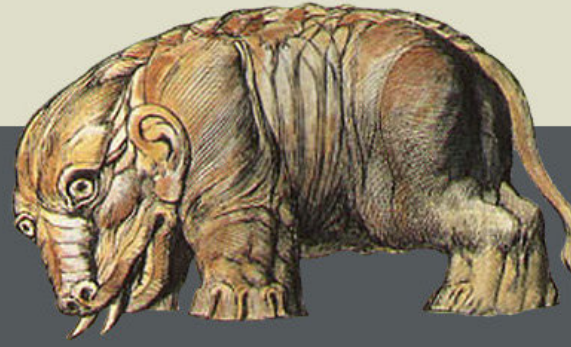


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ABOLITIONIST FUTURES: PREFIGURATIONS BEYOND VIOLENCE

Daniel Loick, Vanessa E. Thompson

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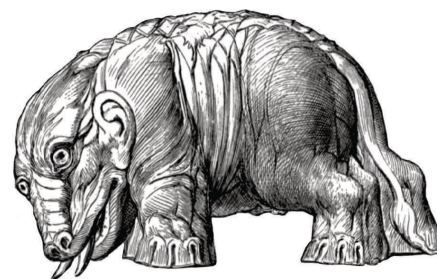
Editorial: Abolitionist Futures

Daniel Loick, Vanessa E. Thompson

In her recently published book *Becoming Abolitionists* (2021), U.S. activist Derecka Purnell describes how she became an abolitionist. The book begins with an account of her childhood in an impoverished St. Louis neighborhood. The police were omnipresent here. They were the only responsive authority on many matters, from a too-loud party or minor injuries to mental health crises or grave cases of violence. Purnell describes how, over the course of her life, the police increasingly lost the status of a taken-for-granted presence: roused by the mostly unpunished murders of black poor people by the police, Purnell began to question more and more the necessity of this institution – and of the entire state apparatus on which it is based. Starting with the realization that calling the cops rarely actually solved a problem, she began to look at history, to talk to activists, to organize. The starting point for her thinking about alternatives was the already existing practices of her own community: for her, “abolition” is not an event of a radical break in a utopian future, but an experimental practice embedded in the existing everyday routines of marginalized communities. Abolitionism, as a radical political movement and historical study, reconstructs these experiments, assembles them and incorporates them into a coherent theoretical approach. Purnell’s book ends with a series of political proposals that start from the concrete reality of those communities: in order to make the police and the penal system obsolete, significant venues for democratic self-government (‘councils’), a reliable social and medical infrastructure, and new forms of neighborhood conflict resolution are needed. But even before such demands are achieved in the society at large, abolition is present as an ethos: instead of calling the police, abolitionists seek to build communities of solidarity that are able to manage their own problems while also struggling for societal transformation.

Purnell’s path can be understood as paradigmatic for the specific transformational strategy of abolitionism. Abolitionism is an umbrella term that encompasses theoretical and practical movements that seek to overcome state violence in its various forms (especially prison, police, and camps) while also addressing forms of extralegal or interpersonal violence (Davis 2003; Critical Resistance 2008; Kaba 2021; Davis/Dent/Meiners/Richie 2022). The concept of abolition explicitly places itself in the tradition of the transnational struggle for the abolition of slavery in the Americas in the 19th century and works through the possibilities of alternative formations of (re-)production, relations and forms of belongings which were exercised in the realms of the Haitian revolution, Maroon and

Some of the texts in this issue were contributions to the (online) workshop “What does it mean to abolish (state power)?”, hosted by the University of Amsterdam in early 2021. The videos of all talks are available here: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLlx9omWm2uvv1-DAQuQAd6Zdl1AS2Zd1QJ>.



Quilombo formations as well as anti-colonial resistance projects (Du Bois 1935; Robinson 1983; Sinha 2016). Contemporary political movements and radical thinkers thus recall the unfulfilled desires and demands associated with emancipation from enslavement and colonialism. A central concern in the 20th century, for example, was the abolition of the death penalty, which disproportionately affected the African American population in the United States. Fueled by the international *Black Lives Matter* protests, over the past two decades abolitionism has established itself as a comprehensive approach of critical theory and as a current of radical political practice, primarily in North America but also (to a lesser extent) internationally (Gilmore 2007; James 2000). In contemporary Europe, abolitionist politics have been especially established by self-organised refugee protests and resistances of migrants with the aim of abolishing border regimes and lagers.

These heterogeneous struggles share that they are always defined by a double movement: On the one hand, they present a (“negative”) critique of violent conditions, on the other hand, they aim at the (“positive”) development of alternatives that are supposed to make a free life materially possible (Dilts 2019). On the one hand, these theories scandalize, for example, the racist-capitalist foundation of mass incarceration (Alexander 2010) and police violence (Akbar 2020); on the other hand, these institutions are not simply to be eliminated while leaving the overall background conditions in place, but to be replaced by new institutions of social, political, and cultural participation, such as the expansion of social housing, the improvement of health care and the intensification and proliferation of democratic decision-making processes (McLeod 2019). The goal remains the successive dismantling of carceral institutions altogether (Davis 2001) and the creation of worlds beyond racial capitalism and worlds otherwise.

Abolitionists thus repeatedly emphasize that they are not only concerned with the *destruction* of previous institutions, but also with a comprehensive social-transformative strategy that includes the *construction* of new institutions as well as new socialities, relations of re-production, and socio-ecological care. Abolitionists thereby assume that precisely those groups that are particularly vulnerable to state repression and intersectionally connected forms of oppression (especially people of color, refugees, illegalized sex workers, queer, trans and non-binary folks and other socially (multiply) marginalized groups) have already found innovative models for conflict resolution, violence prevention and decision-making beyond the state. Particularly advanced in this regard is the discussion on dealing with sexualized violence, domestic violence and interpersonal violence, which is being conducted under the keywords of *transformative justice* and *community accountability* (GenerationFive 2007; CARA 2016; Dixon/Piepzna-Samarasinha 2020). Furthermore, theoretical reflections and practical experiments can also be found in relation to questions of autonomous political self-organization and decision-making in subaltern communities, in which new imaginary resources of a completely different human cohabitation emerge.

Anchored in the actual lifeworlds of oppressed groups, abolitionism thus aims to construct a new world out of the ruins of the old, using an alchemy of transforming conditions of misery and suffering into resources for agency and livingness. As geographer and abolitionist theorist Ruth Wilson Gilmore puts it, “Abolition is not absence, it is presence.” As she elaborates, “What the

world will become already exists in fragments and pieces, experiments and possibilities. So those who feel in their gut deep anxiety that abolition means knock it all down, scorch the earth and start something new, let that go. Abolition is building the future from the present, in all of the ways we can.” (Gilmore 2018) This *Special Issue* seeks to trace the “fragments and pieces” of abolitionist futures within conditions riddled with violence. The contributions illuminate the experiences made in very heterogeneous fields and contexts and explore the question of *how to become an abolitionist* – not only in the sense of a political conviction, but also of a prefigurative practice.

Jaden Janak reconstructs the formation of a resistant community in a carceral environment that is one of the core themes of the abolitionist tradition, the prison. The experience of solidarity within and beyond prison walls has always been essential for the survival of the incarcerated. A central technique for establishing such relationships of solidarity is letter writing. As Janak reconstructs through the correspondence of black militant trans prisoner Alyssa Hope, pen-pal relationships not only simply satisfy a universal need for contact and communication, but in a stronger sense manifest forms of mutual aid that, according to Janak, has long been a central focus of radical black movements and that might provide a stable alternative to the benefits of the failing welfare state. This case study shows paradigmatically how practices that emerge out of conditions of poverty and isolation can transcend the given situation and thus anticipate and build radically different social relations.

A similar question – how do oppressed communities manage to wrestle from situations of all-encompassing violence, injustice, and unfreedom the nucleus of a fundamentally different and more liberated society – guides the contribution by *Vicki Squire*. Squire looks at the testimonies of irregularized migrants en route via the Mediterranean to Europe. In what Squire calls ‘unruly migrations’, these people not only reject and refuse the colonial militarized violence manifest in the European border regime and their murderous ‘protection’ agencies, they also imagine different models of cohabitation, belonging, and political autonomy. The explicit political claims made and desires expressed by migrants in interviews can be reconstructed in such a way that they ultimately explode the segregated and exclusionary foundations of the order of the nation state. Furthermore, the act of unruly migration itself is an implicit refusal of this order, for they desert situations that are marked by conditions of ‘organized abandonment’ (Gilmore). This has important implications for how to criticize the exclusionary effects of the nation state: rather than by claims to hospitality (or ‘integration’), abolitionist critique is based on mobile solidarities.

The creation of alternative forms of safety, and thereby of worlds otherwise, also lies at the center of *Jin Haritaworn’s* article. Against the background of the current political conjuncture of pandemic and mass protests, Haritaworn engages with the experiences and perspectives of black, migrant and activists of color on the basis of interviews and discusses the necropolitical dimensions of COVID policies. Focusing on the political and media debates on the vaccination campaigns in so called ‘hotspots’, the tabooization of the high number of migrant COVID patients in intensive care units as well as the prohibition of the commemoration of the victims brutally murdered in Hanau, Haritaworn shows how necropolitical and racist capitalist state reg-

ulations produce migrants as ‘risks’. Inspired by the alternative genealogies of care and safety put in practice by self-organised queer, trans, black, migrant, of color and disability justice movements, practices of safety during queer, anti-racist protests and mutual aid networks in the pandemic conjuncture, Haritaworn shows how these movements not only resist necropolitical logics of security, but *transform* safety and thereby create new social relations and visions. Through what Haritaworn calls ‘transformation of safety’, abolitionist visions of safety are not only imagined, but moreover lived in the pre-sence.

Also engaging with the prefigurative potential of abolitionist practices and socialities and how they unfold in protests and revolutions, *Mathijs van de Sande*’s article turns to the crucial question of violence in abolitionist politics. Van de Sande argues that abolitionist projects, notwithstanding their various differences with regard to geographic, cultural and also political articulations, share a specific political grammar and practice of prefiguration. Whether violence is rejected or understood as a means of self-defence in prefigurative politics, van de Sande argues that both of these positions rely on an instrumentalist understanding of violence in order to achieve a particular end. The article discusses various positions on the relation between prefiguration and violence. Drawing on Walter Benjamin’s work and attending to transformative justice politics, van de Sande invites us to reimagine the relation between prefiguration and violence. Rather than advocating for or against violence, van de Sande argues that violence is a social given which must be constantly re-negotiated in prefiguration as an open-ended process.

Continuing this line of inquiry, this special issue concludes with a philosophical reflection on the possibility of non-violent political action by *Christoph Menke*. Can the abolition of violence itself be non-violent? And if not, does this not render the desire to abolish violence self-contradictory? By way of a close reading of Benjamin’s essay ‘Critique of Violence’, Menke argues that every political action that deserves its name must be considered violent, for it significantly intervenes into established ethical life. Nonetheless, Menke argues, this does not lead to a paradox, as Benjamin offers still another option: a violence “of a different kind”. The crucial distinction is thus not between violence and non-violence, but between different kinds of violence. Against the violence of the law and the state stands another form of violence: one that liberates us in that it forces us to become something and somebody else than we already are. The act of self-transformation, Menke argues, always involves an infringement or a violation of our naturalized self. But rather than rejecting such force by reference to non-violence, we should embrace the abolition of our ‘given’ identity along with the abolition of ‘law, order and form’ as our liberation.

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Cultivating Solidarity from the Inside-Out

Abolitionist Efforts to Trans-gress the Prison Walls

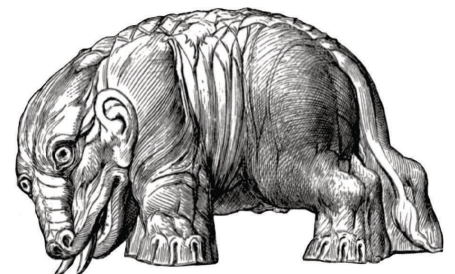
Jaden Janak

Abstract

Incarcerated radical intellectuals elucidate the nature of political struggle and its various arenas. Alongside these writers are solidarity groups that propagate their writings and intellectual products. Through a close reading of Black Communist trans prisoner Alyssa V. Hope's legal efforts and writings, this article unearths how a pen-pal relationship transformed into a comprehensive abolitionist community. This case study provides an example of how abolitionists are grappling with the need to support the material needs of marginalised communities while still building otherwise possible worlds separate from a failing welfare state. Mutual aid projects, like the one formed by Hope's supporters, showcase that otherwise possible worlds are not only possible, but they are being created right now before us.

Keywords: Prison Industrial Complex
Abolition, Solidarity, Mutual Aid, Inside-Out Organizing

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Prison writers set the political and social consciousness of leftist movements. The smuggled writings of imprisoned radical intellectuals (Rodriguez 2006) across prison boundaries can articulate the zeitgeist of socio-political movements by locating additional battlegrounds for organizing. Notable authors such as Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1947), North American radical philosopher George Jackson (1970), and Ugandan poet Stella Nyanzi (2020), exist in a long lineage of writers that have challenged dominant regimes and articulated the necessity of otherwise possible worlds (McKittrick 2006). Radical prison writers, like Gramsci, Jackson, and Nyanzi, give a unique, grounded perspective of the material conditions that structure not only the prison but society as a whole. Working alongside prison writers have always been the brave individuals that have disseminated their writings in the free world. In the United States, another writer is emerging within this radical legacy—Black Trans Communist and prison lawyer, Alyssa V. Hope. This essay focuses on the writings of Hope and the coordinated solidarity efforts her writings have inspired. Using the pen as her weapon, Hope’s writings expand the bounds of prison abolitionist organizing by advocating for the concerns of incarcerated Black trans women and amplifying these concerns through solidarity ties to the free world.

Prison industrial complex abolition (PIC abolition) challenges the replication of violence and the roots of violence itself. The PIC is global in reach. Its tentacles touch every aspect of human and non-human life from our schooling to our homes and jobs, and even the soil and air. Starting from the site of the prison, PIC abolition interrogates state and state-sponsored violence within carceral institutions like prisons and jails, practices such as expulsion and captivity commonly used in education systems, and economic belief systems that structure Western society (Foucault 1977). I use this term over other terms like penal abolition or prison abolition to emphasize the large-scale nature of carcerality and the size of solutions needed to combat it. More than the tearing down of jails and prisons (though that is certainly part of an abolitionist project), PIC abolition is about community building and resource sharing amidst organised abandonment from the state in the form of loose welfare nets, lackluster healthcare, and disposability of marginalised populations (Gilmore 1999, 180). Abolitionists, then, counteract the isolation and criminalization embedded within the carceral state by creating bonds of solidarity between prisoners and the outside world. As abolitionist organiser and theorist Mariame Kaba writes, “The work of abolition insists that we foreground the people who are behind the walls... That we transform the relationships we have with each other so that we can really create new forms of safety and justice in our communities.” (Duda/Kaba 2017) This solidarity takes many forms such as written correspondence via pen-pal programs, like that of Britain’s Bent Bars Project, which shows relationships between LGBTQ+ prisoners and supporters on the outside. Abolitionist programs like Bent Bars resolve to cultivate the kinds of relationships between prisoners and ‘free’ people that meet the needs of communities (Lamble 2011, 252). While prisons, jails, and disciplinary institutions like public schools use punishment and coercion to control populations (Morris 2016), abolitionists counter these fear tactics with community care and support that emphasises the plight of incarcerated people.

More than a one-way exchange of sympathy, abolitionist solidarity operationalises mutual aid as a foundational modality for community building. Abolitionist mutual aid recognises the necessity of meeting immediate communal needs while also addressing deeper causes of violence: mechanisms of control, management, and punishment that structure everyday life (Spade 2020, 9). Historically, mutual aid communities have taken many forms including the 1969 Free Breakfast programs of the Black Panther Party in the United States and the maroon communities formed by free and escaped enslaved people (Nelson 2011). In the 1950s and 1960s, health providers routinely refused Black patients and relegated Black people to sub-standard facilities (ibid., 24). To protest this treatment and provide for their community, the Black Panther Party of Oakland and other chapters around the nation and world opened People's Free Medical Clinics that provided quality medical services free of charge to Black community members (ibid., 79). Mutual aid work, like that of the Black Panther Party, is not top-down charity. Rather, mutual aid projects "are an integrated part of our lives... and [they] cultivate a shared analysis of the root causes of the problem." (Spade 2020, 28f.) Even as the welfare state continues to crumble, communities work together to meet each other's needs while creating new relations of accountability and care in the state's absence. During the Covid-19 pandemic, mutual aid groups around the world have emerged to provide financial, health-related, and material assistance for struggling communities. As local and national governments have failed to provide substantial resources for families struggling with unemployment, astronomical healthcare costs, and lack of access to stable housing, material aid operations like that established by the Karda House in Berlin helped to match providers of assistance with those in need of groceries, financial aid, and human connection (Trott 2020, 91). Mutual aid cooperatives embody the understanding that we already have the tools we need to survive even when the state fails us. Sometimes, these tools are virtual. This is the story of how an almost entirely online community emerged to support and enrich the life of Black trans prisoner writer, Alyssa V. Hope. In the next section, we will get to know Hope and her writings. The following section explores how a support committee for Hope emerged outside the prison walls and how they have mobilised to meet Hope's needs inside prison. Lastly, the conclusion analyses the role of mutual aid in building international bonds of solidarity that transcend struggle and geographical bounds.

The Advocacy of Alyssa V. Hope

Incarcerated for more than ten years in a 'hyper-tech' maximum security men's prison, Hope has filed numerous legal petitions on her own behalf in order to garner access to basic resources. Like many trans prisoners, Hope is often segregated from the prison community via solitary confinement and the outside world because of restricted mail privileges (Corcione 2020).[1] Hope legally changed her name to better fit her gender identity in 2018, and yet, her court filings can only be found using her birth name. Hope has filed suit multiple times against prison medical staff for refusal to treat ongoing medical issues caused by her time in prison. According to *Jones v. Joubert*

[1] Transgender prisoners are often put into administrative segregation (also known as solitary confinement) to prevent violence that might be done to them by their fellow prisoners. Additionally, trans prisoners can often be punished within the prison for having gender-related items that do not match how the prison has categorized them; these items (makeup, chest binding materials, etc.) can be considered contraband by prison officials. For more information on this please consult the 2015 report: "Coming Out of Concrete Closets" by LGBTQ+ prisoner rights organization, Black & Pink.

(2017), Hope alleges prison staff at North Branch Correctional Institution ignored her chronic pain, only prescribing Ibuprofen to treat it. Though this lawsuit and subsequent ones to gain access to hormone treatments were initially unsuccessful, Hope has continued to advocate for herself as a jailhouse lawyer. She has even won access to hormone therapy as a result.

