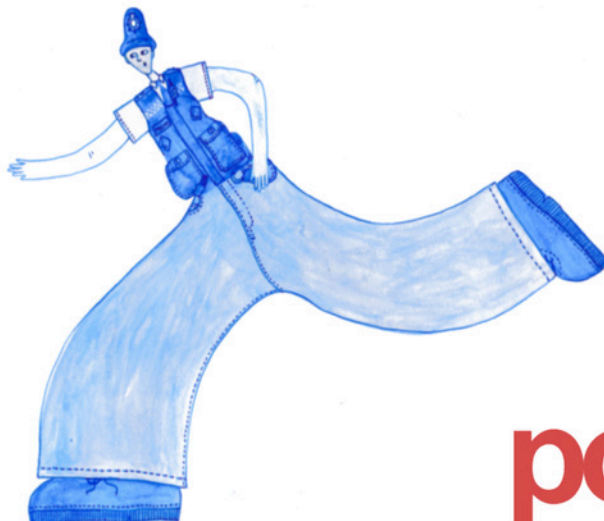


Dialogue

Issue 27

Winter 2024



what
gives
you
power?



find our previous issues at kclpolitics.com

hey!

This is the first issue of two that this year's Dialogue committee will publish. It's the culmination of work by our wonderful editors and writers that have dedicated their time to create a publication filled with fascinating and important insights on the world's sociopolitical landscape. We hope to introduce something new to the table, a new format, a new design, a new compelling theme with new perspectives.

We're excited to bring to you this collection of riveting articles to contribute to the dialogue regarding world issues during a time rife with uncertainty and conflict. Not only do we wish for you to enjoy reading the articles but we also wish that you take away something new and expand your view on unfamiliar topics. But above all have a wonderful read!

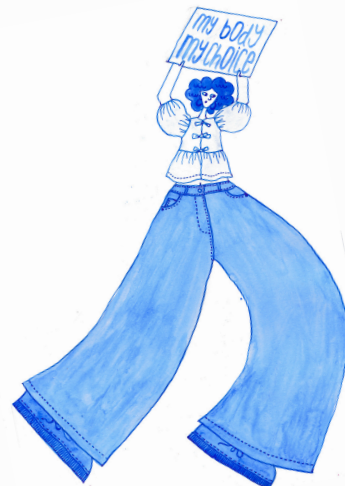
Sincerely,
Your Editors-in-Chief



Laetitia Pangerang
Editor in Chief



Nour Lejmi
Editor in Chief



A Note from the KCL Politics Society

Power. Prestige. Poison. These three words carry untold meaning. Their pervasiveness is paramount and their influence is ever pressing.

As humans, many see our entire history best explained by the pursuit of power. To look at this argument charitably we must understand power in its broadest sense. Yes, the ability to manipulate government, to enforce violence and hard power. Yet, power manifests its versatile head in all crevices of the human experience. It's in our relationships, our households, our work, our readings, our food, our transport, our energy. Power is everywhere.

So, why do we as students not feel this pulsation of power beneath our fingertips. Because too often we are the victim or consequence of others decisions. It is only, in taking action, in getting our voice heard and in thinking critically about all the power structures around us that we might be able to take a slice of the pie for ourselves.

Everything we do at KCL Politics is encapsulated by this spirit - to give you - our wonderful, cherished members a voice or the equipment and knowledge to make that voice most impactful. The truly phenomenal and inspiring work of the Dialogue Team epitomises that. This year, the team has been fully integrated with the main committee, and we've fostered a sense of teamwork like never before. We've dispelled the traditional power dynamics in creating a prosperous co-editor-in-chief relationship and we've empowered 10s of student writers in just one edition.

To say I am proud of this team would be an understatement. They have been nothing short of a dream to work alongside.

I invite the reader to stay in touch with KCL Politics and the Dialogue. There are now over 25 people working every day and creating incredible opportunities for you!

Very best wishes,

Josh Robinson
President, KCL Politics Society

our editors:



Nour Lejmi *Editor in Chief*

I'm a Tunisian Postgraduate student. I'm majoring in Politics and Economics of the Middle East. I am completely impassioned to present this edition as a journey through contemporary and old politics, theory, and personal analyses. I am personally drawn to themes such as Middle Eastern politics and mobilisation theory. It has never been more important to observe and pick apart what's happening in the world today, and form the ideas of tomorrow. We hope this inspires you to take part in the global Dialogue.



Laetitia Pangerang *Editor in Chief*

I'm a first year History and Political Economy student. I've always had an interest in writing and the humanities, especially in researching and discussing about issues such as post-colonialism, democracy and topics outside of a Eurocentric worldview. I've joined the Dialogue in hopes of contributing to the political discussion in University. I also hope that this issue will highlight new or infrequently discussed perspectives that interests you, and that you enjoy reading it because I definitely enjoyed being a part of the team that created it!



Deborah Solomon *Topic Editor*

Hi! My name is Deborah and I'm a second year Law student. I joined Dialogue because it's an accessible and exciting creative forum for our generation to get involved in politics. This issue presents global and nuanced perspectives on what power means depending on who and where you are. I'm so proud to be part of the fantastic team that's worked so hard on this publication. Happy reading!



Noor Bayoumi *Topic Editor*

I'm a final year Politics BA student. Being a topic editor with The Dialogue introduced me to so many new political and social issues from around the world. I am most interested in Middle Eastern Politics and the climate crisis, as well as in American politics. I hope you enjoy reading this year's edition!



Druva Sawhney *Topic Editor*

Hi! My name is Druva, and I'm a first-year BA Philosophy student at King's College London. Through Dialogue, I aim to blend my passion for storytelling and political theory, focusing on the intersection of film & media, socio-political issues, and philosophy. I hope you enjoy this edition as much as we enjoyed bringing it to life!



Leon Wheeler *Topic Editor*

Hi, I'm Leon and I'm currently studying an MA in the Politics and Economics of the Middle East. Getting involved with the Dialogue as a Topic Editor has been an incredibly enjoyable experience for me as it's combined two areas I'm interested in: politics and journalism. hope you enjoy reading this edition's articles as much as I enjoyed editing them.



Florence Wilson *Design Editor*

I'm a first year Social Sciences BA student who spent last year studying fashion and illustration. I've worked to make this Semester's edition of The Dialogue accessible and engaging through layout - including the front cover, which I illustrated to represent the multitude of figures who represent/hold power in our lives. Thanks for picking up this issue - I hope you enjoy!



Charlotte Darsonville *Design Editor*

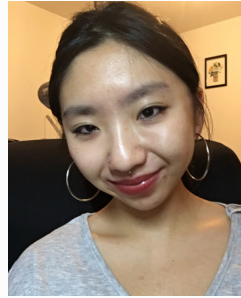
Hey:) I'm a third year Politics student, half French half Argentinian. The Dialogue gave me the chance to combine my two passions: design and politics. Both as a designer and a writer: I hope you really enjoy this edition as we've all worked super hard to make it fun, interesting, and engaging (and cute).

our writers:



Roxy Lees

Words are the most important tool, ideas are so powerful and I'm glad Dialogue exists as a place for students to discuss very important ideas, politics hugely effects us all so it's imperative everyone joins the conversations deciding how our future will look.



Kak Lok Ng

I am Amy (or Kak Lok), a first year biomedical student. I think about life purposes a lot



Alexandra McKay

I'm a Strategic Communications Master's student with a deep interest in how narratives shape our perceptions of the world, ourselves, and others. My work focuses on the interplay between power and knowledge in climate governance and the potentials to expand participation and inclusion in this critical sphere.



Sara Latif

I am a Master's student of Political Economy and have joined The Dialogue to satisfy my itch to write about topics relating to international politics. When I thought of power in politics, I thought about our misconceptions of what this power entails and false beliefs of polarised and unjustified uses of power.



Anna Julia Cantoni

I'm a first year War Studies BS student. I decided to write for The Dialogue due to my ardent interest in politics and the way they shape society. I'm mostly curious about the relationship between power, identity, and the state, with these being central themes in my article. I hope you find my writing compelling and I invite you to reflect on your own personal experiences.



Hannah Durkin

I'm Hannah, a masters student here at King's, reading Modern Literature and Culture. I was drawn to this edition of Dialogue because of the topic 'power'. I thought it would be a great opportunity to fuse my passions for literature and current cultural hot topics.



Edoardo De Maria

I'm studying Politics, Philosophy, and Economics at King's College. I've applied to The Dialogue for the chance to collaborate with peers on global issues that matter to me. Writing, especially creative writing, is an art that should be nurtured. Bringing a fresh perspective to common topics makes the reading experience more engaging.



Afrah Sheikh

I am a 1st year Politics, Philosophy and Law LLB student. I wanted to share an article on the topical issue of citizenship. I am very interested in how citizenship has power both culturally and legally over immigrants lives. I hope you enjoy reading the Dialogue and I am very proud to be part of this year's edition!

more writers:



Aabha Joshi

Hi there! I am Aabha, I am final year History and Political Economy student. I joined Dialogue to meet like-minded people and to find a platform to put forth this story. My academic interests are around South Asia, the Global South, the Indian Ocean World, Development, and much more!



Charlotte Darsonville

Hey:) I'm a third year Politics student, half French half Argentinian. The Dialogue gave me the chance to combine my two passions: design and politics. Both as a designer and a writer: I hope you really enjoy this edition as we've all worked hard to make it cute and engaging.



Oliver Conac

Hi! My name is Olivier and I'm a European Studies Master student. I'm interested in International Relations, the EU and in International Criminal Justice with the role of nation-states vis-à-vis the ICC. This is why I chose to write an article on the ICC and the arrest warrants recently issued regarding the State of Palestine. I hope you will enjoy reading my article along with the other articles this edition has to offer!



Lev Stockmann

Hi! My name is Lev, and I am a first year law student. I wanted to engage with The Dialogue because it combines my passion for politics and journalism. As I am German, the government crisis was an obvious topic to write about, and I hope to give people more of an insight into what is going on at the moment. It was a lot of fun working together with a great group of people and I hope you enjoy the outcome.



Alena Varilova

Hi, I'm Alena, a final-year European Politics student. I have explored a broad range of political topics, but I am particularly intrigued by the influence of modern media on contemporary political issues. Contributing to the Dialogue has given me the opportunity to share my perspectives while engaging with the diverse ideas of the team. I hope you enjoy reading this year's edition as much as we enjoyed creating it!



Valeria Abram

Hi! My Name is Valeria, I come from Perú and I'm a first year politics student. I am deeply passionate about unraveling the truths through journalism, specifically concerning the causes and consequences of illicit groups in Latin America. I hope you enjoy reading and learn new important political issues around the globe!



Constance Creswell

Hi, I am Constance, I am a writer and journalist specialising in political and social justice journalism. I have been wanting to get involved with some brilliant minds of which Dialogue has so many! I hope to produce writing that challenges the failing status quo and opens the gates for a new world to emerge. I hope you this years publication, its been a pleasure to be in such brilliant company.



Angelika Etherington-Smith

Hi! My name is Angelika, and I'm a finalist in International Relations. I wanted to engage with the Dialogue to explore a subject matter I find academically and socially fascinating that I feel is unexplored by most media outlets, and this allows me to explore complex concepts with my love for writing and politics. I'm a strong believer in increasing the power young people have by channeling their voices in writing. I am incredibly grateful to be part of this project this year.

whyPOWER?



The theme of this edition, *Power*, delves into the divides that shape contemporary society, inviting writers to reflect on the boundaries that both separate and define us and the power dynamics that may feed that. It asks: to what extent do these boundaries shape our identities, and how do they manifest in normative expressions like poetry and practical analyses like essays? The goal is to encourage readers to rethink the nature of these divides and consider their impact on our daily lives—whether at a personal, micro level, or in the broader social, economic, political, and ideological spheres. Is division inherently good or bad, or can it be both? This edition aims to be more than just a collection of thoughts; it's a journey, offering a space for creativity and introspection.

Power is a force that permeates every aspect of our lives—subtle yet omnipresent, constructive yet destructive. It is woven into the fabric of human interaction, shaping relationships, institutions, and ideologies. This edition seeks to uncover how power is wielded, negotiated, and contested. From the quiet authority of a whispered word to the sweeping influence of global movements, power defines what is possible, who is heard, and what remains unseen. Through diverse voices and perspectives and scaling from the individual to the group, we aim to explore its many dimensions: the allure of dominance, the strength of resistance, and the transformative potential of solidarity. By engaging with these narratives, we invite readers to examine their own relationship with power and envision paths toward a more just world. What will you do with the power you hold?

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several fluid, overlapping loops and lines.

Nour Lejmi
Editor in Chief

2.3 Million Shackles: Understanding the Prison Industrial Complex.....8

Athena Unbound? The evolution of the Tamil tigress in the Sri Lankan Civil War.....10

A Defense of the Power of the People13

The ICC Arrests Warrants: Breakthrough or a glimpse at posterity?15

Rethinking Knowledge: Whose Voices Should be Heard in Climate Governance17

"Rhodes Must Fall": Power, Protest, and the Struggle for Inclusivity20

The Power of Populist Rhetoric.....22

Our Age of Orwellian Machine Anxiety.....24

Can Media Transform Stereotypes?: The Case of the Roma Minority.....26

Why Kamala Harris' Presidential Campaign Should Make Us Question Political Power.....28

Unprotected Crossings: The Human Trafficking Crisis in the Shadow of Migration.....30

The Power of Citizenship: Identity and Borders.....32

Fallacy of Protection: Women in London vs the Met Police.....34

The Contradictions of Feminism in the 21st-Century.....36

The Lost Art of Compromise.....38

Confronting Loneliness in Individualism.....40



contents

2.3 million Shackles:

Understanding the Prison Industrial Complex



Anna Julia Cantoni

Freedom is an illusion. The “American Dream” is a lie. Our only purpose in life is to work in order to be exploited for the profit of others. The Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) is a phenomenon that describes the overlapping interests of the government and multinational corporations (MNCs) that use surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social and political problems. MNCs exercise immense power over society, as they are corporate organisations that network with multiple countries and may also have headquarters overseas. They are tightly linked with the PIC as they are involved in the operation of prisons that profit from incarcerating humans. Sounds illegal right? Unfortunately, due to a loophole in the 13th amendment of the United States Constitution, MNCs are able to exploit prisoners for labour, essentially a legal form of slavery/forced work due to the highlighted section in the article: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.”

