

ISSUE 1

OUR WORDS



Literary Magazine



Our Streets Now

Our Streets Now is a campaign demanding the right of women, girls and marginalised genders to be safe in public spaces. How it has started? Two sisters, 15 and 21, spoke about how they experience the world as young women. About feeling afraid walking home at night. About being harassed in their school uniform. About how their lives were restricted by the fear of harassment. Channelling this anger into change, they decided to start a petition. Hundreds of women, girls and marginalised genders went online to share their stories of being insulted, followed and assaulted on the streets of Britain. Soon enough, thousands of voices were joining the Our Streets Now movement, tired of harassment being a 'normal' part of growing up a girl. Our Streets Now became a community determined to challenge the myths and taboos stopping this topic from being discussed and challenged, out in the open.

**#CRIMENOT
COMPLIMENT**

*Join the
movement
now!*



HELLO FROM THE EDITOR

I'm delighted to share with you the first issue of *Our Words Literary Magazine*. *Our Words* will tackle a range of topics presented in fiction and non-fiction books, such as public sexual harassment, feminism(s), violence against women and girls and mental health.

It's crucial for the *Our Words* team to have an intersectional perspective and analysis when engaging with these topics. So, considering the ways different forms of oppression are entangled, we look at social categories (i.e. race, gender, class, sexuality, and others) as non-separate entities when reflecting on the interrelatedness of identities, structures and practices. We aim to constantly reflect on our positionality and its influences on our writing. We pledge to critically question oppressive and hierarchical power dynamics and structures within the voices, books and topics we promote and the knowledge we produce.

We hope that you will become a frequent reader of *Our Words* and that together we can cherish education, reflection, debate and transformative changes in our communities.

Renata Guimarães Naso
Editor



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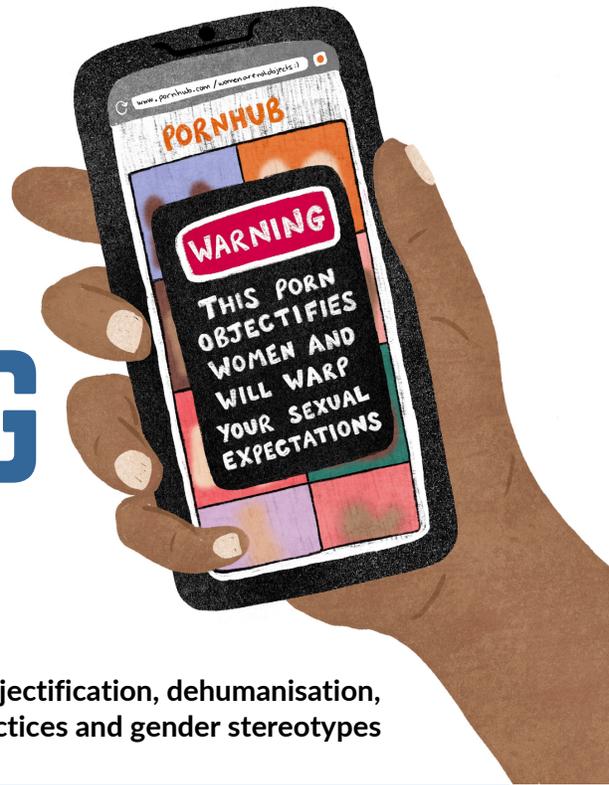
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trigger warnings

This issue covers some sensitive topics and may be triggering for some readers. Each article will be marked with a specific TW and we advise readers to seek support if needed. Go to:
<https://www.ourstreetsnow.org/support>

SEXUAL REAWAKENING



Written by Naomi Grace Wilkinson

Illustration by Sophie Kathleen (@sophiekathleenn)

TW VAWG, objectification, dehumanisation, oppressive practices and gender stereotypes

My eyes exposed to it at 17
 His at 12
 I felt uncomfortable
 While he felt he must delve
 Deeper and deeper to 'know' what's expected
 But I couldn't watch
 That image of sex I rejected

No condom. No consent. No sound from him.
 No romantic or sensual hands on women
 He grabs her hair - she's not a prude
 Apparently she must finish first, otherwise she's rude

He penetrates immediately
 She makes a sound
 Is she attracted to him romantically?
 All I'd be thinking about is my mound
 It's shaven, looks painful
 It's exposed as is she
 Gagging on his dick; that cannot be nice for her really
 I'm on a site for women and I type in sensual
 But the videos that come up... they're so two dimensional

At 12 he was praised
 Those same people made me feel perverted
 They thought I must be inadequately raised
 But the expectation to have sex like these pornstars was asserted



My girlfriends watched porn
To learn to please and perform
Because the questions not answered during sex Ed left us all feeling torn
Is sex just for his pleasure?
And is masturbation only for him?
And is it rape if he penetrates again without me knowing the condom's in the bin?

