

invisibilities



ISSUE No2

Part II.



Contributors

LORI ARDEN

Lori Arden writes about home, heritage, and belonging. She's lived in many places and draws inspiration from each. She is half-Filipino.

VISUALS ON PAGE 26

SHANA BAHEMAT

Shana Bahemat is an Iranian immigrant living in Philadelphia with a Masters in Women's & Gender Studies from DePaul University. Her work explores transgenerational trauma and its affects on our bodies and memories in the diaspora. If you'd like to connect with her, you can find her on instagram (@saffronbby) baking sweet and savory treats, visiting the ocean often, and spending time with her dog Anar. For additional info please visit www.shanabahemat.com

LEAH BRATHWAITE

Leah Brathwaite is a young writer who recently picked up the pen after years of questioning whether her work was good enough to share with others. She learned that whether or not it's good enough, the fact that it was important enough to be written down means it is worthy of being shared.

VISUALS ON PAGES 18, 19

AMANDA CANNELLA

Amanda Cannella is a Canadian-Italian artist and aspiring scholar who is thrilled to be cautiously foraying into creative nonfiction writing. She is 26, resides with her amazing partner and their two cats, and lives with Complex Regional Pain Syndrome. Her family hails from *Gioiosa Marea, Sicilia*, one of the southern most islands of Italy. Her last name is Italian for cinnamon.

VANESSA COSTELLO

Vanessa Costello is an expatriate child of an immigrant parent. Proudly British and Irish, she currently lives in Toronto. With North America now being the fourth continent on which she has resided, she is fascinated with the concept of 'home,' including the Welsh notion of Hiraeth.

JASMIN ELYSIA

Jasmin Elysia is a Toronto-based poet and freelance writer with roots in three countries: England, her birthplace, Trinidad, where her family is from, and Canada, which she calls home. Her creative work grapples with geographical, emotional, and physical space: the relationships we hold within ourselves, with others, and the places we move through. Her poetry can be found on the page in *Living Hyphen*, online at *Mitra magazine*, and in person, sometimes, at Stories of Ours Toronto.

NAAKITA FELDMAN-KISS

naakita feldman-kiss is a lesbian artist of mixed roots currently working between Montreal, Ottawa, and Toronto. Her practice examines concepts of inheritance and highlighting experiences of intergenerational memory and liminal identities through contemporary forms of oral tradition. Her process-based explorations manifest as transmedia installation works, often incorporating text-based, performative, technological and social elements. Recent presentations include New York MoMA PS1 (2012);

Eastern Bloc, Montreal, QC (2015); Unnoticed Festival, Nijmegen, NL (2016); Galerie B-312, Montreal, QC (2016); Knot Project Space, Ottawa, ON (2018); Critical Distance, Toronto, ON (2019).

LETLOTLO GARIBA

Letlotlo (Lettie) Gariba is a Lesotho born, Ghanaian raised person living and manifesting in Toronto.

LUX HABRICH

Having moved to Atlantic Canada in 2012 to complete an Interdisciplinary BFA at NSCAD University, Lux Habrich found herself drawn to the intimate narrative potential in tactile craft processes, due to their inherent political nature as domestic and feminine mediums, thus undervalued as a form of production. Inspired by her mixed racial and cultural identity, Lux externalizes intense internal grievances, to open up collective issues and qualities of larger community struggle to receive moments of healing, empowerment and insight.

VISUALS ON PAGES 30, 31

CHRISTINA HAJJAR

Christina Hajjar is a first-generation Lebanese-Canadian pisces dyke ghanouj with a big appetite! Her work focuses on diaspora, femme identity, and food culture. Catch her art, writing, and organizing at christinahajjar.com or @garbagebagprincess. For more diasporic content check out @carnationzine.

YUMING HE

Yuming He is a hobbyist photographer, Bonsai designer, and 3rd year Visual Studies Specialist student at the University of Toronto. She was born and raised in Beijing until she came to Canada at age 14. She is mostly interested in portrait photography, working on a film portrait series titled [SUBJECT]. Using a Konika Hexar RF camera, [SUBJECT] takes place within the subjects' homes. The homes are familiar to the subject, but not to He, providing an ability to see things that are unique and different to her. She also works with installation art, and is very much rooted in Chinese culture. Her work can be found at @yuminghee.cr2 or www.yuminghee.com.

VISUALS ON PAGES 12, 49

JOSEFINA HERNANDEZ

Josefina Hernandez was born in 1987 in Bogota, Colombia. She immigrated to Canada in high school at the age of sixteen. She obtained her Honours Bachelors of Arts with high distinction in 2012 from the University of Toronto. Since then she has taken part in a number of group shows. Josefina's practice consists of paper cut works that are meticulously carved with an x-acto knife. Largely inspired by nature's sinuous and organic forms, Josefina explores belonging and the relationship between us and the spaces we inhabit. In her work, she seeks to convey both the spiritual and material realities of human existence juxtaposing architectural elements with the natural world. Josefina recently moved to New York City. She lives and works in Washington Heights.

