

Queer and the Cost of Living Crisis (Royal Society of Edinburgh Seminar Series)

With L.E. Fox, author of *This Has Always Been a War. The Radicalization of a Working Class Queer*, and Yvette Taylor author of *Working-Class Queers. Time, Place and Politics*

L.E. Fox is a queer, non-binary, working-class writer and journalist. Their work, which focuses on issues of class, gender, sexuality, the environment, and the messy places where these things intersect, has appeared with *The Guardian*, *Vice*, and *The Globe and Mail*, among many other outlets. *This Has Always Been a War* is their first book.

Yvette Taylor is a professor in the Strathclyde Institute of Education, a queer feminist sociologist, and author of *Working-Class Queers* (Pluto, 2023). Yvette researches intersecting inequalities, often including social class, gender and sexuality, and is now editing a collection titled *Queer in A Wee Place* (Bloomsbury, 2025).

The below conversation took place as part of the Royal Society of Edinburgh funded Queer and the Cost of Living Crisis Seminar Series. This Series is part of Yvette Taylor's RSE Personal Fellowship on Queer Social Justice.¹

Yvette Taylor (YT): So welcome again to the second Queer and the Cost-of-living Crisis seminar series. So far we've had Kevin Guyan from the University of Glasgow, and in the new year we'll have a panel with Patrick Harvie, who is a Member of the Scottish Parliament, and the Equality Network, as well as a student panel in February with LGBTQ+ student association reps. So, watch out for that! But today I'm delighted to welcome Laurence Fox, whose work I came across a couple of years ago and I found it really inspirational, so thanks Laurence. Laurence, or LE, Fox is a queer, non-binary, working-class writer and journalist. Their work has been published by *The Guardian*, *Vice* and *The Global and Mail*. Laurence is also an author of *This Has Always been a War: The Radicalisation of a Working-Class Queer*, a collection of personal political essays exploring the intersections of class, gender, sexuality under capitalism.

This a queer space, and a safe space, and while that might mean different things for different people, here it means LGBTQ+ inclusive and, for example, we might want to be mindful of language, of assumptions about another person's gender, pronouns, sexuality, disability, ethnic identity, or life experiences. We'll likely cover difficult topics, of inequality, poverty, abuse, crisis - let's be open to thinking, being challenged, and learning - and I include myself in that of course! And if you need a break, please take that. Be prepared to challenge harassment and discrimination and where appropriate to report it.² And mindful of the contradictions and conflicts that can occur when

¹ Other series' transcripts available here: <https://pure.strath.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/183555017/Guyan-Taylor-RSE-2023-Queer-and-the-cost-of-living-crisis-data-in-as-crisis.pdf>

² LGBT Scotland and Student Association Guidelines: <https://www.lgbthealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Safe-Space-Commitment-online-events.pdf>
<https://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/about/policy/internal/safespaces>

institutional or organizations are turned to for protection, I want to offer Laurence's words on 'safe spaces', as maybe more effective than official process, and in conveying the spirit of the Queer and the Cost of Living Crisis Seminar Series, in which this event sits: 'I love the trans women calling out TERFS like J.K. Rowling, fanning the flames of the pyres on which the Harry Potter books burn, the literal smoking ruins of cis-heteronormative mediocrity...' (101: 2023).

The book weaves in a huge amount of personal, social, and political detail across time and place, and seasons. It uses ethnographic reporting, autobiographical writing, policy critiques, case studies, analyses of books, and my favourite analysis is of *The Jungle Book*, as well as dreams and dog stories, and thanks to Herman (L.E.'s dog). To quote Laurence, if I can briefly, 'it's about the story. The story, the whole story, from beginning to end, is very important. As a culture we deal so much in half-stories these days. I want to tell the whole story. I'm a storyteller, and every good story, every true story anyway, is equal parts an act of forgiveness and an act of revenge'. So for PhD students and academics in the room we might call the book mixed methods or interdisciplinary.

