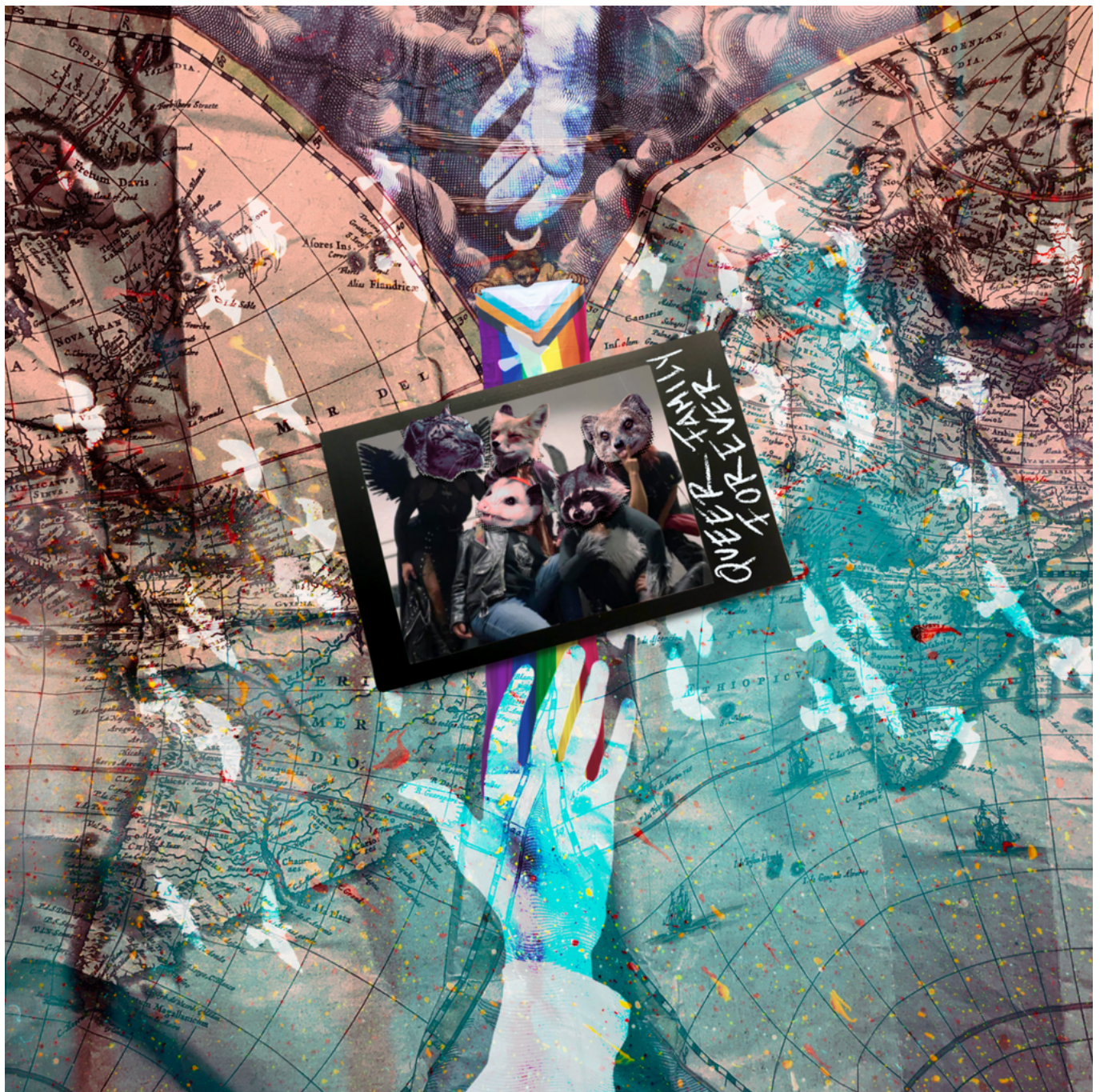


NECESSITY NECESSITY



REPORTING ON DIASPORA QUEER AND TRANS VOICES
NEEDS | ATTITUDES | JOY | STRUGGLES | SOLIDARITY



INTRO

I'd like to put the making of this zine into context. I've been an immigrant since I was a child, having been forcibly displaced from my home country because of a conflict that's spanned enough generations and seen enough violence that our people's diaspora is larger than the total population of some European nation states that have existed for centuries.

I am no longer that child, but as I fully embody the choices that I have made in the early years of my adulthood, the things that I have come to accept and embrace about myself, my background, my identity and my trauma, that child's curiosity and wish to go home has resurfaced.

Diaspora has become the central issue of most of my work, because of my experiences yes, but also because nearly everyone I know and love has a story with it. I am enamored with the transformative process of storytelling, with the ways in which we move across this vast beautiful world, and the beauty and strength of our ancestral connections to different lands and cultures, which reach and find paths to flow and find one another like rivers and underground waterways.

Over the last few weeks, and for the following ones ahead, I am completely uprooted. I will be reporting as I move through different countries and talking to different people from various communities. I'm blessed with the opportunity of traveling again, although it's never a vacation. People like me often find ourselves in constant motion, without the luxury or resources for comfort and safety— but what better time for working on a project like this one than when drifting across lands and oceans? This is my comfort zone, although it's starting to wear down on me.

So here I am, wherever here is. It's 7:18 am, I just woke up and I am typing from the bed in the back of my partner's truck. I am somewhere on Turtle Island—so-called USA. This is Lakota Sioux territory I think, and my phone isn't getting any bars. It's October, and there's frost on the glass of the windows. Looking outside, the orange leaves are fading into monochrome tones, and I feel safe knowing that there's no one else but us for miles probably.

We have been driving for days non-stop, so I let my partner rest a little longer. They're moving halfway across the country again, for the third or fourth time since we last had the joy of living on the same side of the ocean. I used to live in this country, it was once a home to me, but when I committed to come help them with this process I had to buy a ticket out before I could even think about what I would pack for this journey, or how I would be able to afford it. Being queer, trans, and not from around here feels somehow far more hostile than it used to before the pandemic; even being in love can feel impossible when you don't have the right papers, the passing privileges, or the socially idealized phenotypes.



When I was a teenager, in the first country that gave us refuge from the war, being in love was illegal for someone like me, and I left so I could be free... So why is it that it feels, at times, so much more oppressive for people like us in these so-called “civilized” countries? The systems are stacked against us, leaving us feeling unwanted everywhere.

It’s not just here; I’ve felt it too while moving around SLUMIL K’AJXEMK’OP, “Indomitable Land,” as Europe has been recently renamed by the Zapatistas on their own journey to heal the maladies of this world. My last few years living there and doing activist work with queer migrants and refugees have been equally brutal. I’ve lost precious loved ones to the institutional violence and racism there too, their young lives cut short leaving permanent imprints in my heart and perception of the world.

Lately, all these borders feel like they’ve been reinforced with some sort of special razor wire that cuts down at your soul, at your willingness to keep pushing forward through the bureaucratic trenches. I pause for a moment to think about the lineless land below the belly of the truck, and contemplate the forest, the fresh animal tracks on the mud out the window.

Grounded in the social nature of our animal-selves, I have been talking with several people, friends and strangers alike, about their thoughts and experiences with this subject, in an attempt to listen and share as many voices as I come across what the needs and attitudes that we face are. It’s through our collective efforts that we will change the narrative around our lives and those of future generations, so I hope I can document at least a piece of the moments that we find repose in; the places and people that hold us together, the systemic changes and forms of care that ought to be a right, these containers that we fight so hard for to feel dignity in our lives.

Thank you for coming along with me on this journey to meet these incredible human beings. I promise to be as candid as possible. I don’t have any pretense that I’ll ever be able to fully unravel the thread that connects us in our shared and unique experiences. My greatest hope is that by the time I finish asking questions, reporting and telling these stories, I’ll be able to convey a wide spectrum of realities in a way that empowers everyone who reads this to speak out their own—and that hopefully, by then, I’ll have found my way home, and my migration story will have come to an end, or at least, a repose

Besos and blessings to you,
wherever you are

X CIEL

CONTENTS

INTRO - CIEL

Moving through **land** P.2

CHAPTER 1 - LENNY

Anger in your morning coffee P. 6

CHAPTER 2 - MILA

Care can taste like salmon tacos P. 11

CHAPTER 3 - JACUZZI

Witnessing the splendour of unbeing. P. 16

CHAPTER 4 - MO

Patience is in the machinery of trust. P. 20

CHAPTER 5 - CONSUELO

Action speaks as loud as our bodies. P.25

CHAPTER 6 - PAPI

Rest is a reparation P. 33

CHAPTER 7 - RAZIRA

Hope holds us in our trances' embrace P. 37

OUTRO

Reflection for the mirror P. 40

SPECIAL THANKS

P. 42



"IT'S ENOUGH JUST TRYING TO BE A
PERSON TRYING TO SURVIVE CAPITALISM"

Lenny was the first person I crossed paths with on my journey who I decided to interview. I have known Lenny for well over a decade now—we shared both joyous and traumatic experiences in our late teens/early twenties that shaped me politically, and I hadn't seen them in a long time, since I moved to Europe many years ago. I was excited to catch up with them, but also to have a frank conversation on these topics face to face and check in. I had been deeply concerned about them through the pandemic, and their struggles, from what we had chatted about briefly online before meeting up, are truly relatable to every last one of us trying to survive in the labor market of late stage capital.

We sat on a balcony-porch-situation outside their bedroom, overlooking a big row of trees that lined their block, and while I tried to figure out how to record, they tried to lure the cat to play through the window with a stick. It was a first experience for both of us, but quickly got into the flow of things, and the weight on their chest from the constant onslaught of racist microaggressions started blowing through the fall leaves rattling against the wooden deck.

Ciel: Okay, I'm recording now. Please introduce yourself!

Lenny: Hi, I'm Lenny. My pronouns are they/them, and I am Chinese-American... second generation? I think? I was born here—not here, here, but yeah in the United States.

C: Yeah, when you're born here that's second-generation; first generation is where you leave your country of origin and you're like "oh god, I'm here now."

L: Okay yeah, so I live in Philadelphia, which is a different "oh god I'm here now." Originally I am from New York City. I jumped around; kind of tried to resettle myself in Seattle before the pandemic hit, but that didn't work out because I was cast away. Hahaha okay no, I wasn't cast away. I just had a bad relationship with a friend and didn't feel quite welcome there. I don't feel quite welcome here either in Philly. I feel like most of my life revolves around my job as a barista. I meet a lot of interesting and also scary people doing that. Like for example the other day, there were these bougie-ass white old women who were totally not allowed to just stick their hands in the pastry trays with covers on them, but they did and then they paid for them without tipping me and then I overheard them saying like "oh I didn't know I wasn't supposed to do that" and then the other lady was like, "it's okay. They're just peasants"

"JUST . . .
. . . PEASANTS . . ."

So yeah, so you deal with a lot of these kinds of attitudes from people. Yeah, and this isn't just sometimes—it's enough that I can say it's a daily occurrence, at least whenever I work there. There's always somebody starting some kind of function.

C: Do you feel like you have to fight more for basic rights at your job than your white cisgender coworkers?

L: Absolutely... there's basic things I feel that we really need to see change in that environment! Our security first of all, and a proper structure so that not all work is delegated to one person. And by one person I mean me.

I am the only racialized person in the whole team of white people. Everybody always gets to show up whenever they want, they get to leave early, but if I did that I would be scrutinized. Last weekend, I was the one working front of house for both weekend days alone, and if I was lucky I could get some partial help sometimes, but I would still have to close by myself at the end of the day, and it ruined my mental health for the rest of the week.

I did it throughout the whole summer, and now that we have indoor dining again people are so demanding and so disgusting. They treat our cafe like it's their bedroom or something.

C: Oh, no... That's terrible. Why do you think that is? Do you feel like the dynamic has shifted? Or the attitudes of the people that you deal with on a day-to-day basis

L: Before the COVID hit, I would hear horror stories of people working in Starbucks, and what they had to deal with, but now I feel like things are getting worse, that people are more entitled, and I don't know... They just want an outlet for their—I don't know what it is. Their feelings inside. It's almost animalistic or something. They just really want to take their anger out on people. And so there I am, the lone Asian person at the counter. I happen to be a very easy target.

C: You're probably having more of a target on your back with everything that's been going on, especially the increase in Asian Hate out here resurfacing through the pandemic. It's sad to say, the only place I've seen the majority of people still wearing masks out here in the US has been in Chinatown, and it's bullshit that it's because of a fear beyond the actual Covid-19 virus! How do you cope?

L: I've had to become meaner to my customers. I feel like they mess with me less now, but they still mess with me. There's this recurring thief that keeps coming into our shop and trying to steal our tips but he knows that I know him and I just have to be the mean guy they project onto me. Every time it's like a different thing.

C: Do you see yourself having any opportunities for work outside of the coffee house business? You are a profoundly skilled artist, so I guess what I am asking is what barriers have you encountered pursuing your artistic career? Or do you feel like you're just having to hustle to survive?

