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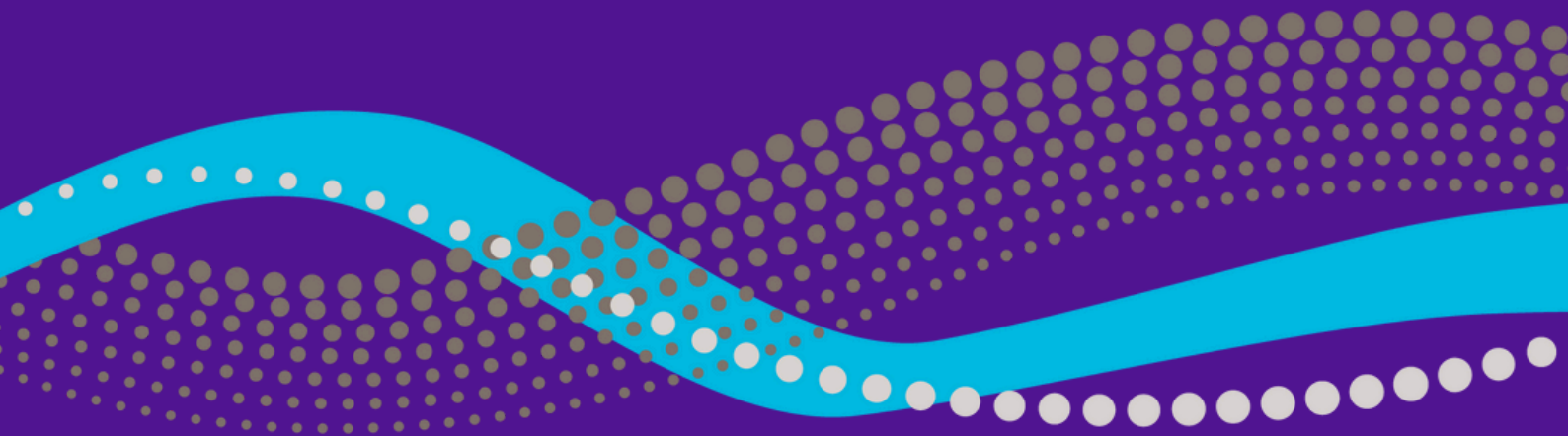
BRENDA TRENOWDEN FEMINIST ANALYSIS ESSAY PRIZE 2025

Humayra Ismail, Ida Di Stasio, Georgia Small



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Gender Studies Network at King's

FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES

BRENDA TRENOWDEN FEMINIST ANALYSIS ESSAY PRIZE

Essay Collection 2025

Humayra Ismail, Ida Di Stasio, Georgia Small

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Humayra Ismail

Humayra is a recent Global Health and Social Medicine graduate, passionate about women's health and how culture shapes our understanding of the body. Beyond her studies, she hopes to pursue a career that bridges research, patient advocacy, and global health equity. Her winning essay explores the theory of the biological unconscious, blending her interests in medicine, sociology, and feminist thought to produce a beautifully interdisciplinary piece of work.

Ida Di Stasio

Ida Di Stasio has completed an MSc in Emerging Economies and International Development. Ida is an aspiring international development professional, with a particular interest in gender equality and migration policies. During her studies at King's College London, she worked with an international NGO that rescues shipwrecked migrants in the Central Mediterranean - an experience that powerfully informed her essay on the gendered risks of irregular migration.

Georgia Small

Georgia graduated in 2025 with a BA in Geography, focusing much of their degree on queer cultural geographies. They aspire to work within the arts and cultural sector, and their passion for celebrating queer voices has led them to create a poetry and art zine, to volunteer with *Butch Lineages* - a queer archiving group at the Feminist Library - and it also inspired the essay that earned them this award: an insightful exploration of homemaking within trans self-portraiture.

THE PRIZE

The Feminist Analysis Essay Prize honours the pioneering work of Brenda Trenowden (1967–2022).

Brenda Trenowden was an exemplar of inclusive leadership. She used her intellect, kindness, passion and energy to bring people together to help make the world a better place. She had a stellar career that was driven by purpose. Brenda was a tireless advocate for gender equality. In tandem with a successful career in financial services in Hong Kong, Singapore, India, Bangladesh and the UK, she spearheaded efforts to improve diversity and advance feminism not just in business and sport, but across the range of charities and interests in which she was involved.

As Chair, first of the City Women's Network and then of the 30% Club, she oversaw the achievement of the goal of 30 per cent female representation on FTSE 100 corporate boards. She established a new goal of 30 per cent representation of women on FTSE 350 boards as well as an increased focus on broader diversity goals, such as LGBT inclusion, and the launch of 30% Club sister organisations in countries including the US, Australia and in southern Africa.

Her support for diversity initiatives went well beyond the world of UK plc. Born in Nova Scotia, Canada, she was the first generation of her family to go to university, and she campaigned throughout her career for greater access to opportunity for the less privileged. She was a trustee of the EY Foundation, helping young people into employment, the senior independent director of the England and Wales Cricket Board, improving access to the game and advancing all its work, and a trustee at the Royal Marsden Cancer Charity. Her interests ranged more broadly, from literature, to art, to politics and music. She maintained strong links to her homeland, and was awarded an honorary degree by her alma mater, Queen's University Canada, as well as a CBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List in 2018, for services to the financial sector and gender equality.

The Brenda Trenowden Feminist Analysis Essay Prize, organised by the Global Institute for Women's Leadership, in collaboration with the Gender Studies Network and Feminist Perspectives, encourages students at King's College London to explore and apply feminist perspectives within their academic work. This prize celebrates students, from any degree programme, who demonstrate how feminist analysis can deepen understanding across their field/s of study.

This initiative aims not only to promote academic excellence but also foster a community dedicated to advancing gender equality and social justice through innovative research.

This year, we are proud to celebrate winners Humayra Ismail, Ida Di Stasio and Georgia Small.

CRITICAL DISCUSSION ON THE BIOLOGICAL UNCONSCIOUS THEORY

Humayra Ismail

Elizabeth Wilson's biological unconscious theory (2004; 2015), has gained significant attention for its innovative approach to understanding the relationship between biology and culture. It was published during a time when feminist theory was grappling with the implications of the "material turn," a shift which emphasised the importance of materiality and the physical and embodied aspects of existence, and the increasing influence of neuroscience and biology (Sheldon, 2017). This turn emerged as a response to the limitations of approaches that emphasised language and discourse in shaping social reality (Van Der Tuin, 2011). Wilson's work offers a fresh perspective on the complex interplay between the body and the mind, drawing on insights from new materialism, psychoanalysis theory, and science and technology studies to challenge traditional understandings of embodiment and agency (Sheldon, 2017).

