

The Feminist Library



**CARE IN A PANDEMIC
ISSUE 1**

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Editors' Letter

“The unique time that is my life, that is your life, is a terra infirma, neither flat nor secure underfoot. It is continually broken up and fissured by events that send the present and imagined future spiralling off in unforeseen directions.”

So says Yasmin Gunaratnam in her exploration of death, migrant bodies, and care. She reminds us that the world we know and live in is always spiralling in a million different directions at once. As feminists living in political and social uncertainty, as people invested in more liberated futures, it is our duty to analyse our conditions, to gather and build the components of the futures we wish to enact. The Feminist Library Zine is a volunteer-run space for reflection, for imagination, and for exercising our creative faculties. It is a vehicle through which we document and speak back against the oppressive organisation of our lives. It is a space to carve out. It belongs to a legacy of DIY feminist archival practice – when you are not included in the legitimate canon of history, you must create your own, and learn how to nurture it. We want this to be a space to proudly proclaim what matters to us as critical thinkers and add to the legacy of feminist resistance movements in the UK and abroad. The Feminist Library was established in 1975 to attempt to document the creations of a burgeoning women’s movement and ensure that the history of that movement was not displaced or forgotten. Sometimes, we are too busy doing the work to remember to record it. As those connected to the library, sometimes we are too busy trying to keep the lights on that we forget that the work must be preserved for others. We have created the zine for this purpose.

This first edition of the Feminist Library zine, published in July 2020, is being launched in the middle of a global pandemic. We chose the theme CARE IN A PANDEMIC because, at this moment, women and their families are being failed by the state and by all the legitimate authorities they have been taught to trust. Vulnerable workers exploited by zero-hour contracts are dying, the elderly are dying alone in care homes, and we are unable to properly mourn together. Black women and women of colour are being called up to care for the sick without protective equipment, and survivors of domestic violence are forced to remain with their abusers because they have nowhere to go. It is women and non-binary people who do the bulk of the care work in this world; we carry the burden of live-making activities. We chose this theme to mark this moment and to try and make real what is happening around us. Feminists have always been concerned with making suffering known – they have never been content to banish pain out of sight. Theorists, organisers, and artists have called us to witness the way prevailing systems of power organise our lives and the ways that we resist through care, through community, and through the practice of a revolutionary love.

Care is a core component of a radical feminist ethos that is often dismissed as an incomplete methodology for revolution. Something about care is too soft, too facile to sustain us. Yet, as our submissions will show, care means many things. It is the principle at the root of resistance; we struggle, we oppose, because we know that we could live differently, and that the other worlds we strive for are worlds where callousness and indifference to suffering are impossible. Care requires us to exert our energy with and for others, to replace the cult of the individual with a commitment to understanding and supporting one another. It is the life-blood of networks of mutual aid that are keeping so many alive at this moment, it is the way we attempt to keep ourselves nourished in a time of mass death and grieving, it provides the impetus for solidarity, acts of service, and the dissemination of political education. Care means extending our protection and consideration to all. It means we must craft political futures that attend to everyone’s needs by first naming the problems (capitalism, racism, gendered violence). Care means treating each other as if we were family, recognising the ways our lives are interlinked and fundamentally inseparable. Care means all of us or nothing.

Our submissions have been selected and ordered with careful consideration – we hope that you enjoy reading. We hope that the submissions wake you up to the political urgency of this moment and others leave you feeling calm. We hope they spur in you a desire to cultivate your own ethos of care, and to extend it to all those who surround you.

Lola, Rhiannon, Cristina, and Jennifer





Works on paper

Lily Hughes

Embroidery on handmade face-mask exploring the throwaway culture of political jargon. I spent a lot of time feeling powerless in response to the current crisis, angry with the government, their treatment of the NHS and the subsequent phenomena of grassroots charities being made to fill in the gaps. This work is an attempt to consolidate the experience of austerity and pandemic. The process of making protective equipment from old bedding - and embroidering quotes overheard from the media - has helped me find a voice within the quiet chaos of a crisis that has always been political.



TOO EARLY TO
SAY

In the Neighbourhood of Trans Care

Harry Josephine

In the year leading up to the coronavirus pandemic, I was part of three different support teams for neighbours recovering from vaginoplasty. This trans surgery has a three month recovery period, with very little mobility for the first month, which means that my friends needed support with cooking, cleaning, cat litter, dog walks, laundry, shopping – all the daily work of staying safe and alive. Flats had to be kept hygienic to prevent infection, store cupboards had to be kept full of easy and nutritious meals. And recovering from surgery is hard on mental health, can leave you feeling isolated and depressed, and all the pressure of relating to your trans body makes things harder still, so emotional support and good friendship were also part of the care responsibilities.

But transfems are usually poor, often distanced from family, frequently living with disabilities and mental distress, and always face discrimination from state care institutions. That means that we can't always rely on the unpaid and power-driven gendered labour named "mother" or "wife", nor on the precarious and migrant-reliant gendered labour of private housework agencies, nor on the securitised and austerity-ravaged gendered labour of local authority support workers. Instead, when we need care, we have to rely on our neighbours, on our trans and queer community. For each of my three friends this meant online spreadsheets, WhatsApp groups, endless planning and organisation, and a lot of chat about how "good friendship" and "care responsibility" can fit together without breaking people apart.

When the truth of the coronavirus pandemic hit, in the middle of the recovery period for my third friend, after a year of spending a few hours each week running errands, wiping surfaces and managing calendars with my trans neighbours, my first thought was "It's OK. I know how to do this." The Facebook chat that organised care for one person started to deliver support to a whole community; the spreadsheet template I copied from one care team to organise the other became the model for a city-wide mutual aid project.

And suddenly everyone else was talking about mutual aid. The kind of work I had been doing for the past year, just as a regular part of being a trans person in trans community, was now in everyone else's daily lives. In the same way, the kind of issues faced by disabled people before the pandemic – being cut off from state support, organising autonomous care teams, adjusting work to health needs, thinking through bodily safety in every aspect of daily life – became everyone else's concern as well. Suddenly, trans and disabled people had all the skills and experiences that everyone else needed.

But at the same time, the pandemic means that trans support needs have greatly increased, and our experience of prejudice and deprivation has intensified. Gender Identity Clinics – the NHS institutions which manage our authorised care – have all restricted services, and some have shut down entirely, cutting many trans people off from healthcare. Surgeries are all cancelled, hormone supplies are interrupted, and waiting lists, already at a two-year minimum nationally, are stretching off over an impossible horizon. Writing now, six weeks into lockdown, I know that the toll on trans mental health is already very high. I'm scared. Those of us supporting autonomous and community-centred trans care have a lot more work to do.

People keep talking about "when it all goes back to normal" and "after the pandemic". But trans health was already in crisis before the pandemic, and disabled people were already being pushed out of community by the austerity state. People keep talking about "when the lockdown lifts", but my community is full of immunocompromised and other vulnerable people who are expecting to stay in some form of isolation for the rest of 2020. There is no going back to normal for me and my friends – or, rather, the pandemic just intensified our normal crisis conditions, and "after the pandemic" will probably mean a further intensification as the UK government initiates a new round of austerity.

There is something utopian in the way trans people organise our care, have always organised our care. There's never been a time when wider society or the state met our needs, at least not since the advent of empire and capitalism. Trans people have always made each other, sharing the spells, techniques, chemicals and protocols that make trans life possible. We've always been here, our care has always been autonomous, and we've always survived. Or, rather, some of us have survived, enough to pass on the torch of transness and mourn those who didn't.

But I'm stretched. I'm cracking. I don't know how long I can keep going. I want to write that trans people are a model of how care can be provided in a liberatory way: mutual, autonomous, negotiated, freely given and taken, centred without judgement on individual needs, organised by neighbourhood, supported internationally. And I do think that's true. But at the same time, trans care is taking place now under intolerable conditions. We don't have enough money, time or emotional strength to withstand everything that's thrown at us. I know that because not all of us survive. Every time I lose a trans community member to failed conflict resolution, every time a trans neighbour in poverty disappears and I never hear what happened, every time a trans friend dies by suicide, I think "We do not have enough."

Besides, trans people aren't perfect utopians: we're flawed, we're limited, we hurt each other, and sometimes care work is hard, or painful, or boring, or shit. I don't want to have to care all the time, and sometimes I just don't want to clean the toilet, but I have to. I don't want care work to be shaped by messed-up dynamics of gratitude and power, charity and impoverishment, cisheteropatriarchy and the family, but right now it is. I don't really know how to make this making-each-other something that always feels liberatory, or even whether that's desirable.

Jamie Berrout, in *The Abolition of Publishing via the Anti-Press*, writes of 'underground economies of sex workers and trans women of color, of revolt and unsanctioned mutual aid, where the law is, "I accept nothing for myself that my sisters cannot also have / demand of me all that you do not have which is in my hands.' I believe in that law, and I break it, and it breaks me. I have it pinned above my desk. In a world that sets out to kill trans women through impoverishment, discrimination and violence, none of us have enough, but we must share what we have. That can never be utopian until sharing means that we all have more than we need.

My hope is that the wider experience of the necessity of mutual aid during the pandemic has taught more people what it means to have to rely on each other. My hope is that, now, more people will demand better for those who have the least. My hope is that having to seek community care has taught more people that it is good and right and necessary to seek and provide community care, and so that it should be funded, by all of us, in a way that centres collectivity and autonomy. I think of the man who posted daily to the neighbourhood Facebook mutual aid group asking for help: his wife was in hospital, and one day he needed a phone, and the next day he needed help doing a load of laundry, and the next day he needed help with the shopping. That help was given by other men. I hope that he learned something about the labour of housework that week, and who does it, and what we deserve. I hope that no one goes back to normal.

Because the risk is there. The risk that, in the desire to move on from the grief of the moment, people with privilege forget what they have learned. The risk that "we're all in this together" becomes again the nationalist lie that papers over the truth of who it is that is providing care in this pandemic, and who is struggling, and who is dying. That once more the poor are blamed for austerity and bear its true social cost. That the murderous political project of normality is allowed again to reassert itself.

Against that threat, a threat that extends well past the coronavirus pandemic, I hold up the full possibility of trans care: a care that gives what is needed, a care against the state, a care that holds friendship and support together, a care of neighbours, an autonomous care, a care that in the giving means that everyone has had enough.

– at least we are here to witness the rot!

Tamara Hart

every so often you take my hand
show me around
gently inquire
'see?'