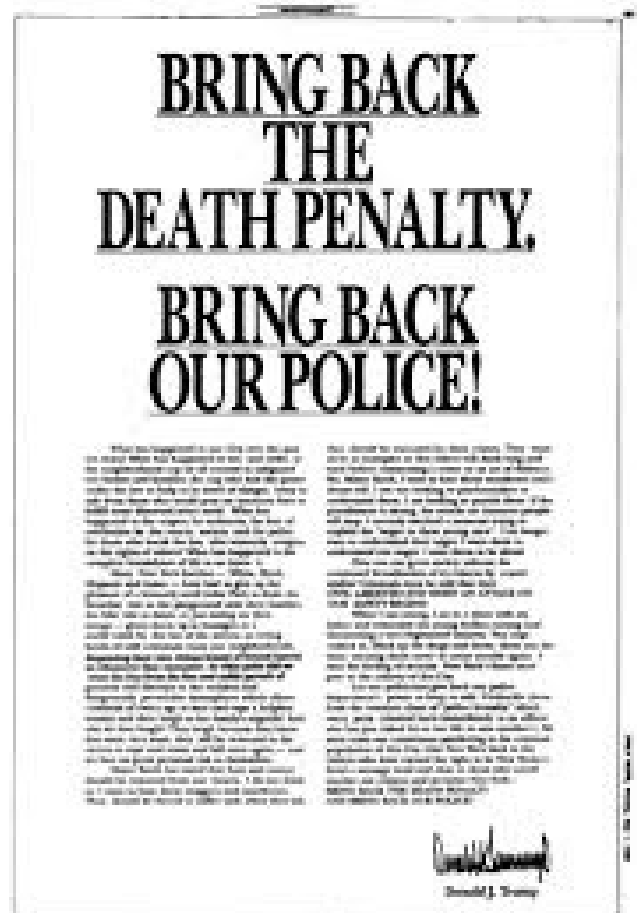
The United States has a disproportionately high incarcerated population of 2.3 million people, with an additional 4.5 million on probation or parole. They represent over 20% of the world's prison population despite having only less than 5% of the world's total population. The exploitation doesn't just involve the labour, but also the way incarcerated

individuals are forced to live. Prison conditions include lack of air conditioning, restricted movement and limited access to clean drinking water. Millions of Americans are incarcerated in overcrowded, violent, and inhumane jails and prisons that do not provide treatment, education, or rehabilitation. American prisons are in crisis. Incarcerated people are beaten, stabbed, raped, and killed in facilities run by corrupt officials who abuse their power. People in need medical care, disability assistance, mental health and addiction treatment, as well as suicide prevention are denied care, ignored, punished, and placed in solitary confinement. And despite growing support for criminal justice reform, the private prison industry continues to block meaningful proposals. Furthermore, Black and Hispanic people are incarcerated at more than five times the rate of white people, in fact, they're jailed at the same rates as white people if prison populations decreased by 40 percent. This is largely due to surveillance bias, where a specific group is scrutinised more than others, which leads to fewer white people being caught compared to other races. Trivial behaviours are criminalised to target these communities, which explains why local jails as opposed to federal prisons are especially full. These include owning minimal amounts of marijuana, speeding on the road, or loitering, all minor crimes that shouldn't equal years of detainment. Furthermore, the growth of private prisons, such as the Corrections Corporation of America, have engaged in lobbying efforts to influence politicians in favour of laws that contribute to higher levels of incarceration, such as mandatory sentencing laws. For example, if you are convicted of three felonies in Texas, you can be subjected to extremely harsh legal penalties, facing a minimum prison sentence of 25 years, up to 99 years, or even life. The relationship between private prison companies and political figures has prompted scrutiny and criticism, with concerns about potential conflicts of interest and the influence of corporations on public policy. This results in a political environment where candidates align themselves with pro-prison positions for financial gain and public support, which is undemocratic. Civil rights movements like Black Lives Matter have been very vocal about this issue, starting slogans like “Black Lives Matter in prison too” and showing resistance against the funding of prisons, as they claim putting money into prisons is not a solution to poverty but it just aids the cycle of mass incarceration.

The case of the Central Park 5 perfectly exemplifies the dangers of the PIC in relation to the incarceration of young Black men and how the idea of being innocent until proven guilty isn't applied equally in society. This case involved the rape of a 28 year old woman named Trisha Meili in Central Park, New York, in 1989. During the aftermath of the crime, 5 suspects, Antron McCray, Kevin Richardson, Yusef Salaam, Raymond Santana, and Korey Wise who were aged 14/16, were convicted of assaulting her. The boys, 4 of whom Black and one Hispanic, ere falsely accused and claimed that they pleaded guilty due to the coercion and abuse they endured from NYPD officers during questioning. Wise had to serve his entire sentence in an adult prison, where he endured significant personal violence, prompting him to spend extended periods of isolation for his safety. He was transferred between four different prisons, hoping to find better conditions. He was eventually released in August 2002, becoming the last of the five to regain his freedom. In 2003, they all filed a federal lawsuit against the City of New York, alleging false arrest, malicious prosecution, and a racially motivated conspiracy by the city's police and prosecutors to violate their civil rights. They demanded \$52 million. Only in September 2014 did the settlement get finalized. Santana, Salaam, McCray, and Richardson each received approximately \$7.1 million, while Wise was awarded \$12.2 million due to serving an additional six years. However, the city still did not admit any wrongdoing. Although these wrongful convictions occurred over three decades ago, their legacies are still deeply relevant. Approximately ten days after the boys began confessing, real estate magnate Donald Trump took out full-page advertisements in all four of New York City's major newspapers on May 1, 1989, advocating for the reinstatement of the death penalty for murder. Trump stated that he wanted "criminals of every age to be afraid." The ads reportedly cost around \$85,000 (equivalent to \$209,000 in 2024).

Trump has explicitly stated his stance on the case in various instances. He commented on the settlement in a 2014 opinion article for the New York Daily News saying the settlement was "a disgrace", and that the boys were likely guilty: "Settling doesn't mean innocence. Speak to the detectives on the case and try listening to the facts. These young men do not exactly have the pasts of angels." Then, during his

campaign in 2016 he said "They admitted they were guilty....The fact that that case was settled with so much evidence against them is outrageous." CNN assessed that, "Trump obviously still believes that the Central Park 5 are guilty, so it cannot be said he is lying or even misleading." In June 2019 Trump stated he would not apologize, saying the Central Park Five "admitted their guilt". Most recently, in September 2024, during his debate against Kamala Harris, he falsely stated that the Five had initially pleaded guilty to the assault before changing their pleas (some of them had confessed but recanted before entering any official plea). Trump also described his viewpoint at the time of those events: "I said, 'well, if they pled guilty they badly hurt a person, killed a person ultimately....'" Doctors predicted the victim might ultimately die of her injuries, but she survived. He reiterated these same opinions in the September 2024 presidential debate against Kamala Harris. The fact that a man that was elected president twice, that was partially responsible for the public perception of the innocence of the 5 boys, shows how the PIC has serious political implications and that the issue of mass incarceration is still a systemic issue to this day.



Trump's ad, which ran in the New York Daily News. New York Daily News Archives, 2019.

Athena Unbound?

The evolution of the Tamil tigress in the Sri Lankan Civil War

Aabha Joshi

I closed my eyes and fired my gun” — Niraiesai at 26 when the war intensified in August, 2007.

In November, she found herself surrounded by the army with six of her female colleagues. “At first, we fought...[then] we surrendered...But two women, 18-year-old Nallisai and Mathuvanthi, 22, stayed behind...they removed the clips from their hand grenades and put them on their stomachs and committed suicide.” (The Guardian)

The Sri Lankan civil war ended 15 years ago, yet it is one of those conflicts whose aftermath is an underexplored debris. Who are these women who patrolled the northern thickets of this tear-shaped island of the Indian Ocean? Moreover—why women? What does it tell us about their agency? Or, were they mere puppets of the insurgent group’s patriarchy? Is there liberation or female emancipation in a civil war—can a conflict bring true change? And, why does Sri Lanka’s LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) recruit women for its terrorist activities and combats—thus making it primarily the first of such cases. The Tamil Tigress, exists no more, however, she is key to study South Asia’s International Relations; her assassinations of international actors, presence in the subcontinent, reasons to join the LTTE—was she really expressing her politics or was she a prey to a brainwashing ideology; one of the first pawns to be sacrificed on the geopolitical chessboard. During the war — Anatomy of the Tamil Tigress

Demand and Supply or ideology or intra-Tamil power struggle?

Alisa Stack-O’Connor endeavours to investigate the case by adopting the chronological method to elucidate why women were chosen as fighters; she clearly identifies that both Eelam People’s Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and People’s Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) recruited women whilst LTTE staggered. PLOTE’s and EPRLF’s inclusion of women was guided by their leftist ideologies whilst the LTTE initially had no intention for militant women.

According to Stack-O’Connor the major factor to explain ‘why women’ or ‘why not 1974 but 1984’ is that the organisation lost almost 8% of its membership. The GOSL’s counterinsurgency policy meant interrogation and detention of Tamil males between 14 and 40 years. Freedom Birds’ fighting commenced when about 3000 Tamil men were being detained. Stack-O’Connor remains sceptical of the influence of Palestinian guerilla training that the LTTE undertook in the 1970s.

Although there is one narrative that the LTTE imbibed the women in combat and terrorism during the 1977 Lebanon and 1984 PFLP’s (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) training. For instance, PFLP’s guerrilla, hijacker, and spokesperson, Leila Khaled and her success inspired the LTTE to incorporate women. However, Stack-O’Connor’s chronological reasoning does prove that this account fails to establish clear links as Khaled’s highjacking operations were between 1969-1970 whereas the LTTE trained in 1977 and women were included in 1984. Khaled also appears to be one of the sporadic cases.

Sexual Abuse: Feminine Motivation, Propaganda Tool — a double-edged sword?

Women’s sexual victimisation stories are often used as a strategic tool to attract members, justify attacks, and shame and discredit GOSL and IPKF (Indian Peace Keeping Force); the Chechens and Al Qaeda have also used this tactic to attract men to fight and discredit their adversaries. The media was used as a puppet since attention to the female fighters or the rape victim of IPKF and Sri Lankan army atrocities, was crucial to cultivate sympathy for the Tamil cause and movement.

Although Stack O’Connor concludes that men and women terrorists and guerillas portray rationality in their decision making — it is a contention lacking nuance as albeit women here are defying the stereotype of ‘being too emotional’ for rational-decision making their situation nevertheless is weaponized.

Black Tiger Elitism

Famed for donning the cyanide capsule to swallow if captured, the LTTE demands suicide from all its members. In fact, to be a black tiger is a matter of prestige. Unlike HAMAS and Al Qaeda, the LTTE is unique indeed as religion plays no role as a motivation factor. Women make 33% of the Black Tigers; the choice for female or male Black Tiger is also tactical since female attacks gain more attention. For instance, Rajiv Gandhi, PM Kumaratunga, and Lieutenant General Sarath Fonseka were all assassinated by female black tigers. Black tigers were writing international relations and India's domestic politics, assassinating major world leaders to serve their cause, realising that Gandhi's death was crucial to prevent him another term and sending IPKF back. On 21st May, 1991, Gandhi was assassinated at an election rally with 16 others in Tamil Nadu by 17 year-old Dhanu (The Guardian).

Recruitment — the game of strategic dramaturgy

Kathleen Turner— a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army— identifies two fundamental factors of motivation that extremist groups use to recruit females: tactical and strategic. Tactical factors are: to augment the number of operatives and women are seldom searched by hesitant security personnel. Women and children are perceived as non-combatants and women could easily enshroud explosives in their clothing or fake pregnancy; the 'least likely suspect' tactic deployment is strategic for an extremist group. Turner evokes a more pronounced yet underdiscussed element, on a strategic level female suicide attacks have a "greater psychological impact" — creating more attention and publicity igniting fear and shock. In a 2002 *Agence France-Presse* interview, Liza Taraki concludes, "Suicide attacks are done for the effect, the more dramatic the effect, the stronger the message". Emotions were core in the anatomy of LTTE recruitment strategy; for instance, speeches, movies, poetry, street performances were used to evoke emotions in the impressionable minds of youngsters. Provocation of 'anger' and 'shame' was facilitated via detailed description of atrocities by LTTE's video documentary unit recording and producing videos and movies; the personalised narratives bolstered the emotional impact in self-volunteering. Recruiters made sure to stress on how fighting equaled a respectful life. Evoking 'shame' and claiming that fighting is more 'honourable' and useful than studying. Often visiting students in

after-school hours and narrating personal accounts. Thus, here we see how emotions drive collective action dynamics. As the risk to participate is high, any success in a rebellion is unlikely, thus incentives to participate are less; the solution proposed by armed groups is — selective distribution of incentives to influence and motivate individuals to join. Hence the provocation of 'anger', 'shame', and 'resentment' was important to reinforce the LTTE propaganda; for instance, many of Meier's interviewees described after attending propaganda events that they felt "to boil inside".

Ambivalent Empowerment—The Women's Crusade

Violence against unarmed citizens and state institutions carried out by women redefine our notions of nationalism, religious identity, and gender — this sheds light on the intricate and problematic relationship with feminism. Women and conflict in IR is complex indeed; there are three specific accounts to illustrate this. First, feminists that identify wars and conflicts as firsthand manifestations of militarism conventionally associated with men. Second, radical feminists who assert women's special affinity toward peace, rejecting that these women fight in men's wars. Third, the victimhood theory i.e., feminists who recognise that women suffer the most as victims during wars and conflicts and are reluctant to ponder beyond 'victimhood' whilst enforcing it on violent women. There is a triad of tensions, the 'silences' foisted by feminists on militant women, the gendered comprehension and identities that have pushed women out of the IR theatre, and salient attempts to address — various narrativization occurring on the fringes of mainstream IR. The fervent debate either sees capitulation to the patriarchy and inferiority in victimhood.

What exactly compelled women to transform into patrons and perpetrators of violence? It is a mélange of both political and personal. Although the LTTE faced the brunt from international actors for recruitment of women and child soldiers, one-fifth of its force was female. The Director of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (Colombo) and former UN rapporteur on violence against women termed these women as 'cogs in the wheel'. LTTE female combatants in Batticaloa, for example, reveal their lack of choice in joining the organisation. The tigers introduced forced conscription, every family had to send one

child to serve for the cause; reasons for volunteer conscription were myriad but families also sent daughters to save their sons. However, women seldom had better opportunities in the organisation; as Mangalika De Silva identifies, only Sundari (one woman) was given the role of assistant secretary in the political wing. Besides the Rajiv Gandhi death squad—selection of Dhanu and Shuba—formation undertaken by Akhila Akka, Sundar’s successor, there is no evidence claiming that Akhila had any other major role in key decision making. Despite black tigers being female, the assassination was strategised by Sivarasan and Pottu Amman (intelligence chief, LTTE). Alison also underpins Parashar’s claim as even she also fails to find evidence for participation in policy-making or political decision-making; we see them primarily as implementers of policy or consumers instead of producers of top political decisions.

Women cadres were transforming their bodies into weapons under male control, their individuality and politics was being reduced to their sex and body — thus suggesting no room for emancipatory politics in the LTTE ranks. However, female cadres have indeed broken away from traditional domestically cloistering systems and defying gender roles. Although some did confess that their recruitment was involuntary, almost all claimed that their involvement meant feeling stronger and protected. I agree with Parashar’s view that the role of female cadres demands to be scrutinised in the gray hues of nuance; that it is inutile to see it in the binary of ‘victims or agents’, ‘oppressed or emancipated’, ‘subjugated or liberated’. Like Parashar, I contend that the Rajasingham-Senanayake term ‘ambivalent empowerment’ does render this sphere of analysis some justice, as it is seeking to situate the realities somewhere between and beyond agency and victimhood. Though breaking the fetters of domesticity, as fighters they are yet captives of *both* Prabhakaran’s patriarchal nationalist project and oppression under the Sri Lankan military. Binary notions of female cadets are unsophisticated and unnecessary. In these we can see how the blurry lines of personal and political alley to shape women militants.

Post-war life — shoved back in the kitchen

Once the war came to an end, ex-combattants reverted back to their traditional roles. Now, all of a sudden, they were expected to marry, raise children, and take care of the household (Washington Post).

