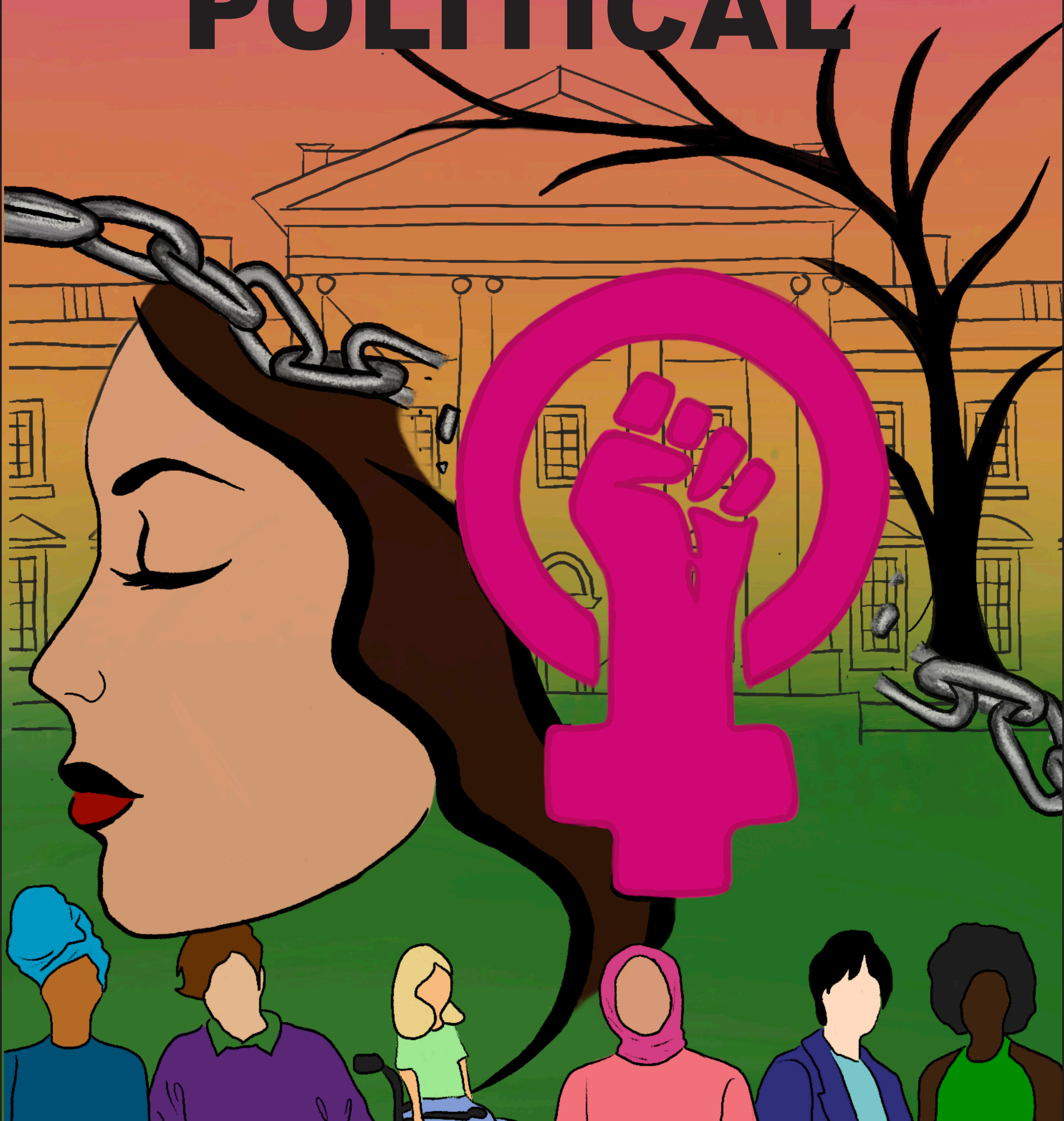
The Personal is

Vo. 1 Issue 1

POLITICAL



(un)Disturbed: A Journal of Feminist Voices

UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO

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The Editor's Introduction

Welcome! We're happy you're here. We are excited to launch the inaugural issue of (un)Disturbed: A Journal of Feminist Voices. The idea for this journal emerged from conversations with our larger research network, Feminist Think Tank, at the University of Waterloo that we've been having since the early 2020s, around the desire for an intergenerational space to share scholarly feminist ideas outside of the strict double-blind peer-reviewed structure, particularly for undergraduate and students. Coupled with the fact that, as many of us know, our students write such compelling and passionate work that deserves to be seen outside of the classroom, (un)Disturbed was born.

(un)Disturbed reflects our shared desire to bring feminist voices at various points in our scholarly and activist careers together to map what feminist thinking and action can and does look like in the present moment. Our hope is that the work presented here invites others who are interested into dialogue with us to, ultimately, build even larger networks of thinkers, makers, and communities of support. This journal aims to uphold principles of care-ful solidarity and a commitment to social justice as our cornerstones. Afterall, at Feminist Think Tank we like to describe ourselves as follows: We are intersectional, we are intergenerational, and we are intentional. We are undisturbed.

Feminist Think Tank (FTT) is a research collective led by journal editors Dr. Shana MacDonald (Associate Professor, Communication Arts) and Dr. Brianna Wiens (Assistant Professor, English Language & Literature), and advances research on intersectional feminist design, digital culture, and networked activism by creating space for interdisciplinary crossovers and idea-sharing. FTT holds a commitment to intervening into discourses of white supremacy, misogyny, queer and transphobia, and ableism, largely through creating spaces to gather and build community to encourage each other in our navigation of the sometimes inhospitable spaces and experiences of the internet, of academia, and of everyday life. As both a space of peer encouragement and of research, FTT provides students and researchers with opportunities to advance their knowledge through participating in critical reading groups, brainstorming sessions, research review, data jams, and research-creation opportunities. Together, we talk, think, and make.

Aligned with the overall ethos of FTT, (un)Disturbed arises as a testament to the feelings of being troubled, annoyed, and interrupted by the various issues that continue to plague feminists today; it is a place of naming how we are often disturbed by what we face across different sectors of our working and personal lives. At the same time, the index of "(un)" in "(un) Disturbed" emphasizes how undeterred we are by the tasks that face us, joining together as we do in communities of solidarity and resistance. Drawing on prolific feminist writer and thinker Sara Ahmed's "feminist snaps" that suggest a sudden, decisive, and often transformative shift in consciousness, a break away from the heteropatriarchal norm, this journal seeks to offer space for both emerging and established scholars to reflect on, analyze, create, critique, and think through the significances of our commitments to feminist activism. Wel invite emerging scholars to contribute, engage, and shape the dialogue around gender and gender identity, power, oppression, and intersectionality as activists, artists, and scholars. We also invite established scholars to share insights from their experiences to model possible pathways forward. Often, in an academic setting, the ever-evolving issues and complexity of our personal experiences moving within feminism are underrepresented. Knowing this, (un)Disturbed fosters an environment where readers can feel represented, learn more about feminist issues, and have access to both scholarly and creative outputs. To that end, we invite you to engage in what our contributors present in this first issue and encourage you to find a place for yourself within these pages, both as a part of our community and, hopefully, in future issues as a contributor.

In this first issue, we invited members of FTT to consider the long-standing feminist maxim of "'the personal is political" (Hanisch 1972) in the current moment. We are grateful for their generous and thoughtful contributions that stem from this initial prompt. As founders of FTT, our work has always hinged on this concept, as it usefully allows us to understand that our personal experiences are informed and shaped by structural and institutional forces that operate within the confines of gendered, and largely patriarchal, white supremecist, cis-hetero, capitalist, and ableist ideologies. In recognizing how we are structured by power, we are able to name that which hurts us (hooks 2000), see clearly the matrix of domination (Collins 1990) that constrains us, and find our

voice to speak back to power. This also allows us to know that we are, first, not alone and, second, these constraints and hurts are not our fault and we don't need to bear them alone. There is power in communities, even if provisional, contingent, and shifting. They give us the landing space, even if for brief moments, to feel the warmth of connection and recognition, and build ourselves in more steadfast ways for the more equitable, feminist future we hope to shape.

In solidarity,
Bri and Shana

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#Black Love and #BlackGirlMagic as Signs: A Semiotic Analysis

By Lowenna Barungi

In this paper I will be discussing and analyzing the social media hashtags #BlackLove and #BlackGirlMagic as artifacts through semiotic analysis. I will argue that the Black community uses hashtags like this as symbols of both celebration and protest simultaneously. They serve to create a new media narrative for a new generation of young Black children recovering from the generational trauma caused by historical crimes of racism and hate towards the Black community. However, while these movements were originally intended to be a celebration of blackness, Black people, and their stories, I will argue that they have lost their meaning over time. They have evolved and have been warped into subtle, but pervasive exclusionary messages that are imbedding new, toxic ways of thinking into this new generation of Black youth. In this paper I will propose a new way of using these hashtags on social media in a way that is more representative of all Black bodies, and not just the ones deemed as palatable and socially desirable.

#BlackLove is a popular hashtag that has been increasingly circulating in social media, especially by millennials. It is a hashtag that is usually paired with a cute photo or TikTok video of a Black couple. The couple is usually doing something romantic or funny, and the posts can also be aesthetically pleasing vacation montages of the couple. These cute vacation montages are also referred to as "baecations". "#BlackGirlMagic is a concept and movement to celebrate the beauty, power, and resilience of all Brown and Black girls. Throughout American history, Brown and Black girls face adversity, hegemonic forms of beauty, marginalization, and systematic racism. However, Black girls still achieve with little supplies or support to become the most educated group in the U.S. and have the highest rate of entrepreneurial growth" (MelPrill).

Semiotic analysis is the study of signs and their meaning relating to the social world and social processes (Curtis and Curtis). With semiotic analysis we peel back the layers of an arbitrary sign, instead of taking it upon face value, and examine the ways in which a sign has been constructed to mean what we know it to mean within culture and society. A sign is made up of the signifier and the signified, where the signifier is an arbitrary term or description we use to identify the thing in question, and the signified is what we associate with the arbitrary term or description.

The hashtag 'Black love' originated as a way of "[combating] the very popular belief that Black men and Black women [could not] hold healthy relationships" (Marquaysa B.). The hashtag 'Black girl magic' originated as a phrase that was popularized by CaShawn Thompson in 2013 "when she first tweeted the hashtag #BlackGirlsAreMagic to celebrate the everyday ways that Black women thrive despite the boundaries erected to keep us from doing such" (Steele 6). It is no secret that Black women are vilified every day in person and especially online. In Digital Black Feminism (2021), Catherine Knight Steele makes reference to Safiya Noble (2018), who "began her inquiry into algorithmic bias with a simple question: What happens when you google search "Black girls"? In Algorithms of Oppression, she details how the creation and utilization of algorithms in nearly every aspect of our digital lives perpetuate anti-Black racism and misogynoir" (Steele 4). While we are coerced into believing that data, statistics, and numbers are completely factual and devoid of all human bias, this is simply not the case. Safiya Noble's sentiments are an example of a concept we covered during this

course. As Louise Amoore (2020) wrote, "Algorithms come to act in the world precisely in and through the relations of selves to selves, and to others, as these relations manifest in the clusters and attributes of data" (Amoore 204). Amoore argues that algorithms are not neutral as we are led as a society to believe, and they are in fact laced with the very same biases that humans experience. Digital algorithms are created by us and for us, so it is evident that the same biases against Black women that exist in real life exist online as well, as argued in *Digital Black Feminism*. Black people and Black women in particular, began pushing against racial stereotypes through these hashtags, but this in turn sparked an online counterargument against these phrases for 'making everything about race'. Even as Black people continue to use digital spaces as a way to speak up against the injustices of systematic racism, they still suffer from algorithms that are inevitably biased against them. In Rianka Singh's *Rethinking Platform Power* (2021), she notes that "it is often imagined and argued that users are empowered by digital platforms as they afford users a voice by lowering barriers to participating" (Singh 712). However, she goes on to say that "we need to push back against the notion of platforms as liberatory" (Singh 711). Therefore, it is clear from the way Black people are treated online and discriminated against through algorithms, that platform affordance cannot be equated to liberation.