L: This is sort of maybe a different topic, and I'm kind of backtracking in my life...but I feel like maybe if my college experience was different, and they taught us more about business instead of encouraging us to play social games like we're all standing on the same starting line. I studied animation, and in our careers class they would encourage us to find people to crash on couches with in LA and that was like their whole stick about how to make it in the industry, and that's just not realistic for everyone!

It was so pathetic and sad, and for a while I bought into that, I thought I just needed to travel and crash on somebody's couch to make it and network and shit, but then a lot of predatory shit happened to me and yeah... I guess that stuff works out for like white people, and people who have something to fall back on, but if you're thrusting someone who might not have the same chances into these kinds of precarious situations—that's just evil. That's setting us up for failure or worse.

I'm glad I did community college first and then transferred there. So now I only have about \$20,000 left of debt, but it still doesn't feel worth it. This was at SVA, which is like the Ivy League of art schools private education, and this is the kind of stuff they advertise as high quality education in America.

C: Yikes, that is awful. I can totally believe that this is what they would suggest though, it's the sort of stuff that furthers the struggling artist narrative and romanticizes precarity, when we're really out here trying to have a bit of dignity and value.

L: **ART SCHOOL. NOT EVEN ONCE.**

But see, I don't feel like this job has really hindered my art. It just adds on to the stress of my regular daily life that I'm too exhausted to do creative stuff at home. Sometimes I'm allowed to do the signs at work. I'm allowed to play guitar with my co-worker and that's nice, but it doesn't make up for the shit that we have to go through.

C: Of course not. Do you feel like you have encountered enough opportunities that reach out to people in your situation, who've had to go through life on their own?

L: No. I've honestly been trying to find the queer Asian-American community here. We're very spread out.

I feel like most Asian-American people who have lived in Philly longer than I have either live in Chinatown or South Philly and I never have an excuse to go to those areas unfortunately. I've tried to reach out online, I've told my story on this Asian-American Philly people's group, and I don't know, I just got like 10 likes and sad faces on it. I did not get any responses, which is what I was really disappointed in, like I thought in such a smaller city compared to other cities there'd be more people dealing with this same issue or wanting to connect.

C: Would you consider it a matter of erasure in the spaces you're in?

L: Yeah, a lot. I feel like a lot of people see me, an Asian person, as privileged somehow, and it's kind of true that we don't experience racism the same way that brown and black people do but we still experience it nevertheless.

I haven't been physically assaulted or killed yet, so that's good I guess!

C: I'm glad, but you shouldn't have to wait until that happens for your life to be important or valued or worthy of defending, like it shouldn't reach a point of violence for people to care about each other.

L: It's a very complex issue because sometimes the discourse on racism becomes a competition. It's like now this group is suffering more, this group is suffering this new thing, and we're being put against each other. We're all going through similar situations on a systemic level, even if it looks different on an individual level, and we forget that it's not the oppression olympics. And anyways, all racism sucks.



C: For sure, we should be focusing on uplifting one another at least as much as we do on acknowledging our differences and privileges, and fighting that common goal of systemic oppression. Fighting anti-blackness is a huge part of that though!

L: Seriously... I remember when I first started working at the cafe, my boss told me that he once had a black employee, who was actually probably the manager there, and he was saying "Oh my god, yeah, she was treated really horribly" and in my mind I'm just thinking how he still learned nothing from that. Just repeating woke stuff to look good. When I said that I've been dealing with some racist stuff, he was just like "why" and then he was like "oh, yeah" and then didn't really do anything about the issue in question.

Usually what happens when someone's giving me a hard time, and then suddenly my boss shows up, or my white coworker comes to try to support me, they get a little more tame like "oh the white person's actually in charge, not this fucking Chinese kid, what a relief" and I can see the relief in their eyes.

C: Damn, that's so wrong...What would you say you would need to have a safer workplace environment?

L: I feel like bodyguards should be a norm at restaurants and cafes now, because shit happens all the time at any food service establishment and it's unacceptable. It's rare, but people die from the job sometimes because of crazy customers going wild, and employees should never be afraid of that. Actually having fair conditions, having time off and redistribution of labor in equal or proportional amounts, so I'm not the only one taking on all of the rough tasks. I also feel like a huge issue right now is that my boss doesn't care about the growth of his employees or the cafe. He just kind of wants it to remain shitty as it is, and I feel like I have the title of manager without the benefits, because a lot of work has plopped onto me.

I'm the one mostly doing inventory and staying after to receive packages that nobody even tells me are coming, and none of that gets any recognition. It's like if you're the weird queer Asian kid you're expected to do everything and more to prove your worth, so it doesn't count. I've asked him if I can get food service-certified because that can potentially get me better jobs and better positions, but he keeps dodging the question every time because it's very obvious he doesn't want me to leave there or pay me more, and it's just, it's very selfish.

C: Why wouldn't you want your employee to do better? Maybe if you were treating your employee better they wouldn't want to leave?

L: Yeah, exactly, that's the thing. So maybe another need is more awareness.

I don't know how you could ever ask somebody to see beyond their nose or make them wear your shoes for a minute and just see how hard you're having it. I don't think that there's any way for that kind of level of empathy to be reached even if it's just for a day or a minute. You can't get the cumulative experience of someone who goes through it their whole life, so I guess just really listening and accepting and doing whatever you can to make it even slightly less of a struggle.

Also please, **I WOULD LOVE PEOPLE TO TIP US BETTER. PAY UP.**

We can always use more tips. Pay living wages and better tips. I hate that capital is a thing but escaping it is so much harder. Other things like better training, more information to know how to deal with situations and stuff would be great too, so when we deal with shitty people we're less caught in the headlights or having to suck it up, and training for the coworkers also to know how to stand up when racist or homophobic stuff happens.

But yea, I dunno, a lot of it comes down to resources, and that's again, money.

C: Wealth redistribution is an important goal to ensure the safety of those in systematically oppressed and vulnerable positions, for sure. We have a lot of individuals now crowdfunding for themselves and each other, but it would be better if there were other direct routes to address inequality.

L: And help give money to like, you know, groups of kids, if it means that these kids then have more resources to pursue their dreams because, and I think this is a very universal experience talking with other second generation immigrants and it's like, you grow up not only tending to what your future is, we're also tending to our parents' future, because you have to be translating a lot of stuff for them, and explaining a lot of stuff for them and making sure that they don't fall through the cracks in the system, and learning what the systems are in the first place because next thing you know they've already fallen through the cracks and you're like 15 and you don't know what's going on.

I've seen a lot of relatives and people I know in the asian-american community that have to deal with that for sure, their parents not knowing how to speak english, and a lot falls onto them. I feel fortunate that I never had to deal with that. Now that I think about it, my parents brought me up right for the most part, even though they hindered a lot of progress at the same time, but that's for other reasons, more obvious reasons, hahah.

C: I guess your situation is also different in other ways because there's no standard narrative for trans people growing up in migrant homes; everyone goes through a different process with that.

L: Yeah, you know growing up in that kind of environment where parents are working very hard trying to bring you up right and what that means for them versus what it means for you in your own experiences and your own story.

C: Of course. So what do you think might help young queer and trans asian people get into a position where they don't have to deal with shitty people? What could communities do to ensure that they're protected and able to embrace their roots without all the social pressure that you describe?

L: Maybe we just gotta lean into it. Maybe if we all wore black belts? Yeah, if we all had like regular martial arts training things could be different for fucking sure. You know, it sounds extreme, but the thing is when people mess with me at work, they don't expect me to react back now and when I do react back they think I'm scary or dangerous and then they might leave a bad review on google. People are so petty!

C: Pettiness is at the core of a lot of discriminatory attitudes too! It's all based on assumptions.

L: People will immediately look at us and assume like "oh, you're so submissive! Oh, I'll just walk all over you!" and then there's this immediate shift to like "You are scary!" So yeah, I would love more people to have the public knowledge that we're not whatever stereotype you think we are. We're not DTF. We're usually not interested in even talking to you. I don't want to know you! I want to live my life!

I'm fine struggling with the same things as everyone else. It's a normal life having to make rent and figure out my art career and figure out dinner and stuff like that—just any of the extra shit on top would be great to have some support with and take a load off our backs that I've seen I'd rather not have.

It's enough just trying to be a person trying to survive capitalism.

**A LOT OF PEOPLE SAY THIS IS
PART OF THE JOB, THAT
"THE CUSTOMER IS ALWAYS RIGHT"
AND I WOULD LOVE TO FLIP THAT
NARRATIVE AND SAY NO.**

THAT IS NOT RIGHT.

THAT'S FUCKED UP.

THAT'S EXPLOITATIVE.

THAT IS JUST NO.





"I FIND MYSELF LONGING FOR THE KIND OF
EMOTIONAL SUPPORT NETWORK ONE CAN
ONLY REALLY SEE IN AN EXTENDED FAMILY"

Mila greets me in her home with a long, long-overdue first hug ever. We've been online friends for years, and she's now living at a trans house with some of my earliest chosen family members, but we had never gotten the chance to meet in person. I am really emotional about this encounter, looking over the bikes in the living room that I have seen in photographs and the fantasy world posters. It feels like I am visiting a little sister that I had been estranged from by distance and circumstance. We had agreed to do this interview beforehand, because it's precisely the kind of subject we've often delved into in our long online rants, and so we thought it would be cool to talk about it in person, sharing over food.

She has been cooking since before I got here, and is pacing back and forth trying to make sure everyone is ready to eat and has been offered water. Though Mila tells me she's a bit nervous and not used to having people over, her every gesture full of care and love shows how natural this is to her. It's this kind of comforting kindness that everyone who's grown up in a migrant household knows as an indicator of home, and I feel profoundly lucky to finally share with her in person, and hear her talk about her experiences first-hand.

Ciel: Thank you for the food and the time to chat! I wanted to ask if you want to first talk a little bit about yourself and your context and your background, that would be a helpful start I think!

Mila: Well, I mean, the most obvious place to start is like, I'm originally from Belarus. I was born in the 90s and Belarus in the 90s and the whole post-Soviet sphere, with the exception of the Baltic countries, really suffered a lot of economic troubles that they haven't really started bouncing back from until relatively recently.

I only know so little about what my parents were up to, but my mom worked as an accountant and according to her half the job was just fraud in that kind of culture and context. My dad had this business for some time. Eventually, his old best friend robbed him at gunpoint and took his car. That's the kind of cultural and economic situation that prevails where I'm from, but I don't really remember much of that. When I was really little, my parents moved to the Czech Republic, then when I was five or six, we moved back to Belarus, and we stayed there for a while before finally migrating to the United States.

It's a lot, and, you know, I wasn't even able to make any of those choices for myself. I kind of resent a lot of the choices my parents made, honestly, with how everything was handled. And just where our lives turned up, anyway.

C: If you had the ability to change the past, would you have rather grown up in elsewhere—back in Belarus or in, like, Czechia?

M: I mean, *definitely not Belarus*, but really what I would rather have had is just stability, regardless of where I lived or where I had moved to. After we migrated to the United States, my dad joined the U.S. military, which I am personally against, but regardless, we ended up moving around a lot, which was just really isolating, every two or three years. Having to pack up and move, having every person you know, every aspect of your life changing all the time, you know how it is. Even though you keep moving around, you would never expect that as your world gets bigger, your space in which you inhabit becomes smaller and smaller.

C: Back in the today and the now, would you say that some of those are themes that you still deal with? Would you say that you're still dealing with isolation, that you're still dealing with lack of stability?

M: Wait, isn't everyone? There's really not that much of a support network when your entire extended family is on another continent. And if you're, for example, a young trans adult, those parents aren't necessarily...supporting, or supportable. It becomes a really isolated experience. There's a lot of people that I just can't interact with because they don't understand my baseline experiences, and a lot of family that I wish I could have any degree of connection with honestly, like my grandparents.

C: Isolation is a big issue across the board for queers in general, doubly so for those of us who have been raised outside of our ancestral homelands, and as foreigners. How would you envision support networks to overcome this issue in a utopic scenario? Which forms of care would you prioritize?

M: I think there's a couple compounding issues at play here, ranging from social isolation, to financial and housing insecurity.

SUPPORT NETWORKS HAVE TO BE MULTIFACETED IN THIS REGARD—MUCH LIKE A FAMILIAL SUPPORT NETWORK OUGHT TO BE.

Whether this takes the form of something akin to a family or not is a question for the individual and their own needs, but I find myself longing for the kind of emotional support network one can only really see in an extended family, for the most part.

C I get that, I'm very attached to my chosen family and queer kinship bonds. It's definitely easier to build those with others who have similar shared experiences even if we have super different cultural backgrounds and personal histories and sometimes even political approaches.

M: Yeah. Especially as an immigrant, being queer is an incredibly isolating experience, even with found families.

C: Why do you think that is?

