



## Creative Intervention

### Re: What is Wealth Inequality?

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#### Context

In May 2022, I was invited to participate in a small community-based panel about wealth inequality that was hosted by *ThriveYouth* (then known as *DAREart*), a community youth group based in Tkaronto that provides a platform for children and young adults to pursue creative expression, learn and think critically,<sup>1</sup> and “develop the skills and confidence needed” to promote transformative action (ThriveYouth, n.d., para 1). Bringing together community leaders and social justice-minded high school students, the panel was organized around the question “what is wealth inequality and why does it exist?” The question immediately struck me as the type of question students might ask during a lecture or tutorial, or which a keen peer might pose after a conference presentation. However, I had been invited into the panel not as an academic but as a community organizer, and so I answered as such. I felt a great pedagogical and creative liberty in that space, and in response I was inspired to write down my thoughts, as a poem, one which wove together my multidimensional experiences with wealth inequality as both person and organizer. The result was a very full, very alive description of wealth inequality (or, as I prefer, wealth *inequity*) that I would have never expressed if I had been constrained to academic jargon and rhetoric. Whereas academia often requires us to “prove” and “validate” all our thoughts and feelings, typically by using three-dollar words, poetry allows us to embody and express them as is, free of citations and structured analyses. I performed the poem, found below, to the youth who then attended the 2022 panel in Toronto (followed by an equivalent event in Vancouver).

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<sup>1</sup> Tkaronto is the original name of the colonially known city of Toronto. As shared by Indigenous creatives Selena Mills and Sara Roque (2019), “Toronto itself is a word that originates from the Mohawk word ‘Tkaronto,’ meaning ‘the place in the water where the trees are standing,’ which is said to refer to the wooden stakes that were used as fishing weirs in the narrows of local river systems by the Haudenosaunee and Huron-Wendat” (para 6).

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**Re: What is Wealth Inequality?**

I understand wealth inequality for what it isn't.  
It isn't just working-class white people yelling in the streets.  
It isn't just something that dead white men  
wrote about  
during the industrial revolution,  
or the black and white films they made about factories.

Wealth inequality isn't just the Great Depression  
or assembly lines,  
or even capitalism.

Wealth inequality is COVID-19; it's Amazon; it's white supremacy.  
it's going to bed hungry and waking up the same.  
It's working paycheck-to-paycheck,  
and taking on more shifts,  
just to keep up with price inflation.

It's taking three bus transfers,  
just to get somewhere a few kilometres away.

It's raiding tent cities,  
and paying \$2500 in rent.

It's reusing every single yogurt container you've ever bought,  
so that you never have to buy Tupperware.

It's being haunted by poverty,  
even when you are no longer poor.

Wealth inequality is being the immigrants,  
the white people in the streets,  
are yelling at.

The same immigrants,  
who were pushed out of their homes,  
in service of Canadian nationalism.

It's the migrants and refugees,  
who pick the fruits and vegetables,  
that fill our grocery stores –  
the same migrants,  
who pay for health insurance,  
they can't access,

but who break their backs,  
to feed our children – well, *some* children.

Wealth inequality is criminalizing sex work,  
it's conflating being 'queer' with being 'rich' and 'white'.

It's trans youth 'house surfing'  
it's never going to the dentist,  
it's defunding harm reduction,  
it's thinking that "AIDS is over",  
while Black and Indigenous folx,  
continue to live through a pandemic.

It's thinking "COVID is over",  
when disabled people can't leave their homes,  
or access their fundamental needs  
or stay alive.

Wealth inequality is not the root,  
but the symptom of a world  
that is haunted,

haunted by settler colonialism,  
by anti-black racism,  
by imperialism,  
by ableism,  
by sexism,  
by queerphobia,  
by fatphobia,  
by whorephobia,  
by transphobia,  
by Islamophobia,  
by Xenophobia,

By all the isms and ophobias we live every-single-day;  
by the systematic death,  
designed for profit.

## References

- Mills, S., & Roque. (2019). Land acknowledgements: uncovering an oral history of Tkaronto. *Local Love*. Retrieved October 13, 2022. <https://locallove.ca/issues/land-acknowledgements-uncovering-an-oral-history-of-tkaronto/#.YaPALNDMI2w>
- ThriveYouth. (n.d.). *ThriveYouth Development Canada*. <https://thriveyouth.ca/>