Wilson acknowledges the important role of early feminist thinkers in liberating feminist theory from biological determinism. However, she challenges the strict separation between biological and cultural factors that have been a core concept in feminist theory for a long time (Wilson, 2015). She argues that this separation is not only artificial but also detrimental to our understanding of the complex interplay between the body and the mind. Wilson's theory proposes that the enteric nervous system (ENS), or the "second brain" in the gut, plays a crucial role in shaping our mental processes and behaviour, and that this biological reality cannot be divorced from cultural and social influences (Wilson, 2015). To support her argument, Wilson draws on the work of psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, particularly her concept of object relations. Klein emphasised the importance of early experiences, especially the infant's relationship with the mother's breast, in shaping psychological development. Wilson extends Klein's ideas to the gut, arguing that the infant's early experiences of feeding and digestion play a crucial role in the formation of the self (Woudstra, 2017). She suggests that "the gut is not just a metaphor for the self, but a key site of its constitution" (Wilson, 2015, p. 43).

This perspective aligns with Ian Hacking's concept of "looping effects," which describes how categories of human experience and identity are shaped by the interplay between biological and social factors (Hacking, 1995). According to Hacking, the ways in which we classify and describe human experiences and behaviours can have a profound impact on how those experiences and behaviours are understood and experienced. In other words, the categories we use to make sense of the world are not simply descriptive, but also productive, shaping the very phenomena they seek to explain. In the context of Wilson's theory, this suggests that the categories and concepts we use to understand the relationship between the gut and the mind are not simply neutral or objective, but are shaped by social, cultural, and historical factors.

By exploring what she calls an entanglement or imbrication of biology and culture, Wilson offers a new perspective on the nature of embodied experience. As she writes "the body is not a passive surface awaiting the imprint of culture, but a dynamic entity that actively participates in the production of meaning and experience" (Wilson, 2015, p. 21). This quote highlights Wilson's key argument that the body is an active participant in shaping our experiences and identities, rather than a mere recipient of cultural influences. By emphasising the significance of biological factors in shaping human experience and the need for exchange and interaction between biological and

cultural factors, Wilson challenges feminist theory to reconsider its relationship to biology . She advocates for a more integrative approach to understanding the body and the mind, one that acknowledges the complex entanglement of biology and culture in shaping our experiences and identities (Sheldon, 2017).

Gayle Rubin's groundbreaking work in feminist and queer theory has had a significant impact on Elizabeth Wilson's thinking and the development of the biological unconscious theory. Rubin's influential essay "The Traffic in Women" (1975) and her later work on the "charmed circle" (1985) of sexuality have been pivotal in shaping contemporary understandings of gender and sexuality as socially constructed rather than biologically determined. Her emphasis on the cultural and historical factors that shape sexual norms and practices has been widely influential in feminist theory and has helped to challenge essentialist notions of gender and sexuality (Rubin, 2011). While Wilson acknowledges the importance of Rubin's work, she also argues that many feminist thinkers have neglected biological data in their work, failing to engage with it in the same way they engage with historical and anthropological data. Rubin's statement that "no examination of the body or its parts can explain the nature and variety of human social systems" exemplifies this tendency to separate the biological from the social and cultural, a separation that Wilson seeks to challenge through her theory of the biological unconscious (Rubin, 1975, p. 147).

According to Wilson, much of feminist theory, including Rubin's work, has tended to treat biology as a static and deterministic force rather than as a dynamic and interactive factor in shaping human experience (Rubin, 2018). Wilson contends that by neglecting these biological factors, Rubin's work and other feminist approaches risk perpetuating a mind-body dualism that fails to capture the complexity of human experience. In contrast, she argues for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between biology and culture, one that recognizes the ways in which these factors are deeply entangled and mutually constitutive (Wilson, 2015). At the same time, Wilson is careful to emphasise that her critique of Rubin's work is not intended to dismiss the importance of social and cultural factors in shaping gender and sexuality. Rather, she advocates for a more integrative approach that acknowledges the complex interplay between biology and culture and takes seriously the ways in which these factors are mutually constitutive. By engaging critically with Rubin's work, Wilson aims to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between the body and the mind in shaping human experience (Sheldon, 2017).

One of the main critiques of Wilson's biological unconscious theory is the risk of biological reductionism. Some critics argue that by emphasising the role of biological factors such as the enteric nervous system and the gut-brain axis in shaping human experience, Wilson's theory risks oversimplifying complex phenomena and reducing them to purely biological processes. This critique is exemplified by the work of Myra J. Hird (2018), who that Wilson's focus on the biological aspects of experience may inadvertently reinforce essentialist notions of gender and sexuality. Hird suggests that by privileging biological explanations over social and cultural ones, Wilson's theory risks perpetuating the very mind-body dualism that it seeks to challenge (Hird, 2018). As Hird states, "Wilson's attention to the gut as a site of feminist theory is both provocative and productive ... In particular, we need to be cautious about the potential for biological explanations to be used to reinscribe essentialist notions of gender and sexuality" (Hird, 2018, p. 23). She argues that while acknowledging the importance of biological factors, these must be understood in relation to the broader social and cultural contexts in which they operate. Hird also raises concerns about the potential political implications of Wilson's theory, suggesting that an overemphasis on biology could be used to justify existing power structures and inequalities (Hird, 2005). In response to this critique, defenders of Wilson's theory might argue that the biological

unconscious is not intended to reduce human experience to purely biological processes, but rather to highlight the ways in which biology and culture are deeply entangled. They may suggest that by taking seriously the role of biological factors in shaping experience, Wilson's theory opens up new possibilities for understanding the complexity of embodiment and for challenging reductive forms of biological determinism (Sheldon, 2017). However, in doing so they would also need to address the legitimate concerns raised by critics like Hird about the potential risks of privileging biological explanations and perpetuating further inequalities.

Astrida Neimanis (2013) raises important concerns about the potential risks of engaging with biological and scientific thought in feminist theory. Neimanis points out that feminist thinkers have often been reluctant to engage with biological data out of concern that it could be used to "congeal, reify or essentialize aspects of our embodiment in ways that incarcerate and oppress us" (Neimanis, 2013, p. 15). She argues that treating science as the ultimate authority can have disastrous effects on marginalised groups, including women, indigenous people , people of colour, people who have disabilities, and queer people (Neimanis, 2013). These concerns are particularly relevant to Elizabeth Wilson's work (2015) which engages extensively with biological data and scientific theories. While Wilson's approach has been praised for its interdisciplinary engagement and its challenge to the mind-body dualism that has long dominated Western thought, it also runs the risk of reinforcing the very dualisms and power structures that feminist thinkers have worked so hard to dismantle (Neimanis, 2013). In this context, Wilson's work requires careful consideration and critical engagement from feminist scholars who are committed to developing more nuanced and integrative approaches to embodiment and experience. While acknowledging the potential insights offered by Wilson's engagement with biological data, feminist thinkers must also remain attentive to the ways in which such data can be used to oppress and marginalise certain groups. As such, any engagement with biological and scientific thought in feminist theory must be accompanied by a critical interrogation of the power structures and assumptions that underlie such thought, and a commitment to developing more inclusive and liberatory approaches to embodiment and experience.

