



**base**



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"WHAT POWELL SAYS TODAY, THE TORIES SAY TOMORROW AND LABOUR LEGISLATES ON THE DAY AFTER." — A. SIVANANDAN

# THE BIG CONTROL STATION

Set against the deepening context of global mass migration, increasingly precipitated by the final climate crisis our species is likely to experience, the British state steadily continues to reconfigure itself around racial lines. The implications of Brexit continue to make survival - for migrants and citizens racialised in certain ways - increasingly unachievable on this island, where in the “national interest” the state makes border guards of teachers, nurses and landlords. At street level, the gendered violence of the property-form continues to express itself, the dispossessions of the housing crisis forming an alliance between domestic and state violence through a mass denial of access to safe and secure shelter and other means of reproduction.

The attempt to use teachers to catalogue children's nationalities has been met with a coordinated response (see @Schools\_ABC for more information). People continue to resist violent immigration raids (an impression of this can be found at @AntiRaids). Groups like Housing Action Southwark and Lambeth and North East London Migrant Action continue to fight to make local councils accountable for the routine gatekeeping that keeps people - often migrant women, often escaping domestic violence - from safe housing. These acts of mutual solidarity continue to deliver results, but they also extend outwards to other collectivities of care and support - often invisible, precarious and utterly essential. A sharp focus towards the state's management of surplus populations reveals this terrain as the de facto battleground of contemporary social movements.

There has never existed a modern capitalist state that does not define its subjects according to the priorities of capital accumulation. Those “who count” are nationally defined, politically mediated and legislated for - constituted as ‘subjects’ and ‘citizens’ - for in all and every instance the state prioritises its survival as a competitor in the world market.

Classifications of legal and illegal, productive and unproductive are insidiously negotiated. In the early sixties those from Commonwealth nations required government-issued employment vouchers in order to settle in the UK and a few years later, once the Labour-led 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act passed, they then had to prove that a parent or grandparent was born in the UK in order to claim the right to reside. Unsurprisingly, this impacted black and brown bodies more than it did white Australians. After the initial postwar influx of migrant labour was sufficient for the needs of capital, politicians and the vast majority of the white population became

more preoccupied with “race relations”. While the context differs broadly across time, there is a continuation of a trend in the state's willful composition and geographic ordering of its subjects.

The state, historically conceived, has been nonetheless elided by the British labour movement (and the broader left in general) orientating now around Corbyn and McDonnell. And worse, pragmatically accepted as the price of emancipation from Tory rule. What this moralistic ultimatum concedes is an inability to reason with what it truly means to win over the state; to police and manage a new acceleration of capital accumulation.

There has followed a tendency, in some left factions associated with this movement, to “think like a state”, as if it were not a political form adequate to capitalist social relations, but a big control station, merely awaiting the righteous and reasonable to finally assert good governance. This flair for utopian consolidations of state power reflects a massive disconnect between the British left parliamentary movement and the social context of really existing struggles. And here, where no suggestive example of ‘just’ state rule can be advanced, we are left with a peculiar alliance of speculative fiction and Keynesian nostalgia.

The current moment will be defined by struggles against far right racism enacted through the state but working symbiotically with media and street-level variants. If there is any such thing as a “left” that exists beyond a thousand conferences, think-pieces, figureheads and fictions of social movements, it needs to find ways to make itself useful against this onslaught.

Parliamentary social movements, organised around the citizen-subject, are form-determined to pursue the goals and rhetoric of statecraft and sovereignty which, by the nature of their political composition, are found wanting when it comes to showing solidarity with struggles facing up to the state. The new grandees of a state-in-waiting, who declare themselves connected to activities and experiences they at best ignore and at worst actively quell, increasingly find themselves at odds with the resistance manifesting itself through day-to-day survival.

It is in proximity to struggle that a voice estranged from the sensibility of the citizen/state promises a more likely composition of political force. Take, as one stark example, the organising and mediation of a kind *apart* and *aside* from the parliamentary front in the work of Mediterranean search and rescue operations; voices that cannot be sidelined, political innovations and messages that cannot be ignored:

“‘Stay home and be bombarded or come here and we'll lock you on a prison island” #Europe's message to those forced from home in 2016’ ~ 09:39am, 13 October 2016 @MSF\_Sea

AN ACCOUNT OF THE NEW DIRECTION OUR COLLECTIVE HAS TAKEN TO PRODUCE A PUBLICATION THAT AIMS TO BE PART OF THE STRUGGLE AGAINST STATE AND CAPITAL. WE INTRODUCE BASE AND TALK ABOUT THE CONSIDERATIONS THAT HAVE LED TO ITS CREATION

# Introducing base

As you likely will have noticed, it's been a few months since our little collective rolled anything off the printers. That's because we've been busy organising near where we live, and also because we've been plotting where we want the publication to go. As you can see, we've made a few changes. You are reading the first issue of base - a new publication format and name, but also a continuation of the collective publishing project that we've been evolving over the past few years.

So why change the way we present what we publish? First of all, the politics of the paper, and more importantly the politics of the collective that produces it, has drastically changed over the last few years, partly from having been involved in organising as well as this project of collective production and learning. Secondly, we wanted the publication to better reflect what the collective has become - its relation to and celebration of anti-authoritarian grassroots politics.

The publication will continue to produce, collate and share both written word and visual imagery which questions and seeks to contextualise and address the numerous inequities borne of structural, kyriarchal oppressions. Our background in publishing has developed into a focus on the complex of institutional and internalised modes of domination; whiteness, racism, patriarchy and cis-heternormativity, borders, state powers and logics, the capital-labour relation, technology, social cleansing, and education. We feel analysis driven by experience, theory and collective knowledge is crucial, especially without discussions being overshadowed by electoral politics or social democratic frameworks.

We hope to continue to provide information framed around issues we think are important to those challenging today's dominant power relations. We also think it remains valuable to make this information more tactile and tangible via a physical print publication. Seeking to stray from some of the conventions we had fallen into, we hope that creating a new space will better reflect our political intentions. Of course, with such a format change for the print publication, we've also updated the layout of our website, to reflect the new name and how we want to share our articles, imagery and propaganda online — basepublication.org

These new design considerations are important to us because we believe in playing with the relationship between word and image, and the generation of meaning in the process of communication - as a collaborative project we want to investigate the use of the medium in a more open fashion, where all readers might have a genuine investment in the experience of a message. The base project wants to explore collective understandings of the processes and responsibilities within visual communication and the intention of the maker. It is the investigation not only of the production of messages, but the way in which it is possible to see a visual message as a form of social commentary. Central to the base project is the relationship between written words and images, and how they can work together to create single or multiple and open or fixed messages, challenging existing hierarchies and assumptions implicit to the communication process.

In order to put together and produce all of our desires for this publication, we focused this around the name and conception of base - it's a simple launching off point, a prop for political resistance and struggle, a foundation from which to build, and a root from which to grow.

We'd also like to thank each and every one of you who kindly made a donation to us to keep us in print and to keep us experimenting - we know money is not an easy thing to come by, and we appreciate everything you have given us.

In solidarity,

**The OT Collective**  
**The base Collective**

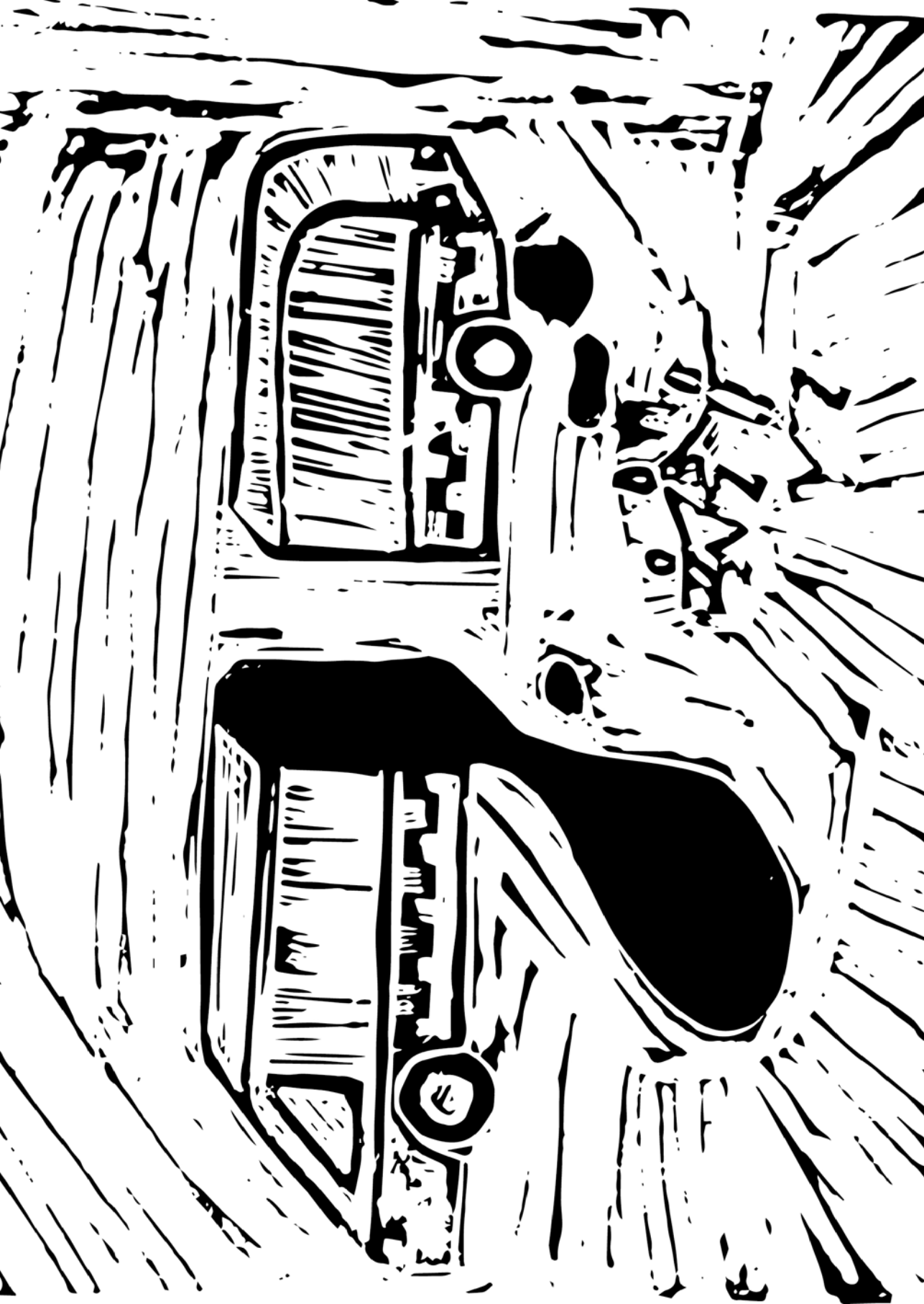




ALL  
LANDLORDS  
ARE SCUM







THE POWER OF THE FAR RIGHT IS IN ASCENDANCE ACROSS EUROPE, EXPRESSING ITSELF THROUGH INCREASINGLY VIOLENT NATIONALIST AND XENOPHOBIC POLICIES. THIS PIECE OUTLINES A NUMBER OF PRINCIPLES IN BUILDING CULTURES OPPOSED TO FASCISM. THIS TEXT WAS WRITTEN BY SOME PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE ANTI-RAIDS NETWORK – IT DOESN'T REPRESENT THE POSITION OF THE WHOLE NETWORK.

## Building an anti-fascist culture Post-Brexit

A vast amount has already been said about 'Brexit' and the general climate of nationalism and xenophobia in which the vote took place. We want to concentrate on where we can go from here. Between rising fascism on the one hand, and despair on the other, we think it's essential we build a culture of anti-fascism based on solidarity and autonomy. Solidarity here means taking action to support each other against those who seek to impose their authoritarian and racist ideal of a uniform society. Autonomy means unlearning our habit of looking to leaders for solutions, and taking the initiative to organise for ourselves.

For our anti-fascism to be meaningful and effective, we feel that it should follow a few basic principles:

### It should be decentralised & grassroots

Rather than searching for the next political party/saviour figure/controlling coalition to dictate our direction and tactics, now really is the time for each of us who identify with anti-fascist positions to have the courage and commitment to take the initiative. Seek out and get involved in local groups, or better still, start your own\*. Our groups and actions should multiply, not massify, and with this carry the crucial idea that anyone can be part of this struggle.

### It should target all forms of nationalism & xenophobia – from the street to the state

We need to think creatively about how to effectively counter nationalist groups taking to the streets, but it is critical that we do not neglect the 'respectable' xenophobia of the suit-wearing demagogues in power and those who carry out their commands. Both these groups reinforce one another, with politicians normalising such practices as deadly border controls and the daily round-up of migrants from our neighbourhoods, while street groups and keyboard warriors garner citizen-support for these right wing agendas and demand that they be taken to more extreme levels

### It should be braver

Too often, we respond to the latest oppressive state action or policy by seeking the validation of our friends and comfortable social media 'scene', rather than taking action. Instead of seeking solace from Twitter, why not go out and put up some posters? We also need to challenge ourselves to get out of our comfort zones, and not leave risky actions to some mythical 'others', who have no responsibilities or cause to fear repression. Of course, there are some who face more severe reprisals due to issues such as their immigration status, race or class – but anti-fascism wouldn't be called a struggle if it didn't carry any risk. When the time comes to hold the line, we need to be there for each other.

### It should be creative

At the same time, conflict cannot be sustained without a broader culture to nourish it. This struggle is not simply about the defeat of an authoritarian ideology; we also have to show an alternative form of power – the power of solidarity and real community. Our culture should carry the seeds of a new society, another way of life, and not be purely orientated towards what we oppose.

### It should be multiform

*...posting, organising cultural events, blocking immigration vans, leafletting, graffiti, running DIY martial arts clubs, neutralising nazis on the streets, sabotaging deportation attempts, giving workshops and skillshares, supporting resistance in detention, running regular stalls, making anti-fascist art and music, mobilising against evictions, taking direct action against the peddlers of nationalism and bigotry.....* building an anti-fascist culture takes these forms and many more. We should recognise the value of all these actions and encourage & support different people's contributions according to their interest and skills.

These are just a few possible guidelines for what we hope will be a fiery, emancipatory, and truly grassroots resistance that can be our only response to the shackles of nationalism, borders, and state control.

