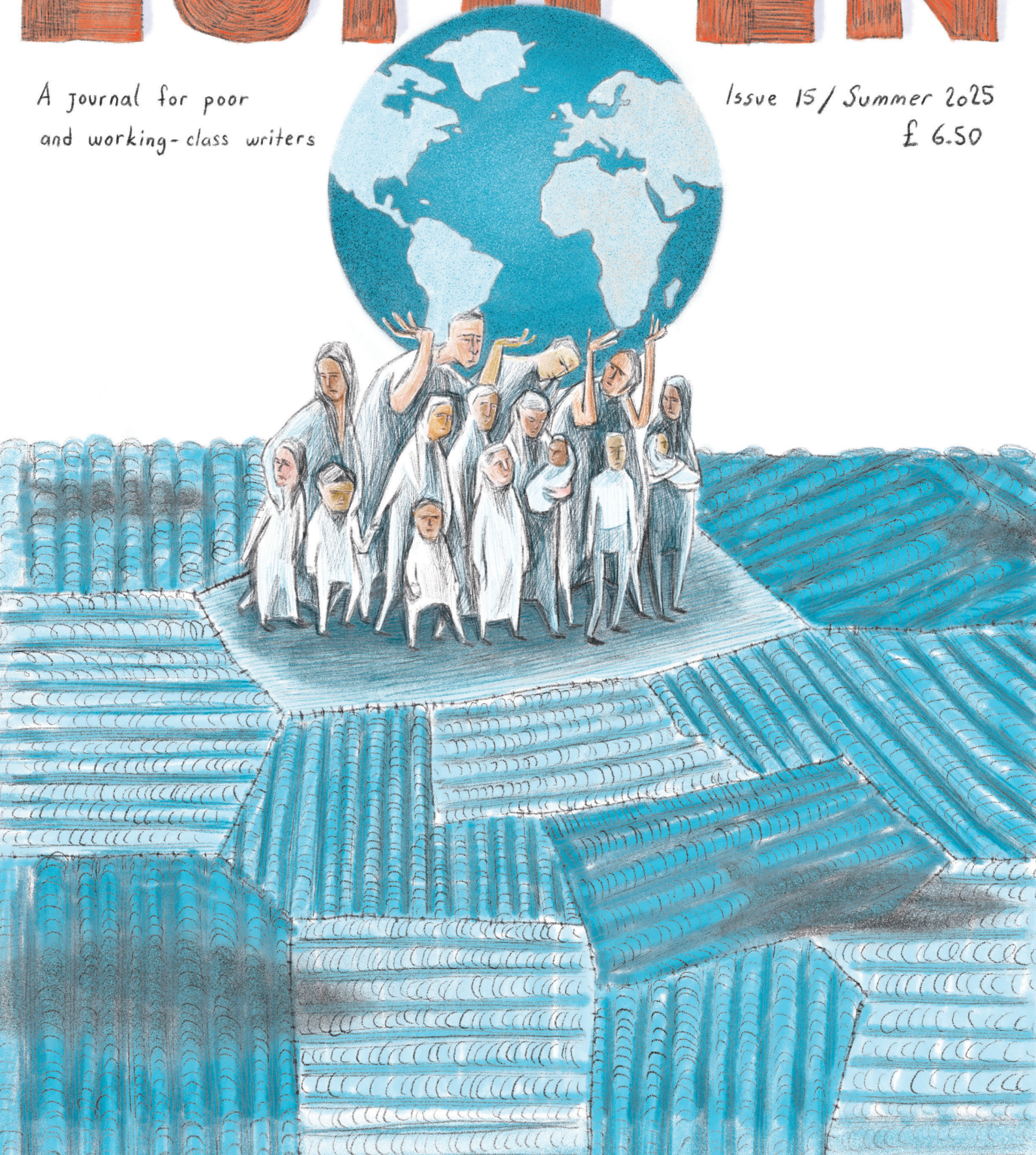


LUMPEN

A journal for poor
and working-class writers

Issue 15 / Summer 2025
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LUMPEN#15

A JOURNAL FOR POOR AND WORKING CLASS WRITERS

MIGRATION

LUMPEN: A JOURNAL FOR POOR AND WORKING-CLASS WRITERS

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Each author asserts their moral right to be identified as the author of their respective work

We printed this issue using an online print service because printing co-ops aren't affordable to us. All workers still got paid. But sadly, there was at least one boss involved in the process of publishing this journal.

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EDITORIAL

Zosia Brom

The first time I had lived experience of how deep class division in the UK runs was shortly after my arrival, when a much younger version of myself began my first romantic relationship on these isles. ‘It’s not gonna last,’ remarked someone I used to share a squat with, a someone who was merely a passer-by in my life, ‘he’s too working class for you.’ Obviously before that I was aware of how the British perceive class and how embedded class-based divisions are in British society, a theoretical knowledge I had due to my general political leanings but also, such is the association between Britishness and class that I actually remembered my school’s English teacher explaining it to us, a bunch of kids sitting in a school somewhere in rural Poland. I also remember my bafflement with the discovery that Elisabeth Windsor et co aren’t kept merely as a tourist attraction, but instead this country is rather serious about the monarchy and its outdated rituals, concept of divine destiny, inheritable aristocracy status and all the trimmings such as an unelected legislative power aka the House of Lords: all ancient concepts I was under the impression were put to bed in Europe sometime between 1848 and 1918.

But this passing remark about my personal life was the first time someone presented it to me so bluntly, and also while making far-reaching assumptions about what they assumed they knew about my background and experiences, applying their British-centric stereotypes of class to it and then spitting out this, frankly, completely fucked unsolicited statement.

Back then, it took me a while to process what just happened. Firstly, the class prejudice of course, coming from someone I already considered full of themselves: a rich English kid temporarily playing so-called alternative lifestyle before disappearing back to their little comfortable life: anyone who has had any experience of squatting should be familiar with the type. But secondly, I was amazed how the remarker was apparently both able to perfectly assess my love interest’s class background and get it absolutely wrong with mine. There was an assumption behind what they said, and it was that I’m too good for this particular guy I was into, and that it is a natural law. And this assumption really puzzled me because, even if we for the moment look at the world with the prejudiced lenses of the person making the statement, it was hilariously misjudged and reflected exactly nothing about who I was. I was dirt poor, and it certainly wasn’t a predicament new to me. I didn’t have parents giving me access to bank of mum and dad. I wasn’t going to inherit any riches. I was working in a fish & chips shop, only to few years later become a push bike courier and then a landscaper, which were the three main sources of my income all the way until my early 40s

when I, by this or that miracle managed to land this job, the one paying me for navel gazing to you in an editorial of a magazine, but most importantly the one that does not require me to work outdoors rain or shine, delivering other people’s parcels or laying rolled grass on some posh bastard’s lawn while worrying about how much longer my knees are gonna last in all that while patiently allowing the said posh bastard to ask me questions such as, “oh you are Polish, surely happen to know a good cleaner?” the honest answer to which would be something like, ‘yeah I do, but fuck off’.

All of this was ignored to vomit this prejudiced statement out, based, I believe, on the fact that other than the above, I also held a higher education degree (from a country where free education is guaranteed by a very much written down constitution), I was able to hold a conversation about most general knowledge trivia, I was rather well-read, I spoke two languages, and all other of my cultural capital features that are considered as sure-tale higher class indicators by, well, the type of people who know nothing beyond a stereotype about the working class. There are plenty of such people in some progressive circles, the same circles where it is impolite to talk about money, so we are politely not asking each other about what we do to get them and whether it’s working or simply going to the magic hole in the wall to, without fail, find them there.

This experience, while certainly flagrant due to it also expressing a strong prejudice to the British working class,

is just one of many I’ve had when my own class status was routinely misjudged based on myself not fulfilling some kind of standard of what passes for working class among the higher classes in the progressive left, the same classes who are also more than happy to downgrade or blur their own backgrounds to take up the seat on the table of the class discourse in the UK that simply should not be theirs. This relates to the general tendency in the British society to see migrants as a special type of demographics, people talked about but not with, people perhaps worth helping and supporting, but not necessarily including. It recreates the divisions between “the working class” as opposed to “the migrants” that are peddled by the likes of Nigel Farage. It’s harmful, unfair and counterproductive. It needs to change.

With this issue, we give space to people who have lived experience of migration. With it, we attempt to normalise such voices in the class discourse in the UK. We also give some space to British working class people to talk about how they see issues such as migration, racism, Britishness.

It’s important to note that we aren’t going to stop including migrants in what we do on this issue only: it is merely a part of a wider set of projects and activities we are busy developing in our drive to challenge some tendencies in the left when it comes to migrants and class discourse, as well as forward the idea of migrants as a legitimate part of British society: an effort both ambitious and worth taking, especially given the trends in the mainstream politics to sow divisions based on people’s places of birth, which increasingly results in shameful and terrifying events such as the racially-motivated riots from Summer 2024 and, more recently, in Northern Ireland, making building links between different groups of people inhabiting the UK even more urgent than before. •

IT MIGHT BE TIME TO MIGRATE. AGAIN.

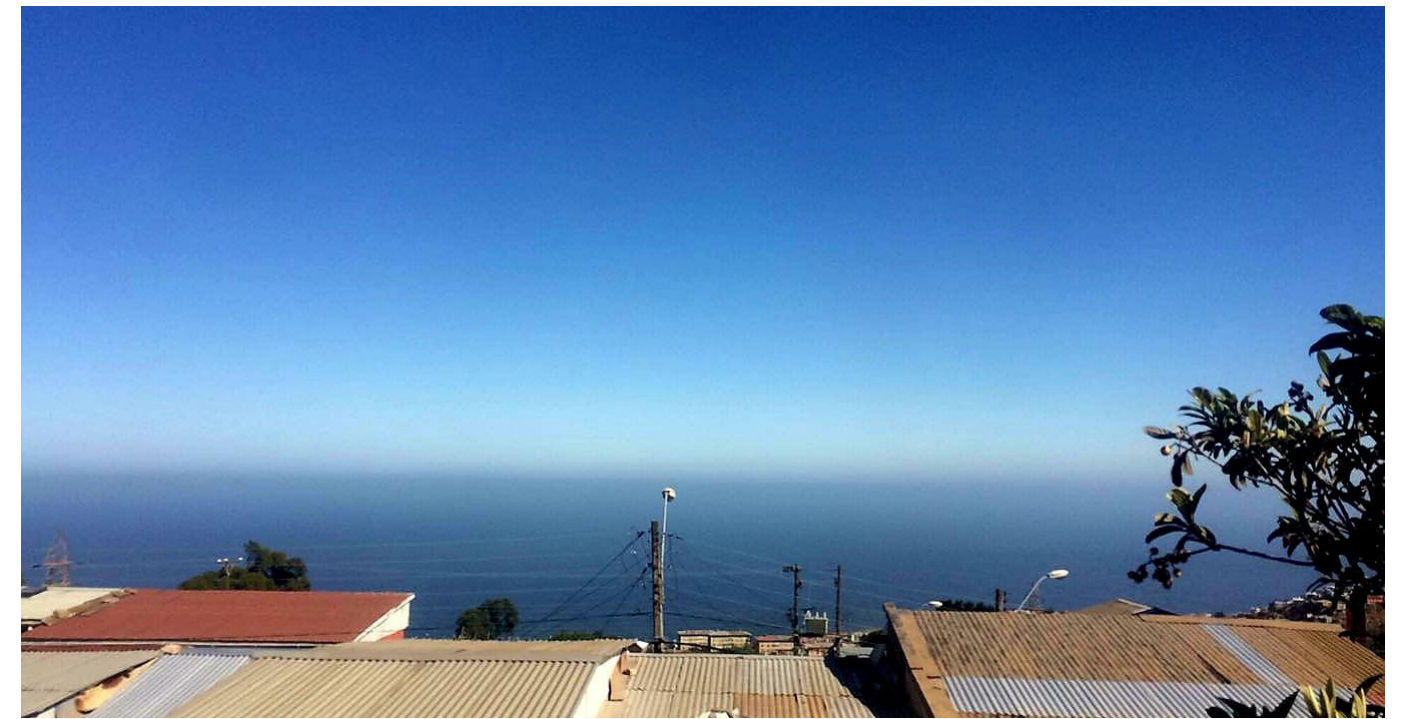
RUD{e}

I was eight years old the first time I migrated. Mother had an urgent operation that could not be done in our city. We moved from Valparaíso to Santiago when I was 11 - Chile of the mid 90's. We were living with an aunt's family, husband and three daughters. It was a joyous experience in so many ways, for instance, I had never spent so much time with them. I remember creating choreographies, to the soundtrack of a popular 90's children's TV show, with the youngest. I can't remember when we moved out to live in Renca. During the time I spent in Santiago, I went to three schools, all very different from each other. They were the places I learned I spoke differently to others for being from another city and using different words and tones, and they would point it out a lot. I remember one friend fondly, she was from the first school I went to, she was also a neighbour. She knew how it felt, the isolation, the humiliation and the abandonment from those who were supposed to care. When I was eight years old, I peed on the classroom seat in front of the whole class. I can't remember what happened for me to get there, all I remember is hearing laughter while I intensively stared at the

paddle around the tiny feet. She was the only one that stood up for me. When I moved to the next place in Santiago, we lost contact.

