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Democracy
Equality & Culture
Beyond
the Nation State

PACT
FOR
EQUALITY

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European Alternatives team
Jana Ahlers, Irene Alonso Toucido, Billie Dibb, Yasmine Djidel, Viktoria Kostova, Ophélie Masson, Marta Cillero Manzano, Garance Martin, Niccolò Milanese, Noemi Pittalà, Ségolène Pruvot, Ruxandra Stan, Csenge Schneider-Lonhart, Gabriela Siegel and Jessica Valdez

Art Direction and Graphic Design
Luca Pantorno - studiolucapan

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Imagine, Demand, Enact

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CONTRIBUTORS

Nicoletta Alessio is a regular contributor to Melting Pot Europa, where she edits the column "CPR, Hotspot, CPA" and collaborates on the production of podcasts. In 2024–25 she coordinated the project Voices Across Borders: Uniting Against the Italy-Albania Agreement. She worked in the institutional reception system for refugees and asylum seekers in Italy and currently works as a Case Worker for Refugees Welcome Italia. She worked as a research fellow and holds a postgraduate degree in Inter-Mediterranean Migration from Ca' Foscari University and Paul Valéry University of Montpellier, which led her study in France, Algeria and Tunisia.

Sara Badri is a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences at Scuola Normale Superiore and Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna, in Italy. Her interdisciplinary research explores how diasporic community collectives in London practice fugitive care as a prefigurative act, challenging dominant frameworks and creating space for futurity and alternative world-making.

Francesca Paola Beltrame is an architect, researcher and artist from Rome. Her work is concerned with spatial justice drawing from decolonial and feminist methodologies. She employs a spatial lens to investigate the colonial legacies embedded within Italian cultures and landscapes, where through participatory formats, video and installations, she weaves alternative methods of relation and collective counter-cartographies. Her recent research has been focused on food systems, migration and the weaponization of borders in the Mediterranean context.

Andria Charilaou is a Cypriot urbanist, architect, and researcher exploring the intersections of gender, conflict, inequality, and urban life. She combines visual ethnography with feminist and queer theory to reveal hidden power dynamics in cities. Her work blends personal and marginalized narratives with research, uncovering how militarisation, patriarchy, and colonial legacies shape everyday lives and collective memory.

Anne Fock (fock@europa-uni.de) researches and writes along the fault lines of international law – what it promises, where it fails, and what openings might emerge in its gaps. She taught and conducted research at the European University Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder) and worked with international organizations and NGOs, which has influenced her perspective on the promises and limits of global governance. Her ongoing PhD traces the fragmented protection of the environment in international humanitarian law and beyond, treating this field as a terrain for engaging with critical approaches to international law.

Sara Gambino has a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work (LUMSA University, Palermo) and a Master's Degree in Planning and Management of Social Politics and Services (Alma Mater Studiorum University, Bologna). She worked as a social caseworker in Italy with different kinds of vulnerable clients and in England with women at risk of social exclusion. Employed by the Italian Ministry of Justice (2010 – 2019) as Penitentiary Educator in Padua's male prison (2010 – 2016) became Responsible for Education and Cultural Activities (2016 – 2018), and then Responsible for training of the penitentiary personnel (2018 – 2019). She worked as a researcher at Vienna Centre for Societal Security on EU projects for 2 years. She is now a Project Manager and developer at CEIPES for justice-related projects.

Utibe Joseph is an activist and law student based in Bologna, working on immigration, migration policies, and citizenship, with a focus on the rights of people with migrant backgrounds. Her work is grounded in the intersection of lived experience, legal analysis, and political practice.
She is active in political, cultural, and grassroots networks promoting a, bottom-up transformation of migration and belonging policies in Europe. She speaks in public, academic, and cultural contexts and also engages artistic and narrative practices as tools for political reflection.

Maguy Ikulu is a jurist and political scientist specializing in gender equality, anti-racism, and decolonial approaches. A war refugee and genocide survivor from the DRC, she transformed her personal history into a lifelong commitment to justice and systemic change. She currently serves as Diversity and SDG Officer at UCLouvain, leading strategies for equity, inclusion, and institutional transformation.

Ana Luiza Loio (or just Analu) is a Brazilian-Portuguese storyteller working at the intersection of culture, politics, and collective change. Born in Manaus and today based in Europe, she collaborates with mission-driven teams to craft stories for systemic change. In her free time, you'll find her dancing to Brazilian rhythms or enjoying chocolatey treats in a city café.

Franca Marquardt is an anthropologist and documentarist seeking ways to combine visuals and research to support social change. Currently, she is a PhD candidate in Sociology and Political Science at the Scuola Normale Superiore in Florence exploring emotions and visuality in internationalist social movements. She is also an editor of the ethnographic storytelling journal Thirdshelf. https://thirdshelfjournal.com/ https://www.instagram.com/francamidore

Stellar Meris is a painter and performer based between Berlin and Basel. Their work explores queer and decolonial perspectives through storytelling and immersive happenings. Expanding on research into the German Templers and the early colonization of Palestine, Meris graduated from the University of the Arts Berlin in 2019 and is pursuing a master's degree at the Dutch Art Institute (2024–2026). They have exhibited and performed at the Biennale für Freiburg 2, Haus Kunst Mitte (Berlin), Kunstraum LLC (New York), NIDAC (Nida, Lithuania), and Centrale Fies (Dro, Italy), and participated in the symposium "What Is To Be Done?" organized by the Febrayer Network in Berlin.

Nata Simebaji is an interdisciplinary artist, poet, and cultural practitioner. Author of "In the Name of the Fragmentary" (2021) and co-author of "Wild Construction" (2010). Her work featured at Woman Scream Festival (Dominican Republic), PASA Seoul, and Kalemegdan Belgrade (Climateeurope2). Her poems and photographs appeared in "Climate Action through Photography and Poetry" by Center for Science Promotion. She co-organizes exhibitions on forgotten heritage and published in "My Danube Story" (2023). Through poetry, visual arts, and cultural projects, she explores memory, heritage, and collaboration.

Xiaoji Song (b. 1995, Wuhan, she/they) is a Berlin-based artist, writer, and researcher. Xiaoji's practice spans text, games, social practices, and performance to construct critical fabulations around bordering practices, notions of security, and alternative economies. Their work has been presented at Ringtheater Berlin, Berliner Festspiele, Goethe-Institut Bulgaria, NECE Festival, Sofia Art Week, and Matadero Madrid Contemporary Art Center. For their social practices, activism, and advocacy work, they regularly collaborate with grassroots initiatives, NGOs, and civil society groups.

Pact for Equality: A campaign for Anti-Discrimination in Europe and beyond

Europe is a continent shaped by movement: people, ideas, solidarities crossing borders both visible and invisible. And yet, across this shifting terrain, too many bodies still meet walls – legal, cultural, economic, intimate. Racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, class injustice: these are interconnected systems that shape who gets to feel safe, who gets to speak, who gets to belong.

This twelfth issue of the *European Alternatives Journal* emerges from those fractures.

But it also emerges from the refusal that grows in their cracks.

The **Pact for Equality** campaign in 2024 began with voices often pushed to the margins: advocates with a migration background, artists and organisers resisting everyday discrimination, young people reimagining community across languages and borders. Their demands were clear: equality cannot be an abstract principle, nor a bureaucratic promise deferred to the next electoral cycle.

In this final issue of the year, we explore a double movement.

On one side, we gather personal and collective stories, analyses and critiques that expose the every-

day and structural violence of discriminatory systems, how they shape identities, opportunities, and imaginaries across Europe's uneven terrains.

On the other, we turn deliberately towards solutions: collective practices of resistance, models of solidarity, and the best practices that movements, communities and cultural actors are already building.

This tension, between naming injustice and cultivating alternatives, is the heartbeat of Issue 12. It reminds us that equality is not only a demand but a practice, lived in common, shaped through struggle, and refined through the creativity of those who refuse to be silenced.

We begin with **Sara Badri**'s *Proof of Being*, a poem that captures the quiet resistance of living under borders, bureaucracy, and shifting notions of belonging. That intimate tension reappears in **Ana Luiza Loio**'s reflection, on navigating a coloniser/colonised identity, where personal history becomes a landscape shaped by movement, rupture, and survival.

From here, the issue turns outward. In **Francesca Paola Beltrame**'s *Pomo d'Orographies*, the tomato becomes a lens to trace migration, labour exploitation, and domestic ritual, reminding us that political violence often lives inside the everyday.