The boys causing a disturbance are sent out the class
Don't do that. They need to listen
Because I've heard them talk about "that lass"
About amazing, smart women that they used to 'win' a competition
Of who can dehumanise them the most in doggy position
Excluding them from the conversation is the easy way out
But if we are going to build caring, educated men
Then we have a duty to call their behaviour out
Let them know the damage that their 'jokes' can cause
As they're showing off to their friends in the corridors

We must sit them down
Let them hear the voices of women
Ones who speak openly about masturbation and surviving;
Terrible assaults and the pain that it caused
The pain that can be stopped by opening doors
Doors to education not taught through porn
But the realistic women who have hearts to be worn
On their sleeves without judgment
Not scared and putting up a front
So those boys can destroy the toxic masculinity
That prevents them from uplifting each other and embracing their femininity

We need them to empathise
So that those like me do not feel
That everything we do has to appeal
To the needs and wants of men
Subject to the male gaze
We can break down the barriers and we must raise
A generation of people who understand one another
And can communicate openly without our emotions being smothered.

FACT & FICTION

Written by ALICE NUTTALL

Illustration by KRIZIABEL ALQUEZA
(@faerycreative)

TW public sexual harassment, mental health, VAWG, oppression, stalking, religious misogyny (fantasy context), blood.

Can contemporary fantasy stories accurately depict the relationship between mental health and public sexual harassment?

Fiction may not be an exact replication of reality, but it reflects the real world and, in particular, the societal issues of the time. Writers use stories as tools to explore personal (and more widespread) social experiences, including public sexual harassment, mental health, and how the former impacts the latter. Public sexual harassment (PSH), defined by the grassroots campaign *Our Streets Now* as "unwelcomed and unwanted attention, sexual advances and intimidating behaviour that occurs in public spaces, both in-person and online", is a regular part of everyday life for women, girls and non-binary people in the UK. 68% of adult women have experienced some form of PSH since the age of 15. Over one-third of girls have experienced some form of PSH every month.(1)

The prevalence of PSH means that it inevitably plays a role in undermining mental health for women, girls and marginalised genders. PSH can cause anxiety and feelings of guilt or shame at the moment and can also lead to longer-term anxiety issues and depression.

meet our writer

Alice Nuttall is a children's and webcomic writer who spends her free time reading, knitting, and playing D&D, occasionally all at the same time. Her superpower is the ability to find a cup of coffee no matter where she is. She is a member of the *Our Streets Now* (OSN) team, and her work includes writing and proofreading for the OSN campaign.

Experiences of PSH can, in some cases, cause PTSD or trigger PTSD episodes in people who have prior experiences of sexual trauma or abuse. The experience itself can be traumatic or bring up memories of earlier traumatic events in a person's life. *Our Streets Now* discovered that 90% of people who had experienced PSH felt that it had negatively impacted their mental health, causing anxiety, depression, and leading to people developing avoidant behaviours like taking different routes in public or changing their clothes in an attempt to avoid harassment. >>

>> In 2019, the Young Women's Trust ran a study that found that women in the UK who experience sexism are five times more likely to suffer from clinical depression.(3)

Even though PSH is often trivialised by society because of its frequency, it is unsurprising that representations of PSH have made their way into all kinds of media, from films and TV shows to books featuring women, girls, and people of marginalised genders. Yet, many of these representations don't focus on the impact of PSH on mental health. The 2000 version of *Charlie's Angels*, for example, representing the cliched scene where a female protagonist beats up a man who sexually harasses her in a bar and then walks away without a backwards glance, might be cathartic. But it doesn't reflect the reality of shame, embarrassment, anxiety, and fear of an escalation of violence that can be part of real-world PSH incidents.

At least, it is a slight progression from the patriarchal trope where a man does it instead. These kinds of representations may elicit a 'hell yeah!' reaction in the viewer; still, they downplay the fact that PSH is in itself a form of violence against women and girls (VAWG), on the same continuum as sexual assault and abuse. Treating PSH as a throwaway moment in a story undermines the impact of this particular form of violence. Works of fiction that acknowledge the potential impact of PSH on mental health are essential. Representation in literature and popular culture can raise awareness of an issue, make people who've experienced it feel less alone and give people who've not experienced it a specific scenario to relate to emotionally. This is something that may impact them more than statistics and factual reports. >>

"Even though PSH is often trivialised by society because of its frequency, it is unsurprising that representations of PSH have made their way into all kinds of media, from films and TV shows to books featuring women, girls, and people of marginalised genders. Yet, many of these representations don't focus on the impact of PSH on mental health."