#BlackLove as a Sign:

#BlackLove exists as a symbol of celebrating and embracing Black culture. Black history and African roots are often erased and forgotten due to decades of whitewashing. In this context, the hashtag reminds Black couples to be proud of their roots and celebrate them.

Unfortunately, many languages are beginning to die out because Black children are growing up without learning their traditional languages, privileging English, and other centralized languages over their own. This will eventually lead to the wiping out of entire peoples and cultures that have existed for centuries. Those that did grow up knowing their own languages often feel embarrassed to speak their languages or speak with their native accents in White dominated spaces for fear of being looked down on. This is known as code-switching, broadly defined as "adjusting one's style of speech, appearance, behavior, and expression in ways that will optimize the comfort of others in exchange for fair treatment, quality service, and employment opportunities" (McCluney et al.).

This hashtag, therefore, reminds Black people to revive and embrace their forgotten traditions, languages, and cultures, and hopefully pass them down to their children in generations to come. It demands for them to take up space just the way they are, instead of bending to the perceptions of dominant cultures.

Secondly, #BlackLove is used as a symbol of hope for Black families. As mentioned previously, Black families are stereotypically known to be broken, usually with a single mother and a father who has left

his family or has been incarcerated. It has also become a racial slur that is weaponized against young Black children—for example, "your abandonment issues are because you have no father", or "your daddy is in jail". Here, the hashtag signifies healthy, loving Black families defying the stereotype, breaking generational curses they experienced in the past, and overcoming other racial stereotypes. It shows that contrary to popular belief, Black couples can maintain healthy relationships both for themselves and their children. In addition to this, the hashtag serves an equal but opposite purpose. It symbolizes the uplifting of Black love and Black families, while simultaneously symbolizing a rejection of white superiority in mainstream media. White couples are often idealized in the media, while interracial couples are fetishized, and Black couples are underrepresented. This shows that mainstream media does not consider Black love as 'pure' or valid enough to be pedestalized the way White couples are. In this context, the hashtag exists to highlight and emphasize the beauty of Black love.

Lastly, #BlackLove is a symbol of appreciation for Black women. "The most disrespected woman in America, is the Black woman. The most un-protected person in America is the Black woman. The most neglected person in America, is the Black

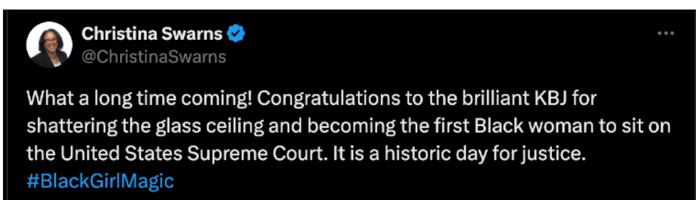
woman" (Wilson). This quote by Malcom X was heavily circulated in 2020, and clearly this statement reigns true to this day, and not just in America. Black women are hated, discredited, degraded, vilified, dehumanized, objectified and unloved because of their skin color and because of the stereotypical personality traits that are associated with them. Black women are even victimized amongst people of their own race, I would say more often than they are by people of other races.

(jnochill_et al.), Photo Courtesy of @misoynoirs

(ohTavareys), Photo Courtesy of @misogynoirs

As shown in the images above, Black women, especially dark-skinned women are seen as less attractive and less desirable, even by dark-skinned Black men themselves in a heterosexual context. Therefore, this hashtag acts as a symbol of protest against conventional beauty standards that praise whiteness and lightness, and highlights the beauty of Black women, especially dark-skinned Black women. It reminds them that they are beautiful and deserved to be loved truly. #BlackLove and #BlackGirlMagic are similar in this sense, because they both act as a symbol of appreciation for Black women, even though #BlackLove carries multiple other meanings.

#BlackGirlMagic as a Sign:



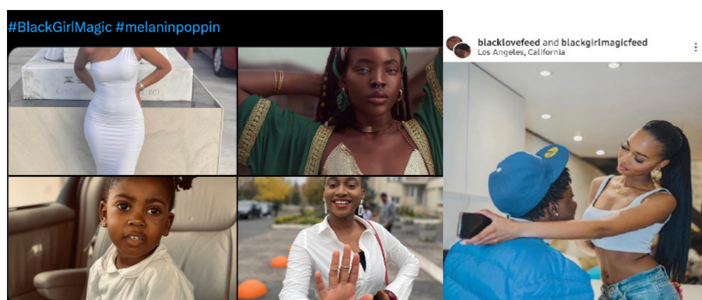
(ChristinaSwarns)

As mentioned above, #BlackGirlMagic and #BlackLove are similar in their symbolization of love for Black women, however #BlackGirlMagic's primary focus is on highlighting Black women's capabilities specifically, whereas #BlackLove mainly focuses on the union of Black people in romantic relationships. Despite where they differ, they both act as forms of hashtag feminism. As Conley (2021) writes, "In particular, hashtag activism, hashtag feminism, and digital feminism…have been formalized…to describe the role hashtags play in documenting social and political life, and in theorizing about power. [It] examines modes of activism and feminist practices, namely how Twitter hashtags locate activist campaigns, organize online communities, and amplify social movements" (Conley 2). Hashtag feminism transcends in different ways, and these hashtags, particularly #BlackGirlMagic, are just one of the ways Black women are reclaiming digital and physical spaces by protesting racism, sexism, colorism, homophobia, and misogyny. #BlackGirlMagic is a celebration of the intelligence, beauty, strength, resilience, femininity, and excellence of Black women in the face of multiple forms of discrimination and degradation. In fact, as seen in the images on pages 5 and 6, many heterosexual men of various races claim and strongly assert that they would not date heterosexual dark-skinned Black women, or Black women in general. There has been a long-standing argument about whether this is blatant racism masked as a 'preference'. Regardless of whether it is a preference or internalized racism, it is undeniable that Black women are generally considered undesirable, a racial stereotype that #BlackGirlMagic is working to change.

Furthermore, #BlackGirlMagic is a symbol of the celebration of Black hair, a topic that has caused controversy in schools for no reason other than the fact that Black hair is different from conventional beauty standards. There have been endless stories of Black children whose braids or dreadlocks have been cut off by their peers in school, or even their teachers. Some have been stopped from participating in sports that require uniformity, such as cheerleading, until they 'change' their hairstyles to something more palatable (Asmelash). This is not only prevalent in a North American context. Growing up in Uganda, I witnessed firsthand the discrimination young Ugandan children have faced in schools. As a rule, children are not allowed to keep their hair long during school semesters so before the beginning of each semester, they are required to cut off their hair for the sake of uniformity. If they do not have it cut before they come to school, there have been cases where teachers cut off the children's hair themselves. However, some schools have a double standard for this rule when it comes to foreigners. Foreigners, including Asian children, White children or mixed-race children with hair that is considered 'fair', are not forced to cut off their hair

before reporting to school. This shows how deeply embedded racism and colorism are, to the extent that we discriminate against ourselves and privilege foreigners and whiteness even within our own country. Therefore, #BlackGirlMagic acts as a protest against hair discrimination and discrimination of other forms.

Lastly, #BlackGirlMagic is a celebration of Black bodies and afro-features. In the world we live in today, Black women's curvy bodies are the blueprint and are idealized as the new beauty standard. Many social media influencers pay thousands for the 'Instagram influencer body' that so many Black women naturally have, after being popularized by socialites like Kim Kardashian. However, even though the bodies and the culture of Black women have been appropriated, they are still hated and vilified, and are not credited for their creations. This links to the story of Saartjie Baartman, a South African woman who was exploited and exhibited for her body. According to *Body of Evidence* (2011), her body "which although subaltern, seemed to speak not only for itself, but for women, especially Brown women, everywhere. Saartjie Baartman's body told the story of how Brown women had for centuries suffered emotional, physical, and epistemic violence at the hands of White men, history, and science" (Ndlovu 18). She was treated like an animal and was forced to live in inhumane conditions for the entertainment and muse of her captors. And while her body's uniqueness was considered an anomaly to Europeans, her shape was certainly not unique in South Africa, let alone in many other African countries. She had the opposite of an ideal body at the time, but today the bodies of Black women like hers are the new trend. Beauty standards for women have evolved numerous times over the course of history, and while curvy bodies are in-style or on trend now, there will come a time when the standard will change again. When that point comes, will Black women still have the modest significance they do today? #BlackGirlMagic serves to answer this question by showing love and respect to Black bodies, long after they go out of style when the tides turn.



Above are examples of how #BlackLove and #Black GirlMagic are used as symbols of appreciation.

While #BlackLove and #BlackGirlMagic have proved to be symbols of celebration and hope for Black people, especially Black women, some argue that they are the Black community's way of finding every opportunity to make everything about race. People online, particularly White supremacists, have created a counter hashtag "#WhiteGirlsAreMagic", in retaliation of #BlackGirlMagic because firstly, they feel that using #BlackGirlMagic is unfair since #WhiteGirlsAreMagic is considered racist and derogatory. Secondly, they feel that if Black people can create a hashtag to celebrate themselves in that manner, then why can't they? It is also worth noting that #WhiteGirlsAreMagic and #WhiteGirlMagic were not created to celebrate the beauty of White women, they were created simply because #BlackGirlsAreMagic and #BlackGirlMagic started trending first (Rankin). While it is fundamentally racist, in and of itself, for White people to lay claim to the digital spaces created by Black people in this manner, it is not what I wish to focus on.

Instead, I would argue that the way these hashtags have evolved is doing harm to the Black community, which is overshadowing the good that they have done over the years. This is because they have slowly and inconspicuously morphed into social media trends that play into the very same tropes that they are protesting against. Firstly, some argue that these hashtags (and similar ones such as #BlackExcellence) create impossible expectations for the Black community to live up to, because people are trying to live up to the perfect social media versions of those who glamorize these hashtags. While I agree, I believe this is an issue we all generally face when it comes to social media, and I think that there are more insidiously detrimental ways in which these hashtags are affecting the Black community.

Firstly, I believe that these hashtags have evolved to become discriminatory, especially #BlackLove. #BlackLove pages on social media, particularly Instagram, privilege heterosexual couples and tend to exclude queer couples. This is because the Black community has traditionally struggled to be accepting and welcoming of members of the LGBTQA+ community, and this has seeped into these hashtags subconsciously by virtually excluding queer couples from these pages

and algorithms, reducing the amount of representation Black queer people see online. This fundamentally affects their perception of themselves and only makes them feel more underrepresented within their own communities.

Additionally, these #BlackLove pages idealize the heterosexual couples where either: both the man and the woman are light-skinned, or the woman is light-skinned but the man is slightly or significantly darker than the woman. This is something I noticed while looking through some of these pages, and I realized that most of these pages are very similar because they get content from the same places. There is little to no representation of dark-skinned women on these pages, and those that are included tend to be models with perfect skin and perfect hair. If you opened Instagram this minute, searched up #BlackLove, and clicked on one of the pages, you would notice that it takes a large amount of scrolling before you stumble upon a couple that does not fit the aesthetic that I just described above. Additionally, there is also little to no representation of couples that do not have 'Instagram influencer bodies', a phrase that has come to represent slim but curvy or model-like women and fit, toned, tall men. The couples pictured also tend to be in aesthetically pleasing locations, usually on vacation, denoting a certain level of wealth and status. The same goes for #BlackGirlMagic, because again, most of the women pictured using this hashtag tend to fit the 'Instagram influencer body' blueprint. For these reasons, I believe that these hashtags subliminally privilege some bodies and exclude others. It sends a message to Black girls and women that they are only worthy of Black love if they are light-skinned, heterosexual, able-bodied, or have an 'Instagram influencer body'. Is it really Black love and Black girl magic if the people portrayed only represent a miniscule percentage of the Black population?