Wilson's work (2015) draws on a range of empirical evidence from various fields, including neuroscience, physiology, and microbiology, to support her arguments about the role of the gut in shaping human experience. However, the extent and nature of this evidence have been a subject of debate among scholars engaging with her work. Wilson (2015) cites numerous scientific studies and findings to illustrate the complex interactions between the gut, the brain, and the rest of the body. For example, she discusses research on the enteric nervous system (ENS), the role of gut microbes in influencing mood and behaviour, and the connection between gastrointestinal disorders and mental health conditions (Wilson, 2015). However, some critics have argued that the empirical evidence presented in her 2015 work is limited or anecdotal, and that Wilson's theory relies heavily on speculative or theoretical arguments. For instance, in her review of the book, Rebekah Sheldon suggests that while Wilson's work is "theoretically generative," it "sometimes lacks the empirical heft to fully substantiate its claims" (Sheldon, 2017, p. 238). Angela Willey (2016) provides a more detailed critique of the empirical evidence of Wilson's (2015) Work. Willey acknowledges that Wilson's engagement with scientific research on the gut-brain connection is innovative and thought-provoking. However, she also points out that much of this research is still in its early stages, and that the conclusions drawn from these studies are often tentative or speculative (Willey, 2016). Willey argues that while the gut-brain connection is a promising area of inquiry for feminist theory, more robust empirical research is needed to fully understand the implications of this relationship. She suggests that future studies should employ more rigorous methodologies, larger sample sizes, and longitudinal designs to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how the gut influences

human experience and behaviour (Willey, 2016). Furthermore, Willey cautions against uncritically accepting scientific findings without considering the social, cultural, and political contexts in which they are produced. She emphasises the need for feminist scholars to engage critically with scientific research and to interrogate the assumptions and biases that may underlie such work (Willey, 2016). Despite these critiques, Wiley praises Wilson's work for its innovative approach to feminist theory and its engagement with cutting-edge scientific research. While the empirical evidence presented in the book may not be exhaustive, it does provide a compelling foundation for Wilson's arguments and opens up new avenues for feminist inquiry into embodiment and experience. As the field continues to develop, it will be important to develop more sophisticated methodologies and research designs for testing the claims of the biological unconscious theory and for integrating its insights with other approaches to understanding the complexity of human experience.

The critiques of Elizabeth Wilson's biological unconscious theory raised by scholars such as Hird (2018) and Willey (2016) highlight the need for a more integrative and politically engaged approach to understanding the relationship between biology and culture. As Deboleena Roy (2018) argues that while Wilson's theory offers important insights into the entanglement of biology and culture, it may not fully grapple with the political and ethical implications of this entanglement. Roy (2018) suggests that feminist engagements with biology must go beyond simply acknowledging the role of biological factors in shaping human experience and must also consider the ways in which these factors are shaped by and implicated in broader structures of power and inequality. This means taking seriously the ways in which biological research and biotechnologies are embedded in histories of colonialism, racism, and other forms of oppression, and considering how feminist theories and practices can work to challenge and transform these histories (Roy, 2018). One potential direction for future research in this area is to develop more nuanced and context-specific understandings of the relationship between biology and culture, ones that take seriously the ways in which these factors intersect with other dimensions of social and political life (Roy, 2018). This might involve, for example, examining how the biological unconscious operates differently in different cultural and historical contexts, or exploring how it is shaped by factors such as race, class, and disability (Hird, 2018; Willey, 2016).

In conclusion, Elizabeth Wilson's biological unconscious theory offers a provocative and generative framework for understanding the complex relationship between biology and culture (Wilson, 2015). By challenging the mind-body dualism that has long characterised Western thought and emphasising the ways in which biological factors such as the enteric nervous system and the gut-brain axis shape human experience, Wilson's theory opens up new possibilities for feminist and queer engagements with the body and the mind (Woudstra, 2017). However, as critics like Hird (2018) and Willey (2016) have pointed out, Wilson's approach also risks reinforcing biological determinism if not carefully framed within a broader social and political context. To fully realise the potential of the biological unconscious theory, feminist scholars must grapple with the complex social and political realities in which this entanglement of biology and culture is embedded, and engage critically with the ethical and political implications of our evolving understandings of the body and the mind (Roy, 2018). Only by developing more integrative and transformative approaches that take seriously the intersections of biology, culture, and power can we hope to advance a truly liberatory feminist politics of embodiment and experience.

FLEEING VIOLENCE, FACING VIOLENCE: THE GENDERED RISKS OF IRREGULAR MIGRATION CHANNELS

Ida Di Stasio

Content note: the following essay discusses sexual and gender-based violence experienced by migrant women and girls, including testimonies of survivors, which may be distressing for some readers.

According to the UN Human Rights Council, the global number of women who migrate has been increasing from 1960 (UNHRC, 2019). In 2017, women made up around 48% of the global migrant population. Furthermore, this report highlights how women are increasingly migrating on their own and are also likely to be the first family member to migrate, instead of migrating for family reunification (UNHRC, 2019). Moreover, the International Organization for Migration has found that women's migration has become a household strategy to secure income as migrant women may be more likely to secure a job in sectors with growing demand for migrant labour, like the care sector (IOM, 2024).

Besides better employment opportunities, some crucial determinants of women's migration are sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and discrimination (UN Human Rights Council, 2019; UN Women, 2020). Evidence of this phenomenon comes from all over the world. For instance, a UN Women (2021) report found that women and girls flee the Horn of Africa to escape GBV, child marriages and female genital mutilation. Another example is Afghanistan; with the return of the Taliban, and hence with new restrictions on and dangers for women, the numbers of female emigrants has increased (IOM, 2024). Also, the IFRC (2018) reported on how young migrant girls from Central America named fear of rape and sexual assault, often at the hands of gangs, as a driver for their migration. Women and girls also migrate to escape social stigma caused by divorce or being a single mother, like in the Republic of Moldova and in Guatemala (UN Human Rights Council, 2019).

Nevertheless, the same social stigma and gender expectations that drive women to migrate may hinder their access to regular, safe migration channels. Indeed, in some societies independent immigration for women is considered shameful (IOM, 2024). Besides social norms, countries may even have restrictions or even bans on women's migration (UN Women, 2021). These impediments, of social and/or legal nature, can push women to migrate through irregular channels (UN Human Rights Council, 2019). These channels are dangerous for all those who undertake them, but women, together with LGBTQ+ individuals, face heightened risks.

