


# JULY / AUGUST 2018 DISCUSSION GUIDE

AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL   
**BOOK CLUB**  
DISCUSSION  
GUIDE

## SCARBOROUGH

BY CATHERINE HERNANDEZ

RECOMMENDED BY AHMAD DANNY RAMADAN





# WELCOME

## Amnesty Book Club members

Welcome back to the Amnesty International Book Club! We are pleased to announce our July/August title *Scarborough* by Catherine Hernandez. This title has been recommended by guest reader Ahmad Danny Ramadan, with whom you will explore the novel and delve into the pressing need to ensure the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) people are respected, protected, and upheld in Canada and around the world.

In this guide, you will find reflections and commentary from the author and our guest reader, discussion questions, and information on LGBTI rights and an action you can take during this summer's Pride season to protect LGBTI rights in Indonesia.

Scarborough is a vibrant, culturally and economically diverse neighborhood east of Toronto, the fourth largest city in North America, which, like many inner-city communities, is not a stranger to poverty, drugs, and crime. *Scarborough* the novel employs a multitude of voices to tell the story of a tight-knit neighborhood and its challenges.

*Scarborough* offers a raw yet empathetic glimpse into a community that locates its dignity in unexpected places. It is a neighborhood that refuses to be undone.

Thank you for being part of the Amnesty International Book Club. We appreciate your interest and would love to hear from you with any questions, suggestions, or comments you may have. Just send us an email at [bookclub@amnesty.ca](mailto:bookclub@amnesty.ca).

We think you will really enjoy *Scarborough*.  
Happy reading!

– The Book Club Team

### About Amnesty International

Amnesty International is a global movement of more than seven million supporters, members and activists in over 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights.

Our vision is for all people to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion, and are funded mainly by our membership.

Until everyone can enjoy all of their rights, we will continue our efforts. We will not stop until everyone can live in dignity; until every person's voice can be heard; until no one is tortured or executed.

Our members are the cornerstone of these efforts. They take up human rights issues through letter-writing, online and off line campaigning, demonstrations, vigils and direct lobbying of those with power and influence.

Locally, nationally and globally, we join together to mobilize public pressure and show international solidarity.

Together, we make a difference.

For more information about Amnesty International visit [www.amnesty.ca](http://www.amnesty.ca) or write to us at: Amnesty International, 312 Laurier Ave. E., Ottawa, ON K1N 1H9.

## About this month's author, **Catherine Hernandez**



Catherine Hernandez is the award-winning author of *Scarborough* (Arsenal Pulp Press). *Scarborough* won the Jim Wong-Chu Award, was shortlisted for the Toronto Book Award, the Evergreen Forest of Reading Award, and the Edmund White Award for Debut Fiction. It was longlisted for Canada Reads 2018. It made the "Best of 2017" list for the *Globe and Mail*, *National Post*, *Quill and Quire*, and *CBC Books*.



## About this month's reader, **Ahmad Danny Ramadan**



Danny Ramadan is a Syrian-Canadian author, public speaker, storyteller, and an LGBTI refugee rights activist. His English debut novel, *The Clothesline Swing*, continues to receive raving reviews.

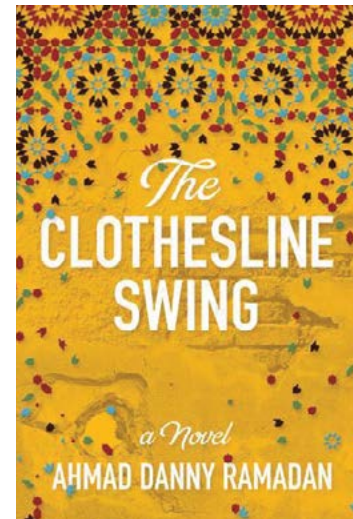
He has been involved in coordinating efforts to support LGBTI-identifying refugees from Syria. Danny volunteers with Rainbow Refugee Society, supporting their work to create private sponsorship for LGBTI-identifying refugees from Syria to his

new home in Canada. Danny also runs the annual

An Evening in Damascus fundraiser to support these efforts. Since May 2015, he has raised over \$100,000 to support eight LGBTI-identifying Syrian refugees. In recognition of his contributions he was the Grand Marshal of Vancouver Pride in 2016.

