
Too Many Flavors for One Platform: Staceyann Chin's Facebook Poems and Slam Poetry Performances

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Poems and Slam Poetry Performances**

Mémoire présenté par Caiola Melissa en vue de
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Melissa Caiola

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Introduction

African American politician Shirley Chisholm once advised “if they don’t give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair” (“Shirley Chisholm.”) More than bringing her chair to the table, Staceyann Chin brings her poems and a computer. By creating her writer’s page on Facebook through which she can self-publish her poems, she created a platform to speak to those who have the desire and the means to listen. She also provides a space for people to connect and fight together against inequalities and discrimination, as will be discussed in this master’s thesis.

Staceyann Chin was born in Jamaica to an African-Jamaican woman and a Chinese man, both of whom were not truly involved in her life. During her childhood, she was raped by relatives and was again abused by a group of men at University for being a lesbian. The attack was meant to “correct” her sexuality. Following the attack and fearing for her life, Chin fled to the United States in 1997 (Chin, *The Other Side of Paradise* 272). Her lack of direct action during and after the assault was a catalyst to the process of becoming an activist (“Poet vs.”), and she decided she would never be silent or silenced again (“Poet vs.”). Since she moved to New York, she developed her career as a poet, and started to tour and perform in various states and countries. She appeared on HBO’s *Def Poetry Jam* and performed on Broadway. She also published in 2009 a “memoir of her childhood that was critically well received” called *The Other Side of Paradise* (Murray-Román 123). She has written articles for renowned newspapers such as *The Guardian* and *The New York Times* (Murray-Román 124). In order to post her work, she first created a website (which no longer exists) before moving to Facebook, where she published until 2016 (Murray-Román 124). More recently, in October 2019,

she finally released her first – and long-awaited – poetry book entitled *Crossfire: A Litany for Survival*.

As Staceyann Chin states in her poem “Cross-fire”: “I come in too many flavors for one fucking spoon” (“Staceyann Chin ‘Feminist or a Womanist’”), indeed Chin possesses many facets that altogether, form the person and the artist that she is. In her work, which is inspired by her identity and stories, she fights for all marginalized individuals. Her poems are often an intersection of topics including gender, race, and sexuality, among other things. She has also discussed in a video what intersectionality means to her and how she uses it in her poems:

Intersectionality just means that you have more than one thing dat concern you. Like, you’re black and you’re lesbian and you’re poor. And you’re—y’know, like the more shit you have wrong with you, the more intersectionality is *you*. Basically, when all those things kind of converged in my identity and my way of seeing the world, I knew I needed to find something to do. I needed to speak out and [performance poetry] was my way (qtd. in Tift 82).

In this passage, Chin explains that she considers herself to be “intersectional” since she has multiple identities which intersect and suffers from multi-dimensional discrimination. Poetry was a way for her to externalize that intersectionality. In her Facebook note “Join The Conversation About The Michigan Womyn's Music Festival” (August 19, 2014), she describes herself in the following terms:

My Name is Staceyann Chin and I am a feminist. A Black woman. Half Chinese. Immigrant-American. Lesbian. Mother. A Jamaican women. I belong to so many communities. I am in constant movement through those various communities.

[...]

I believe every woman has a right to exist in a space that celebrates who she is. And I believe there is space enough on this planet, inside our politics, inside our hearts, for all of us to exist. Radical feminists. Moderate feminists. Trans-identified feminists. Feminists who are men. Feminist in heels. Feminists in drag. White feminists. Black feminists. Korean feminists. Native American feminists. Aboriginal feminists. Mixed feminists.

I am also an anti-racist worker. And an activist who believes deeply in the safety of women. And people with the least resources on the planet. That includes poor Black people. And poor White people. And oppressed lesbians. And trans-people. And children who are trafficked. And people without clean water. In Jamaica. And The Americas. And on the continent of Africa. And Asia. And India. And the middle East. And beyond. And in the world I dream for my two year old daughter, there is room enough for everyone.

Her point here is that every human being who is oppressed, deserves to be fought for, no matter the communities they belong to, no matter their gender -or absence of gender- their sexuality and sexual preferences, their race, their class, no matter the continent on which these human beings are denied the right to basic human rights, they deserve to be fought for. Although she defines her work as inclusive, it can be argued otherwise, as we will examine later. Nonetheless, as she states at the end of her Facebook note: “I’m not always the self I want to be, but I’m always working to get better than I was yesterday”, suggesting that she is constantly learning. Through this note, she also emphasizes that she believes all of these communities have something in common, starting with the fact that they are all oppressed by the same enemy and rejected by a society that marginalizes them. She stresses that it is possible for all these communities

to find a common ground, to work together in peace and help each other fight against a society that denies them basic human rights. This willingness to include every socially marginalized individual, can be observed in another Facebook note, "Talking About A Revolution Sounds Like A Whisper..." (January 28, 2010), in which Chin explains that at some point in her career as activist, she was invited to a retreat which aimed to discuss ways in which oppression could be abolished:

We talked. Argued. Fought. Hard. There were so many different ways to do things. To talk about those things. We talked about Civil Disobedience, and Direct Action. Others talked about privilege. And how this group was NOT EVERYBODY.

That had to sit for a minute. But we got through it and talked some more.

We bandied around the term Radically Inclusive. We all agreed that it meant that we have to get everybody in the door. We had no idea how to do that. We knew it was going to be hard. Damn near impossible. But we discovered that real revolution, real change cannot happen until we attempt to get every vote counted. Until we included every voice that has a stake in the outcome. This was what Democracy really looks like. And I wasn't exactly excited by it. But it had to be done. Any plan we agreed on had to include everybody. And that was what was so radical about that kind of inclusion.

Hence the term RADICAL INCLUSIVITY.

The concept is big. And so hard. So we needed a big phrase.

RADICAL INCLUSIVITY.

As Chin said, during that retreat, she realized that inclusivity was a necessary step towards the liberation of socially marginalized individuals.

In one of her interviews, Chin explains that all types of oppression are connected:

I think if you form connections with people, if your life expands, it is normal that the people you are concerned about, the issues you're concerned about, expand also. [...] All oppression is connected. [...] Therefore, it's the same enemy, therefore, we need to link arms and figure out how it is to make all these small movements and large movements, too, these minority movements and these majority movements, that are for the same thing, to come together. ("S2 #2: The Evolution of Staceyann Chin")

As can be seen in this interview, Chin believes that inclusivity is a necessary step towards liberation, therefore, in her work, she invites her audience to be themselves more inclusive. Inclusivity is precisely what interests us in this master's thesis. Indeed, our objective is to show how, through her work, Chin deconstructs and criticizes notions of "feminism", "anti-racism" and "LGBTQ+ rights" and promotes inclusivity in terms of race, gender and class.

For that purpose, we will use theories from bell hooks's *Feminist theory: From Margin to Center* (2015) and Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (2007). We will try to propose an analysis of Chin's inclusivity, or lack of inclusivity for that matter. To these theories, we will also add Kimberlé Crenshaw's *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics* (1989), which will help to understand the role of intersectionality in the quest for inclusivity.

Part one of this master's thesis will focus on the platforms through which Chin shares her work. This master's thesis will specifically focus on Facebook, the stage and YouTube, as it is through these platforms that her performances are accessible to watch. This part will look at the advantages and disadvantages of self-publishing her poems, the accessibility and visibility of her work, but also how she interacts with her readers, exchanges with them and how they play a part in co-constructing her work. It will also look at how the various platforms she uses are interconnected, complementary and nourish one another.

Part two will focus on the Facebook poems and slam poetry performances that show to what extent her work is inclusive, in terms of gender, race, sexuality and sexual orientation. The first chapter will focus on how Chin aims to promote racial inclusivity within the feminist movement. The second chapter will focus on how she aims to promote gender inclusivity within the anti-racist movement. The third chapter will focus on how she aims to promote inclusivity within the LGBTQ+ movement in terms of race, class and gender. Finally, the last chapter will be concerned with presenting another side of Staceyann Chin's work, in order to illustrate how her work can sometimes be perceived as non-inclusive of the transgender community.

Part I: The Platforms

This part will be concerned with a brief analysis of the platforms Staceyann Chin uses to share her poems and how she uses them. It will also briefly discuss the interconnection that exist between the different platforms.

Facebook

When visiting Staceyann Chin's Facebook writer's page, we come across her "profile picture," which is a picture of her during one of her slam poetry performances. In that picture, she is standing in front of a microphone, fists clenched, mouth open, and she is wearing a t-shirt that reads "The lesbians are coming". It is this picture she has chosen to represent her in her fight for equality.

In the "About" section of her Facebook writer's page, there is one work listed, which is her memoir entitled *The Other Side of Paradise* (2009), which was published in 2009. It is during that same year that she began publishing her poems in the "Notes" section on her Facebook writer's page. Most of her poems end with a picture that illustrates and completes her poem as it always adds additional meaning to her words. Her last poem is dated from June 2016, and it is also the only poem she wrote that year.

Her page "likes" six other pages which are; American feminist and activist bell hooks, Afro-American anthropologist and writer Zora Neale Hurston, her Facebook page dedicated to her memoir, as well as female singer artist Meshell Ndegeocello, along with "The Gwendolyn Brooks Center for Black Literature and Creative Writing", and "Irana's Passage Pregnancy, Wellness and Bonding Services"

which is a center supporting women throughout their pregnancy experience. The fact that her page “likes” bell hooks Facebook page is interesting as she often mentions bell hooks either in her poems or in some of her interviews as well.

In the “about” section of her Facebook page, she wrote a small description of her platform which reads:

watch me lose my acquired manners see me run wild woman loose skin
stop asking me to be still kill me if you will I intend to run circles round
this tight white drawers you have put me in (copyright, staceyann chin)
(@StaceyannChin).

This description is then followed by a small biography:

Jamaican-Born, Brooklyn-Living, Woman-Loving, Writer/Poet, Political
Activist and Performance Artist. Single Mama.

Author of The Memoir: The Other Side Of Paradise

Here, whoever reads this section on her Facebook page, will instantly understand Staceyann Chin’s intersectionality. Every poem she posts on her page represents a fragment of her identity, of her story and the struggles she went through, which put altogether, make a bigger picture, tell the whole story about her. Every poem is also a patchwork of themes intertwined with one another. This particularity about her poems also illustrates the intersectionality that inhabits it. Even though she uses other social media like Twitter and Instagram, it is on Facebook that she chose to publish her poems, it makes sense in that it is the most convenient to write lengthy posts.

Poetry is one way that Staceyann Chin chooses to rebel against society and try to make a change. Through art and poetry, she conveys her fight for equality. As every other platform, Facebook offers both advantages and disadvantages. The "free publication of [her] work, in a national and international level" seems to be an important one (Sanchez Valdepeñas Hernandez 2). Then, as her poems are stored on her Facebook page, it is easy for people to access them, wherever and whenever they please. Thus, it also has made communication possible as well as exchanges between people residing in different parts of the world, allowing for the creation of virtual proximity and connections between people who are physically far from each other. This can be seen in many of the comments she receives from her readers such as underneath her poem "Raise The Roof (Because Y/Our Silence is Complicit)" (December 4, 2014); (January 17, 2017), where @Leigh-AnnNaidoo commented: "written over there, resonating hugely over here in South Africa!," to which @GabrielleLeRoux answered: "and as strongly here in Mexico!"