Alongside her work as a jailhouse lawyer, Hope utilises public writing to galvanise support for the larger PIC abolition movement. In a special edition of *Dazed Magazine*, organised and edited by Chelsea Manning, Hope writes about the lasting consequences of the 1971 Attica Uprising in New York.^[2] Hope writes that Attica prisoners were maimed and murdered to “show America [and the world] why prisons were needed, and why the [state] would need additional funding to build more secure prisons...” (Hope 2019). After Attica, specialised prisons, much like the high-tech maximum-security prison in which Hope is currently incarcerated, became a ‘solution’ to prisoner control. More than a critique of the escalating nature of the carceral state, Hope’s work is that of a domestic geographer (Vasudevan/Smith 2020). Drawing on feminist and Black geographical traditions, Vasudevan and Smith’s conception of a domestic geographical sphere is useful in articulating how Hope utilizes the confined and intimate space of the prison cell alongside the larger, yet still confined space of the United States, to cultivate a politics of struggle against the PIC (ibid., 3). Hope’s development of an internationalist minded, anti-imperialist politics while inside the prison places her in a much larger lineage of Black political struggle known as the Black Radical Tradition (Robinson 1983). The prison, though fixed as a location of state and state sponsored enslavement, has always also facilitated this type of counter-hegemonic resistance through a relationship Garrett Felber refers to as the dialectics of discipline (2020). In the case of Attica, the legacy of the rebellion lives inside of the current iteration of abolitionist politics around the world. As Hope states, it is our job now to “not let our elders [from the Attica Rebellion] die in vain.” (2019) Hope’s insistence on the importance of Attica to a broader abolitionist fight counteracts the liberal impulse to believe PIC abolition is a recent invention by the North American academy (James 2021). Moreover, Hope’s provocation to remember Attica is a cry for historiographical expansiveness that remembers, recovers, and regenerates the struggles of the past within the current moment. The abolition movement of today builds on the sacrifices of those before us, whose critiques of the PIC were met with unspeakable violence. Hope’s writing contextualises the long lineage of PIC abolition work from Attica to today.

The Solidarity Movement Behind Hope

What started as a pen-pal relationship between Hope and socialist organiser/writer, Adryan Corcione, has transformed into a digital lifeline for Hope. In 2017, Corcione and Hope became connected by Black & Pink, an abolitionist queer organization which is headquartered in Nebraska. Collaborating with Hope via phone call, physical letter, and electronic mail, Corcione coordinated an online platform for Hope through the Twitter profile @comradealyssa. This profile tweets opportunities to advocate for Hope and other Black trans incarcerated people. When prison officials refused to acknowledge Hope’s name change, the @comradealyssa community mobilised to re-

^[2] Considered one of the bloodiest prison rebellions in the world, the Attica Prison Rebellion of 1971 occurred two weeks after the murder of revolutionary George Jackson and resulted in the death of more than 40 people. A group of majority Black prisoners took several hostages and released a list of 27 demands, including the creation of basic sanitation practices, visiting rights, and an end to racist treatment and brutalization by prison staff. After four days of failed negotiation, Governor Rockefeller ordered the State Police to quell the rebellion, and thus, military, police, and prison guards dropped tear gas into the prison and opened fire. In 2000, New York settled with the families of prisoners killed at Attica for \$8 million.

peatedly call the prison to demand the recognition of Hope's name change (Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee, 2018). Moreover, this community solicits pecuniary resources that fund Hope's legal efforts, help Hope purchase books, and gender transition supplies. Through the Comrade Alyssa Support Committee's individual social media as well as the @comradealyssa account, Corcione and their comrades amplify Hope's story to socialist and abolitionist organizations around the world, including the UK branch of the Incarcerated Workers Organising Committee. As a result of the Support Committee's organizing, Hope has often lost privileges to phone and letter access. This is the state's attempt to starve out the resources Hope has amassed on the outside while also sending a message to Hope and other radical prisoners that their political activities will not be tolerated. In response, Hope's Support Committee has continued organizing for her rights inside, and when they are allowed contact with her, they spread her writings, condition, and needs to transnational networks of support. When they are denied access, the Support Committee uplifts stories of other Black radical prisoners, like Strawberry Hampton, a trans woman, who has been kept in solitary confinement for several months after she sued the Illinois Department of Corrections for being held in men's prisons (Corcione 2020). The Comrade Alyssa Support Committee resists the state's attempt to isolate Hope by spreading her writings and uplifting the struggles of other radical prisoners.

Alongside supporting Hope's immediate needs, Hope's support committee also facilitates the publication of her writing. The committee posts Hope's writings from prison to an online subscription platform with the proceeds going to support Hope's ongoing material needs. In an "Essay to the LGB-TQIA Community from August 2020", Hope writes of the need for mutual aid. She asserts, "We are all we got in this life. If we don't love each other, then who will love us?" (2020). Hope understands that the same state that incarcerates and kills cannot fulfil the needs of communities. She continues, "We, as a community, have to unite and begin to build a foundation of trust and begin to assist our people in all areas of our life." (2020) Here, Hope's writing, perhaps inadvertently, comments on the nature of her own support community. When the state left Hope vulnerable to abuse and violence, Hope's own support committee formed to meet her needs and to disseminate Hope's polemics to broader society.

Community support groups like Hope's have broad implications for the creation of otherwise possible worlds. Hope and the @comradealyssa community are theorizing and actively building a new world apart from a punishment regime. As PIC abolition becomes a more widely disseminated idea, some question whether the vision is too broad, too theoretical, and even possible. Through the mobilization and organization of solidarity groups like Hope's, Bent Bars, and Black & Pink, PIC abolition emerges not as a thought exercise, but as a phenomenon that is already unfolding before us. Abolition requires mutual aid work between those who may disagree on tactics and strategy but maintain a shared value in the dignity of all living things (Lee 2008, 112). A mutual aid framework can help alleviate the strain of ideological and political debates by recognizing regardless of whether one particularly lives by an abolitionist position, socialists, anarchists, communists, and other radical sects can find utility in creating and maintaining community formations to solve systemic problems. Ideological and political contradic-

tions necessarily remain, but mutual aid connects disparate struggles to the larger project of abolition. In this regard, “freedom is a place”, a geographical creation that involves the destruction of harmful systems and practices and the creation of mutually constituted community formations embedded in what Ruth Wilson Gilmore theorizes as abolition geographies (2017, 227). By joining LGBTQ+ movement with the movement against incarceration and the Movement for Black Lives, Hope’s support committee showcases the nature of abolition as a multi-faceted fight for life. This fight as Gilmore reminds us, requires that we change one thing: everything.

Only We Can Save Us

Prison writers and their comrades on the outside transform the conditions for organizing and the political terrains encompassed within the ‘possible’ paradigm. Imprisoned radical intellectuals, like Hope, embody a praxis that “entails the invention of new communicative modalities and strategies, from the production of new political vernaculars to the construction of subversive pedagogical spaces and networks.” (Rodriguez 2006, 73) These intellectuals continue to imagine and cultivate caring communities, despite uncertainty of whether these futuristic models will ever take shape widely. Prescription and status quo are antithetical to an abolitionist project, and imprisoned radical intellectuals know this. Canadian scholar Robyn Maynard affirms that “we must refuse to surrender our imaginations”, and confront the refusal-creation dialectic which abolition requires (2017, 249). The refusal of the prison system (and its posterity) must always be accompanied by the creative forces needed to imagine sustainable worlds, where prisons and isolationism become unthinkable. In the case of Hope, her committee raises money for commissary and legal fees through a subscription service that gives individuals access to Hope’s writing. This helps provide for her immediate needs while the Committee works towards longer term journey of building abolition.

Collective political struggle, inspired by historical continuities and mistakes of past actors, is the only way to transform a carceral society into a safe one. This process is transnational and across varied political struggles. The Free Angela Davis (And All Political Prisoners) Campaign stands as an example for solidarity campaigns like the Comrade Alyssa Support Committee. Facing murder charges after a courthouse shootout involving her comrade Jonathan Jackson, the committee created to save Davis’ life garnered international support from European freedom fighters and beyond. Historical examples like the Free Angela Committee animate contemporary struggles like that of the Comrade Alyssa Support Committee, which utilizes the story of one individual to connect broader struggles against global imperialism through social media awareness campaigns and phone zaps (Rosenberg 2020). From the Free Angela Committee to the @comradealyssa committee, solidarity has been a worldwide practice of community building, resource sharing, and mobilization to support one another. From Hope’s theoretical writing to the group-centered leadership function of the committee, solidarity and collective well-being are at the centre of every part of the group’s work. Other social movements can benefit from the horizontal and decentralized approaches modelled by the @comradealyssa committee. Social media,

just like flyers and long-form essays, are a tool that can be used effectively in the building of more equal communities. Abolitionist formations, like Hope's, preserve the intellectual archives of prison writers all the while demonstrating that the only way to cultivate livable lives is through collective struggle.

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Unruly Migrations, Abolitionist Alternatives

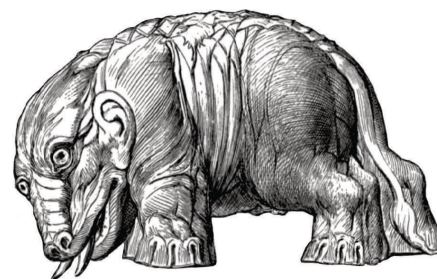
Vicki Squire

Abstract

This essay considers how appeals for the abolition of structures of unfreedom, situations of violence and harm, and enduring practices of neglect and dehumanisation are generated through acts of unruly migration. It does so on the basis of a close engagement with a counter-archive of migratory testimonies that was produced during 2015 and 2016 with people who had migrated – or were planning to migrate – across the Mediterranean to Europe. Drawing inspiration from Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s conceptualisation of ‘organised abandonment’, the essay suggests that key dimensions of an abolitionist politics are evident in refusals of the racialised, gendered and classed dynamics of militarism and colonialism that are integral to the border complex. In so doing, it also reflects on *alternatives* – transformative imaginaries and forms of organising that emerge through what are interpreted as abolitionist acts of migration.

Keywords: Migration, Borders, Abolition, Mediterranean

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'Everybody is free.'
(Nigerian woman, Rome)

'Let us live in security.'
(Cameroonian woman, Rome)

'Consider us as humans.'
(Ethiopian man, Malta)

Freedom, security, respect: these are just a few of the demands advanced by people migrating across the Mediterranean in precarious conditions during 2015 and 2016. In this essay, I argue that, although these statements stand as appeals to equal treatment, they can also be interpreted as appeals for the *abolition* of structures of unfreedom, situations of violence and harm, and enduring practices of neglect and dehumanisation. Indeed, by reading further into these demands, I suggest that a range of abolitionist alternatives emerge that refuse the power and violence of racialised, gendered and classed bordering practices. These alternatives beckon a world where it is no longer the case that “White people normally go to Nigeria” while Nigerians face barriers in return (Nigerian woman, Rome);^[1] a world where people are no longer denied the right to migrate while “security issues are not solved” in the regions from which they flee (Cameroonian woman, Rome); and a world where the contributions that people migrating can make “not only to the economy but also in policy-making” are no longer ignored (Ethiopian man, Malta).

My aim in this essay is to further reflect on some of the ways in which unruly acts of migration can be interpreted as a refusal of the concrete manifestations of violence and harm that are embedded within racialised, gendered and classed bordering practices. I use the term ‘unruly’ in broad terms here, to refer to migrations that in various ways challenge or exceed the attempts of states to govern migration (Tazzioli 2019). Rather than confining my focus to state power in a narrow sense, I draw from Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s suggestion that the prison industrial complex involves “all sorts of people and places that are tied in, or want to be tied in, to that complex” (2012, 3f.). A similar argument can be made about the ‘border industrial complex’, which Todd Miller (2021) examines in the US context to highlight how territorial borders function as sites of border security, military technologies, policing, transport and logistics (plus much more besides), thus implicating a range of private corporations as well as state agencies and civil society organisations. This is also evident in the European context, where bordering practices cut across and extend far beyond territorial borderlines (Balibar 1998), tying all sorts of ‘people and places’ into the border complex (see also Anderson 2014).

Just as Ruth Wilson Gilmore highlights how the prison industrial complex developed in response to multiple struggles during the 1950s and 1960s in the US (2012, 5), I want to suggest that the border industrial complex can similarly be interpreted as having developed in response to the struggles of those migrating. In this essay, I interpret such struggles as a form of *refusal* or escape from experiences of violence and harm, which arise where citizens are abandoned to processes of forced depopulation and “lucrative death” (Estévez 2021), where people on the move are abandoned to physical ele-

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[1] The quotes throughout this essay are from the interviews conducted as part of the *Crossing the Mediterranean Sea by Boat: Mapping and Documenting Migratory Journeys and Experiences* project, with people who had made – or who had contemplated making – the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean Sea by boat to Europe. Interviews were carried out during 2015 and 2016 in Kos, Malta and Sicily as well as in Athens Berlin, Istanbul and Rome.

ments across deserts and seas (Doty 2011; Heller/Pezzani 2012) and where those seeking refuge are subject to the ‘slow violence’ of impoverishment (Mayblin 2020). I draw on abolitionist literatures to suggest that these practices of escape are conditioned by forms of ‘organised abandonment’ that “extract” or “compromis[e]” the “very resources that people need to survive and live with dignity” (Miller 2021, 143). The essay begins by discussing violence and harm in terms of *abandonment*, before highlighting the significance of escape understood through the lens of *desertion*. It then reflects on some of the ways in which the concrete demands advanced by people migrating can be interpreted as appeals to *abolition*, focusing specifically to the refusal of militaristic and colonial structures and institutions that condition many precarious forms of migration today. In conclusion, the essay briefly reflects on *alternatives* – transformative imaginaries and forms of organising that emerge through what I interpret as abolitionist acts of migration.

The argument advanced within this essay is grounded in my engagement with a counter-archive of migratory testimonies that was produced during 2015 and 2016 with 271 people in Germany, Italy, Malta and Turkey who had migrated – or were planning to migrate – across the Mediterranean.^[2] The counter-archive forms part of a larger collaborative project, which was designed to amplify the voices of those most directly impacted by the European Commission’s 2015 migration policy agenda (see Squire et al. 2017; 2021). I have engaged with these testimonies in sustained terms, to focus not only on the lived experiences that they document but also the claims to which these experiences give rise (Squire 2020; cf. ‘Gabriel’ with Squire 2017). My aim here is not to present a comprehensive or conclusive analysis of the testimonies, whether in an individual or collective sense. Neither is it to suggest that migration is reducible to abolitionist acts. Rather, I aim to shed light on some of the ways in which unruly acts of migration entail a refusal of concrete manifestations of power and violence that are embedded within the border complex, in so doing gesturing toward abolitionist alternatives.

Abandonment

Much has been written in the field of migration and border studies about the ways in which people migrating are subject through processes of abandonment to state-sanctioned practices of violence and harm. For example, Alison Mountz (2020) highlights the longer histories of racialised violence that are embedded in diffuse practices of interception at sea, island containment and detention, showing how these together represent the ‘death of asylum’. Behrouz Bouchani (2018), who spent six years in offshore Australian detention on Manus island, documents first-hand his experience as ‘an illegally imprisoned refugee’ of the ‘Kyriarchical’ system that pits detainees against one another. In the European context, violence and harm have been examined both in relation to the deaths of people ‘left to die’ across the Mediterranean Sea (Heller/Pezzani 2012; Albahari 2016; Mainwaring 2020), as well as in terms of the systemic neglect experienced by many in refugee camps (Davies et al. 2017). Scholars have convincingly shown how both humanitarian and militaristic or security-based modes of governing are implicated in the continued violence against people on the move (Tazzioli 2019). They have also importantly pointed to the longer-standing relations

^[2] The first phase was completed during September–November 2015 and involved 136 interviews with a total of 139 participants at three island arrival sites: Kos, Malta and Sicily. Difficulties in recruiting research participants in Malta due to reduced arrivals resulting from an ‘agreement’ with Italy during the time-period of our research led to some of the interviews being carried out at this site between December 2015 and March 2016. The second phase was completed during May–July 2016 and involved 121 interviews with a total of 132 participants at four urban sites: Athens, Berlin, Istanbul and Rome.

of colonial violence implicated in border policing across the ‘Black Mediterranean’ and beyond (Saucier/Woods 2014; Danewid 2017).

I find it helpful on multiple counts to conceptualise these manifestations of violence and harm, along with the practices of neglect and dehumanisation within which they are grounded, in terms of Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s (2015; 2020) notion of ‘organised abandonment’. It is worth noting that Gilmore’s work is primarily orientated toward the US prison system and, in this context, she develops the concept of organised abandonment as a means to highlight the impact of neoliberal austerity measures on racialised communities who face imprisonment at a much higher rate than the average. Nevertheless, understood more broadly as a mode of “extracting, polluting or compromising the very resources that people need to survive and live with dignity” (Miller 2021, 143), the concept of ‘organised abandonment’ facilitates appreciation of the recurring harms that are produced through racialised as well as gendered and classed bordering practices. These are manifest at multiple phases along what are often long and fragmented migratory journeys, whether in terms of the multiple ‘drivers’ of migration and the forms of extraction, pollution and compromise that these involve (Estévez 2021, 25ff.; Squire et al. 2021, 102ff.), or in terms of the on-going situations of violence and harm that demand an on-going struggle to survive and live with dignity *en route* and on arrival (ibid., 135ff.). The concept of organised abandonment is particularly helpful here in moving beyond dehistoricised and deracialised conceptions of abandonment, which have been prominent within migration and border studies due to the heavy influence of Giorgio Agamben’s conceptualisation of sovereign power.

Indeed, the concept of organised abandonment is important because it draws attention to the responsibility of state authorities for the precarity and mortality of people on the move, yet without reducing violence and harm to the actions of ‘the state’ or sovereign power alone. As the works highlighted at the start of this section indicate, various forms of violence are enacted by multiple agencies through the abandonment of people migrating – including at sea, on islands or in detention. Yet in such contexts, responsibility for harm is often evaded. For example, offshore detention or practices of interception at isolated sites render violence and harm relatively hidden. Moreover, the containment of migratory struggles within sites such as deserts and seas provide authorities with what Roxanne Lynn Doty (2012) describes as a ‘moral alibi’ for border deaths. State-sanctioned forms of violence and harm in this regard persist, while culpability for precarity and mortality is evaded (Squire 2017a). The causes of precarity and mortality are of course complex and multifaceted, but the concept of organised abandonment is helpful in facilitating appreciation of the *persistent production* of precarity for those who are targeted by racialised, gendered and classed bordering practices (see also Mayblin/Turner 2021, 133). It is in this context that I suggest practices of escape or desertion from situations of violence and harm form a critical dimension of migratory struggles.

Desertion

To examine migration through the lens of escape is to highlight the constitutive power of migratory struggles; an aspect that has been strongly emphasised by scholars of the ‘autonomy of migration’ (Mezzadra 2004; Papadopoulos et al. 2008). Elsewhere (Squire 2015), I have drawn on such works to suggest that a shift of focus from escape to *desertion* can facilitate appreciation of the dynamic relations between migratory struggles and the state-sanctioned practices of violence and abandonment briefly discussed above. The definition of desertion derives from the term ‘desert’, which is related to the Latin *desertus* meaning ‘left waste’. As a verb, to desert not only translates as ‘to abandon’, but also as ‘to withdraw’. As an act of abandon that is treacherous, desertion means to leave a place empty, yet it also refers to the failure to remain at a key moment (Oxford Dictionary, np). In other words, desertion implies both abandonment *and* renouncement. The concept of desertion can thus be approached from multiple directions. On the one hand, the violence of the border complex involves desertion as a form of abandonment, through which racialised, gendered and classed bodies are subject to violence and harm – or left to ‘waste’ (Bauman 2003). That is, those compelled to migrate in precarious conditions are rendered vulnerable to premature death, in Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s (2007) terms, or subject to a living death, in Achille Mbembe’s (2003). Yet, on the other hand, desertion also involves a form of renouncement or withdrawal – including from situations of organised abandonment. This is no more evident than in the struggles of people on the move to escape lived experiences of violence and harm through the act of withdrawal, or ‘leave-taking’.