Danny is also a public speaker and a storyteller, featured in the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia Breakfast 2015, the 2016 National Liberal Convention, and TEDxSFU 2016.

In 2017, Danny was awarded the StandOut Social Activist Award by the Vancouver Pride Society, and was named one of the 25 Top Immigrants to Canada by *Canadian Immigrant* magazine.



## Danny Ramadan's Reflection on *Scarborough*

### *Scarborough* by Catherine Hernandez: An Intricate Tale of Love, Community and Acceptance.

Full Disclosure: Catherine Hernandez and I met on a panel of writers in one of the International Writers Festivals in the 2017 Fall Season. I'd had the pleasure of reading her book weeks before we met, and I enjoyed the well-developed characters, the intertwining stories and the look on the upbringing of marginalized communities in the low-income neighborhood of Scarborough. However, I did not know that our fateful meeting would have such an impact on me.

On that stage, and possibly for the first time in my author career, I realized that I was sharing the stage with someone who I share multiple identities with as well. Catherine, to quote her bio, is a "proud queer woman of colour, radical mother and an activist" whose debut novel engulfs all of those identities into a narrative of stories that reflect them and mirror them.

Carrying those identities and facing a unique challenge based on them is coined as intersectionality: the attempt of understanding the lived experiences of folks based not solely on one identity, but the many they carry together.

There was a true moment of Queer POC [person of colour] togetherness that we shared. I was mesmerized by her strong performance, loving attitude and thoughtful politics. In the mostly white-centric Canadian literature community, it was a meaningful moment for us both to be on the same stage, carrying our identities proudly in our words and on our faces.



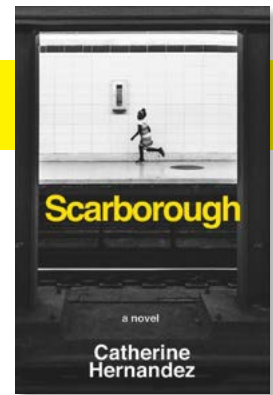
*Scarborough* is a book that sometimes hurts like a hot iron; sometimes purrs like a sleepy cat. Set in the low-income, culturally diverse neighborhood east of Toronto; the book explores the inner city community as it suffers under the weight of poverty, drugs, crime, and urban blight. *Scarborough* the novel employs a multitude of voices to tell the story of a tight-knit neighborhood under fire: among them, Victor, a black artist harassed by the police; Winsum, a West Indian restaurant owner struggling to keep it together; and Hina, a Muslim school worker who witnesses first-hand the impact of poverty on education.

However, the characters that steal the show in the book are the three kids who work to rise above a system that consistently fails them: Bing, a gay Filipino boy who lives under the shadow of his father's mental illness; Sylvie, Bing's best friend, an Indigenous girl whose family struggles to find a permanent home to live in; and Laura, whose history of neglect by her mother is destined to repeat itself with her father.

In real life, intersectionality plays a role that's rarely measured or witnessed by the society at large. Bing, my own personal hero in this novel, is struggling not just with his sexuality, but also with his identity as a Person of Colour, a person living with poverty, his father's mental illness and his own body issues. This character representation takes a step aside from the traditional queer characters in Western Modern Literature, which usually focus on young, white, sexually-driven men. It's a truthful telling of a story that doesn't tantalize a queer character, but attempts to provide a realistic view of its struggles.

As we read the story of Bing doing a drag performance of Whitney Houston's "I Wanna Dance with Somebody" in front of his school through his mother's eyes, it's quite moving to see the proud mother affirming her child and embracing his queerness so fully.

*Scarborough* is a book you must read for the joy of understanding a raw, heavy and meaningful work about the many identities one neighborhood – and its many folks – can carry.





# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## Discussion questions from guest reader Danny Ramadan:

1. Which of the many narratives and characters of this book do you identify with? Why?
2. Each of the characters in the book carry multiple identities –some share similar ones, and others have conflicting ones: Which identity do you share with this book? Do you think this identity was well represented?
3. Think about intersectionality and the many identities we carry and the unique challenges our multiple and intersecting identities might present in our lives. Discuss one character's intersectionality, and how it affected the person's fate.
4. Do you believe the book presented a truthful look at the reality of life in a low-income neighborhood like Scarborough?
5. Do you believe that LGBTI characters are well-represented within the Canadian literature? In what way?

