CRUSHING COLONIALISM

THE MAGAZINE

June 2025 | Edition 07



DECOLONIZED BEATZ INDIGENOUS WORLD PRIDE

Celebrating the 2SLGBTQIA+ Community

THE QUEER PENDULUM

Hard-Won Gains, and the Fight to Keep Them

THE CONCEPT OF “CHI”

Igbo Ontology on Gender and Sexuality

LETTER FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



This issue arrives at an increasingly dangerous time for Indigenous and queer communities across the globe. I won't lie to you—I'm afraid. I'm afraid of what lies ahead under the looming threat of another Trump administration, and I'm afraid of the steady global rise of fascism. These aren't distant possibilities; they're unfolding now.

We've seen trans women banned from sports, bathroom bills targeting gender expression, and brutal cuts to tribal government funding in the so-called "United States." On a global scale, U.S. foreign aid, much of which supports health and survival programs in Indigenous communities, has been slashed by over 90%. This includes essential HIV/AIDS services in many African countries.

Fear is a justified emotion. But we cannot—and will not—let it stop us. Our ancestors didn't, and neither will we.

That's why we're creating space for something bold, joyful, and rooted in resistance: Decolonized Beatz Indigenous World Pride (DBIWP). We are claiming our space as "Washington, DC" prepares to host World Pride. DBIWP is our answer to political violence, cultural erasure, and the co-optation of Pride itself. It is an act of love and a defiant celebration.

On May 30th and June 1st, Indigiqueer speakers, artists, and performers from across the globe will gather for events designed by us and for us. These moments are more than festivities, they are declarations. Of our presence. Of our power. Of our futures.
At Crushing Colonialism, we believe deeply in the traditional Indigenous value of storytelling. In a colonized world, storytelling is a radical act, one that asserts sovereignty and makes survival visible. DBIWP is one such story, shaped by community and grounded in culture. It reflects our ongoing commitment to center the voices of Indigenous people least likely to be handed the mic, including our queer, trans, and nonbinary relatives.

There are many names for who we are: Indigiqueer, Two-Spirit, takatāpui, skeiv. And we have always been here. Many of our nations recognized and honored gender-diverse relatives long before colonization. Some, like my own Cherokee Nation, speak in languages that don't even use gendered pronouns. Our understanding of gender and sexuality was—and is—fluid, complex, and sacred.

But colonization tried to erase that. And so did systems of state violence, religion, and settler-imposed binaries. Pride was once a rebellion against those systems, a movement led by bisexuals and trans women of color. Today, much of Pride has been hijacked by corporations with militarized law enforcement often present, leaving Indigenous people largely invisible.

DBIWP is a return to Pride's roots. It's an act of reclamation. It says: We are still here. And we are still resisting.

This issue of *The Magazine* is part of that same resistance. These pages honor the generations who came before us and fought so we could be here now. And they leave something behind for the generations still to come: a growing, living archive of Indigiqueer truth, memory, and love.

As you read, I invite you to open your heart to the diversity and brilliance that exists across queerness and Indigeneity. Reflect on your place within the systems that shape our lives. Ask yourself: Where do I hold power? How do I benefit? And how might I use that privilege—or even that fear—to help crush colonialism?

Because in the end, all we have is each other—and that's more powerful than anything trying to erase us.

Wado,
Jen Deerinwater
Founding Executive Director
Crushing Colonialism



Ángeles Cruz in front of the Municipal Agency in Villa Guadalupe Victoria, Oaxaca, Mexico. Photo credit: Ange Cayuman, January 5, 2022

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Cover photo by Cole Witter.

*Throughout *The Magazine*, we default to using Indigenous place names unless otherwise stated. Colonial names are indicated in quotation marks for context.

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Photo Courtesy of Tony Enos



Photo Credit: Michael Colgan

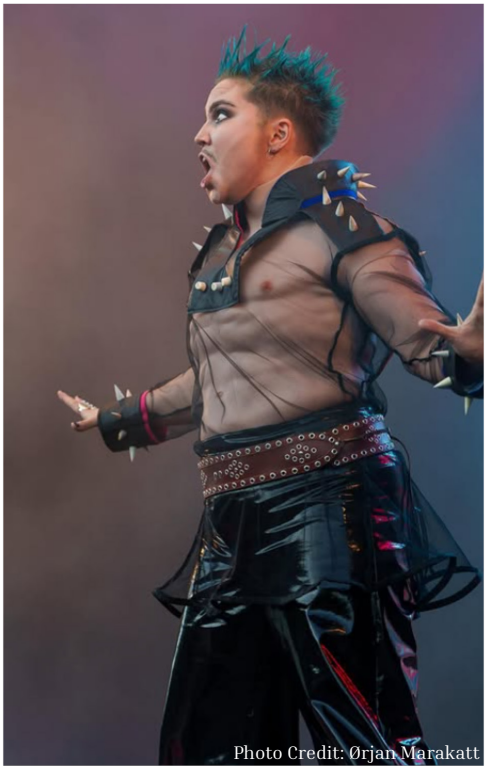


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Photo Credit: Yatou Sallah



Photo Courtesy of 9A

DECOLONIZED BEATZ INDIGENOUS WORLD 2025

Decolonized Beatz Indigenous World Pride 2025 is a global event celebrating the artistry and creative work of 2SLGBTQIA+ Indigenous artists, performers, and storytellers. Taking place on May 30 at the Arena Stage and June 1 at the Atlas Performance Art Center on Piscataway Land (Washington, DC), DBIWP events will also be live streamed with accessible video available after the event.

SCHEDULE



MAY 30, 2025

ARENA STAGE
1101 6TH ST SW, WASHINGTON, DC 20024

- 5:30 PM DOORS OPEN
- 5:30 PM – CLOSE INDIGIQUEER POPUP MARKET
- 6:00 – 7:00 PM INDIGENEITY, GENDER, SEXUALITY & DECOLONIZATION
- 7:00 – 8:00 PM LIVE ENTERTAINMENT
- 8:00 – 9:00 PM INDIGIQUEER STORYTELLING IN ARTS & MEDIA NOW!

JUNE 1, 2025

ATLAS PERFORMING ARTS CENTER
1333 H ST NE, WASHINGTON, DC 20002

- 4:30 PM DOORS OPEN
- 5:00 – 6:30 PM INDIGIQUEER YOUTH FILM SCREENING + DISCUSSION
- 6:30 – 7:30 PM RECEPTION
- 7:30 – 9:00 PM LIVE ENTERTAINMENT
- 9:00 – 10:00 PM DANCE PARTY



Can't make it to Washington, D.C. for #DBIWP25? Join the Livestream by scanning this QR Code

SCAN ME

Scan this QR Code to download the *HOPE* Album

SCAN ME

INTERVIEW WITH RAYCEEN PENDARVIS

EVENT HOST, COMMUNITY ADVOCATE, HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST, AND LGBTQ ELDER

BY ELYSE



Photo credit: Jeff Salmore for Team Rayceen Productions

Rayceen (also known as Mother) is a powerful voice and stalwart figure within the "Washington, DC" community—an event host, community advocate, human rights activist, and LGBTQ elder, as well as co-founder of Team Rayceen Productions (along with Zar). Rayceen has hosted and co-hosted many events, including *The Ask Rayceen Show* (2012–2021), DC Black Pride, DC Trans Pride, District of Pride, Silver Pride, and Youth Pride Day. Rayceen has received accolades such as being named a Capital Pride Hero in 2016, Local Hero by the *Washington Blade* in 2021, and Most Committed Activist in the Best of LGBTQ DC Readers' Poll in 2022 and 2024. Washington DC Mayor Muriel Bowser issued an official proclamation declaring March 18, 2024 as Team Rayceen Day for the Team's use of events and social media to create a platform for Black LGTBQIA+ community members on issues ranging from gender equality and equity to voter participation to LGBTQ rights and resources.

Q. You are well-known in the "Washington, DC" area. How would you introduce yourself to readers who are outside of DC?

I am an event host, community advocate, and lifelong Washingtonian who was elected and served as a Ward 5 Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner. I'm also known as the High Priestess of Love, Queen of the Shameless Plug, Empress of Pride, and Goddess of DC.

Q. How do you identify on the 2 Spirit LGBTQA+ spectrum?

I identify as DC's original gender-blender. I feel a kinship to Two-Spirit peoples, the Māhū and Fa'afafine of the Pacific Islands, the Chibados of what is now Angola, the Khanith of Oman, men in various cultures who embrace roles as nurturers and matriarchs, and all those individuals who encompass both the masculine and the feminine. I am the father of five and mother to many.

Q. Can you share more about your role in the DBIWP events?

I am very honored to have been invited to speak at the closing reception, which is at one of my favorite DC venues, Atlas Performing Arts Center.

Q. Why is it important to you to be part of the DBIWP events?

First, I am eager to participate in any event which is curated with the obvious level of care, intentionality, professionalism, dedication, and enthusiasm that DBIWP has received. Long before DEI became a term misused for political gain, I always had the ambition to interact with diverse groups of people in spaces that are as inclusive as possible. It is important that there's not just ethnic diversity, but people from different age groups and various backgrounds. But in terms of ethnic diversity, Indigenous people are almost always left out, especially in the Mid-Atlantic region. I want to support and amplify DBIWP however I can and meet the talented people who are participating in it. Lastly, as do many African Americans, I have multi-ethnic ancestry; this includes my great-great-great grandmother and her sister, who were both Blackfoot Indian [Niitsitapi]. I see DBIWP as an opportunity to honor their legacies and keep my family's memories of them alive.

Q. As someone who has hosted many LGBTQ+ events, can you speak to the value in having an event like DBIWP that is specific to the Indigenous community?

Over the past few decades, I have hosted events presented by almost every Pride organization in DC: Youth Pride Day, Silver Pride, Capital Pride, DC Black Pride, DC Latinx Pride, Trans Pride, and District of Pride. That's why I'm the Empress of Pride. I hope to do something with Asian and Pacific Islander Pride one day and whatever else someone creates in the future. Being included in DBIWP is truly an honor and the value of it happening this year cannot be exaggerated, not just because of WorldPride DC, but because in this time of political turmoil in this country, we need to consider the original people of this land and all that those ancestors experienced, suffered, endured, and achieved. Representation matters and I hope DBIWP inspires future generations as much as it inspires me.

Q. Considering the current political climate in the "U.S.", could you reflect on what it means to organize Pride events in the nation's capital at this time?

I don't think most U.S. citizens or many people who don't live here understand the precarious position of the residents of Washington, DC. We have Home Rule, but the US Congress is able to interfere in local affairs. Since we are not a state, we are not protected the way that other major US cities are protected from federal intervention. Having Pride events in DC becomes bigger than the local communities, neighborhoods, or opportunities to celebrate with our neighbors in Maryland, Virginia, Delaware, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and beyond. It is showing the entire nation, and indeed the world, that LGBTQ people are not just tolerated here, but we are celebrated. We are a political and cultural force. We support our transgender, intersex, and nonbinary siblings. We are unified and resilient.

Q. Do you have one take home message for 2SLGBTQIA+ Indigenous folks who are attending DBIWP?

Be proud of this event and that members of your community overcame all the obstacles that made it a challenge to bring it all to fruition. Please share your appreciation and praise with the organizers. What they do isn't easy; most people who advocate for their communities don't expect accolades, but it feels really good when people share gratitude. Please give them their flowers!

Q. Do you have one take home message for allies who are attending DBIWP?

Being an ally isn't a notion, it's an action. Being indifferent or neutral is not being an ally. Being silent or passive isn't being an ally. To be an ally, you need to do the work or support the people who are doing the work. Social media engagement is terrific, but it is just about literally the least that you can do. Find out how you can support causes with your time, talent, and money. Talk to people and find out what you can do to help them be successful. Be a volunteer. Help them network and make connections. If you can't do that, scrounge up some money and make a donation.

Q. Are there any upcoming projects that you are working on?

I always have something upcoming, and I am the Queen of the Shameless Plug, so for the latest, please follow me on social media—especially the fabulous new platforms, including Bluesky and Substack. I'm looking forward to Silver Pride 2025 events on May 21st and 27th, upcoming District of Pride events with the DC Mayor's Office of LGBTQ Affairs, and I hope to announce my involvement in WorldPride DC soon. Team Rayceen Productions is currently on hiatus, but we have over 900 videos available to watch on YouTube. Please visit www.Rayceen.com for all of those links.

Q. Any final thoughts?

I want young people especially to remember that social media can be an excellent tool, but it is not real life. Posts and comments are not as indicative of what most people's opinions are as you might think. Connect with people and create bonds and alliances. This is a time for building bridges. These bridges need to be intergenerational. To my peers, to other elders, I want to encourage them to interact with young people; mentor them, encourage them, and include them. When there's a community project, the youngest people at the meeting shouldn't be over age 50. Be proactive and inclusive. There should almost always be people under 30 and over 60 included in the process.

INTERVIEW WITH THEO CUTHAND

TWO-SPIRIT ARTIST

BY ELYSE

Theo (pronouns: he/him) is a Two-Spirit artist, filmmaker, performance artist, writer, and indie game developer. He is an Indigiqueer pansexual trans man and a member of the Little Pine First Nation. For 30 years, he has been making short videos and films that have been shown at film festivals worldwide, including ImagineNATIVE in Toronto, Tribeca Film Festival in New York City, Mix Brazil Festival of Sexual Diversity in São Paulo, and Berlinale in Berlin. He has a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Film and Video and a Master of Arts in Media Production, and won the Hnatyshyn Foundation's REVEAL Indigenous Art Award (2017). He is currently an Indigenous-Artist-In-Residence at Western University.

Theo is on the DBIWP planning committee and is in charge of the Indigiqueer Youth Video Workshop Program. Through that program, he trained an international group of Indigenous queer youth to make videos, mentoring them in video production and postproduction.

Theo graciously agreed to speak with *The Magazine* about his participation in DBIWP programming—which is motivated by excitement and interest in connecting with international, Indigenous, queer people—and his experience mentoring Indigiqueer Youth in filmmaking.



Photo Courtesy of Theo Cuthand

Q. Describe your experience working with the Indigiqueer Youth who were part of the Video Workshop Program.

There was one student from Fiji, he did a series of videos talking to queer and trans and drag performers in Fiji. And then we had another one who is in Colombia who made a video that was talking to her elders about sexual diversity and her elders were not super supportive of it. But she has this really open sense of wanting to get back to the old acceptance that there used to be in the area. And then there were two others who were from the States: one made a video about her family's history and the other one did a video about the history of the Indigenous urban community in Seattle. So they're all different videos. And it was great to work with them. They're really interesting people.

Q. Could you share your reflections on the significance of DBIWP through your different lenses and through the themes of your artistic work that you do?

Part of my practice has been passing on skills. So in that regard, it was a really good experience for me to be able to teach youth how to make videos in our video workshop program. We also had two guest speakers which was really exciting for me and the youth. We had Erica Tremblay, who did *Fancy Dance* [co-wrote, directed, and produced the movie, starring Lily Gladstone] and Sky Hopinka, who got one of those Macarthur genius grants, so they're connecting people, especially emerging artists with older people in the industry or older artists. That's important to me. So I think that was something I really appreciated.

