# BETWEEN ARTS AND SCIENCE

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Dear reader,

It is our absolute pleasure to present you with the fifth volume of ASFA's *Between Arts and Sciences*. We are thrilled to showcase six exceptional articles from our faculty, covering a wide range of topics from within the disciplines of Arts and Science. Our 2022 journal reflects a desire to learn from past mistakes, as do many of the works published. So with that, we thank those who have worked tirelessly to make this a reality.

As co-editors-in-chief, we have both learned a lot, and want to be as transparent as possible when presenting the final product. When we were hired, we were informed that the theme of the journal would be Indigenous Reconciliation. This theme was advertised when the calls for editors, authors, and artists were made. What lacked, however, was any consultation with Indigenous communities or amplification of Indigenous voices. As a team composed entirely of settlers, we do not have the authority to present work under the guise of reconciliation, as privileging settler voices over Indigenous ones is the exact opposite of reconciliation. Though these decisions and callouts were made and written before we joined the project, we were still working with this theme, which was not carried out in the way that it should have been, with extensive discussion and consultation with Indigenous students, as well as providing more space for Indigenous editors, artists, and writers to get involved with the journal.

Above all, we are determined to learn from our mistakes and strive to encourage everyone in the publishing world, especially the future ASFA journal teams, to do better when promising to amplify marginalized voices. True reconciliation is not surface-level, but instead involves diving deep, actively working to remove the privilege that certain voices have and promoting equality in academia. This journal should never have been assigned the theme that it had without proper Indigenous involvement, and though the two of us worked within this framework for months, once we realized the potential harm that could be caused, we tried to remedy it.

we continue to support equality in literature and the decolonization of academia, and hope that future publications do better than we have done.

Though the realization of the errors in our ways happened far too late in the publication process, we have done our best to fix our mistakes and caution other writers against making the same errors. We would like to thank Kels Blair, the councillor for the First Peoples' Studies Member Association and head of the Arts and Science Federation Association's task force, for their support and assistance. Without them, we would not have been able to publish this journal. We thank them for teaching us that transparency is the best way forward toward reconciliation.

Our incredible editing team has triple-checked every comma with care and was punctual beyond our wildest dreams. Their dedication is more than commendable, and we consider ourselves unbelievably lucky to have been able to work with such a talented group of women. Thank you to the cover artist, Alessia Simo, for her breathtaking art, and to the ASFA graphic design team, Angel Cenerini and Nesreen Galal, for their hard work. Final thanks to the ASFA Academic Coordinator, Lily Charette, for her continuous support throughout the year. This journal has been in the hands of a wonderful team from the start, and we are thrilled to be able to share it with you.

Julia Bifulco and Talia Kliot
Co-Editors-In-Chief

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# CRISIS IN BURMA:

## HOW NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS ARE PROVIDING AID AMID THE 2021 COUP

BY SOPHIA MOE

## Abstract

**Following a tragic history of internalized violence, Myanmar/Burma resorted to its prior unethical standards and humanitarian crimes after a military coup was launched on February 1, 2021 in a show of disapproval of the newly elected government. As a result, mass protests were led throughout the nation to challenge the authoritarian regime, which has displaced, injured, and killed thousands of its citizens. The critical demand for civilian support and aid has placed an immense amount of pressure onto humanitarian efforts led by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as they struggle to keep up with the nation's instability and deteriorating economic and social factors. Due to the restrictions placed by the military junta, many NGOs struggle to maintain and access resources that are key to protecting vulnerable citizens. This research paper explores the humanitarian efforts of NGOs during the 2021 Myanmar/Burma civil coup. An interview showcasing the experiences of an individual who works with an NGO in Burma was conducted to further strengthen our understanding of the coup.**

Authoritarian regimes pose as intricate and complex networks of power that are often unstable for all individuals involved. These governments often disrespect human rights and liberties, which serves as a barrier for the political stability of a nation. Severe tensions arise between civilians, authoritarian regimes, and international parties, as burdens and responsibilities are placed upon other actors, who are vigilantly observing and reassessing plans of execution amid fears of unpredictability and dangerous instability in the regime's decision-making. In consequence, it can be argued that these actors must sacrifice efficiency and effectiveness for time, and must work swiftly to aid the populations they target as safely as possible.

Recently, the nation of Burma has experienced a time of turmoil and political instability that has forcibly resulted in an authoritarian regime by the military junta—a government led by its own military leaders. Burma's long and troubled history has been filled with several internal conflicts, with some regarding it as "the world's longest-running civil war" (Watson, Iqbal, and Maung 2015). On the morning of February 1st, 2021, the military staged a coup d'état, seizing control of all operations in the nation and declaring a year-long state of emergency with claims of election fraud by the winning party: the National League for Democracy (NLD). Civilians quickly showcased their discontent through the protests of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) across the nation; intergovernmental responses pushed for the restoration of democracy,

resulting in sanctions and condemnation of the junta's actions (Cuddy 2021). Meanwhile, actors in NGOs are left with the rush to forgo efficiency and effectiveness to support the populations they are serving as safely and promptly as possible. This research paper will explore the humanitarian efforts made by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) across the country of Myanmar/Burma during its 2021 civil coup. The literature gathered will be used as a foundation to evaluate the interview responses of a member of an NGO who is currently residing in Burma.

**Literature Review**

Many studies regarding Burma's crisis focus on the problem of authoritarian regimes, economic access, and the nation's social issues; the secondary sources referenced in this essay engage with all three primary concerns. An analysis by Doyle and Simpson (2006) concludes that control initiated by authoritarian regimes fails to endorse the very foundation of civil rights that are found in successful democracies. Despite initiatives launched in partnership with external forces and international support, ultimately, it is up to the government to transform its ways. Steinberg (2006) theorizes that negative outlooks towards foreign assistance and interventions may hinder their impact. Additionally, Barany (2015) underscores the use of transparency and trust between society, the nation, and the military as tools that must be well-established to address the social issues that the military has entirely instigated by its abolishment of civil rights. Overall, an analysis conducted by Desaine (2011) highlights all three of the aforementioned issues of authoritarian regimes, economic access, and social issues as the root problems halting successful partnerships that must be confronted. The author argues that the cultural mindset of superiority must be remedied and the urgent need for assistance should not be challenged.

While there has been a great deal of research conducted on the problem of the authoritarian regime, economic access, and the nation's social issues, few researchers have taken into consideration the difficulties faced by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as a result of the coup. A study by Norum, Mostafanezhad, and Sebro (2016) highlights that with the proliferation of individuals requiring aid, it becomes more difficult to provide resources critical for survival in the long term. An analysis by San Suu Kyi (1996) attests that in order for a nation to succeed in the chaos of an authoritarian regime, its people must be willing to involve themselves in the governance of their country with the support and cooperation of external organizations. Farah (2014) argues that by working alongside NGOs, governments may gain credibility amongst their citizens, which in turn encourages other nations to provide assistance during humanitarian crises. Furthermore, an examination conducted by Clarke (1998) confirms the immense pressure of becoming a political voice faced by NGOs.

Across these studies, there is adequate evidence that the relationships between the regime, civilians, economic access, social issues, and external actors have been negatively impacted. Numerous media broadcasts and global news networks address human rights violations, public NGO statements, and humanitarian efforts, and warn that action must be taken quickly in order to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe (Human Rights Watch 2021; Al Jazeera 2021; Fishbein and Lusan 2021; Lederer 2021; Ebbighausen 2021). Nevertheless, the actions of the military junta have impeded the humanitarian efforts of the NGOs that have been working to support the same people they have harmed, yet also claim to protect and serve.

Several more reports and studies have been focused on the ongoing conflicts in Burma and the militarization of several ethnic and geographical groups, which is a precedent set very clearly by the military regime (Watson, Iqbal, and Maung 2015). These reports are useful in determining the history of the military's abuse, the civilian understanding of the nature of conflict—even prior to the elections and subsequent coup. Additionally, it provides additional perspectives of the conflict (other than those of NGOs).

## Methodology

In this paper, I will be referring to the country of Myanmar by its previous name: Burma. The current official name was implemented by the military government in 1989 and its use has been the topic of much controversy. "Myanmar" and "Burma" can be used interchangeably; however, due to the humanitarian crimes the regime has committed, "Burma" will be primarily used to challenge the legitimacy of the junta, who were responsible for the alteration of the name.

The objective of this research is to highlight the struggles members of NGOs in Burma are currently facing amid the military coup and their personal perceptions of the situation. A semi-structured interview was conducted with an individual currently experiencing the hardships brought on by the coup. This approach to primary research was selected due to the lack of reliable accounts of first-hand victims of the conflict, largely resulting from the strong media censorship chokehold the regime has placed on the country since. Unlike international news outlets and academic sources, which tend to focus on facts and events, an interview with an individual currently facing these difficulties provides more psychological and sociological insight into the situation. For safety and security purposes during this critical time in Burma, the interviewee's personal information has been kept anonymous.

For research purposes, the chosen respondent was characterized as someone who works with an NGO, resides long-term in Burma, and has directly experienced the limitation of resources that their team has faced since the start of the coup's term in power. The interview was conducted in Burmese and later translated into English. Prior to the interview, it was made clear that the process would be difficult, as it involved interviews at inconsistent and quite late/early times. Each interview also had the possibility of being cut short due to curfews, technological interferences, and connection issues, as well as personal safety measures that could have rapidly evolved. Therefore, in order to maximize efficiency, all interview questions were prepared ahead of time. There were eight questions in total, but only the four that provided new details will be discussed in this paper. The interviews were held through a network of communication from the privacy of both of our homes, and each interview lasted approximately ten to twenty minutes. They were conducted on July 16, 2021 (EDT) in Montreal, and July 16 and 17 (UTC/GMT +6:30 hours) in Burma. The responses from the individual were documented through a simple series of notes jotted down in a notebook—the interviewee was hesitant to provide consent to be recorded because any type of media that could be used to identify them or their associates could place them in harm. Thus, for the purposes of this paper, the interviewee will be referred to as "Anon."

Following the interview process, details revealed by the interviewee were then corroborated by secondary sources. Pieces of literature ranging from peer-reviewed to professional sources were selected based upon political theories, similarity to previous coup attempts throughout history, and experiences of other non-governmental organizations. The data collected was analyzed in comparison to several anonymous responses obtained by other news media networks, which allowed the data's accuracy to be verified and any 'holes' which may have resulted from unreported or misreported events to be filled in. The data was also analyzed from the framework of these methodologies to further explore the impacts on NGOs in the discussion section.

## Results

The interview process and the results drawn from it were quite heartbreaking. As we sat down to begin the process, one of the first questions asked was: "How are the NGOs in Burma dealing with the current crisis, considering the high numbers of people desperate for aid?" Anon stated that they were struggling with the lack of basic supplies such as food, clean water, medicine, and medical equipment—even more so due to the rapidly increasing number of people requiring urgent aid. They were also

running low on cash, a monetary tool crucial in this time of economic instability due to the inability to access local banks, which had been closed down by the junta for several months. Since the beginning of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) when protests were springing up across the nation, several priorities rapidly arose: safety, shelter, security, and food. Thousands of people were either displaced or in hiding, frightened of returning to their homes; even more were struggling to find proper nutrition.

To follow up, a second question was asked: "Are there a lot of people working with you inside of Burma compared to before the coup?" Anon claimed that the situation was too complicated to say and that they were uncertain about the exact numbers overall. However, they mentioned some details that provided a figurative idea of the number of volunteers and employees available. They began by explaining that a handful of their coworkers ended up leaving the organization or country out of fear for their personal safety and the safety of their families. Many of them still had young children, which made them extremely vulnerable. Anon claimed that the military was firing bullets and arresting members of the Red Cross. Furthermore, threats and rumours of torture contributed to the responses that prompted several to leave. On the other hand, Anon said that they had also 'unofficially' recruited several civilian volunteers who were determined to help out regardless of the potential risks. One of the recruits stated: "Helping will not make the situation worse. This is the people's country and we will do whatever it may take to support one another." This helps us understand the psychological mindset of the brave volunteers assisting the humanitarian organizations.

As a follow-up to the previous response, Anon was asked a third question in reference to their status as an employee of an NGO: "How do you personally feel right now, being in the position that you are currently in?" Anon divulged to me their fears of being imprisoned or of suffering a worse fate. Despite their role in the organization they were still a citizen of Burma and feared the coup—the junta's unpredictability, constant shift in decisions, and lack of transparency were immensely worrisome. Additionally, Anon admitted to feeling guilty on several fronts—most importantly, that they may not be able to do enough for the people given the current state of affairs. They claimed that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic had been an absolute nightmare on top of everything else. Not only was medical assistance difficult to obtain, but oxygen tanks were scarce—especially since the regime had been keeping them to themselves, detaining anyone who tried to obtain one. In Anon's words, "The virus has spread quicker than imaginable, but we cannot stop working or protesting. We're trying our best to stay safe and to take precautions." Furthermore, the guilt and emotional weight of losing beloved friends—their partners in the "battlefield caused by the coup"—weighed down upon them.

The fourth question addressed those in the nations outside of Burma: "What can people in the international communities do to help with this ongoing crisis?" Anon replied, "We [the people of Burma] need people to stay informed about what is happening and keep Burma relevant. How many months has it been now? Instead of getting better, the situation is getting worse and worse." They continued by stating, "We are doing our best with our jobs to keep up and to support, but we need this to end soon." It was their hope that speaking out and publicizing several of the challenges and atrocities faced would lead to change in the future. Overall, the results of this interview proved to be chilling and thought-provoking.

In the following discussion section, several aspects of Anon's response will be juxtaposed with external information and analyses that have been conducted on several related topics including Burma's history of conflict, the role of NGOs in civil conflicts, and NGO responses and limitations in other similar international crises. These aspects include the physical challenges faced by Anon's organization, the threats posed by the military regime, and the psychological state of the actors involved.

## Discussion

The recent coup in Burma caused drastic instability for all actors involved; the authoritarian regime failed to uphold civil rights and political liberties that are present in modern democracies (Doyle and Simpson 2006, 751). This includes shutting down any criticism, restricting access to resources for dissidents, and violent action against perceived threats to their power.

NGOs play an extensive role in the empowerment of beneficiary communities in developing countries caused by flaws in their unstable regimes (Clarke 1998, 44). They can actively increase both transparency and trust in the system, especially after decades of isolation—as was the case of Burma when it opened its door to the international community in 2010 (Barany 2015, 97). Considering Burma's history, riddled with military governance and internal conflicts, the country has rarely provided an opportunity for its citizens to participate in decision-making, and any attempts to create a movement of change have been faced with guns and threats of violence. NGOs are well-known for resolving conflicts through their negotiations, communicating effectively, and encouraging all stakeholders and members to participate fully (San Suu Kyi 1996, 84). If provided with the right resources and conditions, NGOs—more specifically transnational non-governmental organizations (TNGOs)—hold the ability to become "the voice that upholds human rights [and] expose abuses, [making them] heroes of the revolution which the military aims to silence" (Farah 2014, 88). However, these external players cannot contribute or provide support if the authorities deem it inadequate—which is ironic as the Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perception Index ranked Burma 156th out of 175 countries (Barany 2015, 98).

