Queer Cost of Living Crisis: Porty Pride panel (Royal Society of Edinburgh Seminar Series)

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The below conversation took place as part of the Royal Society of Edinburgh funded Queer and the Cost of Living Crisis Seminar Series.

Yvette: Welcome everyone to the 7th event in the Series of Queer and the Cost of Living Crisis, it's nice to see new – and familiar – faces I'm going to say a few words about the series and our speakers, before coming to today's conversation, which in many ways represents a continuation of these issues and discussions: we previously heard from academics, authors, politicians and LGBTQ+ students and representatives across Scotland, exploring student voice and experience in the cost of living crisis. In the spirit of open access, we are going to record this discussion – the transcriptions of all other events are posted open access on my webpage at Strathclyde University. And as with other events, I'll stop when we come into any audience participation and Q+A.

I'm going to speak to some of the issues around crisis, and as continuation or a disruption, through my book on *Working-Class Queers. Time, Place and Politics*. The book pulls on research over a 20yr period and through different 'crisis' periods – from the hope and failure of 'New Labour', through to austerity, from ongoing Scottish Independence claims through Brexit, and from the COVID pandemic, to endemic cost of living crisis. How do we acknowledge the times we're living in? To turn to the acknowledgement in the book:

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> This book was written during a global pandemic. To write this is to acknowledge the times we're in, as stretching backwards and forwards. To write now is to complicate crisis as exceptional, resolved by DIY individualism, resource management, austerity, deferral … or in keeping writing. And yet I have kept writing, enabled and supported by people in and beyond these book pages and often as queer-feminist solidarity and persistence. I write, hopeful of something different rather than a return to 'business as usual'. In this book I ask if this might be a queer-left hope, animated by working-class queer life.
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> To re-write our projects, embodied as parts of ourselves, means revisiting data – going back through official and unofficial archives, records, readings, places and feelings. Such data is represented between these pages, structured into chapters, headings and sub-headings and made neat, even as it surpasses the pages. Queer data in particular might be thought of as excessive, weighty, emotional: the data in-between and beyond these pages weigh down on me and rightly does so as a demand for attention. But it also weighs as practice, as a continual re-doing, re-writing and re-thinking about how and why class and sexuality come to matter.

[1] Lou Brodie is an applied artist, performance maker and project manager. Jj Fadaka is a writer, facilitator, radical, and StAnza Poet in Residence (2023). Esraa Husain is a freelance writer, facilitator and community curator. Sanjay Lago is an Actor, Writer, Facilitator and Comedian. Yvette Taylor is an academia and organiser of the Queer and the Cost of Living Crisis seminar series. This Series is part of the RSE Personal Fellowship on Queer Social Justice. Other transcripts from the Series are available open access here: https://pureportal.strath.ac.uk/en/publications/queer-and-the-cost-of-living-crisis-royal-society-of-edinburgh-se

We might be struck by – or stuck in – cycles of crisis: unemployment, homelessness, employment or housing precarity, stigma, discrimination etc. are not new issues. This might be exhausting – but there might be some recognition, politically, or use, in seeing these as part of long-term and everyday struggles. I'm going to quote one of my interviewees on this sense of working across the long-term, and with the politicised vocabulary, effort and commitment to intersectionality, which might be more recognisable now, rather than then:

> I feel a lot in my work, and maybe it is a sign of age as well, but I feel like I'm now in the cycle of repetition, that things that I said way back at the start … But in terms of practice and moving forward, I noticed that [LGBT charity] has been doing a lot of things in terms of thinking intersectionally.
> – Project worker, UK LGBT charity, interviewed 2021

Thinking intersectionally – and about queer crisis – might mean different things, it might become a quick tick-box or glossing over inequality where e.g. being working-class or poor, itself a diverse and intersectional category, can't be a 'protected characteristic' in a capitalist society, with recognition (even from the State) rather than redistribution only ever taking us so far. And perhaps back into exhausting cycles.

In thinking about contemporary social formation as part and case of the crisis, rather than thinking of the height of the COVID pandemic as an interruption, or different kinds of State solutions (e.g. Scottish independence) or exceptions, I turn to another interviewees' words, which convey crisis as a chronic condition:

> I imagine my future at all points as being someone who is not fitting in, and I think sometimes structurally that means that the world is not for you.
> —Alisha, 39, South Asian, lesbian, interviewed 2020

When the world is not for us, what do we do? What questions can we ask back, and to ourselves? To start us off here are some questions we might address:

- What does the topic 'queer and the cost of living crisis' mean to you?
- Is this an issue you deal with in your practice/research/community/everyday life?
- What does it mean to live with, through, in and beyond the cost of living crisis? Why is this an LGBTQ+ issue? Why is this a Pride issue?
- Is the cost of living crisis the forever state of queer existence?
- Might queer experience tell us something about ways in - and out of - crisis times?
- How can queer life inform solutions to crisis and how can we think locally, nationally and globally?