Sara Gambino deepens this view with her analysis of the criminalisation of "people on the move," while **Nicoletta Alessio** exposes the geopolitical machinery behind the Italy–Albania agreement. Together,

they map the structural discrimination embedded in Europe's border regime.

With **Maguy Ikulu**'s account of Congo, the centre of gravity shifts again, toward the global hierarchies of attention and empathy that determine whose suffering becomes legible in Europe.

At this point, the issue pauses to open a new space: two special episodes dedicated to Pact for Equality of our new European Alternatives Podcast appear here, echoing and expanding the written contributions. The first features – again – Maguy Ikulu in conversation with our Deputy Director, Ophélie Masson, continuing the thread of her article. The second is a dialogue between activist **Utibe Joseph** (from Dalla Parte Giusta della Storia, on the Italian citizenship referendum) and our Communications Officer, Noemi Pittalà, exploring grassroots mobilisation and democratic futures.

The momentum then widens again. **Andria Charilaou** examines how militarisation and patriarchy shape both public and private life; **Anne Fock** interrogates the ghostly figure of the "international community," asking what solidarity really means when institutions falter.

From here, a thread tightens around a city central to European Alternatives: Berlin, home of our School of Transnational Organizing, and a living laboratory of grassroots resistance. In **Xiaoji Song**'s piece *Translocal Workers for Economic Justice*, Berlin becomes

a crossroads where migrant delivery riders, informal workers, and translocal networks organise for economic justice across borders, showing how people build power even inside systems designed to exclude them. **Stella Meris** carries this energy into the cultural field, where artists mobilise against censorship, imperialism, and silencing. Her contribution reframes Berlin not only as a site of struggle but as a space where new imaginaries are crafted collectively. This movement finds its visual crescendo in **Franca Marquardt**'s photographic essay, capturing gestures of solidarity in the streets of Berlin. These images illuminate the everyday acts that give political hope its form: people coming together, refusing isolation, insisting on dignity.

And the issue closes, as it began, in poetry. **Nata Simebaji**'s *The Third Way* breaks open the binaries that constrict our political imagination, offering a horizon where solidarity becomes both method and possibility.

Across all contributions, one insight becomes clear: discrimination in Europe is structural, and so must be the response. The *Pact for Equality* emerges precisely from this understanding: equality cannot remain an ideal, it must be a shift in power shaped by those who live inequality every day.

Issue 12 shows that this work is already happening: in migrant organising, in feminist and decolonial practices, in translocal labour struggles, in artistic refusals that redraw the boundaries of what Europe can be.

The Pact begins here: in the refusal to accept discrimination as inevitable, and in the collective creation of alternatives across borders.

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Proof of Being

Sara Badri

There's a distinction between home and homing
Even though we're not compatible,
I still call it home
Because I understand it

I call it home because it welcomes me
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Complex, fragile, wise, sometimes sassy
With all the lineages, folk stories between fiction and reality
Generational traumas, revolutions, knowledge, and alchemy

That illusion of home
Made a difference
Not precisely returning to the homeland
Rather, reconnecting with the people, rivers, and sand
Sit al shay, the tea lady
The heat and humidity

There is no after, there is no return
It was the option, the possibility,
the stability
The illusion of home

[Copy of visa page]

The stability, even though it's anything but stable
It's hard to make sense of chaos as stable
on any level

But it did in many ways stabilise
Rooted, grounded, anchored
It makes sense, not logic
Senses, experiences, and memories

[Copy of all passport pages..]

The illusion of home
meant a "permanent address"
That's stability, isn't it?

Knowing that I can return home
A place that doesn't question my intentions at its borders

[Parents' nationality..?]
[Is that the same nationality at birth?]

I'm welcomed home, not "granted access"
Simply existing
No residence permit, "Permesso di Soggiorno" or "leave to remain"
No expiration date
No proof of funds
No proof... of being

How are you supposed to "be"?
What does "being" mean?
Coming into this world is enough reason to exist, move, create, and dance. Right?

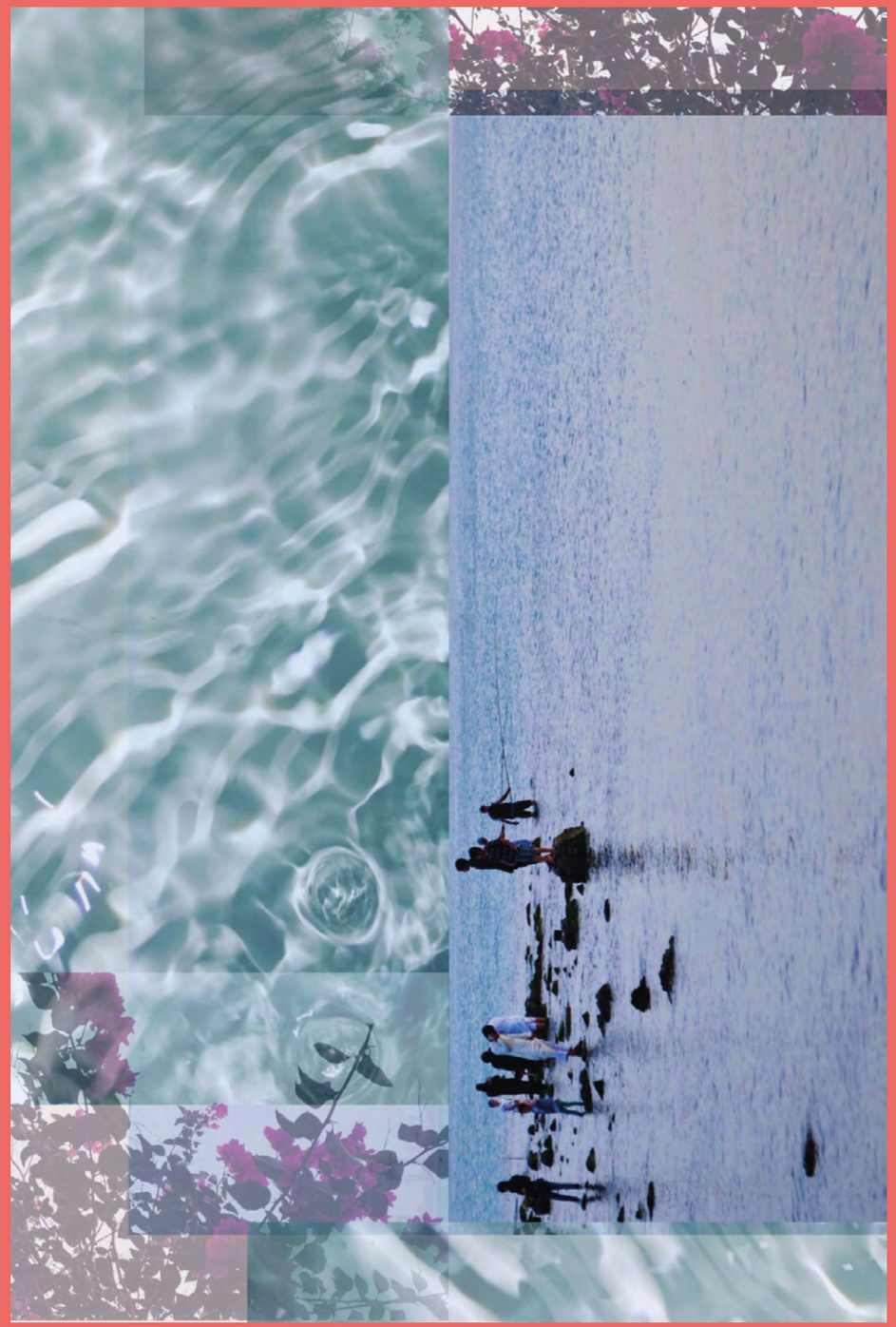
Seriously, how do you prove existence, worth...
The right to be
Beyond doubt

[Question marks/border maintenance]

Unless "being"
human-being // being-human
Humanity is questioned

Here, they call me triple X
Literally, Xxx, that's not my name
Mistake in the system
Which system, who runs the system?
No, the system is not running
Then who is running?

[Proof of Humanity]



Homecoming *Experiences at the crossroads of a coloniser/colonised identity*

Ana Luiza Loio

I'm sitting in a classroom, amused at the situation I've landed in. Everyone around me is some eight years younger, which is taking me back to distant school times. Except these kids roll their R's in a way that would make me spit everywhere and have funny words for things like 'pedestrian' or 'ambulance lights'.

