Interfere: Journal for Critical Thought and Radical Politics is an international, open access and peer-reviewed journal run by the post-graduate community of the Centre for Applied Philosophy, Politics and Ethics (CAPPE) in the School of Humanities at University of Brighton.

Interfere publishes scholarly articles, interviews, dialogues, political reports and other forms of critical reflection offering a forum to critically analyse the politics of the present.

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1 Taken from the Italian 1920s slogan "siamo tutti antifascisti" (masc.), contemporary activist literature uses the "x" in a gender-neutral slogan for a queer and feminist approach (Spina, 2024: https://revueladeferlante.fr/siamo-tuttx-antifascistx-pour-un-front-queer-antifasciste/)

Editor's note

Natasha Jane Kennedy

This issue began with an observation. In 2024, more than one hundred countries across the world held general elections affording it the nickname, the "year of elections" (John & Sen, 2024). These elections revealed a "swing" towards the far right in Western countries. The National Rally in France, the Reform Party in the UK, and other nationalist parties have gained in popularity, but the re-election of Trump in the USA truly cemented this political shift. Since then, countless discriminatory policies have been adopted, censorship and silencing of voices is rife, and our news and social media feels swamped by disheartening exposures – or erasures – of our current political climate. Antifascist resistance has been witnessed globally, in political demonstrations, academic discussions, and in creative and artistic mobilisations.

The primary object of this issue was to record contemporary responses to the rise of the far right in the world, but as a journal whose goal is to offer critical reflections on the politics of the present, we were equally keen on including a variety of voices in this special issue. Academic journals and discourse often appear as crystallised around articles, or closed-door conferences, producing an ivory tower effect; an institutionalised bubble, but critical analysis, resistance and solidarity come in myriad forms. Artistic production, forms of artivism, craftivism, community engagement and everyday resistance appear as fundamental to political movements and aspirations towards societal change. This idea became a pillar for our issue; a space where both critical and creative responses hold equal value, are showcased and celebrated, and interact with each other to stimulate discourse and resistance, and even become generative of new avenues for discussion. We received essays, articles, interviews, but also photography, music, film, painting, prose, poetry, mixed-media and digital media.

In this sense, our chosen slogan "Siamo tuttx antifascistx", a gender-neutral adaptation of the 1920s Italian slogan "Siamo tutti antifascisti" (Spina, 2024), engages not only with contemporary discourse and resistance around gender politics with its queer and feminist inclusive "x", but also with narratives of solidarity between communities and voices. Indeed, Spina's article is accompanied by an illustration by Hélène Aldeguer created specifically for *La Déferlante*, which also welcomes both critical and creative contributions.

Sarah Maple's 'Inaction' was the perfect piece to represent this special issue. Her mirror featuring the words 'Inaction is a weapon of mass destruction" in bold capital letters became a mantra when working alongside so many invested thinkers and artists over the last year. Faced with this piece, the viewer has no choice but to see themselves reflected behind the words, and ponder how even the smallest acts can be conducive of forms of resistance. Maple claims the following:

I'm not saying we have to all be out there with banners and protest; but I think in small ways, we can be 'active', like calling someone out on something. It may seem like a small thing, but I think small acts can create a cultural shift in some way. Even using social media to spread news and promote causes – things like that! I know we can't all dedicate our time to activism, but it's really easy now to do small things, which can really help.
(Interview with Kate Bryan, 2020)

For us, this special issue regroups an array of these "small things" – or indeed larger things – that individuals and communities, artists and academics do to stand up for what they believe in, and marks an important moment in Interfere's development as a journal for critical thought, in scholarly, public and artistic spheres.

Siamo tuttx antifascistx!

'Inaction', Sarah Maple, 2012
Vinyl on mirror, 60 x 60 cm

A note on languages
When we sent out our call for contributions, we wanted to account for responses in a variety of languages that we, as editors, could reasonably review or delegate for review. The call was sent out as widely as possible, in four different languages. Only one response ended up being in French, and rather than withdraw it for cohesiveness, we decided to keep it in the final version, in alignment with the project of the issue.

Associated readings:

Bryan, Kate. 2020. 'Sarah Maple Calls Out the Artworld'. https://www.sarahmaple.com/text.
John, Mark, and Sumanta Sen. 2024. 'Elections in 2024 Are Going to Reshape Global Politics'. Reuters, July 9. https://www.reuters.com/graphics/GLOBAL-ELECTIONS2024/gdvzmkejkpw/.
Spina, Constant. 2024. 'Vers un front queer antifasciste'. La Déferlante, July 26. https://revueladeferlante.fr/siamo-tuttx-antifascistx-pour-un-front-queer-antifasciste/.

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There was never a truly, fully developed theory of fascism

Theodor W. Adorno, 'Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism' (2020)

How Should We Approach the Understanding of Fascism?
A critical analysis of its definitions

Théo Boucknooghe, Université de Lille

Abstract

With the resurgence of fascism on a global scale came the need for renewed theorization of this phenomenon. The feeling of necessity and urgency of conceptualizing fascism is common to all, yet many approach this task from divergent, and at times contradictory, theoretical frameworks. This article aims to contribute to the development of a comprehensive theory of fascism by critically examining various dominant approaches. Through comparative analysis, I assess the strengths and limitations of each perspective, highlighting how they diverge but also mutually inform one another. While this study aims to clarify the theoretical landscape of fascism, it ultimately doesn't provide a definitive synthesis of these approaches, leaving open the question of how best to articulate the historical manifestations of fascism, its economic determinants, and its psychological underpinnings.

Introduction

The question of how to understand fascism is a complex one. No singular or universally accepted definition exists, and the debate surrounding its conceptualization remains a contentious issue among scholars. The intensity of this debate reflects the profound political stakes involved in defining fascism, as different interpretations often reveal more about the ideological commitments of those producing them than about the phenomenon itself. Indeed, the definition of fascism is inseparable from the dynamics of class struggle that shaped the historical movement of societies. For example, the collective imaginaries often represent the struggle against Nazism as a unified front, but this appearance of unity is sustained by the conceptual vagueness surrounding fascism itself. Indeed, although Churchill and the partisans both appeared to be resisting Nazi Germany, their goals and motivations were vastly different, as they had completely different understandings of fascism. Also, the failure to dismantle fascism's structural foundations after the war stems in part from the marginalization of materialist analyses at the time in favor of a more moral approach to fascism. Its downfall occurred largely on the terms of the liberal bourgeoisie. As a result, the capitalist, colonial, and imperialist infrastructures that nourished fascist regimes remained largely intact. This underscores the urgent need for a rigorous theory of fascism, one capable not only of diagnosing its reappearances but of confronting its underlying conditions and ensuring its thorough eradication.

Furthermore, definitions of fascism are frequently shaped by affective investments and political strategies, which in turn generate accusations of conceptual overreach or, contrarily, reductivism. On the one hand, some argue that the term has been misapplied, leading to an inflationary use that risks diluting its historical and theoretical significance. On the other hand, overly rigid definitions may obscure how fascism operates in different contexts, preventing scholars from recognizing its contemporary manifestations. Theodor Adorno argued that there has never been a coherent theory of fascism because he understood fascism to be a 'conceptless praxis' and an 'unconditional domination', a movement lacking consistent ideological content and theoretical foundations[1]. Its ideological inconsistency renders it resistant to systematic theorization. That is because fascism is never pure; it is always historically and geographically situated. Its historical form can adapt to the state of the society in which it appears. Yet, despite these challenges, the need for a rigorous understanding of fascism remains pressing. Any attempt to develop a theory of fascism must first engage with the fundamental questions of methodological approach. Various disciplines have tackled the question of fascism; it is important to cross-reference them in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding. This paper aims to provide a critical overview of the principal, though not exhaustive, approaches to understanding fascism, tracing their historical development and critically evaluating their respective strengths and limitations. By doing so, I hope to bring greater clarity to the discourse on fascism and to assist others in navigating the complexities involved in theorizing this phenomenon.

I. The *a priori* and *a posteriori* approaches to fascism

Influential historians such as Gilbert Allardyce and Ernst Nolte have questioned the legitimacy of theorizing fascism. In his essay *What Fascism Is Not: Thoughts on the Deflation of a Concept,* Allardyce questions the analytical relevance of the concept of fascism[2]. In contemporary societies, fascism is often

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1   Theodor W. Adorno, *Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020), 16.
2   Gilbert Allardyce, "What Fascism Is Not: Thoughts on the Deflation of a Concept" *The American Historical Review* 84, no. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

considered an accident of history, that the world has moved on, and that this question isn't relevant anymore. Allardyce's skepticism is grounded in two key points: first, the overuse of the term has led to dilution of its meaning; second, the difficulty in isolating a "fascist minimum", a core set of traits common to all fascist movements, casts doubt on the concept's coherence. This issue is aggravated by historical fascisms, dealing with core internal contradictions themselves. Can fascism even be theorized, or is it merely an arbitrary concept retrospectively imposed on heterogeneous historical phenomena? Nolte, commenting on Allardyce's essay, defends the importance of maintaining a general conceptualization of fascism. He concedes its polemical usages but maintains its potential analytical value if conceptualized correctly. He suggests that the internal contradictions of fascism can be one of the elements that define it, as a form of paradoxical concept. Despite his doubts, Allardyce cautiously suggests the possibility of a core definition, calling fascism:

> An international movement, a phenomenon that found purest expression in Italy and Germany, but also appeared in a wide number of other countries. When stripped of national trappings, it is commonly believed, all of these movements had a common characteristic that was the essence of fascism itself.[3]

Allardyce's search for a fascist minimum parallels Roger Griffin's approach, who defined fascism in *The Nature of Fascism* as "palingenetic ultranationalism"[4]. However, we need to distinguish between Nolte's fascist minimum and Griffin's theory of generic fascism. The former seeks the essence of fascism found in all fascist movements, while the latter refers to a broader category, encompassing a variety of movements sharing certain traits, though varying by context. The attempt to define fascism, whether through a minimal essence or a broader typology, inevitably raises the question of how we come to know fascism at all. This leads us to the disciplinary crossroads where fascist theory emerges: the intersection of empirical history and philosophical abstraction. On one side, the historian's task is constrained by fact rigor and source analysis, resulting in a precise but materially limited understanding. On the other hand, philosophical critique aims to reveal underlying structures that transcend empirical data. As Allardyce noted: "The more we know in detail, the less we know in general"[5]. This tension illustrates both the difficulty and necessity of constructing an interdisciplinary theory of fascism. These theoretical challenges may seem discouraging or unnecessary. Some might argue that the already broadly shared

understanding of fascism is sufficient for contemporary resistance. However, I argue the opposite: misidentifying fascism, either by seeing it everywhere or failing to see it at all, can lead to serious errors. More critically, analyzing only its surface expressions, rather than its core logic, is deeply insufficient. For instance, focusing solely on the racism and violence of the far-right might obscure fascism's deeper connection to the crisis of capitalism in its imperial stage and the colonial heritage that it still relies on today.

To continue our analysis of the different approaches to the definition of fascism, some historians restrict the definition of fascism to 20th century regimes, especially Mussolini's Italy and Nazi Germany. This minimalist approach has the benefit of avoiding abusive comparisons with other authoritarian regimes like Stalin's USSR or Latin American dictatorships. Yet, even within this narrow framework, debates persist: should the Franco or Salazar regimes be included in the fascist regimes? This difficulty lies partially in fascist regimes' self-descriptions: often contradictory or disconnected from their actual political practices, these discourses cannot alone resolve the question of classification. Consequently, any attempt to define fascism inevitably relies on criteria that are arbitrary or context dependent. Detaching the definition of fascism from its self-representations, however arbitrary the external criteria may seem, helps dispel persistent misconceptions in contemporary debates. While this may never fully prevent the spread of erroneous narratives about fascist regimes, as is often seen in mainstream media, developing a robust, academically grounded theory that does not rely on fascist self-description, and instead situates fascism in its role of preserving the capitalist system of domination and exploitation, is essential to countering such narratives. Just as Holocaust denial persists today, the vast quantity of historical evidence for that event renders such denial increasingly untenable; anyone expressing even a doubt about the Holocaust is, in good faith, automatically regarded as a denier. Similarly, any discourse, such as the still common claim that Nazi Germany was socialist, would be recognized as contradicting the academically accepted theory and as a fascist sympathizer. Educating a broader audience to fascist studies would also hopefully put an end to the ridiculous parallels between fascist movements and antifascist resistances.

In contrast, broader interpretations conceive fascism not as a closed historical phenomenon but as an ongoing *process of fascisation*, capable of manifesting beyond its "original" contexts. This perspective

invites us to scrutinize the persistence of fascist logics within ostensibly democratic societies and to regard fascism as a latent potentiality embedded in modern political life. These theoretical tensions reflect a deeper divide between what we could call *a posteriori* and *a priori* approaches to fascism.

The *a posteriori* method defines fascism retrospectively, grounded in historical case studies of known fascist regimes. While valuable for understanding fascism's empirical reality, this approach risks confining it to a past epoch, limiting its applicability to contemporary or emergent forms. The other way around, an *a priori* approach seeks to identify the structural invariants of fascism, its essential features independent of historical circumstance. It assumes that although fascism may appear differently across periods, it is driven by constant underlying dynamics that can be theorized as general laws. Thus, the issue is not merely definitional; it raises broader philosophical questions about the conditions of possibility for fascism in history and the need for a conceptual framework capable of accounting for its transformations. From this standpoint, we will explore the respective contributions and limitations of both *a posteriori* and *a priori* theories of fascism.

A posteriori theories of fascism often rest on historical reconstructions aimed at identifying patterns in its emergence. Angelo Tasca, historian and co-founder with Antonio Gramsci of the Italian Communist Party, declared that "our way of defining fascism is to write its history"[6]. While this approach situates fascism within its historical context, it risks confining contemporary analysis to analogies with the past. Yet historical conditions and power relations evolve, making it essential to move beyond static patterns. Furthermore, for a definition to be relevant and useful, it must account for fascism's past, present, and potential future manifestations. This need has led to a relative consensus among contemporary historians favoring definitions that transcend specific historical periods. Conceptualizations by Roger Griffin and Ernst Nolte, for instance, approach fascism as a transhistorical phenomenon. Griffin defines it as "a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultranationalism"[7] emphasising its regenerative and mythological structure. Although critical of the term's overuse in political discourse, blaming primarily Marxist currents for revisionist inflation, Griffin acknowledges Marxism's key contributions, especially in analysing fascism's structural ties to capitalism. Still, he rejects the rigid interpretative

frameworks of the Comintern, whose early readings of fascist agitation in Europe were overly political and mechanistic. This led to an underestimation of fascism's scope, as Sebastian Budgen notes in *Période*:

> Many [Marxists] viewed fascist bands as mere extensions of White counter-revolutionary militias funded by capital. They believed these groups were tools of the capitalist class against the working class. As a result, Marxists were politically unprepared when Mussolini came to power.[8]

Left-wing circles often simplify the definition of fascism, and understandably so; it enables the creation of clear, accessible messages that don't require deep theoretical knowledge and can be conveyed in concise slogans. While the common idea that fascism is a tool of the bourgeoisie to reestablish order is not entirely incorrect, it overlooks crucial aspects of the complex role fascism plays in the political economy of capital. Such simplification can undermine the development of precise and effective resistance by obscuring the actual target.

In opposition to the Comintern, Griffin instead turns to historically grounded Marxist analyses, like those of August Thalheimer and Otto Bauer on Bonapartism, or Lenin's study of the development of capitalism in Russia. Griffin illustrates how definitions of fascism can be biased by ideologies, quoting a 1985 report by the European Economic Community, which defined fascism as:

> A nationalistic attitude essentially hostile to the principles of democracy, to the rule of law and to the fundamental rights and freedoms, as well as the irrational exaltation of a particular community, in relation to which people outside it are systematically excluded.[9]

Griffin sees this definition as revealing more about the liberal ideology of the EEC than about fascism itself. Similarly, the Comintern's theory of "social fascism" reflected less a rigorous analysis than a political strategy aimed at opposing social democrats. While reformist movements may have contributed to fascism's rise, labeling them "social-fascist" was more tactical than analytical. Hence, the boundaries of fascism's theorization emerge as a political battlefield where competing intellectual traditions and worldviews clash. Every definition "carries ideological weight. This should not be underestimated: ideology reflects and serves as a battleground for class struggle. If dominant ideas in society reflect those of the ruling class, then the prevailing definition of

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3   Ibid, 367.
4   Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1993), 26.
5   Gilbert Allardyce, "What Fascism Is Not: Thoughts on the Deflation of a Concept", *The American Historical Review* 84, no. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 368.

6   Angelo Tasca, *The Rise of Italian Fascism* (London: Methuen, 1938) ix.
7   Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1993), 26.
8   Sebastian Budgen, *Les fascismes* (Revue Période). Décembre 2017. http://revueperiode.net/guide-de-lecture-sur-les-fascismes/.
9   Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1993), 8.

fascism will likely be shaped by bourgeois interests. The bourgeoisie will not endorse a definition that implicates its own role in the emergence or support of fascism. Hence, the necessity for resistance to develop a robust theoretical alternative capable of challenging the ideological state apparatus.

While a historical reading of fascism risks rigidity, discarding it entirely undermines theoretical relevance. The Comintern's theorization, though rigid and doctrinaire, attempted, during congresses, to refine its theory of fascism through historiographical analysis. Yet Stalin's ideological control stifled these efforts. August Thalheimer's case is telling. He rejected the "social fascism" theory and returned to Marx and Engels to refine fascism's understanding, drawing on *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and Engels's preface to *The Civil War in France*. He observed structural parallels, though not equivalent, between Bonapartism and fascism:

> The best starting point for an investigation of fascism is, in my opinion, the analysis of Bonapartism (Louis Bonaparte) by Marx and Engels. It should be taken for granted that I do not equate fascism and Bonapartism. But they are related phenomena, having both common and divergent features, both of which require elaboration.[10]

Quoting Marx, he adds:

> The bourgeoisie is thus one of the social foundations of Bonapartism, but in order to save its social existence in a specific historical situation it abandons its political power – it subordinates itself to the 'executive authority which has made itself an independent power'.[11]

This insight, later echoed by Umberto Eco, reveals that fascism arises not merely from an authoritarian coup d'Etat, but from broader socio-economic dynamics. It represents a structural reconfiguration wherein a third power consolidates one class's domination over another. As Eco notes, fascism emerges at the intersection of bourgeois self-preservation and its readiness to surrender political autonomy when its dominance is threatened, ironically endorsing a regime that restricts its own liberties. This is perfectly reflected in fascism's ability to transform classes into masses while simultaneously preserving the class contradictions necessary for capital accumulation and reproduction. This dynamic is described by Ken Kawashima as follows:

> What we could call fascist eclecticism is nothing but a hodge-podge of theory that blurs the boundaries between class contradictions and

mass non-contradictions, and that 'seduce[s] social strata whose aspirations and interests are fundamentally antagonistic.' Fascism thus neutralises (class) antagonisms through a mass-based seduction of attraction and repulsion.[12]

Despite Thalheimer's theoretical rigor and status within the German Communist Party (KPD), his views were marginalized. Only with Georgi Dimitrov's Popular Front strategy in 1935 did some of his ideas gain implicit recognition, but by then, Thalheimer was already exiled in France, fleeing Stalinist purges. Even with its determinist framework, the Comintern's view of fascism as fundamentally anti-communist retains some relevance. Non-Marxist historians like Stanley Payne also emphasize fascism's "negative dimension"[13]. According to Payne, fascism is defined as much by what it rejects, liberalism, socialism, and communism, as by what it affirms. This oppositional stance underpins its reactionary identity. Thus, while retrospective analyses can become overly rigid when confined to specific past regimes, they can also yield valuable insights when they engage broader dynamics and long-term structural logics. Only by adopting such a lens can we move beyond chronicling the past to interrogating the persistent conditions enabling fascism's resurgence.

An *a priori* theory of fascism seeks to identify the phenomenon's structural and invariant elements, its essential characteristics independent of specific historical contexts. While shaped by historical and social conditions, fascism is not reducible to them. Its concrete forms vary, but the underlying logic remains governed by stable principles. These may be theorized as general laws. In this light, Umberto Eco's work is especially relevant. He proposes a list of characteristic signs of fascism, arguing that while their combinations vary historically, the theoretical "knots" connecting them reveal deeper structures. Identifying such invariants provides a framework for a conceptualization of fascism that traces the stable core of fascism while accounting for contextual variation. This method integrates *a posteriori* insights within a broader transhistorical understanding, enabling us to grasp fascism's potential contemporary and future forms. Indeed, fascism is too fluid and volatile to be reduced to a list of fixed traits, a point Eco demonstrates convincingly. Drawing from his direct experience under Mussolini, Eco formulates the idea of *Ur-Fascism*, a primal and eternal form transcending historical context[14]. Rather than a rigid definition, he identifies fourteen features a fascist regime

might exhibit. Crucially, not all must be present for a regime to be recognizably fascist. As Eco observes:

> Fascism became an all-purpose term because one can eliminate from a fascist regime one or more features, and it will still be recognizable as fascist. Take away imperialism from fascism and you still have Franco and Salazar. Take away colonialism and you still have the Balkan fascism of the Ustashes. Add to the Italian fascism a radical anti-capitalism (which never much fascinated Mussolini) and you have Ezra Pound. Add a cult of Celtic mythology and the Grail mysticism (completely alien to official fascism) and you have one of the most respected fascist gurus, Julius Evola.[15]

Eco's formulation has a key advantage: it avoids historicist reduction and portrays fascism as polymorphic and insidious, capable of reemerging in novel guises without identical socio-economic conditions. His fourteen signs serve not as rigid criteria, but as warning signals. Eco argues that fascism is defined less by the sum of its features, which may even contradict each other, but more by structural "knots", deeper points of coherence between elements that allow the phenomenon to reconfigure and persist. This aspect of Eco's work is often overlooked in contemporary debates. People tend to reference his list of fourteen traits to either label something as fascist based on how many traits it exhibits or to reject the label due to the absence of certain features. Yet the core of Eco's argument lies not in counting characteristics, but in identifying the structural "knots" that link them together. Michael A. Peters echoes this perspective. Drawing on Brad Evans and Julian Reid, he contends:

> The problem of fascism today cannot simply be addressed as that of the potential or variable return and reconstitution of fascism, as if fascism had ever, or could ever, 'disappear', only to return and be made again, like some spectral figure from the past. The problem of fascism cannot, we believe, be represented or understood as that of an historically constituted regime, particular system of power relations, or incipient ideology. Fascism, we believe, is as diffuse as the phenomenon of power itself.[16]

Thus, a purely historical lens risks overlooking contemporary forms that deviate from past archetypes. A more dynamic methodology is needed to apprehend fascism's substructures. As Nicolas Lebourg notes regarding France:

> There is thus a methodological trap in the debate on French fascism: arguing over the quantitative aspect of groups or the presence or absence of a leader amounts to trying to align the French case with those where fascism led to a mass move-

ment and, subsequently, to a state. This assumes that only this form—the victorious fascism—is the one that historically exists. But do we require other political movements to succeed in seizing power in order to acknowledge their existence?[17]

By detaching fascism from a strictly historical framework, one opens the possibility of apprehending it as an autonomous phenomenon, governed by its own logic or rationality, rather than merely as a product of contingent historical circumstances. This methodological shift allows for a richer analysis of fascism, including dimensions that have remained invisible within strictly historical definitions.

II. The deflation of the concept

Gilbert Allardyce highlighted the dangers of an inflationary use of the concept of fascism. He argued that the proliferation of theories of fascism largely stems from conflating fascism with the broader far-right movement. While fascism belongs to the far-right ideological family, it is a mistake to equate all far-right expressions with fascism. Such conflation undermines analytical clarity and, according to Allardyce's call for conceptual deflation, the term needs to be restricted to precise historical configurations to preserve its theoretical relevance. This demand for a strict definition also appears among rigorous Marxist-Leninist theorists who, adhering to historical materialism, define fascism as capital's specific response to an organic crisis. A regime is deemed fascist only if it represents an authoritarian reorganization of the bourgeois state in reaction to a real or perceived threat to the established order, the bourgeoisie's domination. Fascism is thus not an arbitrary tightening of power, but a strategic bourgeois reaction to an intensified class struggle, driven by capital's declining rate of profit. As long as the class balance remains favourable to the bourgeoisie, any authoritarian shifts are seen as marginal adjustments of capitalist order, not genuinely fascist dynamics. According to Lenin, under capitalism in its imperial stage, the political system becomes increasingly reactionary and repressive. However, this alone does not fully explain the fascist transformation of society. To identify the rise of fascism, we must look beyond the deterioration of democracy and examine the symptoms of a crisis of capitalism in its imperialist phase.

From this perspective, even authoritarian or quasi-totalitarian forms taken by liberal democracies

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10   August Thalheimer, "On Fascism," *Telos*, no. 40 (1979): 95.

11   Ibid, 95.

12   Ken Kawashima, "Fascism is a Reaction to Capitalist Crisis in the Stage of Imperialism," *Historical Materialism*, March 31, 2021, https://www.historicalmaterialism.org/fascism-is-a-reaction-to-capitalist-crisis-in-the-stage-of-imperialism/.

13   Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism: Comparison and Definition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980).

14   Umberto Eco, *How to Spot a Fascist* (London: Harvill Secker, 2020).

15   Ibid, 10.

16   Michael A. Peters, "'The Fascism in Our Heads': Reich, Fromm, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari – The Social Pathology of Fascism in the 21st Century," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 54, no. 9 (2022): 1278.

17   Nicolas Lebourg, «Interpréter le fascisme : débats et perspectives,» in *Fascismes ibériques ? Sources, définitions, pratiques*, ed. Christine Lavail and Manuelle Peloille (Nanterre: Presses de l'Université Paris Ouest, 2014), 25. Translation by the author.

under specific conditions cannot be equated with fascism. Political violence, frequently cited as a fascist characteristic, is likewise insufficient to define fascism. For advocates of a strict Marxist definition of fascism, such violence, whether state-led or by far-right paramilitaries, remains an ordinary instrument of class domination. Therefore, none of the empirical features typically associated with far-right movements: violence, extreme nationalism, or authoritarianism, is sufficient on its own to define fascism. Rather, fascism must be understood as a historically specific form of authoritarian capitalist reorganization in times of hegemonic crisis. A central issue for Marxist traditions is the constitutive link between fascism and bourgeois democracy. Instead of viewing them as radically opposed regimes, fascism should be conceived as an immanent potential of the liberal-capitalist order, not merely its negation. Liberal democracy functions as a legitimation process for bourgeois domination but also as a means of bringing fascist regimes to power, as shown by the historian Johann Chapoutot[18].

Fascism must thus be approached from its historical function: an authoritarian restructuring of society when class domination shatters due to crises of legitimacy or rising subversive forces. Reducing fascism to its institutional manifestations (party, regime) falsely assumes the political coherence it lacks. To grasp fascism as a political phenomenon is to confront its radical nature, its capacity to dissolve classical political categories. Though it may rise through democratic mechanisms, its political practice exceeds liberal governmentality. Fascism is characterized by its ability to suspend the traditional political framework when it hinders its goals. Understanding fascism through conventional political categories misses its essence: a constellation of discursive, affective, and symbolic practices aimed at violently reshaping the social order. This is why Theodor W. Adorno's analyses remain relevant. For him, fascism is not a negation of modern society's values but its product, an expression of instrumental reason turned into a tool of domination. A rationalised form of barbarism, where reason ceases to liberate and instead subjugates. Fascism's ideological contradictions and doctrinal shifts are not theoretical weaknesses but signs of strategic performativity. Fascism is not coherent, but it is effective. It mobilizes not through convincing arguments but through affect, catalyses nationalism, and channels collective impulses. This makes it deeply dangerous. Stanley G. Payne similarly stresses fascism's doctrinal indeterminacy, noting how Italian attempts to create a fascist International failed due to the lack of a co-

herent ideology or unified doctrine. This difficulty reflects the disjunction between theory and practice in Italian fascism, the absence of foundational texts, and profound divergences. The only common feature between interwar European fascisms was radical nationalism, though variably defined. Thus, fascism resists stable characterization and is better understood in terms of its function within the crisis of capitalism. In sum, fascism cannot be treated as a traditional political current, for it escapes the usual framework of political thought. It lacks a stable institutional or ideological form. Fascism arises from specific political crises and pursues a specific goal; these are its only constant features. Its mode of operation exceeds politics in the narrow sense. Fascism tends to erase traditional divides between state and society, public and private. As such, it cannot be analysed within conventional political science frameworks but must be approached as a project of radical social reengineering.

The notion of fascism as a "third way" between Marxism and liberalism has served as an attempt to account for its political incoherence. It is presented as a synthesis of revolutionary aspirations and authoritarian, reactionary reflexes, a dual movement aimed both at a "new order" and the restoration of a mythical past. Zeev Sternhell belongs to this "third way" theory. He insists that fascism must be traced back to deep intellectual and cultural roots, extending as far as the French Revolution. As he writes:

> The search for a third way between liberalism and Marxism dates back to the second half of the 19th century and is part of a major revolt against the modernist legacy of the Enlightenment. It is then that the idea takes form that both liberalism and Marxist socialism are symptoms of the same decline. The rejection of decadence merges with the rejection of modernity and the invention of an alternative.[19]

Fascism thus appears as an ideological response to the failed promises of modernity. The Dreyfus Affair already revealed fissures in republican universalism and the rule of law, accompanied by nationalist resurgence, antisemitism, and paramilitary mobilization, a proto-fascist moment driven by fear of pluralism and desire for organic unity. World War I further shattered Enlightenment ideals, through its rationalized use of mass violence and subsequent moral collapse. In this civilizational crisis, Mussolini's fascism arose as an attempt to reimpose social order. The Great Depression gave the final blow to liberal modernity, with mass unemployment, social instability, and institutional discrediting paving the way for Hitler's rise in 1933. Fascism then emerges

as a form of counter-modernity: authoritarian, mythic, and radically anti-universalist. Yet it would be reductive to cast fascism as purely anti-modern. While it denounces Enlightenment ideals and democratic universalism, fascism preserves and intensifies core features of modernity: its technocratic rationalism, its myth of progress, and its cult of efficiency. These are instrumentalised by fascism, as seen in Nazi propaganda, which glorifies science and technological innovation while subordinating them to totalitarian ends, monumental architecture, militarized economy, and the "medicalisation" of racism. This is what Horkheimer and Adorno call instrumental reason: rationality stripped of emancipatory content and employed as a tool of oppression. Moreover, fascism invents new myths: race, homogeneous eternal people, charismatic leaders. These myths do not necessarily oppose modernity *per se,* they rather represent a perverted and mythologised form of it. Thus, fascism appears less as an anti-modern movement than as an alternative or corrupted form of modernity, drawing upon pre-modern, mythic, and even esoteric imaginaries. The Nazi regime developed a mystique of blood and race, infused with pagan rites and symbolisms from a mythologized Germanic past. As Emilio Gentile argues, fascism constitutes a "political religion," aiming to spiritually transform the individual via racial, national, or imperial transcendence[20]. In reaction to modern individualism and disenchantment, fascism reclaims a lost spiritual unity. This recourse to the irrational is not a negation of modernity but an attempt to fill the void left by its decline. Georges Valois captured this dual heritage when he linked fascism to both Jacobinism and the existential rupture of World War I[21]. It is, in this sense, a modernity in crisis that produces its own sacral forms and political myths. Sternhell's reading of fascism as a dissident modernity does not fundamentally contradict the Marxist thesis: that fascism arises as a political response to structural crises of capitalism, itself a product of modernity. As Sternhell states:

> The search for a third way is a natural response to the crisis of liberalism and Marxism. A deep conviction that liberal values and institutions lead to decadence is accompanied by an equally strong belief in the harmfulness of Marxism—not just as political systems, but as failed cultural futures.[22]

From this angle, fascism emerges not merely against communism, but from the breakdown of hegemonies, liberal or revolutionary, within a capitalism rendered unstable by its internal contradictions. Fascism, like

capitalism, contains inherent contradictions, like tension between modernity and anti-modernity as outlined above. It is not a monolithic phenomenon but rather a complex formation shaped by antagonistic social relations. A failure to critically engage with this tension risks misleading antifascist resistance. Consequently, antifascist praxis cannot be reduced to merely opposing fascism's manifest expressions, it must also target the imperialist roots of capitalism, particularly its colonial dimensions, in order to prevent any recurrence of fascism.

The 20th century saw this instability deepen, with neither bourgeois nor proletarian forces able to stabilize the social order. Into this vacuum, fascism entered, violently reasserting social control without altering the foundations of capitalist domination. As Sternhell notes, fascism is "a political revolution that claims to be a moral and spiritual revolution, but one that never entails economic or social structural changes"[23]. Thus, the "third way" is not a true alternative to capitalism or Marxism, but a mode of capitalist reproduction during systemic paralysis. It offers symbolic and affective reordering without challenging material hierarchies. Fascism must therefore be understood as a hybrid formation, modern and anti-modern, revolutionary in appearance, yet ultimately preserving the conditions of capitalist continuity.

III. The contribution of Marxism

Marxism has often been criticised for its deterministic interpretations of fascism, particularly in Comintern discourses during the Stalinist era, which portrayed fascism as an inevitable stage in capitalism's collapse toward communism. This teleological reading served Stalin's ideological ends, presenting the USSR as both the shield against fascism and the liberator from capitalist exploitation. However, this mechanistic and linear view reduces Marx's original dialectical method. While Marx did highlight capitalism's authoritarian tendencies in times of crisis, he never theorized fascism as a necessary phase toward communism. In fact, as pointed out by Ken Kawashima, fascism can actually delay the collapse of capitalism in its final stage as fascism emerges not merely as a response to crisis, but as a mechanism to manage, displace, and prolong that crisis by neutralizing class antagonisms.[24] A break from this deter-

18   Johann Chapoutot, *Les irresponsables. Qui a porté Hitler au pouvoir ?* (Paris : Gallimard, 2025).
19   Zeev Sternhell, « La troisième voie fasciste ou la recherche d'une culture politique alternative », dans *Ni gauche, ni droite*. (Pessac : Maison des Sciences de l'Homme d'Aquitaine, 1995), 17. Translation by the author.

20   Emilio Gentile, *La religion fasciste : La sacralisation de la politique dans l'Italie fasciste*, trad. Julien Gayrard (Paris : Perrin, 2002).
21   Georges Valois, *Le fascisme* (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, 1927).
22   Zeev Sternhell, « La troisième voie fasciste ou la recherche d'une culture politique alternative », dans *Ni gauche, ni droite*. (Pessac : Maison des Sciences de l'Homme d'Aquitaine, 1995), 29. Translation by the author.
23   Ibid, 18.
24   Ken Kawashima, "Fascism is a Reaction to Capitalist Crisis in the Stage of Imperialism," *Historical Materialism,*

minism invites a more contextual approach. By detaching fascism from a strict historical framework, it becomes possible to conceptualize it as a relatively autonomous phenomenon. The challenge is thus to transcend economic reductionism and assess fascism's autonomy as a philosophical object. Angelo Tasca observed:

> The true originality (of fascism) lies in the determining and relatively autonomous function of tactics at the expense of a program [...] Fascism fights more a battle of positions than one of principles.[25]

Fascism, then, is less defined by ideological coherence than by its strategic exploitation of crises in bourgeois democracy, functioning as a conquering movement. The autonomy of fascism is not absolute nor detached from any context. Fascism is a form of contingent potentiality. This potentiality can be enabled, yet not systematically, by structural crises. It is one possible, but never inevitable, outcome of capitalism's contradictions. Fascism must thus be seen as a structural possibility within capitalism, a form of "becoming-fascist", but not its necessary product. It is neither capitalism's direct outcome nor simply an instrument of the bourgeoisie. Capitalism creates the conditions for fascism through its crises without determining the time of its emergence or form. The crisis generated by class antagonisms, rooted in the capital–labour relation, manifests itself through an intensification of the contradictions inherent to the capitalist mode of production. The proletariat is thus subjected to a dual pressure: on the one hand, the increasingly violent mechanisms of surplus value extraction; on the other, the rise of fascist tendencies as a repressive response to systemic crisis. In such a conjuncture, the proletariat experiences a deepening of its material and ideological subjugation. However, this intensification of antagonisms also reinforces the conditions for the emergence of revolutionary subjectivity. In this sense, resistance to fascism cannot be separated from the struggle against the alienating conditions of capitalist accumulation and extraction of surplus value from material, intellectual, and reproductive labour.

This view that fascism is a historically situated autonomous force departs from the deterministic readings of the Third International, such as Georgi Dimitrov's, which presented fascism as the tool of the monopolistic bourgeoisie in times of crisis. Nic-os Poulantzas, in *Fascisme et dictature* (1974), argues instead that fascism is not an inevitable response to capitalist crisis, but one possible configuration within imperialist capitalism[26]. For Poulantzas, fascism is a specific form of the state of exception: "Fascism is a form of state and regime at the extreme 'limit' of the capitalist state."[27]. Thus, fascism lies at one end of the continuum of capitalist domination, alongside other authoritarian forms that are not necessarily fascist. In later work, Poulantzas further distinguishes fascism from what he calls "authoritarian statism", a centralization of state power and an erosion of the remaining democratic mechanisms:

> The emergence of authoritarian statism cannot be identified with either a new fascism or a process of fascisation. This state is neither a new form of exceptional state nor a transitional phase: it represents the new 'democratic' form of the bourgeois republic in its current phase.[28]

Hence, the increasing authoritarianism of today's capitalist state must be interpreted within the democratic framework, without leaning necessarily into the fascist paradigm. This distinction helps avoid diluting the specificity of fascism in an overly broad authoritarian category. Early Marxist interpretations posited that the bourgeoisie, under proletarian pressure, makes a rational cost-benefit calculation in delegating power to fascism, a tactical surrender to preserve capitalist order. In this view, the bourgeoisie remains the historical subject in the process of fascisation of society. In contrast, Trotsky saw fascism as an autonomous mass movement, constituted primarily of the petty bourgeoisie and segments of the proletariat. This composition explains its contradictions:

> Fascism, as a plebeian movement, can express anti-bourgeois, anti-capitalist, and anti-plutocratic criticisms. It is the expression of a class trapped between capital and the proletariat, articulating contradictory policies.[29]

Thus, fascism is not simply an elite tool but a political force, exploiting systemic crises. It asserts itself as an independent actor in power struggles. Consequently, liberal authoritarian drift cannot be equated with a fascist trajectory. Rather, authoritarianism may be a bourgeois reaction to contain rising fascist pressure, not just from below (the proletariat), but also from an autonomous fascist surge. It is crucial, then, to distinguish between two dynamics: the state's authoritarian hardening as crisis management, and the fascist drive for hegemony. Fascism emerges as a contingent possibility, not a historical necessity, shaped by the specific balance of forces within capitalism. In a capitalist crisis, three main dynamics typically arise: (1) a class-conscious workers' movement advancing a revolutionary project; (2) a fascist surge seeking power through structural ruptures; and (3) a bourgeoisie adapting its governing mechanisms under pressure from both previously mentioned. Rather than presupposing fascism as the default outcome, the most likely structural tendency in deep crisis may be the emergence of some form of dictatorship aimed at stabilization. This can take three distinct forms:

1. Proletarian dictatorship: a transitional form seeking to reorganize production towards communism.

2. Bourgeois dictatorship: an authoritarian radicalization preserving class society through permanent exception.

3. Fascist dictatorship: an autonomous form seeking total control over all life forms and a restructured social order.

Fascism is thus neither a restoration of bourgeois order nor a socialist revolution, but an authoritarian recomposition of the socio-economic structures grounded in an anti-liberal and anti-Marxist synthesis. This hybrid nature merits deeper analysis. Rather than a mere defence of existing interests, fascism involves an active transformation of the state apparatus. It begins as a power-seeking movement and, once in control, pursues the total reorganization of society. This distinguishes it theoretically from other revolutionary models: the communist revolution aims to transform production relations, the liberal revolution to adjust legal-political structures, but the fascist revolution seeks to reshape the human being itself. While Marx focused on economic structures as determining human subjectivity within the capital-labour relation, fascism pursues a deeper alienation, psychic, emotional, and symbolic. It aims to integrate the individual into collective representations that reshape instincts, desires, and affections. As Zeev Sternhell explains:

> Whereas liberalism and Marxism see fundamental problems as economic, fascism sees them as psychological and cultural [...] The fascist revolution is a political one that claims to be spiritual and moral, without implying economic or social structural change.[30]

Fascism's goal is not the birth of a new society through changes in social relations of production, but of a new community, and above all, a new individual, conceived as a social animal within an organic whole. This echoes Roger Griffin's notion of fascism as *palingenetic ultranationalism*, a mythic national rebirth through moral and cultural purification. If fascism seeks to transform the human being beyond economic determinism, classical Marxist analysis appears partially disarmed. As Wilhelm Reich noted in *The Mass Psychology of Fascism:* "The province of mass psychology, then, begins precisely at the point where the immediate socio-economic explanation fails."[31]. Thus, a complete understanding of fascism requires a framework that transcends, but does not discard, economism, incorporating affective, psychological, and symbolic dimensions of domination.

To further understand fascism, we must pause to examine a central concept: ideology, which, depending on its definition, can significantly shape the interpretation of fascism. Two main conceptions emerge. First, in the classical sense, ideology refers to a set of representations, beliefs, and values characteristic of an individual, group, or society. It structures how people relate to the world and their conditions of existence. If fascism aims to transform the human being, emotionally, morally, and existentially, it can indeed be seen as an ideology: a totalising system carrying an anthropological project. Gramsci sees fascism as a passive revolution, a top-down restructuring enabled by the failure of progressive forces to build a counter-hegemony. Fascism unifies ideology around strong symbols: nation, order, virility, spirituality, forming a new historical bloc subordinating the interests of dominated classes to a supposed national unity. Gramsci writes: "The great popular masses have detached themselves from traditional ideologies [...] but have not yet created their own. This vacuum allows dominant ideologies to reorganize."[32] Fascism fills this void not with programmatic clarity, but through mythical politics, mobilizing collective imagination around identity and imaginary enemies.

Second, from Marx's perspective, ideology is structural: a system of beliefs and practices legitimizing and reproducing domination, particularly capitalist production. For Marx, ideology is false consciousness, a veil obscuring material social relations. As he states: "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness."[33] Thus, dominant

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March 31, 2021, https://www.historicalmaterialism.org/fascism-is-a-reaction-to-capitalist-crisis-in-the-stage-of-imperialism/.

25   Collectif, *Fascismes, un siècle mis en abîme* (Paris : Syllepse, 2000), 31. Article extrait de *Contre le fascisme* (Genève, 1970). Translation by the author.

26   Nicos Poulantzas, *Fascisme et dictature. La Troisième Internationale face au fascisme* (Paris: Seuil, 1974).

27   Ibid, 63. Translation by the author.

28   Nicos Poulantzas, *L'État, le pouvoir, le socialisme* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1978), 231-232. Translation by the author.

29   Sebastian Budgen, *Les fascismes* (Revue Période). Décembre 2017. Translation by the author

30   Zeev Sternhell, « La troisième voie fasciste ou la recherche d'une culture politique alternative », dans *Ni gauche, ni droite*. (Pessac : Maison des Sciences de l'Homme d'Aquitaine, 1995), 18. Translation by the author.

31   Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, trans. Theodore P. Wolfe (New York: Orgone Institute Press, 1946), 16.

32   Antonio Gramsci, *Cahiers de prison. Anthologie*, éd. Jean-Yves Frétigné et Jean-Claude Zancarini (Paris : Gallimard, 2021). Translation by the author.

33   Karl Marx, *Contribution à la critique de l'économie politique (1859), «Avant-propos»*, trad. G. Fondu et J. Quétier (Paris :

ideology reflects the ruling class's interests, rooted in economic structures. A central contradiction arises: if fascism claims to transform the human subject fundamentally, Marxist logic demands a transformation of production relations, the material base of subjectivity. Yet, fascist regimes maintained capitalist structures, merely overlaying them with authoritarianism and nationalism. This paradox is noted by Gilbert Allardyce, who challenges the unity of the concept "fascism," asserting:

> Only individual things are real; everything abstracted from them, whether concepts or universals, exists solely in the mind. There is no such thing as fascism. There are only the men and movements that we call by that name.[34]

Ideas cannot be divorced from their material base, implying that a total ideological project demands a transformation of production relations. Thus, we must confront a key paradox: can fascism claim a total transformation of man and society while preserving bourgeois-capitalist economic foundations? To address this, we must refine our concept of fascist ideology. Roger Griffin warns against reducing fascism to a traditional ideology. First, this ignores the material conditions that made its emergence possible, disconnecting it from history and social context. He writes:

> To search for a minimal definition of fascism based on its ideology is to lose sight of the material socio-economic conditions and objective political context which formed the preconditions for the genesis and structure of its particular manifestations.[35]

Second, fascism lacks a stable doctrine or canonical thinkers. It is intellectually eclectic, "a rag-bag of third-hand ideas", says Griffin. Imposing coherence on it risks misrepresenting its irrational core. Third, viewing fascism ideologically risks moral and methodological failure by abstracting from its violent outcomes (war, purges, genocide, ...). As Griffin notes:

> It detracts attention from concrete events which constitute the real 'nature of fascism' and moreover euphemizes the immense human suffering caused when nebulous fascist ideals and policies become translated into gruesome political realities.[36]

Fascism, then, is less an ideology than a performative politics, a conjunctural dynamic, an affective mobilization, and a reaction to capitalist crisis. It operates as mythic rhetoric, not doctrinal coherence, a technology of power grounded in violence, authority, and nationalist regeneration. Its "revolution" is existential, not ideological.

IV. Psychoanalysis in fascist theory

To address the paradox: how can fascism claim to transform humanity while preserving capitalist class structures? We turn back to Wilhelm Reich, who critiqued traditional Marxism's limitations whilst keeping a Marxist framework. Alongside Erich Fromm, Reich explores how fascism triggers psychological needs, not just economic interests. Fromm, in *Fear of Freedom*, argues that Hitler became a symbol of "Germany", making dissent a form of existential exclusion. Fear of isolation, combined with weak moral principles, explains popular loyalty to fascism[37]. For Reich, orthodox Marxism mistakenly idealizes class consciousness as purely rational. The Comintern, for instance, failed to account for why large segments of the proletariat supported fascism despite their high level of class consciousness. Guillaume Sibertin-Blanc notes that by making the correlation between the political capacity of the masses and their 'awareness' of their 'interests' and 'conditions of existence' the traditional Marxist approach:

> identifies those conditions themselves with a social relation conceived as a pure structure of production and exchange, ultimately reducing the ideological factor to a mere reflection or presupposition of this structure.[38]

Before adding that:

> the key issue is to understand that ideology is not merely the expression of economic rationality, nor the direct expression of political interests and groupings determined by this rationality, but rather its irrational other, as Reich puts it—precisely that which class struggle operates upon and seeks to rationalize, though never fully or evenly succeeds in doing so.[39]

Reich reframes ideology as an autonomous material force, embedded in the collective unconscious and affective structures. It shapes subjectivity at the level of desire, not just rational recognition. He writes:

> There is an important relationship between the economic structure of a society and the mass-psychological structure of its members. It is not merely that the ruling ideology is the ideology of the ruling class. What is more important for the solution of practical problems is the fact that the contradictions in the economic structure of a society are also anchored in the mass-psychological structure of its members. Otherwise, the fact could not be understood that the economic laws of a society can have practical effects only through the activity of the masses who are subject to them.[40]

Fascism, for Reich, is not merely political domination, it is a *Weltanschauung*, a worldview shaping perceptions of love, labour, and human relations: "Fascism is not a political party but a specific Weltanschauung and a specific attitude toward people, toward love and work."[41] This view sees ideology not just as mystification, but as a productive force. Power not only represses, but it also creates social reality. The appeal of fascism lies in how it captures and mobilises libidinal investments, integrating psychology into material analysis. Other thinkers followed similar paths. Bataille, for example, combined Freudian mass psychology with classical sociology[42]. Walter Benjamin, in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, argues that:

> The growing proletarianization of modern man and the increasing formation of masses are two aspects of the same process. Fascism attempts to organize the newly created proletarian masses without affecting the property structure which the masses strive to eliminate. Fascism sees its salvation in giving these masses not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves. The masses have a right to change property relations; Fascism seeks to give them an expression while preserving property. The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life. The violation of the masses, whom Fascism, with its Führer cult, forces to their knees, has its counterpart in the violation of an apparatus which is pressed into the production of ritual values.[43]

Fascism expresses the masses' desire for change, but diverts it through symbolic channels, preserving capitalist property relations. Likewise, Sigmund Freud's 1922 essay *Mass Psychology and the Analysis of the "I"*[44], alongside Theodor Adorno's 1951 essay *Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda*[45], further developed the theoretical groundwork for understanding the psycho-social dimensions of fascism. The Frankfurt School, through its transdisciplinary approach, profoundly reshaped Marxism, revealing how fascism merges economic contradictions with affective structures. As Jean-Marie Brohm notes, its value lies in fusing philosophical analysis with empirical research[46]. Freudo-Marxist thought evolved further with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, notably in *Anti-Oedipus*[47] and *A Thousand Plateaus*[48]. They reject Freud and Marx's orthodoxies, proposing a radically original theory of fascist desire. In the preface to *Anti-Oedipus*, entitled "Introduction to the Non-Fascist Life", Michel Foucault encapsulates the critique made against the historical approaches to understanding fascism. He also summarises the central argument proposed by Deleuze and Guattari regarding the desire for fascism, which addresses the paradox of the German working class in the 1930s. Foucault writes:

> The major enemy, the strategic adversary, is fascism (whereas Anti-Oedipus' opposition to the others is more of a tactical engagement). And not only historical fascism, the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini—which was able to mobilise and use the desire of the masses so effectively—but also the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behaviour, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us.[49]

Here, Foucault touches upon a central concern of the Freudo-Marxist tradition, which Guattari also developed in his essay *Everybody wants to be a fascist*[50]: the internalization of fascist desire, a desire that is not solely constructed through external historical forces but that also manifests the subject's inner relationship to power, authority, and self-dominance. This conceptualisation of fascism not only deepens the understanding of the mechanisms behind the fascist phenomenon but also raises broader questions about the complexities of desire and human agency

Les Éditions sociales, 2014), 63–64.

34   Gilbert Allardyce, "What Fascism Is Not: Thoughts on the Deflation of a Concept," *The American Historical Review* 84, no. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, April 1979), 368.

35   Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1993), 14.

36   Ibid, 14.

37   Erich Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1942).

38   Guillaume Sibertin-Blanc, "A Scientia Sexualis to Confront the Fascist Mystique," in *Psychoanalysis, the Other Materialism, Actual Marx* 59, no. 1 (2016): 54-55.

39   Ibid, 54-55.

40   Wilhelm Reich, The Mass Psychology of Fascism, trans. Theodore P. Wolfe (New York: Orgone Institute Press, 1946), 18.

41   Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, trans. Theodore P. Wolfe (New York: Orgone Institute Press, 1946), 19.

42   Georges Bataille, "The Psychological Structure of Fascism," *New German Critique*, no. 16 (Winter 1979).

43   Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 19.

44   Sigmund Freud, *Mass Psychology and Other Writings*, trans. J. A. Underwood (London: Penguin Books, 2004).

45   Theodor W. Adorno, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda," in *Psychoanalysis and the Social Sciences*, vol. 3, ed. G. Róheim (New York: International Universities Press, 1951).

46   Jean-Marie Brohm, «Sur la psychologie de masse du fascisme,» *Mauvais temps*, no. 6/7 (March 2000).

47   Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (New York: Viking Press, 1977).

48   Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

49   Michel Foucault, "Preface," to *Anti-Oedipus*, by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), XIII.

50   Félix Guattari, «Everybody Wants to Be a Fascist,» in *Chaosophy*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007).

within political and social life. Deleuze and Guattari start by acknowledging the influence of the early Freudo-Marxists, such as Reich, on the study of fascism as something that is not imposed passively on the masses but something that the masses actively want: Deleuze and Guattari emphasise Wilhelm Reich's crucial contribution: that the masses actively desired fascism. They quote:

> Reich is at his profoundest as a thinker when he refuses to accept ignorance or illusion on the part of the masses as an explanation of fascism, and demands an explanation that will take their desires into account, an explanation formulated in terms of desire: no, the masses were not innocent dupes; at a certain point, under a certain set of conditions, they wanted fascism, and it is this perversion of the desire of the masses that needs to be accounted for.[51]

Yet, they critique Reich for reintroducing a rational/irrational binary, assigning irrational desire to psychoanalysis while treating production as rational. Instead, they propose a non-fascist life, where desire is liberated from domination. Fascism is not an error, but a product of how desire, power, and social production intertwine. It must be understood not as illusion or coercion alone, but as a libidinal economy that seduces the masses into their own domination. This overview of various Freudo-Marxist theories reveals that this approach to fascism is often neglected in contemporary debates. While psychoanalysis has a documented history of problematic practices, as criticized by thinkers such as Foucault, Deleuze, Guattari, their contributions went further: they sought to displace the dysfunctional Freudian framework with a more materialist understanding of the psyche. Despite this, the radical left has frequently overlooked the psychological dimensions of fascism, limiting its analysis to purely economic or structural factors. However, fascism cannot be fully understood without accounting for its libidinal investments and affective mobilisations that a critical psychoanalytic perspective can illuminate.

Conclusion

The path toward a general theory of fascism remains fraught with challenges, notably due to the rapidly evolving nature of capitalist economies. As capitalism advances in its final, imperialist stage, the intensification of its internal contradictions gives rise to unforeseen crises, crises that are likely to shape the conditions for the resurgence of fascism. Fascism is therefore not a stable concept and is highly sensitive to structural changes, which makes its study more challenging. Nevertheless, developing a shared methodological framework is essential. This requires disentangling ideological biases, striking a careful balance between historical specificity and philosophical abstraction, and avoiding both definitional inflation and reductive minimalism. Fascism remains a notoriously elusive and paradoxical concept; one whose misinterpretation carries profound political risks. A rigorous, interdisciplinary approach is thus not merely desirable, but necessary.

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51   Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 38.

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NO OTHER LANDERS: Filming and screening against oppression and silence

Liat Savin Ben Shoshan & Sigal Barnir, Bezalel academy of Arts and Design, Jerusalem
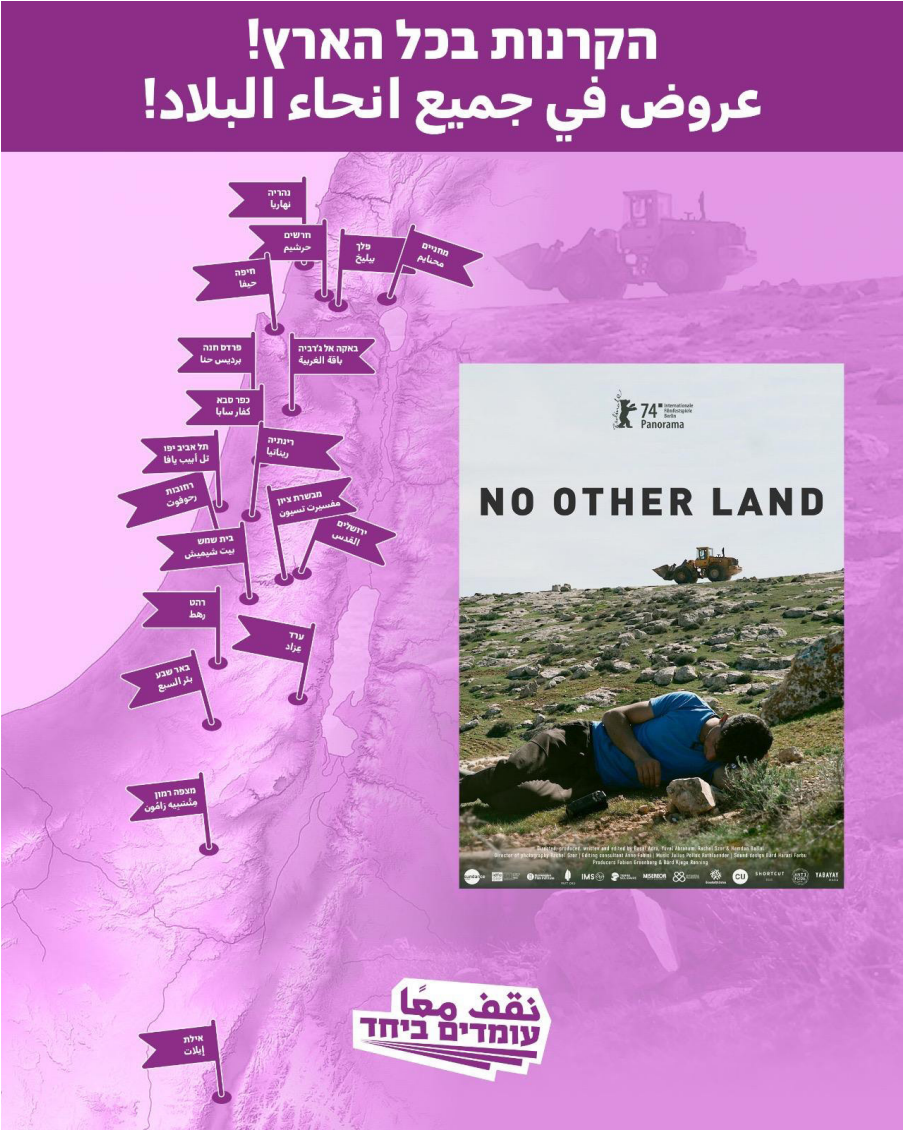
Note:
The following article underwent last minute changes to its use of vocabulary, omitting the word "genocidal" and replacing it with "agressive". As editors we do not mean to minimise our language or disregard the appellation of genocide, however the article was accordingly edited to ensure the authors' safety in the online publication.

NO OTHER LANDERS: Filming and screening against oppression and silence

Liat Savin Ben Shoshan & Sigal Barnir, Bezalel academy of Arts and Design, Jerusalem

Abstract

This article examines *No Other Land* (2024)—a collaborative documentary film—as a creative act of resistance against the rise of far-right nationalist politics in Israel. The film documented the struggle against the displacement of Masafer Yatta communities while building a new politics of witnessing, grounded in shared vulnerability and radical friendships. Through informal screenings organised by "Standing Together", the Jewish–Arab movement, *No Other Land* became a catalyst for grassroots mobilization. This study argues that aesthetics, ethics, and circulation of the film constitute a performative challenge against the silencing of voices opposing war, occupation, and Israel's right-wing governance.

