https://www.instagram.com/p/BJyTTughYb1/?hl=en>> [Accessed 31 October 2016].

¹¹⁵ Mizzoni, F, repealproject [instagram]. ‘Fabiana Mizzoni shared her story [...]’, 2016.

<<https://www.instagram.com/p/BLL3nZcBDxo/?hl=en>> [Accessed 31 October 2016].

¹¹⁶ Cahill, S, repealproject [instagram]. ‘Susan Cahill shared her abortion story [...]’, 2016.

<<https://www.instagram.com/p/BJZiDsYh5Ua/?hl=en>> [Accessed 31 October 2016].

In Susan Bordo's discussion of the containment of female hunger – political, social, material – she concludes with this powerful claim: “I began to give myself permission to take up the space I needed and claim the power I craved”.¹¹⁷ This need to take up space, to claim power is echoed by Cixous when she writes that woman must seize the chance to speak in order to shatter the history that is always based on her suppression.¹¹⁸ This is wonderfully enacted in the REPEAL jumpers which first dotted the streets of Dublin, before they spread *like naphtha* across social media, spread even into classrooms and the streets of Utrecht. The March for Choice has taken place for years but this “crying out, yelling, tearing the air [...] doesn't leave traces”.¹¹⁹ Voices can get lost but writing is marking oneself, it is making yourself noticed.¹²⁰ Words grab attention, the single word REPEAL denotes solidarity, rebellion, power. Writing enables us to not disappear.

We must stop listening to the Sirens – to the men – and instead look the Medusa straight on.¹²¹ To change history we must be seen and must be visible. Armed with words we can keep resistance alive, we can bring into the world new ways of being which will not restrain, drive away or perish from their narrowness.¹²² To write is to take up space, to be bold, to reject, to look the face of oppression straight on. If we expand the meaning of writing to include any words we make public – “wearing outwear for a hidden problem” – to wear this word REPEAL is to give oneself permission to claim change, to denounce doubt, to repeal laws.

“As I disembark from the train, an elderly woman grabs my hand. She has seen my ‘Repeal’ sweater, she tells me. “Thank you,” she says. “Thank you”. It always breaks my heart when older women say things like that to me. What stories do they have? What secrets have they kept? And for how long?” - Louise O'Neill.¹²³

III – Witches Survive

Feminist Figurations: The Witch

Feminist figurations feature in *écriture féminine* – from Cixous's *Medusa* to Luce Irigaray's *lips* – as a performative image of the future¹²⁴ which challenges a separation of reason from imagination.¹²⁵ If women chase off the Sirens call¹²⁶ we can see in the myths of the *Medusa* (and the witches) women's repressed power which has been present and feared throughout the past. Feminist figurations act on boundaries: of past and future, reason and imagination, in order to point a way out of the current situations of hegemonic, phallogocentric oppression. In this way the witch, as it appears in *We Face This Land*, can be understood as a figuration, reworking women's past in Ireland as a tool to present day struggle. As I will now demonstrate, the *witch* takes all that has been written on the female body and uses it for change.

*“Witches or women – these are our bodies which shall not be given up”*¹²⁷

“Woman must write woman” argues,¹²⁸ and when they do, the hidden, the quietly powerful will return: the witches will return from beyond (masculine) culture. Why witches? Why do witches return when women seize power, seize their voice, seize their pen? Susan Stryker writes about how her war with nature, with the conditions of human community, sparks a rage which leads her to “the chaos and blackness from which Nature itself splits forth”.¹²⁹ Stryker allies herself with the supernatural, the monsters of fiction, in order to overcome human society. The voice of women in *We Face This Land* echoes this tactic of survival:

We are not witches but if the church and state insists
Then let us be the descendants of all the witches they could not drown¹³⁰

¹¹⁷ Bordo, S. ‘Taking up Space’, in Laurie, P. *Meat Market: Female Flesh Under Capitalism*. Winchester: Zero, 2011. pp. 22- 35, p. 35.