M: Well, I really don't think people appreciate just how big an extended family they have, or the friendships they build up over their adolescent and early adult years. It's really rough even just starting over in a new city, let alone in a new country—and oftentimes, the queer experience, for safety or other reasons, involves having to find entirely new networks of friends and found families.

You've got all these compounding factors, and on top of it all, modern society is structured around households that feel as islands unto themselves... I think it takes exceptional effort to maintain any social life at all if you're strapped for resources.

C: It's true, and honestly I feel it a lot here in the US. There's this element of the hyper capitalist rat-race that makes it impossible to even muster the energy to maintain tight bonds, and I'm sure it's by design. We hear so much about "queer community" this and "migrant communities" that, but we often end up feeling disconnected and alone anyways! It feels harder these days to get to know someone enough to build trust too because we're constantly stuck in hypervigilance—worried about how we might be perceived or that we will say the wrong thing.

M: For sure—especially in the US, there's a shocking lack of any public spaces that aren't designed to sell you something. Even pride events have been co-opted to be a marketing tool.

There's this sickening feeling like I'm getting my own queerness sold back to me when I attend the official pride events my city puts on; it's in sharp contrast to, for example, the dyke marches, where police, corporate ads, and so on are simply not welcome. But at the end of the day that's just one day out of the year, and building long-lasting support networks I feel is even more involved than organizing a march.

Then you've got that hypervigilance you mentioned, and it's really difficult for me to exist with confidence, even in ostensibly queer spaces as a trans woman, especially when those spaces are for women. There's this nagging feeling that you're an outsider looking in, or barging in, from how much literal physical space you take up, to this feeling that you can't relate, and they can't relate to you. You end up perceiving, whether true or not, a sort of silent ostracism.



C: It does often seem like the spaces that are meant to be the safe ones end up being very hostile to transfemmes. I've seen the scrutiny that goes on in some social spaces where people will over-perform respectability politics in theory, but in practice it's alienating at best, dehumanizing at worst. Most official pride events are also notoriously unsafe for trans people, especially migrants and BIPOC. I can't remember the last time I attended one personally.

M: Right! And we're already under so much scrutiny!

**WE'RE PUT FRONT AND CENTER
OF ALL THE VITRIOL THAT'S THROWN AT
US BY TRANSPHOBES AND QUEERPHOBES.**



I'm pretty much taller than most people you'd find on the street, and it's downright impossible to conceal the fact that I'm trans because of that, and I've had some really hateful things levied against me on the street. So it ends up feeling really alienating when I'm the only trans woman in feminist or queer spaces, when I physically take up the most space and seem to be more or less the most scrutinized.

And this perception that all eyes are on me is really exhausting because it leads to a lot less social activity overall; I had more confidence about going out femme five whole years ago than I do now, for instance, just because of how sickening it feels when you're clocked and run into a transphobe on the street.

C: I am so sorry, that really fucking sucks. I hate how much it feels that progress has been lost over the past few years. Reactionary transphobic attitudes have been on the rise across both sides of the ocean, and it's so scary.

Thank you for being real and vulnerable with me about this by the way, I know it's horrible to verbalize these realities sometimes...

How have you been coping with the current cultural pressure rising? Russian imperialism and US fascist fundamentalism are two sides of the same coin, and I respect your insights as someone who has been personally impacted by both. I also care about you as a friend, and have been wondering how you've been feeling with all this?

M: Not well. It's...I mean, a few years ago it was absolutely unimaginable to me that treatment access would be threatened to the point that it is. I suppose in the back of my mind I always knew that they would be turning a push from banning puberty blockers to banning any kind of treatment for minors to banning gender-affirming care entirely in republican-controlled states, but seeing it happen right before my eyes is... unsettling.

**IT FEELS LIKE ALL THE DUCKS
ARE BEING SET UP IN A ROW TO
LEGISLATE MY EXISTENCE AWAY
ENTIRELY, WHETHER FIVE YEARS FROM
NOW OR FIFTY YEARS FROM NOW—**

Overtuning Roe feels more or less like the tip of the iceberg. Then there's hypervisibility everyone experiences these days, with the proliferation of tiktok and other social media, this sense that you might be recorded at any instant, and anything you do can be taken out of context.

C: Dystopian Hyper Reality. What a nightmare. And it seems like whatever the US does, the rest of the world follows.

M: Speaking to Russian imperialism, it's just... unsurprising and demoralizing. I'm originally from Belarus; my grandfather was a Russian Red Army officer; my first language was Russian, and I still don't know Belarusian. I'm the living product of Russification and Russian colonialism, and it makes me sick to my stomach that it's still ongoing. I don't know if I can ever really encapsulate the entirety of how I feel on this ongoing history that I am literally the product of; of how cold war attitudes in the US only serve to fuel conflict, with the people of central Europe being pawns in the geopolitical games of great powers. I see people clamoring for bloodshed, for escalation, celebrating death and carnage in war between peoples who I've been raised to see as kin... Everyone is descending into hawkish, fascistic nationalism, while soldiers and civilians lose their lives because the Russian state is losing its grasp on geopolitical relevance in the post-Soviet world.

There's a kind of inherent guilt I have in being half-Russian, a kind of self-disgust, and a really alienating sensation to know just how much people back home hate queer people. I'm carrying around all of this cultural baggage, and it really feels like there's no one thing to really reconnect my roots with; the whole tree just feels rotten.

C: I have heard similar sentiments from other migrant queer trans people from former USSR backgrounds. It's akin to a need to culturally amputate or disassociate because so much of that culture negates your own reality, values and identity— I felt that shame very intensely growing up, being aware of the war and the violence around me, until fairly recently.

What do you think would help to heal that for you? Is there anything that you feel would be helpful to uplift and empower queer, and especially trans, youth from your cultural background?

M: I think that really starts with a change in attitudes; people in the west see people from a slavic background as something of a joke, or as an exotic 'other.' Having a sense of community would also be a really good first step—seeing that you're not the only one with your unique circumstances. In college, I had a sort of friend group of Russian-speaking friends. They weren't a very good influence on me, and I kind of didn't like any of them, but I still hung out with them because there was a sense of kinship I didn't get from anyone else.

C: It would be great to see more networks of slav queer and trans people across different countries as well as locally! Having that kind of kinship can definitely shift the narratives, and well—I don't know how to articulate this adequately, but I feel like those of us who have already seen the effects of socially regressive policies, fundamentalism, bigotry and and so on, have a profound exhaustion on our shoulders, but also a degree of insight and FIRE that can be very transformative when we empower each other.

M: Definitely—although it's entirely too easy to just...retreat within yourself.

Ciel: Well yeah, especially when our mental health debilitates our ability to reach out. To overcome these things takes a lot of support and resilience, and that often comes in the form of connection and shining moments. What brings you joy and a sense of belonging?

M: I think, more than anything else, it's food.
Making food, sharing food, spending time with my
friends or family in the kitchen.

FOOD IS SOMETHING WE ALL NEED,
IT'S A CENTRAL PART OF OUR LIVES. AND
WHAT WE EAT AND HOW WE PREPARE IT
SAYS A LOT ABOUT OUR PERSONALITIES!

C: Also, which needs do you prioritize outside of
basic survival? Which tools and skills have helped
you keep on?

M: Again, I'm brought back to food. Learning to
cook for myself, doing things like making as many
things as possible from scratch, baking bread using
flour that's less than a dollar a pound instead of
buying a loaf for \$3, etc... Just the other day I made
a huge batch of pickled red onions, for instance.
Habits like these have helped me stretch out the
food dollar as far as it realistically can go. So when I
have money to spare, when I can splurge, I make
something elaborate or extravagant, some
decadent, complex recipe, and when I take that
bite, I feel really proud of it! It gives me a sense of
structure and control I haven't been able to find in
art—which I've been struggling to regain my stride
in working towards bettering.



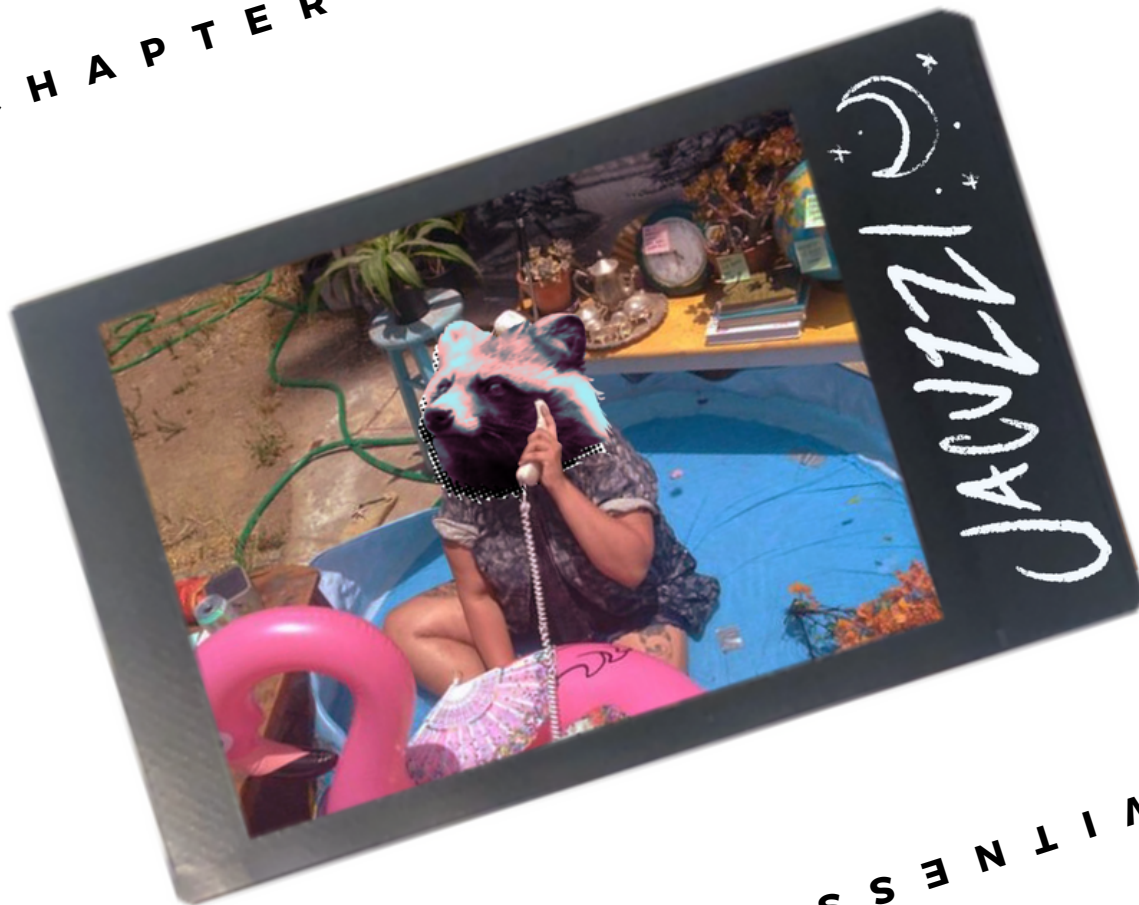
C: Food is the absolute best! It's also a form of
connecting to our roots that is usually safe and nice
when everything else fails. Not to mention, a love
language!
Next time we see each other I'll hopefully not just
be passing through but staying for a nice little
while—I will cook so many things for you!

M: I want to cook so many things for you! I made
these kickass salmon tacos the other day that I
want to make again.

C: That sounds amazingggg! Yes please!

SOMETIMES TRANS QUEER LOVE IS JUST
FRIENDS COOKING FOR EACH OTHER,
AND IF THAT'S THE BEST THING WE
GOT, WE'RE INCREDIBLY BLESSED!

CHAPTER 3



WITNESSING

"A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF DISCOMFORT IS THE COOL SIDE OF THE PILLOW FOR ME"

It's Halloween in Los Angeles, California. I am covered in sand from rolling around the beach in front of a shoreside Samhain bonfire, filled with euphoria from being around some of my closest kinships on this side of the ocean. I hadn't seen most of them since 2016, and I am here thanks to them. I personally hate LA, but I love the chaotic frantic cackles of my coven in the corner of this Korea town karaoke bar enough that I want this moment framed forever. Unbridled joy bounces off the walls and refracts off the sequined dress of my brand new shiny friend, the Astro Jacuzzi.

They're dressed as a magician bunny and holding a birthday watermelon. We're both here for a brief moment before continuing to pinball our way to distant places, a saturnine connection that feels like an explosion of YES. Realizing that we're both different flavors of mixed filling food-pockets (empanadas and dumplings are equally precious!) There's an agreement over the fact that we have so much to talk about, but a particularly stellar rendition of Nena's 99 Red Balloons by a genderqueer femme version of Donnie Darko has us both mesmerized. We settle on having our talk online at some other point, when we're both less sandy and less distracted, and leave it with a kiss on the cheek for now. By the time we get to it, we're on completely different shores and continents, and have had enough time to cook up a nice insight soup!

Ciel: Can you tell us a bit about yourself? Just some basics!