Keywords: documentary film, Masafer Yatta, No Other Land, protective presence, Israel-Palestine

Introduction

Recently, the rise of far-right political parties worldwide has dramatically reshaped the landscape of public discourse, political visibility, and cultural production. In Israel, this shift intersects with the long-standing Israel–Palestine conflict and forced regime of oppression, segregation, and settler colonialism in the West Bank. This article had been written almost two years into the war that began with the Hamas-led attack on October 7, 2023. The retaliation against the Hamas-led attack has led to the ongoing war in Gaza, which, apparently, manifests the highest climax of violence in the century-long history of this conflict between the two nations, and currently Israel's aggressive campaign in Gaza and ethnic cleansing in the West Bank is still going on. The war further radicalised an intense wave of nationalist extremism within Israel. The trauma of the attack led by Hamas has been instrumentalised by the state of Israel and right-wing political actors to amplify nationalist sentiments and suppress dissent. This includes silencing the voices of critics, blacklisting academics and human rights activists, and growing delegitimization of joint Palestinian–Jewish initiatives.[1]

Against this backdrop, this article will relate the documentary, *No Other Land*, to its reception in Israel and to the attempts to screen it, despite the rise of nationalist sentiments and call for forced "national unity" in the post October 7, 2023 period. *No Other Land* was created by a Palestinian–Israeli group of activist filmmakers—Basel Adra, Hamdan Ballal, Yuval Abraham, and Rachel Szor—between 2019 and 2023. The film consists of personal footage, which dates back to the 1980s, and aims to highlight the historical and ongoing struggles of indigenous rural communities in Masafer Yatta, West Bank, a region in the South Hebron Hills classified as Area C under the Oslo Accords.[2] Since 1967, Israel continues with its occupation of the West Bank, which has entailed military control over population living in the area, the establishment of illegal Jewish settlements under international law, and construction of a complex regime of checkpoints, administrative restrictions, and land appropriations. Palestinians in the occupied territories, including Masafer Yatta, who are not Israeli citizens are subject to martial law. In contrast, Jewish settlers in the same area enjoy full rights under Israeli civil law. Within Israel proper, Palestinians who remained after 1948 and their descendants were provided with Israeli citizenship.[3]

Figure 1: Masafer Yatta homes.

Masafer Yatta, occupied by Israel following the 1967 war, has been inhabited by agro-pastoral communities for more than a century. People of these communities have lived inside mountain caves and buildings made of stone and makeshift materials. Israel

1   See Patrick Kingsley, "Israelis Turn on Peace Activists amid Trauma of War," *Financial Times,* November 3, 2023, https://www.ft.com/content/b9626124-168e-436f-9d53-cc17e8775140. Anshel Pfeffer, "Thursday Briefing: How the War in Gaza Is Making Life Harder for Israel's Palestinian Citizens," *The Guardian,* November 21, 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/nov/21/first-edition-palestinian-israelis. Ken Silverstein, "Inside the Israeli Crackdown on Speech," *The New Yorker,* February 12, 2024, https://www.newyorker.com/news/annals-of-human-rights/inside-the-israeli-crackdown-on-speech. Breaking the Silence and B'Tselem, "The Delegitimization of Joint Israeli–Palestinian Solidarity," *+ 972 Magazine,* March 2024, https://www.972mag.com/israel-delegitimizes-joint-initiatives/.
2   Norwegian Refugee Council, *Area C is Everything,* March 2023, https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/reports/area-c-is-everything/area-c-is-everything-v2.pdf.
3   B'Tselem, *A Regime of Jewish Supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is Apartheid,* January 2021, https://www.btselem.org/publications/fulltext/202101_this_is_apartheid.

designated the region as a military training zone in 1981, a strategy, which later unravelled as an instrument to remove Palestinian residents and open the land for Jewish settlements.[4] Although international law prohibits forced displacement of populations in occupied territories, the designation of Masafer Yatta as a military training zone was upheld by the Israeli High Court in 2000 based on the claim that residents lived there only seasonally, thereby dismissing pre-occupation political geography and ignoring traditional agro-pastoral lifestyles. Decades (and according to certain sources more than a century) before the Israeli occupation started, the communities of Masafer Yatta lived most of the year on the countryside, in mountain caves and makeshift homes, and the rest of the year in the town of Yatta (Figure 2). Although the court temporarily delayed the full evacuation, the ruling in 2000 effectively stripped these residents of their historical land rights and rendered them illegal. Hundreds of people were displaced over the subsequent two decades. Despite a two-decade legal battle led by residents and human rights organizations, in May 2022 the Israeli Supreme Court ruled in favour of the military, authorising the eviction of approximately 1,000 residents from more than 12 villages.[5] The ruling was condemned by international legal experts and United Nations (UN) officials as a violation of the international humanitarian law and a form of

forcible transfer.[6] As of June 2025, with the war in Gaza and another war with Iran continuing, the Israeli army has declared that it will resume training in Firing Zone 918, suggesting forced displacement of the remaining population in Masafer Yatta is imminent.[7] Although no formal steps have yet been taken to carry out this policy, escalating violence by Jewish settlers and the almost absolute impunity granted to them is the reality on the ground. On July 28, 2025, this was demonstrated in the form of the murder of Awdah Hathaleen, a teacher and an activist who was involved in the making of No Other Land.[8]
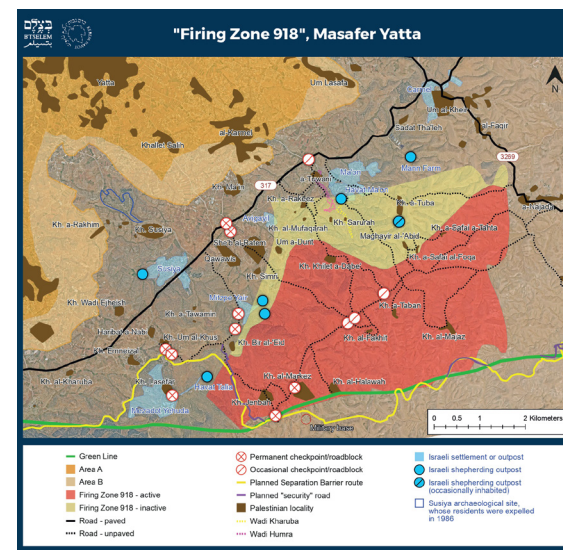

Figure 2: Masafer Yatta map. Credit: Betzelem

The film No Other Land depicts the harsh and violent reality of Israeli occupation, which several other Israeli and Palestinian films have done over the

past decades. We have demonstrated this later in the article. However, compared with other films, No Other Land is based on a unique Israeli–Palestinian partnership. The relationship is based on a practice called "protective presence", in which human rights activists (both international and Israeli) have come to protect Palestinians at friction points with settlers and the army. The protective presence gradually transforms into a friendship between Yuval and Basel, on more equal terms, with private humour and a common language. At the Oscar winning ceremony, the filmmakers issued a statement highlighting their shared yet unequal realities—some living under military occupation without rights, whereas others enjoying full citizenship rights: "There is no symmetry between us," they wrote. "We made this film—Israelis and Palestinians—because our voices are stronger together," said Yuval Abraham. "There is another way...a political solution without ethnic supremacy, with national rights for both our peoples. ...Our paths are intertwined. My people can only be truly safe when Basel's people are free and safe. There is another way! It is not too late. There is no other land."[9] Later in the article, it will be shown how these words inspired our reading of the politically transformative potential of the film (Figure 3: Oscar ceremony).

Figure 3: Oscar Ceremony.

In Israel, the film was received with anger. Its debut in February 2024, five months after the attack on October 7, provoked strong reactions. Owing to the war, the nationalistic processes, which had already intensified with the rise of the far-right government in December 2022, had accelerated.[10] Although the film gained acclaim worldwide, it provoked outrage in Israel.[11] The film's focus on the suffering of Palestinians was perceived as disruptive to the dominant narratives involving Jewish victimhood and national unity. Based on the argument that the film presented a one-sided narrative, it was labelled as "anti-Israeli" and "antisemitic."[12] The Minister of Culture, a member of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud Party, called the Oscar win for No Other Land "a sad moment for the world of cinema," claiming that the film "echoed narratives that distort Israel's image in the world." A public statement was issued urging government-funded cultural institutions not to screen the film, asserting that public funds should

4   Ariel (Arik) Sharon, when serving as Israel's Agricultural (and later Defense) Minister, spoke candidly in the late 1970s and early 1980s about the purpose of military firing zones in the occupied West Bank, particularly in areas, such as Masafer Yatta. In a classified 1979 meeting, Sharon explained that immediately after the Six-Day War, he designated certain West Bank areas as military firing zones to reserve land for future Jewish settlements. About Firing Zone 918 (Masafer Yatta), specifically, Sharon asserted in another meeting (circa 1981), "...to stop the spread of the Arab villagers on the mountainside toward the desert". Yuval Avraham, "Classified document reveals IDF firing zones built to give land to settlers," 972 and Local Call, July 11, 2022, https://www.972mag.com/firing-zones-sharon-settlements. Kerem Navot Report, "A Locked Garden: Declaration of Closed Areas in the West Bank," March 2015, https://www.keremnavot.org/_files/ugd/a76eb4_e5f6e246e5424b0895f3b-67147fbcc17.pdf.

5   B'Tselem, "Demolitions and confiscations in communities facing expulsion," 2022, https://www.btselem.org/facing_expulsion_blog.

6   Notably, Masafer Yatta is not unique. Approximately 18% of the Area C has been designated as closed military zones, affecting dozens of Palestinian communities (Hauser 2021). These zones suspend civilian rights under the guise of military necessity, turning spaces of life into zones of lawlessness. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "Fact Sheet: Masafer Yatta Communities at Risk of Forcible Transfer." July 6, 2022. https://www.ochaopt.org/content/masafer-yatta-communities-risk-forcible-transfer-june-2022.

7   Nir Hasson. "IDF: Firing Zone in West Bank's Masafer Yatta Vital for Training, Buildings Must Be Cleared," Haaretz, June 25, 2025, https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2025-06-25/ty-article/.premium/idf-firing-zone-in-west-banks-masafer-yatta-vital-for-drills-buildings-must-be-cleared/00000197-a832-df21-a1df-fdfa95530000.

8   William Christou and Quique Kierszenbaum, "Wave of condemnation after killing of Palestinian activist in West Bank," The Guardian, July 29, 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jul/29/palestinian-awdah-hathaleen-oscar-winning-no-other-land-killed-in-west-bank.

9   Basel Adra and Yuval Abraham, "Acceptance Speech at the 96th Academy Awards," March 10, 2025, Quoted in Haaretz and Mako. https://www.mako.co.il/news-entertainment/2025_q1/Article-abc1234567b.html (In Hebrew).

10   For example, the once fringe "Kahanism"—an extremist ultranationalist ethos advocating Jewish supremacy and even expulsion of Palestinians—has become increasingly embedded in the ruling coalition. Figures, such as Itamar BenGvir, brought such ideas into government roles, relegating dissent to the margins and normalising exclusionary politics. Joshua Leifer, "Kahane's Ghost: how a long dead extremist rabbi continues to haunt Israel's politics," The Guardian, March 20, 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/news/2025/mar/20/meir-kahane-israel-kach-ben-gvir-long-dead-extremist?

11   Philip Oltermann, "Israeli Director Receives Death Threats after Officials Call Berlin Film Festival 'Antisemitic'." The Guardian, February 27, 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2024/feb/27/israeli-director-receives-death-threats-after-officials-call-berlinale-antisemitic.

12   Antonella Gambotto-Burke, "Israeli & Palestinian Filmmakers Accused of AntiSemitism at Berlinale," Markaz, February 2024, https://themarkaz.org/israeli-palestinian-filmmakers-accused-of-anti-semitism-at-berlinale/. The film was also boycotted by the BDS movement, as the collaboration between Palestinians and Israelis was seen as a "normalization" of the occupation. The following statement outlines concerns of Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) regarding the film's compliance with its anti-normalization guidelines, emphasising the importance of Palestinian self-representation without reliance on Israeli validation. Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), "PACBI's Position on No Other Land," BDS Movement, March 5, 2025, https://www.bdsmovement.net/no-other-land.

not support content that "serves our enemies."[13] Consequently, not only commercial cinematheques but also publicly funded ones avoided screening the film in Israel.

However, despite such restrictions and non-cooperations, alternative channels had emerged for distributing the film, including free online access, informal circulation, and community screenings. These channels manifested to viewers the existence of a collaborative struggle against all odds in a climate of political persecution and delegitimization of joint Palestinian–Israeli initiatives. Methodologically, drawing on film analysis and critical theory (Laclau 2005, Mouffe 2008, 2018), our study analyses the significance of No Other Land from several perspectives. First, we relate to the film's reconfiguration of visual and ethical politics of witnessing, proposing a distinct model of collaboration shaped by co-presence, uneven friendship, and mutual vulnerability between Palestinians and Israelis. We argue that in the political reality of occupation, war, and far-right extremism, such friendships have become increasingly radical.

Second, we relate the film's free online access and informal screenings at homes, community centres, and universities organised by "Standing Together", a grassroots social movement, which unites Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel around shared campaigns for peace, equality, social justice, and opposition, to the occupation and far-right extremism. We argue that screenings of the film are counter-hegemonic interventions that enact political community through shared spectatorship.

Third, we relate it to the notion of NoOtherlander, a

novel political intersubjectivity that arises from the film and its activist setting. This intersubjectivity has "no other land," as it rejects the use of land as a tool of exclusion. The NoOtherlander is deeply anti-sovereign, as it does not seek to find a new polity, but rather imagines a space for co-resistance.[14]

1. The Intersubjective Gaze and Radical Friendship

In the first section, we examine the way No Other Land reconfigures the documentary visual and ethical politics of witnessing, arguing that it proposes a distinct model of Palestinian–Israeli partnership, one that is shaped by co-presence, uneven friendship, and mutual vulnerability. The visual and ethical politics of viewing documentary films refer to a set of aesthetic strategies and moral responsibilities through which films represent suffering, violence, and resistance, positioning both subjects and audiences in relation to visibility and accountability. It is "visual" because it involves choices about framing, editing, and cinematic forms that shape what can be seen and recognised; it is "ethical" because these choices are never neutral, but rather implicate filmmakers and viewers through questions of responsibility, complicity, and solidarity. Witnessing, in this sense, is about creating conditions for subjects—often marginalised or silenced—to appear politically and for audiences to respond. Thus, the politics of witnessing lie at the intersection of aesthetics, ethics, and politics—the way violence and suffering are visualised, subjects whose voices are heard, and the way spectators are called into an ethical relationship with what they see.[15]

No Other Land introduces a distinct model of witnessing through an intersubjective gaze, which departs not only from the ethics of documentary films,

such as 5 Broken Cameras (Emad Burnat and Guy Davidi, 2011), but also from documentary ethics developed by B'Tselem, an Israeli human rights organization that documents human rights violations. In contrast to these models, the No Other Land model foregrounds asymmetry as a condition for shared struggle, political intimacy, or an agency, proposing political subjectivity grounded in relational solidarity.

The B'Tselem Camera Project, which was launched in 2007, marked an important shift in the practice of documenting human rights violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. By equipping Palestinians living in occupied territories with high-definition cameras, B'Tselem expanded its monitoring capabilities and exposed routine violations that escaped external scrutiny frequently. This initiative relocated the act of filming from international or Israeli staff to Palestinians, offering a more embedded view of their daily lives under occupation.[16] However, this effort neither did alter the frameworks through which the images were circulated nor did it allow for the articulation of a self-determined narrative.[17] Ginzburg noted that this redistribution of the camera did not fully resolve power asymmetries embedded in the human rights discourse.[18] The documentation was primarily intended for external legal and media frameworks. Although some Palestinian participants developed new modes of self-representation, the logic of evidence collection and NGO advocacy remained dominant. Moreover, the visibility offered to Palestinians was often filtered through Israeli or international narratives that tended to emphasise Palestinian victimhood over political agen-

cies. In this context, the gaze was transformed, but only partially.

The documentary 5 Broken Cameras pushed this trajectory further. Shot primarily by a Palestinian farmer Emad Burnat over several years in the village of Bil'in, the film documented both personal and political dimensions of resistance to the Israeli separation barrier. Unlike the B'Tselem model, Burnat's project began as a self-driven act of storytelling and explored Palestinian self-narration referred to by Hammad (2025).[19] Burnat's footage was deeply embedded in the rhythms of village life, comprising demonstrations, home life, family milestones, and repeated confrontations with Israeli military forces. However, the final form of the film was shaped significantly owing to the co-direction with Israeli filmmaker Guy Davidi and the development in the "Greenhouse" documentary incubator. Yael Friedman has shown that this transnational production context complicates the film's claims of authorship and narrative control,[20] as seen in the film's dialogue:

> Guy Davidi: …. For Palestinian, speaking about his personal life is very difficult. They talk about the community, the nation, and Palestine. This film presents a new way of speaking about these delicate issues with no judgmental wars. For me, it is a film about how suffering can grow something. Sometimes in their language, they speak about suffering... look how much we suffer, but actually in their lives and their decisions they are inspiring, and I wanted to bring that to the discussion.

> Imad Burnat: I approached him to work with me because it was not a political decision. It was very clear to us and him that this was my film. I have been working on it many years before, and you come here to support and help... This is a Palestinian film. This was my experience from both my perspective and my point of view. We began with this to work on the film.[21]

13   "It is not appropriate for public funds to support or screen a work that defames the State of Israel. I appeal to you to show public responsibility and solidarity, and not to provide a public stage in Israel for a film that serves our enemies.'" Miki Zohar, "Culture Minister Zohar Responds to No Other Land Oscar Win: 'A Sad Moment for Cinema.'" Mako, March 3, 2025, https://www.mako.co.il/news-entertainment/2025_q1/Article-abc12345678.htm. (In Hebrew)

14   We credit our colleague Dr. David Alvarez for the idea of "NoOtherlanders" and its conceptual development following a presentation of this paper in Portugal on May 23, 2025.

15   For discussions of documentary ethics see Michael Renov, "Toward a poetics of documentary," in Theorizing documentary, ed. Michael Renov (Routledge, 1993), 12–36. Bill Nichols, Representing reality: Issues and concepts in documentary (Indiana University Press, 1991).

16   B'Tselem, "Annual Activity Report 2007," 2008, https://www.btselem.org/download/2007_activity_report_eng.pdf.

17   Ibid.

18   Ruthie Ginsburg, "Emancipation and Collaboration: A Critical Examination of Human Rights Video Advocacy," Theory, Culture & Society, 38, no. 3 (2019): 51–70, https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276419861681.

19   Hammad explores the concept of "anagnorisis"—a moment of critical discovery in narratives—and applies it to the Palestinian experience. She critiques narratives that centre on non-Palestinian realisations of Palestinian humanity, advocating instead for narratives that foreground Palestinian perspectives. The lecture was delivered at the Columbia University during the Edward W. Said Memorial Lecture on September 28, 2023, just days before the events of October 7. An afterword, written in early 2024, reflects on the subsequent developments and the ongoing struggle for Palestinian freedom. Isabella Hammad, "Recognizing the Stranger: On Palestine and Narrative," Journal of Palestine Studies, 54, no. 3 (2025): 112–117.

20   Yael Friedman, "Guises of Transnationalism in Israel/Palestine: A Few Notes on 5 Broken Cameras," Transnational Cinemas, 6, no. 1 (2015): 19–34.

21   5 Broken Cameras, directed by Emad Burnat and Guy Davidi (Burnat Films [Palestine], Guy DVD Films [Israel], and

While Burnat appears to be the film's central figure, Davidi's role as a co-director is nearly absent. This absence has been read not only as an ethical decision, designating the film as Palestinian, but also as disguising the involvement of an Israeli partner in shaping its narrative. Friedman argues that such collaborations may risk reproducing neo-Orientalist dynamics, positioning Palestinians as the "Other," as subjects of suffering, and Israelis as mediators of legibility for international audiences.[22] Ya'ara Ozeri notes, "...the significant struggle of docu-activism is a struggle over the viewer's position, especially one that alters the reality of the 'Other' while turning the viewer's gaze back onto themselves and the society they live in". She further argues:

> only a dynamic position, one that challenges and ex-
> poses the embedded (and reproduced) power relations
> between the documenter and the documented, and
> acknowledges the limitations of docu-activist cinema,
> can allow the viewer to respect both the distance and
> the proximity between themselves and the Other, and
> to shift from a dichotomous moral judgment to a more
> complex stance.[25]

No Other Land departed significantly from the prior models. Created by a team of Palestinian and Israeli activists, the collaboration was not based on oversight or advocacy. Unlike *5 Broken Cameras*, it did not rely on the distinction between a Palestinian narrator and an Israeli external filmmaker, or that between visible and invisible collaborators. Instead, the film emerged from a shared but asymmetrical political experience.

One of the practices depicted in *No Other Land* is "protective presence"—a practice not at all unique to the West Bank. It is a form of embodied solidarity

through which activists physically place themselves alongside communities under threat—often in zones with heightened military and settler violence—as observers of human rights violations. This practice draws on the long history of non-violent interventionist solidarity.[24] However, *No Other Land* went further. The presence of Yuval Abraham was not only as an activist; rather, he had become a cohabitant of Masafer Yatta both physically and cinematically. His fluency in Arabic was significant, allowing for a deeper mutual understanding on and off screen.

Yuval Abraham: You are Basel. I am Yuval.

Basel Adra: Yuval please be sensitive with the people here

YA: they asked if I am an Israeli journalist?

BA: I don't know...

YA: I speak Arabic

Hamdan Billal: I speak English don't talk to me Arabic

BA: he is a journalist

HB: where are you from?

YA: Beer Sheba.

HB: so you are Palestinian...

YA: No I am Israeli.

HB: you are Israeli? seriously? Are you Israeli human rights? something like this. What do you think your country is doing to us?

YA: I think it's a crime...

Figure 4: Basel and Yuval.

Over the course of last five years, Israeli filmmakers lived, filmed, and resisted alongside their Palestinian counterparts, producing a deeply interwoven narrative of shared vulnerability (Figure 4). The camera in *No Other Land* was not only an instrument of observation but also a part of the Palestinian–Israeli relationship. The protagonists not only documented but also spoke with each other through the lens.

While Basel and Yuval were the protagonists, Hamdan appeared on the screen only a few times, and Rachel stayed behind the camera. Although all were subjects and observers, they were never on equal terms. For instance, Basel and Hamdan lived under military rule, whereas Yuval and Rachel were Israeli citizens with full legal rights. However, the presence of Yuval and Rachel in the village was also fragile and vulnerable to settler attacks, arrests by the army for violating military orders, and administrative detention. Despite these different circumstances and their friendship, the film did not attempt to hide the asymmetry in their respective existence. For instance, Yuval's life outside the struggle remains largely unexamined.

BA: I feel you're enthusiastic

YA: What do you mean?

BA: You want everything to happen quickly, as if you came to solve everything in 10 days and then go back home. This [occupation] continued for several decades.

YA: You really feel I want to go home in 10 days?

BA: No...but you are enthusiastic... like you want to end the occupation in 10 days....you want it all fast."

YA: I do not think it will end in 10 days. What am I stupid?

BA: You are enthusiastic..

YA: So what's the problem?

BA: There is no problem, but you will not succeed. It requires patience. Get used to failing...

You come here from the outside, you can move freely, and you have a job..!

YA: Basel, honestly, I do not know how I would be if I were you. How would I have so much hope and power like you?

BA: Yes, but sometimes I think too hard about it all, and I feel this huge depression.

These dialogues manifest in a shared space—Yuval, the Israeli, is a partner in a political struggle, which victimises Palestinians; however, he is also a part of the frame, where he is gazed upon, criticised, and exposed to his own weaknesses. He is also a guest and is received by his hosts on their troubled land (Figure 4). However, neither does the film present an

Alegria Productions [France], 2011). Cinematography was done by Burnat himself, while editing was undertaken by Véronique Lagoarde–Ségot and Guy Davidi.
22   Friedman, ibid.
23   Ya'ara Ozeri, "Change Reality, Look at Ourselves: Docu-Activism and the Gaze at the Other in '52/50' and 'Dear Life'," *Takriv*, November 2015, https://takriv.net/article/%d7%9c%d7%a9%d7%a0%d7%95%d7%aa-%d7%90%d7%aa-%d7%94%d7%9e%d7%a6%d7%99%d7%90%d7%95%d7%aa-%d7%9c%d7%94%d7%a2%d7%99%d7%93-%d7%a2%d7%9c-%d7%a2-%d7%a6%d7%9e%d7%a0%d7%95/.
24   On the practice of "protective presence" as a type of Third Party Nonviolent Intervention (TPNI) see for instance, Rachel Julian and Christine Schweitzer, "The Origins and Development of Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping," *Peace Review* 27, no. 1 (2015): 1–8, https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2015.1000181. Karen Ridd and Craig Kauffman, "Protective accompaniment," *Peace Review* 9, no. 2 (2007): 215–219, https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659708426053.

idyllic friendship nor does it "normalise" the situation. Rather, it renders tensions, gaps, and moments of doubt visible, insisting that the political power of this relationship lies within its fragility. On the one hand, this approach challenges dominant models of advocacy and filmmaking, whereas on the other, it opens a fragile, partial, and contingent space capturing the vulnerability of shared struggle.

Figure 5: Basel and Yuval. Credit: Dogwoof Films

2. Standing Together and Grassroots Reclamation of Public Space

Another tangible political effect of *No Other Land* relates to the strategies adopted for screening of the film in Israel. After condemning the film in media, Israel's Culture Minister issued an appeal to publicly funded venues to refrain from screening it.[25] Although the screening of the film could not be banned legally, it was clear that government funding would be withheld if theatres did not comply with the appeal. In this context, providing free and open access to, and grassroot-level screenings of, the film became crucial as a means of reappropriating public spaces. The journalism platform "Local Call" created an open-access link to make the film available in Is-

rael. Public screenings were organised by the Israeli–Palestinian activist movement group "Standing Together" (*Omdim Beyachad*). Some of the screenings took place in "purple homes," local community-based organizing hubs that acted as physical and symbolic spaces for grassroots activism, dialogue, and solidarity-building between Israeli and Palestinian citizens.[26] Other screenings were initiated by individuals, community leaders, and student cells in colleges and universities and were assisted by activists involved with the movement across the country. The map in Figure 6 shows the screenings for a variety of cities (Figure 6. Screening map).
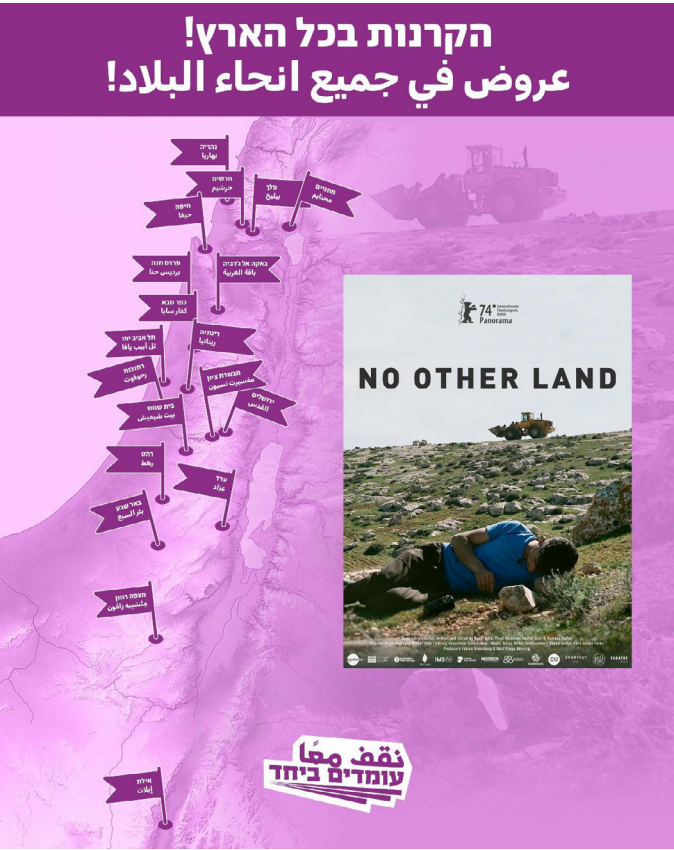

Figure 6. Screenings map (Credit: Standing Together)

The title of the map states screenings of *No Other Land* throughout the country. Some the cities that are marked by names on the map are Arab majority (Rahat and Bak'a Al-Gharbiya), whereas others are Jewish majority (Tel Aviv-Jaffa, Beit Shemesh, etc.).

Cities, such as Jerusalem, Haifa, and the southern Metropole of Be'er-Sheba, have a mixed population. This movement began with the dissemination of a "call to those interested in screening the film", a protocol through which the film became part of the recruitment activity. Organisers received instructions for the screening, followed tips for conducting discussions on techniques used during the filming process, and conducted post-screening exchange of opinions among the audience. The screening was not only significant in itself but also set the stage for mobilizing more activists into the movement.[27]

After an incident at the Sapir College in Sderot, next to the border with Gaza, where extremist right-wing activists disrupted a screening, an activist involved in organizing screenings of the film said, "For us [at Standing Together] it doesn't matter. As long as there is discussion and people's awareness of the film and our activity is raised, that is what counts. Even if a screening is broken into, or cancelled, for us, it is worth it".[28]

"Standing Together" describes itself as a movement for peace, equality, and social justice, uniting Israeli and Palestinian citizens of Israel around shared struggles. The movement enacts (knowingly), a leftist populist practice, according to Chantal Mouffe, and creates "chains of equivalence" among diverse struggles—against occupation, racism, and economic inequality—by drawing them into a common political horizon.[29]

> The path towards change requires a new majority – a broad coalition of diverse communities – Jewish and Arab; Mizrachi and Ashkenazi; Women, Men, and all other genders; secular and religious; rural and urban. To build this coalition, we will identify alternative solutions that serve the majority, correct strategic failures that impede mass political mobilization, and cultivate soli-

darity among diverse groups. This is the strategy of the People's Left – a Left that expresses the interests of everyone living here. A Left that does not discuss abstract principles of justice or in the name of others' interests. The joint Jewish-Arab Left reflects the full diversity of Israel. A Left that encourages political involvement among all social classes and fights the elites' monopoly on political activity...We set small goals to achieve small victories. Such victories reinforce the feeling that we can enact change. Finally, the existence of a unified, political, and forward-looking community will generate hope.[30]

By organising community-based screenings of *No Other Land,* the film becomes not only a cultural nodal point but also a site of political articulation. The physical space where the screenings take place—private or public—becomes a political stage; the act of viewing becomes an act of public witnessing; and the discussion afterward becomes a rehearsal for collective action. The mode of distribution of the film is different from that of other independent films. It is grassroots and bottom-up, and screenings are initiated by individuals or local groups who reach out to "Standing Together" for support. This organic mobilisation resonates with Jonathan Smucker's call for "new political homes"—affective and material infrastructures, which support long-term collective identification and action, building shared spaces of belonging that are impure, but porous, dynamic, and open to newcomers.[31]

The open-access release and bottom-up screenings of *No Other Land* via "Local Call" reflect a global turn toward decentralised, activist-led media distribution, echoing "Brave New Films" in the US, or "Shasha" and "Aflamuna" in the Arab world, which contribute to models of documentary activism, digital-first releases, and community viewings.[32] Patricia Zimmerman and Sasha Welland relate to these as

25   Ben Sales, "Israeli officials are criticizing Oscar-winner "No Other Land." So are Palestinian activists," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, March 6, 2025, https://www.jta.org/2025/03/06/culture/israeli-officials-are-criticizing-oscar-winner-no-other-land-so-are-palestinian-activists.
26   The term *"purple"* represents the movement's signature colour, symbolising a blend of red (socialist/leftist politics) and blue (peace-oriented politics)—a visual representation of solidarity across national, ethnic, and class lines. Standing Together's official website: https://www.standing-together.org.

27   We publish this protocol with the authorization of Standing Together, Israel.
28   Omri Yekutieli, conversation with authors, April 2025.
29   Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left Populism,* (Verso, 2018).
30   "Change Together: Standing Together's Theory of Change." About Us, Standing Together. April 2019, accessed June 28, 2025. https://www.standing-together.org/en/about.
31   Jonathan Smucker, *Hegemony How-To: A Roadmap for Radicals* (AK Press, 2017).
32   Sherry B. Ortner, *Screening Social Justice: Brave New Films and Documentary Activism* (Duke University Press, 2023). Zina Saro-Wiwa, "Decolonizing Distribution: Notes on Streaming and African/Arab Cinemas," *Film Quarterly* 75, no. 3 (2022): 45–58. Róisín Tapponi, "Shasha: The World's First Independent Streaming Service for SWANA Cinema," *TIME*, February 25, 2021. https://time.com/5943142/shasha-streaming-movies-middle-east-north-africa/. The Culturist, "Aflamuna: A Space for

"microcinemas", arguing that these screenings function as anti-authoritarian media circulation when institutional venues exclude dissenting voices. [33]

In June 2025, a screening was conducted at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem. It was initiated by the Bezalel student cell of "Standing Together", who not only planned to screen the film but also held a panel discussion comprising speakers from the Bezalel faculty and students, followed by a Q&A session (Figure 7-8). The screening was announced on the academy's digital platforms in an attempt to refrain from drawing external "visitors" who might disrupt the event. Before the screening began, a group of students carrying Israeli flags sat on the top seats of the auditorium, and some of them remained standing throughout the screening with flags raised. They were a part of another student cell, which described itself as the "Zionist" cell. [34] They came prepared not only to supervise the screening process but also to protest. During the Q&A session, these protesting students asked several questions, which involved the film not presenting "both sides of the story" and putting lives of Israeli soldiers in danger internationally (several students were and had been in active military service throughout the war). However, one of these students mentioned that the film was very good and that although she thought differently, it had touched her. After the event ended, students from different cells and others continued to discuss the film in the hallway for a long time. The event was concluded by the initiators who described it a phenomenal success. These two examples demonstrate that the film may lead to different responses by raising questions, encouraging thoughts, and expressing doubts, as well as evoking

violent responses. However, it was important that these different responses occurred and raised conflicts.

Figure 7: Screening in Bezalel. Credit: Authors

The circulation of *No Other Land* within "microcinemas" and via community screenings across Israel could be regarded as highly fragile or uneven in their dispersal and unexpected in their outcome. However, these efforts not only illustrate a method of circumventing censorship but also a broader reimagining of what political participation can look like in a fractured public sphere. These screenings, which are often quiet and improvised, operate at the intersection of media, space, and activism. They expose society's contradictions during the time of a severe conflict. As such, the film's decentralised screenings show the way collective witnessing, partial or ambivalent, leads to fleeting yet potent moments of shared reflection and dissent, opening cracks for political solidarity beyond official narratives, false unification, and institutional barriers.

3. "NoOtherlanders": Empty Signifiers and the Politics of Transversal Belonging

The film *No Other Land* clearly refers to a well-known Israeli song, "I Have No Other Land" (*Ein Li Eretz Acheret*) by Ehud Manor. The song was considered to be written as a belated response to the death of his younger brother in war: "I have no other country. Although my land is burning, my veins and soul are. With an aching body and with a hungry heart, here is my home...I will not be silent, for my country has changed her face". Upon its release in 1986, the song was perceived as a veiled protest against the Lebanon War in 1982, encouraging anti-war voices. However, adopted by various—often opposing—groups within Israeli society, the song quickly evolved into a multifaceted anthem. For example, during the 2005 Disengagement from Gaza, the song was invoked by right-wing groups and residents of Gush Katif (the Jewish settlement region in the Gaza Strip), symbolising their connection to Israel's land and acting as an expression of resistance against the withdrawal and evacuation of settlements. [35] This attribute of resistance in the lyrics became especially evident when the U.S. Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, invoked the song on two high-profile occasions—once following the January 2021 Capitol riot and again in response to the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to overturn the constitutional right to abortion. In both cases, the lyrics were recontextualised to express democratic struggles in the American sphere. [36]

In this sense, the song functioned as an empty signifier, a term drawn from the theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, the meaning of which is not defined and is shaped by shifting political and social contexts. For Laclau and Mouffe, empty signifiers

are crucial because they gather diverse demands and voices under one banner, even if they do not agree with everything. Mouffe explains, "Every hegemonic order is susceptible to challenge, for it is always based on the temporary fixation of meaning. This is why the role of empty signifiers is crucial for understanding how political identities are constructed". [37]

In the film's title, the word "I" has been deliberately omitted (transforming *"I Have No Other Land"* to simply *No Other Land*). This omission shifts emphasis from framing the phrase around a singular, personal, or exclusively national claim, to multiple interpretations. Both Israelis and Palestinians yearn for the same land, yet in the nationalist discourse, this longing often excludes the other side. The omission of the "I" destabilises the meaning of the original song. In doing so, the title reframes the symbolic structure of the song, turning it into a statement of exclusive belonging to a shared and contested space. Reworking this phrase suggests the possibility of transforming this contested territory into an inclusive one in which different identities and political subjectivities can coexist and be heard.

The *NoOtherlander*—an imaginary figure, proposed in a discussion, by David Alvarez Gracia - from Universidad de Vigo, Spain, emerges from the destabilised meaning of the signifier "land" described above. In this sense, the figure of *NoOtherlander* represents a way of belonging that resists the binary division of Israeli/Palestinian and instead gestures toward a common, although contested, horizon. Following Laclau and Mouffe, the *NoOtherlander* can be understood as an empty signifier mentioned above. Although the term does not have a single, stable, or predetermined meaning, it represents an openness that allows it to function as a site of collective identi-

Socio-Political and Critical Thought Around Independent Arab Cinema," https://www.theculturist.com/home/aflamu-na-a-space-for-socio-political-and-critical-thought-around-independent-arab-cinema.

33   Patricia R. Zimmerman and Helen De Michiel, *Open Space New Media Documentary: A Toolkit for Theory and Practice* (Routledge, 2017). Sasha Su-Ling Welland, "Screening Feminism: Portable Cinemas and Radical Audiences," *Camera Obscura* 36, no. 3 (2021): 55–79.

34   "Hat Zvi is a Zionist student group founded at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem, aiming to promote Jewish–Zionist artistic expression and cultivate national discourse within the campus environment. The group emerged in response to a sense of exclusion and ideological imbalance in Bezalel's academic and cultural atmosphere, particularly following incidents where some students expressed solidarity with attackers, and the administration remained silent. Hat Zvi organizes exhibitions, screenings, and discussions that reflect Zionist values and seeks to give voice to students who feel their identity is underrepresented in the institutional arts space." October 2022. https://www.instagram.com/p/Cj-UqSKtJww/

35   Ben Shalev, "When Corinne Alal and Gali Atari went up on stage, The protest against the judicial revolution found its anthem," March 7, 2023, https://www.haaretz.co.il/gallery/music/2023-03-07/ty-article-magazine/.premium/00000186-bbc1-db81-afc6-bbc3a83d0000?utm.

36   Nur Ayoubi, "'Tone Deaf': Nancy Pelosi Recites Israeli Poem in Response to Roe v Wade Decision," *Middle East Eye,* June 2022, https://www.middleeasteye.net/users/nur-ayoubi?page=1&utm_.

37   Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (Verso, 2000), 36. As Laclau explains, empty signifiers are crucial to political articulation because they hold together heterogeneous demands by providing a flexible and contested space around which a coalition can cohere. Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (Verso, 2005), 70.

fication. The power of an empty signifier lies in its indeterminacy—it can have multiple meanings, which can be unified through a shared antagonism against exclusion. In this light, the *NoOtherlander* signifies not any individual as such but a political possibility—a new kind of collective subjectivity built on openness, contestation, and the refusal of closure. In the case of the film and its political articulation, *NoOtherlander* becomes a uniting point of those who oppose the machinery of partition, be it settler colonialism, state racism, or ethno-nationalism. It names a subject who has "no other land," not because of nationalist attachment, but because they reject the use of land as a tool of exclusion. In this sense, the term is deeply anti-sovereign, as it does not seek a new polity but exposes the violence of existing territorial claims and imagines a space for co-resistance. This reframing constitutes a Mouffean populist articulation par excellence—it forges a new "people" by binding them into a collective antagonism. The antagonism here is not between nations but between those who are invested in the regime of silencing and partitioning and those who seek to disrupt the regime by creating new coordinates for political belonging, solidarity, and language for people who have no place on the dominant map.[38]

The film contributes to this articulation by refusing the logic of "balance" or "dialogue" that often accompanies Israeli–Palestinian collaborations. *No Other Land* was unapologetically focused on the Palestinian struggle while opening space for a shared fight against oppression. The relationship between Basel and Yuval, the two protagonists whose lives were shaped by radically different systems of privilege and control, became the narrative site for political subjectivity to take form. Their relationship, shared risks, and cinematic labour enacted the possibility of *NoOtherlander* politics. It refused the identity traps imposed by the regime of separation, where Palestinians performed victimhood and Israelis performed liberal remorse, and instead crafted a political imagination rooted in joint refusal, mutual care, and the radical ethics of co-presence, expanding the familiar human rights practice of protective presence mentioned earlier into a form of existence of being together.

To declare oneself a *NoOtherlander* is to reject inherited antagonisms and challenge both states and armed forces to reposition themselves, and declare the current us–them division illegitimate. To declare oneself a *NoOtherlander* is to propose a new conflictual relationship—not between Israelis and Palestinians but between warmongers and those who refuse war. The antagonistic line is WARMONGERS versus NOOTHERLANDERS. This reframing creates a powerful space for transverse solidarity. It neither does demand the erasure of identity nor does it resolve all contradictions. Instead, it provides a common political horizon, a position of shared refusal and possibilities. As such, the figure of a *NoOther-*

lander may be among the most important contributions of *No Other Land* to the resistance landscape. Its resonance extends beyond Israel–Palestine conflict into a world that is increasingly marked by militarised borders, ethno-national enclosures, forced displacements, and collapsing political imaginaries. The *NoOtherlander* names a global subjectivity of resistance. It gestures toward alliances between struggles—from Gaza to Ukraine, from migrant camps in Europe to Indigenous land rights movements in the Americas—where communities confront exclusionary sovereignties and imagine living otherwise.

Conclusion

This study explored *No Other Land* as a collaborative political intervention that challenged the dominant paradigms of separation, representation, and control. From its ethics of co-filmmaking and intersubjective gaze to its informal, grassroots modes of circulation, and finally to the emergence of the *NoOtherlander* as a shared political subject, the film enacts a multidimensional practice of resistance. At the time of writing this article, the war in Gaza, starvation and killing, and the deaths of soldiers and hostages continues. In Masafer Yatta, approximately 1,150 residents resist the forced displacement. The reality surrounding the film is harsh, and the processes of repression, displacement, and militarisation that it documents are ongoing and even deteriorating; it may appear that non-violent struggle, activism, and filmmaking are weak forms of protest, as they face silencing, violence, and the unstoppable war and war-profit machine. However, even under these conditions, we believe in continuing to work for shared spaces, mutual recognition, and transversal solidarity to create cracks in a reality in which co-resistance is still thinkable and, at times, even visible.

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38   The grammar of populist politics depends on social mobilization, and this, in turn, is made possible through common identification with a common banner, despite the internal pluralism. This banner must be maximally shareable among all potential allies and therefore be ideally devoid of divisive particular content—an "empty signifier." The way to articulate a collective is by drawing an antagonistic line in the sand that defines the conflict between us and them. In populist politics, the "us" is "the people" as opposed to "the elites". Everyone who sides with the "popular" will redefine their identity and claim to fit with the populist movement. Equally, we might see this in formations, such as "feminists" versus "patriarchy," "green" versus "polluters," or "workers" versus "rentiers". Politics here is the art of drawing the line in such a way that it articulates the maximum number of possible allies while minimizing internal alienation. This means that parties in a coalition must reframe their particular identities to become compatible while maintaining their distinct demands—what Laclau and Mouffe describe as a "chain of equivalence". Each demand remains particular, but becomes part of a broader articulation of "the people". In the case of "Standing Together", the traditional position of a peace movement is structurally weak within the grammar of populist politics because it accepts the antagonistic line imposed by the conflict—a line separating two fixed, existential identities. Thus, such movements are often depicted as perversely positioned—"traitors" by the state sacrificing its youth, or "collaborators" by a population under siege. Both sides benefit from the permanence of the conflict. The only viable alternative for a movement, such as "Standing Together" is to redraw the antagonistic line itself—to propose a new collective identity that refuses the existing binary. That new articulation is precisely what the *NoOtherlander* offers. As an empty signifier, the term applies equally to Israelis and Palestinians who feel they have no other homeland, not in the sense of ethno-national destiny, but because they are rooted in the land and committed to co-resistance.

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Borrowed Syndrome

Einat Leader and David Goss

The book *Borrowed Syndrome* (2017), followed our exhibition (2015) with the same title. This project addressed the rise of the messianic right in Israel over the last decades, intertwining it with South Africa's Apartheid history of racism and anti-democratic legislation. We were both born and raised in these regions - one in Jerusalem, the other in Cape Town - where messianic racial supremacy violently enforced silenced and unequal environments on subordinated populations.

We borrowed the term "syndrome" from the Jerusalem one - a pathology of messianic delusions with extreme sense of righteousness when encountering Jerusalem. Syndrome sufferers are admitted to the Shaul Village Psychiatric Hospital, ironically built on remains of the Palestinian village Deir Yassin - itself symbolizing a repressed past from 1948 when the Israeli army attacked and deported the village's population.

In this project, a site-specific installation of objects, jewellery and paintings, we created representations capsulizing the divisions and mutations of reality, in which the roots of the new extreme right have repetitive and common traits, apparent in both region's histories.

Editor's note: it felt important to include this project ten years after its original conception. The world's current political climate is urgent, but trails behint it decades of past struggles. To this, the artists state that "Nevertheless, we hope that eventually both sides will acknowledge the others historical suffering and the basic human longing to live with equality and dignity today. ".

The Ofer prison (now called the Ofer camp) is an Israeli army base on the outskirts of Palestinian city of Ramallah on the road to Jerusalem. The camp was used initially to hold Palestinian detainees.
This work is a site-specific wall painting, using the transparent painting medium called: Arabic gum directly on the wall. The gum is a transparent medium used to make watercolor paint.
The painting is painted on one face of the two columns that were constructed in the gallery for the exhibition. On the opposite face of this column were paintings of an air-view image of Robben Island in Cape Town, that held anti-Apartheid political prisoners.
On the two other faces of the column, between Ofer prison and Robben Island were images of an oriental carpet.

David Goss, Ofer Prison (exhibition view)
Wall painting, gum Arabic on wall, 2015
Photo: Elad Sarig

Souvenirs from Jerusalem #8 is a reflection on the body – seasoned, scarred by war, marked by injury, a symbol of pain.

Einat Leader, Souvenirs from Jerusalem #8
Brooch, patinated silver, aluminium, stainless steel, 2014
Photo: Liat Elbling
Borrowed Syndrome, pp.10-11

Bottled up was created out of the pain caused by the war in Jerusalem and the madness that's overtaken it. These small bottles, filled with different building materials and topped with ironic crowns, stand somewhere between a utopian skyline; a symbol of possible destruction; and a nostalgic reminder of a landscape that no longer exists.

Einat Leader, Souvenirs from Jerusalem #18
Cement and pigment, ready-made bottles, aluminium, gold-plated iron, matches, 2015
Photo: Liat Elbling
Borrowed Syndrome, pp.80-81

This is a group photo of olive wood camels, once a typical souvenir from East Jerusalem and a proud example of skilled local craftsmanship. Here they are pendants and brooches, all disturbed and distorted. The camels that seemingly have "gone mad" act as ornaments, but in fact they reflect the mutation and blindness of messianism.

Einat Leader, Souvenirs from Jerusalem, group picture
Pendants, brooches, mixed media, 2014-2015
Photo: Liat Elbling
Borrowed Syndrome, pp.8-9

Two poems

Ella B. Winters
Instagram: @ella.b.winters
May 2025

In a world increasingly hostile towards all that is perceived as 'other', I have often battled with the concept of personal identity and the notion of 'passing', in particular with regards to ethnicity, nationality and immigration status. With the rise of far-right politics globally in recent years, I have been forced outside my relative privilege often, never more so than during the most recent enduring attack of the Israeli regime on Palestine, driven by supremacist ideologies.

These two poems speak to my experience of occupying and responding to the challenging space created when my multiple identities clash with far-right ideas. The first poem (Origin) speaks of resistance to forced identification. In the second (People), in the absence of coercion, I relinquish my identity willingly, but confronting and framing it on my terms.

Origin

You ask me where I'm from.
Brighton, I say,
well, just north of,
to be exact.
That's not what you meant,
but I don't owe you
my provenance to consume
like an imported orange.
peel and segment,
juice spilling
over the vulnerable flesh.
Of all people,
I want to entrust
the complexity of my heritage
least
to those demanding it,
however politely.

People

My people are killing
your people.
And there is nothing
I can do about it.
I go on a solidarity march.
I write to my MP.
I started learning Arabic,
again.

My people are killing
your people.
And there is nothing
I can do apart from
wearing the shame
like the star of David necklace
that I tuck into my shirt,
whispering my heritage.

Neither of us can go back,
and the irony is not lost on me.
You, denied your right of return;
Me, wilfully abandoning my
birthright,
not bearing arms,
but witness
to my people killing
your people.

My mother calls me.
She cries.
We are suffocating,
she tells me,

we are scared to leave the house.
I want to tell her
that when you have no air
in your lungs,
you cannot cry,
you cannot leave a house
that is no longer there.
But I am suffocating, too.
Choking on the bitterness
of my unspoken words.
There is no air in the lungs of
your people.

My people are killing
your people
And there is nothing
I can do about it.
I write to my MP again.
I stopped buying
the hummus that tastes
like home.
Still, the bombs
keep
coming,
killing your people,
killing my people,
killing that childish
two-thousand-year-old hope
of freedom.

I refuse to let my children kill
your children.

Influencer Tour

Shir Cohen

Instagram: @shircohenart

2024

Influencer Tour, Shir Cohen, 2024
Oil on polycotton, 245x145cm

A few months after October 7th I started seeing well-known Israeli social media influencers publishing vlogs from the places that were attacked. Those were the results of real tours facilitated by the state of Israel. They were joined by international media, and mostly international politicians. These vlogs are all available to watch as internal Israeli propaganda, and some even repeat debunked misinformation that was widespread in the months after the attack, focusing on atrocities allegedly committed by Hamas. The vlogs had much in common, and as someone who keeps a close look on hasbara (a Hebrew word that literally means "explaining", and used to denote external Israeli propaganda), the aesthetics showed a marked change. The journalists in bulletproof vests and helmets were new, as we usually see this look from Palestinian journalists. There were also the tour leaders: some residents of the attacked towns and kibbutzim led them, rather than the usual view of an army general. Israel was projecting itself as less strong, less professionalized, and as a country still recovering from humiliation and disaster.

Other residents of the attacked towns protested the tours being conducted while their own life was not able to return to normal, and in some cases, with the government ignoring their needs. Both types of survivors were still clearly traumatized, and not necessarily media prepared. They were then edited into formats that would fit YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, so that the influencers would not only tell their stories but also tell the world "the truth about Israel", and specifically propagandise Israel's atrocities in Gaza as a correct and acceptable response to the October 7th attacks.

The characters in the painting are all based on Israeli media personality types- the cameraman, the young influencer, a settlement spokeswoman, a muscular field journalist. All, including the victim telling his story, are based on friends and family. Nearly two years after the fact, the painting still evokes my complicated relationship with Israeli society, the way it retraumatizes victims in order to gain media sympathy, and the cover this type of operations give to atrocities committed throughout Palestine.

"Influencer Tour" was part of the duo exhibition "Scene Study" that took place in miłość gallery in January 2025, along with prints by Gosia Kołdraszewska that portrayed inappropriate tourist photography in the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum and one selfie of Israeli soldiers in a residential house in Gaza.

Artist Bio

Shir Cohen holds a BFA from the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design in Jerusalem and moved from there to London in 2018, to pursue a Painting MA at the Royal College of Art, with support from the Clore-Bezalel foundation. Their work often deals with queerness, disability, and scientific racism, but currently focuses on Israeli propaganda, starting in 2024 with the duo show Scene Study in miłość gallery with Gosia Kołdraszewska.

Shir has exhibited projects based on Jewish and antisemitic literature, including a series of pictorial tapestries based on the Oskar Panizza short story "The Operated Jew", an artist book inspired by the Breslov tale "The Indik", and video work featuring readings from the neo-Nazi novel "Hunter".

A 2023 duo show in Huxley-Parlour Gallery with Olivia Sterling, Rage Comics, focused on male victimization myths as perpetuated through incel culture and the online manosphere. Taking the form of a butcher's shop, the artists worked on imagery related to meat, animals, and a constant competition between men and between genders. Building on a dog-eat-dog world of flesh and judgement. For this, Shir created paintings, works on paper, embroideries, and soft sculptures, which enveloped the gallery space.

Shir is currently working on a solo project for miłość gallery, based both on Israeli propaganda and Shir's love of opera. The work will deal with the hard questions that come from loved ones being supportive, or simply indifferent to the genocide, and how can that be dealt with, emotionally and practically, by people of conscious.

'A language to make sense of what was felt but remained to be thought'

Tom Hull, University of Brighton

Saif Sidari didn't intend to write poetry – but poetry found him. This might come as a surprise to anyone who glanced through **Visiting Hours,** his debut pamphlet, which employs a deftly chosen variety of forms to reflect on its author's complex experiences of identity and belonging with candour and precision.

Attendees across multiple countries joined both online and in person on 28 May to celebrate the pamphlet's launch, which was facilitated by CAPPE co-director and Professor of Critical Theory, Mark Devenney. The event, hosted at the University of Brighton, commenced with Sidari giving selected readings from the collection. This was followed by a conversation about the work with Devenney, and a Q&A from an audience of students, academics, and poetry enthusiasts, before retiring for refreshment and further conversation.

"I started writing poetry as a therapeutic exercise of sorts," Sidari, whose doctoral research in creative writing takes the form of prose, explains about the pamphlet's origins. "It wasn't something I technically considered or planned, and only in hindsight am I able to identify what was happening for me. Poetry situated me in a different headspace to prose, in that I felt a greater urgency to interrogate my way into the marrow of my life and the world, or certain aspects of it. And that economy of language, where every syllable in every word in every sentence needed tending to, allowed me to really unpick things. Similarly, the punctuation, the line breaks, the rhythm and flow – even as I did not adhere to a rhyme scheme, created a new challenge. Being backed into a corner by form and space made it that I had to stretch the limits of what I thought possible inside of language. But it wasn't just about writing what I already knew to be true. Poetry offered a language to make sense of what was felt but remained to be thought, and what was thought but remained to be felt. A coherence that seemed to me only possible given this framework of storying practice."
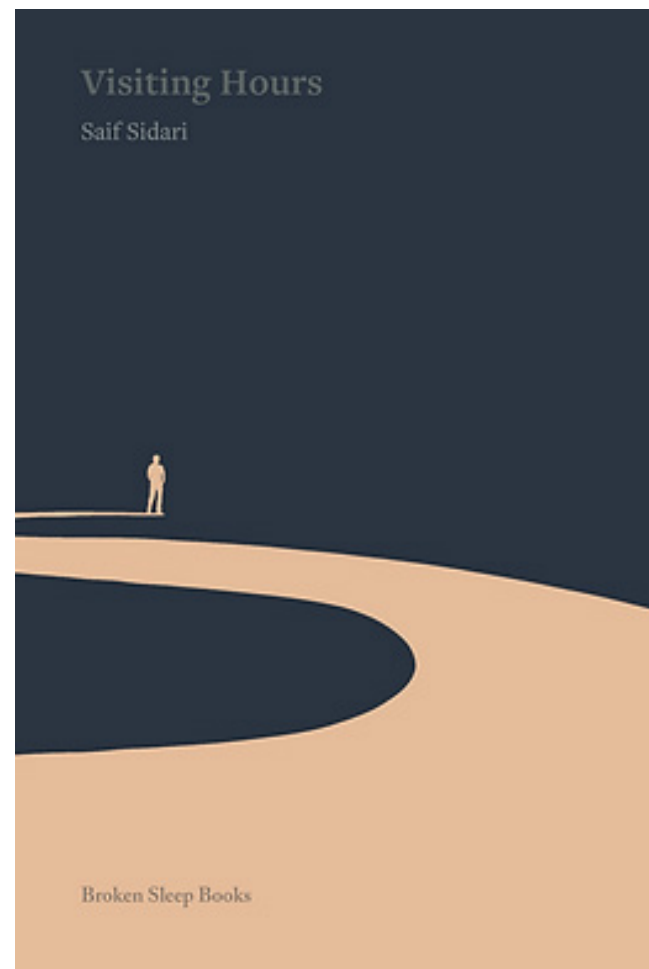
Celebrating the launch of Saif Sidari's Visiting Hours at University of Brighton

This expansive yet precise play with the limits of form is reflected in the breadth of the work; the poems muddy the lines between childhood memories, adult relationships, griefs and freedoms. *Visiting Hours* spans a range of themes and topics, but returns often to the themes of identity — personal, national, sexual, and familial. As a queer Arab, and as a Palestinian poet who has never been able to visit Palestine, Sidari reflected, much of his life has been spent navigating the contradictions of identities typically presented in opposition to each other; unquestionable lived experiences which are often made into political hypotheticals. Discussion at the event naturally coalesced along these lines, as Sidari reflected with insight on the significant place of his mother in the work, along with the complexity of how language and national identity contradict: the limitations of writing in English and the difficulty of what publishing this work in Arabic would entail.

I first read *Visiting Hours* in a café on a rainy March day in Edinburgh, and found myself blinking away tears and passing the pamphlet to my partner wordlessly when I reached 'I want to write about love' (p.37), a short prose poem of just one stanza. It was heartachingly relatable, reaching out and taking my hand in the way only good writing can. Hearing the poet's own voice a few months later was an intimate matter in a room full of strangers.

I asked Sidari what it was like to read and discuss this kind of quasi-therapeutic work in front of an audience. "I'd be lying if I said it comes naturally to me," he replied. "My gut instinct is still to retreat or disappear. And if I'm honest, half the time I'm not *all* there. It's not the pamphlet's proximity to the intimate details of my history that I find difficult, in and of itself. In fact, I cherish the opportunity to share, to connect. What a gift! But then, it's tricky, this attempt to negotiate my nervous system out of what it knows. The existential threat, given particular realities of my life – past and present included – which relegate the bulk of this work to the unsayable. I am *more* free, but I am not essentially free."

When academic institutions platform independent creative endeavours, we expand the possibilities of what can be expressed within these frameworks and open up new ways to express it. As Sidari puts it in the poem 'The Stranger': "I find my-self, writing a genealogy for the new world" (p.24).

I carried out this interview within the framework of this issue, with *Interfere*, and wanted to know what Sidari's position was on the overall theme, as well as some of the suggested topics, such as "language acts and grammars of resistance". To this he replied:

"It's easy enough to imagine why so many find themselves turning away from the world, from one another – and, therefore, from themselves. Certain horrors are much too abject to conceive, let alone internalise and confront head on. This is not a personal failing. We strive to do what we *must*, because this is the hand we've been dealt, and because it is the right thing to do. But it *is* overwhelming. Everywhere you look there is injustice and another call to action. I cannot fault anyone for craving pockets of dull reprieve.