*\*If you would like to act against immigration raids in London, check out our statement of principles and feel free to visit your nearest anti raids stall (times correct at the time of writing):*

Deptford market, 12-2pm on Saturdays:  
**deptford-antiraid [at] riseup.net**

Rye Lane, Peckham, 12-2pm on Saturdays:  
**antiraid [at] riseup.net**

Whitechapel Market, 2-4pm on Saturdays:  
**whitechapelantiraid [at] riseup.net**

"CLASSIFICATION SYSTEMS ARE NOT ALWAYS THE SAME AND DO NOT ALWAYS STAY THE SAME—BUT THAT THE BORDER IS ABOVE ALL A MEANS OF CLASSIFICATION AND A PROCESS WHICH GIVES RISE TO PROPERTIES AS IF THEY WERE INHERENT TO THIS OR THAT PERSON RATHER THAN AN OUTCOME."

# ON BORDERS / RACE / FASCISM / LABOUR / PRECARIITY / FEMINISM

Many descriptions of borders conceive of them as a line, dividing those within from without. How limited is this description? And what conceptions of resistance can be formed by looking at borders as containing and disciplining those within a terrain - especially when residing on this terrain is so intensely conditional and violently policed?

If we think of the border as a fixed line of absolute and geographic division then we stop thinking about it as a system of variable processes, and processes which mean that those systems do not smoothly decide unequivocal outcomes. Among other things, we may become tin-eared to the nuances of conflict and power. [...] In short, we may come to facilitate the border as our own method—which is what the effort to translate movement into academic capital has unfortunately too often entailed.

If we have an idea of the border as an absolute and fixed line we stop posing questions about what the border does, assume we already know what it is and does, and are at best confused when it 'fails' to fulfil idealised expectations. We attribute functions and properties based on an idea that may or may not 'manifest' in practice and often does not, which is a metaphysical move par excellence. In doing so, we dispense with a knowledge of the border that draws upon the ongoing, experimental test of migration and opposition to border controls in favour of an idea of the border that will always be obliged to rely on outdated notions of space and citizenship in the service of performing an insincere, remote expertise—

which is to say, one emptied of honest, rigorous and critical engagement. Put another way, we are liable to fix upon an idea of the border that is perpetually contested by migrants themselves, including by migrant scholars.

**Borders are sometimes described as semi-permeable - allowing unimpeded circulation of capital and easier transit for those racialised as white, whilst forming an unassailable hurdle for many black people and PoC. What can we learn from how different borders operate? Are all borders equal, or is there use in making comparisons between, for example, the border of a white supremacist settler colony like Australia, and that of a colonial heartland such as the UK?**

Perhaps it would be useful to outline a history of this re-description of the border as semi-permeable because while it has recently become a widespread view, it is important not to erase or rewrite that history—after all, it too is instructive about how borders operate differently for different people. There have been two clear moments or stakes in the reformulation. The first occurred within and against the prevailing view of the so-called Anti-globalisation movements and theories of globalisation at the turn of the century, and it involved a convergence between scholars of colour and those parts of the 'anti-summit' campaigns that did not align with the then-prominent nationalist framing of those protests.

The second took place a little later, within government and policy circles, and arguably amounts to an acknowledgement of that reformulation, albeit from the perspective of attempting to better calibrate controls and the management of movements. Between these two there is a more ambivalent or ambiguous concept, since it emerged from the adaptation of the first to the task of refurbishing otherwise conventional concepts of the political.

The point of such an understanding is that it emphasised an analysis of what borders do. And so it becomes clear that if the border is in many respects not so much a thing—though it involves things such as walls, passports and so on—as a process that converts indeterminate movements into manageable classes of potentially profitable things and flows. [...] This is I think one of the ways in which the categorical terms of race become materialised, in which, say, measures and definitions of risk are encoded as if they are the conditions rather than results of processes of classification—much as formal slavery was once encoded as if it were a property of blackness in the United States.

Because these are processes, it also means that it is important to not reify the workings of the categories and assume they all mean the same thing everywhere and have never changed. The box that I tick on the form in Australia and the UK is not the same one, indeed it perceptibly changes from city to city and town to town even where there is no form to fill out. The terms of 'passing' are not everywhere always the same. Moreover, 'blackness' means something very different in Australia than it does in the United States, since in the former it has come to signify a link to the politics of Indigeneity

that it does not in the US—and there will continue to be debates in both of these countries about this.

It might also be worth noting that colonies such as Australia contained a promise to be 'more British than British,' so it was always more viciously racist toward people of colour and Indigenous people while, at the same time, being considered remarkably affable and egalitarian when it came to those seen as canonically British. [...] Classification systems are not always the same and do not always stay the same—but that the border is above all a means of classification and a process which gives rise to properties as if they were inherent to this or that person rather than an outcome.

**There is a lot of focus on challenging deportations and immigration raids in the UK - especially in London. Whilst there are possibilities for the capacities of these activities to grow, and in doing so making the reproduction of borders more difficult, what do you see as the hard limits to this kind of organising? Could you suggest other methods to complement this activity?**

I admire those who engage in anti-deportation and anti-raids actions. The stakes are very real and immediate, and beyond those who understand how migration systems work the distinction between legal and illegal migrants is often viewed as if it were a virtuous one. The same goes for those who establish alternate routes and safe stops for undocumented migrants. Those networks are vital but they also have to be scaled up to cover instances where information about impending deportations are limited but where it might be possible to interrupt deportations nevertheless—through boycotts, PR campaigns, engaging the ground and flight crew of the airline carrier that holds contracts to remove people.

There's also a case, I think, to make such a campaign preemptive, for instance by calling upon airlines and flight crews to state that they do not or will not deport people. Without those accompanying actions, we are often chasing last minute and tenuous information, too many fall through the cracks if they are not already hooked into supportive networks, and

always scaling down means increasing exhaustion without necessarily increasing effectiveness. There are additional limits to effectiveness when dealing with offshored or remote detention—which is one of the reasons why offshoring came about. It's simply not possible to halt a deportation when that takes place from, say, Nauru; and in that case, closing down the detention centre becomes the only way of doing so.

This is also to say that deportations and raids increasingly occur in tandem with detention systems, and ignoring the latter makes little sense. Which is why anti-detention campaigns are so important, and why xborder have focused on divestment and boycott campaigns for the last few years since, as in the UK, these are also run through private outsourcing companies which have a complex of contracts and locales, and therefore can be impacted through the financial methods of divestment and the boycott.

**Your work in the past has traced capitalist history through the prism of 'contract' and 'contagion' and the centrality of 'oikonomia'. Can you introduce us to how you use these terms, particularly with regard to significant shifts in capitalist social relations in recent decades? Is it possible to speculate how something like Brexit might reconfigure things in this regard?**

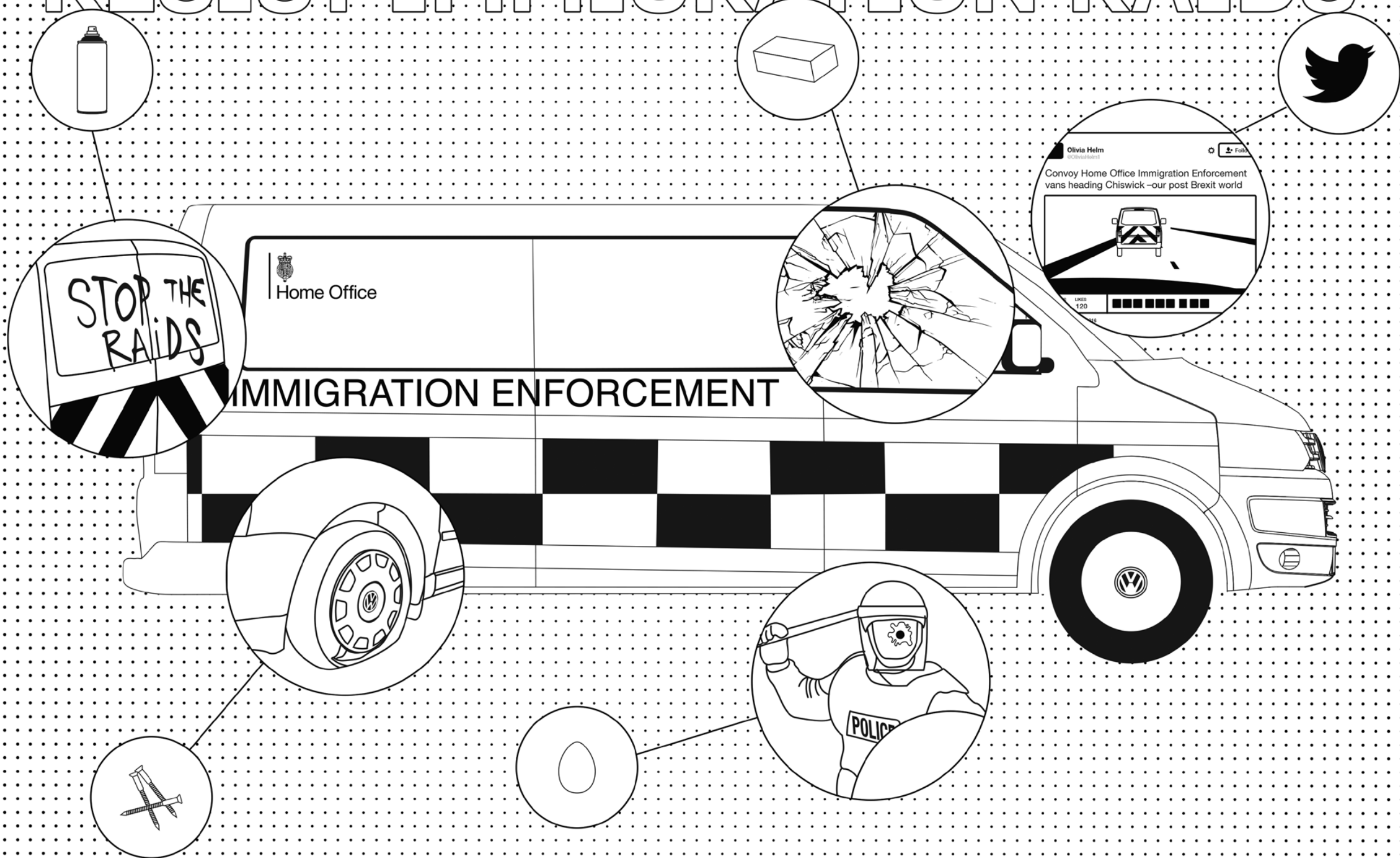
'Oikonomia' is the etymological root of 'economy,' but also 'ecology' (*oikologia*). It is a conjunction of household (*oikos*) and law (*nomos*), or 'the law of the household.' As I tracked back and through this concept, the two concepts which recur and around which ideas of regulation, agency and, by contrast, disorder and risk are hung were those of, respectively, contract and contagion. This does not mean they were always figured as binaries, since it is possible to place a value on risk (as in the case of insurance). But I did not find any

instance in which these concepts were not invoked as a dialectic that is immanent to the centuries' long history of capitalism, or indeed contemporary understandings of the border as if it bounded a domestic, familial space and its porosity.

And the reason why these three concepts are important to me is that, first, they allow me to think through the links be-



# RESIST IMMIGRATION RAIDS



tween economics and law (or politics) rather than assume a distinction, but also to be somewhat more rigorous in understanding the meaning of race, gender and class, as well as the confluences of family, race and nation that underpin nationalism. Rather than assume they are separate identities, they too are interlinked processes. The importance of gender and sexuality, and why there is a fetish for its regulation, is that in the oikonomic schema it is sexuality and gender difference that reproduces the purportedly unique properties of the *oikos*, and race is the exemplary motif of a unique and heritable property. Concepts of race always hinge on concepts of a heteronormative sexuality and genealogy, since it is ostensibly through sex that race is reproduced.

Contracts are important in that, coming from a sociological background and in political theory, it's impossible not to notice how pivotal this is to the dichotomies of public and private/familial space, or contract and coercion. Capitalism is a dynamic that distributes both the egalitarianism of a fraternal politics and the coercive, naturalised hierarchies we associate with slavery and the slave-holding estate.

**To what extent could you link both the atmosphere of the Brexit campaign, the result of the vote and the following spike in racialised violence to a long term framing of immigration as an existential threat extending in scale from household to nation (and conflating the two)? Is this an example of what you've called a 'recursion to oikonomia' and a 'restoration along genealogical lines'?**



It is what I would call a recursion to *oikonomia*, in that the lines of affection, intimacy and movement it seeks to redraw are around those of a familial-racial-national entity and its apparently unique properties. So we might also take an additional step and redescribe domestic violence as a method of control that includes both gendered violence as well as the kind of racist violence that escalated around Brexit, including the horrific murder of Jo Cox. It is not clear to me why we do not draw the connections between these two kinds of violence, which after all turn on ideas of domestic property (its rightful ownership, lines of inheritance and transmission), including for instance the kind of violence that Trump incites at his rallies in the US while conducting the entire campaign as one for a family-name brand.

Once again, I would say it is impossible to separate gendered and racial violence—in the case of Jo Cox's murder, I think that women are more often cast as 'race traitors' because men being entitled to regard women (they read as white like them) as their property has been an important compensatory element in the history and politics of class and race. I think it is difficult to separate concepts of feminine availability (and anxiety about paternity or ownership, women's promiscuity) from anxieties about proper, racial reproduction.

I am also still reeling a little at the realisation that Jo Cox's murder did not lead to the widespread and outright rejection of Brexit but, instead, incited a rush to embrace some version of it in arguments for stricter migration controls, as if the mere presence of migrants rather than a racism is the problem. Which is perhaps an index of how deep, still, the emotional conflation between family, race and nation is, and why it returns as the normative idea of what a crisis is and how to solve it.

**In 'Contract & Contagion' you say: 'The materialities of infrastructure render it the most pertinent political question there is. Everything else is distraction.' Given the level of importance you give to infrastructure and its embeddedness in processes of global capital accumulation and circulation, what do you see as the potentials for a) disruption and b) the takeover or repurposing/bricolage of technological infrastructures built solely for the world of value?**

I've been particularly interested in the shift from the gatherings in public squares to the blocking of intersections and bridges that occurred between the time of the Occupy protests to the more recent protests of Black Lives Matter and SOSBlakAustralia that happened since I wrote that. And the disruption of roads, bridges and infrastructure tells us a great deal about how politics and dissent have changed in the previous decade, and the change in setting is I think linked to the shift in focus. I'd suggest that the occupation of Gezi Park in Istanbul marks that shift, in that the issues of infrastructure were foregrounded in ways that they had not been in the United States. I would also include the protests over oil pipelines in North America in this shift. The change in setting suggests a renewed emphasis on impacting the circuits of value, less of a preoccupation with assembling an alternative version of the political, which despite any tangible iteration will remain a metaphysical idea since there is never just one.