That was my first driving theory in class... in Portugal. It's all familiarly unfamiliar, literally – my mom's entire family is from here. I grew up hearing the gossip from their village in Viseu, having my grandma's cozido for lunch on Sundays, and religiously wearing Ronaldo's face on my jerseys every four years.

But this is my first time actually living in the country.

When I first enrolled for classes, the nice lady at the reception seemed surprised to see me hand in a Portuguese ID card rather than a residence permit. I quickly rushed to explain that I'm Portuguese, too. And she smiled, uninterested.

Making a point to tell Portuguese people that I'm Brazilian *and* Portuguese is something I do pretty often. But I know that it's pointless. The moment my tongue touches the roof of my mouth rather than the back of my teeth when I say "bom dia" is when my foreignness is established.

I don't know why it matters. I love being Brazilian. I grew up in Manaus, a massive city in the heart of the Brazilian Amazon. My favourite childhood memories involve a ton of maracujá ice cream and playing hide and seek with my cousins on a boat in the middle of the world's biggest river. Yes, I was sometimes seen as "the Portuguese girl" back then, but that didn't prevent me from participating in local culture. And even now, I'm still grateful that I get to experience both realities. That sense of moving between them has always felt like a gift – just one that I've come to understand differently over time.

That shift started with my sister. When Fernanda moved to Portugal as a teenager, I was already off to uni in the Netherlands. I watched her identity collide with the very culture we grew up celebrating. Even at a distance, seeing her struggle changed the way I understood my own belonging.

I'll forever remember my mom crying on the phone, worried my sister couldn't adapt in school. I'll never forgive the teachers who threatened to take points off her exams if she didn't write in "proper" Portuguese. Or the girls who made fun of her accent. Or the boys who called her a slut (and other creative words to the same effect). She was only fifteen, and I grew frustrated I couldn't protect her.

"It's sad to say because it's a culture I have a lot of affection for, but I developed a certain kind of rage against Portuguese people", says Fernanda. Her rage reminds me of a moment in *Homegoing*, Yaa Gyasi's novel about how the legacy of slavery and colonization reverberates through generations. In it, Quey – half Fante, half British – names a snail Richard because the animal is "bad like the British are bad". When he remembers that his own father is British, he shrugs it off.

This helps me realise that mine and my sister's experience is far from individual. Across Europe, there are millions of people whose lives were touched by colonial history in different ways. So I begin reaching out to friends and acquaintances whose identities also sit in that uneasy space between a former colony and its coloniser.

All the people I spoke to expressed ambiguous feelings around national belonging. A friend whose parents are Moroccan but who grew up in Spain tells me he doesn't feel like he belongs to either place. "You're an inevitable guest in the group you're trying to belong to", he says. When I first met him, he told me I could call him Sam or Husam, no preference – and I'm now finding this a funny metaphor for how little he feels anchored to a cultural home.

"This helps me realise that mine and my sister's experience is far from individual. Across Europe, there are millions of people whose lives were touched by colonial history in different ways."

Sam tells me that he always felt more belonging to Moroccan in-groups within Spain than with Spanish people in Spain or Moroccans in Morocco. A sentiment that is shared by Marco, who also grew up in Spain but whose parents are Venezuelan. He tells me about growing up surrounded by the Venezuelan kids of his parents' friends. "We were all now being raised as Venezuelans on the weekends but then during the week we were spending all this time with Spanish kids", he says. Inside these groups, Marco and his friends were going through that inevitable shape-shifting process that distances you from clear-cut identity categories. He recalls that Venezuelan newcomers would often make fun of their Spanish accents, but within a year would be speaking the same way.

Language and accents come up again and again. Dewi, who was born and raised in the Netherlands to a Dutch mother and Indonesian father, tells me that it was the language barrier that immediately gave away her "Dutchness" when she travelled to Indonesia. People saw her Indonesian name, saw something familiar in her face, and would start speaking to her in Indonesian. And she'd explain, in her Duolingo-level Indonesian, that she had grown up in the Netherlands. It made her realise how differently the world reads her depending on where she is: familiar enough to be recognised, foreign enough to stand out.

In my sister Fernanda's experience, the barrier wasn't the language, but the accent. She spoke Portuguese flawlessly, but not *Portuguese* Portuguese. "I would ask the kids why they didn't consider me Portuguese", she tells me. "And their answer was always the same: **'You're not like us. You speak Brazilian'**".

Then there's Neylo, a Brazilian friend who moved to Portugal at seven. He lived something similar, just at an age when it's harder to resist the pressure to fit in. Today he can switch between accents effortlessly, but back in school he always used his Portuguese one. "Having the same accent as the people around me just felt logical, it avoided friction", he says. "But it was also involuntary. It wasn't a conscious decision".

I used to be adaptable like that too. As a child, I could switch between a Brazilian and a Portuguese accent without thinking. I picked up the Portuguese one by imitating my grandmother and, for someone who had never lived in Portugal, it was surprisingly accurate. My family loved when I did it, and I loved the validation. I started losing that accent around eighteen, the same age I began spending nights out in Portuguese clubs during my summer holidays. That's where I first encountered the nastier side of how Portuguese men spoke about Brazilian women. My sister says the same. "The discrimination came mostly from men. Extremely more, notoriously more", she agrees.

It strikes me how identity categories intersect so clearly in these chats I've had. Gender, class, race all play a role in how people experience colonial legacies. Fernanda and I have had the privilege of being white – which opened doors to our family's social ascension in Brazil, softened the discrimination my sister experienced in Portugal, and made the rest of Europe so much more sympathetic to us as we both moved around the continent. But not everyone I spoke to has had the same experience.

Sam tells me he feels that in Spain belonging is still largely filtered through whiteness. "It's something you cannot change", he says. "So you follow expectations, you do everything and it's not enough for you to belong to that group". He explains to me that growing up he was constantly reminded that he was a "moro" – a derogatory term used to refer to North African immigrants.

Marco, the Venezuelan friend who also grew up in Madrid, describes something different. He doesn't recall many episodes of overt discrimination. This is partly because he was still very young, and partly because, as he puts it, "Latin Americans could go unnoticed" in contrast with Arab immigrants. And when Marco did feel othered, he finds it hard to separate what came from being Venezuelan from what simply came from switching schools a lot as a child. Still, he remembers Venezuelans being met with a mix of "dismissal" and "wannabe-ism". "To Spanish people, we are exotic", he says.

And then there are experiences like Dewi's, where mixed ancestry introduces yet another layer. Her features signal Asian heritage even though she's partly Dutch and always lived in the Netherlands . "I think discrimination makes you feel like you don't belong in the group that is the majority", she says. At the same time, she's aware that varying degrees of whiteness brought privilege to both sides of her family history – to her mother's Dutch background and her father's mixed-race upbringing in Indonesia. "So you're part of a history in which people are oppressed, but also the oppressors themselves", she reflects.

This duality is something that's been in my mind a lot too. Doing a traineeship at the European Parliament last semester, I told myself that it's important for Global South voices to be present in these spaces. To reaffirm Europe's responsibility for its colonial history. But I ended up feeling like I was just a cog-in-a-wheel in a system that fails to even acknowledge coloniality and genocide taking place in the world today – in Gaza, Sudan, Congo, and beyond. **Though these political crises may seem distant, they are part of the same global system that shapes how people with Global South or post-colonial identities are racialised and treated in Europe**. The lived experiences that inform the decisions of those in power are not so different from the attitudes you might hear from a casually racist neighbour.

This leaves me trying to figure out what to do with my own place in all of this. As a white Brazilian woman living in Europe, how can I turn my privileges toward repair rather than repetition? How can I honour my ancestry in fullness? Not just the European bits, but especially the indigenous and black people whose features no longer appear on my face but to whose lives I *also* owe my own life to.

I guess these questions are not exclusive to people with identities at the crossroads of a former colony and its colo-

“A Pact for Equality that invests in historical education, critical discussion, and multicultural exchange is the way to go.”

niser. But I do notice that the clarity with which privilege and disprivilege show up in our family histories leads many of us to think of these things a lot.