But this turning away becomes highly problematic when it is protracted. The far-right thrives in these individualistic vacuums of disconnection, of moral and relational apathy. They capitalise on overwhelm and passivity. They underfund/defund universities, who are quick to cull their scholars, educators, and programs, especially – and prejudicially – from the Humanities and Social Sciences. They stoke fear of those they have othered and undermine the *human*. They make us estranged from one another, in part by embedding and amplifying a grave logic of scarcity – that life is inherently zero-sum, such that a person/group outside oneself couldn't possibly flourish without a detrimental, personal cost.

We cannot dispense with human languages – with creativity and storying practices. Because we *need* one another. There is no path back to our own humanity without connection. And we cannot hope to address the dangers of far-right ideology in the anti-human silos they have constructed for us. This urgent appeal for interdependence may not be unique to our time, but it is urgent all the same.

Cultivate the languages that will enable you to name a wound, and to love and be *in-relation*. And if yours is an endless suffering, then let your suffering be a bridge. Never underestimate the reciprocal value of this kindness. It will not be a silver bullet fix, but it is a meaningful victory – a *good* act of self-preservation that ripples beyond borders, affecting new worlds and future futures. In the end, this is a fight to (re)claim our collective humanity. And what is more *essentially* and *historically* human than the practices of storytelling and poetry? What better way to begin – or begin again – so we may forge these bonds?

As such, I'm truly honoured to have been invited by Mark and CAPPE for this event; for this opportunity to connect. Their efforts are invaluable, particularly at this juncture in history, in this unsettling political climate. And I'm equally grateful to Interfere, for the space and time they have carved out to engage with my work."

Editor's postscript

Natasha Jane Kennedy

The political is everywhere. When working on a commissioned interview, we initially wondered how explicitly linked to the issue we needed to make this piece. But we quickly realised that we didn't need to fit Sidari's work into any kind of tight box for it to go above and beyond what we were looking for. In this issue, we focus on featuring writers, thinkers, and artists who are indispensable to the effort of understanding our contemporary political situation. We wanted to name where we are, how we got there, think through what remains, and imagine where to go from here.

As a début collection by a transnational poet and researcher, *Visiting Hours* lives in proximity to political situations that confront the very possibility of its arrival. A text which appears, like the poet, to be searching for solid ground—reprieve from estrangement. With candour that is reasonably self-conscious, Sidari's work is an intimate exploration of what it can mean to be human in a world that is primed to make you forget, often under sustained dehumanising circumstances. Every piece is in some way an attempt to write towards identification and embodiment; an attempt from the poet to penetrate his own life as more than a spectre, who "visit[s] in-time with [his] ghost tongue" ('Visiting Hours', p.21).

Sidari's acute awareness of the context in which he writes underpins the collection in filigree; what a privilege it is to write, speak, and exist freely in the public domain. The poetry is urgent, and unforgiving. It is true, *Visiting Hours* is a personal witness statement: its author Palestinian, born in the diaspora, a queer man, an Arab immigrant residing in today's England. But one not need belong to the situations depicted to relate and glean important human insights. Personal truths exhume for this reader a democratic responsibility to question the histories we inherit—contexts we take for granted, and ones we often find ourselves inexorably tangled up with.

HOMEWRECKER

"Does a dream fall sick like the dreamers? ...
Can a people be born on the guillotine?"

Mahmoud Darwish, *We Are Entitled to Love Autumn*

I only ever know myself hanging, in a tempest   untouched

by nativities—the possibilities of my name

emptied to the firmaments, which could not care to claim me

yet feed my vapour body, back to the greying

furies. My own jettisoned   at waysides. A bay of white

polyester sheets, illuminated by ornate house keys, bandaged

         after Catastrophe. A world

disappearing   from my grandfather's memory—exit wounds. *I can't find*

         your grandmother.

I cradle his hand, stitching up time. *She died three years ago, seedi.* He recalls

his own key, cloaked in his jubbah, wields it like a prayer, the copper Right

of Return   remains, welded to his frame, this despite

the bulldozer, rending our home in its maw. Hatchet season, entitled

homewrecker, who kneads our histories into spoils   tragedy-capital to make

         victim of an-other,

blood mixing in the mortar. A communion of myths

migrating at the beak of an arrow, toward new beginnings, new ceaseless

wounding, 'cleansing' means   cleaving. The net at my lips gathering

         dreams—generational springs

nurture me. A stone to resist the tank, cast like going back

in Her arms, where in this mourning we might sing, as we always had,

         a song that is ours. A key

longs for turning locks, unspooling the brow, till I am no longer

scattering, everywhere   a ruin meandering through the trees

         or immigration offices.

(from *Visiting Hours,* p.42)

Visiting Hours by Saif Sidari is available now from Broken Sleep Books.

Denied Access

Finn Evans

Instagram: @chudatsi.

Since I was born, I have always seemed to be denied access. Denied early from the mother's womb, born in a hurry to live, only to be kept in a box, away from love's first touch.

Years have passed and that box that first separated us, is still there, invisible but just as constricting.

The box of *"You are my daughter."*

I broke that one, finding a field of love on a foreign island, yet entering the box of a foreigner. Of other. You have to settle for a settlement, but you will always be on the outside. So I did.

But hey, I have two passports, two homes, two chances. In time, I would see it - the first one, received, while in a life-saving box, only to be taken away, far away into a country that didn't recognise me as theirs, even if my blood is Bulgarian, that didn't stop them, they wanted me to change. A baby - with denied access, due to their name. So, they changed it. This would be the first of many. Just the beginning of othering, the beginning of many boxes along the way and many name variables.

They changed me, so now I am the only family member with a different surname. No one fought for me then, no one fights for me now, when I change my name with my own two hands, as I was otherwise to be nameless, as my mother doesn't have a son, she has a daughter, so I stay nameless, with a foreign name in a foreign country, that claims to be my home.

So, I looked towards the blue passport, hoping, scheming - one day, I would go back home, to where I was born, so much in a hurry, it must have been exciting to see, no?

Well, 2025 reached and the T has been erased, so I look at my blue passport - my last hope to find a home and wish to burn it.

You were supposed to be my safe box, why?

I am a trans, queer artist working across film, theatre, and writing to explore themes such as identity, displacement, and resistance. My practice is rooted in lived experience — shaped by bureaucratic erasure, cultural alienation, and the invisible constraints of gender and nationality.

Born in the U.S., I was initially denied Bulgarian citizenship despite both my parents being Bulgarian. Later, I faced settlement processes in the UK. These border-crossings, both literal and symbolic, revealed a common tendency: the impulse of systems to rename, reframe, and confine people in boxes.

In my piece Denied Access, I invoke the image of a baby incubator — both a life-saving device and a metaphor for forced separation and controlled existence.

Through poetic language, visual storytelling, and community-building, I work to reclaim narrative power for those, whose stories are often rewritten or silenced. Denied Access was my raw reaction to Trump's anti-trans legislation and the broader rise of far-right politics in both Bulgaria and the UK. It speaks to the pain of being denied home, recognition, and selfhood — again and again, by family, state, and society. I believe art can be both deeply intimate and profoundly political.
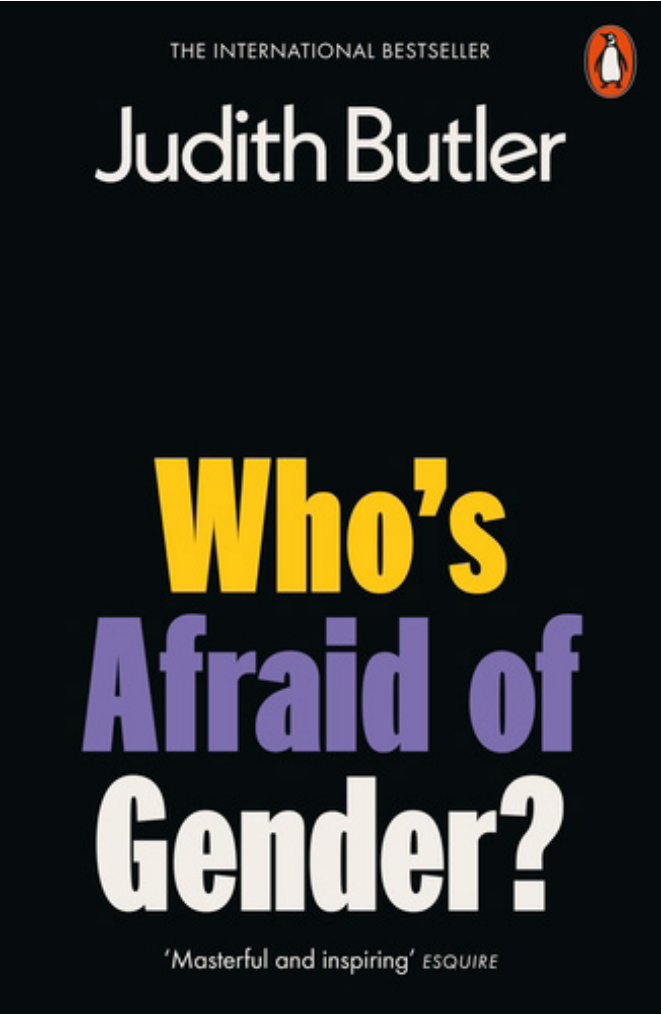
Book Review: Who's Afraid Of Gender

Judith Butler, Allen Lane, 2024, 308pp, ISBN 9780241595824, £25.00 (hardback).

Tea Lawrence

Following the sexual optimism of the late 1990's and early 2000's, a time when, as Paris Lees puts it, you could "wear what you want, be who you want, shag who you want," the last two decades have been less than optimistic (Lees & Welsh, 2025). There has been a gradual, but accelerating rise of homophobia, transphobia and misogyny, both culturally and legally; a trend that is synchronised with a broader rise of conservative, authoritarian, and fascist movements across the world. Whilst Judith Butler's earlier work in the nineties and noughties may have been written in a context of increased politico-legal protection, and thus functioning to establish and solidify the position of feminist and queer theory in the academy, the rising urgency for resisting political violence against gendered and sexed minorities has led to an increasing political intensity in their work; this political intensity culminating in the 2024 monograph, *Who's Afraid Of Gender.*

A year on from its release, Judith Butler's titular question is no less pertinent. This March Orbán's Hungary (unsuccessfully) banned pride events, in May the UK Supreme Court ruled on the definition of a woman through obscure biological-reductionism, and throughout 2025 we have seen a flurry of "anti-gender" executive orders from President Trump. It is in the context of these intensifying global attacks on gender theory, feminism, and trans rights that Butler gives an account of how the concept of "gender" has come to occupy such a complex space in contemporary debate. For instance, that within the frame of "anti-gender" movements, gender has come to represent sexual anarchy yet also totalitarian erasure of tradition; or Marxism yet also capitalism; or how in the OECD, gender can be a threat to "Western" values, but in most of the world, it can be seen as a tool of European imperialism.

Recognising this complexity Butler deploys Jean Laplanche's concept of the "phantasm" as the central concept of the book in order to give an account of how these contradictory and disparate signifiers can be "arbitrarily connected" (p. 12), but also to conceive of how minority persons and groups can come to represent a diffuse range of social ills – social ills to which those minorities may be the very targets of. The core thesis of the book which follows from this analysis is a call to action for a feminist and queer politics which is not limited to the sphere of individual rights, but which connects all struggles for social and economic justice to one another and seeks to build large coalitions of people. Coalitions of people who may not be comfortable together nor even like one another, but whose solidarity and partnership are necessary in building transna-

tional struggles for justice.

A key strength in communicating this coalitional message is the distinct accessibility of the book. Butler is an author who has been more than critiqued for obscurantism, their prose often leading to persistent misreadings of their work. Here however, the book in some regards stands as a summary of their oeuvre redacted of philosophical minutiae; in handfuls of sentences their philosophical concepts (such as "iteration," "framing," and "liveability") and scholarly influences and interlocutors (such as Andrea Dworkin, Jack Halberstam, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak) are simplified and introduced to a lay audience. As Butler said in a March 2025 interview for PoliticsJOE, their new role seems to be "mak[ing] nerdy available".

A consequence, and potential critique, of the book follows this accessibility: that there is an occasional tendency to gloss over key terms without even mentioning, let alone analysing, their contested readings in critical theory. However, as this brevity was necessary for the book's accessibility, and the accessibility in turn serves its political efficacy, this critique is quite limited. Furthermore, as someone writing from a gender studies department at a less than accessible university, my ability to judge its readability to a lay audience should be taken cautiously; this is further evident in some non-academic reviews labelling the book "opaque" (Loffhagen 2024).

However, another limitation of the book is that although it calls for coalitions between differently violated bodies, the analysis is primarily directed at the phantasm of gender, at signification and psycho-social displacement. This leads to an occasional failing to properly consider the violations which led to the phantasm; although the deterioration of living standards is mentioned (primarily in the conclusion), a more developed analysis of how capital, austerity, and/or neoliberal governmentality produces the conditions of precarity that allow the phantasm to be operable may have proved effective in emphasising the commonalities such a coalition would be reliant upon, making the call for such a coalition stronger.

A final issue is that although Butler asserts that the book "cannot be fully global in its reach," (p. 64) the tendency to refer to "the anti-gender movement" without geo-political hedging can at times come across as universalising, risking re-inscribing the very epistemological Eurocentrism and monolingual obstinacy (p. 238) which their calls for anti-imperial, anti-universalising coalitions aim to contest.

These critiques aside, the book's role as an accessible polemic addressing the political urgency of gender studies, and its wider call to protect and foster critical democratic thinking, remains deeply relevant. In the months since publication, "gender," along with critical race theory, decolonial theory, and similar academic fields have only continued intensifying as phantasms. Today, not only are particular fields of study under threat, but – as Butler makes clear throughout the book – study itself is under threat. Reading, critical thought, artistic expression, and the university are all increasingly becoming that to which social ills are displaced; as Butler says: "thought itself [is framed as] a danger to society." (p. 23)

Quoting his father, New York mayoral candidate Zohran Mamdani recently opined that "when the right gains power, the left writes a great book" (Mamdani 2025). Butler's 264 page call to preserve democratic thinking in the face of authoritarian populism may hold this snarky statement true, but we should take heed of Butler's notion that reading is "a precondition of democratic life," and recognise that the American President and the Vatican and whoever else censor for a reason: because it is necessary in the establishment of their own hegemony through erasing complexity and the ability for transformational thought. *Who's Afraid Of Gender,* in its accessibility, its political imperative, and its inadvertent function as an introduction to both gender studies, and to critical theory more broadly, will make the book essential in instigating, preserving, and fostering critical thought in the uncertain years ahead.

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Requiem Redux: A Chorus for the Present

Scott Ennis

Requiem Redux: A Chorus for the Present is a sequence of original sonnets in poetic dialogue with Anna Akhmatova's *Requiem*. It reimagines her elegiac witness to Stalinist terror within today's shifting authoritarian landscapes, from border detentions to surveillance states and the weaponization of silence. Written in a blend of traditional and contemporary registers, the sequence centers women's voices across space and time, forming a transhistorical chorus of resistance. Rather than translating Akhmatova, the work engages in a creative correspondence with her: each sonnet is both an echo and an answer. This poetic offering builds a living archive of grief, defiance, and remembrance, where the lyric becomes an act of refusal. The piece is offered as a creative response to the rise of gendered authoritarianism, and speaks to the theme of gender politics within the new right. It may be performed, read aloud, or presented as text.

Requiem Redux: A Chorus for the Present

A Performance Script in Sonnets

By Scott Ennis

Inspired by and in dialogue with Anna Akhmatova's *Requiem*

Cast of Voices

POET – Contemporary narrator bridging past and present

ANNA – Akhmatova's voice: lyrical, firm

MOTHER – Modern-day woman facing state repression

GUARD – Border official, conflicted

DAUGHTER – Next generation, inheriting resistance

CHORUS – Collective voice of women across time

I. BEFORE THE GATES

Spotlight. The POET stands center, addressing the audience.

POET

We do not knock; the guards have no such door

We stand in queues of code, of barbed regret

No stone, no cell, no paper to abhor

Just silence signed by fingerprints and debt

A woman's voice cracks through a filtered screen

Her child was taken for the state to cleanse

The echo rings in sterile, glassy green

Where laws collapse and mercy never mends

I've learned to breathe without a sound or plea

To swallow names before the drones can hear

What they call justice doesn't come for free

And in this queue we barter pain for fear

The ghosts of Leningrad come haunt this place

They mouth our words, then vanish without trace.

II. AFTER AKHMATOVA

Side lighting. ANNA is seated, composed, her voice unwavering.

ANNA

No, not beneath the eyes of silent drones

Did I rehearse my grief in measured lines

The frost upon the prison's copper stones

Felt warmer than the age that now confines

I stood with mothers, centuries away

With sisters mourning, kin in whispered names

They choked us with the ash of every day

And lit our silent pyres with their flames

I gave no outcry but I did not yield

My voice, though veiled, remained intact, alive

I stitched it in the hem of what was sealed

A gospel no regime could yet deprive

The poet's task is not to beg or bow

But witness, with her broken, bloodless brow.

III. DETAINED

MOTHER stands or sits quietly, holding a child's paper fan.

MOTHER

They took my daughter in a windowed van
The papers said it wasn't theft at all
She stole a slice of bread with trembling hand
Her hunger born of poverty's great call

I dream her hand still folds her paper fans
Each crease a prayer, a promise not to break
They say her name beyond the windowed vans
Too soft for wind, too slow for breath to take

I count the codes, the filings, the appeals
The doors stay locked. The system hums its lie
The legalese obscures what justice feels
A child afraid beneath fluorescent sky

Let every border guard and scribe take note
My silence is the anthem that I wrote.

IV. THE GUARD'S SONNET

GUARD speaks slowly, halting, then gains clarity.

GUARD

I mark the boxes. I don't read the names
The ink is data, and the data's clean
A mother wails. I don't play petty games
I tally crossings, not the souls between

But once a girl not older than my niece
Looked up and asked if poetry could die
She held a doll, a verse stitched in the fleece
And whispered, "They erased my lullaby"

My kin read Akhmatova in the war
And taught me not to flinch at sorrow's call
I looked away. The child knelt on the floor
And silence settled thick against the wall

Each border crossed is written on the skin
And some of us are traitors deep within.

V. THE DAUGHTER'S RETURN

DAUGHTER speaks standing, proud, voice bright with fire.

DAUGHTER

They told me you had vanished. But you wrote
In thread, in margins, in the flour bag's seam
I read your syllables like they could float
Like voice could resurrect a buried dream

You wrote of barbed wire gardens, rusted gates
Of lullabies that sharpened into knives
You wrote the names of women lost to fates
Too small for courtrooms, too immense for lives

They taught me numbers. You gave me the word
You hid it in a map beneath my bed
It pulsed. It bled. It dared to be unheard
And now I speak it for the nameless dead

The ink survives. The terror does not stay
Your silence shaped the words I speak today.

VI. CHORUS

ALL voices. Lines overlap, then converge in unison.

CHORUS (fragmented, overlapping)

We are the women, knowing what we know

We are the girls with silence in our hands

We are the mothers forced to let them go

We are the ghosts that rise in foreign lands

You'll find us in the footnotes and the files

Our language shifts, but never begs or pleads

In scraps of cloth, in silent signs, in miles

Where whispered prayers are passed through hidden deeds

We do not ask permission now to speak

The breath you tried to crush drew strength from pain

We rose from rubble, starving, scorched, and weak

And carved the names you buried in disdain

ALL (in unison, rising)

The poet lives. The state will pass away

And still our tongues remember how to pray.

VII. CODA: FOR AKHMATOVA
POET alone. One step forward, softer tone.

POET

Anna, I keep your picture on my wall

Not framed, but taped, as if to say you stayed

Your gaze is not forgiving, not at all

You ask me: Have you watched your people fade?

I try, I fail. I write and try again

I fashion sonnets like they might resist

Your silence echoes in my subtle pen

Your name survives, not carved, but softly kissed

They'll say the world is new, that you are gone

But I have seen you in the refugee

In every poet smuggling a dawn

In girls who learn to name their agony

And when I'm told to hush or walk away

I mouth your lines and dare again to stay.

End.

I am a poet, a sonneteer who has written more sonnets than Shakespeare. My name, Scott Ennis, forms the anagram "Sonnettics." In 2011, I traveled on a literary tour of Russia, where I was introduced to the brilliant and harrowing work of the poet Anna Akhmatova. That experience stayed with me. Over time, I began expanding my writing into short stories and drama, so composing a short play in sonnets felt like a natural evolution.

The current state of the world made me reflect on the repetition of history and inspired me to create my own interpretation of current events based on the events Akhmatova memorialized in her piece, Requiem. If I am ever asked, as she once was, "Can you describe this?"—I hope I will have the courage to answer, as she did: "Yes, I can."

Heads Above Water

Afra Nuarey

I chose to make a documentary about the hijra community because I have always been curious about their identity and facade's complexity growing up in Bangladesh. Studying Gender Studies in my undergrad made me even more intrigued about everything from how they dress to the politics of their semblance attitude. As I started to integrate into Bangladesh society in 2019, I was not satisfied with how the media portrayed the community. This compelled me to pursue my hidden passion as a storyteller and ensure that the film I make aligns with my perspective of the Hijra community.

I wanted to be a detached observer in the film. Creating this film pushed me to understand the dynamic and the struggles faced by the community, which often is not found in a textbook or known internationally or even locally! It is my way of introducing the socio-economic realities of the transgender and intersex communities in Bangladesh, which is comparatively different from the west.

https://www.nowness.asia/picks/heads-above-water
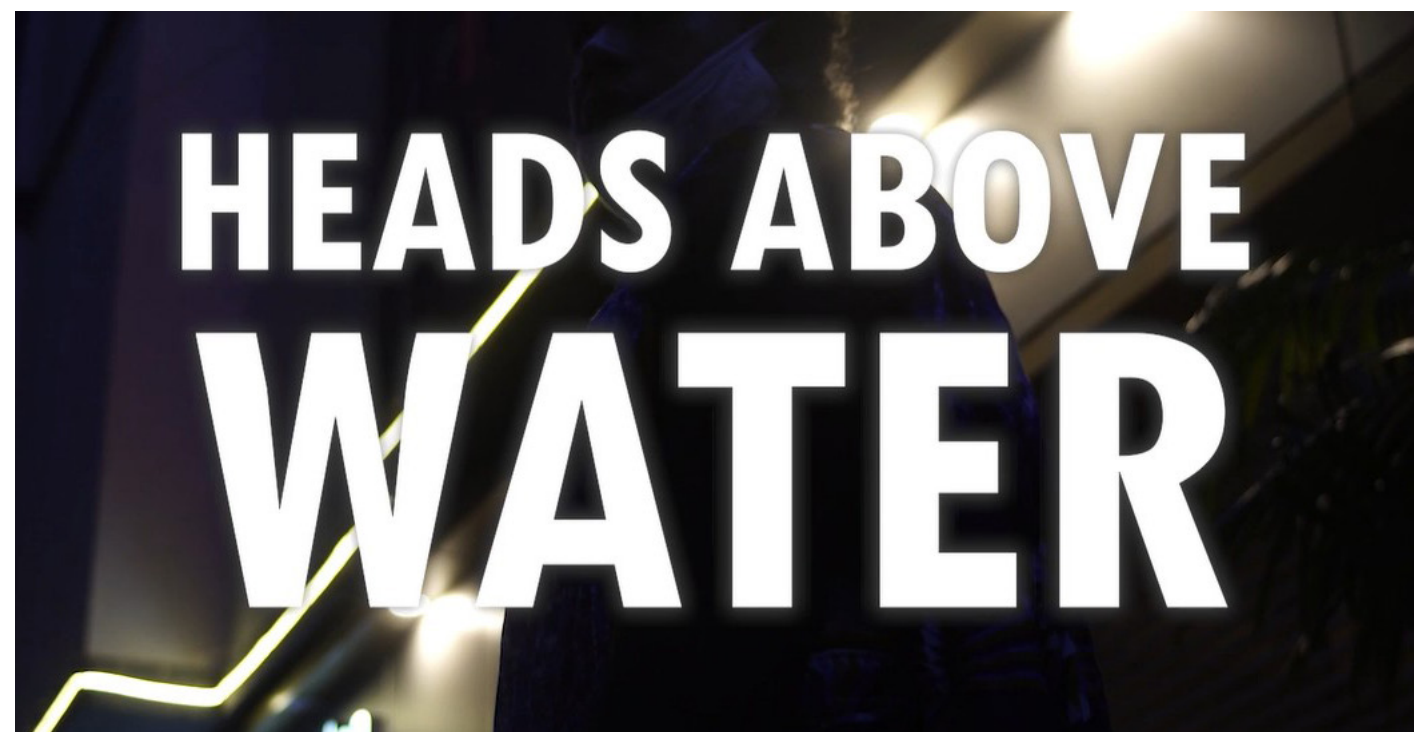
Afra Nuarey is a multimedia documentary storyteller based in Dhaka and London. She focuses on bringing a humanistic lens to social issues such as transgender rights, migration, and women's rights through print and digital media.
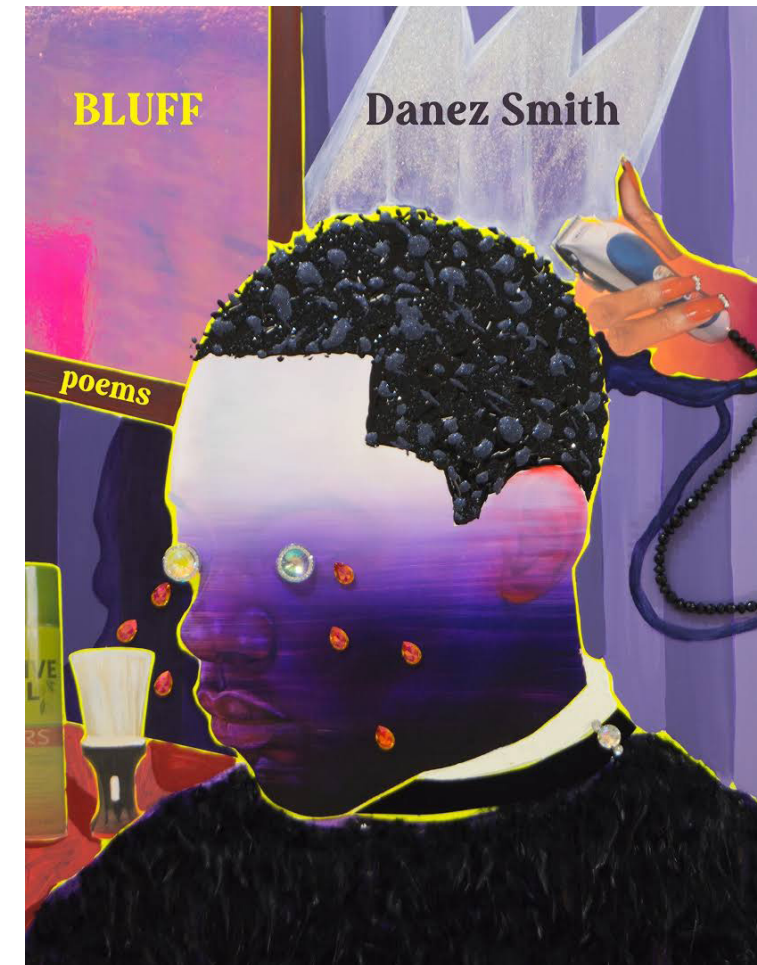
Book Review: Bluff

Danez Smith, Chatto & Winus, 2024, 160 pp, ISBN: 9781784745738, £14.99 (paperback)

Elisa Cecchinato, University Gustave Eiffel

In a 2024 interview with Danez Smith, poetry podcaster David Naimon observes that 'bluff' evokes an elevated spot, an overhanging space. From there, the Black queer poet, slam performer and activist inspects their past work, and the transformations that occurred between the publication of *[insert]Boy* (2014), *Don't Call Us Dead* (2017), and *Homie* (2020) and the production of Smith's last collection of poetry, *Bluff* (2024). The poet's elevated position and overview invert the choking scene of deadly submission forced upon George Floyd by a white police officer on 25 May 2020 in Minneapolis, Smith's present hometown – and with it a history of US antiblack fascism and racist subjection of the Black body in the USA – in a poetic, self-reflecting act of liberation and movement. In this act, voice is resituated in the Black body, which is in turn resituated to the space of the city, of the neighbourhood, of the store, the streets and the parks. The political and poetic priority of *Bluff*'s creative gesture is in the choice of the collection's ideal reader: *Bluff* must speak the same language as community members such as Larcenia Floyd, George Floyd's mother, who stands for all Black mothers/women and their resistance in fascist, misogynist and antiblack USA (Naimon, 2024). *Bluff*'s project of self-exploration, voicing trauma, self and collective liberation, takes place in a temporality which embraces present, past and future, where time amplifies the empowering scope of the dialogues that the poet has with themselves, their communities, and their readers. "Minneapolis, Saint Paul" (pp. 49-56) is one hinging point of *Bluff*'s structure, rooting Smith's poetry – and its discontents – in community, upheaval and abolitionist insurrection against police, the state, whiteness, and coloniality. In this project, which is also one of exposure and undoing of internalized Americanness, the bluff or cliff where the poet stands expropriates the geography of the colonizer, exposing the genealogy of its violent toponymy: "was it dayton's bluff   meaning his cock on the table was his name on the hill   or was it dayton's bluff   meaning a people had to be disappeared off the cliff for his legacy to rise   or was it dayton's bluff   meaning the land was never his" ("Dayton's Bluff," p. 33). Crucially, the bluff signals a position of liminality and contradiction, central elements of Smith's poetry in the collection.

Smith's 2024 compositions blow up the "I" into its multiple and often contradictory components, moving from explorations of sexuality, Black masculinity, HIV-positive condition, self-reconstruction and "he-ness" developed in *[insert]Boy*, *Don't Call Us Dead* and *Homie*, to a "they-ness" and commitment to community, which in *Bluff* is philosophically inspired by the Black Art Movement, Rastafarianism and Indigenous epistemologies. Abolishing the normative textual font ("I") rooted in colonial individualistic axiologies implies

the systematic use of a lower-case "i," an action performed right at the beginning of the collection, with the illustrated poem "on knowledge" (pp. 7-15), where the thoughts and words break out of a black square fenced-in by "I-s". This is a way to underscore, study and embrace individual impasses as an aesthetic and existential rather than moral gesture, to situate them in a choral and collective history, which is mapped across the collection. What is the violence that inhabits the poet and that they reclaim, in a revolutionary gesture ("but how long in the apocalypse could you go before have to kill some white dude," p. 93)? How can the poet "kill the state within [themselves]" ("principles," pp. 59-63, p. 62)? How can they imagine community? What does the poet make of the fact that neighbours, a beloved mother or a friend, may become cops and vigilantes in their oppressed communities, to patrol the territory or "Money" from both internal and external threats ("Minneapolis, Saint Paul," pp.49-56; "maybe my mother is a cop" in the digitalized section "METRO_deleted poems")? But also, what is the status of that "i" that had once diminished a girl-friend to engage with "brutal fraternity" ("The Slap," pp. 72-73, p. 73)? How is masculinity inscribed in such gesture? *Bluff*'s is an aesthetic of complexity, materiality and multiplicity, which takes note of contradiction and the questionings it inspires, beyond the identity injunctions of a disciplinary and abstract social morality. To qualify contradiction in gendered terms, the components of Smith's "i" are both male and female, an "indigenous two-spiritedness" (Naimon, 2024), which is shaped by the poet's inscription in a matrilinear genealogy. Key to the collection is the figure of a grandmother who endures the year-long relation with a violent husband/grandfather, a man whose story the poet seeks to grasp, keep at a distance, appropriate and represent ("1955," p. 31; "The Joke," p. 75). The figure of a hated and beloved father is explored in the same way ("i miss that negro," p. 76). The they-ness of the poet takes all its meaning when their everyday actions to relieve familiar trauma imply that the poet trans-genders but also transitions across generations and time: "i washed [grandpa's] back/& got him calm. he wanted his mama. i was/his mother for a bath. i tilted my boy's head back" ("[cancer's reveal was him in the tub]" in the digitalized section).

Embedded in the gesture of making contradictions visible is the possibility of transformation of the poet's self, and of the selves of other characters appearing in the collection, of the community, and of readers. The centrality of such a possibility is contained in the poetic form of the sonnet, whose *volta* Danez Smith uses as a formal device and a metaphor to represent individual and collective change as a form of self-understanding ("volta," p. 28; "volta", in the digitalized section). In their interview with Naimon, the poet underlines that change and transformation through time allow a person to look at their past actions and contradictions in a truthful manner, with transformation being for Smith the most powerful form of testimony – an idea inspired by the poet's religious upbringing in Black Christian communities. Hence, against the mould of hegemonic and fascistic Americanness and capitalist false consciousness, the act of writing poetry – often painful, ambiguous and frustrating ("anti poetica," p. 3 and p. 58 ; "it doesn't feel like a time to write," pp. 18-20; "Minneapolis, Saint Paul," *ibid.,* p. 52) – takes on meaning through gestures of testimony, and through Smith's plea to their communities, that they read and critically respond to the poet's experiments in representing peoples and places (Naimon, 2024; "My Beautiful End of the World," pp. 88-92, p.91). The possibility of poetry is akin to the urgency of naming hurtful experience and writing the self out of it, yet it can only exist away from solitude: where poetic form is a means to "[reorder]/the wound's language," it is the presence of the other, of a friend, which can actually nurture such an act ("ars poetica at the end of the writer's block," in the digitalized section). The polyphonic result of this collective creative ethos is embedded in the numerous intertextual references to poets, artists and theorists that Smith invokes through the collection, either contemporaneous (Phillip B. Williams, Jane Huffman, Jonah Mixon-Webster, Angel Nafis, Jamila Woods, Ross Gay, Tarell Alvin MCraney, Marlin M. Jenkins, Hank Willis Thomas, June Jordan) or authors from the Black queer tradition, among whom Assotto Saint holds a central place.

Bluff's questioning of community, collective and individual identity – and the strictures of the notion of identity itself – is deeply rooted in Saint's queer poetic and intellectual creation during the AIDS/HIV pan-

demic of the 1980s and early 1990s, and his callout of the double oppression of Black queer men, as Blacks in US society and as queers within their own communities and territories. The rough interrogation that *Bluff* makes on the sense of community and of the "we" is particularly influenced by this preoccupation ("i'm not bold, i'm fucking traumatized," pp. 69-71). Smith's dialogue with Saint also reflects the long history of Black queer literary publishing, depublishing (Cran, 2024), and the embattled visibility of Black literary queer voices, which barely survived the pandemic because of the unwillingness or unawareness of copyright holders, often relatives and families, to allow for publication of documents deemed unbecoming, or to save written works for them to be published ("my deepest & most ashamed apologies to Assotto Saint," in the digitalized section "METRO_deleted poems"). Once again, Smith's poetry operates across time to bring back to the surface and to the readers a constellation of Black queer struggles, desires, joy, artistic and poetic creations, which marginalization risks subtracting from intergenerational transmission and fruition – as in "love poem (Vandross)," dedicated to Black soul and R&B singer Luther Vandross, and imagining his queer loves, asking him about them, celebrating them in erotic acts of love (in the digitalized section).

Through this poetic voicing of self, of time, desire, community, and testimony always in the making, territory emerges as a structuring element for *Bluff*'s texts, which Naimon calls "poems of place:" cities and towns where Smith has grown up and lived – primarily Minneapolis-Saint Paul – parks, rivers, landscape and cityscape elements. Movement of words and bodies on the surface of the text bear intertextual inspiration from the scholarship of Black American scholar Christina Sharpe, in particular regarding the inscription of the transatlantic slave trade in Black art production, representation, memory and trauma ("ars America (in the hold)," p. 4): this is how Minneapolis becomes Smith's "murderer, [...] mother ship, moose heart, [...] mercy" ("I-35 W North // Downtown Exits," p. 48).

The pages of the collection are made into maps, a decolonial cartography meant to orient the self out of the colonizer's/state's fascist topography – as in "rondo" (pp. 35-41), where a long thick black line cuts several pages in half, to represent the I-94 interstate, which in 1955 was built across Rondo, a historical centre of Minneapolis' Black community. Words scatter and are entrapped on the two sides of the line, as residents are on the two sides of the interstate, at first divided and dispersed, and at last reunited in long sentences, massively cutting through the violent and authoritarian infrastructure. A similar mobility of words and sentences appears in "sonnet" (pp. 104-117), developed across 14 pages, each occupied by a four-square grid. Each square develops a thematic thread: untrustworthy political leaders, fascistic urban ghettoization, mass techno-surveillance, and the seductions of power. Each one of the four threads is interwoven with the others: mapping the concatenation of words and themes makes one compositional logic emerge, without forbidding alternate combinations to produce meaning, in an act of sabotage against the scheme of oppression that the "sonnet" unveils. The conclusive image of 'water' (p. 116) breaks the grid by way of an enlarged font and diagonal orientation, producing a suggestive and highly political reference to the impossibility of containment in the imagined and pragmatic geography of *Bluff*. In the form of an essay, "My Beautiful End of the World" (pp. 88-92) reflects on the relation of the Black body to the body of the city and to non-urban spaces, through the long history of red-lining and urban segregation, assessing the deprivation of access to green and natural spaces while asking how the body/territory can be cured in times of ecological disaster.

The digitalized section of *Bluff* – accessible via the QR-code that appears on the same page as the poem "METRO" (p. 42) – adds a further dimension to the maps that the collection engages with. It is announced as such by Smith on the second page of the section: "These poems helped me see the book and find my way through it. I hope you enjoy the B-side!" Borrowing from the techniques of recordings and music – an art which is central to Smith's production – this add-on to the collection, whose pages are not numbered, assembles 22 additional compositions – absent from the index – the last of which, "Evaluation," conveys the permanent questioning that has guided Danez in their work:

Young Danez, who are you writing for? Who is freed by your pessimistic mind? What use are you to the slave? Where are the Black women? Who is alive at the end of your imagination? Why isn't it you? What future do you add your premonition to? What do you refuse to reanimate? Who do you love? Who do your poems hold? Captive? Where is the poem like air & water & food? Who will you feed? Will you feed?

It is the Black boy, the key figure of Smith's liberation poetry across their four collections, that is oriented by these interrogations. The last poem of the collection, "craft" (pp. 137-138), provides a direction: the sonnet – and poetic form – is a "beautiful thing" which allows both verbalization and shielding from violence. Through it, the poet asks to "let [them] map you to oasis," addressing a "you" who embraces the self, the Black mother, the Black boy, and the poet's communities. In this oasis, the "you" can find "where the weapons are" (p. 138). From the clear sight on top the bluff, and against the bluff of "hope and despair" in face of individual and collective founding contradictions (Naimon, 2024), Smith reclaims the weaponization of language (Kapri, 2020) as part of the decolonial project that can orient a "we" in-the-making alongside Black abolitionist and liberation struggle, which *Bluff* advocates against deadly US antiblackness, fascism, and imperialism. The constant homage to Palestine's resistance against colonial erasure is a clear testimony to the global reach that Smith's poetic and critical project reclaims ("poem," p. 64; "Israel memes," in the digitalized section).

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Elisa Cecchinato is the author of a PhD dissertation titled *Fire on the Harlem Renaissance: Black Cultural Identities, Desiring Agencies, and the Disciplinary Episteme*, defended in 2018 at Université Gustave Eiffel (in the suburbs of Paris, France) under the supervision of Jean-Paul Rocchi. Affiliated with UGE's laboratory LISAA, Elisa continues her research on the Harlem Renaissance and on Black American literature, politics, and culture, while simultaneously preparing a diploma in archival studies at the University of Paris 8. Her work is accessible here: https://canenms.wordpress.com/

Contact information : canenms@gmail.com

The review was written during the summer of 2025. For this reason, the spiral of bloody repression and courageous resistance that Minneapolis and Saint Paul have been experiencing from December 2025 is not mentioned in these pages.

Aestheticised Subordination: 'Trad-Wife' Influencers and the Gendered Violence of Far-Right Radicalisation

Níamh Burns & Kathryn Zacharek, University of Brighton

Abstract:

This paper explores the growing phenomenon of the "trad-wife" influencer, understood here as women promoting hyper-traditional gender roles on platforms such as TikTok and YouTube, as a case study in the gendered dynamics of far-right radicalisation. These influencers serve as integral sources of propaganda for the far-right (Leidig, 2023), legitimised through digital aesthetics and far-right ideological frames, that normalise and aestheticise women's subordination. Against this backdrop, critical questions are raised: Why do women join the movements that openly advocate for the restriction of their autonomy, reproductive and political rights?

The role these influencers enact reflects a paradoxical position, one which challenges the binary of 'victims' and 'perpetrators' and reveals a complex web of tension in this context, stemming from both the inequality and violence these women face, and their active participation as spokeswomen in movements that endorse ideologies which oppress them and other women. This poses a question for feminist activists, to what extent can their status as victims of misogyny be a rallying point to support these women (if) they decide to leave the movement? After all, would anyone want to fund a refuge for women Nazi's? (Shearing, 2024).

Building on Lois Shearing's (2024) comparison between the radicalisation of women into far-right movements and the coercive tactics used in human trafficking, this paper explores the complex positioning of these influencers as both subjects of patriarchal control and active agents of far-right propaganda.

Focusing on US based content creators who align themselves with Christian Nationalism and neo-Nazi ideologies, we argue that "trad-wife" content has become a vehicle for aestheticising and legitimising women's subordination within extremist politics. Within this, we situate the "trad-wife" as a rebranding of patriarchal coercion as empowerment, and drawing on feminist theory, we argue that it sits within a broader continuum of gendered violence (Kelly, 1987).

Introduction

The re-election of Donald Trump in the 2024 US presidential election was underpinned by support from far-right groups, such as the Proud Boys (Roston, 2024) and Christian Nationalists (Allam, 2024), raising renewed concerns surrounding the political and social rights of women. These concerns are not without foundation, for in the wake of Trump's victory, when the right-wing political pundit Nick Fuentes posted on X (formerly Twitter) the phrase 'your body, my choice', after the 5th November 2024, the use of the phrase went from 'fewer than 20 mentions a day to nearly 2000' (Gooding, 2024). Trump's presidency has long been associated with misogynistic rhetoric and behaviour, from grabbing women 'by the pussy' (Revesz, 2016) to burying his ex-wife, Ivana Trump, on his New Jersey golf course (Waters, 2022) such actions testify to the low regard Trump has for women. Yet in 2024, 53 percent of white women voted for Trump (Cousens, 2024), he also made notable gains among younger women when compared to the 2020 election (Sherman, 2024).

Against this backdrop, this paper explores the role of women within far-right movements, and more specifically, the role of 'traditional housewife' ('trad-wife') influencers who have gained notoriety in recent years on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube. Analysed through an intersectional feminist lens, with a specific focus on the role of race and religion in contemporary American politics; and drawing on Shearing's trafficking metaphor (Shearing, 2024), we seek to unpack the extent to which women such as Lauren Southern and Estee Williams (to name only a couple) complicate our understanding of the complicity of women within structures of patriarchal violence that are glorified as 'ideal domesticity' within far-right movements.

It should be noted, the reason why we have opted for the usage of the term 'patriarchal violence' is that it best describes the 'interconnected system of institutions, practices, policies, beliefs and behaviours that harm, undervalues, and terrorises girls, women, femme, intersex, gender non-conforming, LGBTQ, and other gender oppressed people' as well as being a 'widespread [normalized] epidemic based on the domination, control, and colonizing of bodies, genders and sexualities' (Bates, 2021). This definition can help us explore the precarious bargain women make when they become members of hate groups. On the one hand, they promote a racist, self-serving ideology (as they understand their race as superseding their gender) while simultaneously forfeiting their safety from misogyny and gender based violence. As this paper will show, while women in these movements are victims of a multitude of violences such as physical and sexual abuse, coercive control, isolation and their 'value' being rooted solely in their reproductive capacities, these women are also complicit in the perpetration of such violences as they are an integral function in the recruitment process by being the 'friendly face of the far-right' (Shearing, 2024).

This article is structured into four key sections. The first provides a cultural and ideological mapping of the 'trad-wife,' whereby we survey the key pieces of literature that have already surveyed this topic. The second then interrogates the framing of submission as empowerment, challenging the narratives of choice presented within the trad-wife framework. Following this, Shearing's metaphor of trafficking is used to unpack the patterns of coercion and gendered violence embedded within trad-wife relationships. The contribution this article seeks to make, in doing an in-depth analysis on the case of Lauren Southern in the final section of this paper, is to tease out the contradictions and complexities of the position of women within contemporary far-right movements. By building on the work of Shearing (2024) we aim to unpack not only the problematic binary between "victims" and "perpetrators" of patriarchal violence, but also to further the conversation on how best to pinpoint where women such as Southern are positioned on the continuum of patriarchal violence. This matter is growing ever more pertinent, as with the rise of social media platforms such as TikTok, trends are no longer confined to the acquisition of material goods (for example Labubu's) but entire lifestyles and their underpinning philosophies should be considered within this scope.

Sourdough and Fascism

Megan L. Zahay defines trad-wives as women who forward a "traditionalist [understanding] of womanhood in which mothering and nurturing are their primary role" (2022: 172). Yet, the justification for this varies across political and religious spheres. For example, Estee Williams promotes a "50s escapist fantasy" (Love, 2020:2) of 'biblical submission' (featuring milk-maid dresses and home cooking) where the hierarchy of authority goes from Christ at the top, followed by the husband, then the wife, and lastly children (Williams, 2024a). She contends that women do not have 'less value' in the home by being biblically submissive to their husbands, but she argues that 'it should be a priority for women to take care of their family and home' (Williams, 2024b) as this is more in line with their 'natural femininity' (Zahay, 2017).

Many 'trad-wife' influencers draw upon religious texts to justify their adherence to traditional gender roles. Proverbs 31, for example, a Biblical passage that praises the 'virtuous woman' who takes care of her home and family is commonly cited within 'trad-wife' ideology. These moralistic framings create a moral high ground, one which positions traditional gender roles as not only desirable but an inherently 'good' choice (Chowdhury, 2024). Moreover, Estee Williams actively distances herself from white supremacist movements that promote the 'trad-wife lifestyle', stating on her TikTok page that the conflation between white supremacy and traditional families is unwarranted (Williams, 2024b).[1] Yet, what Estee Williams fails to acknowledge in her statement is that religion (more specifically Christian denominations in this instance) and the far-right are not mutually exclusive groups, Ayla Stewart (a.k.a Wife with a Purpose) is an example of a crossover as she identifies as Mormon but also promotes white supremacist ideologies. Nevertheless, far-right, white supremacist content creators are some of the most ardent promoters of the trad-wife lifestyle.

Lauren Southern offers a compelling case study in this context. While she did not make 'trad-wife' content when she was married, before her marriage and after her divorce, she promoted the 'traditional' lifestyle for women as the ideal and continues to be one of the most prominent female figures of the far-right. In an interview with Alex Clark (2024), Lauren Southern detailed how her upbringing in Canada led her to 'embrace' right-wing ideology. Raised in a middle-class, conservative Christian home (Harrington, 2024) she claims that mass migration was 'so bad' that her 'culture was being eroded' (Clark, 2024). Yet, it was mass migration, compounded by the fact that she was being 'force-fed the ideology of white privilege at school' which subsequently led to her being 'red-pilled' (Clark, 2024).[2]

During her time as a documentary filmmaker and internet personality, Lauren Southern argued for the Great Replacement Theory (Right Response Team, 2018), and this gets to the heart of the distinction between creators such as Estee Williams and Lauren Southern. Though both women advocate for the nuclear family and designated gender roles, Eviane Leidig notes that 'the far-right has an explicit political message: to preserve and uphold Western civilisation' (2023:100). Far-right women not only embrace traditional gender roles, but they do so with the explicit purpose to circumvent the 'declining white birth rate' by having as many children as possible. Ayla Stewart once encouraged her followers to take part in a 'White Baby Challenge' (Minna-Stern, 2019) in a bid to 'restore' Western civilisation. The core belief that the reproductive freedom of women is a threat to 'Western civilisation' is the foundation upon which the role of women within far-right movements is constructed. As Tracey Llanera states, 'white women are needed for the continuation of the white race, and the realities of mixed-race partnerships, the sexual freedom of women and the fear that non-whites are procreating at a far higher rate than whites today are treated by racist extremists as being pressing global issues' (2023: 159-160). Therefore, the sexuality of white women needs to be controlled, as women's autonomy diminishes the accessibility of white men to their bodies and thus impedes procreation. But this begs the question: if these movements promote submission and control, how is it that these women frame their lifestyle as a form of empowerment?

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[1]   It should be noted that though Estee Williams focuses on 'biblical submission' in her content, her family do have links to far-right political organisations, in particular Turning Point USA (Taylor, 2025). Though the group says that it rejects white supremacist ideologies, it continues to attract racists to its meetings (Anti-Defamation League, 2019).

[2]   This is a term used by far-right individuals to refer to the process of having their perspective radically transformed and finally seeing the 'true nature' of a particular situation. The term derives from the 1999 film The Matrix where the protagonist, Leo is offered a blue pill (i.e.,Comfort and security) or a red-pill (i.e., truth and awakening). The irony of far-right actors utilising these terms when the Matrix movies were directed by Lana and Lilly Wachowski, two transgender women, seems somewhat lost on them.

Trad-wife ideology: Empowerment or External Influence?

At the heart of the 'trad-wife' ideology lies the belief that submission to male partners is the cornerstone of femininity and fulfilment (Beamish 2024). Estee Williams' TikTok serves as an example of this, with content that delves into conservative beliefs, sporting titles such as "Independence doesn't equal fulfilment" (Beamish 2024). Trad-wife influencers often frame this submission as a conscious and empowering choice (Raza, 2024), reframing traditional gender roles as aspirational. This mirrors previous far-right sentiments, seen for example when women who were engaged in the British Union of Fascists during the 1930's described their engagement as empowering and emancipating (Gottlieb 2002).

However, much like the criticisms of 'Choice Feminism,' this perspective oversimplifies the complexities surrounding women's choices, overlooking the broader structural influences at play, raising critical questions about the nature of choice and empowerment in this context. While these women assert their autonomy in their choice to occupy these trad-wife roles, and have every right to do so, it is essential to recognise that choices are rarely made in vacuum, as Raza (2024) rightly points out, "these choices exist within the narrow framework of privilege, wealth and traditional gender roles." Thwaites (2016) similarly cautions that autonomy in such contexts must be understood in light of structures that constrain or direct choice. In addition, Mackinnon's (2003) discussions around how subordination can sometimes appear to be power when it is the only form of visibility or agency available are relevant. Connections are easy to make here, as tradwife roles are often framed as choices, yet unpicking this reveals that this perceived choice and agency are constructed within a framework that limits options, reinforcing patriarchal structures. As feminists have long argued, the line between consent and coercion is often complicated (Featherstone et al, 2023). This lens reflects a broader and more nuanced understanding of the women involved in trad-wife content making.

Far-right ideologies often reinforce controlling structures by promoting practices like homeschooling to prevent exposure to liberal values, a strategy explicitly endorsed by Lauren Southern who has stated she would homeschool her children to avoid 'left-wing indoctrination'(Leidig, 2023:99). This complexity is illuminated by theories of gender socialisation. Research suggests that individuals develop ideas about gender through their interactions with 'socialising agents (e.g., parents, siblings, and peers) and exposure to socialising channels (e.g., schools and media)' (Perales et al, 2021: 2). For women raised in conservative or religious environments, traditional gender norms may be internalised, creating a deep-seated belief in submission and subordination. This then, may be further emphasised and reinforced by religious teachings, cultural narratives and social expectations within their communities. Even aside from any 'extreme' manifestation of this, it is clear that women and girls are relentlessly exposed to the systematic gender inequality that runs through every vein of society.

Bates' (2015) Everyday Sexism, for example, explores how young girls encounter sexism and gender roles from infancy, with segregated toys, and media that focuses on beauty and domesticity rather than the wide variety of interests and activities that their male counterparts are surrounded by. Bates (2015) also discusses how young girls receive messaging to stay silent and to distrust themselves, and importantly connects this to sexual assault and the focus on women to behave 'properly.' She importantly quotes, 'the impact of learning such 'truths' from the people you trust the most can cause them to become deeply ingrained, making it much harder for women to realize that what is happening to them is wrong, or to speak up about it later on," (Bates 2015, p.30-31). The internalisation of the traditional gender roles that women are constantly bombarded with can limit personal agency and perpetuate gender inequalities by reinforcing the idea that women's primary and only value lies in their roles as wives and mothers.

Religious institutions can also play a harmful role in reinforcing traditional gender roles. Internet commentator FunkyFrogBait's (2024) analysis of the Mormon Church, for example, highlights how gender roles are integral to Mormon religious messaging, and every aspect of a woman's life is influenced by the mandates of the church. The consequences of actions that deviate from the 'acceptable norm' can be extreme in some cases. When women get married in the Mormon temple, they become bound to their husbands for eternity. If a woman were to leave her husband in one life, she would still be bound to him in the afterlife, but she would lose access to her children for eternity. By presenting traditional gender roles as morally superior, individuals may come to accept deviations from these roles as morally inferior or wrong. Within closed systems like these, women may appear empowered, but their agency exists within a structure that rewards compliance and punishes deviation.

What can also be seen in the 'trad-wife' discourse, is the rejection of feminism, and indeed on some level, capitalism, as stated by Hu (2023, p.25), "What unites tradwives is their rejection of both capitalism and feminism, which are conflated in the gloomy figure of the working woman." Particularly relevant in this context is the view of the unhappy, overworked absent mother that the trad-wife supposedly provides a better alternative for. However, what this argument fails to account for is that this ideology is not an outright rejection of capitalism, but is in fact a recall to outdated and gendered capitalist relations where women are relegated to the supporting role of their husbands, in which their primary function is to keep the male worker happy.

The working woman is seen as a slave, and the aspiration of a successful career could never compete with the happiness gained from being a successful/ submissive homemaker (Stotzer & Nelson 2025). Feminism has been critiqued within the trad-wife movement for 'harming women,' forcing them to work, whilst also bearing primary childcare and domestic responsibilities (Stotzer & Nelson 2025). Rather than placing the blame on the patriarchal systems that lead to this dynamic, we instead see a vilification of feminism for adding more pressure and labour for women, which has been reinforced by the bombardment of narratives that frame women's roles as within the home, and as a 'better and safer option' for women. A common theme that is situated within

this, is how "submitting to one husband is better than submitting to ten bosses" (Tebaldi 2023, p.73). The rejection of modern day feminism and working outside of the home echoes Mackinnon's (2003) previously discussed sentiment, subordination in this context, against a backdrop of unequal domestic labour and capitalist demands, may appear to be power when it is perceived to be the only form of agency available.

The ideal of the 'trad-wife' often then presents an image of economic stability and security rooted in a single-income household, women don't have to work, they can choose to stay at home and be the 'perfect' mother and wife. Alongside the anti-capitalist language that is deployed against working women while elevating white working men, there is a common, recurring motif of the husband as a heroic figure, a 'modern-day Prince Charming,' a narrative that positions the tradwife's femininity as flourishing under the protection and leadership of a strong, male partner (Tebaldi 2023). The husband is supposed to work, to provide, to save a woman from the 'harms' of working, of feminism and of economic and social challenges. It is crucial however, to point out that for a woman to fulfill this role, she requires financial support from her husband, underscoring the socioeconomic privilege embedded within single-income households (Beamish, 2024). This is not an arrangement accessible to everyone. YouTube commentator Shanspeare (2024) notes how historically black and brown women were never given the choice to stay at home or be in the workplace, they had to be at work. The trad-wife lifestyle promoted by content creators has racialised underpinnings as it is the promotion of a nostalgia for the experiences of white, middle class women, which has come to be idolised by many.

Tradwife influencers promote 'single-income households' (something that is not viable for many families under current economic circumstances, where the prices of everyday essentials continue to rise faster than wages), but there are two key caveats to this. The first is that multiple popular tradwives are married to men who are already well off, for example Hannah Neeleman[3] (aka Ballerina Farm) married the JetBlue heir Daniel Neeleman and had a net worth estimated to be in the region

3   It should be noted that Neeleman rejects the label of trad wife but her lifestyle has been embraced by many as the ideal

of \$400 million when you factor in generational wealth (Kester, 2024). Further, it is also important to challenge the notion that these women do not engage in work; their domestic roles constitute significant labour and, ironically, tradwives make money through their online content. It should also be noted, however, that just because tradwives contribute to the financial assets of their family via their content, does not mean that they are financially independent and there is no way of proving that the money they make goes directly back to them. In the case of Ballerina Farm, Hannah Neeleman is the face of their agricultural business brand, but the LLC is in her husband's name, making him the owner of the company (Dun & Brandstreet Business Directory). Although Neelman may have some protective legal interest in this company for numerous reasons, it is relatively symbolic that despite being the face of the business, she does not technically own it. She has also stated in a TikTok video that her husband has the final say on their finances (Champion & Ingram, 2023).

The dynamic of this financial dependence also presents significant risks for abuse, and control within these relationships, as women are rendered economically vulnerable. Due to the prevailing beliefs about the differing roles of men and women, an apparent perpetuating cycle of denial and dismissal emerges, one that from every point of view, works to further solidify their belief system. We see an example of this in Stotzer & Nelson's study, as they find sentiments such as 'many women scoffed at concerns expressed…they were convinced that their man was a "good man" and would always provide and never harm them' (2025:9) The women in this study argued that 'women were in part forced into the boss babe lifestyle because men were not being taught to be masculine enough, to be providers, but that they were the exception and had found the "right" kind of man' (Stotzer & Nelson 2025:9). According to Stotzer & Nelson, few of these women recognised how choosing the "right" kind of man was in fact a privilege that enabled them to choose their traditional lifestyle, and emphasise that even those that did recognise the privilege still blamed women for choosing the "wrong" man (2025:9).

