

Vol. 6

Destroying Cages and Reclaiming Freedom

Cover art by Ashanti Ameresekere

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.

Destroying Cages

Por Que Igual Te Mueres (Cuz You're Gonna Die Anyways): Visual Renderings of the Pre-Renaissance Apocalypse

Dani Kriatura

Abstract

My visual storytelling practice is my place of reflection, redirection, re-conception, and re-rendering of multigenerational trauma, displacement, movement, and migration. It is where I re/shape my relationship with land, community, and self. It is a space of communion; liberated territory where I play, engage, and converge with all I need to let go; all I yearn to know; and all not yet born. The themes I address in my visual storytelling practice actively center neurodivergent disabled Two-Spirit, Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (2SQTBIPOC) living, surviving, and thriving during this time of mass extinction and global apocalyptic fascism. My work goes beyond the defiant flaunting of our aesthetics and celebration of our joy; it dares to envision what our liberation and collective healing will consist of and what we need to rebuild our dying world. I also speak raw truth to the grim reality of precarity and exploitation for the racialized underclass, who have the least to gain from the preservation of the current dystopian capitalist order. This small collection of my artwork pertains to the themes of loving all we hold in abundance in resistance to all attempts to make it scarce.

Keywords

arts-based research; abolition; political art; capitalist dystopia; visual storytelling



Figure 1. *Pronto Viveremos*.



Figure 2. *We Are the Soil.*

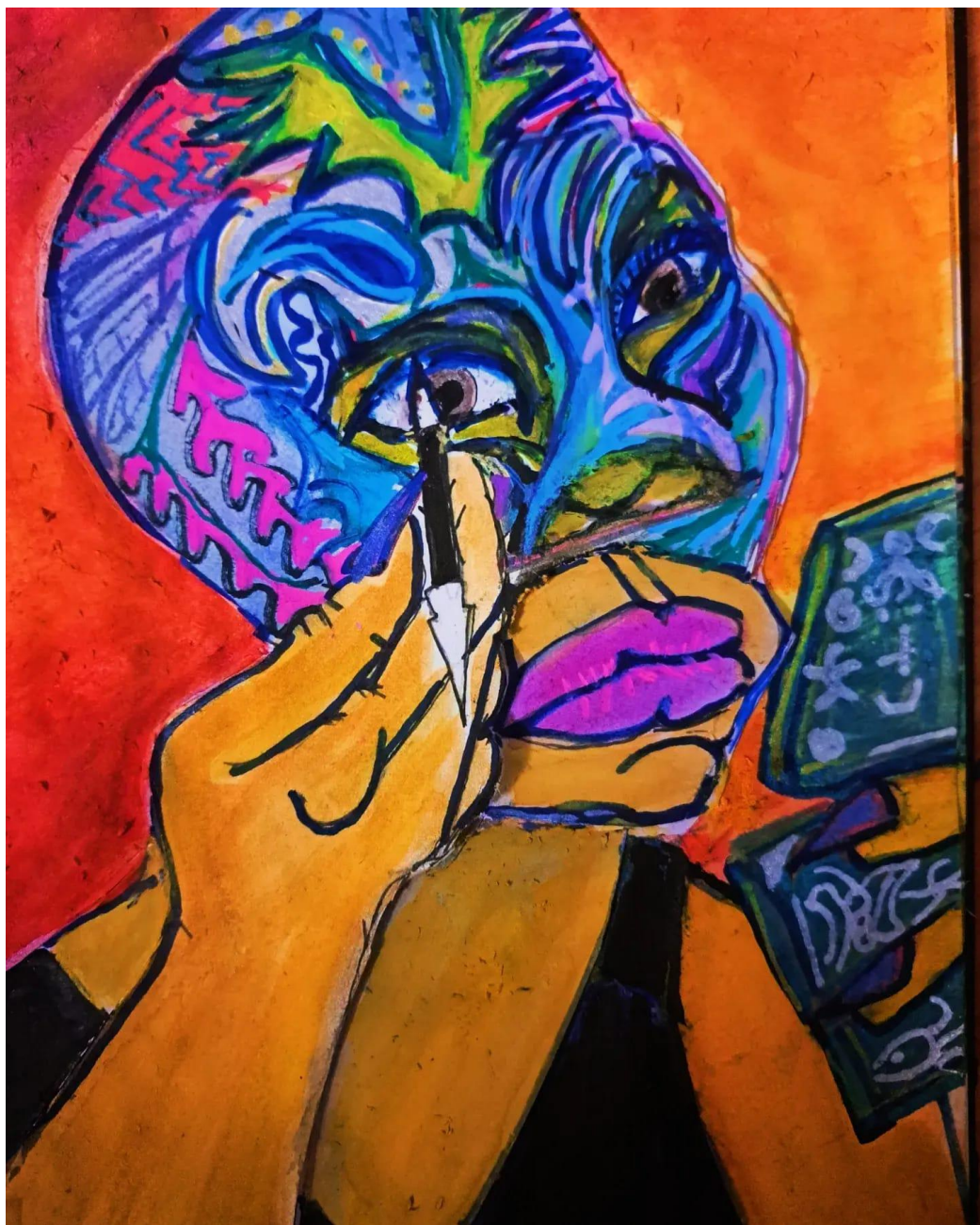


Figure 3. *A Long Way From Home.*



Figure 4. Future Visitor.



Figure 5. *Unmasked.*



Figure 6. *Holding Grief and Mourning.*



Figure 7. *Look Back in Disdain.*



Figure 8. *Punk The Jug.*



Figure 9. *Self Portrait.*

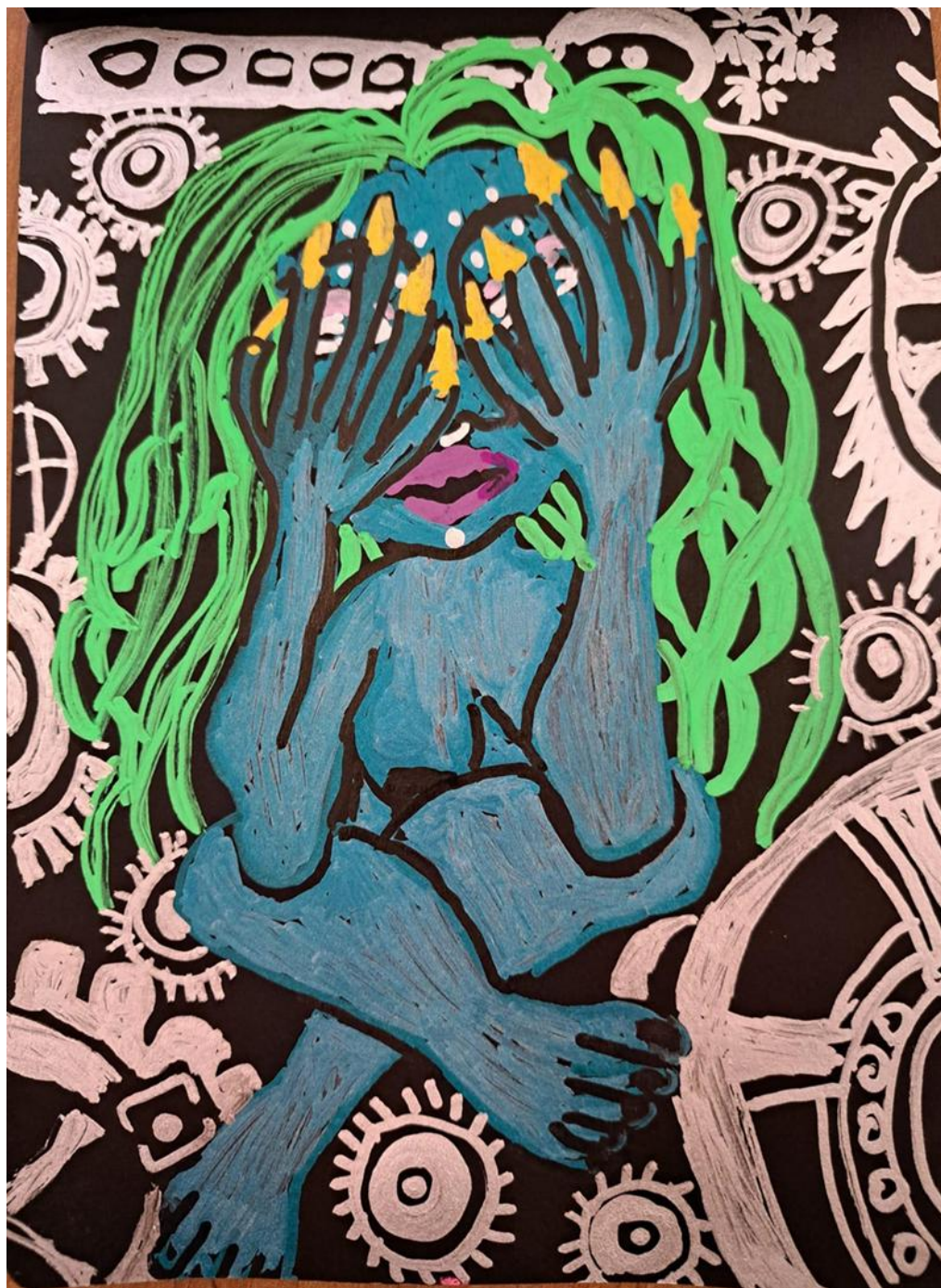


Figure 10. *Modern Distress.*



Figure 11. *We Can't Go Back to The Days Before We Found Love.*



Figure 12. *If You Don't Know Me By Now.*



Figure 13. *Love in the Time of Extinction.*



Figure 14. *Witnessed and Experienced.*



Figure 15. *Last of Days First of Many.*



Figure 16. *Fascist Plague.*

Acknowledgments

It is often very daunting to list and name all the peoples and communities who love me, support me and assist in critical ways to help me nurture, sustain and develop my creative practice. This is not so much because of who I might forget, so much as it is because just naming folks barely does justice in recognizing them as the beings and presences who keep the oxygen in my lungs and the skies from falling, even if and when they are no longer here on this physical plain or if our paths have diverted. First and foremost, I wish to extend my gratitude to my parents Alejandro Rojas (RIP) and Elena Orrego, my siblings Marcela Paz and Tomas, my abuelita Manena, and my two children, Minerva and Jhalil.