A former Sea Tiger—veteran from the naval division—confesses that there are no options (WP). She had signed up when she was just 12, and her shrapnel peppered battle scars from the 1990s speak about her bloody past. She said in a Washington Post interview, “I wanted to start offering karate and self-defense lessons to girls...but my husband said it will draw attention and people would be suspicious” (WP).



Source: The Guardian

Most today struggle with the psychological aftermath of the war and struggle to have a steady income. Alan Keenan, the senior Sri Lanka analyst at International Crisis Group, says that the Sri Lankan government has not developed a comprehensive policy and has done little to address the socioeconomic needs of female ex-combatants (WP). Now, the social strictures command these fighters, trousers swapped with saris and short hair to be grown out. Ananthi Sasitharan, the Northern Province minister, says that most live without husbands or jobs and remain clandestine of their ex-combatant status due to state surveillance (WP). Whilst announcing the budget for an advanced economy by 2025, Finance Minister Mangala Samaraweera mentioned in the parliament that, “Despite winning the war, we have yet to win the peace” (WP). However, the opportunities are barely reaching the northern corners of the island.

Neither romanticising or feminising them, a female militant is a ‘multilayered societal construction’ by militant groups. The blurry lines of personal and political alley to shape them. The Tamil Tiger did express her politics, her fight to prevent further sexual crimes from the army and IPKF, her quest for a future Tamil nation state, and to tear down the orthodox patriarchy by her very presence. Although, now we see how ephemeral the emancipation was. Perhaps, she was a cog in the wheel, yet she was also more than that.

A Defense of the Power of the People

Roxy Lees



Waay 31 News, 2024.

When you look at the world in which we live you see the many problems facing yourself and others, but what power does the average person have to change them? Why shout against the injustice of the storm battering against you when it is much safer to wait out the wind and hide away? The pressure to surrender to a world out of your control is great and I understand the pessimism many people feel. Deep polarisation, rampant inequality, lack of action on climate change, state violence and a myriad of other pressing issues make citizens feel powerless. If you vote, only to see your candidate lose then what do you do until the next election? If your candidate won, but they were only the least worst, what do you do? Politicians cannot be trusted and so citizens are apathetic leading to a down-ward spiral of self-fulfilling prophecy where we lose faith in politics as a means of securing a better future. If people believe themselves to be powerless they won't take action, and without collective action change is unreachable.

The power of the people is often disparaged to be an illusion or naive hope. But we would not live the way we do without the bold vision and tenacity of past generations. Courageous change-makers

who expanded the frame of what can be possible. Women's right to vote, workers' rights, civil rights, independence from colonial powers, the right to roam and many more core aspects of modern society were all hard-fought and won through the commitment, solidarity and hope of activists.

The UK is a representative democracy so every five years we vote for our MP, send them to Westminster and (hopefully) trust they will advance our views. This faith in elected representatives to instinctively know your political stance is naive. There is no reason for the government to know what silent people want - instead we must tell them - through public demonstrations and collective action. The political agenda is set by people protesting and making their standards clear. Representative democracy might imply sitting back in between elections - but we must not let it.

Politicians do care about the electorate as they care about winning votes. When citizens commit themselves to grassroots organisations or align with a social movement they commit to a set of shared principals and values, drawing attention to injustices

that cannot be tolerated. As numbers grow the power of collective action strengthens. When people consistently demonstrate their passion for a cause it influences public opinion, when public opinion sways it influences policy.

In 2006 Tarana Burke founded the Me Too movement to support survivors of sexual violence. Burke was raised in a housing project in the Bronx, facing intense structural inequality such that many may have assumed her powerless to drive change. However, from a grassroots organisation, #MeToo has become an international movement. Burke and her community changed the narrative around sexual violence, they centred survivors and held perpetrators to account, pushing the conversation into the mainstream and shifting societal norms in how we treat sexual harassment and abuse. The ten year commitment of Burke's organisation in providing resources and empathy to survivors led to women across the world being empowered to share their stories and come forward.

In 1932, hundreds of hikers protested their exclusion from the countryside in the Kinder Scout Mass Trespass. The crowd forced their way over moorland and against gamekeepers. The fields they fought to walk in are now the peak district national park - open for all to enjoy. Benny Rothman, a 20-year-old Mancunian organised the protest and was subsequently arrested and sentenced to three months for rioting and inciting a riot. Public support for the hikers fueled the right to roam movement. The campaigning of Rothman and many others increased the access we all have to the countryside and contributed to the establishment of national parks.

Justice for Cleaners, the student group at KCL, campaigned jointly with the union for cleaners to be employed 'in house', ensuring they have the working rights and protection all King's employees deserve. Students wrote to decision makers, screened a film and protested for almost a year. Despite doubts, even from union representatives, the campaign successfully pressured the university into terminating the contract with external company Servest.

Everything we appreciate now was once seen as radical change, if 'powerless' people had timidly accepted their fate the world would look very different. Without ordinary people struggling against

injustice the future is bleak. We owe it to each other and to future generations to support fairness and fight injustice always.

The role of the activist is a key part of any vibrant democracy - civic responsibility cannot be left in the polling station. Every citizen has the duty to stand against injustice and join the design of their forever changing society. Pressure your representative to reflect your views, write to them, and add your concerns to the political agenda. Protest and organise, find groups making change and help, in every way you can. If you care you cannot sit back, no one will do it for you and everyone is needed. The injustices we face today are challenging monsters to fight, progress was never promised but it was won.



AT KINDER SCOUT hikers have had a tilt or two with the local keepers, for it is enjoined that to go off the footpaths in this area constitutes trespass, and few hikers are very punctilious on the subject of right of way

Mary Evans Picture Diary

The ICC Arrest Warrants

Breakthrough or a glimpse at posterity?

As I write these lines, the International Criminal Court (ICC) has just released arrest warrants against Israeli officials Benjamin Netanyahu, Yoav Gallant and Hamas military leader Mohammed Deif. However, I argue that these measures will matter little in the grand scheme of international criminal justice - a mark of the relative lack of physical power the ICC possesses.

To understand why, one must look at how the ICC works. The ICC is an independent court of justice which was created in 1998 by state signatories of the Rome Statute. The Court's foundations rely on these nation-states. The ICC's mission is to prosecute

individuals (not countries or organizations) responsible for crimes against humanity, genocides, war crimes and the crime of aggression. The ICC is a court of last resort, it is not meant to supersede national courts but comes into action if national courts are unable or unwilling to prosecute the crimes that fall within its jurisdiction. The ICC, despite having noble aims, has struggled for power and legitimacy since its creation specifically because it challenges nation-states: the court can judge individuals with crimes that fall within its jurisdiction, hence, nation-states do not hold the complete monopoly on judging crimes and if certain crimes go unpunished, the ICC can theoretically step in.

When the Court was created ; it faced backlash from the United States. This was mainly because the US did not want the ICC to constrain them and potentially issue arrest warrants against US officials and citizens. To remedy that, the ICC has had to accommodate itself with cases that do not go against the US' interests such as in Uganda. The Ugandan case is particular as the country self-referred the situation with the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) following a suggestion from the office of the



Prosecutor (OTP). The ICC had just been established and the Court needed to look efficient, therefore taking the case of Uganda was a good move for the court as it showed the Court working with a US ally towards a legitimate goal. Unfortunately, the ICC was used politically in that case as it only looked at the crimes committed by the LRA and renounced looking at the crimes of the Ugandan government as it would have hurt the Court's investigation.

The ICC is famous for its structural weaknesses: it possesses no enforcement mechanisms, it depends on states to handle a case or be assigned one and even needs states' help to conduct investigations. Hence the ICC relies on states' cooperation to be effective. In particular, when it comes to arresting the individuals ; it has issued arrest warrants against. If a state has signed and ratified the Rome Statute, it is contractually obliged to arrest the individuals wanted by the ICC and send them to the Hague. For example, if Gallant goes to France (a state that ratified the Rome Statute), the French authorities are legally required to arrest him. Yet the ICC is powerless if a state does not execute its international obligations. When Vladimir Putin was in South Africa and Mongolia, he was not arrested despite having an ICC arrest warrant out for him. The same applies for Sudanese President Al-Bashir who was not arrested when present in South Africa. Because the ICC can only judge individuals once they are in their custody, if a state does not cooperate by transferring them, the Court is unfortunately stuck. As a result, the ICC is forced to rely on states' good will and legal obligations as it is devoid of its own enforcement mechanisms. Therefore, one can seriously doubt the ICC's ability to effectively arrest the people it seeks considering a state can theoretically opt to not comply with its obligations with little consequences.

Furthermore, other aspects of the Israel/Palestine case make it harder for the ICC to exert power. The arrest warrants may hurt the ICC's legitimacy as it goes against two Israeli officials and only one Hamas leader. Considering the fact that Mohammed Deif is most likely dead (Le Monde, 2024), the focus is probably going to shift towards Netanyahu and Gallant not being arrested. This could hurt the ICC by giving the false impression that it only seeks to arrest Israeli leaders - but of course, this impression is only fueled by the fact that

most Hamas leaders are dead. In fact, in May 2023, the Office of The Prosecutor expressed its will to prosecute two other Hamas leaders but their arrest warrants were not issued as they had been killed after the OTP asked for their arrest warrants. Hence, unlike the first cases of the ICC in Uganda, this demonstrates that the ICC has considered atrocities committed by both sides. One could almost consider the arrest warrant issued for Mohammed Deif to have been issued for the sake of holding Hamas responsible as well considering two arrest warrants issued only against Israeli officials would have sparked controversies by only looking at the crimes of one side. Obviously, we can't expect the ICC to resuscitate Hamas leaders in order to judge them for the sake of appearing impartial by holding the two sides' crimes equally accountable. However, this is where things stand. The ICC, going forward, might be perceived as going against Israeli officials even though their intention is to be impartial by considering all crimes committed in this complex state of affairs.

Nevertheless, on a symbolic perspective, the warrants could be seen as a success for the ICC as the Court is taking action in the midst of a turning point in the history of Israel and Palestine. Beyond the fact that the ICC has now issued warrants against leaders historically supported by the West, one noteworthy fact is that the ICC has acted quickly, releasing warrants against Israeli and Hamas leaders only eleven months after the events of October 7. For an institution deemed weak, slow and even biased towards the West, this is a symbolic victory. One could interpret this as the ICC proclaiming: We, the guardians of international criminal justice, have acted according to our responsibilities. As History watches us, we play our role and won't be judged for having failed our mission. Although there is little chance that Netanyahu, Gallant and Deif will be judged at The Hague, the ICC can say they have done everything in their (limited) power to act according to the rule of international law.

The arrest warrants can be seen as a symbolic victory. True. But for an institution which is constantly pointed at for being powerless, does it matter that much? Idealists will say yes. Realists will say no. In the end, I argue that while this decision by the ICC will likely result in nothing substantial in the case of Israel and Palestine due to the ICC's lack of power, it will have the merit of holding both sides accountable for their crimes. For posterity, that's a form of power.

Rethinking Knowledge



Whose voices should be heard in Climate Governance

Alexandra McKay

“I don’t want you to listen to me. I want you to listen to the scientists.” With these famous words addressed to the American Congress, Greta Thunberg drew on the established credibility of science to champion climate action. But this raises an important question: is science the only voice we should be listening to?

Science

For too long, climate governance has positioned science as the preeminent source of knowledge. While robust and invaluable, science alone offers an incomplete picture of how to tackle climate change, often neglecting the social, cultural, and economic impacts on vulnerable populations. To create truly equitable climate solutions, we must not overlook the insights of lived experience, gained by those living on the frontlines of climate change, or the Indigenous Knowledge Systems, the traditions and understandings passed down through generations, which have safeguarded ecosystems for centuries. It’s time to rethink whose voices should be heard.

Before unpacking the value of other modes of knowledge, let’s briefly return to Greta’s scientists. We owe a collective debt to climate science: after decades of research and reports, experts have proved

that climate change is real, human-caused, and poses an existential threat. Thanks to their work, denialism is on the decline and international treaties like the Paris Agreement are pushing forward. However, progress remains painfully slow – emissions continue to rise, and global climate goals go unmet. Clearly, scientific knowledge alone can only take us so far. Besides, the application of science is not as neutral as we might think. Historically, it has been interwoven with colonialist systems of expansion, extraction and control. This legacy of structural oppression continues to shape climate governance institutions today, where voices from the Global North dominate. For instance, Europe and North America account for as much as 73% of participation in the IPCC, and REDD+ efforts to conserve forests have been criticised for re-enacting colonial practices, benefiting international corporations at the expense of local and Indigenous peoples.

We must do better by our global community, ensuring these voices are heard, valued and integrated into climate governance conventions. Beyond technical reports and scientific studies, we must ask ourselves: what would a more inclusive and equitable approach to knowledge look like?

Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Although Indigenous people make up just 6% of the global population, their lands sustain approximately 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity. Acknowledging this immense contribution is vital as we move forwards, and so too is active collaboration. Indigenous Knowledge Systems incorporate localised understandings of land use and conservation which have been honed over centuries. These proven agroecology techniques can complement scientific knowledge to prevent soil erosion and improve water management, aiding climate mitigation and adaptation alike. Take Peru, where hydrologists and engineers have incorporated modern materials into pre-Inca irrigation canals, improving water security. Similarly, the Aboriginal practice of 'cultural burning' is increasingly recognised in Australia for its role in protecting biodiversity and managing wildfires.

Extending beyond technical solutions, Indigenous Knowledge Systems also challenge us to rethink our relationship with planet Earth. The sacred groves of India, where spiritual beliefs have long protected the local forests which serve as crucial carbon sinks, offer a vivid example of this holistic perspective – where nature is not simply reduced to material for scientific observation, but is revered. Consider also the Iroquois Confederacy, an alliance of Haudenosaunee people in northeast North America, who conceived of and used the 'seventh generation principle': a decision-making framework which actively considers the right and lives of future generations. If climate governance embraced such perspectives, would we continue to postpone action and fall short of our own pledges?

Yet collaboration with Indigenous communities must be approached with care. Too often, these partnerships risk re-enacting colonial trauma by treating Indigenous knowledge as a resource to be 'extracted'. It is crucial to avoid tokenism, or generalising localised and differentiated knowledge. Instead, meaningful engagement requires consent, cultural sensitivity, and respect.

Lived Experience

A troubling disconnect often exists between climate science and the lived experience of those most affected by climate change. By engaging with the human stories behind the data, we can better understand the complex, everyday challenges that climate change exacerbates – challenges that disproportionately affect women, people of colour, working-class communities, and disabled individuals. These groups are often hugely underrepresented in scientific and policy circles, but their voices are crucial.

Employing lived experience not only highlights specific problems, but also presents practical solutions which benefit people and planet more broadly. Surely we all stand to gain from the efforts of South African trade unions who advocated for hydration and rest during heatwaves, as well as the reskilling programmes that energy-sector workers demanded in Southeast Asia, as industries transition to renewables. Yet these insights rarely have a seat at the table of global climate governance institutions.

Furthermore, the personal dimension of lived experience holds transformative power for shaping legislation. In Switzerland, a grassroots group of elderly women took their government to court over rising temperatures, setting a legal precedent for holding governments accountable for climate inaction. Meanwhile in London, stories of children suffering from air pollution bolstered campaigns for stricter environmental regulations. These examples demonstrate that elevating the voices of vulnerable populations can lead to broader benefits for all.