Q. Could you speak to what you think is important about events like DBIWP?

Just having more connections is important, especially in the world we're living in. Diversity is important. And having different cultures perform for each other and share stories is, I think,

crucial, especially for building marginal communities, Indigenous communities around the world. It's important. And I think also just the youth being able to show their videos that they work so hard on is also important—to have an audience and their chance to shine.

Q. I'm wondering if your perspective on DBIWP events has shifted over time or specifically within the current political context?

It feels more important now, because our communities are under threat. I just saw something recently about how the Smithsonian is now also being attacked, the [U.S.] President doesn't want them to show things that are divisive according to him, which I think is just talking about people who aren't white. So the more we have spaces to perform our art and share with each other is important. But also there are organizations, galleries, and festivals that seem to be complying in advance in the States. I've noticed where they either have canceled shows or are not programming BIPOC or QTBIPOC [Queer and Trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Color], Indigenous, [and] queer people. And I don't think it serves anybody for these organizations to be compliant in advance with totalitarian government. So, seeing that happen has been dismaying, but knowing that there are still organizations that are committed to this work is important.

Q. You will be attending DBIWP via Zoom due to being trans and issues related to crossing the border. Can you speak to the difficulty the trans community is facing when it comes to traveling to the U.S.?

The U.S. border is getting harder to cross every day, for a lot of people, not just trans people. But I started out last year. I knew something was gonna come. So I decided to stop coming to the States. But then they started having all these restrictions at the border and restrictions on trans people getting visas and stuff, especially where you needed to present a passport that has your birth gender on it. I don't have that kind of passport anymore because I did do a legal name change and gender change here in Canada. So my ID has all been updated. And so I don't have the appropriate documentation to cross the border anymore.

Q. I wonder if you would be willing to share a bit or reflect a bit on the themes that tend to be the focus of your own work.

I think a lot of it started out being about identity, marginal identities that I had being Indigenous and queer, and having madness in there also. And then it started being more about community. So a lot of my videos now are about the Indigiqueer, queer community, and Two-Spirit community—how politics operates on our community and issues facing our community, even just within ourselves, disagreements and agreements, and the difficulties of all caring for each other. And the joys of caring for each other, too. My practice went from being very individualistic to being very community focused.

Q. You mentioned madness. Could you talk about what that means for you?

I have bipolar disorder. So I had a lot of depression growing up which obviously influenced my worldview a lot which is funny because I make a lot of comedic videos . . . And then, when I was 24, I had my first manic episode. So bipolar has touched my life in a certain way, where the mood swings colored my life. But also, being somebody who was subjected to institutionalization in a psych ward and in a group home has changed the way I think about the world. Being involuntarily confined is horrifying, but it's something that people don't understand unless they've been in a situation where they were not allowed to leave a hospital or a prison. So it taught me things; I use them in my work.

Q. Could you speak about the ways that being Indigenous has impacted your creation of art and the work that you do?

It's all tied in with my art, the stories I tell, I think, because a lot of my videos have monologues to them, which is how my grandfather used to tell his traditional stories that have been passed down through the family. So a lot of my videos start with a monologue. And they're this first-person story. And a lot of my family is storytellers. I have an auntie who's a writer and I have an uncle who is a journalist. And my mom's an artist and my dad's an artist. So Indigenous art and storytelling was always a part of my life. I think I was destined to make some art or storytelling in in my career . . . When I was growing up, I always saw my mom mentoring other artists and doing so much work in the community; she was always on a board of some kind. She just really instilled in me this need to give back to the community and make sure it's not that you're just getting ahead for your own personal gain. It's you're getting ahead, but you're also bringing people with you. So that was a value I got from her really strongly.

Q. And is there a key message that you would want any Indigiqueer folks who are attending DBIWP to take home with them?

I think I would want people to know that if they haven't made art before, it's very easy to make art. You don't have to make perfect art to make art. I always want to encourage people to tell their own stories, if there's a story that you have that isn't being told, then I think you should try to figure out a way to tell that story, even if it's just a poem or a written story—you don't always have to make a film. But I would always encourage more Indigiqueer stories and art making out there than there is now, because we need more.

Q. Do you have a message for allies attending DBIWP?

It's to, especially now, to protect Indigiqueer/queer people. And that doesn't mean ignoring them. Protection doesn't mean isolating people. I think that means celebrating them. And if a larger force is trying to say that's not an appropriate person to celebrate because they're queer or trans, or whatever, then you don't have to listen to that. Resist by celebrating marginalized people and giving them a space to talk and perform and show their work.

Q. Are there any other projects that you're working on?

Right now, I'm working on an Indie video game called, *Repatriate Me* where you're the spirit of this Indigenous *nêhiyaw,* which is a Plains Cree man, whose remains are being held in a museum, and he has to fight his way up to the top of the museum to the director's office to get repatriated. And then I'm also going to be shooting a short film this summer called *Poor*, which is just based on—I got really fed up with being poor. So I wrote a story about it and I got money to make it. And I'm also working on a feature film. But . . . it's still in development. We're doing the last draft of it, and then we're gonna go for production money. But it's about murdered and missing Indigenous women, and it's a vengeance rescue story with supernatural powers.

INTERVIEW WITH TONY ENOS

TWO-SPIRIT MUSICIAN AND PRODUCER

BY ELYSE

Tony Enos (pronouns: he/him) is a gay and Two-Spirit musician and a member of the Echota Cherokee tribe. Tony has twice been nominated for Native American Music Awards and has produced six solo albums. He also co-wrote and produced an original song with Marcy Angeles and Jen Deerinwater, Executive Director of Crushing Colonialism, for the 2021 Disability Futures Virtual Festival (funded by the Ford Foundation).

Tony, a member of the DBIWP 2025 Planning Council, will perform live music as part of DBIWP events and will serve as a DBIWP panelist addressing the importance of Indigiqueer storytelling. He also produced the *HOPE* album featuring himself and several other Indigiqueer artists from around the world. The *HOPE* album will be released on all music platforms on May 19th, 2025 as a free download. Tony warmly and graciously agreed to speak with *The Magazine* about his participation in DBIWP.



Photo Courtesy of Tony Enos

Q. What are the relationships or connections that linked you into the DBIWP programming?

I've known of Crushing Colonialism and DBIWP for years through just being in the Two-Spirit community. I've also known it's Director Jen Deerinwater for years through being a part of the Two-Spirit community. So I think that speaks to how important being in community sharing space with each other is.

Q. What made you want to participate in DBIWP programming?

I don't say that "I am" many things, because I am that I am, but I AM a musician. It's the fabric of my soul. I really believe in the power of music, and to bring that medicine to our indigenous communities—but especially our two spirit community—has become part of my mission as a musician. I love that DBIWP prioritizes the same mission and values the positive effects that

music can have on our community members. It's that shared drive that made me want to be a part of DBIWP programming.

Q. What is important to you about an event like DBIWP?

I think it affords people the opportunity to ask themselves, "What do I want out of the music I listen to?" Often times the mainstream record companies are telling us what we should want through the music and artists they choose to prioritize and their advertising campaigns. Indigenous artists and stories are usually not part of that narrative—which is putting it mildly. That's a systemic choice. To silence or just flat out ignore the plight and narrative of Indigenous artists. DBIWP affords people the chance to decolonize their music consumption and make more informed choices about who and what they're listening to and the narratives they're choosing to lift up as music consumers.

Q. Your performance and music has always had a focus on love, unity, and healing. I'm wondering how those themes might be woven into your participation in DBIWP?

Those themes are really the cornerstones of my musicianship and what I hope to accomplish as a performer. I truly believe that where words fail music speaks. People may be moved by a piece of music and a story told to them in song as opposed to being "talked at" about the same issue and completely tuning out. Music is the language of the soul and has significant effects on the brain as well. It impacts people differently than just words alone. It's how we can hear a beautiful song in another language and still be moved to tears by it's power and emotion. Music is a miracle. It has a universal strength.

I want to empower others through music and always encourage love and the immutable fact that we're sharing this planet together. Outside of the egocentric stories we tell ourselves to make us feel "separate" there's actually no such thing. We go forward together or continue to see humanity suffer. Most of the time I'm pleading with others through my music to wake up, love themselves, each other, and our precious and beautiful world that gives us so much. I'll continue to do that in my work with DBIWP.

Q. Has your perspective on DBIWP and events such as this shifted over time, or within the current political context?

Absolutely! The work DBIWP is more important now than ever. There's that old saying the artists are the true healers, and we were already in desperate need of community and individual healing before the current (US) administration began targeting minorities, stripping away peoples' rights, and fear mongering. People are exhausted and afraid.

Many feel quite hopeless and disempowered or beaten by the system. DBIWP is providing community members with medicine. Unity, empowerment, and a chance to grieve, to fight isolation, to be heard, to create, and to find a way forward through music and artistic expression. Many political regimes have come and gone throughout time and around the world, but art and its medicine have and always will endure. DBIWP is part of that endurance.

Q. I would love to hear your reflections on the significance of DBIWP's events through the lens of your artistic work.

It's interesting how the mainstream arts and entertainment industry still carries over that colonial sense of "othering" and "norming." It can easily fool you into thinking that there's no place for you and your stories, and that you have nothing of any "real value" to offer. Crushing Colonialism and DBIWP work tirelessly to remedy that dreadful and unhealthy imbalance. Giving Two-Spirit and Indigenous artists an opportunity and a place to be heard, seen, and validated.

Q. Could you speak on the ways that your position as a citizen of the Echota Cherokee Nation has impacted your music and creation of art?

I really believe that my Indigeneity has been the seat of my political music and art. As I was growing into adulthood and making sense of the world for myself, my Indigeneity removed the wool from my eyes and reversed the bamboozling that happens to all of us as we grow up in a world of money-hungry and power-hungry rich white men. There's that saying, "the fish stinks from the head," and every patriarchal social norm and custom is a trickle-down effect from those who need the world to be a certain way so that they can maintain their egocentric ideals of power and privilege. As long as I have breath in my bottom I will rail against those systems and people through my music.

Q. What types of supports have you experienced for your music from Indigenous community?

I've really been supported in every way an artist can be by the Indigenous community, but the love is what stays. It's the most transcendent and most powerful force on earth. The love from my community, from my Elders . . . it's food for my spirit. I am eternally grateful for the love.

Q. If you have one take home message for 2SLGBTQIA+ Indigenous folks (or allies) attending DBIWP, what would it be?

When I'm on stage, I just want to love on everyone in that room, whether it's 15 minutes or 90 minutes. There really will be so much love at all of the upcoming DBIWP events. With all my heart, I really want to invite folks to attend every DBWIP event they can, and to come and share the love. I know that what I focus on grows, so I will always focus on love and empowerment because those are the things I want to see grow. When we focus together, when we come together and care together, anything is possible.

Q. Would you share any details of other upcoming projects that you are working on?

I've just released a new dance single called "Set the World on Fire," and it's really about being that sacred flame of love and burning it as far and wide as you can. The single is available now on all music platforms. I'll also be appearing in a Jeff London film later this year entitled *Snow Falling on Pumpkins*. The movie stars Ben Stobber and Mel England, and a really wonderful and talented cast of others. The film is an LGBTQ+ romance movie and it follows Michael (Ben Stobber) as he tries to navigate life and his relationship with his partner James (Mel England) after receiving a diagnosis of early-onset Alzheimer's. I'm also scoring the film and producing/writing/performing the film's soundtrack and the theme song of the same title. So I hope folks will keep an eye out for it on all streaming services and support independent filmmaking.

INTERVIEW WITH 9A

OGLALAWIN SINGER, SONGWRITER, ACTRESS

BY ELYSE



Photo Courtesy of 9a

9a, who goes by Nyna when not performing, (pronouns: she/they) is a member of the Oglala Lakota Nation, based on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. She is a bi polyamorous trans OglalaWin (Lakota for "Oglala woman"). 9a was nominated for two Native American music awards in 2022, as well as other accolades. Her music weaves in social commentary and spans a variety of styles from up-tempo pop bangers to poignant love songs. 9a's debut album, *Matoi* (2023), was her first project that is primarily in her Lakota language.

9a collaborated with other Indigenous musicians on the DBIWP album, *HOPE*. In this interview, she discusses her experience collaborating on the album and her passion for celebrating her language and culture in her Lakota pop music.

Q. Could you speak about the themes or messages in your music?

There's a lot of things I want to say. I speak to real struggles and the desire to continue forward, no matter what happens as an Indigenous person, no matter your dynamics. I want to influence ways in which people could be healthier but also still live and have fun and make love and be as authentic to who they are and move in a genuinely good way.

Q. Are these themes and that focus woven into your participation in DBIWP as well?

When we're faced with this current administration, [with] the level of hatred and bigotry and misinformation that is out here that is radicalizing people in the worst way possible . . . Our LGBTQ+ relatives, our Two-Spirit relatives, we've always served such an important and definitive role. I come from a culture where we already had terms for relatives like me, we're not something new . . . we have always been here.

This isn't okay with where things are at. And we have to be a part of changing that. And that's what I see when it comes to this event and everything going on, it's meant to do that—if we do it right, if we move in a good way and put our best foot forward and love as much as possible. Because we have to be as loud and present and boisterous about everything that we are. That's why I love being able to be a part of this, not just talking about the realm of a better world, but actually creating genuine action items for everyone to realize the definitive steps they have to take.

Q. Could you speak about what's important about events like DBIWP?

I think it's important to always be able to share the message that there really is always a way forward. It's never over. It's never really the end. Even when it feels like it. There's always a chance for something to be different here. No matter what's happening. We need to be able to have genuine, effective dynamics, of what we can do going forward. And I think that's what events like this do. It puts that in perspective, and makes people more aware of really important dynamics, especially when being Indigenous, we are more intentionally wiped out from mainstream rhetoric.

Q. Has your broader perspective on DBIWP and events like DBIWP shifted over time or within the current political context?

The hard part is that it is something that has always been lurking beneath. It has always been there. And now we're seeing this full-on display of it. There's no hiding from it, which means now this is our opportunity more than ever to fully get rid of it once and for all. This is not okay. This is not normal. This is wrong . . . This is not conducive to the well-being of everyone, and just the general consideration of other human beings. More specifically, women and people of color and us. Everyone has to suddenly feel their humanity to a T, that they are no longer a cog in a machine. If enough people wake up to the reality of these circumstances, that's our only chance . . . It has to be this mass awakening.

Q. Has this sense of community responsibility impacted the themes of your artistic work?

Absolutely, absolutely. I care about what my impact is. This is me, defiantly existing as the OglalaWin woman that I am, with everything that I am. That in itself—everything about me, even just me living my day-to-day life—is an act of resistance, me choosing to still be here and live defiantly. I want to be able to create this very genuine hue of who we are at the core of us, regardless of whatever people want to believe. We still have to work and navigate in a world in this current state, and that can affect us in various ways. We have to be as humanizing and loving and caring as possible, especially when we're trying to call back our people to our ways and to our culture, and to a healthier and happier mindset, and sobriety. I put those themes, and I sprinkle it through all of my music.

Q. Within this context, and through the lens of your artistic work, what do you see as the significance of the DBIWP events, specifically?

These events are to encourage and have a healthier dynamic where everyone is treated like humans and loved and cared for. A lot of the problems that we've had [boils down to] the lack of community and the divisive tendencies of the world that we live in. And the more opportunities [to] not only come together, but actually be with each other—sitting with everything and feeling it, being able to have something powerful and something that moves you. We may have our own respective ways of expressing ourselves and doing what we do, but that's what I think the mindset should always be: What can be the betterment of our world and our circumstances that we are currently in?