All my reverence and all love to Lee Maracle (RIP), Nishi Saundra-Fae, Siva Thangeswary Sivarajah, Alicia Bunyan-Sampson. Jade Milika, Libby Zeleke, Lorenzo Fiorito, WH Virgo, Jah Grey, Carmen Aguirre, Sundus Mahamed, Lureah Divine, Daphnee Nostrome and Marimba, Erica Pena, Siobhan Stewart, Madison Paige, John M. Ellison, Darryl Jackson, Missy Pixel, Aurora Saramago, Larisha Stone, Joy Tabernacle, Ayahna Kadir, jes sachse (RIP), 89 Graphics (Ricky, Nafisa, Gillian), Dennis Leroy Kangalee and Kangalee Arts Ensemble (Brooklyn, NY), Myrmex Non-Profit Housing Corporation, Sex Salon Series, Critical Zero, Interstellar Punk Bazaar, ArtHouse TO, Liz Johnston-Dupre and Folk Riot Magazine (New Orleans, LA), Erica Lundy, APFO (All Peoples Fighting Oppression), Casa Maiz, Xpace Cultural Centre, Ripple Community Collective, drea the vibe dealer, Marley Moon, Oshun Zari, Adrian Hayles and Worth Gallery, First Nations House (U of T), Samantha Hollis, Kee Merriweather, Theodore Walker Robinson, Khari X Waits, DiAnne St. Rose, Vestigio, Sabotage TO, Ivan Baeza, Ryot Rysto, Lucretia McEvil, Nawesa, Nico and inPrint Collective, Mark Jackson, Stan Doyle-Wood, Belinda Ageda, Chineda Ukabam, Carol Camper, Brig Feltus, SATE, James Spooner, Kitty Lvthn, Naty Tremblay, Jenny Blackbird and Indigenous Waves (CIUT FM), Medusa Mori (NYC), Mr. Sisterr (Chile), Cat China (RIP), d'bi. young anitafrika, Lamoi

Simmonds, Zymbul Fkara, Erick Agsoven, Hadiyya Mwapachu, Asheda Dwyer, Victoria Grant, Richard Barrett, Mai Cao, Shilo Hill, Kalmplex, Curtis Smith, DJ Son Of S.O.U.L. (RIP), Darryl Dennis aka Gigz the Unknown Producer, Sunny War, Pedro Pietri (RIP), Mtume Gant, Lillian Allen, Dr. Afua Cooper, Tiraj Johnson-Gray, Kelly Pflug-Black, Carolina Brown and Sister Bettina, Esneider and Huasipungo, Michael Reyes, Maureen, Dave, Shadiya, Tyriq, Donisha, Jen, King, Tish, Genius, Don, Beverly, Nicole, Wayde Compton, Steven Green, Christina Luke. Shabiki Crane, Gemma Bissesar, Dr. Ogtha Roach, Gord Hill, Wangechi Mutu, Harper-Shirt/Saavedra family, Kehewin family, and last but absolutely NEVER least, *New Sociology: Journal of Critical Praxis* for blessing me with the opportunity to feature in this issue, and for being so kind, loving, supportive and accommodating throughout this entire process.

Chaltumai and eternal gratitude to one and all!

"The task of the artist is determined always by the status and process and agenda of the community that it already serves. If you're an artist who identifies with, who springs from, who is serviced by or drafted by a bourgeois capitalist class then that's the kind of writing you do. Then your job is to maintain status quo, to celebrate exploitation or to guise it in some lovely, romantic way. That's your job...

As a cultural worker who belongs to an oppressed people my job is to make the revolution irresistible."

Toni Cade Bambara.

Author Biography

My artist moniker is Dani Kriatura (they/them). I am a visual storyteller working with chalk, spray paint, watercolors, acrylics, sharpies, wires, stencils, found artifacts, clay, ink, and paper to create alternate worlds through murals, figurines, masks, and upcycled clothing items. I am a diasporic non-binary/gendervoid AuDHD adult refugee child/grown up street kid of multiple resistant displaced ancestries. Based in T'kranto since the age of 4, I live as embodied shadows, celebrations, revolutionary dreams, and traumas of parents who fled the fascist military coup which took place in Wallmapu (Chile) in 1973. I claim Mapuche, Selk'nam, Basque, Andalusian, Lebanese, and Russian Jewish lineages, legacies, and contradictions. I draw inspiration from the people I know, love, fight for, and live for, and the ecosystems of which we are an inherent part.

Freedom: A Poem

Nakanee Fernandez

Abstract

I thought of all the times I felt free and as though the tainted structures of society could not reach me. I thought about the practices I enact to recreate that feeling. I thought about what else could make me feel that way and where I might find it. I thought about what freedom is at its core. Then I connected these ideas. This poem serves as a convergence of the paths I take to freedom by drawing a line between love and violence. More specifically, the thin line we must walk towards liberation that requires us to grasp both things while weighing them against our heart. Breaking cages is violent, but it is also love, and love is freedom.

Keywords

Love, politics, violence, poetry

I

the kind of kiss that doesn't ask
are you sure ?
it says, yes | unequivocally | certainly

II

work rests hard,
building joy harder than diamond-mined-misery
we are doing nothing | we are doing everything.

III

found deeper than unnatural dis-connected trickery
wells untainted | unfounded depth | overflowing cadence

IV

hands around a gun, fingers on a trigger—
bullets sing:
I am not afraid | We are not afraid

V

take back heartbeats that sink synchronicity
&
sinister misters hell-lent "history"
written truths | spoken loose

VI

it contains no mystery
seedlings waiting for assured rain
dark | imagination | growing | creation

VII

Destiny

VIII

trigger fingers clasp hands like holding guns
they reach to pull
your body close | we're going home

Author Biography

Nakanee Fernandez (she/they) is a multidisciplinary artist, activist, and poet from Tacoma, Washington, who takes inspiration from the great but also terrible beauties of the world. Born from music (love) and anointed by word and colour, you can find them in the water or the forest... or on Substack. Her published poetry can be found in Grit City Magazine and the anthology Voices of Tacoma. In addition, she is the owner of Moon Spice Studios, where disciplines of creation are blended to build a beautiful future.

Colour Me Freedom

Chika Maduakolam

Abstract

This poem reflects on freedom, as a personal desire and as part of the collective fight against racial and ethnic injustices. While presenting an idealized expectation of freedom, I consider the complex and contradictory elements of freedom. Freedom is reimagined as an inclusive, liberatory experience rooted in individual authenticity and shared humanity. Reflecting on the struggle between self-expression and systemic limitations on freedom, this poem celebrates both the scars of oppression and the resilience born from collective histories. It critiques the use of freedom as a weapon to perpetuate violence and advocates for a freedom that is collaborative, just, and mutual. This poem provides space for solidarity-based individual development and dislocating structures of oppression. This poem invites us into a space wherein freedom is free flowing, interrelatedly acknowledged, and equitable, likening freedom to the boundless flight of a butterfly.

Keywords

self-actualization, social justice, collective liberation, radical self-care

What is freedom to me?

The unfettered wings of a butterfly. Free to fly, free to shine.

Beauty in its spread, height in its flight.

Creatures of light. Custodians of resplendent color.

What is freedom to me?

Space to grow, room to bloom. Shedding the weight of the history I carry.

Embracing the scars of my identity. Yet blossoming in the fullness of who I am.

What is freedom to me?

Knowing the fabric of shared pain and struggle.

Acknowledging the separation of unique oppression. Feeling my pain and feeling it deeply.

Enjoying my joy and revelling even deeper in it. Using my words and respecting my living.

What is freedom to you?

To be loved, as you are, no shame, no constraint. To exist, in the fullness of your story.

To be reached, in the ways you want to be. To live, completely and wholly.

What is freedom to you?

To have your hurts and call it what you please. To hold your fears and own the time to let them go.

To take your happiness and spread it like a gift. To be is all you ask, of me, of you, of the world.

What is freedom to us?

Our struggles being called who we are. Our sources of strength from the lives we have lived.

And the lives we have inherited. Our victories becoming our identities.

Our stories becoming our own.

What is freedom to us?

You versus me being a relic of the past. You and me as the forge of the future.

A blending of lines that build on fairness and justice. A tapestry woven with each sweat and heart.

A bridge of worlds that are different but do not divide.

Freedom is what we call the moments where our hearts are light.

Freedom is what we hope as we live each day.

Freedom is what we seek as our journeys meet.

Challenged, disagreed with, rebelled against, we still ask to be free.

Trampled upon, relegated, ignored, we still desire to be free.

Applauded, extolled, praised, we still ask for no limits.

Freedom is the light of our path and the prism of our peace.

And yet, freedom is ever out of our reach.

Here is an invitation: shall we be free together?

Pursue a freedom that holds space for your thoughts and my dreams.

Build a place where we share who we are without dimming the other.

Craft a garden which carries our histories and stories side by side

Like well watered foliage.

Pour water in places where rocks have been built

Creating fountains of shared beauty, pleasure and tranquility.

Here is an invitation: can we be free together?

Like butterflies who spread their beautiful wings in the vast sky
With no limits to all the space they can occupy
Displaying the splendor of their wings
Here is an invitation: will we be free together?

Acknowledgments

For everyone who has gone before me and for everyone who comes after, thank you. You are a part of my story and my strength. In any form you have taken—family, friends, mentors, colleagues, mentees, or as an educator, guide, advisor, editor, and reviewer—you have made me better. Thank you.

Author Biography

Chika Maduakolam is a Ph.D. candidate in Socio-Legal Studies at York University. She holds an LLM degree from Osgoode Hall Law School. She has worked as a research assistant on an international research project on gendered violence in war and a domestic project on civil justice in Canada. Her research areas focus on sexual and gender-based violence in conflict, militarized masculinities, international law, gender and human rights.