Jacuzzi : SOME BASICS? I'm an equal parts enthusiastic and trepidatious person, white-knuckling my way through an identity crisis, casual and nutritious, both artistic and geographic in nature. In the middle of a few big life changes and using something that could be described as an upcycled umbilical cord to lasso in a solidified structure to hold New Ways of Being. Which is hard to do under a new section of the sky, but I kind of operate in extremes anyway so HERE I GO.

Ciel: There you GO! In which ways would you say that being a child of multiple diasporas has influenced your relationship to land and your recent movements across various territories?

J: I was born in Japan to a Japanese/Iranian family and grew up in Los Angeles which has large populations/strong communities of each culture. I would go to Japan fairly regularly until around age 13, and while I felt a lot of resonance and within-ness to Japanese culture I was also very aware that it was rare for that to be recognized externally and the echo wasn't usually returned. I didn't really mind because ya can't miss what ya don't know.

On the other hand, having a lot more regular proximity to my Iranian extended family in Los Angeles, I experienced a lot of over-the-table othering. I think as a younger person I didn't realize that wasn't how it had to be—maybe I found it oddly comforting also that there was no effort made to conceal opinions. There is a lot of decorum to Japanese social choreography that younger me found exhausting.

I attended Muslim school on Saturdays to learn Farsi—which was confusing because my non-religious parents also made the decision to send me to a Lutheran Christian school from kindergarten to 7th grade. I think that in their minds they were making a decision to assimilate me into the dominant culture but my lived experience was very...how do you say filled with consistent reminders from various authority figures of my eventual assured relocation to hell as a non-believer.

I think that subjective baby terror of receiving a verbal brochure to fire and brimstone along with my midday snack really implanted a deep sense of existentially fragrant non-belonging in most community spaces that serves as the bone broth of my inbetweener syndrome.

AND ALL OF THAT IS TO SAY THAT I DON'T REALLY HAVE THE COMFORTING EXHALE OF BELONGING THAT I THINK A LOT OF PEOPLE WOULD TRADITIONALLY FEEL WHEN AT "HOME."



I think a certain amount of discomfort is the cool side of the pillow for me. And in my recent travels I find myself so sympathetic to the confusions that I witnessed my parents navigating as they built their new life in the states. Having an emotional understanding of that is obviously different than having an intellectual understanding of it and that is something I've been integrating into the way that I organize my perception of our immigration story.

Ciel: How do you manage to stay grounded when you're feeling uprooted? What are some practices that help you reconnect?

Jacuzzi: I'm remodeling this corner of my mental house lately, after lubricating the maybe-familiar-to-you *Upheaval Incinerator 6000 Machine*. I think accustoming myself to the sting of loss is helping lately. I'm practicing the paradox of integrating that void/absence into my reasons to remain hopeful. I find it anchoring to submerge myself into the jacuzzi of private self-documentation, although being in a place where I am practicing a new language and communicating with a lot of non-English speakers I already have a lot of cerebral privacy and maybe an overflow of unexpressed thoughts. It's probably good for me to shut the fuck up a little bit, but how little bit is a little bit?

Ciel: It's hard to know these days! We're constantly exposed to everyone's inner monologues all the time. Digital-to-analog interfacing is a challenge.

Another struggle of living in the age of technology, where we're able to tune-in to the struggles of our ancestral lands from a distance, can be very complex, emotionally, spiritually and in the immediate sense of urgency that shapes our very actions. The impact of this real-time digital experience is something of an uncharted ocean we're still learning how to navigate! What are some reflections that you've had in this context that you're up for sharing?

J: I've been thinking about this one a lot because of what's happening in Iran—I'm aware that I'm having an emotional reaction that I don't necessarily understand, and it's hard I think for anyone following the news to know how to process the uncharted-ness of the massive sea change the populace is pushing through.

Iranian culture is something I never really got to participate in through a lens of joy or a sense of belonging so there is a spectator dynamic in the way that I interact with the culture anyway but sometimes it feels asinine for me to be doing anything while absorbing all the bloody news. I feel I need 3 extra brains to process it all. I wish my Farsi was way way way better. I'm digging up old brain cells trying to sound out a dusty poster of the alphabet in the back of my mind and stitch together tiny particles of pixels while trying to absorb as much as I can from what makes its way out of the country.

I think I feel a lot of hope that one day *SOON???* I could go to a free Iran. I feel a lot of guilt about not making an effort to learn the language.

I FEEL A LOT OF PRIDE,
I FEEL A LOT OF PAIN,
I FEEL A LOT OF INVALIDITY IN HOW
BIG MY EMOTIONS ARE,
I FEEL A BIG FIRE TO WITNESS,
I FEEL A LOT OF CONFUSION ABOUT
WHERE TO PLACE MY FEELINGS AND HOW
TO PROCESS THEM IN A WAY THAT IS
USEFUL BEYOND MY SINGULAR EXISTENCE.

C: Are there any forms of community support and/or care that you feel are important to you to be able to feel emboldened and embodied through the manifold process of existing in the cultural intersections of being queer elsewhere?

J: I'm not sure what to say in terms of community support because of all the aforementioned inbetween self-identity confusion, but when I was in Berlin at the end of September I went to a solidarity rally for the revolution and I had never been around so many other weird queer Iranians before. Watching how they helped each other pass through a whole spectrum of grief, guilt, purging, channeling, it was a really beautiful thing for me to peer into from my raised eyebrows perspective.

I think a personally decontextualized experience of witnessing *NEW WAYS OF BEING* that still embodies the ancestral data and experience of tradition was a really nutritious energetic vision for me to bathe in during a time of reconnecting with the world. There was such a strong queer/freak presence that I didn't have a chance to see existing alongside the Iranian culture I had access to growling up. I still feel a resonance with Iran in my own way, a familiar Frankenstein puzzle choreography for most hybrid babies I'm sure. I feel it in the stories I grew up with, the presence of garlic and lime and greens in my flavor palate. I have been wanting to go on my own for years. Do me a deep adventure, satiate my curiosity, meet the hypothetical piñata of family connection lacking on both sides of my lineage.

I feel a strong pull in this way especially because I spent the last four years so deeply entrenched in my Japanese heritage, which to open another door of this self indulgent mental bubble bath stream of consciousness over share session was a decision I made out of realizing that yes I talk so much shit about the USA and "western" culture, but like hey, if I'm not putting any energy into honoring or actively participating in any of the other cultural influences that are available to me, that shaped me, I'm just like a bird on a telephone line dropping little poops talking shit and that's not really the depth of engagement or integrity or homemade energy that I want to move through the world with.

Ciel: This is a helpful attitude to take I think! Reconnection is a part of it, and being able to witness and craft the space for people to go through their processes is another. Visibly seeing others who understand the ancestral pull and dissonance of being in times of crisis can be liberating also, so I am glad you had that community "AHA!" moment of recognition.



Jacuzzi: I am just having a lot of feelings as I sit here in my little ant farm of mental snow shoveling. I think in terms of community care, it's helpful for me to remember that there are many different operating softwares for language-emotional technology that needs to be in sync with mine to have the words land effectively on the other side.



REMEMBERING THAT SOME PEOPLE WILL UNDERSTAND ME AND THAT THERE ARE MANY TYPES OF COMMUNICATION, AND NOT HAVING AN INSTINCTUAL EASE WITH ONE DOESN'T MEAN I AM DOOMED TO A LIFE OF BEING BEHIND FROSTED GLASS.

CHAPTER 4



PATIENCE

"PETTINESS IS HIERARCHY"

I passed through the UK briefly in my travels, but quickly found myself worn out on the cold humid shore and having to isolate after having had contact with someone who tested positive for covid. Fortunately I was spared but, as I am immune compromised, I decided to take things with caution. The general attitude now in most countries, but especially in the USA, Germany and UK, is one of casual disregard for the risks at hand, and I've found that most people who still care to take precautions are young queer people. Maybe it's that we're already all too aware of how fragile and precious life can be, but regardless we have always had to take care of each other and make compromises for the continued wellbeing of our communities.

Being no stranger to isolation in the soggy islands, like most of my generational cohorts, I spent some time taking care of myself, recovering my strength, and hanging out online. For years I've been active on various online political discourse servers, and so I reached out to Mo, who happens to run one such space. I had appreciated chatting with Mo briefly here and there in the past, and this time it led to a long, stellar conversation! As someone who spends a lot of time talking to people from all sorts of backgrounds, and with a wide range of first-hand experiences on the physical and digital realm, I knew Mo's perspectives would reach some areas that speak to the needs of many who are rarely in the spotlight of mainstream activist movements. It was a chaotic interview spanning several conversations and days as we both got very easily sidetracked, but I came out of the experience with a new online friend and a lot of knowledge I am happy to share here now.



Ciel: Alright, can you please introduce yourself first?
 Mo: Hi!! I'm Mo, I'm a writer- I was born in the USA, and I currently live in England. I love politics and sci-fi and I struggle with my mental health. I'm mixed white/middle eastern and I'm transmasculine. That's a good start.

C: Do you wanna talk about the kind of challenges you've encountered?

Mo: Well it's interesting because y'know, apart from the obvious culture shock, it's not been as difficult as it would have been for other people [legally]... except for the racism and xenophobia, where people assume I'm from the Middle East, so they sometimes even say stuff about me in English like I can't understand them.

C: Do people make those assumptions a lot?

Mo: More so now that I've transitioned to a man cause I'm much hairier, which makes me a lot less white passing.

C: You pass more as a man but not as the white man that they approve of. England's islamophobia seems to be getting worse the past few years too.

Mo: Also transphobia— saw a person openly wearing a transphobic symbol in the ER!

C: Gotta say, having a huge transphobe for PM definitely emboldens people in dangerous ways. The intersection of islamophobia and transphobia seems like a delicate experience

Mo: Yes basically people assume I'm your average muslim man (I'm agnostic) and thus sexist and queerphobic and it's like uhhh whaaat? It's very weird to be vulnerable but seen as a threat.

C: How do you navigate those assumptions? It seems like a challenging situation to balance.

Mo: Well mainly I sort of just choose whether to hide or broadcast my identity, so like when I meet people and if after a conversation I decide they are worth knowing in some sort of longer term I'm just like here's a one paragraph blurb of my identity- It can seem a bit extra, but it's a good way to explain my situation, and I try to couch it in humor so that it doesn't seem antagonistic.

C: That's a pretty good approach, I think a lot of trans bipoc can relate to that. You get to decide when to be vulnerable and when to be threatening. Being perceived as threatening can be a double edged sword in this society.

Mo: For sure, sometimes you get people saying really problematic shit thinking you're one of them and you have to decide between safety and ethics — that's always fun.

Mo: I also try to consume as ethically as I can even though there's no such thing, and I'm not as good as many who are more diligent. I tend to think of marginalization as a general experience with identities that are the "flavors" and some share more qualities than others.

C: Absolutely. The more of a broad range of people's takes are heard, the more I feel like the range of our voices is accounted for. Which brings me to my next question: When it comes to your day to day needs regarding access and care, what would you say are the things that you feel people are lacking in that would make existing easier for you?

Mo: I THINK EMPATHY AND PATIENCE ARE MISSING IN GENERAL, EVEN MORE SO FOR MARGINALIZED PEOPLE, BUT IN THE CASE OF PEOPLE THAT YOU THINK OF AS DANGEROUS?

YEAH.
THERE'S NEVER ANY OF THAT EXTENDED AT ALL. THERE'S NEVER A BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT, AND I UNDERSTAND WHY BUT IT'S VERY TIRING.

THE OTHER IS ALSO A BETTER MEDICAL SYSTEM.



C: We really do need better access to healthcare, and I completely agree with what you brought up about patience and empathy. I feel that communities often fail to account for themselves, and will scapegoat individuals who don't fit their standards.

Mo: It comes back to my interpretation of intersectionality as multi-minority vs mono-minority.

C: Would you be able to expand on that?

Mo: Ok, so obviously we talk about people as privileged or marginalized, and intersectionality is also trying to take into account the whole depth of the spectrum, but we haven't really started to develop language for it yet, so with things like a straight cis white woman vs even just a straight cis black woman, there's a difference of experience. That's where multi and mono come in or operate in a similar capacity, where they focus only on one aspect of marginalization—in the case of the cishet white woman it leads to white feminism, feminism without intersectionality, because she is a mono-minority. Yes, she's marginalized, but because it's on only one axis she doesn't fully understand the bigger picture. It's also how you get people like hoteps (who are basically the incels of the black community) or liberal cis gays, etc. The more marginalizations you have the more you see how the systems of oppression are interconnected. Does that make sense?

C: Yeah that makes perfect sense to me.

Mo: Yay I'm glad I was able to explain it coherently! It's nothing new to intersectionality, it's just a different angle than we normally come at when we talk about it. I also see some people as blends (such as mixed race, or bi, or migrants) as people who can bridge communities in a way unique to them, and thus we need to platform their voices in relation to such issues.