VISUALS ON PAGES 2, 37, 47, 50

NYDA KWASOWSKY

Nyda Kwasowsky is freelance dance artist, performer and choreographer based out of her native home of Toronto. She studied classically at The National Ballet School of Canada, and has since worked with a large scope of movement languages leading to her interest in trauma informed somatic practices. As a Person of Colour with intersectional identity, her curiosity to connect humanity lies at the core of the work she is drawn to. Her interest in the states of the undefined where vulnerability, humanity, mystery, conflict, difficulty and process exist inform her personal practice and choreographic voice. Nyda has recently been exploring 'identity' in her work, in relation to her intersectional experience as a bi-racial, marginalized body of colour, leading to the importance of diasporas and colonial history in her artistic development and processes.

STEPHANIE LATTY

Stephanie Latty is a queer Black woman of Afro-Caribbean descent. She is an emerging poet, scholar, and cyborg. She is currently working on a doctorate in the Departments of Social Justice Education and Women and Gender Studies at the University of Toronto. Stephanie currently resides in the not-so-distant future/past and enjoys warm blankets, lunar eclipses and Octavia Butler.

MELINA MEHR

Melina Mehr is a multi-disciplinary creator currently based in Toronto, whose work focuses on cultural lineage and transgenerational memory. She holds a Masters in Museum Studies and strives to develop inclusive, accessible, and decolonized art experiences. In both her professional and personal pursuits, Melina works towards creating environments which are a little more open and kind.

VISUALS ON COVER, PAGES 14, 17, 54, 68

NOUR ABI NAKHOUL

nour abi nakhoul is a mixed and arab transsexual woman living and loving out of tkaronto.

ZOE OSBORNE

Zoe Osborne graduated with a Bachelor of Interior Design from Ryerson University and currently works as a Junior Interior Designer at an architecture firm in Toronto. Zoe grew up in Barbados and moved to Toronto in 2012 for university. She is the founder of a Caribbean History and Culture collective called *Mahogany Culture*. She has showcased her work in art gallery shows and has written articles for a local newspaper in Barbados.

ANETA PACHOLSKA

Originally from Poland, Aneta Pacholska has traveled the world learning and perfecting her craft. The influences and experiences that she gained while traveling from country to country are expressed in her illustrations. From Berlin to Granada to her current home in Toronto, Aneta loves engaging with people, culture, and music — it helps her illustrate from different angles and show various perspectives. She contributes a unique perspective through her distinctive illustrations, international background, and ability to tell visual stories.

VISUALS ON PAGES 58, 59, 60, 61

GIA PEREIRA

Gia Pereira is 26-year-old cis queer femme womxn living in the city of Toronto. She was born and spent her early years in Quezon City, Manila, Philippines, the daughter of a teenage unwed mother and a software engineer five years her senior. The poem she chose to share touches upon her experience with being a member of the diaspora, as well as her sense of displacement in Canada, a country that has been her home for most of her life. Her struggle with her sense of self, her peripheral sense of pride, her withering yet defining connection with her memories and her cultural heritage, and her desire to understand and be embraced by her ancestry are the central themes of her submission.

SARAH PHILLIPS

Sarah Phillips is a Toronto-based writer and brand strategist, with a Masters degree in English Literature. She likes reading, watching and telling complex stories about women, trauma, healing and community that explore how our individuality shapes and is shaped by our shared histories.

NAZ RAHBAR

Naz Rahbar is a multidisciplinary artist, working in drawing, print, handmade books, performance, animation and installation. With drawing at the core of her practice, often autobiographical, narrative based and about the dilemmas of queer immigrant identity and orientation. She graduated OCAD University in 2009 majoring in Drawing & Painting, with a minor in Printmaking. Naz Rahbar has also been working in the field of education. She completed a Bachelor of Education with a Fine Arts focus at York University in 2012. Naz is currently an MFA candidate at York University (2017-2019). She lives and works in Toronto as an artist and art educator.

VISUALS ON PAGES 11, 33, 65

JULIA EDEN, REBECCA JADE, ALYSHA RUTH

Julia: future couponing auntie; cat mom; she/her.

Rebecca: Black femme, she/her, pro denim.

Alysha: jamaican jewess, she/her, if you're on time you're late.

VISUALS ON PAGES 22, 24, 25

CAMILA SALCEDO

Camila Salcedo is a textile, performance and video-based artist. She has lived half of her life in Caracas, Venezuela and the other half in Toronto and Halifax, Canada. She is currently doing two artist residencies in Argentina.

VISUALS ON PAGES 52, 53

KATE SIKLOSI

Kate Siklosi lives, writes, and thinks in Toronto. She is the author of numerous works of poetry both online and in print, including three chapbooks of poetry:

po po poems (above/ground press, 2018), *may day* (no press, 2018), and *coup* (The Blasted Tree, 2018). She is also the co-founding editor of *Gap Riot Press*, a feminist experimental poetry small press.