I pound my psyche
harder each time
to feel what you feel
-- fruitlessly

I'd cry all your tears
zig-zag the streets
consume those drugs
face paralysed
fight against restraint

'that's not how it works' you say

it's an honour
to hear your voice

I look for yellow tulips
no longer finding warmth
in the usual places
you feel a sense of comradery
(a smile, a wink)

in my eyes the world is melting
in yours it's blooming

the pleasure in rotting
that gives us solace
a moment of
solidarity

– at least we are here to witness the rot!

Tamara Hart

The end of the world floats through our dreams. A melody echoing the collapse of social and economic systems, its notes are plaintive, haunting and lush. The end of the world here signifies the dissolution of architecture structuring our realities. As a major pandemic diminishes the authority of social order and established systems of thought, we are forced to collectively dream of a decaying future.

Yet as dreaming crystallises into reality, who among us is equipped to accept the end of the world? Certainly, philosophers, cosmologists and social theorists are logical advisors. However, a crisis does not account for the logical and, as we venture further into isolation, it is my conviction that those who are closest to darkness can more readily accept the sense of chaos and loss that characterise a crisis. They've already grieved the world, they've long since attuned to its rotting chorus and we have much to learn from them. In turn, we can offer a brief moment of solidarity through the act of witnessing decay.

**on chaos*

The belief that those who experience darkness can embrace entropy in times of crisis is mirrored in the film *Melancholia* (2011), directed by Lars von Trier. A psychological sci-fi drama chronicling the collision of Earth with a planet called Melancholia, the film is narrated through the lens of two sisters, Justine and Claire. Justine suffers from severe depression and, though finding professional success and love, her appetite for life fades. She is melancholic and capricious as daily rituals become meaningless. In contrast, Claire, a wife and mother, leads a life of service to others, readily performing such duties in an attempt to control chaos. She is anxious about the future of her loved ones and inept at coping with pain. As the apocalypse approaches, Justine's fatalism allows her to accept the notion of a future-less world, while her sister unravels in despair. Justine creates a ritual to soothe Claire and, as the narrative ends, they link hands in solidarity under a fort of wooden sticks. This brief moment allows for a mutual understanding of chaos, pain and, ultimately, death. Von Trier notes that the premise of the film is based on findings that melancholic individuals would act in a more practical way during a crisis, as they have experienced this many times before. How these findings are measured can be debated, however, the argument remains compelling.

Providing insight into another journey through chaos, Elyn R. Saks recounts her experience of schizophrenia in *The Center Cannot Hold*. Describing her psychotic episodes, she writes, "The 'me' becomes a haze, and the solid center from which one experiences reality breaks up like a bad radio signal [...] the center cannot hold." During each psychological crisis, reality dissolves and the self is lost. Further, Saks feels the overwhelming sense that she is a murderer, a delusion that forces her to manage multiple realities, again fracturing her identity. In order to claw her way out of each episode, she must rebuild her sense of existence and self. Similarly, in Esmé Weijun Wang's memoir on schizophrenia, the author recounts her tormenting shifts in perspective through psychosis. During such times, Wang's chief convictions are that she is dead and that robots have replaced her loved ones. She sells her valuable possessions and simulates cheerful conversations with family as she melts into an atemporal universe. This dystopian post-obit is clearly not real, she reasons, she is simply a ghost laying witness to it. Like Saks, Wang's encounters with psychological terror and extreme loss force her to understand the darkness of entropy and develop tools to navigate through it. In many ways, a global crisis forces us to feel a corresponding sense of disorder, a loss of self. We do not inhabit the world; we are in a post-mortem, looking at our lives through a quarantined lens of disbelief. Death is everywhere, money is speculative, time is relative. The 'us' that once existed is lost and we are confronted with multiple universes that do not align. So then, what is there to learn from this collective crumbling?

**on decay*

Canadian writer Jill Yonit Goldberg attests that in economically developed societies – particularly within the context of middle-class upbringing – it is common to believe that expectations will be met and dreams fulfilled. When an unexpected trauma takes these beliefs away from an individual, this occurrence is viewed as an exception. Yet, she argues, rather than disregarding the suffering of others to prioritise our own individual pain, we must understand that distress is universally felt. It is not an exception but a rule. In a pandemic, it is important to accept this ‘banality of distress’. We cannot view our own discomfort as exceptional; rather, we must acknowledge its natural place within the economy of vulnerability. As Roman philosopher Seneca penned in consolation to a woman who lost her son, our privileges are not gifted but rather are on loan, our lives being one such privilege. It is no surprise when they are taken away; rather our debts are to be savoured until inevitably collected. Though we will never truly understand the pain of another, we can share the knowledge that immunity to distress is a delusion, one often maintained by so-called ‘developed societies’. Gaslit by capitalism, they are fooled into believing that the economy of finance is more reliable than the economy of pain. This crisis will not change systems of inequality or structured violence, yet our experience of chaos may allow for a brief instant – if only that – of collectivity in vulnerability.

Further to this argument, writer and poet Kraljii Gardiner contends that there is a form of solidarity in witnessing decay. In her edited anthology *Against Death*, Gardiner recounts her experience of overcoming a life-threatening illness. She compiles a group of writers who have experienced trauma in relation to death, whose survival has allowed them to observe their own mortality. After experiencing despair for years, Gardiner writes: “Now I watch my body progress through ageing, a natural process maligned and criticized by the media, and think at least I am here to witness the rot!” It is not a right but an honour to witness decay. Many people do not live to see a global crisis, their debts collected and misfortunes intensified. Further, certain communities have the resources and infrastructure to successfully recover from collapse, while others do not. Yet there is solace in knowing that we are witnessing the melting of time and order on a collective, rather than individual, basis. As we watch the rotting of the earth – an environmental melancholia that mirrors the rot of our own bodies – we must remind ourselves that we are here, that our shared experience of crisis is a testimony of shared collapse.

**towards future rot*

In a future-oriented, death-phobic society, healing begins with the collective experience of watching the future rot. Journeys through darkness – whether through mental collapse, physical illness or social entropy – teach us to maintain compassion and strength while our minds, bodies and worlds fragment. Seizing life from the jaws of chaos provides a fleeting connection to those whose days are filled with disillusion and pain. As our worldviews are deepened, we can begin to remodel our collective future with different architectural tools, taking into account those who have graciously shared their perspectives to help facilitate our unravelling.

Mourning complex grief and making *that thing* called home in pandemic lockdown

Niharika Pandit

Sid had just made it in time from Delhi to our mum's apartment in Bhopal before the three-week nationwide lockdown to contain COVID-19 was announced. 'So glad you are here before domestic flights were suspended,' I said as the TV sounds faded in the background. Soon after, he switched it off, repeating for the umpteenth time that we should limit our news consumption, that thinking about the coronavirus disease is making us more anxious – we should instead binge on Netflix and make the most of this lockdown.

Mum, Sid and I are together in the same place and time zone after a year, albeit with an altered sense of the world we now inhabit. Last year, it was dad's sudden death that led me on a flight from London, where I live, via Dubai-Delhi and finally to Bhopal, and a great deal of composure on my part to tell Sid about what had just happened. Anxiety is an old friend; naturally calm is not. Yet, the quiet I inhabited then is as clear as Greek seawater to me.

'There is something I need to tell you... something bad has happened at home.'

'Is mummy okay?' Sid asked like I had an hour ago when mum phoned, sobbing uncontrollably.

Living with years of strife in the home had programmed us to sense an impending doom with every phone call from mum. Dad rarely phoned me; whenever he did, my first response would inadvertently be, 'Is mum okay?'

Home, as is the case with many others, was never a safe space for us. Home was the last place I ever wanted to be in.

I dreaded school summer break. As soon as it was time to be home, I either drowned myself in assignments or stayed out playing, loitering, cycling, running errands in the harsh summer sun. Sid coped differently. He stayed home, learning to be stone-cold; seeing, listening, being in the midst of it all, yet somehow away from it. He had his sketchbooks, pens, animals and dinosaur toys. His was always a solo show; he barely felt the need for a play partner or friend. I also do not remember him using pencils for his drawings – as if teaching himself that everything had to be final. That there was no room for mistakes, that one had to be perfectly prepared to survive the cruel world that greeted us almost every morning for 18 years until we moved away for education.

Consequently, Sid and I have embodied trauma differently. We also live with it in vastly different ways.

'Yes, mum is okay. But something has happened to dad.' I knew the vagueness of these words as soon as they were uttered.

Sid, too, thought that it may be one of dad's usual afflictions, among the many that he had had. Some he embraced voluntarily or so I like to believe, for it lessens the shame that has made permanent homes in our lives. 'No... he is dead,' followed by fleeting silence on both ends. 'Okay' was all Sid could manage saying. It seems too surreal as I now recall. Something that I never imagined would happen to me, to the three of us. How could a person die so suddenly, so quickly, without notice, without a last goodbye, without repentance, a profuse apology or a muddled, muddled, too-difficult-to-intellectually-rationalise declaration of love?

So, you need to take the first flight back home. You are fine, you are safe. Just get on a flight, do not worry about anything. And if you cannot, phone...' I told him to call my friends in Delhi for help if needed. 'Okay...' We hung up.

Exactly a year after, we are holed up in our mum's apartment, to which we had frantically made her move after she could no longer stay in the house where my dad suffered cardiac arrest. Theirs was a classical love; a love that should never have been, a love that was more violent than the world they had fought with to be together, a love marred by all the murk there was; a love that I believe should have never come to fruition, and finally, the kind of love where he died in her arms. This is why my planned research trip to India had a detour so we could be together for his first death anniversary. We had planned nothing elaborate. Come to think of it, there was no plan at all other than the three of us being together and perhaps driving to some place. Of course, this had to be altered as the pandemic world fast changes in deeply unsettling ways.

Unsurprisingly then, what was to be a quiet and solemn coming-together for a few days has metamorphosed into a month-long quarantine now. In this time, Sid and I have redesigned (all DIY, of course) mum's balconies that she had neither the time nor the energy to attend to. I had wanted to do this in our family home (our previous apartment, in another city) that I grew up in, but was always sapped of energy. There were urgent matters of carrying on and getting by that needed attending to. It is different this time. We cook meals together; sometimes I do the cooking while Sid does the dishes. We play cards and ludo, we laugh together, we wake up late, we nap a lot, we share an odd glass of vodka soda (this is indeed after lots of reservation but that is another story), we discuss our work, and binge on memes and funny videos. Sundays are for occupying the drawing-room and watching films, followed by evening chai. In this process, there is a brief exchange of glances. I think I know what they are feeling.

This time, home is safe and we are carefully carving it so.