Unfortunately, advocacy "is not a welcome word in [Burma]" (Wallis and Jacquet 2015, 22) as it is met with cynicism and negativity. It is theorized that foreign intervention is seen in a poor light due to the cultural beliefs and attitudes that resonate within Burma's history itself. As a post-colonial country previously under British (and briefly, Japanese) occupation, Burma understandably rejects the influence of Western culture and political ideals. Although it is considered controversial, there is a strong opinion among the population that "Burmese culture is under threat from the imposition of deleterious foreign influences," (Steinberg 2006, 221) which halts the progress towards liberalization and democracy. This sentiment is often harnessed by the regime to dissuade, discredit, and silence attempts at reforming the system if they come from individuals with ties to the West (which is often the case). This may be a significant reason behind the close monitoring of external organizations—although it is no excuse for the military's previous and current actions. Members of NGOs find it difficult to "believe that the government will do legitimate business with foreigners" (Norum, Mostafanezhad, and Sebro 2016, 68). Despite the fact that NGOs tread cautiously when it comes to their relationship with Burma, international NGOs have been permitted to set operations into the nation; however, many NGOs refrain from documenting their agendas in fear of the delicate state of the nation that may collapse at any given time (Desaine 2011, 96). This is a sentiment shared by the interviewee, who emphasized the risks of working in such an unstable political environment.

Considering the barriers NGOs have faced during the current crisis, the authoritarian regime has positioned the nation's social and economic factors on the brink of collapse. Bräutigam and Segarra argue that states may attempt to shift the economic balance to hold power and to control NGOs (2007, 160). This theory can be applied to the junta's current actions, as the nation is suffering from economic failure and cash shortage, which can be seen amongst the displaced civilians located along the Burma-Thailand border. NGOs are also impacted by the collapse of economic activity; as corroborated by Anon's interview responses, banks are frozen and difficult to access. A lack of funds limits the organization's ability to provide care and assistance. It also places the NGO's members—volunteers and employees alike—in danger of financial risk themselves, as they may be forced

to contribute their own finances. It can be of political interest for these authoritarian regimes to hinder the finances of NGOs—doing so contributes to physically weakening and spreading hopelessness and desperation among the population, then subsequently lowering the risk of incursion or protest. The crisis that the military has caused has contributed towards desperation; many "have turned to selling drugs and engaging in prostitution and gambling within the camps themselves" (Norum, Mostafanezhad, and Sebro 2016, 69). This situation will not improve until the wrongs of the coup have been addressed and remedied. Members of the NGO communities that work along the border have previously suggested that "there is 'only a matter of time' before the border exile population is forced back to Burma" (Norum, Mostafanezhad, and Sebro 2016, 69). When this occurs, Burma will be plunged deeper into chaos, and humanitarian organizations will struggle to stay afloat and manage their resources across the unstable nation.

At this point, aid organizations across the globe are sending warnings depicting an impending humanitarian catastrophe; however, the military shows no intention of withdrawing from their state of control and NGOs are left defenseless with the power struggle placing strain on their plans, funding, and relationship with the nation. Fortunately, despite several NGOs temporarily withdrawing their staff, many well-connected NGOs—as well as the Red Cross—have remained actively involved with their operations and humanitarian efforts (Ebbighausen 2021). Despite the apparent lack of staff to assist in NGOs' humanitarian efforts, there is a glimmer of hope for them—as explained by Anon, several organizations have resorted to unofficially recruiting volunteers for their causes. These volunteers are often part of the local community and offer their aid out of dutifulness for their communities. The term 'unofficial recruitment' is used because many NGOs prefer to keep a low profile with these efforts in order to maintain a stable relationship with the military junta. Despite the harsh endeavours imposed by the military, it is critical for NGOs to remain cautious and maintain a reputable standing with the regime; their fluctuating practices and initial agreements can promptly create contrasting results that can dramatically impact the population. As explained by Anon, due to the unpredictability of the environment in which the NGOs are working, they prefer to carry out certain activities under the radar rather than overtly.

There are several members of NGOs that have experiences and concerns similar to Anon's. According to The New Humanitarian, an anonymous civilian—referred to as "Zau Lawn"—joined forces with local NGOs and charity groups to provide assistance after tens of thousands of civilians were displaced amid the crises. Zau Lawn confessed, "If the Burmese soldiers found me with humanitarian items, I am afraid that they would harm me" (Fishbein and Lusan 2021). This is a concern that has been voiced by several humanitarian responders, including the individuals that previously worked with Anon; it is challenging for NGOs to provide support and assistance when the responders are at risk of the military's unpredictable civilian killing sprees, life-threatening assault, and unlawful arrests. It is heartbreaking to know that organizations "cannot openly transport humanitarian aid for displaced people; [they] have to pretend [the items] are for trading or other purposes" (Fishbein and Lusan 2021). These organizations that are continuing their operations in Burma are caught between a rock and a hard place. Between the civil/military conflict and the disappointing lane that is arising as a result of failing democracy, the nation desperately needs assistance. There is not a single person or township that is safely protected against these unwarranted crimes.

Prior to the 2021 coup, the military was quick to accuse NGOs of supporting Burma's regional and local political organizations. Considering the military's attitude towards the other ethnic groups and political organizations in general, this event was not shocking. According to The New Humanitarian, the largest humanitarian aid provider in the state—the Kachin Baptist Convention —was accused of supporting the

armed political group Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) by "delivering food supplies to displaced people" (Fishbein and Lusan 2021). Consequently, the Kachin Baptist Convention was pressured to halt its efforts in Kachin. Another organization demonstrated the same pressure faced with providing humanitarian assistance in this region, as they wanted to "avoid negotiating for permission with the military" (Fishbein and Lusan 2021) in fear of potential bodily harm—a grim reality for any actor or stakeholder seeking civil discussion with the junta. A third organization—a Christian charity based in the city of Myitkyina—has claimed the same encounters with the military, to the point where they have significantly reduced the number of trips taken around the Kachin State (Fishbein and Lusan 2021). This tactic of accusing NGOs of being politically motivated is a tactic employed to weaken the groups they assist and is an inevitable by-product of Burma's ethnic group political separation—this is a result of several armed militant political groups rejecting the regime's legitimacy since its early takeover, thus making them long-term enemies of the state.

Fortunately, in a letter signed by 137 non-governmental groups from 31 countries, these NGOs have demonstrated their voice to action by calling for the UN Security Council to impose a global arms embargo, as the military's long history of war crimes, human rights violations and abuse failed to cease (Human Rights Watch 2021). As a result, in addition to the arms embargo, the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, reassured, "We will do everything we can to mobilize all the key actors and the international community to put enough pressure on [Burma] to make sure that this coup fails" (Human Rights Watch 2021). Despite the UN's calls for the restoration of Burma's elected government and the termination of unnecessary and excessive use of force against protesters, multiple NGOs have said that the "time for statements has passed" and immediate action is required (Al Jazeera 2021). According to a statement released by these NGOs concerning the events since February 1st, the military "has demonstrated a callous disregard for human life," killing hundreds of people including children, political activists, university professors, journalists, civil servants (medical staff, office workers, lawyers, etc.), and politicians (Lederer 2021). Additionally, hundreds of civilians have been reported missing and in armed custody, the military has refused to acknowledge their involvement. However, this is not surprising given the junta's lack of transparency—for example, their reports claim "a far lower death toll" than recorded by a local monitoring group (Al Jazeera 2021).

**Conclusion**

There is no doubt that NGOs have played a crucial role in mandating support systems for the civilians of Burma in response to the February 2021 coup. The actions of the military junta have hindered and impeded the humanitarian efforts of the several NGOs that have been working to support the same people they have harmed, yet also claim to protect and serve.

As previously mentioned, tens of thousands of people have been displaced and hundreds have died due to the actions and lack of transparency of the junta. The literature review indicated the themes revolving around economic and social factors, as well as the authoritarian regime itself being responsible for undermining Burma's development and sealing its fate. However, it failed to address the members of NGOs that dedicate their lives to build a future of better opportunity for the people of the country as a major theme in itself. Taking the interview conducted into consideration, the NGO workers experience similar levels of fear from the coup and instability as the protesting civilians.

Burma was once considered the "land of gold," demonstrating one of the winning opportunities and prospects for both economic and social development in Southeast Asia—an opportunity that has now become a distant dream (Steinberg 2006, 212). A society that was once treasured and

respected crumbled into a reality in which the nation's "military rulers exist in a self-constructed cocoon, isolated from most of the trauma associated with civilian life" (Steinberg 2006, 215). As a result of greed for power through the authoritarian regime, the nation struggles socially and economically, unable to move forward while becoming "a state within a state" (Steinberg 2006, 215). As of August 18, 2021, the activist group Assistance Association of Political Prisoners (AAPP) have stated that the death toll—as a result of the coup—has reached over 1000 civilians dead. However, they believe that the number of victims is significantly higher, as there are missing individuals that may not have been accounted for (The Globe and Mail 2021).

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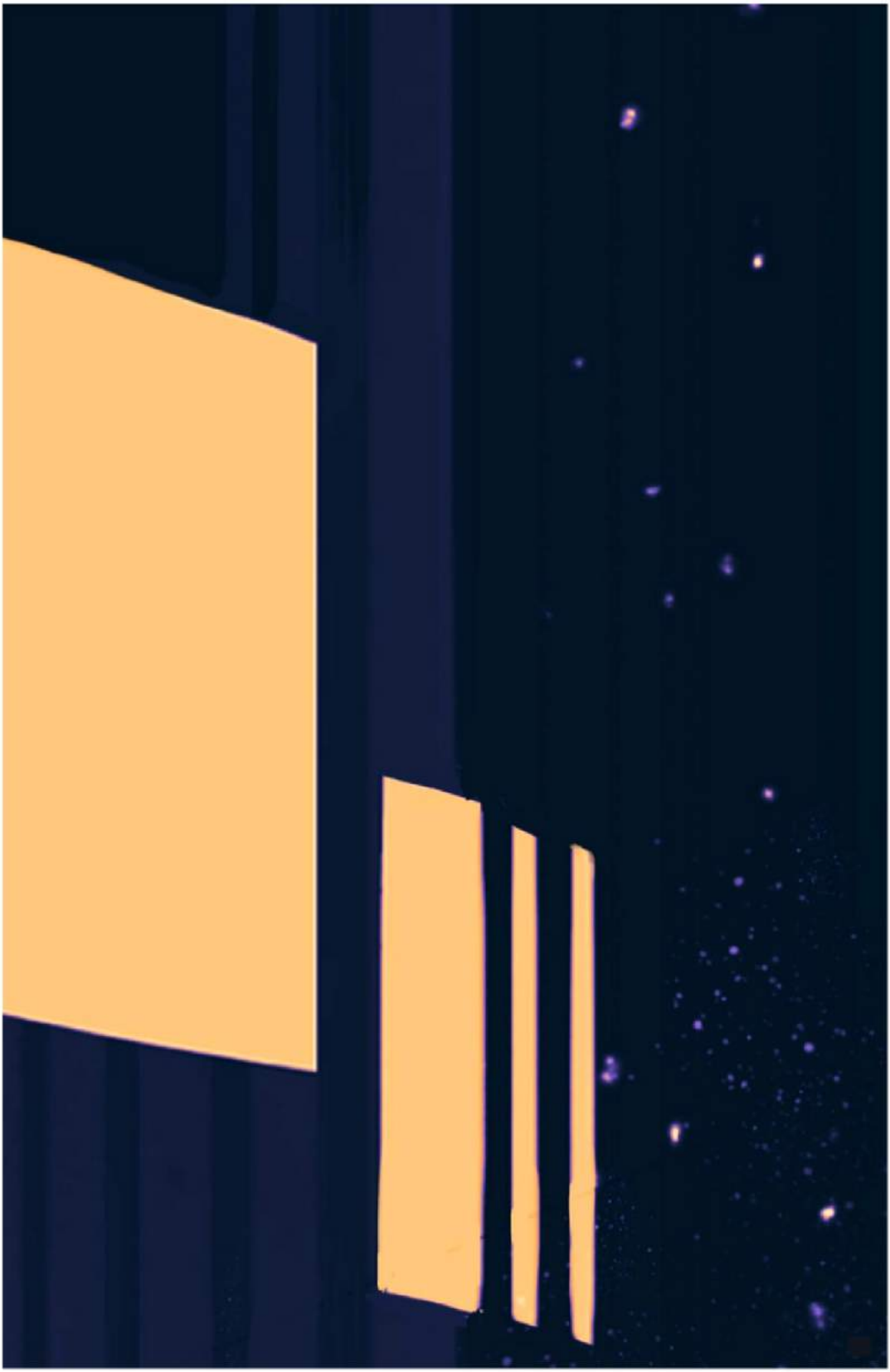

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# MOVING ACADIA:

## EXAMINING THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE 1755 ACADIAN DEPORTATIONS THROUGH THE STORY OF A LIFE

BY MAIRE DOWDALL

## Abstract

**Between 1755 and 1764, thousands of Acadians were separated from their families, deprived of their livestock and crops, imprisoned, and forcibly expelled from their communities in what is now Nova Scotia. This event, referred to as the "Grand Derangement," sprang from the refusal of many Acadians to swear allegiance to the British Crown following the transfer of sovereignty from France to Britain in 1713. The Acadians that were deported were dispersed among the Thirteen Colonies and elsewhere in a deliberate campaign to prevent their reassembly. However, a significant proportion of them never made it to their destinations, many dying from famine or pestilence on transport ships during the gruelling voyage. Those that did survive encountered hostile populations who refused to assist them. Many deportees attempted to return to Nova Scotia. Still others were sold into servitude or ended up destitute. The following fictionalized tale of the Gangier family and their experience of deportation demonstrates the collective resilience of ordinary civilians against violent colonial policies of cultural erasure.**

The harsh winter of 1720 had been especially challenging for the Gangier family living in Minas Basin, Acadia. Martin Gangier, thirty-one, had spent many a night repairing the damage done by wild winds. Nails were a rare commodity; therefore, he often resorted to wooden pegs and a mixture of cow dung and mud to fill the gaps of his small cottage (Jobb 48). Martin was exceptionally proud of his family's home. The home was built of logs with a hard-packed floor, (Virtual Museum of Canada) and there was a single window above the doorway. After a severely cold day in January, Martin sank into a chair with his English pipe (Jobb 50), where he would remain for the next hour or so. He had spent the whole day cleaning out the stables and cutting firewood. Meanwhile, his wife, Catherine, spent much of the evening tending to the fire (Griffiths 21-34). She had spent the day preparing a hearty vegetable stew with a generous portion of pork meat. It was unfortunate that they had had to slaughter their young swine, but provisions were tight that year. The Acadians were a prudent people; Catherine would salt the remaining meat and save it for the long winter months ahead. (Virtual Museum of Canada) While Martin was a vegetable farmer, he also had an impressive show of livestock, including a sizable number of cows, sheep, chickens, and pigs (Griffiths 21-34).