## Discussion questions from the Amnesty International Book Club

1. What are your thoughts on Scarborough?
2. Which aspects of the book did you enjoy the most, and which ones did you find the most challenging?
3. Bing is a gay man and a person of colour. How would you, in your activism, be a good ally to someone like Bing? Where might you find resources on how to be a good ally?
4. How have you seen rights protections for, and societal acceptance of, LGBTI people change in Canada over the past few decades?
5. What else needs to be done to make sure that every person in Canada and live freely, in dignity and safety, with their human rights protected?



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## BACKGROUND



Amnesty International activists take part in Gay Pride in Paris, June 2015.

## LGBTI Rights

Around the world, the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) people are violated daily. People are beaten, imprisoned, or killed by the authorities, by community members, and by family members simply because of who they are or who they are attracted to.

Over 70 countries criminalize same sex sexual conduct with punishments ranging from fines to flogging, imprisonment, or even the death penalty. In many parts of the world, including countries where homosexuality is not criminalized, people may experience discrimination, harassment, and violence for their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.

LGBTI human rights defenders—people who advocate for the rights of LGBTI people to be protected—face extreme risk of discrimination and violence in many parts of the world.

People of all sexual orientations and gender identities have the right to be equal under the law and the right to exercise their full range of human rights, without exception. Amnesty works to protect the rights of LGBTI individuals by shining a light on rights abuses, calling for policy change, and working to protect LGBTI human

rights defenders. Amnesty International considers anyone imprisoned solely because of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity to be prisoners of conscience who should be immediately and unconditionally released.

## Show your Pride this summer

Pride festivals are held in communities large and small across Canada from May through September. The Pride movement traces its origins to a riot at New York City's Stonewall Inn in response to years of police harassment, raids, and violence against members of the LGBTI community. Pride remains a call to action to ensure that LGBTI people can live free from violence and discrimination. **Learn more about how to show your Pride and advocate for LGBTI rights with Amnesty International this summer at:** <http://www.amnesty.ca/blog/show-your-pride-summer-0>

Allies who do not identify as LGBTI are most welcome—and indeed encouraged—to advocate for LGBTI rights at Pride festivals throughout the summer. **Learn more about how to be a stellar ally to LGBTI communities in Canada at:** <http://www.amnesty.ca/blog/how-show-your-human-rights-pride-summer>



## Global crackdown on LGBTI rights

It's nearly a year since reports surfaced of a carefully orchestrated campaign by Chechen police in which more than a hundred men were abducted and detained within the space of a few weeks.

Marked by its extreme brutality, the region-wide crackdown left at least three men dead, while many more were tortured in detention. The only 'crime' of these men was that they were suspected of being gay. The victims reported that they were tortured in order to force them to 'out' others.

The NGO Russian LGBT Network laid out in harrowing detail the dehumanizing ordeal these men faced. They were subjected to severe beatings, electrocution, sleep deprivation, denied food and water, forced to sleep on concrete floors and routinely humiliated.

But state-sponsored homophobic persecution is not unique to Chechnya. Amnesty International's latest annual report on the state of human rights reveals the alarming scale of mass arrests and persecution of LGBTI people that took place last year.

Take Azerbaijan, for example; 83 people were detained in September in a police raid, with many beaten, denied access to lawyers and sentenced to up to three weeks in administrative detention. An Azerbaijani government official was quoted in the media saying the raid was in response to complaints from locals that LGBTI people were not "respecting others around them".

The following month, 51 people were arrested in Indonesia when police raided a sauna in Jakarta. And at least 76 people were arrested in Egypt, for "debauchery" under the country's prostitution law, after some audience members raised a rainbow flag at a music concert in Cairo in September.

### When decriminalizing homosexuality is not enough

Beyond the flagrant persecution of LGBTI communities, these cases share something else in common: of the hundreds arrested, not a single person was detained under laws that explicitly prohibit same sex sexual activity. This is because no such laws exist in these countries.

Russia, Azerbaijan, and Egypt are not among the 72 nations that explicitly criminalize sex between adults of the same gender. Neither does Indonesia's capital, Jakarta. Instead, police and criminal justice systems use other laws to harass, arrest and detain LGBTI people.

