

Edited by  
International Research Group on Authoritarianism and Counter-Strategies  
kollektiv orangotango

# BEYOND MOLOTOVS

**A VISUAL HANDBOOK OF  
ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN STRATEGIES**

[transcript] PoliticalScience

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Beyond Molotovs – A Visual Handbook of Anti-Authoritarian Strategies

The **International Research Group on Authoritarianism and Counter-Strategies** (IRGAC) is an initiative of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung that brings together scholar-activists from across the Global South to research authoritarian capitalism, the far right, and strategic responses from the left.  
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**kollektiv orangotango** is a circle of critical geographers and friends who have been in co-evolution since the 2000s. As popular educators, they strive for a collective horizontal production of knowledge; as militant scholars, they link practical interventions and theoretical reflection. They place their work at the service of emancipatory processes in youth clubs and community gardens, in schools and autonomous social centres, on park benches and in lecture halls, in favelas and in rural communities.  
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# **BEYOND MOLOTOVS**

**A VISUAL HANDBOOK OF  
ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN STRATEGIES**

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# STRATEGIES

## expose · accuse · remember

Exposing the mechanisms of domination and denouncing injustices that are otherwise systematically hidden can be a powerful counter-strategy. This is especially true because authoritarianism often works by rewriting both history and present, thus erasing and silencing those who are dominated. These contributions are about counter-narratives and counter-cartographies, about raising our voice and documenting and remembering from the margins.

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## subvert · hijack · divert

Here we're bringing together struggles and practices that take the tools and expressions of authoritarianism and turn them back on themselves. They appropriate, sabotage, and repurpose the oppressive meanings, materials, and intentions inscribed in advertisements, monuments, memes, or riot fences. They turn destruction into creation, control into chaos, and forbidden fruits into resistance.

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## **disrupt · retake · transfigure**

Authoritarianism takes the beautiful multiplicity and chaotic interwovenness of life and reduces it to compartmentalized reductions and reproductions of the “normal”. What remains is the orderly tyranny of capital and commodification. Thus, these anti-authoritarian interventions break through the unidimensionality imposed on discourse, life, and space, making visible what has been suppressed, reconquering public life, and revitalizing the streets.

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## explore · transcend · desire

Only by doing, living, and imagining otherwise can we produce glimpses of alternative futures, of a just society, and of an emancipated self. To explore other ways and other meanings, to build real utopias, and to project ourselves as different to what we are today: these are powerful antidotes to authoritarian neoliberalism's suppression of softness, and its destruction of hope and future time.

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## **sense · convey · assemble**

Making sense of the world collectively, making common cause with others who are fighting to define and create a world in which we can all flourish, recognizing ourselves as one in spite – and indeed because – of our differences, and being recognized by others in turn. The contributions here speak of creating spaces for collective resonance and reverberation; a shared language, made of songs and symbols, rituals, artefacts, and gestures of defiance.

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## link · weave · nurture

Fighting against the forces of authoritarian violence, precarity, atomization, and dispossession means finding new ways of feeding, nurturing, reproducing, and reclaiming life. These contributions talk of the materialities of solidarity, of comradery, and of collective action.

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# BEYOND AUTHORITY

## FOR AN ANTI-FASCISM OF THE FUTURE

Authoritarianism can be defied and defeated: that is the most important lesson of this book. Around the world, countless people, collectives, and movements develop powerful and creative strategies to oppose nationalist, racist, classist, and anti-feminist forces. Many of these strategies go well beyond a narrow definition of “defending democracy” or “resistance”. They do not defend the catastrophic status quo against the far right, but propose different, more just and more democratic ways of being together. These strategies and struggles carry ideas, emotions, and practices that are the seeds of another world. Yes, it is true that imagining a fundamentally different world has become more difficult recently, and yet, it is possible. It is actually being lived out in anti-authoritarian strategies worldwide.

“Beyond Molotovs – A Visual Handbook of Anti-Authoritarian Strategies” brings together first-hand accounts of anti-authoritarian struggles from around the world, focusing on strategies that address the sensuous, emotional, and aesthetic dimensions of authoritarianism. These are neither the only, nor necessarily the most important, strategies of resistance. From classical antifascist organizing and monitoring work on the ground, to mobilizing broad social strata in defence of democratic rights, to militant struggle against oppressive regimes, a wide variety of initiatives is needed to counter the authoritarian attacks on democracy and social rights. By proposing to go “beyond molotovs”, we are not disregarding the importance of these myriad forms of resistance. Instead, we want to enrich them by bringing in new perspectives focused on dimensions that are all too often neglected when we discuss our strategies against authoritarianism.

### Reclaiming futures

Addressing these dimensions is of crucial importance for at least three reasons. The first is that a century of scholarship on authoritarianism has repeatedly shown that authoritarianism operates fundamentally at the level of the visceral. It mobilizes and channels insecurities, fears, and anxieties, and cannot be reduced to rationality. Nevertheless, much of the opposition to authoritarianism still relies on the illusion of the most convincing argument or political agenda. But this hardly ever weakens authoritarian forces. Quite the contrary, it seems that the less they engage in reasoned argumentation, the more successful they are. We, thus, need to ask ourselves: how can we respond to authoritarian populist discourse and its “affective offer”? What other emotions and imaginaries – indeed, what other forms

# ORITARIANISM

## 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

Aurel Eschmann, Bőrries Nehe

of seeing and being – do we have to offer? And how can we *massify* them? This must surely mean actively playing in the field of how people interpret and give meaning to the world, a process that is still too frequently thought to be mediated merely through words and ideas, though it is now clear that affect plays a fundamental role in it.

We briefly alluded to the second reason for focusing on the sensuous: we feel that this is where the *utopian energy* for alternative ways of imagining and living can be found. A lot has been said about the “crisis of the left” and, more generally, about the impossibility of imagining the end of capitalism. There are many reasons for this, but we remain convinced that the ideas of emancipation and social justice are not outdated, nor do we lack proposals for how they can be achieved. Years of neoliberal conditioning – as well as the profound contradictions of historical socialist experiments – have stripped these ideas of much of their appeal and capacity to move peoples’ bodies and minds. In order to re-think and re-invent emancipatory politics and offer a different vision of the future, beyond coherent political programs, we need to revitalize their concrete utopian appeal and energy. In other words, we have to win back *hope*, not as an abstract idea or empty slogan, but as a collectively crafted and lived reality. This book is about producing hope and reclaiming the future even in the most adverse conditions.

The third reason why it is of crucial importance to look at the dimension of emotions and aesthetics is that authoritarian tendencies are deeply inscribed within the affective as well as the institutional landscape of capitalism itself. These tendencies boil up violently in moments of crisis. Thus, we cannot approach authoritarian capitalist affectivity as a phenomenon that is external to us. Instead, we need to recognize and reflect on the fact that as subjects in late capitalism, we are necessarily shaped by these dynamics in one way or another. Capitalism is constantly exploiting our anxieties and desires, be it by commodifying our need for recognition on social media platforms, or by mobilizing our fears and aspirations through meritocracy and competition.

The intimate relation of capitalism and authoritarianism should come as no surprise. Capitalism is based on the exploitation of the many by the few, and on an ever-greater concentration of wealth and power to the detriment of our well-being and capacity to determine the course of our own lives. While democracy is about equality and collective decision-making, capitalism is systematically unequal, hierarchical, and exclusive. This produces constant tensions and antagonisms between the two, and this is why democratic rights have had to be – and must continue to be – conquered and defended against the dominant classes that will try to shield the exercise of power from popular interference. Likewise, from the outset, global capitalism has been intimately interwoven

with patriarchy, racism, and colonialism. They form the very foundation for depriving most people in the world of their rights and facilitating the direct exploitation of both the people themselves and the spaces they live in.

Neoliberal capitalism emphasizes the authoritarian tendencies within capitalism. Over the past decades, popular and workers' organizations, social welfare structures, and mechanisms for the redistribution of wealth have been under attack. Simultaneously, the ideas, images, and concrete politics of social justice, solidarity, and democracy have been increasingly hollowed out.<sup>1</sup> Neoliberalism demands from individuals permanent competition, performance, and flexibility – that is, an active subjugation under the logic of capital – while simultaneously stripping them of any social safety net. It thus constitutes a colonization of life itself. Neoliberal capitalism extends the logic of accumulation, exploitation, and commodification to all fields of our existence, including the very way we experience life itself.

As we explain in more detail below, contemporary authoritarianism constitutes, in many ways, an exaltation of these dynamics but in a neo-Darwinist guise. This is why it would be useless to aim for the sort of restoration of a near past that is envisioned by current liberal opposition to the far right. Rather, we take the authoritarianism inherent in capitalist society seriously, and believe, as such, that consistent anti-authoritarianism must aim to overcome this social form. It must, once again, take up the search for post-capitalist social relations and aesthetics.

### What is authoritarianism all about?

To say that capitalist states and societies inherently comprise authoritarian dimensions does not mean that nothing has changed. For a decade or so now, the world has steadily become a less democratic and more violent place. This trend is often portrayed by focusing on its most outrageous manifestations and their frequently bizarre protagonists, such as Donald Trump in the US, Narendra Modi in India, or Javier Milei in Argentina. The electoral successes of European far-right parties and the openly repressive military regimes of Myanmar and Syria provide further evidence of this disturbing development. In an effort to understand and describe this phenomenon, a number of terms have come to constitute an increasingly important part of our vocabulary, including “populism”, “neo-conservatism”, “illiberalism”, “ultra-nationalism”, “post-fascism”, “fundamentalism”.

Many of these concepts are very useful in describing certain facets of the phenomenon. But we feel that one important disadvantage in this multiplication of terms is that it does not allow us to grasp the simultaneity and commonalities between the different, yet interconnected, processes of global authoritarian transformation. Against this background, we propose recovering and expanding the notion of authoritarianism. In contrast to the reductive ways in which this concept is frequently used, we see it as a complex social phenomenon that is not limited to the state and its institutions. Although there is an authoritarian agenda that is consciously pursued by specific actors, it is not a conspiracy of demagogues and ruling elites who trick the masses into politics that go against their own interests. Though it gains its strength from mass support, it is not just a reactionary “popular revolt”. It's neither exclusively top-down nor bottom-up. Authoritarianism is a redefinition of power relations and mechanisms of exploitation that occurs simultaneously in the social, cultural, political, and economic spheres. As an analytical concept, it does not compete with other descriptions of the phenomenon that are, at times, more specific. Rather, as we have already stated elsewhere, authoritarianism allows us to build “a conceptual arc between the concrete expressions of a global trend towards an increasingly weaponized regime of capital accumulation coupled with processes of de-democratization and brutalization of social and political practices and relations”.<sup>2</sup>

At the heart of the current authoritarian turn of global capitalism lies a shared experience of a world in crisis. This polycrisis of global turmoil sees shifts in the geopolitical balance of power and the ecological crisis coinciding with regional and national political crises, economic dislocations, and a long train of other interconnected and mutually reinforcing crises pertaining to migration, health, and social cohesion. Established political actors and arrangements seem less and less able to deal with the situation, leading to a massive loss of legitimacy in terms of political representation as well as, more fundamentally, the liberal values on which that representation is based.

It is impossible to determine exactly where or when this crisis began, but many people point to the financial crisis of 2008 as the first, and most spectacular, manifestation of what is increasingly experienced and understood as a general collapse. Since then, neoliberal capitalism has been losing its hegemonic aura and appeal, and at an ever-greater pace. It seemed, at first, that we were in the midst of a hopeful and transformative moment. In the aftermath of the crisis, there was an eruption of powerful social movements, from the Arab Spring to Occupy Wall Street, from Hong Kong to Chile, and from Gezi Park in Turkey to the *Indignados* in Spain. However, rather than finally giving up the ghost, neoliberalism has returned as the living dead. Stripped of its liberal imagery and its promises of an institutional rule of law, of a borderless market economy in which any conflict can be resolved, of liberal social values, and of a better future, it now wanders the earth as naked commodification, exploitation, propertization, and precarization.<sup>3</sup>

We are experiencing what Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci referred to in his writing on Italian fascism as an *interregnum*, that is, a crisis which consists in the fact that “the old is dying but the new cannot be born”, and in which “a great variety of morbid symptoms appear”.<sup>4</sup> Authoritarianism is a symptom – and thus an indication – of the helplessness of both the dominated and the dominant. The first “no longer believe what they used to believe” but have, thus far, not come up with a viable alternative to a system that produces ever more suffering and destruction. As for the ruling classes, there is no longer any consensus in terms of how to move forward. The implosion of the political landscapes around the world speaks to the profound conflicts within the elites as to how the general and, indeed, hegemonic crisis should be addressed.

An increasingly weaponized, authoritarian version of neoliberalism, which is systematically insulated from democratic interference (and for which the European Union can be seen as a prominent example) is currently competing with an active and reactionary ideological mobilization that is represented by authoritarian populism. This “solution” to the crisis – which currently seems to be the more successful – combines authentically neoliberal ingredients with others that are both reactionary and, at this stage, all too familiar. We, thus, see an unhinged market economy coupled with familialist, religious, and racist topoi, and unlimited individual “freedom” with updated versions of social-Darwinism.

If we take a close look, it becomes clear that authoritarian ideological components often converge in specific amalgams from one context to another. But what all these manifestations of authoritarianism have in common is that they activate resentment and hate against particular Others who are generally perceived as weak and, at the same time, menacing. As such, authoritarianism addresses real needs and desires. It channels people’s frustrations, fears, and a genuine, though often unarticulated, longing for things to *change* – because change they must, given that these frustrations and fears are very real. However, authoritarianism leads them down a destructive path, one that can only deepen the existential malaise. In exchange for the momentary pleasure of superiority – as Whites, males, patriots, and so on – the infrastructure of suffering is left intact.

## An anti-fascism for the 21st century

This constellation poses huge challenges to those fighting for a just and democratic society. The global expansion of authoritarianism and the disintegration of the liberal consensus requires us to re-think our strategies. One fundamental premise, as we mentioned above, is that we have to go beyond “resistance”: there is no going back, and the defence of what is, is simply not an option.

If historical anti-fascism in Europe after World War II has proven anything, it is that a successful anti-authoritarian strategy must address people’s needs. Anti-fascism has never been solely about morals, symbols, or humanist convictions. In order to be effective as mass politics, it must safeguard against corporate power and redistribute rather than concentrate wealth. But human needs and desires extend beyond the materialistic and into the psychological. In our everyday experience, the economic and the cultural are inseparably intertwined. In this book, we are interested in how counter-strategies interact with material and immaterial needs and desires, and how they respond to the authoritarian ways of addressing them.

One key aspect of contemporary authoritarianism is that it allows for what has been termed a “conformist rebellion”; that is, it serves as a valve for frustration and rage that lack an addressee. It thus channels both the desire to “change everything”, and the desire to have everything remain the same, insofar as the existing relations of power and domination go completely unchallenged. If we want to achieve real and enduring social change, it is thus pivotal to understand the sensuous and sociopsychological dimension of counter-strategies. As psychotherapy shows, change cannot be imposed from the outside but must arise from within, as rooted in a genuine desire.

To make people yearn and strive for fundamental change, we must understand our emotional attachments to the world as it is. Our beliefs and convictions serve important psychological functions for our self-perception, for coping with existential problems, and for stabilizing our precarious existence in a world full of uncertainties. In fact, many counter-strategies understand and address the wounds within neoliberal subjectivity and the way authoritarianism engages them affectively. Often without consciously spelling it out, they develop affective countermeasures.

One cross-cutting theme in this book is the resistance to the cult of death that unites authoritarianism and capitalism, especially in the face of crisis. At the heart of capitalism lies destructiveness: of nature, of living bonds, of any hope for a future, of life itself.<sup>5</sup> The authoritarian solution to this destructiveness is to fetishize it. As Walter Benjamin put it, facing the rise of fascism: “[humankind’s] self-alienation has reached the point where it can experience its own annihilation as a supreme aesthetic pleasure.”<sup>6</sup> Today’s counter-strategies must address the authoritarian reverence for death and destruction, for compartmentalization and alienation. Consequently, one crucial aspect that binds all the contributions in this book together is that they celebrate life over death, connection over individualization, multiplicity over reduction, and chaos over order.

## Counter-strategies as potentiality

Not all anti-authoritarian movements achieve lasting social change. In fact, most of them do not. But even though they may fail to achieve their immediate goals, they often go beyond themselves, changing the people involved. By that, they transcend their own particular historical moments and can reappear elsewhere, on another occasion and in another guise, much like in the famous saying: “they buried us, but they didn’t know we were seeds.” By looking at counter-strategies in practice, we understand the marks they leave in the world beyond the direct political change they aspire to.<sup>7</sup>



In examining these practices, we also begin to grasp what actually makes people resist and fight authoritarianism, even against seemingly improbable odds. Indeed, as anybody who has blocked a road or participated in a strike knows, the sense of joy, comradeship and empowerment is as important as critical analysis.

There is another reason why we should engage with struggles, including – indeed, with particular attention to – those that seem to have failed. That history unfolded the way it did does not mean that this was the only way it could have happened. This contingency makes it worthwhile to revisit the moments of ambiguity and of multiple possibilities, as well as learning strategic lessons from them. Our focus thus shifts towards the concrete *potentiality* of the moments of struggle: to the glimpses of possible worlds. These moments, when social antagonisms become explicit, are privileged sites for gaining knowledge about the world that is, and about the world that can be. As conceptual fetishes implode, moments of social and political creativity open up, and *other* identifications and social relations momentarily become a reality.

One of the key questions that underpin this book is how anti-authoritarian struggles affect us, and how we affect others. This is why all the struggles portrayed here bear some relation to arts and aesthetics, as they often have the greatest power to touch and affect us. Everything in this book is art, whether it be graffiti scribbled by protesters, chants sung by mass movements, an anti-authoritarian board game, or an exhibition in a museum. All the contributions in this book speak of a transformative affect that is the essence of art.

### Decentering anti-authoritarianism

Notwithstanding the many cross-cutting themes and concerns, the contributions in this book are very diverse. One reason for this is that authoritarianism takes on different forms in different contexts. There is no reason to believe that authoritarianism in Brazil will look exactly as it does in Myanmar, and the same applies to “colonialism” and “patriarchy” (or neoliberalism, for that matter). Nevertheless, they exist and have enough features in common for us to name and think about them together, as well as to recognize our many struggles against them as one.

This is also how we approached the issue when we reached out to the contributors for this book. Rather than formulating an explicit definition, we reckoned that those who know best what authoritarianism actually looks like in each context are those who are organizing against it. What is more, we realized that we can learn a great deal about *global* authoritarianism and its different manifestations by looking at *local* struggles and strategies against it.

Consequently, some of the struggles portrayed in this book could also be understood as feminist, some as environmentalist, others as fights for democracy or for indigenous rights and so on. The contributions also vary in scale. Whereas some engage with shared symbols of political mass movements, others explore the bonds that result from co-creative practices carried out in small collectives, or explore the effects of patriarchy on the life of one’s own mother through a single painting. Some speak of struggles that transgress national boundaries, while others look at struggles that are highly localized. Some are meticulously organized, while others are spontaneous and chaotic.

We do not aim to reduce all these approaches to a list of universal lessons. In fact, this would defeat the very purpose of the book. Although we decided to call it a handbook, rather than a step-by-step guide, this book is an exploration of the beauty of anti-authoritarian resistance. It combines diverse accounts from different contexts, showcasing a relational approach to producing knowledge, referred to by the political philosopher Boike Rehbein as *Kaleidoscopic Dialectics*. The aim is not universality, but an appreciation of the complex web of traits shared

among different counter-strategies, like the *Familienähnlichkeiten* (family resemblances) described by Wittgenstein. No single trait is shared by all the counter-strategies, so we cannot distil universal traits of affective counter-strategies. Yet, each counter-strategy shares a trait with certain others. These intersections and overlaps are where understanding beyond the individual case emerges. However, this understanding only reveals itself when we look at the entire mosaic. In this, our approach to editing resembles the “decentering” that is proposed on pages 242-247, where contributions and their arrangements are understood as “zones of encounter marked by the remarkable ability of ideas to touch and travel”. One of the many possible learnings from this relational approach is found in the table of contents (one of three) titled “Strategies” and is explained in more detail below.

### Zones of encounter

When it comes to knowledge production, we engage in decentering insofar as we do not maintain the paralyzing and illusory boundaries between academic theory, art, and activism. Most contributions to this book unite different approaches in unique ways. Nevertheless, we decided to separate some texts from the rest visually, as they constitute broader reflections, based upon a prior reading of, and critical engagement with, many of the other contributions. The articles by Eva von Redecker, Gustavo Robles, Lorena Zárata and Firoozeh Farvardin thus offer key ways of understanding – as well as possible pathways through – the mosaic of struggles and strategies within and outside this book.

To highlight the multiplicity of connections between the contributions, we propose three different ways of looking at their relations, which are represented by the three tables of contents. The most straightforward, *Places*, groups the contributions by physical location, highlighting similarities and differences because or in spite of geographical position. But the map also reveals the limitations of our positionality as editors. It would, of course, be problematic – not to mention impossible – to attempt to represent the entire world in a book, but we did strive for geographical diversity. Nevertheless, some regions – principally Europe and Latin America – are relatively overrepresented as compared to others, most notably Africa and Oceania. This is due, in part, to the fact that our search for contributions was limited by the networks we have as editors, by linguistic frontiers, and, very likely, by certain differences in understandings of authoritarianism. The second table, entitled *Contents*, follows a narrative flow that escapes clear categorization yet appeals to our own intuitive perception of the relations between the contributions. This is also the sequence that the contributions are in if you read the book from beginning to end.

### Anti-authoritarian strategies through the kaleidoscope

The third way of ordering the contributions is called *Strategies*. The strategic dimensions we refer to are neither the methods they employ nor the political demands they formulate, but the ways they address the sensuous and the affective. The focus, here, is on the things that happen while protesting, striking, resisting, and defying, on the collective emotions cultivated, on the subject states experienced, on the bonds that are woven, and the senses that are tingled. It is an approach that also involves distilling what we conceive as their underlying idea of transformation. These six categorizations represent the main

learnings from the kaleidoscopic approach mentioned above. The similarities and overlaps in their affective approach help to give us a more general idea of how counter-strategies aim to achieve profound transformation. Given that the affective can often only be approximated by language, each chapter is represented by three words that triangulate what we see as the essence of the strategic approach discussed in each case.

When the range of what is speakable and imaginable is minimal, and the beautiful multiplicity and chaotic fabric of life is reduced to compartmentalized reductions and reproductions of the “normal”, what remains is the orderly tyranny of capital and commodification. Authoritarianism wants nothing more than for you to sit back on your sofa and not care. The anti-authoritarian interventions united in **disrupt retake transfigure** break through numbness, resignation, and the retreat into the private, through the unidimensionality imposed on discourse, life, and space. They make visible what has been suppressed. With huge wall-paintings and tiny stickers, naked bodies, rap songs, dwarves, and street signs, they remind the world that they are still here, that they have a voice, and that there are other ways of living. They can be silent reminders, or the gong that shatters the illusion. They reconquer public life, revitalize the streets, defy “common sense”, and bring back what has been repressed.

Authoritarianism often works by rewriting both the past and the present, by distorting perspectives and silencing those who are inconvenient. As the contributions brought together in **expose accuse remember** show, exposing tools of deceit and mechanisms of power, and crafting a counter-narrative, can be an effective counter-strategy. Be it through a viral campaign that exposes government killings, or by counter-cartographies that unmask continuities of colonial violence, such strategies can lift veils, incite anger, light fuses, stir up the collective unconscious.

Keeping score of injustices and atrocities is also important not to lose yourself amidst relativization and gaslighting. These strategies direct our gaze to where systemic violence and destruction reveal themselves. They make us feel the brutality of the status quo, be it through poems, performances, drawings, paintings, or maps. When they want you to forget, remembering can be an act of resistance. But it can also open a pathway to a radically different understanding of ourselves, our relation to others, and to the world, for example when “mapping decolonial Berlin” (see pp. 234-241).

In the chapter **subvert hijack divert**, we bring together struggles and practices that use authoritarianism’s own tools and expressions against it. They appropriate, sabotage, and repurpose the oppressive meanings, materials, and intentions inscribed in advertisements, monuments, political parties, memes, and riot fences. In the face of a seemingly omnipotent, all-penetrating authoritarian apparatus, making use of whatever it throws at us is a necessity. But it is also a powerful way of affectively taking back control. The one thing that can never be fully subjugated is how we feel about things. As Albert Camus’ smiling Sisyphus knows, our own emotional response can become the last refuge of self-determination, as well as a powerful resource for regaining agency. It is enormously liberating to laugh at the things meant to instil fear, to turn the tools of control into agents of emancipation, and separators into vessels of relating. The strategies turn destruction into creation, silence into communication, and forbidden fruits into resistance.

Only when we get a taste of liberation, can we truly strive to be free, and desire change both in the world and for ourselves. This is why it is important to create spaces in the here and now where we can experience glimpses of a liberated life, a process we have given the title **explore transcend desire**. Even if these spaces are only islands of performative

prefigurations, these real utopias are powerful antidotes to authoritarian neoliberalism's suppression of softness, and its destruction of hope and future time. The strategies in this section write dreams on walls, overcome failures of communication by taking on the role of boardgame players, find utopian ways of life amidst a city in revolt. They explore the aesthetics of utopian communities, radically different ways of looking, of collective editing, and staring into the abyss while getting a taste of utopia.

At its core, liberation always contains a notion of universalist humanism. This is why it is crucial to make sense of the world collectively, to make common cause with others who are fighting to define and create a world in which we can all flourish. Recognizing ourselves as one in spite – and, indeed, because – of our differences while being recognized, in turn, by others, is powerfully transformative. The contributions in **sense convey assemble** speak of creating spaces for collective resonance and reverberation; a shared language, made of songs and symbols, rituals, artefacts, and gestures of defiance. These strategies use pots and pans, songs, post-its, scarves, hand gestures, lightning bolts, and Pokémon. They ignite passions, circulate ideas, create shared identity, and unite in collective creation.

Finally, **link weave nurture** pays tribute to human creation as, and in, social relation. We can only reproduce in society what we experience in our lived relations, and finding the courage for radical change often depends on the strength we gain through our surroundings and our relations to others. Fighting against the forces of authoritarian violence, precarity, atomization, and dispossession means finding new ways of feeding, nurturing, reproducing, and reclaiming life. These contributions speak of the materialities of solidarity, of companionship, and of collective action. They weave networks by cooking, eating, drinking, marching, or sewing together. They explore the materiality of resistance by looking at tarpaulin tents and artwork made from food wrappers. They develop powerful infrastructures of tenderness and solidarity, they cross oceans and take back the means of (re-)production.

### About us

This book is a collective effort that started three years ago. It was born out of discussions that showed us again and again that although we know a lot about the workings of authoritarianism, we know astonishingly little about counter-strategies, and even less about the way they emotionally engage us. Virtually none of the literature on anti-authoritarian struggles seems to express how we actually feel and what we share with friends about these struggles. What makes us join ant-fascist rallies or roadblocks, and what happens there? What makes people, even in the most adverse circumstances, oppose authoritarian regimes? How do they do so? And what potentiality do these struggles have for a fundamentally different world?

Particularly in view of the globalization of authoritarianism, we realized that we need spaces where we can systematically exchange experiences and reflect on counter-strategies. Opposition to authoritarianism operates under extreme pressure and heavy surveillance. Those who fight often lack the time and resources to document, archive, or reach out to others that are not immediately connected to their cause, especially to those in other countries and on other continents. Considering this, we also wanted to provide an infrastructure within which we can exchange and engage, we can bond with and recognize one another, and we can celebrate the courage and creativity of anti-fascism.

For the authors of this introduction, the International Research Group on Authoritarianism and Counter-Strategies (IRGAC) that brings together around 20 scholars and activ-

ists from the so-called Global South, has served as a key space to discuss and advance these issues. Similarly, the work of kollektiv orangotango, which is somewhere between activism, artistic intervention, and counter-cartography has been an important source of inspiration. Particularly their book “This Is Not an Atlas”<sup>8</sup> shows how to produce and curate collective, decentred knowledge, as well as materializing that knowledge in the form of beautiful and powerful objects (books, maps, graffiti, and so on).

In 2021, Aurel Eschmann and Börries Nehe formed an editorial collective together with Paul Schweizer and Severin Halder from kollektiv orangotango, IRGAC fellows Inés Durán Matute, Ailynn Torres and Julieta Mira, as well as Nico Baumgarten, who is also the designer of this book. The collective soon devised a call for contributions that was translated into several languages, and disseminated via the networks of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, the IRGAC, and kollektiv orangotango. We received over 130 proposals from 46 countries. Reading them was an indescribably encouraging experience as it demonstrated, first and foremost, just how many resistances, strategies, and forms of struggle there are, how little we know of them, and how much we can learn from each other.

After selecting around forty proposals, we identified many possible connections between them as well as certain blind spots. We then reached out in order to fill some of those gaps. We approached this task much as an artisan might build a mosaic or weave a tapestry. Without ever aiming to definitively represent the incredible multiplicity of struggles around the globe, we assembled and arranged, linked and weaved, in a collective process that combined theoretical reflections with considerations that were artistic and, in that sense, consciously subjective. We hope that “Beyond Molotovs – A Visual Handbook of Anti-Authoritarian Strategies” will be a tool for the internationalist anti-fascism that our times require, and a testimony to emancipation.

## Endnotes

- 1 For a detailed discussion, see, for example, Wendy Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West*, New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2019.
- 2 International Research Group on Authoritarianism & Counter-Strategies, *Global Authoritarianism. Perspectives and Contestations from the South*, Bielefeld: transcript, 2022, p. 9.
- 3 See: *Affective Counterstrategies and Heterotopic Interventions*, p. 172.
- 4 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1917.
- 5 See: *Counterstrategies for Life*, p. 96.
- 6 Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*. Edited by Marcus Paul Bullock, Michael William Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1996, p. 270.
- 7 See: *Other Feminisms: A Subversive Gift to the World*, p. 286.
- 8 kollektiv orangotango, *This Is Not an Atlas: A Global Collection of Counter-Cartographies*, Bielefeld: transcript, 2018.

# The Art of Protest in Hong Kong



Kwai Fong Multi storey Car Park  
葵芳多層停車場  
Lai King  
荔景



# Protest Hong Kong



Sophie Mak

The acidic smell of tear gas, the burning sensation of pepper spray stinging the skin, and the brutal sight of police officers attacking protesters were a traumatic yet bonding experience for many Hongkongers between 2019 and 2020. During the summer of 2019, millions of Hongkongers protested an extradition bill that would establish a mechanism for fugitives to be transferred from Hong Kong to mainland China. Many feared that the “high degree of autonomy” and the “one country, two systems” principles that had been enshrined in the Hong Kong Basic Law since 1997 would be eroded once the city’s unique jurisdiction was absorbed into China’s legal system – which is largely characterized by its poor human rights record and a lack of judicial independence.

Initially, protesters only demanded the withdrawal of the extradition bill. However, following an escalation in the severity of policing tactics in June 2019, the protesters’ demands grew to include the release and exoneration of all arrested protesters, the retraction of the characterization of the protests as “riots”, the establishment of an independent commission of inquiry into police misconduct, and systematic democratic change including universal suffrage for Legislative Council and Chief Executive elections.

During the protests, art became an indispensable avenue for dissent and political expression. It offered a peaceful, alternative way for citizens to express their views and ideologies without having to protest in the streets. Artists formed an integral part of the political movement that reinvented Hong Kong’s identity and preserved the city’s soul. Anyone could create their own artwork – and anyone who did was referred to as a member of the “文宣組” (publicity faction) of the movement. Most artists created work under pseudonyms, both to protect their identity and to adhere to the movement’s leaderless nature. Their artworks were often distributed via social media, local forum channels, the encrypted messaging platform Telegram, and Apple’s Bluetooth-enabled AirDrop function. They eventually crossed into reality, ending up as banners and signs that protesters held up during demonstrations or stickers that protesters stuck to walls, escalators, footbridges, and public pavements. These innovative methods of creating and distributing led to a level of unity and fluidity that had never been seen before.



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## We redefine who we are

In popular poster art, Hong Kong protesters were often portrayed as brave, passionate fighters prevailing over the evil totalitarian regime and its rulers despite insurmountable odds. The image of the elegant, yet powerful Lady Liberty was often invoked during the protests in the form of statues, posters, and graffiti artwork to symbolize “the unparalleled bravery of Hong-kongers in voicing out amidst the rain of bullets and tear gas”. The design concept behind Lady Liberty was inspired by a typical demonstrator’s outfit: adopting a gallant stance, dressed in head-to-toe black, usually donning a yellow hardhat, protective eye goggles, and gas mask,

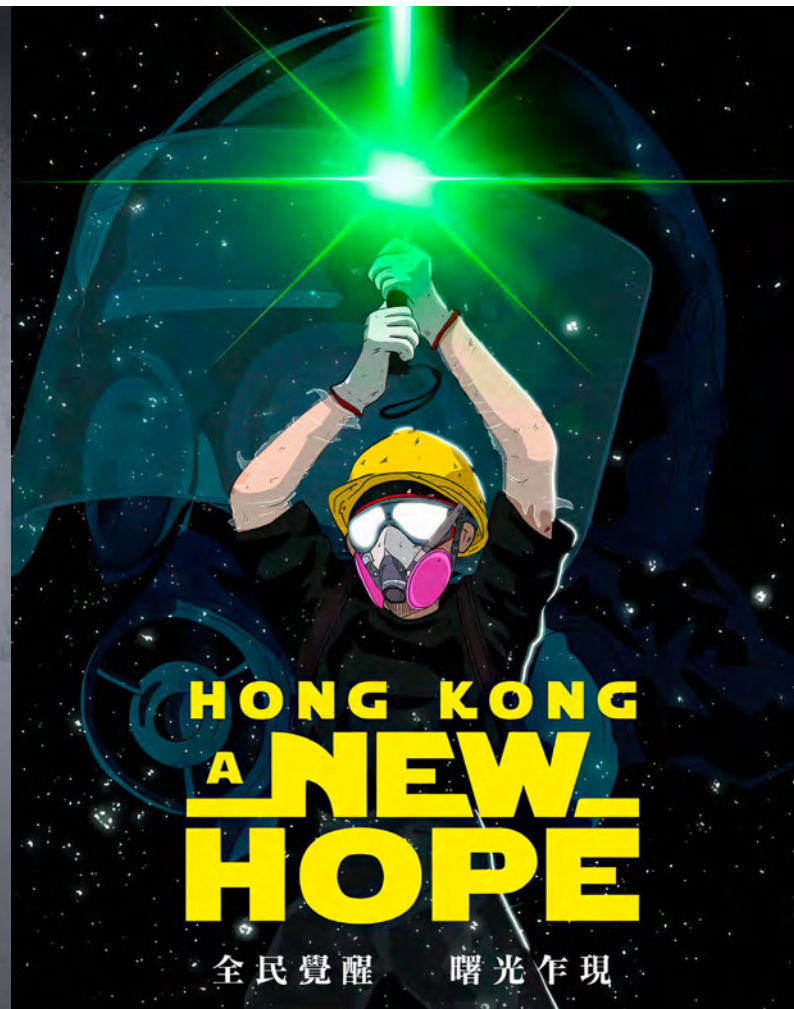
her right hand holding an umbrella and left hand waving a flag with the slogan “光復香港，時代革命” (Liberate Hong Kong, Revolution of Our Times) written across it.

The heroic portrayal of the protesters was a direct repudiation of official state narratives that dehumanized and vilified them by comparing them to “cockroaches” and “political viruses”. It affirmed the pure and noble spirit of the protesters, who were willing to sacrifice their own safety for the collective good. A widely shared painting titled “兄弟爬山” (Our Vantage) created by the anonymous illustrator Harcourt Romanticist did just that. The painting directly referenced Eugène Delacroix’s painting “Liberty Leading the People”, a piece commemorating the 1830 July Revolution in France,





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# HONG KONG A NEW HOPE

全民覺醒 曙光乍現

which toppled King Charles X. The new painting inherits the spirit of freedom from the original and depicts the young protesters in masks and helmets standing over a barricade, waving a Black Bauhinia flag, and holding each other up, emphasizing their unity, strength, and bravery as they fight through tear gas and pepper spray.

Heroes only emerge against the existence of villains. In protest art, the Hong Kong Police Force and government officials were often compared to notorious movie villains that needed to be defeated. Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam was often the target of ridicule in satirical illustrations. She was portrayed as a set of monstrous characters that included Pennywise the Clown from the hit film "IT" and the Jigsaw Killer

from the "Saw" movies. The Hong Kong Police Force was compared to the crazed antagonists in the movie series "The Purge", who indiscriminately hunt down and hurt people.

Protest art often showed good prevailing over evil. Even under the most despairing of circumstances, artists remained hopeful that one day protesters, united against the government, could see a Hong Kong in which citizens could enjoy democracy and freedom once again. Seeking inspiration and solace in the rousing number "Do You Hear The People Sing?" from the 1980 musical "Les Misérables", the lyric "even the darkest night will end and the sun will rise" became a revolutionary call for people to overcome adversity and win the fight against evil. Hongkongers took pride in the fact that their un-



willingness to surrender was their most treasured weapon, the one thing that would take them across the finishing line, a message that could be seen in the “We Will Win” poster designed by famous Chinese dissident Badiucao. Similarly, poster art inspired by youth pop culture, such as the “Star Wars” franchise, became popular among protesters. The film revolves around young heroes rising up and triumphing against older, corrupted authority figures, echoing the situation in Hong Kong. The messages resonating throughout the film franchise – upholding one’s ideals, unity amongst the “rebels”, and resistance against the authorities – were a source of hope and inspiration to many in Hong Kong.

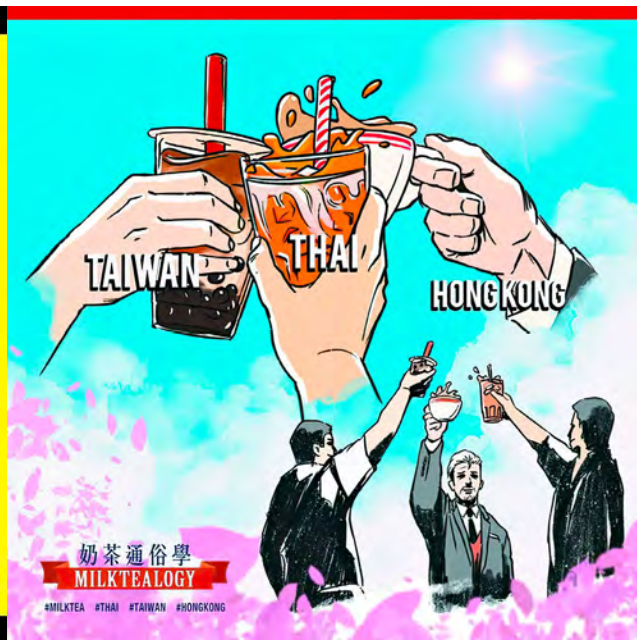
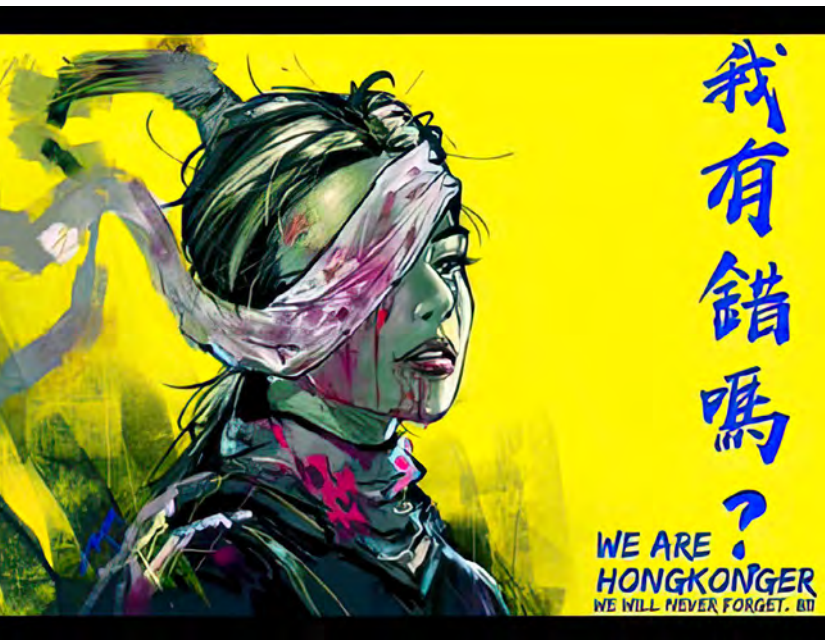
## We remember the truth

Official narratives purported by government spokespeople and the “independent” police watchdog have repeatedly whitewashed widely-publicized instances of police misconduct. While armed officers were caught on film waving their batons, shooting rubber bullets, sponge grenades, and even live ammunition at protesters, journalists, and first-aiders, official reports have largely glossed over such excessive uses of force and instead focused on characterizing protesters as lawless and aggressive. Artwork can be used to remind people of the truth about what actually happened. Poster



art depicted the 7.21 Yuen Long incident, during which police allegedly colluded with a large group of white-clad triad members to attack protesters and other members of the public in a train station; similarly depicted was the 8.31 Prince Edward station attack, during which Hong Kong police indiscriminately attacked passengers and arrested peaceful protesters who were returning home on the underground. The police vehemently denied any allegations of misconduct and abuse of power. The artworks sought to show just how untrue that was and to reclaim the narrative. Protest artwork remembered the fallen and all those who have been victimized by the state.

Illustrations served as a tribute to memorialize many individuals that the government would want to be forgotten and to commemorate their sacrifices. Some of these individuals include Marco Leung, who fell to his death from scaffolding while hanging up a protest banner in a yellow raincoat; a volunteer medic who was blinded by a police projectile; Indonesian journalist Veby Mega Indah who lost her eye while covering the protests; Alex Chow, a student demonstrator who fell to his death from a car park near where police were breaking up a protest; and 18-year-old Tsang Chi-kin, who was shot in the chest at point-blank range by the police.

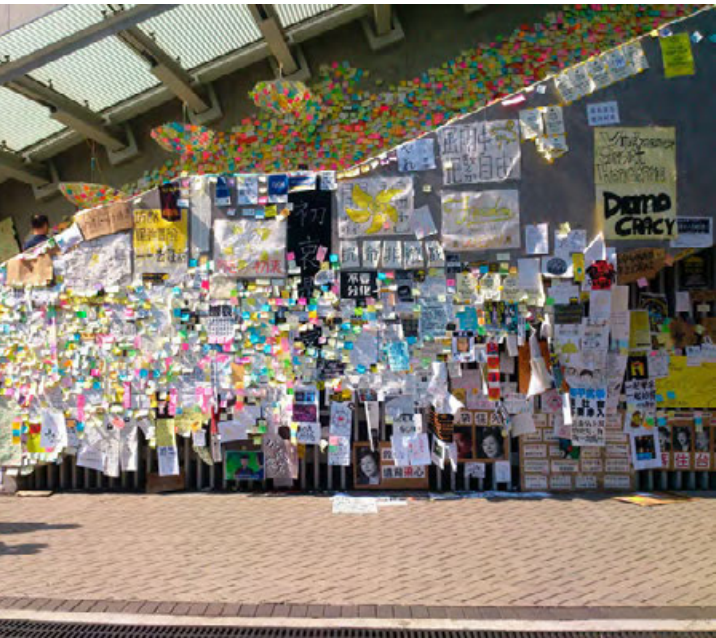


## We stand together

Art can be a tool to express collective defiance. One of the more iconic modes of protest in Hong Kong was the construction of Lennon Walls. Inspired by the original Lennon Wall in Prague (where young Czechs drew graffiti to express their grievances against the newly-installed communist government), many thousands of Hong Kong people posted colorful post-it notes and posters expressing democratic wishes for their city. Messages of freedom and democracy “遍地開花” (blossomed everywhere) and Lennon Walls appeared throughout the city. Colorful Lennon Walls could be found on the sides of underpasses and pedestrian bridges, on shopfronts, and in schools. The ubiquitous Lennon Walls served as a symbol of hope and support between like-minded individuals in Hong Kong. Because of their strong symbolism, Lennon Walls were often the site of conflict between pro-democracy and pro-Beijing citizens, some of whom attempted to tear down messages off the walls. Their attempts were, however, unsuccessful as protesters declared they would put up hundreds more Lennon Walls for each that was removed (“撕一貼百”), and messages of solidarity for

the pro-democracy movement truly blossomed everywhere, as mobile Lennon Walls popped up around the world in cities including Toronto, Berlin, Tokyo, London, Sydney, and Auckland.

Solidarity among protesters was also solidified through art. Following a rising number of suicides that appeared to be directly linked to the demonstrations, protesters began chanting the rallying cry “齊上齊落” (We rise up and go down together) and “一個都不能少” (We can't lose one person) to reinforce the importance of unity and remind one another that everyone had an important role to play in the movement. Artwork often echoed this message, raising awareness of mental health by depicting protesters taking care of each other and shouldering each other's emotional burdens. The phrase “Be Water,” coined by martial arts hero Bruce Lee, was also a returning refrain featured in the artworks: it is a reminder that people should maintain flexibility and open-mindedness, and should adapt to the circumstances they have been put into, no matter how trying they might be. Solidarity between pro-democracy movements across different regions was equally important to the Hongkongers' cause as a way to increase



international outreach and defend universal values of human rights and democracy. In October 2019, Hong Kong activists showed support for Catalan protest leaders who were subjected to police violence and unfair jail terms for their political views. Similarly, in August 2020, Hong Kong protesters expressed solidarity with the demonstrators in Belarus who objected to the unlawful election of President Alexander Lukashenko. Aside from holding parallel rallies, multiple artworks were also created to show support for movements rising up in other countries, which included posters typically showing protesters from different countries holding hands. Important to mention is the pan-Asian solidarity movement known as the Milk Tea Alliance, made up of netizens fighting for freedom from Hong Kong, Thailand, Taiwan, and Myanmar. Originally a response to the increased presence of Chinese nationalist commentators on social media, it has since evolved into a dynamic multinational protest movement against tyrannical regimes and an advocate for democracy. Milk tea refers to the common drink found in all the countries that are part of the alliance: Hong Kong-style *lai cha*, Thai *cha yen*, Taiwanese *boba* tea, and Burmese *laphet-yay* are all local variations of milk

tea with strong similarities. In the wake of the Myanmar coup d'état, anti-monarchy protests in Thailand, and Taiwan's struggle against China's increasing aggression and encroachment, artists in Hong Kong began to exercise their creativity by producing artwork that became solidly integrated into the online anti-authoritarian protest movement.

Between 2019 and 2020, Hongkongers turned art into a key part of their protest strategy, something that everyone could contribute to, regardless of age, gender, skill, or profession. However, Hong Kong's creative community has become noticeably muted following the enactment of the National Security Law on 30 June 2020. The legislation, which criminalizes "secession of Hong Kong, subversion against the Chinese government, terrorism, and colluding with foreign forces", scared even the most outspoken activists into self-censorship and exile. Any form of protest, from street demonstrations to street art, has been banned. Those who are prosecuted on these grounds may face life imprisonment. Many are earnestly finding ways to navigate the growing restrictions and reclaim their artistic expression; many more are taking action to preserve the local culture that may get destroyed or wiped off the Internet at any given time. This chapter is one of those efforts.

## Illustrations

p. 22: "HK Protest Art, Kwai Fong Lennon wall" by Studio Incendo, 2019.

p. 24, left: "Our Vantage" by Harcourt Romanticist, 2019.

p. 27, right: @kailanegg1, 2020.

p. 29, right: ceeseven, CC-BY-SA-4.0.

The authorship of all illustrations not listed here could not be determined.

Erik  
Thurman

# Not 30 Pesos, 30 Years!



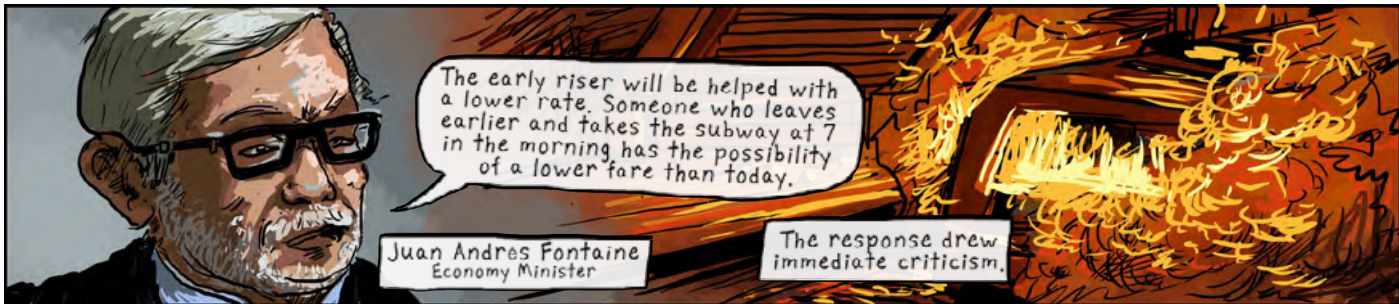
In October 2019, high school students in the Santiago Metropolitan Region of Chile protested against a 30 peso metro fee hike, jumping turnstiles and forcing metro gates open.



The early riser will be helped with a lower rate. Someone who leaves earlier and takes the subway at 7 in the morning has the possibility of a lower fare than today.

Juan Andres Fontaine  
Economy Minister

The response drew immediate criticism.



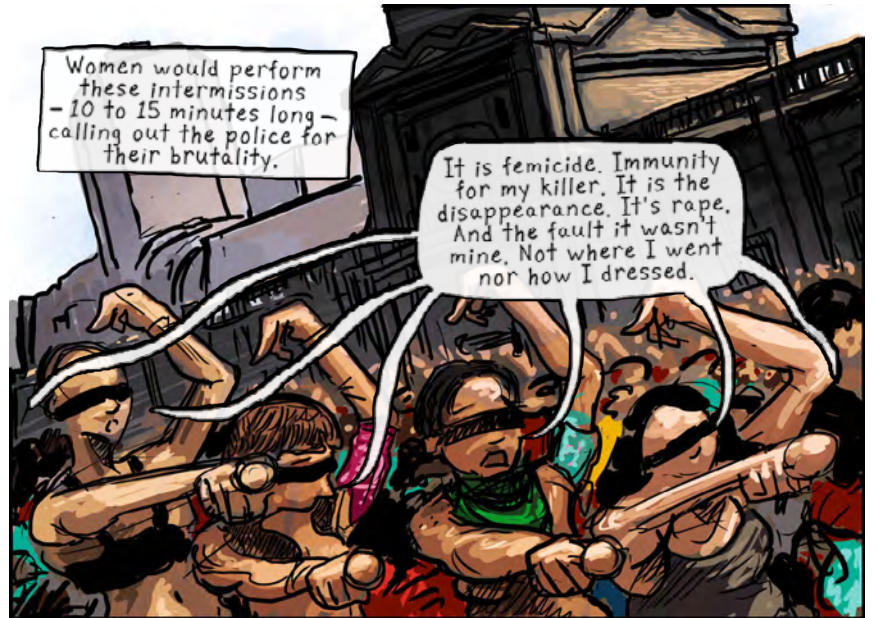
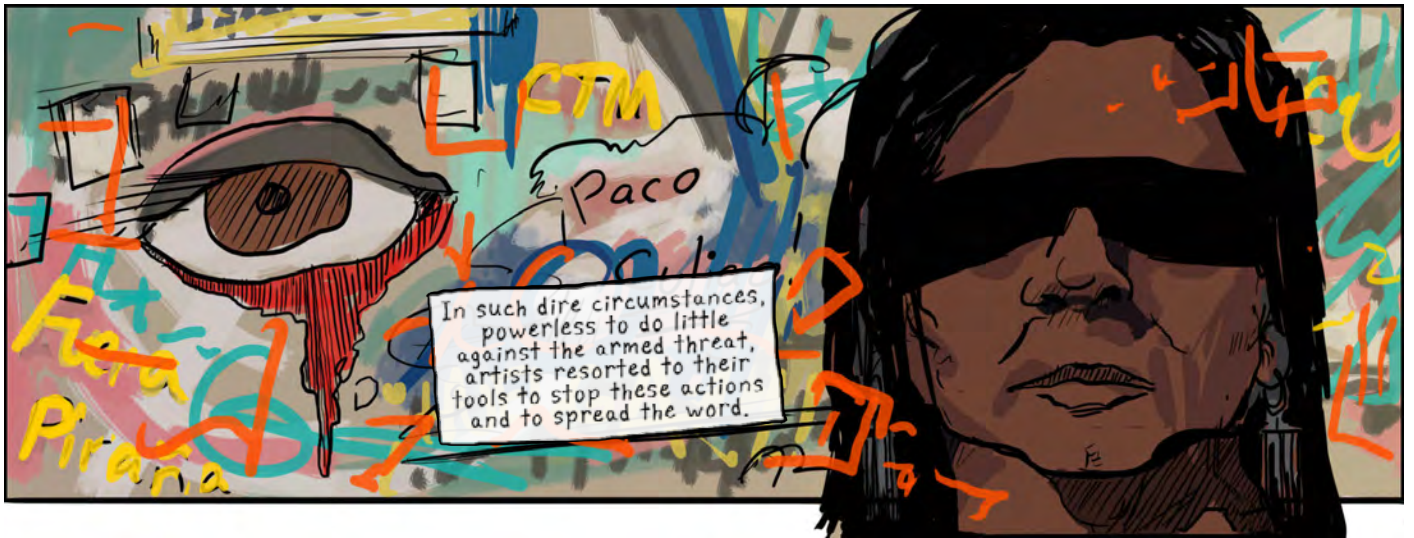
A few days later, the Piñera government escalated the response against protestors leading to riots throughout the capital, using the chaos to declare a state of exception to place military in the streets for the first time since the Pinochet dictatorship.

The events would become the 2019 Social Outbreak - a series of protests and strikes against the Piñera administration, who was looking to crush protest at a time where multiple countries through Latin America were experiencing similar attacks by right-wing governments...

...and where the military was disappearing, - torturing, and intentionally blinded and mutilated protesters by firing at their eyes.

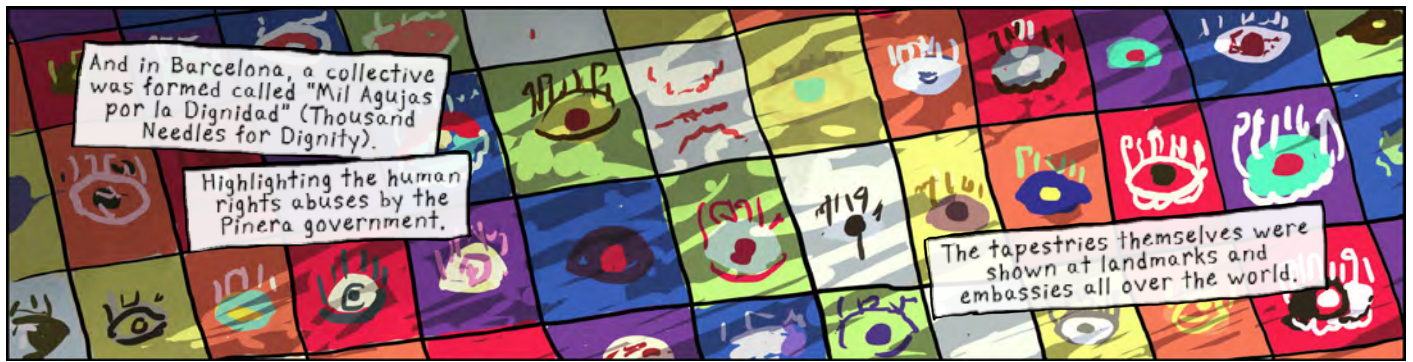


And with international media obscuring these abuses, alluding to Cuban agents and K-pop, the world was left in the dark about the atrocities here as it was in 1973.



"The rapist was you. The rapist is you. The judges. The state. The president."



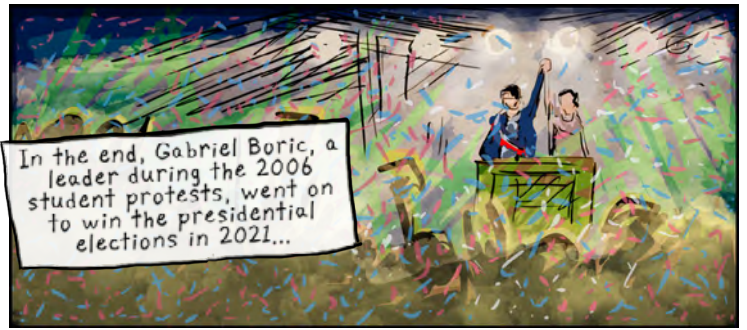


At the core of the protests was the economic system that still remained 30 years after the dictatorship.



A long 30 years of democracy in chains. A rallying call for a new constitution took place that would tear up the last of Pinochet's regime. Protests filled the squares even as curfews were put into place.





Against rising global authoritarianism, perhaps the medium is the message.

# Comuna de Cumming

## 63 Days of Revolt

Text:  
montoneras,  
OPA Kolektiva,  
Taller Fábrica

**“The story of a stream,  
even the smallest one  
that rises and is lost within the moss,  
is the story of infinity.”**

**Élisée Reclus**

Illustration:  
Loica  
@\_manu\_li

**O**n 18 October 2019 “Chile Despertó” (Chile Woke Up). As has been the case many times in recent history, it was high school students who started a massive movement in the Santiago subway, demanding lower fares. At the end of the journey, 41 stations were left inoperative and a revolt broke out with the slogan “It’s not 30 pesos, it’s 30 years”.<sup>1</sup> Behind the hike in transport costs, there were decades, or even centuries of deprivation. On 19 October 2019 “Valparaíso Despertó”. From the top of the hills, crowds moved down from shanties to take over the main streets of this port city. The surrounding neighbourhoods became the sites of long days of protests that included barricades and sit-ins. This is the case of Subida Cumming, where the

neighbourhood – organized with specific tasks for each block – resisted the militarized police force, producing a liberated space that, second by second, was built and constituted as a public (art) work.

Each work was named as an act of liberation. Plaza Aníbal Pinto was renamed Plaza de la Resistencia.

Cumming Street was renamed Comuna de Cumming, echoing other popular revolts such as the Paris Commune. Beneath the asphalt was a torrent of water that retook its course in the streams released into the street as the people took it upon themselves to seek a more just and dignified country.

Here is a text written by twelve inhabitants of the Comuna:

# TIPS BARRIA LES PARA ESPANTAR LOS MALES

RECOPILA PAOLA  
APATA EL ALMACEN

RECOPILA PAOLA

ASAMBLEAS MARTES 17:00

EL PUEBLO AYUDA AL PUEBLO EL BARRIO RESISTE Y SE ORGANIZA !!

CACEROLEA!

FIN A LA MILITARIZACION

descansa y RESISTE LA LUCHA SIGUE

LUCHA!



LIBERTAD A LXS PRESXS POLITIKXS!! NO OVIDANOS LAS MUERTES, TORTURAS, Y VOLVERENOS CON MAS FUERZA NATIAS ORELLANA PE

HUERTEA



APAGA LA TELE !! PRENDE LA MENTE !!

GUARDA UN PERRO

MAGALLANES

TODAS LAS DAJAS SE VAN A DEVOLVER !!

HACE COMPOST PLANTA MEDICINA. LAVANDA, OREGANO, TORRILLO, AJO, MENTA, HINOJO - ASENSO, SARNIA, POLEO, ETC

NO MAS ZONAS de SACRIFICIO

NO MAS INMOBILIARIAS

Donde la mona

Apaña el COMERCIO LOCAL

LES NINEZ DEL BARRIO DECIMOS NO + VIOLENCIA !! TORNA conciencia !!

RECUPERA ESPACIOS !!

GUIDA TUS PALABRAS

¡podrían estar escuchando!

Si llega la REPU, NO DEJAS !!

LA BUZ Grande Las Vecis

Si APATA REGISTRAR A LES COMPUTERES DEBES CUIDAR !! NO REGISTRAS NOSTROS AL SUBIRLO EN RA.SS. PRECAUCION CUIDATE DE LA ANI !!

a la longitud de pan PANCITO L2 21

NO TE OLVIDARAS PANCITO !! PRESENTE !! GUAU GUAU

TIPS ENERGETICO PRENDE VELITAS GUENA ROTTERO - LAUREL ENTOMA TIANTRAS MEDITA - ATA Y SANA AGRADECE, SONRTE Y RESPIRA !!

¡COMTE PROBIOTICOS ITIASA MADRE !!

## The revolt

At around 1 p.m. on 19 October 2019 a small cluster of people, animals, and/or things spontaneously yelled “general strike, general strike, general strike” through the streets of downtown Valparaíso.

As the chants arrived at the former Anibal Pinto square, which is adjacent to Cumming Street, the cluster encountered others, others, and others. A slogan was beginning to take shape. It started as a murmur and spread in the surrounding mountains: “No one and nothing is forgotten”.

Little by little, the clusters became a river of people, overflowing onto the streets and squares. Hordes of mannequins, televisions, and assorted items were coming out of the Ripley’s shopping mall, which began to burn, cutting off a main artery of the city.

Then the river became streams.

Comuna de Cumming overwhelmed the country as a space that was liberated from police-colonial-capital control for 63 days.

## La comuna

The embryo grew. Its birthing cry was a wave that began to spread. The neighbourhood of Cumming opened its doors and streets to become a common house for the commune. On the edges of the commune and among the burning streets, amid a toxic fog of teargas, it was necessary to resist a compromised justice – exposed in ruins, with bodies shot, blinded, imprisoned. From sidewalk to sidewalk: living, dead, dreamed, inert, or unborn learned together in a sort of open code cooperative-school-workshop-cookery-barricade. A living collective work of mongrels, stones, neighbours, termites – mapped in cartographies, posters, potions, and other forms that still swarm the streets of Valparaíso.



## The T-shirt

Instructions for use:

- a. take a T-shirt that fits three people and a roadblock  
(we tailored it to fit the width of Condell Street, the main street of Valparaíso)
- b. sew three T-shirt collars on the top and a sleeve on each side
- c. print a flame pattern
- d. write “Gobierno asesino te estamos mirando” (Killer government, we are watching you), or “Escépticxs totales resentidxs letales” (Totally resentful lethal sceptics)
- e. release the T-shirt in an action entitled “Pasarela” (Catwalk)  
(we released it on 18 December 2019, two months into the revolt)
- f. cut off traffic with the performance
- g. turn the T-shirt into a barricade – as in the Paris Commune,  
we consider the barricade to be a public oeuvre
- h. repeat this action in marches, on 8 March and others  
– it can reappear when you least expect it!

## Cyklostyle

Sometimes from the Peña Folclórica El Canario terrace – a communal shelter – long parchments with sticky slogans were tossed out, launched from multiple pedalling hands to quickly pass from the outskirts to the central marches.

Cyklostyle appeared in the Comuna as a mobile device for mass production of pamphlets. It combined the reuse of a mimeograph with the pedals and sprockets of a bicycle to produce posters in the context of mobilization, 8 March, or communal food.

It was also a tribute to Monique Markowicz, porteña by choice and fighter for human rights, who in her youth used the mimeograph as a tool for clandestine agitation and propaganda.







## Alien upheaval

Around 4 p.m. on 26 November 2019, the Comuna was full of posters, slogans, and some mysterious fanzines left by aliens. On Peña Folclórica El Canario terrace, numerous greenish-gray mongrels and humans were carefully reading contributions by Paula Cometa de LASTESIS, Miguel Norambuena, Gino Bailey, Lucía Egaña, and many others.

Then came an ice-cream truck of Helados York – a well-known local brand; Tuga – a local mime and international star; the anti-riot tank also came while loudspeakers played the Portavoz song “Donde Empieza”: “No me hablen de violencia / como si no la conociera ...” (Don’t talk to me about violence / as if I didn’t know ...).

On the front line, activists chanted “El estado opresor es un macho violador” (The oppressor state is a macho rapist). In that moment, a can of blue paint fell on the anti-riot tank, turning it into a non-visibility UFO. We took shelter in Canario while someone murmured from behind: “Ay, no tener veinte años menos amigos míos...” (If only I were twenty years younger, my friends ...)



## Molotov de Plata

The Gaviota de Plata (Silver Seagull) is the award given by the Viña del Mar music festival to the most cheered on participants, at the request of a demanding public that each year establishes a popularity ranking through shouting and applause.

As a parody of this contest, Comuna de Cumming decided to pay tribute to distinguished communards, giving them a Molotov de Plata (Silver Molotov) in recognition of their work.

Unlike the Gaviota, a small metal statue, we preferred to make our own trophy and ceremony: we prepared a glass bottle well wrapped in aluminium foil, placing cut-outs of flames on top; music from the festival was played through speakers and we invited anyone who wanted to present in the style of the purest daytime TV programmes. Some of these Molotovs were already roaming other streets and communes, igniting the rebellious hearts of those who received them.

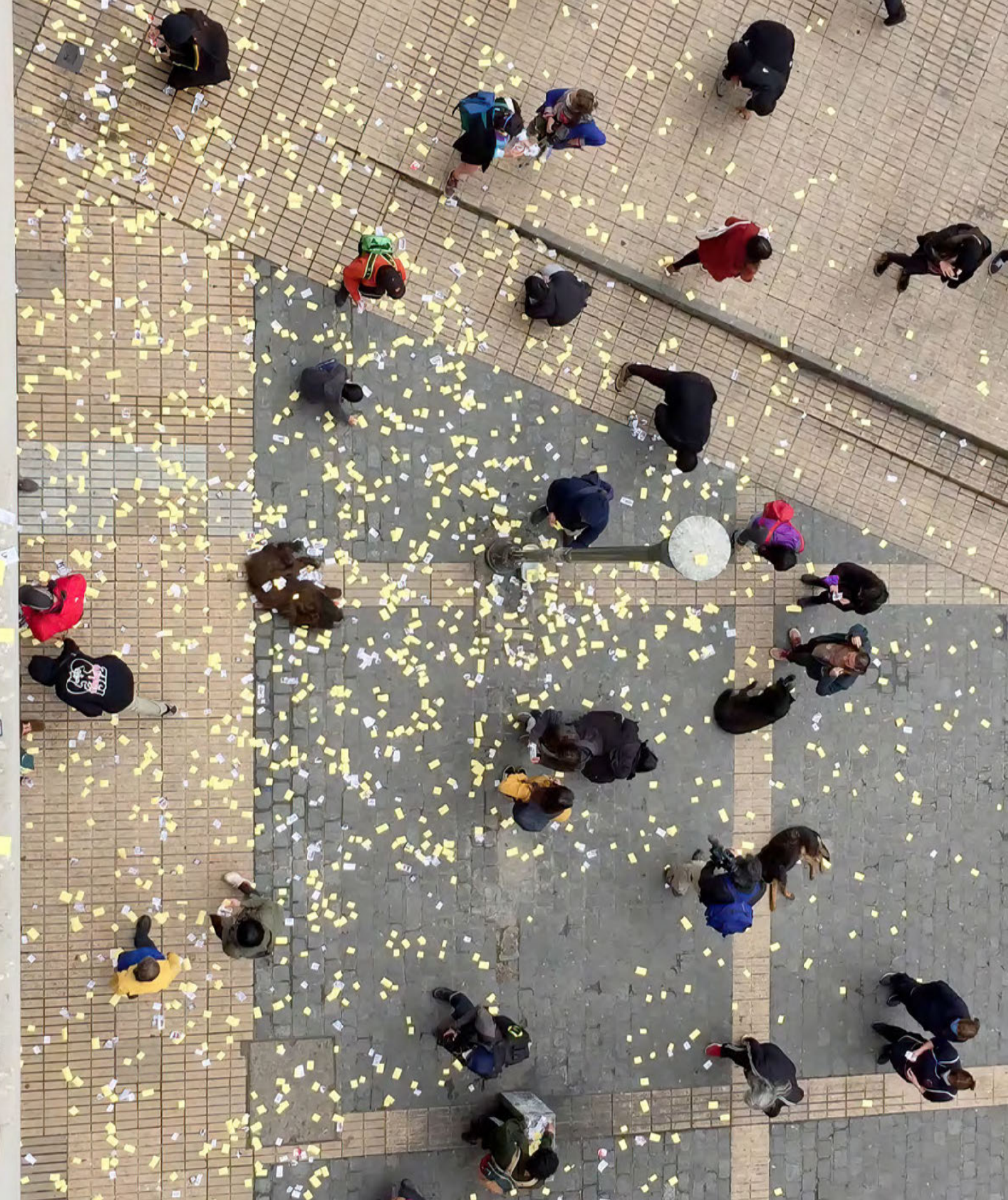
## Moika

At around 1 p.m. on 31 December 2019, to the sound of the “Vals del obrero” (The Worker’s Waltz), a group of communards set up a street beauty salon with the mission of preparing our bodies for the coming year: Moika-punk style haircuts, tattoos on mestizo skin, and graphic propaganda as a visual guerrilla.

A few hours passed and the police tried to put an end to the New Year’s Eve party. Teargas bombs were thrown into the Comuna, which we treasure to this day. We sometimes set them up like bowling pins and threw stones at them while shouting: “Hit and win!!!”

And what did we win? We won the luxury of thinking of our neighbourhood as a beauty salon: streets and monuments could be renamed. The former Plaza Aníbal Pinto – adjacent to our Commune – was renamed Plaza de la Resistencia by means of posters, a metallic plaque, and other signage. Only memories remain of the plaque, since it was stolen to reinstate the colonial order; but the communards continue to call it by its real name: Resistencia.





## Rain

At 12 p.m. on 16 October 2020, one year after the revolt, a heavy rain hit Plaza de la Resistencia. It was not water falling from the sky, but a cloud of stickers launched from the top of Cooperativa Vitalicia – the first skyscraper in the city – thanks to the collaboration of a resident.

Divina Tota – a queer/trans/punk friend of the movement – acted as master of ceremonies to the beat of Rocío Durcal’s well-known song “La gata bajo la lluvia” (The Cat in the Rain). Through an open call, the graphics of La Ratatouille, Julietattoo, Danny Reveco, Mono Gonzalez, Niñxs Antifascistas Valparaiso, among others, were set alive through hundreds of falling stickers.

The performance surprised the public in the square, but not the graphic content – this was already a common part of the words and actions of the Comuna. Dreams rained down, drenching us with future worlds.