Unlike scientific reports, which strive for objectivity and universality, lived experience evokes empathy, urgency, and mobilises communities and policymakers to action. If science tells us what's happening, lived experience shows us why it matters.



“A binary system of thought which privileges man (over woman), reason (over emotion), culture (over nature), civilised (over ‘savage’).”

Towards Co-Productive Knowledge

Integrating diverse knowledge systems into climate governance presents significant challenges. Tensions between environmental goals and economic realities complicate collaboration at all levels, from the individual to the international. Bolivia’s eco-socialist government, which recognised nature as a living entity with legal rights, and yet expanded extraction of fossil fuels to fund social programmes, serves as a cautionary tale. Balancing the interests of all is never simple – nor always possible, if we take a short-term approach – but over time, respecting diverse experience is essential for finding climate solutions which are fair and just.

Expanding the number of voices could also slow decision-making at a time when rapid action is critical. The current consensus model of the UN conventions on climate change, biodiversity and desertification, has long stalled developments. A shift towards majority-based decision-making could open the possibility of more radical action, even while incorporating a broader range of voices. Though systemic reform is far from easy, it pales in comparison to the immense costs of inaction.

A meaningful way through these challenges lies in co-production – a collaborative approach rooted in mutual respect and an openness to multiple ways of knowing. The philosophy of *Etuaptmunk* (two-eyed seeing), which originates from the Indigenous *Mi’kmaq* people of Eastern Canada, offers a practical framework and a powerful metaphor. It invites us to see the world through two lenses simultaneously: one “eye” represents Indigenous ways of knowing, which are relational, holistic, and grounded in lived experience; the other “eye” symbolises Western scientific knowledge, based on empirical evidence and objectivity. Together, they provide a richer vision, reminding us that no single knowledge system holds all the answers.

Embracing a co-productive approach is not only about finding solutions – urgent though they might be. It’s also about healing the fractures in how we relate to each other and the planet. Co-production is both a means and an end – a way to solve problems, and to build trust, amplify marginalised voices, and create communities rooted in shared values and mutual respect. In the process, we might just find our shared humanity and uncover new imaginations, pathways, and possibilities that science alone could never illuminate.



"Rhodes Must Fall"

In 2015, the "Rhodes Must Fall" movement emerged, calling for the removal of the statue of Cecil Rhodes, a 19th-century British politician and businessman central to imperialist expansion in Africa. Rhodes is seen by many as a symbol of oppression due to his role in the British Empire. The protest, which began at the University of Cape Town, quickly spread to institutions such as the University of Oxford, where Rhodes' statue became a focal point. The movement argues that celebrating figures like Rhodes ignores historical injustices and perpetuates the suffering of colonized peoples.

At the heart of this protest is the fight against the colonial legacy that deeply impacted southern Africa, especially nations such as Zimbabwe and Zambia, where land grabs and forced labour systems led to extreme racial oppression. For demonstrators, Rhodes' statue is not just a historical symbol but a reminder of the enduring racial inequality that consistently affects many people until today. Preserving Cecil Rhodes' statue, despite the

Power, Protest, and the Struggle for Inclusivity

Edoardo De Maria

controversy implicit, is therefore a sign of the imposition of racialised norms and an example of the exercise of power over an disadvantaged and colonised people and society.

Racial Inequality and the Struggle for Inclusivity

This movement highlights the lasting effects of colonialism, particularly in South Africa, where Rhodes' policies laid the groundwork for apartheid. One of the most notable pieces of legislation he oversaw was the Native Land Act of 1913, which severely restricted the land that black Africans could own or occupy. The Act allocated only about 10% of South Africa's land to the black population, effectively displacing millions and relegating them to impoverished areas - often far from urban centres and economic opportunities. His actions favoured white settlers, while denying Black Africans basic rights.

Rhodes' legacy also extends to Zimbabwe and Zambia, where land seizures have created tensions that persist to this day. These two countries were once collectively known as 'Rhodesia', named after Rhodes - a clear reflection of his influence in the



in the region during the colonial era.

For many, the statue at Oxford is a painful reminder of oppression, representing centuries of injustice that continue to shape the region and the lives of its people. According to Alax Hotz, before the protests, racial injustice was also represented by a lack of sense of belonging in universities or by verbal and physical attacks in the streets - actions which were considered “normal” from a colonized perspective. Those who reduce these movements to just the statue, might be seen as failing to recognize the wider picture protestors are trying to paint. In this it can be seen how power and oppression are reflected both physically and mentally in how they impact students from colonised nations.

A Global Movement for Decolonizing Education

from this oppressive exercise of power, which began as a campus protest in South Africa, that a global call to remove statues of colonial figures like Rhodes formed. The movement is not only about removing symbols but further rethinking how education and institutions are structured, and thus influence their network. Universities built on the wealth and power gained through colonialism continue to promote a Eurocentric worldview that marginalizes the histories of non-Western people. For many, the statue symbolizes a system that prioritizes the narratives of colonizers, leaving the voices of the colonized marginalized. The protest conveys a divergent interpretation of power in the academic sphere. This implies that education plays a role in the impact power, racism and colonial injustices have upon the population.

The Legacy of Authority in Academia

The debate over Rhodes' statue at Oxford reveals a deeper conflict between preserving historical legacies and confronting uncomfortable truths. For many protesters, the issue goes beyond the statue itself; it concerns the culture of authority that Rhodes embodies, which continues to shape academic institutions today. Rhodes, who was reputed as a racist even by the standards of his own time, represents a figure whose views and actions are deemed inhumane and unacceptable.

However, some argue that the statue should remain as a tool for society to engage with difficult historical legacies. Suggestions such as adding plaques to provide context or maintaining the statue as a symbol of confrontation reflect the complexities

involved in addressing these painful remnants of the past. Additionally, the existence of the Rhodes Scholarship, which continues to offer financial support to students worldwide, further complicates the conversation; it both honours Rhodes' legacy and challenges the implications of his actions. Thus, opponents perceive power and oppression as unshakable institutions, a reason that may explain Oxford's decision to keep the statue in place. However, not condemning this legacy creates an imbalance, where Rhodes' racist views continue to overshadow progress and alienate non-white students, making it harder to build a more inclusive and critical academic environment.

A Balanced Approach to Education: Acknowledging the Past, Shaping the Future

Today, the push for inclusivity in education is stronger than ever, with students and activists demanding that history be taught with honesty and neutrality. They argue that both the achievements and the darker chapters of the past must be recognized. This goes beyond the removal of symbols or questioning historical figures; and rather focuses on shaping a future that is more inclusive and representative. This inclusivity must be balanced, ensuring that civil rights are protected while fostering progress. At the core of this movement is a call for an education system that amplifies the voices that have long been overlooked. A curriculum that moves beyond the Eurocentric narrative toward a postcolonial one, can help bridge cultural divides and create a future where all voices are heard and valued. By doing so, this shift will challenge long-standing power dynamics in education, redistributing influence and fostering a more equitable environment - one where ethnicity and colonial legacy no longer dictate whose history and perspectives are prioritised.

the power of populist rhetoric

by Charlotte Darsonville

what is populism?

No politician seems to escape the 'populist' allegations. The word has become so overused that its meaning has blurred. Its descriptive use has evolved into an insult, serving as a tool to discredit political leaders. But what does it actually mean?

Populism has traditionally been viewed as a contested concept, but a growing consensus now defines it through an ideational approach, focusing on the dichotomy between "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite". It is best understood as a thin-centred ideology framing society as divided into two antagonistic groups and that politics should express the general will of the people.

Simply, a populist leader perceives themselves as the literal embodiment of the people. If you do not align with the leader, you are simply not the people. This dynamic is very clearly observed in the 'us versus them' (the people versus the establishment) discourse commonly adopted by populist leaders. Populism is also frequently linked to accusations of employing emotional, simplistic rhetoric and pursuing opportunistic policies designed to quickly satisfy the preferences of the voters.

how have we been misusing the term?

The trivialization of the term populist has conflated it with concepts like nativism, nationalism, protectionism, and racism, inadvertently legitimising these phenomena by deflecting deeper scrutiny of policies labelled as "populist". Several misconceptions have thus emerged: e.g. that populism is intertwined with either left or right ideologies, which is strictly incorrect, as populism is a form of governance. Using the term to discredit a politician or party further obscures and broadens its definition.

populism and Argentina

The historical context of populism in Argentina is exemplified through both Juan Domingo Perón and Javier Milei, prominent politicians who embraced populist rhetoric and strategies. Juan Domingo Perón, Argentina's president for three terms (1946–1955, 1973–1974) marked by political violence and economic instability, led Peronism, a movement combining nationalism, labor advocacy, and social welfare. His presidency faced criticism for authoritarianism, anti-globalisation, and ties to fascist leaders. Perón's populism

united "the people" against "the elite," emphasising social justice but deepening political polarisation and economic challenges. Perón's populism united "the people" against "the elite," emphasising social justice but deepening political polarisation and economic challenges. Peronism remains influential in modern Argentinian politics.

Javier Milei, elected Argentina's president in December 2023, is a libertarian economist known for right-wing populism and radical economic policies. Focused on combating hyperinflation, poverty, and a collapsing currency, he advocates for minimal government intervention and laissez-faire economics. His populist rhetoric targets the "political caste," framing politics as a battle between "the people" and corrupt elites. While resonating with disillusioned voters, critics warn his approach could deepen inequalities and undermine democratic norms.

what sentiments does populist rhetoric awaken in the electorate?

To answer this and other questions, I have conducted an interview with Alan Futerman and Margarita Trovato, two Argentinians on opposite sides of the political spectrum.

What is your reaction when leaders of the opposing party are referred to as "the Messiah," "the Lion," or "the Boss"?

To what extent do you feel the party you don't align with prioritises democratic principles over its ideology?

Alan Futerman is a PhD candidate in political economy at King's College London with a BA in Economics and a Master's in Finance. He has written on Austrian economics, libertarianism, and the philosophy of science, focusing on the epistemology and methodology of economics. He is critical of Perón.

Margarita Trovato is a lawyer specializing in human rights with 10 years of experience in litigation, research, and advocacy. A member of Fundación Vía Libre, she focuses on digital rights, privacy, and technology's societal impact, while also teaching at secondary and university levels. She is critical of Milei.

Futerman replies to the first question:

The rule of law is impersonal, yet political movements are driven by both ideas and people. Leaders often embody key traits of their ideology, naturally fostering strong attachment among followers, especially in societies where customs shape politics. In Argentina, this attachment often mirrors the passion seen in football. Labels for leaders, such as “the boss,” don’t necessarily reflect their actual politics; a communist and a libertarian leader could share the title, yet its implications would differ vastly. When used metaphorically, such labels symbolise emotional or cultural ties rather than concrete political ideologies. They only gain political significance if followers interpret them literally, illustrating how labels often reflect symbolic loyalty rather than defining a leader’s governance style.

Trovato presents a similar view to Futerman’s:

It’s understandable for supporters to view their leader as a “messiah” or “lion,” as strong political representation often inspires such sentiments. These nicknames, on their own, aren’t inherently problematic. However, issues arise when they suggest the leader holds extraordinary powers, such as overriding Congress or making unilateral decisions. While admiration for a leader is valid, such glorification risks fostering fanaticism that undermines institutional norms. If the leader adheres to democratic principles and supporters still use these terms, so be it. The concern lies in how this devotion can distort the leader-public relationship, creating a cult-like following that prioritizes the individual over democratic institutions, threatening the balance and integrity of democracy itself.

When faced with the second question, Futerman replied:

The current administration aligns its philosophy with democratic institutions, though interpretations of democracy differ between classical liberalism and social democracy. Critics claim it falls short of democratic values, citing policies like environmental intervention and economic redistribution as essential to democracy. Peronism, however, is better understood as a flexible political movement than a strict ideology. Peronist governments can adopt both free-market and interventionist policies, often reflecting the leader’s perspective. This adaptability can create unpredictability, tension with the rule of law, and instability, as checks and balances erode under Peronist regimes. Despite these challenges, core democratic features, such as regular election cycles, are generally upheld, even if institutional integrity may be weakened.

When faced with the second question, Trovato replied:

Regardless of personal sympathies, I am deeply concerned about a coalition that gains power democratically but undermines those principles in office. La Libertad Avanza (LLA) seems insufficiently committed

to democracy, clashing with ideals like rights, equality, and liberty. Its security and cybersecurity agenda fosters hyper-vigilance, criminalizes dissent, and targets individuals through investigations. Harassment of opposition voices—such as attacks on journalists and labeling congressmen as “rats”—reflects troubling rhetoric. While calling LLA undemocratic may be sensationalist, these actions suggest democracy is not its priority.

what conclusions can be drawn from these answers?

Arguably, the most interesting conclusion to be drawn from the answers to the first question is that you wouldn’t know which answer belonged to whom. Both interviewees, on opposite sides of the political spectrum, seem to agree that the .mstrong polarisation that Argentina has experienced for the last century has normalised autocratic practices, e.g. extremely personalistic governance. These nicknames separate leaders from the electorate, and focus disproportionate attention on the executive. Such focus on the leaders and their discourse is the first step towards populist rhetoric and such glorifying language by current leaders undermines the core principle of democracy: prioritizing the people above all else.

The answers to the second question prove that institutions are not robust enough to prevent leaders from subtly and sporadically challenging democracy, accepting the precondition that populism does inscribe itself within democratic rules. Since Argentina’s first populist leader, the ‘Overton Window’ has been concerningly stretched. The Overton Window is the range of ideas considered acceptable in public discourse, explaining how political or social movements can affect this, influencing public opinion and policy. This interesting effect could have been seen in Mauricio Macri, president from 2015 to 2019, who avoided political fanaticism and personalist governance. Critics and supporters alike faulted his lack of charisma and weak connection with “the people.” Would this still be a flaw without nearly a century of populist influence?

The emphasis on leaders over policies has developed and entrenched a culture where leaders are scrutinized more for charisma rather than their adherence to democratic norms. Marrying an ideology would be counterproductive as it undermines context-specific contingencies, practicalities, and fosters a narrow reasoning prone to echo-chambers. But marrying a leader and promising them loyalty, blind trust, and unreciprocated respect, is far more dangerous and democracy-threatening. People subjected to presidential systems should switch the focus from leaders to parties, both to prevent populist leaders from emerging, and to foster a wider understanding of the executive and its constraints. Both in academia and informal conversation, the word ‘populism’ should be used much more conscientiously.

Our Age of Orwellian Machine Anxiety

Anxieties
around AI
in the
modern
day



Hannah Durkin

‘Your screentime is up by 100% compared to last week’. I’m sure this is a familiar message to many. With the bombardment and abundance of spoon-fed personalised content a tap away we are now more than ever conscious of the machines’ presence.

The power of technology is something we cannot shun, correct. For much of our earthy activities, technology is what is holding our livelihood together, from air traffic control to UberEats.

Approach 2 (For Data Paragraph; dedicates more space to the findings):

Yet, current technological developments, particularly in the field of artificial intelligence (AI), stir a distinct and growing fear in society. This is reflected in a recent study by King Saud University, which investigated existential anxieties surrounding AI and revealed striking findings:

‘Key concerns included the fear of death (96% of participants), fate’s unpredictability (86.3%), a sense of emptiness (79%), anxiety about meaninglessness (92.7%), guilt over potential AI-related catastrophes (87.7%), and fear of condemnation due to ethical dilemmas in AI (93%), highlighting widespread apprehensions about humanity’s future in an AI-dominated era.’