In Chechnya, the brutal crackdown was facilitated by a climate of homophobia and impunity for police



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harassment. Police can freely arrest people on inflated charges and Russian laws banning “the promotion of non-traditional sexual relationships among minors” could have also been a reason why there was no public outcry in Russia in response to this outrageous campaign. Other similarly ambiguous or vague laws are being exploited elsewhere.

Those convicted in Azerbaijan were done so largely on the basis of police allegations that they were “resisting the police’s legitimate orders.” And it is common practice to see scores of people charged with “habitual debauchery” in Egypt. This vague indictment is one that prosecutors often like to use against LGBTI people as it is not defined under Egyptian law, meaning that although it does not specify that it criminalizes sex between adults of the same sex, it is vague enough that it can be used to prosecute them.

## Giving governments the unwanted attention they deserve

So what does all of this tell us? Firstly, it shows that while explicit decriminalization is needed, it is still not enough to ensure the full protection of LGBTI rights, which are also human rights. If they want to, law enforcement and other state authorities will find different ways to harass and criminalize LGBTI people and communities.

This tactic isn’t new, but 2017 saw its use becoming

more widespread and increasingly flagrant. Vague laws, selectively enforced, create a chilling effect on entire communities. But, more encouragingly, last year also demonstrated that people are more willing than ever to stand up to the persecution of LGBTI communities. Even in countries where homosexuality is taboo and where these communities have long been targeted by police, most governments still prefer to avoid the attention that widespread global condemnation brings.

Last year more than 650,000 people around the globe joined Amnesty International to protest the arrests in Chechnya. From Brazil to Ukraine to Taiwan, activists signed petitions, protested outside embassies and stood in solidarity with LGBTI people. Instead of turning a blind eye to these human rights abuses—which is their usual response—the international outcry forced central Russian authorities to at least announce a “pre-investigation examination” of the reports of the purge of gay men in Chechnya.

A year on, no official investigation has been opened, which just underscores the need to keep up the pressure on Russian authorities to address this issue urgently.

The world is watching. No one should be harassed, arrested or killed because of who they are or who they love. Last year hundreds of thousands of people around the world showed they were ready to stand up for LGBTI rights. We need to keep doing so if we are to put an end to these brutal crackdowns.





## TAKE ACTION

### INDONESIA: JUSTICE FOR 12 PEOPLE TORTURED BASED ON THEIR PRESUMED GENDER IDENTITY.

The North Aceh Police Force in Indonesia arbitrarily arrested, humiliated, and tortured 12 people they assumed to be transgender women. The individuals remain deeply traumatized, some lost their jobs, and others were forced to flee due to safety concerns.

Same-sex relations are criminalized under Shari'a law in Aceh, but are not criminalized under Indonesia's Criminal Code. This, however, could change, as Indonesian lawmakers are currently debating whether to criminalize same-sex relations.

To take action, follow this url: <https://bit.ly/2MH46dZ> to contact the authorities immediately, urging them to:

- 1 Ensure that an independent, impartial and efficient investigation is carried out in addition to the internal one, that the report is made public, and that perpetrators are brought to justice;
- 2 Provide full reparations to all victims, as well as effective protection to them and their family members from threats to their lives and safety, both from members of the local police and local people; and
- 3 Respect Indonesia's international human rights obligations and prevent, investigate and eliminate transphobia, gender-based violence, and criminalization of individuals due to their gender expression, identity, and/or sexual orientation.



## A PIECE BY THE AUTHOR CATHERINE HERNANDEZ

Recognizing that some Amnesty Book Club members may be interested in how best to be a good ally to the LGBTI people in their lives, Catherine Hernandez wanted to share this blog with you.

### SO YOUR KID CAME OUT OF THE CLOSET

If your kid just came out to you as LGBTQ2s and you're struggling with it, I imagine you've spent the last while feeling alone, afraid, angry and betrayed.

I want you to understand that, while I am a proud queer woman, I am also a parent. This means I am on your side. I do not judge you. I do not think you are evil for having a difficult time dealing with your child's newfound sexuality and identity. If you don't judge me for taking my driver's test three times before the adjudicator took pity on me and my horrible parallel parking, then I won't judge you for being human. Deal? Okay.

