



Imagining Liberatory Futures with Alexis Pauline Gumbs and M. E. O'Brien

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ABSTRACT

In this visionary conversation, Alexis Pauline Gumbs and M.E. O'Brien explore collective relations, liberatory practices and radical futures. Engaging with Black feminist theory, insurgent utopias, psychoanalytic insights, communist visions and poetic expressions, they connect the fields of race, symbolic exchange, social dreaming, speaking and listening, accountability, maternal practice, the family, poetic interventions, and envisioning through struggle. Together, they invite us all to conjure a world of shared imaginations and collective liberation.

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Tracy Simon: M.E. and Alexis, we are thrilled to bring you into conversation for the *Maternal Impossibility* SGS Issue. Through your speculative writing, you both invite us to envision conditions of possibility through new future imaginaries, which ties to the paradox we're exploring in this issue: the notion of impossibility that carries with it the potential for the possible. Both *M Archive* and *Everything for Everyone* offer us a vision for those who will be inhabiting the future, bridging the gaps between unimaginable grief, stasis, and entrenched systems with new forms of collective relations, liberatory practices, and radical considerations of futurity.

M.E., through *Family Abolition: Capitalism, and the Communizing of Care*, you give us a glimpse into a world where relationships are liberated from capitalist constraints, where individuals have access to essential resources, ushering in a new era of unbounded familial connections, free from gender and material conditions. Alexis, through your groundbreaking work in *Revolutionary Mothering*, you expand our understanding of mothering as a practice of transformation and liberation. You challenge traditional gender and privatized family forms, queering the concept of mothering and emphasizing collective caretaking and the resistance work of raising children together. Much of your work fluidly moves between past and future, bodies and planets, human and non-human, the inseparability of life and death, ancestor and spirit relations, reminding us of our forever interconnectedness.

We would be grateful to hear an excerpt of your writing to bring us into the conversation.

M. E. O'Brien: I'm going to read an excerpt from my co-authored novel *Everything for Everyone*. This is from an interview with a fictional character in the future, a young trans woman named Kayla Puan, and it touches on some themes in *Family Abolition*.

I'm the fictional interviewer in the future. I say, "Maybe this is a good time to go back to your growing up? Tell me about your parents. How did they meet? What kind of work did they do?"

Puan responds, “I had four parents, initially. Kareem—who I mentioned— Kareem, was killed. His boyfriend Joseph. Joseph’s three-hour was coordinating the distribution of a drug used by diabetics. A pharmaceutical logistics circle. He is retired now. Sara, my mom, she is a nurse for her three-hour. Still working. And Caleb, Sara’s husband, was a teacher. He became a bus driver because of his political group, he told me once. They all helped found the North Ironbound Commune shortly after the insurrection took Newark. Ani and xe’s children moved in much later. So yeah. We lived in a subuny together for my first years.”

“Tell me about North Ironbound,” I ask.

“It’s my commune. We have 231 residents. It was the first commune of Newark. Other people know this story; the place was founded a few months before I was born. During the insurrection, people set up these big cooperative kitchens and worked together around getting food and eating it together. People started sharing childcare and trying to sleep close to each other for safety. Initially it was about staying alive, figuring out how to get everyone fed, how to keep things going when they got rid of money, and all the police and the fascists were driven out. People needed to eat. The group kitchens were the beginnings of the commune, and from there, they shared all the other kinds of work of daily life. Groups of a couple hundred, I guess? Chaps decided it was a better way to live, and as the insurrection went on people adopted these apartment buildings for commune centers. North Ironbound Commune was the first in Newark, and Dutch Neck just down the road was second. You are very old! You may remember that.”

I say, “I do! I was in Brooklyn. I was old then, too. Did you ever wish your family was more independent, like cooking and cleaning for themselves, and living separated, and with the parents in charge of everything?”

“No! Oh god, I get that is how people used to live but it sounds so lonely and so bad. And I don’t think it would have been good for me. None of my parents were very into trans stuff when I came out, but they were able to get a lot of help from everyone here who they worked with and ate with. The money and property stuff sounds like such a terrible idea, all around, and seems like it must have been so miserable for everyone.”

“What was your first memory?” I ask Puan.

“I remember crawling around in the sun and finding squash hiding under the big leaves. The sun coming through the leaves, I remember that. A lot of my childhood I spent on the farm. We have this farm, people love it.”

“Was the farm how people survived?”