Q. Do you have any projects that are coming up?

I have my website: oglalapuppies.com. I will be looking to go on a world tour. I hope I can get enough people to continue supporting me. And being able to get booked for more opportunities, generate more excitement, to have more people out here discover me and come out to my shows.

INTERVIEW WITH LADY SHUG

AUNTIE, PERFORMER, AND HOST

BY ELYSE

Lady Shug (pronoun: Lady Shug) from the Diné Nation, is a tireless advocate for Two-Spirit LGBTQ rights and for health equity for trans folks. Lady Shug also raises money using the hashtag #ShugChallenge to support unsheltered, elderly, and youth in the LGBTQ community. Lady Shug has appeared on the HBO's *We're Here*, a show focused on drag in small towns, and was crowned Miss New Mexico Pride (2016). Lady Shug was named one of *The Advocate* magazine's Champions of Pride (2019) and has been featured in *USA Today, The New York Times, Vogue Spain,* and PBS. Lady Shug is co-creator (with Two-Spirit Chickasaw performer Landa Lakes) of the #LaLaLandBack Tour which has headlined New York Pride and been featured in venues including the Smithsonian, and is also a founder of Indigenous Drag Storytime. Lady Shug Drag spoke to *The Magazine* about DBIWP and the importance of being true to yourself.



Photo Courtesy of Lady Shug

Q. Could you speak to how you identify?

First and foremost, I'm Indigenous. I'm Diné. I do identify as Two-Spirit. But I would be considered, *nàdleehé*. That's Two-Spirit in our language.

Q. Could tell me a bit about your role in DBIWP?

I think I've become the auntie of the group . . . I always say, if you need me, lean on me. I will bring my power, my strength, my voice, and my existence. My presence is what I'm going to bring. I am going to be one of the hosts and performers. I'm also going to be a moderator for one of the panels. So you'll get to see me all weekend, and then some! I'm very excited. This has been two years in the making, and I've just been so excited. It's not all the time we are afforded a platform, especially during Pride season, especially when you're Indigenous. It's so beautiful to see and to be included.

Q. Could you speak to the importance of DBIWP events?

I think they're very important. Especially because I was born and raised and currently still live on my territory. There are not many events for me to do, especially on our territories. I have to travel to these big cities to be included. And so events like this bring us together, and it's sad that it only can happen during Pride season. . . We need to go back to the ways of including each other as relatives and coming together. So events like this give us the opportunity to build those relations.

Q. I'd love to hear your reflections on the significance of DBIWP events through the lens of your artistic work.

I've never considered myself an artist until just recently, and it was one of my mentors that encouraged me to do that. We lost him a few years ago. He was a radical Indigenous resistance organizer. And he told me, you *do* have a voice, and you can do that voice of your artwork, do drag. And so, after I got that push, that's when my art really flourished through my drag.

Q. Could you share more about giving back to the community?

My art has become bigger than myself. It's benefiting not just me, but my community . . . I do mutual aid work around the

year, and there's one called #ShugChallenge. I go to my social media, and I ask community to help me fundraise. Now that I've gotten a voice through Lady Shug and through my mutual aid #ShugChallenge, why don't I help the communities that are always forgotten? Because there was a point in time in my life that I felt I was forgotten. Now that I've become comfortable in my skin and know that my existence is strong and very loud, I want to help the ones that are forgotten, or don't have a voice.

Q. I'm wondering if your perspective on your performance, or on DBIWP, has shifted either over time?

I wouldn't say it has shifted. We've always been left out or forgotten or erased. It's always been that. We just gotta continue to fight to exist.

Q. Could you speak to the ways in which being Indigenous impacts your performance or your creation of art?

We were always taught to be aware of the white man, as superior to us, so keep your head down. Don't ever talk out of turn, or don't ever "spread your Indigenousness," if that makes sense. So now that I've gotten older, I am proudly Indigenous and proudly queer, [it] took a long time and took a journey for me to say that out loud, and to actually live it. And I want to, continuously.

A lot of times we're not included nor will never be included because we still live in a white man's world. So somebody (that's me!) that's out queer and femme and does drag is very challenging for a lot of cisgender people.

I'd like to put my work everywhere, but also it gets exhausting because it's not my goal to educate everybody. But I open my arms to everybody to be able to experience what I offer as an artist. And I hope that it not only educates them, but also puts a respect on Indigenous folks and queer and trans people.

Q. How do you do drag correctly, what does that mean to you?

We're the ones that do drag, and we're the ones that do drag correctly. So don't give those cisgender Indigenous folks the views! Don't pay them just because they think they can put on a wig. I beg to differ and would love to see them walk in my heels one time! Native humor is amazing.

But, honey, you can't just throw on a wig or put on some lipstick and think you're doing drag. I think anybody can do drag but put an effort into it or put intention into your drag. The ancestors and the people that opened the doors before us, put a respect on them. Put some dignity to it. Drag's not easy.

Q. Are there any other projects that you're working on?

The La La Land Back tour. We do an all Indigenous variety show.

It's the opportunity for us to go to these communities and book [and pay] local, Indigenous, queer, and trans artists. Please look up the La La Land Back Tour, and book us, or tell your Pride organization to book us, but also tell your community centers. Tell your tribal leaders to book our tour.

I'm a founder of Indigenous Drag Story Hour, which is me and Landa Lakes. It's also for adults and for elderly, for anybody who is a kid at heart. Indigenous Story Hour highlights and amplifies Indigenous voices, whether it's the authors, the drag artists themselves, or whether it's the illustrators or publishers, or even our own storytelling through our traditions.

Q. Do you have a take home message for any of the Indigiqueer folks who will be attending DBIWP?

It doesn't matter who you love or what you love. It's important that you love, and I think a lot of times we forget that. To all my relatives, far and near, whether you're gonna come to this event or not, I want you to know that there are people like me that are trying to kick the door down and normalize Indigenous, queer, and trans excellence. For not just you, but for our elders, for our young folks, our future generations, to know that it's beautiful to be Indigenous. And one thing that I tell people wholeheartedly, especially if you're Indigenous, and especially if you're queer or trans, is somebody cannot take away your existence. Somebody can't just come up to you and just be, "Oh, I'm taking away your queerness. I'm taking away your transness. I'm taking away your Indigeneity. I'm taking away that you live in the city, or you live in the reservation." They can never take away your trauma, your triumphs, your love, your passion, no one can ever take who you are from you. Your existence—who you are and what you are—is your power, and existence is a form of resistance. So you, just existing and just being who you are, is power within itself. And once you find that, and once you find that power, you'll feel the joy and passion.

Sometimes you have to rely on the land. What I mean is, sometimes I've emerged myself into the water, or even just going outside and putting my feet in the dirt, and talking to the land, and respecting the land, has given me so much power and so much strength. You might not have your birth family that support you. Or you might not have built up a chosen family. But remember, you always have Mother Earth and Father Sky to protect you...So always look out to them, always talk to them, even to our four-legged animals and our plants. Those are relatives, too.

You will find a way to get that strength, and I encourage you to just energetically be Indigenous, energetically be queer, trans. And don't let nobody tell you different.

Q. That is important. That's beautiful. Thank you. And do you have a take home message for the allies who might be attending DBIWP?

Yes, give us some land back or pay us well. To the allies, I would just say to uplift us, include us. Give us a voice or give us a platform. Give us that respect that we would need. Our ancestors were never afforded that, or it was taken away from them. Give us a chance to speak. Get to know us. Educate your family, educate your community. That's more put on you, instead of us, to educate. You, educate your colleagues, your family, your communities, and include us. Don't forget that the First Nation people have been here and have existed. We've been here. We are here. We've never gone anywhere. We're here and we don't want to be erased.

INTERVIEW WITH RITNI TEARS

SÁMI STORYTELLER AND PERFORMER

BY ELYSE

Ritni Tears is a Deanu River Sámi storyteller and performing artist who does drag, dance, and choreography, as well as writing. He identifies as a queer, trans, masc person, while also noting that pronouns within drag can be he, they, she, and everything. He focuses on doing drag in a sustainable way and creating accessibility for those living in Sápmi, the Sámi peoples' traditional territory in Northern Scandinavia. Ritni's drag performance started with the fuckboizband Hot Compost in 2022, in Berlin. Ritni tours with Indigenous Drag Excellence XXL, featuring fellow Indigenous drag artists Aunty Tamara, Feather Talia, Randy River. He also tours with Girjái, a decolonial dreaming performance project co-created with his working group. Ritni Tears graciously spoke with *The Magazine* about his art and the DBIWP event.





Photos by Maxvell Vice/Riddu Riđđu

Q. Can you tell me a bit about your role in the DBIWP programming?

I will be participating as an artist, coming as a guest, and performing. I'm just so grateful to come. It's also really highlighting how important it is that we gather amongst our own communities because we really need that in these times. I do come with open heart and I bring myself. And let's see how it's gonna be and what is needed in the space at that moment. I see myself as a storyteller, a modern version of a Sámi storyteller that my elders have been. My grandparents, they were storytellers as well and doing handcrafts, arts, telling stories, yoiking, which is our traditional way of storytelling that comes from throat singing practice. And you remember and tell about the places, you tell stories via yoiking them.

And then my storytelling is coming from different forms of art. And then it's how we do storytelling in drag, because it's kind of a new thing in our community.

Q. Could you speak about the connections between your art and being a Sámi person? And Girjái?

Art has the power to bring people together and radically dream. And then this radical, decolonial, dreaming practice has been super super important to me. And basically, it's really guiding me within all my arts. What I do.

When there's no structural oppression, harassment, no racism, everyone is really equal—what if you write down your dream where you want to be? And then it was first, Whoa! It's so hard to dream outside these structures, what would really be there? So then we just basically jam there together with my working group. We are all performers/facilitators. It's also mostly improvised. But there's dance, there's yoiks. There are also the archive materials that we have found from our elders and trying to bring them back. And we invite people to dream with us. And also "How we can decolonize our ways of working?" has been a very important question. How do we really operate in this in this structure that we have here?

Q. What made you want to participate in DBIWP?

As a trans and Indigenous person, queer person, I'm always so touched by how we are living geographically so far away. But power comes when we are together and there's common ground and understanding, even though, of course, our experiences are different. It has been a healing process.

Q. How might the themes of joy and decolonization and other themes in your work be woven into your performance at DBIWP?

All my work is rooted with decolonizing and querying stuff and humor and radical choice, so important. That is really something that I want to bring and spread and share with others as well. Because, as I said earlier, our people, we have survived a ton of stuff. And we're facing all the time new challenges, and they try to silence us, and they always find new ways to oppress us. But what we can do? We cannot change the government in one second, but what can we do? We can change our own existence, our feeling in our community. We can always gather, we can always take time for our own community. I find rest is resistance, as well, how important for us to collectively rest, that we can also heal, that we manage and we can thrive in this crazy times when we are facing so many genocides. We are just living in the times of multiple crises. And it's just so uncertain. So I feel that's why it's even more important to us to build in our own communities the way we take care of ourselves.

Q. And has your perspective on the importance of this shifted over time?

Totally. It's even more important that we gather, it's really the only thing that we can do right now. We can gather around and figure out together and take moments. Create spaces where we can actually rest for a bit, because it's very exhausting right now. And I think, DBIWP, I'm hopeful, will be a space that for joy and for gathering and for rest and support, something non-commercial.

How important in these days to have this kind of event and places where we can gather, and that are based really on the values that we all share.

Q. I'm wondering about supports that you've had for your dance and drag performance within Indigenous community.

It's been so lovely to see how it resonates. You know that you do something. You invite people. And then you see how much it resonates with people. And so it has been really powerful. People had said they have longed for this, how much we share in common and how, even though we were talking about our perspective, what decoloniality means for instance, in Sápmi, our Sámi land, and how we want to operate there and then—it was just so lovely to hear from different folks, just talk together about what decoloniality means in different contexts.

And of course, nowadays, when we can access the internet, it's making it more accessible to also connect with other Indigenous communities, and I've gotten so much support just seeing what Indigenous, queer folks are doing other places. Helsinki is so white and we're not many Indigenous, just being a small minority. And how our approach to drag is different. So it has, for me, been so important to see how my [relatives] are doing in other places and get inspiration. And share together. I've gotten so much space to grow here.

Q. You said that your drag is different. Can you speak to some of the differences?

What marks my drag? Nowadays it's really open. I do also feminine drag. I do different kind of characters. I feel drag is just a playground, and really it can be anything and everything. So there's just the ideas that I have in my mind. They're coming out in the form of drag. And sometimes it really resonates with people. And that has been really nice for me. There's some idea, vision, feeling, and then it comes in the form of drag, and I get to share it with others, and then we can continue there. And that's something that is very beautiful, and I value.

Q. Do you have a take home message for any Indigenous queer Two-Spirit folks who might be attending DBIWP?

I guess my message is we're all still here. We are still queer. That our ancestors they have survived so many stuff, and we will survive as well. And I can't wait to meet everyone, and I feel the radical, Indigenous joy is so important. Rest is also resistance. We'll never stop resisting. And then it's also so important to take care of ourselves when we are thriving in the midst of these very uncertain times. So I guess my message is that I hope this will be a weekend that we can chill. We can maybe take a break a little bit and just be together collectively. And there's so much power in that.

So I'm just really looking forward that we can just gather and be together and build these alternative worlds, we can build this structure, and really it leaves always a mark when you're in the space with Indigenous trans, queer folks, and when you're in space physically, with these people. At least for me it shifts this all my whole, how I feel in this space. So I'm already emotional about the feeling, how great it's gonna be when we all can gather because we are siblings all across the globe. So I'm just very, very looking forward and excited to meet everyone.

Q. And if you have a take home message for any allies who are attending DBIWP?

You're welcome to join. But don't take too much space. So I would say to allies, really think in the space where you are at, and think how much space you take.

Q. Are there any other projects that you're working on?

It's happening this year that we're going also other Indigenous territories with Girjái. Indigenous drag excellence, it's also an ongoing project.

We're [Ritni's working group] doing this photo exhibition, and it's basically inspired by our community members—it's photo portrayals of these people, fictional. Of course, good storytellers. The stories are, really based on our community members and the queer community members that are not, maybe, publicly speaking so much. So then our aim with that for the exhibition is to bring those voices. And just show amazing Sámi queer arts with these drag characters. And then also amongst the photos, the visual portrait, I'm gonna write stories the community members would tell about them. Our traditional storytelling is obviously the oral storytelling. But now this is, we're going to explore how it would be in this modern day, drag.

INTERVIEW WITH OSWIN LATIMER

MODERATOR OF DBIWP PANEL ON INDIGENEITY, GENDER, SEXUALITY AND DECOLONIZATION

BY ELYSE

Oswin (pronouns they/them) is bi-gender, from the Choctaw Nation, and is the treasurer for Crushing Colonialism. Oswin has a background doing policy work, education, and consulting and is the founding director of Foundations for Divergent Minds (FDM), an autistic-run nonprofit organization focused on Disability Justice and intersectionality which addresses disparities for multiply marginalized autistic people through programming and education.



Photo Courtesy of Oswin Latimer

Oswin graciously agreed to be interviewed about their participation in DBIWP, as an organizer and participant from the disability non-profit world rather than the arts world. They are excited about DBIWP! Their role in the DBIWP programming is primarily on the operations side, booking travel, as well as moderating a panel looking at how our Indigenous identities really shape our queer and gender presentation and experience.