An analysis of desertion is suggestive of the ambiguities that arise in confronting the violence of organised abandonment, as well as of the ways in which practices of escape open up what Reece Jones (2012) calls ‘spaces of refusal’ that exceed the operations of state-sanctioned violence. Another way of conceptualising this is through Paulo Virno’s conception of exodus as a mode of engaged withdrawal. Virno argues that escape or exodus is not simply a process of hiding or of taking a backdoor exit, but rather involves the *opening* of an exit through an act of “founding leave-taking” (1996, 197). In other words, escape is not just about disappearing but about the failure to be seen, which involves “a free-thinking inventiveness that changes the rules of the game” (ibid., 199). More than simply a refusal of the violence of organised abandonment, escape can in this regard be understood in terms of the creation of alternative forms of existence. It is in this sense that we might engage desertion through the lens of engaged withdrawal as a means to consider how people migrating in precarious conditions reject and reconfigure experiences of violence and harm, generating abolitionist alternatives to the border complex and to processes of organised abandonment in so doing. In the next section, I provide initial insights into some of the ways in which these alternatives emerge from an analysis of the claims or demands of people on the move.

Abolition

I was afraid to be taken to the army because normally the students are exempted for [a] temporary [period] to serve the army. But with my friend, they didn't allow them... so they went to the army. And I didn't want that to happen to me. [*without translation:*] I don't kill anyone.

(Syrian man, Berlin)

I had to serve in the army. And at the first checkpoint in the border, I will be taken away, because I, I didn't go to the army myself. I would be taken away to serve the army and carry the weapons to kill innocent people. I didn't want to carry the blood in my name.

(Syrian man, Berlin)

I was called, summoned to the army, I didn't want to join the army. If I join the army, I have to kill people. I don't want to kill anybody, not from inside either [the] opposition, or the regime. Furthermore, I wanted to do my postgraduate studies.

(Syrian man, Berlin)

These three quotes are from different Syrian men, all of whom our research team spoke with in Berlin. Each expresses a refusal to participate in violence as this is concretely manifest in the institution of the armed forces. Given the context of civil war and the prominence of different military groups in Syria, this includes a refusal to participate in military violence advanced by “opposition” groups, as well as by “the regime” (quote 3). None of the men cited above were members of any armed group at the point of fleeing Syria, yet their claims remain significant given that one of the key definitions of desertion relates to the abandonment of military duties. Notably, each expresses their escape from the army in terms of a refusal to kill: “I don't kill anyone” (quote 1); “I didn't want to carry the blood in my name” (quote 2); “I don't want to kill anybody” (quote 3). Indeed, several others with whom we spoke describe similar situations and sentiments, including a significant number of men and their family members fleeing Syria, as well as some fleeing situations marked by conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa (Squire 2020).

In each of these cases, migration as a form of desertion appears to be an act of renouncement or refusal of the violence of warfare (rather than, for example, an act of abandon involving recklessness or the disavowal of responsibility). The quotes suggest a principled form of desertion, whereby the process of fleeing enforced conscription involves a refusal to kill “innocent people” (quote 2). On this basis, I suggest that we might interpret these acts of migration as resembling an anti-militarist or anti-war movement, which rejects recurring dynamics of racial and masculinist violence (see Squire 2020). Beyond an expression of respect or care for others, withdrawal from the conflict is also expressed as a means of respecting one's own life. As one of the men cited above explains: “If you – there is a war raging on in your country and you get the chance to reach a safe country, won't you take that chance?” (quote 2). Another describes: “I have to finish my German studies.

Get my Abitur done. And apply for the Freie Universität in Berlin... My big concern is first my further study... in Syria, everything is collapsing, no studies at all” (quote 1). These affirmations of alternative conditions of existence grounded in safety, respect and education are echoed in the refusal of militarist violence by a fourth Syrian man, who demands that European politicians “use [their] brains, stop selling weapons to our country” (Syrian man, Berlin). Such a demand is suggestive of a refusal of masculinist and militarist power and violence as well as of the wider military industrial complex within which the Syrian conflict is embedded.

While the demands of the three Syrian men in Berlin cited above can be interpreted as forming an anti-war movement, the demands of three Nigerian women in Rome are perhaps better understood as constituting an anti-colonial movement (see Squire 2020). This is evident in the opening quote cited in this essay, which is worth reading as part of a longer interview extract:

ROM2.06c: Yeah. [I think we have the right to enter].

Interviewer: Why would you say that?

ROM2.06c: White people normally go to Nigeria, they are safe, they are ok. I know that very well. So... you know God created everybody.

ROM2.06a: Everybody have equal rights.

ROM2.06c: So it is the same. Everybody is free. You are free to go to Nigeria, there is your choice. So your push allows us enter Italy freely without no problem, that is what we want.

(Interview with three Nigerian women, Rome)

Particularly striking in this extract is that there is a clear refusal of the targeting of racialised groups of people from the global south, who are identified as facing more extensive barriers in exercising their rights to cross-border migration than ‘White’ people from the global north. This is not simply to demand that “everybody is free” and that “everybody” has “equal rights” but is perhaps better understood as a refusal of the migration of privileged “White people” over others. Unruly migration in this sense can be interpreted as the desertion or enactment of escape from racialised and classed bordering practices. Indeed, a range of people with whom we spoke rejected the processes of dehumanisation generated by such practices: “[W]e want them to treat people like they are humans and not animals”, explained a Syrian woman we spoke with in Kos in 2015. “They shouldn’t think that the Afghani is an animal”, said an Afghan man in Athens. “Don’t consider us as a trade”, a Syrian man in Berlin told us in 2016. “Don’t save us from death and put us in misery”, appealed a Sudanese man in Rome during 2016.

Claims to a shared humanity and to the importance of respecting the human rights of all people were expressed by many of those with whom we spoke (Squire et al. 2021). While the extract above highlights how the racial dimensions of these demands were sometimes direct and explicit, we also found these implicitly or indirectly expressed with reference to the ‘connected’ histories of European states with those from which people had escaped (Bhambra 2014). For example, a Syrian woman in Istanbul echoed the statement of the Syrian man above regarding the continued role of Europe in the

civil war, to say: “Who is responsible [for the bloodshed in Syria]? It is the politics of the powerful countries... The powerful countries are watching us. They are silent. International silence”. An Afghan man in Kos gestured toward the racialised politics of asylum through which Europe denies protection to those migrating, noting that: “Back in time, we used to have Europeans as refugees. We had them in Iraq also... After the second world war.” Describing the failed actions of European states to resolve the issues driving migration, a man from Ivory Coast with whom we spoke in Malta said: “the Europeans of those who colonise us they have a lot of organisations, or [organisations run] by... Europe[an countries] to cooperate with our government in my country”.

These statements are all significant because they point to the ways in which the countries from which many people fled during 2015 and 2016 are connected to Europe through imperial or colonial histories, as well as contemporary trade and military engagements (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018). The statement from the Afghan man in Kos is also suggestive of the ways in which the bordering practices of European states advance a racialised politics of asylum that has persisted over a much longer duration. Unruly migration as an act of engaged withdrawal can thus be understood as challenging these politics through a form of desertion that renounces the violence and harms of racialised, gendered and classed bordering practices, even while remaining vulnerable to them. To draw on the insights of E. Tendayi Achiume, we might interpret migration here as a “decolonising movement” that rejects the “asymmetrical...structure of co-dependence” embedded in the (post)colonial condition, along with the “severe political-economic conditions and the fall-out of these conditions” (2017, 142ff.). Understood as an abolitionist act, unruly migration refuses structures of unfreedom and situations of violence and harm through bringing to light recurring practices of neglect and dehumanisation. Indeed, in speaking back to experiences of the violence and harm of racialised, gendered and classed bordering practices, a range of alternatives to organised abandonment begin to emerge from the testimonies of those cited above: “I propose that they think a little bit about our future. They are people, and we are people” (Syrian woman, Istanbul); “We expect to be treated humanely” (Afghan man, Kos). “[T]ake action... real action... that can really make change in Africa” (man from Ivory Coast, Malta). It is to the potential of unruly migration to establish abolitionist alternatives that I will turn in concluding this essay.

Alternatives

In her discussion of sanctuary and abolition, Naomi Paik suggests that an abolitionist approach “understands both the interlocking forces that criminalise differently marginalised people (via citizenship status, race, gender, etc.) and the interlocking need for a broad-based movement that empowers all targeted people” (2020, 5). Critical, then, is not only that we pay attention to the various people and places that are tied into the border complex, but also that we consider how those migrating in precarious conditions generate a “reorganisation” of how people live “together in the world” (Gilmore 2020) in the face of compromises to their “surviv[al] and [ability to access resources to] live with dignity” (Miller 2021, 143). One poignant example of this can be

found in the case of the Syrian man from Berlin quoted in the last section as saying: “I don’t want to kill anybody” (quote 3). He explains how, with no family members left, he travelled with a young woman fleeing along the same route as him: “This woman was my road companion, I was her protector, I was her guard. The one who wants to look after her...[they] are in Germany... She is now part of [my] family. I’m her family.” This statement not only highlights how personal and familial relationships transform in situations of precarity (Squire 2017b). It also exemplifies a form of sociality based on relations of care and mutual support, thus gesturing toward alternative ways of living grounded in an appreciation that “life is precious” (Gilmore 2020, np).

So, what does abolition mean in this context, and how might unruly migrations generate alternative imaginaries and institutions to those associated with the violence and harms of the ‘border industrial complex’? A growing body of critical scholarship has made the case for no borders or open borders (e.g. Jones 2019; King 2016; Sharma 2021), including through the analysis of migratory struggles that show how infringements on the freedom of movement are contested or subverted by people on the move and their allies (e.g. Mezzadra 2020; Stierl 2020). In her abolitionist analysis of the Black Mediterranean, for example, Ida Danewid (2021) explores forms of resistance that are grounded in solidarity and abolition, rather than hospitality. Others have made the case for abolishing institutions as a concrete step towards dismantling the border complex, such as in George Boyce’s discussion of the abolition of US Border Patrol (cited in Miller 2021, 86). The contribution of this essay lies in its consideration of how far, and in what ways, people on the move *themselves* engage a politics of abolition – whether directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly. While the testimonies for our counter-archive do not speak to the abolition of borders directly, I have suggested that key dimensions of an abolitionist politics can nevertheless be indirectly perceived in refusals of the racialised, gendered and classed dynamics of militarism and colonialism that are embedded within the border complex. Abolitionist alternatives in this regard are multiple, yet nevertheless come together in a mode of desertion that renounces situations of organised abandonment: “A decent life”, a man from Syria in Berlin suggests. “It’s education!” a man from Gambia in Sicily proclaims. “Open the border” a Syrian woman in Athens requests. Or, as a Syrian woman in Athens states: “We want security, we’re looking for the opportunity to work, for a future for our kids. Is this wrong?”

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Riskante Migrant*innen und schützenswerte Bürger*innen

Die Transformation der Sicherheit in der
Konjunktur von Pandemie und Protest

Risky Migrants and Citizens in Need of Protection

The Transformation of Safety on the
Conjuncture of Pandemic and Protest

Jin Haritaworn

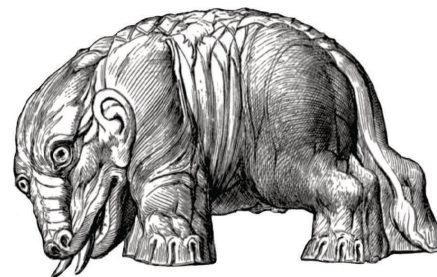
Abstract

This article examines abolitionist strategies of COVID safety that present alternatives to the logics of racial profiling and risk management that are at the basis of the state's COVID regulations. As in previous crises, queer, antiracist and other self-organized movements are leading the transformation of safety and the development of new societal visions. This article is grounded in interviews with activists in Berlin that critique a necropolitical COVID policy which treats Black people, migrants and people of colour as infectious rulebreakers – as risks rather than risk groups. This is explored with regard to three media and political debates: the so-called taboo regarding the high number of migrant COVID patients on German ICUs, the vaccination campaign in the so-called hotspots, and the protests against anti-Black racism and to commemorate the victims of the racist mass murder in Hanau (Hesse), which politicians and journalists declared to be superspreader events. Nevertheless, it is on the conjuncture of pandemic and protest that new possibilities of care and of collectivity are arising that open up worlds beyond racial capitalism.

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Keywords, engl.: Coronaracism, Health Inequalities, *Racial* Capitalism, Bio- and Necropolitics, Transformative Justice, Intersectionality



Einleitung

This moment of precarity and disaster reminds us that we cannot rely on the state for our wellbeing. The legacies of imperialism, capitalism, and patriarchy undergird forms of violence that unevenly expose many in our communities to further risk, rendering people disposable.

Yet, in this moment, we also see how revolutionary love and care can reshape our world. We see the urgency, necessity, and radical possibilities of decarceration, language justice, health-care and housing access, economic redistribution, and mutual aid. Our dreams, visions, and desires for an alternative world and future can be realized. We are made of communities with deep collective knowledge on how to care for each other and the earth around us. Together, we can survive and build interdependent communities of resistance (Asian American Feminist Antibodies 2020).

Mit den globalen Protesten infolge des Polizeimordes an George Floyd ist auch im deutschsprachigen Raum eine größere Offenheit für Konzepte wie Polizeirassismus und Abolition entstanden, die auf längere lokale Bewegungsgeschichten zurückgehen (Bruce-Jones 2012; EOTO i.E.; Thompson 2021). Zugleich hat die Corona-Pandemie die von Abolitionist*innen gestellte Frage, was uns sicher macht, neu aufgeworfen (Brazell 2018). Dies ist der Gegenstand der bislang zwanzig qualitativen Interviews, welche ich Anfang 2021 mit Menschen in Berlin führte, die in unterschiedlichen selbst-organisierten Kontexten – unter anderem als queer, migrantisch, Schwarz oder People of Colour – aktiv sind. Wir besprachen, wie Corona-Sicherheit in marginalisierten Räumen praktiziert wird: vom kreativen Umgang mit den staatlichen Corona-Regeln, deren Haushaltsdefinition ein weißes, cis-heteronormatives Familien-Konzept vorschreibt, zur Bildung von Pods, Bubbles und Care-Kollektiven,^[1] zur Organisation von Protesten, wo Sicherheit von Grund auf transformiert wird. Gemein ist den Organisator*innen dieser vielfältigen Projekte nicht nur, dass sie sich am Rande des staatlich Sanktionierten bewegen – sie halten sich nicht immer an die Regeln und erfinden zugleich neue, die auch marginalisierten Menschen Schutz versprechen. Gemein ist diesen Projekten auch, dass sie präfigurativ sind (Brown 2017). Sie handeln, als wäre eine bessere Zukunft bereits greifbar und lassen diese näher rücken.

Die von den Teilnehmenden vorgestellten Entwürfe stellen Echos der Abolition dar, als Traum einer Welt jenseits des Gefängnisses, der weißen Vorherrschaft und des *racial* Kapitalismus (Davis/Rodriguez 2000; Gilmore 2007; Melamed 2015). Sie sind Teil transnationaler Konversationen, die von der deutschsprachigen Linken bisher akut unterschätzt wurden, und deren gemeinsamer Nenner die Suche nach Alternativen zum karzeralen^[2] Staat ist. Hierzu zählen Schwarzer Feminismus, Queer/Transgender of Colour Politik, Indigene Dekolonisierung sowie Disability Justice, eine von behinderten Queers of Colour gegründete Bewegung, die Behinderung, Krankheit und Wohlergehen immer bereits intersektional definiert (z.B. Popoola/Sezen 1999; Leben nach Migration 2010; Incite! 2006; FSIS/NMS/NYSHN 2014;

[1] Pods, Bubbles und Care-Kollektive entstammen der Disability Justice, einer von behinderten Queers of Colour gegründeten Bewegung, die Fürsorge jenseits von ableistischen, rassistischen und cis-heteronormativen Strukturen kollektiviert und auf Prinzipien wie Interdependenz und Abolition aufbauend neu definiert (z.B. Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018). Der Begriff Pod wurde in derselben Bewegung als Werkzeug transformativer Gerechtigkeit erfunden (vgl. Mingus 2016).

[2] Der karzerale Staat beschreibt straffende Institutionen wie Polizei, Gefängnisse und Gerichte. Wie ich in diesem Artikel darlege, ist er zugleich im Zusammenspiel mit Institutionen, die normalerweise mit dem Wohlfahrtsstaat verbunden werden, beispielsweise dem Schul- und Gesundheitssystem, zu verstehen (Haritaworn 2015; Thompson 2021). Auch diese sind regelmäßig an der Überwachung und Kriminalisierung von nicht-weißen und migrantisierten Menschen beteiligt. Zu einer abolitionistischen Perspektive auf Sozialarbeit siehe Chapman und Withers (2019).

Haritaworn 2015; El-Tayeb/Thompson 2019; Dixon/Piepzna-Samarasinha 2020). Die in diesen transnationalen Begegnungen entwickelten Theorien zu Community Accountability und transformativer Gerechtigkeit bieten praktische Lösungsvorschläge und visionäre Zukunftsentwürfe. In ihrer Sonderausgabe zu Community Accountability erklären Clarissa Rojas, Mimi Kim und Alisa Bierria (2012) die Entstehung dieses Ansatzes im Kontext anhaltender Polizeigewalt gegen Schwarze, Indigene und People of Colour Communitys. Sie heben die Wichtigkeit informeller und oft unterschätzter Orte und Praktiken wie „family oral histories[,] intimate kitchentable and back-room storytelling“ für die Erfindung von Strategien gegen zwischenmenschliche Gewalt hervor, die die Polizei oft gänzlich umgehen (ebd., 5). Den Kontext dieser praktischen und theoretischen Entstehung erklären sie wie folgt: „People have responded to gendered violence within conditions of specific, sustained, and violent alienation from police[.] That community work remains unnamed, unwritten, and outside the boundaries of political institutions.“ (ebd.)

Neben kollektiver Rechenschaft gegenüber jenen, die Schaden anrichten und Verantwortung gegenüber jenen, die Schaden erfahren, zielt Community Accountability auch auf die Erweiterung zwischenmenschlicher Kapazitäten ab, ein Ziel, welches gerade im Kontext von Corona aktuell erscheint, wo viele sich vom Staat allein gelassen fühlen. Sie entzieht dem neoliberalen karzeralen Staat Macht über kriminalisierte Communitys und erneuert Ressourcen, die uns im Zuge kapitalistischer Entwicklung weggenommen wurden. Dies ist auch bei ihrer Schwesterbewegung, für transformative Gerechtigkeit, der Fall. Letztere experimentiert mit alternativen Formulierungen von Gerechtigkeit und eignet sich die Definitionsmacht darüber, was Gerechtigkeit und vor allem auch Sicherheit schafft – eine Frage, welche hier im Vordergrund steht –, wieder an. Die darauf basierenden, oft experimentellen, umfochtenen und noch in der Entstehung befindlichen Anti-Gewalt-Strategien umgehen die Polizei, Gerichte und Gefängnisse und rücken das Wohlergehen von Menschen und Communitys, die Gewalt erfahren, in den Vordergrund. In einem Interview zum von ihnen herausgegebenen Sammelband zu transformativer Gerechtigkeit (2020) beschreiben Ejeris Dixon und Leah Lakshmi Piepzna Samarasinha dies wie folgt:

Ejeris: I think of transformative justice as a framework that includes strategies on how we prevent and intervene and hold people accountable and heal from violence and harm. And also how we transform the social context and conditions that fuel and feed a culture of violence. And how we do all of those things without relying on state systems – police, prisons.

Leah: ... I'm coming from more of a harm reduction place where I often describe TJ as „anything that creates more safety, justice, or healing for people who have survived violence, abuse, or harm that doesn't rely on the cops or courts.“ It could be that the perpetrator transforms, or it could just be that the survivor got out alive (Brown/Brown 2021).

