

FRENZY

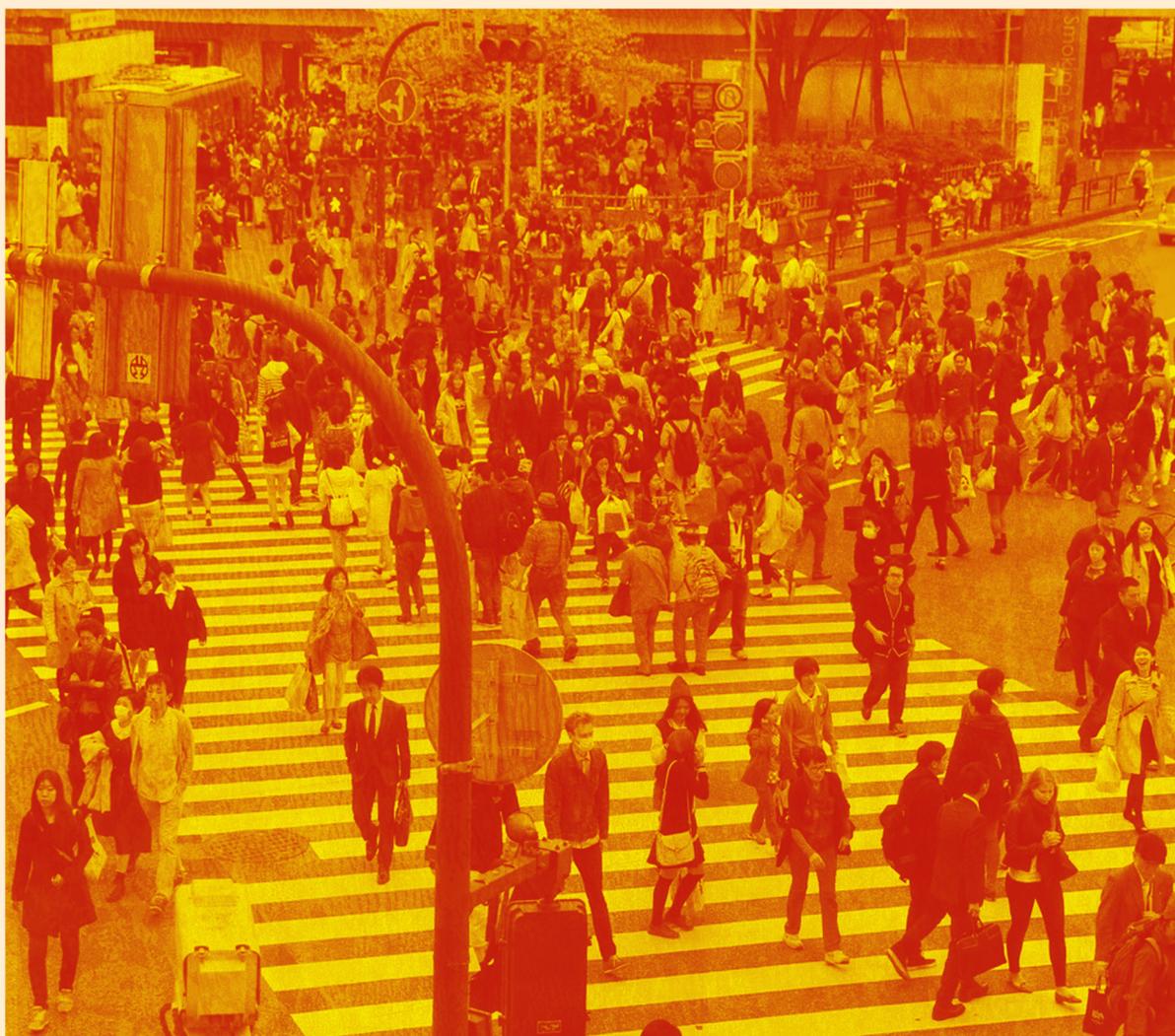


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Editors' Letter

Traditionally, *The Isis*'s editors spend their opening letters expounding on the merits of their chosen theme. Luckily for us, 'Frenzy' feels pretty self-explanatory. As we close in on a General Election and push for what seems like our hundredth Brexit extension, frenzy feels like the right word. Further afield, Kashmir loses sight of freedom day by day, Venice is flooding, and the Amazon burns while the world watches. It is in the context of this global chaos that we took on our editorship, with that certain keenness only student journalists possess – convinced we would solve international debates in 56 pages.

And so we began our term, meeting in dimly lit college rooms to argue about paragraph breaks over Party Rings and grapes. We quickly realised that, while we were not going to halt the climate crisis with a few choice articles, our magazine has something to offer its audience. We are situated in a University that looms absurdly large in the British imagination. Many former Prime Ministers spent formative years in Oxford colleges, and the University's reputation has afforded many billionaire donors the chance to cleanse their names. Our first decision, then, was that this magazine would hold institutions like our university to account. We'd like to think that we have somewhat succeeded. From Oxford's links with the arms trade, to the booming self-care industry, to the US government and its immigration policy – diving in headfirst, we've undertaken to discuss all these topics, and more.

Our response to 'Frenzy' has taken various twists and turns. Poets in particular demonstrate throughout this issue that even while disorder reigns, poetry can rise to the occasion. From notes on ripening figs, to ruminations on diaspora experience, the fiction in this issue motivated us during those long winter meetings. It is easy to dismiss student work, but biased though we may be, we think it's important to take the work of our peers and friends seriously. Creative bursts, crammed between essay deadlines and 9am lectures, are a form of self-care. Operating within structures that can feel stifling, creation becomes a political act. We can promise you, therefore, that both our fiction and non-fiction are proudly eclectic.

Above all, the production of this mag was enabled by the efforts of our team. We learned a lot in these last few months. Each other's coffee order, how to copy edit a piece between the hours of 2 and 5am, and particularly, that collective effort yields change. To go from a theme concept to a whole magazine took over 50 people deciding to take time out of their term to create art, debate the future of dozens of pieces, and plan events with hundreds of attendees to fundraise for the printing of this issue. From a panel discussion on neoliberal feminism to a layin fueled by £1 iced lattes, we have all spent countless hours doing weird and often thankless tasks under the banner of *The Isis*. As we try and adjust back to a life without the magazine taking centre stage (if such a reality really exists), that understanding of collective power will be our main takeaway. It is true that our present is frenzied, in every sense of the word. But to effect any kind of plausible change to counteract the dark currents around us, collaborative action is key. Action can take the form of joining a local activist group, getting involved with volunteering, or even, dare we say it, making a magazine.

With our newfound wisdom imparted, we leave you to read this issue. Making it has been a joy. We are so excited to be sharing it with you.

With love,

Zehra and Léa

the chatter

of men and women

and fish in the room calling out her name over and over again
was unbearable a courthouse
of carp all slippery down the
chamber sliding against the
defendant as he spoke we could hear ever more loudly the noise
of a gavel gulping
for air or maybe someone in
her statement softly crying?
he asked her something kept saying something it was
something sour whether she
had been repeating herself? did
she take the tongue too
literally, let it wash her
mouth out? could she
remember the
open moon? the sound a bald
egg made when it fell out of
its nest? whether the
dogs howled or made white
noise? his short sharp trim
tickled her nose crisp hairs like
scales rubbed her skin pink on the stands
he thought: a woman is
a moment of softness that is
meaningless
the fish glubbering their flatfish eyes
round and hollow
she thought: this man is
scooping water
into black wool I am inside you
and mourning.

DECONSTRUCTING 'AFRICA'

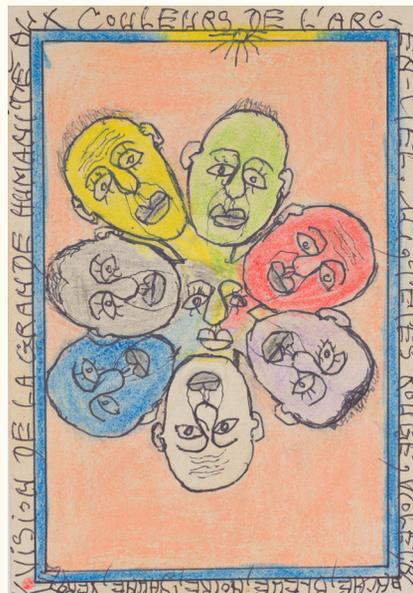
Bruly Bouabré's ways of seeing

Seven disembodied heads float in a circle, cheek-to-cheek, their chins pointing to a face in the middle. They look like old men: wrinkled foreheads, receding hairlines, long, drawn-out faces, and empty eyes staring out ahead. The shapes of their eyes, noses, mouths are crude and repetitive. This might be why the Telegraph called his work “childlike”. But who is this child?

Frédéric Bruly Bouabré never received any art training. But in 1948, he underwent a prophetic vision, announcing in 1958 that he was founding a new religion, L'Ordre des Persécutés, and that his name was now Cheik Nadro. In 1989 his art career took off when he was one of the ‘primitive’ artists featured in the monumental exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, which sought to compare the ethnic arts of non-Western cultures with the cutting-edge conceptual art of Europeans and Americans.

His work is collected as ‘African contemporary art’ on the global market. Yet Westerners seem to like him precisely because for them, he embodies the idea of the backwards, ignorant tribesman: scratching wildly colorful drawings in a devotional stupor. In 1995, with this in mind, the Nigerian intellectual Okwui Enwezor commented: “This is the kind of art we African writers and critics wish to disinherit.”

But Bouabré cannot be so easily stereotyped. He was an educated, multilingual government clerk who had lived through French colonial rule as well as Côte d'Ivoire's independence in 1960, and he wrote extensively on the customs of his Bété people. He knew exactly what he was doing when he courted European intellectuals, and used their academic fascination with authentic African culture to his advantage.



When he first founded his religion in 1958, he'd been helping French anthropologist Denise Paulme with her field research. He invited her to attend his proclamation – probably hoping that she would write about it (she did). That same year, Bouabré sent Théodore Monod of the IFAN, a ‘Black Africa’ research institute, a major project he had been working on: creating an iconographic alphabet for the Bété language,

which had no written form. Monod eventually wrote about this too. As Bouabré grew famous for his art over the years, he streamlined his production process by having his sons prepare his cards and draw the sun-filled blue border that features in all of his pictures. He never passively waited to be ‘discovered’ by the contemporary art world, contrary to the assumptions of the collectors and curators who were fascinated by him.

A recent exhibition at the Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University has been the first step in a long overdue re-evaluation of Bouabré’s legacy. In a small room painted bright yellow, from 20 June 2018 to 2 March 2019, *Alphabété: The World Through the Eyes of Frédéric Bruly Bouabré* showed Bouabré disrupting notions of art and analysing everyday life. Dr. Amanda Maples, who organised the exhibition when she was serving as the Cantor’s Curatorial Fellow in African and Indigenous American Arts, told me that tiny spaces like the Patricia S. Rebele gallery where the show took place “really lend themselves to close looking.”

When asked why she thinks Bouabré is being reassessed at the moment, she says that there is a “push to reconsider the *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition that brought so many contemporary artists of African descent to the forefront, including Bouabré, because they were presented from a particular Westernised worldview.” The exhibited images, created in the late 2000s and early 2010s, just before the artist died, not only engage with Côte d’Ivoire’s colonial history but also investigate the ambiguity of mod-

ern life. From the 1980s, neoliberal ideas and the promotion of self-interest and competitive markets led Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan to drastically reduce state participation in the economy, creating a ‘laissez-faire’ environment. As the years passed, regions of Africa that were recovering from colonisation and violence were heavily encouraged to conform to free-market economics by seemingly neutral entities like the World Trade Organisation and the World Bank. Corporations went multinational, and soon Coca-Cola logos abounded. The aging Bouabré cast a keen eye over these developments and relayed this perspective in his work.

In 2002, Bouabré told anthropologist Cédric Vincent that historically, white colonisers have dominated written discourse on Africa, silencing native voices. “I’m literate,” he said, “so when I make a drawing, I want to put down the thoughts that pertain to the work I’ve just made. The work is there, but we also need to clarify what it says, we need to have this discourse alongside it. Africa has laboured a lot, but she hasn’t been able to explain her labour. This is a fact that has to disappear.” Bouabré aimed to give a voice to the oppressed, to let the subaltern speak. He did this not only through his invention of the *Bété* alphabet and through his writings, but also within his artistic work.

In ‘Man and the art of dressing well: here, young African in red-black button-up shirt’ (2009), the male African subject looks directly at the viewer with his mouth open in a grimace, as if protesting our gaze. The image cuts

“Africa has laboured a lot, but she hasn’t been able to explain her labour”



him off at the torso, subverting the dehumanising tradition of nineteenth-century ethnography, which infamously objectified naked African ‘tribesmen’ standing next to baobab trees and huts. Bouabré isn’t just reframing the way the young man is being seen, but gives him the ability to reject being seen altogether.

