nemesis
EDITORIAL

"Urging all of us to open our minds and hearts so that we can know beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable, so that we can think and rethink, so that we can create new visions, I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions – a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom."

– bell hooks

We are very excited to present to you the first ever edition of the nemesis journal. We founded nemesis with the intention of providing a platform wherein feminist discourse could be prioritised on campus. Our hope is for this journal to be a nexus wherein overlapping and intersecting forms of oppression can be examined. The insightful and talent-brimming submissions we received have confirmed how well-used a platform such as this could be, as have various movements on campus, including the upcoming Strike4Repeal on March 8th. It is clear that our current political climate requires and is producing various movements of resistance. Knowledge and truth, too, will brew change, and so we hope for nemesis to contribute to those liberatory processes of education that enable rethinking and transgression. This issue wouldn’t have been possible without the time and effort put forth by our team, and by all of those who submitted. We are incredibly grateful for that.

– Laura McCormack and Jenny Moran

The contents of this issue are divided into three sections: Academic, Feature, and Creative. Where applicable, pieces of writing contain their own Content Notifications (CNs) under the title. Any relevant Trigger Warnings will be contained within the CNs. Copyright remains with the author of each piece. All content in this edition will be published on our website.

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CN: racism, ethnocentrism, war, bombings

‘A revolution in consciousness is an empty high without a revolution in the distribution of power.’ - Abbie Hoffman, 1

I first came across the political whirlwind that was Abbie Hoffman whilst a new activist in university. I was studying for an honours degree in Middle East studies, and living in an eco-feminist, catholic worker commune in Camden, NJ. The forty-minute commute between Camden and West Philadelphia, where my university was located, brought me through some of the U.S’s poorest neighbourhoods. In fact, my own city of Camden had routinely made the list of ‘America’s most dangerous cities’ due to the high homicide rates relative to the size of population. The contrasts between my abstemious life at home in Camden, and the cloying wealth of the University of Pennsylvania was vast.

Though, even at the tender age of 19, contrasts of privilege and power had already seeded an avid political consciousness in me. Growing up as a minority in the U.S., I knew contrast. As a child of ‘mixed’ parentage - my mother an American of Irish descent, and my father an Azeri-Iranian and an immigrant - our family was codified within the racially ambiguous term ‘blended’. Yet, in my experience, the word blended fails to capture much of the reality, as our family was probably better characterised as immiscible, in other words, we did not ‘blend’.

Already strained by the burden of attempting to cope with normative gender roles that seemed to confirm Carol Hanisch’s observation that the ‘personal is political’, my parents’ marriage seemed to suffer particularly by the inverse of that famous slogan, ‘the political [was] personal.’ My parents divorced in 1986 when I was not yet three years of age. In November 1985, the Reagan administration began secretly and illegally selling arms to the Iranian government, just at the height of the Iran-Iraq war, as means of funding Right-wing paramilitaries (aka ‘the Contras’) in Nicaragua, who were under sanction by the U.S. congress. Whilst the Reagan administration made pronouncements condemning various governments’ ‘support for terrorism’ or ‘lack of democracy’ it was, if not instigating, fuelling wars from Latin America to the USSR to the Middle East.

Unwilling to challenge the undemocratic, often surreptitious policies that have characterised U.S. foreign policy since Reconstruction, the media turned its gaze towards those who were largely its victims. In the case of Iran, the media became obsessed with curating Islam as cultish, and fixated on perfunctory depictions of Iranian women, clad in billowing, black chadors, (invariably) shouting: Marg barg Amerika! (death to America) at any opportunity.

These depictions were not simply the fantasies of doltish, American journalists. They were, rather, the consequence of economic, political, and social contexts, and intended to conjure specific kinds of reactions and affirm particular world views. In these ‘stories’, Iranian women were all the same. They did not have subjectivity, they did not ‘act’, and their reactionary politics was driven by ideology and false-consciousness. Of course these are the very discursive manoeuvres that have, since the Enlightenment, helped to formalise Islam as a counterpoint to the West with the issue of women’s rights as the cornerstone. Today, the paradigm that the ‘West’ and the ‘Islamic world’ are caught in an intractable conflict continues to set the tone of debates - and worse, policies - with disastrous effect.

In recent history, one consequences of the harm of maintaining this spurious characterisation is the War on Terror, and the invasion into Afghanistan, that successfully mobilised mainstream feminist groups, like the Feminist Majority, to support it under the guise of ‘protecting the rights of women and girls.’ The so-called ‘mission of hope in Afghanistan’ - as described by Laura Bush with little recognition of the deeply colonial frame

such a description provokes - included several partners from post-colonial states, including Ireland. Through its ‘peace partnership’ with NATO, Irish troops maintained a modest presence in Afghanistan from 2002 - 2014.

These political realities are the contrasts and complexities of the world I was born into, and the one in which we are all bound to dwell. They are maintained by structures of injustice, disparities of wealth and power, and animate the spatial landscapes that also determine our epistemic view. This is why it is important to notice, for instance, why certain postcodes have well-funded schools and well-connected services, and others struggle to maintain a modicum of these rights. It is also important to notice that issues of inequality such as those Hanisch’s essay articulate, were not merely ‘personal’ without political consequence, but deeply political and connected to material structures of discrimination that narrate those structures as ‘natural’.

Further, where Second Wave feminism championed Hanisch’s slogan through a myriad of campaigns like reproductive rights and equal pay for equal work, Third Wave conceptions brought the slogan into the reverse: the political was personal. The difference between the two is subtle yet critical as a means to disturb some of the ways in which certain streams of feminism have colonised what it means to be a ‘feminist’ and what feminist collective action looks like. The difference is also important in terms of framing; our strategies of resistance to hetero-patriarchy (centrally) need to be constitutive of a larger political imagination; an imagination that both asks and attempts to answer the question: what kind of society do we want to live in?

When I began integrating the idea that the ‘political was personal, ‘several questions arose. The first went back to my childhood and my parents’ marriage and eventual divorce. 1979 was the year my father and mother met and fell in love, and was also the year that the romance between the U.S. and Iran went afoul. As my parents made attempts to salvage their relationship in the early 1980s, the political backdrop created new challenges that put considerable stress on them that became too much to bear. Reagan’s decision to fund the Contras in Nicaragua through weapons sales to Iran (facilitated by Israel) assisted in prolonging a brutal war between Iran and Iraq that killed nearly half a million people over eight years. The war also displaced millions, with a fortune few, like my family, able to migrate away from Iran (and Iraq) and settle in places like the U.S. and Europe.

However, though it is possible to travel away from war, it’s futile to believe you can be ‘free from war’. For my family, there was a constant tension over fears that any single day could deliver news of a relative’s death, a beloved city bombed, or the further consolidation of authoritarian power in Iran. It was a political personalism never intended by Hanisch, but just as ostensible.

Like my parents’ ill-fated attempts to save their marriage, the U.S. and Iran never regained their ‘special relationship’, and as a result, I’ve never been able to visit Iran. Nevertheless, I was always defined by it, not least because of my name, but also as a result of the particularities of my experience - those contrasts - that have come to define and determine my life. Like those whose identity and self-definition has led them to distinguish themselves outside the binaries of sex and gender, I’ve refused the homogenising spaces meant to govern the performative aspects of one’s ethnic (or racial) identity. Similar to how I moved from my early activist days seeing patriarchy as the supremacy of men over women--instead of the creation of gender as an exercise of power—so too have my thoughts on feminism at the intersection of race evolved.

I no longer seek to strictly define feminist or feminism under a single, over-arching notion of equality or choice as determined by Western neo-liberalism. Nor do I condone the idea of ‘cultural relativism,’ as what we define as culture is neither fixed nor free from structures of injustice that shape it positively and negatively.

Instead, I have found the work of artists, activists and scholars committed to ending patriarchy and building a society of inclusivity to be most instructive and most able to actively maintain a space of diversity. Sometimes diversity will be dialectical and emancipatory, exemplifying an almost seamless congruence of the

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widest array of thoughts and identities. At other times, diversity will be the (mundane beauty of) work necessary to hold opposites in tension.

For feminists of our time (or womanists or gender justice activists – widely defined) there is an urgent need to re-examine and re-claim the political project of feminism from its co-optation into capitalism, Eurocentrism and heteronormativity. How we do that (in other words our strategies for resistance) is as important as the results. I think our strategy begins with what many have described as ‘de-colonising feminism’. This process has largely given way to the post-Third wave feminist paradigms that have sought to expand beyond the limiting dichotomies of Western epistemology. These epistemes attempt to simplify and bifurcate what are the very rich and complex diversities into one thing and its opposing twin: East/West, Modern/Backward, Us/Other, Mother country/Colony, Civilised/Uncivilised, White/Black.

This vision of the world is dangerous in the way in which it has defined most of the colonised world outside of the realm of ‘civilisation’, and assumes there is a normative, natural hierarchy in which the world is organised. Those at the top of this hierarchy, mainly the U.S. and Europe, are thus able to colonise all visions of what it means to be modern and civilised – and that everything that is not ‘Western’ is therefore the uncivilised, traditional, and backwards. In fact, Edward Said, post-colonialism’s most well-known scholar, argued that there has been a sustained pattern of misrepresentation of the Islamic world for the specific purpose of justifying Western hegemony. Chandra Mohanty expanded on Said’s research by relating how one of the central tropes of Western colonial literature in the 20th century is the depiction of the ‘oppressed Muslim woman’ in need of ‘saving’. This trope racialises women of the ‘Islamic world’ on the basis of their racial /ethnic identities in many of the same ways patriarchy attempts to subordinate women identified and non-binary people on the basis of their gender identities.

For feminists interested in de-colonising their feminism, Angela Davis’ Women, Culture and Politics is instructive. In the book, Davis describes a trip she made to Egypt in the late 1980s where she came face to face with the complexities of her location as subaltern woman of the global North in relation to her fellow subaltern women of the global South. In this relation, Davis’ identity, even as an African American woman of colour, was privileged vis-a-vis many of her fellow Egyptian female identified counterparts. This encounter prompted Davis to write about the necessity of never taking identity or relations of power for granted, and of the imperative to always interrogate one’s own power in connection to shifting relationships.

Davis’ reflexive approach shouldn’t be seen as something that is simply ‘morally good’, but as a feminist praxis that centres the subjectivity of her fellow feminist activists over her own assumptions. In so doing she actively made space for the voices of her fellow feminist activists from less privileged positions of power than her own to be heard. Today’s Black Lives Matter movement describes this approach as ‘leaning out’ to allow others to ‘lean in’. What’s more, Davis uses her subaltern identity to progress the reach of her feminist solidarity by offering her own platform as a space to bring in others even more marginalised than herself. Her example asks the important question to all feminists: how do we cultivate a radical anti-capitalist / anti-systemic politics, which is constitutive of, but goes beyond, the confines of identity politics?

One way I’ve chosen to struggle with that question publicly is to start a blog called Steal this Hijab (StH). My blog was created for me to both demonstrate that the Islamic world has a rich, diverse and long-reaching history of gender justice movements, but also as a way of discussing and debating de-colonial feminisms. StH’s names was ‘stolen’ from a work of a similar title, Steal this Book by Abbie Hoffman, an American anti-war activist (in)famous for his theatrical approach to political engagement. As the passage at the outset of this essay relates, Hoffman knew that raising the consciousness of people would only be an initial step; one that would inevitably remain elitist and ineffectual without being tied to acts of political dissent. Hoffman called this ‘critical resistance’ and offered that it could be achieved whilst maintain imagination and a sense of humour.

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Finally, the capacity for feminists to aspire towards changing the societies in which we live is not separate from the political and cultural regimes within which our lives are intertwined. By understanding the complex dynamics of our identities and their contexts we can transform the dominant narratives that frame our personal and political lives and make genuine solidarity possible.
The Academic Guise of Sexism: Why We Will Never be Done with Feminism in the Classroom
by Katelyn Carter
CN: rape and sexual assault, mention of a racial slur, eurocentrism in the classroom

I'm a graduate student in literature, and I recently went to a lecture where we discussed the permeability of the author's voice in the main character of their novel. It was an interesting dialogue about what parts of the passage represented the author's own views, and if the author did indeed use the main character as a mouthpiece for that author's own beliefs. I will now assign a gendered pronoun to this introduction, as it will lead us to the point: we discussed the permeability of her voice in the female main character; we spent nearly half of our class time debating if the author used her female protagonist to propagate her own beliefs. Now, this may not sound particularly interesting—but, at some indeterminate moment in this discussion, I was struck by the realization that not only was this the first lecture of the semester in which we discussed female writers, but it was the first time we had analyzed and picked apart the author's own life and opinions for the majority of the class rather than discussing the actual work itself. We spent a majority of our time debating if the author was an 'angry,' 'biased,' or 'political' writer, but we had done this with none of our previous male authors. For those male authors, we seemed to inherently believe and practice that while an author's own life may inform their work, the integrity of the work can still stand alone. How did this happen in a graduate level course? To that question, I propose four suggestions as a female literature student entering into the world of academia. Hopefully my own opinions will not detract from the message of this work.