“Oh no! Once the fighting died down, we got food from all over the world, or at least all over the region and cooler stuff from around the world. We always had digits, and movies, and the Internet came back up quickly.”

I’ll stop there.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs: I love it! I’ll read from *Evidence*, a short story published in the anthology *Octavia’s Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements*, edited by adrienne maree brown and Walidah Imarisha, that will be republished in a collection of my own work next year.

“By reading past this point you agree that you are accountable to the council. You affirm our collective agreement that in the time of accountability, the time past law and order, the story is the storehouse of justice. You remember that justice is no longer punishment. You affirm that the time of crime was an era of refused understanding and stunted evolution. We believe now in the experience of brilliance on the scale of the intergalactic tribe.

Today the evidence we need is legacy. May the public record show and celebrate that Alandrix consciously exists in an ancestral context. May this living textual copy of her digital compilation, and all its future amendments be a resource for Alandrix, her mentors, her loved ones and partners, her descendents and detractors to use in the ongoing process of supporting her just intentions.

We are grateful that you are reading this. Thank you for remembering.
 With love and what our ancestors called “faith,”
the intergenerational council of possible elders
 And, let’s see, **Exhibit B. Or Be is for Brilliant**
Letter from Alandrix, age 12:
 (sent via skytablet during dream upload third cycle of the facing moon, receipt unknown)

Ancestor Alexis,

I’ve heard about you. I’ve even read some of your writing. Everyone says I have an old soul, and I’m really interested in what it was like back when you lived. It seems like people were afraid a lot. Maybe every day? It’s hard to imagine, but it seems that way from the writing. I have to remember that no one knew that things would get better, and that even people who were working to make it happen had to live with oppression every day. I read your writing and the writing of your other comrades from that time and I feel grateful. It seems like maybe you knew about us. It feels like you loved us already. Thank you for being brave.

I’m 12 and last year I did a project for our community about your time, the time of silence breaking. I made a poster and everything and an interactive dance. A friend of mine did one on the second abbreviated ice age instigated by oil on fire, but I thought writing about the time of silence breaking would be harder. The ice continents were in your imaginations, the limits of your memory melted, you spoke about the hard things and you could see your own voices. It must feel almost like a force of nature when you live.

I’m 12 and you would have thought of me as part of your family, even though now we do family differently; we have chosen family now, so maybe we would just be comrades if you lived here in this generation. Who knows. But I think that if you met me, you would feel like we have some things in common. I’m a poet and I use interactive dance so maybe you would choose me as family. I know I would choose you.

You could have been at my wow kapow ritual that happened recently. In our community, 12 is an important accountability age. We named this ritual for how it feels in our bodies around now. Wow kapow. I think you used to call it the pituitary gland.

We are here five generations after you and a lot has happened. A lot of the things that used to exist when you were 12 and even when you were 28 don’t exist anymore. People broke a lot of things other than silence during your lifetime. And people learned how to grow new things and in new ways. Now we are very good at growing. I’m growing a lot right now and everyone is supportive of growing time, which includes daydreams, deep breaths, and quiet walks. No one is impatient while anyone else is growing. It seems like people are growing all the time in different ways. It was great to learn about you and a time when whole communities decided to grow past silence.

M. E. O’Brien: That is just tremendous.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs: They so meet up!

M. E. O’Brien: The Kayla Puan interview is the one place in *Everything for Everyone* where we explicitly describe a transformative justice accountability process. One of her fathers becomes violently abusive when he’s grieving and alcoholic, and she describes the process of coming together and arguing about what to do. The commune responds with what they call “an accompaniment” where one of his friend’s volunteers to stay with him continuously. And she describes her thinking through this process, and how other people in the community respond to it.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs: This is what we must do. We must imagine all of these things.

Tracy Simon: How do you both reach these places, this imagination beyond? It's a question about your approach to listening and writing.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs: I think listening is the word. All of my writing is listening. I ask: What if my listening is not limited by fill-in-the-blank, by species, by past and future, by life and death? In my process, I've found that I'm usually the limit to my listening. The way adrienne and Walidah articulate visionary fiction was a powerful turning point in my writing, allowing me to ask myself what is the furthest thing I can imagine?

