

Sinister Wisdom

A Multicultural Lesbian Literary & Art Journal

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To my beloved *Sinister Wisdom* communities:

The recent petition signed by over 350 women attacking *Sinister Wisdom* 128: *Trans/Feminisms* and my editorship reflects the worst intemperances of lesbian separatism, a political formation that I value and uplift, but one that is historically prone to excesses that result in challenging moments and negative consequences for lesbian communities. Cherríe Moraga identified this in 1981 in the Preface to *This Bridge Called My Back*. She wrote:

The deepest political tragedy I have experienced is how with such grace, such blind faith, this commitment to women in the feminist movement grew to be exclusive and reactionary. *I call my white sisters on this*. I have had enough of this....I need to feel enlivened again in a movement that can finally, as my friend Amber Hollibaugh states, 'ask the right questions and admit to not having all the answers.'

At *Sinister Wisdom*, I am trying to live inside Moraga's words.

I want to state very clearly that this petition is riddled with factual inaccuracies, inflammatory language, and intellectually dishonest assertions. In addition, it is primarily written without signatories and utilizing initials; women have signed it anonymously. A practice that I detest. Ideas, conflicts, and public conversations are among people with names and accountability to their words. They should be shared with measure, compassion, and care by real people speaking in identifiable ways. Many of the women circulating this petition refuse to engage in this honest and forthright manner. When objections to this issue first arose, organizers sent another version of this letter to me with about a dozen signatures. I emailed women who signed that letter who I know personally, voicing my objection to its content. Few replied. That letter and this petition are not acts seeking conversation and engagement, they are designed to bully *Sinister Wisdom* and me, and to provide a platform to organize against transpeople.

I have stopped responding to these women individually and collectively; it is clear to me that their interest is neither in civil dialogue nor in respecting my work as a lesbian. I am not going to rebut the petition nor the facts. My work speaks for itself.

I do want to speak to my beloved lesbians and queer women in the *Sinister Wisdom* community at this moment.

Over the past few years at *Sinister Wisdom*, I have seen our community grow and thrive, and I have seen repeatedly the rewards of an inclusive community, of a community that works to engage women from a variety of racial backgrounds, of a community that embraces people with trans experiences, of a community that cares about people with a range of class experiences and life stories, of a community located around the globe. Including more voices of lesbians and queer women helps all of us to develop a greater understanding of what lesbian cultures are and what they could be. I do not mean to suggest that *Sinister Wisdom* is a panacea; we are not. There are still ideas and communities to engage, still places to grow and learn and change. Inclusivity and curiosity are core values for me in editing *Sinister Wisdom*. Through my leadership, *Sinister Wisdom* is interested in the lives and experiences of all who call themselves lesbian, queer, dyke, butch, fem, kiki, bulldagger, marimacha, sapphist, or any other word that lifts from our lips to hail our full selves in the world.

I am heartened by the hundreds of women who have expressed support for our work over the past six months since the *Trans/Feminisms* issue published. They join hundreds of other women who have stood with *Sinister Wisdom* over the past forty-seven years.

This support has arrived in a variety of ways. One long-time reader told me, *Yeah, I knew you would be in trouble; I skimmed it and then gave it to a young lesbian I know. She loved it.* Many readers have written to me about their first experiences with trans people and what they meant to them. Many checks have arrived with short notes of support for *Sinister Wisdom* as an inclusive space. I am grateful and honored by the support and many messages.

Today, I want to ask our community to do two things.

First, if you receive a request to support this vitriolic, anti-trans statement—or any other that might be written in the future, please decline and clearly state the value of an inclusive vision for lesbian communities. I encourage you to re-frame the mindset of besiegement, scarcity, and panic around our trans siblings and instead turn towards solidarity and abundance. Both *Sinister Wisdom* and our wider community of lesbian, queer, and trans people benefit from deepening relationships and collaborations like the *Trans/Feminisms* issue.

I have been cheered by women who have defended me and *Sinister Wisdom*, and I also note how many people are silent—not because they do not support the work but because this type of bullying is designed to promote silence and thwart solidarity. **We collectively must resist that.**

There are many simple things to say in response to people carrying this anti-trans message:

*That is not my vision for lesbian communities. AND/OR
I support inclusivity for lesbian communities. AND/OR
Lesbian communities at their strongest are elastic and embrace all people.*

And perhaps most meaningful to me: *Lesbian culture and lesbian communities are thriving and face no threat from trans, queer, and other emerging communal formations.*

Second, I assume that each of you reading this letter are doing everything you can to support lesbians, lesbian liberations, and lesbian cultures. For that, I thank you. While our communities and cultures are thriving, it is no secret that there are threats from right wing extremism which is surging in the United States and in other places around the world. Our work always includes challenging right-wing attacks on us and people in our beloved community. To that end, I invite each of you to find ways to be a trans ally as a part of your work. Trans people, including translesbians, are under terrible attacks in the United States and around the world. I have seen first-hand in Florida the viciousness of politicians and others against transpeople, people of color, queer people, immigrants, and others. I feel it is incumbent on me to stand up and speak out when I see transphobia in my community. I invite you to find ways to stand up against transphobia in conversation with all the political work that you do.

Lesbian separatism, which I continue to value and understand as a vital practice, withers when it becomes insular. Moraga's words remind me of the racial exclusions of some separatist practices. I invite us as lesbians and queer women today to think about how to express political and social solidarity with people of color, with trans people, and with all people victimized by right wing extremism. I invite us to build lesbian communities that value practices of inclusivity and solidarity. I invite us to grow and nurture our greatest communal impulses for inclusivity, multiculturalism, curiosity, and care.

Thank you for reading this message and for your support of *Sinister Wisdom* and the work we are doing for lesbian cultures.

In sisterhood,



Julie R. Enszer, PhD