Freedom is a Dialogue

Daphnée Nostrome

Abstract

This piece examines the fluid nature of freedom through four 4"x4" Acrylic paintings set against a paper background with written notes and arrows between the pieces. Collectively, the questions, pieces, and directions disrupt conceptualizations of freedom as a picture-perfect static endpoint, instead presenting it as an ongoing, messy dialogue through abstract visual language. The artwork explores our complex relationships with land, imagination, self, culture, community and history. Each image features fluid lines that intermingle and flow, mirroring how ideas and concepts of liberation blend and evolve. Rather than presenting freedom as fixed, the pieces invite viewers to discover freedom in motion. The primary colour palette of red, blue, and yellow serves a dual purpose. In art theory, these foundational colours give birth to countless colour combinations. Similarly, within these works, this colour palette suggests that our pursuit of liberation gives rise to infinite possibilities. Blue and red carry the colours of the Haytian flag forward into these works. As a descendant of the freedom fighters who liberated my family and countless others from slavery's grip, I see in these foundational hues not mere pigments, but centuries of struggle distilled into colour—each brushstroke a quiet homage to those who bled for the freedom we continue to seek. Additionally, I use "Hayti" instead of the common spelling of Haïti as an act of reclamation. When our revolutionary leader, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, declared the country's independence in 1804, my ancestors deliberately named the country "Hayti" to honour the original Taino name, Ayiti, and reject the colonial renaming of the land. Using Hayti connects me to that revolutionary moment when we successfully overthrew slavery to establish a free Black republic.

Keywords

Black Studies, abstract art, Afrocentric, diaspora, mixed media, Haïti

Prelude

Freedom is often imagined as a fixed destination—a reward at the end of a journey, a moment in time captured like a snapshot or a painting. These four pieces challenge such thinking by exploring freedom as an ongoing dialogue spanning individual and collective worlds. This is particularly true for Diasporic Haytians, who are grappling with Hayti's current socio-political realities in a way that honours its rich legacy of liberation. Freedom is in the spaces between thoughts; it is in the challenging questions we dare to ask; it is the connections we forge; it is our evolving relationship with ourselves, our communities, our cultures, our histories, our lands, and our imaginations. Like the sacred crossroads where Papa Legba, a divinity in the Vodou pantheon, opens pathways between worlds, freedom exists in the liminal spaces where possibility meets reality. The deeper our inquiry into the normative frames of existence, of what is and isn't free, the more we shift the tone and values embedded within these frames; the more we wonder new possibilities into being—much as my ancestors in the mountains of Hayti carved hidden trails that led from bondage to liberation, creating freedom through the very act of moving toward it. Embarking on a visual dialogue of one such wondering, the artwork emphasizes freedom as an unfixed destination; as a living, breathing, ongoing exchange, flowing much like the Vodou divinity Dambala's serpentine wisdom through landscapes both seen and unseen. Freedom is found in the very act of seeking it. Perhaps it is less of a declaration and more of a punctuation, or even the blank space between defined boundaries and ideas. Perhaps freedom is an open space where ideas flow, where the maroon paths of my ancestors intersect with the possibilities that emerge when we, in the Diaspora, honour both the struggle that brought us here and the becoming that calls us forward.



Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my ancestors and the divinities that walk with us, as well as the editorial team at *New Sociology: Journal of Critical Praxis* and York University for this momentous opportunity.

Author Biography

Daphnée is a Toronto-based Haytian diasporic artist who knew how to draw before she could string a sentence together. Drawing is her first love and her love language—a language she's been refining for over 4 decades. She is a multidisciplinary artist who paints, sings, draws and writes. Her works centre on themes of decolonization, womanhood, and collective healing. She has designed works for Greenpeace, and displayed her work at human rights conferences and art galleries in Toronto, both as a part of group and for solo shows. Daphnée is passionate about using her talents to imagine and build a more just world for all.

Healing Grief

Fabulating Free(dom): Be/coming Non

Vishwaveda Joshi

Abstract

These notes to self, written and drawn as reflections of/for personal experiences over the last year (2023–2024) imagine and fabulate the notion of “non” as a means to *feeling* free(dom). They convey the non in a way that one can attune with in order to find their own non-s. Through a series of digital artworks inspired by Firelei Baez’s² (2022) works created by juxtaposing found images on Canva to make no/one/thing concrete, but any/one/thing fluid. My contribution complicates ideas of negation and/or absence as excess. In contexts of freedom and unfreedom, it provides insights into an articulation of freedom that flows through the gaps of the cages that hold us. Non is no/one/thing and every/one/thing simultaneously, allowing an experience of freedom that is both positively overwhelming and discomforting. This work fabulates freedom by non-following empirical rules of academic writing³. **Content Warning:** This piece talks about death.

Keywords

speculative art, decolonial, queer negativity, insufficient, excess

¹ I propose non as a counter-concept of sorts that doesn’t fit into the idea of concept because it cannot be defined. It is felt. Therefore, it is multiple and incomplete. It resists completion. Thus, working with it as a fluid, ever flowing event, growing and de-growing conceptually with the strength of speculation, non encourages us to co-explore freedom within ourselves, from years of colonial conditioning, trauma, and capitalist containment, as we explore ways to reclaim freedom for the collective. Non is therefore, deliberately not defined, but rather allowed to be excessive and speculative in its multiple expressions. That deliberate choice is a reclamation of freedom of expression in academic contexts, with hopes to then let it seep through other aspects of human experience—though not limited to it. This contribution attempts to part with established rules of writing, because within those rules, non cannot be articulated.

² Baez, F. and Hessel, K. (2024, March 8). Museums Without Men. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*.
<https://www.metmuseum.org/perspectives/katy-hessel-audio-tour-firelei-baez-transcript>

This work is disjointed, disconnected, different, unfinished. It is speculative and

hopes to be provocative. At its core, it is an attempt at overcoming a fear of irrelevance and not being enough: especially when it comes to positioning myself, a neurodivergent, queer, South Asian _____ in academia, in the world, and in my family. Even deeper, is an attempt to free myself of/from my colonial genesis. Generational conditioning to think and therefore relate in colonial ways, even as colonized beings, generational trauma of being colonized, and of continuing it.

I turn to my journal and to art to think through ways of reclaiming freedom as equitable, just, and inclusive, as I move through feelings of ungroundedness. The entries presented here grapple with my own questions of freedom, unfreedom, freeness, and boundedness and attempt to challenge the images and imagery of cages, being caged and be/coming caged as the goal of colonial

genesis—to keep in cages of violence, injustice, genocide. To contain. To oppress. Amidst all this containment, I look for freedom in academia, freedom in my own body, freedom in the world, in politics, in thoughts. I turn to my body, because over the last year, many experiences have given me a glimpse of freedom that is fleeting but powerfully rooted. Elusive but precise. Tentative but resistant. Events like a concussion, experiencing statelessness, and the death of my father have pushed me to experience what I try to articulate and conceptualize as non. Non,



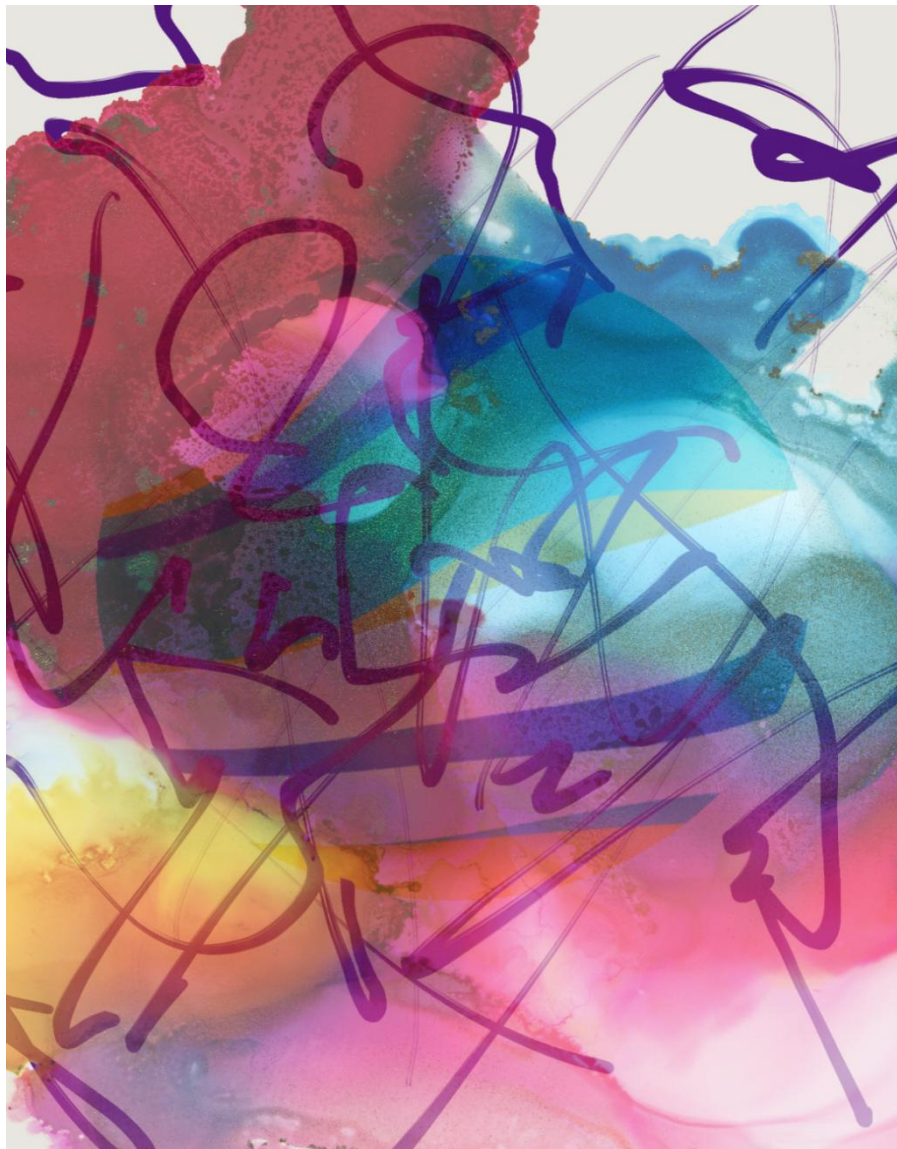
is therefore a speculative event, continuously imagined pre-cognitively. It is ever expanding, disobedient. Defiant. It can be articulated through speculations and imaginations, but it resists captivation, formation, logic, and definition. **NON** is excess both of presence and of absence. It is an excess of transience. Of impermanence. And, because it is no/one/thing, any/one/thing, and every/one/thing,

These reflections are personal learnings, that at the first read or upon several reads implicate freedom, ideas of self, and decolonial ontologies with “returning to the self” clichés to demonstrate a reclaiming process, but, once stripped of the initial icks and urges to categorize them as **non-sensical**, they reveal resonances of freedom through a re/connection with non. *Non*, here, is constantly affecting between nothing, something, and anything. It never be/comes, but it is always be/coming. It is excess that resists to be contained. The event of non requires us to resituate freedom, not as a state, but as a continuation, a free/dom/ing through which, in which, for which we are always in motion, never static. Motion, here, does not refer to capitalist, ableist ideas of moving forward or moving through, but the very sparks of speculation and inspiration that are buried by colonial logics and wrath. The sparks that rise when a janky, unexpected thing happens.