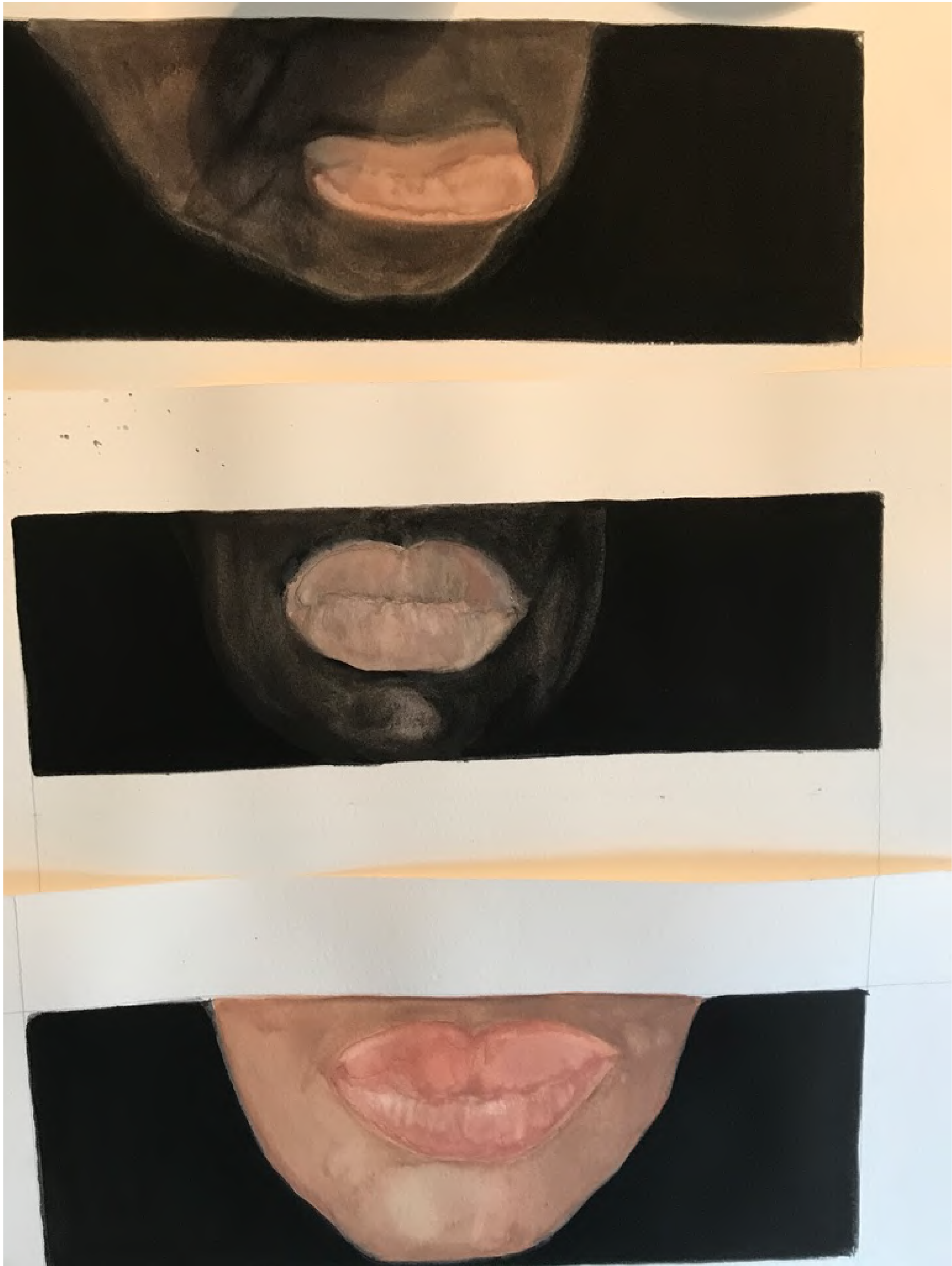
It is nearly miraculous that we can feel joy, tears born out of that joy and experience them as they come, without a care or worry, or the need to stifle them like before. Previously, they often signified our misery, so not letting them out and pretending everything was going to be okay was an everyday ritual that had to be unfailingly practiced. Despite all the worldly worries now, this new feeling is beautiful. And I am letting myself feel it.

Mourning is a complex process. It is also non-linear, and, dare I say, incredibly funny. For the past year, I have been reading lots of books on the complexities of grief while drawing messy flowcharts and mind maps to figure out of my feelings. A big part of me was always invested in making sense of losing a deeply troubled parental/parentified relationship and what such grieving was supposed to feel like. Like many other millennials do in desperate times, I Google-searched my feelings a lot, hoping to find someone somewhere writing about what I was going through. A few essays spoke to me, but there was always something amiss. It did not feel honest.

Probably because a lot was written about the singular life of grief; its visceral, transient mechanics and ways of individual coping. But what does it mean to collectively mourn a loss, which has had lasting psychic effects, similar yet distinct? It is only in this pandemic world that most of us who otherwise remain in confinement have begun to realise the deep interconnected nature of unsettlement, uncertainty and grieving the loss of everyday life that will no longer be the same, at least in the near future. And rising out of this storm would require us to be vulnerable, to acknowledge our vulnerability as we collectivise in fiercely equal ways.

Writing this now and reminiscing the last couple of weeks in lockdown, it is gradually becoming clear to me – that I needed to be here in this place and time, that the three of us needed to be together and process our anger, pain, regret and grief collectively as we held each other close. Over the past weeks, we have cried, quarrelled, shared our deepest fears and secrets that had in the past immobilised us. Perhaps mourning is also about mourning what was not and what could have been. A form of loss that may never be known, yet is deeply felt. Maybe it is also about finding solace in what is. Indeed, being together in this space that we are making into a home has made it all less heavy. It almost feels serendipitous now that a few days before the lockdown, I managed to get my dad's nazm inked: main musafir hoon, mujhe chalna hi hai (I am a traveller, I must keep moving on).

I think I may have begun to realise what it signifies.



Family Portrait
Sandi Hudson-Francis



PINK MOON SOLITUDE

By Ella Berny

“Thus they went on living in a reality that was slipping away”
- Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

The other night, on April 7, there was a supermoon, also known as the Pink Moon, Sprouting Grass Moon, Egg Moon, Fish Moon, the Pesach or Passover Moon, Paschal Moon, Hanuman Jayanti, Bak Poya.

The sky was clear and the Moon, alone, shone white.

A pink moon, for the beginning of spring.

A Sprouting Grass Moon, an Egg Moon, a Fish Moon, for new life.

In April comes herb moss pink, also known as creeping phlox, moss phlox, or mountain phlox, which is native to the rocky ledges of eastern US and one of the earliest widespread flowers of spring.

In April, shad fish swim upstream to spawn.

On April 7, we looked out of our windows, we went outside, and looked up at the sky. Some people saw a bright white, others a peach pink. For some it was magnificent, for others it was barely visible. But even if you couldn't see it, for everyone, it was there.

Was the Moon laughing at us that night?

Heralding in beauty, new life, spring?

Gleaming in extreme isolation. Owning it.

How does she do it?

At the beginning of the lockdown, I made a list. Things I will achieve with this new time. I bought an electric piano, something I'd been meaning to do for a while. I bought toy-box-yellow wall paint. I made a writing schedule, I set a routine for my days. My friends and I set up twice daily calls where we could check in, chat, make sure we were all ok. We tried to fill the routines and structures we'd lost with a new busyness. An isolated busyness. We tried to distract ourselves from being alone.

To protect others, you must stay at home if you or someone you live with has symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19).

This is called self-isolation.

Isolation n.

1. the condition of being alone, especially when this makes you feel unhappy
2. the fact that something is separate and not connected to other things.

"Lost in the solitude of his immense power, he began to lose direction."
- Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

In Chinese Mythology, the Chinese moon goddess 嫦娥, Chang'e, drinks an elixir of immortality that had been gifted to her husband. In some versions of the myth, this was an act of greed. In others, it was seen as an act of self-sacrifice. The immortality potion makes her drift away from Earth and she becomes the essence of the Moon.

Hina, a Hawaiian goddess, lives in the Moon. In one version of the legend, Hina was fed up with how she was treated by her family, especially her husband, so left Earth to take up residency on its lunar neighbour.

Nut, an Ancient Egyptian sky-goddess, was said to be covered in stars. It was believed that her body wrapped the Earth. At the end of the day, Nut swallowed the Sun-god, Ra, and gave birth to him every morning.

"...time was not passing...it was turning in a circle..."
- Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

The etymology of *moon* has roots in the Latin, *mensis*, which means month. In many languages the word *moon* has roots in words relating to time or measurement, referencing the Moon's phases as an ancient measurement of time.

Many cultures call May's full moon the Flower Moon, as spring fully blooms. Other names include the Hare Moon, the Corn Planting Moon, and the Milk Moon.

We'll look up and see her magnificent solitude. We'll share it, together.

The other day, I took my bike out. I left my phone at home and didn't take a watch or map. I had no bag and nowhere to go. I turned down streets that looked the most interesting and I avoided signs. I had time to get lost.

We strongly advise you to significantly limit your face-to-face interaction with friends and family.

Everyone should be following social distancing measures as much as possible.

Distancing, v.

1. to become or seem less involved or connected with something

Stay two meters apart.

This weekend I didn't try and fill the time. I'm not sure what an hour means now anyway. In the middle of the day, I lay on my bed, and drifted. And I stayed adrift.

Solitude, n.

1. the situation of being alone, often by choice.
2. the joyful experience of being alone; the ability to connect with oneself.

ENDS

Pandemic reflections: on longing

Taylor Gardner

On nights when my mind is calm enough to notice the full moon, pink skies, light transgressing, consistent gradient meets me in my bedroom, somewhere between day and evening.

Wednesdays are saved for candlelit masturbation, bonding time with myself. I pass the time by staring at my reflection, with the hope that if I do so for long enough, a whole self will begin to emerge.

Once you become aware of the disconnect you embark on a fruitless journey of returning home. Reclaiming voice, reclaiming space, reclaiming identity.

Each task becomes an act of uncovering, unravelling. Energised by the notion that there is a coherent you looming somewhere beneath these layers of wonder, waiting to be salvaged.

Seeking:

permission

approval

love

purpose

belonging

a state-approved relationship with my body and self

All we were ever looking for was permission to feel, to be ourselves fully, to be alleviated from the creeping disbelief of “is this all there is?” Guiltily propelled by Buckowski-esque notions of the shit-work-fuck-sleep banality and realising the permission will never be granted, we build new homes within ourselves.

I have spent too much time in your reality to refuse to indulge in my own.

They wanted us to believe that the lines between love and obsession were fixed, rigid boundaries, but we have come to see how easily these commonly worshipped borders can be blurred.