C: It's a pretty accessible way of explaining it. And I would agree that being cognizant of our ability to bridge issues and being open to doing the educational/emotional/relational labor is a super important point too. I also really do think that ableism isn't being treated with nearly enough weight in most community spaces, which is a shame because there are so many people who end up being alienated and left out of our movements who have incredibly valuable insights and ideas of liberation that absolutely every marginalized and oppressed person would benefit from.

C: There's so many ways in which they could get creative and accommodate for that.

Mo: Yep yep yep. I've been a carer because my mom has autoimmune issues, but I have ADHD and PTSD so my parents have also had to look after me in my bad moments. We don't have mental health support that good here in England, and I've also personally been screwed over by medical issues cause I'm trans and ND [neurodivergent], so it's a topic that is very close and personal to me—my mom pointed out to me that all my work so far is around critiquing the medical system.

C: Would you like to tell me a bit more about the game you mentioned you were writing?

Mo: So basically the game takes place in a tech repair shop in the near future, but instead of repairing phones or computers, you repair implants and prosthetics, and the game highlights how warranties, patents, copyright, and all that sort of stuff punishes disabled people. Also insurance is shitty.

C: That's a damn good concept, I'm intrigued! I'd love to know more about the ways in which you are using it to analyze the failings of the medical system, and what you would say are important things that need to be addressed.

Mo: Well I am a huge fan of sci-fi and really love when sci-fi gets political. I also try and learn from the left wing side of different communities, and this kinda all started when I read a tweet where someone said that transhumanism is ableist because it fully ignores disabled people's existence and only focuses on 'enhancing' abled body people, and when it does deal with disability it's often to 'fix' or 'cure' it, and so that sat in my noggin for a while, and I was like

**"WHAT WOULD A TRANSHUMANIST
NARRATIVE CENTERED AROUND DISABILITY
LOOK LIKE?"**

Most of my writing tries to be educational while also being entertaining because those are my favorite parts of stuff I consume myself. The game kinda fully came into existence as a concept when I started learning about how right to repair affected disabled people.

C: Right to repair?

Mo: So, right to repair is basically the movement against planned obsolescence in technology and also how the tech is basically still owned by the company even though you bought it.

So for example, an article came out a little while back about how ventilators were not being repaired because the company didn't have enough people to repair them, but also wouldn't let non-company people repair them, so a bunch of ventilators that could have been used back when hospitals were overwhelmed with COVID victims just sat there. That's one of the ones that kinda politicized me on it, along with a vtuber who is disabled talking about how they will repair things until they stop producing parts and then you have to buy the newest model, even though without the oxygen condenser she can't really go anywhere, so it's like basically having to pay to move around.

Anyway I collected a bunch of complaints I've read and heard, and sort of imagined them in the near future. I got a few other writers on board, one who themselves has a handful of health issues, and we've decided to write it together so that as you play you learn a little bit about what it's like to deal with disabilities in the modern world. Obviously, because it's sci-fi some people will choose to ignore the lesson, but hopefully not most!

C: That's absolutely brilliant! I'm looking forward to playing it when it's out for sure. I find it interesting that you brought up transhumanism as a lens through which to analyze modern day social issues. Not a lot of people offline are acquainted with transhumanism, and the very few that I have met who are familiar with it are also trans people. How would you describe it, and its relationship to transness?

Mo: I think in order to like transhumanism you have to already have a more distant relationship to your body. You have to be someone who doesn't view changing your body as inherently 'cheating' OR as 'losing' something, and trans people view our bodies often kinda as meat chassis partially from the dysphoria and so then it's not a stretch to imagine modifying the body however the person might want. Unfortunately transhumanism can't work under any form of hierarchy or social pressures.

I think some disabled people are also into transhumanism except they constantly are pressured into being fixed, and so of course altering your body would not be something you fantasize about if it's something people try and pressure you

As for its onlineness I think transhumanism was introduced as a concept before the internet (not much before mind you) but, like many things, since it's niche it doesn't really have a home outside of the internet.

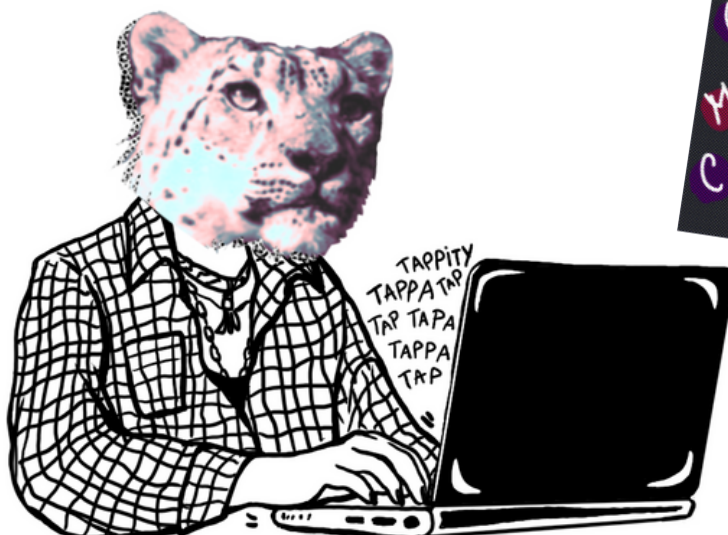
C: True. Online spaces are super important to both the trans and disabled communities, in great part because of the isolation that we face. The server is a good example of that! Would you be down to talk a bit about it?

Mo: Well it's called the "Pettiness is Hierarchy" server, and it has a lot of people with different accessibility needs on there. Most of us in it are ND, disabled, racialized, queer, working class, or a combination. It wasn't designed like that but what happened was that I found this server I liked, which was very similar in breakdown to PiH, a little more than other ones I have been in (I simplified it) and like most leftist servers I have been on never had room for people to talk about their traumas genuinely. I struggled with addiction at the time, and asking for support was triggering some people. So, on the one hand sure, I don't want to trigger people, but on the other hand I don't want to ban people who need help.

C: That's absolutely real.

Mo: Also many of the other leftists spaces were also openly hostile to anarchists—and for no reason! Right, it wasn't like some edgy teen came on, it was me wanting to talk about ideas of alternative systems or meeting in the wild and wanting to bond over our views, so I set up a new server to be open to anarchists and other anti-hierarchy leftists because I found that leftist spaces often were not as welcoming as they claimed. Many anarchist spaces online were very inaccessible because they were either very argumentative or they were super hard on theory, so when I set up the server I knew a bunch of things I didn't like and wanted to create ways those things were less likely to happen. There were teething problems at first of course, but as things went on we addressed issues immediately and integrated the new stuff into the system.

WHAT HAPPENED WAS BASICALLY SOMETHING
WHERE ABOVE ALL ELSE WE VALUED
COMMUNICATION AND PATIENCE.



Obviously also sharing knowledge, but that's not unique to our server.

I think simply those two things being valued so highly and creating an environment where people felt like they could say things and not be judged for stumbling over their words meant that lots of people from different walks of life could meet safely and interact.

That, and the fact that people could genuinely complain about shit also meant that people who were ND, and struggled with mental health, as well as just being oppressed, could feel safe to talk without being told they were talking the wrong way or that they were talking too much or about the wrong things, which isn't what people are trying to say directly, but it's often how it ends up feeling in many spaces.

C: That's rad. Honestly it's refreshing to encounter spaces that are free of judgment where we can just support each other through the rough times, and help each other grow to be better, kinder, and healthier. Which you would hope would be more of a common goal considering the kind of stuff we deal with from the profoundly judgmental and punitive approaches of mainstream white cis capital society.

Mo: **WE DESPERATELY NEED REAL,
PALPABLE EMPATHY!**





"LISTEN TO PEOPLE, ASK, AND DO
SOMETHING! WHAT ARE YOU GONNA DO
INSTEAD OF JUST HOLDING THE SITUATION?"

Back in Berlin now, I am packing up my life once again and evaluating the experiences I've had, the work that I have done here. Usually when I have been in this process in the past, I have been filled with anxiety, fear, or disappointment. I've done this more times than I ever imagined I would, leaving behind a life in a space, but this time somehow feels different. I am moving towards something I always longed for; I am returning home, and I am filled with gratitude for the experiences and people I have encountered here. I will take this life within me.

There's a voice in the background that sings to me and gives me courage like no other. It's my bro's voice coming out of the speaker, and if there's someone whose voice I would love to broadcast, it's theirs. Consuelo is a multitudinal, transdimensional musician, and I was blessed to share my lockdown with them. Countless hours we spent talking about everything, forging a kinship that transcends time and distance. I have seen the way in which they move about the world evolve over the years, and have shared their struggles in a way that made me reframe everything I had learned about anti-racist work. They're incredibly real and radiating a magic that allows them to transform through their words, so I beckoned them to come over for an in-depth late night interview that fit our nocturnal schedules.

Ciel: Alright, you're Consuelo.

Consuelo: I'm Consuelo.

I am worldwide. And I am a prophet of spiritual gangstery...

And what being queer means to me is very related to also what I say about being a prophet and spiritual gangstery and also being worldwide. Like for me, being queer is an embodiment of everything that is forbidden or tossed aside.

[Normativity]... creates a certain illusion of what humanity is and what it's not, but when one is queer, it's like... In your own body, in your own birth—and it's not something that no one can do about being queer—you embody the margins.

Your own body is a voice of itself, against so much silence.

BUT EVEN THOUGH THERE ARE SO MANY EFFORTS TO SILENCE QUEER BODIES, THEY ARE SO LOUD, YOU KNOW? IN EVERY ASPECT.

So that's literally what spiritual gangstery is to me. And that's who I am.

Ciel: You've talked before about the isolation of being black and queer in a relatively small town. What were some of the most common attitudes you had to deal with?

And what did you do to cope with all the nonsense?

Consuelo: I've lived in lots of different small towns, growing up, but the one that I remember the most is the one that I was between 10 and 17. That is the one that I remember the most.

And in that place, we were the only black people... And I feel like we were even the only black people that they had ever seen in their life. I think we caught them off guard, so they didn't even get to develop the classic defense mechanisms of indirect or direct violence against us. It was more like confusion, you know? They were confused.

Ciel: Ignorance can be confusing!

Consuelo: Ye, for example here's a typical thing—I would wear braids one day, the next day I would not have the braids or like box braids, you know, like the hair is longer, whatever. And the next day I would have the box braids that were going the other way around, so I would have short hair and then long hair.

And they were like, "oh my God, how did your hair grow so long and so little?" These are not classic aggressions or nothing like that. But at the same time, it made me feel very alone, because it was like, you don't even understand my hair? I don't think that you can even understand the complexities of this kid right here.

I was also met with a lot of "positive" discrimination, because I was a very diligent kid and I was very athletic and blah, blah, blah. And I did things very well, so people were like "oh my God, look at this kid! They're doing things so right!" Why were they so shocked that I do things well? So as much as they were trying to integrate me, it was making me feel a bit weird.

I feel like I grew towards the inside because yeah, I could not really let myself be with even my close friends and stuff, because there would be things that they couldn't really understand, or with my family because of this huge traumatic blockage because they just come from a fucking war in Rwanda.

Ciel: It's really difficult to connect with parents when they've just come from profound trauma.

Consuelo: Yea. Mama didn't even want to connect about who she is.

She was like, not in denial, but you know, avoidant.

Ciel: So you grow inward because you had no way to reach out... What kept you grounded in yourself?

Consuelo: Dissociation. Literally. I realized actually, in my early 20s, that I grew up dissociated most of the time. I don't have a lot of memories of my childhood or my teenage years or nothing like that. And it's because most of the time I feel like my body was shutting down because it was like, *actually, when you process it, you're going to suffer a lot. So just don't, bro. Just don't.. You know, go daydream, play around, go play football, don't think about yourself...*

I EVEN DISSOCIATED FROM THE FACT THAT I WAS TRANS AND QUEER. AND I KNOW SINCE... ALWAYS.

SINCE ALWAYS.

Ciel: That's one of those things that you always know, deep down, but then you're like, well, there's nothing I can do about this! So I'm just going to... do nothing.

Until you realize, oh wait... This is a thing I can't ignore anymore.

Consuelo: Exactly! Until I had a huge crush on a girl and then, I was like, OH okay, this is ooohhhh... oh. Oh, no, this is real.

Ciel: Oh yea, that's real. You're speaking to my heart.

Consuelo: Yeah. By then I was like 17 or something and I was not grounded in myself at all. I wrote a whole lot later, but I was a very dissociated kid. Then at some point there was something that did help: I played piano.

At first I was not connecting much with it, but then I became obsessed with Lady Gaga, (...) it made me feel illusioned with playing piano and writing songs and blah, blah, blah. So being connected with the music helped. I started writing raps when I was like 13 or whatever, you know, I was actually uploading on MySpace.

Ciel: Oh, hell yeah. You were in it from the beginning.

Consuelo: Yea, and at some point, it got me to ground myself in myself and start really developing consciousness. It was music that did that. Thanks Gaga.

Ciel: Every time I listen to Lady Gaga, now I think of you. But, honestly, Lady Gaga was a big revelation for a lot of kids of our generation. Especially when you weren't surrounded by other queer people.