The Dilemma:

As I compile these notes to make tangible the idea of non, I find myself in a conundrum to choose. Do I express my new-found insight of free/dom/ing in a way, through words, that others can relate to, resonate with, re-sound through, affect with, or do I release myself from language, free myself from rules of communication, and yet, speak to the free/dom/ing within us. So, then, I ask myself, can I communicate the processuality of free/dom/ing from my colonial genesis in ways that can be non-colonial? Can I re-ontologize my experience of self and therefore the world? I come up with something insufficient and inefficient. But here I am, trying against my colonial will to communicate the non-s. When I sit to edit some of the notes to submit for the call, the fear of writing something that does not fit directly to the call, that isn’t obedient but does contribute takes over. It is writing that is simple, vulnerable, and non-academic. It is lurking around the idea of freedom as a social justice rhetoric by proposing that for me, decolonizing myself, re-ontologizing myself to the world, changing the ways in which I currently, colonially relate through identities and identifications, must happen first before I can truly experience freedom, and create spaces of collective freedom. This does not mean a withdrawal from support, solidarity, or fighting capitalist logics of justifying violence, genocide, discrimination. It means, to be open to the non-s through the work we/I do, to gesture towards a decolonial future, where there is a possibility to experience non – [_____]. Of living defiantly. fluidly, be/coming non-containable, non-governable, non-suppressible. Non reclaims freedom because it resists. It defies. It refuses.

THOUGHT ACT 2- Statelessness



March 23,

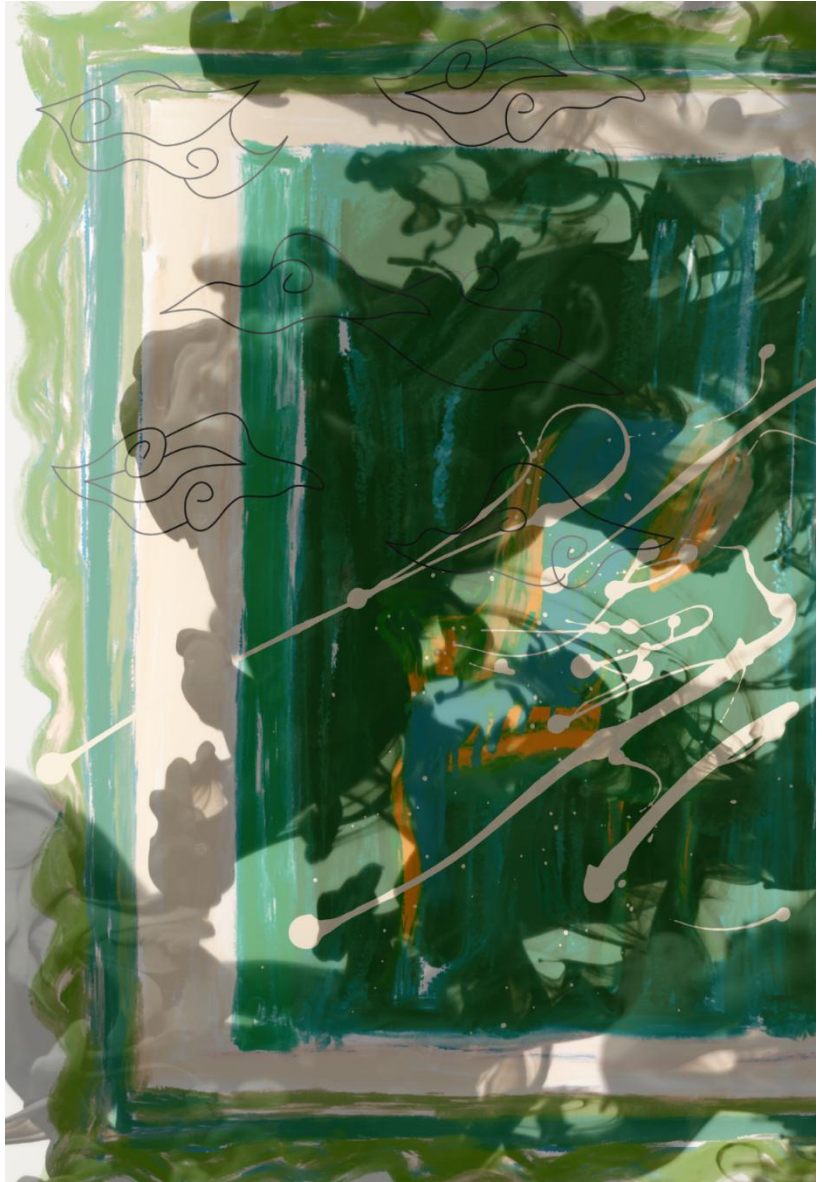
2023. Passport renewal application rejected. I am no longer, in a span of seconds, part of the world. I cannot continue education in Canada. I must withdraw from my studies. Leave the country. Go back. But how? I stay without documents, laying low. For months. Sweats. Nightmares. Fear. Guilt. Shame. Nothing to do. No earning. I withdraw from life. See less people. Sirens freak me out. Rapid, shallow, improper breathing. Fainting. Again. I am no/one/thing. Yet. Yet, I feel free. Sparks of connection and relation to the world, beyond human, in ways I have not felt. I relate to the humanness of people. I am free to be... to do the work that got pushed away due to degree-based commitments.

thought act 3 - My Father dies.

November 12, 2023. Leukemia. Dialysis. Ventilator. Blood bottles. A dance between consciousness and unconsciousness. A decision made to take him off life support. Made in 30 seconds. Unbelievable. He is gone. But my love for him is here, overflowing.

In excess. How to contain it? He visits my dreams. I am in deep shock. Who am I? How can I make the decision to take away someone's life? Panic attack. Tears running down, uncontrollably.

Life as I have known to be is gone. He didn't know some of my truths. I will never have a chance to tell them. As I sign papers for his release, he is lying there, dead. But it feels like he is looking at me. Calling me. His body jerks. I call the nurse. He tells me that it was a muscle spasm. Last of life that was left in him is gone. He gives me



a nod. Overwhelmed, sad, not knowing who I will be now, I experience non again. This time, I understand the “yet” of things. The yet to be. There is freedom in it. From hate, anger, rage, from how we relate to ourselves and others. My need to blame myself and the doctors for his death is gone, just like he is, in 30 seconds. I am yet to be _____, and that is free/dom/ing. I cry freely. For he is gone.



Thought Act
1 —

Concussant.
January 29,
2023.

Tumbling
down through
15 stairs.
Injury. Ears
ringing. Guts
nauseating.

Not
remembering
words. Heat
flashes. Head
throbs. Non-
linear, rapid
breathing.

Shivering.
Unable to
stand up.
Don't know
who I am. I
am nothing.

OR
ANYthing.

Pupils
dilated.
Cannot stop
crying. Panic
attack.

Emergence of
non for the
first time. Just
a glimpse.
Feeling calm.

Liberated.
Free I
understand,
later that day
in a dream

that to be/come free from anything, we must first experience this state of fluidity, nothingness.

Acknowledgments

Papa, I hope my musings bring a smile to you, wherever you are, I hope we can always keep talking.

Author Biography

Vishwaveda, an anthropologist in the making, is currently a practitioner of unfinished, the not-yet, dancing in-between disciplines, titles, and roles. Having recently finished licensing as an expressive arts therapy practitioner, she is currently contemplating pedagogical experiments using collage-making as a mode of thinking and feeling otherwise. Drawing on theories of affect, decolonial thought, and relational aesthetics, she seeks to reimagine ethnographic writing as a space for tenderness, opacity, and transformation. She aims to move towards practice that refuses containment, unfolding across care work, critical inquiry, and poetic experimentation within the disciplines of anthropology and art therapy.

I Wrote Myself into Being with a Thousand Grandmothers

Siva Thangeswary Sivarajah

Abstract

This piece reflects on the liberatory power of self-making; the Queer, Trans, Two-Spirit, Black, Indigenous, or Person of Color (QT2SBIPOC) reframing of kinship; and the act of relational co-witnessing as essential modes of “kin-ing” and becoming. Centered on a roll calling moment within an Indigenous studies classroom, this narrative highlights an educator’s use of humour to bring levity to an often racially charged and gender essentializing encounter. Through this act, the simple gesture of writing a name is shifted from a spectacle to an affirmation of QT2SBIPOC Joy. It becomes a way of reclaiming agency through co-witnessing and co-making, ultimately enabling the disruption of the “tragic being,” a colonial trope that frames marginalized existences as inherently marked by suffering, erasure, or loss. The story underscores how communal laughter, joy, and kinship serve as vital forms of resistance against the colonial death-making practice of erasure, calling attention to the relational and collective nature of freedom-making for QT2SBIPOC.