SABRINA SUKHDEO

Sabrina Sukhdeo is a Toronto-based writer of Indo-Guyanese descent. Her writing intimately explores the concepts of belonging and rootlessness through her experiences as a third culture daughter. She has previously been published in *Kajal Magazine* and *This is Worldtown*.

CHRISTINE H. TRAN

Christine H. Tran is a Vietnamese-Canadian writer, critic, and aspiring scholar. Her work has been featured in *untethered*, *alt.theatre magazine*, and ATB Publishing's *Outside In*. She often assists at Toronto's *Brick: a Literary Journal*. This one time, Christine used her SSHRC grant to write about *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Catch her on Instagram at the_chriscourse.

CORIE WAUGH

Corie Waugh is a queer interdisciplinary artist of Jewish descent based in Montreal, Quebec. She is currently exploring the ideas of the expanded painting, ontological aesthetics, ideas and intersection of language and visual communication, and the autobiographical position artists often take, all within her practice. Corie's project *Refuge* explores her families immigration narrative, escaping the Pogroms and Holocaust of Europe as Jewish people. Using her family's history she wishes to highlight the current atrocities occurring today with people seeking refuge in Canada and the US. Through this work she hopes to explore Canada's immigration platform's history of discrimination and exclusion of certain ethnic groups past and present. To explore this she has painted family photographs where her family is systematically removed in a "what if..?" scenario, imagining they were refused entry to Canada.