But it's a book that's undisciplined I think, and speaks back to its own powerful questions, including – let me pick up the book – 'what if working-class people stopped working?' 'What if we refused to let the upper classes have so much more than us, and told them that they couldn't any more?' and 'how can we have feminism without queer women and non-binary people?' Throughout the book there's a profound acknowledgement of all essential overlooked, underpaid, invisibilised, belittled, imagined as unskilled, unqualified and frequently abused workers, often abused at the hands of employers. And I think Laurence's dedication at the front of the book really highlights this too, and throughout. But the acknowledgement at the front reads, 'for my people, the working-classes, who cook the meals and pick the fruits, who serve the tables and stock the shelves, who work the gigs and deliver the orders. We are the makers and builders and doers of this world, and all that is in it belongs to us'.

I really appreciate this book Laurence, and thanks for writing it. Can I maybe start off by asking, what are your sources of your, we might say, I'm a sociologist, might say data, and this is maybe a methods question on how to write a book that we're part of, when there's a danger maybe of writing only about ourselves? And how do we connect our personal stories with those wider collective stories and politics when the personal is social too, and we do more than just gathering data?'

L.E Fox (LEF): Yeah. What a lot of people, first of all thank you so much for having me here today, it's a real pleasure to see everybody. It can be a little bit isolating here in the Yukon, and sometimes I kind of forget that I wrote a book. Some people, or I often find people are surprised to learn that by trade I'm actually a science journalist, and so I deal heavily with data. And one of the reasons that I select the methods that I select for the kind of essay-writing and the kind of reporting that I do in *This Has Always Been a War*, and which I'm currently engaged in – I'm in the middle of finishing my second book, which is called *This Book is a Knife*, and it's about queerness, class, and climate change – and I use similar methods in that, although I draw much more heavily on data, for obvious reasons. Data doesn't mean anything if it doesn't have a story that goes with it.

A really good example of this is a piece that I wrote a couple of years ago for a Canadian magazine called *The Tyee* – a tyee, if you don't know, is a kind of salmon – about the forest fires that have been devastating BC for the last few years. And the stories that we get about that are always like 'this is how much climate change is damaging the forest, and this is how much forestland has been destroyed, and this is how many houses have been lost'. But we never get the story of the working-class people who are now displaced because we're in the middle of a crushing housing crisis. And

when you lose housing, or when you change the landscape, you, by necessity, move people around. And if there already weren't enough places for people to live, the people who don't have places to live any more are the most vulnerable people.

And during those forest fires, which were sparked by heatwaves, a substantial number – and I don't have the exact number in front of me – but several hundred people died during those heatwaves in Vancouver. And, you know, you can say three hundred people died, but that doesn't really mean anything to a reader. What it does mean something to a reader is two and a half full city busloads that that represents. If you line up two and a half buses and fill them to capacity that's how many people died. And the people who died were the elderly, were the vulnerable, were basically people who could not afford to not cook the fuck to death. And I think that there's a real siloing – I'm not an academic, I'm a very working-class person who has had a rather unusual career trajectory, but I'm quite well-read, and I always find it funny that, like I've written, or I've read fifteen books about climate change this year for the work that I'm doing, and it's always very obvious who those books are written for. And they're not written for working-class people. They're written for other academics and other middle-class, usually white, people, middle and upper-middle class people, or other scientists. And I always think that's funny because that's not the story, like that doesn't tell the story of the thing that they're trying to tell. They're just talking, they're talking themselves in circles in these siloes.

And so I try, in my work, to use storytelling combined with data and personal experience to create a bridge between classes and between experiences, that allows the reader to come with me. I was teaching a small class here in the Yukon recently in creative non-fiction, and I was explaining that there's different kinds of creative non-fiction and that, you know, there's communicative, which is basically just like hard news, like 'I'm trying to tell you a thing, here's the thing that happened, here's the data about that', bang, you're done. There's combative, which is where you are writing an op-ed or an opinion piece where someone is trying to convince you of something, and that can be done in a number of ways, but it breaks down to, of course, the rhetorical. And then there's collaborative, and in collaborative writing, and in, there's also collaborative interviewing, but I'll stick to collaborative writing, in collaborative writing I'm trying to hold my hand out to you to bring you with me to come and see something. And I want you, in order to do that I have to make an emotional connection to you so that you can come with me and trust me to show you something. Even if it's something you don't like, even if it's something that at the end you disagree with, in that moment I want you to just come with me and see a thing, and then you can decide for yourself.