Secondly, there has been a long-standing argument in the media within the Black community about the people who 'count' as Black, which creates a double standard. To illustrate, the hashtag #BlackLove is rarely applicable to couples where at least one of the people in the relationship is of Black descent but looks racially ambiguous, for example Dwayne Johnson or Meghan Markle. Some have gone so far as to say that Meghan Markle is not 'really Black'. Furthermore, the criteria that allows certain racially ambiguous people to 'count' as Black while excluding others is seriously flawed because it denies some people entire parts of their heritage and culture. For example, Drake is Black, but Halsey is not, and yet they both each have one parent of African American descent. Would Halsey be 'allowed' to use either of these hashtags? Halsey has notoriously received backlash online for trying to embrace her African American roots simply because she looks whiter than she does black. This not only influences who is 'allowed' to use the hashtags and who is not, but it has far-reaching effects on the identities of mixed-race people and almost denies them access to Black digital spaces.

Some argue that Black people who are racially ambiguous or 'white-passing' cannot possibly understand the magnitude of racism Black people face throughout their lifetimes, because they have never had to experience it full scale. While it is certainly true that racially ambiguous Black people benefit from light-skin or even white privilege, that should not take away from their experience as racialized people in our society. It should not deny them parts of their own heritage, and they should not be subjected to shame and torment for wanting to embrace their roots, just as these hashtags encourage them to do. Their lived experiences are just as valid, important, and real as everyone else's experiences. In my opinion, while it is important for light-skinned and racially ambiguous Black people to acknowledge and be aware of their privilege, I believe that the Black community's focus on cherry-picking who gets to participate in Black culture can at times be self-defeating, because it takes away attention from the larger societal issue at hand: systemic racism. Rather than using such hashtags as ways to create more divisions amongst ourselves, it is more important to find better ways to come together in unity and in solidarity against the oppression and systemic racism we all face as a people.

In conclusion, while I strongly believe in the amount of positive change these hashtags have done for the Black community and Black women in particular, they have unfortunately evolved into mere trends and are now subliminally playing into certain ways of thinking that privilege some groups and exclude others. Because of this, we need to go back to the roots of these hashtags and think about why they were created in the first place. I suggest a total rethinking of the way these hashtags are used online by rejecting

what is currently being circulated. One of the main ways to combat what these hashtags have become is by actively flooding the algorithms with content that empowers the groups that have been marginalized both by society in real life and by underrepresentation in the media. This is not to say that there is entirely no representation of Black marginalized groups, because there certainly is—more than ever before, and it is growing at a faster rate. However, representation of these marginalized groups within the Black community is difficult to come across unless your algorithm or feed is specifically constructed to display such content, which should not be the case. It is very important for Black people to be able to go online and see themselves represented in the content that is posted using these hashtags, and not just the curated aesthetically pleasing snapshots of models and influencers that are currently flooding the algorithms. The only way to ensure this is by taking control of the narrative and creating real content to counteract the facade of perfection portrayed by social media under the guise of #BlackLove and #BlackGirlMagic.

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A Historical Analysis of Western Feminism

By Sakeenah Ashique, Navneet Kaur, and Thuvaraka Mahenthiran

Despite decades of evolving feminist movements, Feminism continues to be a disputed term. Without solidifying a shared understanding of the term, creating an impactful movement is, and has been, challenging. However, defining feminism universally is an arbitrary goal, as women and other marginalized genders around the globe relate to it differently. The objective at hand is instead to focus on Western feminism. With increased globalization and (im)migration that are sure to continue thanks to the climate crisis, strengthening the bonds of solidarity through a shared understanding of intersectional feminism is necessary. Intersectional feminism recognizes the unique ways female identities experience discrimination as a result of their overlapping identities. By re-evaluating the foundational three waves of feminism through the lens of Intersectional Feminism, we can foster a more inclusive and impactful movement that addresses the diverse struggles of women.

Historically, western feminism has been largely fixated on White women, failing to see the bigger picture of feminist issues related to race and gender inequality. The first wave of feminism started in the early 19th century, characterized by the women's suffrage movement. Motivated by the unjust legal system, White women worked to gain legal identity for themselves, which included but was not limited to: the right to vote, to own property, to sue, and to form legal contracts. Though prominent suffragettes started out as abolitionists, they largely ignored issues of racism and poverty. Spearheaded by the upper– and middle–class White women who shared similar sentiments on race and class as their male counterparts, they formed an exclusionary movement. After the passing of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, which gave citizenship to all persons born or naturalized in the U.S. –including formerly enslaved people– and granted African American men the right to vote, White women felt distraught that Black men were perceived as superior to them. This led to the creation of two organizations, the American Woman Suffrage Association, which aimed to gain voting rights for all women, and the National Woman Suffrage Association, which aimed to gain voting rights strictly for White women.

During this revolutionary era, Black women were marginalized by both Black men and White women, failing to reap the benefits from either the Abolitionist or Suffrage movements they were protesting alongside. They were erased from the narrative, gaining little recognition for the effort they put into protesting the systems of injustice. In 1896, Black women founded The National Association of Colored Women (NACW). They focused on suffrage as well as the general improvement of life for African Americans. Black figures such as Ida B. Wells, who founded the first Black suffrage organization focused solely on voting rights for Black women, created spaces of refuge for women of colour. When asked to march in a suffrage protest, Wells refused after discovering she could not walk alongside White women, who still practiced race-based segregation. Thus was the birth of White-feminism, built on the oppression and exploitation of other groups of women by weaponizing their class and race, and waving the banner of gendered oppression in their battle against the patriarchy.

The second wave of feminism is said to be inspired initially by Betty Friedan's book: *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963. The book played a significant role in amplifying the common convictions held by millions of White women in the United States and has subsequently earned recognition as one of the most influential works of feminist literature. In the book, Friedan characterizes the challenges collectively experienced by women as a "problem that has no name." Her message resonated with many women as the book explored feelings of discontentment and a sense of emptiness towards their duty of achieving the perceived pinnacle of femininity: to be wives, mothers, and homemakers. Though The Feminine Mystique was in some part relatable to all women across the U.S., Black women and women of colour are nowhere to be found in the text. In fact, as Black feminist second-wave scholar bell hooks discusses in her book, *From Margin to Center*, "the 'problem that has no name,' often quoted to describe the condition of women in this society, actually referred to the plight of a select group of college-educated, middle- and upper-class, married White women– housewives bored with leisure, with the home, with children, with buying products, who wanted more out of life…"(hooks 30). Furthermore, The Feminine Mystique largely failed to acknowledge Indigenous women and their narratives surrounding gender roles and identity which greatly differed from the mainstream European narratives being addressed. The "pinnacle of femininity" as Friedan conceptualizes it cannot be applied to the experience of Indigenous women whose languages and ideas about identity and the role of women in communities allow for greater fluidity and understanding of what it means to be a "woman." Dr. Chela Sandoval provides an explanation to this, referred to as "hegemonic feminism." Hegemonic feminism is characterized by overlooking issues of class and race, typically viewing equality with men as the primary objective of feminism. It adopts an individual rights-oriented perspective for driving social change rather than a justice-centered one. This form of feminism is predominantly led by White individuals, which diminishes the activism and perspectives of women of colour and generally regards sexism as the ultimate form of oppression.

The second wave, through the adoption of hegemonic feminism, lacked intersectionality. Though Black and other women of colour were involved with the mainstream ways of participating in the second wave such as the National Organization for Women (NOW) and consciousness-raising groups, much of their work was

oversimplified and undervalued. As such, the notion that women of colour joined the feminist movement later than White women was popularized. In reality, women of colour were consistently engaged in three areas at this time: collaborating with feminist groups dominated by White individuals, establishing women's advocacy groups within pre-existing mixed-gender organizations, and founding feminist organizations for Black, Latina, Native American, and Asian women. Additionally, it is ironic how the social equity which first and second-wave feminists yearned for had already existed for hundreds of years prior, in traditional Indigenous societies. In certain Indigenous communities, the women were the leaders, they were recognized for their roles as mothers, knowledge keepers, and skilled warriors, and yet, while White women fought for their rights, Indigenous women were simultaneously being stripped of theirs through the centuries-long practice of forced assimilation in both Canada and the United States. One of the earliest examples of feminist organizations founded by women of colour in the second wave was a Chicana group called the Hijas de Cuauhtémoc. The founders Anna Neito-Gómez and Adelaida Castillo created the organization in response to the harassment Chicana women were facing in the Chicano movement, which centred on matters of social justice, equality, educational reforms, and political and economic self-determination for Chicano communities in the United States. Ironically, the second wave of feminism has often been described as the period of "women's liberation," a time when women worked towards the establishment of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). However, intersectional feminist, Benita Roth, described second-wave activism as the emergence of "feminisms"; a movement in which various groups of women, predominantly created based on race, formed distinct groups. The Third World Women's Alliance (TWWA) emerged as a pioneering socialist organization dedicated to women of colour in the United States, active from 1968 to 1980. It pursued the goals of dismantling capitalism and eradicating racism, imperialism, and sexism. TWWA was a frontrunner in championing an intersectional approach to confront the multifaceted oppression faced by women, marking a significant milestone in the history of feminist activism. By excluding activism from women of colour in public discourse, both their work and identity have been removed from the movement. If feminism is deeply rooted in the marginalization of women of colour, the very image of feminism is distorted.

The second wave of feminism was constructed upon earlier concepts of racial bias that had been present since the first wave of feminism. This exposes the underlying reality that what had initially appeared as a gender-based movement was, in fact, intertwined with issues of white supremacy.

The third wave has its beginnings in the Anita Hill case and the Riot Grrrl movement. In 1991, Anita Hill testified that Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas had sexually harassed her when she worked as an advisor for him. The all-white and all-male jury sparked outrage among feminists.

Writer and activist Rebecca Walker (2007), in response to the hearings, wrote an article in Ms. magazine touching on what many feminists were thinking:

> To me, the hearings were not about determining whether or not Clarence Thomas did in fact harass Anita Hill. They were about checking and redefining the extent of women's credibility and power. Can a woman's experience undermine a man's career? Can a woman's voice, a woman's sense of self-worth and injustice challenge a structure predicated upon the subjugation of our gender? (Walker 2007)

In her article, Walker made a plea to all women: "The fight is far from over… Turn that outrage into political power… I am not a postfeminism feminist. I am the Third Wave." As a result of the Anita Hill case and Rebecca Walker's article, the term "Third Wave" was born. Sparking an era unlike the previous waves. Additionally, in the early nineties, underground feminist punk rock bands emerged, forming the collective "Riot Grrl" groups. These groups developed as a response to the combination of sexist punk culture, politics, feminism, and style. The movement became popular through the use of zines, which became an important way to produce feminist-led publications that could discuss issues that were considered too taboo in mainstream culture.