Q. Crushing Colonialism has a mission to uplift Indigenous voices and center Indigenous storytelling. Why is this an important mission? Why is Crushing Colonialism and events like DBIWP so important?

[They are] a really amazing way of really centering our stories and centering our existence. I joined the board with that in mind, because I find that in most movement work at this point there's a really big lack in understanding of Indigenous cultures. In the way that we frame things. It still comes from this push against a Western lens instead of centering our own lens. It's really, really easy to stay in in opposition to something and a lot harder to bring yourself fully in the culture that you come from, with the way that colonialism has really impacted specifically Native American communities, but really Indigenous communities globally. And so I think that that aspect of it—of really helping us to showcase ourselves and not put it under those pretenses—is just such an important thing.

Q. Has your perspective on DBIWP and events like this shifted over time or with the current political context?

When I think about DBIWP, I really feel like it's a continuation of the things that tribes have been doing for a really long time. For my lifetime at least, and a lot of it even further back. DBIWP is really about an extension of that drive to continue to have our voices be in the world. And while it is true that in this current political climate that is something that is more needed than ever, I think the reality is it's always been needed. We have always had to create our own spaces like this.

Q. Are there are any other themes that would be woven into your participation in DBIWP?

My gender really comes into play a lot here, too. I have really

deconstructed the way that my gender was erased specifically because of colonialism. I believe fairly solidly that the way that I would have been treated in pre-colonial times, or if we hadn't had the colonial influence, that my gender would have never been in question, it probably would have been something that was embraced from very early on. And so those aspects of how those integrate together is something else I will be very much bringing to the table.

Q. Do you have any reflections on how DBIWP could be significant to the community?

One of the things that we're getting to now with Indigiqueer identity and the ways that we've really deconstructed that, presents a new stage in the way that we can bring our communities together, countrywide and globally. Because we have the ability to integrate these things into the public consciousness . . . this marks something that is really important for our continued longevity and continued existence.

Q. How has your Indigeneity impacted your more general participation in the work that you do?

I really try to relate to experiences that I've had and help people build that relational understanding. It's bringing in these multiple layers that we, as Native people (at least in North America) have always tried to do. At least my specific tribal culture has that integration of understanding, but in a way that's relatable to others. And I think that that is something that is central to the way that we get to talk about it with DBIWP and within Crushing Colonialism. It is really trying to bring that humanity to ways that aren't the dominant society's views.

Q. And what types of supports have you experienced within Indigenous community for the work that you do?

As an autistic person, my communication is very much frowned upon within most communities. The way that I come to things is very much marginalized because of the way that my culture does push back against the dominant culture, but also because my disability doesn't allow for the masking and code switching that most of us have to do within normal society. That's not something I have to do here. The support that I get is not even really support, it is just the overall culture where I can be like, this is just what is happening. This is what I need. And so there's not the heavy basis of like trying to force me into those different framings that happens a whole lot outside of Indigenous spaces. I put this down to the fact that we are so relational that that kind of support is just embedded in the culture, and that makes it so much easier to work with everyone.

Q. I don't want to create artificial divisions between the communities. But I'm also going to ask what the supports have been like in in disability community?

So that's a little bit trickier. Autism as a disability has had a very fraught past and present. Within disability rights, we see a lot of individualism that is embedded, everything is so person centered that it's also the person's responsibility to overcome their challenges and find ways to fit into the normative community. And so disability has that really heavy influence to it, if you're not looking within Disability Justice communities. And so when I typically show up there, there's still this very heavy emphasis on, "I need to find ways to support myself," instead of asking for support from the collective that I'm part of.

Q. Again, not to artificially separate the communities. But I'm interested in the supports you have found in queer community?

Queer community is way more accepting of difference . . . It's more acceptable within the identity to push against norms . . . Those are all embraced at least within the queer communities that I am a part of. I don't trend towards being in white, queer communities. I definitely still trend towards BIPoC communities similar to the way I'm separating out disability rights and disability justice . . . Queer spaces? They expect that individuality. So the way that I present, the way that I come is accepted and integrated, but less relationally and more as this is your identity formation.

Q. And then for DBIWP, is it more focused on the collective experience or more focused on all of these multiple elements?

All these things come together in a really lovely way. It's not just opposition, it is our own . . . I think it does both. And I think that's what's so amazing about it. Because we do all come from different cultures. The people that are performing, those of us that are doing the panel stuff. We do come from very different cultures. But there's something about the way that we come to it that is all similar, and all in the same vein. And so we get to bring that individuality that we expect from queer culture, but also the collective identity of our Indigenous cultures being something to bring to the forefront and doing it in community with each other, so that we can have that more powerful community and collective existence and message.

Q. Do you have a key take home message for Indigiqueer folks specifically, who will be attending or will be part of the live stream, or watching DBIWP programming?

Come as you are, because I think that you will be accepted into our spaces, no matter how you present, how you move through the world. That that is the point of this. That bringing ourselves wholly and fully is how people should feel like they can come and engage with us.

Q. Any take home messages for allies who are attending DBIWP?

The same message. Come as you are, come with your gaps in understanding, and not feel threatened by that. And to recognize that this is how we are going to show our community our culture. So you can understand us better. So you can see our fullness. But not trying to make it about what you can learn. Just come and be present as you are, because we will embrace you, too.

Q. Do you have any final thoughts about anything that we've been talking about?

Because of all the changes politically, I know that this is something that people are either scared or excited about involving themselves in and coming to. And I think that right now, what I think people should be thinking about is how much we can make this a celebration in this moment and not just make it about the opposition. I think that what we are doing is wholly good by itself, without the climate, and that we should bring that joy of being in community. That is something that we should be embracing in this moment, because we need to have these moments of joy.

INTERVIEW WITH DR. MANDY HENNINGHAM

BISEXUAL, QUEER, NON-BINARY INDIGENOUS ACADEMIC

BY ELYSE

Mandy Henningham (pronouns: she/they) is a bisexual queer non-binary Indigenous person. An academic who was born, raised, and continues to live on Dharug land, and whose family (known as "mob" in Australia) is from Butchulla Country, Australia. She has achieved a PhD, and her research interests focus on gender and sexuality among marginalized populations. She will be participating in the DBIWP panel on Indigeneity, gender, sexuality, and decolonization, which will be an educational conversation with a global perspective.

Dr. Henningham wrote an article on their experiences of being queer and Indigenous in Australia for the journal, *Social Inclusion*, that focuses on analyzing her lived experiences as a way of exploring broader issues. It is about her experience of living with borderland identities—being on the fringes of her different identities—and the impact this experience has on her social and emotional well-being, as well as her career and social interactions. Dr. Henningham described a sense of disconnectedness from her country and family, as well as challenges as a result of colonialism and of assimilation.

Q. What made you want to participate in DBIWP programming, particularly given that it is in DC and you are based in Australia?

Colonization is an ongoing global issue that continues to impact Indigenous peoples around the world. Despite us all being different, we all share so many of the same or similar experiences. I'm looking forward to connecting with other First Peoples, to share our stories, and to share our hope as well.

Q. What is important to you about an event like DBIWP?

The coming together. The celebration of us. To showcase our strengths and culture and to revel in how empowering it is.
I think now more than ever we need to come together to show our intersectionality, our solidarity, and our strengths . . . we need to continue to take up space. We won't be silenced, and we are stronger together.



Photo Courtesy of Dr. Mandy Henningham

Q. Can you share a bit about the work that you do?

I'm an interdisciplinary academic, so my research spans across sociology, health, education, and gender and sexuality, mostly around Indigenous and LGBTQIA+ health, wellbeing and identity. At the moment, I'm working on a few different projects around bisexuality (and other bi+ identities) which I'm really excited about. I also teach the Indigenous Rights class as part of our Master of Social Justice program where I get to meet so many wonderful and passionate students who are really dedicated to Indigenous justice. We do a lot of land-based learning activities which offers a really grounded and tactical approach to learning about Indigenous rights issues. I'm also the Diversity and Inclusion Coordinator for my School, so I spend a lot of time advocating for students and staff who are Indigenous, have disabilities, are from diverse cultures, are neurodivergent, are queer—anyone who might be marginalized in a university environment. We are working on creating a more inclusive environment by holding various events, training, and inclusive art around the School. I really want to take the School to being not just inclusive, but celebratory of diversity.

Q. I would love to hear your reflections on the significance of DBIWP's events through the lens of your work.

DBIWP events really highlight the richness of our cultures, our intersectionality, our histories, and our strength and solidarity as we stand together. It truly is an intersectional act of celebration as resistance.

Q. I'm wondering if you could speak to the ways that your position as an Indigenous person has impacted your perspective.

Kinship is everything. Quite literally. The harm done in one area, impacts everything else. Our people, our environments, our foods, our animals, our plants, our waters, our spirit, our communities, our families. There is no compartmentalization when everything is so interconnected. That's why it is so important to stand together against injustices.

Q. If you have one take home message for 2SLGBTQIA+ Indigenous folks attending DBIWP, what would it be?

Revel in culture. Celebrate us. Connect with each other. We are stronger together.

Q. If you have one take home message for allies attending DBIWP, what would it be?

Learn from us. Create space for us. Champion us.

INTERVIEW WITH JOHNNIE JAE

INDIGIQUEER ARTIST, JOURNALIST, AND ADVOCATE

BY ELYSE

Johnnie Jae (pronouns: they/them) is an Otoe-Missouria and Choctaw asexual Indigiqueer artist, journalist, and advocate. They are the founder of media platforms Grim Native and A Tribe Called Geek. They are an artist for Eighth Generation and Portraits & Portals. They also serve on the Walking in the Footsteps of Our Ancestors Coordinating Council and co-lead the Sharing the Story Committee. In addition, they host the Talking in the Footsteps of Our Ancestors podcast, creating conversations around the work and impact of the Walking in the Footsteps of Our Ancestors Project as they work to reconnect the Otoe-Missouria to their ancestral homelands in Nebraska.

Johnnie Jae is a board member and webmaster for Crushing Colonialism and will be a panelist in the DBIWP event. They graciously agreed to an interview to share more about themselves and their involvement with DBIWP.



Photo Courtesy of Johnnie Jae

Q. Could you tell me about the programming that you are involved with for DBIWP?

Absolutely. So, I'll be on the panel "Indigeneity, Gender, Sexuality and Decolonization." I think this is a crucial conversation because many Indigenous peoples across the globe had (and still have) their ancestral ways of understanding gender and sexuality that do not align with Western binaries. For example, many Indigenous peoples recognize third, fourth, or fifth genders, each with distinct social or spiritual roles. Sexuality within Indigenous communities is just as diverse.

But there's a lot of silence and fear in recognizing this because of the trauma of colonization. These colonial systems, through law, religion, education, etc,. sought to erase these inherent ways of being to impose rigid binary gender roles and heteronormativity. The imposition of patriarchy and Christianity has led to Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, and LGBTQIA+ folks being disproportionately affected by violence, marginalization, and erasure that has created a global crisis of murdered and missing Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, and LGBTQIA+ folks around the world.

We need to break the silence because we can't afford to be afraid, especially in this political landscape, when who we are as Indigenous people, as Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+, and our resistance are the direct target of this administration.

Q. What made you want to participate in DBIWP programming?

So much of my journey has been about navigating the intersections of my identity in spaces not always ready or safe for me. I wanted to be a part of DBIWP because there's power in sharing the truth of our identities, experiences, histories, and futures. Now, more than ever, it is critical to speak truth to power when our identities are vilified, our histories erased, and our futures threatened by the current administration.

But more than anything, I also wanted to be part of the joy. There's something sacred about celebrating ourselves in public, out loud, on our terms, and completely defying a world that wants us invisible, silent, gone.

Q. What is important to you about an event like DBIWP?

It centers Indigiqueer and Two-Spirit joy, truth, and resilience in a world that has tried to erase us at every turn. For generations, colonial systems have told us that who we are, how we love, how we express gender, and how we live in relation to community and spirit is wrong, unnatural, or doesn't exist. Yet, here we are, proving otherwise.

Events like DBIWP are vital because they are rooted in our cultures, stories, bodies, and futures. They provide space where we don't have to shrink or translate ourselves, where being Indigenous and queer isn't something we have to explain or defend, but it just is.

Q. Can you share a bit about your artwork and the work that you do?

As a journalist and artist, my work exists at the intersection of storytelling, survivance, and systems disruption, grounded in Indigenous values and futurisms.

Most of my work is about making space for Indigenous people to see ourselves reflected in the world not as stereotypes or side notes but as the innovators, culture-shapers, and badass creators we've always been. Whether through digital media, art, or podcasts, I use my platforms to celebrate the diversity of our Indigeneity and challenge the narratives that marginalize or erase our contributions.

At the end of the day, my work is about truth, visibility, and challenging the notion of there being a singular, homogenized way of being as Indigenous people.

Q. Would you share your reflections on the significance of DBIWP's events through the lens of your artistic work?

DBIWP is an embodiment of everything I try to express through my art. It's about truth-telling, joy, disruption, and liberation. DBIWP creates a space where our full selves, as Indigenous, queer, trans, Two-Spirit, disabled, etc., aren't just seen but celebrated. That's the space my work dreams of, grieves for, and helps build.

As an artist and journalist, my work often confronts the silence and those places where we've been erased, shamed, or told we're too much. DBIWP fills those silences with sound, story, movement, and color. It's radical in that it refuses invisibility and dares to center us in our beauty and complexity. That kind of visibility is medicine.

Q. I'm wondering if you could speak on the ways that your position as an Indigenous person has impacted your music and creation of art?

Being Indigenous isn't a perspective I bring into my art; it's the root system from which everything grows. So, it doesn't matter if I'm doodling Pikachu or beading a Thunderbird; it's Indigenous art. It's Otoe-Missouria and Choctaw art because that is who I am. It's that perspective that I'm hoping more people adopt when it comes to engaging with Indigenous art because our creativity is not limited to a preconceived notion of what is and isn't Native art; what it is we should and shouldn't be creating as Indigenous artists to be considered "Indigenous" artists.

Q. What types of supports have you experienced for your art from community?

I've been incredibly fortunate to have support from the various communities I am a part of. Whether it's aunties sharing words of encouragement, fellow artists offering collaborations and sharing opportunities, or folks buying my art or telling me what my work means to them.

There's a tenderness, shared resilience, and refusal to let each other disappear or give up on ourselves or each other, especially within our Two-Spirit, LGBTQIA+, and disabled communities. It's helped me see there's no separation between art and community. That, just like art, belonging is a practice, and community is the canvas that holds us all.

Q. If you have one take home message for 2SLGBTQIA+ Indigenous folks attending DBIWP, what would it be?

There is no part of you, your identity, your gender, your sexuality, your disability, your softness, your rage, that needs to be made smaller or explained away. You are whole. You are medicine. You belong exactly as you are.

Q. If you have one take home message for allies attending DBIWP, what would it be?

DBIWP exists because of centuries of resistance because 2SLGBTQIA+ Indigenous people have had to fight to be seen, heard, and kept alive. Being an ally isn't about showing up for the celebration. It's about committing to the work after the music fades.