Mum had two or three jobs, in a shirt factory and caring for a couple of families; sometimes I got to go with her. At one of the houses, I watched for the first time The Little Mermaid and the whole Disney collection available then, at the other one, I discovered Cartoon Network and Nickelodeon. I absolutely enjoyed being spoiled by Mum in such comfortable surroundings. I still missed the sea though. I remembered opening the curtains of Mum's room and staring at the horizon and the Pacific ocean, I used to feel very tiny.

While mum worked at these houses, I explored gardens, tree houses, and played with dolls. I got to see the life of those living near the foot of the mountain and went everywhere by car. There were different family



The Pacific view (author's own)

dynamics, I saw another side of Mother, and another social reality. Where we lived was dustier, darker and less greener. It also felt cramped in comparison with the open skies of the mountain.

It was in this period that the older brother hit me for the first time, when the memory comes on its own, my body remembers the fear, crawling to open the door, where he kicked me a couple more times, before I ran out of the flat. I walked for a bit, to the nearest bus stop, and I stood outside a bakery, thinking that Mum would get off there. I waited for hours. In Playa Ancha, the hill in Valparaíso where I am from, I could have run to my neighbours' house. That was a safe place for me. I felt so loved. I still do. They are family. When the bakery closed, the

cashier spoke to me kindly and took me to her flat. It turned out she lived in the building opposite us. Mother was so worried, I don't remember well what happened after the lady dropped me to the flat. All I know is that I never stopped being scared.

After almost 3 years of our arrival, we packed our things and migrated back to Valparaíso. There was so much during this period as well, that I am still processing much of it. I went back to the previous school, the same class room. The adaptation period was sort of ok. I integrated into lots of activities, a marching band, brigadier, choir, you name it. I kept to a few activities while I slowly started changing. I always talked back, but this time it came with an attitude, not the nice kind. That big mouth got me the first black and a half bloodshot eye. I will never forget the warm feeling of the older brother's fist rubbing on my face, until a friend grabbed me by the arm and pulled me. She broke a spell, I could

now hear the shouting, her screams and a cold wave moving through the body. We ran as fast as we could to the house she lived in. I slept with meat on the eye until mum was back, and asked to go back again. She took us to the hospital, the eye didn't look well to her. I just felt deformed. The doctor looked at me and asked how it happened, Mum did the talking, until the doctor asked to step out and sit with the older brother. I felt her eyes full of tears looking at me through the door. I kept the lie. For a long time, I asked myself whether he hated me.

Years later, when I was 15 years old, Mum made the decision to migrate to London, by herself. Brother now 19, in the navy and with a son, stayed in the same city. I was sent to live in Santiago with a different auntie, husband and daughter, favourite cousin in the whole entire world. Because yes, favouritism exists. This time, I didn't adapt very well, at all. I can say that I have learned a lot about myself from this period, as it is this part of me that helped me survive once and I am sure it can do it again, just this time around, I want to hurt nobody. Or at least the least amount of beings possible and hopefully never with intention. After learning about capitalism, feminism and mental health, much of what happened here started making sense. Still not yet processed. Some ghosts still keep coming back to visit.

When I turned 18, I migrated to the UK to join Mum and brother, who had joined her the year before. There is the assumption that people who travel to the UK might want to stay forever, at that moment, I didn't know

what I wanted or had the time to process what was happening. There was a lot of bureaucracy and proving that I could survive by myself with no help from the state. I was so nervous when we landed, a person offered to help me with the hand luggage and we walked together to passport control. I told him it was the first time I had been on a plane and outside the country. I got to pass~' for having very poor English, so I immediately asked for a translator. The level of intrusion in the life of others to get permission to enter another country was scary. In my head, exploring the world sounded amazing, fed by TV series and movies and magazines, the real life put to test everything I knew. A few minutes into the interview, the person that helped had also offered to show me how to get to the tube, and waved at me, the officer stared at me and says "You said you came alone", that accusatory tone felt aggressive and I stumble the words to the translator "I just met him", one of the officers signaled a colleague, who then talked to the gentleman, he looked at me and waved goodbye. After a couple of hours a passport control officer arrived with the suitcases. I live in survival mode, which means the brain is analysing the

'There is the assumption that people who travel to the UK might want to stay forever, at that moment, I didn't know what I wanted or had the time to process what was happening.'

worst case scenario of situations. Yes, anticipating. Sending the body messages that it is actually happening. Both hands were sweating. The officer offered me the luggage and the documentation. I was finally out hugging Mum again.

The novelty of the city, the excitement of learning a language that I had already been practicing and a new found sense of freedom called me to merge with the city. I experienced many things in London, and now after 20 years I have learned to name them. One of them happened on the way home after a long day at work. I had met one of the flatmates, we spoke Spanish together. Near Tottenham Court Road Station, a group of teens got on. One of them lit a cigarette, another passenger slapped it and walked off. We kept to our conversation. At Camden Town, one of them got off and banged on the window from outside. It startled us

and the whole group started laughing. Soon after, we started hearing them shouting at us "speak English, we are in England". We just ignored them. Until two of them jumped on us. I could feel the air going and cold hands on the throat. I wiggled my legs just to feel another pair of hands on them. I don't remember how long it had been when I felt the hands lose the grip and I jumped up to punch the face in front of me. When I lowered my hand, I noticed the police at the front of the bus staring. They took the flatmate and me off the bus and proceeded to ask questions. In the corner of the eye I saw the bus moving. In basic English I tried asking what was happening and where the teens were. When the answer was, "we saw you throwing the punch", in the guts I felt a hand crawl up the throat and grab the vocal cords really tight. I don't remember what happened after, I just remembered them leaving us feeling really confused. I don't even remember how we got home. The hands stayed on the neck a couple of days more. After two years of studying English, working extra shifts, and enjoying time with friends, I made the decision to go back to Chile. I was home sick and I didn't see or have in London what I see and have now 20 years after. Community.

I noticed that every time I migrate, my luggage becomes lighter. I arrived in Santiago to study with the idea of becoming “independent”. As a good child of the system, I wanted to win the rat race, and in my 20s, I had enough energy to do it. In one of the cinemas where I worked while I was studying, the nickname given to me by one of the supervisors was Ritalin (drug to deal with ADHD traits). It is not until now that I believe what they saw in me then. I had gone back to Santiago with the London rhythm, and things just happened one after the other. To me life is built by little moments that might have seemed to go slow, but now that I have gotten older, I see them in fast motion. I worked at two different cinemas whilst studying for a year or so. Then I started working in an office full-time. After a year and a half, I met my future husband, began to study again, and I became a Mum. During the 5 years I spent in Santiago, I lived many lives.

In March 2010, with a two-year-old toddler, a couple of suitcases and a sleeping bag, we arrived in London, after a long bureaucratic process, again, which was beyond my understanding. We received a lot of support from a friend that had gone through the same a few years back. The privilege of arriving with a visa, reduced the questionnaire to the bare minimum and removed the stress of the first experience. This time around, I met a different side of London and I fell for it. Each of the migrations had taught me something different about myself and about the world. I strongly believe that it is in London that I was able to start peeling the layers of the armour

I created along the travels. Also, in each of the travels there were friends. I was never alone.

Now, after 15 years, I’m closing another cycle in London. Who knows. It might be time to migrate, again. •

RUD{e} is loud, bold and resilient - a personality forged through both, fear and courage, allows her now to share in front others her mind rambles. You can find her on Instagram: @real.utopian.dreams



Image: VeraJane Vickers / Public Domain

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A JOB STEALER

Tomasz Halnowski

I am a Polish immigrant living in the UK. I originally moved there to attend a university, and during my study I worked as a picker¹ for an agency at a warehouse of a major British retailer to support myself. I worked there on a zero-hours contract for a total of 3 years. The story below is a semi-fictional account of my average work day during that time. Currently, there are over one million workers employed on zero-hours contracts here in Great Britain, many of them immigrants and young people. I wanted this story to show the situation that many of them find themselves in, having to cope with lack of job security, low pay, poor working conditions, no possibilities for career progression, and, in some cases, abuse, all in the face of inaction from labour unions, and growing anti-immigrant sentiment, as expressed not only by populist politicians like Nigel Farage, but also by top figures within the British government. This story is also an expression of my personal experiences. It was during my time in that warehouse when I became interested in writing. I wanted to show that art can bloom even in the drudgery-filled reality of warehouse

work. This is why I decided to split segments of this story with fragments of my old poems that I wrote during that period.

*Sweet when I want, bitter when you have to be,
But like the wind, always, always with me,
Who would I be without you, my black tea!*

I'm woken up by the sound of a lawnmower right outside my window. It's 9:30 am. My alarm didn't wake me up again. Oh well. I make myself a quick breakfast – two grilled onion and cheese sandwiches with Worcestershire sauce. I can't bring myself to eat anything other than grilled sandwiches for breakfast these days. I'd love to make myself some scrambled eggs instead, but I rarely have enough time for that in the morning. I try to relax a bit while enjoying my food. I'm trying to think that today is gonna be a good day. I finish the sandwiches, and

savour the last sips of my tea. I sink into the couch while looking at the rays of the Sun making their way into the living room. Five minutes later, I have to get up and get dressed. Band t-shirt, ragged hoodie, torn jacket, cargo pants, and worn-out steel-toes. I should ask my manager for a new pair of boots, they give them out for free anyway. I've only had these for a month, but they already have holes in them. I should probably ask for a fresh pair of gloves while I'm at it, but they probably won't have my size.

*Crocuses crack the ice
Leaves sprout, the cold leaves
Returning birds bring warm winds
And the shining Sun melts
Our cold frozen hearts*

I get off the train. The weather is warm, but not hot, and very pleasant. Perfect for a day-trip or a hike or a walk. Wish they'd just cancelled my shift today. I make my way to my usual corner shop, and buy an energy drink and a chocolate bar. I walk across the street to an ATM, and withdraw 20 quid for lunch at the canteen. As I make my way to the warehouse, I look at people's front gardens, at trees and at bushes. It's spring. Everything is blooming, and the air is thick with the smell of flowers. I pass through an overgrown footpath, trying my best not to step into a pile of dog shit. I see a local cat that I managed

to befriend a few weeks ago. I pet him for a while and keep walking. The footpath leads me to a thin patch of woods on a steep slope. As I make my way down, I can see the all-too-familiar shape of the warehouse appearing from behind the trees.

*In this country
This one big warehouse
Everything is supervised*

I notice my friend Darek² standing next to the smoking area. After our usual greeting ritual, he mentions that one of our co-workers, Maria, had her shift cancelled. "That's weird", I say, "because yesterday one of the managers told me that there'd be a lot of work today". Darek says someone told him that Maria called in sick a day before she went on holiday two weeks ago, and this is the management's way of "teaching her a lesson". I pass through the gate and head into the managers' office. I see one of the new ladies arguing with Mihail, one of our supervisors. I can't understand much because they're both speaking Bulgarian, but I can make out a few words. It seems like she wants a day off next week, and he doesn't want to grant it. She storms out of the office after a minute or two, leaving just me and Mihail. I tell him that I need a new pair of boots. He lets out a deep sigh, and gets up from his chair. We go to the reception to ask for a key. He then takes me to the storage room, and hands me a pair. I thank him, and make my way to the changing room.

‘I know exactly what he’s about to say. He says that my pick rate’s too low, and that I had some still time around 20 minutes prior. I tell him that I needed to go to the toilet, hence the still time. He says that I took 6 minutes and 14 seconds, which is too much.’

For eight hours a day

Five days a week

Eternally

Bananas bananas bananas

Bananas. It’s 12 pm and we’re getting bananas already. And of course my AMT³ points me to a pallet of bananas as soon as I log in. 45 cardboard boxes. I grab a PPT⁴ and make my way to the warm hall⁵. As the gate to the hall rolls up, my nostrils are hit by an onion-like smell. I pass through. 0 to 15 degrees Celsius in a few seconds. I sneeze. I walk up to my pallet, and pick it up with my PPT. I leave my jacket on one of the coat-hangers in the corner of the hall, and get to work. I can see there’s a long queue into the fruit alley. 30 or so people, from one end of the hall to the other, all with pallets of bananas on their trucks⁶. I lean against my PPT. After a few minutes, I finally get to the first cage. The air reeks of rotten eggs and fresh fruit, and the only sounds I can hear are the beeps of our scanners and Jackie Wilson’s “Higher

& Higher” playing on the radio. Every now and then the droning cacophony of Northern soul and high-pitched noises is broken by a swear word in one of the many languages spoken at this warehouse. One 20-kilogram box after another, I slowly make my way past rows of cold steel cages. I curse myself for not picking up a new pair of gloves as the handle cut-outs leave an impression on my exposed fingers. When I get to the bend where the alley does a U-turn, I decide to leave the queue to park my PPT, and go to the toilet. My pick rate⁷ isn’t gonna be great anyway.

