XPRESSION AGAINST OPPRESSION
Xpression Against Oppression is a campaign aimed at providing various platforms for marginalized identities to speak about their identities and experiences that come with it.

SCSU has facilitated XAO initiatives centered on police brutality toward Black bodies, as well as a space called the Trans* Inclusive Vagina Monologues.

Resistance looks different to the multitude of intersecting identities, which is why submissions for the Zine were not limited to any particular theme.

As marginalized identities, the powers of our voices unsilenced & intentionally break physical, social and metaphysical barriers.

Xpression Against Opression Zine 2017
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FEATURED ARTISTS

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sylvie stojanovski
tasneem mewa

tasnia

tea mutonji
tasar vanessa

zarin tasnim
a girl and her friends
OUR DEAR FRIEND
SHE HAS GONE
TO THE STARS

hanna zhang
It always starts out like this for him.

Standing in front of his mirror, hands linked behind his head, as he stands upright in front of his mirror and stares at his own reflection.

His skin tingles, unease crawling up his back like tiny little spider-legs. He wants to swat them away, he really does, but he knows that the only thing he’ll be able to feel is air and hairless skin.

As critical eyes continue to roam his reflection, the overwhelming thoughts continue to plague his mind. It’s like picking at a scab: the more he picks, the more it scars.

A rounded chest glares back at him, taunting him. No matter how many layers he wears, or how tightly he binds his chest, they will always be there. They mark him, putting him back in his place, within an endless expanse of pink and frilly lace.

He straightens his back and drops his hands to his baggy jeans. He narrows his eyes at his reflection, willing it to change through the lenses of his eyes, to see a version of himself that didn’t need to bind, to hide.

He moves his hand up to his chest and he traces down to the top of his chest down to the waistband of his jeans with his thumb. He takes note of the curves that linger there, how they define his body in a way that makes him feel nauseous.
Binding and baggy clothing can only fix so much, and they aren’t enough to quell the stark terror he feels when he even goes outside to just his groceries. He’s afraid of them knowing, he’s afraid of their hateful words, and of their ignorance.

Fear envelops him, like cobwebs holding him in place. The echoes of their unspoken words in his head make his eyes drop to his feet, his spine bending down with him.

He takes a deep breath and crosses his arms, covering the imperfections on his chest. He blinks back a few tears and takes another deep breath to calm his fluttering heartbeat.

He clenches his fists and raises his eyes back to his reflection. His lips press into a hard line as he blinks back a few more tears, his eyes becoming red and glassy.

They stare back at him, even if his arms are covering them. He sees his top half completely in the mirror. He sees how he looks to the world. He sees danger of his own image.

He’s angry at the violence, misunderstanding and ugliness of the hatred. He blinks through clenched teeth as more tears begin to form at the corners of his eyes.

The spider legs begin to solidify and sharpen against his back, the itch becomes stronger and hyper-real. The longing for old times and even older habits he used to use to satisfy that itch. But he quit that habit far too long ago.

His uncrosses his arms and wipes the tears away with the back of his hand. He shakes his head to snap out of his thoughts.

His brother said to him, the first time they went shopping for clothes together, that courage and strength came from within; there’s no reason to bow down to them.

He holds his head and straightens his back as much as he can, pulling his shoulder back. His lips are still in a hard line as his eyes staring back at his own reflection, never breaking away from what he sees.

He thinks about how strong he needs to be, that he is not a freak and his identity is not invalid. He is a man. He is himself. No amount of doubt or fear will stamp out this identity.

He puffs out his chest, unbothered by the feminine shape in the mirror. His body floods with confidence, and the spider, threatened, disappears from his back. He finally feels free of its lingering presence.

He soon returns to his normal stance, and, unwaveringly, he says to himself, “I am my own person. I am Kyle.”

erin c. miller
How can we find home when all forms of home don’t claim us?
Diaspora spilling pieces of self in places that self has never been. When will the self find home?
Thunder sounds in the midnight sky and shoots fear into the hearts of the young. Raindrops pool on concrete and splatter onto windshields and drips onto cell floors through leaking roofs. Concerned mothers pull curtains aside hoping their child has not been caught in the storm. I pull covers tighter around me and whisper to the lord, “when will our summer really begin?”

I’ve been told its summer but it’s the coldest summer I’ve ever known. The rain only stops when you’re inside with the blinds drawn and denial covering your ears. They say its summer but it feels like the coldest part of autumn, right before a winter that will rival the ice age. The weatherman reports with no update on when the rain will end. I’ve been told its summer but it’s the coldest summer I’ve ever known.