The easiness of access that social media offer its users has thus made digital platforms like Facebook an ideal place for artists and activists like Staceyann Chin to create a space where to speak to those who have the means and the desire to listen to her and to read her. Contrary to her previous blog (*Staceyannchin.com*), publishing her poems on Facebook allows her poems to have a larger visibility. Facebook offers its users a certain range of features to help them with the diffusion of their work. One of such features is Facebook's "share" button which allows people to repost Chin poems on their own Facebook page, thus allowing other people to see them and share them in turns. Thus, people may come across her poems simply because someone shared it on their Facebook page. Sometimes, Staceyann Chin herself invites her readers to share her poems. Underneath her poem "Raise The Roof (Because Y/Our

Silence is Complicit)” (December 4, 2014), [@LindsayHolton](#) writes: “Beautiful and painful, depressing and stirring. Thank you. I wish I could share.” Comment to which Chin answered, “Why can't you? Just copy the link and share. Here's a link. bit.ly/1A1C3IE” ([@Staceyannchin](#)).

Facebook also has the power to provide its users with easy ways to communicate with Chin herself. Indeed, through the “comment section” as well as the “direct message” option, readers can connect and participate in conversations with Chin. As Jeannine Murray-Román notes, “In all of her social media platforms, commenting readers engage widely with Chin’s writing” (133). Indeed, it is quite common to notice Staceyann Chin answering comments her readers left underneath her poems. Sometimes, as will be seen later in this work, some of these exchanges are interesting and important in the process of understanding Staceyann Chin’s work and beliefs.

Through Facebook, Chin is thus able to connect with her readers. She can create a space where she works at building and nurturing a community. Indeed, Chin seems to work at building a close relationship with her readers as she allows them to message her and often reply to their comments underneath her poems.

One thing that attests how much she connects with people is how people relate to her and her writings. When looking at the comment sections underneath Chin’s poems, it becomes obvious that many of her readers relate to what she says in her poems. Even when they are living on the other side of the world, people are moved by her words.

As can be seen underneath Chin's poem "Old Water/Running" (May 11, 2010), @AkeebaAlaowrites writes: "Crazy how much I relate to this." Similarly, @LeAnnChristopher comments: "It's like ur writing for me/ it's as though my thoughts and sorrows and feelings flow though ur ink, thank you."

As Chin states in an interview with "First Person," connecting with her readers is necessary:

if you can tell a story that's specific enough and universal enough at the same time, that is how we connect humanity, that is how you take a thing that is at the same time so specific to where it is from and so different from anything else it can be compared to. And if you can find common friends that experience alongside these [similar] unparalleled experiences that is the key to connecting you, us, to the human condition ("S2 #2").

Thus, as can be seen in @AkeebaAlaowrites and @LeAnnChristopher's comments, Chin manages to connect her readers to her poems and thus, to the "human condition," conveying this way, the message she aims to get across: to abolish discrimination and oppression.

However, while the visibility this platform offers coupled with the comment section allow her to connect to her readers, all of her readers might not be well-intentioned. Indeed, the visibility to which Chin is subjected can be both a blessing and a curse. Indeed, while most of the time, the comments underneath Chin's poems are positive and encouraging, it is not always the case. At best, she receives comment which either congratulate her on her work as a poet (i.e. "You are an artist/activist with access to melodious, staining words that teach, defend and heal" (@JohanNairneBeckles)), or comments that illustrate how much her readers can relate to her words (i.e. "Crazy how much I relate to this" and "It's like ur

writing for me/ it's as though my thoughts and sorrows and feelings flow through ur ink, thank you" (@AkeebaAlao); (@LeAnnChristopher)). At worst, the visibility to which Chin has access provides an easy way for malicious people to send her violent messages:

Today @312Barstool (bigot) tweeted @staceyannchin (me)
"You're a dirty carpet munching cunt that belongs in my kitchen,
washing my dishes and cock. Write a poem about that...."
So I took his advice and wrote the poem (@staceyannchin).

As it is the case with this Tweet, Staceyann Chin sometimes takes the violent messages she receives and publicly replies to them through the writing of a poem. By breaking the silence and replying to her oppressor publicly, Chin illustrates how it is crucial for women to speak about the abuses they suffer from. Chin discusses to what extent silence and breaking the silence are important to her. Indeed, in an interview with Donald Shorter, Chin explains that after she was attacked for being a lesbian, her reaction, her lack of reaction and sound, during and after the assault, was certainly a traumatic yet eye-opening experience that played its part in her decision and need to become an activist:

I was not just undone by the thing itself happening, I was also undone by the fact that I did not fight back, and that I didn't respond in a way that was fierce and feminist and loud and unapologetic, that I was maybe quite still and silent during the process and then kind of went into a kind of hiding and quiet after it happened. And then I left Jamaica, and maybe it was then that I decided I would never be silent again about something that was happening to me. I think I became an activist because I was so shocked, and then furious and undone by the fact ("S2 #2").

After the assault, she decided that she would never be silent again. And that is exactly what she does when she publishes that type of poem on Facebook where everyone can see it, even the person who sent her this message. Here, she uses Facebook to get back at her oppressor and take back her power.

She then ends the poem with a picture, as she often does. The picture she places underneath her poems often complete and/or add meaning to the poem. It can then appear as a form of continuation of the poem itself. In this case, she ends with the following picture. The picture illustrates Chin herself, standing naked, bent knees, loose hair and pointing her middle finger supposedly aimed at her oppressor; @312Barstool.



Staceyann Chin standing naked, bent knees,

loose hair and middle finger supposedly aimed at

@312Barstool (@Staceyannchin).

While Chin often ends her poems with a picture, she also often ends by speaking directly to the readers, vividly suggesting them to take action and be involved in the socio-political issues happening around them and in the world. This is particularly obvious in her poem “Raise The Roof (Because Y/Our Silence is Complicit)” (December 4, 2014):

if there is any humanity left in you
get up
stand up
join a fucking protest
pick up a fucking pen
write
scream
wail
march
meet
gather
plan
strategize
its time to find a way to make them listen
its time to make the powers that be hear
they need to see we are no longer complicit
it's time to raise the roof on these motherfuckers
so they know
we are never going away

Through the publishing of her poems on Facebook, she challenges the immateriality of the digital platform, to materialize her voice and bring people physically together in

protesting in the streets. Indeed, through this stanza, along with the use of terms like “get up,” and “join a fucking protest” she finds a way to “challenge the immateriality of cyberspace with language” (Murray-Román 138). Indeed, by writing these words and vividly encouraging the readers to take action, she illustrates how words can produce an effect on the material world.

Silence and how it is necessary to break it and take action is a topic that Chin often discusses. It can be found in many of her poems like the following one, “Bring Back Our Girls (Poem For The Missing Nigerian Schoolgirls),” in which she refers to Audre Lorde:

we raise this call to every/body
sitting on the sidelines of indecision
get up/cast off the heavy habit of apathy
Audre Lorde already told you
your silence will not protect you
nor your daughters
this is a moment to find your voice

[...]

get up
get up/from the comfort of your couches
raise a ruckus about this/this begs us
to cry out justice
we need to create the sound necessary

Here, again, Chin addresses the reader and tells them to “get up,” however, she adds that “Audre Lorde already told you your silence will not protect you.” Here, Chin seems to refer to what Lorde refers to as “the transformation of silence into language and action” (40-41). As Lorde explains:

Your silence will not protect you. But for every real word spoken, for every attempt I had ever made to speak those truths for which I am still seeking, I had made contact with other women while we examined the words to fit a world in which we all believed, bridging our differences.
(41)

Thus, Chin seems to emphasize that by deciding to stop being silent about the brutalities to which socially marginalized individuals are subjected, we open up possibilities to connect and together, fight to make a change. This fact is strengthened by Chin's line "we are at our best when our voices are raised against injustice," which illustrates how, to be heard, all the voices need to be raised, and this starts with breaking the silence.

Spoken Word Performances

While Staceyann Chin publishes her poems on Facebook, she does not publish her performances at all. Indeed, the analysis of Chin's performances that are provided in this master's thesis, was made possible because some of her performances were recorded by either attendees or the hosts and made available on their YouTube account. Contrary to live and thus ephemeral performances, YouTube provides a platform allowing performances to be stored, and thus accessed without limitations in time and/or space. Thus, thanks to YouTube, some of Chin's performances are accessible to anyone.

Before every performance, Chin's ritual is to introduce the poem she is about to perform with humor and/or sarcasm. By doing so, she seems to create a bond with her audience, which often responds with laughter.

When performing, Chin's voice is informed with a definite and determined tone. As the performance progresses, the volume of her voice increases and she often ends her performances by screaming, as if to force the audience to hear what she has to say. To the

rhythm of her voice, her body becomes the stage for the stories that she tells. As Krystil Tift describes accurately in *Embodying Intersections: The Performance Poetry of Staceyann Chin and Lenelle Moïse*:

she holds no emotion back and moves instinctually as a performer. With grand physical movements and gestures, Chin forces energy out through all of her limbs (and, yes, even her hair). When she makes an error in the text, it goes unnoticed. She does not draw attention to it and, instead, pushes through it with flat palms parallel to the stage floor. She forces her words out verbally and physically to do more than recall the text. She becomes one with it. The more intense her words of protest, the more her arms flail with passionate intention about each social issue that she is for or against (84).

When she performs her poems, she places herself at the center of the attention. Indeed, she seems to want to capture the attention of the audience so that they do not wish to look away.

In an interview with Sarah Neilson, Chin has talked about the process she experiences when writing and performing her poems on stage:

When I write poems, there's definitely some kind of release. Poems begin as a worry, an anxious knot inside of me, like a thought that just won't go away: a decision that needs to be made, a thing that needs to be explored. Pieces of lines float across my brain, and I have to find a way to put them together, make them relate to each other or have them make sense.

The other part comes when I perform it. When I perform, I'm trying to see if other people feel the same way, or if the language I used is actually what I intended to say. Sometimes, you write something and you think, "I'm saying

the bag is blue,” and then you get up on stage, and what you’re actually saying is, “I love the blue of this bag.”

On stage, you have a conversation with people and you get to hear it out loud in a way you can’t when you’re inside of your own house by yourself. When you’re reading in front of people, you can’t edit at the same time. You’re really trapped in the presentation of it, and so I think my body is, first, forced to listen to a thought; second, to assess whether that thought is accurate; third, to see whether that thought translates to other people; and fourth, to see how people feel about what they’ve heard.