>> Public Sexual Harassment in Fiction

In recent years, several books, particularly in the Young Adult Fiction (YA) category, have explored how PSH experiences can damage someone's mental health. The Spinster Club series by Holly Bourne, which follows the stories of three best friends who start a feminist club at their school, focuses on PSH. In the third instalment, *What's a Girl Gotta Do?* Lottie is publicly sexually harassed by two men while on her way to school – a scenario familiar to a vast number of readers in the book's teen target audience. Despite being an outspoken feminist, and a confident person in her everyday life, Lottie immediately feels guilt and shame and initially can't shake the thought, "I wasn't even wearing a short skirt".(4)

Lottie decides to fight back by campaigning for sustained change, reporting the men who harassed her and dedicating her life to calling out sexism wherever she sees it. The book, and Lottie's mental health, take a turn when Lottie begins to experience another insidious form of PSH; online sexual harassment. As Lottie's campaign grows, the number of trolls targeting her social media accounts increases, and despite her resilience and dedication, Lottie experiences depression and burnout. Online PSH has only increased since *What's a Girl Gotta Do?* was published, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. In September 2020, anti-online harassment charity Glitch conducted a survey in which 46% of respondents reported being sexually harassed online, with that number increasing to 50% for Black women, women of colour, and non-binary people.(5)

In Elizabeth Acevedo's *Clap When You Land*, one of the two protagonists, Camino Rios, deals with anxiety when walking around her neighbourhood.(6)

She is sexually harassed and stalked by a local man, El Cero. The death of Camino's father leads to an escalation in El Cero's targeting of Camino, as he now considers her "unprotected" and more vulnerable. As a result, Camino's anxiety increases, and she changes her behaviour and habits to avoid El Cero by taking different routes home and avoiding her beloved beach. (7)

Both *Clap When You Land* and *What's a Girl Gotta Do?* deal with the impact of PSH on mental health in contemporary, realistic settings, but fantasy literature has also been used to explore the ways that PSH affects mental health. *The Gilded Ones*, a debut novel by Namina Forna, is set in an intensely patriarchal world, where girls are tested for "purity" when they turn 16 by being publicly bleeding their local temple.(8) If their blood runs red, they are considered "pure"; if it is gold, they are publicly identified as "impure" with demonic blood and are executed by their friends and families. Even "pure" women are strictly controlled in Forna's fictional society. They are required to wear masks in public at all times and cannot have jobs or hold any positions of authority. Unsurprisingly, a society that so overtly treats women as property has its share of PSH. The heroine, Dekka, is sexually harassed by a soldier on her way to the temple for the purity ceremony because, as an underage girl, she is not yet wearing a mask.

The Gilded Ones deals with the most extreme examples of sexist violence. When Dekka's blood runs gold, she is revealed to be an Alaki, someone with demonic blood who cannot be killed by mortal means. Before she is rescued and taken to train as a soldier in a secret force put together by the nation's capital, Dekka is imprisoned by the elders in her village, who repeatedly torture her. Other Alaki girls that Dekka meets upon her arrival at the capital have experienced rape, child sexual abuse, and sex trafficking. >>

>> The physical violence she goes through is the major root cause of Deka's trauma. Nevertheless, the PSH she experiences impacts and influences her PTSD and her anxiety when spending time around non-Alaki characters. This ultimately prompts her to rebel against the authoritarian society that has allowed these different forms of violence. Rebellion is a theme in many stories that feature PSH, whether it's Lottie carrying out a grassroots campaign against patriarchal thinking or Deka joining an army to overthrow her country's government.

While it can be inspiring to read stories of women and girls turning their anxiety and resentment at being sexually harassed into fuel for a revolution, there are fewer stories that go into the longer-term impacts of PSH on mental health or feature characters who are unable to fight back at the moment (or shortly afterwards). Showing this side of the way PSH affects mental health is crucial. Many women, girls and non-binary people who have been harassed and who have a freeze or flight reaction experience shame for not 'fighting back' or 'standing up for themselves'. However, these responses are as valid as any other, and sometimes not fighting back is the only way to avoid escalating violence.

I would love to see more stories that look at how PSH affects the mental health of women, girls and marginalised genders who reacted in a variety of different ways to the harassment they experienced. It would also be great to see stories with cis male protagonists who do the work of calling out harassers in their friendship groups, preferably in a useful and progressive way, rather than a rehashing of the patriarchal stereotype of a man beating an aggressor up to 'protect his woman'.

