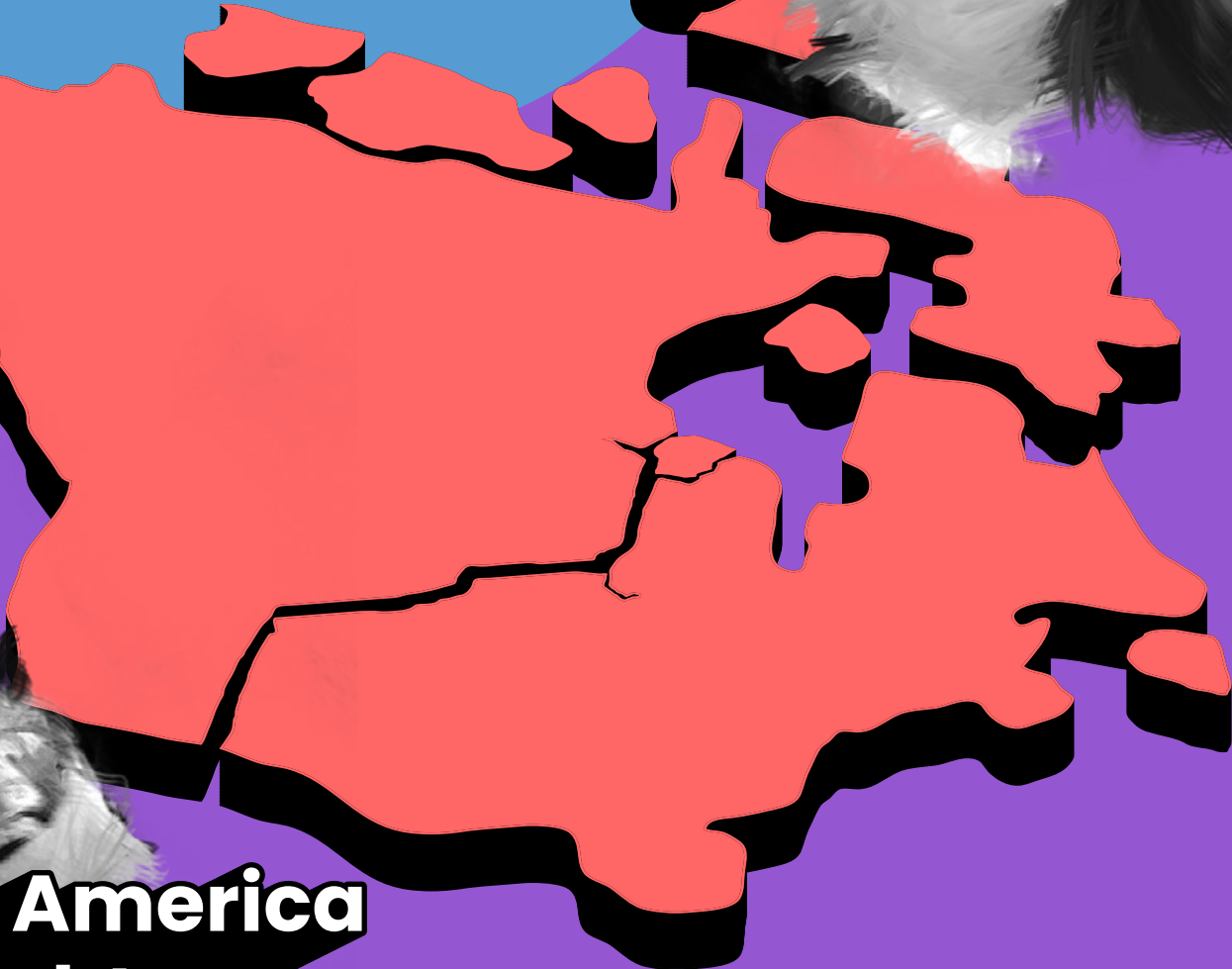


RESILIENT REALITIES

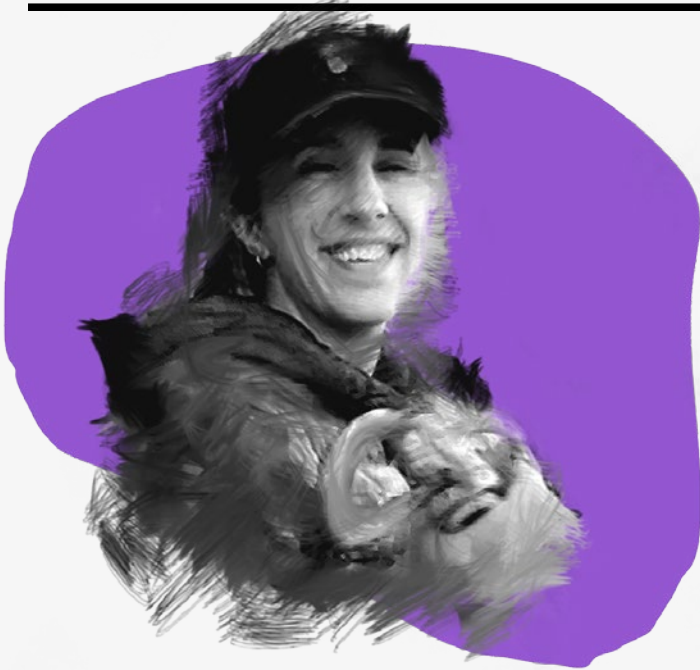
How youth civil society is experiencing and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.



**North America
Spotlights:
Realising our
Interconnectedness**

Participatory research
coordinated in partnership between
**Restless Development, Recreer,
& the Development Alternative**

North America Co-Researchers



EMILIA GONZALEZ

I am a young researcher passionate about exploring wellbeing through movement, creativity, nature and community-building. As a graduate student in Social and Cultural Psychiatry at McGill University, I am exploring the role that community-based youth-led organizations play in supporting newcomer youth