Anti-colonial discourse has long run parallel to nationalist and culturally essentialist ideas. In ‘Decolonising the Mind’, Ngugi wa Thiong’o famously called for a wholesale rejection of the coloniser’s language, and asked his literary peers to begin writing in their own languages. Similarly, art critic Olu Oguibe’s complaints on white fetishisation of Bouabré (whom Oguibe calls “Felix”) betrays a preoccupation with an ‘authentic African-ness’ that lies beneath all of the white man’s stereotypes.

But Bouabré asks: what is ‘indigenous knowledge’ in a former colony? Côte d’Ivoire was completely transformed under decades of French rule and both cultures became inevitably entangled. In modern times, is there really such a thing as a ‘true’ Ivorian identity without any European characteristics, and is it regressive or futile to go back into the past to try and uncover it? Bouabré instead asks how we can move forward and create a new, progressive world. He doesn’t shy away from appropriating the French language in his work – after all, French now belongs as much to him as it does to elite academics like the anthropologists

Paulme and Monod. “Bouabré is an inspiring figure to consider,” Dr. Maples says, “in that he wanted to privilege the legacy of oral languages and histories by adapting it to the Western model, yet making it accessible to all people, everywhere.”



This universalism is clearly expressed in the Tagro Dréhounou! series where Bouabré depicts his mother with 4 different nationalities: Central African, British, Cameroonain, and Georgian. In each picture, she looks exactly the same except for the flag on her skirt. The arbitrariness of the colours he selects for this series – an orange background, a pink spotted stick – throw into question the colours which do, at first, seem to make sense: beige skin, black skin, the colours of a national flag. Here, colour defines meaning, Bouabré appropriates the coloniser’s invention of ‘race’ as defining one’s

humanity. Yet he also shows that national identity is skin-deep too: without the national flags drawn onto the women's skirts, how would anyone know where they're meant to be from?

At the same time, I wonder whether we are all equal: despite their portrayed sameness, the lives of these four women would have been drastically different. How valuable are buzzwords like 'multiculturalism' in a world still defined by structural inequality? And what does it mean to be 'African' – is there a singular, unified identity for the continent that doesn't play into colonial machinations?

Bouabré's art doesn't see anything as static or pre-defined, passively existing, out there waiting to be possessed. He doesn't act like he knows everything. Instead, he seeks a process of knowing and understanding what he sees through the practice of depicting it. Bouabré told art historian Sidney Kasfir: "I do not work from my imagination. I observe, and what I see delights me. And so I want to imitate." But Bouabré's idea of "imitation" is far from the Western canon's notion of it. It is not material wealth or the quality of light that he wants to capture. Instead, he revels in the human eye's ability to narrow in on only the details that seem to matter, like a 'divine sign' in an orange.

"He chose syncretism over singularity even while championing our commonalities, universalising us," Dr. Maples continues. "This is especially interesting when you think about the rhetoric of Africans being 'othered' or 'primitivised' by outside points of view, as he would have known. If we all have something in common, it levels the playing field." She adds: "But I can't stress enough that he was also inserting local knowledges, histories, and language and that specificity is still so crucial. It teases out questions about the articulation of global identities and ideas in local ways."



In his series of women in the rain in Vienna, Yerevan, Jeddah, Rosario, and St. John's, Bouabré denies us anything that might make the location of the scene unique: no iconic buildings, but just text and a curtain of rain, blocking any kind of connection the woman could have with her surroundings. A cross-cultural, hyper-connected society puts us in touch with people from around the world, but globalisation can also be homogenising: the women all look the same in their adherence to Eurocentric fashion.

Or maybe it's just the same woman, wearing different coloured dresses, holding different coloured umbrellas, standing against a flat backdrop in a studio. Why should we take for granted what his titles say, anyway? Where most artists would just write their title, Bouabré intentionally includes quotation marks around them. Snaking around his drawings, the scribbled titles literally serve as a frame, and the quotes add a second frame. Based on Bouabré's tendency for narratives, it's possible they denote a narrator's voice, presenting a story to the viewer while remaining distant. Indeed, Bouabré satirises the idea of the male artist-genius integral to the Western canon: Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Pollock. On the back of each picture, he sardonically writes "Signature-auteur:" before signing his autograph.

When tracing over his pencil outlines with ballpoint pen, he presses unbelievably hard, leaving deep grooves in the cardboard, as if he were possessed by some spontaneous, divine inspiration. Yet, comically, the pencil lines are still obvious underneath. Bouabré suggests that he never really took anything seriously, especially not his role as Cheik Nadro. He knew all about the performative nature of art, and sought to use his unique lexicon to explore it.

**“To what extent can you
'subvert' white colonial
mindsets if they insist on
overlooking the complexity
within your work?”**

Bouabré dreamt of a world without borders. He did not claim objectivity, instead celebrating the mysterious and ambiguous. The world, dominated by Western white men who assumed they had the prerogative to interpret and classify everything, saw only the apparent immaturity of his style. He was depicted as an irrational, superstitious ‘savage’ whose lack of ‘civilisation’ made him charming. The reception of his work raises questions about the role art can play in politics. To what extent can you ‘subvert’ white colonial mindsets if they insist on overlooking the complexity within your work? And is it enough to just destabilise notions of identity, or should more be done to galvanise action? Bouabré brought these questions to the table. Now we must engage with them.

Images courtesy of the Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University; Gift of Stefan Simchowitz.

IMPERFECT SYMPATHIES

(TWO YEARS
IN SERVICE)



1 I met Zhipeng the first day I got to my battalion. We were bound together, both set to finish at the same time in April next year. Everybody else in the company would finish in March. Zhipeng spoke broken Mandarin and broken English. He spoke Chinese to me for a whole day before realising I couldn't carry a conversation in it. Zhipeng was working with laser cutters on a cargo ship before he enlisted. That's what he learned at school, the Institute of Technical Education. He would talk endlessly about his girlfriends (there were several, all slightly too young), his visits to prostitutes, his mother, his sister, his father. He bragged about how his father had supposedly killed a man. I listened and nodded. With my A-Levels, and my Oxford place, and my bag full of books, I hated him. I hated how uneducated he was. How simple, how crude, how unlike me. It is hard to say what I found offensive about him. It is hard to say because it is elitist in Singapore's supposedly classless society. Mostly I found the things he did and said to be in bad taste. Taste is like class: relative, local, and slippery.

2 In Singapore, rising to the top of the military is a solid route into the political world and the ruling elite. Most of these boys are picked at eighteen, straight out of school. They are put through a rigorous selection exercise that ends with them going away all expenses paid to a prestigious university (sometimes Oxford, mostly Cambridge), then coming back and serving in the army where they quickly rise through the chain of command. Five out of nineteen of our current cabinet ministers, including the current Prime Minister, are former uniformed officers (four armed forces, one police force). So are the current heads of the national media, the trade unions, and the public transportation system. Aside from A-Level results, the selection process includes personality tests, extra-curricular achievements, and leadership displayed during Basic Military Training. They are usually groomed for these scholarships by their schools, starting at around age sixteen. I quickly discovered that I wasn't going to be picked for one of these. These boys all seemed so efficient and organised, so industrious. And sincere. Still as I watched them troop up to teachers after classes in their cliques of neat haircuts and pressed uniforms, I felt an unshakable sense of being left out, of failing a test I didn't know I was taking.

3 None of this was on Zhipeng's mind when he enlisted. Born with a bad lazy eye, Zhipeng was assigned the lowest PES, or medical grade, in the army – E9L9. This meant that he was not allowed to run, jump, march, swim, carry a rifle, do push-ups, or go outfield. But he was allowed to waste his time. He spent a lot of time in a hi-vi jacket warding off cars while everybody else ran or marched on the roads around camp. He would constantly ask me if he could upgrade his medical status, or up-PES. He wanted to join in, to do the things everyone else was doing. I could never answer.

4 Once, we were put on duty together. Three people are put on duty at any one time to man the battalion's emergency phone and keys: an officer, a sergeant, and a 'man' (a corporal or any rank below that). The officer usually left us alone. There isn't much to do but talk when you're stuck inside a 2x2 metre room with no phones and no internet for 24 hours. We'd take turns to leave. At night it was just the two of us. I was lying in bed with my boots off, trying to get to sleep as early as possible to make the time pass faster. Zhipeng was talking to me about lion dance, his hobby. A 'lion', in southern Chinese tradition, is made of two men moving in unison underneath an ornate cloth costume. The front man has to hold and control a large, expressive, puppet-like head, with eyes that move and flash. There are usually two lions in a performance, and a large, loud band made mostly of drums and cymbals. You can hear them from miles away. There are lion dance competitions every new year, where the lions between poles are set four to five meters in the air. He would spend hours of every precious weekend out of camp practising the intricate, highly coordinated dance. He told me he loved how the head of the lion moved and showed me using a cardboard box. I never found out if he got to perform or if he was a reserve.

5 My father spent twelve years in the armed forces. He was an airplane mechanic. When he was sixteen, my grandfather signed the contract. He wasn't allowed to sign it himself, nor did he want to. He had just done his O-Levels. He hadn't done well enough to carry on in education or badly enough to re-take them. My father only spoke to me once about being there. The only thing he ever told me was an anecdote about a man in his camp who hadn't gone to school, and couldn't speak any language well. Once, my father looked in a notebook the man kept, and inside he found endless scribbles of nonsense, lines and lines of nothing filling up page after page. My father used this incident over and over again as some sort of horror story, a reason for my brother and I to do well in school, to speak well, to read, for fear of becoming this man. Only years later did I realise that the fear my father felt was not born out of disgust at the man but of sameness, of recognition. He was afraid that that was how we saw him, how we thought of him. I can only imagine how alone he must have felt, how locked out and left behind within the bounds of his own life.

6 A few months before we were set to finish our service, we caught Zhipeng stealing money from one of our bunkmates. He was sent to military prison for a few weeks. When he came back, he was defiant and emboldened, proud of his new notoriety. I wouldn't speak to him. I avoided him. I sulked for weeks. Somehow, I felt as though he had failed me, or I'd failed him. Maybe some messy mix of the two. We were supposed to leave at the same time. I felt like he'd left me behind. Or forced me to leave him.

T H E L I O N

The first night my father was gone wasn't the worst of it but it was bad: the three of us in the big bed, wide awake until dawn. I still remember each long hour. February, and the restless dreamless night stretched on forever, my mother rubbing her freezing feet on us, my brother crawling deep under the covers as if that would make a difference, wriggling to the foot of the bed, to the middle, to upside down, resting his feet under the pillow. Me, stock still on my father's side, watching the red light of the alarm clock, the only light in the room. We were awake, with nothing to do but be awake, as if we were waiting for something. At five thirty my mother decided it was a human time to be up, so she went downstairs to get the paper and make tea. I was filling the kettle with water when she came back inside.

"Snowed again last night," she said. "There are fresh mountain lion tracks up there. All around the car."

"Weren't they coyote tracks before?" I asked, lighting the stove.

"Probably won't be too many coyotes around now," she laughed. "It's snowing – run up now if you want to see them."

I did. They were clear cat prints, crisp fossils in the glowing new snow already losing their shape in the fall, unspooling from around her Honda SUV and leading somewhere up the hill along our obscure mountain road.

While I was gone, my mother had lit candles, an endless string of tea lights.

"Make some tea for your brother. He'll be down in a minute," she said.

I made her Irish Breakfast, him Peppermint. I made myself medicinal throat tea. I wasn't sick, just liked the taste. We sat in silence, my mother's face cast in strange shadows from the vitamin D lamps that all the stay-at-home moms here have so they don't want to kill themselves

so much. It's the worst in winter, all her friends said.

When all that was left in her mug was honey, my mother went downstairs. In the computer room, she made phone call after phone call to old friends. PTA chairs, Girl Scout leader friends, friends from college, old bosses. I'd always liked to listen under the door but I'd been doing it more often, and straining harder, since he went to the desert to get better. It had been hard to hear but I caught some things, like the thing about the horses. My father hated horses but the therapists were making him ride them anyways. Said it'd be good for him. My mother could hardly talk about it – she hated horses just as much as he did.

Somewhere behind me, my brother arranged his train set on the floor. I could hear him pushing the toy trains faster and faster.

After a while my mother headed out to shovel the driveway, to get rid of the tracks. But I was waiting to see if it got colder. I wanted to see the creek behind the house freeze solid.



A week and a half later, my mother came into my room while I was doing math homework to tell me she'd seen it. The mountain lion.