Consuelo: My mind, at least, instantly expanded. I was like...ART. Ooohh art is...oh my god wtf I could also make art! You know? The artistry of it was incredible, and I feel like she's talking to me. Such great songwriting and art direction that she herself carried that also shaped the way that I see creation.

Ciel: It expanded your horizons and what you have been surrounded by.

Consuelo: Yeah. And she also introduced me to the occult because I was watching "Is Lady Gaga Illuminati" type of videos on YouTube so in more than one way she influenced my spiritual path.



Ciel: So then through that music became a way of connecting to others?

Consuelo: To me, mostly, it didn't connect me to anyone else really until... What could I say? 2017, when I started working in a security company. [...] I met my guy there, Marcelo. To this day, we're still making music together—he's in Madrid. We started working together, we entered at the same time. One day we were coming out of the training and he was like, "yo, sick shoes." I had some Jordans on, I think. We talked together, walking and waiting for the train. One day he was like, "yo, do you make music or something? You look like a rapper." And I'm like, yeah, yeah, yeah, whatever. So he asked "yo, do you know how I can start? Because I would like to start making music". And at that point, I wasn't making anything, but I had the cracks for the programs to do stuff with. So I told him to give me a USB and the next day he brought it. And one week after he came with a fucking beat and he was like, "listen, listen." I listened and the words started flowing. Since then I started really connecting with people through music, but actually before like, I had never really done that...

Ok well, yeah, I did Heterofobia and all of that before then, but I didn't really take it seriously. It was more like a joke, you know, I was playing around.

Ciel: Oh, but it was good though. There were some good tracks there too!

Consuelo: Yeah you're right... Actually, that was a legendary moment. We should be in music history in Spain, honestly. You know, actually we traveled in Spain and everything, they took us to places to sing. They paid us. We were on the radio! Yeah. National radio! Actually, you know what? It was a moment. I must say, Heterofobia did something for me.

So yeah, Heterofobia first, but then we split up and then I didn't do nothing for some time, and then I met this guy, and he kind of like ignited my fires again, you know— Ok wait that sounds so bad... He ignited my fires, hahaha. The creative juices started flowing! They started flowing again. They were flowing. A waterfall.

Back then, when I was in Heterofobia, I went by Kino Kinoa, and when I went solo, I went for Consuelo. And then I became Consuelo.

Ciel: Then you embodied Consuelo.

Consuelo: And then I became Consuelo Worldwide.

Ciel: Mr. Worldwide.

Consuelo: Exactly. That's me. Ok, Pitbull and me.

Ciel: Let's just continue on talking about your music. Your music conveys a lot of feelings that lots of people don't like to talk about when it comes to being marginalized. Like, for example, hopelessness, disillusionment, mistrust, apathy, anger, criminality, entrapment, etc. But it also carries a sense of defiance, humor, and power to overcome and triumph in spite of it. Why would you say that there's so much fear and stigma around talking about these topics, even amongst people with similar experiences?

Consuelo: Yeah. Oh. Well, on one side is, like, if you really do speak about it and people listen to you, you're going to end up dead. And history has proven that time and time again. So fear of death makes a lot of sense. Yeah. Even if it's conscious or unconscious.

On the other side, I also feel like there's not so many voices out there that will talk about it. Especially because if you actually want to dedicate time and effort to something, a lot of our existences cannot afford to give time and effort to something that is not going to give you money. You know what I mean? So it's like, if you want to go in a creative route and you want to make money out of it, there are some things you just don't touch cuz there's no money in it and we all have to survive somehow.

Nowadays it's starting to be a bit different, and I've seen in some places like here Berlin it's also different. People hustle in a way with the institutions and they can create political work that they can justify financially. But it's not always like that, and also you have to have the resources to do all of that. Most of the time, if you want to follow a creative route and you want to give time and effort to music, paint, whatever... You're going to do it in a way that is going to be more, well, not necessarily commercial, but it's gotta be lucrative.

The way that I feel that I'm building my artistic career, aside from my own setbacks and stuff, I feel it's a very slow path; it builds up slowly when you're being absolutely real, and it will reach a point where I know that I can live off it, but until I reach that point, I have to do so many other things to support myself. And I have... so I do understand why.

Like, if I had chosen to sing about something else all these years, or to do something more commercial or whatever, maybe I would be another point right now. But I didn't choose to do that because my music and my art means what it means to me, and that's why I'm called Consuelo, you know? If I don't do that with my music I feel like I'm just surrendering myself to the machine again.

AUTHENTICITY TAKES RESOURCES OR COURAGE, USUALLY BOTH.

And I'm a spiritual guy, so I do it, but I do understand all the people who do something else too, or they decide to not do it. I would like to hear more people speak up. I feel like the people that do get attention are, like, very watered-down so it's easier to digest. I'm not comparing myself at all but let's take for example, Kendrick Lamar that talks about very heavy issues... but still he's very watered-down, that's why he's so popular. He's safe. You know what I mean? Why do you think they got Tupac? (...) people were listening and he was being very raw about shit, he was very being real. Listen to Brenda's Got a Baby, you know what I mean? I don't see Kendrick doing something like that. If you do go to that place and you say things that actually are going to shake people out of their state, those in power, they're going to come for you. And this is not conspiracies or shit. *It goes like that, everyone dies when people start listening to them and they're saying something heavy. It definitely takes courage.*

Ciel: What do you think has helped you inspire you to transcend and overcome that fear?

Consuelo: Uh, my mama. Uh-huh. Original spiritual gangsta. That's the OSC. Oh my God. Sometimes I feel like, yeah, at the end of the day, it's also true that my music goes ahead of me most of the time in my own conscious process of things. So, sometimes, I listen to my music years later and I say, damn, fucking prophet! For real, for real. I feel like there's attitudes that I had in my music that didn't correlate to the immediate reality, to my day-to-day life or my present circumstances when I write it. It didn't, and now it does more. Like, I'm manifesting it.

I feel like the moment in which I did the shifting and started looking at myself and my life and existence and reality, and started to feel the difference, it was in a moment in which I was thinking about my mom. Time is a circle, she was always there. Yeah. Hello, mom!

Ciel: Shout out to Claudine!

Consuelo: Shout out to Claudine the OSC! You know, momma was... Momma is doing the best she could. That takes courage too, you know? She went through a lot, so I can too.

Ciel: What are some things that you've experienced recently that have helped empower you?

Ciel: What are some things that you've experienced recently that have helped empower you?

Consuelo: Hmm. Hmm. The 2020 quarantine. Yeah, no. The 2020 quarantine. Locked down. Locked out. Not having to go to work, but still getting money. I feel like, for the first time in, I think, in my whole life, I could wake up and breathe, ironically. I was in my fucking wagon and I didn't have to put up a fucking mask because I don't have to go no fucking where. It was a blessing.

Ciel: Oh yessss! We were living together in the woods then, and to be fair, we kind of had it all, even though we had nothing. We all had each other's backs.

Consuelo: We had it all. I don't have to go no fucking where. I could wake up and if I wanted to spend the next two weeks there laying down and crying, I would spend the next two weeks laying down and crying. That's what I did. And it felt like shit, but it also felt amazing, you know what I mean? Because I feel like I was processing my whole life, you know? For the first time, I felt like I was looking at my life and processing and being like, oh, wait, wait, oh.

Ciel: You actually had the time to yourself.

Consuelo: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, exactly. I mean, that just really speaks to the importance of having time and space and to not always have to be hustling. **LABOR WAS FUCKING SUCKING MY LIFE AWAY. YOU KNOW, LIFE FORCE EXTRACTION. THIS IS SOME DARK WITCHCRAFT.**

Ciel: Capitalism is a curse that disempowers people!

Consuelo: Capitalism IS a curse! It's like spiritually realizing that there's this tangled web, and you start pulling apart the threads, completely unraveling the dark threads of a dark magic done to me, and liberating myself. So yeah that also empowered me a lot!

Also, Testosterone.

Ciel: That's absolutely real. It's an amazing feeling when you get access to your hormones, it's really empowering on a raw physical level! It feels like a blessing!

Consuelo: Forreal, like every day you're like oh fuck hold on shorty where you at hold on I just remembered I am me, right, that's right! It is *literally* a blessing.



Ciel: I do think a lot about the idea of remembering in an etymological way, it's totally a blessing! So it's interesting to frame taking hormones that way, as remembering. Dysphoria can feel like you have been pulled apart, so remembering is like putting yourself back together. You call back to mind all the aspects of yourself that society has made you forget in the tangle of what is being imposed on you.

Consuelo: The threads! Exactly! And when the threads have just had you completely tangled up, it's like you have to recollect all of your parts back to yourself. We been this person, always, and the testosterone is like a part of remembering and I think because you feel it so physically with the hormonal shift you're like *oh shiiiiit*.

Ciel: *Oh shit*, all of these parts of myself are coming back to me, yeah! *I feel confident, I feel good, I feel energy, I feel alive again*, because that part of myself I remembered is getting the physical validation to break free from that mess.

Consuelo: Definitely. I need to pick up more of that stuff soon.

Ciel: Same. So, time, resources, space, hormones... What are other needs that you feel are crucial to have met for your well-being and continued joy?

Consuelo: Yaaaah, well I'm at a point in which I feel that I need to recollect myself, like at this specific moment, so I feel like the thing that I need to develop or create for myself here is safety. Safety in the material sense, whatever you want to call it, housing security.

Ciel: Housing security is a big one.

Consuelo: Could also call it stable income that doesn't require so much labor, or if it does then at least something that is my typa shit, you know? I also need more trust and care. Rest too, I need to stop running so much, but I don't know, I feel like I cannot stop running right now because I will collapse. I don't know, maybe we need another lockdown, but not for covid, for something else. Hopefully the aliens.

Ciel: Oh man, can it please be the aliens, oh my god please.

Consuelo: Forreal... but while the curse is still in place and we wait on the aliens, I feel like I have to keep running. I guess yeah, **THE MOST IMPORTANT THING THAT I NEED RIGHT NOW IS FINANCIAL SECURITY.**

I need to stop again for a minute, and then I can walk again and not have to run so much, but I need to stop for real for real.

Ciel: I think we all need that. Something like Universal Basic Income or Universal Free Housing would be nice. Gotta get that income for everyone in a way that makes sense because things right now aren't making a lot of sense.

Consuelo: I need that. You know I'm a prophet, I don't hope for nothing—I don't need hope, I work on fate, like the legendary Tiffany "New York" Pollard said. Another big shout out, another spiritual gangster haha. But yea it's gonna happen, shit is gonna change. Shit always changing.

Ciel: So do you feel like people's attitudes toward you have changed over time?

Consuelo: Oh 100%.

Ciel: In which ways?

Consuelo: That's fluctuated. Between going here, and there, and that, and here, and you know, you meet with certain things over and over, and some other things died, you know? I feel that when I was younger for example in my town, like with my friends in my town and all these people, I feel like I was always very introverted and very shy and stuff and that has also changed in me, so when I come back it's always different over time. I used to feel kind of invisible but very visible at the same time, like they would see some things and then didn't see some other [...] Now when I come back I feel visible, but I don't feel invisible anymore, and I feel appreciated in some type of way. I feel like the relationship that I have developed with the people there, with the ones that I see that are close to me has been like,

they have kind of transcended their own ignorance about things to understand me, and I don't feel that they have done an active effort, it has been just out of interaction and I feel genuinely seen because it's a small town. I left for Madrid, and then I left for Berlin, and then when I come back they're like "oh you're crazy, you're going places" or whatever, in a good way.

I feel like the general perception of myself always reflects on others, like before I was actively trying to invisibilize myself, wanting that people don't notice my existence, don't notice my presence—unconsciously. Even my clothes, I was very like...not normie, but what my brain considers to be normie hahah. I look at myself in pictures now and I'm like "who's this f*ggot" but back then I was like "yeah I'm normie" when I was wearing, I dunno, a green ass tank shirt with red pants and a hat with the cookie monster or something hahaha. This change definitely also has to do with my gender.

IN THE PAST TWO-THREE YEARS, I HAVE CHANGED A LOT BECAUSE I FEEL MORE AFFIRMED IN MY GENDER AND STUFF SO I FEEL LIKE I'M MORE OPEN; I DON'T FEEL SO SCARED OR SO AVOIDANT OF PRESENCE.

I still don't like to be the center of attention and shit because it feels weird, but I don't feel so many barriers towards interacting with others. I used to feel this invisible barrier between me and groups of people, especially people that I don't know, and it was very present for me in my body, I would feel so much social anxiety. And I feel like it's been dissolving and it's coming from me, it's not so much coming from outside even though I'm very aware of the dangers of outside. That's the thing about the way that I have grown up and how I have developed my consciousness—I am very aware of danger. That's what I'm dissociating from. That's what I'm so aware of. That's why I'm distrustful. But now I have the strength to explore the other side of things and I know I don't have to be distrustful. I can trust people now. If people fuck up then I say goodbye. I don't ghost no more, I wait for things to happen before I pass judgment. I try to see things through.