M. E. O'Brien: I recently spoke about how to parse the difference between colonial utopianism, that top-down plan for a new society that relies on the colonial frontier, and insurgent utopianism, a utopian horizon that emerges in mass struggle. I've been writing about the abolition of police as such a utopian revolutionary demand taken up in recent social movements, and "From the River to the Sea" as another. In both cases, a basic task for organizers and radical writers is noticing how those demands are taken up, what they animate and what they make possible. This draws on an organizing practice of listening and distilling in the Maoist tradition known as the Mass Line.

In how I approach both communist theory and speculative fiction, it is essential to notice how revolutionary utopian visions emerge from struggles themselves, particularly at moments that protests grow very rapidly and draw in huge numbers of people. Movements start being able to collectively imagine something as conceivable in a way that it wasn't before. Those are moments of collective theorizing. Writers within movements can play a role in naming, drawing out, and thinking through the new insights becoming conceivable at these moments, and offer those insights back to people we are in struggle with. *Everything for Everyone* begins with the question, what if we won? What would that look like? Let's imagine that together. My work only becomes possible by being a part of these struggles, to learn from the brilliance that emerges in these moments of mass protest. I can't think about them from an external place, only from a place created by the struggle.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs: That resonates so much. adrienne and Walidah say all community organizing is science fiction and this is how they generate their definition of visionary fiction, which I live inside of. That sense of being inside "evidence" that comes out of this collective question, from women of Color, survivors of sexual violence, who say: We believe there can be a world beyond and free of sexual violence.

I love how you say that the imagining is happening inside of the struggle, because that's also the condition of my daily writing practice; I see it as a long, Black feminist struggle, which also is why I'm interested in an intergenerational temporality. I can identify with a person in the future that I can't imagine, just as I know that there were folks in the past who were struggling, and part of what kept them able to engage in struggle, able to stay with each other and risk what they risked, was that they imagined the conditions of possibility that I live in right now. This form of love was something that they tapped into already, to sustain themselves and remind themselves why they demanded what they did. They were doing it with a sense of kinship that didn't consist of people they knew, or people that existed, or people that they could control in any way. This expansiveness is also part of family abolition.

Tracy Simon: You both theorize about temporality and its relation to our ongoing interconnectedness.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs: Those terms already exist in a capitalist mode of reproduction that insists on extending the present in a violent, terrifying way that we witness and we are surviving. I'm reading essays by Rashida Phillips for a forthcoming book called *Dismantling the Master's Clock*. She's co-founder of Black Quantum Futurism along with Camae Ayewa. She is asking us to look at the racist and colonialist bias that constitutes the idea of linear time in science. She keeps hearing from scientists,

‘we believe that time moves this way because we get older and not suddenly younger.’ But that’s so bound to the normative timeline of a singular separate life!

M. E. O’Brien: I was recently discussing the role of the fee in psychoanalytic treatment, even in very, very low fee settings. The fee can act as a form of symbolic, abstract exchange that links up to questions of intergenerational debt, relationships of dependence we don’t know, and how we are linked into capital as a world-structuring and world-destroying force. By charging a fee, the analysis comes to have something to do with all this, offering a chance to work through something in how we relate to these questions. A friend and comrade raised the question of how psychoanalysis would be possible under communism, in a society without money and commodity exchange. What then would play that role in structuring symbolic life, what would be the debt that ties together lineages, that separates generations? Money does so in a horrific, violent, and catastrophic way. What else could mark what we owe to our ancestors, to future generations? What links together the past and the future, and a present if not the violence of money and capital?

Recently I worked with *Pinko Magazine* on this new book, *After Accountability*. The book is a collection of interviews with activists about their experiences of accountability as a concept and movement practice. Accountability, as many said, depends on strong communities. But these communities are so precarious under capitalism. Under the dynamics of wage, labor, state violence, white supremacy and heteronormativity, communities are exceedingly fleeting. Our real material human interdependence on a global scale is mediated through impersonal market exchange. The task of imagining an interdependent society on a global scale beyond money and capital is profoundly challenging and fundamentally necessary.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs: Sylvia Wynter writes about this: How did economics become the new priesthood, in which it is constantly generated as the symbolic representation of connection in our lives? What it takes for that to happen is continuously eradicating and silencing multiple indigenous understandings of what connects us and what represents our aliveness.

I’m wearing my Wampum earrings right now. In my Shinnecock lineage these are oyster shells for the writer to write the story, the treaty. But all treaties can be broken and so it became a currency, which is a deep impoverishment of what it is to be the people of the shoreline in relationship with the oysters, in relationship with the North Atlantic Right Whale. Understanding our debt is what makes life possible in a very tangible way. Understanding our interspecies field of relation and the contingency of our lives, and the profound dependence of our lives on this interspecies trust is so important. I think about how we are relating through the network of capitalism. The costs that are not calculated enable the destruction of our own conditions of possibility in our own environment, because that is what cannot be included in that capitalist matrix.

