

Queer Elsewhere: Pathways

Wendy Hoag

*Caring thoughts and practices
By Racialised Queer Youth
For Racialised Queer Youth*



*We dedicate this zine to all the tired diaspora
queers looking for paths to flourish from in between
the cracks in and out of the system*



Viet Nam - A Journey of Pain and Reconnection, 2020
by *Phuong*
16:46 mins : scan to view

Identifying the issue...

At the Queer Elsewhere Gathering of queer BIPOC Youth, which took place in La Bassa Mar, Spain in September 2022, we identified physical and emotional exhaustion as a problem affecting the majority of racialised queer youth activists, be it first or second generation migrants.

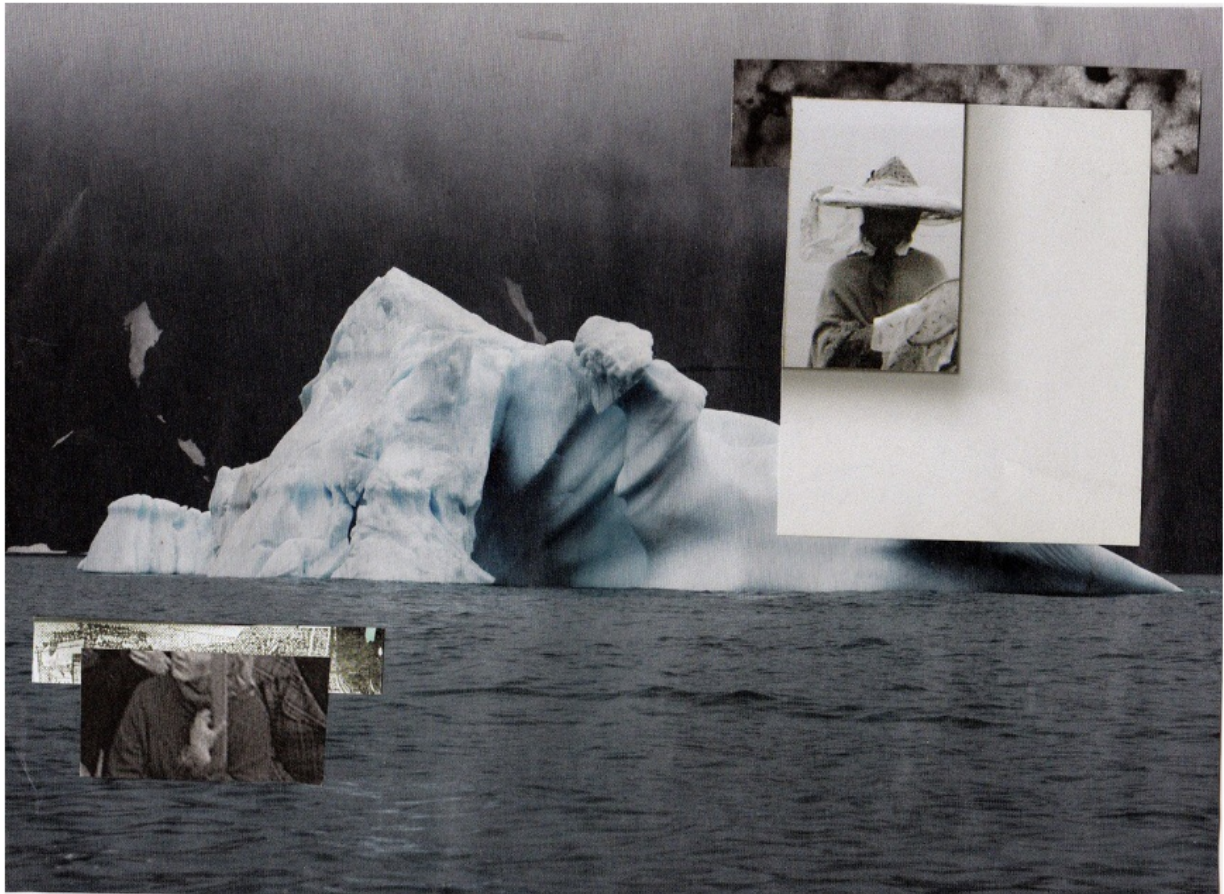
During this time we came to realise that we share a concern about the impact that this situation can have on our lives, our activism and our movements. From this reflection, we articulated the following factors affecting our collective well-being:

- The structural violence that we experience in the European context: the rise of right populism, queerphobia, increase in hate crimes towards the queer BIPOC community, among others.
- Threats and attacks against BIPOC activists.
- Many queer activists begin their work without access to basic tools that would prepare them emotionally to listen, see, and address everything that entails defending fellow queer activists.
- The pervasiveness of a culture of social activism that values unbalanced dedication, reducing psycho-emotional impacts to the individual sphere.



When we were made aware of this shared reality, we asked ourselves: "What can we do to make our struggles more sustainable?"

The answer clearly pointed to the development of self-care strategies that needed to be built collectively.



Looking into your eyes, and your heart tells me:
 " living in diaspora means to (learn to) make
 new homes in different places".

There is a lot of truth about it.
 I'm feeling pain, trauma, anxiety, and hope,
 family and connectedness.

Where are my roots?
 Have I received my transcestor's* messages yet?
 Am I opening myself to hear them speaking to me,
 through the wind, the rain, the sun?

Looking into my eyes, and my heart suffers:
 I have no idea who I am, where I come from and where to
 go.
 but my homesick and longing is taking me
 from place to place,
 from human to human,
 from season to season
 - and my journey is plural & eternal.

Living in Diaspora Pt. 1

*trans & ancestor

More than just Self-Care:

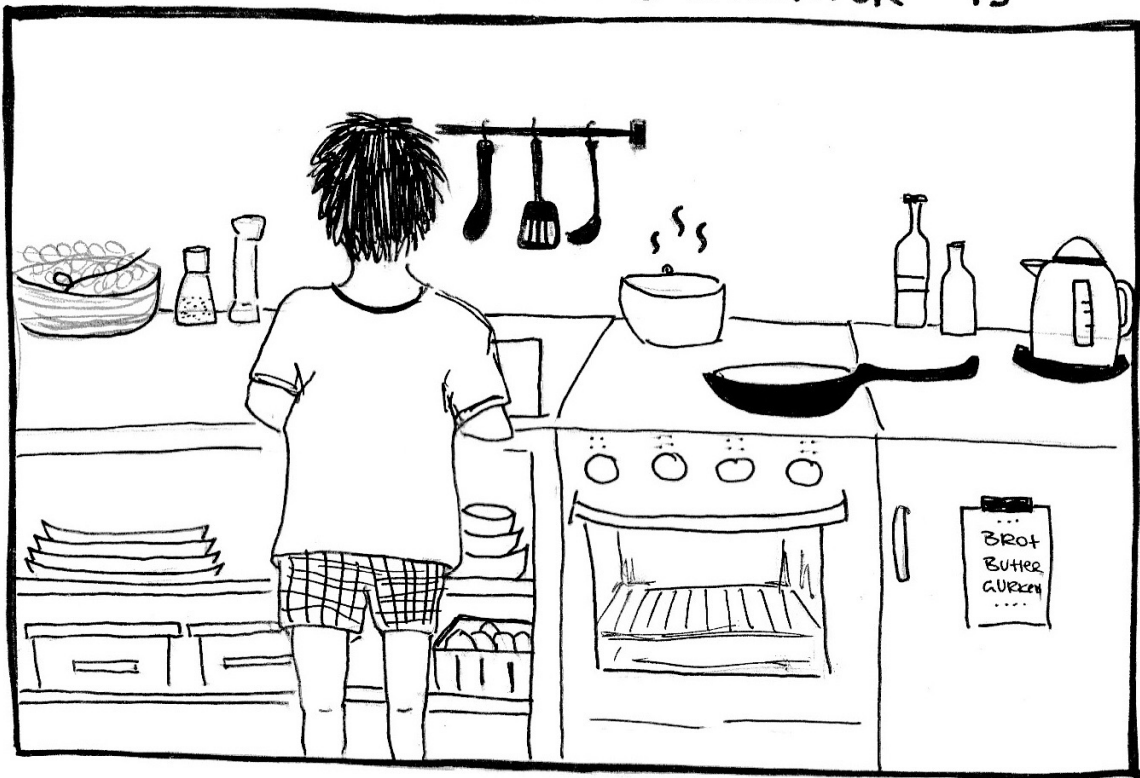
Collective Care

From the very beginning it was clear to us that our understanding of self-care focused on transforming our political practice, with the goal of impacting the sustainability of our struggles. For us this meant being politically consequent in our own bodies and lives with the rights for which we fight. At first, we were concerned with recognising our needs, on the importance of creating safer spaces, on responding to immediate – and often urgent – health or emotional support needs. This made us realise how damaging it can be to understand self-care from an individualist perspective, reducing it to an isolated moment that does not transform our practice, or as a privilege for those who have resources and time.

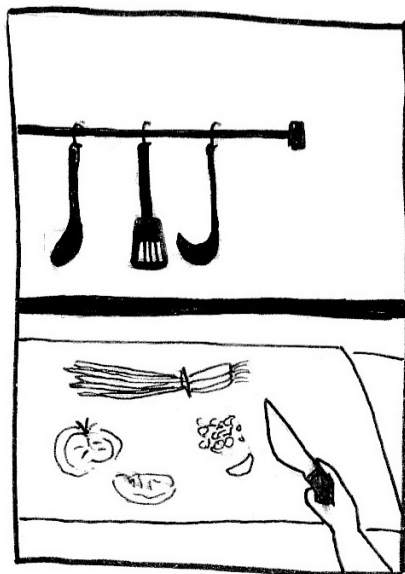
A notion of collective care was developed throughout the duration of our gathering during our daily morning circles, in which we shared our feelings and reflections about the experiences and learning outcomes of the previous day, and in specific sessions allotted to this endeavour, as well through the ongoing conversations that carried on after the gathering.

We cannot pin point a specific moment in which our idea of self-care changed to collective care, it was more a process that began with understanding self-care as a set of habits, transformations and reflections in relation to our activism and our own lives as racialised queer youth. Realising this made us want to develop a proposal for a Complete Protection that would move away from the neoliberal idea of care culture that uses self-care in order to uphold the functioning of capitalism, reducing it to wellness.

COOKING / eating ALONE & together is



INTIMATE



&

POLITICAL



Ideas of Care that support the strategy for self-care, collective care, and healing

We formulated the following principles to support our work on Complete Protection. They come from the strategy for self-care, collective care, and healing, and from our recognition of the cultural diversity that characterised the Queer Elsewhere gathering.

- Care is a right.
- Care is an act of justice that reconnects us with individual and collective well-being.
- Care is a transgressive act that challenges the neoliberal, capitalist, racist, patriarchal, and queerphobic models.
- Care is a political practice that leads us to decolonize our relationships, emotions and practices.
- Care is a form of resistance in a context of constant oppression and violence against our bodies and minds.

We believe that the practice of care should be based on:

- The awareness that it is a dynamic process of permanent learning.
- Recovering and recognising our diverse knowledges and practices, learning from others, exploring new proposals and reclaiming ancestral wisdoms, opening new spaces for sharing tools, reflections, and knowledge.
- Work in the physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and energy dimensions, starting with the body as the first territory, understanding and addressing our pains, transforming beliefs, seeking other ways of relating to the world and to nature, continuing to gather and grow our spirit.
- Integrating our families, organisations and collectives into the self-care, collective care, and healing processes. From experience, we know that if our process does not include our loved ones, our children, we cannot achieve rest or healing.

- Seeking balance between the individual and the collective. This comes from each person's experience, flexibility, autonomy, and respect for personal process and decisions. It counts on networks to resist and accompany each other in a predatory context.

It is based on trust, on circularity, and on networks of women in all their diversity; on collective power; on respect for the actions and healing of others along the path; on treating each other well, valuing the other; on the use words for assertive communication.

- Weaving loving practices, for the long run, at the individual, organisational, and collective level.

