

**Lavender as a Symbol of Queerness, Environment, and Migration in
Futur Drei/No Hard Feelings (2020)'s Scenes of Utopia**
Cybele Zhang, Stanford '22

Abstract: This essay explores the final scene of Franz Shariat's *Futur Drei/No Hard Feelings*, specifically the shot in which the three protagonists stand with a bushel of lavender. I argue that the trance-like sequence at the end of the 2020 film is a momentary realization of the trio's imagined future—an alternate, utopic Germany. The inclusion of the lavender is especially notable because it highlights key themes of the film and attributes central to this utopia: queer representation and acceptance, environmental consciousness, and the protection and welcoming of refugees and migrants.

Parvis, Amon, and Banafshe stand alone in an arid field. For the first time in Faraz Shariat's film *Futur Drei/No Hard Feelings*, the three protagonists break the fourth wall and stare at the camera, which circles around them. The entire film has built up to this final moment where the trio makes their escape through the German countryside and is thus especially symbolic. The semibiographical film itself follows Parvis, the openly gay, young adult son of Iranian immigrants, who lives with his parents in Hildesheim, a small, historic city near Hannover. When Parvis is caught shoplifting, he is sent to volunteer at a housing project for refugees, where the film commences. Although initially unequipped for the position, Parvis befriends Banafshe and her brother, Amon—both Iranian refugees who live in the housing project as they seek asylum. As the siblings struggle to establish legal residency to remain in Germany, Banafshe encourages a budding romantic relationship between Parvis and Amon, who is still coming to terms with his sexuality. Between scenes in the housing project, the film cuts to Parvis going on Grindr dates and walking home after late nights clubbing—a liberating world that he begins to expose the siblings to. In addition to centering themes of sexuality, the film also grapples with complex questions of nationality and inequity; despite their differing immigration statuses and varied perspectives on Germany and Iran, all three protagonists feel a lack of belonging, which they combat by imagining a more accepting future. The film ends with Banafshe fleeing the housing project after she learns that the police are on their way to deport her, and Parvis promises to take care of her brother. Before she flees, the trio shares a final moment together, running through the countryside, momentarily realizing their idealized Germany—"the world [that] is ours," to paraphrase Banafshe's exultant shout during the sequence (Shariat, 2020, 1:21:23).¹ This world is epitomized by a long shot of the three standing together with a bushel of lavender—which will prove to be the final time the three are pictured together. The rural, natural scene and the inclusion of lavender, in particular, stresses the interconnection of plants and humans, which comes up throughout the film. In this final image of queer utopia, the bouquet symbolizes the pro-LGBTQ+, pro-climate justice, and pro-immigration values that the three fight for, and the scene thus becomes a liminal embodiment of the alternative Germany they seek.

On a facile level, this trance-like scene in nature stands apart cinematically because it cuts between imagined moments, creating the sense of an alternative reality as if in a dream. Running from the police, the three seek the only place they can be together: a fantasy land. Constricted by legal statute and prejudice, the sequence offers a momentary escape, serving arguably as the climax of the entire film. The otherworldly scene cuts sporadically between imagined moments of serenity and joy—from Parvis and Amon eating sushi to Banafshe rapping atop a Mercedes-Benz.² The oscillating images at first glance are thus seemingly disconnected. Some moments are reinterpretations of prior events in the film, while others are entirely new, as

¹ Still in the primary frame of the film's narrative, prior to the trance-like interlude, Banafshe declares "the world is ours" in Farsi.

² The fact that this still shot was selected for promotional images further emphasizes the idea that this scene (the three standing in the field as Banafshe holds the lavender) is the climax of the movie and embodies the overarching message of the film. Scenes of the trance-like utopia are from 1:21:23 to 1:22:14 (Shariat, 2020).

if an experience that could happen in the future in the trio's idealized Germany. In a longer shot within the sequence, mentioned prior, Parvis, Amon, and Banafshe stand in an unnatural triangular placement, drawing attention to the scene. This particular moment, with the camera circling the trio, in fact, rejects its own cinematic format and dissolves the barrier that conventionally separates the unknowing subject within the film from the observer on the other side of the screen. The three stare at the viewer, breaking the fourth wall, and draw attention to their intimate connection with the implied viewer, as if the viewer is in the field, too. At the same time, the direct gaze into the camera also highlights the trio's consciousness of the scene as a man-made creation in a film—it is not reality that they live in, but they exist in a created world that they imagine and mold. This image of the trio standing in the field mirrors a similar shot just seconds before, but there is one difference: the addition of lavender in Banafshe's arms.³ The similarity between the scenes thus triggers an eerie sense of *déjà vu*, but the slight variation also catches the viewer's eye, prompting the question why the bouquet is needed in the imagined scene. The remainder of this essay explores what lavender specifically and plants broadly thus add to the scene through the queerness that it symbolizes.