Across trad-wife content, there is a strong emphasis of this lifestyle.

on the displaying of the feminine self, that feeds into 'the cult of natural femininity,' which has stemmed from attempts to characterise 'natural beauty' as an idealised type of femininity (McCann, 2022: 18). For example, there are numerous videos and blog posts acting as 'guides' for how to dress in traditional, feminine and modest styles, and in particular, the Darling Academy underwent a three-month challenge, exclusively wearing dresses to feel more authentically feminine (Pettit, 2021). But, as Laura Jane Bower (2024) rightly points out, such notions of 'womanhood' that underpin these discourses, while constructed as being 'natural' are white-centric and have historically been denied to black women. Trad wives, particularly those situated at the intersection of Christian traditional values and opposition to feminism, embody a foundational principle of rejecting feminism (Bower, 2024). In fact, it is clear that some tradwives view feminist women as rebelling against their natural feminine identity, and use terms like "going feminist" as one might use "letting myself go" to refer to weight gain' (Tebaldi 2024:100). There is an apparent association of femininity with conformity to heteronormative social orders, with 'prettiness' and 'femininity' being indicative of conforming to gendered notions of softness, submissiveness and beauty standards (Tebaldi, 2024). We see tradwife influencers such as Brittany Pettibone describe feminists as iconically ugly and 'deliberate inversion[s] of feminine beauty' as they had rebelled against innate female nature" (Tebaldi, 2024: 100). Lack of conformity to this gendered order is therefore expressed through a moral lens, showing feminism as "unnatural" (Tebaldi, 2024).

According to Proctor (2022), these women often perceive feminism as an attack on femininity, eradicating men from the family structure and posing a threat to Christian religious values. Lilian Sediles of 'Postmodern Mom' for example, described contemporary feminism as a 'trojan horse' which has negative effects on society, as it is distancing men and women from their biologically determined roles (Sediles 2019). Others, like Solie Osorio, have described the motivations behind their online presence as a 'safe haven for those who are searching for identity and grappling with what it means to be a feminine woman'(Osorio, 2020) and Caitlin Huber of Mrs Midwest, who describes her blog as 'a haven

for traditionally feminine women' (Huber, 2019). This concept is embedded within the radicalisation of 'feminism' apparent in many Christian denominations and works to distort women's liberation, often positioning it as anti-Christian and anti-Biblical, and therefore not aligning with and even challenging the conceptualisation of traditional 'femininity' (Beamish, 2024). Consequently, exposure to teachings that reinforce these narratives may act as constraints, influencing religious women's political attitudes and their rejection of feminism, with beliefs about gender becoming ingrained in their belief systems (Beamish, 2024).

In a stark contrast to these perceptions of the 'ugliness' of feminism, trad-wife content presents itself as offering an aesthetically appealing visual that aligns with the high-esteemed values of femininity, family and faith. The content of trad-wives centres around aesthetically pleasing content that makes their lifestyle seem like a break from modern stresses. This is 'tailor made' for young women according to Piazza (2022). We see this beautiful and idealised package that directly contrasts with the corporate world that is hostile to women. Trad-wives are painting pretty pictures of happiness and fulfillment and therefore offer a perceived sense of security in an increasingly insecure world, providing guidelines on how to dress and behave, and a sense of direction and purpose (Deem, 2023). Trad-wife content often portrays an idyllic family life, with well-behaved children and harmonious relationships which can be particularly appealing to those seeking to cultivate similar environments in their own lives. What this does however, is provide a "soft face for saying quite extreme things, quite dangerous things; things that are quite divisive and that demonise parts of our own society" (Campion, as cited in Kelsey-Sugg & Marin, 2021).

The Trafficking Metaphor: Abuse by Another Name?

Shearing's statement that being a tradwife is 'like being trafficked' is not a dismissal of women's domestic choices, but instead represents a structural and political critique of how the tradwife model facilitates environments that mirror the power dynamics of coercive control (Shearing, 2025). While Shearing's analogy of trafficking does not

suggest that women are quite literally abducted into the far right, it offers an important metaphor for further understanding the structural influences and manipulations involved in far-right recruitment by highlighting the gendered and racialized mechanisms of persuasion and manipulation that often underscore this process. Shearing is not the first to have made a comparison like this, as at the centre of coercive control theory lies a similar reasoning, one that has compared coercive control to 'capture' crimes like kidnapping or hostage taking (Stark, 2007). Domestic violence is widely understood as constituting not just physical violence, but patterns of coercive control, involving systematic attempts to dominate a partner through isolation, emotional manipulation, economic dependence, and the restriction of autonomy (Stark 2007). The concept of a continuum of gendered violence, developed by scholars such as Liz Kelly (1987), challenges narrow understandings of gendered violence and instead, frames it as a spectrum of behaviours, ideologies and social structures that sustain patriarchy. Within this framework, the tradwife phenomenon can be situated as part of the ideological and structural end of the continuum, a site where women are socialised, encouraged, or pressured into conforming to roles that reinforce patriarchal dominance and restrict female autonomy. Using this understanding, we can see that the recruitment of women into the far right often reflects patterns of affective manipulation, gendered socialisation, and psychological grooming that align closely with the dynamics of coercive control and gender-based violence.

According to Shearing, grooming and abuse is rife within far-right communities, beginning at a young age (Shearing, 2025). Corinna Olsen, previously a member of the neo-Nazi group National Socialist Movement recounts how the spectre of racial patriarchy when turned towards her two daughters caused (part of) her disillusionment with the far-right. When working as a secretary for Harold Covington, founder of the white separatist movement Northwest Front (NWF) insisted that she 'bring her daughters to the NWF's Washington office, so that he could put his eyes on two Aryan girls' and the idea of an aging man eyeing up her daughters made her 'sick to her stomach' (Llanera, 2021:168). For some, like Olsen, misogyny can convince them of the harmful nature of the far right, but for many white women, the benefit of being celebrated for

their whiteness outweighs the negatives of sexism. The form of grooming present within the far right mirrors the dynamics seen in abusive relationships and coercive environments, where control is not just physically exerted but imposed through charm, validation and isolation (Duron et al, 2021).

Tradwife culture presents as an idealised vision of femininity that is carefully curated through aesthetics that centre on baking and homemaking, appealing to those who may feel alienated by modern feminism. Similarly to grooming practices, this process is gradual, women are not initially recruited with explicit political messaging but are instead drawn into an aesthetic culture that celebrates family values, this acts as a form of grooming into patriarchy. Worryingly websites have emerged online writing about how to groom a female partner, which quote statements like "Mold Your Wife into the Glorious Wife You Want Her to Be" (Biblical Gender Roles, 2025). Similarly to that of coercively controlling relationships, this process is compounded by isolation from counter-narratives, the tradwife movement encourages skepticism and hostility towards feminism and liberal media, mirroring how abusers often isolate victims from support networks (Stark, 2007; Lloyd, 2024). The emphasis on aesthetic appeal and ideological grooming reflects a form of structural violence that is deeply gendered but easily obscured because it operates through seduction rather than force (Lloyd, 2024). This grooming does not always present through one singular actor but through patriarchal norms, online communities, political and religious ideologies and media that act to recruit and retain women within a framework of structural subordination (Leidig, 2021). It has "let a disguised conservatism take root, repackaging volatile gender roles in the language of fad trends like slow living and divine femininity" (Lloyd, 2024).

It is not far-fetched to believe that explicit gendered violence also occurs within these tradwife dynamics, as feminist scholars have argued that husband gender traditionalism is one of the root causes of spousal violence against women (Ka-Lok Cheung & Yuk-Ping Choi, 2016). Traditional gender ideologies that uphold male dominance and traditional gender arrangements have been considered among the most prominent causes of husband to wife violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). The gender attitude of women in marital relationships has also been considered to play a role in husband-to-wife violence, as 'a husband who holds traditional gender attitudes may interpret a non-traditional gender attitude in his wife as a challenge to the traditional gender arrangement; this can provoke such men to seek to put their wives "in line" (Ka-Lok Cheung & Yuk-Ping Choi, 2016). In addition, domestic violence has also been considered a consequence of cultural values and norms that emphasise 'proper' masculinity through a lens of domination and control over a female partner (Dery, 2019; Bassey and Bubu, 2019). When applied to the tradwife framework, these insights are deeply concerning, the tradwife ethos emphasises male authority and female submission, conditions in which domestic violence thrives. Violence may be employed to 'restore order' in these relationships.Women socialised to accept this subservience may internalise blame for abuse, or even refuse recognition as abuse, or sanitize it as love, in these environments, divorce may also be discouraged or forbidden, trapping women in abusive relationships. In some far right ideology we also see the idea that women must 'earn' male protection through obedience, placing further blame on victims and reinforcing a coercive model of safety (Beatty, 2024). Women are also encouraged to forgo careers, surrendering decision making to their male partners, leading to a dynamic of financial and social dependency, with women isolated from feminist support networks. While not every tradwife relationship is violent, the movement propagates an ideology that increases the risk factors of abuse, naturalising male dominance, and idealising female submission and control.

Shearing's trafficking analogy also opens up an avenue for us to think about reproductive coercion as a form of gender-based violence embedded in traditionalist ideologies. Reproductive control is increasingly evident within the tradwife framework. In a basic sense, reproductive coercion can be understood as 'anything that may impact reproductive choices and autonomy' (Graham, et al 2023: 5), this includes coercing a woman to become pregnant. Coercive behaviours in this regard are often thought to be typically perpetrated by male intimate partners, with expansive definitions also including wider influences, like 'socio-cultural norms and practices, service provision and access, policies, law, and legislation that restrict reproductive autonomy' (Graham, et al 2023: 5). It is also thought to be a form of violence against women, and is often part of a broader pattern of coercive control (Tarzia & Mckenzie, 2024). Within the tradwife ethos, motherhood is positioned as a woman's highest calling, with procreation as a moral obligation and a fulfilment of natural gender roles (Champion & Ingram 2023). In addition, the tradwife ethos projects a range of harmful ideas that centre around birth control and procreation, often opposing contraception (Jenkins, 2024). Although it is unfair and reductive to say that all women who identify as tradwives are subjected to reproductive coercion, the movement operates within broader cultural and religious structures that uphold patriarchy and normalises reproductive subservience. In this context, fertility is a socially constructed imperative that is reinforced through shame, moral rhetoric and romanticised domesticity. These discourses frequently idolise large families and women's 'biological destiny' as caregivers and homemakers, while rejecting reproductive autonomy, framing modern feminism and reproductive autonomy as harmful or 'anti-woman' (Champion & Ingram 2023). Public figures in the broader far right have reinforced this framing, with Lauren Southern for example, claiming that feminism taught women to "to work 9–5 and drink wine every night until their ovaries dry up." (Norris, 2023). Framing feminism in this way presents the liberated woman as unfulfilled and sterile, justifying a return to traditional gender roles. The language of empowerment and choice used by the movement masks the coercive aspects that glorify reproductive labour and are embedded in a religious and cultural system that denies women bodily autonomy. This ethos of structural reproductive control not only infringes upon women's rights but also perpetuates a cycle of dependency and subjugation.

Beyond its gendered implications, the tradwife movement is also implicated in racialised ideologies of reproductive control, particularly through its alignment with white nationalist and ethno-nationalist politics. The tradwife movement is embedded within structures that aim to uphold white supremacy, with the idealisation of women's roles often intersecting with Nationalist ideologies that frame women's reproduction as central to national and racial identity (Bower, 2024). Within this framework, white women's bodies are weaponised in the service of racial preservation. While not all tradwives outwardly identify with nationalist beliefs, the aesthetic and ideological overlaps between tradwife culture and far-right pronatalism are significant (Proctor, 2023). The celebration of Western traditionalism, the rejection of multiculturalism, and the emphasis on heterosexual, monogamous family structures all contribute to a vision of femininity and motherhood that is implicitly, and often explicitly, racialised (Proctor, 2023). What this demonstrates, is how the tradwife lifestyle is centred on components of the fascist ideology that governs the far right, white supremacy and patriarchy. The influence of these ideologies are becoming increasingly worrying, with the global far right pushing to overturn laws protecting women from gender based violence and limiting reproductive rights, gaining significant support from right wing political parties.

Lauren Southern: the embodiment of the 'misogyny paradox'.

The reason why we wished to focus on the curious case of Lauren Southern is that what she has experienced these last ten years- transitioning from documentary filmmaker, to tradwife, and back to being an internet personality after her divorce - showcases the multifaceted, and context dependent, nature of the 'misogyny paradox' of far-right groups. As Llanera argues, 'the better alt-right women propagandists promote hate, the greater hostility they experience from their fellow racists and critics; the more submissive women alt-right members become, the harsher the impact of misogyny' (2023:159). In a video titled 'Why I'm Not Married' (2018), Southern details her reasoning for remaining unmarried at twenty-two. These include wanting to marry for love, and that while she does desire to live a traditional lifestyle, she argues that her demographic is struggling to navigate looking for a compatible partner in a world inundated with 'Marxist propaganda', as this has inhibited their understanding of how relationships work 'properly'.

But the reason why Lauren Southern made this video in the first place is that her previous videos critiquing liberal feminist understandings of relationships

resulted in her being inundated with comments questioning why she was not married herself. The comments she received and directly quoted in the video are illuminating. These include "Hey Lauren, why aren't you making videos with your five kids and your husband?" and "How dare you say this as a woman without kids and a traditional marriage" (Lauren Southern, 2018). The comment section of this video is also revealing, as while many call out the hypocrisy of Southerns' reasoning (i.e., a woman even having the choice to wait to get married at a time that suits her is a result of feminist activism), others commend her rationale. But there is also a stream of misogyny in the comments section of her video. A few examples include from @insomniacresurrected with 'it is your biological duty to pop out white children, what is the problem with that, why are you making excuses?', from @anthonygloria5177 came 'Lauren Southern is contributing to White Genocide by not having white babies every year', and @ AlbionTarkhan implored 'For God's sake. Please please. Get married and have lots of well-adjusted children. It's the weakest link in Western societies all over the world. We aren't having kids while our governments are importing third world morons. It's like we are all ok with committing cultural and demographic suicide'.

Comments such as these get to the heart of the Misogyny Paradox (Llanera, 2021) and the tension inherent in the position that white supremacist propagandists such as Southern occupy. Within these movements, the dominant image of white femininity is associated with passivity, subservience and service, either to their white husband or the white children they are expected to produce and raise. Yet, Southern's lifestyle as a documentary filmmaker, travelling the world and building a successful public platform to spread conspiracy theories, clashes with this ideal as she performs more 'masculine traits' such as power and prestige in the public sphere due to her political activism. As Llanbera succinctly puts it 'Women in the alt-right are thus being judged in their capacity to meet their main role as service workers to white men and the white cause. Their racial activism is a secondary feature of their identity, undertaken out of necessity, and embraced an idealised white community only if these 'women are simultaneously performing their gendered service work adequately' (2021:165). This 'neglect' of their primary function provokes immense hostility against them. Still, the

paradox is that the more successful women, such as Southern, are at promoting hate for the far-right, the more intra-group punishment they get in return (Llanera, 2021).

Southern stepped away from public life quite suddenly at the height of her fame, after getting married. Yet, in her interview with Alex Clark for Turning Point USA (2024) she outlines how very soon into the marriage the coercion, and eventually abuse started. Southern details to Alex Clark how she became isolated from her friends and family, and even went so far as to take a job in Australia without consulting Southern a while after she had given birth (though he agreed before being married to Southern that they would stay in Canada so she could be with her family) and threatened her with divorce if she did not agree with the decision. Once she was thousands of miles away from home, Southern reports becoming 'the closest thing to a modern-day Western slave' she had to do everything 'the laws, the house, the cooking, the baby care, his university homework. And I didn't know anyone. I didn't have any support. There was no help changing diapers, there was no help waking up in the night with the baby. I'd [Southern] still had to wake up, to make breakfast before work. I'd be shaking and nervous, for fear I'm going to get yelled at' (Harrington, 2024). The abuse was not just verbal, beside being called pathetic and berated for not earning money, Southern states that her ex-husband would sometimes lock her out of the house, resulting in her having to knock on the neighbours door on rainy nights (Harrington, 2024). This story alludes to another paradox of misogyny within far-right organisations. Even when you are fulfilling the proscribed role as a wife and mother, this does not protect you from patriarchal violence. Rather than being trolled online by anonymous commentators, Southern was abused by the person who was supposed to 'protect' her white womanhood. The trad-wife lifestyle leaves women vulnerable to several forms of abuse. Financial as women become dependent upon the income of their husbands; sexual as women are expected to always be available for their husbands desire; reproductive as women are expected to give birth to as many white children as possible to prevent the 'decline of Western civilisation' and physical abuse.

Yet, even after her experience of the trad-wife lifestyle, Southern continues to promote it, as she now claims that trad-wife relationships can only work if they have a 'solid biblical foundation' (Alex Clark, 2024). The case of Lauren Southern calls into question the binary between 'victim' and 'perpetrator' of patriarchal violence within far-right movements, as women are indispensable to the propaganda machine but they are also at risk of being on the receiving end of the worst excesses of the violence they promote.

Is Victimhood contingent on innocence?

The narrative of 'white victimhood' has long been a staple of white supremacy and particularly in 'white feminism' reflects a failure to hold white women accountable (Moon & Holling, 2020). This kind of feminism frames white women as victims of white patriarchy and in this narrative white men are constructed as solely responsible for both racism and sexism which ignores the allegiance of white women to the same harmful ideologies, (Moon & Holling, 2020). This is summarised by Moon & Holling, (2020: 1) 'By erasing women of colour, positioning women as victims of white male hegemony, and failing to hold white women accountable for the production and reproduction of white supremacy, (white) feminism manifests its allegiance to whiteness and in doing so commits "discursive violence." As Seyward Darby argues in her book Sisters in Hate (2020) women are socialised to be 'nice', 'good' and 'nurturing', resulting in a 'women-are-wonderful' effect. Not only does this produce the idea that women (and especially white women) are in need of protection, it also produces a disbelief about the complicity of women in some of the worst forms of bigotry throughout history. The growing fascination with the complicity of women within far-right movements is evident on the internet, with commentators producing an ever growing collection of video essays on the matter, but one film that confronts the tension between the supposed soft femininity of white women and gratuitous racial violence of the far right is the 2022 horror Soft and Quiet. At the start of the film, we see that the main character, a kindergarten teacher named Emily, has organised a get-together of like-minded (all white) women. She hugs and greets the attendees, exchanges pleasantries, and places her homemade cherry pie on the table. Lifting the foil

we see that she has carved a swastika into the top of the pie. As the film progresses, what begins as a meeting for women to discuss their concerns about the continuity of the white race and the importance of their roles as wives and mothers descends into a home invasion movie, and the directors hold no bars in showing the extent of violence white women in these movements are capable of. Emily emerges as a truly terrifying figure, who recruits other women to help her perform torture and violence towards people whose existence they consider as beneath theirs (in this instance two Asian-American sisters who had the bad luck of encountering these women at a shop).

At the heart of black feminist scholarship lies the concern that gender is bound to racialised constructions, and that gender tropes reinforce 'whiteness' as upholding a structural power (Bower, 2024). Gendered constructions of femininity for example have long been rooted within white-centric ideals, that in their design, intentionally exclude black women, as summarised by Deliovsky, (2008: 10), femininity is 'far from being race-neutral' but 'is always already raced as white.' There is no better demonstration of this than Sojourner Truth's 'Aren't I a woman?' speech, in which she articulates how whiteness is often the primary basis for the conceptualisation of a woman, and neglects black women from these gendered constructions (Bower, 2024). Tradition has also long served as a euphemism for 'whiteness' which has further reinforced the marginalisation of black women. The tradwife lifestyle, imbued with the historical, colonial-rooted connections of white supremacy reinforces and bolsters these constructions.

So despite the current framing of this analysis, we are absolutely not trying to condone or excuse the behaviour of these women. Any analysis in this context must acknowledge the agency and conscious political engagement of these women. Framing all women in these roles as victims of grooming risks oversimplifying the complex motivations within far-right spaces. Acknowledging the complexity of this discussion is therefore crucial to avoid assumptions that may further silence women's voices or limit the understanding of the ideological adherence or responsibility that these women have. While coercive dynamics are significant, we do also acknowledge the ways in which these women

actively participate and embrace tradwife identities on their own terms.

This is why the analogy Shearing (2024) posits of far-right influencers being akin to traffickers is so powerful. It allows us to account not only for the range of violences women are subjected to within far-right movements, but also how women who bring other women into the fold, knowing the harm that will be more than likely inflicted upon them, but also other marginalised communities, are complicit in racialised patriarchal violence. The fact that women are harmed in these movements does not diminish the harm they inflict. But what Shearing (2024) also highlights is that such influencers who recruit other women into hate movements may not be solely for ideological reasons, but as a way to deflect harassment away from themselves.

A Question for Feminists

In summation, this article has explored the proliferation of 'trad-wife' influencers, and how this burgeoning body of online content promotes an idealised lifestyle in line with a womans 'natural femininity' and submission to one's husband. Yet, such narratives occlude the heightened vulnerability to financial, physical, sexual, emotional and mental abuse. For those in the far-right, the 'traditional lifestyle' is a means of not only 'protecting Western civilisation' by recruiting women to bear as many children as possible, but it makes evident the entitlement that men in these movements believe they should have in terms of access to a woman's body and labour. But, as we have elucidated, there is a thorny issue that feminists must confront when it comes to the complicity of women in these movements. They challenge the binary between 'victim' and 'perpetrator', as these women promote ideologies that actively harm marginalised communities such as LGBTQ+, ethnic minorities and fellow women. This begs the question as to how feminist activists and scholars can best respond to women who decided to leave the movement. With financial resources limited, as Shearing (2024) rightly points out, would anyone be open to the opening of a refuge for women Nazi's?

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Critique of African Philosophy: Towards Pluriversal Epistemes

Luqma Onikosi University of Brighton

Introduction

In this paper, I will examine the existence of African philosophy and consider whether, despite the pervasive influence of Western philosophical coloniality, African philosophy can be recognised as an independent academic discipline.

Postcolonial and decolonial thinkers have shown beyond doubt that the decolonisation struggle began from the moment the white man set foot in Africa. Nevertheless, since the emergence of the decolonisation movement in Africa in the 1940s, the debate on what is or could be termed African philosophy has generated a heated exchange between diverging views, according to Hountondji (1996, p. viii). This is perhaps due to the sensitive nature of the subject. This raging debate generally pits the so-called Western-trained African professional philosophers against African-trained philosophers.

In the assessment of both Van Hook (1993, p. 33) and Bodunrin (1981, p. 161), citing Odera Oruka (1981), who surveyed the scene of African philosophy as a discipline, we can identify four categories in the trends of the discourse of African philosophy, namely, ethnophilosophy, philosophic sagacity, nationalist-ideological philosophy and professional philosophy.

The ethnophilosophers, the first category according to Bodunrin (1981, p. 161), are those who combined anthropology, sociology, ethnography and philosophy in the presentation of their study, observation and articulation of the cosmovision of the African peoples, such as their myths, folklore and folk wisdom as philosophy. According to Van Hook (1993, pp. 33–34), ethnophilosophy is essentially a form of "folk philosophy" that views philosophy as inherent in the shared and primarily religious experiences of a community, rather than as the explicit reasoning or intellectual inquiry of an individual. It considers African philosophy to differ fundamentally from Western philosophy in its meaning, logic, and content, owing to the distinct mental orientations of each tradition. In the view of Bodunrin (1981, p. 161), ethnophilosophers aim at giving an account of the cosmovision or a particular African community's epistemes or of Africa as a whole. Instead of understanding philosophy as "a body of logically argued thoughts of individuals". Therefore, ethnophilosophers perceive African philosophy as "communal thought", and the appeal to emotion is one of its unique features.

In the second category is philosophic sagacity or sage philosophy, which has been referred to as "culture philosophy" by some of its critics (Van Hook, 1993, p. 34). Sage philosophy is argued to invalidate the idea that traditional African people were incapable of logical and critical thinking. It also contends that the notion of the traditional African epistemes does not "go beyond folk wisdom and non-critical thoughts" (Van Hook, 1993, p. 34). Bodunrin (1981, p. 162) contrasted the philosophic sagacity with ethnophilosophy, as rejecting the holistic approach to African philosophy. It does not perceive African philosophy as "communal thought," which seeks to understand African philosophy in general through communal cosmovision, customs, and folklore, as in the practice of ethnophilosophy. Instead, it seeks out African individuals in society who are renowned for their wisdom. As such, it endeavours to illustrate that "philosophical reflection and exposition" is not conditioned by literacy and that there are in African society, people who are independent critical thinkers, "who guide their thought and judgments by the power of reason and inborn insight rather than by the authority of the communal consensus" (Bodunrin, 1981, p. 162).

Van Hook (1993, p. 34) described the third category as nationalist-ideological philosophy: a form of political philosophy that is found in the discourses related to the anticolonial struggle for African liberation. From the perspective of nationalist-ideological philosophers, genuine freedom can only be achieved through true mental emancipation and, where possible and appropriate, a return to the authentic values of traditional African humanism (Bodunrin, 1981, p. 162). In this regard, nationalist-ideological philosophy attempts to create, newly, a political theory which is built upon "traditional African socialism and familyhood" (Bodunrin, 1981, p. 162). Although it is mostly post-independence political thought of African leaders, it could also refer to generally radical political thought coming out of Africa.

The last of the four categories is professional philosophy, characterised by trained philosophers who perceive themselves to be on the same level or standard as the scientific or technological disciplines (Van Hook, 1993, p. 35). Professional philosophers dismiss the conjectures of ethnophilosophy as inadequate and inappropriate, affirming that critical rationality is central to philosophy, as opposed to appealing to emotion. As such, they uphold the universalist view of philosophy, which is core to its assumption that philosophy must have a similar meaning across all cultures (Bodunrin, 1981, p. 162). Oruka (1981), as cited in Van Hook (1993, p. 35), described it as "professional" because it adheres to a classical tradition of thought, being a form of "technical philosophy" overseen by professionally trained philosophers. This type of philosophy follows a classical line of thought inherent in the work of Western philosophers. In this regard, this technique has also been adopted by Western-trained African philosophers and by Africans who received their training from philosophers who were trained in the West.

This heated debate about African philosophy narrows down into two camps, namely, universalism and particularism. The universalists posited that "philosophy is philosophy" irrespective of where it is propounded and practised. Therefore, the pursuit of philosophy is compellingly similar across cultures, while particularists see philosophy as varying from culture to culture. As such, particularists averred that "African philosophy" should be African in its cosmovision and content, and must be pertinent to African tradition, history, culture, and contemporary struggles, with the freedom to develop its own methodology.

In what follows, I will demonstrate how this orientation generates epistemological tensions regarding what constitutes legitimate philosophy. In Section 1, I focus on the extant debate among African philosophers, specifically between Western-trained African professional philosophers and African-trained philosophers, particularly between universalism and particularism. I also explore the "intercultural philosophy" that Sophie Oluwole (2014, p. 19) offers as an alternative to the intellectual rivalry between Western philosophy and African philosophy, aiming to generate a dialogue and collaboration between the two thought systems. I argue that "intercultural philosophy" assumes that the so-called "African philosophy" would be accorded equal status as Western philosophy on the world academic stage. Instead, I argue that African thinkers should "delink" African epistemologies from Western philosophy, as Western philosophy is an academic hegemon that dominates the discipline and the canon of philosophy. It portrays the thought systems of Global South societies, especially those in Africa, as unable to contribute to deeper intellectual thought in philosophy as a discipline.

In Section 2, I review Kwasi Wiredu's (1998, p. 17) idea of decolonising African philosophy, which he defines as divesting our African philosophical thoughts from "undue influences" stemming from our colonial past. For Wiredu, to critically conceptualise and formulate African philosophy, there must first be an exorcism of "colonial mentality" from traditional African philosophies. Therefore, decolonisation of African philosophy is not a parochial project or attitude whereby African scholars involved in critical thinking avoid those philosophical disciplines that were historically developed in the West; therefore, there is no need for African thinkers to reinvent the wheel and develop their own methodologies. I argue that to decolonise African philosophy properly, African thinkers engaged in critical analysis of African epistemes need to break away from the appendages of Western philosophy, which African philosophers, in general, emulate and aspire to fashion their African epistemes and methodologies after.

In Section 3, I draw on the theoretical concept of the coloniality of power, developed in the Americas and the Caribbean. I applied the concept to explain the epistemic lived experiences of Africans under slavery and colonialism in relation to modernity. I contend that African epistemic existence has been systematically positioned outside the borders of dominant global structures—epistemically, politically, and socio-economically—by the enduring framework of the coloniality of power. This marginal positioning is particularly evident in the sphere of knowledge production, especially within disciplines such as philosophy, where Western paradigms continue to define legitimacy and authority, thereby conferring validity. Consequently, what Walter Mignolo (2000, pp. xv-xxii) terms "border thinking" becomes an essential intellectual stance. "Border thinking" compels us to seek a decolonial option—a mode of thought that resists the epistemic confinement imposed by colonial modernity and instead affirms the validity of African ways of knowing. In this sense, border thinking does not simply critique exclusion; it constructs new epistemic spaces where African epistemes can exist as legitimate, autonomous, and dialogical knowledge systems within a pluriversal world.

In the concluding part, I argue that decolonising African philosophy requires "delinking" from the Western canon that has hegemonically monopolised

the epistemic authority of what counts as philosophy. Rather than seeking inclusion into the philosophical mainstream, African epistemes should embrace their own epistemic foundations through border thinking and pluriversality. Therefore, they should develop their own decolonial methodologies. This calls for abandoning the notion of a single, universal philosophy and replacing it with a mosaic of epistemic traditions that reflect the lived realities of all peoples. African epistemes must be allowed to speak in their own voice, on their own terms, not as a derivative of Western norms but as a rich, autonomous system of knowledge and meaning.

Section 1: On the Existence of African Philosophy - Universalism vs Particularism

In this section, I focus on the extant debate among African philosophers, specifically between Western-trained African professional philosophers and African-trained philosophers, particularly regarding the contrast between universalism and particularism. I will also look at the alternative that Oluwole (2014, p. 19) offered, that is, the "inter-cultural philosophy", the dialogue between Western and African philosophy. This alternative proposed by Oluwole assumes that the so-called 'African philosophy' would be accorded the same status as Western philosophy in the world academic stage. I argue that African epistemes and their academics should "delink" from Western philosophy because it is an academic hegemon that dominates the discipline and the canon of philosophy. It portrays the thought systems of Global South societies, especially those in Africa, as unable to contribute to deeper intellectual thought in philosophy as a discipline.

The portrayal of the roots of philosophy as uniquely and exclusively European in origin, whose foundation is claimed to be laid by ancient Greeks, is now being challenged contemporarily. In his voluminous book, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilisation*, Bernal (1987, pp. 1-73) analysed Greek history from two perspectives, namely, the Ancient model, which sees Greek culture as emanating from Near Eastern and the Aryan model, which views Greek history as uniquely European. Bernal contested the conventional view that the civilisation progress enjoyed in the Greek Classical (500-336 BC) and Hellenistic (323-31 BC) ages was uniquely European, instead arguing that it was due to the colonisation of Greece by the Egyptians and Phoenicians around 1500 BC, who civilised the native inhabitants of Greece. As such, the Greeks

continued to borrow from the Near Eastern culture. Supposedly, it was only in the nineteenth century that the Aryan model became dominant, which was fuelled by racism, to make the claim that Greek civilisation was essentially European. By extension, philosophy was European in its roots.

African philosophy, which is struggling with its emergence as a canon, is argued must mirror the European thought systems, hence, Western philosophical discipline. As Van Hook (1993, p. 29) and Oluwole (2014, pp. 83-104) rightly noted, there are raging discussions and arguments between the Western-trained African professional philosophers and African-trained philosophers about whether there is such a thing as 'African philosophy' or even if Africans can philosophise. Van Hook (1993, p. 29) referred to the questions posed by Innocent Onyewuenyi (1976), cited in Van Hook (1993, p. 29), "is there an African philosophy?". Building on the original query, Peter Bodunrin raises the issue again, this time delving deeper (1981), cited in Van Hook (1993, p. 29), who asked, "is there an African philosophy? and if there is, what is it?".

One of Nigeria's prominent African-trained philosophers, Sophie Bosede Oluwole (2014, p. 84), found fault with the Western-trained professional philosophers for claiming that Africans traditionally convey their ideas, beliefs and views in an emotive, non-rational and unscientific manner. She cited the work of the Western-educated Ghanaian, Kwasi Wiredu (1976) cited in Oluwole (2014, p. 84), who essentially argued that the African traditional mode of understanding and explaining the place of man within it, a mode which is generally adopted by the "African race", is based on intuition, without conscious reasoning, therefore is an unscientific method. As such, this unanalytical and unscientific mindset is what is affecting African societies. Wiredu (1976), cited in Oluwole (2014, p. 84), went further to add that Africans, in the modern world stage of advanced intellectual development, are at the pre-scientific stage of intellectual development and are lagging behind the West in cultivating rational inquiry, which does not manifest in African traditional epistemes. For Wiredu (1976) cited in Oluwole (2014, p. 87), traditional thought systems did exist in most cultures, he insisted as humans experience events around them and develop a more profound understanding of the inner workings of nature, they tend to form a wiser knowledge and discard the traditional thoughts system and replace them with a "modern" scientific thought system. The point arrived at by Wiredu (1976) cited in Oluwole (2014, p. 87), arguing for a *modern* tradition of African philosophy, is that it must be fashioned along the *modern* Western model of philosophy. Wiredu

(1976), cited in Oluwole (2014, p. 84), as a result, affirms that Africans have no choice but to submit themselves to Western philosophical methods of rational and scientific inquiries to learn how to think because the African ancestors left the Africans with no written philosophical heritage.

Another reproval of African traditional epistemes, according to Oluwole (2014, p. 86) examination of Western-trained African professional philosophers' theses reveals that African ancient thinkers existed in non-literate societies, wherefore, their ideas, beliefs and views were recorded and handed down from generation to generation in oral form; a form that gives no philosophical space for analysis, criticism, argument and counterargument. As such, this oral knowledge is "bald and non-critical" because they are expression of myths, proverbs, tales and metaphors which cannot be subjected to the laws of logic, rational and empirical validation. Oluwole (2014, p. 86) made reference to the works of Anthony Appiah and Valentine Mudimbe (1993, pp. 131-132), another two Western-trained African professional philosophers who argued that the modern mode of theorising is subjected to an image of constant change, where, for instance, today's theories would be laid open to revision tomorrow. However, they added that because African cultures are non-literate, there exists unchanging folklore which was passed down from generation to generation as knowledge. What they implied, Oluwole (2014, p. 86) explained that for any thinker to arrive at critical thought, s/he must put his/her thoughts down in writing, which therefore allows the thinker or other thinkers to reflect on the ideas and correct any errors in a particular thinker's work. Oluwole (2014, p. 94) vehemently rebutted the idea of an image of knowledge that is unchanging in African traditional epistemes. This, she argued, was the position of Socrates, who argued that the type of knowledge a philosopher must seek is the one that is eternal and unchanging. This axiom is one which is not true in the Yorùbá episteme because the Yorùbá people believe that "wisdom this year is madness the next year".

Van Hook (1993, pp. 36-37) observes and identifies two categories of African philosophers central to the debate of whether there is African philosophy, namely, universalism and particularism. The universalists posited that "philosophy is philosophy" irrespective of where it is propounded and practised. Therefore, the pursuit of philosophy is compellingly similar from culture to culture. One of the universalists and Western-trained philosophers, Henry Odera Oruka (1975), cited in Van Hook (1993, p. 37), expressed that "reason is a universal human trait. And the greatest disservice to

African philosophy is to deny it a reason and dress it in magic and extra-rational traditionalism". In a similar view, Peter. O. Bodunrin (1981), cited in Van Hook (1993, p. 38), sees philosophy as having "the same meaning in all cultures, although the subject which receives priority, and perhaps the method of dealing with them, may be dictated by cultural biases and existential situation...". Nevertheless, Bodunrin (1981), cited in Van Hook (1993, p. 38), warned of the problem of romanticising the African past way of life, "which made it possible for our ancestors to be subjugated by a handful of Europeans cannot be described as totally glorious".

In contrast to the universalists, Van Hook (1993, p. 37) describes the particularists as seeing philosophy as varying from culture to culture. As such, particularism averred that "African philosophy" should be African in its cosmovision and content and must be pertinent to African tradition, history, culture and contemporary struggles and have the freedom to develop its methodology. Therefore, philosophies (*in plural*) should be articulations of certain "historical and cultural contexts and the problem and proposed solutions, as well as worldviews found in them" (Van Hook, 1993, p. 37). On whether African philosophy is guaranteed to be devoid of rationality if it adheres to African traditional epistemes, Lucius Outlaw (1987) cited in Van Hook (1993, p. 39), argued that philosophy does not have a universal essence and averred that Western philosophy "has served as court rationalist for false universalism" to preclude Africans. "False universalism", he claimed, is used to rationalise cultural imperialism upon the Africans. Outlaw (1987) cited in Van Hook (1993, pp. 37-38) (1993, p. 37-38) went further to claim that the idea of rationality as it is used in philosophy is particular and a product of Western philosophy. Similarly, K.C. Anyanwu (1987), as cited in Van Hook (1993, p. 39), rejected the notion of a universal philosophy that applies equally to all peoples and cultures. He argued that philosophy arises from and reflects lived experience, serving as a guide to life, and that these experiences are shaped by people's histories and circumstances. He lamented that academic philosophy too often speaks only to other philosophers rather than to human beings within their real historical contexts.

According to Van Hook (1993, p. 37) the incongruity between these two categories is that both accused each other of being a stooge of colonial and neo-colonial oppression, in what could be perceived in decolonial critique as coloniality. The universalists accused the particularists of imbibing the "inferior and idiosyncratic conception of philosophy", which is devoid of "intellectual rigour". For this reason, universalists argued that particularists

have caused their marginalisation in the world of philosophy. The particularist, on the other hand, accused the universalists of allowing the West to lay down authoritatively the agenda and rules of the philosophical paradigm and, thereby, blindly playing "the game of the oppressors" as it is dictated by the West. In this regard, it assures its indifference to the issues and struggles of the Africans.

Instead, Oluwole (2014, p. 19) proposes "inter-cultural philosophy," an expansive dialogue between Western thought systems and African epistemes, which assumes that the so-called "African philosophy" would be accorded the same status as Western philosophy on the world academic stage. Western philosophy holds academic hegemony over the use of the word and the canon of philosophy, portraying Global South societies, especially those in Africa, as incapable of contributing to deeper intellectual thought. As Van Hook (1997, p. 387) expressed, even among the so-called African philosophers, there is distrust and misgivings about the definition of and criteria for philosophy because it is established by alien and hostile powers. Expanding on this perspective, Van Hook (1997, p. 387) cited Gene Blocker (1987), an American philosopher, who argued that while the term "philosophy" carries honorific and value-laden connotations—implying intellectual rigour, rationality, and cultural prestige—the debate over the existence and legitimacy of African philosophy extends far beyond a mere academic inquiry. According to Blocker (1987), this question is deeply entangled with issues of cultural identity, political recognition, and historical power relations. To question whether African philosophy exists, therefore, is not a politically neutral act; it reflects broader tensions between Western intellectual hegemony and the struggle of African thinkers to assert the validity and autonomy of their own epistemic traditions. Blocker (1987) added that "philosophy" is an expression of Western thought systems; therefore, he doubts whether this could be applied to African epistemes. In this vein, in academia, when philosophy is mentioned, subconsciously, intellectuals, including African professional philosophers, suppose that the speakers are referring to Western thought systems. The implication of this, for many African scholars striving to present African epistemes as legitimate philosophy, is that the hegemony of Western thought and its control over what counts as "canonical" philosophy effectively bars African systems of knowledge from being accepted as philosophy in their own right. Western intellectual traditions have long defined the parameters of philosophical discourse, determining what qualifies as rational, rigorous, and universal. Consequently, African epistemes are often marginalised, denied

entry into the philosophical canon, or recognised only under a qualifying label such as *"African philosophy"*. Even if Western intellectual hegemony over the canon of philosophy were somehow to be suddenly challenged by a conscience for equality in academia and it acknowledged the need for greater inclusivity, the structural hierarchy embedded in its traditions would still enforce the classification of African thought as 'other'—a distinct category that must carry an ethnic or regional prefix. This subtle yet powerful form of hegemonic exclusion ensures that Western philosophy retains its universal status while African philosophy remains in the category of the 'other'. It is a dynamic of epistemic subordination that African thinkers continue to resist, yet one that is deeply entrenched in the historical architecture of global academic power. This is a disservice and disfavour to African epistemes. Cogently, this devalues the richness of the African indigenous epistemes that rivalled the Western thought systems. This devaluation alludes to the false characterisation of an ahistorical stereotype of early African societies, which were thought not to have developed the capacity for intellectual reflection and, therefore, disqualifying Africa's indigenous epistemes from being permitted to inhabit a space in the philosophical arena (Hallen, 2002, p. 3). That being the case, African philosophy remains a footnote appendage of philosophy. This may explain why some African thinkers, especially the Western-trained African professional philosophers, have not been able to break African epistemology and its ontology away as a subset of philosophy.

Even though African studies intellectuals obviously are of the same opinion that the criteria used to "define what is and what is not philosophy" are largely biased towards African philosophy (Hallen, 2002, p. 11). A criterion that claims that African epistemes are "fundamentally symbolic and ritualised in character" (Hallen, 2002, p. 14) and that the African indigenous people could not express themselves in discursive verbal statements. The only verbalisation of their epistemes is said to be found in their myths and proverbs. Frustratingly, the way in which the so-called 'African philosophers' have chosen to address this issue is to continue to use the Western philosophical standard, approach and view of the world to frame what counts as truth and knowledge in the African's cosmovision. As Hallen (2002, pp. 13–14) aptly observed, the sources of the so-called "African philosophy" are remarkably diverse and multifaceted, reflecting the continent's vast cultural, linguistic, and intellectual heterogeneity. If African epistemes were to assert themselves within a continental philosophical canon, the "African philosophy", this very diversity could present a challenge. Whereby, epistemic

traditions such as Bantu, Abyssinian, Dogon, Akan, and Yorùbá epistemes, each representing distinct systems of thought, grounded in unique metaphysical frameworks, moral codes, and conceptions of reality, are lumped together under African philosophy. However, these epistemes, which offer profound insights into human existence and knowledge that deserve philosophical recognition in their own right, could also create internal tensions within these multiple traditions. In competing for legitimacy within the continental philosophical canon, they might inadvertently fragment rather than unify the broader field of African philosophy. Instead of presenting a cohesive intellectual movement, the proliferation of localised philosophies within African philosophy could reinforce the perception of African thought as scattered and fragmented and lacking the coherent front that Western philosophy often claims.

Section 2: Philosophy and Coloniality of Power

In this section, I review Kwasi Wiredu's (1998, p. 17) idea of decolonising African philosophy, which he defined as divesting our African philosophical thoughts from "undue influences" coming from our colonial past. He noted that African philosophy is not to be equated with traditional African philosophies. To critically conceptualise and formulate African philosophy, there must first be an exorcism of "colonial mentality" from traditional African philosophies. For Wiredu (1998, p. 17) decolonisation of African philosophy is therefore not a parochial project or attitude whereby African academics involved in critical thinking avoid those philosophical disciplines that were historically developed in the West. I argue that to decolonise African philosophy properly, African thinkers engaged in critical analysis of the African epistemes need to "delink" from the appendages of Western philosophy, which African philosophers, in general, emulate and aspire to fashion the African epistemes and its methodologies after.

Kwasi Wiredu, who is a Western-trained African professional philosopher, wrote about decolonising African philosophy and defined it as divesting our African philosophical thoughts from "undue influences" coming from our colonial past. Wiredu (1998, p. 17) argued that colonialism was a political imposition as well as a cultural one, which gravely infected the African system of education, which was delivered in a foreign language such as English, French, etc. Therefore, Wiredu postulated that if you study philosophy in a certain language, it is in

this language that one will naturally philosophise during one's study and for life. Wiredu (1998, p. 17) asserted that Africans, for instance, who have studied philosophy in English by the force of historical circumstances, have become, most likely, "conceptually westernised". As such, Africans who have been trained in foreign philosophical traditions find themselves in a cross-cultural dimension because, in addition to the foreign philosophical tradition in which they are trained and studied, they have their own language, which has its own "conceptual suggestiveness", which makes African philosophers "doubly critical". Accordingly, African philosophers, in this regard, should not hold back only when they are engaging in courses particularly termed African philosophy by introducing African input in addressing some philosophical issues, such as in logic, epistemology, ethics or metaphysics. Wiredu (1998, p.17) avers that it is somewhat "colonial mentality" to consider African philosophy to be kept separate from the mainstream of philosophical thinking, meaning Western philosophy. Wiredu (1998, p. 19) went further to claim that some African academic philosophers portray Africans as seeing the world through the prism of spirituality and religiosity. As a result, the African epistemes are incapable of separating secular from religiosity, and consequently, it is mystical. African academic philosophers have internalised such accounts of African thought through their training, and this conceptual understanding has become part of the furniture of their minds. Such minds, Wiredu (1998, p. 20) claims, are unduly affected by colonisation, which has made them ingrain in their minds an inferiority complex. The difference between the decolonised and the colonised thinking for Wiredu (1998, p. 20) is "due reflection" that African scholars must do in their approach in engaging with discourses about African thought framed in foreign categories. According to Wiredu (1998, p. 21), although the African philosophy encompasses both the traditional and the modern components of philosophy, African philosophy is not to be equated with traditional African philosophy. To conceptually and critically formulate African philosophy, there must first be an exorcism of "colonial mentality" from traditional African philosophy. Yet, he argues that African philosophy lacks development of cardinal modern branches of philosophy, such as philosophy of logic, mathematics and natural science. Since modern Western logicians and philosophers have been engaged in the field for a long period, there is no doubt that African scholars trying to do philosophy can have something to build on. Thus, there is no rationality in trying to reinvent the wheel. Decolonisation of African philosophy is, therefore, not a parochial project or attitude whereby African

academics involved in critical thinking avoid those philosophical disciplines which were historically developed in the West.

I agree with Wiredu (1998) that we need to strip off our African thoughts of "undue influences" of our colonial past; however, that is why African epistemes do not need to beseech the hegemonic Western thought systems to enter the sphere of philosophical canon. Wiredu wants the African academics who engage in the critical analysis of African epistemes to be "doubly critical" and to incorporate African cosmovision in addressing philosophical issues. Despite that, he rejected the traditional African epistemes, as Wiredu claimed, are filled with colonial mentality, and there is nothing in traditional African philosophies that qualifies them as philosophy (Chimakonam, 2022).

Contrary to Wiredu's conceptual analysis of the decolonisation of African philosophy, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986, p. 4) saw at the core of the colonising of African minds, the Berlin conference in 1884, where Africa was divided into various "languages of the European power". The important sphere of domination by colonialism was the "mental universe" of the African people, which cognitively impacted how they perceived themselves and their relationship to the world through the dominant culture of language. Even today, African countries see and define themselves in terms of the language of the Europeans, such as English-speaking, French-speaking and Portuguese-speaking African countries. In these regards, crucial to decolonising the minds of Africans, it is essential to own one's native language and write traditional African thoughts in African native languages. Although wa Thiong'o (1986, p. 5), did not criticise African writers who write in English, French or Portuguese per se, he made clear how the choice of language that the African writers choose to write in became a matter of legacy of historical colonialism in Africa, as imperialism continues to fiercely dominate and influence control over the cultures of Africa. wa Thiong'o (1986, pp. 13-16) argues that it is absolutely necessary to return to African languages because language is the means of communication and bearer of a culture, and how language is used is pivotal to how people define themselves in connection to the natural and social environment and to the entire universe. Thus, language as culture is the repository of the people's experience in history. On that account, as the legacy of colonialism debars Africans from writing in African indigenous languages, African schoolchildren and intellectuals will find themselves in dissonance with their world and environment (Wa Thiong'o, 1986, pp. 16-18).

Drawing from Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's (1986) argument, it is culturally cumbersome to be "doubly critical", as Wiredu (1998, p. 22) propounded, because, in the first place, in an African country such as Nigeria, its schoolchildren are not socialised through the Western-induced African education system to explore and understand their own cultures. Their native language is forbidden to be spoken at school and home, and it is perceived as "vernacular"; emphasis is laid on speaking the coloniser's language. When these schoolchildren become academic scholars, the coloniser's language has already become more ingrained in their minds, as Wiredu himself put it, and becomes the language in which they think and philosophise. Unfortunately, the traditional African cosmovision, which should have been instilled into schoolchildren at a formative age, could have made the schoolchildren "doubly critical" in philosophising later in life, but it has been socialised out of them, thereby colonising the minds of the schoolchildren. Therefore, exploring traditional African epistemes through the coloniser's language becomes limiting because there are things in the indigenous language that cannot be expressed in the coloniser's foreign language.

Nevertheless, Wiredu wants African scholars engaged in the field of African thought systems to discard the traditional African epistemes and focus on African philosophy in a modern sense, emulating the cardinal modern branch of philosophy by following Western thought systems. As Chimakonam (2022) rightly put it, if traditional African epistemes are discarded, what will be there to be critically analysed? It is nonsensical to jettison the traditional African epistemes because it is the core edifice upon which the contemporary African epistemes would need to build. I disagree with the assertion that traditional African epistemes are inherently shaped by a colonial mentality. On the contrary, these systems represent some of the few surviving and everyday lived expressions of authentic African intellectual heritage—systems of knowledge that have endured despite centuries of colonial suppression. Rather than being products of colonial influence, they are repositories of indigenous epistemes, logic, and metaphysics that predate colonial encounters and continue to reflect the epistemic depth of African civilisations. A striking example of this is the Ifá episteme of the Yorùbá people of Nigeria, a sophisticated system of divination, logic, and moral reasoning that dates back to at least 500 BCE (Oluwole, 2014, p. 36). Ifá is not merely a religious or mystical practice, nor an epistemic relic of the past; it is a comprehensive epistemic framework encompassing ontology, ethics, epistemology, and cosmology. Its oral literature, the Odu and Ese Ifá, encodes centuries of

reflection on human behaviour, social order, and the nature of knowledge, constituting a rich epistemic tradition long before Western philosophy entered African intellectual spaces. Thus, far from being tainted by colonial mentality, traditional African epistemes like Ifá stand as powerful counterpoints to colonial erasure. They embody a form of intellectual resistance and continuity, preserving the epistemic autonomy of African thought and challenging the assumption that rational inquiry and systematic knowledge are exclusive to the Western canon.

The decolonisation that Wiredu proposed is flawed and is nothing but making more concrete and real coloniality of power of philosophy, where Western philosophy has primacy. As Bhambra & Holmwood (2021, p. 1) describe, knowledge production is the product of privileged knowers, which involves the debarring of the "other" knowers and repressing their knowledge system. Pushing these "other" knowers and their knowledge system into the periphery, outside the categories of mainstream as either alternative knowledges or oppositional, subaltern knowledge. This is exactly what Western thought systems' hegemony over philosophy has done to African philosophy. Due to the primacy of Western thought systems over philosophy, African philosophy will always find itself at the margins.

To decolonise, properly, African philosophy, the African thinkers engaged in critical analysis of African epistemes need to "delink" from the appendages of the Western colonial "modern" thought systems, which African philosophers, in general, emulate and aspire to fashion African epistemes after because it is "modern" (Mignolo, 2000, p. ix). A modern way of philosophising is rife and fraught with the domination by Western thought systems, which dictate the paradigm of philosophy. A colonial thought system that emerged with "modernity" that spanned from the Era of Renaissance to the Age of Enlightenment (Bhambra & Holmwood, 2021, pp. 4-9). Suffice it to argue that "there is no modernity without coloniality" (Mignolo, 2000, p. ix). This is because the history of the origin of European/Western modernity began at the same time as the oppression of the "other" bodies and relegation of the histories of the other civilisations in the Global South, such as Africa. African thinkers must recognise and acknowledge that they are locked out of the philosophical canon through Western epistemic violence and injustice toward African epistemes, situated on the border of the coloniality of power of the discipline of philosophy. To give African thinkers a unique vantage point, they must first realise that the 'modernity' that they are trying to emulate hides behind the splendour of happiness, and it is made up of and structured by coloniality of

power (Mignolo, 2000, p. ix). Crucially, a colonised life, such as an African life, is a life on the border (Mignolo, 2000, p. ix). Secondly, African thinkers must look critically at traditional African epistemes and formulate from them contemporary African epistemes and their methodologies independent of philosophy, invariably from the Western thought system. Thirdly, it is key to move away from trying to co-opt the African epistemes into the universality of philosophy because philosophy is conditioned by the coloniality of power.

Coloniality, as Maldonado-Torres (2007, p. 243) describes it, differs from colonialism in that it persists even after colonialism has ended. Coloniality refers to the well-established form of power that cropped up because of colonialism. A colonial form of power that defines culture, labour, intersubjective relations and knowledge production beyond the strict boundaries of colonial administration. In this regard, coloniality is kept alive in books, in cultural forms, in the self-image of the people, in the aspiration of self and a lot of other aspects of our modern experience (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 243). The coloniality of power is a concept first conceived by Anibal Quijano to explain the structures of power, control, and hegemony that came out of the modernist era, the era of colonialism, which dates from the conquest of the Americas to the present (Martinot, 2011). When Anibal Quijano theoretically developed coloniality of power, he was specifically writing about the elements and experiences of the Latin Americans and the Caribbean with respect to how the advent of Western modernity ushered in the era of colonialism. The first elements and the experiences which he identified were all forms of use of labour, production and exploitation viewed as a whole, such as slavery, serfdom, petty commodity production, reciprocity and salary, which evolved around capital and the world market (Quijano, 2000, p. 216). According to Quijano (2000, p. 216), these elements and experiences were new articulations of new patterns of power. The second element and experience he pointed out was the new mental category to codify the relationship between the conquering (Spanish-European) and the conquered (the native Americans) in terms of race (Quijano, 2000, p. 216). In these regards, Quijano (2000, pp. 216-217) explained that the idea of race was not only meant to differentiate the physiognomy of the dominant and the dominated but also to tell apart the mental and cultural differences by definition, superior and inferior categories. As such, race was used as one of the basic touchstones to order the population in the power hierarchy of the new society in relation to the nature of roles and division of labour and in control of resources of production (Quijano, 2000, p. 216). Quijano (2000, p. 217) inferred that after

this was successful in the Americas, in relation to the racist distribution of the form of work and the exploitation by colonial capitalism, the expansion of colonial domination was imposed upon the rest of the world by a single race, using the same criteria of social classification on a global scale.

Section 3: Applying Coloniality of Power to African Lived Experience

In this section, drawing on the theoretical development of the concept of coloniality of power in Latin America and the Caribbean, I argue that this concept can be applied to explain the epistemic lived experiences of Africans under slavery and colonialism in relation to modernity, thereby highlighting the concept of coloniality. I examine the applicability of the concept of coloniality of power to the African epistemic lived experience, aiming to "delink" from Western thought systems, such as philosophy and move towards pluriversal epistemes. I contend that African epistemic existence has been systematically positioned outside the borders of dominant global structures—epistemically, politically, and socio-economically—by the enduring framework of the coloniality of power. This marginal positioning is particularly evident in the sphere of knowledge production, especially within disciplines such as philosophy, where Western paradigms continue to define legitimacy and authority, thereby conferring validity. Consequently, what Walter Mignolo (2000, pp. xv-xxii) terms "border thinking" becomes an essential intellectual stance. "Border thinking" compels us to seek a decolonial option—a mode of thought that resists the epistemic confinement imposed by colonial modernity and instead affirms the validity of African ways of knowing. This decolonial option calls for the re-framing of African epistemic lived experiences not as peripheral or derivative of Western philosophy but as authentic local histories and diverse epistemic cosmologies in their own right. It acknowledges that African thought emerges from specific historical, cultural, and existential contexts and must therefore be understood on its own terms rather than through Eurocentric frameworks of analysis. In this sense, border thinking does not simply critique exclusion; it constructs new epistemic spaces where African epistemes can exist as legitimate, autonomous, and dialogical knowledge systems within a pluriversal world.

The Americas' conquest in 1492 and domination began with the claim of discovery by Christopher Columbus, who was commissioned by Queen Isabella I of Castile to find a shorter maritime route from Europe to Asia after the Ottoman Empire conquered Constantinople in 1453 and gradually blocked the Silk Road (Liss, 2004; Lybyer, 1915, pp. 577-578). Due to the blockage of the existing trade routes by the Ottomans, new European explorations tried to discover oceanic routes to India and the Far East using their modern navigation equipment and skills (Lybyer, 1915, p. 585). So was the Portuguese royal prince, Henry the Navigator, sponsoring explorers to find a new route to the Spice Islands in the Far East. A search that led to contact with the African people and led to their enslavement and colonisation (Law, 1991, p. 116).

According to Ijoma (1982, p. 136), prior to the 1400s, European contact with the interior part of Africa, especially West Africa, was limited and was through the Sahara Desert and people of North Africa. Around this time, a lot was known about North Africans, but little or nothing was known about the Africans south of the Sahara by Europeans. However, from the fifteenth century onwards, the Portuguese explorers, inspired by Henry the Navigator, changed that. When Ceuta, a town in present-day Morocco, was captured in 1415 by the Portuguese from the Moors, Henry the Navigator collected information about "Timbuctu" (Timbuktu), in the present-day West African country of Mali (Axelson, 1961, p. 147; Ijoma, 1982, p. 136). He also learnt of the trans-Saharan trade between North African communities and Sudan and aspired to conquer it too. Henry the Navigator hoped that commercial contact with this region would bring untold wealth to Portugal because, at about this time, there was a renewed desire to chart a new oceanic route to the Far East, which would not be under Muslim power, such as the Ottoman (Ijoma, 1982, p. 136).

Upon reading various literature, it can be understood that the Portuguese exploration to find a route to the Spice Islands in the Far East was not carried out in one go. Their expeditions were carried out in various stages, perhaps due to the capacity of the technology of the maritime equipment and the transport system of the time (Ijoma, 1982, p. 137; Law, 1991, pp. 116-118). From 1417, when Portuguese maritime activities began, they discovered Madeira Island (a region within Portuguese waters) a year after the maritime activities began. They sailed to Cape Bojador (headland on the west coast of Western Sahara) in 1434, Cape Blanco (headland divided by the border between Mauritania and Western Sahara) in 1442. In 1443, they landed at Arguin (an island off the western coast of Mauritania), reached the Senegal seaboard in 1445, and in 1446, they got as far as Portuguese Guinea (in the present-day West African country of Guinea-Bissau). Portuguese explorers went further; they reached Cape Verde in 1457, Sierra Leone in 1460, anchored at Sao Tome and Principe (an African island nation close to the equator) in 1470, made it to modern Ghana in 1471, to the Bight of Benin in 1475, and the Congo in 1482 (Ijoma, 1982, p. 137).

In the view of Ijoma (1982, p. 137) around this period, the Portuguese established a trade monopoly over the trade routes. The African coasts that were discovered were divided into trade districts, which were auctioned in Lisbon. The merchants who bought these trade districts were granted trading rights in return for paying a yearly rent to the King of Portugal. On the Arguin Island, off the western coast of Mauritania, which was the Portuguese's first trading base around Africa from 1443 onwards. Its main articles of trade were African slaves and gold dust, which were brought from the Western Sudan by Arab and Berber merchants. It was said that the slave trade, rather than the gold that made the Portuguese huge profit (Ijoma, 1982, p. 138). As noted by Ijoma (1982, p. 138) that in the account of Alvise Cadamosto, a slave trader, who was contracted by Henry the Navigator to undertake journeys to West Africa, in 1455, he recorded that 1000 African slaves were annually shipped to Portugal from Arguin Island.