Keywords

kinship, care ethics, queer joy, trans joy, kin-ing, QT2SBIPOC

My face is warm. I am suddenly hyperaware that I am being seen. I briefly debate sinking into my chair, cloaking me with an illusionary comfort of being invisible. There is comfort in not being perceived. It is impossible to be invisible sitting across from you at the table. Your loud earthly laugh breaks the silence in the classroom with the strength of a thousand grandmothers. You continue laughing, mischievously holding the attendance sheet to your face like a child who had just been passed a note with juicy gossip that only we both knew.

The attendance sheet circulated. I was the last student remaining. I wrote my name, "Siva," reached out across the table and passed the attendance to you. As usual, you call out the names of each of your students. Your eyes still glued to the attendance sheet, you arrive at my name and all we hear is a burst of laughter. The rest of the class stared at the both of us with looks of confusion on their faces, attempting to make meaning out of your laughter. You moved to the edge of your chair and continue laughing. Your laugh becoming increasingly mischievous, you leaned in as you looked up at me. You made sure I could see the joy in your eyes. Seeing your joy made me realize my being is not a Shakespearean tragedy.

How can I remain invisible in the presences of a thousand grandmothers? I have been told that my being is a figment of my imagination. But imagination is a powerful thing. You can imagine your way into being. You continue laughing while you called my name, "Siva!" We both know that you already knew my name. I just wanted to know what it would feel like to hear someone call me by my name for the first time in my life.

So, I wrote myself into being with a thousand grandmothers.

Acknowledgments

With deep love, I honor my chosen grandmother and traditional teacher, who has passed on to the spirit world, for teaching me that my writing can save my life. I also offer my love and thanks to my chosen Kin and my partner for their care, grounding presence, and patience in sitting with me through countless information dump sessions.

Author Biography

Siva Thangeswary Sivarajah (He/Him) is a Transmasc, autistic, mad, and disabled Eelam Tamil settler-refugee. He lives on the traditional territory of many Nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinaabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples. Siva is a student services practitioner and Ph.D. candidate in Education Curriculum and Pedagogy at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. As a Thinai (தினை)¹ scholar, educator, and storyteller, Siva's research centers a QT2SBIPOC mad and disabled dialectic in landscape-based, embodied relational teaching and learning pedagogy. His work counters hegemonic, colonial, and alienating graduate classroom curricula to negotiate collective survivance in academia. Siva's oral storytelling practice rejects the colonial conceptualization of oral traditions, which devalues and limits the expression of oral storytelling. Instead, it centers on the concept of Muttamil, the "threefold of Tamil expression," which intricately intertwines Iyal (written literature, poetry, or prose), Icai (Tamil music and song), and Nadagam (Tamil performance or enactment), all captured within Thinai storytelling.

¹Thinai, a Tamil Cangam landscape-based relational storytelling practice, centers embodied relational collective knowledge production as a form of kinship building.

Denison Bank

Kevin Ufoegbune

Abstract

Denison Bank illustrates the complex challenges Black immigrants from Africa face as they seek freedom in the Western world. Chinedu, a young immigrant from Nigeria, arrives in Toronto with aspirations of becoming a teacher, only to have his hopes and dreams thwarted by the harsh realities of anti-Black racism and xenophobia. Struggling to make ends meet, he finds employment selling accidental death insurance at Denison Bank after encountering microaggressions and prejudices during the hiring process. *Denison Bank* chronicles Chinedu's journey toward achieving his dreams, highlighting his critical personal growth, experiences with migration and racism, as well as the enriching relationships he forms and maintains with people in his homeland and abroad.

Keywords

African diaspora, Canadian citizenship, Nigerian immigration, migration narratives

"You have what it takes to do well here. You're real, and that's what this job requires. Plus, they really need people like *you* here, that's the new thing now," Marlene said to Chinedu before she sipped prudently from the bitter coffee that she earned for being salesperson of the month. Chinedu marveled at how people could take such victories seriously. Marlene smelled of cigarette smoke and simplicity, a blended scent he did not want to get accustomed to. It was moments like these that made Chinedu envision giving up on his dream, packing up his few belongings, and retreating to Nigeria, flying weightlessly.

It was not that he had anticipated his new life in Canada to be seamless; it was that he had grown tired of working for less than he deserved. He had become diminished by his otherness and the social worlds he faced. Work at the call centre had become drearier and more plasticky than usual. Chinedu was faced with the superficiality of Toronto, wrapped in its pretension, causing him to reach his breaking point.

Marlene continued, "Bud, I was a millionaire before I decided to come work here and be a telemarketer, and I wouldn't change a thing! And remember, when you're selling accidental death insurance, make sure that you really believe – Oh hello? Hi ma'am, I'm calling on behalf of Denison Bank of Canada. How are you today?" As Marlene began her sales pitch, the other telemarketers continued their own calls behind the sound of her boisterous voice. *A choir of underachievers* thought Chinedu.

Marlene set the coffee down beside her computer monitor and pasted on a seemingly concerned expression after running her fingers through her grey hair that had a bluish highlight within it. Her butter-colored teeth flashed as she smiled, and the skin around her eyes appeared more wrinkled when she did. The conversation dragged on, her once bubbly voice flattening back to normal, then dragging as though being pulled over rocks. "Yeah, like I said, love," Marlene was becoming slightly irritated, "take the accidental death insurance for now, if you don't like it—though I'm sure you will, love—by any means just call in and cancel it. I'm not yanking your

chain, but like, you never know. You gotta protect everyone around you, all of yous! So, I'll sign you up? Super duper! You have a fabulous day! And thank you for being a valued customer of Denison Bank of Canada. Bye for now, love!

Chinedu rolled his eyes before Marlene could catch him and hastily rubbed his fingertips against his stubble. He was unsure which irritated him more. Was it the duplicity of her carbonated voice that fizzled every time she spoke to a customer? Or was it that he had recently graduated with a master's degree, and instead of successfully landing a job in education, he was preparing for a career as a telemarketer?

The Toronto sun infiltrated the small building, reminding Chinedu that he would rather be anywhere else than indoors on this office floor, where every worker sat crammed together in cubicles. He had not felt this claustrophobic since his first arrival in the city, riding the subway for the very first time. He found it so odd to be so close to strangers that their warm, sticky breath could warm the small hairs on the back of his neck, causing him to recoil. So close that their elbows could thrust into his sides, inducing a dry giggle. Once, when he went to hold onto a trolley pole, he placed his hand on top of a young woman's hand. The owner of the hand smiled at him as he apologized profusely, his head bowed to avoid her beautiful, almond-shaped eyes.

He would tell his younger brother, Debare, in Nigeria, about how people even took their dogs on the subway and spoke lovingly to them, just as they would their spouses. To this, Debare would reply, "Brother, buy a car, you're in Canada now! You should not be traveling with mad people. By the way, I'm still suffering here o, brother, what about my school fees?" It was after their last conversation about the subway that Chinedu decided he would no longer tell Debare about any difficulties he was experiencing in Toronto. He would fold up his disdainful stories and tuck them away like he did his master's degree.

Debare always failed to empathize with Chinedu. Every story Chinedu shared about his harrowing experiences as an immigrant, Debare would counter with an expectation for Chinedu to

send more money home to him, their mother, and their father. Chinedu sent home a portion of the money he earned as a telemarketer on probation at Denison. He sent funds to help his father pay for legal fees, his mother's business expenses, and Debare's school fees. The money that remained after such payments felt as insignificant as the English biscuit wrappers and crumbs found at the bottom of his carry-on bag when he first arrived in Canada. Yet to Debare, Chinedu was a newly rich Canadian who could afford to contribute more. Debare and the rest of the family did not know that Chinedu was making only minimum wage and was behind on his rent, nor would they comprehend how dire his situation truly was. His favorite shirt, now tight, his uncut bushy hair, frayed jeans, and worn sneakers could attest to this. There was no dress code at the Denison Bank of Canada call centre, no requirement whatsoever to appear like the quintessential professional or like his best self. He was not polishing his pedagogy or influencing the next generation of politicians, doctors, or great thinkers—he was trying to sell accidental death insurance and failing wretchedly at it.

"Hello, my name is Chinedu, you can call me Michaels. I'm calling from Denison Bank of Canada. How are you today, sir?" Chinedu said with his headset digging into his ebony hair and squeezing his pierced ears. The adoption of the name *Michaels* last year had not helped his employment situation. At the job interview for Denison Bank in Calgary, the interviewer struggled. "Shy-knee-dough, shy-knee-dough? Sounds like a Chinese dessert!" the interviewer said with an arrogant smirk as he glanced over Chinedu's resume.

Chinedu kept calm. "Yes, my name is sweet!" His high cheekbones raised as he wearily joked. "But it's pronounced Chee-Nay-Do. It means God leads, and he's led me to you, sir." Peals of laughter bounced about the interviewer's office, but the real sigh of relief came when Chinedu was offered the job in Toronto instead of Calgary, a city that he was trying out for job prospects.

Chinedu saw the customer alert screen pop up on his desktop. "I'm great, the wife and I are

getting ready to go over to the cottage." The voice of the customer sounded sturdy and confident. It was entitled and weighty, but Chinedu decided that its waves would not drown him. Instead, he would ride them.

"Is this a good time?"

Chinedu stood his ground.

"Yes, it is. We just came back from Shop-Mart. How can I help you, Chinedu?" Mr. Giles, the customer, had said his name correctly. Chinedu swallowed and pushed the wrinkled brown fast-food bag on his desk behind his computer monitor as if doing so would prepare him for what seemed to be imminent combat. He had started to become accustomed to Western food now, swapping jollof rice for greasy low-cost cheeseburgers.

"Well, sir, I am calling to let you know about a deal that I can offer you for accidental death insurance." There was an empty pause before the customer began to speak again.

"Nope, sorry, that's already handled through my employer and the wife's, so—"

"Yes, but Mr. Giles—"

"It's Harry."

"Sir?" Chinedu was confused and felt himself losing the battle.

"My name is Harry," the customer said with an empathetic laugh. "We don't need any formalities. Are you from Nigeria?"

"Yes, sir. How can you tell?" Chinedu asked while attempting to conceal his accent, his mouth suffocating those words.