As to how one repurposes infrastructure, that is a more difficult question. For instance, the pipe is often indistinguishable from the stuff that runs through it, such that it's difficult to see how it might be refunctioned in practice even though to do so would raise the additional question about energy sources and uses and not only their conveyance. The water crisis in Flint, Michigan is perhaps a grim and horrifying example of the technical limits of refunctioning. It is also an index of how much the Platonist distinction between form and matter falls apart when we look more closely at how infrastructure works, or does not.

The point here is that it is impossible to talk in a general sense about the refunctioning of infrastructure other than to say that every infrastructure raises its own questions and limits,

even if we might not embrace a technological determinism, technologies both tangible and otherwise involve, at best, an encoding of parameters. Still, it possible to rethink elements of infrastructure by understanding that a god-like intentionality is not always guaranteed by design, or that rules do not always rule—as with Gibson's reimagining of the San Francisco/Oakland Bay Bridge as a liminal city in his aptly-named *Bridge Trilogy*, or Delany's pornotopia of homelessness and waste in *The Mad Man*.

**You've spoken before about how nationalism and militarism are de facto part of the bargain of a kind of negotiated integration for mainstream gay rights movements, organisations and events like Pride. And as marital and adoptive rights are celebrated as legislative victories for LGBTQ people, how is an anticapitalist queer politics meant to assert itself against/relate to organisations of mainstream gay integration and a narrative of integration as opposed to a rejection of sexual and gender norms?**

When Toronto Black Lives Matter accepted the invitation to lead the Toronto Pride march, and then refused to move forward until a series of demands were met by organisers, this was an important moment in the history of Pride. Far from introducing claims external to Pride, as many have accused them of doing, they reminded us that Pride celebrates the time when, predominantly, queers of colour and trans women fought back against repression. The history of Pride since then has worked to erase this history and rebrand it as an LGBT parade, whose prevailing representation by mostly white gay men and, less so, white lesbian women has been far too uncontroversial. I hope that Toronto Pride does not eventually go back on its promise to remove the police float from the parade, and that other Pride rallies follow suit.

We should not accept the assumption that all queers are white any more than the parallel one of all people of colour

or black people are straight—because this is a fiction whose only real function is to erase queer women of colour and black queer women, including transwomen, and it correlates with the fact that these are the people most likely to be subjected to violence and derogation both in and outside queer and LGBT circles. So I think we can make different choices about whose comfort, safety and feelings should be prioritized when we are thinking about creating a different world or simply an event, and that opting for assuaging the feelings of people with institutional power is a choice that makes fewer people safer over time. Those are the kinds of choices that define whether a space is indeed queered or just another commercial venue or event operating in a niche market.

We can already see the clear limits of assimilation in the trajectory of mainstream television drama over the last few years. Yes, same-sex marriage was legalized after a period when, in the 1990s, it was made illegal through constitutional and legislative means in many countries—and the links between access to services and marriage introduced additional stakes in the campaign for same-sex marriage. And as that campaign gathered pace, television networks introduced more queer characters into television shows but, as it happens, they were also the characters who 'for some reason' happened to die, at far higher rates than characters coded as or explicitly heterosexual. When the entertainment industry, which so often congratulates itself for being tolerant and diverse, is so systematically dreaming of dead queers, we might pause and wonder why this is seen as normal and entertaining, for whom, why this is happening now, and why is this not shocking for those who are not queer. Which brings us to the massacre at Pulse in Orlando, where the dream of killing queers became a bloody reality.

This piece is a cut-down version of a longer interview. The full conversation can be found at: [bit.ly/AngelaMitropoulos](http://bit.ly/AngelaMitropoulos)





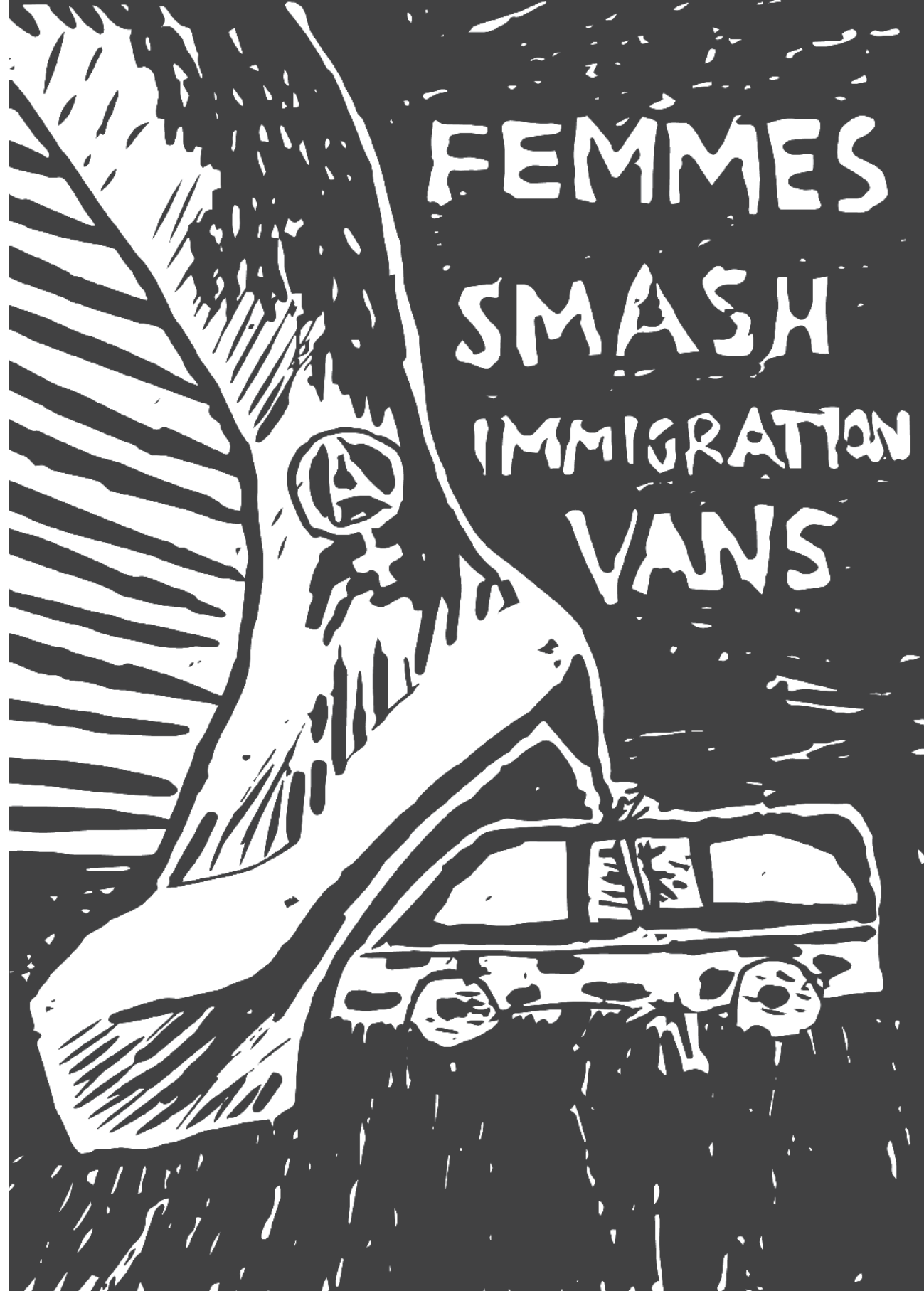


## Challenging Street Racism

Following the EU referendum, there has been a measurable spike in racist and xenophobic physical street violence. It is incumbent on all of us to build a tangible solidarity against racism. If you see someone being racially abused, here are some tips for how to offer support: **Note: Law of England & Wales only.**

**The Police are institutionally racist.** Don't rely on their support. // **Before taking action, look for escape routes and CCTV cameras.** If you have to escape, try switching items of clothing around. // **As a minimum, offer to walk someone being abused to a place of safety.** Be mindful of people approaching from behind. Use light/shadow and reflections to your advantage. If you need to wait, keep your

back to a wall for 180° vision. // **If someone makes a verbal or physical threat of racist violence, balance it with steps to defend yourself/another against them.** Legally, this is to prevent hate crime through "necessary and reasonable" action. // **More force might be justified against someone 'bigger and uglier' than yourself/another.** // Snap-judgements have to be made. Less force might be called for where the assailant could be seen as physically vulnerable - eg. the difference between a block and a strike. Intoxication of either party can also affect a verdict. Remember, your actions will be judged by a racist justice system, not your mates. // **These ideas might be applicable to countering racist graffiti too.** Carry stationary, you might want to use a marker pen to cross out that swastika that's been bothering you. Using keys to deface fascist stickers is definitely fair game. // **If you are arrested, SAY NO COMMENT to all questions except your name and an address.** If you have injuries or medical needs tell the station doctor in as few words as possible: they work for the cops. Call a trusted lawyer for free rather than taking a duty solicitor. When you get out, contact GBC or LDMG for free additional specialist legal support ASAP.



KEREM & ALEXANDER DISCUSS THE EMERGENCE OF CAPITALISM, ARGUING THAT THE ORIGINS OF CAPITALISM HAVE CLEAR GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXTS AND THAT AN ANALYSIS OF HISTORY FROM A MULTIPLICITY OF SPATIAL AND NONLINEAR VANTAGE POINTS IS CRUCIAL IN UNDERSTANDING HOW THE WEST CAME TO RULE. THEY WERE KIND ENOUGH TO RESPOND TO A NUMBER OF QUESTIONS FOR US, OFFERING A SUMMARY OF THE IDEAS WITHIN THE BOOK AND DEALING WITH THOUGHTS WHICH WERE RAISED BY OUR READING OF THE TEXT.

# How the West Came to Rule

**Your methodology throughout ‘How the West Came to Rule’ leans heavily upon Trotsky’s theory of Uneven and Combined Development. Can you explain what this is, how you use it and why you think this is such a good analytic lens through which to understand this period of history that sees the emergence of the capitalist mode of production?**

The dominant wisdom among Marxists in the time Trotsky was writing was that societies all pass through the same stages of development in a linear fashion (from slave, to feudal, to capitalist, to communist). Trotsky’s idea of Uneven and Combined Development (UCD) was originally used to break from this stadial conception of history and demonstrate the multilinear and international (or intersocietal) character of all social development.

In effect what UCD does is introduce the ontological premise of social multiplicity into our conception of historical change. All of human history has been marked by the co-existence of multiple societies. As a consequence no society develops on its own, hermetically sealed off from others. Rather, interactions between societies are constitutive of historical development and social relations however defined. In and of itself this is not an especially controversial claim, but it is remarkable how much classical sociology is marked by internalism, that is, social theory derived from the dynamics internal to any given society.

Indeed, when building his theory of the capitalist mode of production Marx explicitly and intentionally abstracts from international relations. And although ‘the international’ figures empirically in Marx, there are only sporadic traces of what this intersocietal interaction means for understanding capitalism. So we wanted to take some of these empirical referents to the international and see how their theorisation might change the way we think about capitalism.

For understanding the emergence of capitalism specifically, we found UCD to be useful in two ways. Firstly, with societal

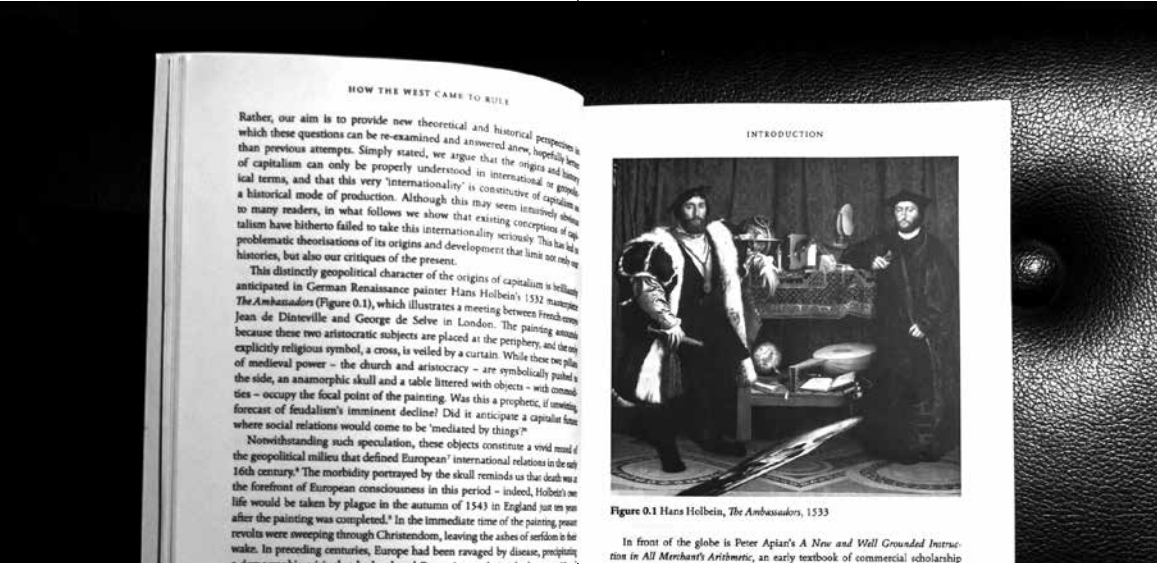
multiplicity as its basic ontological premise, UCD demands that history is studied from a multiplicity of spatial or geographical vantage points. By breaking the boundaries of internalist analysis we were able to move beyond the Eurocentrism that pervades the study of this period. Deploying UCD in this way therefore also helped us to uncover how interactions between these societies were constitutive of capitalism – the primitive accumulation of capital, for example, took place through a set of international dynamics involving cultural and technological diffusion but also war, conquest and intersocietal violence. This was a truly global history in which actors from Asia, the Americas, Africa and Europe were all present and involved (if in uneven ways).

