

It's Just Business Dahling! —

Capitalist Enlightenment in Roblox' Largest LGBTQ Cult

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‘You may take away our group, but you will never take our gay spirit, ah!’ — Valindra

Introduction

With the rising popularity of *Roblox* — further boosted by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic — media outlets have noted that alt-right ideology is proliferating in online-gaming communities, and users are being indoctrinated through the means of callous gamification (D'Anastasio 2021). *Roblox* is a game creation platform and host service for user-generated online video games. Users are able to create their own games through the platform's software, which can then be uploaded within the *Roblox* infrastructure for others to play. Players enter user-generated *Roblox* games with their own customisable avatar, the base skin of which looks uncannily like a Lego figure. Because *Roblox*' target group is classified as below the age of 18, the platform strongly enforces SFW (Safe for Work) politics (Roblox Website). As such, the ToS (Terms of Service) for game creators prohibit anything that might be inappropriate for its target audience, such as gore and sexually explicit content (Roblox Community Rules). Despite these guidelines the platform's global userbase, ease of access and the potential to create 'Any experience imaginable' (Roblox Website) consequentially lead to the emergence of games that feature outright fascist content and authoritarian group activities (Farivar 2019). However, an ideological affiliation to the far-right does not only materialise through the most intentional Nazi-roleplays, but also may arise through more obfuscated means. To investigate this phenomenon further, this thesis takes the *Roblox* group *Divine Sister* (previously known as *The Sister's Order*) as a central case study.

The *Divine Sister*, known for its controversies¹, is an LGBTQ *Roblox* community initiated by a mysterious avatar called Valindra. The society has acquired a dedicated cult following through multiple incantations of worship-themed LGBTQ games, such as the *Gaymoria Peak Church Asylum*, the *Qweerial Isle Asylum Paradise* or their Magnum Opus *De Pride Isle Sanatorium*. Throughout their portfolio of games the *Divine Sister* community has formed a set of suspicious traditions, such as the worship of the *Gay Gods* (formerly *Gay Jesus*), the performance of unsolicited plastic surgery, holy LGBTQ sermons and, yes, cannibalism. The *Divine Sister* claims that their institution serves to enable players to discover themselves and embrace their gender and sexuality. Furthermore: one of their specific goals is to rid the world of homophobes — and strive for enlightenment, ah! Despite its activist framing, the group's activities are often received as absurdist trolling: the *Divine Sister* engages with a wide range of cultural symbols which are remixed and employed in an ironic way. The group also features LARPs that entertain pop-cultural

¹ See *Toppling Valindra's Throne & Divine Sister's Truth*.

revisionism, such as *Transtanic!* (transphobic attack on reimagined Titanic) or scripted video performances like *Gay Conversion Therapy!* (a homophobe is turned gay) (Divine Sister: YouTube 2021). Due to authoritarian tendencies within the group and the involvement of Valindra as the object of worship, the Divine Sister is often described as a cult (SomeOrdinaryGamers 2020). Despite the society's ambivalent framing, Valindra has recently come under scrutiny for using racial slurs and behaving in an insensitive manner towards the Muslim faith specifically (everthelest 2020a).

In this text I will explore how the discourse and aesthetics of certain online spaces — such as the *Divine Sister* — influence the formation of user subjectivity. Furthermore, I will investigate how indeterminacy in such spaces may lead to the ambivalent production of isms - in this case, racism and Islamophobia. How are power structures established in ludic spaces and what conditions provide fertile ground for the indoctrination of players into far-right ideology? How are players exposed to this agenda and what influences them to be uncritical of its content? Through this analysis, I also ask how the already-in-place systems and structures of oppression and control might be opposed.

As a focal point, this text will analyse the activities within the *Divine Sister* society. First, I will investigate the narrative-social relation established in *De Pride Isle*, which is currently the society's most popular game. I will then analyse the *Divine Sister*'s ambivalent conflation of symbols, their colonial narrative of enlightenment and how their aesthetics may provide a platform for right-wing entryism. In the conclusion of my analysis, I will discuss the ways a right-shift — however ambivalent it may be — can be avoided in online micro communities.

‘Ah! Welcome to our holy society! A place of Progressive Social Change! ❤️ Your journey of self-enlightenment, self-discovery! Finding a path to truly learn what matters in life! Begins NOW! Come and seek it with us!’²

— Divine Sister: Group Page

² Any and all quotations drawn from online platforms are direct quotations, and therefore any mistakes of spelling or grammar are assumed to be original. Thus, I will not be using the [sic] marker for these sources, as doing so would be excessively redundant.

Chapter 1: Ah! I Need Money Bitch! — Game Syntax and Capitalist Accumulation

In order to discuss the emergence of ambivalent forms of oppression and control within the *Divine Sister*, it is crucial to explore the ideological underpinnings of *De Pride Isle*'s gameplay loop and its broader — and more cynical — relation to labour and capital. *De Pride Isle*'s game-world consist of a sanatorium, where players are promised to be ‘cured of whatever ails’ them (Stalzie 2020).