Books help open our eyes to a whole range of human experiences, and I hope that representations of PSH and mental health in literature, in all age groups and genres, will not only show how widespread this issue is but also support current and future generations as we build our own revolution, and end the problem of PSH once and for all. ●

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(2) *IBID.*

(3) 'IMPACT OF SEXISM ON YOUNG WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH', *YOUNG WOMEN'S TRUST*, [HTTPS://WWW.YOUNGWOMENSTRUST.ORG/RESEARCH/IMPACT-SEXISM-YOUNG-WOMENS-MENTAL-HEALTH/](https://www.youngwomenstrust.org/research/impact-sexism-young-womens-mental-health/) [ACCESSED 24 APRIL 2021]

(4) H. BOURNE, *WHAT'S A GIRL GOTTA DO?* (LONDON, 2016), P1

(5) GLITCH, *THE RIPPLE EFFECT: COVID-19 AND THE EPIDEMIC OF ONLINE ABUSE*, [HTTPS://WWW.ENDVIOLENCEAGAINSTWOMEN.ORG.UK/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/GLITCH-AND-EVAW-THE-RIPPLE-EFFECT-ONLINE-ABUSE-DURING-COVID-19-SEPT-2020.PDF](https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/glitch-and-evaw-the-ripple-effect-online-abuse-during-covid-19-sept-2020.pdf), P7 [ACCESSED 24 APRIL 2021]

(6) E. ACEVEDO, *CLAP WHEN YOU LAND* (NEW YORK, 2020)

(7) THIS PRACTICE OF AVOIDING PLACES AND CHANGING ROUTES REFLECTS RESEARCH BY PLAN INTERNATIONAL UK AND OUR STREETS NOW, WHICH REVEALED THAT 47% OF PARENTS INSTRUCT THEIR DAUGHTERS TO AVOID CERTAIN PLACES, AND 40% INSTRUCT THEM TO TAKE DIFFERENT ROUTES HOME IN ORDER TO AVOID STREET HARASSMENT. B. DAWSON, 'HOW PUBLIC SEXUAL HARASSMENT IS HOLDING GIRLS BACK', *DAZED*, [HTTPS://WWW.DAZEDDIGITAL.COM/LIFE-CULTURE/ARTICLE/51206/1/HOW-PUBLIC-SEXUAL-HARASSMENT-IS-HOLDING-GIRLS-BACK-OUR-STREETS-NOW](https://www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/51206/1/how-public-sexual-harassment-is-holding-girls-back-our-streets-now) [ACCESSED 25 APRIL 2021]

(8) N. FORNA, *THE GILDED ONES* (LONDON, 2021)

HAPPILY EVER AFTER DOESN'T EXIST

Written by HANI THAPA

Illustration by SOPHIE KATHLEEN
(@sophiekathleenn)

TW misogyny and sexism

Do fairytales such as Cinderella perpetuate oppressive stereotypes of femininity and masculinity? What purpose do they serve in the 21st century feminist narrative of equality and intersectionality?

Cinderella is a fairytale that's familiar to many. Modern-day visual versions of fairytales, from animated to live-action, have been popularised by Walt Disney and are a significant aspect of children's cinema today. Fairytales are magical to young children and some adults, especially with Disney films being a sentimental token of many childhoods. However, fairytales set an impossible standard of reality beneath their dream-like fantasy facade. The idea of a 'happily ever after' perpetuates a naive expectation of life to be a utopia, promised only to those conforming to societal norms. >>



"Fairytales are relics of a patriarchal society, serving little purpose in the 21st century feminist narrative of equality and intersectionality"

>> Fairytales can also reinforce a class hierarchy and gender binary stereotypes, as classic tales portray predominantly heterosexual relationships between the damsel in distress and her wealthy male saviour. In the contemporary versions of Cinderella, there is a clear distinction between good and bad women, with the former associated with passivity and the latter with being outspoken and jealous.

In *Cinderella Tales and Their Significance*, Kristen Friedman suggests that fairytales have served several purposes throughout history, such as a 'social criticism, as a tool to teach lessons or morals, as a tale to entertain in which audiences create sympathetic bonds with characters (and) as a method of preserving culture.'(1)

The initial exchange of folktales symbolises a shared culture between early Indo-European societies devoid of any class distinctions. To exemplify, a study published in The Royal Society found that folktales could be traced back thousands of years, as an oral tradition, in early versions of the Indo-European language across Western society.(2) The study shows that these tales have been exchanged between ancestors and across societies due to trade and the emergence of literary texts. Therefore, folktales acted as a common marker of early Western civilisation and culture.