M. E. O’Brien: These material interrelations of dependency, for our actual physical survival and wellbeing, through collective labor and collective consumption, define and structure our lives. So much of organizing is collaboratively crafting a set of narratives that make an argument about the causal processes that shape our present, and about the alternative causal processes of collective endeavors that could change things. Narratives articulate the debts and relations of cares that bind us together, that enable us to act together in the world.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs: Accountability becomes so literal. In *Everything for Everyone* you explained the accountability process for the grieving person who has become abusive in their actions. The accountability of accompaniment: Can someone give an account of what’s going on with this person right now? Because it matters. That story is a storehouse of justice. It’s asking for responsibility. You hold the account. That’s the Wampum restoration, the listening practice, towards being able to hold

more than I have been expecting myself to hold with my listening, more than I've been taught in a colonial education about what's possible from listening. It's a completely different value.

Tracy Simon: It makes me wonder about psychoanalysis, the act of speech and the project of listening.

M. E. O'Brien: As an analyst in formation, I've been moved by how powerful speaking can be. A speech act can transform people's relationships to their past, their future, their bodies, their health. Part of what makes speaking powerful is that we always say more than we intend. The speech act of a narrative about how we're linked together can be very helpful, but the speech itself, and the structure of it, slips. And in the slip, it opens onto a beyond. A patient is speaking to me, but always to someone beyond me, a figure from their lives but also not quite that person, even beyond them. That slip, that beyond opens onto their own desire. But in trying to articulate something of their desire and allowing the slip, allowing something to rupture and open into that space beyond, is where the work is. That shares so much, for me, with thinking about the riot and what starts in the collective insurgency, in the disruption of the social order. There begins to be space to think about what we could become.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs: Last night, I was talking with poets Tomiko Bayer and Frannie Choi about poetry as a catalyst for change. In the therapeutic setting, it's the desire that can't be articulated, but it's present. To me, it's the poem, that's what keeps me in the poetic practice.

M. E. O'Brien: There's something you wrote in *M Archive* that resonates:

what we wanted was to want to. not to have to do anything. and the problem was we forgot after all these years of force what wanting was.

want was not getting, nor was it having. wanting was not needing. wanting was not having to have or needing not to need. it was not. and there was a wideness in wanting that didn't quite fold in on itself. it deepened and rose up and radiated out and touched softly to itself with warm warning.

Tracy Simon: These ideas about desire and transformation raise important questions about the family: How do you envision the structure of the family? And how do you think about the place of the maternal? Even as a term, the maternal carries significant weight around gender and the erasure of certain bodies and types of labor.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs: I started writing poetry as praise poems to people in my family of origin. I think about that child doing that work as an honoring, and expressing desires beyond what it is to name somebody grandfather, mother, father, cousin, categories of our supposed relation that were so insufficient to me that I had, as a child, to create a whole poetics to reclaim that. Renaming is the root of everything. The marriage abolition, the queer mothering, the idea of school.

Audre Lorde's use of the maternal and mother is like a mother goddess, a cosmology that she understood herself inside of. By our children, she means the children of all Black lesbians and gays, the claim that it has to be bigger. At the same time, she's writing about her own life, refusing to be property with impropriety - she was so proud of what a bad kid she was! These are some genesis points on the idea of expansive mothering: A refusal of some pre-existing terms of relation, an insistence on a poetic act of relation, and the perspective of the child.

M. E. O'Brien: I've been appreciating Joy James work around the *Captive Maternal* which resonates with my interest in the history of racial capitalism and struggles around collective care and against the white supremacist family form. But I came to her work as I was finishing my book, and wasn't able to incorporate it. I looked in my [book] index, and I don't have the words "maternal" or "mother" in it. Under "mothering" I just have "concept of Alexis Pauline Gumbs". In a book about the history of the family and racial capitalism, the crisis of social reproduction, and revolutionary speculation about how care could be transformed in the struggle to overcome class society, I made a choice to abstract away from the maternal and mothering.