### Endnotes

1 See: Not 30 Pesos, 30 Years, p. 30.

### Further reading

[fabrikafabrika.com](http://fabrikafabrika.com)

**Porque fuimos  
Somos y resistimos  
Bajo nuestro pellejo  
La colaboración como arma  
Para germinar mundos  
Y hacerlos lienzo, acorde,  
refugio, salvavidas, sombra,  
aliento, performance, soporte  
y olla común**

**Because we were  
We are and we resist  
Under our skin  
Collaboration as a weapon  
To germinate worlds  
And to make them a canvas,  
chord, refuge, lifeline, shadow,  
breath, performance, support  
and common pot**

**This poem is dedicated to Verdeplomo, a stray dog of the community who died during the revolt in the Comuna and to Pinela, an outstanding community member who passed away in the aftermath.**

# Visualizing Ut



# opia

## The Trojan Horses of the Bishan Commune

Mai Corlin  
Frederiksen





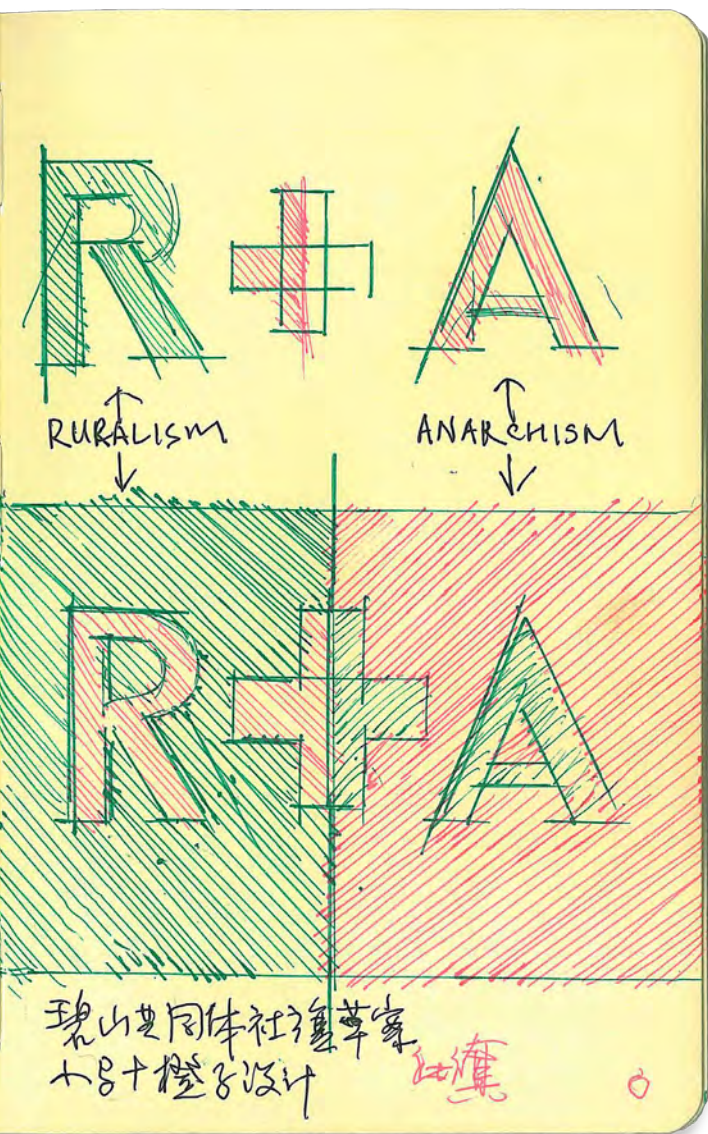
**T**he Bishan Commune project (2010-2016) was an influential long-term socially engaged art project that unfolded in Bishan village in the countryside of Southern Anhui province in eastern China. The project was devised by the artist and intellectual Ou Ning, who in 2010 wrote a notebook entitled “The Bishan Commune: How to Start Your Own Utopia”<sup>1</sup>. The utopia of the notebook was based on the ideas of Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin and the Chinese rural reconstruction advocate of the 1930s James Yen. In 2011, Ou Ning and his colleague Zuo Jing, initiated the Bishan Commune project in Bishan Village in Southern Anhui Province. From 2011 up until its forced closure in early 2016, the Bishan Commune attracted a range of artists, activists, and other volunteers. They came and spent time in Bishan, organizing art festivals, film screenings, second hand shops, reading groups, archery research, performances, sharing sessions, and so much more.<sup>2</sup> Along with being an anarchist, people-centred endeavour in the Chinese countryside, the Bishan Commune presented itself through changing visual strategies that lead me to the following questions: how did the Bishan Commune present itself visually and why? How did this visuality change along the way? The project existed for five years and had its daily routines in the village, it had a visual presence on social media platforms, it had a strong international presence, it was exhibited worldwide, and it was aware of the importance of its visual statements.<sup>3</sup>



## Imagining utopia

Most people’s first visual meeting of the Bishan Commune – myself included – was often through the notebook utopia drafted by Ou Ning. The notebook contains research into alternative communities across the world and provides a blueprint for how to approach the complex issue of creating your own utopia.





The notebook presents drawings for a possible utopian architecture, for the visual appearance, for a passport and community emblem, and so forth. The notebook drawings serve as proxies for imagining other ways of living in a rural China imagined to be hopelessly lagging behind in terms of culture and social coherence. They propose an egalitarian mindset and a political utopia that does not draw upon the legacy of

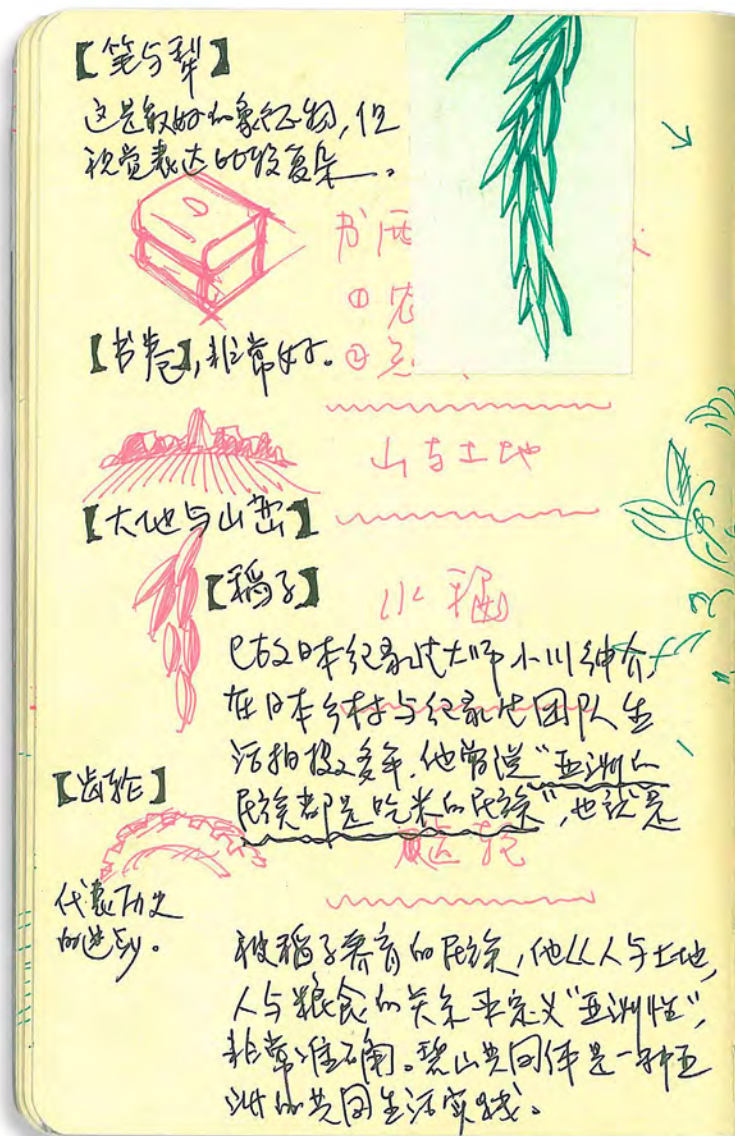


the Chinese Communist Party, but rather sets itself apart by pointing towards historical forefathers (Peter Kropotkin and James Yen), who are not associated with a Maoist past. In the notebook, Ou Ning presents a list of what you should have when setting up a utopia today. Besides a system for architecture, communication, and everyday living, Ou Ning explicitly mentions a “visual system”. Passport, visa permits, vouchers, and the homepage are placed under the category of the visual system, thus placing significant importance on the visual and its ability to attract commune members. The community flag should give a sense of identification, the design and font of the community symbols should not be too refined, instead catering to all kinds of people. The final emblem of the Bishan Commune turned out to be different from the one presented in the notebook (see above). A village was added in the background, as were power pylons connecting the village to the outside world, and a water buffalo (possibly representing Ou Ning’s house named Buffalo Institute) is seen on the field in the front. Next, we shall see how the first visual imagery coming out of the Bishan Project was focused on the ability to attract people from other parts of China (and the world) to come to Bishan.



## Bishan from afar

To many people, the Bishan project looked like a specific photograph taken by Ou Ning, which he used in most of his presentations of the project (see above). The photograph depicts a field view of green rice paddies in the foreground, five small grey-white silkworm-breeding houses and a small grey-white pagoda towards the back, and low mountains in the distant background. This representation is perhaps best described by what is not there: no villagers, no traditional Hui-architecture, no artists, no intellectuals, no government, no art, no exchanges, only: agriculture (or to urbanites: nature). People who had not been to the village could have been led to think that it was a very small, remote, rice-growing village consisting of a pagoda and five poor households (mistaking the silkworm breeding house for inhabited homes). The Bishan project as represented by this photograph seems devoid of some of the crucial ingredients of socially engaged art projects: people. It seems to propose a romantic, rural, utopian dream more than the actual project unfolding in rural China. I have included the image here, because it is one of the images most used to represent the Bishan Commune and because it served a very important initial purpose: to attract people to come to Bishan. However, as Ou Ning settled down in the village, the visual strategy changed to one focused more on displaying the traditional Hui-architecture of the village.



## The Bishan Bookstore

The Bishan Bookstore opened in 2014 and became a central meeting space for villagers and visiting artists interested in the ideas of the Bishan Project.<sup>4</sup> Images of the Bookstore reveal an important change in the visual representation of the Bishan Commune. It shows a departure from the somewhat dreamy, utopian ideas of



the notebook and the rather disconnected green and lush rice paddies. It enters the village proper through one of its core structures: a traditional Huizhou forefather temple of the Wang-clan (see lead image).

I see the introduction of the Bookstore into the Bishan Commune project scheme as a catalytic event. This is where the utopian ideas of the Bishan Commune transform into a Trojan



Horse. Here I think of the Trojan Horse introduced by Lucy Lippard as the first activist art work<sup>5</sup>. The Bishan Commune is taking a leap into the village, through the shape of a traditional Hui-structure. The village committee offered the Bishan Bookstore to rent the old forefather temple for free, and thus let the Bishan Commune occupy a central architectural structure in the village. The village committee invited in the Trojan Horse of the Bishan Commune.

## School of Tillers

A year or so after the Bishan Bookstore opened, another central institution run by the Bishan Commune entered the scene, namely the School of Tillers (see photograph above). The School of Tillers was located in an old Hui-complex adjacent to Ou Ning's house and housed an exhibition space, a library, and a small store from where volunteers helped farmers sell their farm produce. Through the School of Tillers, a large group of volunteers became involved with the project, slowly connecting a strong network of volunteers and villagers, due to which the ideas of the Bishan Commune began to spread in the village. The volunteers, or commune members, were crucial in this. As the soldiers hidden in the belly of the Trojan Horse, the volunteers swarmed into the village and formed new rela-

tionships with different villagers, some of whom were university village officials serving in the nearby village committees. Through the volunteers and university village officials, the ideas of the Bishan Commune slowly seeped into the village committees – the lowest point of entry to the Chinese authorities. It is important to understand that the ideas of the Bishan Commune should not be considered directly subversive or as openly attacking the government. The Bishan Commune Project collaborated with the local government on more or less amiable terms. However, at the same time the Bishan Commune continually worked with an agenda of mutual aid and active engagement with the villagers of Bishan in an attempt to create a new sociality and a new way of living and being in rural China (based on ideas of anarchism).



## Leaving Bishan

With the School of Tillers and the incoming volunteers, the Trojan Horse of the Bishan Commune seemed to be flourishing. However, and perhaps because the Bishan Commune was so successful in creating networks of like-minded people within the village, in February 2016 Ou Ning was told by the central authorities to shut down the Bishan Project and leave the village immediately. With a few days' notice, Ou Ning and his family left Bishan. The local authorities afterwards continued down the path of tourist development and beautified the village to set a good example in the area.

## Illustrations

- p. 46: Performance with the Danish art ensemble *Bevægeligt Akkurat* (Moveable Accurate) at the Bishan Bookstore. Photo: Mai Corlin, October 2014.
- p. 48: View of Bishan Village, Anhui Province, China. Photo: Mai Corlin, October 2014.
- p. 48/49, center: Drafts for passport and flag for the Bishan Commune by Xiaoma and Chengzi. Courtesy of Ou Ning and the Bishan Commune.
- p. 49: The final emblem of the Bishan Commune by Xiaoma and Chengzi. Courtesy of Ou Ning and the Bishan Commune.
- p. 50: View of the rice paddies of Bishan Village. Photo: Ou Ning, 2011.
- p. 50/51, center: Draft for the Bishan Commune emblem by Xiaoma and Chengzi. Courtesy of Ou Ning and the Bishan Commune.
- p. 51: The volunteers of the School of Tillers. Ou Ning in the background. Photo: courtesy of Ou Ning and the Bishan Commune.
- p. 52: The new village square after renovation. Photo: Mai Corlin, August 2019.

## Endnotes

- 1 Ou, Ning, *Bishan Commune: How to Start Your Own Utopia*, Hornslet: OVO and Antipyrine, 2014.
- 2 For an in-depth study of the Bishan Commune, see Mai Corlin, *The Bishan Commune and the Practice of Socially Engaged Art in Rural China*, Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2020.
- 3 The examples I give here of the visual representation of the Bishan Commune do not span the entire visuality of the project. Besides the photographic documentation of the events and life in the village, groups of artists engaged in the project have produced large maps, card games, stories, seed exchanges, paintings, images and much more – all of which carries a visuality of its own. The entire extent of the visuality (and reality) of such a complex and long running project (which was five years) goes far beyond the scope of this essay.
- 4 The Bishan Bookstore was opened by Ou Ning's long-term friend Qian Xiaohua. Qian Xiaohua is known for establishing a whole chain of bookstores in rural China following the opening of Bishan Bookstore. Ou Ning is not financially involved with the bookstore.
- 5 Lippard, Lucy, "Trojan Horses: Activist Art and Power", in Brian Wallis (ed.), *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984, pp. 341–58.

# Singing in



# Dark Times

BounSergi  
Collective

**“In the dark times,  
will there also be singing?  
Yes, there will be singing.  
About the dark times.”**

**Bertolt Brecht**

**W**e are the BounSergi Collective: a group of queer individuals who believe that freedom of expression is crucial in a state of emergency. We formed our collective when our so-called safe-spaces went under siege and we needed to stand together in order not to fall. We organize exhibitions, protests, guerrilla art festivals, and create our own art.

## Background

Turkey's AKP (Justice and Development Party) government has been in power for 20 years. Over the years, it has increasingly descended into the foul pond of fascism. The AKP has been implementing an increasingly authoritarian version of its neoliberal government, benefitting government officials and their allies. The government has been combining authoritarian

neoliberalism with populist Islam-based rhetoric to secure popular support through mobilizing historic anger held by the conservative sections of Turkish society. Turkey is currently a difficult place to live for anyone who does not align themselves with government ideology. As we move further away from freedom and into a world dictated by the beliefs of others, the vulnerability associated with being in any way different increases. Marginalized communities face violence on a daily basis and are getting used to being constantly bullied by the state. Boğaziçi University is one of only a few places where those leading marginalized lifestyles, as well as dissidents, can exist freely. It is also located in a very attractive part of Istanbul, making it interesting in the context of urban transformation



programmes. It is a central feature of AKP's authoritarian neoliberal model to use such programmes to exploit valuable land for their own capital interests. This is why on 1 January 2021, bypassing official elections, the government appointed a rector external to the university. His role would be both to make profit and to stir up a storm.

This is the context during which the Boğaziçi Resistance emerged: the longest non-violent protest and solidarity movement since the Occupy Gezi Protests in 2013. Then and now, any free thought or critique has been perceived as a threat to the reign of ignorance the government works to enforce. Even though the government's oppressive policies create an empire of fear, people continue to express their frustrations, though needing to seek alternative ways to speak up. Art emerged as one of the most efficient tools in this pursuit, since art is able to play into a weakness of authoritarian regimes, by challenging the values that they embrace.

## Boğaziçi resistance

The safety and well-being of queer people or women, along with many others, is not guaranteed in Turkey. The state violates basic human rights. They bully people into normalcy. The only and best place where we felt safe and free to exist as BounSergi has always been our university.

Queer people were at the forefronts of the resistance by carrying rainbow flags, being visible, and celebrating their existence. Seeing different kinds of students, including Muslim and LGBTQ+ students, forming solidarities was troubling to the oppressors. As the movement grew, the illegitimate rector took some aggressive actions, which included closing the LGBTQ+ club and the Sexual Harassment Prevention Coordination. This was severely harmful to our safe spaces. The school became an active war zone between the students and the police. From the beginning of the resistance, the university's South Campus was surrounded by riot police, which included a deployment of snipers.

Our collective came into being during the first month of this period. Our name, BounSergi, is a combination of BOUN (Boğaziçi University) and Sergi, which translates to exhibition in Turkish.





This is how we flowered into the resistance we are today: nourished by the love for strangers and protected against fascist forces of authority by the thorns of solidarity, which grow through the cracks in the cement of a society built on division.

## First exhibition on South Campus

For the first exhibition, we collected more than 400 artworks. This was possible thanks to the contribution of 150 artists worldwide. For the second exhibition, we collected 300 more. The BounSergi art exhibition facilitated a transversal solidarity by gathering people from different backgrounds, artistic disciplines, and political views. There was no selection process: everything that was submitted was exhibited. The art works were vinyl-printed, as if they were banners, and occu-

pled different areas. The transportability and the durability of the material helped us on our mission. We tied them with yarn ropes to everything, everywhere, regardless of the weather conditions; we tied them to trees, on resistors, to the gates of the university; we took them to courtrooms and courtyards, to any protest against the current regime.

Our first exhibition lasted three days and it turned into a stage for various kinds of protests. Hoaxing became one of our most important tactics during the exhibition, which was practiced through punk and rock concerts, choir performances, individual dance performances, raves, stand-up shows, games, and open lectures by queer performance artists. As we confronted the police blockade in front of our gates, we would dress up for the resistance. We turned up the volume of our speakers and marched through the police blockade each day, all together. Especially for us as queer people, our resistance was existential: shining brightly was essential for our performative encounter to be in contrast with the metal, grey, and weaponized riot police forces standing in front of us. We dealt with the distress by turning the campus into a playground and we invited all Boğaziçi University members to play with us in solidarity. Boğaziçi University had never been a place solely

to study. Apart from its educational purposes, it has also been a place for social, intellectual, and artistic gatherings. The political appointment of the new rector was also an attempt to attack our university's cultural tradition. This is why we practiced our culture in excess as a form of protest. On the last day of the exhibition, four people from our collective were arrested on charges of incitement to hatred. The reason given for their detention was on the grounds of an anonymous artwork exhibited during the day. However, the government did not manage to break the resistance with this, as it had hoped to do. Instead, this was the moment when the most confrontative period of the resistance movement began, and the support for the Boğaziçi Resistance among the general public reached 69%.

## The movement flourished

Once our friends were released from prison and house arrest, we organized the second exhibition, which we named after the legal paragraph with which we were prosecuted: "216/1". This exhibition also took place online. In order to avoid police raids, we organized it on the terrace of an apartment, in occupied parks, and in protest areas. As it was forbidden to shout slogans and to gather to protest, we organized pop-up exhibitions in public parks to keep the spirit of resistance alive, in collaboration with five other universities. In solidarity with the Berlin Boğaziçi Resistance, we also organized an exhibition during a Boğaziçi protest in Berlin.

Especially due to everything we experienced during the first exhibition, we received many new works. We used the artworks sent to us to occupy both physical and online spaces. The exhibition gained more exposure when we took it to social media with the intention of reaching more people. We tried to

give space to any person who wished to express themselves through their art, and we discovered many people who had been producing art actively but were not able to find a place to display or perform their works.

While the appointed rector was sitting in his room, we were occupying the campus, parks, and streets with art to confront him with opposing

views that he insistently avoided engaging with. Resisting through an art exhibition allows its participants to self-authenticate their works as art and themselves as artists. Displaying works of art from various disciplines within a political context enabled the demonstrations to maintain a polyphonic yet unified common struggle.





## Now

Since then, half of the collective members moved to Berlin, Germany. We continue to organise pop-up exhibitions and solidarity events, as do those of us who remained in Istanbul. With our new Berlin-Istanbul exhibition, named "Home/Yuva", our aim is to pave the way for international solidarity. We wish for all humankind to call Earth their home.

## Illustrations

p. 54: Süslü, KLAY, 2021.

p. 56, left: Untitled, Ozan Acidere, 2021.

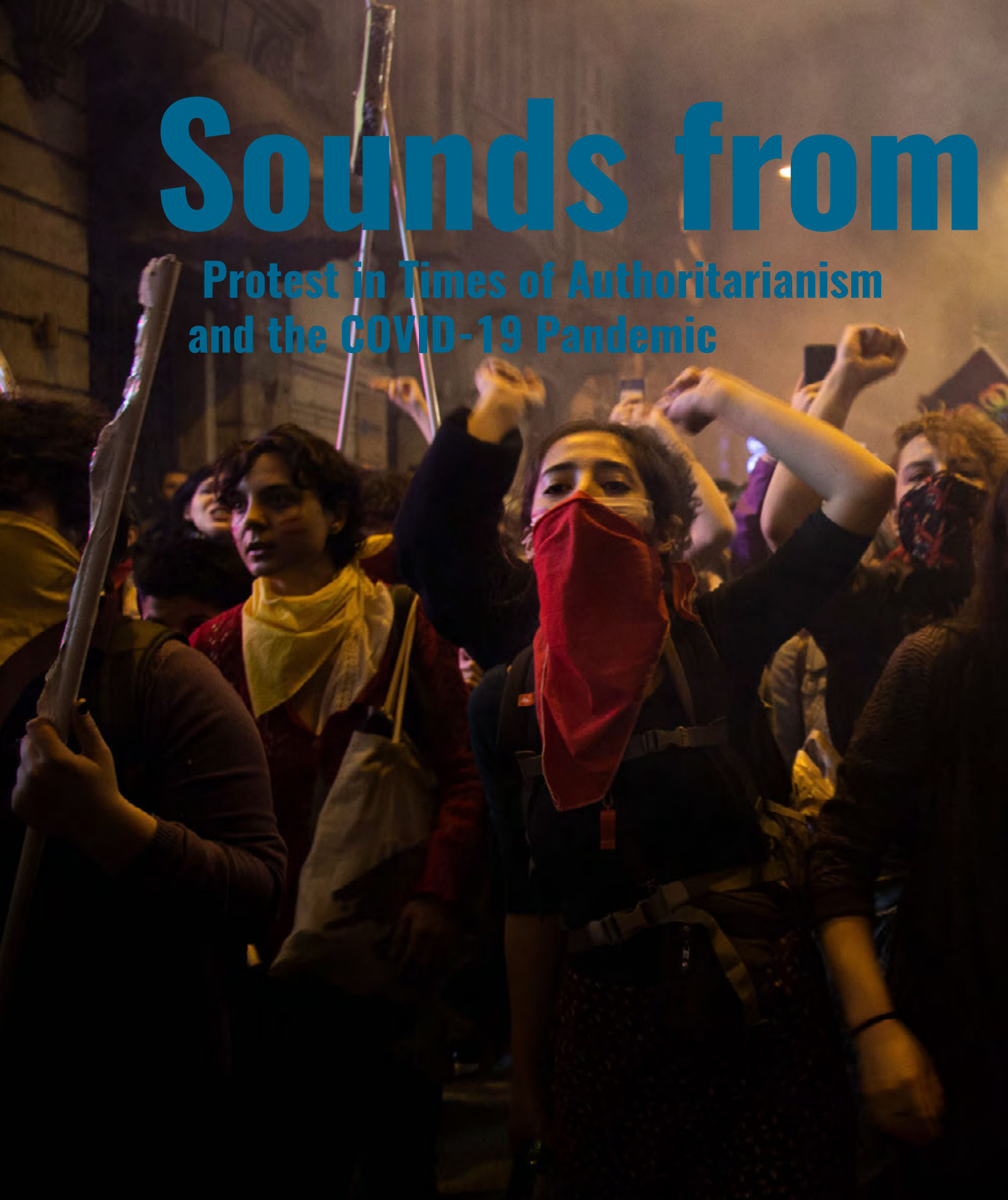
p. 56/57: Asla aşağı bakmayacağız, Hazar, 2022.

p. 57: Untitled, Hazar, 2021.

p. 59: Yılanı Güldürseler, No-Lifer.

# Sounds from

Protest in Times of Authoritarianism  
and the COVID-19 Pandemic



# Below

Begüm  
Özden Fırat

Look at this photograph and listen to this image. Can you feel the sonic atmosphere of the 18th feminist night march in Siraselviler street in Taksim? Do you hear the slogans being chanted as the photograph was taken? Raised arms and open mouths ... Do you feel the anger and the joy?

The 2020 “Istanbul Feminist Night March” had a rather extraordinary atmosphere. That year’s march, which has been bringing thousands of women from all walks of life and generations together in the very centre of Istanbul since its first realization in 2003, was banned by the Governorship of Istanbul – same as the year before. Despite the ban and the massive presence of riot police, I too joined the crowd around the Taksim Square. You could feel the tension in the air. It was extremely noisy. It felt like the march was not only taking back the urban centre and reclaiming the night, but also creating a sound-clash: never-ending hum of whistles, roaring slogans, and screams from the crowd tore the “civilized” urban soundscape apart with its cacophonous rumble.<sup>1</sup>

While all political regimes regulate socio-cultural soundscapes, authoritarian regimes might have specific and intricate ways of controlling the auditory and other sensory aspects of public life. The neo-liberal authoritarian populist regime of Erdoğan and the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) not only represses social and political movements and impedes the right of assembly, it also denies movements the right to speak up and be heard. However, while public gatherings might be suppressed, social movements develop distinctive ways of making themselves heard by inventing new forms of collective action that are possible without necessarily coming together physically.<sup>2</sup> Different auditory tactics are used by diverse movements as a response to the sensory restrictions and regulations of the existing political regime. This contribution focuses on noise actions re-invented during the COVID-19 lockdowns, at the intersection of drastic intensification of social movement repression and socio-spatial restrictions that exemplified the first wave of the pandemic.

## Local soundscapes of the pandemic

A few days after the Feminist Night March, the first COVID-19 case in Turkey was publicly announced. In the aftermath of this announcement, cities gradually became quiet as the practices of lockdown and self-isolation became the urban rule. Yet, pandemic cities had a polyphonic texture to them even when they were thought to be completely silent. Kate Wagner proposes to think of pandemic cities as a combination of silenced urban centres on the one hand and massive crowds and noisy protests, such as the Black Lives Matter protests,

on the other. She argues that these two soundscapes encapsulate an age-old battle between noise and silence, which is a struggle for control over city life, and “resolving the conflict between them demands facing broader issues of environmental, social, and political power”.<sup>3</sup>

As Wagner underlines, this sonic struggle between noise and silence endured not only in urban centres but also in the peripheries. During the so-called first state-imposed lockdown, which took place roughly between March and July 2020 all over Turkey, cyclical protests, public celebrations, and commemorations were performed noisily from the thresholds of dwellings – such as windows and balconies – enabling people to join in collective protest and joy without leaving their homes. In this sense, it is plausible to argue that while the imposition of lockdowns gave the state a chance to expand its domains of power and strengthen technologies of surveillance and control, it also turned local neighbourhoods into spaces of solidarity with a vivid sonic atmosphere.

The first instance of noise protests was the applause action, held from balconies at 9 p.m. and which offered symbolic support for health-care workers. This solidarity action, which was organized from below on social media was immediately co-opted by state authorities, with the Minister of Health and President Erdoğan announcing various calls for applause. After this action was initiated, the General Directorate of Religious Services published a statement inviting mosques all over the country to recite the salah, and to chant prayers and hymns. Every night for a couple of weeks, applause and chants were in competition with the ever-intensifying sound of imams praying. The urban pandemic soundscape of Istanbul, shaped by the contesting sounds of chants during public celebrations, cyclical national and political events, applause actions, religious hymns, and ordinary everyday sounds is captured in the short documentary “The Lightwell”.

In research conducted during the 2020 lockdowns, one of our interviewees from the middle-class Şişli neighbourhood in Istanbul stated that noise protests gave people, who had been for many years afraid to take to the streets, the chance to raise their voices without taking the risk of being seen and identified as a protester.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, such protests politicized local neighbourhoods and turned them into a space where clashes between hegemonic and non-hegemonic sounds take place. Yet this does not mean that such protests are not containable by ruling powers, or that local protests do not repress the minority voices within.

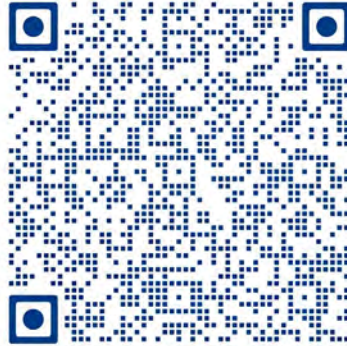
## Organizing public celebrations and protests on balconies

Similar to the ways in which the autonomously initiated applause actions were contained, state officials sent top-down “invitations” to celebrate on balconies the “National Sovereignty and

Children’s Day” festivities on 23 April and the “Commemoration of Atatürk, Youth and Sports Day” on 19 May. As nationalist songs sung by people echoed on the streets, other voices and languages were locked in the private realm and were silenced. It seemed like 24 April, which marks the beginning of the Armenian Genocide in Istanbul, had never been so silent before.

While the nationalist sounds of public commemorations took over local soundscapes,

radical unions called people to give a voice to May Day celebrations from their balconies, since it was impossible to get together in urban squares. Similarly, Taksim Solidarity sent out a call to commemorate the anniversary of the Gezi Uprising on 31 May. Newroz, a traditional spring festival celebrated by the Kurds in Turkey, was also celebrated with noise actions on roofs and balconies. Such organization of sounds from below created a feeling of an alternative community through the presence of sheer sound. In our research, another interviewee named Emek, a woman identifying herself as a leftist, described the formation of community through noise protests as follows:



Scan the QR code to watch “The Lightwell” (directed by Begüm Özden Fırat, 2020) or go to [tinyurl.com/2whthrf](https://tinyurl.com/2whthrf)

*“At Newroz, I heard noises from the windows in our street. I realized that the noises were coming from my neighbours next door, whom I never met face to face before. They were chanting slogans for Newroz or playing May Day revolutionary songs on tape, I felt like I belonged to a community without ever meeting them. I felt like I knew them, without meeting them, even before seeing them.”*

However, Emek also knew that there were others who were disturbed and felt uncomfortable with such radical sounds echoing through their neighbourhoods. In this sense, noise spilling from windows, balconies, and sometimes even rooftops has turned the soundscape of cities into a conflict zone. Yet again, the recent celebration of festivities, such as the national holiday on 23 April, reveals that dominant voices rule not only the national, but also the local soundscapes during the pandemic as well.

In 2021, the “Feminist Night March” took place in the streets despite the burgeoning repression against the feminist movement and threat of the spread of the coronavirus. The Governorship of Istanbul banned the march again, and yet again the march took place in the streets – and it was epic and lurid. From then on, social movements started taking to the streets again, while organized rallies were usually banned on grounds of the coronavirus. Under these circumstances, local noise protests became customary even after state-imposed lockdowns were over. For example, during the Boğaziçi University protests of 2021, which started as a response to

Erdoğan naming a AKP loyalist as the rector of the university, massive demonstrations in and around the campus, as well as local noise protests in several neighbourhoods, were held. While I am writing this text, Turkey is going through one of the worst economic crises in its history with the Turkish lira hitting an

all-time low. Overnight, the crisis sparked popular protests demanding the resignation of the government. Socialist parties organized small neighbourhood-scale protests in the streets, and those who stayed indoors accompanied them by banging pots and pans from their balconies and windows.

These recent examples show that a new protest (sound)scape might be in formation. The noise demonstrations organized in local neighbourhoods and that became popular during the pandemic lockdowns, seem to have had a lasting effect on the action repertoire of social movements. This could be a temporary phenomenon, but it might also well become a lasting method used as collective warming up, a testing of the waters, before hitting the streets.

## Illustrations

p. 60: The 2020 Feminist Night March, Ateş Alpar, 2020.

p. 66: Action call made by Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey – DİSK for MayDay 2020. It reads: “Every balcony is May 1 area / Every window is a square! / On May 1 evening we are on the balconies / For a new social order”.





## Endnotes

- 1 See Ege Akdemir, “Listening to Possible Worlds: The 2019 İstanbul Feminist Night March and its Acoustic Conflicts”, Unpublished master thesis, İstanbul: Boğaziçi University, 2021.
- 2 For different and dispersed forms of collective action before and during the pandemic, see Aylin Kuryel and Begüm Özden Fırat, “Remembering the Crowd: Collective Action During the Pandemic”, *Prospections: How to Assemble Now*, 2020. [bakonline.org/prospections/remembering-the-crowd-collective-action-during-the-pandemic/](https://bakonline.org/prospections/remembering-the-crowd-collective-action-during-the-pandemic/)
- 3 Kate Wagner, “The Struggle For The Urban Soundscape” *The Atlantic*, 2020. [theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2020/07/the-struggle-for-the-urban-soundscape/614044/](https://theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2020/07/the-struggle-for-the-urban-soundscape/614044/)
- 4 This research conducted by Berfin Atlı, Çișel Karacebe, Suzi Asa, and myself examined the acoustic experiences of Kurtuluş inhabitants, living in two distinct neighborhoods Son Durak and Pangaltı, during the first wave of the pandemic, when there were strict curfews. The study focuses on how each neighbourhood, with its different socio-economic demographics, architectures, and topographies, operates as an acoustic community.

# Songs for and Regional Solidarity

يا بشار ياملعون  
مفكر علينا بتمون  
دم الشهداء ما بنخون  
و يلا ارحل بشار

يا بشار ويا دكتور  
حاج تلف وحاج تدور  
دمك في درعا مهدور  
و يلا ارحل يا بشار

يا بشار و يا خسيس  
انت ألعن من ابليس  
ويا لله ارحل يا بشار  
و بدنا شيلك يا بشار  
و بهمتنا القوية

ويا بشار ويا مندرس  
تضرب انت وحزب البعث  
وروح صلح حرف الاس  
ويلا ارحل يا بشار

و بدنا نشيلو لبشار وبهمتنا القوية  
سوريا بدا حرية.. سوريا بدا حرية

وبلا ماهر وبلا بشار وهالعصابة الهمجية  
سوريا بدا حرية .... سوريا بدا حرية

يا بشار و يا خسيس  
و دم الشهداء مانو رخيص  
و ضبلي غراضك بالكيس و  
يلا ارحل يا بشار

Joey  
Ayoub

# Free Syria Cross-Border

## يلا ارحل يا بشار حماة ( 2011 )

ويا بشار طز فيك  
وطز يلي بيحيك  
والله بقرف طلع فيك  
ويلا ارحل يا بشار

ويا بشار حاه تدور  
ودمك بحماة مهدور  
وخطأك مانو مغفور  
ويلا ارحل يا بشار

لسا كل فترة حرامي  
شاليش وماهر ورامي  
سرقوا اخواتي وعمامي  
ويلا ارحل يا بشار

يلا ارحل يا بشار  
ويا بشار مانك منا  
خود ماهر وارحل عنا  
وشرعيتك سقطت عنا  
ويلا ارحل يا بشار

يا بشار ويا كذاب  
تضرب أنت وهالخطاب  
الحرية صارت على الباب  
ويلا ارحل يا بشار

ويا ماهر وياجبان  
ويا عميل الامريكان  
الشعب السوري ما بنهان  
ويلا ارحل يا بشار

**M**ost of the region known as the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), or South West Asia & North Africa (SWANA), continues to be mired in brutal military dictatorships or monarchies.

At the time of writing, however, which is over a decade following the start of the 2011 revolution and several years into Syria's ongoing destruction, chants first heard on the streets of Syria have been since re-used in Palestine and Lebanon. For that reason, this text will argue that chants are some of the most powerful remnants of a time not permitted to survive.

On 30 December 2011, surrounded by thousands of Syrian protesters in Homs' Clock Tower Square, ex-goalkeeper Abdul Baset al-Sarout led the crowd in chanting one of the region's most famous songs:

جنة جنة جنة والله يا وطنًا  
"Heaven, heaven, oh our homeland [is heaven.]"

يا وطن يا حبيب يا بو تراب الطيب حتى تارك جنة  
"Oh homeland, oh beloved, oh good soil, even your fire is heaven."

By the time he was killed in combat in June 2019, al-Sarout had led hundreds of chants at protests throughout the country, especially in his native Homs.

## Cross-border co-conspirators

During another protest that took place just a few days later on 3 January 2012, this time in Hama, Ibrahim Qashoush led the crowd in singing the following:

جنو جنو البعثية لما طلبنا الحرية  
"They lost their mind, they lost their mind, the Baathists lost their mind when we demanded freedom."

Qashoush and his musical co-conspirators changed the term "heaven" (janna) to "they lost their mind" (jannou). As it happens, "Baathists" (Baathyyeh), a reference to the ruling Baath party in Syria which has been in power since 1970, rhymes with both freedom (Hurryeh) and thieves (Harmyyeh), so the rest of the chorus goes like this:

يلعن روحك أبو حافظ يا ابن الحرامية  
"Curse your soul Abou Hafez [Bashar Al-Assad], you son of thieves."

Every verse is followed by a repeat of the chorus: Baathyyeh (Baathists) and Harmyyeh (thieves), with Hurryeh (freedom) stubbornly inserting itself between the two.

Chants are often overlooked as being nothing more than momentary. In Syria, there is even a term for the pre-2011 policy of the Assad regime to occasionally allow some critical voices to reach a wider audience: tanfis. In the words of Shareah Taleghani, author of "Readings in Syrian Prison Literature: The Poetics of Human Rights", tanfis could be understood as a "safety valve" which "preserves the hegemony of a repressive regime by allowing the venting of frustrations that might otherwise be translated into oppositional political action"<sup>1</sup>. Dismissing the importance of chants, therefore, risks reinforcing the structures which uphold authoritarian regimes such as that of Assad in Syria. To put it differently, ignoring chants is akin to accepting the logic of tanfis: they are there to let some steam out, but nothing more.

Instead, it is important to recognize that chants, alongside visual creations such as protest signs, memes, music videos, and so on, are tools of non-violent resistance, especially during times when taking to the streets becomes too dangerous. For example, when the Assad regime was dropping bombs on Eastern Ghouta in March 2018, one defiant singer in Yarmouk opted to release a video of himself singing for Ghouta, which was visible in his background, encouraging its residents to rise up.

## **Get out, Bashar**

Hama (2011)

**Get out (depart), Bashar  
Bashar you are not one of us  
Take Maher and leave us  
Your legitimacy with us has fallen  
Yalla get out Bashar**

**Oh Bashar you liar  
To hell with you and your speech  
Freedom is at the door  
Yalla get out Bashar**

**Oh Maher you coward  
You agent of the Americans  
The Syrian people will not be insulted  
Yalla get out Bashar**

**Oh Bashar, screw you  
And screw those who salute you  
God is disgusted by you  
Yalla get out Bashar**

**Bashar, stop hiding  
Your blood is worthless in Hama  
Your mistake is not forgiven.  
Yalla get out Bashar**

**There are new thieves all the time  
[Dhu al-Himma] Shalish and Maher [Al-Assad] and Rami [Makhlouf]  
They robbed my brothers and my uncles  
Yalla get out Bashar**

Since the 2011 Arab Spring, we've seen a creative outburst of Arabic (and Kurdish) chants and songs, particularly from Syria, crossing the region's colonial borders into neighboring Lebanon and Israel-Palestine. Part of their appeal is their malleability of being adaptable to the context in which they are sung. For example, in Da'el in February 2012 protesters chanted: "Even if he [Assad], wants to kill thousands with a Shilka [Soviet-era tank] or an AK47, even if he becomes Muammar Gaddafi, we will liberate Syria."

By then, the Assad regime had already declared war on Homs and started obliterating neighborhood after neighborhood starting from Baba Amr. The protesters in Da'el referenced this by singing: "Baba Amr bleeds and the massacres are a daily occurrence, and the world does not care. Where is Arab chivalry? The [United Nations] security council, deaf to our cries, did not hear the million-man march. Tell us how many it will cost; we want to liberate Syria!"

In this song, as with many that preceded and that followed, protesters were referencing existing realities. They knew what was happening around them and they responded with death-defying chants celebrating life, solidarity, and revolution.

## Adapting local contexts

Their impact has been so powerful that by the time large-scale protests were happening in Lebanon (2019) and Israel-Palestine (2021), Lebanese and Palestinian protesters took some of the Syrian chants, adapted them to their local contexts, and spread them on the streets and the internet.

Take the example of "*yalla erhal ya Bashar*" (hurry up, leave Bashar [Al-Assad]), also by Qashoush. "*Yalla erhal ya Bashar*" has since been adapted by protesters throughout the region and beyond. During the 2019 October revolution, protesters adapted the "*ya Bashar*" chant to the various warlords and oligarchs ruling Lebanon, such as Nasrallah, Hariri, Aoun, Berri, Jumblatt, Geagea, Bassil, Sinioura, and more. It exists in multiple

versions, perhaps the most iconic being the chant sung by Lebanese diaspora protesters in Paris on 17 November 2019 in which most of the major politicians were named.

A group of feminists even went beyond the specific Lebanese context and adopted the tune; they converted the "*ya/lla/er/hal/ya/ba/shar*" into "*thaw/ra/bi/kel/el/belden*", meaning "revolution in all of the countries".

In addition to its resonance across Arab-majority countries such as Iraq, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, and Palestine, the chant was also heard in Hong Kong, Iran, and Chile – places also engaged in struggle. When the chant first emerged, not all countries were actively engaged in struggle, but all were and are countries that have this immediate potential. Feminists created a bond in such a way, as if saying to the others "we are waiting for you": "We know that you will one day engage in struggle (again)".

As it happens, when Palestinians took to the streets against Israeli violence in May 2021, some of them looked to another Lebanese chant. "Hela Hela Ho", which was sung in Haifa, was first sung in Beirut against the Lebanese politician Gebran Bassil. It was adopted in Haifa and targeted Mahmoud Abbas, leader of the Palestinian Authority and a figure widely seen as complicit in the Israeli occupation.

This chant is simple and purposefully vulgar, a way of showing complete disrespect to figures who constantly demand to be respected: "Hela Hela, Hela Hela Ho, Fuck [name of politician]". Literally: "his mother's vagina" which means "fuck his mother" (the "Emmo" [his mother] rhymes with the "Ho" sound) as a way of saying "fuck [name of politician]". Given the gendered nature of this insult, common in Lebanon and the region, feminists have tried to reclaim it by replacing the second part of the sentence with "fuck Gebran and his uncle"; "his uncle" being a reference to the president Michel Aoun, Bassil's father-in-law. The Arabic for "fuck him" here literally translates to "my penis [in Gebran]" as means of subverting the otherwise common

**Bashar, you infiltrator  
Screw you and the Baath party.  
And go fix your letter 's'  
Yalla get out Bashar**

**We will remove Bashar by our strong determination  
Syria wants freedom**

**No Maher [Al-Assad] and no Bashar and no barbaric gang  
Syria wants freedom**

**Oh Bashar you villain  
The blood of martyrs is not cheap  
Pack your stuff in a bag  
Yalla get out Bashar**

**Oh Bashar you damned  
You think you can cheat us  
The blood of martyrs is not cheap  
Yalla get out Bashar**

**Oh Bashar you doctor  
Enough hide and seek  
Your blood is worthless in Daraa  
Yalla get out Bashar**

**Oh Bashar you villain  
You are cursed by the devil  
Yalla get out Bashar**

**We will remove you Bashar  
With our strong determination**

usage of a mother's genitalia as an insult. Palestinian refugees in Lebanon were the first to use the "Hela Hela Ho" song against Mahmoud Abbas in 2019, while also joining in the chants against Lebanese politicians. In other words, Palestinians across the Israel-Palestine/Lebanon border, the border that stands in the way of their right of return, saw value in a chant and used it against both Lebanese and Palestinian politicians.

Palestinians have also been singing the "Heaven, heaven, oh our homeland" song popularized by al-Sarout over the past decade, most recently in May 2021, and protesters in Lebanon adapted the Syrian chant "*hur hur hurryeh*" (free, free, freedom) to their local context. This is how it goes:

حر، حر، حرية، نحنا بدنا حرية، غصبا عنك يا بشار، رح  
نحصل عالحرية

*"Free- free- freedom, we will reach our freedom.  
Despite you oh [name], we will reach our freedom."*

In Syria, the person named would be inevitably Bashar Al-Assad. In Lebanon, a country which unlike Syria doesn't have a single dictator, the main oligarchs and warlords listed before would be named instead, as done in October 2019 by a group of protesters in Beirut, for example. Having been present at this event, I can describe the mood as that of euphoria, as if we had finally managed to break the taboo of respectability against our politicians.

## The most famous of them all

Finally, no overview of regional anti-government chants would be complete without mentioning the most famous of them all:

الشعب يريد إسقاط النظام  
*"The people want the downfall of the regime."*

It was first chanted in Tunisia and Egypt. It then spread and continues to echo and travel across the region, having been heard again in the streets as recently as in 2019 in Lebanon, Iraq, Sudan and Algeria and in 2021 in Israel-Palestine. In Lebanon, the chant was adopted to the local context, with "the regime" (although this word was also used many times) replaced with "sectarianism", a reference to the country's confessional political system widely seen as a major source of corruption. In Israel-Palestine, protesters in front of Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque replaced "the regime" with "the president", Mahmoud Abbas.

## Endnotes

- 1 R. Shareah Taleghani, *Readings in Syrian Prison Literature: The Poetics of Human Rights*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2021.

## Further reading/listening

thefirethesetimes.com

Video of the song "Get out, Bashar":

[youtube.com/watch?v=a-qDRkZ1354](https://youtube.com/watch?v=a-qDRkZ1354)



## يا حيف سميح شقير

يا حيف اخ ويا حيف  
زخ رصاص على الناس العزل يا حيف  
وأطفال بعمر الورد تعتقلن كيف  
وانت ابن بلادي تقتل بولادي  
وظهرك للعادي وعليه هاجم بالسيف  
يا حيف يا حيف

وهذا اللي صاير يا حيف  
بدرعا ويا يما ويا حيف  
سمعت هالشباب يما الحرية عالباب يما طلعو يهتفولوا  
شافو البواريد يما قالو اخوتنا هن ومش رح يضربونا  
ضربونا يما بالرصاص الحي  
متنا، بايد إخوتنا، باسم امن الوطن  
واحنا مين إحنا  
واسألوا التاريخ، يقرأ صفحتنا

### Ya heif (What a shame)

Samih Choukeir

Ya heif

Firing your guns on unarmed civilians ya heif

Young children young as roses being detained, how can this be?

You are the son of my country, and you are killing my children

Your back is turned to the enemy and you're pulling a sword in my face

Ya heif

مش تاري السجن يما كلمة حرية وحدة هزتلو اركانو  
ومن هتفت لجموع يما اصبح كالمسوع  
يما يصلينا بنيرانو واحنا اللي قلنا اللي بيقتل شعبو خاين  
يكون من كاين  
والشعب مثل القدر  
من ينتخي ماين  
والشعب مثل القدر  
والامل باين

يا حيف

This is what's happening, ya heif,

In Dar'aa, this is what's happening, oh mother!

Young people heard that freedom is at the gates so they went out to call for it

They saw the guns and said the gunholders won't shoot for they are our brothers

But they did shoot us, oh mother, with real bullets

We were killed by the hands of our brothers in the name of national security

Who are we?

Ask history, it will show you our page

A single word, 'freedom' oh mother shooock the jailer to his core

And when the crowd chanted, o mother he became mad

We became his target and we're the ones who said:

'He who kills his people is a traitor

Whoever he may be'

Our people are like destiny

They will rise and they will be heard

Our people are like destiny

And hope is clear

Ya Heif



# From Solidarity Anti-Capitalism

**T**he public appearance of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in Chiapas, Mexico, on 1 January 1994, exposed a racist and elitist state that did not guarantee the most basic demands of its citizens. The EZLN was born as an armed movement with an indigenous base, but soon became a source for daily political practice in the fight for land, work, housing, food, health, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice, and peace. It awakened minds and nourished hearts, pushing to imagine and create worlds that respect *other* ways, times, and geographies.

With this in mind, the Zapatistas founded the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) in 1996, a space for meeting, dialogue, analysis, and connection for all the native peoples of Mexico. The CNI is currently composed of 43 native peoples, each bringing its own culture, history, and challenges. Its intention is to be a network that strengthens struggles and ways of organization, representation, and decision-making, breaking away from the practices of old politics that rely on institutionalism and the seizure of power.

The emergence of the EZLN has been a watershed moment that inaugurated a new way of doing politics: a way that is more horizontal, and through which each people resolves its problems

without waiting for state assistance. These *other* politics have their origin in the national events of 2001. The hegemonic party that had governed for 71 years lost the elections, giving way for a new government. People began to talk of a transition to democracy. However, the continued exclusion of native populations and the strong authoritarian component of the state soon

became evident.

As a result, the EZLN broke off negotiations with the federal government and opted for *de facto* autonomy. Operating in this way, it has been able to implement its forms of organization and government, as well as its educational, pro-



# ty to st Organizing

## Globalizing Other Politics from Below and to the Left

Inés Durán Matute,  
Rocío Moreno

ductive, health, justice, and communication systems to improve the living conditions of the communities. The intention of the EZLN was not only to fight for and with the native peoples, but also for and with “all the exploited and dispossessed”, as announced in the Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona (2005). Their goal was to create a national program of anti-capitalist struggle through

*“another way of doing politics, one which once again has the spirit of serving others, without material interests, with sacrifice, with dedication, with honesty, which keeps its word, whose only payment is the satisfaction of duty performed ...”.*

The CNI ratified the Sixth Declaration, exercising their rights and *de facto* autonomy – and they continue to do so. In both the EZLN and the CNI, *other* politics from below and to the left took shape, where one “walks asking questions” guided by seven principles:

*To Serve Others, not Serve Oneself  
To Represent, not Supplant  
To Construct, not Destroy  
To Obey, not Command  
To Propose, not Impose  
To Convince, not Defeat  
To Go Down, not Up*

Women, men, and *otroas*<sup>1</sup>, with faces covered by balaclavas and bandanas, became a symbol of the movement, making space for a poetic-political organization against capitalism. They inspired the native population, as well as thousands of people in Mexico and across the world, to practice their own form of alternative politics.

## The three tiers of the struggle

For the organized communities of the CNI and the EZLN, the struggle has to take place on three scales: local, national and global. For example, a CNI delegate carries her own struggle, her demands as a community, but she also participates in the national struggle as a native person, and globally as a woman and an exploited person. This was most evident in 2016, on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the CNI, when an assessment was made together with the Zapatista communities about the current situation of its peoples.

It was concluded that the situation is devastating, as there are more dead, disappeared, imprisoned, and displaced people as a result of a war that entered another gear in 2006. The country was militarized, provoking greater repression and criminalization of social struggles in defence of life and territory. It was therefore decided to consult in 523 assemblies nationally on the formation of an Indigenous Council of Government (CIG) that would carry out three tasks: to travel across the country and invite all those who feel part of a grass-roots movement in Mexico to organize; to position the problems of native peoples on a national level at the juncture of the presidential election; and to participate in these elections not to take power, but to break into the spaces of the political class.

The creation of the CIG was approved and made up of one man and one woman from each CNI community, 180 council members in total. In addition, María de Jesús Patricio “Marichuy” from the Nahuatl people, founder of the CNI and doctor of traditional medicine from Tuxpan, Jalisco, was appointed spokesperson of the CIG. Together they toured Mexico under the pretext of collecting signatures for her registration as an independent candidate for the presidency. In reality, they held dialogues on other forms of organization and called for the creation of networks of resistance and rebellion.



Imagine hundreds of people in Mexico shouting “¡Mujeres rebeldes, conscientes y valientes!” (Rebellious, conscious, and brave women!) accompanied by a loud “¡Que muera el sistema capitalista!” (Let the capitalist system die!). These voices coming together in unison were to encourage Marichuy and the CIG to unmask elitist and racist politics, and the simulated democracy that excludes the people from decision-making. Moreover, they called out the worsening dispossession, war, poverty, disinte-



gration, and exploitation. As a counteroffer, they listened and articulated the words, pains, and longings of the communities. This showed how resistance can imagine another reality, one that projects colour, dignity, life, and hope. This anti-racist, anti-colonial, anti-patriarchal, and anti-capitalist proposal toured 62 towns and cities in Mexico. Some saw it as a passing event, but for many it became a symbol of defending life and building other futures in Mexico and the world. It is not the first time that the

Zapatistas were involved in such a proposal, as they have sought to be a bridge to unite different struggles in the world and create “a world where many worlds fit”. Zapatismo is considered one of the greatest examples of internationalism, not only because of the way thousands around the world have shown solidarity with their struggle, but also because of its anti-capitalism and defence of humanity.

The Sixth Declaration made the need for a global anti-capitalist organization apparent. The Sexta Internacional was established and has served to support, denounce, and watch over the security, freedom, and respect of Zapatista communities, as well as growing and strengthening the networks of resistance and rebellion. The formation of the CIJ and its subsequent tour was a strategy to reactivate local and national organization. However, to defend life, the organization must be able to cross and break all borders.

## The Journey for Life

In 2015, the Zapatistas warned that a catastrophe was coming, so it was necessary to come together to reflect on what others observed and how to resist. With the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic, the prognosis was obvious – the civilizational crisis was exposed and exacerbated. In October 2020 the Zapatistas announced that, in the face of the fast approaching collapse, they would travel the world looking not for differences, but for what makes us equal. The first stop would be Europe; to listen, learn, thank, and embrace the resistances and rebellions that are fighting for life.



On 1 January 1 2021, they launched the *Declaración por la vida* (declaration for life), which has been signed by thousands of people, collectives, and organizations from at least 65 territories. The intention is to generate a space for meeting, dialogue, and exchange to share concerns and struggles, and to generate complicity among those who struggle for life in all corners of the world.

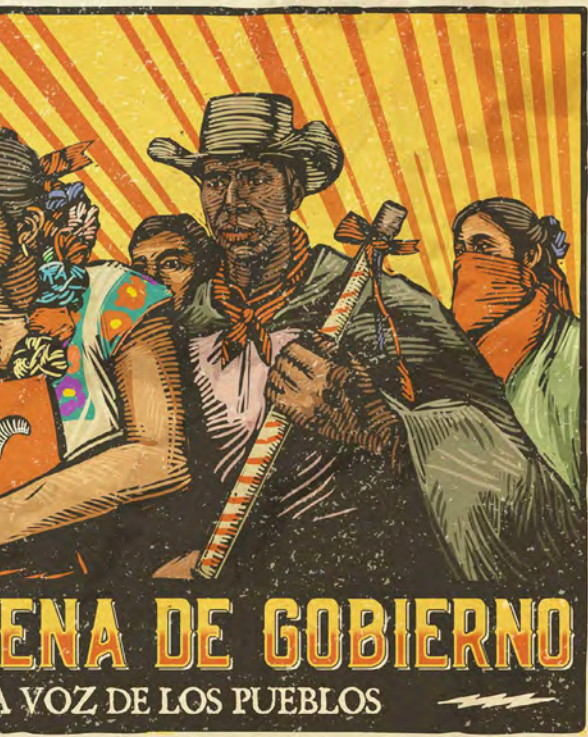
They announced:

*“Just as the ongoing destruction does not recognize borders, nationalities, flags, languages, cultures, races; so the fight for humanity is everywhere, all the time.”*

On 2 May, Squadron 421, composed of four women, two men, and one *otroa*, set sail from the Yucatan peninsula to Europe. From that moment on, the image of Zapatistas travelling by boat circulated as extraordinary proof of a

commitment to rethink the transformation of the world. The voyage was a journey in reverse, a counter to a history of conquest. 500 years after the arrival of the Spaniards in “America”, the Zapatistas told the world that “you didn’t conquer us. We continue to resist and rebel.” They renamed Europe as *Slumil k’ajxemk’op* (“Rebellious Land” or “Land which does not give in nor give up”) to emphasize the persistent resistance and *other* politics. These poetic and performative actions showed a possibility of disputing history and reclaiming it from our present reality.

Later, a delegation of 177 Zapatistas travelled by air, accompanied by 16 delegates from the CNI-CIG and the Frente de Pueblos en Defensa de la Tierra y el Agua de Morelos, Puebla y Tlaxcala (Peoples’ Front in Defence of Land and Water of Morelos, Puebla, and Tlaxcala, FPDTA-MPT). They visited around 30 countries,



where the Zapatistas held closed-door meetings with collectives to share their experiences, sow seeds, and think together about ways to organize. In parallel, the CNI-CIG/FPDTA-MPT delegation denounced the multiple megaprojects that threaten life in their territories and shared their struggles.

As we witness the storm sweeping everything away, “*luchar por la vida*” (to struggle for life) has become the slogan, image, and music of *other* politics that seek to create a new world. This new initiative shows how Zapatismo invites us to globally challenge the times and spaces of capital as the only possibility to confront the destruction

of the world. This journey rewrote history, contested borders with political imagination, and created networks through the subversive acts of listening and speaking. At the time of writing, there are still four continents ahead in the Zapatistas’ journey, not as a means of increasing solidarity, but to give strength to anti-capitalist organization.

### Illustrations

- p. 74: Photograph by Inés Durán Matute.
- p. 76/77: Photograph by Inés Durán Matute.
- p. 78: Illustration by Colectivos Adherentes a la Sexta.
- p. 78/79: Illustration by Gran OM y El Dante.
- p. 79: Photograph by Enlace Zapatista.

### Endnotes

- 1 For a detailed explanation of ‘otroas’, see: [chiapas-support.org/2021/06/30/otroa-companeroas-gender-fluidity-a-contemporary-emergence-with-ancestral-roots/](http://chiapas-support.org/2021/06/30/otroa-companeroas-gender-fluidity-a-contemporary-emergence-with-ancestral-roots/)

# Counter-Cartography of Resistance





# ographies

## Exposing Everyday Authoritarianism in the Philippines

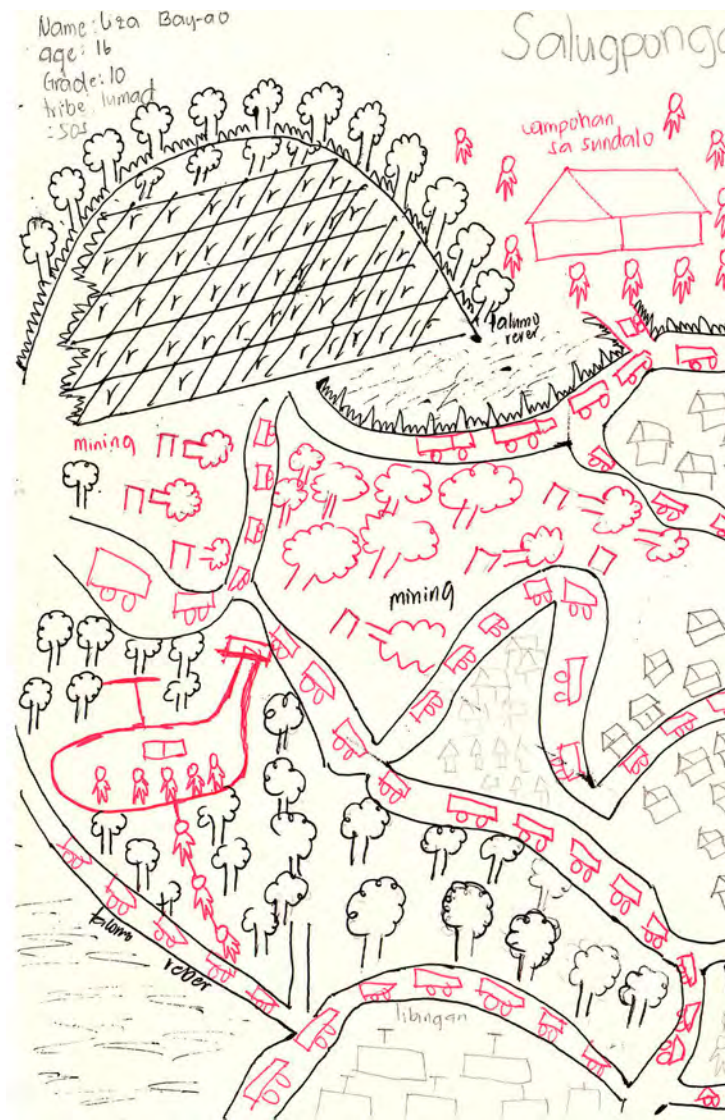
Arnisson Andre Ortega,  
Bernardino Dela Cruz,  
Cian Dayrit,  
Ervic Angeles,  
Kristian Karlo Saguin,  
Leonardo Miguel Garcia,  
Ma. Simeona Martinez,  
Mylene T. De Guzman,  
Yany Lopez,  
Counter-Mapping  
PH Collective



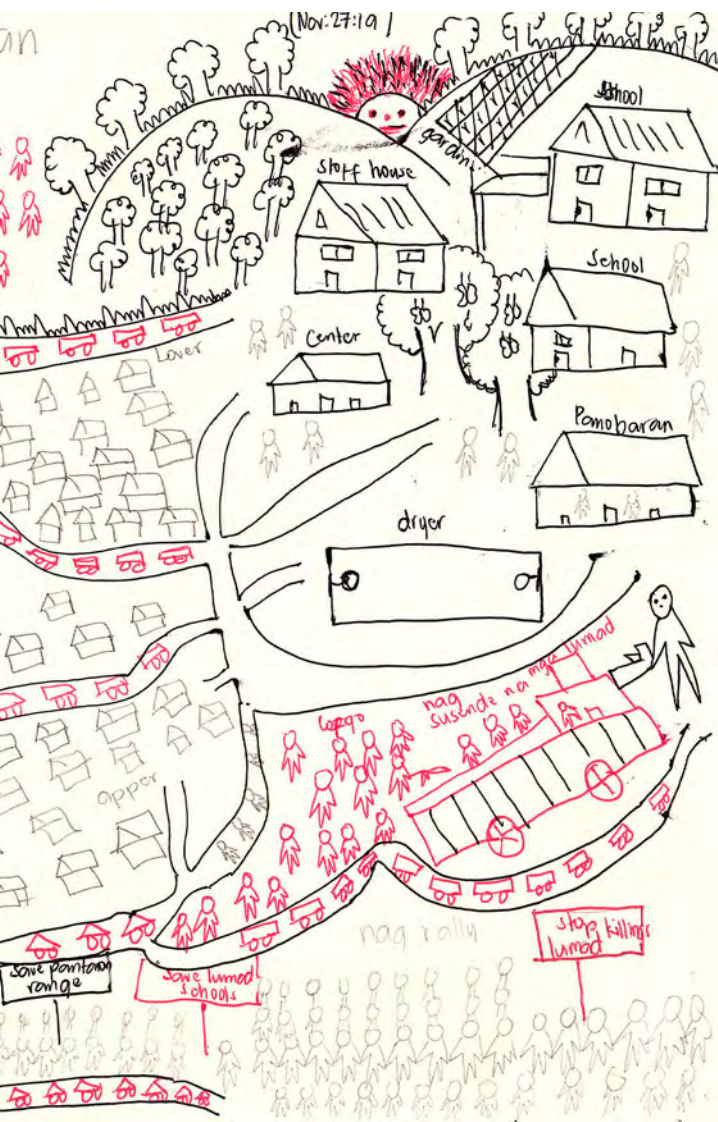
**W**e, the Counter-Mapping PH Collective, are a collective of Filipino scholars, artists, and activists who foreground the visual politics of mapmaking as a means of contesting everyday expressions of authoritarianism in the Philippines.

The Philippines is no stranger to authoritarianism. The country was previously under the dictatorial rule of Ferdinand Marcos, a regime known worldwide for its corruption, human rights violations, and profligacy. The – at the time of writing – current Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte is considered to be one of the world's most controversial authoritarian figures. Since 2016, Duterte's administration has initiated contentious programmes leading to killings and human rights abuses, which includes the brutal war on drugs resulting in an estimated 20,000 deaths. The regime has simultaneously embarked on massive infrastructure programmes that are expected to displace millions of informal settlers. These modes of accumulation, which consolidate the political and economic power of Duterte and his allies, are facilitated by silencing dissent, particularly that of activists.

We resist by engaging in counter-mapping practices that not only expose the regime's violent operations, but also stand in solidarity with efforts to organize together with marginalized communities. Acknowledging the power of maps, we turn to counter-mapping, understanding it as a diverse set of mapping practices that enables marginalized groups to confront power while using multiple modalities to express their experiences. Our projects demonstrate the collaborative orientation of mapping and the power of visibility through community maps and protest arts, as tools for exposing violence and consolidating resistance. We feature three projects that support various campaigns against dispossession and human rights violations. These projects were the result of our recent engagements with communities, aiming to heed their calls and make their plights known through various creative and innovative means and platforms. Our collaborative mapping activities strengthened community resistance and yielded multiple



mapping outputs that were used for – among others – online campaigns, distribution of information to residents, and publication of reports for pertinent agencies. Beyond these mapping projects, our collective continues to collaborate with our community partners and readily engages with new community-based organizations, as more issues across the Philippines emerge.



## Community-based mental mapping workshops

Our first project involved mental mapping workshops organized by artist Cian Dayrit.<sup>1</sup> Using mental mapping as a means of foregrounding stories of struggle and survival, these workshops were conducted with marginalized communities who have experienced rights violations,

land grabbing, and harassment. In the mental mapping activities, the main objective was to highlight the personal subjective accounts of lived experiences in relation to shared material conditions shaped by social inequities and lack of access to resources.

The workshops consisted of focus group discussions and drawing sessions. A point person was tasked with facilitating the discussions, reviewing the questions asked of participants, and providing necessary guidance in drawing various parts of the map. The sketching was done individually or in pairs using blank paper and basic drawing materials such as pencils and pens. The objective was to express and visualize the lived experiences of residents by tracing the everyday route of accessing resources, sketching spaces of fear and trauma, and articulating collective aspirations and calls.

Although mental mapping was done individually, the method prompts the participants to visualize their experiences within the context of their broader communities, as they were asked to articulate shared conditions and collective struggles from their individual viewpoints. The workshops yielded raw and intimate mental maps, serving as artefacts of personal narratives which provided a situated understanding of critical events that took place in their communities. For example, displaced lumads (Indigenous people of Mindanao island), who sought refuge in selected university spaces in Metro Manila, created mental maps that documented the militarization of their communities, resulting in violence and dispossession. Through mental mapping, the lumads were empowered to articulate their experiences and express them visually. For university students and the general public who joined the lumads in their gathering spaces, the maps unpacked and clarified the complicated narratives that emerge from the lumads' socio-spatial conditions. These workshops contributed to the ongoing social justice campaigns and in the organization of wider networks of allies and national minority advocates (see the sample mental map on this page).

## Counter-mapping New Clark City

Another project was the counter-mapping of New Clark City (NCC), organized by a team of geographers, students, volunteers, residents, and community organizers. The mapping project contested the planned construction of the NCC, posed to displace thousands of farmers and Indigenous peoples of the area. Considered to be the Duterte administration's flagship infrastructural development, its land area is measured at 9,450 hectares, categorized by the government as "idle". NCC has been promoted as a smart city that is inclusive, sustainable, and disaster-resilient.

However, the rise of NCC threatens the conversion of vast lands and the dispossession of existing communities. Counter-mapping NCC contests the city's neoliberal narrative and foregrounds the communities' violent experiences through various mapping activities, such as mental and collective mapping, walking interviews, photo-elicitation, and auto-photography. We also conducted drone mapping (the lead image was taken during one of these drone flights) to document the area's rapid land conversion.

The mapping documented NCC's negative impact on the residents as well as the environment: from harassing farmers to the levelling of sacred ancestral mountains. The outcomes of the counter-mapping workshops were used for various community campaigns. The maps were disseminated across social media and some were printed and distributed in the communities as posters and flyers. The maps were also used in a background report about the NCC that was distributed to government agencies, international organizations, and other institutions.

For residents, these maps have been helpful in articulating the various ways they are being affected by the development of NCC through, for example, settlement and farmland displacement, or mountain and hillside destruction. The generated maps were utilized to consolidate support from affected communities and were used to challenge and resist the well-circulated commercial maps of NCC developers.

## Geo-narratives of Human Rights Defenders in Negros Island

This project highlighted the geo-narratives of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) in Negros Island, exposing the quotidian authoritarianism which HRDs confront. Negros Island has become the hotbed of impunity towards HRDs in the Philippines. This rise in human rights violations can be attributed to the implementation of counter-insurgency programmes and massive deployment of state troops in the island since the beginning of Duterte's presidency. In response, this third project counter-mapped the highly contested and largely unseen spaces of HRDs, examined their ideas of risk and security, and shed light on how to better protect and fight for their human rights. As this was conducted during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, this project employed a spatially-oriented qualitative method which combined mental mapping, online interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). Utilizing an online meeting platform, human rights de-



fenders generated mental maps, and identified safe and precarious spaces through online interviews and FGDs. Spatial narratives detailing intense emotional journeys of HRDs who face violence and harassment were shown on the mental maps. HRDs experience psychological warfare in the form of deliberate and indirect intimidation, constant surveillance, death threats, and “red-tagging” – or accusation of being members of the New People’s Army (NPA). Furthermore, HRDs are faced with physical harassment such as assault and arbitrary arrests. These forms of violence occur in urban and rural settings in both private and public spaces, such as homes, workplaces, streets, and even on social media. The most notable form of violence experienced by HRDs are the killings that have taken the lives of more than 60 people since 2016. Such conditions have constrained their everyday geographies, making virtually all their spaces unsafe and potentially dangerous. From these spatial narratives, the project produced several maps that were used by HRDs in various campaigns.



## Conclusion

As a collective, we are united in a common stand against authoritarianism in the Philippines. We turn to counter-mapping to expose the Duterte regime and its negative impacts on the lives of marginalized Filipinos. By using diverse forms of counter-mapping as a means of working with communities, we engage in creative projects that foreground experiences and concerns of the marginalized and forge ties of solidarity in the struggle against authoritarianism and imperialism. The multiple outcomes of the three projects that we featured have been utilized by our partner communities, grassroots organizations, and in academia. The maps took multiple forms and were deployed on various platforms, from poster maps prominently hung in community spaces, to infographics that show sites of violence. It is our hope that our participatory mapping projects will sustain and expand ongoing solidarity work among academics, organizations, and communities in confronting the operations of the authoritarian regime and in advocating for social justice.

## Illustrations

- p. 80: Drone mapping in Tarlac, Counter-mapping PH Network-NCC Research Team, 2019.
- p. 82/83: Lumad mental maps, Cian Dayrit, 2019.
- p. 84: Mental Mapping workshop, Cian Dayrit, 2019.
- p. 85: Walking Interview in Tarlac, Counter-mapping PH Network-NCC Research Team, 2019.

## Endnotes

- 1 See: Mapping From the Ground Up, p. 228.

# The Distributed Vertical Border

**T**he Distributed Vertical Border is a project that explores the production of space as a result of mass migration. It focuses on architecture that has erupted from the process of displacement and

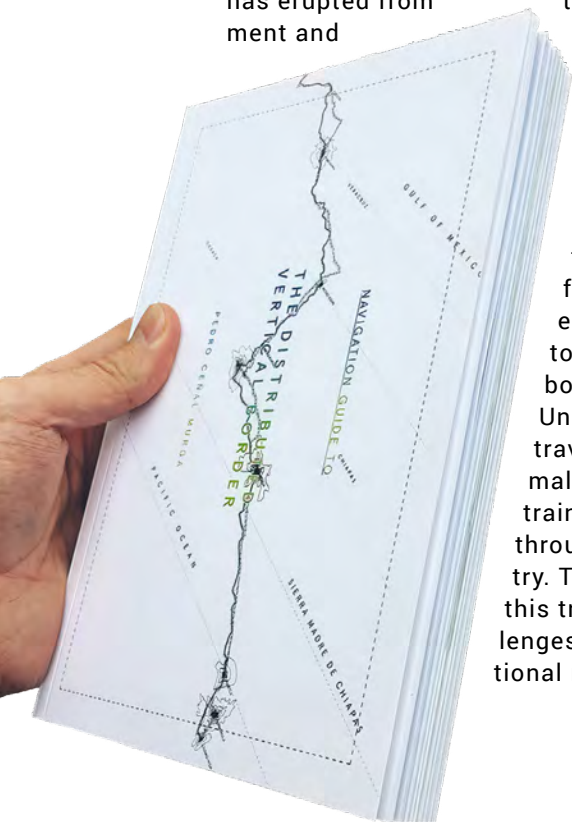
the process of displacement as experienced by undocumented migrants that navigate through clandestine routes from southern Mexico to reach the border with the United States, travelling informally on freight trains that run through the country. The impact of this transit challenges the conventional notion of a

border and proposes an alternative border territory that extends and is distributed beyond the line depicted in maps and in the collective imagination.

After conducting a field trip through these territories, I began drawing

a series of maps. In thinking together about the architectural objects I found and the psychogeographical experience surrounding them, I concluded that a travel guide would be an ideal rendering of the project. For me, travelling refers more to leisure or pleasure, and does not necessarily imply attentiveness; the project was more about navigating, an action tied to planning ahead and that entails insightfulness.

