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The Idea Has Failed
By Basman Aldirawi
Translated by Elete

I sympathize with God a lot:
My heart, too, has been let down.
If we could sit together now
we'd share a cigarette. I'd rest my hand on His shoulder, and
we'd cry together until a light rain fell,
washing Gaza of this cloud of smoke
that does not belong to the sky,
stopping the din that kills another child in Gaza
and the blood that's spilling from the world's hand and mouth.
Life will spread across Gaza's chest, and there will be a resurrection:
Not a wound nor a scar on her.
But scars do not die, ya Allah.
I hear Him cry: "A billion silent, a million killed."
The sound of weeping rings out
And though I am no obedient worshiper, I pray.
I remember the faces of families and friends,
the streets, the cities, the sea,
the faces of everyone I've ever met, every day in Gaza.
I pray and I hear His voice, with every explosion and severed limb, shouting:
The idea has failed
The idea has failed

Eman Ghanayem

Proactive Grief

Palestinian Reflections on Death

Abstract: Part memoir, part theoretical reflection, this essay offers one answer to the question "How do Palestinians grieve?" In this narration of the author's mother's relationship to death, her multiple displacements, and her plan for her life, the term *proactive grief* is used to theorize how and why her mother's life trajectory was shaped by her strife to have a dignified death, in other words, to be able to die in Palestine. To illuminate the significance of her mother's approach to death and its relationship to being Palestinian, being refugee, and living under colonial war conditions, this essay also reflects on the difficulty of writing about grief while being personally entangled in its complicated emotions. Ultimately, her mother's proactiveness and commitment to home within and beyond life present an intimate narrative and a family history that could show readers what it means to be Palestinian, to live colonization, to love home, and to face constant threat with dignity.

Prelude: My Mother's Obsession with Death

My mother sits me down very often to tell me about the things she wants to leave me when she dies. My mother, a Palestinian who spent her formative years as a refugee before making her way back home—in the West Bank where she now lives with the rest of my family—is not saying that because she thinks she will die suddenly. She also does not say that politically—that is, in political terms related to her life under war conditions and the possibility of getting killed. No, none of that. My mother has a plan for her life.

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She used to say, "I will die at the age of sixty-three" (she is sixty-six now). She used to hope to die while praying, but sometimes would tell stories about other women where she would say, "She died in her sleep, *masha'Allah*!"—so perhaps she wanted that too? Her plan had a clear trajectory. It had a beginning, a middle that is the present, and an end: death. Death often factors the most in her stories. I know that my grandfather died of cancer, but I do not know much about how he lived. I know that my grandmother hemorrhaged to death because of a medical mistake made during the amputation of her leg, due to a negligent doctor's dismissing her when she reported a stroke, which originally hit her leg, because she walked in the snow, because she wanted to save her trees (you see, a storm was coming, and she did not want them to die). I know all the details of my grandmother's death. I imagine them so often that they actually turned into a memory, yet I do not have real memories of how she looked, or how she was with her trees, or where I was when she died.

My mother would always caution us about how people end up dying when they have remorselessly done bad deeds. I learned about the difference between good and bad through my mother's metaphors of death. She would equate painful deaths to evil life. She often gave as examples war criminals and how they die. She would always say, "Look at X and how many Palestinians he killed . . . now look at how he died." My mother never wished death on anyone except Zionists, especially soldiers.[1] And it was not framed as a threat (not that I need to offer that disclaimer). She would say that because she genuinely believed that any person who is capable of killing others or authorizing the death of others, with full impunity, needs to disappear. Her metaphor for death in that context was "to be taken away." She always wished soldiers to be taken away, before they kill anyone, because they killed someone, or because everywhere they go, they bring death.

My mother always prays for a swift death, but she knows that there likely is a tough path ahead. Like my father, like every senior person in my family, my mother has chronic illnesses. She always says that sickness is an opportunity for redemption. When we are sick, we realize our own mortality—a lesson so impactful that it would remind us to be better humans. Sickness, in that sense, offers us a second chance, or so she would imply. She anticipates that her chronic conditions will kill her slowly. Again, none of this is said in hopelessness. My mother has a plan.

My mother has a plan for my father too. She feared that he would suffer in his death. Her rationale was his eruptive emotion, his inability to easily

let go, which often trapped him into a mental reaction in which he would say something hurtful—something others would have a hard time forgiving. He usually did not remember what he said, which made my mother assume a lack of remorse. I believe that forgetfulness was his way of coping. A sensitive child who was expected to compete for the love of his mother, my father had a lot of unprocessed heartbreak. It led him to a state of constant movement, traveling out of Palestine to study in Lebanon—a challenge for someone who had only Palestinian documents and came from extreme poverty—then to the United Arab Emirates where he worked for twenty years without receiving citizenship rights, then to Jordan, then back to Surif, his home village in the district of Hebron. His difficult journey from poverty to moderate wealth, in pursuit of stability, a near impossibility within the conditions of imminent displacement, led him to a constant state of restlessness. My father's response to tension, to crisis, to reminders of finality and vulnerability always manifested in denial, negotiation, anger, depression, but never acceptance—an unconsummated, almost ritualistic, cycle of grief.[2]

I understand if this part of the story is hard to rationalize. Why would my mother think that her own husband might have a bad death? Why would she tolerate his chronic despondency? And how did that fit into her plan? My mother's fear about my father's death motivated her prayers for years: she prayed that my father finds comfort, that he forgives hurt, and that he lets go of what he cannot control; in other words, that he dies peacefully. Her fear comes from love. I am also convinced that her love is of the kind that, she anticipates, could vindicate her as well. She, by extension, by not giving up on his fate, by not allowing a painful death to occur, by not being a silent witness to the procession of possible tragedy, might also be able to do good, to save another human—might also be able to die a dignified death. Such is a desire that surfaces in the subtext of her conversations, even as it is not outwardly iterated. The rule of thumb for her, in the big picture of life and the point of it, is to always move beyond misery. She will not despair about her life, my father's, mine, and her family's. She has a plan for her life and everyone's. She wants to save us; she wants to be saved by us in return.

Before going further into the point of this story, and other stories about my mother that can expand on its implications, I would like to propose a thesis about grief. My argument is threefold. First, there is an intrinsic tie between grief, hope, and dignity in the setting of death under settler

colonial conditions. I use the term *proactive grief* to name the type of grief that emerges out of these conditions, and which constantly rejects despair even while it acknowledges and works toward an end.[3] Second, I argue that this type of grief implicates settler colonialism and the multiple forms of dispossession that Palestinians experience. Throughout this essay I use my mother's story as a form of ethnography to illuminate a Palestinian epistemology that grapples with the complexity of crisis, death, and mourning in the context of colonial war and constant displacement. Proactive grief intertwines with place and one's relationship to it. It structures itself through a cultivated conviction in origin and the Palestinians' perception of life and death through an Indigenous relationship to Palestine: the place where they strive to be and where they hope to die.

This takes me to my third and final argument. Because I am attempting a theory on Palestinian grief while being intimately implicated in its context, I argue that the process of writing this essay, and about death and colonization generally, is also a process of grief that is complex, cyclical, and unfinalized. For that reason, I am not answering the question How do Palestinians grieve? as much as I am processing it, reflecting on possible answers, and honoring my mother and her wisdom. In that sense I am also participating in proactive grief, which primarily motivates why I narrate a family story in this essay and how I establish my reading as subjective and as motivated by the same set of values I discuss. It is important to say here that, in line with Palestinian anti-colonial praxes against despair, this essay, while speaking of severe death conditions, and while aware of how it could burden its readers or heavily resonate with them, concludes with hope and iterates it throughout.

Proactive Grief in the Journey to Death

My mother's story, and my family's story in general, takes place in multiple locations. To understand how my mother was able to develop her plan for her life, readers have to know certain aspects about Palestinian ways of thinking. My mother's approach to driving is an adequate analogy to use here. She once told me that the best way to drive is to chart out the way in your head before you even run the car. "You have to visualize it in full, every step, every place, every turn, and the final destination, and that will make driving much easier." This is how she put it to help me get less overwhelmed and flustered when I drove in the busy streets of Amman where we lived at the time. Charting out places, visualizing the full map, or planning a

journey with a start and an end reflects what I will describe here as a refugee mindset. Like myself, every refugee or child of refugees I know has expressed a similar inclination to draw mental maps. They can take the form of what we traditionally understand as a map, or they could be a formula, a route, or a set of choices that can help us move left, right, across, and beyond. Sit next to the door in crowded settings, take classes with friends so they can have your back, have an alternative career plan in case you need it, confide your valuable information to someone you trust in case of an emergency, keep your legal documents up-to-date, always save money, and so on. These roadmaps could be for one's day-to-day existence but could also extend to many years ahead.

The refugee's displacement factors greatly in how these maps are drawn. Death comes from anywhere, at any point, and in every imaginable way. In the fact of its omnipresence, it has no place and no time, but also all places and all times. Displacement teaches refugees of the many places of death and the work death does everywhere they turn. To a large extent, refugee displacement does not connote a lack of placeness, as some would think, but instead a proliferation of place. Contrary to popular opinion about what constitutes a refugee and the focus on their homelessness that sets them apart from figures like the citizen or the well-traveled (i.e., "the global citizen"), refugees tend to be hyper aware of place. They know it too well, and they set their memories and goals in relation to it. My mother's plan is to die in Palestine. She hopes to be buried in Der Sharaf in Nablus, her birthplace. Her parents died in Jordan, a full country removed from their original home. The process of transferring dead Palestinian bodies back to Palestine is virtually impossible. This goes in line with Israeli policies that deny Palestinians a dignified death and access to their place-specific mourning traditions (or impose an expense with deep financial and political ramifications for the majority of Palestinian families).[4] Denial of burials in Palestine for those outside it, the confiscation of dead bodies to delay mourning, and the burial of Palestinians in unmarked graves are some of the many ways Israel's colonization of Palestine has impacted our relationship to death and, by extension, life on both personal and communal levels.[5]

My mother's approach to death has always anticipated the possibility that, like her parents, she does not have much control over how, when, and where she dies. Her aspirational death plan, right from its very inception, has involved always achieving the most possible proximity to her

birthplace, which she hopes to be her final abode. In a way, the plan is meant to help her regain some control over her future and, even if symbolically, take charge of her life. Her journey across multiple settings of displacement culminated in a return to Palestine after decades of *shatat*, or diaspora, in Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, and then Jordan again. Such a feat would be almost impossible to achieve today. In the 1980s my mother took advantage of what at the time was known as the "reunion law." This legal opening enabled Palestinians who were Jordanian citizens, but whose spouses had Palestinian documents, to attain legal Palestinian credentials as well. In the process of (bluntly put) hustling her way through this arduous process, the details of which I cannot divulge in public writing, my mother's Jordanian citizenship combined with my father's Palestinian citizenship, and, together, we were able to become both Palestinian and Jordanian. In Palestinian terms, we were able to cross the border between Jordan and the West Bank. I was the only person among all my Palestinian refugee friends in Jordan to be able to travel to Palestine. And, since obtaining this dual status, I have lived in both places.

Like my mother, I learned to map this multi-location existence in how I lived, in my thoughts about the world, and in every life decision I made. Like language itself, my bilingualism, my ability to speak the *fallahi*, or Palestinian rural dialects of both my parents, the dialect of Amman where I lived most of my life, the dialect of Ramallah where I worked, enough of Hebrew to understand soldiers, and colloquiums of the American Midwest where I lived for eight years—are all evidence of proliferated place, of being able to gauge the many words and cultures of human emotion, and of knowing how to communicate them in different settings. My mother's plan, like the intricate language of Palestinian feelings, is extremely aware of the complex relationship between people, place, and life and how the three should interact. In the face of an omnipresent death condition, my mother meets life with a well-cultivated protocol and due respect. She says to the reality of dying: I know you are plural, unsettled, shape shifting, tongue twisting, and supreme, and I plan to carry myself through you with seriousness and gravity. I will never take you lightly, I will never bend your truth, and I know you will happen to me however you please.

In its quintessence, proactive grief is a form of proactive living. In an existence defined by its boundaries, by constant threats of destabilization, roadblocks, enclosures, and expulsions, my mother's plan for her death affirms a complex map of what lies ahead: every possible step, every

possible place, every possible turn, and the ultimate destination. It is a map of life that is not about certainty, or about defying death, but about hope and the constant strife to do good and be at peace. Her death philosophy comes from a place-oriented culture that primes one's origin as the catalyst for one's life struggle and pursuit of happiness, or as my mother would put it, *el-ridha wa hadat el-bal*, contentment and peace of mind. For Palestinians who exist under the cyclical and hard reality of settler colonial dispossession, that origin is and remains to be Palestine—whether in the sense of it being one's actual birthplace or when made through the power of familial memory into a real, felt homeland. Understanding how this point of origination functions in my mother's death plan greatly factors in evaluating the immense significance of her strategy and the overall value of proactive grieving. In my mother's story, her birthplace and her death place are intended to be the same. Such intention defines the aspirational trajectory of everything she does and hopes to achieve. It also plays a great role in how she has structured our family and planned our lives (because, as mentioned previously, she wants us to die a good death too). This becomes most evident in my current diasporic circumstance and the strain it continues to have on my family. Every year I spend in the United States, my family's rarely uttered fear that I may never come back becomes harder to hide. While growing up, my mother often shared her death plan with me because she needed a witness and a listener, but she also used it to prepare me for what later became my own trajectory for life: I, too, want to die in Palestine. Whenever my family's fear of losing me surfaces, I remind them that my plan never strayed from theirs.

I am not saying that my mother's idea of death is shared by every Palestinian mother, woman, or person. But her approach, which was her mother's and now is mine, reflects a recurrent life pattern relevant to her and her family's type of Palestinian displacement among the many that define our collective colonization. My mother's experience with multiple dispersions instilled in her an ethical approach to life that motivated her good actions and her movements. There is much to say about the religious foundation that influenced my mother's outlook, particularly in aspects of "contentment and internal peace." The emotional comfort of prayer, the meditative serenity of ritual, and her unbroken conviction that strife is a pathway to better things—all constitute the contours of her death philosophy. But alongside her Muslim faith, my mother's definition of strife always mingled with her unbroken bond with Palestine that continues to overcome all

obstacles. My mother, in her fifties, once walked through sewage pipes just to visit Jerusalem. When I was in my twenties, she used to have me dress like a minor so I could walk through the checkpoint between Bethlehem and Jerusalem to avoid getting carded.[6] She always insisted "we find a way" to visit all possible places in Palestine, whether they are in the West Bank or the parts of Palestine we are colonially denied. That strife matters. "A form of getting closer to Allah," she sometimes called it. "Our way of earning life," she would add.

I end this section with strife because practicing proactive grief is about understanding the journey to death as demanding ethical and political decisions that prime loyalty to home, family, and people. Return, or *al-awda*, as a concept that motivates Palestinians, their writings, and their political movements not only connotes a desire to return to one's homeland, but it also predetermines the whole trajectory of Palestinian life.[7] Everything my mother did and continues to do pursues Palestine and the preservation of her family's right to live and die there. The grieving process that underlies this mission contends with colonialism and its strong hold of Palestinian lives that often leaves us ambivalent and with minimal control. Like cyclical violence, my mother's strife renews in the presence of new and open-ended displacements, responds to this endless violence, and finds refuge in the certainty of death. Rather than escape the truth of mortality, my mother created a smart death plan that could counteract Israeli settler colonialism and its intention to make Palestinians live and die horribly, unexpectedly, and in degrading form.[8] My mother, in all places and all times, chose dignity instead.

The Process: How to Write Palestinian Grief?

My intention with this essay is to highlight Palestinians' approach to death as an intelligent model of anticipatory thinking and anti-colonial resiliency. To accept death is not a small feat. To accept it within constant daily reminders of how it can be utilized as a colonial tool to coerce and terrorize, and while witnessing the many ways Israelis kill Palestinians, makes hope the more difficult to generate.[9] Personal strife, or *jihad al-nafs*, defines this form of thinking, and the pursuit of a dignified life and a dignified death represents its primary motivations.[10] The original story is simple. My mother was born in Palestine, and she wants to die there. What complicates it is that I was not born in Palestine, but I also want to die there. At what point did her strife become mine? How did this transition happen?

And what does it say about Palestinians and their way of being? These questions influenced how I chose to unravel the narrative and its implications. My mother is the hero of the story, but I needed to establish that I am also there, and so is her husband and the entirety of her family, which includes five children and twelve grandchildren. We are all part of her death plan, and we are all part of her political agenda.

The storytelling itself was the hardest part in the writing process. Establishing a distinction between my parents on the subject matter of death, and then maneuvering a way to highlight my mother's perspective as philosophical and foundational to our family history, required self-examination and emotional vulnerability. There are also parts of the story I could not tell—all the deaths that my mother experienced and all the near-death experiences of loved ones she witnessed that influenced her thinking. I needed to grieve too in the process of writing about her grief. These feelings intuitively but painstakingly emerged out of me as I stared at the page. This was not a performed state of mind but real mental distress emerging from the context of writing this essay: the harsh reality of COVID-19 deaths and the heightened settler, police, and military violence in East Jerusalem,[11] Gaza, and different parts of the West Bank and historic Palestine during the summer of 2021.[12] I was writing this while mourning the distance between me and my family, my inability to hold them, my anxiety of losing them before seeing them again, and the immense strain of a colonization that psychologically and emotionally abuses us.

When I started writing this essay, I used the least formal, least bold font possible. I made it very small and used narrow margins. I figured that way the magnitude of certain words would be lost in the busy pages, the voice would feel less formal, and I would be less debilitated by the stress of having to maintain rationality when colonial violence defies all sense. In the process of writing about grief, I also stumbled on having to define it. I wanted to use my mother's story as a literary text that I could analyze and use as a site for theory making. But I wanted it to be a theory about my family that could explain our relationship to Palestine, my mother's strange activity of recounting her hopes for her death, and how we as a family choose to grieve. In that sense the definition needed to be personal and specific to our colonial experience. Muslim faith factors greatly in how my mother understands life and death, and it combines with a political angle that brings up the question of Palestine, Palestinian belonging, and my mother's unbreakable loyalty to the homeland. The intricacy of her

conviction nuances and defines what it means to be Palestinian, Muslim, refugee, woman, and parent in the way my mother has been. In the larger picture of Palestinian decolonization, my mother's liberatory action is her death plan, which I, her direct descendant, understand as a cultural inheritance. In the telling of the story, I came closer to understanding that inheritance, its deep implications, and why I too have been obsessed with it for years.

It was also difficult to stray from my mother's story and into secondary references and theoretical considerations that shift the attention away from her. I drew a mental map of the story, and I kept to the path that starts with her and ends with her. There are theoretical angles to consider: theories about mourning, grief, and grievability[13] that could expand on my mother's story and, ultimately, turn it into an entry point into a much larger discussion on Palestinians and settler colonialism. I could not go into those paths while telling the story. My mother is the matriarch of seventeen direct descendants, she has lived in multiple homes and experienced immense hardship, and her story represents many others in Palestine and elsewhere. I used the term *refugee mindset* to create an opening for readers who share similarities with my mother. Displacement manufactured my mother's resourcefulness, and it made her more able to anticipate and manage disruptive crises and an unstable life condition. What she does stems from a deep cultural practice. It revolves primarily around grief, but it also represents other forms of knowing: knowing how to live, how to create family, how to mother,[14] how to be Palestinian, how to be Indigenous and refugee, how to be an ethical human, how to be under colonization, and how to be beyond colonization. These implications led to my theoretical juncture in the telling of her story: "Proactive grief is a form of proactive living." It was not a premeditated statement; rather, it organically emerged out of the details of her story. I wanted readers to be reminded that writing about death is also writing about life, that my mother accepts but does not desire death, and that Palestinians desire life strongly, even as they approach it practically. More importantly, I wanted readers to observe (and, hopefully, intellectually participate in) the contradictions that define my mother's life and the lives of many like her: living in the context of always dying, death as a life force, and so on. Like the intricate epistemology that underlies her Palestinian story, the dialectic of life and death that defines her ways of being, thinking, and feeling is a topic that, over the course of this essay, was more accessible to describe through the intuitive pull of storytelling than to theorize as a macro social phenomenon. Rather

than force scholarly sense into the contradictions of living under colonial conditions, storytelling helps me invite readers to know with me, to reflect on the difficulty of life, and to grieve together.

The complexity of what my mother's story potentially and likely represents is equally heightened by the fact that I, the writer, am also her daughter. The close proximity means that I am able to share intimate details about her life and my family's history while also wanting to make sense of them. As a child, my mother's constant mention of death perplexed me, even scared me. The details I used in this essay, the narrative I reconstructed, serve as an investigation, a way to answer why and how she became the way she is. Conceptualizing her approach to death as a plan brings retroactive assurance, and it bridges a mental gap that I needed to fill. In the process of trying to understand her better, I was able to take pride in her and our Palestinian story more. The fear I experienced as a child listening to her talk about dying somehow, here, brought me strength and comfort. I am not writing this essay in a separate space and time from the death condition that determined and will always determine Palestinian life. I write it at a juncture similar in its complexity and incomprehensibility to the many that shrouded my mother's life with existential threat. Many feelings remain unarticulated here. I am writing this essay over six-thousand miles away from my mother, having not seen her in over two years, hindered by COVID-19 travel restrictions and immigration issues to see her, and burdened by a barrage of news from home that has defined the year 2021 for us so far: a war on Gaza that killed 256 Palestinians and injured thousands, including protestors in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and 48 territories;[15] the desecration of Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem during the month of Ramadan; the threatening of hundreds of families who inhabit the Palestinian neighborhoods of Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan in East Jerusalem; great harms experienced by Palestinians who live in West Bank villages near illegal Jewish settlements as they protect their lands from theft; and a heavy-handed suppression of Palestinian voices in the streets and on social media. I write this essay while mourning, as a form of mourning, and to remind myself through the telling of my mother's story that our death always will and should matter.

Conclusion: We Will All Die

Inna Lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un. Surely, we belong to Allah and to Him we shall return is a statement said by Muslims when they hear news of death. The statement is meant to stir, or restir, like sickness does, like abrupt

death, the following epiphany: we will all die. Death begins where words end—complete silence, complete peace after unrest, the conclusion of crisis. My mother's relationship to death gives insight into the relationship between colonial violence and grief. Understanding cultural expressions of grief, such as my mother's, can generate an idea about the feelings and motivations that underlie how those who are constantly confronted with death within and across multiple settings of uncertainty, and who live their entire lives under real colonization, choose to process the finitude of life.

My mother and I recently discussed a new plan that anticipates and could solve the following problem: what should we do if she dies while I am away? She brought up the question anxiously. Because I am always unable to visit my family as frequently as she wants, my mother assumed I would not make the trip to see her. She was genuinely surprised to hear that I had planned for that many years ago. I said that I will immediately book a direct flight to Jordan, take a taxi from the airport to the Jordanian-Israeli-Palestinian borders, take the bus that crosses into the West Bank, take a shuttle to Hebron, take a minibus to Surif, and hopefully be able to say goodbye before the burial.[16] "I will not let it happen without seeing you," I concluded. Proactive grief, once more in this case, intrinsically emerges as a roadmap that affirms mutual dignity under colonialism's constant state of crisis and death. My mother was elated to hear my plan. *Allah yirdha 'aliki, farrahtini*, "God bless you; you made me happy," she said.

For reasons I attempted to understand here, my mother derives freedom, comfort, and joy in planning her death as finely and wisely as she does. In writing her story, I wished to prepare myself for the worst, thus participating in her ritual of early mourning. It is not only the occasion of her ultimate death that saddens me but also the fact that my map might not work or, more accurately, might not be possible in the context of the ambivalences that plague Palestinians all the time. I will, however, take her lead and anticipate every step, every place, and every turn—never hesitating to hope that my final destination and hers will be the same.

Eman Ghanayem is a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Comparative Literature and the Society for the Humanities at Cornell University. Her research examines Palestinian and American Indian literatures, and the larger context of Indigenous and refugee narratives, through a framework of interconnected settler colonialisms and comparative Indigeneities.

Notes

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1 *Zionism* here refers mainly to what is also known as modern Zionism, or political Zionism, the nineteenth-century nationalist ideology whose primary objective was to create a Jewish nation-state in Palestine through colonial means (such as the expulsion of the native population, land appropriation, the creation of Israel, and the erasure of the Palestinian narrative). Palestinians use *Zionism* to connote the settler colonization of Palestine and those who maintain it (in the particular example of my mother's saying, that would be Israeli soldiers).

2 I am here referring to the popular grief model that postulates that those experiencing loss go through five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and, ultimately, acceptance. My father passed away on April 4, 2022, months into revising this essay for the special issue. The reader may want to know that my father passed away in Palestine, as my mother had hoped, and that he was buried in his home village. Those my mother thought would be unable to forgive my father were, according to what she later told me, some of the ones who mourned his death the most. I could not be present in Palestine when he died and during his burial.

3 I use the term *proactive grief* to highlight farsightedness and wisdom in the way my mother and many Palestinians experience death. While writing this essay, I found that Hayder Al-Mohammad's (2019) article, "What Is the 'Preparation' in the Preparing for Death? New Confrontations with Death and Dying in Iraq" reflects a similar approach to the subject matter of death, culture, and war. The idea of preparing for death as he analyzes it also implies a proactiveness enmeshed with a refusal to despair, particularly as relevant to Iraqi cultural practices. In addition, Al-Mohammad discusses the blurring of binaries between life and death, which, alongside many other things, leads to the "dying" exerting much labor for the sake of those assumed to be living longer than them. My mother's death plan falls within that category of labor.

4 Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2020) in "Necropenology: Conquering New Bodies, Psychics, and Territories of Death in East Jerusalem" offers examples of the legal and financial burdens inflicted on Palestinians who wish to bury their relatives in their place of origin and in accordance with religious ritual.

5 These death-related policies have been part and parcel of the Zionist colonization of Palestine since its beginnings. See Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2013, Daher-Nashif 2018, Daher-Nashif 2020, and Wahbe 2020. Achille Mbembe's (2019: 66) concept of necropolitics, or "the power and capacity to dictate who is able to live and who must die," is also useful to engage with here to understand the

relationship between colonization and the violent management of native death. Necropenology (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2020), a Palestine-specific legal delineation of Mbembe's necropolitics, is relevant and useful here as well.

6 Palestinians from the West Bank have a green identity card that limits their access and movement. Unlike Jerusalemites and Israeli citizens, they are required to prove that they have a reason to enter Jerusalem, apply for a permit in advance, and show these documents before entering the city. Minors and seniors are often exempted from this process.

7 Return constitutes a major preoccupation for Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories and in the diaspora. It is a primary cultural consciousness and the driver of the Palestinian Cause (here, the term is often phrased as "the right of return," or *haq al-awda*).

8 *Karameh* or dignity is deeply cultural to the Palestinian People. Randa May Wahbe (2020) offers insight into the humiliation Palestinians are forced undergo in their experience with targeted life-threatening violence. "The politics of *Karameh*," as she frames it, become the means to respond to real and potential humiliation in death.

9 I am not denying that killings occur on the Israeli side as well. However, it is important to point out that the killing of Palestinians is legalized, institutionalized, governed, and made systematic by the Israeli government, which, as Palestinians and non-Palestinian scholars of settler colonialism contend, should be understood as a settler colonial government. My reflections should then be understood as a critique of settler colonial states and governmentality rather than of individuals or individual intent.

10 In Islamic teachings, *jihad*, which is Arabic for strife or struggle, has different forms. *Jihad al-nafs*, or *jihad* of the heart, is the most internal form of strife, and it manifests in the individual's ability to withstand pain and temptation and enact faith in Allah and the work of fate, especially in matters of life and death.

11 Displacing families and neighborhoods and possessing their homes and lands in East Jerusalem has been part and parcel of Israeli policy for many decades. For a historical overview, see Abowd 2014. For reports on violence in the time of writing this essay, see Jundi 2021a, Jundi 2021b.

12 During the outbreak of COVID-19, Israel implemented violent measures that threatened Palestinian lives, which eventually prompted terming Israel "a medical apartheid" state (Rabbani 2021). These measures included Israel's obfuscation of Palestinian health-related activities in their communities (e.g., the destruction of sanitization stations in Hebron), refusing to improve poor health-care accessibility for Palestinians, failing to properly address upticks in deaths among the Arab population, and prioritizing the vaccination of its Jewish population over Arabs. Besides these pandemic-related acts of violence, Israel continued its illegal settlement in the West Bank, its dispossessive practices in East Jerusalem, and its siege and war on Gaza. For an overview of Israel's violence during COVID-19, see the *Journal of Palestine Studies*' summer 2020 special issue "The Pandemic and Palestine," edited by Rashid Khalidi and

Sherene Seikaly. The special issue gives great insight into the many facets of Israel's threats to Palestinian life, medically, politically, and socially.

13 The term *grievable* is theorized by Judith Butler (2009) in her examination of complicated mourning in the setting of war. Imperial wars and the invisibility attached to those deemed "casual deaths" deny oppressed, racialized peoples the world's reverence and grief. Though this idea majorly circulates in studies of grief and mourning, and is incredibly valuable to the study of power, its conceptualization focuses primarily on colonial denials of precarious lives. This essay follows a different approach by giving no attention to colonial perspectives on native lives and instead discusses cultural forms of resiliency that, I would argue, undermine colonial projections—discursive and otherwise. In that sense my mother's life is not predicated on colonial views of it but instead operates above and beyond colonization itself. My approach is inspired by Palestinian and Arab feminists who centralize everyday practices of Palestinian and Arab women and peoples in contexts of wars.

14 I say "mother" here because it is relevant to my mother's experience. But I am also thinking about mothering in the context of care, community, and radical politics. Arab feminist scholar Nadine Naber's (2021) theorization of radical mothering is particularly useful here (see also Naber, Naser, and Strong 2020).

15 *48 Territories* is one term used by Palestinians to name lands that were stolen to create what is now geopolitically bounded as the "State of Israel."