In *De Pride Isle*, the self-discovery process is embedded within a gameplay-loop that demands the participation of different layers of authority. The game does not make use of any NPCs (non-player characters) and instead relies on player labour to facilitate its gameplay metabolism. Valindra assumes the role of the Trumpian boss: positioned above everyone, she reigns with supreme power, recruiting and firing collaborators and *Nurses* on a whim. The *Nurses*, who act as a middle-management layer, guide the player through the ludic experience. Players without a higher rank come to the sanatorium with the *Refugee*-title. They are being cared for by the *Nurses*, who provide food and guidance through leisure activities and ceremonies. During the nighttime, patients (everyone under the *Nurse*-rank) must find shelter in their dorms and *Nurses* must make sure that no one roams the halls. Based on certain gameplay conditions, patients may then automatically turn into *Cannibals*, which enables them to kill and feast on other patients.

Given *Roblox*' demographic (8-18 years old), one may assume that many members of the *Divine Sister* are in their most formative teenage years. Indeed, *Roblox* YouTuber and former *Divine Sister* contributor everthelest describes how the group shaped their sense of self: ‘When I found this community, there were many players and nurses who made me feel welcome and allowed me to begin questioning my identity. Never in my life did I have a safe space to do that before, I felt like being a part of the Divine Sister community that i finally could express that’ (everthelest 2020a). However, these formative experiences can also result in the induction into cultic ideology. In *Cultic Cultures* (2017, p.7), Morgan Quaintance describes that a ‘distorted view of collectivism has laid fertile ground for the growth in prominence of what British sociologist Colin Campbell calls the cultic milieu, a “cultural underground society” that is composed of and conducive to the creation of cults’. The longing for such counter-normative epistemologies, particularly in the art field, is cultivated by a form of *seekership*, an ‘operative state for potential cult members’ (Quaintance 2017, p.10). The fascination for non-conformist realities corresponds with the *Divine Sister*'s promise of a community of like-minded individuals. One could conclude that LGBTQ-seekers are

especially susceptible to being red-pilled³ having experienced ‘the essential fictiveness of the world and its various epistemological foundations’ (Ibid., p.10). This ‘essential fictiveness’ may be apprehended through constructs, which LGBTQ-seekers feel oppressed by — e.g. gender, sexuality, religion or heteronormativity. It is worth noting how post-Fordist capitalism furthermore amplifies the formation of *seekership* - especially for queer teenagers. Mark Fisher explains that ‘with the public sphere under attack and the safety nets that a “Nanny State” used to provide being dismantled, the family becomes an increasingly important place of respite from the pressures of a world in which instability is a constant’ (Fisher 2009, p.33). At the same time, however, ‘post-Fordist capitalism’ is ‘denying parents time with children putting intolerable stress on couples as they become the exclusive source of affective consolation for each other’ (Ibid.). The market-driven alienation between parents and children further engenders the *Divine Sister*’s allure for their target audience. Their alleged commitment to ‘A place of Progressive Social Change’ (Divine Sister: Group Page) evokes a vision of collectivity that is imagined to be able to offset the instability of contemporary life.

‘Becoming a Nurse in the Divine Sister community, shall give you the ability to change peoples lives! in REAL LIFE! How will you do it right?’

— Divine Sister: Nurse Application

As mentioned above, the game loop in *De Pride Isle* cannot function without human labour being carried out by the *Nurses*. Their so-called *Torium*-rank is highly sought after and of prestigious standing within the *Divine Sister* culture. The rank is itself hierarchical and subdivided into titles that bear respective privileges. In order to become a *Nurse* one must either buy a so-called *Game Pass for 3.333 Robux (Roblox)* in-game currency, which is tied to real-world currency, 3.333 *Robux* equals approximately \$40) or undergo a ‘rigorous’ application process (Divine Sister: *Torium Trainee*). Amongst other things, the lengthy application form includes questions such as: ‘Will you always support the Divine Sister, even in times of doubt?’ and ‘How will you enlighten those LGBTPhobic minds with the Divine Sister?’ (everthelest 2020b). These questions not only suggest that *Nurses* are expected to uphold and enforce orthodoxy, but they also reveal the ideologically

³ ‘The term “red pill” refers to the 1999 blockbuster The Matrix, in which the protagonist Neo is offered a choice between two pills. Were he to choose the blue pill, life would carry on as he knew it. Choosing the “red pill”, however, would mean tearing through the thick membrane of ideology and accepting the sanity-threatening truth that humans live inside a virtual reality generated by their AI overlords.’