in Montreal. My work is inspired by and centered around the resilience and meaningful participation of young people.



BONNIE DEVINE

I'm an independent social worker, traveler, researcher, activist, and musician from Colombia. I am passionate about environmental and gender activism and I promote participatory and emancipatory research experiences in the independent arts community in South America.

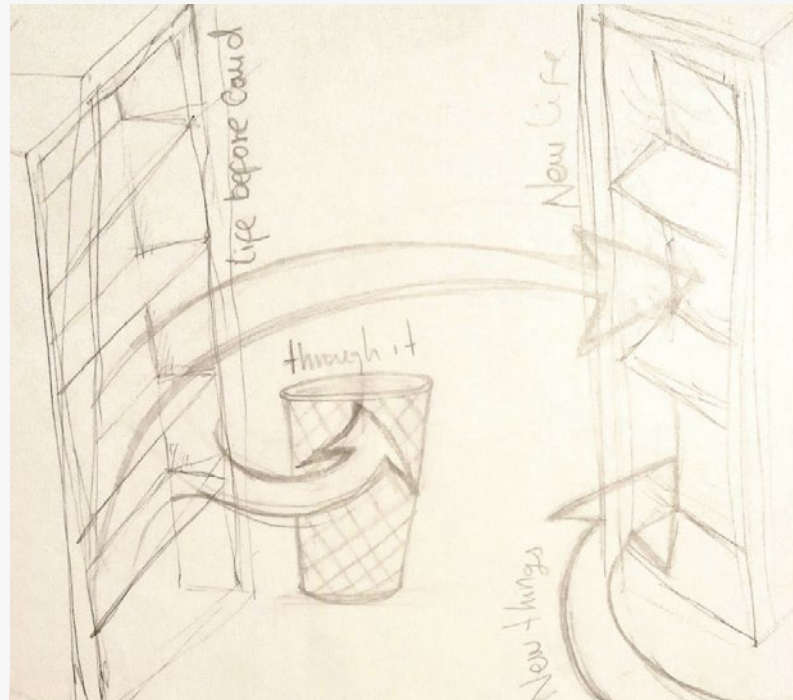
Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we lived more isolated lives, relying increasingly on technology to communicate with each other. We wondered how these new ways of connecting that we are experiencing as individuals translated to relationships between youth organisers. We asked:

How have youth actors, youth communities and youth-led organisations connected, supported and shared with each other during the COVID-19? What do these emergent ways of relating to one another tell us about the world we want to create and live in?

Emilia: I interviewed six young community organizers representing youth-led organizations in Montreal, Canada. In my piece, I share some of the questions that emerged from these conversations. I illustrate these questions with some of the quotes I found most inspiring. In line with the reflection that “we consume art better than we consume policies” (Marcelle, representative of Montreal Youth in Care Alumni Student Association (MYCASA)), I have experimented with poetry as a medium to present these insights.

Bonnie: I interviewed 5 representatives from gender-focused organisations in the United States. In this piece, I ask myself how gender might have impacted the COVID-19 crisis. I also invited the rest of the co-research team to consider a gender analysis in their research.



Reflective Activity

How has your library changed during COVID-19? Reflect on which book/idea/concept you are adding to your library. Which ones belonged to your pre-COVID-19 library that you are ready to toss away? Which old ones do you want to keep?.

What We Learned About Our Research Question:

How have youth actors, youth communities and youth-led organisations connected, supported and shared with each other during the COVID-19? What do these emergent ways of relating to one another tell us about the world we want to create and live in?



The COVID-19 crisis has created more awareness of the interconnectedness between different people, causes, perspectives and groups. This crisis is giving us the opportunity to experiment and learn about working together across social movements: it is the moment to invest in testing and scaling collaborative initiatives that invite work across different movements, groups and organisations



Mutual aid initiatives should be valued, encouraged, and supported. The fabrics of our communities strengthen and our resilience increases when we learn how to support and care for one another. We have much to learn from the mutual aid initiatives that have emerged during this crisis especially because these initiatives invite us to ask hard questions and envision new ways to relate to one another.



The age-bracket of 'youth' is very wide, there is value in recognising initiatives in which different generations of young people work together. This intergenerational dialogue can bring forward new ways of sharing lessons learned so that we can make the most of established and emergent ways of organising.



How are we interconnected?

A few questions for reflection

By Emilia Gonzalez

What does connecting and being connected look like during a pandemic? How is connection created, maintained and nurtured in predominantly virtual landscapes? Can we imagine our connection with others as a source of strength and resilience during a time of crisis?

With these questions in mind, I interviewed six Montreal-based community organisers who are leading a variety of social justice movements during the pandemic. I spoke with Naja from [Full Circle](#), a youth-for-youth organisation that promotes personal, sexual and mental well-being of 2SLGBTQI¹ youth and with Juliana from the [Canadian Council for Refugees Youth Network](#), a youth-led virtual space that amplifies refugee and newcomer youth's voices and advocates for their rights. Cassandra shared her insights working with the [Desta Black Youth Network](#) in supporting Black youth to achieve their educational, employability and entrepreneurial goals. I also heard Marcelle's views from [MYCASA](#), an association and support network for and by youth in the care system. Finally, Shir and Katia shared their perspective as youth climate activists with [Sustainable Youth Canada Montreal](#). This piece collects some of the reflections and stories shared by these six young community leaders during the pandemic in Montreal.

Our Humanity (Kassandra)

*We're confronted with this reality
that goes against our human nature*

*Our ability to connect
and be affectionate
and share energy*

*This situation is making us
less and less human*

So, we need to counteract that

Purposefully

*Putting those human traits and values
at the forefront
so that we don't lose our humanity
and become robots*

¹ The acronym stands for: Two Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Pansexual, Trans, Gender Independent, Queer and Questioning.