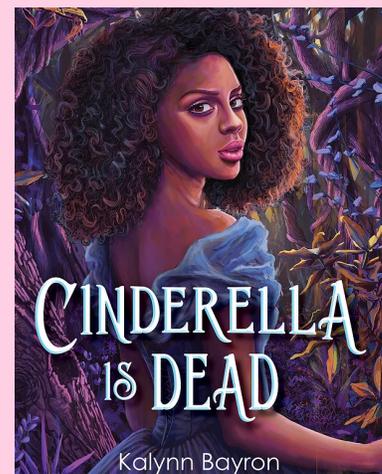
In contrast, contemporary tales seem to 'entertain' the upper-class and 'teach lessons or morals' that divide society based on class and gender. (3) Friedman refers to this upper-class appeal echoing Jane Yolen's idea that Cinderella was not a story of "rags to riches but rather riches recovered."(4)

Cinderella's father was a wealthy nobleman meaning that she already belonged to an upper-class family.(5) Therefore, aristocratic women identifying themselves in the character of Cinderella would have been particularly sympathetic to her situation. Cinderella's marriage to Prince Charming restores the class order that was disrupted in the beginning by her servant status, thereby appealing to the upper class. This union also allows Cinderella to live 'happily ever after', thus teaching young girls that both marriage and wealth are the pinnacles of happiness and necessary aspirations for women. While men appear to be self-accomplished, women are encouraged to depend on men for fulfilment.

In the 17th century, fairytales were indeed tools for 'social criticism', to quote Friedman.(6) >>

book recommendation

Cinderella Is Dead by Kalynn Bayron, published in 2020, offers a unique take on the Cinderella story. In this dystopian novel, the town of Lille is under authoritarian rule, and the story of Cinderella is propaganda, used as a tool to enforce gender norms. The protagonist, Sophia, is determined to defy expectations and build a new life free from patriarchal oppression. In this book, Bayron darkens the aspirational quality of Cinderella, shedding light on its stereotypical and restrictive perceptions of femininity. The author challenges the hegemony of heterosexuality, dedicating space for queer representation. *Cinderella Is Dead* is enticing and innovative. Nothing is as it seems in Lille, and Sophia must choose the path of truth or obedience.(14)



“The idea of good women versus bad women suggests that they can only be one or the other. It doesn’t allow them to be complex beings who are continuously learning.”

>> Madame D’Aulnoy, a French noblewoman, was a pioneering figure of fairytales whose stories would often follow independent women defying the patriarchal expectations of femininity relating to marriage and motherhood. Fairytales were feminist critiques circulated by women in salons.(7) However, there was a strict social hierarchy of both class and gender because salons were literary spaces frequented by wealthy, aristocratic women excluded from universities, which were reserved for men. Emerging years after Mme D’Aulnoy, Charles Perrault authored *Cendrillon*, introducing the widely recognised attributes of the story, such as the pumpkin and the glass slipper.(8) In contrast to Mme D’Aulnoy, Perrault’s fairytale was targeted at families and was later adapted by Disney in their 1950s animation of *Cinderella*.

One critic notes that Disney’s *Cinderella* was transformative both on and off-screen, contributing to its popularity. *Cinderella*’s makeover represented the possibility of a cultural shift, from the austerity and discontentment of World War II to a life of endless luxury and happiness. >>

meet our writer

Hani Thapa is an English Literature graduate currently focusing on growing her writing experience. Hani is passionate about social justice, and you can usually find her lost in a bookshop or daydreaming about the beach.

>> The story portrays marriage as a stable structure that would have appealed to a wide audience, especially after the uncertainty and chaos of war in the preceding years. In this post-war period, new ideals of femininity were emerging with Christian Dior's debut haute couture collection that emphasised a slim waist and the hourglass figure. (10) Therefore, Disney's *Cinderella* may have been more popular amongst the upper-class women who could afford designer clothing to mimic Cinderella's transformation.

In 2015, Disney released a live-action *Cinderella* that was criticised for conforming to, rather than challenging, old stereotypes of femininity by creating a similarly passive *Cinderella* as her popular predecessors. If contemporary fairytales still adhere to outdated stereotypes of gender, then it must be questioned what purpose, if any, they serve today. As previously mentioned, historical versions of *Cinderella* seemed to appeal to the upper classes because nobility and wealth are marketed to be aspirational compared to the working class. *Cinderella*, the princess, dressed lavishly and married to the Prince, is presented as the end goal, whereas *Cinderella*, the maid, must be altered in both appearance and class. The 2015 live-action *Cinderella* takes a similar course, and *Cinderella* does indeed live happily ever after once she's united with the Prince. This version of *Cinderella* still perpetuates old stereotypes ignorant of the feminist rhetoric of the 21st century that champions women's rights and agency. For this reason, it causes more discomfort than it entertains and doesn't contribute any unique ideas to the fairytale genre.