And I think that a lot of, especially with the way the political climate has evolved and the way that we have been trained to read media and engage with media - both journalism and books in general, fiction and non-fiction – we've been trained to look at them as combative pieces. And there's a room for combat, but I think that we miss something when we don't engage with the collaborative.

YT: Yeah absolutely. There's so many thoughts. And I was thinking of, when I was writing *Working-Class Queers*, who are often not the imagined reader of many books, whether academic or more journalistic or popular, I was reminded by Pluto [the publishers] that working-class queers was intended for a crossover audience. And I had trouble kind of imagining who this crossover person was! The book should, hopefully, appeal to both academic audiences and non-academic, or popular, audiences. And for me it was a little bit, I mean writing is a struggle, we know this, but also imagining *who* was kind of being positioned in those groups, and having had to skill myself up and learn the language of being an academic, which is a classed language, to try to kind of unpick and undo that and appeal popularly. I think what I'm sort of imagining is the need to write in many different voices and many different forums. And I imagine that comes in through your journalism as well.

But I was really intrigued about the title, the *This Has Always Been a War*, and I think we're encouraged to think about like the fires or floods as exceptional events versus that repetition as crisis is the norm, or, as you say, this has *always* been a war. Did you want to say a bit more about the title and how you arrived at that title?

LEF: I think it's only become more apparent to me, and I'm not sure what it's like in Europe, I've never been to Scotland, and so I'm speaking very specifically from a North American perspective right now, and a North America that is increasingly divided in terms of its wealth and social values. Capitalism itself is inherently predicated on the necessity to do violence to working-class bodies, and those bodies are often, the kinds of violence that are done to those bodies is stratified by race, by gender, by sexuality, by queerness, by a whole host of things. But capitalism requires a large, cheap labour force, and in order to have that labour force serve you capitalism requires that that labour force obey.

And so we are taught that the only forms of violence that are acceptable, a kid can't push another kid in a schoolyard because that's violence, and you can't punch a cop even if that cop is hurting someone that they maybe shouldn't be hurting, you can't grab that cop, because the cop is the state and the state is capitalism, and any form of pushback against that, even if it's, for example, to stop working, as we saw during the pandemic. If you refuse to work under those conditions and you refuse to obey and you refuse to accept the wages that you are paid or the conditions that you work under or the physical violence that is laid against your body when you refuse to accept those conditions, you are doing violence yourself. And that is positioned as an active, unacceptable aggression.

Whereas when you look at the kind of language that we use when we talk about war, when we talk about two combatants moving against each other – and I think it's so interesting because, you know, you watch TV and there's so much violence on TV, but it's always positioned in a way that the person doing that violence is in some way serving a greater cause, it's often the state – and that's okay. But for you to say walk into a bank and say 'listen I don't have any money, my family doesn't have any money, nobody has any money. We're going to starve, we can't pay our bills, we have medical debt, we're going to get evicted. I'm afraid I'm going to have to take a whole bunch of this stuff. Sorry', that's an unacceptable violence. But it's acceptable for you to be evicted and for your family to have nothing and for you to end up on the street and endure all of the forms of violence that occur there.

And so what I'm talking about, the war we're engaged with is the ideological war that capitalism presents us with, which is that bodies matter less than things, and the right to property is, it only extends to those who can afford it. There is an inherent hierarchical system built into capitalism that is predicated on the lie that you can move up classes. But in order to move up classes you have to have a continuously stable base who is willing to do that labour for you. And I'll give you a great example. Here in the Yukon housing crises are, I'm not going to apologise for my language because I speak as a working-class person who has worked in fields and on farms, it's fucked. Our housing crisis is fucked. We pay the same amount of money for absolute garbage housing, we have a one per cent vacancy rate, and there is a condo above – I work for IN Yukon as campaigns coordinator part-time right now. That's an environmental not-for-profit. Basically, I elbow caribou all day – and there is a condo above us that is selling for seven hundred K. That's like, those are like Toronto prices. Like I don't know if there's like a way for me to make you understand how absolutely insane that price point is. You cannot find a place to rent here as a single person.