Neben der von Abolitionist*innen häufig gestellten Frage, wie mit einzelnen Individuen umzugehen sei, deren Akte anderen tatsächlich schaden,

fragt transformative Gerechtigkeit also auch, was diese Akte mit weiteren systemischen Gewaltverhältnissen zu tun haben. Diese Frage ist gerade im Kontext von Corona relevant, wo nicht-weiße Menschen häufig als infektiöse Regelbrecher*innen dämonisiert werden. Mein Artikel untersucht die Transformation der Sicherheit im Kontext der sozialen, politischen, ökonomischen und ideologischen ‚Konjunktur‘, wie Stuart Hall es bezeichnen würde, von Pandemie und Protest (Hall/Massey 2010). Dabei beziehe ich mich auf drei mediale und politische Debatten: den sogenannten Tabubruch um die hohe Zahl migrantischer Corona-Patient*innen auf deutschen Intensivstationen, die Impfkampagne in den sogenannten Hotspots und die Proteste gegen anti-Schwarzen Rassismus und zum Gedenken an die Opfer von Hanau, welche von Politik und Medien als Superspreader-Events diskutiert wurden. In diesen Debatten erscheinen nicht-weiße Menschen als degenerierte Körper, die die Sicherheit anderer gefährden, deren Leben schützenswert und deren gesellschaftliche Teilhabe – oft aufgrund von weißen und heterosexuellen Privilegien – normalisiert ist.

Dem entgegen stehen die Analysen und Praxen von Aktivist*innen, die Alternativen zur staatlichen Corona-Politik schaffen. Der folgende Artikel konzentriert sich auf das Beispiel von Demonstrationen, in deren Kontext es neben aktivem Widerstand auch um die Einübung eigener Sicherheits-Strategien geht, welche sich neoliberalen und karzeralen Logiken entziehen und Horizonte von abolitionistischer Fürsorge und Kollektivität eröffnen.

Risiken vs. Risikogruppen

Die Unterscheidung derer, die zur schützenswerten Risikogruppe gehören, von jenen, die ein Risiko darstellen, folgt denselben Trennlinien, anhand derer Lebenschancen sowie Chancen auf den frühzeitigen Tod verteilt werden. Sie ist das Produkt eines Kapitalismus, der seit seinen Anfängen rassifiziert war. In seinem erstmals 1983 veröffentlichten Buch *Black Marxism* beschrieb Cedric Robinson (2020) sein einflussreiches Konzept des *racial* Kapitalismus. Seiner in Europa beginnenden historischen Analyse zufolge benötigte die Akkumulierung von Kapital von Beginn an Fiktionen der Differenz (siehe auch Melamed 2015; Pulido 2016). Diese wurden zunächst in Hinblick auf inner-europäische Minderheiten erprobt und dann im Zuge des kolonialen Raubs an Indigenem Land und versklavten Schwarzen Körpern globalisiert. Im Kontext der Finanzialisierung des Kapitals rückt die Spekulation mit ‚Zahlen‘ und die Minimierung von Risiko in den Vordergrund – im Corona-Diskurs in Form von Inzidenz, R-Wert, Hospitalisierung, Infizierten, Impfquoten und Intensivbetten. Auf den ersten Blick erscheinen diese Statistiken als neutrale biopolitische Techniken. Jedoch sind sowohl der ältere finanzkapitalistische Diskurs des Risikos (Martin 2017) als auch der in der jetzigen Konjunktur entstehende Diskurs der Risikogruppe zutiefst rassifiziert (Haritaworn 2015). Die Trennung zwischen schützenswürdigen und -unwürdigen Gruppen wiederholt demnach lang erprobte Differenzen, deren Aufrechterhaltung der fortwährenden Akkumulierung von Kapital innerhalb dieser neuesten Krise dient. Der Staat tritt hier als Risiko-Manager*in auf, deren Rolle es ist, ‚Risikogruppen‘ zu schützen, und zugleich das ungestörte Weiterlaufen der Wirtschaft zu gewährleisten. Dagegen verkörpern nicht-weiße Menschen das Risiko, das es zu diesem Zwecke zu managen gilt.

In *Queer Lovers and Hateful Others* beschrieb ich die Reduzierung nicht-weißer Menschen auf degenerierte Körper an degenerierten Orten, deren kriminelle, homophobe Ausrichtung und impulsive Gewaltbereitschaft die öffentliche Sicherheit gefährden (Haritaworn 2015). Wie ich jetzt zeigen werde, geht es auch beim Corona-Rassismus um degenerierte Körper, deren Schauplätze und Charaktere infolge jahrzehntelanger Debatten um gescheiterte Integration, Islam und Jugendkriminalität bekannt sind: von Problemkiezen wie Kreuzberg und Neukölln zu archaisch-patriarchalen Großfamilien, deren verfehlte Heterosexualität nicht nur Homophobie, Bildungsferne und Gewalt reproduziert, sondern nunmehr auch Corona. Auf diesem Terrain verdienen nicht-weiße Menschen keine Räume, Ressourcen und Lebenschancen, weil sie immer bereits eine Gefahr für die Gesellschaft darstellen.

Neben den soeben beschriebenen abolitionistischen Theorien beschäftige ich mich erneut mit Foucaults (1978) Gedanken zum „gefährlichen Individuum“, dessen degeneriertes Leben – im Gegensatz zu den rechtmäßig Lebenden – nicht als solches wahrnehmbar ist (siehe Haritaworn 2015). Rassismus ist im biopolitischen, lebensaffirmierenden Diskurs nicht benennbar, da er dem Schutz der sogenannten Gesellschaft dient. Foucaults – zumeist Rassismus-evasive[3] – Biopolitik wurde in Mbembes Konzept der Nekropolitik radikalisiert (Mbembe 2003; Haritaworn/Kuntsman/Posocco 2014). Dieses beschreibt die unverhohlene Tödlichkeit moderner Regierungsformen: „[I]n the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of death-worlds, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjugated to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living-dead.“ (Mbembe 2003, 40)

Die zombiehafte Figur der lebenden Toten hat eine unheimliche Resonanz mit der Behandlung nicht-weißer Menschen in den Debatten um Impfstoff und Intensivbetten. Wie ich im Folgenden zeige, erscheint deren überdurchschnittliche Infektiosität, Morbidität und Mortalität hierbei nur bemerkenswert, weil sie die rechtmäßig Lebenden gefährdet. Zugleich lenken diese Debatten von der gezielten Verknappung von Gesundheits- und anderen Ressourcen infolge der jahrzehntelangen neoliberalen Kürzungspolitik ab.

Unsere abolitionistische Analyse lässt sich nicht auf die strafenden Institutionen beschränken (siehe auch Thompson 2021). Auch viele klassischerweise mit Wohlfahrt verbundenen Institutionen wirken seit jeher differenziell. Während sie Ressourcen und Lebenschancen für weiße Bürger*innen vorbehalten, wirken sie für viele nicht-weiße Menschen als Arme einer Nekropolitik, die sie zu lebenden Toten macht. Das deutsche Gesundheitssystem, welches – lange vor der Debatte um Triage – rassifizierte Leben kaum als Priorität behandelte, ist ein gutes Beispiel für diese Verquickung ‚fürsorglicher‘ und karzeraler Institutionen.[4]

Dieser medizinische Rassismus wurde Anfang März 2021 deutlich, als Zeitungen auf den überproportionalen Anteil von Migrierten unter den Corona-Patient*innen auf deutschen Intensivstationen aufmerksam machten (z.B. Althoff 2021; Bild 2021; Brandes 2021; Schattauer 2021). Neben Jens Spahn (Bundesgesundheitsminister bis November 2021) wurde auch Robert-Koch-Instituts-Chef Lothar Wieler, dem während Corona eine Hauptrolle in der öffentlichen Sicherheit zukam, mit der Information zitiert, dass

[3] Als Rassismus-evasiv bezeichne ich Diskurse, die die Benennung rassistischer Prozesse und Verhältnisse verunmöglichen und somit weiße Vorherrschafts- und Anrechtslogiken aufrechterhalten.

[4] Thompson (2020) zeigt dies anhand des Todes, vermutlich an Corona, von Kayla Williams, einer Schwarzen Londonerin, im März 2020. Williams' Tod war kein Lebernehmen, wie es oft durch die Polizei geschieht, sondern ein Sterbenlassen durch Rettungssanitäter*innen, die sich – auch ohne formelle Triage – weigerten, sie ins Krankenhaus zu bringen, da sie „keine Priorität“ sei. Dass medizinischer Rassismus vor allem in Deutschland unaussprechlich bleibt, zeigte sich am Eklat um den Tweet von Ferda Ataman im selben Monat, in dem Williams starb. Die Mitbegründerin der Neuen Deutschen Medienmacher hatte lediglich Folgendes getweetet: „Ich habe irgendwie eine Ahnung, welche Bevölkerungsgruppen in Krankenhäusern zuerst behandelt werden, wenn die Beatmungsgeräte knapp werden“ (Lehmann 2020). Daraufhin antworteten „[b]is dato 1.200 Menschen [...] auf den Tweet, unter ihnen Chefredakteur*innen, Ärzt*innen und selbsternannte Intergrationsforscher*innen, die in Ferda Ataman eine Hetzerin, Spalterin und Hasspredigerin sehen.“ (Bozdoğan 2020) Dabei hat medizinischer Rassismus in Deutschland eine lange Geschichte (z.B. Bonhomme 2020). Zur unterschiedlichen Behandlung von Migrierten und Geflüchteten in Deutschland durch diverse Institutionen siehe Bendel, Bekyol und Leisenheimer (2021).

die Mehrheit der „intubierten, schwerst kranken Patienten“ keine weißen Deutschen seien und „deutlich über 50 Prozent“ davon muslimisch (Althoff 2021).

Dennoch wurde die Chance verspielt, die anderswo bereits früh belegte Vulnerabilität nicht-weißer Menschen für COVID (z.B. Public Health Ontario 2020; Wellesley Institute 2021) auch in Deutschland zu benennen, und eine akademische Kultur Rassismus-evasiver Forschung zu durchbrechen (#Afrozensus o.D.). Den Artikeln zufolge verschwieg die Regierung die Hinweise aus „Angst vor einer Rassismusdebatte“ (Brandes 2021; siehe auch Althoff 2021; Schattauer 2021). Zugleich wurde das sogenannte Tabu von einem Schwall rassifizierender Aussagen begleitet. So beschrieb Wieler das Problem als eines von „Parallelgesellschaften“, wo man „nur mit beinhardter Sozialarbeit in den Moscheen“ etwas ausrichten könne (Brandes 2021). Ein lieber „anonym bleiben[der]“ Mediziner sagte dem *Focus*, bestimmte Kulturkreise glaubten, „Corona sei gar nicht so schlimm – und eigentlich müsse man da nur gut beten“ (Schattauer 2021). Ein von der *BZ* interviewter CDU-Politiker in Berlin-Neukölln beschrieb das Problem als „sprachliche und kulturelle Barrieren“, die dazu führten, dass Corona-Regeln „nicht ankämen oder eingehalten würden.“ Auch seien die „Familienverbände“ (sic) oft viel größer (Brandes 2021).

Derselbe *BZ*-Artikel geht auf mehrere Faktoren ein, die in der progressiven Gesundheitsforschung oft als soziale Determinanten bezeichnet werden. Demnach fließt Krankheit nicht natürlicherweise aus rassifizierten Körpern heraus, sondern wird durch toxische Arbeits- und Wohnbedingungen, rassistische Zuschreibungen und Ausschlüsse vom Gesundheitssystem erst sozial konstruiert und erzeugt. Im Artikel finden sich Echos der sozialen Determinanten in der Erwähnung einer Studie der Berliner Senatsverwaltung, der zufolge beengte Wohnverhältnisse in Stadtteilen mit höheren Migrierten-Anteilen zu höheren Inzidenzen führen. Dennoch reiht sich diese Erklärung der Krise als sozial konstruiert wie oben dargelegt nahtlos ein in eine Pathologie, die rassifizierten Menschen und Orten scheinbar innewohnt.

Zwei Monate später, im Mai 2021, fand derselbe essentialistische Diskurs in die Impfkampagne in den ‚Hotspots‘ Einzug. Die Kampagne erfolgte im Vergleich zu Ländern, wo *Race* und Klasse von Beginn an Priorisierungskriterien waren, sehr spät. In Kanada beispielsweise waren Indigene Menschen neben den über 80-jährigen Teil der ersten Priorisierungs-Phase (Government of Canada 2020). In Deutschland hingegen wurden nicht-weiße Menschen selbst dann oft nicht geimpft, wenn sie etablierten Prio-Gruppen angehörten. In einem raren Bericht der *ÄrzteZeitung* heißt es:

Bei einer Veranstaltung des Ministeriums am 4. Mai berichtete der Mannheimer Oberbürgermeister Dr. Peter Kurz von Impfquoten in bestimmten Stadtteilen, die um Faktor 3 niedriger sind als in Quartieren mit günstigen sozialen Rahmendaten.

Besonders erschreckend: In den ersten sechs Wochen der Impfkampagne wurden in Mannheim über 80-jährige Bewohner mit Migrationshintergrund fast überhaupt nicht geimpft – obwohl sie in der Stadt ein Viertel dieser Altersgruppe ausmachen. (Staeck 2021)

Nicht nur ist Rassismus kein Priorisierungsgrund. Auch die Prio-Gruppe der über 80-jährigen schließt migrantisierte Menschen dem Zitat gemäß „fast überhaupt nicht“ (ebd.) ein. Hinzu kommt, dass Rassismus, der einflussreichen Definition Ruth Wilson Gilmores (2007) zufolge, an sich bereits zum frühzeitigen Tod führt. Cila Yakeca, eine von mir interviewte Schwarze und Indigene Person, beschreibt, wie sich dies auf die Corona-Sicherheit von Schwarzen Menschen auswirkt:

The life expectancy of Black folks is lower than for white people. So black people are not only the ones hit hardest by COVID but also vaccinated less, since they decided to vaccinate older people first.

Ist es ein Zufall, dass die nostalgische Figur der zu impfenden Alten oft weiß und cis-heterosexuell aussieht? Ein weiterer Interviewpartner, Ahmad Awadalla, Berater für Migrant*innen bei der Berliner Aids-Hilfe, kontrastierte diese Figur mit der schützensunwerten queeren Migrant*in, die nur als „Risiko für andere“ wahrnehmbar ist.

As a person whose life is always affected by these issues [laughs], it's interesting how people who are vulnerable to viruses become the vectors, super-spreaders or risks to others. For example, queer men who have sex with men, as science likes to call it, are more affected by HIV and other STIs. But larger society sees us as dangerous. [...] And this whole idea that vulnerability is reduced to age, I find that very problematic. Because at the end of the day I don't know what will happen to my body if I get coronavirus. I have no idea if I will survive it, I mean I would assume so, but do I really know that? [...]

My experiences with the medical system in Germany, in Berlin, are horrible [laughs]. And I am lucky because I have health insurance. A lot of people in the queer community that I meet don't have health insurance and don't know how to navigate the system at all. Why is that not being discussed as a vulnerability?

In der Hotspot-Impfkampagne wurden migrantisierte Menschen schließlich indirekt, als symbolträchtige Anwohner*innen von Problemkiezen, entdeckt. Die Kampagne war jedoch nicht als Priorisierung sondern als Sonderbehandlung formuliert. Bereits Spahns Ankündigung der neuen Kampagne im *ZDF Heute-Journal* mit dem defensiven Satz „Weggenommen werden soll niemand etwas“ schien sie zur Debatte zu stellen (*ZDF Heute-Journal* 30.04.2021). In der Berichterstattung kodiert wurde die Kampagne durch Bilder und Kulissen von Pop-Up Impfbüros, Hochhäusern, Kommentaren und Wortfetzen, die Migrant*in als hypothetisch impfunwillig, womöglich Corona leugnend und gebrochen Deutsch sprechend beschrieben (*ZDF Heute-Journal* 30.04.2021; Quarks 01.06.2021). Migrantisierte erscheinen hier erneut als Risiko statt als Risikogruppe. Selbst in Berichten, die wider Erwar-

ten ihre Impfbereitschaft feststellen, ist ihr Anrecht auf Impfstoff von Beginn an diskutabel.

Unterdessen deuten anekdotische Berichte darauf hin, dass nicht-weiße und andere prekäre Bevölkerungsgruppen häufig die uneffektivsten und unsichersten Impfstoffe erhalten. In ihrem Interview berichtete B.A. (ein Pseudonym), die bei einer von Schwarzen Menschen geleiteten Graswurzel-Organisation in Berlin aktiv ist, dass Undokumentierte in der Regel auf Pro-Bono-Ärzt*innen angewiesen sind, die umsonst und ohne staatliche Unterstützung arbeiten und daher Johnson&Johnson, die billigste und zugleich unsicherste Option, verimpfen. Laut B.A. tragen afrikanische Menschen die Risiken der Corona-Gesundheitspolitik ferner als die Versuchskaninchen, an denen die Impfstoffe getestet werden sollten.[5]

Dass nicht-weiße Menschen Risiken tragen (statt sind), zeigt sich auch an der sozialen Konstruktion der ‚Systemrelevanz‘. Kritiken an dieser Kategorie, welche es einigen ermöglicht, im Home Office zu arbeiten, während andere mit den Risiken der Pandemie alleingelassen werden, haben selten deren Rassifizierung benannt. Dies ist auch bei der Benennung der unsicheren Wohn- und Arbeitsverhältnisse als Corona-Risiko-Faktor der Fall. Wie oben gezeigt, finden diese sehr wohl Erwähnung in den medialen Risiko-Landschaften. Dennoch bleibt die Frage, durch welche Fiktionen von Differenz Prekarität erst erzeugt wird, das eigentliche „Tabu“ der „vermiedenen Rassismus-Debatte“ (Althoff 2021). Newroz Mîran, der sich als kurdische Trans-Person und Podcaster beschreibt und in Neukölln lebt, veranschaulichte die täglichen Risiken, denen „systemrelevante“ Menschen während der Pandemie ausgesetzt sind:

Was man arbeitet, hat viel damit zu tun, wie eine Pandemie einen betrifft... Ich arbeite als Pflegeassistent, das heißt meine Arbeit hat nie aufgehört. Und ich bin halt zu bestimmten Uhrzeiten zur Arbeit gefahren, und du siehst in der U-Bahn, wer kein Home Office machen kann. Und das sind fast ausschließlich ältere Menschen of Colour der Gastarbeiter*innen-Generation. Und es gibt viele Leute, die einfach Home Office machen können, und die sich gar keine Gedanken darüber machen müssen, was das bedeutet für Leute, in einer Pandemie zur Arbeit zu gehen. Weil das natürlich ein Risiko ist, sich in öffentlichen Verkehrsmitteln aufzuhalten. Nicht jeder Mensch hat ein Auto, und nicht alle können zu Hause arbeiten.