¹¹⁸ Cixous. 1976, p. 880.

¹¹⁹ Cixous. 1991, p. 15.

¹²⁰ By no means am I saying that peaceful protest and yearly marches are not a valuable way of having your voice heard; however, a multiple approach is probably always more effective.

¹²¹ Cixous. 1976, p. 885.

¹²² Cixous. 1991, p. 2, 7.

¹²³ O'Neill, L, *repealproject* [instagram] ‘Louise O'Neill from @irishexaminer [...]’, 2016.

<<https://www.instagram.com/p/BLCI6sQhBnl/?hl=en>> [Accessed 31 October 2016].

¹²⁴ Kember, S. ‘Feminist figuration and the question of origin’, *FutureNatural: Nature, Science, Culture*. ed. Robertson, G. Psychology Press, 1996. p. 256.

¹²⁵ Lykke. 2010, p. 38. Lykke quotes Braidotti. 2002, p. 3.

¹²⁶ Cixous. 1976, p. 885.

¹²⁷ Griffin. 2016.

¹²⁸ Cixous. 1976, p. 877.

¹²⁹ Stryker, S. ‘My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamunix: Performing Transgender Rage’, *GLQ*, 1.3. 1994, pp. 227-254, p. 93.

¹³⁰ Griffin. 2016.

If we cannot be women – bodies in their own right – then we will become witches. Cixous and Clément argue that it is only through death that woman can return to their femininity: “a woman warrior is not a woman; it is a woman who has killed the woman in her”.¹³¹ The only way that Irish woman could survive – *can* survive, can have a voice – is by killing her femininity, becoming *witch*:

If she survives the drowning and floats
She’s a witch. If she dies, she’s a woman¹³²

Rewriting the Supernatural

So what happens when women write women and in doing so reclaim the supernatural – the monster, the witch, the warrior – in women? Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English write about the history of healers – the history of women and witches.¹³³ They argue that healers were attacked, labelled as witches, *because* they were women. To reclaim witches is to reclaim *history’s* rejection of women who acted *for* women in a man’s world. Cixous powerfully writes that man must write for man, and that only “an oblique consideration” of him will be found in her text.¹³⁴ Writing for women, reclaiming unnatural labels, these are actions against rational masculine discourse. “The stethoscope is a crucifix on your belly”¹³⁵ – masculine medicine writes masculine religious doctrine on the body of woman. But *We Face This Land* is writing back the bodies of women, it is writing the experiences and rage of women, it is rewriting the power of the witch, and in doing so it reclaims the confiscated female body.¹³⁶

IV – Class in the REPEAL project

A Jumper of One’s Own

Eleven women per day travel across the sea to procure an abortion. Travel. Ireland’s exportation of their “problem” means that women with access to funds, women with passports, women who are not too ill to travel, women who are not waiting on asylum claims, women who can leave family responsibilities behind for a couple of days can all travel. The eighth amendment creates a class boundary between those who can travel and make their own reproductive choices, and those who can’t. Women who cannot travel are forced (in the words of Cixous) to *lay*.¹³⁷

The REPEAL project reproduces this class barrier between women who can choose and women who can’t. In the same way that Cixous has been criticised for not offering “any specific analysis of the material factors preventing women from writing”,¹³⁸ the REPEAL project does not highlight stories of women who could not travel. Their jumpers cost twenty-five euro, does this mean that these jumpers are only seen on some faces, only in some areas of Dublin, of Ireland? Audre Lorde argues that the form that creativity takes often robs us of each other’s creative insight and energy.¹³⁹ She argues that poetry is a more accessible form of creative production because it does not require much physical labour or materials, and can be written between shifts. For Lorde poetry gives voice to the poor. We need to be aware of the form that our creative activism takes, and how creative production is a class issue¹⁴⁰. If the REPEAL project can be understood as *écriture féminine* and as a possibility for change by writing from the body, then we must ensure that all bodies are included.