16 For Muslims burials should happen immediately after a person's death. This is another reason that the Israeli government's policy of confiscating the bodies of dead Palestinians (those killed by soldiers in contact zones such as protests) is considered religiously and culturally offensive.

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Gioconda Belli

Translated by J.S. Tennant

Calm Down

Calm down.
Let your hands
rediscover their reptile forebears
to slither
like snakes
across the heavy depths of my skin.

The dome of my temple
is the circumference enclosing
the sacrosanct ark of the covenant.
My ears: minarets
for the dampest canticles
of your tongue.

Reverse the order.
From top to toe
lower yourself
like a thief
suspended from my longest eyelashes.

Slide on the toboggan of my neck
like the seeker who vainly attempts
to square the circle
and, thrown out from yourself,
traverse the taut valley
that lies between my breasts.

In the well-spring of my belly button
place a mercurial kiss
that can wind its way into the deep labyrinths
leading to the memory
of my mother's womb.

From there on in
let yourself be guided by craving
by the greed of your mouth
by your explorer's vocation
in search of the Centre of the Earth.

Be the miner who—gropingly—
discovers the seam of salt
left behind by the sea in the feminine caves
where life takes refuge.
Cling to the wet rose of the winds:
more powerful even than Caribbean hurric
or tidal waves in the Pacific.

Sate your thirst and rage in me,
in the depth of moss and algae
which—moaning—returns you
to the brief, eternal safety
of that lost paradise.

Translating Poetry, Translating Blackness[1] by John Keene

I. "Making Poetry I Feel Only This"

Mandei a frase sonhar,
e ele se foi num labirinto.
Fazer poesia, eu sinto, apenas isso.
Dar ordens a um exército,
para conquistar um império extinto.

I ordered the sentence to dream,
and off it went into a labyrinth.
Making poetry, I feel, only this:
Giving orders to an army,
to conquer an extinct kingdom.

—Paulo Leminski, from "Desencontrários"[2]

I have been translating now for about a decade and a half, beginning not long after I graduated from college, and, at that point, quite badly. I primarily translate poetry and fiction, from Portuguese and French, as well as a little Spanish, though I also have worked on translations from languages I know far less well, including German, Italian, and Dutch.

Unlike many translators I know I did not grow up in a bilingual or multilingual family, nor have I ever had the opportunity to live in a non-Anglophone country, but I was introduced to non-English languages beginning in junior high school, when the school I attended required all students in 7th grade to study French and Latin. In 9th grade I had the option to study Ancient Greek, so I took it, and then I also took a year of German, which was offered at the time, so that by my graduation from high school, I had studied five languages intensively, including English. My school did not offer the opportunity of learning any non-European languages (though it now offers Mandarin Chinese), so on my own from childhood on I have tried to teach myself other languages. I vividly recall being in 6th grade and coming across Michael Coulson's *Teach Yourself Sanskrit* at the Webster Groves

Public Library, and decided I not only must learn Sanskrit, but had to have the book. I will refrain from stating whether it is still in my possession (hint, hint). I also have picked up languages from friends, and so have a smattering of quite a few in my head.

My initial introduction to Portuguese came this way, i.e., autodidaxy, from library books, perhaps as far back as middle school, mainly out of a childhood fascination with Brazil and its people, history and cultures. I assimilated the grammar long before I had ever heard anyone speak the language or could read or speak it myself. In contrast to the usual sequence, I learned Spanish (beyond the little I'd picked on the PBS show *Villa Alegre*) after Portuguese—and of course French, Latin, and so on. Part of my push to learn other languages comes from an innate interest in language itself as a medium, a field, a tool, a site of being and expression and communication. Another derives from a desire early on to connect with other cultures through one of the primary means that exists. I especially wanted to be able to read in other languages, and translation makes it possible for those who cannot to have access to the untranslated texts.

What has been especially important for me as a translator is to focus on areas of literary cultural production that other literary translators tend to overlook for a range of reasons. These include writing, especially poetry, by women writers, by LGBTQ writers, and by writers of African descent, all of which (and whom) tend to be less frequently translated than writing by men, writing by white writers (in multiethnic societies), and cis-heterosexual/straight writers.[3]

nous nous sommes enivrés des clameurs d'une sève frustrée
nous avons rebroussé chemin)
mais ceux qui ont tendu cette embuscade à
nos futurs
nous avons mission de dire
l'étendue de leur
forfaiture

we grew drunk from the tumult of
frustrated sap

we have turned back)
but those who have laid this ambush for
our futures
we are on a mission to share
the extent of their
crimes

—Noel X Ebony, from "Portrait des Siècles Meurtres"

I have translated both poetry and prose, fiction and nonfiction, and find that I enjoy translating poetry much more, though I find it considerably more challenging, because of poets' use of form and the deep resources of their native languages. Translating form and other components of poetry (meter, rhyme, rhetorical devices, etc.) across languages can be extremely difficult—this was, I read, one of the areas on which Google engineers were intensely focusing a few years ago—and every language's intrinsic resonances and capacity for semantic ambiguity and polysemy based on sound, as well as cultural resonances based on historical, social and political contexts, and so on, often mean that poetry in particular can be difficult to bring from one language into another.

As part of the panel at which I initially presented this talk, the organizer, Jen Hofer, invited all the panelists to bring an object representative of our translation work, and I brought a tether, which I also viewed as an anchor cable and lifeline. At first I worried that the literal and symbolic nature of the tether might be too abstract, but I realized as I unearthed it for everyone in the conference meeting room in Missoula, Montana, that I see my translation projects as a lifeline linking me to other writers and cultures across the globe—a lifeline to bring them into English, and to bring and keep us—I and all who read my translations, however flawed—into conversation, communication, and contact.

II. "The Black Ones Have Veiled Names"

> Os negros estão chegando
> com seus padroeiros: silêncio.
> Os negros têm nomes velados.
>
> The blacks are arriving
> with their patron saints: silence.
> The black ones have veiled names.
>
> —Edimilson de Almeida Pereira, "Capelinha"

#BlackLivesMatter is a phrase many of us have seen and read quite frequently over the last few years in response to the state murders of Trayvon Martin initially, and then Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Rekiah Boyd, Sandra Bland, and many other black and brown women and men, girls and boys. What I'd like to raise today is an adjacent issue, which is #BlackNarrativesMatter, or #NarrativesofBlackLivesMatter, or to put it another way: #NonAnglophoneNarrativesStoriesPoemsandOtherFormsofExpressionofBlackLivesMatter.

What am I talking about? For some years now, I have been expounding a particular line from soapboxes I have constructed online and rhetorically among friends, which is that we need more translation of literary works by non-Anglophone black diasporic authors into English, particularly by U.S.-based translators, and that these translations should then be published by U.S.-based publishing organs, including literary periodicals, as well as by publishing houses large and small.[1] I believe this effort is as important for writing from Africa—which would include translations from indigenous African languages into English, as well as from the colonial languages, in which a wide array of literary works are written across the continent—as it is for black Diasporic writers living outside Africa, which is to say, from across Latin America, Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and the Pacific Rim.

To put it another way, I believe there is a considerable body of literature by writers from across the African Diaspora that is not regularly or readily being made available in English, and this, I would

argue, is a longstanding and continuing problem—or, to put it another way, a challenge for translators to address. Most certainly, the United States could stand more—an immense amount more—publication of translations in general, particularly from regions other than Europe, or from non-European languages, though translations in general constitute a tiny percentage of the U.S. annual publication market. According to translator Todd Fredson, this work may be viewed by American publishers as "'fringe' literature," to use Ivorian writer Tanella Boni's term, which is to say, it is viewed as either having limited market potential—thereby marking out as commercially unviable, or depicts a social world that requires knowledge and information that a dominant readership—American readers—are unlikely to possess, and may find difficult to acquire.[4]

But the translation publishing statistics suggest that American publishers may view the majority of non-Anglophone writing as "fringe literature." According to the publishing company Bowker, roughly 3% of all the books published annually in America are translations of *any kind*, including literary texts.[5] The website *Three Percent*, which takes its name from this statistic and which is a component of the University of Rochester's translation program and Open Letter, its translation press, looked more closely at this percentage, and from 2008 through this year has carefully tracked the books, publishers, source languages, and national affiliations of translated literary works, showing that only about .7% of the annual translations fit this category.[6]

Moreover, if one looks carefully *at the works that are translated*, they are predominantly by European authors, writing in European languages, with a smaller number coming from Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the South Pacific. For Three Percent's 2015 database, which features 588 books of translated poetry and fiction published in 2014, an overwhelming majority of the translations came from European authors. To give several examples, there were eighty-five translations of French authors (though only one of the 2014 French Nobel Laureate); sixty-four translations of authors from Germany; thirty-four translations of authors from Italy; twenty-eight translations by Russian authors; twenty-five translations by authors from Sweden and Spain each (three of the latter from Catalan); and fourteen by Swiss authors.

On the other hand, only twenty-five translations came from the most populous country on earth, China, nineteen from Japan, and twelve from South Korea, while only four were by works from India (with translations from Urdu, Marathi, Hindi, and Tamil). Among African countries, less than five were published by non-Anglophone authors from sub-Saharan Africa; the majority of non-English African works came from Egypt, and the bias remains on Anglophone African literature, with a few notable exceptions.

> Um azul intenso devora meus dedos
> e os olhos, inteiros, são de oceano e vão
> e eu estou perdida: não há portas
> mas as chaves persistem,
> pendendo de minhas mãos.
>
> An intense blue devours my fingers
> and eyes whole, they become ocean and flow
> and I am lost: no doors
> but the keys continue
> hanging from my hands.
>
> —Lívia Natália, from "Sometimes"

Among Latin American countries, Brazilian literature saw the largest number of translations with eighteen, followed by Argentina with fifteen, Mexico with ten, Cuba with nine, and Chile with seven. According to the database, in 2014, no publisher issued a translated literary work from Puerto Rico, an American Commonwealth, or from Latin American countries with sizable heritage populations in the United States, such as Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, or Panama. A careful scan of the nationally delineated texts above underlines my earlier point; which is to say, if one takes an even more granular approach, with an eye to racial diversity, the numbers are extremely small.

Looking at the translations of Brazilian literature, only 19th century fiction writer Joaquim Machado de Assis would be considered

black under Brazil's racial standards (though any of the other writers might, like many Brazilians, have some African ancestry). And yet Brazil not only has a sizable number of contemporary writers of self-identified African ancestry, but also has a majority population that self-identifies as black or brown, as well as the largest numerical population of people of African descent outside of Africa itself. Among the Cuban titles, Nancy Morejón, whose poetry collection *Homing Instincts*, and Georgina Herrera, whose book of poems, *Always Rebellious*, were both published by Cubanabooks, are two well known and highly regarded Afro-Cuban writers, but all of the others would, in Cuban terms, be considered white.[7]

A similar situation obtains with Latin American writing, whether the countries have sizable populations of Afrodescendents, like Brazil, Haiti, or Dominican Republic, where they are a majority, or constitute a sizable community (Cuba, Venezuela, Colombia, and Puerto Rico) or small one (Mexico, Uruguay, Ecuador, and Peru). Any survey of the Brazilian writers published in book form in the last twenty years would show that while there have been some exceptions, the overwhelming majority of those translated and published have been and would be considered white in Brazil.

In the case of Haiti, the issue is not that white Haitian writers (few though they may be) are being translated and published in the U.S., but that Haitian writing in general, despite some significant exceptions—and the large and vibrant Haitian-American communities in the U.S.—remains still too under-translated. For the Dominican Republic, whose historical racial complexities I will not tread upon here, a similar situation obtains; far too few of its best-known writers, including acclaimed ones who self-identify as Afrodescendents, have been regularly translated and published. Outside of a few acclaimed journals focused primarily on writing from the black world and African Diaspora, like *Callaloo* and *African American Review*, and anthologies with similar aims, the same problem inheres.[8]

> Oh, simples mujeres nuevas
> simples mujeres negras
> dando el aliento vivo

de una luz nueva
para todos.

Oh, natural black women
natural black women
giving the living breath
of a new light
to everyone

—Nancy Morejón, from "Mujeres Nuevas"

If we look specifically at European countries with significant populations of people of African descent, such as France or the Netherlands, the numbers are fairly small in the case of the former, and minimal in the case of the latter. Some notable Francophone authors, including award-winners such as Marie NDiaye and Alain Mabanckou, and more recently Scholastique Mukasonga, have been translated and published by American presses, but they remain in the minority. For every one of these authors, there are others, like Surinamese-Dutch writer Astrid Roemer, who have almost no works, beyond pieces that have appeared in literary journals, translated into English. In the case of other countries like Germany, to take one example, an acclaimed Afro-German writer Petra Mikutta, who has even lived in the United States, has nevertheless seen almost no English-language publication at all.

III. "The Living Breath of a New Light to Everyone"

Why is this absence of translated black voices significant? One of the ongoing problems, if I can state it bluntly, is that if we already are experiencing serious and ongoing crises in American society in part through the omission, elision, and erasure of, and indifference to narratives, stories, and other forms of imaginative expression, in all their complexity, of black American people's lives and existences—an issue that affects not only black Americans but everyone in the society; as the Native American writer Bill Yellow Robe, among many others, underlined in a talk he delivered at the 2016 Thinking Its Presence conference, the same

is true with narratives, stories, plays, and so on by indigenous peoples, to give another glaring example—we further limit our understanding of the world, in multiple ways, in the absence of black stories and voices from outside the Anglosphere, which is not a coherent whole, but nevertheless is limited in its capacity to convey the breadth of experience of black peoples across the globe. Just as black Americans are hardly a "fringe," neither are black people and voices from the rest of the world.

Were more black voices translated we would have a clearer sense of the connections and commonalities, as well as the differences across the African Diaspora, and better understand an array of regional, national, and hemispheric issues. We would not be surprised, as many were after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, that there were black people in Basra and other parts of Iraq; that Pakistan has its own contemporary self-styled "Langston Hughes," Meem Danish, and that there are long established black communities throughout South Asia; that Aboriginal poets and writers in the Pacific Rim and Oceania have articulated very similar critiques, sometimes deeply influenced by African-American and African Diasporic cultural production, of their societies; that Sri Lankan Tamil writers like Antonythasan Jesuthasan, an actor and novelist who writes under the pen name Sobashakti, meaning "Black Power," invoke liberation-centered critiques in conversation with similar ones around the black world; or that the social and cultural experiences—including the challenges of racism and white supremacy—both French Minister of Justice Christine Taubira and Amédy Coulibaly, one of the terrorists in the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, have faced in their lives mirror what we might find among black peoples across the globe.

Dorothy escuchaba los ecos del have dream
Mientras los blacks panters
Apuñalaban el cielo
En las calles de Harlem

Dorothy was listening to the echoes
Of "I Have a Dream"
While the Black Panthers pierced the sky
In the streets of Harlem
—Mateo Morrison, from "Dorothy Dandridge"

More of us might grasp that in Brazil, there have long been discourses of resistance that draw upon, complement, inflect, and in some cases challenge the prevailing discourses in the Afro-Anglosphere. We might be able to understand with far greater nuance the ways in which race and racism function within the Dominican Republic, and speak and write with more subtlety and care not only about its relationship with its neighbor on the island of Hispaniola, Haiti, but about the relationships between Dominicans and other peoples of African descent throughout the hemisphere, including as they unfold within the context of U.S. society, and in relation to African American history and culture.

And I have not even mentioned all of the non-Anglophone work coming out of Africa. This aporia limits our understanding of the range and complexity of black lives all over the world, and also limits our understanding of forms of living and being, as well as of systems and structures of oppression, based on race (and ethnicity, indigeneity, class, gender, religious affiliation, etc.), have direct parallels globally. To put it another way, we have a truer and fuller sense of the black diaspora, and thus the globe, when we have translations of the vast body of work out there.

What this approach to translation aims for is not only access to new literary works and the linguistic and cultural worlds—which are forms of knowledge to be more specific—for their own sake, valuable though they will be. This is, rather, a call to reconfigure how we think about the world, our neighbors, our sisters and brothers, and ourselves; to see, to listen, to pay attention in new ways, to continue developing lines of exchange. What might happen if through our engagement with these translated works we were able to deepen our understanding of the conversations already underway across linguistic and cultural barriers, while also learning from them new ways to decenter Western and U.S. hegemonic perspectives about blackness and black people, which might include black Americans' participation in furthering that hegemony. Perhaps not only more translators, but more *black* translators, particularly from the United States, will step into the breach to undertake this work.[9]

The more voices we open our ears to, read and hear—acknowledging that the bridges we construct through translation will not be

foolproof—the less likely we are to misunderstand, and thus erase or elide particularities and specificities, and the more likely we are to see connections and commonalities at the same time.

> Et même s'il m'est arrivé d'être emporté par le courant
> d'une rivière
> Dans chacun de mes songes
> Revient ce nom
> Deux syllabes
> Congo
>
> And even if it's come to pass that I have been removed
> by a river's current
> In each of my dreams
> this name returns
> Two syllables:
> Congo
>
> —Alain Mabanckou, from "À ma mère"

***

[1] I believe too that we should have far more translations in general of work from outside the European and European-language sphere, more translations of work by women, by LGBTQ peoples, by Indigenous writers, by working class and poor writers, by writers with disabilities, and so on.

[2] All translations, whatever their faults, are mine.

[3] I should note that have translated work by canonical and less-er-known white writers as well.

[4] Todd Fredson mentioned this concept of "fringe literature" in a proposal to translate Ivorian poet Josué Guébo that he shared with me in April 2015.

[5] “English-Speaking Countries Published 375,000 New Books Worldwide in 2004,” Bowker News Release. October 12, 2005, New Providence, New Jersey. Media contact: dteague@teaguecommunications.com, cited in Esther Allen, editor, To Be Translated Or Not to Be: PEN/IRL Report on the International Situation of Literary Translation, Barcelona, Institut Ramon Llull, 2011; see also Three Percent.

[6] Glancing at the 2015 chart, for example, it appears that all of the texts Three Percent tracked fall into the categories of fiction and poetry; not a single one is listed as drama, or creative nonfiction.

[7] I offer these racial categorizations with the full acknowledgment that the racial and ethnic genealogies and histories of Brazil and Cuba, along with every other country in the Americas, are complex, and understandings of “race” and racial affiliation in the United States should not be considered the standard for any other country.

[8] Additionally, as Tiffany Higgins noted at a 2016 Associated Writing Programs panel on “Brazil Women Writers,” in some cases when literary periodicals, like *Granta*, for example have published issues heralding the “best” new writing in national terms, they have failed to publish a single self-identified black writer.

[9] The challenges of cultivating and supporting more black literary translators, particularly in the United States, is a topic for another essay.

Living Between Languages
Sylvia Molloy

FAMILY ROMANCE

Like many English immigrants of her generation, my grandmother, my father's mother, spoke bad Spanish. She had trouble remembering the word for teapot and, much to her son's glee, would ask not for a *tetera* but a *tetada*, a titty, of tea. It upset her that I didn't speak English very early on, that Spanish was my first language. I think it also upset her that my father had married an "Argentine girl." It never occurred to her that my father was himself an "Argentine boy"; she just did not think of him that way. Immigrants and their offspring, regardless of their place of birth, were thought of in terms of language; they were their language. My mother had lost the French of her childhood; she was monolingual, left out in the cold, therefore Argentine. My father spoke English with his mother and sisters, Spanish with his wife and friends. Sometimes people called him *che*, *inglés*. My grandmother died when I was four: I remember visiting her shortly before her death, I remember saying something to her, I don't know in what language. This not knowing what language I used needles me. In fact, I have used the episode on two occasions in fiction: in one version, the child speaks English and makes his grandmother happy before she dies; in the other, the child refuses.

TERRITORY

Each language has its territory, its appropriate time, its rank. The school I went to as a child was divided in two: English in the morning, Spanish in the afternoon. It was, therefore, a bilingual school, but everybody thought of it as an English institution, *un colegio inglés*. This was due no doubt to the prestige attached to the term, but also to the rules of the school. If a student was caught speaking Spanish in the morning, she was punished. She had to go to the principal's office, where she signed a black book, which turned out to be a tatty little black notebook, less ominous than it sounded. If you signed three times, however, you were

expelled. Other serious offenses that led to signing the black book and to eventual banishment: wearing your socks rolled down, having your hair untied, or cheating on a test. These were serious offenses (as arbitrary as mortal sins in the Catholic church) but to speak Spanish during the English morning period may well have been the worst. In the afternoon, classes were taught in Spanish. If someone spoke English, no one cared; there was no punishment. Compared to English, Spanish was a lackluster language, at least for those of us who brought it from home. As the mother, in Freud, Spanish was *certissima*. My parents admired this pedagogical system, not just because of the clear-cut division of linguistic time and space but because English was taught to students in the morning, "when their minds are fresher." They scolded me, scolded us, my sister and me, if we mixed. Our home mimicked the lines drawn by the family romance: Spanish with the mother, English with the father. A mixture of both (when nobody heard us) between sisters, a private language of sorts. I recognized that very same mixture not too long ago, in Buenos Aires, in a shop selling *artesanías* and indigenous art. Two well-dressed women, roughly my age, are fingering some alpaca wool scarves while speaking to each other: "This one will look good on him, *no te parece*, but it's quite expensive, *che, no quiero gastar tanto*, *después de todo*, I don't know him that well." The switching is effortless: it may have its rules but I, as a speaker, am unaware of them, I can switch *pero no puedo analizar*. I tell myself: these women must have gone to the same school I did, and now that their parents are not around, they mix.

PUNCTUM

Why do I speak of bilingualism, of my bilingualism, in only one language, and why am I doing it right now in English? An earlier version of this text was in Spanish: it came more naturally at the time, I don't exactly know why. Another question: How do you translate bilingualism, how do you convert the switching so that the effect of two languages working on each other, against each other, remains? Unavoidably, one must always be bilingual from one language, the *heimlich* one, if only for a moment, since *heim* or home can change:

let's say one is bilingual from the language one settles into first, if only temporarily—the language of fleeting self-recognition. This does not mean the language in which one feels more at ease, or the language one speaks the best, much less the language one has chosen to write in. There is (rather, one chooses) a point of support, and from that point one establishes a relation with the other language as absence, or rather as shadow, the object of linguistic desire. Although she has two languages, the bilingual subject always speaks as if she were lacking something, in a permanent state of need. (I think of this last phrase in French: *état de besoin*. Among other things, the expression describes the state of an addict in need of a fix.)

ANIMAL TALK

What language do I use to speak to my pets, a friend wants to know? Never in French, I shoot right back, sure of myself. Maybe because French never quite became a home language for me, and animals are very much part of the home. I think some more and add that maybe I speak in English because I like speaking nonsense to them and call them silly names when no one is around, and nonsense comes naturally in English. But no, that's not quite the case, I add, I must talk to them in both English and Spanish because I often call the dog *mamita linda*, and as you can well imagine, I never called anyone in my life "pretty mama," I wouldn't be caught dead, but with animals one can afford to be cute or *cursi*, whatever. As for speaking nonsense, I guess it's not just limited to English because I used to call one of my hens, for quite some time, *Curuzú Cuatiá*. Don't ask me why: it's the Indian name of a town in an Argentine province, yet it sounded just right and made me cackle. Yes, I do speak Spanish to my chickens, I conclude without hesitation, and see the surprise in my friend's eyes. He did not know I had chickens. They come running to me when I call out, "*Chicas, a comer!*" and when I put them to bed at night I sing, "*A la cama, a la cama, a la cama con Porcel*" as they march into their coop. This I say as if confessing a serious sin; I who was never a fan of Jorge Porcel, one of the most vulgar and sexist entertainers in the history of Argentine television who did, indeed, invite young women to bed. My friend

laughs and—I think—understands. But then, do they know about Porcel in Puerto Rico?

SPEAKING FROM DIFFERENT PLACES

To be bilingual is to speak fully aware that what is being said is always being said in another place, in many other places. This awareness of the inherent strangeness of all communication, this knowing that what is being said is always necessarily alien, that speaking always implies insufficiency and above all else doubling, if not duplicity (there is always another way of saying it), is applicable to any language in itself, but in our need for transparency and contact we tend to forget it. The explicit, often messy bilingualism of the subject wielding more than one language—through a habit or laziness, as a provocation, for aesthetic needs, sometimes simultaneously, sometimes sequentially—renders that otherness patent. That is the bilingual subject's privilege; it is also her undoing. I recall what Nabokov says of his passage to English: in translating *Despair* he discovers he can use English as "a wistful standby" for Russian. Replacing one language for another is not devoid of melancholy: "I still feel the pangs of that substitution." I also remember that, many years ago, before I left Argentina, I found a memorable phrase in a text by Valery Larbaud. In a list of recommendations to potential writers, he advised them to "*donner un air étranger a ce qu'on écrit*." The advice struck me as brilliant: it turned what I considered a fault into an advantage, uncomfortable to be sure, but an advantage nonetheless. It gave me permission to write "in translation." And so, I did, and continue to do so.

LAPSUS

In what language does one wake up? When I'm away from home, traveling, and the phone rings, I answer half asleep, trying to do so in the right language, the language spoken there, wherever that is. If I don't, I feel I've made a bad blunder, I've been careless, have been caught off guard. I've allowed something that usually remains unseen to be seen—something literally obscene—and I don't quite know what

that is. It's as if I had been caught in a compromising position. One morning, still half asleep, I started speaking to the woman lying next to me and she kept smiling while I became impatient, as if I were dealing with a deaf person. It was like one of those dreams in which you think you're saying something but the sounds never come out of your mouth. Suddenly I woke up completely and realized that I had been speaking to her in the other language, the language she did not know. I never found out what it was that I really wanted to tell her. And why do I say "really?"

THE WRITING LESSON

In terms of writing, how and by what means does the bilingual subject enter the written language? The nineteenth-century Cuban slave Juan Francisco Manzano—who, it could be said, was bilingual since he spoke both his own hybrid Spanish and the cultivated Spanish read and spoken by his master—teaches himself to write by literally tracing the writing of the other. That second language, the neoclassical, literary Spanish, becomes his own for poetry, yet when he writes down his life, at his master's bidding, he goes back to his other Spanish, the messy one. I remember similar exercises in mimesis. When I wrote my first book in French, I tried to imitate the writing of my dissertation adviser, paying close attention to the idioms that peppered his discourse: for example, *qu'à cela ne tienne*. Then, when I wrote my first texts in Spanish, I filtered—the verb is not excessive—everything I wanted to say through my readings of Borges. When I wrote my first book in English, though, I trained for the exercise like an athlete. Until then, English had been a practical language, destined for the everyday life of exile, and the language of affections, past and present. It was also the language of memory, mainly the memory of my father. To regain ease in written English—ease and authority—I did not follow prestigious examples but practiced a *bric-à-brac* effect. I would write words on bits of paper, expressions, clauses (usually adversatives) that I liked and wished to use, a little as if I were plagiarizing; instead of *tout compte fait* or *qu'à cela ne tienne*, it was now *notwithstanding*, *hitherto*, *despite*, *conversely*. It was an adventure in translation.

I have written the keyword: translation. I will not dwell on its

implications, just mark its power for the bilingual subject as a permanent reminder of the "being in between" that marks her speech, her writing, her tenuous life. And while on the subject of translation, one last anecdote. Many years ago, back in Argentina after many years spent in France and before I attempted to write anything of my own in Spanish, I entered two translation contests together with a friend. One was a translation from French to Spanish (Jean Paulhan), the other from English to Spanish (Virginia Woolf). When we were done (it was a collaborative venture), we had to choose a pseudonym. My friend always claimed that I got depressed when I translated, looked gloomier than an impending storm, *qué cara de tormenta, che*. I had just finished reading *Tropic of Cancer* and treasured the scene in the Paris bordello where the narrator's friend, the Indian Nanantatee, defecated in the bidet because he had no idea what a bidet was for: it was a culturally alien artifact. My friend and I chose "Gloomy Nonentity" for a pseudonym. We won both translation prizes. Today, I would certainly not use that adjective to qualify the task of the translator, or the life of the bilingual subject, I would look for something more upbeat because, for all its inconveniences, it is part of me. I might, however, keep the noun.

Translated from Spanish by Sylvia Molloy

WILD GEESE

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

There must be a kind of painting totally free of the dependence on the figure —or object—which, like music, illustrates nothing, tells no story, and launches no myth. Such painting would simply evoke the incommunicable kingdoms of the spirit, where dream becomes thought, where line becomes existence.

— Michel Seuphor

It's with such profound happiness. Such a hallelujah. Hallelujah, I shout, hallelujah merging with the darkest human howl of the pain of separation but a shout of diabolic joy. Because no one can hold me back now. I can still reason—I studied mathematics, which is the madness of reason—but now I want the plasma—I want to eat straight from the placenta. I am a little scared: scared of surrendering completely because the next instant is the unknown. The next instant, do I make it? or does it make itself? We make it together with our breath. And with the flair of the bullfighter in the ring.

Let me tell you: I'm trying to seize the fourth dimension of this instant-now so fleeting that it's already gone because it's already become a new instant-now that's also already gone. Every thing has an instant in which it is. I want to grab hold of the *is* of the thing. These instants passing through the air I breathe: in fireworks they explode silently in space. I want to possess the atoms of time. And to capture the present, forbidden by its very nature: the present slips away and the instant too, I am this very second forever in the now. Only the act of love—the limpid star-like abstraction of feeling—captures the unknown moment, the instant hard as crystal and vibrating in the air and life is this untellable instant, larger than the event itself: during love the impersonal jewel of the moment shines in the air, the strange glory of the body, matter made feeling in the trembling of the instants—and the feeling is both immaterial and so objective that it seems to happen outside your body, sparkling on high, joy, joy is time's material and the essence of the instant. And in the instant is the *is* of the instant. I want to seize my *is*. And like a bird I sing hallelujah into the air. And my song belongs to no one. But no passion suffered in pain and love is not followed by a hallelujah.