First I start with self. (Marcelle)

*I think it's easier
and more authentic
to demand change from yourself
and then to be able to bring that demand
to the systems,
to the collective.*

How does looking inward support social change?

All the interviewees I spoke with shared their experience finding a different rhythm and relationship with their work. Marcelle, from MYCASA shares:

"We've slowed down. We've learned to take smaller bites, to be more intentional, and have a sense of sustainability in our movements".

Katia, from Sustainable Youth Canada Montreal also shares that she realised the "value of the now and what is important." It seems that the pandemic gave us as youth activists and organisers permission to look inside and see ourselves as active contributing members of our society. As part of this collective mental process, we've questioned, "how do we do things differently?"

Marcelle shares that, instead of disassociating from the system, we can start by including ourselves in it and ask "where are we messing up?":

"I've begun by looking in the mirror and naming my 'isms' – my classism, my racism, my sexism, my ageism, my

ableism. I've spent time thinking about my social position, my personal experiences and my privilege, recognizing that I can only see the world through the lens that have been provided for me."

When we explore and connect with aspects of ourselves we often suppress, ignore or deny, we begin to ask ourselves, "Are we going to tolerate that?"

Interviewees also shared that the pandemic challenged young people to think about how to consume less, how to appreciate moments more and how to avoid having a high pressure of performance at all times. It has challenged both young people in general and youth organisers in particular to practice self-care because, as Marcelle shares:

"[the situation] gets so heavy so quickly. And it's not that [we] don't want things to change, [we] just have to think [how to] be more strategic with [ourselves]."

In short, by looking inwards, we are learning that,

"in building the world that you want to see, it first starts with yourself, how you define and present yourself, and how you align your actions with who you are."

Kassandra, The Desta Black Youth Network

How has the pandemic changed the way we see ourselves and our communities?

For Naja from Project 10, the boundaries between ‘categories’ of people and social justice movements are not so clear because “youth do not compartmentalise things as much. It’s all connected.”

Youth have been leading initiatives that build bridges across communities to reach those that need help the most. At the Desta Black Youth Network, young people are leading a community-based food program that brings food to people who are at risk due to the virus:

“We started this delivery service because we feel like there is value in being able to offer families food to the safety of their homes. There is a trust that is being built there between various communities that are still marginalized but that don’t identify as Black. That is beautiful to see.”

In other words, the interviewees shared that the pandemic has invited young people to see themselves as embedded within the networks of our communities. I’ve found that the pandemic

has been an invitation to rely on each other for connection and support, as individuals and as communities, and that this interconnectedness and interdependence are key elements to our resilience during the pandemic.

Several mutual aid groups and informal support networks have sprouted and grown across Montreal. These have emerged from “a need from people and a will from people” (Shir, Sustainable Youth Canada Montreal). Marcelle shares that helping others was important to her particularly in this period: “you build a community of healers. And this motivated and gave a purpose which we all lost. It gave a purpose in a time when we all got so lonely.”

Katia, from Sustainable Youth Canada Montreal, felt that in reaching out and connecting with other youth and youth-led movements, she has “created social nets in society [and realised] how integral these organisations are to the functioning of our society”.

Interviewees are also questioning the term ‘young person’. The youth bracket is very wide, they stressed. We are seeing more of an intergenerational dialogue between ‘younger’ and ‘older’ youth, where both support and learn from each other.

I’m 29 now, like oh shit can I still be a youth? I have been taking leading roles in my youth work for so many years that I feel like I’m a grandma, you know? I can no longer take that youth title! But what I see is that they try so hard to do better and at times there is a little bit of entitlement, entitlement that comes with privilege and that has been transferred onto a social justice cause where it has no room. So yes, there is wisdom that comes from experience and failing and trying. We still need ancient wisdom and even if some mentalities are outdated, there is a sense of groundedness and intergenerational knowledge that is required. (Marcelle)

I am in this position of being the coordinator, the mentor, the support. However, these weekly virtual check-ins with the youth network have helped me take a step back and not always be the person who knows everything or who is always ok. There are days when I am not ok. It has been positive to share more personally about myself and develop a support network about taking care of each other. (Juliana)

How are young people feeling about the disruption brought by COVID-19?