And so what we're seeing is that working-class people can't afford to live here anymore so they're leaving, so there's this massive labour shortage. And the upper third tier of our population is

government and mining, who make three or four times as much as the average person on the bottom. And so suddenly you go to a coffee shop and you can't find anyone to pour you a cup of coffee or to clean the building or to do any of the basic, we have, the housing crisis and the cost-of-living is so incredibly high that we have a ten per cent job vacancy within our healthcare system and most of those jobs are lower tier jobs like basic lab assistant, because even they can't find housing. And so the very foundation of our society is starting to crumble and the people at the top are constantly asking each other, 'well where did all the workers go?' The workers left because there isn't anywhere for them to live and they can't afford to eat. And it's this very curious thing that happens within capitalism, where it's so ingrained within us, not just as an economic mode but as a culture and as, almost as a religion, where we just believe that this is the way that things should be, and so surely if you're at the top you deserve to be at the top. And when the bottom starts to fall apart it must be the fault of the bottom, not the fault of the top.

I don't know what it was like during the pandemic for you folks, but there was a lot of shaming of working-class people where, because they're like 'we don't want to go back to work when we could possibly die, or when we're making less than enough to live on. Why would we possibly go back to work?' And so there was this huge push to try to make people go back to stocking shelves and waiting tables and going back to work at the gym. And the impetus behind that was not necessarily that those things weren't being done or didn't, or that there weren't alternative ways to do that. It was just that the upper-classes wanted their lives to resume at the cost of the lower-classes. And when you have sectioned groups like that, when you have siloed groups like that, where one group has power and the other group does not, that's an inherent conflict. And the violence, and the kinds of things that happen to the bodies on the bottom is inherently a form of violence. When you don't have proper healthcare but the person above you does, because they can afford it and you can't, that's violence.

YT: Yes. I'm sure we recognise this across our own places, communities, cities, whether that's in Scotland or elsewhere, in the different types of Scotland, the different types of Glasgow, Edinburgh, and within that. But I wanted to, given that you mentioned service work there, and I think you start off with your own story of doing service work, and you've got a great quote – let me try and capture this – which talks about your own experiences of service work across seventeen years. And you say 'if my career as a waiter were a kid it would have a learner's permit and be bugging me to buy a car by now'. So you talk about those, you know, problems of harassment, poor wages, expectations around tipping as though to fill in for wages. But also that sort of joy and camaraderie. Like you talk about the joy of a full dining service. And I think you do an excellent job of going back and talking about the real problems, like wages not meeting housing costs, but also that element of getting on and getting by nonetheless.

So I just wanted to ask you about the service sector as important in thinking about queer radical presences, because I guess sometimes we have an imagination that the service sector is feminised, right? And sometimes that's articulated as a loss – a loss for working-class men. But I think you're telling a queerer story about the service sector industry.

LEF: I mean that piece, and a piece that I did for *The Globe and Mail* about the service industry, is probably the two pieces that I've been asked about most. And I think that, and it may be a bit different in Europe, because I understand that your service system is different in Europe. I have not experienced it myself. But in North America our service and tipping culture is a remnant of slavery, like actually. Like you, when slaves were freed in order to avoid paying them they created this tipping system where they basically gave freed black slaves a meal, and all of their wages were supplemented by the people that they served in restaurants. That's the origin of tipping in North

America. And that's quite well-documented. If you look at my book you'll find documentation for that, and there have been scholars who've done much better documentation or work on that than myself. But that's the origin of that in North America.

And so that has gradually extended culturally, although we do know that people of colour especially tend to make fewer tips, regardless of gender, and there is a discretion within the service industry that still exists, a discrimination within the service industry that still exists for people of colour. And there's some fascinating documentation on that, and there has been some fascinating research. We do know however that the people who make the most money are pretty, busty, blonde, white women, white cis women, and handsome male bartenders. And despite the fact that, as I document in my book, despite the fact that the service industry is almost entirely, servers themselves are almost entirely – it's something like eighty per cent or eighty-nine per cent, it's high – female, the majority of management is still male, as is the ownership of restaurants.

