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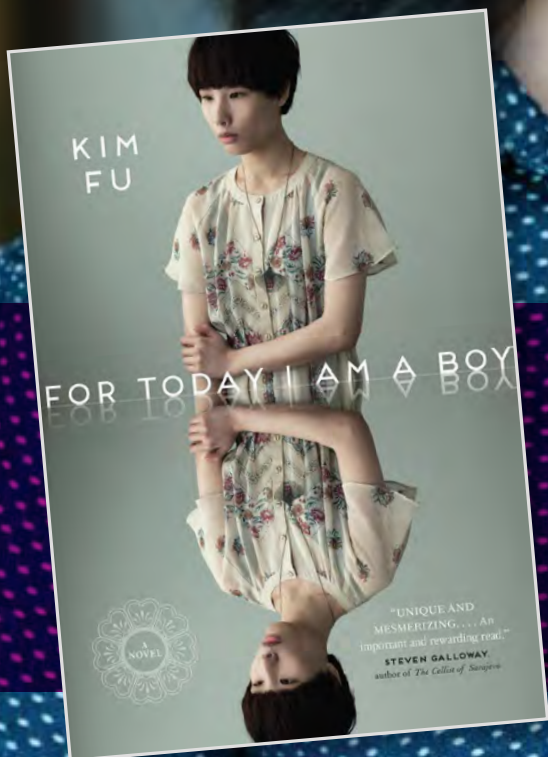


BOOK CLUB

DISCUSSION  
GUIDE

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TAKE ACTION  
TO STOP HATE  
CRIMES AGAINST  
LGBTI PEOPLE  
IN GREECE,  
PAGE 9



JULY/AUGUST 2016 BOOK

**KIM FU**

**FOR TODAY I AM A BOY\***

RECOMMENDED BY GUEST READER **BIF NAKED**

\*Please note that this novel contains of scenes of sexuality as well as assault, and may be inappropriate for young readers.

We are pleased to be reading this book as Pride celebrations take place around the globe and hope that it sheds light on the many challenges that LGBTI people face.

## Understanding identity

The July/August Amnesty International Book Club selection is Kim Fu's debut novel, *For Today I Am a Boy*. We are pleased to be reading this book as Pride celebrations take place around the globe and hope that it sheds light on the many challenges that LGBTI people face.

*For Today I Am a Boy* provides insights into experiences that may be unfamiliar to many of us. We are introduced to Peter Huang and his three sisters. Peter is the much desired son of a Chinese immigrant family, living in a small town in Ontario. Peter, however, knows from a very early age, that while his anatomy dictates that he is male, he is certain he is a girl. Throughout this story, Peter struggles with his gender identity, fighting his 'other' self and failing at every turn. We experience Peter's loneliness, depression, grief, and glimmers of joy when his true self emerges, often when he is alone and behind closed doors.

Transgender experiences are not well understood and Peter's experience is not unlike that of many transgender (trans) people, who find that their desire to change or expand boundaries of gender can come at great personal costs, whether financial, emotional or social. Peter's story provides insights into the pain and loneliness that can come with living in a body which does not outwardly reflect your inner self. It reminds us that while we have made progress recognizing the rights of lesbians and gays in our society, we have been much slower to acknowledge and respect trans and other gender non-conforming individuals.

Treating trans people with respect means using pronouns that match their gender identity. In *For Today I Am a Boy*, Peter struggles to come to terms with and assert an identity that is not recognized or respected by many of the other characters. We chose to use the pronouns "he" and "his" in keeping with the language that is used in the book, but we encourage you to

consider and discuss the ways that pronouns and other gendered language are used throughout the book and what impact that has on Peter.

In keeping with our focus on LGBTI people, this edition's action urges the Greek Minister of Justice to order a full investigation into a homophobic and racist attack that took place in Athens in August 2014.

Thank you for being part of the Amnesty International Book Club. If you have any questions, suggestions, or comments, we'd love to hear from you. You can send us an email at [bookclub@amnesty.ca](mailto:bookclub@amnesty.ca).

—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.



