



NOT MY SHAME.

The Not My Shame project.

The Not My Shame project was launched by researchers and artists to empower survivors of violence and abuse. It is about shifting the narrative from blaming the victim and recognizing that the societal culture of shame exacerbates mental health problems and is a barrier to healing.

In collaboration with The Maya Centre, a community-based charity providing free mental health and wellbeing services to women on low incomes, Not My Shame aimed to support survivors with developing creative writing skills to empower and support them in healing and breaking silence and shame.

We wanted to provide a platform to amplify the voices of survivors from underrepresented groups to inform best practice for relevant services and organisations. We also aimed to raise awareness of lived experiences and shift public perception and knowledge around violence, abuse and mental health.

The project consisted of a six-week creative writing workshop for Black LGBTQ+ survivors hosted by Andreena Leeanne, a Lived Experience Speaker, Writing Workshop Facilitator & Poet. This zine is a further outcome of the project, which features an essay written by Evie Muir, a social justice writer and domestic abuse specialist. This zine was designed by Zoe Thompson from sweet-thang zine, which is a publication and indie press that celebrates work by Black creatives. Huge thank you to all that were involved in the makings of this project!

NOT MY SHAME

INFLORESCENCE.

AN ESSAY BY

EVIE MUIR



Evie Muir (she/her) is a domestic abuse specialist with over 10 years experience working in the Violence Against Women and Girls sector. A survivor herself, she's interested in decolonial and abolitionist solutions to eradicating gendered and racialised violence. She is also a social justice writer and founder of Peaks of Colour, a Peak District-based nature-for-healing club by and for people of colour.



I, the fig.

Inflorescence; *noun*

the complete head of a plant including stems, stalks, bracts, and flowers;
the process of flowering.



The ethical legitimacy of figs - yes, figs - recently became a topic of controversy across the corners of the internet which home the vegan community. It was there I learnt that figs aren't vegan. Well, depending on whom you ask.

For a fig to grow, a wasp must die inside it. The wasp penetrates the infantile shield of a sapling, vulnerable and unprepared. It pollinates it as it does so, depositing eggs to be fertilised. With its role completed, the wasp dies and its decaying carcass is digested by the fig.

It strikes me that this violent process of invasion and insemination is not too dissimilar from the ways that trauma permeates the existence of queer survivors of colour. This trauma, usually at the hands of another, burrows deep inside of us, contorting and camouflaging so that eventually, the rotting remnants of pain become indistinguishable to our core.

We are one and the same, my trauma and I. Just like the wasp, something inside us dies, innocence, optimism, joy, a former self, perhaps. I don't recall a time before it, this trauma buried deep, and I don't know who I am without it.

The eggs left behind in the sapling by the now-deceased wasp emerge as minute larvae, which grow into a family of wasps that then continue the pollination process long after the fig has sprouted. From this uncomfortable act of nature, a fig is born. Bruised in deep hues of purples, reds and greens, its soft exterior shelters the internal bleeding of its syrupy centre. Decaying from the inside out, it is no one's fault but the parasite that chose us as its host, and we, as survivors, exist nonetheless.

We, the fig tree.

The vegan debate continues in the comment section. The symbiotic nature of this relationship between wasp and fig is not one of human-made exploitation, I read. I thought this a valid counterargument that cannot be applied to a survivor's trauma, defined with few exceptions, by its human-made devastation of life.

By way of being, a fig is not actually a fruit but an internalised inflorescence – a cluster of flowers and seeds housed within a bulbous stem. The fig tree, therefore, is a bouquet, one that, across the world, holds cultural significance as a symbol of peace, fertility, restoration and prosperity.

In ecological spaces, fig trees are often cited as a prime example of coevolution - Charles Darwin once pointed to figs in his description of how plants and insects could evolve through reciprocal exchanges.



**"Yet for survivors,
transforming our trauma into
something flourishing is not a
tool that comes naturally."**

Yet for survivors, transforming our trauma into something flourishing is not a tool that comes naturally. If anything, it feels like a stunting of all unknown possibilities to the evolutions of our future selves.

Healing isn't easy, for a queer survivor of colour. Maybe, an acceptance of this coevolution means our wasps simply are lighter to carry. Maybe, our wasps will decay to the point of disintegration. And justice? Justice, as defined by the colonial West at least, is near impossible. The institutions, designed to uphold such justice and support us in our healing, have never nourished us. Their racism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism sting existing wounds like a wasp's venom. If we are to coevolve with our trauma, can we reach a point of healing where the weight of our wasps is a little lighter to carry, where they decay to the point of disintegration?