The third wave quickly became an era of inclusivity where scholars such as Kimberlé Crenshaw, who first coined the term "intersectionality," became known for their works and could exist in spaces with White feminists. However, Dr. Rebecca Clark Mane exam-

ines how, though third-wavers pushed for diversity, the critiques of women of colour and/or anti-racist feminists highlight the reality that the mainstream feminist agenda did not advance enough to ensure that the "inclusion of racial difference" was actually transformative. Mane, through an analysis of the grammar of whiteness in the third wave, raises the idea that diversity served a functional purpose. Furthermore, Chela Sandoval argues that though diverse feminist scholarship was included in the third wave, it has been "misrecognized and underanalyzed." Various scholars continue this discussion by arguing that the third-wave institutional feminist narrative had extended to tokenize the inclusion of women of colour scholarship without even reconceptualizing the "whole White, middle class, gendered knowledge base." Third-wave feminism betrayed women of colour by positioning it as an inclusive, radical feminist movement. They waved the banner of feminism without dismantling the racist, classist implications of it. They weaponized the term feminist, claiming to be welcoming and all-inclusive. bell hooks critiqued this in her book, *Feminism is for Everybody*, stating, "The dismantling of consciousness-raising groups all but erased the notion that one had to learn about feminism and make an informed choice about embracing feminist politics to become a feminist advocate." Feminists must be informed about intersectionality. This does not suggest education plays a role in understanding feminism as this institutionalized view of feminism was built on classist ideologies. In the book Against White Feminism, author Rafia Zakaria writes, "[there is a] division between the women who write and speak feminism and the women who live it, the women who voice versus the women who have experienced, the ones who make the theories and policies, and the ones who bear scars and sutures from the fight" (Zakaria, 2021). If feminism is to stand in solidarity with those who face gender-based discrimination, and systemic patriarchy, and establish freedom and rights for all people, one who harbours racist ideologies cannot be a feminist. Feminism has been built and practiced on a foundation of White supremacy, and therefore a forward trajectory is not entitled, but a critical analysis and re-evaluation of the entire movement is president.

Current fourth-wave feminism has returned to spaces of public discourse taken up by previous waves. Social media has facilitated this change, allowing voices to travel far and wide. A key example of the underlying hegemonic feminism in the fourth wave was the #MeToo movement where women across North America shared their stories of sexual harassment and assault. Though the movement gained massive attention after actress and producer Alyssa Milano's involvement, the origin of this movement is a woman of colour, Tarana Burke. Within the mainstream #MeToo movement, women of colour have been left out of the conversation. Instead, affluent White women are the ones who have their voices heard. In a Washington Post article, Tarana Burke discusses how "What history has shown us time and again is that if marginalized voices—those of people of colour, queer people, disabled people, and poor people—aren't centred in our movements, then they tend to become no more than a footnote." The continued marginalization of women of colour is dangerous, especially when considering the fact that women of colour are more vulnerable to sexual harassment and are less likely to be believed when they report harassment, assault, and rape. Indigenous women continue to face disproportionate risks of experiencing domestic abuse in their communities fueled by the intergenerational trauma of forced assimilation policies. Still, the larger society is no safer as rates of missing and murdered Indigenous women remain alarming. In the book *White Tears/Brown Scars: How White Feminism Betrays Women of Color* by Ruby Hamad, the author wrote "It is only when white women are violated or even imagined to be violated by nonwhite men that white society suddenly seems to find its moral compass". In this line, Hamad is proposing that the issues related to gendered violence and oppression are exacerbated by white supremacy, disproportionately harming racialized individuals. Feminist movements such as this are grounded in single-issue frameworks, overshadowing the complexity of the problem that impacts the lives of so many women.

As feminism in the West has evolved, it is clear that the experiences of White women have often dominated the narrative, sidelining the intersectional struggles faced by women of color and marginalized groups. Despite the emergence of intersectional feminism, which aims for a more inclusive approach, there is still a pressing need to center the voices and experiences of those who have been historically marginalized. To truly achieve gender justice, we must challenge existing power structures and prioritize solidarity across all intersections of identity. It is far less palatable to admit that men are not the primary cause of injustice

and systemic oppression, but that women have also contributed to the mistreatment and discrimination of other women. Accepting this reality is a crucial step towards fostering a more impactful movement centered around women's rights.

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White Feminism in Relation to Pakistan's Aurat Marches

By Suhana Kumar

Women have been fighting for their rights for centuries, and the concept of feminism has, in some shape or form, often always surrounded women and their fight to empower themselves and each other. When we think of "feminism," and of advocating for women's rights, sometimes we imagine the stereotypical feminist activist; short or dyed hair, maybe a few tattoos, holding up signs with slogans such as "the future is female!". We may think of something much older, like the early 20th-century suffragettes who fought for voting rights in Europe and North America. We may even think of feminist icons such as Joan of Arc, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, or Simone de Beauvoir. In short, as individuals who are currently living and experiencing Western culture as we know it today, these are the women who shaped our perceptions of what it means to live in a free society as a woman. *But what about the rest of the world?*

North American feminists don't always take into account the differences in struggle and disadvantages that women from marginalized countries have, as they themselves have not experienced those disadvantages that are often rooted in cultural context. It is not an easy thing to answer if women in other parts of the world have the same rights we have today, as their history, and their experiences, look very different. We can explore the lens of the variability of feminist activism through the example of the Aurat Marches in Pakistan. Every year, thousands of women come together to march the streets of cities such as Lahore and Karachi to advocate women's rights in Pakistan and speak out against the harassment women face in such a conservative country. The online discourse surrounding this event has created a divide between online Pakistani communities. In 2018, the slogan "*Mera Jism, Meri Marzi*," which translates to "*My Body, My Choice*" was created to represent the marches, and to fight for women's rights to their bodies in particular. The slogan was leveraged to an even greater extent in 2019 through the marches and on social media. The intense backlash from conservative parties in Pakistan over the slogan created a nationwide online phenomenon and sparked discourse that would not have been as relevant as it became if it weren't for the current technology and hashtag culture we have today. Despite an increase in dialogue, the threats from opposing parties and exposure from vitriolic online communities continue to spread hatred, coining the term as "too Western" in thinking and allowing men to oppose these ideals on social media using hashtags such as "WeRejectMeraJismMeriMarzi." While this event created ripples in Pakistan and the South Asian communities, there was little to no news coverage about the Paki-

stani Women's Marches in North America. In fact, the only way I, a South Asian woman, found out about it was through another South Asian friend of mine. Why is that the case?

Most North Americans believe that they are the driving forces for creating positive change and inclusivity. However, for a society that claims to be forward thinkers in the feminist lens, the difference between creating awareness around rights for Caucasian, privileged women and women from marginalized groups is staggering. As Marlene LeGates claims, the "we" that white, middle-class feminists have advocated for were presumed to include all women, (LeGates 2012, 2), without taking into account the diversity of women and the differences in their experiences. However, the oppression a Caucasian woman living in the United States experiences is not the same as a South Asian, Muslim woman living in Pakistan. The Mera Jism, Meri Marzi movement is something that white feminists haven't experienced at all. The cultural context in Pakistan often doesn't allow women to have the same privileges that they get within a North American cultural sphere, making their personal experiences with female oppression and feminist defiance (in short, what rights they are fighting for) to be very different. The North American woman who is able to work but doesn't get fair wages fights a different battle from a Pakistani woman who wants the right to complete a university degree and start a career. While both battles are extremely valid, North American feminists cannot compare their disadvantages to women in other parts of the world, especially considering the different cultural contexts in which women are oppressed.

According to Aída Hurtado (1989), in North American history,

> 'White' middle-class women are groomed from birth to be the lovers, mothers, and partners (however unequal) of white men because of the economic and social benefits attached to these roles. Upper- and middle-class white women are supposed to be the biological bearers of the members of the next generation who will inherit positions of power in society. Women of Color, in contrast, are groomed from birth to be primarily the lovers, mothers, and partners (however unequal) of men of Color, who are also oppressed by white men. (Hurtado 1989, 842-43)

To this day, white women hold importance and priority over women of colour within Western society as they are connected to the individuals who traditionally hold the most positions of power, and therefore their voices will most certainly be heard more than women of colour.

Even the big media and news outlets have traditionally been run by white men of power, and it is they who decide what the general public gets exposed to and not. By allowing feminist topics to be displayed on big media outlets traditionally set up and regulated by men, they are allowing women to destabilize the traditional, white male-dominated power structure and open up the potential for a multicultural female influence to come into the media, which would drastically change what the public is exposed to, and in turn, how the public reacts to certain social justice issues. These privileged men in power then come to see white feminism as less of a threat to the patriarchal structure that has been set up in North American media. This allows white feminists to speak their truth while fundamentally believing they are making the world a better place for women everywhere. In this way, white feminists are seen as the top of the chain within the marginalized female group, and it is what they advocate for and their power that gets exposed to the media and what North Americans hear about. Therefore, in this day and age, media outlets are more inclined to hear the voices of those women in power who have traditionally been their mothers, their lovers, and their partners, and are more aware of their struggles because they were surrounded by it. This often dismisses certain movements and feminist fights happening in other parts of the world, mirroring the imbalance in power amongst white women and women of colour within North America. Western media outlets censoring and concealing the experiences of women of colour around the globe is why I myself have not heard of the Aurat Marches until now.

It is important to note that times are changing. With social media sites taking over the news cycle and traditional news outlets becoming a dying industry sector, the internet is allowing people from all walks of life to share their stories and truths. It is something that is no longer dictated by patriarchal men who

sanction what goes out to the general public and what doesn't. In short, anyone now has the power to speak their general truth. However, there also comes the problem of advocacy within the confines of social media's structure. While someone now may be allowed to advocate for a cause, social media and the public can choose and regulate where and to whom this message gets spread to, providing freedom only to a certain limit and bringing in the topic of censorship. While the destabilization of white, patriarchal media structures is inevitable, there comes a new power of white feminism that masks and oppresses feminist advocacy in other parts of the world through social media's structures. For example, a body-positive post by a popular white, female celebrity will become more viral than a video of a Pakistani woman trying to advocate for women's rights in her own country. It is the job of feminist scholars and advocates in privileged areas of the world such as North America to bring these voices into the light and make others aware of their fights, and to give them support to have the right to their own bodies. It is the job of privileged feminists to advocate for our fellow women through social media, word-of-mouth, and campaigns to help bring their story to light. There are still many things that need to be improved upon, and I encourage us all to educate ourselves on important feminist issues from around the world, especially experiences that differ from our own, and take part in advocating women from all walks of life.

However, that is not to say that no progress has been made at all. While online conservatives had bashed the "Mera Jism Meri Marzi" statement, the slogan had also received positive responses from Pakistani feminists, as they continue to persevere and leverage the slogan to fight for bodily autonomy for women. While it may be hard for us to pack our bags and join the fight there, we can help these women by amplifying their voices through social media and leveraging our platforms to support those whose voices aren't reaching beyond their home countries. Even encouraging discussion within groups and through word of mouth is a powerful tool in amplifying mixed voices fighting for women's rights. Despite the lack of coverage in Western parts of the world, these marches show how similar to North America, women all over the world are fighting for their right to exist and thrive in a society traditionally set up by men. Despite cultural differences, each cause contains the essence of fighting for womanhood in a patriarchal society.

Fighting for basic women's rights such as having autonomy over our own bodies is political. Movements run by marginalized and racialized women not getting the attention they deserve are political. Having little to no media coverage about feminist movements around the world is political. Wanting power and freedom despite our backgrounds is political. Wanting the right to be ourselves is political.

The question is, what are Western feminists going to do about it?

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Politics as Personal Player Choice

By Jay Smith

Baldur's Gate 3, Larian Studios' massive narrative roleplaying video game, is a deeply political work in our current socio-political landscape. This is largely because the game includes representations of normalised and destigmatized bi/pansexuality, polyamory, and non-cisnormative gender expressions. Baldur's Gate 3's narrative design, especially around its secondary characters, extends a notion of the personal into direct political experience for players. My personal interest here is shown in how the narrative arcs for two characters (Astarion and Wyll) create an understanding of the personal as a form of political action and fundamentally the political as extension of the personal.

Part of what makes Baldur's Gate 3 interesting to both discuss and play is how narratively open the game feels, while still seemingly drawing the player on a simple overarching plot line. This does lead to the game being challenging to talk about in absolute terms, since any given player may engage with these narratives in fundamentally different ways, or not at all. This analysis, as a result, will depend heavily on my personal experience with these narratives, an

experience that is not exhaustive or fully complete for every option in the game. This article is thus representative of both generalities and, also my personal experience.