Secondly, the use of UCD helped us to consider how non-waged forms of exploitation and social control act as constitutive parts of the functioning of the capitalist mode of production. More substantially, we argue that various non-waged forms of exploitation and oppression undergirded the sort of wage exploitation that orthodox Marxists have tended to privilege historically and theoretically. In making this claim, we sought to integrate rather than disconnect histories of colonialism, patriarchy, racism and the violence of the state more broadly into our understanding of how capitalism came into being.

**How do you define development in the present context, where both so-called ‘advanced economies’ and ‘emerging economies’ (“the west” and “the rest”) struggle to expand their interdependent regimes of accumulation? The concept of development - as it is normatively understood - would need to be radically subverted or overhauled if an alternative project to capitalism is to take place. What critical purchase does the term ‘development’ have as we encounter this present crisis point in historical capitalism?**

Development has typically been used to denote three things: (1) linear historical change over time – i.e. society developed from time A to time B; (2) a level or measure of wealth or power – i.e. country A is more developed than country B; (3) a particular normative claim on the value of (1) and/or (2) – i.e. it is ‘better/ desirable’ for country B to developmentally catch up with country A. Enlightenment thought tended to use development to mean all three at once and such discourses have been a central plank in colonial relations ever since. The problem with this conception was that it cloaked power relations and contested normative claims with the language of teleological historical change. This had the effect of legitimising and obscuring those very power relations and norms. For example, the civilising mission was considered a historical necessity, a burden on white men to drag ‘backward’ countries into the civilised world. The result was colonial violence and genocide but what is remembered in the British national memory is that the empire built railroads in India.

After WWII the same logic was articulated through ‘modernisation’ as an explicit strategy of US foreign policy to keep



decolonising movements in check. Indeed, the subtitle to Walt Whitman Rostow’s famous theorisation of ‘The Stages of Economic Growth’ was ‘A Non-Communist Manifesto’. Today the language has slightly changed and people talk about growth and development but the basic premise remains – that societies must conform to social norms set by the Global North and if they don’t the Global North is entitled to intervene (violently if needs must).

At the same time, the post-Marxist left seem unanimous in agreement that it will be through the development of the productive forces – automation specifically – that an alternative to capitalism will be established. Labour and value will be abolished and we’ll have machines to do the bulk of production while we pursue personal projects on a universal basic income. Frustratingly such perspectives tend to be plagued by Eurocentrism (or West-centrism) both in their understanding of the development of productive forces and what a post-capitalist society would look like. Specifically, it suffers by turning away from colonial violence, historically and in the present day – the natural resources that fuel automation are usually found in the global south, and are accessible to the global north thanks to war, hyper-exploitation, displacement and environmental degradation.

Post-development writers have long called for people to abandon discourses of development. Perhaps they are right, perhaps what is needed is less a radical redefinition of development and greater anti-development mobilization; as we write protesters in North Dakota have stopped the plans to build a pipeline on sacred Native American lands.

**The book provides rich histories of non-European empires such as the Mongols, Ottomans and Mughals. You explore how at different points these were the more dominant powers and argue that they had significant agency over the development of capitalism and modernity in Europe. Could you share some examples that illustrate these claims?**

Whether it was in terms of military capabilities, levels of technological development or material wealth, we find that the tributary Asian empires such as the Ottomans and Mughals were the envy of European states up until around the late 17th or early 18th century and, in some cases, after that period. For example, the exceptional war-making of the Mongolian Empire established dense networks of intersocietal interaction across Eurasia, plugging European actors into this widened sphere of activity to an unprecedented degree. This integration had the effect of unifying these continents by disease – the Black Death and subsequent demographic crisis would eventually contribute to the breakdown of feudal social relations in Europe. Similarly, throughout the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries the Ottoman Empire’s military strength, imperial expansion and seemingly stable socio-political system was a source of both admiration and fear for Europeans.

Luke Cooper’s work has shown that in military technique, Asian kingdoms could still outgun Europeans in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Hyder Ali used the Mysorean Rocket against the British East India Company in the 1780s to devastating effect. In a notable example of combined development, the British subsequently appropriated and then adapted the Mysorean designs and eventually deployed these rockets against the Chinese in their subsequent 19<sup>th</sup> century conflicts.

You don’t have to agree with every detail or argument made by the now vast revisionist historiography of the early modern period to recognise that the traditional story of an always somehow latent Western power going back as far back Roman or early Medieval times is based upon myths that were developed in the high age of European imperialism often as justifications for colonial domination and oppression. And contemporary attempts to rehash such flawed Eurocentric narratives reek of imperial nostalgia.

**The section on the history of the Atlantic slave trade and chattel slavery in the New World is particularly strong. You also explore the complex relations be-**



**tween European and West African societies that led to the explosion of the slave trade. Can you tell us a bit about this - particularly a distinction you make about the role slavery already played in those West African kingdoms and the specific transformation of these social relations through an encounter with mercantilist European societies?**

There is a comparative and interactive element to this argument. Comparatively speaking, modern European slavery was of a different form to slavery found outside of Europe prior to modernity. Although chattel slavery did exist before the period of the transatlantic slave trade, the acquisition of chattel slaves was generally not what drove the logic of enslavement in West Africa. Rather people were enslaved in order to: (a) populate a peasant class in a context where quasi-communal land ownership predominated; and (b) populate the ruling class. In the case of (a), the experiences of West African slaves would have resembled more a relation of tribute than the forms of hyper-violent and hyper-exploitative chattel slavery experienced by enslaved Africans in the Americas. In the case of (b) - in the Songhay and Kongo kingdoms for example - the enslaved were also elites, that is members of the state administration, the military and so on.

a labour shortage crisis in the 'New World' colonies. Firstly, experiments with using European wage-labour failed in the New World primarily because they couldn't be controlled - workers were able to regularly flee the exploitative conditions they found themselves in. Secondly, the super-exploitation of indigenous peoples and the attempts to impose social control on them led to acts of resistance, flight among indigenous populations, but also mass genocide carried out by Europeans through war, famine and disease. Whether through flight or death, the consequence for the European rulers was an exhaustion of labour supply found in existing populations. Thirdly, closer to home, surplus populations shed by technological developments and the enclosure of land in countries like England were being gobbled up as wage-labourers by nascent capital formation.

These conditions intersected with early modern interactions between Europeans and West African communities. Unlike the 'New World' where Europeans were able to penetrate, control and eventually destroy indigenous communities, in West Africa Europeans found it difficult to unilaterally impose their will. As a consequence, they couldn't simply occupy territories and exploit labourers wherever they encountered them. Enslavement, and more specifically the movement of



None of this is to say that non-European forms of slavery were okay. These were violent, exploitative class relations used to enrich a ruling class and buttress state power. Rather what we argue is that there are sociological and historical specificities in the functioning of slavery in different historical contexts. An awareness of this historical specificity is crucial to properly understanding what was peculiar and new about the modern slavery conducted by Europeans.

the enslaved - their circulation - in the form of the transatlantic slave trade was the horrific 'solution' to the European colonialists' problem of access to exploitable but also controllable labour. And with the construction of racial categories - blackness, whiteness - and their identification with class categories - 'slave' and 'free' respectively - Africans became even more 'desirable' to colonialists as a hyper-exploitable and hyper-controllable class of labourers.

There are two implications in particular. Firstly, the existence of slavery should not be seen as antithetical to capitalism - it is not some pre-modern or pre-capitalist relic that is swept away by the 'liberating' force of the market. Rather it constitutes a form of social control that can be deployed for different purposes, depending on the specificity of the wider social relations in question. This brings us to the interactive component. The use of slaves from Africa was a conscious strategic decision made by Europeans based on the geopolitical challenges they faced at the time - specifically,

**What are your criticisms of the historical treatment commonly given to this subject in terms of naturalising blackness as inevitably and transhistorically 'suited' to slavery?**

There is a worry that some accounts - even radical or critical ones - read back into very different historical contexts for present day relations of domination and oppression in a way that naturalises these relations. Africans were not naturally or physically more suited to chattel slavery than people from

other parts of the world. We know this because until the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, Europeans made up the overwhelming majority of the slave population in Europe. We also know that European domination in Africa was not automatic and only really became self-evident in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Until then African kingdoms, empires and communities had successfully resisted the sort of totalising colonial encroachment that was seen in the Americas.

So the equation of slavery with blackness (and conversely freedom with whiteness) was the product of long durational, violent and contested histories. It was a product or effect of racist practices, not its cause.

**Who would you name as the feminist writers who have most influenced your critique of the capital-labour relation?**

Silvia Federici was (and still is) a huge influence. *Caliban and the Witch* remains, in our view, the best book on the origins of capitalism. Its emphasis on the gendered and racialised violence behind the construction of the capital-labour relation significantly transformed the way we were initially going about theorising capitalism. Then there is Maria Mies' *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*. Although theoretically somewhat at odds with our own analysis, her historical work does a great job of showing how developments in class, gender and race outside Europe was constitutive of capitalism

It's probably worth acknowledging that our own engagement with a gendered critique of class was largely grounded in history and theoretically speaking largely embryonic. So we tended to draw on those authors whose focus was historically similar. For this reason our theoretical engagement could be significantly built upon and indeed since completing the book we have been looking into deepening this critique. The work of black feminists in particular have been especially instructive. Claudia Jones, Angela Davis, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins immediately come to mind.

Finally, there are authors who work on similar histories that we wished we'd come across sooner. For example, María Elena Martínez's *Genealogical Fictions* shows how the development of modern relations of race and class in Iberian colonies were deeply imbricated with the construction of patriarchal relations. Specifically, racialised anxieties about miscegenation fed into emergent conceptions and relations of property (and class as such). Recovering such histories is crucial to breaking from theories of oppression that see different vectors - class, race, gender - as somehow disparate and discrete.

**You state in the conclusion: "The forms of oppression mobilised by the capitalist mode of production have been, from capitalism's very origins, 'intersectional'." This argument is developed by exposing the attempt of theoretical traditions - such as 'Political Marxism' - to narrow the historical origin of capitalism and in turn, privilege the capital-labour relation as the universal arbiter of power relations. Other theoretical projects analysing capitalism as we find it today, such as Endnotes, reassert the capital-la-**

**bour relation as central to the intersection of struggles. Do you see any tension between these respective political conclusions?**

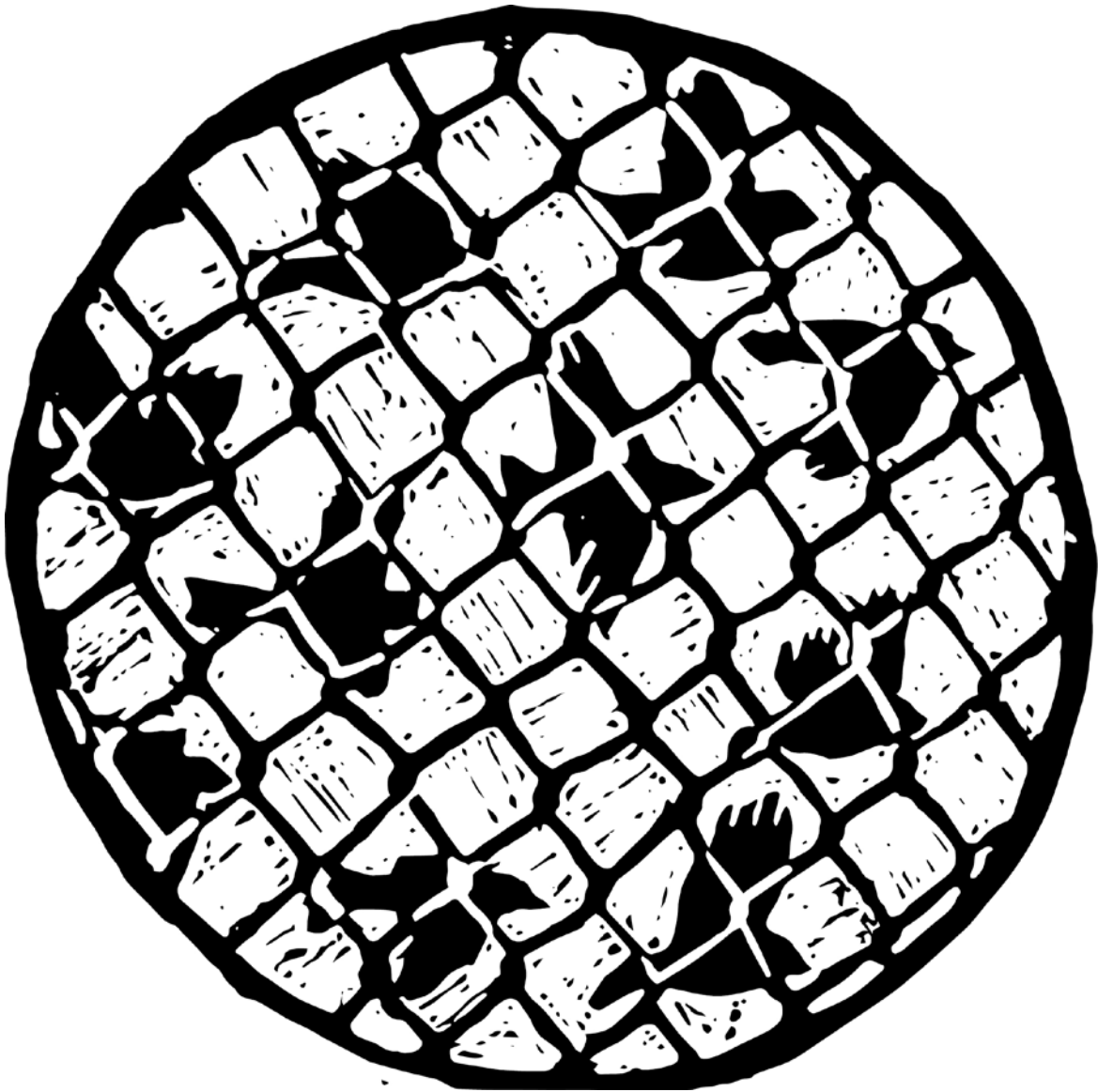
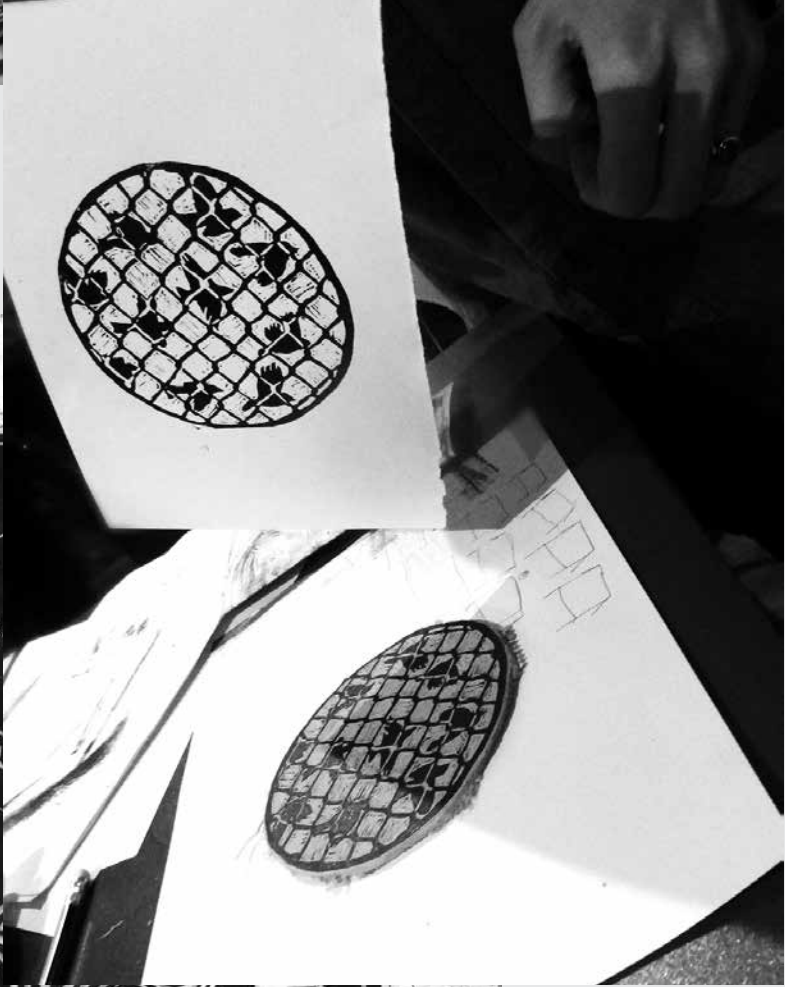
Depends what you or others mean by 'central'! One of our primary interests in *How the West Came to Rule* was to show how a geographically decentred history of the origins of capitalism might also decentre the singular emphasis or priority given to the capital-labour relation in certain approaches (such as Political Marxism). That being said, we in no way wanted to throw the baby out with the bathwater - an understanding of how the capital-labour relation operates is of course 'central' to understanding the operation of the capitalist mode of production. What we argue is that to properly understand the operation of the capital-labour relation we need to look beyond it and beyond social relations that are reducible to it. So to say that racism, patriarchy and state violence are crucial to the operation of the capital-labour relation (but not reducible to it) at once decentres that relation but also provides a fuller understanding of its operation. For what it's worth, the reverse is also true - any attempt to theorise racism today without looking at how it relates to the operation of patriarchy or capital will be self-limiting.