The performance is also a physically explosive thing for me. I hold it quite tight when I begin to read, and then, by the time I’m done, it’s an exhalation. Maybe it’s also an implosion. It breaks up something inside of me. I think some people experience it as an implosion, as in they’re watching me break myself to pieces inside a little bit. And then some people experience it as an explosion, where the matter gets to them and breaks something in them, opens something in them (Neilson).

As Chin explains, while writing is rather a process that she has to do on her own, performing is, on the contrary, a process in which sharing is necessary as it provides her with feedback. In fact, without feedback, Chin cannot know if what she writes is received as intended. Thus, without feedback, she cannot be sure that her message will be understood by the audience. Then, she explains that on stage, she can directly hear what the audience thinks of her poem, as at spoken words performances, the audience is expected to react to what they hear and thus, somehow participate in the performance. However, when she states that “when you’re inside of your own house by yourself,” she cannot hear what the audience thinks, this is only true if she does not publish the poem on her Facebook page. Indeed, as it has been stated above, Facebook’s comment section provides the readers with a way to comment almost instantly underneath Chin’s poem. This thus reproduces the feedback process normally reserved for performance. The

readers either write commentaries or mimic the sound they would normally do if they were watching the live performance. For instance, in her Facebook poem “Cutting Loose: Girl Power/Squared” (March 9, 2012), @QianaPatrick writes: “*snappin fingers* speak!” and @NeeCeeLynnMurphy-Leacock writes: “::applauding::.”

Thus, as it will be seen later, the poems she publishes on Facebook and her spoken word performances are often interconnected and nourish one another.

Part II: Facebook Poems and Slam Poetry Performances

I: FEMINISM

This chapter will aim to demonstrate to what extent Staceyann Chin's work is informed with promoting racial inclusivity within the feminist movement. Indeed, as the movement achieved a lot of progress in its quest for women's rights, there are still some issues that persist. Two of these issues are notably the failure to acknowledge Black women's intersectionality and the lack of discussion concerning race and class within the women's liberation narrative, which leads to the systematic exclusion of Black, non-white, and/or poor women.

Tsunami rising

In 2017, Staceyann Chin performed a poem entitled "Tsunami rising" (October 1, 2019), for the *Women's Unity Rally*. She chose to perform a poem in which she denounces the issues that persist within the feminist movement and continue to divide women across race and class. She specifically addresses the lack of inclusivity of white feminists towards Black women, which consequently amplifies the discrimination to which Black women are subjected. The analysis of this poem aims to demonstrate to what extent Staceyann Chin's work promotes a racial inclusive narrative within the women's liberation movement.

In this poem, Chin discusses the multi-dimensional discrimination that Black women suffer from:

for centuries black women have endured the culture of rape and racism combined/ for centuries the world has stood silent while Black women and girls were bullied by Black men and white men/white women alike/ for centuries/anyone who wanted to hit something or own someone/could decide we were it/ without consequence anyone could tag the Black woman/the dark girl/the universal punching bag

What Chin demonstrates in this passage is that although anti-discrimination groups have often been praised for the significant progress and achievements they have brought about; they also participate in the oppression of black women. Nowadays, even though Black women have always supported the feminist and anti-racist movements, they rarely receive any support from them, and thus continue to be largely excluded from the feminist and anti-racist narrative. Thus, not only do they continue to be oppressed by white men, but also by Black men, white women, feminists and anti-racists alike. As Chin summarizes, Black women and girls have always been used as universal punching bags, meaning that whatever was done to them was deemed acceptable and/or justified.

As Chin observes in another stanza, Black women do not suffer from racism and sexism separately but from a combination of both:

the idiots obsessed with category have decided that a double X chromosome designates me subordinate to all those with an X and a Y
intersect those two X's with the fact of my Blackness
and/my existence is coded as dangerous/hostile/ a direct threat to the endurance of the white patriarchy/ and everybody knows white men have spent centuries appropriating what they wanted the gold they found in Africa/wasn't enough so they packed human bodies/head to toe

In this excerpt, Chin alludes to Black women's intersectionality with the line "intersect those two X's with the fact of my Blackness", which is interestingly located between a

line about sexism and another regarding racism. The structure of the stanza mimics the interconnection and overlapping of gender and racial discrimination, resulting in the line concerning intersectionality being lost or drowned in the text, much like Black women's experiences. One of the reasons why Black women are often discriminated is due to the fact that we fail to understand and acknowledge Black women's intersectionality, that is, not considering racism and sexism as interconnected discriminations.

As African American feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw explains in *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics* (1989), "Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" (140). Thus, as anti-discrimination groups rarely acknowledge intersectionality, they contribute to the oppression of Black women. Crenshaw then goes on to write that:

Thus, for feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse to embrace the experiences and concerns of Black women, the entire framework that has been used as a basis for translating "women's experience" or "the Black experience" into concrete policy demands must be rethought and recast. (140)

Rethinking the entire framework used to translate women and Black experiences is precisely what Staceyann Chin does. By drawing attention to women's intersectionality and their systematic exclusion from the frameworks through which anti-discrimination groups consider gender and racial discrimination, Chin shows a willingness to challenge the dominant view according to which "a discriminator treats all people within a race or sex category similarly" (Crenshaw 150). Indeed, as Crenshaw argues the use of a

“single-issue framework for discrimination” alienates Black women, making it harder to end racism and patriarchy (152).

Moreover, in the poem, Chin also mentions the name of Tarana Burke to emphasize once more how Black women’s voices are never heard. Indeed, Tarana Burke created the hashtag “MeToo” for women to share their own stories of sexual assault and denounce their oppressors (Alexander). However, Chin writes that “ironically the viral mobility of the #Me too hashtag was only possible because a white woman with power retweeted a Black woman’s words”, which refers to white American actress Alyssa Milano sharing Burke’s words (Nadja). Not only did this turn the #Me too as a symbol of white women’s experiences, it also swept under the carpet Black women’s experiences. In fact, as Chin mentions in her poem, “twelve years after Tarana Burke’s #Me too movement Black women are still largely missing from the public dialogue about sexual assault”. Through Tarana Burke’s story, Staceyann Chin underlines the fact that even when Black women create opportunities to raise awareness about the abuse and oppression they suffer from, they are not heard without a white woman approving their words, fight. What is more, Black women are constantly denied a voice in the feminist fight against sexism and patriarchy. Even when Black women talk about their struggles, their voice is appropriated by white women, thus, once again, making Black women invisible and silencing their voice.

Another strategy that Staceyann Chin uses to promote racial inclusivity in women’s rights movement, is that within the poem, she addresses a letter to white feminists. In this letter, she denounces white feminists’ ways of discriminating Black women, and also provide white feminists with some tools to educate themselves on the difference between them, and the discontentment of Black women. By performing this poem at the *Women’s Unity Rally*, Chin is aware that the audience will be mainly

composed of women involved in the women's rights movement. Through this letter, she addresses white feminists, including those in the audience. As a Black feminist, representing Black women's rights in front of white feminists, she uses the space she is given at this event to criticize white feminists' lack of racial inclusivity and denounces the additional oppression they inflict to Black women (by being racist). She begins the letter saying:

Dear weeping white women,

Even as we cannot find safe space to show you when or where or how we were torn open we are only holding the sorrow to keep our hearts from imploding we are unable to process our pain with you because we are exhausted from centuries of holding you and your children and we have a hard time trusting you because you all have never been able to stand/ by us

The language Chin uses is raw and direct, which translates a willingness to create a confrontation and to show Black feminists' and her level of discontentment. She confronts white feminists and criticizes their lack of inclusivity towards Black women and their assumption that gender discrimination is "monolithic" (Johnson 18).

In this letter, she also suggests that white feminists educate themselves on the differences that exist and persist between Black and white women:

we are so tired of explaining ourselves
and by the way if you wish to know more about the genesis of our rage
please Google us
or maybe you can read Bell Hooks
or Brittany Cooper
or any of the blogs of the bevy of Black women writers your white
publishers are too afraid to publish

She points out that, if they are willing to learn more about the origins of Black women's discontentment, they can easily find resources on the Internet, and even recommends reading the works of Black feminists, such as bell hooks or Brittney Cooper. It is also interesting to note that, instead of wasting time educating white women on the subject, she invites them to do it themselves. By refusing to waste her time educating white feminists, she illustrates that, as African American feminist Audre Lorde argues in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (2007), it is not the responsibility of the oppressed to educate the oppressors, but it is, in fact, the responsibility of the oppressors to seek to educate themselves on their mistakes (114). Indeed, these beliefs only represent "an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns," which help the oppressor to create "a diversion of energies and a tragic repetition of racist patriarchal thought" (Lorde 113). Thus, by providing white feminists with some resources to educate themselves, Chin saves her energy to fight the oppressor and along the way, projects her desire to see in white feminists, some allies.

It is only at the very end of the final stanza that Chin's anger against white feminists gives way to a willingness to build a cohesive community of women, capable of acknowledging their differences and use them as a force to connect them rather than an excuse to separate them. However, bell hooks has written about the fact that, when white feminists invite Black women to join the movement, they do so as hosts, leaders who invite Black women as guests, creating yet other ways to keep Black women as subordinate (54-55). By inviting white feminists and women to join Black feminists, as she does it in the following lines,

you come and you roar with us at these rallies/ you sit beside us in
schools/you sing with us in church/you stand with us where it matters/ you
vote with us and vote fucking for us at the polls

Chin turns the situation around and places Black feminists in a position of leadership.
She then strengthens her point by naming some of the most honorable figures of the
Black feminists' movement:

if you want to be free like Harriet Tubman/ weapon in hand/wading through
unfriendly waters/ her power compelling the freedom of even those who did
not want to be free/ if you desire to be confrontational like Sojourner/ if you
wish to be audacious like Audre antagonistic like Angela gangsta like
Winnie Mandela angry like Assata Shakur

By emphasizing the great virtues of these Black women, she places Black women as a
model of strength. She seems to do so in an attempt to deconstruct the existing belief
that “ruling groups of white males” (hooks 88) were the greatest model of strength and
power to seek. By emphasizing that Black feminists are strong too, and that we can look
up to them, Chin offers ways to rethink strength outside the existing white patriarchal
structures and models of strength (hooks 85).