Jj: Thanks. Hi everyone. My name is Jj. I'm a writer and a poet here in Edinburgh, I live in Leith. I think, yeah I was really interested to come and talk on this panel because I, I don't want to say I love, but I am very passionate about speaking about the housing crisis. And coming out of university and realising that housing doesn't get any better, even though that's what is promised, yeah. I think Edinburgh has a big issue with like this like student population rubbing against like the need for social housing and the need for like affordable housing. And I was really struck to learn, when I moved here, that the council would rather give out permits for new student housing because student flats don't have to meet minimum requirements for like what is a liveable space. And I found that really

disgusting, and it kind of like rhymed with me. It made me feel the same way as I did when I learn about social housing, when I lived with my family back in Essex, or where I grew up in London, where I would see family members trying to fight for social housing, trying to fight for housing that really was not liveable, and still having to fight for that. And the justification of their needing to fight was 'well you're poor, you can't afford a house, so you should be grateful for whatever's given to you', 'well you're Black. People live in this type of housing anyway. Why would you want anything better than your station?' And now it's, yeah, and now it's the same things. You know, even applying for houses I would hide my queerness from landlords, because if you're applying with someone else they really want you to be married, they want you to like replicate a certain type of family, and queerness is not justified in that, like it doesn't have a place to fit. I can't say 'oh this is my friend that I'm like very dedicated to. This is my chosen family', right? They want your parent to be a guarantor, they want like some rich family member, that of course we all have, to be your guarantor and to earn forty times as much as you, because why would you leave your house otherwise, if you didn't have that, you know? It's not like queer people get chased out of their homes or, yeah, people have to migrate for loads of different reasons.

So I think, yeah, coming, moving to Edinburgh, moving into adult life, I realised like housing is a big, was just a big way for me to like face the state's assumptions about me head on. And people were really open about speaking about the discrimination, like against queer people, against Black people, against people that don't, aren't, I don't know. I don't know, what even is normal? But aren't like normative or like don't want to follow like capitalism's idea of like creating a home. And if, I think if so many people fall outside of that what do we expect, what kind of conditions do we expect those people to live in? They're just not thought about. If my landlord is going to act on behalf of the state and say 'you're not producing a normal family. You're not a person who is like in need of housing, you're not justified to have housing', there's nobody that answers the question 'well where do I live, and what do I do now? Where am I supposed to keep my food? How am I supposed to eat? How am I supposed to get to work on time?' There's nobody there to answer those questions. But you're still expected to do those things anyway.

And yeah, that's the kind of situation, or like where I'm like speaking from now, where the cost-of-living crisis is this like, yeah I love that you say it's not like a deviation from the norm, it is very normal. It's just that very often we have these like flare-ups because, yeah, it's like, it exposes like the state doesn't have the power, or the care, to like do something about a health crisis, or do something about people that can't, who are living on the breadline anyway. So if there's any type of like economic fluctuation, yeah it just exposes that there's lots of people that were just about managing and now they can't manage at all.

Yeah, so I see, I've now found like workarounds to those things. Saying like 'oh yeah, this is my friend who I intend to marry next year, I promise, and look we're engaged'. And now you have to, yeah, now that's like the gateway for gay people. Like 'oh well you have marriage, and that's when we will accept you as like normal'. But even in that the issues like still arise. Now we're thinking about, okay how do I work my minimum wage job and afford this ever-increasing rent? So I've made it, I've got my home, I've got a roof over my head, but the problems still haven't stopped. As a queer person I'm wondering, yeah, like how that impacts like the type of work available to me, discrimination in like applying for jobs, queer people, especially in, like not especially in Scotland, but in Scotland like yeah usually intersect with being working-class, that's what we're here to talk about. If you, yeah, can barely afford your rent how do you find time to like make life around that?

On the way here I was thinking about what I want to live for, and I really don't want to live for my minimum wage job. Even though I'm really lucky, like I do enjoy the work I do now, but there's been

many times where I've had a job that I don't love, and queerness for me has been a way to find another way to live, to be like 'oh I don't want to live in a gendered body. This love that I feel for someone, love that has not been replicated to me before, it unlocks something different in me and gives me like a new reason for being. It gives me like a new example of like what I want the world to look like. To defy expectations, to like push boundaries, and be more than someone said I could be'.

But capital, like it doesn't, it's not for that. Like it's not there to like bolster that in you, it's not there, you don't get a house so that now you can live your beautiful queer life. You get a house so that you can go do your minimum wage job and go home, and you have to find time and find energy to live your little queer life around the margins of that. One thing that we spoke about with Yvette was like what can queerness teach us about demanding more, or like asking for something different? I think if you look at your life now and like what queerness means to me, I don't want to be an extension of capital. I don't want to say, I don't want to be like a powerful queer person, because I feel like that is just a way to like protect the violence against queerness. Like the operative word there is powerful and not queer.