— Teixeira Pinto 2019

colonial narrative behind the *Divine Sister*'s mission for *enlightenment*. The insinuation of such enforcement is coherent with 'Europe's hegemony over the new model of global power', which 'concentrated all forms of the control of subjectivity, culture, and especially knowledge and the production of knowledge under its hegemony' (Quijano 2000, 540). The form furthermore asks whether 'it is possible you [the player] have enough money to purchase the correct employee attire', which is not included in the *Game Pass*. It is, however, noted, that there is a charity for underprivileged players who cannot afford their uniform (Divine Sister 2019); no one shall be excluded from engaging in labour for the *Divine Sister* — how infinitely generous! The entrance-level *Torium-ranks* 'keep the Isles running all day, every day. Junior Ranks are expected to possess adaptability, humility, positive attitude and eagerness to learn' (Callistia 2020), which is in itself incredibly abstract and indicative of a decentralised organisation of work. Once making it into the *Torium-ranks*, *Nurses* are bound to a web of narrative-social responsibilities, lateral control and HR abuse — all while being paid absolutely nothing. Naturally, *De Pride Isle Nurses* have no worker's rights, thus failing to adhere to one's respective responsibilities may invoke a publicised demotion. In an official *Divine Sister* staff rules document it is stated that 'Any conversations about reforms will not only decrease your chance of being promoted but will also decrease the chance of them happening, so don't be silly x' (Divine Sister: Old staff Rules), which effectively inhibits *Nurses* from engaging in any kind of collective dissent and from forming unions to organise themselves. The fear of sudden unemployment and loss of social standing, not being able to fulfil one's elastically phrased role-description, and the instability that results from life and work becoming 'inseparable' (Fischer 2009, p.34) signify conditions of post-Fordist work culture. The *Divine Sister* perpetuates a labour-capital relation, whose detrimental real-world impact on families ironically served to instil players into the *Divine Sister*'s cultic ideology in the first place.

Valindra, who holds the rank of *Divine Sister*, is the founder and CEO of the group. One can assume that, as the owner of the game, she is responsible for the marketing and inner workings of the *Divine Sister*. As such she also gains revenue from micro-transactions, such as the purchase of *Game Passes*. Valindra usually rocks revealing outfits that often create the illusion of her having breasts. She is, of course, tall and skinny and often brandishes a gun in portraits. She appears to have a demon tail on her YouTube channel banner, although her 'avatar does not have it currently, and no one is sure why' (Divine Sister: Wiki). Her adherence to a certain business ontology — however recently adopted — is revealed in a voice clip that circulates on YouTube. In the clip she is

asked whether she ‘made the game pass, so you [Valindra] could get more money’, to which Valindra replied:

‘I mean... Aurora Navy Baby, it’s just... business dahling. How the hell do you think I’m gonna be able to afford the damn developers that are working on the game right now? HELLO?! Are you just a child who can’t understand, that I — the game — needs money? [...] Ah! I need money bitch!’

— verified 2020, transcribed from video

Despite the Freudian slip, it is also worth noting how Valindra remains in character while mocking someone for confronting her about the game’s financial model. The clip also reveals the lack of transparency around how this in-game revenue is spent. The *Game Passes* and their speculative exchange value are furthermore subject to Valindra’s and the HR’s capricious managerial qualities: the *Torium*-rank can be revoked at any point if the title’s power is abused or if a *Nurse* ‘made enough mistakes’, committed ‘unholy acts’ or is being inactive (*Divine Sister: De Pride Isle*). Having already established how *De Pride Isle*’s game-loop syntax is symptomatic of a postmodern operative mode, it is now important to understand how Valindra’s managerial agency ties into a larger game-loop of late capitalist social reproduction. Mark Fisher explains that ‘Capitalist realism, however, entails subordinating oneself to a reality that is infinitely plastic, capable of reconfiguring itself at any moment’ (Fisher 2009, p.54). Valindra’s managerial relation to this infinitely plastic reality could be observed when *Roblox* officials decided to ‘lock’ the previous iteration of *De Pride Isle* due to ToS violations in late 2019. Valindra subsequently framed this unannounced ban as a homophobic attack deliberately carried out to disorient the *Divine Sister*’s community (*Divine Sister: YouTube* 2021). In order to re-upload the game — and keep it from being banned again — all content that potentially violated the *Roblox* ToS had to be cut. A series of changes was announced via the *Divine Sister*’s Twitter account, which is moderated by Valindra herself. In a post, accompanied by four images, she remarks ‘We try our best to follow the rules, Please guide us first’. The pictures’ respective captures read:

‘Human Surgery? ILLEGAL & REMOVED!’

““Lego Cannibals”? ILLEGAL AND REMOVED!”

‘POOP? ILLEGAL & REMOVED!’

‘GORE? ILLEGAL AND LESSENED!’