Throughout the film, Shariat links characters to their natural surroundings, so the final lavender scene in the countryside is a logical progression from the images of connected plants and queer humans that proceed it.⁴ Despite the movie's relatively urban setting in suburban Hildesheim, nature is everywhere—especially at key moments in the plot's progression. Amon first approaches Parvis at the refugee shelter with an offering of sunflower seeds, a snack symbolic of potential growth and new beginnings (Shariat, 2020, 12:28). The first time the viewer sees Parvis and Banafshe interact is in the sibling's plant filled room, establishing the plants' association with the domestic (Shariat, 2020, 16:55). Parvis and Amon's first confrontation is on a forested hill as they walk up from a lake (Shariat, 2020, 22:30). And Parvis and Amon's first sexual encounter is in the former's wood paneled bedroom (Shariat, 2020, 45:40). From the film's start to end, plant-life in some form is present. Even in the film's closing scene, Banafshe's voicemail message, which does not inherently have a visual component, plays over a montage of various plants (Shariat, 2020, 1:26:40). As Banafshe speaks, the screen fills completely with changing natural images—shades of green and the textures of leaves, bark, or cacti—as if the plants themselves are personified and talk to the viewer. In this final scene most explicitly, plants and humans merge on screen.⁵

Shariat's focus on the connection between plants and humans, especially in relation to sexuality, is not a novel idea. The sexuality of plants, in fact, has roots in imperialist, eighteenth century botany (Sandilands, 2007). Carl Linnaeus notably asserted that plants are “possessors of

³ Shariat includes two near identical shots of the trio standing in the field; in one, they hold nothing (1:21:23), and in another Banafshe holds a bushel of lavender (1:22:05).

⁴ To further this connection with flora and fauna, the film's promotional materials are rife with natural imagery. The *Futur Drei/No Hard Feelings* poster includes a plant stalk out of focus up the middle of the photo and the movie's [Instagram](#) has decorative floral art and photographs, among other examples.

⁵ Another example of plant and human merging is through Parvis' word choice for his German hookup at the beginning of the film: *jung gebliebene Kartoffeln* or young potatoes—that is, unripe or prematurely harvested (Shariat, 2020, 20:35)

a sexual life comparable to that of humans”—but not every plant fits into his heteronormative mold (Moore, 2005). In “Clandestine Marriage: Botany and Romantic Culture,” Theresa Kelley provides a queer caveat to Linnaeus’ argument and posits that “there was (and remains) something decidedly queer in [plants’] refusal to conform to the sexual categories on which Linnaean taxonomy rests, which are figured as kinds of “marriage” between male stamens and female pistils” (Sandilands, 2007). Just as plants in real life defy the social and sexual expectations of heteronormative Linnaean thought, plants in *Futur Drei/No Hard Feelings* also serve as a symbol of queerness. The three protagonists, like plants, push back against heteronormative, European conventions and forge relationships and a boundless world of their own design.

In the final scene of the trio together, the lavender bushel serves as a living manifestation that no boundaries or categories exist in the trio’s imagined utopia. Shariat positions the flower and humans on equal levels within the kaleidoscopic scene to create a sense of fluidity between animal and vegetable, man and woman, citizen and asylum seeker, imagined and real, and present and future. Catriona Sandilands writes on the inherent queerness of plants:

The sheer number and variety of plant species; their categorical fluidity; their ability to trouble firmly drawn lines between activity and passivity, animal and vegetable (as seen in carnivorous, fast-moving plants like Venus flytraps); and their radically different forms of embodiment, growth, and proliferation still call into question some of the ways in which EuroWestern understandings of liveliness are based on a privileging of animal (really, of human) being. Plants, in other words, still queer life. (Sandilands, 2007)

By asserting the “liveliness” of the lavender in the trio’s utopia, Shariat upsets existing hierarchies. The central placement of the live plant also asserts the liveliness of the marginalized characters that bear the flowers—implicitly arguing for the equality of queer people, racial minorities, migrants, and any other marginalized groups. As Jeffery T. Nealon writes, “the version of life [plants] open up to conversation far exceeds the reach of current discourses about human rights, recognition, and identity: again, plants decidedly queer the field of living and draw biopolitical stories toward a more complex telling” (Sandilands, 2007). Plant-life presence in the scene thus becomes the agent for larger narrative, and its central positioning asserts that discourse on such biopolitical topics is core to this imagined future.