Martin was accustomed to the cold season. He had spent the warm season building another dyke. These dykes would produce larger yields of hay, grain, and flax this coming

harvest (Griffiths 21-34). Building dykes was not an easy task; Martin had spent tireless hours hand-digging ditches for the drainage system. Thus, like all Acadians, he prided himself on hard work. The construction of dykes helped to transform the wet marshes of Minas Basin into luscious farmland, thereby enriching a tight-knit community (Ibid 21-34).

The Gangier family was rather small compared to the typical pioneer families of the eighteenth century (Jobb 48). Although Catherine had married Martin at the young age of sixteen, they had had only two children. Isabelle, age nine, was always cheerful and hardworking. She thoroughly enjoyed mending and customizing the few bleak items of clothing the family possessed. Arnaud, in contrast, was meek and frail. Arnaud's physically weak condition was unexpected; the Acadians were settled in the remote areas of Fundy Bay and were often isolated from plagues and epidemics (Caron 6). What is more, the Acadians had a good relationship with the Mi'kmaq from whom they learnt about herbal medicines and the use of local foods. They also adopted many Indigenous inventions, such as canoes and snowshoes (Faragher). It was not uncommon for the Gangier children to play with the nearby Métis family (Faragher).

However, the family's greatest excitement was attending the Beauchamp's work bee. Although it was a long and difficult trek, the Gangiers' spirits were high (Jobb 52)! Martin had helped Richard Beauchamp repair his fence and was in turn invited to a large festive gathering with the rest of the neighbourhood. They thanked the British for the imported rum, wine, and brandy as they danced the night away (Caron 6). While the men worked, Catherine and Isabelle would sit by the fire and gossip while "pressing together pieces of woven wool fabric to create warm and durable clothing" (Virtual Museum of Canada). Bees were the perfect opportunities to expand one's social network and solidify social status within the community (Wilson 431-64). Moreover, Martin had a reputation for being one of the most hard-working and dependable farmers in Minas Basin. He was a descendant of the earliest French settlers to Quebec in the seventeenth century (Faragher) and had acquired, from his forefathers and the Mi'kmaq, great knowledge of how to best cultivate the land. Martin was also a skilled barterer; he often illegally exchanged his produce for scarce British exports, such as pipes, spices, and iron products (Caron 7). Of course, the English authorities were greatly displeased with the illegal trading between the Acadians and Louisburg, but it had simply become a way of life (Griffiths 21-34). Acadian land was rich in natural resources, but imported tools were necessary to manage the grueling labour required to benefit from such fertility (Griffiths).

For the most part, Martin was not bothered by the British presence in Acadia. He was content so long as he could continue to practice his Roman-Catholic faith and was not forced to take up arms against his previous colonizers: the French and their Indian allies (Griffiths). Like many of his fellow Acadians, Martin had grown tired of the constant reconquering of their land by the British and French. He recalled the French counterattacks on the English back in 1697. With the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, which marked the end of the Spanish War of Succession, the Acadians were once again under British rule (Ibid). England had required the Acadians to swear an oath of allegiance. Those who had refused had been required to move, within a year, with only their few portable possessions (Fergusson 127-35). However, Martin had adopted the idea that it was simply a matter of time before the French, residing in Isle Royal and Saint-Jean, would come back to claim ownership of the territory as they had done numerous times before (Griffiths).

Despite Britain's irksome demands, it had almost no practical authority over the Acadian people (Griffiths). The British centre of Annapolis Royal was removed from the local settlements, and it was near impossible to regulate the activity and movements of all Acadians. Furthermore, the Acadians had had a notable amount of independence under French rule and generally resolved social and economic disputes between families among themselves (Ibid). The autonomous sentiment held by Martin led him, and the majority of Acadians, to conclude that

they, as a people, possessed a degree of political power which might enable them to leverage their position (Faragher). Rather than accepting the proposed British oath, the Acadians sent back their own revised version (Griffiths). The Acadian oath of allegiance to the British Crown insisted on the freedom to practice their Catholic faith and asserted their refusal to take up arms against the French. Previously, Martin had considered emigrating to another French colony. Be that as it may, he was unwilling to surrender his eight acres for the unknown terrain of Isle Royal or Saint-Jean. Hence, in 1725, Martin thought it best to sign the Acadian rendition of the oath. Fortunately, Governor Richard Philipps backed this mutual agreement with the Acadians, despite the inconsistencies with the official oath prescribed by the British Crown (Griffiths).

The wealth and happiness associated with the Golden Age of Acadia proved true in the case of Martin, who rejoiced in his status as "Neutral French" (Johnston 31-48) Any hostilities seemed, in that moment, to fade away, even if temporarily. The Gangiers spent the spring of 1730 tending to the chores. Catherine and Isabelle milked the cows and gathered eggs from the coop, while Martin and Arnaud cared for the livestock, extended their wooden fence to protect their herd of sheep, and planted the crops. The greatest delight, though, came from the birth of Isabelle's son, Benoit. Isabelle, now aged sixteen, had gone to watch a neighbour's logging bee, (Wilson 431-64) a community gathering centered on clearing trees for the planting of crops. There, she met Thierry Guyon, aged twenty-one. Martin had been greatly pleased by the merging of both families. Thierry was the youngest of four boys, and although it was rare for a man to move into the household of his new wife, Martin had insisted upon this arrangement. Martin had found the last few years exceptionally difficult due to his old age, and Thierry would be able to provide much-needed labour support.

Although life was usually quite pleasant, Martin occasionally got into senseless arguments. Georges and Bernard Rocheleau – much to Martin's discontent – were among the few that enjoyed ruffling the feathers of the English redcoats (Caron 8). The French had acknowledged the Acadians' lack of interest in starting anew in a French colony. As a result, they sought to reclaim their lost territory by antagonizing the British: French missionaries and French agents were dispatched into Acadia (Fergusson 127-35). Catholicism occupied an important place in Acadian society and the younger Acadians were often swayed by a false sense of French nationalism promoted by the priests.

Tensions between the British, the French, and the Acadians continued to increase over the next few decades. Since 1713, the French had been attempting to renegotiate the borders of Acadia. In 1748, the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, which ended the Austrian War of Succession, returned Fort Louisburg to the French, further aggravating the English (Griffiths). Subsequently, Great Britain established a naval base in Halifax (Faragher). In 1749, the French retaliated by establishing Fort Beausejour, and once again the British responded by erecting Fort Lawrence nearby (Marsh). The British were angry at the fact that the Acadians occupied the best agricultural lands and mingled with the indigenous populations, thus preventing the settlement of new Protestant immigrants. Moreover, the British had noticed Acadian participation in a few minor raids conducted by the Indians and French, thereby contradicting their oath of loyalty to the English (Lockerby, Fowler 144-67). There were also rumours of the French requesting that the Acadians take an opposing oath of allegiance to King Louis of France )Johnston 31-48). Consequently, Governor Charles Lawrence of Acadia and Governor William Shirley of Massachusetts reinstated the plan to rid the colony of French Acadians out of fear that they might revolt (Faragher). Their plan to deport thousands of Acadians is often referred to as the "Noble Scheme."

In the fall of 1754, many of Martin's friends, having been accused either of collaborating with the French or of refusing to pledge the oath, had left for Ile Saint-Jean (Faragher). On one July

afternoon, a band of English soldiers knocked on Martin's door. According to the bilingual parish priest who accompanied the soldiers, the English Crown had demanded that all Acadians sign over their weapons (Faragher). Confused but compliant, Martin did as asked. Over the next few months, Martin would begin to note a considerable increase in the number of British soldiers roaming Minas Basin. He estimated a couple of thousand around the centre of town.

On July 27, 1755, Martin made his way to Sunday Mass. The priest again assured his congregation that the Acadian delegations had been successful in reaffirming their concerns with the British official oath, and consequently, the Acadian position as neutrals had been accepted by the British (Faragher). However, unbeknownst to the Acadians, the delegates—having refused to swear an unconditional oath of loyalty to the British that would have exposed them to the wrath of the French and Indians—had been detained by the British council. Another round of delegates from Minas Basin and Annapolis Royal had also been summoned on July 25, but the conclusion remained unchanged, and they, too, were imprisoned. Furthermore, the order to deport all Acadians had been approved by the British Crown on July 11. The Battle of Beausejour, in June 1755, had solidified once and for all the British suspicions; several Acadians had been caught defending the French fort against the British troops (Caron 8).

September 5, 1755 was a day Martin would remember for the rest of his life (Lockerby, Fowler 144-67). The British authorities had scheduled a meeting at the church in Grand-Pre requesting that all men and boys, aged ten years and older, attend (Lee). Upon arriving, Martin was taken aback by the vast number of armed British soldiers creating a perimeter around the church grounds. Some 400 Acadian men were gathered inside; Martin would naively spend the first few hours socializing with his neighbours. At three in the afternoon, Paul Landry, the only Acadian man literate in English, was called upon to translate the King's commission (Cosentino). Martin would listen in silent horror to the sealing of his fate: that all horned cattle, sheep, goats, hogs and poultry of all kinds that were this day supposed to be vested in the French inhabitants of this province are become forfeited to his Majesty whose property they now are" (Cosentino). Additionally, the French Acadians were to be removed from his Majesty's province in the foreseeable future (Ibid). Although the room erupted into shouts of anger, Martin was overwhelmed with a feeling of despair and utter disbelief. How could the King accuse him of being a traitor? Had his signature on the oath of neutrality not been accepted? Had the confiscation of his firearms not been sufficient to secure his loyalty?

Martin, along with the others, was confined within the church for five days. Luckily, after much complaining and pleading, the soldiers permitted the families of the men to bring them provisions (Ibid). The fear and uncertainty in Martin's eyes were difficult to conceal from Catherine. He was quick to relay their dire situation to her before the guards intervened. What is more, the environment within the church became increasingly hostile; a small dissenting group of Acadians attempted to escape (Griffiths), resulting in the number of sentries being doubled. Major-General John Winslow, noting the Acadian unrest, gave orders to embark some 200 Acadians onto five ships in the harbour. On the morning of September 10th, 1755, Martin awoke to shouts from outside the church. The men had been divided into two groups: one set for transport to North Carolina (Cosentino), the other sent back home to gather any portable goods (Caron 10). Martin was part of the latter group—his son Arnaud, the former. Martin solemnly watched as his son was marched away, British bayonets to his waistband; the commander's promise to keep families together was proving itself to be worthless. In actuality, though the purpose of the deportations had never been to extinguish the Acadian population, it did aim to disrupt their social cohesion and separatist political identity (Caron 10).

Catherine wept incessantly upon hearing of her only son's departure. Meanwhile, Isabelle and Thierry began packing their various iron pots and pans, along with their shawls, bonnets, and clothing for little Benoit. Sadness swept over Acadia. Rumours of Acadians who had attempted to escape into the forest with the help of the Mi'kmaq circulated the village (Griffiths). Major-General John Winslow had given the order to burn down the escapees' homes (Cosentino) so that upon their return, they would be forced to surrender and would be easily captured. In the coming days, Martin would continue to feed the livestock, harvest the fields, and cut firewood. Nonetheless, the unpredictability of his family's situation worried him deeply.

On September 11, Martin and Thierry were asked to hastily collect their belongings and follow the soldiers onto the beaches where the Leopard, destined for Maryland, awaited them (Cosentino). Martin was wise enough not to challenge the might of the Englishmen. Thierry, however, enraged that his wife and child were not allowed to board with him, took up a rake and brandished it at the soldiers. The British reaction showed that they were not above the use of force. Despite Isabelle's cries and pleas, Thierry was struck repeatedly with the butt of a redcoat's musket. After Thierry had been hoisted up by two soldiers, the Gangiers were ushered to their barn where the soldiers proceeded to set it on fire. Martin had spent many weeks constructing the barn; it had been his pride and joy. He wept silently, head hung low, as they were marched down to the shores.

The hull of the ship was cold and depressing due to the lack of sunlight. Although Martin was reunited with Catherine once aboard the *Leopard*, she delivered sorrowful news: Isabelle and Benoit had been forced to embark upon *Molly*, destined for Virginia (Ibid). Martin estimated that there were at least twenty other families crowded into the small quarters; it was so tight that the Acadians were forced to take turns sleeping because they were unable to all lie down at once. Additionally, they were forced to share the space with the crew's cargo which frequently slid around the ship's floor whenever it encountered a wave. Although Captain Church (Ibid) was kind to his passengers, food and fresh water were scarce. Moreover, diseases such as typhus, yellow fever, and dysentery spread quickly among the captives (Caron 10). The ship's medic was forbidden from descending below deck out of fear that he might transmit sickness to the British crew and soldiers above. Martin spent many of his forty-eight days aboard the Leopard suffering from scurvy. He would die on October 28, 1755, only days before arriving on the shores of Maryland.

Thierry and Catherine would arrive safely in Maryland, but their new life would be unforgiving; they would be met with discrimination from the locals and would remain in poverty for much of their lives (Caron 11). Furthermore, Isabelle's ship would be rejected at the ports of Virginia and she would once again be expelled (Leblanc 523-41). To support Benoit, she would work as a servant in England catering to a rich noblewoman. Arnaud would eventually return to Acadia where he would be granted a land occupancy permit (Caron 12). The Gangiers were never reunited. Nonetheless, their familial bond and shared struggle never perished (Leblanc 523-41).

After the Seven Years War, many Acadian survivors made their way back to their homeland and reunited with their lost friends and family members with whom they slowly began to reconstruct their identity. The story of a simple Acadian like Martin Gangier lends much insight into the systematic and violent methods of ethnic cleansing undertaken by settlers in early Canada, and indeed across the globe. However, the "Great Upheaval" also showcases the strength and longitude of culture despite centuries of conflict and oppression. Telling stories such as these, even fictionalized ones, is a means of illuminating the experiences of victims, thereby expanding and nuancing the historical record to more closely reflect the truth.