There's a beauty to what is left to hold us, these delicate figs, bloated with suffering. Our own ancestral survival instincts, rooted deep into the earth, plant orchards of hope. The brittle branches of our community, strong but themselves weathered, form canopies of shelter and sustenance. There is some comfort then, in the power we hold to answer the questions that promise solutions to our trauma, the power to create a flourishing future for generations of queer survivors of colour to come.

Written by Evie Muir



ABOUT sweet-thang zine.

sweet-thang zine is

a literary zine, arts platform and indie press celebrating Black DIY creativity. Established in 2017, sweet-thang publishes poetry, creative writing, visual art and more, championing radical publishing and underground movements.

sweet-thang is about joy,
a resource for self-empowerment!

about the founder:

Zoe Thompson (she/her) is the founder of sweet-thang. She is a freelance social media manager and writer based in London, specialising in editorial design, workshop hosting, and poetry.



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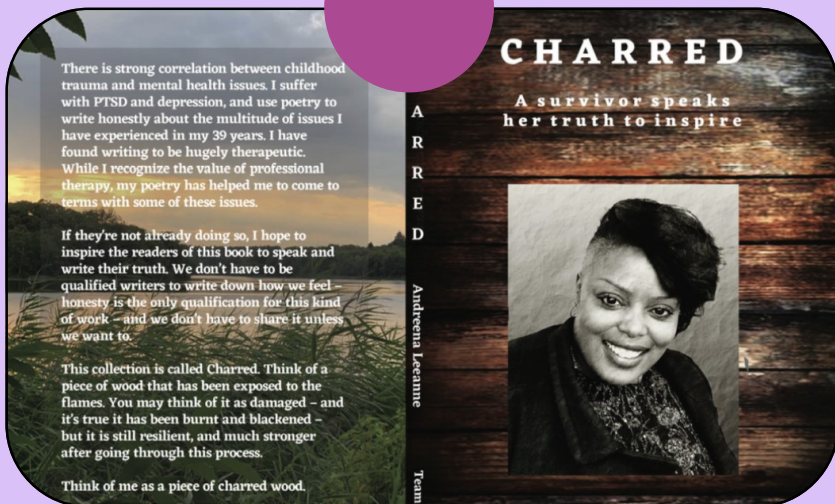


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ABOUT ANDREENA LEEANNE.



Andreena LEEANNE (she/her) 41, is a Black Lesbian Lived Experience Speaker, Writing Workshop Facilitator & Poet who helps community groups and organisations with their inclusion and wellbeing strategy by speaking about intersectionality, authenticity, allyship and facilitating creative writing workshops on self-care. Andreena writes and performs poetry to come to terms with and speak out about her personal experiences with homelessness, mental health, identity, childhood sexual abuse & the many other challenges she has faced in her life. Her debut poetry collection CHARRED was published by Team Angelica in 2020 and was shortlisted for a Polari First Book Prize in 2021.

Website www.andreena.co.uk



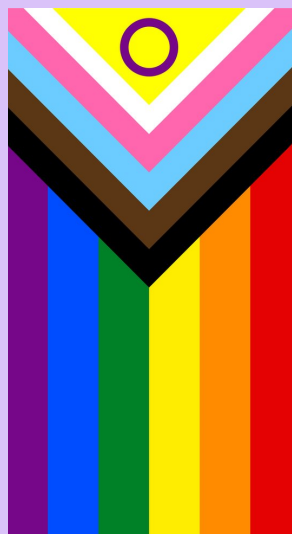
WRITING FOR SELF-CARE: SIX-WEEK CREATIVE WRITING WORKSHOPS

"The structured 90-minute 6-week self-care writing workshops for wellbeing focussed on six key elements of wellbeing each week using the Self-Care Wheel which was created by The Olga Phoenix Project. I also included the use of mindfulness techniques as well as the use of essential oils and my own affirmation well-being cards.

Each week, the participants were given timed writing prompts and encouraged to write a poem, short story, list, letter to self, or anything the participants wished to write about on the topic of that week. The participants did not need to have any prior writing experience and whatever they chose to write about was always good enough. Having the support of a professional therapist each week was also a huge bonus to the workshops. During week 1 it was evident from the discussions that self-care was thought of as selfish and something that is not accessible so to see that by week 6 the perception of self-care had changed, was absolutely magical and rewarding. It was a pleasure to facilitate these workshops and see how beneficial they were to all involved." - Andreena Leeanne



Olga Phoenix Project:
Healing for Social
Change (2013)



Garden Song.