Femininity in the *Cinderella* story is presented in the following ways:

there's the character of *Cinderella* – a young woman wronged by her stepfamily but who accepts her fate – representing innocence and subservience; there are the stepsisters who are wildly jealous and competitive with *Cinderella*; and there's the stepmother, a cunning and manipulative woman driven by status and greed. These portrayals of femininity create a distinction between good women and bad women; *Cinderella* is good because she completes her domestic chores, and the stepsisters and stepmother are bad because they are independent and outspoken. These distinctions portray the *Cinderella* story as a cautionary tale. It teaches young women that using their voices and being independent is detrimental because happy marriages are rewarded only to the women who conform to societal expectations, such as *Cinderella*.

The dichotomy between good and bad women is not coincidental. For example, a Vox journalist examined *Grimm's Bad Girls and Bold Boys*, in which author Ruth Bottigheimer tracks the frequency and style of dialogue across the many editions of *Grimm's Cinderella*.(11) Bottigheimer found that in 1812, *Cinderella* had twelve lines of speech; however, by 1857, she only had six. Bottigheimer argues that the Grimm brothers gave rise to the good women versus bad women stereotypes as their 19th-century bourgeois values influenced them.(12) During this era, women were expected to be the meek and dutiful wives while men dominated the working industry to earn for their families; men occupied the public sphere, whereas women occupied the private, domestic sphere.(13) The Grimm brothers' version of *Cinderella* reinforces these patriarchal gender norms by reducing *Cinderella*'s speech, consequently rewarding her with marriage. This was likely intentional as by doing so, it would maintain the social order that placed educated and wealthy men, like the Grimm brothers, at the top of the hierarchy. >>

>> Furthermore, the idea of the good woman versus the bad woman suggests that women can only be one or the other. It doesn't allow women to be complex beings who are continuously learning. In contrast, the characteristics of the bad women, who use their voices and are persistent, are commended and encouraged traits in men. This is particularly problematic because it perpetuates a world where girls are expected to be passive and silent to be rewarded while boys are allowed to use their voices to speak up. Cinderella's Prince Charming is determined to find her, searching far and wide. As a Prince, he is strong-minded and powerful. The same could be said about Cinderella's stepmother as she is also persistent in matching her daughter with the Prince, but she's portrayed as someone wicked and cunning.

The story of Cinderella perpetuates the oppressive double standards held for men and women throughout history. Most concerning, it reinforces predatory behaviour in men, commending their persistence in pursuing a woman. It also normalises competition between women about men through the dynamic between Cinderella and her stepsisters. In the context of the patriarchy, this is particularly significant because women's supposed inferiority is reinforced by their inability to be mature and good-natured to one another. While Cinderella tales may have served different purposes throughout history, many of the aforementioned stories encourage a class and gender hierarchy, with women being subservient to men, the central heroes of the story. Therefore, it's problematic to champion these stories in the 21st century without critical reflections because it fares on the side of sexism, presenting heteronormative ideals of marriage as the epitome of happiness and success for women. ●