1. Female writers and feminist studies need to stop constantly being made into a specialized class or lecture series.

As a future teacher, this is my most berating point. I am not saying that detailed lectures shouldn't be given surrounding issues like feminism, queer studies, and gender studies. Indeed, for decades in so many literary canons, women either went unmentioned or unnoticed, or they were touted as a great 'female writer' who was then celebrated, prodded, and paraded around classrooms and academic journals like an exotic animal at the zoo's special exhibit. It's important to create educational spaces that encourage students to deeply engage with theories surrounding feminism and to read female writers within a feminist context, because for so long there was no theory or space for these writers outside of a subordination of or dependence upon the 'already established' canon, i.e. the male one. It's important to have dedicated classes that address female writers, but so often these classes exist because a) students have such limited exposure to it in their foundational literary education, or b) because we have continued to make white men the centre of the accepted literary canon. Female writers and feminist studies are not and should not be seen as 'specialized' forms of literature or theory. Create a space for female writers and feminist studies, but don't continue to make that space such a niche. Put it where it belongs: in the same pool of 'the classics' that male authors have been living in since the dawn of time. So, if you're going to give your students a 'fun' example of a serialized Victorian mystery novel, give them both Wilkie Collins and Agatha Christie. When you teach psychoanalysis, don't just teach Freud; teach the other Freud—Anna. And for the love of God, teach Karen Horney. We can't all believe psychoanalysis is so fully driven by a penis.

2. If you're going to bring in her personal life, then bring in his.

Am I slightly irked by the fact that you feel the need to bring up Jane Austen's spinster life in every comment about her 'snarky' female characters? Yes. But what actually upsets me is that you don't even mention the fact that Norman Mailer stabbed his second wife while praising 'The White Negro' or The Executioner's Song. Of course, Mailer's novels can be good—just like Austen's—but if you're going to constantly assess a literary work within a female novelist's real life, then I expect you to spend the same amount of time discussing how the personal life of a male writer informs his work. While we're at it, let's just state the obvious: literature is inherently an ideological statement of some kind. Whether touting a belief, criticizing it, or rendering it meaningless, literature is by nature an expression of the author. This does not mean that Melville is or secretly wants to be Ishamel, or that Fitzgerald wishes he were Gatsby; so then why is there so much discussion about Jane Austen living a wish fulfillment in Elizabeth Bennet, or using her as a mouthpiece for Austen's full ideology
regarding relationships, class, and marriage? Authors and their works are not one in the same, so stop constantly diminishing or avoiding literary study of a work because of your opinions on that work’s female author.

3. Stop excusing sexism in any literary form.

All of the male writers listed so far are from what many may deem ‘the West’ or perhaps ‘the global north’ (crudely meaning Europe and America for the sake of this point). This is intentional, as not only is the standard literary canon predominantly comprised of men, but also white, European and American men. As a student of postcolonialism, the increasing awareness of and appetite for non-Western literature in many Western classrooms encourages me. There have been massive developments in canonizing postcolonial and non-Western literature in Western literary classrooms since the late 70s, but in our race to be inclusive, let’s not dismiss the sexism of male authors simply because they are seen as key figures in non-Western literature. To use an extreme example (the man has always been and will die controversial, in my opinion), V.S. Naipaul—arguably a postcolonial writer and winner of the Nobel prize for literature—has said of female writers: “I read a piece of writing and within a paragraph or two I know whether it is by a woman or not,” and he ended with every feminist’s favorite words: “unequal to me.”

Reactive / Active
by Síofra Dempsey

CN: discussion of gender roles, sexual identity, masculinity/femininity, coming out, transitioning

In an attempt to understand the workings of gender as a cultural, social, personal and political phenomenon, I have laid out some of my considerations of major gender theories and the ways in which they are applied to bodies in social discourse. I write from my perspective as a non-binary person and student of gender theory, and thus this is entirely subjective and hypothetical.

There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender... identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results — Judith Butler, Gender Trouble, 1990.9

Hypothesis

From this basis, I will consider the workings and experiences of gender and gendered individuals. Social constructionism (and, by extension, gender performativity) posits gender as a cultural and social phenomenon that is not inherent or even related to individual identities, psychological or mental states, or experiences. The individual is simply a weak agent that is located within the field of gender and onto whom gender is projected. This makes sense in most cases, because most people relate to their gender in largely the same way — by which I mean that most people are cisgender. Most people are mostly comfortable with their location in the gender domain. By this, I do not mean that most people are satisfied with gender roles or expectations — most women would today take issue with the idea that women should do more than their share of the housework because housework is 'women's work', for instance. Rather, what I mean is that most people with vaginas, wombs, breasts, with XX chromosomes, etc. etc., are considered by (a) society, and (b) themselves, to be women.

Gender is not one-size-fits-all, but rather one-size-mostly-fits-most.

However, in some cases, the individual finds themselves at odds with the gender domain in which they are located — referring to transgender people, under which umbrella label I (hesitantly, but for the sake of clarity) include those who label themselves transsexual, transvestites, genderfluid and genderqueer, agender and non-binary, and the host of other labels and definitions of 'gender non-conformity'. For some reason, (binary, or cis) gender is mapped inaccurately, insufficiently, or incompletely onto some individuals, resulting in what I think of as ripples or tears in the fabric of gender. Inconsistencies. I would like, at this point, to make clear that I am not interested in the reasons this happens — looking for a reason for something like this generally also means looking for a 'cure' or 'prevention', which is needless and harmful.

The interactions between the individual and their socio-cultural contexts are an ongoing process, and this includes gender and navigating the gender domain (taken to comprise of the gender ‘binary’ of male/female, masculine/feminine, and everything that comes between and outside of these parameters). If gender is cultural, socially constructed, and projected or assigned onto the body, then there is something in the individual that reacts to this projection. Due to the fact that the majority of the population react mostly positively to this gender construction, in the case of what we would call cisgender people, the reaction goes largely unnoticed. However, I propose that in the cases of transgender people, that reaction moves negatively against constructed, or external, or cultural gender, and in doing so creates a ripple, or a tear altogether, in the otherwise mostly smooth fabric of cultural gender norms. Thus, while Judith Butler contends that, where social construction theory correctly identifies the influence of social systems and expectations, but overstates the role of the individual, I am at odds with Butler's negation of the individual.10 Positing gender as solely external and performative does not account for individual gender ‘identities’, whatever they may be based upon.

10 ibid.
Thus, gender norms are projected onto the individual, who eventually reacts to this projection, forming their own gender identity.

This reaction is not immediate, immutable, or easily defined. The question of individual reaction gives scope for the infinite variations of gender identities, expressions, and forms that are beginning to be recognised. A conception of personal gender as a reaction allows for the interplay between personal, social and political identities. A reaction does not constitute an entire identity, nor does it limit an individual to either the cisgender or transgender labels, but allows the individual to navigate their relationship and their placement within the field of gender. Conceiving gender as reactive also acknowledges the inherently unrealistic and constructed nature of gender as imposed on the individual, while still valuing the experience of the individual in question. In a more extreme sense, it could also allow us to discard entirely the idea of the cis- or transgender identity, as each individual reaction will be different and personal, and none will entirely align with the impossible expectation, or model, set by society.

**What of masculinity and femininity?**

Then comes the tricky question of masculinity and femininity. Traditionally we associate men, maleness, and masculinity with being leaders, being providers and breadwinners, being stoic and hardworking, and shaping and safekeeping the future—on an individual, familial level, and also on a collective level, through the extension of the patriarchal figure from head of family to head of state. On the other hand, women, the feminine, and femininity are associated with keeping house, with child-rearing, emotional labour, and vanity. The basis of this gendering of roles stems from the association of masculinity with ideas like strength, forcefulness, direct speech, assertiveness, and independence; and femininity with things like gentleness, emotionality, empathy, and nuanced thinking. It can be seen that gendering traits like emotionality/gentleness lead to the creation of gender roles like carers/mothers, for example, and many others. Examining their bases betrays the fact that gender roles are based on unfounded claims of particular traits belonging to particular genders.

Evidently, these distinctions quickly lose traction, as it is commonly acknowledged now that nothing about biological sex automatically engenders an individual to these traits. The pop psychology myth of the male and female brain has been robustly scientifically debunked—see particularly Raewyn Connell’s *Gender*. It is also commonly acknowledged that both ‘men’ and ‘women’ can display a variety of masculine or feminine traits, even more so in the case of trans and gender non-conforming people. So if a masculine trait is not masculine because it is displayed by men, nor is it inherent in men, nor is it only seen amongst men, what makes it masculine? Even finding traits to name as either masculine or feminine becomes difficult, especially when we recognise and reject the essentialist nature of gendering anything other than the self.

So what, then, do we mean when we describe traits, people, ideas, anything, as masculine or feminine?

I suggest that ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ are nothing more than words to describe what is valued and what is not valued by any given society.

Most Western societies value traits like independence, competitiveness, selfishness, and forcefulness, while they devalue softness, vulnerability, empathy, and passivity. That’s not to say that we eschew these traits entirely. There has been particular increase recently in encouraging men to explore and rediscover their empathy, to ‘get in touch with’ their emotions, etc. etc. However, I believe it can be easily said that, as a society, we only value ‘feminine’ traits in moderation, and only when accompanied by ‘masculine’ traits. Therefore, looking at what a society considers masculine or feminine can give excellent insight into what that society values. However, ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ do not refer to gender in the way in which we generally assume they do. This understanding is very important in considering the unequal power structures that are embedded within the gender ‘binary’ and the overall gender domain, but of which I will not really speak here, because

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12 Lorraine Code, *Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on Gendered Locations* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 120.
many others have done so much better than I. What I mostly want to convey is that ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ have much less to do with inherent gender or psychology than they do with society and social values.

**Gender and the individual**

I've spoken about social construction and performativity theories, and my own considerations of gender have developed from these perspectives. As I have also previously mentioned, both social construction theory and, to a greater extent, performativity theory have been accused of negating the role of the individual or the presence of individual agency in the gender process. By positing gender as formed through the reaction of the individual to the social construction, I hope to have re-centred the subject within the gender domain. That being said, I believe that gender is still primarily external, cultural, or social. I also believe that most perspectives are external in this way, extending well beyond gender.

How, then, can we understand the authentic individual? Can authenticity be said to exist? The gender process begins at birth and continues throughout the lifespan of the individual. Gender is mostly obviously mapped onto the individual during the first stages of life. This happens particularly throughout childhood, which is often characterised as not only very overtly gendered, but a time when gender is actively imposed upon the individual, through the promotion of gendered toys, spaces and practices.13 Throughout childhood, social capital is often amassed through successful gender performance, often for an adult audience, which is seen as the mark of social competence.14 Childhood and pre-pubescence are generally the era in which external gender norms hold greatest sway with the individual.15

However, as we age, we become more aware of social processes and systems at work around us. At some point—probably around adolescence, though often throughout and after teenage years—the individual becomes aware of the external and even constructed nature of gender, gendered roles and the gender performance. This awareness is often subliminal, subtle, even unrecognised, but it is of vital importance, as this is the time at which the individual begins to react to the gender process. As mentioned above, the majority of people will become aware of this external influence, but will not find themselves at odds with it, and therefore are often considered to be cisgender. A smaller proportion of people will react against this imposition, often outright rejecting it, and we generally call them transgender. Often the discovery of this negative reaction can cause considerable distress for the individual.

What comes after the individual discovers the gender reaction is of vital importance, because it is in the aftermath of this discovery that we uncover the authentic self. Once the individual becomes aware of this ongoing reaction, they cannot return to ignorance of it, whether they are cisgender or transgender. However, often when the average cisgender person becomes aware of the constructed nature of the gender imposed upon them, they engage only passively with this process. Recognising the superficial nature of the gendered order does not necessarily beget acting against that order, and for many that recognition will be the end of their active engagement with the gender domain.

Thus it can be said that individual authenticity lies in the conscious reaction to social processes, including the gender process. Furthermore, the greater critical self-analysis carried out by the individual, the more authentic they will become.

Transgender identities generally warrant further personal exploration than cisgender identities. Transgender and queer people will often carry out greater introspection and self-analysis than the average cisgender person, at least in relation to their gender identity and expression. Because transgender people will all at some point question their identities and their place within the gender domain and society as a whole, it is

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14 ibid., p. 142.
15 ibid.
my belief that transgender people tend to engage more critically with their identities, and often tend to be more self-aware.

**Queerness**

Considerations of gender, particularly of transgender experiences, often lead naturally to discussion of queerness and queer experiences. Queer theory is a vast and fascinating field, and for the sake of this essay I will only briefly introduce the idea of queerness. In my opinion, queerness is the natural conclusion of the authentic self in relation to surrounding social processes regarding gender and sexuality.

