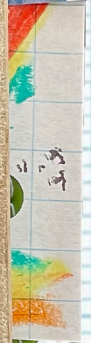
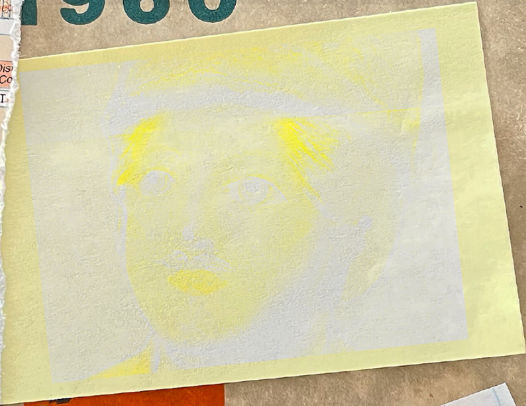


1960



THE
AGENDA



A PAGE



cover art by Sophie Te Whaiti



STOP THE VIOLENCE
QUEERS FIGHT BACK

The Agenda

@theagendazine
theagendazine.com

Lavi Abitbol (editor)
Sherry Zhang (editor)
Nika Januszkiewicz (graphic design)
Sophie Te Whaiti (visual editor & graphic design)

notes from the editors

The Agenda is made by queer people for queer people to uplift and celebrate the amazing work of our Aotearoa LGBTQIA+ family.

We are a small team that started this zine as a passion project and we're so excited to see it flourishing into a beautiful amalgamation of creativity, expression, and gay shit.

We invite you to really sit with the pieces in this volume, particularly the ones that portray a world view that you might not be familiar with.

We want to thank you for supporting our baby, into which we have poured so much time and love.

Enjoy it. Share it. Live it. Laugh it. Love it.

Periodt.

- Nika, Sophie, Sherry, & Lavi

**If this inspires you to create, our submission box is always open:
@theagendazine
theagendazine@gmail.com**

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being queer in 2021

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE QUEER IN 2021?

"Being open and free"

"Queerness in 2021 is defined by the self. Throughout my journey I have consistently seen and realised that there is no one way to be queer--and they are all valid."

"Unparalleled progress but still so far to go"

"It means a constant awareness and education about myself and my sexuality, my confidence in my queerness has never been so honest and open. I finally feel like I am excited to be open about my queerness in 2021 and leave the huge weights of self-doubt and insecurity in the past."

"Wanting to build community but simultaneously not compromise myself in conservative spaces"

"To be openly and unapologetically myself. LGBTQ+ activists from our history have paved the way for us. This means now more than ever I choose to be proud of how I identify and continue to be truly me, to love whoever I want to love."

**we would love to hear your feedback about volume 2:
@theagendazine
theagendazine.com**

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by Alesha Ahdar

"I'm used to taking my shoes off and leaving them at the door – but my tūpuna?"

I'm used to taking my shoes off and leaving them at the door – but my tūpuna?

As a Takatāpui person, my Māoritanga and Polynesian heritage are the central part of my identity. Every other part of me flows beautifully from that. I never really knew how I identified until I heard this word – Takatāpui. It is not the Māori translation for english words, rather, english words can attempt to translate it but they never fully will.

I'm used to taking my shoes off and leaving them at the door – but my tūpuna?

Growing up in predominantly white churches, I learnt how to navigate white spaces. I was meticulous in making sure I always appeared friendly, and not feared. How do I look? How do I speak? How's my tone? Vernacular? Am I wearing my best smile at all times? Be charming. Leave your politics at the door. Hide your culturally significant tattoos. Cover your body. That wasn't funny – laugh anyway and make them feel welcome. Appear friendly, don't be feared.

I recently came to the realisation that I felt I had to pull out the above techniques in white LGBTQIA+ spaces. Appear friendly, don't be feared. I remember the first time (of many) that a white LGBTQIA+ person called me a "marketable queer". I didn't realise that it is the LGBTQIA+ equivalent of "You're not like other mow-rees". I was palatable. Friendly, not too political (a lot has changed haha), wouldn't cause a stir publically, would respectfully and eloquently 'negotiate', good for our image.

I'm used to taking my shoes off and leaving them at the door – but my tūpuna?

My tūpuna were political. They were creatives, outspoken, and strong in their beliefs. I pride myself in pursuing to be the same. When I think about the times that I have adjusted myself to fit in to white LGBTQIA+ spaces, I think about me leaving them at the door. And that hurts.



THE ART OF DENIAL

People romanticise the idea of falling in love accidentally. We have a fascination with sudden realisations. We like the idea of denial.

I have a talent for denying things – more specifically, queerness. I have far less talent for realising things – more specifically, queerness.

My first experience of falling in love was not dissimilar to most people's experience of realising they'd left the door unlocked. 3 hours after they left the house. Or make that three years. A 'nothing to be done about it now, no point going back, what if someone takes my laptop with my half-finished opinion on it' – type thing.

It was unsurprising I could never realise experiences for what they were. My queerness was like forgotten knowledge. Feeling different was an instinctual nagging, hiding felt habitual, and the idea that I wasn't straight was background noise. But knowing is not realising, and my younger self made an art form out of denying evidence.

"I want to be her friend."

"I'm an ally."

"I look up to her. That's all."

"I'm an ally."

"We'd all rather marry our friends than a man."

"I'm an ally."

"I'm straight."

There was nothing I couldn't deny. Monopolised an entire English class ranting about homophobia when the lesson was actually on *The Great Gatsby*? Ally-ship. People suggesting you're a lesbian because you play football? 10 minute lecture on harmful stereotypes. Falling in love with a girl? Friendship (I was clearly destined to pursue history – my talent for denying gay relationships was fostered young).

There were the BuzzFeed quizzes I would retake and rig. I'm very good at rigging BuzzFeed quizzes now. There were the conversations with friends who came out to me, where I carefully prefaced every sentence with "not that I understand but –".

"I have a talent for denying things – more specifically, queerness"

There was reading LGBTQ history "for interest's sake" (actually, everyone should do that). Not understanding why the two main characters in *Bend It Like Beckham* didn't end up together when they obviously should have – and never bringing that up to my friends.

When I tell these stories now, they're funny. It's simple to play off the inherent absurdity that lives in profound denial of obvious facts. Crying, watching coming out videos and still telling myself I was straight has the kind of ridiculousness to it that makes it amusing to look back on.

As long as you don't think too hard.

When I think too hard I get that 'left the door unlocked' feeling. I think about lost friendships. I think about how much mental energy I used up on denial. I think about unfounded fear – that I would be a lesser academic, musician, athlete, that I would be less. I think about wasted time.

Denial that runs so deep is all at once conscious and unconscious. I knew, without knowing, that I wasn't straight for a long time but I denied it to others because I denied it to myself. Denial like that is too large for a young frame: it crushes almost everything else. And so it has been freeing to stop.

People in the community like to joke about 'baby gays' who put rainbows on everything. But I get it. I have a rainbow in my bio on Twitter, which isn't much of a statement at all. But every time I see it I remember that I've stopped denying, and so I have stopped wasting my own time.