You see

When you’re useless

You’ll never get used or abused

So don’t expect too much from me -

Through my idleness, I am excused

After a few more pallets of bananas, my rate rises from the 51% I had initially up to 74%. It’s an improvement, but still not nearly enough. Can’t do much more with so many people around, though. The queues are just too long. I’m about to head to the managers’ office to ask for some delay time⁸ when I see Mihail, clipboard in hand, walking up to me. I know exactly what he’s about to say. He says that my pick rate’s too low, and that I had some still time⁹ around 20 minutes prior. I tell him that I needed to go to the toilet, hence the still time. He says that I took 6 minutes and 14 seconds, which is too much, and that I should keep an eye on the time I spend away from my PPT. Bastard knows I’ve got IBS. “Alright, boss”, I tell him, and ask him for some delay time, and to move me to the cold hall. He says he’ll see what can be done, but I know he won’t do anything. I’ll have to ask one of the supervisors from the late shift.

Oh, to be forgotten!

To have my whole past

Burned away completely

To hide in a deep hole

From the whole world

And to cease living without dying

It’s 2 pm. The morning shift people are finishing work and going home, and the afternoon shift is starting.

I can see some familiar faces streaming into the hall for the next batch of bananas. I greet those I’m on friendly terms with, and pick up my pallet. I manage to finish it quite quickly, and finally get moved to the other hall. I put on my jacket, and walk through the roll-up gate. I sneeze. The sweat on my back makes me feel cold, but I start feeling comfortable after a while. My AMT graces me with sandwiches. Couldn’t ask for a better pallet, I think to myself. Not only because it’s light, but also because the sandwich alley is empty right now. And it’s a multi-product pick¹⁰, so I’ll be able to improve my rate easily. I start working through the pallet, taking my time and trying not to rush too much. Around halfway through the alley I stop, take a look around to make sure there’s no one nearby, and pull out my notebook to write down a rhyme I’ve just come up with. I carry on with my pallet, making sure to pick the last few items in reverse order. When I go to pick up more sandwiches, I can see that my rate has gone up by 10%.

But what is this? The multitudes depart!

Oh, rejoice, you bones which have been humbled,

For where they stood now stands a wooden chair!

Be glad, my worn-out frame! Take heart, my heart!

For you were beaten, and kicked, and crumbled,

But here, rest you may; God answered your prayer!

Around 5:30 pm I park my PPT and go on break. My lunchtime passes uneventfully and way too quickly, and at 6:00 pm I clock back in. On my way to my truck, however, I notice that there are barely any pallets left, and people are idling around waiting for

work. I check my AMT, but I don't get any work either, so I head to the podium to get a no-work card¹¹. I scan the card, and sit down on my PPT's bonnet. I look at the wide and open expanse of cold concrete under my feet, illuminated by the snow-white LED lights fixed on the ceiling. I look at my co-workers, who are chatting with each other, drinking that God-awful vending machine coffee, walking around the warehouse, or otherwise enjoying their unplanned break. It feels heavenly. My little moment of Zen is abruptly ended when a Cockney senior manager walks up to me from behind and tells me to stop sitting on my truck. I get off it, and shortly after my AMT directs me to pick up a pallet of cabbages.

*The tedium of my short days
Torments me to Hell and back
When, then, and where
Am I to enjoy the little things?*

As I was expecting, my shift ends early at 8 pm. The joys of zero-hours contracts. I feel like I should be pissed off because this month's council tax payment set me back quite a bit, and I wouldn't mind some extra quid, but I can't be bothered to care. I think I finished my shift with a pick rate of 86%, but I'm not sure. It should be just about enough. I see Darek standing by the gate on my way out. We set off for the train station together, chatting along the way. We both wonder why we were given 10 hour shifts, only to get sent home early. We both shudder when the flower-scented wind blows as our worn-out hi-vis vests shine in the darkness. We both stop at a corner shop to get something to drink. The night is chilly and the Moon is

full. Beer flows from aluminium cans straight into our mouths which keep uttering complaints, primarily about our union reps. The loss of our Christmas bonuses hurts almost as much as our feet, especially considering we didn't even get to vote on it. We leave our grievances and empty beer cans behind as we get onto our trains, each going in opposite direction. I get home, take a shower, eat a sandwich, drink some more beer, and write poetry. •

Tomasz Halnowski is an aspiring writer and a Polish immigrant living in the UK. His primary interests include poetry, music, hiking, the rapidly deteriorating state of the world, and cooking. You can read more of his texts at his website: fermenteddiary.neocities.org/

1 In the context of warehouse work, picking involves taking pallets of products using PPTs or manual pump trucks, and unloading their contents into cages. Each cage is destined for a specific shop, so it is important that the picker makes sure that the correct product is picked into the right cage.

2 All names have been changed

3 Arm Mounted Terminal – a small computer with a scanner attached to it. In the context of warehouse work, AMTs are used to scan barcodes of products and cages, as well as to direct pickers to specific pallets and locations. They are also used to keep track of their

performance, and how much time they spend not working (e.g. going to the toilet).

4 Powered Pallet Truck – a pallet truck with a heavy battery and a motor, able to reach speeds up to around 10 km/h. A much more comfortable alternative to manual pump trucks. These can be, however, prone to breaking down, and require regular battery changes, typically done manually by pickers themselves, which can be quite difficult for some as a battery may weigh over 125 kilograms. These batteries are also often prone to leaking, which can lead to dangerous accidents, especially when eye protection goggles are not provided.

5The warehouse I worked at was divided into two halls – one for products which required refrigeration, such as sandwiches and meat, and one for products that did not, such as fruits and dry goods.

6 See 4.

7 The overall performance of pickers at my warehouse was expressed as a percentage, though the exact formula used to calculate it seemed to be a mystery even to our supervisors. It was possible to go over 100%, though most people tended to score lower than that. The minimum required rate changed over time, and was around 93% when I started, however it was later reduced to 85%, which was still difficult to achieve.

8 Supervisors can add delay time to a picker's rate under special circumstances (e.g. heavy traffic, PPT breakdown, etc.) in order to offset any delays out of their control they may have faced, effectively improving their rate.

9 Still time is the amount of time a picker spends without scanning any barcodes, i.e. not working. A manager is notified when a picker's still time reaches 5 minutes.

10 Some pallets may contain more than one product. These are often spread across different layers on the pallet. AMTs treat such pallets differently, and calculate performance rate separately for each product, leaving room for cheating due to bugs in the system's code.

11 At times when there is no work available, pickers are given special cards with barcodes, which they can scan at clock machines. These cards effectively freeze their pick rate until a new assignment is assigned to them.

ON THE VIOLENCE OF SURVIVAL

Esraa Husain

Confinement in my lifetime embodies multiple constitutions. Confinement in a dress code, in a language, in a certain gender expression, in a jail cell, confinement because of bigotry and confinement in memory. Sometimes, one incident can combine more than one form of confinement. I remember I was arrested for my gender nonconformity in 2015 which is a crime according to article 198 of the Kuwaiti penal code.

[I remember playing with sand,]

The officer asked me about ‘tahweel’¹. I remember not understanding what the question was. In Arabic, the word could mean a movement of location, or it could also refer to movements and transitions in the body, my body. *Is the officer asking about my gender transitioning?* I can play along and claim: it’s only a buzzcut. It’s only my gym outfit that appears masculine. Yes, it is true all my clothes are from the men’s section, but only because they are comfortable!

And my body hair? That’s just because I’m lazy and don’t feel like shaving all the time! It’s not an invitation to question my gender. The other officer stopped using my official registered name and started calling me a ‘Mohammad’, to affirm his belief of my gender and to belittle me by renaming me without my consent. But it just leaves me confused because my boy-name is actually Hasson not Mohammad. I’m also wearing a navy T-shirt that says ‘there are more than two genders’, in English, but I bet they cannot read into that.

[I remember a minute of loving; being embraced,]

I remember being taken into the storage room of the Forensic Evidence Building. I see a trans woman getting ready to be captured by his camera. I noticed her sleeping gown, and a tattoo of red lips on her

‘Within the asylum system here, being jailed is being ‘detained’ or ‘confined’ – according to the Home-Office documents. I remember asking an officer in Aberdeen what he meant when he told me he would ‘detain’ me, and him addressing as many words as he could in English to explain but failing to mention the part where he would interrogate me with a recorder in a room then lock me in a cell with an exposed toilet, under constant surveillance.’

left thigh. She plays with her hair and looks at me. I remember him asking me to leave and within that same breath asking her to take her clothes off. He said, *‘wait outside while I deal with him’*. She is getting undressed, and I see her breasts, then I leave.

[I remember the barbeque with my cousins in AlKhiran resort,]

I remember how the system failed me in my early twenties, being jailed for the first time, for imitating the opposite sex. I shared the cell with foreign women asking the officers in fragmented Arabic mixed with English why I was placed among them instead of being inside the men’s block. One officer shares

with the cell block that my official gender identification is female to ease the women’s anxieties and concerns towards my presence, then he closes the cell’s door. He uses a tissue as he does this, not wanting his flesh to touch the handle. Their hostility calmed, two women approached me and showed me their purple bruises and scars. Another woman offered me a bottle of water. I remember I withdrew, not for the last time. I failed to show my friendliness and laid on the floor facing the wall in a foetus position.

[I remember my first tattoo being inked around my arm,]

I found out that being jailed in the UK comes under different terms. Within the asylum system here, being jailed is being ‘detained’ or ‘confined’ – according to the Home-Office documents. I remember asking an officer in

'I want to address the confinement that I alongside thousands of Black and people of colour have faced when the racist riots took place in the UK in 2024.'

Aberdeen what he meant when he told me he would 'detain' me, and him addressing as many words as he could in English to explain but failing to mention the part where he would interrogate me with a recorder in a room then lock me in a cell with an exposed toilet, under constant surveillance. He thought the issue was connected to translation and me not being a native speaker. Saying 'detain' might make him feel better, but eventually it is me being *jailed* in a cell, yet again, under a different constitution that is deemed to be tolerant and accepting, in opposition of the Kuwaiti penal code that is unconstitutional and violating Human Rights. Language is full of suspense and translation is sometimes tragic. I left one country for another; I left one cell to be incarcerated into another.

[I remember reaching the summit of Ben Lomond,]

The brutality of confinement that I have witnessed growing up in Kuwait continued

under different names in the UK. The brutality of racism is the one most prominent. I want to address the confinement that I alongside thousands of Black and people of colour have faced when the racist riots took place in the UK in 2024. Forced to stay indoors to avoid attacks. Feeling so helpless against fascist groups that felt bold and comfortable enough to terrorise thousands of people with no consequences. This memory is not mine to hold, it's for all of us. For the history records. For better futures.

[I remember flames and waves while chasing the Northern Lights,]

It was a sunny Sunday. I went to the local gym for a quick session. I came back home to cook brunch for my girlfriend, grilled halloumi and tomatoes, smashed avocado on toast



Riot outside the Southport Mosque/ StreetMic LiveStream

and a fruity smoothie. We decided to visit a friend to gift him with a lamp. Holding my girlfriend's hand and walking side by side. Our friend lives in the same neighbourhood as ours, right next to the local post office. He came downstairs to meet us. We hug and laugh and joke. He loved how colourful the lamp was, and I loved how colourful my day was, feeling safe, confident and so in love with my girlfriend, and so grateful for my friend's warmth and joy. Then there is a white man walking towards us, interrupting, cursing under his breath, and asking us to fuck away. It was a moment of unease, but we silently agreed on moving away from him both physically and mentally. We bring back the focus to our friendship and we share how lovely the lamp would be if placed in the living room and noting how lovely is my friend's hairstyle. My friend

says it's difficult to find a good service for his Afro hair texture in Glasgow. Both my friend and my girlfriend mention the abundance of services tailored to the Black communities in London, including barbers and hair salons. The white man comes back, and this time he yells at my friend, asking about his name, his home address, and the reason he stands in front of the building's door. My friend explains that he lives in this building and says, 'I'm your neighbour'. The white man kept questioning my friend about his presence, while completely ignoring the presence of my girlfriend and I who are standing right there with him. I step forward placing my arm in front of my friend's body and pushing him behind me. I face the white man and say: 'don't speak to my friend like this'. The white man reaches his arm and starts to strangle me. I can't speak anymore. I kick and push. My friend and my girlfriend are trying to help me. Everyone is shouting and pushing. I suffocate. The white man keeps choking. Once we broke from the white man's grip, I roared.

[I remember deadlifting 92 KG,]

I'm at work on Monday. Attending meetings with my team and chatting about developing a programme to be delivered at the Refugee Festival Scotland 2025. Meeting with volunteers. Replying to emails. Saying hi to coworkers. Going on a lunch break and seeing the white man's face in every white man's face. I'm fuming. I'm at my second job on Tuesday. Attending meetings with my team and chatting about organising activities for the Just Active group. Meeting with community members. Replying to emails. Saying hi to coworkers. I'm upset with my girlfriend, my friend and the world. I call Breathing Space phone number before going to bed. I'm working on my PhD on Wednesday. Writing and editing a chapter to submit to my Annual Progress Review. Replying to emails. Meeting with my supervisors. I can't go to sleep. I call Victim Support Scotland. It's my second working day at my second job on Thursdays. Attending meetings with my team. Replying to emails. Wishing my coworkers a nice weekend. Crying while walking back home. I'm working on U Belong on Friday. Organising the next event titled Fighting Stereotypes + Community Meal. Meeting with participants. Replying to emails. Then switching to the PhD work; more reading and more writing. More editing and more self-doubt. The weekend arrives – recovery.

