

New Sociology: Journal of Critical Praxis

York University, Tkaronto, So-Called Canada

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

"When we say *I want to be free* or *I want you to be free*, we are speaking about these distinct selves but also about social freedoms that should be accorded to everyone as long as no real harm is done. And for that caveat to work, we have to expose the fearmongering that would recast fundamental freedoms as harms, and make freedom into a new and vital object of desire."—Judith Butler¹

This issue of *New Sociology: Journal of Critical Praxis* explores the concept of freedom during times of grief, resistance, and healing, particularly in the context of geopolitical conflict, migration, queerness, exclusion, and loss. We examine the concept of freedom and its evolving significance in a world in which the term is simultaneously used to advocate for the rights and dignity of marginalized groups as well as weaponized against these same groups through political, colonial, and militaristic actions.

Destroying Cages and Reclaiming Freedom asks how the complexities of competing narratives of freedom can blur understandings of who is being treated unjustly, who needs to be free, and how that freedom is to be achieved. Systems of oppression create hegemonic norms that can constrain freedom, reproducing a narrow vision of liberation that fails, if not refuses, to emancipate us all. Such claims to "freedom" distort relations of power and uphold the very systems that produce and maintain forms of unfreedom. This issue emerges from within this tension, aiming to reestablish freedom as a radical critique and rejection of oppressive, authoritarian, capitalistic, and ethno-nationalist ideologies of what it means to be free.

We know that between the struggle to destroy cages and the triumph of reclaiming freedom lies the unspoken terrain of grief. The process of

healing from this grief is not passive; it is radical, embodied, and tender; it requires us to (re)root freedom in the abundance and struggle of collective love, memory, and care. Yet liberation is also internal—a reclamation of selfhood after trauma, a collective exhale after generations of holding pain. It is with these multifaceted notions of freedom in mind that we came to this issue, taking most seriously that the fight for freedom is inherently inclusive, liberating, and collectivistic. Through the pieces included here, we highlight how efforts to explain and envision freedom are essential to the pursuit of freedom, which we understand as a journey that requires us to attend to our emotions, empower one another, and engage in mutual struggle.

This issue is a deep reflection on what unfreedom is and what freedom can be. It was inspired by a desire to respond to misrepresentations of freedom, and how they have been used to forward xenophobia, ableism, sanism, classism, queerphobia, and white supremacy within and beyond so-called Canada. This includes efforts to roll back advancements in racial equity and LGBTQ education, fascist assaults on sexual, mental, and physical health, and the troubling misuse of free speech rights to defend hate speech and incite violence. The issue at hand critiques how notions of freedom that are premised on the unfreedom of others are used to justify interpersonal harm, sociopolitical patterns of violence, and genocide, while reflecting on how specific interpretations of freedom stand in stark opposition to genuine liberation, underscoring the urgent need for freedom for all. Specifically, the pieces in this collection are organized into three main themes: *Destroying Cages*, *Healing Grief*, and *Reclaiming Freedom*.

The first theme, *Destroying Cages*, explores the complexities of navigating relations of unfreedom, and moving beyond limitations

imposed by them. The pieces in this section explore the struggle of charting a way forward through the wreckage of the oppressive systems that we seek to dismantle. Our featured piece is an artistic reflection on multigenerational trauma, displacement, movement, and migration by Dani Kriatura, titled “Por Que Igual Te Mueres (Cuz You’re Gonna Die Anyways).” Kriatura’s darkly vibrant artwork conveys the complex relationships between land, community, and self through a neurodivergent, queer of colour perspective that rebukes the myriad abuses of racial capitalism while boldly envisioning collective healing and liberation in an ever-challenging world.

Following this is “Freedom: A Poem,” by Nakanee Fernandez. This poem sheds light on the complex balancing act between violence and love that those who seek liberation must constantly negotiate, serving as a reminder of the multifaceted nature of conflict and struggle. Next is Chika Maduakolam’s poem “Color Me Freedom,” which envisions freedom as a fluid experience, likened to the flight of a butterfly. Maduakolam’s words convey the personal and collective struggle against racial and ethnic injustice while advocating for an understanding of freedom based in social justice, and the fight against violence, oppression, and exclusion. Last in the section is Daphnée Nostrome’s vivid visual art piece, “Freedom is a Dialogue,” which reframes freedom as an ongoing, relational practice rooted in curiosity, imagination, and collective transformation. Here, freedom is conceived of, not as static, but as in movement: as fluid, expansive, and always in conversation with the self, community, land, and imagination.