The only registers of discussing the maternal that resonate with me come out of Black feminism. I have deep skepticism about the role of the maternal in the history of white feminism, the place of trans people in it, the place of enslavement, property relations, and what is reproduced in the logic of the white maternal. I take a piece that's quite essential to the maternal, that of care, and think a lot about care alongside this Marxist-feminist model of social reproduction and how it could function, but also all that it excludes. Black studies and Black feminism think about how exclusions are central to constituting what's being reproduced. The maternal that interests me is one that emerges precisely at the point that someone can't access a certain kind of normative regime of the family. It's precisely the exclusion from a kind of normative category of the female that opens onto the possibility of being revolutionary.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs: If [mother] becomes a status, there's so much violence in maintaining any status inside of patriarchal racial capitalism. This is why, in *Revolutionary Mothering*, we insist on returning to the action, looking for the erased labor. Once you ask, "who's really doing the labor?", we reveal what that status is supposed to hide.

Tracy Simon: I appreciate you bringing in Joy James' work and the erasures she reveals. I'm also thinking about the mother as theorized within psychoanalysis.

M. E. O'Brien: On the one hand, [in psychoanalysis], there's the emphasis on the maternal function of the analyst that I've been quite skeptical of, and, on the other, the pervasive misogyny of locating pathology in mothers. I'm thinking about Bracha Ettinger's work on how identifying your mother as the source of your problems is about severing these really deep connections that tie your body to others.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs: Joy James, Dorothy Roberts, and others write about the disconnection from the connection to other bodies as an antisocial act, and how the criminalization of Black mothers and identifying them as a site of pathology has worked to create an antisocial economy people have bought into. Speaking of the work that narrative does.

M. E. O'Brien: One issue in Black feminist theory that influenced my thinking about family abolition is the relationship between sexual freedom and pathologization of Black motherhood. The demonization of Black families in the 1960's centered around Black women's access to sex, and thinking about that alongside the Gay Liberation Front, and the queer freedom and sexual freedom movements unfolding at the time. A campaign by NWRO [The National Welfare Rights Organization] was successful in organizing protests and in court battles was around ending the practice of 'midnight raids'. In the midnight raids, social workers and police officers would raid the homes of welfare recipients, Black mothers, to see if they had a man in their bed, because if they had a man in their bed, their man should be financially responsible, and they should be kicked off welfare. Ending the midnight raids was a campaign for the sexual freedom of Black women, for the right to have casual sex, the demand for sexual pleasure.

This led me to an interest in defense of sexual freedom and to rethinking narratives about the flight from Jim Crow to urban areas in the Great Migrations. Under Jim Crow, heterosexuality was mandated for Black people. You could only rent land if you were married. So Black people married very young and stayed together. And the moment the Jim Crow cotton economy was disrupted, like from a boll weevil epidemic and the cotton was destroyed, Black people would suddenly separate and start engaging with more casual relationships. The flight from Jim Crow was a flight from racial terror and the exploitive sharecropping Southern economy, but also from heterosexuality and monogamy into the possibility of sexual freedom. That's part of what was at stake in Black women's organizing in the 1960's.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs: Hmm, I'm still just holding the image of the midnight raids of the beds of Black women, and, at the same time, the midnight raids of the bars. The violence in that, but the coherence too.

Tracy Simon: This evokes Spillers' work as well as the Reproductive Justice movement.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs: Absolutely, so many things we've said touch on ideas she [Spillers] brings forward. Certainly, motherhood's status within the patriarchal slave economy, but also the idea: If I did not exist, I would have to be invented. The narrative importance of Black maternity specifically, the queerness, and the story as a storehouse of justice, like the work of Reproductive Justice to tell the stories of forced sterilization. And, to get us back to the nonlinear conversation we were having earlier, to say justice instead of rights is a poetic intervention, like that section of *M Archive* you read: We don't want to have to want that. Who knows what we will want? That's the freedom that we have to have.

M. E. O'Brien: Desire that opens up beyond the slip.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs: It speaks to what you were saying, M.E., about what are the conditions in which we have what we need? Reproductive Justice doesn't just say individuals should be able to make choices about their bodies. Reproductive Justice says it's about the possibility of what and whom we create to be fully able to grow, thrive, live, love, survive, right? It's those conditions that we're trying to imagine.