VISUALS ON PAGE 43

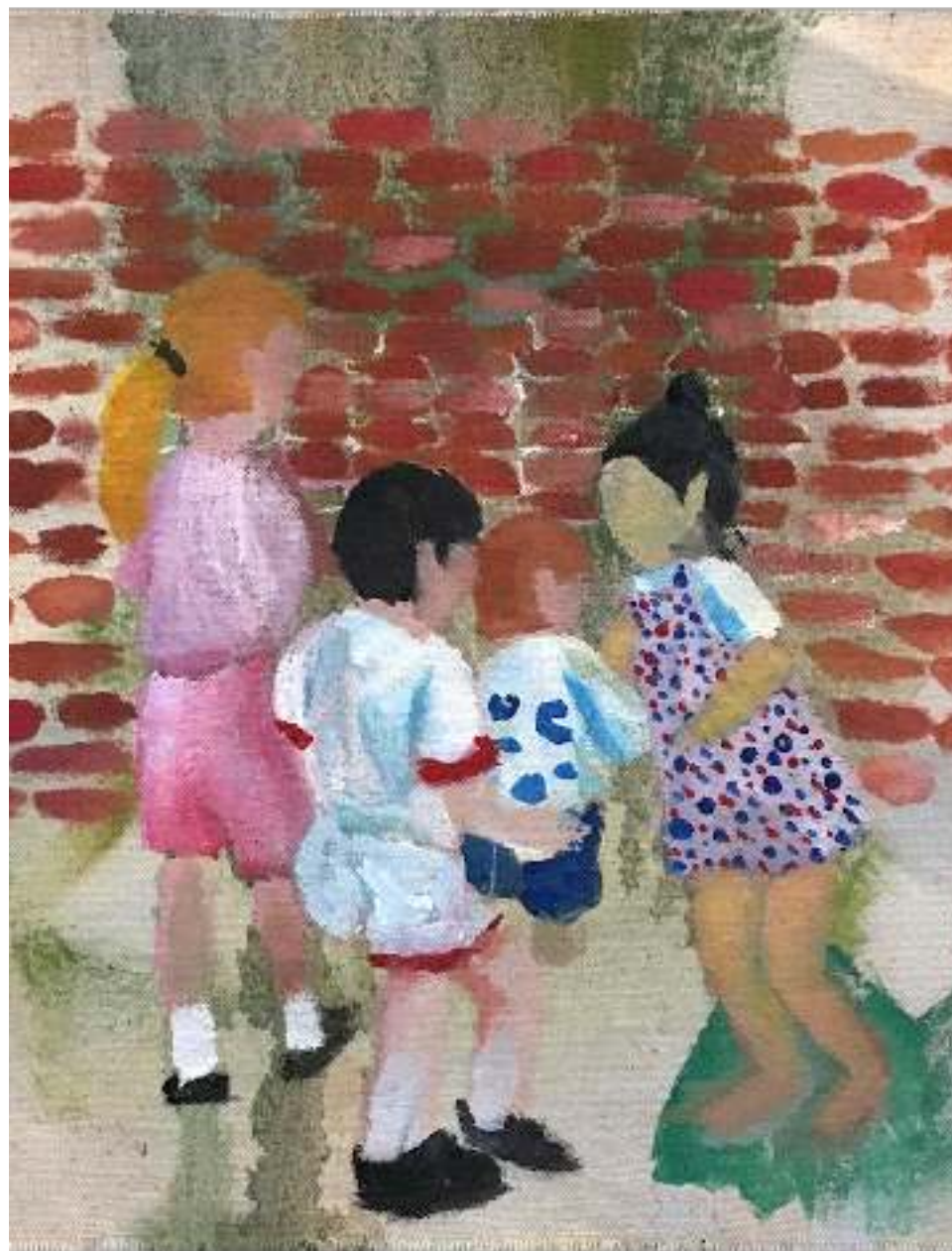
CLAUDIA YANG

claudia yang (she/her) is a multidisciplinary artist; processing feelings through her words, sharing stories behind the lens, and healing through Cycles of reconnecting/re-learning with language. a second generation canadian, born and raised on unceded coast salish territories to hong kong parents. she now resides in tkaronto, where she is currently laying down her creative roots, exploring with different mediums through her art. her solo show "(re)trace" focused on loss and grief whilst in form of chinese calligraphy and film photography, april 2019.

FLORENCE YEE

Florence Yee is a 2.5-generation, Cantonese-struggling artist based in Tkaronto and Tiotia:ke. Their text-based visual art practice focuses on the authenticity and failure in relation to the everyday experiences of the diaspora.

VISUALS ON PAGES 34, 35, 44, 45



THE ONLY
RITUAL I
KNOW IS
SACRIFICE



nour abi nakhoul

areolas scream, sing,

whine out in acappella

& we can only understand maybe 3 or 4 words that waltzed atop our mother(s) tongue
which were not crooned over storybook or plastic crib

& we do hold grudges —

are there not certain still-life portraits & angles of g*d's face that we were never gifted
the pigment to paint?