This is the framework we are referring to when talking about our commitment to collectively transform the sustainability of our struggles.

TAKING CARE OF PLANTS HELPS ME TO
STAY ON TRACK & TAKE RESPONSIBILITY



SEEING MY PLANTS GROW
MAKES ME VERY HAPPY



SOMETIMES I'M AFRAID THAT
I'LL GET LONELY BY BEING
ALONE. BUT I LEARN THAT BEING
ALONE IS A PHYSICAL STATE AND
THAT BEING LONELY A FEELING.



I LIKE HAVING MY OWN LITTLE PARTIES

The Political perspectives in self-care, collective care, and healing

Queer Elsewhere's reflections on self-care, collective care, and healing over the duration of the gathering can be summarised into a political perspective that follows this principles we will present as follow:

- *The personal is political*

We are political subjects, we practice for ourselves what we want for others. This means doing a personal review and a collective reflection about the asymmetric relationships between ourselves. We have to intersectionally understand the political causes of what affects us in the private sphere and how they are rooted in the interconnection of systems of oppression (racism, colorism, ableism, classism, capitalism, patriarchy, etc.).

- *Beyond the idealisations of activists spaces and the defence of queer rights*

To recognise that activist spaces and the defence of queer rights are not ideal means to be constantly attentive of how systems of oppression are reproduced within our spaces, even without us noticing it. This notion should make us recognise our power and strength in the process of dismantling such dominations.

- *Activism is not a sacrifice*

This is an invitation to reflect on the urgency of the task at hand and our capacities to complete it. Is what we need to do so urgent that it cannot wait until we eat, sleep, rest, or have fun for a while? Making an effort beyond our mental and physical capacities, doesn't make our struggle stronger, on the contrary it leaves us physically and mentally exhausted, reducing our capacity to act. Our realities go beyond us individually and it is only through collective work and caring among ourselves that we will succeed at advancing our struggles.

- *Neither money nor time should be a limitation*

We want to promote a self-care that is based on knowledges and resources that are very accessible because they only require willingness and time to dedicate to oneself, individually and collectively. This does not mean that we ignore the hard work, even the wage work, we must take on, instead we want to focus on the aim to dismantle all structures of oppression that exhaust us and place our well-being at risk.

- *Each to their own*

It is impossible to generalise the needs of all activists, collectives or organisations regarding their well-being. We want to promote reflection, dialogue, exchanges of knowledges and experiences, so that each one can determine what they need based on an honest evaluation of their own necessities.

- *Self-care is personal and collective*

In order for the personal care of each activist to be transformative, the groups in which we interact (family, community, collective, organisation,) must reach collective agreements that encourage care: fair distribution of care-work and workloads and develop mechanisms for peaceful conflict resolution, among others. It is essential to change these practices to strengthen our movements based on our collective well-being to promote sustainable activism.

- *Healing as a life repairing process*

Reclaiming our ancestors healing knowledges, cultivating spirituality and connection with life and nature are transformative acts in response to violent colonial and oppressive models. Seeking healing practices that best adapt to daily life on the personal and collective levels is part of repairing the damage caused by the constant violence that system of oppression and colonialism exert on us.

Collection of Self-care and healing tools

Queer BIPOC activists fighting for the rights of the racialised LGBTIQ+ community live and work in contexts of structural racist, patriarchal and queerphobic violence. This means that we face a high daily risk to our security, well-being, our safety, and sometimes even our lives. This reality imposes a strenuous collective dynamic on us, high levels of stress and effects on our physical, mental, emotional and energetic health.

To attend to and counteract these effects, to manage and discharge our emotions without repressing or damaging them, healing wounds and preventing wear and tear, is part of the integral protection of Queer BIPOC activists. At the individual and collective level, it is necessary to create care and self-care habits as well as agreements within our collectives that allow us to feel accompanied, safe, listened to and healthy. We are sure that by listening to our bodies we will be able to go through this together. To this end, we propose to strengthen the following dimensions:

Physical dimension:

Pay attention to our body and increase our connection to what we feel, to our afflictions, to take care of our body, to listen to our organs, listen to our symptoms, try to attend to their needs. It includes nutrition, sleep, rest, medical care and various healing therapies, among others.