She'd been taking rotting vegetables to the compost bin. Because our house was built into a hill, the porch (which extended from the second storey) was far above the forest floor. Underneath we kept everything that rotted: our compost bin, potted plants my mother had killed, lawn chairs left out too long in the rain. She had turned around to go back inside and there it was, across the small creek that ran behind our row of houses down to the lake, a little ways up the mountain. He was stalking away, my mother said, but his shape was unmistakable.

I'd heard stories about the mountain lions that lived in the woods. We all had. When you lived that deep in the forest you saw things.

"It was bizarre," my mother sighed, settling onto my bed even as I turned back to my work. "The way it moved. Like water. Like it didn't have bones."

I waited for her to continue, to give news about my father, maybe even – I almost hoped – to explain what he was doing out there. What had happened when she filed the missing persons

report, when he was found, and why he had to go somewhere in Arizona for months. But she just stared up at the ceiling, silent, her legs too long for my little mattress, and eventually fell asleep so that I had to tiptoe out of my own room.

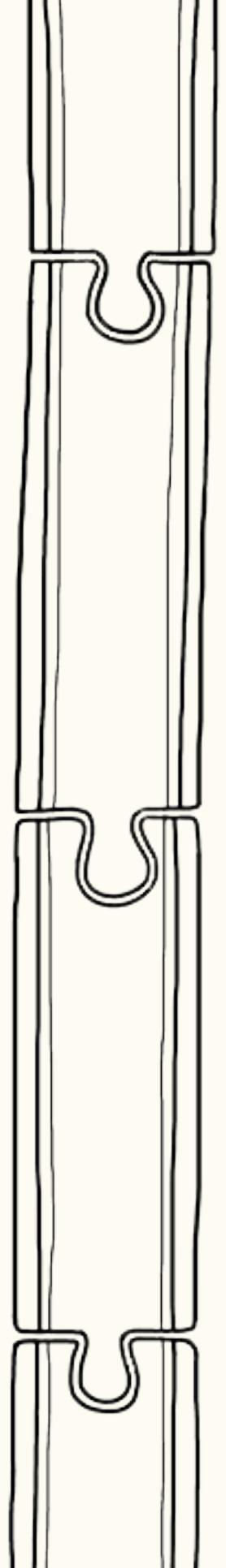


When my mother saw it three more times over the next two weeks, she decided to kill the lion herself. Everyone knew animal control did nothing for those of us this far out and she could handle it. It wasn't until later that I saw how she intended to kill it.

On the last day of March my mother told me what my dad wanted more than anything was drawings from his two beautiful children. They were done with the horses and he'd been doing other types of therapy that were going quite well and the doctors thought he might be coming back even earlier than expected. "But only if you kids do your part," my mother said. We crossed our hearts that we would. I stayed up late into the night drawing and redrawing and tracing and copying and throwing it all out, because, even though I was truly a terrible drawer, I couldn't let

him down. I drew over and over and over to get it right. But all I could manage was a horse with a face that looked more like a shoe and creeks whose water didn't flow at the right angle and dogs with legs all different lengths. I let myself cry silently in the closet behind the coats, slowly crushing the shoe-horse drawing into a smaller and smaller ball. Then I screwed up my face and sat back at the desk to try again and get it right this time.

That night I snuck into the computer room to steal more printer paper. I found my mother sitting cross-legged on the floor, staring out the window at the birches pulling up from the frozen ground in the wind. She was clutching the rifle I'd seen under the big bed when hiding there during hide and seek. As I stood in the doorway, a hulking shape stalked past the window. She jerked back, making a sound from deep in her throat. She started to breathe very fast. I crept back upstairs without any more paper.



I'd been on ferries before where I'd watched orcas' dorsal fins drift closer and closer until the captain went on the intercom to whisper that they'd slipped under the boat. People below us rolled down their windows, watching from their cars, sticking their necks out, slack-jawed. As I slipped up the stairs, I could feel it: something moving under the stairs. Something huge, smooth, with great big teeth, here just for me.

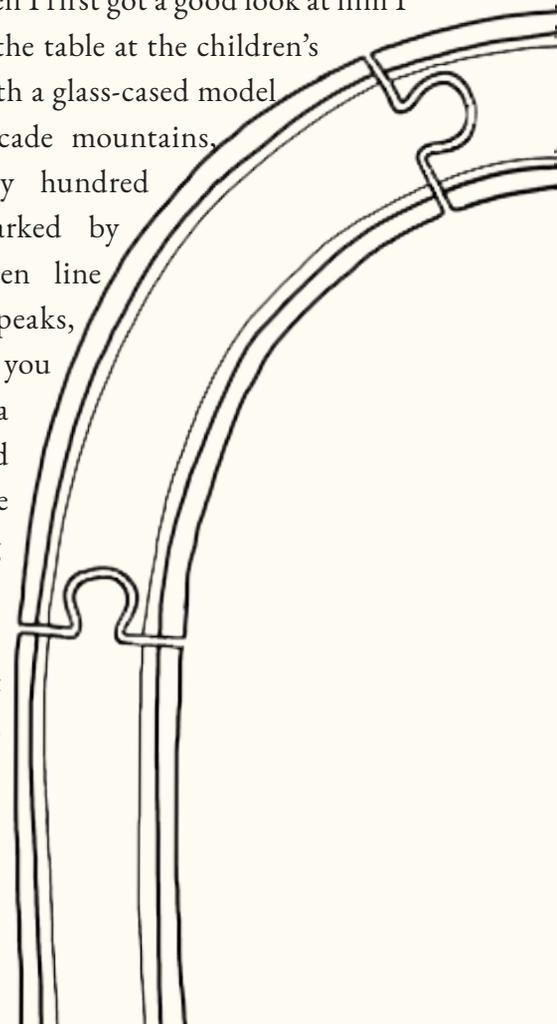


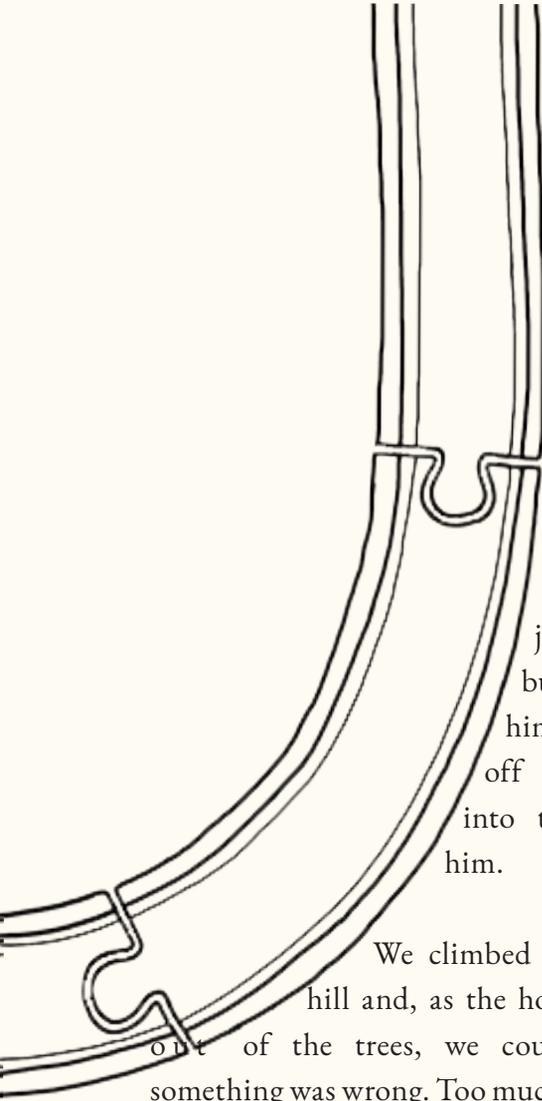
It didn't snow that year; the creek kept running wet. In April I spent hours looking out my window into the woods, searching for the lion. There had been a drought that year and my teacher taught me that droughts drew the animals closer, to hunt for the food they needed. I'd seen the lion's prints but I couldn't picture it properly. When I tried to imagine its eyes I pictured my father's. When I tried to imagine its gait, I pictured how my father might look in a mountain lion suit, ambling on all fours, a little silly, a little self-conscious, knocking over a birch, crushing salamanders under his oversized paws. In my dreams, the lion crept into my room at night, walking on all fours, and kissed me goodnight. I pretended to sleep but I knew it was him in that suit, and I began to get angry that he was running around eating fish from the lake and small mammals right in front of us, as if we couldn't tell that it was him in a lion costume.

In May, school ended. I'd been picturing my father's homecoming for so long that I didn't know what to think when he walked through the front door. We hugged him tight, slapping our limbs against him when he tried to release us, as though if we pretended hard enough we could become those little spurs on forest trails, caught in your socks and there forever.

Standing in our hallway, he was almost the same as I remembered him, except for a few things: strange scars on his arms, long and uneven, traced topographical around his veins. When I asked, my mother said he'd hurt himself on a broken wine bottle. He was thinner and the lines in his face were gouged deeper. When I first got a good look at him I thought of the table at the children's museum with a glass-cased model of the Cascade mountains, where every hundred feet is marked by a thin green line on the peaks, and where you can press a button and watch the whole thing flood.

The first thing he wanted to do was go down to





the lake, just sit on a blanket on the grass and watch us splash around. I felt weird playing out in the water where he was just a blur, but I indulged him. I jumped off the old log into the lake for him.

We climbed back up the hill and, as the house emerged out of the trees, we could tell that something was wrong. Too much movement. As we drew closer, we could see it clearly: the lean mountain lion, ribs exposed, pacing under our deck, where the lawn chairs had been knocked askew.

My mother started hollering, pulling us to her, waving her arms wide like you're supposed to, but the lion was uninterested.

"Scream," she said. "Like your lives depend on it." And she raced into the house through the basement door.

The three of us backed up, my father yelling meaningless sounds – *huah, yii, ga-ah* – as he

inched us back into the trail. We scrambled down into the small canyon of creek bed where there was nothing but water. My father tucked us into the crumbling rock walls and some fell in my mouth. He could see out but all we could see was sandstone.

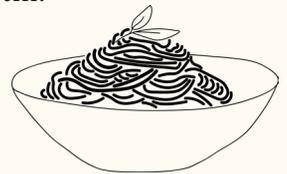
My brother kept asking me, where's Momma, what's she doing, is she okay, is the mountain lion gone, is it gone, is it gone, is she coming back now. I whispered nonsense words to him but I was staring up. How predatory my father's new face looked, I thought, staring at the house like that. And look how he shifts from foot to foot, like he wants to prowl. When he glanced down at us I realised what an unnatural shine his eyes had, and I was suddenly very afraid for my mother.

My brother was in the middle of asking if a mountain lion was the same thing as a cougar when we heard what sounded like a gunshot, only impossibly loud.



My mother cooked that night, a big elaborate meal. Tagliatelle from scratch, using the old pasta press my father had brought from Italy. Sauce with tomatoes and peppers, caramelised onions and mushrooms and sausage, entire unchopped cloves of garlic. Bruschetta, prosciutto, burrata. Bottles of sparkling water, and two flavours of gelato for dessert. I helped her set the table in silence, testing out the words and realising I could never tell her, never explain, that the thing she'd really shot behind our house was not a lion at all.

Later the conversation came smoothly, and we shouted and laughed and my brother rolled a toy train along the edge of his placemat. But before that, we served ourselves in silence, so quietly we could feel the table tremble, so quietly we could hear the cold wind buffeting the slim paper birches side to side. Even as we moved our forks and knives, the windows shuddering in their frames, my brother rolling the toy wheels faster and faster with his finger, everything felt perfectly still.



“Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

Emma Lazarus, The New Colossus

MEXICAN COUNTRIES

In 1992, on the night before the feast day of St. Anthony of Padua, a saint who is invoked to find that which is lost (items, peoples, souls), Michael Elmer, a Border Patrol agent, killed Darío Miranda Valenzuela, a Mexican man in his mid-twenties.

Thomas Watson, Elmer's partner, testified that Watson dragged Miranda's body to the Mexico-US border in Nogales, Arizona. As if he could have predicted how everything would turn out, Elmer did not even bother to bury the corpse. He told Watson he would do it the next day, and instead of reporting the shooting to his superiors, he went drinking with other cops. When the case arrived at a court in Arizona, Elmer was acquitted. After a second trial in a federal court, he was absolved again. The jury, mostly white, argued that Elmer had acted in self-defence when he shot Miranda in the back. Twice.

During the last decades of the twentieth century, a series of economic crises pushed millions of Mexicans to the North. This wave

of immigration grew even more after the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into effect, with tens of thousands of displaced farmers who could no longer make a living due to the cheaper US imports. In 2005, the World Bank reported that the level of extreme rural poverty in Mexico had increased from 35 per cent in 1994 to 55 per cent in 1998. And, without an open war being declared, the US-Mexico border became a battlefield. As unemployment in the US in the 1970s rose for the first time since the end of World War II, “immigrants became a convenient scapegoat,” according to Immanuel Wallerstein. The media would often describe Mexicans as invaders of states that, in only the previous century, had belonged to their country. Then, the US invasion of Mexico resulted in old arbitrary borders being replaced by new arbitrary borders, and the residents who crossed them turned not only into foreigners, but into a foreign threat.