Harry laughed again; this time, the laugh was more endearing. "No, the reason I am asking is because of your first name. The wife and I know a new couple who recently joined our friend's church from that place. My guess is that they left because of the heat." Chinedu was speechless, so Harry laughed again to signify that it was a meaningless and poorly delivered joke. "Comedy was never my strong suit," he continued.

"Harry, if you do not like the accidental death insurance, you can always cancel it. So, let me go ahead and add it. You have thirty days, death comes unexpectedly—"

"Wow! What don't you understand? I'm not

interested! You're becoming really rude and pushy. How do I know you're even calling from Denison Bank and not *Africa*?" Chinedu could feel the customer's energy – it was belligerent, antagonistic, and standoffish, giving him a lamentably familiar experience. The way Harry said Africa made Chinedu shudder and block out any other words that followed. He was acutely aware of himself, his difference, once he heard Harry say *Africa*.

Chinedu's demeanor became hard and solemn. "You can visit www.denisonbankofcanada.com. You can also give us a call if you ever need any assistance with anything banking-related. Our phone number and website are on the back of your personal and business debit cards." Chinedu's eyes swelled up while his voice began to break, and he could feel the penetrating stares of his neighbouring coworkers as he struggled through the closing of his catastrophic sales pitch. He felt overpowered and demoralized. Not only had he not made any sales at Denison, but he had just been insulted and stereotyped.

Flashbacks of failed interviews and short-lived jobs after graduation seemed to choke him, gripping his neck with vulgar force while subduing him to an agonizing reality. The memories of being told that he was too accented and of when an interviewer tore his resume now intrusively settled at the bottom of his chest.

Marlene was now standing by his cubicle. Her brown sweatshirt with holes failed to match her emerald-coloured eyes. "Just hang up! Plenty of other fish in the sea! You got the bait, kid, but hang up now!" Her voice was husky and encouraging while her coffee breath was sour. She had so many voices, like clothes in the closet that she could pull down at her convenience.

Chinedu looked at Marlene, then looked back at the computer screen that illuminated his pancake-shaped face. "And sir," Chinedu said sharply, "should you require any other assistance, I suggest that you and your wife both go to hell!" The awkward pause that had once visited the conversation between Chinedu and Harry reappeared.

"Excuse me? I have been a customer for

twenty-seven years. I—" Harry attempted to shoot back, but Chinedu hung up.

"Dude, what did you do?" Marlene's lips parted in a shudder. She placed her thick hands on her cheeks as if to squeeze her face together to add to the absurdity of the call.

"I took your advice! I hung up. Thanks for that, Marlene!" Chinedu said with a smug smile on his face. He rose to his feet and felt the feelings of pain and insecurity leave his body as he exhaled. He logged out of his computer and swiftly removed the headset from his curls before tossing the fast-food bag into the trash bin in front of his seat. He picked up his navy-blue backpack that was stationed by his cubicle. "Goodbye, I guess I'm not one of *those* people you thought I was," he said, specifically to Marlene.

Chinedu was headed for the door when he was stopped by Lara. The two had always talked about how much they loved Nollywood and Bollywood films during lunch in the staff room. She had been introduced to both types of films by her fiancé, an engineer from Mumbai, Chinedu had discovered. They would chuckle at how the women in each movie industry seemed so dramatic, and they teased the Nollywood actors who tried to replicate American accents. He loved how he could speak to his supervisor with such comfort and security, something that he was unable to do back home in Nigeria. Lara would tear off pieces of her homemade sandwich slowly every time Chinedu spoke, as if eating her lunch with care was a demonstration of respect for a new immigrant who seemed *lost in foreignness*. In recent days, Lara had stopped speaking with Chinedu, and she would look at the peeling paint as she walked through the halls so that her eyes would not meet his as he walked in the opposite direction.

"So, you're just leaving, like that? That's it? Are you feeling well?" Lara's tone made her sound worried about an old friend.

"I have never felt better. Lara, I've had enough! Today, I have had enough," Chinedu said in his *musical* accent.

"I'm a teacher, I don't belong here."

"Oh, that's right, you have your fancy-pants

master's degree," Marlene said sarcastically and bitterly. She was now behind him, engaged in conversation near the building door.

"Goodbye, you two, and thank you!" A weight lifted off Chinedu that both Marlene and Lara could feel as he walked down the building steps, retrieving his cell phone from his backpack to schedule an Uber ride.

Days passed since Chinedu's dramatic exit from Denison, but the heat from the sun continued to fry the busy Toronto sidewalks and cook pedestrians in the same way it did that day. From his downtown apartment, which he shared with four other roommates, he could often hear the acts of parading and celebrating, and he thought about how removed he was from summer life. After all, he seldom left his apartment and was living off the generosity of his roommates. He wondered if he was experiencing depression, the *sickness of the spirit* that his ex-girlfriend Sanaa had often talked about. When they talked about this subject, Chinedu would say that men could not have depression, and Sanaa would say that statements like that *made* her depressed.

Months passed, and autumn blatantly replaced summer's tranquility. Frustrated by the mechanical procedure of sending resumes and cover letters into an abyss, Chinedu often scoured the internet for free Nollywood movies to watch. He had already applied to many school boards across the country but never received so much as a rejection letter. Beer bottles, wilted fries, and grocery bags decked the floor of the apartment.

One Monday morning, in his short blue house shorts and white tank top, he picked up his phone and logged onto Instagram. He saw his cousin Austin's post about his new job as an engineer. He had posted a photo wearing a purple blazer and a yellow construction hat, accompanied by a caption that thanked his new wife for her diligent support. Chinedu felt estranged from Nigeria in that moment, angry at himself for having left and disappointed in himself for not being successfully employed. "That's it! I'm booking my ticket home," he yelled out to himself. "I should never have come to this country!"

The room was quiet after his outburst as if the

walls of his apartment had been silenced. Defeatedly, Chinedu refreshed his email once more before deciding to turn off his laptop. The email title and sender's name in bold made his heart beat a little quicker out of surprise; it was Marlene Ray from Denison Bank. It was not a potential employer who would validate his credentials and give him something to brag about to his family back home. It was not the notification of an interview that he would later be able to throw in Debare's face. It was only Marlene, and somehow that was enough for Chinedu—enough to make him smile, pause in the moment, and *be* in the moment. He read the email, his eyes dancing across the lines with unexpected delight.

Hey, stranger! It's been forever and a day! I don't mean to ruin your dramatic exit, but Lara found an elementary curriculum handbook when she was doing some cleaning, and I figured it must be yours. You need it? Plus, you still owe me for buying the card for Brian's retirement—that was your job! Speaking of which, any luck with the teaching thingy?

When he had first started at Denison Bank, Marlene had invited him and a few others to go out with her to throw darts and have a few beers. He was appalled at her, at the time, that she could flirt with him and call him her African prince even though she was older than his mother and in her third marriage. What business, he had wondered at the time, did a middle-aged woman have going to a bar, drinking, and throwing darts without her husband's permission? It was Sanaa who had forced Chinedu to let go of what she called his patriarchal ideas, and slowly, with each *Sociology of Gender* lecture she had dragged him to, as well as the passionate debates they would have about misogyny and gender roles, he did let them go.

The email continued.

The hiring freeze is crazy, eh? Listen bud! Nothing good comes easy, but I wish you all the very best from my oxygen-deprived heart (damn cigarettes). There's something out there with your name on it, bud, trust me. Oh, and I would still like to catch a Jay's or Leaf's game with you, beers on me, cause I'm assuming that your

paychecks are all gone with the wind. Boy, you blew up on the customer on your last day, eh? So unlike you, but hey, you never really enjoyed this line of work, and it was a matter of time before you erupted. I always pegged you as a pool boy anyway, even with your fancy-pants master's degree.

Chinedu giggled to himself and thought about his reply to Marlene. He thought about telling her to leave telemarketing for a career in stand-up comedy.

He would make it in Canada after all, he said to himself, just as Marlene had told him he would. Coming to the West and living the *Canadian Dream* was the hope of every little boy in Chinedu's village, including himself, and he certainly could never give up on teaching, his one true passion. Hearing from someone, seemingly genuine, who understood his plight eased Chinedu's frustration, though he detested that so many others mistook his confidence for arrogance. Going back home could wait, he thought, as he readied himself to reply to Marlene. He did not know when or how he would become employed as a teacher. In this moment, all he knew was that a beer with a brazen older woman, over a game that he did not understand, did not seem so bad.

It seemed like the Canadian thing to do.

Acknowledgments

To my good friend Mack, for all the wisdom, laughter, and fellowship.

Author Biography

Kevin Ufoegbune is a psychotherapist, social worker, and entertainer, and is currently completing his PhD. His Master of Social Work (MSW) practice-based research paper at York University focused on intergenerational trauma and psychotherapy within the Nigerian diaspora, utilizing a critical autoethnographic approach. As a therapist, he works with BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) community members, couples, families, and organizations (including the NBA), as well as fellow Christians, addressing issues such as spirituality, addictions, trauma, depression, anxiety, and other challenges. He enjoys singing, hiking, exercising, and cooking. As a television producer, he co-created *Flavours of Africa* on Rogers Television in 2016 with his mother, Mrs. Doris Ufoegbune. The series highlights African and international cuisine, culture, and narratives.

Reclaiming Freedom

The Flavour of Freedom

Kevin Ufoegbune

Abstract

I wrote this poem to symbolise the peace I experience when I visit Nigeria. I have always identified more strongly with Mother Africa. There is an indescribable sense of belongingness, harmony, freedom and completeness people like me feel when they reconnect with their (diasporic) homeland. As a child growing up in Winnipeg, Manitoba, my Nigerian mother taught me my mother tongue, Igbo. I have learned to cook our dishes and perform our traditional dances because of the love for Africa that she instilled in me. I am grateful for the opportunities my family and I have experienced, and I will always long for Nigeria. This poem encapsulates this longing; the longing to be in my homeland once more and for the freedom I experience whenever I return.