It helps.

by Helena Wiseman



photo courtesy of Sophie Te Whaiti

Siblings & Sexuality

By James Tapp

As far as things go, siblings are generally your best friend and your worst enemy. The backstabber but also your rock. At the end of the day, you're there for each other. Sexuality is no exception to this.

When I was 15, I came out to my parents as bi. This was met by "it's a phase" and "go to sleep James, you're tired". Unfortunately, I know so many other people who have been in similar situations or far worse.

After this occasion, I kept it all bottled up while I learnt what it meant to be a bit more fluid with my sexuality. As I explored, sometimes I told those around me, sometimes I kept it hidden. The one person I didn't tell was my sister.

"Words hurt. But they also bring us together."

Last year, my sister had a huge breakdown with one of her friends, which resulted in her being called out online for a number of things; sexuality was one of them. My parents comforted my sister, but also wanted to know what the instagram story said.

I'm pretty sure I knew my sister was bi before even she did, but just like it was with me, it took my parents by surprise.

"If that's the path of life she wants to take, then so be it".

Words hurt. But they also bring us together.

That evening, I had one of the happiest moments of my life. I sat down with my sister, knowing that I was going to tell her she wasn't alone.

I am positive the words "So am I!" have never made either of us so happy, nor have they made us cry so much.

Since that moment, since we stuck together, since my parents realised their children were looking at the possibilities of sexuality, things have gotten better. While now I just identify as 'not straight', I appreciate the effort my mum puts into including the possibilities of dating anyone.

For myself, I wouldn't be as confident in myself if it wasn't for my sister. I went to my first Big Gay Out with her. I've gossiped with her about how she didn't really like the guy she spent the afternoon with, with interest turning to some cute girls at her school. For both of us, there's still a lot to figure out, seeing as neither of us have brought home a same sex partner. But at least we know that when we do, we've got support and find it hilarious that it makes our parents squirm just a little.

For many siblings as well as families, coming out as anything other than hetero is a big and life-changing moment. No one comes out with the hopes that they won't be accepted. Deep down all we want is to be loved. So really, while these are just two coming out stories, unconditional love can change everything.

So whether you're part of the community or not, still try to be the person who is loving and supportive, because no one can take on life alone.

YOUI.

- Naomi Seah

Like a sneeze before it happens
I fall into you.
Like a train before a station
I come home to you.
Like a rising tide and a falling sea--
I drown in you.

Mili Ghosh





Sherry Zhang talks to sex educator and pleasure coach Sarita Das (they/them) on intimacy, sex education and safe healthy relationships and connections in our Rainbow Community.

SD: Masturbation is one of the things that we don't get taught about when it comes to sex. People don't know enough about it, so they think whatever they do is weird. But it's very common. It's a lot of fast, quiet, tense muscles and shallow muscles. It's not focusing as much on the physical stuff, but the mental stuff. So anytime we are getting turned on in our heads, it's a different kind of arousal to just feeling arousal in the genitals.

SZ: As a queer sex educator, many people may jump to a heteronormative concept of sex. How does that differ for the Rainbow community?

SD: I teach queer sex to everyone! People come up to me from any side of orientation or gender presentation. We've all learned sex the straight way. And so anything that can queer your sex life is only a bonus. It means you are doing something outside of the P & V situation, which doesn't work for everyone.

SZ: So little of sex is the physical act, and so much of it is the intimacy and connection. What are your tips on building that space?

SD: A really good way to begin is discovering the roles you need from sex. As a queer person, I still struggle with rigid heteronormative gender roles. I couldn't figure out how to make those roles change. Communicating that is a way to build intimacy.

SZ: There can be so much shame in figuring out your gender identity, and/or sexuality. Then you add another layer of shame with sex - which can be a wonderful thing but also a nervous, sometimes traumatic thing.

SD: Shame is something that exists in the dark. If you shine light on it, and communicate it to someone you trust, then you'll realise very soon you aren't the only person experiencing this. No matter if it's about having sex or being queer. For people coming out later in life, there might be a lot of that shame in not knowing how to have queer sex.

SZ: What do you think about sex education in high school? Is it inclusive enough or good enough?

SD: The importance of female pleasure and queer pleasure is missing. The sex education I received was STIs, some body changes, and penis and vagina sex until the penis ejaculates. But what about the clitoris? Sex feels good. We aren't teaching them something new. But there is this fear that if we tell them that it feels good they will do it. But guess what, they're already doing it! Abstinence teaching is so full of shit.

Look at the rates of pregnancy for young people and the trauma associated with that. We need to equip them to do it safely - not just the physical side but the emotional side. It's knowing when someone is being emotionally abusive. The communication around consent and boundaries. We need to talk about touch and how to feel connected to your body, so you can know when you are feeling a yes or no in your body. I would even go as far to say that a pleasure based, queer inclusive, trans inclusive, age appropriate sex education throughout schooling life is an incredibly huge step to sexual violence prevention. If people are taught to feel a boundary, and respect a boundary, it's a really good step to nip it in the bud.

SZ: What does healthy safe sex look like?

SD: It's communication and knowledge of your own body. It's not having expectations of someone else. I can't give you a bullet point list because it's different for everyone. It might be learning to be okay making sounds. Knowing the difference between taking touch, giving touch, receiving touch and allowing touch.

SZ: I've noticed that sometimes when things are getting steamy, in the back of my mind I'll always wonder, am I getting fetishised? How do you work through that?

SD: 100 % know what you mean. Because of history and colonisation, female brown bodies and female asian bodies have been hypersexualised. I look at who else they've dated. Have they dated a whole bunch of POC? Are they being respectful, do they tokenise? Fuck, you could even straight up ask them.

SZ: Finally, what are your top sex tips?

SD: I hate sex tips, they are stupid. Because there is nothing I can tell you that can help you interact with someone sexually. You have your body and they have their body. You don't know how to pleasure them. They have to have the agency to feel what their own body wants, and communicate that. It's between you and the other person to advocate what you need sexually right then. Check in before you get steamy. "I'm totally cool with sex right now, how do you feel? What does sex mean for you?". Checking the fuck in. That's my tip.

@somaticsarita (IG) Safe to Talk: helpline for sexual harm 0800 044 334





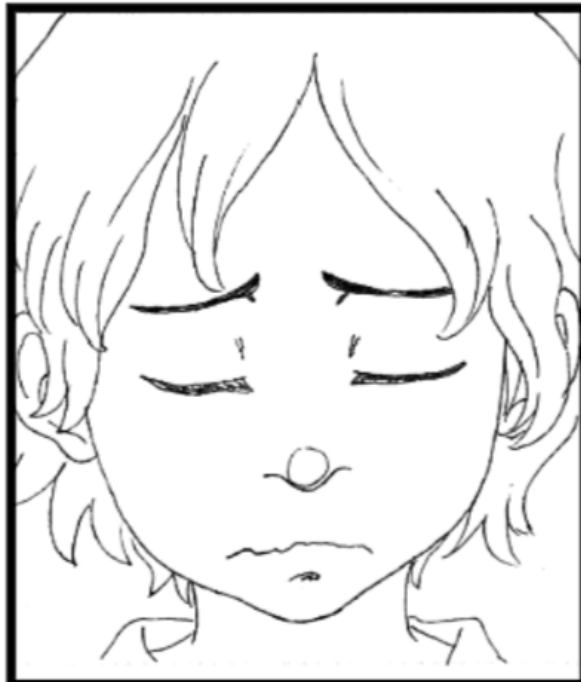


FORMER REFUGEE

BY AMUR



HELLO MY NAME IS AMUR, AND I'M A UNIVERSITY STUDENT. I LIKE TO READ AND TO SING, AND I ENJOY SPENDING TIME WITH ANIMALS AND GOING ON BUSH WALKS. I'M ALSO A FORMER REFUGEE.