Gunshots sound in the midnight sky and shoots fear into the hearts of our young. Blood drops pool on concrete and splatter onto windshields and drips onto cell floors through ruptured veins. Concerned mothers pull curtains aside hoping their child has not been caught in the shit storm. A young black human pulls covers tighter around her and whispers to the lord, “when will our summer really begin?”

It’s gotten to the point where breaking news ain’t really news no more. And the only thing in this world that isn’t broken is the backs of the humans the injustice has been tethered to. And if they die, you can pile even more on cuz now they can’t complain. And if their brothers and sisters have something to say just kill them too. The dead bodies provide a more stable surface to balance the lies. Much better than the live ones that make the load shake with every intake of breath. Their backs will never break.

But how can two people stand in the same place and report two different seasons? How can you stand in the sun and pretend you don’t see the rain clouds above them? Don’t you dare pretend its summer when they’re standing in front of you dripping wet. Your sun will not set if you acknowledge their darkness. Your stars won’t shine less if you let them see it too. And I promise you, no matter how hard we try, we will never know their pain. But stop using your lack of any experience as permission to invalidate theirs…

So maybe it is summer, but only to the blind.

deborah ocholi
She is nothing but a tint, a pigment, a long chain of amino acids to protect you from the sun
She is the cursed treasure; the more you have the less you are
She is the most influential bystander in history; never relevant but always affecting
She is an excuse, a defining trait, an unwilling agent of segregation
She is so little but so much, so useful but so hated, so harmless but so attacked, so peaceful but so stimulating
She is an invisible force distributed unevenly across mankind; she went years unnoticed until those that didn’t have her came along
She’s the well-meaning friend that you resent because she always ends up hurting you
She is that person you love, yet everyone hates and you can’t understand why
She is the reason that you glow but also the reason for your fear
She is the topic that doesn’t relate yet everyone keeps reaching for connections
She is beautiful, she is glorious, she is heavenly, Even on your darkest days she’s always popping
She’s minding her own business but everyone wants a piece of the both of you
She is so innocent yet so tainted

She won’t leave you alone; she thinks she’s your best friend; she maybe kind of is your best friend
You love her so much but they keep using her against you
She is so powerful yet so subjugated, so important yet so marginalized
She constantly reminds you of her presence
She’s always there for you when you need her, even when you think you don’t, and even when you really don’t
Sometimes this beautiful dark treasure, sometimes she’s a real pain
She’s a real pain and she doesn’t even try
Sometimes you hate her as much as they want you to
She is your sister who provokes the bullies simply by existing, and they fight you too by association
She is your mother shielding you from danger with a side-effect of smothering
I can’t breathe. I can’t breathe. I can’t breathe
I didn’t ask for her but I’m stuck with her
I didn’t ask for her but here she is causing problems
She holds a gun to your head but it is not her decision
Stop don’t shoot. Hands up don’t shoot. For God’s sake don’t shoot!
She does not want to shoot, a hand wraps around her wrist and pushes the barrel against your skull
She is trembling, she is crying, she does not want to hurt you
She is melanin, she is yours, and they keep using her against you.
**I AM GREY**

I am grey.
Now, I know what you’re going to say,
But you’re wrong, save it.
I’m not having that today.
Why should I conform to your norms?
What for?
I am black and I am white but I’m also much more.
I’m not neutral...not that you bothered to ask
I do have feelings as a matter of fact:
Energetic as yellow,
Deep crimson with rage.
As thoughtful as indigo,
I am not dreary, or dull or grey of old age.
Who are you to sentence me to an existence of
gloom
And darkness?
You may know my components
But you don’t know who I am,
That which makes me me.
My grey and your grey may not be the same,
Everyone has different views,
Different hues.
It can change from day to day, depending on the
time, the weather.
I will not feel guilt or shame,
You only know me by name.
I am grey;
But not just the bastard child of shades.
I’m my own way
And I am good enough.

**PRESSURE**

I feel under pressure
As if under water.
Urged to hook up
To get into someone’s daughter.
When the boys hang out
We pass along our stories,
Sharing our accolades,
Tales of triumph and glory.
Desperate for affection
Skin itching for a touch,
So we sprinkle on words
Like “love”, “always” and such.
Morals get cloudy
When hormones are urgin’
Everyone knows its not cool
To still be a virgin.
Fantasies of bodies rubbing,
The desire to feel,
The warmth of making love
Illegitimate or real.
It feels so good
To have then dismiss her
Until the dumb slut
Is your little sister.
It can be hard to believe
That love’s not fictitious
When guys act like dogs
Chasing after bitches.
Shouldn’t sex have a greater meaning
Than simply seeking pleasure?
This can’t be the reason
Men and women come together.