I want to be a queer person that like wants to like queer the world. If I don't want to live in a gendered body myself I want that for everyone else as well. I don't want to like accumulate money or buy a house or have a good job just so that people won't harass me in the street, or I'm like shielded from that. I really love an Audre Lorde quote that's like 'you should only seek liberation so you can liberate the next person'. And yeah, I think if you're lucky enough to have any resources, like any type of care in your life, it's about like passing that on, passing on that baton, and trying to grab some of your life back. Like I really appreciate people speaking about the Coronavirus pandemic still in panel talks, I appreciate coming to events where people are still masked. It makes me think about other spaces I go where people aren't masked, and like what are the values like in those spaces? I think about during the pandemic, people, friends I delivered food to, people I spoke to on Zoom because we were lonely and isolated. I think about people that couldn't go home, like, you know, during lockdown, and, yeah, had to spend lockdown in different situations. Like deviant, yeah, not like, not in their family home for example. And I think about all the care that was provided, and like how the Coronavirus pandemic was such a, like so exposing about the different ways people live, and there is not one script to live by.

And I really want to continue that thinking. I want to be like 'oh we spent so much time doing unpaid care work. Now I want to be paid for it, and that's what I want my life to be about'. Yeah, I don't want to like have to do a really exhausting job and then come home and do that unpaid care work, and then just continue that cycle and exhaust myself. Where I think that's the ask of queer people in the cost-of-living crisis. Like survive. I don't care how you do it. Like capital's like 'I don't care how you do it, just survive and show up the next day'. I want to demand the resources for the life that I want, and the life that I also need. Because if people stopped doing that unpaid work I think a lot of people would perish, me included. Like I think a lot of people would lose their community. If I didn't have someone to like lie with me on my rental application, I wouldn't have a home, you know?

Like yeah, I want to find ways to like resource that and I want queerness to be like an inspiration for that. Yeah. So those are my thoughts generally. I'll pass this to you.

Lou: Thank you for the baton. I'm going to move this. So I was thinking lots about, and actually it's interesting that you were saying Yvette, the time period that the book was written in is the sort of time period that I have been an adult. I graduated from university in 2004, and so my arts career, as someone might call it, has been kind of through those twenty years of crisis, or not crisis, however we want to look at it. And also the sort of first half of that adult life I wasn't openly queer, even

though I existed in a sort of arts bubble. I am a community artist, I trained in theatre, but really since leaving university have mainly worked in community arts, because, I think mainly because it mirrors a lot of the spaces that I grew up in.

I grew up in what would probably be described as a fairly socioeconomically deprived area, an area with quite a lot of violence in it, a lot of kind of drug violence in it. And often actually I find myself in those spaces delivering community arts projects. And I think partly that even though I wasn't out as a queer, like an openly queer person, and understanding myself as a queer person, actually wasn't necessarily that I was sort of hiding, but it was more that I didn't understand myself as a queer person until I was in my early thirties, that actually being in those spaces is that, why it's a pride issue, why it's an LGBT issue, is like turning up in those spaces and, I don't know if I would describe myself as thriving, but I think I'm doing slightly better than surviving. So it feels important to me to turn up in those spaces and try to be like the most authentic version of myself.

And predominantly those spaces are with children, and children who like me were living in poverty, are living in poverty, are living in households that can be incredibly aggressive, or are, you know, have come to Scotland as refugee, asylum-seeking young people, you know? So there's like so much layers of stuff going on there, and so actually for me turning up into those spaces and trying to be completely me in those spaces is an act of queering that space, especially because the projects that I do, particularly the one at the moment, is a children's rights project, and so actively trying to share a space where the young people and I share power for me is queering the space, because young people are pretty much told that they're not full citizens. You're not a full citizen until you can contribute economically and you can vote basically, right? So if they are told they're not full citizens and that is something that as queer people historically we have encountered a lot I feel like I am queering the space by turning up and fully being myself there.

And in terms of what I felt like I wanted to offer today, is I suppose the last few years of my life, is to talk about the household that I have been living in, because it has brought an interesting reflection for me, round about the fact that I'm an incredibly privileged member of the queer community actually. Yes, I come from a working-class background, but I definitely live a middle-class lifestyle, one that I can mainly afford. But interestingly I arrived in Edinburgh in the summer of 2021. I moved from Inverness, which is classed as a city in Scotland. You could debate that if you want. Yes, you could absolutely debate that, but it is classed as a city in Scotland. So I arrived from Inverness to Edinburgh, which is of course Scotland's capital, it is the finance district of Scotland. So of course my outgoings are going to increase, right? Like I'm not silly, I didn't imagine that I was going to arrive in Edinburgh and somehow I was going to be living the same kind of life. So it increased I would say about fifty per cent, and that's the summer of 2021.