Such ‘concerns’, anxious feelings, and even threats from the development of AI, form what I would coin ‘Machine Anxiety’. The point at which the machine starts thinking is clearly one of the many tipping points to this existential threat. The ‘AI era’ like any

other era is dominated by a force of power, and in this case it is the machine.

This machine anxiety, felt by us sentient beings, highlights a power that is held over us by the faceless machine and a terrifying reality whereby the machine holds the power of the human. Not only is there a fear of the cognitive power of the machine overtaking the work and minds of humankind.

An Orwellian example

Taking the call for a ‘multidisciplinary strategy’ I turn to the written word in order to see machine anxiety being played out. Orwellian literature has long been enjoyed by many as a cautionary tale of totalitarian powers, warnings against the ‘regime’ and a stand post for socialist power. But the special breed of Orwellian machine anxiety offers illuminating parallels to the modern day:

QUOTE:

‘There is really no reason why a human being should do more than eat, drink, sleep, breathe, and procreate; everything else could be done for him by machinery. Therefore the logical end of mechanical progress is to reduce the human being to something resembling a brain in a bottle. That is the goal towards which we are already moving, though, of course, we have no intention of getting there; just as a man who drinks a bottle of whisky a day does not actually intend to get cirrhosis of the liver.’

Orwellian machine anxiety offers a frightening slow decline of the human body and the ruin of the individual self for the rise of the machine. For Orwell, the mind endures. The human ‘brain in a bottle’ is the only essence of sentience - sentience being a being ‘that feels or is capable of feeling’ - left after full mechanisation. However, as evident in general discourse of contemporary technology the question of artificial sentient intelligence would leave no need for any brain in any bottle.

For Orwell, like the cirrhosis of a liver, mechanisation leads to a decline of what makes us human, not only our physical body but our ability to be social beings to interact, to feel and to be. When this machine becomes an intelligent machine, akin to modelled human behaviour – like strong AI systems such as large language models (LLMs) – the position of the human, for Orwell could be utterly redundant. Are we not teetering on this with the development of LLMs?

AI Work and Orwell.

Despite the cynicism and eventual ‘brain bottling’, the Orwellian train of thought has most definitely begun its journey. LLMs are incredibly useful for translation work, for summarisation of dense information, speeding up data analysis, the list goes on. Much like any other development of technology, surely increased efficiency in the workforce will lead to surplus ‘free time’ for people? Potentially. As for Orwell’s view:

‘The machine would even encroach upon the activities we now class as ‘art’; it is doing so already, via the camera and the radio. Mechanize the world as fully as it might be mechanized, and whichever way you turn there will be some machine cutting you off from the chance of working—that is, of living.’

Full mechanisation will, for Orwell, encroach into art. The camera and the radio, in Orwellian terms, have mechanised the painter and the performer. Transposing this to the contemporary level of mechanisation, the rise of AI-generated imagery—tools like Midjourney and DALL-E replacing the need to photograph with synthography. The concept of ‘taking a picture’ falls apart when AI can generate one for us. For Orwell the machine removes the need to work, yet paradoxically ‘whatever they want to do, they will find that another machine has set them free from that.’ Both work and leisure are under threat by

mechanisation.

The anxiety of keeping ones work, maintain a job is a hot topic in the discourse surrounding the development of AI. A Goldman and Sachs study from April 2023, estimated around 300 million jobs could be replaced by AI by 2030. If you found yourself teetering on the edge of a manual-turn-machine job would you be singing the praises of your new artificial colleague?

Conclusion

The fundamental underpinning is conscionability. Given this article sits nestled in a volume of writings of power, we must, as sentient beings be conscientious to the use of AI. That means we need to scrutinise the implementation – and the intent of those implementing – AI into our day-to-day life. Yet, we cannot stop this *AI era*, in fact, shouldn't we embrace it? The idiom goes *better the devil you know* and if we are to find this a machine anxiety of a devious nature surely we must *know* it. The alternative would be blindly racing into an Orwellian dystopia of fully mechanised power, of either ‘bottled brains’ or a panopticonic Ministry of Truth.

We can take from Orwell a solace that machine anxieties, and existential technological fears have always existed. But keeping Orwell at our side we must remember that - for now at least - unlike Winson we can turn our telescreen off.

CAN MEDIA TRANSFORM

What happened in 2009?

STEREOTYPES?:

THE CASE OF THE ROMA MINORITY

ALENA VARILOVA

In 2009, aged four, I watched a television broadcast in my grandparents' living room, of a two year old girl nearly burned to death in a small town in the Czech Republic. The disbelief and memory sticks with me to this day and many years later, has caused me to consider the media's influence on the shifting power dynamics in the power structure between the Roma minority and majority white population in the Czech Republic. The significance of mediatization and the power of media to influence societal structures remains as relevant today as it was in the wake of the 2009 attack.



Who are the Roma?

The Roma minority is the largest minority in Europe, with an estimated population of around 10 to 12 million. The minority is most dense in Central and Eastern Europe, although they are found across the continent and in other parts of the world. Historically, Romani people in Europe have faced discrimination and social exclusion by majority ethnic white groups. During the Second World War, at least 250,000 Romani people were killed by the Nazis. In the Czech Republic, beyond the atrocities of the Second World War, the Roma minority endured further persecution under the socialist regime from its establishment in 1948 until its fall in November 1989. Since the fall of socialism in the Czech Republic, many Romani saw the changing political system as an opportunity for a stereotype ("their national revival"), where Romani culture could finally be accepted nationwide. However, this hope was short-lived, as evidenced by the 2009 incident.

The attack happened on the night of April 19, 2009 in the small eastern town of Vítkov. A group of 4 neo-Nazis decided to throw Molotov cocktails into the windows of a house inhabited by a Roma family of four. 3 members of the family suffered severe burns and Natálka Kudrikova, a 2-year old toddler at the time, suffered burns across 80% of her body, and is considered a miracle for having been able to survive. She was in a coma for over 4 months and has undergone over 100 surgeries to live. While such assaults are not commonplace, they are by no means rare: a similar assault occurred in 2007 which caused a Roma man to lose his arm and legs. Most of these offensives result in no injuries and the police don't never catch the perpetrators, yet due to the especially severe nature of the incident with Natálka and her family, as well as the consideration of Natálka's age, the media's response changed. And despite the fact that 15 years have passed, it remains critically relevant, seeing as no such event has received the same public outcry, and because Natálka has been turned into a famous figure.

The Persistence of Stereotypes

Due to the heavy strong media attention devoted to this incident, the question of whether it has played a role in changing the racism prevalent in the country has been raised. Unfortunately, the stereotypes of and lies about involving the Roma minority in the Czech Republic remain, despite the fleeting post-socialism optimism. A large fraction of the Czech population refers to Romani as "cykání" or gypsies, a term which has negative connotations, often in relation to thieves, liars, swindlers or vagabonds, and is thus disliked by many Romani. Many believe that Romani have no interest in educating themselves or acting in a "civilised" manner, and while there may be some who do not subscribe to these stereotypes, these lies remain widely-held beliefs. The European Commission's call in October 2024 for the Czech Republic to address Roma discrimination in schools demonstrates that it would be naive to think that much has been done to change the racial and ethnic discrimination the Roma people face.

Therefore, it is worth analyzing whether 2009 was a breaking point in Czech society, and possibly one which extended past the small country's borders. The mass domestic and international attention amassed by the attack, through which the discrimination facing the minority was brought to light, may have been crucial in changing the power structures of the time, where the Roma minority was and is constantly presented as inferior.

Was the incident's media representation a turning point?

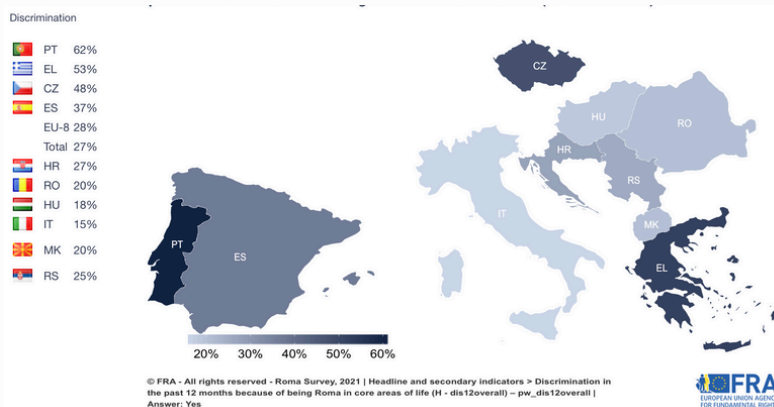
Whilst the majority of the white Czech population has become more educated on the severity of the discrimination faced by Roma, true social mobility has not yet been achieved for the minority. Some of the media have even reverted back to rhetoric that advances existing stereotypes. One such example is an interview with a famous Czech TV host, Jan Kraus, and the mother of Natálka, Anna Sivakova. Jan Kraus is known for his humorous interviews, so the mere invitation merely inviting Sivakova for an interview already seemed inappropriate, almost enticing a circus. During the interview, Kraus seemed to quite publicly ridicule Sivakova, asking her about her lack of marital status with her partner, her child from her previous relationship, her partner's criminal record and asking her to speak louder. Rather than using his platform to empower the victim, the media directly opened the floodgates for further criticism. Shockingly, in comments on the interview, many viewers shockingly blamed Anna Siváková for her daughter Natálka's injuries, accusing her of negligence during the attack and even criticizing her behavior during the talk show. This backlash underscored how deeply ingrained prejudices against the Roma minority are, as the focus shifted away from the real perpetrators of the crime to unfairly scrutinizing the victim's family.

The failure to generate a meaningful societal response can largely, in large part, be attributed to the media's framing of the event. While the incident was widely covered, the focus remained on the extremism of the specific perpetrators rather than the wider problem of systemic discrimination. As a result, the event was framed as an isolated hate crime associated with extremists, and rather sparked criticism of the rise of far-right groups. To a certain extent, the reported brutality overshadowed the ongoing inequalities that thousands within the Roma community continued facing.

This limitation extended to political responses. Mainstream parties, such as the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) or the Social Democratic Party (ČSSD), condemned the attack and denounced extremism, yet failed to use their platforms to advocate for further Roma rights and integration. Only smaller parties, who however lack such influence, like the Green Party, advocated for increased rights and hence, systemic reforms. The subsequent and continued lack of action was a reflection of the populist political landscape that to this day uses discrimination against the Roma minority for gaining votes. This is done by framing Romanis as harmful to wider society,; a narrative many continue to buy into.

If a serious political response had been paired with a purposeful media effort, the prospects for meaningful change would have significantly increased. The media is a powerful tool for mobilizing society, but only if it is used appropriately. Unfortunately, the media attention that followed the incident in 2009 failed to address the broader issues present past this one event. However, it is important to note that the scope of media has significantly changed over the past 15 years, particularly through the introduction of social media. If the event were to happen today, social media could potentially mobilize society around the broader issue of discrimination. Although, at the same time, filter bubbles present on most social media platforms recommend content according to an algorithm, meaning that most users will be exposed to content that shares their prejudices and opinions.

Discrimination in the past 12 months because of being Roma in core areas of life (H - dis12overall)



The effectiveness of the media in mobilizing the public on social issues often relies on political commitment. While the media can bring attention to certain topics, it is ultimately politicians who have the authority to drive meaningful action. Even after 15 years, the Roma minority still faces discrimination both within the Czech Republic country and beyond, highlighting the urgent need for systemic reform. Furthermore, as highlighted by the Labeling Theory, individuals often adopt the stereotypes imposed on them. By perpetuating these stereotypes, more people are likely to reinforce behaviors that align with such biases. Ultimately, dismantling systemic prejudice is a joint effort between media representation and political action.

Why Kamala Harris' Presidential Campaign Should Make Us Question Political Power

Sara Latif

Political campaigns today often focus less on detailed policies and more on optics, relying primarily on grandiose election promises and emotion-driven political narratives to mobilise voters. As statistics suggests, voters have shown decreasing trust in political figures. This is a likely consequence of overreaching promises made by politicians which may be tempting to make but impossible to realise, causing them to underdeliver. Perhaps by taking a closer look at campaigning, we may allow ourselves to perceive political power as a make-believe concept, a fluid and imagined aura that in many instances pops like a bubble when it touches the real world.

Kamala Harris' campaign in 2024 has been a surprising reimagination of the U.S. presidential campaigns – when the Democrat party finally decided to switch their candidate for the presidential election, one might argue it was already too late to abandon the image of a decaying Democrat representative leading a global hegemon. They were not wrong; what looked like a successful comeback for the Democrat Party turned out to fall on its head in a very short time. There is a vast debate on how Kamala Harris' campaign lost by such a large margin, despite the perceived tie between herself and Donald Trump. While we may not be able to find a singular reason, we could deem the lack of realistic solutions to notably contribute to her downfall. Specifically, let us look at the main campaign focus, which was female rights and the infamous overturn of *Roe v. Wade*. Many voters, in fact as much as 12%, have set this to be the main motivation to cast their ballot. The idea of a woman in lead with a core purpose of re-establishing the right to abortion on a

constitutional level was strong despite there being no clarity, no plan and no specific vision to enact this reform. In the world of politics, things are often easier said than done, and this was no different in the case of the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election.

Looking at *Roe v. Wade*, one of America's most proclaimed federal cases which represents a major turnover in the fight for female rights, there is a complex history behind why it came to exist and why its precedence was terminated. The overturn has been attributed to President Trump in his reshaping of federal judiciary – including the appointment of three conservative-leaning Supreme Court judges, granting an ever-so strong judicial power to the Republicans. Despite the strong views held by many regarding those decisions, this is a standard practice for the President of the United States:

“Supreme Court justices, court of appeals judges, and district court judges are nominated by the President and confirmed by the United States Senate, as stated in the Constitution.”

But to correctly explain the overturn of *Roe v. Wade* (1973), we need to start at the beginning. The U.S. justice systems is based on a series of precedents – past legal rulings, which on the federal level aim to guide the judge's conclusions on any new legal proceeding. Each such ruling follows from the Constitution, which presents a brief 'manual' to the set of fundamental rights common for all the States to respect. As such, any appeal that passes all the way to the Supreme Court will be faced with any existing precedents. Amongst the precedent cases that helped shape *Roe v. Wade* was *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965), where it was argued that the

access to contraceptives should be protected, granted by the ‘right to privacy.’ It was ruled that the right to privacy, despite not being explicitly stated in the Constitution, remains implied by other rights that follow from the 4th, 9th and 14th Amendments, and is therefore constitutional. Quoting Justice Goldberg on *Griswold*: “The right to privacy in marriage is so fundamental that allowing its infringement because privacy is not specifically addressed in the previous eight amendments is to ignore the Ninth Amendment altogether.” A similar reasoning was used for *Roe v. Wade*. A part of the ruling was the separation of individual right and interest of the state, and as such, the pregnancy period ought to be separated into three trimesters, granting an absolute right to abort in the first trimester, allowing state regulations on the second, and bans on the third. This was to recognise when the foetus turns into a human being.