So the key thing really is looking at how various, seemingly disparate, social processes relate to one another; it's not about trying to establish one social relation as some historical or political prime mover. In the case of Endnotes there are instances of them doing both (or at least publishing people who do both) so  
^ [ ] ^

**Since 2008, we have seen very different global struggles interact and combine. Where today can you see struggles interact over geographies while still focusing attention on the specific determinations that each locale must necessarily confront?**

It's worth firstly thinking about the combination of global struggles in terms of the conditions in which they emerge. It's difficult to find any political movement that is limited by borders today whether we're talking about the Arab Spring or the new social democracy we see from the US to Europe.

If we're talking about how movements interact and combine, the recent emergence of Black Lives Matter in the UK is perhaps a useful example. So we see a slogan and an organisational form that originated in the US subsequently 'combining' with already-existing (and in some cases new) anti-racist organising locally. Despite the obvious inspiration from what US activists are doing, UKBLM have been explicit that there is a need to address the specificity of the UK context, not least post-Brexit. Alongside this domestic focus, the specificity of British racism, with its deep colonial history and ongoing commitment to the policing of borders, necessitates a concomitant focus on 'the international'. It is really interesting that a UKBLM-specific line is 'the struggle is global, and so must be the solution'; worded to demonstrate that Black Lives Matter outside of the US too, the appeal to the 'global' is made to carve out a legitimate space for 'local' (UK) organising.







Lynne Friedli

BASED ON HER EXTENSIVE RESEARCH EXPLORING PSYCHOLOGICAL COERCION IN WORKFARE, LYNNE FRIEDLI EXAMINES THE FUNCTION AND USE OF DISCIPLINARY FRAMEWORKS BY THE 'WELFARE-TO-WORK' INDUSTRY AND THE STATE IN THEIR ATTEMPTS TO MANIPULATE AND MAKE 'PRODUCTIVE' BENEFITS CLAIMANTS AND WORKERS.

There is also an increasing use of psychology to explain unemployment and to classify claimants. This includes bogus constructs like ‘psychological resistance to work’, ‘employability’, ‘job ready’, ‘entrenched worklessness’ and ‘job search self-efficacy’. The ‘work resistant personality’ and ‘willingness to violate norms concerning work’ are concepts used by Adam Perkins in his book *The Welfare Trait*, which has received positive press in many places. Senior politicians from various parties frequently contribute to this demonising discourse. The current Health Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, has said: *‘those reliant on benefits lack the dignity & self-respect of those who earn all their own money’*. Meanwhile, all the British Psychological Society has had to say is that ‘tests’ on claimants should be conducted by qualified psychologists. Narratives of institutional psychology function to undermine resistance to work. And psychology, like public health, has become complicit in state attacks - economic and ideological - on those who dare to refuse work.

Increasingly, there are similarities in the kind of psychological coercion experienced by both claimants and workers, especially precarious workers *‘forced to navigate the border zone between work and welfare’*, as Ivor Southwood describes it. Psychology is a primary source of cultural ideas about the ‘psycho-social benefits of work’ that so often justifies no pay, low pay and lengthy periods of ‘waiting for a wage’. Whether through forced unpaid labour, internships, traineeships or mandatory ‘volunteering’, psychological discourse has helped the state and employers to rebrand precarity and insecurity as opportunity and liberation.

Meanwhile, the reverse is true as this also contributes centrally to stigmatising people who are unemployed or receiving work-related benefits. To be worthy of a job, no matter how badly paid or demeaning, what is required is a certain kind of personality: the positive attitude described by the Confederation of British Industry as the ‘foundation of employability’. Psychology is fundamental to the shift from ‘what you have **to do**’ to get benefits (apply for jobs, attend interviews etc), to ‘what you have **to be**’. *‘How to achieve a mindset that appeals to employers’* as one course puts it, to become ‘the sort of person who can get a job’. ‘Employability’ isn’t a set of skills or attributes required for a specific job or job offer. Rather, it is an approved, generic upbeat state that demonstrates an appropriate psychological profile: confident, motivated, flexible, optimistic, aspirational.

Psycho-social accounts of the ostensible positive impact of work on confidence, self esteem and dignity also legitimise the work cure and other state-funded psycho-interventions designed to force claimants to understand that work is good for you.

The discourse of psychological deficit - unemployment as a psychological disorder - is a growth market for psychologists and allied professionals in the ‘welfare-to-work’ industry (those who are paid to “activate” claimants and those who profit from their unpaid labour). These developments authorise the extension of state or state-contracted surveillance to psychological characteristics and in the case of

‘psychological treatment’ in job centres and ‘job coaches in GP surgeries’, permit the state to set therapeutic goals for people who are poor: those who are out of work, not working enough, not earning enough and/or apparently failing to seek work with sufficient application.

Whether it is managing the personality of claimants or workers, we see an attempt by employers and the state to *bring the whole self into productivity*. The ‘all purpose positivity’ harvested for profit, theorised by Kathi Weeks, Ivor Southwood and others. Happiness recast as a disciplinary issue - as Ivor Southwood describes it in the case of agency workers in his powerful book *‘Non-stop Inertia’*. And as Pan Hustej describes in his account of a mandatory work activity ‘compliance doubt’, raised when he refused to state that he was happy to work in a charity shop:

*“You are requesting from me to be positive about something negative that happened to me, something negative perpetrated against me. I’m requested to do MWA, I’m obliged to do it by law, I’m going to do it. But demanding from me to declare that I’m happy to do it, you’re not going to get that from me”.*

So here we have it: refusal of positive affect as an act of resistance.

What’s happening in the UK now is an intensive effort to escalate mandatory work cures through ‘JobCentre take over’ as the DWP *‘aspires to join up all public services to get local people back to work - including transport and housing.’* This means moving ‘employability’ into more and more spaces; a shift from putting psychological services into job centres to moving the job centre function into schools, libraries, food banks and now GP surgeries. At the centre of this is the Work & Health programme (replacing the Work programme), which aims to merge health and employment, with a shift in focus to the longer term unemployed, disabled people and those with health conditions.

Health professionals, already fluent in ‘strengths-based discourse’, will be central to this strategy, with a raft of measures supporting the imposition of work cures: jobs on prescription, setting employment as a clinical outcome and allowing job coaches to directly update a patient’s medical record. Statements like “embed employment into the wiring of the healthcare system” and ‘integrating employment support into the map of medicine’ are starting to appear. The case for mandatory treatment for people with long term conditions (first flagged up in the Tory Manifesto) is currently being reviewed, including whether benefit entitlements should be linked to ‘accepting appropriate treatments or support’:

*“people who might benefit from treatment should get the medical help they need so they can return to work. If they refuse a recommended treatment, we will review whether their benefits should be reduced”.*

These developments are akin to the emotional labour required in many minimum wage jobs in the service sector. Mandatory courses claimants are sent on replicate and reinforce the imposition of a narrowly defined and specific

‘workplace personality’ which is required before you even get the job:

*“You have to show us that you really want this,” he challenged me, like he was an X Factor judge and I the contestant desperately seeking his endorsement. “Do you just want the work, to earn your money and go home? Or do you want a career here?”*

One consequence of all this is that fighting workfare and fighting waged exploitation are more easily seen as one struggle. It’s less easy to set workers against claimants. We’re seeing growing solidarity between the resistance to psycho-coercion, grassroots struggles for better pay & conditions for migrant workers and the resurgence of anti-work politics, notably from a disability rights perspective. A protest against putting job coaches in GP surgeries in North London, was organised by Mental Health Resistance Network, Recovery in the Bin, Boycott Workfare and Disabled People Against Cuts with support from United Voices of the World as well as Psychologists Against Austerity. The attempt to put job coaches in GP surgeries helped to expose common experiences. So the fight for sick pay also becomes a fight against ‘jobs on prescription’ and a fight to stop health professionals using the ‘fit note’ to force people back to work. Activists from the survivor movement, with in-depth experience and analysis of psycho-coercion (within the benefits and the mental health systems) are bringing a unique perspective, as well as brilliant traditions of satire and subversion, forged through Mad Pride and other protest movements. The refusal of spoiled identities.

As we resist psycho-coercion and forced unpaid labour, we also resist the use of psychology to enforce the reification of work and to obscure issues of class power and privilege. Insubordination to the work ethic is potentially more subversive than ever before. As the Italian feminist Maria Dalla Costa put it, *“We have worked enough”*.

Lynne Friedli is a freelance researcher, involved with @boycottworkfare and other initiatives

# PSYCHO-RESISTANCE: SOLIDARITY IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST PSYCHOLOGICAL COERCION

Over the past few years, I’ve been preoccupied with documenting and fighting back against state-sponsored psychological coercion - a form of coercion and manipulation that’s become a central feature of workfare and a daily experience for people claiming benefits. My work, in partnership with Robert Stearn and others, is part of a growing body of testimony, research and activism (by claimants, grassroots unions, mental health and disability rights activists) that aims to expose and resist psycho-compulsion, defined here as the deliberate use of psychological techniques, underpinned by sanctions or the threat of sanctions, to discipline and punish claimants.

I emphasise the state because the use of psychology in this way is not incidental or accidental, but is embedded in government policy in the UK and across much of Europe, Australia and the USA. Programmes designed to enforce changes in attitudes and beliefs about work and to impose an approved work personality, rooted in positive affect, (better described as mandatory cheerfulness), feature in a wide range of Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) contract specifications for the (once) lucrative welfare-to-work and ‘employability’ sectors. We’re seeing the rise of psychological conditionality (the requirement to demonstrate a certain attribute or mindset e.g. ‘motivation’ or ‘positive change’ as a condition of receiving benefits or other resources e.g. cheap food).



Sara

SARA WRITES ABOUT SOME OF HER EXPERIENCES LIVING WITH AND TRYING TO SURVIVE AN ABUSIVE AND ALCOHOLIC FATHER. SHE TALKS ABOUT THE LIMITS OF 'CHOICE' ONCE ALCOHOL ABUSE BECOMES A DEPENDENCY, AND THE DIFFICULTY BUT NECESSITY IN DRAWING A LINE BETWEEN ALCOHOLISM AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. CONTENT NOTE: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, ABUSE, SUBSTANCE ABUSE

weren't abusive to their families, they just did the other stuff, like hiding alcohol around the house, being drunk, wandering around the streets with cans, or into pubs, watch TV, sleep a lot, fall out of bed. It's confusing though; it's confusing because he was my dad, and because when I was younger I do remember periods of happiness, gentleness and kindness from him. I think I remember love too. But these feelings were completely void when I became a teenager, as his alcoholism became an unstoppable force wrecking and consuming every part of our lives and he became more aggressive – it's hard not to see a correlation.

All of these complicated and untidy questions used to get me thinking about 'choice' – what we actually mean by it, its limits and extent. I am very familiar with dominant narratives in the UK (if not the world), which continue to restrict discussions of alcoholism to the level of the individual: to the choices we make, how hard we work (or not enough), our family history, and sometimes to the biological. At the beginning, during the alcohol abuse stage, I do think choice can perhaps factor into it, but I think this can become harder to sustain as dependence sets in – this is where you vomit and shake and sweat without alcohol, where you need it to live. But I also find the nexus between choice and pathology is problematic: a lack of choice and pathologising can deny agency and responsibility, whilst it being a choice falls back on painting the person as pathologically inept – a failed human being, unproductive and surplus. There are degrees, and I suppose much of it depends on what stage someone's at with their misuse of alcohol, and perhaps what came before in terms of mental health.