So listen more than you speak. Reflect before you react. Ask yourself what you're willing to risk or give up to help build a world where our people don't have to fight so hard to exist. Most importantly, it means seeing 2SLGBTQIA+ Indigenous people not just as symbols of resilience but as whole, thriving human beings deserving of love, safety, joy, and rest. Let this space change you. Then, go home and help change everything else.

Q. Any upcoming projects you are working on that you'd like to share (and signal boost in the article)?

Yes! I'm excited and honored to be working on a couple of meaningful projects reflecting the heart of my creative and community work.

One is Walking in the Footsteps of Our Ancestors, a powerful, collaborative effort to reconnect the Otoe-Missouria people with our ancestral homelands in southeast Nebraska. Through this project, we're not just mapping history. We're restoring relationships, raising awareness, and creating space for truth, healing, and presence. I serve on the Coordinating Council & Co-Lead the Sharing The Story Committee, where I host the Talking in the Footsteps of Our Ancestors podcast to discuss the work and impact we are having through our work.

Another project I'm incredibly proud to be part of is Portraits and Portals. As one of the six disabled artists for Portraits and Portals, I'm part of a powerful year-long project that pairs six disabled artists and creatives of color with six disaster survivors of color. Together, we are exploring the raw realities of crisis while celebrating the resilience, creativity, and humanity that emerge in its aftermath. This collaboration allows me to create through an Indigenous, disabled lens—where survivance, memory, and imagination meet. My work becomes a portal: a space for reflection, healing, and dreaming our way forward.

These projects mean so much to me because they allow me to merge art, advocacy, and community in ways that honor where we come from while being able to dream forward together.

INTERVIEW WITH YAFFA

TRANS PALESTINIAN AUTHOR, POET, AND ARTIST

BY SHANA

Yaffa (pronouns: they/she) is an autistic, queer, trans, Muslim, and multiply displaced Indigenous Palestinian. They are, among other things, a public speaker, published author, poet, stand-up comic, activist, and organizer. Yaffa is the Executive Director of the Muslim Alliance for Sexual and Gender Diversity (MASGD) and founder of several nonprofits.

Yaffa took time to speak to *The Magazine* about the prevalent theme of displacement in their writing, the powerful way stand-up comedy and stage performance can be therapeutic for both artist and audience, and their participation in DBIWP.



Photo Credit: Michael Colgan

Q. I was curious to know more about your work as a poet, author, and artist. What themes do you touch on in your work? What is important to you in your art?

I think for me so much of my art has always been about the lived reality that I'm experiencing, and my people are experiencing. I remember as a teenager when I first started writing novels at 13, so many of the themes were the things that were happening in my day-to-day life. Specifically different forms of marginalizations and oppression that I was witnessing and, even before I had language around liberation and utopia building, there was a lot of that. So I feel like, historically, it has always been my way of processing what's been happening and then, along the way, I learned how to utilize my art as either a way to mobilize people or kind of move us to organizing and building a collectively liberated world.

Q. How long have you been doing comedy? What got you started in that medium?

I started doing stand-up comedy really only a few years ago. I was finally in a space where I was ready to explore other art forms and I started doing stand-up comedy and absolutely loved it. It was so great. I felt like I was able to bring a lot of my different worlds together. And then October 7th happened [October 7, 2023 when the HAMAS-led attack on civilians ignited the war and humanitarian crisis in Gaza].

I wanted to include [the stand-up comedy] in my bio because I think a lot of times we think about the larger things that we lose along the way in terms of—especially with something like October 7th, or whenever we're thinking of genocide, or acts of war, or really just large-scale crises—often we're thinking about the number of people who have died, which is really really important. But also at the same time, for me, I think it is important to name the lived day-to-day things that we also lose along the way. So if it wasn't for October 7th, I probably would be doing a lot more stand-up. And post-October 7th, I just [decided that] actually, I am just going to withhold this comedy until we live in a world with a free Falasteen.

Q. With your approach to comedy, do you approach it differently than your other forms of creative expression? Does comedy help you cope or process in the same way that the other forms do?

I write a lot of non-fiction. I even write young adult fantasy. I write a lot of different things. But with poetry, in particular, you don't need to maintain a plot. There is no structure that you have

to abide by—you get to just be in that moment. So I feel like, in a lot of ways, stand-up was really similar to that. I think where the main difference with that was with stand-up I was able to allow these things to move through my body on a stage.

So post October 7th, I haven't done stand-up, but one of the things I have done is, starting last year, is I did a one-person show. It's a one-hour show—the easiest way to describe it is it's Yaffa in the living room/kitchen, away from everyone as a queer and trans Palestinian in the midst of genocide. And it's a show that kind of moves within the extreme realms of different emotions that we're all experiencing on a daily basis. And so you can go from immense joy to immense grief in an instant . . . You can be excited about something and then devastated about the same thing or a different thing—and it's just like this roller coaster of emotions. Obviously with stand-up, the focus is going to be on the laughter piece; it's about the comedy. Whereas with the show, I am able to kind of experience a wider range of emotions. But I feel like stand-up was a really beautiful stepping stone into that.

Q. The theme of displacement has been a prominent one in your work. Can you share a bit about what it means to you to be displaced?

Displacement has been a huge part of my life. I was displaced really early on and then continuously displaced.

Usually, when I start with my story, I always start with my grandparents' generation with their displacement versus my first displacement. Because I was born maybe less than six months post my parents being displaced from Kuwait post the Gulf War. And I like starting it before I was even born because displacement is one of those things—and a lot of different forms of trauma and a lot of forms of injustices are similar—they don't really start when we show up, right. They're there. They're impacting us.

The world that I was born into is a completely different world than the world that my oldest sister was born into, for example. Where she was born two years prior to the Gulf War. So just in terms of stability, in terms of access to resources—almost everything was different between just the two of us and we're 3 ½ years apart. So within those 3 ½ years, my parents' entire world shifted. And I was born in a very different world than she was born in. And it's like that for all of my sisters who were born after me. And so, even though we were all displaced, our displacement ended up looking very different. Even as I went off on my own—I left home when I was 16, 17—and since then I've lived in six other countries. Then my experience with that became very different than my sisters' because that's not their lived reality. And so, for me, it's always been a big part of my life.

I am really grateful for the last 10 years of my life where within each of the forms of displacement or move, I've been able to reclaim a lot of things around my heritage and who I am as a person, who my community is, and really allow myself to balance that out. So prior to a lot of that, there was almost like this desperation for having place. I would go from place to place almost begging for acceptance, for any kind of "Okay, I can be here, I can stay here."

[In] the last 10 years, I have really learned to move toward a place where home is no longer a specific physical place somewhere in the world; it's just wherever I am. And that's been really helpful especially with the level of travel I do.

Q. Can you share what it means to you to have a sense of "place"?

This concept of like, "I'm somewhere and this is where I belong," that didn't really happen until last year. In August, I went to Falasteen for the first time. I had never been there. I wasn't born there. And it's been about 60 years since anyone from my immediate family has been able to go. So my grandparents have not been back. My parents have not been back. In fact, my parents don't remember it because they were children when they left.

I think in my head I thought as soon as I crossed the border, I would immediately feel like I was at home and be like everything is different now. But that didn't necessarily happen in that way. What did happen though was when I did go to where my dad is from, it felt so different from any other place I've ever lived in. Because it was walking down the street knowing that I am Indigenous to this land. And for the first time in my life, I was not a settler. And that's not really an experience I had ever had or that I could really have in the vast majority of the world. Because everywhere else I am always hypervigilant about what is my role in being on this land. And being really really careful of like what is my relationship to the Indigenous folx of this land, what is my role in terms of stewarding the land—there's so much of that within the role of being a settler on stolen land that I am always consciously thinking of. And being in Falasteen was the first place where that's not what I was thinking about. That was not taking up 100% of my mental capacity. Being in Falasteen was the first time where it was like, "Wait, I can just be a person for a minute. I can just exist here."

Q. What does it mean to you to be part of a community event like DBIWP? What is important about having events like DBIWP?

As soon as I found out about this event, I was like I just want to be there, for me as a person. Which is not something that I usually get to think about . . . Usually I'm thinking, like, okay how do I make this related to the work that I'm doing? How is it related to collective liberation? How is it related to my organizing?

So when I first heard [about DBIWP], I was like I just want to be there as a human. As an Indigenous, queer, and trans person. I just want to be in that space. I don't need to say anything. I don't need to do anything. I just want to be surrounded by that energy, period. There are so few spaces that are for Indigenous folx to really center queerness, transness, Two-Spirit folx . . . I don't know any other place that really does that on a broader Indigenous scope.

As a visibly trans person, when I walk into any room, that room can never be the same, period. It just, it cannot. But, for me, there's that added layer of it can stop there or now it can be a pathway to utilize that space to move resources, to mobilize people, to build some kind of organizing pathway, to build infrastructure—there's so many different directions that it can go in and, to me, that's work that is going to move us to collective liberation. So I feel like a lot of the other events that I am aware of are really just focused on that first part of how we just exist but I love that with this event, it is also taking that second step where like, yes, our existence is resistance, but now what? Where are we going with this? What is it that we are trying to build?

When I think of Indigenous, queer, trans, and Two-Spirit folx, I think of the most powerful people in the world, right. Like, to me, we're the people who should be defining what liberation looks like and what our societies can look like in the future. I want

people at the forefront of those experiences and realities coming up with that vision. And ultimately a lot of the people most impacted by things are the people who are the ones who know how to move us in those directions more than anybody else. It is kind of a missed opportunity if we don't take that next step because I know so may people are excited to go on that next step. They are looking for that next step. Where do we actually go from here?

And I feel like with this event, it balances that out really well. Let's share space, let's really celebrate one another. Let's celebrate our realities and our existence. And also, where are we going?

You are doing a poetry reading during the event. What do you hope those attending your poetry reading DBIWP walk away with from the experience?

Being in that space, I would want my poetry and everything I say to really just allow people to feel seen. There is so much power in poetry and other forms of art where we are able to make very specific experiences almost universal. So many of us go through the same thing, but there is this assumption that everyone is on their own. And I feel like art allows us to break down some of those binaries and some of those barriers that tell us that we are all alone. So I would want people to really recognize that they're not alone.

I love trying to send the message to people of I see you. I am hearing you. I am witnessing everything that you are. But then also adding that second part—I witness you, now what? What can you do for collective liberation when you're witnessed versus when you're not witnessed? . . . There is always an "and" to it. The conversation doesn't end. And I feel like I get to do that within my poetry and with my art.

I like introducing chaos into space. People have certain expectations of what something looks like and sounds like a feels like . . . When chaos is introduced, it is kind of like a cold plunge. It resets your nervous system. And you're no longer holding onto all of the beliefs and the things that are getting in your way potentially because you're no longer thinking about the impossibility of things because you had that nervous system reset. All of a sudden, possibilities are real again. Something you held onto your entire life all of a sudden might not make sense anymore. It leaves space for that. I think chaos is a really powerful tool when it comes to mobilizing and organizing because a lot of the work that those systems have done is conditioned us into very specific ways of thinking. And as long as we are holding onto those specific ways of thinking, it means that we actually can't move forward with collective liberation . . .

I'm just honored to be a part of this and all the events and everybody's journey where I just get to be there. I am the person who throws someone into a cold plunge. What they do beyond that cold plunge is really up to them.

Q. You spoke a bit about wanting to be part of this event just as a human—being part of the event, being part of the space, being part of the energy. What do you hope to walk away with as someone participating in the event?

I really appreciate this questions because I think it will get me to think about it even more and really set some intentionality for this. I believe that rest happens in community, not away from community. I talk about how the capitalist version of rest is working 50 weeks a year. You hate everyone. It's destroying you. But then you go for a two week vacation and you're supposed to come back and do it all over again. I find even within organizing spaces, we're still holding onto that idea that to rest is to step away from everything. That can work for physical rest, but when it comes to rest across the other dimensions (emotionally, and mentally, and spiritually), to me, that happens within community which is part of why I do the work that I do and why I go into so many communities and have these conversations because those become spaces of rest for me. They mobilize me in different ways. They hold me accountable in different ways. They refresh my soul.

Usually when I am resting in community, it's my event. With this, I am sharing poetry, but I am very much more so a participant within the space, so I am hoping to be on the receiving end of that rest without having to do the labor of organizing the entire thing. The other part I am hoping for is witnessing some of the incredible things that other people are doing on their journeys toward collective liberation.

I would love to witness other people doing the work that they are doing and then that would give me new ideas and ways to support things that are happening. Whenever I meet someone who is doing incredible work, I am like okay cool, how do I support you? How do we make sure that you get to continue doing this? And by "I," I don't necessarily mean in this physical body. I mean "I" as in my communities—this broader ecosystem and how do we merge our ecosystems to strengthen one another. Realistically, none of us are going to get there without everybody else. It's going to be a lot of movements together. It's going to be a lot of people from a lot of backgrounds building a revolution. It can't be a single cause, it can't even just be a couple of causes—it has to be all these causes together. So I am looking forward to just witnessing that with other people and hopefully being able to support others.



Photo Credit: Michael Colgan

INTERVIEW WITH REBECCA NAGLE

JOURNALIST, WRITER, AND SUPPORTER OF DBIWP

BY ELYSE

Rebecca Nagle (pronouns: she/her) is a Two-Spirit/Queer citizen of Cherokee Nation. She has received several awards for her journalism and is a Peabody Award nominee. Her recent book, titled *By the Fire We Carry: The Generations-Long Fight for Justice on Native Land*, is a national bestseller and finalist for several book prizes, including the National Book Critics Circle Prize and the Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Nonfiction, and winner of the Oklahoma Historical Society's E. E. Dale Award. *By the Fire We Carry* tells the story of the ongoing fight for sovereignty and tribal land in Oklahoma through legal means and Indigenous resistance, intertwined with a murder that ultimately resulted in the Supreme Court ruling in favor of Native rights to the land. It is on the Best Books of the Year (2024) list for The New Yorker, Publishers Weekly, NPR, Esquire, Barnes & Noble and Kirkus. She is sharing a copy of her book with DBIWP and graciously agreed to an interview.



Photo Credit: Brittany Bendabout

Q. I want to ask you about the relationships that connect you to DBIWP programming.

I know Jen [Jen Deerinwater, Executive Director of Crushing Colonialism]. We're both citizens of Cherokee Nation. And when I lived in Baltimore, the Baltimore/DC Native community is pretty connected. And so I would go down to DC for different powwows or community gatherings, and vice versa . . . and there was a time where we organized for Two-Spirits to march in the Baltimore Pride Parade, and we're doing some organizing of Two-Spirit people in the DMV [the local term for the National Capital region of Washington, DC/Maryland/Virginia]. And so I knew Jen through that. And [I] have been following what Crushing Colonialism has been up to and all of the good work that you have been doing. And then [I] also learned about DBIWP . . . I'm really excited about the festival.

Q. What would be important about an event such as DBIWP?

I think what's really important is that often in the context of LGBTQ advocacy, or just general mainstream LGBTQ advocacy, Native people get left out. I think erasure is one of the primary ways that anti-Indigenous racism functions in the United States, and so when it comes to TV, culture, the media, K–12 education, over and over again, Native people are just left out. I think you see the same thing happen when it comes to critical discussions about contemporary issues. So when we're talking about what is it to be LGBTQ in the United States in 2025, Native people are often left out of those conversations. But we have unique histories, unique cultures, unique strengths, and unique challenges that really need to be recognized. So I think it's really important that during world pride, there's space set aside for Native folks.