Emotional dimension:

Paying attention to our feelings and emotions, being able to express them so that pains, anger and sadness are not accumulate . This is part of the care that Queer BIPOC activists need. Emotions and feelings are a powerful tool for our protection. We need to learn exercises to manage and discharge emotions when we feel desperate, anxious, sad and angry. This prevents them from staying in our body and turning into illnesses.

Energetic dimension:

Queer BIPOC activists work with very difficult realities and this often generates blockages in our bodily and environmental energy, for example, we can feel "charged with bad vibes", "with dead energy" "with mistrust for no apparent reason", etc. Healing and clearing energy blockages allows us to improve our state of hope, the work environment and lighten the burdens we carry.

Mental dimension:

Racist, queerphobic and patriarchal violence also damages our mind, i.e. what we think. Queer BIPOC activists often have recurring thoughts that bring us down us and leave us no rest, ideas that that hinder our basic well-being, such as: "no matter how hard I work, it's not enough", "nothing will change", "how can I do it?", "I am not worthy". This causes wear and tear, suffering and damage that we need to recognise in order to change little by little and recover our power and worth.

Spiritual dimension:

To recognise the benefit of all those practices, symbols and rituals that Queer BIPOC activists do to feel connected to life, nature, to the greatness of a collective transformative power. Our ancestors have a great spiritual richness that we can reclaim to strengthen our well-being and recover and inspire our movements for justice.

The series of tools presented below are intended to help us to improve our well-being in these dimensions. If we practice them consciously, we will be contributing towards the sustainability of our movements and to fight against the structural powers of systems of oppression.

This collection is yours! We invite you to go through it calmly and take the time to practice each of the tools we propose. Keep in mind that these are just a few of the many tools for self-care, collective care and healing that exist. You may know many more, so trust your wisdom and bring yourself feelings of strength, well-being and calmness.

Body map: talking with my body

Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to connect with the body's signals and to become aware of the needs to be attended to expand well-being. To increase self-awareness on a physical, emotional, mental and energetic level.

Introduction

Our body is a box of surprises, it produces and stores the energy of life and if it receives what it needs: care and attention, we will have a good well-being. Non-Western and Anticolonial views in general point out that when the body gets sick there are energy blockages, i.e. stagnations that do not allow it to follow its natural flow. Our body gives us signals all the time, it guides us about what it requires to feel good and also when there are unmet needs. This exercise is an imaginary journey that allows a deep connection with oneself to notice the pains or discomforts, emotions, thoughts and strengths that are expressed in the different parts of our body and in our mood.

It is useful to make a self-diagnosis of how our body, emotions, thoughts and strengths are doing at that moment and from there to take actions and measures to promote greater well-being.

Exercise

This exercise has three parts:

1. Connect with the body through an imaginary journey.
2. Self-diagnosis based on a body map.
3. Self-reflection and opportunity to act towards your well-being

1. Imaginary journey:

In this part you make a self-guided fantasy to explore the aches, pains and strengths of the body and the moods that are currently states of mind that are currently prevalent in your life.

To begin, you can place yourself in a quiet and comfortable place where you can lie on your back on a mat, preferably without a pillow. Your feet and hands are loose and resting. Close your eyes and begin to breathe, to pay attention to the entry and exit of air through your nose, remain aware of your breathing and let it take on its own rhythm. Notice how the breath brings you a sense of calmness.

Being in this calmness begin slowly to go through your whole body starting with your toes, your heels, the soles of your feet. Feel if they feel heavy, swollen, light, sore, aching, throbbing. Recall all the sensations that arise, if you perceive pain, burning sensation and also if you feel that your feet are strong and well planted, what do you feel? Run your imagination over your feet for as long as you need to finish.

Now move up to your calves and repeat the exercise, then go to your knees and allow yourself to dialogue with them, do they feel stiff, do they hurt, do they feel strong and flexible at the same time, are they swollen Remember, all of the information that comes up is useful to you

Now focus your attention on your thighs, then move up to your belly and imagine your internal organs, bowels, bladder, where does tension accumulate? What are the most frequent sensations? Go over the whole area and allow your organs to talk to you. Check your hips, your buttocks, your waist.