For various reasons I've lived in a few places in Edinburgh, and most recently, until about the end of March, beginning of April, I actually lived in Portobello. I lived for two years in Portobello, it's a beautiful place, I had a lovely time here. I lived there with my friend. My friend doesn't necessarily identify as queer in her sexuality or in her gender expression, but I would say that she lives her life with a queer sensibility. She's very actively trying to reject hustle culture, reject capitalism. She comes from a very similar childhood background to myself, so we sort of share that experience in life.

And I would say fairly early on in arriving in Portobello it was quite clear to us that we weren't going to be able to afford to keep that flat. Like at that point I had gone from my outgoings going up by about fifty per cent, I would say it had pretty much doubled if not more at that point. And that is, I would say, directly an economic impact of the cost-of-living crisis, and I'm literally like seeing it. And

at the same time as that's happening I'm also in a new relationship, which is really beautiful, and we have started, as is probably not surprising to many of us in here, talking about living with each other, because, you know, as lovely queer femmes we were like straight in, 'are we going to live together?' But we didn't want finance to be one of the impacting factors that made that choice for us. And I think that speaks to the privilege that I've got, that actually we were able to resist that. Because I know many people that can't, many people that actually flat sharing, sharing a space with your partner, you've got no choice, you've got absolutely no choice.

And actually I grew up in a household where that was no choice. It wasn't a queer household, but there was no choice in one of those people leaving that household because of finance. And so I think it's, it feels really important to me to take time to reflect on that privilege of that household that I've got. I now do live with my partner, she happens to be in the room, she's over there. We moved in together at the end of March, the beginning of April, at a point where it was right for us. We were able to resist that financial, economic kind of push. However, we bring in more than the national average as a wage between the two of us. I did a bit of research into like what the national average is. You know, we've been working for all of our adult life and we've managed to get ourself into a position where we're privileged enough we would bring in more than the national average. Not masses more, but more than the national average.

And I would tell you right now that end of the month there ain't no wealth creation happening in my household. I'm not building masses of savings, like there's no cushion. If we split up I'm going to live with my sister, like I'm going to live with my sister, and thank god I've got a relationship with my sister that means that I'm able to do that. So like you can see that I'm getting kind of raging about it, because it does, it makes me like super-angry, because I also am sitting here as like a white, cisgendered woman with tonnes of privilege, and if that's the case for me what the hell does that mean for like my queer siblings at the absolute margins? Like what are they having to deal with, you know?

And I don't necessarily want to go back and live with my sister. She's great, I love her, but that would mean living in the village that I grew up in, and, you know, that's not the vibe that I want for my life. But I'm lucky that I've got that safety net. And I think like, going back to my point about turning up in the spaces that I work in, as a kind of like cultural worker who predominantly works with children, I feel like I have to turn up with that rage, but also with the joy of what it is to have been able to find those spaces and those households that I've lived in. Because even though the economic picture of it is absolutely grim what I have been able to create is households of chosen family, households of love, households built on trying to exist joyfully as a queer person, and understanding what that means when I arrived into that knowledge in my early thirties, thinking I was late. I'm not late. I've been queer the whole time. But arriving fully into that knowledge, then how do I turn up into those spaces with those ten-year-olds, and how does that like push that social justice forward?

So turning up into those spaces, trauma-informed, figuring out how to poverty proof, and figuring out how I like turn up. And I'm super-honest with being who I am in front of them and making that space for them. So I think that's the realisation that I kind of had in sitting with these like questions. Like yeah it's actually about being super-honest and just leading with like who I am and where I'm at.

Sanjay: I'm a freelance actor, writer, became a comedian two years ago, which I've been working on. I don't recommend it to anybody. And I'm in, me and Lou did the same course but at different points in the course. Because yours was contemporary theatre practice

Lou: Mmhmm.

Sanjay: And then mine was contemporary performance practice.

Lou: A huge difference.

Sanjay: Huge difference. And I was thinking about it, we were talking about it this morning. I graduated in 2019, which was, everybody's like 'oh that's great, before the pandemic'. But what a lot of people don't realise in the arts is unless you're like David Tennant or something you're not going to get work overnight. It's a hard slog. You're in different areas of the whole arts world. So I started getting work and then lost it all by March 2020. And then I was told, oh it'd get recast, but it got recast with 2020 graduates, 2021. This morning I was at an event and we were talking about the ghost year of 2019 graduates. Because it feels like you've got 2018, they had a whole year to get into 2019, then the pandemic. But then 2019, a lot of us, well a lot of people I studied with, have all left the industry, because we kind of felt forgotten about.