# A word about gender identity and expression, and how they differ from sexual orientation



**Gender identity** refers to each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, or with the way they are made to express their gender, including the personal sense of the body and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech, and mannerisms. An individual's gender identity may be male, female, or a gender which is neither male nor female; it may also be more than one gender, or no gender.

**Gender expression** refers to the means by which individuals express their gender identity. This may or may not include clothes, make-up, speech, mannerisms, and/or surgical or hormone treatment.

**Transgender people** are individuals whose gender expression and/or gender identity differs from conventional expectations based on the physical sex they were assigned at birth. Commonly, a **transgender woman** is a person who was assigned 'male' at birth but has a female gender identity; a **transgender man** is a person who was assigned 'female' at birth but has a male gender identity. However, not all transgender individuals identify as male or female; transgender is a term that includes people who identify as more than one gender or no gender at all. Transgender individuals may or may not choose to undergo some or all possible forms of medical or social gender transition.

**Cisgender people** are individuals whose gender expression and/or gender identity aligns with

conventional expectations based on the physical sex they were assigned at birth. In broad terms, cisgender is the opposite of transgender.

A common misconception is that gender identity and expression are linked to sexual or romantic attraction. However, as with cisgender people, transgender people may be gay or lesbian (attracted to people of the same gender), straight (attracted to people of a different gender), bisexual or pansexual (attracted to people of multiple genders), or asexual (not experiencing sexual attraction). Who you are attracted to is your sexual orientation; who you are is your gender identity.

The idea behind these different forms of identity and expression is that traditional gender roles — how people are expected by society to act based on the gender assigned to them at birth — are a social construct, not a biological one. <sup>1</sup>

## He, She, Ze, They?

In the English language, if you're referring to one person, you have to gender them. We have no gender neutral terms. But pronouns are important for those fighting for trans rights. Being referred to in a pronoun which reflects one's gender identity is very important.

If you aren't sure what pronoun to use, just ask. Some people may use she, he, ze, they, or some other pronoun. We should always be sure to use the words we're asked to by our trans friends, even when we're not around them. The more we use the correct gender pronouns, the faster the words and their meanings will spread through our communities.

Using the right pronouns in our own daily language and asking others to do the same isn't enough to change the extreme transphobia, discrimination, and violence that trans people experience, but it's a simple way to use language to show respect for our friends, to make trans issues visible, and to challenge gender-based oppression.

He, she, ze, they – it's well worth the work of getting it right. <sup>2</sup>



About this month's  
guest reader,

## BIF NAKED

BIF NAKED was born in India and raised in the United States and Canada, spending many of her formative years in Winnipeg. After fronting the underground bands Gorilla Gorilla and Chrome Dog, Bif became a prominent alternative artist, performer and songwriter. Her striking image, friendly personality and powerful live performances have had her appearing in concerts and festivals around the world. She has also appeared on film and TV, on shows such as *The Tonight Show* with Jay Leno and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Bif recently released her memoir, *I, Bificus*, available everywhere books are sold. Bif lives in Vancouver, B.C. Follow her on Twitter [@bifnaked](#).



## BIF NAKED ON *FOR TODAY I AM A BOY*



### My Totally Gushy Loving Adoration for Kim Fu's *For Today I Am a Boy*

*"I wish I could meet Peter Huang. I love Peter Huang. He is my hero. I love who Peter is, who he was, and who he identifies as."*

*This book moved and touched me so deeply because Kim Fu*

*has delicately created an incredibly sweet and sensitive character that drew me in and gave me a glimpse of the intimate narrative of his heart. And I loved his heart (and the author's, for her use of language that was like beautiful lace).*

*I was touched by Peter's vulnerable sweetness and honesty. I sympathized with him, though I never felt sorry for him. He was a quiet strength (like his mother) and a regal resilience (bestowed on him by his birth name, Juan Chaun: king, or powerful king). For me, reading was a call to action. I could relate to his childhood and upbringing so much that I found myself wanting to reach into the book, break through its very*

*pages, and pull Peter to safety to protect him. I would have fought for him in the school playgrounds and in the restaurants.*