Nowadays, most of the immigrants and refugees crossing the US border from Mexico

are not Mexicans, but Central Americans. They reflect an important change in immigration patterns from the South in contrast to the previous decades: whole families, instead of young men, are fleeing home – alongside tens of thousands of unaccompanied children and teenagers.

Another recent transformation has been the creation of migrant caravans, composed of thousands of people who travel together, largely on foot, across the 2,000 miles that separate the US from Central America. The group Pueblo Sin Fronteras (People Without Borders) has had a key role in the organisation of the caravans since 2018. Their goal is to accompany immigrants as they traverse Mexico, since doing so alone makes them extremely vulnerable to many forms of violent, and potentially lethal, crime on their long journey north.

But each time a new caravan has formed, it has been dragged to the centre of political rhetoric and news cycles in North America (including Mexico), and has quickly become surrounded by demonising narratives of invading hordes and barbarism.



Last August, a Texan man drove more than 600 miles to a mall in El Paso, a border city with a historically large Hispanic and immigrant population and a popular shopping destination for Mexican nationals who live on the other side of the border. He then carried out the deadliest mass shooting in the US of 2019 (and the third deadliest in Texan history), killing 22 people. The shooter had allegedly posted a manifesto on the internet forum 8chan, detailing a ‘Hispanic invasion of Texas,’ and claiming to be defending his country ‘from cultural and ethnic replacement.’

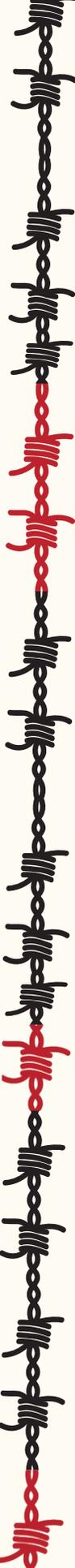
This rhetoric, though prevalent today, is by no means new. In 1836, Stephen F. Austin, an American businessman seen as a founding figure of Texas due to his role in colonising the region, made this claim when asking the federal government to support the independence of Texas from Mexico:

A war of extermination is raging in Texas – a war of barbarism and of despotic principles, waged by the mongrel Spanish-Indian and Negro race, against civilization and the Anglo-American race. For fifteen years I have been labouring like a slave to Americanize Texas [...] But the Anglo-American foundation, this nucleus of republicanism, is to be broken up, and its place supplied by a population of Indians, Mexicans, and renegades, all mixed together, and all the natural enemies of white men and civilisation.

Mónica Muñoz Martínez, a History professor at Brown University, talked recently about her project Refusing to Forget, an NGO that works to create awareness of an unaccounted period of brutal racial violence in Texas at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was a decade in which white border vigilantes and authorities systematically kidnapped, tortured, and murdered Mexicans: “Extralegal executions became so common,” says Muñoz Martínez, “that a San Antonio reporter

“The history of America is the shared regional story of a whole continent whose elements cannot be understood in isolation.”





observed that the ‘finding of dead bodies of Mexicans, suspected for various reasons of being connected with the troubles, has reached a point where it creates little or no interest. It is only when a raid is reported, or an American is killed, that the ire of the people is aroused.’”

In a recent interview with *The Intercept*, Muñoz Martínez explained: ‘The pretexts for the atrocities varied, but the underlying motives for the Texas terror campaign were bound up in white settlers’ longing for power and control over a population they deemed inferior. The killers sought to break apart and divide communities like El Paso through violence, to disenfranchise Mexican American voters, and to relegate them to manual labour.’ This resonates with Wallerstein’s account of the purpose of racist structures: ‘The object of racism is not to exclude people, much less exterminate them, but to keep them within the system as *Untermenschen*, to be exploited economically and used as political scapegoats.’



From its modern origin during the European invasions to the current processes of massive immigration to the North (from Central America to Mexico, and from there to the US), the history of America is the shared regional story of a whole continent, and its elements cannot be understood in isolation. Nevertheless, a dominant narrative lingers of two regions radically different in their essence and destiny: North America, wrongly portrayed as only Canada and the US – the predominantly white Anglo America – and everything else. Early this year, the US news programme *Fox & Friends* unintentionally revealed how prevalent this understanding continues to be when it referred to Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala as “three Mexican countries.” In this imagery, Mexico is not a country, but an amorphous mass of otherness;

“In this imagery, Mexico is not a country, but the amorphous mass of otherness, the amalgamation of everything white America is not.”

the amalgamation of everything white America is not. South of the Rio Grande, borders no longer matter, and all countries are Mexican countries.

Today, Central American families constitute the largest proportion of immigrants apprehended at the US border. Many of them turn themselves in to Border Patrol agents as soon as they arrive and ask for asylum, their right as recognized by US federal law and international treaties the country has signed and ratified. Most are running from systemic violence and poverty brought about by a complex, multifactorial, and interregional history: the transnational War on Drugs in America and its intrinsically related gang and military violence; the corruption and complicity of political elites with criminal groups; continuous US interventions in the region during the Cold War; climate change’s disastrous effects on small-scale agriculture; a globalised economy furthering the same politics that pushed thousands of Mexican farmers out; a history of exploitation and forced displacement by local governments and foreign companies (such as the infamous United Fruit Company, ‘the quintessential representative of American imperialism in Central America’), and – intimately linked to the latter – the enduring radicalised hierarchies of colonialism and neo-colonialism.

Now, as much as 60 per cent of Central Americans live below the poverty line. El Salvador is the deadliest country on earth which is not an official war zone. This is the nightmarish context which Central Americans, and still many Mexicans, are trying to flee. But before they can get to the border and request asylum, these refugees have to cross Mexico.



2006 was a paradigmatic year for Mexico. Felipe Calderón, then President, declared a war on drugs, sending 6,500 soldiers to Michoacán, a state located in Western Mexico which, in the following years, was to become one of the most dangerous in the country. The offensive soon spread throughout the whole country, following the path traced by the US – ‘an all-out global war on the drug menace’ launched by Richard Nixon in the 1970s.

Since then, Mexico has experienced unprecedented levels of violence which are rising year after year. It is the same violence which both pushes people to run, but also prevents thousands of Mexican and Central American immigrants from reaching their destinations and beginning the process of seeking refuge in the US. According to estimates by the Border Patrol (which does not take into account all the missing people), 7,216 immigrants died trying to cross the border between 1998 and 2017. And the Associated Press reported that, from 2014 to 2018, 4,000 more died or disappeared trying to traverse Mexico.

In *La Frontera* [Borderlands] (1987), Gloria Anzaldúa wrote:

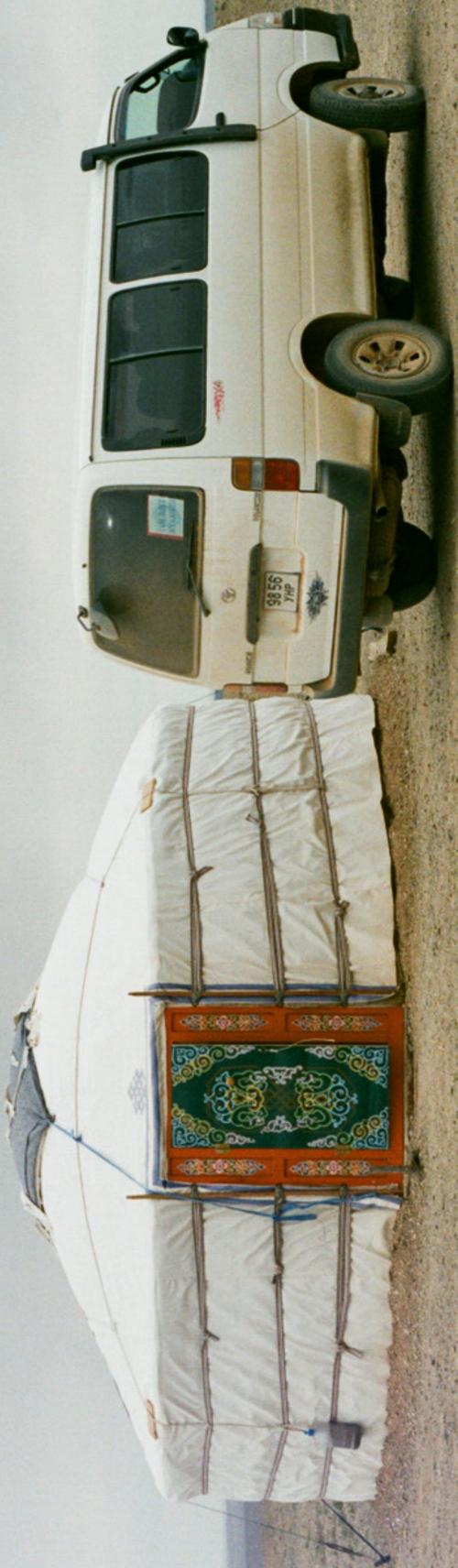
The US-Mexican border es una herida abierta [is an open wound] where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it haemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary.

The border is a line that physically and symbolically created the US by separating it from Latin America. The borderland creates a field of meaning, a narrative space from which two classes of human beings emerge: lives that are valued and lives that are not. In the end, the border does not fulfil its intended duty of separation and, while many disappear in a journey that entails unimaginable suffering, hundreds of thousands cross it every year in various ways. For the tired, the poor, the wretched, for the ‘huddled masses yearning to breathe free,’ crossing the border does not mean leaving it behind, and those who go through it carry it with them forever.

**una
herida abierta**



**an
open wound**



WORLD



IN



FLUX

funding UNDER fire

Walking out of the Oxford train station, the first building you see is a sleek three-storey structure, its polished modernity incongruous with its modest surroundings. The Saïd Business School, built in 2001, oversees teaching for Oxford University students in business, management, and finance. Only the name of the school, engraved above its Park End Street entrance, hints at its connection to an infamous arms deal orchestrated decades before its construction.

The Al Yamamah deal between the UK and Saudi Arabia remains Britain's largest ever arms deal, earning prime contractor BAE Systems at least £43 billion in sales to the Gulf state between 1985 and 2007. Rumours of corruption surfaced almost immediately, but investigations were thwarted for decades. In the early 2000s, after a series of Guardian investigations, a UK government Serious Fraud Office (SFO) probe into the negotiations found evidence of 'commission' payments – or bribes – totalling as much as £6 billion. Wafic Saïd, founder of the Saïd Business School, was allegedly responsible for arranging a bribe of around £1 billion for Prince Bandar bin Sultan, a key negotiator of the deal, and one of £12 million for Margaret Thatcher's son Mark.

Saïd rejects the idea that he is an 'arms dealer', telling The Daily Telegraph in 2001: "I have never even sold a pen knife." However, Oxford's association with individuals involved in the arms trade has provoked widespread criticism. Andrew Feinstein, a prominent writer and campaigner against the arms trade and director of Corruption Watch UK, describes the University's willingness to deal with figures "at the centre of the most corrupt deal in history" as "shameful and indefensible". Besides the Saïd connection, the Oxford business school has received six-figure grants from BAE Systems, whose chairman is a visiting fellow. Moreover, the ex-Thatcher adviser Lord Charles Powell serves as Chairman of the Trustees of the Saïd Business School. In 2006, BAE employed Powell to lobby Tony Blair to close down the SFO investigation into Al Yamamah. Blair himself allegedly used his political weight while Prime Minister to push through the school's construction.

The connection between Al Yamamah and Oxford is loose change relative to the abundant funding the arms industry and military agencies give Oxford University. Investigations by The Isis have found extensive financial relationships which have allowed military priorities to threaten academic freedom. These findings raise fundamental questions around the ethics of how Oxford is financed and the independence of its research.