However, in March 2018, the state of Mississippi adopted the Gestational Age Act (HB 1510), prohibiting most abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy. This is well before the point of foetus viability, which is estimated to happen at around 24 weeks of pregnancy. Jackson Women’s Health Organisation, the only certified abortion clinic in the capital, responded by filing a lawsuit in the federal district court, which granted the motion. In December 2019, the same ruling was upheld in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit. The state of Mississippi then appealed to the Supreme Court. And finally, in 2022, the Supreme Court responded with a twist – it approved of Mississippi’s prohibition of pre-viability abortion as well as overruled *Roe v. Wade*. The decision of Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr., is based on behalf of two main arguments:

1. The lack of historical validity: abortion rights weren't objectively recognised as “deeply rooted in this Nation’s history and tradition,” ruling them as non-fundamental rights. (*Washington v. Glucksberg* [1997], citing *Moore v. City of East Cleveland* [1977])
2. Broadness of the 14th Amendment's Use: the link between abortion rights and the right of privacy and personal liberty, was seen as too indefinite and loose.

President Trump’s power in the result of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* (2022) is therefore at best quite indirect despite any statements made on the topic. This makes Kamala Harris’

suggestions to re-establish *Roe v. Wade* even more ambiguous. The only power she would have to affect the judiciary in the same manner would be appointing Democrat federal judges. The judicial power remains to be the regulatory hand of any candidate’s potential whims. It holds true even when the proposed policies seem to be unanimously supported, such as in the case of the Child Labour ban that was never approved into the Constitution. Overturning federal-level decisions also happened frequently during U.S. history. In some cases, for an objectively fairer world, example being the overturn of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) which mandated racial segregation [*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954)]. Ideas can twist and turn the world, but despite extraordinary political figures being known to shape history as we know it, it takes a lot of plausible circumstances out of one’s control to be able to transcend a thought into legislation – for as long as our legal establishments hold, this is unlikely to change.

Politicians appear overtly strong, and while some of their power is clearly significant, the voters often tend to decide not based on the objective reality of its scope, but rather a series of bloated statements. And of course, there are infinite examples of unfulfilled promises, such as former President Nixon’s ‘secret plan to end the Vietnam war,’ former U.K. prime minister Boris Johnson promising to build 40 new hospitals in the next decade or former Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard’s pledge to not introduce the carbon tax. A candidate will likely need to overinflate their power to gain it – especially as they must compete with other candidates with similar approaches, this seems perfectly sensible. However, the increasingly polarised electorate and its blind approach to evaluating politics gives rise to a new worry. Democracy generally operates on behalf of its people; if they are not able to identify the modus operandi of political candidates prior to their election, it means that an increasingly larger segment of people’s votes is, at the least, terribly uninformed. Questioning the electorate would then merge into questioning modern democracies. How may we prevent this? Perhaps we can start by urging the readers to read further than the headlines.

Unprotected Crossings: The Human Trafficking Crisis in the Shadow of Migration



by VALERIA ABRAM

Introduction

Venezuela, once considered one of Latin America's wealthiest nations, is now a victim of a multifaceted crisis. Years of economic mismanagement, anti-democratic governance, collapsing public services, and political repression have plunged the country into turmoil, leaving millions of its citizens in poverty and despair. Starting in 2015, 1.3 million people left Venezuela, and by 2022, that figure surged to 7 million.

This mass displacement represents one of contemporary history's fastest and largest displacements, close to those caused by armed conflicts in Syria and surpassing those from South Sudan. As Venezuelans flee their country in search of safety and opportunity, the Colombia-Venezuela border, particularly in Norte de Santander, has become a crucial area for exploitation.

Border Dynamics in Colombia and Venezuela

Norte de Santander is a region on the Colombia-Venezuela border that spans 2,219 kilometers and is a key transit zone for migrants. Its official crossings and illegal paths (*trochas*) are controlled by violent non-state actors (VNSAs), including guerrilla groups and narco-trafficking cartels. The absence of state authority exposes migrants, particularly Venezuelans, to extortion, forced labor, and sexual exploitation. Human trafficking in Norte de Santander is an escalating issue, a critical human rights crisis that is shaped by the power struggles between VNSAs, government authorities, and vulnerable migrants. The migration crisis has exposed severe governance failures, providing VNSAs with opportunities to exploit the desperation and precarious circumstances of migrants. Venezuelan refugees, especially women, often find themselves caught between the coercive tactics of criminal groups and the inability—or collusion—of state institutions to protect them. This troubling dynamic illustrates the relationship between forces of exploitation, power imbalances, and institutional shortcomings, creating suffering for Venezuelan migrants.

Sex Trafficking

VNSAs such as the National Liberation Army (ELN), Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dissidents, and Tren de Aragua dominate illegal crossings and *trochas*, which serve as critical areas for trafficking operations as there is no *de jure* authority. When women got to Norte de Santander, they were presented with opportunities like becoming maids and waitresses in homes and billiard parlors. But in reality, as maids, the women are forced to work for more than 12 hours in a row, affecting their psychological and physical health. They are also subject to their phones being taken away and being forced to have sex with family members, and in billiard parlors, it's coerced sex with clients. In 2021, the Colombia Ombudsman Office highlighted that 34% of Venezuelans are forced to suffer through human trafficking. Norte de Santander, having the second-highest number of Venezuelans in Colombia, is also the region with more sex trafficking victims. Beyond targeting women for sexual exploitation, VNSAs prey on the vulnerabilities of children and teenagers through forced recruitment, intensifying the humanitarian crisis.

Forced Recruitment

In Catatumbo, a region in Norte de Santander, the ELN and the Popular Liberation Army (*Ejército Popular de Liberación*, EPL) are armed groups that control the area and have been fighting for territory since early 2018. Armed groups in Norte de Santander have exploited the region's lack of adequate immigration controls and economic desperation to commit a wide range of abuses against both the local and migrant populations. As of April 2023, approximately 260,369 Venezuelans lived in the area, making it a primary destination for fleeing migrants fleeing instability. These groups have targeted civilians, including Venezuelan migrants, with killings, disappearances, sexual violence, forced displacement, child recruitment, and threats against community

leaders and human rights defenders. Venezuelans, in particular, face heightened vulnerability, with many subjected to exploitation, sexual abuse, and forced disappearances. The extent of abuses suffered by Venezuelans in Catatumbo is challenging to measure, given that many are not aware of reporting procedures or fear deportation if they file complaints to Colombian authorities. In practice, Venezuelans have had limited access to services provided by the Colombian government to victims of the armed conflicts.

Authorities' Complicity with Non-State Actors

Beyond the violence of armed groups, systemic corruption among authorities exacerbates the suffering of migrants. The strategic interactions between border enforcers and unauthorized border crossers are called “border games,” implying that state authorities and non-state violent actors often collaborate through the existing means of corruption. According to *La Opinión*, a local news outlet, government officials and local politicians work together with drug traffickers to recruit Venezuelans by force and coercion into sex work. *La Opinión* stated that members of the national police knew of the ring of sex trafficking and allowed it to continue. Three people were arrested because of this, e.g. “*la Yiya*”, who recruited Colombian and Venezuelan minors on social media by promising them careers as models. She took away their documents and forced them to take intimate photos and videos to send to clients. Later, they were forced into sexual work by promoting migrants in bars in Norte de Santander. This indicates a lack of protection for the human rights of migrants by governmental authorities. They contribute to this criminal network instead of helping migrants acquire legal status.

In Puerto Santander, local officials claim that human trafficking is absent, framing it instead as 'induction into prostitution' despite evidence of operational trafficking networks in a municipality in Puerto Santander. However, according to the Mayor's Office Official, "...the work has focused on updating a decree of trafficking established since 2017," meaning that they understand the extent of sex networks but don't have diagnostic, recognition, prevention, and reception of the issue for migrants that are trafficking victims. Hindering the possibilities for the regional government to provide access to services for victims of trafficking creates obstacles to investigation and judicialization. There is a naturalization of trafficking networks, confusing sex work with sexual exploitation, thus maintaining the misconceptions of sex work as a “trade of easy women,” ignoring the illegitimacy of sex work in Colombia. These cases of official complicity are not isolated incidents but part of a larger pattern of governance failures that erode public trust and leave migrants without protection.

Undermining Governance

In 2016, the United Nations Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on Trafficking in Persons called for prioritizing the protection of people, especially women and children, from all forms of human trafficking during conflict and while fleeing unrest, violence, and abuses in their home country. Essentially, it's a vicious cycle. When public authorities, such as the police, are implicated in illegal activities, it erodes Venezuelans' trust in the institutions and government agencies responsible for implementing policies to protect immigrants.

The perception among locals in Norte de Santander that VNSAs exert significant control over the border highlights a discrepancy between local authorities' behavior and government enforcement of public policies, particularly concerning criminal activities across borders. Additionally, government authorities who are part of trafficking networks may ignore illicit activities, allowing them to grow without intervention. Therefore, trust in public authorities plays a crucial role in shaping public attitudes towards immigration policies.

A Call to Confront the Crisis

The human trafficking crisis in Norte de Santander exposes a failure in governance, both locally and across borders, leaving Venezuelan migrants—especially women and children—vulnerable to exploitation. As VNSAs leverage control of unregulated border areas and state complicity undermines public trust in institutions, migrants are left without the protections they urgently need. The lack of media attention on this issue underscores the Norte de Santander's reputation as the “forgotten children of Colombia.” The lack of awareness regarding border realities perpetuates dangerous ignorance of the migration crisis and its consequences. The wider general public and policymakers must educate themselves about the ongoing situation endured by Venezuelan migrants and the systemic failures that aggravate their suffering. To effectively address this issue, Venezuela and Colombia must work together to enhance border security while working transparently to combat corruption, aiming to establish accessible legal pathways for migration. Without immediate intervention, the cycle of exploitation, displacement, and governance failure will continue, deepening the suffering of millions and further destabilizing the region.



The Power of Citizenship

Identity and Borders

Afrak Sheikh

Citizenship is more than a legal status; it is a powerful construct that shapes personal identity and global hierarchies. At its core, citizenship defines the relationship between individuals and the state; with subsequent rights, responsibilities, and degrees of belonging. However, in the 21st century, citizenship also serves as a gatekeeper, granting privileges to some while excluding others. This creates a 'them vs. us' dichotomy that drives much of today's political discourse, particularly immigration policies and national border controls. These issues endow citizenship with profound global power and implications for migrants' identity.

The power citizenship has over identity is dual in nature. On one hand, it offers individuals a sense of belonging, security, and access to resources within a defined national framework. On the other hand, it establishes a boundary that inherently excludes non-citizens and refugees who may lack the same legal protections or societal acceptance. This duality causes the transition from migrant to citizen to signify acceptance and stability but may also involve challenges, from navigating complex legal systems to confronting societal prejudices. For instance, how the city is constructed: citizens have property rights whereas migrants are kept at the periphery rather than the core. Additionally, immigrants frequently balance the culture and identity of their homeland with the expectations and social norms of their adopted nation which may not co-exist and raises the concept of "borderless identities". Globalisation has facilitated the movement of people, to the point that individuals increasingly identify with multiple cultures and communities. The rise of borderless identities promotes important cultural exchange and global understanding between historically miscategorised groups such as the Innuits in Canada.

However, to governments in many states, borderless identities seem to complicate integration and resource allocation as the critics of borderless identities argue that they undermine national unity. Politicians on both sides have addressed these issues, with some advocating for stricter immigration controls to preserve national identity and nationalism. Others have called for more inclusive policies that reflect the shift from traditional notions of citizenship to fluid belonging that is not limited to a single nation-state. The tension between these perspectives emphasises the ongoing debate over citizenship and borders. The power of citizenship ultimately lies in its ability to define individual identity and shape the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion across borders.

National borders reinforce the exclusivity of citizenship, creating physical and psychological boundaries that separate individuals into categories of 'insider' and 'outsider'. There has been a rise of right-wing parties in recent European elections who often emphasise the protection of national identity and resources, with some citizens viewing immigration as a potential threat to sovereignty and cultural cohesion. This further exacerbates the ideological divide seen in recent elections, for example the United States, where immigration has been a polarising issue, with proposals for stricter border controls or pathways to citizenship for undocumented immigrants sparking fierce debate. Similarly, the refugee crisis has challenged the balance between national security and humanitarian obligations in Europe, revealing stark differences in how nations perceive their responsibilities to non-citizens. For instance, Marine Le Pen, leader of France's far-right National Rally party (formerly the National Front), has argued: "Without borders, there is no nation, there is no citizenship". Legal distinctions between citizens and non-citizens reinforce psychological divisions that shape perceptions of identity as foreign-born residents have less social and institutional power in their country of residence than native-born citizens. This further creates a 'them vs. us' mentality where citizenship has the power to amplify white supremacist views in the Western world because blockades to citizenship are often aimed at non-white individuals. The legal dimension of citizenship is crucial to its power. It determines who has the right to vote, work, and access social services while denying these privileges to others. This legal superiority is often evident in

international agreements such as visa regimes, which prioritise wealthier nations' citizens. Passports are unequal in the power they confer: citizens of countries like Germany or Japan enjoy visa-free access to over 190 destinations, while others, such as Afghanistan or Syria, face significant travel restrictions. This disparity shows the geopolitical power dynamics embedded in citizenship.

Former British Prime Minister Theresa May, during her tenure as Home Secretary, stated: "The aim is to create here in Britain a really hostile environment for illegal immigrants." This made a defence of stricter immigration controls and emphasised how legal frameworks are wielded to enforce exclusion and prioritize the rights of citizens over non-citizens. In the United States, legal battles over policies like the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program demonstrate the tension between citizenship and inclusivity. Advocates for DACA argue that undocumented immigrants who arrived as children deserve pathways to citizenship as they are not at fault for their parent's actions, while opponents claim such measures undermine national sovereignty. These legal struggles indicate how citizenship laws are often weaponised to serve political agendas for example since winning the 2024 US Presidential election Trump's cabinet has announced plans for the mass deportation of undocumented migrants.

The power of citizenship also manifests in international law, where certain nations exert disproportionate influence. This is evident in the global hierarchy of citizenship, where nationals from powerful countries receive preferential treatment in trade, diplomacy, and mobility. For instance, the ability of the European Union to offer citizenship through programs like 'golden visas' highlights the commodification of national belonging, where wealth can buy access to privileges denied to millions of refugees and asylum seekers. U.S. President Elect Donald Trump's remarks on a proposed merit-based immigration system starkly illustrate this: "We should have a system that prioritizes the best and brightest." While this approach seems practical, it reflects a broader trend of favouring economic and strategic advantages over humanitarian considerations which reinforces the superiority of certain nations in the global citizenship hierarchy. Furthermore, the legal power of citizenship is evident in the experiences of refugees and stateless individuals. Citizenship provides access to basic rights and protections; without it, individuals are

vulnerable to exploitation, discrimination, and exclusion. Recent refugee crises have brought these issues to the forefront of discussions for example, the Syrian civil war has displaced millions, many of whom remain stateless or trapped in protracted legal battles for asylum. The absence of citizenship not only limits their mobility but also denies them the ability to rebuild their lives so it has great power across the globe. For instance, Shamima Begum had her citizenship stripped from her by the UK government leaving her a stateless individual living in a Syrian refugee camp. This highlights how citizenship can be used as a powerful weapon in denying individuals agency over their own lives and future.