Die Tabuisierung des Risikos, dem nicht-weiße Arbeiterklassenmenschen im *racial* Kapitalismus regelmäßig ausgesetzt sind, geht auf einen älteren medizinischen Rassismus zurück, der Krankheit als Eigenschaft rassifizierter Körper konstruiert. Nayan Shah (2001) untersucht in Bezug auf die Geschichte der Chinatowns seit Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts, wie chinesische Menschen zu infektiösen Körpern wurden, deren vermeintliche Degeneriertheit den gesamten Volkskörper bedrohte. Dies wiederholt sich im, zunächst anti-asiatischen, Corona-Rassismus. Während asiatische Menschen, wie in der Hashtag-Kampagne #IchBinKeinVirus skandalisiert, weiterhin überproportional Opfer sind, sind auch andere People of Colour nicht immun gegen Corona-Rassismus. Seit seinem mythischen Ursprung im ‚Orient‘ hat das so-

[5] Anhaltspunkt hierfür war auch das TV-Interview mit zwei französischen Ärzten, die besagten, dass Impfstoffe gegen Corona zunächst an Menschen in Afrika getestet werden sollten, ähnlich wie zuvor bei AIDS, da es dort sowieso keine Masken oder Intensivbehandlungen gäbe. Bonhomme (2020) weist auf die Kontinuität zwischen dieser Aussage und den Experimenten Robert Kochs an Ostafrikaner*innen während der Kolonialzeit hin.

genannte ‚China‘-, oder ‚Wuhan-Virus‘ mehrere kulturelle Mutationen durchlaufen und lokale Wirte in den signifikanten Anderen des deutschen Arbeitsmigrationsregimes gefunden: von jugendlichen Party- und Krawallmachern bis hin zu Ramadan-Feiern, ‚Clan-Beerdigungen‘ und ‚illegalen Hochzeitsfeiern‘, die – im Gegensatz zu Weihnachten oder Ostern – immer bereits Superspreader-Events sind. Neben anti-muslimischem Rassismus nahm gerade Antiromaismus 2020 epidemisch zu, wie in der gefängnisartigen Abriegelung ganzer, mit Sinti*zze und Rom*nja assoziierter, Wohnblöcke zu sehen war (taz 2020a). Ein weiteres Beispiel dieses rassifizierten Infektiositäts-Diskurses stellen die Äußerungen Jens Spahns im *ZDF Heute-Journal* dar: „[Letzten Sommer] haben die Auslandsreisen, häufig Verwandtschaftsbesuche in der Türkei und auf dem Balkan, phasenweise rund 50% der Neuinfektionen bei uns ausgelöst. Das müssen wir in diesem Jahr verhindern“ (23.05.2021). Ironischerweise war kurz zuvor publik geworden, dass sich Spahn selbst, während er Corona hatte, mit einem Dutzend Parteispendern zum Abendessen getroffen hatte.

Diese Debatten sind der Kontext, in dem ich meine zentralen Forschungsannahmen formulierte. Im Design des Projektes ging ich erstens davon aus, dass die Definitionsmacht darüber, was uns schützt oder gefährdet, nicht dem Staat überlassen werden kann. Meine zweite Annahme war, dass die, deren intersektionale Vulnerabilität momentan keinen Skandal darstellt, *Sicherheit verdienen*. In den zwanzig semi-strukturierten Interviews ging es neben einer Kritik an den staatlichen Maßnahmen auch um die aktive Suche nach Alternativen, angefangen mit den intersektionalen Verhandlungen jener, die organisches Wissen und emergente Theorien innerhalb der Konjunktur von Pandemie und Protest hervorbringen. Die Interviews fanden per Zoom statt und dauerten 40-90 Minuten. Sie beinhalteten Fragen danach, wie sich die Corona-Krise auf unterdrückte Gruppen auswirkt, wie Interviewte die Rolle des Staates darin sahen, Sicherheit vor Corona zu schaffen, und wie ihre eigenen sicherheitsschaffenden Praktiken und Visionen aussahen.

Teilnehmende bezeichneten sich unter anderem als queer, migrantisch, Schwarz, Indigen, of Colour, muslimisch, kurdisch, vietdeutsch, lesbisch, trans oder nicht-binär und wollten teils namentlich, teils mit Pseudonymen oder Vornamen zitiert werden. Queere intersektionale Perspektiven waren mir wichtig, da es gerade im Berliner Kontext eine neue Formierung gibt, an Orten wie dem *Cutie BIPOC Fest Network* (www.facebook.com/qtbpocfest, seit 2014), der von existierenden Bewegungen und Theorien wenig Beachtung geschenkt wird. Zugleich war es für die Teilnahme am Forschungsprojekt nicht zwingend, sich als queer, migrantisch oder of Colour zu identifizieren – eine rassismuskritische und queer-positive Perspektive, die ein solidarisches Bewusstsein und eine Neugier darüber beinhaltet, was Corona-Sicherheit mit intersektionalen Gewaltverhältnissen zu tun hat, reichte mir.

Corona und Polizeigewalt

Keine staatliche Behörde symbolisiert die *Unsicherheit* der staatlichen Corona-Politik deutlicher als die Polizei. Newroz Mîran kommentierte hierzu: „Wir haben auch in dieser Pandemie gemerkt, dass der Staat dazu da ist, um Besitz zu beschützen, um reiche Menschen zu beschützen. Ja, ich glaube

nicht, dass ich mich jemals vom Staat beschützt gefühlt habe. Ich glaube auch nicht, dass es die Aufgabe des Staates ist, mich zu schützen.“ Cassandra, eine in Brandenburg lebende Dozentin und Praktikerin von Embodied Social Justice, beantwortete die Frage, ob die Polizei Schutz verspricht, wie folgt:

Don't get me started talking about the popo. I'm sorry, you're asking the wrong person, I'm telling you right now [laughs]. I'll never forget, in one of my social justice courses, I had a Danish student and a Chicano student. We were talking about the police. She was like ‚I feel safe with the police‘, and his face turned to stone, he was like ‚Oh my God‘. And you see how your positioning, your experience colours and forms, or ‚co-forms‘, as Paola Bacchetta says, your ideas about things, and how you move through the world.

Die von Cassandra zitierte Schwarze radikale Tradition beschreibt die Abolition der Polizei und Gefängnisse als Vollendung der Abschaffung der Sklaverei. Diese erfolgte in den USA mit dem Zusatz des 13. Artikels der Verfassung, demzufolge Bestrafung für ‚Verbrechen‘ weiterhin eine legitime Form von Zwangsarbeit und Gefangenschaft darstellt. Während es also illegitim ist, Menschen außerhalb von Gefängnissen zur Arbeit zu zwingen und gefangen zu halten, ist dies innerhalb von Gefängnissen explizit erlaubt. Zugleich sind es nicht zufällig Schwarze Menschen, die weiterhin überproportional ihrer Freiheit beraubt werden. Cassandra beschrieb die Rolle der US-amerikanischen Polizei in der Unterdrückung von Schwarzem Widerstand daher auch als originär: „Slavery, slave catchers, that was the first police.“

Für antirassistische Aktivist*innen und Theoretiker*innen global ist die Polizei weiterhin ein wichtiger Faktor für die frühzeitigen Tode von Schwarzen, nicht-weißen und migrantisierten Menschen. Hiesige Beispiele beinhalten die staatlich sanktionierten Polizeimorde an Oury Jalloh und Christy Schwundek, die intimen Verbindungen der Polizei mit dem NSU (1 und 2), sowie die mangelnde Verhinderung und Aufklärung des Anschlags in Hanau (Bruce-Jones 2012; Karakayalı et al. 2017; Cholia/Jänicke 2021; Thompson 2021).

Den von mir Interviewten zufolge nimmt die Macht der Polizei während der Pandemie noch zu. Auf meine Frage, ob die Polizei Sicherheit vor Corona schaffe, antwortete Sula, die sich als Schwarze Frau und Mutter und als Policy Worker vorstellte:

[Schnaubt, lacht] Also, da gab's tatsächlich ganz viele Diskussionen in meiner Bubble am Anfang, wo einige schon nach dem Lockdown gerufen haben und andere meinten, ich habe keine Lust auf noch mehr Polizeikontrollen auf der Straße.

Auch B.A. sah in den Corona-Regeln eine weitere Ausrede für racial Profiling:

It's just one more pass to stop Black people, to ask for documentation and to pull you over. So I don't think there's any safety role that the police are playing, more just enforcing the

same discriminatory practices, and they have one more green light for doing it and justifying it.

Maryam, die sich als queer, 25 und Studentin beschrieb und bei Migrantifa aktiv war, schilderte ihren Eindruck, dass von der Polizei „die Corona-Regeln oft als Anlass genommen werden, um Menschen anzugreifen oder zur Seite zu ziehen, unter dem Vorbehalt, ‚Du hast deine Maske nicht getragen‘. Obwohl das auch stattgefunden hätte, wenn nicht gerade Corona wäre.“ Dies wurde von Sanchita Basu bestätigt, die bei ReachOut, der Berliner Hilfsstelle für Opfer von Gewalt, arbeitet. Ihr zufolge müssen nicht-weiße Menschen, die ihre Maske vergessen, mit einer Festnahme statt Verwarnung rechnen, „einschließlich Handschellen“ und anderer überproportionaler Gewalt. Mona ElOmari, eine Diplom-Sozialpädagogin und systemische Beraterin mit Inhaftierten, kontextualisierte die Erweiterung polizeilicher Kapazitäten wie folgt:

Im Sommer [2020] wurde sehr schnell sichtbar, wer so poliziert wird. Von dem, was ich hier so alltagsempirisch mitgekriegt hab in Berlin, war die Polizeipräsenz in Kreuzberg und Neukölln um einiges höher. In Friedrichshain der Volkspark war im Sommer voll bis zum geht nicht mehr. Es wurde da viel weniger poliziert als in anderen Stadtteilen[, und der] Umgang [war] viel höflicher und diskreter. [Corona hat] die bestehenden Verhältnisse auf Steroids gepackt. Da wird dann groß berichtet über irgendwelche türkischen Hochzeiten und Feiern in Roma-Familien, und da werden ganze Wohnblöcke abgeriegelt. Und jetzt im Herbst sind sie wieder in Tirol zum Skifahren. So wie ich das mitbekommen hab, war Tirol ja der erste Corona-Hotspot in Europa. Und trotzdem haben wir uns monatelang über den sogenannten chinesischen Virus unterhalten. Alles was an Polizieren problematisch ist, hat sich noch weiter verschärft, und es sind jetzt quasi neue Crimes dazugekommen. So Sachen wie Loitering zum Beispiel – wenn so ne Gruppe BPoC Jungs einfach irgendwo auf der Straße rumchillen, werden die eher von der Polizei angesprochen als irgendwelche weißen Hipsters. Ne Ansammlung von Leuten ist mittlerweile noch verdächtiger, wenn sie nicht-weiss ist.

Neben der Straße und dem ‚Problemkiez‘ wurden auch private Wohnungen und Parks, unter anderem schwule Cruising-Treffpunkte, Zielscheiben von racial Profiling. Rassistisches Polizieren geschah den Interviewten zufolge oft in der Überschneidung von Staat und Zivilgesellschaft. Ahmad Awadalla berichtete von einem brutalen Überfall auf die Wohnung eines queeren brasilianischen Freundes, der Besuch hatte, woraufhin Nachbar*innen die Polizei riefen. Auch die Nachbarin von Alex Rodriguez, eine*r in Neukölln lebenden Aktivist*in, rief die Polizei, als Alex mit Freund*innen, die teilweise im selben Gebäude wohnten und eine Corona-gerechte Blase bildeten, im Garten Sport machte. Dies unterstreicht die Vulnerabilität gerade von Queers of Colour, die in abolitionistischen Diskussionen oft als politische Subjekte mit relevantem Wissen übersehen werden.

Ein weiterer stark polizierter Raum waren antirassistische Proteste. 2020 fanden die weltweit größten antirassistischen Demonstrationen aller Zeiten unter dem Banner der Black Lives Matter (BLM) Bewegung statt, die 2013 nach dem Freispruch George Zimmermanns vom Mord des 17-jährigen Trayvon Martins entstand. In Deutschland demonstrierten am 6. Juni 2020 allein zehntausende Menschen, davon mindestens 15.000 am Alexanderplatz in Berlin (Die Zeit 2020).

In der Konjunktur von Pandemie und Protest und im Zuge des rassistischen Massenmordes in Hanau am 19. Februar 2020, der neun Menschen tötete und mit dem Ausbruch der Pandemie zunächst aus den Nachrichten verschwand, entstand Migrantifa, eine neue Bewegung, die seit 2020 in etlichen Städten Demonstrationen organisierte (<https://migrantifaberlin.wordpress.com/>). In Hanau wurde von Angehörigen und Überlebenden die Initiative 19. Februar gegründet, die für das Gedenken an die Opfer kämpft (<https://19feb-hanau.org/>). Sagt ihre Namen:

Gökhan Gültekin, Sedat Gürbüz, Said Nesar Hashemi,
Mercedes Kierpacz, Hamza Kurtović, Vili Viorel Păun, Fatih
Saraçoğlu, Ferhat Unvar, Kaloyan Velkov.

Neben BLM- und Hanau-Demos nannten Interviewte auch die sogenannten Krawalle, die in Stuttgart und anderen westdeutschen Städten stattfanden, oft im Zuge polizeilicher Schikanen im Namen der Corona-Regeln. Für Horst Seehofer (Bundesinnenminister bis November 2021), der für seine Entgleisungen zum Thema Migration bekannt ist, waren vor allem letztere ein Anlass, die seit langem von Aktivist*innen geforderte Studie zu Polizeirassismus zurückzuweisen und stattdessen eine Studie zu Gewalt *gegen* die Polizei in Auftrag zu geben (taz 2020b).

Auch die im Namen von Black Lives Matter (BLM) organisierten Proteste im Juni 2020 stellten Politik und Medien zufolge eine Gefahr für die Corona-Sicherheit dar. Wenngleich die Demonstrationen nicht nur von Schwarzen Menschen besucht waren, waren die politischen und medialen Reaktionen auf sie sehr wohl von kolonialen Diskursen über Schwarzen Widerstand geprägt. Laut Spahn „verheer[t]en“ die BLM Demonstrationen das „Vertrauen, dass wir für ein pragmatisches Einhalten der Spielregeln sorgen.“ Karl Lauterbach (der ein Jahr später Gesundheitsminister der Ampelkoalition wurde) zufolge waren sie ein „Sargnagel“ für die Regeln – „Viel zu viele Leute, zu wenige Masken, zu wenig Abstand – das ideale Super-Spreading Event!“ (Mercur 2020) Das normalisierte Innen, das vor dem infektiösen Außen der Demonstrierenden geschützt werden muss, charakterisierte Spahn, wie in der *Bild* zitiert, wie folgt:

Gerade die Mitte in unserem Land verhalte sich in Hinblick auf die Corona-Regeln sehr diszipliniert und geduldig, obgleich sie besondere Lasten zu tragen habe. Die Menschen dort seien die ersten Leidtragenden, wenn andere zu sorglos seien. Das sei etwa der Fall, wenn Schulen wieder dicht machen. (Bild 2020)

Im hier beschworenen Bild der Nation gehören Schwarze Demonstrierende nicht zum disziplinierten, domestizierten Innen. Die „Mitte in unserem Land“ wird Pars pro toto durch die – autochthonisierte und heterosexualisierte – Figur der Familie mit Schulkindern beschrieben, die geduldig zu Hause bleibt, deren reproduktive Lasten anerkannt sind, und deren Privatheit Schutz verdient. Schwarze Demonstrierende, wie auch die in der Debatte über migrantische Intensivpatienten beschworenen Großfamilien, können dieser schützenswerten nationalen Heimeligkeit nicht angehören, sondern bilden ihr konstitutives Außen. Sie werden als virale, undisziplinier- und -kontrollierbare Masse figuriert, deren Reproduktivität auf der Straße stattfindet statt daheim, und immer bereits den Volkskörper gefährdet. Dies ist umso bemerkenswerter, wenn wir uns an die drei Monate ältere Figur der schwerst erkrankten Migrierten erinnern. Den oben zitierten Artikeln zufolge wusste Spahn zum Zeitpunkt der Demonstrationen bereits, dass Menschen of Colour von der Corona-Krise überproportional betroffen sind.

Im Gegensatz zu ihrer Darstellung als sorglos haben gerade Schwarze Aktivist*innen gezeigt, wie ein solidarisches Wir zu Zeiten von Corona überhaupt möglich ist, gerade auch wenn dieses Wir unterschiedlich positioniert ist, zum Beispiel in Bezug auf Behinderung und sexuelle oder Geschlechtsidentität. Ein Beispiel hierfür sind die Proteste, die Ende Mai 2020 in Toronto und anderswo in Kanada gegen anti-Schwarzen Rassismus stattfanden. Regis Korchinski-Paquet, eine junge Schwarze und Indigene Frau, war während einer emotionalen Krise in der Präsenz von Polizei vom 24. Stock ihrer Wohnung in Toronto gefallen, nachdem ihre Familie diese um Hilfe gerufen hatte. Disability Justice war ein wichtiges Prinzip bei der Organisation der Proteste, was nicht zuletzt auf die zentrale Rolle behinderter und verrückter queerer Schwarzer Menschen bei BLM Toronto und anderen lokalen Schwarzen Gruppen zurückzuführen ist. Neben dem Aufruf zum Tragen von Masken und zum Einhalten von Abstand eröffneten Organisator*innen auch jenen die Möglichkeit zur Teilhabe an den Protesten, die aufgrund von Krankheit oder Behinderung physisch nicht dabei sein konnten – beispielsweise durch Spenden oder als Notfallkontakte für Demonstrierende (siehe auch Vision Change Win 2020). Dies ist nur ein Beispiel dafür, dass viele antirassistische Demonstrationen zu Zeiten von Corona Orte der Fürsorge statt der Fahrlässigkeit sind.

BLM-Gruppen weltweit reagierten unterschiedlich auf die Corona-Krise. BLM Berlin stellte von Mai 2020 bis Juli 2021 medizinischem Rat folgend Demos und andere Präsenzveranstaltungen gänzlich ein (BLMB 2020). Dennoch entwickelte BLMB ein international rezipiertes Sicherheits-Protokoll für jene, die weiterhin protestieren wollten. Neben Masken und Abstand widmet sich dieses auch Fragen von Kontaktverfolgung, Verhaftungen, Tränengas-Attacken sowie der Überwachung von Handys und Facebook-Profilen (BLMB o.D.). Dieser mehrdimensionale Sicherheitsbegriff schlug sich auch in der ersten offiziellen BLMB Demo seit Beginn der Pandemie nieder, die im Juli 2021 stattfand. Laut B.A. achtete das Planungs-Team nicht nur auf Masken und Abstand; die Versammlung wurde durch mehrere Bühnen und Ausgangspunkte entzerrt. Für Menschen aus Risikogruppen wurden Tests und Autos bereitgestellt.

Dass die Entscheidung, während einer Pandemie zu demonstrieren, kaum egoistisch ist, und dass auch zuhause zu bleiben für viele Schwarze

Menschen keine Sicherheit verspricht, illustriert Marc Lamont Hill (2020) mit seinen Erinnerungen an die Aufstände für Black Lives in seiner Heimatstadt Philadelphia:

I had to make a calculation... If I went to a protest and was exposed to the virus, would I survive? Would I wake up alone on a hospital ventilator, fighting for my life? [...] The thing that we have to do to keep alive could also be the thing that kills us... This conundrum in many ways represents what it means to be Black in America: In what way am I going to resist death today? (10-12)

Laut Hill nahmen Schwarze Protestierende im Sommer 2020 ein potenziertes Risiko auf sich, Corona und Polizeigewalt zum Trotz auf die Straße zu gehen. Dagegen galten nicht-weiße Demonstrierende auch im Corona-Sicherheitsdiskurs des deutschen Staates in erster Linie als das Risiko, vor dem andere geschützt werden mussten.