[I remember the coldness of the Fairy Pools in Skye,]

[Memories of Freedom.] •

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1 Esraa Husain, 'The Required Labels', in Kohl: A Journal for Body and Gender Research, 4, 1 (2018), pp. 124-125 (p. 125).

TWO LANGUAGES, TWO LIVES

Bilingualism and the Under-represented Voices of Immigrants

Anna Zekthi

I am the child of immigrants. Young, naïve me would have never realised how stigmatised my mere presence would become, but still, I carried an intuition that many people looked at us differently. Many years of my adolescence were spent schooling in a non-diversified environment.

When my parents came to pick me up after school, their Albanian accents would boldly draw attention. Some other parents, unfamiliar, would look at them as if they had been assaulted by their accents. My parents' difference was camouflaged, not being physically apparent, but being very noticeable audibly. Then was my first familiarity with the sinister belief: I am the *other*.

Unfortunately, I grew ashamed of my own heritage. Wanting to fit into the majority, I tried to bleach myself

of my own ancestry as my teenage years hit. In an attempt to silence the conversation about my foreignness, especially to stop those who mocked it, I would recoil when people asked where I came from. Even if their curiosity was purely intended, I tried to avoid the conversation outright. It's a pity that this became of my relationship to my identity and heritage during my teen years. I live with extreme gratitude that this internalisation was unlearned quickly into adulthood, with changes in circumstance and maturity.

Now, it seems ridiculous that I harboured such shame over my heritage. Nonetheless, a young me felt it was necessary to hide my heritage to fit in with the majority. With the wisdom of age, not only do you discover how wrong you were, but you also uncover how advantageous it is for your existence to transcend borders. How your mere existence becomes a fusion of cultures, how we children of migrants embody two nationalities within one. How we grow familiar with two or many more languages, casually.

‘When my parents came to pick me up after school, their Albanian accents would boldly draw attention. Some other parents, unfamiliar, would look at them as if they had been assaulted by their accents.’

Unfortunately, I never picked up my native language well. Both languages, Albanian and English, were spoken in my household, and toddler me only spoke gibberish, my parents say, fluently. A visit to the speech therapist was proven necessary due to my delayed development that showed no light of improvement. Here, my parents were met with the advice that would impact me until today: **only speak one language to your daughter.** The therapist’s reasoning, according to my parents’ recollection, was that two languages overwhelms a developing child, and speaking one will avoid this conflict. When not thought about deeply, it makes sense; two words for the same thing is a confusing concept, and a child probably cannot orderly distinguish between the two. My parents dutifully adhered to the advice given and only spoke to me in English, and from there my pidgin Albanian was born. My parents actively avoided all Albanian around me until my English grew proficient, but by then my family were so familiarised with exclusively talking in English to me that I became a very efficient

Albanian language repellent. This topic was left dormant in my family for years, only temporarily resurfacing when meeting family who can only speak Albanian and cannot speak English, and we would need to communicate through the powerful medium of *body language*. I was re-exposed to this topic full-frontal during a language in the brain class taken during my bachelor studies. It was then that I fully conceptualised just how misunderstood the world of bilingualism was and how it still impacts us, and how it impacted me.

The advice provided to my parents is now outdated and no longer reflects what is commonly offered to bilingual households. The advice presently is to speak in one dominant language but infuse the secondary language into conversations to still expose the

child to the other language so as not to inhibit its development. It is usually expected for development to take longer in bilingual children, as it takes a child longer to semantically process that there may be two words for “dog” as opposed to just one, but importantly, this processing will occur. Patience will do the trick. It is only in the 1980s that the narrative of bilingualism in children began to change, from being seen as having negative consequences on development to shifting to positive. A landmark study within the field, conducted by Peal and Lambert, found that bilingual children outperformed monolingual children in both language tasks and non-verbal spatial tasks¹. This differs from what was predicted: that bilingual children would perform worse in language tasks. From here, the realm of bilingualism in developing and adult minds shifted, with more current studies finding that bilingualism can protect against cognitive decline and delay symptoms of dementia in older age². Research has also expanded across bimodal bilingualism, which refers to those fluent in a spoken and signed language, which also has similar neuroprotective effects³.

With all this current research that paints a story entirely different from what we previously believed about bilingualism, it makes one

think about how we could have been just so wrong. How was it that my parents were so vehemently deterred from something that is so beneficial socially but also neurologically? My hypothesis? We do not respect or listen to immigrant voices and experiences enough. For too long I believe we chose to look over the experiences of those whose existence fuses two languages and two borders. Perhaps it was expected for the languages transported to new lands would be lost, but I hope this research will bring light to just how important expanding language horizons and the preservation of native languages are. •

Anna Zekthi is a psychologist who specialises in neuroaesthetics and human creativity. Her writing focuses on science, culture and the human experience.

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2 Bialystok E, Craik FIM, Luk G. Bilingualism: consequences for mind and brain. *Trends Cogn Sci.* 2012 Apr;16(4):240–50.

3 Li L, Abutalebi J, Emmorey K, Gong G, Yan X, Feng X, et al. How bilingualism protects the brain from aging: Insights from bimodal bilinguals. *Hum Brain Mapp.* 2017 Aug;38(8):4109–24.



Image: Daniel Lobo/Public Domain

THE VANISHED

Marijam Didžgalvytė

The Leftovers - an American TV series that ran from 2014 to 2017 and pretty much cleaned up at the awards seasons during those years - had a fantastical premise: 2 percent of the population suddenly vanished. One in every fifty people, gone. Some of the remaining weren't as affected - what are the odds? - perhaps they knew someone at school who had disappeared. But Nora Durst (played by Carrie Coon, of *The White Lotus* fame) lost her entire family: her husband and two children. The show's three seasons trace the grotesque, absurd, and often unhinged ways the remaining 98 percent of people process the loss. All the ways grief twists reality, the variety of ways it drives people mad.

The show is deeply spiritual, otherworldly even, but still, the human tragedy it portrays is nothing compared to a mass exodus that

received no such cultural treatment. In the decade between the mid-2000s and the 2010s, around 20 percent - one in five - of Lithuania's population left in search of economic survival.

I was one of them. A bright kid who grew up in a bohemian, poor but sexy family with theatre critic parents. In 2008 I packed my 17-year-old's belongings, said goodbye to my burgeoning, adorable little life as a brooding activist and ska-punk singer, and joined my mum in East London with 12 other Eastern European migrants in a tiny terraced house, where she moved to work in a clothing factory for pennies.

Every time I'd go back to Lithuania for one occasion or another, my dissonance to the country that I had left behind became wider. Not only is this mass migration treated as some natural disaster, not to be spoken of, just something to contend with. Even my beloved comrades and friends from my teenage years would perceive me as some "from abroad"

kind of girl. Yes, there was, especially amongst our circles, a layer of the golden youth who went *abroad* for uni, but they should have known it was my story.

When anybody questions my materialist views, it's impossible not to respond that I wish I wouldn't have to be as focussed on any of it myself, it just happens to be that my existence is fundamentally tied to my existence in the class relations. Migration, which tore me away from my community and thrust me into another one - London anarcho-squatter scene - is all tied to class. My parents' anxieties, my own awkward shuffle across the class spectrum of activist spaces - all of it, class. Lithuania losing nearly a third of its population since independence from the Soviet Union? That too. It is hard to become anything else, but an Anarchist, when the state that you were born into - leaves you with little else than sustained self-esteem, daddy rejected me issues. But because it's about class, it's left unspoken, unexplored.

We are the lost generation. The children who look longingly and with deep seated jealousy at peers our own age in the countries where we were born, unbothered by the bouts of neuroticism that poverty and manoeuvring to a new country and its ways of being, one as strange as the UK not least, we never chose this. Ours is a generation not vanished, but dislocated. Not mourned, but ignored. Minds and lives lost, but only in shy and private mundane tragedies.

I keep wondering: what would the reaction be if 15 million Brits fled the UK? Or even the actual third of the population of Ukraine - 12 million people. Europe and the rest of the world have to deal with a tiny two million people, and it's a war we're talking about.

Meanwhile Lithuania - now under the teat of EU (not NATO's any more, eh?), polluted with up-and-coming fin-tech nonsense, and other unicorn hopefuls, a burgeoning landlord class, privatised and proud - would rather depopulate itself out of existence than admit foreigners (oh, the irony!) or guarantee a decent standard of living for any hope of those who would entertain a return. The property bubble is so brutal, my apartment in central Copenhagen is somehow cheaper than a similar flat in not-even-central Kaunas - my hometown and Lithuania's second-biggest city.

This might all sound a bit regional, but I suspect it's familiar to many. Especially to those from the post-Soviet sphere.

'Be realistic - demand the impossible,' the Situationists taught me. So every time I feel insecure about my accent, or feel stupid for not understanding some custom or code in the places I'm meant to

'... every time I feel insecure about my accent, or feel stupid for not understanding some custom or code in the places I'm meant to assimilate into - even with all the privileges whiteness affords me - I remind myself: it wasn't my fault.'

assimilate into - even with all the privileges whiteness affords me - I remind myself: it wasn't my fault. Soon enough, Poland and the Baltics will smugly boast that their standard of living has overtaken the UK's. But I demand the nations that traded a temporary feeling of shame for generations lost to acknowledge their violence. The UK was perhaps a strict, inattentive step-parent, but still a better one than my birth one.

I demand an apology. From the politicians. From those who engineered the 2008 crisis and placed its weight on the working class. From those who shaped a generation into economic migrants, forced to justify our displacement with productivity or shame. No one wants this - not the Lithuanians who left, nor the migrants from the Global South now stuck at the Belarusian border trying to enter Lithuania. To my fellow working-class writers

contributing to this brilliant magazine, to the migrants among us, to all the readers - let's never take our eyes off the ones in power. Let's do it with gall, inspiration, and unity.

The traumas of poverty and migration aren't natural disasters, as much as they'd like us to believe. They're not some quasi-religious, extra-terrestrial incursions like in *The Leftovers*. Because, unlike in *The Leftovers*, we're still here. The vanished are just... somewhere else. Unseen, unsupported, undocumented by art, maligned. An inconvenience. Citizens of nowhere.

No Emmy for that. •

Marijam Didžgalvytė is a Lithuanian-Tatar writer. Her debut book, Everything to Play For: How Videogames Are Changing the World, is out now with Verso Books.

ALTERNATE CURRENT

ch'ixi proxy

The city never slept. But she did, as if the city fed off her to survive. She slept standing up at the traffic lights, slept when the metro brought her back to work. She slept with eyes open; tiredness always dominated her.

She couldn't remember exactly how she arrived in the city. Only fragments. The map of the city was coded in her mind. The wait in the transport hangar. The temporary implant so her accent wouldn't reveal her origin.

From the window of flat 87, Nain observed the flow of cars at night. The lights extend like liquid strands over the damp concrete. The cars go down the slope as if they followed the invisible channel of a river buried under the layers of history and asphalt. The city does not appear to have shores, a city without limits.

For a moment, the car lights fade. And, suddenly, the fresh breeze of the nocturnal cold feels watery.

The river appears. It goes up her ankles, it wets her knees, it caresses her thighs. The cold water from the south, from the river that spoke to her and

hugged her. The river from her childhood. The one that bordered her floodable neighbourhood. The one that was border, the one that defined the limits of the land, a known land, a land where she felt safe and sheltered.

She blinks.

Again, the city. But something remains: a wet echo between the legs, an internal current. In the suspended metro, her face is multiplied in the curved glass. Behind every reflection, another version of herself, but it's difficult to recognise oneself; identity is shattered amongst the ought to be of a city that doesn't forgive. Around her, other bodies slept too, connected to personal networks that whispered promotions, simulated dreams, bits of past news.

She looked at her reflection in the glass. For a second, the face wasn't hers. It was her mother's, with skin furrowed by the wind.

She blinks. It was her again. But in her cheeks she still felt the heat of the sun from the south, that one that didn't exist in the metropolis.

She blinks. One of those versions is not human. It has eyes with no lids and cables coming out of the neck. It smiles at her. The robotic voice of the metro repeats her name in reverse: Nian... Nian... Nian... She closes her eyes and the defeaning noise from the metro gives her a sharp pain in the temple. "Hurry up, miss" said a voice in between the martial sound of steps at the station.

Every step was an echo of the steps in the damp soil¹.

She gets to work: the factory vibrates with the assemblage engines. Nain was assigned to a special line: sensory microcontrollers for uteruses to rent synthetically. The contract specifies: "experimental use, heightened affective stimulation, duration until systemic failure or miscarriage".

The factory smelled of ozone and disinfectant. Her hands repeated the same motions for weeks: weld, twist, assemble.

Nain lowered her gaze. In her palm there was a small fish, transparent,

¹ Translator's note: this could also be land, referring to the homeland.

with sparkly eyes. When she blinked, it was no longer there.