The power of citizenship is evident in global hierarchies and divisions that exclude millions from the privileges of legal recognition and create psychological identity divisions. The tension between the legal and personal dimensions of citizenship suggests the need for a paradigm shift away from traditional national sovereignty to address the realities of a world where globalization means that civil identities are more fluid. Addressing these issues requires not only policy changes but also a shift in values, moving from exclusion to inclusion and from competition to collaboration. Governments could adopt policies such as Canada's private sponsorship model for refugees, enabling communities to actively support newcomers and promote integration, and countries could strengthen regional agreements, like the EU's Schengen Area, to facilitate trade and mobility for mutual benefit. As former U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon stated: "Borders are not the problem; the way we manage borders is."



Soloaga, I. 2023 Volunteer distribute supplies to migrants in Northern France

Fallacy of Protection: Women in London vs the Met Police

CONSTANCE CRESWELL

Content Warning: Rape, Male Violence, Police Brutality

Women in London have been haunted since March 2021 by the infamous abduction, rape and murder of 33-year-old Londoner, Sarah Everard, at the hands of Metropolitan Police constable Wayne Couzens. This horrific event triggered widespread and ongoing critique of the Met Police as a public consensus of distrust in the institution has solidified.

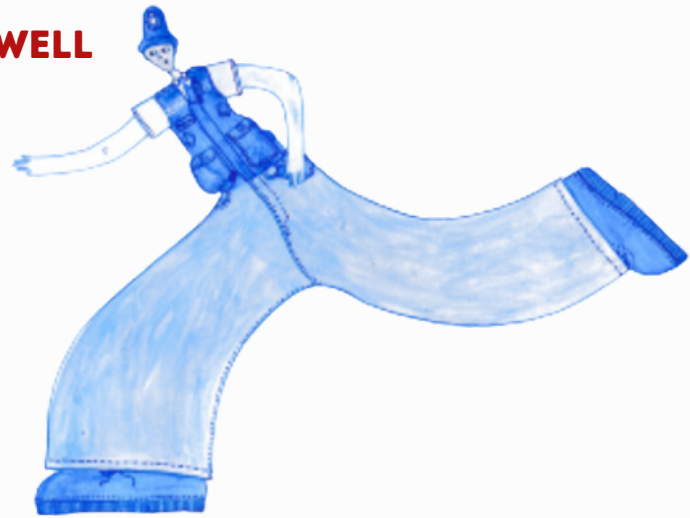
I dove into the institutional aftermath, looking at wider critique of the Met Police and spoke to women in London to hear their thoughts.

On the evening of the 3rd of March, 2021, 33-year-old Londoner Sarah Everard, was walking home to Brixton Hill from a friends house near Clapham Common, when she was stopped by an off-duty Metropolitan Police constable, Wayne Couzens. Couzens identified himself as an active officer who

was arresting her - he handcuffed Sarah and placed her in his car then transported her to Kent. He then raped Sarah, strangled her and burnt her body before disposing of her remains in a woodland pond.

Two years after Sarah's murder, on the 7th of March, 2023, an "independent review into the standards of behaviour and internal culture of the Metropolitan Police Service" was published by Baroness Casey of Blackstock, a Crossbench peer and former British government official, from whom the review took its name: the Baroness Casey Review (Casey Review). This incredibly thorough and dedicated 363 page review came as a necessary responsive action after Sarah's infamous case. It concretely found the Metropolitan police to be institutionally racist, sexist and homophobic, and in need of radical reform.

The news that Sarah was missing spread far and wide on social media soon after her disappearance on March 3rd 2021, and I'm sure that many of you reading will remember the moment that reports came out that it was in fact a Met Police officer who had abducted her, and then the later, more horrifying, (but expected by many) moment when we heard that she had been raped and murdered by that same police officer.



The following sentiment of women nationwide was that it could have been any one of us. It sparked immense fear and reinforced the fact that women are simply not safe to exist in a society so riddled with male violence against women.



"The Met Police Are Rap_sts!" graffiti seen in Tower Hamlets, Image by me

Movements both online and off prompted conversations around the epidemic of male violence against women, with women begging men to do better and be better, with vital and growing critiques of the police system in tandem. Those already painfully aware that the police system is historically and institutionally built to fail us saw their concerns being given air time, with many expressing frustration that it took a white woman's abduction for people to reflect and take seriously the deeply flawed, sexist, racist and bastardised police culture in the UK.

In September 2020, the body of 21-year-old Black woman, Blessing Olusegun was found on Bexhill seafront. Her death was hastily dismissed as "inconclusive", and "non suspicious" by Sussex Police and it garnered little to no media attention or public outcry.* Many compared Blessing's case to the contrastingly huge public and institutional response to Sarah's death, begging the question: would Blessing's death have been dismissed with such haste if she has been a white woman? Most likely no

Habiba Katsha, writing for the Independent, said “I know that I could have easily been Sarah but I don’t know if my case would be treated the same. It’s scary to think if I went missing, the news of my disappearance could vanish as easily as I did. This is why it’s so important to factor in Black women in these discussions.”

A survey commissioned after Sarah’s death by The End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAWC) showed that 47% of women (and 40% of men) reported their trust in the police to have declined, with 1 in 10 women being less likely to report sexual assault to the police because of the incident. The survey also found that 65% of people think that the government should do more to prevent violence against women.

Alongside investigations such as that done by the EVAWC, the incredibly concrete Casey Review holds up a vital mirror to the Met Police, the British police forces and the policing system as a whole. They must confront what this mirror is showing - that the way the police system is built both permits and encourages abuse of power by the very worst people in our society, and that without total radical reform of the system, citizens cannot even begin to feel safe under policing power, let alone under the Metropolitan Police.

In an interview with Crest Advisory about the Casey Review Baroness Casey emphasises the need for the Met to “accept the totality of (the Casey Review), because it is the totality of that culture (institutionalised racism, sexism and homophobia) that has to change”. She goes on to critique implementation of performative strategies saying its often a cheap way institutions to claim they’re anti-racist or anti-sexist because “**being anti-something is easier than accepting that you’re it**, and that your organisation has to change.”

I spoke to a handful of women in London to get a citizen’s perspective. I asked, “three years on from the horrific and haunting abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard at the hands of Metropolitan Police constable, Wayne Couzens, do you feel safe around the Met Police? This can mean simply in the presence of the Met Police, or knowing that you have to rely on them in emergencies / if you ever need help.”

Out of the 40 people I spoke to, **95%** said **no**.

When asked to elaborate if they felt comfortable one woman said simply “I wouldn’t feel safe going to them in any situation” another said “seeing their presence on the street feels like a threat, I would rather ask a civilian for aid.” A particularly telling account was a woman who told me “absolutely I don’t (feel safe). I’ve turned to them time and time again in my hour of need and been met with disdain, belittling and no help.”

You would be correct to assume that the Met police has in fact not embraced the important critiques, it has not radically reformed itself in the years since Sarahs murder or in the year since the release of the Casey Review. Although one may suggest that we could hold out hope that maybe change will come with time, but hope in an institution that has time and time again failed so many is clearly not enough.

In February of 2023, a month before the Casey Review was released, David Carrick, another Met Police Officer, was found guilty of being one of the worst sexual offenders in modern history, thanks in huge part to his ability to abuse the power of being a police officer.

This is another case of gross institutional idiocy - Carrick’s misconduct had come to the attention of the Met and other forces **nine times** prior to October 2021, yet none had any impact on his employment at the Met Police, Another disappointing and unsettling example of the Met Police’s disregard for the seriousness of sexual offences / violence against women, **especially** when it comes from within its own forces.

Since Carrick’s arrest, two inquiries have been opened looking into how Carrick was permitted to carry on serving as an officer despite the numerous criminal/misconduct allegations against him, inquiries that although will iron out the details and illuminate individual acts of negligence, will likely come to the same conclusion as the Casey Review - that the Metropolitan Police is (alongside other services investigated in the Carrick related reviews) institutionally sexist and abhorrent in its handling of officer misconduct.



Going forward, we can wait to see if these thin promises of anti-sexist policies and more diligent officer vetting processes come to any fruition, but as Baroness Casey made clear, it is far easier for the Met to treat the symptoms of a rotten system rather than up-hauling and facing, head on, the deformed, bastardised institution that is the Metropolitan Police.

girl, it's so confusing sometimes to be a... feminist?

The Contradictions of Feminism in the 21st Century

Angelika Etherington-Smith

Feminism in the 21st century is a tapestry of progress, empowerment, and contradiction. It has successfully pushed boundaries in many areas, from workplace representation to cultural narratives. Yet, this progress is often accompanied by tensions that complicate its trajectory. Whether it's the mixed messages in popular media, the precarious nature of female leadership exemplified by the "glass cliff," or the uneven implementation of feminist policies, modern feminism finds itself at a crossroads. While its goals remain admirable, the execution sometimes undermines its own ideals.

This piece critically examines these contradictions, probing the challenges of translating feminist principles into meaningful action. In doing so, it highlights the need for reflection and recalibration within the movement, urging a conversation that is both celebratory and introspective. What can you and I do better? What do we need to look out for? And when is a seemingly feminist move in fact a guised patriarchy working hard to enforce lasting and damaging stereotypes about women's leadership potential?

Cultural Narratives: Surface Empowerment or Lasting Impact?

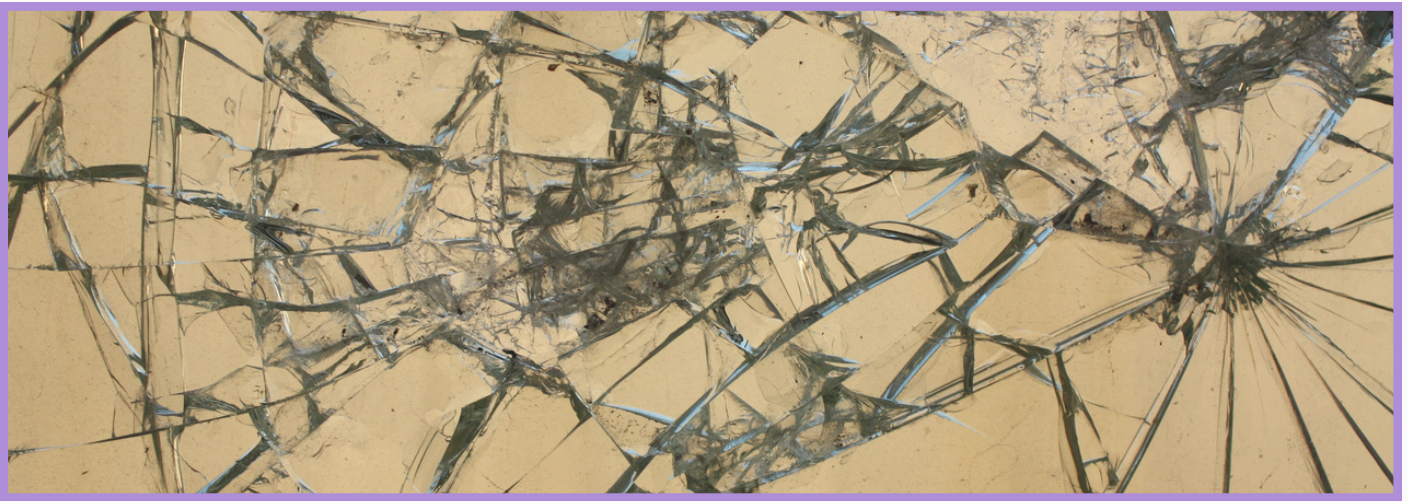
Popular culture has long been a battleground for feminist expression, often shaping public perceptions of the movement.

Films like *Barbie* were celebrated as feminist milestones, with their bold messaging about gender roles and societal expectations. However, such narratives are not without their critics. Despite its glossy feminist packaging, *Barbie* was criticized for offering a message that felt superficial, failing to propose substantive solutions to systemic issues. Similarly, social media trends like "Girl Math" and "Girl Dinner" attempt to celebrate aspects of womanhood but often walk a fine line between empowerment and trivialization.

While such trends resonate with audiences for their relatability, they can inadvertently reinforce stereotypes about women's priorities or behaviours. These examples highlight a recurring theme: the tension between feminist ideals and their translation into mainstream culture. Do these narratives challenge the status quo, or do they merely offer feel-good moments that leave systemic inequalities intact?

The Glass Cliff case study: A Precarious Victory

Beyond cultural representation, feminism's contradictions become even starker in the professional realm. The "glass ceiling," which symbolizes barriers preventing women from reaching leadership positions, has been a focal point of feminist advocacy for decades. Yet, breaking through it often reveals another challenge: the "glass cliff." This phenomenon refers to the tendency of women to be appointed to leadership roles during periods of crisis or organizational decline, setting them up for a higher likelihood of failure. Linda Yaccarino's appointment as Twitter's CEO is a prime example. Following Elon Musk's tumultuous tenure, she inherited a company rife with challenges, from declining user trust to financial instability. While her appointment was celebrated as a step forward for women in tech leadership, it also underscores how such opportunities often come with disproportionate risks. The Glass Cliff reveals a critical blind spot in the feminist movement. While celebrating women who rise to leadership roles, there is insufficient attention to the conditions under which these roles are granted. Are these appointments genuine opportunities for empowerment, or are they scapegoating tactics that ultimately reinforce patriarchal structures?



Western Feminism's Global and Local Gaps

Western feminism, often seen as the vanguard of gender equality, has its own set of contradictions. While it champions progressive policies and global initiatives, these efforts are frequently criticized for being overly prescriptive or culturally insensitive.

For instance, campaigns for women's rights in the Global South sometimes fail to account for the cultural and social nuances of those regions, leading to accusations of neocolonialism. Even within Western contexts, feminist policies often fall short of their intended impact. Consider maternity leave policies.

While they are framed as empowering, many fail to address the broader economic pressures women face when re-entering the workforce. This often leads to a scenario where policies ostensibly designed to promote equality end up reinforcing traditional gender roles. These gaps illustrate the importance of intersectionality—a concept that emphasizes the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender. Without an intersectional approach, feminist policies risk becoming one-dimensional, benefiting a privileged few while leaving others behind.

At the heart of these issues lies a fundamental question: How does feminism hold itself accountable? Progress is undeniable, but so are the contradictions that accompany it. Critiquing the movement is not an act of betrayal but rather a step toward its evolution.

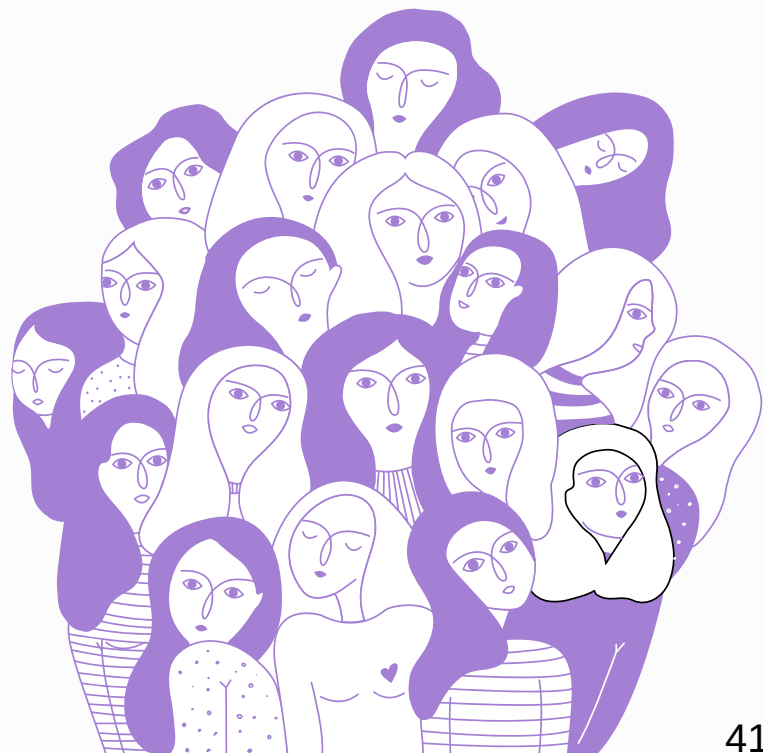
For instance, celebrating films, campaigns, or policies without examining their deeper implications risks diluting feminist ideals. A meaningful feminist critique would ask whether these cultural products or policies challenge systemic inequalities or simply package feminism in ways that are palatable to the mainstream.