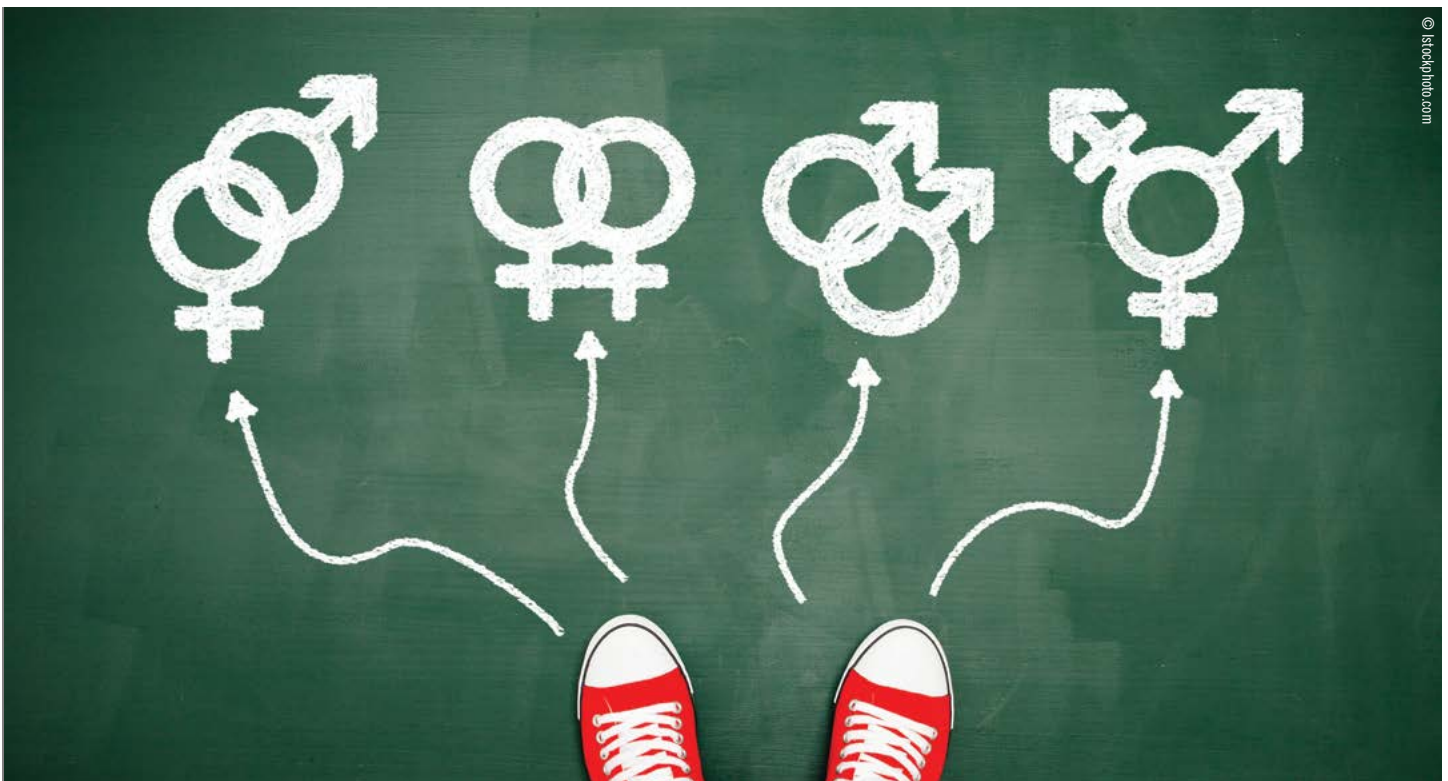
Here are some things I imagine might be going on in your head.

### IF MY KID IS QUEER, THAT MEANS I FAILED

Let's reframe this. Do you remember the decision your child made to be brave enough to take their first steps? Say their first word? Go down the slide by themselves? Introduce themselves to new friends? You have, through your love and confidence, trained them to be the brave person they are. It is with this guidance that you have given them that they came to you to tell you their truth. Most likely, they have considered the terrifying possibility of losing you and still were brave enough to come out to you. Pat yourself on the back. You've raised a kick-ass kid, my friend. It's Miller Time.

### MAYBE MY KID ISN'T TRULY QUEER. THEY'RE JUST CONFUSED.

I want you to know that as someone who is queer, identifying openly as such is not a decision made lightly. In today's society, being open about your truth takes a lot of risk. It's not done out of confusion. It's done out of honesty. And even though it's honest, identities and





sexualities can change and evolve. That said, this is your kid's truth right here, right now.