I want to hold your face in my hands, to feel your skin against mine, but for now a pixelated, refabricated representation of you will have to do. Your laughter transported to my bedroom through this screen will have to do.

Trying to find some common ground between an overflow of stimulation, the tap-tap-tapping fuelled anxiety, and gratitude for so much company, support, care, connection, love and kindness.

Transference is the cure and never have we been more cyborg than we are in this moment. Our intimacy facilitated through cyberspace, technologies of kinship, we become willing dependent

Pandemic walks; the time to reflect afforded to some. April blooms and I try to make peace with another discrepancy, the conflict between my internal mood and the beauty that flourishes around me.

Though contemplating futures feels frivolous during a time where these same fates are rapidly and cruelly being stripped from many, the essential elements for change circulate; we utilise time,



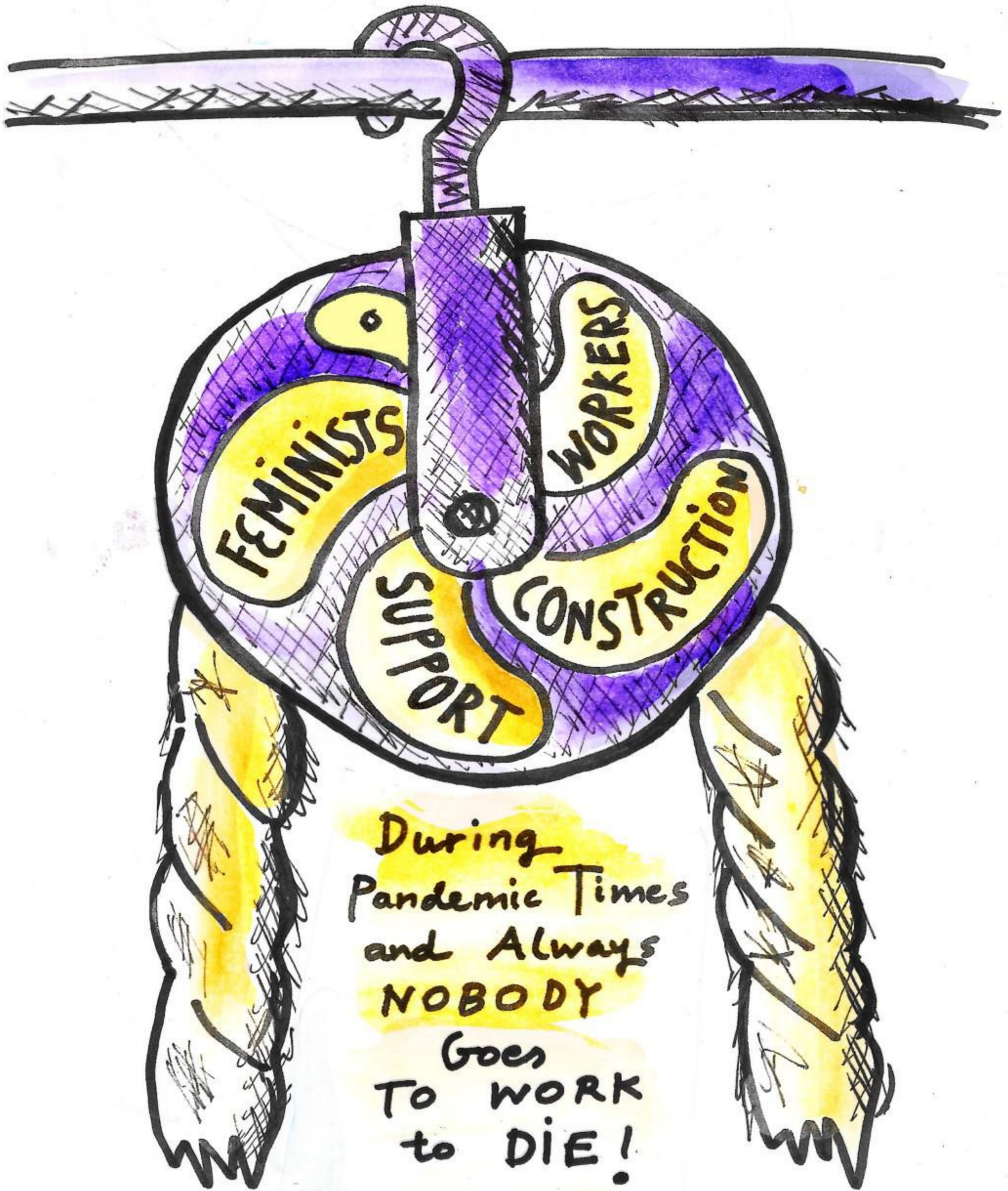
attention, imagination, invitations to resist and refuse commanding narratives on how to be productive.

Intimacy outsourced to multiple technologies, through co-created, digi-networks we hold space, offer comfort, share pain and silences when there are no words.

Take time to slow down, to pause, I remind myself.

Allow surrogate replacements for the sensation of being held. Allow anger, frustration, desire to energise us through this time. Notice, nourish and sustain these feelings until they can be mobilised.

Allow seeds to grow, for imagined worlds and alternative futures to flourish through times of despair, grief and isolation



Pops

Feminists support construction workers
Pops_comixs

You Must Say No

Rachel Cleverly

My parents applied for Italian citizenship last July.

The heatwave left them stewed, stickier than

the year of the holiday when Nonna waited but we went away

– Mum telephoned everyday in outdated

dialect, translated to us the sounds of her shrinking.

Cartons of long life milk collected in the held breath of the cupboard.

We shopped for a fortnight of mealtimes.

We were scared she'd refuse soup heated in a foreign microwave.

This Spring has been quite frozen – I can't even feel my own fingers.

My family lays in the garden and coughs

to hide the tight, tinfoil whimper of Mum's knees.

We clap on the grass, think of indoors, of Nonna,

defrosting in the front room.

Interview with Mary, a domiciliary worker

This is a transcript of a conversation between Mary*, a domiciliary care worker, and a member of the Feminist Library.

Sharon: Can you describe a bit about your job?

Mary: My job is to visit clients in their own homes and to attend to all their personal and practical needs – this can cover providing their food, giving them medication, washing and bathing them, doing shopping, so many things. Some clients may need four visits a day. Like most other domiciliary care workers, I work from morning to night, on split shifts. For example, I might work 7 to 10 a.m, then 12 to 3, then again from 5 to 9.30 p.m. I don't live in the area where I work, and I have to get the bus up and down to reach my job.

Sharon: Tell me a bit about the difficulties domiciliary care workers face, particularly during this period of Covid19.

Mary: I wanted to talk to you because I want to bring attention to domiciliary care workers – the government and media don't give us any attention, even now. At first, the clapping was only for front-line workers in the NHS, and, of course, they do a very good job, but we need to be recognised as part of the healthcare system. When the situation in care homes began to be revealed, they changed the Thursday night clapping to Clapping for Carers, but I didn't hear anything about domiciliary care workers, and focus on PPE is still pretty much on care homes.

I live with my elderly mother and my teenage daughter, so I'm very worried about going into my clients' homes and then carrying coronavirus to my home, and also the possibility of carrying coronavirus from one of my clients to the others. Domiciliary care workers who come through agencies aren't given PPE at all, and we are only given one set to last the whole week. We should be given a complete set for each job.

Domiciliary workers don't have an office, we walk or take public transport from one job to the next – not many of us have cars. Before Covid-19, if you lived too far away to get home between shifts (and most of us do), then you could sit in a cafe or go to a library, but they're all closed now, so now we have to hang about in the street, sheltering where we can. We can get ill from going on public transport the whole time, we can get colds from being out in the rain, we have no time to rest – so that in itself is bad for our health. If we are not taken care of, there will be a complete breakdown in the system; there's already a great pressure if staff are off sick.

They used to organise shifts so that you could work straight through, say either 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. or noon to 9 p.m., but they changed that to save money. It's always inconvenient to have split shifts, but especially now with Covid-19. Since they changed the contract last year, you're not paid for the hours you are hanging around. But you are still under the pressure of your job because you can't do anything while you're waiting for your next shift. It is very worrying and distressing for those who don't live locally.

The bosses are not looking at the community and what it needs – the way we work, as carers, can affect everybody's families. The CQC [Care Quality Commission, who supervise standards in care homes – a bit like what Ofsted does for education establishments] is not looking at domiciliary workers, they're only going into care homes and don't think about our way of working. Domiciliary workers are lone workers – we shouldn't have to hang about in the streets without any support.

In some ways private agency care workers have more choice, for example, they can refuse to do the evening shift, whereas if you work for the council they force you into doing shifts, even if it's a very unsatisfactory split-shift pattern. So, as a council worker, you are paying for the fact that you have job security and pension – the whole system is very unfair.

Sharon: How does race intensify the pressure you experience?

Mary: Most workers in the care system are Black, especially in London and bigger cities, and we definitely have more pressures on us. For example, my GP wrote a letter to the council because of my diabetes to say that my shifts should be arranged so that I could eat proper meals, but he was ignored. There is a white girl on my team who is diabetic, and they let her stay in the office. I also suffer from incontinence, so my GP said I should have visits near each other. He told management that they should try to accommodate me, but they didn't. The strain of all this is making me lose my confidence, as I worry that this could happen to me while I'm out. My male manager told me I had no right to use clients' toilets when I am in their house! Where is the duty of care to me?

Black women don't have any access to being heard. They don't respect us, and even when we have qualifications, we are not given the chance to be promoted.

Sharon: Thank you so much for sharing this information about your working life. I'm sure this will give people an important insight into some of what domiciliary carers have to put up with, and I hope everybody will start campaigning for you all as well.

**Mary is the pseudonym of a domiciliary care worker who works for a local authority.*

Readying our lot

Rosie Watson

This poem is dedicated to all those who are being met by the cycle of life and death in this time. My heart feels with you.

From seed to soil
We ink the earth
Grow daringly high
Ready to fall, back
To the home our bodies have always known
The dirt from where we came
The moisture the soles of our feet remember
Leaves join us
As we slowly decay
Readying our lot for rebirth
The cycle cuts through us
Is in us
We become us
All of us
Inking the earth
Readying it for the next masterpiece

EN AMÉRICA LATINA Y EL CARIBE TENEMOS NUESTRO FEMINISMO. ES UN FEMINISMO, COMUNITARIO QUE DESDE NUESTRAS RAÍCES INDÍGENAS, DE LOS PUEBLOS ORIGINARIOS Y NUESTRAS AFRODESCENDENCIAS NOS INVITAN A LUCHAR, INDIGNARNOS Y BUSCAR LAS ALTERNATIVAS PARA SANAR Y DEFENDER NUESTRO TERRITORIO-CUERPO-CREACIÓN. ANTE ESAS OPRESIONES QUE POLÍTICAMENTE NOS ATRAVIESAN LOS CUERPOS, DEBEMOS

ACUERPARNOS PARA SANARNOS DESDE LAS MEMORIAS ANCESTRALES

LA SANACIÓN POLÍTICA DE NUESTROS CUERPOS ES UNA NECESIDAD.