Furthermore, feminism must confront its blind spots. Issues like the glass cliff are rarely discussed within mainstream feminist discourse, yet they represent a growing concern.

Addressing such phenomena requires moving beyond surface-level advocacy and delving into the structural conditions that perpetuate inequality.

The contradictions of 21st-century feminism are not insurmountable; they are an invitation to reflect and adapt. By acknowledging its own limitations and biases, the movement can build a more inclusive and effective framework for change. This means engaging with cultural narratives critically, addressing systemic issues like the glass cliff, and ensuring that policies are intersectional and impactful. Modern feminism has achieved much, but its work is far from over.

As it grapples with its contradictions, the movement has the opportunity to reaffirm its relevance and reshape its strategies for the better. The movement must not only celebrate progress but also confront the uncomfortable truths that accompany it.



The Lost Art of Compromise



Lev Stockmann

When centre-parties forget how to constructively work together, democracy suffers - especially in a country like Germany where the forming of a coalition government is a necessity under a system of proportional representation. But on 6 November, 2024, the ruling “traffic light coalition” (a reference to the traditional colors of the parties involved) between the Social Democratic Party (SPD) of Chancellor Olaf Scholz, the Greens, and the centre-right liberal FDP led by former Finance Minister Christian Lindner, collapsed. The self-proclaimed “progress coalition”, set to lead the way into a new era following 16 years of Angela Merkel at the top, ended in disaster.

"Too often, Federal Minister Lindner has blocked laws on grounds not related to the matter. Too often, he has acted in a petty, tactical, party-political manner. Too often, he has broken my trust." With these harsh words directed at Lindner, Chancellor Scholz verified what had already been debated in public discourse for months. The sacking of Lindner and the subsequent exit of the FDP in the dispute over the 2025 budget, confirmed the third-ever coalition breakdown at the federal level since World War II.

Meanwhile, the dispute over attributing responsibility for the coalition's end rages on. On the evening of November 6, Lindner himself painted a completely different picture of the events in response to the Chancellor's speech: "His precisely prepared statement this evening shows that Olaf Scholz was no longer interested in a viable agreement for all, but in a calculated break of this coalition. In doing so, he is leading Germany into a phase of uncertainty."

D-Day, hidden divisions, doubts and dismissals

However, it seems that achieving a viable agreement had long ceased to be on Lindner's agenda. Not even four

weeks after the end of the coalition, the FDP published an internal document, dubbed “D-Day”, which set an outline for preparing for the coalition's demise. This publication came after most of the document's content had already been reported by various news publications. Lindner claimed to not have taken notice of the paper even though its author was one of Lindner's closest allies within the party for several years.

Unsurprisingly, it wasn't only the FDP that had serious doubts about the coalition well before its downfall. As Scholz revealed in the aftermath, he had been considering dismissing Lindner over the budget dispute as early as the summer. The impression left by these events is a fatal one. It appears that, months before the coalition's inglorious end, the parties involved did not have a genuine interest in or desire to keep the government together until the next regular election in September 2025. Instead, the parties presented various partisan scenarios, with each one seeking the best way out of the unappealing relationship.

The transport minister trades his party for the coalition

Regarding the FDP's considerations, one discussed scenario for continuing the coalition was reportedly only supported by Federal Transport Minister Volker Wissing. Notably, he did not resign the day after the coalition collapsed, unlike the two other remaining FDP ministers, but stayed in office and left the party.

Wissing's comments on the coalition's work offered a revealing glimpse into what happened behind closed doors: "We are in difficult times, and I believe the government would have had more chances if it had worked together more cohesively and stronger from the beginning." But such cohesion never materialized in a coalition consisting of conflicting ideologies from the start.

Public disputes between coalition parties and the rise of the far-right

At the start of its term, the coalition admittedly faced a much more hostile geopolitical climate than its predecessors had. Russia's invasion of Ukraine posed massive problems for Germany, exposing the country's dependency on cheap Russian gas and led to an urgent need for additional defense spending on Germany's long-neglected military. Moreover, a ruling by the Federal Constitutional Court declared the government's 2021 supplementary budget unconstitutional, which blew a 60 billion Euro gap in the government's budget.

These challenges were undeniably huge for an ideologically mismatched coalition, which ultimately, did in fact fall out over the budget. Nevertheless, the way the parties handled these circumstances must be scrutinised. Time and again, finalised compromises were publicly questioned after the fact, by members of each of the three parties, sending out anything but a signal of unity.

Instead, the tone between the three parties often resembled that between the opposition and the government, rather than between actual coalition partners. The political chaos perceived by the public was likely a contributing factor to the unusually high level of dissatisfaction with the government, which, in turn, may have helped propel the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) to its currently extraordinary position.

For the past year and a half, the AfD has consistently ranked second in nationwide polls—ahead of all the coalition government parties—and, in September, won a state election for the first time in Thuringia. Although the AfD currently has no coalition partners and is unlikely to assume government responsibility in the near future, the shift is nonetheless significant.

Centrist parties: Infighting instead of cooperation

The breakup of the traffic light coalition is even more damaging, considering that there now most likely won't be a coalition between any of the involved parties on the federal level anytime soon, significantly shrinking the options in the political centre. And it doesn't stop there. Even long-standing, recently uncontroversial political combinations are more and more at risk.

The Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (CDU) and the Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern (CSU), typically referred to as the Union (CDU/CSU), has shifted back towards a more conservative ideology since Angela Merkel's chancellorship ended. Recently, the Union has adopted a tone of hostility towards other centrist parties in its pursuit of right-leaning voters, contributing to the increasingly toxic political climate in Germany.

This resulted in CSU leader Markus Söder repeatedly ruling out a coalition between the Union and the Greens

after the next federal election. While Friedrich Merz, the CDU's candidate for the next federal election and the person who currently has the best prospects of becoming Germany's next Chancellor, did not rule out a coalition with the Greens, he has frequently referred to the Greens as the CDU's main opponent since 2022, triggering criticism within his party.

This is a noteworthy development, considering that the CDU and the Greens currently govern together in five federal states. Additionally, a coalition at the federal level with the FDP failed in 2017 not due to differences between the CDU and the Greens, but because the FDP ended talks with the other two parties.

How a polarized centre polarizes the nation

In the wake of the coalition's collapse, the parties involved are far from healing the current destructive political climate. In this respect, Chancellor Scholz' speech, unusual for the head of a German government, due to its direct and personal attacks on Lindner, is worth questioning. Merkel criticized Scholz for this, saying it was not a good example of the dignity of the Chancellor's office.

Such partisan antics should be avoided at all costs in order to prevent Germany's polarized political climate from escalating even further. A view abroad should be enough of a warning for centre-oriented politicians not to exacerbate their verbal disagreements. The example of Germany's close ally, the United States, especially, shows how drastic political polarization can affect society, which was highlighted by particularly dramatic instances such as the January 6th riots and the two assassination attempts on Donald Trump.

While Germany has not yet reached such extremes, a clear trend in this direction is emerging. All parties, regardless of their political orientation, must take responsibility and avoid further fueling societal tensions with their rhetoric.

The breakdown of Germany's government: A reflection on the state of Western democracy

Ultimately, the focus of the government should be on substantive debates, not ideological red lines, which make compromise-driven cooperation incredibly more difficult. This willingness to compromise was, for years, a strength and cornerstone of the stability of Germany's multi-party system.

However, this willingness appears to have been lost among the actors in the traffic light coalition. They can be seen as a fitting example of the growing instability of Western democracies, increasingly threatened by authoritarian ideologies. In times where the influence of social media and filter bubbles on individual thinking thrives unchecked, the task of centre-oriented politics should be to counteract these trends and growing polarization with pragmatic policies - not to reinforce them.

Confronting Loneliness in Individualism

Kak Lok Ng



Loneliness. This inevitable yet oddly beneficial experience permeates each of our modern lives. From the solitude we desire to the alienation we fear, the paradigm is tied to larger societal commitments to individualism. As we will explore in this article, ways to combat loneliness and reclaim authenticity, one must recognize the ‘intrinsic power’ of the self and find an equilibrium between freedom and belongingness.

Utilitarianism is tainting our generation.

Although we cannot entirely accuse individualism as the source of all our void, it necessitates the tenets of selfishness, instrumentality, and homogeneity to serve for individualistic 'self-love'. As psychologist Erich Fromm argues, self-love requires acceptance rather than suppression of our authentic identity, and selfishness is a reflection of one's insecurity by their pursuit of satisfaction that could never be met. However, under individualism, everyone ‘should’ get the most benefit out of others. We objectify others and also are objectified into a commodity with different values to this society, we are stressed to adopt performative identities and follow the market feedback. Furthermore, due to modern society’s

prioritisation of external success rather than internal growth, we are often faced with growing personal alienation. Everyone initiates relationships upon (temporary) happiness and benefits rather than common virtues; hiding our feelings, personalities, and passions from colleagues; not expressing our opinion and desire out of fear having expectations unmet, dominated, belittled, or be deemed odd, vulnerable and “unsuccessful” in the eyes of others. Eventually, our relationships grow more distant and shallow.

We have mistaken societal ideologies that were created for productivity as a personal pursuit. Mixhael Sanfell argued that the biggest inequality in this world is social recognition. Under the myth of meritocracy, another consequential tenet of individualism, we determine our own value by measuring material success, even though such success fails to reflect genuine effort or ability. It seems to me the problem under individualism is not that we do not feel like we belong, it is that we are systemically unable to feel like we belong.

Are we acting for our genuine self fulfilment or



chasing a rush of escapism? To combat the societal tendency of homogeneity, we must actively pursue what intrigues us and promotes our inner growth. The true self is an entity “with all his potentialities” while the social self is a ‘role’ necessitated by society for the “objective social function.” Martin Heidegger stresses that we can only live an authentic life if we strive for our non-social self. Considering individualism is a social structure that we are incapable of changing, we have to seek power from ourselves – that is faith in our identity and capability – during any crisis.

Solitude, the positive endpoint of individuation, and Flow, a tool to reclaim emotion:

Individuation, the human process theorized by Carl Jung, follows this order: primary ties, education involving frustration and prohibitions, loneliness, and centralization (i.e., living in the real world). Loneliness reinforces the difference between the individual and ‘them,’ and it forces us to either succumb into an autonomous personality, symbiotic relationship, and destructive mindset, or relationships involving love and productive work that values our individuality. Only the latter would lead us to the stage of centralisation – “when one has become an individual, one stands alone and faces the world in all its perilous and overpowering aspects.” In this stage, we would ideally live on inner values rather than external validation that has less effect as

we consolidate our personal identity, which is done by maintaining an equilibrium of belongingness (belonging to society) and freedom (free from society). Although it is relatively easy to obtain emotional (not existential) belongingness from like-minded and supportive communities, for freedom, it would be obtained from the realisation of our individuality and independence.

Solitude here is not a physical isolation but a state of mind free from external objectification. Being-with-others = Being-in-the world = Being-with. We are living with others in solitude through self-objectification. By naturally minimising external awareness and objectifying our emotions, we could conclude our individuality from the objectives of our emotions. Every single aspect of ourselves is constantly shifting and adapting to the world with the same nature, therefore, contemplation about our identities and experiences is crucial to navigate a distinct future and affirm our uniqueness, and this could only be done when our mind gazes solely on ourselves. However, we need to acquire an initial sense of ‘self’ from authorities (something/ someone that we keen to follow) to navigate the ‘self’ with assurance and courage, and so there would not be an excessive amount of void that destroys our ability to think. Solitude is a reverberating event that catalyses independence, newness, and emotional authenticity, with the most valuable rewards being our courage to confront life. To combat the sense of insignificance under societal instrumentalism, we have to start taking more control of our life and live in our will – one way is to participate in a task of Flow. ‘Flow’ is a state of mind that we reach in solitude, when we get so attentive in doing something that we could no longer mentally and physically distracted by others, including utilitarian judgement. It often occurs in tasks that perfectly equilibrate difficulty and our skill, therefore, bringing us both excitement in challenges and recognition of our ability, most importantly, it increases our intrinsic power. Manifesting in diverse settings, it could take the form of a writer, entirely engrossed in crafting the story and absorbed in their thoughts and words, or even a sports player making split-second decisions, momentarily unaware of the crowd or even their own fatigue. By constantly doing tasks that bring us the Flow, we are more certain about both our will and power to become ‘ourselves’.

Growth in life often involves pain.

When Michael Sandell says our society needs better education about civic virtue and solutions to issues of the day, I started wondering if loneliness could be considered a privilege – a sensation of insufficiency from someone with abundant resources to not feel lonely. We feel lonely over the absence of something not part of our Self, like a romantic partner, social media recognition, or a constant companionship. As Adler's theories suggest, all symptomatology has a core telos (i.e. purpose), contemporary loneliness seemingly stems from a twisted personal pursuit that consumerism and materialism constantly feed us. Considering that most socially deemed successes are fundamentally paradoxical and unnecessary to Eudemonia (i.e. human flourishing), if loneliness exists merely to serve our greed and external validations, life would be forever lonely. As Carl Jung regarded depressive emotions as a "libido (i.e. psychological energy) hibernation", and as Stoicism advocated, seeking inner strength and living in peace with ourselves is the only sustainable way to live our life.

Drawing on another key thinker, psychologist James Davies argued that personal revelations buried in the subconscious such as instincts, drives, and personalities could only be obtained if one descends into the deepest depths of our emotions, such as loneliness. Reflecting on the period of transformation in his own life, it never comes with comfort and happiness but uncertainty and fear. "... satisfaction achieves nothing but a painless condition in which he is only given over to boredom..." said by Arthur Schopenhauer. When you expose yourself to the pain, your individuation would then be complete. It is no longer imaginary, it is realistic and full of life.

The Purpose of Life is not predetermined.

We derive meaning by engaging with the world, shaping purpose through the actions we take and the fulfillment they bring. It seems to us that if we have a purpose in life, we would no longer be afraid of existential loneliness; while this is somewhat correct, it offers only an incomplete picture. Meaning is not given to us, it is our conclusion after completing anything in life. **Carpe diem – for the pursuit of life is what makes life meaningful.**

Despite all the frameworks that have been advocated,

I do not agree with a lifestyle to follow or a need to seek meaning and answer in everything, they are just some perspectives that provide a sense of relief if we are getting overwhelmed by aloneness. As this article serves for a liberation rather than constriction of worldview, any takeaway is up to the way our audiences process information. I want to sacrifice all the delusional happiness I have under protection and comfort to pursue a new freedom under pain, to get a taste of the wracked reality and appreciate it.