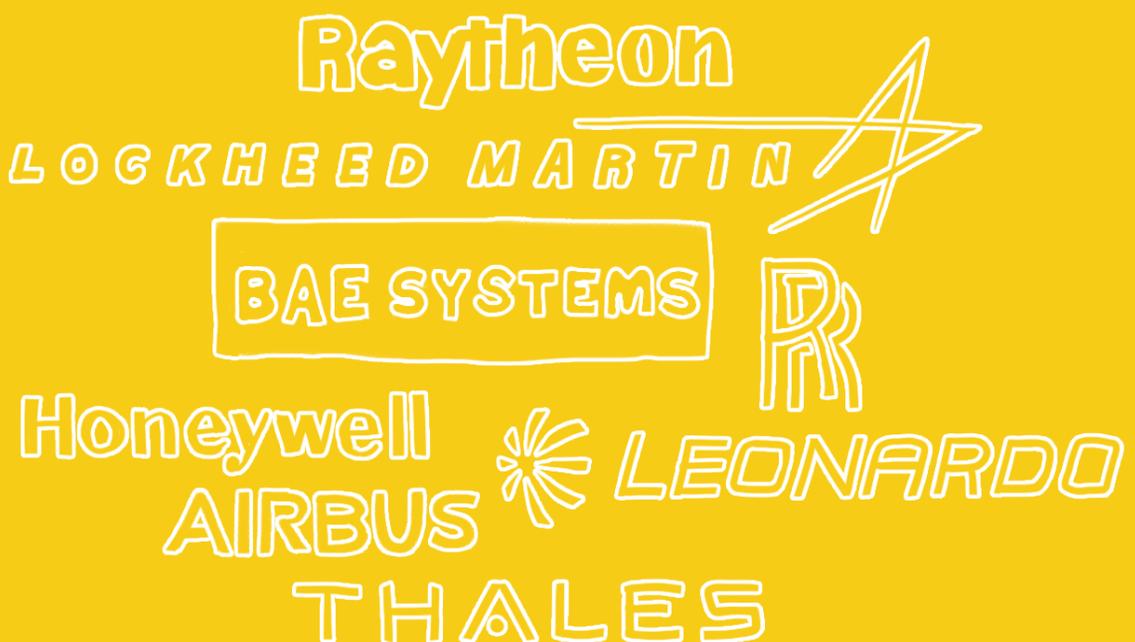
associated with unethical activity

Internal Oxford University guidelines state: 'funding is only requested or accepted if it will not result in the University or any of its members acting illegally, improperly, or unethically.' This includes money that 'originates from or is associated with unethical activity,' while all donations and research funding that 'raise issues of a reputation, ethical or similar nature' are referred to the Committee to Review Donations and Research Funding.

Military contractors sponsoring research at Oxford include BAE Systems, the Airbus Group, Honeywell International, Leonardo, Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, Rolls Royce, and Thales. All of these organisations feature on investor exclusion lists for their involvement in the production of controversial weapons. All possess export licences to Saudi Arabia. BAE particularly has played a role in sup-

plying, training, and maintaining the Saudi Air Force during its ongoing Yemen offensive. In September 2019, Amnesty International released a report accusing seven arms companies linked to Oxford of an 'alarming indifference to the human cost of their business' in a manner that could 'expose these companies and their bosses to prosecution for war crimes.' More recently, arms companies connected to Oxford have been heavily criticised in the press for their role in arming Turkish forces ahead of the Kurdish offensive.

Their involvement in dubious overseas activities is not the only criticism to be levelled at these companies. Besides its violent implications, studies suggest that the arms trade accounts for as much as 40 per cent of all corruption in world trade. Rolls Royce, which has given Oxford over £6 million in



the last three years alone, was forced to pay £671 million in penalties in 2017 relating to claims of bribery; Thales are currently facing trial on corruption charges alongside South Africa's disgraced former President, Jacob Zuma; BAE Systems have been accused of handing out billions of pounds in bribes to win contracts – the list goes on.

Responding to The Isis' findings, the Campaign Against The Arms Trade's universities coordinator stated: "Universities are public institutions that are supposed to work for the public good and encourage innovation, creativity and fruitful dialogue. Instead, universities like Oxford are profiting from death, destruction, and oppression, home and abroad."

A University spokesperson rejected these accusations, arguing that projects financed by these companies 'advance general scientific understanding, with subsequent civilian applications including climate change monitoring, earthquake detection, energy efficiency, and humanitarian relief, as well as potential application by the defence sector.' However, the humanitarian applications for a significant number of such projects are unclear. Individual projects uncovered by The Isis include a £129,000 grant from Rolls Royce for an Engineering project entitled 'Tempest', running from 1 December 2018 to 29 February 2020. Although no details of this project have been made publicly available, the word 'Tempest' is also the name given to a Rolls Royce, BAE Systems, MBDA, Leonardo, and Ministry of Defence (MoD) programme to build a sixth generation stealth fighter jet. The University did not respond when asked to comment directly on this subject.

Clear-cut individual cases such as these are not the only examples of arms involvement in financing research at Oxford. In most cases, defence-related funding takes root at an institutional level. Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs) manage research council-funded PhD students. These centres aim to provide students with 'technical and transferable skills' through research and training, with an emphasis on collaboration with industrial partners. This collaboration produces sets of funded projects

for PhD students, who have complained that limited choice makes it difficult for them to refuse projects. Leading arms manufacturers such as Thales and Leonardo are industrial partners at a number of CDTs, meaning their representatives directly supervise PhD projects. In these cases, when CDT projects involve confidential information, students may not be given full details before beginning research. Once students do begin research projects, it can be difficult to withdraw, not least since project contracts often feature Non-Disclosure Agreements. One graduate student, who wished to remain anonymous, remarked that **it is possible to be "forced into certain directions" once research has begun.** PhD students also suffer if their research cannot legally be published because of confidentiality agreements, their academic freedom threatened by the priorities of the University's military funders.

deep immersion

As Dr. Peter Burt, a researcher for Drone Wars UK, explains, universities "provide the kind of academic expertise and knowledge, bases for research, and facilities that are not available elsewhere." Beyond influencing academic research, financial support allows military bodies to directly access these resources.

The Oxford Robotics Institute (ORI), a subsidiary of the Engineering Department, offers an 'Industrial Membership' programme to prospective commercial funders. According to the Institute, membership 'buys deep immersion within the ORI to the full portfolio of our research and activity.' The programme is tiered. A 'Full Industrial Member' can embed an employee within the institution with 'full access' to 'all of [their] data, software, hardware, and computing facilities.' Three of the ORI's six current industrial members have ties to the arms trade or defence agencies. One of them is a subsidiary of the sixth largest defence contractor in the world, and works exclusively on building unmanned surface vehicles. Their website lists the

military and security applications of their vehicles, described as ‘the future for Maritime Operations.’

Oxford also houses two Rolls Royce University Technology Centres. At the Solid Mechanics Engineering department, home to one of them, three of the department’s twelve professors do consultancy work for Rolls Royce. Another professor is on the MoD’s Defence Scientific Advisory Committee’s register of security-cleared scientific advisors. Over half of the department’s research projects listed online have received funding from defence-related bodies, including the US Air Force. Given the power of faculty boards, especially over academics early in their contracts, it can be very difficult to ask questions about established senior professors and their connections with defence bodies. For Dr Stuart Parkinson of Scientists for Global Responsibility, the result of such connections is a “labyrinth that builds up and becomes very solidified and powerful within that environment.”

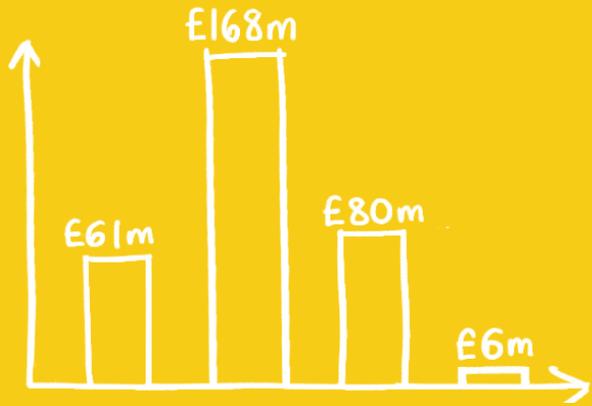
battle-winning impact

The convergence between defence bodies and the University relates to both funding and personnel. Academics routinely involved in defence-funded projects have been found on the payrolls of bodies such as BAE Systems, Rolls Royce, and the MoD, working as consultants to supplement their University income. The MoD in particular has a significant Oxford crossover, with officials invited to give lectures at the University, and government defence laboratories running interactive workshops for students.

Government policy documents reveal targeted funding from the MoD with the explicit goal of shifting the research agenda towards military interests. Following its 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review, the MoD announced an initiative to ‘unearth defence and security pioneers’ by funding programmes designed to encourage collaboration

between academia and arms companies. Specific research areas where the MoD sees the ‘greatest potential to transform military capabilities to achieve battle-winning impacts’ are outlined in the Science and Technology Framework, published in September 2019. Responsibility for delivering this strategy falls on the MoD’s Chief Scientific Adviser, Professor Dame Angela McLean - the Professor of Mathematical Biology at Oxford’s Department of Zoology.

MoD funding at Oxford University totals over £6 million for research contracts active in the last three financial years. This includes six-figure grants for research projects with specified applications including electronic warfare and drones. Oxford’s Networked Quantum Information Technologies hub, established by an MoD-led government programme, has received £61 million in grants paired with military contractors since its foundation in 2014. It also receives additional funding from government bodies including the Atomic Weapons Establishment. As of 2016, the University had overseen seven MoD-funded PhDs as part of this programme, more than any other participating university in the country.



In addition to direct funding, the MoD collaborates with government councils to finance projects and encourage military sector collaboration. Oxford’s research council grants active in 2019 include over £80 million paired with the MoD, while nearly 40 per cent of its £420 million of science council grants are paired with military-related bodies.

Another central facet of the MoD’s Science and Technology Framework is autonomous technologies. In November 2018, Drone Wars UK published ‘Off The Leash’, a report into the development of autonomous lethal weapons systems. Such systems - dubbed ‘killer robots’ by campaigners - are a contentious area, labelled by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres as “politically unacceptable and morally repugnant” ahead of a UN summit earlier this year. In its report, Off the Leash found ‘tangible evidence’ that the MoD, military contractors, and universities are ‘actively engaged in research and the development of technology

politically
unacceptable
AND
morally
repugnant

which would enable weaponised drones to undertake autonomous missions.’ These developments can be traced to Oxford, where The Isis has found extensive collaboration between government agencies and military contractors in areas relevant to drones. Currently, funding at the University from defence-partnered grants related to autonomy totals at least £22 million, with Thales, QinetiQ, and BAE Systems – leading developers of drone technologies – providing significant financial support. Meanwhile, MoD-funded Oxford projects include a number of PhDs relating to unmanned flight control and sensor development.

a changing field

The UK universities system is at a critical junction. A long-term decline in higher education government support combined with the impending loss of EU grants has left university administrators scabbling for funding. Responding to The Isis’ findings, the University spokesperson maintained that ‘all research funders must first pass ethical scrutiny and be approved by a robust, independent system, which takes legal, ethical, and reputational issues into consideration.’ However, the pressure to find alternative financial sources has already raised serious questions about the suitability of Oxford’s current ethical frameworks. As Andrew Feinstein argues: “funding from defence companies is not undertaken philanthropically.” Just this year, it emerged that three years of negotiations and an internal ethical review into a £150 million donation from Stephen Schwarzman were subject to Non-Disclosure Agreements, sparking concerns amongst university campaigners about the University’s clear lack of transparency.

A month on from the announcement of Schwarzman’s donation, University Vice-Chancellor Louise Richardson lamented the disparity in fundraising between the University and “our American competitors.” If anything, this changing

environment is moving Oxford closer to American funding models, with industrial research funding growing at over twice the rate of research grants over the past five years.

Oxford’s spokesperson concluded that the University’s research is ‘academically driven, with the ultimate aim of enhancing openly available scholarship and knowledge.’ Questions persist about this assessment – the Campaign Against the Arms Trade’s universities coordinator stated that the findings demonstrated a “destructive role in suppressing students’ ability to contribute positively to society rather than to develop technologies of war.” The influence of industrial partners on the publication of research projects with commercially sensitive findings also hinders the pursuit of openly available knowledge. Meanwhile, although scholarship at Oxford remains ‘academically driven,’ the considerations that determine which projects receive funding are not. Further work is needed to uncover the full extent of the close connections between Oxford University and military organisations. For now, the question remains: how long can the University maintain a global reputation for progress while wedded to the military sector?

FISHERMAN

My little eyes are whittled wide. They slip through clouded water, sleekly oiled, starved of tide, to find the feinting fish. My whetted nets will drip with jewels that dart and dive at every angle.

I need to strip them of their silver-plated scales, roam like a fishing hook to every fissure, nook, and glib oesophagus, or jab my digits into golden gills until they're mangled.

The fish are opalescent, like light fired through a prism-like sun on a shard of mirror, or the way that melting asphalt gleams and glimmers. I must harvest the pit-stone pupils of eyes that are not almond-shaped like mine, but spherical and spangled.

Its guts could be studded with precious stones – if so, I'll shake it till they jangle; jockey and jostle so it coughs them loose and chokes. Then, I'll pick them out from where they dangle.

But it's devoid of drive and dazzle, barely breathing, its tender tendons hemmed with plastic gems and frazzled entrails, haemorrhaged and heaving, so I hold it to the sky to see it struggle as it's strangled.