I was just thinking about that this morning, about, that wasn't in my notes, hence why I'm glad that I'm looking at this. Because what does the topic of queer and the cost-of-living crisis mean to me? And it just makes me think of, it just feels like there's another barrier added on to who I am. Because I already get the barrier of being Asian in a society, subject to racism, and then you get the barrier of being gay. So you've got the barrier of being gay in a western society but also being gay in an Indian society, which is two different barriers. Then you've also got a barrier about being neurodiverse, so your brain's all over the place and some people don't understand that, how to work with that. And then you've got the barrier of coming from Ibrox in Glasgow, which is not well off, it's not got a lot of money. I was told in school that I would never get a degree. Here I am now about to apply for a master's, so yay.

But it just feels like, when I was thinking about that question of like what does the cost-of-living crisis mean to you, it just feels like it's another barrier put on top of all of that. Because talking about housing, me and my partner, my partner's also in the room, over there, we've been speaking about how we'd love to live together, how we'd love to get a house. But I currently have six jobs on the go, and I was thinking about the question of, oh I can't remember what the question was, oh yeah, what does it mean to live with it? And I think the one word I wrote down was tired. Because I feel like as a creative having to juggle all these jobs, yeah, you don't really get savings as an artist. And then not having savings you can't really save to get a house, and then you don't really have enough money then to travel for different jobs.

I'm between Glasgow, Edinburgh and London a lot, and London's not cheap to get to. But then also I don't get seen in Scotland as an actor, I've never performed here, and I've worked for thirteen years as an actor, but all my work is down south. So also I feel, like when I think about that question I also feel invisible. Like I feel like there's another layer of invisibility that is added to me. Because people say 'oh you went to the conservatoire'. So going to a place called the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, where your king is the patron means nothing really when you leave, because he's not giving me money. The Conservatoire make you a freelancer, but then when you leave that door they don't really support you as a freelancer.

And I'm on a zero-hour contract at the conservatoire as a front-of-house supervisor, and it is, it's, they make artists but then they don't fully support you when you go in. And I think, having graduated in 2019 it feels like an extra layer of a slog to get there. I feel lucky in a way that, I feel really privileged that I've worked with people on this panel. I worked with Luke, and people that have kind of helped me through the pandemic, because the pandemic was hard, thinking of am I going to stay

in this career? Do I want to go retrain? But meeting people, because I've also worked with Lou through Imaginate and working with young kids.

The reason I've stayed in this industry, and I stay in the world that I'm in, is because if we don't keep the work going we will lose a generation of young artists, we will lose a generation of young queers. A lot of the work I create, especially when I'm working with young people is, especially for the Asian community, you already don't see many Asians in Scottish theatre, you don't see many people of colour, and it's working with those young people, I'm like 'you can exist in this industry, not only as an Asian but also as a queer Asian'. And I'll never forget, the first time I did a job …… in a school in Glasgow and there was two young Asian boys who as I walked in they thought I was just there to like be an assistant. When I told them I was leading they went [makes a surprised face], and that's always stayed with me because that's the reason I'm in this industry.

But it is tiring. It does get to a point where you're like 'why am I doing this?' And that's why I feel like I'm going to go do this master's, just for a bit of stability. Because I feel like, again you get, you go into drama school to become a freelancer, but they don't really teach you how to make it stable, they don't really teach you how to look after yourself mental health wise. I'm grateful I've got friends that kind of keep me stable, I've got a partner that keeps me stable, my family keep me stable. But how do you find that stability financially? Because you can go and read a book in a coffee shop, you're having a day off, but how do you then find the longevity of. What else am I going to say?

Being able to fund it, I think that's a big thing. I think the arts is in a very interesting place right now because everything's at a standstill with multi-year funding, which includes museums, I think it's libraries, Glasgow I think includes libraries does it not? I'm asking you because I feel like you might know this.

Lou: I think that's a bit different, but yeah.

Sanjay: It is. But multi-year funding, we're currently like on a standstill until October. I was at a talk this morning and there was three people on a panel this morning who are artistic directors, and they all said 'we're not supporting artists just now because we don't know what money's coming in until October'. So it's also about finding that, how do you fund yourself when theatres aren't supporting artists? Now one of the questions was is it an LGBT issue, and I've said it is an LGBTQ+ issue because I do feel within society there is still bias and prejudice towards queer people. There is that whole thing, people judge you when you are a queer person. I have at times been like 'okay, so I'll put in an application. Should I talk about only being Asian, should I talk about being queer, should I talk about both? Oh, do I tell them I'm dyslexic just now or do I not?' And there is always the option of you can send in an audio or a video, but I rarely do that. Because in my head I'm going, will they look down less at me, will they see me as less able to do that application?

