Reflections on Identity:
Stephen Lawrence Day &
Lesbian Visibility Week

by Azza Essakhi

When I was about 5 or 6, I saw a newspaper front page about the Stephen Lawrence case. I asked my dad what happened, and he told me, in ways that were appropriate for a child, about what transpired at that bus stop in Southeast London on the night Stephen was brutally murdered for being black, but also how the perpetrators had got away with it.

I was born in 1995 so Stephen's murder happened before I was even alive, but I remember feeling hurt by it. It was my first acknowledgement or realisation that there were people who wanted to hurt others because they were different.

It's been over 20 years since that conversation with my dad, but any time I've felt affected by racism, what happened to Stephen Lawrence will always spring to mind. It was an extreme case of something that exists and is sadly rife in our society today.

Race isn't something you can hide unlike lots of other minority characteristics. Being queer was something I knew about myself from childhood. I may not have been able to make sense of those feelings whilst growing up in the early 2000's in the suburbs of London. Lesbian visibility was something I needed to see growing up - not only knowing that there were others like me out there, but also that they led normal and successful lives.

There is no doubt that society has become more tolerant of homosexuality, but there are other minority characteristics that exist within the LGBTQIA+ community that are very much shunned by the general population. It feels like I am living on the brink of a large precipice of change on one end where queer people can live their lives peacefully, but at the other end is a big, fascist, dystopian, hellscape that exists to oppress minorities.