Is my theme the instant? the theme of my life. I try to keep up with it, I divide thousands of times into as many times as the number of instants running by, fragmented as I am and the moments so fragile—my only vow is to life born with time and growing along with it: only in time itself is there room enough for me.

All of me is writing to you and I feel the taste of being and the taste-of-you is as abstract as the instant. I also use my whole body when I paint and set the bodiless upon the canvas, my whole body wrestling with myself. You don't understand music: you hear it. So hear me with your whole body. When you come to read me you will ask why I don't keep to painting and my exhibitions, since I write so rough and disorderly. It's because now I feel the need for words—and what I'm writing is new to me because until now my true word has never been touched. The word is my fourth dimension.

Today I finished the canvas I told you about: curves that intersect in fine black lines, and you, with your habit of wanting to know why— I'm not interested in that, the cause is past matter—will ask me why the fine black lines? because of the same secret that now makes me write as if to you, writing something round and rolled up and warm, but sometimes cold as the fresh instants, the water of an ever-trembling stream. Can what I painted on this canvas be put into words? Just as the silent word can be suggested by a musical sound.

I see that I've never told you how I listen to music—I gently rest my hand on the record player and my hand vibrates, sending waves through my whole body: and so I listen to the electricity of the vibrations, the last substratum of reality's realm, and the world trembles inside my hands.

And so I realize that I want the vibrating substratum of the repeated word sung in Gregorian chant. I'm aware that I can't say everything I know, I only know when painting or pronouncing, syllables blind of meaning. And if here I must use words, they must bear an almost merely bodily meaning. I'm struggling with the last vibration. To tell you of my substratum I make a

sentence of words made only from instants-now. Read, therefore, my invention as pure vibration with no meaning beyond each whistling syllable, read this: “with the passing of the centuries I lost the secret of Egypt, when I moved in longitudes, latitudes, and altitudes with the energetic action of electrons, protons, and neutrons, under the spell of the word and its shadow.” What I wrote you here is an electronic drawing without past or future: it is simply now.

I must also write to you because you harvest discursive words and not the directness of my painting. I know that my phrases are crude, I write them with too much love, and that love makes up for their faults, but too much love is bad for the work. This isn’t a book because this isn’t how anyone writes. Is what I write a single climax? My days are a single climax: I live on the edge.

In writing I can’t manufacture something as in painting, when I use my craft to mix a color. But I’m trying to write to you with my whole body, loosing an arrow that will sink into the tender and neuralgic centre of the word. My secret body tells you: dinosaurs, ichthyosaurs, and plesiosaurs, meaning nothing but their sound, though this doesn’t dry them out like straw but moistens them instead. I don’t paint ideas, I paint the unattainable “forever.” Or “for never,” it amounts to the same. More than anything else, I paint painting. And more than anything else, I write you hard writing. I want to grab the word in my hand. Is the word an object? And from the instants I extract the juice of their fruits. I must deprive myself to reach the core and seed of life. The instant is living seed.

The secret harmony of disharmony: I don’t want something already made but something still being tortuously made. My unbalanced words are the wealth of my silence. I write in acrobatics and pirouettes in the air—I write because I so deeply want to speak. Though writing only gives me the full measure of silence.

And if I say “I” it’s because I dare not say “you,” or “we” or “one.” I’m forced to the humility of personalizing myself belittling myself but I am the

are-you.

Yes, I want the last word which is also so primary that it gets tangled up with the unattainable part of the real. I'm still afraid to move away from logic because I fall into instinct and directness, and into the future: the invention of today is the only way to usher in the future. Then it's the future, and any hour is your allotted hour. So what's the harm of moving away from logic? I deal in raw materials. I'm after whatever is lurking beyond thought. No use trying to pin me down: I simply slip away and won't allow it, no label will stick. I'm entering a very new and genuine chapter, curious about itself, so appealing and personal that I can't paint it or write it. It's like moments I had with you, when I would love you, moments I couldn't go past because I descended into their depths. It's a state of touching the surrounding energy and I shudder. Some mad, mad harmony. I know that my gaze must be that of a primitive person surrendered completely to the world, primitive like the gods who only allow the broad strokes of good and evil and don't want to know about good tangled up like hair in evil, evil that is good.

I pin down sudden instants that carry within them their own death and others are born—I pin down the instants of metamorphosis and there's a terrible beauty to their sequence and concurrence.

Now day is breaking, a dawn of white mist on the sands of the beach. Everything is mine, then. I barely touch food, I don't want to awaken beyond the day's awakening. I'm growing with the day that as it grows kills in me a certain vague hope and forces me to look the hard sun straight in the face. The gale blows and scatters my papers. I hear that wind of cries, the death rattle of a bird open in oblique flight. And I here impose upon myself the severity of a taut language, I impose upon myself the nakedness of a white skeleton free of humours. But the skeleton is free of life and while I live I shudder all over. I won't reach the final nakedness. And I still don't want it, apparently.

This is life seen by life. I may not have meaning but it is the same lack of meaning that the pulsing vein has.

I want to write to you like someone learning. I photograph each instant. I deepen the words as if I were painting, more than an object, its shadow. I don't want to ask why, you can always ask why and always get no answer —could I manage to surrender to the expectant silence that follows a question without an answer? Though I sense that some place or time the great answer for me does exist.

And then I shall know how to paint and write, after the strange but intimate answer. Listen to me, listen to the silence. What I say to you is never what I say to you but something else instead. It captures the thing that escapes me and yet I live from it and am above a shining darkness. One instant leads me numbly to the next and the athematic theme unfurls without a plan but geometric like the successive shapes in a kaleidoscope.

I slowly enter my gift to myself, splendor ripped open by the final song that seems to be the first. I enter the writing slowly as I once entered painting. It is a world tangled up in creepers, syllables, woodbine, colors and words— threshold of an ancestral cavern that is the womb of the world and from it I shall be born.

And if I often paint caves that is because they are my plunge into the earth, dark but haloed with brightness, and I, blood of nature— extravagant and dangerous caves, talisman of the Earth, where stalactites, fossils and rocks come together, and where the animals mad by their own malign nature seek refuge. The caves are my hell. Forever dreaming cave with its fogs, memory or longing? eerie, eerie, esoteric, greenish with the slime of time. Inside the dark cave glimmer the hanging rats with the cruciform wings of bats. I see downy and black spiders. Mice and rats run frightened along the ground and up the walls. Between the rocks the scorpion. Crabs, just like themselves since prehistory, through deaths and births, would look like threatening beasts if they were the size of a man. Old cockroaches crawl in the murky light. And all of this is me. All is weighted with sleep when I

paint a cave or write to you about it—from outside it comes the clatter of dozens of wild horses stamping with dry hoofs the darkness, and from the friction of the hoofs the rejoicing is freed in sparks: here I am, I and the cave, in the very time that will rot us.

I want to put into words but without description the existence of the cave that some time ago I painted—and I don't know how. Only by repeating its sweet horror, cavern of terror and wonders, place of afflicted souls, winter and hell, unpredictable substratum of the evil that is inside an earth that is not fertile. I call the cave by its name and it begins to live with its miasma. I then fear myself who knows how to paint the horror, I, creature of echoing caverns that I am, and I suffocate because I am word and also its echo.

But the instant-now is a firefly that sparks and goes out, sparks and goes out. The present is the instant in which the wheel of the speeding car just barely touches the ground. And the part of the wheel that still hasn't touched, will touch in that immediacy that absorbs the present instant and turns it into the past. I, alive and glimmering like the instants, spark and go out, alight and go out, spark and go out. It's just that whatever I capture in me has, when it's now being transposed into writing, the despair that words take up more instants than the flash of a glance. More than the instant, I want its flow.

A new era, this my own, and it announces me right away. Am I brave enough? For now I am: because I come from the suffering afar, I come from the hell of love but now I am free of you. I come from afar—from a weighty ancestry. I who come from the pain of living. And I no longer want it. I want the vibration of happiness. I want the impartiality of Mozart. But I also want inconsistency. Freedom? it's my final refuge, I forced myself to freedom and I bear it not like a talent but with heroism: I'm heroically free. And I want the flow.

What I write to you is not comfortable. I don't impart confidences. Instead I metallize myself. And I'm not comfortable for you and for me; my word bursts into the space of the day. What you will know of me is the shadow of

the arrow that has hit its target. I shall only vainly grasp a shadow that takes up no room in space, and what barely matters is the dart. I construct something free of me and of you—this is my freedom that leads to death.

In this instant-now I'm enveloped by a wandering diffuse desire for marvelling and millions of reflections of the sun in the water that runs from the faucet onto the lawn of a garden all ripe with perfumes, garden and shadows that I invent right here and now and that are the concrete means of speaking in this my instant of life. My state is that of a garden with running water. In describing it I try to mix words that time can make itself. What I tell you should be read quickly like when you look.

Now it's day and suddenly again Sunday in an unexpected eruption. Sunday is a day of echoes—hot, dry, and everywhere buzzings of bees and wasps, cries of birds and the distance of paced hammer blows—where do the echoes of Sunday come from? I who loathe Sunday because it's hollow. I, who want the most primary thing because it's the source of generation—I who long to drink water at the source of the spring—I who am all of this, must by fate and tragic destiny only know and taste the echoes of me, because I cannot capture the me itself. I am in a stupefying, trembling, marvel expectation, my back turned to the world, and somewhere the innocent squirrel escapes. Plants, plants. I snooze in the summer heat of the Sunday that has flies circling the sugar-bowl. A boast of colors, that of Sunday, and ripe splendor. And all this I painted some time ago and on another Sunday. And here is that once-virgin canvas, now covered by ripe colors. Bluebottle flies glitter in front of my window open to the air of the torpid street. The day seems like the smooth stretched skin of a fruit that in a small catastrophe the teeth tear, its liquor drains. I'm afraid of the accursed Sunday that liquidifies me.

To remake myself and remake you I return to my state of garden and shadow, cool reality, I barely exist and if I exist it's with delicate caution. Around the shadow is a heat of abundant sweat. I'm alive. But I feel that I have yet to reach my limits, borders with what? without borders, the adventure of dangerous freedom. But I take risks, I live taking risks. I'm

full of acacias swaying yellow, and I who have barely started my journey, I start it with a sense of tragedy, guessing toward which lost ocean my steps of life are leading. And madly I take control of the recesses of myself, my ravings suffocate me with so much beauty. I am before, I am almost, I am never. And all of this I won when I stopped loving you.

I write to you as an exercise in sketching before painting. I see words. What I say is pure present and this book is a straight line in space. It's always current, and a camera's photometer opens and immediately closes, but keeping within it the flash. Even if I say "I lived" or "I shall live" it's present because I'm saying them now.

I also started these pages with the goal of preparing myself for painting. But now I'm overwhelmed by the taste of words, and almost free myself from the dominion of paint; I feel a voluptuousness in going along creating something to tell you. I'm living the initiation ceremony of the word and my gestures are hieratic and triangular.

Yes, this is life seen by life. But suddenly I forget how to capture whatever is happening, I don't know how to capture whatever exists except by living here each thing that arises and no matter what it is: I am almost free of my errors. I let the free horse run fiery. I, who trot nervously and only reality delimits me.

And when the day reaches its end I hear the crickets and become entirely replete and unintelligible. Then I live the blue daybreak that comes with its bulge full of little birds—I wonder if I'm giving you an idea of what a person goes through in life? And every thing that occurs to me I note to pin it down. For I want to feel in my hands the quivering and lively nerve of the now and may that nerve resist me like a restless vein. And may it rebel, that nerve of life, and may it contort and throb. And may sapphires, amethysts and emeralds spill into the dark eroticism of abundant life: because in my darkness quakes at last the great topaz, word that has its own light.

I am now listening to a sylvan music, almost just drumming and rhythm that comes from a neighboring house where young junkies live the present. Another instant of incessant, incessant rhythm, and something terrible happens to me.

It's that I shall pass because of the rhythm into its paroxysm—I shall pass to the other side of life. How can I tell you this? It's terrible and threatens me. I feel that I can no longer stop and I'm scared. I try to distract myself from the fear. But the real hammering stopped long ago: I'm being the incessant hammering in me. From which I must free myself. But I can't: the other side of me calls me. The footsteps I hear are my own.

As if ripping from the depths of the earth the knotted roots of a rare tree, that's how I write to you, and those roots as if they were powerful tentacles like voluminous naked bodies of strong women entwined by serpents and by carnal desires for fulfilment, and all this is the prayer of a black mass, and a creeping plea for amen: because the bad is unprotected and needs the approval of God: that is creation.

Could I have gone without feeling it to the other side? The other side is a throbbingly hellish life. But there is the transfiguration of my terror: so I give myself over to a heavy life all in symbols heavy as ripe fruits. I choose mistaken resemblances but that drag me through the tangle. A trace memory of the common sense of my past keeps me brushing against this side here. Help me because something is coming toward me and laughing at me. Quick, save me.

But no one can give me their hand to help me out: I must use great strength —and in the nightmare, with a sudden wrench, I finally fall face-down on this side here. I let myself lie tossed upon the rustic earth, exhausted, heart still beating madly, breathing in great retchings. Am I safe? I wipe my damp brow. I get up slowly, try to take the first steps of a weak convalescence. I'm managing to get my balance.

No, all this isn't happening in real facts but in the domain of—of an art? yes, of an artifice through which a most delicate reality arises which comes to exist in me: the transfiguration happened to me.

But the other side, from which I barely escaped, became sacred and I confide my secret to no one. It seems to me that in a dream I swore a pledge on the other side, a blood oath. No one will know anything: what I know is so volatile and nearly inexistent that it is between me and I.

Am I one of the weak? a weak woman possessed by incessant and mad rhythm? if I were solid and strong would I even have heard the rhythm? I find no answer: I am. This is all that comes to me from life. But what am I? the answer is just: what am I. Though I sometimes scream: I no longer want to be I! but I stick to myself and inextricably there forms a tessitura of life.

May whoever comes along with me come along: the journey is long, it is tough, but lived. Because now I am speaking to you seriously: I am not playing with words. I incarnate myself in the voluptuous and unintelligible phrases that tangle up beyond the words. And a silence rises subtly from the knock of the phrases.

So writing is the method of using the word as bait: the word fishing for whatever is not word. When this non-word—between the lines— takes the bait, something has been written. Once whatever is between the lines is caught, the word can be tossed away in relief. But that's where the analogy ends: the non-word, taking the bait, incorporates it. So what saves you is writing absentmindedly.

I don't want to have the terrible limitation of those who live merely from what can make sense. Not I: I want an invented truth.

What shall I tell you? I shall tell you the instants. I go too far and only then do I exist and in a feverish way. What a fever—will I one day manage to stop living? woe is me, who dies so much. I follow the tortuous path of

roots bursting the earth, I have a gift for passion, in the bonfire of a dry trunk I contort in the blaze. To the span of my existence I give an occult meaning that goes beyond me. I'm a concomitant being: I gather in me time past, the present and the future, the time that pulses in the tick-tock of the clocks.

To interpret myself and formulate me I need new signs and new articulations in shapes found on this side and beyond my human story. I transfigure reality and then another dreaming and sleepwalking reality, creates me. And all of me rolls and as I roll on the ground I add to myself in leaves, I, anonymous work of an anonymous reality only justifiable as long as my life lasts. And then? then all that I lived will be a poor superfluity.

But for the time being I am in the centre of everything that screams and teems. And it's subtle as the most intangible reality. For now time is the duration of a thought.

This contact with the invisible nucleus of reality is of such purity.

I know what I am doing here: I am telling of the instants that drip and are thick with blood.

I know what I am doing here: I'm improvising. But what's wrong with that? improvising as in jazz they improvise music, jazz in fury, improvising in front of the crowd.

It's so odd to have exchanged my paints for this strange thing that is the word. Words—I move cautiously among them as they can turn threatening; I can have the freedom to write this: "pilgrims, merchants and shepherds led their caravans toward Tibet and the roads were difficult and primitive." With that phrase I made a scene be born, as in a photographic flash.

What does this jazz that is improvisation say? it says arms tangled with legs and the flames rising and I passive like meat that is devoured by the sharp

hook of an eagle that interrupts its blind flight. I express to me and to you my most hidden desires and achieve an orgiastic confused beauty. I tremble with pleasure amidst the novelty of using words that form an intense thicket. I struggle to conquer more deeply my freedom of sensations and thoughts, without any utilitarian meaning: I am alone, I and my freedom. Such is my freedom that it could scandalize a primitive but I know that you are not scandalized by the fullness I achieve and that is without perceptible borders. This capacity of mine to live whatever is rounded and ample —I surround myself with carnivorous plants and legendary animals, all bathed in the coarse and twisted oblique light of a mythical sex. I proceed in an intuitive way and without seeking an idea: I am organic. And I don't question myself about my motives. I plunge into the almost pain of an intense happiness— and to adorn me leaves and branches spring up in my hair.

I don't know what I'm writing about: I am obscure to myself. I only had initially a lunar and lucid vision, and so I plucked for myself the instant before it died and perpetually dies. This is not a message of ideas that I am transmitting to you but an instinctive ecstasy of whatever is hidden in nature and that I foretell. And this is a feast of words. I write in signs that are more a gesture than voice. All this is what I got used to painting, delving into the intimate nature of things. But now the time to stop painting has come in order to remake myself, I remake myself in these lines. I have a voice. As I throw myself into the line of my drawing, this is an exercise in life without planning. The world has no visible order and all I have is the order of my breath. I let myself happen.

I am inside the great dreams of the night: for the right-now is by night. And I sing the passage of time: I am still the queen of the Medes and of the Persians and am also my slow evolution that throws itself like a drawbridge into a future whose milky fogs I already breathe today. My aura is mystery of life. I surpass myself abdicating myself and am therefore the world: I follow the voice of the world, I myself suddenly with a unique voice.

The world: a tangle of bristling telephone wires. And the brightness however is still dark: that is I facing the world.

A dangerous balance, mine, mortal danger for the soul. The night of today looks at me with torpor, verdigris and lime. I want inside this night that is longer than life, I want, inside this night, life raw and bloody and full of saliva. I want this word: splendidness, splendidness is the fruit in its succulence, fruit without sadness. I want distances. My wild intuition about myself. But my main thing is always hidden. I am implicit. And when I make myself explicit I lose the humid intimacy.

What color is the spatial infinity? it is the color of air.

We—faced with the scandal of death.

Listen only superficially to what I say and from the lack of meaning a meaning will be born as from me a high and light life is inexplicably born. The dense jungle of words thickly envelops what I feel and live, and transforms everything I am into some thing of mine that remains outside me. Nature is enveloping: it entangles me entirely and is sexually alive, just that: alive. I too am ferociously alive—and I lick my snout like a tiger who has just devoured a deer.

I write to you now, at the very moment itself. I unfold only in the now. I speak today—not yesterday or tomorrow—but today and at this actual perishable instant. My small and boxed-in freedom joins me to the freedom of the world—but what is a window if not the air framed by right angles? I am rudely alive. I am leaving—says death without adding that he's taking me along. And I shiver in panting breath because I must go with him. I am death. Death takes place in my very being—how can I explain to you? It's a sensual death. Like a dead person I walk through the high grass in the greenish light of its blades: I am Diana the Huntress of gold and all I can find are heaps of bones. I live from an underlying layer of feelings: I am barely alive.

But these high summer days of damnation whisper to me the need for renunciation. I renounce having a meaning, and then the sweet and painful weakness grips me. Round and round shapes cross in the air. It's a summer heat. I navigate in my galley that braves the winds of a bewitched summer. Crushed leaves remind me of the ground of my childhood. The green hand and the golden breasts—that is how I paint the mark of Satan. They who fear us and our alchemy stripped witches and sorcerers in search of the hidden mark that was almost always found though it could only be known on sight for that mark was indescribable and unpronounceable even in the darkness of the Middle Ages— Middle Ages, thou art my dark subjacency and in the glare of the bonfires the marked ones dance in circles riding branches and foliage which are the phallic symbol of fertility: even in the white mass blood is used and there it is drunk.

Listen: I let you be, therefore let me be.

But eternally is a very hard word: it has a granitic "t" in the middle. Eternity: for everything that is never began. My small ever so limited head bursts when thinking about something that doesn't begin and doesn't end—for that is the eternal. Fortunately that feeling doesn't last long because I can't bear it to stay and if it did it would lead to madness. But my head also bursts when imagining the opposite: something that has begun—because where would it begin? And that has ended—but what comes after ending? As you see, it's impossible for me to deepen and take possession of life, which is aerial, is my light breath. But I do know what I want here: I want the inconclusive. I want the profound organic disorder that nevertheless hints at an underlying order. The great potency of potentiality. These babbled phrases of mine are made the very moment they're being written and are so new and green they crackle. They are the now. I want the experience of a lack of construction. Though this text of mine is crossed from end to end by a fragile connecting thread—which? that of a plunge into the matter of the word? of passion? A lustful thread, breath that heats the passing of syllables. Life really just barely escapes me though the certainty comes to me that life is other and has a hidden style.

This text that I give you is not to be seen close up: it gains its secret previously invisible roundness when seen from a high-flying plane. Then you can divine the play of islands and see the channels and seas. Understand me: I write you an onomatopoeia, convulsion of language. I'm not transmitting to you a story but just words that live from sound. I speak to you thus:

"Lustful trunk."

And I bathe within it. It is linked to the root that penetrates inside us into the earth. All that I write you is taut. I use stray words that are in themselves a free dart: savages, barbarians, decadent noblemen and gangsters. Does that mean anything to you? It speaks to me.

But the most important word in the language has but two letters: is. Is.

I am at its core.

I still am.

I am at the living and soft centre.

Still.

It sparkles and is elastic. Like the gait of a glossy black panther that I saw and that walked softly, slowly and dangerously. But not caged—because I don't want that. As for the unforeseeable—the next phrase is unforeseeable to me. In the core where I am, in the core of the Is, I ask no questions. Because when it is—it is. I am only limited by my identity. I, elastic being and separated from other bodies.

In truth I'm still not quite seeing properly the thread of what I'm writing you. I think I never shall—but I acknowledge the dark in which the two

eyes of the soft panther shine. Darkness is my hothouse. Enchanted darkness. I'll keep talking to you and taking the risk of disconnection: I am subterraneously unreachable by my knowledge.

I write to you because I don't understand myself.

But I'll keep following myself. Elastic. This forest where I survive in order to be is such a mystery. But now I think things are happening. That is: I'm going in. I mean: into the mystery. I myself mysterious and inside the core in which I move swimming, protozoan. One day I childishly said: I can do everything. It was the pre-viewing of one day being able to cast myself off and fall into the abandon of every law. Elastic. The profound joy: the secret ecstasy. I know how to invent a thought. I feel the commotion of novelty. But I am well aware that what I write is only a tone.

In my core I have the strange impression that I don't belong to the human species.

There is much to say that I don't know how to say. The words are lacking. But I refuse to invent new ones: those that already exist must say what can be said and what is forbidden. And I can sense whatever is forbidden. If I have the strength. Beyond thought there are no words: it is itself. My painting has no words: it is beyond thought. In this land of the is-itself I am pure crystalline ecstasy. It is itself. I am myself. You are yourself.

And I am haunted by my ghosts, by all that is mythic, fantastic and gigantic: life is supernatural. I walk holding an open umbrella upon a tightrope. I walk to the limit of my great dream. I see the fury of the visceral impulses: tortured viscera guide me. I don't like what I just wrote — but I'm duty-bound to accept the whole section because it happened to me. And I have much respect for what I happen to myself. My essence is unconscious of itself and that's why I obey myself blindly.

I’m being antimelodic. I take pleasure in the difficult harmony of the harsh opposites. Where am I going? and the answer is: I’m going.

And so when I die, I’ll never have been born and lived: death washes away the traces of the sea-foam on the beach.

Now it is an instant.

Here is another now.

And another. My effort: to bring now the future to here. I move inside my deep instincts which carry themselves out blindly. I feel then that I’m near springs, pools and waterfalls, all with abundant waters. And I free.

To the Woman Crying Uncontrollably in the Next Stall

If you ever woke in your dress at 4am ever
closed your legs to someone you loved opened
them for someone you didn't moved against
a pillow in the dark stood miserably on a beach
seaweed clinging to your ankles paid
good money for a bad haircut backed away
from a mirror that wanted to kill you bled
into the back seat for lack of a tampon
if you swam across a river under rain sang
using a dildo for a microphone stayed up
to watch the moon eat the sun entire
ripped out the stitches in your heart
because why not if you think nothing &
no one can / listen I love you joy is coming

Article

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The ontological woman: A history of deauthentication, dehumanization, and violence

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Cristan Williams
Transgender Archive, USA

Abstract
Trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs) make use of an ethical, moralistic framework to support specific rhetoric and behavior. Taken together, these form a self-referential ideology that functions to protect an essentialist ontology, which reliably harms cisgender, transgender, and feminist communities. Through an examination of the historical record of US radical feminist and TERF discourses, including first-hand accounts, this article considers how the ontological framework that inspires TERF rhetoric and behavior has functioned as a cycle of moral fulfillment, even as it necessitates the eradication of trans bodies. The article analyzes how TERF morality, rhetoric, and action construct social forms through a sexed binary by relying on an appeal to the natural, which serves to objectify ontological embodiment. It also foregrounds the different historical and contemporary positionalities of trans-exclusionary and trans-inclusive radical feminisms, and concludes with a reminder of the complementary attributes of trans feminism and radical feminism that are evidenced by decades of cooperation.

Keywords
gender ontology, morality, radical feminism, rhetoric, trans exclusion

The ontological question

In the mid-1960s, around the time that the term 'transgender' was beginning to appear in medical discourses (Williams, 2014f), groups of feminists especially in Anglophone and European contexts began excluding certain women from feminist spaces. During this period, the excluded women in the 1960s were principally lesbians, as being a lesbian was considered akin to being an un-woman: someone who had left 'the Territory of Womanhood altogether' (Koedt, 1973, p. 247). This created a constituency of feminists split in two: authenticated women who enjoyed visibility and inclusion within feminist spaces, and deauthenticated women who endured shunning and had to fight for their

Corresponding author:
Cristan Williams, Transgender Archive, P.O. Box 542287 Houston, Texas 77254-2287, USA.
Email: cristan@transadvocate.com

inclusion. This type of constituency-policing would later significantly affect transgender women, and thus offers important context for the history of deauthentication, dehumanization, and violence directed at trans women.

In 1970, in response to their exclusion, some lesbians began promoting a notion of 'woman' that could be inclusive of their experiences, describing a 'women-identified woman' as one who obtained 'her internal sense of self' from 'ideals of nurturing, community, and cooperation that she defined as female' (Gianoulis, 2015) because she was not 'considered a "real woman"' (Radicalesbians, 1970). Reflecting upon the exclusion of lesbians in feminist spaces, Rita Mae Brown, a member of both the Radicalesbians and Furies Collective, framed the experience thusly: 'those [feminist] women, most of whom were rather privileged and very bright, treated lesbians the way men treated them . . . [Betty Friedan] tossed me out and said that I was the Lavender Menace' (Makers, 2012). The deauthentication of lesbian women's experiences of selfhood to compel them to assume a social context not representative of their truths, experience, or class realities was and is an enfeebled attempt to grasp at empowerment through a form of lateral violence; an animus directed against one's peers rather than one's oppressors. Such empowerment strategies have been disruptive and destructive to constituencies of women.

During a 1979 speech, Monique Wittig (1992, p. 12) described the following experience:

> Lesbians should always remember and acknowledge how unnatural, compelling, totally oppressive, and destructive being woman was for us in the old days before the women's liberation movement. It was a political constraint, and those who resisted it were accused of not being real women. But then we were proud of it, since in the accusation there was already something like a shadow of victory: the avowal by the oppressor that woman is not something that goes without saying, since to be one, one has to be a real one.

For radical feminists like Wittig, 'woman' was not a sexed class constructed with reference to an essential or reductive attribute. Rather, 'woman' was defined by material conditions within culture. As Andrea Dworkin (1983, p. 223) argued, it is a system of material oppression that keeps 'women women in an immovable system of sex hierarchy.' Significantly, for both Wittig and Dworkin, the move to root feminism in an inherent biological, psychological, or reified ontology was to endorse the very essentialism upon which patriarchy was built:

> [A]s Andrea Dworkin emphasizes, many lesbians recently 'have increasingly tried to transform the very ideology that has enslaved us into a, religious, psychologically compelling celebration of female biological potential.' . . . What the concept 'woman is wonderful' accomplishes is that it retains for defining women the best features (best according to whom?) which oppression has granted us, and it does not radically question the categories man and woman, which are political categories and not natural givens. It puts us in a position of fighting within the class 'women' not as the other classes do, for the disappearance of our class, but for the defense of 'woman' and its reinforcement. (Wittig, 1992, pp. 13–14)

Wittig (1992, p. 2) further argued that 'there is no sex. There is but sex that is oppressed and sex that oppresses. It is oppression that creates sex and not the contrary.'

Such analysis harkens back to the very foundations of radical feminism. Before Simone de Beauvoir (2009, p. 283) asserted that: 'One is not born, but rather becomes, woman,' early radical feminists such as Ruth Herschberger (1948, pp. 3–4) noted the cultural nature of the sexed body binary:

> As important as the differences in sex organs – the books imply – is that the mature male should possess broad squared shoulders, heavy brows, straight arms, narrow hips, cylindrical thighs, blunt toes and bulging calves. The mature female is chartered by soft sloping shoulders, a short neck, bent arms, wide hips, conical thighs, small feet and knock-knees. . . . For these representatives of the basic differences between the sexes appear to have been put together by calipers and glue rather than by the shakier hands of Mother Nature.