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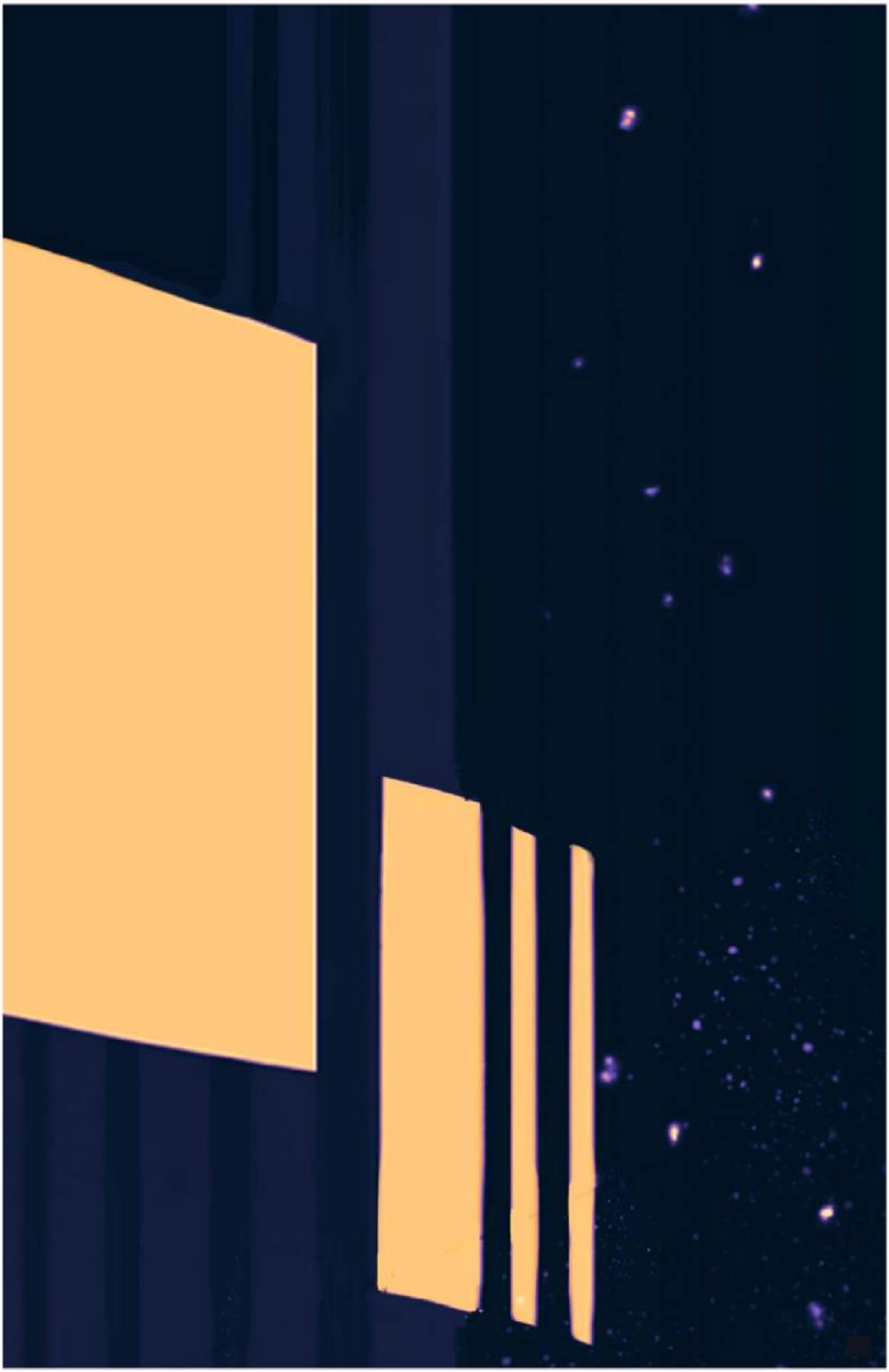

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# MUTUAL AID:

## DISCOURSES OF NON-NORMATIVE CARE, HAPPINESS, AND THE FAMILY UNDER NEOLIBERAL CAPITALISM IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

BY HANNAH JAMET-LANGE

## Abstract

**This paper looks at the ways that mutual aid can disrupt heteronormative individualistic systems of care under neoliberal capitalism that posits the nuclear family as the main provider of care. In the first part, I analyse how neoliberal society neglects community care in favour of the heteronormative nuclear family which is regarded as the centre of happiness and care. This leads to issues for LGBTQ+ people and all those that are not able to rely on traditional family structures. Shifting focus to examine media discourses and examples of mutual aid during and before the COVID-19 pandemic, I discuss the potential of mutual aid to disrupt neoliberal systems of care. My analysis illuminates that community care fills the void left by the current systems in place. Though there are dangers in relying on mutual aid as the sole solution, I conclude that it can be one part of building social movements that work towards radical change, recognizing interdependency and community as the main focus conceptions of care and happiness must take.**

At the time I am writing this paper, it is Spring of 2021, and I am a year into a global pandemic which has taken close to three million lives worldwide with no end in sight. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated and highlighted the inequalities and disparities of our society. It has particularly revealed the inadequacy of the current systems of care existing under neoliberal capitalism. In this context, we are confronted with the question of how to care for ourselves and each other in an ongoing state of crisis. Neoliberalism isolates people from each other and relies on the individual and the nuclear (heteronormative) family as the main localities of care, while pushing aside the importance of community support. In a global pandemic, this leads to inadequate political action and governmental neglect of the most vulnerable, such as those without traditional (i.e. biological) families to fall back on.

Faced with the pandemic, people have been forced to come together and care for each other in ways capitalism cannot. While the pandemic has forced us to reduce physical contact, thus isolating us in one sense, it is also important to examine the ways it brings us together to care for one another. As Natalie Kouri-Towe (2020) writes: "The relational aspect of care of the self, both for oneself and for the good of others, is magnified in a pandemic, where self-management has become a key form of viral containment outside of more authoritarian responses" (p. 192). This has been particularly prominent through the rise of mutual aid funds aimed at getting money and other resources directly into the pockets of those who need it, instead of funding institutions or non-profits that then redistribute them through more bureaucratic mechanisms. Mutual aid efforts aim

to directly meet people's survival needs, and are based on a shared understanding that the conditions in which we are made to live are unjust" (Spade, 2020, p. 7). As such, I argue that mutual aid is a form of care that disrupts heteronormative individualistic conceptions of care. It recognizes the interconnectedness of the people and positions them within a community, thus opposing neoliberal systems of care that produce precarity and further marginalize certain communities. Mutual aid can be a way to rethink the current systems of care by focusing on solidarity and going against heteronormative ideals around family and happiness, thus creating new ways for people to experience care and contentment.

In order to examine how mutual aid can disrupt normative systems of care, I will first attempt to define care and its crisis, exploring what care looks like in a neoliberal system and how this connects to the nuclear family. In her book The Care Crisis, Dowling (2021) defines care as "all the supporting activities that take place to make, remake, maintain, contain, and repair the world we live in and the physical, emotional, and intellectual capacities required to do so" (p. 21). Care is essential—not just for populations we usually see as requiring care such as the elderly or disabled folks, but for everyone—it is reproductive, and thus represents a central part "of a fundamental infrastructure which holds society together" (Dowling, 2021, p. 21). Many activists and scholars like Dowling argue for feminist ethics of care that center interdependency.

However, neoliberalism does not place the focus on interdependency and community. Instead, within our current systems, the Care Collective (2020) states:
"Ideas of social welfare and community have been pushed aside for individualized notions of resilience, wellness and self-improvement, promoted through a ballooning 'self-care' industry which relegates care to something we are supposed to buy for ourselves on a personal basis. (p. 9) "
The individual is thus made responsible for their own well-being (or lack thereof), with little attention paid to external factors that influence one's ability to engage in self-care practices. At the same time, austerity measures have led to a deterioration of care services placing even more burden on the individual, leaving people to fend for themselves.

Through the lack of other adequate systems of care, the family then often becomes the main support system on which most of us rely. Within capitalist heteronormative patriarchal systems, the (heterosexual) nuclear family represents the central tenet of society and the space where care is mainly located. As Sara Ahmed (2015) writes: "Heterosexuality becomes a script that binds the familial with the global: the coupling of man and woman becomes a kind of 'birthing,' a giving birth not only to new life, but to ways of living that are already recognisable as forms of civilisation. (p. 144)"The heterosexual couple and the nuclear family produced by it is not just preferred but prescribed in order to access care, relying on the "unpaid caring capacities of women," most often symbolized through the housewife (Dowling, 2021, p. 32). Care work undertaken within family structures is neglected, it is devalued and remains invisible, all the while neoliberalist capitalism implicitly relies on it. This care work becomes necessary because of the lack of care afforded by the state, it is thus forced upon families, and particularly upon women. This was observable during lockdowns resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic when "families had to turn their homes into offices, nurseries and schools, with an uneven burden of the work involved falling on women" (Dowling, 2021, p. 7). We can thus define care as a task of making and maintaining the world, a task that is often (made) invisible and relies on the un(der)paid labour of women and racialized people. In the context of neoliberal capitalism, care work comes increasingly tied to the nuclear family where anything that deviates from this norm comes to be seen as outlying and moving away from respectability (Rubin, 1984).

As I have argued, receiving care in a neoliberal context thus overwhelmingly depends on having the right associations and having a family that can care for us, since we will not receive support from the state, and there is little emphasis on community as the centre of care. Neoliberal forms of care, which expect us to fit into a certain model of society, the concept of happiness is similarly tied to normative markers: "The very promise that happiness is what you get for having the right associations might be how we are directed toward certain things" (Ahmed, 2010, p. 2). On their end, Berlant (2011) lists "enduring reciprocity in couples, families, political systems, institutions, markets, and at work" as parts of 'the good life,' it is a fantasy by which "people hoard idealizing theories and tableaux about how they and the world 'add up to something'" (p. 2). The concept of 'the good life' falls in line with neoliberal ideals of individualism, the idea of the American dream. Thus, the nuclear family is constituted as the center of both care and happiness, it is the center of what is assumed to constitute a good life, a life that takes on "the direction promised as a social good, which means imagining one's futurity in terms of reaching certain points along a life course" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 554). These points along a life course are traditionally built around family: marriage, birth of children, home ownership, etc.

While the nuclear family can be a source of care and joy, relying on it as the main provider of care leaves out anyone not fitting into traditional heteronormative scripts of what constitutes a family. According to Davies (2016), neoliberal "capitalism spreads a plague of materialism, which undermines our collectiveness, leaving many of us isolated and lonely" (p. 211). This isolation from each other thus makes it difficult for anyone outside a nuclear family system to access care, a phenomenon which becomes aggravated by the need for additional physical distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, queer people have always existed, as well as other marginalized folks actively resisting traditional heteronormative scripts of family systems, both out of necessity and as a form of protest. People in the margins have always created their own communities and organized for survival with the knowledge in mind that "only by multiplying our circles of care—in the first instance, by expanding our notion of kinship—will we achieve the psychic infrastructures necessary to build a caring society that has universal care as its ideal" (Care Collective, 2020, p. 28). Having been rejected by their blood families due to their sexuality and/or gender, many LGBTQ+ people are not able to access traditional systems of care if these are rooted in the nuclear family. Thus, people under the LGBTQ+ umbrella, but especially Black trans women and QTBIPOC, have had to build their own communities—a phenomenon often referred to as 'chosen families'—in order to find the care and support they needed.

This is not the first time neoliberalism has failed in face of a health crisis or that the marginalized have had to rely on their chosen families and communities for care. We can look at the AIDS crisis as an example of this. During the early years of the AIDS epidemic, government officials completely ignored the crisis that left thousands of mostly gay men and trans women to suffer and die, with then-president Reagan not even uttering the word AIDS until several years into the epidemic. The communities most affected—which were in themselves already marginalized due to their sexuality and/or gender identity and expression—had to create their own systems of care. This system of care was inspired and guided by "the community models of the Black Panthers, and feminist and gay liberation healthcare initiatives from the 1970s" which exemplified the ways that "community organizations of varying sizes and political stripes emerged to fill the gaps" left by governments and official health care systems (Care Collective, 2020, p. 30).

We can thus see the importance of community care for marginalized groups. In most cases, going against hegemonic conceptions of family and care systems is a necessity: it is a survival method that illustrates the inadequacy of normative systems of care. It becomes inevitable to "[break] up this liberal timeline and [imagine]

different possible worlds by attending to queer practices of world-making past, a recollection that leads not to our doleful present but, rather, incites desire for queer-life-affirming practices and relations to come" (Crosby & Jakobsen, 2020, p. 78). In their Manifesto (2020), the Care Collective sets out in a detailed way on how to reimagine care, led by the idea that we are all connected and need to recognize these interdependencies (p. 11). They imagine a vision of "universal care":

"The ideal of a society in which care is placed front and centre on every scale of life. Universal care means that care—in all its various manifestations—is our priority not only in the domestic sphere but in all spheres: from our kinship groups and communities to our states and planet. (p. 20)"

Within the context of COVID-19, we have become even more aware of the need for radical change in our current systems of care. Very early on in the pandemic, people started organizing. Before the virus was even declared a global pandemic by the WHO on March 11, 2020, communities had already started creating mutual aid Facebook groups—such as the "Montréal - Tio'tia:ke - Entraide - Mutual Aid (MTL COVID-19 Mutual Aid Mo.)" group—and other digital forms of organizing care. This shows an anticipation, a knowledge, that government officials are not going to resolve all care needs adequately. The reliance on heteronormative family systems is not enough. Therefore, community care in the form of mutual aid networks is prioritized and seen as the best way to address the needs of the most vulnerable populations. Dean Spade (2020) defines mutual aid as a "collective coordination to meet each other's needs, usually from an awareness that the systems we have in place are not going to meet them" (p. 14). Mutual aid differs from charity and non-profit models because it recognizes that the system itself is inherently unjust with charity only providing nominal relief and always on the terms of those providing the resources. On the other hand, mutual aid aims to "mobilize people, expand solidarity, and build movements" in a capitalist system where "social problems resulting from exploitation and the maldistribution of resources are understood as individual moral failings, not systemic problems" (Spade, 2020, p. 18; p. 13). It aims to recognize the interconnectedness of people and have those in need of resources take agency, elaborating "a feminist, queer, anti-racist and eco-socialist perspective, where care and care practices are understood as broadly as possible" (Care Collective, 2020, p. 21).

At the beginning of the pandemic, when needs were exacerbated in light of physical distancing and government-mandated shutdowns, mutual aid quickly became a way for people to support each other (Kouri-Towe, 2020, p. 192). An example of such efforts is the Montreal Restaurant Workers Relief Fund (MTLRWRF) which launched in March 2020 and defines itself as "a collectively-run organization that redistributes wealth, mobilizes and shares resources, and supports Montreal's restaurant workers" (MTLRWRF, n.d.). Through their aim to "help workers empower themselves through community, direct action, and resources," the MTLRWRF embodies an essential aspect of mutual aid by being created within the community it wants to help, and being a tool for agency, instead of assuming needs as is common for nonprofits and charities (MTLRWRF, n.d.).

However, mutual aid efforts long precede the pandemic, although many had to adapt in some way to the new context of the pandemic. "Taking What We Need" is an example of such a mutual aid project. Created in 2015 by three trans women, TWWN denounce campaigns around trans visibility that champion visibility as liberation. Instead, they recognize the serious barriers still existing for trans women in particular. According to their Facebook page, their goal is to raise funds for trans women to meet their needs, whatever they may be (TWWN, n.d.). This thus represents a project that recognizes the lack of care and the lack of support provided to trans women by the neoliberal capitalist care systems, and tries to provide the necessary resources to the affected community without judgment or questioning what the money will be spent on.

However, Kouri-Towe (2020) and Spade (2020) in their respective writings outline the possible dangers of mutual aid efforts. Kouri-Towe (2020) writes: "While mutual aid may be one model for building solidarity rooted in models of care, solidarity is itself a risky endeavour, because our desire for solidarity can exceed our capacity to attend to how power circulates and is mobilized," thus reminding us of the importance to question existing power relations themselves (p. 195). Spade (2020) summarizes "four dangerous tendencies" that mutual aid efforts might have to face: "Dividing people into those who are deserving and undeserving of help, practicing saviorism, being co-opted, and collaborating with efforts to eliminate public infrastructure and replace it with private enterprise and volunteerism" (p. 45). Hence, mutual aid efforts, while in themselves being a positive force that meets direct needs, also have their pitfalls that need to be addressed.