THE POWER OF OUR ANCESTORS

CELEBRATING

The

QUEERS

&

CONTRIBUTIONS OF WOMEN WHO CAME BEFORE US.

ACUERPARNOS ES PONER EN SINTONÍA NUESTROS CUERPOS, NUESTRO SENTIR-PENSAR ROMPIENDO LAS FRONTERAS Y DISTANCIAS TERRITORIALES-COLONIALES.

ACUERPARNOS COMO ACTO DE TERNURA, COMO ACTO DE EMANCIPACIÓN Y TRANSGRESIÓN AL ACTUAL SISTEMA.

@jaeldelaluz



Acuerparnos para cuidarnos y resistir en tiempos de pandemia

Jael de la Luz

En América Latina y el Caribe nuestro feminismo popular tiene su origen en la resistencia de nuestros pueblos originarios, nuestras mujeres indígenas, afrodescendientes y mestizas pobres. Es un feminismo que surge de la constante resistencia a la colonización y al uso de nuestros cuerpos, sabidurías, espiritualidades y territorios para su explotación, venta y extracción de nuestros recursos naturales para sostener este sistema patriarcal capitalista de muerte. Por esa resistencia nuestras familias y comunidades han sido marginadas, discriminadas y obligadas a vivir al margen de la modernidad, negándoseles sus derechos básicos para su existencia.

Quienes nos asumimos como feministas comunitarias, tenemos memoria de cómo nuestras ancestras experimentaron la violencia colonial, las violaciones masivas, los silencios impuestos y los virus de muerte que llegaron junto a los colonizadores. Enfermedades como la viruela, el sarampión, la sífilis y la lepra fueron una de las armas de exterminio que los europeos usaron para diezmar a nuestros ancestros y ancestras hace un poco más de 500 años. Con todo eso, la sabiduría ancestral basada en la herbolaria, los masajes corporales y las oraciones a todas las deidades cosmogónicas, llevaron a una resistencia que perdura hasta el día de hoy en muchos pueblos de nuestra América.

Esas sabidurías pasadas de generación en generación a través de la tradición oral, nos han acompañado a las mujeres que hemos migrado a Occidente y nos encontramos con experiencias similares a las que nuestras ancestras enfrentaron en sus propios territorios: violencia patriarcal dentro y fuera del hogar, violencia del Estado, el constante cuestionamiento por nuestro estatus migratorio, por nuestro nulo inglés o nuestro acento y por nuestro capital cultural. Lo que Occidente no sabe es que nuestras armas no son terrenales; es decir, somos portadoras de una resiliencia de esperanza colectiva donde esperamos un cielo y tierra nueva. Por eso defendemos nuestros territorios de manera transatlántica haciendo eco a la lucha contra el extrativismo en las zonas verdes de América Latina, luchando acá en UK contra la gentrificación y la desaparición de las comunidades de color; nos manifestamos contra las violencias machista y feminicida en América Latina, luchando acá contra los recortes a los servicios de mujeres BME por los gobiernos conservadores. Luchamos contra la precariedad salarial haciendo eco que ningún ser humano es ilegal y que queremos vida en abundancia para todas y todos.

Es por ello que esa memoria de resistencia, me lleva a pensar en la importancia de acuerparnos en tiempos de pandemia, de confinamiento y distancia social que hoy vivimos para erradicar el Covid19. Acuerparnos es poner en sintonía nuestro cuerpo cansado y enfermo junto a otros cuerpos que también están atravesados por las mismas violencias que van más allá de esta pandemia. Romper las fronteras y distancias territoriales para crear una comunidad de apoyo, de acompañamiento para no sentir el aislamiento, el miedo y la ansiedad es el sentido de sentirse parte de un mismo cuerpo; eso es acuerparse.

De momento, muchas de nosotras nos acuerpamos con la familia en nuestras casas, con nuestros amigos y familiares por las redes sociales, nos acuerpamos cuando la ternura y la escucha mutua nos invitan a compartir nuestro sentir-pensar y pasar de boca en boca algunas de las recetas y consejos para aliviarnos el alma, honrando así el legado de nuestras antepasadas. Acuerpar es poner el cuerpo, el tiempo y las sabidurías de la experiencia personal a lo común, y entre todos buscar lo que nos sane para seguir resistiendo frente a toda condena.

Sharing life's glories

Emily Roope

As our global economic system is being reconfigured under the throws of Covid-19, the rupture has offered an ideological opportunity for new ways of socially driven exchange. I wanted to use this space to reflect on bread's recent history as a commodity, in comparison to how it is currently being shared as a social currency, bringing comfort and a sense of community as we feel the full effects of the pandemic.

Discussing the history of bread as a commodity is a way of understanding how we arrived at contemporary pan capitalism, in which ruling elites refigure thought, custom and culture to generate profit within a globalised marketplace. Since 1500 long-distance trade has created the interdependent agricultural relationship between regions, and Britain's imperialist legacy of 'free trade' ideology created the trans-oceanic market in basic foods. This laid the grounds for the industrialisation of agriculture on lands taken by force from indigenous populations, and the creation of working classes which relied on purchasing food.² Alongside its economic history, bread has been approached by historians as a gateway to accessing rich social histories involving gender, community and craft. Bread is a source of soulful enjoyment, and it is no surprise that our current period of lockdown has seen a widespread trend of testing our own hands at baking a loaf. We are witnessing a return to valuing our own abilities of making and sharing outside of a commodity marketplace.

I'd like to draw attention to a community-focused project by Lexi Smith - Bread on Earth. The simple aim of Bread on Earth is to share knowledge and sourdough spores across the world, for free. At this time, Lexi has sent over 1000 packages of sourdough spores globally, with that number only expected to grow. By providing her services (time, bread, educational recourses) to an international community for free, the impetus for exchange is driven by social care rather than profit. Covid-19 has provided an opportunity to realise the value in a sharing economy and the strengthening of social relationships that come with it. A sharing economy is a non-monetised system of exchanging goods and services which is subversive to the capitalist system. As our societies struggle to visualise the future of our current economic crisis under Covid-19, there has been a return to sharing information, time, objects, consumables, and care without the exchange of cash. In the past few short weeks I have seen publications making their work available online, callouts to vulnerable members of society, and the offer of hot meals to be delivered locally - without a price. By baking our own bread, and sharing it, we're respecting its humble identity as the food of the people. In Lexi's words, 'bread is the commodity that requires humans to produce. A return to it logically coincides with a time when human life feels unprecedentedly precarious. All metaphorical intonations of bread as life, bread as livelihood, bread as money, as body, have melted pretty quickly into the real.'³ The key values in baking good bread are patience, quality grains and sharing the results.

The theory which underpins sharing economies is not new, yet the unique conditions of Covid-19 have brought with them a revived awareness of our symbiotic relationship as a social community outside of profits. My sourdough starter from Lexi arrived in the post today, and I can't wait to continue the spread by sharing as much of it as I can. If you would like to receive some or continue on the project, please contact me by email emily.roope@gmail.com, or visit <https://bread-on.earth/>

Virus, fungi, humans

Nandita Dutta

I buy a loaf of sourdough from a wholefood store. Fresh, round and hard. The night before, I heard an episode of BBC Foods podcast on sourdough. I know everyone's baking the bread these days, but this is not your usual sourdough story. Let me tell you that sourdough was my favourite bread long before I discovered how trendy it was.

A few days later, I still have a chunk of the loaf left. Interior like a cross-section of sponge. Exterior like craters on the moon. How much bread can a solitary soul consume?

I see green polka dots growing out of the white dust of flour on the leftover sourdough. Like signs of vegetation on the moon's craters. I touch a dot. A green powdery substance sticks to my fingertip. The bread smells like furniture dumped and forgotten in the cellar.

I go and buy a fresh loaf of ciabatta from a regular supermarket.

*

I keep a jar of strawberry jam in my room to eat with bread for when hunger strikes unexpectedly. I twist the lid of the jar and nearly jump. A powerful, rancid stench. I notice the patches of grey discolouring the lush red jam.

*

Things have started to go bad in lockdown. Or am I paying too much attention to details with all the time on my hands?

*

Moulds are multicellular fungi that reproduce by the formation of spores. Formed in large numbers, spores are single cells that are easily dispersed through the air. Once these spores land on a food substrate, they can grow and reproduce if conditions are favourable. Fungi and virus are both pathogens.

*

The curious thing is scientists don't even agree on whether viruses are living organisms or not. To be alive, an organism must be able to grow, reproduce, and generate energy on its own. Viruses cannot generate their own energy and cannot reproduce without a host.

*

The state of the world is such that in order for us to not become unwitting hosts to these oddly inanimate but powerful creatures, all humans must stay at home. In London, where I live, we are allowed to go out to buy food or get some exercise once a day but we must maintain a distance of six feet from each other. As the virus proliferates, humans are dying. The ones that are alive are shrinking away from each other. It's a war, no less. A fascinating article in The New Yorker pointed out that the constant, unending, and unpredictable warfare between human and bug takes place in a state of moral indifference, at least on the bug's side. That microbes are amoral, that they come not to punish or instruct but to live, to reproduce, as living things will, completely indifferent to the terrible results they can wreak.

Many of us make sense of the world through writing. So everyone whose words are worth something – writers, filmmakers, artists – is writing about what they can see from their window nowadays. About deserted streets and spring flowers. About isolation and loneliness. About life and death. You don't need to sit by your window to hear the ambulance sirens or know that winter has turned into spring. Also, let no one fool you: there was loneliness before the pandemic and there will be loneliness after.

*

The pathogen is never lonely. The mould on my sourdough is growing at breakneck speed. I haven't thrown the bread into the compost bin yet. I am conducting a weird experiment by observing the growth of fungi on my bread, day after day. Newspaper articles tell me that the coronavirus has an R0 (R-naught) or basic reproduction number of 2.2-2.7. It means that one infected person can infect up to 3 other people.

*

Humans are different from pathogens. I smell entitlement in all those articles on how to survive loneliness in lockdown. They seem to hold a tacit promise that once this is over, you won't be lonely again. I am referring to a particular kind of loneliness that is not caused by a virus but by a lack of belief in the heterosexual model of coupledness and its products, such as the family and kids, and a feeling of having settled down. Not in an ontological sense, but simply a rootedness that comes from staying put. Just because you do not want something does not mean you can't miss it.