So there are times that I do think, what do I talk about more? What do I hide more? What do I do? What do I become when I get the job? Do I show them Sanjay when I get the job and just be someone else? So I think it is an issue, a queer issue, because I think, but I think it's a society issue, not a queer, LGBT community issue. I think it's a wider society's issue on how they still view us. And if we look at how the trans community's currently getting targeted left, right and centre, I think that's not, we should all be supporting them obviously, but it's a wider issue. And I think it also for me comes down to education. I don't think education, I think education is the tool to educate people, and I don't think it's strong enough yet because we've not got the right people pushing the right education. And I don't even just mean queer education, I also mean when we talk about people of colour, we don't get taught about the partition of India in schools.

We have the eightieth anniversary in three years' time, and I spoke to a friend last week who was like 'oh I didn't know it was eighty years in three years'. I was like that's shocking, because Britain was a massive part in that. The guy who drew the line for India, into India and Pakistan was Scottish, and we don't even get taught that in Scotland. So yeah, I think that's my issue. And also I will say this is only my third ever Pride event in my life. I came out when I was twenty-six in the worst way possible, which, I came out, there was a plan A and plan B. Plan A didn't happen to plan B happened. Plan A was to come out on stage on my birthday in my final year degree show. I didn't do that, because my lecturer sat me down and told me 'don't do that. That's not right, that's not fair on your parents or you'. So I came out the day before my birthday and screamed it at my mum. I don't know if that was any better, but it happened.

But I've never also been to Pride events because as a person of colour I always question, is this a space for me? Like can I go to these events? And the second Pride event I went to was only a couple of weeks ago, and it was called Pride lite, and it was for two hundred and fifty school kids where I was a keynote speaker. And those are the events that I love, because I was able to inspire young queer people to tell them that we're all in this together, and you've got it. I think that's why I love being an artist, because I feel like the arts is a great tool. I feel like comedy, poetry is great ways to educate. Going back to the living crisis, I think as an artist though yeah I do sometimes choose what do I talk about to be seen to get funding. Because I do think funding bodies can still be a bit homophobia, there can be biases there. You might not see it on their face and that, but in the back of their minds there is.

So yeah, I think my dream would be for us to have a house, to have a garden, and I've even said this, I would love to have an old train in my garden, like a train carriage, and I would love to do it up, and make it like my own like creative shed. But these are dreams. And I also agree there's too much student housing. And I think the student accommodation thing for me is in Glasgow there's so much student accommodation getting made, but what I think a lot of people don't realise is, and I've talked to a lot of students at the conservatoire, they only go there for like a year, most of them stay there only for a year and then want to find a house. Because I've partied in student accommodations, and they're boxes, they're not fine. The windows you can't fully open, there's no gardens. I get why they want to get a house. But I think there needs to be a balance of instead of making student housing just make like student villages like kind of thing, instead of making housing, like student accommodation. Because I think that's, there's a big space in Glasgow that's getting turned into student accommodation and I look at it going, that could be like houses, that could be like flats, really nice flats. I think for me and when I think about the housing crisis and student accommodation is instead of making student accommodation make like houses for them. Because the reason they're all leaving and not staying in there is because they're boxes. Like this room could be like four student accommodation rooms, which is quite terrifying. But that is the reality. So, and I think with the housing crisis it's about thinking about what is needed, because I don't think student accommodation is, I think liveable housing is needed.

I hope that made sense from what I was trying to say there. But yeah. Cool. But yeah that's me. And I'll pass on the baton.

Esraa: Thank you. Just sitting with all these thoughts. I can definitely resonate with a lot of elements mentioned from the panellists. To start my name is Esraa Husain, I'm wearing glasses, I have short hair, I have what you'd call here olive skin, and I'm wearing green. I'm a researcher and a community curator and a creative writer. I'm the founder of U Belong Glasgow, U just the letter U, making it a bit jazzy. It's a multilingual community platform based in Glasgow. It's for underrepresented creatives basically, so it's Black and people of colour, creatives from the LGBTQ+ I community, and creatives

with disabilities. And that got established in September 2020, in the middle of the lockdown and everything going on back then. And as you can imagine I started with a lot of enthusiasm for it, but it takes a lot of energy and it takes a lot of capacity and space. So it used to be a monthly event in collaboration with Glasgow Zine Library in the southside, but now it's depending on funding, and we went down from every month to twice a year. But that works better.

I'm really glad to be here today. I was looking over the questions, thinking about them, and I think I want to focus on two elements. I also hate to be repetitive, but I want to think about why is this a queer issue, just thinking about Pride and why is a queer issue. The second thing for me, how did I make it work? And I think starting with why is it a Pride issue? I think that's a brilliant question, because when I think of Pride and understanding Pride, claiming Pride, I go back to of course to the Stonewall riot, and I think of the people who started it, including Marsha P Johnson, which, she was an African American sex worker from the working-class and an activist, advocating for gay and trans rights. And for me it's this living crisis, like sorry the class struggle and the living crisis, is it a part of Pride? Of course. It was founded in Pride and it was part of the reasons why Pride came about. So that's how I look at it.