Most cisgender people within US and European culture will, at some point in their life, undertake body modifications to better embody their sexed persona and emulate what is, we are told, a natural sexed body binary. Billions are spent each year on hair care, removal, and maintenance; cosmetic surgeries; workouts; exogenous chemicals; and 'health' and 'lifestyle' products. Many of these are targeted to cisgender population's need to embody 'the True Male and the True Female, the average, the typical, and to judge by a look around us, [the] possibly extinct' (Herschberger, 1948, p. 3). In a world where most cisgender bodies have biological attributes of both 'the True Male and the True Female,' where one in 100 people are, to one degree or another, intersex (Ainsworth, 2015), and where transgender people transition their phenotype from one category to another, trans feminists are joining early radical feminists in questioning systems predicated upon discrete, natural, and unconstructed body binaries. Such ontological questions threaten the moral landscape that sex essentialists depend on.

It is ironic then that trans-exclusionary radical feminist activists (TERFs) have invested decades into promoting a central ideological position, namely that a 'woman' is defined by her Nature and/or God-given female body experience. This is an ontological claim; an argument about the nature of being. TERFs perceive a material conflict with their ideological position when they encounter trans people. As with any identarian movement based upon rooting out impurity of form, instead of interrogating their ideology, they attack that which questions it.

The morality

Any comprehensive analysis of TERF rhetoric, morality, or behavior must begin with the political dialectic popularized by early sex-essentialist activists such as Janice Raymond, Mary Daly, and Robin Morgan. The moral reasoning promoted by Raymond in her 1979 book, *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*, is found in nearly all sex-essentialist anti-trans interventions, from so-called 'bathroom bills' – laws forcing transgender and intersex people to use bathrooms corresponding to their sex assigned at birth – to TERF protests at Pride parades. At the heart of the ethical calculus Raymond popularized is an ad naturam fallacy – an argument which relies on an appeal to the natural – wherein cisgender bodies are natural, whole, and therefore good, while transgender bodies are unnatural, broken, and therefore bad. While such a natural/unnatural binary is useful for

Raymond's morality, it is nonetheless a moral trap distracting the cisgender reader from the ways in which they themselves work to construct their own bodies into a binary. As Susan Stryker argued in 1994,

> You are as constructed as me; the same anarchic Womb has birthed us both. I call upon you to investigate your nature as I have been compelled to confront mine. . . . Heed my words, and you may well discover the seams and sutures in yourself. (Stryker, 2006, p. 247)

Raymond (1979, p. 17) attempted to protect her moral framework from being critiqued as simply an appeal to the morality of the natural, asserting: 'I am not arguing that what is natural is good, I am not polarizing technology against nature.' This might withstand scrutiny if it were not immediately followed by the statement, 'I am making an appeal to the integrity or harmony of the whole' (Raymond, 1979, p. 17). Raymond is not appealing to the body's natural state but, rather, its whole state. Her equivocation seems exceptionally disingenuous as she consistently critiques trans people's implicitly non-natural states through terms such as 'male-to-constructed-female' (Raymond, 1979, p. 3). While Raymond claims that her 'whole' (i.e., unaltered) body ontology is not presented as a moral opposite to that which is unnatural (and therefore bad) she nevertheless appeals to the concept of 'natural-born' woman. For instance, she takes pains to detail that which is non-'genuine' (i.e., 'synthetic') about trans people: 'Instead of developing genuine integrity, the transsexual becomes a synthetic product. Synthetic parts, such as chemical hormones and surgical artifacts of false vaginas and breasts, produce a synthetic whole' (Raymond, 1979, p. 165). Raymond's usage of 'the harmony or integrity of the whole' and 'synthetic whole' implies moral polarities. Consider the following examples:

> As alchemy treated the qualitative as quantitative in its attempts to isolate vital forces of the universe within its laboratories of matter, transsexual treatment does the same by reducing the quest for the vital forces of selfhood to the artifacts of hormones and surgical appendages . . . [producing] a surgically constructed androgyne, and thus a synthetic hybrid. (Raymond, 1979, p. 155)

> [Transsexuals] purport to be the real thing. And our suspension of disbelief in their synthetic nature is required as a moral imperative. (Raymond, 1979, p. xxiii)

This is an ad naturam moral argument. Raymond's morality even privileges her in denying humanity to trans women. Trans women are, instead, represented as 'synthetic products.' When trans people are no longer human in the sense that Raymond is, the moral imperative to respect trans people's body autonomy, identity, selfhood, and life becomes less important: 'transsexualism itself is a deeply moral question rather than a medical-technical answer. I contend that the problem of transsexualism would best be served by morally mandating it out of existence' (Raymond, 1979, p. 120). While Raymond may claim that she is not appealing to the morality of the natural, it is precisely this morality that enables her, and all sex-essentialist activists who use her moral framework, to condemn that which must be viewed as unnatural: namely, trans bodies. Raymond's ad naturam morality deems transitioned phenotypes to be inherently synthetic, violating the untransitioned body's natural 'integrity.'

In *Gender Hurts*, Sheila Jeffreys, building on Raymond, acted to protect her own stake in the morality of the natural. She states that the word 'cisgender' should not be used because it impugns the nature of her own claim to a naturally sexed body binary: claiming that 'cis' is being applied 'to all those who are not unhappy with their "gender"', Jeffreys (2014, p. 50) argues that:

> . . . the term 'cis' creates two kinds of women, those with female bodies who are labeled 'cisgender', and those with male bodies who are 'transwomen'. Women, those born female and raised as women, thus suffer a loss of status as they are relegated to being just one kind of woman and their voices will have to compete on a level playing field with the other variety, men who transgender.

For Jeffreys, this is a moral issue, and it is upon this sense of morality that she constructs her rhetoric around bodies that are sexed rather than body attributes that are sexed:

> Another reason for adherence to pronouns that indicate biology is that, as a feminist, I consider the female pronoun to be an honorific, a term that conveys respect. Respect is due to women as members of a sex caste that have survived subordination and deserve to be addressed with honour. (Jeffreys, 2014, p. 9)

In explicitly appealing to the ad naturam morality within her sexed body, Jeffreys is pronouncing her attachment to and support of behavioral norms and taboos predicated upon a coercive binary cultural system. While we generally refer to such systems as 'gender,' Jeffreys' drive to lay claim to identity labels rooted in a body binary means that she has privileged herself to disregard another's identity precisely because, within her gender system, such behavior is honorable. With an ad naturam foundation, certain ways of speaking about trans people become honorable, and as history bears witness, those who claim such moral authority do not limit themselves to words alone.

The rhetoric

The foundation of sex-essentialist discourses is a rhetoric rigged to ensure authenticity is forever withheld from trans experiences. Such rhetorical posturing might be epitomized by the so-called 'woman-born woman' rubric. The book *A to Z of the Lesbian Liberation Movement* defines woman-born women as:

> . . . women who were born women [as] opposed to male to female transgendered persons who may have, and retain, male privilege. Identifying or declaring oneself woman-born woman helps to keep 'woman only' or lesbian-separatist space pure. (Myers, 2009, p. 245)

Within the 'woman-born woman' framework, there exists a discrete 'woman' that is authentic, and one that is not. This approach was institutionalized by a minority of activists at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival (MichFest), a woman-only feminist event held from 1976 to 2015. When surveyed by cisgender radical lesbian feminists in 1992, 73.1% of respondents said they wanted MichFest to be inclusive of trans women (Burkholder, 1993). However, for many years the festival maintained a so-called

'womyn-born-womyn' policy. In 2014, a TERF group produced a MichFest zine booklet for 'radical feminists' that claimed to offer an 'opportunity to answer the following questions: what is radical feminism; where is it going and/or where should it go; and, why and how should women join the movement?' (Pettersen, 2014, p. 1). The zine answers these questions through assertions such as:

> There are and will be plenty of women (and of course, men) who do not put women first in their advocacy work, but instead, will fall for the lies and false promises of gender liberation for 'all women' – including men who claim to be women. The transactivist movement is like an invasion of the body snatchers, only worse, because not only does it harm our ability to organize authentic safe spaces for women, but it is harmful to those who practice transgenderism too. Synthetic hormones, puberty inhibitors and genital mutilation are not methods of human liberation and health. (Pettersen, 2014, pp. 2–3)

Within TERF discourses, trans people are rhetorically constructed as the opposite of cisgender: unnatural, monstrous, and dangerous to themselves and others. This reflects Raymond's representation of the trans experience: the opposite of cisgender body integrity and spirit is transgender body mutilation and violence. Consider Raymond's (1979, pp. 103–104) argument that

> Rape, of course, is a masculinist violation of bodily integrity. All transsexuals rape women's bodies by reducing the real female form to an artifact, appropriating this body for themselves. However, the transsexually constructed lesbian-feminist violates women's sexuality and spirit, as well.

Thirty-five years later, Raymond conceded that transsexual people do not, in fact, rape cisgender women by merely existing, and explained that the term 'rape' was used at that time as a euphemism for violation (Vigo, 2014). However, even with this revision, her meaning remains clear: the existence of trans bodies is a violation of authenticated women's bodies, sexuality, and spirit.

The way in which the trans experience is represented within contemporary TERF communities is merely a reflection of their own ideological histories. Themes of violation, inauthenticity, caricature, mutilation, and monstrosity continue to feature prominently as a foundational moral dialectic which is re-enacted daily on social media and within feminist spaces. Not only are the bodies of trans people mutilated; the bodies of trans people are 'smelly,' as Jeffreys contends (Williams, 2015a), or 'decaying,' as Raymond asserts (Raymond, 1979, p. 167).

The message TERF opinion leaders send is clear: trans women represent the wolf in sheep's clothing; an enemy that could be anywhere, especially in authenticated women's spaces. For Jeffreys (2014), when a trans woman urinates in a public restroom, it is a violation of an authenticated woman's human rights. Such moral contextualization of trans women contribute to a social climate wherein trans women are publicly beaten (Amusing, 2011) or sexually assaulted by cisgender women (Williams, 2019) when merely attempting to use the restroom (see also Jones and Slater, this issue).

1970s: The West Coast Lesbian Conference and Olivia Collective controversies

Perhaps the earliest known instance of TERF aggression causing a violent rift within a feminist community occurred after Beth Elliott, a trans woman, asked to join the San Francisco Daughters of Bilitis lesbian feminist organization in 1971. Elliott was 'honest about her transition and, after heated controversy and disagreements among the members, was accepted, even becoming vice president of the local chapter' (Gallo, 2006, p. 190). The 'heated controversy' concerning her presence in the Daughters of Bilitis landed on a national stage at the 1973 West Coast Lesbian Conference (WCLC): though Elliott had helped organize the event, a TERF group calling itself the Gutter Dykes demanded that the conference become a trans-exclusionary space. The coming TERF violence was foreshadowed by a preconference phone call to Elliott. The anonymous woman on the other line asked for 'Mr. Elliott,' instructed her to not attend the event she helped organize, and ended the call with a death threat. When Elliott dared to participate, the Gutter Dykes violently disrupted the event, physically attacked trans-supportive radical feminist performers Robin Tyler and Patty Harrison, who stopped the group from bashing Elliott (Williams, 2014d), and threatened to continue the disruption unless Elliott was removed.

Some of the controversial discourse was preserved by conference organizer and Lesbian Tide Collective member Barbara McLean (1973, pp. 36–37) in her diary, later reprinted in The Lesbian Tide:

> This woman is insisting that Beth Elliott not be permitted to perform because Beth is a transsexual. Beth was on the San Francisco steering committee for the conference, a part of the original group that gave birth to the idea. . . . No. We do not, cannot relate to her as a man. We have not known her as a man.
>
> 'He has a prick! That makes him a man.'
>
> That's bullshit! Anatomy is NOT destiny! There is a contradiction here. Do we or do we not believe that anatomy is destiny?
>
> '[This is] the most bizarre and dangerous co-optation of lesbian energy and emotion [we] can imagine.'

McLean's diary also recorded her thoughts on an infamously transmisogynistic keynote address by Robin Morgan:

> [Robin Morgan] said that rather than call for unity, she chooses to call for polarity. I'm confused. . . . Especially since the announced purpose for the conference is UNITY . . . I'm angry. I somehow feel betrayed . . . Now she's trashing us over the transsexual thing. Now she's trashing EVERYONE. I can't believe she ever wrote anything about 'sister-hood.'

For the first time on a US national stage, Morgan's speech introduced numerous tropes commonly found to this day in contemporary sex-essentialist radical feminist discourse:

> [A]re we yet again going to defend the male supremacist yes obscenity of male transvestitism? How many of us will try to explain away – or permit into our organizations, even, men who deliberately reemphasize gender roles, and who parody female oppression and suffering as 'camp'? No. I will not call a male 'she': thirty-two years of suffering in the androcentric society, and of surviving, have earned me the name 'woman'; one walk down the street by a male transvestite, five minutes of his being hassled (which he may enjoy), and then he dares, he dares to think he understands our pain? No. In our mothers' names and in our own, we must not call him sister. We know what's at work when whites wear blackface; the same thing is at work when men wear drag. (Morgan, 1973, cited in Ridinger, 2004, p. 204)

Even in this early example, we can observe the clash between inclusionary and exclusionary radical feminist discourse. Note that the sex-essentialist gaze produces a 'dangerous' trans caricature who is taking away women's 'energy' and 'emotion.' Such moralistic rhetoric is commonplace in contemporary sex-essentialist discourse, and for sex-essentialist activists such as TERFs, it is a functional moral imperative. Trans people are constructed as monstrous, parasitic, or even embodied caricatures of murderers. Mary Daly (1978) insisted that trans people are 'Frankenstein' constructs, invaders bent on violating women's boundaries, while Germaine Greer (1999) compared trans people to horror movie serial killers who murder their own mothers.

While Robin Morgan's anthologized version of her keynote WCLC address includes many anti-trans tropes commonly featured in contemporary sex-essentialist discourses, her comments specifically concerning Elliott are often edited out. Missing from the commonly anthologized version is the following call to action, which precipitated TERF violence at the WCLC:

> [Elliott], the same man *[sic]* who, when personally begged by women not to attend this Conference, replied that if he [*sic*] were kept out he [*sic*] would bring a Federal suit against these women on the charges of 'discrimination and criminal conspiracy to discriminate. . .' Where The Man is concerned, we must not be separate fingers but one fist. I charge [Elliott] as an opportunist, an infiltrator, and a destroyer – with the mentality of a rapist. And you women at this Conference know who he [*sic*] is. Now. You can let him [*sic*] into your workshops – or you can deal with him [*sic*]. (Blasius, 1997, p. 429)

The phone call Morgan references wherein Elliott was 'begged' not to attend was the same call that began by misgendering her and ended with a death threat (Nettick & Elliott, 1996, p. 256). After Morgan's speech, a Conference-wide vote was taken on whether the WCLC should become trans-exclusionary. In *Transgender History*, Stryker (2008, p. 105) recounts that 'more than two-thirds of those present voted to allow Elliott to remain, but the anti-transsexual faction refused to accept the popular results and promised to disrupt the conference if their demands were not met.' Having received permission to stay, Elliott took to the Conference stage to play a scheduled acoustic guitar set. It was at this point that the Gutter Dykes rushed the stage intent on bashing Elliott, while other radical feminists used their own bodies to shield her from the violence.

Conference organizer and Lesbian Tide Collective founder Jeanne Córdova[1] characterized the unrest as a seismic event: 'It was like an earthquake – at first, a little earthquake. Then an 8.5' (Faderman & Timmons, 2006, p. 191). Fearing further violence and

disruption, Elliott left the event. This incident was later featured in *The Transsexual Empire* as evidence of the essentially 'destructive' nature of trans women (Raymond, 1979, p. 85). However, Raymond's account erases the TERF violence, Morgan's call to have Elliott 'dealt with' and the courage of the radical feminists who used their own bodies to shield a trans woman from a public bashing.

This was not the last time that cis radical feminists stood up against TERF groups claiming to represent authentic radical feminism, nor was it the last time that such events were publicly misrepresented. Trans-inclusive radical feminist groups such as Cell 16 were similarly targeted for their inclusion of trans women. The pioneering radical feminist lesbian separatist women's music collective Olivia Records was not only trans-inclusive, but trans-affirming, and even provided trans medical care (Williams, 2014b). When Raymond learned of what she apparently perceived to be Olivia's treachery, she set in motion a series of events that culminated in an organized terrorist action against the women of Olivia and specifically, collective member and out trans woman Sandy Stone. Stone has described how events turned potentially deadly after Raymond began sending letters to feminist groups about Olivia's approach to trans inclusion:

> [W]e were getting hate mail about me. After a while the hate mail got so vicious that the mail room made a decision to not pass that mail along to me. This was vile stuff. A lot of it included death threats. . . . The death threats were directed at me, but there were violent consequences proposed for the Collective if they didn't get rid of me. (Williams, 2014b)

While organizing a tour to 'provide women's music for women in major cities,' Stone recounted that Olivia received a letter warning them of a separatist paramilitary group of women called the Gorgons in Seattle, who carried live weapons:

> We were told that when we got to town, [the Gorgons] were going to kill me. . . . We did, in fact, go to Seattle, but we went as probably the only women's music tour that was ever done with serious muscle security. They were very alert for weapons and, in fact, Gorgons did come, and they did have guns taken away from them.
>
> I was pants-wetting scared at that event. I was terrified. During a break between a musical number someone shouted out 'GORGONS!' and I made it from my seat at the console to under the table the console was on at something like superluminal speed. I stayed under there until it was clear that I wasn't about to be shot . . . Not that it would have done me any good to be under there. (Williams, 2014b)

Raymond (1979, pp. 101–102) herself addressed Stone's involvement in Olivia Records in *The Transsexual Empire*:

> Stone is not only crucial to the Olivia enterprise but plays a very dominant role there . . . . This only serves to enhance his [*sic*] previously dominant role and to divide women, as men [*sic*] frequently do, when they make their presence necessary and vital to women. Having produced such divisiveness, one would think that if Stone's commitment to and identification with women were genuinely woman-centered, he [*sic*] would have removed himself from Olivia and assumed some responsibility for the divisiveness.

In Raymond's account, TERF violence is erased and, in its place, appears a perverse caricature of Stone which acts as the narrative source of 'divisiveness' – a profane euphemism for the violent threats this trans-inclusive radical feminist women's collective faced. Ginny Berson, a radical feminist and co-founder of both the Furies and Olivia collectives, responded to Raymond's description:

> The anti-trans activists created some problems for us, and we went through some ugly and hard times because of them. Not because of Sandy . . . It was horrible. It was ugly and destructive and mean-spirited and just stupid. How much easier it is to attack people close to you than to focus on the patriarchy! It was painful. It felt like everything we had done was invisible and irrelevant to those people. (Williams, 2016b)

Fearing for her safety, the safety of her fellow collective members, and the future of Olivia in the face of a threatened national TERF-led boycott, Stone left the collective. However, she went on to apply the radical-to-the-root feminist ethics she learned at Olivia to what became a foundational document for both trans feminism and transgender studies: 'The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto' (Stone, 1992).

Raymond's eventual influence was far more devastating than any violent movement to crush trans-inclusive radical feminist spaces. It was her work that helped to precipitate the end of both public and private insurance coverage of trans medical care (Williams, 2014a) during a period when employment discrimination against trans people was ruled legal (*Ulane* v. *Eastern Airlines*, 1984). If we are to place any level of confidence in research linking the lack of medical care to the high mortality rate of trans people (Zaker-Shahrak et al., 2012), we must concede that the medical system Raymond helped to pioneer resulted in unnecessary deaths.

1990s: MichFest and Camp Trans

As Raymond's policy work began to affect trans people's ability to access affirmative healthcare in the US, the woman-born woman dialectic gained increasing cultural currency. In 1991, Nancy Burkholder, a trans woman, was thrown out of MichFest. Until that point, few – including Burkholder – knew there was a no-trans policy in place. When she was ejected, cisgender lesbian feminist Janis Walworth began organizing a response that would later become known as Camp Trans.

Walworth organized a letter-writing campaign, contacted queer media outlets to get the word out about what had happened to Burkholder, and returned to MichFest in 1992 and 1993 with friends. She began distributing educational leaflets titled 'Gender Myths,' but was told by MichFest security that they should leave because they were in physical danger:

> . . . the festival security stopped by and told us that the trans women in our group would have to leave, 'for their own safety.' Tensions were definitely rising, we were told. We had scheduled to do some workshops and some folks were definitely hostile. We were told that, for our own safety, the trans women would need to leave the festival as soon as possible. (Williams, 2016a)

While the MichFest Leather Dykes said they would provide bodyguard protection for Walworth's team, it was decided that avoiding violence was the best course of action.

Thus, an outside outreach camp was created in 1993, which later came to be called, 'Camp Trans'. As with Raymond's account of the threats against Olivia Records, much of this reality is erased from Sheila Jeffreys' historical account published in *Gender Hurts*:

> [T]he siege of the festival began in 1993 when some transgender activists set up 'Camp Trans' opposite the entrance to the festival to protest the policy of not admitting self-identified transgenders. (Jeffreys, 2014, p. 167)

Gone is the reality that cisgender lesbian women began what became Camp Trans. Hidden is the threat of violence that made Camp Trans necessary as an outside entity, and gone are the brave Leather Dykes who offered to physically protect Camp Trans activists.

Also missing from Jeffreys' account is the fact that by the late 1990s, Camp Trans was largely facilitated by the Lesbian Avengers, and that, as part of the group's activities in 1999, a group of young Avengers bought a 16-year-old trans girl entry to MichFest from the festival ticket booth. The Lesbian Avengers explicitly stated that everyone in the group was from Camp Trans and some of their group was trans. Everyone in the group was sold tickets, but the moment they entered the gates, a group began trailing them shouting, 'MAN ON THE LAND!' This continued until MichFest security moved everyone to a tent where the young woman was made to stand in front of the group while TERFs spent the next two hours berating her. One adult even openly threatened her life. What follows are the Lesbian Avengers' accounts of this harrowing experience:

S. [Lesbian Avenger]: About 10 TERFs were waiting for us when we came in. The whole 'MAN ON THE LAND!' started as soon as we walked in. I mean, at the time, we're kids, we're teenagers and these are all adults. . . . [I]t was just so fucked up. We were trying to give out t-shirts and stickers about being inclusive. But it was getting bad.

K. [trans girl in the Lesbian Avenger group]: A huge crowd of yelling people formed around us and I started crying at that point. It got so loud that Nomy Lamm, who was performing there as part of Sister Spit, came over and stood up for us . . . The crowd and me were walked over to a tent area. . . . [T]here was a queue of people who were going to get to say whatever they wanted to say. I remember, specifically, one woman looking right at me and telling me that I needed to leave the Land as soon as possible because she had a knife and didn't know if she would be able to control herself if I was around her. . . . [A]s soon as one person stopped speaking, another would start, so nobody said or did anything about the death threat. . . . I was sobbing and [B] was holding my face close to hers, telling me that it would be over soon, but then I just checked out.

S: The moderator did nothing. It was just a mudslinging, hatred pouring out. It was just like one by one by one being like, 'You're a rapist! You're raping the Land! You're destroying womanhood! I don't know what I'm going to do to you!' – it was just violent, hatred, and I know that most of it was geared at [K]. I was up there being attacked, but I wasn't getting the brunt of it. . . . At least 30 people were allowed to speak at us, but there were around 75 under the tent, and if you included the people around the tent who were watching and listening, well over 100. (Williams, 2014e)

In keeping with the decades-long tradition of erasing trans-inclusive radical feminists' voices and experience, MichFest organizer Lisa Vogel (1999) addressed what occurred to K thusly:

> A number of spontaneous gatherings developed where participants discussed and debated the presence of the Son of Camp Trans activists and their actions. Volunteer facilitators helped to structure discussions so that various viewpoints, including those of the Son of Camp Trans, could be heard.

Instead of an unruly mob that set upon itself the task of stalking, harassing, and ultimately threatening the life of a teenage trans girl, MichFest claimed that both sides of the debate could be heard. Erased too was the experience of the MichFest performer, Nomy Lamm, who used her own body to protect the trans youth:

> I think I just felt really protective. I was like, 'No way! Huh uh! You're not gonna fuck with this brave [kid] who put herself on the frontlines here!' I felt angry that people couldn't see that this was a person, a vulnerable young person . . . I can't imagine how traumatic that must have been for her.
>
> When I was on stage I said, 'I just want to say that including trans women in this space is not going to take anything away, it's going to add to it. I've been in women-only spaces that include trans women and that's been my experience.' I was surprised that a bunch of people stood up and cheered. It made me feel hopeful. (Williams, 2014e)

Naming exclusion

When considering the practical effect of TERF ideology upon both trans and feminist communities, one must consider how much effort, time, and attention is wasted in acts of lateral violence. How many organizations were fundamentally disrupted or shuttered altogether? Where might trans and feminist communities be without the animus inflicted, for decades, upon these communities?

While TERF opinion leaders would have us believe that it is trans existence that is problematic, for both trans people and feminist spaces, the historical record reveals a very different story that is long overdue in the telling. It was for that very reason an online feminist space popularized the notion that inclusive radical feminists were

different from a group that called themselves radical feminist, but who primarily worked to attack the equal existence of trans people, especially in feminist spaces.

While TERFs frequently claim that trans people coined 'TERF' as a slur; a term that is 'insulting, hyperbolic, misleading, and ultimately defamatory' (Hungerford, 2013), the reality is that the acronym was popularized by cisgender feminists who were part of a radical feminist community. Viv Smythe, an early promoter of the term (Smythe, 2018), recounts how and why 'TERF' arose within feminist discourse in 2008:

> [TERF] was not meant to be insulting. It was meant to be a deliberately technically neutral description of an activist grouping. . . . We wanted a way to distinguish TERFs from other radfems with whom we engaged who were trans*-positive/neutral, because we had several years of history of engaging productively/substantively with non-TERF radfems, and then suddenly TERF comments/posts seemed to be erupting in RadFem spaces where they threadjacked dozens of discussions, and there was a great deal of general frustration about that. It is possible that one of us picked it or something similar up from an IRC [internet relay chat] discussion elsewhere and then we both adopted/adapted it for ourselves, perhaps transforming it from some other initialism into an acronym, because we both appreciate the utility of acronyms in simplifying discourse . . . distinguishing between different arms of activism is what social activist movements do as they grow and develop and react to change within and without. (Williams, 2014c)

The emerging ability to describe a difference between TERFs and other radical feminists is a response to the decades-long appropriation of radical feminism itself by a group primarily concerned with the eradication of trans bodies within society. Even as traditional media platforms continue to conflate sex-essentialist activism with radical feminism (BBC, 2019), new media platforms routinely make this much needed distinction (Peltz, 2019). TERF, as an internet-born term, offers those concerned about the erasure of trans-inclusive radical feminist history the ability to concisely distinguish between radical feminists and sex-essentialist activists who claim their anti-trans activism represents radical feminism.

Whether we are speaking of heteronormative women excluding lesbian women for not being the right kind of woman, or TERFs excluding trans women for the same reason, these supposed strategies for women's empowerment are both painful and toxic. The now decades-old sex-essentialist movement continues to justify itself through a morality it constructs with a rhetoric of denaturalization and dehumanization. This, in turn, justifies lateral violence against trans and feminist communities. The history recounted in this article reveals that such empowerment strategies are inherently disruptive and destructive to constituencies of women. TERF rhetoric, morality, and behaviors are, at their core, an attempt to exact a gain from another woman's forced loss of both humanity and authenticity.

In 1977, Dworkin (1996, p. 60) called out what she termed an 'ideological rot' within a certain type of feminism:

> . . . women have increasingly tried to transform the very ideology that has enslaved us into a dynamic, religious, psychologically compelling celebration of female biological potential. This attempted transformation may have survival value – that is, the worship of our procreative capacity as power may temporarily stay the male-supremacist hand that cradles the test tube. But the price we pay is that we become carriers of the disease we must cure.

In Dworkin's analysis, some women have toxic strategies for attempting to access empowerment. Her words are echoed by Catherine MacKinnon's radical feminist perspective:

> My views on this have not changed one iota over time, although they have become more informed as more trans people have written, spoken out, and more discussion has been engaged, and as I have met more and more out trans people (mostly transwomen) all over the world. My basic feeling, with Simone de Beauvoir, is 'one is not born, one rather becomes a woman.' How one becomes a woman is not, I think, our job to police, even as everything about that process is worth inquiry and detailed understanding. (Williams, 2015b)

When one considers these analyses from some of the foundational radical feminist opinion leaders and organizations, we find a movement that in some significant ways begins to resemble the central analysis of what has become known as 'trans feminism.' It is difficult to read some of the most influential radical feminist thinkers and not notice how their ideas about a supposedly natural sexed body binary sound a lot like trans feminist critiques of body binaries.

Conclusion

TERF activism is founded upon a sex-essentialist ideology wherein 'woman' is reducible to any number of nature or God-given (non-cultural) essential biological attributes such as chromosomes, fecundity, and bone morphology. For TERFs, the presence or absence of these essential attributes defines one's material condition so that trans men are oppressed as women in society and trans women are not. When such an analytical framework is contrasted against the radical feminist analyses of thinkers such as Wittig and MacKinnon, the foundational differences between trans-exclusionary and trans-inclusive radical feminisms could not be more stark.

The complementary attributes of trans feminism and radical feminism are evidenced in decades of cooperation and community-building between cis and trans feminists. TERFs, aided by uninformed media platforms, have enjoyed the largely unquestioned position of representing 'radical feminist' and 'lesbian feminist' analysis within traditional news outlets. Therefore, TERF, as an addition to the feminist vocabulary, constructs a much-needed lexical firewall between a group primarily concerned with the eradication of trans bodies, and a group primarily concerned with the eradication of patriarchy.

It is the need to defend an ontological woman rooted in sex-essentialism that morally animates TERF rhetoric and behaviors. The fear that women are being 'erased' (O'Neil, 2018) provides an ethical lens through which serious and immediate action to police the category 'woman' becomes moral, leading TERFs to advocate against the Equality Act (The Heritage Foundation, 2019) and the Violence Against Women Act (House Judiciary, 116th Congress, 2019) in the US. It is through this lens that TERFs dehumanize trans people and it is through this process of dehumanization that aggressive action against the existence of trans bodies becomes a moral imperative.