held in breaks of static silence

in blood

under terrain

underwater

which slip through our wanting-waning hands like

sand never stuck between our toes

we've never seen the sun like maybe you did

rolling out from the back of throat phlegmatic to

crush the local masjid

& set 6 blocks of babies screeching like car alarms

we've also never seen the ocean like maybe you did

a multi-line expressway from which to bid goodbye, salaam,

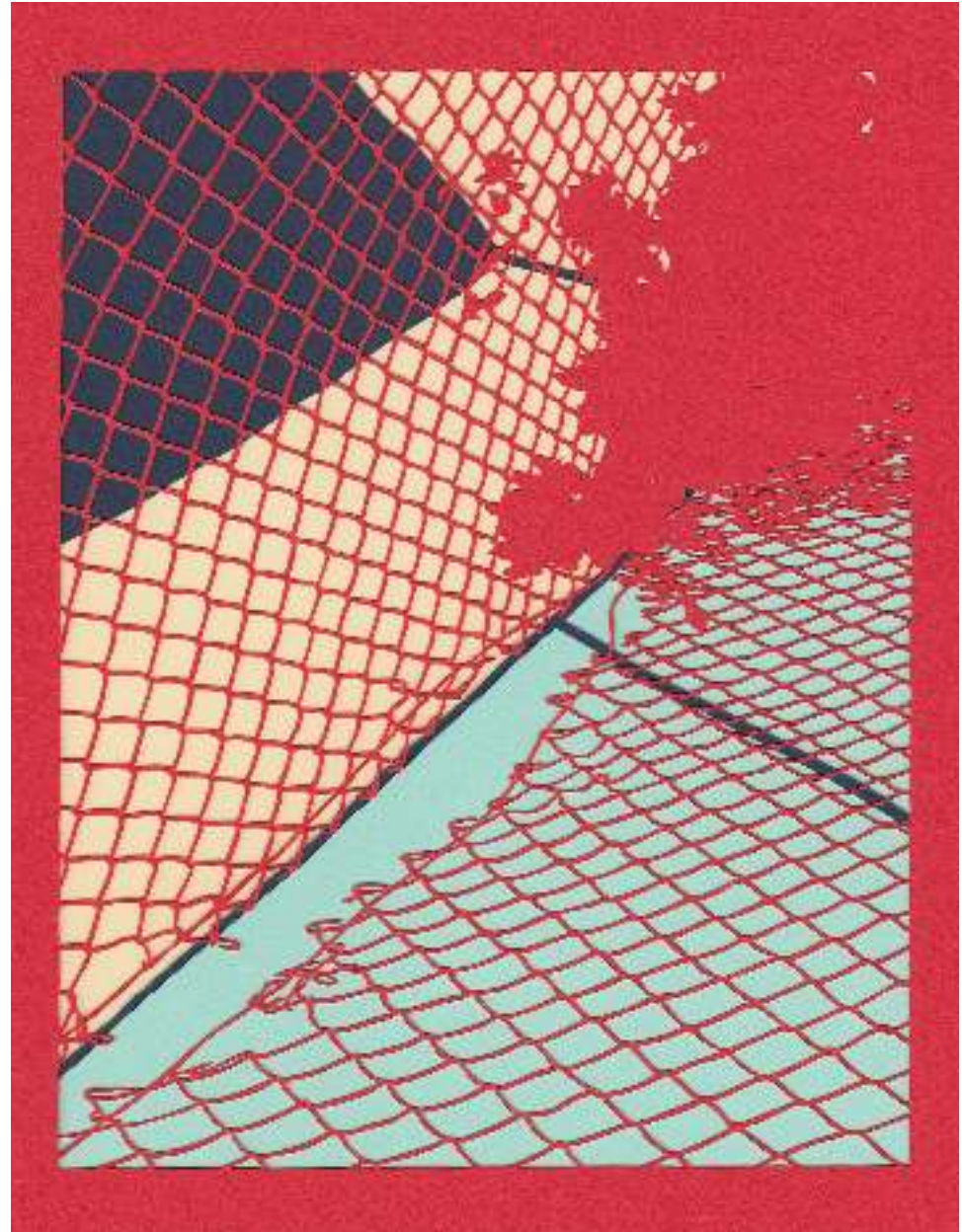
& pull fast the continental curtain

results:

genealogy's most recent plucked mandrake

now fails to remember where, exactly,

the trumpet's cry hails from.



come over she said come pay your respects to 阿公 knees on the floor
crouching her head touches the floor with each bow a purpose for every stride
incense burning which i used to detest when i was younger i never wanted to
bring friends over because i was embarrassed by the statues and ashamed of my
culture i burn each stick now with hope that the smoke reaches to my ancestors
to let them know i am here the smell of familiarity an odd sense of home
again wherever i am / they were healers 阿公 and 阿婆 i only realised that now
the small kitchen where the herbs cooked on the vintage stove they've had since
the sixties how i still feel the heat beating the alchemy of ingredients bubbling
passed down through generations to heal a broken bone 阿公 had swam down
to escape from the revolution water to help him heal to try to cleanse the blood
that had murdered the rest of his family i wonder if he will ever know it was the
tears they had shed which carried him down to safety / my pisces mother is
what you would call 口硬心軟 mouth hard heart soft i think of her often now
that i've moved away i miss her cooking the soups she would make from
scratch goji berries lotus seeds winter melon snow fungus wood ear
she brought home back to me she learned english from migrating to canada
how lonely it must have been to leave everyone behind to some place foreign
only to be called a foreigner here go back where you came from i don't ever
recall seeing her cry only twice she was terribly upset with me and the second
time was when 阿公 was in a wooden box as she cried as we all cried out to
him as we watched him turn into ashes back to where we all came from i hope
she knows that i love her deeply even though we don't speak of it because i
owe all my roots and flowers to her

— fractured memories of the maternal || the first love i'll ever know

claudia yang





sleepless

Sabrina Sukhdeo

an unholy languor from a distant day pulls the skin beneath my eyes the sockets cave into
warm green-water swamps and the memory of a transient ripples through the blurred gleam
she was also bound by a suffocating sleeplessness a possessive love her lands were contused
in the arms of a planter or a cane-cutter and all this woman and all this freedom
ruptured the muscle this was the old religion hymnal in its corruption they could not
move without twisting her nose and snapping the bone – my mothers find empathy for
my fathers whose person was gnawed raw in the mouldy mouth of greed i'm taught to
press my lips to the violence etched in the lines of their palms because our hurt lusts the
same all the while a revelation unfurls in my dreams weeping like a tortured prophecy
or a promise these men they have not changed.



*Miyó Gego Marisol
Terasas*





Kawal

Gia Pereira

there is a war within me
it is one fought by my mothers
bought and paid for in blood and rosaries
they ask me to meet them
where the water gathers

i pray with them there
i've not spoken to god in some time
they feed me, bathe me, and wash my hair
teach me my true name
and hold me as i cry

in a language i cannot speak, i spoke
national anthems, long since forgotten
marked with their symbols, adorned in their cloaks
they prepare me, though they know
this is not the first war i've fought in

they shield me with the spirit
of their quiet footsteps and loud laughter
though surrounded by darkness, i do not fear it
for i am the blessed, daughter of soldiers
and i will join them by the water after

Stephanie Latty

Memoirs of NoPlace

memoir 6

sensing danger
where there appears to none
is part of my violent inheritance.
maybe this is why i am afraid of things.
big things, like ships.
small things, like shadows across a dark window,
or the sound of a settling house.

memoir 7

my body is a map
of dark matter.
it is an ossuary.
a resting place
for generations of bones.

memoir 8

i keep trying to stitch the map together with
my hair or my skin,
wanting it to graft like a healing bone.
ancestors tell me to leave the ashes and shreds where they lay.
my body knows better than to repair an irreparable thing.

Kate Siklosi

Anatomy. A rootlike subdivision of a nerve or vein.

II. Nagymama

I see where I get my hips from,
the ones that were built to pull carts
and bear children. Thick calves, she has my
bones, or I hers. The big ones. Gypsy cheeks, the
kind that touch the browbone when smiling. A business
of flies does not faze her. She looks like she's guarding a secret
or is it her knowing she will die in childbirth only a year
and three quarters later. A preparing, steeling, the
coming of the grey. A wraith she could not
see. Damp thoughts dry tight like paper.
The sun is in her eyes, and she's
holding on to the fence or

is she holding it up.