Before getting to the characters however, a discussion of how I am using the term "political" is required, as its definition is generally nebulous. To be political can be to address explicit politics, the acts and systems of governments, power, and oppression, but more recently it can be understood as something engaging with society and social problems. A tweet by Emma Vossen that addressed this frames it as "Gamers are still convinced that there are only: // Two races: white and "political" // Two genders: Male and "political" [...]" (Vossen 2019). The "gamers" in Vossen's analysis is not intrinsically linked to those who play games, but more accurately could be syncretized to politically conservative/reactionary attitudes present in that subset. Given that, accordingly this framing fundamentally makes any engagement with a non-dominant identity an expression of the nebulous "political". It is through Vossen's framing that elements of the personal become fundamentally politically charged. The idea is not that politics are intrinsic to an identity or even act, but rather that the political is socially constructed by the audience that is observing said identity or act. This idea of the political is present in the main plot line, which follows a traditional expanding viewpoint model, where the story starts on the player character and small actions (i.e., helping one person or one small collective) and expands in each of the story's three acts until the fate of the world is at stake. What defines an "act" is where characters outside the party change states (such as location) without the party killing the character, mainly seen in characters like the Tieflings moving from the relative safety of Act One's sanctuary town to the dangers of Act Two's open spaces. As readers, we can understand this as a political extension of the personal, where the framing of the personal gradually extends to systems and societies on a macro-scale. However, this does not feel political, but rather it feels akin to the standardised "Save the World" plot.

It is instead the personal stories of the party characters that enable this more political exploration to take place. There are around eleven companions in the game with some degree of character side quest. Not all of these characters follow the notion of the political as personal actions, for example Karlach's main narrative is entirely personal, derived from the seeming death sentence of her artificial heart. Karlach's story is set up from her introduction and clearly personal throughout and the resolution of it is about helping her find meaning in her last days, and to get revenge on those who did this to her. However, using Vossen's notion of "gamer politics", Karlach is a woman and also, like all companions, bi/pansexual. The latter is mostly an extension of the design wanting to minimise constraint on the player character's romantic options. What this does do however, is it situates the companion characters like Karlach as intrinsically others to heteronormative society, with each of their individual stories exploring deviations from other norms of their cultural framework. Karlach is fleeing from the demonic hierarchy for wanting her freedom, a wholly personal motivation, while Astarion…

Astarion and the Politics of Queer Anti-Capitalist Vampires

Astarion is a vampire. Astarion is rhetorically and functionally queer, like all the party members being bi/pansexual, but also has what can best be described as queer mannerisms. Astarion is a representation of the queer reclamation of the vampire as a symbol of the queer other. We see some of this in the article "The Vampire, the Queer, and the Girl: Reflections on the Politics and Ethics of Immortality's Gendering." by Kimberly J. Lau (2018). Lau identifies how the queer vampire is rooted in the earliest English novelized vampire stories, specifically how the vampire's monstrous nature is drawn as a parallel to homosexual relationships (Kimberly 2018, 5). It is then in modern works where the vampire's queerness becomes disentangled with the monstrousness, rather being coincidental or thematic. The idea being that there are still queer vampires, but their nature as queer is not comorbid with vampirism, but rather that vampires are people and people are queer.

Astarion's predominant motivation is derived from his previous subservient and abusive relationship to his master Cazador but enabled by the main plot to break free of that control. This freedom allows Astarion to understand and reject Cazador's design for him, but also become his own person. This development is expressed through many discussions with the player, where Astarion begins to move away from where he

started this narrative (attempting to hold the player character hostage) towards a more rounded and emotionally available person. Through discussions with Astarion, the player learns that Cazador had emotionally, sexually, and physically abused Astarion for around two hundred years. This creates an understanding of Astarion, a damaged person, trying to take any shreds of power he can to protect himself. He expresses trepidation about going back to Baldur's Gate out of fear that Cazador might regain control over him there. It is this fear that Astarion's narrative gradually pushes against, leading him to open up to the player character, first about being a vampire, then his concerns with Cazador.

Once the player gets to Baldur's Gate, Astarion's plot becomes active, seeking out Cazador and killing him. What starts out as a revenge plot becomes entangled with a greater threat of Cazador himself, who wants to use Astarion among others to elevate himself to something approaching divinity. There is a lot to say about vampires and their metaphorical relationship to notions of bourgeois power. In "Marxferatu: The Vampire Metaphor as a Tool for Teaching Marx's Critique of Capitalism," Jason Morrissette (2013) describes the metaphor of the vampire's relation to capitalist control as "owners step[ing] into the role of the vampire, draining the surplus value of the worker's labor" (637). Cazador works as a textual manifestation of those ideas. He feeds off the poor, both in the traditional consumption of their blood as well as a form of ritual, collecting the poor as the literal fuel for a near deific ascension. He uses his accumulated power to manipulate and enforce his will upon society. Even those who serve him, like Astarion, are just tools for his ascension. There are parallels to be drawn between Cazador's plan to ascend to near divinity through the deaths of thousands of the poor, and the ultra-rich's obsession with moving to Mars. Both Cazador and figures like Jeff Bezos attempting to escape the consequences of the world they live in, the system that allows their empowerment, at the cost of the lives of others.

It is therefore fitting that Astarion, the most unloved and mistreated and queer coded of Cazador's servants, is the means of Cazador's failure. It is a message that those who are marginalised by society can personally act against their oppressors and win. It is a political action entangled with and rooted in a deeply personal exploration. It is perhaps critical that, unlike other side quests with this structure, once Cazador is defeated, the narrative decision is not whether Cazador should die, but whether Astarion should take Cazador's place (at the cost of the lives of thousands of Cazador's other victims). The idea that the oppressed will become the oppressor if given the opportunity becomes one crucial option in the game play. However, the game allows for Astarion to be persuaded to reject the choice, with three additional options that push Astarion away from this choice.

Wyll and the Politics of Rejection

Wyll's narrative is fundamentally entwined with the main plot more than any other party member, with it being impossible to fully complete Wyll's narrative without taking a specific path in the main plot as well. It is also one of the largest and most elaborate side narratives in the game, to the degree that the number of outcomes varies wildly. This is partially because Wyll's backstory entangles him directly with the political power structures of the city Baldur's Gate, being the son of one of the dukes of the city. Wyll has a concrete understanding of right and wrong that revolves around protecting people at any cost to himself, including the possibility of his death.

This self-sacrificing behaviour is seen in Wyll's mechanical class as a warlock, a class of character that have bound themselves to an extra-planar entity for power. The idea of the warlock is generally a replication of the trope of the Faustian Bargain and, like Astarion with vampirism, Wyll is an interrogation of how we moralise that trope. While versions of this narrative predate it, a prominent example in the Western literature on this theme is that of Christopher Marlow's The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus, hence the term "Faustian Bargain" as near synonymous in the cultural mindset with "deal with the devil" (2014). Where Wyll differs from Faustus is in motivation, with Faustus's deal being born of ambition, Wyll's is one of desperation. The player is told that Wyll's contract was started in an attempt to save the people of Baldur's Gate years ago, that it was him attempting the only thing he could think of to stop the loss of life. His temptation towards his contract is entirely altruistic and in service of the general good. Despite this, Wyll is exiled by his father, Duke Ravenguard, for this contract, with his father understanding any contract with a demon as

only stemming from ambition or moral failing. Duke Ravenguard takes a morally absolute position while Wyll takes one of relativist or, to invoke ethical philosophy, utilitarian position.

With the aforementioned divergences of Wyll's plot line, the player can direct Wyll's narrative towards him attempting to escape his contract because of how it negatively impacts him. While elements of this plot line start appearing as early as Act One, they come to a head in Act Three where Duke Ravenguard is kidnapped at the start of the game by the cult that serves as the game's main antagonist, with him always being just out of reach until Act Three. Mizora offers to save Ravenguard, but at the cost of Wyll's contract becoming permanent. There is a genuine argument for both sides, with neither seeming out of character for Wyll to make, with both cementing and understanding of Wyll as he relates to systems of law and power. To accept Mizora's offer is to value power as a means of changing society, even if that power also restrains your action. In rejecting Mizora, the choice my Wyll made, we see a Wyll who accepts that power is not neutral, it is a bond that restricts and makes real change impossible. Wyll becomes a nexus between a liberal and anarchist understanding of power and power dynamics.

Importantly, it is still possible to save Duke Ravenguard, but the challenge in a mechanical sense is increased because Mizora is acting against you. This makes succeeding on this feel rewarding, like conquering not a person, but the system of oppression that person signified. The idea that you do not need to follow the law if that law does not lead to justice or perpetuates injustice is a radicalising message. That message becomes the core of my Wyll narrative after this point, with later developments with Duke Ravenguard culminating in Wyll rejecting the system of hierarchy in order to better protect people.

Ravenguard offers Wyll a political title and the responsibility of it, but the majority of the Act Three is a process of understanding that Baldur's Gate itself is based upon inequality, and that the military/police enable and empower the elevation of a tyrant to power. My Wyll understood that any action within that system would cater to or be complicit in the same power structure that led to the tyranny of the main plot. The idea that this choice is but one of several options for Wyll makes each a deeply personal decision for the player, but it also shows how the player is engaging the game's political elements. If I had pushed Wyll towards taking this power, I would recognize that my Wyll would be out of place there, that the systems of power do not fit for a character whose main choice was rejecting power in service of protecting others. I personally could have framed it as Wyll "changing the system from the inside", but his narrative was about trying that, and it failed him. There is this notion of the inevitability of failure from symptomatic political action that Wyll's narrative is a direct critique of.

Conclusion: On Personal Choice

This analysis, though grounded in the broader trajectory of the character's plots, is fundamentally grounded in my personal choices. My Wyll chose to break his contract because I stood beside him on that choice. My Astarion chose to reject Cazador's power because I recognized how it would harm him emotionally. I can say that for me, with where these characters ended up, their narratives felt complete and fulfilling, with elements like Wyll's rejection of political power allowing him to help another companion at the end of the game. Astarion is forced to flee from the sun at the end of the game, when what was protecting him fades away and leaves him vulnerable again.

Part of what makes these endings satisfying is how they resolve and entwine the political themes of their narrative into the completion. Rejecting power, whether physical or social, has its personal costs. The political elements of these narratives are means of making the player explore their own relationship to these ideas, with the personal and emotional connections being means of grounding the player's choices. Baldur's Gate 3's narrative design pushes players to recognize and accept that the political is grounded in the personal: that any discussion of power, legality, or systems is personal.

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(Un)Idle Talk: The Personal and Political Power of Feminist Gossip

By Kate Bradley

Psst! Did you hear? Feminist gossip is totally cool.

Gossip is a contentious concept. It is often dismissed as idle talk, or more specifically, as idle *women’s* talk. It has been historically devalued as unreliable, disobedient, and even evil (Federici 2019). Gossip has been punished with ridicule, degradation, and even physical torture like the “gossip bridle” (a sixteeth-century device that locked around a woman’s head and pressed a metal spike onto her tongue). Patriarchy thrives when women are isolated and silent; it fears when we are together and loud.

Gossip, and the women who share it, are often demonized by men in positions of patriarchal power. Take, for example, this propaganda poster from WWII (Figure 1). It features four panels, two of which are women sharing secrets amongst one another. This gossip leads to war information reaching the “enemy,” but more damningly, in the image gossiping women are painted as the enemy as well.

Figure 1. “Telling a friend may mean telling the enemy,” poster (1942).

Gossiping does not make us the enemy. In fact, feminist gossip builds webs of relationality and trust. It is an affective information practice that can be crucial for feminists to survive and thrive in patriarchal systems (Guerrero 2022). Take for instance, how gossip operates within a university setting. Gossiping feminists in the university may share tips for academic nomination, insight into what misogynist academics to avoid, or personal experiences of gendered barriers within university walls. I am an emerging feminist scholar and young historian who has found solace and safety in the information shared during feminist gossip sessions. This is a personal practice for me as well as an academic one - much like feminist gossip.