It’s not a coincidence that Sam carries this awareness into his activism, pushing the Spanish left to take Black and POC representation seriously. Marco takes it into the classroom, challenging eurocentrism in his international politics studies. Dewi imagines it shaping her future as an English teacher, grounding her work in a decolonial approach. For Neylo, it shows up as the urge to travel widely and maybe one day return to Brazil to build something rooted in the communities he comes from. My sister feels it in the Amazon, hoping to work in sustainable tourism and make our region’s diversity more visible. And I carry it into storytelling and narrative change, making space for stories like this one.

In the end, we’re all trying to open room for more critical explorations of what “European” can mean. In political circles, I often hear that creating a cohesive European identity is difficult when there are supposedly 27 different cultures to consider. But listening to people whose lives sit at the intersection of former colonies and colonizing states shows me that the landscape is far more complex. If personal stories reveal the cracks in the system, policy is what can close them. So if Europe is serious about acknowledging these layered histories and the people who carry them, a Pact for Equality that invests in historical education, critical discussion, and multicultural exchange is the way to go. Because identity work cannot rely on individual awareness. It demands the political will to turn recognition into fairer structures.

Pomo d’orographies: imagining democracy from the domestic

Francesca Paola Beltrame

Tomato is an ambiguous symbol of Italian culture, both ubiquitous in its gastronomy and the product of a transcultural journey through colonial, migratory and trade routes. Xitomatl in Nahuatl, the indigenous language of the Aztecs, and Pomodoro in Italian translating to Pommel of gold. Indeed, the fruit was brought to the Mediterranean as late as the 16th century by Spanish colonizers from Central America to Europe's aristocratic gardens. Thus, from its inception the fruit most marketed as Italian around the world is in fact not what it seems.

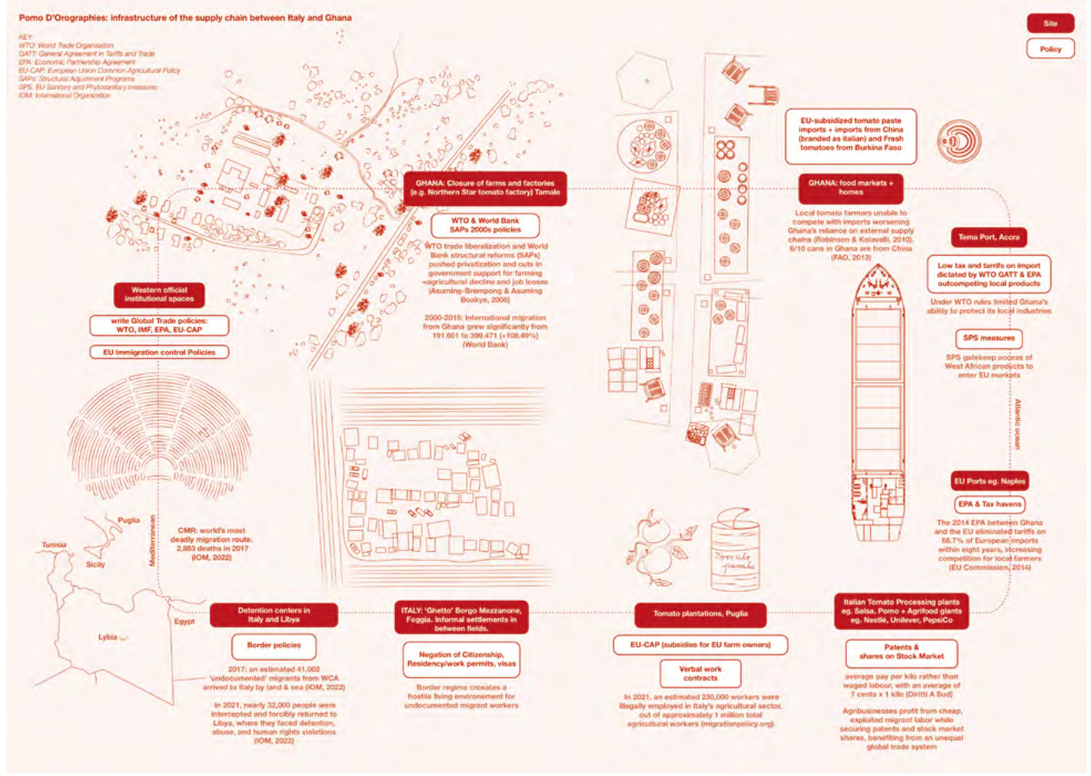
‘Devemos, por desgracia,
asesinarlo:
se hunde
el cuchillo
en su pulpa viviente,
es una roja
viscera,
un sol
fresco,
profundo,
inagotable,’ [1]

For the past years I have been immersed in what started as an architectural investigation into the infrastructures and spaces along the trade and migration routes between Italy and Ghana. This case study demonstrates the inter-connection of tomato production and border violence, and how these dynamics permeate our homes and palates.

I developed two counter-cartographic exercises to illustrate the research. The first map threads the various policies and the spaces it affects, to visualise the supply chain and its dependency on precarious labour. The connection between migration and trade is revealing of the violence of supply chain capitalism: tomatoes picked under exploitative conditions, including by Ghanaian migrants, are canned and exported back to Ghana, where these imports devastate the local economy, pushing farmers to migrate. The overwhelming majority of land workers on Italian monocultures are from migrant backgrounds, and are individuals made vulnerable by Italian and EU anti-immigration policies. Racist nationalistic narratives claiming national identity on tomatoes go in opposition to the way these are produced and expose the hypocrisy of anti-immigration policies. Italian agri-food giants and mafia-run organisations profit from the cheap and undocumented labour they provide. Seasonal migrant workers endure both legal and spatial invisibility: not only are their rights denied by a hostile legal regime, but their existence is also erased, kept in constant mobility across harvests and confined to self-arranged settlements in the middle of the fields, referred to as “ghettoes” because segregated from the cities.

The second is a collective and on-going counter-cartographic exercise initiated on a tablecloth I inherited from the women in my family. The tablecloth travelled with me during my research creating the temporary architecture that facilitated each encounter.

1. Pablo Neruda, Odas Elementales, extract from ‘Oda al Tomate’, Editorial Losada, 1954



Ghana-Italy case study. © Authors own image

Pomo D'Orographies II: a counter-cartography of Vevey, FoodCulture Days biennale 2023. Participatory workshop, where over the preparation of a light meal, participants were invited to embroider on the tablecloth that serves as a map to reveal the multiple realities of tomato production and consumption, in Vevey and beyond. © Beatrice Zerbato

In May 2022, I visited the association Diritti A Sud (DAS), a migrant farmer solidarity network, legal help desk and independent agroecology farming initiative in Nardò, Puglia. Paola, Rosa, Musse, Abdullah and myself spent a whole evening together over food. First, we met in the main square for some drinks and lighthearted chats, getting to know each other. Later, we headed to a local restaurant they were familiar with. The owners were extremely welcoming and let me set up my tablecloth, an unusual request which was met with much curiosity and excitement. Thank you Roberto and Carolina for the hospitality.

Speaking to DAS, the racial segregation is obvious. There is a lack of mediation between the migrant communities and Italian society which is aggravating social inequalities and sustaining a gap between what we eat and take pride in, and how it gets on our plates. The palate becomes just another site of bordering[2]. While we prepare food at home, if we remain un-attuned to the violence embedded in food production, then we are just reproducing that violence and hostile environment from within our most intimate refuge: the home.

In line with feminist tradition, the starting point of my reflections is from the domestic space. After recognizing the pervasiveness of these extractive systems, we can challenge romanticized notions of the home and reclaim its militant potential. Cooking, then, becomes a site of resistance, negotiation and agency. I am not referring to individual consumer choices but to collective action and imagination. As youth we cannot rely on institutional power for change. History shows that meaningful change never came top down but from grassroots movements demanding justice from the bottom up. Transmitting militant memory is crucial to resist the individualist scapegoating that capitalism and neoliberalism impose on us.

The tablecloth has allowed me to create the space to talk about policy by leveling the playing field and inviting people outside of official institutions of decision making. The more it collected signatures, marks and embroideries, the more I noticed its transformation from being a tool for conversation to a collective archive. Threading lines from the domestic to the political, narrating multiple lifeworlds.

Dot by dot
Stitch by stitch
Punto a punto
Draw a line
Hide it
with the needle Flourish waves
around it Blurs
Punto croce, punto erba

Retrace it with the needle
The thread resists
Retrace it, with the
Need to resist
penetrate the horizon
changes

The surface is not flat anymore
It's soft you push in
It releases
Pressure

While you follow the creases
with your finger
The line rounding
the border disseminates
They don't exist
They needn't exist[3]

2. Bordering is an active process of differentiation and exclusion, shaping territories, identities, and mobilities through both visible and invisible mechanisms (LIMINAL, About, University of Bologna's Department of the Arts, accessed [2/9/2025], https://liminal-lab.org/about).