"We were waiting for this revolution," Marcelle from MYCASA told me. In this research process, I've found a deep desire for system transformation:

"Business as usual cannot continue. This is a wakeup call, this shows the risk of inaction, whether it's about climate change or not being proactive enough with pandemic, there are a lot of parallels."

Shir, Sustainable Youth Canada Montreal

Naja also shares that attendance at Project 10 increased and their services became more accessible to people: "It was a wakeup call; we should have been doing this a long time ago. The internet existed before COVID".

Yet, some young people are still left out, Naja reflects: "We know people don't have access but we do not know who. And since we are online we can't know who. That's definitely a challenge. It's impossible for us to be able to reach out to them."

So I ask myself, "In this new reality, whose voices are we hearing and who is (still) on mute?"

The revolution. (Naja)

We have the potential to break everything down
build everything back up again.

Why not bring change from a positive space?
before the forces of
colonization and
globalization
kill
us
all

I feel like people are more down for the revolution.
People are tired of the bullshit
the violence
the excuses.

For a lot of people,
seeing everything burn is a sign of change
and liberation.
it's not just a sign of decay.

If it burns, we can rebuild.

The street. (Marcelle)

We negotiated
one public health risk
for another
and we did not take into consideration
certain basic needs like housing

To some extent,
street work is really limited to a space:
the street.

So, there is only so much to do
virtually.

The reason why street work started
is because people
are left in the street

And that doesn't completely stop.



The COVID-19 Crisis from a Gender Perspective: Some Reflections

By Bonnie Devine

What does it mean to look at the COVID-19 crisis through a gender lens?

This is what I understand:

We have created our world on the basis of MANKind, where one kind of human is assumed as the baseline for all. That human is a white, Western, adult, educated, heterosexual, cisgender man with a comfortable income. This human will be the embodiment of what our Modern State means when it says citizen.

Everyone else is other to this norm and will have to strive to become a citizen (Maffia, 2008¹). When we look at how youth civil society is responding to the COVID-19 crisis through a gender lens, we are deciding to question this “normal human” and “other human” dichotomy, seeing it for what it truly is, a social construct, and not the natural way of things.

In my interviews, I learned that youth and women identified people are being greatly impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, alongside people who aren't white, cisgender, homeowners, straight...

1 Maffia, D (2008). “Contra las dicotomías: feminismo y epistemología crítica”. Seminario de epistemología feminista, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad de Buenos Aires.

“There needs to be a general expansion for who counts, because often it’s easy to be like: young people, feminists, young women, but what kind of young women? What if that young woman is not the ideal woman? Does it not matter anymore? Does she not deserve the same rights? Some of these hard conversations are becoming much more prominent because we see how our structures and systems don’t serve everybody, especially not black and trans and sex worker communities”

N., interview July 6 2020

“I’m noticing that there are so many more no-nbinary and femme presenting people coming to (our) workshops, wanting to know more, wanting to have these tools so that they can implement that change. I think with more non-men doing that work, there is going to be more action around policies or negative issues that are occurring in their community that impact their gender”

Sheela Lal, interview July 10, 2020

An exacerbation of gender-based violence, precarity of labour in and out of the home (in other words, paid and unpaid), generalised discrimination and criminalisation of abortions are other ways that COVID-19 is affecting young women identified people in the U.S., according to interviewees.