Chin continues to invite white feminists to educate themselves and join
them, Black feminists, in the following stanza:

travel with us in the virtual in the flesh/ over these waters they have used
against us as weapons/ against/ the lands we call rock/ we all call home/ let
us/ crack open this ground with a fire/ uprising that will never again die
down/ we have to tell them/ next time we comin/ we gon' use fire/ we no
use wata/ fira next time no more wata we say/ fira/next time/ no/ more wata/
we go come with some motherfuckin fire fo yo ass next time

As we will see, this stanza can be interpreted in different ways. Indeed, many words can have a double meaning, such as the word “rock”. Rock is at the same time Jamaica’s nickname (Writer) and refers to the expression “to be somebody’s rock”, which means something or someone you can rely on. Thus, the line “the lands we call rock/ the lands we all call home” can be a reference to either Jamaica or the United States. In fact, since Chin performs in front of white women in the United States, the pronoun “we” encompasses American women, Black and white. The land they all call home would then be the United States, which reinforces the idea that they all have things in common and should ally themselves in this fight. Likewise, in the line “travel with us in the virtual in the flesh/ over these waters they have used against us as weapons”, Chin makes reference to the middle passage and the triangular slave trade (“The Triangular Trade”). By mentioning this part of history, she again asks white women to educate themselves on American, African and Caribbean history. With the line “travel with us”, she urges them to learn about the atrocities committed during colonization and slavery and understand their pain and history. Besides, the word “flesh” used in “travel with us in the virtual in the flesh”, can be understood in the way Hortense Spillers defines it:

But I would make a distinction in this case between "body" and "flesh" and impose that distinction as the central one between captive and liberated subject-positions. In that sense, before the "body" there is the "flesh," that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography [...] These undecipherable markings on the captive body render a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh whose severe disjunctures come to be hidden to the cultural seeing by skin color (Spillers 67).

What Spillers explains here is that the body is different from the flesh in that the body is marked with stereotypes, subjectivities that are attached to it while the flesh is free of any subjectivity, it is as it is. According to Spillers, the flesh is a symbol of liberation, nonetheless, the flesh is marked by what has been done to the body while it was “captive”. Slavery is an example of something that leaves invisible scars on the liberated subject. If we apply Spillers’ definition to Chin’s performance, with the line, “travel with us in the virtual in the flesh”, Chin could potentially be telling white women, to go on an informative and emotional journey, to understand the scars of the past and participate in Black women’s liberation. In order to fight patriarchy and sexism, all women must work together for “without community there is no liberation” (Lorde 112).

Also, this invitation to join the Black feminists is strengthened by the shifts in the subjects. Indeed, she shifts from lines in which she marks a clear separation between the white and Black feminists through the use of “you” (i.e. white feminists) in opposition to “us” (i.e. Black feminists), as illustrated in the lines “if you want to be free [...] you come and you roar with us at these rallies/ you sit beside us in schools/you sing with us in church/you stand with us where it matters/ you vote with us and vote fucking for us at the polls,” to a “we” which includes both Black and white feminists in the line “we have to tell them/ next time we comin/ we gon’ use fire,” in opposition to “them,” which refers to white men and the white patriarchy, thus reinforcing the sense of belonging to a community, to a movement, the feminist movement.

The communal “we” which refers to both Black and white feminists is then associated with words which appear to be in Jamaican Patwah:

we have to tell them/ next time we comin/ we gon’ use fire/ we no use wata/
fira next time no more wata we say/ fira/next time/ no/ more wata/ we go
come with some motherfuckin fire fo yo ass next time

This sudden shift from standard English to Jamaican Patwah seems to illustrate the idea that, while in the past Black women were forced to speak the colonizer's language and saw/had a part of their identity stolen. Thus, by inviting white feminists to join Black feminists in Jamaican Patwah, she invites them, once again, to educate themselves on the differences that exist between black women and white women, and culture is an important one in order to understand the suffering through which the black community went through.

Up from the valley

In order to enrich the analysis of "Tsunami rising" on how Staceyann Chin's work aims to promote racial inclusivity within the feminist movement, we will analyze one of her Facebook poems entitled "Up from the valley" (September 11, 2012), in which she emphasizes that, brutalities and abuses against female are a generalized phenomenon, happening around the world. Indeed worldwide, females see their basic human rights taken away from them. While in "Tsunami rising" she illustrated how necessary it is for feminists to take into account the intersectionality of Black women, in this poem she emphasizes how it is crucial to take into account that gender discrimination can and often is interconnected with race and class. In this poem, Chin includes the experiences and discriminations suffered by women all over the world. She stresses, in particular, the diversity of women's experiences in the following stanza:

these brutes are right now raping women in South Africa
trafficking small girls in Thailand
in Russia

in the land of the free/America
women still earn less money
for doing more work than our male counterparts
in China
little girls are being killed at birth/because they are not boys
in Haiti/in India/in Iraq the presence of a flap of flesh called a hymen
decides how much a girl is worth as somebody's wife

By contrasting women's experiences in South Africa, Thailand, Russia, America, etc. Chin highlights that discrimination not only depends on gender but also on race and class. As African American feminist Audre Lorde notes "The oppression of women knows no ethnic nor racial boundaries [,]" this fact "does not mean it is identical within those differences", gender discrimination is not unique, it varies according to several factors (Lorde 70).

Chin then goes on to write that the issues she mentions in her poem ("raping", "trafficking" etc.) are "only backdrop to the destructive details dotting the globe". By using the oxymoron "destructive details" to speak of the brutalities which are happening around the globe, she underscores the irony of the situation. Indeed, although these issues should be taken anything but lightly, they are not discussed or talked about. With the expression "destructive details", she highlights the gravity of these issues with the word "destructive" but also emphasizes how trivial they are considered in reality with the word "details". Moreover, when enumerating women's experiences and gender discrimination around the globe, Chin places the line "in the land of the free/America women still earn less money" in the midst of other discriminations/abuses such as rape, child trafficking, murder. This can be understood in two ways: either Chin is being ironic since earning less money seems a lot better than

being killed or raped, or by choosing this discrimination instead of “killed by police officers”, for example, she includes all American women (white and non-white). If we understand it as being ironic, Chin is trying to demonstrate that white feminism (in this case, represented by the USA), the most established form of feminism, has actually less to revendicate than other countries or types of feminism. In this case, America is the only country cited that is majorly white, and if white feminists only take care of gender discriminations in the USA, they give up on all the other women in the world who are suffering from a worse fate. On the other hand, if we consider that Chin has chosen the wage gap because it includes all American women, it could also be argued that the wage gap is further aggravated by race and class. Indeed, if women generally earn less than men, Black women earn even less than white women.

II: ANTI-RACISM

Gender inclusivity within the anti-racist movements

This chapter will aim to demonstrate to what extent Staceyann Chin's work is informed with promoting gender inclusivity within the anti-racist movement. Indeed, in her poem "Raise The Roof (Because Y/Our Silence is Complicit)," she illustrates how Black females are rarely taken into consideration when fighting against racism. In this poem, she particularly discusses the brutalities of the police towards Black people and emphasizes how, even though it is rarely the case, it is a necessity for Black women to be included in the anti-racists narrative against these brutalities that affect the Black community.

Raise The Roof (Because Y/Our Silence is Complicit)

In this chapter, I will analyze a poem that Staceyann Chin first posted on Facebook in 2014 and then performed in 2017 for the WNYC's 11th Annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. celebration. The poem, "Raise The Roof (Because Y/Our Silence is Complicit)" (December 4, 2014); (January 17, 2017) is a poem that discusses the brutalities of the police towards black people, which quite often leads to death.

As discussed in the previous chapter, racism and sexism are interconnected and cannot be considered separately when discussing discrimination, and especially black women's discrimination. However, as Crenshaw explains, "the model of race discrimination tends to be based on the experiences of the most privileged Blacks," meaning that "[a]nti-racists policy [has] been organized in part, around the equation of racism with what happens to the Black middle-class, or to Black men" (Crenshaw 151-

152). Thus, while, as aforementioned, white feminists' tendency to exclude black women from their fight is mainly due to a framing failure and lack of awareness regarding black women's intersectionality, this pattern of framing failure can also be extended to anti-racists who fail to include black women in their narrative for black liberation (Crenshaw 140).

Furthermore, as Crenshaw explains, "Without frames that allow us to see how social problems impact all the members of a targeted group, many will fall through the cracks of our movements, left to suffer in virtual isolation" ("The Urgency of Intersectionality", 4:34). As a result, in the media, there is almost no reference to the black women who were murdered by the police ("The Urgency of Intersectionality", 11:54). Raising public awareness about the reality of police violence against black women is crucial in the fight for black liberation.

As a black woman and an anti-racist who believes in inclusivity, Staceyann Chin aims to include every socially marginalized individual in her fight for liberation. In this poem, inclusivity is mirrored in the fact that she includes black women in her discourse against racial discrimination and consequently also contributes to raising awareness about the fact that black females are as brutalized by the police as black men are.

One of the strategies that will be used to demonstrate this fact, is to compare the version she published on Facebook and the version she performed. Indeed, between the two versions of this poem, Chin has modified some terms and lines which suggests that, while the version she posted on Facebook does not particularly show a desire to emphasize how black women are also suffering from this violence, it does in the version she performed.

Indeed, as can be seen in the following lines, in the version she posted on Facebook, Chin mainly focuses on black males when discussing black people who were murdered by the police:

these men who are killed are not dominoes
these dead boys belonged to people who now mourn them

Through these lines, she somehow implies that men are the ones who are primarily affected by these atrocities. Then, although it is true that she does mention a few women like “Yvette Smith,” “Eleanor Bumpurs,” and “Amadou Diallo,” their names seem to be drowned amongst the names of black males:

my name is Trayvon Martin
my name is Tamir Rice
my daughter is Michael Brown
your mother is Sean Bell
your father is Yvette Smith
Eleanor Bumpurs could have been any one of us

I am Amadou Diallo
and Eric Garner is all of us

Thus, these two excerpts show that in the version she posted on Facebook, Chin places more emphasis on black males than females. This ambiguity can raise questions regarding Chin’s awareness about the fact that it is also a reality that black females suffer from police violence and often die from these encounters (“The Urgency of Intersectionality”, 4:56).

The following stanzas from her Facebook poem demonstrate a certain contrast compared to others that can be found in her performance. Indeed, when she performed this poem two years later, she presented a much more nuanced version of the poem she had posted on Facebook. In this second version, she replaced the lines:

these men who are killed are not dominoes
these dead boys belonged to people who now mourn them

by the following lines, in which she adds the word “women”:

those murdered men and women are not dominoes
these dead children belonged to parents who now mourn them

In replacing the terms “men” and “dead boys,” by the more equalitarian terms “men and women,” as well as more inclusive “dead children,” she places black females and males on an equal footing. In addition to this modification, she also adds several stanzas in which she emphasizes that both black males and females are victims of police brutalities:

shot at twelve/for holding a toy gun
strangled in an illegal chokehold for selling loose cigarettes
arrested without cause for being too black
or too loud
or too much her own woman
these incidents filmed/ for families to watch
these murders played out on prime time TV

Another adjustment she made is that she modified the following stanza, in which she uses the word “child” to refer to her daughter:

I am holding my own sorrow
for my only child born Black
in a country in which her brown body does not matter
to anyone with any power

She then specifies that her “child” is actually her “little girl”:

I am holding my own sorrow
for my own little girl born Black
in a country in which her brown body does not matter
to anyone with any power

being woman and black
is hard
in this topsy turvy world where men
are created equal
when they are white and heterosexual

By replacing the word “child” with “little girl,” she expresses her fears for her daughter who is a black female. She also adds another stanza, in which she emphasizes the hardship of being a black female in a world ruled by heterosexual white men, which supports her statement.