In this essay, I will argue that irregular migration pathways, shaped by restrictive migration regimes, expose women and girls to systemic GBV, which greatly hinders their physical, psychological and emotional wellbeing. While UN Women (2021) makes clear that women and girls are vulnerable to GBV throughout all the stages of migration, from the country of origin to the destination country, here I focus on GBV during transit. Drawing on secondary sources including studies from UN agencies and non-governmental organisations, I will present evidence on GBV from several migration routes, from South Asia, to Sub-Saharan Africa, to the Mexico-US border. Furthermore, I will shed light on two particular forms of GBV: survival sex and sex trafficking, to which women and girls migrants are highly vulnerable when migrating irregularly. I will also delve deeper in the

case study of Libya, an infamous transit country for migrants en route to Europe. Before continuing, I feel obliged to say that much of the research I carried out on this topic contains explicit accounts of gender-based violence, including instances of rape. While I will report as much information as necessary to ensure a comprehensive analysis, including testimonies of survivors, I will avoid including sensational details. This is a conscious choice to prevent the spectacularizing of women and girls' pain and suffering, and to treat these accounts with the dignity they deserve.

Gender-based violence refers to "any act of violence that is directed against an individual based on their gender identity or perceived gender" (Plan International, 2024) and is a violation of human rights (REF – e.g. CEDAW). GBV takes multiple forms, including sexual violence, sex trafficking, exclusion leading to survival sex, physical violence, and intimate partner violence (UNICEF, 2022; CARE International, 2022), and, while everyone can be a victim of it, women and girls are especially at risk (UNHCR, 2023). Irregular migration paths heighten these risks, as women and girls lack access to protection networks and information, and fear reporting abuse due to the threat of incarceration or deportation. Indeed, UN Women (2020) finds that migrant women, in particular irregular ones, face higher risks of GBV and exploitation at the hands of smugglers, border officials, traffickers, as well as other migrants. In the East and Horn of Africa migration route, smugglers are responsible for 90% of instances of GBV (UN Women, 2021). Another example is provided by the migration route from Central America to the United States; Amnesty International found that 6 out of 10 migrant women and girls were raped while travelling to cross the border. Smugglers, especially coyotes the desert guides, (PBS NewsHour, 2024) are key perpetrators. Women and girls are aware of the high risks of GBV, particularly of rape, that they face during migration, and hence some of them take precautions to avoid pregnancies. The IFRC (2018) found that girls from East Africa who migrated through Sudan took emergency contraception with them, anticipating the risks of sexual violence. This is corroborated by accounts of migrant women who reached Italy through Libya and reported taking birth control due to such risks (Taylor, 2016). Migrant women and girls who migrate through Mexico often take similar preventative measures: the pharmacist in Altar, the last town migrants encounter before entering the desert, reports that women often come to her asking for contraception in case they are raped (PBS NewsHour, 2024). As highlighted by the above evidence, women and girl migrants are highly susceptible to risks of GBV - in particular to rape - in transit countries, and those who migrate irregularly are the most exposed, as this violence is often consumed at the hands of smugglers.

It is fundamental to stress that migrants who are members of the LGBTQ+ community are at high risk of GBV as well. Migrant transgender women are especially vulnerable: they are often placed in detention facilities with men (UN Human Rights Council, 2019), which exposes them to the risk of being abused by fellow migrants as well as by smugglers and jailers.

FORMS OF GBV: SURVIVAL SEX AND SEX TRAFFICKING.

When migrating through irregular channels, women and girls migrants can also fall victim to two particular forms of GBV and exploitation: survival sex and sex trafficking.

Survival sex occurs when people engage in sexual exchanges to meet a survival need (Changing Lives, 2023), like food, shelter, and, in the case of migration, safe passage. As highlighted by Czechowski et al. (2022), since this transaction occurs when the person exchanging sex is highly vulnerable, survival sex is characterized by power imbalances, which undermines the ability to freely consent to sex, making survival sex a form of sexual violence. Evidence of this phenomenon comes from various migration routes. A study conducted in Bangladesh showed cases of women

that had to perform sexual activities for border agents in order to obtain safe passage (UN Human Rights Council, 2019). Similarly, in the Central Sahel, smugglers may require sex as a form of payment for "smuggling services" (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2024), another form of sex-for-passage. Moreover, humanitarian workers of the IFRC found that many unaccompanied adolescent girls travelling from Nigeria through Niger resort to survival sex in brothels to have shelter and gather enough money to continue their journey (IFRC, 2018). This is different from sex work, as the latter implies the free choice of exchanging sexual activities for different benefits (Changing Lives, 2023), whilst these migrant girls sell sex to meet their survival needs. Documentation of survival sex, especially in the form of sex-for-passage, has been reported also along the Mediterranean, especially in Libya, Central American and East African migration routes (Amnesty International, 2010; UN Women, 2021). Being coerced into transactional sex profoundly impacts women and girls' wellbeing. They risk unplanned pregnancies and STDs, which can bring further health problems due to lack of access to sexual and reproductive care during migration. Moreover, trauma and stigma can hinder their emotional and psychological wellbeing.

People can be trafficked for several purposes, for instance forced labour, domestic servitude, forced marriage, and sexual exploitation. Nonetheless, trafficking is a highly gendered phenomenon. Out of the 51,675 detected victims of human trafficking in 2020, 42% were women and 18% were girls, constituting the majority of the victims (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2022). Most of these women and girls have been trafficked for sexual exploitation, hence sex trafficking (Linares, 2022). Sex trafficking is a form of human trafficking that involves the "recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act" (CDC, 2024). Trafficked persons are coerced to engage in transactional sex. therefore, as with survival sex, they cannot freely consent to sex. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2022) further finds that, beyond representing the majority of human trafficking victims, trafficked women are subjected to physical or extreme violence at the hands of the traffickers three times more than their male counterparts.

Both men and women migrants can fall into the hands of traffickers: 25% of detected victims are migrants (Linares, 2022). This is exacerbated when migration is irregular (McAuliffe and Kitimbo, 2021), because it greatly reduces the access to protection networks and institutions for migrants. Moreover, the fear of incarceration and deportation may lead irregular migrants to not report the crimes they have been victims of, and hence the share of trafficking victims who are migrants may be underestimated in official data. Moreover, since it is a highly gendered phenomenon, women and girls are particularly at risk of being trafficked for sexual exploitation. Due to the fallacies in reporting and the vulnerability of irregular migrants, human trafficking (specifically sex trafficking) plagues several migration routes, including the Asia-Pacific West African and the Central American routes (United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime, 2024; Caballero-Anthony, 2018; Linares, 2022).

In the context of irregular migration, smugglers can traffic people directly or connect the people they are smuggling with traffickers (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2024). Evidence of both phenomena are found by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2024) in different migration routes, including the Central Sahel and the Western Mediterranean. In the former, there have been instances where smugglers directly trafficked women for sexual exploitation along the journey. In the latter, there are documentations of smugglers connecting women to local community leaders, who then sell them to pimps. Just as for the case of survival sex, trafficked women and girls face immense risks for their physical, psychological and emotional health and wellbeing, and often lack information and access to care services, which further exacerbates their condition.