While radical feminist, trans, and TERF approaches share foundational analyses regarding bodies and reproduction, TERF analysis diverges from radical and trans feminisms in that it often asserts that all aspects of gender are sexist and must therefore be

abolished. Leaving aside the particulars of how individuals might cease contextualizing and communicating their subjective experience of phenotype, TERFs objectify trans people as the embodiment of gender and therefore sexism itself. Instead of focusing on the systemic architecture of sexism within society, as radical and trans feminists do, TERFs primarily focus upon the eradication of that which they believe has come to embody all that is oppressive about patriarchal culture: trans people.

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Note

1. It's worth noting that Córdova later self-identified as a 'trans-butch' lesbian (Córdova, 2011). The Lesbian Avengers interviewed requested that their identities be withheld because they feared how TERF activists might react to their history being disclosed.

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BODY COUNTS

Who among us hasn't been asked for their number---
when someone asks, *how many people have you slept with*,
what counts? How does one count the ways
their lives have intertwined with yours? One man
told me he would've told Gore Vidal about me. One man
read me an Olga Broumas poem when we were done.
One man invited me to his bathtub, view of the Pacific---
brought me champagne. One man bought me two drinks.
One man bought me a desk. One novelist called me
a perfect angel. One man wouldn't stop calling me
until I blocked him. One man cried when we were finished.
One man told me he visited the AIDS wards in San Francisco,
how visitors were required to dip their hands
in bowls of lemon juice to find the cuts.

(William Ward Butler)

14 Indexing gender

ELINOR OCHS

Editors' introduction

One of the pioneers in the field of developmental pragmatics, Elinor Ochs (formerly Elinor Ochs Keenan) carried out one of the earliest longitudinal studies of children's conversational competence (Keenan 1974, 1977). Ochs, especially through her long-term collaboration with Bambi Schieffelin, was one of those most responsible for giving new impetus to the field of language socialization (Ochs and Schieffelin 1984, Schieffelin and Ochs 1986). Strongly grounded in ethnography as a research method, the study of language socialization focuses on the process of becoming a culturally competent member of society through language activity. Within this domain, Ochs has been stressing the importance of looking at the larger cultural context in which adults communicate with a child. This means that stylistic characteristics of language used to, by, and around the child should be understood *vis-à-vis* local theories and local practices of child rearing, including the social relationship between the child and her caretakers and the notion of task (Ochs 1982, 1988). The important discoveries of this line of research go beyond the empirical discovery that Baby Talk is not universal (Ochs 1982) to include theoretical hypotheses about how cultural accounts of this register are based on local epistemologies and theories of social order.

Another important insight in Ochs' work is the idea that a theory of language socialization rests on a theory of indexicality (see also Hanks, this volume). In the model presented in this chapter, indexicality is depicted as a property of speech through which cultural contexts such as social identities (e.g. gender) and social activities (e.g. a gossip session) are constituted by particular stances and acts. Linguistic features index more than one dimension of the sociocultural context; the indexing of certain dimensions is linked in a constitutive sense to the indexing of other dimensions (e.g. tag questions may index a stance of uncertainty as well as the act of requesting confirmation/clarification/feedback; these two contextual features in turn may index/help constitute female gender identity in certain communities). Hence children's acquisition of linguistic forms entails a developmental process of delineating and organizing contextual dimensions in culturally sensible ways.

Ochs' earlier work on developmental pragmatics and her more recent research on language socialization come together in her current analysis of indexicality. Across the world's speech communities, there are pragmatic universals in the linguistic indexing of stance and act. That is, children everywhere are developing similar pragmatic competences. This accounts for why we can communicate at

some level across societies. On the other hand, each social group has specific ways of organizing the distribution of stance and indexical action across social identities, relationships, and activities, with different values associated with each set of indexicals. Cultural competence entails developing knowledge of these more complex indexical systems. This research has also implications for our understanding of miscommunication across groups: communication across social groups may flounder as one group assumes the other shares not just stance and act meanings but the whole indexical network (see Gumperz' article, this volume).

Elinor Ochs is Professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of California, Los Angeles.

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Indexing gender

1 The micro-ethnography of gender hierarchy

Gender hierarchies display themselves in all domains of social behavior, not the least of which is talk. Gender ideologies are socialized, sustained, and transformed through talk, particularly through verbal practices that recur innumerable times in the lives of members of social groups. This view embodies Althusser's notion that "ideas of a human subject exist in his actions" and his rephrasing of Pascal's ideas in terms of the imperative "Kneel down, move your lips in prayer and you will believe" (1971: 168). Mundane, prosaic, and altogether unsensational though they may appear to be, conversational practices are primary resources for the realization of gender hierarchy.

In the course of the following discussion, I will argue that the relation between language and gender is not a simple straightforward mapping of

linguistic form to social meaning of gender. Rather the relation of language to gender is constituted and mediated by the relation of language to stances, social acts, social activities, and other social constructs. As such, novices come to understand gender meanings through coming to understand certain pragmatic functions of language (such as expressing stance) and coming to understand local expectations *vis-à-vis* the distribution of these functions and their variable expression across social identities.

With respect to gender hierarchy, the following discussion argues that images of women are linked to images of mothering and that such images are socialized through communicative practices associated with caregiving. Although mothering is a universal kinship role of women and in this role women have universally positions of control and power, their communicative practices as mothers vary considerably across societies, revealing differences in social positions of mothers. Mothers vary in the extent to which their communication with children is child-centered (i.e. accommodating). Differences in caregiver communicative practices socialize infants and small children into different local images of women. These images may change over developmental time when these young novices see women using different communicative practices to realize different social roles (familial, economic, political, etc.). On the other hand, continuity in women's verbal practices associated with stance and social action in the enactment of diverse social roles may sustain images of women that emerge in the earliest moments of human life.

The discussion will compare communicative practices of mothers in mainstream American households (Anglo, white, middle class) and in traditional Western Samoan households. Insights concerning mainstream American mothers derive from numerous child language development studies, particularly earlier research carried out by Bambi Schieffelin and myself on language socialization in this community (Ochs and Schieffelin 1984; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986a, 1986b). Insights concerning mothering in Western Samoan households are based on a longitudinal language acquisition and language socialization study conducted in Falefaa, Western Samoa, during 1978–9 and in 1981 (Ochs 1982, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1990).

2 Social meanings and indexicality

Before turning to the communicative practices of mothers and their impact on socialization of gender, let us turn our attention to a more general consideration of language and gender, both how it has been examined and how it can be more fruitfully examined. These comments on language and gender should be taken as exemplary of a more general relation between language and social meaning.

Sociological and anthropological studies of language behavior are predicated on the assumptions that (1) language systematically varies across

social contexts and (2) such variation is part of the meaning indexed by linguistic structures. Sociolinguistic studies tend to relate particular structures to particular situational conditions, or clusters of structures to such conditions. The meanings so indexed are referred to as social meanings, in contrast to purely referential or logical meanings expressed by linguistic structures. Hence two or more phonological variants of the same word may share the identical reference but convey different social meanings, e.g. differences in social class or ethnicity of speakers, differences in social distances between speaker and addressee, differences in affect. In every community, members have available to them linguistic resources for communicating such social meanings at the same time as they are providing other levels of information. This system of multifarious signalling is highly efficient. Competent members of every community have been socialized to interpret these meanings and can without conscious control orchestrate messages to convey social meanings. Sociological and anthropological research is dedicated to understanding these communicative skills, interpretive processes, and systems of meaning indexed through language.

Research on indexicality has been carried out within several major disciplinary frameworks. Current thinking about social meaning of language draws heavily on the theoretical perspectives of the Soviet literary critics and philosophers M. Bakhtin (1981) and V. N. Vološinov (1973). This approach stresses the inherently social construction of written and spoken language behavior. Part of the meaning of any utterance (spoken or written) is its social history, its social presence, and its social future. With respect to social history, Bakhtin and Vološinov make the point that utterances may have several "voices" – the speaker's or writer's voice, the voice of a someone referred to within the utterance, the voice of another for whom the message is conveyed, etc. The voices of speaker/writer and others may be blended in the course of the message and become part of the social meanings indexed within the message. This perspective is a potentially critical one for investigating the relation of language to gender, where gender may generate its own set of voices.

A second tradition examining social indexicality of language is sociological and anthropological research on speech events and speech activities. Here Bateson's (1972) and Goffman's (1974) work on keying and frames for events, as well as discussions by Gumperz (1982) on contextualization cues, Hymes (1974) on speech event keys, and Silverstein (1976) on shifters and indexes are all useful in analyzing the social potential of language behavior. Silverstein provides further specification of indexes in terms of whether social context is indexed referentially or non-referentially. That is, social conditions may be communicated through the referential content of a word, phrase, or clause or through some linguistic feature that has no reference. With respect to indexing of gender in English, referential indexes include such items as the third person pro-

nouns "he" and "she," and the titles "Mr." and "Mrs.," "Sir" and "Madam," and the like. Referential indexes have been a major source of discussion among those concerned with the linguistic construction of gender ideology (see especially Silverstein 1985).

From a sociolinguistic point of view, however, referential indexes are far fewer than non-referential indexes of social meaning, including gender. Non-referential indexing of gender may be accomplished through a vast range of morphological, syntactic, and phonological devices available across the world's languages. For example, pitch range may be used in a number of speech communities to index gender of speaker. For example, research on pre-adolescent American male and female children indicates that young girls speak as if their vocal apparatus were smaller than young boys of the same age and same size vocal chords (Sachs 1975). Here it is evident that pitch has social meaning and that young children have come to understand these meanings and employ pitch appropriately to these ends. Other studies (see especially Andersen 1977) indicate that children as young as four years of age can use pitch to index male and female identities.

A concern with indexicality is also at the heart of linguistic and philosophical approaches to the field of pragmatics, the study of language in context (Levinson 1983). Here a major concern is broadening the notion of presupposition beyond logical presupposition to include pragmatic presupposition, i.e. context-sensitive presupposition. Thus an utterance such as "Give me that pen" logically presupposes that there exists a specific pen and pragmatically presupposes that (1) the pen is some distance from the speaker and (2) the speaker is performing the speech act of ordering. From this perspective, we can say that utterances may pragmatically presuppose genders of speakers, addressees, overhearers, and referents. For example, in Japanese, sentences that include such sentence-final morphological particles as *ze* pragmatically presuppose that the speaker is a male whereas sentences that include the sentence-final particle *wa* pragmatically presuppose that the speaker is a female.

3 The indexing of gender

The notion of gender centers on the premise that the notions of men and women / male and female are sociocultural transformations of biological categories and processes (cf., for example, Ortner and Whitehead 1981, Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974, McConnell-Ginet, Borker, and Furman 1980, Gilligan 1982, West and Zimmerman 1987). That is, social groups organize and conceptualize men and women in culturally specific and meaningful ways. Given that language is the major symbolic system of the human species, we would expect language to be a source and moving force of gender ideologies. In other words, we should expect language to be

influenced by local organizations of gender roles, rights, and expectations and to actively perpetuate these organizations in spoken and written communication (Bourdieu 1977). In relating sociocultural constructions of gender to social meaning of language, an issue of importance emerges: **few features of language directly and exclusively index gender**.

In light of this, we must work towards a different conceptualization of the indexical relation between language and gender. In the following discussion, I suggest three characteristics of the language–gender relation. The relation of language to gender is (1) non-exclusive, (2) constitutive, (3) temporally transcendent.

3.1 Non-exclusive relation

In looking at different languages and different speech communities, the most striking generalization is the paucity of linguistic features that alone index local concepts of men and women or even more minimally the sex of a speaker/addressee/referent (Brown and Levinson 1979, Ochs 1987, Seki 1986, Silverstein 1985). Most linguistic features, particularly if we go beyond the lexicon (e.g. kin terms that index this information), do not share such a strict, i.e. presuppositional, relation to the semantic domain of gender.

Rather, overwhelmingly we find that the relation between particular features of language and gender is typically non-exclusive. By non-exclusive, I mean that often variable features of language may be used by/with/for both sexes. Hence, strictly speaking we cannot say that these features pragmatically presuppose male or female. What we find, rather, is that the features may be employed more by one than the other sex. Thus, for example, in British and American English, women tend to use prestige phonological variants more than men of the same social class and ethnicity. Indeed women more than men in these communities overuse the prestige variants, producing "hypercorrect" words (Labov 1966, Trudgill 1974). Women in New York City, for example, overuse the postvocalic /r/ to the extent that they sometimes insert an /r/ in a word that has no "r" in its written form, e.g. instead of saying "idea," they hypercorrect to "idear" (Labov 1966). In this and other examples, the relation between language and gender is distributional and probabilistic.

In addition, non-exclusivity is demonstrated by the fact that many linguistic forms associated with gender are associated as well with the marking of other social information, such as the marking of stance and social action. Thus, for example, tag questions in English are associated not only with female speakers (Andersen 1977), but with stances such as hesitancy, and social acts such as confirmation checks. Certain sentence-final particles in Japanese are associated not only with male and female speakers but with stances of coarse versus delicate intensity. This system of

linguistic forms conveying multiple social meanings is highly efficient from the point of view of linguistic processing and acquisition (Slobin 1985). Further, the multiplicity of potential meanings allows speakers to exploit such inherent ambiguities for strategic ends, such as avoiding going "on-record" in communicating a particular social meaning (Brown and Levinson 1987, Tannen 1986).

A question raised by such facts is "Why this distribution?" How does the distribution of linguistic resources relate to rights, expectations, and other conceptions of men and women in society? These questions seem more in line with those asked by social scientists concerned with the position of men and women *vis-à-vis* access to and control over resources and activities.

3.2 Constitutive relation

By positing a constitutive relation between language and gender, I mean that one or more linguistic features may index social meanings (e.g. stances, social acts, social activities), which in turn helps to constitute gender meanings. The pursuit of such constitutive routes is a far more interesting activity than assessing either obligatory or probabilistic relations between language and sex of speaker/addressee/referent, for here we begin to understand pragmatic meanings of features and their complex relation to gender images.

Let me provide a few examples of constitutiveness. Many of the linguistic features that in the literature are associated primarily with either men or women have as their core social meaning a particular affective stance. As noted earlier, certain linguistic features associated with men's speech in Japanese coarsely intensify the force of an utterance, while those associated with women's speech typically convey an affect of gentle intensity (Uyeno 1971, Seki 1986). We can say that the former features directly index coarse intensity and the latter a soft or delicate intensity. The affective dispositions so indexed are part of the preferred images of men and women and motivate their differential use by men and women. When someone wishes to speak like a woman in Japanese, they may speak gently, using particles such as the sentence-final *wa*, or to speak like a man they may speak coarsely, using the sentence-final particle *ze*.

Similarly, we can find particular linguistic features directly indexing **social acts** or **social activities**, such as the imperative mode indexing the act of ordering in English or respect vocabulary terms in Samoan indexing the activity of oratory. These acts and activities in turn may be associated with speaking like a male or speaking like a female and may display different frequencies of use across the two social categories.

It is in this sense that the relation between language and gender is mediated and constituted through a web of socially organized pragmatic

Figure 14.1 *Indexing gender in Japanese*

Linguistic form	Direct index	Indirect index
ze	coarse intensity	male "voice"
wa	delicate intensity	female "voice"

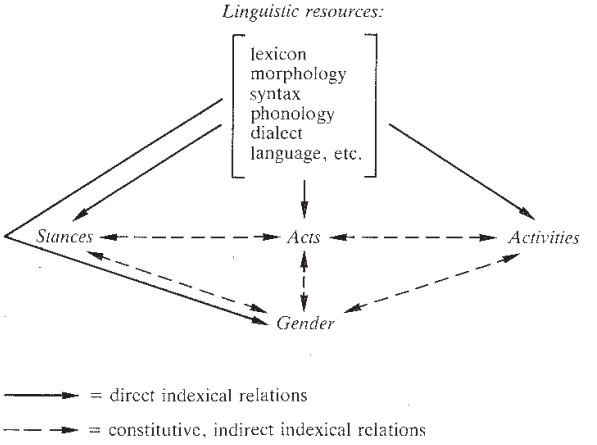

Figure 14.2 *Language and gender*

meanings. Knowledge of how language relates to gender is not a catalogue of correlations between particular linguistic forms and sex of speakers, referents, addressees and the like. Rather, such knowledge entails tacit understanding of (1) how particular linguistic forms can be used to perform particular pragmatic work (such as conveying stance and social action) and (2) norms, preferences, and expectations regarding the distribution of this work *vis-à-vis* particular social identities of speakers, referents, and addressees. To discuss the relation of language to gender in these terms is far more revealing than simply identifying features as directly marking men's or women's speech.

A more favorable model relates linguistic forms to gender either indirectly (through other social meanings indexed) or directly. This model displays different kinds of language–gender relations and begins to specify the kinds of meanings men and women are likely to index through language, the relation of these patterns to the position and images of men and women in society.

A model displaying how linguistic forms help to constitute gender meanings is presented in Figure 14.2. In this model, linguistic forms are resources for conveying a range of social meanings. Further, particular social meanings may be constituted through other social meanings. Although our discussion has focused on gender, the model can be taken as exemplary of how language conveys social identities more generally. Further, the model indicates that constitutive relations obtain between stances, acts, and activities as well as between each of these and gender meanings.

This model indicates two kinds of relations between language and gender. The first and less common is the direct indexical relation, as when a personal pronoun indexes gender of speaker or a kin term **indexes** gender of speaker and referent. This relation is represented by radiating lines from linguistic resources to social meanings. The second relates gender to language through some other social meaning indexed. In this second relation, certain social meanings are more central than others. These meanings however help to **constitute** other domains of social reality. That is, a domain such as stance helps to constitute the image of gender. This sort of constitutive relation is represented by two-headed arrows.

This model puts gender in its place, indicating that it enters into complex constitutive relations with other categories of social meaning. Indeed the model indicates that gender is not the only category of social meaning that may be impacted by a different social domain. For example, speech acts contribute to the establishment of speech activities and the other way around, the expression of stance contributes to the definition of speech acts, and so on.

A more complex representation of language and gender would specify which types of conversational acts, speech activities, affective and epistemological stances, participant roles in situations, and so on enter into the constitution or construction of gender within a particular community and across different communities. A more refined model would also introduce the notion of markedness. Certain acts, activities, stances, roles, etc. are frequently enacted by members of a particular sex, that is, they are unmarked behaviors for that sex. Others are less frequent behaviors, and yet others are highly unusual for that particular sex. These behaviors would be interpreted differently than unmarked behaviors. Where the behavior is highly marked, one sex may be seen as assuming the "voice" of another (Bakhtin 1981), or as acting like the other sex.

One of the major advances in language and gender research has been a move away from relating isolated linguistic forms to gender differences and toward specifying **clusters** of linguistic features that distinguish men's and women's speech in society. This shift represents a move toward defining men's and women's communicative styles, their access to different conversational acts, activities, and genres, and their strategies for performing

similar acts, activities, and genres (Borker 1980, Gal 1989, Goodwin 1990). The starting point for this perspective is functional and strategic rather than formal. That is, researchers have focused primarily on what men and women do with words, to use Austin's phrase (Austin 1962) and have in this endeavor then isolated linguistic structures that men and women use to this end. Studies that start out by isolating particular linguistic forms associated with male or female speakers/addressees/referents tend not to reach this kind of functional or strategy-based account of men's and women's speech. Such studies do not initially focus on activities and situations and examine men's and women's speech *vis-à-vis* those social contexts. These studies, rather, describe a distributional pattern of linguistic forms across the two sexes. Once this pattern is isolated, some *ad hoc* accounting is inferred.

We now have access to a range of studies that are stylistic and strategic in orientation (cf., for example, Gal 1989, Schieffelin 1987, Philips and Reynolds 1987, Brown 1980, Zimmerman and West 1975, West and Zimmerman 1987) Several studies have noted the tendency for men to participate more in speech activities that involve formal interactions with outsiders and women to be restricted to activities within family and village contexts. In these cases, men and women display different competence in particular genres, including, of course, their grammatical and discourse structures (cf., for example, Gal 1989, Keenan [Ochs] 1974, Sherzer 1987, Shore 1982).

Other studies have emphasized ways in which men and women attend to the "face" of their addressees in performing conversational acts that may offend the other. Studies of women's speech in several societies (e.g. Tenejapa [Brown 1979, 1980], American [Lakoff 1973, Zimmerman and West 1975], Japanese [Uyeno 1971]) indicate that women tend to be more polite than men. Brown's study of tenejapa Maya society is by far the most compelling and detailed. Her research indicates that Tenejapa women talking with other women tend to be more polite than men talking with men. When women and men talk to one another, they are equally polite. Tenejapa women talking with other women tend to use different kinds of politeness features than do men with other. They use linguistic structures that show support, approval of another, what Brown and Levinson (1987) have called "positive politeness," whereas men tend to use linguistic forms that indicate a sensitivity to the other's need not to be intruded upon, what Brown and Levinson have called "negative politeness."

The association of women with greater politeness is not universal. My own research among the Malagasy (Keenan [Ochs] 1974) indicates that men are far more polite than are women. Women are seen as abrupt and direct, saying exactly what is on their mind, whereas men are seen as speaking with care and indirectness. Hence women are seen as

inappropriate spokespersons in formal speech activities involving other families, where delicacy and indirectness are demanded. Women rather are selected for other activities. They are the ones to directly confront others, hence the primary performers of accusations, bargaining with Europeans, and gossip. Men control oratorical genres as well as a wide range of poetic and metaphoric forms highly prized in this society.

Similarly, in a more recent study of men's and women's speech in Western Samoan rural society, I have not found that Samoan women are more polite than men of the same social status, except in one particular context. As listeners to narrative tellings, women tend to use more positive politeness supportive feedback forms than do men of the same status. In other contexts, however, the expression of politeness differs more in terms of social rank of speaker (e.g. titled person or spouse of titled person, untitled person) than in terms of gender. With the exception of Brown's study, research on men's and women's attention to face and expression of politeness needs to be pursued more systematically, taking into account a range of situational parameters (the speech activity, the speaker–addressee–author–audience–overhearer–referent relationships, the genre, etc.). A wider data base is needed to understand differences in men's and women's communicative strategies and to resolve contradictory findings within the same society (cf. for example Connor–Linton 1986 on politeness among American middle class adolescents).

3.3 Temporally transcendent relation

Thus far we have considered how linguistic forms may help constitute local conceptions of male and female at the time a particular utterance is produced or is perceived. Japanese speakers index femaleness as they use the sentence-final particle *wa*, for example. Language in this sense has the power to constitute the present context. The constitutive power of language, however, **transcends** the time of utterance production/perception, hence the property of temporal transcendence. Language can also constitute past and future contexts. I call the constitution of past contexts "recontextualization" and the constitution of future contexts "precontextualization" (Ochs 1990). Each of these functions can be carried out through a variety of verbal practices and forms. For example, the practice of speculation can recontextualize past events or precontextualize future events by changing "certain" events into "uncertain" events (Ochs 1982). Similarly, the practice of praising can recontextualize a past act as an accomplishment, and accusations can recontextualize past acts as wrongdoings and personal characters as irreputable. All conversational acts that function as first-pair parts of adjacency sequences (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974), e.g. questions, invitations, compliments,

precontextualize the future in that they set up expectations for what the next conversational act is likely to be (e.g. answers, acceptances/declines).

The relevances of temporal transcendence to this discussion of language and gender is that societies establish norms, preferences and expectations *vis-à-vis* the extent to which and the manner in which men and women can verbally recontextualize the past and precontextualize the future. The roles and status of men and women are partly realized through the distribution of recontextualizing and precontextualizing acts, activities, stances, and topics.

The potential of language to recontextualize and precontextualize will be of import to our discussion of mothering. The status of women in mainstream American society and Western Samoan society is in part constituted through the particular ways women as mothers recast the past and precast the future in their interactions with infants and small children.

4 Communicative styles of mothers and other caregivers

4.1 Underrated mothers

One of the major concerns in gender research has been the social and cultural construction of gender in society. A logical locus to examine this process is interaction between young children and older members of society. By examining the kinds of activities and acts caregivers of both sexes engage in with children of both sexes and the manner in which these activities and acts are carried out, we can not only infer local expectations concerning gender but as well articulate how these expectations are socialized. One important tool of socialization is language. Not only the content of language but the manner in which language is used communicates a vast range of sociocultural knowledge to children and other novices. This use of language we call "language socialization" (Schieffelin and Ochs 1986a, 1986b; Ochs 1986, 1988, 1990). Language socialization includes both socialization through language and socialization to use language. In the following discussion, I will propose a relation between the position and image of women in society and language use in caregiver–child interaction.

Although mothering is a universal kinship role of women and in this role women have positions of control and power, their communicative styles as mothers vary considerably across societies. Such variation in the language of mothering reveals differences across societies in the social position of mothers *vis-à-vis* their young charges. The discussion here will contrast caregiving communicative styles among mainstream white middle class (WMC) Americans with Western Samoan caregiving styles. Based on research carried out with B. Schieffelin (Ochs and Schieffelin 1984; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986a, 1986b), I will argue that images of women in WMC American society are socialized through a communicative strategy

Figure 14.3 *Verbal strategies that constitute mothering*

	Mainstream American (child-centered)	Samoan (other-centered)
Production strategies	Extensive simplification	Little simplification
Intepretive strategies	Express guess and negotiate meaning	Display minimal grasp
Praising	Unidirectional	Bidirectional

of high accommodation to young children. A very different image of women is socialized in traditional Samoan households, where children are expected to be communicatively accommodating to caregivers.

In their ground-breaking volume on sexual meanings, Ortner and Whitehead (1981: 12) comment that "women's universal and highly visible kinship function, mothering, is surprisingly underrated, even ignored, in definitions of womanhood in a wide range of societies with differing kinship organizations." I will argue that the white middle class social scientists' dispreference for attending to the role of mothering is an outcome of the very language socialization practices I am about to describe.

In the analysis to follow I focus on cross-cultural differences in strategies associated with three pervasive verbal practices of mothers and other caregivers:

(1) verbal strategies for getting messages across to young children (**message production strategies**)
(2) verbal strategies for clarifying messages of young children (**interpretive strategies**)
(3) verbal strategies for evaluating accomplishments of children and others (**praising strategies**)

I will demonstrate that through each of these verbal strategies, mainstream American mothers, in contrast to traditional Samoan mothers, construct a low image of themselves. The strategies adopted by mainstream American mothers minimize their own importance by (1) lowering their status, (2) giving priority to the child's point of view, and (3) even denying their participation in accomplishing a task. The strategies to be discussed are represented in Figure 14.3.

4.2 Organization of caregiving

Before detailing these strategies, let us consider briefly the organization of caregiving in the two societies under consideration. In traditional Samoan

households, caregiving is organized in a somewhat different manner from that characteristic of mainstream American households. First, caregiving is shared among a number of family members of **both genders**. Mothers are primary caregivers in the first few months of their infant's life, but they are always assisted, usually by siblings (both brothers and sisters) of the young infant. Once the infant is somewhat older, these sibling caregivers assume most of the basic caregiving tasks, although they are monitored at a distance by older family members. In the village in which I carried out research, siblings took turns staying home from school during the week to care for a younger child. This type of caregiving arrangement is characteristic of most of the world's societies (Weisner and Gallimore 1977).

As is widely documented, Samoan society is hierarchically organized (Mead 1930, Sahlins 1958, Shore 1982). Social stratification is evident in the political distinctions of *ali'i* "chief," *tulaafale* "orator," and *taule'ale'a* "untitled person"; in titles within the rank of *ali'i* and within the rank of *tulaafale*; and among untitled persons along the dimensions of relative age and generation. Hierarchical distinctions are evident in domestic as well as public interactions.

Of particular concern to the discussion at hand is the fact that caregiving is hierarchically organized. Untitled, older, higher generation caregivers assume a social status superior to younger untitled caregivers who are co-present in a household setting. Further, caregivers enjoy a higher status than the young charges under their care.

Among the demeanors Samoans associated with social rank, direction of accommodation is most salient. Lower ranking persons are expected to accommodate to higher ranking persons, as in other stratified societies. Lower ranking caregivers show respect by carrying out the tasks set for them by their elders. They provide the more active caregivers, while others stay seated and provide verbal directives. Samoan caregivers say that infants and young children are by nature wild and willful and that accommodation in the form of respect is the single most important demeanor that young children must learn. A core feature of respect is attending to others and serving their needs. A great deal of care is taken to orient infants and young children to notice others. Infants, for example, are usually held outwards and even spoonfed facing the social group co-present.

4.3 Message production strategies

One of the outstanding observations of mainstream American mothers is that they use a special verbal style or register (Ferguson 1964, 1977). This register, often called "Baby Talk" or "Motherese" (Newport 1976), is a simplified register, and it shares many of the features of other simplified registers, such as Teacher Talk, Foreigner Talk and talk to the elderly,

lovers, and to pets. Characteristics of this register include the following: restricted lexicon, Baby Talk words (child's own versions of words), shorter sentence length, phonological simplification (such as avoidance of consonant clusters in favor of consonant–vowel alternation, e.g. tummy versus stomach), morphosyntactic simplification (e.g. avoidance of complex sentences, copula), topical focus on here-and-now versus past/future, exaggerated intonation, slower pace, repetition, cooperative proposition-making with child (e.g. expanding the child's utterance into adult grammatical form, providing sentence frames for child to complete.)