— Divine Sister: Twitter

One can notice that despite Valindra’s compliance to the ToS enforcement, her actual mindset remains unchanged — her actions only serve to appease the ‘homophobes’ at *Roblox*. Mark Fisher classifies the ability to adapt as ‘the strategy of managerialism par excellence’ (Fisher 2009, p.28). He continues that ‘in terms of his inner subjective attitude, the manager is hostile, even contemptuous, towards, the bureaucratic procedures he supervises; but in terms of his outward behaviour, he is perfectly compliant’ (Fisher 2009, p.55), which perfectly applies to Valindra’s attitude in this case. It is worth noting that the aforementioned pictures indicate a certain memetic methodology employed by the *Divine Sister*. The image depicting human surgery, a practice that was until then openly exercised in the *Divine Sister*’s community, shows a patient lying on a bed and a *Nurse* with some kind of medicinal contraption strapped to her arm, presumably mid-surgery. The *Nurse*’s speech bubble reads ‘-Does Liposuction-’ (stylised with - and œ) while the patient’s reads ‘Am I skinny now?’. The image radiates a kind of humour that is archetypical for the *Divine Sister*’s culture: it calls upon an LGBTQ pop-stack affinity to plastic surgery while juxtaposing it with a more sinister fetishisation of elitism — and in turn the rejection of everything that is not skinny, tall and fabulous, dahling. Even in capitulation to *Roblox*’ ToS enforcement, the *Divine Sister* remains in control of their established cultural signifiers through cultural production — in this example the creation of memes reveal Valindra’s inner defiance and contempt against her ‘supervisors’ — yet she plays the game.



Figure 1: Valindra with a gun and a demon tail on the *Divine Sister*’s YouTube banner

Chapter 2: Holy Aesthetics — Symbolism and Coloniality

Having analysed the *Divine Sister's* engagement in systems of social control and capitalist accumulation, I will now discuss the *Divine Sister's* aesthetics, their production of authenticity and how their cultural mythology may contribute to a formation of subjectivities that — coherent with alt-right methodologies — serve to lessen the resistance towards racism and Islamophobia.

In order to understand how subjectivity is formed within the *Divine Sister's* culture, one needs to discuss its ideological underpinnings and primal operative modes; one of which is the queering of and engagement with religion and ceremony. A central aspect of the *Divine Sister's* gameplay loop is the celebration of holy masses. In *De Pride Isle*, players regularly gathered to perform their rendition of religion, which for them is a reinterpreted version of Christianity. Valindra and upper *Torium*-ranks would regularly preach about the deeds of *Gay Jesus*, a fabulous gay version of the historic Jesus Christ. Through a parable, Valindra propagates:

‘After Jesus noticed the woman’s lack of fashion sense behind him.. He strut left and moved his hips! blocking the woman view and would move his arms up like a true queen he is! [...] But alas! Jesus wasn’t just here to be converted to the “straight” christian religion.. He was also here to convert straights too! The Hidden Gxy Agenda of our Queen!!’

— Divine Sister: Gay Jesus

According to Valindra’s reinterpretation, Gay Jesus is predominantly invested in being fierce and performing missionary work — his holy agenda consists of turning straights into gays by being an absolutely sickening member of the LGBTQ, yas queen! In a *confession*, a ceremonial storytelling role-play, in which attendees are asked to spontaneously tell personal — often LGBTQ-flavoured — anecdotes, Valindra revealed the reason for her aversion to Christianity, which she indicates as an oppressive, homophobic force. She explains, ‘it was soy hard! my hometown was infested with this abrahamic religion! they hated me for being fem! -cries-’. This ‘infestation’, hinting towards the colonial reality of Christian crusade and Western cultural encroachment, would have been a valid point of the *Divine Sister's* criticism if it was discussed in a historically intelligent manner. The aspect of colonialism is, however, never directly brought up in Valindra’s performative criticism. What instead ensues, is the reinterpretation of Jesus Christ, who inconsequently still engages in missionary tasks. Despite Valindra’s (unconscious) description of the detrimental effects of

Christian expansion politics, i.e. homophobia, she incompletely realises the root cause thereof to be religion itself instead of an interlocking ‘imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy’ supra-structure (hooks 2005, p.17). Thus the queering of narratives utterly fails to address the real issue, i.e. the complicity of religion and white supremacy, patriarchy, etc. On the contrary, the *Divine Sister*’s performance instead reinforces the notion of the rightfulness of mechanisms of oppression exerted by dominant culture, which are apparently acceptable as long as they are pink.