Ciel: What would you like to see communities do differently to protect and power and care for queer migrant youth? And especially in black trans kids.

Consuelo: I don't know, communities gotta figure out ways of building trust that are real. There's a lot of theoretical community but no real efforts to build trust and that's a problem.

PEOPLE DON'T HAVE CLOSENESS, SO
THEY DON'T REALLY SEE US, JUST AS A
STATISTIC OR WHAT WE REPRESENT.

COMMUNITY HAS TO DO THINGS
TOGETHER TO SOLVE NEEDS.

OR LIKE TRY TO APPROACH
NEEDS IN A TANGIBLE WAY.

I feel, in my own experience with communities, that they have a very theoretical approach to things. It's like "this should be like this, in this, because we are that" And it's like...no. That's not how that works! What are you doing to be this and that? You know what I mean? Actually do things. Materialize them, because I feel like everything is very nice and beautiful on paper and saying there's no effort made to provide. There's actions that are lacking. I'm not saying actions as in like go fucking demonstration or go burn something, I'm saying more as in like, yo if you come across, for example like a black trans kid or if a black trans person comes into a situation and they need help from you, don't wait until it's a crisis. Listen to people, ask, and do something! What are you gonna do instead of just holding the situation? How are you gonna try to move this person toward tangible change or tangible help, you know what I mean?

Are you gonna provide this person with the meds they need, shelter, care, or whatever kind of need they have? Are you gonna help them get some insurance so they can get them themselves? If this hypothetical kid has problems with their parents, are you actually gonna try to address that and see if that kid can have a safe space within a family or not? Are you gonna do any of that shit? Are you gonna move your ass and do something or just pretend that you're an ally for clout? I feel like, yeah, it's not safe for us in most political spaces. It's not safe for us out here in the spaces that are supposed to be safe for us, you know?

Ciel: What would help ensure our wellbeing beyond a theoretical illusion of safety?

Consuelo: Actually taking care of people's material needs and having the willingness to move your ass to do the things that need doing, because everything can be done if you get together to do something. I used to think shit was just static but, and this is something that Doctor Who has shown me, that if you see some shit to do something about it actually, you know? Yeah, like, okay, what can I do about this?

Ciel: It's true! History can change if people see a problem and work together, yeah. I love that this was a Doctor Who lesson. Being proactive. It's real but we don't see that a lot in real life.



Consuelo: Yeah, exactly. That's something that I have not experienced personally in the political spaces that I have come across in my lifetime. That's something that I do not see happen. The movements I see are organizing this, demonstrating that BULLSHIT! What is that? No, no, no, no, come on. Let's get it together.

If you sit down with someone that has a problem of a certain type, and they tell you what the issue is and what their needs are, be real about it. I'm here to help or we are here to help or there's something that we can do then let's start the motion.

BECAUSE MAYBE I AM NOT ENOUGH,
MAYBE THE FIVE OF US ARE NOT ENOUGH,
MAYBE THIS COMMUNITY IS NOT ENOUGH
BUT THERE'S A GONNA BE AT LEAST A
HUNDRED THAT CAN HELP IN BERLIN,
MAYBE THERE'S A MILLION IN EUROPE,
THERE'S A BILLION EVERYWHERE;

We live in a globalized world, and if you don't do something, you don't want to at this point in life, you know?
be honest with yourself

Ciel: I feel like people need to redefine the meaning of mobilization. When people talk about support and solidarity in activist spaces and they talk about mobilization a lot of the time they are talking about how many people can we get on the street and it's like, no, we don't need people moving on the street, we need people coordinating and talking together and figuring out how to address the root issues or even just the immediate ones.

Consuelo: That's what I'm saying! For example, do you remember this Black Lives Matter march that happened here? I was still working at my old job and I had to pick up the shifts of some colleagues that went to that march and afterwards they were asking me if I went too, and I was like "why would I march with you and you and you? What do you do in your day to day to ensure safety of anyone that's black. I've been with all of you at a bar and there have been situations in which I have felt completely unsafe with you and you have done nothing.

So why are you going now to the fucking Black Lives Matter demonstration when probably the only black friend that you have is right in front of you, having to pick up shifts and you don't do shit, you know?"

Some of these people they were also still working when I had to leave because people were fucking disrespectful to me and it's like what black lives matter? Do I not count? This is bullshit, what are you gonna do?

If you know a black person is getting treated like shit at work, you go to the boss and you say, this is bullshit, this is anti-blackness, we're not working until you do something—that's what is doing something.

That's manifesting action. Will they do that?

Ciel: No, usually not, because that's taking a risk and being an accomplice.

Consuelo: Yeah they won't do shit. People like demonstrations because you can go with a beer, a joint, you know? You have a party in the street. Legal. You know what I mean? You see your friends, you take your shirt off, shout a little, maybe meet some shorty, you know what I mean?

So yeah.





"WE WANT OUR PLEASURE BACK!"

It's cold outside. German winters can be brutal, but it feels a lot like my hometown in this apartment right now, or at least that's just my impression. Probably because it's Papi's house.

Their tropical presence radiates through every corner of the space, with an intensity that matches their stormy laughter. Papi and I share a lot in common beyond being from the same diaspora, in our work, our passions, our joys, our politics—we even have drag children together back in my hometown. It was here, in the babel belly of Berlin, where we met through our activism and struggles as queer trans migrants, and where we share our survival through a different form of reciprocity. One with Ajiaco on the menu.

In the last few days staying with them, we have partied together, laughed together, cried together, cooked together, planned together, and given each other the space to feel ourselves through our transits. Getting to experience so much, even our second puberty, along with someone who is continually questioning and celebrating everything through the lens of decolonial processes has been immensely healing, so I am grateful that they have agreed to let me interview them despite the fact that they have been overwhelmed in their hectic double life as a performer and educator. Because of the nature of their work, I decided to ask them very few questions and just let them take the mic and do what they do best.

Ciel: How do you like to describe yourself, in and out of drag?

Papi: La Papi Patacón is a character that became my life. I am a genderfluid person and define myself as a decolonial being, who deconstructs their thoughts, behaviors and actions through constant self-reflection. Full of love and passion to give and receive, who loves art from spontaneity and authentic creation. In my day to day life, I perform feminized masculinity, and on stage I show a lot of flesh, because I have always liked to be naked.

I really like my body, to show it, to move it, and to paint it. I do a lot of improv, and try to be as funny, uncomfortable, and confrontational as possible. I like to lead people to question themselves, as well as myself. I am always willing to listen to diverse points of view and I like to materialize spaces for migrants, racialized, and queer people. I am very outspoken, I like to make a lot of concessions to open my circles and be able to empathize with different ways of life.

IN MY WORK I LIKE TO GET INVOLVED WITH SPIRITUALITY TO GENERATE COLLECTIVE HEALING SPACES AND TRANSCEND IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPACES, WITH MEDITATION AND RITUALS.

My Drag is a very big part of my life but it is not the only one. My persona begins to evolve when I am with children, as I am an educator. In these contexts I use my name Indigo Caicedo, which facilitates bureaucratic processes, as well as with children or elderly people, since the impact of having a name that means daddy in a Spanish-speaking context with this specific public can be counterproductive, or generate a situation that puts me in danger, as with people who do not want to understand the gender identity in everyday contexts, such as banks, bureaucracies, meetings with authority, and so on.

Ciel: How do these identities respond to one another, and to the realities that you have experienced as a migrant body in transit?

Papi: I live my life mostly as Papi, I like to feel in control of my reality and know that I am creating an impact with my existence. In Germany, saying that my name is Papi has always had a positive impact, also linked to the social stereotype of exoticization of Latin bodies, so it's like a card that I play in my favor.

I play with that stereotype and get what I want, since I have been living in this territory for a long time and I know how to handle their attitudes—based on my privilege of being able to speak German, knowing their ways of thinking from a very young age.

This only works in scenes that brand themselves as diverse, where enforcing my rights becomes a platform to get jobs or opportunities. In the space outside of that bubble, I am still getting feminized and deadnamed, so it's a dystopia of living in different worlds.

My workplace environment and the children at my job have taken my transition and my decisions with curiosity and ignorance, but always eager to learn, open to anything that comes along. I have been very lucky in my jobs, where my gender identity is respected.

In Colombia it was different, since Papi as a name in Spanish sounds like something very out of the ordinary and even more so if it is a person that is perceived feminine. This was the driving force to pick out an alternative name, which would allow me to take care of myself in more conservative or bureaucratic spaces.



IT'S DEFINITELY A BALANCING ACT BETWEEN DIFFERENT IDENTITIES AND DIFFERENT WORLDS.

C: What would you say are some of the ongoing barriers and struggles that you have encountered in your many years in Europe?

P: For me the biggest barriers are the constant racism and xenophobia. People in Germany don't take active responsibility over their conservative and Nazi past and present. They still apply many very nationalistic laws, behaviors and systems, in which only some people have the possibility to have a life in dignity

GUILT IS THE OVERARCHING FEELING THAT ABOUNDS IN THIS TERRITORY, WHICH DOES NOT ALLOW PEOPLE TO OPEN THEIR EYES TO REALIZE THAT THEY ARE GENERATING AN INTERNATIONAL GAP OF INEQUALITY, IN THEIR TERRITORIES AND BEYOND.



C: Can you expand a little bit more on that? Germany does a lot to hide its colonial past, so can you talk a bit more about its colonial present?

P: They steal absolutely everything that does not belong to them, and take away the identity of the people who have been fighting and resisting for decades. They sustain social inequality at a systemic and corporate level, and it infuses the mentality of people. It really makes me very angry, but that's why I see myself in a position to continue here, because I have all the tools to take advantage of this situation, in addition to generating monetary reparations to southern territories. I want to change laws, to fight alongside my fellow migrants and racialized people, who have been creating a history of resistance in this whitewashed and unjust system.

Germany made me understand what it means to damage the soul of the people, through the coldness of not feeling from the heart and soul, ignoring their own body, history, roots, and emotions.

HERE, FLAVOR DOES NOT REALLY EXIST, SO WE HAVE TO CREATE IT OURSELVES.

C: You're right about that, I commend you honestly for your resilience. Something that I have noticed a lot is how little local Germans like to interact with us in most places. Our communities tend to be quite isolated from the local scene, and yet it's often those in the margins that create new cultural interest and organize a lot of events and parties that everyone wants to engage with. Why do you think that is? And why is it so difficult for first generation queer migrants, especially young ones like us, to feel safe around local europeans?

P: The truth is that I do believe that it is a question of possibilities and capabilities. I have been living here for so long that I recognize that eventually I will be part of the German social scene. My purpose with that is to create opportunities for us, with fair wages, decent jobs, as well as pleasure and lots of fun. That's my fight, that's why I'm still here.

I BELIEVE IN THE CHANGE AND TRANSFORMATION OF THIS ELITIST SYSTEM, PLUNDERING THE PREDETERMINED STRUCTURES.

OUR UNITY AND TOGETHERNESS WILL MAKE THE CHANGE AND THE IMPACT, THAT'S WHY WE ARE WHERE WE ARE.

But it is definitely a privilege, lots of other queers can't take on the responsibility of doing all the political and bureaucratic work involved because they need to pay for basic things, like food, rent, and health. Really, most migrant queers are in very precarious situations here, we must recognize that it is not easy and even less if you are first generation and you don't know many people. It takes a long time to build a sense of stability, and the odds are stacked against you by the system a lot of the time.

C: We usually end up having to help each other with performing basic survival tasks or navigating the systems. Doesn't help that German is not a very accessible language grammatically.

P: Yeah, even if you know people here, they're usually other migrants, and there are few who speak German. Language is one of the biggest barriers. Because no matter how well you speak, you will always get screwed, I say this from my own experience. Everything else derives from that possibility, to talk and communicate with people who don't even want to listen to you. If you do speak it, you get tired too because you end up being a medium and while things get structured and you find a group with whom you can work in collective ways and the like, and with no money involved...like, *I'm just one guy dealing with all that, it's already tiring!*

Still, we keep motivating each other and ourselves, so far, we have come out here to we keep fighting for a more dignified life and more social justice.

THAT'S WHY TAKING BREAKS IS SO IMPORTANT, SO WE CAN MAKE THE SUPPORT NETWORK SUSTAINABLE AND LOVING.

C: Rest is important, it needs to be honored! What do you feel are some of the most important things that any individual person or organization can do to support your needs?

P: I believe that we are all products of society. That means that we have to start from the fact that we are ignorant and that we are learning something different every day and that there is always the possibility to change thoughts and actions. So educating ourselves and learning to actively listen is very important to me, in order to create social and political change.

I WANT EVERYONE TO BE A LISTENER AND LISTEN TO OTHERS. I THINK EVERYONE SHOULD TAKE PART IN ANTI-RACIST WORKSHOPS TO REFLECT ON THEIR ACTIONS.