While mutual aid represents only one part of social movements, it is an initiative that can begin to address the lack of care under neoliberal capitalism. Within a system that relies on un(der)paid invisible labour centred in the heteronormative nuclear family, forms of care that center community disrupt heteronormative, marginalizing oppressive systems of care that further produce precarity. Through mutual aid, we can reimagine "the political as that which magnetizes a desire for intimacy, sociality, affective solidarity, and happiness" (Berlant, 2011, p. 252). We can thus use mutual aid as a stepping-stone of radical change towards systems of care and conceptions of happiness that recognize interdependency and community as their main focus.

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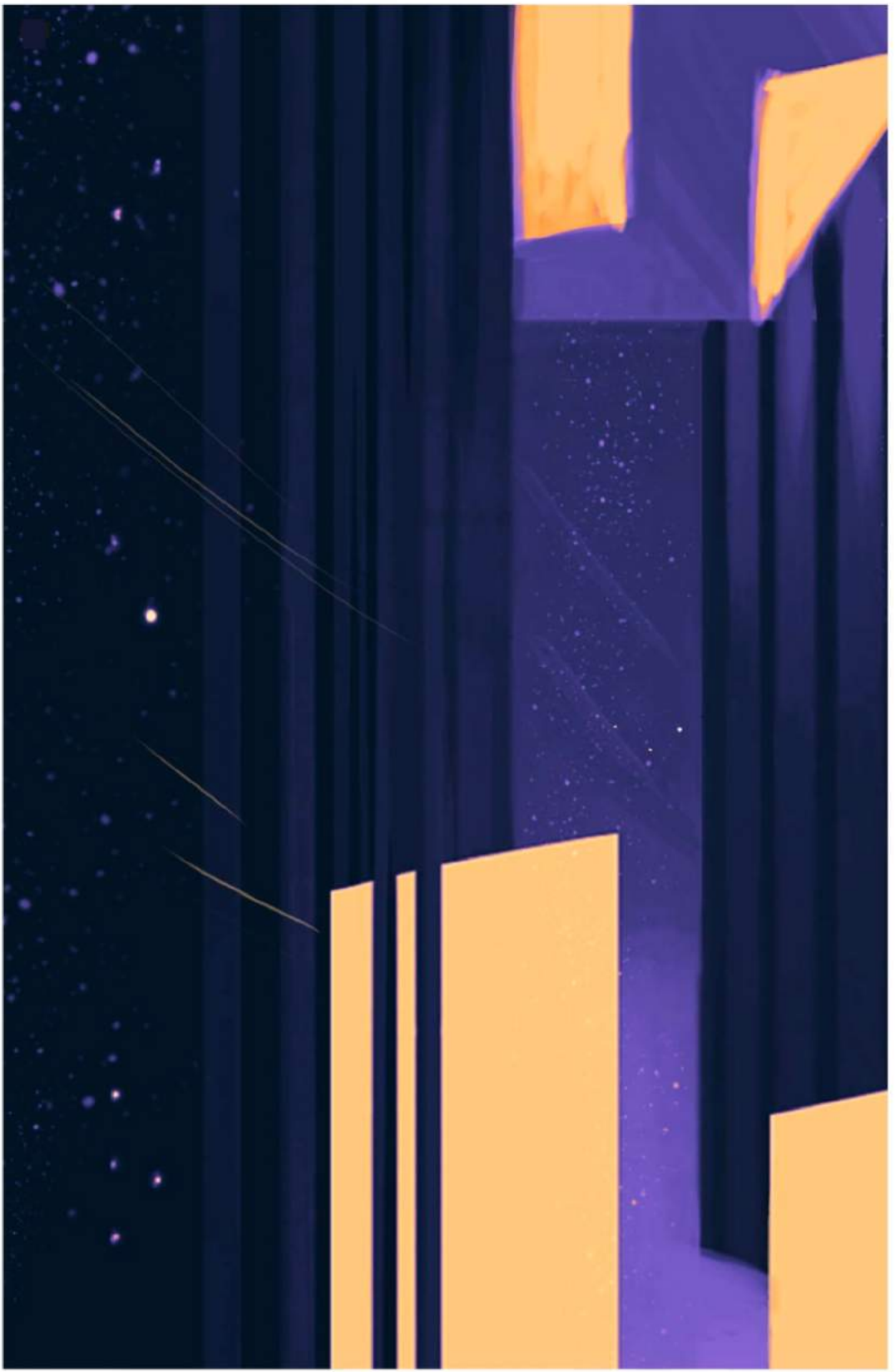

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# NOT YOUR FETISH:

## THE EFFECTS OF THE MALE GAZE ON QUEER FEMALE REPRESENTATIONS IN FILM

BY BIANCA GIGLIO

## Abstract

**This article argues that many representations of queer female romance in film are over-sexualized as a result of heterosexual male fetishism. The first section introduces Laura Mulvey's feminist film theory of the male gaze and describes how this theory can be applied to depictions of lesbianism in film. The next part discusses the pornographic nature of lesbian romance films, which it seeks to explain as a result of the male gaze. The article develops a content analysis of twenty popular lesbian romance films selected from IMDB. A correlation is drawn between the age rating and/or presence of nudity in a given film and the gender of its director; the results indicate that overall, the male-directed films include more nudity and sexual content. Taking an intersectional approach, the final section evaluates white patriarchal conventions of beauty and desirability in lesbian films; it touches upon race, body shape and size, and dis/ability of the characters featured within the selected films. The findings of this research study point to the female leads' overwhelming conformity to societal beauty standards in lesbian romance films, which substantiates the argument that these films uphold the heterosexual male gaze.**

From Franz von Bayros's The Serenade to Gustave Courbet's Le Sommeil, there has been evidence of lesbian erotic art created by men for men for centuries, the earliest of which dates back to 515-495 B.C.E in Ancient Greece (Michalska 2017). Prior to technology, there were erotic paintings and illustrations depicting sex between two women; in the 21st century, pornographic photos and videos do the same. However, the media's substantial and ever-growing influence over society has resulted in calls from the LGBTQ+ community for genuine representation in film, television, books, and other forms of fiction. Queer women are seeking fiction that represents their identities and relationships in positive and empowering ways.

Though these representations are growing in number, the effects of the male gaze on portrayals of romantic and sexual relationships between queer women are indisputable. Many of the films portraying lesbianism—particularly those directed by men—do so through a very narrow lens. Often, they reduce the romantic love shared by queer women to something that revolves around sex. These films share several common denominators: an abundance of nudity, graphic sexual content, and a general lack of diversity.

As a result of queer activism normalizing homosexuality and steering it away from taboo territory, heterosexual men began to view lesbianism as something that exists to satisfy their own desires. Male directors seized the opportunity to turn lesbian romance films into something more appealing to male audiences—what I have begun calling "lesbian porn in disguise." In essence, it has become more excusable to depict relationships between queer women in fiction in a hypersexualized manner under the guise of representation.

From a queer feminist perspective, I will analyze data collected from a set of twenty lesbian romance films. This research paper will serve to prove one central idea: that queer women's representation should not be straight men's porn. Of note, for the purposes of this paper, I shall refer to "lesbianism" as an umbrella term to describe the relationships, romantic and/or sexual, between two women. Unless otherwise specified, this does not necessarily refer to the sexual orientations of the women involved, as people in woman/woman relationships may also identify as bisexual, pansexual, unlabeled, or simply as queer.

**The Male Gaze and Lesbianism**

Laura Mulvey (1975) was the first to present the feminist film theory of the male gaze in her article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Using psychoanalysis, Mulvey examines the representation of women in film. According to this theory, female film characters are displayed in a way that is desirable and pleasurable to their male counterparts. The article explains that the female character is presented as an erotic object for the spectator, as well as for the male protagonist with whom he is meant to identify. Her purpose is to inspire feelings within the hero, whether they be lust or love or concern; she does not, however, possess any importance as a character. This "male gaze" applies not only to women as individuals within works of fiction, but also to the relationships between them—especially when those relationships are romantic and sexual. Through the lens of heterosexual masculinity, men view lesbianism as something that exists for their own pleasure. Scanlon and Lewis (2017) build off of Mulvey's theory to explore women's internalization of the male gaze and how it impacts their viewing experiences of lesbians on screen. The authors examine one particular strategy used by women to resist the male gaze: viewing lesbian films in women-only spaces. Scanlon and Lewis analyze data from focus groups comprising women-only audiences to demonstrate the effectiveness of this strategy in eliminating feelings of self-consciousness among women during sexually explicit scenes and preventing them from self-silencing in post-film discussions.

The historically heterosexual male institution of pornography is one of the main ways through which men have come to possess the capacity to sexualize lesbians on a large scale. Wirthlin (2009) discusses the methods used by lesbians to subvert this institution through the creation of their own pornography. In a similar vein, Swedberg (1989) highlights the contrast between lesbian pornography created by and for heterosexual men and lesbian pornography created by and for lesbians. After having viewed numerous pornographic lesbian movies, both lesbian- and heterosexual-made, Swedberg finds that lesbian-made porn tends to feature a single (monogamous) couple, while characters featured in heterosexual-made movies often have multiple sexual partners. She also notes that pornography made by lesbians is overall more emotive and domestic.

Furthermore, the female characters in lesbian romance films typically conform to societal beauty standards produced by the male gaze—they are femme, thin, white, cisgender, able-bodied, and conventionally attractive. As such, these depictions fail to reflect the multiplicity of the human experience and of queer women's identities. Gill (2009) provides an intersectional analysis of sexualization in advertising, including depictions of "hot lesbians" that exist to satisfy men. Gill's paper touches upon how the straight male gaze is maintained through the confinement of lesbian depictions to conventional norms of feminine attractiveness.

The objective of this paper is to demonstrate the effects of the male gaze on portrayals of queer women in film. Using content analysis, I shall evaluate certain aspects of twenty of IMDB's top-rated lesbian romance films. I will gather data on the age ratings and the presence of nudity in each of these films. I will also consider the correlation between these age ratings and the directors' genders, using this to construct the argument that male portrayals of lesbians are, more often than not, unrealistic and hypersexualized. Finally, from an intersectional standpoint, I will examine the patriarchal beauty standards that these lesbian romance films uphold by observing the queer female characters' conformity to said standards.

**Lesbian Romance Films: Pornography in Disguise**

"In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its [fantasy onto] the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness." (Mulvey 1975, 11)

When it comes to film, both the directors and the audience members are influenced by the male gaze. This gaze results in "representations of the female body [that] are constructed to excite men at the expense of offending women" (Wirthlin 2009, 33). Thusly, male visions and desires become reflected within stories that are meant to revolve around women.

In the case of woman/woman relationships and their portrayals in fiction, however, the male gaze is magnified. It is no secret that lesbianism is heavily fetishized by men; "[i]n popular imagination, the term 'lesbians on screen' resonates as a synonym for pornography directed at a heterosexual male audience, due to the history of that genre's appropriation of a version of lesbian sexuality" (Scanlon and Lewis 2017, 1007). At times, as I was writing this paper, even the most carefully-worded searches involving the word "lesbian" yielded pornography. The eroticization of queer female sexuality is so deeply entrenched in our society that the word itself—lesbian—is used widely, and perhaps even most commonly, in the context of porn.

Though some presume lesbians to be the most accepted members of the queer community, this will never be true as long as they remain the most sexualized. The fetishization of queer women by men occurs at the concurrence of two overlapping systems of oppression: heterosexism and the patriarchy. Lesbians are not attracted to men, making them "unattainable"—they cannot be "possessed" by a man and subjugated by the patriarchy. This "unattainability" is a source of frustration for men, forcing them to turn to their imaginations. In turn, their depictions of lesbian relationships (in film or otherwise) become over-sexualized masturbatory fodder for other cisgender, heterosexual men. Their goal is not to portray queer female relationships realistically, but instead to portray what they want to see. These men designate lesbianism itself, which does not in any way involve them, as something that exists to satisfy their own fantasies and desires.

For my analysis, I have compiled a list of twenty lesbian romance films sorted by popularity and tagged with the keyword "lesbian-romance" on IMDB: Duck Butter (Arteta 2018), Loving Annabelle (Brooks 2006), Vita & Virginia (Button 2018), The Handmaiden (Chan-wook 2016), A Perfect Ending (Conn 2012), Gia (Cristofer 1998), Happiest Season (DuVall 2020), Carol (Haynes 2015), Monster (Jenkins 2003), Blue Is the Warmest Colour (Kechiche 2013), Cocoon (Krippendorff 2020), Ammonite (Lee 2020), Disobedience (Lelio 2017), Below Her Mouth (Mullen 2016), Imagine Me & You (Parker 2005), Portrait of a Lady on Fire (Sciamma 2019), My Days of Mercy (Shalom-Ezer 2017), Summerland (Swale 2020), Bound (Wachowski and Wachowski 1996), and The Half of It (Wu 2020)

Of these twenty films, eight (40%) were directed by men. Nine were rated R (Gia, Carol, Monster, Ammonite, Disobedience, Imagine Me & You, Portrait of a Lady on Fire, My Days of Mercy, and Bound), one was rated NC-17 (Blue Is the Warmest Colour), and six were unrated but contained nudity and sexual content (Duck

Butter, Loving Annabelle, Vita & Virginia, The Handmaiden, A Perfect Ending, and Below Her Mouth). This leaves four films rated below R, with no graphic sexual content and no nudity: Happiest Season, Cocoon, Summerland, and The Half of It. Notably, each of these four films was directed by a woman. This means that every single lesbian romance film directed by a man from this set of popular films contained nudity and sexual content.

Why does such a large percentage of these lesbian romances contain nudity and sexual content? Where are all the lesbian romantic comedies, the teenage lesbian dramas? Why are (cisgender) men producing and directing lesbian films? And most importantly, why do men seem to be incapable of creating a lesbian love story that does not revolve around sex? These are some of the questions I asked myself while conducting this research. Approximately 33% of the films in this set that were directed by women did not contain nudity; while this number could be higher, many of the women who wrote and directed these stories are queer themselves. However, it is the male-directed films that gave rise to such striking results. Given that not a single one of the twenty films analyzed is both male-directed and nudity-free, it is undeniable that the male gaze is at work when men direct lesbian love stories.

The presence of nudity in the majority of lesbian films is significant because lesbianism "is represented almost not at all in the culture outside pornography but is and has always been a dominant feature of representations of women's sexuality within pornography" (Swedberg 1989, 603). These so-called lesbian romance films are not created for the romance; they are, in essence, "disguised" or "enhanced" pornography. They do contain aspects of romance, but the films present sexual intercourse as the culmination of the love story between two characters—the ultimate end goal. And it is not only sex, but nudity, that is rampant in male-directed films, even though nudity is not necessary in order to either depict or imply sexual intercourse in a film. It is under the guise of representation that these movies can be marketed as romance films, and the directors afforded the credit for this representation.