3. Francesca Paola Beltrame, Raqam Mediterraneo, 2024

4. Édouard Glissant: One World in Relation, dir. Manthia Diawara, French with English subtitles, 48 minutes (K'a Yéléma Productions, 2009).

In Italy as in much of western media, migration in the Mediterranean is portrayed as a threat to the border. The verbal and visual language of illegality, border enforcement and surveillance technologies work to dehumanize and sensationalise the lives of people on the move. This strategy successfully portrays migration out of context, generating a climate of fear and pity rather than mobilizing solidarity. Harvesting consensus for the violence of the border. However, border violence is structural and policies form the administrative architecture of exclusion that encompass the spaces that lead to the border and beyond. This current relationship of Europe to its borders is consuming our democratic fabric.

"I find it quite pleasant to pass from one atmosphere to another through crossing a border. [...] Borders must be permeable; they must not be weapons against migration or immigration processes." [4]

Philosopher Éduard Glissant offers us a potential avenue. For borders to be permeable, we must dismantle, rethink and reconfigure not only their physical state, but also imagine alternative modalities of cross-border relation that oppose the aforementioned administrative framework that perpetrates the border's violence beyond its fictitious line.

During the various gatherings that made this research, we experimented discussing policies over the tablecloth, using the embroideries from past encounters as the starting point of each meeting. The materiality of the tablecloth and the practice of embroidery, allowed me to uphold the right to opacity in the process of archiving testimonies. The tablecloth interrupts regimes of audibility and provides us the opportunity to forge alternative understandings of ourselves that defy the dominant narratives around borders, migration and the origin of foods through Relation. This methodology draws from Glissant's concept of Relation and Opacity, where multicultural interaction should allow for opacity and illegibility in order to counter the appropriation and duality of wanting to 'comprendre' (french for 'understand', whose etymological translation is to 'take with'). Instead his idea allows for a relation that assembles dissimilarities and challenges western oppositional discourse that insists on transparency as a condition for understanding the Other. People on the move are constantly requested to make their story 'palatable', opacity resists this demand.

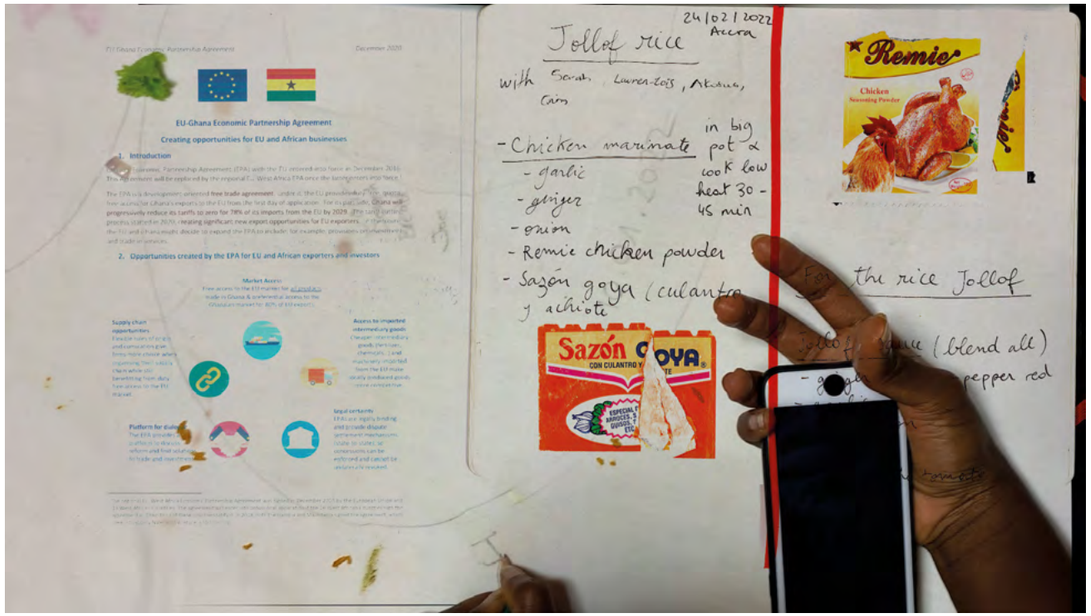
The very first gathering around the tablecloth actually happened prior to my visit in Puglia. I organized a dinner in London for my Masters unit friends to explore the cultural hegemony of the Italian canned tomato. The invitation entailed bringing a tomato based recipe from their home. The event is now archived on the tablecloth as the first layer of pomo d'orographies, mapping staple tomato recipes across cultures and familial traditions, from Ghanaian tomato and pepper dips, South African bunny-chow, Chinese tomato egg, Malay nasi tomato, Italian Parmigiana etc. This first layer of inscriptions expose the reach of colonial routes and reveals how people are not passive agents of these historical processes.

A month later, with the same research group we travelled to Ghana. The field trip was organized by our academic tutor Dele, who at the time was based in Accra, making our stay rich with encounters. During our stay we had the chance to engage with Ramsey, a local farmer who hosted us for two days. Ramsey talked me through the various market pressures local people face, from imports of fresh tomatoes from neighboring countries to the omnipresence of canned products from Italy and China. As well as the agronomic difficulties due to increased droughts in the north of the country. Many tomato farmers in fact abandon their fields because selling their produce has become financially unsustainable, where most of the farming is done by women and the men are then the ones migrating to Europe as a result of this economic violence. A similar issue independent farmers around the world are facing due to neo-liberal market competition. The hypocrisy of the current economic model can also be summarized in the fact that often leaving the tomatoes to rot on the fields is cheaper than harvesting them, a similar survival practice I was told about by Sicilian farmers.

The next day, while on a bus drive back from our visit to Cape Coast 'slave castle' (the logistical infrastructures that operated the trans-atlantic slave trade) to Accra, Ramsey spotted an old lady selling the local variety of tomato on the side of the road, we abruptly stopped the bus, taken by the excitement and went to her stand. We were in a rural area but Italian Salsa and Gino (a Chinese canned product marketed as Italian) were still present at her small stand. I bought a bunch and we started tasting a few. The seller, Auntie Araba, told us the seed had been transmitted within her community for generations. Her ntoosi (Twi for tomato) were small akin to cherry tomatoes but ribbed like the 'costelluto' heirloom varieties I am familiar with back home. I like to believe that this smaller and sweeter tomato was probably the closest to the first colonial tomato imports. Ramsey showed me how to extract seeds, one needs to take out as many as possible to increase the chances of propagation, then place them under the sun on a paper towel. Once dry I carefully stored them between the pages of my notebook. Later that spring I replanted them with my aunt and her neighbour to eat in August.

Mid-week in Accra, thanks to my friend Lauren-Loïs and her aunts to whom I am immensely grateful, we cooked Jollof rice to discuss the recipe. Lauren, her auntie and myself left the rest of the group early to go food shopping at the market. As expected, the city market only had imported fresh tomatoes, the local vendor told us came from Burkina Faso and the usual Italian canned products. We bought some Salsa and the rest of the ingredients and headed back to the house. In the kitchen, we got to work taking instructions from the aunties immersed in the chatty atmosphere of it all. I asked auntie Felicia about the various ingredients of Jollof rice, if and when Italian tomato concentrate started becoming an indispensable component. Indeed, she told me that it was not always part of the recipe but more of a new addition from

the past two decades. In fact, Italian canned tomatoes started appearing in West African markets in the year 2000s with the introduction of the Economic Partnerships Agreements of free trade between EU and West African countries. The lunch was delicious and while I was flavoring each bite, I thought of how we could mobilize the idea that recipes are the domestic blueprints of global trade policies.



Recipe-policy collage. Still from short film.
© Authors own image

At the end of the week in Ghana we organized a gathering inviting all the people we met in the previous days to share our research in an informal 'crit' day. I unfolded the tablecloth and used it as my material to speak from. The feedback that most struck me was an anecdote from one of our guests.

The vicious cycle is so well-known to Ghanaians that it has been summarized in a local banter whereby local tomato farmers abandon their own farm to pick the tomatoes that had driven their own tomato prices down in Italy. It becomes apparent that our current legal regimes are biassed, as they punish people on the move for what our economic policies create in the first place. The concept of illegality and that rights come by entitlement are in deep contradiction to universal human rights and democratic values.