I'm also not sure that essentialising or pathologising is helpful for us in understanding why people develop substance abuse problems. Broader social relations are too often left out of the equation, our ways of life - the psycho-social, economic and political forces that exist in society and create contradiction and conflict - are muted. We don't tend to hold to account the institutions that perpetuate unhelpful stigmatising discourses around addiction, homelessness, poverty, or even mental health more broadly, or critically engage with and scrutinise our experiences.

My dad has a somewhat stereotyped background. He grew up in a poor part of Glasgow with four younger siblings crammed into a small council house on a sprawling estate. Both his parents were regular drinkers. His mum died young, in her forties, but again no one ever really talked about that. My dad started drinking himself as a young teenager, as did two of his brothers. One of my uncles took a slightly different path and ended up struggling with a heroin addiction, a problem which my cousin would later die from in her twenties. Her step-dad also died from heroin use.

We used to take trips from our home in England to visit the family in Glasgow and stay in my dad's old house with my granddad. The whole family always came over, but we'd often find ourselves spending a lot of time in a pub. Many of my childhood memories revolve around sitting in pubs (a tradition which continued into my late teens as I tried to ensure

he got home from the rougher pubs he started frequenting, without incident.) I'd hang out with my cousins. We'd generally get up to mischief, lift booze, pinch the odd cigarette here and there, and steal sweets from the nearby shops, but we'd also play games and hang out with other kids, climbing garages, hang around in one of the neglected parks, or go to the local swimming pool. We'd also occasionally be tasked with going to the ice cream van during the long summer holidays to get the adults' cigarettes and cans of lager - under 16, no questions asked.



I loved spending time with my family in Glasgow, it allowed us to deflect attention from my dad and, at that time, seemed to strangely excuse his alcohol abuse as somehow normal and okay. There seemed to be some unspoken agreement that this was just what poor people in Glasgow did. Although he moved away from Scotland, he remained caught in this relational web. He still abused alcohol, and later, when I was in my early teens, he moved onto whiskey, bottles and bottles of which he would hide around the house.

My mum thought things would be better if we moved to Northern Ireland where she got a job. Of course moving didn't help anything. Although the environment changed, the social forces, the habits, remained intact. After moving around, from Strabane to Coleraine and in between, we finally settled on a small estate in a town heaving with pubs. It was an area, like many others, adorned with colourful and dramatic murals, with flags fluttering on several street corners and in the pubs we frequented, and painted on lamp posts and pavements. There were also monuments to those who had died during The Troubles, and we saw new memorials erected for the people who died in Omagh.

After a stressful period of getting used to the political situation and aesthetics of where we lived, which used to agitate him, my dad seemed, for a period, happier. He made lots of friends, used to play golf with them, and when he couldn't find stable work, he sat in a pub all day and drank with

them. There were few judgements passed here. His drinking seemed more acceptable in this small town, as it had been in Glasgow. But over the years we began to see a much angrier and scarier person as his dependence rendered him completely dysfunctional.

At one point, albeit temporarily, while he was still capable of apologising, and telling us how shameful and guilty he felt, he agreed to get help. We moved back to England and he went into hospital; a hospital I myself would later become very

familiar with. After a few weeks of drying out, medication and therapy, he came out into the world, but started drinking again after a few days. We went through a long period of cycles like this - trying AA, getting medication from his GP, but the moments of sobriety and pleasantness were always short lived. Stints in hospital were always a fight - as well as the fear of going through the process of withdrawing from alcohol, he hated being treated like a child and the disciplinary structures that pervaded the institutions and the attitudes of the professionals working in them.

I hated that too. We'd argue about why I had to stay in hospital when my mental health got worse, but he could leave, and why I wasn't given a choice. It made me think that he just wasn't trying hard enough to sort himself out, to stop abusing us. It made me question why alcoholics were treated differently from other people who had problems with other things that weren't labelled 'substance abuse'. Some were framed as choices, others were not, but I struggled to see how alcohol dependence was a choice when watching my dad - why would he choose to be like this and act this way? Were we that much of a disappointment to him? Was he really just a scumbag?

Over time, he stopped visiting me in hospital. I'm not sure if that was some sense of guilt on his part, or if he'd just rather spend his time getting drunk. In any event, a part of me was thankful because I didn't want to have to deal with him as I

# Alcoholism

I want to share some thoughts on alcoholism as someone who was affected by it, an outsider peering in, but whose life was invariably shaped by it. My father was an alcoholic. He drank himself to death alone, just after turning 50. Several years later and I still think about him a lot. I have nightmares which put me back into a state of panic. It's like my mind forces me to live through this part of my life again and again. It lingers. But I don't like to talk about it, neither do my family. We don't talk about the pain, the sadness, the anger, the violence and the fear of what it was like living with him, and then watching him die. It also feels humdrum somehow - alcoholism is common, excused as a problem for 'certain' people, it attaches a stigma: "they did it to themselves" etc.

I still remain plagued by so many questions: what would life have been like if my dad wasn't addicted to alcohol? Would we have been happy? Would he have still abused us? Would I have gotten ill myself? These are perhaps useless speculations. One difficulty is that I don't think I ever knew my dad without alcohol playing a big part in his life. Two years ago, my mum found some old footage of us together. In it, she was playing around with a camcorder we bought ourselves for Christmas. I'm about 7 years old. Me and my sister are opening presents and my dad's watching. During the excitement, and before I've even unwrapped my plastic treasure chest, I suddenly stop and ask him, "why do you drink so much?" He throws one of his cheeky grins before the camera is switched off. The question bugged me then as it does now.

Would he still have been abusive without alcohol is a messier question. I certainly don't want to excuse or apologise for his violence just because he was an alcoholic. I never bought the 'it's just the alcohol' line. I knew other alcoholics who

was trying to get myself back in touch with reality: the smell of alcohol on his breath and clothes, the way he would act in front of ‘outsiders’, all friendly, jokey and pleasant, and the constant edginess of being around him, gauging what mood he was going to be in.

He found a bit of work the first time I was away, but it didn't last. He was finally arrested for drink driving and lost his licence after one of our neighbours called the police on him. Good. He never listened when we pleaded with him to leave the van at home, bringing it up would just lead to a fight. It makes me angry now thinking about how he used to drive me and my sister in the back of his van pissed off his head when we were children. I'm thankful that someone outside of our family was able to do what was necessary.

At the same time, this is when things got worse. He couldn't get another job because he was disqualified, so my mum had to get another one to make ends meet. In between my own mental breakdowns, I worked at Tesco and she came to work there too. Police interactions also became a lot more frequent. They'd come round to our house when the neighbours heard screaming and smashing, but my mum never told them the full story - she was afraid to. He'd also be evasive and manipulative when the police did come and they always believed him.

Besides the fear of being around him when he was drunk, I was also embarrassed. I remember having a house party when he came home and started fighting with my friends. Another time I had someone sleep over, they went to the bathroom and saw him passed out naked on the floor. We were lucky in that we had locks on our doors, so we could at least try to avoid angry confrontations with him. Sometimes we'd hear him in the early hours of the morning alone in the living room, shouting, smashing bottles and other objects. I was so sad when I woke up one morning to find that he had smashed the model ship we had given him one birthday and family photos from a time that was still troubled but didn't seem as full of fury and rage as the situation had then become.

He'd wield kitchen knives, strangle and shove us. Once he bought me a chocolate bar. I smiled and thanked him and he went away, only to return moments later and attempt to shove it down my throat. I thought he was going to break my jaw, until my mum intervened. When I got older I fought back because fuck him. I was full of rage, anger and fury too, so much so that I seriously considered ways to kill him - I needed it to end; I knew I'd be punished, but I didn't care. Our routines and different personas in public and private had become so normalised. I didn't really have time to think about how unhealthy all of this was, and I think my mum was just busy trying to survive with an abusive partner and a poorly daughter.

Eventually, when I was functioning again and with encouragement from my mum, I found an escape route - I went to college to do an access course to get to university. I was really worried about leaving my mum because I couldn't protect her if things got too much - my dad wouldn't go for me anymore the way he did her, but my mum was keen for me to get away. I lost contact with him for a while. My mum eventually left him

too. I saw him on and off when I did get the courage to go back home and revisit sore memories. He had a new girlfriend, she tried to support him, he wore smart new clothes, no longer sported a shaved head, but there was nothing she could do either. As time moved on his contradictory mantras of “I'm too old to recover” or “I don't have a drink problem” became further entrenched.

In the midst of finishing off my final year of university, my mum called me and told me to come home because he was in hospital after someone found him unconscious in his bedsit. I saw him in hospital. He'd lost so much weight yet remained puffy and bloated, especially his stomach. His eyes were a vivid yellow, his skin, also yellow, had a strange odour. I remember him being so small and fragile in the hospital bed; he was a shell of the person I remembered. He woke up when I came in and pretended to be fine, shifting himself up in the bed to ask me how I was. I wanted to shout and scream at him but I knew that this time he was going to die and that felt like retribution enough somehow.

I went home after spending about 30 minutes with him, but was called back the next day as his liver failed during the night. When he was lying in intensive care he couldn't even look at me. I think he was scared as he realised that he wasn't going to be lucky this time. I sat with him, fighting with myself about whether it was weird if I touched him or held his hand. I think I did, but only when he lost consciousness - I didn't want him to think I had forgiven him. He hadn't even apologised. I could see his body rising with the ventilator strapped to his face. After four last deep breaths, he died. I knew this day was coming, but it was still a shock. I remember feeling relief, like a weight had been lifted, but then a heavy sadness crept in.

I didn't want to acknowledge the sadness because he was abusive to us. I didn't want to cry because it felt that I was somehow excusing his violence towards the women in his life. The trauma couldn't simply be explained away because he was drunk and ‘unaware’ of what he was doing because there were times in the past, when he was functioning, that he would do or say abusive, sexist things. For example, he used to say to me that I should have been a boy and he used to bully my mum about her appearance, so the tendency towards patriarchal relations was very much alive and well before his condition worsened.

In terms of his addiction, I do think the odds were stacked against him: it seemed generational, a short-term comfort for people growing up in my family, for those forced into specific relational spaces and conditions - a deindustrialised, alienated, deprived part of Glasgow. Some are able to unstick themselves, but for others these things are terminal. It's almost as if my dad was a walking, visceral embodiment of an internalised and painful hopelessness about the future, but the women he supposedly loved ended up being hurt the most, and we are still trying to pick up the pieces.







GIVEN THE STIGMA ATTACHED TO PSYCHOTIC DISORDERS AND THE MISINFORMATION SURROUNDING PSYCHOSIS, WE SAT DOWN WITH @BLURJEEBIE AND @CECESADIST TO DISCUSS THEIR EXPERIENCES AND SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS ON WHAT PSYCHOSIS MEANS, INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF INSTITUTIONAL SPACES AND PATHOLOGIES, HOW SUCH CONCEPTIONS FAIL OR SUCCEED IN REPRESENTING THEM, AND HOW OTHER APPROACHES ROOTED IN SURVIVAL POLITICS CAN BE USEFUL FOR THINKING ABOUT PSYCHOSIS, SAFETY AND CARE  
CONTENT NOTE: STATE VIOLENCE, ABUSE, DESCRIPTIONS OF GASLIGHTING, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

# Surviving psychosis

**What does the term “psychosis” mean to you? Is it a political label, a medical description, an idea you reproduce through choice or because it’s the only term available? Is it useful? Does it identify you? Does it represent your struggle?**

**C** I have real problems with how it’s conceptualised in a medical setting. The only reason I personally hold onto it as a label is due to the fact that people dismissed my experiences, so the idea of “psychotic” became useful for demonstrating the reality of that - its directness was useful too. I feel like my use of “psychosis” is sometimes about a reappropriation of the term. Sometimes using the word psychotic feels more to the point of where things are, and often highlights in a similar way for me how I situate myself within using “queer” - there is an abstractness to it, but firmly rooted in external conditions and experience and social setting.

**B** I was diagnosed with a psychotic disorder quite young. All of a sudden, after having years of positive and negative symptoms - by positive I mean auditory and visual hallucinations and persecutory thought patterns - and then having negative symptoms, which manifested as social withdrawal, disordered thoughts, and what’s famously called ‘word salad’ - I was very much medicalised into a world of psychiatric logic. Certain medical terms became a badge of stigma. I lost a lot of friends and my family reacted very awkwardly. I was forced into hospital for a long time. Whilst still in the midst of bad experiences, probably in my late teens, I realised that psychosis was very much codified [...]Some

people needed the label, to have the diagnosis in order to say “look, the reason why I’m acting like this, and why I’m having problems at home, at school, it’s because I’ve got this label”. I found that quite difficult though because I was ashamed, I didn’t feel that it really applied to me because I was in this massive state of denial for a long time.

**Would either of you consider yourself to have a disease? Are you ill? I ask this because these would perhaps be the strongest connotations associated with psychosis by those in power.**

**C** I definitely tend towards describing myself as ill. I was medicalised and diagnosed at 18. It was always explained to me by doctors, by services as “this is a blip” and “give it X amount of time, X amount of bed rest, X amount of not working etc. and this will go away”. They kept saying “it’s like when you break your leg” again and again. By virtue of knowing quite a few people dealing with chronic illnesses, being able to find people who’d understand that I feel this is something that won’t go away and is in fact a part of my life and doesn’t have to be some damned tragedy, even though at times it might be horrible. So the idea of illness has at times felt useful to me, but not “disease” because in the same way that this worries me regarding various forms of oppression it’s also just such a nasty way of coercing people into demanding cures, which has always terrified me more than anything, I think.

**B** I’ve always stayed away from categorisations of disease and illness - disease especially because I get this sense of “othering” and something requiring pathologisation and determination via biology, as if somehow this is a genetic glitch or a biological factor that can be zapped away or cured - I’ve always found that discourse really problematic. Similarly, I’ve had psychiatrists say to me (though they never told me this was a temporary thing like they did C - quite the opposite) that the world would never accommodate me [...] Just because these things are described as illness and disease, doesn’t mean those experiencing it have to take on this framework for the rest of their lives. Experiences and diagnoses can also change over time, and the medical world can make mistakes. I think it’s a cop out to say that mental health experiences are relegated to just “a few bad apples” who represent a minority of people - lots of people face mental health problems, lots of people experience psychosis, and I think that we have to put the buck back where it should be, which is basically looking at society rather than saying “this is a biologically determined thing and you’re therefore an outsider” - this rhetoric can easily slip into victim-blaming.