Dies zeigte sich erneut am 19. September 2020, zwei Monate nach der Debatte um BLM und sechs Monate nach dem Anschlag in Hanau. Zum Schock von Aktivist*innen wurde die geplante Gedenk-Demo trotz eines ausgearbeiteten Hygieneplans aufgrund „steigender Zahlen“ untersagt (taz 2020c).^[6] Zeitgleich fanden, vom Staat weitgehend toleriert, regelmäßig ‚Querdenken‘-Proteste statt. Neben ihrer rechtsextremen und offen staatsfeindlichen Tendenz verweigerten diese Proteste demonstrativ die staatlichen Corona-Regeln. Hamza, kurdisch, muslimisch, nicht-binär/trans und an der Organisation der untersagten Hanau-Demo beteiligt, beschrieb den Widerspruch so:

Was auch schockierend war, es gab ja [zeitgleich] diese richtig große Corona-Leugner*innen Demo. Es war so unverständlich, warum diese Demo laufen durfte, aber nicht Menschen ihre Trauer verarbeiten durften. Es wäre so wichtig gewesen, das zu erlauben, damit die Angehörigen sehen, dass sie nicht allein sind, und dass viele Menschen aus verschiedenen Städten extra anreisen, um ihnen zu zeigen: ‚Hey, wir stehen das gemeinsam durch.‘

Im Gegensatz zu den antirassistischen Protesten, wo das Tragen von Masken, wie im nächsten Abschnitt beschrieben, eine von vielen Strategien der gemeinsamen Einübung einer kollektiven, auf das gemeinsame Überleben ausgerichteten Sicherheit darstellt, sind Querdenken-Mobilisierungen vom aktiven Verweigern von Masken, Impfungen und anderen Schutzmaßnahmen sowie von der Einschüchterung derer, die sie befolgen, geprägt. Einer Studie des Leibniz-Instituts Mannheim und der Humboldt-Universität Berlin zufolge waren die Querdenken-Demonstrationen tatsächlich Superspreader-Events und Mit-Auslöser für die zweite Welle im Winter 2020/21 (Lange/Monscheuer 2021). Dennoch wurden sie im Vergleich zu den antirassistischen Protesten kaum poliziert.

Wie Hamza unterstrichen auch andere Teilnehmende die Widersprüche eines staatlichen Sicherheitsdiskurses, der wiederholt zusieht, wie unmaskierte Rechte zu Tausenden aufmarschieren, während das Gedenken an die

^[6] Wie Black Lives Matter Berlin formulierte auch die Initiative 19. Februar Sicherheitsprotokolle. Beispielsweise fanden nach der Untersagung der Demo unter dem Motto „Hanau ist überall!“ in etlichen deutschsprachigen Städten Veranstaltungen zum Gedenken an die Toten statt (Initiative 19. Februar 2020). Vanessa Thompson bezeichnet dies als ein dezentralisiertes Sicherheitsprotokoll, das von vielen antirassistischen Organisationen im deutschsprachigen Raum befolgt wird (2021, persönliches Feedback).

Opfer rechter Gewalt verboten wird. Weiter ausholend lässt sich die ungleiche Durchsetzung der Corona-Maßnahmen als neueste Episode einer bundesdeutschen Sicherheitstradition begreifen, welche antirassistischen Widerstand im Vergleich zu rechter Gewalt seit jeher als die größere Gefahr behandelt (Nobrega/Quent/Zipf 2021).

Doch zeigt die oben untersuchte Figur der Intubierten auf der Intensivstation, dass rassifizierte Körper nicht erst dann gefährlich sind, wenn sie auf die Straße gehen. Die Diagnose *riskant* haftet rassifizierten Körpern auch dann an, wenn sie lediglich versuchen zu atmen. Wie Vanessa Thompson erklärt, war dies für Schwarze Menschen schon vor Corona der Fall:

I can't breathe ist als Verunmöglichung von Atmen (Fanon 1965), die gerade pandemisch wird, ein metaphorischer wie auch materieller Zustand und eine Erfahrung, die sich durch die historischen und gelebten Wissensarchive Schwarzer und auch anderer rassifizierter deprivilegierter Menschen zieht (2020).

Neben den Polizeimorden durch Erstickung an Eric Garner, George Floyd und zahllosen anderen Schwarzen Menschen kommen hier auch polizeiliche Strategien wie der Einsatz von Tränengas und anderen chemischen Waffen während der Aufstände in den Sinn, die die Lunge zur Zielscheibe machten. Weit davon entfernt, auf Demonstrationen Sicherheit vor Corona zu schaffen, benutzte die Polizei das Coronavirus vielerorts als Kumpan.

Viele der von mir Interviewten sahen Polizei-Rassismus nicht als Problem, das durch die Entfernung einiger fauler Eier reformiert werden kann – wie während der nicht endenden Skandale zu rechtsextremen Gruppen in der Polizei oft suggeriert wurde. Maryam kommt „immer mehr zur Überzeugung, dass die Polizei nichts ist... was uns schützt“:

Das wäre natürlich richtig schön, wenn auch vom Staat eingegriffen wird, aber ich glaube, dass das nicht passieren wird, und dass es deswegen wir sind, die uns gegenseitig schützen müssen, und die andere schützen müssen. Weil ich sehe keine Zukunft, in der ich mich auf den Staat und auf die Polizei verlassen kann.

Was macht uns wirklich sicher? (Brazell 2018). Die Polizei, so waren meine Gesprächspartner*innen und ich uns einig, tut es nicht – im Gegenteil. Doch zeigen die der Corona-Krise zugrunde liegenden intersektionalen Gewaltverhältnisse einmal mehr, dass wir Sicherheit brauchen und auch verdienen. Wie der nächste Abschnitt darlegt, existieren alternative Visionen hierzu bereits zuhauf.

Die Transformation der Sicherheit

Mein Konzept der Transformation der Sicherheit ist an die eingangs beschriebene transformative Gerechtigkeitsbewegung angelehnt. Auch hat es Resonanzen mit Anthony Giddens' (1992), wenngleich *Race-* und Gender-

evasivem, Zugeständnis, dass queere Aktivist*innen infolge der AIDS-Krise eine „Transformation der Intimität“ bewirkt haben, von der auch heterosexuelle Menschen profitiert haben (vgl. Jamieson 1999). Ich beobachte einen ähnlichen Prozess während der jetzigen Pandemie, der jedoch über Veränderungen in romantischen und sexuellen Beziehungen hinausgeht. Nicht nur zeigen marginalisierte Menschen erneut auf, wie Sozialität mit einem Virus möglich ist, das eventuell nicht wieder weggeht. Die Transformation der Sicherheit, die heute stattfindet, geschieht auf allen Skalen, sogar und gerade auf der zur Gefahrenzone erklärten Straße.

Gesprächspartner*innen erwähnten vielfältige Sicherheits-Strategien, denen ich hier aus Platzgründen nicht gleichermaßen Beachtung schenken kann. Neben der Sicherheit auf Protesten, der ich mich im Folgenden widme, waren Interviewte an der Schaffung neuer Netzwerke für Mutual Aid aktiv, die sich bewusst von hierarchischen Paradigmen der Wohltätigkeit unterscheiden und auf eine Welt voller interdependenter Communities abzielen (Hwang 2019; ASA 2020). Ferner fand eine Digitalisierung existierender Räume und Veranstaltungen statt (z.B. CUTIE.BIPOC Festival 14 November - 13 Dezember). Des Weiteren sind die Pods, Bubbles und Care-Kollektive zu erwähnen, die eine detailliertere Diskussion verdienen, der ich mich in zukünftigen Veröffentlichungen widmen möchte. Diese gehen auf queere Traditionen zurück, die auch in dieser Krise wichtig sind, um einander zu unterstützen und am zu Leben halten (Cortez/Kaba 2020; Haritaworn 2021). Beispielsweise berichtete eine alleinlebende Person, die an COVID erkrankte, wie Freund*innen sie mit Essen und Medizin versorgten. Gerade queere Netzwerke und Wahlfamilien entsprechen selten den staatlichen Kontakt- und Haushaltsregeln und wurden während der Lockdowns *de facto* kriminalisiert. Zugleich sind sie wichtige Orte, an denen Normen und Regeln geschaffen werden, die Alternativen zur racial-Profiling-Logik der staatlichen Maßnahmen darstellen und somit als abolitionistische Akte ernst zu nehmen sind.

Diesen und anderen Strategien liegen Prinzipien von Disability Justice zugrunde, die wie oben genannt auch in die Organisation vieler anti-rassistischer Proteste während der Pandemie einfließen. Der letzte Teil dieses Artikels beschrieb, wie antirassistische Demos als Superspreader-Events dämonisiert wurden. Im Folgenden wende ich mich der Demo erneut zu, als einem Ort, an dem unterdrückte Menschen nach einer langen Geschichte der Entmündigung die Frage von Kollektivität in die eigene Hand nehmen. Interessanterweise geschieht es gerade am als ‚riskant‘ stigmatisierten Ort der Demo, dass Formen von Sicherheit und Fürsorge erlernt werden, die nicht auf karzeralen Unterscheidungen beruhen.

Die Demonstration ist ein Raum, in dem Transformation erkämpft, aber auch präfiguriert wird. Das aktivistische Konzept der Präfiguration beschreibt unsere kollektive Macht, Räume, über die wir bereits verfügen, so zu gestalten, *als wären sie die Welt*, in der wir leben wollen. Die Demonstration ist ein vergänglicher Ort, der meist am selben Tag endet wie er beginnt, und dessen Vernetztheit es dennoch ermöglicht, neue Beziehungsformen und Verhaltensweisen zu erproben, die größere Wellen schlagen.

Das Entstehen dieses Raums folgt einem Begehren, das andere Methoden erfordert und neue Visionen verfolgt. Gerade die Kurzlebigkeit der Demonstration ermöglicht es vielen, die privatisierte Isolation des #StayHome zu

verlassen und physischen Kontakt zu wagen, in der Präsenz eines Virus, das womöglich nicht mehr weggeht. Auf der Demonstration werden alternative Konzepte von Sicherheit und Fürsorge erprobt, jenseits der konservativen Hygiene des Privaten und der Kommerzialisierung öffentlicher Räume. Diese Konzepte sind abolitionistisch, insofern sie sich der Kontrolle des karzeralen Staates verweigern und Beziehungen und Formen des Überlebens einüben, die nicht auf Hierarchie und Ausbeutung beruhen.

Dies erfordert Bewusstsein und Kompetenzen, die auf die intersektionalen, anti-rassistischen Strategien der Disability Justice-Bewegung zurückgehen. Maryam nannte dies „ein Grundverständnis von Sicherheit und Zugang, von Access: ‚Ich mache das, damit du auch hier sein kannst““. Die Sicherheit, die hierbei entsteht, ist ein Spiegelbild der Transformationen, für die die Demo kämpft. Sie ist weder offensichtlich noch automatisch, sondern umfochten. Tatsächlich ist sie das Resultat von politischer Arbeit: von Schaden, der entstand, Fehlern, die gemacht wurden, Lektionen, die Konsequenzen hatten, Verhalten, das transformiert wurde. Hamza erzählte von einer Infektionskette, die zu einem radikalen Umdenken in der Bewegung führte und letztlich auch zum Schaffen neuer Sicherheits-Praktiken wie Online-Plena und durch die Community selbst organisierte Kontaktverfolgung. Auf den ersten Blick ähneln diese den staatlichen Corona-Maßnahmen. Jedoch beruhen sie auf Werten und Zielen, die mit den staatlichen Maßnahmen oft in Konflikt stehen. Als Beispiel nannte Hamza den Umgang mit Masken:

Es mussten alle auf der Demonstration 'ne Maske tragen, das war auf jeden Fall Pflicht. Aber wir Order*innen hatten auch extra Masken dabei zum Verteilen an Leute, die Interesse hatten, sich der Demo anzuschließen. Wir hatten z.B. eine Situation mit einer Person, die ich auch als nicht-weiß gelesen hab, die so auf unsere Demo zugelaufen ist und es richtig cool fand, aber halt keine Maske dabei hatte. Und [so] muss man nicht sagen, man exkludiert jetzt die Leute, die gerade keine Maske dabei haben, aber ein Teil davon sein wollen. Genau, dass man auf solche Sachen geachtet hat.

Im Gegensatz zum staatlichen Diskurs war die Aufforderung, Maske zu tragen, keine Belehrung. Für die Organisator*innen war klar, dass eine unmaskierte Person auf einer antirassistischen Demonstration (im Gegensatz zur Coronaleugner*innen-Demo am selben Tag) sich und andere gefährden würde – sowohl für Corona als auch für racial Profiling. Die Erkenntnis, dass Sicherheit sozial konstruiert ist (wo neben dem Virus auch die, die vor ihm schützen sollen, eine Gefahr darstellen) macht sie nicht weniger wichtig. Es gibt klare Regeln. Wir lernen, dass wir Maske tragen müssen, damit möglichst viele kommen können und niemand verhaftet wird. Unsere Praxis ist zugleich redistributiv: Wir wissen, dass Masken und Desinfektionsmittel Geld kosten, und dass ihre Anwendung kollektives Lernen erfordert. Diese Regeln, Normen und Praxen sind weder abstrakt noch universell. Sie sind konsensuell statt belehrend, Raum schaffend statt isolierend oder exkludierend. Sie basieren auf einem abolitionistischen Verständnis von Fürsorge, welches Praxen und Beziehungen ermöglicht, die den strafenden Logiken

der staatlichen Corona-Maßnahmen nicht ferner sein könnten. Sie üben eine Zukunft, in der es Platz für alle gibt.

Schluss

In diesem Artikel habe ich die Rassifizierung von Corona anhand dreier rassifizierter Figuren beschrieben – der impulsiven Demonstrierenden, der impfunwilligen Migrierten und der Intubierten auf der Intensivstation. In den hier untersuchten Debatten werden Menschen mit Rassismuserfahrungen nur als Risiko statt als Risikogruppe wahrnehmbar. Sie erscheinen als irrationale Masse oder als selbstverschuldete Kranke, die kein Anrecht auf Gehör, Fürsorge, Ressourcen und Lebenschancen haben. Selbst und gerade in ihren verwundbarsten Momenten – des letzten Atems, der Trauer um ihre Kinder – werden sie als Allgemeingefährliche repräsentiert, vor denen die Gesellschaft geschützt werden muss.

Diese Rassifizierung von Corona ist nicht zufällig. Sie folgt Jahrhunderten von medizinischem Rassismus, sowie Jahrzehnten einer neoliberalen Gesundheitspolitik, die überlebenswichtige Ressourcen – von Intensivbetten zu Impfstoff – fatal verknappt hat. Sie geschieht während eines Superwahljahres, inmitten von Skandalen: vom Rechtsextremismus in der Polizei und der Bundeswehr zu den Masken-Skandalen um Spahn und andere politische Persönlichkeiten, zu einer Corona-Politik, die in Deutschland zum Zeitpunkt der Redaktion mehr als 100.000 Menschen das Leben gekostet hat.

Der degenerierenden Gefahr, welche von nicht-weißen Menschen ausgeht, stehen die kaum benennbaren Gewalten gegenüber, die das normale Leben gewährleisten: der Staat, der schützt. Die heterosexuelle Familie, die er schützt. Die Wirtschaft, die weiterlaufen muss. Wie ich in diesem Artikel dargelegt habe, hat diese ‚natürliche Umwelt‘ Andere in jenen, die über die Vorteile dieser Gesellschaft erst belehrt werden müssen – von den Queer- und Transmenschen, deren Netzwerke und Wahlfamilien erneut kriminalisiert werden, zu den ‚systemrelevanten‘ Arbeiterklassenmenschen, die dem Virus ausgesetzt werden, um die ununterbrochene Akkumulierung von Kapital zu gewährleisten. Die Sicherheit, die diese Normalität verspricht, dient somit nur wenigen.

Dieser entmündigten Welt steht die vielerorts stattfindende Transformation der Sicherheit entgegen, die ich am Beispiel von antirassistischen Demonstrationen illustriert habe. Der abolitionistische Sicherheits-Diskurs, der in der Welt der Demo präfiguriert wird, hat Auswirkungen über die Corona-Krise hinaus. In der hier entstehenden Welt darf eine Person, deren Bewusstsein in einer Zeit der rasanten Veränderungen noch im Entstehen ist, nicht nur dabei sein. Sie verdient Zugehörigkeit zu einer Community, in der wir miteinander, voneinander und füreinander lernen, um das Leben von Grund auf neu zu imaginieren.

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The Master's Tools

Prefigurative Politics and the Abolition of Violence

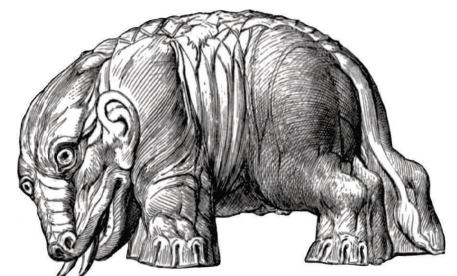
Mathijs van de Sande

Abstract

In the course of the past decade, radical political theory has seen an increased interest in 'prefiguration'. Stemming from anarchist and feminist traditions, this idea prescribes a high measure of consistency between the means and ends of revolutionary practice. But what is the place of violence in a prefigurative politics? Does it imply nonviolence as a moral or strategic principle? Or should its practitioners at least be prepared to engage in self-defence? After reconstructing various positions on this matter, this paper seeks to offer an alternative perspective. Rather than to see violence as a means or instrument that one willingly employs in a revolutionary situation, it should instead be understood as a social given: something that is often already implied in such a context. The question, then, is not whether or how prefiguration and violence are compatible, but rather how violence could be dealt with in a prefigurative way.

Keywords: Prefigurative Politics, Violence, Anarchism, Feminism, Social Movement Strategy

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Introduction

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Egyptian revolution of 2011. The occupied Tahrir Square in Cairo has become an iconic symbol for revolution both within the region and beyond. Behind the barricades, its temporary inhabitants had erected a miniature society-in-development, in which they experimented with alternative forms of organisation, representation, communication, and distribution (Van de Sande 2013; De Smet 2016). In the course of the past decade, this ‘utopian republic of Tahrir’ (Khalil 2011, 247) has continued to inspire a global wave of similar ‘assembly movements’ (Butler 2015): from the Spanish *15-M* movement to *Occupy Wall Street*, and the 2014 Gezi Park protests in Istanbul to *Nuit Debout* in 2016. This list has continued to grow in the past years, with the Sudanese revolution of 2019; the occupation of another Tahrir Square, this time in Baghdad, in 2019-2020; and the Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone in Seattle, which sprouted from local *Black Lives Matter* protests in 2020.

Notwithstanding the obvious demographic, cultural, and political differences between them, these various assembly movements all shared a particular political repertoire. Within the confined space of their occupied squares, they experimentally embodied or enacted the kind of future society that they sought to realise on a grander and more durable scale (Douzinas 2013; Flesher Fominaya 2020; Graeber 2013; Smucker 2017). This technique or repertoire is often referred to as ‘prefiguration’: a term that originally stems from anarchist and feminist theory (Franks 2003; Gordon 2018; Rowbotham 1979), but has gained significant traction in the wake of these recent movements. In a prefigurative politics, the means employed in political action are understood to resemble or ‘mirror’ the pursued ends. One aims to abolish the hierarchy, exploitation, and violence that inheres in capitalism and the state – not in a distant future but in the ‘here and now’. Such an abolitionist politics is “not about what is possible, but about making the impossible reality” (Abolition Collective 2020, 7). Although many recent assembly movements did not explicitly use the term ‘prefiguration’, this is arguably what all of them tried to do.