Feminist gossip is dually personal and political, it is both intimate and collective. Gossip straddles two worlds that seem increasingly inseparable for feminists in academia: their political stance in the university, and their personal embodied experience and relations. Below, I am building a definition of feminist gossip. I have pieced this definition together from the words of other scholars and some of my own in order to situate gossip as an important form of collective feminist action.

Feminist gossip - *noun*:

> A. a chatty talk, of an intimate and interested nature, that blurs the boundaries of personal and political (Merriam-Webster; Adkins 2022).
>
> B. A feminist praxis of care (Guerrero 2022).

Feminist gossip is a personal act and a political action. Defining gossip as feminist praxis allows us, as feminists, to dismiss conceptions of gossip as petty, dangerous, or disobedient. This definition simultaneously welcomes the personal intimacy of gossip and situates it as undoubtedly political.

Feminist gossip is personal.

Taking from the definition above, gossip is an intimate talk. It is a chatty space to share “emotional experiences, relationships, or memories”: things that are often seen as belonging in the personal world (unlike stereotypical “men’s talk” of sports, politics, and other safe public topics) (Guerrero 2022). But for feminists, the causes we fight for in our academic work are also the causes that we fight for personally: inclusion of diverse voices, bodily safety and autonomy, social equality, security, safety, and recognition. Our identities are at stake, and as a result, so are our hearts (Corner 2020).

Feminists often feel cynical, drained, and overwhelmed while working within institutional bounds (Raving 2021). Everyday sexism, institutional bullying, and patriarchal barriers compound upon us within

the neo-liberal, productivity-obsessed space of the university. We are expected to work beyond our limits - and quietly. In response, we become hypervigilant to institutional sexism - we see it everywhere. Sara Ahmed (2020) says, "When you are harassed and bullied, when doors are closed, nay slammed, making it hard to get anywhere, it can be history you are up against; thrown up against." Harassment from sexist superiors, exclusion from the 'boy's club' of higher academia, and hostility towards feminist theory and scholarship drains us, both historically and currently. We become exhausted by the slammed doors of academia. We may feel angry, cynical, and tired.

All of these are feelings that are important to share with friends to lessen the disproportionate levels of burnout experienced by feminists in the academy (and elsewhere) (Ranganathan 2016). Gossip is an intimate space that revels in the messiness of emotion. It welcomes our broken feminist hearts. When we gossip in the university, we validate emotions, name them, and find a way to bring our broken hearts together in collective action that combats the patriarchal academy.

Feminist gossip is political.

Gossip as a collective action has the power to undermine, question, and dismantle the patriarchal norms of the university (Crawford and Windsor 2021). Everyone is afraid when women gather and talk. And when feminist gossip is involved, I think they have good reason to be. Feminist philosopher Karen C. Adkins (2002) says gossip can be an important area of knowledge-making, allowing those who participate to explore serious subjects and make connections between their experiences more freely (because of gossip's perceived casual nature). These gossipy sessions can unearth shared experiences. For example, the fact that women's emotional labour is crucial to the university, but goes unpaid and unsupported (Gray 2022). Conversations that begin in the realm of gossip can turn to discussions of policy, pay, and expectations that productively threaten normalized care-labour exploitation of academia.

Feminist gossip can act as a praxis of affective knowledge-making: a care-ful shared space where grievances and inequalities can be brought up and tangled with (Guerrero 2022; Adkins 2022). Emily Guerrero (2022), talking about gossip in archives, says she is fascinated when "information systems born out of the brilliance of survival are weighted equally against systems that understand information as a collection of inherent truths." Academia confines itself to being a 'life of the mind,' structuring an idea of truth and normalcy around white male thought. This dismisses the embodied and lived experience of marginalized academics (Gray 2022). Feminist gossip has the power to question this understanding of truth and to open up new avenues to disrupt academic institutions.

Feminist gossip is personal and political.

Gossip is yet another area for feminists where the personal is political (Hanisch 1972). Feminist gossip blurs the academic distinctions between cerebral and embodied. It rejects the assumption that casual talk is unreliable. Although the university sees these intimate chats as idle, feminist gossip has radical transformative potential because of what it allows us to share with one another. Having an unbounded, trustful, friendship-driven chatty talk can also disrupt an institution (Taylor and Klein 2018). Our intimate chats between feminist allies within the university productively disturb the distinctions of friend-talk and work-talk. Gossip likewise disturbs the neo-liberal expectation of individualism (UnLeading 2024). Instead of celebrating alone-ness or individual success, gossip requires collaboration and interdisciplinary connection. Gossip combats academic demands that we are 'just one.' We become many.

It is impossible to separate feminist gossip from the critical networks of care and trust it creates. Guerrero (2022) describes this intricacy well, saying "gossip is a deeply relational communication system, reliant on in-jokes, community knowledge, and small groups of trusted kin. Through its combination of feelings, experience, and care work, it exists as a feminized tool, which is in turn routinely undervalued and demonized precisely because of its utility in efforts toward collective safety." Feminist gossip is a care-full and friend-full community effort.

We need feminist gossip.

Academia still dismisses the idea that gossip could be a source of knowledge. It is still seen as idle and unreliable. But despite its devaluation, feminist gossip remains a hugely important site of personal and polit-

ical care. Gossipy feminist relationships can become safe intimate spaces within unsafe institutions to share emotional experiences caused by those very institutions. Together, we build structures that help to bolster and sustain us. Gossip allows for personal catharsis, political knowledge-gathering, and the combination of the two.

So, let us make tea and chat. We can disrupt while the tea steeps. We can care while it cools.

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Are We the Bimbos from Hell

By Anna McWebb and Rency Luan

The viral economy of social media has inevitably distorted the definition of bimbo. Despite the negative connotations of the word "bimbo" used to label conventionally attractive women as unintelligent and clueless, Gen Z is spearheading the effort to reclaim the word. The New Age bimbo shatters the phallus-governed society by her performative acts of vanity and cluelessness. In the post-2016 Hilary Clinton pantsuit era of #girlbossing, bimboism subverts the 'Girlboss' persona by (re)claiming hyper-femininity. Above all, bimbo feminism realizes there is more to her college degrees and resúmé. The modern bimbo is back.

In this essay, we dish out the juicy details of bimbo feminism, exploring first how bimbo feminism is situated within an intersectional feminism framework, untangling the multifaceted dimensions of inequality. From there, we dissect the larger cultural context of bimboism through pop culture digital mediums, such as TikTok. Tracing the genealogy of bimboism, we examine how bimboism has emerged and gained virality across the digital landscape. Lastly, we explicate how bimboism is tied to the theme of "the personal is political" through an emphasis on self-actualization as a method for subverting phallocentric norms.

Intersectional Feminism x Bimbo Feminism

Kimberlé Crenshaw, an American civil rights advocate and leading scholar of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and law, coined the term "intersectionality" nearly 30 years ago. Situated in Black feminism and CRT, intersectionality argues that identities such as "gender, race, sexuality, and other markers of difference intersect and reflect large social structures of oppression and privilege, such as sexism, racism, and heteronormativity" (Kelly et al. 2021). Intersectionality is foundational in conceptualizing feminism and feminist theory. At its core, Crenshaw defines intersectional feminism as "a prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate and exacerbate each other" (Steinmetz 2020). This begs the question: How do we situate bimbo feminism within an intersectional feminist framework? Situating bimbo feminism within an intersectional feminist framework calls attention to the larger social structures of oppression that dictate how women are supposed to act, talk, and carry themselves under the regime of the heteropatriarchy. Ever since the premier of the Barbie movie, Bimbo feminism has (re)gained traction on TikTok (as it originally emerged on the platform around 2020), now coined BimboTok. At its core, Bimbo feminism embraces a multi-faceted

representation of feminism: (re)claiming hyper-femininity; pushing back against the capitalist 'Girlboss' aesthetic; and ultimately, arguing that it is okay to be hot, dumb, and depressed! Since the rise of BimboTok, there have been waves of backlash, criticizing self-described bimbo feminists as sexist, obnoxious, and essentially, detrimental to the feminist movement. Operating under these rigid rubrics of oppression, bimbo feminism seeks to expose the ways in which sexism, racism, and heteronormativity circulates in society, ultimately (re)claiming her feminist power.

Who is a Bimbo?

To begin identifying who a bimbo feminist is, you might ask the question: are you hot, queer, and climate conscious? Then you might be a bimbo (Chlapecka 2023). Emerging as a response to the post-2016 Hilary Clinton pantsuit era of #girlbossing, bimboism reclaims hyper-femininity and frivolity as powerful and subversive expressions of feminism within the realm of digital media, actively contradicting the suppression of girlishness inherent in the grind culture and capitalistic sentiments of the girlboss trend. Generated largely by Gen Z content creators and users, the genealogy of bimbo feminism can be traced back to TikTok creator Chrissy Chlapecka, who began making videos clad in head-to-toe pink, and making unabashed remarks on the polemics of the male gaze, sex-positivity, and taking pleasure in simply existing as a woman in the world (Haigney 2022). Though bimboism presents itself through ultra-feminine optics, self-identified bimbos like Chlapecka make it clear that a bimbo is a gender-neutral term: "there's bimbos, thembos, himbos…", and further a bimbo will always be there for their "girls, gays, and theys" (Chlapecka 2020), which points to bimbo feminism's intersectional nature, as it actively pushes against the historical and contemporary strains of whiteness and heteronormativity within the feminist debate. A nod to drag is necessary here, as drag queens have historically been employing these same polemical tactics in their personas and performances and continue to do so. Drag queens, The Sugar and Spice Twins (popularized on TikTok and later on RuPaul's Drag Race) construct their twin personalities around the persona of bimbos, utilizing hyper-femininity and sarcasm to boldly reclaim bimbofication, as is exemplified in their music video "Dingaling" and "Bimbofied" (Sugar and Spice Twins 2023). The queerness of bimboism cannot go unnoticed, and in the words of Chrissy Chlapecka, "if you're homophobic, I'll castrate you!" (Chlapecka 2020).

Self-Actualization and Subversion of Phallocentric Discourse

This reclamation of identity and self-actualization at the core of bimboism is not broadly understood or valued as inherently feminist. This is due in part to the optics and political character of the TikTok bimbo encouraging frivolity and femininity, though the trend is condemned for this exact audacity, which some criticize as reinforcing gendered stereotypes. As such, a criticism of the TikTok bimbo is that it only serves to benefit the heteronormative and patriarchal male gaze (Elliott 2022). A bimbo, though, would say that they are conscious of their own frivolity, and that it is precisely the hyper-feminine, yet politically critical, commentary that satirizes the heteronormative expectations of someone who may present as a bimbo. How dare a woman be both a bimbo and have a political opinion! Cheeky comedy has been woven through bimboism from the beginning, when Chrissy Chlapecka began making videos and people (mostly men) commented on her videos, dismissing her as bimbo as a way to belittle and insult – fortunately it had the opposite effect, as Chlapecka decided to go with it and claim the label of bimbo with confidence and pride, effectively rendering the notoriously heteronormative male-driven insult useless.