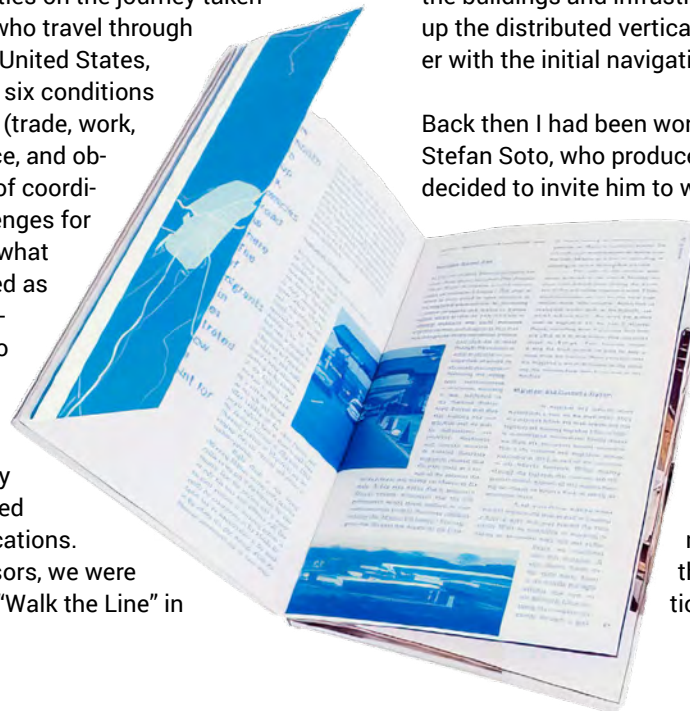
The project finally took the form of a navigation guide comprising critical descriptions for each of the prevailing conditions, as detailed below, along with archival material, essays focused on crucial sites, conceptual illustrations of key buildings and sites. The pages were divided into six sections – each represented by a specific town (or stop) and a series of maps ranging from the zoomed out to ones focused on detailed locations.



# d rder

Pedro  
Ceñal  
Murga

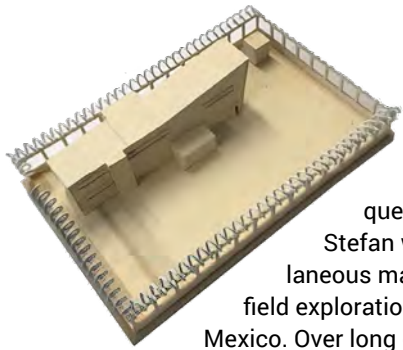
In 2017, alongside two colleagues I started working on the concept of “Proyector”, an independent curatorial platform in Mexico City that sought to promote emerging voices in architectural research. For our inaugural exhibition, we chose to translate the navigation guide into an exhibition. Focused on the first seven cities on the journey taken by undocumented migrants who travel through Mexico heading towards the United States, the exhibition spatialized the six conditions detailed in previous research (trade, work, screening, protection, violence, and obstruction) through a system of coordinates. One of the main challenges for this project was to translate what had originally been formulated as an academic text into a cohesive four-month exhibition. To address this, we assembled a team of people that included María Sevilla, an architect who I had previously worked with and who produced 3D models of some of the locations. Thanks to institutional sponsors, we were able to successfully present “Walk the Line” in



September of 2018. Andrea Carrillo, an artist and graphic designer, designed the exhibition brochure and a publication for which we invited several researchers working on topics close to the argument of the exhibition and who later took part in our public programme.

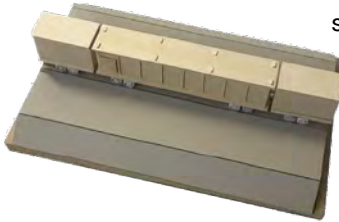
The exhibition travelled to other cities after its debut in Mexico City and was reshaped in response to different venues. In its latest manifestation, this research was invited to the exhibition “Mapping Along”, presented in Berlin. The ideal language for this iteration was a series of models that showed some of the buildings and infrastructures making up the distributed vertical border, together with the initial navigation guide.

Back then I had been working with Stefan Soto, who produces models, and decided to invite him to work on the project as a long-term collaboration. Compared with “Walk the Line”, this time I had more time to produce the materials. I saw this collaboration with Stefan

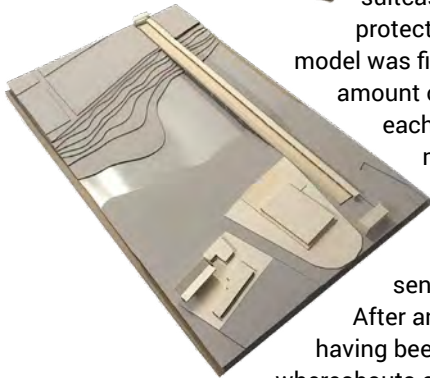


as an opportunity to work with constant feedback and find the best way to depict the objects in question.

Stefan worked with an archive of miscellaneous materials I had produced during my field explorations through the southern states of Mexico. Over long conversations we would fix things so that the models could accurately represent the spatial experiences they intended to reflect.



By February 2021, we had prepared ten impeccable models. I was supposed to ship the models myself and in order to do that, Stefan built a suitcase-box to store the models and protect them from any damage. Each model was fixed in a tray that kept the right amount of space to avoid contact with each other. COVID-19 restrictions made it impossible for me to fly to Berlin to bring the models personally, so it was decided it would be best to send them with FedEx.



After an odyssey of delays and having been kept in the dark about the whereabouts of the package, on Monday 12 April, I woke up to an email from the curatorial team. It had photos of the rigid box that appeared untouched, though later turned out to have signs of having been broken into. The inside seemed to be completely destroyed. Some of the models were torn into pieces and others were damaged. Some even had footprint marks, showing that someone forcibly stepped onto them. Others disappeared and were not in the box any more.



We realized that these models, which depicted migratory phenomena, had been destroyed by the authorities during their long trip from one country to another. When I had tracked the shipment, I saw that it had stopped in Memphis, Tennessee. It stayed there a whole day before crossing the Atlantic Ocean.







After an initial reaction of discontent, when considering it from different perspectives the shipment conveyed powerful meanings. The curatorial team and I decided to show the damaged models with photos of their original appearance, the original box, and a note from me, explaining the journey of the models. The remaining evidence was a chance to talk about forms of violence beyond the damaged box, the fragments, and the lost pieces – they could evoke metaphors of hundreds of thousands of muted bodies that take part in a phenomenon that is, day by day, erased by those in power.



The violence to which this shipment was subjected to speaks, on an objective scale, to how vulnerable migrants are against authorities that oppress them and make them invisible. It also reveals a relegated reality, which constantly needs forces of resistance to be (re)constructed and publicly exposed.

A few months ago, the organizers of the exhibition offered to ship the models. They repacked them in a new box, and tried to ship them through FedEx again. The shipment was held in Cologne and then was sent back to Berlin. Once again, it did not manage to clear customs. At the time of writing, the models are kept in a storage room inside the Kunstraum Kreuzberg. Once the package and the traces it holds manage to resist the bureaucratic constraints and ideological forces impeding their movement, the box will travel back to Mexico, reaching its final destination.



# Life of Migrant Balkan Route

## Selected Poems From a Migrant's Diary of Resistance

### About the author

After a 50km ride between the towns of Bihać and Velika Kladuša, our car arrived at the location where we were due to meet up with A. We parked just off the road, nearer to Kladuša than to Bihać, and stepped out in front of "Royal". The humble roadside café-restaurant had nothing really royal about it, thank goodness, but what it did have, was an unusually warm feel to it, most likely due to the yellow lights reflecting off the peach-tinted interior walls, decorated with the Marshal's portrait-calendar hanged right next to the mounted TV. We, however, decided to sit outside. Soon after A. appeared from the embrace of a rather chilly twilight, coming down at the road. He arrived by foot from Miral - the migrant camp located about ten minutes walking distance from

Royal. As we planted ourselves at the wooden tables, we started a conversation with one of the wisest and most courageous people I have ever met. A. is his pseudonym. And his story? All we know is he is born in 1996 in Cameroon, as a Cameroonian citizen belonging to the Anglophone community. The human rights breaches committed by the Cameroonian francophone-dominated government are well-documented: kidnapping, torture, extrajudicial killings, and burning of whole villages. As a persecuted activist in his home country, A. had to leave and embark on a dangerous journey to Europe, arriving in Slovenia in 2019, accompanied by a Kurdish friend.

Between January 2018 and October 2021, the Slovenian police carried out 29,043 extraditions to the Croatian police, ignoring most asylum requests. The Croatian police persistently and violently pushes people back to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and this is precisely what happened to A. upon encountering both police forces. A. then took the state of Slovenia to court with the help of good friends from a local Slovenian activist group, Infokolpa. Over the several years that followed, as he waited for the outcome of

# ts on the to Europe

Photos:  
unknown/  
untraceable

Poems:  
A. Nana

Redactor:  
Saša Hajzler

the court case, he started writing a diary. He also collected testimonies and stories from other migrants in camp Miral, publishing them along with his thoughts as true *poetry of resistance* on his social-media blog, titled “Life of migrants on the Balkan road to Europe”.<sup>1</sup> The selection of poems that follows speaks for itself. It is up to the reader to read between the lines, and form his or her own impression of the situation and the agency of migrants along the route. The words that follow are words of resistance and freedom. The words belong to A., but the voice is of all migrants.

## About the photographs

The photos are visual testimonies taken somewhere between the Greek islands, the Macedonian woodlands, Serbian roads, the camps in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the forests and rivers in Croatia and Slovenia, between 2015 and 2021. Other than that, the photos are not anchored to a specific time and place, and are thus timeless and placeless, freely circulating among migrant and activist communities. Many such visual testimonies are lost along the way, as people lose their phones in the forests, or they are stolen by the police along with their other belongings.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Link to the blog: [facebook.com/Life-of-migrants-on-the-Balkan-road-to-Europe-109971613811154](https://facebook.com/Life-of-migrants-on-the-Balkan-road-to-Europe-109971613811154)

**Friday, December 6, 2019 at 2:20 AM**

It's been a year and some months now  
Far, far from everyone else and everything I love  
I set off on a trip to an unknown place  
With dreams I dreamed of reaching

Europe,  
It was something I could nearly touch  
It was at my reach

But it's a year and a half now  
I am living in the streets  
I have been forced to move to the Croatian borders  
When I realized my dreams had been broken

With the passing of time  
With every beating  
Sleepless night  
And escaping through many forests  
Little by little they have taken away my dreams  
And also – my life

**Sunday, January 12, 2020 at 2:38 PM**

We left home in search for a better life  
In a continent  
(Europe)  
Where we know human rights  
(And humanity)  
Are performed and everyone  
(Migrants)  
Is accepted by society  
But on getting here  
After passing days  
(And nights)  
On the oceans and forests



**Thursday, December 19, 2019 at 7:01 PM**

It's been 8 months now since we left our families  
back at home with dreams of making or giving  
them a better life but now those dreams have  
been killed 4 in number but just 2 are left. What a  
world we live in.

They received us  
(With beatings)  
And the destruction of our belongings  
So we ask this:  
Is it true that human rights exist in Europe  
(If yes where are they)  
Is it true that the act of humanity  
is performed in Europe  
If yes why are we  
(Migrants)  
Not accepted by society

Why will there be posts in public places like  
NO ENTRANCE FOR MIGRANTS  
Are those rights and the act of humanity  
just in books  
For us to read?



**Monday, August 31, 2020 at 2:44 PM**  
Run Run Run Run Run  
From those who use the name of refugees  
for personal gain  
Run from those who use your misfortune to their aid  
Ones who care not  
Who use you to show power  
Who want you to see them as God  
Who are happy when you sob  
Run run from those who think  
your life is in their hands  
Who in brutalizing find happiness  
Run run from those who use you  
for their political upper hand  
Who use the name of refugees  
for their personal political agenda and plan  
I say run run run from those  
Who are happy to see division among humans  
Get up and run  
Keep up running until you go far  
From those who know nothing  
About what you're going through  
I say run – as far and fast as you can run

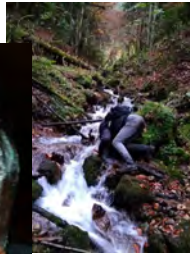
**Wednesday, December 23, 2020 at 4:06 PM**  
We don't define ourselves  
by the many roadblocks on our path.  
We define ourselves by the courage  
we have found to forge new roads.  
We do not define ourselves  
by disappointments and wrath  
We define ourselves by forgiveness  
and how newfound faith explodes.

We do not define ourselves  
By how many times we have been knocked down  
Those aren't the signs  
We define ourselves by how many times  
we have struggled to stand on our feet, inspired  
We are not our pain  
We are not our past  
We are that which emerged from fire

**Thursday, January 7, 2021 at 12:14 PM**

Nobody can teach us (migrants) who we are  
But you can describe parts of us  
As for who we are or what we want, what is far  
That's something we have to find out  
Thus no matter the brutalizing, rejection or killing  
You cannot teach or find out who we are  
Or where we are going  
Nor where we are coming from  
To my brothers and sisters  
We should stand strong  
For very soon the moon  
Will give way for the dawn.

The more asking myself all of these questions  
And with a loud voice which scared the birds away  
I shouted  
I won't give up!  
No matter how hard they try to break me  
Let the spirit of positivity keep growing



**Tuesday, June 29, 2021 at 1:58 PM**

Getting to walking through nature today  
I was welcomed with a sweet melody  
By birds who sang that melody of freedom  
Getting to listening to this sweet, sweet melody  
It went right deep into my soul, made me shed tears  
Why shedding tears?  
I began to ask myself many questions like  
When are migrants going to be free  
When are we going to be free from rejection  
When from dehumanization  
When are they going to stop killing us  
When are they going to accept us  
Just like any other human  
Oh, how I shed those tears

**Monday, August 16, 2021 at 5:31 PM**

A letter from a migrant to himself  
Dear me  
I know it's really, really hard  
You're probably staring at yourself now  
Crying your eyes out  
This is not what I imagined it to be!  
I'm here to tell you, you're doing it for the past me  
Preparing for a better future we  
Have faith in yourself and remember  
When you took your first step  
It's some of the best memories  
you will have ever kept  
It will be worth it  
Hang in there and make a big difference  
Between your childhood self  
And your present significance  
Must go through darkness  
To appreciate the light which reflects  
We love you

**Tuesday, August 31, 2021 at 10:34 PM**

These last days many say am unhappy but I'm not  
I just appreciate silences  
In a world which repeatedly violates human rights  
They use humans for their political purposes  
and enriching themselves  
Sacrificing innocent souls  
I just appreciate silences  
In a world that derives joy from the pains of others  
I just appreciate silences  
In a world that never stops talking

**Thursday, October 7, 2021 at 1:16 PM**

European borders  
The best place for anyone  
Heartless and wicked  
To see how brutality  
Dehumanization  
And violation of human rights  
Are carried out  
One should visit the European borders  
Throughout  
Many say the European union stands for justice  
But I will say No  
It stands for violence



**Sunday, October 3, 2021 at 6:02 PM**

Oh the Balkans  
What a killer of dreams  
And sweet hospitality  
Oh Balkans  
Why you let yourself become a modern prison  
And migrant cemetery  
Oh gods of the Balkans  
We plead for your mercy  
And permission to go through  
Wickedness of mankind made us find ourselves here  
May you Have mercy on us poor migrants

Closing its eyes to what's happening  
So I ask  
When will it come to an ending  
When will they hold guilty  
All those violating the law  
Ooh – I forgot  
How can someone who's guilty as guilty  
Accuse the guilty of being guilty

# COUNTERSTRAT

## What time is it?

In her book “Emergent Strategy”, the movement facilitator adrienne maree brown recounts a formative exchange she had with her friend and mentor Grace Lee Boggs. Lee Boggs, at that time nearly 100 years old, was a US-American labour organizer, communist philosopher, translator of Marx, and fervent ecological thinker. In the regular gatherings of friends and activists in her house, one of the core questions Lee Boggs posed to her audience was “What time is it on the clock of the World?”. adrienne maree brown reflects on her own teaching and writing in the context of the Movement for Black Lives in the light of this question, summing it up in this answer: “Time to close the gap between vision and practice. Time for those of us who seek justice and liberation to be just and liberated, to be of this place fully.”<sup>1</sup>

Her answer is the answer from within acting, the only possible answer perhaps that lives up to the real transformative impulse. It seems to reply “Now!” to the question about world-time, but a closer look suggests that it proposes a sophisticated temporality to give that “now” – the only time we ever really have – a revolutionary structure: the imperative to be fully of “this place” folds a future of justice and liberation into the present moment, a present moment figured as a gap between vision and practice. Lee Boggs, with her grandiose assumption of a unified clock of the World, embeds this answer in a dialectical aspiration, the task to read the moment before grasping it.

## Authoritarianism as defence of phantom possession

Our moment, no doubt, is one of a rising authoritarian tide. It is a moment in which a gnawing reactionary malcontent with the successes of decolonial struggles of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and the cultural revolution of '68 merges with a backlash freshly whipped-up by contemporary progressive politics – in the US especially the mass mobilization around Black Lives Matter.

This backlash displays a peculiar temporality itself. It is nearly the opposite to what brown envisions: not future liberation, but past dominion folded into the gaps of the present. Even when it is so clearly on the advance, authoritarianism mobilizes from a defensive position. Something is always attacked or stolen, but it is never (at least for the right-wing) something material. Instead, it is the nation, the women, the embryos, the election, past glory, and present freedom. When authoritarianism seeks to restore domains of lifelessness, it does not call this “authority”. It calls it “freedom”. And freedom, in this context, is a proud, individual possession. “[E]stablishing the spacetime of possession



# STRATEGIES FOR LIFE

Eva von Redecker

and self-possession in ownership,” according to Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, is the fundamental operation of white subjectivity. This stance is predicated on violence and bound to tip into defensive frenzy: “every step they take is a stamping of the world out of earthly existence and into racial capitalist human being. It grows more pronounced the more it is threatened, consumed by its own feedback loop, and it produces sharper and sharper subject reactions in the face of this threat.”<sup>2</sup>

Authoritarianism in the present day, to a large extent, articulates “sharper and sharper subject reactions”. The reactions themselves follow a peculiar logic, one that I propose to analyze as defence of *phantom possession*. The *phantom* in phantom possession should be read in analogy with phantom pain. Right-wing entitlement operates in an empty place, it is a residual claim following amputation: ownership without object. That, indeed, makes for a very unstable status.

This is, however, not a status appearing late in the history of liberalism, whereby once all formerly oppressed groups are accorded self-ownership and a few privileged losers cannot quite get used to that. Authoritarian accumulation, the acquisition of entitlement over *othered* lives, is deeply embedded in liberal capitalism. It is, in fact, the flipside of liberalism’s central achievement: the free, self-owning individual. Marxist critics have long since pointed out that owning nothing but yourself is not a very tenable situation to be in. However, if we pay more attention to what exactly “owning” means, it becomes clear that it functions as a powerful bribe for some to invest in the ideology of ownership – even in the absence of actual riches. Self-ownership, the trophy of emancipation from feudal serfdom, enslavement, and patriarchal rule alike, is embedded in a specific genealogy of property, that of modern dominion. Ownership here denotes not just some sort of belonging. As a legal and economic practice, ownership in the West is defined as an absolute entitlement. This form of property ownership, enforced through colonization and enclosures, grants full sovereignty, the right to dispose at will over a bounded object. Dominion is limited through the property of others, but not by the object in question. Thus, being owned renders an object abusable, destructible, and killable.

This is why self-ownership is never enough. An embodied, partly self-conscious existence does not warrant the experience of total dominion. Though capable of suicide, we do not survive the test-case of self-destruction. If the aspiration is for the freedom of full ownership, modern subjects require an outer domain to exercise their will in: a certain “ground” in the words of Moten and Harney, as the basis for that “stamping of the world out of earthly existence and into racial capitalist human being.” In the most brutal institutions of modern domination, enslavement, marriage under coverture, forced labour, and conscription, the lives of some groups were partly – near-fully in chattel slavery – propertized and appropriated by other subjects. Those other, freer subjects

gained a domain supplementing self-ownership, a domain within which abuse was licensed: commodified bodies, objectified care and sexuality, extracted labour, defensive force. Freedom, white freedom, is premised on the mandate over a domain of death-dealing. With living, even self-conscious objects, of course, the instability of ownership is perpetuated. The full control over such propertized domains is forever imperfect, or fragile. But it is an outwardly aggressive fragility. As Sun Yung Shin writes in a piece on “white fragility”: “Glass is fragile. It’s actually a very slow liquid, but it breaks, and it breaks into sharp pieces, and it cuts flesh, and it can kill a person”.<sup>3</sup>

Propertized violence, at times amounting to destruction, serves to perform and reinscribe the differentiation between the free, owning subject and the objectified owned object. The political form that validates the aspiration to defend phantom possession is authoritarianism. It often materializes the defence institutionally, for instance as border fortification, the police force, the prison system, and punitive austerity policies. If, either individually or with the help of these arrangements, the “sharper and sharper subject reactions” are pursued all the way towards liquidating their objects, it seems warranted to speak of neo-fascism. From the point of view of fascism, the unwieldy domains of phantom possession do not require husbandry, but hunt. Often, of course, the same group is attacked in both modes – those who resist are seen as thieves of themselves and get punished accordingly. At other times, the modes are split, allowing to make the objectified subjects “innocent” property which is corrupted by another group, just as in the Great Replacement conspiracy theory, which (in some of its variants) claims that immigrants are brought in by Jews to replace a white population which does not reproduce sufficiently because women, in turn, are manipulated by feminists and “gender ideologues”.

### Neoliberalism and the destruction of future time

Authoritarianism is not just a backlash against emancipation. Its peculiar and frightening projection of past dominion onto the political body of today is in line with the long history of violence that underwrites the colonial-capitalist conquest of the globe. Yet when we ask about our specific moment in world history, we can better situate authoritarianism’s selective fixation on domains of unchecked dominion. It is the anthropocene, the time shaped by men self-reproducing through plantation-agriculture and fossil capitalism. Our era is marked by an unprecedented generalization of loss. One way to describe the neoliberal present is as a loss of the world – not in pieces, but as future time. Neoliberalism as financialized capitalism codifies future life as destructible property and hence potential commodity. Future labour time is propertized and dispossessed by debt, future political time by data-mediated predictability. Neoliberalism is also the continuation of fossil capitalism in full knowledge of its ecocidal effects. Extractivism has always destroyed futures alongside the enormous amount of past ecological time stored in what it propertized as resources. In its current continuation, it destroys the very basis of planetary life.

Unlike what some sections of the ecological movement like to think, climate warming and mass extinction are not a potential apocalyptic moment located in the future, something we might still avert through heightened virtue. The ecological catastrophe is a loss of

time which has already happened by extracting the past time safely stored in resources, most of all fossil fuels, but also phosphate fertilizer and rare metals, and by discarding them – in morphed, toxic form – back into the future.

The time that is broken by this colonial-capitalist mode of human reproduction is not the modern fiction of linear, progressive time. That fiction, rather, served to avert the gaze, of the profiteers at least, from all the devastation caused by extractivism to future returns. Ecological time is neither linear nor progressive: ecological time is regenerative. It has the form of tides, myriad interlocking time-spans of self-reproduction. And these tides are already broken in many ways and in many places through propertization and littering. The collapse of eco-systems consists of the desynchronization and devastation of tides. This is what I mean by losing the world as future time.

In some sense, the self-possessive individual has always already lost the world. That is its way of living in it. Its bounded domains of phantom-possession are cut out of a shared world and enclose freedom as sovereignty, the privileged form of solitary confinement. In its protracted hold over material objects, and objectified subjects, the possessive individual seals that loss as literal, and irrevocable, world-historical process. Past extractivism has already implied the dispossession of some groups of their ancestral lands and their future life time. Continued extraction is now happening in full knowledge of the destruction of the shared conditions of life for all. Maybe, like in neo-fascism, what is “new” in neoliberal capitalism, apart from innovative algorithmic and legal tools to contract and invert time, is just that we know that it is happening.

And yet we lack the power to stop it from happening. That circumstances lend a certain rationality to the authoritarian affirmation of death-dealing. If it were written on the clock that the violence could not stop, then it makes sense to grab whatever it is possible to get hold of, to viciously defend all entitlements and – vis-à-vis a future that might never happen – at least to secure one’s share in the joy of destruction. Neoliberal rationality is marked not by the performance principle, but by the possessive principle. Instead of the disciplinary incentive to sacrifice the subject’s present moment for future gains, there is the aggressive impulse to sacrifice the object’s future existence for a demonstration of sovereignty, right now.

### Revolution for life

Authoritarianism is a hollow, and yet deadly, attempt to perpetuate past violence. This violence is not accidental, it is part and parcel of capitalist accumulation. The violence is “part” of capitalist accumulation, because only as disposable property can parts of the natural world – including labouring bodies – be rendered exploitable. And it is “parcel” of capitalist accumulation because phantom possession provides a potent ideological compensation for the losses suffered in market societies.

Anti-authoritarianism, as a radical political force, opposes not just authoritarianism. It opposes the hold of dominion over life. The mobilizing themes in anti-authoritarianism are multi-faceted. We see struggles around race, migration, gender, reproductive freedom. Struggles against debt and land-grabbing and gentrification. Organized as well as wild-cat strikes. Occupations protesting the extraction of natural resources, especially fossil fuels, and civil disobedience blocking destructive infrastructure projects. New forms of democratic self-organization, and attempts to resist the ongoing militarization of societies

that spend most of their budgets on arms capable of contracting the anthropocentric work of world-destruction to one single moment of button-pushing. In all those instances, precious domains of life are wrested from profitable exhaustion and from control by those who regard them as phantom possession, fit for littering or obliteration. We also see seemingly passive yet extremely potent gestures of exodus, gestures that counter the generalized exhaustion not with possessive rage, but with an insistence on pause and regeneration. Adherents of the *tangping* or lying flat movement in China refuse to make the effort of inclusion into the standard possessive practices of modern societies – career, house-ownership, and family. This echoes the “Great Resignation” noted in North America and Western Europe, where unprecedented numbers of workers quit their jobs two years into the Covid-19 pandemic.

A labour politics that can identify class-issues in all depletion and exhaustion of regenerative time might be able to claim these “passive strikes” for a socialist feminist agenda. In fighting the continued and renewed dominion, resistance can liberate lives not just from subjugation, but also from isolation – this is celebrated where the gap between vision and practice is indeed closed, as in the mass mobilization achieved by Black Lives Matter and the Latin American Feminist movement. Counter-authoritarian politics, according to one of its most effective practitioners consists in a very particular type of assembly. Verónica Gago describes the assemblies of Argentinian feminists as an exercise in reappropriating time. They are kitchens (her word) for creating political time, the time of new beginning. In the actual practice of the feminist strike, with its focus on reproductive labour, the possibility of a new planetary time articulates itself: the time where properitized reproductive labour is paused, and depropertized regenerative tides might set in. Labour as we know it abolished, yet reproductive activity universalized. Freedom, then, could be detached from the possessive individual. It might mean that we can share our time without losing or looting it, and learn to exchange softer and softer subject reactions. In every moment where authoritarianism’s prolongation of past dominion is blocked, the possibility of a different life articulates itself: one in which we might have all the time in the world. No more “stomping of the world out of earthly existence and into racial capitalist human being” – but rather being “of this place fully”.



# Marielle Franco Transcending

**14** March 2018, 9 p.m., the neighbourhood of Estácio, Rio de Janeiro. As she was leaving the event “Jovens Negras Movendo as Estruturas” (Young Black Women Mobilizing Structures), organized by her administration, city councillor Marielle Franco and her driver, Anderson Gomes, were shot dead in a politically motivated attack that shocked Brazil and the world. To this day, more than five years later, investigations into the case have failed to solve key questions such as: who ordered the hit? And how is this episode connected with the most powerful militia groups in Brazil?

Marielle had the fifth-highest vote count in the 2016 city councillor elections in Rio de Janeiro, having received 46,502 votes. Running as an LGBTQIA+ black woman from a *favela* and a champion of human rights, she built her campaign around two slogans: “I am because we are”, drawing on the African philosophy of Ubuntu, and “WomanRace”, insisting that the intersections of gender and race are crucial to doing politics – and this must come from bodies and perspectives that are different to those that have historically dominated decision-making.

During her 15 months in office at the city council, Marielle introduced bills that sought to fight forms of structural violence and inequality in society, and organized public hearings and meetings that filled the halls

of the chamber with a vibrant and diverse crowd of black women, LGBTQIA+ people, and residents of the *periferia* (poorer city outskirts), with the intention of giving this space back to the people.

News of the murder spread rapidly, provoking a mix of disbelief and pain, and it was soon among the top trending topics on social media and in the headlines of every news portal.

The following day, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets and social networks all over Brazil and around the world, to utter the first cry for justice and offer the first consoling embraces in what would be a long period of collective grieving. Weeks of crowded protests, overflowing with outrage and revolt, followed.

As she carried so many political agendas in her body and so many practices of inclusion and empowerment in her way of doing politics, Marielle became a giant, capable of transcending territorial, aesthetic, and ideological boundaries.

# nco Street Boundaries

Anielle Franco,  
Luna Costa,  
Marcelle Decothé,  
Rafael Rezende

The threat that such colossal strength could pose for the conservative, colonial, patriarchal, elitist, white supremacist political project, which was assuming a hegemonic position in Brazil at the time caused fear in the leaders of this political project. Just a few hours after the brutal tragedy, they initiated an aggressive strategy of misinformation on social media, spreading fake news and hateful content, with the purpose of relativizing and even justifying the murder of a sitting councillor. “Taking my daughter’s life wasn’t enough for them, they wanted to kill her a second time by damaging her memory”, said Marielle’s mother, Marinete Silva, cofounder of the Instituto Marielle Franco. This attempt to put an end to Marielle’s work and legacy was not successful. Alongside an effective legal and communication strategy – which identified the main authors of deceitful and violent publications and held them to account – in recent years, we have seen the emergence of a range of diverse actions that defend Marielle’s memory.





## The first street sign

During one of the first protests on 20 March 2018, an independent activist, who chose to remain anonymous, carried out an intervention in Marielle's honour: she replaced the sign bearing the name of the plaza outside the city council with an official-looking street sign saying "Rua Marielle Franco" (Marielle Franco Street).

This tactic of renaming public places is often used as a way of commemorating personalities who have dedicated their lives to the struggle for a more just world, as well as removing the prestige traditionally given to dictatorial and authoritarian politicians. It is a gesture of urban poetry that claims the right to the city and to memory.

Photos of this action were circulated on social networks, and the street sign remained in place for the six months that followed.

## The authoritarian response

30 September 2018, 4 p.m., Rio de Janeiro. Straight after the "Ele Não" (Not Him) mobilization organized against Bolsonaro by groups of women on the eve of the election, causing streets all over Brazil to be flooded with massive protests. Two congressional candidates and a candidate in the gubernatorial race, all from the far-right, were holding a campaign rally in Petrópolis (a city where the members of the former Brazilian Imperial Court still live), among hateful cries and fascist salutes from their supporters.

The enthusiasm of the crowd, made up mostly of white men, hit its peak when the candidates raised the broken sign of "Marielle Franco Street" (which they had torn down from the plaza the previous morning) and yelled: "This shit is over! It's Bolsonaro's time!" As expected, the video showing the sign being snapped in half went viral on social media, fuelled by the outrage of those who felt offended, and by the hate speech from those candidates' supporters.





## The counter-strategy

Hours later, an online campaign was launched by *Sensacionalista*, a Brazilian satirical political publication, to raise funds for “100 signs for Marielle”. The campaign sought to raise 2,000 Brazilian reals, and in less than 24 hours, it received more than 40,000 BRL, thanks to donations of 1,691 people. We set up a WhatsApp group to organize the delivery of the street signs, supported by Sidnei Balbino’s printing studio, the studio where the first sign had been made and which offered to print all the new signs at cost price. Until the day before the action, we had reservations regarding the possible risks, considering the tense atmosphere that prevailed in Brazil at the time, but we pushed on.

We carried out the action, handing out 1,000 street signs to the people who had queued up. After giving each person a sign, we asked that they go to an area marked on the ground with masking tape, which formed the shape of the letters spelling MARIELLE – to form a human mosaic which appeared on the cover of every newspaper the following day.

From this moment on, the “Marielle Franco Street” sign became a transcendent symbol of resistance and was reproduced in several different formats, from giant flags to intricate embroideries. During the historic 2019 Carnival parade by the Mangueira samba school, themed: “the story that history doesn’t tell”, the same independent activist who made the original sign produced copies of it in a green-and-pink version – the colours of Mangueira – and handed them out among the audience and the dancers. At the pride parade that same year, the sign was printed in rainbow colours and made into a gigantic flag. The same signs were placed on the office doors of progressive members of the Chamber of Deputies.

## Transcending boundaries

A year after Marielle's death, thanks to the Chama organization – an agency/network for publicizing and organizing around political causes formed by many of Mari's friends – we launched the website *ruamariellefranco.com.br*. Through the website, anyone could print their own street sign and register its location on the virtual map, which showed their spread. During this campaign, more than 30,000 signs were printed.

The campaign ceased to be purely symbolic and took on concrete forms. Organized groups all over the world started working to exert influence on legislative bodies and officially name city streets and squares after Marielle – from a garden in Paris to a metro station in Buenos Aires. The Comitê Ruas Marielle Franco (Marielle Franco Streets Committee), formed by Brazilian activists, most of whom were black women, started to band together in Berlin with the intent of renaming the street where the Brazilian Embassy is located, gaining the attention of networks in other countries with the same goal. These collectives meet up in different parts of different cities to carry out the symbolic renaming ceremony, and use these meetings to create an inclusive space for political empowerment.

## Instituto Marielle Franco

Many of these initiatives have received support, validation, and encouragement from the Instituto Marielle Franco, an organization that was established by Marielle's family with the mission of inspiring, connecting, and empowering black, LGBTQIA+, and marginalized women to continue the work of forcing structural change. The Instituto maintains the website *ruamariellefranco.com.br* and functions as the main distributor of Marielle Franco Street signs in Brazil and around the world.

Based on the understanding that Marielle's legacy is manifold and cannot be contained within one organization, the institute acts collectively, and its core principles express the work that her family has been doing since 14 March 2018: to fight for justice, defend Marielle's memory, foster her legacy, and water the seeds of her activism – hoping to help cultivate this broader movement.

## Marielle the giant

The story we have shared here illustrates how the authoritarian attempts of erasure and violence against Marielle had the opposite effect, as they were confronted with a counter-strategy based on the principles of scalability, replicability, and creativity, helping to strengthen Marielle's image as an icon for people and movements in Brazil and abroad. We hope that the lessons we learned from this experience can inspire resistance movements and give strength to the struggle for rights everywhere.

### Illustrations

- p. 103: The original Marielle Franco Street sign, independent activist, 2018.
- p. 104: Black women occupying the plenary seats of the City Council, Naldinho Lourenço, 2017.
- p. 105: Marielle and guests at the event "Awrê to our ancestors", with leaders of African religions in the Chamber of Deputies, Luna Costa, 2017.
- p. 107: Human mosaic creating the name MARIELLE with the plaques, Francisco Proner, 2018.

### Further reading

[institutomariellefranco.org](http://institutomariellefranco.org)



# The Art of Sus a Movement

16  
Niepodległości

Visual and Sonic  
Identity of the  
2020/21  
Strajk Kobiet  
Protests  
in Poland



# staining

Hanna  
Grześkiewicz



**T**he fascistic aim of Poland's PiS (Law and Justice party) government to control the bodies of those who can bear children was tied to visions of a perfect Polish nation – white, Catholic, patriarchal, and reliant on reproductive labour performed by women<sup>1</sup> for its survival. Controlling women's bodies was a key element in this endeavour. Restricting access to abortion was part of a wider eradication of reproductive rights designed to maintain the current system, while also being a (futile) attempt at encouraging more births. With anti-abortion rhetoric arguing for childbirth be carried out at any cost, it became akin to a “sacrificial” act for the nation – men die in combat, women in childbirth.

When the Polish Constitutional Tribunal announced the de facto abortion ban on 22 October 2020, furious protesters filled the streets of hundreds of Polish cities and towns. This wave of protests was inspiringly creative and artistic, developing a strong visual and sonic identity. The protests lasted until the ruling was published in late January 2021, making it law. While the protests did not succeed in overturning the de facto abortion ban, the movement's success is evident in increased public debate over abortion. This is reflected in all recent polls, which show public support for the liberalisation of abortion laws to be at an all-time high of 72-80% (depending on the wording of the exact question).

## A struggle over public space

The red lightning bolt became the main visual symbol of this wave of protests. It first came to use in Ola Jasionowska's design of the logo for the *Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet* (All-Poland Women's Strike, OSK), and later became synonymous with supporting the movement against the abortion ban – and more broadly for the legalisation of abortion, and women's rights. While the artist initially conceived it as a warning sign to the government, its meaning shifted according to the movement's goals, at times also interpreted to mean rage and power. Although the symbol tied the protests to OSK, who assumed leadership to a large extent, it grew beyond an association with this organisation.

Social media played a significant role in this expansion of meaning: as Ewa Majewska describes it, many people were first able to “rehearse participation” in the movement with their Facebook profile pictures, Instagram stories, or posts, and through this increased courage to take to the streets adorned with this same symbolism on clothes, masks, or protest signs.

The lightning bolt was also very present in public spaces. For example, it was added to the famous neon sign of the volleyball player in Warsaw, it





was visible in the aerial image of a flash mob that formed the word *strajk* in one of Kraków's main parks, and it was on the OSK flag planted atop a mountain near Zakopane. Each such intervention was also documented for social media.

The ubiquity of the red lightning bolt in both public and digital spaces over that three-month period transformed this simple symbol into one of belonging to a movement and to a community. Walking through Polish cities, it can still be seen displayed in car windows, hung on balconies, or sewn onto clothes.

This hybrid (analogue-digital) tactic for visual depiction was deliberately adopted by the *Archiwum Protestów Publicznych* (Public Protest Archive), a photographers' collective that documented many of the protests and collected the images in an online archive. They printed

*Gazety Strajkowe* (Strike Newspapers) made up of slogans, testimonials and photos from the demonstrations, which could be used as a mobile exhibition, held as protest signs during demonstrations, or plastered in public spaces. The collective also asked participants to tag them on Instagram whenever using the newspapers. One of its members, Rafał Milach, said in a recent interview: "By creating this alternative circulation of images, we control the narrative and their usage." The APP is a public archive for distributing images from protests, and all the images used in this text are taken from their online repository.



## Reclaiming national(ist) symbols

The right-wing in Poland had been consistently and overwhelmingly claiming public spaces as their own. The right-wing's campaign to dominate public spaces include anti-abortion billboards depicting fetuses, *plodobusy* (vans that drive around displaying gruesome images of aborted fetuses and use their speakers to spread hateful messages), graffiti relating to historical battles and uprisings, and displays of "heroism" by nationalists, such as during the Independence Day marches on 11 November. Particularly on this public holiday, over the last few years mainstream and social media has been filled with images of crowds, largely of men holding red flares. The photos are eerie, and are disconcerting because a closer look shows the nationalist, homophobic, racist and misogynist slogans and blatant displays of neo-Nazi symbolism.

Reclaiming public space is part of the feminist fight against the binary of public and private – with "women's issues" often relegated to the private sphere – and for the visibility and agency of women in public spaces. Stickers, the strike newspapers, billboards with the phone number of the grassroots initiative Abortion Dream Team, and graffiti were all used to reclaim public space.



The OSK logo is black, white and red – the white and red deeply entrenched in the Polish consciousness as the national colours. The red flare was also (re)claimed by the Strajk Kobiet protesters, building towards the overarching question raised by the protests: who does Poland belong to?

Artistic interventions were part of this tug-of-war over national(ist) symbols. During one of the nights characterized by protests, in a building opposite Kaczyński's house in Warsaw's Żoliborz district there was a revival of the play *Dziady* (in this context best translated as "old croaks" though the word also means "forefathers") by Poland's most famous bard, Adam Mickiewicz, with the modern *dziad*, Kaczyński, in a starring role. In Poznań, one of the urban blockades was accompanied by the sounds of the polonaise – a national dance – which led to the headline in the next morning's *Gazeta Wyborcza* reading "Drivers applaud. Gays Dance the Polonaise". A particularly interesting case is the renaming of Warsaw's *Rondo Dmowskiego* (Dmowski Roundabout) to the *Rondo Praw Kobiet* (Women's Rights Roundabout). Dmowski was one of the main ideologues of Polish nationalism at the turn of the 20th century. The name change was first done symbolically throughout the protests, with

activists mounting self-made signs to mark it; the petition to make the name change official was approved in December 2021 by the Warsaw City Council and is currently awaiting additional legal steps.

These different types of actions had multiple purposes – not only did they paint an image of a more inclusive Poland, but they also sustained the movement. It is not enough to march daily towards empty government buildings. There are always new ideas, actions, and reasons emerging for going back out onto the streets, encouraging inexperienced protesters to keep turning up.



## Collective joy

Another important element in the art of sustaining a movement is community building. The feeling of belonging to a community can increase through experiences and memories of protests. Moments of what Lynne Segal calls “collective joy”, often sparked by a memorable event, can bring a group of people closer and can be crucial in this process. One particularly memorable incident was the repurposing of Eryk Prydz’s classic dance track *Call On Me* into a protest song by including the chant “Jebać PiS”, later remixed into a new track, *JBĆ PIS*, by Polish hip hop artist Cypis. The humour and joy produced by dancing to this track while chanting is an experience shared by many protesters. Similarly, DJs often contributed to these feelings of collective joy by organising techno blockades, which were both fun and kept protesters warm in the marathon effort of trying to bring cities to a standstill.

The resonance of sonic interventions, which ranged from a new version of *Bella Ciao*, titled *Tortury Ciało* (Body Tortures) filmed in Kraków to videos of thousands shouting *wypierdalać* (Get the f\*\*\* out), was intensified through wide circulation on social media. This wave of protest was the first to prolifically use swear words as protest chants. The eight stars, which stood for *Jebać PiS* (F\*\*\* PiS), were also present as a visual symbol, although they related to a much broader dissatisfaction with the ruling party. There is a joy that is released when shouting such slogans in the streets, alongside thousands of others, even if other emotions initially led to the outbreak of protests. There was also a joy in the creativity of the protest signs held by protesters – which often used humour – and which were widely shared and documented.

During the months of the protests, there was an arguably arbitrary distinction between professional and spontaneous artistic interventions. Although there were artists who tried to (and did) profit off the back of the movement, many gave support using their skills, feeding their art back into the streets. Art – in its broadest sense – was used within protests as a tactic of building community, awareness and consciousness within and for different communities. Whether shown in humorous cardboard protest signs, a restaging of a national play, logo design, or a rewriting of an anti-fascist song, this collective artistry is what made this a movement that still keeps hold of many hearts and minds, despite its inability to overturn the de facto abortion ban.

### Illustrations

- p. 108: Protest against stricter abortion laws in Leszno. Leszno 2020, Michał Adamski / APP.
- p. 110: Wojtek Radwański.
- p. 111: Adam Lach.
- p. 112: Dawid Zieliński.
- p. 113: Joanna Musiał.
- p. 115: Concert on December 13, Warsaw, 13.12.2020, Marta Bogdanska.

### Endnotes

- 1 “Women” is the term which was used by the movement and for that reason is also used here, but these issues relate to all of those who can become pregnant, including cis-women, trans-men, and non-binary people, with the acknowledgement that neither trans-men nor non-binary people are women.



# Mother's Story of Resistance

I am Gertrude Alex Malizeni, an experimental multi-disciplinary artist based in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania. Much of my practice is based on sharing stories of women from my family and society. I focus on this, because I want to raise awareness on issues, such as the limitations placed on the kind of jobs a woman is able to do, the pressure on how a woman should live her life to fit the qualities of a woman, and the expectations on how she acts before men, as well as many more issues that affect women in East African societies, which need to be addressed and changed. These limits and boundaries are mostly upheld by religious leaders and our culture as it connects to political rule, which exerts so much control over women.

Due to the authoritarian manifestation of the patriarchy, I have faced challenges in exhibiting this work. My artistic language was seen as offensive to society, since a woman's body is perceived to be sexually provocative. I find it offensive that a body would be so uncomfortable to the audience because of who has the authority in our society.

This artwork is about my mother who suffered in her marriage, its patriarchal nature being the cause of her young death. My mom became pregnant with me when she was in high school, at the age of 17. Her parents broke the bond with her out of disappointment. Once they found out she was pregnant, she was no longer allowed in the family. She then went to live with my father, who was working and a few years her elder. As days went by, this man

started treating her like trash. Her future was doomed: she had no more connection with her parents and was being treated badly at her young age. Her life was miserable. When I was born, the situation got worse. Her man started bringing different women home, knowing my mother had nowhere else to go. She had to live through all that, just to keep going. She tried giving her daughter the kind of life she thought was best for her, until she was not able to take it anymore and she attempted suicide when I was two years old. After this attempt, she continued to be strong for me and kept up with whatever treatment my father was inflicting on her.

This empowered the man to become more comfortable in his ways, which resulted in him infecting her with HIV/AIDS, leading to both their deaths. Before she died, my mother went through a lot of hardship with her parents-in-law on the question of inheritance, fighting for her daughter's well-being. Later on, she was shamed for having been infected with the disease. Despite all of this, she managed to smile and to look so happy and fresh. My mother is the best thing that ever happened to me. I see situations like my mother's around me today and it makes me sick. I want to raise my voice to the highest, to speak against situations like these.

Gertrude  
Malizeni



# The Tarp Shed of Public Sp



# Occupations spaces

Simeen Anjum,  
Sana Sheikh



**T**arpaulin is an intensely and diversely used material among the working class and marginalised populations in India. It features as a distinct visual element of cityscapes, and acts as a contrast to the huge shiny buildings. The site of towering, elevated buildings just beside the tarpaulin *chawls* (tenements) in Bombay is a typical image that comes to mind in understanding the nature of this material. Tarpaulin, commonly called *tirpal*, is used for a range of purposes, such as providing shade from the sun, rain, protection from dust, and making temporary shelters. Due to its affordability and durability, it is a popular choice especially for those who cannot afford permanent shelter. Tarp sheds serve as a shelter to “illegal” people, who are deprived of the right to a permanent roof of their own. It is commonly seen on the streets used by food cart owners, roadside peddlers, and by a variety of professionals that include barbers, cobblers, fruit sellers etc. Tarps are also a primary material used by the homeless and refugees for building makeshift homes. The practice of using tarpaulin, therefore, is deeply rooted in the modern history of the subcontinent, which could be traced back to the emergence of consumerism and modern capitalist class structures. However, in 2019 the use of tarpaulin gained new meanings and an implicit significance.

## Tarpaulin as material of resistance

In 2019, India witnessed a unique protest strategy that transformed these same tarp sheds into important sites of resistance. The notorious CAA-NRC bill, which was passed in the Indian parliament, was met with massive opposition from the people. The bill was designed in a way that it threatened the citizenship status of some of India’s population, specifically targeting the Muslim population and the economically backward sections of Indian society, who were now required to prove their citizenship by means of written documents, whose ownership was of course a privilege reserved for the literate. For the Muslims in particular, it was a manoeuvre that put into question their sense of belonging in India. In response to this discriminatory citizenship bill designed to strip off the Muslim citizens in India of their rights, millions of people across the country came out in protest.

The unique counterstrategy developed during these protests was that of sit-in occupations of public spaces/roads, mainly led by Muslim women. Protesters occupied public spaces with big canopy sheds, made up of tarpaulins, blocking public roads and disrupting the normal life of the city using non-violent resistance. The first time this strategy was used, was during the famous Shaheen Bagh protest where a national highway was blocked by protesters for over one hundred days; it was later adopted in other cities and neighbourhoods as a mode of resistance against the discriminatory citizenship law. The tarp sheds served as a shelter for hundreds of protesters who occupied the roads. They also housed community kitchens, where protesters prepared their food – and later makeshift libraries and activity centres for kids that lasted until the end of the movement.

## Spaces that do not belong to anyone

A tarpaulin, one that could be hoisted, adjusted, transported, one that could envelop the protesters who came together from a variety of backgrounds, symbolized the idea of unified resistance. In the context of the Shaheen Bagh protests, it symbolized a unity that dissolved distinctions between different classes and castes. Students from various institutions, housewives, labourers after their long working day, 9-to-5 job holders, all gathered under the tarps in the evenings to show their unbridled support to the resistance. More importantly, the tarpaulin was crucial to the performance. The state passed a bill that could render millions homeless



and hopeless. A tarpaulin represented an alternate way of being: of never giving up, of being adamant in staying in one's own country, even if under the shades of a tarpaulin. It gave out a clear signal that people from diverse backgrounds could gather around it to perform resistance. The simple acts of living, sleeping, eating, playing, cheering, singing, and conversing inside a tarpaulin became forms of resistance. A whole way of living, living against all odds, entered the framework of politics and resistance. A tarpaulin, on the other hand, also demarcates a space that does not belong to anyone. It runs strictly against the idea of ownership. No one participating in the performance inquired about the owners of the tarpaulin. It was there to comfort and reassure people of a roof over their heads. Not only did it protect against the harsh weather conditions, it also gave people a sense of belonging. A sense of belonging at a time when this very sense was being attacked, ridiculed, and threatened. Tarpaulins were homes in the potential state-enforced homelessness.

The tarpaulins, in very deliberate manoeuvre, also made sure that people become visible and united. They symbolized a moment that was against invisibilization of all kinds. Tarp sheds and the people who sat under them brought to attention a sight that the city-state nexus neglected for a long time. In these new conditions, this invisibilization of the poor who slept on the roads, in dire conditions, paved way to a massive wave of visibilization of people demanding to be seen and heard. They suddenly entered a frame of politics and representation. Though there were other, more structural, reasons behind the success of the protests, what cannot be denied is that Shaheen Bagh, which became the locus of anti CAA-NRC sentiments, and the successful mobilization of people at the site, is owing to ground-level organization in which tarpaulins had their own seemingly negligible, but in reality extremely significant role to play.

The movement also faced resistance from various agents who went as far as to bring lethal weapons to these sites of non-violent protests. The bill, which was part of a wider



authoritarian Hindu nationalist project, was passed by the Lok Sabha (lower house of the Indian parliament) on 9 December 2019 and by the Rajya Sabha (upper house) on 11 December 2019. The movement against the bill came to a rather abrupt end due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the movement marked a watershed moment in India which gave a new face to non-violent resistance against the authoritarian regime by gathering, reading, sleeping, or simply being under tarps, and by showcasing absolute determination against tyranny.

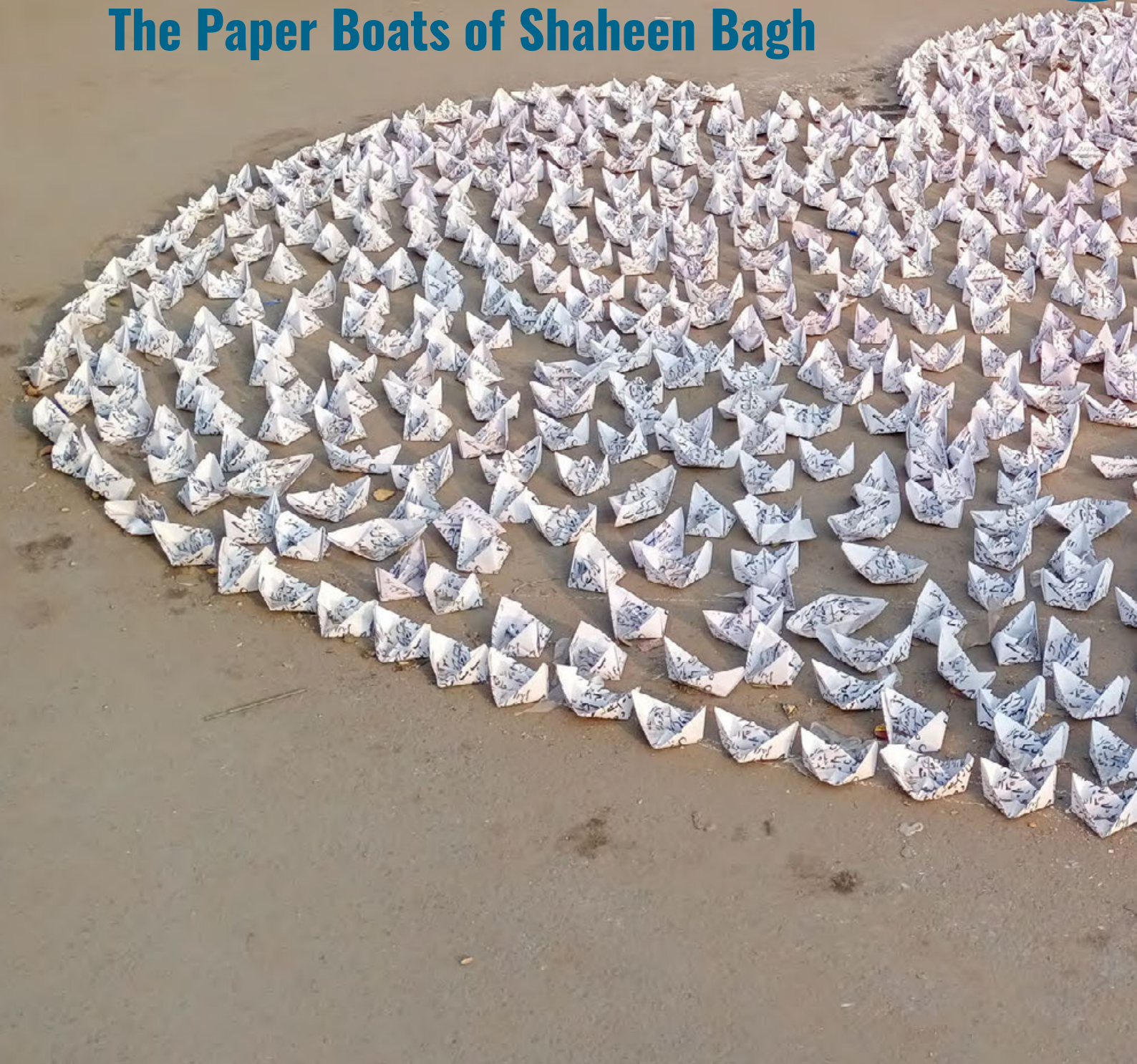
## Illustrations

p. 118: A visual of the main area where women have been sitting for 32 days Shaheen Bagh, January 15 2020, DTM, CC0 – public domain.

p. 121: A roadside barber with a tarpaulin shed to work under, Simeen Anjum, 2021.

# A Sea of Song

The Paper Boats of Shaheen Bagh





Arushi  
Vats



**O**n a crisp winter evening in January 2020, when the streets of New Delhi were swaddled in shawls, blankets, and makeshift bonfires, I exited the warmth of a metro coach filled with radiant, pulsating bodies at Jasola Vihar station. Since the onset of the peaceful demonstration at Shaheen Bagh in December 2019, the metro station had become a landmark, a confluence towards which tributaries of people gushed from every corner of the megacity to visit the protest site. As if anticipating the arrival of visitors from the metro, a wave of sounds would rise up to the elevated bridge that connected the exit with the road below, its railings adorned with colourful banners proclaiming slogans of secularism and democracy, tacked and strung along the length of the corridor and staircase. Under the guise of controlling cross-border migration from neighbouring countries, the central government of India (a coalition led by the Hindu fundamentalist Bharatiya Janata Party) amended the citizenship provisions of the Indian constitution, redefining the qualifications required to claim citizenship of India and demeriting members of the Muslim community specifically. In response to the cumulative fury at the physical attacks on dissenting students by the central police force and the legal violence of the Constitutional Amendment Bill 2019 (now an Act), which would strip many residents of their existing citizenship and empower the state to restrain them in detention centres that resemble labour camps, Muslim women in a small neighbourhood in New Delhi began an indefinite sit-in protest, which came to be identified as the Shaheen Bagh protest site. Shaheen Bagh became the nucleus of a rhizomatic network of protests across India, presenting a vision for challenging brute authoritarianism and legal excess by a repressive state. The strategies of resistance produced at Shaheen Bagh came to be adopted across other sites: unyielding sit-ins by women who braved the cold nights of Delhi under a feeble *shamiyana* (makeshift tent) and an atmosphere of sharing, be it of quilts, food, or other modes of sustenance, was supplemented by unconditional hospitality extended to each visitor – including members of the police force sent to monitor and surveil the protest – as they were offered *samosas* (fried snacks) and hot tea by voluntary committees led by local residents and students.

## We will see

At Shaheen Bagh, art erupted from the *shamiyana* that hosted the sit-in, which began with and was led by Muslim women protesters, and which grew to include thousands of participants, most notably students. Shaheen Bagh's invocations spilled into the surrounding lanes – found on flyers resting on plastic tables at adjacent *dhabas* (food stalls), spreading into the painted streets, climbing up the staircase and travelling on the metro to every corner of the city. They travelled in the form of pins and booklets, books, illustrated posters, flyers, and witnessings of radical civic dissent

and solidarity that continue to be venerated by the many who participated in and observed the protest. The Shaheen Bagh protest redefined its surrounding landscape, creating a sensorium of collectivity that touched the land, air, and sky alike with its vision of a secular nation – art installations filled the horizon, songs of peace and *azaadi* (freedom) soared through the lanes, and the ground was nourished with the feet and hands of hundreds drawing and resting upon it. It was on this ground, christened by the unrelenting spirit of a *chakka jam* (road blockage) led by Muslim women as a form of civic protest, with the street claimed for peaceful demonstration, that I first glimpsed the undulating shape of a heart made with candles. Paper boats made with simple origami folds, carefully assembled to fill up the shape, trembled in the cold wind and among the flickering flames. Illuminated by candlelight, the script printed



on the paper with which the boats were made was strong and assertive. It held lines from Faiz Ahmad Faiz's poem, "Wa Yabqa Wajh-o-Rabbik", popularly known by the refrain in the lyric "Hum Dekhenge" (We will see). The poem had become an anthem that winter of the Anti-CAA protests. It surged from the lungs of protesters, it was scribbled on walls and minds, and it was recited frequently by the protesters at Shaheen Bagh. The poem holds steadfast in its conviction that all tyrannies will be witnessed, remembered, and surmounted on the day of judgement, written in the context of another dictatorial state and sung throughout history as a warning against unfettered power. Faiz penned the

poem in 1979, months after a military coup led by General Zia-ul-Haq gained control of Pakistan in 1978. The lyrics of the poem counter the religious conservatism of the military regime by placing "true faith" in the hearts of those who bear witness to history.

The lines from the poem were rendered in Urdu script which ran through the folded boats. Upon closer look, I could see that at the bottom of the heart, where two candles met to make a pointed conclusion, there sat a toy military tank. The miniature tank figurine appeared frozen in front of the boats, its diminutive plastic scale made to seem even smaller by the cascade of paper forms.

## Folding

It was my first encounter with artist Arif Naeem's installation at Shaheen Bagh, titled after the poem which it inscribed and transformed into the shape of a boat. A graduate of the MFA programme at Jamia Millia Islamia, Naeem had been working with the form of paper boats in public installations for years before Shaheen Bagh. Yet, I couldn't help but wonder that his choice of the form and the constellations of ideas it beckoned found its home at the protest site – a place where *making* was wrested from the limits of individualism and transformed into a collective verb. When Naeem began the work of creating the installation at Shaheen Bagh, he had with him xerox copies of Faiz's poem, scripted elegantly by his father and then photocopied, and chalk for drawing on the ground. He had invited friends and acquaintances, but was hopeful that others present at the site would join in. He was not mistaken. As people sat on the ground, folding sheets of paper into boats with him, Naeem had realized the participatory ideal he sought with each project. Naeem informed me that the candles which illuminated the heart made from paper-boats were placed there at night by protesters on site, an act of care and custodianship that is emblematic of the commons. A focus on art-making as a communicative act, a moment of inhabiting a public space together, sharing time and exchanging ideas among strangers – all this has been a focus of his practice, and at Shaheen Bagh the installation became a gathering place that in delimiting its surroundings, created a hub for resting, gazing, and conversation. To Naeem, the boats are a metaphor – a vehicle for life, destiny, and stewardship. At the Shaheen Bagh protest site, the boats also stood in for the bodies that were stateless, suspended between exile and refuge, stripped

of rights, shunted into detention centres, and maligned in xenophobic speech. It was these bodies that the Indian state had been steadily controlling through the narrative of sifting “illegal outsiders” and “legitimate citizens” on the basis of religion that the Citizenship Amendment Act ossified into the force of law. The protesters at Shaheen Bagh were asserting not only their own stake in citizenship, but the abrogation of a fundamental tenet of the Indian constitution, which lists secularism as a basic principle. The medium of paper was especially prudent, as the production of impossible documents to trace ancestry was the requirement of claiming citizenship under the rubric of CAA. “Kaagaz nahi dikhayenge”, which translates to “We will not show the papers”, was a poem penned by Varun Grover during the protests that conveyed the widespread sentiment of refusal to perform the act of documentary compliance with a discriminatory law. In Naeem's hands, and the hands of many others who joined in, paper became a medium for countering power. A boat evokes a transient space, a testament to migration as a journey, crossing over, or passage that runs against the ideas of cartographic fixity and impermeability of borders. The boats at Shaheen Bagh recalled the struggles of refugees stranded at sea and seized on borderlands. As an installation, as the boats converged against the figurine of the military tank, overcoming state violence was given a visual possibility. A symbol of playfulness and joy, the paper boats bore words of freedom and residues of a life of collective tending and care that was emblematic of the community that Shaheen Bagh became, a porous place that would welcome in solidarity and support movements speaking truth to power around the world.

## The material of protest

Driven by poetic traditions and histories of peaceful protest, Naeem also lists John Lennon as a figure of inspiration. It is not coincidental that the medium of paper – a light, organic material that is inexpensive, ubiquitous, and tactile, that spatializes the possibilities of mark-making and inscription – has also been found recently in the form of colourful sticky-notes, dubbed Lennon Walls<sup>1</sup>, in the subway networks of Hong Kong during anti-extradition protests of 2019, and which have a longer history originating in the Umbrella movement for universal suffrage in 2014. The malleable and proliferatory nature of paper has also been galvanized in the form of paper *samosa packets* (fried snack packets) by artist Sofia Karim in a joint-artistic project titled *Turbine Bagh* (2020), for which folded paper packets were printed with photojournalistic and artistic documentation from the sub-continent to draw attention to recent authoritarian excess and violations in Bangladesh and India.

Samosas and fried snacks with tea are community-led offerings at protest sites, and the practice of community nourishment and sharing of snacks flourished in Shaheen Bagh as well. The ordinariness of packets, notes, and origami shapes help root the protest as an exceptional event in the daily lives of its participants, harkening the familiar into a potent force at such public sites, and depositing residues of protest as a limited temporal frame into the longer, continuing tides of their private lives. As participants carried back ephemera from the site, they were also extending both its geographic radius and narrative afterlife. Recounting an encounter during the assembly of the paper boat installation, Naeem described how a woman with a child came up to him and narrated her experience with origami as a schoolgirl. From the paper that was being used to make the boats, she fashioned an origami rose and presented it to Naeem – a paper flower he treasures to date.

A few days after the installation was mounted, there was a downpour. Yet, the boats stood, brimming atop the shallow pools of water which had gathered – standing steadfast as the protesters continued to sing, chant, and recite together. Naeem was drawn to the fragility of a paper boat, its unknowable journey in the rain as a symbol of hope against the dark. At Shaheen Bagh, dawn and dusk became a twin phenomenon in the light of a thousand shining eyes, and hope beamed over the darkness of an endless night.

### Illustrations

- p. 122: An installation view of the participatory work titled *Hum Dekhenge* (2020) by Arif Naeem at Shaheen Bagh, Arif Naeem, 2020.
- p. 125: A close-up view of the participatory work titled *Hum Dekhenge* (2020) by Arif Naeem at Shaheen Bagh. The hand-inked text in Urdu script on the paper is from the poem *Wa Yabqa Wajh-o-Rabbik* by Faiz Ahmad Faiz.

### Endnotes

- 1 See: *The Art of Protest in Hong Kong*, p. 22.

# To Feed is to

Unión de  
Trabajadores y  
Trabajadoras  
de la Tierra







# Resist

## Verdurazos and the Struggle Toward Food Sovereignty

From the depths of Argentina, the cries of thousands of families resound across its land. Time appears to have stopped in these rural areas, oblivious to digital technology and the dizzying and mundane features of modern life. Here, on rented plots known as *quintas*, male and female comrades, entire families of small-scale farmers, pass the working day in adverse climates, fighting for a better life. They all have stories to tell and face uncertain futures due to economic policies and social systems that generate more anxiety than assurance.

Walking through the fields, almost never their own and almost always far from home, farmers hold individual stories that together become a collective account of suffering. Every day, they toil the land to sow fruits and vegetables that will reach thousands of tables after a long process of production. The Unión de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras de la Tierra (Landworkers' Union, UTT) was born out of this scenario: the need to extend a helping hand towards a path of equality.

After a decade of tenacious militancy, there is a path that connects the regions with concrete action. Our organization was born in Greater La Plata, capital of the province of Buenos Aires, a traditional fruit and vegetable growing area that supplies multiple larger and smaller markets

throughout the state. We also support victims of Argentina's difficult history; those who cannot cover their most basic needs. We respond to the urgency and need to organize collectively. Many of our comrades represent social organizations that emerged from the social unrest in 2001, a milestone that deepened an unprecedented crisis, when more than half of the population fell into poverty.

These comrades have joined peasant families uprooted from their places of origin: *peones golondrinas* – dislocated farmers – working on plantations and harvesting crops on the outskirts of the big cities, living in precarious wooden shanties with dirt floors.

There are still entire families who live on rented plots of less than three hectares,



cultivating seasonal fruits and vegetables. They wake up, work, and rest – after long days of suffocating heat and bitter cold – paying costly rents, uncertain about how long they will be able to stay. This situation is replicated in every corner of Argentina, whereby thousands of farming families, producers of 60% of the country's food, must rent a piece of land. Moreover, their expenses are not limited to renting the *quinta*. They also include the construction of greenhouses, complete with shade cloth, wooden posts, hundreds of meters of wire, irrigation equipment, and water pumps, all at ever-increasing and dollarized prices. Farmers are also forced to purchase seeds, a vital

element commercialized by large agribusiness companies. An endemic evil that puts the rural communities of our continent on edge through evictions and agro-toxins, this model involves the plundering of bodies and territories, consented to by governments in power. Also complicit are mass media and passive societies that avoid the urgent actions that our planet desperately needs.



## Enhancing the flavour of food by a thousand colours

To counteract this situation, our comrades, despite the suffering and manipulation, use natural elements that fortify both crops and hope. Through a long process, they are freeing themselves from pesticides, – a euphemism for the strong poisons that cause harm to farmers, but more subtly harm our general urban populations as well. The People's Technical Consultancy (COTEPO) is the result of years of research and training to create a definitive path toward agroecology. This process enhances the flavour of food by a thousand colours; glimmers of hope. Each furrow represents part of the struggle

toward food sovereignty, which includes the decisions of what to produce, how, where, and when to do it – without impositions or poisons.

UTT's development in commercialization is based on internal and horizontal discussions regarding pricing, driven by the concept of fair trade, which proposes a new trading paradigm that excludes intermediaries. By avoiding the middle man/woman, some of the inflationary pressure on food is controlled. The produce is sold in supermarkets, as well as in wholesale markets that hold seasonal fruits and vegetables, as well as products of hundreds of cooperatives with similar interests. This way, the UTT avoids the speculation that threatens the quality and price of food.

## Giving our food as anti-authoritarian counterstrategy

The organization has had further achievements. Given the enormous demand for food, resources were created from the ingenuity and collective commitment that we continue to raise every day. We are also dedicated to the legacy of historic struggles in sectors subjugated to the powers that be. This is the origin of the *Verdurazos*, collective actions in public spaces that take place in urban centres to support marginalized areas: Dozens of crates are quickly taken down from trucks and placed on sidewalks that surround key transportation centres, where railroad, subway, and bus stations intersect. The action often takes place metres away from the Casa Rosada, the office of the president, or in the vicinity of the National Congress, from whom we demand a Land Access Law that would definitively grant us the rights we deserve.

Born several years ago, the *Verdurazos* are a form of direct connection between the needs of the people and the people themselves. In the midst of the socio-economic crisis, a result of the exclusionary policies of former President Mauricio Macri, the UTT gives away vegetables to workers on their way home, as well as to soup kitchens that feed children, the unemployed, the homeless, and the elderly with inadequate pensions. In that period of dystopia and uncertainty, the collective gathering around food was a concrete response to authoritarian intervention. It was also a response to an intolerance of national security forces. This was captured in a photograph that resonated nationally and internationally: an elderly woman picking up an eggplant from the ground, leaning on her shopping cart, surrounded by uniformed men. Just as hundreds of others who came to the *Verdurazo*, she walked blocks for a couple of kilos of fresh food, under the threatening gaze of the police and the total disregard of a government uninterested in alleviating the effects of its brutal economic policies. The photo is a visual example of a crisis with a devastating economic impact.

That afternoon, the activity was paralyzed due to the refusal of the Buenos Aires city government to permit the *Verdurazo*. The situation was aggravated by the arrival of more police officers, which only added to the tension and the scorching heat of that day, 14 February 2016. The *Verdurazo* was the only thing standing between the government and street demonstrations. The situation soon got out of control, and comrades were forced to disperse. Not even fruits and vegetables were spared: the police threw tear gas at the crates, rendering the produce inedible, and then proceeded to confiscate some of it. The love and collective effort between the farms, the solidarity of each family willing to donate some of their produce to those in need, as well as the human and logistical effort to make the produce available, was torn to pieces in a few minutes.

In spite of this, through persistence, the *Verdurazos* were replicated in other cities, and later morphed into the *Feriazos*, where fruits, vegetables, and products from cooperatives are sold at fair prices. The *Feriazos* are a partial solution to the cyclical inflation and insufficient public policies that have plagued Argentina for five decades.

The *Verdurazos* and many other activities replicated throughout Argentina represent an act of resistance in support of the thousands of homeless people in the streets. These



activities respond to the same need and the same gratitude, strengthening bonds that spread by word of mouth toward new social constructs. Promoting a movement of land, work, and social change is more than a slogan. It is a political conviction that, through concrete actions leading to a paradigm shift, produces rooted and sustained development, fair trade and healthy food. Beyond speculation or personal interests, it is the collective engine that activates struggles from below, toward a dignified life.

## Illustrations

p. 128: Photograph by Bernardino Ávila.

p. 130: Photograph by Bernardino Ávila.

p. 131: Photograph by Pepe Mateos.

p. 133: Photograph by Bernardino Ávila.



# Marching Against Repression



# inst

Manuel Bayón Jiménez,  
Samantha Garrido Arce



**E**ach morning of the month-long march of communities toward Quito begins with a ceremony. It is both an expression of strength and an assertion of survival for Andean and Amazonian knowledge. They invoke the cosmivision – or world view – contained in the Andean *chakana*; the relationship with fruits and vegetables worked from the land, coming from the *pampamesas*; or calls to provide food collectively, which is also a source of energy for the march. The *mamas*, wise women who perform the ceremonies, burn incense and rosewood around the participants for protection during the march. It smells of centuries of struggle and dignity.

“Que se queden en el paramo” (Go back to the paramo); “vayan a ordenar a su casa... unos cuantos abusivos, así se vistan de poncho” (boss around at home... a few harassers, look at the ponchos) or “indio encontrado, indio preso” (find an Indian, lock him (her) up): These are just a few of the insults that have been hurled by governing politicians or the hegemonic media toward indigenous marches as they arrived in Ecuador’s largest cities. The historical configuration of Latin American cities that were “founded” by the colonizers in the 15th century – who erased the cities’ previous history and who assumed the cities as spaces that belonged to *them* – has had a strong influence with regards to public demonstrations. Racism implies violence toward non-white/mestizo ways of inhabiting urban space and the violence reaches its peak during the marches: the deployment of the police and the army is especially brutal, as reflected in the eight deaths during the last indigenous uprising in October 2019.

## Marching through the highlands to the capital

The anti-repression strategy of Ecuador’s indigenous movement has been to carry out marches from emblematic places for its peoples and nations to the capital city of Quito. Despite the 2008 Constitution recognizing the right to resistance through the *Sumak Kawsay*, or Good Living and the Rights of Nature, changes such as the new mining law of 2009, the cancellation of the Yasuní-ITT initiative, and oil exploration through the XI oil round forced the indigenous movement to raise its voice. As a result, five large marches have been held in the last decade, starting in the Amazon and traveling through the Ecuadorian highlands to the center of

Quito, converging thousands of people from the north and south of the country, supported by urban leftist groups.