*

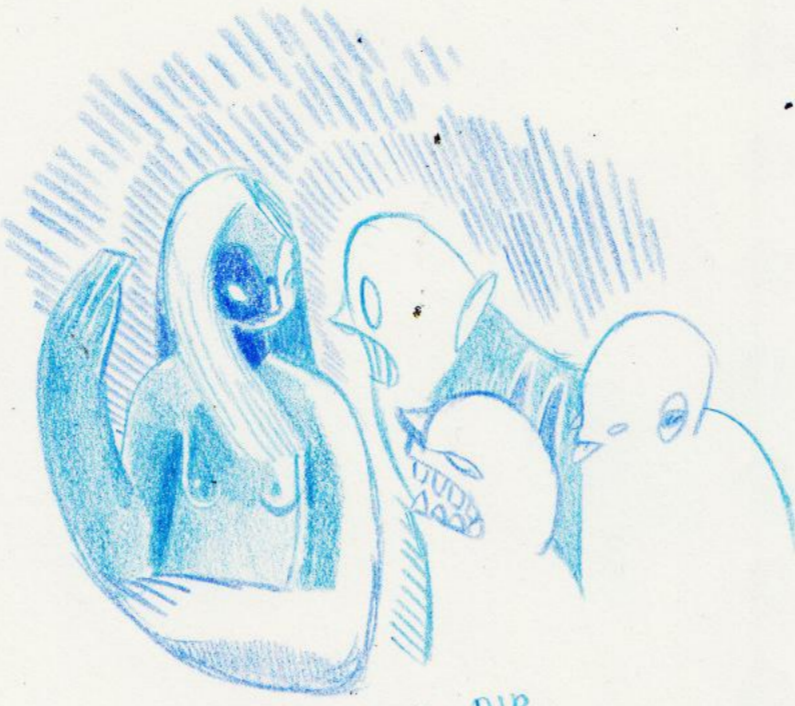
Against the mindless rampage of the pathogen, I recommend an ethic of mindful creation. It helps me deal with loneliness, pandemic or not. Some find it in the magical act of cooking; in merging salt, fire, acid and heat in a way that births something nourishing and appealing to at least four human senses – sight, smell, touch and taste. I don't have a talent for it, so I write hungrily instead. The process of stringing words together – like ingredients – to see them come alive in a resonant sentence gives me the same pleasure as cooking a meal. I don't write about loneliness; I write against it.

A moral and political process of production to counter the reproduction of the pathogen.
A conscious act of creativity against heteronormativity's assembly-line project.

*

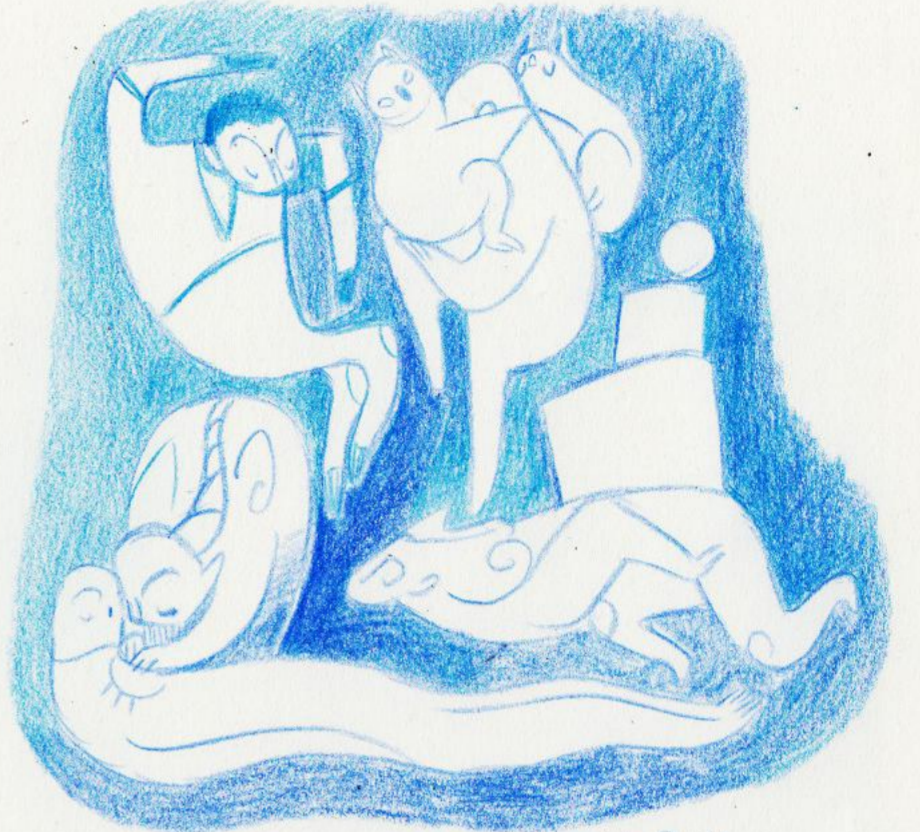
The mouldy sourdough has got disgusting to look at. I must get rid of it. I think about it a great deal. No matter where I dump it, the fungi will soon envelope everything. That's the nature of the pathogen we are up against.

WE ARE ALREADY
TIRED



THE VIRUS DID
NOT ARRIVE IN
PEACETIME

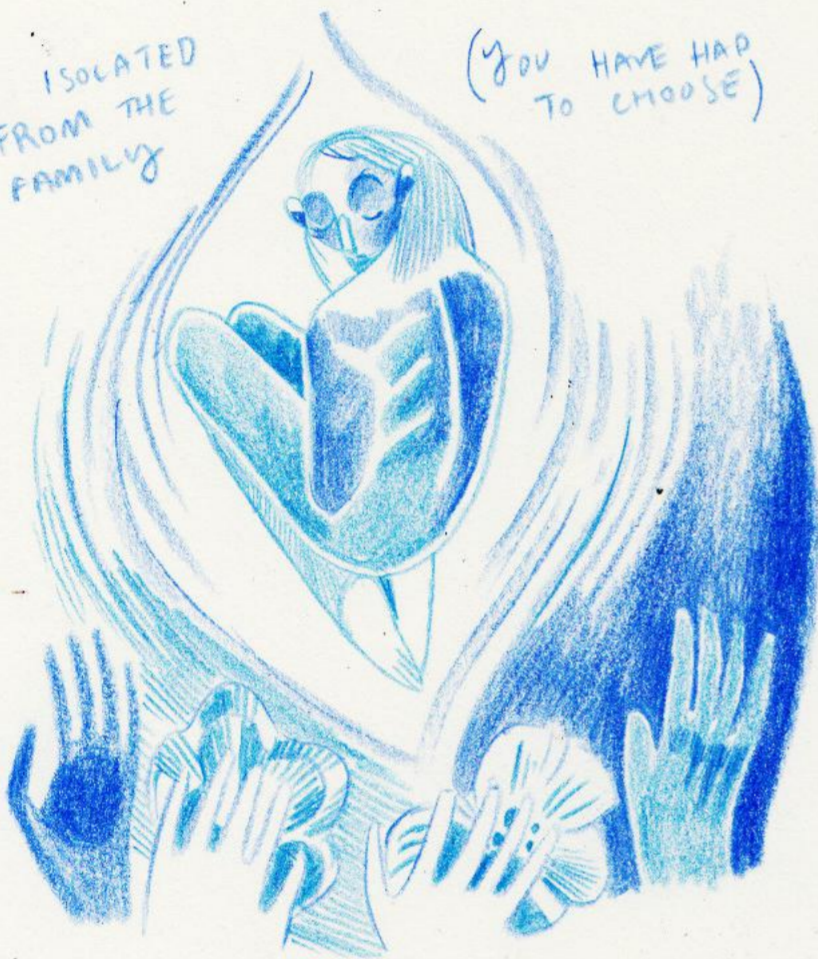
OH I'M SORRY. HAD
YOU NOT ~~BEEN~~ BEEN INFORMED
THAT AN ESSENTIAL LABOUR



IS POORLY PAID ... UNPAID ...
INVISIBLE ... PREDOMINANTLY
FEMALE?

ISOLATED
FROM THE
FAMILY

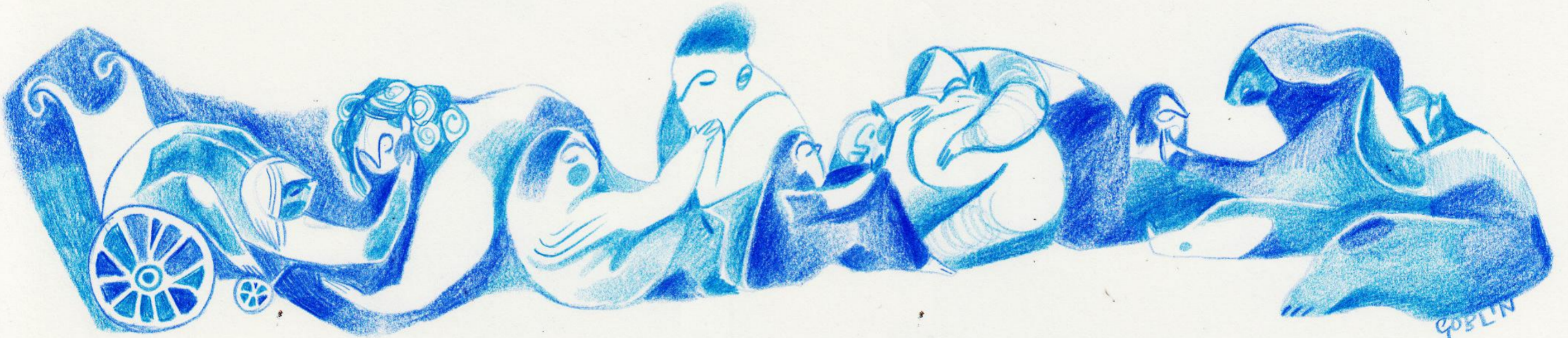
(YOU HAVE HAD
TO CHOOSE)