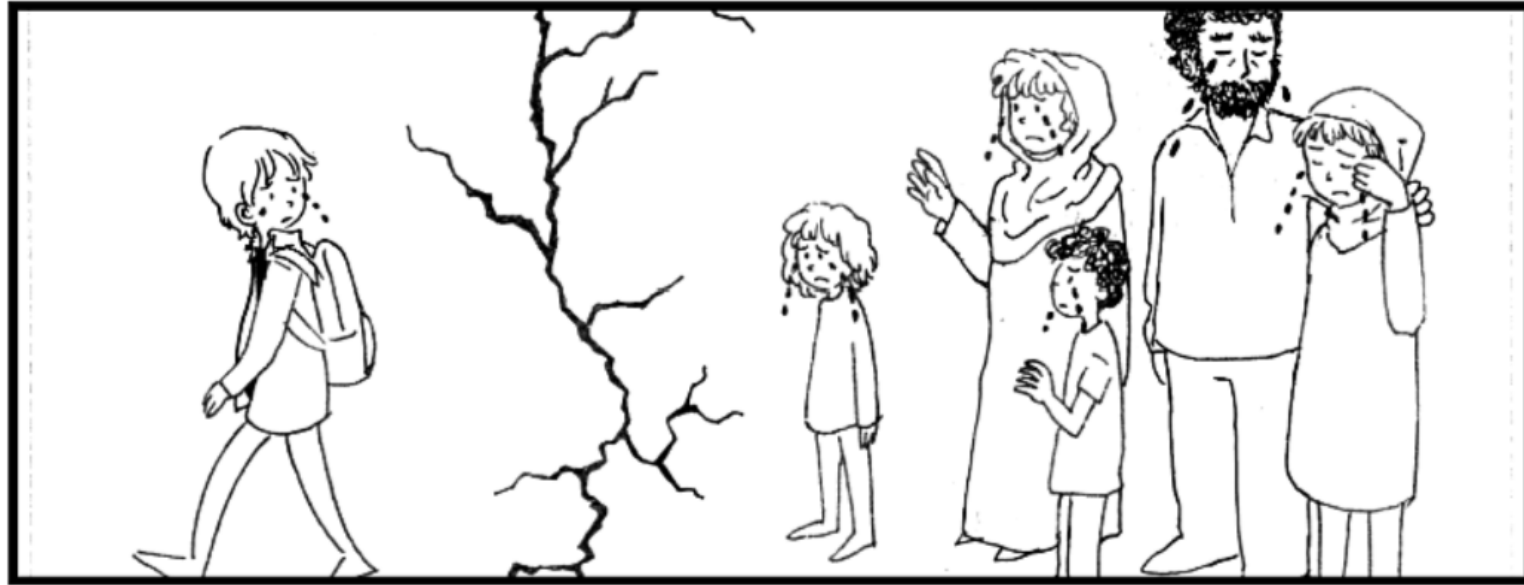


NEVERTHELESS, IT PAINED ME HAVING TO LEAVE MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS BEHIND

I ARRIVED IN NEW ZEALAND A FEW YEARS AGO FROM A REFUGEE CAMP WHERE I SPENT MOST OF MY LIFE. I'D BEEN STATELESS FOR SO LONG, SO WHEN I FINALLY SETTLED DOWN, I WAS VERY GRATEFUL, AND EXCITED TO HAVE A PLACE THAT I COULD CALL HOME.



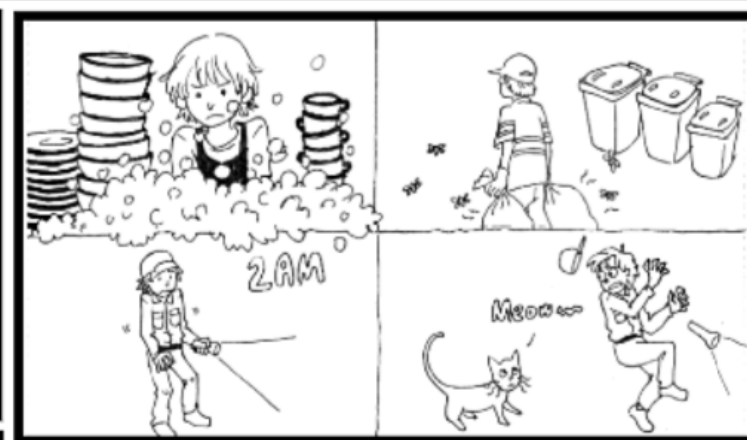
MY OPPORTUNITY TO BE RESETTLED DIDN'T COME EASILY. DID YOU KNOW THAT THE AVERAGE TIME A REFUGEE SPENDS IN A CAMP IS 7 YEARS? UNTIL THEN, WE SIMPLY HAD TO WAIT. AND EVEN WHEN THE OPPORTUNITY COMES, IT IS NOT FOR US TO CHOOSE WHERE WE WANT TO GO, AND WHETHER WE CAN GO TOGETHER AS A FAMILY.