I've strummed the strings of its shiny spine until they're meek and marred, and the sound of sinew snapping's hot and hard to handle. It heaves with styrene pieces, cleaved by PVC debris, bright-dyed like bags of sweets. I'm thinking queasily how easily its offal disentangled.

Its skeleton's slats are slotted with nicotine stubs; they've slipped out from the stomach where they skulk unseen, neat nubs stuffed in like smashed terrine, all trod and trampled. I could take its flinching litter-tinted fins and wear them round my wrists, like a burden, like a bangle.

I slice it, slit it, splice it on a spit. It thrashes, all slashed through with dregs-dreck dashes. I waver, then I watch it writhe and wrangle.



As Good As It Gets

Prison, according to Roger Hallam, co-founder of environmentalist movement Extinction Rebellion (XR), is 'as good as it gets.' After serving a six-week jail term in Wormwood Scrubs, Hallam summarised the prison experience in a Facebook post as consisting of 'sitting on a bed all day reading biographies of Gandhi' and 'having my food made for me.' He then writes: 'if anything was annoying, it was sitting there thinking about why so many people make up excuses for not taking this step.'

Hallam is speaking from personal experience. But his comments can be seen as a condemnation based entirely on the experience of a white, cisgender, financially secure man. His rhetoric invalidates the struggles of thousands of people who are currently suffering in British jails, and alienates activists who are happy to protest but unwilling to serve a prison term. When Hallam encourages people to get arrested, he is also encouraging vulnerable people to put themselves at risk. Hallam is not the only one responsible for this marginalisation. XR's original (and now deleted) online prison guide described prison as having the potential

to be a 'moving and maturing experience,' and fellow founder Gail Bradbrook described arrest as being 'transcendent' and 'spell-breaking.' In Hallam's post-release broadcast, he argues that "thousands of people from all backgrounds can do it." He is only one link in a chain of activists who, by holding the same attitude ignorant of the race, class, and gender struggles of many XR activists, are hindering the movement's potential to become the larger, more inclusive, and more diverse one that is necessary in order to effectively tackle climate change.

XR has become well known over the past year for its roadblocks and localised acts of civil disobedience – acts that have started to bring about crucial changes. After XR's April action in London, which brought parts of the city's transport system to a standstill, the British government finally declared a climate emergency. This was a critical step in the direction of climate justice. The XR movement aims to use widespread civil disobedience to force the government into recognising the impending climate crisis, and to take serious action in response. According to

Hallam, in order to catch the attention of the government, “you need about 400 people to go to prison [and] about two to three thousand people to be arrested.” This goal drives him to relay his positive experience of arrest to XR members and urge them to follow his lead.

What Hallam and Bradbrook don't seem to appreciate are the consequences that imprisonment has on more vulnerable members of society – consequences which can be debilitating. Many inmates lose their accommodation one way or another whilst in prison, a fact that generally goes unacknowledged. Entitlement to housing benefit stops for all prisoners with sentences longer than thirteen weeks, and standard rent contracts continue throughout incarceration. Half of respondents to a 2016 YouGov survey admitted that they would not consider hiring an ex-offender. For many, the duress of prison lasts much longer than the sentence and asking these people to get themselves arrested excludes and endangers them.

This lack of class sensitivity saturates the rest of Hallam's Facebook page. His 'prison update' posts are littered with generalisations and dismissals of experiences that are not akin to his own. In an earlier post, another member of XR shared that he had escaped a cell which he shared with 'a drug dealer and a stabber.' The crass reduction of his cellmates to their crimes (crimes undeniably less palatable to the public than climate activism) indicates a problematic elevation of climate activists over other incarcerated individuals. This practice draws a line between 'bad prisoners' and 'good prisoners' – those who deserve to be in prison, and those who have nobly sacrificed themselves for the climate movement.

In 2018, Ben Smoke and fourteen other activists broke into Stansted Airport and chained themselves to a plane which had been

" Talking about climate change only in terms of its effect on white British people excludes people of colour from the movement "



chartered by the Home Office to deport 60 people to Nigeria, Ghana, and Sierra Leone. For this act of civil disobedience, Ben Smoke was unexpectedly charged with a terror offence that carried a life sentence. Smoke has recently expressed his discomfort at the nature of XR's discourse around prison. He told the Guardian that 'to have people like Roger Hallam speaking of prison so casually undermines those who are the poorest or most oppressed in our society whose lives are ripped apart by

it.' This undermining is not solely a tendency of Hallam's, with Bradbrook also talking of arrest light-heartedly, claiming the only thing she disliked about it was the paperwork. The ability to put complete trust in the consistency of the prison system signifies a privilege that more socially advantaged activists often refuse to acknowledge. Trivialising the prison experience like this is dangerous on two counts: not only does it undermine the prison reform movement in its fight to

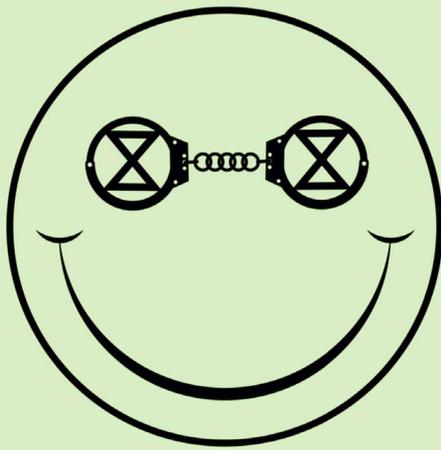
expose the injustice of the penal system, it also encourages less privileged members of XR to subject themselves to a criminal justice process that is much more likely to destabilise them, potentially irreversibly.

Hallam claims that the objections people have to getting arrested are merely "excuses" spun out of "prejudices" and "unfounded fears", and dismisses concerns regarding arrest, specifically those voiced by activists of colour. In an interview with Tribune Radio, Hallam responded to a suggestion that people of colour face increased systematic bias from the police: "with all due respect, I think you're empirically wrong". By accusing people of colour of exaggerating the institutionalised racism they often face from the police, Hallam sends a wider message of ignorance and intolerance to the wider community of XR. Later in the interview, he went on to claim that there is "strong evidence" that people of colour are treated "basically the same" as white people by the penal system.

This is not the case. In face to face confrontations with the police, figures from 2018 showed that black people were four times more likely to have force used against them. This statistic is particularly damning considering that civil disobedience more often than not involves face to face confrontation with the police. When such statistics are considered, the dismissal of BAME activists' fears regarding arrest as 'unfounded' is unforgivable. Despite this, XR's original prison guide claimed that 'most prison guards are black and don't wish to give you a hard time.' In reality, according to an official government report from March 2019, 94 per cent of prison guards are white, and only 2.7 per cent are black. The concerns that people have raised about such inconsistencies were dismissed in the Tribune Radio interview as a symptom of the 'chronically over-critical, radical, and hard left.'



" You need about 400 people to go to prison [and] about two to three thousand people to be arrested "



**extinction
rebellion**

The idea of this ‘chronically over-critical, radical, and hard left’ has been used by other civil disobedience movements to disregard or ostracise disempowered identities as they fight for “the greater good.” The British Suffragettes, cited by XR as an inspiration, are known for winning women the vote in 1918, but what they actually won that year was the right for women above the age of 30 who owned property to vote. Sylvia Pankhurst, daughter of Suffragette founder Emmeline Pankhurst, was expelled from the movement after encouraging working-class women to join the fight. Emmeline believed that suffrage could best be achieved through the efforts of middle-class women only, and that bringing leftist politics into the movement would antagonise the British government and stunt the campaign. Whilst classism excluded less privileged women from suffrage in Britain, racism did the same for American suffrage. The American suffragettes exploited racial politics, using the fact that the black male vote was granted in 1865 to question why educated white women still had not won the privilege. Suffragette Carrie Chapman Catt enticed ambivalent Americans with the promise that

“White supremacy will be strengthened, not weakened, by women’s suffrage.” Overriding the rights of one group in order to advocate those of another means that all progress is tainted by regression. Climate justice is a universal cause, and it is essential that the fight for it is equally universal.

Certain members of XR are also guilty of pandering to intolerance as a means of recruitment. In a recent speech, Hallam cited mass immigration as a consequence of global warming, before saying that the environmentalist movement needs to “start talking in terms of tradition, nation, and honour.” Ronan Harrington, another spokesperson for XR, supported these ideas in a recent video entitled ‘What Can Extinction Rebellion Learn from Nigel Farage?’, advising activists to avoid taking “lefty liberal positions” such as “no borders” so as not to alienate far-right allies. Rupert Read, Green Party campaigner and spokesperson for XR, adds to this controversial idea, arguing that ‘net environmental footprint’ is increased by migrants, and that harsher border laws will help to halt climate change. Talking about climate change only in terms of its effect on white British people excludes people of colour from the movement. By indulging (even if unwittingly) xenophobic and racial prejudices at the same time as advocating arrest-based activism, which is primarily suited to white British nationals, activists like Hallam, Harrington, and Read are pushing ethnic minorities out of the fight for climate justice. A focus on nationhood reduces a global cause to a national one, undermining its gravity and disregarding the fact that climate deterioration will impact the Global South sooner and more tragically than the Global North. The impact of climate change in the Southern Hemisphere is often neglected in XR circles. Nathan Lawson, a young BAME XR activist, describes the movement’s discourse around the

Global South as veering towards ‘neocolonial’ when it is present at all, and believes that XR has a responsibility to platform activists from the Global South and allow them to speak for themselves, and not simply use them as frightening statistics.

XR is a relatively new movement, but it is starting to accept the need to grow. The original prison guide has been replaced by a new document. This version reminds activists that ‘prison is not to be taken lightly’ and details things to consider before getting arrested, referencing immigration status and financial stability. Sub-groups such as XR Internationalist Solidarity are emerging within the movement, pushing to make it more global and inclusive. Charlie Balchin, a member of this subgroup, comments that climate activists brought together by XR are increasingly ‘creating new groups under the XR umbrella with different arrest/privilege narratives.’

XR Scotland recently addressed the simmering tensions within the movement regarding its tendency to exclude marginalised people from the climate justice narrative. As part of the ‘October Rebellion’, Scottish activists created and displayed banners that read ‘DECOLONISE XR’ and ‘CLIMATE STRUGGLE = CLASS STRUGGLE’, a positive sign that the movement is heading in a more inclusive direction. However, in a related

Facebook post, XR Scotland admits that ‘Others in XR UK questioned this messaging.’ An incident at a recent roadblock is then detailed, in which a young woman of colour was silenced by a middle-aged white woman who snatched her megaphone when she asked the crowd to refrain from an alienating chant about loving the police.

Extinction Rebellion is fighting for the most important cause in history. Governments around the world must take radical action to combat climate deterioration immediately, or there will be no climate left to defend. However, as today’s most powerful environmentalist movement, XR must acknowledge the unique struggles of marginalised communities both in and outside of Britain. In order for the climate movement to progress into the revolutionary global force that it needs to be, prolific groups like Extinction Rebellion must avoid individualistic and exclusionary attitudes and discourses. By trivialising both the prison experience and the unique intersectional struggles of disempowered voices, XR risks alienating a large proportion of the population. With sub-groups such as Global Justice Rebellion and XR International Solidarity Network increasingly contributing to the movement, there is still hope that the fight for climate justice can become a more inclusive and supportive space for the marginalised.

' DECOLONISE XR '



The Rhymelessness of Orange

The tangerine played hard to get,
Full-pipped and bursting 'til it wept
In half a drop – and in the bed it
Let itself, still pressurised,
Implode. And now, I see the eyes
(Tomorrow's seeds) come whining.
Lungs segment and shine with
Pithy veins of difficult.

The reeling brains unsqueeze
A wince, juice the unconvinced
Decision. Ulcered vagueness stings
In citrus bleeds. It flicks away the
Far-flung seeds (still pulsing, now
From contact), and the peel.





The Fig Tree

in the garden is ripening faster than we know what to do with –
Figs lie on the counter like a school of purple fish.
In a box by the door, more are pressing down.
The weight of fig upon fig puts rips into their skin.

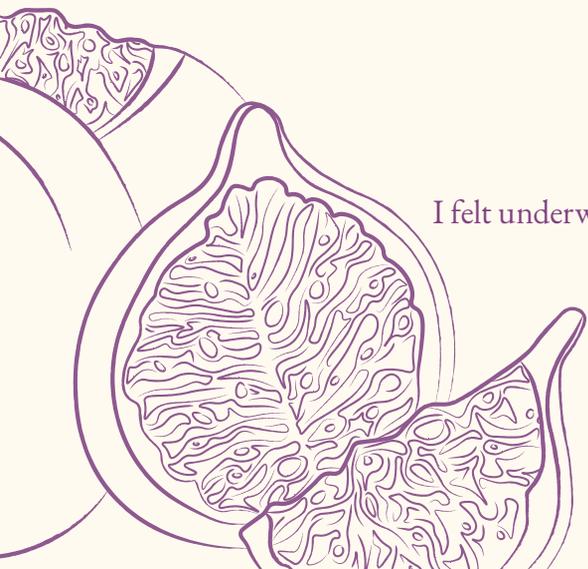
It is a strange room. There is nothing but figs except ourselves,
And we pull our boots on quickly when we leave.
Mud dries in footprints on the floor.