Valindra’s incitement to worship Gay Jesus, as she herself confessed, was, however, ‘simply meant to make “Homophobic Christians” uncomfortable’ (PlusAintANumber 2020). The *Divine Sister*’s engagement with religious ceremony can therefore be understood as a troll, which is rendered acceptable because it is marketed under the pretense of LGBTQ-progressiveness. The mimicry of that which is identified as the oppressive force indicates an accelerationist impulse, that is further consolidated by the *Divine Sister*’s grounding in capitalist accumulation discussed earlier. Writer and cultural theorist Ana Teixeira Pinto explains that ‘Affirmational strategies speak the idiom of the fetish. Their sole register is intensification (e.g., the worse the better; trolling the trolls; the only way out is the way through)’ (Teixeira Pinto 2017a), which specifies the *Divine Sister*’s operational mode regarding their relation to capital and their accelerationist tendencies. In this sense the *Divine Sister*’s political aesthetics are coherent with ‘post-internet art’s specific brand of weak, indirect criticality, where criticism of late capitalism should be inferred from an artist’s participation in, mimesis or re-presentation of, its strategies and forms of alienation, objectification and commodification’ (Quaintance 2015), and in that sense their critique, if conceived as such, is highly ineffective.

In the above example it is also worth noting how Valindra’s use of language incorporates linguistic quirks that have emerged within the *Divine Sister*’s culture (‘soy’ instead of so; a verb nestled in hyphens, indicating an action, like -sees-; Ah!; My dahlings!; etc.). The use of coded language may indicate that Valindra approaches role-play within the group’s culture with ironic undertones, which is to be presumed given her participation in rituals of trolling. These ceremonies — which involve irony, trolling, and transgressive rhetorics — form a ‘calculated imprecision’, which may facilitate ‘casual observers’ to ‘consent to its constituent elements under the auspices of their formal disorganisation’ (Untermesh 2017). This condition in turn may give rise to entryism: the subtle establishment of a pipeline towards reactionary thought. As Pinto explains, ‘in online image boards

[and gaming spaces] détournement and appropriation are themselves co-opted’, users are drawn to the cause of the right, ‘while fantasies of transgression are used to mask a matter-of-fact complicity or jaded cynicism’ (Teixeira Pinto 2017b). For Valindra ‘The ironic frame has a strategic function; it allows one “to dig responsibility for his or her choices, aesthetic and otherwise”’ (Ibid.). The indefinite rejection of responsibilities are particularly evident in the *Hijabgate* controversy, which I will discuss at length in a later section.

The affinity to ‘contemporary modes of visual disorder’ (Untermesh 2017), especially in relation to the group’s interaction with symbols, are furthermore evident in the work of *The Sister’s Covenant*, a previous iteration of the *Divine Sister*. Their practice of religious activities are described as follows:

‘On Sundays we worship the Christian God. On Mondays we worship the Muslim God. On Tuesday we worship the Buddhist God. On Wednesdays we wear pink. On Thursdays we worship the Judaist God. On Fridays we worship the Hindu God. On Saturdays we worship a Random God.’

— Stalzie 2020

Within the group all gods were perceived as gay and the ‘Random God’ almost always turned out to be Satan (The Sister’s Covenant Wiki). It is instantly suspicious how religious practice is conflated with a pop-cultural reference relating to the movie *Mean Girls* (Waters 2000), which is ’wearing pink’.⁴ This conflation is moreover happening in a comedic way: the semantic link between ‘wearing pink’ and the practice of religion implies that the aesthetic markers of membership to an exclusive group should be worshipped on the same level as gods. What ensues is a collapse of semiotics: it does not really matter what is practiced or if anything is practiced at all — wearing pink is just as good. This symmetry of meaning, or LGBTQ-oriented iconoclasm, furthermore implies that the *Covenants’* political agenda, which is ‘to fight against the sin of sexism’ (The Sister’s Covenant Wiki), can not only be furthered by religious worship, but also simply by representation; being in-crowd and a *Mean Girls stan*. More important is, however, that the juxtaposition of religions implies that each of them is subject to the same critique discussed above:

⁴ In *Mean Girls*, to be part of *The Plastics* (popular girls) one has to follow the rules of the group, one of which is wearing pink on Wednesdays.

religion itself is compressed into one single bad object, the source of homophobia and all suffering for the LGBTQ community.

The *Divine Sister*'s tendency to conflate LGBTQ tropes with religious symbolism also becomes evident through a minor detail in the *Qweerial Isle Asylum Paradise*, an earlier version of *De Pride Isle*: in the *Nurses'* staffroom a pin-board displays various notes, one of which seems to be a shopping list reads: 'sage | holy water | silver | Lipgloss x | beige Nail Polish' (Stalzie 2020), which seems to follow the same methodological approach as seen in the *Sister's Covenant*'s description of religious practice. Other notes on the same pin-board read 'Finish autopsy', 'Pray to Gay Jesus' and 'Oh my!' along with a traditionally seeming illustration of Jesus (hinting towards orthodoxy) and a Christian nun in a sexy latex attire (hinting towards BDSM practices) (*Ibid.*). Similar to how the worship of Satan is stealthily practiced in the *Sister's Covenant*, the 'Finish Autopsy' note suggests secret, more sinister activities within the *Divine Sister*'s culture. The fact that these elements are highly recursive within the group — although only conjured up through environmental cues or concealed cultural activities — may testify to their creator's awareness of their potentially controversial nature; a deliberately practiced obscurantism.