Keywords

Homeland, Mother Africa, African diaspora, poetry

Standing regal and proud
Feet on red Igbo earth
My voice makes a sound
I find my worth

This is the flavour of freedom

Mama Africa embraces me
With a scenic sunset
Says I came from her womb
We were fed by her breasts

This is the flavour of freedom

Savoury Jollof
Rich Egusi soup
We own rich histories
Here is my proof

This is the flavour of freedom

I wear Ankara wax prints
And a red chief cap
I am in the birthplace
Of both jazz and rap

This is the flavour of freedom

Sheltered by palm trees
No longer maple
With the love of my ancestors
Once again, I am able

This is the flavour of freedom

The Obi, the King
He welcomes me home
And speaks of traditions
Worth more than gold

This is the flavour of freedom

Acknowledgments

To my dear mother, for sharing her love of reading and writing with me and for introducing me to African folklore, storytelling, and proverbs from our ancestral land. To my immediate elder sister for insight and the enjoyable memories we continue to make.

Author Biography

Kevin Ufoegbune is a psychotherapist, social worker, and entertainer, and is currently completing his PhD. His Master of Social Work (MSW) practice-based research paper at York University focused on intergenerational trauma and psychotherapy within the Nigerian diaspora, utilizing a critical autoethnographic approach. As a therapist, he works with BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) community members, couples, families, and organizations (including the NBA), as well as fellow Christians, addressing issues such as spirituality, addictions, trauma, depression, anxiety, and other challenges. He enjoys singing, hiking, exercising, and cooking. As a television producer, he co-created *Flavours of Africa* on Rogers Television in 2016 with his mother, Mrs. Doris Ufoegbune. The series highlights African and international cuisine, culture, and narratives.

Message on the Bulletin Board

Andrea White

Abstract

This short fictional piece highlights the voices of psychiatric inpatients, as they are coming to a collective consciousness and reckoning with their oppression, loss of social status, and confinement. Also examined is the absence of true therapeutic support, the prohibition against friendships, and the lack of agency psychiatric patients have. The piece can be understood as a critique from the inside, from patients who recognize themselves as an oppressed class. Many of the issues described are from the author's direct observations as a psychiatric patient. **Content warning:** mention of sexual assault, psychiatric violence, police violence.

Keywords

psychiatric survivors, mad studies, disability studies, collectivity, manifesto, fiction

We considered a hunger strike but the young girls with eating disorders were too frail for that, and as angry as we are, we don't want to hurt ourselves.

Isn't that the very thing we've been accused of? Hurting ourselves for drama and attention? Or else we are not hurting ourselves enough to merit any care.

The response is barely a nod or sometimes a card with a hastily scribbled number.

We have had it with your two-way mirrors, medication checks, your ridiculous puzzle games, and questionnaires. Some of us have master's degrees for god's sake. And while we don't understand it, we don't think wearing a hijab is pathological or makes a tiny woman from Syria a terrorist. We submit you are the terrorists, with your million-dollar homes and deep, full leather handbags. Who the hell taught you that empathy is about fake nods of concern as you type type type on your laptop? We are not the mental patients of yesteryear oozing Chlorpromazine and Haldol. We know this is wrong. We learned that we have rights, but you had the audacity to punish our leader who merely pointed this out to us. The very least you can do is stop treating us like infants. The only thing childlike about us is our vulnerability, which you choose to ignore.

One of us lost our disability payments because the chief asshole decided we had a personality problem, not a mood problem (forgive the language but we feel this level of anger is appropriate). We wonder if a personality can ever be disordered, but if it can, surely yours is. Why else would you delight in your ugly, soft-souled nursing shoes and the whoosh of your key fob in the art room. Pipe cleaners? Really? What's next, macaroni and ziti? We want some classical music and some books. We have laughed to the point of, yes, appropriate tears over this.

We nodded in compliance when you said "Walking on Sunshine" by Katrina and the Waves was a more appropriate song to have as a personal anthem. What was wrong with Sarah McLachlan? She is Canadian after all. What is in your music collection? We don't like the way you see us as outside of humanity. Whose idea was it

to put the piano next to the phones? I mean, no one wants to hear manic musical improvisations while trying to talk to loved ones. We do have them, you know. We cannot be reduced like fractions to a common denominator or a fragment of our beautiful complex selves. We do not consider it therapeutic to water the chief asshole's palm tree. That is what you offer for mental stimulation. Oh, and by the way, you aren't fooling anyone by calling ECT "treatment." We know what it is, and we see slices of ourselves seared and our memories scorched three mornings a week. We don't think *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* was far off the mark.

You take from us and offer the mantle of mental patient in return. We all regret falling for the cozy representations of after-school specials, where a wise and kind therapist helps us on the path to self-determination. The only paths you have for us are social assistance and a bed-sitting room with mice in Parkdale. We won't be writing memoirs *Under the Tuscan Sun*. We will be lucky to catch the streetcar to the lake. We find you to be fake and false and utterly disinterested in our actual lives. We tallied up 15 university degrees, 78 years of paid work, 19 children, 7 grandchildren and many aborted identities among us.

You do not see us for who we are. You have reduced us to a mass of human suffering. And we see you recoil at our pain, our ill-fitting clothes, and demands to have forms completed. *We see you*. We remember when one of us stood up at a community meeting and asked if our pain was how you paid for your wife's gaudy gold rings. We remember when our lesbian friend was told to buy high heels and dresses and masturbate in front of the doctor. She won a settlement. We know there are those among your ranks who are like us, but because of luck and money, they never found themselves on the other side of the prescription pad. We know, and we know you know we know, and like some slapstick skit, we all pretend it's not happening.

We think this is dramatic irony.

One of us is a writer and she will reveal what you did. The nurses are not off the hook either.

You think we want to hear about your wedding plans and your tacky dress? We have been transformed into bad seeds, told to be grateful, and expected to be an audience for the ordinary life that our diagnoses deny us. Screw you and your boyfriend in the oil patch. We don't care how many nights you must sleep alone to get that fancy house in the Annex. Our dreams are of a lock on our door, and a washer and dryer in the building.

We know your tricks and reject the selfish offer to become your lapdog and sing a scripted song of gratitude to solicit donations for this bloated monolith of a mental hospital. We are lucky to be given a day-old muffin for our troubles while you pat yourself on the back for being progressive.

As for security guards, we find you too loathsome to address directly. You who get your thrills stripping trauma victims and throwing them in seclusion, who snickered when the nurse explained that this is where we go when we are BAD. You, you are bad. We wish you pain and suffering and a reckoning where you are powerless. We won't be helping you so if you are ever at the supermarket and find your tacky pickup has been keyed—remember—we are everywhere and unless the drugs have done damage to us—we are invisible. We deserve this cloak of sanity since we have been denied so much already. We no longer believe in the promise of society and many of us used to think it was cute to try and forget we were middle class. Now we would give anything not to have to shop at the Sally Ann.

Poverty is an accessory of mental illness.

We are told not to talk, not to fraternize. We reject your interference in our right to associate—we happen to know about the books our people publish. Our observations are not novel. We have kin. We do not recognize you. You betrayed humanity when you labelled and sedated us, when you said we were not like you, and that we do not need privacy. Our friends sobbed with shock at the conditions here. One even called the minister of health about the shit and piss coating the floor and walls of the toilets. We will not be stopping

to let you cross the street, we will not let our children befriend yours. We will never forget.

We twitch and quake and drool and scuff and teeter and clench and you pretend it has nothing to do with the medication. We know better. We are tired of your dismissals and your prescription repeats. We find it a cruel irony that the flexible community treatment team fires any patient that forgets to call every two weeks. We are not violent, you are violent. We are amazed that we aren't violent, given the pain we suffer. Many of us lost everything because we phoned a distress line. Some of us were gunned down by police who could not listen to us. We doubt you would bother to read this. You only know how to filter us through your clinical gaze and overlook us. We have realized that those who go along with your plan die young and swiftly. We reject your labels and will craft our lives our way.

We want to live, and we want to love. We will not be like you, with a wizened heart unable to grasp us as part of you. We are the parts of you that you cannot recognize. Here we are persisting beneath blankets of benzodiazepines and behind curtains of anti-psychotics. We can live without you, but you need us because not being us is how you define yourself, how you prop yourself up. We are backstage changing things up. Enough with the rehearsals. We have seen you and we know that without our charts to cosset you, you are naked and nothing. We will not be clothing you with our misery anymore. Why don't you try mindfulness or take a walk? And if that does not work, call a crisis line. We remind you that there may be long waiting times. We recommend you take a deep breath.

Acknowledgments

For Frances, Johnny, and Melinda who left too soon. And for Roger and Karen who are still here. For Pat Capponi, Don Weitz, Geoffrey Reaume, and Mel Starkman who taught me another way is possible - and for Barry, who continues to love me after all these years.

Author Biography

Andrea Jane White is a PhD student and SSHRC scholar at the University of Victoria. Originally from Newfoundland she spent 8 years in Toronto and now lives on the traditional territories of the Lekwungen people, also known as the Songhees, and Esquimalt First Nations. Her work has appeared in *Asylum* Magazine, and she has been involved in mad pride organizing. She has lived experience of involuntary psychiatric treatment and is working to create peer-led alternatives to conventional care.

Hum Dekhenge (We Shall See)

Shifa Zoya

Abstract

In 2019, protests erupted across India after the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) was introduced just before parliamentary elections took place. The act grants expedited Indian citizenship to “illegal” and undocumented migrants belonging to six religious minorities (Hindus, Parsis, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and Christians) who escaped to India from religious persecution in Muslim-majority Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan before December 31, 2014, even without valid visas or other required paperwork. However, the Act excludes Muslims from availing this benefit, resulting in backlash for the Islamophobic policy. It was introduced along with the National Register of Citizens (NRC), which is a list of people who entered India before March 24, 1971, a day before Bangladesh became an independent country. While the register claims to enable the identification and deportation of “illegal” immigrants, it can only identify, apart from Muslims, those without the required documents, an overwhelming majority of whom are women, the poor, marginalised and Indigenous communities, orphans or illiterate people. The CAA and NRC represent two of the many discriminatory laws and policies that have been used to target Muslims in India in a push for a Hindu nation. In what follows, I reflect on my living with and through these policies as an Indian citizen and work through the question of what it means to be a Muslim in India, especially in the current atmosphere of Hindu nationalism and the erosion of the secular fabric of the country.