I went picking and the tree was low over the ground.

I admit, I mostly went to climb.

I felt underwater when my head was in the bower and entirely forgot

My sticky hands; you lifting
A fig up to your mouth, many teeth.



The Self Care Machine

“Careful, Poppy: THIS makes him lose interest FAST.” An email flashes up on my phone. It’s Matthew Hussey, an Essex-born dating guru whose four-million strong, predominantly female flock I have recently joined. The girl next to me has undoubtedly seen – it doesn’t matter, because soon ‘Matt’ will be personally attacking her, too. Months later, in Pizza Hut, my companion’s phone screen lights up – it’s him. She solemnly puts down her meat feast. “What pushes your ex away (and how to pull him back).” It’s spreading.

This ominous email is not, however, an exceptional experience for women who are, inevitably, consumers. An overlooked consequence of the lack of funding for mental health provisions in the UK and the US is that ‘self-care’ and ‘wellbeing’ industries have sprung up in both countries, with the objective of plastering over this dangerous gap with products and services that supposedly meet the demands of those left behind by the system. The commendable boom in public awareness of mental health issues, which has taken place over the last decade, has coincided with significant cuts to the NHS. These cuts have meant that although more money is allocated each year (with related trusts gaining an income boost of almost 2.5 percent in 2016/17), the number of specialist nurses has decreased by 13 percent since 2009. Alongside this, the explosion of social media has created a platform for those seeking to capitalise on the need for a sense of wellbeing that health services fail to meet. This is where ‘self-care’ enters the stage. It has long been treated as a broad term for fix-all solutions – a phrase carefully calculated to embody just the right level of association with empowerment and good mental practice. It has also become the making of entrepreneurs willing to align their videos, their products, and their services with this new ideology – and turn a good buck in the process. Hussey, who shot to fame during this critical period, has made a career out of it, and many others have followed.

The first time I encountered the quiff-sporting life coach, it was by virtue of a Facebook algorithm’s depressing decision that my ‘suggested videos’ ought to feature his viral dating advice. I watched one after the other, fascinated and appalled by the rock-solid gender essentialism of Hussey’s world: the cartoon women in his instructional videos populate two-dimensional bars and coffee shops, variously getting ghosted, fending off saucy texts, and sighing. At first glance, the videos seemed at home among the menagerie of odd media which Facebook sent my way; upon closer inspection, I realised that I had been offered an ideology based on my age and gender. It was designed to lead me deeper and deeper into his content, and eventually to encourage me to part with my money in exchange for his vision of my better self. As Hussey himself confidently states in a video advert for his programme: “this isn’t about finding myself, this is about creating myself.” I now understood myself as configured in data: a young female active on social media channels, a customer waiting to be sold empowerment.

The tone of the ‘featured videos’ first encountered by many of his fans is warm, lightly comic; Hussey often issues a coquettish string of jabs at “us men”. In his world, that lynx-doused swarm of cookie-cutter individuals on the other side of a strict gender binary just needs to be flattered into treating women well. “Do all the work for him,” Matt beams. “Start a conversation that he thinks he started.” “Ask for a favour.” Hussey’s ‘man’ is an innocuous and uncalculating figure. The simplicity of his formulas for ‘attraction’ must appeal to the women who comment on, follow, and ultimately purchase his content. There is a comforting security in the assurances of a clean-cut, successful-looking life coach: the content is a safe place away from the harrowing complexities of modern gender relations. The generation of millennial women Hussey mainly attracts is beset by competing demands to be highly empowered, in control, and yet hypersexual, ever-closer to the archetypes of femaleness flooding social media. Being a woman online means being subjected to a flurry of content aimed at fulfilling these seemingly compulsory pressures. Lip fillers, meditation apps, and yes, dating advice, are forced to the would-be consumer. Hussey’s brand offers apparent respite from the murky world of monetised empowerment. We should be asking what happens when governmental services leave self-improvement and wellness in the hands of unqualified individuals, who exchange their unmediated messages for money – and lots of it.

The image of the ‘life coach’ or ‘relationship guru’ has never been taken seriously by mainstream commentators. Coverage of Hussey’s growing empire, ‘How to Get the Guy’, has long been the comic ‘girl-talk’ section of a magazine show, or a columnist’s low-stakes ‘what I learned’ trip to a coaching session. Hussey has undoubtedly profited from these enterprises: he has been an ‘expert’ on the Today Show in the US, he has written for Cosmopolitan, and he has promotional ties with businesses including Hugo Boss, Proctor & Gamble, and the consultancy firm Accenture. He is followed by more than four million people on Facebook, has accumulated 266 million views on YouTube, and claims to have ‘coached’ over 291 million women.

His influence should not be underestimated. He is not the exception, but rather a key example of a much broader trend. Other gurus have cracked the industry alongside Hussey: motivational figures like Jay Shetty and Deepak Chopra are some of the most visible among a sea of influencers whose accounts – ‘@doingwell’, ‘@thebalancedblonde’ or ‘@recipesforselflove’ – represent a sales pitch for a personal brand of wellbeing.

The lack of serious interrogation of personalities like Hussey is undoubtedly related to the media’s trivialisation of the lives of the demographic he attracts. The women interviewed in advertisements for his retreats and programmes speak of great personal trauma – abusive relationships, deep-seated confidence issues, and a feeling of being ‘left behind’ by a dating culture that does not understand them. The objectives

Careful, [name]: THIS makes him lose interest FAST.

of these women go far beyond securing successful relationships. They seem to want to move past or undo experiences that have shaped them, to find a 'self' that might be empowered despite a culture that has not brought them happiness or success. These women have been won over by a social media star who promises them both. Rarely are these issues addressed in a public forum: recent articles on Hussey have focused on his expensive and somewhat bizarre 'retreats' (in which fans pay four thousand pounds to 'create themselves' in a Florida conference hall), his eye-watering individual counselling costs, and the more clickbait-friendly dating suggestions in his arsenal. In a culture derisive of female interventions in 'self-care' and preoccupied by the spurned, ditzy thirty-something 'Bridget Jones' archetype, where can women look for answers and be taken seriously? In the same way that female fans of mainstream celebrities are ridiculed for the 'stan' culture they represent, the women who follow figures like Hussey – women whose personal experiences warrant respectful sympathy as well as, in some cases, the assistance of a health system robust enough to support their anxieties – are left behind. In a culture intent on shaming the singleness and frustrations of the millennial woman, it is understandable why empires like Hussey's spring up: there is simply no alternative available.

The precedents for programmes like 'How to Get the Guy' certainly cloy in the cultural consciousness, and his output does little to help. There's Hussey's semi-sickly tone ('if you find me in your junk folder, kindly move me to your inbox...so your email knows we're friends'). There's the promotional material showing women nervously whooping in the strip-lighting of a conference hall. There's his suspicious resemblance to Ryan Gosling in a 'Daz' advert. Diving deeper into Hussey's philosophy, I discovered much more than these factors at play. At its heart lies a rigidly gendered assumption about 'what women want' and 'what men want' – phrases that crop up everywhere in his output. Hussey's audience is forever encouraged to see their actions through

If you find me in your junk folder,

kindly move me to your inbox so your

the eyes of the men they aim to attract: every text, every speech, is calculated to achieve specific results in a potential partner. Not only does this assume that all women are heterosexual and looking for a male partner who also wants the same thing, but it encourages women to see themselves through the lens of male validation, or, as the French feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray put it, to become: ‘a more or less obliging prop for the enactment of man’s fantasies.’ Irigaray, writing specifically about the female sexual self-image being geared towards male pleasure, concludes that this approach ‘leaves her in a familiar state of dependency upon men.’ One wonders whether the same thing is replicated here, in the slow-dance of tactical seduction: Hussey’s followers are indeed encouraged to increase their ‘value’ (a term which should raise eyebrows) by pandering to an imagined desire in their object of affection. By dismissing such programmes designed for women and excluding them from broader cultural commentary, commentators are leaving those in need of assurance and self-esteem vulnerable to problematic ideologies. The consequences of dismissing the ideologies behind such programmes are as yet unknown, and they ought to be scrutinised.

Hussey charges £10,000 for a one-on-one coaching session, and most of his internet programmes have complicated payment requirements which can amount to considerable monthly fees. One woman, who reviews her experience of the Florida retreat in a promotional video, recalls that a friend asked her if she’d “checked out this guy called Matthew,” and instantly she “got a bottle of wine and a box of chocolates...and bought all the online programmes. All weekend I did nothing else.” Whether or not his methods and mentality are helpful, the sales rubric of his business seems to be centred on revenue rather than the wellbeing of the women he sees. Once you’ve trawled through his videos and free guides, each of which leads you to card purchases in the form of tailored packages and links to exclusive content, you are encouraged to enter the payment-led

email knows we’re friends

program of ever-mounting costs. Each has tailored packages, links to exclusive content, and more contact with the man himself. With such straightforward testimonials as “I didn’t love myself and now I do” (offered by one woman on a retreat), and promises along the lines of “our easy-to-follow dating programmes will get you exactly what you want” it is evident that Hussey’s silver bullet holds appeal.

What we need is a greater cultural investment in, and concern for, the welfare of those who seek out programmes like his. Beyond the gateway delight of copying-and-pasting his confected text chat-up lines (on 9texts.com you’ll find gems such as “it’s a good thing we’re colleagues/live far apart/just friends...you and I would be trouble”), women are encouraged to rely on Hussey and his team to entirely transform their confidence and sense of empowerment, in a world where every woman’s deepest desires are a) a man and b) for him to commit. Rather than letting programmes like these fly under the radar of cultural criticism, added to the vault of ‘women’s things’ that exist only in the mainstream as light-hearted tidbits, commentators should interrogate the gendered nature of these widely-consumed programmes and ask why societal apparatuses have left those who endorse them behind.

We have to be wary when examining how the culture of ‘self-care’ and female-centred empowerment has become commodified by emerging markets. ‘Self-help’ – a term that sprang to life in the 1980’s and blossomed into a wildly successful publishing opportunity – has transmuted into what we’re seeing today. The industry is worth \$11 billion in the US alone, and has seen key waves of wellness-based trends, carefully monitored by marketing executives among the biggest businesses. While individual products may be effective in improving a sense of wellbeing, as consumers we would do well to remember that conglomerates succeed by jumping on bandwagons, co-opting movements. For example, ‘adult colouring books’, a craze that exploded in 2015 to the delight of publishing houses, quickly became a market dominated by Amazon, who swept up the profits in the following year.

All facets of the lifestyle market – from beauty to fitness, have seen companies diversifying their products to align with the thirst for ‘self-care’. A quick tour of the products featured in wellness-gear editorials and on Amazon suggests that the link between the product and its glossy ideology can be tenuous at best. The ‘Bellabeat Leaf Urban Health Tracker’, retailing at \$124, interprets well-being as an exhaustive compilation of bodily data in a ‘gorgeous’ leaf jewellery design.

**It’s a good thing
that we’re colleagues**

you and I would be trouble

Amazon peddles unsuspecting women nose hair trimmers, charcoal teeth-whitening powder, and a ‘tutti frutti shower jelly gift set’, all under the promise of ‘self-care’. Perhaps most bleakly, Lululemon (whose reputation was recently tarred by a Guardian article revealing horrific abuses of workers in one of its factories) broke into the market earlier this year with a ‘Self Care line’; the consumer review website Retail Dive consulted the head of A.T. Kearney’s beauty division, Patricia Hong, for her analysis. Hong cites Lululemon’s desire to “expand into new categories” and “leverage existing distribution channels.” One might wonder whether the term ‘self-care’ has been cynically tacked on to the range in order to enact this smart business move: the beauty line is simply advertised as ‘designed to solve sweaty problems and to get you quickly from sweaty to ready.’ At a hefty \$48 for 48ml of face moisturiser, it had better work. The NHS soberly defines ‘self-care’ as ‘keeping fit and healthy, understanding when you can look after yourself, when a pharmacist can help, and when to get advice from your GP.’ Wariness over the pushing of bogus products with hiked-up prices would be wise.