Conclusion

Cixous writes, “a body is always a substance for inscription [. T]he flesh writes and is given to be read; and to be written”.¹⁴¹ The body and writing are intrinsically connected. But the body is also connected to our social, political, masculine world. This discussion has mapped how the eighth amendment epitomises masculine inscription on the feminine body.

This paper was inspired by the very raw connection I felt on reading *The Laugh of the Medusa*. Cixous’s text crossed the boundary of my expected connection with an academic text, the boundary between the rational and the passionate. I was

¹³¹ Cavallaro. 2003, p. 123-124. Cavallaro quotes Cixous and Clément. 1987, p. 118.

¹³² Griffin. 2016.

¹³³ Ehrenreich, B. and English, D. *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers*. Old Westbury: The Feminist Press, 1973. p. 1-3.

¹³⁴ Cixous. 1976, p. 877.

¹³⁵ Griffin. 2016.

¹³⁶ Cixous. 1976, p. 880.

¹³⁷ Cixous. 1991, p. 27.

¹³⁸ Cavallaro. 2003, p. 123. Cavallaro quotes Moi. 1985, p. 123.

¹³⁹ Lorde, A. ‘Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference’, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007. p. 116.

¹⁴⁰ It is worth noting here that class is not the only dimension that you could examine this project with. The stories on Instagram which come with a name and a face are mostly the names and faces of Irish white women. Where are the stories of women like Savita and Ms Y?

¹⁴¹ Cixous. 1991, p. 26.

struck by how *écriture féminine* was the perfect way of understanding the power I feel in the REPEAL project. I return to Audre Lorde's words:

My anger has meant pain to me *but it has also meant survival*, and before I give it up I'm going to be sure that there is something at least as powerful to replace it on the road to clarity.¹⁴²

The pain of being **any** woman in a country which does not recognise our fundamental human rights has been reclaimed with murals, films, poetry, women's stories, and song in the last few months. This is the "something at least as powerful" I have been waiting for.

¹⁴² Lorde. 2007, p. 132. Italics mine.



by Áine O'Hara



by Áine O'Hara

Cliffside

By Katie Leigh Walsh

CN: gore, decay

I can't find the words, though I feel them
Lurching around my chest like ships in a storm,
Bouncing off my ribs and
Scraping my throat with their masts.

Eighteen years in a paper skin,
An insubstantial prison, a swathe,
Drawing black rings around my eyes
And wearing tits like a badge of honour.

I've been eroded all my life
Washed away by winds and whispers, reduced
To this transparent skeleton,
Heavy with this rotting chameleon flesh.

HANDS

By Orlaith Holland

CN: violence, implied rape/sexual assault, victim blaming

You took my voice away.
That's what stays.
The girl who shouted loudest
Was soundless.
And in that silence
Blame lay thickest.
"Did you say no?"
"Were you loud?"
"Did you say no—" again
and again
and again and again and again
(The first few times didn't count.)
It was you who proved
I wasn't immune
To the threat
Spoken of by adults
Hushed, overhead.
How they judge.
How they disapprove.
Of me and my mouth.
Loud, crass.
Always asking
To be slapped.
Always asking
To be gagged.
Always asking -
For all of that.
Be glad.
I'm done with matters of mouths
and hands.

HydroTherapy

By Christopher Joyce

CN: implied abuse, recovery

I like my showers hot:
Hotter than hot,
I want them scalding.

I turn off the lights,
Letting the steam,
Suffocate my thoughts,
And choke my worries.
I lather myself,
In memories.
Just to wash them away.

In the glass,
I am just a body:
I am skin.
Neither thick nor thin,
Tough or soft,
I am simply skin.

Under the spray
I turn pink.
As old layers disappear.
Until I am crisp and new.
Until there is no part of me,
That they have touched.

Under the spray
I turn red.
As fresh layers,
Are burnt away.
Until I am raw:
Strange and unfamiliar.

I like my showers hot,
Because the cold ones,
Leave me numb.