Keywords

nationalism, discrimination, anti-minority

I used to say my name with confidence when I was in my teens. Painfully shy as a child, I avoided talking in general in middle school. My mother told me I barely made a sound, even when I cried as an infant. Which brings me to the present.

Most people don't get my name right on the first try. *Shilpa, Sheeba, Shippa*. They don't taste the Arabic that flows through the curves of my name. In South India, where I grew up, people struggle to pronounce the /f/ sound. I didn't mind. Not until they asked me if I was a foreigner. Then I minded. I still do. At the Meenakshi Amman temple in Madurai, my mother, aunt, and I had to fight with the security guards to convince them that we were not foreigners by speaking in Hindi. They even demanded to see our passports, which we indignantly refused to show. It was only my uncle yelling from the other side of the metal detector that saved us. *My wife, my wife!*

Once, a family friend took me to see the gardens outside the Honourable Supreme Court of India in Delhi, where he is a lawyer. One of his colleagues was walking by just at that moment and came over to us. *Are you French?* I was too stunned to respond, so our family friend replied on my behalf. *Arre nahi, yeh desi kudi hai!* (Oh no, she is an Indian girl!).

Other people have asked me if I am French too. It always makes me laugh.

Then what are you?

The ever-present follow-up question, when I deny the above allegations. I always answer softly these days.

Whenever people ask me what my native is, I always tell them I am from Bangalore and that my parents are from Mumbai. In a sense, this is true, although I can't speak fluent Kannada. Every year, my mother would bundle my sister and me up in the Udyan Express train to Mumbai. My father would come to see us off, pressing against the window and pretending to push the train out of the station when it sounded its whistle. He would then run alongside the train, slowly at first and then faster until the train pulled out of the station. My sister and I would press our cheeks against the cold metal, waving excitedly until we

couldn't see him anymore. By dinner time, my sister would have befriended half the bogey, jumping from upper berth to upper berth and coming back with a new friend every half an hour, while I would sit reading by the window.

In 2017, I remember reading about a young boy who was stabbed to death on a train right after Eid shopping, as a fight broke out over seats. People called him a "beef-eater." I didn't know Eid could be so heartbreaking.

My undergraduate Sociology classes were heavy and intense, more often than not. I was always looking for empty benches at the back where I could sit and watch food videos without being disturbed or spotted by the professor. I preferred sitting alone, in my Instagram haze, removed from reality. The classes had more than 80 students enrolled in them, and I was easily lost. In my second year, I decided to participate in a two-day Sociology conference at a faraway location. All I heard was an overnight stay with my friends, but I still had to write a paper to present. Having personally known someone who almost got lynched due to fake WhatsApp forwards about organ traffickers, I felt that was a good starting point for my conference paper. That is, until I discovered a world of WhatsApp-related lynchings in the name of the cow. I presented my paper on a morning heavy with fear, wearing a red *kurta*. I titled it *The Violent App*.

When I was six years old, my father took me to the quiet streets behind our house to teach me how to cycle. Taking off my training wheels, he steadied the back of my cycle while I rode until suddenly, he wasn't. After some time, I noticed and turned back in fear to look for his warm, reassuring hands, but promptly fell off. My father made me so independent that 20 years later, when I sat on my motorcycle, I realised I could go anywhere in that very instant. But I didn't want to go anywhere else. Not until 2019.

A Kashmiri friend asked me – *Why didn't you speak up for us all this time? Why now?* I had no answer. *I was too young?* She was born into

conflict. *I didn't know?* Everyone knew about the “Kashmir issue.” *I didn't know what it meant to be Muslim?*

Then, seriously, why now?

The protests came like a hammer to my conscience. It hurt. I hurt. But why? Especially when I felt like a fake, like I didn't deserve the tag of my community for having lived in blissful peace all these years. The only time I felt Muslim was on Eid when I got Eidi money. I had never claimed my identity outside of filling out forms. I was a hypocrite. So, what was it that brought me out onto the streets when I was twenty-one, after always feeling like I never belonged, a half child of two cities, two cultures, and two languages?

I was angry. The onus of being secular was being placed on Muslims, even though they were the ones primarily being singled out.

The anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) movement in India began ahead of the parliamentary elections in 2019. “*Hum kaagaz nahi dikhayenge!*” (We will not show our papers/documents!) became a popular slogan during this time. The CAA was widely condemned and criticised because of its discriminatory policy, which only excludes “illegal” and undocumented Muslim immigrants from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh from expedited Indian citizenship. It was introduced along with the National Register of Citizens (NRC), which is a list of people who entered India before Bangladesh became an independent country on March 24, 1971. The NRC enables the identification and deportation of “illegal” immigrants, but actually affects those without proper documentation. Protests erupted all over the country as the CAA and NRC together were seen as Islamophobic and anti-minority policies that granted expedited Indian citizenship to “illegal” and undocumented migrants belonging to six religious minorities, except Muslims. This went against the fundamental rights granted by the Constitution of India, where religion was never a basis for granting citizenship in the history of the country since it gained Independence in 1947.

The song that became a symbol of the protests

was *Hum Dekhenge* (We Shall See). It was written in 1986 by Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz in protest against the oppressive regime of Pakistani dictator Zia-ul-Haq. To this day, I am in awe of the story of Pakistani singer Iqbal Bano's famous performance of the song, in protest against the ban on Faiz's poetry. Bano performed in a black *sari* to symbolize her resistance, as *saris* were considered Indian attire. I now realize that I have more freedom to protest as a non-citizen in another country than I do as a Muslim in India. This identity of mine did not haunt me then as it does now. I have had to relearn how to navigate interactions with people and friends back home.

So, I sat down one evening and wrote – *Aap mujhse itni nafrat kyun karte ho?* (Why do you hate me so much?)

This country's best-kept secret.

Let us go then, you and I,
To the *maidan*, one Azad, one Kranti.
Lined with policewomen and men,
With menacing rifles
Propped lazily against closed shop shutters.
Guiding the crowd.
They calmly watched you walk home,
Green poster in hand
Held up in the crowds that chanted,
“*Hum kaagaz nahi dikhayenge!*”
“*Inquilab zindabad!*” and
“*Azadi, azadi!*”
Just a few hours before.
You looked at my poster and smiled sadly.
“*Aap mujhse itni nafrat kyun karte ho?*”
I read your lips whisper.
A TV reporter stuck her mic in my face,
You held my hand as I spoke broken words
That made no sense, in my fear.
Someone has just finished singing “*Hum Dekhenge*”
When you tug my arm.
The crowds of thousands of troubled minds
Almost drown out your voice.
Let us go home then,
You and I.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all my family, friends, and colleagues who have helped shape who I am today and who have given me the strength and courage to be able to write about what plays on my heart and mind. I am also grateful to all those who stood in solidarity against the CAA and NRC and all those who continue to stand up for the rights of those who are stripped of them.

Author Biography

Shifa Zoya is currently doing her MA in Social Anthropology at York University, Toronto, Canada. She is from Bangalore, India, where she completed an MA in English Literature. Having previously worked for an NGO that works on labour rights and migration in Rajasthan, India, she is passionate about bringing about social change and creating meaningful impact. When she is not working, worrying about the state of the world or trying out new cuisines, you will find her reading in sunlit windows and drinking hot chocolate or South Indian coffee. Or sailing out in the sea.

Unyielding Spirit

Sahra Mohamed

Abstract

This poem serves as both a tribute and a powerful reminder of the enduring spirit of Palestinians, capturing their pain, their struggle, and, above all, their resilience in the face of oppression and loss. Through its verses, readers will look into the suffering and hope of Palestine, shedding light on the emotional and physical scars of a land torn apart by an apartheid state. It provides a clear picture of a place where pain, loss, and deferred dreams coexist with an unbreakable spirit. Amidst ongoing turmoil, this poem delivers a profound message of resilience, portraying the fight for freedom as an unstoppable force. Even as the world continues to turn a blind eye, the people of Palestine honor their martyrs, nurture their hope, and hold a steadfast belief that a brighter, stronger future will rise from the ashes of the past.

Keywords

Palestine, resilience, freedom, justice

Unyielding Spirit

Beneath the sun, where shadows fall,
A land of tears, a silent call.
The olive trees still whisper tales,
Of children lost, of dreams derailed.

The streets are scarred, the hearts are torn,
From mothers' cries to graves unborn.
Yet in the dust, a fire remains
The hope of freedom, through the chains.

The world has turned a blinded eye,
As ancient skies watch spirits fly.
But every tear that stains the earth,
Gives birth to voices, claims their worth.

Palestine, you will not break,
Your soul is strong, you will awake.
Through endless night, through endless pain,
Your dawn will come, you'll rise again.

The martyrs' names in silence speak,
Their courage is loud, though their bodies are weak.
No tyrant's wall, no iron dome,
Can silence dreams that still exist.

One day, the flag will fly once more,
And open hearts will reach the shore.
No more will blood be spilled in vain,
For freedom calls, and breaks the chain.

We won't forget, we won't let go,
The seeds of justice, we will sow.
Palestine, your heart still beats,
A future free, where hope repeats.

Acknowledgments

I want to acknowledge the people of Palestine, the people many of us will never stop fighting for, never stop advocating for. You have worked so hard to preserve your land, your culture, and your identity, and we will never forget that. I will never forget that. From the river to the sea.

Author Biography

Sahra Mohamed (she/her) is a Black Somali community advocate and Torontonion. She graduated from the University of Guelph in 2024 with a degree in Sociology and is now an MSc candidate in Human Rights and Politics at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Sahra works alongside organizations like Midaynta Community Services to support underrepresented and underserved groups. Her commitment to global equity has taken her abroad as a humanitarian aid worker, including time in Nairobi, Kenya, where she helped deliver educational resources to marginalized communities. She plans to continue this work in Merca, Somalia, through her initiative Education Africa, which focuses on creating sustainable, accessible education across the continent.