To conclude this thread of thoughts, the most meaningful inscription on my tablecloth is what Musse wrote while in Puglia. 'Il diritto vale per tutti', rights apply to everyone, recalling his words, the right to dignity, work and housing belong to all. While I progress on embroidering the various signatures awaiting their turn, the tablecloth now tells its own story and reminds us that democracy needs constant stitching to be kept alive.

'Daddy Kojo picking tomatoes on an Italian tomato farm', Nuno, quote from inscription on the tablecloth. Collage
© Authors own image

'Il diritto vale per tutti' Musse, founding member of Diritti A Sud. Inscription on the tablecloth. Still from short film.
© Authors own image

Discriminated at the sea: the criminalization of people on the move and the call for justice

Sara Gambino

Sea rescue is not a crime. Credits: Mika Baumeister

Across the Mediterranean, thousands of people each year risk their lives to reach Europe in search of safety, stability, and dignity. Yet, for many of them, arrival marks not liberation but the beginning of further issues and troubles. Those accused of steering boats during the journey, commonly labelled '*captains*', often find themselves prosecuted under national and European anti-smuggling laws. In Italy, but not solely, these prosecutions have become a recurrent feature of migration control, revealing how individuals who are often victims of coercion and trafficking become subjects of severe penal measures whilst searching for their freedom and survival.

Moreover, the trend of criminalization extends beyond the migrants themselves. Humanitarian organizations engaged in sea rescue operations, such as *Mediterranea Saving Humans, Sea-Watch, SoS Mediterranee* and *Ocean Viking*, have faced judicial proceedings, vessel seizures, and administrative sanctions for their efforts to save lives at sea[1]. While their activities comply with international maritime law and the duty to rescue people in distress, they are often framed as facilitating irregular migration.

This pattern reflects an alarming expansion of criminal liability, where acts of solidarity and humanitarian aid are increasingly treated as offences, further confusing the line between legality and moral responsibility.

The phenomenon highlights a broader pattern of discrimination within the European justice landscape, where people in vulnerable migratory situations are treated as criminals rather than as rights-holders. To engage on this issue, *CEIPES – International Centre for the Promotion of Education and Development* in partnership with the *ARCI Porco Rosso* as grassroot organization, the *Palermo Legal Clinic for Human Rights, Advocats Sans Frontiere* and *The University of Palermo* has developed a project which is awaiting evaluation but encompasses a deep field and desk research with the aim of countering the discriminatory treatment of people accused of migration-related

crimes and promoting fair trial standards. In fact, through desk research and interviews with lawyers, grassroots organizations, activists and civil society actors, the organization underscored how systemic inequalities in criminal proceedings reinforce the marginalization and discrimination of those "on the move". The research identified key patterns of unequal treatment: the lack of specialized legal defence, the absence of interpreters and cultural mediators, and the general weakness of the evidence used in prosecutions.

Therefore, this article reports, among others, some of the CEIPES's findings during the course of its research on the topic which was carried out between June 2024 and September 2025. The article analyses the discriminatory dimensions of these prosecutions of people reaching Europe by sea, their legal and social implications, and the urgent need, on a European level, for justice systems to ensure equal treatment before the law.

From survival to guilt: discrimination and criminalization in the Mediterranean Sea

Over the past decade, Italy has tightened visa and residence permit policies, alongside implementing harsher penalties for migration-related offences. The 2023 "Cutro Decree"[2] broadened the notion of "facilitation of illegal immigration" to include cases involving injury or death, creating a legal environment in which migrants crossing the sea are frequent targets of prosecution.

According to the International Organization for Migration data[3], between January 2025 and September 2025, 47,889 migrants were disembarked in Italy (over the whole of 2024, 66,617 people were disembarked). Data on people arrested for offences related to immigration at their arrival are not easy to gather, however as reported in the ARCI Porco Rosso and Alarm Phone's Report, the Italian Police data reports that between 2013 and 2024 the number of people arrested as "boat drivers, organisers and assistants" amounts to around 3,200[4]; there are currently 1,167 people in prison in Italy for facilitating irregular immigration[5]. Many of these defendants, often from sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, or South Asia, were passengers coerced into steering a boat or operating a GPS under threat from smugglers. In several cases, testimonies show that refusal to comply would have resulted in physical violence or abandonment at sea[6].

1. EMERGENCY, "The Obstruction of search and rescue vessels causes hundreds of deaths at the sea", July 2024, https://en.emergency.it/press-releases/joint-statement-the-obstruction-of-search-and-rescue-vessels-causes-hundreds-of-deaths-at-sea/, last accessed November 2025

Despite these circumstances, national prosecutors have applied criminal law as if all accused shared equal intent and responsibility. This reflects a structural form of discrimination, where the migrant's social and legal status amplifies their vulnerability in the judicial process. Migrants without resources or interpreters are more likely to face charges unsupported by solid evidence, revealing how status-based inequality shapes outcomes in court[7].

Rather than addressing migration as a systemic reality, penal policy often focuses on symbolic punishment. This approach transforms human mobility, a phenomenon driven by survival, into a criminal act, reproducing discrimination within the very institutions meant to protect rights.

Discriminatory practices and the violation of Fair Trial rights

Findings and testimonies from Italian courtrooms highlight concerns about how EU Directives on fair trial rights are being upheld. These include the Directive 2010/64/EU on the right to interpretation and translation, the Directive 2012/13/EU on the right to information, and the Directive 2013/48/EU guaranteeing access to a lawyer.

In numerous cases, accused persons were unable to understand the charges or the proceedings due to inadequate interpretation[8]. Courts often lacked cultural mediators capable of explaining the social or linguistic context of the migrants' statements. Lawyers defending these cases frequently had no prior experience with migration-related prosecutions and operated without institutional support networks.

Such procedural shortcomings produce indirect discrimination, as defendants' migrant status becomes a barrier to accessing justice. Moreover, many trials rely on fragile evidence, such as uncorroborated statements or assumptions about who was 'in charge'of the vessel, contradicting the principles of presumption of innocence guaranteed under Directive (EU) 2016/343[9].

This pattern, where lack of resources intersects with prejudicial assumptions, leads to a discriminatory application of justice: while European citizens benefit from procedural safeguards, migrants accused in similar contexts often face expedited trials and harsher penalties.

Penal Populism and the structural discrimination of migrants

The persistence of these cases cannot be separated from broader social and political narratives. Over the last decade, migration has been framed as a security issue, fueling what scholars describe as penal populism (Pratt, 2006). This refers to the political use of criminal law to address public fears and to appear "tough" on crime and migration.

In this climate, discrimination operates through criminalization. Public discourse tends to associate irregular migration with illegality, obscuring the structural causes of movement such as conflict, inequality, and climate change. By criminalizing migrants for their status or survival strategies, penal populism transforms inequality into guilt.

The **Campaign for the Decriminalization of Poverty, Status and Activism**[10], an international initiative active in several countries and now extending to Europe, exposes this dynamic. It shows how penal systems worldwide increasingly target people not for their actions but for their social condition, whether poverty, homelessness, or migration. CEIPES, as one of the organizations which joined this campaign, highlights that criminalizing migrants because of their mobility perpetuates discrimination embedded in legal frameworks rather than eliminating exploitation.

2. Italian Government, *Law-Decree 20/2023 ("Disposizioni urgenti in materia di flussi di ingresso legale dei lavoratori stranieri e di prevenzione e contrasto all'immigrazione irregolare")*, Official Gazette of the Italian Republic, https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2023/03/10/23600050/sg, last accessed November 2025. The name 'Cutro' used to refer to this Decree in slang refers to a serious shipwreck that occurred on the night between 25 and 26 February 2023, when a boat that had left Turkey with about 200 migrants on board broke apart on a shoal a few metres from the coast of Steccato di Cutro. The accident claimed the lives of 94 people, including many minors.