On Unresolved Things

By Alicia Byrne Keane

CN: emotional abuse, gaslighting, victim invalidation, manipulation, mention of statutory sexual assault

I don't really remember my relationship with you at all – just that we dated for a year and a bit, and it ended the summer I went to France. I'll recall unreasonable things you did, but not the build-up of tension between us that may have provoked them. I'll remember isolated quotes from you that seem implausibly insulting. I have no doubt that I gave as good as I got. I'm sure I was no picnic. But in these memories, it's like the sound has been turned off when I'm speaking. In the same way that all my drunken shite-talk seems to disappear down into some recess - the psychological equivalent of the side of the couch – my words have been cut from these scenes. It makes me wonder all the time if I'm being unfair in my assessment of you as an emotional abuser. It makes me wonder whether it was my fault all along.

I can remember trying to find a working payphone one freezing night, panicking, my phone dead, in the grip of a frantic need to apologise to you about something. I can remember a day that should have been nice, the day I passed my driving test, ending with you leaving abruptly in anger and me walking around town sobbing. But I can't remember any of the arguments, only their endings.

It's because the bits I do remember don't really make sense. It's as if your responses were mismatched to my actions, like our dialogue had been written and then all the lines got scrambled up. None of the answers corresponded to the questions. Around January I mentioned that I was going on an eight-week trip to France for college in the summer, and I got a bunch of messages from you in return. They said, dispassionately, that I should return the Christmas presents I'd bought you because they were cheap and shitty. I remember inviting you to a party and your response reading, deady serious: *I knew I wasn't your first priority, but I didn't expect to be your last.* I remember bringing you out to a club with some female friends and, as we all danced in a circle, you suddenly walking off in anger.

Your reactions would be both disproportionate to the situation, and completely unforeseen. Certain interchanges of ours would take on this absurd quality, as if all meaning had broken down. It was deeply unnerving, Beckett dialogue kind of stuff. Like I was a kid re-learning how to interact for the first time, and everything I said came out rude and wrong whenever I tried to communicate. I'd be constantly thinking, *what did I say to make you so upset?* Or, *what was so bad about what I just did?* It was as if there was an unintentional meanness to all my actions, a vibe you were picking up on that I hadn't realized I gave out.

A fortnight before I was due to leave for France, we were sitting on the O'Connell Statue, about to go somewhere for coffee. We had just met up. I spotted a friend from college across the street – her navy thermal top, her square gym bag held at her hip – and I immediately felt a sense of dread. Situations that involved you and my friends in the one place always went badly, resulting in awkwardness at best and fights at worst. This included even just running into people I knew on the street. It meant that when I saw acquaintances walking towards us in town I'd make a quick calculation of how bad this might get. This friend in particular, Ida, was if possible the most problematic one of them all. At this particular moment, she was walking towards us, in her slow, measured way. She was Scandinavian and very 'centred', although I hate that word. You had taken an immediate dislike to her. You'd go quiet like a child in her presence, looking at her critically, and I'd end up floundering between you as I tried to find topics of conversation on which you two could possibly connect.

Anyway, Ida came up to us, greeted us with hugs, and started musing away about some drama she was having in her job. This part of the conversation is lost to me, but in all likelihood I probably wasn't even listening at the time. I'd often be too busy panicking in my head when these things happened.

Sure enough, as we were talking, you abruptly stood up and walked off. We both watched as you continued up towards Parnell Street, paused slightly near the Spire, and crossed the road. There was a silence.

'Whoops! Is he okay? Just going for a pee or...?'

'No...no, I don't think so. Not going for a pee. Gone, I think.'

'Oh. Wow.'

I realized how resigned I sounded, and how Ida was looking at me with her eyebrows pulled together in concern. An 'I-didn't-know-the-extent-of-it' face. It occurred to me that I should try to seem more surprised, to act like this type of behaviour wasn't relatively common with you.

'God, I can't believe this,' I said, half-heartedly. 'God, I'm so annoyed.'