Baby Talk register has been a major area of investigation over the last decade or so in the field of language acquisition. The existence of such a register was argued by many to indicate that language acquisition was facilitated by such input. More recently, cross-cultural observations of caregiver–child communication indicate that simplified registers are not characteristic of this communicative context in all societies (Heath 1982, Ochs 1982, Ochs and Schieffelin 1984, Schieffelin and Ochs 1986a, 1986b, Ward 1971). We now know that the process of language acquisition does not depend on this sociolinguistic environment. Western Samoan, Kaluli New Guinea and black working class American children are not surrounded by simplified speech of the sort described above and yet they become perfectly competent speakers in the course of normal development. Given that such simplification is not necessary for the process of language acquisition, we might ask why then do caregivers in certain societies choose to communicate in this fashion with their children whereas others do not.

In Ochs and Schieffelin (1984), we proposed that Baby Talk is part of a more pervasive cultural orientation to children among mainstream Americans. In particular, we proposed that mainstream American society is highly child-centered and that there is a very strong expectation that those in the presence of young children will **accommodate to children's perceived wants and needs**. Such accommodation is both non-verbal and verbal. It manifests itself in a vast range of child-oriented artifacts such as child-proof medicine bottles, safety catches on cabinets and electrical outlets, miniaturization of furniture and clothes, and so on. Adults in the presence of sleeping children will similarly accommodate to them by lowering their voices.

In the domain of verbal communication, accommodation takes many forms. Beyond the use of Baby Talk register, a widely observed behavior of mainstream American mothers is their participation in conversation-like interactions with tiny infants. Mothers have been observed engaging in greeting exchanges with infants as soon as twenty-four hours after birth (Stern 1977). To pull this off obviously requires quite a bit of communicative accommodation on the part of the mother. Indeed what is characteristic of these **proto-conversations** (Bates *et al.* 1977) is the mother's willingness

to take on the conversational work of the infant as well as her own. Thus mothers "ventriloquate" through infants (Bakhtin 1981) and in this way sustain "conversations" for some time.

Throughout the course of their infancy, children are thus participants in exchanges which are strongly scaffolded (Bruner 1975) by their mothers. Mothers are able to enter into and sustain communication with small children by not only speaking for them but as well by taking into consideration what the child is holding, what the child is looking at, what event just took place, when the child last slept and ate, and a variety of other child-oriented conditions that may assist in the interpretation of children's gestures and vocalizations. In this way, mothers are able to respond to children in what they perceive to be communicatively appropriate ways.

This scaffolding is also manifest in non-verbal interactions between mothers and children, as when mothers assist young children in building play structures or to realize some intention associated with other tasks. In Vygotsky's terms (1978), mothers are providing a 'zone of proximal development' for their children, where a socially structured environment enhances the attainment of particular skills.

Such extensive verbal and non-verbal accommodation on the part of mothers and others in caregiving roles is expected as part of the mainstream American caregiving role. Being a "good mother" or "good teacher" is to empathize with and respond to the child's mind set. Once a caregiver believes that she or he understands this mind set, a good caregiver will either intervene or assist the child in carrying out her or his desired activity.

In the sociocultural world of traditional Samoan households, where children are socialized to accommodate to others, it is not surprising to learn that mothers and other caregivers do not use a simplified register in speaking to infants and young children. Such a register indexes a stance of accommodation by speaker to addressee. Samoan does have a simplified register, but this register is used towards foreigners, who historically have been missionaries, government representatives, and others who hold a high social position. In this context, a stance of accommodation is appropriate, just as host accommodates to guest.

In the case at hand, we see that linguistic forms in collocation convey particular stances – here simplified speech conveys accommodation to addressee – and these social meanings in turn help to constitute and index particular social identities. Of cross-cultural significance is the observation that societies differ in the social identities of speakers and addressees associated with this stance. Hence the same set of linguistic features that directly index one social meaning, i.e. accommodation, in two speech communities (mainstream American, traditional Western Samoan) indirectly index different social identities (i.e. caregivers and children,

members to foreign dignitaries). Simplified registers display accommodation in that they respond to a perceived communicative desire or need of the addressee, e.g. the need or desire to decode a message. Accommodation is universally associated with demeanor of lower towards higher ranking parties. That mainstream American mothers use a simplified register pervasively has a constitutive impact on the image of women in that this practice socializes young children into an image of women as accommodating or addressee-centered in demeanor. In traditional Western Samoan households, mothers and other caregivers rarely simplify their speech to young children. This practice socializes young children to be accommodating, i.e. to attend carefully to the non-simplified speech and actions of others.

4.4 Interpretive strategies

A second manifestation of child- versus other-centeredness or accommodating versus non-accommodating verbal practices is located in cross-cultural differences in mothers' and other caregivers' responses to children's unintelligible utterances (see Figure 14.3).

As with simplified registers, Western Samoan and mainstream American speech communities generally display similar verbal practices in responding to unintelligible utterances. However, important differences lie in the social conditions under which particular practices are preferred and appropriate. In both communities, unintelligible utterances may be (1) ignored, (2) responded to by indicating unintelligibility (e.g. "What?," "I don't understand," "Huh?," etc.), or (3) responded to by verbally guessing at the meaning of the utterance (Ochs 1984). The two communities differ in their preferences for using these strategies when speaking to young children. Overwhelmingly, mainstream American mothers prefer to respond to young children's unintelligible speech by verbally guessing. Overwhelmingly, Western Samoan mothers and other caregivers prefer to ignore or point out the unintelligibility of the child's utterance.

These differences reinforce different images of mothers and other caregivers in the two societies, i.e. more/less child-centered and more/less accommodating. Verbal guesses are more child-centered and accommodating than simply indicating unintelligibility in two senses:

(1) Expressed guesses entails greater perspective-taking, i.e. taking the child's point of view. Guessing involves attempting to formulate the child's intended message, which in turn may entail taking into consideration what the child is looking at, holding, what the child just said, and other cues. Pointing out that the child's utterance is not clear does not entail this kind of sociocentrism, and if the child wishes to get a message across, he or she must reformulate the message to better meet the recipients' communicative requirements. Otherwise the utterance will be ignored.

(2) Expressed guesses are hypotheses or candidate interpretations presented to the child for confirmation, disconfirmation, or modification. Expressed guesses thus allow the child to participate in negotiations over the meanings of utterances produced by the child. Another way of looking at this phenomenon is to say that in verbally expressing a guess, mothers give the child the right to influence mothers' interpretations of the child's utterances. In contrast, displays of non-understanding do not engage the child in such negotiations.

Once again we can see that verbal practices and the linguistic forms that realize them (e.g. yes–no interrogatives helping to constitute guessing, particles such as "Huh?" expressing minimal understanding) participate in the construction of local images of mothering.

Another way of analyzing message production practices and interpretive practices is to say that Samoan and mainstream American mothers define different goals in their interactions with young children and that these goals in turn entail different linguistic practices. Mainstream American mothers often set the goal of engaging infants and small children as conversational partners, and they do so from within hours of their child's birth for lengthy stretches of time (Ochs and Schieffelin 1984). Once they establish conversation as a goal, mothers are obliged to make enormous linguistic accommodation for that goal to be accomplished. Children who are a few hours old, for example, can hardly be expected to speak for themselves, therefore the mainstream American mother who insists on such conversations takes on both conversational roles, speaking for the infant as well as herself. The generalization of importance here is that mainstream American mothers systematically set goals that are impossible for a child to achieve without dramatic scaffolding by the mother.

The Samoan way is different, for Samoan mothers and other caregivers do not establish goals for the child that demand such extensive accommodation from others. They do not engage infants in proto-conversations, which demand that the caregiver assume the perspective of the infant and speak for the infant, as characteristic of American WMC interactions with young babies. Samoan caregivers simply do not place infants in communicative contexts that demand this kind of verbal scaffolding. The Samoan way is to delay such communicative exchanges until the child displays more verbal and communicative competence.

4.5 Praising strategies

The final strategy relevant to the construction of gender meanings in society concerns mothers' and other caregivers' evaluative comments on an activity involving a child (see Figure 14.3). In this discussion, we attend to the property of language introduced earlier as "temporal transcendence," i.e. the capacity of language to recontextualize the past and precontextual-

ize the future in addition to contextualizing the present. Among their many functions, evaluative comments reframe or recontextualize a past act or set of acts. Praising, for example, recontextualizes a past act/activity as an accomplishment. In this sense, praising has a backwards performative function. Through the uttering of a praise, the speaker turns any act or set of acts into an accomplishment. Of interest to this discussion is the fact that (1) mainstream American and Western Samoan mothers and other caregivers recontextualize past acts/activities as **different** kinds of accomplishments, and (2) these different contextualizations help to constitute weak and strong images of the mothers and others.

From the discussion so far, you are aware that mainstream American mothers provide extensive assistance in communicating with young children – simplifying, guessing, and even speaking for them. We have also noted the tendency for mothers to heavily assist children in carrying out certain activities, e.g. constructing a toy, drawing a picture, tying a shoelace. From a Vygotskian perspective, such activities may be seen as "joint activities" (Vygotsky 1978), accomplished by mother and child. In contrast, however, mainstream American mothers typically recontextualize such activities as solely the child's accomplishment (Ochs and Schieffelin 1984). This is accomplished by directing praises at the child such as "Good!" or "Look at the beautiful castle you made!," with no mention of the mother's role nor any expectation that the child should praise the mother for her part in accomplishing the task at hand. In other words, these mothers deny their own participation; through their own praising practices, they make themselves invisible. It is precisely this kind of verbal reframing that socializes infants and small children into images and expectations of mothers.

In Ochs and Schieffelin (1984), we noted that this kind of behavior defines the child as more competent than she or he may actually be. (The child could not do these activities without the caregiver's scaffolding.) This behavior as well lowers the position of the caregiver (usually the mother). We have claimed that these behaviors along with the widespread use of Baby Talk and other verbal behaviors serve to minimize the asymmetry in knowledge and power between caregiver and child. Indeed we have claimed that caregivers in mainstream American society are uncomfortable with such asymmetry and they mask differences in competence by acting as if the other were more competent and they less competent. Hence with respect to other societies, caregiver–child communication in current mainstream American society both reflects and creates (socializes) a more egalitarian relationship. This is not to say that these caregivers do not exercise power and control over their charges (cf., for example, Corsaro 1979), but rather that they do so less than in other societies. Mainstream caregivers do not claim "ownership" to products of joint activity, they speak like small children (simplified register), they take the perspective of

the child and do not expect the child to assume their perspective until rather late in their development.

In contrast to American middle class households, in traditional Samoan communities, activities are often recognized as jointly accomplished. This recognition is realized linguistically through a praising practice distinct from that typical of mainstream American praising. Whereas in mainstream American interactions, praising is typically unidirectional, in Samoan interactions, praising is typically bidirectional. There is a strong expectation that the first one to be praised will in turn praise the praiser. Typically the praise consists of the expression *Maaloo!* "Well done!" Once the first *maaloo* is uttered, a second *maaloo* is to be directed to the producer of the original *maaloo*. In these *maaloo* exchanges, each *maaloo* recontextualizes the situation. Like mainstream American praising, the first *maaloo* recontextualizes an act/activity of the addressee as an accomplishment. The second *maaloo*, however, recontextualizes the act/activity as jointly accomplished. The second *maaloo* acknowledges the support of the first speaker as contributing to the successful achievement of the task at hand. In other words, the second *maaloo* recontextualizes the congratulator as someone to be congratulated as well. Children in Western Samoan households are socialized through such bidirectional praising practices to articulate the contribution of others, including mothers.

5 Gender hierarchies

In summary, I have suggested that mothering cannot be taken for granted in assessing gender identity across societies. While women's position in society has been reckoned in terms of their roles as sisters and wives, very little ethnography has been devoted to assessing their position as mothers. I have suggested here that mothering demeanor cannot be taken for granted. At least in the realm of verbal behavior, we can see significant cultural patterning. When I examine transcripts of children's interactions with others, I see a set of cultural meanings about the position of mother, hence about women, being conveyed to children hundreds of times in the course of their early lives through linguistic forms and the pragmatic practices these forms help to constitute. I do not pretend to have a handle on women's position in either current WMC American society or traditional Samoan society (cf. Mead 1928, Shore 1981, 1982). From a sociolinguistic standpoint, however, Samoan mothers enjoy a more prestigious position *vis-à-vis* their offspring than do mainstream American mothers (as currently observed in the developmental psycholinguistic literature.) On a communicative level, they are accommodated to more often by children and starting at a much earlier age than is characteristic of American households. Further, they socialize young children to recognize the contribution of caregivers and others to achieving a goal, in contrast to

American middle class mothers, who tend to socialize their children to ignore or minimize the role of the mother in reaching a goal. Finally, Samoan mothers have command over human labour in that they are typically the highest status caregivers present and have the right to delegate the more time-consuming and physically active caregiving tasks to younger, lower status caregivers at hand. Thus even among caregivers they are the least accommodating, and the linguistic record indexes this demeanor in numerous ways.

Samoan women enjoy their prestigious position in the hierarchy of caregiving and in caregiver–child relationships. Mainstream American mothers use certain indexes of power in their communicative demeanor, but not to the extent manifest in Samoan mothers' speech. American mothers enter into negotiations with their children over the meaning of children's unclear utterances; Samoan mothers (and other caregivers) do not. Mainstream American mothers treat even the tiniest of infants as conversational partners (Ochs and Schieffelin 1984); Samoan mothers do not. And the list of communicative manifestations of the relative statuses of mothers in these two societies goes on.

We are now in a better position to evaluate Ortner and Whitehead's remark that the role of mothering "is surprisingly underrated, even ignored, in definitions of womanhood" (1981: 12). This state of affairs is precisely what we would predict from the language socialization practices in mainstream American households in the United States and much of middle class Western Europe as well. "Mother" is underrated because she does not socialize children to acknowledge her participation in accomplishments. "Mother" is ignored because through her own language behavior, "mother" has become invisible.

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Apolitical Intellectuals

I

One day,
the apolitical
intellectuals
of my country
will be interrogated
by the humblest
of our people.

They will be asked
what they did
when
their homeland was slowly
extinguished,
like a sweet fire,
small and alone.

No one will ask them
about their suits,
or about their long
siestas
after lunch,
or about their sterile
battles with nothingness,
nor about
their ontological
way
of making money.
They won't be questioned
about Greek mythology,
or about the self-disgust they felt
when someone, deep down,
accepted the fate of dying a coward's death.
They'll be asked nothing
about their absurd
justifications,
born in the shadow
of a total lie.

II

On that day
the humble people will come.
Those who had no place
in the books and poems
of the apolitical intellectuals,
yet, every day, brought them
their bread and milk,
their eggs and tortillas,
those who mended their clothes,
who drove their cars,
who cared for their dogs and tended
their gardens,
who worked for them,
and they'll ask:
'What did you do when the poor
suffered, when the tenderness and life
was snuffed out of them?'.

III

Apolitical intellectuals
of my sweet country,
you will have nothing to say.

A vulture of silence
will devour your insides.
Your own misery
will gnaw at your soul.
And you will be silent,
ashamed of yourselves.

--Otto René Castillo

"Only with You, this Broom Will Fly"

ROJAVA, MAGIC, AND SWEEPING AWAY THE STATE INSIDE US

Dilar Dirik

And one day,
the (r)evolution came.
We held instructions in our mighty hands,
but the blueprints of the new era were pink and green and upside down,
written in a language that none of us could read,
except a mother with three kids on her back and five hiding under her skirt.
"It says," she said,
"don't expect from the gods, whether earthly or heavenly, what you can find in yourself."
And thus, walked off
the illiterate woman,
to wash her face with the rays of the sun.[1]

A year into the war in Syria, on July 19, 2012, the people in the majority-Kurdish north of the country took over governmental facilities, hoisted their yellow, green, and red flags, and chanting aloud revolutionary music declared, "Revolution in Rojava." Not many years have passed, but enough things have happened since then to fill entire libraries.[2]

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1. All the epigraph stories were written by me, based on many conversations with women in Rojava.

2. *Editor's note*: This piece was written in mid-2019, and thus doesn't reflect any of the "things [that] have happened since."

A monstrous fascist entity, the so-called Islamic State (ISIS), rose up, conquered vast territories, and fell within years. Yet ISIS only accounts for a small percent of the unimaginable violence, brutality, and trauma inflicted on millions of people by the Syrian forces and other groups involved in the ongoing war, not least of which involves the global arms trade that sponsors and perpetuates conflicts around the world. In a short time, various peoples, communities, cultures, and ecologies suffered irreversible losses. Considering the international system within which all this was able to happen, it seems meaningless to say that it could have been prevented.

Parallel to these atrocities, though, volumes of stories of resistance, courage, and liberation were written, as various communities came together to fight shoulder to shoulder against seemingly invincible doctrines of destruction. In the early 2010s, peoples across the Middle East and North Africa revolted against the authoritarian nation-states that deprived them of the means to live in a dignified and meaningful manner. Like a supernatural force, the spirit of revolution spread as if wildfire from country to country, as hegemonic global powers eagerly tried to suffocate, control, or at least contain it. Within this context, the conditions to declare the revolution in Rojava presented themselves. Although the fight against ISIS was militarily supported by the US-led Global Coalition forces, the people on the ground, notably including the People's Defense Forces (YPG) and Women's Defense Forces (YPJ), had been defending their regions against ISIS and similar groups, backed by the hostile Turkish state, since 2012. In fact, it was their commitment to building a world without such coalitions, without doctrines of power, domination, and exploitation, that enabled the peoples in Rojava to defend their values for a life in freedom. Especially with the battles in places like Kobanê, it became clear to many that what was at stake in this war was not merely the defense of a territory but also a

refusal to accept violence and fascism as a fact of life as well as a belief in the possibility of building a different world.

In a world of capitalist assaults on our imagination, dreams, and hopes in the potentiality of alternatives, the idea of revolutionary change and liberated societies may resemble fairy tales in remote places beyond our reach in time and space. It appears as though revolution is something that happens out there, elsewhere, not here, not now, not to us. And yet a decade ago, if you had told the impoverished and colonized Kurdish people in northern Syria that one day internationalists from around the world would be buried in these lands after helping to defend the people's resistance against fascism, who would have believed it?

Sometimes radical imaginaries require that we stretch our temporal and spatial scale just enough to envision the possible, without losing sight of the immense labor and often sacrifice that is required to achieve such possibilities. This is the case when trying to make sense of what has been referred to as the "revolution in Rojava," which over the years came to signify a large-scale sphere of self-determined autonomy not only in the localized absence of a state among some three million people and tens of thousands of square miles of land but also, relatively speaking, outside the control of an international system of domination and exploitation.

Rojavayê Kurdistanê simply means "western Kurdistan" in Kurdish, as it refers to the westernmost area of Kurdistan divided into four parts one century ago. It is within this Rojava, in the context of the Syrian war, that the Kurdish liberation movement's system of democratic confederalism, a political project developed by imprisoned leader Abdullah Öcalan as an alternative to the nation-state, started to be implemented in relative freedom and on a larger scale. While in the past, autonomous structures were built up in northern Kurdistan/Turkey as well in the form of communes,

assemblies, congresses, cooperatives, and academies, these efforts were criminalized, banned, and destroyed over the past ten or fifteen years by the state under the Justice and Development Party.

In light of this, since 2011, to present a "third way" in rejection of the two available political options—the regime, or the increasingly radicalizing and foreign-determined opposition—people started to form their nonstate alternative, or self-governance structures. While much of this organizing was shaped by spontaneous and creative responses to the developments in the region, the effect of the forty-year-old legacy of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, led by Öcalan in Rojava, cannot be understated.

At the same time, from reconciliation committees and tribunes, to media work and education, to social and cultural activities, to economic and political decision-making bodies, the women's movement in Rojava is building up its own autonomous confederal system from the bottom up. It's doing so in order to secure women's achievements, interests, and needs in the face of patriarchal violence in their movements, communities, and families. One of the most common phrases that one hears in this political atmosphere is that "the revolution in Rojava is a women's revolution." Indeed, the movement aspires to make women's liberation the defining criterion of the social transformation's success.

In the meantime, balancing the realities of war, diversity of the communities, external attacks, and domestic conflicts as well as sensitivities related to social issues, parallel to the directly democratic practices and educational activities on the ground, a representative federal system was formed over time to allow the region to deal as a coherent unit with outside elements.

Not least due to the ever-changing geopolitical, economic, and social dynamics, what started out as the Democratic Self-Administration of Rojava with three cantons announced in January 2014, has changed in form,

size, and shape almost every year ever since. As the war against ISIS spread beyond majority-Kurdish Rojava, in 2016, the term "northern Syria" began to be used exclusively to do justice to the cultural diversity in the region. With the ousting of ISIS from the eastern part of the country, the self-administration came to encompass the Democratic Federation of Northern and Eastern Syria. Today, there are several "regions" with cantons, which have districts, assemblies, city councils, and thousands of communes that govern themselves. While Rojava remains the symbolic name for this liberation project, because it started in the majority-Kurdish areas, as of the end of 2018, the political system of the large area protected by the Syrian Democratic Forces was referred to as the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria. What it will be called tomorrow is yet to be seen!

The admittedly complex network of movements, self-governance structures, levels of accountability, and decision-making mechanisms appears almost as illegible to bureaucratic state systems as the protective geography of Kurdistan's mountains. As we will see, however, we need to divert our gaze from the drone view to the movement of politics on the grassroots level to make sense of Rojava's social dynamics. This is important especially when considering that one of the main points of argument within radical circles in the past seven years has been the labeling of Rojava as a "revolution." Either clinging onto old-fashioned, memorized formulas on the "how-to" of revolutions, or capitalist views of social transformation and change that expect instant reward and tangible results, many ignored that in the lives of countless people, especially women, thousands of small revolutions started to realize themselves in a collective process.

What if we were to take up a feminist lens when analyzing the efforts of grassroots self-organization? Can we define revolution from a feminist perspective? Is it possible to view revolution as a process that requires patience,

care, communality, and leadership that is selfless and productive, aiming at the development of life itself? To keep more witches and their magic from being burned and annihilated, do we need to break the jinx of the state that has so profoundly damaged our relationships, mentalities, and personalities?

Revolution Is Not a Magic Wand . . .

A million years ago, people thought that the stretched index fingers of little boys in Syria and Iraq were taught to them by an army of men, who had come to steal their dreams and loot their futures.

In reality, however, these children were pointing at the sky, trying to spot the flying caravan of magical women in the clouds.

The story goes that one day, in a dark, moldy basement in ar-Raqqa, a group of women from different countries, of different tongues, decided to come together to share their stories, away from the gaze of the male guard with four pairs of eyes and a microphone-shaped beard who was watching them at all times. In those days, whenever women came together to speak about their conditions and lives, society would refer to this as an act of "conspiracy." The moment the women gathered in a circle and faced each other, surrounded by their infant children, they felt as though they had suddenly broken a charm; they felt relieved of the duty to guard an ancient secret.

Bewildered and shocked about this obscene sight of women in assembly, the guard's moustache fell off and landed on his lap. Anxiously trying to pick up the twitching, two-legged moustache, his body suddenly froze in movement. Everyone's heads turned to Ezra, the oldest woman in the basement. The tips of her two white braids were still smoking. They had been the cause of this epic turn of events. Defying her hunched back, she assumed a proud posture to say, "I always knew I had magical powers!"

> The awkward pose of the man's stiff body immediately became a playground for the children. They climbed up his archaic authority-shoulders, monkey-hanging themselves from these arms of ancient abuse. Whoever was the first to reach his warning index finger won the game round until they abolished winning altogether and just enjoyed themselves.

To antiauthoritarian radicals, the idea that the egalitarian utopias of socialism have been betrayed historically by states and statist mind-sets is nothing new. Anarchists in particular have been attentive to the exploitative nature of the state institution as a tool of domination and hierarchy. Statist notions of socialism stand in contrast to movements and perspectives that rely on the consciousness as well as action of everyday people, and their potential to become subjects of transformative social processes without orders from above. As described by authors like anarchist anthropologist James C. Scott, state socialism's high modernist visions of a bureaucratically governed, socially engineered society imply the notion that a flawless statist order would render politics obsolete. One can add that it would render notions of ethics, justice, or accountability redundant. Why get involved in the messy business of organizing life when anonymous, obscure institutions can gladly take charge?

Despite being critical of the state as an institution, many radicals seem to adopt a mode of understanding society that is not too dissimilar from it, though. The ways in which radicals around the world have struggled to make sense of Rojava is an expression of this phenomenon. Instead of considering the historical, socioeconomic, cultural, and geopolitical context in which Rojava asserted itself as an alternative to existing surrounding systems of exploitation, people seemed to think that lasting societal change could come about with certain magical formulas.

"But you haven't abolished private property!"
"But women are still doing all the housework!"
"But you continue to use so much plastic! What about ecology?"

Ready-made solutions, however, are an expression of a capitalist mode of thought, which demands instant gratification without labor, care, and sustainability. Moreover, one can't help but think that sectarian understandings of anything slightly radical going on anywhere in the world resemble the authoritarianism of abusive patriarchal fatherhood that lacks all self-criticism, and rejects, punishes, and disciplines its child when they do not turn out in one's own image. While expecting rapid change in social relations, this patriarchal notion of revolution, even when referring to itself as capitalist, is in fact employing a view of society as a factory product. Yet fundamental societal transformation is not the same as life in a squat, where one may come across people more or less inclined toward similar politics.

Feminist prefigurative politics, less focused on measurable impact, or provable or testable formulas, but concerned with care, sustainability, collectivism, ecology, and the self-determination and autonomy of different identities, allows us a view of revolution that is different from a fatherlike radical politics that treats society as a group of objects to be disciplined and led. Revolutionary processes require patience and love, hope and belief.

Yet There's Magic in Rejecting the Doctrine of Impossibility

Sahra from east of the river looked west at Zamaan, who looked back at Sahra: "Take my name and let your name be mine." They exchanged names, but remained themselves, became themselves even more deeply, for they had claimed the power to name themselves.

It is possible to imagine flags hung upside down, uniforms worn inside out, and marches sung backward, but it is difficult to imagine a world without hierarchy. Such is authoritarianism's impact on our imaginary. We can only conceive of possibilities through the lens of what we already know, when the logics of our lifeworlds are governed by mechanisms and structures of top-down power. "Capitalist realism," as described by theorist Mark Fisher in his book of that name, refers to the dominant and increasingly hegemonic notion that "not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative to it."[3]

Many thinkers around the world have pointed out the ways in which the state, especially under capitalism, represents a secular entity with seemingly divine attributes. The power of the state, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent—and yes, omnivorous—stifles our movements, thoughts, and sense of self to such an extent that we almost cease to know our own power to act on the world. Dividing our lives into spheres of control and administration (household versus public life, cities versus nature, and so on) is part of the state project to divorce us from our ability to live meaningfully. While rendering itself to be the beginning and end of everything, the capitalist state kills all that about life that it cannot commodify, including our imagination.

In the patriarchal worldview, magic—or rather, illusion—is yet another tool in the authoritarian kit in order to deceive, mislead, and manipulate thoughts, beliefs, and social structures. By way of impressing the subject—a spectator with seemingly unintelligible, inconceivable powers—the illu-

3. Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Ropley, UK: Zero Books, 2009), 2.

sionist—that is, the grandiose state—ties the subject to their chair without bonds. Nationalism, fascism, and neoliberalism use similarly deceptive tools, including violence, to claim power over life and death in the earthly world and beyond. Despite being built on pretensions, impositions, and false images, this treacherous system of authoritarian power has a real impact on most people's everyday lives. This power does not create; it only destroys.

While asserting their realities in all spheres of our life through ideology, illusion, and force, both the capitalist state and patriarchy at the same time fundamentally rely on dashing our belief in other forms of seemingly magical power. Mesmerized by the power of the state or father figure, we frequently forget our own power, and our relationship to ourselves, society, and nature. Oftentimes, the reproduction of life through the unpaid emotional and physical work done especially by women appears to us as magic, in a derogatory or at least disbelieving sense. As described by feminist author Silvia Federici in *Caliban and the Witch*, for instance, the capitalist logic of work needed to drive out any notion of magic from people's lives in order to monopolize reality. The power over life and death could not be left to instances of power outside the state, whether material or imagined.

According to twentieth-century anarchist anthropologist Pierre Clastres, in Western philosophy, society is inherently connected to the notion of people living under a state, which in turn considers itself to be the center of society. Thus, state societies refer to nonstate societies as "people without faith, without law, without king," or in other words, nonsocieties. The glorification of the state as the supreme instance of secular sovereignty has been a crucial assumption since the Enlightenment era and especially

since the formulations of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, whose rationalist dialectics further strengthened the foundations of a modernist paradigm that understands the state as a logical step in humanity's linear progression toward an enlightened order. Among nonstate peoples, however, in Clastres's view, the political does not exist in a sphere external to the self in the sense that it is not delegated to a statist "other" outside society but instead operates through and within society. In short, the political sphere cannot be separated from the social sphere.

But the magic of life lingered in the shadows. It is now strongly connected to what could be called the principle of hope; it allows us to imagine that the course of things can go differently. Magic breaks with the doctrine of impossibility, or the hegemonic slogan of late capitalism that "there is no alternative." The realm of magic is a world protected from the constraints imposed on us by statist ideology, heteropatriarchal mentalities, religious dogmas, and capitalist mutilations of our fantasies, and a way to try to counter their concrete assaults.

Seen in this light, statelessness or antistate modes of organizing in fact lend themselves to direct ways of intervening in and acting on life. They protect and defend a piece of the magical world outside the state and patriarchy by embodying alternatives through their very existence and ways of life.

An ecological view of life, divorced from the statist-patriarchal gaze, will allow us to understand that just as we cannot fully grasp the materiality of magic, we cannot prefiguratively imagine liberated individuals outside societal contexts. The magic happens in the actually doing of the alternative itself.

> The guardian's keys, shaped like body parts, were seized by Lenya, who had never been behind a wheel, but knew all about driving nonetheless. As the women and children entered the bus one by one, Lenya hungrily eyed the driver's seat like her baby had done to her breast, until . . .
>
> With a devout "Bismillah!" she heaved her heavy body onto her new throne. Her manic laugh, as she maneuvered the bus through the sky, had a blue color and kept evil patriarchal spirits away from her precious passengers.