The Divine Sister's cultural mythology is therefore constructed in three steps: The first step is the misinterpretation of religion to be the root cause of homophobia. The second step is a symmetry of meaning, which allows one to apply the same incompletely deduced critique to all subjects. The third step is the fabrication of a holy-unholy binary that serves to reinforce the notion of LGBTQ-righteousness. Members of the *Divine Sister* are made to believe that 'their information is the true one' whereas 'other people, ALL placed under the umbrella term "homophobe" [...], are wrong and should be ignored, being "unholy" and their arguments being "false"' (PlusAintANumber 2020). Entrenched in neoliberal ideology and imbued with transgressive irony, religious obscurantism and an accelerationist impulse, the *Divine Sister* hence engenders an enlightenment subjectivity that provides fertile ground for the ambivalent production of racism and Islamophobia. The established condition, which gave rise to the infamous *Hijabgate*, legitimises one to go from trolling dominant cultures to mocking marginalised groups seamlessly.

Hijabgate refers to a controversy occurring at the end of 2020, in which Valindra was heavily criticised after she was seen wearing a hijab combined with a revealing Chanel-outfit in game. She

initially brushed off any accountability by posting: ‘There is NOTHING to apologise! I believe in my right! In what I do, to reach out to ze people who feel oppressed!’ (everthelest 2020a). She continues that she won’t pretend to ‘love the WHOLE muslim culture’ and that there are ‘parts I love and hate’ (Ibid.). In the *Hijabgate* incident, Valindra again tries to exert her critique by transgressive performance, irony and trolling under the pretense of the liberation of oppressed people. However, in contrast to the queering of Christianity, the strategic indictment of Muslims as oppressors is coherent with what already happens in society; it is complicit in a larger push to the far-right. Given the ideological framework of the *Divine Sister*, this development must be realised as not coincidental but, in fact, absolutely formulaic. In order to grasp the neo-colonial qualities of Valindra’s performance — and thus her complicity in the re-enactment of historic modes of oppression — one must understand how Muslims have been historically characterised as being ‘dangerously premodern’ (Puar 2013, p.336) (read: homophobe; reluctant to identify as homosexual; adhering to nonegalitarian sexual relations) and how this notion served to legitimise the colonial *Incitement to Discourse* (Foucault 1976) in Muslim countries and nation-state *pinkwashing*.

Jasbir Puar coins the term *homonationalism*, a conceptual frame for ‘understanding the complexities of how “acceptance” and “tolerance” for gay and lesbian subjects have become a barometer by which the right to and capacity for national sovereignty is evaluated’ (Puar 2013, p.336). *Homonationalism* is to be understood as ‘a facet of modernity and a historical shift marked by the entrance of (some) homosexual bodies as worthy of protection by nation-states, a constitutive and fundamental reorientation of the relationship between the state, capitalism, and sexuality’ (Puar 2013, p.337). It lays the global framework for the state practice of *pinkwashing* (e.g. Israel’s attempt at rebranding its aggressive settler colonialism in Palestine via a narrative of Israeli ‘gay liberation’ versus Palestinian ‘gay oppression’) and *Incitement to Discourse* by Western gay human rights organisations, ‘as it undergirds U.S. imperial structures through an embrace of a sexually progressive multiculturalism justifying foreign intervention’ (Ibid., p.336). The liberation of supposedly oppressed people by what Joseph A. Massad describes as the *Gay International*, a conglomerate of ‘missionary tasks, the discourse that produces them, and the organizations that represent them’, is legitimised by the axiomatic presupposition of the universalness of gay rights (Massad 2008, p.176). In order to liberate the supposed victim of homophobic state oppression, the assumed oppressor is othered by summoning the reference of a *Mythological West*, a ‘mythical

'idealized self', which in turn describes the other 'as a projection of all that it is not and that it does not contain, namely, nonegalitarian sexual relations, the oppressive rule of men, "gender-based" sexuality, patriarchy, and so forth' (Ibid., p.170). Joseph A. Massad argues that this proliferation of *homonationalist* ideology served to have 'resistant "Oriental" desires' be 're-oriented to and subjected by the "more enlightened" Occident' (Ibid., p.164). This construction of the *other* allows for the institution of a binary: 'the status of "gay-friendly" versus "homophobic"', which in turn is perceived as a measure for modernity (Puar 2013, p.337). What follows is a proliferation of 'Euro-American constructs of identity (not to mention the notion of a sexual identity itself) that privilege identity politics, "coming out," public visibility, and legislative measures as the dominant barometers of social progress' (Ibid., p.338). By inciting discourse and thus producing 'homosexuals, as well as gays and lesbians, where they do not exist'⁵, the *Gay International* provokes anti-colonial reactions, which are in turn framed as signifiers of their rationale's legitimacy: 'the Gay International is in fact *heterosexualizing* a world that is being forced to be fixed by a Western binary' (Massad 2008, p.188).