At the beginning of this analysis, two hypotheses have been put forward. The first is that in the first version of the poem she published on Facebook, Chin lacks awareness about the murders of black women by the police. The second is that, by

opposition, in the version of the poem she performed, she shows much more awareness regarding black females' murders, and thus shows inclusivity in terms of gender.

As aforementioned, when she published her poem on Facebook on December 4, 2014, Chin seemed to imply that only black males were murdered by the police. Then, on July 27, 2015, she published the following post on her Facebook page:

Every article I read about #SandraBland serves to concretize my rising anger/press at my feelings of helplessness. When it was largely Black men & boys, I felt angry/helpless. Now I am Terrified, because these assholes are also gunning for me/my daughter. #WeeNeedToStandTogether #AllOppressionIsConnected

Here, she implies that the killings of black women by the police only started at the time she wrote this post about Sandra Bland, a black woman who was arrested by the police at a traffic stop and “found hanged in a jail cell” in 2015 (“Sandra Bland, 28”). As we will see later, Sandra Bland appears on several of her Facebook posts and on the version of the poem she performed. However, it is a reality that black females were already killed by the police way before Chin wrote this post. It was for instance the case of Shelly Frey, who was shot by the police in 2012, along with so many other Black females (“Shelly Frey, 27.”). Thus, this post seems to support the assumption that was made before, and according to which in her Facebook poem, she places emphasis on black males rather than females.

Another fact which seems to support this hypothesis is that, between the version of the poem she published on her Facebook page (2014), and the version she performed on stage (2017), two important facts can be observed; Sandra Bland's death, and the creation of the #SayHerName campaign by the African American Policy Forum (AAPF). Although the campaign was created in 2014, it is only from 2015, that they

launched their first event at Union Square in New York City and that they have supposedly reached more visibility at that moment.

As a matter of fact, in 2016, Chin published several statuses on her Facebook page regarding Sandra Bland and the #SayHerName campaign. It is interesting to note that, in these statuses, the only times she mentions #SayHerName, she also mentions Sandra Bland. Indeed, on July 25, 2015, she writes: “Just watched #SandraBland videos. #SayHerName #YourSilenceWillNotProtectYou #PleaseStopKillingBlackPeople” (Chin). Then, almost a year later, on July 13, 2016, she writes: "Sandra Bland. #SayHerName" (Chin).

Both statuses were published between Chin’s publication of her Facebook poem (i.e. 2014) and her performance of this poem (i.e. 2017). It is true that the facts exposed above could be trivial choices made by Staceyann Chin, with no relation whatsoever with this poem. However, in her performance she modifies some of the names of the black people she mentioned in her Facebook poem:

my name is Trayvon Martin
my name is Tamir Rice
my daughter is Michael Brown
your mother is Sean Bell
your father is Yvette Smith
Eleanor Bumpurs could have been any one of us

I am Amadou Diallo
and Eric Garner is all of us

Then, in the version of the poem she performed, she modifies some of the names of the black people who were murdered by the police, and adds the name of Sandra Bland:

with one voice /we have to call out the names of the dead
claim them as each our own /we must continue to say these names
Trayvon Martin
Tamir Rice
Michael Brown
Sean Bell
Yvette Smith
Sandra Bland

Thus, these several mentions of Sandra Bland's name along with this modification that appears in her performance, suggest that one of the reasons why the version of the poem Chin performed seems to be much more inclusive in terms of gender, is indeed related to Sandra Bland's death.

However, although in her performance she never writes or says "Say Her Name," she does say:

with one voice /we have to call out the names of the dead
claim them as each our own /we must continue to say these names

Thus, instead of saying "say her name," she uses the more inclusive "we must continue to say these names," implying that both black females and males must be included in the fight for black liberation. This willingness to include every black person in her fight can be observed in the following Facebook post: "#RaisedFist! Help me with this list! #SandraBland #EricGarner #MichaelBrown: #SayTheirNames" (Chin). In this post, she mentions, once more, Sandra Bland, along with Eric Garner and Michael Brown, all three murdered by the police.

More than including both black females and males in her fight, she also demonstrates a wish to promote a sense of belonging to a community, the black

community. Indeed, throughout the poem, she places a certain emphasis on the word “Black,” like in “Black bodies,” or “Black despair,” thus creating a sense of common history of pain and suffering. Then, as the poem progresses, it also becomes clear that she systematically places black people in opposition to either white people, white privilege or white supremacy:

fifty years later
race relations in America is still a fucking cauldron
bubbling angry under the ugly swirl of Black despair
and lack of white accountability

By doing so, she emphasizes how the black community has always been and continues to be oppressed by white people. Thus, it is as a community that they must fight against racial discrimination. Her willingness to build and nourish a sense of community between black people, is then strengthened by the final stanza:

we
as a culture
as a people
we remain a force of resistance
to the proliferation of white supremacy

Through her use of the pronoun “we,” which refers to the Black community, she illustrates that together they are “a people,” “a culture,” and thus, it is as such that they must join forces and fight against the oppression to which they are subjected.

In this analysis, it has been argued that, in the performance version of the poem, Staceyann Chin demonstrates a willingness to be inclusive in terms of gender. Thus, when she uses terms like “Black despair,” or “a people,” it can be assumed that

contrary to the anti-racist groups, she does include black females. In a similar fashion, the fact that she is a black woman, saying these words in front of the audience, emphasizes the understanding that this “we” she speaks about refers to black females as well. This strengthens her willingness to be inclusive of all black people.

Another difference we can observe between the Facebook version of the poem and her performance is that, in her performance, she is more direct. While in the Facebook version, she writes:

my death must be something more
than a footnote in media frenzy of our time
I am owed something
for having been violated by a system sworn to protect me
my name is Trayvon Martin
my name is Tamir Rice
my daughter is Michael Brown
your mother is Sean Bell
your father is Yvette Smith
Eleanor Bumpurs could have been any one of us

I am Amadou Diallo
and Eric Garner is all of us

In this version, Chin uses the pronoun “I” (and the expression “My name is”) to show that she, as a black woman, could have been one of these names, she could be the next name on this list. While she also addresses the reader by saying “your mother” or “Eric Garner is all of us”, she is not as direct as she is in her performance:

we should speak in solidarity
our sorrow must be one

our rage must be one
with one voice /we have to call out the names of the dead
claim them as each our own /we must continue to say these names
Trayvon Martin
Tamir Rice
Michael Brown
Sean Bell
Yvette Smith
Sandra Bland
Could have been anyone of us sitting here this evening
Victims all silenced by
State sanctions executions

In her performance, Chin directly addresses her audience by using the pronoun “we” and saying that all these names could have been anybody in the audience. Moreover, she invites her audience to join her and say their names and unite as one voice to fight racism. With the lines “we should speak in solidarity our sorrow must be one our rage must be one”, she calls for solidarity within the black community. She emphasizes how no matter if it is a black woman or a black man who has died, it is a black life and their fight is the same.

On another note, it is interesting to underline the fact that even though she is also a feminist, she does not show an anti-male sentiment, and includes them in her fight even though they have never included her. One could also ask why is it that she fights for black males’ rights, when she has been sexually assaulted by some of her cousins when she was a child, and when older, black men have also sexually assaulted her on campus for being a lesbian. This absence of hate towards black males can be explained by the fact that black people share a common struggle, hence as a black female, she is herself prone to feel compassion for black males. As bell hooks explains:

There is a special tie binding people together who struggle collectively for liberation. Black women and men have been united by such ties. They have known the experience of political solidarity [...] It is the experience of shared resistance struggle that led Black women to reject the anti-male stance of some feminist activists. (hooks, 69-70)

Black men and women are bound by the same struggle and discrimination, which is racism. However, while Staceyann Chin, in her effort to be inclusive, demonstrates that, indeed, a common struggle calls for solidarity, it could also question black males' lack of inclusivity. Thus, by placing an emphasis on the sense of community, Chin could also aim to show black males that inclusivity is a necessary step towards Black liberation (hooks 64).

Nevertheless, the fact that she fights for black males' rights does not mean that she turns a blind eye to the reality that, even though black males are oppressed, they can and sometimes are oppressors as well. Indeed, this fact is illustrated at the beginning of the poem through the mention of Bill Cosby's case of sexual abuse towards dozens of women:

December in New York
and the world has lost it's fucking mind
Christmas trees being erected like
Dicks amidst the groundswell of Bill Cosby accusers coming out of the
closet of secrecy
synchronizing with stories about frat boys growing up rapists

In this stanza, she mentions African American actor Bill Cosby, who was accused and "found guilty of sexual assault in 2018" (Bowley and Hurdle). The fact that she places

this stanza in the middle of other stanzas denouncing the too many murders that have stroked the black community, illustrates that she is well aware that while black males are oppressed, they can also be oppressors. She illustrates this in other poems of hers, like “Not my fault,” in which she denounces that she was sexually assaulted by some of her cousins when she was a child. The fact that she mentions Bill Cosby and other abuses perpetrated by black males, is crucial because, as Lorde argues:

As Black women and men, we cannot hope to begin dialogue by denying the oppressive nature of male privilege. And if Black males choose to assume that privilege for whatever reason — raping, brutalizing, and killing Black women — then ignoring these acts of Black male oppression within our communities can only serve our destroyers. One oppression does not justify another. (Lorde 63)

Thus, as Lorde explains, acknowledging and denouncing black male oppression is a necessary step towards black liberation.

As Crenshaw explains, "Communication experts tell that when facts do not fit within the available frames, people have a difficult time incorporating new facts into their ways of thinking about a problem" (“The Urgency of Intersectionality”, 3:28). Thus, in her effort to include black women within the anti-racists narrative for black liberation, and her attempt to raise awareness about the fact that black females suffer from police brutalities as well, she contributes to the creation of a frame which allows people to rethink racial discrimination, in order to understand the discrimination to which black females are subjected, and finally, for the anti-racist movement to be more inclusive themselves.

III: LGBTQ+ RIGHTS

Whenever Staceyann Chin discusses sexuality and sexual orientation in her poems or spoken word poetry, she often does so in two particular ways. She either talks about her own story and homophobia in Jamaica, she criticizes the heteronormative structures and fights for the rights that are denied to the LGBTQ+ community, such as Proposition 8 or the “Don’t ask don’t tell” act, or she celebrates the LGBTQ+ community. “All oppression is connected” is the only poem in which she offers a critic of the LGBTQ+ community for their lack of racial, gender and class inclusivity.

Thus, in this chapter, we will look at how Chin criticizes the LGBTQ+ community for not being inclusive enough in terms of race, class and gender in the poem “All oppression is connected”. Indeed, in this poem, performed in 2006 at the Chicago’s Gay Games VII, Chin denounces the privileged and selective community that the LGBTQ+ movement has become. She condemns them for only caring about white and wealthy people and turning a blind eye to other minorities that are part of the LGBTQ+ community and marginalized communities outside the LGBTQ+ community.