According to the results of this research study, such is especially true when men are the ones creating and directing lesbian romances. Male directors commodify relationships between women, reducing them to sex in order to satisfy their own desires and the desires of their heterosexual male audiences. Hence, lesbian representation is used for marketability, appealing to both the LGBTQ+ community and the men who fetishize them. Queer women, desperate to see their sexual orientations and relationships represented in film, will pay to watch these so-called lesbian romance movies in which their pleasure and sexuality are appropriated for heterosexual men's fantasies. These men, on the other hand, are further enabled by the film industry to continue their fetishization. For this reason, lesbian films created by men cannot be said to constitute the true representation that queer women seek.

**Conventions of Beauty in Lesbian Films**

Women in lesbian romance films tend to fit standards of beauty created by the white patriarchy. They conform to standards of thinness (always) and whiteness (usually)—if they are women of colour, they tend to be white-passing and/or light-skinned, or otherwise lack racialized features that would be considered "undesirable" according to cultural beauty norms. They are also often "conventionally attractive" and femme, making them sexually appealing to heterosexual male audiences. Though "this marks a rupture with earlier negative portrayals of lesbians as 'manly' or 'ugly', such representations have been criticized for packaging lesbianism within heterosexual norms of female attractiveness" (Gill 2009, 151). In other words, the de-stigmatization of lesbianism has led to an increase in fetishization—a latent function of queer activism.

Within the set of twenty films I analyzed for this research paper, the majority of the female characters were white. In fourteen of the films, both parties of the central woman/woman relationship were white, whereas in only six films

one or both of the main characters were women of colour: Duck Butter (Arteta 2018), The Handmaiden (Chan-wook 2016), A Perfect Ending (Conn 2012), Summerland (Swale 2020), Bound (Wachowski and Wachowski 1996), and The Half of It (Wu 2020). Nevertheless, this is as far these films go in the matter of diversity, for the women in all of these films were also thin, cisgender, and able-bodied.

Real queer women are far more diverse than these films would have us believe. Though heterosexual men enjoy envisioning lesbianism as two "hot" white women with extreme libidos, this is not at all representative of queer female sexuality. The lack of diversity in terms of race, body shape and size, and dis/ability in lesbian films serves only to indulge the male audiences that sexualize lesbianism.

**Conclusion**

Despite the increase in representations of queer female characters and relationships in film, it is evident that we have a long way to go before lesbianism is portrayed in an accurate and empowering light. The research that I have done underscores the over-sexualization of lesbians in film—particularly in male-directed films. Moreover, the female characters in these films conform to patriarchal standards of beauty, further legitimizing heterosexual male fetishization of lesbians.

Not all representation is good representation, particularly when it is created with the intent of appealing to a privileged group that seeks only to objectify and sexualize—in this case, heterosexual men. To amend these issues, queer female characters and relationships should be created by, produced by, written by, directed by, and performed by queer women rather than by men. Ensuring that minorities have access to platforms to tell their own stories is crucial in the LGBTQ+ social movement, as it would certify the wider acceptance and normalization of queerness in society and would allow younger queer audiences to see positive representations of their sexualities in the media.

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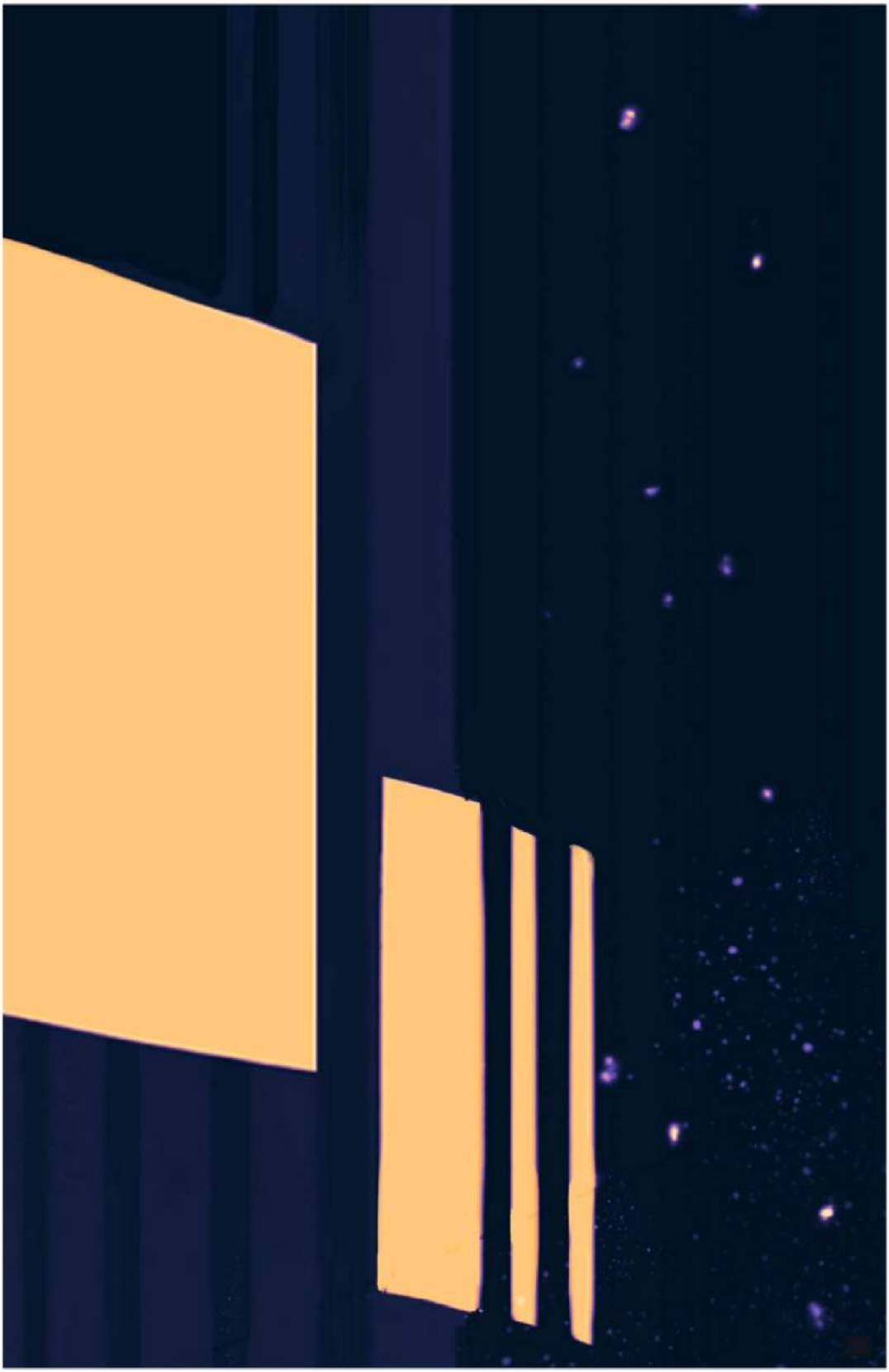

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# TRANSVERSING DOMESTICITY AND WILDNESS

## JAMAICA KINCAID'S GARDEN AS UNRULY EDGE

BY STEFANIE SWEENEY

## ABSTRACT

**In My Garden (Book), Jamaica Kincaid documents her complex relationship with the land she owns in the U.S. state of Vermont. Referring to Julietta Singh's politics of discomfort and vital ambivalence, the paper explores Kincaid's garden as a space representing colonial practices and political resistance. By digging her garden into strange shapes that come to resemble a map of the Caribbean, Kincaid performs what Jacques Derrida refers to as "psychic tilling:" an act that not only challenges the temporal boundary of past and present but also requires her to re-trace a complicated history through time and across geographies. In this way, her garden is not merely a New England garden but a hybrid space where one is forced to reckon with the colonial histories of extraction and transplantation. Calling on Julietta Singh's politics of discomfort and Anna Tsing's "unruly edges," I explore Kincaid's garden as a space that gains political impetus via its inherent contradictions. For instance, when Kincaid declares she has become a member of the conquering class, it is understood that she is still a member of the conquered class; one does not cancel out the other. Similarly, this paper firmly resists categorical depictions of wildness and domesticity, emphasizing that "wildness" only exists as a response to what is perceived to be domestic and vice versa. Anna Tsing notes that a division of the world into these two overly simplistic categories fails to account for the spaces that benefit from leakage and disorder, urging us to think of the interdependencies between nature and culture, which are far from mutually exclusive. Finally, Kincaid stresses the importance of localized activism in decolonization efforts by focusing on her relationship with her garden, a space where the personal and the political meet.**

In *My Garden (Book)*, Jamaica Kincaid explores her New England garden as a complex site of hybridity. Hybridity, in this case, relates to its unique position between domesticity and wildness. It allows the garden to act as a site of resistance while remaining a symbol of colonial practices such as extraction and transplantation. More specifically, Kincaid's garden is a site of simultaneous mourning and possibility, but never one without the other. Kincaid, who becomes interested in gardening as she becomes a mother, tries to grow (and contain) wild things. This blurred boundary between domesticity and wildness becomes emphasized by the garden's inherent paradoxes: how do we contain nature? In an effort to respond to this query, Kincaid digs up her lawn "into the most peculiar ungardenlike shapes," thereby resisting the conventional aesthetics of gardening (or at least the English and American garden) (Kincaid 7). However, she does not renounce the garden altogether; instead, she uses the space differently, finding new ways to grow her plants and flowers. In

doing so, she realizes: "the garden I was making (and am still making and will always be making) resembled a map of the Caribbean and the sea that surrounds it" (Kincaid 8). In "Cultivating Discomfort," Julietta Singh recognizes Kincaid's garden to be "an exercise in memory that draws her back to uncontainable pasts both personal and political" (Singh 8). Thus, Kincaid mourns Antigua and its native plants via her garden, but the latter's dual nature reveals tensions that are impossible to ignore. For instance, Kincaid admits the botanical garden in Antigua once conveyed to her the power of the conquerors who brought her "the botany of the world they owned" (Kincaid 120). It's interesting to think of this reversal, where Kincaid herself is positioned as a conqueror of the garden, trying to grow plants in her backyard that are not native to Vermont. In particular, it reveals Kincaid's dual position as both a conqueror and a conquered subject, complicating her relationship to her garden. I will resort to Singh's politics of discomfort and vital ambivalence to demonstrate how Kincaid embodies the tensions of the garden and thinks through her own complicity in practices of mastery. When Anna Tsing writes that "domination, domestication, and love are deeply entangled" and that domestication is particularly stifling for women and plants, it reaffirms Kincaid's unique relationship to the soil (Tsing 141). Hence, I would like to propose that her garden is a site where all of these realities come to fruition, and then extend beyond, bringing about new possibilities. After all, Kincaid's garden manages to "refuse the boundaries that cordon nature from culture" (Tsing 141). If we accept that wildness has always been in our homes and our gardens, then the garden can assume that "unruly edge," where it becomes impossible to ignore the interdependencies of the social and the ecological.

Moreover, Kincaid's garden is a site of mourning homelands—of old names and histories. Romon E. Soto-Crespo links the dislocation and transplantation of plants with the central theme of dislocation in diaspora narratives, reminding us that the latter requires cross-cultural connections to be made. Soto-Crespo also affirms that for Kincaid, as well as for other diasporic writers, mourning is "less a psychological phase to be superseded than a political condition of existence" (Soto-Crespo 343). And thus, the importance of Megan Boler's pedagogy of discomfort (referenced by Singh) is reified when Kincaid herself states: "I am in a state of constant discomfort and I like this state so much I would like to share it" (Kincaid 229). Boler's pedagogies "emphasize the bodies and materialities that both make life possible and differentiate (often radically) some lives from others" (Singh 152). Moreover, Boler encourages us to explore the space between our emotions and beliefs, where discomfort can teach us how to make space for paradoxical feelings and use them to make sense of the world we inhabit. Often, traditional forms of pedagogy don't allow us to make sense of these leaky narratives in the same way because they rely on the discoveries of truth about the world that fit neatly into categories that oversimplify the relationship between nature and culture. Singh also states that "discomfort is transplanted across generations and geographies," and not only addressing these discomforts but learning to live with them allows us, in turn, to "live with the ambiguities and uncertainties of our complex ethical entanglements" (Singh 152). She goes on to call the garden a "fecund site through which to think discomfort precisely because it is a threshold space: often situated between the home and the world, between culture and nature," much like Tsing's unruly edge (Singh 152). Hence, the garden teaches the gardener to learn and unlearn their colonial history, unleashing the potential to reimagine new ways of engaging with the garden that challenge concepts of mastery and reckon with the agency of the nonhuman. After all, the fox in the closing sentences of My Garden (Book) reminds us of the slippage between discourses of nature and domesticity, thereby hinting that nature can in fact be highly organized.

Kincaid's garden exhibits a hybridity that challenges the domestic and wildness boundary, as well as the temporal one. For instance, both the English and American gardens try to stand outside of time, bound by a bourgeois lifestyle

that associates gardening with leisure activity and fails to engage with the complex colonial histories of the non-native species growing in people's backyards and greenhouses. This garden, with all of its new Latin names, reminds us of the colonial fantasy—that of large-scale and violent acts of erasure of conquered peoples and their history. As Kincaid herself writes:
"These new plants from far away, like the people far away, had no history, no names, and so they could be given names. And who was there to dispute Linnaeus, even if there was someone who would listen? This naming of things is so crucial to possession—a spiritual padlock with the key thrown irretrievably away—that it is a murder, an erasing, and it is not surprising that when people have felt themselves prey to it (conquest), among their first acts of liberation is to change their names (Rhodesia to Zimbabwe, LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka)." (Kincaid 122)

The colonizers' erasure of these histories is an act of dehumanization, effectively relegating those conquered into the realm of the inhuman, along with the plants, animals, and all that fails to fit neatly in their exclusive category of "human." Native to Mexico, the dahlia—once the cocoxochitl—began appearing in North American gardens like souvenirs from the lands they have conquered—a vain reminder of their own power and the violence of their erasure. The commodification of that plant, once used for its medicinal value (Kincaid recalls Dahlia societies and dinner-plate-sized dahlias), further erases the plant's history and the history of those who first named it.

We might imagine Kincaid's relationship with her garden as a queer relationship, one that rejects traditional scripts and seeks out new possibilities for life and meaning. This queering of the garden can be thought of as Kincaid's engagement with the feral, what Halberstam and Nyong'o describe as "a mode of mess making in a world obsessed with order" (Halberstam & Nyong'o 456). The traditional conception of a New England garden is associated with the middle class and leisure time—Kincaid's garden, on the other hand, effectively distorts this notion of time as it demands history return to it. This demand must be met with an urgency that rushes the garden and its history into the present moment as part of her ongoing project of "an exercise in memory" (Kincaid 8). This explains why Kincaid is "still making and will always be making" her garden (Kincaid 8). Thus, the friction generated by her garden is a result of its hybridity, of its assumed complicity in the colonial project of the conquering class, and its potential for resistance. What Kincaid's garden doesn't do is revolutionize itself or erase its violent history; rather, her garden sits in the discomfort produced by the very conditions that allow it to exist. Luciano and Chen, in thinking of the human and the inhuman, choose to examine how "those categories rub on, and against, each other, generating friction and leakage," and the same can be said of the garden and its multiple potentials for meaning (Luciano & Chen 186).