CASE STUDY: LIBYA

Now, I will turn to analyse further the case of Libya and phenomena of GBV, including survival sex and sex trafficking, for migrants transiting there. Libya is a transit country for migrants coming from Western and Eastern Africa, the Middle East, and even Southeast Asia (UNHCR, 2024; UNHCR, 2017), and it is the main departing point for Europe of the Central Mediterranean migration route, the deadliest migration route in the world. Since 2014, 24,7800 migrants have died or gone missing crossing the Central Mediterranean (IOM, 2025). However, this tragedy is far from the only reason why Libya has gained infamy as a transit country for migrants. Widespread violence, including gender-based and sexual violence at the hands of smugglers and traffickers, further cements its reputation as one of the most dangerous migration routes in the world. Libya's case indeed exemplifies how the difficulties in accessing regular migration paths can foster a system of structural violence on migrants, with women and girls facing the highest risks.

Libya has attracted migrants seeking job opportunities for decades (UNHCR, 2017). Yet, with the fall of the Gaddafi regime in 2011, the economic crisis in the country exacerbated, leading to decreased job opportunities and bleak economic conditions both for the Libyan population and for migrants, who increasingly decided to leave the country and further migrate to Europe. Moreover, this political breakdown, which resulted in the failure of the state and hence the incapability of enforcing laws, led to the flourishing of migrant smuggling and trafficking networks (Eaton, 2025). The expansion of these networks, together with the economic and political collapse of the country, have turned Libya into a crucial transit country for migrants who aim to reach Europe. Indeed, the numbers of migrants entering Italy across the Mediterranean increased from less than 30,000 in 2011 to more than 160,000 in 2016, and in 2017 around 110,000 migrants crossed the Mediterranean from Libya (Eaton, 2025). Looking at this year's data, 92% of the migrants who arrived in Italy in March through the Central Mediterranean route sailed from Libya (Italpress, 2025).

The transit through this North African country is filled with dangers and risks which affect all migrants travelling through irregular routes, regardless of sex and gender. Violence and abuse is overwhelmingly committed by traffickers and smugglers, who often engage in human trafficking themselves. Fares (2024) reports testimonies of two Syrian men migrating through Libya, who have been incarcerated, trafficked by their smugglers and enslaved for forced labour. One of these men, Malik, tells the reporter how his smuggler told him that he only had to stay in Libya for ten days before sailing to Italy, but ended up being detained, abused and trafficked for over eight months (Fares, 2024). Nevertheless, as previously discussed, women and girls face heightened risks of violence and trafficking during transit. They constitute around 8-10% of migrants sailing from Libya, and they are frequent victims of GBV and sexual violence. They are three times more likely to witness and/or experience sexual abuse than their male counterparts (Ghani, 2020), with UN Women (2020) estimating that around 90% of migrant women and girls are raped when transiting. According to a joint report by the UN Support Mission in Libya and the UN Human Rights Office, the main perpetrators of sexual violence are smugglers and traffickers (Sou-Jie van Brunnersum, 2024).

Evidence and testimonies from women and girls survivors show again instances of survival sex and sex trafficking. A 22-year-old Nigerian woman reported that smugglers coerced many fellow migrant women to have sex with them under the threat of leaving them in the desert (Ghani, 2020). Clearly, they could not freely express their consent, as their own survival was at stake. Moreover, there is evidence of survival sex used to repay for the exorbitant smuggling fees, that can reach up to $5,000 (UNHCR, 2017). As smugglers perpetrate 45% of the reported SGBV against women and

girls migrants transiting through Libya, it is impossible to not notice again the pattern that goes from irregular migration channels to abuse and violence towards women, as the victims do not have the means and information to access protection and care networks. Moreover, irregularity can lead victims to not report the crimes and abuse they have endured for fear of incarceration and deportation. This results in impunity for the perpetrators, who can continue to smuggle and abuse migrants, and in underestimation of the share of migrant women and girls who have been victims of GBV in Libya.

Irregular migrants transiting through Libya are vulnerable to human trafficking at the hands of the smugglers, or through smugglers that have connections with traffickers (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2024). The country indeed has a score of 8.5 out of 10 for human trafficking according to the Global Organized Crime Index (Watkins, 2024). Just as for smugglers, the flourishing of traffickers has been favoured by the failure of the Libyan state and the subsequent turmoil and violence. Moreover, through the great influx of migrants in the country, traffickers have increasingly found vulnerable victims. Several forms of human trafficking are perpetrated in Libya, from sexual exploitation to forced labour (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2022), and it impacts migrant women, men and even children, with the latter demographic constituting the 13% of trafficking victims exploited in Libya (CTDC, 2022). Nevertheless, as previously shown, women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sex trafficking: they represent 99% of the reported victims (Watkins, 2024).

Women and girl migrants are indeed targeted for sex trafficking (Sou-Jie van Brunnersum, 2024), with smugglers often being intermediaries between the victims and the traffickers. A Nigerian migrant woman reported to the UN that, during the transit through Libya, it is common for women and girls to be "sold and forced to have sex with Arab and African men" for money (Ghani, 2020). Another Nigerian migrant woman, Deborah, who was 20 years old when she crossed Libya, reported that the smuggler she left Nigeria with sold her to a woman who forced her into prostitution. In Deborah's words: "The first day we reached Libya, he sold me to a woman... I told them to take me back. ... They said that was impossible. The first woman I was sold to was Abigail. She took me to her place and told me to start working. I asked her, what work? ... She said I'd work as a prostitute." (IOM, 2024).

Moreover, smugglers can become perpetrators of sex trafficking as well. One girl, still a minor during transit, reported that her smuggler forced her into prostitution: "As soon as he had visitors, he would tell me to go into my room and wait for them, the friends would then eat and come to the room to have sex with me. Most of the time, they gave me small money when they finished." (Adeyinka et al., 2023). A testimony of another migrant woman shows how the lack of access to protection and care networks, which characterizes irregular migration, can easily lead women and girls to fall victim to such abuse. She reported that, while prostitution wasn't part of the agreement she had with the smuggler, she couldn't do anything to prevent it as she didn't know anyone in Libya and had nowhere to go (ibid).

These testimonies highlight again how the lack of access to regular migration channels can gravely affect women and girls' sexual and reproductive health, together with their emotional and psychological wellbeing.

Smugglers can also become perpetrators of sexual exploitation and trafficking, particularly targeting women and girls in situations of vulnerability. Testimonies from migrant women who transited through Libya reveal how, in the absence of protection and care networks, exploitation can easily occur. One girl, still a minor during transit, reported that her smuggler forced her into prostitution: "As soon as he had visitors, he would tell me to go into my room and wait for them, the friends

would then eat and come to the room to have sex with me. Most of the time, they gave me small money when they finished" (Adeyinka et al., 2023). Similarly, another woman recounted that, while prostitution was not part of the agreement she had with the smuggler, she was unable to resist his demands, as she knew no one in Libya and had nowhere else to go (ibid). These testimonies underscore how the lack of access to regular migration channels, and the consequent dependence on smugglers, can gravely compromise women and girls' sexual and reproductive health as well as their emotional and psychological wellbeing.