Banafshe does not carry just any plant but lavender, specifically, and Shariat strategically selects this flower for its long history as a symbol of queerness, as Banafshe metaphorically brings queerness into the imagined utopia. Within the larger narrative, Banafshe helps her brother come to terms with his sexuality and her presence in the trace-like scene is similar, helping to usher in similar acceptance into the alternative future. Historically, the color, plant, and term lavender were covert signals of gay men’s identity in order to signal their sexuality to other gay men, while avoiding public persecution (Ellis, 2020). Karen Stollznaw writes of its use in the nineteenth century “Within the community, a gay man might be called a *lavender lad*, *lavender boy*, or a *man with a dash of lavender*... At the time, the scent of lavender was

often associated with effeminate men, while the colors lavender, violet, mauve, lilac, and purple came to symbolize flamboyance, art, the aesthetic, and same-sex desire” (Stollznow, 2020; Hastings, 2020).⁶ “Lavender” has also been used as a derogatory term, but in recent decades queer people have reclaimed the word as a symbol of empowerment and pride.⁷ The trio’s lavender, given that it is a German film, may also allude to Felix Rexhausen’s *Lavendelschwert* (1966) or “lavender sword,” one of the only texts explicitly about gay Germans from the post-war period. Thus, in the trance-like imagined scene, lavender also carries these queer, prideful connotations. It is especially significant that Banafshe carries the lavender, rather than Parvis or Amon, because the kaleidoscopic scene also highlights her own queerness. A few seconds prior in the imagined sequence, she kisses another woman as the camera passes through a beaded curtain—a metaphor for her coming out of the closet. Thus, Banafshe’s bouquet emphasizes her own “dash of lavender” (Shariat, 2020, 1:21:45). A woman holding the lavender is also reminiscent of Lavender Menace, an informal group of lesbian radical feminists formed to protest the exclusion of lesbians and lesbian issues from the feminist movement in the United States in the 1970’s. The flower’s presence within the scene is both a prideful acknowledgement of the characters’ own sexualities and serves an invitation for the viewer to enter a “lavender” world where queerness is embraced.

Another pro-LGBTQI+ function of the lavender is to emphasize that, contrary to the common assumption, homosexuality is not a biological end. If the lavender and plants more broadly symbolize life, Banafshe carrying the bouquet is also a metaphor for her bringing life into the world with the two men behind her. Banafshe even cradles the lavender like a child. The bushel may represent the idea of future human offspring in their dream-like utopia, but it could also connote a more abstract idea of procreation. In *Strange Natures*, Nicole Seymour encourages readers to reconfigure “reproductivity and futurity” and “attend to how worlds can have ‘myriad non-reproductive but nonetheless generative interactions tak[ing] place between different species and ecological elements’” (Schoppelrei, 2020). Elizabeth Schoppelrei applies Seymour’s theory to nineteenth century queer poems, but the same idea of alternative forms of reproduction rings true in the context of *Futur Drei/No Hard Feelings*. Banafshe and the lavender are one example of this plant-human symbiosis; another is Amon cultivating and finding refuge in the plants in his room at the housing project. Schoppelrei writes that “the ethics and care found in the interactions between plants and woman (and the blurring of these two

⁶ Another important historical linkage between lavender and queerness was the “Lavender Scare,” a moral panic movement that paralleled McCarthyism and the Red Scare in the U.S. Rather than root out communism, the “Lavender Scare” in the mid-twentieth century sought the mass dismissal of queer people from government service. Lavender also brings to mind the term “lavender marriage”—a marriage of convenience between a gay man and woman in order to afford a protective façade. The idea of a marriage of convenience is especially relevant in the film’s context because Banafshe’s male boss’ makes inappropriate sexual advances and offers a marriage of convenience that would allow her to escape deportation (Shariat, 2020, 54:30).

⁷ “In the 1960s and 70s, demonstrators and activists wore lavender during events that included a march to commemorate the Stonewall Riots; decades later after the 2016 [United States] presidential election, Gilbert Baker reworked his rainbow flag design to include a lavender stripe so that the flag would have ‘another color to represent diversity in the age of Trump’” (Ellis).

entities) unravels a series of generative acts that make new kinships legible.” In the film’s context, Parvis, Amon, and Banafshe’s interaction with the natural world they escape to is what provides them with the safety and freedom to imagine and momentarily create the utopia they seek—a place in which they forge “new kinships,” interpersonally and with the natural world. As Schoppelrei also notes of the poems she analyzes, the intimacy of plant and human thus “weakens heteronormative futurity and serves as an investment in hopeful spaces of interspecies intimacy and futures of creative and caring kinship.” The trio in *Futur Drei/No Hard Feelings* similarly gives the implied viewer a glimpse unto an alternative queer world that decenters the heterosexual, nuclear family and instead presents a queer story through nature and, to paraphrase Schoppelrei, introduces a blurry “space of possibility” for any other form of intimacy and kinship.