Explore your whole abdomen, how does it feel, swollen, light? Travel through your organs, liver, stomach, spleen. what feelings or emotions are most prevalent in your life now? is there prolonged anger, helplessness, sadness, well-being, joy? What other things do you notice?

Visualise now your chest, how does it feel? Check in with your lungs, is your breathe deep or is it shallow? Move towards your heart and ask it how is it, what feelings does it hold? Go up to your throat, your neck and notice if you have stored things in your them, pains or unexpressed anger, is your neck stiff or sore? How does it feel?

Now go to your shoulders and check if they feel too high up towards your ears, if they are sore, strong... Check in with your shoulder blades, with your back, your spine, travel down your spine from your neck to your waist, do you feel any pain?

Finally visualize your head, your brain, the back of the head, above the neck, check if you feel heaviness, if you feel saturated, if there is pain or not. Check your scalp, your face, your forehead, your eyes, your eyebrows, your ears, your nose, your mouth, how do you see yourself? Is your face relaxed or stiff? How does your jaw feel? Check in with all the parts of your face.

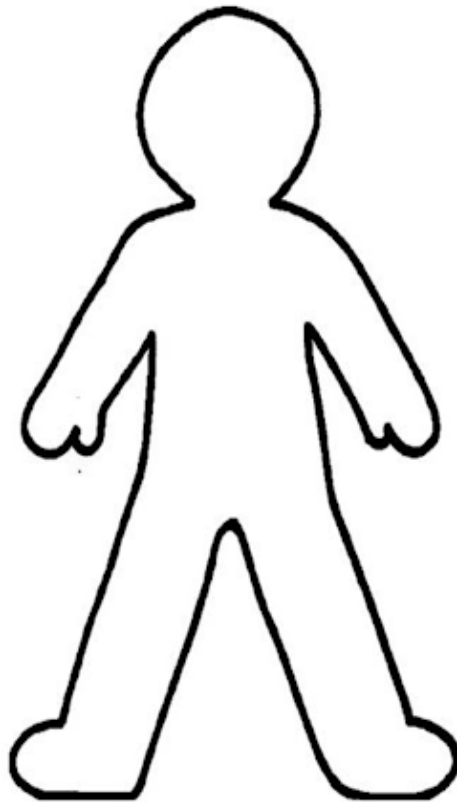
When you have finished you can concentrate on your breathing for a few minutes, feel the air going in and out and be confident that this breathing exercise brings a silent and deep well-being.

When you are ready you can open your eyes

2. Self-diagnosis: your body map

(You need a sheet of paper and a two colour pencils).

In this part of the exercise you can put on paper what you visualised in your imaginary journey. To do this you can draw the front and back of a full body silhouette on a sheet of paper (see image).



On this silhouette you can mark in one colour the areas of well-being, those parts of your body that you perceive as strong, vigorous, and with another colour those that indicate discomfort or ailments.

You can also add key words in different areas, for example, in the head, you can add "phrases or ideas that weigh on me", or feelings that describe the mood you felt.

Try to express in the silhouette all the information that comes to your mind, try to do it in the most detailed way. It is important that you do not repress what comes out of you. When you have finished the silhouette, take a few minutes to look at it and perceive how you feel about your creation.



Changing places & shifting time:
my stories are mine.

My stories with its scars are wholesome,
my body moving freely in order to find home.