Valindra's predisposition to an anti-islamic position — however recently adopted — can be deduced by tracking her coherence to *homonationalist* mechanisms of oppression as discussed above. Her involvement in *Hijabgate*, for instance, precisely perpetuates the indictment of Muslims as a projection of everything the *Mythological West* — and by extension the *Divine Sister* — is perceived not to be. This notion is consolidated and legitimised by the group's readily available and elastically maintained binary between holy and unholy; unapologetically LGBTQ and homophobe; insider and outsider. By claiming liberatory motifs, Valindra justifies her adoption of far-right rhetorics and colonial aspects by means of *pinkwashing*: her trolling of Muslims is rendered acceptable, because she is fighting hegemonic patriarchy under the banner of LGBTQ-righteousness. This synergy of anti-Muslim rhetoric and the weaponising of LGBTQ-agency is constituted by *pinkwashing* functioning 'in part by tapping into the discursive and structural circuits produced by U.S. and European crusades against the spectral threat of "radical Islam" or "Islamofascism"' (Puar 2013, p.338). Coherent with the 'universalization of "gay rights"' (Massad 2008, p. 160), Valindra presupposes a global realism of Western sexual epistemologies, and in turn insinuates an undesirability of other ways of being. This assumption may produce, as Joseph A. Massad describes, 'an effect that is less than liberatory', and may in fact paradoxically repress these

⁵ Massad is referring to the *homonationalist* identity categories of 'gay' and 'lesbian'.

presumed victims who often ‘refuse to be assimilated into its [Western] sexual epistemology’ (*Ibid.*, p.163). On her Twitter page Valindra exclaims that ‘Sexuality is a part of our identity! That needs to be expressed! And never suppressed!’ (Divine Sister: Twitter), which heavily implies her concept of a universalised LGBTQ ontology. Her initially discussed idealisation of Western LGBTQ epistemologies furthermore becomes apparent in her use of the term *enlightenment*, which she utilises to insinuate superiority; a justification for the institution of paradigms of re-orientation on victimised bodies. Valindra proudly confesses: “I am an enlightened 2020 woman!” (everthelest 2020a).



Figure 2: Screenshot of *ROBLOX BIRTH OF GAY JESUS* — Bethlehem as cruising paradise

Chapter 3: #SORRY — Opposing the Divine Sister

Having discussed the *Divine Sister*'s callous narrative relation to capitalist accumulation and how the group's cultural mythology establishes a subjectivity that normalises racism and Islamophobia by invoking the notion of enlightenment, I will now look into ways such tendencies can be opposed. I will, however, first discuss how opposition remains unsuccessful by investigating Valindra's reactions to the *Hijabgate* controversy. After having been excessively pressured by her community to take responsibility for her actions, Valindra issued numerous apologies that, however, demonstrated her inability to grasp the problematic nature of her behaviour. Lined with irony and, once again, not abstaining from linguistic quirks, her initial statement reads:

‘Ah! My dahlings! I can’t imagine this day has finally come to bite me in ze holy behind!
But alas I am truly sorry for wearing ze sacred Hijab with my beautiful revealing outfit
made by Chanel! It is soy islamophobic of me to wear such a holy clothing! I deeply
apologize! #SORRY’

— everthelest 2020a

This moment marked a transition in the Divine Sister's credibility: players further criticised Valindra for her lack of accountability, emphasising the ramifications of her actions for members of the group, many of which are young Muslims (Ibid.). In her video *The Divine Sister Hijabphobia: A Full Breakdown*, everthelest — herself Muslim — states: ‘At the moment it feels like a fraud. Like everything I valued about this community was built on a lie’ (Ibid.). Despite all public criticism, Valindra however, kept producing content that aimed to legitimise her involvement in liberatory human rights activism: In March 2020 she uploaded a video to the Divine Sister's YouTube channel called *Roblox Conservative Mother*. The video shows a mother, wearing a hijab, and her trans-son, Amirr, sporting a pride wristband, fleeing from a convoy of police cars. During the chase they argue about the son's gender identity. After being addressed as *Amirra* by his mother, the son replies: ’My name is Amirr now mother. I can no longer hide my true self mother. I am a MAN. I am to be free mother. To be free...’ (Divine Sister: YouTube 2021b).

The video fades to black and then shows the mother in front of a dramatic background of a volcano erupting. She contemplates:

‘Where did I go wrong as a mother? Was it because I let her play such manly things? Or was it because I have sinned! NOOO! -enlightened voice- My Child is whatever he wants himself to be! I will always be there for you my darling! I am your mother... Never forget that! Ah!’

— Ibid.