The next theme in the issue is *Healing Grief*, which examines efforts to build freedom from within, specifically by growing, feeling, and seeking personal freedom and empowerment. This section invites readers to linger in that in-between space, where mourning becomes meaning-making, and loss becomes a catalyst for transformation. First in this section is Vishwaveda Joshi’s “Fabulating Free(dom):Be/coming Non,” which explores the concept of freedom within the context of absence or loss, drawing on personal experiences of unfreedom, death, and discomfort. Joshi’s work encourages us to examine our sense of freedom in the context of trauma, greed, grief,

and the influences of colonialism and capitalism.

Next is Siva Thangeswary Sivarajah’s piece, “I Wrote Myself into Being with a Thousand Grandmothers,” which discusses freedom from within through the simple act of writing a name, shifting a moment from a spectacle to an affirmation of Trans Joy and agency in the classroom. Sivarajah’s narrative resists colonial erasure and serves as evidence of personal freedom and empowerment for Queer, Trans, Two-Spirit, Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour. The last piece in this section is Kevin Ufoegbune’s short story, “Denison Bank.” This piece follows a young Nigerian immigrant in Toronto navigating racism, alienation, and economic precarity while holding fast to his dream of becoming a teacher. Through sharp prose and layered emotion, the story explores the cost of survival and the quiet courage it takes to reclaim one’s dignity and future.

The final theme, *Reclaiming Freedom*, reflects on the experience of freedom in relation to resistance. These pieces represent moments of joy, courage, and triumph, in the face of challenges posed by a violent colonial, patriarchal order. First, Kevin Ufoegbune offers another reflection on freedom and migration in his poem, “The Flavour of Freedom,” where he reclaims freedom by connecting with his homeland of Nigeria. By discussing Nigeria as a positive and healing environment, Ufoegbune rejects colonial understandings of non-Western countries and shows the liberatory potential of culture and memory. In the next piece, “Message on the Bulletin Board,” Andrea White captures the violence that psychiatric inpatients are subjected to by the people who are purported to care for them. Through this animated fictional piece, White illuminates harrowing experiences of unfreedom linked to sanism and ableism, challenging decades of psychiatric abuse with the strong, defiant voices of a group of patients who decide to take their power back and demand their collective freedom.

Following this is Shifa Zoya’s piece, “Hum Dekhenge (We Shall See),” a reflection on what it was like for her to grow up Muslim in India. Zoya recounts her journey through moments of pain, fear, and resistance, working to reclaim her identity in the face of Islamophobic legislation and Hindu nationalism. Finally, the volume closes with

Sahra Mohamed's "Unyielding Spirit," a poetic tribute to Palestinians and their enduring spirit of resistance amid genocide, displacement, and torture. With evocative imagery and rhythmic urgency, the piece insists that justice and liberation are not deferred dreams, but inevitable truths.

We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to all the contributors to this issue, *Destroying Cages and Reclaiming Freedom*. Thank you for helping us better understand how to achieve collective liberation by offering your valuable perspectives. Additionally, we want to thank our copyeditors, Isaac Abban, Eric Goodchild, and Namitha Rathinappillai, as well as Bilal Zahoor, for all of their hard work editing the issue. Thank you to Ashanti Ameresekere for designing the beautiful cover art for this issue. Finally, thank you to the readers of *New Sociology*. You are essential to this journal's success, and we are so appreciative of you all. With that, we once more quote Butler (2024) and leave you with a question that rests at the heart of this issue: "What if we make freedom into the air we together breathe?" (p. 264).

Naiomi Perera, NS Special Issue Editor, S.B., NS Chief Deputy Editor, Michelle Molubi, NS Chief Deputy Editor, Tigist Wame, NS Chief Deputy Editor, with Jade Crimson Rose Da Costa, NS Founder and Editor-In-Chief.

¹ Butler, J. (2024). *Who's afraid of gender?* Knopf Canada, p. 260.