And of course it touches also on my personal experience. Like all the lovely people here have experienced, and maybe not going too much into the personal, but that takes me into the other, one of the other questions is like how do I deal with it and how can I navigate it and just try to thrive instead of survive. And that's when I think I came across the community building and the practice of curating community, and being in community with people. And I feel like that was the core reason for why U Belong came about. It was during a very difficult time, not just for me, I wasn't special in it, it was the whole world. And I was in my, going into the second year of the PhD full-time, working part-time. You call it part-time but it was over the hours of part-time. And struggling with institutional racism, discrimination, and just as a person, also a creative person, a person of colour who comes from the asylum and refugee class, and trying to like hold, uphold my values and my ethics in my academic life, but also as a creative, that was such a struggle.

And what I found back then is that community was my reason for survival, and community was the reason I kept going. And it was so interesting. I think, I was just thinking in Glasgow it would be really nice to have a space that, designed for you, not just telling you 'oh you're welcome here or you're tolerated here', but 'this is only for you'. And then a bunch of people started talking to me, like 'yeah Esraa, that sounds a good idea'. And like I felt it was effortless. All of us kept it happening and all of us, it's just an idea but then working with creatives, I mean that's how I got to work with Jj and Sanjay and working with other creatives and like sharing that sentiment.

And I have some notes on my phone, I didn't bring a notebook, so forgive me I'm going to read a couple of things. I think because at the end of the day I am a creative person and I do appreciate like the opportunity to speak, but also I was thinking maybe this is a good opportunity to share some of my creative work, and to share with people that also it's the challenge in the PhD now going into the fourth year, finishing the third year. Can you feel the pain? It's there. And I think it will stay there for a long time. But yeah, I needed to take a break from that, just to establish my finances and get my life going. I think a lot of the struggle was that academia was a very rigid sphere, very conventional, and as a bilingual person, person of colour, queer, multiethnic, it was, you can imagine, so hard to place myself within these boxes.

And I had struggle as well dealing with supervisory teams, but now thankfully I have a really good supervisory team. I think this is the fourth one so far. And this is where I allowed myself to combine my creativity with my academic writing, and I had that leeway and flexibility to write about, to write

creatively about academia. And I would like to share a few pieces from that chapter. I mainly focused on Black Scottish literature, and focusing on queer women, queer Black women, and the relationship between Scotland and Africa. So Aminatta Forna, Sierra Leonian and Scottish, and there is Zoe Wicomb, South African and Scottish, and there is Maud Sulter, Ghanaian and Scottish. And such an under researched field. So I was really like glad to be there and very enthusiastic about it.

But then through the PhD and my research journey I was thinking about, oh okay there is more to the Black Scottish writing, because it's about also forging kinship, and how other people of colour and allies working together and making that safe space and that space curation possible. And I would like to read this piece. This is one of the, I will read three today, short I promise. This one is called Unhoused. It's part of the chapter and it's also part of my creative practice.

'Pick and choose your battles I heard my inner CVT voice saying. I can find another shelter that would kindly attend to my needs I hoped. It is not necessary for every place I live in to be gracefully remembered. Not every place should be carried in my memory with the same depth and proximity. Some places are meant to be a task, a clarification, a move to somewhere else. I save the credit and try to be selective when moving on. These reminders about places also apply to people. I go back online to look for a different place, and the spirit was high facing the competitiveness of housing in Glasgow City. And through that I think, obtaining shelter and safety, I'm always remembered of the work of Kimberley Cranshaw.' And while also preparing for this panel I was going online, and a lot of statistics and research that share the conclusion that people, queer people face a lot of challenging of housing especially, and especially queer people of colour, and especially queer women. And then you have queer women with disability, and then it goes on and on, and all these intersections are in it. And I feel that's such an important point, that I know I live it and I know in my community and my surroundings, people also, friends and acquaintances, they also live it. But I think in the media and the mainstream it's such a, like an omitted version of ourselves, or a version of our stories that doesn't get to be highlighted and told so much.

Okay, going back to Unhoused. 'According to fate next place on this journey is moving to a studio that is fifteen minutes' walk away from Queen's Park in the southside of Glasgow. Never estimate how much, sorry, never underestimate how much respite, comfort, spirit, transcendence there might be when sleeping on a clean well-made bed with new pillows and taking warm showers. The first peaceful sleep I had in five or more months is what felt like forever. That was an attempt to deflect from thinking of performative democracy and justifying the capitalist system treatment of anyone not privileged by wealth, class and whiteness.'