I have not really considered sexuality here; however, it follows quite simply that if binary gender is socially constructed, and individual identities are in practice much more complex than that binary would assume, then binary sexuality (both heterosexuality and homosexuality) are also socially constructed. The idea of learned, or compulsory, heterosexuality is also Judith Butler’s, and it seems clear that the range of human desires and loves cannot be truly encapsulated in the concepts of binary sexualities. This becomes particularly relevant in the case of transgender people—many have reported a shift in sexuality and sexual preferences after transition. In a study carried out by Raine Dozier, he found that some transgender men, who had identified as lesbians before coming out and transitioning, found that they were newly attracted to men after transitioning. Dozier concluded that the nature of the relationships were not founded on immutable ideas of attraction, but rather that their sexuality shifted to maintain the queerness of their relationships.

If gender relations can be said to be based on unequal power dynamics (masculine as valued, feminine as devalued), and personal gender identity is based on the extent to which the individual conforms to these dynamics (gender as reactive, authenticity as consciousness), then queerness is the natural result of the conscious rejection of these power dynamics in both the fields of gender and sexuality, to the extent that it is even possible to separate them.

Furthermore, if transgender identities involve conscious self-criticism and self-awareness, I believe that queerness implies not only a certain amount of conscious awareness, but also an active rejection of hierarchical, binarist, patriarchal, racist society. Queerness requires political and social engagement, awareness, and active empathy, vulnerability, and strength.

**Conclusion**

All of society is constructed. All of gender is fake. The individual ego does not exist. We construct our conceptions of self through the accumulation of experiences and reflect this back to the world, creating an unending domino effect, imposing ourselves on those around us, creating multiple crises in everyone we encounter. All of this is essentially meaningless, as to understand gender in this way is to recognise its superficial and constructed nature, and acknowledging this means that we must eventually move away from the gendered order that is the subject of this argument in the first place. Through active self-analysis and rejection of harmful processes and structures, we can hope to minimise their effect, but we cannot remove ourselves from their influence.

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17 Raine Dozier, 'Beards, Breasts and Bodies: Doing Sex in a Gendered World', *Gender & Society* 19.3 (June 2005), 297-316, p. 303, 313.

18 ibid., p. 313.
Statistics Say Rape is OK
by Rachel O’Neill
CN: rape, domestic violence, sexual assault and abuse, victim-blaming, cisnormative statistics

A new report released by the European Commission in November 2016 has produced some damning statistics on how rape and domestic violence are viewed in Ireland. 1,002 Irish people were interviewed in this survey entitled “Special Eurobarometer on Gender-Based Violence” which sought to establish how various European countries viewed gender-based violence.19

While 97% of Irish respondents agreed that domestic violence against women is unacceptable, 18% of the respondents also said that such violence is often provoked by the victim.20 This is a paradox. Violence against any person is never justified, and yet nearly 1 in 5 respondents feel that the victim of the violence has brought it on themselves or deserves it in some way.21 This is correlated with the fact that 23% of Irish respondents say that women often make up or exaggerate claims of rape or abuse.22

Our views towards sexual intercourse without consent (otherwise known as rape) make for some uncomfortable reading. 11% of Irish respondents believe that being drunk or using drugs justifies rape while 9% believe that going home with someone voluntarily also justifies rape.23 9% of Irish respondents also said that wearing provocative or sexy clothing justifies rape, while 7% said that walking alone at night also justifies rape.24 The final and most damning statistic from this report is that 21% of Irish respondents believe that rape may be justified in certain situations, most likely those that have already been mentioned.25

These statistics do not make easy reading, especially as a woman. The percentages may be small, but they are still too high. We already know that rape in Ireland is underreported, with 7% of rape charges ending in conviction as of 2013.26 The European Commission survey shows that Ireland is not as progressive as we would like to believe.

There are many reasons why our attitudes towards rape and gender based violence are so warped. We have grown up in a society that refuses to talk about sex as a whole. We have grown up in a society where there is no legal definition of consent. We have grown up in a society that blames victims because of what they were wearing, how much they drank and how they behaved.

Think back to your school days and how your sexual education was taught. I was taught that sex is something that is necessary for procreation rather than pleasure. I was taught that sex is something to be ashamed of and something that we don’t talk about. We repress it and that is both damaging and dangerous. A society that views sex as something taboo means that when a rape happens, we keep it quiet. We say nothing because we’ll be viewed as dirty. We are no longer a person but a statistic. This only gives more power to the abuser as they know we won’t talk. They prey on our views that we won’t be believed or that we’re making it up or exaggerating. Our societal views gives these attitudes justification and power, and gives confidence to people who think that what they’re doing is OK, when it isn’t.

Rape is not always being dragged down an alley in the dead of night. Rape is being too drunk to say yes, but a partner having sex with you anyway. Rape may be vaginal, oral or anal. Rape is changing your mind, but being guilted into having sex anyway by a partner who says things like “You came home with me” or “You

20 ibid.
21 ibid.
22 ibid.
23 ibid.
24 ibid.
25 ibid.
promised”. Rape is saying no, but someone having sex with you anyway, and that is what Irish respondents need to understand.

How do we change these attitudes? We start by talking openly and honestly about sex, consent and porn. We need to talk about the damaging effects of the porn that is produced purely to show domination over women. The porn that young people watch shows women being non-consensually dominated and enjoying it. It often shows women saying “no” and being penetrated anyway. It creates the idea that when a person says no, they actually mean yes, and this teaches young people that sex is about domination and power instead of enjoyment. There is no doubt that there is porn available that shows a healthy attitude to consent and sex. Unfortunately, it is being drowned out in a sea of porn, made purely for the male viewer, that puts non-consensual domination and power to the forefront.

We counteract the damaging effect of porn by teaching consent from a young age. We teach children that sometimes people don’t want to do something and that’s OK. We teach our children to ask one another if they want a hug before hugging them. We teach them to ask first instead of assuming. That is how simple teaching consent could be. We then add to that throughout our education by introducing consent workshops and teaching people how to give consent, how to ask for it, and how to deal with situations where alcohol or drugs are involved, and where it’s not always clear if consent can be given. We teach people to talk openly and honestly about sex. We teach them to ask questions in an open environment where they won’t be mocked or judged. We create a health society that addresses things rather than repress them. These lessons are not hard to teach, and they could do so much good for the generations that follow us.

People have argued that they do not need to be taught about consent and rape because they already know what it is. What’s clear to me from this survey is that too many people have grown up in a society that has normalised sexism and victim-blaming. If we truly want to become a safe and equal society, we need to address our issues and our attitudes. We can no longer stick our heads in the sand and say “Well I’ve never done that”. Rape culture is alive and it is damaging us every day.

It is time we eradicated it entirely.
by Áine O’Hara
Access to Abortion in Ireland

by Need Abortion Ireland

CN: abortion rights, mention of rape, suicide and incest

The last number of years have seen an explosion in interest and mobilisation on abortion in Ireland. No longer just a ‘fringe’ issue, abortions rights and reproductive justice have finally become embedded within cultural, media and political narratives, in a post-Marriage Equality Ireland. Pro-choice groups have sprung up around the country, the 5th annual March for Choice saw thousands of feet on the street this September, our cities and towns are awash with Repeal emblazoned jumpers and lampposts. Recent opinion polls strongly support a very real desire to repeal the eighth amendment, and criticism from human rights bodies is relentless and, at this stage, no longer avoidable.

Such energy and vitality, such positivity and enthusiasm from men and women across Ireland, however, is sharply juxtaposed against the arbiters of legislative power, a majority centre-right government, which some would argue to represent far more conservative interests than those of the Irish population. The Citizens’ Assembly, though signalling a desire to begin the conversation on abortion in Ireland, represents, in our view, just another delaying tactic, another method of quelling anger and frustration, of sitting on the fence just a little longer. While members of government call for calm, reasoned debate, and ‘appropriate’ women, over nine women a day face an often arduous journey overseas to access an abortion, nine women too many. This can no longer be tolerated – we’re tired of talking - and the fence? Well, it’s shaking.

However, if current momentum and public opinion veers closer towards repealing the eighth, the question must be posed - what will actually come afterwards? Will we be left, after years of struggle, with inadequate abortion legislation, legislation which caters only for those ‘deserving’ abortions, such as in cases of rape, suicide, or incest? It is quite possible. Even in the best case scenario, which in our view, would include free and safe access to abortion on the basis of bodily autonomy, as opposed to any other classifier, problems would almost inevitably arise. It is well documented that in countries where abortion is legislated for, women are still faced with boundless challenges and intricacies in terms of access. Take the US, for example, where women are often forced to travel for miles to their nearest abortion provider, or Spain and Poland, where conservative forces have pushed for rollbacks on hard fought victories.

Continued grassroots activism and political pressure is vital in terms of halting regression on legislative change, of constantly pushing for improvement. What is also critical, however, is the provision of safe, accessible abortion to women, when and how they need it. Need Abortion Ireland was set up this year with this in mind. We are unapologetic in our provision of information and practical support on access to medical abortion in Ireland, with abortion pills accessed from the website www.womenhelp.org. Our assistance involves guidance on logistics, financial support, aftercare and the delivery of care packages.

Such service provision, in itself, represents a political act, but is also something which, while we await legislative action on abortion, is simply needed. Providing women with the tools required to take control of their own lives, without interference, is something which has always, and will always be vital. When, or indeed if, implemented, progressive legislative action on abortion in Ireland will be welcomed. In the meantime, and long afterwards, the world will continue to spin, and women will continue to live their lives.
Abortion is a Trans Issue too
by Max Butler

CN: abortion rights, discussion of cisnormativity, gender and passing

The campaign for a referendum to repeal the 8th amendment has been many things. It's given unlikely allies the chance to unite for the cause and it has given people courage to come forward with their stories. While the campaign has managed to bring some people together, it has also been divisive. The obvious divide is between the Pro-Choice side and the Pro-Life side but there are also people who are being left out in the cold in the debates going back and forth.

The abortion issue is a women's rights issue. Except it's not as simple as that.

Every time the words 'woman' and 'abortion' are bandied around, you're alienating a group of people who have a hard enough time gaining support as it is. When you say 'woman', you probably don't think about the fact that there are people who aren't women but who can still become pregnant and require access to abortion too.

Those people are people like me, people who don't necessarily want to have a uterus - never mind having a functioning one - but like or not, we have them. There are a great deal of trans people, whether trans men, non-binary or whatever term they care to use, who were assigned female at birth. We rejected the label of 'woman' that society tried to stick on us but we continue to have many of the concerns that are common to women.

If you class yourself as a woman then you might be aware of the fear that can come with pregnancy and the loss of control. They're fears that trans people have as well. There are many reasons why one might want to have an abortion and there's plenty of overlap between women and trans people. It's not a matter of detracting from women's experience by saying that they don't have a monopoly on this problem but rather acknowledging that we are here too. You might have come across us in everyday life and not realised it. There are trans men and transmasculine people who pass as men in day to day life and they might be "stealth", which means they haven't let anyone in school or the workplace or someone else know that they're trans and were assigned female at birth. You might have told a stealth trans person that repeal the eighth was none of their concern because they couldn't understand it, would never be in such a situation. You might have thought that we were just being supportive of women in our lives because we were wearing a repeal jumper or showed up at an event.

Not being seen as someone affected by the eighth can be frustrating but it's more than that. As I've said it can be alienating and it can be isolating. We don't have access to women's spaces where abortion might be discussed and don't have the same level of support because of it. When I dared to say that I was a trans guy with a uterus, I was surprised to find that some women became defensive as if I was taking away from their experience by sharing it in some way. This isn't a situation where someone has said, "Black Lives Matter" and we've shouted back, "All Lives Matter." We aren't trying to make something about us despite the fact it doesn't apply to us because it does apply to us. We just want to be remembered and included too. If the eighth amendment is repealed then it will affect us too. I think we have every right to be talked about because we exist, we're affected by this and we aren't going away.

We were ignored during the run-up to the Marriage Equality referendum. We're often ignored or shunned within the LGBT+ community despite the fact that people mention the T! When you include trans people into the mix, things aren't always as black and white as they seemed before. Maybe you have a nice snappy slogan that doesn't work as well if you have to make it inclusive to trans people. Ultimately, when these sorts of situations arise, we end up hidden under a rug somewhere because we're inconvenient. Am I saying that you can't make repeal the eighth about women? No, I'm not saying that at all. I'm saying that you should bring us up every once in awhile, not shoot us down if we say something about an experience that we share with you, make the effort to bring us back in from the cold and perhaps help with things regarding policy.

Trans people have issues with the health system. People can be discriminatory, hospitals can have policies in place that mean you have to call yourself a woman even if you're not, and to put things simply, problems arise. If the eighth amendment is repealed then it would be nice to have someone to say, "We should make policies inclusive to trans people," because no one listens to trans people. I know that some will say that no one listens to women, but believe me, you're far more likely to be heard than we are.
An Interview with Niamh Herbert and Laura Beston
by Jenny Moran

CN: ableism, mention of ableist slur, abortion rights, forced pregnancy, hidden disabilities and validation

Niamh Herbert is a first year student of European Studies and Laura Beston is a second year student of Film and English Studies. Together they have set up the platform Disability and I, which seeks to raise awareness and advocate for the rights of disabled people in Ireland. The rights of disabled people should also be central to the feminist agenda, particularly in relation to theories of privilege and bodily autonomy. In this interview, Niamh and Laura discuss some of the intersections between privilege, feminism, and disability, outline their activist work, and highlight their aims.