**C** After my initial engagement with mental health services, I was also given a diagnosis of PTSD. I always found it strange where these institutions then drew the line between these two conditions. What’s a hallucination and what’s dissociation?! That feels pretty damn arbitrary to me - if I see one thing and they call it a flashback because I’ve experienced that as an idea before, “that’s PTSD”. But if I experience something they regard as “new” in some way or some other slight detail in the experience then that’s “part of the



psychosis” almost as if they imagined these venn diagrams of things and to be legitimate an experience had to fit within one of the circles.

**In what ways would you say an approach grounded in survival, and a politics of survivors - especially in regard to ideas such as #ibelieveher and a politics rooted in trusting and listening to experience - shape your struggle with psychosis? How can the difference in people’s psyches and experiences be accommodated, rather than erased or subject to discipline?**

**C** I’ve found the notion of gaslighting to be quite useful, and the similarities it has to dismissals of my experiences of psychosis. A focus on belief and experience can then become a way of attacking that, just as it does when we’re talking about reproducing rape culture, which ultimately changes the material experiences of that phenomena. I’ve found connections here between the way people react to my experiences and their connection with psychosis.

**B** I feel that people with psychosis aren’t given the same allowances. Whereas depression and anxiety have been (relatively) normalised to some degree in society, things like psychosis, bipolar and, especially, schizophrenia are still treated as almost totally alien. I know that I sometimes don’t have the skills, language and clarity of thought to articulate things in a way that won’t appear threatening, or derail a meeting. This makes me believe that a focus on need, rather than accommodation, is what’s required. It upsets me when I see people who hold themselves to be leftist role models, even those who have excellent positions on centring survival and experience, still say things that are really harmful to us. And it’s rare to get a decent response when this is challenged.

**Is there a need to de-pathologise survival mechanisms? What is the relationship between those**

**who are deemed “psychotic” and those (gendered, racialised, class-based) carceral logics which shape and reproduce the diagnosis? How is the metric of “health” around experiences with “psychosis” related to the capitalist work-relation - and its attendant discipline of “productive subjects”?**

**C** The phrase someone said to me was “approaching it in, out and around services”. One thing I’ve found in leftist circles, when mental health organising comes up is that it can very quickly become “mental health for activists” . There’s quite a dislocation I think, in part, because people who are in various states of being institutionalised, or incarcerated, are viewed as unpalatable. On the one hand I always want to be fighting for what service users need from services as they exist and pushing that as far as possible, but also knowing for me personally that so many of those institutions I’d like to see destroyed. I guess the way I see through that is mainly addressing the fact that talking about my experiences of mental health within the left has been so dislocated from people who are in any way institutionalised - and I find that really worrying, that it becomes a facet of the experience of being white and middle class and university educated, rather than being understood in a context of external conditions that disproportionately affects black people, poor people, survivors, and is massively gendered in loads of different ways.

**B** There tends to be very little questioning of how bodies are exploited under capitalism, or how all the distinct, interconnected relations of oppression - whiteness, patriarchy - reproduce themselves through space and time, and are internalised. You’re far more likely to be diagnosed with schizophrenia or come into forced hospitalisation under the Mental Health Act, for example, if you’re a young black person. Mental health discourse doesn’t seem to take full account of the effects of that, which I think then folds back into the idea of pathologising via disciplinary power relations that certain people are forced into. Women are heavily affected

[illegible]



by all this, but then that's a problematic thing as well - most of the statistics you see still tend to reproduce a very cis-heteronormative kind of logic. I also find this troubling, this gendered aspect - but also because the statistics that back this up are taken from those who are already in mental health services, or people who have gone through the process of being diagnosed - there are probably thousands of people in the UK alone that experience conditions or symptoms of psychoses, or depression, or whatever it may be, who are avoiding the system, through silence or aversion, or they might simply be privileged enough to not be snared within the system.

**How would you say NHS wards reproduce the logic of prisons? How dominant were narratives of correction and rehabilitation, and how strong were the implications that your submission to these could secure your release?**

**B** There were bars on the windows, you were locked into a little room, and you had communal time for a few hours in a communal area based on what risk level you were assessed as - you'd go through these gates locked with a key [...] Although I'm against forced hospitalisation, I hope people can get the help they need from these institutions. But, I think a lot about some of the people I knew in hospital - are they still there, or are they still going through the system? - and that makes me really upset because I know it's a more than remote possibility.

**C** I remember one particularly awful point of crisis, going to Croydon May Day Hospital on a Saturday night and ending up not in a psych ward, but in a psych "area". I guess one thing that I hadn't expected at the time was just how many people would be brought there by police. From my bed, I could see a couple of people who *only* had cops with them and very obviously being held against their will - having a guy next to me shout "put me back in the cell" was a particularly horrendous moment. I don't face racialised violence, but am still scared shitless of cops - I was terrified, struggling to speak - my mum noticed that I'd suddenly got worse at that point - to try and just get out words and just say "cops, there's cops here" when I'm supposed to be somewhere that I can feel better or at the very least, be warehoused in a place that I don't feel worse! The presence of that was just so stark. [...] At that point, I was at the intersection of police and the NHS, just another site of trauma for me - I can't imagine how it must have been for others in the situation.

**B** It was so isolating - you're in the room by yourself, you'll meet your psychiatrist every day, by yourself, and then potentially you'll eat by yourself. The fact is that you were stripped - you weren't allowed to wear your normal clothes inside, you just felt you were being forced into a role where you were a victim or someone who needed to be corrected. I don't think inpatient experiences, whether forced or voluntary, are something that should be flattened or equated to other forms of treatment because it is a different kettle of fish altogether. In terms of therapy stuff in hospital, they're supposed to offer people with psychosis and schizophrenia something called "family intervention", which itself is horrible terminology. It effectively means that you're forced to sit there, with people - possibly an abuser - and discuss everything. No one

wanted to talk about the broader social relations and family relationship, they didn't want to talk about violence - they'd have rather pumped me full of Chlorpromazine or something.

**How are those social movements claiming to be fighting for liberation failing to address these concerns - and in what ways do they continue to contribute to your oppression? In what ways is this struggle collective? Are there solidarity relations that could and should be developed to combat these issues?**

**C** I've never found spaces on the left to be with other people and to talk about the actual content of it, of the nature of my psychosis - in a safe space. To be mentally ill is not something that's catered for, the idea of what's presumed to help in creating these safe spaces relies on a perception of certain conditions, and I think that's not necessarily that useful, and often comes from quite a detached place and tends to harm quite a lot of people with a variety of conditions because it's an abstract - the idea that these conditions can be known and catered for, without ever being led by those of us who have those experiences, at all.

**B** I would really like to be able to communicate things that are happening, that I'm seeing or hearing. At the moment, I'm struggling with disordered thoughts - and sometimes I'm not able to speak, or only say random words - which obviously make sense to me, but it throws other people, and they back away. It would be nice if they didn't do that. One issue I've also found, which is a consequence if you're experiencing paranoid thought patterns, is that I've struggled to be able to (sometimes I have to think it over for a few hours) want to communicate things because sometimes I perceive everyone I'm surrounded by as my enemy, and your mind can make the connections required to justify that. I'd love to be able to share in similar experiences with people, to pull through it and explain these things.

**C** There has been a massive failing of survivors in ultra-left circles. I don't want to take one thing and make it a tokenistic gesture "this will help the psychotics too!" - but until that's been properly addressed, I don't think I can ever feel safe in ultra-left spaces. The need to take that seriously has huge implications for mental health, along with many other things.

**B** One thing I'm quite clear on - because it upsets me when I hear it - are mental health slurs describing people as "psychotic" to pejoratively assign something to behaviours deemed as un-natural or deserving of discipline. It should be quite clear that it would be quite possible to build accountability around this - just by simply having the conversation or trying to unpick why these words are being used in this derogatory way, and thinking about how people can open their language to not reproduce this discourse.

**C** I think just on the language front as well, that people have used Trump as a recent way to talk about that and the fact that people have been leaning on mental health language to describe him and his politics. I'd previously noticed this amongst ultra-left and anarchists using terms like

'delusional' and 'psychotic' about the far right in *this* country - I've had to have several conversations about how fucking insulting and violent that is. That's something I'd like to see specifically talked about - sometimes there are really weirdly politically loaded references - I find it so frustrating and damaging seeing people use medical language interchangeably with 'fascist' so many times.

Something I find as well, when my mental health stuff comes up in ultra-left spaces and places that are forming anti-psychiatry as well, where this horrible tone creeps in, almost like the idea of 'false consciousness' - if people have mental health problems but don't regard it in some way as wholly systemic, that they must be somehow bowing to capitalist logic. I think that's really horrible, particularly with psychosis, where you've had experiences that you've already been gaslit around, and as a survivor have been gaslit around - and then to have people who're supposed to be comrades telling you you're not conceptualising things correctly - where you're castigated if your own actual experiences don't fit with some grand theory of madness under capitalism.

**B** The amount of times I've had people quote Freud and Laing at me - to tell me what my own experiences are and why they're happening - I find that so horrible - *that* needs to be held to account. For people these things aren't happening to, there's not only the tendency to reproduce the logics of pathology, but there's also this idea that it's something that's fixable in the immediate. That really denies people a lot, and denies me an entitlement to my own life.

**C** I've found that super difficult, feeling on the one hand that I've got to be accepting of services as they stand, fighting cuts etc. Or to otherwise insist on a totally systemic rejection of the thing - and I don't feel like I fully fit in either of

those conceptions - I mean I've been totally fucked over by both of them. I have no place in liberal spaces around mental health, where I can't oppose disciplinary systems. Equally, I feel really shut out of more academic discussions around mental illness, being told that I'm almost complicit in my own oppression by seeking any kind of care that I might want from services as they stand, which is really a pretty shitty way of calling mentally ill people scabs - I'd like accountability around that as well. In the short term, I'd like people to have as much agency as possible - which often includes fighting to defend whatever resources people going through this actually *want*. If people say, and they do, that having access to services is important to them, I'd like to fight for it to be a thing, even though it's not a series of structures that I think will help me get better - I want choice, not just another hierarchy with, instead, dictating a single idea of what treatment best meets people's needs

**B** So, making the state institutions more accountable, answerable to their users, would be desirable, which I know is something made even more difficult by the increasingly limited resources these services are obliged to operate on - all of which, of course, pales in comparison with improving the quality of life of someone who, say, hasn't even left the house in 7 weeks and needs support. And in the absence of a genuinely liberatory politics at the heart of all this, we need to be fighting for what we can secure right now.

This conversation has been heavily abridged for inclusion in our print publication. You can read the full version at: [bit.ly/SurvivingPsychosis](https://bit.ly/SurvivingPsychosis)

Photography by Kieran Cudlip







IN WANTING TO GIVE EXPOSURE TO A BROAD TAKE ON ACTION, INTERVENTION AND TECHNICAL LIFE, WE PUT A SHOUT-OUT ACROSS OUR NETWORKS TO GATHER THE FOLLOWING COLLECTION OF MEMORIES. THESE PASSAGES RECOUNT CRITICAL MOMENTS OF POLITICAL INTERVENTION AND ACTION FROM A NUMBER OF ANONYMISED AUTHORS, THROUGH RECENT DECADES AND INTO THE PRESENT MOMENT. WE HOPE THIS COMPOSITION RELAYS AND RESONATES: ON STRUGGLE, EXPERIENCE AND VOICE.

## Out of the Woodwork

Two people. Two crowbars. We're deep into the night and we've been working on this project for way too long to give up anytime soon. Juggling a few things at once: keeping the noise down so we don't wake up the neighborhood; making sure we're on enough of a wavelength that one of us won't bail out at any moment; trying desperately not to fuck up the material we're working on. One tool finds some magic point of entry in between the timbers and we hammer it deeper. Some old, damp rags between the metal to cover the racket. Then in with the second crowbar, vertical this time in line with the grain of the wood. The idea is to keep it all intact - and pry the thing free. Little nudges of words and language surface as we're working, more like sounds than words; *affirm*, *negate*, *sigh*. Words only go halfway to sending the message - it's the tools that do the talking, sending signals through the strain of the material. The first crowbar starts to lift the wood and then we shuffle in sideways with the second, starting to find a rhythm for the task at hand. This is an innocent task.

*Whitechapel, 2016*

As the fascists came around the corner on their way to the election meeting, we ambled out of the pub and into their ranks. The police who were herding the nazis didn't care, as we looked pretty much like the rest of them; dodgy looking white guys, short hair, casual clothes, bomber jackets. The fash themselves weren't too sure what was happening either - they must've thought we were pals to start with, but as the march made its way up the sunny street the muttered threats from our lot started to unsettle them. Just as we got to the venue, someone shouted "right, let's have it!" and all hell broke loose. The 'master race' were decked left, right and centre. Lucozade bottles were a favoured weapon, as I remember; easy to carry, but the thick glass at the base made for a satisfying swing.

*East London, 1990*

My hands are filthy and I'm washing them properly for the first time in ages. Been living without a sink, but the street never lets you down if you care to look. It's like Legoland but 100% rubbish. A bed frame, stripped of its fabric, stands upturned in the kitchen with a kid's bath (a yellow plastic thing) resting on top. The water comes out of a pistol-shaped watering nozzle attached to some garden hose. The other end of that,

softened with hot water, was forced onto the source (a copper stub in the wall) and secured with a twisted piece of a wire coat-hanger. The dirty water drains into a bucket underneath through a plastic pipe sealed in with putty. My hands are now their cleanest ever and the bucket is full. With unmatched satisfaction I use it to flush the toilet and join the others for dinner. Needless to say, I find a real sink next time I'm out. I leave it behind – ours is just perfect.

*Squatting in Stoke Newington, 2009*

I'm not sure what gave me the audacity, that first day, to stop and film an arrest - maybe a combination of grief and anger at the most recent police killings in America, which had brought the UK's police brutality to the front of my mind; a feeling of fear that there was a very real chance that the arrest I was witnessing could lead to violence against the arrestee; and on the (slightly) more positive side, feeling empowered by the work of groups such as LCAPSV and the Anti-Raids Network. Or maybe I was just in a bad mood (I was) and unable to ignore what I saw as police harassment of the young, black man they were holding - literally. During that arrest, I completely ignored the police, spoke only to the person they held, and filmed them until they left. Another time, filming a much more physically violent arrest in my area, I found myself screaming at the officers as I filmed them, even as I realised this was no help to the boy being arrested. It was the day after the death of Mzee Muhmammad in police custody - a lot of my yelling pertained to that. I don't think I'm able to walk on by any longer - it would feel too much like allowing the police to go about their brutality unquestioned, almost like being an accessory to that, to a degree. I'm very aware intervening in this way is not a possibility for everyone or all the time, so I'm grateful to be able to do this. I hope by witnessing and amplifying these incidents, I can contribute towards forcing a greater degree of accountability from police, and make it less easy for them to perpetrate their daily violences.