Later that evening, I lay by myself on a bench on the James Joyce Bridge. The bridge looked white and clean and space-age in the dusk. The view down the Liffey was a muted expanse, some dystopia from a Kubrick film. The IFSC office blocks like dirty mother-of-pearl. I stared up at the intersecting white girders above me, the wires like the strings of a harp. I remember thinking it would have been a nice photograph. The white angle of the bridge's arm in the top right corner, the sky deepening behind it. I lay there for a long time, the coolness from the metal bench seeping into my shoulder blades.

For years afterwards, I tried to figure out what exactly had happened between us. With only patchy, skewed memories to go on, I tried to understand you in retrospect. I broke up with you that day you walked off on me in town, but I still attempted to maintain a friendship with you for years afterwards. I'd privately Google-diagnose you with everything under the sun, terrified that you had been going through psychological difficulties and I hadn't recognized it. Terrified that it had been exploitative of me to date you, that *I* was the emotional abuser. I thought through every possible source of personal turmoil you could have been experiencing. I read endless bleak Yahoo Answers forums about relationships, and among the 16-year-old Midwestern kids pining over crushes and the 37 year olds anxious about marriage I never found an experience that sounded anything like my own.

Educating myself about feminism in my twenties gave me a huge sense of relief in a lot of ways, as it made me see certain phenomena named and discussed. Phenomena that, as a teenager, I'd assumed were unusual, maybe even unique to the people I knew: the ex-boyfriend who pestered me with manipulative and attention-seeking texts for two years after we broke up, the nineteen-year-old male acquaintance who dated fourteen-year-olds and messaged me about his encounters in graphic detail. Deconstructing entitlement in its many insidious forms offered resolution to vague feelings of confused injustice I'd pretty much always felt. However, feminism has also taught me another lesson, one that's linked to this but sort of the opposite – namely, that sometimes you won't get answers.

They say that people who have experienced emotional abuse - gaslighting and such - become obsessed with trying to understand their abuser, even in retrospect. Even to themselves, years after the relationship has ended. That's something I possibly have still failed to concede: that there will be no eventual confrontation with you, no Greys Anatomy-style outpouring in which all of my anger gets validated. I wonder how many people have something like that, a bunch of weird memories they carry around with them for years, hoping for eventual explanation. I think that's why I'm writing this. To say that I am here for anyone who has had experiences they can't quite understand.

Altars

By Naoise Osborne

CN: objectification

She was used to hearing ancient scripture.
She was used to hearing quotes drip from religious tongues.
Maybe that had been her first mistake.

He'd said her name like a prayer,
an oath,
a promise.

And she should have known that from poetic mouths
spilled ink, not truths,
and nothing about him was holy.

Nothing was worth worshipping,
and she could bare her neck,
and lay herself down for sacrifice,
but she couldn't make an altar out of his discarded clothes.

Pronouns

By Kit Stookey

CN: misgendering

“Guys, I use they/them pronouns now, remember?”

They raise their eyebrows and exchange looks. “Alright, we get it, you use...”

You can’t understand the words that come out of their mouths—can’t quite tell if they’re words, even. It’s a noise—a cross between a blood-curdling scream and the roar of the ocean, and something else, something not of this world.

You want to correct them, but they’re gone now. All that’s left is coral-colored smoke, smelling of lemons and sulfur, and the sound.

Always the sound.

The sound pulses through you, reverberates in your bones, your mind. It echoes in your dreams. You spend your dreams searching for the source of the sound, trekking through barren grey fields, marching through sheets of freezing green fire. You see something—someone? It looks almost human at moments, until it morphs into something you have no words for, only the sound—but only out of the corner of your eye. Every time you try to look at it dead-on, you’re transported somewhere else, somewhere more terrible and strange than the last.

You see an eye. The pupil, square like a goat’s, is the size of your head, and changes colors. The blue iris radiates cold. Frost crystalizes on your sleeve, your cheek.

You feel hot vapors at the back of your neck. The sound is closer. It is right behind you, cracking through your skull.