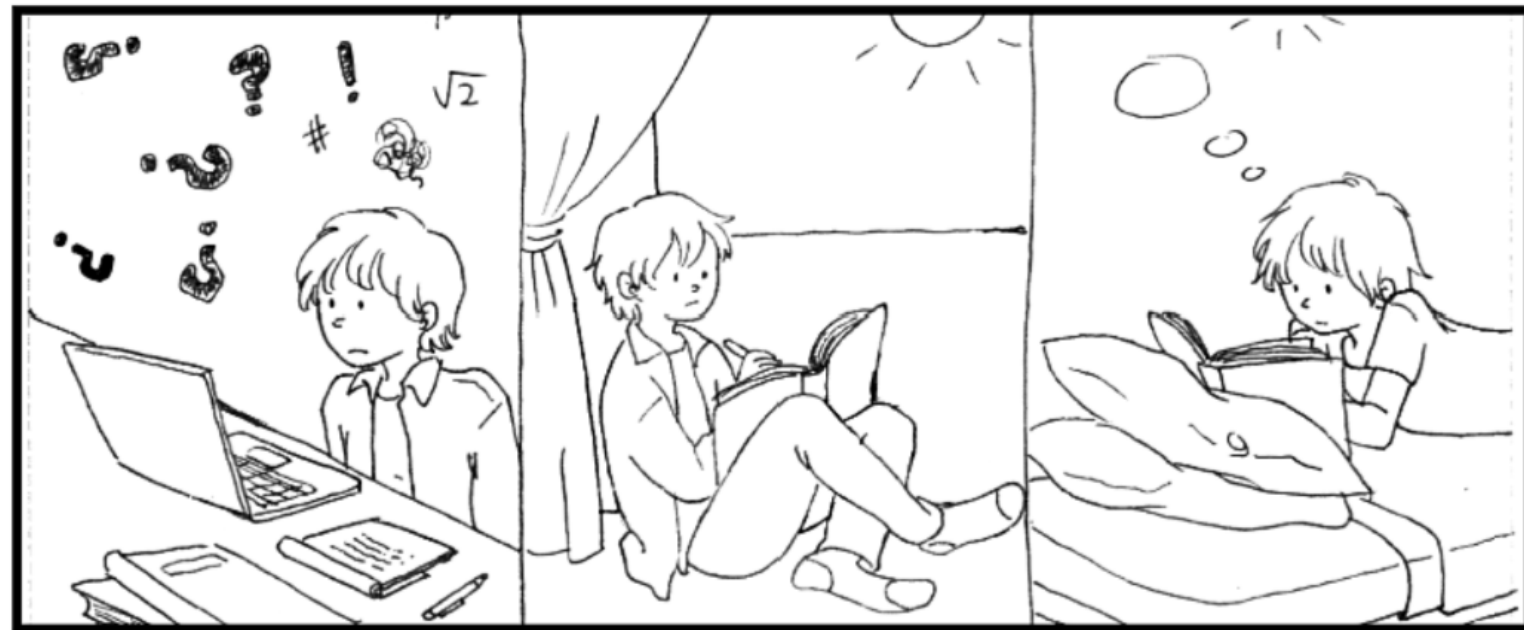
IN MY CASE, BY THE TIME I WAS GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO RESETTLE, I HAD NOT BEEN ABLE TO ACCESS ANY FORMAL EDUCATION FOR OVER 10 YEARS. MY FAMILY WANTED ME TO HAVE THE CHANCE FOR A BETTER LIFE, AND TO HAVE A FUTURE. SO THEY MADE THE DIFFICULT DECISION TO SPLIT UP WITH ME, DESPITE THE GRIEF THEY FELT, AND THE WORRY THAT THEY MAY NEVER SEE ME AGAIN.



MY NEW LIFE CAME AT A GREAT COST, SO I AM DETERMINED TO MAKE SOMETHING OUT OF IT. ON MY ARRIVAL, I LEARNED ABOUT THE "KIWI'S" CULTURES AND LAWS, AND I TOOK LANGUAGE LESSONS SO THAT I COULD ENGAGE WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES.



I APPLIED FOR WORK AND TERTIARY EDUCATION AS SOON AS I WAS ALLOWED TO. I WORKED HARD, LONG HOURS IN HARSH CONDITIONS, DOING MINIMUM-WAGE JOBS THAT ONLY MIGRANTS LIKE ME ARE WILLING TO TAKE ON.



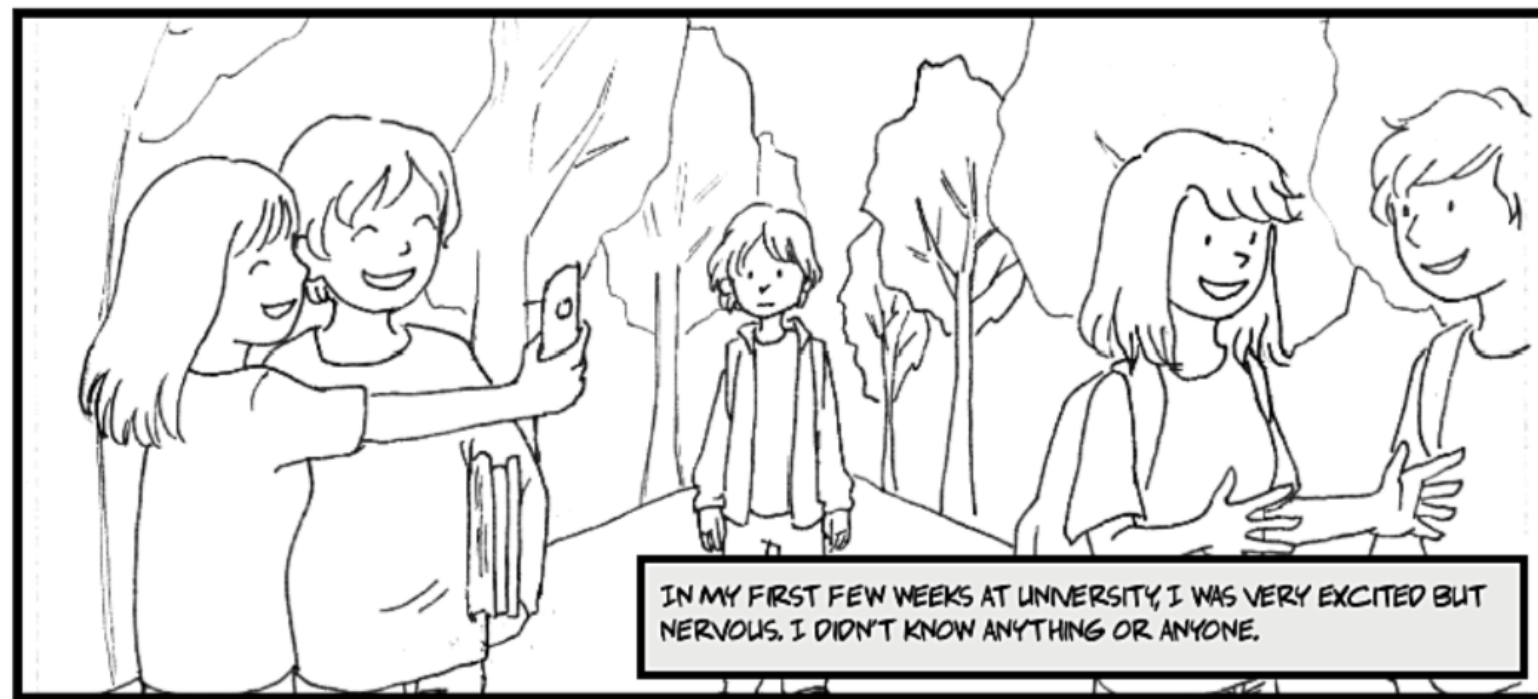
AT UNIVERSITY, I READ EVERYTHING I COULD GET MY HANDS ON, AND I TRY TO MEMORISE EVERY SINGLE WORD THE LECTURERS SAY. I AM KEEN TO GIVE BACK TO THIS COUNTRY, AND I AM INSPIRED TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE. A PLACE WHERE EVERY PERSON CAN LIVE AS A DIGNIFIED HUMAN BEING.