3. International Organization for Migration, Migration Data Portal, https://www.migrationdataportal.org/international-data?i-stock_abs_&t-2024, last accessed September 2025

4. Arci Porco Rosso e Alarm Phone, *"Report Dal Mare al Carcere. La criminalizzazione dei cosiddetti scafisti"*, 2021, https://dal-mare-al-carcere.info/1-dati/, and updates

5. *ibidem*

6. *ibidem*

7. *CEIPES's findings through interviews to Palermo Legal Clinic for Human Rights' Lawyers, June 2024*

8. *ibidem*

9. *ibidem*

10. Campaign for the Decriminalization of Poverty, Status and Activism, https://decrimpovertystatus.org , last accessed November 2025

Rethinking Borders: from criminalization to human mobility

Any discussion of migration and criminalization in the Central Mediterranean must also confront the European policies of border externalization which have produced inhumane conditions. Despite official claims of managing migration flows, the deal between Italy and Libya, for instance, has drawn criticism from human rights organizations for perpetuating abuses and discriminatory practices in Libya's detention system.

Migrants intercepted at sea or deported from Italy are frequently detained in Libyan detention centers, where reports by international and State organizations have documented torture, sexual violence, forced labor, and extortion[11].

The collaboration between European and Libyan authorities, through funding, training, and equipment, has effectively outsourced migration control to a state where the rule of law is absent. Many of the same migrants later prosecuted as "captains" in Italy have survived these centers, only to face new forms of criminalization upon arrival. The paradox is grim: the victims of structural violence are reclassified as perpetrators, while the systems enabling their exploitation remain unchallenged.

So, what if instead of migrants we talk about "people on the move"? What if we rethink the concept of "border" and its meaning?

The Italian journalist and writer **Gabriele Del Grande**, in his book *Il secolo mobile* (The Mobile Century), argues that the twenty-first century will be defined by human mobility rather than immobility. He calls for the abolition of borders, not as a utopian gesture, but as a pragmatic response to the inevitability of movement in a globalized world. According to Del Grande, criminalizing migration is not only unjust but futile: borders cannot contain human aspiration, and their reinforcement only produces new hierarchies of vulnerability.

Criminalizing "captains" does not deter migration, it only deepens social divisions and legitimizes systemic discrimination. True security lies not in the exclusion of others, but in the protection of human rights and dignity across borders.

Conclusion: towards equal Justice and collective responsibility

The situation of the "captains" reveals not merely isolated judicial errors but a structural pattern of discrimination that undermines the principles of equality before the law. When individuals are prosecuted for acts committed under coercion or necessity, the justice system fails in its core mandate: impartiality.

Migration should be approached as a long-term structural phenomenon, not as a temporary emergency. Effective and fair legal systems must adapt to this reality by ensuring non-discriminatory procedures, equal access to defence, and proper application of international and European standards.

Progress depends on renewed political commitment and institutional responsibility, rather than *ad hoc* reactions. Governments and judicial bodies should invest in training, coordination, and monitoring mechanisms that prevent discrimination in prosecutions related to migration.

Finally, civil society and citizens play an essential role. Public understanding of the injustices faced by those criminalized for migration is crucial to counter prejudice and to reaffirm a shared sense of justice. By confronting discrimination within legal systems, societies not only protect migrants, they protect the integrity of justice itself.

11. U.S. Department of State, *"Libya 2024 Human Rights Report"*, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/624521_LIBYA-2024-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf, last accessed November 2025

The Italy–Albania agreement is not just an Italo Albanian issue

Nicoletta Alessio

Protesters in front of Gjäder CPR. © Alessandro Murtas

Protesters with banner in Tirana © Alessandro Murtas

On November 1–2, 2025, the *Network Against Migrant Detention*—a coalition of Italian and Albanian organizations united in opposing the Rama–Meloni agreement—gathered in Albania for a two-day mobilization. The agreement has enabled the creation of two migrant detention centers in Albania under Italian jurisdiction. This was the Network's second large-scale action, following the December 2024 protest when the centres were still empty.

This year's protest, launched under the slogan "From Albania to Europe: Abolish Migrant Detention Centers," drew participation from around ten EU and non-EU countries. Representatives from Nantes, Brussels, Bilbao, Dresden, Berlin, Vienna, Pristina, and Mexico joined Albanian and Italian groups to learn more about the agreement, discuss its implications, and explore potential joint initiatives.

> "Everywhere—from Gjäder to Rome, from Brussels to Nantes, from the U.S. to Mexico, to Libya, Tunisia, and beyond—we want the same thing: freedom of movement and dignity for all" reports the Network's political statement on the mobilization[1]."

The mobilisation followed the Network's established two-day format: a public demonstration followed by political discussions through panels and assemblies.

On Saturday, November 1, over 150 people marched through the streets of Tirana, stopping at the Albanian Prime Minister's office, the Italian Embassy, and the EU Delegation to Albania to denounce the agreement. A large banner depicting Meloni, Rama, Trump, and von der Leyen dressed as prison officials accompanied the protesters, alongside another that denounced: *"Europe preaches democracy but embraces autocrats."*

> "Rama maintains his grip on power through close ties with these figures, signing an illegal agreement with Meloni that the European Union quietly approved. It's precisely this silence from the EU that we cannot forgive," said Edison Lika from Mesdhe, the Albanian collective that organized and hosted the mobilization.

Rama faces mounting criticism from Albanian civil society, which describes its country as a democracy only on paper. Financial and political dealings remain opaque, while civic participation is stifled by repression—both the lingering legacy of Hoxha's regime and today's subtler forms of punishment, such as firings at work or the suspension of meager pensions for relatives of troublesome activists.

The march concluded at the gates of the Gjäder CPR (Repatriation Detention Center), where participants commemorated the forty-seven people who have died in Italian CPRs, expressed solidarity with the 24 currently detained individuals by chanting "You are not alone," and displayed a massive banner directed at the above mentioned leaders depicted as guards:

> "Your Remigration Prisons Are Criminal. Stop Funding Wars and Deporting People!"

Protesters behind banners outside of the Gjäder CPR
© Alessandro Murtas

Protesters hold signs with the names of victims of Italian's CPR
© Alessandro Murtas

On Sunday, the University of Tirana hosted a transnational assembly bringing together activists from across Europe and beyond. Discussions focused on racism, colonialism, and the broader meaning of the Italy–Albania agreement within European migration policy. The event - organized by Albanian activists and lecturers who titled it "Is Europe Still Our Dream?"— highlighted how EU membership has repeatedly been conditioned on violence at its borders.

1. Network Against Migrant Detention Centers, *From Albania to Europe: Abolish Migrant Detention Centres*, Instagram page, 2025

"In 1998, Giorgio Napolitano declared that if the CPTs [former CPR, *Ed.notes*] hadn't been established and the Kater i Rades shipwreck hadn't occurred, Italy wouldn't have been able to prove to the EU that it could defend its borders," said Clara Osma, an activist with Mesdhe and Italiani Senza Cittadinanza, outside the gates of Gjäder.

Meanwhile, in France, groups from the *Anti-CRA Network* organized a solidarity action in Nantes to coincide with the Tirana mobilization.

staffing costs. Only about fifty Albanians are employed at the centers—as precarious workers for *Medihospes*, the Italian company managing the Gjäder CPR and one of the giants of Italy's migrant reception industry. The company provides mainly temporary contracts and expands or shrinks according to the fluctuating number of detainees. According to the Network, these centres are not only unconstitutional but part of a colonial project that, through the complicity of the Albanian government, sets a dangerous precedent the EU aims to replicate under the New Pact on Migration and Asylum[3].

Banners in Nantes in solidarity with the protest in Albania © anticra44 instagram page

Some activists who were meant to travel to Albania instead disembarked from their Bologna–Tirana flight after protesting the presence of police officers carrying out the deportation of two Albanian citizens on their Ryanair plane.

The detention centers in Albania are far from operating as the Meloni government had envisioned.The *Shëngjin hotspot* remains empty, while the *Gjäder CPR* holds around twenty people at a time,despite a total capacity of 880. Yet the activists within the Network stress that the agreement has already had unacceptable consequences: over 220 people have been detained, and one man, 42-year-old Hamid Badoui, has died.

Despite this, the Meloni government has allocated €670 million of Italian taxpayers' money to build and maintain the centers. More than €127 million of that sum comes from cuts to public ministries—including the Economy and Finance, Foreign Affairs, and University and Research ministries[2].

These funds do little to boost the local economy; instead, they mainly cover construction, maintenance, and

For this reason, the Italy–Albania agreement is far from a bilateral matter. Many fear that the Meloni government is preserving these centers in preparation for the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, due to take effect in June 2026, potentially transforming them into the Return Hubs now being discussed at the EU level.