CONCLUSION

This essay has shown that irregular migration pathways, shaped by restrictive and gendered migration regimes, expose women and girl migrants to systemic forms of gender-based violence, particularly during transit. From survival sex to sex trafficking, and through the case study of Libya, I have demonstrated that these are not isolated incidents, but structural patterns of abuse rooted in the vulnerabilities created by irregular migration. While migration can be a strategy for women to escape violence and seek better opportunities, the very journey they undertake often reproduces and magnifies the same violence they are trying to flee.

The significance of this analysis lies in revealing how restrictive migration policies, by limiting access to regular and safe mobility channels, inadvertently contribute to the perpetuation of violence against women and girls. A gender-sensitive migration governance framework is therefore essential. States and international actors must prioritise the expansion of legal and safe migration pathways, strengthen protection and reporting mechanisms in transit zones, and ensure that survivors of sexual and gender-based violence have access to trauma-informed and culture-sensitive health, psychosocial, and legal support.

For the women who have experienced such violence, the consequences extend far beyond the moment of abuse, affecting their physical and mental health and wellbeing, their ability to rebuild trust and stability, and their prospects for integration and empowerment at destination. Addressing the gendered violence embedded in irregular migration is not only a matter of border management, but of human rights and justice. Ensuring that no woman's journey towards safety becomes a journey into further harm must remain a central goal of migration and gender policy alike.

HOME IS WHERE THE ART IS: TRANS* SELF-PORTRAITURE AS A PRAXIS OF HOMEMAKING

Georgia Small

This essay will explore how photography, specifically self-portraiture can be considered a form of doing queer domesticity, "the act of creating a domestic space and sense of home outside of heteronormative constraints" (Fobear, 2023, p.328). Transgender people face multiple forms of systemic violence from a cis-normative society, demonstrated clearly by the rollback in transgender rights across the UK and US in recent years (Das and Banduni, 2025; Quinan, 2025). This essay argues that self-portraiture has been used as a practice of claiming trans* belonging within public and private spheres and therefore as a form of homemaking across the material and imaginary aspects of home (Baxter and Brickell, 2014).

Blunt and Dowling (2006) describe home as "a set of intersecting and variable ideas and feelings, which are related to context, and which construct places, extend across spaces and scales, and connect places" (p.2). Home consists of the interaction between the material and the emotional, such as a feeling of belonging. Identity is intimately connected to home, and both are shaped by one's position within a "power geometry" (Massey, 2009).

There is a significant underrepresentation of trans*i homemaking practices both in mainstream culture and in academic literature (Doan, 2007). This is important to address as both the materialities and imaginaries of home have deep rooted political implications for trans* folk; the home is a site which can support or inhibit identity, it can be a place of safety, violence and of resistance. Furthermore, this essay will do work to challenge Geography as a "cis discipline", following calls to centre trans* voices within scholarship and move towards a "trans radical geographical imagination" (Rosenberg, 2023, p. 604; Brice, 2021). Therefore, trans* homemaking is a vital topic to be explored with far reaching political implications for trans* liberation.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND CRITICAL GEOGRAPHIES OF HOME

Photography can provide a vital method to investigate the trans* experience of homemaking as it allows trans* people to represent their own meanings of home outside of the confines of language. Choi argues that "it is almost impossible to explain the nature of transgender identity when working with pre-existing terminology and within current norms". Photography can therefore provide important routes to "recovering subjective voices" (2013, p.122).

Gossett et al. argue that although there has been a rise in trans* representation in popular culture, this "neoliberal spotlight" does not work for greater trans* equality and can be considered a form of extraction if there is no agency in self-representation. However, they also argue that self-representation holds immense power for societal change as "representations do not simply re-present an already existing reality but are also doors into making new futures possible" (2017, p.xviii).

Photography has been used to explore queer homemaking within academia, particularly through photovoice methodology. Photovoice is a participatory action research method which has been used

to allow members of marginalised communities to explore and represent their lives, concerns and subjectivities using photography. This includes Andrucki and Kaplan's (2018) study on the relationship between identity and the objects in transmasculine homes, where participants narrate their perspective on home. Photovoice methods have also been used to explore homemaking for queer asylum seekers (Fobear, 2023) and queer youth experiencing homelessness (Forge, et.al., 2017).

However, there is a significant gap in literature focusing on the connection between self-portraiture and trans* homemaking. Self-portraiture has a long history within queer art, allowing one to have agency in their own representation (Johannesson, 2024). Unlike other photography methods, the subject of the photograph is centred on the self, where one has full agency of the representation of their body and the space they inhabit.

The self-portrait can therefore be thought of as a "technology of embodiment" (Jones, 2002, p.950), through which understandings of the self and one's place in the world can shape and be shaped by self-representation. When considering homemaking and unmaking for trans* people it is important to centre trans* voices (Todd, 2021). Self-portraiture can be considered a language, giving agency to the photographer over what to include and exclude from frame and therefore what story they want to tell.

I argue that self-portraiture is innately a form of homemaking as it is a praxis of claiming belonging. Moreover, I argue that self-portraiture is a vital method in exploring the embodied experiences of home making and unmaking processes for trans* folk. Ideas of home in trans* self-portraiture must be considered at multiple scales, as homemaking and unmaking is also multi-scalar. Therefore, these self-portraits will be read "through the skin" (Bryant, 2015, p.279), locating representations of the body and home within a "power geometry" (Massey, 2009). Furthermore, self-portraiture will be considered as a form of "doing" critical geographies of home (Brickell, 2012), challenging unequal power structures that contributes to both the disproportionate home unmaking for trans* folk and the lack of representation surrounding queer homemaking (Baxter and Brickell, 2014).