She used to pick apricots from an aging ladder
in the backyard, would scrawl her needs on the back
of leaves and wait for them to wilt. or else the goddamned rain.
my aunt poaches a still-warm poppy seed roll and
steals across the lawn barefoot, chasing ducks.

Am I being too pastoral here?

You are.

Pest was more urban, she only dreamed of a yard,

the meagre objects of a life,

the protected heart centre where all things reside

in an archive of memory.





INTROSPECTION

- Zoe Osborne

My mind.

My voice.

My hair.

My skin.

I have recolonized myself in this multicultural landscape
I have lost what they have fought for,
Freedom to express my, now blurry, African roots.

Who am I? I feel empty and unsure
No longer grounded in the morals of my upbringing,
That pure image tainted by the stench of the city.

My identity confused with rap and hip hop
Social media is my enemy
Who am I as a black Caribbean woman?
Do you know where I'm from? It's not just where I'm from but where I grew up,
Can you hear it in my voice?
Speaking "clearly" now comes easier than my dialect,
Pushing me further away from home. This is my disconnect.

I feel comfort in the ones that have recently come,
They are still grounded in their culture,
I can hear it in their voice and see it in their smile.

When I'm assimilated I feel empty
Can't be too sad, always wear a smile and although I'm asking how you're doing
I'm not supposed to truly listen because I'm asking; not always because I care
but because if I don't I might offend you.

My ears bleed from high pitched voices and sentences that end as questions,
As I become them I question myself, unsure of my reflection.

What is my voice?
I love my hair but I wish it was bigger
I love my skin but I wish it was darker
I hope when you see me you also see my culture.



Hiraeth

Vanessa Costello

No one tells you
That backwards glance at the home you love, is the last you'll ever take:
Rip out heart. Snap it in two. Bury it deep
Organic matter meets organic matter.

The current is fierce, unrelenting
You kick and splutter and gasp
Tearing off clothes, you search for new skin.
Gasps morph to deep breaths, air excavating lungs
As life ripples, undulates around you, you stagger - almost stand
fixated on the horizon. Light, shadow, shadow, light

With time you're infatuated by sand, gristly on fingertips
The wind whispers it will love you
Distracted from pain and under cover of darkness
Your half-heart has sprouted, penetrating the earth.

No one tells you
That backwards glance at the home you love, is the last you'll ever take.
Only the realisation that a heart splintered, fragmented
Will never beat whole again.



WHAT WILL YOU TAKE?

Sarah Phillips

We spend our lives trying to discern where we end and the rest of the world begins. We snatch our freeze-frame of life from the simultaneity of existence by holding on to illusions of permanence, congruence, and linearity; of static selves and lives that unfold in sensical narratives. All the while, we mistake chance for choice, our labels and models of things for the things themselves, our records for our history. History is not what happened, but what survives the shipwrecks of judgment and chance.

- Maria Popova, *Figuring*

When I couldn't sleep, I would fantasize my house was catching fire. I would do a mental inventory of everything I owned and as it passed through my imagination, I'd ask myself, is this the one item I would take with me if I was running from the flames? My selection varied over the years. First it was my Sammy, a Cabbage Patch doll who permanently wore eyeshadow and lipstick in the same shade of pink highlighter. My grandparents bought her for me when I was born and so she held a special place in my heart – a key artifact of my past, of my being born in this place and belonging to this family of mine. In later years, it was a pair of platform boots I bought with my own money that I couldn't imagine living without. Or my journal, or photos from summer camp.

Funny that I spent so much time cataloguing and ranking my possessions considering how often I've purged them. I've been called unsentimental because I don't keep photos (or really take them to begin with), I don't have my childhood toys (sorry, Sammy), I don't know where my graduate school diploma has gone, and I've never been interested in holding onto things like old concert tickets. My partner meanwhile still has t-shirts branded with the name of that bar he used to drink at in university, and he even seems to have trouble parting with gas station receipts.

Hoarding the past is a luxury. It's not just a vice for those with the financial means to accumulate so much stuff in the first place – it's a privilege belonging only to those of us lucky enough to stay put. I lived in 11 homes with my family before I moved into the first place of my own. There's more if you count my father's various houses that always had rooms for my brother and I but never really felt like ours.

When you're always moving it's helpful to not have too many things. Before each address change I had to assess what mattered, what I needed to be me and what I would leave behind.

There was an underlining positivity in our moves, or at least my mother did her best to make it so. Fresh starts and whatnot. *Movin' on up* my mom would hum as she danced around dropping off the boxes in our rooms again. Some of those moves did bring good news. Like the time we moved closer to my friends. It was more difficult to put a positive spin on our move into my grandparents' basement, the first of many changes of address without my father. The move into Harvey's home, setting up rooms next to our new stepsister and brother, was more fun than the time we moved out. We packed up broken hearts and did our best to leave our anger about "things just not working out" with the dust bunnies under our beds.