The Personal is Political: From TikTok to Hollywood

Broadly, bimbo feminism re-frames the second-wave feminist phrase "the personal is political" in a digital and intersectional context, where the emphasis on self-actualization subverts phallocentric norms through conscious frivolity and cheeky comedic commentary. Chrissy Chlapecka in her first video on defining who a bimbo is, "Who is a gen z bimbo", states: "I don't do this for the misogynistic male gaze, I do it for my gaze! And d@mn, my t!t$ look good! <3" (Chlapecka 2020). This sentiment gets to the core of bimboism and self-actualization as political resistance. The statement of "damn, my tits look good" as an offshoot comment to the casting aside of the male gaze essentially renders the undoubtable weight of the heteronormative patriarchal judgment weightless. Years later, in 2023, Chrissy Chlapecka, along with a fellow

bimbo, celebrated three years of bimbofication. In it, the bimbos overview what makes a bimbo, stating that: “A bimbo is hot, queer, and climate conscious” (Chlapecka 2023). Bimbofication remains prolific on TikTok, and if you’re still curious about whether or not you might be a bimbo, refer to TikTok user fauxrich’s video where the diagnosis includes questions such as: “Are you hot? Do you not care about society’s elitist view on academic intelligence” (Fauxrich 2020)? If yes, then fauxrich would might just diagnose you as a New Age Bimbo, where the only treatment is juicy couture and pink glitter (2020). Bimboism, at its essence, is the political as deeply personal, because its critical nature is intertwined at its core with individual identity and the reclamation of feminine confidence within the self. Bimboism has been amplified in the larger popular culture context since the premier of Hollywood blockbuster, Barbie on July 21st, 2023. The most iconic scene in Barbie – a powerful monologue by Gloria (America Ferrara) – reinforces the juxtaposing role of women operating under heteronormative power structures. In an attempt to de-program the Barbies from the patriarchal brainwashing, Gloria proclaims, “[Women are] supposed to stay pretty for men, but not so pretty that you tempt them too much or that you threaten other women because you’re supposed to be a part of the sisterhood” (Barbie, 1:19:04). Yes, living as a woman under the patriarchy is wildly contradictory. Bimboism aestheticizes and exaggerates these contradictions to reveal the ways in which embracing the turbulence of being feminine may actually be liberating. Even under the contradictory norms of the patriarchy, bimboism teaches us to live boldly and powerfully: to affirm our individual identities as a reclamation of feminine confidence within the self.

It seems that we have certainly not seen the last of bimbo feminism, or the potential implications on broader intersectional feminist discourse. It is perhaps not such a bad thing to consider how the core values of self-actualization and polemical comedy can address the political polarization, disinformation, and increasing gendered, queerphobic, and racial violence within the ubiquitous mediascape of online platforms like TikTok. The Hollywood blockbuster Barbie may not be the only or last theatricalization of bimboism in a larger popular culture context, and we can be optimistic about the wider adoption of its progressive ideals. Regardless of what happens, we can remain hopeful, as in the words of drag queen Sugar, “a bimbo never dies.”.

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Why Can’t Men Stop Talking in Classrooms? *An Ode to Mr. Loudmouth’s Presence in Academia*

By Shelby Page

Imagine having the audacity, the confidence, the entitlement to move through the world believing that you should externalize every thought you have, and that people will always listen to you.

And having it come true over and over and over again.

In a classroom setting, femme coded bodies are aware of leaving space for other students to have the opportunity to share their thoughts, too. There are unwritten rules of etiquette that we are all conscious of. You should not answer the same question twice. You should not spend ten minutes monologuing your opinions. You should not start talking unprompted. You should not interrupt other students. You should not speak over the prof.

So why do men feel that these are acceptable things to do?

Throughout my five years thus far in academia, I have come across countless men who believe it is their right to dominate the classroom, treating the space like yet another place they must assert themselves as the leader of the pack or else they will be dismissed as adequate.

Mr. Loudmouth, do you get a kick of adrenaline when you cut off women profs? Do you feel satisfaction when you make all the other students listen to you making your subpar statements? Do you enjoy bringing up irrelevant points and veering well off-track? Does it make you feel powerful to play devil's advocate?

What must it be like to constantly have your superiority reinforced by societal structures and the ways people who look like you are portrayed? It is society that has allowed men to control conversations, classrooms, academia for so long. And it is society that is still allowing this to continue. Society has given men permission to talk without thinking and expect people to listen to them. Educational spheres are full of men who believe they are entitled to the time and attention of peers and experts alike. And because they have "put in their dues" and have had formal teaching, they believe that their voices are even more important.

If women were socialized the same way as men, this would be a very different conversation. We wouldn't be asking what we have to do to be heard, what we have to do to be taken seriously, what we have to do to earn the successes that we have had.

We wouldn't have to always be perfect. We wouldn't have to always do the mental and social labour for everyone around us in addition to ourselves.

Because I am a woman, I have to work harder. I have to wait longer. I have to talk louder. All because society has conditioned women into believing that they cannot take up space, that they must always be conscientious of others, that they have to be gracious for the attention that they are given.

This is bullshit. And I'm so very tired of it.

Why can't I monopolize the time of others? Why can't I over-explain and talk down to my peers? Why can't I go through the world without constantly analyzing how I am being received? Sometimes, it feels very tempting to do so. But this isn't the solution. Because this behaviour isn't just synonymous to being a rude man, it's synonymous to being a rude human. And the world has enough rude people in it.

So how do we solve the problem of men taking up more than their share of space in classrooms? How can we take back the ground we were forced to cede to them in the fight for sharing our thoughts?

It is so hard to combat this because it is a subtle way of undermining women authority figures and creating an environment that makes others feel like their thoughts do not have the same value. When addressing it afterwards, the critiques can sound ridiculous and easily deconstructed. You are participating too much in discussions (where everyone is encouraged to participate). You are giving too many opinions on a topic (that everyone is instructed to think critically about). You are engaging too much with the materials (that everyone has been told to analyze). It is an issue that must be dealt with while it is happening, and oftentimes other students do not have the power to do so.

The next time a man in your classes is taking up too much time and space, think about how you, perhaps with others in your class, can respond to it and minimize the harm that it does to everyone. Think about the ways you could constructively intervene and participate in the discussion. Think about how you can help to make the classroom a more safe and inclusive space for those who are less comfortable and less privileged in it.

Because unless we take responsibility for making academia less male-dominated, it will never happen. Society has stacked the systems against us. We need to work at dismantling them, one small action at a time. We're doing it now. I see it happening. And these small actions grow to have big impacts on everyone who witnesses them.

Lady of Labour? Co-constructed Storying of a Korean-Canadian Homemaker

By Melanie Lim and Lisbeth Berbary

I took a women's studies course as an elective during my undergraduate studies and at the time I never thought I would find myself so deeply immersed in the words of Sara Ahmed, Audre Lorde, and bell hooks, to name a few. I felt that this was the kind of work that inspired me most in articulating the ways I live as a woman and the ways my mother has always lived her seemingly simple and leisurely, but truthfully complex life. As I began to think more deeply about my relations with race, gender, and family in an academic context, I had difficulty finding space to converse about readings that spoke more specifically to my lived reality. During my Masters, I was able to spend time on guided readings with my supervisor, Dr. Lisbeth Berbary. I was able to bring Korean scholarship (in a North American context), and Confucian philosophy into the classroom which have all shaped and inspired who I think with and what theories would help me understand the relations around me and my existence in a liminal space. Perhaps this is an overplayed thought, but it is true that as a Korean-Canadian, I am neither one nor the other.

In my personal life, often when I am asked about my ethnicity, I experience a particular type of storying surrounding the glamours of Korean culture. Korean boyband BTS, for example, has demonstrated its global popularity by achieving the title of most streamed music group on Spotify in 2021 alongside globally known, North American artists such as Taylor Swift and Drake (Shim 2021). Squid Game, a Korean TV series, also showed global interest, as Netflix's top-watched show by hour in its first 28 days since its release (Spangler 2021). Finally, Korean beauty has built to be a $ 10 billion industry, with its products flooding the shelves of stores across the North American market (Kim and Denyer 2019). Despite this fascination and arguable appreciation for Korean culture, my associations as a 2.5-generation immigrant are rather dark and have been built upon the tension both within and outside of my home life.

Not only are Koreans projected to be one of the fastest-growing visible minority groups in Canada through 2031 (Noh, Kim, & Noh, 2012), but since the 1990s, the 'Korean Wave', or Hallyu, has marked a deep rise in popularity amongst North Americans around Korean culture (Jin 2014). However, while we are seeing both this rise in population and cultural influence, leisure studies, even when it tends to explore Peoples of Colour, neglects Asians as a vast, complex group of multiple ethnicities (Tirone and Pedlar 2000). Searching through the top journals in leisure, Leisure/Loisir for example, 'Korean Identity' is relevant in 24 articles and of those 24, only about 3 discuss Korean identity in specificity, while in others it is merely mentioned as part of a broader grouping of immigrant peoples. Unfortunately, this erasure in much of euro-us-centric society and research fails to acknowledge the deep contributions and uniqueness of Korean culture and Korean lived experiences in a North American context.

I grew up in a relatively traditional Korean household, with my mom, dad, older brother, and paternal grandparents. This was always normal to me as it is for many immigrant families. I always thought of the home as a peaceful place for respite but what I did not know was that the walls of our home were the foundation of deep-rooted discomfort and tension for the only person in the house who performed intense amounts of care labour within it - my mother. With homemaking came the burden of being watched from Foucault's panopticon (Foucault 1977) by her in-laws, in-laws whose mindsets, despite social and technological advancements in Korea, continue to remain trapped by oppressive tradition and misogyny since their immigration to Canada in 70s.

Recognizing this erasure of Korean specificity in leisure research, this conceptual paper focuses on Korean immigrant housewife experiences in relation to their navigation of feminine identity and labour. Additionally, this piece continues to be a work in progress as I write about what I am currently living through. As Delgado so beautifully wrote I "dare to inject narrative, perspective, and feeling" into otherwise scholarly work. Though I emphasize my own experience, specifically as a Korean woman in Canada, I urge you to reflect upon sex-gender systems, white supremacy, and notions of family in your life.

What my work will do:

1. *Fill a gap in current cultural understandings – by exposing Korean culture beyond its popularity of what has been merely commodified.*
2. *Continue conversation around gender, race, and labour – by deeply considering what constitutes labour (homemaker, unpaid care work) with the added burden of race, gender, culture, and feelings of living in liminality.*
3. *Challenge systems/spaces of oppression – by contributing to existing understandings in qualitative inquiry which demonstrates the necessity and impacts of narrative inquiry.*

CONTEXT

Confucianism explains much of the dynamics within the Korean family household, the space in which the homemaker might consider to be their place of work. Korean family structure is often role-based, where the mother is the homemaker and has historically held a tight-knit relationship with her children, while the father demonstrates the typical gender-based role as a breadwinner (Koh 2008). In this case, the Korean homemaker would be expected to sacrifice for their family. More specifically, we can understand the complex meaning of selfhood and one's identities or existences through an anti-essentialist lens, according to Xiang (2019): "This assumption of human agency also means that the Confucian understanding of hierarchy is social as opposed to ontological and that difference between people are understood to be a result of culture-custom variation" (p. 11). As Korean people have been strongly influenced by Confucian philosophy, Confucian societies tend to be interdependent, and favour collectivism over individuality: "chemyon maintains the harmony of interpersonal relations and becomes the means or goal of strengthening the relationships" (Choi and Lee 2002, 333). Chemyon is a concept known as 'the social face' and arguably a significant aspect of Korean culture to consider. In essence, the self is neglected in favour of the group (Cha and Kim 2013). The idea of chemyon can be applied to the Korean immigrant housewife, either in ways that it is resisted or played out in a Canadian context.

THEORY

I read an article from the Boston Review on Identity Politics to my mother while hanging out together at home. The article, written by Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò, critiques the concept, explaining its misconceptions and misuse. Táíwò explained that Identity Politics is "deployed by political, social, and economic elites in the service of their own interests, rather than in the service of the vulnerable people they often claim to represent". I proceeded to go on a rant on feminism, the lack of shared politics amongst women, broader ideas of what it means to be a woman, and the lack of support I have witnessed amongst those who travel under its sign (Ahmed 2017). Social justice reduces itself to merely a buzzword and its acts often come across as performative. I noticed a sense of frustration in my mother. While I was reading and speaking out loud in my own thoughts, she told me "I couldn't really listen to you, whatever it is that you're trying to read, and understand, and think about…I am experiencing it, I am experiencing this lack of support because people simply do not get it". I couldn't wrap my head around the idea until this moment of coming into my research through inter-action but rather intra-action as Barad (2007) explained as a constitution of entangled agencies. This is what we are living, and in my mother's case, her existences materialize through and with the space, gender and age hierarchies that make up our Korean family home and her role as a homemaker, mother, wife, and daughter-in-law.