1. INSTAGRAM AS A HOMEMAKING PRAXIS

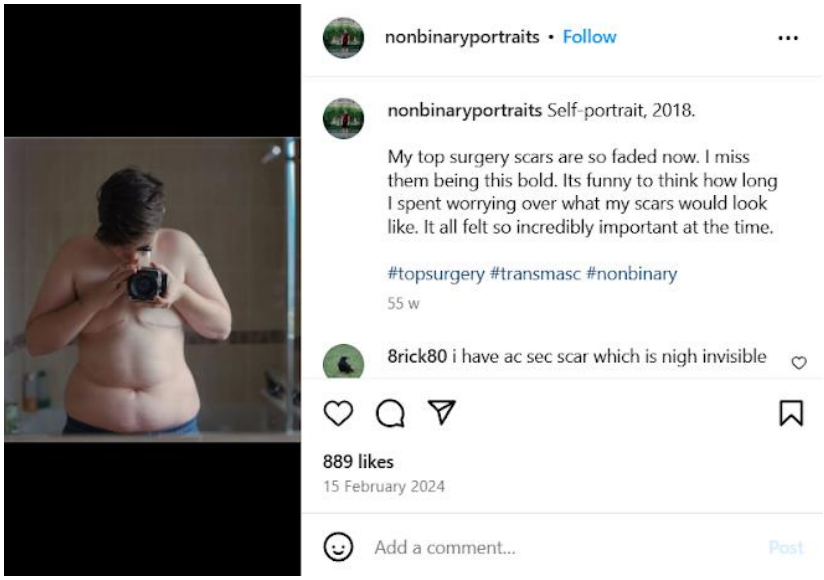

Figure 1:: "Self Portrait" (Akitt, 2024)

Social media platforms have opened new avenues for trans* people to express and make visible their bodies and stories. Eikers (2023) argues that posting and consuming social media plays a vital role in many people's transitions. This includes consuming images of other trans* people and forming imagined communities in which they feel a sense of belonging. Furthermore, social media functions as a place of knowledge sharing regarding the transitioning process, whereby influencers document their transition journeys, and the bodily changes involved with hormones and surgeries. The transition process is rarely or ever told from the perspective of trans* voices in popular culture. Therefore, social media content can be a vital tool in allowing people to "imagine possible future selves" and to have agency in representing themselves "to themselves and others online" (Eikers, 2023, p.239).

Chen (2017) explores how the internet, specifically YouTube, is used as form of archive by trans* creators. This form of archiving is "viral", shifting and changing with gender identities. For example, Jackson Akitt posts a mix of self-portraits at various points throughout their transition on their Instagram account "nonbinaryportraits", described as a project to document "the artists relationship with gender non-conformity" (fotofemmeunited, 2024). Their Instagram page is a form of personal archive, albeit unofficial and unstable due to the platform on which it is stored. The internet provides a space for trans* people to archive their gender and homemaking processes "told in their own voice", resisting the "trap of visibility" where representations of transitions in popular culture often cater to cis viewers rather than actively working to "make new futures possible" for trans* people (Gossett, et, al., 2017, p.xviii).

Bryant (2015) argues that the queer home must be understood through the concept of "be/longing", the relationship between the material home and the imaginary and feeling of being at home "in any number of spaces, relationships and conditions" (p.263). They use the methodology of "reading through the skin" (p.267) to understand the trans* relationship to home, where one must feel at home within their own body to occupy space and have a sense of belonging in the world. This is because the body mediates the connection between the subject and the social, "in the sense that the skin registers how bodies are touched by others" (Ahmed, 2000, p.45).

Narratives surrounding transition are often that of a journey towards home. This involves the search to feel belonging in one's "unhomely" body where the body is "re-remembered" through transition fuelled by the desire for the "ideal of home" (Bhanji, 2011, p.163). Whilst for many medical transition is a necessary step in feeling "at home", Jackson Akitt challenges the idea of transition as a linear process. Rather, their Instagram explores "trans temporalities", where one departs from the "linear norms of straight time" (Pearce, 2018, p.3).

Through posting self-portraits at various points throughout their transition, Akitt brings past and present together in their understandings of their gender. The trans* body can "carry traces of a differently gendered past or anticipate a differently gendered future" and therefore experience the "continual interplay of past/present/future" throughout their transition (Pearce, 2018, p.3). This is an example of Halberstam's "queer time", where "alternative temporalities" are produced through allowing one to live "outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience" (2005, p.14).

The selfie is a form of "trans self-imaging praxis" in the tradition of self-portraiture, whereby people have agency to represent themselves. This "self-imaging" is vital in forming one's self-identity and expression through creating representation to challenge harmful mainstream narratives. In this way, having a public online presence allows creators to "bring into existence identities that are otherwise unimaginable" (Lehner, 2019, p.62). Self-portraiture through social media can therefore be considered a form of homemaking in the body, where "to feel "at home in one's skin" is to be "taken

in the world for who one feels oneself to be" (Bhanji, 2011, p.164). These representations create feelings of belonging by claiming space within public discourse.

2. MAKING SPACE FOR TRANS* BELONGING AT HOME IN THE DIGITAL ARCHIVE

"I cook to love myself, to love other people, and to say a big fuck you to a world that can't deal with the radical acts of survival happening in the heart of my home. Kitchen=life."

– A quote from Maggie, a contributor to "Queer in the kitchen", posted below their self-portrait (Laneia, 2017)

Feminist geography has explored how "both metaphorical and material homes support and shut down identities" (Blunt and Dowling, 2006, p.20). This literature has explored how the physical home and the meanings attached to it can be deeply heterosexual and perpetuate traditional gender roles (Barrett, 2015; Wilkinson, 2014). However, Gorman-Murray (2006), argues that the home can also work to reinforce queer identities, through sharing space with other queer people, supporting non-traditional "chosen" families, and displaying objects that reaffirm identities. It is however the lack of representation of these queer homemaking practices that reinforces the cis-heterosexual narratives that perpetuate society's cultural meaning of home. Whilst some queer domestic spaces have been represented in pop-culture, such as on the television programme *Queer Eye*, these are largely centred on cis, white gay men, thereby leaving other queer identities marginalised and under-represented (Pilkey, 2015).

Beck argues that self-portraiture is a praxis that allows for the voices of marginalised communities to represent their own domestic practices and "make visible practices that serve emancipatory functions" (2021, p.16). One example of this, was "Queer in the kitchen", a series of photographs and self-portraits within queer people's kitchens, posted on Autostraddle, a news and entertainment site for queer women and trans* people. This was part of the "Queer IRL" project, a digital archive of photographs submitted by the community that aimed to capture queer women and trans* folk "just living our lives" (Laneia, 2017).

"Queer in the Kitchen" challenges mainstream understandings of identity and home, filling the gap in representation of gender non-conforming people in domestic spaces. Beck argues that this digital archive makes "highly visible that queer bodies and communities are neither absent nor affectively lost" (2021, p.21) in the domestic sphere. This also works to allow individuals to experience a sense of belonging in the home through "mutual recognition" (Butler, 2004), where one must see themselves reflected in others to feel validated as fully human. In this sense, taking pictures for and collating digital archives can be considered a form of queer homemaking.

Maggie, a contributor to the archive, describes cooking as a "radical act of survival", a practice of love to themself and others in their network of care. Feminist geographers have argued that the kitchen is traditionally deeply gendered, tied to female domestic labour to support the nuclear family and capitalist reproduction (Meah, 2013). However, their self-portrait challenges these imaginaries, where "day-to-day household activities work to queer the home" (Barrett, 2015, p.196). The kitchen instead is used as a node in Maggie's queer network of care. This ties into Blunt and Dowling's argument that the home is both "material and imaginative" (2006), where Maggie's

homemaking extends beyond the material bounds of their kitchen to encompass the feeling of providing care to those in their "chosen family" (Wilkinson, 2014).