She dreamt that she swam. Ancient voices spoke from the stones. She woke up in a white room, cold. She had been found talking to herself. A mental health protocol was activated at the factory. Three days rest. Three days with no connection to the general network.

Three days of freedom.

On the third day, she went out for a walk. She passed through the industrial sector, crossed the loading zone and continued until the limit where the city was dissolved in the fog.

There was an injured river. The river that had crossed the border with her, hidden in her memory. She kneeled and the water went up like a live animal, wrapping around her. She heard the voices again.

She returned to the lit up city. She was walking between screens that produced pain in the eyes. People were sleeping figures floating down the current. She saw a shop window, one of those shops where pain is sold in a collectable format. A transparent uterus, with incrustated circuits and a mutant embryo that glowed in the dark.

She imagined the embryo feeding on her memories, on her anguish, on the voices of her mother and other mothers. If it had roots, it would choose the mountain range. But here, in this city of metal and surveillance, there are no mountains. Only towers. Towers that surveil. Towers that rape. Towers that

walk without touching the ground. Nain is unrooted. A moss that multiplies with the hysteric speed of the city, that covers the wounds as it can, that doesn't take root but insists. A moss that turns into bacteria.

The river returns to fill her empty uterus, the river returns in her. Between nerves and tendons. Between the concrete and the fog, the river appears again. It's a glitch. An error in the system of visualisation of the city. Like a ghost she nears the edge of the lit up bridge, looking at the flow of the river. She lets go of her pain in it. She feels how the city takes her flesh away to give her a skin-mask, to endure the acid rain, the inquisitive drones, the emotional coldness. But with time that skin oxidised, leaving an open wound. Now the nerves sparkle, her skin turns fluorescent, and with it, other forms start to become visible. Bacteria, latent wounds, non assumed exiles. Her lit body is multiplied; the city doesn't know what to do with some much light.

She closes her eyes.

The lukewarm water went up her body as a current of unencrypted data. She felt each word in her encrypted language, each untranslated name. She felt the fingers full of mud. She was sitting on the bridge, looking at the reflection of the lights that moved with her.

"Stay?" a voice asked, "Or cross completely?" The river calls until she jumps to the real water. The city was left behind. The water receives her as an absent mother, as a daughter that returns. For a moment, she

stops being a body. She dissolves, the ego shuts down. And the only thing that remains in the continuous current.

More bodies received her, in the depths of the river, depths of the sea, bodies trapped in mistaken currents, languages without translation. Bodies that would remember the way back.

Since then, she appears sometimes where the voices of the past still code the future. Where the pain, the nostalgia, the desire and the error blend together. She appears as a glimmer, blending with the ghosts that beat at the fringes. She's a shining wound, moss over metal, ghostly flux. •

ch'ixi proxy: is a cyborg, community educator, and 'che' in the making. They formally studied design, cybersecurity, and pedagogy, and written in collective fanzines of poetry, horror, erotica, and science fiction. They participate in community projects promoting and educating about the use of free technologies. They are part of the Descuartizadora collective and the Tequionet cooperative, both of which focus on the development and use of tequiologies for communities.

'SHE DREAMT THAT SHE SWAM. ANCIENT VOICES SPOKE FROM THE STONES. SHE WOKE UP IN A WHITE ROOM, COLD. SHE HAD BEEN FOUND TALKING TO HERSELF. A MENTAL HEALTH PROTOCOL WAS ACTIVATED AT THE FACTORY. THREE DAYS REST. THREE DAYS WITH NO CONNECTION TO THE GENERAL NETWORK.'



Image: Maggie Jones/Public Domain

MIGRATION : THE LEVER OF POWER

Kiranmayi Vadlamudi

It is not a 'good' or 'bad' phenomenon in itself: to be 'pro' or 'anti' migration is a redundant question, which undermines the dignity of people who have migrated. Migration represents the diversity of humanity and human experience and does not singularly define people or their life trajectories. - Hannah Cross

When thinking about migration from global south countries, there is a tendency to separate the global structures that cause migration from the consequences felt in the global north. The discourses around immigration either evoke feelings of charity, tending to take on 'developmentalist productivist' outlook, or responses of fear tending to blame immigrants for all that is not functioning, such as rising homelessness, crime, unemployment, erosion of social welfare benefits etc. Immigration has become a successful distraction for domestic politics, drawing attention away from the structures and policies that cause these crises and inequalities. As a result, an immigrant has become the 'other', an unfortunate scapegoat and a victim of institutionalised racism and oppression. Unravelling the historical structures of colonialism and present-day neoliberal policies is

therefore key and perhaps the only meaningful way of understanding the causes of global inequalities and the causes of migration as well.

Colonisation played a two-part process in creating inequalities. A) It caused a huge economic drain of resources, wealth and human lives that put countries of the global south behind by several centuries across many indicators such as GDP, longevity of life, wealth, poverty, health etc. B) It introduced hierarchies of population, inferiorising people by their ethnic-racial identities by inventing the concept of 'race'. Race offered an effective categorising system by which white Christian Europeans could rationalise other beings as 'non-human' and continue to colonise their lands and bodies, carry out genocides, appropriate their wealth, and deny them the right to life. Together, they laid the 'foundation for the constitution of the modern colonial world system'¹, one where borders are used to create a global apartheid. They curb and control movement, create an international separation of labour, yet maintain free flow of capital.

Central to understanding the crux of migration are two questions: how did we get here? And who stands to benefit from this arrangement? In answering these questions, we will find the solutions to the struggles of today's workers across the world, who are, in the end, victims of global inequalities.

Colonial Economic Barriers of the Global South

The unequal distribution of wealth that resulted from colonisation divided the world into the 'core', which was Europe and the 'periphery', which constituted Asia, Latin America, and Africa. As a result, post-colonisation, core countries developed a dependency on the exploitation of peripheral countries, preventing their development. Challenging and understanding these relations and how colonisation shaped them, and led to uneven development and inequalities, is central to understanding Global south-to-north migration. It is in this context, we view the plunder of the global south as imposing structural economic barriers, preventing countries from establishing domestic industries generating employment, but instead creating pools of unemployed labour who are forced to migrate in search of work. It is therefore worth diving into colonisation's crippling effect on global south economies that is felt even today.

Before the colonial period, Europe's GDP was in shambles, accounting for only 15% of the world economy, whereas India and China collectively contributed 65%. This condition of the economy was also reflected in its people, who on average had a life span 10 years less than their counterparts in Asia and Latin

America. Post-colonisation, India and China's fair share of GDP had dropped to 10%, while Europe's had tripled. By the 1800s, Latin America, which was the first to be colonised by the Spanish Crown, had 100 million kilograms of silver and 185,000 kilograms of gold siphoned off and pumped into Europe's economy. Much of this metal was extracted violently, leaving 70 million indigenous people dead in the wake of this plunder. The silver was first acquired by the Spanish crown and used to pay off its debts to the rest of Europe. Europe then used it to build military capacity and gain access to trade in the East with China and India, trading it for land-intensive goods and resources it itself lacked. Silver was one of the only European commodities that Asia had wanted. It allowed Europe to enter the world markets, protecting it from suffering trade deficits. It also allowed Europe's economy to grow beyond its natural ecological limits. Buying land-intensive goods and resources from the East, allowed Europe to pursue industrial development with its now freed labour and capital. Meanwhile, 95% of Latin America's population from the start of its conquest in 1492 to 1600, had been decimated, either through slavery, through coercive mining, by dismantled social and economic systems of sustenance and by deliberate use of diseases such as smallpox. Jason Hickel in his 2017

book *The Divide*, provides a way of imagining the amount of silver that was extracted, he writes, if '100 million silver was invested in 1800 at 5% interest rate, the historical average, it would have amounted to \$165 trillion (by 2015), more than double of the world's GDP in 2015'. Similarly, the Portuguese in the 1700s, extracted and siphoned more gold from colonised Brazil using enslaved labour than the silver extracted by Spain over the previous two centuries. Turning Latin American and African indigenous people into slaves, also gave Europe the benefit of millions of slave labour hours that have remained mainly unaccounted for. Quoting some sources, Jason Hickel writes that between 1619 to 1865, when slavery was abolished in the US, a total of 222,505,049 hours of forced labour was generated in the USA alone - amounting to \$97 trillion (as of 1993). England's appropriation of India's resources and goods meant that India was witnessing massive trade surpluses; however, she wasn't being paid for it. Instead of an inflow of gold, India saw an outflow of its earnings, while Britain, despite having trade deficits, saw ever more gold and sterling inflows. In due course of time, the British government became the world's largest dealer in foreign exchange, exporting capital despite its trade deficits to other settler colonies such as Australia, New Zealand, South Africa etc, while Indian producers

were never compensated for their traded goods. Britain's colonisation of India was a '*state operated system of fraud on the people*'² where wealth appropriated from India was used to develop settler colonies around the world. These policies drained India and the economic transformation reflected in its contribution to the world economy which fell from 27% pre colonisation to 3% at independence.

Privatising Ireland, the Irish Question and Migration

The colonisation of Ireland by Britain was a turning point in the history of British imperialism and for migration, fuelled by the logic of capitalism. Profit accumulation by England's ruling classes required land, and the creation of labour markets required people. England's elites found a way to kill two birds with one stone by privatising land. The logic of privatising land, called the 'labour theory of property', justified the actions of the ruling class to evict people from their lands and make it their own, under the rationalisation of maximising its use and profitability.

The elites in England first tested this on their own peasantry, violently evicting them from their lands by enforcing the Enclosure Act. Enclosures created mass impoverishment and challenged the expectations of people's right to habitation, to life and having access to means of sustenance. They were met with violence, resistance and revolt by the peasantry.

When England extended this experiment to Ireland in the 18th century, turning farms and pastures into sites of meat and wool

‘It is only through the struggles for the rights of migrant labour that English workers build a chance of a unified front and combat anti-immigrant discourses fueling the media in Western countries.’

production for English markets to be sold for the cheapest price, evicted and displaced Irish were forced to emigrate out in search of work to America and England. Those immigrating into England created a surplus of labour for the English labour markets, just as how the English aristocracy had wanted. However, the English aristocracy was making it increasingly difficult for the Irish to go to America. James Connolly, a prominent Irish labour activist, wrote of how British steamships were instructed not to board Irish men of military age and how Atlantic liners in Liverpool or Derry refused Irish people. Those who managed to make it to America found its conditions were turning more and more like Ireland, where a ‘small class had taken possession of its resources’, while workers were being repressed. The English aristocracy carefully controlled the flow of migration, using it as a lever to affect the labour market, working conditions, and wages³.

Karl Marx, noting how the ordinary English worker was being manipulated by aristocrats for their own end - sowing hostility, division

and competition between the two groups, wrote in his 1870 letter to Sigfrid Meyer and August Vogt, that ‘The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who forces down the standard of life. In relation to the Irish worker, he feels himself to be a member of the ruling nation and therefore makes himself a tool of his aristocrats and capitalists against Ireland, thus strengthening their domination over himself. He harbours religious, social, and national prejudices against him . . . The Irishman pays him back with interest in his own money. He sees in the English worker both the accomplice and the stupid tool of the English rule in Ireland.’

This isn’t very different to what we observe today, where border systems and immigration policies are controlled through the manoeuvring of public sentiment to match

intended economic effects. National chauvinism and anti-immigrant sentiments are nurtured to be part of this neoliberal ploy. Turned on and off like a tap, based on the needs of the economy.

However, Marx also offered a solution to the English workers’ anti-Irish hostility, a way forward for united labour struggles and a way to topple England’s capitalist class. He saw that the emancipation of Ireland was also tied to England’s internal social development. He wrote that the Irish had to stand for their self governance and for revolution, and that it was imminent in England’s future that Ireland revolted against the English ruling class. In Ireland’s emancipation, he saw an opportunity for the emancipation of English workers as well.

This lesson is an important realisation and offers an ideological awareness that is needed in the present-day anti-immigrant discourse in the global north. It is only through the struggles for the rights of migrant labour that English workers build a chance of a unified front and combat anti-immigrant discourses fueling the media in Western countries. The treatment of the Irish, the very first migrants to England, therefore offers an important perspective on understanding anti-immigrant hostility in the present-day UK.

An International Separation by Borders and Immigration

The movement of the vast majority of humanity is heavily policed and controlled, and tens of millions of people are prevented from staying at home by the processes of capital-driven displacement and militarism.

Hannah Cross

Prior to the necessity of passports for immigration, and between 1850-1920, there was absolute free mobility for people across borders. Immigration was granted with ease, and so was citizenship. During this time, 70 million people emigrated from Europe, 36 million to America, 6.6 million to Canada, 5.7 million to Argentina and 5.6 million to Brazil; in total 17% of Europe’s population had emigrated out. This was made possible because repeated conquests and colonisation cleared indigenous lands of its people through genocides of all kinds, making way for people of European descent to travel to the new world.

Mass emigration also prevented surplus unemployed labour from accumulating in Europe, and gave the workers in Europe a real chance in receiving an upward push on their wages. If the same proportion had emigrated out from the global south during that period, today, global north countries would have had 70% more population. Instead, today the immigration rates from global north to global south countries remains in stark contrast, a mere 0.8%, about one-twentieth of the fraction of Europe’s population that emigrated back then. John Smith in his 2016 book⁴, presents a cutting analysis for today’s border policies which puts articles such as these⁵ in perspective.