And I think service, at least in North America, is a really interesting way to look at capitalism as a microcosm, because it highlights the implicit nature of being working-class. And what's implied in service is that you are a servant. And what is being rewarded in service is complacency, obedience, and a willingness to serve. And it is implicit in that contract that during – in that unwritten contract – that during the time you are serving a customer your body, in some way, belongs to that person. And, you know, I write about that extensively. In my younger days when I was presenting as a much more feminine, in a much more feminine way - and this would've been in, you know, the early 2000s. Actually I think in the book, that opening book I'm actually writing about a Scottish pub. Canadians love Scottish pubs. I think it's the funniest shit. Like they throw us into kilts and then put a bunch of scotch on the wall, and you're like 'you're in a Scottish pub, hooray', and then like men have like, especially like white-collar men, kind of have like a weird fetish thing for this, it's very bizarre – but you get touched all the time. Like you get your ass grabbed, you get, and it's not just by staff, or sorry it's not just by customers. Staff will touch you inappropriately.

It's getting a bit better, but like one of my very first jobs, at eighteen or nineteen I worked in a sushi bar where I had to, I walked out in the middle of the shift as I was closing because the sushi chef propositioned me and when I said no he threatened me with a sushi knife. Like that's, there is a power dynamic, because they know you need that work. And so when you're dealing specifically with customers they know that not only do you need that work but they have control over how much money you go home with, direct control. And they've done studies on this, and I document this in the book, where some of New York's finest dining establishments attempted to go to a built-in tip system – and again I'm not sure how it works in Europe – but instead of having tipping be discretionary tipping was set at like eighteen per cent of your bill. And they found that customers were less satisfied with that dining experience and ordered less and felt that they were getting less value for their money even though they were technically paying the exact same amount. Because what was missing from that experience for them was power, was power over the person, usually a woman, that they got to control for that short period of time.

There's a very sexualised element and a very class-based element to that, and I think that it's, I'd love to write more about it someday, but I really feel like that is a moving parable of how capitalism functions. And so much of the labour that is done in those restaurants is done by women and is undervalued and underpaid because it's done by women and by femmes, because a lot of it is emotional. It's knowing what to expect from someone, it's anticipating need, it's fulfilling emotional need, it's small acts of kindness. It's seeing that someone has a cough and bringing them a cup of tea with honey in it without them asking. Those are, and like when I worked as a server – it's only been a couple of years since I haven't – those were things I quite enjoyed, because those are things that are

valuable to the people around you, is bringing pleasure and bringing ease and a moment of peace to people. But there is also implicit in that arrangement a sense of – and it depends on who you're working with and where you're working. Fine dining is notorious for this – but a sense of entitlement to that labour that is unpaid and unspoken.

YT: Yeah. I was just thinking, sticking with the theme of emotional labour, one of the chapters is titled 'The Happy Family Game', and you say that you won't play the happy family game, and how family frequently fails us, even though we've got all these emotions invested in it and even as we're meant to feel it as protection, or we're meant to feel it as some kind of cure for social ills. And you say that these stories, our stories, are going to be difficult to hear. So thinking about that theme of family, and all the sort of promise and failure of that, I wonder, and I wonder about this in my own work too, about what do we make of queers' desire for family?

LEF: I think that the desire for family has been confused with the desire for community, and the nuclear family, as it's presented within the happy family game, is actually a packaged power structure that has been marketed to us. It's a product. Case in point, something that has been a real gift in my life as a non-binary person is getting to move through the world first as a little girl and then as a young woman and then gradually moving down the spectrum to where I am now, where I'm very non-binary, and more masculine presenting that I probably have been in the past. I've had top surgery and I now live in this space between. And there's a very curious tipping point where I went from being a sex object to being a rival, and the way that I am treated by men, and by women, now, is so wildly different depending on how I'm read in a social situation. And I have so much more power now as someone who is masculine presenting, or more masculine presenting, even though like I'm five foot four for context, like I am not a tremendous human being. I am five foot four, but the way that I am spoken to and the way that I am listened to is so, like it is mind-blowing. And I am extremely aware of my power because I haven't always had it, and so I use it in a way, I try to make a point of using it in a way to protect the femmes around me. Because now I have an unusual space that I occupy, where men will listen to me in a way that they would not have listened to me before.

For example, I have a dog, I go to the dog park, everybody knows that one douchebag who has his big angry male dog who he won't control and causes problems for people at the dog park. Most of the people who go to the dog park are women and femmes, and then there's this one guy who's causing problems for everybody. And recently I turned around to him and told him he had to leave. And that's not something I probably could have done as a woman, and made this man leave, but it's something that I can do occupying this body because of the power that the family structure has ingrained in people's minds around masculinity, around what masculinity means. And I mean for me as someone who has literally shape-shifted through life it's mind-blowing. But it, I think about it a lot, and I think about it a lot in the context of the happy family game, because within that essay I talk a lot about how there's a head of this family and everything possible has to be done to ensure that he is protected. And that power is inherently ingrained and supported by everyone else below him in a way that is detrimental not only to themselves but to the person at the top. Because it is a construction, and it's not a construction that's serving anyone.