Malatino argues that many trans* individuals rely on these networks of care for "survival", due to the "way the normative or presumed centres of a life have fallen out or never were desired by us in the first place". In the absence of access to normative centres of care, a "queer and trans care web" emerges (Malatino, 2020, p.2). "Queer in the kitchen" decentres the white Eurocentric idea of the domesticity of the nuclear family as the centre of homemaking and instead makes visible the domestic work within webs of 'chosen family' through which many queer people make home and find support instead.

Furthermore, the archive challenges ideas of the home being bounded and private (Kaika, 2004) and instead reveals how the home is actively produced in relation to its connection to the outside world (Baxter and Brickell, 2014). "Queer in the Kitchen" is a clear example of this, for Maggie, homemaking is an activist response to the exclusions felt in wider society, locating the domestic within a larger network of queer homemaking that works to provide care denied in the "public" sphere through "private" spaces.

Home and the meanings attached to it are therefore located within a "power geometry" (Massey, 2009), where the space of the kitchen is located within and connected to networks of power stretching from the intimate to the global. The praxis of cooking for others and then of publicly posting the self-portrait and caption of this domestic work challenges the unequal power geometry of home for queer people through making the "private" public and so working against the neoliberal logic of individualism.

3. BARRIERS TO TRANS* HOMEMAKING

Opie's "Self Portrait/Cutting" (1993) explores the "wounds of heteronormative exclusion" (Saketopoulou, 2013, p.248). Coming into queerness can be considered both a homemaking and home unmaking process. As Baxter and Brickell argue, "home unmaking should not be understood as an exclusively negative erosion of material integrity and/or loss of attachment. Rather, unmaking can also work symbiotically with the recovery or remaking of home too." (2014, p.135). Coming "home" in one's own skin as trans* can be entwined with home unmaking processes as the body is read as "other" within the cis-heteronormative state.

This portrait can be read "through the skin" to explore the relationship between the body and the human right to adequate housing. Through being read "through the skin via heteronormative, racial, and class screens of discrimination" (Bryant, 2015, p.279) trans* folk are at a much greater risk of homelessness and insecure housing due to inequalities in their financial, legal and social status (England, 2022). Latty et al. (2016) argue that human rights, such as the right to housing, are tied to the idea of the human, and who is viewed as "enough human". Intersectional structural inequalities in how one's body is "read" create systemic barriers to housing (Crenshaw, 1989).

Research has shown that there is a disproportionate amount of LGBT people who are currently experiencing or have experienced homelessness in the UK, Canada and US. However, there is a gap in literature on the experiences of trans* homelessness (McCarthy and Parr, 2022). Transgender individuals are more likely to experience homelessness than their cisgender counterparts (NAEH, 2020). Despite this, shelter services have been found to be exclusionary to trans* folk due to often being gender specific, organised into men's and women's shelters and dorms. Those who do not "pass" within the gender binary or who are gender-queer face barriers to accessing services such as

denial of access and risk of physical harm and assault (Pyne, 2011). Due to discrimination affecting access to homeless services, studies have shown trans* individuals are more likely to have to engage in survival sex to gain the basic necessities to survive (Kattari and Begun, 2016).

González argues that Opie explores the failings of the state to protect queer bodies in 'Self-portrait/Cutting', enacting a "queer politics of mourning" for queer subjects who are "exiled from the basic comforts of normal life". This resists the narrative of "homonationalism", where the state uses the acceptance of the "good queer" to demonstrate the promises of egalitarianism and liberty that Neoliberalism supposedly offers. This narrative bolsters the 'exceptionalism' of the Western state whilst rendering persisting inequalities for those who do not fit within the homonormative framework illegible (2021, p.89).

The physical and emotional harm caused by the disparity between the utopian promises of the state and the reality for those marked as "other" is explored through the visceral wounds on Opie's skin. Opie described how she is "nostalgic for what I thought of as the utopian possibility of what America was set out to stand for: freedom, diversity, and so on", where instead "the omnipresent xenophobia, homophobia is terrifying. and exhausting" (Reilly, 2001, p.95). The link between the state, home and violence done to the body ties into arguments from critical geographies that the home is an "intensely political" site (Blunt and Dowling, 2006, p.33). Access to home as a private space is unequal across intersecting lines of gender, race and class (Brickell, 2012). This can be read through the cutting of the skin, physically breaking boundaries between inside and outside, public and private.

Opie's self-portrait resists this ideology through 'doing' a critical geography of home (Brickell, 2012), challenging domestic injustice through highlighting how the supposedly 'private' issue of home is instead a societal issue. By facing away from the camera, she is anonymised, calling attention to how barriers to housing and homemaking for queer subjects is not an individualised issue but constructed from systematic injustices.

Moreover, through anonymising herself, Opie further undoes the dichotomy between public and private, revealing the paradox of the "hyper(in)visibility" (Gailey, 2014) of trans* bodies in public discourse where "privates are made a cause for public concern" (Gieseking, 2023, p. 573), and simultaneously excluded from academia and popular media, particularly regarding the home. As Gieseking argues, many trans* people are denied a "claim to a private they are forced to occupy" (2023, p.573). Through facing away from the camera Opie enacts a claim to privacy. Although denied access to the utopian imaginary of a private home, she still has agency over her own representation and what she chooses to show and conceal of herself and her body.

CONCLUSION – CLAIMING BELONGING

In conclusion, trans* self-portraits can be "read through the skin" (Bryant, 2015, p279) to reveal material and imaginary processes of homemaking in the contemporary world. Taking self-portraits and sharing them publicly is a form of "doing" critical geographies of home, making the "private" public. This praxis does work to create representation for the relationship between gender nonconformity and the home, claiming belonging in the body, domestic and society. Furthermore, these self-portraits trouble the binary of public/private through exploring how trans* homemaking is porous, both affected by and a resistance to structural inequalities.

Furthermore, multiple sites of homemaking and unmaking are explored. Making home within one's skin operates at multiple scales, from the body to the global through sharing and consuming online

images. Online archives similarly have global reach yet create feelings of belonging within the intimate domestic space. Furthermore, for many trans* individuals the domestic space is not bounded but connected to other private and public spaces through a “queer network” in resistance to structural inequalities. However, how the body is read is a powerful force of home unmaking, leaving many without access to the material and imaginary aspects of home. These self-portraits exploring home are deeply political, enacting a claim to agency in how trans* homemaking is represented and challenging inequalities.

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[i] Trans* is understood as an embodied, lived experience that gives agency to those who self-identify as such without measuring identity on "final form, a specific shape, or an established configuration of desire and identity" (Halberstam, 2018, p.4).

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