*The Huang family's dynamic was much like my own growing up. The stories that unfold about the family – the sisters, their quiet mother, and their determined father – growing up in small-town Canada made me feel as though I was sitting at the table there with them, eating in silence. I had older and younger sisters, who were very much like Peter's. The way that they bonded with each other, so emotionally, may have been because of their strict parents, and I could relate to that. Their dynamic was interesting to me, and I felt like I gained an understanding of Peter as a result of his primary relationships. There was always an undercurrent of shame: his father relentlessly tried to avoid his generational shame, and he almost silenced his wife, who complied dutifully. As I read, I imagined the subconscious humiliation Peter must have had to bear and struggle with, like a boulder he was forced to carry his entire life. The weight of his heavy heart crushed even me, frequently.*

*Nonetheless, I cheered for Peter and wished for him to succeed, whatever that looked like for him. I just wanted him to be happy. I hoped that he would*

*be able to accept himself and feel no self-doubt, unworthiness, or self-hatred.*

*I wanted Peter to love himself as much as I loved him. In the end, I loved how he persevered. The way we learn about him and the sweetness of his secrets is extremely tender and positive. I wish the entire world could get to know sweet Peter (and his wonderful friend John in Montreal) and learn more about transgender people through this positive and thoughtfully written book. Perhaps, like me, they would even discover different things about themselves and their own gender identities. I learned so much from him and his confusion, and I hope this award-winning story finds its way into school classrooms all over the world. This is an important book."*

—Bif Naked



## About this month's featured author, **Kim Fu**

Kim Fu's debut novel *For Today I Am a Boy* was the winner of the Edmund White Award, finalist for the PEN/Hemingway Award, a New York Times Book Review Editor's Choice, and long-listed for Canada Reads, among other honors. Her first poetry collection *How Festive The Ambulance* was published in May 2016. Her nonfiction credits include *The Atlantic*, NPR Books, *The Rumpus*, *Hazlitt*, *Maisonneuve*, and republication in *Best Canadian Essays*. Fu has an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of British Columbia, and lives in Seattle, Washington.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON *FOR TODAY I AM A BOY*

### Discussion questions from Kim Fu

1. Before reading the novel, what did the title mean to you?
2. The prologue provides two versions of the oldest sister's birth: the mother's version and the butcher's version. Which version do you believe? Why? What does this duplicity foreshadow?
3. How would you describe Peter's father's disciplinary approach? Do you find it fair? Is it effective?
4. Peter grows up associating with boys like Roger and Ollie, who are rough, physical, and crude. Peter tries to belong but often finds himself in difficult situations. While these situations often offer a bit of comic relief for the reader, Peter flounders in frustration and panic. In one scene Peter has to pee standing up, something he has never done. Why do you think Peter has never peed standing up? Discuss other examples of Peter's frustration with trying to fit in.
5. There's not much interaction between Peter and his father, yet when interaction does occur, it provides powerful messages about men and women. Consider when Peter's father says, "Women bleed more," or when he refers to "women's work." What do these moments create for Peter?
6. Maintaining a balance between wanting to belong and still being different presents difficulties for Peter, yet he maintains this balance. When he exercises with Ollie, he

points out a woman with a powerful physique, wishing to look like her. Ollie finds it normal to be "hulking and large," so he accepts Peter's desire. Peter finds comfort in a common bond with Ollie: they both "wanted different bodies." Is Peter hiding? Or coping? How far should a person attempt to change himself/herself?

7. Eileen provides the final catalyst for Peter. "You don't have to look like that to be a woman. That's not what being a woman means" (p.237). Explain Eileen's statement. Do you agree with her? What does it mean to be a woman? A man? A person?

### Discussion questions from Amnesty

1. Trans issues are beginning to receive a lot of attention in popular culture. What narratives of trans people have you seen in movies or other media? Have those narratives come from trans people, or from cis people? What roles do you think cis actors, writers or directors should have in telling these stories?
2. How do Peter's experiences differ from those of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people? How are they similar?
3. How could the people in Peter's life be supportive and respectful of Peter's identity? What can you do to make your community a safer and more welcoming place for trans people?