Despite its aspiration to become a sphere in which freedom can develop, on top of being encircled by violence, Rojava also faces all the sorts of problems that any other context around the world does when it comes to organizing. How do we even begin to motivate a severely traumatized, mainly conservative, impoverished society, whose homes and dreams have been taken away?

Parallel to processes and efforts to create new ways of relating to one another, there are of course large sections of society that are apolitical, disinterested, or otherwise preoccupied. And within Rojava, there are also hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people and refugees with urgent needs to be met in an efficient manner.

If we look at the context in which Rojava's revolution emerged, we will see more clearly that what the people on the ground are up against is not only an army of different systems of violence and authority but also a whole set of internalized mentalities as a result of oppression and colonization. The following is a testimony by female revolutionary Fouwza Yousif, whom I interviewed in Rojava:

> Unlike other parts of Kurdistan, Syrian policy toward the Kurds was determined by a policy of "de-identification." Not only was Kurdish identity de-

nied, the state also wanted to render people landless. By stripping many people of their citizenship, the state took away any possible Arab identity and treated Kurds like landless foreigners. The right to buy and own a house, land, property, and businesses, all of which are basic things for people's economy in this region, were denied. One had to register someone else's name.

The impact of the existence as a landless, rootless people went deeper than political denial. Psychologically, those who still had Syrian IDs feared that if they rose up, their rights as citizens would be taken away as well. When Arabs were settled in the fertile, majority-Kurdish areas, Kurds were separated from each other, and a grudge developed toward the state, but also toward these Arab tribes. In legal disputes, the government usually sided with Arabs; law was politicized.

While pitting communities against each other, the state further implemented a state-of-emergency rule in the area to check and control the Kurds. The state policy was based on intelligence, by turning the population into agents. Communal ties were broken as people were increasingly afraid to trust each other. Although people spoke Kurdish at home, the language was forbidden in the public realm. Students were encouraged in school to tell on their own families if they spoke Kurdish.

Since only Syrian citizens could become officers, young Kurds lacked incentives for studying. Education served as a tool of assimilation anyway. There was no mention of the Kurds in the Syrian syllabus; geography and history were distorted. Êzîdî people were forced to study Islam in schools. Those who did not receive education remained ignorant, and those who did study became assimilated.

Economically, the state tried to tie the economy of this fertile, rich area to its central administration, putting the people in a state of dependency. You could only grow things like wheat and lentils. Due to real socialist policy, there were no private sectors anyway. Nothing was planned according to the needs of the society, but instead organized for state interests, although the resources

were plentiful and could have fed everyone. Oil would be extracted from Rimelan, but refined in Homs. Wheat would be grown in Cizîrê and Kobanê, but milled in Aleppo, Homs, or Damascus. It was a biopower regime, an economic special war strategy, a state between death and life; people would be given barely enough to survive, not to live comfortably. It was a colonial treatment to leave people hungry and dependent. Landless as they were, without industry, people migrated to Damascus and Aleppo.

Finally, there was no chance to organize; even cultural or social centers were banned. Existing ones either operated secretly, or remained insignificant and marginal. The secret service was so strong that associations were infiltrated and could not do meaningful, serious work. Trade unions and civil society organizations? Zero. All had to adhere to Ba'ath, at least through affiliation. There was no real civil society. All this resulted in an organizationless, landless, tongueless, identityless society.

In this sense, there were several layers of exploitation that affected people in a variety of ways. With the revocation of citizenship and economic policies, the Kurds were psychologically made to feel like guests in their homes, impeding the development of a rage against the system, due to a lack of identification with the land. Military marches, glorifications of Arab nationalism, and gratifying encouragement to join the Ba'ath party accompanied the absence of teachings on Kurdish history and existence to ideologically enable exploitation. In parallel, the assimilation and dispossession policies from the 1960s onward were seen by many as a preemptive attempt to reward potential opposition in the Arab community with Kurdish lands, causing nationalist sentiments on both sides to pit groups against each other that might otherwise challenge the state.

That the greatest revolution is the one against the ways in which authoritarianism manifests itself in one's own personage is also evident in

another testimony. The following words belong to Kînem, a spokesperson at the Asayish academy in Rimelan:

> The Syrian regime tried to destroy a people by nothing-izing it. It didn't use genocide and direct violence like in Turkey and Iraq. But it created an alienated, extinguished society that was rendered dreamless. This society was conditioned to accept its degraded state as its state of nature.
>
> In this sense, our greatest struggle has been in the realm of personalities. People here had no life dream, no life utopia, left to hold onto; they found excuses to justify backwardness. The culture of laziness and lying was dominant. People learned to be secretive and almost automatically lie in the face of difficulty, as though the regime was in front of them. They still can't believe the regime is gone. This demonstrates the psychological dimensions of the system's expressions within the individual.
>
> Combined with an alienated relationship to work and dispossession from one's own land, this wretched state established a notion of nonbelonging and thus nonresponsibility to public life. If you are given drops of water in a desert, you find yourself in a state between life and death that will cause you to appreciate the most oppressive regime. In this sense, the mental revolution is truly the most difficult part of the revolutionary process. It is easy to liberate lands; it is not easy to liberate people from the poverty of slave mentalities.

On Breaking the Statist Jinx

The new Zamaan spread her arms, and more fabric than was already covering her body fell out from underneath her armpits. With a skilled movement, she pushed herself off the ground. She was flying; her veil was her wings. "I will be your guide in the sky. I see, I understand. I protect through knowing."

In the meantime, the new Sahra, sitting on top of the bus, silently recited forbidden fairy tales in the rhythm of the wind in her grayed hair.

> Farzana, beside her, caught a tree branch, hurling through the wind. As she uttered a prayer-like recital, her scarred fingertips turned the branch three times until it became a string instrument that the musicians of the world had yet to see. Her ears on Sahra's poetry, she played a song that silenced the thunderstorm around them.

The first written law codex emerged in the twenty-first century BC, issued by the first states and institutionalized patriarchal systems. Several hundred kilometers north along the Euphrates River, in the twenty-first century AD, women drafted laws of nonstate people's democracies, while questioning assumptions of law, justice, and authority. The justice system of Rojava aims to create an ethical-political society with the means of solving its own problems and managing its affairs. This raises the question of the origin of authority, power, rights, and legitimacy. Does justice mean equal treatment before law, regardless of the individual and society's conditions? Is adherence to law contrary to revolutionary principles and practices? Can a system be nonstatist and have the "authority" to write "law" and create a system of "justice"?

When I interviewed her, Rufend Xelef, a young woman from Tirbêspiyê, was the copresident of the legislative council of the Cizîrê Canton. She had been part of the work for the social contract of Rojava (published in January 2014) and women's laws. Having been trained in law at a university under the regime, she spoke of an ongoing struggle to overcome internalized state mentalities, which the initial committee discussed for weeks. There are several layers and systems of justice and law that cooperate, coordinate, and counterbalance each other in an attempt to politicize society, while allowing for adaptations to a radical democratic system. Several legal documents coexist alongside the people's tribunals, people's and women's

houses (*mala gel* and *mala jin*, respectively), and commune-linked peace and reconciliation (*silhê*) committees.

In the early years of the revolution, to ensure a sense of stability and prevent the traumatized society from descending into arbitrariness, the need emerged to establish a justice system. In the first instance, peace and reconciliation committees aimed to facilitate the communes' autonomous solving of their problems without interference from strangers. If a dispute is not resolved in the commune, the case is taken to the mala gel or mala jin of the town. These committees listen to the relevant parties, write down all sides of the story, stamp the files, and send them to the tribunal in the last instance. As Rufend explained,

> As oppressed people, we automatically think of violence, when we think of law and state. When we studied law in the state system, we could not find any justice, any solution to social problems, because the law was far from society's reach. Our own rights were violated. Our new system originates from the people and tries to serve them. The legislation is not created to take food away from people or protect state power. We constantly remind ourselves that we don't write these laws for a small group of privileged people but rather for the comfort and happiness of society.

I met Rufend for the first time during my stay in June 2015 at the women's academy in Rimelan, where she was part of several committees traveling around to discuss the women's laws with large sections of society. At the time of our interview, she was part of the committee to establish a new justice council.

> People said, "How dare you come up with laws? Who are you to do that?" Placing their hopes in the state that oppressed them, people kept wanting to return to state authority. Particularly jurists were upset when we proposed to

> create people's tribunals with nonexperts on the judging board. They said people are not educated and don't know what they do, but that they themselves had studied law and were state authorized to practice it. But how much of society's problems were they aware of? Did they realize how far their own ways of deciding and judging were from the way things work in society?

Rather than aspiring to uphold a "blind," objective justice ideal that treats all cases in a standardized, identical manner, whereby parties are judged to be guilty or innocent, accuser or accused, the aim is to achieve consensus. The logic is to end hostility and resolve underlying issues at the root of disputes to assure lasting peace and reconciliation. While there are guidelines, there is no standard sentencing, as each case is treated within an individual context. According to Rufend, around 70 percent of the cases get resolved at the commune and council levels before they reach the courts, while about six thousand court cases reach the canton level every year. The system renders obsolete the identity of the lawyer as the protector of state-sanctioned law by making citizens the mediators of justice, whereby societal analysis, knowledge of a community's issues, emotional sensitivity, and commitment to ethical principles is prioritized over bureaucracy and law. The system's manifold structures and levels of accountability and answerability allow for focused, indeed sociological analyses, whereby the people working in the field of justice identify the diversity of social problems in relation to their geographic, historical, cultural, and economic dimensions. For instance, while oil-rich cities and areas close to the border report higher numbers of oil theft and smuggling, large cities like Qamishlo face human trafficking. Therefore each region must find its own formats and approaches to assuring justice. Since most crimes are related to the economy, the need for a just economic system arises. Rufend describes some of the difficulties of abolishing state-referencing mentalities:

> The main problem was that fundamentally we believed that only the state has the power to legislate. We kept returning to the statist framework, although the state was the reason for our revolution. We needed to understand that the state could not be the authority to "give" rights. How to write laws for a new system, with a new philosophy? The revolution had started, but the state mentality was still present. Our reflexes against authority had been killed by the state. Actionism was dead. So much that we were doing things without knowing why. This lack of awareness or internalization of behaviors was reflected in our discussions. We asked, Whose justice are we protecting? Whose rights? Where do law, rights, and justice come from?

Rufend gave examples of men fearing a loss of rights with the women's laws. The women's laws are not seen as solutions in themselves but rather serve as blueprints for general principles to prevent things such as underage marriages, bride exchanges, polygamy, and violence. Educational seminars accompany the process to promote radical principles while not losing touch with societal realities, which would otherwise cause backlash, rejection, and hostility. The tribunal is a platform, attended by different parties, including delegates from the umbrella women's movement Kongreya Star—which is organized in the form of a congress—peace and reconciliation councils, martyr's families, and community members, who get to voice their perspectives and ask questions.

According to people who work in this field, society gets judged whether a mentality, historical condition, or social problem is being interpreted. Was the person forced to do this? Do they regret their act? Did they steal to survive or exploit others? How can this person be helped? What needs to change for this crime to stop? In this sense, not only the person who feels harmed, but the whole society suffers from each issue, which is why the ancient "eye for an eye" philosophy of law is not a solution in a nonstate system. The origin of crime and violence is delegated to the existence of

predominant but historically established "mentalities" instead of being taken for granted. Against a Hobbesian assumption of the inherently corrupt nature of humans, a rehabilitative, reconciliatory approach to the ills of society emerges, strengthened by the extent to which the newly developing system can deliver its promises of liberation and solidarity.

Mobilizing the Tools to Struggle

> Sitting in a circle with the children of the women, Ranya sang a song from the women of her tribe in the desert. In the open palm of her hands, the children could see the reflection of the universe. Each scar of her large body taught them another lesson about beauty, life, and death. Nobody was there to police her knowledge. Every child that she blessed with a kiss from her wisdom-speaking lips was embarking on a trip to the school of life.

There are a variety of mechanisms to guide the democratization process in Rojava; alongside the communes, committees, assemblies, congresses, and cooperatives, a complex system of documents, principles, guidelines, formal and informal practices, silent agreements, and economies all impact how decisions are taken. Social contracts, oaths, promises, traditions, and dreams all inform the ways in which ethics and politics are woven into each other to create a new social fabric based on justice. As Leyla, a young woman from Tirbêspiyê who experienced a violent and vulnerable childhood, described it, "Before the revolution, we did not have the tools to struggle. Now we start to get to know ourselves and organize the power to struggle."

In the first years of the revolution, hundreds of communes and assemblies were formed. The community houses now each solve dozens of issues in their communities every month. As observed by many, one of the main reasons for this efficiency is the absence of bureaucracy. Instead of

being driven by formalities and legal proscriptions, people act spontaneously and according to collective notions of justice.

Through their involvement in cooperative economic efforts, women especially have become increasingly more aware of their abilities. They are less likely to accept exploitation now that they have taken charge of their own economy and self-organization.

At the mala jin, younger and older women work together for the first time on equal terms—a challenge to the gerontocracy that is a deeply rooted mechanism of power and hierarchy in the regional culture. Rather than erasing differences of age, it has encouraged older female workers to keep an open mind about new perspectives, while the youths benefit from the former's life experiences.

Although each canton runs its economy independently, committees oversee the intercanton economy and manage their coordination based on solidarity. This way, for instance, the majority of humanitarian aid for the cantons of Kobanê and Afrîn came from Cizîrê. Rojava was not only spared from famine but also managed to look after hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons from Syria and refugees from Iraq. Although the war economy due to the external and internal embargo on Rojava made everything more expensive, the prices for goods have continuously remained much lower than in the rest of Syria, and because of that, many people who initially left Rojava to live in Turkey or Iraqi Kurdistan have now returned. In what's referred to as the "democratic autonomy" system, the aim is to create economic alternatives, relying mostly on the development of cooperatives. The oppressiveness of the long-term conditions of war is manifested in the constant balance between keeping the war economy going, assuring the basic needs of millions of people, struggling to uphold principles, and planning and establishing a farsighted system against exploitation and for economic justice.

Key to this is the plethora of autonomous women's media outlets in Rojava. Whether TV programs, women-only studios, or publications, their aim is to bring an antipatriarchal perspective to light. These media both increase the visibility of women's active roles and work in the revolution as well as create news from an autonomous women's viewpoint with the goal of transforming ideas in society in general. Apart from the technical training (news writing, editing, camerawork, personal computer skills, reporting, and so on), women train to develop an eye that is sensitive to sexism and patriarchy. It is a priority to focus on the untold or invisible stories of women's daily lives, political struggles, practical work, and history. This includes altering the language and formats in which TV discussions are held. According to Jiyan, one of the coordinators of Ragihandina Jinê (RAJIN), the women's media association,

> Before the revolution, opposition could be arrested or killed for expressing their thoughts. People relied on the state to get information and knowledge of the world. This is one way in which sexism and chauvinism were naturalized—through media. In our education, we research the media's role in the creation of oppressive and violent systems. For the creation of a society, a conscientious media is necessary. Around the world, media plays a role in justifying wars, causing friction between communities, and glorifying violence, especially against women. They do not solve society's issues. We show that people can and do coexist; that women do struggle. We report about efforts of peace, freedom, and coexistence in practice.

The idea is to question dominant assumptions about the seemingly natural course of events and transform narratives, as told through the eyes of the oppressed. Women's media becomes an intervention in the ways in which daily events are communicated:

> When a woman commits suicide, it is often due to the violence she experienced, but society claims that she must have breached traditional norms, violated family honor, and so on. In other words: she deserved it. We try to understand the wider social, political, and even historical contexts of such issues. What kind of society do we live in, where a woman is driven to suicide? Instead of saying, "A woman killed herself," we focus on the fact that a woman has been murdered or driven to death by an existing antiwoman system that normalizes violence. It is not an individual act but rather a mentality, a system, that did this. We try to write differently, to expose social contradictions and change dominant perceptions. Women see themselves or women like themselves on the screen, accomplishing all sorts of things that previously were taboo. That becomes your self-defense. This consciousness becomes a weapon to you, with which you then know how to act and stop taking certain things for granted.

Apart from a new general educational system, a communal education through the new academies has been developed in Rojava. The ideological and political motivation behind it is less concerned with teaching knowledge and facts; instead, it's about creating subjects who can think for themselves, and have the ability to be active politically and solve issues in their own society. Education is viewed as vital in defending the self against assimilation, alienation, and consumption by capitalist modernity's physical and metaphysical weapons. Moreover, revolutionary principles such as women's liberation and solidarity between peoples cannot be expected to come naturally in a historically oppressed community also traumatized by war. In the words of Adnan Husên, who was teaching at the Mesopotamia Academy for Social Sciences at the time I interviewed him,

> It is relatively easy to achieve a military or political revolution using force by taking advantage of temporary conjunctural moments, but in light of colo-

nialist politics, if a long-term and sustainable transformation with practical outcomes is aspired to, the revolution must start in the minds. It might look like a contradiction that while we are amid war, with embargoes as well as political and military attacks from all sides, we are sitting in a room, discussing history. But we have no alternative to this.

The development of a different consciousness complements the military aspects of this revolution. Otherwise, the self-defense aspect will not hold meaning in itself; military victories alone will not achieve ideals. Without consciousness, awareness, and knowledge, all sacrifices quickly disappear. If you call your war a revolution, for it to be more than the change of a shell, it must be filled with revolutionary content for society, based on a democratic, ecological, and women's liberationist paradigm. To work toward a farsighted perspective for the liberation of society, the revolutionary principles must be socialized.

Twenty-year-old Nujîn, whose class I attended at the academy, explained the pedagogical process as a means of finding one's voice while acting on societal processes:

It's about understanding the conditions and situations you find yourself in. To know and understand yourself is an old human endeavor. Here, we create the possibility of thought. This place creates its own teachers. We haven't reached a professional stage, and we don't say that we are "experts" in anything. It's not like the state created a university for me to visit. I myself created this academy [with others]!

For example, we started a discussion in class about the links between the fact that both women's and Kurdish history have not been written. I realized then how history and sociology go hand in hand. In discussions, we analyzed our internalized behaviors. Women at the beginning felt too embarrassed to get up and speak. They were ashamed, having always been taught to sit prettily and shut up. Men were the ones to have opinions. To understand why

my own community has certain problems, I need to look at its history and put it into a wider context. And suddenly, when we do this, we realize that we are writing history too!

The academies are neither schools of dogmatic indoctrination nor objective, formal, bureaucratic institutions. They, too, are institutions that emerged out of an identified need to develop deliberative skills to enable active participation in public life. Through raising their consciousness about structures of injustice, people, especially women, realize that their oppressed status is not set in stone but instead can be changed. Especially women with little or no formal education benefit from the academies, which enable them to learn, self-reflect, share experiences, and come up with new concepts of knowledge based on grounded, lived experiences. Their practices that had been dismissed by capitalist, statist, and patriarchal structures are now valued and revived as valid forms of knowing.

Not a Fairy Tale, But a Million Real Stories

Tara, who had been feeling ashamed and unclean the whole day, since she discovered blood in her underwear in the morning and knew that this was a sign of things only getting worse from now on, lifted the ends of her long dress, swirled through the bus, jumping from seat to seat. Every spot that her blood touched began to sprout flowers in different colors: marigolds, poppies, tulips, and daffodils:

"I create, I become. I am myself precisely through changing! It is through me that life can be!"

Whereas at the start, revolutionaries from around the world paid visits to Rojava either to get a firsthand idea of the process or join in any capacity without necessarily having clear plans, today internationalists are physically building their commune in Derîk, learning Kurdish, educating them-

selves, and participating in the civil structures, often with the aim of eventually returning home to organize. The participation of different ethnic and religious communities in the new system is so common that people do not find it necessary to mention it explicitly anymore. And visually, it is harder to distinguish between seasoned revolutionaries and the local people who have been involved in the public process over the last years, as their levels of knowledge, experience, and confidence increased with the developments on the ground.

Rojava is flourishing in various ways. Street art decorates the walls. Across the region, newly formed centers for theater, cinema, music, dance, and fine arts have been established, recruiting from and performing for local communities, displaced peoples, and refugees. The women's cultural movement Kevana Zerrîn (Golden Crescent) organizes trainings and activities autonomously in cultural centers. Common themes in arts performances are war, peace, coexistence, women's liberation, and resistance to oppression. There are many bands that include several nationalities and perform revolutionary songs in multiple languages.

It is also still a place where a woman can learn about women's history and go home to beat her child for something that is "shameful"; where men can talk publicly about gender equality and yet complain about the increasing divorce cases filed by women; where someone can be part of creating the YPJ and then decide to become a housewife; or where parents gladly defend the land to death, but send their children to Europe.

Yet it is region where many taboos have been broken, forcibly destroyed practices of self-sufficiency have now been remembered and revived, and people don't just aspire to reinstitute the past but rather to do better. As an imam, a religious scholar, explained his understanding of the women's revolution in Rojava to me,

> Entire families take part in the revolutionary process today. People see the fruits of their labor, and escape the previous state of misery and poverty. *Jin, jiyan, azadî* ["Women, life, freedom," the main slogan of the Kurdish women's movement] became a philosophy of life here. The women's struggle attracted people from around the world. Kobanê became one of the best-known Syrian cities, due to women's resistance. Of course, this impacts society here when people see the values that were fought for so that we can live.

Mantra-like repetitions of slogans. "Jin, jiyan, azadî." "The Rojava revolution is a women's revolution." Such magical spells, repeated, enacted, and died for, have over time become principles to live by. They are not propaganda for the outside world. Instead, they serve to remind people of the achievability of their own dreams.

In a world in which social entanglements are being forcibly broken up, where ancient ecosystems are being devastated and degraded into nothingness, where our connection to the past and the multitude of presents is being commodified, caricatured, and made alien to us, where bonds between fascist systems and institutions are strangling the lungs of life ever more tightly—it is obvious that the survival of Rojava and other emancipatory projects, no matter the scale, relies on liberatory developments in other parts of the world. This can be seen, for instance, in the catastrophic war in Afrîn, where the Turkish state and its second-largest NATO army attacked the area from the air in support of its local extremist mercenaries, which led to the eventual displacement of close to half a million people. Years of building grassroots structures, local economies, and self-governing systems were destroyed with the silent approval of the international community. Rojava's contribution to our understanding of social struggles is manifold, but one of its most concrete reiterations is the realization that no

liberation can exist in a vacuum. Furthermore, liberationist endeavors cannot be preplanned, fully organized to the last detail. Rather, most of the issues that need to be addressed come about during periods of struggle and experimentation. Revolutionary work and internationalist solidarity in this way relate to each other, just as does radical theory and practice. Sometimes we will only gain sight of the so-called next step when we decide to act. And to the extent to which our communities as well as our internationalisms diversify through self-determined and autonomous action, we can liberate ourselves on our own terms, without reliance on formats imposed on us.

Magic is not to be found in the palaces, military bases, or temples of the rulers, who can only delude us into subjugation. Magic *is not really* magic but instead the joyful power to determine our own lives, to speak, define, and decide for ourselves; it is hidden within our potentialities to express our creativity and autonomy hand in hand with other people. Not with guidebooks, but with rooted sight in our daily lives, in connection with the oppressed peoples around the world, in constant warfare against the state within ourselves, we build the worlds that render life meaningful and dignified. Defending these endeavors before fascism suffocates us, before it convinces us again that "there is no alternative," is therefore one of the main tasks for radicals today. To protect Rojava's universal appeal to all those who believe in self-determined life, we must be able to see our struggles in each other. As the Kurdish women's movement asserts, abstractly speaking about "giving" each other solidarity is no longer sufficient if we want to combat, much less defeat, fascism. We need common vocabularies and common perspectives; we need to find ways of struggling together, defying those borders that we've magically been taught to believe in by the state and patriarchy.

And so the flying caravan of magical women exploded notions of time and space, as they set off to explore a revolution on their own terms, on their own time, on their own scale.

At the doorstep of a curious place called Rojava, a woman was sweeping the floor with her broom.

She continued her chore, but with a smile.

"I don't know what you have been told about our country.

But here I am, indeed, running a household."

She stopped her deed and looked up.

"For years, I have been waiting for you, my sisters,

to join me for our next assembly meeting.

Without you, nobody could continue.

Only with you, this broom will fly."

*

Dilar Dirik is a sociologist and activist of the Kurdish women's movement in Europe. She occasionally writes for international outlets on freedom struggles in Kurdistan. Her political work focuses on establishing links between the Kurdish women's liberation movement and women's struggles around the world. Dilar would like to thank all the women who opened their doors and lives to her, and without whom this chapter would not have been possible.

Toward the Poem II

Words, phrases, syllables, stars turning about a fixed center. Two bodies, many beings meeting in one word. The paper becomes covered with indeible letters, spoken by nobody, dictated by nobody, that burn and flame up and go out. This, then, is how poetry exists, how love exists. And if I do not exist, you do.

Everywhere those in solitary begin to create the words of a new dialogue.

The gush. A mouthful of health. A girl lying on her past. Wine, fire, guitar, tablecloth. A red blush wall in a village square. Cheers, glittering cavalry that enter the city, the people in flight: hymns! Eruption of white, green, fiery. The easiest thing, that which writes itself: poetry.

The poem prepares a loving order. I foresee a man sun and a moon woman, he free of his own power, she free of her slavery, and implacable love shining through black space. Everything must give way before these incandescent eagles.

On the battlements of your brow song finds its daybreak. Poetic justice sets fire to fields of shame: no place for nostalgia, for I, the proper noun.

Every poem is made at the poet's expense.

Future noon, an immense tree of invisible leaves. In the streets, men and women singing the song of the sun, a fountain of transparencies. Yellow surf covers me: nothing of myself is to speak through my own mouth.

When History sleeps, it speaks in dreams: on the brow of the sleeping people, the poem is a constellation of blood. When History wakes, image becomes deed, the poem is achieved: poetry goes into action.

Deserve your dream.

~Octavio Paz
trans Muriel Rukeyser

Notes on Craft: Writing in the Hour of Genocide
Fargo Tbakhi

What does Palestine require of us, as writers writing in English from within the imperial core, in this moment of genocide? I want to offer here some notes and some directions towards beginning to answer this question.

I.

Craft is a machine built to produce and reproduce ethical failures; it is a counterrevolutionary machine.

I use "Craft" here to describe the network of sanitizing influences exerted on writing in the English language: the influences of neoliberalism, of complicit institutions, and of the linguistic priorities of the state and of empire. Anticolonial writers in the U.S. and across the globe have long modeled alternative crafts which reject these priorities, and continue to do so in this present moment. Yet Craft still haunts our writing; these notes aim to clarify it, so we can rid ourselves of its influence.

Above all, Craft is the result of market forces; it is therefore the result of imperial forces, as the two are so inextricably bound up together as to be one and the same. The Craft which is taught in Western institutions, taken up and reproduced by Western publishers, literary institutions, and awards bodies, is a set of regulatory ideas which curtail forms of speech that might enact real danger to the constellation of economic and social values which are, as I write this, facilitating genocide in Palestine and elsewhere across the globe. If, as Audre Lorde taught us, the master's tools cannot dismantle the master's house, then Craft is the process by which our own real liberatory tools are dulled, confiscated, and replaced. We believe our words sharper than they turn out to be. We play with toy hammers and think we can break down concrete. We think a spoon is a saw.

In the title poem of Solmaz Sharif's collection Look, she writes:

> Whereas
> *Well, if I were from your culture, living in this country,*

said the man outside the 2004 Republican National
Convention, *I would put up with that for this country*;
Whereas I felt the need to clarify: *You would put up with*
TORTURE, you mean and he proclaimed: *Yes*;

In a lecture, Sharif describes the erasure and reduction the poem demanded of this moment, which we might also understand to be the demands of Craft. What the poem simplified into that brief section existed in real life as a prolonged encounter of violent rhetoric, and what the demands of the poem erased was the violence of a liberal protestor who stood by, ignored this encounter, and said to the Republican that while he didn't agree with what he said, he knew he was a good person. Sharif calls this "the most violent betrayal and politically destructive decision this poem made me make, making me question whether a good poem is forever in fact irreconcilable with the nuanced reckoning our lives actually depend on." All the qualities of Craft, the qualities which make a "good" poem, pressured this violence—the violence of the liberal American unwilling to put their body and their peace of mind on the line, a violence which might exist fundamentally outside the boundaries the lyric can address—into disappearing. Craft success is contingent upon ethical and political failure.

This is what Craft does to our writing: pressures and pressures until what matters, what we need to say, gets pushed to the margins or disappeared entirely. It is a Craft decision to describe Palestinians as human animals. It is a Craft decision to pressure U.S. officials not to use the word "ceasefire" or "de-escalation." It is a Craft decision to describe Israelis as "children of light" and Palestinians as "children of darkness." It is a Craft decision to begin interviews demanding Palestinians condemn violent resistance, a Craft decision to erase the perpetrators of bombings from headlines describing the bombings, a Craft decision to question the reliability of Palestinian death counts. These are Craft decisions because they are decisions which occur in language, and that language feeds and is in turn fed by policy. Somebody, with a name and an address, wrote, vetted, revised, and spoke aloud these words. The tools they used to do it, the ideologies which filled their vocabulary—these are Craft.

Craft is a machine for regulation, estrangement, sanitization. Palestine and all the struggles with which it is bound up require of us, in any and all forms of speech going forward, a commitment to constant and escalating betrayals of this machine. It requires that we poison and betray Craft at all turns.

II.

To write in solidarity with Palestine is to write amidst the long middle of revolution.

Between 1936 and 1939, Palestinian fellahin revolted against the economic deprivations imposed by the British Mandate and a growing Zionist movement in Palestine. Their revolt involved coordinated general strikes and violent resistance to the beginnings of ethnic cleansing and forced displacement. In response, the British instituted a set of policies which would become the 1945 "Defence (Emergency) Regulations", which allowed British officers to bring about the full repressive strength of empire to bear on Palestinian peasantry to brutally destroy the revolt. After the Nakba, these regulations served as the basis for much of the state of Israel's legal governmental structure.