And so I think that sometimes queer people, you know, like within the queer community, we try to replicate the cis-heterosexual model of family in a way that does not serve us, because that model doesn't really serve, it's not functioning. Like I have tons of cis-heterosexual friends right now who are having babies and are pulling their hair out because they have no support and they're all alone and they're trying to find daycare, and they're just siloed away into these tiny little corners of this room, regardless of their gender. Because that unit, the happy family game, the happy family lie, keeps people separated from each other so that they can be independent buying units and more

easily controlled both by state and capitalism. And that system didn't really exist until the 1950s, like that's well documented. Like there was more community, you helped people, you did things together. I live in a very different community from the kind of community that you probably live in, and it's very cis-heterosexual normative, very patriarchal in the north. But we are few, and you can legit die like eight months of the year outside here, like it is cold. And something that always fascinates me is the collaborative and communal nature of my community that's so different from even when I go down south to say Vancouver, or Vancouver Island, where there are more people and those things don't exist. There is a much more collaborative community effort here, where people share, even if they hate each other. Like even if they don't like each other, even if your, like if your worst enemy was walking down the side of the road at negative forty you would stop and pick them up.

And I think that that gets lost the more deeply enmeshed you are within the happy family game. And I mean I think a big part of that too is that we're a very, we're a community that has a lot of, a very large first nations population, and that culture is very communally oriented, and it really spills into our communities. Like there's a lot of spillover between the communities in terms of our values together. Does that answer the question?

YT: Yes, and lots of food for thought. Talking about sort of collectivities, I was thinking about feminism, or feminisms, and one of the chapters that I really love is called 'Where the Fuck Are We in Your Dystopia?' And you talk about a women's potluck, a women's get-together where people are invited to sing to their wombs.

LEF: [laughs] Sorry, it will never not be funny.

YT: Yeah, it was hilarious, and it really resonated with like different experiences, including, you know, I write about this in *Working-Class Queers*, how having researched queer parents and being really sceptical about sort of the emotional labour and investments people were making in parenting, and how it's maybe not a queer project. I was then at a health clinic, and it was to do with my thyroid, so not about any sort of reproductive capacities, right? But being asked, sort of on repeat, if I wanted children, and this becoming a really super-awkward moment of realising that I had been seen as one of those sort of potential, if queer, parents that could might have the right consumption power to buy into another version of parenting. And that's what clinics could do and offer now as service providers.

But anyway, that's a detour from the sort of singing to wombs! So I wasn't singing to my womb basically is what I wanted to say.

LEF: I mean I'm all for singing to your womb, like I'm here for it. It was just really, really, really awkward, because I thought it was a joke and it was not a joke.

YT: Right. I mean it made me think about that humour, or the potential of humour and joking and laughter within a feminist project. Like does it all have to be very serious and earnest, or can we talk about the sort of moments of disruption and joy and humour and failure as part of a feminist project?

LEF: I think that, it's so weird to me how seriously people take their bodies. And like, like how seriously people take the role of their, their gender role. And like again I live between worlds, I'm a non-binary person, so there are trans people who will tell you I'm not trans enough because I'm not on hormones. But I also have had top surgery, so I'm clearly not cis any more. What the hell does that mean? And I recently changed my name to Laurence, which a gender-neutral name, and I've had

to have these bizarre conversations with my publisher where they're like 'oh well like how are we going to link you to your previous work as Lori Fox? Because people are going to think that we're deadnaming you, and that's going to upset some people. But also like some people might be concerned that you're like losing your feminist element'. And I'm like 'I'm the same person, like I'm the exact same human being. We've just rearranged some letters at the front'. And it's like, it's not Coke or Pepsi, like I don't have to pick, like it's very bizarre to me that I've had to have this conversation. And I mean you and I have talked a bit about this, when I picked Laurence part of the reason I did it is because people were having a really hard time. My pronouns are they/them, people were having a really hard time using my pronouns because they associate Lori as a very feminine name. And I live in a small community of twenty-five thousand people where I've lived for over a decade and people were having a hard time making the switch. So this seemed like a very normal thing to do for me, and I'm not hugely emotionally invested in being deadnamed or not being deadnamed. I just wanted something new. I had gone through surgery, I felt like it was time for me to have something for myself.