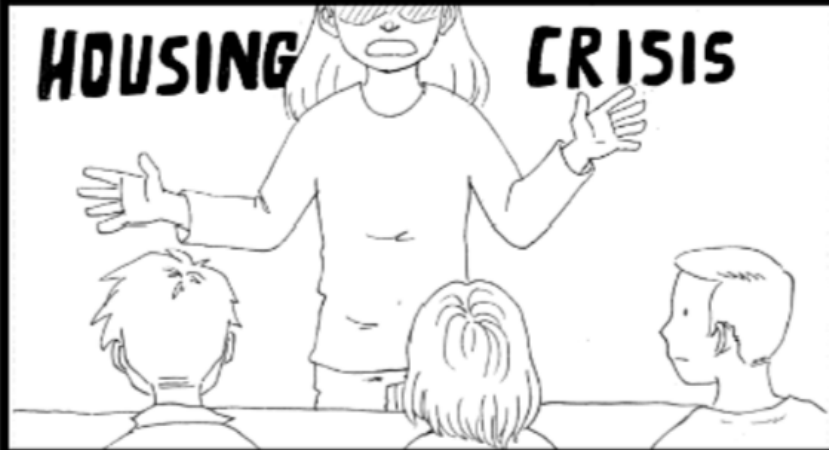
THEY DIDN'T UNDERSTAND THAT MIGRANTS HAVE THE CHOICE AND RESOURCES TO MOVE TO A DIFFERENT COUNTRY, WHILE REFUGEES ARE FORCED TO RESETTLE, BECAUSE THE NECESSITIES TO LIFE AND THEIR BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS ARE NOT BEING MET IN THEIR PREVIOUS LIVING CONDITIONS. PEOPLE ARE MADE TO WASTE THEIR LIVES AWAY IN CONFINED SPACES THAT ARE NOT MEANT TO HOST HUMAN BEINGS.



AT FIRST, IT DIDN'T MATTER TO ME. I WAS JUST SO EXCITED TO BE ABLE TO STUDY AND TO MAKE FRIENDS LIKE EVERY OTHER YOUNG PERSON MY AGE!

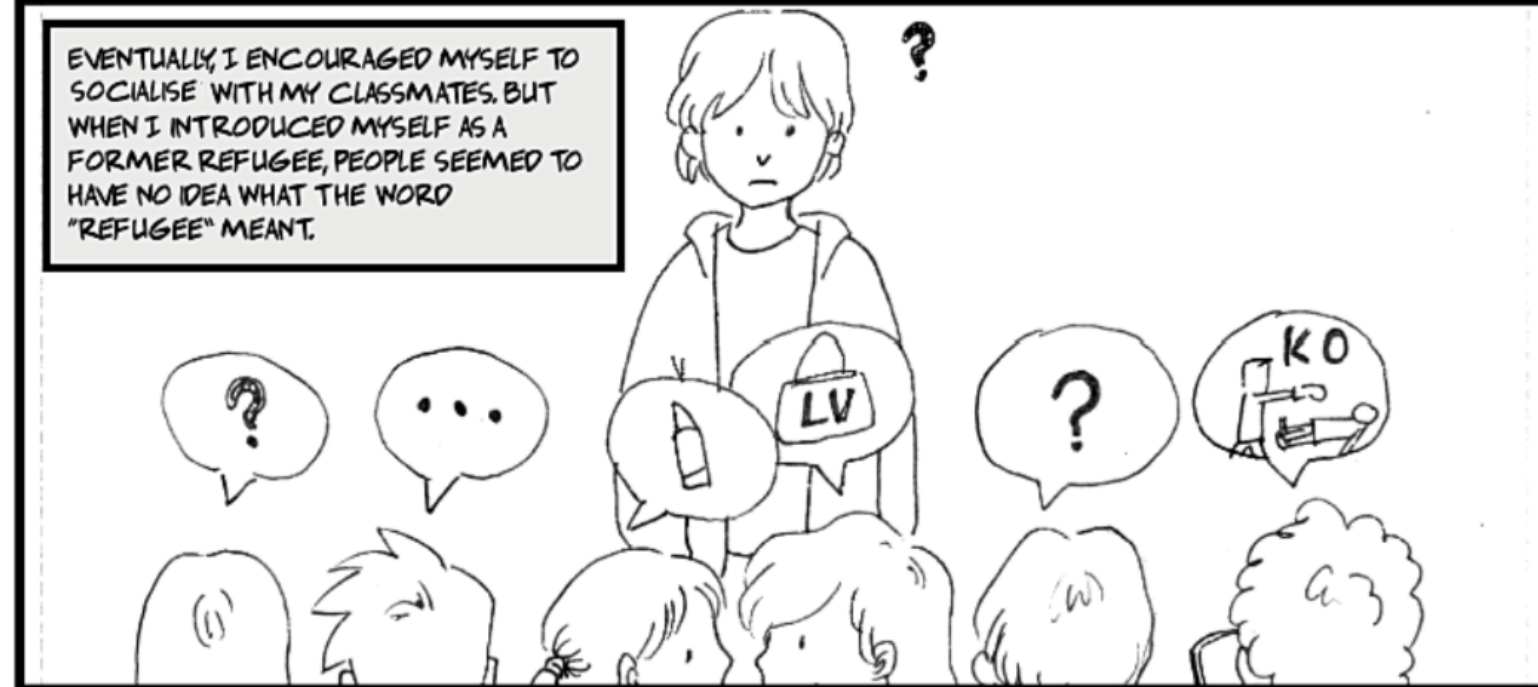


IN MY FIRST FEW WEEKS AT UNIVERSITY, I WAS VERY EXCITED BUT NERVOUS. I DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING OR ANYONE.



UNTIL ONE DAY, DURING A LECTURE ABOUT THE HOUSING CRISIS IN NEW ZEALAND, MY LECTURER ASSERTED THEIR IDEAS OF THE CAUSE TO THIS COMPLICATED PROBLEM EXPLICITLY. "IT'S ALL BECAUSE OF THESE REFUGEES COMING INTO OUR COUNTRY UNINVITEDLY," THE LECTURER SAID, "THEY TOOK OUR HOUSES AND OUR RESOURCES, AND NOW THE REAL NEW ZEALANDERS HAVE NOWHERE TO LIVE."

"Unwanted refugees took houses from the REAL New Zealanders!"



EVENTUALLY, I ENCOURAGED MYSELF TO SOCIALISE WITH MY CLASSMATES. BUT WHEN I INTRODUCED MYSELF AS A FORMER REFUGEE, PEOPLE SEEMED TO HAVE NO IDEA WHAT THE WORD "REFUGEE" MEANT.



ALL OF A SUDDEN, THE CLASSROOM BECAME QUIET AND STILL. EVERYONE IN THE CLASSROOM TURNED AROUND TO LOOK AT ME. THEY ALL KNEW THAT I AM A FORMER REFUGEE, AND THE LECTURER KNEW IT AS WELL. I WAS SHOCKED BY WHAT I JUST HEARD, SO SHAKEN UP THAT I COULDN'T SAY ANYTHING TO JUSTIFY MYSELF.



SOME INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS SHOWED DISDAIN TOWARDS ME, BECAUSE THEY HAVE PAID INTERNATIONAL TUITION FEES, WHILE I AM SEEN AS A DOMESTIC STUDENT. "IT'S NOT FAIR THAT YOU ARE ALLOWED TO JUMP THE QUEUE", THEY SAID.



**BUT WHAT WAS I
ASHAMED OF?**

I FELT SICK, BUT I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO. IN THE END I JUST SAT THERE AND STARED DOWN AT MY HANDS IN SHAME.

...

IT WASN'T MY CHOICE TO GROW UP IN A CAMP
AND HAVE MY DUE CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH
SNATCHED AWAY FROM ME;

...