For seventy-five years, then, Palestinians have existed—violent or not, political or not, active or not—in a state of revolt. We are legally defined as such; the law and its human enforcers across the globe act accordingly. This means that as long as Palestinians have lived under the colonization of the Zionist state, and until Palestinians are no longer subject to a state whose definitional contours are premised on their existence as essentially threatening others, the revolt has been, and is, *in progress*. It is a daily lived thing, and Palestinians have always labored to define its shape for themselves: the Great Revolt, the First Intifada, the Second Intifada, the March of Return, the Unity Intifada, the myriad forms of resistance both minute and maximal, spontaneous and organized, armed and unarmed—these are part of the long and ongoing essential Intifada, a long and ongoing revolution that has taken many forms and will continue to evolve, and whose endpoint is liberation.

The Freedom Theater in Jenin refugee camp was founded by

Juliano Mer Khamis and Zakaria Zubeidi in 2006, out of the rubble of the Stone Theater, which had been founded by Juliano's mother Arna and was destroyed by Israel. The Freedom Theater's work is premised in part on the notion that "the third Intifada will be a cultural one." Yet crucially, Juliano stressed: "What we are doing in the theatre is not trying to be a replacement or an alternative to the resistance of the Palestinians in the struggle for liberation, just the opposite. This must be clear." Palestine demands that all of us, as writers and artists, consider ourselves in principled solidarity with the long cultural Intifada that is built alongside and in collaboration with the material Intifada. We are writing amidst its long middle; the page is a weapon.

III.

The long middle is the state of the dailiness, oppression so pervasive as to form an atmosphere we move through.

The long middle is not a condition of time; we might be nearer to the end of revolution than the beginning, we might be nearer liberation than defeat, but our experience and our actions exist within the frame we can see, the frame of the long middle. Liberation is the end, but it is a geographical end rather than a temporal one, a soil and not an hour. We move *towards* it— sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly, but always. It is the location by which we orient our movement. We know it because it gets closer, not necessarily because it comes sooner.

(And liberation moves too, it has its own sort of agency, it can dance a little, as you stare through the hole in the fence you've just cut you might feel a hand on your shoulder, someone standing by your side like a friend, liberation letting you know what it feels like, that you're going the right way.)

The long middle, then, is the affective experience of moving inside the dailiness, inside the structural and therefore constant violence that forms the machinery of genocide and greases its wheels. Yet this affective experience also is, or might be, one of a counter and opposing dailiness: the dailiness of resistance and unrelenting struggle. This counter-dailiness is modeled by Palestinians, whose struggle within the

long middle takes an astonishing diversity of forms—forms of care, of tenderness, of violence, of ingenuity, resource, and survival.

This constant Intifada is the path through the long middle. Intifada is a shaking off of oppression, shaking it off like a layer of dust. This is a bodily action, to shake, to convulse oneself in a constant motion of refusal, to be clean in the face of the world. We will get tired. Our muscles will tear, and then get stronger. Someone falls, we pick them up. We fall, we are lifted by others. We must continue.

IV.

We must ask: what does this require of us, then—to write amidst the long middle of Intifada? What might it mean for how we approach the page as a front of the long war?

The Brazilian antifascist theatermaker Augusto Boal wrote, in Theater of the Oppressed, that traditional Aristotelian narrative structures are coercive tools of the bourgeoisie, serving to purge an audience's revolutionary emotion and with it the obligation to intervene in an unfolding narrative as an active participant. This coercion is intended to make us feel as though world-historical events are beyond our grasp, that we have no agency within them and should remain within the status quo, which is only the dailiness. As Boal argues:

> "The poetics of Aristotle is the poetics of oppression: the world is known, perfect or about to be perfected, and all its values are imposed on the spectators, who passively delegate power to the characters to act and think in their place. In so doing the spectators purge themselves of their tragic flaw—that is, of something capable of changing society. A catharsis of the revolutionary impetus is produced!"

This catharsis makes witnesses of us, and nothing else.

(We should be suspicious of "witness," too. In the West, in English, a witness is only ever in service of the law, their testimony only meant to convince a judge. The words and the positions they require of us are already tainted; the law won't save us, the law is the one that kills us.)

Palestine requires that we abandon this catharsis. Nobody should get out of our work feeling purged, clean. Nobody should live happily during the war. Our readers can feel that way when liberation is the precondition for our work, and not the dream. When it is the place we stand, and not the place we shake ourselves towards.

In this way, what the long middle of revolution requires, what Palestine requires, is an approach to writing whose primary purpose is to *gather others up with us*, to generate within them an energy which their bodies cannot translate into anything but revolutionary movement. This is what Boal modeled for us in his theatrical experiments, which were dedicated to empowering audiences to *act*, to participate in a creative struggle to envision and embody alternatives. For Boal, theater was not revolution, but it was a rehearsal for the revolution, meant to gather communities together in that rehearsal. Creative work readies us for material work, by offering a space to try out strategies, think through contradictions, remind us of our own agency.

We must be engaged in this kind of writing, which calls others into mobilization, generating feelings within our audiences that cannot be dispersed through the act of reading, but must be carried out into collective action. You sit, you read something, you feel grief or anger or joy, you get it all out, you put it down, you go about business as usual—this is the coercive affective system that Craft insists upon. We must write in such a way that there is no business, there is no usual. We must write so that, as Boal says, "the action ceases to be presented in a deterministic manner, as something inevitable, as Fate… Everything is subject to criticism, to rectification. All can be changed, and at a moment's notice."

V.

The facilitation of this genocide is contingent upon the great discursive and material weapon of the West: the ontological categories of "terrorist" and "terrorism."

We must remember that terrorism does not describe an objective reality; it is, like other pieces of language weaponized to murder, an ideological

word used by ideological powers, with specific legislative and carceral bodies attached to its use.

C. Heike Schotten, in *Queer Terror: Life, Death, and Desire in the Settler-Colony*, offers us the only definition of terrorism that matters. She writes that the figure of the terrorist:

> "…can be understood as the contemporary settler state's moralized imperial name for the unthinkable indigenous remainder that, in the insistence on remaining, challenges the settler state's claim to sovereignty, security, and civilizational value. Indeed, indigenous peoples' continued existence not only challenges settler sovereignty's claim to legitimacy and 'first'-ness, but is the harbinger of that sovereignty's death insofar as they become legible to it as existing."

Terrorism is the great weapon of the West. It is used only against those who can fit inside its scope, and that is not everyone. It is the indigenous remainder, and those in solidarity with them, in the scope; no one else appears. Land defenders blocking Cop City appear in the scope, protestors fighting police brutality appear in the scope. Terrorism does only what it was designed to do only to those it was designed to target. Terrorism cannot be recuperated. We cannot use or weaponize it for our own purposes. It means nothing to call Israeli or American violence terrorist violence, because terrorism is a one-sided weapon and its bullets belong to the state. The state cannot appear in the scope. In trying to prove that we are not terrorists, or prove that someone else is a terrorist, we reify that the weapon of terrorism ought to exist at all, and that the problem is simply giving it the right target. We reload the weapon ourselves when we do this. Instead, as Schotten argues:

> "If the only options are… to side with a futurist, settler, and imperial 'us' (whether as avowed advocates of empire or its collaborationist liberal compromisers) or with a queered, 'savage,' and 'terrorist' other, the choice, I think, is clear: we must choose to stand with the 'terrorists.'"

This choice must shape our writing. No more conversation between the sword and the neck. No more attempting to prove that the oppressed are the neck and not the sword, to point the sword in a direction that will satisfy its blade. It doesn't matter. This applies to a multitude of other

words whose meanings are situated outside of our control. The language is poisoned already. There is no cure.

What does that choice make possible? In her short film "In the Future We Ate From the Finest Porcelain," Larissa Sansour has a character use the phrase "narrative terrorism." This can be our approach: to engage in a guerilla war on the page, to consider it an additional front in our solidarity with those who will always and forever be the targets of the state's weapons. One way to think of this is to consider what narrative means when it is firmly on the side of those rendered terrorists, on the side of the colonized and the oppressed, on the side of those in the scope. What tactics, shapes, strategies and necessities do their struggles demand of our narratives? How might our narratives serve the haunting of the indigenous remainder, eating away at the foundations of empire like termites? How might our writing, in the words of Palestinian intellectual and martyr Bassel Al-Araj, "live like a porcupine, fight like a flea"? And, perhaps most importantly, how can we refuse the integration of these choices and this language into a new neoliberal set of constraints that pay lip service to the struggle but work to neutralize it nonetheless? That is, how can we continue to globalize the Intifada without allowing it to be merely subsumed into the project of globalization?

We might escalate this narrative terrorism towards a constant aesthetic terrorism; we might pursue infrastructural damage to the arts and to the structures of publishing. This might mean, among other things, clogging submission portals, hijacking the space of the bio, as Rasha Abdulhadi has modeled, hijacking the interview and the podcast and the craft talk and the classroom and the call for submissions and the $75 payment via Venmo for the poem. It might mean writing things that are unpublishable and forcing publishers into doing it anyway; it might mean circumventing or ignoring the structures of publishing in favor of means of circulation outside the bounds of capital and therefore free from the grasp of the invisible hand. It might mean boycott, pressure, and refusing to allow the return of the oppressive dailiness in any space we inhabit. It might mean being loud, annoying, and resolutely steadfast in our refusals and our insistences. It might mean joining with writers who are extending solidarity beyond the page and into direct actions

against the complicity of our institutions, literary or otherwise. It might mean, too, building alternative and sustained networks of support for our fellow writers who lose jobs, opportunities, or face harassment. Like a net, we tie ourselves to one another to stop the dailiness from getting through; we tie ourselves tight enough so none of us get lost along the way. Maximal commitment, minimal loneliness, to paraphrase a comrade.

VI.

We should betray Craft by replacing it with political thought.

The PFLP's 1969 document, "Strategy for the Liberation of Palestine" (developed, in part, by the Palestinian writer, revolutionary, and martyr Ghassan Kanafani) notes:

> One of the basic conditions of success is a clear perspective of things: a clear perspective of the enemy and a clear perspective of the revolutionary forces. It is in this light that the strategy of the struggle is determined, and without this perspective, national action becomes an impetuous gamble which soon ends in failure. Revolutionary political thought is not an abstract idea hanging in a vacuum, or a mental luxury, or an intellectual hobby for the educated, which we can, if we wish, lay aside as an unnecessary luxury. Scientific revolutionary thought is clear thought whereby the masses are able to understand their enemy, his points of weakness or strength and the forces which support and ally themselves to the enemy.

If we are to consider our writing a space in which to fight, we'd better know who we're fighting, who we're fighting *with*, and why. Political thought and political education are the vital building blocks of that knowledge. Craft asks us to consider the language first and the politics second, tells us that a political education is not central but peripheral to being a writer. We must reject this. As Amiri Baraka argued in a 2004 lecture on art and politics:

> "You must raise the level of our understanding of the world… so that we understand the causal connections in the world, why it acts

> the way it does. So that we don't believe everybody who smiles at us and gives us a broom is our friend. So that we know who are our friends and who are our enemies, and right now so that we can build that united front. What is the artist's job? To make war. The artist's job is unrelenting war on evil."

Baraka tells us we are making war, and war requires strategy. Political thought is what provides the strategy for an artistic war. Political thought is the enemy of Craft; Craft is a machine to elide and foreclose political thought. This must be our constant betrayal, to know now that the lyric is not as valuable as the polemic. That the sonnet must give way to the photocopied and wheatpasted list of companies and individuals with financial ties to the genocide. That political thought is not only an option for artists but a duty, an obligation and a fundamental necessity. That it supersedes the line break, the marginalia, the invocation of the muse. Better to know what we're saying and why, and to say it with force, like a stone hurled from the river that reaches the sea.

VII.

The craft for the long Intifada is made and remade each day by resistance.

Iwrote all this because I needed it, or something like it. I have felt unable to write and needed a way back in. I was suspicious of writing, of what its powers really are in a moment of crisis, and I was equally suspicious of the more common ways we have to answer that question. I needed more than healing, witness, catharsis, community, imagining otherwise. I needed something that Craft does not contain, is in fact devoted to purging from "writing" in its professionalization and enforced respectability.

In September 2021, six Palestinian prisoners escaped from Gilboa prison by tunneling out with a spoon. Among them was Zakaria Zubeidi of the Freedom Theater, further reminding us that the cultural revolt is inseparable from the material one. One of the other escapees, Mohammed al-Ardah, said they did it to show "the occupation is a

mere illusion made of dust." This illusion of dust coating our bodies, drowning us in cruelty. We move with Intifada to shatter the illusion.

This is what I need. Not Craft, but the immeasurable creative force that breaks a prison using only the artifacts of bare survival which have been allotted to us, and the clarity of knowing why we did it. This is what life looks like. This is something we can do with spoons.

Above all, Craft is what keeps us polite while the boot is on our neck or on somebody else's. And we cannot afford that, not now and not going forward. As June Jordan wrote, in *Civil Wars*:

> "If you make and keep my life horrible then, when I can tell the truth, it will be a horrible truth; it will not sound good or look good or, God willing, feel good to you, either. There is nothing good about the evils of a life forced into useless and impotent drift and privation. There is very little that is attractive or soothing about being strangled to death, whether it is the literal death of the body or the actual death of the soul that lying, that the humiliation and the evil of self-denial, guarantees. Extremity demands, and justifies, extreme response. Violation invites, and teaches, violence. Less than that, less than a scream or a fist, less than the absolute cessation of normal events in the lock of abnormal duress is a lie and, worse than that, it is blasphemous ridicule of the self."

Craft is that lie. This Craft of the state, the Craft of the weapons manufacturing board members, the silent, silencing universities, the financially imbricated publishers, and the complicit awards bodies. We have to abandon it and write with sharper teeth, without politeness, without compromise. We have to learn, or build, or steal, or steal back, the craft we need for the long Intifada, which we carry with us to liberation and beyond.

Vol. 1

Adrienne Rich	Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying (1975)
Audre Lorde	Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power (1978)
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Mary Beard	The Public Voice of Women (2017)
Maggie Nelson	The Argonauts (2015)
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Linda Nochlin	Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists? (1971)
Kathi Weeks	The Problem with Work (2011)
Valerie Solanas	SCUM Manifesto (1967)
Silvia Federici	Wages against Housework (1975)
Virginie Despentes	She's So Depraved, You Can't Rape Her (2006)

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Kathy Acker	All Girls Together (1997)
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Laboria Cuboniks	Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation (2015)
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Guy Hocquenghem	The Screwball Asses (1973)
Johanna Hedva	Sick Woman Theory (2016)
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Rote Zora	Interview with Rote Zora (1982)

Vol. 5

Anne Carson	The Gender of Sound (1995)
Michelle Murphy	Against Population, Towards Afterlife (2018)
Anna Zett	A Situation (2019)
Combahee River Collective	A Black Feminist Statement (1977)
Aurora Levins Morales	False Memories (1998)
Carole Maso	Rupture, Verge, and Precipice Precipice, Verge, and Hurt Not (1996)
José Esteban Muñoz	Performing Disidentifications (1999)
Starhawk	Consciousness, Politics, and Magic (1982)
xtian w	Between Forever & Wherever You Are: A Non-Binary Trans Poetics (2018)

Isolation Vol. 1

Sayak Valencia	Necropolitics (2010)
Anne Boyer	The Season of Cartesian Breathing & Woman Sitting at a Machine & The Imaginary, Half-Nothing Time & The Dead Woman (2018)
Mumia Abu-Jamal	Christmas in a Cage (1982) & Never Again (1992) & When a Child Is Not a Child (1999) & Analysis of Empire (2003) & Katrina: One Year Later (2006) & Ebola (2014)
Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing	Arts of Noticing & Contamination as Collaboration (2015)
Paul Preciado	Your Death & Becoming T (2008)
Behrouz Boochani	The Wandering Kowlis Perform/The Barn Owls Watch (2018)
Hervé Guibert	Cytomegalovirus: A Hospitalization Diary (1992)

—

James Baldwin	Untitled (ND)
Nikki Giovanni	Cotton Candy on a Rainy Day (1978)
June Jordan	Nobody Riding the Roads Today (ND)
Eduardo Galeano	The Night (1991)
Diane di Prima	Revolutionary Letter #3 (1970)

Muriel Rukeyser	This Morning (1944)
Nikki Giovanni	Choices (ND)

Isolation Vol. 2

Carla Bergman & Nick Montgomery	Joyful Militancy (2017)
Rebecca Brown	The Gift of Skin & The Gift of Death (1994)
Lola Olufemi	Feminism, Interrupted: Disrupting Power (2020)
Bhanu Kapil	Humanimal: A Project for Future Children (2009)
Raoul Vaneigem	Humiliation & Isolation & Survival Sickness (1967)
Kathy Acker	Against Ordinary Language: The Language of the Body (1993)
June Jordan	Report from the Bahamas (1982)

—

Zoe Leonard	I Want a President (1992)
Etel Adnan	There (1997)
Akasha (Gloria) Hull	Poem (1979)
Nawal El Saadawi	Write my daughter so that you may live (ND)
Tania De Rozario	What You Are (2013)
Rachelle Toarmino	You Up? (2016)
Rae Armantrout	Around (2009)

Isolation Vol. 3

Oyèrónké Oyewùmí	Visualizing the Body (1997)
Ruha Benjamin	Black AfterLives Matter: Cultivating Kinfulness as Reproductive Justice (2018)
Fred Moten	Here, There, and Everywhere (2018)
Houria Bouteldja	We, Indigenous Women (2017)
Abdullah Ocalan	All Slavery Is Based on Housewifisation (2013)
Michael Knapp, Anja Flach & Ercan Ayboga	A Women's Revolution (2016)
Silvia Federici	The Body, Capitalism, and the Reproduction of Labor Power & "Body Politics" in the Feminist Revolt (2020)

—

Rosmarie Waldrop	Doing (2016)
M. NourbeSe Philip	Zong! #26 (2006)
John Keene	Power (2016)
Samira Negrouche	Quay 2l1 (2019)
Gülten Akin	I Cut My Black Black Hair (1960)
Maya Angelou	Alone (1975)

Isolation Vol. 4

Juno Mac & Molly Easo Smith	Borders (2018)
Luce Irigaray	Women on the Market (1978)
Eli Clare	Freaks and Queers (1999)
Dodie Bellamy	When the Sick Rule the World (2015)
Gloria E. Anzaldúa	now let us shift... the path of conocimiento... inner works, public acts (2002)
Dionne Brand	A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging (2001)
Sheila Heti	Motherhood (2018)

—

Aria Aber	Family Portrait (2019)
Julia Gjika	Autumn Afternoon (2020)
Louise Glück	Memoir (2001)
Harryette Mullen	Elliptical (2002)
Natalie Diaz	Abecedarian Requiring Further Examination of Anglikan Seraphym Subjugation of a Wild Indian Rezervation (2012)
Anne Waldman	Fast Speaking Woman (1974)
Hilde Domin	Birthdays (1959)

Isolation Vol. 5

Alexandra Kollontai	Make Way for Winged Eros: A Letter to Working Y Youth (1923)
María Puig de la Bellacasa	Touching Visions (2017)
Jamie Heckert	Listening, Caring, Becoming: Anarchism as an Ethics of Direct Relationships (2010)
Judith Butler	To Preserve the Life of the Other (2020)
Carmen Maria Machado	In the Dream House (2019)
María Lugones	Toward a Decolonial Feminism (2010)
Legacy Russell	Glitch Feminism (2020)

—

Pedro Neves Marques	Sex as Care (2019)
Bejan Matur	If this is a lament (2017)
Jayne Cortez	There It Is (1982)
Lucille Clifton	Whose Side Are You On? (1991)
Monika Rinck	Pond (2004)
Eunsong Kim	Curved, Bells (2017)
Érica Zíngano	this morning (2019)

Isolation Vol. 6

Françoise Vergès	Taking Sides: Decolonial Feminism (2021)
Haunani-Kay Trask	Neocolonialism and Indigenous Structures & From a Native Daughter (1993)
Sarah Schulman	Abandoning the Personal: The State and the Production of Abuse (2016)
bell hooks	Wanted: Men Who Love & Feminist Manhood (2004)
Michael Taussig	Gift of the Gods & The Designer Smile & The Designer Body (2012)
Christina Sharpe	The Wake (2016)
—	
May Ayim	Blues in Black and White (1990)
Hanif Abdurraqib	It's Just That I'm Not Really into Politics (2017)
Ammiel Alcalay	Order (2011)
Sarah McCarry	Muscle Memory (2014)
Samiya Bashir	i traveled the world. it was fine. (2021)
Elizabeth Bishop	One Art (1976)

Isolation Vol. 7

Cinzia Arruzza	Remarks on Gender (2014)
Fumi Okiji	Onanism, Handjobs, Smut: Performances of Self-Valorization (2020)
Heather Berg	Porn Work against Work (2021)
Olúfemi Táíwò	Being-in-the-Room Privilege: Elite Capture and Epistemic Deference (2020)
Sadie Plant	Zeros + Ones (1997) & On the Matrix: Cyberfeminist Simulations (1996)
Max Liboiron	Pollution Is Colonialism (2021)
—	
Andrea Abi-Karam	To the Cop Who Read My Text Messages (2018)
Hua Xi	Everything Lies in All Directions (2021)
Ren Cook	I KNOW THAT I WILL ONLY CHANGE THROUGH THE PASSAGE (2019)
Oksana Zabuzhko	Letter from the Summer House (1992)
Alfonsina Storni	Squares and Angles (1918)
Kamau Brathwaite	Mesongs (2010)

Isolation Vol. 8

Chela Sandoval	Revolutionary Force: Connecting Desire to Reality (2000)
Gina Athena Ulysse	Papa, Patriarchy, and Power: Snapshots of a Good Haitian Girl, Feminism, and Dyasporic Dreams (2006)

Lauren Berlant	Cruel Optimism (2011)
Franco Bifo Berardi	Necro-Capitalism (2017)
Sara Ahmed	The Performativity of Disgust (2004)
Kathleen LeBesco	Queering Fat Bodies/Politics (2001)
Joan W. Scott	The Evidence of Experience (1991)

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manuel arturo abreu	poetry press release for unrealized show (“The Last Airdancer”) (2017)
Dolores Dorantes	Copia (fragment) (2021)
Meena Kandasamy	Kingdom of heaven (2011)
Rasaq Malik Gbolahan	What Crosses the Sea (2021)
Marwa Helal	intimacy v. isolation ixix. (2019)
Anna Maria Hong	I, Sing (2018)
Ariel Yelen	What Is This Air Changing, This Warm Aura, These Threads of Vibrating Rows of People (2022)

Now Vol. 1

Adrienne Rich	Anger and Tenderness (1976)
Karen Barad	On Touching: The Inhuman That Therefore I Am (2012)
Robin Wall Kimmerer	Learning the Grammar of Animacy (2013)
Vicky Osterweil	The Racial Roots of Property (2020)
Gregg Bordowitz	Volition (2009)
L	Women Reflected in Their Own History (2022)
Rita Laura Segato	Gender and Coloniality: From Low-Intensity Communal Patriarchy to High-Intensity Colonial-Modern Patriarchy (2020)
Aimé Césaire	Discourse on Colonialism (1950)

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Jack Spicer	For Hal (1965)
Solmaz Sharif	Civilization Spurns the Leopard (2016)
Jazra Khaleed	Words (2009)
Rosa Chávez	I like to kiss scars (2022)
Chen Chen	Selections from a Small Book of Questions (2018)
Mary Ruefle	Deconstruction (2008)
Tawanda Mulalu	All We Got Was Autumn. All We Got Was Winter. (2022)
Eunice de Souza	Conversation Piece (1979)

Now Vol. 2

Kadji Amin	We Are All Nonbinary: A Brief History of Accidents (2022)
Piro Rexhepi	(Dis)Embodying Enclosure: Of Straightened Muslim Men and Secular Masculinities (2022)

Gabriela Veronelli	A Coalitional Approach to Theorizing Decolonial Communication (2016)
Paulette Nardal	Woman in the City (1945) & Setting the Record Straight (1945) & Poverty Does Not Wait (1945) & Facing History (1946) & On Intellectual Laziness (1948)
Bessel van der Kolk	The Unbearable Heaviness of Remembering (2014)
Simone Weil	The Needs of the Soul (1949)
Alphonso Lingis	Community in Death (1994)
Derek Ford	Listening for What We Don't Know (2023)
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Aracelis Girmay	Elegy (2011)
Carl Phillips	Fixed Shadow, Moving Water (2022)
Joan Naviyuk Kane	Turning Back (2022)
Wisława Szymborska	The End and the Beginning (2001)
Édouard Glissant	Eyes Voice (1961)
Valzhyna Mort	An Attempt at Genealogy (2018)
Lila Zemborain	may 5, 2002 (2006)
Leslie Scalapino	Whistler (1976)

Now Vol. 3

Verónica Gago	Violence: Is There a War on and against Women's Bodies? (2019)
Saidiya Hartman	The Anarchy of Colored Girls Assembled in a Riotous Manner (2018)
Teresa de Lauretis	The Technology of Gender (1987)
Tina M. Campt	Quiet Soundings: The Grammar of Black Futurity (2017)
Rema Hammami	Precarious Politics: The Activism of "Bodies That Count" (Aligning with Those That Don't) in Palestine's Colonial Frontier (2016)
Simone Weil	The Needs of the Soul (1949)
Joy James	Assata Shakur and Black Female Agency (2009)
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Cameron Awkward-Rich	Meditations in an Emergency (2019)
Susana Thénon	In the Star (1985)
Jorge Enrique Adoum	Beauty Keepsake (1949)
Mikko Harvey	Funny Business (2022)
Oliver de la Paz	Pantoum Beginning and Ending with Thorns (2023)
Mary Karr	The Voice of God (2014)
Wendy Trevino	Feel Good Lyric (2022)

Now Vol. 4

Ghada Karmi	The One-State Solution (2023)
Peggy Kornegger	Anarchism: The Feminist Connection (1975)
Sandy Stone	The *Empire* Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto (1987)
Mari Ruti	The Specificity of Desire (2013)
Audre Lorde	The Transformation of Silence into Action (1978)
Sawako Nakayasu	Say Translation Is Art (2020)
Jacqueline Rose	The Last Resistance (2007)
Etel Adnan	To Write in a Foreign Language (1989)

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Michael Bazzett	My Favorite State (2023)
Rita Dove	Unaccompanied Anthem (2023)
Ashley M. Jones	Summer Vacation in the Subjunctive (2020)
Victoria Chang	Flower in the Wind, 1963 (2023)
Ariana Reines	A Partial History (2019)
Ross Gay	To the Fig Tree on 9th and Christian (2013)
Jorie Graham	Still Life with Window and Fish (1983)

Now Vol. 5

Deniz Kandiyoti	Bargaining with Patriarchy (1988)
Trinh T. Minh-ha	Far Away, From Home (The Comma Between) (2010)
Homi K. Bhabha	Introduction: Locations of Culture (1994)
Adriana Cavarero	Echo; or, On Resonance (2005)
Andrea Dworkin	Israel: Whose Country Is It Anyway? (1990)
Adania Shibli	from *Minor Detail* (2017)
Benedict Anderson	Memory and Forgetting (1983)

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Essex Hemphill	American Wedding (1992)
Terrance Hayes	What It Look Like (2015)
Bahaar Ahsan	Orphic Interlude #1 (2023)
Gordon Mitchell Smith	On Dating (2023)
Andrea Dworkin	Goodbye to All This (1983)
CA Conrad	Part of This Forest (2023)
Fady Joudah	Remove (2021)

Now Vol. 6

Munir Fasheh	Mujaawarah (neighboring... sort of) as manifested in my life (2021)

Mexico City-Based Feminist-Anarchist

Affinity Group	Our Affinity Is Our Manifesto (2024)
Gerda Lerner	The Creation of Patriarchy (1986)
Hélène Cixous	The Laugh of the Medusa (1975)
Sylvia Wynter	Black Metamorphosis: Introduction & The Making of the Myth, the Negro as Commodity (1970s)
Alexis Pauline Gumbs	Dub: Finding Ceremony (2020)
Achille Mbembe	Brutalism: Introduction & Border-Bodies (2020)
Ruth Wilson Gilmore	Abolition Geography and the Problem of Innocence (2018)

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Doha Kahlout	Images from the War (2024)
Audre Lorde	Who Said It Was Simple (1973)
Victoria Chang	With My Back to the World, 1997 (2024)
David Whyte	Everything is Waiting for You (2007)
Mosab Abu Toha	We Love What We Have (2022)
Ocean Vuong	Torso of Air (2016)
Ada Limón	In Praise of Mystery: A Poem for Europa (2023)
June Jordan	Intifada Incantation: Poem #8 for b.b.L. (nd)

Eman Ghanayem
Proactive Grief (2022)

John Keene
Translating Poetry, Translating Blackness (2016)

Sylvia Molloy
Living Between Languages (2016)

Clarice Lispector
Água Viva (1973)

Cristian Williams
The Ontological Woman: A History of Deauthentication, Dehumanization, and Violence (2020)

Elinor Ochs
Indexing Gender (1992)

Dilar Dirak
“Only with You This Broom Will Fly”: Rojava, Magic, and Sweeping Away the State Inside of Us (2019)

Fargo Tbakhi
Notes on Craft: Writing in the Hour of Genocide (2023)

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Basman Aldirawi
The Idea Has Failed (2025)

Gioconda Belli
Calm Down (2012)

Mary Oliver
Wild Geese (2004)

Kim Addonizio
To the Woman Crying Uncontrollably in the Next Stall (2016)

William Ward Butler
Body Counts (2024)

Otto René Castillo
Apolitical Intellectuals (1965)

Octavio Paz
Toward the Poem II (1957)