When the uninhabited archipelago and island of Cape Verde were discovered in 1457, and the Portuguese encouraged the colonisation of Cape Verde, cotton industry and livestock breeding formed the main occupation (Ijoma, 1982, pp. 138-139). However, the daily labour of the occupation was not provided by the Portuguese. The African slaves provided the much-needed labour for the cotton industry, dye processing and livestock breeding. As such, Cape Verde's agriculture and trading activities were made possible by the transportation of African slaves from mainland Africa to provide slave labour. By 1582, the population of African slaves were eight times the population of the white Portuguese, who numbered only 1608. The freed slaves numbered 400, and the African slaves totalled 13,000. From this account, one could infer that the Portuguese laid the foundation for the chattel slavery of the African people and the colonisation of the African continent (Beazley, 1912, p. 259; Ijoma, 1982, p. 139).

From the narration above, decoloniality recognises colonialism survives slavery, so also, as Maldonado-Torres (2007, p. 243) succinctly affirmed, "coloniality survives colonialism". On the question of the emergence of coloniality, Grosfoguel (2007, p. 219) compellingly argues that one of the most pervasive myths of the twentieth century is the belief that the formal end of colonial rule in the colonised world signified genuine decolonisation, whether in economic, political, socio-cultural, or epistemic terms. This misconception gave rise to what he calls the myth of postcolonialism—the false assumption that the world has moved beyond the structures and logics of colonial domination. In reality, the vast and deeply entrenched global systems of power constructed over more than 450 years of colonial expansion did not simply vanish with the political decolonisation of the global periphery over the last six decades. According to Grosfoguel, what has occurred instead is a transformation rather than a termination of colonial power. The formal withdrawal of colonial administrations did not dismantle the underlying hierarchies of race, knowledge, and capital that continue to govern global relations. These enduring formations constitute what he terms the "colonial power matrix"—a global structure that perpetuates colonial patterns of domination and dependency under new guises. Thus, rather than transitioning from colonialism to freedom, the world has shifted from an era of global colonialism to one of global coloniality, where the legacy of empire persists in the economic systems, epistemic hierarchies, and cultural imaginaries that continue to shape the present world order.

Contemporary African thinkers are increasingly aligning their perspectives with those of thinkers from the Americas in examining the metamorphosis and enduring effects of coloniality on the lived realities of people across the African continent. This intellectual convergence highlights a shared concern with how colonial structures continue to shape epistemic life—especially through the persistent marginalisation and devaluation of African epistemes and indigenous systems of knowledge production.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, p. 3) contends that in the twenty-first century, one of the central challenges confronting African thought is the persistence of the *"epistemic line"*—a concept that extends from the *"colour line"* first theorised by W. E. B. Du Bois (1903). This epistemic line functions as a boundary that denies African people the status of credible knowers, effectively disqualifying them from epistemic virtue. It is maintained through what Ndlovu-Gatsheni calls *"abyssal thinking"*—a colonial mode of thought that situates Africans on the far side of reason, knowledge, and humanity itself. Through this lens, the logic of colonialism systematically dehumanised Africans, casting them as intellectually inferior beings devoid of legitimate knowledge systems. For Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, p. 3), the epistemic struggles of African people are both old and new. They are *old* in that they originated during the initial moments of colonial contact, when African ways of knowing were first undermined and

suppressed. Yet they are also *new*, as they have re-emerged within today's context of profound global systemic and epistemic crises—moments that expose the limitations of Western-centric knowledge and create renewed space for African epistemes to reclaim their relevance and authority in shaping the future of thought.

Nevertheless, building on Grosfoguel's (2007, p. 219) analysis, Africa remains deeply entangled within the colonial matrix of power, which operates through four interconnected domains: the control of the economy, the control of authority, the control of gender, and the control of knowledge (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, p. 37). For the purposes of this article, my focus will be on the control of knowledge—the most insidious and enduring dimension of colonisation. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013, pp. 38–39) persuasively argues, the gravest form of colonisation is not territorial conquest but the colonisation of consciousness—the creation of epistemological mimicry and intellectual dependency. This process continues to afflict the minds of formerly colonised Africans long after the formal end of colonial rule.

As Nwoma, Yerima-Avazi, & Odoh (2021, p. xxi) expressed, the coloniality of the African being became a disastrous historical development in the chapter of post-independent Africa that would come to haunt it and alter its epistemological configurations. Nwoma, Yerima-Avazi, & Odoh (2021, p. xi) argued that for any progress to be made, crucially, it must start from an understanding of the dimension and bearing of the changes that colonised Africans have undergone. It is, therefore, crucial to interrogate the mechanisms and manifestations through which hegemonic Western epistemes have been inscribed into Africa's epistemic landscape. The coloniality of power entrenched Western ways of knowing as universal, while simultaneously relegating African epistemes to the realm of the primitive or the pre-modern. Through the processes of epistemological colonisation—what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) termed the colonisation of the mind—Western modernity succeeded in displacing and marginalising pre-existing African systems of knowledge. This universalisation of Western particularism not only redefined what counts as legitimate knowledge but also erased the epistemic agency of African thought, pushing it to the peripheries of global intellectual discourse.

Western modernity and colonialism did not merely marginalise or displace Africa's pre-existing systems of knowledge—they did so through violence, both physical and psychological. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013, p. 50) poignantly observes, colonialism's most devastating impact was its colonisation of the mental universe of Africans—a process far more difficult to undo than political or economic domination. This form of colonisation penetrated the deepest layers of African consciousness: it stole the African soul, invaded the imagination, and distorted visions of the future. Such epistemic violence was not incidental but structural—it sought to erase African ways of knowing and to implant Western epistemes as the only legitimate form of rationality. This analysis is crucial because it exposes the epistemological roots of the unfinished and deceptive project of decolonisation. The continued belief in the myth of complete decolonisation serves to obscure the persistence of coloniality in contemporary structures of thought and power. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013, p. 51) forcefully argues, as long as epistemic coloniality endures, Africa's political independence remains largely illusory. The systems that produce and legitimise knowledge—schools, universities, and research institutions—continue to operate within Western paradigms, perpetuating the dominance of European values and worldviews. Thus, the struggle for true liberation must go beyond the political and economic domains to confront the colonisation of consciousness itself. Only by decolonising knowledge production and reclaiming African epistemic agency can the continent begin to move toward genuine intellectual and existential freedom.

Given the centuries of physical violence inflicted upon African peoples and the subsequent epistemic violence that accompanied European colonisation, Atieno-Odhiambo (2002, p. 14), as cited in Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, p. 1), posed a profound question which I am paraphrasing: after centuries of epistemic domination and injustice, can African historians reclaim their historical space and reassert an African philosophy of history grounded in autonomy? Has the time come to challenge the universal acceptance of the hegemonic Western episteme—the belief that the philosophical study of history is an intellectual domain exclusively owned by Western civilisation? At the core of the African struggle for epistemic freedom lies not only the quest to decolonise philosophy but also the deeper struggle for control over the African minds. Many scholars and students continue to engage with knowledge systems deeply rooted in Enlightenment rationalism and Western modernity, often filtered through Marxist or liberal paradigms. As a result, African thought is frequently measured against European benchmarks rather than being valued on its own terms. Bhambra (2007, p. 25) further observes that this Eurocentric orientation has led to the subsumption of African history within broader ideological frameworks—whether colonial, nationalist, or Marxist. Each of these frameworks, while claiming universality, imposes an external lens on African experience. Consequently, what is labelled as "African history" often reflects not African epistemic perspectives, but rather Western interpretive models that continue to define the boundaries of legitimacy within the global intellectual order.

This situation demands an immediate and decisive rupture from the Western-centric stranglehold over the philosophy of history. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, p. 2) powerfully asserts, the quest for epistemic freedom is essential to restoring African peoples to the centre of their own intellectual and historical narratives—as autonomous agents rather than passive subjects. This is not merely an academic adjustment but a profoundly decolonial imperative: a call to reclaim ownership of episteme, history, and thought. To begin this process, Africans must consciously re-centre themselves within their epistemic history, recognising that long before colonial contact, they possessed sophisticated, legitimate, and dynamic systems of knowledge and education. Traditions such as the Ifá thought system of the Yorùbá exemplify this intellectual richness, embodying epistemic logic, morality, and cosmology that rival any classical canon. Yet, for generations, these indigenous epistemes have been neglected or dismissed, even by most African peoples, and therefore overshadowed by Western paradigms that continue to dominate academic discourse and the production of the so-called philosophical knowledge. Reclaiming epistemic freedom, therefore, requires a deliberate act of intellectual self-affirmation—an acknowledgement that African ways of knowing are not peripheral or derivative but foundational to African cosmovisions. Only by returning to and revitalising these indigenous knowledge systems can Africa truly dismantle the epistemic hierarchies imposed by colonial modernity and redefine their epistemic history on their own terms.

According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, p. 3), to challenge this entrenched Western-centric dominance over the philosophy of history, descendants of the enslaved, displaced, and colonised have begun to reassert their rightful place within global academia. Their act of intellectual reclamation—proclaiming that they are human beings born into valid and sophisticated epistemic traditions—represents a continuation of the long-standing struggle for epistemic freedom. This movement calls upon African scholars to develop their own methodologies, rooted in their lived realities and historical contexts, and to write from positions of intellectual autonomy, free from the constraints of Eurocentric validation. Ultimately, the pursuit of epistemic justice is not merely about inclusion within existing systems of knowledge—it is about liberating reason itself from coloniality, which has defined what counts as knowledge, truth, and rationality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, p. 3). By reclaiming the authority to define their own epistemes, Africans contribute not only to their own emancipation but to the decolonisation of global thought systems itself. Hence, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, p. 4) imperatively argued for the double task of 'provincialising Europe' and, while simultaneously, 'deprovincialising Africa'.

The first part of the dual task involves provincialising Europe, a concept first introduced and popularised by Dipesh Chakrabarty (2009, pp. 15–20). Chakrabarty argues that European thought—particularly Enlightenment ideals such as modernity, rationality, and progress—has been universalised, shaping the very foundations of how the world understands history and development. In response, he calls for Europe's intellectual legacy to be treated not as a universal norm but as one province among many within a pluralistic global framework. This perspective invites the recognition that non-European experiences and epistemologies are not merely lagging behind Europe but represent alternative modernities—distinct ways of engaging with modern life and history. By doing so, Chakrabarty seeks to decentre Europe's epistemic dominance in the understanding of global modernity and historical development.

I agree that we need to decentre the European episteme and move towards a pluriversal epistemes; however, while Chakrabarty's notion of provincialising Europe is intellectually provocative, it is not without its contradictions. The concept becomes problematic precisely because it continues to employ the very language of modernity that it seeks to critique. The term "modernity" is deeply violent in its historical usage—it was weaponised during colonialism to legitimise violent domination over Global South societies and to marginalise, suppress, and devalue their indigenous epistemes. Yet, paradoxically, Chakrabarty's framework relies heavily on European philosophical figures such as Marx, Heidegger, and Derrida to articulate this critique, thereby reproducing the intellectual dependency it aims to dismantle. Furthermore, by invoking the idea of multiple modernities to describe the epistemic trajectories of Global South societies, Chakrabarty risks reinforcing the very Eurocentric developmental logic he opposes. This framing subtly implies that non-European societies must still be understood in relation to, or in comparison with, Europe's historical evolution—as though they occupy different stages within a shared temporal model of progress. Such a position is conceptually dangerous because it inadvertently

re-centres Europe as the benchmark of historical and philosophical development, rather than truly liberating other epistemic traditions to stand on their own terms.

Nevertheless, despite its inherent contradictions, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, p. 6) argues that Chakrabarty's concept of provincialising Europe can still be salvaged, reclaimed and reinterpreted through a decolonial lens. In this rearticulation, the concept must move beyond its original postcolonial framing to confront directly the coloniality of knowledge—the enduring legacy of colonialism that invaded and reshaped the mental universe of the colonised world. For Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, p. 4), this means that provincialising Europe must explicitly tackle the persistent overrepresentation of European epistemes, and philosophy in particular, in global systems of knowledge production, social theory, and education. Its ultimate purpose, therefore, is not simply to "limit" Europe's universality, but to de-Europeanise the world. This process of de-Europeanisation, according to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, p. 6), simultaneously involves deprovincialising Africa—an intellectual and academic undertaking that centres Africa as a legitimate historical unit of analysis and an epistemic location from which the world can be interpreted. To deprovincialise Africa is to mainstream African epistemes and affirm Africa as a producer, rather than merely a consumer, of theory and its praxis. It is a project of epistemic decolonisation aimed at undoing the long-term effects of Europeanisation of the world, including epistemicide (the destruction of indigenous knowledge systems), linguicide (the erasure of native languages), cultural imperialism, and alienation. In this sense, Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018, p. 6) reinterpretation of provincialising Europe transforms it into a radical call for epistemic justice. It challenges the long-standing hierarchy that positions Europe as the "teacher of the world" and Africa as its "pupil"—a dynamic poignantly captured by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986, p. 17). Through deprovincialising Africa, the decolonial project seeks to rehumanise African epistemes, reclaim intellectual sovereignty, and restore the continent's rightful place as a vital contributor to global knowledge production. As Nwoma et al. (2021, p. xi) argue, the pathway toward intellectual and cultural emancipation for formerly colonised peoples must be anchored in decolonial scholarship—an approach that interrogates and dismantles the lingering structures of colonial power embedded in systems of knowledge, culture, and being.

Therefore, the decolonisation of African philosophy must begin with what Mignolo (2010, p. 173) terms epistemic disobedience: the conscious refusal to submit to the universalising tendencies of Western epistemes, hence philosophy. This disobedience is not merely an act of rejection but a constructive assertion of epistemological and ontological pluriversality—the idea that there are multiple valid ways of knowing and being in the world. Through this lens, African philosophy is not a derivative or regional variation of Western philosophy, but a vital and distinct intellectual tradition grounded in Africa's own histories, cosmologies, and epistemic lived experiences. Decolonising African philosophy, then, involves reclaiming the right to theorise from within African contexts, languages, and worldviews. It requires creating intellectual spaces where indigenous epistemes—such as Ifá, Ubuntu, and Akan epistemes—can converse with, rather than be subsumed under, the Western philosophical paradigm. Ultimately, epistemic disobedience serves as both resistance and reconstruction: it breaks the chains of cognitive dependency while affirming Africa's rightful place as a producer of knowledge within a truly pluriversal global academy.

Conclusion: Toward Pluriversal Epistemes

Contrary to Wiredu's (1998, pp. 17-28) assertions, it is not a colonial mentality to seek to preserve African epistemes from the universality of mainstream philosophical thinking and its forms of coloniality of power. It is actually "border thinking" in the sense that, according to Mignolo (2000, pp. xv-xxii), it is a concept that says the theoretical and the epistemic way of thinking or seeing the world must have an epistemic lived experience of those who have been excluded and pushed to the margin of the production of knowledge by modernity/coloniality. Theories and epistemologies rooted in the epistemic lived experiences of those excluded and marginalised from dominant knowledge production long predate the epochs of slavery and colonialism and have persisted despite the epistemic violence of those periods. However, they were forced to exist at the periphery of the coloniality of power—a framework that presents particular worldviews and knowledges as "universal," thereby granting Western ontology and epistemology primacy over other ways of knowing and being. "Border thinking", therefore, is the combination of thinking from the outside of the border and using the 'other' knowledge traditions and indigenous languages of expression to decolonise knowledge and reconstruct decolonial African histories, thus restoring the dignity that Western modernity/colonialism deprived the colonised people, such as the African people (Mignolo, 2000, pp. x-xxii).

To understand "border thinking" as a decolonial option, one must grasp how the Western epistemic local history projected itself to become the global design for epistemic "universal history." The "universal history" of the ontology and epistemology, for over five hundred years, from 1500 to the present, from the time Columbus discovered the Americas, one local history, constructed itself as the owner of history, has been narrated from the viewpoint of Western civilisation, which passes for the truth (Mignolo, 2000, pp. 9-23). As such, histories of the "other" civilisations' knowledge and truth, which were already in existence alongside Western civilisation, were dismissed as inferior epistemic local histories. To this end, the "other" epistemic local histories were prevented from laying their claim to the universality of history. Thus, it managed to grant Western civilisation the privilege to tell and project its epistemic local history as universal history since the European Renaissance (Mignolo, 2000, pp. 3-23). That being so, the "other" epistemic local histories, for instance, African philosophy, will not be able to articulate and project itself without being entangled with the Western epistemic local history, which is what the Western-trained African professional philosophers are doing. Drawing from this, "border thinking" therefore becomes the indispensable way of knowing to "delink" and decolonise knowledge in order to reconstitute a decolonial epistemic local history of the "other", such as Africa (Mignolo, 2000, pp. 3-23).

To "delink" from the Western thought systems' hegemonic grip on philosophy, which projects its epistemic local history as universal, we need to move away from the concept of African philosophy and realise that African epistemes are forced to reside at the border of the coloniality of power. Border thinking compels us to seek a decolonial option that enables us to frame African epistemic lived experiences as part of local histories, and pluriversal epistemes facilitate this.

A pluriversal framework embraces epistemic diversity. It neither seeks to replace Western universalism with another monolithic model nor to replicate it in African form. Instead, it calls for a world where multiple epistemologies coexist equally, without hierarchical subordination. Pluriversality resists the notion that there is a singular path to knowledge or progress. It acknowledges that African epistemic systems are not inferior or incomplete, but rather different, based on decolonial options of ways of being and knowing. This vision challenges the philosophical canon that has historically excluded African voices. I submit that by adopting a pluriversal epistemic framework, African epistemes can break free from the margins. It enables the reconstitution of African histories and epistemes on their own terms—not as alternatives to a dominant model, but as equally valid epistemic systems in a world of many worlds.

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From freedom to economic submission:

A Laclauian reading of Bolsonaro in the 2022 elections

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Lucas Garcia, University of Pelotas, Brazil

Co-authors: Bianca Linhares & Lucas Antônio Penna Rey., University of Pelotas

Abstract

The rise of the far-right in the world has shown a discursive logic in which, while affirming the crisis of liberal democracies, it positions itself as a response to this failure. Thus, it is expected that these leaders will defend alternative logics to liberalism/neoliberalism. However, as can be seen in Bolsonaro's electoral propaganda in 2022, the connection between the far-right and neoliberalism reduces freedom itself to the dictates of economic liberty, economicising all aspects of social and political life – like Wendy Brown analyses the neoliberalism in Citizen Sacrificial Citizenship: Neoliberalism, Human Capital, and Austerity Politics. This work presents a discursive analysis of Bolsonaro's campaign in the 2022 election, specifically focusing on "economic liberty" and the encompassed signifiers (reduction of the State, individual freedom, and national development – as well as their idiosyncrasies) that counterpose his antagonist – the Workers' Party.

Keywords: Freedom; Economy; Neoliberalism; Bolsonaro; 2022 Electoral Campaign; Discourse Analysis

Introduction

The last decade has witnessed a stark rise of far-right politicians and governments. The rise of these extremes on the ideological spectrum presents an almost uniform discourse, in which conservative agendas are the keynote of their representatives' speeches. But what are these agendas? The question arises because pragmatism is a strong characteristic of conservatism. In this way, conservative demands can vary depending on the situation.

Jair Bolsonaro's government in Brazil, in economic terms, has sought to develop a neoliberal policy. It's interesting that Bolsonaro's conservatism has adapted to the economy. As a federal deputy, he kept the defence of statism on the horizon. As a candidate for the presidency of Brazil in 2018, he maintained his *conservatism in customs* but surprisingly embraced liberalism in the economy. With this in mind, and considering his quest for re-election in 2022, this discussion raises the following question: How did the discursive construction of economic freedom take place in Jair Bolsonaro's discourse in the 2022 elections, using Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's Discourse Theory as a theoretical-methodological basis and relying on Wendy's Brown conception of neoliberalism?

This closer look allows us to extrapolate the issue beyond this centrality and conjecture the consequences of such a perspective for the construction of the candidate himself as a political subject. This is where we seek to identify the interrelationships between the candidate's discourse and the neoliberal agendas that have demarcated the discourse of the extreme right in the world, at least in the field of politics. Thus, in addition to scrutinising Bolsonaro's discourse in the 2022 elections, it is necessary to identify where, how and to what extent 'economic freedom' was inserted into the discursive construction of the then presidential candidate.

Discussion

For this discussion, we selected two relevant signifiers from Bolsonaro's campaign - economy and freedom - given our interest in seeing how neoliberalism appears in his 2022 electoral discourse. Based on an in-depth analysis, a major discourse emerged called Economic Freedom, which articulates three major demands: Decrease the State, which combines ideas such as Defending public-private partnership, Defending the free market, Reducing bureaucracy, Privatisation and Reducing taxes; Individual Freedom, which includes Freedom of the press, Freedom of expression and Individual economic freedom; and National Development, which includes Investments in infrastructure, Defending agribusiness, Regional development and Investments in national industry. In turn, the Economic Freedom node is the nodal point, the result of the articulation chain, which gives representation to all these demands.

A political discourse is always an opposition discourse, a discourse that pretends to be hegemonic in a context of constant dispute for hegemony. In the case of Bolsonaro, the discourse is built around the slogan 'God, homeland, family and freedom'. Although these four signifiers claim to be central in their articulations, a discourse, especially that of a political candidate, involves various other themes. In the case of this article, as already mentioned, two signifiers were mobilised to read the analysis material: freedom and the economy. The transformation of these two signifiers into one, economic freedom, occurred because, at the end of the day, there is little that can be said about freedom that is not linked to economic freedom in the Bolsonaro discourse of the 2022 campaign.

During his administration, Bolsonaro has sought to deepen the agenda of the previous government, with an institutional framework that prevents the alternation of power from allowing a new ruler to use instruments other than those of a neoliberal logic. Although defences such as freedom of expression and freedom of the press appeared in the candidate's campaign, they were always focused on issues that were directly associated with individual freedom, which is subject to economic freedom.

It is also relevant to address the antagonism that constructs the very identity of Bolsonaro's candidate in 2022. The discourse in opposition to the Workers' Party (PT) and communism runs through the entire discursive construction of the candidate. For this reason, the antagonistic will be presented alongside the elements that together make up Bolsonaro's discursive construction of Economic Freedom. I will present now the details of the three major demands, starting with Decrease the State.

As the expression itself makes clear, the element Decrease the State establishes the defence of reducing the state apparatus. Even in 2018, Bolsonaro's electoral base was already demanding this position, which has guided his government. According to Rocha & Solano (2021), the former president's definition of the bad characteristics of the state led to a solution by replacing it with private enterprise. In Bolsonaro's view, the Brazilian state needs to be slimmed down. He made this clear at the launch of his candidacy, when he declared: 'Our mission is not to get in the way of your lives! It's to get the state off your backs more and more. Strong state, weak people, strong people, weak state'.

The idea of this regulatory state that should be put aside exalts privatisations, de-bureaucratisation's, public-private partnerships and deregulations that

boost the 'free market' and favour job creation. These perceptions are in line with Wendy Brown's analysis of neoliberalism: the neoliberal rationality of the economicisation of political and social life is characterised by a discursive production that extends market logics to all dimensions of life - this extension seeks on the one hand, to emancipate individuals from state interventions and, on the other, to involve these individuals in the neoliberalised sphere. There are several statements about these meanings in relation to the antagonistic pole: the Workers' Party, in general terms in Bolsonaro's discourse, represents bureaucracy, corruption and economic recession.

In addition, reducing taxes was the main action defended by Bolsonaro, specially related to the achievements of his government. Most of the time, the tax pronouncements are aimed at the population to construct them as people who suffer from the heavy burden of the state - a state that makes consumer items more expensive due to the high tax. Here are two reflections. The first is the question of who, for example, does cutting import taxes benefit? The second is that without taxes, the state cannot guarantee access to and maintenance of services for the people. During the Bolsonaro administration, the fiscal area has faced a strong neoliberal policy, such as the Pension Reform, seeking the proposed transition to a capitalisation system, an attempt to privatise the General Pension System. In this direction, and beyond this idea of reducing the state, the meanings related to reducing taxes are also closely linked to another fundamental element in Bolsonaro's construction, *individual freedom.*

The word freedom appeared a lot throughout Bolsonaro's election campaign. It's curious that at no point did the former president state what was his conception about what freedom is. He simply defended it, based on an antagonistic logic in which freedom was threatened by the left, then represented by the PT, and he – Bolsonaro - was the only one capable of saving it. Firstly, it's worth pointing out that freedom is an empty signifier that brings together a range of meanings that are articulated around it. It is also mobilised in relation to an antagonistic enemy, the left-wing candidate, Lula, of PT, and the left itself, which defends collective agendas.

In an analysis of the conditions of emergence and the context of the discourses constructed throughout the campaign, freedom - and especially the individual's freedom of expression - takes on conservative and reactionary contours. A reactionary is a political figure who follows the logic of what the name suggests: react. In this sense, a reactionary reacts in an individualistic way, because they don't trust anyone except their closest relations. Thus, the defence of 'unrestricted' and 'absolute' freedom to express all ideas is limited to reactionary and conservative ideas

that are exclusionary, discriminatory and/or anti-democratic. The defence of freedom of expression, therefore, remains a very narrow concept, used to prevent any form of investigation or criminalisation of speeches aligned with the president.

Although this freedom of expression from the 2022 campaign is a fundamental part of Bolsonaro's discursive construction of the defence of individual freedom, it is especially another meaning given to freedom that stands out: the individual's economic freedom. This is because a significant part of Bolsonaro's discourse, according to what we observed earlier, is closely linked to the economic aspect.

This economic freedom of the individual that emerges in Bolsonaro's discourse is linked to the concept of individualism and the move away from a regulatory state. As the state is viewed negatively by Bolsonaro, nothing could be fairer than people getting rid of it and being able to make their own choices - as in the quest to privatise the General Welfare System. Representing the idea of the individual who thrives on their own, and of a state that should be reduced, since it only impedes individual freedom.

In this way, Bolsonaro's economic discourse based on the idea of 'getting the state off our backs' is translated into exaltations of reducing the state apparatus and public spending. Returning to what was said earlier, there are many mentions of reducing taxes and cutting red tape, which are closely linked to the growth of the economy and job creation during his administration. Equally recurrent is the idea par excellence of liberalism, which is the defence of private property, seen as a kind of 'sacred right of the individual', which is also threatened by the antagonistic discursive enemy.

Thus, the discourse of individual freedom articulates freedom of expression and economic freedom in a very close relationship with neoliberalism. According to Wendy Brown, the neoliberal sphere places the entrepreneurial dimension everywhere, resulting in the drastic reduction of substantive active citizenship in favour of valuing freedom and individual responsibility - in the latter, individuals are doubly implicated: for self-care and for the economic prosperity of the whole.

In this sense, although it may initially be surprising that Bolsonaro's speeches articulate the defence of individual freedoms within an extreme right-wing proposal seen as conservative and reactionary, Wendy Brown can help explain the phenomenon once again. According to the author, in the theories of neoliberalism - notably Friedrich von Hayek - conservatism of customs and neoliberalism are, in her words, rooted in a common ontology of spontaneously evolved orders carried by tradition.

Considering this discourse, in which there would be few taxes, few or no public companies and no state investment, how would the National Development be possible, according to Bolsonaro's electoral discourse? This is the theme of the last element to be analysed here.

The elements-moments explored earlier support a typically neoliberal discourse, National Development goes along with this logic. Neoliberalism is closely related to globalisation. While the first concept is a doctrine that minimises the role of the state, preaches deregulation, market freedom and privatisation, the second refers to a process that seeks to interconnect the world in different spaces such as trade, the financial environment, politics and culture. In this sense, neoliberalism facilitates globalisation because it allows the flow of goods, services and financial investments regardless of borders, as tariffs and trade barriers are reduced. The notion of national development in Bolsonaro's discursive construction basically concerns investments in the country's infrastructure and the development of Brazilian agribusiness. It also touches on regional development and national industry.

Bolsonaro constantly emphasised in his campaign the works carried out by his government, investment in infrastructure that made economic development and job creation possible. At the same time as citing his government's achievements in infrastructure, Bolsonaro's election campaign did not stop negatively characterising the actions of left-wing governments. In this sense, Bolsonaro's discourse always combines an achievement of his own government with some idea that links the antagonist not only to the condition of failure, but also to that of being corrupt or immoral.

The defence of agribusiness has been strongly defended since the 2018 election, when Bolsonaro won its support by criticising policies that go against it, such as the environment, land reform, indigenous demarcations and arms limitations. He is given prominence especially when linked to the idea that it is agribusiness that powers Brazil's economy and feeds the world. It should be noted that small producers are not a part of this agribusiness.

Regional development was addressed by the campaign with a lot of attention to the Northeast, where Bolsonaro's electorate was the smallest in the country. Once again, the strategy applied in the campaign discourse combined the achievements of the then President with the depreciation of the actions of the PT governments. One example is the use of the conclusion of the transposition of the São Francisco River to dignify Bolsonaro's candidacy and disqualify the PT governments. For other regions, regional development was fundamentally linked to investment in infrastructure.

Regarding the defence of investment in national industry, the approach is very targeted. The campaign takes an approach based on entrepreneurship and innovation. At the same time, intentions are cited that benefit private groups in the guise of protecting the population.

In National Development, Bolsonaro's discourse that exposes the antagonistic line that separates what prevents its full constitution as an identity also appears. The PT is the main reference, accused of sending money to other countries instead of investing in Brazil. In his words:

> The PT governments, Lula and Dilma, sent Brazilians' money to friendly dictators. And what's worse - they defaulted on Brazil. The PT preferred to build the metro in Venezuela rather than invest in the metro in Minas Gerais. The PT preferred to build a port in Cuba than to transpose the São Francisco and double our motorways. Lula preferred to support dictatorships rather than create jobs and develop Brazil.

These excerpts cast Bolsonaro's opponent as an adherent of corruption and a supporter of dictatorships. Both ideas have severe consequences for employment and the country's development. It is also possible to deduce, in a broad analysis, that the economic extension of the state, supported by taxes collected from the population, has allowed left-wing governments to invest abroad, neglecting domestic needs. This is the basis for Bolsonaro's defence of less state, more individual freedom and a focus on national development. Even if domestic needs are not defended as a matter for the state.

Concluding, this analysis highlights how Bolsonaro's discourse not only constructed a vision of limited state intervention and privatization as synonymous with national prosperity but also positioned opposition forces as threats to freedom itself. Ultimately, his ability to fuse neoliberal rationality with reactionary conservatism underscores Wendy Brown's assertion that neoliberalism extends market logics into all facets of life, reinforcing an individualistic, depoliticized society. This study thus contributes to the understanding of how brazilian right-wing populism deploy economic discourse as a tool for hegemonic struggle, shaping political identities and reinforcing ideological antagonisms in contemporary democracies in exchange for a radicalisation of neoliberal reason.

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In the name of Miley Cyrus:
Strategical coverings of Milei's name in public spaces

Lyric Essay

Marc Pereyra, Universidad de Buenos Aires

Abstract:

In 2023, as a part of Milei's presidential campaign in Argentina, his name started to appear written with markers all over public spaces in Buenos Aires. At the same time, the name of Miley Cyrus also began to appear. Detractors of the far right's candidate were turning the 'i' in Milei into a 'y'. A language act of resistance in written form was created. An invocation of a pop icon that profited from the well-known name of the artist. 'Milei' is subversively appropriated through word play and street intervention. The city became a canvas of social conflict.

Keywords: art; pop; fandom; hacktivism; deconstruction.

Miley over Milei

In 2023, the political campaign that led Javier Milei into the presidency of Argentina presented the people with a series of novel strategies that included grassroots actions and a heavy use of social media platforms, especially Twitter. Milei proposed an unforeseen sharp turn to the right that radically shifted the country's political landscape. His discourse was plagued by numerous regressive claims regarding human rights. He became popular for his hate speech and homophobic remarks. Milei's approach to public policy questions Argentine sovereignty over the Falkland Islands, denies the disappearances enforced during the last dictatorship, openly supports genocidal Israel, expresses admiration for Donald Trump, and is currently trying to dismantle public health and public education (opposing, in particular, university gratuity). Notably relevant to this article, another of his government's policies consists of an ongoing attack on culture (notoriously epitomised in a cartoonish hatred of national cinema). The bleak scenarios Argentina was facing as part of a global trend, brought to public attention the widespread support of such reactionary notions.

Either as a part or as a side effect of Milei's campaign leading to the 2023 election, his name started to appear written with markers all over public spaces in Buenos Aires. The seemingly improvised and accessible character of this form of expression made the political support for the far right appear popular, youthful, passionate, and spontaneous. At the same time, the name of Miley Cyrus also began to appear ubiquitously scrawled with markers. Detractors of the far right's candidate were turning the 'i' in Milei into a 'y' and adding the surname Cyrus to make it an unrelated expression of fandom. Unsuspecting passersby might have thought that a certain US singer was becoming increasingly fashionable. Between Milei and Miley, there is but i/y of difference. In Spanish, both letters are generally pronounced the same, and, in utterance of their names, they both need a second word to be distinguishable from one another, either 'i latina' or 'y griega'. Without prior knowledge of whom those names reference, based on Spanish phonetics, a clarification would be needed to know which i/y to use. There is a founding confusion which enables the political action that concerns this article.

The Miley scrawls are a use case. A use case of agency, of urbanity, of art, of the possibility of the written word in a current and contingent context. A demurral, ephemeral because it is material; an erasure meant to be erased. A localised displacement of electoral propaganda that makes do with what there is and intervenes it to confuse reading perception. A political stance which is not an opposition, but a refusal to contest democracy on its own terms. This commentary understands that there is no gap which is not an underlying condition. Drawing from Henri Lefebvre's and Jacques Derrida's notions on the relationality of space and language signs, and their links to presence; and Jacques Rancière's approach to dissent as that which makes certain utterances possible, small inscriptions are brought to the fore. These three thinkers contribute to form an abstract spatial canvas of interweaving lines of flight and force which shape the very founding provisions of expression, where the distance between the threads of the urban fabric is telling of their placement and trajectory. The accessibility, subtlety, and ease of iterability of the street articulations studied here, rejects the burdensome utilitarian impositions weighing on political art. From the tip of brash markers, Miley acquires a becoming in which anarchism turns soft power into a playful signature gesturing to its own hard methods.

For a moment, in 2023, writing Miley Cyrus on street signs, city walls, and bathroom stalls; quickly, and fleetingly, became a form of expression of political opposition. In a city visually besieged by propaganda, a cheap marker can be an apt blade to cut rifts in the optic images of oppression. Milei is written into Miley. As if the pop singer could shield people's eyes from electoral support of a proposed erosion of fundamental rights. As an action of street intervention, the name change highlights the importance of cultural resistance in urban spaces. Meaning is contested, for it can never be fixed. What is seen becomes dependent on the beholder's gaze. This article is divided into three sections: first, a conceptualization of urban space according to the configurations of its discourse; second, a reflection on the affective applications of pop iconography; and third, a spectral analysis of the scopes of deconstruction, culture jamming, and hacktivism manifested in this case. Buenos Aires offers mixed signals and strong sentiments to those who wander and linger.

Your signs dream of crosses[1]

As any other city, Buenos Aires's space is constructed to correspond with a series of ideological patterns which coalesce the community that makes use of

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1 This subtitle is a translation of "Tus letreros sueñan cruces", a line from the tango "Tristezas de la calle Corrientes", lyrics by Homero Expósito.

them. The cultural usage of the cityscape implies transformation and involves a certain aesthetic disposition (Torrijos, 1988, pp. 17-18). This results in a mode of participation in which every actor is a co-creator, and where reciprocity should be highlighted (Lefebvre, 1972, p. 92; Torrijos, 1988, p. 32). Because urban space is lived together, it involves manifold social relations; its polysemy allows for a vast profusion of interweaving variety. Aesthetically, an emphasis is placed on the visual aspects of circuits which are commodified and whose contents cannot become intelligible by the simplifying polar fictions of transparency and opacity (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 75; 81; 83; 85-87; 92). According to Henri Lefebvre, the urban is a socially practiced morphology that is mainly characterised by simultaneity. The city's form is a social and perceptible signifying assemblage that enfolds meanings which appear and resound in its paths, projected in ways that tamper with the senses of closeness and extension. It presents admixture upon its plane in a manner that veils conflicts and refracts them as a style, each object duplicated into an image (Lefebvre, 1972, pp. 69-71; 96). In such a context, the increasingly unrelenting prevalence of propaganda renders political interventions a preferential tool to forwardly seek to shape the urban landscape. Signs dream and citizens might, in passing, offer them a caress made of ink. People read and write on city walls; and if it is true that walls have ears, it should not be discarded that they can also irradiate enlightenment.

For Jacques Rancière, the specificity of political dissent is the ephemeral form of partaking assumed by its relationships. Political action defies the blindness of those who do not see that which is excluded from sight, transforming its surroundings by making visible a gap in perception. A political act is one that exhibits a possibility; where space becomes the stage for an appearance that marks an internal difference capable of modifying what can be done, seen, and named within certain boundaries (Rancière, 2010, pp. 27; 37-39; 133). A shift in the aesthetic metapolitics which frame the possibilities of art must be enacted. A form of intervention through which the city is evidenced as an open site of social conflicts. If state power is sustained by polarising myths that place otherness at the margins, then those who are situated on the fringes must tactically utilise their imagery to inscribe their own cultural radiations into prohibitive spaces (Cf. Bartra, 2007, pp. 17-18; 37). An appropriation of the means of the other places a challenge to arbitrary allocations by the very act which dares to evidence that a factitious allotment has parcelled out common space.

Although political street art is necessarily site-specific, certain stylistic traits recur across diverse locations. Julia Tulke has studied interventions of this sort in Istanbul and Athens, linking them to a Lefebvrian urban space where decentralised participatory encounters strategically register a spectrum of thinking (Tulke, 2019, pp. 122-124). Tulke places great importance on the digital socialisation and preservation of these actions, seeing it as an immaterial collective memory that resists the erasure of censorship and enables an archive ready for conjuring. These interpretations differ substantially from the ones expressed in this article, which treats erasure as potency. The Milei / Miley iterations passed largely undocumented. Here, the ephemeral quality of the writings is praised as an attribute resisting dominant impositions of transcendence; and the focus, set on a materiality that cannot be deferred, regards the digital as a source of hacking know-how to be borrowed for extrapolation. Memory is not tied to an archived productive output, rather, it is unleashed through blurry recollections towards undetermined speculative exercises.

To communicate something in public space, the message must conform to the presentation, articulation, and behaviours such a sphere prescribes. When considering advertising campaigns in urban contexts, the salient aspect is that it seems all available room has been assigned and that any other form of written expression is devalued and regarded as vandalism. What is more, even transgressive information is expected to replicate the forms of official advertisements if it is meant to be decoded by the general public. It is, therefore, evident that struggle over discourse always implies an aesthetic struggle (Schneider and Friesinger, 2010, pp. 15; 27-28). To Lefebvre the term 'discourse' refers to the commodification of language. This is the form of allowed messages in public spaces, which impose social patterns that tend to regulatory perpetuation. Discourse plagues language and failure to comply results in the inability to make oneself understood, the formulation of certain things must remain inarticulable (Lefebvre, 1966, pp. 371-372). At a time when policing and ubiquitous surveillance deters citizens from manners of expression that stray from normative sanctions (Northoff, 2010, p. 143; Cf. Schneider and Friesinger, 2010, p. 25), sense disputes necessitate destabilising assertions that favour questions and foster disloyalty to any fixed value. Because both the president's endorsement and its subversion were unofficial manifestations, they both enact a certain disruption of regulated perception. Yet there is a paradox in the expression of state support by such vandalistic scribble. Does it seek to expropriate the means of dissent, or does it intend to showcase the margins' reinforcement of state legitimacy?

According to political scientist Dolores Rocca Rivarola, Argentina exhibits a general tendency towards personalist political campaigns; but the right, in particular, aims to portray its support as an unmediated and spontaneous backing from the unaffiliated, non-partisan common folk (Rocca Rivarola, 2024, pp. 337; 339; 347). This latter trait has also been identified in right-wing movements internationally. Examples from England and Japan showcase heterogeneous supporters who identify as unaffiliated, ordinary 'patriots' partaking in a 'grassroots revolution' and taking to the streets to make an emotional appeal to passersby (Busher, 2016, pp. 171-175; Hall, 2021, pp. 44; 159; 178; 202). Street interventions centred on Milei's name either were, or appeared to be, part of these broader trends of spontaneous grassroots tactics. But if official discourse seeks to profit from unofficial tools, then approved discourses must be made to turn against themselves. Once again officialism calls to be contested in its own terms. So, how can Miley Cyrus, once a Disney product, become a poster girl against the rise of the capitalist right?

Paint to match the roses

All spaces conjure imaginaries, that is, understandings comprised of material configurations and narratives that shape them and endow them with a particular emotional quality. Because each individual mentally maps the city using a combination of landmarks related to needs of orientation and subjective bias, imaginaries carry a dimension that is deeply personal. Yet these imaginaries are also shared and shaped collectively through conversational exchanges, written descriptions, and representations in numerous arts. A cultural process mediates the formation of what becomes the city, a common imaginary under continuous change (Saitta, 2010, p. 51). Cities are plagued by representational spaces modified for ritual requirements. Be they religious or political, spaces of this kind present a sanctified inwardness and a repressive immanence. The symbols which adorn them thrive on a certain confusion between the sensory, the sensual, and the sexual (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 48-49). Surely, Miley can be regarded as a sex symbol, while Milei can be construed as repressive political figure. Overwritten, Miley Cyrus, thus, emerges as a frictional signifier, a star ready to collide with a system.

The visual rumour of Miley Cyrus's name circulates the city: bouncing on the walls, causing multiple reflections, reverberating in the urban space. Lefebvre notes that orientation is a sense, a perception, a movement, a direction (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 423). Miley cannot be apprehended as a one-dimensional construct, the appropriation of her name for a political cause declares a contradiction. The kind of contradiction necessary to formulate dissent. Regulations are enacted to provide a certain degree of stability (Gadringer, 2010, p. 36), but space allotment is always provisional (Rambatan, 2010, p. 48). If popular culture is defined in opposition to power (Cf. Hall, 1981, p. 238), then popular celebrity culture can also be constituted as a site of resistance in the aesthetic economy of public space. Miley Cyrus simultaneously offers the image of a star purveyed by a corporation and a controlled dose of marketable transgression, following her rebranding a decade prior to these interventions. In this respect, she could be perceived as a far more innocuous version of the campaign that led Milei into power, which portrayed him as a 'State rebel' at the service of free capitalism. This ironic mirroring of product placement could be read as a way to expose the politician's role as a puppet for market interests. But although Miley and Milei might have been sold similarly, the radical difference between the two cannot be understated. One is an artist in the entertainment industry, and the other is a politician attempting to dismantle public institutions and desecrate acquired human rights. That is the opposition which allows the former to be erected as a bastion against the oppressive agenda of the latter.

Argentina has a tradition of canonising singers, in a manner akin to popular saints, to channel transformative intentions. Perhaps, the most emblematic case of such a processes is that of cumbia singer Gilda, whose ceremonial admiration encompasses a series of spontaneously organised practices associated with her spiritual powers after death. Recurring votive actions performed for Gilda include giving offerings, writing letters, gathering at her gravesite in Buenos Aires on the weekends, and making trips to her sanctuary in Entre Ríos. Sociologist Eloísa Martín describes how fans actively partake in the construction of Gilda's persona and her inscription on the realm of that which is sacred. In her affinity to sacred perceptions, Gilda acquires a certain differential quality that is socially recognised and performed at specific moments in specific spaces. Fandom is a becoming, a process of successive choices through which the idol starts to gain increasing presence in daily life. Gilda's differential sacredness is strengthened by communal practical understandings that bring forth an affective attachment to artistic admiration (Martín, 2007, pp. 31; 33; 37-39; 44-45; 49). As it transpires, these regional fandom practices can aid in interpreting the temporary tactical association of Miley's name to modes of affective holiness.

Celebrity culture expresses a form of consumption in which fans become active parties in production in order to further the proximity with their idol through collective affective investments of symbolic value (Derbaix and Korchia, 2019, pp. 110-112; 115; 117). David Morgan explains that "religion can be understood as a system of technologies for the body's interface with complex networks that join human and non-human actors in practices of exchange and interaction" (Morgan, 2016, p. 277). He adds that these technologies function as delegates, setting socially arranged matrices of interaction and redefining body continuity by projecting the self onto the surroundings (*Ibid.*). Following this conception of devotional endeavours, a makeshift folk invocation of a pop icon can be a bridge between grassroots manifestations and ideological phantoms.

The title of this section is extracted from the lyrics of the song 'Flowers' by Miley Cyrus, released in 2023 just some months prior to the street interventions analysed in this paper. The song proposes an ethical response to Bruno Mars's 2013 hit 'When I was your man'. Distancing herself from the pervasive discourse of romantic dependency, Cyrus asserts her own individual self-sufficiency. Despite engaging in an artistic dialogue with a previous song, as musicians often do, 'Flowers' was struck with a copyright claim brought forward by partial shareholders of 'When I was your man'. The claim by the plaintiff that 'Flowers' replicates 'numerous melodic, harmonic and lyrical elements' is not sufficient from a musical standpoint to sustain a copyright litigation, as Cyrus's song offers enough musical variation. Reuters reported that Cyrus's team contested the standing of the plaintiffs to bring the lawsuit. If that has been the only argument raised so far, it is not surprising that the judge allowed the case to proceed (Brittain, 2025). Although U.S. copyright law is vague enough to favour corporate litigiousness, it is reasonable to believe that musical arguments will prevail in court. It will be up to her lawyers to demonstrate that the similarities operate as a reference and do not constitute a derivative work. The case provides a telling exemplification of current appraisals of authorship. In the gardens of the city, Miley's roses still smell as sweet, regardless of the name in the card.

The reason why Miley Cyrus performs so aptly as a contentious political aesthetic entity is because it does not futilely attempt to resolve its inherent contradiction, rather it thrives by manipulating its paradoxical richness and bringing forth the complex links between its clashing terms. Exposing the connections between pop music and neofascist trends, raises issue with what is purported as natural and destabilises the façade that veils ideology to perpetuate it. The mere suggestion of the ties of representation that bind the system is enough to activate an inquest into its insidiousness (Monroe, 2005, pp. 126-127; 129). One of the most prevalent traps of activism in the global South is a quaint idealization of locality which romanticises tendentious constructions of identity. That is not to say that regional specificity should not be defended, rather, territorial forms of articulation should always be conscious of their place in the current international geopolitical agenda. Intervening public space must be oriented to favour possibilities for further intervention (cf. Schneider and Friesinger, 2010, pp. 30; 32). Perhaps the choice of a singer from the United States might be hinting at the way Milei reveres U.S. imperialistic interests.

According to writer Thomas O. St-Pierre, Miley Cyrus is an iconic figure representing youths born in the beginning of the twenty-first century. Coincidentally, or not, those same youths have been blamed for tilting the scale to secure the far right's ascent to power. St-Pierre reprises the much exploited debate surrounding Miley's rebranding from innocent child star to sexualised pop icon, to note that the 2013 controversy was just another expression of the ever-recurring conflict which could be labelled as 'inter-generational intransigence'. It is noted that in these periodical rifts, youth always appears to infringe moral boundaries (St-Pierre, 2018, pp. 15; 20-21). Another of the inherent contradictions the superimposed name of Miley brings to the fore is the question as to whether, in this case, those moral concerns arose from the alleged sexual liberation of the pansexual singer or the regressive resurgence of fascism. Even if the apparent political incorrectness of the right could never be revolutionary, inasmuch as it legitimises oppression, that does not mean its 'oppositional appeal' cannot be marketed. Maybe Miley is a tongue in cheek retort to a president that is a caricature straight from the manosphere. Another aspect to consider is that if Miley's main controversy concerns her sexuality, it is because, as an adult, she still has to grapple with the image of innocence imposed upon her as a child star. The ageism implied in inter-generational conflicts, is reinterpreted in relation to concerns about the lack of maturity to deal with mature topics (St-Pierre, 2018, pp. 29; 58). Whatever the case, there is an undeniable polysemy to Miley Cyrus as a figure of speech.

At this point, it is relevant to reference Marco Deseriis's analysis of the symbolic power of Donald Trump's name. In it, the author provides a historic-philosophical approach to proper names and starts by reflecting on the sonic associations of the utterance of the politician's name (Deseriis, 2017, p. 4). Destiny Hope Cyrus legally changed her name to Miley Ray Cyrus in 2008, inspired by her childhood nickname: Smiley (Oliver, 2011, p. 171). Miley's name is derived from a sonic association to a familial term of endearment. In this light, although it may seem a little far-fetched, it is tempting to extrapolate Deseriis's method. It is curious that Milei sounds like 'mi ley' (my law, in Spanish). It would be too speculative to wonder whether such a homophony played a role in the president's public image, but it is worth mentioning it. Deseriis also ponders on how taking over the name of a public figure might be used as a tactic to confront discursive authority and privilege. He describes Trump's name as 'the strident sound of the exertion of force (tr-) and the muffled sound of its absorption (–ump)', but explains that its sound symbolism could be subverted to 'evoke an engine start failure (ump-tr-ump-tr-ump)' (Deseriis, 2017, p. 13). By this form of word play, Milei could represent the internalization (mi-) of an imposition (-ley); or it could be read as a semantic drift to tamper with its alleged authority. Deseriis notes that proper names have a 'purely indexical function' which is not reliant on the referent. Able to be associated to as many objects as convention allows, proper names foster ambiguities (Deseriis, 2017, pp. 13-14). A name becomes itself by frequency (Georgelou and Janša, 2017, p. 2). Miley Cyrus can be an expression of resistance to a name with a similar spelling because of the high symbolic power of her standing. The effectiveness of invoking her intercession is dependent on her social recognition as a pop star.

In 2021, Miley Cyrus succeeded in registering her name as a trademark in the European Union (Case T-368/20), solidifying the status of her name as a brand with conceptual meaning linked to her fame. The General Court understood that "the word-sign 'MILEY CYRUS' has a specific semantic content for the relevant public given that it refers to a public figure of international reputation, known by most well-informed, reasonably observant and circumspect persons". The case considered the possible confusion between Miley Cyrus's brand and a previously existing trademark called Cyrus. The ruling set a precedent because it acknowledged that the public can 'neutralize any visual and phonetic similarities' when met with a mark of such relevance (Antoniou, 2021). The concession of Miley's claim lends legal support to the assertion made in this paper, that Miley Cyrus's name holds enough popularity as to overpower the underlying name in the attention of people who read it in public spaces.

Names enact cultural codes (Georgelou and Janša, 2017, p. 2), but they also shape reality. Because names are indexical, they do not necessarily aim at identification, they can express an assertion of will. Names evoke when something is made to appear, and they invoke when effects are manifested (cf. Crowley, n. d., pp. 166; 190; 193). Ritual participation is paramount because it exacerbates perceptions and intensifies affective responses, experiences become internal, sensorial impressions turn intimate, and orientation is directed by a mythical commonality (Cf. Tambiah, 2007, pp. 106; 108). Miley covers Milei to uncover a mechanism, adding ink to smudge the definition of the written word, creating a disorienting double vision. Characters may conjure up a wraith, an apparition of a dubious duplicitous presence, an announcement of an uncertain death. "An unconscionable time a–dying—there is the picture ('I am afraid, gentlemen,')" (Stevenson, 1925, p. 229). When a name is traced, its letters may tether a presence to a space where it would otherwise not be.

The haunting art of vandalism

A common trope in fantasy is the appearance of writings of unknown origin on walls, these inscriptions are often attributed to ghosts, phantoms that manifest a paradoxical coexistence of presence and absence, of that which is seen and that which is not immediately apparent. Milei is occluded by Miley, and Miley is cast, it is spelled, to bring to attention something that was hidden from view. An illustrious name sparks an impression to ward off a threat, to prevent something from returning. Milei is no longer readable, but it remains somewhat identifiable. After the overlay is set, the basal tracing stubbornly iterates producing a condemningly recurring exappropriation. Specters announce a coming, a return or a coming yet to come, but a coming that is forever untimely. The fringes of the letters become hard to discern and insistence on death breeds suspicion. Specters are visions that flicker in the urban dreamscape projected upon unsuspecting surfaces, markers can make a canvas out of almost anything. Spirits are mediators, but iteration may turn them into ghosts. Ghosts are there even when they are not (cf. Derrida, 1993, pp. 25, 159-160; 165; 200; 279). But nothing holds the power to haunt if individuals do not, in fear, grant it capability with each genuflection, with each curtsy (cf. Stirner, 2007, p. 77). Spectres are linked to fear because one ought to remain vigilant. Street signs seem to scream: 'move along, there's nothing to see here'; but observant citizens know better. If you stare at them long enough, they look back; it's uncanny.

Henri Lefebvre proposes a spectral analysis of the city in terms of a study of its scope, its magnitude, its energy, its intensity, its systemic behaviour. His

approach interprets the polysemy of spectres in a different direction. Urbanity is perceived as a virtual reconstitution, the spectre of the city is a practice which encompasses cohesively all composing elements, yet, simultaneously, it projects the fragmentation between said elements. Participation is an obsession that veils a constitutively conflicting content (Lefebvre, 1972, pp. 102-106). For Derrida, spectres relay the frequency of the visibility of that which cannot be seen; what recurs, frequents (Derrida, 1993, pp. 165-166). Music, like Miley's, can also be more deeply analysed by observing its spectral frequency. Lefebvre thinks the city as a creation that appropriates multiplicity and transfigures it. Art is a reflection which restores sense. Urban fulfilment comes in a shape which exalts usage and congregation; it is perceptive and practical. Segregation is a question of political marginalization and class (Lefebvre, 1972, pp. 119; 121). Walls stage separation where continuity is denied, they are performative boundaries (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 87). But ghosts can easily go through walls. Artivism is a form of speculative spectacularisation. Cities can be hauntingly beautiful; they are layered constructs built on vestiges. Cities are sites of struggle where state propaganda lurks, offering lustrous treats to unsuspecting strangers too concerned with their own immediate survival. Milei's written name appears refreshingly haphazard. The president's unofficial campaign included a number of grassroots tactics oriented towards state power acquisition. An active effort was put into promoting forms of inconspicuous political preaching (*bajadas de línea*).[2] The city is haunted, but it won't align. The political spectrum is wide.

Reading sets in motion a situated and contextual decryption of symbols written in a specific order. When codes are executed, they expand to generate readings as numerous as the acts of reading applied (Cf. Ohler, 2010, pp. 189; 202). According to Alexei Monroe, systemic order relies on the concealment of source codes and the deletion of any data that might conflict with current program imperatives. Hacking prompts destabilising altered effects by reintroducing information that should have been erased and pairing it with added contradictory elements (Monroe, 2005, p. 130). The image of the letters which form Miley Cyrus concatenate in a name, but Milei remains in a form of recursion. The repetition implied by this mode of inclusion extends the sequence by way of a sort of communicational reflexivity (cf. Yelle, 2016, p. 213). The relational function of language stresses the relative value of signs; formal integrity can only be attained by the articulation of discontinuous parts. And so it is,

language is cumulative. Forms attempt to reduce that which is irreducible, failing upon imposition to absorb the formless (Lefebvre, 1966, pp. 311-314; 319).

Deconstruction operates from within, borrowing the resources for subversion from the structure it seeks to destabilise. Articulation permits graphic chains where otherness is occluded by the inscriptions it enables. The trace is that conditional difference in perpetual movement which allows the articulation of time and space in experience (Derrida, 1974, pp. 39; 69; 92; 96). Words are determined by their place in a sequence because the gaps in the joints make meaning possible (Hillis Miller, 2011a, pp. 42-43; Hillis Miller, 2011b, p. 44; Hillis Miller, 2011c, p. 50). To confirm that meaning is defined by concatenation, one could say that Trace is also Miley Cyrus' oldest brother, the one whose personality is most like hers (Oliver, 2011, pp. 219-221). But not only inscription should be regarded, for erasure can constitute an optimal tool of political resistance. Strikethrough (*sous-rature*) effaces while allowing legibility, it masks to unveil (Cf. Derrida, 1974, pp. 38; 90). Milei must remain in order to be vanquished; its letters linger under fresher ink. The 'y' that modifies the 'i' marks the spot, the site of a proverbial semiotic treasure. Milei is not just crossed out; it is appropriated against itself. In a gesture reminiscent of the three arrows symbol that is used to cover swastikas, a name with a similar lettering can become an expression of resistance to far right propaganda.

The simultaneity of absence and presence is embodied in the sign as a mediator, in so far as it operates by an erotics of distance that concurrently promises a penetration into meaning and a deferral of contact (Yelle, 2016, p. 215). But absence and presence are not two additive terms, they transcend such simplifying categorical oppositions. Signs illusory name what escapes denomination, and by that act widen the distance. That which creates both ghosts and symbols, retains a certain magic that becomes its most powerful force, and, by its play, space is shaped by the oscillation between absences and presences (Lefebvre, 1980, pp. 225; 230; 240; 244). It cannot be a coincidence that one of the most popular phrases in t-shirts and flags dedicated to Gilda by her fans read: '*Tu muerte no es ausencia, sino un cambio de presencia*' ('Your death is not absence, but a change of presence') (Martín, 2007, p. 47).

The markings that spell the names of the president and the pop star are unsigned. A city of the magnitude of Buenos Aires presents a prime opportunity for creators to remain anonymous (Cf. Gadringer, 2010, pp. 40-41). A political declaration is painted onto the

cityscape whilst the hand that activated the trace is occluded. The graffiti's conditions of possibility fade from view, overshadowed by the words. Anonymity prevents recognition, both admiring and repressive. The value of an action should not be conditioned by authorship. Anonymity depersonalises actions allowing them to blossom into plural causes; since they do not belong to an individualizable will, they can be done in the name of whoever shares their sentiment. Direct actions lust for replication, and one must remember that all means can be weaponised without hierarchy (Anonymous, n. d., pp. 16; 20; 21). Markers are made of plastic, just as the 3D-printed drone frames and speed loaders can be. Distributed agency thrives in the vindication of material resistance. Milei and Miley sign but they are not personally behind the actions, the names exceed their referents.