Sandra Harding (2009) affirmed that in "hierarchically organized societies, the daily activities and experiences of oppressed groups enable insights about how the society functions that are not available or at least not easily available from the perspective of dominant group activity" (p. 195). The importance of multiplicities needs to be highlighted, as it specifically demonstrates the necessity of social research in leisure as we "[fail] to take into account the organizing practices of humanism which distribute powers inequitably." (Berbary 2020, 5). For example, feminism itself cannot be essentialized as I once thought – Heidegger's concept of Dasein, or human existence, informs us of the importance of context and time. More specifically, I am engaging with the notion of racial formations "a sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed and destroyed" explained by Omi and Winant (1994), and conceptualizations of women's care as a means of meaning-making (Crotty 1998; Jaggar 1989). This approach will allow space to write in a way that is partial and tentative, allowing the inclusion of my voice as a researcher.

As such, I work towards:

1. A transformative outcome – as hooks (1991) stated "Theory is not inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary. It fulfills this function only when we ask that it do so and direct our theorizing towards this end" (hooks 1991, 2) and
2. meaningful and affective representation.

METHODOLOGY

This work utilizes narratives as a representational format to provide relational, intergenerational, and cross-cultural narratives of the lived experiences of a Korean housewife. As Delgado (1989) explained, the cure to oppression finds its potential in storytelling as "stories build consensus, a common culture of shared understandings, and deeper, more vital ethics" (p. 2414). Therefore, I pull from multiple theoretical ways of knowing that situate the narrative not simply in a Western, linear format but also one that is non-linear and co-constructed within the relationality of both the researcher and the researched. I will use improvisational methods and narrative approaches to anchor myself as I engage relationally with my mother, a Korean immigrant woman whose job has always been a homemaker. This co-construction of narrative pulls from concepts of improvisational methodologies of collaborative narrative refraction (Berbary and Boles, 2014) to show how through engaging with theorypracticing (Berbary 2020), our experiences and interactions become refracted through oneself and the previous generation. The narratives used to represent this data, therefore, not only represent the current moment but also the history and social engagements that have shaped my mother's generation, which has ultimately shaped my own.

I recognize that there are dangers that come with singular narratives, such as tokenization and generalizations. Further, Bamberg discussed the thought that a narrator may underplay lived moments in the ways that they are sensed, but rather counts moments that "add up to a meaningful temporal plot configuration".

I would argue that singular narratives may also become a powerful tool to deconstruct our perceptions of lived experience. Additionally, these narratives may challenge social expectations, reflect culture and better explain how social ideologies dictate the way we perform. In my lived experience, my mother has been subjugated by social expectations, based on gender, race, and culture both within the home and outside.

In contrast, we could consider counter-narratives as a method to push up against the taken-for-granted, social expectations built by white, heteronormative patriarchal ways of knowing. How might the narrative change if we consider that perhaps my mother conformed as a strategy for survival? Perhaps early in her marriage, she made a bargain with three devils: she acquiesced to being a servant in her own home, so long as my brother and I were treated well and enjoyed a privileged life.

STORYING

From a very young age, I recall coming home from school or my extracurricular activities to my mother cooking – at around 4 pm she would prepare a healthy meal for me and my brother while simultaneously cooking a traditional Korean dinner for my paternal grandparents (i.e. Kimchi stew, fried leek pancakes, octopus stir-fry, dumpling soup, to name a few dishes) many of which are time-consuming to prepare and would fill the house with a strong smell. Close to midnight, my mother would typically prepare a third dinner for my father who would rarely eat a 'regular' hour. In the evenings, my mother would prepare school lunches for me and my brother and for my grandparents and father. I recall one day in my teens; my mother had prepared a pasta casserole for the entire family rather than three separate dinners. My father came home and said, "You're trying to feed my parents shit", enraged that my mother did not cook my grandparents a traditional Korean meal.

I recall the scent of "Murphy's Oil" floor cleaner in the house since I was a child. I witnessed my mother deep-cleaning our hardwood floors regularly. When my brother and I became teens, we would help our mother clean the floors. She uses the same product/process to clean the floors to this day.

As children, she cared for my brother and me physically and emotionally. My father did not share or participate in caring for us as children, as it was his opinion that that was not his role in the house.

She strategically hid that our dad has been a long-time drug and alcohol abuser. We weren't aware of the regular beatings and verbal abuse she suffered while we were asleep or away. All the while, my grandparents instructed their son not to leave any marks on my mom's body. In exchange for being a servant in her own home, my mother had carefully manicured an 'idealistic' life for my brother and me to enjoy growing up.

SO WHAT?

More recently, in 2021, Canada enacted several changes to family law by expanding meanings of abuse beyond the physical, such as financial, verbal, and psychological. This is arguably impactful when considering meanings of labour within spaces where leisure takes place, and power is at the forefront. It is without a doubt that academic writings contain information, arguments and opinions that are needed for new policies and laws to take place. Books of authority, according to Bastarache (1999) are no longer limited to case law as the Court increasingly recognizes the importance of academic writing in judicial decision-making. Consider the psychology writings of Lenore Walker, for example, who brought to the forefront the notion of battered women's syndrome as a relevant factor in determining the outcomes of women acting in self-defence. It is my hope that academic social sciences, where narrative inquiry can be put to use, continues to be an invaluable component of making our society a more just place.

Drawing from Barad's notion of intra-action and Berbary's notion of theorypracticing, I am taking into consideration the idea that "intra-active entanglement of theorypractice reinforces that theory and practice should, and truthfully always have, been one and must be valued equally and engaged simultaneously to move us toward the most useful action" (Berbary 2020, 911). In other words, theory and practice cannot be separate, we make meaning rather than existing simply as separate entities as individuals, and so, I have urged myself to think otherwise and perhaps even reject a "positioning of myself" altogether.

Through improvisational methodologies, which can offer more accessible representations, and by pulling from notions of racial formations and gendered labour, I offer a transformative outcome through this work by daring to bring the personal in my writing. In doing so, I hope to illuminate the lived experiences of a Korean homemaker in a Canadian context, imploring listeners to think differently and consider otherwise.

"[…] and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard
nor welcomed
but when we are silent
we are still afraid
So it is better to speak
Remembering
we were never meant to survive."
(Lorde 1978)

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Why Words Matter

By Your Feminist Friend

Written November 2023

North America is no stranger to polarization. Every political issue has its heroes and its villains; proponents on both sides attack the other for their morals more often than their opinions. The divide between right and left has never been greater, exacerbated by social media. But the specific responsibility of social media, while relevant, is a discussion for another time.

My own worldview, as an individual, is naturally informed by the media that I consume. While I believe that people have a responsibility to read the news, educate themselves, and seek alternative views, it is unfair to entirely blame the individual for lacking perspective. When it comes to Palestine and Israel, people are misinformed because most news outlets are touting a Western-centric narrative— a narrative which is thoroughly refuted by human rights groups and the UN, which have called Israel an apartheid regime.

The question of "truth," once a philosophical debate, has become a political one. But the idea of journalistic integrity is a less contentious one. Journalists know that every story has two sides, and that reality should influence their coverage. News outlets have the minimum responsibility to explore multiple perspectives.

Let us remember an event from 2022. Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, well-known and beloved across the Arab world, was shot in the head by the IDF while on assignment in the occupied West Bank, despite clearly wearing a vest labeled "PRESS". This was targeted, not accidental as originally claimed by the IDF, a story that they maintained for one entire year until the world moved on. After the story had disappeared from global news cycles, the IDF issued an apology, finally admitting fault, although they predictably have borne no consequences.

The unprecedented bombing of the Al-Ahli Al-Arabi Hospital on October 17, which killed hundreds of innocent Palestinians, appears to have followed the same playbook. The Arab world has united in blaming Israel, who in turn has blamed the Gaza-based group Islamic Jihad. With the circulation of such graphic and horrifying footage, people crave an evil enemy to unite against. They need to believe that the source of such evil – a group who would deign to kill civilians, refugees, the injured, but especially children – is not worthy of mercy. And who makes a better scapegoat than an Arab?

I would not be surprised if new evidence is presented one year from now, indicating that this was an intentional targeting by the IDF, rather than an accident traceable to a Palestinian militant group. At the time of writing, even the New York Times has evidence to question Israel's claim.

The burden of proof is on the powerless. The story of Hamas beheading babies, which quickly hit the news circuit until it was discovered that there was no truth to the claim,was a rumor started by an IDF soldier. But Western media loves hearing that an Arab or Muslim has committed an atrocity: this becomes front page news, even without fact checking.

Yes, fake news spreads quickly on social media. But fake news is detectible to the educated or thoughtful person, who does the extra search to find out the truth – it's easy, for example, to discover whether or not former President Barack Obama was really born outside of the United States.

Propaganda, on the other hand, is not necessarily detectible. On the contrary, it is often quite subtle.

The absence of Palestinian voices in Western mainstream media is alarming; there is no concept of elevating their voices or highlighting their narrative. A Palestinian or Arab appears on television only when there is an attack, with the singular request to condemn Hamas. Of course we condemn Hamas and acknowledge that October 7, 2023 was horrific. But the media exclusively interviews the "other" side to highlight Israeli suffering. What of Palestinian suffering, which happens daily – not just in Gaza, but also in the occupied West Bank?

Presence matters, and we should be aware of who is sitting at the table, as well as the language used when these stories are told.

The media consistently uses the phrase Israel-Hamas conflict. And sure, it is technically correct that the current conflict is a war between Israel and Hamas—with countless civilians caught in between, no doubt. But the larger conflict exists between Israel and Palestine. Why do we discount the experiences of Palestinians, by mentioning only Hamas? Why do the media refer to Gazans, rather than Palestinians? The continued failure to acknowledge ethnic Palestinian identity is yet another means of elimination.

If a tree falls in a forest…

If we do not say their names…

Do they still exist? This is what mainstream media are doing. Slow, steady, deliberate erasure.

In the West, we are taught that questioning Israel, let alone condemning them, is akin to antisemitism. Of course, antisemitism should not be tolerated any more than Islamophobia should be tolerated. But the political institution is separable from the religion; for this very reason, condemnation of the Saudi Arabian government does not offend all Muslims.

Imagine the following. During a discussion on women's right to contraception in the global south, the men in the room claim sexism. Or, during a discussion on affirmative action, the white people in the room claim racism. This is a divisive tactic used intentionally to derail discussion. Freedom of speech is a guise under which marginalized groups are allowed to speak, with the condition that they do not criticize the status quo. The media is doing a disservice to Palestinians, to Arabs, to oppressed people everywhere by presenting a one-sided narrative. And they are doing a disservice to their readers. They are not presenting the facts, and they dissuade Westerners from making informed decisions. In fact, one may argue that they are allowing Westerners to continue being complicit in oppression, war crimes, and even genocide. There is no doubt that people have a voice, and that voice is powerful. The BDS (Boycott, Divest, Sanction) movement contributed to the fall of South African apartheid. But the public's voices, influence, and power are stripped when they receive incomplete information.

The media is not just complicit. They are authorizing the oppressive Israeli government to act with impunity. They have given a blank cheque to Prime Minister Netanyahu, following President Biden's example. Is this how they want to be remembered in history?

And we will remember that Western media outlets are instrumental in Palestinian genocide.

As Malcolm X said, "If you're not careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed, and loving the people who are doing the oppressing."

The Palestinians are in pain: they are grieving the loss of family, land, and at the same time trying to advocate for their right to life and to convince the world of their humanity. I am humbly attempting to take on a small piece of this responsibility. If I convince even one person to read more, to think critically, to ask questions rather than blindly consume the media that is too easily at our disposal in this digital age, I will count this as a success.