- (1) K. FRIEDMAN. 'CINDERELLA TALES AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE', *ANTHROPOLOGY* (NEW YORK, 2010). P.2.
- (2) S.G. DA SILVA AND J.J. TEHRANI, 'COMPARATIVE PHYLOGENETIC ANALYSES UNCOVER THE ANCIENT ROOTS OF INDO-EUROPEAN FOLKTALES', *ROYAL SOCIETY OPEN SCIENCE* 3.1 (2016).
- (3) K. FRIEDMAN. 'CINDERELLA TALES AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE', *ANTHROPOLOGY* (NEW YORK, 2010). P.2.
- (4) *IBID*, P.5.
- (5) L. DIAZ DE ARCE. 'DIAMOND AND ASH', (FLORIDA, 2016). P.16.
- (6) K. FRIEDMAN. 'CINDERELLA TALES AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE', *ANTHROPOLOGY* (NEW YORK, 2010). P.2.
- (7) C.EDWARDS. 'THE FORGOTTEN FEMINIST HISTORY OF THE FRENCH FAIRYTALE', *THE LOCAL FR* (2017), [HTTPS://WWW.THELOCAL.FR/20170828/THE-FORGOTTEN-FEMINIST-HISTORY-OF-THE-FRENCH-FAIRY-TALE/](https://www.thelocal.fr/20170828/the-forgotten-feminist-history-of-the-french-fairy-tale/) (ACCESSED 22 APRIL 2021).
- (8) A. T. DONAHUE. '9 CINDERELLA STORIES YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW', *REFINERY 29* (2015), [HTTPS://WWW.REFINERY29.COM/EN-US/CINDERELLA-ORIGINS](https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/cinderella-origins) (ACCESSED 22 APRIL 2021).
- (9) K. CHRISMAN-CAMPBELL. 'CINDERELLA: THE ULTIMATE (POSTWAR) MAKEOVER STORY', *THE ATLANTIC* (2015). [HTTPS://WWW.THEATLANTIC.COM/ENTERTAINMENT/ARCHIVE/2015/03/CINDERELLA-THE-ULTIMATE-POSTWAR-MAKEOVER-STORY/387229/](https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/03/cinderella-the-ultimate-postwar-makeover-story/387229/) (ACCESSED 24 APRIL 2021).
- (10) *IBID*.
- (11) C. GRADY. 'THE SLIPPERY GENIUS OF THE CINDERELLA STORY', *VOX* (2019). [HTTPS://WWW.VOX.COM/THE-HIGHLIGHT/2019/5/29/18524129/CINDERELLA-GRIMMS-PERRAULT-BASILE-DAULNOY-REBECCA-SOLNIT-JACK-ZIPES-RUTH-BOTTIGHEIMER-FAIRY-TALES](https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/5/29/18524129/cinderella-grimms-perrault-basile-daulnoy-rebecca-solnit-jack-zipes-ruth-bottigheimer-fairy-tales) (ACCESSED 19 APRIL 2021).
- (12) *IBID*.
- (13) K. HUGHES. 'GENDER ROLES IN THE 19TH CENTURY', *DISCOVERING LITERATURE: ROMANTICS AND VICTORIANS* (2015).
- (14) K. BAYRON, *CINDERELLA IS DEAD* (LONDON, 2020).

SPEAK FOR YOURSELF

TW racism, oppression, Islamophobia, stereotypical practices, dehumanisation

Why do we expect Muslims and minoritised groups to condemn acts of violence that they have no connection to?

Written by **EVIE NICHOLS**

"Do you now condemn what he does?"

On the 26th of February 2015, Channel 4 News presenter Jon Snow asked the above question to Asim Qureshi, research director of the advocacy group *CAGE*. Snow was asking Qureshi if he condemns the actions of Mohammed Emwazi - otherwise known as the ISIS murderer Jihadi John. Writing about this interview five years later, Qureshi describes how he was made to feel responsible for atrocities he did not commit. He believes Snow only asked this question because he's a Muslim.

Qureshi argues that his experience fits into a broader picture of 'condemnation culture'. This can be understood as the expectation of people of colour to condemn acts of violence they are not connected with. >>

“The book undoubtedly succeeds in making the reader reflect on ways of challenging the normalisation of racism.”

>> *I Refuse to Condemn: Resisting Racism in Times of National Security* is a collection of 17 essays, introduced and edited by Qureshi, exploring how racism is embedded in this culture of condemnation. Each essay carves out a way of resisting the normalisation of racism in Western societies. They're written from different perspectives, including those of a rapper, lawyer, comedian and academic. From these various positions, the essays are written in a highly personal way, bringing vitality to the book.

What many of the essays have in common is the recognition of a double burden of condemnation. As the contributors explain, if people of colour agree to condemn acts of terror, they're confirming the racism that's inherent in this question. Agreement re-affirms racist stereotypes and dehumanisation of people of colour, but if they refuse to condemn, they're portrayed by authorities as 'terrorist sympathisers' or apologists for gang culture. This book argues that refusing to condemn acts of violence is not condoning them. Instead, it's an act of resistance against racism.