IT WASN'T MY CHOICE TO LEAVE MY HOMETOWN, ESCAPING
FROM WAR AND PERSECUTION WHICH, IN FACT, IS LARGELY
THE VERY RESULT OF WESTERN COLONISATION AND
POLITICAL INTERVENTION;

...

IT WASN'T MY CHOICE TO BE FORCIBLY DISPLACED ON A
LAND I HAVE NO ROOTS IN OR CONNECTIONS TO, BECAUSE
MY HOMETOWN IS NO LONGER SAFE FOR HUMAN LIVING;

NOR WAS IT MY CHOICE TO LIVE THIS FUTURE ALL BY MYSELF WHILE
KNOWING MY MOTHER, FATHER, BROTHERS AND SISTERS, AND MY
PEOPLE ARE STILL BACK IN THE CAMP, DAY AFTER DAY, ANGUISHING
THEIR LIVES AWAY. I KNOW THAT DESPAIR.

**AND YET, I MUST BE GRATEFUL,
BUT NO ONE KNOWS ANY OF THAT.**

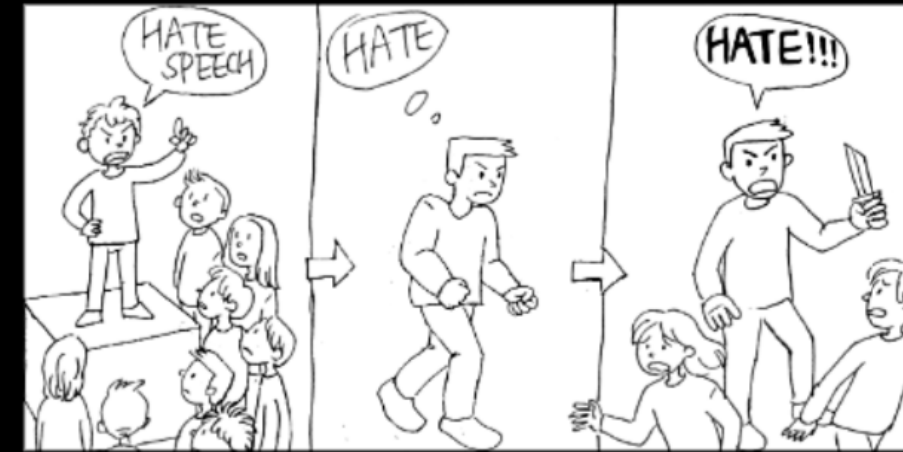


EVER SINCE THAT LECTURE, I FEEL LIKE I'M THE ELEPHANT IN THE CLASSROOM. I REALISED THAT TO MANY PEOPLE, I AM JUST A QUEUE JUMPER; AN UNINVITED FOREIGNER WHO IMPOSED THEMSELVES ONTO OTHER PEOPLE'S LAND; A BENEFIT THIEF WHO IS A HUGE BURDEN TO THIS COMMUNITY.



DESPITE ALL THE WORK I HAD DONE, ALL MY EFFORTS TO FIT IN AND TO CONTRIBUTE, I WILL ALWAYS BE SEEN AS AN OUTSIDER.

HATE SPEECH
MOSQUE ATTACK
ISLAMOPHOBIA
SINOPHOBIA
AFROPHOBIA
XENOPHOBIA
RACISM
WHITE SUPREMACY



AFTER THE MOSQUE ATTACKS, I AM NOW MORE AWARE OF THE LONG-LASTING IMPACT OF MISINFORMATION AND HATEFUL WORDS, ESPECIALLY WHEN THEY COME FROM AUTHORITIES. OUR ACTIONS ARE GUIDED BY OUR BELIEFS AND IDEOLOGIES. AND WHEN OUR MINDS ARE FULL OF HATRED, WE DO TERRIBLE THINGS TO EACH OTHER.

**MY NAME IS AMUR AND THIS
IS MY EXPERIENCE OF
XENOPHOBIA AND RACISM**

TFW THE TENTH MUSE IS BLOWING UP YR [M/N]OTIFS

(with thanks to Sappho, Nina Mingya Powles, and Anne Carson)

1 / My best friend and I are in constant communication.

She's older than me, and lives ages away / leaves
half-garbled voice memos:

] I don't care about [] I care about love!

] when you like someone so much you feel like it'll kill you [

] like you're on fire [

] just want everything so much and forever [

] can't have it, but one day perhaps [

She DMs me at 00:31 like:

*if the only men i'm ever interested in are superimposed w the idea
of them i've built in my head, am i bi or am i actually a lesbian
struggling w comphet????*

*if they're all famous or unavailable i can be attracted to [the idea of]
them from a distance and not have to worry abt physical intimacy...
and is that??? a sign???*

*like the idea of a dude being attracted to me i'm just like,,, GTF away
from me!!!! stop objectifying me!!! i never EVER want to see yr hips*

*if i don't trust a man to be in a relationship w me and to know me
truly instead of just like,,, projecting w/e he wants me to be onto me
for his own ends... .. is that me being aware of the patriarchy or just
me like,,, having issues*

have u seen notting hill did u want hugh grant's haircut

I reply:

yes I have yes I did the character should have been a woman

and re: the other thing I feel you entirely

Sometimes I try her phrases on, like perfume;

perfume and hyacinths and hot oil,
bright, brilliant sun—

she seems to know me better than I do. Every fragment, /
every piece.

2 / Another friend says, "I feel like I know nothing about you."

But we talk all the time—

about feelings, / not facts. Turns out / for
everything I write, I'm a terrible / autobiographer.

Someone will remember us say—

I think of her again, shrouded in mist; my best friend.

—even in another time

3 / Her reputation precedes her, really. I can only imagine the chart-topping single:

*slut-shamed & deified / in near equal measure
sorry, babe, can't help it / gonna live forever*

The tweet when it hits #1: *Robyn eat yr heart out!!!*

Then—jk i LIVE for dancing on my own (calum whomst?????)

4 / And sometimes I think of her at the top of the world, / at the top /
of the rock. What counts as you / when your story
is told in translation?

In fragments? In half-garbled / full-potent

slivers of self?

/ Are you your legacy?

When those morsels have meant so much for so many?

One month and every month / every month of every year—

When someone's projecting w/e [they] want [you] to be / ??????

(at 22:00—

*u can know the idea of someone
rather than the real person, but
perhaps in the same way the
idea of someone can know u even
if the real one doesn't?????*

like the vibes etc.?????

idk does that make sense?????

*i'm meant to be weaving rn but
all i can think about is—)*

5 / c. 6th century BC: someone will remember us / I say / even in another time

And I reply:

yes I have yes I did

and

I feel you entirely

by tate fountain

TRANS- AGENDA

An interview with Amelia Berry // By Sherry Zhang

Amelia Berry is one half of synth pop duo FIMO, two wholes of electronic project Amamelia and “improvised wobbly noises” old chips, and is also part of pop punk band Baby Teeth. Sherry Zhang talks to Amelia about sad queer hearts, being a trans musician, and sharing her ultimate queer anthem playlist.

I'm Amelia Berry. I used to say I make music stuff but I feel like now I can say I *am* a musician! I'm a big nerd about lots of kinds of music, so it's hard to be so devoted to only one. I've been in punk bands, made noise music, disco and synth-pop. I was a rap producer for 15 seconds!