Tracy Simon: This returns us to the beginning and to what Alexis read about the power of growing through daydreams. Neither of you remains confined by insurmountable challenges or stasis; instead, you go beyond toward new possibilities.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs: Toni Cade Bambara writes about her mother protecting her daydreaming, even in her housework, cleaning around her daughter, so that she'll be able to continue her daydreams. Anna Julia Cooper talks about being a child enslaved in North Carolina during the Civil War and the adults in her community waking her up and asking, "what did you see in your dream? Are we going to be free?" The vast majority of Audre Lorde's poems come out of her dream journaling, and her journals are full of documentation of her children's dreams. There's a Black feminist praxis and valuing of dreaming in the aspirational sense, and in the literal subconscious sense of wonder, and in the departure from the normative stasis. I often think: What if a Black feminist theory of dreams and desire is an intergenerational desire, because all of these examples are on an intergenerational scale.

M. E. O'Brien: The dream is not private. It's what ties us to the other.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs: It's so profound. How immediate! Almah LaVon Rice and I facilitated a dream retreat with 21 dreamers of Color. And we dreamt at Alma de Mujer [Center for Social Change]. This is the land stewarded by the Indigenous Women's Network in Texas. We put images from our dreams in a jar, asked questions of our own breakthrough, and pulled out the image from somebody else's dreams. We have this idealized concept of the collective dreaming house and indigenous decolonial pre-colonial practices, yet it was phenomenal how we saw through this connection of our own dreaming that week. We have a circuit of dreams, as you say, dreams are not private, they do not exist on an individual scale. Dreams are one of our best access points right now for remembering connection.

M. E. O'Brien: Living as a single person, it's easy to get lost in the questions of survival, in optimization, maximizing comfort, avoiding catastrophe. These are constant preoccupations. In the capitalist world, people are figuring out how to hustle, how to turn what they're able to tolerate into a livelihood, if they can. It's only in the moment of collectivity, in the moment of the riot, when protests are rapidly exceeding what any organizer has control over, going beyond what anyone's plans

foresaw, that we begin to encounter a subjectivity, a way of being, a way of dreaming together that has been there all along.

This interview will be published much later, but we're on the cusp of the destruction of Rafah right now and there's a terrified anticipation throughout the world about people in Gaza having nowhere left to go. The recent wave of student protests in solidarity with Gaza around the world were crushed by university administrators and police. The Palestinian solidarity movement right now is the biggest it has ever been. Never has so much of the world been so invested in the freedom of Palestinians, and never has the Zionist project been in such question. Yet it's also a moment of struggle characterized by our powerlessness to stop what's happening. That's another side to collective dreaming: the limits to our power. Even as the protests exceed the limits of what can be planned, they are encountering this limit of not being able to stop the genocide unfolding. Perhaps we will, but we certainly don't know how.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs: How to continue dreaming, imagining, loving, holding the prayer, and not refusing the pain of what it means to love and be connected to people who are being massacred, not to dissociate from that reality, which is an embodied reality in our larger body. It can be a thin line between protecting my daydream and abandoning my accountability. Thus, the rigor of what is dreaming? What are we doing with our imaginations, and the study of that in consistent practice. For both of us, it's in our writing practices, but there are many ways that people practice that.

M. E. O'Brien: It does not feel like an accident that so much of the international Palestinian freedom struggle has drawn on the poetry of people of Gaza, the poets killed, the encampments named for murdered poets like Refaat Alareer. Poetry is part of that survival, and speaking poetry has become an important part of the global struggle.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs: There's a real clarity about the danger poetry poses, that the truth tellers of Gaza write in their poetry; truth of the violence, but also of love, freedom, generations of possibility, and the global system. Iterations of the settler colonial state admit that it's profoundly dangerous to them, so the administrators treat student encampments as a violent threat.

M. E. O'Brien: I open *Family Abolition* by talking about the Oaxaca Commune in 2006, and the role of indigenous women in creating what I call insurgent social reproduction. Creating a shared life on the barricades. They cared for children, educated themselves and their children, cooked and fed people on the barricades in this multi-month insurgency, on barricades built to defend their neighborhoods against fascist, paramilitary forces. This is the social reproduction of the protest kitchen. In the passage from *Everything for Everyone* I read, I reference the protest kitchen as the cusp of the formation of the commune.