The first march was called due to the launch of the first mega mining project in the south of the Ecuadorian Amazon, concessioned to a Chinese transnational company. Communities resisting mining from across the country made a show of force as the march passed through numerous cities. One of the other emblematic marches was led by Amazonian women, who walked for days from the centre of the Amazon to voice to state institutions their arguments against oil expansion of Spanish, Belorussian, and Chinese companies. The President of the Republic and the President of the National Assembly refused to receive them.

## Networks of care and solidarity

The marches usually last between nine and 12 days. This involves a quick ascent – from hot tropical climates to the Andean cold – up almost 3000 meters of elevation, which is only possible because of a solidarity network that moves hundreds or thousands of people from one place to the next. Care and mutual solidarities become essential. It is essential to be able to feed all the people who walk from town to town. This is staged through large *pampamesas*: a collective meal that is prepared in huge pots to feed those who arrive at the end of the day, flooding the public space with the smells of the seasonings of the mountains. They symbolize the sense of community, and the importance of nourishing bodies with food.





This is why the presence of healers is also fundamental during the marches. The mothers have the tough job of emotional containment, given that blisters or gastric diseases multiply as the walk goes on. To sustain the march, places to sleep vary in terms of climates and conditions, and an endless number of logistical needs accumulate. In Ecuador, funds are raised through collection, *hacer una vaca* (literally “to make a cow”). For these marches, a cardboard cow in the form of a piggy bank is made, where those who receive the march in each city put their contributions. Human rights, religious, and environmental organizations become important supporters through intercultural solidarity.

The marches are intergenerational. Women are very visible, while at the same time there are spaces for childcare, thanks to which children can participate for the entire route. The marches are a sign of presence and millenary strength of resistance to colonization. The paintings on the faces and bodies of those who walk are crucial; as with the indigenous cosmovisions, they are a way to become part of territories through the representation of animals, plants, concepts, or dreams; they are a message and protection against the white-mestizo society that observes, stigmatizes, or violates them with the police or the army.

## Anti-extractivist mobilizations

Despite the harshness of institutional racism that the marches face, they are lived as moments that will become pillars of memory for indigenous peoples, flooded with emotions. The many moments of music, song, dance, and multiple sharing are also spaces of joy. Although the most symbolic moments are the moments of entry into the successive cities, particularly Quito, hours pass walking through the arid Andean fields, which move between suffocating heat and excessive cold due to torrential rain. Thus, the marches are also symbolic renunciations of the means of travel that use fossil fuels and other sources of modern energy, in a gesture of moving from the strength given by the food produced in the communities. They are a diversity of bodies that march, suffer, move or enjoy together, reconfiguring as the march progresses and more people join, forming a confluence of laughter, sounds, proclamations, languages, and flags.

The marches thus become a form of vindication that acquire a time-space of their own, where hierarchical orders are subverted: the political protagonism of women, the taking of white-mestizo public spaces in the cities, media visibility, or the questioning of the state are results generated through the existence of the marches. These forms of anti-extractivist mobilization have been true milestones in the social articulation and mobilization for the indigenous movement, as well as for the environmental and human rights groups, in the face of transnational mining and oil companies, which have played a key role in the violence of the racist-colonial state in imposing their megaprojects. The marches are a form of struggle against historical inequalities promoted by the hegemonic model of power, not only with respect to the specific demands put forward by the marches, but also to their format; their meaning, organization, and aesthetics. The sheer realization of the marches is a way of displaying the proposed “other” politics, as shown in the slogan of the Ecuadorian indigenous movement: *diciendo-haciendo* (saying-doing).

### Illustrations

p. 134: Marcha 2015, Espacio Rural, Cedhu.

p. 137: Marcha Centro, Juan Manuel Ruales.

p. 139: Marcha 2015, Ceremonia música en camino, Cedhu.





# Having a Territórios

The Beer That Supports Social Movements and Causes

Caroline Maldaner Jacobi,  
Igor Dalla Vecchia

**T**erritórios (Territories) Beer is a political initiative to produce and distribute beer that supports social movements and causes by donating a part of its profits. Alongside the financial support, the product lends great visibility to political struggles through the label design that bears the logos and visual identities of the supported groups and organizations. Territórios was conceived by two activist friends with a history of involvement in grassroots movements, activist research, and critical education. In their contact with social movements, they perceived a frequent need to raise funds to cover the costs of activists' needs: communications materials, food, and infrastructure at social movement offices, indigenous resettlements, and urban occupations. Selling beer fits as a fundraising tool as it is often consumed during moments of relaxation for such groups, and it can be sold by friends and supportive communities. This text provides a brief history of our work on Territórios and reflections on the development of custom labels and their impact. We hope it will inspire the creation of other products geared toward social transformation, financial autonomy, and politically conscious consumption.

The idea for creating Territórios first arose when Igor, a geographer and activist, was earning

his doctorate in Rio de Janeiro and met groups of working-class brewers, such as those in the Roça Collective. Established in 2010, in the Morro do Timbau community in the Maré Favela, the collective makes a beer named Caetés as an autonomous means of financing their actions in agroecology, economic collectivism, and nutritional sovereignty in peripheral areas.

## The first batches and the campaign to resettle Arado Velho

After returning to Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul in southern Brazil in September 2020, Igor brewed his first batch of craft beer supervised, via WhatsApp, by his brewer friends from the Maré Favela. Around that time, Igor contacted his friend Caroline to design the graphic materials for the first Territórios campaign. It was dedicated to the Guarani Resettlement of



TERRITÓRIOS

CERVEJAS E MOVIMENTOS

*Edição Especial de Primavera*



TURU  
CUTA

batucada nobre

*Anticolonial Ipa*

600ml • 8,2% vol.



TERRITÓRIOS

A Territórios trabalha destinando parte do excedente adquirido com a venda de cervejas para fortalecer movimentos sociais que estão deixando suas marcas espaciais na transformação da sociedade.

Nesta edição, apoiamos a **Retomada Indígena Guarani Mbya Karanda Ty**, em Cachoeirinha/RS, que tem a palmeira Carandá como símbolo de resistência frente a projetos imobiliários privados. A Blond é uma cerveja leve, clara, pouco amarga e que destaca o aroma dos maltes.

IBU	EBC	ABV
12	7	5%

/cervejaterritorios

/cervejaterritorios

(51) 99482 6616



Guarde a garrafa para reuso.

CERVEJA

Não pasteurizada.

Manter refrigerada na posição vertical.

TERRITÓRIOS

CERVEJAS E MOVIMENTOS

*Edição Especial de Apoio*



RETOMADA MBYA  
KARANDA TY  
CACHOEIRINHA

*Blond* 600ml • 5% vol.

INGREDIENTES:

Água, malte, lúpulo e levedura.

ALÉRGICOS:

Contém cevada, trigo, glúten. Pode conter aveia e centeio.

**EVITE O CONSUMO EXCESSIVO DE ÁLCOOL. PROIBIDA A VENDA PARA MENORES DE 18 ANOS.**

**AHAM!**  
CERVEJAS ARTESANAIS

Produzido e envasado por Cervejaria Vila Nova Ltda.  
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Box 2, Nível 1, Subsolo.  
Bairro Cavalhada, Porto Alegre/RS, Brasil.  
Indústria Brasileira CNPJ 32219332/0001-58  
Reg. Produto no M.A.P.A.RS 003855-5.000009

Lote / Validade



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Nesta edição, apoiamos o Movimento dos Pequenos Agricultores. A Blond é uma cerveja leve, clara, pouco amarga e que destaca o aroma dos maltes.

IBU	EBC	ABV
12	7	5%

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/cervejaterritorios

(51) 99482 6616



Guarde a garrafa para reuso.

CERVEJA

Não pasteurizada.

Manter refrigerada na posição vertical.

TERRITÓRIOS

CERVEJAS E MOVIMENTOS

*Edição Especial de Apoio*



*Blond* 600ml • 5% vol.

INGREDIENTES:

Água, malte, lúpulo e levedura.

ALÉRGICOS:

Contém cevada, trigo, glúten. Pode conter aveia e centeio.

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Lote / Validade

L04 V09/22



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Nesta edição, apoiamos a oficina comunitária que une ensino, liberdade e autonomia com intuito de propagar o uso de bicicletas pela cidade, fazendo acontecer a mobilidade urbana. A Blond é uma cerveja leve, clara, pouco amarga e que destaca o aroma dos maltes.

IBU	EBC	ABV
12	7	5%

TERRITÓRIOS

CERVEJAS E MOVIMENTOS



INGREDIENTES:

Água, malte, lúpulo e levedura.

ALÉRGICOS:

Contém cevada, trigo, glúten. Pode conter aveia e centeio.

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the Arado Velho Farm, an indigenous group that since 2017 has occupied a rural area in the south of Porto Alegre, where there are plans for the city's biggest gated community to be built. The area contains archaeological sites that confirm the historical presence of indigenous people, which is one of the key reasons for their demands to have the land declared as indigenous territory. We organized the first sales campaign through images circulated in groups on WhatsApp and Facebook, containing information on the beer, prices, sales contacts, and support for the Indigenous Resettlement campaign. From September to December 2020, 38 supporters ordered a total of 229 600ml bottles, an amount that required a great deal of domestic production. This was during the pandemic, and the supporters were people close to the indigenous cause who consumed Territórios as a way of supporting the indigenous struggle without having to go out, since the beer was delivered to their doorstep. Soon after the first round of deliveries, most supporters praised the beer and its political purpose, placing new orders, which confirmed the validity of continuing the project. The experience of the first campaign spurred our desire to expand support to other movements and to establish a more regular production rhythm in partnership with local breweries.

## Regular brewery production and the design of custom labels

Since the start of regular production in April 2021, thanks to the support of the Aham and Zapata breweries, Territórios can be sold in any commercial establishment. Regular production also generated a demand for a name and a visual identity. In a country with a long history of social inequality and concentration of land ownership, a legacy of exploitative colonization, slavery, and a long record of elitist public policies, social movements play an extremely important role in the struggle for the social and territorial rights of marginalized groups such as *quilombolas*,<sup>1</sup> indigenous peoples,<sup>2</sup> and peripheral populations. We thus choose the name Territórios to represent the demands for the transformation of territory made by the social movements and causes we support. The main illustration for the first labels was developed by invited artist Martina Estacia Da Cas, who drew maps consisting of tangled borders

and dislocated blocks of colour that highlight the need to place a reordering of spatial and territorial relationships on the political agenda, subverting the accepted order of national borders across the South American continent. The names of the various types of beer – Isla del Sol, Atacama, Vinicunca, Orinoco, and Amazonia – were chosen to pay homage to places of importance for the peoples of the Latin American continent.

Initially the main criterion for choosing which movements and causes to support was our existing proximity and political confidence shared between us and the activists. Over time, with the increased visibility and impact of the beers, other movements were recommended to

us or sought us out. Soon enough, a broad range of movements was being considered for custom labels, such as women's groups, indigenous resettlements, movements for Black and *quilombola* rights, and cultural groups, among others.

## A label for every movement


In May 2021, we undertook the first campaign on behalf of a nationwide movement, the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto* (Movement of Homeless Workers, MTST). At that time, the MTST was kickstarting its programmes to fight hunger through the establishment of solidarity kitchens.<sup>3</sup> It was also the first time we designed a label displaying a logo of a movement. It was a watershed moment both in terms of the scale of distribution for our beer and the political recognition of the work we had been doing. Just one month after we began regular factory production, the beer went on sale in São Paulo,


excedente adquirido com a venda de cervejas para fortalecer movimentos sociais que estão deixando suas marcas espaciais na transformação da sociedade.

Nesta edição, apoiamos os indígenas que reivindicam a retomada da Floresta Nacional de Canela como um território ancestral, fundamental para sua existência. A Anticolonial Ipa é uma cerveja avermelhada, com amargor forte e aroma expressivo de seus lúpulos cítricos.

IBU	EBC	ABV
71,8	18,8	8,2%

 /cervejaterritorios

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Manter refrigerada na posição vertical.

Edição Especial de Apoio



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ZAPATA

CERVEJARIA RURAL

Produzido e emvasado por Microcervejaria Zapata Ltda. Est. da Capororoca, 2346. Zona Rural, Distrito Espição. 94740-000, Viamão/RS. BRASIL

Indústria Brasileira CNPJ 21589479/0001-13  
Reg. da cervejaria no M.A.P.A RS 000388-3.000044  
Reg. do produto no M.A.P.A RS 000388-3.000059

Lote / Validade



TERRITÓRIOS

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Nesta edição apoiamos o grupo de mulheres de luta, comprometidas com demandas comunitárias, alimentação saudável e Educação Popular. A Blond é uma cerveja leve, clara, pouco amarga e que destaca o aroma dos maltes.

IBU	EBC	ABV
12	7	5%

 /cervejaterritorios

 /cervejaterritorios

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CERVEJA  
Não pasteurizada.  
Manter refrigerada na posição vertical.

TERRITÓRIOS  
CERVEJAS E MOVIMENTOS

Edição Especial de Apoio



Blond 600ml • 5% vol.

INGREDIENTES:  
Água, malte, lúpulo e levedura.

ALÉRGICOS:  
Contém cevada, trigo, glúten.  
Pode conter aveia e centeio.

EVITE O CONSUMO EXCESSIVO DE ÁLCOOL. PROIBIDA A VENDA PARA MENORES DE 18 ANOS.

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Lote / Validade



TERRITÓRIOS

A Territórios trabalha destinando parte do excedente adquirido com a venda de cervejas para fortalecer movimentos sociais que estão deixando suas marcas espaciais na transformação da sociedade.

Nesta edição, apoiamos a organização que há 22 anos busca construir o poder popular em comunidades da Zona Leste de Porto Alegre/RS. A Redstência Irish Ale é uma vermelha, de baixo amargor e com relevo de seu malte caramelizado.

IBU	EBC	ABV
20	28	4,8%

 /cervejaterritorios

 /cervejaterritorios

 (51) 99482 6616



CERVEJA  
Não pasteurizada.

TERRITÓRIOS  
CERVEJAS E MOVIMENTOS

Edição Especial de Apoio



Redstência

INGREDIENTES:  
Água, malte, lúpulo e levedura.

ALÉRGICOS:  
Contém cevada, trigo, glúten. Pode conter aveia e centeio.

EVITE O CONSUMO EXCESSIVO DE ÁLCOOL. PROIBIDA A VENDA PARA MENORES DE 18 ANOS.

ZAPATA

CERVEJARIA RURAL

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Indústria Brasileira CNPJ 21589479/0001-13  
Reg. da cervejaria no M.A.P.A RS 000388-3.000044  
Reg. do produto no M.A.P.A RS 000388-3.000062

Lote / Validade







in southeastern Brazil, a fact that necessitated increased production and opened up even bigger possibilities for supporting social movements. The impact of the MTST label helped us to understand that putting the logo of a movement on the label was a way of raising self-esteem among activists within the movement, as well as increasing political awareness; a movement's colourful symbols would crop up in all sorts of spaces: bars, parties, neighbourhood markets – spaces previously occupied by the logos of multinational brands.

## Social movements' participation in the design process

Since then, the graphic design of labels has been carried out with the input of the social movements. We listen to their suggestions regarding what characteristics should go into the design. As part of this collaborative process, some movements even nominated artists to produce illustrations for the labels, as was the case with the carnival groups Bloco da Laje and Turucutá, both from Porto Alegre, who proposed artist Ananda Aliardi – a member of both groups. These cultural groups organize events in public spaces that feature music and performances to demand the right to use urban space in a democratic and pluralistic way. For another campaign, the non-indigenous artist Daniel Eizirik joined forces with indigenous artist Daniel Kuaray Papa to produce a label in order to raise funds to build a prayer house,<sup>4</sup> called Opy, at the Guarani Karanda Ty Resettlement, located in Cachoeirinha, Rio Grande do Sul, a city in the metropolitan area of Porto Alegre. With the aim of supporting social movements and causes in the cities where the beer is sold, the organizers of the *Feira Bem da Terra* (Good of the Earth Fair), in Pelotas, southern Rio Grande do Sul, came to us requesting support for three *quilombola* communities, who did not have an existing visual identity to use on the labels. After debating and agreeing that the central symbolic element should revolve around

the concept of work – given the widely held prejudice that *quilombola* and indigenous communities are not productive – the communities decided to commission a painting by Zé Darci. Darci is an artist with a track record of involvement with the Black rights movement, and with first-hand knowledge of the challenges faced by *quilombolas*, and so is someone qualified to represent the groups. The painting depicts the rural landscape of the *quilombola* communities of Pelotas and the work they do, which includes tilling the soil and washing clothes in the river.

Accounts of activists, such as one from a woman in a group of domestic violence victims, reveal other interesting results of seeing the labels with a movement's name and symbols on a bottle: "I discovered another women's group through a Territórios label", she told us. "And we are considering inviting them to join us in actions demanding more places for children in the municipal pre-schools." Besides raising awareness among the non-activist public, Territórios also serves the purpose of connecting and linking up the various struggles.<sup>5</sup>

## Next steps, reflections, and conclusions ...

In 2021, with two workers, production in two breweries, and partnerships with artists, establishments, and social movements, we launched four types of beer and created labels for over thirty social movements and causes – reaching four states in Brazil and more than thirty commercial establishments. This collective effort in collaboration with our partners, social movements, and supporters resulted in sales of 7,500 bottles of beer, generating approximately 20,000 Brazilian *reais* for the social movements and causes we supported.

One of the conclusions from this year is that Territórios can only develop further through partnerships and relationships of trust – and that these partnerships must be consolidated. We plan to begin producing beer from raw materials produced by the social movements themselves, such as coffee, honey, and *açaí*, among others. This expands the possibility of support, moving beyond sales-based donations to fostering demand for products already cultivated by certain groups. Besides the quantitative results achieved and the objectives currently in development, the most important contribution of Territórios has been to forge relationships between different groups, be they social movements, companies, supporters, or others who identify with our aims. Such relationships harbour creative potential. There appears to be a lot of support and solidarity on the part of the non-activist public, while movements and causes share an interest in attaining greater visibility for their actions. Territórios promotes the meeting of these two groups, united over a beer that tastes of struggle.

## Endnotes

- 1 *Quilombos*, briefly defined, are territories currently occupied by the descendants of formerly enslaved populations, and their inhabitants are called *quilombolas*. These spaces resisted slavery and they were territories where life, work, farming, culture, and religion could be conducted in freedom from the slave owners.
- 2 Indigenous resettlements are part of the national struggles for the recovery of ancestral lands and territories so that the various indigenous peoples can live with dignity on their rightful land and practice their own culture and way of life.
- 3 Solidarity kitchens were established as spaces offering free nutritious meals and care for the population in the context of the public health crisis caused by the Covid-19 epidemic and the ensuing rise in unemployment.
- 4 Such spaces are essential to spiritual life in indigenous communities and for ensuring the transmission of traditional knowledge from one generation to the next, which is crucial for the development of Guarani culture.
- 5 Regarding liaisons among struggles, we do not mean to imply that such relationships are dependent upon Territórios or derive from it exclusively. The two women's groups probably would have come together at some other moment since they share similar agendas and a common geographical base (the same city). Territórios' contribution, in this instance, was to act as a catalyst, precipitating the encounter between the two movements. In the technical definition of the term, a catalyst is not strictly necessary for a chemical or physical reaction to occur. They can take place without the catalyst but tend to occur more rapidly when one is present. So Territórios served to accelerate a relationship that probably would have happened sooner or later anyway.

# The Watermelon

## Solidarity, Subversion, and Sumud

In the wake of *Al Naksa* (the June/Six Day War) in 1967, Israel made it a crime to raise the Palestinian flag or to present any visual material that combined its four colours: black, white, red, and green. Over two decades later, in 1980, three Palestinian artists (Nabil Anani, Issam Badar, and Sliman Mansour) were arrested by Israeli forces in Ramallah for including the colours of the flag in their works. The artists were consequently told to present their future works to the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) to ensure they were devoid of political content and the colours of the flag – and were reminded by an Israeli police chief that “even if you do a watermelon, it will be confiscated.”

In 2007, artist Khaled Hourani drew inspiration from this story when asked to submit a new design for the Palestinian flag as part of the *Subjective Atlas of Palestine* project. Hourani’s flag was the only one out of the 36 included in the *Atlas* to completely depart from any clear reference to a conventional flag design, instead

submitting an image of a watermelon. Despite using the four colours of the Palestinian flag, Hourani’s design initially appears humorous, apolitical, or indeed absurd. However, for those “in-the-know”, Hourani’s watermelon flag is instantly recognizable as an earnest representation of Palestinian creative resistance strategies – or *sumud* (steadfastness) in the face of occupation and repression.

In May 2021, during global protests against the Israeli war on Gaza and attempts at ethnic cleansing in the Palestinian neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah in Jerusalem, images of Hourani’s work “Watermelon Flag” proliferated social media, finding their way onto t-shirts, protest banners, graffiti works, and even tattoos across the world. Thus, at the time of mass censorship of Palestine-related content, the image of the watermelon cemented its place as an international symbol of solidarity with Palestine.

Chrisoula Lionis (Athens/Manchester) interviews Khaled Hourani (Ramallah) to find out more about the impetus behind the Watermelon Flag, and the role of humour and art as forms of creative resistance in the face of Israeli settler colonialism.

# on Flag

Chrisoula Lionis,  
Khaled Hourani

**Chrisoula Lionis:** Over the past years, there has been much written about the watermelon as a symbol of solidarity with Palestine – with much speculation as to the “real” story behind the watermelon becoming a symbol of resistance. I wonder, when did you first hear the story of the watermelon?

**Khaled Hourani:** I first heard the story sometime in the 1990s. I then revisited the story in 2007 while I was working on the *Subjective Atlas of Palestine* project with a group of artists. An art book published in the Netherlands and in Palestine, the *Atlas* focused not only on Palestinian geography, but also on national symbols, customs, food, currency, and so on, as well as the concept of knowledge. Many artists contributed wonderful submissions to the *Atlas*, and my contribution was the watermelon flag and its origin story.

**CL:** On the subject of Palestinian artists – I understand you are good friends with artist Sliman Mansour. You are both central figures in Palestinian art for your respective generations – that is, Sliman for the generation of the revolution (*jeel al thawra*), and you for the generation of the first intifada (*jeel al hijara*). What do you consider to be some of the main differences between these generations of artists?

**KH:** While there are, of course, differences from generation to generation – as individuals, artists experience the passage of time differently. I con-

sider myself fortunate to be in contact with the generation of artists who preceded me, including Sliman Mansour. I was fortunate to share a friendship with him, one that I still share. It is natural that there is a dialogue, different visions, enmeshment, and synchronicity. These experiences inspired me and I think it was critical to grapple with them.

In terms of characterizing general features of art in Palestine – you might say that the result of dealing with political affairs and national concerns is that, often, there has been an overwhelming romance and engagement with national symbols. However, I am part of a generation that no longer felt the need to paint national leaders and abstract symbols. For example, I drew my father instead of drawing Abu Ammar [Yasser Arafat], and drew portraits of neighbours and women in the neighbourhood, rather than choosing to depict women as symbols of nationhood. This approach wasn't about creating a completely new visual language, but it was rather about expanding the vocabulary.

Broadly speaking, in my work I have been inspired by stories relating to artistic processes in general and by stories centred on artistic practice under occupation specifically. It is in keeping with this that I liked the story of the flag and the Israeli soldier who banned the painting of the four colours of the watermelon. This is a story that happened to Sliman's generation and they told it to me without attempting to translate it visually and this is simply what I did.

However, it wasn't easy to suggest that a funny fruit like the watermelon could symbolise the flag. In a heavily burdensome situation marked by a rigid nationalist discourse, it was a form of satire.

**CL:** The story of the watermelon is, in essence, a story of creative resistance. What do you see as other forms of creative resistance visible in Palestine? What is the potential of these forms, and possibly their limits? And, I wonder, do you see art, or the artist, as having a political responsibility?

**KH:** Art is always a responsibility. However, the expression of this responsibility is more sensitive and difficult when it is tied to people with whom you share dreams and a sense of common destiny. Moreover, the challenge of this responsibility is heightened when it is linked to a cause and a heavy national burden, such as the experience of living under occupation under which your basic human rights are nullified – not just as an artist, but also as a person.

The ideas of revolution and resistance free you from some things but also restrict you from others. Art in Palestine is part of this tension and it is an expression of it – sometimes it is able to reconcile this tension, other times it fails. This is to say that I consider art to be an affirmation of life and I would say that art-making is a good deed, or at least it should be. However, we should be conscious of not asking forms of creative expression, such as art, to be laden with more than they could carry.

**CL:** You are a master storyteller and one of the funniest people I know. I wonder, do you think humour plays a significant role in art?

**KH:** Thank you – this is praise I don't know if I deserve. I do prefer to write instead of drawing sometimes. There is a famous saying in Arabic, "the worst calamities are the ones that make you laugh," and life does not need more worries. It is not black and white. I love operating in the grey area and I love satire. I think it is suitable for all ages and arenas, as it provides a space for meditation and flexibility.

**CL:** Few people can take credit for giving an emoji a new meaning! The watermelon emoji is now a "secret" code of solidarity with Palestine. Why do you think the watermelon has (re)emerged, with Sheikh Jarrah? Is it connected to the proliferation of social media activism? What do you see as new counter-authoritarian strategies for an emerging generation?

**KH:** The emerging generation has its own forms of speech and language, and I would say that con-

temporary means of communication play a role in this. And so, while life moves along, so too does our visual and written language. Every generation has its own language and we must be happy in recognizing, engaging, and learning that language. To do so is to create an effective dialogue with our children.



Every generation has its own language and we have to pass it down. We have to learn that language anew and to be happy in creating an engaging dialogue with newer generations. Why did the watermelon appear suddenly as a symbol for a new generation? This emanated out of

everyday life. People found something in it that spoke to them and expressed the contemporary moment. It is light-hearted and very simple. And that's the secret, the simplicity of things, which is an amazing force in art.

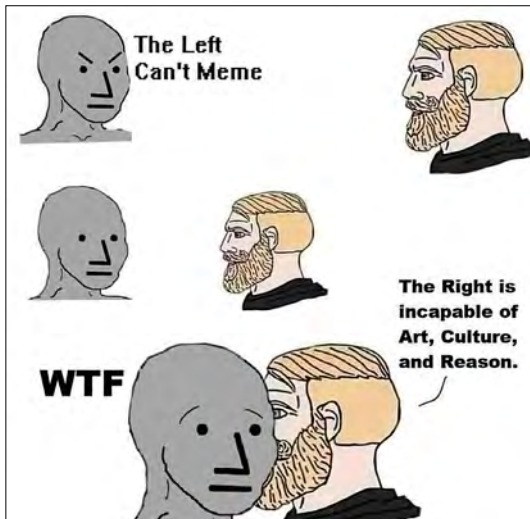
**CL:** What authority are we subverting with these symbols? Is it only clear forms of Israeli oppression?

**KH:** I would say it is important to reconsider everything. Our way of life is changing quickly, and the rules of the game (art-making, representation of the struggle for liberation) have changed. The central notions in Palestine were revolution and liberation. Why shouldn't we revolt against these symbols as well? These forms can represent an occupation of a different kind.

**CL:** If you had to redesign a flag today, would you still include the watermelon? Or would you replace it with something else?

**KH:** The flag in Palestine is an important national symbol and a design that I would like to keep as it is. As for the watermelon, it is great for eating with white cheese, especially in the summer.

# Left Memes



In the run up to the 2016 US presidential election, the internet was flooded with right-wing memes. Both commentators and the right-wing's opponents were caught off guard by this new type of mobilization. The scope and intensity of the hyper-cynical, derogatory, and often downright fascist content that reached millions of people inside and outside the US had not been anticipated. Counter-strategies hence were not immediately available and especially the left found itself scrambling to respond adequately. It is here that the catchphrase "the left can't meme" originated, as memes were hardly used at all in left-wing contexts, giving the right-wing a head start in the field of internet culture.

A lot has changed since then, and the left has long started meming. This contribution wants

to explore the potential of left memes in times of increasing authoritarianism and a general radicalization of politics. Memes as carriers of meaning are as visceral and immediate as present-day politics: in order to be successful, they must evoke an emotional response from the onlooker or else be buried in the depths of social media algorithms. In order to achieve this, left memes comically summarize often complex topics in an average of one to four images. The topics range from left infighting, discussions on left theory, and responses to current events, to general commentary and pop-cultural references. The format of a meme can vary and extends to only text, to images with or without text, to collages of multiple images, or even to gifs and videos. Therefore, there are no real limitations as to what a meme can look like. While there certainly are patterns, many memes defy them. It might hence even be argued that any form of online content, which conveys a meaning that is readily understandable and which is passed on to other people, is a meme.

The circulation of memes mostly occurs on social media platforms. This makes them accessible to whoever frequents these platforms, but it also places them out of reach for everyone else. Age and tech-savviness thus clearly demarcate potential target groups. Regarding the practical political value of left memes, it can be argued that they offer easy entry points into theoretical debates and help elevate an understanding of existing problems. While basic content is mostly humorous, deeper layers of hope, despair, and criticism are also often present.



# Resistance, Ridicule, and Belonging in Times of the Internet

Fabio Braun Carrasco



Copyright issues are usually not taken very seriously when it comes to memes.



Left memes, moreover, take part in the constant recycling of images, as is inherent to all memes. Popular meme templates hence find their way

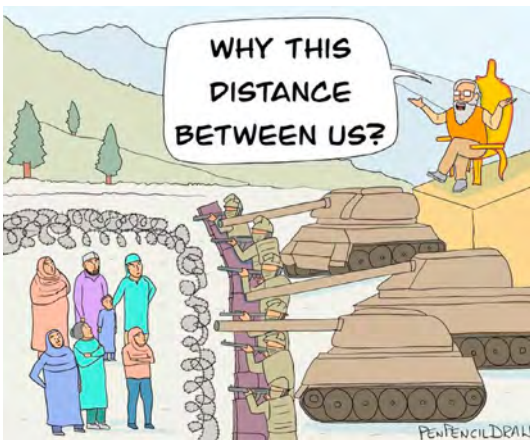
into left meming. The “Trade Offer Meme” and the “Suspicious Girlfriend Meme” are repurposed here to convey specific interpretations of British colonialism and of the oil industry. While drawing from the general meme stock in circulation, left memes often reproduce the gendered stereotypes present in the underlying meme. This is the case both with the “Suspicious Girlfriend Meme” and the meme about Hindi further along, in which women are portrayed as concerned only about trivial and profane things, while men are concerned with *real* political problems.



In times during which politics is often layered with opposing sets of meaning, memes can condense analysis into a few sentences. While liberalism in the US or social democracy in Europe usually portray themselves as benevolent and progressive alternatives to conservative politics, memes manage to point out how they merely represent the other side of the coin in the capitalist parliamentary party system. The unwillingness to implement fundamental changes and the complicity in oppression are transmitted almost effortlessly in a few sentences or in a short text combined with an image.



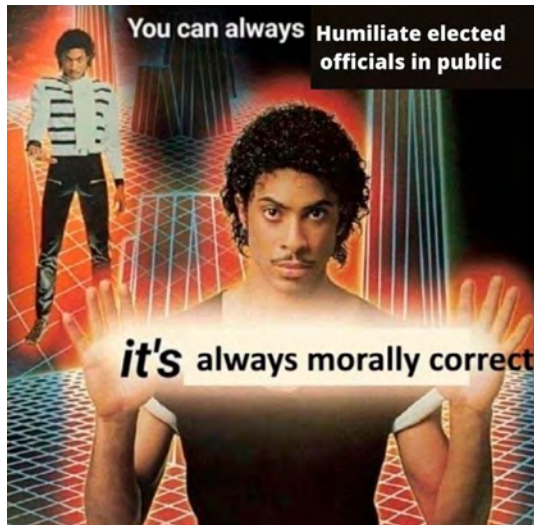
Much of the initial meme production and circulation came from the US and Europe, but the rest of the world has quickly caught up, using memes to discuss either general topics or regional issues and contexts. Wherever right-wing and authoritarian politics are on the rise, left memes seem to appear, both as a counter-strategy and as a coping mechanism. They help to create a shared expression of discontent with and resistance to the status quo. Publicly shared memes hence create space for the realization that you are not alone with the disappointment, rage, or disbelief generated by the bleak reality of present-day politics. There are others who feel the same. Through this memes become a powerful vehicle of shared emotion – a digital marker of (political) community and belonging in an increasingly hostile world.



Despite memes focusing on regional or national contexts, their simple messaging allows them to be easily understood, even if the audience is not fully familiar with the contextual specificities. They sometimes even manage to convey information that the onlooker might not have known before, for example that there might be something problematic in Hindi being India's national language.



Authoritarian politics elicits all manner of responses. While many memes are concerned with analysis, mourning, or rage, others turn to head-on attacks through ridicule.



It is not only political critiques that are to be found in left memes. Mechanisms of social reproduction, gentrification, and the left's own occasional inability to create viable alternatives also find their way into meming. Memes hence invite the viewer to question and criticize both the outside world, but also the viewer's own position within it.



Climate change and capitalism's ineptitude in addressing it, are some of the most often recurring themes. Ecological degradation, the coordinated

shaming of individuals for problems that are systemic, and the Global North's responsibility for much of the destruction we witness today re-appear constantly in memes – reflecting the sense of urgency but also the anxiety associated with the impending climate crisis.

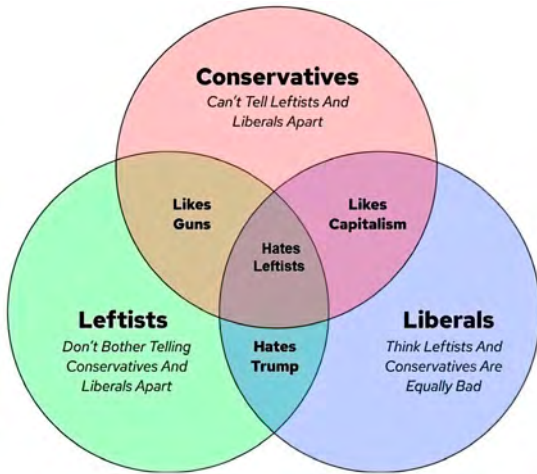


Feminism is another topic that can be found across the board and in many variations. Often, the approach is to look at male behaviour in order to propose feminist critiques of patriarchal society, as present in “woke” circles as it is anywhere else.

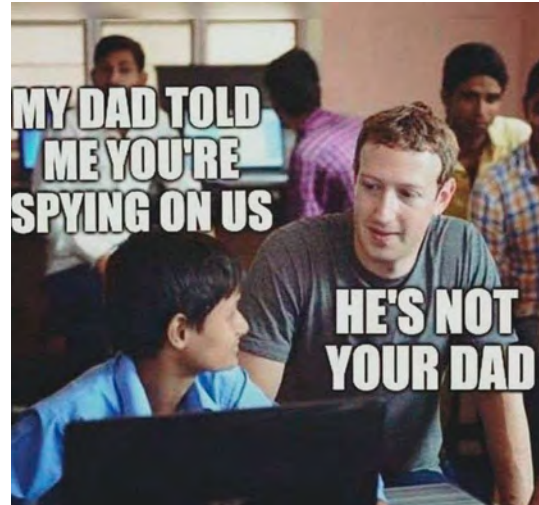


Toxic masculine, me? But – I'm a vegan!

Left spaces – also online – would not be left spaces without infighting.



The alarming influence of social media algorithms and their power to create, shape, and distort meaning, is painfully felt on left-leaning meme pages. While right-wing echo-chambers continuously expand, left voices are increasingly silenced and marginalized on social media platforms. Mark Zuckerberg is hence one of the favourite targets for the occasional dig, as are Jeff Bezos and other tech billionaires. Their blatant attempts at directing public opinion are regularly scrutinized and ridiculed.



The internet and internet surveillance are also cornerstone topics in left meming. Firstly, because the internet is the meme's natural habitat – even though memes have long since crossed over into the analogue world as well – and secondly, because the realization has set in that the internet is neither as free as many people had initially hoped, nor as conducive to an unhindered circulation of information as it could be. Social media platforms seem rather to strengthen biases and to help radicalize formerly moderate opinions.



Left memes hence come in many forms and fulfil a variety of functions. They denounce and critique; they ridicule and attack; they console and uplift; they demand introspection and outward analysis. They are, furthermore, freed from the restraints usually placed on many forms of public communication with regards to wording, formatting, and other established patterns of transmitting information. Memes are snappy, witty, and often enough, blunt and harsh – especially when lashing out at a status quo perceived to be detrimental to the planet's and our own well-being.

While increasing authoritarianism and far-right mobilization seem to be becoming more common around the globe, memes offer a kind of solace rooted in the identification of common problems. By humorously – albeit sometimes bordering on cynically – expressing these problems, a common affective understanding emerges: something is going terribly wrong. Memes hence diffuse, and partly even create a shared conception of what is askew in politics today. Making a problem known, both factually and emotionally, is often the first step in addressing it.

## Illustrations

The authorship information here almost exclusively refers to the Instagram and Twitter handles that posted the memes in question. There is, however, no guarantee that these accounts are also the original creators of the memes. It is to be assumed that many of the memes were “discovered” elsewhere. Listed in order of appearance. Top to bottom, left to right.

redheadrevolutionary  
 leftistperspective  
 antiimp\_memes  
 memetides  
 theguerrillafeminist / @cullenenn  
 penpencildraw  
 unsavoury.indian.memes  
 salt.xmt  
 millennialreviewdotorg  
 italyctuals\_images\_only  
 @andrwfhenderson  
 h0evietuni0nmemes  
 @ThoughtSlime  
 memetides  
 grapejuiceboys  
 possumkratom69  
 literallyeverymeme  
 possumkratom69



# 11 Theses and an Anti-Auth Board Game

# Authoritarian

## The Theses

- 1. In a disenchanted era of relentless work and worry, the lure of reactionary conspiracy theories is driven by the promise of meaning and community.**
- 2. Capitalism's advocates claim it provides humanity's first and only level playing field. But most people feel trapped in a ruthless game they have no hope of winning.**
- 3. In the condescending view of the dominant intelligentsia, the conspiracist is a lonely crank, bordering on psychotic. But conspiracists often build worlds that foster pleasure, collective fun, and connection. Their worldbuilding is a dangerous form of play.**
- 4. The powers-that-be tell us education is the key to remedying conspiracism; but hegemonic education is part of the problem giving rise to conspiracism in the first place.**

- 5. Corruption and collusion have always been part of capitalism's systemic contradictions. It is foolish to deny this. But to simply imagine capitalism as one big conspiracy is dangerous, misleading, and intoxicating.**
- 6. If conspiracy fantasies are the "poor person's cognitive mapping" in the disorienting totality of capitalism, then the role of intellectuals cannot be merely to provide more accurate maps. It must be to convoke experiences of radical map-making.**
- 7. Liberal critiques of conspiracies admit that inequality breeds resentment, which in turn fuels disinformation. But capitalism is also inherently alienating and its enclosure of the human desire for play drives us towards dangerous conspiratorial play.**
- 8. Mainstream commentators bemoan the "falling rate of reason" in what they see as a world beset by irrationality. But they refuse to recognize this is symptomatic of an irrational profit-driven system, where reason is constantly instrumentalised.**
- 9. In a disenchanted world, the far-right has weaponised conspiracy theories in order to destroy the thing we call reality and to open new theatres of violent play and revanchist re-enchantment.**
- 10. Our work as counter-conspiracists, who believe a better world is possible, must include seizing the means of enchantment.**
- 11. So far, critics have only tried to debunk the worlds of conspiracies; the point, however, is to game them.**



## Enter Clue-Anon: Gaming authoritarianism

Clue-Anon is an anti-authoritarian board game for up to four players. We developed it at a time when more and more digital and tabletop games were being released with the aim to teach players that conspiracism is dangerous. In contrast, our game recognizes that conspiracism is often attractive because it is playful and creative, and because it harnesses people's scepticism and critical thinking, albeit towards nefarious ends. The game is inspired by the rise of the Q-Anon conspiracy fantasy, which repackages heinous anti-Semitic myths to suggest a vast global conspiracy to abduct and torture children. Clue-Anon reflects, in particular, on the game-like nature of this fantasy, in which believers/players use digital media to create conspiracist communities that manifest in the offline world – sometimes violently. The game asks players to take on the role of media manipulators, who each have something to gain from spreading the conspiracy: the social media corporations are eager to make money; the megalomaniacal YouTube grifter wants followers; the troll armies are just in it for the laughs; true believers want to grow their cult; and only the independent journalist seems to want to learn the truth. By imagining themselves in these roles and strategising accordingly, players learn that conspiracies can be fun, but that they are also the product of intentional manipulation.

The following scenario is a fictional composite of real playtesting experiences. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, we have not been recording player responses during playtest sessions but we have been, rather, relying on fieldnotes and participant-observation.

Sam, Des, Vish and Moos sit down to play Clue-Anon. They are confronted with an enigmatic board. In each match, the players must try to discover which three parties are engaged in a nefarious conspiracy – in this case, say “who unleashed the global pandemic?” During each game, the same nine cards representing nine conspirators (which include the Military Industrial Complex, Aliens, Satanists, the Deep State) are dealt: the three “real conspirators” are hidden underneath the board; the six that remain are placed face-down on spaces on top of the board. The players will not find out until the end of the game (after six turns) who the three “real conspirators” are. How will they find out? On the surface, the objective of the game is fairly simple: players must take turns spending in-game resources (money and followers) to uncover the six face-down suspect cards on top of the board, in order to deduce who the remaining three “real conspirators” beneath the board are. But things are a little more complex!

Players start the game by drawing character cards, which they keep secret. These characters have special objectives beyond correctly guessing the conspiracy. Sam draws the Independent Journalist character: she will get a bonus if the other players guess the real conspirators. By contrast, Des draws the True Believers character: their goal is to accumulate as many followers as possible. Meanwhile, Vish draws the Social Media Corporation character: he will be trying to make as much money as he can. And Moos is playing the Intelligence Agent, whose job is to try to guess everyone else's secret character. All of them pretend to be an Independent Journalist: everyone wants to convince

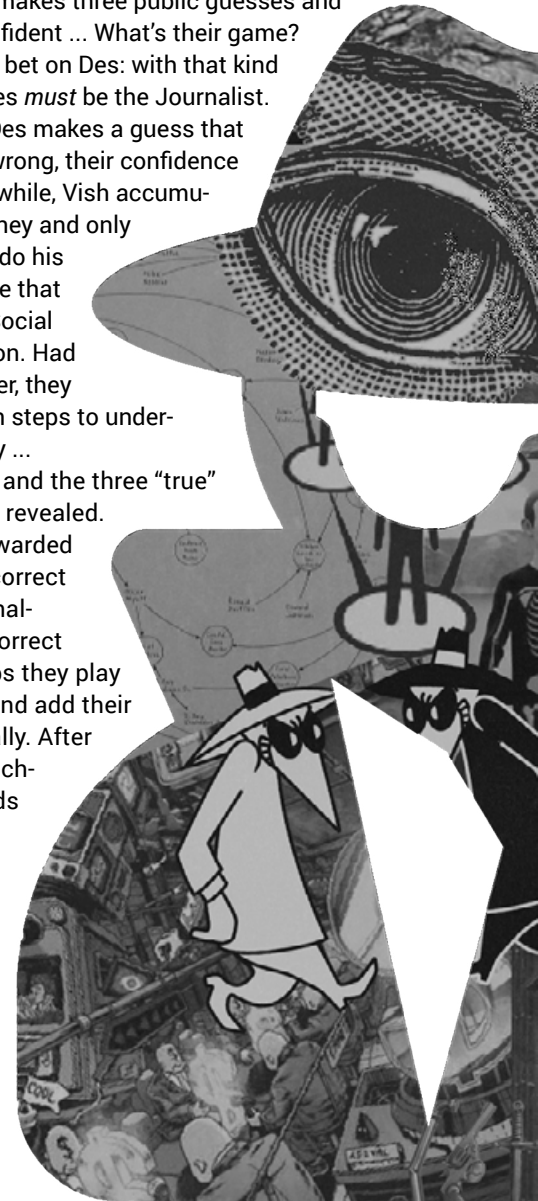
their opponents that they only care about the truth. They only reveal their characters at the end of the game. If the other players guess their identity, they lose points.

At the beginning of the game, each player receives resource tokens representing one dollar and one follower; they will receive this pair of tokens again with each turn. During the first few rounds, players use their resources to take a look at the six conspirators on top of the board, noting who *is not* part of the “real” conspiracy on private pieces of paper. Each round, an event card is revealed, changing the flow of the game and introducing more elements of chance. For example, players can sell their followers’ data to make money, or gain followers from a celebrity endorsement. The event cards represent real-life events that might occur in the trajectory of a conspiracy theory rising to prominence.

It soon becomes clear to all the players that they do not have enough resources (money and followers) to look at all the six face-down conspirator cards in the six rounds of the game. How can they get more resources? They must lie. In the second round, even before it is possible to know who the three hidden “real conspirators” are, Vish places a token face up in front of him, announcing he believes the Evil Corporation is one of the three conspirators. Is he lying? Is he guessing? At the end of the game, if Vish’s guess is correct, he will earn points; if he is wrong, he will lose them. Maybe he will change his guess before the end of the match. Or maybe he holds the True Believers card, and his special power is that he does not lose points for wrong guesses... The other players are left to wonder: should they follow suit and also guess that the Evil Corporation is in on the conspiracy? Regardless, with every turn from now until the end of the game, Vish is going to receive extra money and followers as a reward for making his guess public, which he can use to look at more conspirator cards.

Following suit, almost all the players make public guesses and are raking in the resources – but not Sam. Does that mean she is the Independent Journalist? Or maybe she is just bluffing ... Meanwhile, Des makes three public guesses and seems really confident ... What’s their game? Moos decides to bet on Des: with that kind of confidence, Des *must* be the Journalist. But then, when Des makes a guess that Moos knows is wrong, their confidence is shaken. Meanwhile, Vish accumulates tons of money and only late in the game do his opponents realize that he must be the Social Media Corporation. Had they known earlier, they might have taken steps to undermine his strategy ...

The match ends and the three “true” conspirators are revealed. Each player is awarded points for their correct guesses and penalized for their incorrect guesses. Perhaps they play another match and add their points to their tally. After two or three matches, the game ends and the players finally reveal their secret characters and gain (or lose) extra points, depending on their bonuses: Sam, the Independent Journalist, gets extra points for every time the other players correctly guessed the real conspiracy ... Vish, the Social Media Corporation, gets extra points for his huge stash of money.



## What do players think?

After the game, the four friends talk it over. Sam enjoyed playing the Independent Journalist and reflects on how hard it was to convince the other players she was genuine, as Des and Moos were also falsely claiming to be the Journalist. Des was initially frustrated because they realized they would never be able to gather enough resources or have enough time in a game to look at

all six face-down suspects, and thus accurately deduce the three “true” conspirators: they tend to like games where the path to victory is clear. But after a round or two they got into the hoaxing and really sunk their teeth into the Government Agent character.

It reminded them of stories they had heard from their grandmother about growing up in an authoritarian state, where the government purposely spun conspiracy theories in order to defame opponents and distract people from their own nefarious activities. Vish reflected that the character of the YouTube Grifter was the most important, because it revealed how monetized social media platforms

actively encourage the conspiracism that starts as entertainment but quickly descends into paranoia – or worse.

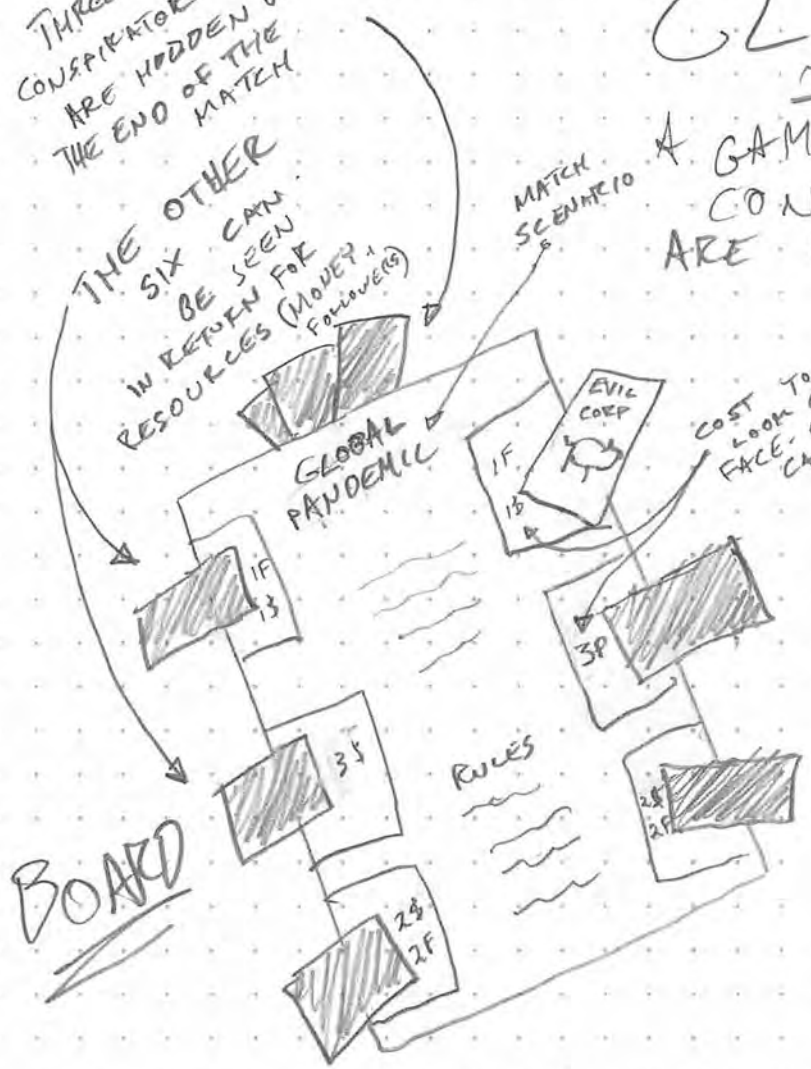
Sam thinks the game is useful because it teaches people to be sceptical and think critically about who is promoting conspiratorial narratives and why. But Moos reflects that the game teaches a dangerous lesson: that all conspiracy theories are equally baseless and that anyone who engages in promoting them is crazy and/or manipulative. What about the conspiracies we *know* to be true – such as those typical to capitalism, where powerful people meet in secret to maintain and extend their power? The game might be at danger of reinforcing a kind of liberal cynical distance that presumes the official narratives purported by the media and politicians are genuine, and that all conspiracy theorizing is pathological.

Could they play it with their families or friends who are in the grips of conspiracy fantasies? The question evokes nervous laughter. Yeah, says Des. My brother spent all his time during the lockdown rabbit-holing into weird conspiracy theories on YouTube – but he got there through his love of games, so maybe this would be a way to start a conversation. Moos feels his family, who are refugees, would find it too confusing: they would definitely get the concepts, but the rules are a bit too complex and too clunky. Sam is going to bring the game to her next board-game nights with her friends, who work together in a feminist collective. She wonders if the game could be adapted to help them think about how to combat the anti-feminist and anti-trans conspiracy theories they encounter. Vish wants to see if he can play it with teenagers in the community centre where he volunteers, who often come to him with wacky conspiracy fantasies which they mostly think of as jokes, but that sometimes lead to obsessions.

THREE OF NINE  
CONSPIRATOR CARDS  
ARE HIDDEN UNTIL  
THE END OF THE  
MATCH

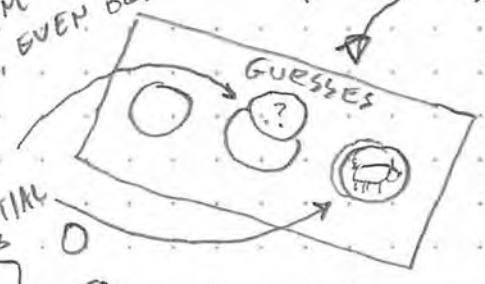
THE OTHER  
SIX CAN  
BE SEEN  
IN KEPTEN FOR  
RESOURCES (Money +  
Followers)

GL  
A GAME  
CON.S  
ARE F



TO GAIN RESOURCES  
PLAYERS MUST PUBLICLY  
PROCLAIM THEIR CONSPIRACY  
THEORY, EVEN BEFORE HAVING  
ENOUGH INFO

NINE TOKENS  
REPRESENT  
NINE POTENTIAL  
CONSPIRATORS

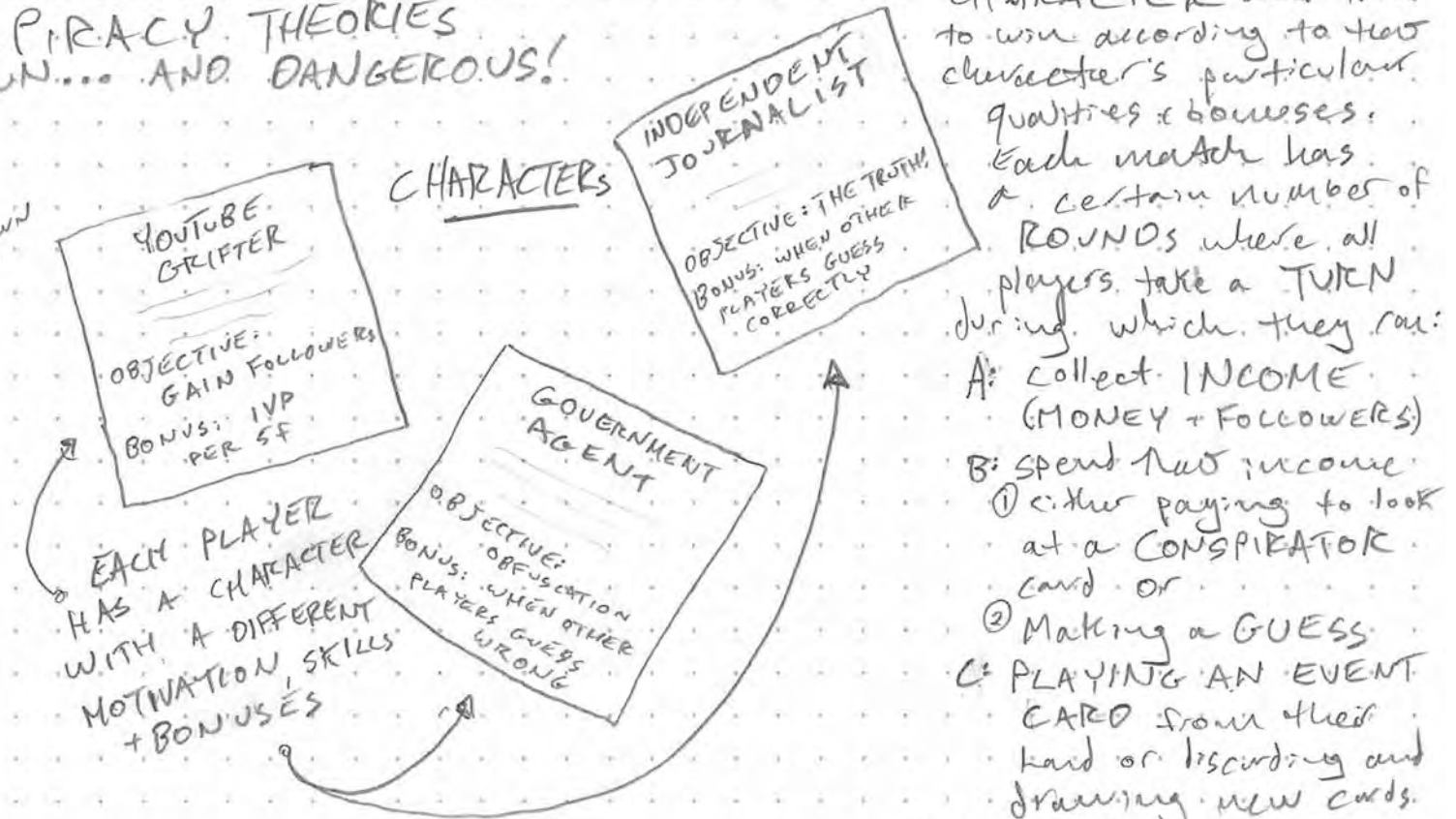


PLAYER  
RESOURCE

RESO  
FOLLOWERS  
[Icons of people]

# JE ANON

## ABOUT WHY PIRACY THEORIES ARE... AND DANGEROUS!



A GAME is made up of several MATCHES during which a player plays the same CHARACTER and tries to win according to that character's particular qualities + bonuses. Each match has a certain number of ROUNDS where all players take a TURN during which they can:

- A: Collect INCOME (MONEY + FOLLOWERS)
- B: Spend that income
  - ① either paying to look at a CONSPIRATOR card or
  - ② Making a GUESS
- C: PLAYING AN EVENT CARD from their hand or discarding and drawing new cards.

At the end of the GAME POINTS are scored and a winner is determined.

## RESOURCES

(F)



## RESOURCES

PLAYERS USE EVENT CARDS TO INFLUENCE THE GAME

## EVENT CARDS

**SELL YOUR FOLLOWERS ORTA**  
Collect your turn income one more time

**GIFT FROM BILLIONAIRE BACKER**  
Take another turn

**YouTube Grifter**  
HIGH TOLERANCE FOR COGNITIVE DISSONANCE  
Change as many guesses as you like for free.

SOME CARDS ARE UNIQUE TO CERTAIN CHARACTERS AND ARE QUITE POWERFUL

# Collective Dreams on the Wall

**B**etween 1933-39, Charlotte Beradt, a Berlin-based journalist, secretly recorded people's dreams when living under the Nazi regime, which resulted in her book, "The Third Reich of Dreams: The Nightmares of a Nation 1933-1939" (1966). The dreamers – from students and lawyers to housewives – were mostly oppositional to the regime. Some dreams that reflect how authoritarianism penetrates bedrooms appeared on the walls of Istanbul in 2021. Next to them were empty pages where people were invited to write their own dreams. Nightmares of the past resonate with the nightmares of today, congregating on city walls. We keep on listening to each other's dreams of the past, present, and future.

## Note at the bottom of each sticker

(left)

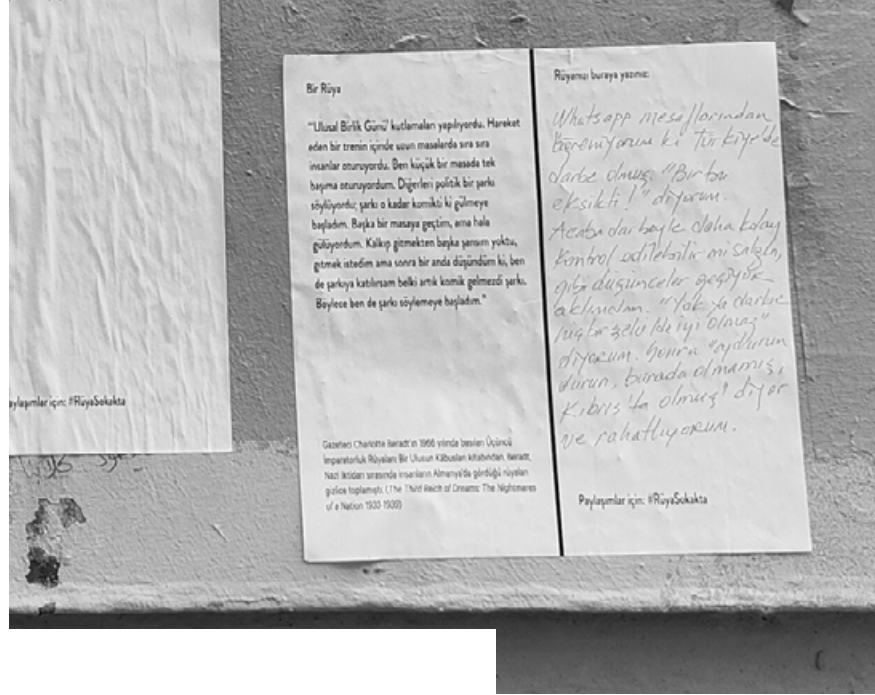
From Charlotte Beradt's book, *The Third Reich of Dreams: The Nightmares of a Nation 1933-1939*, published in 1966. Beradt secretly collected people's dreams under the Nazi regime.

(right)

To share: #dreaminthestreet

# eams

Aylin  
Kuryel



## A dream

"Celebrations were going on for 'National Unity Day'. Long rows of people were sitting at long tables in the dining car of a train that was travelling along. I was sitting by myself at a small table. They were singing a political song that sounded so funny that I had to laugh. There was nothing to do but stand up – I wanted to go out, but then I thought if I sang along maybe it wouldn't seem so funny – so I sang too."

## Write your dream here:

"I learn from WhatsApp messages that there was a coup d'état in Turkey. I say, 'it is just what we needed!'. I think maybe the pandemic can be controlled better with the coup. Then I think the coup cannot be good for anything. Then somebody says, 'wait, the coup happened in Cyprus', I feel relieved."



## A dream

"I dreamt I awoke in the middle of the night to discover that two cherubs that hang over my bed were no longer looking upwards but were instead staring down at me. I was so frightened that I crawled under the bed.

## Write your dream here:

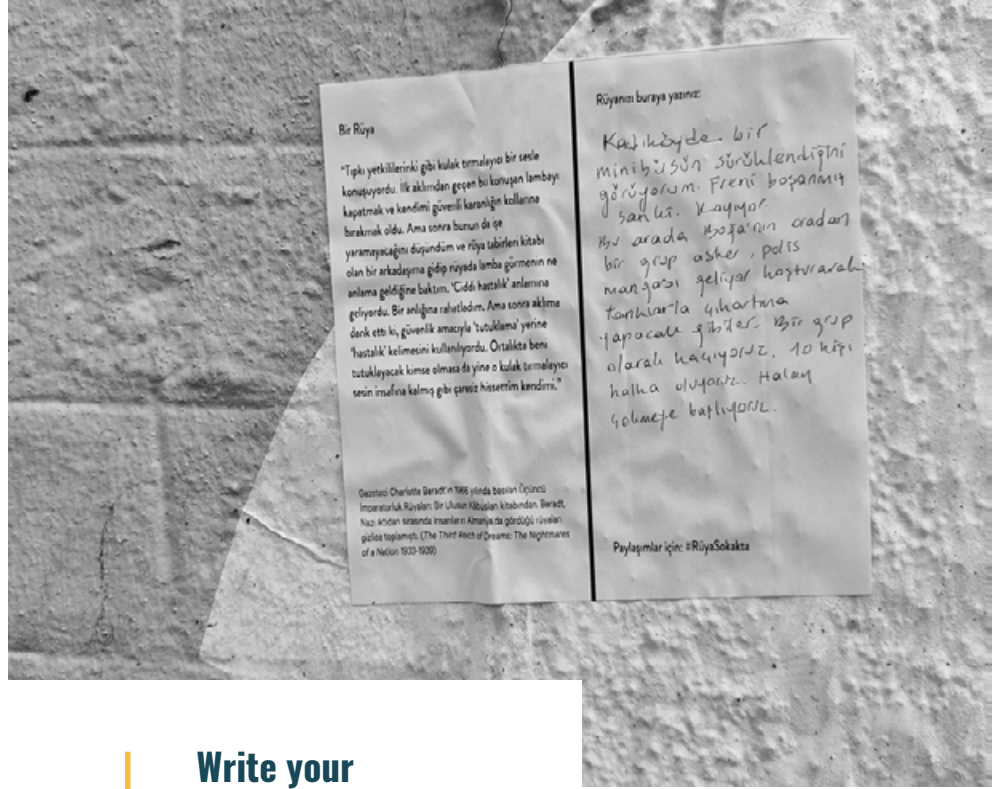
## A dream

"It was about nine o'clock in the evening. My consultations were over, and I was just stretching out on the couch to relax with a book on Matthias Grünewald, when suddenly the walls of my room and then my apartment disappeared. I looked around and discovered to my horror that as far as the eye could see no apartment had any walls any more. Then I heard a loudspeaker boom, 'According to the decree of the 17th of this month on the Abolition of Walls...'"

## Write your dream here:

"A policeman is coming on a horse. I make eye contact with the horse. (I have had this dream 5 times 😊)"



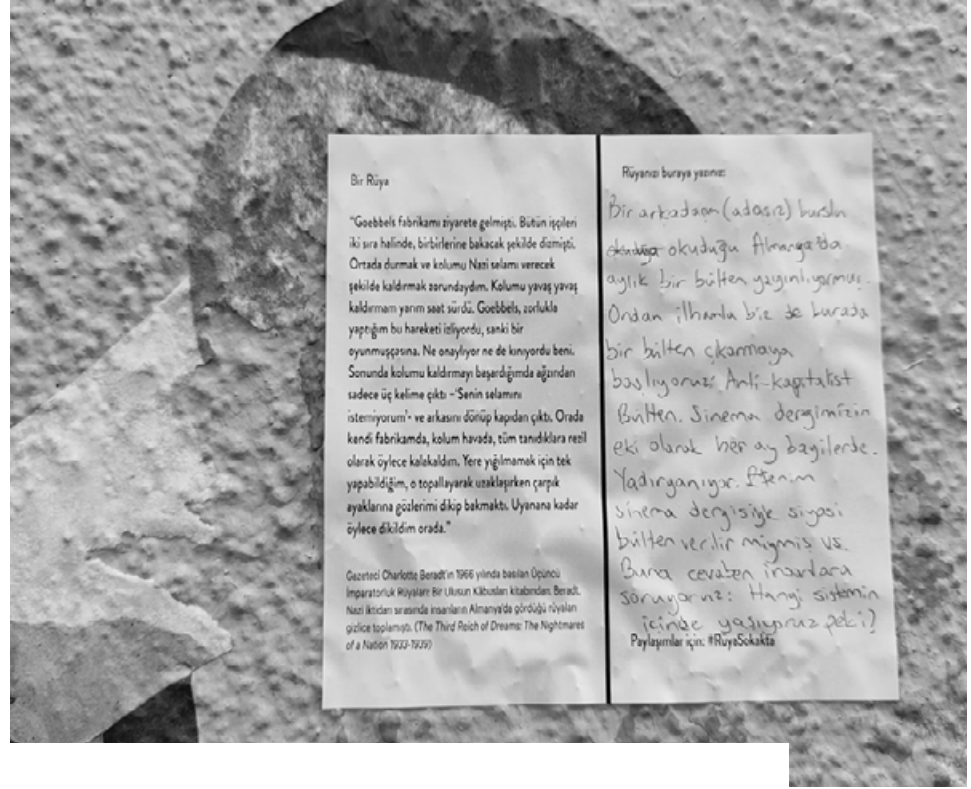


## A dream

"It was speaking in a rasping tone, like officers do. My first thought was to simply turn off the lamp and stay there in the safety of darkness. But then I told myself that wouldn't help, so I dashed over to see my girlfriend, who has a dream book, and looked up 'lamp' – lamp signified only 'serious illness.' For a moment I felt very relieved until it dawned on me that, to be on the safe side, people were using the word illness for arrest, and I felt desperate again, at the mercy of that incessantly rasping voice, even though no one was there to arrest me."

## Write your dream here:

"I see a minibus being dragged in Kadıköy. Seems like a brake fade. At that moment, a group of soldiers, a police squad appear at Boğa, as if they are planning a military landing with tanks. We run away as a group. We form a circle with 10 people. We start dancing the *halay*."

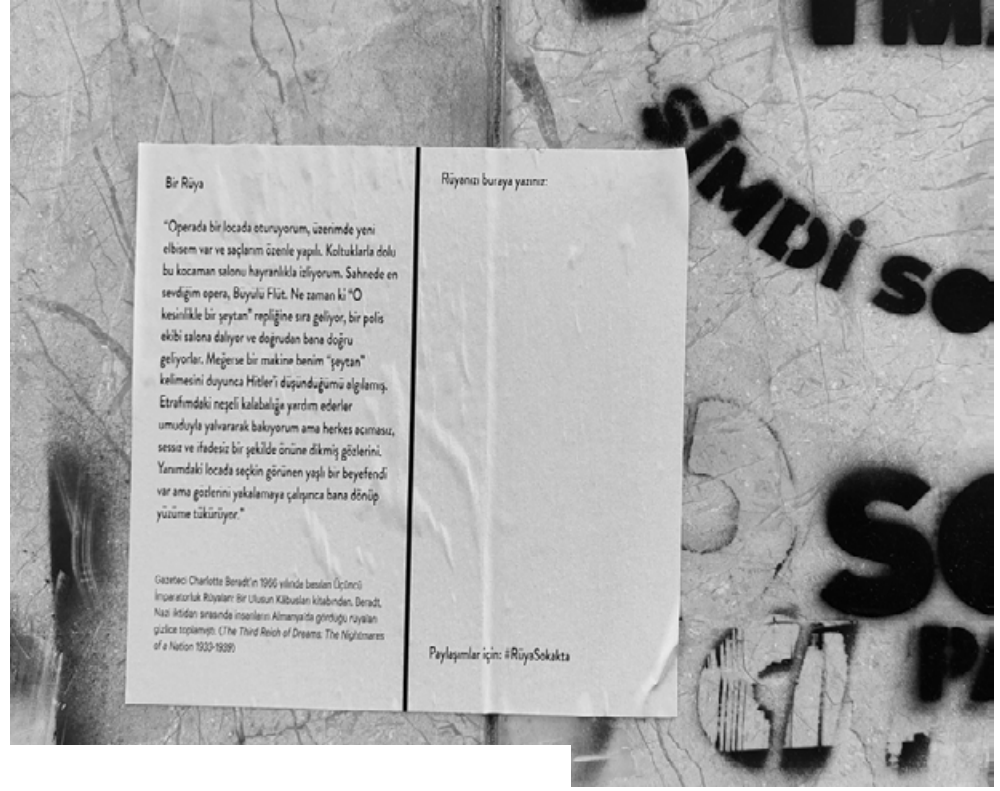


## A dream

“Goebbels was visiting my factory. He had all the workers line up in two rows facing each other. I had to stand in the middle and raise my arm in the Nazi salute. It took me half an hour to get my arm up, inch by inch. Goebbels showed neither approval nor disapproval as he watched my struggle, as if it were a play. When I finally managed to get my arm up, he said just five words – ‘I don’t want your salute’ – then turned and went to the door. There I stood in my own factory, arm raised, pilloried right in the midst of my own people. I was only able to keep from collapsing by staring at his clubfoot as he limped out. And so I stood until I woke up.”

## Write your dream here:

“A friend (we have the same name) publishes a monthly bulletin in Germany where he studies on a scholarship. We get inspired and do the same here. An anti-capitalist bulletin. A monthly supplement to our cinema magazine. People find it weird. Well, why would you have a political bulletin with a cinema magazine etc. We ask people in return: what is the system we live in then?”



## A dream

"I was sitting in a box at the opera, dressed in a new gown, and with my hair beautifully done. It was a huge opera house with many, many tiers, and I was enjoying considerable admiration. They were presenting my favorite opera, 'The Magic Flute'. When it came to the line, 'That is the devil certainly', a squad of policeman came stomping in and marched directly up to me. A machine had registered the fact that I had thought of Hitler on hearing the word 'devil'. I imploringly searched the festive crowd for some sign of help, but they all just sat there staring straight ahead, silent and expressionless, not even one showing pity. The old gentleman in an adjoining box looked kind and distinguished, but when I tried to catch his eye, he spat at me."

**Write your  
dream  
here:**

# AFFECTIVE COUNTRY AND HETEROTOPIA

## Zombie neoliberalism

In recent decades, the figure of the zombie has provoked a morbid fascination within the imagination of the culture industry that is entirely unmatched. A mythological figure originating from Haitian voodoo culture, the zombie is one of the living dead, a resurrected corpse that provokes shock by wandering about, driven by its appetite for destruction while simultaneously devoid of everything that could characterize its past human existence: expectations, dreams, memories, emotions, or desires. The fascination with the figure of the zombie may very well be related to a certain catastrophic feeling that has lodged itself within the social unconscious and defined contemporary existence.

This is also why the figure of the zombie has been used to characterize the current phase of neoliberal governance, which began after the financial crisis of 2007–2008, and which sustains itself more by its destructive capacity than by the vitality it had aspired to decades ago. We are living in a new historical moment characterized by the intertwining of multiple crises: the financial crash triggered a crisis for the legitimacy of neoliberal methods for managing the state, the crisis of liberal democracy prompted the rise of new fascisms, while the pandemic and the consequences of climate change led to concern about a profound crisis in the reproduction of life. In this current situation, which we can call a “crisis of civilization”, neoliberal governance has lost its capacity to use ideology and utopian visions to win people over: the utopia of efficient democracies, prosperous economies, open societies, and happy individuals – which have also taken hold in societies in the Global South, as evidenced by the popular support that neoliberal “modernization” had in the early 90s in Latin America – have all revealed themselves to be empty promises.