Sherry: Your music often makes me feel like a teenager in a golden hour film.

Amelia: People call it teenage longing, but everyone has experiences of that at various points in their life. Being a teenager is where everything is the end of the world, and everything is the best thing ever.



Sherry: What's your relationship with music? With sad queer hearts?

Amelia: Traditionally a lot of queer music is very angry, I love that. A lot of sad and righteous music. But I wanted to do something different from that, partly because I'm not as good at writing that sort of stuff... I think even when I've tried to make uplifting and gay music, people still listen to it as a breakup album

Sherry: Yeah I came up to you very drunk outside Whammy? To tell you that I love “sugar soap,” and it's my breakup anthem.

Amelia: (laughs) “Sugar soap” is very happy. I wrote it when I started going out with my current girlfriend, it's generally not a break up song..

Sherry: I started listening to it when I started a new relationship, and now that it's ended I associated it with the relationship, so it's all those feelings.

Amelia: There's a lot less distinction between different emotions. Feelings are just a lot. And it's amorphous and music can tap into how you want to interpret it.

Sherry: What music do you define as queer?

Amelia: A lot of gay men listen to a lot of straight females. I'm not going to say Carly Rae Jepsen *didn't* change my life, but as a queer woman, I don't quite understand that connection. I understand Barbra Streisand is a queer icon, but I don't get that same experience.

"You either hope for a big queer following, or you play down the queer. I've been involved with music for a while now, and have been told to play more straight."

Sherry: Is it the male gaze?

Amelia: Well, It's harder for women to stan straight men. Like relating to Akon: who's trying to find the words to describe this girl without being disrespectful. The patriarchy of it all. And it's hard to get away from it without a process of reclamation. But there are also some additional barriers stopping queer woman. A lot of my experience comes from 90's movies, like "But I'm a Cheerleader" and "The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls in Love." They both have similar soundtracks; twee guitars and girl pop. I just want music that's by women, for women, about women. More recently I've been into a lot of Australian, trans women musicians. It's been a conscious effort to find more trans artists, for partly selfish reasons (I thought maybe it's time I sing in a band) but you don't hear trans voices in music. And if you do, it's people who transition pre-puberty so it doesn't affect how their voice sounds, such as Kim Petras. But you don't necessarily get voices like mine.

Sherry: I'd love to hear you sing. Please do! How has the space been for trans musicians?

Amelia: In the last few years it's really exploded, with SOPHIE and 100 gecs. I started listening because I want to become more comfortable hearing voices on things; voices like mine. I think it's very easy as a trans woman to think of your voice as disconnected from you. It's a relatively difficult thing to change.

Sherry: What do you hope to see change in this space for trans artists? Queer artists too, but particularly trans artists.

Amelia: There is still a long way to go in having straight audiences listen to queer

**"it's
amorphous
and music
can tap into
how you want
to interpret
it."**

music. You either hope for a big queer following, or you play down the queer. I've been involved with music for a while now, and have been told to play more straight...

Sherry: Ass! The audacity!

Amelia: Yeah, and I think there's still an idea that if you make your music very specifically queer, you are tokenising yourself and only playing for a small particular audience.

Sherry: Isn't that kind of bizarre, because music is such an emotional connection?

Amelia: I understand that only certain kinds of music appeals to some audiences, but as someone who makes music, it is also very difficult to survive in that niche. You can make a thousand little 14 year old baby gays cry, but the government isn't going to give you funding for that. Because music that has a recognisable heterosexual perspective is always going to be more sellable. And when you start making music about being trans, your audience shrinks again. So either there needs to be more support for small musical communities, or the hets are going to have to up their game. It's interesting, I listen to straight music, but a lot of straight people don't listen to queer music. I think we're at a very interesting place for queer music.

Sherry: What about Queer media? Especially as it becomes more mainstream?

Amelia: I never dreamed that there would be a documentary on Netflix, ["Disclosure: Trans lives on screens"] which reflected my experience growing up. Like I saw "Mrs. Doubtfire" and thought it was fucked, I saw "Ace Ventura" and thought I was a monster growing up. Stuff, [like that documentary] is becoming more mainstream, but it's also a bit of a trap. While representation is becoming more liberal, politics is becoming more conservative. Violence against trans women, especially trans women of colour, has been growing. And continuously growing since we've started recording it. And the government has also started banning poppers-

Sherry: Poppers?

Amelia: Poppers... you need to spend more time with gay guys. It's a drug that you buy off the shelf, it's a muscle relaxant and police were going into sex shops and taking them off the shelf even before the law was passed. That's targeting the NZ gay community, and people aren't talking about that stuff. But what we are talking about is: "there's another queer person on tv!" Look, I'm never going to complain about getting more shows about lesbians, or a trans person played by a trans person, but you can't forget about that core stuff. And to bring this back to music, I feel a tension within myself, between the kind of queer who would love to be more or less invisible, and part of me wants to be the good minority.

Sherry: Invisible?

Amelia: The goal for a lot of trans women is to go stealth, so no one knows you are trans. And it's a hard archetype to get

away from. The next best thing is that you are accepted by everyone. There's always a tension, you are a musician and entertainer so you want to appeal to the widest audience possible. But it's also wanting to stay true to your community, and to who you are. It's weird. I think about that, quite a bit. When I make music I think; "is this gay enough, or is too gay?"

Sherry: But then you can never win? You are never enough?

Amelia: Yeah.

Sherry: Yeah :(

Amelia: I have a lot of privilege as well. You have a responsibility if you are taking intersectionality into account, especially since music is so collaborative. So you want to make sure you are elevating people, not just white middle class people.

Amelia's Pick's



Ray of sunshine by Go Sailor
Dancing by Katy Dey

Sleater Kinny is very gay.
Team Dresch, is very gay queer heartbreak music.

For more of Amelia's picks, listen to her show at 95bFM.



by Lucy Squire

CONFESSTION

At age twelve I fell into a girl
as far as a twelve-year-old can fall

Three years older; my summer camp leader
Gymnastic, charismatic, and oh so fanatic
adjoined to the jungle of Jesus freaks
Believed the voice of god would speak
I breathed biblical in far beyond that week
For whom shall I love, whom shall I seek?
But the one who made me
So fearfully and wonderfully

The love of agape - encrypted in her DNA
Match made in heaven; spark in my day
Thoughts that I could not explain

She was everything I wanted to be and to have
She shared my name, she saw my pain
She talked to me, like I mattered
Gently interrupting my loneliness

I prayed to a god I don't know anymore
that she could be my best friend
but even the best of friends
can't make your chest drum so violently
don't keep your mind wandering sleepless
and bring your world to stand still

Round face, almond eyes,
freckled cheeks, and to no one's surprise
she was after a boy
a silly, home-schooled, worship-band-boy

At fifteen I did a sinful thing
or so my doctrine would tell me
I couldn't speak to her for weeks
and all at once His eyes: on me
Soft, glazed and disapproving

She knew parts of me I didn't yet know
She wanted to see me truly let go
But breaking my vow hurt more than staying
Baptised in water and captured, obeying

Jesus, my:
soul saving, childhood praising
Alter calling, knowledge stalling
Diary reading, thought policing
Perfect living, purpose-giving
Spirit feeding, anxiety easing
Avid listening, joy inducing
Love
And sometimes I miss him

Do you now see?
it's not that easy

At seventeen I broke my silence
Cutting ties with my lies
That I fed on for so long
Leaving my faith and joining a rainbow -
both terrifying and euphoric

Finally
I could just
be
me
Shedding shell, damned to hell
Revealing buried truths within
Messy murmurs in music room
Ugly tears and happy hugs
With high school friends sent from above

Who - do - you thank for your daily bread?
Because I don't
thank
god

by abby robertson



Kate Mear



A

fist full of purple wild flowers,
capture it, sunburn it into the membrane.