“Because of lockdown people are afraid of being locked up with their abusers. And their abusers are in the family, they’re the uncles and brothers and cousins. They are using the internet as a way to call out their abusers which

is horrible for them because they are dependent on their parents, they are dependent on their abusers. So there’s a lot of young people who are kind of in danger of being socially but also monetarily ostracized”

N., interview July 6 2020

Seeing this crisis through a gender lens is not just about seeing how women identified and diverse people are impacted by it on a greater scale, it’s also about understanding our resilience. Resilience in the case of gender activists has been grounded in profound intersectionality; this means that we understand our struggles and injustices as deeply interconnected. When each pocket of society is fighting for their own rights, we will never get us as far as widening our scope of action to build as many bridges as possible between movements, nations, organisations, generations and groups of people. Intersectionality within gender activists has been fueled by COVID-19 and by Black Lives Matter (BLM), blurring the borders of where the gender agenda stops and the race agenda begins, but it doesn’t stop there:

“I definitely see this moment as organisations building better coalitions with each other. I think this happens because the momentum is so potent for that to happen, so when people are standing up for Black Lives Matter, it’s not just black people; it’s feminists and socialists and artists and all types of progressive and leftist organizations that are coming together and finding out about each other”

A.F., interview July 9, 2020

This intersectionality is not only blurring borders between movements, but also between countries, making visible new and intricate interconnections between our global struggles.

"It was really interesting how there was a shift to highlighting the Palestinian struggle and how that connected to the Black Lives Matter movement, and I've never seen that before in a university. It's surprising to me"

Mahira Raihan, interview July 10, 2020

One of the answers that communities have found to organise themselves to create more power in response to COVID-19 is mutual aid:

"Mutual aid as a practice brings a lot to the table, and could be something that gives us more transformative ways of relating to each other. Mutual aid meaning: you and I as individuals, we stand to gain together. It's changing the perceptions of power to say that you and I working together in mutually beneficial ways is not just a transactional thing, but you and I, in our practice and ways that we relate to each other will transform the ways that we relate to institutions and communities and the people around us... We're asking the tough questions: why are people going hungry? Why aren't you getting food because you are undocumented? And that requires a deeper connection and an openness and intentionality behind it"

L.S., interview July 13 2020

As a form of organising, mutual aid precedes the COVID-19 crisis, but now more than ever communities are coming together to fill in the gaps of an absent or inefficient state, providing care and support for each other, delivering food and medication amongst neighbors and organising territorially to support local activism.

To conclude, the way we relate to one another is being put to the test as we become more aware of our interconnectedness. Looking at the COVID-19 crisis from a feminist lens brings me to the realisation that the way we relate to one another, both personally and organisationally, is at the root the collective power we need to transform our realities.



We are left with a few big questions:

- 1. As our social, political, economic landscapes shift, whose voices are we (still) not hearing in our communities? How do we connect with and amplify those voices in our new realities?**
- 2. How will connecting, sharing and supporting each other look like as we transition into new stages of the pandemic? Out of what we've learned, what will we carry on into these new phases?**
- 3. What does it look like to take action while seeing the world through our gender glasses and interconnected realities?**



Co-researchers and authors:

Bonnie Devine and Emilia Gonzalez.

This publication can be cited as the following:

Devine, B., & Gonzalez, E. (2020). Resilient Realities. North America Spotlight: Realising our interconnectedness. Restless Development and Recrear International.

Editor and research coordinator:

Gioel Gioacchino, Recrear

Co-editor and research accompaniment:

Fiammetta Wegner, Recrear

Copyediting:

Restless Development

Graphic design:

Cesar Duarte, Recrear

Project coordinator:

Freya Seath, Restless Development

Coordinated in partnership between



**This research project is funded with UK aid from
the UK government**



The background features a vibrant, abstract composition of overlapping organic shapes. A large, central red shape dominates the middle, with a blue shape above it and an orange shape below it. The entire scene is set against a deep purple background. The text 'RESILIENT REALITIES' is centered within the red shape.

**RESILIENT
REALITIES**