Placing so much symbolism on the lavender implicitly signals a broader argument for the importance of nature and the necessity of climate justice for the preservation of such resources. In the utopia scene, the purple lavender contrasts sharply with the brown, dry landscape the trio stands in. The Germany they live in is barren, aside from a few distant trees. The visual contrast between vibrant flowers and bleak countryside stresses the physical impact of climate change. If viewing humans and plants as interconnected and one in the same, as described earlier, saving nature thus also goes hand-in-hand with preserving human life. Nealon argues that this interspecies bond is especially important in the “the catastrophic climate and ecological devastation that is our biopolitical present” because “vegetality is a more appropriate description of life than the individual, organismic human-animal image has ever been” (Sandilands, 2007). Seymour describes a related phenomenon; she argues that futurity is an implicitly queer concept and queer values entail “caring not (just) about the individual, the family or one’s descendants, but about the other species and persons to whom one has no immediate relations”—that is, queer futurity is inherently linked with all forms of life (Seymour 2013). Parvis models this sense of universal care when he comes to love both Amon and Banafshe, and Parvis verbalizes interdependence when he promises to “keep an eye on” Amon for the fleeing Banafshe (Shariat, 2020, 1:22:57). But lavender, and environment more broadly, is also one such species deserving of care. In the utopian montage, Banafshe extends the flowers in front of her, as if asking the viewer to take hold of the important plant and prompt a positive change to embrace and save the natural world.

The contrast between barren landscape and blooming lavender in Banafshe’s arms also symbolizes the value that immigrants bring to Germany. Following Seymour’s logic, the plant life, and by extension human life, in Germany is struggling. Despite Banafshe being turned away by federal immigration services, the trio carry the symbol of life that the landscape (i.e. Germany at-large) lacks. Given the ongoing debate about refugees in German politics as well as the film’s direct engagement with these topics, it is no surprise that immigration is a theme that permeates into the scene of the imagined utopia.⁸ In the vision, the trio create an alternative Germany where

⁸ Since 2015 in particular, when then-Chancellor Angela Merkel vowed to accept refugees into Germany, granting asylum and taking in refugees has been an especially controversial topic in Germany. Although following the release

deportation is of no concern. The topic and politics around it never come up in the minute-long sequence, yet the three appear to remain together in Germany. The absence of discussion of immigration status in the utopian interlude thus implicitly argues against contemporary practices of deportation. Looking through the lens of immigration status, lavender is again an apt choice for the climactic scene because the plant is not indigenous to Germany; while lavender grows there today thanks to global trade and advanced farming techniques, the plant originates in Iran, the Mediterranean coast, Atlantic Islands, Asia Minor, and India (Quin 1864; “Lavender,” n.d.). Thus lavender itself is an example of how imports, and by extension immigrants, benefit Germany.

Although the lavender scene lasts for mere seconds of the film, the fantastical look into an alternative future is highly symbolic and impactful. The dream-like scene focuses the audience’s attention on the agency of the three German-Iranian youth and the world they create—an inherently queer, climate-conscious version of Germany that unabashedly welcomes refugees. The dynamic scene ties together *Futur Drei/No Hard Feelings*’ assertions about the interconnection of plants and humans and the creation of a new form of kinship and love among other somewhat radical, although not entirely novel, declarations. The moment in the field as the three protagonists stand in a triangle is the final glimpse that the audience has of them together and perhaps is the final image they have of each other, too, before Banafshe departs.⁹ Thus, their creation of utopia, no matter how fleeting, lingers in both the minds of the implied audience and the characters themselves. Although the idealized version of Germany that Parvis, Amon, and Banafshe present is far from reality, Shariat’s momentary vision into such a world prompts the implied viewer to buy into the plausibility of such a future, too.

of the film, such debate has been recharged in Germany in the last year with the influx of refugees from Afghanistan and Ukraine.

⁹ One may argue that their triangular placement itself is queer, especially in the German context, and is deliberately symbolic of the pink triangle, the symbol that the Nazi’s forced homosexual men to wear during the Holocaust. In Germany and beyond, the pink triangle has since been reclaimed as a symbol of gay pride. Another interpretation of their triangular stance is that this shape disperses power equally amongst the three—each lie at the tip of the equilateral triangle so no one person is central to the narrative or the imagine future.

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