In a recent blog post Amnesty International's LGBTI Coordinator Alexander Kennedy speaks to his experience as a trans person in Canada. In June 2005, Alex sat in the gallery of the House of Commons the night the Civil Marriage Act was passed. It was the culmination of years of work by LGBTI activists. As the Civil Marriage Act legalized same-sex marriage, Alex had to pause and wonder when the rights of trans people would also be recognized in law in Canada.

Since 2005, federal legislation protecting trans rights has been introduced as a Private Member's Bill seven times, only to be defeated each time. Ontario, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan, Alberta, the Northwest Territories, and most recently Quebec<sup>3</sup> have all included protections for trans people in their provincial and territorial human rights codes. Unfortunately, the rules and requirements for changing sex markers on ID vary significantly from province to province. The provisions do however prohibit discrimination against trans people in areas that fall under provincial jurisdiction, including education and health care.

Finally in May 2016 the Canadian government introduced Bill C-16. This bill will amend the Human Rights Act to ban discrimination and hate propaganda against people based on gender identity or expression.

This means that the terms "gender identity" and "gender expression" will be added to the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code. The addition of gender identity and gender expression to the prohibited grounds of discrimination in the Canadian Human Rights Act will require amendments to other laws and policies that unfairly impact trans people, from getting ID that reflects identities, to being counted in the census, to the way that trans people are treated in prisons. The changes to the Criminal Code hate crimes sentencing provisions will also improve everyone's ability to track, respond to, and work to prevent violence against trans people.

But there are still many hurdles for transgender people.

Egale Canada, an LGBTI human rights organization, reports that discrimination on the basis of gender identity is still very prevalent in Canada. In Ontario, TransPULSE collected statistics on discrimination against trans people. These statistics show that on the basis of their gender identity, 73% of trans people have been made fun of, 39% have been turned down for a job, 26% have been assaulted, and 24% have even been harassed by police. In addition, discrimination in employment imposes a disproportionate burden on trans people in Ontario, including both high unemployment and underemployment.<sup>4</sup>



## LGBTI RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS

A person's sexual orientation or gender identity or expression can lead to abuse in the form of discrimination, violence, imprisonment, torture, or even execution, and these abuses are all illegal under international human rights law. Amnesty International works to protect the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (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 sexual orientation or gender identity or expression to be prisoners of conscience who should be immediately and unconditionally released.

### Violence and discrimination

The European-based Trans Murder Monitoring project has reported 100 murders of trans and gender non-

conforming people around the world in 2016, as of May 17. These figures however are believed to show only the tip of the iceberg as these cases represent only those found through Internet search and cooperation with trans organizations and activists. In most countries, data on murdered trans and gender non-conforming people are not systematically produced, and it is impossible to estimate the numbers of unreported cases. With increased cooperation of organizations and networks in Africa, Asia, and Latin America it is expected that higher numbers will be reported in the future.

Closer to home, several US states have recently passed laws explicitly allowing – or requiring – discrimination against trans people, and several more have similar legislation pending. Attempts to prohibit discrimination in the workplace, housing, and public accommodations



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access public spaces,  
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to find and keep a job,  
access services,  
or pursue an education

(restaurants, hotels, and other places that serve the public) against people based on a variety of traits, particularly sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, have been met with resistance. Opponents have argued that businesses should be able to discriminate against LGBTI people who violate their religious values.

They have further argued that the anti-discrimination legislation would let trans people use the bathroom that corresponds with their gender identity, thus putting others (presumably women) at risk. This debate takes place despite the fact that there is no evidence that letting trans people use the bathroom for their gender identity causes public safety problems; in fact, often it is trans people who face high rates of violence in public washrooms. Even if states allow trans people to use the bathroom that matches their gender identity, rape and sexual assault remain completely illegal. Bathrooms have quickly become the focal point for transphobia.

While the debate about bathrooms may seem trite, it is immensely important for transgender people. Bathrooms remain one of the last gendered spaces in public life,



where women and men are divided. If you can't use public bathrooms, you can't access public spaces, which can make it hard to find and keep a job, access services, or pursue an education – all rights that are protected by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Forcing trans people to use the bathroom that doesn't align with their gender identity is a violation of the right to privacy, and forcing trans people into a situation where they are likely to face violence, violates the right to security of the person, and potentially the right to life. The threat of violence, discrimination, and failure to respect the gender identities of trans people all contribute to extremely high rates of suicide and attempted suicide, making this a key issue for advocates.