After neoliberalism had exhausted the heroic stories it had been telling for decades, its discourse began to be dominated by a managerial vocabulary that aimed to do damage control, with expressions such as “structural adjustment”, “austerity measures”, “financial bailouts to credit institutions”, “strict fiscal policy rules”, and “control of the supply of money” becoming increasingly prevalent. This new face of neoliberalism is based more on coercion than consensus, on the invocation of necessity and urgency than on the promise of progress and welfare.

# TERSTRATEGIES C INTERVENTIONS

Gustavo Robles

In Europe, figures such as François Hollande, Mario Draghi, Gordon Brown, and Angela Merkel have personified this technocratic reaction to the crisis with varying degrees of success. Amidst its crisis, neoliberalism was briefly able to propagate a narrative that a specialized class of professional managers, consultants, and economic specialists would be capable of containing the dire circumstances. But this myth was even more short-lived than its successes in stabilizing capitalism. Faced with the decline of the progressive movements that emerged in the immediate post-crisis period, the world was shaken by a barrage of populist leaders and political forces in the middle of the previous decade, all of whom began to openly dispute the precarious technocratic consensus.

Figures such as Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, Narendra Modi, Rodrigo Duterte, Nigel Farage, and others gave a face to this global authoritarian turn. On the one hand, this turn has posed a symbolic challenge to the globalist technocrats. On the other hand, at a deeper level, it presents itself as an opposition to emancipatory political imaginaries, social equality, and international solidarity that has historically distinguished the left. But this authoritarian regression contains much more than just charismatic leaders and political forces. It is based on discourses, representations, and identitarian and exclusionary sensibilities that take their impetus from the common sense created during the neoliberal times: competition, punitive sentiments, and eradicating solidarity<sup>2</sup>.

In this context, it became common to quote Antonio Gramsci, according to whom “the crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum, a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.”<sup>3</sup> Today, these morbid symptoms appear in the form of an explosive dissemination of all kinds of conspiracy theories, apocalyptic fantasies, Cold War hysterias, or recycled forms of biological racism, such as white supremacy. Likewise, a curious combination of moral conservatism, nihilistic transgression, and neoliberal individualism is giving far-right forces across the globe all kinds of ideological ammunition.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, it is important not to allow ourselves to be hypnotized by the novelty of all of this, since the authoritarian turn is taking place within a complex web of pre-existing discourses, representations, and social sensibilities born in the very heart of neoliberal culture, which ultimately aimed at converting politics into something that only the elites can participate in. But when governments are perceived to be mere (incompetent) managers,

apathy becomes one of the most common civic attitudes and a renewed emphasis on the individualistic and moral aspects of dissent stokes social polarizations, protest votes, and countless instances of social violence. However, it is not only a matter of describing these morbid symptoms, but of being able to grasp what makes them so attractive, and how they manage to channel the libidinal economy in a way that, paradoxically, reproduces those forms of suffering that spawned the discontent in the first place.

### Sad passions

It has never been as clear as it is today that political choices and identities are presented more in emotional terms than in the form of ideas or principles; in other words, they are based more on experiences and sensibilities than on the clear presentation of interests or ideologies. This is evident in the strong polarization that has internally divided almost all societies, as well as in the resurgence of the extreme right and the different forms of social and political authoritarianism sweeping the globe. Of course, this emotional “excess” of our political life is not monopolized by the right wing alone, as can be seen in the way that public debates are frequently moralized and reduced to concerns around individual vulnerability or sensitivity, or what is now known as “woke culture”. But the degree of destructive intensity and the violence employed by contemporary right-wingers makes any comparison between left and right seem ridiculous. As a result, critics must turn their gaze to those emotions and affects that define these new forms of social authoritarianism. In order to do so, I would like to make some comments on two “sad passions” that encode a large part of contemporary collective sensibilities: fear and resentment.

Fear is perhaps the most primal feeling in human life, that part of us that is most visibly linked to the animal kingdom. Fear is an essential tool for our survival, since it activates defence mechanisms that alert us to what threatens us. Because of this almost natural condition of fear (and similar emotions such as awe, shock, panic, or fright), politics has revolved around the question of how communities can coexist in a state of fear without their members going to war against each other. The problem, then, is not our fears themselves – which are otherwise unavoidable – but situations in which these fears determine our social imaginaries and political demands. This danger becomes evident when fear becomes a direct consequence of social processes characteristic of the most recent decades of neoliberalism – namely, precarity and risk as ways of life.

The increase of social situations defined by instability, flexibility, insecurity, and ambiguity in contemporary life undermines the possibility of a peaceful coexistence. This is in part the case because the structures that had previously organized social life – class, unions, state, nation, neighbourhood, etc. – have been rendered derelict by the neoliberal atomization of the world. At the same time, the commodification of more and more areas of life has led to high degrees of conflict between different communities and has exacerbated the economic differences between countries and regions. In short, the combination of the expansion of deregulated capitalism, the hollowing out of political democracy, the digitalization of life and the attendant disintegration of societal networks, along with the fact that competition has become a new categorical imperative have all led to a climate of instability in which people feel they have lost control over their own lives. This increases our fears and anxieties.

One could conceive of today's capitalism as a machine that reproduces itself by exploiting anxieties and fears of social downfall. In a world that considers most of the population to be mere elements that can be sacrificed for the sake of systemic stabilization (for example, when making an ever-increasing number of former jobs superfluous), fear is no longer a side effect of capitalism, but the very core of its ethos. With this in mind, would it not make more sense to consider authoritarian movements as a kind of political management of fears and anxieties? The experience of having lost control over one's own living conditions, which is fundamental to our experience of the world today, makes it necessary to seek out strategies and subterfuges that aim to stabilize our precarious lives, making them more liveable. The different authoritarian movements on the rise globally today exploit these yearnings for identity, security, belonging, and stability, at least at a symbolic level.

If fear is the emotion linked to precariousness and risks, resentment is linked to the inequalities and injustices inherent in capitalist social relations. In general terms, we can describe resentment as an affect that originates in a moral grievance and is accompanied by a desire for revenge which must ultimately be repressed due to impotence. Resentment is not only an emotion that belongs to the inner world and is then transferred to the public space, it is a protest against an order or a state of affairs that is seen as harmful to an individual's self-esteem, or that does not fulfil its promises. In this sense, resentment allows those who feel this specific form of discontent to alleviate their frustration by constructing scapegoats.

This is a key point. In a neoliberal world in which success is considered an expression of the capacity for self-capitalization, and failure is considered to be a result of individual idleness, a lack of motivation, or bad habits, we should not underestimate the capacity of resentment to act as a palliative. All of this becomes more problematic when it is combined with a glorification of one's individual power and the construction of scapegoats who can be blamed for an individual's suffering. Here the emotion of resentment is transformed into a political program. Instead of articulating a particular grievance as a demand for recognition or social change, reactionary feelings appear in the form of identitarian defences of tradition or the fantasy of an existential threat: men threatened by feminism, Europeans threatened by "Islamization", native populations threatened by immigration, urban middle classes threatened by impoverished peoples.

### Affective counterstrategies

The question, then, is what should be done with those sad passions that circulate through the social body and produce fantasies of destructiveness, seek out scapegoats, and create defensive forms of subjectivity? The right wing has chosen to affirm, use, and exploit these sentiments. But what about the left? To answer that, maybe it would be useful to remember one of the principles of the philosopher Baruch Spinoza, according to which "an affect can only be controlled or destroyed by another affect contrary thereto, and with more power for controlling affect"<sup>5</sup>. According to this maxim, it is not enough for the left to denounce these fantasies, it must produce and circulate its own emancipatory, egalitarian, and critical affects. If the current neoliberal crisis channels sad passions into outright reactionary sentiments, it is then a question of inventing alternative dynamics in which passion can come to fruition.

It is precisely here where the aesthetic dimension of the struggles discussed in this book enters the stage. Aesthetics is not to be understood in its limited and academic sense as a theory of art, but rather in the way it was originally conceived, as a theory of sensibilities. This means that emotions and affects are also the realm in which aesthetics and politics coincide: the realm that hosts the dispute over how we experience the world and relate to each other, over the way certain emotions and passions relate to possible modes of subjectivation and fields of action. Aesthetics in this sense does not refer to the theory of art, its autonomy, and its authorship, nor is it the “aestheticization of politics” that Benjamin<sup>6</sup> criticized, and which today becomes the aestheticization of neoliberal life through advertising. What we mean by aesthetics is the way in which artistic practices reconfigure the sensible by intervening in the coordinates of sensory experience, hegemonic codes, and social representations.

The potential aesthetic interventions have to deconstruct common sensibilities has been remarked upon by many authors, for example, by Jacques Ranciere in his idea of “politics of aesthetics”<sup>7</sup> or by Nelly Richards in her reflections on “the political in art”<sup>8</sup>. Beyond their differences, they both agree on the key point that these relations between art and politics are not immediate, because unlike politics, art does not focus on generating an “us” or a “people”. Art does not produce collective identities on its own; rather, it generates material and affective counterstrategies aimed at questioning hierarchies, identifications, and hegemonic ways of seeing and saying. In this sense, we can say that the contributions in this book do not promise a concrete social order, but rather invite us to experience public space differently than under the status quo. Graffiti, stickers, songs, poems, murals, coloured scarves, forms of public sabotage, cell-phone pictures, beer labels, science fiction images, paintings, mocking designs, counter-mappings, naked bodies, radio broadcastings, post cards, board games, comics, coloured tarps, banners, and memes are all “emotional acts of dissent”<sup>9</sup> and, at the same time, moments of “collective joy”<sup>10</sup> which subvert the sad passions of our everyday life under neoliberalism.

Emotional counterstrategies refer to the collective production of materials and forces capable of affecting our sensibilities and promoting critical and strategic emotional dynamics. It refers to a form of aesthetics in which the figure of the author or the genius is no longer central, but where images and signs are presented as collective, collaborative, and anonymous in origin, and hybrid, public, and heteronomous in character. This form of aesthetics cannot be reduced to any authorial self, it is not limited to the institutionalized space of museums and galleries, nor is it addressed to spectators or audiences, instead it is aimed towards the social body and concerned with sharing images, slogans, sensations, and representations that belong to no one in particular because they are dispersed throughout the entirety of the social body. These interventions exist beyond the bourgeois division of public and private aimed at forging seek to generate affective ecologies and collaborative dynamics that account for collective experiences, sufferings, resistances, and sensibilities that cannot be tamed by right-wing politics. The question is whether all this affective and aesthetic *potentia* can add up to something more than just counterstrategies, whether it can fill the utopian space that has been left empty by the neoliberal way of being.



That well-known phrase that claims it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism (whose authorship – Fisher? Jameson? Zizek? – is more difficult to locate than the end of capitalism itself) provides an apt definition of the ideological dilemma of our present. Mark Fisher popularized the term “capitalist realism”<sup>11</sup> to refer to this widespread inability to conceive of a world without capitalism, a kind of cognitive uni-dimensionality that blocks visions of the future, that rewrites the past in the form of nostalgic pastiche, and that incorporates the “alternative” and the “transgressive” into the cultural mainstream through capitalist desires, aspirations, and hopes. However, the problem we face today is perhaps less concerned with a lack of imagination as it is with the inability to transform these visions into a concrete project that appeals to the affective life of the majority. In fact, the contemporary left is not at all lacking in projects, imaginaries, and ambitious struggles. From the experiments in autonomy led by the Zapatistas or the Kurds, to the feminist “green tide”, to creative post-capitalist visions such as accelerationism, degrowth politics, and eco-socialism, to leftist post-humanisms, the utopias are there: the task is to infuse them with social passion.

As Enzo Traverso has shown, the fact that none of these utopias can be put into practice has led to a certain left-wing melancholy which can be designated as the “end of utopias”<sup>12</sup>. Another reason why this situation is fascinating is because the relationship between the left and utopian thought was not always harmonious. Friedrich Engels accused utopian thought of being a mollifying illusion that reduced the scientific critique of reality to a moral judgement and the revolutionary energies to the good will of the heart.<sup>13</sup> This anti-utopian sentiment is also present in some tendencies within the contemporary Lacanian or post-structuralist left, which fault utopian aspirations not for their lack of scientific dispositions, but for expressing ideological fantasies that conceal the conflictual and antagonistic character of the social world through an ideal of harmony that contains the germ of totalitarianism.<sup>14</sup> However, especially after moments of revolutionary change such as the Russian Revolution, the movements of 1968, or the Cuban Revolution, utopia also served the left as a tool to imagine an escape from the rigid gridlocks of the present. Perhaps what we are lacking is not so much those utopias that aspired to be the horizon and the end of politics (and that may well be diluted in romantic daydreams or totalitarian nightmares), but those more modest ones that present themselves as instrumental to transcending the present of capitalist realism.

The point is that the utopias have an important impact on social passions, as we mentioned above. In recent years, it has largely been the right wing that has managed to win popular appeal with its solutions to the utopian question of how to break out of the current capitalist world order. The problem is not only that the right has given an identitarian and reactionary answer that reproduces the miseries of the neoliberalism to which they claim to respond, but that their answer seeks to overcome the present through the lens of an idealized past. For this reason, we can say that the political imagination of these contemporary fascisms is retrotopian rather than utopian: they want to sacrifice the present for the sake of a fantasy of returning to an imaginary past. Trump’s “Make America Great Again”, Modi’s Hindu nationalism, Putin’s or Erdogan’s imperial nostalgia, the dreams of ethnically homogeneous European national societies, or the repeated invocations to the military dictatorships of the 70s in the current Latin American far right, are all histrionic iterations of this nostalgia for a past capable of consoling the sad passions. We can say,

following Samir Gandesha, that these new fascist retrotopias are based “on the need of the people for meaning in their lives”<sup>15</sup> in the post-utopian world of zombie neoliberalism. One potential strategy for modes of imagination that can surpass capitalist realism – without reactionary longing for the past or romantic fantasies of the future – are what Foucault called “heterotopias”<sup>16</sup>. Heterotopias are “*other* places” that are juxtaposed to the space and time of our everyday life; “counter-spaces” where the orders of the city and culture are “at the same time represented, contested or inverted”, dimensions that are traversed by multiple dimensions and multiple temporalities coexisting with one another, sometimes challenging each other, sometimes complementing each other. Let us then conceive of those anti-authoritarian interventions as aesthetic heterotopias that cut the circuit of movements and perceptions and attempt to establish sometimes a message, sometimes an emotion, sometimes a melody, or a communication. Without the ambition of utopias or the re-entrenchment of the retrotopias, these heterotopias seek that which Bolívar Echeverría considered proper to games, festivals, and art, “to become zones of social experience where everyday life is performatively interrupted”.<sup>17</sup> The book you have in your hands deals with such heterotopic interventions.



# Ecologías del

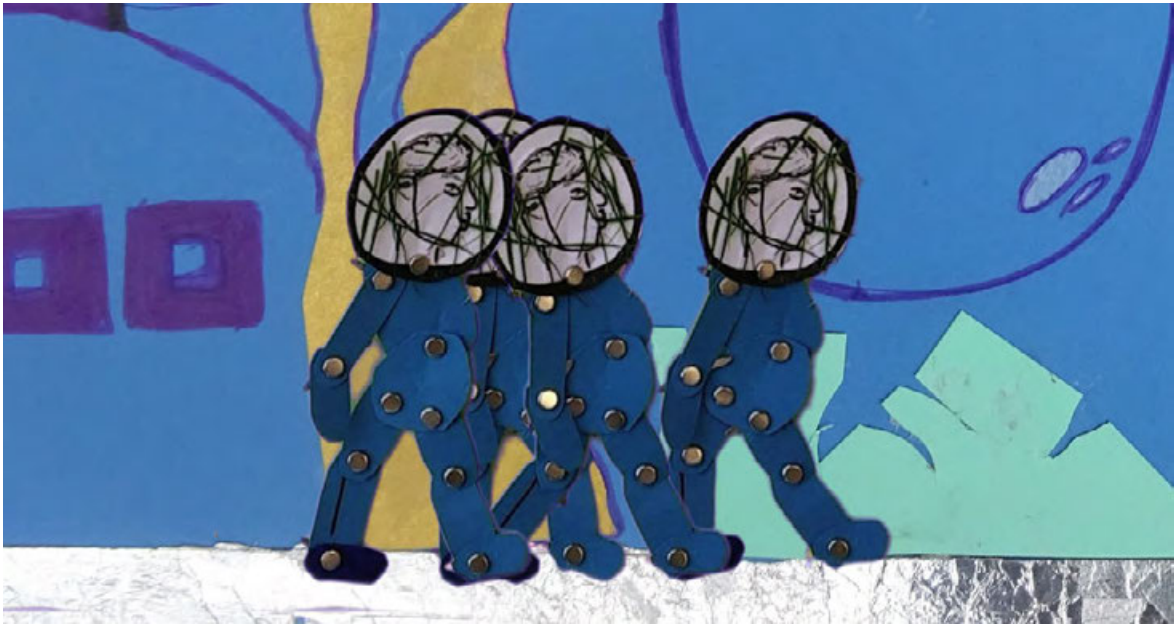
**Science Fiction  
as Radical Imagination**



# Futuro

Francesca Cogni,  
Tuline Gülgönen





**S**cience fiction helps us to examine our reality, working with the imagination as a place for creating future possibilities. It enables critical thinking on issues such as living together, energy production, housing, food, health, communication, and forms of government. And it helps us to imagine other possible forms of society beyond dystopia.

By leaving behind the descriptive and mimetic constraints of conformity to the real world, science fiction can depict with great accuracy our contemporary everyday life, whose concrete dynamics and power relations become more evident.

This paradoxical tension between reality and fiction allows us to look at the present from a very different perspective, thus regaining the ability to formulate desires and develop active visions of the future. This agency is almost non-existent in mainstream contemporary discourse, where visions of the future are paralysed by narratives of ecological disaster and feelings of powerlessness against the inconsistent and often authoritarian decisions of governments all around the globe.

**“It is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.”**

**Mark Fisher**

Wars, energy and sanitary crises, authoritarianism, green washing, social injustice, extractivism of material and immaterial resources, neo-colonialism, border policies, new forms of slavery in digital neoliberalism, as well as experiences of ecological crisis in Global South and North alike, coexist alongside space programmes, cities founded in the desert, artificial meat, and animals re-created from DNA traces. All this creates a scenario far beyond the Hollywood version of science fiction.

Instead of seeing sci-fi narrations as anticipations of possible futures, it seems rather that our present is the result of a sci-fi imaginary – but a mainstream vintage imaginary of classical sci-fi, stripped of its critical potential, mixed with neoliberal ideology and all its brand-new techniques. The present seems like the dream come true of a rich and reckless child, who – having watched too many sci-fi movies in the 90s – has enough money to make it all real. Would another kind of mainstream sci-fi imaginary from the 90s have produced another world today? Would a narration based on the ex-

perience of minorities and oppressed populations, indigenous groups, and resisting communities have provoked and shaped alternative visions and different ways of relating to each other as a community (human and other-than-human)?

**“We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable. So did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings. Resistance and change often begin in art, and very often in our art, the art of words.”**

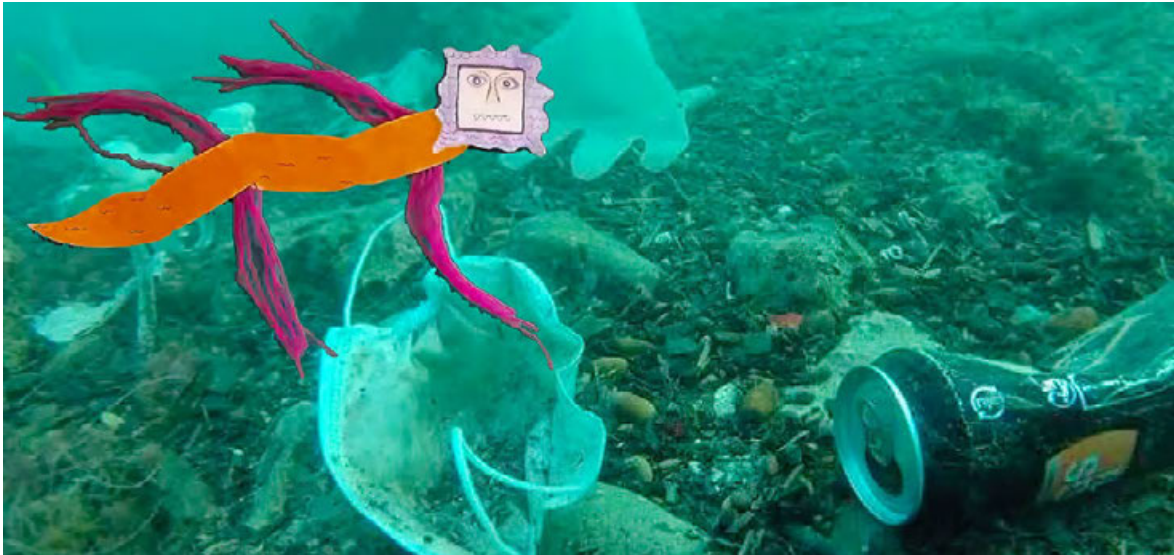
**Ursula K. Le Guin**

Germany, and Tunisia, stemming from questions around climate change and political ecology, including the need to rethink the relationships between humans, as well as between humans and non-humans. *Ecologías del Futuro* takes the form of a series of collective science fiction film workshops, from which emerge mainly short films, but also texts, comics, and podcasts. Since 2018, we have been organizing projects in rural and urban spaces in Mexico, Italy, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, and Tunisia. They have involved children, young people, and adults: students, activists, scientists, artists, musicians, and persons of all ages and contexts, who felt that the topic was relevant to them. We work on the edges – geographical and social – and in network and dialogue with projects that are already active locally.

## **The future as a collective exercise of imagination**

How to provoke a shift away from dystopian visions in order to take back the agency of imagination and its subversive and transformative power, thinking of the future as a collective exercise of imagination? This is the central question of our project, *Ecologías del Futuro*.<sup>1</sup> It is a nomadic project born between Mexico,





Our work is mainly addressed to those who have limited access to cultural resources and where the re-appropriation of narratives of the future is particularly necessary. Guided by the principles of popular education, we work with a horizontal approach based on sharing knowledge and tools. Our approach is clearly situated, looking at ecology from a decolonial, intersectional, feminist, and pluralistic perspective, shifting the epicentre of gaze and narrative away from the Global North.

## Who will live here in 300 years?

Through artistic practices related to moving and still images, sensorial exercises, and experiments involving sound, body, and voice, we explore desires, dreams, and fears. In doing so, we aim to develop a critical and active vision of the present, and to collectively reflect on the ecological, environmental, and political landscapes of the future. We aim to reshape the commons by restoring space for utopia starting from concrete models already active in present days. During the workshops, we collaborate to produce handmade short animation and video films, as well as the accompanying soundtracks. The participants develop,

write, and realize the collective story before shooting the film, always collaboratively. We work with the most easily-accessible tools available: open-access applications, toilet paper tripods, handmade special effects. The starting point of the workshops is the exploration of the place where we are, and the formulation of simple questions: what will this place look like in 300 years? Who will live here? In what kind of habitat? What will gender and sexuality be like? What will people eat? How will they produce energy, how will they move, how will they communicate, how will they govern themselves?

The basis of this process is an exchange on individual worlds, individual wishes for the future, and the question as to of what kind of society we live in. We begin by observing and listening to the world around us, to become aware of our cohabitation with other living beings, trying to understand how the different forms of dwelling are interconnected and interdependent. We learn together and exchange readings, films, images, and ideas. We think about the question of points of view, and changes of scales and perspectives.





## Rethinking the world we live in

The films produced during the workshops feature viruses, pirates, pink dogs, and other mutants that cohabit with other beings. They are silent, or they mix languages and other forms of communication. They often start from a catastrophic situation caused by disasters generated by climate change. They include scenes about beings who escape from authoritarian universes to build other worlds.

They leave many questions open. The visions of the future they explore are not necessarily univocal, and can be based on cyclical timeframes, questioning the idea of a linear conception of time as a prerequisite to think about the interconnection between our present time and the futures we desire.

(Re)telling, changing the narration and the narrative, and inventing new stories, means reappropriating the production of the imaginary and offering new, more complex, transversal, and plural visions of reality. Science

fiction, then, is not only a mirror or a tool for critically reflecting reality; it also has an enormous potential to transform reality itself. *Ecologías del Futuro* is a way of rethinking the world we live in, as well as its prevailing dynamics. Storytelling is a practice of common reflection and an exercise for struggle and resistance. It is one of the most urgent political tasks to reappropriate – mediated through the moving image – the narratives of the future.

### Endnotes

- 1 The collective is international and interdisciplinary, consisting of different people and groups: Francesca Cogni (DE-IT), Lucia Cavalchini (MX), Hafid Velasco (MX), Tuline Gülgönen (DE-MX), Matteo Carli (IT), Kitti Baracsi, kollektiv orangotango (DE), Collectif Corps Citoyen (TN), and others. The project has collaborated with various partner projects and institutions in Europe, North Africa, and Mexico, such as Stadt von Unten, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Kubinaut, Prinzessinengarten, Gemeinschaftsgarten Tempelhofer Feld, Schles27, Verein Gutshaus Ramin, Gridas Napoli, Festival Animasivo Mexico, Goethe-Institut Mexico, Huerto Roma-Verde (Mexico City).

### Further reading

[ecologiasdelfuturo.net](http://ecologiasdelfuturo.net)

# Communication in the Fe



# ng Vessels eminist City

Ana  
Álvarez



I'm 14. I'm standing outside my high school, wearing my school uniform. I peer into the front entrance with my back to the street. Suddenly, a man comes up from behind. He touches my buttocks and vulva. I freeze. A friend sees him, screams; others start chasing him. He runs away. I'm speechless.

I'm 20. I'm sitting on a microbus, wearing jeans. Suddenly, I feel a hand sliding through the gap between my pants and the small of my back. The hand continues in until it touches my arse. I scream; the man jumps off the bus. I feel rage. The passengers, motionless.

I'm 23. I'm walking down the street in the *Centro* of Mexico City. I'm wearing a dress. A man passes by and says with a cynical smile: "estás manchada" (you're stained). I glance at my dress to see that he spit on me. I scream and chase him among a sea of people walking around me, oblivious to what just happened.

I'm 24. I'm walking through the city, trying to dispel a knot of sadness. A naked woman appears, walking through a sea of traffic. I break down with her. A woman from the kitchen of a local restaurant runs out to cover her.

I'm 25. I walk through the city with relative freedom, but defensively with all my senses on high alert, always attentive to my surroundings. I always have several plans for reaction and self-defence ready – for myself or other women around me: things to shout, objects to grab, kicks to give. I'm still afraid of male hands, bodies, and gestures in the street, but I refuse to give up wandering. I work out my schedules, clothing, and routes. I advise women arriving in the city: the subway is divided and you have to pay attention to where the "women-only" cars are. And, yes, you better not wear those shorts here, you could have a bad time.

I'm 27, 28, 29, 30, 35, 40, and the aggression in the street continues – although less physically and more verbally. I have to admit, it affects me less. I have probably adapted to it. However, I'm irritated that they advertise a bus exclusively for women: is this the only way to avoid aggression? By segregating us? I do feel that something is beginning to change collectively. Groups of women are organizing to go on the subway with little clothing and defend their right to be in public as they please, without anyone putting their hands on them. I learn about the monstrous dimensions of public and private harassment of women in Mexico through social networks and #MiPrimerAcoso. Conversations on the subject quickly enter the different women's circles to which I belong. It runs through all of us, we begin to weave ourselves together.

I'm 41. It's 8 March 2019. I walk down *Reforma* Avenue to join the march for International Women's Day and I see monuments wrapped in plastic, "protected" against feminist action. Despite that, further ahead I find the sculpture of a naked woman, soft and delicate, a perfect patriarchal representation of femininity, mediated with a green handkerchief in favour of legal abortion and graffiti on the pedestal that says: "Tira tu miedo y defiéndete" (Lose your fear and defend yourself; see photograph on the right). I feel a shift. I realize that this intervention disputes the public representation of women and is a means of self-representation. Another message painted on the street responds to a bank advertisement in the bus shelter: "No nos felicite, cuestionese: matan a 10 mujeres al día" (Don't congratulate us, question yourself: 10 women are being killed every day). Months later, at another feminist protest, the base of the Independence Monument and its winged Greek goddess of Victory is covered with graffiti. Politicians and others write in the media that the monument must be restored, condemning what they call vandalism. "These are not the pranks of a few girls," writes the *Restauradoras con Glitter* collective, which defends the altered state of the monument. The message must be maintained loud and clear: in Mexico women are being killed, therefore, "primero las mujeres, después las paredes" (first the women, then the walls). "Fuimos todas" (It was all of us), because we all resonate with their messages. The feminist movement begins a dispute with the state as to what public monuments should represent. Who writes the city becomes an intense public debate.

## Breaking the patriarchal pact

I'm 42. We are a few days from 8 March 2020. We wake to the news of the brutal femicide of Ingrid Escamilla at the hands of her partner. The sensationalist and revictimizing media coverage – which exposed her mutilated body – leads to an important discussion about the narratives and representations of violence against women. We need to talk about it in a different way; we need to address the forms of violence without perpetuating them and to recognize what is structural in them. In the coming years, these other means of communication will flourish in the city.

An unprecedented decentralized protest is organized: feminist groups call for an event in front of Ingrid's home, in a neighbourhood to the north of the city. Along the way, neighbours join the march by hanging banners from their windows and doors, and by coming out to support the mobilization. During the event, several teenage girls from the area are encouraged to take the microphone and to publicly denounce the aggression they have experienced at the hands of family members or strangers. The city taken by women helps to break the silence, the patriarchal pact. It is the feminist protests that allow the voices to flow, making public space truly public in a very radical sense, disrupting the idea that violence against women is a private and individual matter.

A few days later, on 8 March, we leave our homes and recognize each other along the way. For the first time, the subway does not reserve cars for women because the whole train is ours; this time nothing will happen to us; we are together, we sing, we shout slogans, we laugh. Rivers of demonstrators stream out of the *Revolución* metro station. We are so many that it takes us hours to start marching; the range is wide: from the direct-action black bloc to those who are marching for the first time in their lives. On the road we read on our bare backs and on banners: "Mi cuerpo, mis reglas" (My body, my rules); "No nací mujer para morir por el hecho de serlo" (I wasn't born a woman

to die for the fact of being one); "Este cuerpo no se viola, no se toca, no se mata" (This body is not to be violated, not to be touched, not to be killed). The fountains of the Alameda Central park are dyed red, creating a powerful image, especially with the accompanying message: "México feminicida" (Femicidal Mexico). One contingent holds a Mexican flag, with the moon and a purple stripe replacing the eagle and the red stripe. The march is a large collective body, united but heterogeneous, vast in resignified symbols, with a voice that speaks to society as a whole.





## “We want to be free, not brave”

I'm 43. We have been quarantined for almost a year because of the COVID-19 pandemic, with children out of school. Domestic violence against women has increased substantially. International Women's Day is approaching again. Two days before, images appear in the news of an imposing wall in front of the *Palacio Nacional* that stretches across the entire *Zócalo*, leaving only one entrance from the south. “Are they that afraid of us?” ask women on social networks. It is unusual. The

Interior Ministry argues that it is to protect monuments, and historic buildings, and the women themselves; the president calls it “el muro de la paz” (the wall of peace). That same night, feminist groups project messages from the central *Zócalo* square onto the facade of the *Palacio Nacional*. “México feminicida” (Feminicidal Mexico), “Somos las mujeres, somos una voz colectiva” (We are women, a collective voice), and with white paint they begin to write on the metal fences the names of the victims of femicide, acid attacks, disappearances, rapes, and harassment. The wall is collectively

transformed into a memorial, a collective intervention that contains the strong and legitimate reasons for the feminist protest.

The next day we joined hundreds of women in putting flowers in the peepholes of the fence, candles, embroidered, hung, pasted, painted messages: “Ponen muros en un país donde las paredes hablan” (They put up walls in a country where the walls speak), “No le temo al COVID, sino a ser mujer en México” (I don’t fear COVID; I fear being a woman in Mexico), “En las calles queremos ser libres, no valientes” (In these streets we want to be free, not brave). There’s room for all forms of understanding the feminist struggle in Mexico. Links are strengthened: “Ellas me cuidan” (My sisters look after me), “En mi lucha caben todas” (There’s room for all women in my struggle). Passers-by read in shock.

The *Zócalo* is transformed into an urban collage with diverse historical and symbolic layers: there are the emblematic pink crosses to protest the femicides in Ciudad Juárez since the 1990s; the “Ni una menos” (Not one less) slogan that arrived from Argentina in 2015; the “Antimonumentas” (Anti-monuments) that since 2019 have spread throughout the country and function as urban memorials to demand justice. This is a dynamic movement with strong roots, there is memory and reinvention. The city serves to insist and expand: “Ni calladita, ni bonita, ni calmadita, ni tuya, ni de nadie, ni una menos, ni una más, ni una más” (I won’t be silent, or pretty, or calm. I won’t be yours or anyone’s. I won’t be one less, nor one more. Not one more).

The pandemic encourages other forms of protest outside the *Zócalo*. Women open windows to sing feminist songs from their homes, hand out posters in neighbourhood streets, paint on the asphalt: “Vivas nos queremos” (We want ourselves alive), and organize to take over numerous public spaces. The river has become a delta of manifestations branching out spatially and temporally. Any moment, any corner, fence, pole, wall, or sidewalk is an opportunity to express oneself, in all kinds of formats, and with multiple messages.

## Building the feminist city

The feminist movement is attentive to the writing of the city; it is meticulous in its reading; it does not allow a colonial sculpture to be removed only to be replaced by another monument of the state that equally denies self-representation and symbolically passes over women. It rejects the invented face of a universal and allegorical indigenous woman made by a man. It takes the initiative and places on the pedestal, where until recently there was a statue of Christopher Columbus, the silhouette of a girl with a raised fist painted in purple.

The “Antimonumenta” that bursts into *Paseo de la Reforma*, the avenue of monuments in the city, is baptized as the “Glorieta de las mujeres que luchan” (Roundabout of Women Who Struggle) and on the fences are inscribed names: “Madres de feminicidio” (Mothers of Femicide Victims), “Buscadoras y madres de desaparecidas en los 70s, 80s, 90s” (Seekers and Mothers of Those Disappeared in the 70s, 80s, 90s), “Mujeres indígenas” (Indigenous Women), “Madres de Ayotzinapa” (Mothers of Ayotzinapa), “Afromexicanas” (Afro-Mexicans), “Defensoras de agua y tierra” (Defenders of Land and Water), “Creadoras” (Female Creators), “Mujeres periodistas” (Female Journalists), “Mujeres históricas” (Historic Women).

The messages that spread throughout the city are powerful, sharp, and territorially relevant: a small sticker claims that: “No tener miedo también es un privilegio” (Living without fear is also a privilege) beside a police panic button that is supposed to protect us.

The activity on social networks jumps onto the street; the viral video of a young woman returning a smoke bomb to the police behind the wall of the *Zócalo* is transformed into street posters in which she, attacked on social networks for her physique, appears vindicated in her strong and brave body. Now it is *La Reinota* or Big Queen who appears on

a purple landscape, holding a bomb from which flowers come out with a clear message: “lo vamos a tirar” (We’re going to take it down). The feminist graphic counter-narrative on urban walls affirms women as what they are: protagonists of social transformation.

In the urban territories of aggression, but also of the imaginary of fear, where women are the ones who have to avoid being assaulted, it is shocking to read on the cyclone fence of an abandoned building: “Eduquemos a no violar, no a cómo protegerse de una violación” (Let’s educate about *not raping* instead of how to protect ourselves from rape; see photographs on this page). This small piece of embroidered cloth resonates strongly, its power is inversely pro-



portional to its size. We began to put our bodies and voices in the streets, to express ourselves publicly in massive groups, small, or alone. We build, even if only for a moment, the feminist city, where networks of visible and invisible women support us, open the space for us to express ourselves. There are messages from, for, and by us. They sprout in every corner and form, strident or discreet, a current that cannot be contained. The city becomes our megaphone, palimpsest, embrace, song, fabric, whisper; communicating vessels to resist and challenge the patriarchy.





# Erasing Borders Around Our S



# rs Skin

Gayatri Ganju,  
Fearless Collective

Painting an Image of Ourselves  
the Way We Want to Be Seen,  
Heard, Loved

शाहमीना शाह रोड  
شاهمینا شاہ روڈ



Once upon a time, all touch disappeared from the world as an invisible virus took over the streets. We became suspicious of the air and (sharing) breath – our life force. As women negotiating public space in South Asia, we are familiar with the fear of being touched. Young girls often learn to draw borders and boundaries around their bodies before they have learned what this really means.

Emerging from our first lockdown in India (one of the harshest in the world), the Fearless Collective travelled to Lucknow in September 2020. Here we joined forces with Sabika Abbas Naqvi, a power-house poet, activist, beating heart – whose work lies in reclaiming public space through her spoken word performances. Alongside her, we spoke to a group of Muslim women from the city about decolonizing desire and what it could look like if we erased the borders around our skin.

As you turn off an eight-lane highway, lined with malls and temples, you find yourself being led through intricate alleyways made of red brick, laced with *itr* (rose scented perfume) and the sound of *aazaan* (the call to prayer). Their history is steeped in poetry and stories of legendary monarchs, the Begums and Nawabs, that are written into quiet mausoleums. It is a parallel universe, home to the kingdom of Oudh. Lucknow remembers itself as gracious, diverse, sensual and refined.

“वो जो हम में तुम में करार था तुम्हें याद हो कनि याद हो  
वही यानी वादा नबिाह का तुम्हें याद हो कनि याद हो”

*“This (entangled) affair between you and me  
You may remember it, and you may not.  
You forget all the promises  
before you speak them aloud,  
You may remember me, and you may not.”*

Walking next to Maqbaras we are warned not to wander too close to fragrant trees because they may house *Jinns* (invisible creatures), a black hand-painted flag

hangs outside the Bada Imbambara and sings “Ya Hussain” as a call to mourning for Shia Muslims to wash the city with their tears. This is despite the pandemic: a *Dastanagoi*<sup>1</sup> is held on Zoom for a group of Urdu poets.

But let us also remember these women who refused to be forgotten: the Indian singer Gauhar Jaan; Begum Samr who ruled over Sardhana; Begum Hazrat Mahal who led the rebellion against the British East India Company in 1857; and singer Zohra Bai. Veiled and concealed from wandering eyes, very little visual documentation of Muslim women exists, but these were women who lived beyond the norm and formed a parallel universe and social ecosystem within their fragrant courtyards. The *Tawaifs of Lucknow*<sup>2</sup> began as courtesans but became revolutionaries, queens, classical musicians, and more. They would keep their lovers entangled and entertained as economic sustenance.

During India’s fight for independence, the Tawaifs played an active role in the revolt from behind the scenes. Their houses became meeting zones and hideouts for rebels. They worked as informers, carried messages to freedom fighters, provided them with shelter.

Here ordinary men would learn *Tameez* and *Tehzeeb* – an appreciation of all fine things, from poetry to literature. These were educated women, empowered women, and the first to allow themselves to be photographed (bejeweled and fantastic). Their names were inscribed in legal documents fighting for property and illegitimate heirs, their voices were recorded as some of the only women’s voices of that time, singing their broken hearts into immortality. They refused to be forgotten.

On the day of our workshop, we gathered at dusk, as the moon was rising, under a wish-fulfilling *parijata* tree at the tomb of Begum Akhtar.

The last of the day’s light had gone out. The circle we were sitting in had curled and softened.

Taking turns, dipping the fragrant *rajnigandha* flower into perfumed water, we guided it over our skin where we wanted to be touched. We recited out loud how we wanted to be held by our lover, what our skin ached for.

*"Slowly and softly across my collar bone, stroked on the small of my back, held in long embrace, her lips on my lips, his chest in my arms, tenderly, forever"*

We knew what we wanted. Women are too often portrayed as objects of desire. We wanted to see, instead, representations of the things we desire. Representations of us being desirous.

Writing down our *tammanas* (wishes) we brought the evening a close to by reciting love poems that moved us or we had just written.

Outside of Begum's dream courtyard, we found ourselves crashing back into the reality that is Uttar Pradesh, infamous for its religious intolerance, extreme patriarchy, and violence against women and minority communities. The wall that we were painting was at Chowk, a bustling intersection in the old city. Here, the streets get narrower and notoriously unsafe for women, who you see few of.

## Breathing life into the wall

Time after time we heard from Madiha, Fatima, Raneem (the girls we were painting with) how they did not know what it meant to just *be* in public space here. They navigated it by getting through, quickly, not making any eye contact, making themselves as little and invisible as possible. This was a group of young women who had built new lives for themselves, studying and working in different cities across the country, but had to come back home to be with their families during the pandemic. For some of them, this meant relinquishing the independence they had fought to establish. Coming to the wall to paint (sometimes secretly, sometimes chaperoned) became an act of resistance.

Never having climbed scaffolding before, the girls were doing so now with wild abandon. Wielding their magic wand brushes and breathing life into the wall, like only a group of women can.



Emerging from one of the world's strictest lockdowns, onto the streets of Lucknow, laughing and painting, was exhilarating. Just a few days into this the rug was pulled from beneath our feet and our faith put to the test as reports started circulating about the brutal gang rape and murder of a young Dalit woman, a few hundred kilometers from where we were standing. In the days that followed, the village of Hathras was

fortified by the police, who cremated her body without the consent of her family. The family were being intimidated and had their phones taken away, while the upper caste perpetrators were being protected. For a couple of weeks, the nation was ablaze, but soon enough everything whimpered into silence.

We've heard this silence before.  
When will it end?

We know what we want. And in bold black and white lettering we painted this onto the wall for the world to see:

*"My desire  
Live the life that I choose  
Wear my hair the way I want to  
Work after I'm married"*

Our painting shows two women holding each other in close embrace cloaked on either side by entwined Urdu and Hindi calligraphy expressing their (deepest) (deepest) desires.

जो मैं चाहू  
जसिको चाहू  
जैसे चाहू

*"What I want  
Who I want  
As I want them."*

### Endnotes

- 1 Editor's note: *Dastangoi* is an ancient form of Urdu storytelling. The word comes from the Persian words for epic (dastan) and telling (goi).
- 2 Editor's note: The *tawaifs* were female entertainers and courtesans in the Indian subcontinent who excelled in poetry, music, dancing, singing, etc.





# Fighting Fear with In





## Contentious Symbolism in Socialist Poland

# nocence

**W**hile sorting through stacks of archival material on the Cold War period in Central Eastern Europe, I stumbled upon a picture of strange graffiti. It captured a smiley little creature with a long, triangle-shaped hat, covering a large patch of hastily applied white paint. Its arms were hanging in the air, as if in an invitation for a big warm hug. I felt this was an absurdly cute and innocent image in an otherwise depressing atmosphere of repression and unfreedom. The picture was part of a photographic collection from 1980s Wrocław, and the dwarf-like creature was painted by a group who came to be known as the Orange Alternative.

### Stormy streets of Poland

Calling the 1980s in Poland a stormy period would be an understatement. As a response to a severe political, economic, and social crisis, numerous strikes were staged around the country – starting in Lublin and the Baltic seaports. Encouraged by the small concessions granted by the regime, thousands of people flooded the streets, demanding the establishment of an independent trade union. A strong bond of solidarity was formed among the protesters, eventually leading to the foundation of the *Solidarność* [Solidarity] trade union, which was a result of an agreement signed between the regime and the strikers led by Lech Wałęsa in Gdansk

on 31 August 1980. *Solidarność* soon turned into a mass dissident movement, acquiring 10 million members in the first month of its existence.

In the eyes of the regime, *Solidarność* became its biggest enemy. To regain control, Prime Minister General Wojciech Jaruzelski imposed Martial Law on 13 December 1981. This announcement meant that all associations, institutions, and trade unions were officially suspended, forcing *Solidarność* underground. In this environment of fearful disenchantment, citizens soon started

looking for alternative ways of organizing protests, serving as the perfect breeding ground for a movement like the Orange Alternative to emerge.

### From a student magazine to a political movement

The Orange Alternative (Polish: *Pomarańczowa Alternatywa*) was an artistic oppositional movement established in the city of Wrocław in the early 1980s. It began as a surrealist student magazine, mysteriously named *A*. Founded in the heat of student strikes preceding the introduction of Mar-



*“May everyone know that we shall not allow them to calmly deceive themselves.”<sup>1</sup>*

Why the *Orange Alternative*? Trapped on the colour wheel between red representing the Communists and the left-wing, and yellow symbolizing the Church and right-wing opposition, orange seemed like a natural alternative to both poles, perceived as equally limiting to freedom of thought and self-expression. The *Orange Alternative* offered a previously missing in-between position desired by many citizens. Even a highly prominent member of the Wrocław chapter of *Solidarność*, Józef Pinior, admitted:

*“I was weary of *Solidarność*; especially the fact that they were forming more and more*

*alliances with the Catholic Church tired me. This is not supposed to be a criticism of the church, but I didn’t think these close ties were right. They resulted in a loss of independence. The *Orange Alternative* helped me take off my mask.”<sup>2</sup>*

tial Law, the magazine was published by the New Culture Movement: the primary outlet of artistic opposition for students and young intelligentsia. Protest through artistic means was crucial, with A’s founder Waldemar “Major” Fydrych drawing inspiration mostly from avant-garde Surrealist and Dadaist movements, as well as Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed. Their aim was clear: to introduce a new cultural paradigm, a more historically fitting *socialist surrealism*, the nature of which was masterfully captured in their Manifesto. Hearts and minds of the young generation needed fresh food for thought to challenge conformism and uncritical stances, and they needed help to snap out of their normalization of everyday reality. As they put it:

### **Dwarf graffiti: innocent symbols as a weapon against authoritarianism**

Actions of the *Orange Alternative* did not stop with the publication of surrealist manifestos. A more open expression of dissent found its place soon after the declaration of Martial Law. All of a sudden, there was unusual graffiti appearing on buildings all over the city. The size of the graffiti was usually quite small, around thirty centimetres, and its form fairly simple. Straight lines with arrows were drawn instead of arms, circles represented heads and eyes, rectangles with snowmen-like buttons became bodies, and triangles with



small circles on top represented hats with pompoms. The use of colour was sparse, keeping the images mostly black and white, sometimes with additional touches of yellow, blue, or red. Despite this simplicity, the painted creatures were immediately recognizable: they were dwarves. With large smiles and open arms prepared for a big warm hug, they served as a constant mood booster to passers-by.

Their symbolic meaning, however, was much deeper. As *Solidarność* was forced to go underground, anti-government slogans appeared on the walls of public buildings: a daring reminder that the fight against the regime was far from over. These were quickly painted over by the militia who, fearing the potential of public mobilization, left behind large patches of white and grey paint. For the Orange Alternative, this was the opportunity they had been waiting for. Perhaps an innocent, seemingly non-political symbol

would have a bigger chance of survival against the militia? After all, who would dare prosecute a fairy-tale? The plan was simple:

*“We’ll paint dwarves on those patches. There are thousands or tens of thousands of paint patches in Wrocław, and probably a million in the entire country. If a million dwarves get painted on a million patches, people will find strength and the government will fall.”<sup>3</sup>*

And so they did just that, with dwarf graffiti soon spreading to most cities in the country. Despite their apolitical character, the context in which they were drawn injected them with distinct political importance. The anti-regime slogans hidden underneath maintained their power. Their reference to fairy-tales also had a strong psychological impact. As smiling and joyful creatures, the dwarves stood in stark contrast to the government’s reign of fear and repression, violently imposed through the Martial Law. They thus played a crucial role in the early stages of mobilization, helping citizens to overcome their fear by proving that an alternative fight with the regime was still possible. One did not need to be involved in a direct clash with the authorities. Symbolic protest was just as powerful, and the Orange Alternative was well aware of this:

*“Dwarves will not accept threats, dwarves are happy and will laugh. In this psychological war, it was the dwarves who were winning, for he who laughs is not afraid!”<sup>4</sup>*

## Impact of the Orange Alternative

Actions of the Orange Alternative quickly spilled over from Wrocław to other Polish cities, growing in scale and participation. At their peak between 1986-1990, they organized around sixty public “happenings”: large-scale participatory protest performances usually attracting hundreds or sometimes thousands of people. They ceased their activities in 1989-1990 following Fydrych’s unsuccessful attempt to be elected President. Despite becoming active again in 2001, they never managed to regain their previous popularity.

Over the course of its existence, the Orange Alternative managed to mobilize people from all social and age groups and significantly contributed to the reactivation of Poland’s culture of protest, paving the way for Solidarność later on. Through their contentious performances, they re-conquered public spaces held captive by the authoritarian regime and helped citizens overcome their fear of reclaiming them. They created a counterpublic: an alternative discursive space where formerly apathetic citizens could once again express their dissent, even if only in a subversively absurd way. By re-asserting their right to visibility, the movement helped break the prevalent “distribution of the sensible”<sup>5</sup> and brought dissenting voices back into the public sphere. As historian Tyszka confirms:

*“Laughter which suddenly started to sound on Świdnicka Street, in the very centre of Wrocław, was the first sign of the liberation of ‘real existence’ in Poland. The political liberation came later.”<sup>6</sup>*

Authoritarian regimes are rarely considered to be fruitful ground for political activism, as the playing field for grassroots movements is far from even. However, as the Orange Alternative shows, certain anti-authoritarian counterstrategies are capable of shaking rigid power structures. Employing symbols of innocent dwarf creatures, the movement waged a powerful and ultimately successful psychological war with its seemingly much stronger opponent. *Encryption* was particularly important here, as seemingly apolitical activities often present the only way for a silenced oppositional movement to re-enter the realm of the visible and the audible. I believe that the Orange Alternative’s protest activities hidden in a layer of innocent absurdity and surrealism present an inspiring case, giving us hope that even the most repressive environments could be conquered by a well-targeted dose of humour.



### Illustrations

- p. 200: A Dwarf preserved on Madalińskiego street in Warsaw, Agnieszka Couderq, "Orange Alternative" Foundation.
- p. 202: Waldemar Fydrych, HuBar, CC-BY.
- p. 203: Major Fydrych's story protagonist, the so-called A5 with a Dwarf in Wrocław, "Orange Alternative" Foundation.
- p. 205: Pomaranczowa alternatywa-dzien wojska, Julo, CC0.

### Endnotes

- 1 Waldemar "Major" Fydrych, *Lives of the Orange Men: A Biographical History of the Polish Orange Alternative*, New York: Minor Compositions, 2014.
- 2 Padraic Kenney, *Wrocławskie Zadymy*, Wrocław: Oficyna Wydawnicza ATUT, 2007.
- 3 Fydrych, op. cit.
- 4 Elżbieta Beszlej, "Through the Absurd in search for Alternative Normality – a case study of Orange Alternative's happenings", Diploma thesis, Goldsmiths College: University of London, 2009.
- 5 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, New York: Continuum, 2004.
- 6 Juliusz Tyszka, "Orange Alternative: street happenings as social performance in Poland under Martial Law", *New Theatre Quarterly* vol. 14, no. 56 (1998), p. 321.

# Who Gave the

## The Mural That Went Viral and Became a Common Good

**D**uring former President Álvaro Uribe's time in office (2002-2010), Colombia was plunged into one of the darkest stages of its armed conflict. Uribe gambled that he could win the counterinsurgency war against the guerrillas, and to do so he strengthened the repressive apparatus of the state. Implementing war tactics used in Vietnam and Korea known as the "body count", Colombian military forces were ordered to kill unarmed civilians in order to falsely increase the number of combatants who died in the fighting. Through the transitional justice model currently operating in Colombia, which is a result of the 2016 peace agreement, known as Special Justice for Peace (JEP), it has been determined that 6,402 young men were kidnapped, tortured, disguised as guerrillas, and then extrajudicially executed between 2002-2008. This state crime, which deliberately deprived people of their right to life, is popularly known in Colombia as *falsos positivos* (false positives).

As a mechanism of political transition in attempting to overcome the war, the JEP offers alternative – not to say derisory – sentences to those guerrillas, state agents, and civilians who voluntarily provide the "whole truth" about the acts of violence that were committed in the context of the conflict. The relatives of false positive victims criticize – with good reason – that the military who appear before the JEP use this to tell half-truths.

The participation of high-ranking military officials in the JEP keeps human rights organizations on edge. Faced with this, twelve participating organizations launched the *Campaña por la Verdad* (Campaign for the Truth) as a counter-strategy. The organizers of the campaign chose to carry out an *escrache*, or "exposure" protest, against the military who were being investigated by the JEP for cases of false positives. The *escrache* consisted of painting a large mural in the city of Bogotá that asked the question "Who gave the order?"

**"If there is no justice,  
there is an *escrache*"**

On 18 October 2019, the *Campaña por la Verdad* commissioned three artists to paint the mural. The mural was located in front of the Military Cadet Academy in Bogotá. Its language was simple and precise: a country that had been immersed in war understands the question "who gave the order?" as linked to barbarism, while also understanding that at the heart of the matter is the chain of command. In the first

# Order?

Nicole  
Jullian

version of the mural, the faces of five high-ranking military commanders were depicted along with their respective names and the number of extrajudicial executions their military brigades were being investigated for. As of October 2019, human rights organizations had a registry of 5,763 people who had been extrajudicially executed in Colombia between 2000-2010. Not all of the human rights organizations belonging to the *Campaña por la Verdad* approved of the murals. Some thought that focusing on the military was not appropriate, and that the campaign should focus on the victims. It should be noted that the communications team of the Movement of Victims of State Crimes (MOVICE)<sup>1</sup> played an important role in the final decision:

*“from the side of the communications teams, we argued that this [a focus on the victims] had already been done countless times and that we believed that this campaign had the potential to show that an *escrache* could be made based on reports that these same organizations had made on the subject of falsos positivos, which were also being prepared in conjunction with the victims and being presented to the JEP (...) When we chose the question ‘who gave the order?’ and included the faces of five military officers, we knew the world was going to come down on us (...).”<sup>2</sup>*

The *escrache* is a long-standing form of political action in Latin America. It originated in the Argentine human rights movement after President Carlos Menem issued a series of pardons between 1989-1990 that benefitted former military personnel and others involved in crimes against humanity. Faced

with this act of impunity, the organization *Hijos e Hijas por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio* (HIJOS) (Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice Against Forgetting and Silence) devised the strategy “if there is no justice, there is an *escrache*”. For HIJOS, the aim of the *escrache* is a societal condemnation of the military, a condemnation that goes beyond simply pointing out the military has gone unpunished. For the organization *Plenaria Memoria y Justicia* (Plenary, Memory, and Justice), the *escrache* is a method of pressure. In this sense, societal condemnation is viewed as justice that does not depend on political agreements – nor does it compromise or forget.

## Censorship and viralization

On that same day, 18 October, while the artists were painting the mural, a soldier interrupted them, took photographs and alerted more sol-



diers. Minutes later, the police also arrived. The military began to cover up the unfinished mural with white paint. Meanwhile, MOVICE reported the censorship of the mural via Twitter with the hashtag #EjércitoCensuraMural. Videos and photos of the military erasing the mural went viral on social networks within hours. This censorship gave the *Campaña por la Verdad* unexpected success. The organizations in charge of the mural decided not to continue. Instead, they chose to disseminate the digital file

of the image by printing posters. In a matter of days, the walls of Bogotá and Medellín were covered with posters. In the midst of this viralization and as the JEP advanced with the investigations related to *falsos positivos*, the *Campaña por la Verdad* updated the numbers from the initial mural. Within a few months, these new versions of the mural began to circulate. The military and MOVICE appeared before the courts. The military officers which had appeared in the mural demanded in court that all the



contents referring to the action be removed. The complaints were mainly directed against MOVICE. None of the lawsuits were successful, with the exception of one by General Marcos Evangelista Pinto. In the first instance (January 2020), the courts denied the protection of Pinto's rights, among other things because the information on the mural was supported by current judicial investigations. Pinto appealed this decision and in the second instance (February 2020), the judge overturned the previous decision, and ruled to protect

Pinto's rights and as a sanction ordered MOVICE to remove the images from public streets, social networks, and media within 48 hours. This second court ruling was impossible to comply with. At this point, the judicial victory of General Pinto could be read as a second act of censorship. The organizations behind the *Campaña por la Verdad* were bold and not only appealed to the Constitutional Court to request a review of the second ruling as a violation of freedom of expression, but also refused to comply with the court's order.



## The mural as a common good

Not even the ruling in favour of General Pinto could stop the strength of this *escrache*. In many parts of the world, the Colombian diaspora together with an international support network positioned in favour of peace in Colombia, in their respective languages asked the question: “Who gave the order?” In my opinion, the magnitude of the viralization of this mural is directly related to the urgent need of people to know the truth, denounce impunity, and demand factual guarantees to ensure wars are not repeated. Thus, the image of the mural became a common good and its message permeated the political discourse of an entire nation. Despite the judicial prohibition of the use of the image, it was replicated in different formats, spaces, cities, and countries. The Constitutional Court issued its verdict in August 2021 and to everyone’s surprise ruled in favour of MOVICE. The court considered that the mural is part of the legitimate right of the victims to demand the truth through extrajudicial means. The court also considered that the mural is speech that must be protected within the scope of the right to freedom of expression, since the *Campaña por la Verdad* is based on the search for the truth.

*Escraches* of this nature have never been seen before in Colombia. Human rights defenders in the country are exposed to high levels of violence, harassment, and repression by the state and paramilitary groups. This is why no one has ever had the audacity to carry out a political action of this magnitude. The mural “Who gave the order?” will go down in history as an unprecedented victory in the long and arduous struggle for truth and the defence of freedom of expression in Colombia.

## Endnotes

- 1 The Movement of Victims of State Crimes (MOVICE) is a Colombian organizational process that brings together more than 200 organizations of victims of forced disappearance, extrajudicial executions, selective assassinations, and forced displacement, as well as human rights defenders. Its origin is closely related to the Colombia Nunca Más project.
- 2 Interview with the MOVICE head of communications, February 2022.

6.402

FALSOS POSITIVOS =  
ASESINATO DE CIVILES

2002 - 2008

BAJO EL MANDO DE:

¿QUIÉN DIO  
LA ORDEN?



75

NICACIO DE JESÚS  
MARTÍNEZ



154

JUAN CARLOS  
BARRERA



2429

MARIO MONTOYA  
URIBE



1653

OSCAR ENRIQUE  
GONZÁLEZ PEÑA



90

FABRICIO  
CABRERA



72

PUBLIO HERNÁN  
MEJIA



JOSÉ JOAQUÍN  
CORTÉS

58



ADOLFO LEÓN  
HERNÁNDEZ

39



HENRY TORRES  
ESCALANTE

28



MIGUEL DAVID  
BASTIDAS

32



JUAN PABLO  
RODRÍGUEZ

62



DIEGO  
TAMAYO

8



MARCOS  
PINTO

45



# Campaña Por La Verdad

# Exclusion, Cor Ap



IN ERINNERUNG AN: M. AZHAR  
T. LAMPRECHT, E. WENDLAND, S. BERISHA  
S. GENÇ, G. ÖZTÜRK, H. HENNERSDORF, H. N. L.  
S. FEUTER, M. KEIMMING, B. GRIGOL, E. FISK, M. LERCH, B. BAYAL, E. RÜTZ, WOR  
T. BOULGARIDES, T. MAIE, F. M. KUBASIK, H. YORGART, A. PIETAR  
J.R. RAFAEL, S. KILIC, D. FRNST, RUTH F., CHRISTOPHER W., M.

# Control, Appropriation

## Collective Political Graffiti in the Neoliberal City

Reclaim  
Your City  
Network



Imagine a world in which public space is not truly public and not all people have access to it. A world where this so-called public space is not shaped by the people who use it and live in it. Where private owners and state institutions determine how this “public space” looks, who and what is visible in it, and what remains invisible. Imagine if mere financial capability was the deciding factor on who has a voice and who does not.

In such a world, would it not be all too understandable if people who feel excluded from the design of cities sought ways to participate in shaping them, to give artistic expression to experiences, feelings, and political positions? Maybe they would develop collective strategies to undermine this unjust and authoritarian public order, maybe they would deem graffiti to be a suitable means? And maybe they would film these interventions to make them last and have an effect beyond the moment of action in time and space.

Why is graffiti such a good answer to the authoritarian rule over space? Political graffiti actions in public space reach people who would otherwise hardly consume anti-authoritarian media, but who are also themselves excluded from shaping their living environment. The video format provides the opportunity to convey detailed political content through voiceovers or text overlays, expanding on what the graffiti alone is able to transmit.

For people who find themselves in an authoritarian world similar to the one imagined above, we want to provide a (carto)graphic guide on what to consider when implementing such graffiti actions and their video processing. The focus is less on the technique of painting than on the strategic approach. However, people who want to follow our instructions should be aware that authoritarian repression against such strategies differs from region to region and from world to world.

The first step would be to ask yourselves who you want to address and how the audience should be affected. If graffiti is found to be suitable as a means of reaching the identified target group and conveying the desired message, then you can think about the staging and its effect: is the focus on the experience of painting together, conveying a sense of agility, power, and action? Or is the result, the

message of the graffiti, the most important thing? Consider how the people who appear in the video are shown. Do they read as militaristic, hyper-masculine, or perhaps colorful and joyful? Does the video invite others to become active themselves and carry out similar actions? Once these questions are answered, the next step is finding a location where these requirements can be realized!

In a world where most people have to empower themselves first to participate in shaping the space in which they live, there are many possible ways to achieve this. In European

cities in the 2010s and 2020s, many such interventions were carried out. Let’s take the following as examples for our imagined world. We have based our graphics on two such interventions.

## Spraying trains or subways in operation

When considering interventions in which entire train compartments are painted during operating traffic, there is one advantage: you choose the location and timing of the intervention, and repressive authorities can only react. For the choice of location, (a) access routes and (b) exit routes are decisive.

(a): Optimally, access routes are few and easy enough to control with a few people on look-out. (b): The best exit routes are those which are not directly accessible by car from the station in which the painting takes place. Is there a park nearby where people can park their bicycles? Can people run from the platform into the tunnel and then come out at a different, more suitable point? Or is there a nearby freeway so that people are able to quickly leave the neighborhood by car? In addition, attention should be paid to CCTV cameras that can be used to identify you, or seize you or your escape vehicles, when approaching or leaving.



## Rolldowns

Rolldowns – slogans or drawings painted downwards from roofs or bridges – place political messages very visibly in urban space. In contrast to wholecars – large-scale painted trains – which are usually cleaned again within a day, rolldowns generally remain visible for much longer. Usually, rolldowns are realized at night in order to draw less attention, since the painting needs a significant amount of time.

In addition, when on a roof of an inhabited building, it can be difficult to know if someone has noticed the action and called the police. Therefore, those who perform such activities usually plan a route that allows them to escape even if the police have arrived in front of the building (preferably via other roofs to another side of the block, via scaffolding at the back of the building, or similar).

To find suitable locations, you can wander around the city or research potential locations in advance on online maps (including photos and satellite views). On site, you have to check out escape routes and think about likely arrival routes (and times) of the repressive organs.

## Video recording and processing

Both forms of action as described above can be documented on video and contextualized with additional content. The actions can thus be made accessible to an even broader public. In order to do this, it is important to find possible positions for filmmakers when choosing the location and to consider from what vantage point the videos and photos of both the action and the finished work will be taken. Consider the time of day and appropriate lighting conditions. Moving trains can create scenic photo opportunities in front of buildings or in lit stations. In addition, both the action and the result of the intervention can be filmed by drone. This makes the video more dynamic and allows insights into the urban environment of the action. Using the drone requires a good takeoff and landing spot.

The decision who is heard, seen, or amplified should never be centralized. Therefore, having the necessary tools and strategies to democratize public space is a necessity for those who seek to withstand authoritarian encroachment and the silencing of public life. This article seeks to supply some of such tools.

# HOW TO PAINT A TRAIN IN TRAFFIC

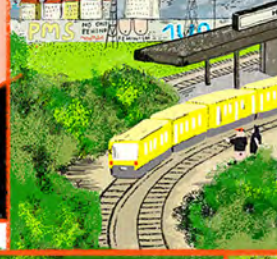
FRANKFURT AM MAIN



	PAINTING SPOT		HAUSEN		METRO STATION		BIKES PARKING SPOT		EXIT		BICYCLE UNDERWAY		TRAIN		
	PAINTING SPOT		30 SECONDS TO RUN FROM PAINTING SPOT TO BIKES PARKING SPOT.		ESCAPE WAYS.		CHECKERS		HIGHWAY						
	POLICE CAR		PARK		CITY		METRO LINES		POLICE ACCESS		MAIN RIVER		PAINTING SPOT		



**BEFORE THE ACTION**



RIDE YOUR BIKE AROUND THE CITY AND FIND A SPOT.

CHECK A MAP (OPEN STREET MAP FOR EXAMPLE)

CHECK THE PERFECT TIME FOR THE ACTION. LESS PEOPLE IS OFTEN TIMES BETTER.

CHECK THE PERFECT WEATHER.



CHECK OUT THE PLACE THAT YOU CHOSE



CHECK THE MOVEMENT OF YOUR OPPONENTS: POLICE PATROLS AND SECURITY.



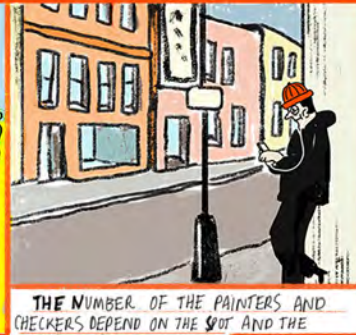
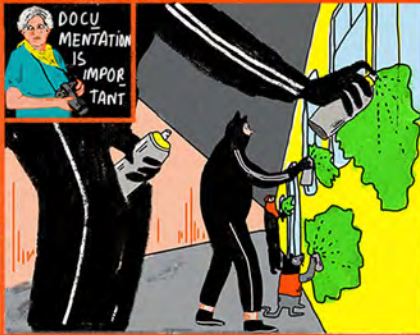
CHECK THE WAYS WHERE YOU CAN ESCAPE.



**HOW MANY PEOPLE?**



WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO? BUT WE RECOMMEND MINIMUM TWO PERSONS.



THE NUMBER OF THE PAINTERS AND CHECKERS DEPEND ON THE SPOT AND THE INTENDED RESULT

**BUT IF YOU WANT TO DO ALONE...**



YOU NEED TO KNOW THE SPOT AND THE SURROUNDING AREAS WELL.



CHOOSE A GOOD ESCAPE WAY WHERE NOBODY CAN FOLLOW YOU EASILY. KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN.

**MATERIALS**



CLEAN YOUR MATERIAL WITH GREASE SOLVENT



DON'T TOUCH ANYTHING WITHOUT GLOVES.

**ONE LIST ITEMS YOU COULD NEED.**



ANONYMOUS PHONES FOR THE CONTACT BETWEEN CHECKERS AND PAINTERS.



CHECKER



PAINTERS

**ALL TOGETHER FOR A BIG ACTION**



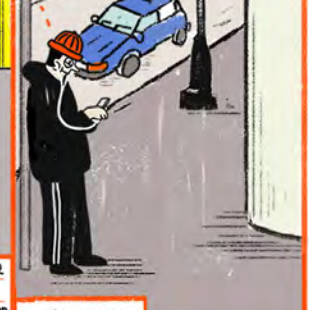
LONG DISTANCE PHOTOGRAPHER



SHORT DISTANCE PHOTOGRAPHER



PAINTERS AND INSIDE CHECKER WITH ANONYMOUS PHONE OR WALKIE-TALKIE



OUTSIDE CHECKER CONNECTED WITH THE PAINTERS.

INSIDE CHECKER RIDING IN THE TRAIN BEFOREHAND TO TELL IF THERE ARE ANY SECURITY TIES ON THE TRAIN

# THE RIGHT TO THE CITY AS ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN

## Places of despair, places of hope: the spatial dimension of political imagination

As many of the contributions to this volume show, political projects always have spatial dimensions (even if they are not always explicit). At the same time, space is a social construction, and therefore always political. Plantations, *haciendas*, and factories; prisons, schools, and hospitals; housing and public spaces; technology and digital tools; collective memory and narratives. All of these relate to the values and power relations that shape our societies. Whether around social control, oppression, and exploitation, or for supporting emancipation, mutual care, and wellbeing (*buen vivir*), the ways in which social activities are organized in and through material and symbolic spaces are relevant and have multiple implications. Space (including place and scale) is not a flat, empty surface where things happen, but an active component in making things possible. Space is not just something out there, but a product of social action and interactions.

Since time immemorial, Indigenous Peoples all over the world have practiced this tacit ethical-political knowledge based on the respect, care, and protection of all forms of life – human and more-than-human – that need physical and immaterial connections to exist and flourish.<sup>1</sup> Within the so-called Western tradition, many authors have discussed the relationships between society and space in dialectical terms, highlighting their mutual imbrication and permanent tension.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, space reflects and reinforces the social, economic, and cultural dynamics at play, including domination, conflict, and resistance. On the other hand, it opens countless possibilities for social transformation and collective sites for prefigurative imagination. For instance, housing and land policies, as well as the design and use of public space, infrastructure, and facilities can reproduce gender and racial inequality, socio-spatial fragmentation, alienation, and segregation; conversely, they can also bring about opportunities for alternative presents and futures, based on redistribution, equity, and radical justice.

Authoritarian and anti-authoritarian imaginaries and practices can therefore be reproduced, challenged, or transformed in real and virtual spaces. Based on such premises, and reflecting from the Latin American experience, this piece contributes some reflections about the relevance of conceiving spatial struggles – especially those for the right to the city – as anti-authoritarian and emancipatory struggles. As Natalie Koch argues, “cities can offer an

# CITY REFLECTIONS FROM LATIN AMERICA AND BEYOND

# TARIAN STRATEGY

Lorena Zárate

especially useful window in how authoritarian practices and spatialities cut across bodies, institutions, aspirations, and animosities”; in particular because “the relationship between urban space, place, and identity is key to understand how authoritarianism is both made and unmade”.<sup>3</sup> Scholars and activists have pointed out the peculiar and non-conventional nature of the right to the city, called upon not only to claim inclusion or access to what already exists but to radically transform it (city and society as one integrated, inseparable whole). More specifically, they have described this right as an opening and a commitment to profoundly questioning and overcoming the commodification of all spheres of life under capitalist relations, as well as the serious limitations of democracy under a Western-liberal approach. In other words, the city understood as a political, collective, and self-determined body, and not just as an assemblage of buildings.

More than 50 years in the making, the right to the city can be seen as a dynamic and expansive political device that connects narratives and advances practices for more just, democratic, and ecological neighbourhoods and territories. At its core are socio-spatial and pedagogical processes that challenge power relations and the distribution of resources at material, symbolic, and political levels. Originally defined as “a cry and a demand”,<sup>4</sup> social movements have promoted the right to the city as a shared vision of other “possible cities”<sup>5</sup> as well as the action-oriented agendas needed to achieve these goals. Its values and proposals resonate with those of a reinvigorated municipalist programme centred on the feminization of politics and the reconstitution of the commons. The right to the city is not a traditional right,<sup>6</sup> but a commitment to assume the responsibility in creating caring, anti-racist, and decolonial places where people can live with dignity and in peace.

The notes below are presented under three thematic vignettes, organized along flexible and overlapping temporal frames. The first one addresses the parallel trajectories of *urbanización popular* and democratization “from below” (1940s-1980s); the second one discusses the limitations and challenges of democratization “from above” through the imposition of a neoliberal agenda (1980s-2000s); and the third and final one proposes an open, forward-looking reflection on the relevance of a renewed right to the city and municipalist activism in a time of (post-)neoliberal authoritarianism (2000s-2020s and beyond). Each section closes with brief reflections on how these topics connect with some of the testimonies and artworks included in this volume.

## The right to the city in Latin America: urbanización popular as democratization from below

Latin America is a highly urbanized region. Eight out of ten people live in cities of diverse sizes and characteristics, including hundreds of millions in megacities and metropolitan areas. It can be said that cities here have been built by the people, many of them migrants from within and beyond the national borders, with women as the main driving force behind community mobilizing. Around an incipient industrialization process fuelled by the Second World War in Europe, in the period between the 1940s-1980s millions of *campesinas/os* (peasants) and rural inhabitants moved from the countryside to the cities in search of opportunities and the promise of better living conditions. Many arrived in overcrowded and precarious housing arrangements located in deteriorated buildings in city centres (*conventillos, vecindades, patios* – known as tenement homes in English). Many others had to occupy parcels of land in the peripheries and start building shelters, as there were no adequate housing policies in place to meet the growing demand.