All oppression is connected

As a Black woman, and thus also part of the marginalized individuals excluded from the LGBTQ+ movement’s narrative for liberation, as they do not take into consideration the fact that she is Black, she uses her marginality to criticize issues that are still perduring within the movement.

The attendees of the Gay Games were mostly privileged people, who could afford to be there. Indeed, as she explains in an interview with Sarah Neilson:

when I was at the Gay Games [,] I saw privileged people who could take the time off, fly there, participate in what amounts to be the gay Olympics, dress up in cute shorts and hang out and have drinks at night; it's a very privileged party. That's also what happens at Pride (Neilson).

This type of audience reflects the kind of individuals Staceyann Chin refers to in this poem and who, by ignoring the issues that do not directly affect them, are contributing to the oppression of others. In fact, during her performance, she directly addresses the attendees, the audience which stands in front of her, and confront them with their lack of concern for others:

and while we stand here well-dressed and rejoicing
in India
in China
in South America
a small child cuts the cloth to construct you that new shirt,
that new shoe
an old imperialism held upright by the misuse of impoverished lives

She implies that there are having a good time at the Gay Games, are wearing clothes and shoes that have been made by children in India, China and/or South America. Through this paragraph, she emphasizes the hypocrisy of it. The fact the LGBTQ+ community does not leave room for conversation about other issues appears as highly frustrating for Staceyann Chin. In fact, as she illustrates it in the following paragraph,

she often feels like there are things she cannot say when she is with the LGBTQ+ community:

bitter branches of things I cannot say out loud sprout deviant from my
neck
fuck you, you fucking racist-sexist-turd
fuck you for crying about homophobia
while you exploit the desperation of undocumented immigrants
to clean your hallways
bathe your children,
cook your dinner for less than you and I spend on our tax deductible
lunch!
I want to scream out loud All oppression is connected you dick

She thus emphasizes that she uses the opportunity given to her at the Gay Games to say all the things she usually keeps to herself.

In an interview she highlights how narrowminded the LGBTQ+ community is:

I feel as if, when I'm in the gay community and when I'm in the queer community, I'm always fighting with people to have a conversation about race. I'm always fighting with people to have a conversation around class (Neilson).

Here, Chin explains how members of the LGBTQ+ community not only do not talk about race and class but also are not willing to make room to talk about it. However, in *Word Warriors: 35 women leaders in the spoken word revolution* (2007), Staceyann Chin shares her feelings about her performance at the Gay Games:

I offered up an intense critique of our increasingly “white, rich, media-friendly” queer cultural face, not knowing if I was going to be well-received. And apart from one or two dissenting voices—the ones who complained that my negative portrayal of the present LGBT community tarnished what was supposed to be a celebration—the stadium was a roar of voices. [...] It restored my faith in the power of saying your truth out loud. I now know that if you shout and shout and shout a truth, eventually, someone hears it, and sometimes if you are really lucky, and if the words are just the right pitch, the crowd will shout along with you. (qtd. in Olsen, n.p.)

Thus, even though her performance was highly critical of the community which was standing in front of her, and that she did not know the response that would emerge of it, the fact that the audience responded positively, gave her faith in the power of speaking out the truth and motivated her to continue doing so.

In the following paragraph, she illustrates that even though progress has been made, the LGBTQ+ community along with all the other marginalized communities, are still considered as subordinate to the larger patriarchal and heteronormative structures, which continue to oppress them:

amidst the new fangled fads and fallacies
the New Age claims that sexual, racial and economic freedom has finally
come for all
these under-informed
self-congratulating
pseudo-intellectual utterances
reflect how apolitical the left has become

As Chin mentions, thinking that equality for all has been achieved, as some members of the LGBTQ+ community seem to think, is idealistic. It is a myth that they have been tricked into believing, as American journalist Rebecca Traister explains:

The United States historically loves to tell itself that we fixed the inequities of the past. [...] And if you're in a position of a degree of comfort where in fact, lots of things have opened up for you, that's a very appealing myth, a very appealing version of the American story to become attached to. And for middle-class white women, [...] or even those with progressive politics in many cases, it's a particularly seductive story. ("The Political Power of Women's Anger: Rebecca Traister & Brittney Cooper")

Through her performance, not only does Chin criticize the people who believe the myth Traister is talking about, but she also works to deconstruct what Traister has called an "appealing myth."

As illustrated in the following stanza, Chin then pushes her critic farther by emphasizing how the LGBTQ+ community often seems corrupted:

the faces that now represent us have begun to look like the ones who used
to burn crosses
and beat bulldaggers and fuck faggots up the ass with loaded guns
the companies that sponsor our events
do not honor the way we live or love or dance or pray

[...]

the current LGBT manifesto
the current left manifesto
is a corporate agenda
and outside of that agenda

a young boy dressed in drag is sucking an adult dick for his dinner
a woman is beaten every 12 seconds every two minutes a girl is raped
somewhere in America

She underscores the disparity between the LGBTQ+ agenda and the measures that have been established to overcome the ongoing issues that affect members of the LGBTQ+ community. Moreover, as Murray-Román notes:

[Staceyann Chin's] speech marks how the community fails to achieve this happy expansion to its fullest extent by citing the intersections between homosexuality and citizenship, class, and race that have been ignored by what she identifies as an increasingly corporate driven identity politics (Murray-Roman, 142).

Indeed, Chin criticizes how the LGBTQ+ community does not hesitate to accept support from people who have and still discriminated and brutalize them.

Moreover, in an interview with Sarah Neilson, Staceyann Chin has talked about how, nowadays, the LGBTQ+ community tends to want to resemble heterosexuals:

I'm always challenged by how all of the sub-worlds we inhabit mimic the larger world we see. [...] It feels as if most LGBT people, particularly the privileged white folk, really just want their piece of the American pie. They want to be acknowledged by the larger cis, heteronormative, white, patriarchal world (Neilson).

This belief of her is illustrated in the following stanza, in which, for a brief moment, she embodies young activists' opinions about the confrontational character of the word lesbian. This willingness of the new generation of activists to blend in/meld, which is

emphasized by the desire for replacing expressions such as “being a lesbian” by more neutral ones like “dating people”:

It is now commonplace to hear young activists say:

"I can't explain why, but the term lesbian just come across as confrontational

Why can't you just say you date people?"

Tongue and courage tied with fear

I am at once livid/ashamed/and paralyzed

by the/ neoconservatism breeding malicious amongst us

This attempt to erase some of the LGBTQ+ particularities, which she here qualifies of “neoconservatism breeding malicious amongst us,” illustrates how, by seeking to be acknowledged by the state, the LGBTQ+ community has progressively drifted away from the initial purpose of the movement, which was to achieve equality and true liberation (Murray-Román 142). By focusing on recognition rather than equality and liberation, they ignore other issues such as racial, gender and class issues that affect members of the LGBTQ+ community, as well as other marginalized individuals. By ignoring the oppression to which certain marginalized communities are subject, they exclude them from their narratives for liberation and thus contribute to their oppression as well.

However, as much as they want and try to be acknowledged by the heterosexual community, they will never be able to achieve the same status or freedom within these structures. They will always be under the control and discriminated by white patriarchy. This fact resonates in the following stanza:

progressive politicians still dance around the issue of gay parenting
and the term marriage is still reserved for those unions sanctioned by a
church- controlled state

for all the landmarks we celebrate
we are still niggers
and faggots
and minstrel references for jokes created on the funny pages of a white,
heterosexual world

As Chin observes, no matter how much you try to be accepted by and treated on equal terms with white heterosexual males, they will always be alienated. For “Radical progressive politics require that we dismantle. According to Audre Lorde, we have to dismantle not just the structure, but the tools that we have used to build those structures” (Neilson). Indeed, as Lorde explains, to achieve liberation, discriminatory structures have to be dismantled:

For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those [people] who still define the master’s house as their only source of support (112).

The issue with trying to raise yourself to the level of the “master,” or privileged, is that you have no chances of success since he is the one who creates the rules and controls the game, and thus he will always be one step ahead of you. (need to construct new structures to achieve liberation)

On another note, while through this poem, Staceyann Chin criticizes and denounce the lack of inclusivity of the LGBTQ+ community, she also displays

inclusivity in her poems. Indeed, from “the epidemic of AIDS in Africa” to “the violence against teenage girls in East New York,” “the death of straight Black women and imprisoned Latino boys” and “the bloody beatings of brown boys accused of the homosexual crime of buggery,” it is without any barriers of race, class and/or gender that Chin brings these horrifying acts of violence together in this poem. By doing so, she illustrates how these oppressions dotting the globe are never addressed by the LGBTQ+ community. It is also a way to show how she, on the contrary, is highly concerned about these individuals who continue to be oppressed, and thus it also demonstrates that her fight aims to be inclusive.

Chin ends the performance by referring to Lutheran pastor Martin Niemöller’s quote:

First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out— because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me (“Martin Niemöller”).

As Murray-Roman notes, “Niemöller’s famous articulation of how fascist regimes take power [, is a] reflection on Nazism [that] speaks to the interdependence of identities” (141). Chin uses Niemöller’s reflection and adapts it to the context of the LGBTQ+ community’s individualism/ to fit the individualistic behavior of the LGBTQ+ community, and uses it as a warning against their individualism:

gather round ye fags, dykes, trannies and all those who are committed to
radical social change
we/are not simply at a crossroads
we/are buried knee deep in the quagmire of a battle for our very
humanity
the powers that have always been have already come
for the Jew
the communist
the trade unionist
and the terrorist
the time to act is now!

Now! while there are still ways that we can fight
Now! because the rights we have left are still so very few
Now! because it is the right thing to do
Now! before we open that door to find that they have finally come
for you.

In Niemöller's reflection, the "I" referring to the speaker, is placed in relation with the communists, the trade unionists and the Jews, and in opposition to "they," referring to the oppressor (Murray-Román 141). Chin remodels the subjects, going from "I" and "they," to "we," "they," and "you" (Murray-Román 141). This triangular relation she creates resembles the actual relationship between "they," referring to the oppressors (i.e. white and heterosexual men), the "you," referring to the members of the LGBTQ+ community who refuse to acknowledge other marginalized individuals as long as it doesn't directly affect them, and then the "we," which embodies the potentiality of a collective group, formed by all the oppressed individuals reunited to help one another, join forces and together, fight against the real oppressors.

Through "to find that they have finally come for you" = "we" open the door, to see that "they" have come for "you," illustrates how if "you," the hypothetical

LGBTQ+ community, stays individualistic when the oppressor will come for them, the “we,” which could potentially refer to // a community which takes every marginalized individual into account. The “we” is placed in opposition to “you.” // Thus, the individuals to whom the “we” refers to, will thus depend on how the LGBTQ+ community decides to define itself; either “narrowly,” or “includ[ing] economic and racial oppression as part of its struggle” (Murray-Román 141, 142). She offers a vision of personhood that is shared between “the self as autonomous,” and the inclusive of people who suffer from oppression as well (Murray-Román 140).