Something deep inside you breaks.

You wake in a cold sweat—pale, shaking.

This is not one of those dreams you wake up forgetting. The sound continues in your mind, beating its way in your skull like a drum.

You think to yourself, “Huh. A brand-new set of neo-pronouns.”

You don’t use them for yourself, but you offer them up to friends questioning gender. You cannot hope to copy the sound perfectly, but your imitation still leaves many of your friends quaking in their Docs.

Still, some like them, and use them. Those friends say they describe a part of themselves they didn’t know existed, some part between the bile in their stomachs and their effervescent thoughts.

You never need to ask these friends to remind you of their pronouns.

Couples

By Kit Stookey

CN: fetishisation of lesbianism, isolation

All your friends are gay, and all your friends are coupled up.

You know that there was once a time where this wasn't true. If you strain, you can remember a name—Chad? Brandon?—someone who watched rugby and drank beer and pretended he wanted you to get a girlfriend so you could be emotionally fulfilled. You, of course, knew that he just wanted you to make out with another girl in front of him. Still, he was fun to have around, probably. You're not quite sure anymore if you ever really liked him—what role he filled besides that of the always valued Token Cisgender Straight Man. You can't place a face to the name, can't find any photos which could trigger any memories. All that's left of him are nail marks on your dresser. You're pretty sure they're *his* nails, anyways—no one else you know has a reason to let their nails grow out in the first place. No one else's nails could leave those long, deep gouges on the top of your cheap pine dresser.

Similarly, you know that you knew your friends before they found their "better halves." Chocolate ice cream and red wine stains dot your couch, *But I'm A Cheerleader*, *D.E.B.S.* and *Saving Face* appear in your "Watch Again" queue on Netflix. Sleeping bags in the closet still smell of your friends' perfume.

You can deduce that there was a girl's night, not too long ago, full of junk food and alcohol and questionable dating app choices. But the last thing you remember is moving into your new (overpriced) apartment.

That was almost a year ago now.

You can't tell your friends and their partners apart, can't remember who were your friends originally and who were once strangers to scrutinize by Snapchat screenshots and bathroom mirror selfies.

You tell them this, that you can't tell them apart, and they laugh.

"We get that a lot!" they say, "and we really don't see it, I'm the one with..." they say something about glasses or a nose ring or a tattoo of a Sappho fragment. There are never any glasses or nose rings or Sappho fragments.

They look like reflections of each other. If only you knew who was mirroring whom.

One of each pair doesn't show up in mirrors, you've noticed. They also sometimes flicker, becoming translucent for just a moment under the afternoon sun as you third-wheel on a hiking date or under the neon sign at your town's one gay bar.

Your arm once brushed against one of theirs. It was cold—the kind of cold that burns your skin. You barely contained your grimace from the pain.

Miraculously, cursedly, you get one of them alone, confrontation on your lips.

She turns, anticipating what you were about to say. With a pitying glance, she says, "Dating is hard, especially when you're gay. You should know that better than anybody. But I can help you find someone."

You ask her, "Whatever happened to Brandon?"

She smiles and squeezes your hand, cold to the touch.

"We gave him the power to become someone *better*—someone we actually wanted and needed. Brandon can be what you want and need, too."

You look up and see yourself.

By Molly-May O'Leary

poly : play

game : change

spoil : sport

pluck out your marbles and sell them to your boyfriends

tie your tongue to your ears and twist

heads rear

fluffy heads

ted talks

pat them on the bum and say thank you mister!

cash in-cash out (ching a ling ling)

yes it's *theirs*¹⁴³

(hills. road signs. bumper stickers.)

but you know the thrill of the:

1,2

1,2

1, 1, 1

imagine life without it

¹⁴³ test by dipping a net of hair into their eyes. find rods projecting round stretch of slope, curve of road out front. lick tastes metallic

Girls in a car

By Kelly O'Brien

We shaped each-other, created each-other,
Deconstructed and reconstructed
In the back seat of the car with our hands
Hanging out of the windows; our laughter
Reverberating, bouncing off the roof,
Calling through the petrol station darkness.