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marcus medford
come take me home.
i'm dying to feel the earth beneath my toes.
come take me home.
there are not enough spaces for my language
to exist without being touched.
come take me home.
i want the unruliness of the sun tattooed on
my skin.
come take me home.
let me near the water because the blues and
greens are so tempting.
come take me home
love gets lost in the loudness of this city.
come take me home.
i want to be reminded that i belong.
come take me home.
where the land carries histories and
herstories of perpetual resilience
come take me home
my roots are showing.

– shharine
come take me home. i'm dying to feel the earth beneath my toes. come take me home. there are not enough spaces for my language to exist without being touched. come take me home. i want the unruliness of the sun tattooed on my skin. come take me home. let me near the water because the blues and greens are so tempting. come take me home. love gets lost in the loudness of this city. come take me home. i want to be reminded that i belong. come take me home. where the land carries histories and herstories of perpetual resilience come take me home. my roots are showing. – shharine
tasnia
The Raped Woman’s Plea

A petition

“death staring at me in a spinning room
where my legs were spread unwillingly.

‘look for the words: a no, a stop
sign, but my eyes do not rise and my
throat. Clogged. My body, my body—
my body too, she was too frail, too consumed.

there had been some interest in the possibility—
just the possibility, of a man and a woman
gutting each other out, romantically—
so long as it meant the night would not end.

‘look for the strength: a hammer, a steak
knife, but my hands, they have lost their grip
and the weight on my body. My body, my body—
my body, she is, too frail, too consumed.

there had been too much discontentment with interest
too much desire, too much curiosity—
men, they take desire and curiosity as an invitation.
too much expectation for mutuality.

death staring at me in a spinning room
where my legs were spread unwillingly.”

If you recognize this poem. The one where a woman
is to a man, a plastic vase, difficult to break, with no
soul and a muted mouth, this poem, where the man is
censored to words that do not ring well with his
intentions. If you recognize this poem, hear my plea:
woman ought sew themselves! Everywhere; mouth,
ears, eyes and yes, between the legs. We ought to cut
our breasts and shave our heads. We ought to set our
clitoris on fire, and feed it to the men who have
raped us. Sign here if you agree______________.

tea mutonji
they've told me i'm not much of a woman.
i walk into this space -- one they've said is meant for me -- and i feel empty. i want to shrink into myself. i want to curl and swallow me. i am a black hole walking, dead girl talking. i should not be here, i don't belong.
here, where they welcome, or so they say -- where trans* is a conscious inclusion -- here is where i should feel round and full and wanted.
women-identified folks.
but words are violent. meaning changes, is misinterpreted. it's never one truth in itself but several. is never in-between. each sound is loud -- it jolts you and your liquidness shivers, spasms, electric, on fire. sharp and bright and breaking.

some days i wake up, wading outside into warm rain.
some days i wake up, sky white and cold, the warmth of skin immediately silenced by the wind.
some days i wake up, and the snow inhales the sounds of all, sky and street and the snapping of my boots on the pavement.
these days, i wake up and am alone, pulling at my skin, sticky from lack of sleep. these days my body smells different, i am less inclined to move, and there are lies hidden in the folds of me.

i am not broken.
i am not one either.
i am skin -- so much skin -- and silence. i am parts of me and not there at all.
binaries.

here, they ask you to represent yourself physically. in this space, they want a snapshot of you at a moment in time, a celebration of your Womanhood.
you don't know what that means.

so you dress in Women's clothes, you dress in Men's clothes, you try Androgyny but your body betray you. when you are with men, you are desexualized, when you are with women you are masculinized, when you are with both you fade away. you are here, yet disassociating. you are Woman, or you are White, or you are Greek -- or you are not. you are Macedonian, or not. Canadian, or not. living, or not. these states are simultaneous, yet not. through every reading there is new interpretation, and every stroke of the pen writes a falsehood.

the day is cold. you dress in one of your favourite outfits -- a black dress with overalls that diminishes the size of your hips and hides the breasts you don't know what to do with. you are wearing clunky boots, dark, with red laces. you wrap yourself in a shawl, woolen and thick, because you know your jacket is broken -- your zipper doesn't zip, leaving your chest bare and open.
This child could memorize accounts of streets in Jaffna, and farms in Killinochi, like a little library wanted to learn how to make kool the right way, whose favourite person was their ammamma.