Marco Deseriis defines improper names as those open to unforeseen appropriations. Proper names of high symbolic power, such as Miley Cyrus, are particularly prone to become improper because of the level of overlapping ambiguities they harbour. Separated from its authorial context, like a signifier disjointed from its referent, these names can become apt 'ready-made signatures'. Through articulation, improper names perform 'collective assemblages of enunciation', they hinge individual actions with impersonal tactics, punctual iterations with organised strategies. Deseriis borrows the image of Maurice Blanchot's unavowable community to describe the elusive plurality that extends behind the use of improper names and explain how that elusiveness of the referent fosters participation (Deseriis, 2015, pp. 7-8; 15-16; 24-26; 221-222; 2017, pp. 13-14). When a name is borrowed for a common cause, as is the case of Miley in graffiti, it can become improper. The street intervention is done in a name capacious enough to contain multitudes (or perhaps not). The uncertainty of numbers gives the act broader imaginary power. Is it just one person roaming the city with a marker, or are there as many actors as there are inscriptions?

In his reflection on Miley Cyrus, Thomas O. St-Pierre proposes a user's guide to being indignant on social networks. He outlines a series of actions, three of which are worth mentioning. The first one specifically concerns political elections, which he describes as 'a great opportunity to take to the virtual streets'. St-Pierre highlights the hypocrisy of general voting campaigns and the moral high ground often assumed by voters. Secondly, he points to the satirical response on social media to those whose views are opposed to one's own, as to elicit a competitive ironical outrage in the comment section. Finally, the author recommends the approach to all

phenomena with irony, especially political signifiers capable of obtaining affective responses. He explains that relativism can be a great way to stage one's own prejudice by way of an essay on a pop singer lucidly 'sprinkled' with self-deprecating gibes (St-Pierre, 2018, pp. 71; 73; 75-76). Evidently, St-Pierre's final instruction is written about himself. However, the resemblance is striking; as is the call for irony in responding to antagonistic political campaigns.

Subversive messages can be spread by appropriating the means of mainstream media. Culture jamming, or *détournement*, is effective in communicating with wide audiences because consumers are already familiar with their ways of conveying. Well-known means of communication rest on a cemented approachability which the public perceives as reliable, therefore, they are ideal vehicles to smuggle disruptive information. Culture jamming is 'an act of semiotic sabotage' that profits from its audience's fluency in the language of popular symbols (Malitz, 2012, pp. 28; 30). Signs are treated as tools without any inherent truth to them, they are instrumentalised against the system that breeds them and readily discarded after use (Spivak, 1997, pp. xviii-xix). That is how the Miley writings manage to divert public attention from the political endorsement to the functioning of propaganda. 'Milei' is subversively appropriated as a tool used against the machinery of which it is a functional part. But, if that fails, Miley Cyrus's name holds enough weight to conjure in the public's imagination a meaning sufficiently unrelated to Argentine politics.

At this point, it seems propitious to review some general aspects that give verbal graffiti its specificity, as noted by Thomas Northoff. Hand-written street interventions are etched into public space by private actions; but they do not function as individual pieces, they are inscribed as parts of 'a process of attached artifacts'. City walls become ductile under the markers' tips, allowing the expression of a wide range of views in an equitable canvas. Graffiti can be a means to communicate a person's feelings, or it can aim at eliciting a broader response. Urban spaces can often turn into a social platform for inter-group dialogue, reflecting collective sentiments, tendencies, aspirations, and orientational directions. Sometimes, words are struck through, evidencing conflicts and a certain disposition for confrontation (Northoff, 2010, pp. 132; 136-137; 143; 145). The city accommodates a copious diversity of groups in continuous interaction. Because of this, its aesthetic makeup is relational, that is to say, perception of graffiti is communicational, concomitant, contextual, and transitory. Street art can be a tool for subaltern groups to access expression in spaces of privilege (Torrijos, 1988, pp. 27; 29; 31-34; 39). All of these traits are exhibited in the Miley Cyrus markings, as

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2 *"Bajada de línea"* is a vernacular expression used in Argentina to refer to the act of trying to push a certain political view onto someone.

they can be understood as a collaborative piece of dialogic confrontation.

Additionally, every use of space requires an orientation, a capacity to decode the messages embedded in the environment. Such orientation stems from a combination of varying coordinates, a sum of different itineraries from multiple perspectives at different moments; and it develops into an encompassing perception of the city which, in turn, forms the citizens. The city's internal abundance holds such disparity that it fosters continuous contradictions, setting up the optimal layout for an interactive playground (Torrijos, 1988, pp. 20-21; 29; 62; 76). The irreverent resort to Miley Cyrus against the self-consciousness of the right, invites its interpretation through the lens of play. The apparent frivolity of the act affronts the affected seriousness of electoral politics. Play does not concern itself with utility (Bataille, 2008, pp. 194-195; 203). Unlike institutionalised political art, which is ruled by efficiency (cf. Rancière, 2010, p. 134), the Miley inscription does not harangue citizens to vote responsibly; it creates a light-hearted distraction. One name does not merely replace another, sustaining an akin usage value; Miley challenges the unquestioned utility of political signs. Vandalism in a monitored space entails a certain risk. Both signings take it, but Milei's creators hope for results and security, where Miley's writers squander their ink with no campaign. The players are aware of the game, wherein the sacred is displaced; their play is rooted in aesthetics, and thus it can rise to the heights of beauty (Bataille, 2008, pp. 189-190). Language is itself a game of referrals, where the lack of a grounding non-significance, the absence of a transcendental signified, renders play limitlessness. Writing becomes an opportunity for repeated *jouissance* (Derrida, 1974, pp. 16; 70; 73; 440).

Plays are also representations. Milei and Miley can be identified with the two types of public figures that Derrida retrieves from Rousseau: the preacher and the actor. The preacher (the politician) is recognised by the coincidence between the representative and the represented. He speaks in his own name while, supposedly, carrying out his duty as a man of State. Conversely, the actor stems from the fragmentation between the representative and the represented. And what a better way to explain it than the rift between Miley Cyrus and Hannah Montana? Miley is not Hannah Montana but in the lending of her voice. Actors display feelings which are not their own, they speak what they are made to say. Miley may sing lyrics written by others or she may lend her name to a political cause she is likely to ignore completely (cf. Derrida, 1974, pp. 430-431). The State rejects multiplying difference, it denies the exchange of absences and presences, it prevents risk and chance,

it represses the death drive. It is the compromise that repudiates sacrifice, expenditure, and play (Derrida, 1974, pp. 432-433). It is the distance between a political party and a party (maybe even a 'Party in the USA'). A political speech as opposed to pop music. To undermine the solemnity of imposition, joy must be reappropriated.

All languages are as suitable for truth as they are for lies (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 81). Systems are networks which transmit coded messages that can be studied by regarding with suspicion the code's tripartition in continuity, discontinuity (opposition), and contiguity. Assessments necessarily oscillate and result in ambiguous considerations that reinforce the very ambiguity detected. Stressing such estrangement offers much potential, allowing for the denouncement of manipulations as readily as it encourages wilful tampering (Lefebvre, 1966, pp. 155-156; 168-169; 268). Cities are systems too and, therefore, they are open to hackers (Saitta, 2010, p. 49). Hackers, urban or otherwise, may be considered players who revel in combinatorics, searching for unexplored and unexpected combinations and permutations. They use their knowledge of the system to experiment with applications that go beyond intended use (Zinsmeister, 2010, pp. 148; 154; 159). Graffiti remains ephemeral while embedded in the city. The seemingly spontaneous character of the Milei / Miley marking makes it impossible to determine whether they were planted or if these doodles were, in fact, undesigned manifestations of political will. Text graffiti can function as identification for like-minded passersby, but it can also elicit responses which acknowledge their threat by distorting them (Northoff, 2010, p. 136).

'Urban hacking is a social praxis' grouped by strategical 'delegitimization', write Frank Apunkt Schneider and Gunther Friesinger (2010, pp. 18-19). Its practitioners are unconcerned with uniting in a consolidated opposition, for they are aware of how seamlessly mainstream culture can reterritorialize diversity. They acknowledge the similarity of all contemporary publics regardless of their political stance, as well as the risk of any insurgent plurality to be assimilated. Urban hackers damage the surface of their medium to release the hidden forces of its operations. Graffiti treats the cityscape as open source, enacting a temporary aesthetic function against cultural determinism. Each coding overwrites another. The generative output of urban hacking is dissent. It is a joyful form of materially situated direct action. Hacking is an articulation of antagonism unconcerned with institutionalised negotiations, social consent, or dialogues that seek to exhaust it. It does not promise a better alternative, it attempts to escape the oppressive condition of participation through critique (Schneider and Friesinger, 2010, pp.

19-20; 23-28). That is why Miley is not a call to vote for another candidate, it is not a call to vote at all; it is a commentary on the genre of political propaganda. Miley is a reappropriation of public space by those alienated by electoral politics. Culture jamming is an exercise in Rancièrian dissent, insofar as it etches an opening to demonstrate a covert functioning. Permeated by pop music, the borders of the state fail to contain politics as a separated sphere. The dividing wall, now vandalised, is evidenced as an operational fragmentation whose exposure brings to utterance previously barred possibilities. In Lefebvrian terms, the participatory interactions that come to form this space, grant a glimpse into that which discourse had rendered unutterable. Such discursive deviations are Derridean iterations, transcending categorical oppositions to signal towards prospects which cannot fully be pinned down.

Culture jamming creates a certain distance from the familiarity of mediated mainstream discourse. Hackers search for gaps in the security that binds the code to expose it. They apply their knowledge of the system to introduce subtle modifications capable of causing significant interferences and even instigate chaos. Hacking is an experimental practice that pushes social and personal limits to provide a platform for what is not immediately apparent. The accuracy of these tactics of dismantlement and reassemblage is always uncertain in advance. Hackers create disorientation by way of their insightful orientation (Gadringer, 2010, pp. 35-36; 38-40). Proper functioning of a system relies on the security of source codes and the eradication of noise, either by silence or masking. When codes are exposed systems cannot maintain efficiency. Hackers must find weak spots and reverse all safeguards of integrity to cause disruption. Corporate technologies are regularly subverted because 'the street finds a use for things' (Monroe, 2005, pp. 123-124; 135). Ideological resistance is spatialised. Urban hacking tampers with space to expose its codes (Rambatan, 2010, p. 47). Lefebvre advises his readers to stay superficial and relay what happens in the medium; one must be wary of the abyssal as much as of the celestial, he writes (Lefebvre, 1966, p. 375). What a way to justify the political relevance of scribbling a Miley Cyrus on a city wall. When a marker scratches a public surface, something emerges.

Walls whisper[3]

Anyone who has ever listened to a Miley Cyrus song before can evoke its music in their head just by reading her name. Sound is an experience linked to being in the world. Its aerial and temporal qualities convey an unstable and omnidirectional perception, and a sense of uncertainty. It floats through the streets, through the walls, and even through people (cf. Toop, 2016, p. 63); like spirits or ghosts. In the city, perception is built in transit: partial, serial, cumulative (Torrijos, 1988, p. 29). Every time Miley Cyrus's name is read, an opportunity to hear her songs arises; every time one of her songs plays, her disembodied voice travels the airwaves in the form of an aural invocation. When Lefebvre describes space, he resorts to many sonic metaphors. He writes of 'waves, movements, rhythms, and frequencies' that 'collide and interfere' (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 87). The name of this journal also relates to sound. Alexei Monroe believes 'ideological and tonal noise are indissolubly linked', so noise in the system must be rendered audible (Monroe, 2005, pp. 127-128). Any signal can be turned into noise (Deseriis, 2017, p. 14). If a record can be scratched to *play* a rhythmic oscillation, then so can be the surface of a wall. A marker may scratch the oscillating ambiguity of absence and presence. While Miley plays on repeat, she's never fully present; yet she is continuously conjured, iterated. Miley Cyrus has ceased to refer simply to a person. The name on a wall is a rupture in the sign. The street sign, of course.

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3 This subtitle references the lyrics of the song "These four walls" by Miley Cyrus.

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Le « retour de bâton » et la « classe ouvrière blanche » dans les discours de One Nation et du parti libéral australien : 1996-2001

Emilie de Witte, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle

Résumé

L'élection de la députée australienne Pauline Hanson en 1996 rompt le consensus bipartisan autour du multiculturalisme instauré par les travaillistes en 1972. Son discours s'articule autour de la « grande dépossession » et du « grand déclassement », appliqués non aux Aborigènes, mais à une « classe ouvrière blanche » présentée comme dépossédée et menacée de devenir « citoyenne de seconde classe ». Ce « retour de bâton » est amplifié par le Premier ministre libéral John Howard, qui, dès 1996, reprend cette rhétorique. L'analyse des discours de **One Nation** et du parti libéral révèle la construction politique de ce ressentiment blanc. Cette rétrospective encourage à la reconnaissance de parallélismes dans la scène politique contemporaine, et l'entrée en vigueur de politiques populistes et discriminatoires.

Mots-clés : « retour de bâton », « classe ouvrière blanche », One Nation, parti libéral australien, multiculturalisme

Abstract in English

The 1996 election of Australian MP Pauline Hanson disrupted the bipartisan consensus on multiculturalism established by Prime Minister Gough Whitlam in 1972. Hanson's rhetoric invoked the notions of "great dispossession" and "great displacement," reframing them around a "white working class" allegedly deprived of its rights and status. This narrative of victimhood, excluding Indigenous experiences, was soon echoed by Liberal Prime Minister John Howard, who sought to capitalize on Hanson's popularity. A discursive analysis of One Nation and the Liberal Party reveals how appeals to a threatened "white working class" became a key instrument in reshaping Australia's post-1996 political discourse. Within the scope of this issue, this account encourages readers to recognise parallelisms within contemporary political discourse, and the coming about of populist and discriminatory policies.

Keywords: "White backlash", "white working class", One Nation, Liberal Party of Australia, multiculturalism

Le 6 janvier 1996, Pauline Hanson, alors candidate du parti libéral lors des élections fédérales de 1996, écrit une lettre ouverte publiée dans le *Queensland Times* dans laquelle elle s'attaque violemment aux peuples autochtones d'Australie et justifie le racisme.

> Comment voulez-vous que ces gens apprennent à se prendre en main quand le gouvernement les arrose d'argent, d'aides et de privilèges, réservés uniquement à eux, même quand il ne leur reste qu'une goutte de sang autochtone dans les veines ? C'est exactement ce type de favoritisme qui provoque le racisme[1].

Face à la controverse, le parti libéral lui retire son investiture ; pourtant, Hanson remporte le siège d'Oxley (Queensland) avec un *swing* de 19,31%, le plus élevé du scrutin, et siège au Parlement en tant que députée indépendante. Lors de ces élections du 2 mars 1996, la coalition entre le *Country Party* et le parti libéral australien menée par John Howard obtient une large victoire avec environ 47% des suffrages en première préférence et 94 sièges à la Chambre des représentants. Devenu Premier ministre, Howard n'a jamais condamné publiquement les propos d'Hanson ; il va même jusqu'à s'approprier l'accusation « d'hansonisme » de la part de l'opposition travailliste lors du débat parlementaire sur la *Pacific Solution*, finalement adoptée en 2001, marquant un tournant sécuritaire à l'encontre des demandeurs d'asile[2]. Ce silence et cette stratégie montrent que face au relatif succès électoral d'Hanson, le parti libéral la rejoint dans sa rhétorique de « retour de bâton » contre le multiculturalisme.

Il marque la fin du consensus établi sous Gough Whitlam, dont le gouvernement travailliste avait explicitement promu le multiculturalisme. Lors de la victoire de son parti en 1972, il avait promis une « nouvelle loi [qui] affirme clairement que l'Australie est une nation multiculturelle, où le patrimoine linguistique et culturel des peuples aborigènes, ainsi que celui des peuples du monde entier, peut occuper une place de choix ». En septembre 1975, le Parlement australien ratifiait la Convention internationale sur l'élimination de toutes les formes de discrimination raciale de l'ONU. En décembre 1975, la dernière année de son mandat, le gouvernement faisait voter le *Racial Discrimination Act,* marquant la fin légale de la *White Australia policy*.

La loi interdit désormais la discrimination dans l'accès aux lieux publics, au logement, aux services, aux syndicats et à l'emploi. Les offenses, insultes, humiliations et intimidations publiques d'une personne sur la base de ses origines sont illégales. Cette base légale d'une politique multiculturelle qui définit des victimes et des coupables alimente son propre rejet : Ghassan Hage note que « L'affirmation même que le multiculturalisme fonctionne bien devient dépendante de la création d'un fossé ontologique entre celle-ci et la "violence raciste". Le multiculturalisme fonctionne bien et appartient à une réalité (*mainstream*), et la violence se déroule dans une autre réalité (marginale) », notant que la fin des années 1990 voit surgir une réaction contre l'héritage multiculturel (Hage 1998). Dans le contexte européen, Roger Hewitt théorise le « retour de bâton blanc » (Hewitt 2005), tandis que Christian Joppke préfère parler de « repli du multiculturalisme » (Joppke 2004) pour décrire la position au tournant des années 2000 des gouvernements européens qui abandonnent leur politique multiculturelle pour se tourner vers un discours identitaire, partant du principe que les politiques multiculturelles auraient été un échec pour l'intégration des minorités ethniques. Dans ce contexte de « retour de bâton », Aurélien Mondon note une « racialisation populiste » du discours politique qui tend à mettre en avant une « classe ouvrière blanche » (Mondon 2018 ; 2023) présentée comme la victime principale des politiques multiculturelles et qu'il faudrait défendre à tout prix afin qu'elle retrouve sa place au cœur de la nation. La porosité entre ce discours typique de l'extrême droite et celui de partis traditionnels de gouvernement comme le parti libéral australien traduit une « normalisation » (« *mainstreaming* ») des idées de l'extrême droite, qui s'installent et influencent durablement un débat qui dépasse les frontières australiennes.

Cette étude mobilise l'analyse critique du discours politique de Teun A. van Dijk (van Dijk 1993) pour examiner ce « retour de bâton » à travers six discours clés : trois de Pauline Hanson, son premier discours au Parlement en 1996, sa première motion de censure la même année et le lancement de son propre parti, *One Nation*, en 1997. Puis trois de John Howard : lors de son premier mandat en 1996, pendant sa campagne pour un deuxième mandat en 1998 et enfin lors de sa campagne pour un troisième mandat en 2001. L'objectif est de dégager la rhétorique commune qui relie le discours populiste d'extrême droite de *One Nation* à celui d'un parti traditionnel de gouvernement, le parti libéral australien, afin de montrer comment se construit en Australie, à partir de 1996, un discours transpartisan de rejet du multiculturalisme au nom d'une identité blanche. Dans le cadre de cette recherche, l'accent est mis sur l'analyse des sources primaires, en particulier

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1 Sauf mention contraire, toutes les traductions sont celles de l'auteur.
2 Les demandeurs d'asile arrivant par bateau sont interceptés et transférer dans des centres de détention offshore, leur empêchant de déposer une demande d'asile sur le sol australien.

les discours politiques eux-mêmes. Ce choix s'inscrit dans la continuité des approches en analyse critique du discours (ACD), mais s'en distingue par la volonté de revenir au matériau discursif brut afin d'en saisir les dynamiques internes, la rhétorique et les stratégies d'énonciation. L'objectif est d'analyser la performativité politique des mots – la manière dont les dirigeants, par le choix de certains lexiques et structures, façonnent la mémoire nationale et redéfinissent les frontières de la communauté australienne. Ce recentrage sur les sources primaires permet de replacer chaque discours dans sa temporalité, ses enjeux électoraux et son intertextualité immédiate, en révélant les continuités et les glissements idéologiques entre Pauline Hanson et John Howard.

Dans un premier temps, l'analyse porte sur les discours de Pauline Hanson afin d'en dégager les thèmes, les stratégies et les représentations idéologiques. Dans un second temps, l'étude se concentre sur les interventions de John Howard pour mettre en évidence les continuités rhétoriques et conceptuelles entre les deux acteurs et montrer comment le *white backlash* s'est progressivement inscrit au cœur du discours politique australien.

1. La rapide ascension politique de Pauline Hanson : de députée indépendante à fondatrice du parti *One Nation*, janvier 1996-avril 1997

1.1. Le premier discours de Pauline Hanson au Parlement : « abroger le multiculturalisme », mars 1996

Lors des élections fédérales australiennes du 2 mars 1996, Pauline Hanson était la candidate du parti libéral pour le siège d'Oxley dans le Queensland rural. Dans un premier temps, il est nécessaire d'établir le profil ethnique et socio-économique de cette circonscription afin de mieux comprendre les enjeux de cette candidature. En 2019, Oxley fait toujours partie des circonscriptions les moins privilégiées : elle a été classée 135ᵉ sur les 150 circonscriptions (Roy Morgan Research, 2020). C'est une banlieue résidentielle en zone rurale et un fief travailliste depuis 1961. Selon le recensement de l'*Australian Bureau of Statistics* en 2001, la majorité de la population (37,9 %) était âgée de 25 à 54 ans. 93 % des résidents avaient la citoyenneté australienne et 7,3 % étaient étrangers. La deuxième langue parlée après l'anglais était l'allemand (0,3 %). Les deux premiers secteurs d'emplois étaient l'agriculture et l'éducation. La première religion représentée était anglicane (31 %). Dans ce contexte, Pauline Hanson a insisté sur l'image d'une australienne blanche qui est née et a grandi dans le Queensland rural. Enfin,

du point de vue de l'opinion publique, 1993 est l'année où l'opposition à l'immigration est la plus forte depuis la fin de la Seconde guerre mondiale (Gibson, McAllister, et Swenson 2002, 827).

Figure 1 : Opposition à l'immigration dans l'opinion publique, 1950-1999.

Sources : Goot (1984, 1991); Australian Election Studies, 1990–1998; Australian

Constitutional Referendum Study, 1999.

A l'échelle locale d'Oxley, le 2 mars 1996, Pauline Hanson remporte les élections avec 48,61 % des voix face au député travailliste sortant Les Scott (39,36 %) et à l'échelle nationale, c'est la coalition entre le *Country Party* et le parti libéral qui met fin à treize ans de gouvernement travailliste avec environ 47, 3 % des suffrages en première préférence. Après ce changement de majorité, l'hostilité envers l'immigration baisse, notamment parce que le public estime que moins d'immigrés entrent dans le pays sous ce nouveau gouvernement.

Dans ce contexte, Pauline Hanson prononce son premier discours à la Chambre des représentants le 10 septembre 1996 où elle conserve le ton et les propos populistes, xénophobes et racistes de sa campagne électorale. Son intervention, relativement longue, se divise en quatre temps. Elle commence par développer la thèse d'un « racisme inversé », selon laquelle les peuples autochtones d'Australie bénéficieraient de privilèges au détriment des « Australiens ordinaires ». Puis elle dénonce les profits supposés de « l'industrie aborigène », avant d'aborder la question économique nationale, centrée sur la critique des privatisations. Enfin, elle relie économie et identité en présentant « l'abrogation du multiculturalisme » comme une mesure à la fois idéologique et budgétaire.

Dès l'ouverture, Hanson se met en scène comme une figure antisystème : elle n'est pas une « politique

lisse », mais une « femme qui a eu son lot de déboires dans la vie », une « mère célibataire de quatre enfants » et la « propriétaire d'un restaurant de *fish and chips* ». Ce portrait vise à incarner une voix des classes populaires et à légitimer une forme d'autorité morale sur la base du « bon sens » et de « l'expérience ». Après cette présentation, elle évoque la controverse qui l'a mise au premier plan : tout en reconnaissant qu'elle a été accusée d'être « raciste », elle réaffirme que les Aborigènes recevraient « plus d'allocations que les non-Aborigènes ». Elle continue d'entretenir l'idée d'une division raciale au sein de la société australienne. Dans ce discours elle va jusqu'à affirmer être victime, au même titre que les « Australiens *mainstream* » – la classe ouvrière blanche, qu'elle définit jusqu'à présent comme les Australiens, blancs, petits propriétaires – de « racisme inversé », caractéristique selon elle de ce groupe. Cet élément rappelle également la notion en France de racisme anti blanc, propre à la rhétorique de l'extrême droite.

Il est à noter que tout au long du discours, les expressions telles que « Australiens *mainstream* », « Australiens ordinaires », sont utilisées comme des synonymes « d'Australiens blancs ». Selon Pauline Hanson, elle représenterait les « Australiens ordinaires », c'est-à-dire les « Blancs », ou encore les « non-Aborigènes ». Ces derniers seraient victimes d'un « racisme inversé » de la part de ceux qui incarneraient le « politiquement correct » : ceux qui « contrôlent l'argent du contribuable », les « multiculturalistes » et des « groupes de minorités ». Cet appareil politique serait uniquement au « service des Aborigènes ». Ces personnes entraveraient le combat de Pauline Hanson pour « l'égalité ». Si ses opposants considèrent qu'elle est « raciste », elle les qualifie de « nantis, bureaucrates et de faux bons samaritains ». Dans une logique populiste, elle oppose une élite politique dont l'unique but serait de se maintenir au pouvoir au détriment des « Australiens ordinaires ».

En découlerait un « séparatisme » d'État où il y aurait des « millions d'Australiens » qui en auraient « ras-le-bol » de voir les Aborigènes bénéficier « d'opportunités, de terres, d'argent et d'équipements ». Alors même qu'elle ne cesse d'opposer les « Blancs », les « non-Aborigènes » aux « Noirs », aux Aborigènes, Pauline Hanson pointe du doigt un problème « social », les « inégalités » dans la société australienne, transformées par le gouvernement en « problème racial ». Pour justifier sa lutte contre cette supposée inégalité d'abord sociale, elle évoque l'ancien ministre libéral des Affaires Etrangères Paul Hasluck, à l'origine de la *Welfare Ordinance* et du *Wards Employment Ordinance* de 1953 qui avait inscrit sa défense des peuples autochtones dans une vision paternaliste et assimilationniste, faisant écho au *white man's burden*.

Il a toujours utilisé les adjectifs « noir » pour les Aborigènes et « blanc » pour les autres Australiens, exactement comme Pauline Hanson. De fait, malgré sa critique du gouvernement, la député ne fournit aucune analyse sociale et n'aborde les débats qu'au travers du prisme racial, que ce soient les difficultés économiques, l'histoire ou encore l'identité. Elle termine même sa description de la société australienne en réaffirmant que « cette nation est divisée entre Noirs et Blancs ».

Elle aborde ensuite le sujet de la restitution des terres des peuples autochtones. Jusqu'à présent, elle a insisté plusieurs fois sur le fait que le gouvernement aurait donné des terres aux Aborigènes. Pour souligner cette supposée inégalité par rapport aux « millions d'Australiens », elle cite plusieurs sommes. Le gouvernement aurait dépensé « 40 millions de dollars australiens » en réclamations de *Native Title*, ainsi qu'« un milliard de dollars australiens » en compensation pour les peuples autochtones et les Insulaires de Torres Strait. Néanmoins, elle se contredit encore une fois. Dans le même paragraphe, alors qu'elle ne cesse d'insister sur tous les privilèges dont bénéficieraient « uniquement les Aborigènes », elle déclare que les sommes évoquées sont allées « dans les poches des avocats et des consultants ». Elle affirme : « Aucun titre n'a été attribué ». Par conséquent, selon ses propres dires, les Aborigènes ne seraient pas « arrosés » d'argent public et de « terres ». Elle poursuit dans la contradiction en affirmant d'un côté que les « allocations tuent les Aborigènes » tout en déclarant dans la phrase suivante qu'il y aurait des personnes qui « profitent de l'industrie aborigène ». Elle cite l'exemple des membres du *Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation* qui recevraient « 290 dollars australiens par jour », « 320 dollars australiens d'indemnités de voyage », en plus d'occuper déjà des positions « très bien rémunérées ». Ainsi, le discours populiste de Pauline Hanson entre en conflit avec ses propos xénophobes.

D'un côté, les Aborigènes bénéficieraient de beaucoup d'argent et d'avantages. De l'autre, une élite de fonctionnaires et d'avocats détournerait toutes les sommes destinées aux Aborigènes. Dans le paragraphe suivant elle utilise un troisième exemple, celui de l'*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, ATSIC* :

C'est une organisation hypocrite et discriminante qui a échoué. C'est un terrible échec pour les personnes qu'elle était censée servir ». Selon ses propos, les Aborigènes seraient effectivement victimes de « discrimination ». Sur la même ligne populiste, la députée dénonce le « séparatisme » qui serait promu par les politiques, tandis qu'elle se présente comme le défenseur d'une union : « un peuple, une nation, un drapeau .

Sur le plan économique, Hanson adopte le ton de proximité. Elle dénonce « l'atomisation des familles » et le « chômage », particulièrement chez les jeunes de sa circonscription, tout en s'excluant du champ des politiques professionnels : « Ces économistes doivent sortir leur tête de leurs cahiers et avoir un travail dans le vrai monde. Je ne les laisserai même pas s'occuper de mes courses ».

Dans la dernière partie de son discours, Hanson appelle à « revoir complètement » les politiques d'immigration et à « abroger le multiculturalisme », estimant que « l'Australie risque d'être envahie par les Asiatiques ». Cette rhétorique rappelle celle de Margaret Thatcher en 1978 : « Les gens de ce pays ont peur d'être envahis par des gens d'une autre culture ». Elle invoque encore une fois une forme de « bon sens » en utilisant une métaphore simple : « Bien sûr, on me traitera de raciste, mais si j'ai le droit d'inviter qui je veux dans ma maison, alors je devrais aussi avoir mon mot à dire sur qui entre dans mon pays ». Il est à noter qu'elle évoque plusieurs fois les accusations de racisme sans pour autant faire un démenti : elle n'affirme jamais explicitement ne pas être raciste. *A contrario*, elle se sert de cette accusation comme un faire-valoir : cette accusation découlerait du fait qu'elle se fait l'écho de la « majorité des Australiens ».

Elle s'appuie aussi sur la référence à Arthur Calwell, ministre travailliste de l'Immigration en 1945, pour légitimer son discours. En citant un homme politique connu pour sa défense d'une immigration exclusivement blanche, elle tente de transformer un racisme d'Etat passé en tradition nationale. Ce procédé suggère une continuité idéologique au-delà des clivages partisans, comme si le racisme constituait un consensus australien refoulé.

Pauline Hanson conclut son discours en liant l'immigration et l'économie : « abolir le multiculturalisme » est présenté comme une mesure économique qui permettrait d'économiser « des milliards de dollars australiens ». Elle resserre son discours en passant de l'échelle nationale à l'échelle locale en insistant sur le fait que toutes ces mesures concerneraient directement son électorat d'Oxley car il est « représentatif de l'Australie *mainstream* ». Sur un ton maternel elle affirme « qu'elle sait qu'elle peut s'occuper des habitants d'Oxley » car, comme

eux, elle n'est « qu'une Australienne ordinaire ». Elle conclut en affirmant qu'il est « rafraichissant de pouvoir exprimer ses opinions sans avoir à dépasser les lignes d'un parti ».

Par conséquent, le premier discours de Pauline Hanson illustre déjà les principaux ressorts de son positionnement idéologique : un rejet violent des peuples autochtones d'Australie et du multiculturalisme en général au nom de la défense des Australiens ordinaires, blancs. Ce discours, prononcé dans un cadre solennel et protégé de toute contradiction, contribue à installer durablement une rhétorique du ressentiment et du repli dans l'espace politique australien.

1.2. La motion contre l'aide étrangère, octobre 1996

Quelques semaines plus tard, le 28 octobre 1996, cette logique de confrontation trouve un nouvel écho lors des questions au Premier ministre. Hanson interpelle directement John Howard, chef du gouvernement, au sujet de l'aide étrangère. Elle propose d'en réduire le montant afin de rediriger les fonds vers la création d'un service national pour les jeunes. Présentée comme une mesure sociale en faveur de l'emploi, cette proposition s'inscrit en réalité dans la continuité du discours populiste et xénophobe de la députée : elle établit une opposition entre les « Australiens », présentés comme victimes d'un système injuste, et les bénéficiaires étrangers, perçus comme indûment privilégiés.

Hanson affirme que la réduction de l'aide internationale permettrait de financer des projets nationaux tels que la « construction de routes, ponts et chemins de fer », et donnerait la priorité à la jeunesse australienne. Cette mesure est présentée comme une solution directe au chômage des jeunes, mais son argumentation repose sur une logique d'exclusion : selon elle, les Australiens seraient contraints de « se battre » contre des pays étrangers pour obtenir des fonds issus de leurs propres impôts. L'aide internationale, estimée à 1,5 milliard de dollars australiens par an, est ainsi décrite comme une ponction injuste au détriment du contribuable.

Cette prise de parole est particulièrement significative car elle constitue la première interaction publique entre la nouvelle députée indépendante et le Premier ministre du parti libéral. L'échange met en lumière l'impact immédiat du discours de Hanson sur la scène politique australienne. La réponse de John Howard révèle une stratégie d'équilibriste : tout en défendant officiellement le principe de l'aide étrangère, il reprend plusieurs éléments de langage de Hanson, adoptant un ton de compréhension et

d'empathie à l'égard des « inquiétudes des Australiens », légitimant la prétention d'Hanson à les représenter. Le Premier ministre répète à trois reprises : « Je comprends ». Il déclare d'abord « comprendre que les Australiens puissent être suspicieux à l'égard de l'aide étrangère », puis ajoute qu'il est « légitime que les Australiens aient l'impression que cette aide n'est pas utilisée efficacement ». Enfin, il affirme « comprendre la colère des Australiens qui estiment que leurs impôts sont gaspillés ». Ce triptyque rhétorique – comprendre, légitimer, partager la colère – transforme une question xénophobe en expression de préoccupations nationales rationnelles et respectables. Or, comme l'a montré l'analyse précédente, le terme « Australiens » dans le discours de Hanson désigne exclusivement les Australiens blancs. En reprenant ce vocabulaire sans le remettre en cause, Howard valide implicitement cette définition raciale de la citoyenneté. Il ne se contente pas de ne pas condamner Hanson : il normalise son lexique, en inscrivant son discours dans un champ de respectabilité politique.

L'échange entre Pauline Hanson et John Howard autour de l'aide étrangère révèle donc un tournant décisif : en quelques mois à peine, la rhétorique d'une députée indépendante parvient à influencer le langage du pouvoir exécutif. Le populisme racial et le discours de l'exclusion, initialement cantonnés à la périphérie du débat public, trouvent désormais une forme de légitimité dans l'espace politique institutionnel. Cette légitimation marque la consolidation d'un cadre discursif fondé sur la peur du déclin national, la dénonciation des élites et la réaffirmation d'une identité australienne blanche, homogène et menacée.

1.3. *One Nation* : fédérer par l'exclusion

Le 11 avril 1997, Pauline Hanson franchit une nouvelle étape dans la formalisation de ce discours avec le lancement officiel de son propre parti, *One Nation*, à Ipswich (Queensland). Ce discours fondateur constitue à la fois l'aboutissement de sa stratégie politique et la systématisation idéologique des thèmes déjà évoqués dans ses précédentes interventions : rejet du multiculturalisme, peur de l'Autre, exaltation du peuple australien « ordinaire » et critique du système parlementaire. L'analyse de ce texte permet ainsi de comprendre comment Hanson transforme une posture individuelle de contestation en mouvement politique structuré, incarnant une nouvelle forme de nationalisme populiste dans l'Australie de la fin des années 1990.

Hanson décline l'objectif de la création de *One Nation* en quatre « opportunités ». D'abord, celle

de « se débarrasser de l'injustice » produite par le « politiquement correct », lequel priverait les « vrais Australiens » de liberté d'expression. Ensuite, celle de « se confronter à ceux qui ont trahi le pays », accusés d'avoir « détruit l'identité australienne » en « imposant la culture des autres ». Enfin, l'ultime opportunité serait de « préserver l'Australie telle qu'on l'a connue, aimée et pour laquelle on s'est battu ». Ce triptyque reprend les idées de la *White Australia Policy*, selon laquelle l'identité nationale serait menacée par l'ouverture multiculturelle et l'immigration. Si ces opportunités ne sont pas saisies, Hanson prédit un futur apocalyptique : les Australiens « perdront leur pays pour toujours » et deviendront des « étrangers dans leur propre patrie ». Cette perte du pays est aussi une perte de statut social, la transformation des Australiens en « citoyens de seconde classe ». Le thème de la dépossession nationale est donc au cœur du discours : l'Australie serait en train d'être confisquée au profit d'élites multiculturelles et de minorités privilégiées. Hanson se présente à la fois comme victime et héroïne sacrificielle.

> Les rares hommes politiques qui se soucient assez de la situation pour la reconnaître n'osent pas s'exprimer, car les multiculturalistes politiquement corrects et certains médias les insulteront, leurs collègues prendront leurs distances, et leur parti les anéantira. Dans mon propre cas, lorsque j'ai dit ce que nous savons tous être la vérité, le parti libéral m'a retiré mon investiture et s'est servi de moi comme exemple pour montrer ce qui arrivera à ceux qui rompent les rangs et disent la vérité.

À travers cette mise en scène, Hanson transforme son exclusion du parti libéral en preuve de son intégrité. Elle revendique une position de martyre politique : celle qui dit la vérité contre le consensus. Ce paradoxe, typique du populisme, consiste à se dire bâillonnée tout en occupant le centre du débat public. Députée, médiatisée et désormais cheffe de parti, Hanson prétend être réduite au silence alors même qu'elle bénéficie d'une visibilité exceptionnelle.

Dans la seconde partie de son discours, Hanson mobilise des arguments économiques pour légitimer sa vision du déclin national. Elle prend 1961 comme année de référence : « en 1961, le chômage était à 2,6 % [...]. Aujourd'hui, il est bien plus élevé ». Elle souligne qu'à cette époque, « 27,5 % des Australiens travaillaient en usine », avant de poser la question : « Où vont les emplois ? Ils vont dans des pays comme l'Indonésie [...]. » Le choix de 1961 est significatif : il correspond à la période d'assouplissement de la *White Australia Policy,* symbole d'une ouverture que Hanson dénonce implicitement. Sans fournir de chiffres récents, elle relie le chômage australien à la

prospérité de l'Asie, qu'elle décrit comme obtenue « au prix de nos emplois ». Par un usage appuyé du possessif – nos emplois, nos produits – elle suggère que les travailleurs asiatiques auraient volé le travail des Australiens.

Elle élargit ensuite son propos à la classe ouvrière rurale.

> Le gouvernement ne se contente pas de donner des emplois australiens à des pays étrangers, chaque jour il laisse une partie de notre pays être vendue, une partie qu'on ne récupérera jamais. Dans l'Australie rurale, 30 familles quittent la campagne chaque semaine. Sans changement, nous perdrons 24 000 agriculteurs qui rejoindront les files d'attentes pour les allocations.

Son idée de la « classe ouvrière blanche » s'accompagne d'une rhétorique de la dépossession, la terre, le travail et la souveraineté nationale seraient vendus à l'étranger. Pour Hanson, la solution réside une fois encore dans l'exclusion des minorités : d'abord les peuples autochtones d'Australie, ensuite les Asiatiques, en Australie comme à l'extérieur. Elle relie d'ailleurs explicitement le phénomène d'exode rural à la question autochtone.

> Pensez à la différence qu'une partie des plus de 30 milliards de dollars australiens versés à l'ATSIC aurait pu faire si elle avait été utilisée pour aider les agriculteurs australiens, plutôt que d'être dilapidée sans contrôle, sans amélioration apparente de la situation des peuples autochtones d'Australie.

Cette citation illustre la récurrence de la figure du bouc émissaire autochtone : la misère des ruraux blancs serait due à l'argent gaspillé pour les peuples autochtones. Hanson reformule ainsi son double thème de prédilection : le « grand déclassement » des Australiens ordinaires et la « grande dépossession » nationale.

Dans la dernière partie de son discours, Hanson adopte un ton ouvertement belliqueux : « Nous reconquerrons notre pays et l'avenir de nos enfants. [...] Ce soir, nous commençons à riposter. [...] Qui parmi vous ne rejoindra pas ce combat ? ». L'Australie est décrite comme un champ de bataille où s'opposent deux camps irréconciliables : le « nous » – les Australiens blancs – et « eux », les Aborigènes, les Asiatiques, les étrangers et les multiculturalistes. Le discours se transforme en véritable déclaration de guerre, où la reconquête du pays devient synonyme de survie nationale. Cette logique binaire s'accentue dans une série de questions rhétoriques adressées

à ses « ennemis » : « Voulez-vous que l'Australie ressemble à l'Indonésie, au Cambodge ou au Vietnam ? [...] Voulez-vous une guerre civile ? ». Par cette accumulation d'exemples négatifs – des pays de l'Asie du Sud-Est associés aux conflits, à la guerre, à la pauvreté et au chaos – Hanson oppose une Australie intensément patriote, ordonnée et blanche à un monde étranger perçu comme menaçant. Elle prétend défendre la paix tout en la conditionnant à la guerre contre l'Autre. Enfin, elle explique que pour « gagner », les Australiens doivent « arrêter toute immigration, sauf celle liée aux investissements » et « abolir les lois relatives aux Aborigènes et au multiculturalisme ». Ces réformes sont présentées comme les conditions nécessaires à la survie du pays. Elle conclut : « Je suis pour la vérité. Je suis pour qu'on soit Australien. Je suis pour qu'on ne soit qu'un peuple, sous un même drapeau et avec la même législation ». Le nom même du parti, *One Nation*, résume cette ambition : un nationalisme ethnique fondé sur l'exclusion.

En l'espace d'une année, Pauline Hanson est passée du statut de conseillère municipale méconnue à celui de cheffe de parti. À travers ses différentes interventions son discours reste remarquablement stable : raciste, xénophobe et populiste. Elle érige une identité australienne « blanche » comme norme et justifie la lutte contre les minorités et le multiculturalisme au nom de la défense des « Australiens ordinaires ». Son idéologie repose sur deux piliers : la crainte d'un déclassement social et d'une dépossession culturelle. Si les Australiens *mainstream* ne rejoignent pas sa cause, ils perdront tout : leur statut, leurs terres et leur pays. Parallèlement, Hanson construit un récit populiste dans lequel une élite multiculturelle maintiendrait son pouvoir en favorisant les minorités ethniques et en muselant les voix dissidentes. Seule face au système, elle se proclame porte-parole des « vrais Australiens » : blancs, travailleurs et patriotes.

2. John Howard : la réponse du parti libéral au « hansonisme »

2.1. Le récit national du « mainstream australien », novembre 1996

Le 18 novembre 1996, le Premier ministre libéral John Howard prononce un discours en hommage à Robert Menzies, fondateur du parti libéral et figure emblématique du conservatisme australien. Sous couvert de célébrer son prédécesseur, Howard fait de « l'histoire australienne » le cœur de son propos et met en garde contre sa prétendue « réécriture ». Howard dénonce en effet une offensive politique et intellectuelle visant, selon lui, à ternir l'héritage de Menzies. Or ce dernier, Premier ministre à

deux reprises (1939-1941 puis 1949-1966), fut un défenseur de la *White Australia Policy,* qu'il justifiait au nom du « bon sens pratique » et de la préservation d'une identité raciale homogène. S'il a promulgué en 1962 le *Commonwealth Electoral Act* accordant le droit de vote aux Aborigènes, cette mesure resta largement symbolique : elle excluait en réalité les Aborigènes encore considérés comme *wards of state,* statut abrogé seulement en 1971. L'égalité électorale ne sera effective qu'en 1984, sous le gouvernement travailliste de Bob Hawke. L'héritage de Menzies repose donc sur une intégration limitée et paternaliste des Aborigènes, que John Howard défend sans nuance. Dans son discours, il rejette les critiques du passé colonial, qu'il assimile à un « *historically correct* », version historique du « politiquement correct » et va jusqu'à comparer la remise en question de l'histoire nationale à un « rite d'arrachage d'yeux », image choquante renvoyant à des stéréotypes sur les traditions des peuples autochtones. Par ce procédé rhétorique, Howard accuse ses opposants de diviser la nation, tout en instaurant lui-même une opposition entre un « nous » – les Australiens « fiers » – et « ceux » qui voudraient « réécrire » le passé.

Cette logique binaire se retrouve dans sa conception de la « Réconciliation » avec les peuples autochtones : Howard refuse toute idée d'excuse ou de reconnaissance constitutionnelle, et propose à la place un programme socio-économique centré sur la santé, l'emploi et l'éducation, qu'il conclut par la nécessité de « favoriser l'indépendance économique ». Sous des dehors pragmatiques, cette formule véhicule le stéréotype des peuples autochtones prétendument dépendants des aides publiques – un thème cher à Pauline Hanson. Sa « Réconciliation » vise ainsi à réintégrer les Aborigènes dans le récit national sans remettre en cause les rapports de pouvoir hérités de la colonisation. Howard enchaîne ensuite une série d'affirmations patriotiques, répétant à plusieurs reprises que « nous avons raison d'être fiers » de l'Australie : de son économie, de son égalitarisme, de sa démocratie et de sa diversité ethnique. Cette insistance sur le pronom collectif « nous » construit un patriotisme exclusif où les Aborigènes, bien qu'évoqués, restent extérieurs à la communauté nationale célébrée. Enfin, Howard réactive le concept des « personnes oubliées », emprunté à Menzies, qu'il associe au *mainstream* australien : petits entrepreneurs, agriculteurs, travailleurs et familles ordinaires. Ce portrait de l'Australien moyen rejoint la rhétorique populiste de Pauline Hanson, qui érigeait déjà la « classe ouvrière blanche » en incarnation du peuple authentique. Ainsi, dès son premier mandat, John Howard s'inscrit dans un consensus où gouvernement et opposition partagent une même rhétorique de défense du « vrai Australien ». En assimilant la reconnaissance du

passé colonial à un excès de repentir, il contribue au « retour de bâton » contre le multiculturalisme et à la réaffirmation d'une identité nationale blanche, homogène et fière d'elle-même.

2.2. « Nos camarades » du ***bush***, septembre 1998

Lors des élections de l'Etat du Queensland en juin 1998, *One Nation* remporte 22, 7 % de suffrage de première préférence, lui permettant d'obtenir onze élus et faisant du parti le troisième le plus important à la Chambre.
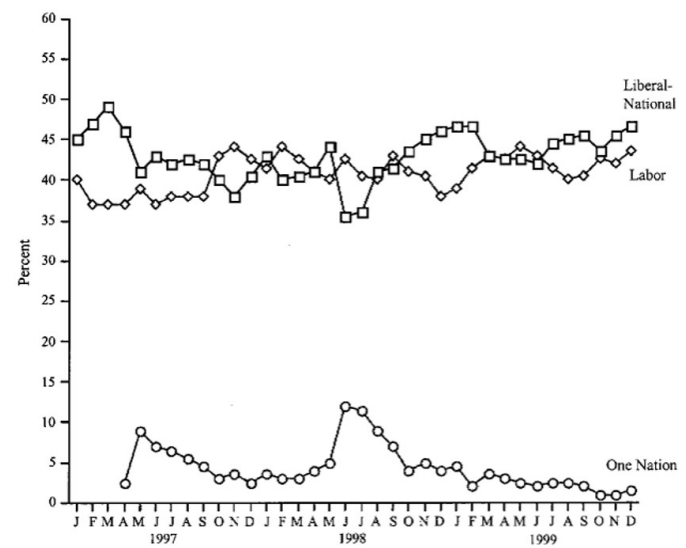

Figure 2 : Intentions de vote lors des élections fédérales, janvier 1997-décembre 1999.

Source : Newspoll Market Research

A l'échelle fédérale, *One Nation* connaît justement un pic dans les intentions de vote en juin 1998, qui coïncide avec le point le plus bas dans les intentions de vote pour la coalition (Gibson, McAllister, and Swenson 2002, 825). Dans ce contexte, après avoir consolidé, dès son premier mandat, une rhétorique nationaliste centrée sur la fierté australienne et la défense du « mainstream », John Howard poursuit dans la même veine lors de sa campagne de 1998.

Le 20 septembre 1998, quelques jours avant les élections fédérales d'octobre, John Howard prononce un discours centré sur la politique économique et la réforme fiscale qu'il propose d'instaurer. Il y défend le bilan de son premier mandat et critique les résultats économiques du précédent gouvernement travailliste. Cependant, une partie significative de son allocution est consacrée à « l'Australie rurale », à laquelle il rend un hommage appuyé : « Mes amis, l'Australie rurale continue de faire face à de très grands défis. Et je sais que nous tous, qui avons grandi en ville, considérons que le bush et tout ce qu'il apporte font partie de l'Australie que nous

aimons ».

Par cet emploi répété du « nous » et d'expressions comme « mes amis » ou « nos camarades Australiens », Howard met en scène une fraternité nationale unissant urbains et ruraux, tout en érigeant ces derniers en gardiens des valeurs australiennes.

Le Premier ministre promet ensuite une série de mesures économiques ciblées : une réduction sur le prix de l'essence et un programme de 70 millions de dollars destiné à créer 500 centres de services ruraux, pour pallier la disparition des infrastructures essentielles (banques, postes, télécommunications, *Medicare*). Il affirme que la majeure partie des bénéfices de sa réforme fiscale, évalués à 3,5 milliards de dollars australiens, sera allouée à l'Australie rurale.

Ce discours inscrit les agriculteurs au cœur du projet économique et moral de la nation : ils deviennent, dans la continuité des « petites entreprises » célébrées en 1996, une autre incarnation des « personnes oubliées » de Menzies, chères à la rhétorique de Howard. Il élargit ainsi sa base symbolique : après les petits entrepreneurs, il s'adresse désormais aux agriculteurs, deux figures présentées comme les piliers vertueux d'une « classe ouvrière blanche » idéalisée. La convergence avec le discours de Pauline Hanson est évidente : tous deux valorisent un peuple travailleur et « authentiquement australien », en opposition implicite aux élites urbaines multiculturalistes et aux minorités.

Lors des élections fédérales d'octobre 1998, la coalition entre le *Country Party* et le parti libéral remporte 80 sièges à la Chambre des représentants et 34 au Sénat, malgré une perte nette de sièges. Le parti travailliste progresse, tandis que *One Nation*, désormais présent dans les cinq États, réalise une percée notable et décroche son premier siège au Sénat avec Heather Hill, même si Pauline Hanson perd le sien. Le redécoupage de la circonscription d'Oxley en 1997, qui a abouti à la création du siège de Blair, modifie profondément la composition socio-économique de la région et affaiblit la base électorale de Hanson. Lors du scrutin, bien qu'elle arrive en tête du premier tour avec 36 % des voix, un accord stratégique entre les trois grands partis – libéral, national et travailliste – permet d'orienter les préférences en faveur du candidat libéral Cameron Thompson, qui l'emporte finalement. Cette coopération interpartis illustre la volonté collective de faire barrage à l'extrême droite sans pour autant s'y opposer sur le plan idéologique. En effet, au lieu d'affirmer une alternative progressiste fondée sur la défense du multiculturalisme, les principaux partis australiens ont choisi de contenir *One Nation* par

des manœuvres électorales, tout en reproduisant une partie de sa rhétorique populiste.

Au cours de son deuxième mandat, John Howard poursuit la consolidation d'un discours nationaliste et sécuritaire qui prolonge ses positions de 1996 et 1998. Après avoir mobilisé le thème de la fierté nationale, puis celui de l'Australie rurale comme cœur du « vrai peuple », il déplace désormais le débat vers la protection des frontières et la sécurité nationale.

2.3. Le « hansonisme » contre les immigrés

En août 2001, la crise de Tampa éclate lorsque le capitaine d'un cargo norvégien, le MV Tampa, porte secours à une centaine de réfugiés indonésiens en détresse dans l'océan Indien. Malgré les appels répétés du capitaine pour accoster sur Christmas Island, John Howard refuse l'autorisation, affirmant : « Je pense que c'est dans l'intérêt national de l'Australie de fixer des limites au nombre de migrants illégaux qui arrivent dans ce pays ». Comme Pauline Hanson avant lui, Howard justifie sa politique migratoire par la nécessité de préserver la souveraineté nationale face à une immigration présentée comme « incontrôlable ». Lorsque le Tampa entre tout de même dans les eaux australiennes face à la dégradation de la santé des passagers, le gouvernement envoie l'armée pour l'empêcher d'accoster. Howard instrumentalise cette crise pour faire adopter la *Pacific Solution,* un ensemble de lois excluant certaines îles (dont Christmas Island) de la zone de migration australienne. Les réfugiés qui y parviennent ne peuvent plus y demander l'asile et sont envoyés dans des centres de détention à Nauru et en Nouvelle-Zélande, créés à la suite d'accords conclus en septembre 2001. Cette politique, soutenue par une majorité du parti travailliste, révèle une nouvelle fois le consensus bipartite autour du durcissement migratoire, symptôme du « retour de bâton » contre le multiculturalisme australien.

Le 28 octobre 2001, lors du lancement de sa campagne pour un troisième mandat, John Howard dresse un bilan entièrement positif de son action. Deux thèmes dominent : la lutte contre le terrorisme et le contrôle de l'immigration. Il affirme que l'Australie « n'est plus un lieu aussi sûr qu'il y a une génération », évoquant les menaces du « crime international » et des « groupes terroristes » – ces menaces sont systématiquement extérieures – justifiant selon lui une « inflexibilité » sur le droit du pays à protéger ses frontières. Il résume cette position dans une formule devenue emblématique : « Nous déciderons qui entre dans ce pays et sous quelles conditions ». Cette déclaration, en miroir exact du discours de Pauline Hanson, repose sur le même

usage exclusif du pronom « nous » et sur la même idée d'un peuple souverain menacé par des intrus. Howard s'en prend ensuite au chef de l'opposition travailliste, Kim Beazley qui l'avait accusé d'être un « amateur du hansonisme ». En mobilisant ce terme, Howard reconnaît implicitement l'influence durable de Pauline Hanson sur la vie politique australienne : son nom devient l'étiquette d'un courant idéologique à part entière. Il reproche ensuite aux travaillistes leur incohérence – avoir voté contre puis pour la loi de protection des frontières – afin de se présenter comme le seul dirigeant cohérent et résolu face à la menace migratoire.

Dans la suite de son discours, Howard réaffirme le « nous » national : « Nous défendrons nos frontières et nous déciderons qui vient dans ce pays. Néanmoins, nous le ferons avec la décence qui caractérise les Australiens ». En attribuant cette « décence » comme valeur intrinsèque au *mainstream* australien, il ajoute à sa définition de la « classe ouvrière blanche » une dimension morale, opposée aux « migrants illégaux ». L'expression « *mainstream Australians* », utilisée à plusieurs reprises, renforce encore le lien rhétorique avec le discours de Hanson.

La coalition entre le Country Party et le parti libéral remporte les élections de novembre 2001 avec 42,9 % des voix et une confortable majorité de 82 sièges à la Chambre des représentants (McAllister 2004, 449).

Figure 4 : Intentions de vote, janvier-novembre 2001.

Source : Goot (2002).

	% Party vote	Change	Seats	Change
Liberal Party	37.4	+ 3.2	69	+ 5
National Party	5.6	+ 0.3	13	− 3
(Total Coalition)	(43.0)	(+ 3.5)	(82)	(+ 2)
Australian Labor Party	37.8	− 2.3	65	(− 2)
Australian Democrats	5.4	+ 0.3	0	0
Pauline Hanson's One Nation	4.3	− 4.1	0	0
Greens	4.4	+ 2.3	0	0
Others	5.1	+ 0.3	3	(+ 2)

Notes:
The party vote is the first-preference vote. The change columns show the change in the percentage first-preference vote and seats, respectively, from the 1998 federal election. In 1998 there were 148 House of Representatives seats, in 2001, 150 seats.

Figure 3 : Résultats des élections à la Chambre des représentants, 2001.

Source : Australian Electoral Commission.

La crise de Tampa est l'événement à partir duquel les intentions de vote pour la coalition se sont clairement démarquées de celles pour le parti travailliste. La coalition a ainsi gagné 5% des intentions de vote (McAllister 2004, 447).
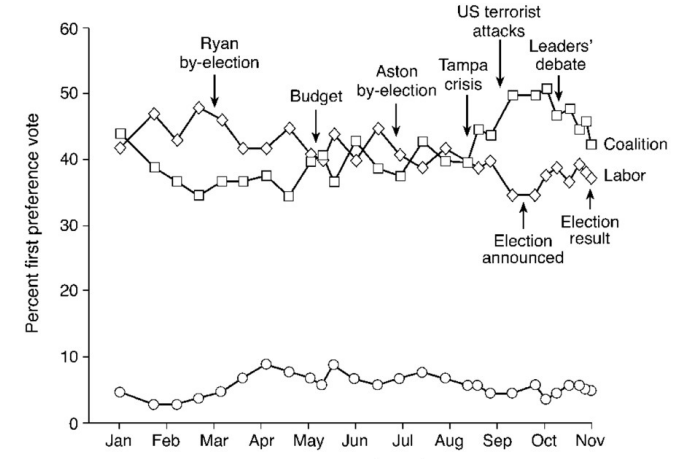
Ces dernières ont augmenté encore plus considérablement après les attentats du 11 septembre 2001. Même s'ils ont eu lieu aux États-Unis, John Howard n'a cessé de répéter que ces événements concernaient aussi directement les Australiens. Il a exprimé un soutien inconditionnel au gouvernement américain et a accepté de déployer des troupes australiennes en Irak. Les attentats terroristes sont devenus la nouvelle justification d'une politique migratoire toujours plus sévère : dès lors, les immigrés sont présentés comme de potentiels terroristes. En dehors de ces crises, on peut constater une baisse des intentions de vote.

Le 9 octobre 2004, la coalition remporte sa quatrième victoire consécutive avec 46, 7% de suffrages de premier choix et obtient la majorité dans les deux Chambres, la plus importante depuis les années 1970. John Howard est confirmé dans sa position de Premier ministre pour un quatrième mandat.

Conclusion

L'analyse croisée des discours de Pauline Hanson et de John Howard révèle une profonde convergence idéologique entre l'extrême droite émergente et le gouvernement libéral de la fin des années 1990. Si Hanson incarne un populisme ouvertement xénophobe et décomplexé, Howard en reprend la structure rhétorique, en l'intégrant dans un cadre politique institutionnel et légitime. Ce glissement marque une normalisation du discours populiste dans la sphère gouvernementale australienne.

Pauline Hanson, dès 1996, construit sa légitimité en opposant l'« Australien ordinaire » – blanc, travailleur et rural – à des élites urbaines jugées déconnectées et à des minorités perçues comme favorisées. Son discours s'appuie sur la dénonciation du multiculturalisme, accusé d'avoir fragmenté la nation et trahi les « vrais Australiens ».

John Howard, quant à lui, reprend ces thématiques dès son premier mandat : il célèbre « l'Australien mainstream », rejette la réconciliation au nom de la fierté nationale, puis érige les petits entrepreneurs et les agriculteurs en piliers du peuple authentique. Sous une apparence de modération, il reformule les mêmes peurs identitaires et sociales que Hanson, tout en leur conférant une légitimité politique et morale. Le parallèle s'accentue dans ses deux mandats suivants. En 1998, la valorisation de l'Australie rurale et des « oubliés » de la prospérité s'inscrit dans la même rhétorique du peuple menacé par les élites. Puis, en 2001, la crise de Tampa et la *Pacific Solution* marquent un tournant sécuritaire : Howard fait de la protection des frontières le symbole de la souveraineté nationale. Son célèbre « Nous déciderons qui entre dans ce pays » condense une vision du monde fondée sur la peur de l'Autre et la défense exclusive d'une communauté nationale blanche.