However, if we look more closely, it also becomes clear that for many of these movements, the prefiguration of a future society was mostly an aspiration. In practice, the immediate abolition of repression or state violence was not an attainable goal at all. The iconic tent camp on Tahrir Square may serve as an example. The ousting of Mubarak has sometimes been depicted as the execution of Gene Sharp’s (2012) script for a ‘peaceful’ revolution. But one often tends to forget that Tahrir Square was repeatedly sieged by thugs and state security forces, and that hundreds of protesters lost their lives protecting the occupied square (Abul-Magd 2012, 566; Schenker 2016, 229). “Aside from the civilized scene at the center of Tahrir displayed in the Western media,” Zeinab Abul-Magd argues (2012, 571), “the front lines of Tahrir and several other squares across the nation were engaged in bloody street fights or a guerrilla war with the police.” Very few accounts make mention of the so-called ‘people’s prison’, which was located at the stairway down to Sadat Metro Station that underlies the square. It is here that state thugs subdued in battle, and the *agent provocateurs* and infiltrators whom the revolutionaries discovered among their own ranks, were detained before being handed over to the army (Ketchley 2017, 69). In some cases, such detainees also

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faced physical abuse (Khalil 2011, 248f.). In short, ‘The Republic of Tahrir’ may be understood as a prefigurative experiment in radical democracy, but it was by no means devoid of violence as it reproduced at least some features of the repressive state that it sought to confront.

It is by no means my intention to discredit the Egyptian revolution or the occupiers of Tahrir Square, who had no choice but to defend themselves against Mubarak’s supporters. But this discrepancy between ideal and reality does give rise to a number of questions on the role and legitimacy of *violence* in a prefigurative politics. One may seek to abolish the violence that lies at the root of capitalism and the state. But is it at all possible to remain consistent when one intervenes in such a hostile environment? And how, or on what conditions, could violence possibly be employed in a prefigurative practice?

In order to address these questions, I will first briefly sketch the history of this concept of ‘prefiguration’ and show how it is embedded in various anarchist and feminist traditions. I subsequently discuss various views of how a prefigurative politics or strategy relates to (non)violence: whereas some anarchist revolutionaries have argued that prefiguration implies a principled rejection of violence in its every kind, others claim that radical political change would be unattainable without the ability and preparedness for self-defence, or even armed struggle. After laying out the contours of this debate, I argue that both positions are implicitly based on the same instrumentalist understanding of violence: in both cases, violence is read as a means or instrument that serves a particular end. And this end, at least in ideal terms, is ultimately the establishment of a society that is devoid of (at least some forms of) violence. But what if violence instead is a social given – something that unfortunately emerges in any social and political context? Rather than simply being ‘for’ or ‘against’ it, I will argue, the real challenge for those engaged in radical politics is how to deal with violence in a prefigurative manner.

Anarchism, feminism, and the history of prefigurative politics

The concept of ‘prefiguration’ or ‘prefigurative politics’ originally stems from the anarchist tradition. Since the late 19th century, anarchists have consistently argued that a classless and stateless society cannot be realised by means of the state as a political instrument, lest it gives rise to new class distinctions and other forms of inequality (Graham 2015). Instead, the means of revolutionary struggle should always be consistent – or, at least, to the greatest degree possible – with its ends. As the classical anarchist theorist Mikhail Bakunin argued in his polemics against Karl Marx “liberty can be created only by liberty” (1990, 179). And thus, the state ought to be abolished on the very first day of the revolution. As the anarchist feminist Emma Goldman phrased it in 1924, reflecting on her experiences in the newly founded Soviet Union:

There is no greater fallacy than the belief that aims and purposes are one thing, while methods and tactics are another.

[...] All human experience teaches that methods and means cannot be separated from the ultimate aim. The means employed become, through individual habit and social practice, part and parcel of the final purpose; they influence it, modify it, and presently the aims and means become identical. [...] No revolution can ever succeed as a factor of liberation unless the MEANS used to further it be identical in spirit and tendency with the PURPOSES to be achieved. (Goldman 2003, 26of.)

The task of the international workers' movement, then, was not only to topple, but also to simultaneously replace the capitalist state and its institutions. It ought to provide an organizational structure for the future society in an embryo form – or, as a famous syndicalist phrase from the early 20th century has it, to build 'a new society in the shell of the old' (Graeber 2013, 232f.). Since the 1970s, the term 'prefiguration' has come to be used in reference to this principle (Boggs 1977; Gordon 2018).

In the course of the 20th century, a larger variety of social movements would adopt prefiguration as a guiding principle. Radical feminists endorsed a similar view of radical politics when they insisted the personal is political too – and, hence, that immediate social change should not only be established on the work floor, but also in the household and the bedroom (Rowbotham 1979). In the 1960s and 1970s, New Left and student movements experimented with decentralized forms of organization and sought to establish more horizontal power relations within their own movement (Breines 1989; Epstein 1991; Kaufman 2017). The so-called 'alterglobalists' around the turn of this century employed prefigurative forms of consensus-oriented decision-making on a large scale (Maeckelbergh 2009). And antiracist or indigenous movements have sought to prefigure new political discourses and sources of identification without reproducing the many aspects of colonialism that still inhere in our society today (Coulthard 2014). In short, long before the emergence of *Occupy Wall Street* or the 'Arab Spring', the originally anarchist idea of prefiguration has explicitly or implicitly informed the repertoire of countless social movements. The logic underpinning this particular view of radical political change is arguably best grasped by this famous passage from the feminist and antiracist author Audre Lorde, which in many respects echoes Goldman's statement quoted above:

We have, built into all of us, old blueprints of expectation and response, old structures of oppression, and these must be altered at the same time as we alter the living conditions which are a result of those structures. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. (Lorde 1984, 123)

This idea of prefiguration clearly has implications for our understanding of violence as a revolutionary means. There are different, ethical as well as more strategic, arguments to support the claim that a prefigurative politics must be nonviolent. At the same time, other anarchists have argued that a principled nonviolence stands in the way of radical political change. It could also be argued that prefiguration is only one part of a more diverse activist

toolbox, which may also contain instruments such as self-defence or even armed struggle. I will engage with both positions in the following sections.

Prefiguration and the principle of nonviolence

Anarchists and abolitionists have always had many reasons to eschew any form of violence within one's own practices or organizational structure. Some of these were more ethical, others more strategic. Already since the early 20th century, anarchist pacifists have insisted that nonviolent action is not only just, but also the most (or even the only) effective means to force the capitalist state on its knees. In his book *The Conquest of Violence* (first English edition from 1937), the Dutch anarcho-syndicalist Bart de Ligt argues that, throughout the history of humankind, violence has always bred class distinctions, inequality, and domination. When revolutionaries employ violent means for their own cause, De Ligt asserts, there thus “appears a flagrant contradiction between such means and the goal in sight” (1989, 72). As a syndicalist, De Ligt instead advocates the General Strike as a revolutionary method. But, unlike for instance George Sorel (2004) or Rudolf Rocker (2004), he claims that such a massive secession of the proletarian class from capitalist production should and could take place in a nonviolent fashion.

A similar, but more institutionally focused, strategy of nonviolent secession was advocated by the American Quaker and peace activist George Lakey. In his 1973 manual *Strategy for a Living Revolution*, Lakey proposes to set up a network of alternative, radically-democratic institutions that should aim to gradually replace the existing order. “As these institutions grow, they become part of the unfolding new society. The people transfer allegiance from the discredited institutions of the past to these new institutions” (Lakey 1987, 48). Both De Ligt's and Lakey's proposals for a nonviolent, prefigurative strategy have had significant impact on various anarchist and pacifist social movements throughout the past decades (Cornell 2011; 2016; Graeber 2013, 194f.).

Such a non-violent, secessionist strategy may thus be seen as the most effective way to establish radical political change in the long term. But there are also other strategic reasons to observe non-violence as a principle. It can also be a source of inspiration or empowerment. One acts ‘as if’ a society based on the principle of nonviolence were already in place – thus providing “a critical tool for uncovering problems concealed within the status quo” (Thaler 2019, 1009). By establishing nonviolent forms of cohabitation and organization within one's own activist practices one shows – to oneself as well as to others – that a radically different society is indeed possible. Thus perceived, one important function of nonviolent prefiguration may be to win people's hearts and minds for the radical cause and “to displace common sense and the everyday routines by institutionalizing new patterns of behavior” (Vintagen 2015, 286).

Next to these strategic considerations, finally, there is also a more deontological argument for prefigurative nonviolence: if one aspires to live in a more just, equal, or peaceful society, then one should also take care not to reproduce the very forms of domination, exploitation, and violence that characterize the present one. Violence, also when it is committed in an act of self-defence, is inevitably done to others. And thus, the very idea that it might

serve a legitimate goal implies that its potential victims or targets can be degraded to mere objects. As Judith Butler (2020, 74f.) states in her recent essay on nonviolence, every human person bears the characteristic of grievability. Denying this to anyone else – even to one’s opponent or oppressor – implies a fundamental societal inequality, and thus contributes to its perpetuation. Seen from this perspective, then, non-violence is observed not merely for its strategic or mobilising functions, but because one seeks to oppose the very instrumentalist logic that arguably inheres in any form of violence. In short, there are several – ethical as well as strategic; deontological as well as consequentialist – arguments as to why abolitionists and revolutionaries should eschew any use of violence within their own radical practices. At the same time, however, some radicals emphatically advocate the right to use violence, at the very least in self-defence. They instead insist that an abolitionist politics cannot always be – or should even explicitly *not* aspire to be – nonviolent.

Nonviolence and the perpetuation of (state) violence

A first, and arguably most principled argument against the idea of nonviolence is that it serves to perpetuate the status quo. The state will only tolerate – or, to some degree, even facilitate – protest and contestation as long as it does not pose any significant threat to its own hegemony. But of course, this is precisely what any radical movement worth its salt seeks to establish. “If we were allowed to live the change we wish to see in the world,” the anarchist activist Peter Gelderloos (2007, 134) argues, “there wouldn’t be much need for revolution.” However, when protesters choose to categorically uphold the principle of nonviolence, they implicitly leave it up to the state to determine the limits and control the outcomes of their actions. And this is only acceptable to those who are privileged enough to settle for less than systemic political change. It thus follows that a principled nonviolence can have racist and sexist implications: it denies minorities the right to use any means necessary in their resistance against their own repression or exploitation (Churchill 2007, 85). When it is used as an axiom, the principle of nonviolence thus may also effectively serve as one of the ‘Master’s tools’ in its own right.

The question, then, is how the employment of violence or self-defence may be compatible with the ultimate aim of establishing a society that is free from any form of exploitation, repression, or violence? As Ward Churchill, a staunch critic of nonviolence, admits, “it seems the highest order of contradiction that, in order to achieve nonviolence, we must first break with it in overcoming its root causes” (Churchill 2007, 104). But it could be argued that, in a society based on various forms of structural violence, it is simply impossible to consistently prefigure a radical alternative to it. According to Leon Trotsky (1973, 42), for instance, “the revolution itself is a product of class society and of necessity bears its traits.” Surely, one can dream of a radically different world. But the instruments that one has at one’s availability now, are the products of the present one. There is no other option than to use them for a different end. In that respect, the means of revolutionary action indeed are “subordinated to the end” (*ibid.*, 42). Seen from this perspective, then, a consistent employment of revolutionary means that prefigure or even

remotely resemble their future ends is simply impossible. To stick with Audre Lorde's metaphor: revolutionaries have no other tools but the ones that they have appropriated from their erstwhile Masters.

Another possible view would be that, although physical violence or self-defence may indeed not be prefigurative in its own right, they may nevertheless be practiced alongside each other. In fact, (the possible threat of) violence may sometimes be necessary to render certain forms of prefiguration, such as mutual aid or consensus-oriented decision-making, possible in the first place. Even if one may explicitly favour prefigurative politics as a way to establish radical change in the long run, one simply does not control the circumstances in which one intervenes. This view does imply, however, that one gives up the pretension to always act consistently with one's ultimate end – or, at least, when it is applied to every aspect of one's political practice. But as the anarchist philosopher Matthew Wilson (2014, 175) stresses, full consistency between means and ends may never be attainable “within a wider context deeply antagonistic to [one's] principles.”

The experiences of Egyptian revolutionaries in 2011 may well serve to illustrate this. It is clear that, without the activists and ‘ultras’ who engaged in street battles with Mubarak's security forces, the activist tent camp on Tahrir Square probably would not have lasted for long (Abul-Magd 2012). But in many other cases, the threat of (armed) self-defence against state repression has been a *sine qua non* for prefigurative politics to emerge – think, for instance, of the Zapatista movement in the South of Mexico and the Kurdish movement in Rojava, who both faced state repression on a military scale (Stanchev 2015). Another interesting example is the Common Ground Collective, a solidarity group that emerged in New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. When the state initially abandoned the city's poor, and predominantly black, population, the Common Ground Collective set up an emergency clinic, field kitchens, and a tool-lending station, and other forms of mutual aid (Solnit 2009, 289ff.). However, the collective also needed to fend off white supremacist vigilantes and the police. As one of its founding members Scott Crow suggests, building a new society often requires an ability to defend oneself against the old one:

Self-defense opens up the possibility of changing the rules of engagement. It doesn't always make situations less violent, but it can help to balance the inequity of power. [...] We can dream, we can build new worlds, but to do so we must not forget to resist on our own terms (Crow 2014, 58).

Violence and self-defence are not prefigurative, for the simple reason that they cannot be consistent with the ultimate end of a just (and supposedly nonviolent) society. But the ability to defend oneself may give rise to new power dynamic and empower those in weak social positions. More importantly, it may be a necessary precondition for prefiguration to emerge. Prefiguration is only one among several tools in the revolutionary toolbox, which may be employed alongside each other or at various phases of a revolutionary process. One thus needs to make a distinction between demolishing and building a house (Coulthard 2014, 148). Whereas a specific and more refined toolset may indeed be required to erect a new building, the Master's tools

may nevertheless be instrumental in breaking down the old one first (Jensen 2007, 18).

Prefiguration and violence beyond the means/ends-distinction

We have reviewed a number of different perspectives on the role and legitimacy of violence in an abolitionist politics. Some argue that, in the pursuit of a just and radically different society, one should only employ means that are consistent with these ends. Others claim that such a principled nonviolence precisely precludes the possibility to enforce radical political change, and thus perpetuates the systemic violence that inheres in capitalism and the state. Finally, it could be argued that one may prefigure a new society at least in some of its aspects, but only on the condition that one is able to defend it against the old one. At a fundamental level, however, most of these different positions do seem to have something in common: they often tend to read violence in instrumentalist terms. Violence is a means, a tool, or an instrument. It may be an illegitimate means to a just end; it may typically be the Master's tool, or precisely one that is required to first dismantle his old house – but it is an instrument nevertheless. This is also evinced by the fact that, in many of these accounts, 'violence' appears to be equated with physical violence more specifically. However, I argue that violence should not necessarily be understood in such instrumentalist terms. We should be more reluctant to reduce this rather complex question on the role of violence in radical politics to a matter of being 'for' or 'against' it. What may be a more nuanced or realistic way to appreciate the challenges that activists and revolutionaries face in their attempt to change the existing social order and imagine an alternative to it?

To begin with, it is important to stress that 'violence' is never a neutral term. As Walter Benjamin argues in his essay "Critique of Violence," there is no 'outside' position from which an objective assessment on the legitimate use of violence could possibly be made. Benjamin shows how violence is closely intertwined with the legal order, and fulfils a double function in this respect (2019, 299). On the one hand, it stands at the very root of the law: violence is 'law-making' in that it asserts the law out of nothing, so to speak. And on the other hand, it protects and facilitates this law and the power relations that it constitutes. It thus follows that both our normative views on the legitimacy of violence and even our very understanding of the term is "from the start defined within certain frameworks and comes to us always interpreted, 'worked over' by its frame" (Butler 2020, 136). This is precisely why the state will always perceive any political action that seeks to break with its established order as a violation (Benjamin 2019, 307). Revolutionaries and abolitionists cannot but engage in a context that is already permeated with violence. In consequence, they cannot do so without being perceived or represented as violent – even if one explicitly refrains from the use of physical force. Thus, rather simply a matter of being 'for' or 'against' violence, it really depends on one's position whether a political action will be perceived as violent in the first place.

This does not mean that nonviolent action is impossible, according to Benjamin. It is mostly in consensual and egalitarian, everyday interactions – in collective decision-making, conference, or interpersonal conflict resolution – that one can recognise the contours of a future, peaceful society (2019, 304). What distinguishes such ‘pure’ or ‘unalloyed means’, as Benjamin calls them, from (state) violence, is that they do not project a particular end or aim beyond themselves – and thus escape the intrinsic instrumentalist logic of the latter. Benjamin’s idea of nonviolence as a ‘pure means’ arguably comes close to Peter Kropotkin’s idea of ‘mutual aid’ (2006) or to what the late David Graeber (2011, 98) called ‘baseline communism’: the idea that, under a thin layer of institutionalised repression and exploitation, egalitarianism and solidarity are always already in place in most of our everyday relations and interactions. The many forms of redistribution and democratic decision-making that emerged in the tent camps of recent assembly movements, for instance, exemplify this potential for nonviolent action. Benjamin acknowledges that a complete or consistent abolition of state violence may not be possible under the present conditions (an assessment that arguably still stands today). But by practicing such everyday forms of nonviolence in the ‘here and now’, it may at least be possible to temporarily break the contingent and mythicized foundations on which the current political order rests. “If the rule of myth is broken occasionally in the present age,” he claims, “the coming age is not so unimaginably remote that an attack on law is altogether futile” (Benjamin 2019, 315).

Although there are significant similarities between Benjamin’s concept of nonviolent action or ‘pure means’ on the one hand, and the contemporary notion of prefiguration on the other, there is one significant difference between them. As we have seen, Benjamin’s ‘pure means’ do not seem to serve a particular programme or pursue a predefined end at all (2019, 307). In consequence, nonviolence does not imply any aspiration or pretension to act consistently with one’s ultimate ends. It is at this point that Benjamin’s ‘open-ended’ conception of nonviolent action may help to refine our understanding of prefiguration in the context of contemporary social movements. Perhaps, the common idea of prefiguration as an equivalence of means and ends is often not precise enough (Yates 2015, 18). If the aim is to consistently foreshadow or mirror one’s ultimate ends within one’s own practices, then it follows that “one needs fairly substantive agreement on ends. [...] It is therefore important that the ends are in fact in view, that is, specified to a greater or lesser degree” (Swain 2019, 53). But arguably, one of the key features that was shared by many recent assembly movements – from Tahrir Square to 15-M or *Occupy Wall Street*, and from Gezi Park movement to *Nuit Debout* – was that its participants often did *not* have any clear, predefined ends. Although these various movements may have had a shared critique of the state institutions that they opposed, they also often lacked a clear understanding of what a future society should look like. They thus turned to prefiguration in order to find this out in the first place. In the context of these recent practices, prefiguration must thus be understood as an open-ended and *experimental* process, in which the question what a radically different society may look like, is always immediately at stake. This, then, is where the radical potential of prefigurative politics really lies: not in its ability to consistently or durably enact a perfect, new society or to found a new political order; but in

its continuous attempt to imagine a radically different society beyond the discursive, legal, and political boundaries of the current one.