Smith writes, that today's advancements in communication technology, ease of travel between countries, rising wage difference (compared to 100 years ago) between global south and global north countries and also the disparity in living conditions should have only seen an increase in immigration than that observed a century ago, but instead 'surplus labour (in the global south) faces unprecedented barriers to emigration to rich countries'. Displaced people and migrants unable to cross borders to global north countries, get absorbed and move from one global south country to another. Countries of the global north have externalised their national borders to neighbouring countries of global south. So today, Asia and Africa receive the most number of migrants from other countries, and transit countries like Mexico and Morocco trap people in a state of permanent transition. Moreover, global south countries, having been denied pathways to emigration, have become intense labour regimes with devalued labour power and low wages. As a result, wage differentials between global southern and northern countries increase, and the gap between them continues to widen. These conditions of migration and wage differentials maintain the status quo and perpetuate inequalities. In addition, it also creates a vast 'reserve army of unemployed people' for the labour market who in desperate need of work, would agree to exploitative and precarious conditions of work just for survival. Globalised production chains and corporations make use of these conditions of wage differentials and unemployed labour in global south countries, and shift their bases of production to those countries. This way they ensure to maximise their profit margins while underpaying the labour of that country.

The wealthy, on the other hand, can purchase their citizenships, get easy access to many countries, and buy properties with little to no tax, driving up local property markets. At the same time, an ordinary worker remains locked out of property markets, unable to buy a house in a city where he has lived his whole life. The working class in the global south are no better. A report in the New African found that the middle class in Africa pays at least \$190 million per year in visa fees to global north countries. In 2015 alone, a survey of 16 African countries found that people lost more than \$22.9 million to the US and \$13.9 million to the UK on rejected visas. Today, the economic drain of money continues through immigration and borders, which are a form of colonial modernity. The rules of movement apply only to the poor and working class who wish to cross, but don't apply to the rich, capital or commodities. John Smith in his 2015 article, pointing out to this disparity of movement writes, 'factories freely cross the U.S.-Mexican border and pass with ease through the walls of Fortress Europe, as do the commodities produced in them and the capitalists who own them, but the human beings who work in them have no right of passage. This is a travesty of globalization—a world without borders to everything and everyone except for working people'⁶.

Rolling in Neoliberal Austerity

By the end of the colonial period, the core-periphery world system was draining \$22 billion each year from the periphery to the core - an amount equal to \$161 billion dollars as of 2015, deepening inequalities between the two. In 1820, the income gap between the richest and poorest countries was approximately 3:1. By the mid-20th century, when the colonial period ended, the gap had widened to 35:1. There was also a slight increase in migration from the Global South to the North during this time.

However, the system of unequal exchange through trade had already fermented in the world system by the early part of the 20th century. USA and Europe were importing primary commodities such as raw materials or grain from the peripheral countries for cheap. Being recently industrialised, they were also exporting manufactured goods back to the periphery, and placing high tariffs on imported manufactured goods, thereby ensuring protection from competitors for their domestic manufacturing industry.

Countries of the Global South, gaining political freedom from their colonisers in the mid-20th century, had their coffers emptied after centuries of colonial plunder. In a

desperate economic state, their biggest hurdle to contend with was to get their countries back on their feet, become self-reliant, economically sovereign, and create employment and industries for their people. However, this meant accepting the unequal trade relations that had cemented and became a source of revenue.

By the 1980s, as neoliberal policies began rolling in several countries, the unequal trade relations exacerbated inequalities between the core and the periphery and widened the gap between wages of global north and south countries. Migration from south to north also 'trickled down owing to draconian immigration laws'⁷. By the time Global South countries could address the unequal trade relations, an extension of colonial history, they were faced with issues of sovereign debt.

While some of the debt was illegitimate and odious, much of it was created as a result of bad loans handed out by Wall Street banks who believed countries couldn't falter on their loans. As Citibank CEO Walter Wriston famously put it, 'Countries don't go bust'. Debt became an instrument of economic control by imperial economies of the Global North over Global South countries. Wanting to get their bad loans paid back with interest, Wall Street approached the US government, which in turn went to the IMF and made it a 'global debt enforcer'. As a result, countries of the global south were forced to open their markets and roll in neoliberal policies. IMF enforced structural adjustment programs forced governments of the global south to divert money from critical sectors such as education, healthcare etc to finance the payment of sovereign debts. This meant

countries couldn't prioritise investments for an industrial base or employment. Instead, they were trapped in cycles of under-development and with a 'reserve army of unemployed labour, and those who managed to get employed remained majorly underpaid owing to widening wage differentials.

Unequal trade relations became central to the neoliberal formula of free trade and carried forward into the 21st century with the help of the WTO. In fact, free trade deepened inequalities, making it even harder for peripheral economies to develop a sovereign industrial base. Free trade theory posited that countries with cheap labour should specialise in labour-intensive goods. On the face of it, completely rational, free trade policies forced countries to trade primary goods and raw materials, which were also heavily subsidised due to unequal trade agreements, much like how Britain used its colonies to source resources and land-intensive goods. This system of trade had two features: first, the prices of primary commodities exported by peripheral countries kept deteriorating compared to the manufactured goods they were importing. This meant that they were spending more to receive less, ending up with an outward transfer of wealth. Second, the wages of workers in developing economies, despite being corrected for productivity and purchasing power, remained much lower than the West. Workers in the Global South remained undercompensated for the value of goods they produced and shipped abroad. This system of trade made inequalities between the USA/Europe and the rest of the world worse. Today trade agreements, treaties,

subsidies imposed on the global south, tariffs etc are all maintained and backed by the military and capital might of core economies who make sure the terms of trade remain unequal and favour their economies and their corporations.

Neoliberal institutes spearheaded by the IMF, WTO etc instead advised governments instead to promote migration between countries, between those who had cheap and unemployed labour to those who had capital and industrial base. The unequal relations continued and perpetrated now through migration. Jason Hickel writes in his book aptly capturing the nature of these relations, 'To suggest that the global South should focus on exporting raw material while the North should focus on capital-intensive industry is the equivalent of saying that black people are just naturally better at working in the cotton fields while white people are just naturally better at being overseers, and that investing in educating a black person to become anything other than a common labourer is a 'distortion' that runs against their natural abilities.'⁸

The Incentive for Migration - But For Who?

Migration after the 1970s never really recovered to levels seen in the early part of the century. While the USA allowed more immigrants in the 1990s, Europe followed suit between 2000 and 2013, both benefiting from an exploitable migrant pool from the global South, reflected in their economies.

According to Hannah Cross, a researcher at University of Westminster, cheap labour is one of the three central tenets encapsulating the political economy of migration. She writes in her book - *Migration Beyond Capitalism*, that keeping labour costs down is a 'precondition for economic growth'⁹ in neoclassical theory that underpins neoliberal economics, the dominant paradigm of economics promoted and accepted by the UN, IMF, ILO etc and by Western governments across the world. In this paradigm of economics, a flexible labour market with workers having less wage-bargaining powers is required for ensuring monetary stability, preventing inflation from rising, preventing a slowdown of economy (and of profits) and for keeping unemployment at bay. So when unionised workers assert their rights by bargaining for better wages, working conditions, safety

and environmental regulations or for control over how profits/capital is used, they 'erode the power of capital'. Neoliberalism therefore, fights hard to avoid this 'rebalancing of power at all costs'.

However, this push towards a neoliberal agenda didn't happen overnight. Steeped in a neoliberal agenda, pursuing growth and profits, these bodies pushed for free trade, deregulation of labour, reduced intervention from government and increased privatisation. In response to this push, several countries in the world rolled back on employment legislations and hard-earned state protections won during the labour movements after the First World War and increased migration flows to ensure a flexible labour market. However, it wasn't just the promise of growth and employment that made governments roll back on legislation, it was also the promise of development. Global finance, international financial institutions etc, convinced governments that profits made by corporations would 'trickle down' to the rest and pave the way for development. This indirect form of pursuing development was to come, if pursuing profits and growth would remain unhindered, and for that 'inflexibilities' such as workers asserting their rights, had to be curbed or corporations had to find other ways of maintaining profits, such as the use of cheaper labour where migration policies came in handy.

If one mistakes this to be an unintended consequence of well-meaning economics, Cross corrects the reader, pointing out that the policies are doing what they were exactly designed to do. It isn't an aberrant or 'aggressive form of capitalism', but this is inherent to

‘AGAINST THIS GLOBAL CONTEXT, COLONIALISM AND COLONIAL MODERNITY, THE BARRAGE OF ANTI-IMMIGRANT SENTIMENTS IN THE UK, USA AND ACROSS THE WORLD ARE TO BE RECOGNISED FOR WHAT THEY TRULY REPRESENT, I.E RESURGENCE OF FASCISM THAT SEEKS TO SOW DIVISIONS BETWEEN THE WORKING CLASS ALONG THE LINES OF RACE, CLASS AND COUNTRY OF BIRTH SO THAT CORPORATIONS CAN CONTINUE TO INCREASE THEIR BOTTOM LINES.’

the nature of capitalism. Policies implemented to keep the economy growing and reduce unemployment have the opposite effect; they generate more competition for jobs, more unemployment, and degrade wages and working conditions. Capitalism requires surplus labour of unemployed people to make profits. Global finance’s role in the economic choices of governments also led to an increased ‘Financialisation’. It modified the role of governments to become non-interventionist, increased privatisation and enabled internationalisation of production, finance and labour. Flexibilisation of labour is also seen as an extension of this ‘Financialisation’ whereby labour work conditions are deregulated and precarity is desired and prioritised, giving way to temporary, part-time and casual work. As a result of this precarity of temporary work, people are sacrificing more of their time and wages in return for higher productivity. Precarious work conditions have pushed many into poverty and increased the gap between the bottom 25% of earners and the top 10%.

It’s also not a coincidence that those who work in precarious jobs also happen to be poor and more vulnerable to exploitation. Across the world, this form of work precarity has reflected in levels of

poverty, with only 12% of the world population being categorised as not poor and the rest forming a part of a ‘developing world middle class’ earning far below living wages, facing exploitation and insecurity¹⁰. Migrant labour, in particular, is more vulnerable to accepting low-wage precarious work. Across the UK, migrant workers are employed extensively in the food, agricultural, horticulture, cleaning and hospitality industries in temporary forms of low-wage precarious work. It is used to create a pool of excess unwanted people, who are then used to keep wages in check, providing leverage for employers and owners. They offer a needed distraction for employers and excuses from having to give in to worker union demands. However, directing hostility towards migrants is far from the solution. Capitalists and owners of capital whose sole focus is accumulating profits do not care for class differences, poverty, the ethnic or racial nature of cheap labour; however, they do stand to benefit from them and use them as leverage and distraction.

The rise of the far-right conservative governments across the world is also a symptom of this very undeterred Financialisation. As Hannan Cross points out in her book as to how ‘Their elections (of Narendra Modi, Jair Bolsonaro, Donald Trump) led to immediate and triumphant market confidence as they ensured the unmitigated privatization and deregulation of natural and public resources by means of accelerating class antagonisms, division and oppression of minorities’¹¹. Against this global context, colonialism and colonial modernity, the barrage of anti-immigrant sentiments in the UK, USA and across the world are to be recognised for what they truly

represent i.e resurgence of Fascism that seeks to sow divisions between the working class along the lines of race, class and country of birth so that corporations can continue to increase their bottom lines.

Migrant Labour, the 'other' labour

Historically, migrant workers were used to alleviate labour shortages during both world wars, with wartime also seeing relaxation of work hours and workdays to meet the demands of the war. However, under the current neoliberal regime, migrant labour is being used by employers to relieve themselves of obligations of improving pay and conditions, including for multi-racial native-born workers, in particular for low-paid jobs. It is in fact encouraged by neoliberal international organisations to fill shortages in this way. Hannah Cross with her acerbic analysis, points out that using migrant labour for undesirable jobs and assuming that they take on jobs no one else wants to, is downright divisive as it assumes that it's acceptable for 'others' to do such jobs owing to their country of birth, their race, the wages they get paid in their country of origin, and that it is acceptable to have low-value for such jobs.

The profits made by paying lower wages for migrant or undocumented labour weaken the bargaining power of not just the migrant community but even of native born workers and affect the working conditions of the whole sector - changing the definition of what is considered acceptable. As to whether migration really depresses wages, several studies reported little to no impact on wages. For example, a report by the Work Foundation on migration

and wages concluded that 'migration seems to have a largely benign effect and, all other things being equal, offers long-run economic benefits'¹². Another study by University College London, found that immigration depressed wages only for the bottom 20% of incomes, but positively affected the other income ranges¹³. Given that immigrants are paid so little, and receive wages much lower than their marginal productivity, the profits reaped from hiring them generates surplus that benefits native wages. Therefore, the reduction of wages is more of a myth, however the worsening of everyone's working conditions and power to bargain are indeed very real.