In *Family Abolition*, I argue that the nuclear family as a social institution is extremely poorly suited to sustaining struggle. Any time large numbers of working-class people are in struggle together—whether in revolutionary or anti-colonial war, protest kitchens, land occupations, mass strikes, or sustained riots that people participate in with their family members—they immediately start creating systems of collective shared social reproduction as strategies of survival and struggle. The sustaining of that struggle depends on people moving past the nuclear family as the primary unit of social reproductive labor and beginning to open to a moment of family abolition, to collective practices of care. You can do a very tepid kind of organizing that reproduces and maintains the nuclear family, and I cite examples of this in the white Socialist movement in Europe at the turn of the last century. But the moment people start going up against the racial state and capital, they immediately have to go beyond their nuclear family to do that.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs: The first people who wrote back to us about *Revolutionary Mothering* were the Afro-indigenous Colombian women who were occupying state buildings and closing down the highways. They said, "Oh, that's what this is, Revolutionary Mothering, that's the word!"

M. E. O'Brien: Exactly. Eman Abdelhadi, my co-author of *Everything for Everyone*, talks about the longstanding social practice of Palestinian children knowing who they can go to if they have to flee an attack and are separated from their parents. That form of kinship exceeds blood and simple social institutions but is essential for the survival of Palestinian life.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs: I've just finished writing a biography of Lorde, and experiments of insurgent social reproduction beyond the nuclear family were so important to her. In the Grenadian Socialist revolution the "Each One Teach One" literacy program, paired a child with an elder, the child knew about the particular educational system and the elder knew something the child needed to know. The women in Soweto collectivizing beyond their families and co-founding the Sisters in South Africa. These women creating our solidarity economy of the world, beyond patriarchal control and apartheid. There's a video of Lorde and Ellen Kuzwayo at the very end of Audre Lorde's life when she can barely talk, but the intensity of her belief in what she calls "scales of practice", taking care of each other, comes through.

I think it's important to say: Audre Lorde, Black, Lesbian, feminist, mother, warrior, poet, and Socialist. She starts her book of essays, *Sister Outsider*, with her trip to Russia and ends it with the Socialist Revolution in Grenada and the US Invasion of Grenada in response. And yet, not coincidentally, most of the way she's remembered erases this core strategy belief and vector of dreaming. This is what she was dreaming and celebrating when she saw it in practice in her lifetime.

M. E. O'Brien: If there's any possibility of a liberatory maternal it has to be in the linking of our capacity to dream, speak, and write, with a community that includes ancestors and descendants, future and past generations, in a broader global project of liberation that encompasses everyone. This is essential to the possibility of our journey. And it is in bringing these together that the maternal could be a liberatory possibility.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs: Beautifully said.

Notes on contributors

Tracy Simon, Psy.D., is a psychologist and psychoanalyst with a practice based in New York. She is a co-editor for the journal *Studies in Gender & Sexuality* and a clinical supervisor at Pulsion Institute, New York. Her published writing navigates the intersections of psychoanalytic theory, gender studies, and maternal subjectivity. She is a graduate of the NYU Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis.

M. E. O'Brien, Ph.D, L.C.S.W., has two books: *Family Abolition: Capitalism and the Communizing of Care* (Pluto, 2023), and a speculative novel entitled *Everything for Everyone: An Oral History of the New York Commune, 2052–2072* (Common Notions, 2022), coauthored with Eman Abdelhadi. She is a co-editor of *Pinko*, a magazine on gay communism. Her work on family abolition has been translated into Chinese, German, Greek, French, Spanish, Catalan and Turkish. Previously, O'Brien coordinated the New York City Trans Oral History Project, and worked in HIV and AIDS activism and services. She completed her PhD at NYU, where she wrote on how capitalism shaped New York City LGBTQ social movements. She is a practicing psychotherapist, a clinical social worker, and in formation as a psychoanalyst at the Pulsion Institute.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Ph.D., is a queer Black Feminist love evangelist and the author of several books, most recently the biography *Survival Is a Promise: The Eternal Life of Audre Lorde* and *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals* for which she received the Whiting Award in Non-Fiction. She is a co-editor with Mai'a Williams and China Martens of the anthology *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Frontlines*. She is also the recipient of the Windham-Campbell Prize in poetry, a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in prose and a National Humanities Center Fellowship for her research on Queer Black Feminist literary and cultural praxis. Alexis has a PhD in English, African and African American Studies and Women and Gender Studies from Duke University. Archival research and inter-generational listening are her favorite forms of time travel. With her partner Sangodare, Alexis co-creates *Mobile Homecoming*, an experiential archive of Black feminist LGBTQ brilliance. Their current focus, supported by Monument Lab and the Loss and Damage Collaborative is listening to artists displaced or impacted by the climate crisis. Alexis is a grateful resident of Durham, North Carolina.

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