In addition, throughout My Garden (Book), Kincaid learns the importance of not only learning the names of those who previously owned the house she lives in, but parts of their stories, including what they grew in their garden and where. For instance, learning that Mrs. McGovern had a peony garden changes Kincaid's relationship to her lawn and teaches her how to "recognize a maple" (Kincaid 6). This example of interdependence between Kincaid, Mrs. McGovern, and the plants in her old garden recalls Anna Tsing's Unruly Edges, which highlights the important role of fungi in virtually all aspects of the "natural" world. The interconnectedness of Tsing's world challenges the isolated and individualistic norms introduced by colonialism and cemented via capitalism. It invites us to critically confront the notion that the world can be broken up into two fixed categories: wilderness and civilization. Halberstam and Nyong'o argue that wildness becomes "part of a colonial division of the world into the modernizing and the extractive zones. The wild was a resource, a genetic variant, or an

indigenous remedy to be patented, transplanted, exploited, commodified" (Halberstam & Nyong'o 455). However, according to Tsing, the division of the world into wilderness and civilization ignores the potential of what she terms "unruly edges:" spaces that resist categorization and benefit from leakage and disorder. She writes that domestication is falsely understood to be a hard line: "you are either in the human fold or you are out in the wild" (Tsing 144). However, it is important to note that these rigid-seeming boundaries result from an ideological commitment to speciesism and human mastery, which this paper resists subscribing to. Tsing reminds us that "domestication is ordinarily understood as human control over other species. That such relations might also change humans is generally ignored" (Tsing 144). Thus, we see in Tsing's argument the potential for interspecies mingling and interdependency, which brings us back to Kincaid's strong ties to her garden and its plants. Ultimately, her garden connects her with her roots in Antigua and forces her to reckon with her dual position as a once-conquered person and a present-day middle-class person living in America who owns a house and a garden.

In "Cultivating Discomfort," Singh draws on Sarah Ahmed's argument that discomfort is about inhabiting norms differently. In this sense, discomfort has the potential to be transformative, because "to feel uncomfortable is precisely to be affected by that which persists in the shaping of bodies and lives" (Singh 151). If we think back to Halberstam and Nyong'o's slippery boundary between civilization and wildness, we can use a similar framework to understand discomfort as an essential part of decolonial praxis. After all, it is Singh who reminds us of the benefit of "living alternatively within our contradictions rather than seeking to escape them" (Singh 157). In a sense, these contradictions exist because we tend to subscribe to all-encompassing scripts and rigid boundaries: modernizing/extractive zones, order/disorder, civilization/nature, and human/non-human. These learned and harmful dichotomies neglect Tsing's roadside margins where leakage occurs and where, at the seams of imperialism, options for alternate forms of living exist. Moreover, Singh calls Kincaid a "split subject" who enacts a "vital ambivalence—a practice of representation that emphasizes, politicizes, and embraces the subject's contradictions and slippages" (Singh 158). For instance, Kincaid's main paradox is her working towards decolonizing the garden while simultaneously engaging in a form of human mastery. The inherent tensions, however, should not be read as a weakness in Kincaid's politics. Instead, attention should be drawn to a critical flaw in decolonial rhetoric and activism, which has, according to Singh, "decried mastery in its expressly colonial form," while failing "to account for the ways that mastery has continued to propagate in other, but critically related, forms and practices of both political and mundane life" (Singh 150-151). It might benefit us to think about what Tsing's inter-species dependencies mean for agency—on all sides. After all, if we reject a script of human mastery, does it not follow that our agency will be affected? And how does this affect discomfort? Susie O'Brien, who views gardening for pleasure as an art form, reminds us that "composing with nature is in part a conquest, in part a kind of surrender, as the garden [...] is always subject to the contingency of soil, of weather, of animals; subject, in other words, to the agency of the non-human world" (O'Brien 176). Likewise, Singh reminds us that it is not only human comfort that is at stake, and this can play a critical role in Kincaid's own discomfort. After all, it is not uncommon for humans to go through life with little thought to animal, plant, and non-human agency, especially under a capitalist system that centres around animal capital, where one is either human or a commodity (Shukin).

In pondering the tensions in her garden, Kincaid expresses concern about her own complicity in the colonial project.

The comparison she draws between Henry James' The Portrait of a Lady, found in Mac Griswold's Pleasures of the Garden: Images from the Metropolitan Museum of Fine Art, and Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions, is especially significant because it reminds us that the garden can mean different things for different lives. The following is an excerpt from Dangarembga's quote:
"I too could think of planting things for merrier reasons than the chore of keeping breath in the body. I wrote it down in my head: I would ask Mai guru for some bulbs and plant a bed of those gay lilies on the homestead. In front of the house. Our home would answer well to being cheered up by such lovely flowers. Bright and cheery, they had been planted for joy. What a strange idea that was" (Kincaid 115).

As expressed above, the narrator has trouble coming to terms with the fact that some people plant things for joy or "for merrier reasons than the chore of keeping breath in the body" (Kincaid 115). Planting for joy and planting for survival can be understood as a dividing line that parallels the colonial division of the world into primitive and modernized zones. Kincaid, in My Garden (Book), straddles that line, and then crosses it:
"And I thought how I had crossed a line: but at whose expense? I cannot begin to look, because what if it is someone I know? I have joined the conquering class: who else could afford this garden—a garden in which I grow things that it would be much cheaper to buy at the store?" (Kincaid 123).

This concern, or guilt, reverberates throughout the text and plays a critical role in her politics of discomfort. O'Brien writes that "the pleasure of gardening, entangled with the poetry of botany, is haunted [...] with guilty knowledge of her complicity with the botany thieves and plant appropriators who aided in the colonization of the country of her birth" (O'Brien 176). Moreover, the straddling of that line, or the inhabiting of two worlds, reiterates Singh's concept of the split subject. Interestingly, Singh calls attention to the ways that discomfort is an inheritance. She recalls Derrida, who describes discomfort as "a hauntological affect that marks the present with a past, one that is in no sense easy to trace" (Singh 152). Thus, when Kincaid makes the garden that she "will always be making" and creates these ungardenlike shapes, she performs what Derrida refers to as "psychic tilling," trying to retrace a past, dig up a history, and convert her garden into an "affective site of political resistance and reinvention" (Singh 152). In other words, we can view Kincaid's psychic tilling as a form of localized action that allows the personal and political to meet.

O'Brien refers to the garden as an awkward topic that is not easily intelligible within existing codes of ecology or economy. She suggests that "its aesthetic significance is informed largely by its transgression of those codes, a transgression, which articulates the history of conquest that such codes both embody and conceal" (O'Brien 176). Moreover, she presents the (post)colonial garden as a site of "environmental dislocation" that refuses a coherent logic of geography as well as ecology (O'Brien 170). It is useful here to think about the garden as also straddling the line between nature and artifice and to what extent the latter might be a marker of one's power. O'Brien recalls Susan Stewart's conception of the garden as a work of art, and specifically as a way to produce form: "Making a garden, like making other works of art and unlike practicing agriculture, involves producing form for its own sake" (O'Brien 175). This approach to gardening is strikingly different from the reality of Dangarembga's narrator in Nervous Conditions, who gardens in order to "keep breath in the body" (Kincaid 115). O'Brien further recalls the comparison between Dangarembga and James when she states that producing form for its own sake exercises power over nature and, "as Kincaid acknowledges, over other people, those who, harnessed within the austere economy of agriculture, are barred from the luxury of simply gardening for joy" (O'Brien 176). Thus, we faced the paradoxical "nature" of the garden, which is neither wild nor fully domesticated, but inhabits both states comfortably and uncomfortably. The awkwardness of the garden illustrates that Kincaid's My Garden (Book) functions less as a

solution to the garden's colonial complicity and more as a guide on how to come face to face with one's own complicity and contradictions:

She enjoys these gardening books in the same way that she "does not mind" the botanical gardens of her youth, which bore testimony to the European desire for control and possession. Not minding, she acknowledges, "is not so grand a gesture on my part, it is mostly an admission of defeat: to mind would be completely futile, I cannot do anything about it anyway. I only mind the absence of this admission, this contradiction: perhaps every good thing that stands before us comes at a great cost to someone else." (O'Brien 151)

While the above quotation echoes Singh's concept of vital ambivalence, I contend that it reiterates the importance of localized activism. In admitting defeat, Kincaid shows us that she has already come to terms with the fact that her garden—despite holding a myriad of histories of people and places—is not going to kick off global change, but it does illustrate the potential for the personal to become political.

Another marker of Kincaid's ambivalence is the very column she writes for. Hardly a small-scale newspaper, *The New Yorker*, as O'Brien reminds us, is "the consummate lifestyle guide for wealthy Americans" (O'Brien 174). It seems these contradictions are aplenty in Kincaid's garden aesthetic, politics, and writing. Let us examine the following description of her garden: "The tulips I had planted last autumn were in bloom and I liked sitting caressing their petals, which felt like skin made up of peau de soie, deliciously disgusting" (O'Brien 174). Funnily enough, the alliteration of "deliciously disgusting" shows us that there is even a *poetics* of paradox in Kincaid's work. Now let us turn back to Luciano and Chen, who argue that queer "does not merely unsettle the human as norm; it generates other possibilities [...] for living" (Luciano & Chen 187). Kincaid's paradoxical garden shows similar generative potential. When Kincaid asks, "at what moment does such ordinary, everyday beauty become a luxury?," we can interpret her question as a call to action that asks us to deconstruct the meanings we associate with gardening, nature, and the non-human (Kincaid 117). After all, who gets to decide what is a luxury? And to whom? And is this luxury not a violence? Interestingly, O'Brien reminds us that Kincaid rebels not only against the literary tradition of garden writing (think Henry James), which tends to be written with an authoritative voice, but in her youth, she rejected the authoritative structure of the botanical garden, "using the space not in the self-edifying way envisioned by the men who created it but rather as a place to explore her own blossoming sexuality through romantic trysts with other girls" (O'Brien 178). Illustrating once again the personal nature of her politics, Kincaid queers the space of the garden of both her youth and her adult life.

Regarding my question about whether luxury is a violence, I can only hypothesize that Kincaid would reject this claim for failing to account for those leaks and slippages in the seams of imperial space. After all, this line of thinking subscribes to scripts of human mastery and fails to consider non-human agency (think of how a squirrel stealing a garden tomato has benefitted from this "luxury," for instance). Moreover, it is helpful to recall O'Brien's comment about the garden being at the will of the soil, weather, and essentially, the non-human world. Simultaneously, however, Kincaid must learn about the history of her new home (like the fact that Mrs. McGovern once had a peony garden) to properly tend to the soil and maintain her garden, once again illustrating the interdependencies between the ecological (the "wild") and the human world (the "domestic"). As O'Brien refers to it, this awkwardness is only "awkward" because of the hard lines drawn to divide the world into this false dichotomy of wilderness versus civilization, especially since the garden is a space that resists this rigid categorization, despite the stories we might tell ourselves. After all, gardening is not a story exclusively about domination, domestication, or

love, but a story about all three. Kincaid not only acknowledges this but presents the garden as a space that both comfortably and uncomfortably inhabits this paradox. Her world is "cracked, unwhole, not pure, [and] accidental" (Kincaid 124), asking us to turn away from all-encompassing categorical divisions of the world and recall Tsing's unruly edges, where life of all sorts can flourish in the slippery margins (Tsing 141).

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# GENDER EMPLOYMENT

## UNEQUAL EFFECTS ON GENDER EMPLOYMENT IN THE UNITED STATES DUE TO COVID-19

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## Abstract

**This paper provides a critical overview of how the pandemic has had disproportionate effects on reproductive work. It explores the history of social reproduction, including reproductive work as gendered, and how neoliberalism led to the undervaluing of reproductive work. It then provides examples of how people working in reproductive work in the United States were affected differently during the pandemic and suggests possible explanations. This essay focuses only on gendered differences, but the study could be improved by taking an intersectional approach.**

In late 2019, COVID-19 had begun rocking the world. By Spring of 2020, much of Canada and the United States was already in lockdown as the virus had been declared a pandemic. The global community came together to fight the spread of the virus as public figures begged everyone to do their part in adopting protective measures. By Summer of 2020, the public was tired—not only from the mental and physical toll of the pandemic but also tired of hearing the line, 'we're all in the same boat.' Though said in good faith, it hardly garnered a positive response for one abundantly clear reason: it was a blatant lie. As Damian Barr noted, we were not in the same boat but rather in the same storm, with some in yachts and others drowning at sea (2020). A slew of social problems including sexism, racism, ableism, and many more meant that people of various social groups were affected very differently by the pandemic and the government's response to it.

Specifically, this paper will examine how men and women were impacted unequally by the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States regarding job loss. First, it will analyze gender inequality in social reproduction more generally through an analysis of critical writings on the topic. It will be followed by an examination of neoliberalism and how it contributes to this problem. Next, the paper will study how the pandemic and government responses to it exacerbated gender inequality in the United

States. It will do this by first studying the impact of the pandemic on job losses across women-dominated industries. Then, it will provide an analysis of other factors that contribute to women being responsible for childcare at home including unequal pay, gender norms, and flexible hours. The paper will conclude by summarizing the main points to clearly illustrate how men and women have experienced unequal impacts of COVID-19 because of neoliberal assumptions about social reproduction.

**Social Reproduction**

Social reproduction is a relatively simple term, only complicated by its lack of recognition in social and political dialogue. Katz (2001) describes it in its most basic form as "the fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life" (711). It entails the work that is performed outside of formal employment needed to sustain the workforce, i.e., the part of the economic system that is not necessarily economically productive but is fundamental to its survival. Power (2020) calls this the "care economy," the foundation to "the economy" which includes "the reproduction of everyday life through cooking, raising children, and so forth" (67). From going to school to buying groceries, to washing dishes and making the bed, everyday chores outside of the formal economy keep society alive and well-prepared to submit their labor to the workforce. This is social reproduction, and decades of neoliberalism have made it a site of gender inequality in North America.

It is important to first understand why social reproduction would be gendered. Traditionally, women are associated with 'nurturing' and 'caring' qualities which inevitably translate to gender roles. As such, chores like cleaning, cooking, and raising children are viewed to be women's work even though they are socially reproductive and therefore necessary to sustain both women and men. On the other hand, men are associated with stoicism and rationality, and are therefore assumed to make up the workforce. Capitalism exacerbates gender roles by dividing the geographies of space between the public and private spheres. Essentially, the public sphere is the men's sphere and is where waged, "economically-productive" labor takes place (England 2010, 133). On the contrary, the private sphere is the women's sphere and is where unpaid, reproductive "labours of love" take place (England 2010, 133). Only after the rise of feminism and neoliberalism did the spheres really begin to blur.

In the 1970s, governments in North America became increasingly neoliberal—an ideology that prioritizes economic growth and assumes citizens are independent, genderless market players (England 2010, 138). This has two implications: the devaluation of social reproductive work and an increased burden for women to take on this work.