My grandmother has moved only once in her life. Her big move took her from the one-bedroom Kensington Market apartment she shared with her three siblings and parents to the North York bungalow she raised her children in, nursed her dying father in, and much later, took care of her ailing husband in. Now living in that bungalow on her own at 85-years-old, she refuses to ever move again.

Wandering Jews, condemned to walk the earth until the Second Coming, my family has been putting in their miles. I've been digging into my family history and learned that the men and women who lived here before me wandered over from Russia, England, Poland, and Kirkland Lake, Ontario. My great-grandmother and her mother boarded ships that ferried them from Eastern Europe to Canada. Their move kept them one step ahead of history, but they left family behind. My great-grandmother managed to bring her brass bed with her. No one knows where it is now.

All this moving around makes me wonder what's been thrown out. What didn't make the cut, wasn't considered important enough to make the journey?

Between those happenings that prefigure it
And those that happen in its anamnesis
Occurs the Event, but that no human wit
Can recognize until all happening ceases.

- W.H. Auden, *Homage to Clio*

I've recently moved to downtown Toronto, setting up a home with my partner that's not far from where my grandmother grew up. When my grandparents talk about their big move in the 1950s, they tell us how happy they were to move out of that poor Jewish ghetto – *movin' on up* – they can barely stand it that we want to return. But where I live bares few traces of their past. My grandmother's apartment is now home to an immigrant family from another country. Or it's a condo.

I've heard it said that Toronto is a city that doesn't do history well. We watch the next glass tower go up, or learn that street name is an Indigenous word we've all been mispronouncing, or how few Italians still live Little Italy. Whether we've been here for three generations or we're just arriving, we make progress, and as we do, we erase the past.

That bungalow my grandmother has been living in for the past 60 years is only a 30-minute drive from her first home. But when I take her to the market she can't remember exactly where that one-bedroom apartment was located. She doesn't talk a lot about the past but I'm pushing her to start sharing her stories with me. I'm sitting with her as she makes her classic recipes – the ones that she's never written down – and I'm recording the ingredients and steps in my iPhone. My cousin is learning Yiddish – that nearly forgotten language – from her mother. Never forget. Or at least, try to remember. Because no one knows where we'll be going next, and what we might want to bring with us.



ON HOME

Nyda Kwasowsky

Twenty seven years recovering home
Walking away with salted nostalgia
Washed into wholeness
Impermeably
In search of;
The displaced memories

Gravitationally I am rooted
In the presence of the four elements
Feeling the light and the living

I am free within the self
Conversations with ancestors
To taste my origins
To witness the spectrum of colour
Hands of sorrow
Veins of their land

To experience past indirectly
Natures grounded
rhythms
textures
frequencies
that inhabit my space
The energy of my own history

Reality of perception
space
time
presence
transcending the dimensions
of structure

Connecting deeply to the stolen riches
to sit nakedly
Mirroring the halves
with intimacy
To forgive;
is to be the warrior



Amanda Cannella

Diaspora blues

So,
here you are
too foreign for home
too foreign for here.
Never enough for both.
- Ijeoma Oluo



I vividly remember sitting cross-legged on the ground, all in a semi-circle with my class and my teacher sitting on a chair. With no recollection as to the context of her statement, she matter-of-factly declared to the class that “Amanda is olive-skinned,” to which I promptly broke into a fit of tears. Not knowing exactly what Ms. Kasprzak had meant—and as a child who, raised in an Italian-Canadian family, had only ever seen those distinctively bright-green *Castelvetrano* olives—I concluded that other people were somehow perceiving my skin as olive-green. That night, my parents talked to and assured me otherwise: they explained, generous with their kid-friendly terms, that olive-skinned is a synonym for tanned. Even though I can retrospectively find humor in the ludicrous imagery my child-aged brain created, it troubles me. What I had subconsciously understood my teacher as saying, even as a child, was the truth at the core of her statement: there was something different about me that distinguished me from my peers. I had, in the words of Neil Bissoondath, “at six years of age, [...] with the best of intentions, [been] handed an identity crisis,” one I was wholly unprepared for.



The first theories of a Mediterranean race occurred in the early 20thC but were relegated to the periphery by scientific communities. What took precedence were those race theories that subscribed entirely to the notion of white supremacy; the Mediterranean theories of D. A. Mackenzie and G. E. Smith were dismissed largely due to their speculations that European whites were ultimately descended from the same genetic roots as those colonial subjects they were—under the guise of racial superiority—



oppressing. With the emergence of critical race studies in 1970s, scholars started seriously deconstructing and problematizing the eugenic-based race theories of the 20th century. Alice Walker helped pioneer the term colorism in 1983 writing—hoping—that “perhaps black women who are writers in the twenty-first century will present a fuller picture of the multiplicity of oppression—and of struggle. Racism, sexism, classism, and colorism will be very much a part of their consciousness,” and, indeed, this statement has only managed to solidify its standing as intersectional forms of oppression have garnered greater recognition. The only amendment I would stress is that it is writers of all colors who need to recognize the multiplicity of oppression ingrained in the normative discourse, because POC are already well-aware of it, and putting the burden of educating the ignorant should not fall solely on those who are being—and have historically been chronically—silenced.