The fact that she places the “you” and “we” in opposition, without clearly defining to whom these pronouns refer, is confusing. It could thus be argued that she purposely creates a certain ambiguity as a strategy to challenge the audience and drive them to reconsider how they define their individual identity and the way this identity is positioned in relation to the LGBTQ+ community, as well as to other equally marginalized communities. Then, then fact that the “you” refers to her audience, which was mainly made of white privileged people from the LGBTQ+ community, “Chin asks [them] to bear Niemöller’s reflections in mind when constructing the present fight for political liberation” (Neilson); (Murray-Román 141).

In this last stanza, the severe criticism of the LGBTQ+ community she maintains throughout the whole poem then makes way for the message she seems to be trying to convey to the LGBTQ+ community which is a “warning against a conception of the self that is isolated in its independence” (Murray-Román 141). In brief, through this poem, she aims to warn the LGBTQ+ community against the danger of individualism and calls for solidarity. For solidarity between the oppressed is necessary for a communal liberation.

IV: THE OTHER SIDE OF STACEYANN CHIN: COUNTERARGUMENT

While the analysis that has been displayed in the previous chapters has demonstrated to what extent Staceyann Chin's work aims to be inclusive in terms of race, gender, class and sexuality, some of her readers have referred to her poems as transmisogynistic. Indeed, even though for the most part, she aims to be truly inclusive of every socially marginalized people and oppressed community, sometimes some of her statements and terms she uses appear to be conflictual and can raise questions about whether her fight is inclusive.

This fact is particularly true in her poem "Cutting Loose: Girl Power/Squared," which is dedicated to her daughter and her hopes for her to defy gender norms and patriarchy. The poem in question, which seems well-intentioned as it addresses the oppression to which women are subjected, however, reveals itself to be the object of controversy among her readers. The reason why this poem appears as conflictual for some of her readers is due to the fact that she uses chromosomal determinism as a standard to define gender. Indeed, throughout the poem, she refers to her daughter as either "girl," "woman," "XX-chromosome," "vagina" and/or "period."

The issue with the terms she uses to define women is that, by defining them based on biological determinism, she implies that transgender women, who do not have a vagina or xx-chromosomes, are thus, not actual women.

As can be seen in the following stanza, she starts the poem by emphasizing the hardship of being a black woman. She also emphasizes black females' intersectionality, which is, as it has been discussed in the previous chapters, necessary

for women's liberation and provides a better understanding of how racism and sexism are interconnected:

I suppose I should have known
the cosmos would have sent me a girl

double/trouble black/body with the dreaded vagina
housed in a history of oppression
nothing I have heard/lived through/makes this journey
sound
easy

However, she then suddenly ends this stanza by the line:

but I was glad when she arrived/two exes raised like fists

At first glance, the metaphor she displays in this line seems to be rather positive as she compares the double X to fists raised against the oppressor. However, by excluding transgender women, she herself becomes the oppressor. As the poem progresses, the term "XX-chromosome" is repeated many times:

resilient/tough/XX-chromosome running rough over terrain
unfamiliar
she showed me how equipped we come

The many repetitions of this term show that its use is intended and demands to be noticed. Through her use of the term "XX-chromosome" to define her own daughter, not only does she exclude transgender women, but she also encloses her daughter within boxes that have been created by the rigid patriarchal and heteronormative structures.

Usually, her readers, or at least the ones who visit her Facebook page with the best intentions, often praise her poems and provide positive feedback on the comment section underneath her poems. However, underneath this poem, she creates discrimination inside of her anti-discrimination discourse, which is as one of her followers (i.e. @ShanaBulhana, herself transgender) provides a rather critical comments about this poem:

Hmm. I like your poetry and spoken word a lot of the time. But I am disappointed by this poem.

You are talking about your child defying the gender establishment, but you are using chromosomal determinism at the same time. There are girls who don't have XX chromosomes (trans* girls, some intersex girls, and so forth). There are boys who have XX chromosomes. There are people who are non-binary who have XX chromosomes. To frame "being a girl" in terms of having XX chromosomes is incredibly cissexist. I'm non-binary and trans* and genderqueer, and my chromosomes do not define or determine my gender.

The other thing is that I was a movement child, I am the child of two activists, one of whom is also a poet and writer who has written about me. My parents expected me to be everything and more-- better than them, everything. I could never fulfill what they wanted from me, so I ended up disappointing them. To expect your child to fit into your activist framework is just recreating another set of norms (@ShanaBulhana).

In her comment, @ShanaBulhana criticizes Chin's lack of tolerance and inclusivity towards the transgender community. She emphasizes how at the same time Chin hopes for her daughter to challenge gender dynamics and patriarchy, but in the meantime restricts her to being defined by her "XX-chromosomes." @ShanaBulhana also

emphasizes how not every person who identifies as a woman have “XX-chromosomes.” To do so, she takes her own example as she identifies as “non-binary and trans* and genderqueer,” and thus do not have “XX-chromosomes.”

Staceyann Chin then answered @ShanaBulhana’s comment in five points:

1. this is only one story. in a plethora of stories. This is mine. My hopes for my daughter. The construct as it stands limits people based on chromosomal category. I speak on this limitation. And make no apologies for it (@StaceyannChin).

In the first part of Staceyann Chin ‘s answer, she explains her point by saying: “The construct as it stands limits people based on chromosomal category. I speak on this limitation” (@StaceyannChin). She, thus, defends the statements she makes in the poem by saying that the reason why she uses the terms “XX-chromosome,” and “vagina,” to refer to women, is only because it is how society defines “being a woman,” and she speaks on these limitations imposed on women by the patriarchal and heteronormative structures (@StaceyannChin). The fact that she then ends the first part of her answer by saying: “And make no apologies for it,” meaning that, even though she is answering @ShanaBulhana, Chin has no intention to change her stance regarding her choice of words, and have no intention to apologize for it. (@StaceyannChin).

Then, when @ShanaBulhan’s states: “To expect your child to fit into your activist framework is just recreating another set of norms,” she is talking about the following stanza of Chin’s poem:

I hope she runs circles
round these small-minded prisons we keep reconstructing/I hope
she takes more room than the sidewalks we have been pounding

I hope she raises both middle-fingers
to the current gender-establishment/I hope she crosses them
double/XX/at the core of her
I hope she takes/the liberties our generation hasn't been able to
I hope she cuts the strings attached to our bordered expectations
to define a self daring and more authentic than my own

@ShanaBulhana comments on the fact that when Chin writes lines like “I hope she takes more room than the sidewalks we have been pounding,” or when she expresses her wish for her daughter to be “more authentic,” terms like “I hope she” and “more,” in which Chin states that she expects her daughter to be a certain way and accomplish certain things, she contributes to recreating a reductive version of the person she wants her daughter to become (@StaceyannChin). To this comment, Chin answers:

2. the word, More, is always debatable. the more she is may not be the same/or even similar to mine. The more, of which I speak, is really more freedom to be herself. Whatever that self-defnes (@StaceyannChin).

Chin then defends her point by stating that the word “more” she speaks of, only illustrates how the “more freedom to be herself” she wishes to her daughter. However, this fact could be questionable as, by repeating several times “I hope,” she seems to imply that her hope is actually a wish.

Chin then goes on to write:

3. I wish the world were better able to house more than just one version of the same story. We are all needing of space to be ourselves. I wish you did not need to feel disappointed by a narrative that is about two people, in a home- my daughter's story need not be similar or different from yours. the

two can exist simultaneously- at least I believe they can in the world i dream to conceive... (@StaceyannChin).

In this part of her answer, Chin justifies herself by stating that her hopes for her daughter only represents one personal story. She also tells @ShanaBulhana, “my daughter's story need not be similar or different from yours,” implying that the issue here is not her words, but the fact that @ShanaBulhana is projecting her personal story onto Chin's and her daughter's, attaching to it a negative memory and feeling, while Chin claims she only wants her daughter to be free (@StaceyannChin). Again, Chin’s answer could be questioned in that, even though it is a story which is specific to Chin’s life and her relationship with her daughter, the fact that her hopes resemble wishes could be, as @ShanaBulhana implies, “recreating another set of norms” (@ShanaBulhana).

In the fourth part of her answer, Chin defends herself with respect to the fact that @ShanaBulhana has qualified her poem, and in some ways also Chin, as “cissexist” (@ShanaBulhana). Chin writes:

4. I believe girl power is trans politics. the point of the piece is that chromosomal make-up cannot define what I can or can't do. the current binaries are often re-affirmed by individuals who keep insisting that the words "girl" and "boy" say anything about inclination or identity. My biology is simply that. I have a vagina. Says nothing about what I can or can't do with regard to dress/partnership etc. It's just my biology. Which is clinical. unchangeable. And meaningless outside of reproduction. That said, we cannot pretend that there aren't limitations set by the current establishment. Those are the limitations I seek to deconstruct... (@StaceyannChin).

In her answer, Chin says that, in this poem, she specifically talks about women as defined by the patriarchal and heteronormative structures (i.e. reduced to a vagina, reproduction abilities and XX-chromosome, etc.), but only to emphasize that even though these structures impose all these limitations on women, women can still be strong and live as they please. However, even though she claims that the purpose of this poem is to defend women's cause, it still does not seem to explain why she did not include transgender women in her narrative for women's liberation.

Chin then ends her answers by thanking @ShanaBulhana for her comment and her opinion:

5. Thanks for weighing in. The conversation can only get better when we challenge each other... (@StaceyannChin).

Here, Chin states that debating is an important aspect of making the discussion move forward. However, throughout her responses, she never provides explanations on why she does not include transgender women at all.

Thus, one could question whether or not she is cissexist, as Shana suggests. What @ShanaBulhana observes in Chin's poem "Cutting Loose: Girl Power/Squared" (March 9, 2012), can also be observed in many other poems. It is notably the case in "Tsunami rising" (October 1, 2019) in which she defends black women's rights, and which has been analyzed in the first chapter:

the idiots obsessed with category have decided that a double X
chromosome designates me subordinate to all those with an X and a Y
intersect those two X's with the fact of my Blackness

In these lines, Chin uses chromosomal determinism to speak about women and men, as she uses “X chromosome,” “two X’s” and “those with an X and a Y” (@StaceyannChin).

This tendency of hers also appears in less obvious ways than in the previous poems that have been analyzed. In her poem “Up from the valley” (September 11, 2012), Chin uses menstruations to define women:

these times
are hard times/girls
harder still if you call yourself/woman
the cycle of blood pouring from your gut
in this valley of shadows smelling like death
in these times
where you almost need a permit to carry your own pussy

Even though it is, in fact, important not to minimize the stigma surrounding menstruation, the fact that she defines a woman in terms of an individual who necessarily menstruates, illustrates once again, that she fails to include transgender women. In the same poem, she also writes that she tells her daughter that she is a woman:

every day I whisper to her/daughter
you are but one small part of a majestic whole
you are a woman/child

By doing so, she implies that because her daughter has XX-chromosomes, a vagina and thus the ability to reproduce, she is necessarily a woman. She thus imposes on her daughter to be a woman based on the definition and limitations imposed by the patriarchal and heteronormative structures.