IN A PLACE WHERE ISOLATION
IS ... NOT NEW



THE VIRUS DID NOT
ARRIVE IN PEACETIME
AND WE WERE ALREADY TIRED



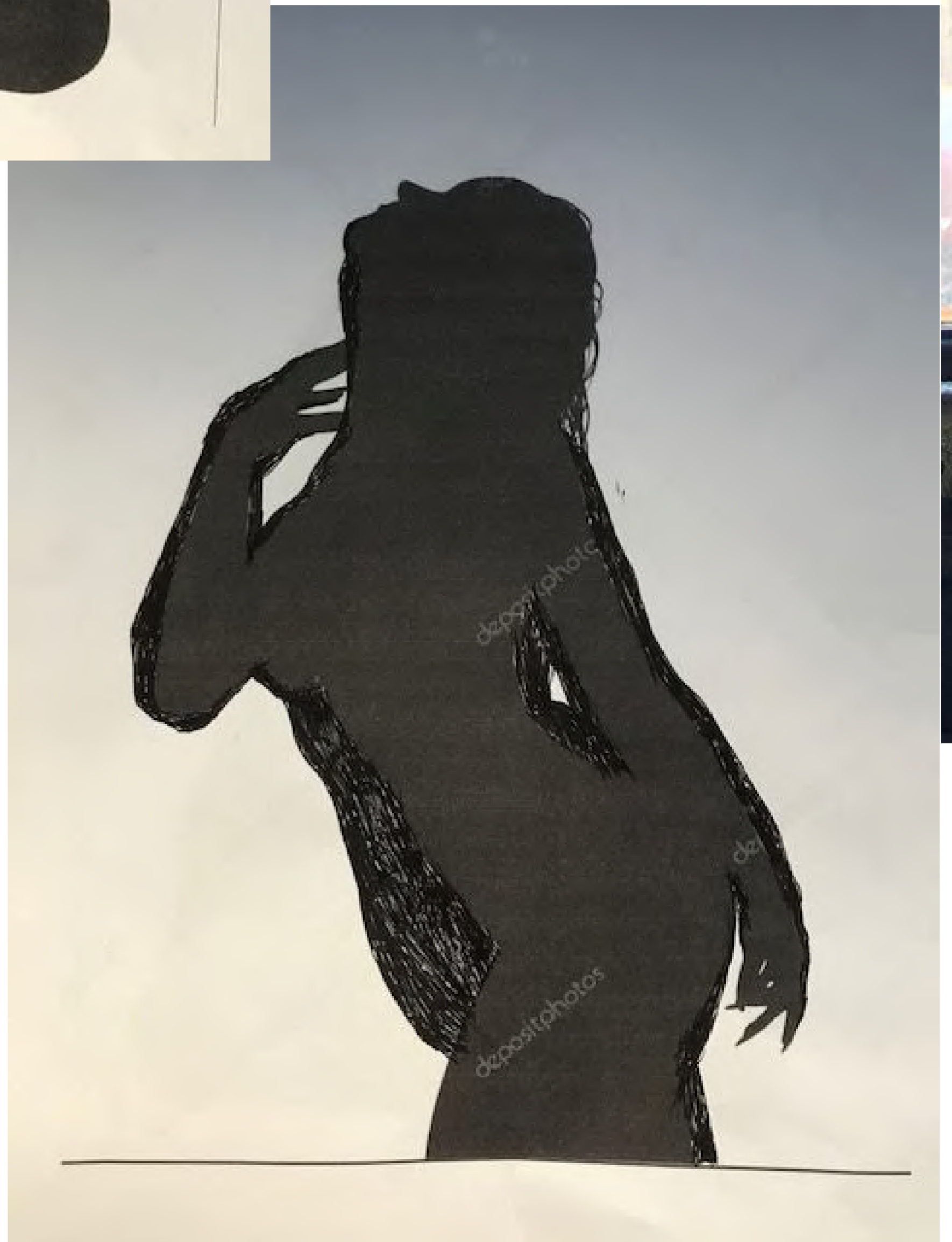
AND YET AND YET AND YET

COELIN

And yet and yet

Candace Purwin

Sexy female silhouette isolated on white —
Stock Illustration



Figuring out Minna Hauka



A View from Peterborough via Hackney

Lorna Harrington & Eva Megias

resilience of people

Wherever we live and whoever we live with



The NHS should not survive off of the charity of individuals. It is not business as usual. Will I ever trust a governing body. I am tired.

STOP TELLING US TO BE PRODUCTIVE
STOP BLAMING INDIVIDUALS
STOP



ENOUGH BS

GET YOUR LIFE ADMIN DONE

space

Spring-clean

place

exercise

feeling...???

home

DO DON'T DO DON'T

'The white man is reaching his sell-by date'

ENOUGH BS

Jill Beller

Coping Mechanism

Mariam Raja

Forced to a halt
stopped at your feet
choice, control and freedom taken away from me.

Daily reminders of loss, grief and pain in our humanity.
so I ask you, how are you coping out in our new normality?

Creativity

When the books on the shelves are finally been read
when your new working office is by the fairy lights on your bed
when your notepad is your new best friend
and you can plan to write that novel because time has no end
And poetry has always been a way for my subconscious to be said
but now it feels more valuable as I navigate through the unknown in my head.

Family

Came back to my mums' home, a week before they said we couldn't leave.
and ironically, one day these will be cherished memories.

Individualism

In a world where we are so connected
we sometimes lose the self,
the 9-5, the commutes, gym classes
the ongoing conveyor belt

The leaving drinks, baby shower, weddings, birthday parties
Social duties
and although the essence of life is about connection and celebration
we are now forced to sit with only the individual
forced to learn how to develop a survival mindset
forced to seek peace and perspective through perseverance learn to be okay,
when the world is not
through the power of our own daily rituals.

and all of this is just coping mechanisms.

To navigate through our reality
and just like you, sometimes they work
and sometimes this feels like insanity

So I ask you, how are you coping in our new normality?

Female friendship in the deep end

Julia Padfield

The key to being good at cards against humanity is to think about not what you find funny, rather what the person deciding will find funny. That's something I realised when I wasn't doing so well when we started to play as a house the other night. It seems the Danny Devito card is one man's trash and another man's treasure. My housemates and I played this game on day 14-17 (I've lost track) of lockdown in the U.K. As we were about to enter week five, the overwhelming feeling I have in this time is gratitude that I feel seen, understood, and cared for by the people I live with, and that they know that I personally *love* the Danny Devito card.

When I first told people I'd be moving in with two of my co-workers (who are also two of my best friends) people looked a bit concerned and said 'that's a lot of time to spend with people no? living and working together?' I'd shrug and say 'I feel like it'll be fine' and it wasn't a lie. Maybe it was that we'd all had similar issues with previous flats or that all our periods had already synced up like witchy moon-sisters, but I wasn't worried at all. We moved in mid-March. A couple of days later we were told to work from home, and a few days after that the country went into lockdown. We started our time together as flatmates in the oddest of scenarios; living and working together is a lot anyway- let alone when the office is your house and you're the only people in the office, and you're not allowed to leave the office or see anyone who isn't in the office. This was going to be the ultimate test of tests; like doing a flip off the highest diving board straight into the deep end.

And yet, it's been fine. No wifi for the first two weeks and hardly any furniture, but we'd balance Emily's laptop on a chair, get some blankets and watch Chicken Run, or drunkenly draw each other without looking while Enya played softly in the background. Every day I wake up amazed at the luck that in this time where members of your household are the only people you see, that I'm with Sophie and Emily in our still-kind-of-empty-fixer-upper house, and we moved just in the nick of time. It makes missing and worrying about your friends and family and wishing you could hug them a lot easier when you live with people around whom you can fully let down your guard.

Last week I saw a photo of a message painted on a bridge in Italy translating to 'romanticising lockdown is a position of privilege', and it explained the unease I've felt about a lot of content I've seen recently, and hoping I'm not accidentally doing the same. About a month before we moved, Emily and I chatted about how excited we were: 'it's just going to be different, living in a flatshare with people you don't know is fun, but I'm excited to live with people who love me, for it to be our house and not like I have a room in someone else's'. Little did we know how much it would mean at that point, and how different it would've been had it not worked out, which it almost didn't.

It's obvious to point out but London is population-dense. Few people have balconies and fewer people have gardens. The place I lived before where I live now was a tiny room in a flat with no communal space and small square footage, which is the reality for a lot of London renters. It was, however, a perfect first flat for me, cheap for London, cosy, well connected in a cool area, and with people I generally got on with: a SpareRoom success story! I was out most of the time anyway, what did it matter that it lacked in space when I was mostly at work or out with friends? But, much like the Spanish Inquisition, nobody expects the nationwide lockdown, and it's hardly something you factor in when looking for a place- although looking into the future who knows!

It's harder to romanticise lockdown when you have no space, no private access to the outside, and, most crucially, when you don't feel comfortable with the people you live with or you struggle with living alone - and that's not to mention being homeless. Domestic abuse calls have been up 25% since lockdown began and calls to charities like Childline have skyrocketed. So, while it's imperative to stay home wherever possible, staying home can have wildly different implications for different people.

Being in the position to romanticise staying home is something afforded to the very few, and I'm aware that I am extremely lucky on two different levels; that staying home is all that is expected of me when others are risking their lives, and that home for me is a place I want to be.

The thing about living through history is that one day you wake up and it's just happening, it's just life as we know it, but in a time like this it's a blessing and a luxury to be able to experience the unreality of it with people who know how you like your tea. It's crazy to think that our first few months (who knows how long this will last) as housemates will have been in lockdown, maybe we'll be bonded in a deeper and weirder way than we would have been, but I guess we'll never know. One thing I'm almost sure of though, is that I wouldn't have been as appreciative. In normal times, I probably would have just cracked a smile over breakfast in the morning as we sang along to the radio, or looked over as we watched a ridiculous film together and thought 'this is nice', but in the current situation things like this make me feel like the luckiest girl in the world; I love it almost as much as I love the Danny Devito card.

If you want to help out with people who don't feel safe at home during this time, please consider donating to:

Solace Women's Aid

Childline

Samaritans

And, if possible, donate to your local NHS.

On trees, collective trauma and a pandemic

Amira Elwakil

Stay home, think in terms of the binaries inside/outside and safe/dangerous, think in terms of the minimum needed, obsess over washing your hands, be fearful of contact with others, dread the death of a loved one, assume the worst. All of this sounds too painfully familiar to me as someone with pre-existing mental ill-health. These instructions are packaged as the key to dealing with this pandemic, to being well, but they also make up my own experience of not being well. Don't get me wrong, I very willingly follow them and even entered a self-imposed lockdown before this one officially came into being. I just wish there was more acknowledgement of what social distancing and self-isolation mean for those of us who have a predisposition to mental ill-health, or who are currently struggling.