We ran on sand purple and volcanic,
On dusky rooftops and twilit driveways,
Open land and tarmacadam highways,
Nights dark and inky in fluidity;
Through the Pacific and the specific,
All of the grubby and the lovely.

California binds and bounded us
Pushing and pulling each-other upwards,
Foundations and buildings rising skywards,
The smell of sunshine and salt on our skin,
Souls, selves arcing through the bright afternoons;
Flying high together, high on each-other.



by Ellie Vardigans

Our Wonderful Contributors

Rosie Agnew

Rosie Agnew is a final year Middle Eastern Studies student in Trinity. Having grown up in Saudi Arabia, she is currently most interested in studying gender and sexuality in Muslim-majority contexts. After completing her undergraduate degree in Trinity, she hopes to go on to do a MSt in Gender Studies.

Charlotte Amrouche

Charlotte Amrouche completed her Undergraduate Degree in Sociology and Politics & International Relations at University College Dublin in 2016. She is currently pursuing a Masters in Gender Studies at Utrecht University in the Netherlands. Her research interests are reproductive rights, menstruation, resistance movements, and feminist theory.

Imaan Bari

imaan is. oh and then she isn't.

Alicia Byrne Keane

Alicia Byrne Keane is a spoken word poet from Dublin. She features regularly at poetry nights around Ireland and the UK, and has performed at festivals such as Body & Soul, Castlepalooza and Electric Picnic.

Sophie Fitzpatrick

Sophie has no tricks up her sleeve. Please text her if you have advice.

Orlaith Holland

Orlaith Holland is a young amateur poet from Ballymun, North Dublin. She is currently doing a degree in Film Studies and English Literature at Trinity College. Writing poetry is her favourite form of procrastination.

Christopher Joyce

Christopher Joyce is currently working on starting his own literary journal/magazine entitled "Chrysanthemum". You can check more of his writing out at "Chris Joyce Poetry" on Facebook or at chrisjoycepoetry.wordpress.com.

Nicole Lam

Nicole is a Macanese-Irish, SocSocPol graduate, and activist-researcher. She believes in the healing and decolonising power of accessible education through a non-Western praxis. She also likes tea and making new friends so hit her up.

Ciara Molloy

Ciara Molloy is a final year History and Political Science student, and is a member of the Women's History Association of Ireland. Previous publications include an essay in Trinity's *Histories and Humanities Journal* on the role of women in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Ireland, and an article on Cumann na mBan in *Offaly Heritage 8*.

Kelly O'Brien

Kelly O'Brien is a third-year English Studies undergraduate in Trinity College. Her poetry has been published previously in the *Attic* and in the *Irish Times* Fighting Words supplement.

Áine O'Hara

Áine O'Hara is an artist and theatre maker based in Mayo/Dublin. They are a graduate of Fine Art at IADT, Dun Laoghaire and Stage Design at The Lir, TCD. They can be contacted at artistscantdraw@gmail.com.

Molly-May O'Leary

Molly-May O'Leary likes to think of herself as an active woman living in Ireland!

Naoise Osborne

Naoise Osborne is a first year English student who is interested in art, literature and music. Her aim is to get involved in campaigning beyond arguing with strangers on nights out.

Ellie Vardigans

Ellie Vardigans is the academic editor for *nemesis*, and a fourth year English Studies student. Despite being a dabbler in amateur photography and a once upon a time classical musician, she's actually not very instinctively creative and so thoroughly enjoys the Art of Citation.

Kit Stookey

Kit is a visiting student for the spring semester at TCD. Their home university is St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, where they study English, Media Studies, and Women's and Gender Studies. Their hobbies include acting and gaying up the place (wherever that place may be).

Katie Walsh

Katie is a second year Irish Studies student in Trinity. This will be her first published poem. You can see more of her work on katieleighwalsh.wordpress.com.