This child knew the words “civil war” before middle school, could articulate UN sanctions in their sleep, had the area codes of other countries printed in the back of their phonebook minds.

This child’s heart drops as the adults reminisce about everything they left in Sri Lanka. Every stumble over a Tamil word is like taking ten steps backwards. Sometimes they wonder if they are smart enough to find all those lost records in the wreckage of history.

This is the diasporic child: hear them speak, in a dialect made of the imported sounds of ancient pasts and still the only language they could ever speak, in all ways.

vanessa vigneswaramoorthy
O Canada
your mountains high your great plains vast your
lakes fresh
and your ice caps melting
O Canada
it was with my eager ear to your heart that heard
the call to democracy
to liberty, to equality, to justice for all
I learned your languages and from my lips I ex-
claimed
Parthenon, Brotherhood
so that when I heard myself speak I also heard you
O Canada
i love you
but you lied to me
and now this broken heart is preparing to sing
O Canada
sell me your freedom so that I may broadcast it’s
greatness to the world
silence your wretched so that i may cast the line
again among the others
forsaken if they should ever abandon the dream
O Canada!
I KNOW WHAT YOU DID
the price that was paid for my freedom
was that of another's
and not just her's but her mother's
and her mother's mother's
and her mother's mother's mothers'
O Canada
this land you extended to me -was not yours to
give
and yet here I live
I did not chose you — nor did my parents
and while your door was seemingly open the truth
is you never were
O Canada
no matter how much we bleed
we can never be you
and now I don't want to be
O Canada
you are the country where I was born but you did
not make me
i may wear your title and share your status but i
am not yours
not any longer
I belong to my sisters
I belong to my mother
I belong to my brothers
I belong to me
this is my anthem.
I saw him
with vision blurred
from living too long
in a world that has idolized
him for centuries.

His strength
blue eyes
and blonde curls
were carved long ago
in a temple big enough
to blot out the sky.

The same stone masons
crafted lenses for a culture
that when looked through
turned victims into Medusa and
monsters to gods.

A backwards loop of justice so
ancient it’s been buried deep
under layers of
‘nice-guy’ sentiments,
now the bedrock
of every damnation
with fingers pointing in
the wrong direction -

it’s why was I drinking?
not why did you rape me?

Running my fingers through
his blonde curls
felt like running through
the fields at the base
of a French mountain on a
family vacation - with weeds
tearing
holes in my jeans:
thinking,
shouldn’t I be enjoying this
more?

Pressing them
softly against my lips
hurt in a way that felt
normal, even when
they started pulling my skin
apart
twisting
my deep blush
into pools of blood
and I wanted it
to stop.

Mornings later, I realized
I shouldn’t have
had to run through them.
I should have
been able to make them a bed
and gone to sleep.

I should have
been able to turn my face to
them
like my face to the sun
and feel the same warmth.

I would see his curls
where they weren’t. In my pillow –
my palms
my nightmares
the back of my eyelids
the corners of my vision.

They were a poison I thought
I asked to ingest
with no antidote, until

I saw those blonde curls
once more on the head of my
sweet,
newborn nephew. a boy spun
from the tensile strength of
his mother’s soft threads of silk.

The first line of light
that broke my darkest horizon.

emma witkowski
many hands have been around my waist
I’ll admit, I love men, loving them is my forte
but I wonder, did they take my value with them
when they unclasped our bodies
or was it when our lips touched-
when was it that I become a whore

at what point did I become defiled from our interactions
while they themselves stayed pure, it’s a man’s world
and it’s a man world because women are the ones with guilt baggage and shame
while men do whatever they please and get to remain the same
even when they’re a big part of the equation
somehow their fault always gets subtracted

SO WHAT AT POINT DID I BECOME A WHORE
was it when you propositioned me and I gladly agreed
or when I wore that dress that drew your eyes
where they shouldn’t be
or when you had wet dreams about me
it was probably when I sent you pictures of my beautiful body
and you sent them to well, everybody

it’s a mans world, I get it
but when did I become a whore

because, as I remember it,
you said you liked it, and I know you wanted more

so if I’m a whore
then you 1x4

but that’s not the point
because my worth is not found in the number of hearts that have held mine
or the hands that have held mine
or the lips that have held mine
or the bodies that have held mine

because i am mine
but sometimes i will lend myself to you
and if that makes me a whore
then I’ll do me, and you do you

flyin fam
I HAVE COME THIS FAR. I HAVE TRAVELLED OVER BRIDGES, I MYSELF.....BURNT; I HAVE CRAWLED THROUGH CLOUDS, DISPERSING AT EACH BREATH; MY LIPS HAVE LICKED UP THE LIGHT OF LONGING; MY STEPS HAVE CARESSED SUN-BURNT SAND AND MY HANDS, HAVE HARNESSED HALTED PATHS ALONG THE WAY. I HAVE COME THIS FAR; WHAT HAS BECOME NEAR CAN SAY, "I’M HERE TO STAY".