In the end, the Muslim mother accepts her trans-son’s wish to express his gender. The catharsis is, however, only short-lived as they both crash down a cliff. Although the video ends here, the thumbnail shows the mother, next to the car wreckage, holding her now presumably dying child in her arms. Their posture hereby alludes to the portrayal of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary in Christian art, the *pietá*, which constitutes another mashup of cultural signifiers as discussed in chapter 2. Although having apologised for her previous involvement with *Hijabgate*, Valindra keeps on performing her transgressive shtick, and, being the adaptive manager, she resists any allegations — even those she previously conceded to — such as the misrepresentation of the Hijab. Her perpetual production of the victimised *other* (here also ironically voiced by herself), who is in dire need of liberation, again testifies to Valindra’s glorification of colonial conquest. In the end, the constant stream of cultural production diminished the potency of criticism, which, despite immense community efforts, makes it seemingly impossible to cancel Valindra. I propose that exactly herein lies the problem: the cancellation of Valindra has been justified by accusing her of being racist and islamophobe; notions she succeeds to deflect by *pinkwashing* her own politics through video productions like *Roblox Conservative Mother*. Thus, Instead of accusing Valindra directly one could pull back and reveal the ‘imperialist white supremacist capitalist’ (hooks 2005, p.17) underpinnings of the group itself, and in turn reveal that the emergence of the game’s key agency of Islamophobia is not just a random by-product but a calculated symptom of its misconception. As long as the problem is understood as a random burst into islamophobic trolling, I would argue that fascist developments would not cease to flare up within the *Divine Sister’s* culture — even if Valindra’s cancellation had been successful.

In order to think about successful ways of opposing reactionary shifts in online spaces, I propose to look at instances where the emergence of fascist entrenchment has been successfully repelled; as such scene I propose LD50: a former East London art space. LD50’s *conference on Reactionary and Neoreactionary thought*, which was held in August 2016, combined speakers like Nick Land, a

‘long-term darling of the art world and academia’ (Abse Gogarty 2017) with right-wing extremists, such as ‘Brett “democracy-destroys-white-people” Stevens (Amerika), anti-immigration activist Peter Brimelow (VDare), masculinist Mark Citadel (Return of Kings), and antifeminist journalist Iben Thranholm’ (Teixeira Pinto 2017a). Writer and art historian Larne Abse Gogarty classifies the deliberate conflation of ‘already-present art-world discourses with their ideological cousins’ as an attempt to create a ‘milieu’ (Abse Gogarty 2017) — and thus an effort to infiltrate and establish right-wing entryism in the art field. The continuation of LD50’s programming was challenged by the combined efforts of local residents and anti-fascist groups, while ‘the art world mostly prevaricated over the ‘complexity’ of the situation’ (Ibid.). Ana Teixeira Pinto concludes, that ‘LD50 is not a story simply about art nor solely about fascism, but specifically about the resurgence of fascism as a cultural force’ (Teixeira Pinto 2017a). If the symptoms of the *Divine Sister*’s underlying politics had been similarly understood — as a systematic attempt to introduce fascist thinking — then, one could assume, that a combined community effort of in-crowd members and, e.g., *Roblox* YouTubers, could have had a similar impact on the *Divine Sister* capability to instil right-wing ideology. Resistance towards oppressive online-spaces would thus presuppose an understanding of one’s own position in such system and the larger socio-economic mechanisms at work. Consequently, the development of a critical discourse and the formation of unions from within the *Divine Sister*’s game world appear to be crucial.



Figure 3: Screenshot of *Roblox Conservative Mother* — enlightenment

Conclusion

What started as a weird fascination with the absurdity of the *Divine Sister's* culture — particularly their practice of religion within a kink-gore space — has quickly turned into disappointment about the group's inner ideological machinations. In the first chapter, I argued that what underpins the gameplay-loop in *De Pride Isle* is essentially a labour-capital relation that introduces a web of managerial control and postmodern instability. After revealing the *Divine Sister's* involvement in schemes of capitalist accumulation, I moved on to discuss the group's aesthetics and their use of symbols. Observing the conflation of pop-cultural signifiers with religious symbolism, I argued that the *Divine Sister's* engagement in the queering of narratives leads to a collapse of semiotics, which at best serves to obfuscate their political agenda and at worst normalises racism and Islamophobia. The subsequent section examined Valindra's perpetuation of a colonial notion of enlightenment and how her performance is coherent with the historical oppression of the *other* under the aegis of LGBTQ-progressiveness. Arriving at the final chapter I presented how Valindra circumvented cancellation by continuously *pinkwashing* her politics through cultural production. Considering that the cancellation of Valindra necessarily remained unsuccessful because of her control over the reality of the *Divine Sister*, I concluded this text by giving an example of an instance of successful opposition to fascist entrenchment in the art field. Although it currently remains unknown how to exactly stop fascism, in order to oppose its resurgence 'as a cultural force' (Teixeira Pinto 2017a), artists and players alike 'need to be prepared to repeatedly intervene with strength and clarity in the coming years' (Abse Gogarty 2017).

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