Jenny: Hi, Niamh and Laura. First of all, congratulations on the important work that you are both doing to advocate for the rights of disabled people in Ireland. Could you tell us a bit more about the Disability and I platform? What made you set up the group?

Niamh: Thank you! Both Laura and myself are stunned at how well our work is being received! We both share an interest and personal investment in the rights of those with disabilities. We both see, on a daily basis, ableism and discrimination, so we decided to take action together. Our hope is that Disability and I will provide awareness to the people of Ireland about how it is to be an Irish person with a disability. We want to destigmatize disability.

J: Niamh, you’re just beginning the second term of your first year of college, and you’ve already set up and activist platform, and organised a march on The Dáil. That’s pretty impressive! Have you always been so politically vocal? How do you manage this in relation to other important aspects of your life?

N: I’ve always been interested in human rights as a whole, but, before now, I lacked the ability to do anything substantial about it. Since coming to Dublin and starting college, I was finally in a position to work towards what I wanted, and I knew I’d meet others who shared the same passion along the way… one of them being Laura!

J: The march which you have organised to call on our government to ratify the UN Convention of Rights for Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) will take place in three days. In what ways would the ratification of the Convention improve the lives of disabled people in Ireland?

N: Almost everybody knows somebody with a disability or has a disability themselves, as almost 18% of the national population have a disability of some kind. Currently, Ireland does not provide for the rights of people with disabilities because it has not ratified the UNCRPD, which means educators, employers, health care providers and many more can discriminate against people with disabilities. We hope to change the government’s treatment of disability, and then eventually society’s view.

J: According to Inclusion Ireland, Ireland is one of the few Member States of the EU that has not yet ratified the UNCRPD, even though it was originally signed in 2007. Why, do you suppose, are we lagging so far behind?

N: Honestly, I don’t know why. There are no excuses as to why Ireland has let ten years go by without ratifying the CRPD. It can be put down to the poorly functioning politicians we have in charge. I’d like to hear the government’s justification for it.

Laura: Frankly, it’s quite embarrassing for the government.

J: A focus of the Disability and I group is to raise awareness for disabled people in Ireland. What kind of images and conversations do you hope to see being produced as a result of your work, Laura?

L: We hope to create a dialogue with the greater public on their opinions on disability, rights and access in Ireland. We want to act as a platform for conversation and as a supportive and encouraging community for those with disabilities.

J: One conversation that feels particularly important to have at the moment is that of the intersection between disability rights and reproductive rights. nemesis are pro-choice, but I’m aware that there is argument that has
credit in some feminist circles that the termination of foetuses based on disabilities is a possibility if people are given full reproductive freedom. In light of this, where does Disability and I stand on Repeal? How do you both believe reproductive rights and the rights of the disabled should intersect? Is this an issue which Disability and I will be concerned with going forward?

N: I find myself in a very contradictory situation here; I value both reproductive rights and disability rights equally, and that causes a problem in the respect that I want to support reproductive autonomy, but I also need to think of the foetuses that would be aborted because of their disabilities (like they are in countries like North Korea and Iceland). I suppose I don’t know where I stand on the issue just yet.

L: I also find this issue very difficult to decide on. Obviously I want people to have the right to terminate a pregnancy no matter what. I would hate to think of people’s lives lost or destroyed because of a pregnancy that they shouldn’t have had to go through with. I think abortion is really important for those with disabilities who have had a pregnancy forced upon them, or would not understand a pregnancy, the pain it entails, or how to care for a child. I think legislation needs to be considered to protect foetuses with disabilities also, however, as 90% of foetuses with Downs Syndrome have been aborted in England since the legalisation of abortion. I support Repeal, but obviously as somebody who cares so much for the rights of people with disabilities, it puts me in a difficult situation.

J: Thank you for your honesty. I was also wondering if the trivialisation of disability is something that you have come across in your personal experience as providers of the Disability and I platform? I’m thinking in particularly of day-to-day trivialisations and microaggressions, such as abelist language and humour which makes fun at disabilities, like the "triggered" meme. What advice would you have for readers in relation to noticing and changing ableist behaviours such as these?

L: I think in society today we have a huge issue with accurate representation and learning how to respect people with disabilities. Meme culture in particular has definitely had a negative effect on people’s lives. I find it disturbing that people actually think it acceptable to poke fun at how somebody looks or how they behave regardless of whether they have a disability or not. Niamh and I really want to encourage people to notice and challenge ableist actions of others. A vast majority of people with disabilities in Trinity alone have hidden disabilities. My advice would be to always imagine you are with somebody with a disability if you think of using the ‘r-word’ as a joke in front of your friends or tagging somebody in a meme. You never know who you may upset and when it relates to people with disabilities I feel as though we have a responsibility to be as respectful and supportive as possible.

J: In what ways might your platform help people to recognise mental disabilities which are hidden, go unnoticed, or are frequently undiagnosed?

L: The strength of Disability and I is that it campaigns for the rights of those with disabilities by including the people with disabilities themselves. As I have a mental disability, I have already had experience with having my disability unnoticed. At a protest we attended recently many people just assumed that Niamh was the only one with a disability because she was in her wheelchair. Our organisation has a focus on telling stories of people from all disability groups, and by doing this people can articulate their own experiences. Within the community of people with mental disabilities there is a huge amount of stigma, and I myself would have experienced a lot of fear and apprehension when speaking out about my disability, but I find that the more people talk the more it encourages others to mention their issues and concerns, and if we successfully achieve that then our work will most definitely have been worth it.

J: On that note, do you believe that social privileges play a role in the validation of disabilities? How might social privilege affect a disabled person?

L: We would definitely agree that a person’s social class and even where they are located can affect how seriously a person’s disability is taken. There are many cases out there where people with disabilities are overlooked. People who wish to interact with the person with a disability interact with their friend, family member or carer instead. This is a very hurtful thing and part of why Niamh and I want to raise awareness about people with disabilities’ experiences. Socio-economic factors can also lead to a greater number of people with disabilities in certain countries, therefore it is important that governments acknowledge this demographic
and include them in economic and social planning. Our campaign to ratify the CRPD would also greatly help people who experience difficulties outside of their disability.

J: Thank you, Niamh and Laura, for your honest answers. Best of luck as you continue to fight for the ratification of the CRPD, and campaign for change with Disability and I.
An Interview with Bríd Smith
by Orla Keaveney

CN: housing crisis, Direct Provision, the Magdalene Laundries, rights of refugees and asylum seekers, the death of Alan Kurdi, abortion rights, cisnormativity

*With years of activism behind her, Bríd Smith was elected as a People Before Profit TD for Dublin South-Central in the 2016 general election. Along with her involvement in high-profile campaigns such as Right2Water and Unite the Union, Smith has been a vocal supporter of women’s rights in Ireland.*

Orla: How are socialism and feminism related?

Bríd: It was Marx who said that social revolution is only possible with the feminine influence. Socialism provides equal opportunities for all men and women, not just the one percent at the top. Capitalism oppresses all of us, men and women, but women are often the ones at home, feeling the pressure, balancing the budget . . . The failures of capitalism affect women more.

O: Are issues related to socio-economic class left out of the feminist movement?

B: When I first got involved [in the feminist movement], the emphasis was on breaking the glass ceiling, and issues that affected professional women . . . now I see women from all backgrounds, younger women . . . feminism has become more radicalised, more revolutionary.

O: In what way is the housing crisis a feminist issue?

B: Homelessness affects whole families, but Saint Vincent de Paul have even found that single parent families, which in most cases are led by women, are the most vulnerable.

O: What kind of problems are there with Coveney’s housing bill?

B: Simon Coveney’s housing bill benefits the markets, the corporations, and the landlords. We have seen that the market doesn’t act in the best interests of the people. It only helps these big companies increase their profits. Not only is the government continuing the policies that brought about the property crash, they’re making the problems worse. We [People Before Profit] are rejecting Coveney’s bill, we’ve made a lot of amendments, but they’ll be ignored because they don’t suit the parties in power. Irish tenants have no rent stability, no security. The government needs to reclaim the NAMA properties from vulture funds, fix these empty properties up and move families in. Where older people are in three and four bed houses and if they want to move to older person accommodation that is more appropriate for them, they should be supported in doing so. If we provided a suitable alternative, safe one- or two-bedroom apartment complexes, this would free up housing for families.

O: You have been outspoken about the fact that the right to water is a basic human right. Could you speak more about this here in relation to Ireland’s policies?

B: Compared to countries like the UK or Denmark, where water is metered, Irish people don’t waste water. If the problem is with people wasting water for swimming pools, bring in a pool tax for those few, instead of making ordinary people pay the price. Domestic meters only detect 7 or 8 percent of water leaks, most of the water is lost through the pipes, under our streets. The money should be spent identifying and repairing these leaks instead of installing meters. Ordinary people only account for 18% of water use. Intel uses 100 million litres of water a day making its computer components . . . When they first privatised bins, there were allowances for low income households and the elderly, but these were brought down. Our fear is that the same thing would happen with water charges.

O: Do you think people who paid water charges should be refunded?

B: Yes. Some people paid their charges voluntarily, but many of them were older people who were bullied into it, who were getting letters from Irish Water saying they had to pay up. I’ve spoken to workers in post office who saw that it was mainly older people who signed up, and they were terrified that their water would be cut off.

O: Is Ireland doing enough to help refugees?
B: No... when the photo of Alan Kurdi [the three-year-old Syrian refugee washed up on a Turkish beach] was in the news, and refugees were the big issue of the day, Ireland committed to taking 4000 refugees. Two years on, and we've only accepted 300. People say we shouldn't take in immigrants when we can't take care of our own, but we [People Before Profit] have shown that Ireland is able to provide for its people. We just have to look after those in need, both here and from other countries, instead of the wealthy minority at the top.

O: What are your opinions on Direct Provision?

B: I honestly believe that Direct Provision centres will be the Magdalene Laundries of our time. Families are given just €19 per week to pay for necessities. They can't even cook a meal. I've been told of the humiliation of begging for toilet paper ... These centres are run by private companies, making a fortune. The government pays them per head ... Refugees need to be accepted into Irish society, not hidden away in prison-like conditions.

O: In October, you produced abortion pills in The Dáil. What was your aim in doing so? What notable responses have you seen to this?

B: My aim was to show that abortion is a reality for Irish women. These pills are safe, and effective, but if I gave these pills to a woman, I could face up to 14 years in prison, and so could that woman. But the Gardai won't arrest me, because they don't want to acknowledge that there is a need for abortions in this country ... I got very positive feedback from women around the country. There was no real negative reaction from other TDs.

O: What are your opinions on the Citizen’s Assembly?

B: The Citizen’s Assembly is inadequate to deal with [repealing the eight amendment]. It’s 99 citizens being advised by psychologists and lawyers, whereas what we really need is for the people to decide. In the meantime, we need to keep meeting, and building our group, and being there as a support for women who face this crisis, so that they’re reminded constantly that they’re not on their own.

O: What are some of the problems caused by the delays put in place by the Citizen’s Assembly in relation to repealing the eight amendment?

B: The fact that women have to go and be treated by strangers is a very disturbing aspect, particularly for those who have a crisis pregnancy, because not only are you dealing with the emotional trauma, and having to go outside your own state, abandoned by your own health service and your own government, but then you have to be with a total stranger at a most personal point in your life. The Citizen’s Assembly need to be reminded about the cohort out there that are very passionate about this, who are demanding bodily autonomy. We need another national demonstration. The last one was fantastic, but it would be even better to build up to it, and have it before next June when the Assembly comes back to us.

O: How might our socialist and feminist movements be most effective going forward, in your opinion?

B: The Right to Water movement has been hugely effective, because it brought together people from different communities, political parties, from rural Ireland, from the trade union movement. They've been hugely effective. I also think the Repeal the 8th campaign has been amazingly effective. It's bringing together young women from colleges, women from rural Ireland, from cities and towns. I think the message is that we can all work together, regardless of what organisations we belong to. All of us need to be united in the goal we want to achieve. We respect our differences, but not harp on about differences – focus on what unites us. Both those movements show by example how it can be done, how a united front can be built and can make a big difference. It's not a new model, it's been used for revolutionary movements throughout history, but it actually does work ... the colourful imaginations of the communities, and how they organise themselves has been very interesting, and colour, art, imagination, all of that have a role to play.
An Interview with Ronit Lentin
by Ellie Vardigans
CN: Islamophobia, discussion of Zionism, occupation, forced displacement, violence, murder, racism, antisemitism, war, the Holocaust, Direct Provision, discrimination against the traveller community, housing crisis, rights of refugees and asylum seekers, abuse of women, children, and mentally-ill people, Magdalene Laundries, rape and abortion rights

Dr Ronit Lentin is an associate professor of Sociology in Trinity College Dublin. Previously the director of the MPhil in Race, Ethnicity, Conflict and the head of Sociology department, Lentin was a founder of the Trinity Immigration Initiative, and is part of Academics for Palestine and the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

Ellie: Could you tell us about your upbringing in Israel, and how that has impacted your commitment to Palestinian self-determination as an academic and activist?