a poem by workshop participant, Jaqueline O

Can you make a garden out of the pain you once felt?
The pain you once inflicted?
Can truly beautiful roses grow from such ugly roots?
Sometimes I feel like a flower
The most delicate one of all
The one that shot out of the most toxic soil
But yet I grow
Still I grow
I constantly falter but here I stand
With so much more sun and water to absorb
I am tall but not tall enough and I wonder if the soil from my beginnings
Hold me down
Pull me down
Drag me all the way down
And I wonder how many more thorns will grow
And prick the many people that I love
Oh how there are less people that I love
Because they tried to separate me from the soil
From the pain that I am
They expect me to be strong no matter what
I cannot be myself without what I have gone through
I cannot ignore it, I must grow with it
But still yet I wonder if that's what's stopping me from being everything
I want to be
Everything that I should be

Jaqueline O

No longer keeping secrets.

a poem by Andreena Leeanne, from *CHARRED*

TW: child sexual abuse

I was sexually abused from the age of five
yes, the innocent and tender age of five
not long was I alive on this Earth
when my mum met that six-foot sex offender in Jamaica
that's when I learned to keep secrets
I was his little secret
at 7 I begged her not to marry him, but she did and years
later
had the cheek to blame me for ruining her marriage
when we returned to England, she sent for him soon after
she said I should have told her
I said, How could I? I was just a child
Leroy Channer is his name and today at 38 I am no longer
ashamed.
to this day that woman still carries his last name
knowing what that man did to me for 5 years
At 9 he tried to pass me to his friend whose name I think begins with M
Looking back, it makes me cringe to think I was almost part of a paedophile ring
She could never say she didn't know because it was her who caught him in the act
He could not lie or deny because she saw me on top of him with her very own eyes
It was her who called the police
He was arrested, convicted and spent a short time inside

She accepted a wooden prison gift handcrafted by him

She saw him when he was released

She had him in her car within 3 miles of our street

The betrayal

The deceit

His punishment far from fit the crime as it's me who is doing the time

Throughout the years I have tried to forgive and forget

This I will never forget

Live and let live yes and maybe with time forgive

Years ago, Mum told me to forgive him and move on and that's when I decided to keep quiet

I decided not to speak even when others confided in me what had happened to them

How can I ever forgive a man who almost ruined my life several times?

I'm not just talking about the times I tried to end my life

I'm talking about the times I could not be touched by the people I claimed to love

I'm talking about the times I slept around so much I was labelled a slut

I'm talking about the times I drank so much I got ridiculously drunk

I'm talking about never fully knowing who to trust

The antidepressants

The time I've lost thinking about this I will never get back

I'm talking about watching my own daughter like a hawk and teaching her from birth to tell me if someone ever touched her here, here or here (pointing to private parts)

At times I relive the physical, psychological and emotional pain and I'm aware it will never fully go away

Some of my relationships have really suffered over the years

I will always be scarred, charred

It has been traumatic to say the least

To say I've been through a lot in my life is an understatement

I have been through heaps
The PTSD
Hours of lost sleep
Wide awake night after night counting sheep
Over time I have been able to see the wood for the trees
Statistics show that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men are affected by this
I am a woman
I am resilient
I am courageous
I have achieved amazing things
Despite my circumstances I remain strong
I now know full well what he did was wrong
I am not to blame
After telling mum I'm now speaking out
Her response is still to keep quiet and move on
He has 5 children she said
What are you after, revenge?
I know she's only trying to safeguard herself
Don't silence me – I will no longer be silent
The silence is broken, the worms have been released from the can
You failed to protect me, mum and now you've washed your hands
I am nobody's little secret; I no longer keep these kinds of secrets
I will speak my truth
It's my truth to speak no matter how much havoc it wreaks
I'm done protecting you, I need to look out for me
I can't turn back time, but I can spend my time fighting for what's right
To ensure others can speak of their plight as I continue to write.

-Andreana Leeane

NOT MY SHAME.

Questions for Inflorescence:

by *Evie Muir*

(1) If we as survivors bear the fruits of our abuse, how do we coevolve, rather than coexist with our trauma?

(2) How do we build healed futures for survivors as nourishing as the fig itself?

(3) Amongst the despair of injustice and powerlessness, in what ways can trauma be transformed into the power to ensure healing justice for ourselves and future generations?

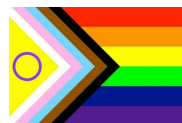


Zine made by Zoe Thompson @sweetthangzine

NOT MY

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SWEET
THANG



Impact
on **Urban
Health**



The Not My Shame project was a collaboration between Andreena Leanne, Zoe Thompson, Evie Muir, King's College London and the Maya Centre. This work was funded by the Violence, Abuse and Mental Health Network. This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council, Centre for Society and Mental Health at King's College London [ES/S012567/1]. The views expressed are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the ESRC or King's College London. This event was supported by the Health and Social Equity Collective, Impact for Urban Health, and Science Gallery London.