How may this help us to rethink the relation between violence and prefigurative politics in a more nuanced and realistic manner? If we could understand prefiguration as an open-ended experiment, rather than a claim to full consistency, then it would follow that a prefigurative politics inevitably has its imperfections, flaws, and limits (Gordon 2008, 46). Violence, whenever it appears in a social or political context, may well be understood to pose such a limit. It may not always be avoided – for instance because one is targeted as a victim, or because the perpetrated violence symptomises deeper psychological or societal problems. Violence may then be understood not as a means or instrument that is willingly and knowingly employed in the pursuit of particular ends, but rather as a social given: something that unfortunately occurs in any social practice, including revolutionary or abolitionist ones. The main issue, then, is not how a perfect society *devoid* of conflict or violence should be realised or prefigured in the ‘here and now’. Nor is it the question whether violence should either be employed or instead be eschewed at all costs. Instead, the real challenge for prefigurative movements would be to ask how a more just society may go about dealing with such problems. Think, for instance, of experiments with ‘transformative justice’ or other forms of conflict resolution that do not require law enforcement (Dixon/Piepzna-Samarasinha 2020). This implies that there may always be forms of violence or abuse, and that its complete abolition may never be realisable in practice. Prefiguration, then, is the continuous and open-ended attempt of activist to address such issues within their radical practices. One of the main questions informing their prefigurative politics is not what a perfectly harmonious, non-violent society should look like, but rather how a radically different society would deal with violence as a social given.

Conclusion

This article started with the observation that many prefigurative practices and social movements tend to reproduce (aspects of) the very violence and repression that they seek to challenge – if only to defend or protect themselves. I used the occupation of Tahrir Square in 2011 as an example: whilst between the barricades, the Egyptian revolutionaries sought to prefigure a radically different society, at the outskirts of the occupied square one often had to engage in bloody street battles in order to defend it. Most Western media only covered the prefigurative experimentation within the square, thus construing an idealised image of a ‘peaceful revolution’ that would fit into a liberal-democratic narrative. But how, I asked, should we understand the relation between violence and prefiguration in a more nuanced and realistic way? I reconstructed several perspectives on the role of violence in a prefigurative politics. Whereas some radical theorists and movements insist that violent means can never serve to establish nonviolent ends, others have altogether dismissed the principle of nonviolence. However, I argued that we should be reluctant to accept an all too benign ideal image of radical politics without violence, as much as we should steer away from the idea that ‘in order to make an omelette, one has to break a few eggs’. At the end of the day, both views are underpinned by a similar instrumentalist idea of violence. By

presenting the question of violence as something that one can simply be ‘for’ or ‘against’, I argued, one arguably does not do justice to its complexity.

Engaging with Walter Benjamin, I have sought to offer an alternative perspective on the relation between prefiguration and violence. I argued how Benjamin’s conception of ‘pure means’ may help us to challenge the common conception of prefiguration as a claim to full consistency. Instead, we may also understand prefiguration as an open-ended experiment: as an attempt to form an, inevitably partial or limited, idea of what a radically different society might be like. Seen from this perspective, then, violence is not a means or instrument that should either be employed or dismissed, but a challenge or problem that activists need to address in one way or the other. The question then becomes how one would deal with (the threat of) violence in a radically different society. Seen from this perspective, revolutionary movements do not prefigure a perfect utopia that is entirely devoid of conflict or violence. They merely create a condition in which it is possible to imagine a radically *different* society. This, indeed, is something that was established on Tahrir Square, as well as in many other places in the course of the past decade.

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Can There Be Non-Violent Political Action?

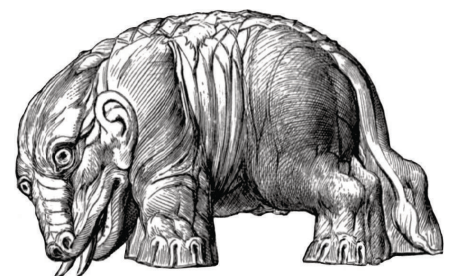
Christoph Menke

Abstract

The text argues for the irreducible violence of the abolition of violence. It aims to show that this is not a paradox, for violence means something else in both instances. We thus need to distinguish between violence and violence: we need a 'critique of violence' in the sense that Walter Benjamin has developed it (in his article with this title). The text will sketch a political reading of Benjamin's distinction between mythic and divine violence by way of his example of education.

Keywords: Violence, Critique, Education, Benjamin

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The title of the conference for which this paper was written asks for what it means “to abolition (state violence)”. What interests me in this formulation is the act of abolishment. More precisely, I am interested in the relationship between this act and what it abolished – the state and its violence. Is the act of the abolition of state violence itself violent? And if so, violent in what sense – distinct from the violence of the state? If we can call the act of abolishment of state violence a (or the) political act, then this is the question of in what sense this act must be violent in order to break the violence of the state. Can there be acts that abolish violence and hence are political and that are non-violent at the same time? I will discuss this question with reference to Walter Benjamin’s reflections in his *Critique of Violence* (1977/1986),^[1] in relation to which the theme of the conference was posed.

If we follow Benjamin’s text, the answer to the question for the possibility of non-violent political action is obviously positive. According to Benjamin, there is non-violent political action, namely insofar as its means (*Mittel*) are ‘pure’ (*rein*, sometimes translated as ‘unalloyed’). We can see what this implies, what ‘pure’ means are, by looking at “relationships between private persons” (that “are all full of examples of this”; *ibid.*, 191/289). Here, Benjamin writes, “nonviolent agreement is possible wherever a civilized outlook [*die Kultur des Herzens*] allows the use of pure means of agreement. [...] Courtesy, sympathy, peaceableness, trust, and whatever else might here be mentioned, are their subjective preconditions” (*ibid.*). Their political “analogy” is the art of diplomacy, whose task is “to resolve conflicts case by case, in the names of their states, peacefully and without contracts” (*ibid.*, 195/293). In all these cases we are dealing with forms of action that aim at the “non-violent resolution of conflict” (*ibid.*, 191/289). The condition of such non-violence is *Sachlichkeit*, i.e., “objectivity”:

Unalloyed [pure, nonviolent] means are never those of direct, but always that of indirect solutions. They therefore never apply directly to the resolution of conflict between man and man, but only to matters concerning objects [*Güter*]. The sphere of nonviolent means opens up in the realm of conflicts relating in the most objective [*sachlichste*] way to goods. (*ibid.*, 192/289)

Thus, the condition for political nonviolence is objectivity, which in turn is only possible through a (technological) relation to goods.

However, insofar as political struggles are contentions over power, domination, and freedom (or liberation), they are different in kind. In such struggles, no ‘objectivity’, and therefore the renunciation of violence that it enables, is achievable. The question “Is non-violent political action possible?” has therefore to be asked once again. The (affirmative) answer with respect to conflict resolution does not suffice. The distinction that Benjamin’s *Critique of Violence* develops in this field, the field of political struggle, is thus another one. It is not the distinction between violence and non-violence, but rather between different kinds of violence. Instead of asking “Is non-violent political action possible?”, Benjamin raises the question for “a different kind of violence” (*ibid.*, 196/293) – a violence that is not a means at all anymore, whether pure or impure.

[1] I quote Benjamin’s text by giving the German (1977) and the English (1986) page numbers. I have occasionally modified the translation.

Before I can try to determine this different kind of violence, it requires an explanation of how I understand the concept of violence, i.e. violence in all of its forms. The definition of violence with which I work here is simple: We can define ‘violence’ as a specific way in which one acts on the other – a specific type of the power-effect that one agent has on some other agent, who receives or suffers that effect. In this broad sense, we can call that kind of effecting or affecting the other ‘violent’ if it violates – injures, hurts, infringes – the other. The simple definition is that violence violates; the violence of the one violates the other. All violence thus causes some kind of suffering.

The violation that violence effects can be understood either in an objective or a subjective sense. If the act of violation is defined objectively, then it means the external disruption of the wholeness of a form, the infringement of its integrity. The objective definition of violence presupposes the idea of a given form that is defined by its teleology – for example, the integrity of a living body or of someone’s psyche. To act violently on that form means to externally disrupt the self-forming activity by which it realizes its telos or essence. In contrast, the subjective definition of violence does without (and indeed rejects) such objectively determined essences and teloi. Subjectively defined, violence consists in disrespecting, constraining or even damaging someone’s self-determination. Here, the criterion of violation is, accordingly, the other’s will. To inflict violence on some other means in the subjective sense to act against the other’s will: to violate the other’s power of self-determination.

With this schematic definition of violence and violation in mind, we can once again pose the question: is political action to be violent, and if so, how and when? Or in Benjamin’s terms: which ‘kinds’ of violence, of violating the integrity or the self-determination of some other, have to be distinguished by a critique of violence?

On the one side of Benjamin’s critical distinction stands the violence of law.^[2] It is obvious and undisputed that the law exerts (or threatens to exert) violence. Nobody denies it; even the most affirmative – that is: uncritical – theory of law accepts, indeed demands, that it must be willing to use violence in order to achieve its goals. The ideologies of law that Benjamin criticizes legitimize such violence in instrumental terms. Accordingly, the violence of law is legitimate because it is merely a means. This is the fundamental mistake of those legal ideologies. For the violence of law is not a means, however just its purpose. Indeed, the violence of law that truly calls for a critique is not a mere means or instrument: Benjamin does not criticize the law because it too constrains, threatens, and violates. Rather, the violence of law is “violence crowned by fate” (ibid., 188/286). That is to say, the violence of law consists in its operating *as or like* fate.

For the function of violence in lawmaking is twofold, in the sense that lawmaking pursues as its end, with violence as the means, what is to be established as law, but at the moment of instatement does not dismiss violence; rather, at this very moment of lawmaking, it specifically establishes as law not an end unalloyed by violence but one necessarily and intimately bound to it, under the title of power. Lawmaking is powermak-

[2] For a detailed account of the following considerations, see Menke (2018, 6ff.).

ing, assumption of power, and to that extent an immediate manifestation of violence. (ibid.; 198/295)

It is not the fact that law is applied and enforced by violent means – not the fact that law uses violence as a means – that is the problem of the law and of the legitimation of its violence. Rather, it is the fact that the violence inherent in the law cannot *remain* a mere means to an end, that it does not ‘abdicate’ itself (Hannah Arendt), and so instead it becomes the mode of being, or operating, of law itself. The violence of the law that Benjamin calls ‘fateful’ for this reason consists in the fact that the law’s violent means ultimately obliterate its just purpose because its self-preservation becomes its only purpose. Law is merely about power: it is about its own power, the power of law to maintain itself. The ‘fateful’ violence of law is the violence of its self-preservation. That, Benjamin argues, is what makes the violence of law reprehensible: namely, not that law, too, threatens, violates, and coerces, but that law operates for its own sake, for the sake of the preservation of its order and the establishment and enforcement of its categories, perspective, and language. The law operates for the sake of its power. Like the power of fate, it is therefore cursed to continue forever.

Due to its circular, fateful character and temporality, this first kind of violence, the violence of law, is called ‘mythic’ violence. Mythic violence is defined by Benjamin as the violence of manifestation, and the violence of manifestation is defined as the manifestation of an order or, more precisely, of its power, of the order *as* power. The preservation of the order is not the goal of the violent act – it is the violent act, in which the establishment and the preservation of the order therefore become indistinguishable. The first kind of non-instrumental violence is thus the violence of power, or more precisely, of ruling power; the power of domination. It is violence as the non-instrumental manifestation of a dominating power over its subjects. This means, conversely, that domination always exceeds the instrumental (or economic) logic of expropriation, appropriation, exploitation, and enrichment of profit. In every form of domination, it is not only about its immediate effect or even benefit (which the domination has for the ruler), but about the self-preservation of the domination itself. Power, like domination, is circular, self-referential, non-instrumental. It *expresses* itself by violence. It is about the joy of violation.[3]

The project of a critique of violence is not just to expose the falsity of such violence of power-manifestation (which obviously can neither be criticized by judging its ends nor its means, but only by presenting its form: its mythic processuality or temporality of fate). The project of a critique of violence is also, and more importantly, to distinguish *this* – mythic, reprehensible – kind of non-instrumental violence from a ‘different kind’ of violence, which is *also* non-instrumental or ‘immediate’, but in an entirely different way (that Benjamin calls ‘divine’ in order to define it against mythic violence). Benjamin describes the critical, i.e. decisive, difference between these two kinds of non-instrumental violence by remarking that while the first one is “law-making”, the second one is “law-destroying” (or law-annihilating); while “the former sets boundaries, the latter boundlessly destroys them”; while the first one “brings at once guilt and retribution,” the second one “only expiates” (ibid., 199/297). We have already seen what Benjamin means when he calls

[3] Orlando Patterson has formulated this Nietzschean point for the specific case of slavery in this way: “What the captive or condemned person lost was the master’s gain. The real sweetness of mastery for the slaveholder lay not immediately in profit, but in the lightening of the soul that comes with realization that at one’s feet is another human creature who lives and breathes only for one’s self, as a surrogate for one’s power, as a living embodiment of one’s manhood and honor. Every slavemaster must, in his heart of hearts, have agreed with Nietzsche’s celebrated declaration: ‘What is good? Everything that heightens the feeling of power in man, the will to power, power itself. What is bad? Everything that is born of weakness. What is happiness? The feeling that power is *growing*, that resistance is overcome.’” (Patterson 1982, 78)

the first kind of non-instrumental violence mythic and law-making: the violence of the power of domination (i.e. violence not as the instrument of power but rather its manifestation or expression: its mode of being). Conversely, therefore, the other kind of immediate, non-instrumental violence is the violence in – or as – the annihilation of power. The other kind of violence is the annihilation of power, and this, in turn, means that the annihilation of power is violence. To annihilate a ruling power is an act of liberation (which Benjamin calls *Entsetzung*). Now, if to annihilate a ruling power is an act of violence and if, secondly, to annihilate a ruling power is an act of liberation, liberation or emancipation is neither accidentally nor instrumentally but rather essentially violent and violating. If political action is an act of liberation, political action is – and must be – an act of violation.

Why is this so? The question can be answered if we follow the hint that Benjamin gives when he writes of “educative power [*erzieherische Gewalt*]” as that “sanctioned [*geheiligte*] manifestation” of a different kind of violence, namely divine violence, which we can still find in “present-day life” (ibid., 200/297). But why is education violent? It is so to the “extent it is justifiable to call this violence, too, annihilating.” (Ibid.) Like the other forms of violence, divine violence annihilates; however, it only annihilates “relatively, with regard to goods, right, life, and suchlike, never absolutely, with regard to the soul of the living” (ibid., 200/197f.). The reason why education is only “relatively” annihilating or violent is that it is “absolutely” affirmative or productive. What education, following Benjamin, affirms or produces is the ‘soul’. What is a soul? I suggest not to understand this term in the Aristotelian sense: as the psyche, i.e. the inner principle or *arche*, the always already existing ground and beginning of a living being. Rather, I understand Benjamin’s “*Seele*” in the sense of Franz Rosenzweig as an effect: namely the effect of a revelation, confronting and transforming the self from outside. According to Rosenzweig the “self” becomes “soul” by a revelatory experience (Rosenzweig 1988, 105ff.; see Santner 2001), and this becoming-soul is the process of liberation. Thus, the self is or has not yet a soul when education (that education which is liberation) starts. The self is rather determined by a natural or social or cultural identity. Such identities are the effects, the seat, and the instrument of power. By liberating the soul, of or from the self, the educatory process is thus the manifestation of law- or power-annihilating violence.[4] It violates the identity of the self, it destroys her or his integrity, wholeness and self-determination. But it is crucial to note that herein the violation again does not function as a means; the violent annihilation of identity is not instrumental. This violence is rather a manifestation: the manifestation of the becoming of the soul, hence of liberation.

Now, such education-as-liberation (or liberation as education) is not yet, not by itself, a political act. Therefore, what should follow from this example of ‘divine’ or ‘pure unmediated violence’ as an example of educative violence, in order to answer the question if (and if so, why) political action cannot be non-violent? Let me take as an example the act of representation: the representation of someone by some other. By representation one can understand either to speak for someone or to speak about someone (in German: *Stellvertretung* and *Darstellung*). I use the term hereafter in a third sense (in which the first two meanings play a role): that of addressing someone; more specifically, in the sense of addressing someone else in front of others.[5] To

[4] Insofar as education is itself an essential mechanism in the re-production of the existing symbolic-normative order and hence an instance of the blending of law making and law preserving, education thus has to turn against itself in order to become liberating. Eva Geulen (2004) describes this (with reference to Benjamin and his discussion of Kant’s pedagogy) as the paradox of education. For an attempt to dissolve this paradox by an act of critical distinction, even separation, see Charles 2016.

[5] I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for alerting me to the need for a clarification. – In the following I am interested in the moment of violence that lies in the fact that it is – as Derrida writes – “impossible” to “address oneself to the other in the language of the other” (1989-1990, 949). I want to indicate why the violence that lies in this missing of the other is indissolubly ambiguous: it is the violence of law *and* of justice.

address someone is a fundamental move of any social situation. If it is performed explicitly and deliberately, it constitutes a social situation and can in this sense be called ‘political’ (if politics has to do with the constitution of the social). The question thus is whether the fundamentally political act of representing someone by addressing her can be non-violent. Can there be non-violent representation following Benjamin’s argument?

One can understand this question in the sense discussed by Jacques Derrida in his early critique of Lévinas. Derrida understands it here as the question whether non-violent representation is at all *possible*. And he answers the question in the negative by claiming that violence is “transcendental” (Derrida 1978, 118ff.). It is a condition of possibility of representing anyone, or even anything, at all; representation, Derrida claims, as such, is violent. So that according to Derrida the alternative is not between a violent and a non-violent representation, but rather between a more or less violent representation. In contrast, here, I want to reframe the question not in terms of whether political representation can be non-violent, but rather if it even *should* be non-violent; i.e., if it should *aim* at non-violence; and moreover, if the commitment to non-violence as such defines the goodness or justice of representation.

On the basis of the analysis of educative violence above, it is clear what the problem, indeed the danger, of such an understanding is that defines justice by non-violence. It lies in the fact that it absolutizes non-violation.[6] As I said in the beginning of this essay, acts of violation can either, objectively understood, injure the integrity of another’s form or, subjectively understood, harm someone’s will; they are either infringements upon the other’s teleology or its self-determination. To claim that any representation that is violent in either sense is, merely by being violent, unjust, thereby presupposes that either any given form or that any given act of self-determination is, simply by being given, legitimate and untouchable. It either presupposes natural goodness (of forms) or natural freedom (of the will). But what is naturally given is neither good nor free. The analysis of educative violence has shown why: it is because that which is given by – first or second – nature is precisely not the liberated “soul”, but rather a condition of identity and hence an effect of domination. It is therefore wrong to say that a just representation of the other must reflect, i.e., merely duplicate, its form or its will. It is thus wrong to say that only that representation of the other is a just representation that corresponds to the other’s self-representation. For in their simple, given, uneducated forms, our self-representations are always false. That is: we are unjust to ourselves.[7] To commit political representation to adopting and duplicating the other’s self-representation is therefore to repeat and thus entrench its injustice. Therefore, the political acts of representation must be violent. They must be a manifestation of the violence that annihilates law, order and form, and liberates the soul from identity. Such violence is the virtue of political action.

[6] Benjamin calls this “a quite childish anarchism” that “[refuses] to acknowledge any constraint toward persons and [declares], ‘What pleases is permitted’” (1977/1986, 187/284). It rejects violence “in the name of a formless ‘freedom’” (ibid.).

[7] The modern foundation of the political community on an agreement or a contract excludes this from the outset. It follows the principle of Roman law that the will cannot injure itself. Kant writes: “if someone decides something against another, it is always possible that he thereby does him wrong, but never in what he decides about himself (volenti non fit iniuria).” (1966, §46; my translation) The willing subject cannot violate her- or himself: this is the assumption on which the concept of contract in civil law rests. Modern political philosophy transposes it – wrongly – to the political realm.

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