Those *villas miserias, colonias populares, barrios jóvenes* (which are three of the many other terms used across the region) are today consolidated neighbourhoods visible in most Latin American big and medium cities; in many places, they represent between half and two thirds of the urbanized environment, achieved not only without the state but also despite the state. Those complex and difficult processes required efforts that went way beyond families and their close circles. Social organizing was crucial in guaranteeing a place to live. Access to land, introduction of services, and construction of facilities demanded both sustained mobilization from within the communities and a significant amount of support from other actors. University students and professors, unions leaders, professionals, and a wide range of activists, from political parties to faith-based institutions, engaged in decades-long processes with relevant political implications, which are still visible today.

In those decades, the inhabitants of self-built neighbourhoods were not only deprived of means to address their basic needs; they were violently displaced, tortured, and assassinated for vocalizing their political and social demands, and for daring to create their own alternatives. Young women and men – from poor communities, working, and middle-class backgrounds – were the main targets. While millions were living in inadequate conditions, massive investments were dedicated to building major urban infrastructures. Highways that cut through city centres, evicting hundreds of people and destroying livelihoods, became material and symbolic targets of the struggle against authoritarian rule. In the context of civic-military dictatorships affecting most of the continent, denouncing injustices and claiming rights was a challenging and dangerous endeavour that so many can painfully attest to. For many communities, claiming the right to be part of the physical urban setting was necessarily linked with the right to be considered full citizens participating in the decision-making processes affecting their lives and the places they live in.

One of the early explicit references to the right to the city in the region can be found in Bogotá, where the term was used to articulate widespread opposition to a highway project financed by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) as part of a city-wide urban plan. Massive social mobilization of thirty-two *barrios* and other popular organizations successfully opposed the initiative. The following excerpt issued in July 1973 by the *Llamado de Unidad de la Unión de los Comités Pro Defensa de los Barrios Orientales* (Call for Unity by the Union of the Committees in Defence of the Eastern Neighbourhoods) expresses their claims and proposals in a compelling manner:

“Some years ago, they expelled us with *La Violencia* [the civil war from 1948 to 1958] from the countryside, stealing our land. And now they want to chase us away from our *barríos* ... with violence, with decrees of expropriation and with the highway. They want to drive us out of the city with urban development plans: *a city that is being constructed by our labour* and which moves day and night thanks to our efforts. We don’t even have a *right to the city!* ... we demand that they let us live in the communities where we live ... that they ask us our opinions about what they want to do with us. And especially that the unnecessary and wasteful highway should not be built, because for us, it means expulsion, more poverty ...”<sup>7</sup>

The strategic use of the right to the city is already symptomatic of a deep understanding of the multi-layered struggle for redistribution of material and political power. The shared experience of resistance to guarantee the appropriation, use, and structuring of urban space became a key factor for political identities and common agendas. For a long time now, the *barrio* (neighbourhood) has been a crucial arena not just for claiming political and social rights but also for experimenting with alternative power relations and spatial arrangements. *Poder popular* (people’s power) can be seen as the nickname of a multitude of efforts to build territories of autonomy and horizontality, based on non-hierarchical, radically democratic, anti-authoritarian, and anti-capitalist ways of living. As such, together with factories and universities, those spaces were visible targets of the repressive state apparatus.

The contemporary global campaign to rename city streets in honour of Marielle Franco (1979–2018) is a powerful testimony of the continued relevance of territorial struggles against invisibilization, oppression, and violence. Self-identified as a Black lesbian woman from the periphery, Marielle was a prominent activist from the Rio de Janeiro’s *favelas*. As an elected representative in the local council, she denounced the growing militarization and marginalization of poor communities. She was assassinated in public in March 2018. As described by the authors of the piece included in this volume (see page 102), the grassroots initiative to remember her legacy through re-appropriating city space represents “[a]n urban poetic gesture, that at the same time reclaims the right to the city and the right to memory”.

### **The imposition of the neoliberal agenda: democratization from above and the commodification of life**

Across the region, the 1980s and 1990s saw the fading away of dictatorships and the (re)installation of formal procedures associated with liberal democracy, such as the separation of government branches, periodic elections, and other civic and political rights, including organization, assembly, and participation. Intrinsically limited, particularly for those traditionally marginalized and oppressed, these mechanisms were further hindered by a weakened institutional framework (with explicit tensions in relation to military and paramilitary forces) as well as the excessive influence of multilateral agencies in charge of the drastic and violent imposition of the neoliberal agenda. So-called structural adjustment policies brought about the accelerated privatization of basic infrastructure and services, including water, energy, and communication services, education and health care, public

spaces, as well as banks and pension funds, to mention only the most significant. In many countries, economic instability, lack of adequate employment, and rising prices translated into massive impoverishment and precarization of living conditions for the majority of the population. Activists and scholars affirm that cities were transformed in “institutional laboratories for a variety of neoliberal policy experiments”, by way of promoting public-private partnerships, increasing financialization, “and state repression associated with new strategies of private appropriation of space”.<sup>8</sup>

Urban and housing policies during this period present contrasting features as well. In general terms, a noticeable shift in the approach to self-built neighbourhoods brought a focus on “improvement” programmes that provided resources for community infrastructure and, to a lesser extent, for granting security of tenure. Although prominently top-down in its elaboration and implementation, some of these initiatives included space for interesting exercises of participatory planning and even participatory budgeting. A new generation of community organizations, NGOs, and academics engaged in supporting these processes of *autogestión* (self-management) and political pedagogy, was actively involved in generating capacity-building and nurturing trans-local, regional, and international networks and alliances of learning, solidarity, and advocacy. Paired with decentralization and devolution dynamics, the possibility of voting for local authorities translated into progressive municipal governments in many cities across the region, which included numerous urban social movements leaders as new public officials at local and national governments, as well as in legislative positions.

Occurring in parallel, but on an evidently contradictory note, housing policies were overall marked by a clear neoliberal character. Directly inspired by the so-called “Chilean model” developed during the Pinochet regime, and following the strict dictates and formulas put forward by the World Bank,<sup>9</sup> housing provision was almost totally transferred to the private sector, accompanied by generous public subsidies and the *ad hoc* modification of legal and financial frameworks to facilitate their functioning and maximize their profits. A visible result of these policies can be seen in the experience of small single family homes mushroomed in the far peripheries of cities, where very poor or inexistent infrastructure and services, as well as lacks in employment and cultural opportunities, deeply affected community cohesion and social mobilizing, notably weakening participation in democratic processes too. Massive new housing programmes since then have focused on individual property ownership as the only option, while at the same time collective forms of organizing and claiming rights were actively obstructed and undermined. In clear opposition with the tendencies of the previous decades, cooperatives and other associative arrangements were not only not supported but made practically inviable by forcing them to comply with the rules designed by and for profit making companies.

At the turn of the millennium, the “pink tide” would bring some hope to the possibility of change in several Latin American countries. Sustained popular uprisings forced neoliberal presidents to step down, launching constitutional processes in Bolivia (2007) and Ecuador (2008) to reclaim not only alternating party politics and governments but a profound reformulation of the social contract. Indigenous peoples’ principles and values such as *buen vivir* and the notion of plurinationality were integrated into the republican and modernist framework<sup>10</sup> and incorporated as ethical-political goal for policy-making. At the same time, the societies embarked on bold (even if limited) exercises of reconfiguring the public sector, promoting commoning and re-nationalization processes paired with social control and direct collective management.

Despite those promising transformations, housing and urban policies maintained a distinctive neoliberal orientation and a highly centralized, technocratic character. Urban sprawl became the norm, with widespread negative repercussions at physical, economic, and administrative levels. Medium-size cities and metropolitan areas grew on average two- or threefold in relation to the population, destroying environmentally relevant resources including forests and farming lands, while at the same time adding enormous operational strains to under-resourced small and rural towns, many of them characterized by Indigenous Peoples' and *campesinas/os* long-standing presence. Housing was seen only as a product, a crucial commodity to reactivate the economies affected by cyclical crises, instead of as a right, a process, and an act of inhabiting.

The social impacts, which are still visible, were catastrophic. Houses in their millions remain empty as people found it impossible to sustain a livelihood in such ill-designed, underserved, and isolated residential settings. Lack of adequate services, facilities, and opportunities made for divided families, with wage-earning parents renting an expensive room somewhere downtown during the week while having to pay off a decades-long mortgage for houses with serious structural issues (including shrinking soils and breaking walls) after only few years of being built. In the meantime, single mothers, children, teenagers, and grandparents are locked in more or less gated poor communities, surrounded by ghost towns under very precarious and ever-deteriorating conditions. Crime-related activities, insecurity, and violence are permanent concerns in neighbourhoods with little social cohesion, which are practically forgotten by public institutions. In many places, violent gangs and parapolice private groups control local residents and small businesses through continuous threat and extortion.

For decades now, several authors have been alerting us to the risks of "urbanization without cities".<sup>11</sup> Framed as a profit-making and electoral strategy, urban sprawl has not been accompanied by an enhancement of city-living. On the contrary, contemporary urbanization has been presented as a major threat to city and countryside alike, since it destroys live-sustaining resources and traditional livelihoods, while at the same time reducing inhabitants to mere taxpayers or constituencies without much individual or collective political agency. Housing monocultures can be seen as a metaphor of the imposition of a homogenizing and extractivist regime. Characterized by a dangerous mixture of pro-business management and the continuity of authoritarian narratives and practices, the (re)nascent democracies in Latin America made evident their multiple contractions and limitations.

Collective counter-cartographies have long been a powerful tool to understand and denounce what is going on in rural and urban communities across the region, while at the same time providing material and symbolic space for imagining emancipatory alternatives. Visualizing everyday struggles against land grabbing, displacement and harassment, they are able to strengthen resistance and crystallize aspirations for more egalitarian and peaceful futures. As shown in the case from the Philippines included in this book (page 80), as well as dozens of examples from around the world gathered in *This is Not an Atlas*,<sup>12</sup> participatory grassroots mapping represents an effective way to reclaim and democratize power relations both in knowledge and space.

**Right to the city and new municipalism as key tools  
to build anti-authoritarian, feminist, and decolonial futures**

From the squares and neighbourhoods of cities in Latin America and beyond, last decades have seen multiple social movements confronting authoritarian rule, neoliberal urbanization, and the commodification of all aspects of life – as well as experimenting with more just, democratic, healthy, and sustainable paradigms for organizing our societies. Linking local and global struggles, the several editions of the World Social Forum that started in the early 2000s were crucial arenas for peer-learning and alliance-building, condensing into forward looking collective documents such as the World Charter for the Right to the City, that have become highly influential.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, and converging on their opposition to austerity measures imposed in the context of the 2007-2008 crisis, the Arab Spring, Occupy, Indignad@s, and hundreds of similar mobilizations brought housing and land rights, public spaces, and radical democracy to the centre of shared agendas. An expanded conception of citizenship – not linked with nationality but with place of residence and access to rights – and participatory practices grounded on autonomy and self-government, are today key political proposals of social movements across regions towards different institutional regimes.

Building on these powerful streams and its own historic roots, a renewed municipalist movement has showed some concrete possibilities for recreating the local state, away from corporate mantras based on competitiveness, privatization, and non-democratic decision-making processes.<sup>14</sup> By explicitly committing to the feminization of politics, during the past decade newly formed citizens' independent parties and progressive platforms in local governments have been openly challenging conventional, hierarchical, and masculine leadership models. In this context, radicalizing democracy gains a new meaning: it does not just address gender inequality and women's institutional under-representation, but it also implements policies that dismantle patriarchy and focus on everyday life and well-being for all. Affective politics and an ethics of care are then at the centre of narratives and practices in a wide range of cities and territories that are being proclaimed as "refuges" or "sanctuaries" to welcome migrants and refugees; which "rebel" against national and international policies that seek to impose austerity agendas and greater social injustice; or are "fearless" in challenging transnational corporate power and all forms of violence. Although not always explicit, an underlying notion of the commons can certainly be detected in most of these transformative urban agendas. The re-municipalization of services and public-community partnerships are proving to be fundamental tools for advancing those goals.

The global pandemic made painfully clear all that is wrong in our increasingly segregated, unjust, and environmentally unsustainable societies; by doing so, it has also signalled the priorities and the ways forward. First and foremost, it suddenly and simultaneously focused our attention on the vulnerability and interdependence of life (again, something that Indigenous Peoples all over the world have known for millennia); the centrality of care and essential workers, the majority of them women and many of them migrants or from racialized groups; and the critical role of neighbourhood cohesion and the proximity of services essential to social reproduction (something a multitude of feminist academics and activists have been pointing out for decades). The sanitary crisis, and the massive social and economic impacts that it carried, made visible and exacerbated pre-existing and longstanding gendered, racial, and class-



based inequalities that have exponentially increased in recent years – a consequence of neoliberal policies, the privatization of public infrastructures and services, unpaid and underpaid care work, and the greedy commodification of the commons.

Public debates on social media and countless webinars have addressed the urgent need to rethink the way we organize cities and territories, and the way we design economic activities and set up decision-making processes at different scales, with cooperation and solidarity as key words in framing claims and proposals arising from a wide range of actors. Local governments and communities were once again the first responders, although often lacking adequate resources and in many cases confronting reluctant – and even authoritarian – national authorities. Even with limited budgets, several local and regional actors took rapid and bold measures to address the emergency.<sup>15</sup> By mobilizing a wide network of in-kind support and de-commodifying access to essential goods and services, they sought to guarantee housing, water, food, and electricity. Rent moratoriums on public housing, lifted fees, and an increase in the provision of food banks were combined with pop-up clinics and remote healthcare services. Repurposing buildings, land, and public space became a critical tool. Empty housing and hotel rooms, conference centres, and other community facilities were adapted to provide shelter for homeless people, women suffering domestic violence, and healthcare workers in need of isolation. Empty streets were rapidly being transformed into wider lines for bikers and pedestrians.

The initiatives taken to confront the crisis were certainly not enough, but they expanded collective imagination and showed that rapid transformations are indeed possible. At the same time, they made clear that while the role of the public sector becomes critical, with it also comes the renewed risks of bureaucratic centralization, non-democratic political agendas, and crony capitalism. In the context of growing ecological cataclysm and violent social polarization fuelled by algorithmic, post-neoliberal authoritarianism and transnational corporate capture, grounded radical imaginations are needed more than ever. Together with long-standing Indigenous *cosmovisiones* like the *buen vivir* and contemporary eco-feminist, anti-racist, and decolonial transformative agendas, the spreading of right to the city and new municipalist practices and narratives might help us create the futures we need around an ethics of redistribution, solidarity, and care.

Across the region, women's, LGBTQIA+, Black and Indigenous movements reclaim bodies, monuments, and public spaces as interconnected sites for political struggle. Massive feminist protests in Mexico City, Santiago de Chile, and elsewhere<sup>16</sup> continue to unmask and challenge colonial and patriarchal discourses, objects and institutions through collective rebellion and mutual care. Everyday violence, discrimination, and oppression are made visible as social phenomena that require naming and shaming of the concrete perpetrators, from family members and neighbours, to private companies, the police and the state. Cities are once again transformed into megaphones, hugs and songs that manifest our anti-authoritarian indignation and hope.

Political imagination takes shape in and through material and symbolic spaces. A poem on the wall reminds us that we have the right – and the commitment – to transform our minds and territories into places of emancipation. Confronting non-democratic and speculative forces, whether at the main square or in the middle of the forest, our collective voice reveals that we are not afraid. We are in this together.





# Mapping From the Ground U

**A**nti-authoritarianism in the context of the Philippines encompasses anti-fascist, anti-imperialist, and anti-feudal positions. We recognize that authoritarian rule enforces and perpetuates the semi-colonial and semi-feudal conditions in our socio-spatial realities.

What do we count as being authoritarian? First of all, the state, which historically has been a puppet of imperialist nations such as the USA; multi-national corporations and the landed bureaucratic capitalists, who divide and control large swaths of land through neoliberal policies; and state security forces, who maintain the state's fascist grip as it serves corporate agendas. Beyond individual names and faces, what is important is the systems of power which allow them to dominate the majority. Through authoritarian rule, the Philippines has been systematically over-exploited. Its resources have been plundered and its people are subject to the hegemony of neoliberal systems. In one way or another, authoritarian rule has shaped our pasts, our presents, and our possible futures. Likewise, these systems dominate the spaces we inhabit as well as the constitutional democratic rights we are all entitled to.

## Attempts at insurgence

I am a visual artist based in the Philippines. My practice deals with notions of power and ways in which these are reproduced through objects and institutions. As maps have been used to exercise power and produce spaces of domination, I have turned to counter-mapping as a gesture of resistance. As Edward Said reminds us: "in the history of colonial invasion, maps are always first drawn by the victors, since maps are instruments of conquest. Geography is therefore the art of war but can also be the art of resistance if there is a counter-map and a counter-strategy."<sup>1</sup>

The process of counter-mapping is transformative, as it urges the author(s) to reconfigure their positionalities in relation to oppressive power structures. Taking reference from medieval tapestries that depict feudal territories, my practice prompts an attempt at insurgence by producing "anti-feudal" textile maps. The works confront the material cultures of authoritarian rule that both enables and justifies land grabbing and forced displacement of landworking and indigenous communities. The production of these artworks is grounded in collaboration, as I work with embroiderer Henry Caceres as well as other activist-researchers.<sup>2</sup> Our work is informed by community narratives and peoples' organizations. Connecting the

# Anti-Authoritarian Cartography in the Semi-Colony

spatial realities and lived experiences to the dominant systems of neoliberal globalization, we seek to formulate new visualizations that are based on anti-authoritarian movements advocating for social justice and liberation.

This text outlines the framework of my practice in mapping out the conditions and spaces of inequality and struggle while building solidarities with marginalized populations. Although much of my work circulates within networks of contemporary art and academic discourse, I continue to ground my methods on “militant research” and solidarity work. Manoeuvring within the contradictions of these distinct worlds becomes a perpetual struggle. Artistic platforms are dominated by the ruling elite who are either unsympathetic or, in one way or another, linked to oppressive power networks (land-grabbing families, union-busting clans, dictator’s cronies, and the like). Thus, public discourse on progressive cultural work is marginalized, giving way to market-oriented art practices

based on speculative trends. Lest we forget, artists, just like landless farmers and contractual workers, are trapped in a cycle of precarious working conditions. Although our main clientele comes from the upper classes of society, we are nowhere near as comfortable or safe as those who can afford our work. Art is not – and should not – be isolated from the rest of society. For as long as the common idea of art is encapsulated in the confines of galleries and institutions,

inaccessible and alienated from the masses and unresponsive to the conditions of society, it is doomed to remain a futile hobby for the rich, a false absolution against unrelenting accumulation by dispossession. I recognize that the objects I produce are, in a way, by-products to my militant position and the liberatory natures of anti-authoritarian action.

## Steps for making a counter-map

**Orient.** Define the political line. Constantly reassess your positionalities and recognize that your job is to recentre your perspective from an individual to a member of a society. Understand the systematic and structural frameworks of peoples’ struggle. Whose perspectives need to be heard? How are our experiences tied to dominant geopolitical conditions and policies? In the case of the Philippines, we place our solidarities with farmers, indigenous minorities, workers, and the urban poor.

**Locate.** What do we need to talk about and visualize? What do we need to (counter)map? Identify socio-spatial issues which alienate the masses. Where are farmers landless? Where are indigenous minorities displaced? Where is there no access to resources? Where are workers exploited? Beyond these questions, we turn to groups that work toward shared goals of social justice. We turn to critical sources that present objective truths and relate them to systemic problems. We echo the calls and campaigns of people fighting for land, life, and justice.

**Navigate.** Expose and oppose policies that put profit over people. Identify the historical lines of anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, and anti-authoritarian resistance. Align your work with movements based on social justice and human rights. By remembering the plights of the masses from centuries ago, we will better understand the struggles of the masses today. Revolutionary paths are carved from gestures of freedom and justice. Guided by these principles, we must aim to uncover what authoritative maps have historically hidden: the people and their/our struggle.

**Synthesize.** Centre all the stories, all the information, all the ideas into a coherent composition that will manifest into the materiality of your work. Ground multi-epistemic narratives in relation to the delineated borders drawn by oppressive centralized bodies. Expose inconsistencies of corporate and neo-colonial boundaries with collective aspirations based on equity and justice.

**Validate.** Subject your practice to deep scrutiny by asking how the people need and want to be represented – and how you can or cannot help. Address the contradictions of your practice and the platforms you take on. The only validation you need is the validation of the masses. In the Philippines there is a saying: “Mula sa masa tungo sa masa” – “Of the masses, for the masses”.

**Activate.** Counter-mapping as well as socially engaged artistic practices should sustain solidarities with marginalized populations. Solidarity is a state of being that is expressed through work and action. Our work does not end with formulating counter-narratives. As information is dynamic, our work can act as an extension of memory, repository of evidence, articulation of actions, or provocation to enlightenment.

## Conclusion

This practice is an attempt at breaking the imperialist matrix of power and the legacies of colonialism. The map, a static image which serves as a historical account, represents dominant perceptions of space and time. As we question the authorship and agendas of maps imposed upon us, we internalize the systems of control that bind and alienate us. While we identify frameworks of power that authoritarian rule is built on, we manoeuvre through conditions that normalize oppression. Maps are themselves discursive instruments to exercise authority. When we make maps against oppressive systems, not only do we foreground collective resistance, we contribute to realizing just and equitable futures. Anti-authoritarian mapping guides us in finding ourselves within the struggles of the masses where we realize that the ground is, in fact, a place of authority. As we build solidarities with disenfranchised populations on the ground, we collectively map out the world based on social justice and human rights.

## Illustrations

All embroidery work done in collaboration with Henry Caceres.

p. 231: “Land Which Outlives”, 2021; A tapestry of Cordillera region. Web based links of a selection of related articles and other material are printed as QR codes and sewn into the composition.

p. 232: “Valley of Dispossession”, 2021; Depicting Central Luzon region in the Philippines, plotting areas of development aggression, militarization and largest landholdings.

p. 233: “Both Poles Serve You”, 2021; A google-translated “eat the rich” proclamation looms over an inverted world map littered with symbols of colonial violence and resource extraction.

## Endnotes

- 1 Edward Said, “Facts, facts, and more facts”, *Peace and Its Discontents: Essays on Palestine in the Middle East Peace Process*, Vintage: New York, 1996.
- 2 The collective CountermappingPH was established in 2020 to consolidate various counter-mapping initiatives across the archipelago. See their contribution: Counter-Cartographies of Resistance, p.80.

KABUNIAN EYE LUMAUIG EYE UMACAYONG EYE MAH-NONGAN EYE WIGAN

Indigenous Resistance to Imperialist Plunder in the **GRAN CORDILLERA**



You ask if we own the land and mock us saying 'Where is your title?' We ask the meaning of your words you answer with taunting arrogance, 'Where is the document to prove that you own the land?' Titles? Documents? Proof of ownership. Such arrogance to speak of owning the land when we instead are owned by it. How can you own that which will outlive you? Only the race owns the land because the race lives on forever. -Macliing Dulag

LIBERATION + SELF-DETERMINATION



LUPANG NINUNO



DEPENSAHAN IPAOLABAN



Resist militarization, foreign mining and large dams!



- LEGEND**
- Administrative region (est. 1998)
  - Provincial boundaries
  - River system
  - Military presence
  - Aggressive development projects (energy/infrastructure)
  - Large scale mining tenements

INDIGENOUS CULTURE IS ROOTED IN THE STRUGGLE FOR LAND

CIAN XHENRIOUS 2021/22



Peasant and Indigenous  
Struggles in  
**CENTRAL LUZON**  
Philippines

AGRICULTURAL REVOLUTION  
IS JUSTICE!

LAND  
TO THE  
TILLERS!

You from my race, this is what you should do for all time: you should love one another, help and care for each other. Respect the land. Plant, tend and nurture it. Treat it as community.  
- Apo Alipon

**LEGEND**

- Administrative region
- Provincial boundaries
- River Systems
- Military presence
- Aggressive development projects (energy/mixed-use)
- Mining tenements
- Largest landholdings amidst peasant landlessness
- Chinese landgrabs

CHRISTIANUS  
2008.11.11





DIVES IN CIBUM

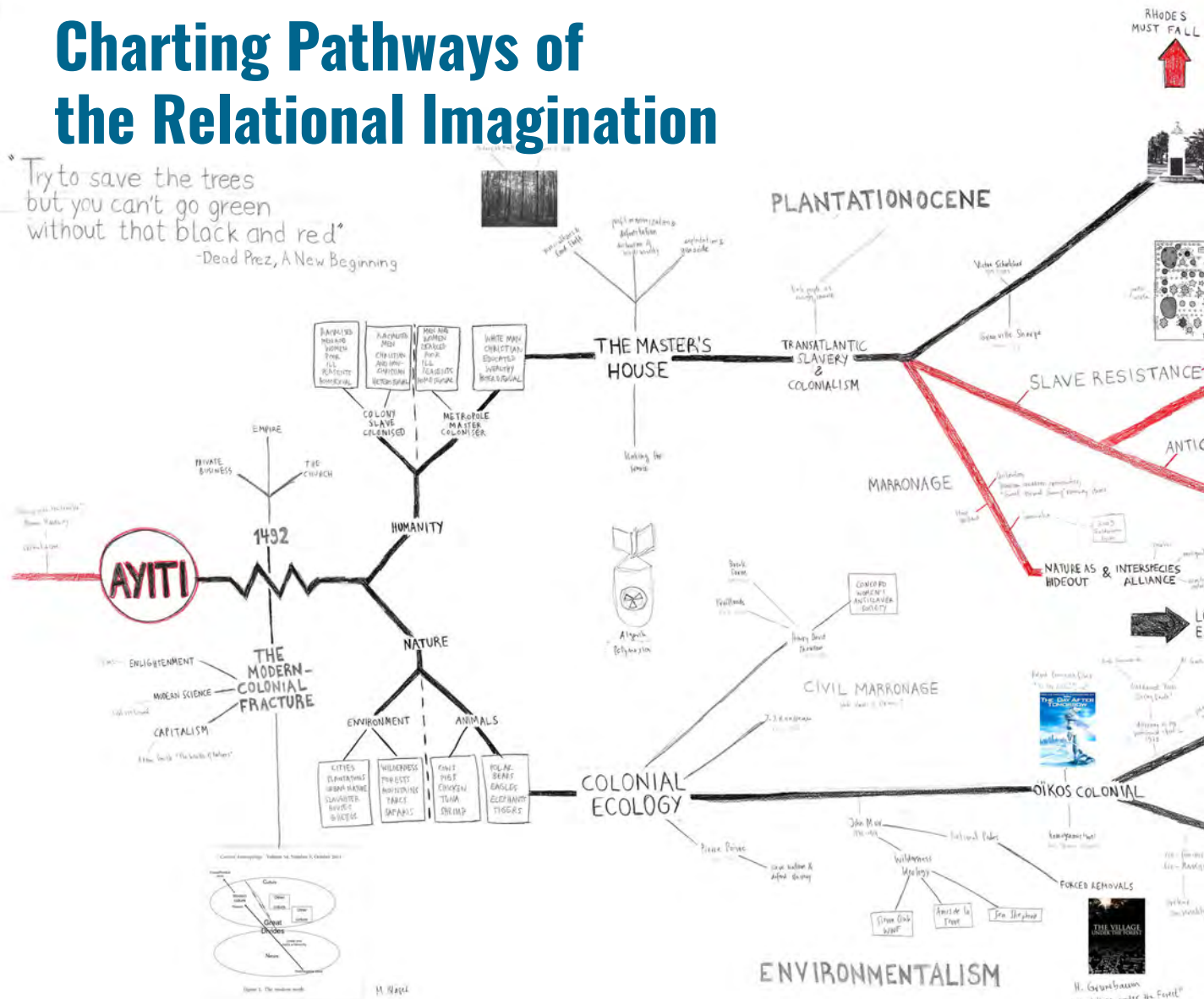
ET CUM IMPERII AMPLIFICANDI

DIAN-HENRIK  
2021

# Mapping Decolonial Bo

## Charting Pathways of the Relational Imagination

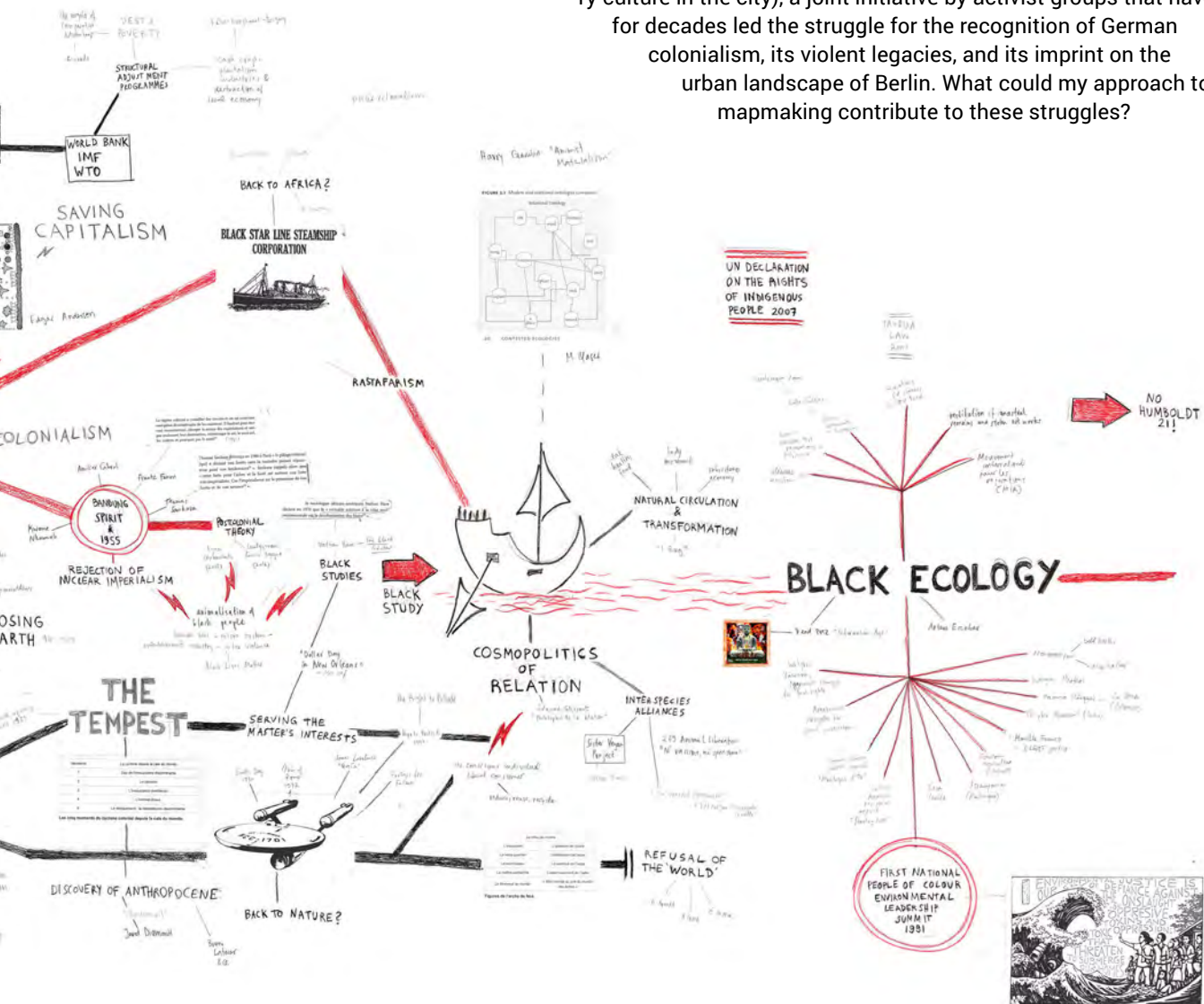
"Try to save the trees but you can't go green without that black and red"  
 -Dead Prez, A New Beginning



# erlin

Moses März

My interest in mapmaking emerged out of collective editorial work at the *Chimurenga Chronic* – a Pan-African literary magazine based in Cape Town, South Africa. I joined the *Chronic's* editorial team in 2014 as preparations for an issue called “New Cartographies” were ongoing. The issue interrogated the role of cartography as a tool of imperialism and asked what kinds of realities and imaginaries would be rendered visible in maps drawn from an African perspective. In the following years, our cartographic work took on increasingly experimental forms in a series of projects dedicated to exchange and circulation across continental Africa, the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean, and the Atlantic.<sup>1</sup> In 2021, I decided to apply this artistic research method to the city of Berlin, sparked by a call for applications by *Dekoloniale – Erinnerungskultur in der Stadt* (The decolonial – memory culture in the city), a joint initiative by activist groups that have for decades led the struggle for the recognition of German colonialism, its violent legacies, and its imprint on the urban landscape of Berlin. What could my approach to mapmaking contribute to these struggles?



# ANTICOLONIALISM

Le régime colonial sous peine de catastrophe de les maintenir. Il faudrait peut-être tout recommencer, changer la nature des exportations et non pas seulement leur destination, réinterroger le sol, le sous-sol, les rivières et pourquoi pas le soleil? (1961)

Thomas Sankara dénonça en 1986 à Paris [qui] a décimé nos forêts sans la moindre précaution pour nos lendemains<sup>61</sup>. Sankara déclara : « cette lutte pour l'arbre et la forêt est une lutte anti-impérialiste. Car l'impérialisme défriche nos forêts et de nos savanes<sup>62</sup> ».



## POSTCOLONIAL THEORY

Dipesh Chakrabarty (2012)  
Saul Bellow (2012)

## REJECTION OF NUCLEAR IMPERIALISM

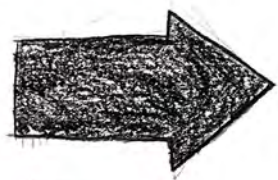
## & INTERSPECIES ALLIANCE

smaker / mosquitos  
insects destroy monocultures

animalisation of black people

human zoos - prison system  
entertainment industry - police violence

Black Lives Matter



## LOSING EARTH 1978-1989

Kate Perrence  
Nathaniel Rich "Losing Earth"  
Al Gore

discovery of the greenhouse effect in 1978

political opening until 1989

# THE TEMPEST

Moments	Le cyclone depuis la cale du monde
1	Cap de l'insouciance discriminante
2	Le calvaire
3	L'insouciance maintenue
4	L'inferral chaos
5	Le dénouement : la redistribution discriminante

Les cinq moments du cyclone colonial depuis la cale du monde.

Earth Day - 1970



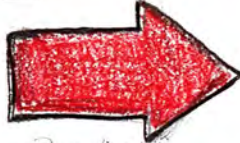
ONIAL

Paris « le pillage colonial  
 oindre pensée répara-  
 rara rappela alors que  
 est surtout une lutte  
 est le pyromane de nos

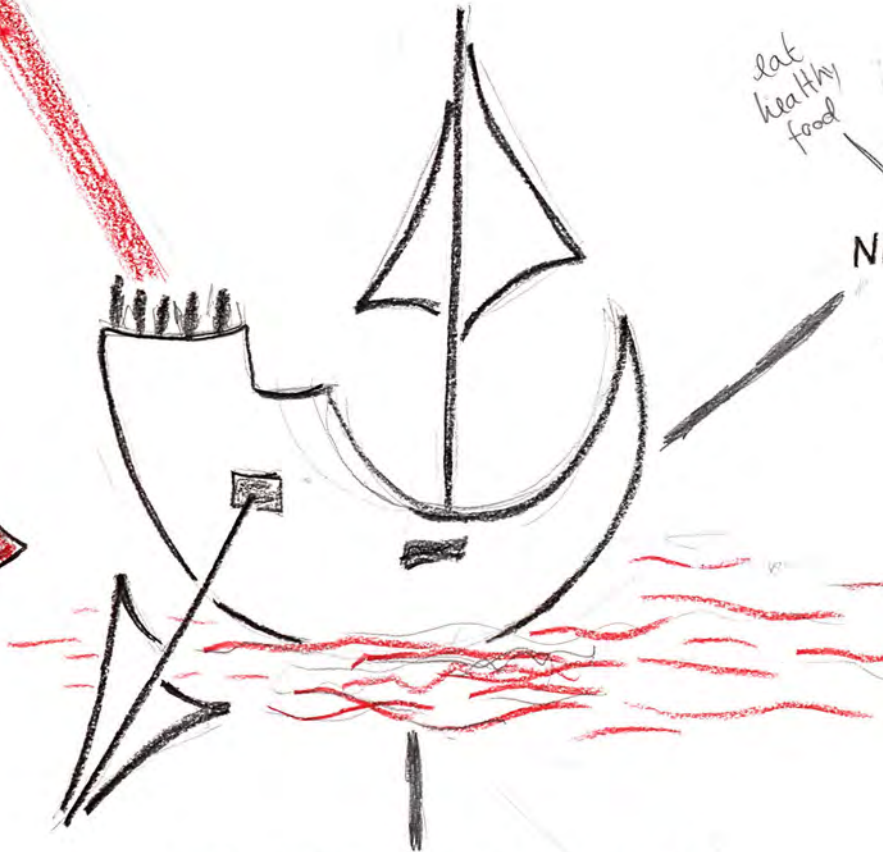
le sociologue africain-américain Nathan Hare  
 déclare en 1970 que la « véritable solution à la crise envi-  
 ronnementale est la décolonisation des Noirs ».

Nathan Hare — The Black  
 Scholar

**BLACK  
 STUDIES**



**BLACK  
 STUDY**



**COSMOPOLITICS  
 OF  
 RELATION**

"Dollar Day  
 in New Orleans"  
 — Mor Def

The Right to Pollute

Édouard Glissant  
 "Philosophie de la Relation"

**SERVING THE  
 MASTER'S INTERESTS**

Kyoto Protocol  
 1997

Sister Vegan  
 Project

James Lovelock  
 "Gaia"

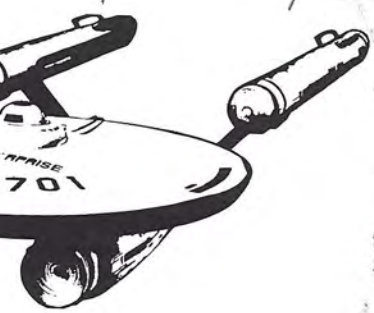
the conscious individual  
 liberal consumer

Breze Harper

Fraturdays for  
 Future

reduce, reuse, recycle

(Club of  
 Rome  
 1972)



Le refus du monde	
L'insouciant	L'abandon de l'autre
Le xéno-guerrier	L'élimination de l'autre
Le sacrificateur	Le sacrifice de l'autre

## Decolonial cartography

A critical focus on official colonialism risks confining the view to an isolated historical era, a legalistic understanding of colonial violence, and a nationalist framework – as shown by the 2016-2017 exhibition on German colonialism in the Deutsches Historisches Museum. A decolonial perspective identifies coloniality, understood as the underlying logic of all Western modern/colonial imperialisms, as the root problem from which specific global and local crisis emerge as symptoms. Racism, capitalism, sexism, and environmental destruction are those most widely discussed by decolonial scholars. In that sense, it forces us to engage with the ontological and epistemological basis of the various kinds of authoritarian traditions we encounter. As a result, the narrow view of political domination, which conventionally opposes regimes from the authoritarian to the liberal democratic, has to be expanded to consider cultural and economic, as well as local-institutional and global-geopolitical forms of domination. In addition to this crucial work of analysis, the term decolonial evokes a commitment to outline concrete proposals towards more egalitarian, less exclusionary, or non-authoritarian ways of seeing and being in the world.

In my Berlin maps I try to replace a segregational and dehumanising worldview with a relational methodology inspired by non-Western animist ontologies that consider living entities to be constituted by the relations that bind them to other entities in a rhizomatic network. In practical terms, this means combining elements from the arts, sciences, and storytelling and exploring alternatives to dominant conceptions of linear time, flat space, and the autonomous individual subject as advocated by the Enlightenment. With regards to their contribution to anti-authoritarian counterstrategies, these decolonial maps are attentive to the concrete alliances and imaginary common-grounds that put different decolonial struggles in relation with one another. For the Caribbean philosopher and poet Édouard Glis-

sant, the relational imagination is marked by a sensibility and respect for all the differences as they exist in the world. He opposes this stance to the “enemies of the living”, who are committed to homogeneity and are driven by fears of the indomitable forces of creolisation.<sup>2</sup> How the conflict between these two forces plays out in and around the specific locality of Berlin is what my decolonial maps seek to chart.

## Relating Black Ecology to the restitution of stolen artworks

Looking at the connections between two of these maps, “Black Ecology” and “Restitution”, serves to illustrate this approach. “Restitution” is largely based on Bénédicte Savoy’s account in “Afrikas Kampf um seine Kunst – Geschichte einer postkolonialen Niederlage” (Africa’s Fight for its Art – History of a Postcolonial Defeat<sup>3</sup>), which traces the transnational history of initiatives calling for the restitution of stolen art works from a German perspective. It responds to a widely discussed topic in Berlin in the lead-up to the opening of the newly built Humboldt Forum, a museum for “non-European” art in the neo-imperial tradition of the British Museum in London and the Quai Branly in Paris. “Black Ecology” draws on Malcolm Ferdinand’s book “Une écologie décoloniale – Penser l’écologie depuis le monde caribéen” (Decolonial Ecology – Thinking from the Caribbean World<sup>2</sup>), which sets out from a critique of the division between antiracist struggles and white environmentalism from a Caribbean perspective. At first sight, the two accounts are dedicated to two very distant struggles and geographies. A closer reading of the two texts and a shift in perspective accorded by a decolonial cartographic perspective nevertheless reveals important connections between them.

“Restitution” shows that requests for the return of illicitly acquired art works is not at all a new phenomenon. It began more than 60 years ago. The map traces the conflict between cultural,

political, and institutional actors from the Global South on the right side in red, and an alliance of European museum directors on the left in black. It conjures up an image of a never-ending dispute for human dignity in which the rejected requests by European institutions function like a missile defence system. Despite the continually shifting technical explanations used by the museums and their political partners, in the end the right of the stronger prevails. The Humboldt Forum opened its doors to the public in 2021. While mapping the structure of Savoy's account, I was wondering whether this story is really just about stolen art works and museums? And was it really a case of "postcolonial failure" as the subtitle of the book suggests? Looking at this struggle from a bit of distance, outside the field of museology and specific policy debates, an array of struggles appears to be related to this issue. In German (post)colonial contexts alone, for example, one has to take into account the struggles for the repatriation of ancestral remains, the call for reparations for the 1904 genocide of the Nama and Herero, and movements for the restitution of the land in Namibia. At the basis of all this issues lies the same power asymmetry and disavowal of African human dignity. Zooming further out, onto a global scale, a similar dynamic could be detected in the structural exploitation of African natural resources for the sake of economies in the Global North, as sanctioned by international financial organisations. As the bottom right corner of the map indicates, a series of maps on these struggles would take on a similar shape. By limiting our attention to any one of them, we might allow the "enemies of the living" to turn a singular issue into a sort of decoy for other forms of neocolonial oppressions to continue unperturbed. This suggests that an effective anti-authoritarian strategy that challenges coloniality at its root might have to develop by bringing these struggles together.

The genealogy of ideas and movements mapped by "Black Ecology" begins more than 500 years ago, in 1492. It approaches contemporary envi-

ronmental issues from the modernist division of the world into humans, non-humans, and the natural realm. For Ferdinand, an awareness of this fundamental rupture is necessary to identify the division between exploitable nature and an exclusionary vision of the human at the foundation of a global economic system, which he calls the Plantationocene. According to Ferdinand, white environmentalism has traditionally focussed on saving the environment or specific animals, while ignoring issues of social justice emerging from genocide of indigenous people, slavery, and colonialism. The map shows the forces resisting these two traditions in red. It traces its history from creole gardens set up by slaves – characterised by their biodiversity in contrast to the plantation's promotion of monocultures – via the rejection of nuclear imperialism at the Afro-Asian Bandung Conference (1955), and more recent articulations of Black Study, towards what Ferdinand calls a "cosmopolitics of relation" that deliberately reconciles the preservation of inter- and non-human relations.

## Relocating Berlin in the history of Black transnationalism

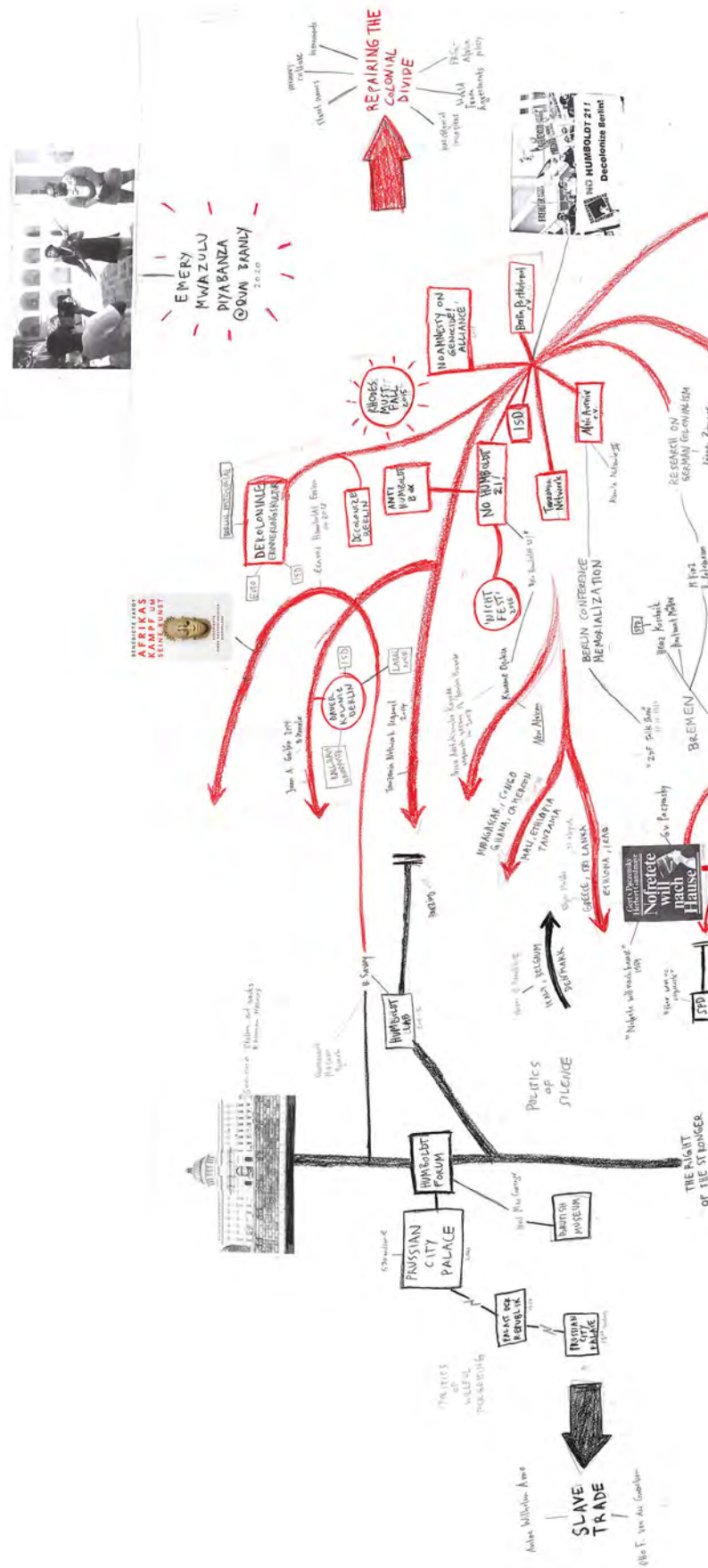
From Ferdinand's perspective, the restitution of stolen art is one of the key areas where bridges across the modern human/nature divide can be built. This requires a radical shift away from a modernist worldview, which considers the works of art in question as inanimate private property, towards a respect for animist epistemologies that consider them to be endowed with a "living force" that troubles the subject/object divide. Framed in this longer history, the struggle for restitution should not be narrowly perceived as having been in vain, but forces us to acknowledge the utopian political potentials of this failure. The red arrow in the top right corner of the map indicates that the "Restitution" map can be seen as a moment in this much larger struggle, one that weaves Berlin and the activism around the Humboldt Forum into a more than 500-year-old

global history of Black transnationalism. In contrast to its self-perceived centrality, Berlin occupies a peripheral position in this history of the world, whose hubs have moved from Kingston to Paris, from Accra to Dar es Salaam, or from Delhi to Havana across the centuries.

Setting these two maps in relation with each other challenges a narrow, nationalist, historical perspective, as well as challenging the engrained opposition between liberal democratic and authoritarian regimes. It reveals how institutions in liberal democratic countries, such as Germany, employ authoritarian strategies that exclude, exploit, or oppress “others” – i.e. those who find themselves on the wrong side of the modern/colonial divide – in order to maintain capitalist, racist, and patriarchic structures. Detecting this larger authoritarian structure and the diverse alliance of forces resisting it requires some distance, as well as a trans-disciplinary perspective for which maps are useful tools.

### Endnotes

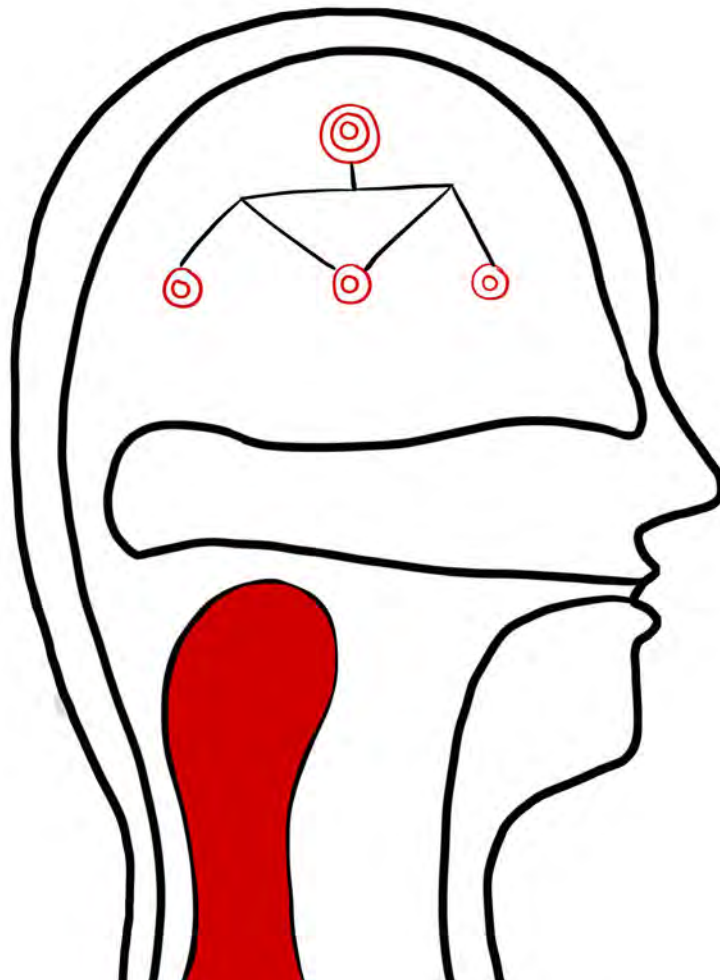
- 1 For an overview of *Chronic publications* see [chimurengachronic.co.za](http://chimurengachronic.co.za)
- 2 Moses März, “Remember Glissant”, *Chimurenga Chronic*, 12 April 2021, [chimurengachronic.co.za/remember-glissant/](http://chimurengachronic.co.za/remember-glissant/)
- 3 Bénédicte Savoy, *Afrikas Kampf um seine Kunst: Geschichte einer postkolonialen Niederlage*, München: C.H. Beck, 2021.
- 4 Malcom Ferdinand, *Une écologie d'écologie: Penser l'écologie depuis le monde caribéen*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2019.







# Experiments in Resistance



# DeCentering Through Radical Intersectionality and Editorial Politics

**Text:**  
G,  
Pragati,  
Mrudula  
Vanangamudi,  
Nangsel,  
Shruty,  
PS,  
Ankush

**Illustrations:**  
G

**Photographs:**  
Abhishek,  
Sarvpriya,  
Shruty,  
Paritosh,  
Randeep,  
Nav



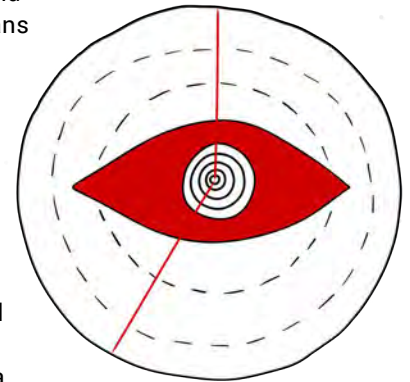
**D**eCenter Magazine is a collaborative space of inquiry focused on imagining the politics of decentering as a strategy of political being and doing, focused on solidarity, resistance, and experimentation. Aimed at creating a parallel, collective, and expressive space for commonly marginalized and fiercely policed discourses, DeCenter was born from surprisingly productive conversations around exhaustion with mainstream media practices in a post-truth world. When one woman turned weary of the enduring misogyny in the revolution, ten others appeared to point out the overt or covert persistence of caste, violence, and elitism in the counter-hegemonic spaces structured around the skeletal frame of Brahminical patriarchy.

What is a centre? How does it come to be? How do the centralizing forces of hegemonic discourses curate and dominate the flows of ideas, conversations, writing, and art? Examined narratively, the centre recounts the story of a single sub-continental subjectivity: the *savarna*,<sup>1</sup> upper-class, most commonly North Indian, heterosexual man. And yet, other ways of knowing and being have persisted on the subcontinent: other maps and markings have survived the epistemic violence of patriarchal caste hierarchies, brutal exploitation of labour, and colonization of physical and affective landscapes. To dismantle the politics of marginalization, we begin by displacing the centre – and this requires radical intersectionality.

## Beyond neoliberal representation

The word “decentre” is a negation. To begin our work of imagining the political and creative work of decentering, i.e., deconstructing and dismantling presumed centres, we imagined the dissolution of tried and tested internal structures of known spaces of resistance. We began by resisting the exploitative and objectifying – if not politically redundant – recourse to token diversity, understood as a politics of representation that does little more than coddle the centre’s impulse of swallowing emerging tropes of resistance and repurposing them as empty slogans for sale in a neoliberal market. Over a period of six months, we assembled a team of academics, journalists, lawyers, and artists to collectively shape a radically intersectional vision of resistance. Around 95% of our team is now made up of Dalits, Bahujans, Adivasis, Muslims, Queer Folks and Minorities. We have editors from South, East, West, and North India.

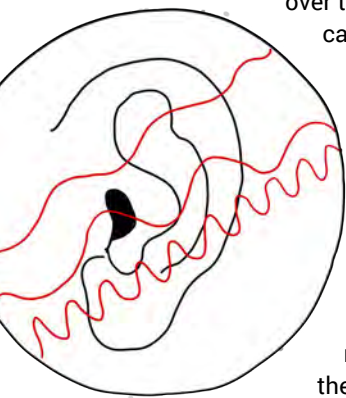
Kashmir and the Northeast are represented on our geographically and linguistically decentred team. DeCenter is thus distinct from mainstream media, where the illusion and façade of objective equality and reality cloud meaningful practice of inclusion, restricting who gets to speak, how much, and when. We are ambivalent towards terms like “representation”, or “slow journalism”, which are co-opted, emptied of their radical potential to alter the nature of reporting and the voyeurism of the “gaze”, and then turned into marketing slogans for media houses. We resist the temptation of using these terms to define and therefore confine, or shape, our editorial process. The easiest way of describing our editorial praxis is as resistant. In a time where being outside of the so-called mainstream is not enough, de-centring offers something beyond the tried, tested, and defanged “voice of the people”/“representation”/“slow journalism” model. We took that offering to shape DeCenter, and the content on our website is its most tangible and visible form.



## Zones of encounters

Our first issue arrived on the heels of major protests in India and movements against racism globally, and in the midst of the Indian farmers' movement. The incessant sexual violations and the coercion of Dalit women in villages, streets, or on the frontlines of protests shaped our sense of urgency. The brutal incarceration of journalists, activists, writers, academics, and students, too, moved us to publish without indulging in languid pauses over the proper use of punctuation. The issue encapsulated the anti-authoritarian potential of decentring. It included Rupsa Nag's interview with subversive poet and musician, Akhu Chingambam from the Imphal Talkies;<sup>2</sup> Afrah Asif's conversation with Dalit transgender activist Grace Banu;<sup>3</sup> Pranjali Kureel, Sankul Sonawane, and Preeti Koli's dedicated analyses of the Indian education system and the impact of the 2020 National Education Policy on Dalit students;<sup>4</sup> Sheikh Saqib's narration of everyday experiences during the siege of Kashmir;<sup>5</sup> and Randeep Maddoke, Varinder Maddoke, and Nav Rahi's photographic documentation of the farmers' protests.<sup>6</sup> As the farmers occupied Delhi's city borders and choked its centre, we reflected on the organic and potent eruption of a decentred yet cohesive movement.

Our carefully drafted calls for submission – broad, open-ended, and malleable – offer a potent way to reimagine political allegiances, solidarity, liminality, marginality, and relationships. As a result, submissions to DeCenter are both subjective and reflexive, which are qualities shunned and shunted by mainstream media. One of our editors quoted Adivasi poet and activist, Jacinta Kerketta, to remind us: "telling your journey, your story, is also the story of this society, this world." The ideas, thus, are fashioned by the magazine's contributors and not by the magazine; they do not take the shape for the container that is the magazine, but the magazine snugly envelopes them. The works of our contributors are different to those produced in highly structured and rigid arrangements. They act as decentred associations and they can be visualized as zones of encounters marked by the remarkable ability



of ideas to touch and travel. The decentred view is a plane of possibilities, enlivened with movements of ideas that bounce, interact, change, develop, become, and sometimes – crucially – dissolve and un-become.

Our sub-editing overlooks the restraints of peg, angle, and hook – all of which are weaponised to gatekeep, and privilege fixations and click-bait material. In our second issue, "Contexts" (April 2022), one of our editors writes on how our ideas about politics are produced through processes of automation, wherein news, art, and "content" are reduced to algorithmic communications in service of authoritarian ideologies. This model of consumerism where news, art, writing, and politics become goods to be consumed and discarded, works hand-in-hand with regimes of surveillance and complacency. DeCenter's editorial practices, in contrast, do not view news – or "content" – as a consumer product, nor do they reduce the reader to a buyer of goods and services. It disturbs the algorithmic familiarity of the news cycle as well as the repetitive newness of content.

"Contexts" includes an interview with labour activist Nodeep Kaur, reflections on mainstream media's clinging to "objectivity", and a text on photography in times of protest, among others – aiming to trouble the assumptions that undergird our times of conspiracy, boredom, and Netflix. Writing about the rehearsed indifference expected of mainstream media journalists, writers, and artists in an ephemeral, fast-paced, and facile news and content consumer industry, an editor asks in her piece, "How sustainable is it to not stop, feel, grieve, and heal?" The editor profiling Nodeep writes, "Marginalised bodies are written about in binaries in mainstream media – valorized as a revolutionary or demonized for as much as critiquing the appropriation

of their struggles” (see illustration on the right). DeCenter revels in the liminal space between the two. This space also offers fertile ground not just for the production of a magazine, but also for fostering relationships and building solidarities.

## Anti-authoritarian modes of engagement

Decentring as a strategy requires resisting the urge to simply recentre; we do not aim to privilege any one counter-hegemonic idea or group, but rather to imagine the margins and edges as an infinite productive perimeter of anti-authoritarian modes of engagement. To produce this anti-structure internally, we designed for ourselves an editorial politics of horizontalism, i.e., there is no editorial hierarchy or chain of command. We work together collaboratively and resolve conflict through mutual discussions with each editor volunteering their labour, according to their interests and abilities. Each of our team members has different experience of and with the centre, none any less or more important than the other. We aim to subvert the pitfalls of homogeneity, avoiding hegemonic editorial slants unwittingly becoming tools of tone policing, often brought to a media platform by hierarchical editorial teams (see lead illustration). All this to show that, in the absence of the hegemonic logic of the centre or, in other words, an organizational strategy marked by concentric circles and flowcharts, we are not left with chaos – a claim pushed by authoritarian rhetoric – but rather, naturally moving forms of ideas and subjectivities. We envision these worlds as topographical idea maps and anti-structures that emerge from the convergence of thoughts. Thus, we advocate a reclaiming of the map, a coercive tool of control often invoked to justify the centre. Our topographical maps are both bereft and brimming over with centres – both being forms of decentring. We imagine the work of decentring as an embodied strategy. The centre, with its perennial, inescapable, panoptic

gaze, watches the margins always from a distance, noting any and all movements. Even as we hope to resist, we remain entrenched in the scopophilic practices of the centralizing and bureaucratizing gaze we have internalized. That gaze coerces us into reproducing spectacles of our subjectivities for a consumerist world. In sharp contrast to the gaze, which travels in linear form like radii on a circle, we support shifts to the metaphorical ear, capable of 360 degrees of reception, convergence, and reflection. Listening is an intimate embodiment of decentring – away from the centre and the naval-gazing self, and in proximity with the infinite and uncertain, shifting and slippery topographical slopes on the margins swirling in the untamed clamour of resistance (see illustration on the previous spread).

However, our work is too nascent to say with certainty what a decentred world would look like. Inhabiting the very violent structures we hope to dismantle, we experiment and grow as a self-reflexive collective willing to walk the path of liminality and ambiguity.



## Endnotes

- 1 Editor's note: Savarna is a term to describe those "within" the caste system, belonging to the four castes (*Varnas*). This term is used in opposition to those that are excluded from this status and who subsequently face the majority of violence, exclusion and discrimination by the caste system. Those are sometimes referred to under the political banner of *bahujan* (the majority) or by the constitutional category Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). Among these *Dalit* is a term coined by B.R. Ambedkar, referring to those belonging to the lowest castes, formally excluded from the caste system, while *Adivasis* refers to indigenous communities in the Indian subcontinent.
- 2 [decentermag.com/interviews-akhu-chingangbam](http://decentermag.com/interviews-akhu-chingangbam)
- 3 [decentermag.com/interviews-grace-banu](http://decentermag.com/interviews-grace-banu)
- 4 [decentermag.com/politics-post-matric](http://decentermag.com/politics-post-matric)
- 5 [decentermag.com/politics-kashmir](http://decentermag.com/politics-kashmir)
- 6 [decentermag.com/photography-farmers](http://decentermag.com/photography-farmers)



# This Joke Is Getting Seri





# Counter-Hegemonic Humour as Anti-Authoritarian Resistance:

Text:  
Gabriella Sesti  
Ossè

Illustrations:  
Elisa  
Bochicchio

# IOUS

## The Curious Case of the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party



**W**ould you trust a chicken dressed up as a politician on national television? Would you feel safer meeting Jedi knights over the police on the streets? Would you ever vote for a gorilla? If the answer is yes, then you should get to know the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party: *Magyar Kétfarkú Kutya Párt* (MKKP).

MKKP's story starts in the early 2000s in a shared apartment in Szeged – a southern Hungarian university town near the Serbian border – and a gang of young students gathered together to have fun and goof around, typical for a group of friends in their twenties. They used to organize pranks and stunts, and they were as happy as a dog with two tails. This image of a non-existent species was so accurate in describing the group's mood, it soon became its logo. Although the party definition was already in the name, at the start the MKKP took the form of an informal association of creative minds, who wanted to come together and vent, while having a good time. The goal has always been to laugh at something together, instead of indulging in contempt and despair.

As a satirical group, the MKKP aims to parody the political élite, make fun of Hungarian mainstream party representatives, denounce the authoritarian turn of Fidesz,<sup>1</sup> and subvert the government's propaganda with subtle and sharp irony. However, MKKP's counter-hegemonic actions do not crystallize into critical information campaigns, full of reliable data delivered in a formal tone; rather they consist of pleasant, funny, and useful activities to draw attention to social problems simultaneously, people laugh to a heart from

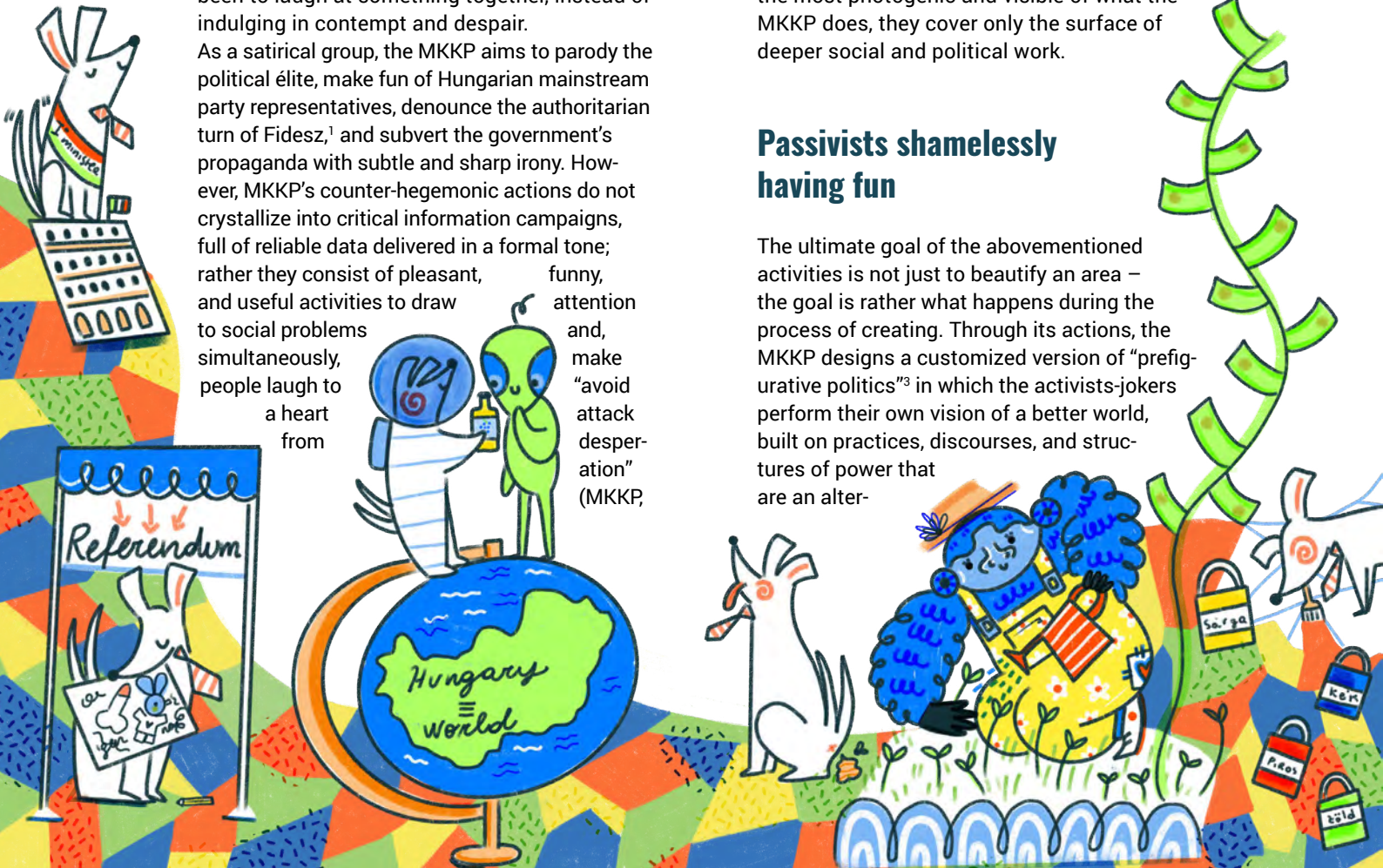
funny, attention and, make “avoid attack desperation” (MKKP,

n.d.). The Two-Tailed Dog Party aims to mobilize citizens by turning them into *passivists*;<sup>2</sup> to establish meaningful political dialogue in opposition to the dominant rhetoric of competition and harsh antagonism; to take over the neglected work of local authorities and encourage them to act; to build a citizen-based approach for efficiently solving concrete problems and addressing social disconnections, while defying the emotive mainstream politics of fear and division.

To do so, the MKKP uses a variety of methods, often organizing actions held in public spaces, which include graffiti, stencils, posters, stickers, billboards, street art and street theatre, “guerrilla-gardening”, decorations of bus stops, subways, or cracks in the tarmac. They always use consistent colour patterns and their logo, both of which enable them to be easily recognizable and identified. Such operations are aesthetically attractive and facilitate immediate complicity between the creators and their audience. However, although these actions are the most photogenic and visible of what the MKKP does, they cover only the surface of deeper social and political work.

## Passivists shamelessly having fun

The ultimate goal of the abovementioned activities is not just to beautify an area – the goal is rather what happens during the process of creating. Through its actions, the MKKP designs a customized version of “prefigurative politics”<sup>3</sup> in which the activists-jokers perform their own vision of a better world, built on practices, discourses, and structures of power that are an alter-



native – if not the opposite – to the dominant. At the same time, they are shamelessly having fun and proudly embracing unproductiveness, challenging the neoliberal understanding of this term. The MKKP contributes to the forging of new meanings and systems of knowledge, while obviously mocking mainstream politics – and putting everyone (except for politicians!) in a cheerful mood.

In addition to this, the Two-Tailed Dog Party stages flash counter-(re)actions and mock campaigns whenever the government implements policies led by hate. For every action that comes out of institutional politics, there is a corresponding grassroots, spontaneous prank-reaction from the MKKP. For instance, as a response to hundreds of xenophobic billboards put up by Viktor Orbán's government in 2015, the MKKP launched a crowdfunding campaign to buy billboard space, substitute Orbán's posters with anti-anti-immigration rhetoric, directly satirizing the original slogans. Eventually, the Two-Tailed Dog Party collected enough money to cover the same number of billboards that had previously been bought by the government. For example, to the government's message "Did you know that nearly one million immigrants want to come to Europe from Libya alone?", the MKKP replied with "Did you know one million Hungarians want to emigrate to Europe?".<sup>4</sup> In the wake of this, when Fidesz launched the "national consultation on immigration and terrorism" in 2016,<sup>5</sup> the MKKP confronted it, encouraging voters to invalidate ballot papers by ticking both "yes" and "no", or by drawing penises, elephants, or batman – to propose "a stupid answer to a stupid question". The list



MKKP Sticker: Tax reduction, eternal life, free beer

of MKKP's counter-attacks is too long to be accurately recounted, but some of them are definitely worthy of mention, such as realization and distribution of a satirical edition of Magyar Hírlap, the Hungarian Gazette used to spread the government's propaganda; organization of counter-demonstrations – the "Alternative Peace Marches"<sup>6</sup> – parallel to marches organized by Fidesz; and printing fake money to highlight the numerous cases of corruption within the Hungarian political system.

## Giving other species a chance for office

However, the MKKP has not limited itself to the performance of humorous, contentious actions and jokes. In 2016 it registered as an official political party. This official label did not lead to shifts neither in its grassroots nature nor in working methods. Nevertheless, when a movement or an informal group acquires the status of a political party, one meaningful change occurs: it is formally entitled to run for political office. The MKKP did just that at every possible electoral opportunity: namely at local, national, and

European levels, organizing campaigns that were “pleasant for voters and annoying for politicians”.

The MKKP gained momentum and major visibility through their electoral campaigns based on absurdity and hilarity. By making impossible promises, which included eternal life, free beer, two sunsets per day in different colours, a one-day work week, or mandatory siesta, the MKKP mocked politicians who often make unrealistic pledges. Likewise, the party’s campaign slogans are all expressed as imperatives or exclamations, and are full of freakish (or visionary?) demands such as “Let everything be better!”, “Money without work!”, “Tomorrow should be yesterday!”, “You will be happy!”, “More everything, less nothing!”. The MKKP’s electoral programs are a product of a collective blue-sky thinking, which include: trade relations with extra-terrestrial life forms to strengthen foreign policy, the creation of new species to balance those threatened by climate change, the flooding of the main roads of Budapest with water on weekdays and beer on holidays to fight traffic and pollution.