Ronit: So I was born four years before the state of Israel, so I was actually born in Palestine, and I grew up in a very normal household, very Zionist, very middle of the road. My parents were not ardent Zionists, but they believed in the necessity of the State of Israel for Jews, particularly after the Holocaust. My mother’s family came to Palestine in 1940, the last moment they could leave Romania, and my father came as a child. And as for school it was very much a private school, very much a Zionist school, where nobody ever questioned the necessity for the state. We went through the ‘48 war when I was still a very small child, and then the ‘56 Suez campaign where Israel was part of an imperialist enterprise of France and Britain to take over the Suez Canal. Eventually while it ‘won’, it was instrument of imperialism, and I remember my father being part of that war and my cousins and older relatives, and we were all kind of together in looking to win. The same with ‘67, when I was 23, we all felt we were threatened and had to go to war, and it took me a few weeks after the war to realise that the whole thing was a set of lies. I was sitting with some friends in a student bar and I asked some friends what’s going on and a person from a Trotskyist school asked me, ‘do you really want me to explain to you?’ And I said, ‘please do’, and he gave me an interpretation of the whole lie we were brought up on: the Israelis are always victims, the whole world hates us, we are endangered, we are under threat of all these Muslim nations amongst whom we found ourselves.

Nobody had explained through my younger days at school that Israel really was a settler colonial enterprise, that Israel settled on a land not theirs, and it imagined it as a land without people for people without land. The Jewish people were imagined as a nation - which they’re not - I mean, the Jewish people really belonged everywhere they lived. They are a religion, but they construct themselves as a nation. So once I found out the true story I couldn’t go back. I couldn’t see Israel as a victim anymore, even though we were brought up strongly in this sense of victimhood with a strong sense of threat from the outside. The Jewish people are a very small portion of the world population, and in fact consider themselves very special, as God’s chosen people. Many of the narratives we are being told today are really the narratives we were brought up on from the Old Testament which we all had to do as part of our education. I think I was convinced of the lie. Our parents were not particularly deliberately lying, as they themselves were convinced that it was the only place for Jews, who needed a place of their own where they could feel safe and not attacked. And yet the feeling was that we were attacked. Yet in 1948 the Arab forces against the Jews were very small and very badly armed and Israel actually threw out of the area of Palestine about 800,000 Palestinians, whose lands were taken, whose houses and villages were demolished. All of this we were not told, and it took me years of unveiling and discovering afterwards.

Then I met my husband, who worked in Israeli television and was quite a Zionist. We argued about it all our lives. He was from Ireland and had worked in RTÉ. So I pursued my interest in anti-Zionism, but it waxed and waned as it wasn’t always possible to be as active as I am now. It is quite hard to be an anti-Zionist in a Zionist society, whereas in Ireland, particularly of late, the atmosphere is much more pro-Palestine. The government has said, for instance, that the activities of the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) campaign are totally legitimate, and while we are still being hounded and cursed and vilified, it is by and large more possible to work on these issues. And these things are very important to me not only as a Jew, because as a Jew I believe there is an imperative to fight for justice, but also as a human being in believing that the Jews are not particularly chosen. If we are chosen we are chosen towards duty rather than towards privilege.

E: In your academic writings, you have frequently focused specifically on the figure of the Palestinian woman. Could you tell us about this?
R: I’ve been interested in women’s issues from the beginning of the women’s movement, although I was married in a heterosexual marriage, I had children, I was the housewife as well as the working woman. I think I have a relentless sense of injustice that I have to do something about, so when I started working on Palestine, I think the issue of women within Palestinian society was very interesting. My first book on Palestine was in Hebrew, an interview with six Palestinian women activists, all of whom were basically working on women’s issues as well as on Palestinian nationalist issues. I remember Hanan Ashrawi, who was the spokeswoman of the Palestinian authority for a while and a minister in Yassar Arafat’s government. She said to me in 1979 that if we work on liberating our nation without liberating half the nation who are repressed – re: women – we have really not done the work properly. So these women were very aware of their role within society and its limitations too. I wrote this book, which was a book of dialogue and interview, and we wanted to tease out the issues. Very early on it became very clear to me that the issue of women’s liberation and national liberation are very tied together in all societies, and in Palestinian society it was very obvious; it tended to be quite traditional in many ways, and women weren’t often given the space to be active even though women have been active in Palestinian society from very early on, through women’s unions, and women’s organisations, playing a part in Palestinian society even though the men didn’t always give them the space.

In the first state intifada, in the start of 1979, women played a major role because many of the men were imprisoned. It does not mean that everything is alright in Palestinian society, nor is it alright in Irish society. Women don’t have equality, few of us still have the same salaries as men, we still very often get paid less for the same work, we don’t necessarily get all the presentation of our proportional population: although we are 51 percent of the country, we are not 51 percent of TDs or ministers. So it is common to all societies. I think in Palestinian society there is a great awareness of the role women are playing despite the fact that some aspects of Palestinian society are quite repressive. But the notion that the main oppression that women in Palestinian society suffer is from their own society and not from the occupation is erroneous. Just imagine being a Palestinian woman in your home, soldiers come in on a regular basis to pick up your children and men on your private space. We see it every day on social media, videos of women being pushed and beaten; and yet they rise.

There is a concept in Palestinian society called sumud: steadfastness, and the determination that they were not going to abandon their land. Women play a great part in that. That was very inspiring, because I think writing about the oppression of Palestinians without writing about the resistance they conduct is incomplete as it constructs the Palestinians as victims of Israeli oppression or Western imperialism or Arab imperialism. They are not only that, they are that as well as resistance fighters. So the figure of the Palestinian woman is an inspiration of resistance and steadfastness, in how she is jeopardised in different ways than men. Not that men are not jeopardised, because most of the people who are killed are still young men. Only today I saw a film of a whole group of soldiers running after a young man who had already been shot, and they are all running to pull him and drag him on the ground having shot him, so this violence happens all the time. So I feel as a member of the group of the perpetrator that it is my role to at least document it, at least write about it, at least bring it constantly to people’s attention.

E: How do you think women’s political movements in support of Palestine have also focused on or disregarded the issue of gender?

R: I think you are asking the wrong question, because I think there has been a tendency to think of women making peace as women being more able to make peace. Women get together, so the saying goes, they sit together and they ask ‘how many children do you have’ and ‘where do you live’ and they are supposedly able to talk to each other better, but this is really very essentialist. The assumption is that women through motherhood are more peace-loving than men, but women have been leading wars since the days of the Old Testament. Women have been wives, mothers, sisters and daughters of soldiers, and they have given support to the wars that the men have waged wholeheartedly. Look at some of the leaders like Margaret Thatcher and Golda Meir. The notion that women are essentially better at making peace than men is erroneous. On the other hand, there is also the notion that women are being written out of peace processes, and while in some cases they have, other women have been very involved. We had Condoleezza Rice, Hillary Clinton, Madeleine Albright and others who have taken part in active peace processes. We have had Hanan Ahrsrawi in Palestine and women in Israel too. There have been loads of movements for women for peace, and I think they have all made the mistake of believing that they are doing it better than men because they don’t actually enlist. In fact they are not achieving anything more than discourse and rhetoric, so I think the group of women Women Waging Peace is nonsense. People talk together but dialogue is not enough. In the Academics for Palestine and the Ireland
Palestine Solidarity Campaign, and other groups I work with, we really object to this, because lots of people are very able to talk to each other, as human beings, as mothers, lawyers, journalists, whoever they are. But that doesn’t actually shift the politics.

The politics does not only mean ending the 1967 occupation, but creating a different state entity in that contested area of Israel/Palestine. People talk about the two state solution which is, again, absolute rubbish, because it is based on an initiative by major commanders lead by Ehud Barak: the best thing for us is to separate from Palestine; they will be there, and we will be here. In other words, separation is apartheid. It is racialisation, it is ‘we don’t want to see you, get out of our eyes,’ when really the only solution is to understand that this space Israel/Palestine – which is very small, it is only the size of Munster – is a space for both of these groups of people. The Jews, who have automatic rights to citizenship in the State of Israel simply because they have a Jewish mother or relatives, have privilege over the Palestinians who may have been born on the land and lived there for many generations. They don't have the right to citizenship. Some of them have the right to residency, but they've been hassled on a constant basis, and basically the State of Israel is interested in as much space of this area called Palestine or Israel or whatever you want to call it. So they enclose them within walls, they close them behind checkpoints, they don’t let them communicate with each other. But the wall is not a wall between Israel and Palestine, it is a wall between Palestinians who find it hard to be with relatives, to get to work or college or hospital. We’ve had case after case of women giving birth at the checkpoint because the ambulance was stopped at the checkpoint. A woman has to prove that she is actually going to give birth and that the ambulance is not hiding bombs, and it is happening time and time again. People have been wounded or been sick and been stuck behind separation devices.

So to come back to the issue of women making peace, I think there is an illusion that women make peace better. Maybe women are very good at chatting to each other but there is no reconciliation. The Minister for Justice is a young woman who is a great achiever and talks in absolutely appalling terms about Palestinians being snakes: they have to be eliminated, so do their mothers, because if we don’t eliminate them they will give birth to more snakes, and so on and so forth. If you look at her, she is a young woman, and she spouts the most appalling racist things. So I think we have to get beyond the essentialist view that women are better at making peace than men. Chatting does not make peace.

E: Where do you see historically and currently the role of Irish movements in the international support of Palestine?

R: I’m not sure where Ireland fits in specifically to the Israel/Palestine conflict. I think that the Irish support for Palestine is very effective and very professional. The Ireland Solidarity Campaign is very well-run, and the head, the chair, is a Palestinian woman, Fatin Al Tamimi, whose family comes from Hebron, but she was from Jordan. The guy who runs it is called Kevin Squires, who really knows Israeli society and Palestinian society very well, and they are connected to other solidarity movements abroad. I don’t think we are particularly more effective, but we able to be a bit more effective because we have support from politicians, trade unions, academics. I am chair of the Academics for Palestine, which is a very visible group even though we are quite small. More than 200 people have signed a pledge to boycott Israel, which, we have to remember at the request of Palestinian society, is not a boycott of Israeli individuals. It is a boycott of Israeli institutions. We must remember that our Irish institutions are totally tied to the Israeli war, armament and security industries. Trinity College has a few projects together with Israel on these issues, so does UL. We must remember that Israel is a supporter of genocide. Ireland has been very good in highlighting these issues and we have a big campaign on boycotting the Israeli armament industry, and I think we are successful as we get good support in the street. After the Gaza war of 2014 we had amazing support from the crowd, because I think people feel very strongly, and there is a sense that we know how to go about resolving conflict. We can then perhaps link with Israeli and Palestinians and help them. I think we are respectable, and we are looked at by other solidarity movements.

E: How do you think movements like the IPSC and those involved in them like yourself can effectively oppose antisemitism and resist accusations of antisemitism?

R: I think the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign, I am very confident as a Jew who has been targeted with antisemitism, is completely committed against antisemitism. Every time anything seems like antisemitism in a meeting they will caution themselves, and I am very happy that they oppose antisemitism. I don’t have any fears about them. Unfortunately, some anti-Zionism can be antisemitism, but I have not come across it in Ireland whatsoever among the activists. So I think we have to continue to resist those who accuse us, or me, as a ‘self-hating Jew’. I am not self-hating, but I am increasingly feeling that I don’t really want to belong to a
Jewish collective that support Israel so blindly, and I have to actually check myself. I also belong to a group called *Jewish Voice for Justice in Palestine*, I was a bit reluctant to join it because I don’t want to act as a Jew only, I want to act as a human being, but I understand the usefulness of Jews being active for justice in Palestine and how it gives support to the solidarity movements, so I have agreed to be part of it. But I think it is important to remember that there are more and more Jewish people throughout US campuses who support Palestine, and who object to the excesses of Israeli behaviour against Palestinians. I see it as an ongoing war, and in fact it was just submitted the other day by the director general of the new ministry against BDS, who told the minister for strategic development, ‘this is war and we are going to win this war’. So they have declared war on everybody that attacks them. We don’t particularly want to engage in that war but we want to support our Palestinian colleagues as much as we can.

We feel very strongly that the upcoming conference in UCC has to happen and we need the debate. If the conference comes up with the notion that Israel is an illegitimate entity so be it, because, in my opinion, it is an illegitimate entity. When I say that, people take me for a total traitor of my own people and some family don’t really talk to me very much but so be it. I prefer to be on the right side of history. I think ultimately you pay the price, but ultimately it is not important, because it was never about me.

E: You have acted and written to end Ireland’s Direct Provision system (DP). Would you mind discussing your views for us?