I've always practised social distancing and self-isolation one way or another. The language I use to talk about it is different – I normally speak of 'hiding' that happens in my room – but it's very similar to what we're doing now during this pandemic. I normally hide in an attempt to feel a bit more in control of my state and my immediate surroundings, but I also sometimes lack any choice in that hiding as (yet) another bout of depression takes hold. I really appreciated coming across the term 'collective trauma' to describe what we're experiencing at the moment, and I want to see us speak more in those terms, but I also remind myself that this collectivity is more complex than what meets the eye. In addition to what many can relate to as we go through this, from crushing helplessness to existential dread, I've personally found the instructions for staying safe incredibly jarring to say the least, and that has been a defining feature of my own experience of this trauma. I've found it an added burden to the experience: in order to be well in one way I also have to re-live being unwell in another, and it's been a struggle to navigate the mutual exclusivity of the two. There is no neat way in which I do this navigation or just deal with this traumatic experience in general, but I often find myself oscillating between being unwell, actively pursuing distractions, experiencing dissociation, and a different type of hiding to the one I usually do: hiding outside home through walking.

When experiencing dissociation, I know I'm here, I'm present, but it just doesn't feel that way; it's a coping mechanism of sorts to help me deal with an impossible situation. It has, strangely enough, enabled me to better be able to give care and listen as injustice after injustice continues to unfold for people I know and as the broken nature of the systems we live in locally and globally is further revealed. My body becomes a separate entity that I observe as it moves and feels. Any activity that will allow me to be with it with more intent becomes an impossibility in moments like these. And it is outside of home that there's more possibility for that to happen, where I can be with and in my body as it moves and feels. I've been trying to walk regularly since the start of this pandemic. The start of spring poignantly coincided with the lockdown, and so as my eyes notice the buds appearing on trees, flowers blooming, and woodlands gradually transforming into new landscapes, I'm also present and I'm also seeing. When the wind blows and kisses the skin on my face, I'm there too, to witness and to feel. The warmth of the sun on my eyelids is felt by me directly. Spring has given me respite in other ways: the transformation of familiar sights in my neighbourhood has given me a sense of safety in the certainty of seasons, in the cyclicity of the environment, a familiarity that I needed to ground me and a reminder that I'm not stuck in relentlessly inflexible concrete. Even though I continue to practise social distancing while walking, I still manage to feel a remote sense of connection to others around me, a connection that Zoom calls can never give me, whether they're walking past, sitting on the other side of their living room window, or delivering post. I never thought I'd ever long for this, but I do sometimes secretly picture myself on a crowded train carriage during the morning rush hour, hidden in a sea of people where we're not afraid of our proximity to one another in the same way we are right now (although in other ways still, unfortunately).

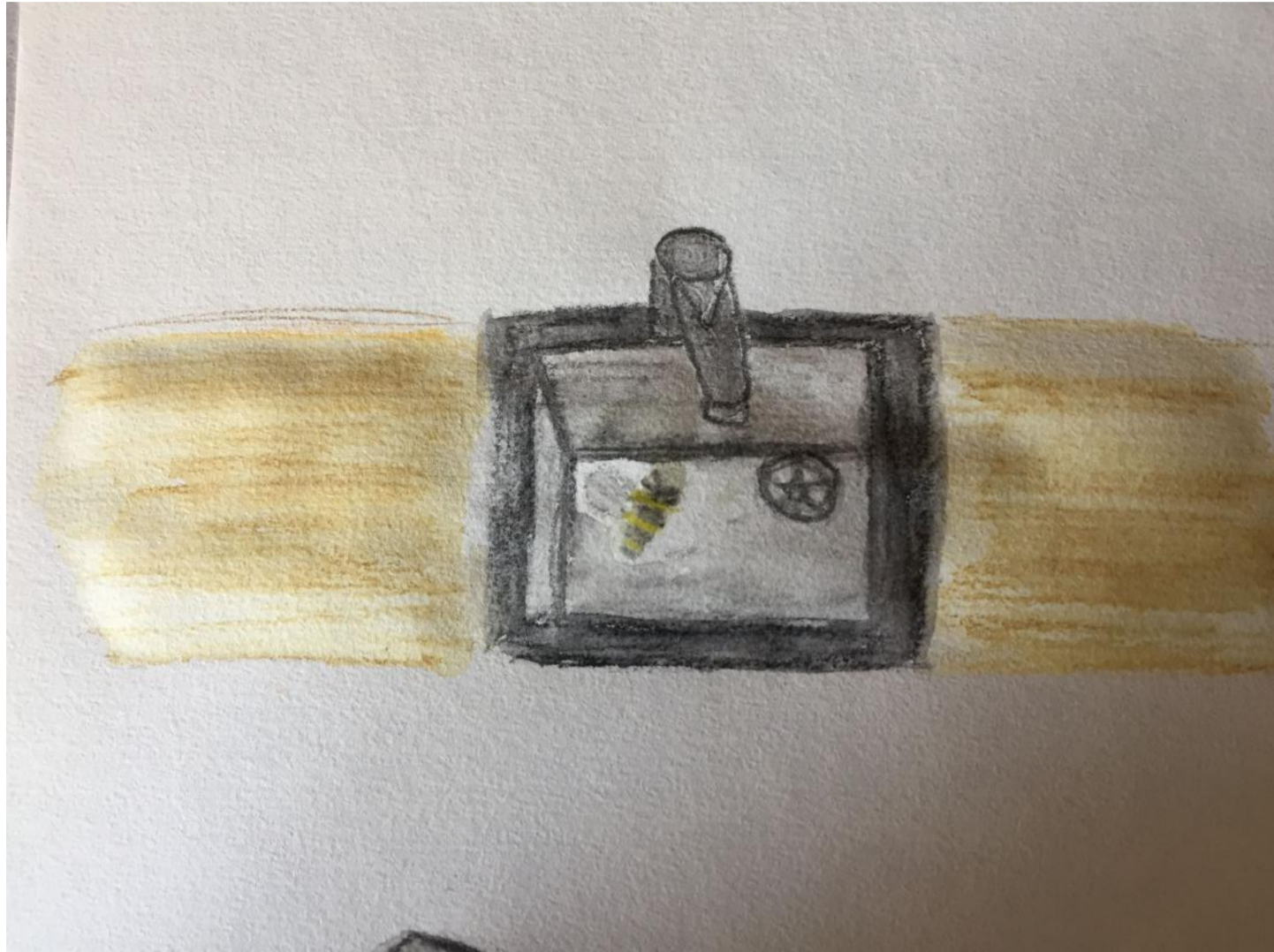
Sometimes my walks extend to hours, where I walk beyond my immediate neighbourhood and into neighbouring boroughs. When that first happened, a month into the lockdown, I realised how much I'd been experiencing a sense of claustrophobia, of being trapped. Walking and observing have become a source of much-needed healing.

But as I reflect on how collective trauma has distinctive manifestations on an individual level - with a focus on myself - I also find it necessary to ask other questions about the term: how collective is 'collective' when not everyone who wants to is able to access the walking I've personally found helpful? When this trauma intersects with other collective traumas for many? This city in which I walk, London, is probably best defined by the disparities that exist across it, and predisposition to mental ill-health, poverty and access to even the mere sight of a nearby tree through the window are all interconnected. The wealthiest boroughs have more private gardens and parkland per capita than the poorest, more overcrowded ones. This borough in which I walk, Hackney, is one of the poorest in London but one which also hosts its own shocking disparities, and where it's very evident how much poverty is racialised. Near my flat are estates with attached green spaces, but at the rate at which gentrification is taking hold here, these are also likely to be eyed by 'developers'. Not everyone is able to roam public spaces freely in this city; stop and search and more police powers during the pandemic mean that Black communities will continue to be targeted more than others. Pseudo-public spaces that are open to the public but with added layers of private policing are also cropping up all over the city, and even the green space attached to City Hall (where the Mayor of London is based), ironically, is one example. Not everyone feels safe in public spaces for other reasons as well; even in the middle of a pandemic sexual harassment is still going strong, something I've witnessed first-hand during my walks. I've also been on trips to prominent green spaces and sights with my students, many of whom are visibly Muslim women and who communicate in a combination of languages, and have seen what hostile staring at people who are othered in these spaces can do. More elaborate green spaces in the form of national parks already often exclude so many as access to them implies you have a car. And if one does manage to get there, the always- intrusive, always-hostile question 'where are you really from?' also manages to follow you. And, of course, walking is not physically accessible to everyone and neither are enough green and/or public spaces. Not everyone can go out for a walk even if they are able to; there are people stuck in abusive contexts at home, especially with the lockdown, women with increased gendered labour, key workers working in multiple jobs with no time at hand, and people who are especially vulnerable in relation to the virus.

Given the facts about the predisposition to mental ill-health amongst people of colour, women, people with (other) disabilities and queer, working-class, and migrant communities, and the plethora of research on the importance of green spaces to mental health, it's difficult not to see the disparity in access to green spaces as an added injustice to that already experienced by these groups, particularly by those living at their intersections. While mainstream narratives will try to amplify essentialist 'reasoning' behind the predisposition to mental ill-health in many of these groups in the same tone that is being used to explain the over-representation of people of colour in cases of Covid-19, the structural nature of this predisposition and its twinning with poverty and poorer access to care, including access to greenery and green spaces, will continue to scream back at us. As the pandemic continues to unfold, I'll continue to seek solace and grounding from the trauma it unleashes. In the trees, in the walks, in the daisies that are slowly appearing, in the breezes. But as I look around me and see who is not here, I'll also continue to be reminded of how mental health - and access to care connected to it, be it in the form of therapy or trees - is political in the same way this pandemic is.

An ambulatory pesto pot to the rescue

Susan Clandillon



Reviving a tired bumble bee discovered in the sink. This fuzzy creature was lifeless and limp but responded well to sugar water and kind encouragement. Carried gently to the garden in pesto pot, after a few slurps of syrupy goodness she was back to her pollinating duties once more. A small pandemic miracle.



1 hairs have been growing unsystematically | it's okay, let them grow
all days of the week:

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<hair>

hair1 hair2 hair3 hairN emerge out of my skin here and there and there, blessings, caresses

</hair>

2 i count and walk and count and walk
down
a street >>

>> repeat, i do this each day of the week {no tracking device}
i take a turn to the left{ }and i keep on counting
not my footsteps, but plastic items

... i am searching ...
... to show you again ...
... our records ...

~/Documents/Rivers_and_skies

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3 queer-feminist-anti-racist 8 she/they/them 7 press EXIT
2 i walked & i stumbled above_below 9 [...] s senses

9 *miercuri* outside a humid muteness without wind,
[weather log] tension building in the air as if a thunderstorm is about to break rainfall;
above an opaque, curved, dry sky

9s i'm giving birth to triplets a sequoia tree
an earthworm
a turtle

</valleys of wind>



1/4

Charlotte Clark