The Two-Tailed Dog Party presents itself to voters as “the only party that makes sense”, asking Hungarians to “give another species a chance”. In fact, their candidates come from human as well as from animal and fantasy realms. Some of them have appeared as a gorilla, chicken, horse, T-rex, an acid-spiting ferret, Santa Claus, and an invisible man. Quoting Gergely Kovács, one of the MKKP’s co-founders, “as a dog party, they welcome animals”, convinced that people have lost their trust in human politicians. Even though it might seem like a frivolous candidacy, the Two-Tailed Dog Party takes elections seriously, considering them as the gateway to begin working on real structural problems. The struggle often pays off and the MKKP obtained 1.73% of the vote in the 2018 Parliamentary elections, 2.62% in 2019 European Parliamentary elections (the highest percentage for a satirical party in EU history), and four of its representatives were elected in different districts of Budapest in the aftermath of the 2019 local elections.

There are many ways and arenas for confronting hegemonic power. The MKKP has the ability to be confrontational in its presence, merry in its mood, and highly receptive to social needs. Its satire works both as comic relief for like-minded people who feel politically disillusioned, as well as a critique of injustices and authoritarian trends. In fact, by adopting tools of humour and absurdity, the Two-Tailed Dog Party builds conditions of conviviality<sup>7</sup> and shapes an alternative normality, all the while raising awareness and mobilizing an increasing number of first-time *passivists*. Laughter has a significant transformative power: firstly, because without it there cannot be any harmo-

nious human community, and secondly because it always carries social significance. As Henri-Louis Bergson pointed out, “our laughter is always laughter of a group”, implying complicity with other laughers, might they be real or imaginary<sup>8</sup>. Indeed, laughter is a compelling antidote to sad passions, a method for enforcing collective fortitude, and a picklock to access progressive futures. To paraphrase one of the most famous lines from the “Communist Manifesto”: all that is solid melts into giggles. To challenge the status quo you might need some serotonin.



## Endnotes

- 1 Fidesz is a right-wing national-conservative political party, led by Viktor Orbán, who has served as Prime Minister continuously since 2010. During the last parliamentary term, the government consolidated control over the country's independent institutions through constitutional and legal means. Additionally, critical operations of opposition groups, journalists, universities, and NGOs have been hampered by hostile policies. Due to this, Hungary has been defined as a 'partly free' country and an 'illiberal democracy' by several NGOs that investigate and evaluate the quality of democracy, the level of political freedom, and the respect for human rights.
- 2 The Two-Tailed Dog Party usually refers to activists as *passivists*, subverting the system of meaning.
- 3 Dan Swain, "Not not but not yet: Present and future in prefigurative politics". *Political Studies*, 67(1) 2019, pp. 47-62.
- 4 The MKKP mocked the government's messages in both style and content. There are more than 20 versions of the "Did you know" campaign. One of the most notable was: "Did you know? A Hungarian has seen more UFOs than migrants during his life."
- 5 The question asked of voters was: "Do you want the European Union to be able to mandate the obligatory resettlement of non-Hungarian citizens into Hungary even without the approval of the National Assembly?"
- 6 During the Alternative Peace March, the Two-Tailed Dog Party carried banners with ironic slogans, such as "down with freedom, up with the government," or banners that demanded "freedom of censorship and the abolition of the press".
- 7 The word 'conviviality' has latin origins and comes from *con-* 'with' + *vivere* 'live', so it literally means 'living with'. Here we interpret conviviality according to Illich's definition, namely as "individual freedom realized in personal interdependence", which stands in direct opposition to the feeling of automatization and alienation induced by industrial production. See Ivan Illich, *Tools for conviviality*, New York: Harper & Row, 1973.
- 8 Bergson, Henri-Louis, *Le rire: Essai sur la signification du comique*, Paris: Felix Alcan, 1900.

# Shvemy Sewin Cooperative



Action against reducing the ambulance service, Vasilyevsky Island, St. Petersburg.



Text on the banner in Russian: "Это не приглашение к изнасилованию" (It isn't an invitation for rape).



Text on the banner in Ukrainian: "49 заяв про домашнє насильство в Дніпрі щодня. Не мовчи!" (49 reported cases of domestic violence in Dnipro per day. Don't keep silent!)

It was a sunny summer day in 2015 and we were working in our workshop. That morning, we received information about an action against reducing the ambulance service taking place on Vasilyevsky Island in St. Petersburg: local authorities wanted to limit the number of ambulance workers and vehicles. Our friends had organized a protest against this on Vasilyevsky Island that day to prevent people from having to wait for emergency medical care. We were confused. One of us said that they didn't want to be only a seamstress – they wanted to be an activist too. Others agreed and we started to

think about how we can support our friends' protest action. We came up with the idea of sewing a textile banner three hours before the action was due to begin. We didn't have time to finish the banner, so it ended up as an image but without the planned inscription: "Солидарность – это сила, сокращения – могила" (Solidarity is a strength, reductions are a grave). Still, the banner turned out really nicely and the message behind the image of a hand with an IV fluid bag

## Our Story Through the Activist Banners

Photos:  
Anastasia Makarenko,  
Vadim Lurie, Sergey Yugov,  
Vlad Lemm

Text:  
Tonya Melnyk,  
Ania Tereshkina,  
Masha Lukianova,  
Olesia Panova



Text on the banner in Ukrainian:  
“Товариш\_ко, з пелюшок вчи доньку самозахисту” (Comrade, teach the daughter self-defense from the cradle).



Text on the banner in Ukrainian:  
“Бам! І ти уже в рабстві. Новий трудовий кодекс України” (Bam! And you are already in slavery. New Labor Law of Ukraine).



Text on the banner in Russian: “Мы – лед под ногами майора” (We are the ice under the mayor's feet).

was clear. While working, we were making jokes about what we were doing. And to this day I remember one joke we made up: “Розова ткань топорщиться, капиталист от страха морщится” (As the pink cloth ripples, the capitalist wrinkles his forehead in fear).

When we came to the action with our unfinished banner, we were surprised at the effect it had: people were really glad to see such a sign of support and solidarity. For me this was the beginning of Shvemy Sewing Cooperative as an activist project.

### The beginning of Shvemy

All of us finished the School of Engaged Art organized by the Chto Delat group in 2015. The idea of the cooperative was voiced (by me) during the last academic semester and it was supported by some other students. We were working on an activist assignment – dresses for the play “Vagina Monologues”, directed by Sonia Akimova. We were trying to develop our methods of maintaining horizontal relationships and to practice



consensus. The results of our work were presented at the final graduation exhibition in the form of an installation and a performance.

Some of us didn't want to stop with our activities. Five people: Masha Lukianova, Anna Tereshkina, Aleksandra Kachko, Nadejda Kaliamina, and I, Tonya Melnyk, started a sewing cooperative after we finished school. The Chto Delat group gave us our first large paid assignment – decorations for the Creative Time Summit, which was part of the Venice Biennale. The decorations were made from the sketches of Nilolay Oleynikov. The group also invited us to work in the Cultural House they organized, and which they named after Rosa Luxemburg. This is when I moved from Kyiv to St. Petersburg to work in a cooperative.

Some of us were more and some less experienced in sewing and contemporary art. All of us were feminists and human rights activists. And we all had a huge desire to build something new. For me, it was something I had been dreaming of for many years, while working in different ateliers and sewing enterprises in Kyiv. Working across different positions, I didn't agree with how things functioned inside the organizations: hierarchies, exploitation of human and natural resources, poor working conditions, and salaries. I was thinking a lot about alternatives. An economic enterprise built on horizontal principles of organization and not alienated labour was one of the variants I was thinking about. Suddenly, in another city I found people who shared this idea and were brave enough to try. We started working





and studying together, having talks and discussions, cooking for each other, educating, helping, and supporting each other.

We were working out a model for a non-hierarchical company with the possibility for all members to participate equally in the working process; we looked for ways for such a company to survive inside the existing system of capitalistic economic relationships and the free market, which usually focuses on either cheap goods or famous brands products. At the same time, we began holding free open workshops on upcycling and repairing clothes. It was an opportunity for us to practice and do new things, and to promote ecological production. It was also an opportunity for anyone who wanted to, to learn how to remake, repair, or create something useful or desirable.

## Activist expression

Everyday life posed a lot of challenges: we lived in Russia, a country with very cruel and militaristic politics. Activist banners and patches were one of the brightest methods for us to publicly spread activist statements and to support people with similar beliefs. We joined numerous actions on gender and labour issues, supporting political prisoners and LGBTQ+ people, against police and state violence. We held workshops on activist banner- and patch-making for people to get the chance to create their own statements on fabric. As a result, the textile banners became our “business cards”. So, we created a lot of them. Some of them were presented during exhibitions at contemporary art galleries, museums,

activist festivals, and sold at auctions to support people and initiatives, who suffered from the regime or were close to our ideas. An example is the banner “Это не приглашение к изнасилованию” (It isn’t an invitation for rape), made in December 2015, and which was created for an action on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. In March 2019 it was sold at an auction to support the Eva’s Ribs feminist space in St. Petersburg.

During the first six months of its existence, Aleksandra Kachko and Nadejda Kaliamina left Shvemy for personal reasons. For a period of time we were three in the group, calling ourselves an international Ukrainian-Russian project. Being in St. Petersburg we supported the antiwar movement against Russian military aggression in different countries, particularly in Ukraine. In September 2015 we made a banner for the March of Peace in St. Petersburg with the slogan “Хуй войне” (Fuck War). But we decided not to show it during the action, because it was really unsafe: Russian law prohibits cursing in public. At night, once the Peace March was finished, we hung this banner on a tree near the metro station where the action had started.

## Distant common activities

We lived and worked together in St. Petersburg until summer 2016, which is when I and Masha Lukianova moved to Kyiv. Before moving to Kyiv, we organized a School of the Sewing Cooperative. Olesia Panova joined Shvemy following the school and after that we were four in the group. We continued our activities from a distance, from time to time joining events on artist and activist topics in different countries. We did workshops, exhibitions, performances, and street actions concerning state and patriarchal violence, and the capitalist system of exploitation and oppression. One of the most remarkable events for me was organizing a series of field workshops on banners, patches, and stencils during CIVIC MEDIA LAB 2017 (Dnipro, Ukraine) in June 2017.

During these workshops with local feminists and activists we created several banners that were placed in public space. One banner that read “49 заяв про домашнє насильство в Дніпрі щодня. Не мовчи!” (49 reported cases of domestic

violence in Dnipro per day. Don’t keep silent!) was placed along the archway of the former restaurant Mayak at Shevchenko Park – the place is perfectly visible if you go walk the park towards the embankment.

A different, very colourful banner “Товариш\_ко, з пелюшок вчи доньку самозахисту” (Comrade, teach the daughter self-defense from the cradle) perfectly fitted into the environment of the bright children’s playground. After hanging it up, we checked on our banners for several days until they disappeared. We gifted the only surviving banner from the children’s playground to the Gender Museum in Kharkiv.

From time to time Ania and Olesia, and Tonya and Masha, living far away from each other, continued

creating activist banners in St. Petersburg and Kyiv respectively. In April 2017, the Kyiv part of Shvemy participated in the picket against the adoption of a new Labour Law in Ukraine. This bill came as a surprise with its abundance of reforms that would narrow the rights of workers and the ability of trade unions to influence labour relations. Tonya and Masha came with a banner that featured the inscription: “Бам! І ти уже в рабстві. Новий трудовий кодекс України” (Bam! And you are already in slavery. New Labour Law of Ukraine). The banner was meant to be a parody of the frequent advertising of a job search site in Kyiv, which says: “Бам! І ти уже на новій роботі” (Bam! and you’re already at your new job).

In May 2018, Ania and Olesia participated in an action against torture in law enforcement agencies. The purpose of the strike was to draw public attention to the practice of using torture by the Russian police and the FSB, which has become the norm. For this event, Ania and Olesia created a banner with a slogan: “Мы – лед под ногами майора” (We are the ice under the mayor’s feet).



## Our lives won't be the same!

In addition to banners, we also held performances in museums and in public space on the topic of the rights and working conditions of workers in the garment industry in developing countries. More precisely, the banners had evolved into more complex actions and we focused on this particular topic. We stopped being an economic project and proclaimed ourselves the International Ukrainian-Russian art activist project.

It was very difficult to continue such intensive work remotely, and the Covid-19 pandemic forced us to put the project on pause, and we became engaged in self-archiving and survival. To this

day, all of us continue our activist and artist work and to fight for a better future without exploitation, hierarchy, patriarchy, and violence. Tonya and Masha created another sewing cooperative in Kyiv, named ReSew; Ania is co-founder of the feminist band "Krasnie Zori"; Olesia participates in many feminist stand-up shows. Shvemy had a great influence on our lifestyles, ways of communication, and building work-life relationships in teams. Our lives won't be the same!

### Further reading

[facebook.com/groups/shvemy](https://facebook.com/groups/shvemy)

# Protesting to Production

**O**n 7 February 2014, on the streets of Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina, activists from the antifascist organization *Front slobode* (Freedom Front), which bears the name of the Yugoslav partisan newspaper established after the liberation of Tuzla in 1943, circulated a manifesto among the 15,000-strong people's protest that had taken to the streets that day. The manifesto proclaimed:

*On the fifth and sixth day of February, the people of Tuzla rose up against the criminal gang in power, which has been killing and looting us for over 20 years. Its end has come. The people, who have been fleeing into helplessness, blindness, and hopelessness, now see and face – a catastrophe!*

*Workers without pay and health insurance; students with no prospect of employment; demobilized soldiers on the brink of starvation and on the verge of madness; our mothers and fathers, sisters, and brothers forced to work in military bases in Iraq and Afghanistan; our pensioners rummaging in garbage bins looking for food.*

*And the gang in power? They have it all. The gang widens the divisions between us, to make it easier for them to steal our money. They blackmail us to give bribes and to behave corruptly for basic survival. The gang secures expensive loans and then*

*forces our children and grandchildren into debt and servitude. The gang lies when they say that we loot, when it is them who are looting. The gang beats us, teargases us, and uses attack dogs on us. The gang has robbed us of everything and has left us destitute! And this gang calls us scum.*

*Are we the scum for wanting to live honestly from our work? Are we the scum for wanting to leave our children what we have honestly earned?*

*We demand that:*

- 1. The government which ordered the beating of the people to be removed.*
- 2. The police force responsible for brutally beating the people to be removed.*
- 3. Those who ordered and used brutal force against the people must stand trial.*
- 4. A force be established for civil protection of the people, which will maintain order and ensure that the gang does not destroy our unity.*
- 5. Salaries of political representatives be set at comparable levels with the salaries of workers in public and private sectors.*

# Maintain

Damir  
Arsenijević

## Popular Protests in Bosnia and Herzegovina

6. *Additional payments to government representatives and civil service workers be annulled.*
7. *Salaries for ministers following the termination of their mandates be abolished.*
8. *Fair social welfare to be provided to ensure a dignified life for all.*
9. *A people's committee be set up with the task to manage common goods and ensure: work and pay for all, health insurance for all, and food for all.*

These demands speak of the devastating impoverishment of people and of the brutality in the “peacebuilding” and “post-war reconstruction” of Bosnia and Herzegovina. They were written using words from the streets of Tuzla: the words of the workers on hunger strike, the words of the students, the words of our homes. Our words spoke of hunger, unaffordable medical treatment, despair, suicides, and factories turned into cheap labour camps. Yet these words were being spoken 20 years after the war had ended. Our predicament was rooted in the peace agreement that cemented the power of political ethno-nationalist elites –

**“People are not responsible for a freedom that has been withheld from them, but they are for an un-freedom against which they failed to stand.”**

**Boris Buden**

who organized concentration camps, genocide, and mass graves during war-time. The peace that ended the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina had become a multiculturalist apartheid, in which ethnicity was reified as the only recognized identity for political participation. The ethno-nationalist elites continued their war-time looting of public assets, but now they were continuing their fearmongering by using democratized tools. When the workers returned from the trenches, they found that the factories which had been owned by them in the socialist Yugoslav self-management structure, were now being sold to private owners with bloodied money. The “transition into democracy” became synonymous with negotiations between international actors and the ethno-nationalist

elites around the privatization of the country's natural resources. "Political participation" became enforced ethnic victimhood. From Washington to Brussels, we were told this was the only way, which was possible.

Workers of five factories in Tuzla—DITA, Polihem, Poliolhem, Gumara, and Konjuh—decided to rise against this bloodstained larceny. To protect the DITA factory from being stripped of assets and closed down, the workers occupied the factory. Exhausted from being undermined by the private owner for three years who withheld payment for their labour, they decided to defend their livelihoods and their factory. Their message was clear: we are protesting in order to maintain production.

A new political axiom was born. The workers' demand was recognized as a universal demand. It brought the street together. This was now the protest.

## Roses, rocks, and teargas – Postcard 1

The peaceful protest became a united push-back against the brutal violence used by the police. We survived the carnage of the war – who dares to claim the right to beat us now? Both rocks and roses were used to invite the police to lay down their batons and to join the people in the struggle for justice. The protest brought together broad section of the society and enabled the emergence of the previously censored speech of commonality. The claim that we live parallel lives, which never intersect, proved to be a lie. The protest showed that while you might be destitute, you are not on your own; it brought us all together, as bodies in movement; it reminded us that the ultimate barricade was the human body, and this collective body was now stopping the terror of peace. In this postcard, the police officers guard the SODASO building, which was the administrative seat of a big industrial conglomerate before the wars, but was later taken over by the ethno-nationalist bureaucrats and converted into government offices. By this point, the government officials had already resigned and fled the building, and the police were guarding an empty seat of power.



POZDRAV IZ TUZLE

## Solidarity – Postcard 2

Approaching the police cordon, I witnessed a mother, who was amongst the protesters, shouting at her son, a police officer: "You better watch out when you get home tonight!" As we moved towards the courts, I heard police officers shouting amongst themselves, some were laying down their truncheons. The solidarity that sustained our push-back against police violence meant that nobody was left alone. A friend and writer Šejla Šehabović



POZDRAV IZ TUZLE



wrote about an anonymous woman who joined the protests: “She is not hungry, she has a secure pension, she is not unemployed, she is not on the margins of society. But she also did not stay at home to watch the despair of her fellow citizens from a respectable distance. When the police pulled out their truncheons and started to impose order on the backs of the citizens, she did not hide herself away. Attempting to protect one of the demonstrators who was being arrested for no reason, she offered to go with him into the police van. Most of the people who watched this scene thought that she was a professional mediator – it looked like she had done this kind of thing a thousand times before. But my dear woman of Tuzla leads a peaceful life. She has never been convicted of anything and has never previously had any contact with the police. There are people who do not need any training to offer to help other people. The man who was taken into the police van was not beaten that day. Because one young woman stood with him.”<sup>1</sup>

## The SODASO building in flames

The sight of the burning SODASO building surprised us and provoked feelings of shock and fear. It has, so far, proven to be impossible to establish how the building caught fire. At the time of writing, in early 2022, the building stands, charred and abandoned. It is an ambiguous site, a site of unease, a reminder of the incompleteness of power. As the empty seat of power was in flames, a decision had to be made – whether to remain at the site of protest, or to move elsewhere. Emina Busuladžić, who led the DITA factory occupation, said: “The SODASO building is ours, built with workers’ money. It is our building that is in flames, and so be it.” We were not counting the losses; we were counting the gains. So, we stayed at the site, we discussed the manifesto that we had previously circulated, and agreed that it should be read out. “On behalf of the people,” was all I added to the text as it was written, as I read it to the journalists who were waiting voraciously. Another



important decision was made: to convene a citizen assembly, a plenum, that evening, open to all citizens, through which collective decisions and demands could be made and action taken, beyond any guarantees of leadership. The plenum became a form of self-organisation and a method of work through which, for months, citizens came together to deliberate and to articulate their demands. The threat of the protests legitimized the plenum. The following day, we returned to the site of the SODASO building to clean up. Charred and uninhabitable, it was still our building.

The backs of the postcards say that they were funded by the *raja* – the commonfolk – from Tuzla. A group of workers, activists, academics, and artists decided to create these postcards to communicate to others how proud we were for having united in our struggle against the socio-economic violence, and to invite as many people as possible to join us in standing against our unfreedoms. The legacy of the protest and plenums is more than just a memory today: it is a concrete physical and emotional infrastructure of a social bond that continues anti-capitalist struggle as a struggle against ethno-nationalist oligarchs. These postcards continue to circulate to remind us of this, and to invite us into taking a concrete stance in this struggle.

## Endnotes

- 1 Šejla Šehabović, "Two stories of solidarity or..." available on: [bhprotestfiles.wordpress.com/2014/02/13/sejla-sehabovic-two-stories-about-solidarity-or/](http://bhprotestfiles.wordpress.com/2014/02/13/sejla-sehabovic-two-stories-about-solidarity-or/)

Pozdrav iz Tuzle

Projekat finansira raja iz Tuzle  
Project is financed by the raja from Tuzla

Pozdrav iz Tuzle

Projekat finansira raja iz Tuzle  
Project is financed by the raja from Tuzla



Blank template for a postcard with a dashed rectangular box at the top and horizontal dashed lines for the address and a solid line for the recipient's name.

Blank template for a postcard with a dashed rectangular box at the top and horizontal dashed lines for the address and a solid line for the recipient's name.



# Mediterranean

From Turkey to Morocco and Beyond

← OSTHAFEN 1  
FRANKFURT AM MAIN  
NORD- UND SÜDBECKEN  
FUNKRUF KANAL 74  
FRANKFURT-PORT-RADIO



# n Comotions

Javier  
Toscano



**T**he power of images cannot be overstated. They are also fragile items, prone to instrumentalisation by authoritarian regimes, who use them to depict political reductionism for the dissemination of hate and fear. In the midst of the contemporary deluge of images, interpretative caution is always necessary. However, sometimes photographs can tell poignant stories – stories so piercing that they make harsh struggles and cruel events visible, in ways that shatter social consciousness and can thus be used as tools against dehumanizing forms of politics.

On 2 September 2015, one such event occurred on the beaches of Bodrum, in Turkey. Dead bodies of two children were washed up by the waves. They were brothers – Alan and Galip Kurdi – from Kobane, Syria. Both of them, along with their mother Rehana whose body was yet to be found, had drowned in the Mediterranean when the dinghy in which they were attempting to reach Greece capsized shortly after leaving land. Their names could be made public immediately because their father survived the accident and was able to describe the details of their plight. The Kurdi family was fleeing the Syrian catastrophe, itself an aftermath of the Iraqi invasion by the Western allies a decade prior, which led to the rise of ISIS and to a convoluted proxy war of inhumane proportions.

The bodies were found early in the morning and they reached international headlines that same day in the form of pictures taken by photojournalist Nilüfer Demir. Demir captured different elements and victims, documenting even the moment in which Turkish crime investigation agents carried the bodies away from the shore. Of all the images, those focusing on Alan's fragile body, his outfit and posture, produced a powerful aesthetic effect that would trigger a cascade of social media replications, as well as causing global outrage.

## Political intensities, humanitarian ends

As soon as it hit social media, one of the images of Alan became instantly iconic. Barely one day after the incident, French President François Hollande called Turkish President Erdoğan specifically referring to the photo, promising to coordinate a more fair and humane European



response to the Syrian conflict. Both British Prime Minister David Cameron and Irish Taoiseach Enda Kenny commented on the photograph, each weighing on its implications as a “human catastrophe”. The discussion even reached the Canadian federal election process, since it became known that the Kurdi family was heading towards Vancouver. Activists and grassroots

organizations in Western countries mobilized to denounce the magnitude of the events, and in many cases urged the authorities to facilitate an easing of migration procedures.

Demir's images of Alan became a gamechanger. Nevertheless, a new debate exploded on social media, this time questioning the image of Alan being used in a sensationalist news cycle – bringing nothing at all to the deceased toddler. Some media outlets opted to stop using the



images, while others decided to blur or cover Alan's body and show only the surrounding actions. The concerns were legitimate, but was this solution useful? After all, images and visual communication channels are a powerful means of conveying an understanding of a humanitarian crisis. A photograph usually goes unchallenged in its ability to represent a specific reality. Some

realities are so distressing that speculative discussions about their representational intent do little to help the situation on the ground. In view of this, the concept of "humanitarian photojournalism" joined the conversation.

"Humanitarian photography" became an attempt to reconcile the legitimate suspicion that lingers over media outlets competing for ratings by appealing to all sorts of affective ruses, and the potential effect of images to influence public opinion – in some cases even changing the course of a conflict. The term is to be understood as "the mobilisation of photography in the service of humanitarian initiatives across state boundaries".<sup>1</sup> Demir's images of Alan can be considered as humanitarian – and not exploitative or simply illustrative – because of the explicit intention behind their publication. She was often interviewed and her intention was always clear:

*"I wish I hadn't had to take that picture... What I saw has left a terrible impression that keeps me awake at night. Then again, I am happy that the world finally cares and is mourning the dead children. I hope that my picture can contribute to changing the way we look at immigration in Europe, and that no more people have to die on their way out of a war."*<sup>2</sup>

Demir's images became exemplary due to the stark situation they depicted and the political mobilization they were able to trigger. This is a delicate balance, since images are never neutral. Indeed, the critical discussion around them orients their meaning; otherwise, they might lead to misconceptions and conflicting beliefs. At the same time, not telling the stories behind them would be disastrous for the refugees fleeing from terror. In this vein, Maria Mattus wrote:

*"In Kurdi's case, the photographs disclosed how innocent children suffer and die between two separate worlds – between warfare and welfare. Demir's images bore witness to a horrible reality, and led media to upgrade the ongoing 'migrant situation' to a 'refugee crisis'."*<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, Demir's work on site was extremely cautious: she produced a substantial set of photographs, many of which escape the gruesomeness and depict instead even-tempered scenes where the facts are evident, yet remain sensitive towards the victim. In the end, Demir's images show an ethical commitment and they remind us stirringly of an ongoing cataclysm. They haunt us. As Susan Sontag suggests:

*"Let the atrocious images haunt us. Even if they are only tokens, and cannot possibly encompass most of the reality to which they refer, they still perform a vital function. The images say: This is what human beings are capable of doing – may volunteer to do, enthusiastically, self-righteously. Don't forget."*<sup>4</sup>

## Iconic drifts, Moroccan performance

Different artists and activists sensed that there was something powerful in Alan's images, and they chose to come to grips with it. Rather than reposting or reprinting the photographs (as we also refrain from doing here), the well-known artist Sudarsan Pattnaik made a sand sculpture of Alan's shape in eastern India; the celebrated artist Ai Weiwei recreated Alan's lifeless pose in a black and white picture; graffiti artists Justus Becker and Oğuz Şen painted a huge mural of it on the river shore in Frankfurt, in Germany. Of all these actions, probably one of the most enduring was organized by performance artist Latifa Ahrar on a beach near Rabat, in Morocco.

Rather than a mimetic intervention, Ahrar's performance became a minimal feat of creative wit. She convened a group of 30 people and together they lay down on the beach, dressed up in Alan's distinctive clothing – a red T-shirt and denim shorts – adopting Alan's estranged and fragile body position. The action was organized in conjunction with other journalists, securing a communicational strategy. Ahrar wanted to remind us of the perfidious European policies that turn that sea into a marine graveyard.

Ahrar's performance was unique in a specific sense. It was based on a minimal gesture that worked through empathic means, and aimed at transmitting a vulnerability that can only be felt on a bodily level, beneath the skin. In that sense, the action implied an appropriation of a bodily posture, of its fragility, which accounts to a mobilisation of the sensible to stir a critical reflection through visceral motifs. The resulting pictures of the performance lend themselves to reinforcement and substitution, by pointing to an ominous known referent. Instead of reproducing an image, Ahrar and her collaborators personified its subtle distress, multiplying it relentlessly with their own bodies.

Based equally on empathy and on outrage over a given state of affairs, Ahrar's performance enabled the recirculation of a fragile gesture, turning it into a counter-strategy against an authoritarian border regime. The action denounced the reality of a disastrous migration policy and its ongoing lethal effects. Re-enacting a tragedy through a collective performance of resistance, Ahrar's work contributed to an iconography of international efforts underlining a common struggle, while organizing a form of solidarity that expanded beyond the rational: an emotional act of dissent.

## Illustrations

- p. 266: Graffiti art by Justus Becker and Oğuz Şen, Frankfurt am Main, Germany. Photograph by Frank C. Müller, CC.
- p. 268: Sudarsan Pattnaik's sculpture, Puri beach near Bhubaneswar, India.
- p. 271: Twitter Screenshot. Performance, Latifa Ahrar.

## Endnotes

- 1 Maria Mattus, "Too dead? Image analyses of humanitarian photos of the Kurdi brothers.", *Visual Studies*, Vol. 35, 2020.
- 2 Ismail Küpeli, "We Spoke to the Photographer Behind the Picture of the Drowned Syrian Boy", *Vice*, 4 September 2015.
- 3 Mattus, "Too dead?", p. 2.
- 4 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Picador: New York, 2003, p. 89.

 The Mirror  
@DailyMirror



Aylan Kurdi's death recreated by 30 people dressed as Syrian boy on Moroccan beach [mirror.co.uk/news/world-new...](http://mirror.co.uk/news/world-new...)



3:41 AM · Sep 10, 2015



7  Reply  Copy link to Tweet

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# LesStickers-te

**L**esStickers-teadores is a creative collective made up of visual artists, designers, and communicators who generate downloadable copyleft graphic content. The collective is focused on making visible the diversity of the big family that is Cuba, and was part of the broad independent activist campaign that arose to challenge the new Code of Families, which was voted on in a referendum in 2022. They were born in a Telegram group of the 11M Platform, a space created by the LGTBQ+ civil society, which organized to defend their rights. The collective chose stickers as a visual resource in response to the campaigns that religious and fundamentalist groups launched on social networks and public spaces across the country against the rights of LGBTQ+ people. In the face of hatred, intolerance, and misinformation, LesStickers-teadores responds with art. A network was then created to design, produce, manage, and distribute free stickers with messages defending rights in those spaces.

## The plot

In 2018, a draft of the new constitution was created and submitted for popular consultation in Cuba. The document replaces the prior constitution which was ratified in 1976. Although the draft constitution ushered in changes in all realms of the economic, political, cultural, and social life of the country, citizen and institutional attention was focused on Article 68.

The “68” defined marriage as “union voluntarily entered into between two persons with legal capacity to do so, in order to live together”. This wording updates the previous definition, which was the union between a man and a woman. Thus, it opened the door for the regulation of same-sex marriage. The 68 upset a large part of the evangelical population and sectors of the Catholic Church. Upon the publication of the article, an intense conflict arose with religious officials voicing their disagreement, using the political weight of the Church to push for

the article to be changed. For the first time in decades, an unofficial voice with national reach dissented on a matter of collective interest.

Initially, five evangelical churches issued a joint statement. They insisted that marriage was a divine institution made up exclusively of man and woman and rejected “gender ideology” as something foreign to Cuba and to “communist countries”. Shortly thereafter, a new communiqué was published, this time signed by twenty-one evangelical organizations. There were also ecumenical alliances between different religious camps that affirmed fundamentalist ideas. The result was a far-reaching campaign against marriage equality. One of its centres was the defence of the “original design” of the family.

Under pressure, the governmental Drafting Commission of the Constitution decided to strike Article 68. In the final text, marriage was defined as: “a social and legal institution. It is one of the forms of organization of families. It is based on free consent and on the equality of rights, obligations, and legal capacity of the spouses” (Art. 82).



# eadores

## For a Cuba From All, With All

Plataforma  
11M

With this decision, the battle for a more inclusive society was postponed until the approval of a new Family Code – the only norm that was put to a referendum, despite more than one hundred that were being created or modified. This gesture made clear the growing influence of evangelical leadership and fundamentalism in Cuba. It also demonstrated their organizational capacity to generate high-impact social campaigns.

### The #11M

As expected, the concessions of a secular state to churches caused concern within the LGBTIQ+ community. The reform and elimination of Article 68 meant subjecting human rights to the conditionality of another referendum process; rights that, due to their nature, should be guaranteed.

A few months before the approval of the new constitution, on 7 May 2019, the National Center for Sex Education (a government institution tasked with working for LGTBIQ+ rights in the country) decided to suspend a traditional conga that takes place every year along Havana's central Calle 23, as part of the Cuban Day



Against Homophobia. In response, part of the LGBTBIQ+ community organized an independent march on 11 May of that year, along the Paseo del Prado, also in the capital. The action was unprecedented.

This march made visible the demands of the community – among them, the approval of marriage equality, a gender identity law, and non-discrimination in the workplace. The march was interrupted by the authorities near Havana's *Malecón*. However, it demonstrated that the only way to confront religious fundamentalist campaigns is through the organization and promotion of public action, with an emphasis on education and awareness in each community.

A year after the march and as a legacy of all LGBTBIQ+ activism, #11M was created on Telegram. This digital space has become a support network, shortening geographical distances. It has also provided spaces for debate, socializing, the construction of collective knowledge and – most importantly – the dismantling of myths and prejudices.

Evangelicals and protestants have continued their campaigns both in their churches and on social media. The referendum on the new Family Code was the next horizon that mobilized this fundamentalist activism – and the activism in defence of rights.

In this context, members of #11M came up with the idea of handing out a pride flag sticker in the shape of a heart. The objective is to make the love between people of the LGBTBIQ+ community visible and to advance social awareness. The gesture was widely welcomed and quickly replicated.

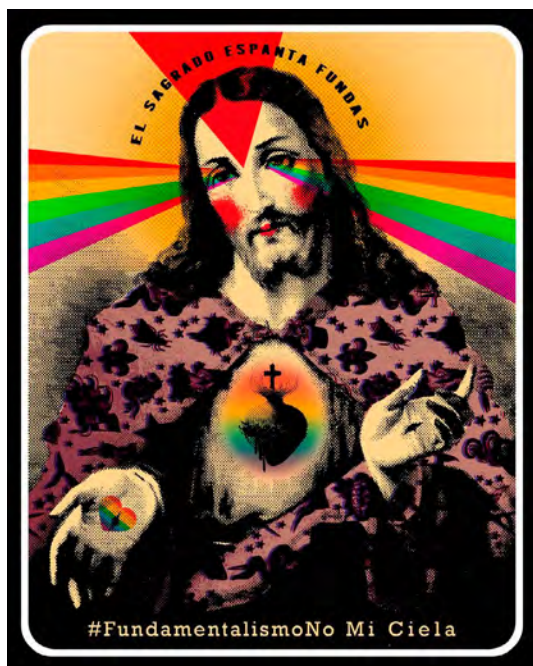


## Stickers beyond Havana

The designs of the LesStickers-teadores communicate diversity of families, different forms of love, and the need for a gender identity law in Cuba. LesStickers-teadores propose collective history with their stickers, scaring away the *fundas* (fundamentalists) and their anti-rights discourses. In addition, they place diversity as a crucial issue for the nation and affirm that the same rights have to protect all its people.

In total, three collections of stickers and other graphic material have been created. They have been launched at different times, as the collective gained collaborators and visibility. The messages, both graphic and text, have LGBTBIQ+ activism as their source and many of them have already been positioned on social networks thanks to activists who have promoted them through hashtags such as #ChúFundas #Espantafunda and #UnCódigoInclusivo.

One of the biggest challenges for the collective has been to escape from "Havana-centrism". Many of the actions that have been developed in the struggle for rights originate and are confined to Havana. LesStickers-teadores wanted to do things differently. The message spreads beyond the capital and communicates through collective action, via stickers, with other parts of the country.



For several months and in almost all Cuban provinces, activities were organized to distribute the stickers and raise awareness of the key topic: that all rights should be for all people. To this end, members of LesStickers-teadores created a general collection account to promote actions in areas of the country that are more difficult to access; they identified places where the stickers could be printed; they made group collections and advised activists remotely on how to respond and promote distribution. The stickers were provided free of charge with collaborative donations as a way of sustaining the campaign.

For the collective it is very important to promote horizontality, self-management, and independence in its activities. The production of the stickers is decentralized and encourages each person to coordinate with other subjects, collectives, or institutions to carry out actions of socializing stickers, *stickerteadas*, or fundraising to produce them. In less than a month LesStickers-teadores achieved national coverage, with at least one action per province.

The experiences have generated mobility and feedback with neighbouring communities in all their diversity, and have served as a pretext to accompany other activities



and actions for the defence of rights. The act of sticking makes the recipient an actor-bearer of the message, whether by handing out stickers or sticking them on the door of their house as a declaration of support. This is the kind of response that energizes community environments and contributes to change.

Restrictions on movement, intimidating state-police control of autonomous initiatives, and provocations exercised by Cuban religious fundamentalist figures in virtual and physical spaces did not prevent LesStickers-teadores from multiplying; on the contrary. In addition to the design and distribution of stickers, the group has organized fundraising parties that contribute to the presentation of new collections, bike rallies for the defence of rights, and creative meetings to devise new actions and projects.

In 2022, a much fairer Family Code was approved by a large majority. But even so, religious fundamentalisms will continue to act and expand. The battle for more rights and guarantees has just begun.

### Further reading

[t.me/LesSticketeadores](https://t.me/LesSticketeadores)

# Orthodox-Va

## Or How to “Steal” and Sabotage a Pro-Life Action

In Russia, despite the consistent violations of human rights and freedom, abortions are fortunately still allowed and accessible. Nevertheless, various public figures, politicians, and Russian Orthodox Church representatives frequently appear in the news and social media with their unwanted thoughts on the subject: should abortion be removed from the list of free medical care services – or is it better to fully ban it? The frequency of these reflections disturbs feminist activists, and neither are there any positive effects when also the president agrees with statements that women need to be more actively dissuaded from abortion when attending consultations ahead of the procedure, as a way of solving the demographic problems in the country.

In 2017, I found out about the “Warriors of Life” – an ultra-conservative Russian Orthodox movement of “pro-lifers” who stand for a total ban on abortion, against IVF, and against birth control pills. A friend of mine shared a link to an article which said that the “Warriors of Life” would embark on a ceremonial anti-abortion boat-trip through the centre of Saint Petersburg.

The idea that a boat with pro-life symbols and banners would float freely through my hometown led me to a decision: this pro-life boat-party had to be disrupted. How could it be done efficiently and without direct confrontation? What if we “stole” their event by gathering a group of feminist activists, dress up as Orthodox “pro-lifers”, rent a tourist boat a few hours earlier, arrange our own version of this ceremony, draw ironic posters, take pictures, and send it to the press? The second I imagined this I grabbed my phone and immediately started texting Leda Garina.

Photos:  
Dave Frenkel

Text:  
Lolja  
Nordic

Leda is a feminist activist and co-founder of

Eve’s Ribs, a prominent feminist community space in Russia.

Leda and the activists from Eve’s Ribs have a huge number of brilliant, daring protest actions behind them, so I knew right away that we would collaborate on this. Leda was also excited about the idea and started gathering others – there were less than two days left for the preparations, but almost 15 people showed up ready to join. We started working immediately.<sup>1</sup>

### Safety issues

I busied myself by working out a strategy for security: I had to find a boat and organize everything in such a way that our names or phone numbers could not be traced. I turned to non-activist friends to help me make everything look as if we were just passing by a boat station and decided to buy tickets spontaneously, without pre-booking. It was crucial for us to take good quality pictures, so

# ginal Control



we invited a reliable and trusted photographer with a lot of experience in working with activists – it was important to us to shoot everything as quickly and efficiently as possible in order to immediately share it with the press. We created a new email account under the “Warriors of Life” name and set up a newsletter which would be sent to all local press.

## Social media

We had to pretend to be Warriors of Life not only during the boat trip, but also online. To make our press release more convincing, we needed to include some actual links. A coder and feminist activist, Margo joined us for this task: overnight she created several fake Warriors of Life public pages, ordered hundreds of bots to make the pages appear to have subscribers, and even made a fake account for the main leader of this movement. All posts on these pages duplicated the originals, with one exception – we changed the announcement of the boat trip. The real Warriors of Life planned to start their event in the afternoon, but we were planning to start early in the morning, to ensure that by lunchtime the news was flooded with our pictures. Our press release, written as the Warriors of Life, was filled with pro-life theses and ideas brought to the grotesque and absurd: we compared masturbation with infanticide, urged all men to abandon masturbation and save their sperm, because it is “a whole army of taxpayers and soldiers”: “every seed spilled during masturbation, outside of the vagina, is to God the same as genocide.”

## Costumes and props

The night before the action, Leda, Dasha, Varya, and other activists gathered in Eve’s Ribs to craft costumes and props. They recreated Orthodox activists looks, drew posters and banners, brainstormed on how to remake the pro-life slogans as funny as possible to uncover their absurdity and misogyny. We were very impressed that the real Warriors also planned to drown an outrageous wreath with an embryo symbol as a part of their ceremony. We, therefore, decided that we also needed to create a symbolic object: we created a huge penis sculpture, made of white fabric. According to our press release, the drowning of the penis sculpture was supposed to symbolize the “seed, which failed to fertilize the egg and was shed in vain.”

Staying up all night turned out to be productive. In addition to the ridiculous press release, we came up with a huge number of absurd slogans

for our posters and banners: “Orthodox-vaginal control”, “Ban abortions! Bring back mass shootings! Fill the gulags!”, “Masturbation is not Orthodox”, “We have wonderful orphanages!” (see photograph on the right), “A woman should give birth, not think”, “Masturbation is genocide”, etc.

## Public reaction

The next morning, we were all set and ready for our mission to steal the Warriors of Life event. We looked very comfortable in our Orthodox-style clothes – even the boat crew did not seem surprised or suspicious when we introduced ourselves as an Orthodox tourist group. We sailed through the central rivers and channels, took pictures, got off the boat, and dispersed. Margot and other activists stayed home to send a press release to the media immediately after receiving the photos. We had a lot of fun during the boat spectacle. It was very empowering to take up the space, ideas, and images of those who oppress us, and to turn them all upside down by making their ideas look absurd.

By lunch, the first articles began to appear in the press, and after a few hours it went viral. Our photos were all over social media and even drew the attention of state television channels. Some wrote about us as if we were the real



Warriors of Life, others stressed that this was a parody. In both cases, many people on social media took our photos and slogans seriously – some of them laughed at our ridiculous looks and posters, others were sharing angry comments about how the pro-lifers had completely crossed the line with their nonsense. The real Warriors of Life were furious, they saw a huge number of publications about “their” action before they were even ready to go out for their real ceremony. They were completely distracted by this social media storm around their name, making our sabotage a success.

The story ended with us being sued for “insulting the feelings of religious people” – a criminal article that was invented following Pussy Riot’s imprisonment for their legendary dance inside

the church. Fortunately, none of us were found guilty under this article. Looking back at this five-year-old story, this now seems like a miracle. Today, Russian feminist activists get regularly preventively arrested and are in danger of being imprisoned for any kind of protest – from Instagram posts to street actions. Nevertheless, every day we continue to take risks and to fight against patriarchy, inequality, discrimination, political repressions, war, and violence of all kinds.

### Endnotes

- 1 The collective are: Lolja Nordic, Eve’s Ribs, Daria Apakhonchich, art group {rodina} (“{motherland}”), Tansulpan Burakaeva, Narnia Catflat.

# Naked Protest

## The Intersections of Gender During Counter-Movements

In South Africa, rape culture is a product of systemic and institutionalized patriarchy. Various patriarchal structures have become entangled and historically co-dependent, to the extent that we may now observe how history speaks through legacies of masculinities advanced by colonialism and apartheid. The country's post-colonial and post-apartheid reality is far from Nelson Mandela's "rainbow nation" utopia that was marketed to the world in 1994. South African women have been active participants in all anti-establishment movements since then and, for this reason, issues that affect women's freedoms cannot be ignored. Women activist Simamkele Dlakavu said that "protests are often romanticized, but they come with personal costs. The psychological trauma that leaves those on the frontlines of these movements damaged and scarred for life is not often highlighted." Dlakavu was one of the frontline protesters during #FeesMustFall, the Rhodes University Naked Protest (#RURferenceList), #RhodesMustFall, and the #RememberKhwezi protest. During the peak of the aforementioned protests movements, Jacob Zuma was the President of South Africa.

I have a growing feeling of grief towards women in my country. The way that South African women use their bodies during protest movements to send a message becomes a sort of martyrdom. We experience grief and our mourning is perpetual. Perpetual mourning has the draining impact of feeling like the burden is ours to bear

indefinitely. At the intersection of the current gender-based politics and the effervescent youthful energy, is an emboldened women's rights movement. The grieving process brings me close to indignation and sometimes hopelessness, a feeling I share with my sisters. A large part of the work against gender-based violence that we are doing as a collective is converting emotion into action.

Boniswa  
Khumalo

### The trial – a symbol of a woman's place in South Africa

On 6 December 2005, *Khwezi* (Star) – the complainant who was given a pseudonym by her supporters to conceal her identity – brought rape charges against Deputy President Jacob Zuma. This was the beginning of one of the most high-profile trials in post-apartheid South Africa. After months of litigation in the Johannesburg High Court, in 2006 Zuma was acquitted of the rape charge. Statistical evidence has shown that there was a reduction in sexual violence and rape reports after the Zuma trial.



# ting



Jake Moloi from the Institute for Security Studies, argued that the judge's decision to set aside section 227(2) of the Criminal Procedure Act "has set a worrying precedent that is now binding on the lower courts". In 2007 Zuma would become the president of South Africa. Khwezi's ultimate passing in 2016 and Zuma's ascension into power following the trial remains a gut-wrenching reality. As a collective, we continue to honour her life, and the lives of our sisters, by wearing black *doeks* (headscarves). I observe our collective mourning with my "mourning sisters" art piece, a visual journey that talks about the perpetual and shared nature of grief.

## Gendering protests

The #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall protest movements mobilized multiple identities. The radical manifestation of the visibility of women in contemporary protests in South Africa revealed the complexity of intersectional issues faced by women. Apart from the Women's March on 9 August 1956 – during which 20,000 women from different races and political backgrounds organized a national march to protest against the racist "pass laws", an internal passport system designed to segregate Blacks and Whites – there was no other publicized protest before 1994 in which women were recognized as leaders of mass resistance.

Between 2015 and 2016, the #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall protest movements demanded higher education institutions and the state to decolonize education. During these uprisings, the intersections of gender, race, and class led to multiple revolutionary happenings. Initially, the imagery in the media reporting on the protests, depicted images of men on the frontlines of protests. Historically, mass action movements were seen as a domain for men and women's leadership and presence was perceived as insignificant. Women manoeuvred themselves into positions of leadership during the mobilization of #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall protest movements that sparked *Mbokodo* Moments, the Rhodes University Naked Protest (#RURreferenceList) and later the #RememberKhwezi protest. We moved from sharing emotional experience of patriarchal oppression towards social action, regardless of male support. The defiance I capture with my artwork "sisters in arms", is a celebration of this progression towards a collective commitment to be active participants in socio-political change, again and again.

## Mbokodo Moments

*Mbokodo* Moments are used to describe the turning points catalyzed by women during the #FeesMustFall protest period. During these moments, women asserted themselves as active leaders in protest actions. The word *mbokodo* is a Zulu term meaning grinding stone. The internal gender marginalization of women on campuses around South Africa during #FeesMustFall lead

to different *Mbokodo* Moments. The intersectionality of the multiplicity of identities came to a head in one significant Moment at Wits University. A group of women comrades decided to wear large African headwraps, white t-shirts, and blue jeans. The group of women sang as they approached the student masses. United, the elected women Student Representative Council (SRC) leaders – outgoing SRC president Shaeera Kalla and incoming president Nompandolo Mkatshwa – took over the podium. Up until this point, women were hardly visible in the leadership ranks of the protest movement and they were sidelined into playing supportive roles. Dressing up as a collective and asserting their place in the protest sent a clear message to male comrades about women's "rightful" place in a protest movement. Women would not be leading from the back.



#AmI Next

WE ARE NOT LOOKING  
FOR OUR OWN STRUGGLE  
WE ARE FIGHTING  
AN OLD ONE

## Communicating displeasure through nakedness

On 17 April 2016, the RU Queer Confessions Facebook group published a list of ten names of male students as part of a confession, titled: "Reference List". This list would later be known as the #RURferenceList and spark a protest against sexual assault and rape culture on campus, even though the original #RURferenceList Facebook post did not explicitly mention rape or sexual assault. News about the post spread across campus and an impromptu meeting was held that evening by female students. The following day a crowd of about 50 female students shut down campus and staged a topless protest (though some students wore bras) with statements reading "No Means No" and "Still Not Asking For It" written across their bodies. The women formed a body barricade as a symbol of unity.

It is known in African indigenous episteme that Bantu women communicate their displeasure through nudity. In this instance, the naked women were trying to use their bodies to also mediate non-violence between the police and the protesting student force. However, this vulnerable act of protest was met with excessive force from Rhodes University's Management and the South African Police Service (SAPS). The police used stun grenades and rubber bullets to break the body barricade. A few women were also arrested. The women-led protest was a desperate plea to expose the callousness of the daily life of women at Rhodes University and women around the country. Women on other university campuses staged their own naked protests in solidarity resulting in multiple *Mbokodo* Moments. Yolanda Dyantyi and Dominique McFall, who were students at Rhodes University at the time, were found guilty of insubordination. Dyantyi was charged with "engaging in offensive/defamatory conduct", and both women were excluded from Rhodes University for life. A documentary titled "DISRUPT" would be released as a documentation of the events that unfolded during the #RURferenceList protest. Despite the weaponization and criminalization of the female body, nudity has continued to be the last resort for women to resist and communicate their displeasure when they feel that they have nothing left to lose. Nudity is a potent protesting tool because it sends a strong physical message that the person or group has no other alternatives.

## Resistance art and guerilla campaigns

Guerilla-style protesting is one of the methods of resistance that women and students used during #FeesMustFall, the Rhodes University Naked Protest (#RURferenceList), and #RhodesMustFall. On 16 August 2016, during a ceremony where President Jacob Zuma was delivering a speech on the results of the 2016 local government elections, four young women dressed in black staged a guerilla-style silent protest. Simamkele Dlakavu was one of four who stood in front of the podium with posters that read "Remember Khwezi", "I am 1 in 3", "#10 years later", and "Khanga". President Jacob Zuma was overshadowed. The crowd and the cameras were drawn to the women donning posters written in red marker. The women were violently and forcibly removed from the stage by presidential security. This was an iconic silent protest that was seen and broadcast to millions of people in South Africa. The silent protest was the women's democratic right as stated in the South African Constitution. In an interview following the protest, one of the women said that the protest was a spur-of-the-moment decision. Witnessing

these four women on television played out like a beautiful theatre piece, sending shivers down my spine. The audacity of the four women brought a smile to my face. We are often told that there are "appropriate" or "inappropriate" times to bring up certain subjects. People who hold patriarchal norms are often inconvenienced by our grief as women. We too are gravely inconvenienced by the brutality of gender-based violence.

## Reflection and looking forward

In the aftermath of the protests in South Africa, university campuses have become more militarized. Protests such as #AmINext and #Total-Shutdown erupted following multiple reports of brutal rapes and murders of women after 2016. Women continued rallying on the frontline of all these protests. Women marched to Parliament and handed over a memorandum of demands after Uyinene Mrwetyana was raped and killed at a local post office. President Cyril Ramaphosa passed three new amendment bills to address the scourge of gender-based violence in 2020. South African women have never known a period of rest. In theory, women in South Africa should enjoy the highest fundamental freedoms of dignity, safety, and security but in practice we continue to mourn our unfulfilled promise of freedom, safety, and equality.

# OTHER FEMINISM

So-called anti-gender politics, characterized by discriminatory, misogynist, homo- and transphobic, and exclusionary languages, regulations, and practices, is on the rise globally. But so are feminist movements and discourses that exceed merely demanding equality by proposing profound structural transformations and political strategies. These feminist movements and discourses mainly originate in the so-called Global South, but their impact is felt worldwide.

Along with the current rise of far-right governments and fascist movements and the normalization of racist and exclusionary discourses, we are seeing greater restrictions on reproductive rights and a significant increase in femicide and trans- and homophobia worldwide. Politicians now shamelessly glorify the patriarchal family and cis-heteronormativity, and adopt moral and religious rhetoric to normalize violence against women and gender dissidents in the name of protecting society.

One can rightfully ask why anti-gender politics plays such a strategic role in mobilizing the masses in the 21st century, whether in liberal democracies or dictatorial regimes. Some argue that the crisis of masculinity – referring to the emotional and political impacts of society’s inability to maintain traditional gender roles, norms, and desires – is not only driving anti-gender politics, but is also a contributing factor to the growth of the far-right more broadly. While the crisis of masculinity can partly explain the affective and cultural prevalence of anti-gender beliefs and practices, it is certainly not sufficient to fully comprehend the political factors driving the worldwide growth of anti-gender and other reactionary politics. In fact, the idea of a resurgence of masculinity has always been a critical factor in fascist and conservative politics. We therefore need to look further afield to explain the key role that anti-gender politics play in contemporary right-wing populist movements.

## The crisis of crisis management

Indeed, the crisis of masculinity and its consequences should be understood as a part of a larger societal crisis, which from a feminist perspective is referred to as “the crisis of social reproduction”. This crisis arises when neoliberal governance fails to reproduce itself and overcome structural challenges through consensual politics. The current global authoritarian shift in governance is a response to the crisis of crisis management. It deploys necropolitical forces, new surveillance technologies, disciplinary mechanisms, and coercive state apparatuses in order to restore social order and govern the ungovernable. The new authoritarian shift has resulted in a surge of multifaceted violence against individuals, populations, and territories. Recent anti-gender movements can be viewed

# ISMS

## A SUBVERSIVE GIFT TO THE WORLD<sup>1</sup>

Firoozeh  
Farvardin

as a reactionary response to the crisis of social reproduction. By enforcing certain gender norms and practices, these movements aim not only to discipline gendered (and racialized) labour forces, but also to reinforce boundaries between public and private, production and reproduction, collective and individual, nature and culture. They seek to overcome the failures in the governance of social reproduction and restore social order.

Yet authoritarian neoliberal governance has met with increasing resistance and opposition. Large-scale movements and significant voices have emerged over the past decade that strive to defend or reclaim the autonomy of non-normatively gendered bodies. This handbook covers many of these movements and voices. They not only demand equal rights and bodily autonomy, but also seek structural transformation. From the bedroom to the state, they challenge the status quo. These movements represent a growing trend towards the feminization of emancipatory politics, emerging in various geographies of marginalization and on different scales.

### The emergence of other feminisms

From feminist mass protests in Latin America against femicide, revolutionary uprisings in Rojava and Iran against state violence, to LGBTIQ+ movements in Turkey and Eastern European countries, women's strikes are burgeoning across the world, and with them, an increase in the active participation of women and gender dissidents in trade union and political organizations, opening new horizons in feminist politics. These emergent feminisms have also brought renewed attention to issues such as care work, gendered pay gaps, and the limitations of neoliberal feminism, gender equality discourses, and identity politics. The many feminist contributions in this handbook are evidence of the feminization of emancipatory politics, and the growing popularity and importance of feminist politics in anti-authoritarian and anti-fascist struggles. How can we think these simultaneous and interwoven movements in their diversity, while at the same time considering what they have in common? And how do these movements undertake this task?

In this article, I contend that there is a plurality of new feminisms emerging, all of which make diverse but valuable contributions to emancipatory movements as a whole. These movements and intellectual interventions are rooted locally, but maintain strong connections with feminist struggles worldwide. These connections, on the one hand, encompass knowledges, strategies, and discursive elements – the conception of the body-territory as a political framework for combatting femicide and colonization, which has travelled from Abya Yala to other regions, or the reappropriation of the “Jin, Jiyan, Azadî” (Woman, Life, Freedom) slogan by feminist movements in the Middle East beyond

Kurdistan, or various performative protests around the world inspired by the LASTESIS performance “Un violador en tu camino” (see below). On the other hand, the emerging feminisms are also connected via concrete collaborations and coordination, as we saw play out in the case of the International Women’s Strikes in 2017 and 2018.

These new feminisms, while drawing inspiration and ideas from previous waves of feminism, can be seen neither as a continuation of these waves nor as constituting an entirely new wave in their own right, since their diverse approaches and practices resist any homogenous categorization. Feminist struggles have continued to evolve and take on various forms across the world, just as neoliberal capitalism has done. Along the way, these struggles have undergone variations and mutations in terms of their intellectual and political projects, strategies, and tactics for grassroots resistance, as well as in their visions for the future.

Therefore, I refer to these emerging trends of feminism as “*other feminisms*”. The term not only highlights their differences and similarities from previous feminisms, it also recognizes that these novel forms mainly originate from marginalized populations and territories. At the same time, *other feminisms* do have certain transnational elements in common, some of which have been acknowledged and debated in the works of transnational feminist theorists. In what follows, I shed light on the profound significance of the rise of *other feminisms* during the past decade while summarizing some of these key commonalities in light of the contributions in this book.

### Violence as the point of departure

The nationwide protest in India after the brutal gang rape and murder of 23-year-old Jyoti Singh Pandey in Delhi in December 2012; the mass mobilization and street protests initiated following the femicide of 14-year-old Chiara Paez which gave birth to the “Ni Una Menos” movement in Argentina and other Latin American territories; Kurdish women’s armed resistance against massacre and mass sexual assault and rape committed by different military forces in Western Kurdistan (Rojava) and Syria, including ISIS, the forces of the Assad Regime, and those of the Turkish state; the protests against sexual assaults and rape culture at Rhodes University in South Africa in 2016; the demonstrations following the 2018 assassination of Marielle Franco, a black queer feminist activist, which included performative acts of renaming public places after her;<sup>2</sup> the Tal’at movement in Palestine against both occupation and patriarchal violence which sprung up after the killing of Israa Ghrayeb, a 21-year-old Palestinian woman from Bethlehem; the “Falgatna” movement against sexual violence in Tunisia; the 2022 revolutionary uprising in Iran following the murder of a Kurdish woman, Jina (Mahsa) Amini, by the morality police of the Islamic Republic;<sup>3</sup> massive protests of women and gender dissidents in Poland in 2020 and 2021 against the new restrictive abortion laws (Strajk Kobiet protests<sup>4</sup>) – these are a few recent examples of the power of movements against gender-based violence to organize and create bridges connecting different forms of discontent and discrimination, and to defy authoritarianism.

*Other feminisms* have emerged out of the struggles against violence in its multifaceted forms, which has necessarily involved a theorization of violence’s multiple meanings and practices. Indeed, it can be argued that the rise of *other feminisms* corresponds to the global trend towards authoritarianism, which utilizes increasingly complex and interwoven



coercive and necropolitical mechanisms that propagate new forms of violence. In this sense, unlike the previous feminisms, even those with intersectional approaches, *other* feminisms concentrate not only on violence against gendered and racialized bodies, but also on economic and ecological violence. All of these necropolitical mechanisms are part of a strategy to advance authoritarian rule and further the exploitation of target populations. These varied forms of violence tend to target women and gender dissidents as their primary site of operation. This explains why forms of gender and sexual violence, such as femicide or violations of the rights of feminized bodies, have often served as trigger events for the recent mass movements across the globe that primarily mobilize women and gender dissidents.

*Other* feminisms confront issues such as domestic violence, public assaults, the policing of feminized bodies, femicide, and state violence against women, queer and trans people. They also implicitly or explicitly address the structural, institutional, and epistemic violence stemming from colonial and capitalist relations of exploitation and extraction. Many of them also involve struggles against the institutional violence of police and the incarceration and criminalization of subversive bodies, indigenous populations, and migrants.

### Movements for reclaiming life

**“My desire  
Live the life that  
I choose”<sup>5</sup>**

March 2020 marked a milestone for anti-authoritarian feminist struggles in Argentina when two women-led movements against the necropolitical forces perpetuating violence in the country met in Buenos Aires.<sup>6</sup> The first movement, the “Madres de Plaza de Mayo” (Mothers of Plaza de Mayo), began under the military junta (1976-1982) and have remained active through to the present day. Wearing their distinctive white scarves, they protest injustice, demand the return of their disappeared children, seek the truth about their fate, and keep the memories of the victims of state violence alive. The second movement is a national women’s movement that uses the green scarf as its symbol and fights for the legal, safe, and accessible right to abortion for all women. They aim to save lives from the gendered and sexual violence to which women are exposed due to the denial of their bodily and reproductive autonomy. Despite their differences in tactics and targeted populations, both movements address the same broader strategic issue of reclaiming life by preserving the memory of victims of violence and saving the social and biological lives of those subjected to sexual and gendered violence.

Of course, this is not the first time feminisms have addressed violence in its multifaceted forms. Indeed, many struggles against anti-gender politics across the globe had previously focused on how the various interlocking mechanisms of oppression and violence, originating in heteropatriarchy, the regime of nation states, colonialism, and capitalism, harm us both collectively and individually. However, the emerging movements in question here go beyond making this violence visible. Instead, their primary focus is on highlighting the ways in which everyday life and survival are dependent on the (social) death and continued violence experienced by “others” due to the prevailing necropolitical regimes and the ways in which they unevenly distribute life and death chances. In other words, *other* feminisms are opposed to the structural dependence on violence and the necropolitics that threaten the reproduction of life.

The historic meeting of the green and white scarves movements in Argentina connects the past and present struggles against authoritarianism in the country. It represents a new political understanding of the interdependence and interconnected destinies of various anti-systemic movements. This understanding goes beyond the specific demands of recognition or seeking justice for a particular group of people.

The struggle against necropolitical forces that threaten or destroy various forms of life, including generational, ecological, (non-)human, biological, social, and cultural life, is crucial in *other* feminisms. In this regard, the meaning of life goes beyond its mere biological conception and comes to signify an interconnected and multifaceted collective that serves as a foil to (social) death and the destruction inflicted by necropolitical forces. In this way, new transnational feminisms prioritize the meaning of life and setting an agenda for reclaiming, maintaining, and reproducing life. Eva von Redecker calls this new movement a “Revolution for Life”, which extends beyond feminist movements, although feminists play key roles in it. According to von Redecker, the revolution for life emphasizes the importance of reproductive labour and its connections to colonization.<sup>7</sup>

The emergent *other* feminisms also challenge the nature-culture divide, which emphasizes their overlap with climate movements, anti-colonial and anti-racist struggles, and anti-authoritarianism. The Kurdish women’s movement, embodied in the slogan of “Jin, Jiyan Azadî”, is a prominent example of putting life at the heart of the struggle against colonialism, extractivism, and the patriarchal regime of the nation-state.

### Beyond equality: a call for transversal politics

**“We want ourselves alive, free, and out of debt!”<sup>8</sup>**

Standing against necropolitical forces and for reclaiming and regenerating life has the potential to connect and weave together different histories, multiple movements, and varied visions for the future. This ability or “*potencia*”, which transcends the framework of gender equality, constitutes another prominent common element of *other* feminisms – “transversality”. Transversality in these new gender movements, as Verónica Gago<sup>9</sup> elaborates, involves making alliances while recognizing and actually celebrating differences among the political forces fighting for justice, equality, autonomy, and liberty on different fronts.

Feminized bodies are often the strategic target of violence, resulting in excessive extraction and exploitation, particularly in marginalized and colonized spaces. Around the world, these bodies continue to perform the majority of social-reproductive labour. At the same time, as noted, feminized bodies comprise the main oppositional forces and voices against necropolitical governance. Therefore, in these different arenas of struggle, they have the collective capacity and occupy key strategic roles that can bridge different forms of oppression and violence, and on that basis forge alliances among bodies and movements. In this sense, transversal feminist politics refers to the potentiality, within discourse production and activism, for *other* feminisms to organically connect different anti-systemic forces.

As an example, contemporary trans and queer feminist resistance in Turkey illustrates the potentiality of *other* feminisms to introduce a new multidimensional agenda for anti-authoritarian struggles beyond gender equality. Authoritarian neoliberalism in Turkey targets women and gender dissidents through neoliberal mechanisms of financialization,

hyper-securitization, and the precarization of their (reproductive) labour. This is intertwined with cis-heteropatriarchal, racist, and religious mechanisms of exclusion and oppression. Yet this has also meant that trans and queer feminists in Turkey have become a strong voice of resistance against the AKP regime. Their unique position and potentiality at the intersection of different forms of violence have enabled them to connect and mobilize against state violence, which includes gender violence, racism, nationalism, gentrification, privatization, ecological destruction, and extractivism.

### Radicalizing the politics of everyday life

By bringing together a multiplicity of different conflicts and situations of injustice, each rooted in particular relationships of domination and exploitation, *other* feminisms have contributed to redefining the meaning and scope of politics. Rather than just focusing on structural and institutional domains of power, *other* feminisms have recognized the need to compose forces in various social, cultural, mental, and physical terrains that have the ability to affect and be affected. In new materialist terms, *other* feminisms have advocated the “micropolitics of everyday life”. This means that their politics acknowledge desires, feelings, and thoughts as much as the material outcomes and physical effects of domination and exploitation. *Other* feminisms have also expanded the scope of struggles and feminist interventions beyond institutional boundaries and the public sphere to include different aspects of social life, from the bedroom and the household to carceral institutions, from the state apparatus to the global financial sector.

*Other* feminisms stress the strategic connection between the gendered issues in everyday life and those more widely considered “political”, offering a new front of emancipatory politics. As an example, *other* feminisms have brought issues, such as domestic violence, femicide, and trans genocide in connection to the dispossession of land and ecocide, access to clean water and basic sanitary materials for women in conflict zones and among marginalized communities, and imposing mandatory hijab as a means of body policing, among other gendered themes, into the forefront of their agendas and visions for the future. As a result, in the Global South and North alike, we are witnessing the politicization of issues that were long considered marginal or local. Thanks to *other* feminist movements, these topics are now often addressed and taken seriously, even in mainstream political discussions and popular campaigns.

Thus, *other* feminisms challenge the boundary separating public from private, as well as that between the micro and macro scales of politics. Although the blurring of the boundaries of public and private is not new to feminism, it seems that *other* feminisms strategically radicalize the politics of everyday life and assert the importance of decentralizing and redefining the domain of politics and its main protagonists.

### Redistribution, recognition, and reparation

*Other* feminisms and their aligned gender movements also challenge the division between the politics of recognition (of suppressed identities and bodies) and the politics of redistribution (of power, wealth, and strategic resources), which had been especially prevalent in the Global North.

In the past, feminist movements have primarily focused on either individual or collective efforts to achieve recognition and address gender inequality, or worked to achieve the redistribution of power resources while also fighting against class stratification and for economic equality.

Despite their divergences in terms of tactics and practices, *other* feminisms are committed to advocating for a revolution of life itself. For this reason, they see feminism as a political project rather than an identity, as Sylvia Walby argues.<sup>10</sup> New feminisms have worked against the division between recognition and redistribution and offered forms of political engagements beyond this duality. The core agenda of *other* feminisms is to reclaim life beyond its mere biological meaning in the face of the necropolitical forces that cause (social) death and destruction.

Moreover, we can observe and identify elements of the politics of “reparation” in *other* feminisms, too.<sup>11</sup> *Other* feminisms seek to restore and repair not only the identities and lives of individuals but also those of entire communities and territories, to hold out hope for future generations, and to keep alive the memory of those lost. New gender movements strive to repair life for those sectors of the population that have been historically marginalized or excluded from society. To do so, these diverse movements employ different practices such as forming justice-seeking movements against gendered or sexual violence, using abolitionist tactics against carceral institutions and state policing, making demands for land reparation or restitution for indigenous communities such as those in America, Kurdistan, and Palestine, and forms of artistic intervention to restore and (de)construct memories of transgressive bodies and subaltern peoples.

### Subversion: aesthetics of the feminist revolt

**“To work with emotions is a subversive gift to the world. Subversion dipped in beauty is revolution.”<sup>12</sup>**

On 27 December 2017, on a very crowded street called Revolution Street in Tehran, Iran, Vida Movahed stood on the utility box, tied her white headscarf to a stick, and waved it to the crowd as a flag. She was arrested immediately after this performance, but the video of her protest went viral. Coinciding with an ongoing uprising in protest against economic hardship and the corruption of the regime, the picture of Vida became symbolic of those protests, despite their various origins and motivations. A month later, other feminized bodies and even a few men started doing the same performance on the utility boxes in the same street. Later, in other streets and cities. Most of the protesters were beaten and arrested right after their performances. However, the individual performances eventually coalesced into a collective feminist movement known as the “Girls of the Revolution Street”.<sup>13</sup>

*Other* feminisms also offer something new in terms of how feminist subjectivities are practiced and performed. The wilful and subversive body, either individual or in various forms of assembly, is at the centre of the performative protests, artistic interventions, or theorizing that are key to *other* feminisms. *Other* feminisms are also popular, in that their protagonists, in most cases, are not politicians or other representative or spectacular figures, but by and large ordinary women and gender dissidents. In other words, anybody can be a figure of resistance by the sheer fact of using their body to perform their subjectivity. Ewa Majewska calls this kind of performance of subjectivity a form of “weak

resistance” which “presents itself as a new territory, as the unexpected reconstitution of the dark matter of the excluded suddenly presenting its agency on the stage of history”.<sup>14</sup> *Other* feminist weak resistances are often decentred, situational, and performative/figurative practices of being/living otherwise everywhere, from beds to streets, carried out by anonymous subversive bodies. In this regard, subversion is a pivotal element of performing feminist subjectivity. That is why joy, in its collective form, is one of the essential forms of expression and assertion in *other* feminist struggles. Through joy and collective wilfulness, feminists manage to undo the oppressive, immiserating, and violent climate surrounding them.

BounSergi Collective, a group of queer activists at Boğaziçi University of Istanbul whose story is told in this book, organized their influential protests at the university through collective joy via art exhibitions, individual dance performances, raves, stand-up shows, and games.<sup>15</sup> Other examples of collective subversive feminist actions which are described in this handbook include the “Antimonumentas” (anti-monuments) movement in Mexico<sup>16</sup>, a Russian feminist group undertaking various forms of sabotage against the pro-life anti-abortion movement in Russia,<sup>17</sup> and LesStickers-teadores collective’s stickers in support of the LGBTIQ+ rights in Cuba.<sup>18</sup>

LASTESIS, a well-known intersectional and trans-inclusive feminist collective from Chile, has also garnered mass appeal and had significant impacts on feminist movements internationally, not least because of their message, which addresses widespread gendered and sexual violence, but also due to the creative form that it advocates, namely, using collective dance and joy to fight against violence. It is no coincidence that immediately after being performed for the first time, “un violador en tu camino” went viral globally and has been translated, contextualized, and performed in different contexts, from Tunis to New York, from Istanbul to Mexico City.

### Alternative vision: a politics of care

**“To care is to be creative, to be willing to imagine otherwise”<sup>19</sup>**

While stressing the current conjuncture and historical trajectories, the focus on a micropolitics of everyday life does not imply that *other* feminisms have no transformative visions for the future. On the contrary, the movements and discourses that have emerged in recent decades are based on reclaiming and repairing life for the future. By caring for the future, they offer a pathway for transforming our current, disastrous form of (re)production. Indeed, “futuresability”, as a horizon of possibility and alternative visions, is one of the main forces behind the new politics of care (for others) that *other* feminisms advocate.

Feminists have long theorized and practiced care as an autonomous survival strategy and a foundation for political organization that seeks to realize a world in which all people have an equal chance of living and thriving. The politics of care serves a dual purpose in *other* feminisms. Firstly, it creates new, independent spaces for recognizing, reproducing, and redistributing life while seeking to reclaim and repair existing spaces and institutions. Secondly, it involves using prefigurative actions in both theory and practice in various feminist movements and initiatives.<sup>20</sup> Prefigurative actions refer to social relations, political actions, and cultural interventions that model a desirable future society in the present moment.

Thus, the politics of care forms the backbone of various feminist initiatives and alternative spaces that endorse practices of being and living otherwise. In other words, (re)constructing autonomous realms of everyday life and carrying out prefigurative actions aimed at repairing life for the future are only possible through collective care and solidarity. The practices of abolitionist feminisms embody a radical understanding of the politics of care and solidarity.

Jinwar, an autonomous village exclusively for women and children in Rojava, northeastern Syria, for many became the symbol of liberation from both the regimes of patriarchy and of nation states. The village, which was officially inaugurated in 2018, aims to introduce itself as a role model for a possible future free from structures of oppression imposed on feminized bodies. Jinwar is one of the many initiatives and autonomous spaces in recent decades to have been founded by women and gender dissidents whose primary objective is collective survival in the face of the perils of the various systems of oppression.

### The future is feminist

While it is not possible to fully explore or list the multifarious aspects of emerging feminisms, I hope to draw the reader's attention to their novel impact in mobilizing different populations and communities. *Other* feminisms continue to address issues related to the hetero-patriarchal system and to gendered and sexual violence, while simultaneously putting forward radical demands and pushing for structural changes beyond the framework of gender equality.

In the past decade, *other* feminisms have been the major force combatting hetero-patriarchy, neoliberal capitalism, racism, extractivism and colonialism, and authoritarianism, no matter how powerful these may seem. In recent years, many of the more successful mass mobilizations in occupying public spaces were either organized or significantly influenced by women and gender dissidents.