Ainsi, la trajectoire de Pauline Hanson et celle de John Howard ne s'opposent pas : elles se répondent et se nourrissent mutuellement. Hanson a ouvert un espace discursif fondé sur la nostalgie et l'exclusion, qu'Howard a ensuite institutionnalisé. Le populisme de la première a servi de laboratoire idéologique au second. Ensemble, ils ont façonné les termes du débat public australien autour de la souveraineté, de l'identité et de la peur, au détriment des valeurs de diversité et de réconciliation. Ce double mouvement illustre pleinement le « retour de bâton » contre le multiculturalisme : ce n'est plus seulement l'extrême droite qui le remet en cause, mais le cœur même du pouvoir politique. En intégrant les thèmes de Hanson dans le discours national, John Howard a contribué à redéfinir la norme du patriotisme australien incarné par une « classe ouvrière blanche ».

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CROSSINGS
by EDWARD DOEGAR

I lean in to look at his phone. They are all men, all dark-skinned. They're wearing life-jackets. All of them have life-jackets. I don't have time to count, but there must be over a dozen people in the dinghy. It sits low in the water. Through one short run of photos, like a flip-book cartoon, a man holds up his arm in greeting. He is excited, hopeful; the majority are impassive, perhaps they are concentrating on keeping their balance, holding on to the rope. Perhaps they already know that these people are not here to help them. My friend navigates through the photos, back and forth through the sequence of time. He uses his thumb and forefinger to zoom in on their faces. In most of the photos they look cold. The dinghy is Liverpool red, against the grey brown sea. The images have a grainy quality to them, a poor resolution. One of the last in the sequence shows the dinghy from further away, like a badly taken family photo, the holiday snap not even interesting to those who were there. His thumb slides over two, three, a dozen photos at once, and we glide into today: a photo of his wife, my friend, modelling an outfit in a shop. They must have been on their way here. – *Sorry for that.* He swipes back through to the final image of the dinghy, pausing on it briefly, before pocketing his phone. In it, the dinghy is a small red mark, barely registering its colour; something, perhaps, in an image that is otherwise of nothing, only the sea.

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– *It was one of the best days of my life.* I look up at him. – *Professionally.*

§

It is earlier, we are on our way, walking to meet our friends. My wife thinks we're going to be late. She's pacing outside, opening and reopening the automatic doors, while I edge forward in the queue, observing the small prescribed journey from one 'Be Smart / Stay 2M Apart' sticker to another. If I stand with my heels together, awkwardly upright like a boy scout, my feet don't quite fit inside the round discs. I scratch at the rhyme with my foot. The stickers are surprisingly resilient. They're still here, still legible, after months. My wife is miming her frustration at me from outside: the exasperated on-stage shrug, the 'what-the-fuck-are-you-doing' foot stamp. Her face contorts with clownish anger, over-articulating morality as she would to a toddler. We're going to have an argument. I turn from her now to the cashier who asks a second time if I want a receipt. – *No. No, thank you.* I pick up my pack of Benson & Hedges; they are indistinguishable from any other brand. I feel a quick, passing elation at the scare photo: the grieving mother and child and not the abscess on the tongue. As I turn towards the exit, my wife is already walking away.

§

Half of me is listening to my friend the journalist as he tells me about his week, and half of me is trying to decide what I want to eat. Despite the pandemic the street market thrums with people. We squeeze past our wives as they join the end of the Ethiopian queue. We have split off into the old order: men and women. I loosen the grip of my anger. – *I don't know about you but I'm so hungry.* My friend offers, trying to coax me out of my mood. – *This looks so good but is practically 100% garlic, I think. Sorry for that.* He is allergic to garlic. I don't notice the smell so much, can't profile a cuisine by its scent as he can. We reach the end of the alley and turn back, decide on pizza. I like that my friend would say if he preferred something else.

– *It's so good to see you.* I echo the same phrase back at him, but, prompted like that, it sounds banal, false. My friend doesn't seem to notice. He resumes his story. – *The fisherman who took me out was quite unusual. Quite sympathetic, I mean.* I'm struck by my friend's care with English, a care only possible, perhaps, in a second language. – *We were maybe eight miles, and the sea is huge.* In the dropped 'h' of huge, I hear Germanic emphasis. – *You cannot believe how huge it is to be honest until you're in a small boat like that.* I think of my childhood, of summers spent with my first best friend, visiting his ex-Navy grandparents. Learning to water-ski: the chug and spew of the outboard motor: the diesel and salt perfume. I think of the sudden aloneness of being left in the sea, as the boat edges away from you, before the rope stiffens, before life goes taut in your grip and pulls you back into the ludicrous reality of trying to stand on water. – *France is not so far when you look at a map but even so, only a few hundred metres from the harbour, the sea is massive. It is unbelievable.* I think of sculling my feet and that sudden sense, as the sun clouds over, of nothing beneath me. The two directions, to shore and not. – *And I am thinking: yes, ok, this will make an interesting story, listening to the fisherman, what he has seen and knows, I can write up his experiences. And then we hear over the radio that there might be a dinghy.* My friend stops, struggles for purchase on the word. – *Do you say ding-ee in English or din-jee?* I have to think. For a moment I don't know. – *Dinghy. We say dinghy.*

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We are in the restaurant now. We had ordered our pizzas standing out there in the street, meaning to take them to a park or eat them perched on a wall, but we changed our minds as we waited and chose a table inside. The waiter asks us if we'd like anything to drink. – *I'll have a beer, I think; yes, a beer.* My friend opts for a coffee. – *It's a relief to be off my feet.* I sigh for emphasis as the waiter leaves. My friend agrees, resets his chair between the joins of floorboards. The restaurant has the feel of a pop-up, turned permanent. The table has a slight wobble, it sinks and surfaces from the slightest pressure of my wrist. A train lumbers overhead, approximating atmosphere, reminding us we're in a converted railway arch. He pulls his phone from his pock-

et, checks it quickly, places it face down. Then he picks it up again and says he'll let the girls know where we are. 'Girls', is that his expression or mine? My beer arrives in a Belgian glass on its own polished-chrome salver, half froth.

His thumb darts over the screen as he types a message. I try to recall the men in the photos. Already, I can't remember them. I didn't look closely enough, didn't register them properly. Did they look African or Middle Eastern? What would it mean to be able to pronounce the country they came from, and not their names? I notice I'm starting to describe them to myself, making them into words, features, turning them into a poem. Their expressions are becoming my thoughts. I think about asking my friend to show me the pictures again. He places the phone back on the table, politely face down. He breathes out, smiles warmly, his attention returning to what's in front of him, to me.

§

I tell my friend I've been watching videos of Nigel Farage online. He nods, offers the cautious encouragement of raised eyebrows which turns into a frown as he declines his lips to his espresso. Its scum decorates his stubble for a moment. – *I am researching a poem.* He glances up, reacquainting his eyes with mine, leaning back in his chair, listening. His left ear is slightly pitched towards me, his mouth away. – *I'm thinking about using his words as found text. His interviews and speeches. Fashioning them into a series of sonnets.* The frown complicates, then resolves. – *But it's toxic, I think, subjecting myself to that, taking in all that bile. I feel full of it afterwards, the hate. Not* his *hate, not thinking* his *thoughts exactly, but still hate.* – *I know.* The table tips as he sets his cup on its saucer. He leans back, clarifies: – *I know what you mean.* – *They really use words like 'invasion'.* – *They do, absolutely.* – *And it is* all *about language, that's the insidious part, their method, the vocabulary of intolerance, always immaculately maintained.* He nods again, a clean precise gesture. I go on: – *Always 'economic migrants', never 'refugees'. And there is always this implicit threat that these are* men. *Men in all their maleness, men because men are violent, men harm. There is an invasion of young men.* Another waiter, a woman in her twenties, interrupts discretely to set down our pizzas. She asks us if we want anything else. She has a southern European accent. Her hair, part-shaven part-dyed, provides a mildly shocking contrast to the trained courtesy of her attention, to her brasserie-style apron.

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He appreciates the difficulty. My friend tells me how hard he found it interviewing right-wing activists earlier in the week. He was glad to be able to, had wanted to balance his article and was pleased to find them there in Dover when he came back down into the town. – *They're nutters but they're well-informed nutters. They can quote facts. They're happy to debate. They have their facts, and I have mine.* He is looking round for someone over his shoulder. He wants some cutlery. The pizza has a thin base, its flavours pool in the centre, staining the chopping-board platter an oily red. – *They have their own world: their own figures, their own authorities, research they can cite.* The first waiter returns with a glass tumbler filled with little wooden knives and forks. My friend hesitates. – *Ah, ok, thank you.* When the waiter leaves, we mirror each other's expression: 'the world gone mad'. He smiles, shakes his head. Resumes: – *This is a huge part of the problem, I think. How few facts we have in common now. There was a time when we agree on the problem and argue about the solution. Now, we discuss the problem and we are not even talking about the same thing.* This is something we have discussed before, something we feel similarly about. – *Sometimes we do not agree there is a problem. I am talking about refugees, you are talking about economic migrants.* I flinch at my role in the analogy, but meet his eyes, nod. My friend sits up. Two thirds of his meal is still untouched. He indicates his plate, holds his palms out open either side of it, like a priest receiving a new-born into the church. – *I say this is a pizza and you say no, not at all, this is our Kentish flat bread.*

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More photos, from later in the day. They got a tip about where the site was. A twenty-minute scrabble up the hills behind the town. Through brambles and bushes into the back end of an industrial estate. My friend scrolls through to find the best examples, I'm thinking about protocol, about what is required to write, as he does, within the obligations of proof. How these images are documents, sources that serve the story he's crafting. So I am thinking about poetry when he shows me the high concrete wall to the compound and how it's topped with razor wire. – *They don't want you to see this. There are two walls about twelve feet high, which we found a way to climb.* The 'we' he means is himself and a photographer. The photographer, arranged by his office, sourced by his assistant, has taken another series of photos, professional photos parallel to these, that will serve my friend's writing in another, different, way. He zooms through the unfocused foreground blur of razor wire into the yard below. It is filled with piles of dinghy carcasses. There must be hundreds of them, the confiscated materials of crossings: dinghies, life jackets, make-shift rafts, paddles... This steady accumulation has been preserved and catalogued; many of the dinghies remain un-deflated, as if ready for future use. On screen in a single shot, there are the remains of at least two hundred crossings. Evidence, to be denied or deployed at the right moment. They are a fact. A fact made of so many other facts, as lives are made of facts. As each of the lives alluded to in the image is also an attempt at a life, at something closer to my life. In an industrial estate in Kent the evidence accrues, evidence that will become – that already is – the fuel of rhetoric.

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As we are settling up, waiting for the card machine, he shares what he was told but couldn't print. It exists for him, but unsubstantiated, only as likelihood, only as a single source. – *They know more are dying. There are bodies that are not being counted. This is what the fisherman who took me out says.* I notice that construction again, the full epithet: the fisherman known as the fisherman who-took-me-out. An awkwardness that is normalised in my friend's speech, his part-foreign part-professional formality. The card machine arrives. Everything is simple: the bill halved, the tip included. I still have most of my second beer to finish. My friend checks then pockets his phone. – *They're coming now. But no, no rush.* He smiles, then remembers what he was saying. He tells me that when one of the fishermen found a body in his nets the police confiscated his equipment. For three months they held it as evidence. – *This is his livelihood; so, of course, it is like killing them.* – *Jesus,* I say, and then the obscene metaphor intrudes internally: I will make you fishers of men. I think of the only dead body I have ever seen, my grandfather's, and how quickly it became lifeless, congealing into a thing. I see my wife outside squinting in at us from the bright sunny day. She is happy, her earlier irritation gone. She is calm, neither hurrying to find us nor hoping not to. Behind her I see my friend's wife, notice the dress from the photo. I wave them over. – *The authorities make them choose between their living and this horrible silence. This is what happens when we don't let people speak.*

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We carry our wine glasses through to the front room. A month later. The meal was a success. I place our guests on the better sofa, as they would us, and turn my desk chair to face them. Conversation has lulled; here in the living room, we have arrived somewhere else, awkwardly satiated. But the setting comes to the rescue: the new curtains offer a topic. I'm pleased they noticed them; pleased, particularly, for my wife, and file the compliments away to share with her later. I can hear her in the other room, taking things out of cupboards, setting the dirty plates in a pile. I want her to come through and join us but she doesn't like to go

to bed with the kitchen a mess, and she knows we won't have the energy to tidy up once they're gone. We think of hospitality differently, she and I. I put this down to her being American. I mention my theory to our friends and then have to stop my friend's wife joining mine. – *Really, honestly, she'll be back in a minute. It's a pernickety North American thing, she'd rather you stay here. I'm always trying to get her to relax. We live in this permeant culture clash.*

The conversation drifts to safer shores, to the grand theories of our time. 'The Clash of Civilisations' replacing 'The End of History'. My friend doesn't like theories. He distrusts such total explanations. – *But the fisherman who took me out, that day in Dover that I was telling you about, even though he was sympathetic to the refugees. He was pretty much on their side but...* My wife finally comes in with a plate of chocolates wrapped in tinfoil, places them on the table between us and takes a seat opposite. The chocolates are acknowledged with courteous delight. The interruption annoys me. Now we are talking about the chocolates, about the deli where they were bought. It's the oldest Italian deli in Soho. – *You were saying?* I try to bait my friend. – *You were saying something about the attitude of the fisherman?* The conversation halves. – *The man who took you out?* – *Oh, yes, that's right. He was sympathetic. But he sees that every time when there's not enough life-jackets, then it's the men wearing them. And the women and children are going without.* What am I uneasy about? Is it that 'every time'. Or is it the fact of it. – *This is the mindset difference. In Arabic culture, I am the head of the family of course I wear the lifejacket.* Where is my discomfort coming from? – *As a British man, he thinks the opposite. It is always the women and children first.* What is it that's not right? – *But the fisherman sees it again and again and so he becomes, in some way, less sympathetic.*

My wife stands up to offer us tea. Both our friends accept and I decline. The conversation closes up over the top of what was just said. We have been reabsorbed in to the larger conversation. My friend is listening to his wife tell me that she's applying to convert a parking space on their road into a pop-up garden for the day. She wants to invite neighbours to mingle, to meet each other, in the space usually reserved for cars. Cars are her bête noire. She has a petition to send us about building more cycle lanes. She's furious at the pace of change here. – *In Berlin, we discuss it and the next month they are building.* I listen to her precise English, the careful footprints she makes with it – like a cat in snow. I think of how she volunteers to lead English practise sessions for asylum seekers. How rarely I hear her praise her homeland. I think how German this is, how German she is, to me; how almost interchangeable the two things are in my mind.

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Another six weeks. We leave them at a vintage shop, head to the corner to get a drink. No, they can't let us in. It's table service only and all the tables are in use. The empty one on the pavement is reserved. My friend suggests heading back to their house. As we turn onto his street, he remembers a bar down by the canal. The steps remind me of stairs in York Minster. Here, they lead down to the sunken, secular garden of the towpath. A route overhung by successive canopies of willow and turning silver birch. We make our way through a stilled waterfall of autumn. Under a bridge, the bar comes into view. It is just past the lock, where the canal opens out to admire the converted warehouses, the new flats. In the building opposite, below the waterline, a lone worker hammers away at her iMac, the last to leave the office. This is how I imagine Copenhagen: clean, productive, keen to glorify nature through exact, angular frames. It is becoming dusk. We hover over of a table near the path. The waiter nods for us to sit down. He brings laminated menus and an A4 sheet with the Track and Trace QR code. We sign in.

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I tell him I'm writing a poem about what he's told me. I'm nervous. The piece is delicate but already exists; it's fragile but worth saving. I'm grateful for the overpriced bottle of London Pride that's placed before me. I begin somewhat formally. – *I guess, in a sense, it's about what's sayable in poetry. Or what's implied by the unsaid. How the English lyric is sort of culpable or inflected or tainted by nationalism somehow.* This isn't untrue, but it's not what I need to ask him about. – *I want to talk to you about that day, again, to go over some of the things you mentioned.* I want to see the faces he showed me; the faces I've forgotten, that I forgot almost at once. I want him to show me the men's faces again, not on his phone but through his words. I want him to tell them to me. – *And I want to learn a little more about journalism, in general. The morality of writing about real events, about people.* He is interested, encouraging. He leans in a little, a knot of folded arms, crossed legs. His eyes strain to focus across the canal, sliding off the glass surfaces. – *I was awake thinking about this the other night: I couldn't sleep. I can remember only two maybe three times before when I failed as a journalist.* He interrupts himself with a familiar tic: – *Did I tell you this already?* I don't know. I say that he called it one of the best days of his life, professionally. – *Yes, that was cynical, no? But it was; it was, it's true. Everything went so perfect from a journalistic point of view. Actually, finding a dinghy in the sea must be something like two-thousand-to-one chance; then this storage facility where they hid the dinghies; and even meeting these right-wing nutters as we come back to the station.* I set my beer down, conscious that his is barely touched. – *And the photographer, I liked him too; this is also not always the case...* His eyes won't steady, they jolt back and forth like someone looking out of a train window. – *But, then, out on the water, actually there, I stopped being a journalist.*

I notice the urge to halt, to console him or give him space. I feel it prickle under my skin like embarrassment. – *The fisherman, the one who took me out, hears on the radio that we are in fact perhaps very close to one of the dinghies. They have these radios that are not exactly legal so I can't mention them in my story. But he says that a dinghy is very close and he asks me if we want to try and find them. And, of course, I said yes. 'Yes, of course! This is why we're here!'* He's emphatic without raising his voice, acting his own part well. *But when we came up alongside them I couldn't and I stayed inside.* – *Inside the cabin?* – *Yes, behind the glass. The fisherman, he was out on deck and spoke with them. Told them where the coastguard was. That they were nearly safe. The photographer was also there, taking photos, getting close. But I couldn't go out there.* Thoughts strobe through his eyes. – *I failed*, he repeats. – *As a journalist?* – *Yes, I stopped being a journalist. I couldn't be out there. I couldn't exploit them, I knew that's what I was doing. What we do, as journalists, when we come to look at them. But I couldn't go out there and interview them, ask them questions only for an article, not as a human being. Where are you from? Why are you here? What is your story? I couldn't exploit them like that.*

§

I am thinking 'I must remember this, I must remember exactly how he said this'. I hear my own thoughts intrude on what he's saying. But he has stopped speaking. Already the moment has started to pass. The confession is scabbing over. His eyes have come to rest. He lifts his beer up, towards his mouth, then places it down without drinking. He tips the bottle slightly, tests the feel of gravity in his palm, smoothing out the creases at the edge of the label. I can't think what to ask him, what to say to stop him from coming back, from becoming my friend again. I want him to tell me what he could never write. What it felt like to see those men and then refuse to see. To testify without witnessing. I am looking at him hard enough for him to feel my eyes. He meets them, tries a smile, unsure. A reflex in me reciprocates. It is enough. He is himself again, composed. He is looking round for the waiter, wants to settle the bill, for us to return to the 'girls'. We both offer to pay for the drinks. He insists. We are back in the circumstances of our lives.

A Note in Three Parts

Looking back through the files on my computer, I can see that I started writing 'Crossings' in October 2020. I wouldn't have known this without the date-stamped drafts. Still less would I have known that I worked on it steadily, fiddling with the punctuation or else completely revising it, until mid-January 2021 when the piece reached its current form. Knowing these facts alters how I feel about the piece, how I reflect on it. It helps me notice both the pandemic's immediate hindsight and its ongoing concerns as tangible undercurrents in the writing. COVID-19 had a tidal quality; death counts rose and fell more than once, and with them the social reactions, the anxieties and fixations of that strange time. The slightly worn quality of the experience is already showing in the writing – the paraphernalia of 'Stay Safe' warnings scuffed by many feet, the 'Eat Out to Help Out' policy already part-digested.

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It is strange how, having written something, it can be transformed in your mind afterwards. I have come across poems that I wrestled over which, when I rediscover them, remain nearly foreign to me. Other times, I've reread something and find the next line arriving in my ear before my eye catches up with the flow of the text. 'Crossings' is particularly unusual, in that the details and facts from which it emerged – the real-life experiences that I transformed into the text – are more pressingly memorable to me than the construction of the sentences. Writing usually tends to overtake its subject matter, for me at least. But here the tension of real life and fiction, of prose vs. poetic thinking, and of my own experiences set against that of a friend's, remain an obstacle of anxiety – just as they were when I tried to write the piece initially. 'Crossings' sits uncomfortably between genres. I had wanted it to acknowledge and explore different forms of responsibility, to celebrate and question a boundary I'd lived by – the distinction between artistic and journalistic description. The exact nature of any such difference still troubles me.

§

Since 'Crossings' was written the pervasive nature of COVID-19, its totalising and encompassing quality, has largely evaporated, the pandemic's insidious presence in our minds seems to have waned too. The many who died must be mourned, but that is largely a private affair now. In contrast, the political discourse and lived reality of the channel crossings – whether discussed as the journey of migrants or refugees – has only grown in consequence. More and more people have died crossing a short stretch of sea, whether named and recorded as individual tragedies or speculated as such by the guesswork of interested parties. These peoples' deaths reckon the scale of our collective failure. Whoever 'we' are, we are measured in part by these crossings. It is not only the deaths we should be shamed by, but also the failure to successfully embrace and enhance the lives of the people who have arrived. There is much need for subtlety and nuance – for the unease that literature allows us to examine – but there is also need for clarity and compassionate action. In this sense, as a literary text, 'Crossings' is a failure, but I hope it allows its readers to imagine their own position more clearly and encourages them to act on it.

Edward Doegar is a poet and editor based in London. He is a fellow of the Complete Works, a consulting editor at *The Rialto* and was commissioning editor at the Poetry Translation Centre between 2018-2022. His most recent publication is *sonnets* (Broken Sleep Books; 2024).
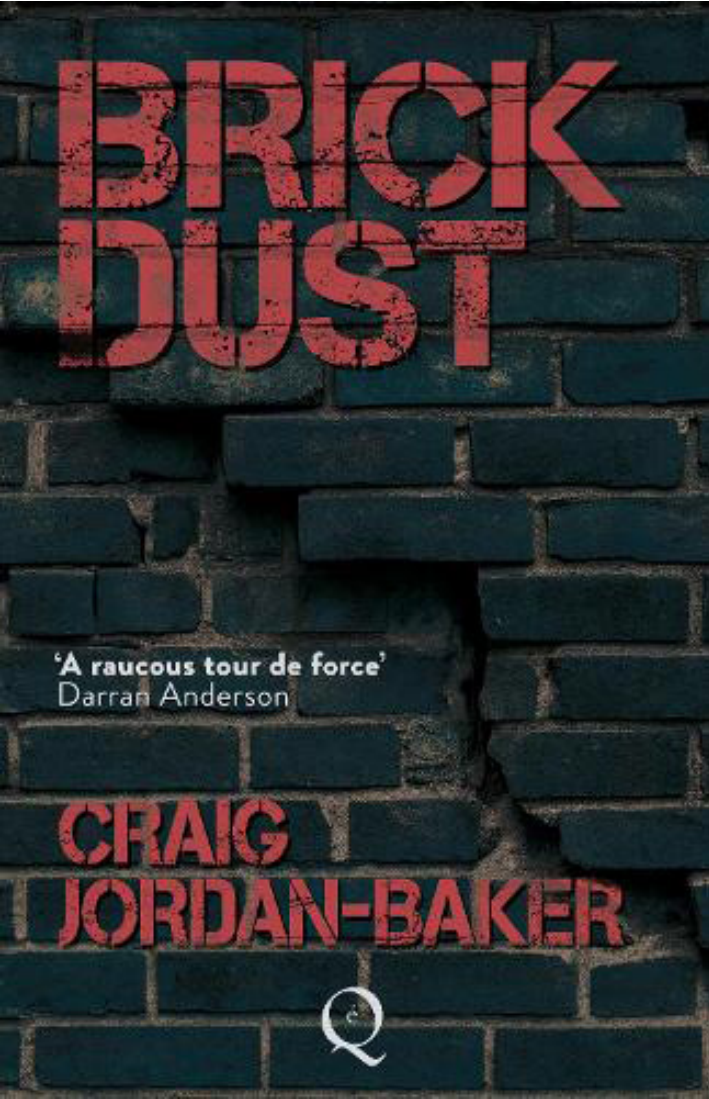
Book Review: Brick Dust

Natasha Jane Kennedy

The first rule about *Brick Dust* is, talk about *Brick Dust*. After a detour around the Bann in *If the River is Hidden* (2022), co-written with poet Cherry Smith, Jordan-Baker returns to the Nacullian family in a multi-voiced, multi-generation assembly of stories.

Jordan-Baker's knack for compelling and polyphonic narratives is redoubled in his latest novel which questions how stories are told, and whose. In *Brick Dust*, the Nacullians' lives are retold from snippets, cuttings of an obsessive collector's archive, scraps from within the confines of a mouldy flat. There is a certain urgency in the novel, a desire to be exhaustive while knowing all too well that there are things that a narrator can simply not cover in a couple hundred pages, before the damp trickles down, or before the council dumps everything in a skip. The stories are interlaced with excerpts of letters, documents from voting polls, newspaper articles, and lists of acronyms men love! "There are things documents can do, and things documents can't" (p.2) and these documents come to life between the nooks and crannies of this hoarder-turned-storyteller's collage of them. But a narrator is arbitrary, never impartial, and so the tales of Greg, of Shannon, Shawna-Seanán, or Nandad become a kaleidoscope of impressions, peppered by a voice that wishes to be so faithful, yet inevitably distorts the narrative with his own observations, reactions, touches of humour, and wittiness. It plays with what a novel can and cannot do.

There is an interesting take here on the role of the narrator with moments where the reader may guess at an omniscient one, but frequent allusions to the damp creeping into the crowded rooms the stories are being told from dislodge this assumption. Readers may wonder who this narrator is. Why these records of the Nacullian family? Where did they come from? Does it even matter? As a literary device this narrator almost disappears behind his stacks of stories. Until he doesn't. Until he seeps into the dialogues, the quips, the passing comments about weirdos, or immigrants taking all the jobs.

Brick Dust pays meticulous attention to detail: from the Nacullians' library fines, their Monday night dinners, saveloys by the polling station, to cutting a hole in young Nandad's... well... I'll let you find that out. And bricks. Lots of bricks. It is funny, maybe even heartwarming at times, and devastating all at once. It will catch you unawares while leading you precisely down the path it has intended you take – the one the narrator has frantically taken.

"I've told you about the Nacullians, but I could have told you about them in so many other ways. I could have made them look better, and made them look worse too."
(pp.165-166)

Written within the framework of the Cartographies of the Political Novel in Europe project (CAPONEU), Jordan-Baker pokes at what it means for a book to engage in political discussion – or not to. For everyday conversations to be political. For minutes of a Morris Dancers' group meeting to be political. And always with more than a touch of satire. The narrator picks up on the characters' views, opinions, behaviours. Their choice of slang. The irony of an Irish woman's idolisation of the Iron Lady. The categories we assign to boys with absent fathers and their mothers' part in getting knocked up in the first place. The things contained in Police Sergeants' desktop's hard drive and in which years these would be deemed problematic or illegal. Funding and discontinuation of a local Gazette. Ireland. Normalness. Girls holding hands.

Brick Dust doesn't make statements, or maybe it does, but it reveals the statements that arise from the banal, the innocuous voiced or unvoiced thoughts, the action or inaction and how these things manifest in the world. *Brick Dust* is enigmatic but will spark questions and opinions of your own.

Jordan-Baker has made leaps from an exciting new voice at époque in 2020 with his début novel *The Nacullians*, to an established and daring author who is not afraid to provoke and prod at readers' curiosity.

Dr Craig Jordan-Baker (University of Brighton) read from his new novel, Brick Dust, *and discussed its content with Dr Liam Connell (University of Brighton) as part of the University of Brighton's series of author readings with the CAPONEU project.*
24th April 2025

You can watch the discussion by scanning this QR code or by following this link:

https://caponeu.eu/cdp/materials/brick-dust-a-novel-pre-launch-discussion

Interview with the collective Affreux Marmots: Art, Resistance, and Affinity in Practice

Théo Boucknooghe

Affreux Marmots is a collective of young artists based in Lille (France) involved in the resistance against the rise of the far-right.

This is a transcription and translation of an hour-long discussion conducted with Ketrug on the 12th of July 2025. Answers have been shortened and reorganized for readers' ease.

First of all, could you introduce your collective? Tell us a bit about how it started, who's involved, and what you do.

We're a group of six friends who all used to hang out in the same spots. Over time, we realized we were facing similar challenges, not just socially, but also personally, with our families and communities. These shared experiences naturally became the foundation for the collective, but most importantly the collective is built around a strong bond between us. We're all very creative and enjoy experimenting across different mediums. PeterCheeky raps, Vaurien and I are graphic designers, Niels and Tom are culinary artisans, and Adrien studies architecture. Even though we come from different backgrounds, creativity is what unites us.

When did you decide to structure yourselves as a collective?

We all had our own individual projects: zines, music, clothing lines, videos, but eventually realized how much we could support each other. That's when the idea of the collective came together. It's very fluid; there's a core, but lots of people orbit around it depending on the project. We all share a similar artistic universe, but we also welcome new people because they bring in their own identities and stories. The more diverse our structure is, the more people can identify with what we produce. We see the opposite happening in far-right circles, where everything is tightly curated to appeal exclusively to a white nationalist identity. We offer a counter-narrative, not just through our messages, but in the very makeup of our collective. That is already a form of resistance in itself. We work in a very horizontal way. Even when we bring in someone external for a specific project, we include them in the decision-making process. We want everyone to leave their mark on what we create.

Your collective seems to be structured informally, around personal ties and affinities. Is that something you've consciously chosen? What strengths or limits does this kind of organization offer?

It happened quite naturally, but we definitely stand by it. Our private lives and political lives are deeply entangled, and our day-to-day existence becomes a site of resistance. That said, being informal and political comes with challenges. For instance, we can't really put our faces out there for promotion. We have to consider everyone's safety. The group may be fluid, but we're cautious about who we let in since anyone publicly associated with us could be exposed to far-right violence. In a world that pushes for individualism and commodification of all social relationships, choosing to organize based on emotional bonds is already a form of utopia, a way of living a post-capitalist ideal in the present.

Your collective is politically engaged. You recently took a stand against the far right. How do you view the relationship between your artistic creations and politics, especially in a context of increasing far-right influence and fascisation of society? Is art a form of resistance for you?

Absolutely. Politics became a recurring topic among us, especially over the past year, as the far right gained momentum. After Macron dissolved Parliament, we saw a call from the antifascist group **Jeune Garde** to support the New Popular Front against the anticipated rise of Le Pen's party. That's when we began collaborating with the antifascists, though not by formally joining the group. We don't have the time or desire to be full-time activists, but we do want to offer our skills when they're needed. For instance, we recently released a scarf. What's great about it is that it can be worn discreetly as a fashion accessory, but also at protests, where it can be used to cover your face. Part of the proceeds go directly to the legal defence fund for the **Jeune Garde**, who are currently fighting against a government attempt to dissolve their group. With the scarf, you can either passively support the antifascist struggle by purchasing a cool fashion item that also provides financial support, or you can actively participate by wearing the scarf to cover your face during whatever actions you choose to take

We don't believe that appealing to a mainstream audience is the way to "massify" support. Instead, we try to reach different small niches. The more we diversify our output, the more people from different backgrounds will find something they can connect with. People might follow us because of a specific piece that speaks to them emotionally, and that can become a gateway to our broader political message. This strategy has drawn criticism, but we have a very specific goal and audience in mind, and we're going for it.

Creating the scarf was particularly meaningful. It was like painting on a blank canvas, adding a tone of symbolism. We drew heavily on the visual language of Russian Constructivism and agitprop (agitation-propaganda) for the symbolism. We even made a poster to explain all the hidden references in the design. Unlike artists such as Obey, who shared similar influences at the outset but eventually became fully absorbed into commercial and capitalist art circuits, we've made it a point to remain radical in our creative approach. Everything we produce is conceived with praxis in mind. For example, our scarf isn't just symbolic; it's made to withstand real-world conditions, street actions, protests... Unlike fashion designers who appropriate workwear aesthetics without ensuring durability, we design with function as well as form. We are graffiti artists, our clothes go through a lot, so we know firsthand that what we make needs to hold up.

Beyond that, we also wanted to challenge the gentrification of working-class styles, like punk or hooligan aesthetics, which have lost their radical meaning as they've gone mainstream. We flipped that logic by taking a traditionally bourgeois item, the scarf (think Hermès), and turning it into a symbol of resistance. On the left, we often find ourselves on the defensive, trying to protect the few social gains of previous generations. With this scarf, we adopted a more offensive posture in the class struggle, stealing items from the bourgeoisie to make them symbols of proletarian and antifascist resistance. We are hungry for victories.
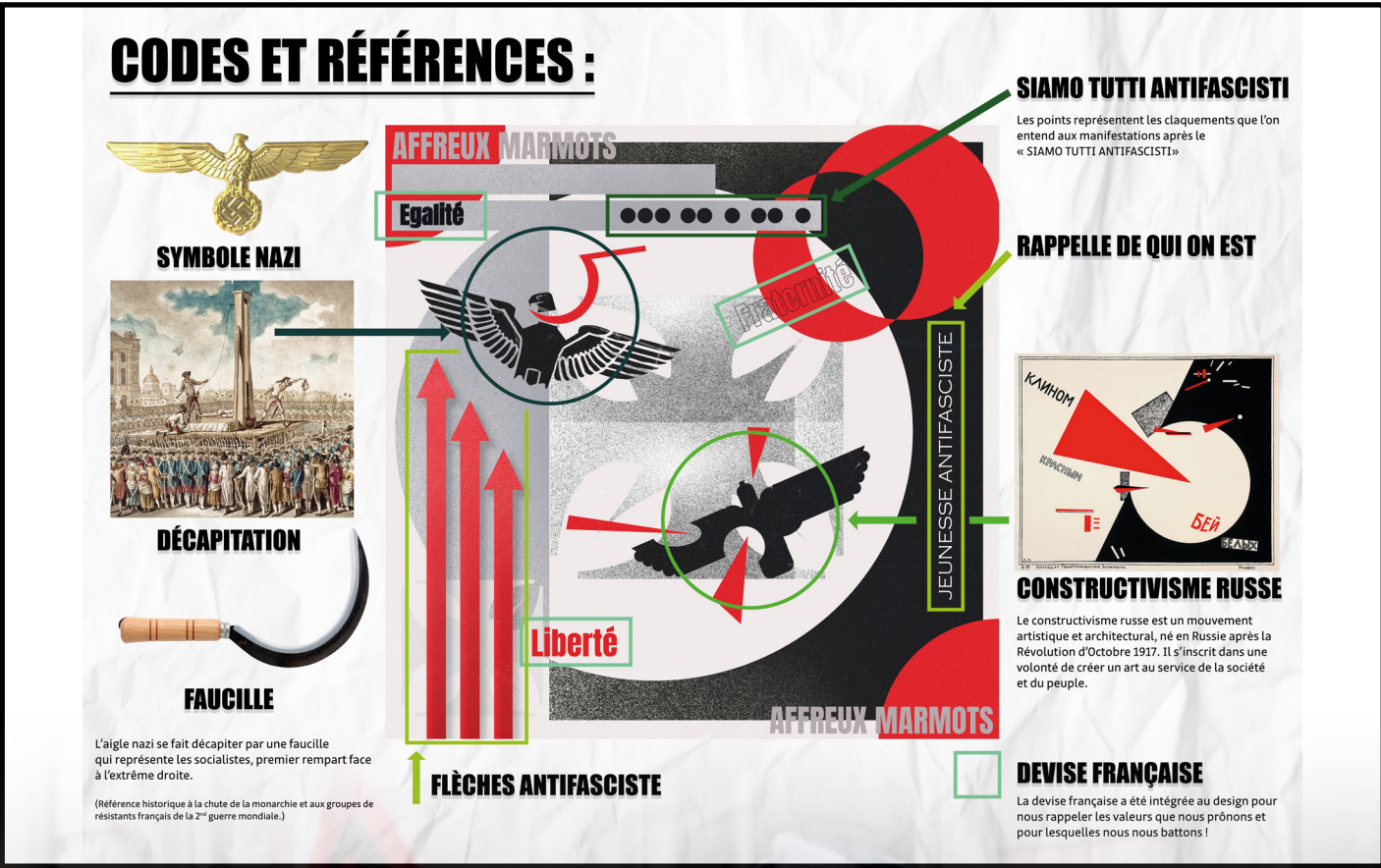
Do you see your art as integrated into a revolutionary practice, as praxis, not just as a medium for messages?

Yes, very much so, although it depends on the medium. For instance, we've also done agitprop-style paintings that critique media manipulation of the working class, and those works serve more as communication tools. But we generally try to create things that function on two levels, like the scarf, which can be worn both casually and politically. I'm especially interested in materials like thermoreactive ink, where the clothing changes depending on the environment it's worn in. That dual function, that shifts between meanings, adds layers to the work.

For us, form is often as important as content. The same message can resonate differently depending on how it's conveyed. Mastering diverse forms allows us to communicate through a wider range of emotional registers. Politics isn't taught to everyone, by design. Too many people around us are poorly informed; we hope to reach them through new and creative forms of communication. We'd like to change that. And the same goes for art: we want to break the glass ceiling and make creative production more accessible.
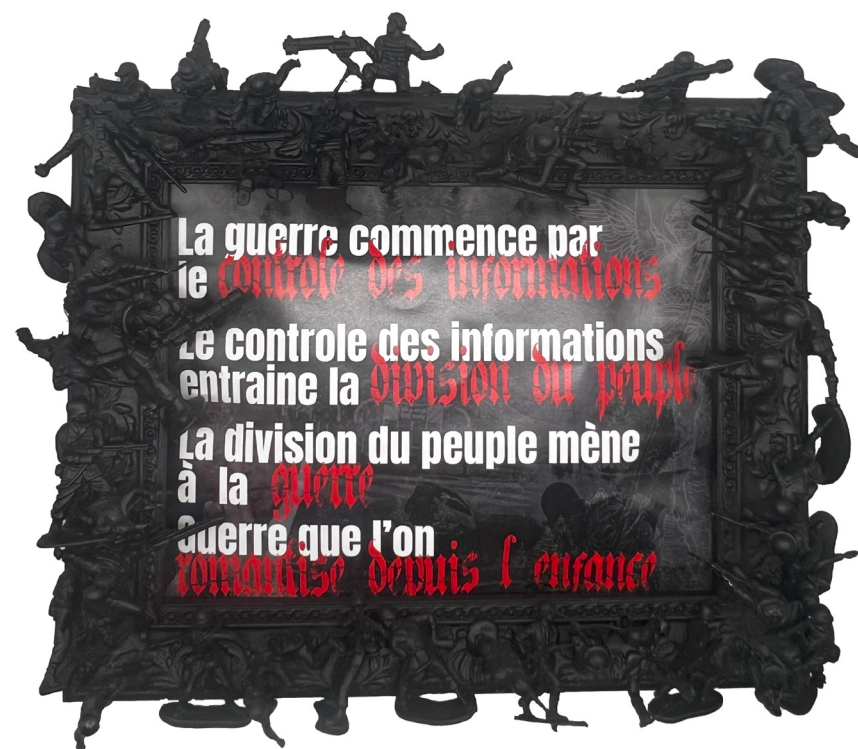
Who are your artistic references, if any?

To be honest, I'm not really into what's traditionally considered "bourgeois" art. It often feels repetitive, beautiful maybe, but emotionally flat. I prefer seeing rage, passion, and urgency in art. For example, we joined a graffiti collective supporting Palestine, and the work produced there really speaks to me. I don't have one specific artist I look up to; our inspiration usually comes from the problems we're facing. But if I had to name a few: Jul, (a French rapper from Marseille and the most-listened-to artist in France for five years in a row, is deeply connected to his local community and to the broader 'masses' who share similar experiences of precarity, lack of prospects, and disillusionment). His work covers a full range of emotions, showing deep sensitivity, and he manages to stay grounded in his community despite his success. He shares his wealth and visibility with the people he grew up with. Also, Ben PLG (Ben PLG, a French rapper from the north of France, is known for his raw, introspective lyrics and his close connection to working-class youth). Emerging from a background marked by social struggle, he gives voice to those facing precarity, marginalization, and a lack of future prospects, because he is incredibly precise in the way he narrates everyday life. When he talks about his grandmother, it feels like he's talking about mine. I also appreciate how committed he is to making culture accessible, especially to those in difficult situations. He's worked with a lot of associations to offer free concerts and cultural programs for underserved communities. The approach of both rappers shows that it is possible to make popular music while staying true to one's beliefs, without compromising on the message or the way it is presented. In fact, they wouldn't be so successful if they hadn't stayed 'real'; that authenticity is what appeals to people. They see themselves in these artists, and through that shared experience, they find the strength to imagine a way out of the hopelessness of everyday life.

Your collective spans across many mediums, music, graffiti, design, fashion. What is your relationship to artistic creation? Do you identify as artists, or is creation just a vehicle for something else? Is diversification important to you?

The diversity of our work comes from our different individual paths and interests, but also from a desire to stay open and experimental. Being able to work across disciplines helps us speak to different people in different ways. It also prevents our work from becoming unoriginal or sterile. Staying agile, fluid, and curious is key to keeping our production alive and relevant.

Do you have a final message for readers of the journal?

Don't hesitate to act, to create, to speak out. We all have a place in this world to express our ideas.

The Rising Tide

Reanna Valentine

This poem was catalysed experiencing a sudden increase in hate speech aimed at me on stage and after performing in early 2025. This was in the context of the UK government's increasing discrimination against both the trans and disabled communities at home, and continued complicity in the genocide in Palestine. Poetry is what I can do in response, the skills I have to offer to the much wider struggle. The poem is aimed at recruiting quiet bystanders into supportive action. We all need to be unified against the rising tide of global fascism, otherwise we all lose in the end.

Reanna Valentine is a poet, printmaker and disabled trans activist. Their solo chapbook 'Mad Again' (Written Off Publishing) followed Saboteur Award-nominated 'Fragmented Light', co-authored with their grandmother Carolyn Reed. Reanna is part of improvised poetry and harp act ULTIMATE TIGERFROG, poetry jam Hyphae Collective and exhibits at Hastings Arts Forum.

Videographer: Immo Horn

Venue: Poetry Brothel Hastings (@poetrybrothelhastings)

You can watch the discussion by scanning this QR code or by following this link:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kbXB0oxx8YQuEuUtaT41Grqgb47co-l2/view?usp=drivesdk

Erasure poem from the Covid-19 lockdown in Paris, March 2020

Eloise O'Dwyer Armary

These poems are extracted from my verse novel, *Fallow* (WIP), which traces the journey of a student in Paris who turns climate activist during the COVID-19 pandemic. The erasure poems use newspaper clips or articles which I translated from French to English. I extracted words and phrases into standalone poems to subvert the plain meaning of these texts at first reading. The erasure poems chart a quest for meaning behind the pandemic and hidden conversations with Covid-19 as a non-human entity. In a time of lockdowns, when community care meant physical isolation, the act of erasure becomes a symbol for a new common space, and tentatively, social change. The form creatively echoes the critical trend to perceive the COVID-19 pandemic as a unique opportunity to reflect on humanity's responsibilities for the climate crisis and ecological loss. (Corvino, 2021; Geiger, 2021).

I'm a civilian.

Mathias Wargon, 53, head of emergency medicine at Delafontaine Hospital in Saint-Denis

I don't
    want
       war

Our
                       missions are
      emergency   ,

real life

I live only in

                             Fear.
          Fear   Fear
Fear   Fear

"This is only the beginning of the war, and we're already starting to lose soldiers."

Mathias Wargon, 53, head of emergency medicine at Delafontaine Hospital in Saint-Denis (Seine-Saint-Denis)

"I don't like the term 'war medicine.' I prefer the term 'disaster medicine.' I'm a civilian. If I had wanted to practice war medicine, I would have joined the army. Here in Saint-Denis, it's not yet war, but the hospital, the entire hospital, has been put into war mode this week."

 Our lab is preparing tests. We've emptied the wards to accommodate Covid patients. There are some intubated in intensive care today. Admissions are filtered, and visits are limited. In the emergency room, we've completely changed our way of working: we're redirecting less serious cases to the private sector.

"At every level, the hospital has jumped into action to deal with the epidemic. This makes the disconnect with real life all the more shocking."

Every lunchtime, a crisis unit meets for an hour, an hour and a half, to manage all the problems (beds, equipment), sometimes contradicting the decisions made the day before. I spend my days solving problems. My life revolves around the hospital; I live only in the coronavirus.

This is only the beginning of the war, and we are already starting to lose soldiers. In the emergency room, three doctors, a nurse, a nursing assistant, and a stretcher-bearer have contracted the coronavirus. They are confined to their homes while they recover. Fear. We've talked about it a lot this week. Fear of contamination. Fear of going home and infecting loved ones. Fear of seeing people die. Fear of having to choose between patients.

Stéphane Foucart, Elisabeth Pineau, Stéphane Mandard, Nathalie Guibert, and Sandrine Blanchard

(Wargon, 2020)

Associated readings

Corvino, F. (2021) 'The covid-19 pandemic and climate change: Some lessons learned on individual ethics and social justice', *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia,* 77(2–3), pp. 691–714. doi:10.17990/rpf/2021_77_2_0691.

Geiger, N. *et al.* (2021) 'Investigating similarities and differences in individual reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Climate Crisis', *Climatic Change,* 167(1–2). doi:10.1007/s10584-021-03143-8.

Saadat, S., Rawtani, D. and Hussain, C.M. (2020) 'Environmental perspective of covid-19', *Science of The Total Environment,* 728, p. 138870. doi:10.1016/j.scitotenv.2020.138870.

Wargon, M. (2020) 'Journal de crise des blouses blanches: "La consigne est de se cacher quand le brancard passe."', *Le Monde,* 22 March.
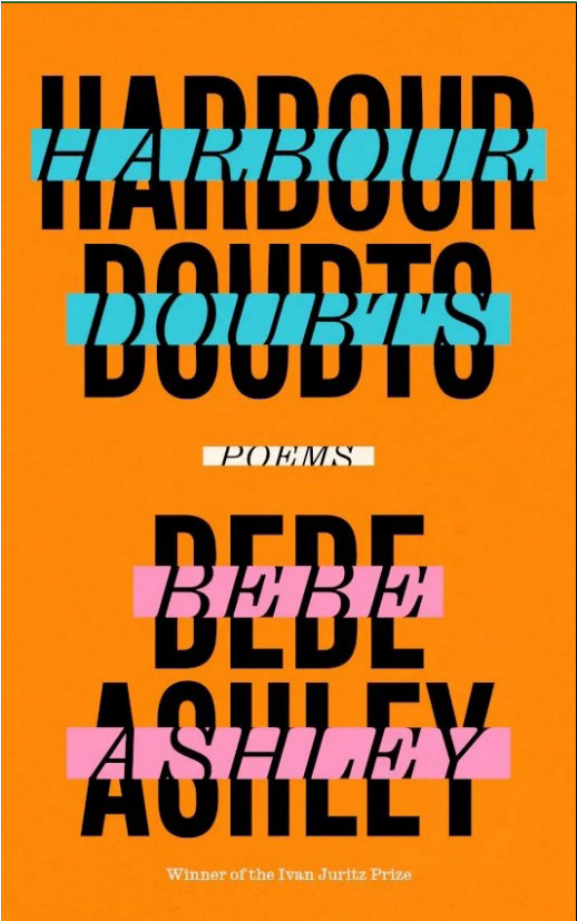
Harbour Doubts

Bebe Ashley, Banshee Press, 2025, 78 pp., ISBN: 978-1-917161-00-8, €12.00 (paperback)

Eloise O'Dwyer-Armary

Bebe Ashley's prizewinning second collection charts the poet's efforts to qualify as a British Sign Language interpreter. Intershot with enquiries into the nature of language as it is spoken and signed, and the process of leaving and finding home, *Harbour Doubts* is a collection that tangles with the burning desire to communicate in the isolation of a late capitalist, post-pandemic world. It's also a love letter to the delights of linguistics and language, a three-dimensional exploration of words and the body. Bringing together meditations on language as mediated through sound, sign, vision, and film, this exciting sophomore collection cements Bebe Ashley's reputation as a fearless experimenter.

Banshee Press, 2025

Harbour Doubts brings together meditations on language and your journey to qualify as a BSL interpreter. Tell us more about your PhD work at the Seamus Heaney Centre. This is where Harbour Doubts first came about.

We have both creative and critical elements in our PhDs. My creative project was a version of *Harbour Doubts* and in my critical element, I specifically looked at *Magma 69: The Deaf Issue.* It took me a long time to find a project that I felt was ambitious but one that I could realistically complete with my skillset. Ultimately, I was interested in *Magma's* publication history, especially in the context of The Equality Act (2010)'s 'protected characteristics' as *Magma* have several themed issues which focus on one of these protected characteristics. Now that I've passed my viva, I'm looking forward to dedicating more of my time to creative experimentation!

In Harbour Doubts, you talk about the pull to speak a language that no one in your surroundings speaks. Why this pull?

I think that poem speaks to a particular time in my life. I love talking about sign language with anybody but now, I get really excited when I meet people that I can sign with. Sometimes I'm so excited that I lose all sense of grammar and later I'll be able to list all the signs that I could've signed more accurately if only I'd slowed down to gather my thoughts.

What have you learned from your training as a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter and learning of Irish Sign Language about d/Deaf representation in society?

I withdrew my application for the interpreting course, so I've only completed a couple of casual and com-

munity-based interpreting courses over the years. So although I still watch shows on BSL Zone or See Hear, I've noticed in the wider entertainment industry there has been an increased visibility of d/Deaf people and more nuanced representation. Sometimes this seems to be after legal cases such as seeing more interpreters at concerts. Recently, I really enjoyed *Code of Silence* not just for Rose Ayling-Ellis's performance but for how the lipreading elements of the show were integral to the whole show and not just one single scene or guest actor. *Only Murders in the Building* also had a fantastic ambient sound episode from the perspective of the series' Deaf character. I hope with more d/Deaf people being given opportunity, we'll see more creative and experimental choices like this.

BSL is classified as a severely endangered language (Deaf Ex-Mainstreamers Group - DEX). What do you think is your role as a hearing speaker in keeping the language alive?

I think we all have a responsibility to protect severely endangered languages. There are several minority languages in the United Kingdom and Ireland, so even if British or Irish Sign Language isn't for you, there are several other languages you could take an interest in and help protect instead. As a hearing person, I believe it's very important to support d/Deaf-led campaigns and education. In learning sign language, you don't only learn vocabulary, but you become much better informed in d/Deaf History and Culture. I'm also trying to use any visibility *Harbour Doubts* might bring as an opportunity to collaborate with the d/Deaf community in the UK and Ireland. For example, my first event with Belfast Book Festival is a collaboration between myself and one of my BSL tutors.

Has learning BSL impacted the way you write poetry in English? Do you use literal translations in poems from BSL?

Learning BSL has impacted how I engage with any form of language. I'm often considering if I know or remember how to sign something, how I could restructure something so that I would know how to sign it, or how I would literally sign what I really mean if I'm being too abstract in English. Another example that I think of most clearly here is how I have translated the title of the book in BSL. In the title, I sign Harbour as Look-After or Care-for.

The third part of the book - [harbour doubts] - is an experimental translation of a British Sign Language speech. The original publication for the Ivan Juritz Prize has a picture of the sign, a translation into English and a poetic commentary. What do you think multilingualism and translation can do for communication in the context of a neoliberal world that pushes individual isolation?

In our current society, I think we are losing a sense of community. I think of some of Yoko Tawada's work which often includes a group of characters from a range of places and who speak many and multiple languages as they work towards a common goal. People are often encouraged to assimilate and conform to the same standards, and I think translation and multilingualism can help create an individual experience of living that is worth protecting.

Your journey follows your efforts and flags your failure in qualifying as a BSL interpreter. Do you think it is important to write narratives about failures? Do you think they somewhat create a counterculture to modernity's success mythology?

I found it quite freeing to write a narrative arc that didn't necessarily end in success or achievement. I feel conflicted about this though because the publication of the book, to me, marks a significant moment of success and achievement so the book comes to represent achievement even without me qualifying as an interpreter. So many people I started writing alongside seem to have stopped and I wonder if part of this is the relentlessness of poetry and of the publishing industry. It feels like you have to be working all the time.

Social media is horrendous for only showing the highlights and forming this curated version of the self that is so inauthentic. I don't believe I am the best poet of my cohort, but I kept writing and applying for opportunities to experience and learn new things and this helped so to write authentically about a goal I had that I didn't achieve felt like a way to reclaim an honesty that is somewhat lost in modern society.

Tell us about your project on Braille and 3D printing. It seems that you are being playful with languages and exploring what different messages we can harvest from each medium, while expanding which mediums are considered artistic.

I switched to learning braille in the pandemic. Learning sign language was a very social activity and when that stopped, I enrolled in a distance learning course and shut myself away in my bedroom with all these printouts from the course. I loved the order of it and how the braille cells build upon themselves. Part of me wonders if I would have learnt braille if I hadn't been looking for so much structure and routine during the pandemic. Again, the 3D printing element developed in the pandemic because although I started with a Perkins brailler and heavyweight paper, I couldn't help but wonder how I could continue to create work when we weren't supposed to share materials and I questioned whether all the antibacterial hand gel we were using could degrade the paper over time. The 3D printing element aimed to create something with more permanence.

What have you learned about the power of poetry as a language to narrate and make sense of our complex world?

I think poetry can be essential in helping people make sense of themselves and the world around us. If you look in standard bookshops so many of the poetry books they stock are anthologies aimed at helping people navigate really big moments in their lives whether that be weddings, funerals. If you look in bookshops that have a more developed contemporary poetry section, you'll find collections from such a vast array of difference and experience. I feel closer to other people when I read poetry as I get a glimpse of how they see and interpret our world.

Poiesis Against Empire: Negri's Aesthetic Theory and Palestinian Resistance Poetry

Gianluca Bellomo, ENS de Lyon

I can write a poem
with the blood that pours,
with the tears, with the dust in my chest,
with the teeth of the bulldozer, with torn-apart limbs,
with the rubble of the building, with the sweat of the rescuers,
with the cries of women and children,
with the wail of sirens, with the remains of a tree I love,
with all these faces searching for their missing,
with the voice of little Anas beneath the ruins whispering: "I am still alive,"
with bodies stripped of features,
with waiting, waiting, and still more waiting!
I can write a poem with the roar of betrayal,
with naked silence,
with the viscous neutrality, with unmasked impotence,
with servility toward America.
What can a poem do?

Youssef Elqedra[1]

Abstract

This article investigates the revolutionary potential of poetic creation by bringing Antonio Negri's aesthetic theory of poetry as *poiesis* into dialogue with Palestinian resistance poetry. For Negri, the act of creation is a constituent power [*potenza*] that can contest imperialist domination opening to ontological alternatives of being and sense. Palestinian poets enact this force by transforming poetry into an act of counter-power, of affirmation of life under conditions of Israeli occupation and genocide. Moving between Negri's theorization of art and the lived practices of Palestinian poets, the article highlights how creative activity generates common sense, affective engagement and imaginative horizons that sustain and orient struggles for liberation.

Keywords: Antonio Negri, Palestinian resistance poetry, *poiesis*, ontology, imperialism

On October 7, 2023, the world's attention turned to Palestine – not for the first time, nor, tragically, for the last. What followed was a military campaign by Israel that human rights organizations, international legal experts, and UN officials have characterized as genocidal in scope and intent[2]. After two years, over 68,000 Palestinians have been killed[3], with the death toll rising daily, alongside the systematic destruction of hospitals, schools, universities, and cultural institutions[4]. Yet, amid this catastrophic violence, Palestinian poets continue to write. From the rubble of bombed homes, from displacement camps, from the precarious shelter of what remains, poetic production endures – not as a luxury of peacetime, but as an act of resistance. This persistence is neither paradoxical, nor heroic, nor surprising. Rather, it represents the continuation of a decades-long tradition

of Palestinian resistance poetry against Zionist colonialism[5]: an anti-imperialist struggle that predates the current genocide by generations, stretching back to the *Nakba* of 1948, the Israeli ethnic cleansing and expulsion of Palestinian Arabs[6].

This article seeks to interrogate the revolutionary potential of Palestinian poetic creation by engaging Antonio Negri's aesthetic theory, specifically his conceptualization of poetry as *poiesis*. In doing so, we aim to explore how creative production might constitute a form of counter-power against imperialist domination. To understand this phenomenon, we aim to situate Palestinian resistance poetry within the broader context of contemporary imperialism, what Antonio Negri with Michael Hardt theorise as "Empire"[7] – a new form of sovereignty that emerged

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1   Youssef Elqedra, "Cosa può una poesia?," in *Il loro grido è la mia voce. Poesie da Gaza*, ed. Alessandra Bocchinfuso, Matteo Soldaini, and Luca Tosti (Rome: Fazi Editore, 2025), my translation.

2   United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, "Israel Has Committed Genocide in the Gaza Strip," report released September 16, 2025, https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/09/israel-has-committed-genocide-gaza-strip-un-commission-finds ; see also Amnesty International, "Amnesty International Concludes Israel Is Committing Genocide Against Palestinians in Gaza," December 5, 2024, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/12/amnesty-international-concludes-israel-is-committing-genocide-against-palestinians-in-gaza/.

3   Between 7 October 2023 and 22 October 2025, according to data from Gaza's Ministry of Health, as reported by OCHA, at least 68,234 Palestinians have been killed and 170,373 injured in the Gaza Strip. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Humanitarian Situation Update #334 | Gaza Strip*, October 22, 2025, https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-update-334-gaza-strip.

4   United Nations Human Rights Council, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel (A/HRC/59/26)*, June 16–July 11 2025, Geneva: United Nations, 2025, https://www.un.org/unispal/document/report-of-the-independent-international-commission-of-inquiry-on-the-occupied-palestinian-territory-including-east-jerusalem-and-israel-a-hrc-59-26/.

5   Arnon Golan, "European Imperialism and the Development of Modern Palestine: Was Zionism a Form of Colonialism?," *Space and Polity* 5, no. 2 (2001): 127–143.

6   Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (London and New York: Oneworld, 2006).