But it's become this big thing, because also apparently in the UK, as you [Yvette] and I have talked about, there is another Laurence Fox, and I guess I should've Googled that, because I did not know this giant douchebag was walking around with my name. I did not know that was a thing. I guess like it would never have occurred to me in ten thousand years to Google that, because what are the odds? Okay like there is of course going to be another Laurence Fox somewhere, but what are the odds he's going to be like a massive douche who is also a movie star? Like I did not have that in the cards and I clearly should've thought that out better. My new life goal is actually to make it so that like, and I will obviously never be this famous, but my new life goal is for that Laurence Fox to like get mistaken for me. Like I would love that, that would make my life like, I would die very happy.

But I think that like people just don't have a sense of humour about things. Like I think it's so funny, and people are like 'oh that's terrible. Like what if you get confused for that person?' Or like 'what if someone deadnames you?' Or like 'are you worried that like now like women who read you will mistake you for a man?' And I'm like 'I am the same human, I'm the exact same human being'. Like if you gained two hundred pounds would you not be the same person? Like I'm so confused about how serious and angry people get about these things. Because there is a lot of humour there. Like even in terms of, I was actually just speaking yesterday to one of the women who was at that women's gathering, who is also queer and has moved on from that space, and we were talking about this. She's read the book and we were talking about the circle, and she was like 'I looked over at you and I was like "oh god, why?" Please don't say anything'. Like she was like praying that I would be able to keep my face together, because she didn't know this was happening either. And like there is so much humour and community in that. And I think that when we, like I mean, and trust me the trans community is just as bad about it as the cis community. We take ourselves way too seriously and we can't find the humour in misunderstandings. Everyone is immediately offended, instead of finding the humanity and the common ground that laughing about it would bring. And I just, I don't know if it's a product of our time or how combative things have become, but I think if we just stopped for a few minutes and thought like, like I live next door to the US where a guy with like nineteen felony accounts who's currently on trial and oddly looks like an overcooked baked potato may well be the president of the United States for the second time around. That's fucking funny. It's terrifying, but it's fucking funny, in the same way that I think it's terrifying that there are people who obsess about the fact that I have had top surgery or the lovely server who brought me a beer last night who is a young trans woman exist in this world, that they're sitting there frothing at the mouth about it when all I want to do is walk my poodle and teach myself to make Pad Thai. Like I, like that's terrifying, but it's

also kind of funny. And I think that if we can't see the humour in it we're all probably doomed. I hope that that answers the question?

YT: Oh yeah, absolutely. And I might circle to like another emotion, which I really appreciate in the book, which is anger. And I think you say towards the end of the book, let me, yeah, so I think towards the beginning you talk about the anger being productive, and certainly I felt that in writing, like I've needed that as motivation. But we don't want to just be stuck in our anger too. So you say 'my anger was in fact killing me. I would always be angry, probably I would always be hurt, but I could choose what to do with that anger and hurt'. And focusing on the reasons, which you name as patriarchy, queerphobia, classism, and capitalism. Do you want to say something about the role of anger in writing?

LEF: I think that, especially as queer people and especially women, I teach a small, I occasionally teach small classes in creative writing, especially non-fiction, and the thing that I am constantly saying to women when I go over their work is 'we are going to cut every sentence that starts with "I feel", "I think", "maybe"', because you are taught, and we are taught, that we must couch our opinions ever so gently. And those are statements that you don't find typically in the work of men. When I'm editing men's work that doesn't exist because they have not been taught that. They have been taught that their feelings, thoughts, and opinions are inherently valued, and therefore they do not have to couch them with this passive language. And I'm constantly going through with like my red pen and being like 'no, no, no, no, nope', and the sentences read much better and much stronger. And when my students see that I feel like there's this thing that happens for them, where suddenly they realise that they can say things they didn't think they could say before.