Q. Has your perspective on DBIWP and events like this shifted over time or within the current political context?

Unfortunately, with what is happening with the Trump administration and our country's movement towards authoritarianism, as with many prior authoritarian regimes, a lot of that movement is based on building out scapegoats. And I don't think I'm the only person saying that. But during the election, and now that Trump has come to power, I think the primary scapegoats are immigrants and trans people. coming together to also center the most vulnerable members of our community.

Q. Could you share your reflections on the significance of DBIWP through the lens of your work?

I'm a journalist and a writer, and I tend to focus on legal issues that impact tribes and tribal sovereignty. And I do long form journalism. I just did a book. And do in depth reporting on cases and things like that. But I have done some reporting specifically about Native LGBTQ issues. It's something that's different that I think a lot of people don't think about. I think that there's a misunderstanding that tribes have less homophobia and less transphobia. And I think that that was true historically, prior to colonization. But colonization had a really big and negative impact on our community. And sometimes in Native communities, because of that impact of colonization, the homophobia and the transphobia can be even stronger in Native communities, and we have a lot of work to do to undo the impacts of colonization, and even to reclaim some of those traditional knowledge bases that we had where Two-Spirit people were even celebrated. But also, we're important.
It's not just about the celebration, but we're recognizing important members of our community, and oftentimes even had specific roles. So I think that there can be a lack of understanding, sometimes with non-Native people, where there can be an excitement or an interest in some of those traditional teachings that maybe are less homophobic or less transphobic without an understanding of where Native people and Native communities are at now. And so, I do some advocacy. I'm on the board of an emerging and growing and developing new Two-Spirit national organization. And we've done some surveys and some listening in the Native community, and one of the big things that we're hearing are people talking about access to things like ceremony and access to community and feeling really isolated as LGBTQ people in their Native communities. So I think there's just still a lot of work to do that is tribally specific. That's specific to tribes and tribal citizens that often gets left out of the mainstream Native or mainstream LGBTQ conversations.

Q. Can you speak on the ways that being a citizen of the Cherokee Nation, has impacted the work that you do: the journalism, the activism, all of these pieces?

Absolutely. Quite a lot. My writing really focuses on tribal sovereignty and Federal Indian law. And so what I choose to write about and what I focus on is really impacted by that. Then, beyond that, I'm lucky. There's a long history in my tribe, especially with the Cherokee Phoenix, of Native journalism, and Native writing, and so I think often about not only how my identity motivates my work, but how my work is situated within a long tradition of Indigenous journalism and history and scholarship, and intellectual thought and activism, and I'm just really humbled to be a small part of that.

Q. And have you experienced supports for that? For the work that you're doing within Indigenous community?

Yeah, absolutely. I've had some recognition here, locally in Oklahoma. Within my tribe and among Native journalists and organizations. But often the coolest thing that I experience is people in my community coming up to me and saying that my podcast or my book helped them understand something that they didn't understand. I think these court cases and these legal issues can be really opaque, and actually the opaqueness and the way that the law and Supreme Court cases can be hard to understand is one way that inequity works. The people whose lives these laws have a big impact on don't even really understand what they are or how they work. And so one of my big goals as a journalist is to make those complicated and opaque systems understandable. It shouldn't be that you have to have a law degree to understand how the law impacts your life; it impacts all of us. That, for me, is the biggest affirmation; running into people being "Oh, my gosh, I learned so much from your podcast," other tribal citizens who feel they learned things, because that's really my goal is that piece of public education.

I'm wondering if you've had support for your work through the Queer community specifically.

Personally, I've been attending Two-Spirit events since I was in my mid-twenties. So there's Two-Spirit gatherings and powwows and different places where the Native LGBTQ community comes together, and those have been really really important for my personal development.

I remember the first time I went to a Two-Spirit gathering, I didn't even know I needed this space, but I needed it so much. And yeah, those spaces for me—just on an emotional level and a spiritual level—are very healing and really important. And so, the ways that our communities come together and take care of each other is really really important.

Q. Have you found that also within the broader LGBTQ community?

My experience with the non-Native LGBTQ community has been mixed. I think there have been some aspects of my work, and who I am as a person, where I have felt really supported in that community. And there have been times that I have felt really erased as a Native person. Or just dealing with people. I remember I was at a Queer dance party, and this drunk white Lady wanted to tell me about the racist craft she did at Summer Camp when she was a kid. And I was like what? Why am I supposed to be listening to this right now? And so stuff that is part of the experience.

And I had an experience that I think is similar to a lot of Native people. I didn't grow up on my reservation, but I grew up in a more conservative area close to the reservation, and I went to an East coast city and then was "Oh, it's so much easier to be Queer here." But then other aspects of my identity were harder in those places, and I think that that's a really common experience for Native LGBTQ. People who might be in more conservative parts of the country go to those cities for Queer community or, especially for our trans relatives, for safety. And then not find a community that is affirming of the other aspects of our identity. So I would say my experience is mixed.

Q. I'm hoping you can talk about more of the themes in your work.

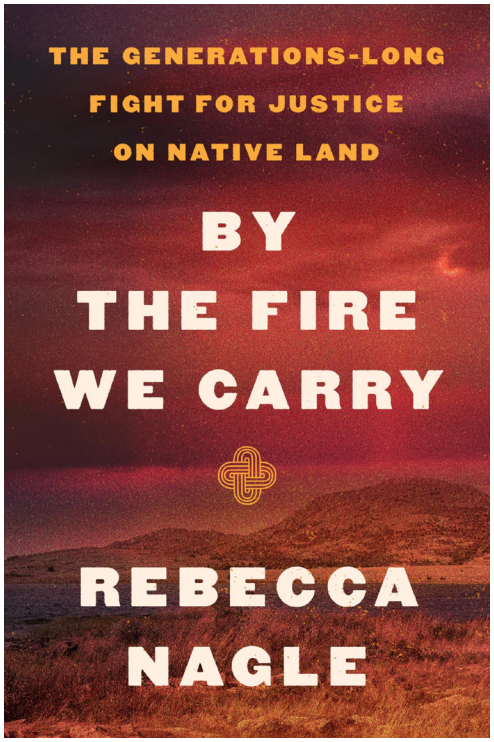
I've hosted two seasons of a podcast called This Land. The first season was about a Supreme Court case that resulted in the largest restoration of tribal land in US history called McGirt. It affirmed a bunch of reservations here in Eastern Oklahoma and centered around the status of the Muskogee Reservation, and it actually started as a murder in 1999. And my book By the Fire We Carry also covers that same case, and it intersperses with the story of how this murder went all the way to the Supreme Court. It goes back and forth in history and talks about our tribes, removal from our homelands in the southeast to what is now Oklahoma, and then how Oklahoma was illegally created on top of that treaty territory. And so my work really focuses on the law, these court cases, but also themes of Indigenous resistance, and how Indigenous people have fought back and helped shape those laws. And I also write a lot about what all of that means for us, democracy, and what that means for our histories—and what these legacies mean for our country.

Q. And if you had one take home message for IndigiQueer or Two-Spirit folks who are going to be attending DBIWP. What would it be?

I would always just say that there's community out there, and that sometimes the first or second, or even third place that we look for community can let us down, and that those experiences can be really hard when we don't feel fully seen or accepted, but that there's community out there that is ready to love you and accept you.

Q. And if you had any messages for the allies who might be attending DBIWP?

There's a lot of work that we have to do to make our LGBTQ spaces more inclusive of Native people. And so coming to something like this is a good first step, and we should continue to talk about what other things we can do moving forward.





THE QUEER PENDULUM

BY THEO JEAN CUTHAND

It was 1993 and I had just realized I was queer. At the time, I thought I was a lesbian, and so that's how I identified. I was in ninth grade at a high school in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. A mid-sized urban area in the middle of the Canadian plains, Saskatoon was not where I wanted to spend my life. I would go to the local bookstore and buy LGBTQ mags like *Out, The Advocate,* and *Diva*. I did not have access to the internet, which was still in its infancy at this point. My mom tried to support me by buying me books from the Ottawa Women's Bookstore about lesbian stuff. I was lonely, and there was not a lot of lesbian teen representation in the media at that point.

By the time I graduated high school in 1996, Saskatoon had its own queer bookstore. I had a group of queer friends I had made at the youth group at what was then known as Gay and Lesbian Health Services (now OUT Saskatoon). I had made my first three videos, one of which was already popular on the Queer film festival circuit internationally. There was more representation and more conversation about my community. Things had shifted for the positive.

I moved to Vancouver after high school. I went to art/film school, which of course was filled with more queers. We had our own queer student art show. Vancouver had a bigger Pride, although I never liked the crowds. There were two queer neighborhoods, Davie Street and Commercial Drive. They also had a queer bookstore. And a ton of clubs, including a lesbian bar called The Lotus. I went to The Lotus so much, getting sauced and acting foolish to Spin Spin Sugar and doing it again the next weekend. I met people in the kink scene. I made friends with other queer filmmakers.

Same-sex marriage was legalized in Canada in 2005. Things were progressing. I was already tiptoeing around the idea of transitioning to male, and also had the nagging suspicion I wasn't really a lesbian. But it was a good community to hang out in, and I was also attracting trans-masc and trans-men friends, so I was learning a lot about possibilities. A trans friend gave me a shot of testosterone, and I liked it, but since I only did the one shot, I didn't get a full appreciation of the power it held for me. I'm sure I looked like an obvious egg. I had a girlfriend who asked if I was a boy, and sometimes friends looked like they were just waiting for me to finally get around to being who they could see me as.

I sometimes joked about being a "fag" (in an affectionate way), but I think it was more true than I was ready to admit. I felt more affinity to gay men's culture at times, and that was confusing. Also, I still dated women and fell madly in love with them. I started looking for a particular type of femme gender expression that held a kind of toppy masculinity. I was also identifying as a butch.

Back in high school, I had read *Stone Butch Blues* by Leslie Feinberg, so I knew about historical butch/femme cultures. And I also knew something about transitioning. I went to talks by people like Kate Bornstein to learn about transgender stuff. But I wasn't coming out fully.

Then in 2007, I came out as a trans man while I was experiencing a manic episode. Unfortunately, my family regarded my gender change as part of my mental health issues. So I didn't feel supported, and finally, a friend I had a crush on talked me out of it altogether. I had a different name for a few months and then went back to my old name. But I kept wearing my packer and did identify as non-binary for a long time.

> *"All this time, I could see the gains queer and trans people were making and was hyper-aware that it was a pendulum."*

All this time, I could see the gains queer and trans people were making and was hyper-aware that it was a pendulum. I knew enough about queer history to see that there were ebbs and flows, that backlash came at times and pushed it all backward. I wondered how long we would have to live our lives.

In 2022, at the age of 44, I finally embraced being a trans man and medically transitioned. From the age of 19 until the age of 44, when I came out for good, I was constantly thinking about transitioning. I asked one of my friends who transitioned all the invasive questions I needed answers to before getting on testosterone. One was "Will I still get wet?" (yes, but it varies from person to person), and the other was how much my bodily smells would shift (the result was pleasant). Armed with the answers to my burning questions, I came out as a bisexual trans man.

However, there was a growing sense of urgency to transition. In 2021, I saw a trans person post online that people should transition while it was still legal. And that was honestly what pushed me to finally do a medical transition. I'd tried to make being non-binary work, but I was still a trans man who just wanted to be he/him and do bi-guy things. Like hooking up with randoms on Grindr, falling tragically in love with femmes, and getting crushes on all types of genders. But most importantly, to experience my body as close to male as possible.

When I was a kid, my boy cousins took me to see *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. I remember Indiana Jones's heroic masculinity, fighting Nazis and having women fall in love with

him, and rescuing (really?) artifacts to put them in museums. Honestly, later on, I could see how it was a colonial dream. But there's one scene where he's escaping and manages to get through the narrowing exit of a chamber as it's closing, and grabs his hat before it closes. And my transition felt like that, rushing through the rapidly closing window of transgender possibilities. I got on hormones, got top surgery, changed my name and gender on my birth certificate and all my IDs, got a passport with my new name and gender, and got on the list for bottom surgery as fast as I could, which still took a couple of years.

I'm in Canada, so right now we're seriously considering the possibility of being invaded by the U.S. People are working hard to try to keep our Conservatives out of power federally, but even then, if we get invaded, those American laws will be enacted on Canadian soil. And it would be a pretty gory war if it happened.

Would I leave this area? Where would I go?

There's this growing tension across the globe as powers shift and fascists make life-ending policy decisions like it's a joke. It's not great. And I can see that the growing unjust anger towards transgender scapegoats is getting broadened into an attack on the rest of the queer community.

I've been alive since 1978. I have seen rights come, and I have seen them start to go. As Indigenous people, we had queer rights before we had colonization. We were accepted and loved in most of our communities. We have oral stories going back to pre-contact times.

I am sure in the future we will have full rights again, to live and love as we please. To have sovereignty over our bodies and gender expressions. To be married to any gender we love. The question is, how long will it take for us to push that pendulum back? How many fights do we have to get through again? What are the best ways to jam the system so it doesn't harm as many people as it wants to? What is my role as a filmmaker and an artist to create images and stories of my communities so that people can see us in our dignified lives?

I have a rule that I have to give people hope because, without it, revolutions don't happen. If I tell you it will never get better again, it never will. But we've seen this before, and we've fought it before, and we can push that pendulum back to a more loving humanity that accepts diversity. I believe that humanity has that potential, and that potential gives me hope for a better tomorrow.

"There's this growing tension across the globe as powers shift and fascists make life-ending policy decisions like it's a joke."



Photo Courtesy of Theo Cuthand, 2025

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Theo Cuthand grew up in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. He makes films about sexuality, madness, Queer identity and love, gender, and Indigeneity. His work has been exhibited at galleries including the MOMA in NYC, the National Gallery in Ottawa, and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. He completed his BFA majoring in Film and Video at Emily Carr University in 2005 and his Master of Arts in Media Production at Toronto Metropolitan University in 2015. He is a Whitney Biennial 2019 artist. He is of Plains Cree and Scots descent, a Little Pine First Nation member, and resides in Toronto,

DANCING BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH: AN AFGHAN TRANS WOMAN'S LIFE IN PAKISTAN

BY RIDA KHAN

Annie's residence is humble. Two mattresses are placed on the carpeted floor of her room, which is also used as a living room and a kitchen. Annie prepares tea, making her home welcoming and cozy.

Annie, a twenty-two-year-old Afghan trans woman based in Peshawar, looks intently in the mirror as she adorns herself for the interview. As an Assigned Male at Birth (AMAB) child, Annie loved being dolled up. In her home country of Afghanistan, Annie was particularly fond of her sister's company and would request her to apply makeup on her face. First, Annie would ask them just to powder her face and then nudge them to put on the blush, thicken the eyebrows, and eventually apply lipstick.

"You have gone too far," Annie's sister would say.

But deep down, Annie knew that breaking the gender binary is not Western; queer people like her were Indigenous to her homeland. With her short hair and makeup, Annie was called an "American woman" by her sisters.

As Annie and I sit down for the interview, her face appears radiant from the varying bright colors reflected from the disco ball in the living room. Hues of blue, green, pink, and yellow dance lightly on her face and the walls around us.

This space is also a recreative site where queer people gather, celebrate joy and dance as the myriad of colors bounce between them.