That's you
on a cliff, Adelaide coastline behind you

And me
always writing poems about you.

Our friends drinking wine +
smoking darts under the sky
in anticipation for the rest of our lives
stretching out ahead of us

That's you
next to me

And me
crying on the train from
Melbourne to Sydney
about you

A

part from me
god, that's pretty pitiful

summer fling
that won't leave,
probably because I got a drunk tattoo in
Jakarta

And then kissed you in
Bali
while stoned

racking up the carbon footprints
to fling back shot twice
to kiss you again
in the new year

breaking many rules
by loving you
personal rules
mainly because I posted on instagram in January
#2k19 single

Thank god Sco Mo + Aunty Cindy
are keeping the border shut this summer

Or I'd had fallen for you
all over again
in 2021

yet still

for a
by Anonymous

WE EXIST.

“Being intersex is about bodies, not gender identity.”

Ever since they were born, doctors were aware that Eliana Rubashkyn’s body was different from their expectations of ‘normal’. Rubashkyn shares with *The Agenda* the changes they hope for the intersex community.

Eliana Rubashkyn is a Jewish intersex transwoman. Eliana’s family migrated from Ukraine to Colombia in the ‘60s where they were later born. Rubashkyn grew up being forced to present as a boy. In Colombia, they experienced horrendous violence. “It was one of the things that made me feel like I needed to leave everything. So I could be able to live with more freedom and not be afraid of having a different body; [to live with] an identity that is not conforming to social expectations or rules.” They arrived in Aotearoa in 2014 as a refugee.

Intersex Awareness New Zealand (ITANZ) was founded by Mani Mitchell in 1997. It was one of the first organisations in the world established with the sole focus of advocating for intersex people. The charitable trust has a model of ‘dignity, diversity, and choice’.

‘Intersex’ is a term that denotes a number of different variations in a person’s bodily characteristics that do not match strict cultural and medical definitions for male or female. These characteristics may be chromosomal, hormonal and/or anatomical and may be present to differing degrees. Many variants of sex characteristics are immediately detected at birth, or even before. Sometimes these variants become evident only at later stages in life, often during puberty. While most intersex people are healthy, a very small percentage may have medical conditions which might be life-threatening, if not treated promptly.

Being intersex is still seen by the medical community as a disorder. Approximately 30-40% of intersex variations can be identified with a chromosome analysis test.



Embryos determined to have intersex variations lead to parents considering aborting their intersex. Sometimes, medication is given that forces sexual differentiation during pregnancy. After birth, healthy individuals experience harmful medical interventions, including non-consensual surgeries and hormones in an attempt to “normalise” appearances.

“The number of abortions occurring as a result of this are unknown, kept secret... Sadly, humans are so afraid of our existence. The combination of abortions and surgeries mean intersex identities are being erased,” explains Rubashkyn. “The law is not protecting us from stigma, discrimination, and violence. Very few countries have protections in place for intersex people”, says Rubashkyn. “There is still a lot of work to be done in New Zealand and around the world.” However, the United

Nations and several UN treaty bodies have started to recognise the gross human violations experienced by intersex people around the world.

“The idea [of ITANZ] is to challenge the concepts that try to minimise the diversity of bodies. We strongly believe that we exist, we existed and we are going to exist.”

Rubashkyn is on the board and explains the work of ITANZ: “it’s to bring awareness that though we are here, we are invisible, and we have been stigmatised. Our bodies have been subjected to unconsented surgeries and coercive medical intervention. We are being made ashamed of who we are. We’ve been told not to tell anyone and to keep it secret.”

Many intersex people feel uncomfortable speaking about their identities. Rubashkyn explains how intersex identities often become generalised as “a pathology, our appearance, or what is in between our legs.” Intersex people have complex identities beyond their sex characteristics. “I am also a human being, a scientist, a person that loves, that believes...” Even the law forgets about intersex identities; “we are seen as statistically insignificant, despite being 1.7% of the population of NZ.”

Rubashkyn finds the main narrative in queer activism to often exclude intersex people. The current narrative is that we should accept queer relationships and gender diversity. But accepting these things does not progress the acceptance of intersex individuals because firstly, it fails to acknowledge the stigma of a sex binary and secondly, does nothing to normalise differential sex characteristics. “It can be rightly or wrongly assigned at birth, or something identified later in life during adolescence, or while trying to conceive.”

Because of this, it is important advocacy supports intersex people by integrating bodily autonomy and normalisation of body diversity in their narrative.

Rubashkyn emphasises the importance of using phrases such as ‘sex characteristics’ and ‘diversity of bodies’. The term ‘sex characteristics’ moves away from the term ‘sex’ as it acknowledges a person may have varying innate biological and anatomical characteristics that lie outside the sex binary. The term ‘diversity of bodies’ is inclusive to other intersections as well as it includes “different sized bodies, disabilities, people in the trans community.” Using this language can remove the boxes that so many people do not fit into.

There needs to be an increase in visibility of the intersex community. Rubashkyn uses the trans community as an example of a group that is beginning to get increased representation. By having non-stereotypical characters in film and television, people are beginning to see that trans people “are as normal as any other person.” Likewise, increased visibility for the intersex community can fight against intersex erasure.

“People should bring visibility to the intersex community whenever they can”. Rubashkyn maintains these conversations should happen even if intersex people aren’t in the room. Rubashkyn states that the intersex flag should be displayed as well; “this tells us that we are not being forgotten, that our struggle and community is being remembered by someone.”

“Every single intersex person I have met feels deeply uncomfortable about being outed.” According to Rubashkyn, everyone on the Board of ITANZ has intersections in the rainbow community. This has been one of the reasons some members of the intersex community are more comfortable in being visible.

“However, the rainbow community has a responsibility in understanding that not everyone in the intersex community has LGBTQ converging identities, and also given their size and visibility as true and genuine allies they can help to increase our visibility in and outside of the LGBTIQ+ community, this can lead to a positive cultural shift where intersex bodies and intersex experiences are normalised.

- interview written by Lavi Abitbol





The Agenda

Sarita Das
Kate Mear
Amur

Kate Mear
Alesha Ahdar
Lucy Squire
Helena Wiseman
James Tapp
Milli Ghosh
Naomii Seah

Tate Fountain
Sherry Zhang
Lucy Squire
Abby Robertson
Kate Mear
Sophie Te Whaiti
Eliana Rubashkyn

STOP THE VIOLENCE
QUEERS FIGHT BACK

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