By Arma Malik
To the men that speak to women in disrespect
Who cat-call as if I asked you to, I never asked you to
But since you want to talk to me so bad
I will tell you what it means to be a woman
I will start by telling you about my mother
I will tell you how soft her hands are
The same hands that wiped my tears from overflowing like an unkempt ocean
Embraced me when my demons entered my heart
The same hands that feed me when I didn’t have the strength to myself
Yes, I will tell you about my mother
And how she is the only woman I have ever wanted to be
To be a woman is to be in danger, but I have only every felt safe in her arms
She is the hero they never wrote about
The prayer that is the last to be recited
The dream you could never seem to remember
But somehow lingers
You feel it in your bones
Through your soul
Between your finger tips
To be a woman is to have the assumption that there is a devil on our shoulder
When God has only every placed two angels’
We are angels’ that God has placed on earth
Mother-Earth has only ever seen angels
We are creatures of heaven that have only ever been treated like devils
To be a woman is to be used, to be hurt, to be betrayed
To be scared that men will mistake our fire for smoke
To be a woman is to be that fire, that keeps your body warm at night
But will never burn you
Like the hands of my mother soothing my wings as I slumber
As my two angels’ guard over me
As God watches over me
Reminding me that I am heavenly
To be a woman is to be heavenly
Through the heavens I seek forgiveness and retribution
To be a woman is to be powerful, I am powerful
So, when you ask me
Did it hurt when you fell from heaven?
My answer is no because God has only ever kept me close

osobe waberi
A smiling face captures affection.

tasneem mewa
Normality is a paved road:
It's comfortable to walk
but no flowers grow
- VdG
Sobriety, that's what's acceptable in our society. Does that make me an extremist? For I have not been sober for as long as I remember. I met you that fall, little did I know, I would, for you, exactly 41 days later. I did, I fell, harder and harder. As September turned to October like turning a page in your favorite book or turning to your side to be able to kiss your lover good morning. as the leaves turned from green to red, November came. I couldn’t build up the courage to pronounce your name. I touched your face and as the leaves fell, so did I, in love with you. You looked up at the sky and describe the stars, I saw them in your eyes.

You told me stories about your home, I felt it in your arms. You kissed me in December and I knew nothing more than what soft lips you have, I kissed you back. One kiss and I was addicted. You entered my heart like drugs in lungs, you showered me with enticement and I was in love with the way you made me feel. We made love that January and I almost felt refined, renew. Your body was so heavenly it washed away my sins and I felt so yours. That February was Valentine’s day, every day. There were roses and kisses on every turning page and in bed we were one, beautifully. I’ve been drunk for the past 76 months and I will be for as long as you’re mine. So, tell me, is being drunk really that bad?

Dedicated to E.C.

raisa masud
I am an aglet, the tip of a shoelace, wrapped tightly around a pair of freshly washed string cords. Weaved through a maze of immaculate white eyelets. Manufactured with only the finest burnished steel, in hopes of never tarnishing.

Carved ornately with ostentatious patterns. I boast about a series of intricate Aztec designs that lace around me.

Despite that though, you take me for an alloy, that just got lucky.

Am I really fortunate? Reliant on the constant pitter patter of stuck-up shoes to keep me going. Acquiescent to every touch of a finger. Forever tainted by untrained hands, and clumsy feet.

You take me for granted because I am always there for you—obedient and faithful. Leading you down busy streets, and up noisy alleyways. Tripping you when you least expect it.

I am accustomed to the boring art of inner city travelling. Never seasoned with sweet lavender scents, or salty grass stains. Never marked with deep metal memory indents.

I yearn to go to somewhere new and exciting, but I cannot.

I am destined to be thrown away and cast aside.

You can find me in filthy shoe soles, and dirty footprints.

I was never your ally.

I stuck to the acidic saliva that coated your tongue, but I bet you never even bothered to remember my name.

sylvie stojanovski
XAO ZINE
VOLUME II