What's more confusing are parents who are not supporting you. The decision you can make today is: Do I want to support my child's truth and love them in their honesty? Or do I want to chance my child facing all the risks of not having supportive families such as suicidality, substance use and unhealthy relationships? You have absolute agency here. No one is forcing you to walk down Yonge Street with rainbow balloons. But your behaviour and ability to process this truth over the next while will determine much of your child's future.

**IF EVERYONE FINDS OUT ABOUT MY KID BEING QUEER, WE WILL LOSE FAMILY AND FRIENDS.**

This may be true. But as a parent to a newly out queer, there will be plenty of opportunities to make friends and chosen family who support your child's identity. There are many parents who are still faithful to their religions, are able to keep friends and family, and join new community circles simply by asking for help. PFLAG Canada is a great option. I know of parents who staunchly denounced their child's identity and slowly, with the help of PFLAG, were able to develop new relationships and evolve in existing ones. You are not alone.

**BUT I'M AFRAID MY KID WILL HAVE A HARD LIFE**

This may also be true, but it's up to all of us that people of diverse identities can flourish and grow in a world

that does not hate them for being who they are. It starts with us parents creating that safe environment. Your community will learn by example watching the compassion and love you have for your child.

If you're still afraid of all the hardships LGBTQ2s folks live on a daily basis, I want you to know this:

I have, by choice, married a loving partner. Your child can, if they so choose, have a healthy partnership. They can also live a healthy life of solitude.

I have a witty, wonderful child who makes me belly laugh every day. Your child can, if they so choose, have their own child in a multitude of ways.

I have a handful of very loving friends I call my chosen family because we choose to be in each other's lives every day.

I am spiritual. I am in constant awe of the world around me. I feel holiness and sacredness in all the art I create. I am with God. Your child can, if they so choose, be spiritual as well.

I am writing this blog post, content and happy in my truth. I am full of possibilities. I am full of hope. I believe in love. I believe in change. I believe in your child's truth. I believe in you.

– Catherine Hernandez, originally published in her blog as Writer in Residence at *Buddies in Bad Times Theatre*



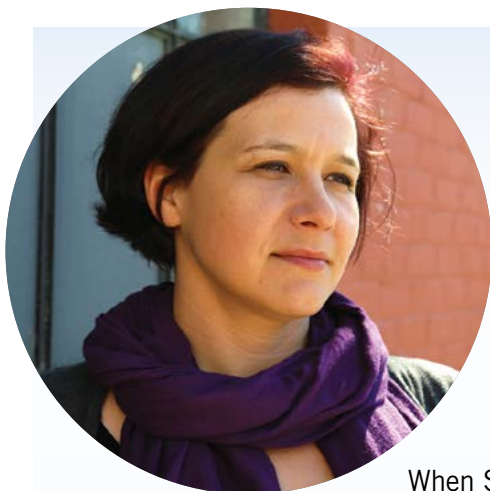
## MORE ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Learn more about LGBTI rights and take action at [www.amnesty.ca/lgbti](http://www.amnesty.ca/lgbti)

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## COMING UP IN SEPTEMBER 2018

### *The Break* by Katherena Vermette

Recommended by Angie Abdou

When Stella, a young Métis mother, looks out her window one evening and spots someone in trouble on the Break—a barren field on an isolated strip of land outside her house—she calls the police to alert them to a possible crime.

In a series of shifting narratives, people who are connected, both directly and indirectly, with the victim—police, family, and friends—tell their personal stories leading up to that fateful night. Lou, a social worker, grapples with the departure of her live-in boyfriend. Cheryl, an artist, mourns the premature death of her sister Rain. Paulina, a single mother, struggles to trust her new partner. Phoenix, a homeless teenager, is released from a youth detention centre. Officer Scott, a Métis police officer, feels caught between two worlds as he patrols the city. Through their various perspectives a larger, more comprehensive story about lives of the residents in Winnipeg's North End, and the pervasive violence experienced by so many Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people in Canada, is exposed.

A powerful intergenerational family saga, *The Break* showcases Vermette's abundant writing talent and positions her as an exciting new voice in Canadian literature.



**The discussion guide will be sent out September 2018.**

In the meanwhile, if you have any questions or comments, please contact us at [bookclub@amnesty.ca](mailto:bookclub@amnesty.ca).