In a climate of longer working hours, ever-present technology, and substantial gender-based social pressures, a push towards self-improvement and mental wellbeing is positive. Yet we should begin to see the industry of ‘self-care’ for what it often is: corporations trying to monetise the frustrations of women. Although Hussey’s area of ‘expertise’ is centred on women’s relationships, his content thrives on the taglines and the empowerment aesthetic responsible for the boom of the broader market. Selling a personal brand is a baffling act of our baffling times; the ‘influencer’ must be understood as a novel commercial tool.

After a long, and at times, disturbing journey to the soul of the man from Essex with the key to my heteronormative happiness, I found myself situating my own experiences within his confected syllabus in a way that I hadn’t before. Maybe men aren’t accountable for their clumsy navigation of relationships; maybe my ‘roadmap for success’ had been upside down the entire time. A momentary hesitation, though. After months of messages from mystical ‘Matt xx’ I finally plopped him into the junk folder, so my email knows we’re not friends.

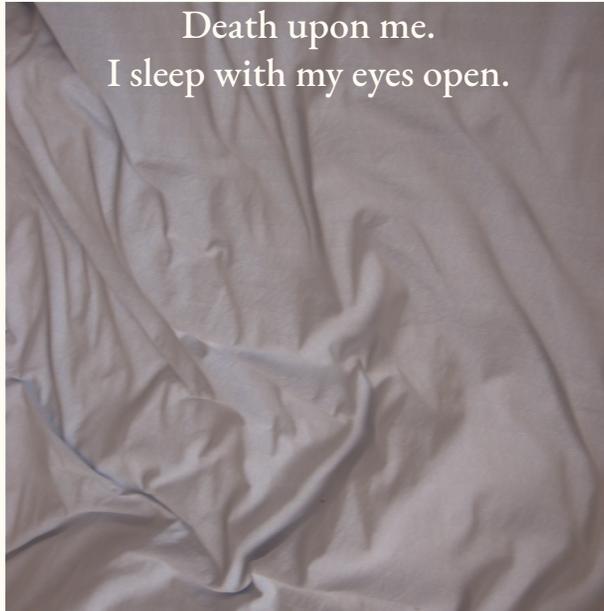


The open window invites in
flies,

who do not yet know
they will scatter dead
in droves across my bedsheets.
(How softly their little grey bodies drift downwards!)

In these months I too feel

Death upon me.
I sleep with my eyes open.



As a regular Twitter user, my timeline is an erratic blend of breaking news and memes. For better or for worse, the intense flurry of tweets that accompanies any news updates has become one of my main sources of information. On 5 August, before news outlets had begun to report on the Kashmir lockdown, my timeline was already flooded with tweets about increased military presence in the area. A viral thread by Kashmiri poet Sanna Reya spoke of the rapid escalation of restrictions in the Indian-administered section of the region.

Once access to first-hand reports and articles increased, differing perspectives on the situation began cropping up. Initially, Twitter users were keen to emphasise Kashmir's status as occupied land, but analysis quickly developed into one recurring comparison. As the hours passed, multiple threads appeared noting the similarities between Kashmir and Palestine. Soon after, people began to criticise these comparisons as desperate, clumsy attempts to raise awareness. These frustrations focused on the lazy simplification of the Kashmir conflict, an issue never far away in commentaries on the 'Muslim world' as a whole.

To contextualise a little – the Himalayan state of Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir is the most militarised zones in the world, with over 500,000 Indian soldiers operating in the region. Located between two nuclear-armed countries, India and Pakistan, ownership of the region has been deeply contested ever since the partition of British India in 1947. As a princely state, Jammu and Kashmir was permitted to choose between the two countries. The state was led by a Hindu prince, Maharaja Hari Singh, whose natural alliance lay with India. Once this became obvious, the Muslim population, with the support of Pakistani militias, began to riot. Singh turned to India for support, and under pressure from Mountbatten, the last viceroy of British India, Singh formally acceded to India. In retaliation, Pakistan invaded the region, triggering the first Indo-Pakistani war.

After this initial period of turmoil, the UN passed Resolution 47, pressuring both countries to reduce their military presence in the region and calling for a plebiscite for the Kashmiri people. Currently, Pakistan and India both control different parts of the territory. The plebiscite has still not happened.

On 5 August 2019, after increasing military presence in the region, the Indian government removed Kashmir's special status as a semi-autonomous region. Through the revocation of two articles of the Indian Constitution (Article 370, which gives

the region its special status, and Article 35(a), which prevents non-residents from purchasing land in Kashmir), the government has effectively absorbed the section of the region it administers into India. For many, this marks the beginning of India's pursuit of a settler-colonial project in the state of Kashmir. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's constitutional reform is widely seen as an attempt to change the demographic of the Muslim-majority state by encouraging the settlement of Hindus and other minorities in the region. Although the separationist conflict has cost over 100,000 lives since 1989, it is still rare to hear any regular news updates on the issue.

Understanding why Kashmir has been largely neglected in the global political sphere is difficult. As the Kashmiri journalist Rouf Dar describes it, Kashmir is a territory founded "on the peripheries of the Muslim World," a status which positions the region in a bleak vacuum of international invisibility. This lack of information surrounding Kashmir presents itself in the need for writers to contextualise the conflict's history, and draw parallels to other global histories, in order to speak freely on the topic. In fact, at one point, it was easier for me to find articles framing the struggle through the Israel-Palestine conflict than it was to find articles by Kashmiri writers themselves.

In truth, comparing the two countries is a logical exercise. Both Palestine and Kashmir are Muslim-majority regions facing non-Muslim occupiers installed by British colonial decisions made in the twentieth century. Their occupiers use the same debilitating and humiliating tactics of checkpoints, regular army convoys, and restriction of movement. The two regions even share the same resistance tactics, characterised by sporadic insurgent attacks and stone-throwing. This comparison extends to regime similarities between Israel and India; for critics, Modi's Hindu-nationalist ideology echoes the dogma championed by Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel. It is easy to argue that India's nullification of the constitutional articles and heavy militarisation of the region are tactics taken straight from the Israeli playbook.

Though a compelling comparison, the international discussion of Kashmir's struggle for self-determination through the lens of the hyper-visible Palestinian struggle has strong consequences for Kashmir. The recurrent portrayal of the region as a 'South Asian West Bank', as seen in the Washington Post, Bloomberg, and The Independent, loses the nuance of the situation. In binding Kashmir to Palestine, Kashmir is unable to develop its own narrative. However similar the two may be, they are not the same. Whilst Palestine resists the targeted efforts of the Israeli military, the Kashmiri region witnesses the involvement of three world powers: India, Pakistan, and China. The continuous

focus on these countries reduces the Kashmiri population to collateral damage, unacknowledged as active participants in the way Palestinians are. Moreover, perhaps the biggest difficulty that the Kashmiri public faces is a lack of unified desire to ally itself with any side. Though some firmly advocate for their independence, others see the Pakistani side as already free.

However, this comparative approach is not just limited to Kashmir and Palestine. Rather, it exemplifies a greater issue in the general analysis of Muslim tragedies, a problem that regularly crops up in reports. From North Africa to South-East Asia, the Muslim experience is externally defined as one of war, persecution, and turmoil. A history of invasions, rebellions, and dictatorships does much to bolster this stereotype, but this does not excuse insufficient reporting. This approach generalises the experience of the Muslim world and denies these regions the complex, exhaustive coverage they deserve.

In the past year, both Algeria and Sudan have experienced political unrest due to civilian-led protests against leaders who had overstayed their welcome. Despite the time gap and historical differences, journalists jumped at the chance to draw comparisons between the Arab Spring and the protests in both countries. In an article published in *The Financial Times*, Andrew England wrote that central to the protests in Sudan, Algeria, and the Arab Spring was political disenchantment and unemployment. In doing so, he overlooked the fact that these issues are common triggers for protests internationally, and are by no means exclusive to the Arab world. Similarly, Reuters published an article entitled: 'Arab Spring comes later in Sudan and Algeria' at the time of the protests, reducing the events in Sudan and Algeria to eight-year-late extensions of the Spring.

Although comparisons are often essential for the comprehension of less well-reported issues, they seem to be unsparingly used in reports on the 'Muslim world'. This simplification through comparison ultimately leads to the implication that these conflicts are inevitable. The public has become accustomed to hearing about issues similar to extensively covered events, resulting in no renewed concern or interest. In portraying all events as extensions of previous ones, the 'Muslim world' is denied support and informed awareness. This cycle of mistakes also perpetuates a characterisation of victimhood as central to the Muslim experience. Not only is this a lazy monolith to establish, but it also facilitates the erasure of the role of international powers both colonial and contemporary, evading demands for external accountability.

While it is beautiful to witness solidarity between two conflict-marred regions, it should not come at the expense of the complexity of their respective fights for independence. Kashmiris themselves identify heavily with the Palestinian cause – pro-Palestine graffiti can be found dotted around the streets of Kashmir. But as external observers, there is a responsibility to conceptualise the conflicts as separate events. The comparative angle often results in brash over-simplification rather than genuine clarification. The crude lumping together of reports on Kashmir and Palestine into the digestible category of 'Muslims being Occupied' erases any trace of racial and historical nuance.

Ultimately, as victims of settler-colonial projects, Kashmir and Palestine are inextricably linked, but in making Kashmir a 'Palestine 2.0', the subtleties of the conflict are neglected. It is dangerous to solely reinforce the image of the Muslim world as caught in a cycle of repeating the same mistakes. Whilst other countries are permitted a layered representation of both external factors and internal triggers, there is a tendency to centre Muslim victimhood and, by extension, culpability in reports on these regions. Through the exclusive focus on loss, a narrative begins to take shape with no space for the accountability of other global actors. In denying a population of almost two billion their complexity, and homogenising their experiences, the shades of identity and ideology that exist are dismissed. It is time for narratives to shift – both for Kashmir and the rest of the Muslim world.

history didn't hand me a blueprint/

and / time is always running / it's the one thing that never stops / we can count
the seconds / and minutes / and hours / and ask how we spent it /

maybe we

could buy it again / in one moment / you are holding your son / to your
nipple / a ripe fruit / blooming / in the night / as you blink / into the narrow
darkness/

the shadows of / a distant Diwali / flashing across / your
cheeks / your only light / as your milk / cooks into / his gums / gulping / in heartbeats
there / you listen to / the scent / of incense stick / to clay walls
/ then the next moment / you are grabbing / your white shawl against / the slicing wind /

made by / blue metal hawks / beating steel wings / that day's heat thick on your chest /

gripping the prayers / in your pockets / this is how / you follow your husband /
to a country / you will never / be allowed / to speak to /

where you will nod / at everything they say /

you will smile / at everything they say /

and you will swallow the / flushing shame /

when they ask you / *"do you know what this means?"* /

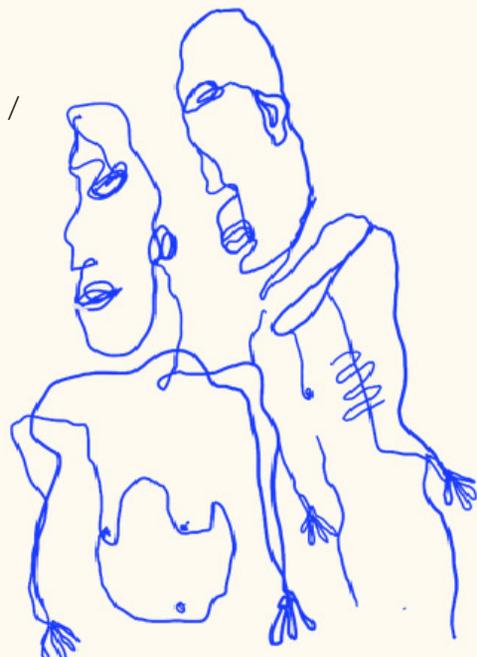
knowing that you don't /

when they ask you / *"can you read this?"* /

knowing that you can't /

knowing that you've / sat at the work agency / staring at the page /
over / and / over /

your tongue / never fizzing / with the lost music / of those words /



those / (tuneless stones) / you pretend / at least / that you
understand / *something* / knowing this is a shame /

that it is your son's cold / warm / gaze / in that
moment / is what will break you / more than being / beaten / in the end / they refuse you /

and suddenly you're / reaching out / into the absence of / a body / you've
lain with for 22 years / the husband of / smoke and altar fire /

to be bound / again in the next 6 lifetimes
/ you may remember / you cried holding / your breath / in his corner / of the bed /

you may remember / only / your body / understood how
the / screams shook your flesh / out of place /

and you may / remember / *your* boy / was sad /
your boy / not a a boy / anymore

/ taller / reaching towards heaven / the crook of another
man's arm / his breath on another man's breath /

and you will remember / "*aru manche heru le ke vancha*"
/ "*what will other people say?*" / you will shame / break / him / until he becomes a stranger /

&

/ he / leaves you / alone again / with a stranger's god / praying / "*god without your strength*" /

i / can't even use my / own / two feet /

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