Alienated from worker union demands, migrants are the most impacted by the worsening work conditions. Combined with threats of deportation, migrant labour is vulnerable to super-exploitation. Some of the most exploitative cases against migrant labour across the UK are reported from supermarkets, restaurants and warehouses. For example, a report on Sports Direct's warehouse revealed that warehouse staff were employed on precarious contracts, kept in a culture of fear and bullying, underwent intrusive searches for leaving premises, discouraged from taking time off and prevented from taking toilet breaks. In a span of two years, the warehouse had reported hundreds of

ambulance calls. Another example of super exploitation came from the Chinese migrant labour working in restaurants of Chinatown, reporting on facing conditions worse than those found in China. At the Permanent People's Tribunal in 2018, Home Officials' unchecked power and physical brutality came to the fore. It was discovered that they would conduct raids, arrest workers, deny them legal aid and abuse their power by granting waivers to businesses employing undocumented labour. In response to this ethnic targeting of migrants, Chinatown saw protests and shutdowns between 2013 and 2018.

The UK's low wage economy is sustained by outsourcing its unwanted low-wage jobs such as cleaning and catering to a flexible, easily exploitable and economically insecure migrant workforce. Migrants that don't share the same privileges of movement as other EU citizens get hired and replaced by cheaper migrants. Cross points to how the housekeeping labour across global hotel chains in London were 'mainly black and ethnic minority workforce (who were) replaced with Romanian migrant workers (and) discouraged from joining a union'. The same trend was seen in the 'migrant cleaners working for London Underground have been made to do more work for lower pay and deterred from joining a union under threat of deportation

and where a 'largely African workforce has been replaced with Polish workers'¹⁴. Migrant labour in the UK increasingly face paltry pay and degrading conditions with subcontracting, agency work, false self employment contracts, zero-hour contracts and under-recording of hours on the rise.

Unions and Solidarity

Class prejudice and national chauvinism are used as weapons of choice to exert neoliberal brutality to make the unification of labour demands seem unachievable. Even wealthier sections of the Left in the UK remain in denial of the domestic class dimensions of migration.

The past, however, offers valuable lessons when it comes to building solidarity against class antagonisms. Seeing how the ruling classes of England used antagonisms between the Irish and English to lower the position of Irish, profiting from the resulting cheapened labour, Karl Marx concluded that a social revolution in England was required where the English sided with their fellow Irish. Furthering the revolution meant calling for Ireland's independence and in it lay the only solution for English workers emancipation as well. Marx's conclusion is liberating and revealing as it connects causes across class and borders. The 1913 Dublin lockout serves as a reminder for how labour struggles weaken when workers fail to unite across borders. The lockout was an industrial dispute in Ireland where 20,000 workers were demanding their right to unionise, the protest supported by fellow English working class in England didn't receive the support of British Trade Union Congress and ended up alienating the Irish working class, failing to stand with

‘Class prejudice and national chauvinism are used as weapons of choice to exert neoliberal brutality to make the unification of labour demands seem unachievable.’

them in their struggles. The lockout as a result failed to achieve its immediate demands, although in the long run it proved instrumental in laying the foundations for the Irish trade union movement.

Rosa Luxemborg had in fact theorised and argued that the only way forward for labour to regain its bargaining power is by ‘advancing the political focus of class struggle’¹⁵. Unions need to inculcate class-conscious workers who are willing to stand with struggles across borders and reinforce a politically oriented internationalist labour struggle.

In a more contemporary example, when the Justice for Cleaners campaign saw protests by the Latin American Workers Association (LAWAS) between 2002 and 2012, it worked with the support of The Transport and General Workers Unite (TGWU), demanding a living wage and better conditions. However, paternalistic attitudes in TGWU failed to acknowledge the experience of LAWAS activists that carried unionising and organising experience from Chile and Columbia and failed to support demonstrations, and legal action

from subcontracted cleaners against their employers. This broke down the relationship between the two unions. As a result when LAWAS won a living wage, the employers worsened their working conditions.

The reality for union struggles today remains challenging. Unions in Europe continue to alienate immigrant, black and ethnic minority workers in participating and influencing mainstream union agendas. Vijay Prashad theorises that this alienation of workers across racial lines is a vestigial part of Europe’s imperial and colonial history, which to this day seeds division, spreads hostility, violence and finds ways of lingering in the masses. Unions are also ‘depoliticised and deradicalised’, compromised in their autonomy and have only managed to ‘blunt rather than destabilise neoliberalism’ [1]. They not only fall for the common trap of alienating and disenfranchising migrant labour from unions, but also fall for the capitalist trap of economic

growth and the neoliberal belief that profits would trickle down to raise everyone’s standard of living. In response to these pressures, unions evolved themselves. For example, in the USA, unions took on ‘business unionism’, where they would negotiate wage and benefits but stood in protection of the corporate system.

However, realising that turning a blind eye to the struggles of migrant labour affects the whole working-class community is key for union struggles. Also, realising that when unions demand higher wages and reduction of labour time they are also standing against the whole capitalist regime remains vital. Union struggles are immensely challenging today, as they must stand against neoliberal capitalism and class antagonisms. Adding to this difficulty is the ‘capitalist law of wages’ wherein capitalists are always pursuing a reduction of wages paid to its employees, always trying to minimise the number of people hired and the wages paid. In trying to walk the thin line between worker demands and feeling responsible for worker wages and in turn profits of their employers, unions have only managed to ‘suppress exploitation’ and only demand what is owed to them under the current market prices.

In conclusion, as antagonisms deepen between migrant and native

born workers, across racial, ethnic and class lines, solidarity of union demands, including migrant labour in worker struggles is the only meaningful way of furthering worker demands. The connecting and internationalisation of worker struggles across borders ensures universal solidarity and directs focus to where it’s most necessary, i.e., against capitalism and neocolonial patterns of exploitation and appropriation (whose goal is to cheapen labour and maximise profits). Capitalists bear no responsibility towards the reserve army of labour they create. However, they stand to benefit from the conflicts that ensue from lowered wages, class and racial conflicts between poor British workers and migrant labour. Actions for solidarity are clear, however class conflicts are used as a tactic against achieving this solidarity. Therefore, the way forward is to realise this neoliberal ploy against migration and turn the battle against capital and all its contradictions, but not against each other. •

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THE JOY OF AN EXPANSIVE VIEW OF THE WORKING CLASS VERSUS THE CULTURAL DEAD END OF WESTMINSTER POLITICS

Jon Bigger

In UK politics when discussion of migration arises, the first thing to come to mind is the shrieking ‘stop the boats’ rhetoric. People taking extreme and dangerous measures to reach the south coast of England in the hope of asylum is the fixation of our political discussion on migration. Rarely but inevitably the discussion turns to migration in its other form: what the politicians call ‘legal migration’. The language is horrendous because it places those people who cannot come here with the correct paperwork simply as ‘illegals’, which in turn is used to suggest danger by those on the far right. Class intersects with this in destructive ways with politicians using it to foster divisions in the working class.

Allow me to state what should be obvious: the vast majority of migrants are working class. Those that are fleeing persecution, famine or other ecological disasters or war will almost certainly be from our social class. Those arriving on small boats or any other means deserve simply our solidarity and help. Those arriving legally in order to work here may also be working class but this could depend on your definition. I choose to take the view that classes form through solidaristic struggle. Those we struggle with, against our rulers, are in the same class as us. Lots of people in our class will be unaware of their position because they just get on with their lives rather than engage in the struggle. Class is complex and the rich people who control our lives benefit from people thinking that they are isolated or that their interests lie in keeping their heads down and just pleasing those powers. There are barriers to reaching people who have been taken in by the ‘migrant crisis’ rhetoric.

The super rich don't seem to have trouble moving around the world. They don't have difficulty getting into the UK and staying here as long as they like. While Reform UK's leader, Nigel Farage, rails against net migration, in detailed interviews he readily admits that the UK needs more doctors, nurses, construction workers and so on. Skilled workers can't be magicked up in seconds and so migration offers the UK possibilities that politicians are reluctant to promote. Having whipped up so much hatred around migration, they now can't talk about the migration they would like. The rioting last year by racists has been followed by a pandering to such sensibilities. Most shockingly, Labour prime minister, Keir Starmer, has moved closer to Farage in both rhetoric and policy rather than even attempting an alternative narrative. This isn't just bad for the UK, it is also morally bankrupt. Migration is overwhelmingly positive for everyone. Labour will find that voters stirred by Farage aren't going to be stirred further by a prime minister desperate to be his ventriloquist dummy.

There's something darkly ironic about the way politics is discussed in the UK. Notions of fairness dominate most political discourse. If you can attach unfairness to a group of people you can describe them in underserving terms and this stokes the fire of much of the migration discussion. It works the opposite way when the discussion turns to Brits abroad, either moving permanently or just wanting second homes. Whereas it's presented as unfair for people to come here it is also presented as unfair for (mainly) white British people to be hampered in their lives abroad

in any capacity. The discussion is framed upon the idea that the British should be able to go wherever they like and certainly not have to queue at the passport gates. Newspapers are regularly filled with articles about the best countries to retire to (if you can afford it), while the front pages scream in rage about people coming here. A country built on the horrors of empire is evolving the dominant beliefs from then into new forms of double standard.

Capitalism requires the vast majority of people to work for the lowest wages bosses can get away with. The way to improve that is to fight the bosses with powerful and united class based action. Too many people fall for the notion that 'working class people' lose out because of migration. We need to be robust about this and explain consistently that most people arriving here are working class. Solidarity is the way forward; division is the way our wages will be suppressed further. We need to think of class as something that recognises no national borders and indeed no nationality. By doing this we can help those around us to understand the tricks the politicians are using to divide us.

The migration debate has an underlying racism at its heart. The way this combines with class is catastrophic to developing solidarity

in communities. Everything from the so called 'Asian grooming gangs' and the recent focus on a requirement for people coming to the UK to pass English tests are testament to this. You don't hear about the 'Church of England grooming gangs', do you? The use of language is extraordinary and I'm not suggesting it should be expanded to cover the scandals in the church but there's a shocking contrast in what racist politicians are willing to say. Actually, the shocking part is how normalised it has become so quickly. The extent and scale of sexual exploitation of young people in the UK is staggering and it does not have a racial basis. There is therefore no basis for it in the national discussion on migration.

Labour are complicit in furthering the idea that migration is something that harms the working class rather than something to embrace. There is another way. We know the joy of an expansive view of the working class. We embrace the cultural differences and we work to advance our class interests with anyone, recognising no divisions put forward by those that seek to exploit us. What differences there are should be celebrated as we exchange cultural understanding. What unites us is much more significant.

The alternative is a cultural dead end. A white, Christian-centric, ultra

conservative UK is what those that would harm our class salivate over. They look towards Trump's USA and hope to spread that vision here. In defending and welcoming people who come here, we extend solidarity to people impacted by those wider struggles. The right will never stop blaming people in the passion to acquire more power. Migration one day, sexuality the next, trans rights, disability, age, gender and so on: they will seek to divide us in many different ways.

We are multifaceted with vibrant and exciting cultures. They are dull and boring and boy do they hate us for it. There is a joy in our expansive vision of the working class. We share a bond and we seek to advance together against the simple messages of the far right and a Labour Party that can never make amends for turning on us. Saying no to borders is just one way of spreading our joy. •

Jon Bigger is a politics tutor, anarchist writer and podcaster.

THE HEAVENS REFLECT OUR LABOURS

Amy Todd

I must have been about 10 years old when my dad stopped at a zebra crossing in Scunthorpe as a South Asian mother and her children crossed the road. He was frustrated that in his eyes, the children following behind her, were being ‘dragged along’ and that she hadn’t crossed the road with them safely. My dad used it as an educational opportunity, ‘They don’t look after their children, not properly like us. That’s why they have so many of them - because they won’t all survive. They need to have loads of kids to go out to work too - they don’t see them as children like we do’.

I never thought my dad was racist growing up - actually, I was always intrigued by what I thought was his very liberal and cultured take on life. He loved Dylan, he was in a band, he loved reading, history. I have undoubtedly inherited and benefited from this love of culture and learning. My dad used it as a way to mark him out from the crowd - he wasn’t like the other steelworkers in Scunthorpe. He was always special, cleverer, more interesting, in the know. Better.

I don’t have contact with my dad now, he’s never met my son. I don’t ever answer my phone in case it is him calling from another number. Last time we spoke, he blamed me holding him accountable for his past abusive behaviours as something that would shake the foundations of his newfound sobriety. He had the zeal of the convert.

Part of the reason we don’t have contact is the professionalisation of this racism. My dad, no longer a Steelworker, supports Roy Chubby Brown’s* shows up and down the country. Yes he is still alive, and yes people do still like that kind of thing. No, he’s not actually banned from every UK venue, and yes it is usually playing a show in some shithole in the North of England (I can say this because I come from a shithole in the North of England).

It is something (thankfully) that the rest of my family find profoundly difficult to support.