R: I’ve written a lot about racism in Ireland, I’ve written two books with Robbie McVeigh who is a Northern Ireland scholar, and I think in my head the two things are connected: antiracism and justice for Palestine are one and the same. DP is something I’ve been writing about for a while. I think it is very important that we remember that Ireland is very good at hiding its own shame, of Magdalene laundries, institutional abuse, mother and baby homes and asylum for the mentally ill and so on and so forth. What it does now is it is really hiding away these people in DP, not really giving any attention to them. They are also really hiding away travellers. We saw the amazing success of the campaign of Apollo House for the homeless, again who are an invisible group of the population, but from that to develop a real campaign for people in DP will be a big leap. I think it is very important to continuously remind people that here are people who have done nothing wrong but seek asylum, which is their right by law, and whose cases are being drawn out, housed in places that are mostly privately owned. The money for their keep, which is a lot of millions, goes to private hands, just like the vulture funds and the vulture developers who own some of these B&Bs and hotels and hostels where homeless people live. This government has really not given any grievance to solving these issues - and the housing issue and the issue of hidden DP is again one and the same. Ireland also has a really bad history of accepting refugees; during World War II, between 1933 and 1946, Ireland accepted only 60 Jewish refugees even though it was a neutral country and there were many applications. Okay, during the war it might have been difficult, but between 1933 and 1939 it was possible, and after the war ended it still did not allow Jews in. Six-zero people, okay? And since then groups of refugees have come and been housed inappropriately. There was a group of Hungarian people who came in 1956, and were housed in some army barracks in Limerick without adequate food or adequate provision away from everything. The majority of them have left, because it was not hospitable to live. So we have a really lousy history of both looking after the insane, the unwanted, the unmarried, the children of unmarried mothers and so on, and accepting refugees. We are just continuing that, and the plight of direct provision has to be remembered in this respect.

I’m a busy body. I can’t bear injustice and I do what I can, but I believe, like with Palestine, that we should not lead the campaigns. We should be informed of the campaigns of the people themselves. There is a very good group called *MASI* (Movement of Asylum Seekers in Ireland) which is a group of asylum seekers in Ireland who are excellent people. I think our campaign should be supporting their campaign. So I have done a lot to try and support them, and I have done it throughout my years both through writing academically and through campaigning. I think it is not up to me as a white citizen who has had citizenship in Ireland for many years, as a privileged middle-class person, to decide for these people how their campaigns should be run. The same as how it is not up to me, as an Israeli Jew, who is part of the privileged, to tell Palestinians how they should run their campaigns. So I think it is very important to be led by the racialised in our campaigns, in our writings and in our activism. This is something that I will not withdraw from.

E: In what way can other political movements in Ireland like the Repeal the 8th campaign better engage with the issues of women in this system?
E: This is again part of the same thing. We don’t do things for people. We have seen this both with Savita Halappanavar, whose case became a big cause, and then the Y case - a woman who was raped in her country of origin and came to Ireland. It was too late for an abortion because they kept delaying her and then she had to have an abortion by a C-section. The plight of asylum seekers who are not allowed to leave the jurisdiction, or sometimes are sent to leave the jurisdiction to get rid of their children, are not really part of the campaign. They are brought in as example, but they are not allowed to be leaders of the campaign. And I have seen it before with groups of migrant women like Akidwa, which is the African and migrant women network, who started various campaigns and have been run out of it by well-meaning Irish NGOs. Irish NGOs compete with migrant-run organisations for the same funding and want to dictate the terms. Recently, I had been to a conference about children and migration, and all of the speakers were white experts from NGOs. There were two women there to speak about their experience, but the analysis was done by white Irish NGO members. I think we have to stop that. People are able to do the analysis. They came here as asylum seekers because they were active in their country of origin, they were possibly leaders and activists and academics maybe. Listen to them, stop running their campaigns for them. It is the same with travellers. Many traveller organisations are headed by settled people. It is time for us to move aside and to say yes, I’ll help, but somebody else is running the campaign. For instance, I didn’t get involved in the Apollo Housing because there were plenty of people there. I thought I didn’t need to be involved in anything. But I have seen a lot of activists who do everything, every campaign and every bandwagon, and I think there is almost a need which is our need to be active, rather than the need of those on whose behalf we are supposedly active. We have to remember that we can do what we can do, but be aware and reflexive about our positions and our privilege. We very often forget this privilege... And we have to remember that when we are active and we write about people, we let them speak. We do not imaginatively give them the voice. They have plenty of voice.
Once, my secondary school put together a map of the world in which the handprints of each student were placed on their country of origin. Ireland, of course, was inundated. Its hands were stapled one on top of another on top of another, barely keeping together in the struggle to claim territory. Glancing right, I saw mine and my sister’s hands alone, placed in India. A few other handprints marked various places on the map, but on the whole, it was scarce. Looking back now I can see that my school was attempting a misguided display of diversity, but at the time, I just remember being angry and embarrassed. Sure, my dad was from India, but I was Irish.

I considered and still consider myself Irish. I was born, raised and educated here, and have only ventured to India once for a month when I was thirteen. Growing up in a white, upper-middle class area, and attending a predominantly white Catholic girls school (both primary and secondary), I saw myself as exactly like my peers. However, niggling incidents cropped up from time to time, reminding me that I was not quite the same as those around me. ‘Aoife D-a-i-t-i? (pause) Dattay?’ I would hear my name being called in roll. ‘It’s Datta,’ I would respond, whilst innocent giggles erupted around me. Of course, I was aware of the differences between myself and my friends. My family never really participated in commonly ‘Irish’ things, like watching or playing Gaelic football, or hosting Sunday roasts. We didn’t have a wealth of cousins that would appear in huge numbers at Christmases, Communions and Confirmations. Then there were the obvious physical dissimilarities that set me aside from my friends. My brown skin was the foremost identifier of my difference, one that brought me pride and embarrassment in rotation. I was reminded of this once by a shout in the street: ‘Paki!’ a stranger called to me. For my sister, Aisling, her darker facial hair earned her the not unfunny nickname of ‘Tashling.’

However, I cannot say that I experienced any real bullying over my being mixed race. Of course, I would be subject to the not-even-relevant turban joke, and when Slumdog Millionaire came out my friends had a field day, but I would always join in. Sometimes I would even make the joke myself. Looking back on my experiences and my responses now, I realise that I was embarrassed. In my mind, being mixed race isolated me from my sense of ‘Irishness.’ I thought the two were mutually exclusive, so I made a joke of my Indian heritage in an attempt to push it away. The results of this attitude were that, in my endeavour to cohere with the surrounding ‘Irishness,’ I lost a part of my heritage through neglect. I never engaged fully with that part of myself. I ignored my dad when he tried to educate me about India and our family history, and I would switch off the Indian music in the car because I thought others would hear. As I have grown older I’ve come to see the damaging effects of that mind-set, but I have also been able to remedy it somewhat through a process of learning and re-discovering.

I realise now, too, that my education was disappointingly sheltered. Not only were myself and my schoolmates predominantly surrounded by a white, catholic cultural sphere, our schooling on diversity and alternative cultures was uneven at best. Even now I can still see that chapter in my Geography book. It was on poverty in Calcutta - the first time we learned about India in class. I remember shrinking back into my chair, hoping that none of my classmates would point out that that was where my dad was from. This lack of education not only contributed to my viewing of India as something ‘other,’ but it also seriously deprived myself and my schoolmates of a broader knowledge and understanding outside of our immediate societal bubble.

I think there is a lot of emphasis in Ireland to define what makes us Irish. Facebook pages, Youtube videos, Memes all tell us that ‘you know you’re Irish when…’, but that can leave little room for being Irish outside the white, catholic parameters. There remains a conspicuous lack of recognition of the other cultures and ethnicities that contribute to Irish culture. When I speak with my friends and contemporaries about this subject, I am told time and time again that Ireland as a country is just not that diverse, therefore it’s understandable that we are not in-tuned to alternative cultures, but this argument has become less and less relevant. Firstly, if we stop and look around we can see that an all-white Ireland simply doesn’t exist anymore. Secondly, we need to stop relying on the idea that it is okay to be ignorant of cultural differences, for racism is perpetuated through that mentality.
The tension I experienced in my upbringing can be somewhat comforted by the idea that Ireland is moving towards becoming a more diverse and culturally aware country. However, it distresses me to see the same things play out in my brother’s life. My half-brother, Sunil, is half-Indian and half-Lithuanian. He currently lives and attends primary school in a small town in Cavan. I was struck this summer by a particular exchange we had: I asked him to come outside to play in the sun, but he turned down the offer by stating that he ‘didn’t want to get more brown.’ He is only eight years old. This resonated with me as I remember feeling an acute awareness and embarrassment of my darker skin tone against the fair skin of my friends. It is upsetting to see him engaging in the same behaviour as I did growing up; a kind of pushing and hiding away of what makes him different. Only it is worse, I think, for him. The town can be frightfully ignorant, and I myself have been subject to racist comments on the few times I’ve attended community events there. This environment is negatively affecting the way my brother sees himself. Indeed, Sunil’s name is constantly mispronounced by his peers, and I caught him one time, pronouncing his name as others did.

All things considered, in writing this essay I do not attempt to assert that all people of colour experience this kind of isolation growing up in Ireland. Everyone’s personal experiences are different. What I wanted to do was to vocalise my particular experiences and the insights I have gained through a deeper understanding of my heritage. When I went on my Erasmus last year, I met a girl who shared in the same kind of experiences that I had. Our discussing and relating with each other released in me a tension that I didn’t realise I was carrying around. I could laugh, and talk seriously about a shared experience of South Asian culture, of being one of the only brown girls in school. Because there were few people around me growing up who could relate to my experience, I kept silent about it, and therefore perpetuated my own feeling of otherness. However, the more I’ve vocalised my experience, the more I’ve gained an awareness of it. Although it is an on-going process of education, the ties that were severed between my Irish and Indian identity are slowly coming together again.
BROWN: Reflections on Colour and Identity
by Huda Awan
CN: racism, ethnocentrism, discussion of religious and sexual identity

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This is how social science theory works - you observe some interaction, or phenomenon involving humans, and then you make a theory based on that observation. That theory is supposed to explain that interaction or phenomenon. Theory ultimately seeks to generalise, and the value of any given theory is derived from its applicability. The best, and sometimes worst, thing about theory is that it provides an analytic paradigm in which we can place observation. This is good, because it allows for conceptualisation and abstraction. But abstraction is a double edged sword, because observation is contextual, and context is important. Abstraction tends to lift observation from context. This paper is borne out of a desire to explain the self, not the self as a conceptual entity, but the self in a single case: myself. This inquiry establishes me as the unit of analysis. This paper is ultimately about the colour brown and how that has interacted with my identity formation.

Let's start with some theory, though. Social identity is conceptualised as a cluster of characteristics tied to a social position. I think conceptualisation of the postmodern self has been the most useful in understanding my own identity formation process. The postmodern self is produced historically, not biologically, and that's why I like the postmodern self. It leaves room for context: historical context, societal context, and cultural context. I like context. Central to the postmodern self is the idea that the self is discursively produced, which means that interactions matter in the formation of self. In my mind, identity is produced by two sets of interactions: an interaction with oneself, i.e. how one perceives and reacts to oneself, and interactions with others, i.e. how others perceive and react to you.

I've never really been able to tell how dark I am. I guess it depends on the light. Sometimes I look in the mirror and think 'beige,' and sometimes I look in the mirror and think 'cold tea.' One of my sisters used to call me 'yellow' when we were younger, like a 'Simpson' (I guess I'm kind of sallow). Her complexion is noticeably warmer than mine, but sometimes in the sun I pick up a tan. One time, an African-American girl mistakenly referred to me as 'white girl' in the bathroom of a club. I guess it was kind of dark. Another time, a white girl asked me what fake tan I use. This incident occurred in broad daylight.

The first time I heard the term brown used as an identifier was at a dinner party at the age of maybe twelve or thirteen. A friend of Iraqi-origin referred to herself as a 'brown girl.' I found this a vaguely amusing, yet stark descriptor. Brown.

Given the title, I want to focus on interactions - my own and other people’s - with colour, specifically my colour, which is brown. It is important to note the context in which these interactions occur – that context being Irish society – because the context really underpins these interactions and, consequentially, identity development. It is also important to note that brown in and of itself signifies nothing. There is no inherent meaning to be gained except a physical appearance. Anyone who understands the idea of social construction can appreciate this. Any meaning associated with colour is manufactured meaning, borne out of reactions to colour. Colour can become associated with other identifiers like ethnicity, nationality and religion, but these associations are constructions that are formulated over continual interactions. These associations are negotiated and renegotiated; defined and redefined. It’s important to note that renegotiation, that redefinition, because it allows for a space of evolution.

I think at this point there are certain key points to flag. First, that notion of fluidity, that identity is not static, and that it evolves through experiences with my environment. Second, that social interactions and context are paramount to understanding certain aspects of my identity, because I don't exist in a vacuum. I want to stress, also, the individualism and specificity of my experiences. Others may have similar experiences, but the point of this is not to make generalised theories about identity development for people of different ethnic groups in Ireland. The point here is to discuss my experience, to share it, to show how identifiers can interact with each other, and from that to kick-start a change in perspective on the nature of these interactions. I’ll develop that a little more later.
I'm going to move from the abstract onto myself, and talk about brown and what that means. Brownness in terms of physicality of course comes from biology, but that brownness is loaded with meaning beyond simple, visual colour. With brownness comes ethnic identity, cultural identity, and religious identity, that travelled over with my parents from Pakistan to Ireland. These aspects of identity are discursively produced and constantly defined and redefined over years and years on the subcontinent. I inherit it simply by being and coming into existence. My existence and my interactions with myself and with my environment continue to create a new, distinct identity, that, experience has shown me, only I can evaluate.