And then there is also a poem that is part of this chapter, but it's also a poem that I curated in one of the reading groups, actually we went with Jj, it was on body and place, it was based in Edinburgh last year. And it's called 'My Heart is Weighted. My heart is weighted with facing prosecution from blood family and state, due to my queerness and conformity and my own ongoing longing for freedom. My heart is weighted from being reminded that Black and people of colour are always being eradicated by redesigned slavery practices in Congo and active genocides in Palestine and Sudan and imperialism. My heart is weighted when people with more social capital and citizenship security remain silent. My heart is weighted from picking up my phone, see the horror around the world, then go about my day.'

And I would like to end with another piece. It's, it got published in The Skinny magazine. Do you know it? Yes, a lot of nodding. That's really nice. It was a section in The Skinny magazine that's called Love Bites. Jj you published one too right? I read your piece. It was beautiful. So I don't remember when this, I think it was two years ago, or maybe three years ago, and I decided to write about the

maternal love and my love for okra stew. It will make sense when I read it I promise. And I know I exaggerate, but that's what I do as a creative writer. I, because I know I need to stay grounded and present myself certain ways, but when I'm writing I'm like I want to be vulnerable and I want to just drag it on and dwell on it and go on it. So that's how the piece is as well.

It starts like this. 'Dearly I yearn for my mother's bread, my mother's coffee, mother's brushing touch, Mahmoud Darwish wrote in the 1960s. Today I personally yearn for Ommi, my mother in Arabic, okra stew. Ommi's Persian and Arab mixed heritage gives her a certain leeway in creativity, in cooking recipes. Her okra stew unconventionally contains fish, and despite years of domestic objections from her siblings she persisted and her okra stew became her branding signature. I believe that maternal intimacy is the foundational imprint of love within my own humanity. In my world Ommi's embrace is a synonym for safety. Her scent of Oud brings me solace and her word of endearment is my native language. Her being is as crucial as oxygen for my sanity, and sometimes my insanity. We live on separate continents now, and I find myself longing for her warmth when I daydream of her okra stew. One evening in winter 2022, Glasgow Southside, I spoke with Ommi over Facetime. She was fighting the urge to surrender her eyelids to sleep while asking what I had for supper. I was in bed and seeking warmth. I only had electric heating, no central heating in that place. "I cooked the diasporic version of your okra stew tonight" I said jokingly. We said our goodnights and ended the video call. What I didn't share was that I couldn't let the stew simmer long enough due to my financial limitations and my anxiety when using, when cooking, when attending to my energy bills. Canned food fits my student budget so I used canned baby okras, canned tomato sauce and canned tuna flakes. And to compensate I sprinkled in some Kuwaiti spices that was sent as a gift from my siblings, and the aroma took me right back to the vision of Ommi in her kitchen cutting fresh vegetables and cooking. I didn't feel cold anymore. Ommi's okra stew brings a complete disconnect from my reality as a solo immigrant, and instead reconnects me to her.'[2]

And, I'm looking at the time, cautious of that, I would just like to end maybe, it was, I did a lot of research for this panel and also like reading about the wonderful authors here, and I thought maybe I can like share some of the highlights that I found online. So there is a really nice research called Pride in Place: Is it important? How can it be measured? It's published in Bennett Institute for Public Policy, Cambridge. And basically what this writer argues is that the way queer people survive, and the way we feel proud and survive this life with the living crisis, is through community and community building. And the community is what actually gives us that sense of sustainability. Not wealth, not capitalist wealth, for that reason.

Another one was in Manchester Pride, on their website, they published like a study, surveys and asking people for years about how they afford rent, living and they're working-class. And I think the conclusion was that a hundred per cent of the participants say that LGBT people who experience hate and abuse and face a lot of barriers in accessing support are the ones who struggle the most in the cost-of-living. And then they give a lot of reasoning and a lot of statistics. It's just for the nerdy ones if you would like to read that.

Yvette: Thank you. Thank you so much to our speakers. Can we give an applause. Thank you. Thank you to our interpreters, and thanks to you, the audience, for listening, because there's no point in speaking if we don't have anybody to hear us. So thank you, and thank you for turning up. So many great issues and points of connection. Points around care and community and turning up and turning up again, and how that can be exhausting as well as productive. And in the last panel we were talking about the product of it and realising that we're not often all in the same space, and we're coming

[2] https://www.theskinny.co.uk/intersections/features/love-bites-on-okra-stew

from different directions and imagining different communities and different futures too. So I think that's good to dwell on at this moment of Pride, and what that might differently mean for people.

I wonder though, we don't have to exit the room right on half past, and I wonder if people wanted to share a thought, a pause, a question, something else to think about when we're thinking queer and the cost-of-living crisis.

[End]