The devaluation of social reproductive work, or care work, can be examined when Canada reduced taxes on big companies to encourage economic growth (Cohen 2013, 236). The reduction in tax revenues required budget cuts (Cohen 2013, 236) which were ultimately imposed on health, education, and social services (England 2010, 139) as they do not directly contribute to economic growth. As Katz notes, because social reproduction is necessary, neoliberals could place its responsibility on families knowing someone else would always be willing or forced to do it instead (2001, 717-718). By transferring the burden from the public to the private sphere, neoliberalism "increases the care work of women in homes" (England 2010, 146). The devaluation of social reproduction was easy to consolidate because, as care work has been commonly referred to as 'labours of love,' there is an idea that performing these labors has value in itself—a "psychic dollar reward" (England 2020, 134). As such, the labor does not require financial compensation, at least not to the same extent as other types of work, because it is rewarding enough to simply perform these 'labors of love' (England 2020, 134). Furthermore, because the burden of social reproduction is transferred to women, it is even easier to devalue it because it is "culturally devalued as women's work" (England 2020, 134). This has had lasting effects on the gender make-up of care work jobs as well as working conditions and pay as we will see in the context of the pandemic.

The second implication of neoliberalism in North America is that workers are viewed as genderless, so women's typical caregiving role is not considered in their joining the workforce. In effect, companies hire women and treat them no differently than men—a measure they take to be gender-neutral, but is far from it, as it ignores the fact that women are typically the ones responsible for social reproduction in households (England 2010, 137). Not considering this may lead to fewer women in high positions, because they are less available than their male counterparts to network outside of work, be it by golfing or going for drinks (Rutland 2021). This, along with the notion that women may need flexible hours or maternal leave to care for children, may reduce women's access to certain types of jobs and thus certain ranges of salaries. Some companies have been quite accommodating in that regard, but as we will see, this tends to reinforce gender inequality in the workforce when the same is not available or presumed to be necessary for men (Qian and Fuller 2020, S96).

The coupling of a decrease in publicly-funded and subsidized family care and an increase in women going to work creates what Arlie Hochschild calls a "care deficit," as cited by Kim England (2010, 142). The rest of this paper will examine how this 'care deficit' has impacted women and men differently during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Gender Inequality in the Pandemic**

North America's unemployment rates have been spiking because of the pandemic, though women have been far more affected in this department than men as seen by their job losses and reduced working hours. For instance, in the United States alone, women have lost 5.4 million jobs in 2020 compared to their male counterparts having lost nearly 4.4 million (Boesch and Phadke 2021). This means women have lost 23% more jobs than men despite in 2019 making up only 47% of the workforce (Catalyst 2020). The causes for this include the gender make-up of in-person service jobs, unequal pay, and gender norms regarding who is responsible for social reproduction.

Gender Division in Jobs and Job Losses

To begin, the gender make-up of various jobs should be analyzed to account for the disproportionate job losses. As explained above, social reproductive tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and raising children are considered to be women's work. This is partly because these are 'house chores' that typically take place in the private sphere and therefore fall into the responsibility of women. However, as aforementioned, women are associated with qualities such as loving, nurturing, and giving. As such, jobs in the service or care industries, such as teachers, waitresses, nurses, entertainers, and the like are typically dominated by women (Boesch and Phadke 2021).

These jobs, which consist largely of in-person interactions, were also some of the hardest hit by the pandemic, as social distancing and other protective measures limited their abilities to proceed (Qian and Fuller 2020, S90). In the United States, women make up 77% of education and healthcare workers, and these sectors alone accounted for 13% of total job losses in 2020 (Boesch and Phadke 2021). Similarly, due to immense bans on sit-in clients, restaurant employees have experienced major job losses as approximately 80% of restaurant staff were let go (Dube 2020). The tourism and hospitality industry has also been one of the hardest hit in the United States (Dube 2020) as a result of travel bans and restrictions. Thus, service and care industries have been severely affected by the pandemic, and as women-dominated sectors, they have been at a loss compared to men. It is the assumption that social reproduction is women's work that is responsible for their disproportionate job losses, as will be further illustrated in the next section.

Job Losses Related to School and Daycare Closures

As one of the many protective measures taken to fight the spread of the virus, school closures have been popular across the United States but have put many families in uncomfortable situations. School closures entail students

learning through online classes remotely, i.e., at home. On March 20th, 2020, 45 states had closed all schools—that equates to at least 114,000 school closures impacting 52.6 million students (Kennedy 2020). The same year, approximately 24.2 million public school students between five and eleven years old had their schools closed for a median of 54 days (Christakis, Cleve, and Zimmerman 2020). On top of that, although daycare services remained open, some parents decided to remove their children from enrollment due to COVID-19 (ZERO TO THREE 2020). For parents that did not, many still had to care for their children at home; the combination of a decrease in enrollment, a lack of government relief programs, and an increase in sanitary expenses led to the closure of thousands of childcare providers (Mongeau 2021). In any case, the increase of children at home inevitably transferred the burden of childcare to parents.

Parents were faced with the challenge of how to manage these changes. Babies and toddlers required special attention, while children learning from home required careful supervision to ensure they were attending class, focusing, getting work done, and the like. During the pandemic, the average unpaid care work in the United States increased by approximately 3 hours a day (Heilman, Bernardini, and Pfeifer 2020). Northeastern University found that 13% of working parents either reduced or left work in response to childcare closures, while Cleo found that 20% were considering leaving work for the same reasons (Kashen, Glynn, and Novello 2020). In the end, it was found that mothers of young children reduced their hours four to five times more than fathers (Kashen, Glynn, and Novello 2020). Furthermore, it was found that in September of 2020, 863,000 women lost their jobs— four times more than their male counterparts (Boesch and Phadke 2021). Note that September is the month where children typically return to school.

Additionally, between fathers and mothers, the percentage of those that reported worsened mental health due to COVID-19 were 32 and 57 respectively, "suggesting that mothers may be bearing a disproportionately large part of the burden" (Power 2020, 68). Thus, it is obvious that mothers were more likely to take on the additional childcare responsibilities than fathers.

The reasons women were more likely to take on the burden are vast, but all come down to neoliberal ideals about women. Besides the fact that many women had already lost their jobs, as explained in the previous section, other reasons include gender norms, flexible working participation, and the gender wage gap.

First, there is the obvious point that nurturing and raising children is women's responsibility. As this has been covered extensively in the section about social reproduction, not much more will be said here. What is important is that the idea may make women the obvious choice for which parent must quit or reduce their working hours to care for their children at home during school closures.

At a different scale, gender norms regarding women's place in the public sphere and their natural caregiver roles have had impacts on women's participation in the workplace. Power explains that although women have increasingly joined the workforce, this "has not generally resulted in redistribution of care tasks between men and women" (2020, 68). This means that women are still expected, for the most part, to take care of social reproduction responsibilities including housework and childcare despite their entry into the workforce. She continues to explain that "flexible working is often promoted as a solution," but can actually "further cement traditional gender roles" (Power 2020, 68). Similarly, more women may find themselves working part-time to balance between their paid work and their housework. These measures that have perhaps helped women join the workforce perpetuate the idea that women are responsible for care work at home. As such, women may be more likely to reduce hours or leave their jobs to take care of their children at home because their economic positions allow them to (Qian and Fuller 2020, S90).

Finally, the gender wage gap may influence which parent must leave work to care for their children during school and daycare closures. Data from the Census Bureau in 2018 shows that women in the United States earn $0.82 for every $1.00 a man makes (Bleiweis 2020). This can be explained by several factors. First, jobs in social reproduction, as discussed earlier, are typically dominated by women. However, these jobs typically "offer lower pay and less benefits than so-called men's jobs" (Bleiweis 2020). Another reason may be that women's assumed responsibilities at home prevent them from important aspects of networking outside of work. Going for drinks, playing golf, and attending work parties are crucial opportunities to socialize, and not being available for these types of events can make women more likely to be passed over for promotions than men (Rutland 2021). Additionally, flexible or part-time hours made to help women balance their work with their other responsibilities may also result in them having lower salaries simply because they are working less than their male counterparts. Lastly, there is gender discrimination. Although this has been illegal since 1963, it is still practiced today (Bleiweis 2020). The controlled gender pay gap measures the median pay gap between women and men in the same positions with equal qualifications (PayScale 2021). This essentially removes all other factors that may cause women to on average earn less than men. Under these controlled conditions, women still earn only $0.98 for every $1.00 a man makes (PayScale 2021). Given the likelihood that the mother has a lower salary than the father, it may come down to a logical financial decision as to which parent gets to carry on with their current workload and which must sacrifice it.

Long-term Effects of the Pandemic on Gender

As it has been illustrated, women have experienced more job losses and working hour reductions than their male counterparts due to the pandemic. Beyond their immediate consequences, the unequal distribution of job losses can affect the long-term viability of women in the workforce. For instance, women who have either lost their jobs because of service and care industries lay-offs or have quit voluntarily to support their children at home may suffer from a variety of losses. Besides their loss of salary, leaving work may result in a loss of benefits such as health insurance and a pension plan. The same can be said about women who have reduced their workloads from full-time to part-time, as many company benefits are reserved for full-time employees. Women who have left their jobs to take care of their children may have also jeopardized potential growth opportunities, as the promotions associated with working at a firm for many years will be passed over to those that stayed. This also means that, when joining the workforce again, the jobs available to women will either be equal to or less than their previous jobs in terms of position and salary, and any opportunities to grow will be delayed another few years. In the long run, this will increase the gender wage gap again and the opportunities available to women compared to men. Therefore, the unequal impacts of the pandemic on women's employment have the potential to perpetuate gender inequalities that have been fought for decades.

Structural changes are necessary to curb the long-term effects of the pandemic on gender equality. First and foremost, the United States government can step back from neoliberalism and take back some of the burden of social reproduction. This would relieve women from the additional responsibilities and allow them the opportunity to build a career comparable to their male counterparts. Businesses can help by promoting flexibility to both women and men along with benefits for part-time employees and equal pay. Societal changes are necessary as well, including abolishing traditional gender norms that will both promote gender equality and, on a larger scale, create an environment more inclusive to the LGBTQ+ community. All this and more would help alleviate the potential long-term effects of the pandemic on gender inequality.

## Conclusion

This paper examined how women in the United States have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In doing so, it first analyzed how social reproduction is gendered, followed by an exploration of how neoliberalism contributed to the devaluation of care work and transferred the burden of it to women. It then examined this in the context of the pandemic, specifically looking at how women experienced far greater job losses than men. It studied the underlying causes for this trend, including the gender make-up of service and care jobs and how they were the hardest hit industries in America. It also studied how gender norms, women's participation in the paid workforce, and the gender pay wage gap all contributed to mothers being more likely than fathers to leave work to take on childcare responsibilities. Next, it explored some potential long-term effects of these impacts on women's viability in the workforce, including stunted potential for growth and an increase in the gender wage gap. Finally, it suggested structural changes to prevent these adverse consequences, including the retreat of neoliberalism in America, the abolishment of traditional gender roles, and equal work benefits for all. Although gender inequality has existed historically and was exacerbated by COVID-19, the hope is that recovery from the pandemic will inspire and consolidate gender equality.

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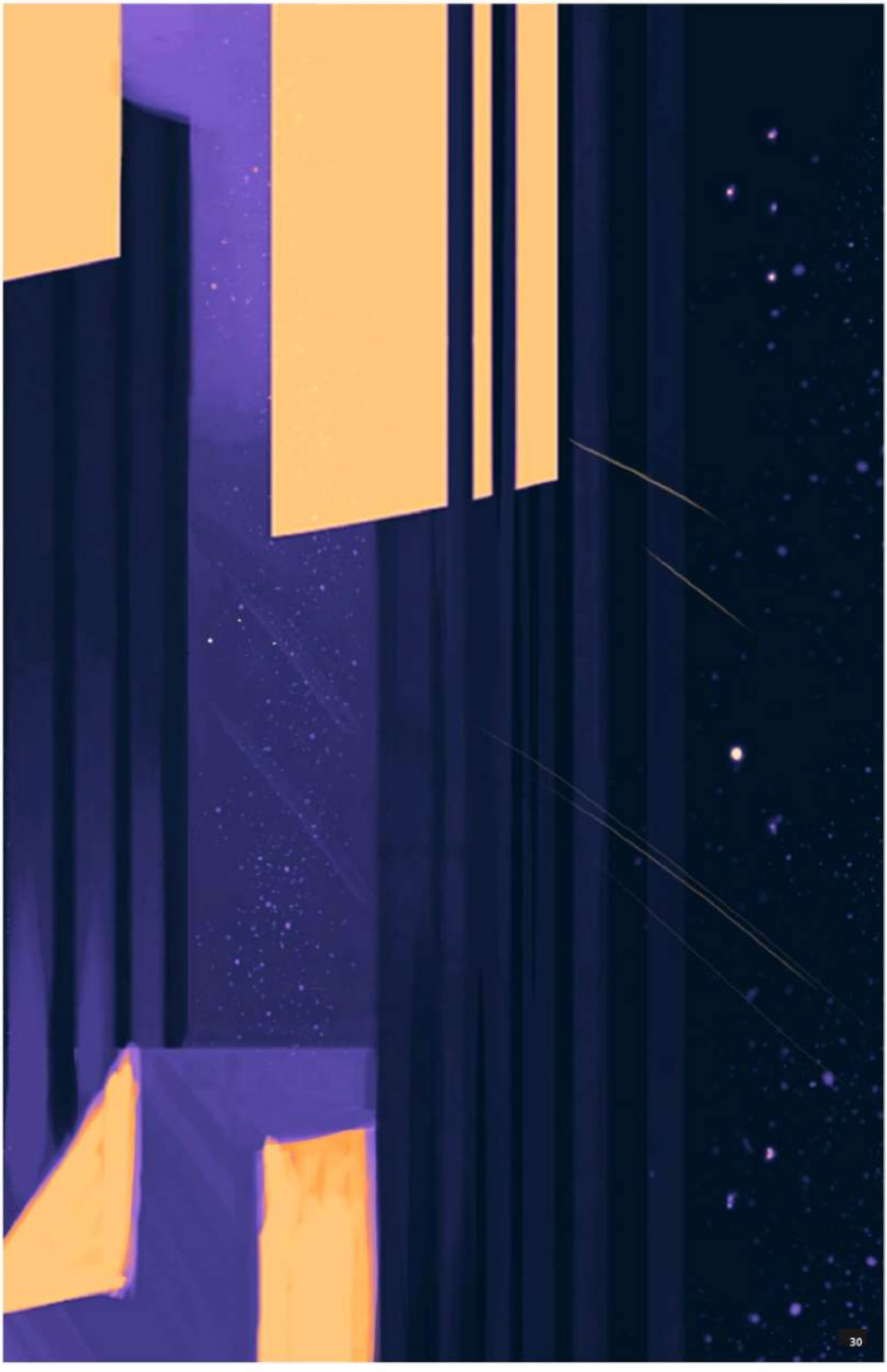

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