On April 4, 2012, Chin published a poem entitled “Tweet This You Small-Minded Motherfucker!” in response to a misogynistic tweet she received on Twitter:

Today @312Barstool (bigot) tweeted @staceyannchin (me)
“You're a dirty carpet munching cunt that belongs in my kitchen, washing my dishes and cock. Write a poem about that...”
So I took his advice and wrote the poem (@StaceyannChin).

The poem she writes is a powerful answer to that Tweet in which she defends women’s rights and presents a strong critic of white patriarchy. However, in this poem, the following stanza seems to be controversial:

unimportant little man
you splatter the male identity
with the putridity you exude
rotting apple/gonorrheal wound
refusing to heal/you would have us conclude
that most people with penises are like you

Underneath this poem, @AnumAfzal comments:

I def think this guy deserved to be told off and to shut the f up, but I think that some lines such as: "You would have us conclude that most people with penises are like you" is pretty trans misogynistic. I think we as cis womyn gotta be better about speaking up/standing up for ourselves in the face of misogyny, without alienating our trans sisters (@AnumAfzal).

As a matter of fact, as @AnumAfzal argues, Chin writes “most people with penises” to speak about men. This line comes as controversial in that, transgender women do have

penises but do not identify as men. Chin did not reply to @AnumAfzal's comment. However, when she performed the poem in 2013 (i.e. a year after publishing this poem on her Facebook page), the line that appeared to be controversial was modified:

unimportant little man
you/ splatter the male identity with the putridity you exude
rotting apple
you /gonorrhoeal wound refusing to heal
you /would have us conclude
that most men are like you

Indeed, as can be seen in the previous stanza, she modified the lines “that most people with penises are like you” and replaced it by the more neutral “that most men are like you” (Chin). By replacing the word “penises” by the word “men,” she specifies that she is talking about men, and erases the possibility for her audience to see her poem as controversial, as it was the case on her Facebook page.

It could be assumed that even though Chin did not answer @AnumAfzal's comment, she read it and decided to modify the controversial line. It is not the only time that Chin has reacted or modified her writing after reading a comment or exchanging with her readers. Indeed, after her discussion on Facebook with @ShanaBulhana, Chin posted a poem called “Courage” (2012) in which she gives examples of different types of courage and courageous people:

Courage
like the white teen from Wisconsin
homeless and fierce in heels
struttin The Village in Winter
no address

no coat/only the compass of your own heart
beating human and afraid

In this stanza, Chin could be talking about a young person dressed in Drag, or a transgender woman. Indeed, the line “only the compass of your own heart” seems to suggest that the person is following their heart, despite what others might think and that they are courageous for doing so. The fact that Chin writes this stanza after her debate with @ShanaBulhana might suggest that she aims to be more inclusive.

In 2014, two years after her exchange with @ShanaBulhana, Staceyann Chin publishes a Facebook note entitled “The Conversation About The Michigan Womyn's Music Festival” (August 19, 2014), in which she discusses the discrimination suffered by all women, including transgender women. In this note, she tells her readers how important it is to demonstrate tolerance toward the transgender community, and also suggests that all women should help each other out, join force and fight against their real oppressors, the ones who oppress all of them:

The trans community needs all of us to make sure the atrocities committed against their bodies and their hearts and their choices end. And women who do not identify as trans need our trans-sisters and our trans brothers to keep fighting this war against women that began long before we came up with the word feminist. We have to figure out this cluster-fuck of a conundrum. I'm not sure how. I'm so unsure that it scares me. But I cannot allow my fear to drive my position on an issue that makes some women quake in anger, others whimper in fear, and others ache with a sorrow I am unable to penetrate.

Deep scars exist on both sides. And we have to stitch this wound that continues to widen and bleed and weaken us. We are not each others'

enemies. The ones who hate both groups of us, and our allies, would love to see us shoot arrows into the heart of all we hold dear.

If you care. Join the Mother-fucking conversation.

I ask this. I beg this. I yearn for this suturing of our collective wound, because I believe if any community has the power to do this, it's us. For the love of the work we do. Join the conversation. Repost and comment. Say you agree. Or not. Or break it down for us. Say where you thought needed this. Or that. Insert your voice. Make it a resounding response. It is time for us to speak. To each other. And I, for one, is working hard. At listening. (Chin)

At first glance, this note appears to be a call for solidarity and tolerance between feminists and the transgender community. Indeed, she mentions the disagreements that have existed and continue to exist between feminists, more specifically radical feminists, and the transgender community. The tensions she mentions come from the fact that “feminists insist on regarding transgender women as men” (Goldberg). While she acknowledges that the transgender community has suffered from brutalities and abuses, she also uses this fact to emphasize that feminists, and women in general, have suffered from brutalities and abuses as well. In this note, Chin thus underlines that both communities have suffered from oppression. Therefore, instead of fighting each other, and adding on suffering to both communities, Chin suggests that they both show solidarity and, together, fight for the liberation of them all.

Thus, when reading this note, it could be argued that @ShanaBulhana’s comment regarding Chin’s demonstration of transmisogyny, has somehow raised Chin’s awareness concerning the fact that sometimes her work can be perceived as such. However, even though this note seems to demonstrate a more tolerant discourse towards

the transgender community, it is necessary to keep in mind that this note is about “The Michigan Womyn's Music Festival,” which is a festival which "promote[s] lesbian-feminist community and music” and which is known to have had in the past, a “controversial separatist intention of welcoming only ‘womyn born as female’”(Goldin-Perschbacher). In addition, in 1991, Nancy Burkholder, a transsexual woman was asked to leave the Festival because transsexuals were not allowed (Williams). Even though nowadays the Festival welcomes all women, including transsexuals and transgender women, this history of transmisogyny, coupled with the fact that the reason why Chin writes this note is linked to the fact that the “Equality Michigan,” which is the “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) political advocacy organization," has called for a boycott of the Festival in 2014 (@MichiganWomyn'sMusicFestival). This seems to be the reason why Chin calls for solidarity of all women, and why she places a certain emphasis on calling for tolerance towards the transgender community.

Thus, in the light of the reasons that seem to motivate this note and the sudden inclusivity of transgender women within her narrative for women’s liberation, one could ask if Chin’s motives are actually genuine. Consequently, this fact could also question Staceyann Chin’s claim that her fight aims to be inclusive.

Conclusion

In this thesis, it has been demonstrated that Staceyann Chin and her poems aimed to promote inclusivity in terms of race, gender, class and sexuality. Indeed, in her spoken words performances as well as in her Facebook poems, Chin either denounces and criticizes the feminist movement, the anti-racist movement as well as the LGBTQ+ community for their lack of inclusivity, and/or shows how she and her poems aim to be inclusive of every socially marginalized individual.

It has also been demonstrated that Chin's interactions with her readers in the comment section underneath her Facebook poems, often leads to the modification of some lines when she performs the poem in question. Thus, this fact seems to show that the platforms she uses to diffuse her poems, i.e. Facebook and the stage, show an obvious interconnection and complementarity which help her nourish her work and help her development as an activist and an artist. Her work can thus be seen as a position co-construction between Chin and her readers. This proximity might be one of the reasons why Chin is so concerned with being inclusive and helping every socially marginalized people. This fact is particularly interesting in that it illustrates how Chin possesses, in fact, "too many flavors for one platform."

That being said, sometimes it seems like there is a gap between her claims and her actual actions. Indeed, the act of criticizing and denouncing the lack of inclusivity in others does not mean that Chin herself demonstrates inclusivity in her poems and fight as an activist. Indeed, while her criticism may allow her to raise awareness about the lack of inclusivity on the part of most anti-discrimination groups, her sporadic lack of inclusivity demonstrates that she herself may not be as inclusive as she claims she aims to be.

Thus, even though Staceyann Chin, as it has been illustrated in this work, has demonstrated inclusivity in most of her poems, some others have proven a lack of inclusivity and even the exclusion of a specific community. Indeed, Chin appears to systematically exclude the transgender community from her narrative for women's rights. This fact has been demonstrated in several of her poems and under different forms and was even pointed out by some of her readers. After this fact was pointed out, Chin defended herself and refused to recognize that some of her poems seemed to be transmisogynistic. However, after this exchange, Chin has shown a willingness to be more inclusive of the transgender community. The true motives of her actions may, however, be questionable as the ways she chose to convey this inclusivity towards the transgender community seems to be linked to her interests as a feminist. Thus, it could be argued that her inclusivity appears to be selective. This fact goes against her claim that any fight towards equality and liberation should include everyone and thus, be radically inclusive.

In the meantime, as can be seen in her Facebook note "Fuck Political Correctness: Please Say What You Fucking Mean!" (January 22, 2013), Staceyann Chin herself describes her attitude towards social justice issues as provocative, in an attempt to make her readers react and raise the discussion:

Can Black folk be racist? Can a penis be feminist? I think the female body should be used as stock image representation of God. I think people who like big guns have small dicks.

These are questions I ask on my facebook/twitter statuses. They are meant to be provocative. They are meant to stir discussion. They are meant to illuminate

various issues I observe, to engage the public in dialogue about these issues of race, class, gender, sex, religion, etc.

[...]

I must say, there have been moments when people's questions, or responses have made me see things differently. In those instances, I see the exchange as proof that raising the issue is better than sitting silent, even when we disagree.

[...]

I believe in multi-issue politics. I think we all have it in us to be the oppressor. I think in some for or the other we all oppress each other. And yes, some groups are guilty of doing this in larger , more systematic ways than others, but we are all human- prone to ego, and self-importance. Couple that natural inclination with the legitimately anger (about the lack of safe space) brewing in the groups most often at the bottom of the power heirarchy, and the powerlessness we feel about our inability to reach those at the top, and we end up with guns drawn against each other. Classic

In this note, Chin explains that, sometimes, in her work, she aims to write provocative statements in an attempt to raise the discussion among her readers, about a particular issue. Sometimes, the discussions that result from her act of provocation lead to her personal development as it helps her see things in a new light. When applying this fact to Staceyann Chin's exchange with @ShanaBulhana and Chin's subsequent attempts at including the transgender community, it could be argued that Chin's lack of inclusivity was an act of provocation which resulted in her seeing things differently. However, Chin then goes on to state that she believes every individual is at once oppressed and oppressor, and that conflicts arise among the socially marginalized communities because, as they cannot fight the real oppressors, they tend to view each other as enemies. Thus, when applying these facts to Chin's lack of inclusivity towards the

transgender community, which has been pointed out by some of her readers, it could be argued that Staceyann Chin herself is at once oppressed and oppressor.

Therefore, between the lack of inclusivity and the deliberate provocation to promote anti-discrimination movements that are more inclusive, it is quite hard to know. I want to conclude with Staceyann Chin's words from the same Facebook note: "That said, I believe the heart of any real move toward equality will only begin when every person/group can be, and questioned/challenged" (Chin). With these words, Chin invites us to follow her critical approach and, in our turn, criticize and question her work.

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