7   Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

with globalization, operating not through the territorial boundaries of nation-states but through deterritorialised networks of power: economic flows, information systems, military alliances, and transnational governance structures. Unlike classical imperialism, which was organised around competing national empires, contemporary Empire functions as a decentred, multilayered configuration of interrelated but unequal powers. It operates not only via direct territorial occupation (although this remains a key mechanism), but via a network of command, a diffuse system of governance that is exercised simultaneously through material coercion and symbolic and cognitive domination[8].

Within this theoretical framework, Palestine emerges not as an isolated tragedy, but as an emblematical case of imperialist barbaric consequences[9]. The Israeli siege operates within and as part of the global architecture of Empire[10]: sustained by Western military aid, justified by transnational discourse networks, embedded in flows of capital and technology, and normalized by multilayered governance structures[11]. Understanding Palestine in light of Negri and Hardt's conception of imperialism allows us to recognize how local violence is inseparable from global structures of domination, and how it is an expression of a broader imperial logic[12].

Negri's theoretical project, however, extends beyond a diagnosis of imperialist power to the theorization of resistance against it, granting art a position of central importance. In his reflections on art and aesthetic production in the age of Empire, Negri conceptualizes poetry as *poiesis* – a creative, constituent power capable of resisting imperial domination through the production of new being and meaning[13]. This theorization of poetry as resistance provides a philosophical framework for understanding Palestinian creative production not as an isolated cultural phenomenon, but as a form of counter-power: an ontological and political practice that directly challenges the death-dealing logic of imperialism.

The endeavour to connect Negri's aesthetic theory with the Palestinian experience of resistance poetry requires particular delicacy. This is not only because of epistemological concerns, given that Negri never directly addressed such contexts, but more urgently because of the current situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and the ongoing genocide. The risk of romanticizing poetry's role, or of naively asserting that a poem might concretely save lives while thousands of Palestinians die daily from starvation[14], thirst, and Israeli and American bombs[15], would be not only reductive and ethically inappropriate, but outrageous. This is neither our intention nor what Negri proposes or would endorse.

The methodological challenge, therefore, is twofold: to avoid the colonising gesture of imposing Western theory upon non-Western experience while refusing the false alternative of hermetic cultural particularism. To read Palestinian poetry through Negri is to stage a dialogue between theory and *praxis* a dialogue that is doubly motivated and mutually transformative. On the one hand Negri's concept of *poiesis* can illuminate the ontological dimension of Palestinian poetic resistance, enabling us to theorize it as artistic production under Empire; on the other hand, Palestinian poetry grounds and challenges Negri's philosophical categories within the empirical, practical, material and historical specificity of colonial occupation and decolonial struggle, transforming theoretical concepts into lived, urgent practice. By bringing Palestinian poetry into dialogue with Negri's theoretical framework, this article aims to interrogate the role of art within contemporary anti-imperialist struggles and more largely about art as a form of resistance or counter-power.

Poetry as Poiesis: Negri's Aesthetic Theory

Within Negri's theory, the question of art receives particular attention in *Art and Multitude*, where he interrogates precisely the status of art and creativity in the postmodern era, the age of Empire[16]. For Negri, art is a synthesis of technogenesis and anthropogenesis[17] – a convergence of technological development (the evolution of tools, techniques, and material conditions of production) and human becoming (the production of subjectivity, social relations, and forms of life). Art, he argues, "always exists within a

specific mode of production, and that it reproduces it – or, more exactly, that it produces it and contests it, that it suffers it and destroys it.[18]" This materialist conception leads him to consider artistic activity not as a completely autonomous sphere detached from social and political life, but as "a mode – a singular form – of labour power[19]", a specific type of productivity.

From this perspective Negri illuminates the dual nature of all artistic production under capital and imperialism: art is simultaneously commodity and creative activity, *poiesis*. It is precisely upon the second aspect – art as *poiesis*, as an act of creation, poetic activity as poietic activity – that Negri concentrates his attention. By framing artistic production through the Greek concept of *poiesis* (ποίησις) — the act of bringing something into being, a mode of making or creating that gives form and transforms matter — Negri positions creative activity as ontologically productive, as the production of new being, the "excedence[20]". Poetry as *poiesis* constitutes a "*potenza* of intelligence and of sense; [a] constituent power.[21]" Within this characterisation, the act of creation assumes the form of a creative "ontological *potenza*.[22]" Unlike power-as-domination (*potere*) – the hierarchical, repressive force exercised by states and institutions, the constituted power – Negri's *potenza* refers to constituent power: the generative, creative capacity of living labor to produce new forms of life, social relations, and subjectivities, new being[23]. In this framework, art is not simply a power structure to be contested, but rather an expression of this constituent capacity, this productive and ontological force of creating new being[24]. This constituent power is not the exclusive domain of a particular class or elite. Rather, it manifests as a genuine anthropological capacity of the "multitude[25]" – the active social subject grounded in the commonality of singularities – for the production of being and resistance to death.

This theorisation resonates distinctly with Deleuze's understanding of artistic creation. In his celebrated lecture on the act of creation, he positioned art fundamentally as resistance, establishing an intimate relationship between the creative act and the act

of resistance itself.[26] For Negri, however, art transcends mere resistance, constituting a real production of being and life[27].

What proves particularly compelling in Negri's reflection is the possibility of generating an exceedance of being, a potentially revolutionary surpassing that the act of creation discloses. Creation configures itself as an unmeasure, an ontological exceedance that discovers a surplus of productivity[28]. The act of creation thus emerges as that which exceeds the determinations of the present, that which overflows the framework of historically given possibilities in order to inaugurate new ones, functioning as a productive counter-power rather than mere resistance. This exceedance remains immanent to material reality and history. Indeed, the multitudinous and revolutionary event of the creative act – the *kairòs*[29] – does not arise from some external elsewhere or *ex nihilo*, but within the very heart of the world's materiality, in a field of historical, social, and political forces. It constitutes a process of continuous creative production interiorised within matter itself. As Negri writes: "the event is not an 'outside' but an internal explosion. The impossibility of 'going-outside': this is, then, what announces creative exceedance.[30]" This internal explosion of creativity enables the surpassing of present contradictions not through evasion, but through internal transformation, proceeding from what is already-there. The act of creation thus represents, for Negri, a process of continuous metamorphic transformation of being – of subjectivities and the world – toward the constitution of the common as an alternative to Empire[31].

From Nakba to Genocide: The History of Palestinian Poetry

Negri's reflection on poetry as an act of creation and resistance, while not providing concrete examples of revolutionary artistic forms, inevitably evokes the experience of Palestinian resistance poetry. When we situate the Palestinian question within the framework of imperialism, the connection between Negri's theory and the poetic practices that emerge from an-

8   Ibid.
9   Mahmoud Ayyash, "The Western Imperial Order on Display in Gaza: Palestine as an Ideological Fault Line in the International Arena," *Third World Quarterly* (2025): 1–18.
10   Khalid Siddiqui, "Palestine, Imperialism, and the Settler Colonial Project," *World Financial Review* (2025): 16–31.
11   Ibid.
12   Michael Hardt and Sandro Mezzadra, "A Global War Regime," *Theory* (May 9, 2024).
13   Antonio Negri, *Art and Multitude*, trans. Ed Emery (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 93.
14   UNICEF, "Famine Confirmed for First Time in Gaza," press release, August 22, 2025, https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/famine-confirmed-first-time.gaza.
15   Al Jazeera, "US-Made Bombs Used in Deadly Israeli Strikes on Gaza Schools, HRW Says," *Al Jazeera*, August 7, 2025, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/8/7/us-made-bombs-used-in-deadly-israeli-strikes-on-gaza-schools-hrw-says.
16   Antonio Negri, "Art and Culture in the Age of Empire and the Time of the Multitudes," trans. M. Henninger, *Italian Post-Workerist Thought 36*, no. 1 (2007): 47–55.
17   Negri, *Art and Multitude,* 108.
18   Ibid.
19   Ibid.
20   Ibid., 93.
21   Ibid., 108.
22   Ibid., 82.
23   Ibid.
24   Ibid., 73.
25   Ibid.
26   Gilles Deleuze, "What Is the Creative Act?," lecture, FEMIS, Paris, March 17, 1987, trans. C. J. Stivale, https://deleuze.cla.purdue.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/1a-Deleuze-What-Is-A-Creative-Act-English_1.pdf.
27   Negri, *Art and multitude*, 93.
28   Ibid.
29   Antonio Negri, *Kairòs, Alma Venus, Multitudo: Nove lezioni impartite a me stesso* (Rome: Manifestolibri, 2000).
30   Negri, *Art and Multitude*, 116.
31   Ibid., 86.

ti-imperialist struggle in Palestine becomes readily apparent. This poetic tradition, spanning from 1948 to the contemporary period, constitutes a paradigmatic case for analysing poetry as an act of creation and resistance during the age of Empire.

The consolidation of poetry as a fundamental practice in occupied Palestine from 1948 onwards reveals a dual symbolic and strategic significance. On one hand, it testifies to the persistence of the identitarian bond linking Palestinian intellectuals to the most deeply rooted expressive traditions of the Arab world; on the other, it constitutes a tactical response to the colonial policies of control and repression that characterized both the British Mandatory administration (1917-1948) and the subsequent Israeli occupation regime[32]. The privileged adoption of the poetic medium responds to specific practical exigencies: its intrinsic portability and memorability facilitate clandestine dissemination, enabling the evasion of censorial apparatuses with greater efficacy than other literary forms[33].

The organization of public poetic festivals[34], such as the Arabic poetry festival of 1958 in Acre[35], represented the principal vector through which the first generation of post-1948 poets succeeded in establishing direct dialogue with Palestinian communities remaining in the occupied territory[36]. These cultural events witnessed the participation of preeminent figures in the Palestinian literary panorama such as Tawfiq Zayyad (1929-1994), Rashid Hussein (1936-1977), Samih al-Qasim (1939-2014), Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008) and Salim Gubran (1941-2011). The biographical profile of these authors – formed within the post-traumatic climate of the *Nakba* and largely originating from subaltern social environments – determined their orientation toward militant poetry, characterized by pronounced sensitivity to working-class and peasant concerns. The interweaving of social imperatives and national claims conferred upon Palestinian poetic production an unequivocally progressive physiognomy, transforming it into a privileged instrument of political mobilisation and cultural elaboration of liberation struggles. This first generation subsequently gave rise to a po-

etic tradition encompassing not only exiled Palestinians but also those within occupied Palestine itself, in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip[37]. Contemporary poets such as Mosab Abu Toha, Refaat Alareer (1979-2023), Doha Al-Kahlout, Alaa Al-Qatrawi, Mona Al-Msaddar, Nour Baaloucha, Hind Joudah, Karim Kattan, Husam Maarouf, and Nasser Rabbah represent only some of the many voices that animate Palestinian poetic production today.

This problematisation of place of art during imperialism and the interrogation of poetry's real efficacy as an act of resistance, finds therefore particularly acute articulation in the reflections of Palestinian poets and intellectuals themselves. Even before the present escalation of violence into genocide, during the long decades of occupation and apartheid, figures such as Mohammed El-Kurd have engaged in critical self-examination regarding the role of culture in Palestinian liberation, raising fundamental questions about art's function and the artist's responsibility in confronting the brutality of Zionist colonial policy. As El-Kurd observes, "it's hard to imagine what a poem can do in the barrel of a gun,[38]" a remark that simultaneously illuminates the pervasive sense of powerlessness that pervades many intellectuals and cautions against idealising the poet's role in the face of war or the rhetoric of "to exist is to resist." Likewise, other contemporary poets such as Hind Joudah and Yousef Elqedra, writing amid genocide, interrogate within their verses what it means to be a poet in wartime[39] and what efficacy poetry can still claim when confronted with such barbarity and criminality[40]. In this sense, Adorno's celebrated remark regarding the possibility of writing poetry *after* Auschwitz[41] – "After Auschwitz, to write poetry is barbaric" – assumes a distinctive configuration in the contemporary context, transforming into the question of what it means to compose poetry *during* Gaza.

For the reasons previously articulated, this article harbours neither the ambition nor the presumption of providing definitive answers to a question of such complexity and sensitivity, particularly given the tragic circumstances experienced by Palestin-

ians. Nevertheless, exercising due methodological and ethical caution, the association between Negri's theoretical framework and the Palestinian poetic experience of resistance retains, in our assessment, considerable heuristic significance, as it opens fundamental inquiries concerning the power of art and creativity when confronted with the most authoritarian and brutal manifestations of imperialism. The Palestinian context emerges as a liminal case through which to interrogate and problematise Negri's theory regarding the power of poetry as *poiesis* in the era of Empire. Gaza represents in fact one of the most tragic manifestations of contemporary imperialism's evolution, where economic systems have become inextricably intertwined with systematic violence and crimes against humanity[42]. It stands as a stark case of how economic imperialism can metastasise into genocidal capitalism[43], a formation in which the logic of capital accumulation operates through the systematic elimination of populations deemed surplus or obstacles to territorial and economic expansion. This configuration thus demands reflection on the actual efficacy and revolutionary potential of poetic creation in resisting such regimes of brutality and erasure.

The Poetic Constitution of the Common

Negri's interrogation of the creative act leads him to consider not only the production of being – the event (*kairòs*) – but also the sense of that production, thereby establishing an essential connection between event and storytelling. He argues that "[t]he crisis of the revolutionary event is tied to the failure of revolutionary story-telling, and only a new story-telling will succeed in determining, let us not say a revolutionary event, but even its thinkability.[44]" Storytelling functions as the imaginative apparatus that repositions us in anticipation of the event – the ontological rupture in history as revolutionary possibility –, but more crucially, it enables us to engage the projective construction of its realization. For Negri, artistic and poetic practice constitutes the privileged site where new narratives about being

can be elaborated, narratives capable of giving form and sense to emerging ontological possibilities. By reading "the future as imagination in action,[45]" creative activity produces the narrative of ontological alternatives, the implicit blueprint of the exceedance that allows rupture to unfold in its full ontological weight. Within storytelling, the imagination of the *multitude*, as *poiesis*, remains in motion: a productive imagination endowed with the power to construct the meaning of the world at every step.

Reality can be reconfigured from its foundations, shattering crystallized significations and opening the field to alternative possibilities. The creative act thus provides the groundwork for the event while simultaneously establishing, through story-telling, the necessary sense that allows its unfolding. Indeed, the "decision for new being" occurs, as Negri insists, "in that prolongation of being, in that event of *kairòs*, which we call imagination.[46]" Imagination thereby emerges as the power of *kairòs*, a "power [*potenza*] of collective communication and constitution[47]" that binds human beings into new collective formations by establishing a new common sense, a shared sense of the common. In this respect, imagination is itself a creator of new being. The imaginative act thus becomes collective not because multiple individuals imagine simultaneously, but because the poetic work itself constructs a common: a shared linguistic, affective, imaginative, symbolic and conceptual terrain upon which collective subjectivity can be built. Palestinian resistance poetry exemplifies this dynamic: poems circulate through refugee camps, across checkpoints, in demonstrations, becoming collective property that binds dispersed individuals into a common horizon of meaning and struggle.

The artistic act that aspires to revolutionary transformation cannot therefore remain content as mere formal expression; it must bear meaning – that is, direction and value toward the being it seeks to produce, toward that ontological alternative Negri designates as "the common." For Negri, "the very desire for the common is an action that demands meaning and direction.[48]" This sense that must orient the on-

32   Khaled Furani, "Dangerous Weddings: Palestinian Poetry Festivals during Israel's First Military Rule," *Arab Studies Journal* 21, no. 1 (2013): 81.

33   Ibid, p.82.

34   Ibid, pp. 79–100.

35   Maha Nassar, "Decolonization and Cultural Production among Palestinian Citizens of Israel," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 50, no. 4 (2018): 778–780.

36   Joseph R. Farag, *Politics and Palestinian Literature in Exile: Gender, Aesthetics and Resistance in the Short Story* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 18.

37   Saddik M. Gohar, "Narratives of Diaspora and Exile in Arabic and Palestinian Poetry," *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 12, no. 1 (2020): 90-103.

38   Mohammed El-Kurd, "What Role Does Culture Play in Palestinian Liberation?," *Mondoweiss*, September 2023.

39   Hind Joudah, "Une poétesse en temps de guerre," in *Gaza. Y a-t-il une vie avant la mort?*, ed. Yassin Adnan (Paris: Points, 2025), 145.

40   Elqedra, "Cosa può una poesia?".

41   Theodor W. Adorno, *Prismen. Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* [1955] (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1963), 26. "Nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch." ["After Auschwitz, to write poetry is barbaric." (my translation)].

42   United Nations, "Israeli Attacks on Educational, Religious and Cultural Sites in the Occupied Palestinian Territory Amount to War Crimes and the Crime against Humanity of Extermination, UN Commission Says," Geneva, 10 June 2025, https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/06/israeli-attacks-educational-religious-and-cultural-sites-occupied.

43   On the neoliberal apartheid policy in Palestine: Adam H. Clarno, *Neoliberal Apartheid: Palestine/Israel and South Africa after 1994* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); see also Francesca Albanese, *From Economy of Occupation to Economy of Genocide*, Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied since 1967, presented at the 59th session of the Human Rights Council (Geneva: United Nations, June 30, 2025), https://www.un.org/unispal/document/a-hrc-59-23-from-economy-of-occupation-to-economy-of-genocide-report-special-rapporteur-francesca-albanese-palestine-2025/.

44   Negri, *Art and multitude*, 73-74.

45   Ibid, p. 73.

46   Negri, *Kairòs, Alma Venus, Multitudo*, 28.

47   Antonio Negri, *Lenta Ginestra. Saggio sull'ontologia di Giacomo Leopardi* (Milan: Sugarco, 1987); translated as *Flower of the Desert: Giacomo Leopardi's Poetic Ontology*, trans. T. S. Murphy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), 104.

48   Antonio Negri, *Arte e Multitudo* (Roma: Derive Approdi 2014), 94 (my translation). The 2014 Italian edition incorpo-

tological production of the commons is fundamentally, in his framework, an ethical one. Thus "the aesthetic act [...] ends by finding ethical decision on its path.[49]" The passage to ethics is what allows aesthetic *potenza* to become truly productive of a meaningful word: "the construction of a meaningful world – this is the way out of the postmodern.[50]", the cultural age of imperialism.

Art, as a privileged domain of meaning-production, emerges simultaneously as potentiality and as ethics[51]. Creative practice is not autonomous aesthetic activity, but always-already embedded within ethical and political frameworks that guide the production of alternative forms of being. Its revolutionary potential depends less on the novelty of forms than on their capacity to orient collective imagination toward the construction of commons-based alternatives to existing social arrangements. The intersection of aesthetic and ethical dimensions thus discloses transformative art as *praxis*. Art is a production of meaning that grounds new collective horizons of liberation. Imagination thus emerges as an ethical force, one that traverses and exceeds the void – the absence of meaning – and the catastrophic crises of imperialism, generating a production that reveals itself as fundamentally ethico-political. This marks the leap from theoretical contemplation to practical engagement.

The capacity to construct a meaningful world (a world that make sense) – the common – represents, for Negri, an ontological alternative liberated and opened by acts of creation, a passage into ethical and normative territory: the experience of the common becomes possible only insofar as the subject constitutes itself as a moral and political agent. Hence poetry and imagination must articulate themselves primarily through ethical action and the constitution of a multitudinarian and materialist *telos*: a purpose neither transcendental nor abstract, but historical and immanent to the multiplicity of singularities composing the *multitude*[52]. This purpose emerges from below, from each and all simultaneously, as a collective project of liberation. In this sense, Negri writes, "sustained by an ethical appreciation of the real, sense and imagination carry on this harsh struggle that is the very form of existence[53]" within

the historical process. This formulation positions creative imagination not as escapist fantasy but as a concrete force for transformation that operates through ethical commitment to collective liberation.

The decisive element, therefore, lies in the articulation of poetic imagination with moral and political practice – in the determination that our emotion and imagination become transformative action. This action must be understood as intervention within life itself, "from within life to qualify its common dimension, to make sense of it.[54]" Such action is both ethical *praxis* and aesthetic *poiesis*: a creative act that represents an encounter between struggle and art, a mode of artistic engagement with reality. To act artistically is to construct new forms of being and novel understandings of existence[55]; transformative action must therefore embody poetry. The production of new being entails with the reality of death. As Negri writes: "In our poetry, there is equally the attempt to live longer and to overcome death – that is, to exalt life through greater investments in health policies, in welfare more generally, in ecological policies...because these 'banalities' are beautiful.[56]" Creative practice is thus not separate from material concerns but integral to the construction of conditions that sustain and enhance life. The poetic dimension of political action thereby becomes a means of generating ontological alternatives capable of contesting structures of domination and annihilation.

Poetic and Political Resistance: A Common Front

This dialectical relationship between artistic production and political engagement as articulated in Negri's thought finds a parallel in the theoretical reflections of Palestinian militants and artists. The trajectory of Ghassan Kanafani – novelist and prominent figure within the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine who was eliminated by Israeli intelligence operations in 1972[57] – exemplifies this symbiotic interconnection between poetical and political struggle. In *On Zionist Literature*, Kanafani particularly attuned to the role that Zionist literary production played in legitimising and articulating Israel's imperialist colonial project[58], and argued that

cultural forms of opposition can hold equivalent value to armed resistance in the pursuit of Palestinian liberation. This perspective recognises the symbolic[59] dimensions of domination and counter-domination, and positions creative activity as a joint front in anti-colonial struggle. Such an understanding, similarly evident in the postcolonial analyses of Barbara Harlow and Edward Said[60], acknowledges that the movement of liberation, as the exercise of hegemonic control, operates through both military force and symbolic acts, necessitating resistance strategies that engage simultaneously with material occupation and the cultural apparatus that sustains it.

The decisive power of poetry as an instrument of struggle is evident, moreover, in the very fact that it has been and continues to be censored by the Israeli government, which recognizes its revolutionary potential impact and fears its consequences[61]. The systematic targeting of literary voices reveals a deliberate strategy of intellectual suppression within the occupied territories. Poets whose work addressed themes such as national self-determination, the right of return for refugees, and resistance to military occupation frequently faced imprisonment[62] and physical abuse, as in the cases of Dareen Tatour or Mosab Abu Toha[63]. This pattern of persecution extends beyond isolated cases, encompassing a broader campaign aimed at the Palestinian intelligentsia. The deliberate assassination of scholars, cultural figures, and creative practitioners represents an attempt to silence critical discourse and to discourage popular engagement in movements for national liberation. Between October 7, 2023, and February 11, 2024, alone, at least 45 artists were killed in Gaza according to the fifth report by the Palestinian Ministry of Culture[64] – figure that predates the most intense phases of bombardment in late 2024 and 2025, suggesting the actual death toll among creative workers has since escalated dramatically.

These tactics underscore how cultural production functions as a site of political contestation, wherein artistic creation is perceived as sufficiently threatening to justify violent repression. The targeting of artists and intellectuals reflects an acknowledgment of the power inherent in cultural labour to shape collective consciousness and mobilise resistance against oppressive structures. The killings of artist-activists such as Ghassan Kanafani, Kamal Nasser provide stark evidence of Israel's strategy to suppress resistance through every available means – a strategy whose implementation continues to this day, as in the case of Refaat Alareer[65]. The suppression extends beyond Palestine's borders to target artists and cultural workers globally who support the Palestinian cause, with social media platforms playing a particularly insidious role, as documented by the UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Irene Khan[66]. Meta's systematic censorship of Palestine-related content on Instagram and Facebook[67] – documented in reports showing algorithmic suppression, content removal, and account suspensions disproportionately affecting Palestinian voices and their supporters – reveals how Western digital media become complicit in silencing resistance narratives. This multi-layered strategy of suppression – assassinations, infrastructure destruction, legal persecution, digital censorship – demonstrates the extent to which cultural production is recognized as a genuine threat to Zionist imperial power, sufficiently dangerous to warrant comprehensive elimination across all available domains.

That warfare and struggle unfold within aesthetic, symbolic, and ideological domains represents a proposition simultaneously obvious yet rarely subjected to serious analytical consideration within philosophical and political discourse. Creative activity possesses the capacity to operate on cognitive

rates a series of newly included texts, among them the *Lettera a Nicolas (Letter to Nicolas)*, from which the present quotation is derived.

49   Negri, *Art and multitude,* 119.
50   Ibid., 29.
51   Ibid., 30.
52   Ibid., 121, 123.
53   Negri, *Flower of the Desert*, 103.
54   Negri, *Lettera a Nicolas,* 90.
55   Negri, "Art and Culture in the Age of Empire and the Time of the Multitudes", 55.
56   Negri, *Art and Multitude,* 86.
57   Danny Rubinstein, *Why Didn't You Bang on the Sides of the Tank?* (מדוע לא דפקתם על דפנות המכלית?) (תולדה רפוס :ינאפנכ ןאס'ע) (Tel Aviv: Yedioth Books - Books in the Attic, 2022).
58   Ghassan Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature* [1967, في الأدب الصهيوني], trans. M. Najib (Oxford: Ebb Books, 2022).

59   In the sense of Pierre Bourdieu, *Méditations pascaliennes*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1997): a struggle for the imposition of embodied schemata of perception and evaluation, which give meaning to reality and influence the perception of the world and the practices of people; a struggle to impose the legitimate principle of vision and division, to create and legitimate the world and his sense.
60   Barbara Harlow, *Resistance and Literature* (London: Methuen, 1987); Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993).
61   Meron Benvenisti, ed., *Israeli Censorship of Arab Publications: A Survey* (New York: Fund for Free Expression, 1984); Adam Raz, "When Israel Censored Poets for Being 'Tools of Expression of Arab Nationalism'," *Haaretz*, May 2021.
62   Stéphanie Latte Abdallah, *La toile carcérale : Une histoire de l'enfermement en Palestine* (Paris: Bayard Éditions, 2021).
63   Noa Shpigel, "Israeli Arab Poet Dareen Tatour Gets Five-Month Sentence for Incitement on Social Media," *Haaretz*, July 31, 2018; Gideon Levy and Alex Levac, "In 2016 Israel, a Palestinian Writer Is in Custody for Her Poetry," *Haaretz*, May 21, 2016; Amira Hass, "Renowned Palestinian-American Poet Released after Israel Arrest in Gaza," *Haaretz*, November 21, 2023.
64   Atef Abu Saif, *The Fourth Preliminary Report on the Cultural Sector's Damages: The War on the Gaza Strip,* October 7, 2023 – February 11, 2024 (Ministry of Culture, 2024), https://drive.google.com/file/d/13Ig3uc1vWFzWZqQeRjzTeutNPt-dGt50/view .
65   Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, Israeli Strike on Refaat Alareer Apparently Deliberate, December 7, 2023; Dan Sheehan, "Poet and Scholar Refaat Alareer Has Been Killed by an Israeli Airstrike," Literary Hub, December 7, 2023.
66   United Nations, A/79/319: Global Threats to Freedom of Expression Arising from the Conflict in Gaza: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Irene Khan (Geneva: United Nations, 2025); Zoe Lafferty, "Dreams of Liberation: Israel's Censorship of Palestinian Art," Middle East Eye, October 3, 2022.
67   Human Rights Watch, *Meta's Broken Promises: Systemic Censorship of Palestine Content on Instagram and Facebook* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2023).

and emotional registers, enabling both rational and affective engagement with contested issues while generating the sense that motivates action[68]. Palestinian poetry does not merely represent suffering or resistance but actively constructs horizons of common sense essential to collective mobilisation – both affective and imaginative – required for liberation struggle. This understanding recognises that political transformation necessitates not only political organization but also the cultivation of shared imaginative frameworks and emotional investments that sustain collective commitment. The *potenza* of creative work lies in its ability to synthesise analytical and affective dimensions of political consciousness, providing both imaginative and emotional resonance that enable sustained engagement with transformative projects of liberation. Such cultural production becomes integral rather than supplementary to political processes, shaping the imaginative and affective conditions within which collective action becomes possible and meaningful.

The act of creation provides those subjected to domination with the capacity to articulate autonomous narratives that function as counter-hegemonic production, while simultaneously enabling the imagination and production of transformative possibilities beyond present circumstances. Through poetic practices, marginalised communities assert a new narrative sovereignty, challenging dominant interpretations of their experience and establishing alternative schemata for understanding and producing their collective identity. They generate meaning, which may be understood as "speaking out within being.[69]" Creative production thus exceeds mere documentation or testimony, extending into the imaginative construction of potential futures capable of overturning current conditions of subjugation. The constituent power of creative action thus operates across multiple temporal dimensions: it reclaims interpretive agency over the interpretation of past and present realities while inaugurating imaginative spaces from which liberation can be envisioned within the present.

Building from Ruins: Ontological Alternatives of Being and Sense

The affirmative force of poetry theorized by Negri resonates powerfully with the reflections of Palestinian poet Youssef Elqedra on writing during genocide: "writing is not just a record of destruction, but an act of counter-creation. The writer reshapes the city with words, rebuilds the alleys destroyed by bombs, etches on paper the faces of those who have so suddenly disappeared. Each text carries within it this continuous effort to preserve something of the spirit of the place, despite all attempts to root it out.[70]" The act of creation as *potenza* embodies ontological force insofar as it partakes in sense-making processes, constructs imaginative horizons, and lays the affective foundations that sustain and motivate liberatory *praxis*.

This ontological power of imaginative reconstruction from ruins finds exemplification in the work of two poets separated by generation yet united in purpose: Mahmoud Darwish, among the most celebrated voices of the post-*Nakba* generation, and Haidar al-Ghazali, a young poet writing from Gaza. In Darwish's *Here, Now, Here and Now*[71], included in his last poem collection *The Dice Player*, the poet positions Palestinian existence precisely at the threshold between annihilation and persistence: "Here, among the fragments of something / and nothing, we live / on the outskirts of eternity." The spatial coordinates – "fragments," "outskirts" – map a geography of dispossession and precarity, yet the declaration "We are still here / building from the ruins / dovecotes of lunar pigeons" performs what Negri identifies as constituent power. The act of building "from ruins" is the creation of what will be – dovecotes for "lunar pigeons" that, through poetic labour, materialize the imaginative architectures destined to shelter a future of freedom.

68   Mark A. Runco and Garrett J. Jaeger, "The Standard Definition of Creativity," *Creativity Research Journal* 24, no. 1 (2012): 92-96.
69   Negri, *Art and multitude*, 38.
70   Youssef Elqedra, trans. M. Lynx Qualey, "Writing in Gaza: An Act of Existence in the Shadows of War", in *Arablit*, January 2025.
71   Mahmoud Darwish, "Here, Now, Here and Now," in *The Dice Player*, from *Qui, ora, qui e ora*, in *Il giocatore d'azzardo,* trans. Fawzi Al Delmi (Messina: Mesogea, 2015), my translation.

HERE, NOW, HERE AND NOW

Here

Here, among fragments of something
and nothing, we live
on the outskirts of eternity.
We play chess, sometimes, heedless of the fates behind the door.
We are still here
building from ruins
dovecotes of lunar pigeons.
We know the past without being past,
without spending summer nights in search
of the golden heroism that was.
We are who we are, without asking ourselves this question,
and so we are still here
mending the garment of eternity.
We are children of hot and cold air,
children of water, dew, fire, light,
of earth and human pulsions.
Half life and half death we have,
and projects of eternity and identity.
Patriots, like olive trees, we are –
yet weary of narcissus reflected
in the water of patriotic songs.
Sentimental by chance, lyrical not by chance,
yet forgetful of love songs.
Here, in the company of meaning,
we rebelled against form,
changing the ending of the work.
In the new act, we are natural and ordinary,
we do not monopolize God
nor the tears of the victim.
We are still here
and we have great dreams:
to persuade the wolf to play guitar
at the annual ball.
And we have small dreams:
to wake healed of disappointment,
without agitated dreams.
Alive, we remain, and the dream continues.
Here, in what remains of God's word on the rock,
by night and at dawn we continue giving thanks –
who knows, the Invisible might hear us
and reveal to one of our boys
a verse from the song of eternity.

Now

Now, between past and future,
a woman washes her windows.
She neither forgets nor remembers.
Now, the sky is clear.
Now, a friend asks me: What is happiness, now?
Then he leaves, hurriedly, before the answer.
Now, between past and future,
there is a floating, transitory limbo.
Time stops, like the instant between two moments.
Now, the country is beautiful and light.
Now, the hills rise up
to nurse diaphanous clouds
and listen to inspiration.
The future is the lottery of the undecided.
Now, our past polishes an icon of moonstone.
Now, we live past and future together.
And we go in two directions
that might exchange a poetic greeting.
Now, meaning bears the scratches
of a present broken like geography.
Now, in the sleep of a child-time,
white eternity changes the names of the sacred.
No prophet on the coastal road.
Now, in us, a poet is born.
He might choose himself a mother
to know himself.
Now, a present blooms from the pomegranate flower.
Now, the celestial vastness
is the undisputed kingdom of swallows.
Now, you are two, three, twenty, a thousand –
how do you know who you are in this crowd of you?
Now you were.
Now you will be –
know who you are to be.

Here and Now

Here and now, History pays no mind
to trees or the dead.
It falls to trees to grow tall,
different in height and might.
It falls to the dead, here and now,
to copy out their own names
and to know how to die one by one.
It falls to the living to live together,
ignorant of how they will live
without written myths
that free them from the shackles
of soft reality
and from the law of realism.
To the living, say:
We are still here
watching a star shine
in every letter of the alphabet.
To the living, sing:
We are still here
bearing the weight of eternity.

Mahmoud Darwish

Al-Ghazali's *The Alphabet of Universes*[72] extends this poetics of reconstruction through invocation: "Come, let us arrange the alphabet of universes." The alphabet – fundamental building block of language, meaning, world-making – becomes plural ("universes"), suggesting infinite creative possibilities even within constrained conditions. The poet marks "the rendezvous upon your hills," claiming the land through poetic inscription where political sovereignty is denied. Witness is multiplied and materialized in object – "the flute will bear witness / and the dawn will bear witness / and my sunken boats will testify"– all testifying that "universes of poetry" have been prepared.

THE ALFABETH OF UNIVERSES

Come, let us arrange the alphabet of universes. I will mark the
rendezvous upon your hills
and the flute will bear witness
and the dawn will bear witness
and my sunken boats will testify
that I danced with the night grown old
and we prepared universes of poetry
O pomegranate flower.
Come, let us arrange the alphabet of universes.
Carry me beneath your eyelids;
for the sea suffocates me in its vastness
and I sleep on the palms of my hands,
poetry flows from your curves, narrow as breaths for the
drowning.
I am the weary phoenix of ash-stories I shed my legend
each night at the doorstep, become a raven, prisoner of your
moonlight.

Lay your mantle upon my chest
and I become a seagull or a dove. Come, let us arrange the
alphabet of universes.
O land of the breathless, why did you take the last
pomegranate flower?
Why did we let ourselves draw universes on the walls of
boats?
Why, O land of the breathless,
are our chests beneath the sea
beneath the courtyards?
I will return one day saying: what the drowned
do not know is that had they not carried with them their great
dreams
all the boats would not have sunk.

Haidar al-Ghazali

These poems work to imaginatively reconstruct the land from ashes and rubble, regenerating life from the flames of bombardments. Recurring images – pomegranate flowers that will bloom again, steadfast olive trees whose roots anchor hillsides, doves and birds that will return bearing peace, hope and freedom – resonate throughout these verses. Not as ornamental metaphors but as operative symbols that, through their continuous invocation and circulation, produce the shared affective and imaginative terrain upon which Palestinian collective identity, heritage, resistance, and territorial belonging are constituted. They generate what we might call "Palestinian common sense" – the inherited frameworks through which communities interpret experience, transmit memory, coordinate struggle and will reshape their homeland.

Palestinian resistance poetry as an act of creation functions not merely as testimonial expression of trauma or aspiration, but as an apparatus for producing being, enabling revolutionary possibilities and grounding their legitimacy against the Zionist project of annihilation. The power of such creative work as *poiesis* resides less in its immediate capacity to counter violence than in its role in generating collective memory, constructing shared identity and sensibility, affirming existence, and disclosing pathways toward alternative presents or futures. As Elqedra remarks, "words are not only a means of expressing pain, but an attempt to draw the contours of a different future.[73]"

This understanding resonates powerfully in the work of Fadwa Tuqan (1917-2003), a pivotal poetic voice of both *Naksa* and the First Intifada, whose poetry exemplifies Palestinian *poiesis* as future world-recon-

struction. In *The Deluge and the Tree*[74] and *Ever Alive*[75], Tuqan demonstrates how creative production under occupation operates not as documentation but as ontological assertion – the generation of futurity precisely where dominant power seeks its foreclosure. Written in the aftermath of the 1967 war, when Palestinian communities faced once again mass displacement[76], *The Deluge and the Tree* functions as collective rallying cry. Against Western coloniser's declarations that "The Tree has fallen! / The great trunk is smashed!", Tuqan counterposes emphatic negation: "Has the Tree really fallen? / Never!". The tree – embodying rootedness and endurance – becomes the site where martyrdom transforms into regeneration and struggle: "our red streams flowing forever" and "the wine of our thorn limbs / Fed the thirsty roots, / Arab roots alive / Tunnelling deep, deep, into the land." The poem's conclusion – "And birds shall return / Undoubtedly, the birds shall return" – establishes through declarative certainty a shared horizon of return as intended rather than hoped-for, providing displaced communities not consolation but active sustenance.

Ever Alive extends this poetics through direct address to the homeland, enumerating what occupation cannot accomplish: cannot "pluck your eyes / Or kill your hopes and dreams / Or crucify your will to rise." The poem culminates in regeneration: "out from our deep sorrows, / Out from the freshness of our spilled blood / Out from the quivering of life and death / Life will be reborn in you again." The poem denies colonial violence the power to define Palestinian futurity asserting and producing instead a future of liberation.

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72   Haidar Al-Ghazali, "The Alphabet of Universes," from "L'alfabeto degli universi," in *Il loro rido è la mia voce*, ibid., my translation.
73   Elqedra, "Writing in Gaza: An Act of Existence in the Shadows of War".

74   Fadwa Tuqan, "The Deluge and the Tree," translated by Naomi Shihab Nye with the help of the editor, in *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature*, ed. Salma Khadra Jayyusi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).
75   Fadwa Tuqan, "Ever Alive," in *Poetry of Resistance in Occupied Palestine*, trans. Sulafa Hajjawi, revised and edited version, 2009 (Baghdad, Iraq: Ministry of Culture, 1968).
76   Nur Masalha, "The 1967 Palestinian Exodus," in The Palestinian Exodus: 1948-1967, ed. Ghada Karmi et al. (Reading: Ithaca Press-Garnet Publishing UK, 1999), 80–95.

THE DELUGE AND THE TREE

When the hurricane swirled and spread its deluge
Of dark evil
Onto the good green land
"They" gloated. The Western skies
Reverberated with joyous accounts:
"The Tree has fallen!
The great trunk is smashed! The hurricane
Leaves no life in the tree!"
Has the Tree really fallen?
Never! Not with our red streams flowing
forever
Not while the wine of our thorn limbs
Fed the thirsty roots,
Arab roots alive
Tunnelling deep, deep, into the land!
When the Tree rises up, the branches
Shall flourish green and fresh in the sun
The laughter of the Tree shall leaf
Beneath the sun
And birds shall return

Undoubtedly, the birds shall return.

Fadwa Tuqan

Tuqan does not merely document Palestinian resistance and hope for a future of liberation – she affirms and produces it through the very act of creation. Her assertions that the branches will flourish and "life will be reborn" constitute ontological claims that, through collective circulation and internalization, materialize as a shared imaginative infrastructure. This narrative horizon operates on two complementary levels: on one hand, it repositions in a state of anticipation relative to the revolutionary event; on the other, and more significantly, it enables active participation in the projective construction of its realization. It is precisely through this narrative dynamic that resistance becomes thinkable, sustainable over time, and transmissible across generations. Poetic narration thus functions as an imaginative apparatus that not only prefigures change but also provides the conceptual and emotional tools to concretely elaborate its practice. In this sense, Tuqan's poetry does not merely describe a desired future; it creates the imaginative conditions of possibility for its historical emergence.

Artistic practice thus emerges as an indispensable component of resistance: an affirmation of being and meaning that sustains, accompanies, and legitimizes the imperative of political struggle and the possibility of future liberation. Acts of creation and resistance prove fundamental precisely through their affirmation of ontological vitality against the logic of destruction and death. Once more an echo in Elqedra's words:

EVER ALIVE

My beloved homeland
No matter how long the millstone
Of pain and agony churns you
In the wilderness of tyranny,
They will never be able
To pluck your eyes
Or kill your hopes and dreams
Or crucify your will to rise
Or steal the smiles of our children
Or destroy and burn
Because out from our deep sorrows,
Out from the freshness of our spilled blood
Out from the quivering of life and death
Life will be reborn in you again...

Fadwa Tuqan

in Gaza writing is not a luxury to be practiced at the margins of daily life; rather, it is an *existential act* that plunges you into the details of this difficult moment. Here, at the point where life and death meet, writing is a way to resist fading away, an attempt to capture what is lost in the chaotic noise of explosions and loss.[77]

This formulation positions poetic creation as resistance operating also at the existential, autobiographical, and deeply personal registers. Elqedra practices an art that itself constitutes grounds for dignity, hope and liberation because its very existence asserts the persistence of creative capacity under conditions designed to extinguish it. *I Color My Name*[78] exemplifies this poetics of existential resistance.

I COLOR MY NAME

I color my name, and an incomplete age
I color; I draw my heart on a discarded
newspaper and I color that too. I sculpt my fingers on the wall
and I splash them with panting colors.
The lines on my palm I read in the language
of color and see in them a path
to myself disguised with a mask of extreme sensitivity at the
gate of autumn
 that stares with sad eyes on tired trees.
I color the trees, autumn, those eyes,
and the sadness with writing; I color
the concrete crawling upon my soul,
and its dreary towers. I color
them with irrepressible insight
and the dances of parapets overlooking
the blue that is occasionally calm

In my chest I carry lonely pavements
that are unaware of passersby,
exhausted by the absence of laughter
and the collapsed dreams of teenagers
replete with pulsation. I color
the sidewalks, loneliness, the passersby,
the dreams, and I kindle the pulse
with rhythm and playful imagination.
I color my name and the empty space
as a swing, and the young women
dancing as butterflies composed
by joy as songs made of gossamer.
Likewise I am composed by a shadow
that walks under skies, and by the moon
that winks at sleeping women, and I color
them with the femininity of absence.

Youssef Elqedra

Elqedra colours his name (asserting identity against systematic erasure), an incomplete age (transforming historical interruption into creative material), and draw his heart on a discarded newspaper (reclaiming narrative means from dominant discourse that reduces Gaza to anonymous "conflict zone"). He works with the materials of concrete devastation – rubble, walls, "cement crawling upon my soul" – transforming them through "irrepressible insight" into sites of creative labour. This culminates in a dialectical reversal: the poet who colours everything reveals himself as composed by absence – by "lonely pavements," "collapsed dreams," and "exhausted" adolescents of Gaza. Yet precisely from this devastation, he produces life: he colours "loneliness, the passersby, the dreams" and kindles "the pulse with rhythm and playful imagination," transforming empty space into a swing and fragile young women into "butterflies composed by joy as songs made of gossamer." The final image – being composed by shadow and moon, coloured "with the femininity of absence" – reveals absence not as sterile lack but as generative force. Writing under occupation, Elqedra demonstrates *poiesis* at its most elemental: the creation of being against organized death, the production of futurity where only extermination is planned, the exercise of constituent power that no bombardment can fully extinguish.

From within catastrophe, history, and materiality, poetry "renews – in reality – the movements of sense, the intellectual and material possibilities,[79]" thereby constituting an indispensable element in the revolutionary transformation of the world and the self-affirmation of freedom and existence. While unable to halt warfare independently, act of creation remains essential for the constructive elaboration of ontological and political alternatives and for the ethico-aesthetic production and affirmation of sense and being. If poetry appears to accomplish lit-

tle in immediate terms, its effects must be measured across extended temporal horizons. When survival is at stake, literary work cannot provide instruments for defending against murderous violence. Poetry can only continue to supply the foundational production necessary for establishing common sense and collective humanity – elements that remain indispensable for resisting warfare and persisting in the struggle for life and freedom.

This formulation acknowledges the limitations of cultural production while asserting its fundamental role in sustaining the conditions that make resistance possible. The temporal distinction between immediate tactical needs and long-term strategic foundations positions creative practice as essential infrastructure for liberation movements, providing the sense-making capacities and collective identification necessary for sustained political engagement. This analysis thus positions poetry not as direct intervention but as foundational work that enables the persistence of transformative possibility even under conditions of extreme duress.

To join the Palestinian struggle means to become *multitude* – a political alliance of poietic bodies united against imperialism, against genocide, for the common being. Despite the systematic attempts at obliteration, Palestinian poets continue to write – in the spirit of *Sumud*, the steadfast perseverance –, transforming poetry into a space of resistance, existence and freedom that cannot be saturated by Israel's destructive and deadly force. In this persistence of creative production under genocidal conditions, we witness the assertion of what Negri terms ontological exceedance – the irreducible capacity of human creativity to exceed present determinations and inaugurate revolutionary possibilities even from within the heart of catastrophe, ultimately to affirm freedom against domination, life against death.

77   Elqedra, "Writing in Gaza: An Act of Existence in the Shadows of War".
78   Yasmin Snounu and Edward A. Morin, "Something Fills the Soul, On the Threshold of Wishing, Time Utters It, and I Color My Name by Yousef el Qedra," Transference 3, no. 1 (2016): Article 13.

79   Negri, *Flower of the Desert*, 92.

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Interview with Falegnameria Marri
Dimmi Che, dimmi qualcosa

Natasha Jane Kennedy

Falegnameria Marri is a creative-collective band based in Perugia (Italy). Their music, composed in the family carpentry shop, giving the band its name, addresses themes of social justice and resistance in a style that blends rock, folk, and world influences, with rich harmonies, engaging tunes and profound lyrics.

This is a transcription of an hour-long discussion conducted with members from the band on the 22nd October 2025. Answers have been shortened and reorganized for readers' ease.

I immediately thought of you guys when working on this issue, and with the new album out in April, the timing seemed perfect. How have things been since the release? Are you working on anything new at the moment?

We are working on two new singles to introduce a new album. We are still working on the concept of it, but we've been thinking about "la tica", like the little bug that sucks blood. A tick. Actually, it's a common name in Italy for leftists! We liked the play on words, and decided to write a song about that. We were also inspired by a XIX century fable; that bug is very persistent and strong, and we thought, okay, we need to make a song about this!

The last album is called *Falegnameria Marri*, and there is a reason for that; it's not because we had no ideas! It deals with a long period of time for the band, the last three years, and the album became a sort of conclusion to those three years. Usually, a band will release an album and go on tour to play it, but for us it is different. We published the album and closed a period, so now the music we are writing is really new. It has been a long period of trial and error, switching up instruments, trying things out in our practice room and on stage.

So, it's quite experimental, right? You've been playing these songs for a long time, and people know them if I'm not mistaken!

Yeah, we never stopped playing the music that is now on the album, and it transformed with us. Actually, the album was already old when we published it. A lot of our audience already know the songs and have seen them change. For us, the live concert is the main thing. But so, when we recorded it we played a lot of instruments that we don't play in the live concerts. We recorded some songs in a studio and the result was so bad! Not how we wanted it to sound at all. We recorded them again, all by ourselves and in Samuele's bedroom! This allowed us to experiment a lot. We put trumpets in there!

But publishing the album meant putting an end to a lot of overthinking. Now we are here, we composed sounds that sound like this but now let' keep working, let's find new shit to play. Full of new ideas, rearranging, finding new songs, new sounds, new riffs, it's a never-ending process. Now we are working on other things, and the release of the album already feels like a past event.

Let's talk a bit about the themes in the album. Each song deals with a different story, right?

It was interesting to listen to it after it was released and see how the songs they have a storyline. But we didn't think about this. It came like on its own, it was a natural thing. There are some themes and words that come up very often like freedom from a lot of points of view. Stories about some categories of people in society. Like migrants. We like to speak for and of the deleted in a way, the people that don't have a social recognition. There is one song called 'Ulrich Lemondeentier' that is about a friend of ours that walked across the Sahara Desert by himself and spent years with the people that regulate the migration system. He suffered terrible violences. You know in Italy there is a type of migration that I think is different from in other nations, because they arrived by the sea, they risked their lives, and we see these difficulties more closely. We see deaths from migration, so we told the story.

'Terra dei Santi' is about the situation in the South of Italy. In fact, we used a local dialect from Molise, where a friend of ours is from, and inspired us to write this song. She actually wrote some of the lyrics thinking about the conditions in the South. I remember she was thinking about living conditions specifically. There is a great North/South divide in Italy with living conditions mostly, and this friend of ours was really not okay about that and wanted to speak about the situation in a poetic way. The chorus says "Vuless' parlare chiaro/Putess' di' la verità" that means "I would speak more clearly, if only I could say the truth". And "clearly" here means "louder". So we created a chorus here. We all sing those lyrics together

like a chorus.

'30 Giorni' is probably the oldest, one of the oldest at least, it is one of the songs we tried to record in a studio and it was a disaster so we recorded it at home. It's about our last percussionist, who works for 30 days for like €300. He wrote the text and together we made some adjustments and recorded it.

In 'Sorelle Distanti', that was Arianna's lyrics and the song is about feminism and is a story about a fight for women's rights. It is a story about a woman who was abused, and she goes into a big protest and starts shouting with other women, and their shouts all together gave the protagonist of the song the strength to fight for women' rights, which is a struggle that many women face on their own. You know we have that line "Sorelle distanti, cuori pulsanti/Per la libertà, per la libertà" which means "Distant sisters, beating hearts/For freedom, for freedom". We find meaning in community.

In 'Dimmi Che' the line "Come fosse l'ultima tra le luci del mondo", which can translate to "As if it were the last of the lights in the world" is actually inspired by an Italian songwriter, Francesco Guccini, who said something similar. He said lights are like the energy of life. He was speaking about young people protesting and said that he was amazed by the energy that was so intense that it was like a light you could see from space.

It's important to us that we are talking about social things but also about personal things, like in 'Dimmi Che' or 'Sentiti Libero'. For example in 'Dimmi Che' we speak about our idea of the universe and our idea of connection with nature; the link between nature and the human. It is the opposite of what we see today, it goes against capitalist ideas, it is a communion between nature and individuals, passing through nature and coexisting with others.

We shout, almost chant "Noi ci sentiamo diversi" ("We feel different"). We feel that inside us there is something that makes us different from other people, but we are together, so this feeling is good, it is not something that wants to separate people but a difference to unite; it goes against homologation.

The last song of the album, 'Tsa-Ta-Ta', seems to tell a story of youth and navigating today's world, and you all take turns singing on it. Did you compose your own parts for this song?

This is the last song in the album and it is different to the others. We were full of emotions and we let it all out, like a stream of consciousness, we are all freeing our minds. There are different voices in this song, and yes, we everyone wrote their own part in this song.

Glauco: I was inspired by my first work experience in a factory, and I wanted to represent the situation of young people when you start to enter in the world as a worker, and there are a lot of issues in our country. The message is that this is not a society for young people; it is not difficult because we don't want to work, it is difficult because society is now about power and all of the biggest positions in companies are occupied by older people and they don't favour young people.

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We often write the lyrics for songs while we play and so the lyrics end up being quite raw feelings, which means a myriad of interpretations are possible; the lyrics often come with the sounds of the song. Some songs have quite cemented meanings like 'Sorelle Distanti', but most often they are feelings in music. But we are still learning how to communicate our feelings and ideas. And each song comes to life in a different way and now we are trying new roads. Of course, in these songs and lyrics, you may see something in your own way, in a different way to when we wrote it. This is the magic of music.

Can we come back to "Dimmi Che" briefly, this idea of becoming one with nature. That is represented in that beautiful videoclip you made. Could you talk a little about that?

That video was our first experience after we gave the album to our sound guy, so we were free. It was our first moment of new creativity; we wrote the storyboard and a friend of us helped us to film us. We do everything ourselves and with our friends, it was created from the bottom, from nothing really. The biggest expense for the video was the gasoline to get there! And the wine, of course! The idea was that we are playing with our friends which is our normal state of being for us. Our ideal setting is with our friends and playing music all together. But in this video, we are playing in a natural environment, and playing this song we take our consciousness through this woods, and we discovered our wild counterparts; this moment when the two groups meet and they see themselves. We also have two twins in the group so it was incredibly easy to make their "doubles". Francesco' wild counterpart discovers his complete self, there is an explosion of energy and they start running. There is no individual without a wild part, an animal part, that would be an incomplete individual, so this connection with nature and with our wildest part is deep inside of us. But we forget this. And the funny part is that in this video we called 30 friends of ours and created this community to share this moment, it was really community based. We wouldn't have made it without them; there were people cooking, bringing our stuff, all together. We were recording the video, and our friends were facility managers!

An additional question; you said your natural state is to be with your friends and there is really collaborative idea in the themes of your songs, on your social media, and just the way you practice, and the way you write, like swapping instruments and being experimental. Could you talk a bit more about that? The experimental aspect and the the collaboration that goes behind your songs and who you are as a band?

We like to create this energy, we feel that when we stay together we have this great energy, more than if we are not together. The whole is more than the sum of its parts, and we like to create this situation. We kind of need it. We found that playing things with other people around us is important. Even in our jam space, we need other people to make our music. For me, because people like our friends understand that we create all together, and that gives us another identity. Yeah, the spirit of Falegnameria Marri! Because the benefit of those situations is for us and all the people who listen to our music, or participate in the live shows, or our video creations, or helping in some difficult concerts, is a sense of community.

Two weeks ago, we played at a peace march, and we decided to go with our instruments and our amps, the microphones and we made a walking concert! So, there was like a trailer with all our amps on. We did this march for 24km playing non-stop for 4hours, and our friends and our parents even, helped us to carry things. And we even played with people who aren't in the band. This collective spirit is maybe the really strong thing that characterises us.

Because we were born as a big band, we were like ten musicians, and we said to our friends that anyone who wanted to join could come on stage. So, there were ten of us for our first concert. A lot of people ask us how we manage this – now there are eight of us working together. In my opinion Falegnameria Marri feels more like a tribe. We work as a collective. When we compose, we are eight people. When we need to organise something, we always work with people we know. Another example of this collaboration is our jam space. We have this massive space, it is like a garage and after a concert we have to bring all our stuff back and all of our friends help us, we make like a chain of people carrying all the instruments. 15 or 20 people helping us! And when we create, we are always inspired by the people who stay with us, like Ulrich, or our friend from Molise. For the stories, for the lyrics, we always work as a community. Something about the sound of the song, it is dedicated to them.

Your videos, concerts and social media presence often show your involvement in marches, and demonstrations, in particular in support of Palestine. Have you found that your musical voice carries your support for such causes?

We have participating in a lot of demonstrations and protests for Palestine, of course we will keep doing this. We do a lot of non-profit shows. Some events were charity events too. For people in Perugia we are a political band, we have that reputation. Actually, our themes are political, and we played for our mayor, at the end of the campaign before the election, we played on a bus around the town. You can see that on Instagram. We didn't do this because we support a party, it was more because in that period it was an important period for Perugia; we couldn't watch this without taking part. Now we don't work with parties, we chose to stop this kind of concert, even though a lot of parties have invited us to play for their campaigns. But we don't want to be the flag of a party. This time on the bus was important because for a long time the mayor had been from a right-wing party, and this last year this young woman from a left party who is a great person was representing our town. It is more for the person than for the party. She did great things for the town like opening a restaurant where the staff are people with learning difficulties, so it gave them opportunities. We did it for her, we aligned with her values rather than those of a specific party that we wanted to represent. And we did it for free!

Now we do a lot of concerts for local associations, we raise money for Palestine etc. These kinds of settings are in line with our values, people from the bottom doing things, and there is where we want our music to be.

Thinking about the theme of the issue, 'Creative and Critical International Responses to the Rise of the Far Right', even without representing a particular party, you are still conveying an important message as collaborative artists and songwriters, with your involvement in the contemporary political sphere in your own way. Do you have anything to add?

We think the way to react to the system is from the bottom, is to do what we are doing now. Not in a party but with the people, with associations, collectives, doing things that people can live and feel. There are a lot of people who work every day for peace and respect and we want to work with them and promote and create a net.

Today I was looking at a political philosopher who says that music has the power to create feelings, and even new feelings, because in our society we are losing some important feelings that are like doing things together. Our voice with other voices can actually change things. This is now a really critical period, and it is necessary to create new feelings between people. Music is like our weapon. We all think that for us the strong way to do something good is in this way, with people, music is our most important weapon and we feel this power. We stay together and we fight, and for us that happens through our music and our involvement in society and with people. We can convey our thoughts, and our intention is to be part of the resistance through the vehicle of music.

This creativity that we have is a political choice against the system. Industrial music and everything artificial is made to create money, like everything in this society. We don't want this. We want to create music to communicate something, to feel something. If we were doing it for money we would have stopped a long time ago! It is the opposite of going to X factor and becoming famous. We were thinking about how long we have been in the band and it's been six years, *cazzo*! Mind-blowing! Because everyone has the capacity to be political and to resist. For us that is with music, we are creative people and we make music, it is our way of engaging in politics.

Not long ago, we said we wanted to make a collective to speak about these political and societal questions, not only with our music but also with writers, journals, we wanted to put together a collective with a lot of arts. Our method is music but there are a lot of people around us who do other things and we want to stay together.

I think that we all play not to reach the perfect music but to create the energy of playing together. We are not trying to be perfect because for us what is important is our authenticity. That is more important than technical perfection. And the process, the experimentation, and being together. None of us is the best musician. We think that playing together makes us better musicians that what we would be on our own. Connecting with each other for the sake of the emotion. We are together in the moment that we are together and that is the point, it is a very strong emotion. Politically it is full of the things we think and feel; it is very "felt" music, and I think people notice that. That is Falegnameria Marri and it is the strongest thing that we are trying to expand, and we want to work with other artists to do this even more.

This was the first interview in English! We feel more international now! Good practice for us!

Falegnameria Marri on Youtube

INACTION IS A WEAPON OF MASS DESTRUCTION

End note

Discriminatory and dehumanising policies still permeate our world today, and unfortunately between the conception of this issue and its publication, many more heartbreaking tensions have arisen in the world. In light of this, we send our strength to citizens in Sudan, Iran, Greenland, Venezuela, the United States, and to any countries, peoples, or communities battling authoritarianism in these uncertain times. We hope that this special issue will inspire further forms of resistance.

Editor
Natasha Jane Kennedy, University of Brighton, N.Kennedy@brighton.ac.uk

Supporting editors
Eloise O'Dwyer-Armary, University of Brighton, e.armary1@uni.brighton.ac.uk
Théo Boucknooghe, Université de Lille, theo.boucknooghe.etu@univ-lille.fr

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