When, in 2010, I was mocked for asking my then-boyfriend to “close” the lights rather than “turn off” the lights, I was, internally, a little shaken; it brought back the feelings from early childhood when I was just starting elementary school. Having been raised by my Italian immigrant father, Canadian mother, and her Italian immigrant parents, my immersion into an English-dominant school—after being so used to the rapid-fire switching-between and blending-of Sicilian, Italian, and English—was disorienting, to put it lightly. When I could only muster a jumbling of languages to communicate my basic needs at school, it caused strain with teachers: “I need to *jittari* [throw out; colloquial] this [garbage],” I’d say, asking to leave my seat. But the request would be met with a blank stare and an insistence that I needed to speak proper English.



The memory of this ex-boyfriend brought upon me an urge to map the history of my linguistic mishaps by dissecting how my predilection to say “close the lights” originated. My family’s hybridized language does have a name: *Italiense*. It is “the Italian/English contact language—a marker of first generation Italian immigrant speech,” which I was unaware I spoke. As a result, when I heard some words used interchangeably (read: improperly), never having formally learned Sicilian or Italian, I was blissfully unaware of my errors. My logic was that if:

turn-off/switch-off = *astutari* * *astutari la luci* = turn of the lights
closing = *chiudiri* * *chiudiri la porta* = close the door
(*chiudiri la porta* ≈ *astutari la porta*), (*chiudiri la luci* ≈ *astutari la luci*)
** *chiudiri* ≈ *astutari*

If *chiudiri* and *astutari* could be used interchangeably within the rules of my family-language, why, then, shouldn’t “turn-off” and “close” be used in the same fashion? This was, apparently, a question my childhood brain asked itself and answered by way of adopting this pattern of mistranslation as a rule of its own.



An aunt of mine frequently tells of the first time she was entrusted with my sister and I for a day, prior to her marriage to my uncle, where she took us to Michaels to buy some crafting supplies for that afternoon. To hear her tell it, we were all shopping peacefully when she noticed I was no longer with them. She went to the next aisle to find my star-fishing body writhing on the floor, trying to wail “I feel like I’m going to throw up!” but instead managing “*mi sento come ruvisciari!*” She turned to my sister for help, not speaking any Italian herself. As my sister was only a year older and in the

same linguistic predicament, my aunt was only met with my sister repeating "*ruvisciari!*" paired with an impromptu charade mimicking the act of vomiting. My aunt's story resolves itself nicely with her eventually understanding my sister's gestures, taking us back to her house, and me, apparently, vomiting all over my father the instant he put me in his car. It gets lots of laughs. But, a nagging feeling remains when she tells it: it's the child inside me who remembers my fear and tears that day, the feeling that I was unable to communicate properly with those around me, the lingering sensation that I was somehow broken.



It is only recently that I have started tackling what it means to be a child of the Italian-Canadian diaspora. It's not uncommon for people, after I've given details of my upbringing, to comment on how I'm "Italian-Italian." Indeed, in a study of Toronto youth belonging to the Italian-Canadian diaspora, participants' answers indicate that "being native Italian is referred to at times as 'Italian Italian' as if the doubling underlines and highlights the authenticity that one claims by birth place," but the problem I have is that Italy isn't my birth place, Canada is. I am "native Italian" only insofar as I grew up in the company of many native Italians, fully immersed in the Sicilian-Italian culture they unwaveringly tried to maintain connections with. Truthfully, I only know the gentle sting of what, to many, is the fathomless, unrelenting, and reverberating bludgeoning of racism, classism, colorism, shadism, et cetera. My stories focus on the areas of skin pigmentation and language, but those are two mere drops in the downpour of potential ways diasporic communities are exposed to situations that challenge their sense of belonging and loyalty to both home- and host-land.



My childhood memories are a window into my own experiences of diasporic dislocation; as Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic write in *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, "stories can name a type of discrimination (e.g., microaggressions, unconscious discrimination, or structural racism); one named, it can be combated," and, after all, it has been argued that silence is one of the ultimate weapons from the toolbox of the oppressors by which they are able to turn those with similar experiences against each other. If we are unable to name the universal experiences or assume that the burden of color is ours alone to deal with, it is not too far from the realm of possibility that this silence will be internalized, manifesting as a belief that what we say isn't worth being heard. On the importance of stories, Neal McLeod suggests that "to tell a story is to link, in the moment of telling, the past to the present, and the present to the past," since it is only by acknowledging how the conditions of the past are inextricably tied to the present condition that we will be able to collectively create a better future for all.