## TAKE ACTION

**Urge Greece to investigate the hate crime against Costas and his partner.**  
Sign the online petition at: <http://bit.ly/294DfG9>



**Or write to the Greek Minister of Justice. Urge him to ensure:**

Ministry of Justice, Transparency and Human Rights  
96 Mesogeion Avenue, 115 27, Athens, Greece

Dear Minister,

In August 2014, Costas and his partner, who is a refugee, were badly beaten up in a homophobic and racist attack in central Athens. No suspects were identified, let alone punished.

Between 2014 and 2015, the number of reported attacks against gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or intersex (LGBTI) people in Greece has more than doubled, while racist attacks remain an ongoing issue.

Minister, I urge you to ensure that:

- This hate crime is fully investigated and Costas and his partner get compensation for the injuries and trauma they have suffered.
- LGBTI people, refugees and migrants, people of colour, and all people affected by hate crimes in Greece live free from harassment and violence.
- The Greek government recognizes and protects relationships of all gender combinations.

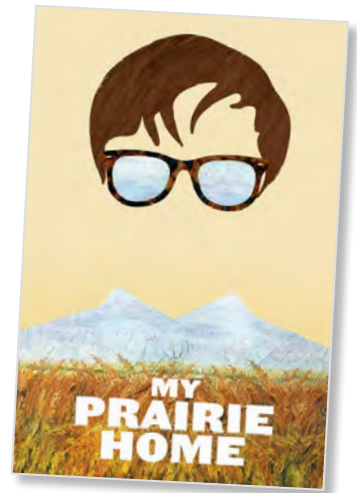
Yours Sincerely, \_\_\_\_\_

## Sources

- <sup>1</sup> 9 questions about gender identity and being transgender you were too embarrassed to ask  
<http://www.vox.com/2015/4/24/8483561/transgender-gender-identity-expression>
- <sup>2</sup> 5 Way Using Correct Gender Pronouns Will Make You a Better Trans\* Ally. Laura Kacere,  
<http://everydayfeminism.com/2013/09/correct-gender-pronouns-to-be-trans-ally/>
- <sup>3</sup> CBC News  
<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/quebec-transgender-rights-minor-youths-1.3609154>
- <sup>4</sup> Egale  
<http://egale.ca/faq-gender-identity/>
- <sup>5</sup> Anti-transgender bathroom hysteria, explained:  
<http://www.vox.com/2016/5/5/11592908/transgender-bathroom-laws-rights>

## More on the issue

- Watch the TV show *Orange Is the New Black* and the film *My Prairie Home* (both available on Netflix Canada)
- For more information on Amnesty International's work on transgender rights visit [www.amnesty.ca/lgbt](http://www.amnesty.ca/lgbt) or contact Alex Kennedy at [LGBTCoordinator@amnesty.ca](mailto:LGBTCoordinator@amnesty.ca)



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## COMING UP IN SEPTEMBER 2016

### *Room* by Emma Donoghue

#### Recommended by guest reader Corey Redekop

To five-year-old Jack, Room is the entire world. It is where he was born and grew up; it's where he lives with his Ma as they learn and read and eat and sleep and play. At night, his Ma shuts him safely in the wardrobe, where he is meant to be asleep when Old Nick visits.

Room is home to Jack, but to Ma, it is the prison where Old Nick has held her captive for seven years. Through determination, ingenuity, and fierce motherly love, Ma has created a life for Jack. But she knows it's not enough...not for her or for him. She devises a bold escape plan, one that relies on her young son's bravery and a lot of luck. What she does not realize is just how unprepared she is for the plan to actually work.

Told entirely in the language of the energetic, pragmatic five-year-old Jack, Room is a celebration of resilience and the limitless bond between parent and child, a brilliantly executed novel about what it means to journey from one world to another

#### The discussion guide will be sent out in September

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