Annie's residence is also a site of scrutiny from the state. Raids by police have become more frequent in Annie's residence ever since the Pakistani government implemented the Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan (IFRP) in 2023. This plan introduced measures to compile comprehensive databases of "illegal foreigners," and manage the arrest, detention, deportation, and repatriation of undocumented or overstaying individuals. As a result, the crackdown against Afghan residents in Pakistan ensued, many of whom faced harassment, arrest, detention, and forced deportation to Afghanistan.

Afghan trans people in Pakistan usually do not hold valid forms of documentation to reside in Pakistan, which include having a Proof of Registration (POR) card issued by the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) or the Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) granted by the Pakistani government. Recently, even Afghans who hold valid forms of documentation, like ACC, are being deported from Pakistan.

Annie fled her home country, Afghanistan, at the mere age of thirteen when she realized that her family was not accepting of her queerness. Annie moved in with her partner in Peshawar and started working at a tailor shop to sustain herself. After five years of living in the city, Annie experienced a traumatizing incident in which she was physically assaulted by men at a dance function where she performed. Her leg was shot, and she experienced severe injuries to her head.



Annie sits in her living room with her partner, holding hands under soft, colorful lights. Photo credit: Jamaima Afridi, March 21, 2025.

"My mother would cry day and night and convince my father to send me back to Afghanistan," Annie recalls.

Annie moved to Afghanistan briefly, but her extended family's taunts would not spare Annie about her feminine attire and get-up. Annie's brother would beat her, tear her clothes apart, and humiliate her. She ran away again, this time on the Chaman border crossing between Afghanistan and Pakistan, to resettle again in Peshawar, where she felt relatively safe. Ever since the Taliban took power in Afghanistan in 2021, Annie has not visited her home country. To do so would endanger her life.

As an undocumented Afghan refugee with only a middle-school education, Annie does not have access to formal employment opportunities in Pakistan. Dancing publicly at functions is her only source of livelihood to sustain herself. Annie makes a meagre amount of six to eight thousand rupees (roughly $20-30) per dance function, which is barely enough to buy a week's groceries for herself. For Annie, dancing publicly offers possibilities but also contradictions. Public dance functions allow Annie to embody her queer self; she wears a wig, dolls herself up and performs for an audience. Dancing brings her joy. But when performing for an entirely male audience, it renders her queerness precarious. She cannot afford joy without being exposed to intimidation and violence. One time, after dancing at one of these functions, Annie was surrounded by a group of men from the audience who demanded that she pay a gruesome amount of two lac (roughly $800), more than

Annie gets paid in a year. Annie did not have the means to arrange the amount so the assailants then threatened her, cut off her hair, and raped her.

Even though the assault was captured by security cameras in the area, the police released Annie's attackers within hours. It wasn't the first time she had been failed by the authorities meant to protect her. Annie no longer has faith in the protection the police are supposed to provide. In February, she was attacked at night by unknown men while walking through the bazaar. Two of them forced her into a car, physically assaulted her, and tore her clothes.

"The moment the men reached for my clothes, I knew that the men did not want to steal. They wanted to do something more brutal," Annie said.

Somehow, she escaped the car and cried for help. Annie called her friend, who took her to a public hospital. There, the hospital had a separate space designated for treating trans patients where they could receive medical care. This was an improvement on past practices, when hospitals would deny treatment to trans people, and it cost them their lives. While these efforts to provide a designated space for trans patients to receive medical care have been lauded by the trans community, they are not adequate to access health justice. While Annie received treatment for her injuries, police officers refused to register her First Investigation Report (FIR). FIR is a complaint lodged with the police by the victim of a cognizable offence or by someone on his/her behalf and allows the police to start investigating the case.

> ***"I don't believe in borders. The Afghan trans women are like sisters. We speak the same language," Namkeen said.***

"Your community always has such problems," the police said to Annie.

According to the lawyer, Aminullah Khan Kundi, many trans people do not come forward to report cases of violence, abuse, and harassment. Oftentimes, once a case is registered, the victim is even more in danger than before. The accused will intimidate the victim, threatening more violence unless the victim drops the charges. Even if an FIR is registered, a financial settlement is reached between the two parties. The police are known to collude with the accused party to avoid any repercussions, and the case is dissolved within hours.

In the absence of legal mechanisms towards justice, Namkeen Peshawri, a trans woman activist based in Peshawar, encourages community-centric survivor support for victims. She runs a Trans Support Group, comprised of Pakistani and Afghan trans people, where she provides housing to Afghan trans people fleeing Afghanistan and offers them support. Through her collective, Namkeen provides communal housing support to Afghan trans people by hosting them and encouraging her Pakistani friends to do the same.

"I don't believe in borders. The Afghan trans women are like sisters. We speak the same language," Namkeen said.

The police's attitude towards trans people in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, located in the northwestern region of Pakistan, is hostile. In one of the TikTok videos that resurfaced over the internet recently, which was shared over 10,000 times, a dance function that comprised trans people performers is interrupted by two policemen. Immediately, a crowd of trans women gathered around the police officers, clapping. Unlike conventional clapping, the hijra clap typically occupies more space, commanding visual and aural attention, and can express happiness, joban (endorsement), anger, the onset of a fight, or protest. As the clap gets louder and more zealous, more power is conveyed.

The police officer said: "You have to seek permission for such functions from the police station. At least twenty people in the area have complained that they cannot sleep."

"This is a wedding function," interrupted one of the members from the crowd. The police officer raised his finger and stated: "There is a way to do things."

The Tiktok video unravels the power dynamics between trans people and police officers; how queer spaces are surveilled, and the patronizing tone in which trans people are treated and corrected. The state-led surveillance is an inherited colonial legacy in which the British criminalized queer people in the sub-continent under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871. According to the historian Jessica Hinchy, the British put *Hijras* (an umbrella term for queer people) under the 'criminal tribes' category that included nomadic tribes and queer people because they defied colonial notions of borders, mobility, and occupation. By criminalizing queer people, *Hijras* were easy to monitor, surveil, and control.

The tribal belt of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, formerly known as Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), that borders Afghanistan, has been particularly vulnerable to police surveillance and control. During colonial times, the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) was introduced, which treated the tribal regions not as part of Pakistan's constitutional mainstream but as an exception zone where the rule of law was suspended in favor of collective punishment, arbitrary detention, and administrative justice. This legal framework enabled the Pakistani state to justify surveillance, displacement, and militarization as part of state security.

Even though the FCR was abolished in 2018, the remnants of the colonial legacy impact the economy of trans people who are largely Afghan. Namkeen Peshawri states that Afghan trans women residing near the tribal belt are more vulnerable to attacks and surveillance. She says that the religious leaders, or *ulema,* have issued a religious ruling, or a *fatwa,* against trans people. The *ulema* claim that trans people in the area are responsible for spreading vulgarity. With no dance functions in that area, trans people's livelihoods have been severely impacted. Namkeen knows at least fifty trans women who are living hand-to-mouth and are compelled to engage in sex work, which exposes them to violence, abuse, and diseases.

Annie aspires to move abroad by seeking asylum like her other friends. She believes that her life would be better as she would be able to have greater mobility and safety.

"My life is like that of a dog. All day the dog barks, but then at night, the dog retreats to a corner and remains silent. All day, we try to make ends meet, go to dance functions, and are then silently cornered," Annie said.

For Annie, going back home is not an option. She would risk her life if she went back to Afghanistan.

"My mother calls me an orphan."

Annie bursts into tears as she thinks about her home and family.



Annie looks out her apartment window, taking in the morning light and Peshawar's cityscape. Photo credit: Jamaima Afridi, March 21, 2025.



Annie looks in the mirror while carefully applying lipstick — a quiet moment of self-affirmation. Photo credit: Jamaima Afridi, March 21, 2025.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rida is an aspiring academic. Her research interests lie at the intersection of queer theory, migration and ethnicity. She is also a feminist organizer.

*Name has been changed to ensure anonymity and protect the identity of our source.

THE CONCEPT OF "CHI" AS REGARDS IGBO ONTOLOGY ON GENDER AND SEXUALITY

BY OBINNA TONY-FRANCIS OCHEM

The Igbo people of Nigerian culture often repeat an unfounded account of their origins. Many believe they are the lost tribe of Judah due to perceived similarities between Igbo culture and Judaism. This belief manifests in their Zionist stance on the Israel-Palestine political issue. It has also led some Igbo Nigerians to practice Judaism despite Catholicism and Anglicanism being the dominant religions and legacies of colonialism. While traditional religious practices still exist, Abrahamic religions thrive more prominently. In Igbo culture, "Chi" is a guardian spirit that guides an individual. When the physical body dies, the "Chi" does not; instead, it searches for a newborn to inhabit. It's a concept known as reincarnation. Similarly, in Judaism, there is also a belief that a soul can be reborn after death.

Igbo cosmology has existed for centuries and has been passed down through oral traditions and cultural practices. "Chi" is a being that holds, initiates, and controls an individual's destiny (Okoro et al., 2021). I was fortunate to meet my grandfather while he was alive and witness firsthand how he performed his traditional rituals. He prayed to his "Chi" for protection or good fortune for his family. Growing up, I understood "Chi" to mean "God" in the Abrahamic sense rather than a divine force within us as Igbo people. It's the spirit and soul that guide one through life. In naming practices, Igbo people often add the prefix "Chi" to various names. "Chi" is a focal point in Igbo psychology. Without "Chi," we are merely flesh that exists. "Chi" is the soul, spirit, and essence of existence. It's one's deity (Onukawa, 2000).

> *"Without "Chi," we are merely flesh that exists. "Chi" is the soul, spirit, and essence of existence."*

While Igbo still believe in reincarnation, the modern interpretation usually assumes that reincarnation follows gendered lines, meaning a woman's "Chi" would reincarnate into a female body, never that a woman's "Chi" could inhabit a male body. This assumption aligns with the rigid conservative definition of gender and sexual orientation. But what if reincarnation is not so rigid? What if "Chi" is more fluid?

Igbo ontology is rarely discussed in popular culture, appearing mostly in academic texts. However, Nigerian authors have recently become more audacious in expressing their culture through literature. These works explore important questions about gender, sexuality, and the role of metaphysical spirit, known as "Chi," in shaping the psychological mind. Akwaeke Emezi, in their novel *The Death of Vivek Oji*, poses an important question: "What if queerness and what our spirit and soul symbolize result from these beings moving from one flesh to another?" The existence of gender non-conformity and diverse sexual orientation further supports this point. In *The Death of Vivek Oji*, Vivek is a queer man, born to an Igbo Nigerian father and an Indian-Tamil mother, similar to Emezi themselves. Vivek is born on the day his maternal grandmother dies, and the novel's narration suggests that Vivek is the reincarnation of his grandmother, evidenced by their resemblance, birthmarks, and mannerisms.

Chigozie Obioma's *An Orchestra of Minorities* explores the concept of "Chi" in a novel told from the perspective of this guardian spirit who has to inhabit his host from the beginning. The story navigates the host's journey from an Igbo town to Cyprus to pursue studies and back home after discovering he had been scammed. *An Orchestra of Minorities* gives "Chi" agency, allowing readers to understand and gain insight into its thoughts as it narrates the host's personal life. This spirit "being" marvels at the world and narrates his host's daily actions.

In *An Orchestra of Minorities,* "Chi" is not directly linked to the protagonist, Chinonso, in the same way as Vivek's "Chi" is. Ahunna, Vivek's paternal grandmother's "Chi," takes over Vivek's body at birth. Though assigned male and raised as a boy in 1990s Igbo society, Vivek grows up identifying as a woman. Among his friends, he was identified by his grandmother's name, "Nnemdi," meaning "my mother lives," a reflection of spiritual inheritance. This name is only known to his mother, father, uncle, and brother.

Gender non-conformity has always existed in Igbo culture. In the 1970s, after the Nigerian Civil War, a notable figure, Area Scatter, who was assigned male at birth, disappeared during the War and returned, socially presenting as a woman. In this new identity, she doubled as a musician and was not ostracized but embraced. She was performing for the "Nze na Ozo," the highest and most important spiritual, religious, and social group in Igbo culture.

Igbo cultural conceptions of gender are fluid compared to the Western traditional definition of gender. For instance, same-sex marriage exists among women based on cultural requirements (Urama, 2019). Though the same-sex practice of "female husbands" exists in Igbo culture largely due to misogyny, it still demonstrates how our culture is not totally aligned in terms of gender and sexuality with Western culture as portrayed after colonialism. Similarly, the role of "male daughter" allows women to inherit properties without being classified as the socially acceptable "womanhood." While misogynistic, Western marriage, shaped by Abrahamic religions, historically positioned women as property, but has since evolved progressively to embrace more egalitarian

principles, and this Igbo phenomenon could approach the same. Unlike ancient Western society, in Igbo society, women were never groomed as subservient, inferior, and voiceless (Emeka-Nwobia, 2021). However, while marginalized, they wielded power through women's groups such as "Umuada," who made decisions in the society as the council of women in charge of peacemaking and social governance and, sometimes, as priestesses and chieftains.

When Akweke Emezi published their debut novel, *Freshwater*, in 2018, I didn't fully grasp its semi-autobiographical argument until I read their third book, *The Death of Vivek Oji*. I had to revisit *Freshwater*. Unlike Vivek Oji, Ada, the protagonist in *Freshwater*, exists in multiplicity. The novel is written from Ada's perspective and is narrated through the "we" plural pronoun. It reflects the Igbo cultural belief in duality, the co-existence of the human and spirit worlds. The spirit world bears the semblance of this world in its ordinary existence. These realms of the spirit and human world are not truly separate but intertwined, according to Igbo culture (Okoro et al., 2021). Given this, what's the cultural context of gender and sexuality in Igbo society today if these worlds—spirit and human—constantly intersect?

The Death of Vivek Oji has made me interrogate my own identity. In reflecting on my life, I see evidence that, like Vivek, I may be a reincarnation. My mother became pregnant a year before my grandfather's brother's wife died in the late 1990s. I was born the same year she died. My belief in God as a Deist without religious affiliation has shaped my worldview in a totally different way. Growing up, I observed the contrasting faiths within my family: my grandmother, a devout Catholic; my grandfather, a traditionalist who prayed to his "Chi," and my uncle, a Protestant.

I was born exactly when this woman, a part of my family, died. Is it possible that her "Chi" has become a part of me through reincarnation? It could be, considering our trajectory. Unlike my grandfather, my great uncle (his older brother) was educated. His wife was educated, too, and a schoolteacher. My aunt once told me that this woman was extremely introverted and also spoke about how her husband mistreated her. I am also extremely introverted, stutter, and shy away from meeting new people. Is this a mere coincidence?