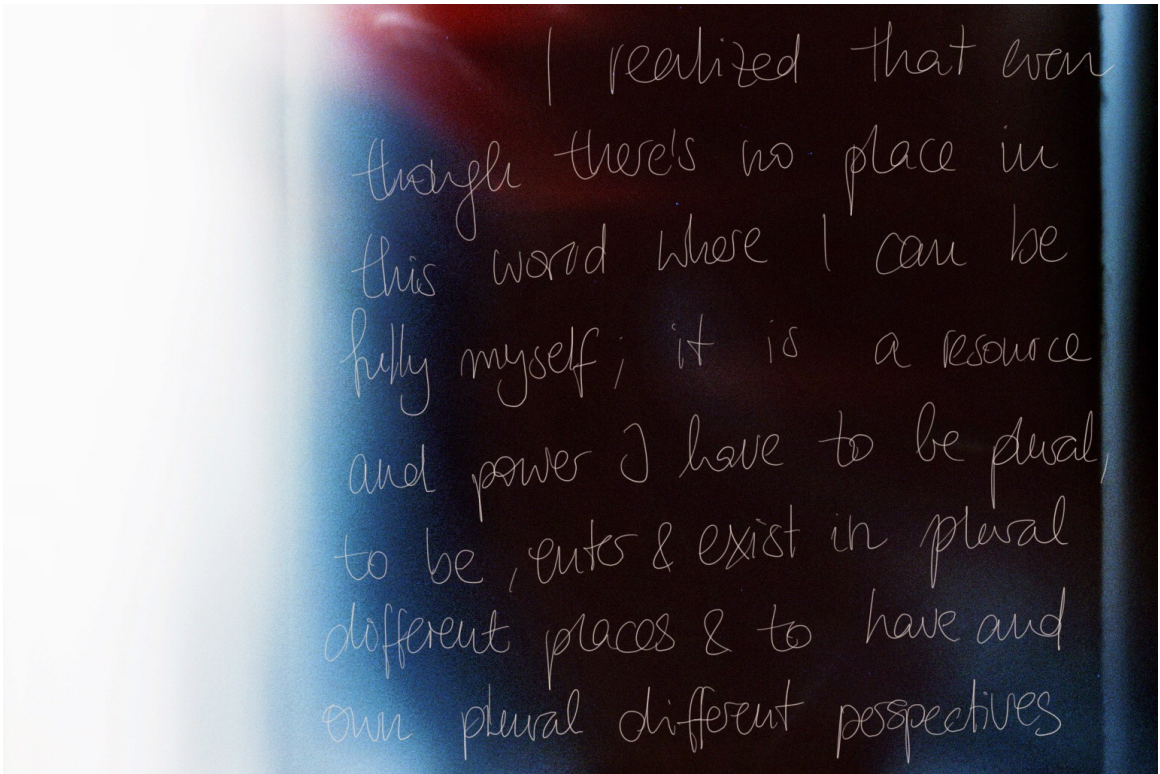
Opening the door, the smell of vietnamese food that's greeting my soul:
my mom's hands have created this space
called unconditional home for me.

In my mom's sad eyes and her broken old body,
I fear the death and its pain.
Her unspoken love is my protective custody.
The endless rain that will come someday I'm not strong enough for.

Where do our stories go when we are dead?
Can we ever heal, in diaspora?

I believe in transformation & love beyond time,
human life and human death.
Accepting the nature's harmony and its life circle,
in this universe: I'm growing and keep moving.

Living in Diaspora Pt. 11



I realized that even though there's no place in this world where I can be fully myself; it is a resource and power I have to be plural, to be, enter & exist in plural different places & to have and own plural different perspectives

Youth centers, associations & grassroots collectives across Europe
Frankfurt's Queer Youth Center Kuss41 -
<http://www.kuss41.de/english/>

Jugendnetzwerk Lambda Berlin-Brandenburg -
<https://www.lambda-bb.de/>

BiPoC-Treff für LSBPATINQ+ in Dortmund -
<https://www.sunrise-dortmund.de/queer-of-colour/poc-treff-swag/>

Cuties! Gruppe für queere jugendliche BiPoC und/oder queere Jugendliche mit Rassismuserfahrungen -
<https://www.lambda-bb.de/cuties/>

Rainbow Welcome! is an initiative designed to improve Europe's reception of LGBTIQ+ refugees. It's interactive map shows LGBTIQ+ shelters and places in Europe where good practices have been put in place to better answer LGBTIQ+ refugees' needs
- <https://rainbowelcome.eu/map/>



*Collaboratively written by
the participants of
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*Artwork and poems by
Phuong
@maro_poebelarts*

*Cover and graphics design by
Ciel Incarnadine
@alchemicum*