In my case, brown exists in conjunction with Irish, which I have claim to by virtue of having been born in Galway and having lived in Ireland my entire life. Irish, as an identifier, signifies nationality and citizenship, and also marks a cultural and social background. Both brown and Irish in their own right have been pivotal in the formation and development of my identity, of what it means to be me, Huda.

Sometimes when I meet a new person, they ask me where I'm from. I tend to reply with 'Galway' or 'Ireland' because this is where I was born, and this is where I've grown up, and, for me, to be from somewhere involves either being born there or having lived there. I find it hard to rationalise being able to be from somewhere without fulfilling at least one of those two criteria. That doesn't mean that I think it's illegitimate for anyone else to rationalise it in any other way, simply that that's how I see it for myself. That said, I wasn't always 'Huda from Galway,' or 'Huda from Ireland.' I distinctly remember having an argument with my father at the age of four because he kept telling me I was Irish even though I insisted I was Pakistani.

'But you were born here, in this country,' was his argument. Not being able to accept that this is what it means to be from somewhere, in retrospect, originated from a simplistic belief that to be Irish I had to be white, like other ethnically-Irish people. Moreover, by not being white, I somehow could not share Irish cultural values, which was a necessary condition for being included under the umbrella of 'Irish.' This was of course intensified not only by my own Pakistani-cultural upbringing – and its Islamic influences which seemed so at odds with the prevailing narrative of Irish people as white Catholics – but also compounded by how people interacted with me and my family. My own experience of being coloured in this country is that you’re not really given the chance to forget it. People ask you where you're from, and, for the most part, they’re not satisfied with 'Galway,' or 'Ireland,' because they'll follow it up with 'Where are you really from?' or 'Where are your parents from?' or 'What's your background?' While these questions may seem like products of harmless intrigue and curiosity, they have a profoundly 'othering' effect. Implied is a questioning of my legitimacy to belong here. Implied is the idea that brownness isn't entirely encompassed in Irishness, that there must be something else that explains brownness. And of course, there is something else, but as I get older, I understand less and less the pedantic intrigue in differentiation. I think, more than anything else, it reflects an ignorance surrounding Irish identity, and how it’s evolving to include people who are not of Irish ethnicity.

As I got older, however, being 'Pakistani' didn’t seem to feel right a label, largely due to an increasing awareness that I didn’t know what it meant to be 'Pakistani’ in its entirety, insofar as I didn’t know what it meant to inhabit that society. I think what made me aware of this was that, despite sharing their colour, and for some time some of their cultural and religious values, I felt like I was treated as somewhat of a foreigner whenever I visited Pakistan. I think language had a lot to do with it, and how we dressed and behaved when we were there. I spoke weirdly accented and broken Urdu with relatives, and wore jeans instead of a shalwaar kameez, and insisted on eating with a fork rather than with my hands. But beyond this, I was never in tune with the cultural nuances, and they picked up on this, and – like people here – asked me where I was from.

I felt like Pakistan didn’t accept me, and rightfully so. I don’t belong there, because I’ve never been exposed to its culture for more than two weeks, and, for me, that's just not enough time to become immersed and subsumed by it. But I’m still brown when I return to Ireland. And at some point along the way, I think I decided that I simply am a product of my environment and cultural context – a product of Irish culture, to be more precise – and that despite brownness, despite how people react to that brownness, I am very much culturally Irish. Feeling that I can identify with being culturally Irish, again, is borne out of my unique experience. I think certain variables have aided this: the fact that as I got older, my social circles became increasingly white; that I moved out of home for college at seventeen and therefore almost severed really the only connection I have to my cultural background; that as I got older my value systems began to move further and further away from Islamic beliefs, to the point that now I think of myself as Muslim only in so far as I come from a Muslim background.
I think I struggled a lot with brownness during my late adolescence, trying to downplay it a lot because it seemed almost inconsistent with how I wanted to portray myself as culturally Irish, and, beyond that, how I wanted to portray other aspects of my identity. Being brown continues to carry with it a huge cultural and religious weight, because it continues to imply certain things about me. There’s a notion of having to take sides with different aspects of identity, and I have felt a tension between ‘western identity,’ a product of participation in Irish society, and ‘brown identity,’ which feels more like an inheritance.

It isn’t my intention to focus solely on the interaction of brownness with being Irish. I am more than those two things - I identify, also, as female, bisexual, socially progressive, and sexually progressive, but it’s difficult to distil the extent to which these identifiers are products of or reactions to either Irishness or brownness. Sexuality, in particular, I wonder about: would I have developed the strong sexual identity I possess now had I experienced a different cultural context? It’s really difficult to disentangle the cause and effect, but I feel like my sexual identity is innate to a degree. How I’ve been able to engage with this aspect of myself, I feel, instead, is somewhat determined by the context in which I’ve grown up.

I think sexual identity is maybe one of the more interesting and illuminating things to look at in my case, because of its interactions with brownness. Again, being brown has meant growing up in a Muslim household, has meant growing up with Islamic beliefs, and has meant being raised with Pakistani cultural values. As a child, I started out with a clear idea of my religious identity as a Muslim, but over time I have found myself severing ties with religion. As I got older, other aspects of my identity began to feel incompatible with what I was told being a Muslim implied, and those aspects became more important to preserve than identification. Sexuality has felt incompatible with brownness because of the religious and cultural values that specifically have dictated modesty and an integrity in abstaining from pre-marital sex. My mother taught us that a woman is respected when she is modest, and that immodesty lies in sexually provocative behaviour. As I got older, this idea of modesty seemed at complete odds with my longing to explore my own sexuality, and I found that I was more interested in exploring it than I was in upholding what I was told were the Muslim values of modesty. Something had to give.

What this has led to in my case, then, is an emphasis over time on being culturally “western”, and an underemphasisation on brownness, because emphasis on the western conveys the things I think are more important about my personality, my sexuality, and my value systems. These are things I have previously considered incompatible with facets of brown and Pakistani, because it implies conservative culture; or brown and Islam, because it implies modesty, and I just don’t feel myself to be a modest person in that interpretation of the word.

But underemphasis on brown has neglected a cultural background that has inevitably shaped who I am, and my viewpoint - it neglects a history of identity formation, and the very foundation of identity. This highlights another tension: a tension between taking sides with differing identities that feel like they’re in conflict with one another. Sexuality feels like it’s in conflict with brown, and, when I act as a sexual being, I am not perceived as ascribing to cultural values associated with brownness. I am essentially distanced from brownness. On the other hand, if I emphasise the richness of my cultural background, I am perceived to be associated with a heightened sense of differentiation.

However, I think there’s a flaw in how I’ve conceptualised all these aspects of myself over the years as being in conflict with each other, because it propagates the idea that all these identifiers are in some way mutually exclusive, and cannot coincide or co-exist. That’s dangerous, because it doesn’t allow for the creation of a space where they can co-exist without that tension. Sexuality, or being sexually progressive, or queerness, or any of the things I feel to be in conflict with brown, aren’t in any way inherent to western values. Despite this, I have felt like they are, forcing myself to constantly pick and choose, which is difficult because it doesn’t allow me to exist in any all-encompassing, wholesome way. I think believing that I need to pick and choose stems from a lack of similar narratives to mine being shared. The term ‘shared’ is important - because these narratives exist, but they are not discussed enough. One of the biggest sources of confusion was the lack of these narratives. I didn’t have access to stories that were similar to mine, until very, very recently, and so I had no way of conceptualising how all these aspects of myself that felt so in conflict with each other could possibly exist in harmony.

Just before term started, a friend of mine called Mariam posted on Facebook looking to interview those who identified as female and had the experience of being Muslim and inhabiting a Western space, for a blog
called ‘Muslim Women Speak.’ The blog is a forum, started by a writer called Fariha Roisin, for women of Muslim backgrounds who also conceive of themselves as western to share their experiences with belonging to both of these identifiers. Some of the topics include reconciling queerness with Islamic beliefs, and the real lives of Muslim women, amongst others. Reading some of those articles felt like a breakthrough, a relief, and they all seem to send out the same message: that there’s too much hassle in trying to exist within classical categories, in picking and choosing. A third space can exist where identities are multidimensional and hybrid and cosmopolitan, but never quite in the same way. The way in which I am queer and Muslim is different to how another woman is queer and Muslim, and the way in which I am brown and western is different to how another woman is brown and western, and the multitude of ways in which we take on those categories are distinct, and appreciating that distinction is important.

That’s where theory inevitably fails. It fails in appreciating that distinction, and that’s why I wanted to write about my experience with being brown. I wanted to demonstrate the idea that though my experience may be relatable, it is distinct, born out of context, continually being redefined, renegotiated by interactions.
By Áine O'Hara
Woven

by Síle Maguire

CN: racism, ethnocentrism

Setting: A classroom in an all-girls Catholic Primary school in rural Ireland, early noughties.

Morning, the beginning of the school day

Characters:

Mrs. Whelan
Áine Mooney
Siobhán Moran.
(Both girls are roughly 12 years old)

Mrs. Whelan: Ciúinas, a chailíní

(the students continue chatting, oblivious to the teacher calling their attention)

Teacher: Cailíní...

(the chatting grows louder)

Teacher: (clearly aggravated, bangs on her desk with a ruler) CIÚINAS!

(An abrupt silence sweeps the classroom as the girls’ head swivels towards the teacher)

Teacher: (clears throat) Anois, teigh amach d’obhair bhaile...broistaigí

Áine: (mumbles under breath) Shit. (turns to Siobhán sitting beside her) Can I look at your answers?

Siobhán: (glances nervously up at the teacher and back to Áine)

Áine: Pleeeeesaaassee

Siobhán: (whispering, trying not to attract attention from the teacher) I dunno, last time that happened I lost a maith thú stamp and then my mam gave out to me...

Áine: I lost a stamp aswell!! Please, c’mon, I’ll give you one of my lipbalms, the strawberry one.

Siobhán: (sighs) Fine

Áine: Thanks-

Mrs. Whelan: Áine Mooney, freagra a cúig

Áine: (nonchalantly) Chonaic sé an feirmeoir ag obair sa phairc

Teacher: Maith an chailín

Áine: (relieved, carefully removes the strawberry lipbalm from her pinafore pocket and hands it to Siobhán under the desk) Are you going to Ciara’s party tomorrow? I think I’m going to wear that glittery top, and those jeans I got last week in River Island, and I’m going to go to Claire’s after school and get that-dya remember that gold hairband? Yeah, that one. And maybe those ladybird earrings-

Mrs. Whelan: (with a stern gaze) Siobhán Moran, freagra a seacht

Siobhán: Duirt sí go raibh an chóisir ag tosú ar a sé a chlog

Mrs. Whelan: An-mhaith (pause) what’s that on your nails? Take that off for tomorrow please, no nail varnish allowed, you know the rules.

(The class all look towards Siobhán)
Siobhán: (timidly) Em, it won’t come off

Mrs. Whelan: Cad?

Siobhán: It’s not nail varnish, Mrs. (pause) It’s this special dye thing from a plant that my aunt did for me...

Mrs. Whelan: (confused) Oh right, well, cover it up the next time.

Siobhán: (uncomfortably looks down at her copybook)

Áine: (Grabs Siobhán’s hand and peers down at her pinky and ring finger nails that are peach coloured) What is that?

Siobhán: (shyly takes her hand away) Oh, it’s this plant that when you press it on to your nails for a bit, it dyes them. It’s kind of this thing that you can do in Spring in-

Áine: China?

Siobhán: (flinches) No, Korea

Áine: Oh yeah, I always forget...where is that again?

Siobhán: It’s inbetween-

Áine: My uncle went to China once and said he ate crickets, ughh! (pause) So, do you like, speak Chinese?

Mrs. Whelan: Cad é an aimsir inniú? Laimhe suas. (pause) Aon duine?

(The class yawn and fidget, clearly uninterested)

Mrs. Whelan: (annoyed) Ah girls! Would you come on! You’re lazy lumps, the lot of ye. The weather? An aimsir, come on. Siobhán Moran.

Siobhán: Tá sé scamallach, agus tá an ghaoth ag seide

Teacher: Agus an bhfuil sé ag cur baistí?

Siobhán: Tá sé ag cur báistí, agus bhí mé fluich go craiceann nuair a chuaigh mé ar scoil ar mhaidin.

Mrs. Whelan: Maith an chailín

Áine: Can you read Chinese? What does this say? (shows her the washing label of her school jumper)

Siobhán: (slightly exasperated) No, I can’t read or speak Chinese.

Áine: Oh. (pause) So like, do you speak Korean with your family and all?