My aunt recently explained the significance of those "marks." Emezi's *Freshwater* was met with social disapproval from Nigerians, including non-Igbos, largely due to the author's LGBTQ+ identity and their public disputes with a prominent Nigerian writer known for her transphobic views. They were criticized for writing *Freshwater*, with some arguing that they explored "Ogbanje" identity for the Western gaze without engaging their work deeply aside from a few limited perspectives of the culture. "Ogbanje" spirits are viewed by many as repugnant (Eruka, 2023). The spirit is believed to be such because it hosts the body of a newborn, bringing happiness, only to die shortly after birth. Sometimes, these children survive, and when they do, they are marked on the side of their faces. While Akwaeke Emezi describes herself as a non-binary Ogbanje, I do not. I describe myself as a queer gay man. Yet, as a child, I have always had tiny marks on both sides of my face, near my eyes, barely visible and almost faded over the years. Told me that when my mother returned to the village from the city, she had planned to stay for several months before returning to the city. One morning, my mother developed a severe headache and was taken to the hospital by my grandmother. There, in the hospital, she collapsed and died. Many family members still speculate that my mother might have taken her own life, having faced gossip and partial alienation from people in the community in which she grew up. In the Southeast Nigerian version of Catholicism, though I am unsure if this is universal, if a daughter has a child outside wedlock, the mother is prohibited from receiving holy communion for a certain period. After my mother's death, I started experiencing recurring illnesses. I was taken to a place my aunt never explained to me, and the mark was inscribed on my face. I wonder if my mother's "Chi" intended to shape my gender and sexuality as a masculine-presenting, effeminate gay man. By my interpretation, the mark could have been an "Ogbanje" mark used to protect children from the malevolent spirit and keep them safe (Uche et al., 2013).

This makes gender and sexuality a complex topic in Igbo Nigerian culture, particularly before the advent of colonialism. Sex was acknowledged, but gender, shaped by societal expectations, was seen as fluid. "Chi" is a personal destiny that's assigned to every individual at conception (Okoro et al., 2021). The flesh dies, but "Chi" never does. *An Orchestra of Minorities* interprets "Chi" as a spirit that does not necessarily influence the flesh's decision. It merely watches and guides. Throughout the novel, the "Chi" observes and evaluates the protagonist's actions without intervening. This differs from the portrayal of "Chi" in Akwaeke Emezi's *The Death of Vivek Oji*.

In 2020, veteran Nigerian actor Pete Edochie, then 73 years old, claimed that the "Ogbanje" spirit caused homosexuality. While his comment seemed like an endorsement of Akwaeke Emezi's work, he likely intended it as a condemnation rather than support. If we consider Vivek, it's reasonable to conclude that after the death of his grandmother, her "Chi" took over his flesh. This cultural belief raises important questions: Do distinctions in gender and sexuality exist in terms of our spiritual essence? Scientifically, human behavior is shaped by the psychology of the mind and soul, which governs actions. These "Chi" beings are in control of our actions and guide us.

In the cultural context of gender and sexuality, Igbo culture has historically viewed sex as binary, based on visible sexual characteristics. Yet, its societal expectations of gender have been more fluid compared to Western societies, where sexuality has traditionally been framed as exclusively heterosexual until recently. However, in today's world, Igbo-Nigerian society largely follows Western orthodoxy, a relic of colonialism and the broader national framework in which it exists in Nigeria.

In my understanding, "Chi" is non-binary. It takes over the body of a newborn and grants it agency. These "Chi" exist beyond societal gender constructs, aligning with their inclinations toward gender and sexuality, while biology remains fixed. Unlike Western colonial frameworks of gender, these metaphysical beings defy societal conditioning, offering a more fluid interpretation of identity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Obinna Tony-Francis Ochem is a freelance writer who navigates gender, class, sexuality, climate change, and shapeshifting monsters. He is an alumnus of several writing workshops, LGBTQ+ fellowships, and mentorship programmes. He currently volunteers as a research writer with ReportOUT, where he contributes to historical and political analysis of LGBTQ+ rights. As part of ReportOUT, he has worked on their UN submission and contributed to their SOGIESC country database. He is currently co-researching intersex/trans identities for their upcoming "OUT in Nigeria".

A BRIEF CHRONICLE OF AN ANCESTRAL JOURNEY

BY ANGE CAYUMAN



Ángeles Cruz in front of the Municipal Agency in Villa Guadalupe Victoria, Oaxaca, Mexico. Photo credit: Ange Cayuman, January 5, 2022

A decade ago, I began searching for Ancestral Diversity in film and audiovisual media. One of its origins was a visit I made in 2013 to the Museum of Pre-Columbian and Indigenous Art in Montevideo, Uruguay. They were showing the exhibition "Original Pleasures. Sexuality, Identity, and Gender in Indigenous Societies." Two films about the Muxe, called "the third sex" by the Zapotec community of Juchitán de Zaragoza, Oaxaca, Mexico, caught my attention.

After years of sexual dissident activism, I needed to explore experiences that resonated with my sexual dissident identity and my belonging to the Mapuche people, an Indigenous community in the southern part of what are now Argentina and Chile. A few years later, I settled in Santiago, Chile, and met Seba Calfuqueo, a Mapuche visual artist, and her video performance "You Will Never Be a Weye." In this work, she interweaves family stories of rejection of homosexuality, passages from colonial chronicles, and a visual aesthetic proposal centered on the artist dressing her body in the traditional fashion of Mapuche women, but in fantasy clothing. Five minutes that open up an understanding of the complexities of identity and colonial violence.

At that moment, I understood the potential of audiovisual language to enable and facilitate conversations about Ancestral Diversity, that is, about being Mapuche and dissident, not as a summation of identities or categories but as an interweaving. The challenge was to uncover interrelationships between collective historical processes, possible ancestral sex-gender genealogies, and contemporary dissident life processes. The following year, Seba invited me to be part of her audiovisual project "Domo." I hesitated to join this work because "domo" means "woman" in Mapudungun, the Mapuche language, and I was feeling that this nomination no longer represented me, but I accepted. I wanted to be part of that dialogue. At that time, Seba identified as a gay man, and I as a lesbian. Over time, we have supported each other in our identity-forming processes, and today Seba is "she" and I am "he."

I began an investigation and search for films and audiovisual works about dissidence from different Indigenous peoples. I realized there was a world rich in dissident works from communities that represented themselves, that is, works made by dissident and Indigenous filmmakers and visual artists. This search intensified when, in 2019, I began working on the International Festival of Indigenous Film and Arts in Wallmapu, FicWallmapu, in Temuco, southern Chile. This was a recommendation from Seba Calfuqueo, as the festival team wanted to address this topic. I proposed that we use the concept of Ancestral Diversity, borrowed from the relatives in Mexico who, in 2012, presented it in a Human Rights report before the Organization of American States (OAS) on diverse Indigenous populations, information that was shared with me by producer and filmmaker of the Wayuu people, David Hernández.

One of the actions we carried out was the art residency "Territories in Tension" in the town of Challupen, near Lake Calafquen and the Villarrica Volcano, in southern Chile. We proposed creating works related to this concept, based on a stay on these lands and a dialogue with the Mapuche community that inhabits them. One of the resident artists, Neyen Pailamilla, met the Mapuche poet Gabriela Llanquinao as

part of her research, who shared a pewma (dream) she had had with her. This process gave rise to the audiovisual work called "Wüfko," which means "spring" in Mapudungun. In the Mapuche tradition, pewma are fundamental, and Neyen, assuming the role of pewmatufe (interpreter of dreams), created a piece that, in three minutes and fourteen seconds, interweaves narrative, dream, feminine sexuality, and a performance where her body becomes another element of the land.

During the pandemic, we held online discussions and film screenings about Ancestral Diversity, and I met the filmmakers of these Indigenous films. In 2021, I began traveling to their countries to meet and interview them. I also obtained press accreditation for the Morelia Film Festival, which has an important window for the distribution of Latin American Indigenous cinema. In a café near the movie theaters, I interviewed Celina Manuel, a Purépecha filmmaker who was premiering the short film *La Espera* at the festival. The synopsis reads: "Yazmín and Zenaida, daughter-in-law and mother-in-law, live awaiting the arrival of their husbands. A time that will reveal infinite possibilities." This film, which has been widely circulated at screenings and festivals, addresses the situation of the communities' migration processes, what happens to those who stay behind, and the flow of sexual and emotional relationships.

At the same time, *Nudo Mixteco*, the multi-award-winning film by Mixteca director Ángeles Cruz, premiered at the same festival. One of the film's three stories is about a lesbian couple who reunite after one of them leaves town due to the discrimination she suffered as a teenager. In *Nudo*, as Ángeles affectionately calls her film, we find one of the most beautiful sex scenes between Indigenous women I've ever seen. I witnessed the wave of applause in the theater when they announced that Cruz won Best Screenplay and that the film won the Audience Award at the festival. Ángeles had traveled to Spain a few days earlier, so I sent her the photos and videos I took of the event. We agreed to meet in her town, in Oaxaca, upon her return.

On November 9, 2021, I arrived at night in Villa Guadalupe Victoria, a town in the upper Mixteca region of Oaxaca, Mexico. When I got out of the car, Ángeles Cruz was waiting for me. I spent a week accompanying her in various duties as community treasurer, a position she held that year, which is highly relevant to mention, as the Mexican filmmaker's cinema is anchored in her relationship with her people. She has presented her projects at the community assembly of Villa Guadalupe Victoria, filmed in its surroundings, with professional actors and actresses and members of the community for her characters.

One day after her duties, we were having coffee, and I asked her what tiricia was. Her first short film is called *Tiricia, or How to Cure Sadness*. Without further ado, she said, “Let’s go to the river.” Along the way, we picked white roses and wildflowers of the same color. Noticing some people watching us and whispering, I mentioned it to her. “They’re always talking about me,” she replied. When we arrived, she showed me how to cleanse. I rolled up my pants, took off my shoes, and entered the water. I greeted the river like I do in my village, lifting four handfuls of water and whispering: “*Mari mari ngen ko, chalieyu lewfü.* I greet you, spirit of the river.” Then I cried until there was no more river in my eyes. When I finished, I let go of the flowers and didn’t look back. The sadness was gone.

To calm me from that profound moment of unraveling my pain and insecurities resulting from various instances of homophobic violence, Ángeles took me to the shore of a large lagoon. On the way, we passed a small blue house. “We were going to film *The Letter* here, but we thought it was too fairy-tale-like,” she told me. *The Letter* is Cruz’s second short film and the first Indigenous lesbian film written and directed by



Ancestral Diversity Film Showcase in Daupará, where a still from the video *Eymi Inchiw* by artist Pablo Lincura was shown. Photo credit: Ange Cayuman, October 18, 2022



From left to right, Celina Manuel, Laura Nuwuanda, and Ange Cayuman at the Transfeminist Film Festival in Guadalajara, Mexico. Credit: Ange Cayuman, November 4, 2023

an Indigenous lesbian woman in Abya Yala, the words the Gunadule people use to refer to what we know as the Americas.

I continued traveling and in 2022, I landed in Bogotá. My colleagues from the production company Sentarte, Arte con Sentido, had invited me to participate in the Daupará, the Colombian Indigenous Film and Video Festival. They initiated meetings with diverse women from Indigenous communities and invited me to give an online talk on the topic in 2021. For this edition of Daupará, they asked me to give an in-person talk on film and Ancestral Diversity. I prepared the exhibition "Tüfachi purun inchiñ ngealu / This dance is for us," inspired by a verse by the poet Daniela Catrileo. Initially composed of six works by Mapuche artists representing sexual dissidence, over time, it has incorporated works from other communities.

For the past five years, I've traveled throughout Mexico, Colombia, and Chile, connecting with filmmakers and visual artists from the Gunadule, Wayuu, Arhuaco, Purépecha, Maya, Mapuche, Mixteco, and Embera Chamí communities, who make films and videos about Ancestral Diversity. Through the interviews and conversations we've had, I've seen a commitment to self-representation on these issues and a willingness to foster dialogue within their own communities. An example of this is Ysai Muñoz Bueno's documentary *Sexilio*, in which the protagonist explains to her community in an assembly: "I dress as a woman; I am who I am. I feel proud of who I am. I want to be recognized for being an Indigenous trans person."

More than ten years after the first audiovisual works of self-representation of Ancestral Diversities, I celebrate the renewed circulation of these imaginaries, which are part of the struggles that Indigenous peoples wage in the current colonial and extractive context. As part of our communities, we reverse the processes of dispossession by generating our own art forms. There are festivals and film exhibitions like Daupará, which has been addressing this theme for three years, and also exhibition windows like the one presented by the Alborde Transfeminist Women's Festival, with its Rooted Identities category.

I also observe a convergence between the cinema of Indigenous peoples of Abya Yala and cinemas from other latitudes, such as Hawaii, where important films on Ancestral Diversities have been produced through the search for their historical narratives and which have been very well received in the exhibitions where I have mediated the artistic and cultural aspects of the films. Other collective processes related to the production and circulation of this cinema are the creation of spaces for women and dissidents, such as the Weavers of the Image Collective. In 2023, as a result of several meetings, this network of young people from Colombia was formed to promote cinema and communication based on Ancestral Diversities.

Now and then, I discover new and old Indigenous dissident works in video poetry, music videos, documentaries, fiction, and visual arts. I feel part of a collective force that expands the political, cultural, and artistic diversity of Indigenous peoples through the audiovisual arts. This journey has been a healing process for me and has given me the experience of being part of a community being cultivated across hundreds of miles.

This year, I began a mediation project for educational events on Ancestral Diversity cinema with colleagues from the Weavers of Image Collective. Through the creation of guides, we seek to foster gatherings and conversations characteristic of community worlds and to fill our territories with images, sounds, and dissident movement.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ange Cayuman is a Mapuche trans writer, journalist, and audiovisual creator. He works in film programming, mediation, and audiovisual curatorships across Argentina, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico. His research focuses on the diaspora of Indigenous peoples, Indigenous audiovisual archives, poetry by Indigenous women, and the self-representations of ancestral diversities.

MIDSUMMA PRIDE PARADE RECLAIMS SPACE BY LIMITING POLICE PRESENCE

BY CRUSHING COLONIALISM



Photo courtesy of Midsumma Festival and J Forsyth

In a bold move to prioritize the safety and dignity of marginalized communities, organizers of Melbourne's 2025 Midsumma Pride Parade requested that workplace-based groups, including police, march without uniforms—a decision grounded in trauma-informed practice. The directive acknowledges what LGBTQ+ and especially Indigenous queer communities have long known: the presence of uniformed police can trigger fear, not celebration.

For many, police uniforms represent not protection, but the enforcement of state violence. Across Australia and globally, LGBTQ+ communities—particularly trans people, people of color, and Indigenous people—have been repeatedly criminalized, surveilled, and brutalized by police. Pride itself was born from resistance to this violence. The presence of armed officers in parades erodes that history.

Rather than honoring the experiences of those most impacted by police brutality, some groups opted to withdraw when asked to forgo uniforms. But the decision to center healing over performative inclusion is a powerful reminder: Pride is not for institutions but for the people, especially those who have been silenced and harmed.

Transgender Victoria also withdrew from the parade, citing community discontent with ongoing harms perpetrated by the police. Their decision reflects a growing demand for true accountability, cultural change, and systems of justice that actually serve queer and trans lives.

This year's Midsumma Pride Parade was a reclamation and a refusal to accommodate the parade for the comfort of power structures. Instead, it returns focus to solidarity, safety, and joy for the communities Pride was built to uplift.

Source: The Guardian, "Police withdraw from Melbourne's Pride Parade after officers barred from marching in uniform ." (2025 Jan 21)

Call for Submissions!

The Magazine is seeking contributions for its upcoming issues. In September, we will focus on Indigenous identity. For December, we are seeking stories about Indigenous people who have made a difference in 2025. We invite Indigenous journalists, artists, and content creators to submit proposals for provocative stories, thoughtful articles, artistic creations, and powerful narratives that address these themes. Send your proposal to: iriofrio@crushingcolonialism.org



Photo courtesy of Tony Enos

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