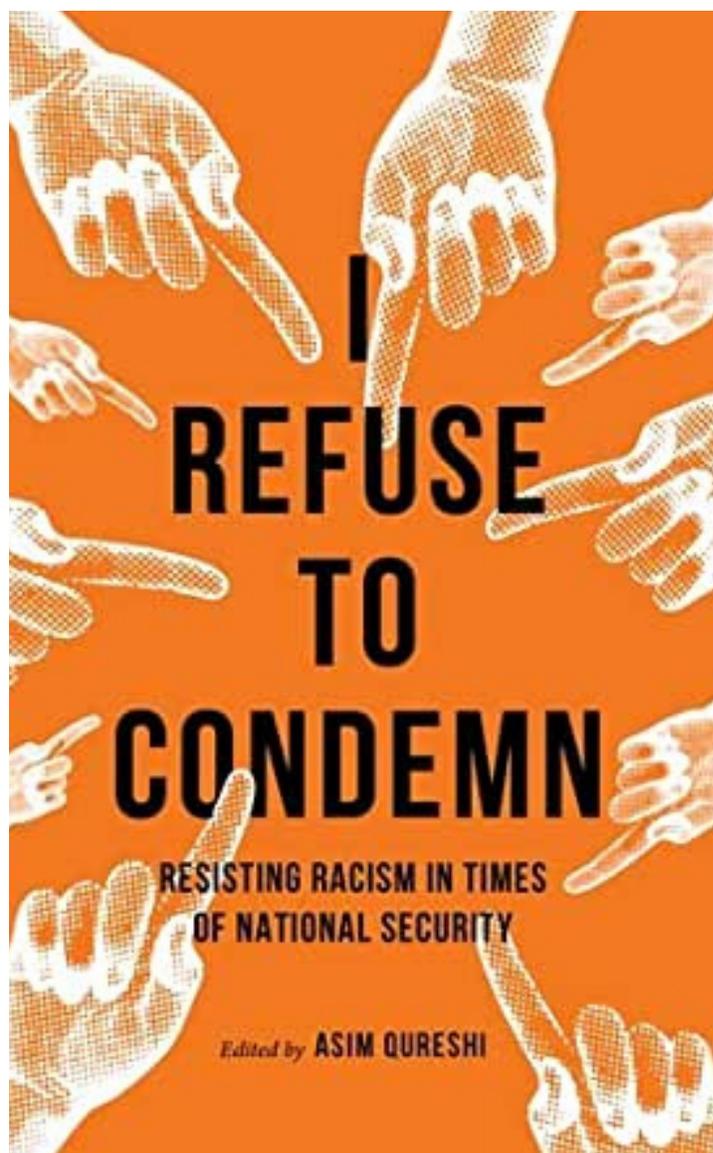
“Refusing to condemn violent acts is not condoning them.”

Why is condemnation culture so problematic? I can give a cursory picture – contributor Yassir Morsi argues "it is a regressive initiation act for Muslims to enter the symbolic space of the War on Terror that denies one half of our being" (chapter 7); Qureshi says that it's a double standard as "no expectation to condemn is made of the larger White society"; Remi Joseph-Salisbury explains that it leads to a focus on the communities rather than on structural racism and Islamophobia (chapter 5); Sadia Habib argues that it, "charts the territory of blaming the Muslim collective, narrows the conversation, and perpetuates Islamophobia" (chapter 11).

In 2015, the refusal to condemn embroiled the organisation Qureshi works for, CAGE, in controversy. The organisation stopped receiving funding from two charities. *The Guardian* explains this in the context of the organisation being 'keen to point out the role of the British security services in his [Emwazi's] radicalisation and reluctant to directly and explicitly condemn his actions'.(1) As an organisation, CAGE aims to 'empower communities impacted by the war on terror'. Critics have accused the organisation of being an apologist for terror.(2) Critics have accused the organisation of being an apologist for terror. >>

>> I Refuse to Condemn is a thought-provoking and powerful book, which fits into a much wider debate. As a sympathetic but relatively uninformed newcomer to lots of the ideas it presents, the book encouraged me to educate myself more on this topic and look for a range of articles that could clarify my questions and allow me to form a concrete opinion. Whether you agree with the book's perspectives or not, it undoubtedly succeeds in making the reader reflect on ways of challenging the normalisation of racism. ●

(1) RAWLINSON, KEVIN. (2015). CHARITIES SEVER TIES WITH PRESSURE GROUP CAGE OVER MOHAMMED EMWAZI LINKS. THE GUARDIAN. AVAILABLE AT: [HTTPS://WWW.THEGUARDIAN.COM/SOCIETY/2015/MAR/06/CHARITIES-SEVER-TIES-WITH-PRESSURE-GROUP-CAGE-OVER-MOHAMMED-EMWAZI-LINKS](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/mar/06/charities-sever-ties-with-pressure-group-cage-over-mohammed-emwazi-links) ACCESSED: JUNE 2022.
(2) AVAILABLE AT: [HTTPS://WWW.CAGE.NGO/](https://www.cage.ngo/) ACCESSED: JUNE 2022.



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book information

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about us



Our Words is part of Our Streets Now (OSN). Within *Our Words*, we have a Literary Magazine, a Book Club and events. We feature various writing pieces on topics covered by inspiring books in the Literary Magazine. The Book Club is an opportunity for the OSN community to engage with one another, creating spaces of dialogue. At events, we promote interviews, lectures, and poetry gatherings. *Our Words*' primary aim is collective learning. We appreciate our members' experiences, knowledge, and interest.

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