I want to be paid for my work fairly, and I want representation of different ways of life in work teams. I want committed and noble collectives to know that the work we are doing is not only for us as individuals, but for and by all the queers of the world. We are all connected, we are one but living different realities, so taking charge of oneself is very important to me.

Besides having spaces for breaks and reflection of the work that is being done, to question and pause the over-productivity, to give way to be and exist from a position of calm. We know that this is something which can only be achieved with monetary resources too...so pay all these queers for their experiences and knowledge! White people and white led organizations need to give back the generational wealth that has been historically stolen, and give back the opportunities that have been taken away. We want our pleasure back!

C: More pleasure, less stress! You know, your art reflects a lot of queer joy and gender euphoria! Can you talk about what that looks like for you? How do you think we can further promote and protect these things in our communities?

P: I LOVE TO WORK FROM PLEASURE. FOR ME, TO RESIST IS TO BE ABLE TO LIVE AND EXIST WITH DIGNITY. TO VALUE OUR PATH AND THE STEPS WE HAVE TAKEN, JUST LIKE OUR QUEER ANCESTORS. IT IS TO HONOR OUR EXISTENCE, TO BE GRATEFUL.

I think that if we learn to value ourselves, we will take the place that we deserve and that is not recognized, but belongs to us. To work from the authenticity and responsibility of existing. Create from the heart, to transform, with a conscious purpose. This is the reason why I started to incorporate meditations in my Drag work, because this way I can get queer people to connect to their feelings, their bodies and imaginations, to create an intimate moment to heal and make collective consciousness, that we exist and we are worth it. So I think this is what I want to continue doing, honoring our shared paths and reflecting on our art in order to work from authenticity. Recognizing the work of the people who inspire and motivate us. So we can vibrate in our euphoria and recognize our existence, pain, and transformation.

C: Yessss!! I love you, I love the love you put into the work you do, and I am so grateful to collaborate with you always! Bless our queer ancestors, past present and future!

P: *QUE VIVAN LAS MARIKASI!*



"LOVE IS A BIG PRACTICE THAT HAS REALLY
HELPED AND CONTINUALLY HELPS ME. "

On the final stretch of my journey, on the way back to my ancestral territory, I passed through Madrid. Traveling around on a budget means making lots of unexpected stops and having to wing it. It's not the safest but it's what I know how to do, and I am fortunate to have a small enclave of queer kin in this city. The world is huge and miniscule at the same time, and among the unexpected encounters I ended up having dinner at the La Panda squat with Razira, her sisters, and more-than-human companions. We had met by chance in Berlin over a year prior, where we shared magic through our struggles, cultivating a garden, tattooing, and trying to heal amidst the global panic. Last I'd heard they were headed to Granada at the tail end of that rainy summer, and I lost contact due to technological challenges, but thought of them often. I had made a drawing of her which she never got to see finished, so when I heard through a dear friend that they were resisting in the same city I happened to be passing through, the need to reconnect and touch base took over me, and we made a date.

Razira is brimming with inner peace. It's cold and the electricity has been cut, so we're huddled with the dogs and each other, drinking hot Agua de apáñela con Limón, and despite the impending threat of eviction lingering like a ghost in the room, we are at ease. I gave her a print of the drawing, she gave me a shell bracelet for my altar. Her smile lights the room, and in this precious moment of happenstance and vulnerability, we take our time.

Ciel: Can you describe yourself in your own self-perception? How do you perceive yourself and your sense of identity?

Razira: Well I'm a trans Albanian gypsy princess, for now living my experience with empty hands, but still full of luck! As a young trans woman, I still have a long way to go, but trying to not follow anyone's steps and following my dreams, with my identity mutating constantly. Otherwise, I'd get bored of myself, and everyday that's more room to be a better version of yourself, or clumsy, or naïve, or grown and so on.

C: What has migration meant for you personally? What are some of the joys and some of the barriers that you have faced throughout your journey?

R: **MIGRATION HAS BEEN FOR ME A PROCESS OF EXPANDING MYSELF, AS I NEVER FELT THAT I BELONG ANYWHERE — PUSHING MY OWN BOUNDARIES, LEARNING ABOUT PRIVILEGES, CONSTANTLY BEING PROUD AND NOT TAKING ANYTHING FOR GRANTED.**

I have spent most of my life in the streets because there it's where I feel on the same level as everybody else, and I find it's hard in most indoor spaces, because there I have found more stratified levels and comparisons and social status, which are an awful invention as society, so I try to soak as little as I can from that!

For me, it's extremely important to embody the representation as a trans woman from my country and, for the queer and trans Albanians, to unapologetically honor my ancestry and roots. Claiming them and our freedom is a constant practice, as is honoring all queer and trans people who still are fighting really hard to make a path.



C: I think most people in Western Europe are quite ignorant to the struggles of the LGBTQ+ community in the Balkan region, even though it's in the same continent. What was it like for you growing up in Albania as a young trans woman?

R: Well western europe can be hard sometimes too to be honest, even though it's also the closest I feel to a home now. I have a very special connection with Albanian and Kosovo people, they are really humble beings, that's the way those lands raised us. I still remember, my childhood was very lonely without queer friends until I reached a certain age. There was a time when I was really young when if I met someone and knew [that they're also queer] I would not interact for the safety of both. There's a high risk if you accompany each other in the streets, therefore it was a lonely transition.

Religion can be a really difficult thing, and so is the way families experience the whole "the honor of the name" sometimes. It's valued beyond anything else, and how people see each other has a really heavy weight on society, which makes it really hard for queer people, because often you don't have the support of your family, nor society, or the police, and so on.

THE LOUDER YOU ARE ABOUT YOUR IDENTITY, ESPECIALLY AS TRANS WOMEN, THE MORE OTHER PEOPLE FEEL ATTACKED. PEOPLE ARE CONSTANTLY JUDGING AND LIMITING EACH OTHER, SO THEY FEEL THE NEED TO LIMIT AND ATTACK YOU, BUT THIS HAPPENS PRETTY MUCH EVERYWHERE NOW.

I really don't feel safer in any European country to be honest. I've been 7 years away from my hometown now, and I'm sure there's been huge progress. I remember that in my last years in Albania and Kosovo there were already so many beautiful spaces and parties, it felt like we were so many!

So now I'm sure there must be even more things happening all the time, back then it was still really new to us.

It was at a point in which I still felt the need to leave due to an attack, which was also very common, but it's even harder without support whatsoever, which was also very common, so I'd love one day to return and feel the queer people and the land anew.

C: I really hope that you get that chance to go back soon and revel in queer joy in your homeland! That's honestly the dream of all of us.
What are some other practices that you do that help ground you and/or empower you?

R: Love. Love is a big practice that has really helped and continually helps me. My dogs, which are my animal family, and trans sisterhood I'm always searching for.

**IT'S SO EMPOWERING TO SEE
AND FEEL HOW MIGRANT TRANS WOMEN
TAKE CARE OF EACH OTHER CREATING
MAGIC WITH FEW RESOURCES AND
ELEMENTS.**

C: Trans sisterhood, and the creation of closely knit kinship as alternative family structures are vital! I think about this often because people often talk about community in vague terms, or hypothetical societal structures without hierarchies, and I think chosen families (although not perfect) are a powerful example of these things. Would you be up for talking about some of the dynamics of care that you experience in sisterhood?

R: Well I'll start with the good first, and the tricky later! For me, one of the dynamics of care that's really beautiful about trans sisterhood is definitely the way you get to know and understand each other. It's truly a treasure and a blessing. It was really hard for me to open up in my lifetime, at least not fully, not to everyone for safety reasons, so to also get the chance to be your authentic self with other individuals that you share so much with feels like that's one of the reasons I'm here.

We are together in this journey of life, and it makes it so much easier and beautiful. There are so many valuable things that we give to each other, and although as you said it's not always perfect, *what does perfect mean anyway?*

Family is a really tricky word for me. I loved my family, they mean the world to me and it's a love I'll never forget, but also really limiting and hurtful a lot of times, and when I went my own path I used to say that I would never carry anyone as deep as I carried my family.

In sisterhood, I love the freedom that we have as the crazy beautiful witchy girlfriends we are, and for me it's best to be that way. It makes it easier for me to be more open and true in good times, and bad ones too. I think time is really limited for us trans people, and I want to share it as best as I can. I'm still learning on the way, to be honest, also making mistakes, but I try to learn from all of them, and I'm really proud because no one showed us how to.

C: I love that and feel it to my core. I think that truly getting to know each other is something that helps us build our shared realities in ways that are very healing. Often, people talk about community in abstract ways, as structures and networks of support based on identity or politics, and then they forget the important, slow and beautiful process of building trust, getting to know, and truly love one another!

R: I couldn't agree more.

C: Which needs do you feel are central to your continued well-being? How can communities best support you in ensuring that those needs are met?

R: I struggle to expose my needs to others. I guess I have trust issues, even though I'm used to seeking safety everywhere and especially in different communities. My needs are really little, basic care and shelter, not forgetting my weight as a human. I'm always escaping societal problems, and community is a place where I want to feel free and lighthearted, but I have also learned that safe spaces are not always safe for everyone.

**MY FIRST SAFE SPACE IS
MYSELF, AND MY BOUNDARIES ARE
MINE TO HONOR AND RESPECT.**

C: What would thriving look like for you now?

R: That would be evolving every day into a better person. Taking care of myself is key, and I must continue following my dreams and having fun along the way. Thriving is my playground, so I claim it as mine, and unique.



OUTRO



**TIME AND TIME AGAIN, HAVING THESE
CONVERSATIONS, TEARS WERE SHED,
LAUGHTER ERUPTED, HANDS WERE HELD,
SPACE WAS GIVEN, AND I FOUND THAT I
NEEDED TO WITNESS THEM IN THE SAME WAY
THAT THE PEOPLE I INTERACTED WITH NEEDED
TO BE WITNESSED.**

ONE LAST REFLECTION FOR THE MIRROR



I have one last question/reflection that I saved for you, dear reader:

I was recently talking with a friend about some of the issues of “post-migration”. They said that if you leave your home country due to a major crisis—regardless of whether the conflict ends or not—if it’s not the current major event being spoken about in the media, people, and elsewhere, the system inevitably stops showing care and support. Some people try to assimilate quickly, some don’t, but regardless of what you choose you’re often stuck feeling disconnected and discarded to some extent everywhere outside of your diaspora community and a small handful of activists if you’re lucky.

Do you think it’s possible to overcome this dynamic of competition, disillusionment, and abandonment triggered by the media attention market, and unify the struggle of diaspora queers? Is solidarity truly possible? How do we build it? What would it look like?

We named this publication Necessity because **WE NEED EACH OTHER!** We need many things to be well, but we need each other the most—alive, cared for, heard, fed, housed, connected. Time and time again, having these conversations, tears were shed, laughter erupted, hands were held, space was given, and I found that I needed to witness them in the same way that the people I interacted with needed to be witnessed.

We are mirrors as much as we are all complete universes within ourselves, so I encourage you to take a deep look within, and without, to find out what the needs and attitudes are for those who live at the crossroads of identity and displacement. For me, I always need a home to come back to, and I am lucky to have found it in my homeland just as I have found it within the care and support of those who’ve crossed my path everywhere, with a full embrace and a desire to connect from a place of genuine and radical acceptance.

x CIEL

SPECIAL THANKS

This was a monumental undertaking to put together! Especially while going through the process of essentially putting my whole life in a blender and sifting out what is precious to me in what has been one of my most important moments of personal transformation. I didn't do it alone— like most things ever worth doing, it was a collective effort between friends, lovers, siblings, and an incredible network of people, collectives and partnerships internationally.

I am a very privileged person, and what I consider my greatest gift is the tremendous amount of love and patience that I receive from the people I encounter in my life. During the three months in which I was on the road, I was received in 17 different homes and found safety in all of them. Big thanks particularly to Cordelia, Orion, Sheena, Geneva, Mel and Maya, Roan, Cecilia, Hola and Marta for holding space for me in such a personal way, allowing me the ability to rest and process to be able to keep going forward. And, because it bears repeating: My heart goes out to all the wonderful people who shared their stories, knowledge and insight in such wonderful and vulnerable ways; You are the greatest stars!

The biggest thanks go to my creative team— Rissy for helping me with the insurmountable task of transcribing the recorded interviews, V for doing all the proofreading and editing, and Elliott Elena (@lookimakethings) for collaborating with me on the graphics to make this incredibly cute publication for everyone to enjoy and smile even though it's heavy at times! I owe y'all big time! I'm eternally grateful to have had you accompanying me on this journey.

Being able to do this kind of work that is so meaningful and precious to us is a gift. I wouldn't have thought it would be possible or sustainable for someone like me to do it without the encouragement, endless accommodations, funds, feedback and training that EYFA has provided through this process to see it through to the end! Thanks to everyone from the EYFA office family in Berlin, and the broader EYFA network for being the most dedicated collaborators and loving production team ever. Gracias extra super much to Fabi; this one's for you...



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QR link :)