Additionally, *other* feminisms play a vital role in expanding the scope of political action by radicalizing everyday life as well as by uniting and connecting various social movements and frontiers of struggle. It is rare to find other political projects that take on environmental concerns, class struggles, indigenous rights to both their land and their bodies, abolitionist movements, gendered or sexual violence, and more, both in their transnational aspects and local contexts.

What unites all these diverse movements and discourses against oppressive power relations in our time is the desire to defend or rather to reclaim life. Life, in its broader and plural meaning, has the potential to mobilize those subjugated bodies that are responsible for the reproduction of life and are affected by the excessive exploitation and extraction of bodies, territories, and (non-)human resources.

*Other* feminisms also offer visions for possible futures by radically engaging with constructing the present and critically repairing the past(s). Indeed, there are many instances worldwide where *other* feminisms, in advocating the politics of care, offer concrete models for future-making via building autonomous reproductive spaces and other forms of prefigurative action.

Finally, *other* feminisms propose alternative ways of being and living through performative and symbolic forms of resistance. The aesthetics of *other* feminist movements differ from previous feminist movements in this way. While the body has always been the focus of

feminist interventions, for these *other* movements, the performance of subversion and wilfulness in various forms and expressions is the impetus that brings together a collection of anonymous feminized bodies.

If we consider all these different aspects of feminist struggles happening in our time, then it is not unrealistic to say if there is a future for our world, it could be feminist. Given the extent of destruction, inequality, and injustice that we face, new emerging popular feminisms have the potential to address the most urgent issues of our time and to suggest ways out of global misery and resurgent authoritarianism. Despite their differences, many of the contributions in this handbook provide evidence of a possible feminist future.

### Endnotes

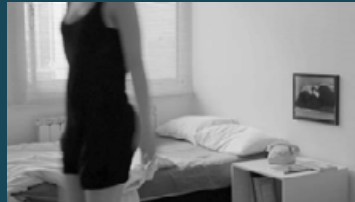
- 1 Inspired by LASTESIS, *Set Fear on Fire: The Feminist Call That Set the Americas Ablaze*, London: Verso Books, 2023.
- 2 See: Marielle Franco *Street Transcending Boundaries*, p. 102.
- 3 See: *Upheaval on the Cloud – Countering the Authoritarian Gaze in the Iranian Uprisings*, p. 296.
- 4 See: *The Art of Sustaining a Movement – Visual and Sonic Identity of the 2020/21 Strajk Kobiet Protests in Poland*, p. 108.
- 5 See: *Erasing Borders Around Our Skin – Painting an Image of Ourselves the Way We Want To Be Seen, Heard, Loved*, p. 194.
- 6 See: *Scarves for Women’s Struggles in Argentina*, p. 306.
- 7 Eva von Redecker, *Revolution für das Leben: Philosophie der neuen Protestformen*, Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer Verlag, 2020; also see her essay *Counterstrategies for Life*, p. 96, in this book.
- 8 A popular slogan that was first used in 2017 by the NiUnaMenos collective in Argentina.
- 9 Verónica Gago, *Feminist international: How to change everything*, London: Verso Books, 2020.
- 10 Jo Littler and Sylvia Walby, “Feminism is a project not an identity”, *Soundings*, 81 (81), 2022, pp. 128–142.
- 11 Jo Littler and Angela McRobbie, “Beyond anti-welfarism and feminist social media mud-slinging: Jo Littler interviews Angela McRobbie”, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 25 (1), 2022, pp. 327–334.
- 12 LASTESIS, *Set Fear on Fire*, p. xii.
- 13 See: *Upheaval on the Cloud – Countering the Authoritarian Gaze in the Iranian Uprisings*, p. 296.
- 14 Ewa Majewska, “Weak resistance”, *Krisis*, Issue 2, 2018.
- 15 See: *Singing in Dark Times*, p. 54.
- 16 See: *Communicating Vessels in the Feminist City*, p. 186.
- 17 See: *Orthodox-Vaginal Control – Or How to “Steal” and Sabotage a Pro-life Action*, p. 276.
- 18 See: *LesStickers-teadores – For a Cuba From All, With All*, p. 272.
- 19 Miriam Ticktin, “Care and the commons”, *The Politics of Care*, edited by Rachel Brown and Deva Woodly, 2021, pp. 916–921.
- 20 Verónica Gago, *Feminist international*.

# Uphaval on t

## Countering the Authoritarian Gaze in the Iranian Uprisings



You wake up.  
You had a dream.



You pick up your phone.  
The news is overwhelming.



# he Cloud

Nafis  
Fathollahzadeh



You pick up your camera,  
and set out to record.

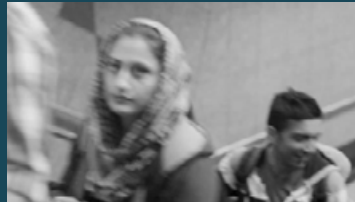


**H**ow do we, both as individuals and as a society, see, memorize, and forget in the context of a hyper-documented world? What kind of visuality can remain, be remembered and restored? And how can film and photography challenge authoritarianism on both political and aesthetic fronts, proposing social and formal innovations that engage with collective action? This essay addresses these questions both by looking at visual fragments of the uprisings in Iran, as well as the way image and imagination have countered the authoritarian regimes in Iran and elsewhere.

Digitalization and the social media boom of the early 2000s shifted the production, distribution and reception of film and photography. Media sharing and citizen journalism altered the way news is accessed, challenged authoritarian hegemonic narratives, and established new conditions for visibility. The use of phone cameras and social media for disseminating news during the 2009 Green movement protests in Iran were a sign of this change, shifting the role of photography and film in the animation of political subjectivity and inspiration of social movements. For visual culture scholar Nicholas Mirzoeff, “the revolutions in North Africa and the global Occupy movement saw the effort to find a horizontal



Her eyes were full of hope and fear.



I remember you breaking the silence in the metro.

visuality in which people envisage and visualize themselves as having a name, a place and the right to look." In his view, this implies a kind of photography that goes beyond "the democratization of the means of reproduction as it was in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries towards a democracy of the self (image)"<sup>1</sup> – enabling people to understand themselves as agents participating in the making of history. The emergence of countless citizen (photo) journalists over the last decade has complicated the notion of the individual eyewitness and challenged the role of the photographer as the sole creator of a unique image, the first on the scene. It has brought a multiplicity of perspectives on

events in times of upheaval, additionally making collaboration possible among users of photography. Social media opened a space for a different form of sociability between two or more people as they look at each other and allow the other to invent them. A collaboration among anonymous people that allows appropriation, reiteration, and reinvention of the authorial image.

Joan Fontcuberta describes this situation as a post-photographic condition when "the author camouflages in the cloud(s). Adoption, recycling, and remixing are standardized. Authorship becomes secondary to content and alternative models of authorship are formulated: co-authoring, collaborative creation and strategic anonymity in which cultural activism is reinforced."<sup>2</sup>



You hold her photographs of the women's march in March 1979, sing a song hand in hand and celebrate International Women's Day. A woman turns to you and says: take care of yourself.



You see her standing in the middle of the revolution,\* in the square, occupying the space on the ground and on the cloud.



You hear the police shouting move on, move on, there is nothing to see here.

\*Revolution Square in Teheran

## Figures of resistance

Such delegitimization of authorship brings about counter-strategies for resisting the authoritarian gaze, prompting a pluralization of perspectives. In the case of Iran, this is a resistance to censorship and propaganda of the regime, the cliché misery narratives of mainstream western media, or the biased media coverage of the Iranian diaspora.

As individuals became more aware of the ways in which they are being visually controlled, they began to take ownership of their own image and image production. This means moving from being mere “objects” of images to becoming active subjects that challenge hegemonic narratives.

(Self-)Image or self-imagination thus have the potential to generate counter-visibility in the context of authoritarian regimes. On the one hand, various subjectivities – that of a protester, observer, narrator, camera person, and filmmaker – merge into one, creating an image of its own, without intermediacy. On the other hand, they render the spectators as active digital witnesses, editors, critics, and translators. They bring something that was not imaginable before, what is forbidden to be seen, imagined, recorded, and distributed. The personal and spontaneous quality of such (self-)image evokes the imagination of everyone else in becoming that figure. The figure of resistance.

In their essay, “Figuring a Women’s Revolution: Bodies Interacting with their Images”, written a



You saw her in different times, there and elsewhere.



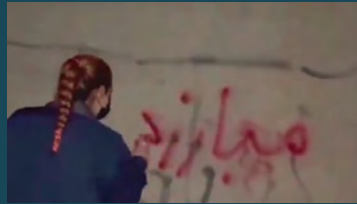
Her image haunted you for decades.



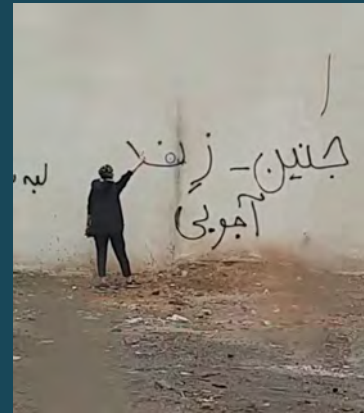
Your imagination became a threat.

few days after the 2022 protests spread nationwide, L, an anonymous writer based in Iran, describes this potentiality by reflecting on the gap between viewing photos and videos of protests online, and the presence in the street. “A woman would jump on top of a trash bin, face the cars, and lift up her fist, fixed in that figure for a few seconds ... Everybody wanted to join the mass of images they had seen in protest videos from the previous days and from people in other cities. Very few people shouted slogans in these moments. I could clearly see this ‘desire’ to become ‘that image’, that image of resistance.” L argues that “these protests are not crowd-centered but situation-centered, not slogan-centered but figure-centered ... In an endless cycle, image

and figure transform into one another. Images are published and distributed, and they arouse the imagination of bodies. People thereafter go to the street not with the bodies that they are, but with the bodies that they can and want to be. With their own imagination. Their revolutionary act is to incarnate this imagination. In truth, in this tying-together of image and street, representation and reality mutually orient one another.”<sup>3</sup> Many examples of self-imagination were visible during the 2022 revolutionary uprisings in Iran. Some circulating videos were reports from events that narrate the scene or comment on it, adding details about the time and place. Scenes from protests, police attacks, vigils, funerals are among those that function as forensic documentation of state violence, while some others take the form of a statement or manifest.



You wrote it on the walls,



in your own language;

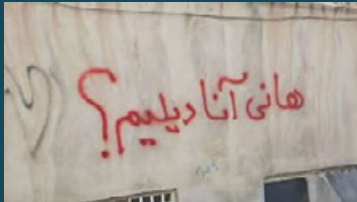
Graffiti on the wall, “struggle” in Farsi

Graffiti on the wall, “Women, life, freedom” in Balochi

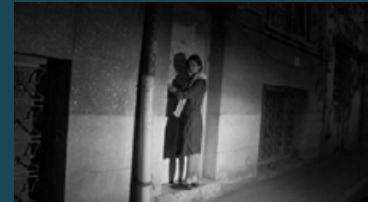
## Scripts for a revolutionary cinema

In one of the videos shared from Mahabad, a town in Kurdistan, the filmmaker walks towards the fire behind the barricade. The camera sets the fire in the center and protestors in the background. The atmosphere is intense. The protest roars while gunshots can be heard. A man talks passionately in Kurdish:

*From Mahabad  
To two martyrs of Tabriz  
To Nika<sup>4</sup>  
To all freedom fighters who lost their lives  
In Sari  
In Mashahad  
In Tehran  
In Marivan  
In resilient Piranshahr  
In mount Arbaba in Baneh  
In bloody Bookan  
In bloody Sanandaj  
Salute to the people of Mahabad  
Salute to the streets  
Salute to the leaders of this revolution, the women  
Women, the leaders of the revolution  
Victory is yours*



where is my mother tongue?



Graffiti on the wall, "Where is my mother tongue" in Turkish

It is a letter from Mahabad to all other cities and revolutionaries and a video with a specific addressee. It is directed by the liberated bodies, on the spot, without any mediator, in their first language.<sup>5</sup> It's short and impulsive in duration, undisciplined in form and production, independent and anonymous in distribution. This is how I see the production and distribution of a script for a revolutionary cinema, a kind of a militant cinema of the 21st century.

This photographic and videographic common archive on the internet impacts the processes of remembering and forgetting, rendering collective memory into an observable and accessible phenomenon. Digital memorialization confronts the

concept of history in which authoritarian power is the only entity capable of visualizing society, writing history, and preserving rights through archival resources. As the internet becomes a repository of collective memory, it is conditioned to its rules; "internet doesn't forget". Our collective memory since then is stored on the cloud alongside places, objects, names, and other entities that Pier Nora described as *lieu de mémoire*, or sites of memory.

In other words what was thought to be an instant image in the digital ephemera of our forgetful modern societies transforms into a specter – a spectre that haunts the present and the future, summons up from the clouds, and transcends borders.



You called her name on the streets



In Sari  
In Mashahad  
In Tehran  
In Marivan  
In resilient Piranshahr  
In mount Arbaba in Baneh  
In bloody Bookan  
In bloody Sanandaj



Her name summoned up a spectre

Craffiti on the wall, "Mahsa, Nika, Asra", three women that were killed during the revolutionary uprisings of 2022

## Endnotes

- 1 Mirzoeff, Michael. "The History of the Anonymous and Horizontal Visuality." *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn*, by Aruna D'Souza, Yale University Press, 2014, p.204.
- 2 Fontcuberta, Joan. *The Post-Photographic Condition*. Kerber, 2015, p.6.
- 3 L. "Figuring a Women's Revolution: Bodies Interacting with Their Images." *Jadaliyya*, 5 Oct. 2022, [jadaliyya.com/Details/44479](https://jadaliyya.com/Details/44479)
- 4 Nika Shakarami was 16 years old when she died under suspicious circumstances suspected to involve violence by security forces in Tehran during the 2022 Iranian protests following the murder of Jina (Mahsa) Amini.
- 5 Farsi is recognized as the official language in Iran despite the diversity of cultures and languages. Speaking other languages than Farsi and education in first language in the schools and universities is sanctioned and it is used as a tool of oppressing diverse ethnicities.



Graffiti on the wall, "For the right of self-determination" in Farsi



that haunts the present and the future

Graffiti on the wall, "Freedom is a daily activity" in Arabic



Graffiti on the wall, "Our revolution is feminist" in Arabic





here and elsewhere.

Women, Life, Freedom

# Scarves for Struggles in A



# For Women's Argentina

Text:  
Julieta  
Mira

Photos:  
Germán Romeo  
Pena



In March 2020, Nina Brugo and Norita Cortiña – two women who had been protesting in the streets and squares of Argentina for years – finally had something to celebrate in their struggle. They met during one of the many mass demonstrations demanding the right to legal abortion in Argentina, which finally became law in December 2020. Both were wearing scarves on their heads; Nina wore a green scarf to represent the fight for the right to abortion, while Norita wore a white scarf from the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* (Mothers of Plaza de Mayo). Their meeting brought together the past and the present, crystallizing anti-authoritarian women’s struggles in Argentina.

## The legacy of Madres de Plaza de Mayo

Madres de Plaza de Mayo left us the scarf as a symbol of struggle and resistance, of dignity and courage. They decided to wear white scarves over their heads to demand the return of their sons and daughters detained and disappeared by military or security forces during the military dictatorship of 1976-1983. The Madres began their struggle in 1977, protesting authoritarianism and its practices of forced disappearances, murder, and torture. Despite the progress of truth and justice – with 273 of 1058 human rights offenders trialled – most of the victims are still missing. Although 46 years have passed since the military coup of 24 March 1976, an estimated 300 kidnapped children are still missing. Only children who were taken together with their parents or those born in captivity are accounted for. The daily search continues for the missing children, with the hope that they will be found and that they will discover their true identities.

The Madres were mobilized by the overwhelming force of mothers seeking to recover their children. They hit the streets with their experiences; they were workers – seamstresses, teachers, journalists and “housewives” – and in some cases they had political or union ties. When the Madres took hold of the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, they sought answers every Thursday afternoon as they paced around the Pirámide de Mayo, in front of the Casa Rosada presidential palace. The



Madres began to wear white scarves to identify each other. The scarves were a simple white triangle, initially made out of diaper cloth. Over time, some began to embroider the names of their sons and daughters and the date of disappearance in blue characters; others used a cross stitch to write the words “Aparición con Vida” (Alive Reappearance). The white scarf became a symbol that united the Madres in their pain, sheltering them and giving them strength in their struggle for memory, truth, and justice.

These vigils were replicated in squares across Argentina. The Madres persistently held their messages high. When the police forced them to move along, they began to walk arm-in-arm so they could not be stopped. The Madres continued to walk every Thursday until the fall of the dictatorship, with some continuing until this day; into their eighties and nineties, upright or in wheelchairs. The Madres were often persecuted and repressed by the state. In 1977, Azucena Villaflor de De Vincenti, María Eugenia Ponce de Bianco, and Esther Ballestrino de Careaga were disappeared along with their sons and daughters for their active roles in Madres de Plaza de Mayo. The military was desperate to disarticulate the movement, but never succeeded.

In the years after the end of the dictatorship, the Madres, with their white scarves, were present in solidarity



with other Argentinian and global struggles. They supported educational projects as well as workers' demands. They were in the Plaza de Mayo during the massive demonstrations in December 2001, when they were repressed by mounted police and tear gas. They were present as witnesses of countless hearings during the reopening of the trials for the crimes perpetrated by the state during the dictatorship. They were also present to witness the repressive state policy or tacit consent of crimes committed by the Argentinian Anticommunist Alliance (Triple A). They sought other ways to fight against the forced disappearances, not only during the dictatorship but also in democracy, as they continued to search for their own sons and daughters. That is why the Madres demanded that forced disappearances

be recognized as a state crime in the text of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, approved by the United Nations General Assembly in 2006.

### **The green tide for legal abortion**

Decades after the emergence of the white scarves, green scarves were worn in the city of Rosario, during the XVIII National Women's Meeting in 2003. The event was held within the framework of the National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion, where the scarves were used for the first time in the closing protest. Once again, the scarf was an aesthetic-political resource to recognize participants, meet, and



show unity in the struggle. Some say that green was chosen to evoke life, hope, and new beginnings. Others say the choice of the colour green was because it was not associated with any political party. Over the years, green scarves flooded a multiplicity of spaces in Argentina and also transcended borders to become a powerful symbol of protest throughout Latin America and the rest of the world.

Nina and Norita also joined the movement in the streets fighting for sexual and reproductive rights known as the *marea verde* (green tide or green wave). The multitude of women who made it possible in recent years, wore green scarves tied to various parts of their bodies to show support for the cause. The scarves read: “Educación sexual para decidir, anticonceptivos para no abortar, aborto legal para no morir” (Sex education to decide; contraceptives to avoid abortion; legal abortion to avoid

death). The *marea verde* became a movement that gained momentum and increased the visibility of messages being heard by society. Within the tide we could get excited, smile, sing, dance, and even shout – at times – despite the rain, cold, and darkness. Such was the eve of one of the debates in the National Congress, which would open the doors to the first law for the right to decide about our bodies.

In the struggle of the *marea verde*, multiple generations shared a common goal: the elimination of deaths from clandestine abortions. We do not want to lose any more daughters, sisters, mothers, and companions. We took to the streets to denounce preventable deaths of women due to their lack of access to safe abortions in hospitals, and also against the criminalization of women for having abortions. We demanded the right to our own life and the right to make choices about our bodies. “La maternidad será deseada o no será” (Motherhood will be wanted or it won’t be) was one of the slogans enthusiastically raised during those days of struggle, which still today is marking a path to follow.



The delayed but eventual approval of a law guaranteeing the right to abortion in Argentina did not stop the movement. Activism continued to focus on the implementation of the law and its diffusion in all corners of the country. The green scarves continued to be tied with conviction to our bodies, gaining presence in the streets, awakening debates and the claiming of the right to decide. This movement is also necessary in resisting those who want to roll back reproductive rights. This is seen in the overturning of the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* precedent, which protected women's freedom to choose abortion in the United States, a decision made in 2022 by the US Supreme Court and its conservative majority. The ruling made it clear that we must continue defending the rights that have already been won.

## Inspiration and solidarity

Throughout recent history, we can see how white and green scarves have met and become entangled, as represented in the meeting of Nina and Norita in the struggle for the right to legal abortion. None of this was coincidental. The scarves evoke a deep feeling in Argentinian society; they have the strength of history, of the struggle against dictatorship and authoritarianism, which allows them to be recognized even when they are dyed another colour. History returns, inspires the collective struggle, and nurtures solidarity among women, visions of motherhood and life, and of feminist politics. On these journeys, the scarf has earned its place as a symbol both in history and in the present women's struggle. It was instituted as a symbol that is resignified, transformed, and dyed in different colours to mobilize for other rights and dreams.

All this is possible because the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* have taught us, through their lifelong struggle, that "the only struggle that is lost is the one that is abandoned".

# A New World Beyond the Trench

## Myanmar's Fight Against Dictatorship

**T**here was speculation about a possible coup in Myanmar starting in mid-January 2021. Foreigner friends residing in Yangon were asking if it was likely. I said “no” because anyone with sensible judgement could have predicted that staging a coup would come at a huge cost to society in the middle of the Covid-19 crisis. A single misstep in politics would cause additional suffering to the public living with the emergency Covid-19 restrictions and resultant economic decline. I woke up early in the morning on 1 February 2021 to an internet blackout. Shortly after, many SMS messages arrived on our phones confirming a coup was staged in Nay Pyi Taw, the nation's capital. I was shocked to realize that the country again was plunged into dictatorship

after the experimental period of the “democratic transition” between 2011-2021. The military leaders again disregard the electoral victory of the National League for Democracy (NLD), the country's most popular party led by the daughter of Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's independence hero, just as they did in 1990. Alongside key members of NLD's government, many activists and artists were also detained.

The country was in a total shock for the first two days. Many of us were talking to each other in close circles, discussing how to react, yet we all knew that the army would crush us – possibly to death – as soon as we gathered for protest, if history be the guide. The first action came on the night of 2 February, happening across many places in Yangon



K. Yang

and later spreading across the whole country. A Facebook page, သံပဲခိုးတီး-Than Bone Tee, was created by unknown campaigners where they raised the first call: “Let’s bang pots and pans at 8 o’clock tonight”. This early action was a relatively easy way to participate: banging on pots and pans requires only a long wooden spoon from the kitchen or a stick that can be found anywhere in the garden. While this social media call could not reach the whole country, or even the whole of Yangon, it ignited the flame of anger and grief throughout the country. Since then, every night, millions of households across Myanmar, in both urban and rural areas, thundered with the noise of banging in the hope that this traditional practice of chasing out evil spirits would also send a serious reminder to the Generals to change their course. As social media users amplified and the media broadcast the banging, musicians responded by quickly creating songs that called for regular pots and pan protests. The Burmese version of “Do You Hear the People Sing?” from *Les Misérables* created by Zin Linn was one of the most popular songs for banging hours:

*Listen to the songs of the people, the music of agony  
This song is for commitment to fight back  
We can’t bear the oppression of the regime  
Our heartbeats find rhyming with the traditional drums,  
We witness that a new day is arriving  
We will make this moment a milestone in history!  
Shall we hold our hands together for the fight?  
Let’s do it when we see a new world beyond the trench.  
A new life with liberty is what we want.*

At night, we all sang these songs and shouted slogans together from our windows or at street protest points, where pictures of military leaders were scattered on the ground. In big cities including Yangon, where most people live in small apartments, people do not tend to know all their neighbours, but felt energized with the knowledge that many people were in solidarity fighting together to topple the military. In the daytime, we went out to the streets to protest and all major junctions in Yangon, Mandalay, and other cities were full of people for two months in February and March 2021.

## Taking protest to the street

From 4 February 2021, protest groups came out wearing different associational flags, banners, and costumes. Despite the serious economic decline caused by the pandemic, the people were very eager to spend their money on donations for the protests – food, water, juice, and campaign materials were ample on the streets. Those protest days would end early, as the police would quickly attack the demonstrations, and the noise of sound grenades and even live shooting in the street spread panic.

The State Administrative Council led by the military began to notice that its initial calculation was wrong: the detention of many well-known activists did not quell demonstrations. Millions took to the street with their three fingers raised – a salute that is understood as an anti-dictatorship symbol in Thailand and Hong Kong, and which was also embraced by the Myanmar protesters. The symbol, originating in the “Hunger Games” film series, sometimes might carry other meanings such as “Thank you” and “Good-bye”.

In Myanmar, it became a symbol of solidarity and represented three demands: 1. to end the military rule; 2. to abolish the current constitution, which guarantees 25 percent permanent seats in parliament and three key law enforcement ministries to the army; 3. to build a federal democratic state that provides equality among all citizens by recognizing the autonomy of oppressed ethnic minority groups. After observing the mass protests in Hong Kong in 2019 and Thailand in 2020, during which the three-fingered hand gesture was widely used, the salute was translated to the local context as an anti-dictatorship symbol.

The General Strike Coordination Body played a central role by working together with Strike Committees across the country. These committees were formed by student organizations,



trade unions, political groups and parties, and civil servants taking part in the civil disobedience movement. They were instrumental in communicating campaign messages and symbols to a wider public. On 22 February, shops and markets were shut down in the whole country to participate in the protest. Professionals from different sectors such as engineers, nurses, teachers, railway workers, and the national football team all wore their uniforms in the streets. The union of poets, film industry workers, the cartoonists' association, and other visual artists came out with their creative campaign ideas.

Poets gathered to recite poems in downtown areas of Yangon, Mandalay, and Monywa throughout February 2021. Monywa, the second biggest city in Upper Myanmar, lost many poets during the first year of revolution from attacks by the army. Khet Thi, who was killed by the police during interrogation, once lamented:

ဒီတိုက်ပွဲ အောင်ပါပြီရှင်  
 နိုင်ငံရေးနဲ့ ဝေးဝေးနေမယ်  
 ကပ်ဖီဆိုင်လေး ဖွင့်မယ်  
 ဆိုင်နာမည်ကို ပြည့်တစ်သစ် လှိုပေးမယ်  
 ဆိုင်လာတဲ့ Gen Z တွေကို လက်ဆောင်တွပေးမယ်

*Once we win this battle,  
 I will stay away from politics.  
 I will open a small coffee place.  
 I'll label it A New Nation,  
 and give away gifts to GenZ  
 when they pay a visit.*

Like him, there were many celebrities who longed for a new democratic nation and the end of the military regime. Along the Sule Pagoda Street in Yangon, the crowd cheered on famous writers, poets, film stars, and theatrical performers who showed up and argued that the military had



been the fundamental cause of political conflicts and the lack of peace in this country. Not far from the celebrities' corner, at Sule Square, student unions occupied the whole junction. You could hear speeches of the trade unions and see the red flag featuring a fighting peacock, a symbol of student activism since the colonial days and now a symbol of the mass resistance movement. As the backdrop, a black banner was hanged on the flyover featuring a phrase from Karl Marx's and Friedrich Engel's *Communist Manifesto* "You have nothing to lose but your chains!".

## The birth of the Civil Disobedience Movement

For public mobilization, open calls on social media as well as secret chats on encrypted communication channels are important. Facebook and Twitter were the main platforms on which the daily protest sites were announced. Security alerts were spread on private groups, including secret chats on Signal and Messenger. When mobile data was cut off to hamper the coordination of street protests, protesters taught each other to use other tools such as Bridgefy and Briar. To overcome the internet shutdown, SIM cards from Thailand on which international roaming was still possible were smuggled across the border.

Many local civil society groups, which held some emergency communication resources, also provided paid VPN connections to the key activists and social mobilizers.

Thanks to the community-based organizations, which had grown in number over the last ten years, a nationwide social movement appeared in no time thanks to the existing social networks. Later, they also quickly transformed themselves into support groups for civil servants who took part in Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), a general strike mobilization spearheaded by hundreds of

thousands of civil servants. The massive support for CDM angered the military even more. When the nearly 400,000 civil servants that took part in CDM nearly collapsed the public sector, the military saw CDM as a form of revenge led by the NLD as opposed to being the voice of discontent from the public. They started chasing and arresting the CDMers. Support was needed to facilitate temporary safe houses and finances to ensure mobility. On the streets and on digital platforms, people used a range of methods for crowdfunding. Artists sold their art works with proceeds going to the CDM fund, while students and parents teamed up to support their teachers. The civil disobedience movement included more than just civil servants. Many media personalities and artists from the entertainment industry who joined CDM abstained from appearing in those media outlets. Celebrities who collaborated with the Junta faced consumer boycotts of ordinary citizens, as well as sanction policies of companies, who stopped hiring them for commercial public relations.

## Shutting the door to protest, opening it to armed revolution

The festive atmosphere of protests with their collective chanting of slogans, music bands, street performances by Generation Z, and public charity came to an end in late March 2021. It is then that the killing spree of the military began. When soldiers attacked the protesters with water cannons, tear gas, live ammunition, sound grenades, and then real bullets, protesters still tried to resist as much as they could. Although the severe forms of attack increased day by day until late April, people from my ward took to the street every day just as millions of others in the city, building barricades on important street corners to block the security forces from attacking the residential areas and protest groups. On many of the protest sites, including the intersection near my house, women of all ages from the neighbourhood took care of the protesters with every possible means including scout, food, water, and soaked cloth-



ing to mitigate the effects of smoke bombs. Young men and women, not fearing possible injuries or even death, came out to protest every day. Every day, they wrote down their blood type and the phone number of loved ones on their forearms, and risked their lives in bloody battles against the junta's army. Likewise, in many cities night protests were organized as mass prayers, where people came together with candle lights and flowers to mourn the fallen heroes and to demand an end to the impunity enjoyed by the army. The prayers were not answered, and the military reign of terror pushed many thousands of young people to take arms and receive military training from ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) who sided with the people's movement. Myanmar has around 20 ethnic armed organizations and only half of them entered into the ceasefire agreement with the



previous governments. All of them, both individually and collectively, strongly condemned the coup and some actively collaborated with the newly formed resistance forces for armed struggle. With the technical support of these EAOs, new insurgent groups were formed across the country, and they call themselves People's Defence Forces. Majority of these armed groups took an oath of allegiance to the parallel government, called the National Unity Government, which was formed in April 2021. The coup council declared it a terrorist organization and arrested anyone who was suspected of giving support to this new government. Although taking up arms was not an option for many of those who showed up on the streets at the beginning of the coup, they still carried out different tasks which included fundraising, logistical support, providing informal education to CDM students, or giving humanitarian aid to the people affected by war. In the face of brutal

repression, people had to make adjustments in terms of strategy. A new focus of action turned to virtual campaigns calling for targeted economic sanctions from foreign countries and boycott actions from investors in natural resource extraction as well as other economic activities. Additionally, flash mob protests happened almost every day, in both rural and urban areas. Sometimes they carried a banner with a phrase by Pablo Neruda "You can cut all the flowers, but you cannot keep spring from coming."

### Illustrations

- p. 314: Khant Min Htin.
- p. 315: Khant Min Htin.
- p. 316: Rise News.
- p. 317: Rise News.



# Sonic in t



# Strategies the Palestinian Struggle

A Soundtrack  
of the May 2021  
Uprising in Palestine

Text:  
Christina  
Hazboun

Photos:  
Samar  
Hazboun



In May 2021, during the uprising that swept through private and public spaces across historic Palestine, people took to the streets to protest the ruthless Israeli colonial practices of invasion, confiscation, and violence. One of the counter-colonial tactics that Palestinians turned to was to fill public spaces – from Jerusalem’s Sheikh Jarrah, Akka’s old town, and Haifa’s Wadi Al-Nisnas, to the village of Beita – with the presence of artists and activists using music, sound, and culture as a tool for fighting oppression.

The acousmatic, or the unseen, is often an overlooked element when analyzing strategies of resistance, yet the sonic context that envelops listeners, citizens, or activists, has both physical and psychological effects on the individual.

Through his analyses of belliphonic<sup>1</sup> sounds in Iraq, J. Martin Daughtry maps the zones of (in)audition into audible inaudible, narrational, tactical, and that of trauma.

Walking in the city, which is where space, time, and encounters mix, the body becomes a vehicle whose rhythmic steps interact with the space, while also moving within it. When Palestinians put their bodies into the historic spaces of Jerusalem, Akka, Bethlehem, or Al-Lydd, they cut through the multiple layers of its history; in the specific moment of the May Uprising, it was imperative to occupy the streets and public spaces, to announce their presence peacefully, yet vigorously. This presence within the boundaries of their land was marked by multiple phenomena which transcended the habitual rhythms of daily life and manifested through an increase in volume and the organisation of voice and sound into singing, music, and noise.

Speaking to my sisters in Bethlehem, I could often hear the sound of gunshots over the phone, taking me into an “audible inaudible”<sup>2</sup>

zone, while my sisters would tell me how they have to avoid the area close to Rachel’s Tomb located north of Bethlehem’s city centre and take a different route home. Their everyday life was hence directly affected by what was audible within the space they inhabit; their actions came as a reaction to those relatively distant sounds which prompted them to navigate their daily life in a specific manner.

When my sister was staying at Dar Jacir, close to Checkpoint 303 in Bethlehem, an internal checkpoint within the city, daily confrontations with the occupation were happening in front of her and she would experience the violence both sonically and visually. Hearing gunfire, teargas, shouts, screams, chants,

flying rocks, burning tires, and then the sound of shattering window glass in her place meant that she had to act rapidly and leave her home to a safer space. Hearing violence means also acting upon it, constructing or reconstructing both memories and events that surround that specific moment.

This state of aural experience is positioned within what Daughtry calls the “tactical zone”, only one step away from the “trauma zone” with all the mental and physical pain that it contains. Within this space, the listener’s experience shifts from hearing to a deep under-the-skin experience: the sound of an explosion could cause temporary or permanent deafness, physical injury, or in severe cases, death.

The May Uprising awakened aural and visual senses from a heightened cultural perspective, as Palestinian civil society within historic Palestine resorted to the implementation of “sonic agency”.<sup>3</sup> By utilizing sonic sensibilities, Palestinians used sound to enact emancipatory practices, countering Israel’s hegemonic and authoritarian practices.

**“Noise is inscribed from the start within the panoply of power. Equivalent to the articulation of a space, it indicates the limits of a territory and the way to make oneself heard within it, how to survive by drawing one’s sustenance from it.”**

Jacques Attali





## Sound as a strategy for liberation

Sound can be used to unsettle, create social formations (protests), and to increase the audibility of the unseen or the non-represented, which is what Palestinians realized and began implementing early on. While music is organised noise, music and noise can serve three purposes: making people forget the violence around them, bringing people together in a sense of harmony, and to silence, deafen, or censor other voices<sup>4</sup>.

In the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of Jerusalem in May 2021, Palestinian protesters took to the streets and used their voices against military occupation. The protestors were often seen clapping, singing, crying, and shouting, which included the *takbeer* (the use of the phrase “*Allahu Akbar*”, or “God is great”) to react to the violent soundscape that was enveloping them, countering it with their own human-made sounds.

Through a careful investigation of videos on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, one could also observe the use of instruments like the *tabla* (a handheld goblet shaped drum), loudspeakers, and bins, to create either noise or rhythms. In one moving event on 3 May 2021, which was during the holy month of Ramadan, a group of Palestinian young men tried to access the Al-Aqsa mosque but were prevented from entering from the side of *Bab al-Silsila* (Chain Gate). Facing the Israeli police officers blocking the road, a group of Palestinian children started chanting “I’m at your gates my lord”, while a young Palestinian man began singing a famous *ibtihal* (invocation) from Sufi Egyptian Sheikh Naqshbandi (1920-1974), which was composed by Egyptian composer Baligh Hamdi and was also titled “I’m at your gates my lord” (*Inni bi babika mawlaya*). The powerful voice of the reciter or invocator brought out awe in the

Palestinians unable to access their holy site, which evoked a unifying and uplifting social formation supporting the Palestinian underheard, while creating a “sonic sensibility” that agitated the oppressors, demonstrating what LaBelle describes as emancipatory practices.

Fireworks, which shine brightly but also sound like gunfire, were utilized in many villages and cities to counter the sonic violence that rained onto Palestinian spaces. As the night spread over the village of Beita near Nablus, Israeli settlers would attack the village with artillery and weaponry. As a counter-strategy for this violence, many of its inhabitants chose to resort to the tactics of “night confusion” – firing fireworks into the night skies and filling the darkness with sounds from all directions, in order to confuse the attacking settlers and disorient them. Usually used to express happiness and celebration, fireworks with their forceful punctuating sounds were used as an effective distraction against imminent attacks.

In another contested soundscape in the city of Al-Lydd, Mahmood Jrere, one of the founders of Palestinian hip-hop band DAM, described the situation in Al-Lydd (Lod) during May and June as very difficult<sup>5</sup>. The citizens of one of the so called “mixed cities” emerged from strict lockdown to face aggressive hostilities as busloads of Israeli settlers were driven into the city, wreaking havoc and terrorizing Palestinians. Jrere recalls the use of sound to alarm and protect. During the settler’s nighttime raids, negotiating systems of domination made listening an essential tool for self-preservation. Muezzins helped alarm people of upcoming danger and informed citizens of where the settlers were present.

What Jrere and other cultural activists and artists also did was resort to music as a means of encouraging children and families, and to uplift their spirits. By organizing physical events that featured performances, the Palestinian community was conceptualising a public sphere through presence and sound – not only in Lod, but also in other cities such as Haifa, Akka, and Nazareth. The production of music, such as Jrere’s own single “*E7na Mla7*” (“We’re good”) came to document the horrific injustices:

*They came at night with their flags  
and their flags were night  
And their media was covering their terrorism  
They killed Moussa and our hearts were lost  
Many hearts were lost before him*

In this piece, Jrere is documenting the killing of 32-year-old father of three, Moussa Hassouneh, who was shot dead during a protest against Israel’s imminent forced eviction of Palestinians in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood.

In countering hegemonic and authoritarian regimes, music was used as a form of therapy, a source of agency, and – in the case of Gaza – a distraction from pain. After the traumatizing round of Israeli bombings over Gaza, several organisations which included the Palestine Music Expo, helped to organize musical concerts in Gaza, Khan Yunis, and Deir Al-Balah. For the first time in years, there were musical performances “over the rubble” of Gaza’s destroyed sights, but also in many of the hotels and resorts which survived the aggression. Children could be seen dancing and moving to

the comforting and familiar sounds from favourite cartoons or nursery rhymes, producing what Tia De Nora describes as an aesthetic environment of pleasure and security.

## The sonic transmission of struggle

Sonic resistance didn’t manifest in rural or urban spaces alone – it also took a digital form as in the example of the Bethlehem, Ramallah, and Amman based Radio Al-Hara. While it is not within the scope of this text to write extensively about the history of radio in Palestine, the emergence of an independent community radio that aims to unite Palestinians divided across borders in March 2020, as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic, played a prominent role in connecting communities, sharing

knowledge, and in the construction of participatory sonic experiences through radio programming.

Founded by five friends, the radio initially served as an outlet for frustrated people during lockdown, by creating listener-driven programming across borders. In this sense, the soundwaves of solidarity extended beyond the physical borders of cities and towns, and the radio's virtual chatroom became a meeting space for audiophiles and cultural activists alike.

Galvanizing listeners into action, the radio played an integral role in the Palestinian struggle from the early days of broadcasting. In a space where all means of communication are strictly guarded by authoritative regimes, the creation of an independent, community run radio space provided an alternative universe for knowledge sharing, demarcating a distinct space for new connections, and new experiences of listening.

Sound forces us to listen with deepened attention and this characteristic lent itself as a strategy: on 10 May 2021 Radio Al-Hara protested against the evictions in Sheikh Jarrah with complete silence. While protesters took to the streets, chanting and clapping, all around the world from Cape Town to London, Jerusalem to New Delhi, other community radios joined Radio Al-Hara in their sonic protest and the collective action evolved into an act of global solidarity culminating in the 72 hour continuous stream towards the end of May, under the title "Sonic Liberation Front".

The contribution of musician and sound artist Dirar Kallash is also worth noting. The artist made it his daily mission to "collect" sounds of violence and aggression and produced a piece transforming these sounds into music, which the radio transmitted on its airwaves. The transformation and neutralisation of sounds of violence, and their manipulation to become less harmful to the listening ear, is an implementation of sonic agency by the Palestinian artist – a coping mechanism also for many others.

## Conclusion

The arrangement and organisation of sound is a tool for sculpting society. In the case of the May Uprising, Palestinians drew on their sonic agency to mark territories and boundaries that their bodies occupied within the contested spaces of historic Palestine by the tactics of singing, chanting, screaming, and noise disruption.

Music and sound became a source of daily sustenance – fuelling the will and energy of protestors – while also helping organize protesters into unified communities. Sound became the mass activity used to oppose the occupiers, their aggression, and to silence the violent sounds of military machines and angry mobs.

As the usual sounds of daily rhythms like commuting to work, the calling of street vendors, the hustle and bustle of the city-scape changed under the hostilities that Palestinians faced, they could not remain silent and resorted to the most basic tools of human communication: that of the vocal cords, alongside mobilising the body through movements reverberating with sounds. In the absence of weaponry, it was the use of the unseen and increasing volumes of the soundscape that helped counter the violence of the colonial war machine.

## Endnotes

- 1 The agglomeration of sounds that are generated by weaponry, motorized vehicles, and any sonic material related to spaces of warfare.
- 2 Daughtry, Martin J., *Listening To War*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 77.
- 3 LaBelle, Brandon, *Sonic Agency*. London: Goldsmiths Press, 2018.
- 4 Attali, Jacques, *Noise. The Political Economy of Music*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985, p. 19.
- 5 Jrere, Mahmood, Author phone interview London- Lod, 14 Decembre 2021.

**No Need to Be  
a Mathematic  
to Know Who  
You Can  
Count On**

**Rap Music as a Tool of Denunciation**

Text: Ams Keuche,  
Tuline Gülgönen

Photos:  
Aurélien Gillier

# ian



**F**or twenty years, Conakry-based artist, writer, and composer Ams Keuche has been using rap music to denounce social inequalities and the politics that create and perpetuate them. Being part of the second generation of Guinean rappers, he claims to have one foot in the old school and one in the new. Reflecting the country's linguistic diversity, his songs mix the languages spoken in Guinea:

*"The official language here is French, but apart from that everyone speaks their own language. To get the message across, so that all of the communities have access, you have to sing in Susu, in Maninka, in Fulani, and sometimes in Baga. And in French, and a little bit in English.*

*Rap music is a way of conveying messages because young people listen to it, and young people are those most often marginalized, most often targeted. When there are protests, most of those who end up in jail are young people."*

Ams Keuche spends part of his time in the ghetto – a source of inspiration and a place of circulating ideas. In Conakry, ghetto refers to a specific social space, and the word is not used in the same way the word as in other regions:

*"Each neighbourhood here has its ghetto. It's a place where young people get together. Sometimes it's several places in the same neighbourhood. The ghetto is a place where young people get together to smoke, but it's also a place to find inspiration, to give each other ideas. It allows you to try things out, to be inspired, to see the reality of how people are living. It's said that this is where the real people live, the people at the bottom of the social scale, the people who are really marginalized. So when I go there, it allows me to see certain realities that you can't find in Guinea's more well-off milieus. It forces me to see things differently.*

*It's this anger that really pushed me to make music. Before that, I didn't think I was going to make music. I'd been to university, so I said to myself: 'I'll wear a suit and tie, I'll work in an office.' But while spending time with certain friends who were in this ghetto, I saw the depths, I saw the injustice, how people were living there, and all this really pushed me to spotlight what I was seeing, what I was feeling.*

*Sometimes, when artists get together, we do free-styles, we play beats, we sing. We criticize things, we talk about our musical projects, and so on, we talk politics, we talk about social issues, about things that aren't acceptable, we talk about the rumours that are going round town. That's what it is, the ghetto."*

His texts accompany the protests of Conakry's inhabitants against the entrenched poverty that impacts their everyday lives, as well as against the related actions of the government. These militant sounds are not played on the radio; they circulate on YouTube and at concerts, in defiance of the censors.

*"I denounce social inequality, arbitrary incarceration, police and military violence, high food prices, the squandering of our riches, by the same people, the same each time, the government changes but the big bosses are always the same people, so they have plenty of time for their manipulations. People say Guinea is a rich country, that kind of thing, but the population doesn't benefit. It's only those in government who benefit, who drive the big cars, whose children go to prestigious schools, either in Guinea or in the West. Only those who are ministers or company directors or who work in the government are well-off. The rest of the population doesn't have a chance."*



### Mon ghetto mon château, 2023

Aloukhi alo won na barama  
 Bba lairi birin finkari noun sirene khoui sonkhö ma  
 Brigandage noun braccage mou gnonma  
 Taimoui é khörökhökhö köñö töräi fan doul khötökhi  
 Mou boré gbé gbé bara ekha kaidi ma nökhö  
 Söré, sairiyalé khanamou guéli,  
 Ghetto gningué n'dé nan naki  
 Mou weed nan toun yi takhoun ma,  
 I ya rabi khanamou i ra gnon manai alo crado  
 Hé bro aloukhi alo won na rideau nan khambira  
 M'ma Ghetto na Rouge ana Jaune ana Vert Ariyan na  
 nara khali wakhati n'dé a to maniyai Yakhan nama ra  
 É bara mou tou toun khan Mur kanké,  
 khakhili ra gnairai dé mou moubai  
 Moumou fakhamoukhi lairi birin mou tanan guéli,  
 Allah kha yafa mou boré ma tourti nékhé bakhi mou yi

Feels like we're living in the ring  
 Gunshots and sirens all of the time  
 Banditry, robbery, all kind of scenes  
 Times are hard but the hurting goes on  
 Many brothers have messed up  
 So it's police justice or prison,  
 one of the colours of my ghetto  
 Weed's the only thing we share freely,  
 open your eyes or you'll end up in the gutter  
 Hey bro, it feels like we're living behind the curtain  
 My ghetto's red, it's gold, it's green,  
 it's paradise even if it often looks like hell  
 With our backs against the wall,  
 we know better where we stand  
 Misunderstood, it's always us in jail.  
 Peace to the brothers the street took from us

### Écoute, 2022

Ghetto knowledge, we know everything's wrong  
 You want to fuck the system, but the system is what?  
 Is it the white-collar butchers or these whites  
 with their talk of development?  
 Or a murderous state that kills off my people  
 and squanders our assets?  
 From bauxite for Fria to Simandou iron,  
 my toxic questions go unanswered  
 From Sékou Conté CNDD to Condé CNRD,<sup>2</sup>  
 i no need to be a mathematician to know  
 who you can count on, hey.

Le savoir du ghetto on sait que rien ne va  
 On veut niquer le système, mais le système c'est quoi?  
 Est-ce ces bourreaux au col blanc ou ces blancs  
 qui nous collent leur parole de développement?  
 Ou un État d'assassins qui massacre  
 les miens en dilapidant nos biens?  
 De la bauxite de Fria au fer de Simandou mes  
 questions toxiques, dont j'ignore le dessous  
 De Sékou Conté CNDD Condé CNRD,<sup>2</sup>  
 pas besoin d'être mathématicien pour savoir  
 sur qui compter, Hé.

## La jungle, 2012

C'est là que j'suis né c'est là que j'ai grandi  
C'est ici que j'ai vu naître une loi, celle du plus fort  
Ici le faible a tort devant celui qui roule sur de l'or  
Ici c'est la pagaille on nage dans le libertinage  
Ici, chacun fait ce qu'il veut  
ou il veut quand il veut  
Et comme par magie personne ne réagit  
Peuple de Guinée où es-tu? Agi!  
Mon pays est devenu une jungle,  
Nous sommes des gibiers devant un état de braconniers  
C'est pas possible regarde les hommes en treillis  
se tromper de cible  
Tirer, des innocents tués, les temps sont durs  
On pense plus à ses poches qu'à ses proches  
Tu veux le changement, change man  
Croise-pas tes bras même si l'État nous ment, tu veux  
vivre où ça ? Ici?  
Là où les droits de l'homme sont violés, Là où on voit  
ses rêves s'envolés, là où ...

On est dans la jungle ici  
C'est la loi du plus fort ici  
On est dans la jungle ici  
C'est la loi du plus fort ici

A tofé kōnō I ma yi gbaifé  
Bé bara fa lou alo Woula kouï  
Birin wama a boré yi bōfé  
Gettho Doumé mou bognai mou sakhi  
Crazy soldiers é ta soukhoui

Ce que tu pensais tout bas écoute le tout haut,  
Combien de coupables sont relâchés?  
Combien d'innocents emprisonnés?  
Combien sont marginalisés?  
Combien ignorent leur droit?  
Combien d'hors la loi?  
Combien? Combien?

This is where I was born, where I grew up  
Here I saw a law emerge, the law of the strongest  
Here the weak are wrong, not those who roll in gold  
It's messed up here, we're drowning in depravity  
Here people do what they want  
where they want when they want  
And, as if by magic, there's no reaction  
People of Guinea, where are you? Do something!  
My country's become a jungle,  
We're game hunted by state poachers  
It can't be true, look at the men in combat gear  
hitting the wrong targets  
Shooting, killing innocent people, times are hard  
People thinking more about cash than about community  
You want change, then change, man.  
Don't just stand there, even if the state lies to us. You  
want to live? Where? Here?  
Where human rights are violated, where we see our  
dreams blown away, where ...

We're in the jungle here  
It's the law of the strongest  
We're in the jungle here  
It's the law of the strongest

Your eyes are open but you can't see  
It's become a jungle here  
People want to devour one another  
Ghetto kids have no peace in their hearts  
The crazy soldiers have taken the city hostage

What you were thinking to yourself, hear it said out loud:  
How many guilty men are released?  
How many innocents imprisoned?  
How many are marginalized?  
How many don't know their rights?  
How many above the law?  
How many? How many?



<b>A tofé kônö l ma yi gbaifé</b>	<b>Your eyes are open but you can't see</b>
[...]	[...]
<b>On est dans la jungle ici</b>	<b>We're in the jungle here</b>
[...]	[...]
<b>C'est les mêmes qui usent les mêmes ruses c'est les mêmes qui abusent</b>	<b>It's the same people using the same tricks, the same abuse</b>
<b>Ici on n'embauche pas, les jeunes diplômés sont là ils ne bossent pas</b>	<b>No one's hiring here, skilled young people are here, but not working</b>
<b>Alors on nique leur système et sa police,</b>	<b>So we fuck their system and its police</b>
<b>Brûle leur ministère de l'injustice,</b>	<b>Burn down their ministry of injustice</b>
<b>J'appelle à l'unité bien qu'il y ait impunité</b>	<b>I call for unity in the face of impunity</b>
<b>On a pas oublié les victimes du 2 et 3 février</b>	<b>We haven't forgotten the victims of February 2nd and 3rd</b>
<b>On a pas oublié les victimes du 22 Janvier</b>	<b>We haven't forgotten the victims of January 22nd</b>
<b>On pense encore à ceux du 28 septembre ...<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>We still think of those of September 28th ...<sup>3</sup></b>
<b>Les politiques à la messe que de fausses promesses</b>	<b>Politicians preaching, nothing but false promises</b>
<b>Où est passée la presse?</b>	<b>What happened to the press?</b>
<b>Au Campus les étudiants se battent pour monter dans les bus ...</b>	<b>On campus, students fight for a place on the bus ...</b>
<b>On est dans la jungle ici</b>	<b>We're in the jungle here</b>
<b>C'est la loi du plus fort ici</b>	<b>It's the law of the strongest</b>
<b>On est dans la jungle ici</b>	<b>We're in the jungle here</b>
<b>C'est la loi du plus fort ici</b>	<b>It's the law of the strongest</b>

## Endnotes

- 1 Interview with Ams Keuche, 1 May 2023.
- 2 List of presidents who have ruled the country since independence in 1958: Sékou Touré, president of Guinea from independence until his death in 1984. He was succeeded by Lansana Conté who ruled until his own death in 2008, after which the CNDD (National Council for Democracy and Development, a military junta) took power, ruling until the election of Alpha Condé, who was president of the republic from 2010 until 2021. He was deposed following a military coup by members of the CNRD (National Unity Committee for Development) led by Mamady Doumbouya.
- 3 On 2 and 3 February 1996, soldiers unsatisfied with their pay called for the resignation of the defence minister, mutinied, and sought to oust President Lansana Conté. The attempted coup failed but many people were killed and a purge of the army followed. In January and February 2007, following the announcement of a general strike by the unions, major demonstrations against the economic policy and authoritarianism of the Conté regime were suppressed by force, with 22 January costing the most lives. On 28 September 2009, following a demonstration opposing the candidacy of Moussa Camara, the head of the military junta in power since the coup of 2008, soldiers opened fire on the crowd and committed sexual crimes in the *Stade du 28 Septembre*, a stadium in Conakry. During the following days, many opposition figures were detained, tortured, and assassinated. The trial of those involved in the massacre of 28 September 2009 began on 28 September 2022.

## Listen to the music

[youtube.com/@amskeuche6143](https://youtube.com/@amskeuche6143)

# Imagining Kur



Drawing is an Act of Conscience

rdistan

Ercan  
Altuntaş



**F**or more than a century, Kurdistan – split across the borders of four different countries – has witnessed all forms of war, varying in the levels of intensity. As a result of the rising authoritarian Islamic regimes in Iran, Turkey, Syria, and Iraq, the habitat, nature and, historical texture of many settlements has been and continues to be irreparably damaged. At the same time, Kurdistan's geographical location lies on the route to Europe, meaning that the places we live in have borne witness to the migration of different groups of people.

Violations to the fundamental right to life of those who oppose the dictatorial regime, as well as prohibitions, limits placed on freedom of expression, deprivation, and punishments have spread to every corner of society in Kurdistan. The regime's exclusion of those who are not on its side has been transformed into ever more brutal punishments, starting with the casualties and deaths left behind after more than 100 years of war, through the Kurdish uprising which began in 1980, to the 1990s – the height of the rebellion in Turkey and Kurdish cities – when 17,000 unsolved murders were committed. During this severe period, the paramilitary

forces of the state created a climate of fear that has lasted for years, and which continues to this day. Every moment we continue to live in Kurdish cities and villages, we live in fear.

As someone who has experienced this process directly, I have made it a conscious duty to draw these destroyed places and the textures left behind by displaced people. I was becoming familiar with the collective memory that exists outside of my own, individually acquired memories. At the same time, I was not a distant observer of the process. When the violence increased, I knew that nothing would ever be the same again – and I worried about the aftermath. At the point at which the destruction could no longer be stopped, everything had to be recorded. Drawing was the way I could convey what I saw and experienced, and the way I expressed myself.





## The “Saturday Mothers” series

For years and years there have been vigils for justice held by the “Saturday Mothers” in different cities for the remains of disappeared children. A series of atrocities affected the Mothers, who are fighting for the rights (bones) of their children. When, in 2019, hunger strikes launched by Kurdish political prisoners against torture and oppression came close to the brink of death, the Mothers started new street vigils for justice for their own children. As a response, they have been beaten up by state forces, and a new penal system was established. Anyone who raised their voice was punished through arrests, beatings, threats, criminalization, and unofficial punishment methods. As I was witnessing this process, I tried to create an alternative to the violence and intimidation policies

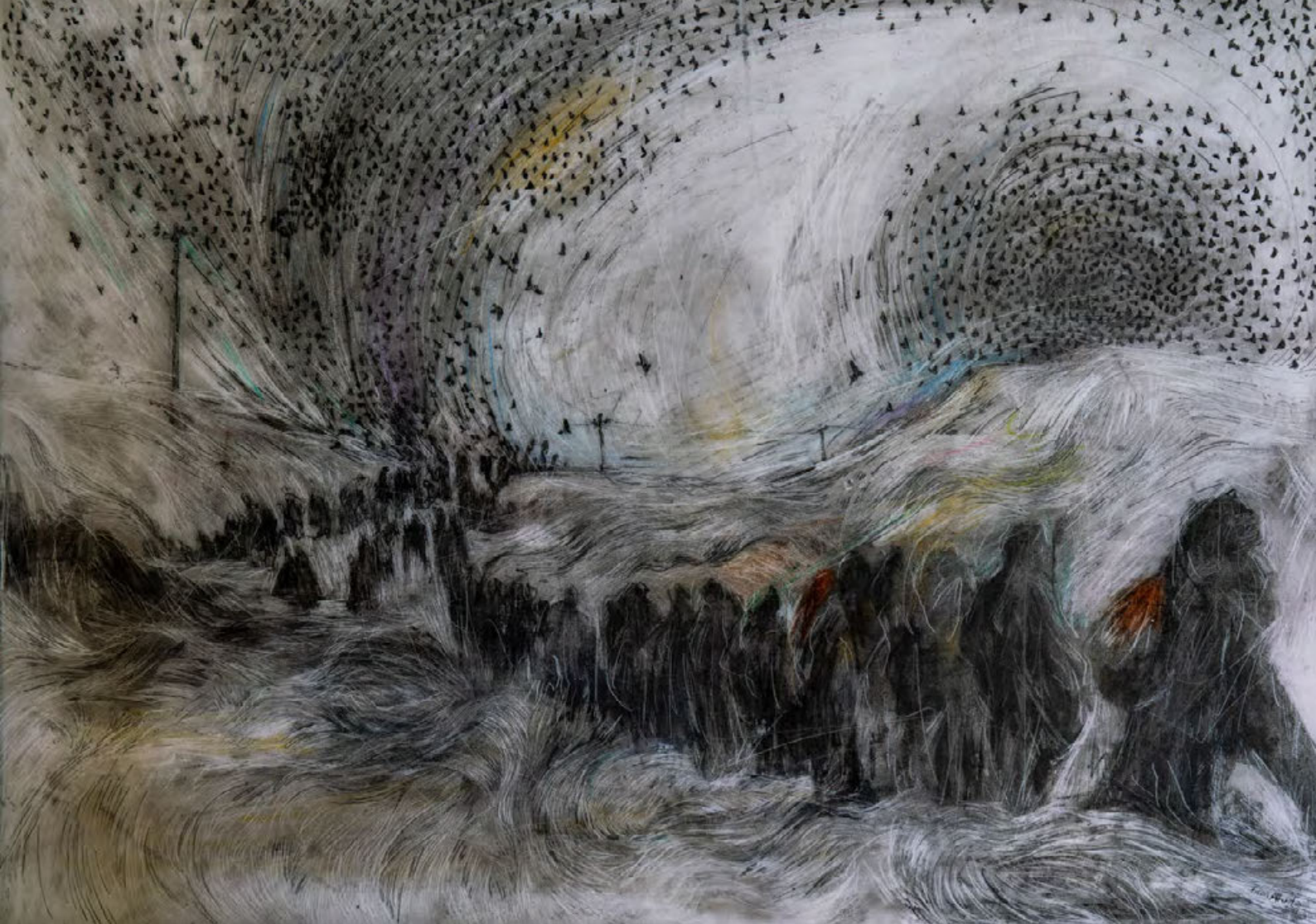
against people defending peace with a white cloth in their hands. I started producing my own drawings in the face of every event that we witnessed in the media. These paintings were not only my effort and my responsibility; they became about creating my own version of reality and my own image of every event that happened and is happening. It was about responsibility of conscience. Every feeling that arose in me emotionally on seeing the image of mothers’ lonely resistance on the street awoke my conscience. I wanted to exist with the conscious responsibility of being part of a reality that lasted for a month by producing a drawing every day. This spiral of violence and oppression will continue in our lives for a long time. As each moment transforms into its own image, I continue and will continue to witness this life with drawn lines.

## The “Migration” series

Landscapes of people losing their lives on migration routes under the oppression of authoritarian regimes. The first time I witnessed scenes such as this was when I left the village where I was born and raised. It began with my grandfather’s last word, my separation from home and the land I belonged to. My grandfather came to the mountainside in the middle of the night, looked back at his house for the last time and said, “Look, children, you will never see this place like this again.” Looking back for the last time, he left me with an emptiness that would not be filled for the rest of my life – and an unresolved feeling that would continue.

Hope is the long walk of people huddled around it. These walks, starting from one end of the world and reaching the other, may represent the greatest march and crisis of our time. The deprivations and punishments experienced on these paths created new images. Dozens of human bodies washed ashore. One war after another, especially in the Middle East; Iraq, Syria, Iran, Afghanistan, and the Kurdish fragmented country. In the aftermath of each war, people begin new waves of migration, and new issues around race, religion, language, and marginalization arise. The migrant needs a piece of land on this earth, on which to live. Like the seasonal migration of birds. From one end to the other, we pass right next to you, right beside you.





But the brutal colonial system condemns entire societies to extinction. The established orders, from wars to relations of production, are centralized through dictators, states, gangs. Power is a battlefield, and a sword over the whole of society. Baby Artin's journey from the Middle East to the Norwegian coast from the persecution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The story of Alan Kurdi, who fled ISIS terror in Syria and was washed ashore on the Aegean coast. Stories of people swallowed by the sea from Africa, resurfacing on the coast of Spain or Italy. On the journey that started barefoot in Afghanistan, stories of people frozen on steep mountainous roads.

## Roboski and the “Sur” series

In villages located at the intersection of the four parts of Kurdistan, people born in the same country are citizens of different nation-states across the decimated borders. In our own geography, in these mountains where we were born and we felt we belonged, the Turkish armed forces bombed and killed thirty-four young people who carried cargo from one border to another. Thirty-four people. Four different countries collecting the remains of people who did not comply with the borders that were forced onto this geography. People went to the mountains one morning in the village of Roboski to collect the remains of their children.

While all kinds of punishments were justified in the genocidal grip, the image of women talking in the windows of their homes was among the most basic sceneries in Sur’s natural texture. Thousands of people found themselves in the middle of a conflict when the city war began among the thousands-year-old historical structure of Amed (Diyarbakır), the largest city of the Kurds. The government gathered all its military and security forces in this city and destroyed a neighbourhood through a conflict that lasted six months. More than a year of curfew and clashes, tanks, guns, flags, destroyed streets, and hundreds of thousands of people made homeless. The sounds of war, the sounds of iron/steel that we listened to with fear from the windows of our own houses with the lights out.

This is a time when our gaze changes, when we leave all our belongings and experiences behind. The street where we grew up was being destroyed day by day with heavy weapons. While trying to draw under the light coming in through the window, being part of this image made it impossible to see what existed. The fear of the constricted time between living and dying, and the image of what was left. The streets no longer carried the sounds of children playing. The image of the colourfully painted streets was changing into the sharpness of black and white. Those women would never have conversations in their windows again. What kept their children

alive was the hope of reaching the days they dreamed of, and what kept their families alive in their homes was the hope of seeing each other again. To believe that life would go on. I wanted to support their hope, to make it visible. A city that had hosted different ethnic groups for millennia was destroyed by the ruthlessness of the state – even its stones and garbage did not escape destruction.

Due to limited time and a lack of materials, I did most of my work either digitally or on portable objects such as small notebooks and paper. As it became difficult to work on large paintings or to use any kinds of paints, I turned to nature as an alternative. I started to draw directly from the colours of nature – to preserve the colour equation and to try new styles to see what I could produce within my narrow means. Searching for ways to respond to the events that took place around me in their own time flow, I came to the conclusion that I could create traces and images with the colours of soil, leaves, and flowers. My work became about creating images in different spheres. On the one hand, I had a conscious responsibility, and on the other hand, I wanted to improve the curative aspects. The fact that my art became visible on social media and in the opposition press made my work much easier, but to produce drawings that are fast and accurate, conveying what is happening to others, has its challenges.

Drawing is a window to the world for me, a way of expressing myself. I do not believe that these works of mine will end. The moments and experiences that appear in my mind and in front of my eyes, that break in the time-space continuum, will continue to make me draw.





# Rainbow of Re and Rebellion



# Resistance

Francisco  
De Parres  
Gómez

## Community Art in the Zapatista Army of National Liberation

**W**hy create a painting that represents indigenous landworking women cultivating land, their faces covered with balaclavas and bandanas? These paintings embody the ideals of the Zapatista resistance, advocating care for Mother Earth. They highlight the importance of women in revolutionary processes and the need for collective work for the creation of anti-capitalist economies. They speak of a sense of community, while at the same time challenging the capitalist, racist, classist, and heteropatriarchal system, which includes the individualizing art and galleries catering to elitist consumption. The work shows the emancipatory potential of art, reinforced by the phrase “Another world is possible”. Mexico is a country with a complex history. Even though there are at least 68 native popu-

lations, the profound racism promoted by the state through its policies of miscegenation has attempted to erase diversity. Just a few decades ago, most Mexicans were unaware

**“It is [art] (and not politics) that digs into the depths of the soul and rescues the human essence. It’s as if the world were still the same, but with art we can find hope among so many nuts, bolts and gears grinding with anger. Unlike politics, art doesn’t try to fix or calibrate the machine. It does something more subversive and unsettling: it shows the possibility of another world.”**

**Subcomandante  
Insurgente Galeano<sup>1</sup>**

of this immense ethnic diversity. However, on 1 January 1994, in the mountains of Chiapas, an unusual event took place before the eyes of the world, when thousands of indigenous Mayan communities took up arms to voice 13 demands: land, work, food, housing, health, education, independence, democracy, freedom, information, culture, justice, and peace. This process brought to light the emergence of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), a guerrilla movement that had been preparing clandestinely for ten years with the objective of redefining and constructing an alternative history of its peoples.



The importance of art within this political project has been made explicit in the Zapatista communities themselves. By “covering their faces to be seen”, the poetic and corporeal-political power of the people was manifested in the use of balaclavas and bandanas, as well as the slogan “*¡Ya basta!*” (Enough is enough).

Over time, these heterogeneous communities made up of Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Tojolabal, Chol, and Mam ethnic groups – all with Mayan roots – have made multiple calls to civil society to establish dialogues with actors for whom creativity has played a fundamental role. Now, thanks to the gradual consolidation of their autonomy, they recognize that the struggle for the life and salvation of humanity must start with “the arts, the sciences, the original peoples, and the basements of the world”.<sup>2</sup>

**“Before the beginning of the uprising, the arts and sciences had a very small universe and a short history inside the EZLN. Both the sciences and arts had a motive, a direction, an imposed reason: war.”**

**Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés and Subcomandante Insurgente Galeano<sup>3</sup>**

## Starting the struggle for life with the arts

To reaffirm the above in the struggle against racism and exclusion, recently the EZLN, as an indigenous organization that inhabits the forests and jungles of south-east Mexico, organized on its territory the CompArte Festival for Humanity (2016-2019). The festivals brought together thousands of people from civil society and communities in resistance to show that it is possible to create art without hierarchies. In other words, art in which all the content is discussed collectively to decide what to exhibit; art based on listening, dialogue, sharing, and coexistence, where what matters is collectivity and creation by community. It is thus diametrically opposed to the art that is produced for commercial purposes or for show as cult objects to be displayed in museums.

The communities affirm that they focus their creative processes on the consolidation of community ties. Art is an activity that can be practiced freely by everyone. It is not exclusive to the elites, nor does it require specialization. In their own words, “for Zapatismo, an artist is anyone who claims their activity as art, regardless of canons, art critics, museums, Wikipedias and other ‘specialist’ schemes that classify (i.e., exclude) human activities”.<sup>4</sup>

## Exploitation and rage turned rebellion

Indigenous poems and songs often refer to painful moments of slavery. Their titles include: “El sufrimiento de nuestros abuelos y abuelas” (The suffering of our grandparents); “Látigo de la finca” (The whip of the estate); “Vida esclavizada” (Enslaved life); “Se hicieron ricos por esclavizar” (They got rich by enslaving); and “La explotación de antes” (Exploitation of the past). However, these songs and poems serve as a reminder as to why the indigenous people resist and why they refuse to return to oppressive conditions. Going beyond a victimizing posture, they highlight the construction of free self-determination, which is evident in texts such as “La explotación y la rabia que se transforma en rebeldía” (Exploitation and rage turned rebellion) or in the song “¿Quiénes somos?” (Who are we?) (2016), which depicts their anti-capitalist struggle:

*We are the original peoples of these lands, the smallest, the most forgotten, the most humiliated and the most despised; those born as a collective. We are the Others! In just 22 years of resistance and rebellion, we are building our autonomy.*

*We are the truth in practice, with a new system of government where the people rule and the government obeys the seven principles of ruling by obeying.*

*We are small, so small that we have already announced that this house is collapsing. But we are building a new one together with all those below*

*and to the left. We are determined peoples, ready to face the great storm that is approaching. This is why we have already chosen such a great enemy to fight; we will defeat it with resistance and rebellion.*

*We are men, women, children, and elders, who want to transform the world for the good of humanity through our small arts.*

*What does the life of man matter? Among us all, children, women and the elderly, we want to save humanity.*

*This is why we are here!*



## The creation of other worlds

The processes for the creation of art in Zapatista territory are different from those in hegemonic galleries. The most important thing is the sharing of experiences to unite struggles. In contrast to the art that is made from within the capitalist system, the art of the Zapatista peoples shows the other worlds that they are creating. They

portray what they have achieved through their struggle and show the progress they have made in education, food, health, and economy – all thanks to resistance and organization, and without any help from the state. This is expressed in the poem “Camino hacia los trece puntos” (The Path to the thirteen points, from 2016):



*You, EZLN, started the war; you fight for thirteen demands, but mainly for land. Your thinking delivered you, and those from above are annoyed by your work.*

*You look, you say, you walk with action; you make demands so that we all have roofs over our heads.*

*Nourishing food to escape death in all nations. You fulfil your mission; you build for the situation and you guide with information.*

*You have given us virtue, to achieve the dream of good health.*

*Democratically, you are just and necessary; because of your conscience you are independent now. You advance through education, organization and building throughout the world; keeping your firm position of rescuing and defending the good of culture.*

*Thus, your word, your dignity, and your lifelong illusion is to see your fruit live in freedom. And now you do not plan to leave it behind; you tell your people to fight so that they can live in peace.*

*And through the sea of your dreams, the world is surprised; we are all awake.*

## Resisting the hydra

The Mayan Zapatistas have made it clear from the movement's conception: art is not merely a collection of ornamental or folkloric objects. Its importance lies in the strengthening of communities to discover what unites the resistance against the common enemy: the capitalist Hydra. Additionally, through the arts we seek to promote the necessary organization, resistance, and rebellion as the paths to emancipation – not only of the Zapatista peoples, but of all the peoples of the world.

As an anti-authoritarian counterstrategy, art for these communities is a communal celebration; a collective re-creation lived from joyful rebellion. At the same time, it functions as a platform for denouncing inequalities. This is why it can be considered art against authoritarianism, against the denial of otherness. In other words, it is an affront to the power of global policies causing the dispossession and death of oppressed peoples. It is an anti-capitalist art, against racism, classism, and the prevailing heteropatriarchy, manifested in the ruling of nation-states, which stands in opposition to the Zapatista governance form of “ruling-obeying”, and whose highest decision-making body is the people's assembly in the form of direct democracy and highly participatory intensity.

“Rainbow of resistance and rebellion” is a metaphor that expresses the plurality of the struggles that shout *digna rabia*, dignified rage, from different geographies, and rebellious community art is for them a powerful space to show that the construction of other worlds is possible.

### Endnotes

- 1 Subcomandante Insurgente Galeano, *Las artes, las ciencias, los pueblos originarios y los sótanos del mundo*, México: Chiapas, EZLN, Enlace Zapatista, 2016.
- 2 Subcomandante Insurgente Galeano, *op. cit.*
- 3 Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés and Subcomandante Insurgente Galeano, *Las Artes y las Ciencias en la historia del (neo) Zapatismo*, México: Chiapas, Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena, Comandancia General del EZLN, Enlace Zapatista, 2016.
- 4 Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés, *Convocatoria zapatista a actividades 2016*. México: EZLN, Enlace Zapatista, 2016.









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***Authoritarianism operates at a visceral level rather than relying on arguments. How can we counter authoritarian affects?***

***This book brings together 50 first-hand accounts from anti-authoritarian movements, activists, artists, and scholars from around the world, focusing on the sensuous dimension of their strategies. From the collective art of feminist movements in India, Iran, Mexico, and Poland, to sewing collectives, subversive internet aesthetics in Hong Kong, and anti-authoritarian board games, the contributions in this volume open up new perspectives on moments of resistance, subversion, and creation.***

***At a time when authoritarian ideologies are on the rise, democratic rights under attack, and emancipatory horizons seem foreclosed, this book argues for an anti-fascism that goes beyond the defence of what is, proposing paths by which we can radically reclaim the future and build real, lived utopias.***