You may have the privilege of not knowing who that guy is. I wouldn’t suggest it was worth the time having a google tbh, but I can’t stop you. What I can tell you is that when my dad asked my brother if he could run him up a lead he needed for the show in Sheffield one day, he convinced him to stay and watch the set. My brother was very hesitant, but hoped it wasn’t as bad as people made out. He left within 15 minutes as the audience chanted, ‘Pak*, Pak*, Pak*’ - gleeful in their collective naughtiness of using this word that the outside world would have condemned them for. The next joke that followed was along the lines of playfully guessing the cost of the Nazi party’s gas-bills.

Every now and then I recount a story to my partner as something spurs a memory. This happened recently when I recalled an argument between my Dad and I when I was about 14. He spoke to me about how, even the most ‘enlightened’ and ‘assimilated’ Muslim members of the UK community are Jihadists. That they are all out to infiltrate and destroy the West. When I (calmly) suggested that surely that can’t be the case, there are many types

of Christian for example - I was met with a vitriolic attack on how I am young, I don’t know, I’m idealistic, I haven’t experienced life like he had, I’m naive. I am 33 nearly, and people still tell me this all the time, yet in a more disguised fashion. Another time, he extolled the success of Eminem in the early 2000’s, as the music industry was hostile to white performers nowadays. It was, in his view, ran by and for Black people and white people, ‘couldn’t get a look in’.

It’s a shame that my dad chose not to see that the working class he claimed to belong to was never just people who looked like him. That it’s always been South Asian mums shepherding kids across roads, Polish welders on night shifts, Somali nurses in the hospital down the road.●

* Roy Chubby Brown is a British comedian popular in late 20th century. His shows frequently feature racist, sexist, misogynistic or queerphobic content.

Amy Todd is a co-director at The Class Work Project.



The Bayeux Tapestry depicting the Norman Conquest of 1066 / Public Domain

BRITISH: A SERIES OF THOUGHTS.

Peter Ó'Maille

From the moment we are born, every working-class person living under the rule of a state is sold a lie. This lie is woven into the very fabric of our emerging identities, reinforced at every turn. It feels innate, as natural a part of us as the colour of our hair.

You draw the lines. You label the neighbours.

You learn who your people are and who they are not.

This is the border. Within this border, it is your country.

You and the country are one and the same.

Between this line and that one, you belong.

Outside it, you do not.

Your country may be old, or young, it might claim to be free or exist as an occupied land. It could be that the borders are ancient, geologic or destined, perhaps the revanchists are already whispering to you that although things are this way now,

they should really be another way. Regardless, you are taught to serve the powerful of this country of yours. Whether they tell you clearly or not, If you work against their interests, you are a traitor. And that, they say, is the worst thing a person can be.

By the time you realise that borders are no natural feature of this world, that they are tools created by ruling classes to divide, control, and exploit, it is already too late. You are defined by these ideas across multiple levels. You've inherited a dozen identities. Each one becomes a vital part of who you are and, simultaneously, a mechanism to reduce you to a statistic, a number in someone else's codified calculus. These labels are used to unite or divide you from your fellow human beings, according to the whims of the powerful.

I am Mancunian. I am a Lancashire man. I am a Northerner. I am Celtic. Most importantly, so I am told, I am English, more often British, and sometimes a UK citizen... depending on whether they want me for flag-waving, war fever, or paying tax.

‘Britain is just an Island, “British” tho this “nation” was mapped out and sold to us so that we’d be happy to be sent off to die trying to prod some other bloke with a sword in the name of some toff’s greed.’

I used to be European, tho now that’s only helpful framing for comrades across the schism lines of global oppression, carried out through brutality, economic violence, cultural coercion, and, when those failed, ethnic cleansing.

There are many forms of identity, some held by nature or nature, chosen and found, others forced by life or by others often with solidarity and malice. This Identity of this kind is a sweet poison. It politicises our individuality, our space, and our place. It is sold to us as something enriching and liberating by those who seek to package us and control us.

Our deep desire to connect with our culture and communities is weaponised against is as we are constantly fed medias designed to re-enforce this, through collective joy and collective pain. So many of us hold on to the artifice. They drink deep. Too few realise that the cup of nationhood is a rusty tin, and they are drinking their own blood.

Whether I was born into it, had it given to me, or found it myself, these aspects of my identity are weapons and not one in my hands, No, my

identity, just like yours is a weapon of the state and like all who seek control, the bastards are inherently hypocritical and lie at every turn.

They tell me I am “White British”. So I grew up with systematic programming that this land is my land, that I am British and Britain is me. I am chosen. God bless the Queen, rule Britannia, piss myself at the proms, sign the hymns and gawk at the aid show as the Lancaster bomber flies past. But what I never am, and always will be, is a child of migrants. As each and every one of us is.

There is no such thing as “native” British. There never has been. There are no autochthonous Brits.

We are all immigrants, refugees, settlers, émigrés. Sorry, my Celtic kin, our roots lie in the Hallstatt

and La Tène cultures of Europe. We first settled these shores only three thousand years ago, wiping out the Bell Beaker peoples who came before us. And before them, vague echoes endless cultures stretching back to the oldest footprints of wanderers on these islands, nearly a million years ago. To pick a point in history and say this is the dawn of history, some arbitrary historical point you think defines us, because it serves your comfort, is a lie.

We are the children of a vast history of brutal genocide, settler colonialism, cultural assimilation, social acculturation, and human integration. In this pain and beauty, and all of this, from the writings of the Mabinogion to dancing at the Notting hill Carnival, from chucking yourself down Cooper’s Hill after some cheese to sharing the love with the first-foot as you nurse a Hogmanay hangover. As a British person who loves this land and it’s people in their infinite splendour, I believe we must cast off comforting lies and face the objective truth with pride. That truth is we are more than we were and our collective identity now is as much Diwali and Rosh Hashanah as it is Halloween and Easter.

Our border lines internal and external both, are xenogeneic ideas written into history to enclose and atomise the working class. This took place internally for the purpose of consolidating power, centralising

it for the ease of the powerful and later the benefits of capital elite. National identity was not born from spontaneous common feeling. It was manufactured from older communal consciousness, often violently, to serve the interests of capital and monarchy. Where differences existed, they were exaggerated or weaponised. Where they did not exist, they were invented. The ideas of “English” and “British” were forged to rally populations for war, colonisation, and industrial expansion.

They were designed to strip the people them of who they were and forcibly unify us all into a singular monoculture. To turn us into what the king and court wanted. Usually, that meant standing in a field, starving, covered in shit, waving a sword at some other poor lad, while a few aristocrats moved a line back and forth. This side of the line, the bastard foreigner, your enemy, this side of the line, noble Englishman and brother. Britain is just an Island, “British” tho this “nation” was mapped out and sold to us so that we’d be happy to be sent off to die trying to prod some other bloke with a sword in the name of some toff’s greed.

“Britishness” is a lie and a recent one at that.

For the vast majority of our history, with only a few exceptions, these islands were porous. The borderlands were blurred. People came and went like waves upon a shore. Our cultures were a beautiful spectrum, filled with individual and collective distinctiveness and shared humanity.

From the Brigantes and Corieltauvi to the Roman Empire and the Caledonii, from

Mercia and Northumbria to Wessex and the Danelaw, Scotland and England to the UK and France, borders between holdings, kingdoms, empires, and petty fiefdoms have never been drawn to reflect cultural distinctiveness. They exist because capital and state demanded enclosed land, controlled populations, and manufactured difference.

As kingdoms grew, borders became tools for feudal elites to control land and people. The borders served as instruments of taxation, conscription, and social control. They restricted mobility and divided populations that had once lived in fluid, local networks. As monarchs consolidated power, they demanded marked territories. These borders divided “us” and “them”. Communities and people became possessions.

By the mid-medieval period, England had consolidated from the petty kingdoms of the Heptarchy under Alfred the Great and his heirs. Around the same time, Scotland had formed into a kingdom, while Wales remained a collection of autonomous entities until it was conquered by Edward I in 1282. As with all colonial endeavours, the English conquest of Wales was marked by brutality, cultural erasure and the land torn into parcels for the benefit of various lords.

From the thirteenth century onward, the system of enclosures had established a steady and systematic process of turning shared land into private possession. What was once all of ours became property of the few. These enclosures pushed us off the land and into cities or colonies. Internal migration became both a necessity and a crime. The poor were punished

for leaving the holdings of their masters while the same elite moved populations for profit. Through all of this, people continued to come and go from further afield too. From the medieval to the Tudor eras, migrants from Europe and North Africa arrived as mercenaries, merchants, diplomats, entertainers, and workers. This isn't conjecture, from the start of our bureaucracy we find people from across the world living and working across England, from courtiers to merchants to farm hands.

Today, around 160,000 families own about 65% of the land, 70% is owned by less than one per cent of the population. Millions of people economically and socially locked into the one city or another, told they've made it if they ever even manage to buy a 2 bed with a garden. Our enclosures still exist.

When James VI of Scotland became James I of England in 1603, the crowns were united. The Union Flag followed in 1606. The Scots insisted on placing the Saltire in front of the Cross of St George until the formal union in 1707. Britishness was the new allegiance. This new identity did not immediately resonate. Civic and ethnic identities clashed. But war and misery have always been effective tools and the promise of Empire will do the rest.

This empire manufactured its provenance with Britannia, a figure drawn from Roman mythology, and

later John Bull, satire come colonial tool. These hollow symbols were used extensively to spawn collective identity as we raped the world and told millions more that they were British too. Possessions like the rest of us as our betters diced up the word, stripping people of who they were and splitting the subjects apart with the pen stroke, often turning them against each other.

There is no single origin of the nation-state, and for all its variety, the result is the same.

Over centuries, authority, Industry, profit, and war produced centralised powers in the hands of monarchs eager to enforce sectarian identities. The Peace of Westphalia is often cited as a milestone of the modern vision, tho the process continued long after. It took millions of deaths and the destruction of the working class during the Thirty Years' War for the powerful to create a framework that suited them. The peasants had no say.

Liberals, conservatives, and fascists still insist that national identity is natural. That it emerges from shared heritage. This is a historical lie. From Britain to Germany, from Lithuania to Italy, lines were drawn by elites. Those on one side became possessions. Their heritage, once common and beautiful, was laced with chauvinism, supremacy, and manufactured mythology.

Migration, when free, is liberty. Yet states have always enforced it selectively. Millions of Africans were kidnapped and transported as cargo in the slave trade. European settlers, however, were celebrated. Sure our “white” natives would repeatedly harry the new comers, whether they were Jewish, Irish, Italian or Eastern European, but assimilation was acceptable for those who lingered as the these new residents were funnelled out into the wild expanse, to find new homes. Their path to freedom was state-sponsored. The indigenous people who lived there were slaughtered. The histories of Africa, Australia and the Americas but one reflection of the horrific duality of how the state purposes migration. Similarly Chinese labour built railways and were later excluded from civil society. Irish migrants worked docks and factories, then faced violence and discrimination. This racist hypocrisy persists. Syrian families walked the length of Europe to be greeted with fresh barbed wire and also to often drowning in European waters. Ukrainians are welcomed, sorry for your troubles, have a biscuit.

The state does not oppose migration. It opposes free migration. The kind it cannot control. The kind that cannot be exploited.

We anarchists understand this legacy and denounce it. We reject its legitimacy and the entire carceral structure that surrounds us. Borders are inherently violent, not just in their enforcement but in their very existence. They are designed to regulate life from above, to define who counts as human, who is entitled to safety, and who may exist and where.

This is fundamentally incompatible with a society based on equality and mutual aid. People should be free to live and roam where they choose, not weaponised the pawns for the agendas of the powerful but as individuals and neighbours. Migration is not a problem to be managed, but a liberty to be defended. We are not the play things of colonial masters. There is no line on a map that defines us. Our community and culture do. We must reject these artificial razor lines, the blood-stained flags, and the rabid chauvinism and hypocritical patriotic fervor that sustain them. If we care for our history, we cannot cling to the xenophobic myths planted in our collective memory by those who would rule us. Repetition does not make it truth. Our roots, they stretch wide and deep, across cultures and continents.

This vision is not utopian, it is objective. To be free means to walk without fear. To live how we choose. To exist in a world where one can travel from Paris to Beijing as easily as from Cardiff to Nottingham.

We do not seek better borders. We seek no borders at all. The end of enclosures.

Only the vast spectrum of humanity. To be free at last to live without the scar lines of a painful, and temporary, mistake. •

Peter Ó Máille is an Anglo-Celtic printer, anarchist communicator, and enemy of every state. He has controversial opinions on Star Trek and the operation of public transit following the revolution. When not busy with the above, he is Lumpen's most awesome distro person and the one giving us abundant graphic design advice and help.

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NOTE FROM EDITOR

In *Lumpen #14 (Just Transition)*, we published a text titled *Just Transition as Green Colonialism: Voices from the Global South* by Phethani Madzivhandila. Unfortunately, after its publication, we realised that the article is missing three references. These should have been given to Debt For Climate (www.debtforclimate.org/) for the quotes taken from their YouTube channel, Hamza Hamouchene for a quote from his article, *Cop28: The climate crisis has been hijacked by corporate power* published by The Middle Eastern Eye, and to Verso Books for use of their promotional text about one of their titles, *Climate Change as Class War: Building Socialism on a Warming Planet* by Matthew Hubner.

We apologise for these mistakes.
(zb)