Siobhán: Yeah, sometimes. Like a mix of the two. Mostly Korean with my mam and then English with my dad-

Áine: That’s really weird. (pause) I think I’m going to get Ciara that silver necklace for her birthday. Or maybe Mean Girls, it’s out on DVD. She says she hasn’t seen it yet, like, it’s sooo good. I think she said we’re going to the cinema after though, so maybe not. Actually, maybe I’ll get her those gel pens. You know the ones that smell like oranges? They’re so cool.

(Siobhán continues to quietly listen to Áine as she speaks about her plans for Ciara’s birthday. She then looks up at the blackboard where the teacher has written down the homework for tomorrow. She begins to take it down in her copy.)

End.
Yellow Feral
by Choy-Ping Clarke-Ng
CN: racism, bullying, mention of a racial slur

"Half Irish, half Chinese"
the worst lie I’ve ever told,
nineteen years old and I learnt
to write my name last week.

A taxi driver looks at me:
"You’re an exotic little flower that needs to be minded."
I shrink away, too drunk tired
to argue, but not to forget.

Hong Kong was mentioned in school, once,
for an essay on pollution ruining lungs.
My mother said no one would hire an Ng,
so we added Clarke.

“What’s your real name?”
Ping is a sound. Ng has no vowels.
"Where are you really from?"
Wicklow isn’t enough. Enniskerry?

I hated photos of myself laughing,
eyes squinted the way kids would pull theirs back.
A lecturer shakes, cackling as he says the word "chink"
I blink and think and am
too slow to react, too scared to react—
all the anger will pour out of me,
teeth bared but I was crying.

Here I sit, split, writing in a language that is not mine.

Slanted eyes, bulbous nose, flat face.
What do you see? Is it beautiful? Is it me?

Angel, Agnostic
by Choy-Ping Clarke-Ng

“I don’t know” I say again,
agnostic tendencies showing through.
I do know I want to heal with you—
swim in the sea where we feel most safe,
dance to trash, call you handsome
though I think you’re pretty.
Two family fuck-ups fucking,
two wrongs making a right.
But who are you, angel
with a nose ring?
Un An de cand Nu Ne am Pupat
by Amy Shaw

un an de cand nu ne am pupat
but kissing?
It was more about you telling me
how hard my tits are
Come talk to us
Eat this smoke these
I told him, I want to meet your mother
Actually you were looking for
a man in England
For the big love,
you said
I lied about art and myself and my life
Compliments could feed me
Better than meat on a stick
ever could

I can't
A small love
It's because actually I live there
It's difficult for me
10 different beds and your feet are cold
Where were you with him?
Fall asleep
Draw us together
Write me a letter
A year since we kissed
Dead Ringer
by Holly Furey
CN: starvation, injuries, death

Bed tethered and lethargic, spoon fed yet starving.
I despise you, my dark-hearted darling.

Laid bare and thinly clothed, childlike yet fully grown.
I detest you, my twin of freckled stone.

Spirit fettered and depthless, blind yet treacherous.
I loathe you, my dear at your death best.

Scatter-bruised and scarred, burning yet nesting dark.
I rage at you, my own kin of heart.

Reckless and speckled cold, on edge yet in control.
I hate your cries, they mimic my own.

You are mellowed out sadness in a red-yellow sundress.
We failed you, my soul-same anonymous.

I have a changeling living within, But they do not believe me, As none can see under skin.

The Abduction of Persephone
by Holly Furey
CN: abduction, consent, blood

The chthonic pull permeates her bed clothes, it is the drag of an Undergod chilling her toes.

Persephone is plucked from a dream amid Demeter’s bruising screams.
Hades, once handsome, tires of this routine, Shouting “alas, the girl, my wife, she did agree!”

He tricked his Queen of shades and this dread planet, not to resist its underworldly aphrodisiac, the plump-supple pomegranate.

For seasons at a time, she bleeds well, seething, and he eats well, feeding.

“She will rise again” Say the hopeful. “She will rise again!” Say the fearful. “I will rise again, I exist still.”
You’ll be a Woman Soon
by Catherine Hearn
CN: blood, gender identity

Fair-haired fat child of five or six,
Could you foresee it
With your round blue eyes?

Small happy spiders on your skin,
A bleached and broken kiss.
Blood like treacle desire.

From the photo, it’s hard to elicit
If you’re a boy or a girl
-just pale damp skin and hair like wire.

ROAR like a lion! QUIET they hiss.
Mother, nurture, love, submit
-your tears are falling on your fire.

'Better before you're married' they insist,
'You'll be a woman soon, then a hypocrite.'
Beautiful, empty. Pacifier.

Blue eyes in the mirror know this:
You're vain and your veins are split
Into woman, lover, loser, liar.
An Address to Cathleen Ní Houlihan
by Catherine Hearn
CN: consent, forced pregnancy, violence and pain, death, victim-blaming

When they planted people inside of you
(against your will)
You were so angry yet so impotent
That you grew ill

And you rotted and your fertility waned
And your family left you
On great ships bound for greener hills
- tiny anomalies of two by two.

We thought we had ‘won you back’
When we proclaimed ownership from the GPO
Not realising we didn’t even own ourselves
- a self-determined other, a circus show

Of lies and Christ and righteous indignation
That has dragged on too long:
The clowns are out of breath, animals exhausted.
The circus master unsure where he’s gone wrong.

Your curves and peninsulas
Were mapped by groping claws
Weighed down with rosary beads
Your nerve endings? An afterthought.

Remember nineteen sixteen lads?
We were so fucking riled.
Where’s our glorious anger now?
Since your people are still dying and still exiled.

When he planted someone inside of you,
They asked ‘Did you not use protection?’
But you’re seeing the corpses and the ships (again)
Wondering how we still can’t recognize our own goddam reflection.
Hedge Cutting
by Sadbh Kellet
CN: death, murder

Call me Gaia
When I call at your homestead
Call to those you slaughtered and silenced.

Beg mercy
Are not my sacred shrines slashed
Enough – The song of death is silence.

Call me Danú.
Wraith, are you not aware
I too am learned in silencing?

Remember
You too can so simply burn,
Your dwellings can so simply shake – and break.

O, our land
Where shepherds kill the sheep.
Ireland, where the colour red runs deep.
A Mháthair Dé
by Niamh McCormack
CN: forced pregnancy, gore

Worshiped too soon
By hands that hold her still
While she lies still
Awake

Feel His power weave and snare
Enslaved by the fruit born
A body that is not your own

Drawn from your gut
A bloody sacrifice
At the altar of disdain
Get on your knees and pray:

Hail Mary, full of grace.
Hallowed be thy pain.
The Woman Un-Dead
by Jenny Moran
CN: rape, gore and violence, abortion rights, death
Ephemera you came to me –
You deserve to be set free.

So slay, stab, die me thee.
Before you were you, I was
she in the poster
with all these old doctors,
winding their scopes 'round my neck,
keeping their stakes in my body.

* * * *

Van Helsing van-helping
stake-fucking in vans.

Touch me, Sir! Cure me!
How cold are your hands
when you pro-life dump in your vampire graves?

And do you see
wood-dagger fingers through soil?

They're reaching to touch you.
We're reaching, Sir! Cure us!

These fingers are heavy
with rape-blood blackberries.

* * * *

I live at the foot of a mountain of dead girls.

But we have the most beautiful church.
The garden seems lusher, more berried, today,
as a priest who looks like Van Helsing arrives,
his crucifix bound to a stethoscope.

Cure us, Sir, with your sermon:

The Protection of Life.

We're hungry and you feed us blackberries.
Other People
by Julia Canney

CN: Domestic abuse, violence, trauma, survivor validation

It's funny when I look at other people, and tell them that
  their words,
  their thoughts,
  their fear,
  is valid.

Is mine?

I say, "it's not your fault," and trust them, and believe them, but I cannot seem to trust my memory, myself.

  When other girls would tell me that they were made to feel
  that fear,
  that pain,
  that isolation, and
  that self-loathing,
the words came easily to me:
  they were survivors.

Am I a survivor?

Are words from years ago, words that cut you down, and break you in a million pieces, that manipulate and strangulate you, as valid as slaps, kicks, punches?

In other people, yes.

In other people, strength shines through them, lifting, healing, making them whole again.

Why can't I see this strength within myself?

Perhaps it's time to see in me, what is so clear and true and valid in other people.
Our Wonderful Contributors

Huda Awan
Huda is a final year PPES student, specialising in Political Science. She is the Chairperson of the Dublin University Photography Association, and her interests in feminist theory focus on intersectionality with ethnicity and sexuality. She previously delivered a paper on the changing symbolism of the Islamic Veil as part of International Women’s Week in 2014.

Imaan Bari
Imaan is a third year studying sociology and social policy. She spends her time observing human interaction as well as taking part in it at times. Empathy and feeling is her game.

Max Butler
Max is an unashamedly trans final year student of English. He has a wide range of interests in various literary genres and eras. He’s also just started his own blog called Pop Lit Phenomenon, where he analyses popular literature. You can find it on blogspot: poplitphenomenon.blogspot.ie/.

Julia Canney
Julia is an MSc Human Rights student at UCD. She studies gender-based violence.

Katelyn Carter
Katelyn is a graduate student in Comparative Literature at Trinity College. She has a particular interest in postcolonialism, feminism, and theology. She plans to look at the relationship between migration and gender in her master’s dissertation. Amongst other passions, she is chiefly invested in how religion, immigration, and educational policies affect women and notions of a female identity.

Choy-Ping Clarke-Ng
Ping is a bisexual Irish / Chinese student of English Literature and Sociology. She loves drawing, set design, installations and writing. She recently performed an installation piece on misconceptions of Chinese womanhood and femininity, for Players Fringe Festival. If you’d like to support her work, you can find her here: facebook.com/cpcnart.

Aoife Datta
Aoife is a final year English Literature and Philosophy student. She is editor of a section in nemesis which invites people of colour to write about their experiences growing up and/or living in Ireland. She is particularly interested in the ways in which people of colour reconcile lived experiences with conceptions of ‘Irishness.’

Síofra Dempsey
Síofra Dempsey graduated from Trinity College in 2016, having completed a BA in French and Modern Irish. They are currently studying Equality Studies in UCD. They are generally interested in social justice and anti-capitalist political models; with particular focus on gender studies, civil disobedience, and queer theory.

Sophie Fitzpatrick
Sophie spends her days just dreaming. In the morning she thinks about fame and you know. In the afternoon she takes a break.

Holly Furey
Holly was a student of the Irish Writing M.Phil at TCD. She likes to write poetry both inside and outside of working hours at her office job. She is currently trying to get in contact with Sinéad O’Connor and would welcome any leads people may have...

Catherine Hearn
Catherine is a third year student of TSM English and German at TCD. Her hobbies include travelling, obsessing over Frank Ocean, and battling the patriarchy.

Orla Keaveney
Orla is an engineering student in UCD. She’s a staff writer for the University Observer and is into singing, debating and badminton.

Sadhbh Kellet
Sadhbh is in her third year of English Studies and is the PRO of Litsoc. Her poetry has been published in the Attic and she is currently finishing up editing the first novel in her fantasy series. She is a vocal supporter of the Repeal the 8th movement and the HeForShe Campaign!
Síle Maguire
Síle is final year drama student. She enjoy good cups of tea, surprises, and a good aul play. She is currently directing 'Handling It', which is a one woman show in Smock Alley Theatre, as part of their Scene and Heard Festival which runs from 28th February until the 1st of March xoxo

Laura McCormack
Laura is a co-founder and co-head editor of nemesis. She is currently in her final year of English Studies. You can find her cheering for Jenny at Cave Writings, getting into arguments about Beyoncé and coming up with witty responses to debates that she had 5 months ago.

Niamh McCormack
Niamh is a final year law student at UCD, with a specific interest in the intersection between Media and Human Rights Law. She is the co-Founder of the UCD Feminist Book Club and the Policy Coordinator of UCD for Choice #Repealthe8th

Farah Mokhtareizadeh
Farah completed her PhD in Islam and feminism from TCD and is the editor of StealthisHijab.com. She works as an activist and community educator on issues of migration, international solidarity and gender justice.

Jenny Moran
Jenny is a co-founder and co-head editor of nemesis. She is a final year student of English and likes theories, but not all the theories. You can usually find her at Cave Writings events or following around stray cats.

Need Abortion Ireland
NAI are a group that fights for reproductive rights in Ireland. Their text service runs from 6-9 p.m. daily on 0894902517. You can also check them out on Facebook or email at info@needabortionireland.org

Áine O’Hara
Áine 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 will be presenting a work in progress 'The Birthday Party' at Scene + Heard Festival at Smock Alley Theatre this Feb 16th/17th.

Rachel O’Neill
Rachel is a final year Neuroscience student in UCD. She currently acts as the Features Editor of The College Tribune, as well as the Press Officer of UCD For Choice.

Ellie Vardigans
Ellie is the academic editor for nemesis, and a fourth year English Studies student. Her critical and personal interests include animal ethology and its construction in the context of race and gender performance within literature. She thoroughly enjoys the Art Of Citation.