*London, 2016*

I was so sick of seeing things that I couldn't stand on the street - SWP posters, Fascist stickers. Obviously, they can be torn down, but sometimes that feels impotent. I've taken to always trying to carry a few basic things with me. I always have a marker pen on me these days, which I use to deface things, or add a hashtag or URL to useful counter-information, a little #ACAB here and there. I always need gaffer tape too and the more I carry it around the more uses I find for it - on stalls, at demos and so on. I also try to carry a few different flyers - things happen all the time, and a little bit of knowledge goes a long way and can sometimes help you overcome that initial hesitation to get stuck in. Anti Raids rights knowledge, stop and search cards, anything - It helps make the travel to and from work that more liberating, and the more I do things, the more confident I feel to do them again. It makes a difference.

*South London, 2016*

We had 'inherited' a dormant account with a wholefoods wholesaler, run from an established squat in Stamford Hill - and when that was evicted, moved on to the replacement house we'd been making habitable while anticipating eviction. Monthly order delivered, paying cash on delivery. Whole-

foods, soya milk, etc., eco cleaning and sanitary products. Started small with prepacks, and as it expanded and users became better able to budget for monthly orders we were able to start buying some items in bulk and weighing out/ splitting down. Eventually about 20 mostly doley/squatter households plugged in. Usual thing, only some of the users got involved with helping out, and you always had to hope/ believe those that didn't were doing other useful things for the movement instead.

*'Pig Trough Food Co-op' Hackney, late 80s*

*Auto-reduction: winding back electricity meters with 'black boxes' in advance of reading dates to make bills more affordable.* A black box was a plastic box from an electronics hobbyist shop into which was fixed a transformer taken from a large non-working television set with a few wires attached – one fitted with a crocodile clip which would first be attached to an earth point, and two which would be pushed up alongside the cables going into the bottom of the meter to make contact and then held in place with clothes pegs. If the wires were inserted the wrong way round the meter would spin forwards faster, right way round it would spin backwards. Unlike other forms of tampering, such as drilling a tiny hole in the underside of the meter to push a pin up against the wheel of the meter to stop it turning, using a black box left no visual evidence, but new designs of meters incorporated clutch mechanisms making it impossible.

*'Illegal Abstraction' Hackney, late 80s*

Hackney Squatters Aid: a bunch of us on a rota basis, two per evening giving weekly advice sessions from a public building, possibly The Old Fire Station but I can no longer remember. As a kind of local branch of ASS (Advisory Service for Squatters) with them to fall back on for more technical/legal resource; advantage of having better local knowledge re emptions and their histories. Particularly trying to spread squatting to those in housing need from e.g. the Turkish/Kurdish refugee community.

*Hackney, early 90s*

Another noise demo. Another pair of hands at the window. Then they're gone, probably pulled back by the guards. Most people don't even know about these places. But they exist, like open wounds on the map of Britain. A place of suffering, of injustice, but also of struggle. Can't count the times I've banged on their overwhelming fences anymore. Now I bang again, startled by my own fantasies of these centres burning down. As violently as the everyday violence they inflict on their prisoners. In one hour or so I'll be back on the train or bus home, whereas the people on the other side of the fence remain in their cells. Their only 'crime' is migration. 'Freedom, Hurriya, Azadi!' The shouting around me sparks more day-dreaming: one day I'll tell my friends and family about the times when these racist detention centres used to exist.

*Colnbrook IRC & Harmondsworth IRC, 2016*

Obviously, the SWP shouldn't be welcome anywhere, but they insist on turning up, so why not combine challenging them and telling them to fuck off with using their resources for better means? Here's how to get as many free placards as you want to use yourself:

1 — Make your posters A3 - Print / Stencil / Handwritten. Bring

them along. Buy some spray mount from an art shop - it goes a long way and is so easy to use.

2 — There's always a pile of SWP placards, and usually only a couple of people supervising them.

3 — Take the placards. This can be done in 2 ways:

A: Grab them, and run. Don't hesitate, just do it. It'll take them a moment to realise what has happened.

B: Approach with smiles, excitedly ask for some placards for you and your friends (point generally towards them) – keep doing this until you have them all.

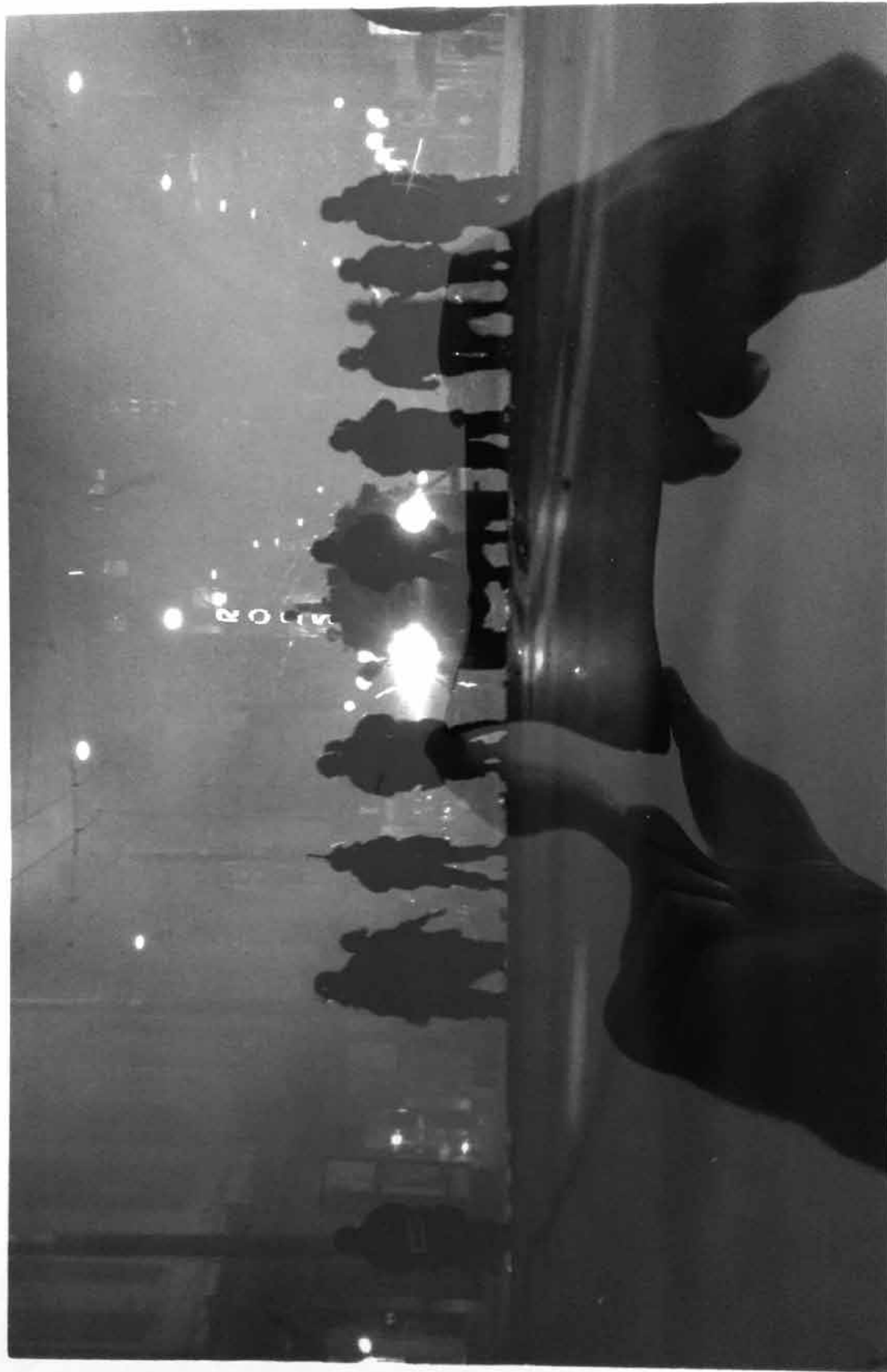
4 — Find a quiet corner (you will get a hostile physical confrontation from violent abusers at this point, so be aware of that before finding yourself in an unsafe situation. These people are scum, remember) and spray mount over the SWP poster, stick yours on, and you're done – no photo op for the SWP and they've covered most of the costs and legwork!

*London, 2016*

High up on the moors, the sweep of the horizon was almost dizzying. A trip to disrupt the so-called 'Glorious Twelfth', start of the grouse shooting season, certainly got us away from the dense intensity of Thatcher era urban politics. Animal rights were a core part of the scene then. Besides, our mate John had a minibus and was willing to make the journey to Yorkshire. That particular day, one hunt supporter was getting particularly pushy, trying to clear us off the moor. With youthful enthusiasm I decided to be as uncooperative as possible. Next thing I know, he opens his hunting jacket, flashes a warrant card at me and then, before I could react, grabbed me in a headlock while telling me I was under arrest. Turns out he was CID. To this day I don't know if he was deployed to protect the toffs or doing it as a favour. Luckily John stepped in. John was tough, level-headed and always on the front line; undemonstrative but effective. He got me out of the headlock and downhill away from the cop. Later he helped another activist 'misplace' a whole load of shot-gun cartridges from under the noses of the shooters. Ironic footnote: years later, it was revealed that 'John' was in fact an undercover office of the Special Demonstration Squad and a central character in the spycops scandal.

FOOTNOTE: years later, it was revealed that 'John' was in fact an undercover office of the Special Demonstration Squad and a central character in the spycops scandal.

*Yorkshire, late eighties*



Nick Cobbing

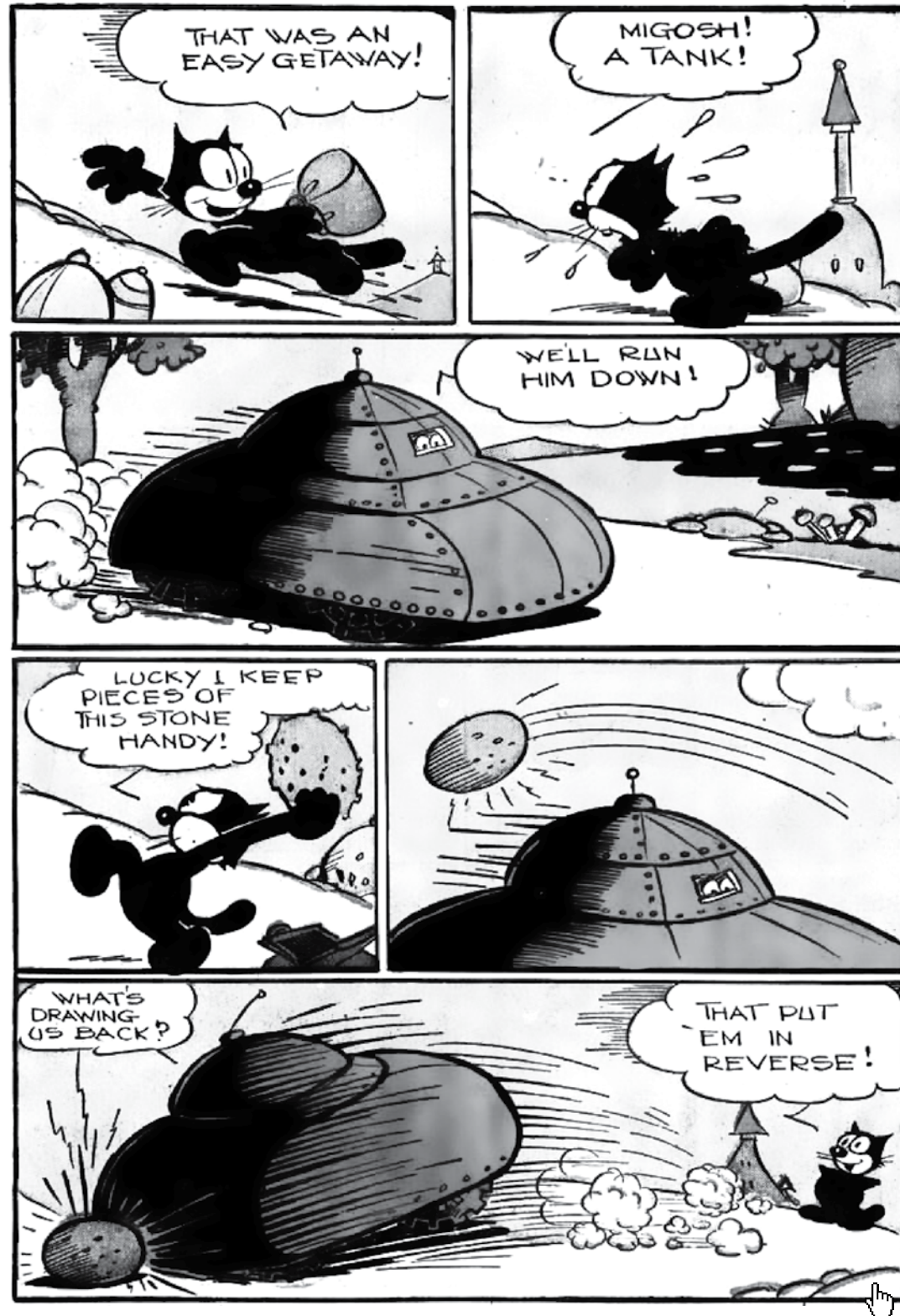
Seattle anti-WTO protests



Darker still.

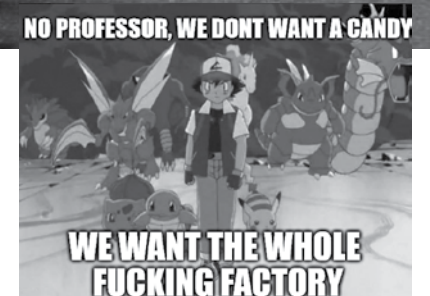






Victory will not go to those who can inflict the most suffering, but to those who can survive the most.

— CrimethInc., Contradictionary







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