And we're taught that anger is violence, even as our bodies are, have violence done to them, especially as working-class people across the board. As a server for example a guy can grab your ass and you're expected to smile, when what you should do is pop him in the nose. And the contract says you can't do that because that's anger and that's violence. But if he yells at you because his dinner is late that's acceptable. So violence is inherently classed and it's inherently controlled by a capitalist patriarchal system, and you can choose to do two things – and this is on both a personal level and a social level – you can choose to do two things. You can be furious and continue to work with that fury within the system as you exist, and have it go nowhere - and often that will either turn out or turn in - or you can choose to turn that anger to the places where it belongs. And, you know, I, it's very frustrating to be a working-class person in a lot of respects, and to be a working-class queer person, because you're very vulnerable as one. And I live in a not great neighbourhood and there is a lot of police violence in my neighbourhood. I recently, this might be upsetting for some people, but I recently watched, or saw, a police officer – watched is not the word I want – saw a police officer, three armed police officers beat the ever-loving shit out of a teenage native girl who was fourteen and having a mental health crisis. And we all took pictures and we're trying to fix that problem. But the fear there is that if you report because you live in a small community these people know where you live and there can be retaliations in ways that you would not expect. I don't know what policing is like in the UK, but it is in Canada and the States basically a paramilitary force. They are armed and they are terrifying, and they will shoot you, they will definitely shoot you.

And, you know, Canadians like to make a big deal about how peaceful and calm and civilised we are, but if you could have seen that poor child's bleeding face your opinion of that would change very rapidly. The difference between Canada and the US in terms of the way that we handle the police state and capitalism and people is that the US will tell you they fucking hate you, kick you in the balls, and spit in your face, and tell you it's your fault. Canada will tell you that, will politely apologise to you as they spit in your face, kick you in the balls, and still tell you it's all your fault. That's really the

difference between the way that we operate. One is passive-aggressive, the other is aggressive, and frankly passive-aggression is just an inefficient form of aggression in my opinion.

We need to be angry, we should be angry. I am very, very, very angry all of the fucking time. And the only thing that gets me out of bed in the morning is trying to make changes, because it's the only thing that I can do, and we have to do that collectively, and it has to be okay for us to be angry collectively. And I mean I don't know how much attention it got in the UK, but when the Black Lives Matters riots and protests were going on in the States, that's what that suppression was about. People were collectively very angry, as they should have been, and the state smashed down hard because that's scary to a capitalist state, is collective anger. And so they work to stop you from being angry together. It doesn't matter how you feel independently. They don't want you to share that anger, and they want that anger for you to be inappropriate and to be inexpressible. Because the only violence that is acceptable is state violence. And you can see why that is of benefit to a capitalist state trying to maintain a workforce.

And, you know, to bring it back to feminism, you can see the way that that violence is being extended to female bodies, to trans bodies and to queer bodies in and around abortion laws and reproductive rights laws, and the fear that cis-heterosexual people have around especially white trans women and white trans men who have, because they can no longer breed white babies. And as we've seen, like in both Canada and the US right now, the great replacement theory is basically the status quo for how the right functions. Like it's not a fringe idea any more, it's very publicly spoken about. And if you think that it's a coincidence that that is in the mainstream at the same time as abortion, reproduction and conversations about trans bodies is frontlining, you aren't paying very close attention. Because it's about control and making sure that you have enough of a working class and a big enough working-class body to maintain control of your capitalist state.

And when I say like it's about, I'm not saying that there's like a giant cabal thinking about this somewhere, I'm not a conspiracy theorist. I would say it's a natural consequence of the ecology of capitalism, what I'd like to think of the ecology of capitalism, the natural biological feedback loop if you will of a capitalist system. If you've ever tried to get five people to agree on what goes on one pizza that's why I don't believe in conspiracy theories. Like people don't agree on anything or keep anything secret long enough to have a conspiracy that large. So when I say like this is why they're doing that I just want to make it really clear that I don't think that there's like a secret cabal in a dark room like making these decisions. It's the consequence of environmental pressures.

YT: That makes a lot of sense, thank you. And I had so many questions and thoughts and great quotes pulled out from your book and I'm not going to get through them all. I think this is, you know, a moment to urge people to read your book, to keep thinking with these hard questions and issues. Thank you Laurence.