> "We need to strengthen a transnational and European perspective that goes beyond local or national mobilizations—a perspective capable of sharing practices, building networks, and coordinating strategies to abolish the European and global regime of apartheid and confinement."[4] - that's the appeal of the Network.

The mobilization closed with a collective commitment to extend this struggle beyond Albania and Italy, organizing demonstrations across Europe and beyond to reinforce transnational solidarity and dismantle the system of migrant detention wherever it exists.

European and Italian flag on Gjäder's facility gates © Alessandro Murtas

Stencils of Von Der Leyen, Trump, Rama and Meloni on protesters' posters in Tirana © Nicoletta Alessio

2. Milena Gabanelli and Simone Ravizza, *Albania, flop dei centri. Chi ha pagato il conto?*, Data Room of Corriere della Sera, 3th November 2025, p.19

3. Network Against Migrant Detention Centers, *From Albania to Europe: Abolish Migrant Detention Centres*, Instagram page, 2025

4. *ibidem*

Do we really know and care about what's happening in Congo?

Maguy Ikulu

"But this is not only my story, nor that of other victims and survivors, it is also, indirectly, yours."

A childhood shattered by war

My name is Maguy, and I am a survivor of war and genocide in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

My story begins in 1992 in Bukavu, a city in the east of the DRC. My childhood was quickly turned upside down in 1994 with the genocide of the Tutsi people. Living in a border city with Rwanda, we too suffered the consequences of that genocide against. My family survived multiple assassination attempts, murderous ambushes in public places, bullets fired into our homes and landing in our beds.

We resisted until 1996, when rebel groups — formed partly in response to the genocide — invaded and took control of Bukavu and other towns in the East. Their main goal was to seize control of territories and their much-coveted, vital natural resources.

These rebel groups — the most notorious being the M23 — are financed by major imperial powers and neighboring countries. They use extreme violence to maintain control and kill without hesitation to achieve their goals. Fleeing is often the only way to survive. My family and I were forced to flee in 1996, when what is now known as the First Congo War officially began. We walked for several months from east to west, during which we had to learn to dodge bullets, recognize explosives, survive without food, and sleep outdoors in the rainforest.

We lived in and passed through several displaced persons' camps, where tents had replaced our homes. I was only five years old, but I remember everything: the landscapes, the smell of mud, the cold and humidity of the tropical forest, the sound of bullets and explosions, the screams and cries, my mother's terrified but determined gaze, and her relentless efforts to protect us , climbing trees to pick fruit so we could eat.

I still carry those memories vividly. I still bear the scars of the violence we survived, but above all, I mourn that stolen childhood that life taken by genocide and by wars that have lasted for over thirty years.

More than 10 million people have died since the beginning of this war, and 6 million have been displaced. I am one of the 6 million.

But this is not only my story, nor that of other victims and survivors, it is also, indirectly, *yours*.

The Congo Basin is the second-largest tropical rainforest in the world, after the Amazon, and is often called the "second lung of humanity." The Congo is also one of the richest countries in the world in terms of natural resources; gold, diamonds, uranium, cobalt, and coltan. Most of these resources are found in the eastern part of the country, particularly rich in cobalt and coltan (often called "blue gold"), two crucial minerals used to manufacture the technologies we rely on every day, smartphones, computers, and electric cars...

The sustainable development and energy transition of the Global North largely depend on the DRC and on the exploitation of its natural wealth. Western and imperialist powers have been exploiting Congo's resources since at least the 19th century, during colonisation and continue to do so today, through ongoing wars, aided by local political complicity and the absence of strong governance to protect affected populations.

The silence around Congo

Why, even today, is this war so underreported? Yet since 2024, rebel groups — mainly M23 — have once again taken control of major cities like Bukavu and Goma, just as they did in 1996, killing thousands of civilians and causing yet another wave of displacement. This heavy silence is itself an answer, a tragic reflection of a system that ranks bodies and lives by value. In that system, racialised people here, black lives, are worth less than white lives.

Have you ever noticed the difference in media coverage between wars involving white bodies and those involving black or racialised bodies? The dehumanising, unblurred images used to depict certain conflicts are not accidental; they are a choice. A choice inherited from colonial propaganda, still perpetuating racism against these populations today. Survivors, refugees in displacement camps, and people living in Congo and across Africa are no exception. Even today, we see degrading images of them daily as if their dignity were worthless, as if there were no other way to inform without erasing their humanity.

> “This system is inseparable from the history of colonization, which operated both as a project of territorial settlement and as an ideological and political structure designed to justify and perpetuate white supremacy.”

Informing is necessary, censorship would be a grave threat to democracy and to our rights and freedoms, but there are more ethical ways to report, through warnings, blurring mechanisms, and editorial lines that genuinely care about the people involved and the impact of their work on how the world perceives them.

Conflicts may sometimes need to be prioritised in the news cycle, but they must never be hierarchised morally because they all coexist within the same system of domination and exploitation by imperialist and (neo)colonial powers. Whether in Congo, Sudan, or Gaza, struggles to denounce violence and support affected people must be fought jointly, with the same strength, following the principle of *convergence of struggles*.

These conflicts teach us at least two harsh truths: white supremacy persists, and colonization is far from over — its deadly consequences continue to shape our world today. By white supremacy, I do not simply mean a skin color, but a social, political, and economic system built on the assumption that white people and the cultures associated with them are inherently superior. It is a system that grants privilege, safety, and visibility to some, while systematically devaluing, exploiting, and destroying the lives of others for their benefit. This system is inseparable from the history of colonization, which operated both as a project of territorial settlement and as an ideological and political structure designed to justify and perpetuate white supremacy.

Another painful lesson is that these wars and their political, socioeconomic, and environmental consequences are still not enough to convince the imperial powers benefiting from them to adopt more inclusive migration policies. On the contrary, today we see in the West in the so-called Global North a fierce rise in anti-migrant, racist, criminalising, and dehumanising policies.

Being part of the problem and the solution

Living with the pain of my stolen childhood, of our stolen lives, is an endless mourning.

Yet I am aware that, despite myself, I am now part of the problem, part of the system that sustains these mechanisms of domination and exploitation, that kills and destroys lives and exploits children to produce the technologies we use daily, myself included.

It’s a painful and shameful truth to admit. And perhaps that’s why we don’t talk more about Congo. But awareness is already a step forward, recognizing that we live in a dangerous, destructive, and deadly system is crucial if we are to break free from it.

So how do we do it? I’ve asked myself this question millions of times for my compatriots in Congo, for my family still there, for Gaza, for Sudan... Through all these examples, through my own story and those of others, I now know that the answer must be collective. Solutions must be built from the bottom up, collectively, in solidarity, and guided by the principle of Ubuntu: *I am because you are*. We are interconnected, interlinked; our actions have consequences on others’ lives. The smartphone or computer you’re using to read this article was built by human hands, and others are still paying with their lives to supply the raw materials needed for these technologies that accompany us every day.

Solidarity and collectivity are the keys. This solidarity includes individual actions (joining protests, contributing to mutual aid funds...) but it is above all political: building progressive, equitable, inclusive, decolonial, and sustainable policies and societies. These two dimensions, individual and institutional, are interconnected, forming a single framework that defines our world. It is up to us to decide what shape we want to give it.

> “Solidarity and collectivity are the keys.”

Today, I am aware of the privileges I have and already had in 1996 that likely saved my family’s life: belonging to a wealthier social class, and having relatives living in Europe. These two factors gave us access to support that many survivors in similar situations never had and still don’t today.

Although part of my family still lives in eastern Congo, I now also have the privilege of being able, at times, to distance myself from the conflict sometimes for protection, sometimes because, like everyone else, I have normalised the act of scrolling away, in a second, from tragedy. We choose consciously (or not) not to know, to look but not to see. Because the truth is hard and ugly to confront, and it evokes discomfort or worse, it forces us to face our collective flaws and failures as a society.

So do you know what’s happening in Congo? Probably. And if you didn’t, did you try to find out or did you choose to avoid it? Do you realise what is happening there, and the lives being destroyed to sustain the comfort you enjoy daily? These are uncomfortable questions, I know, but they are necessary if we are to understand what’s truly at stake: our humanity.

> So do you know what’s happening in Congo? Probably. And if you didn’t, did you try to find out or did you choose to avoid it?

A final reflection

It is paradoxical to be writing these lines on a MacBook whose materials probably come from my native region.

But remaining silent would make me complicit. So I write, hoping that these words make you realise that war is closer to you than you think, whether in the DRC or in Palestine. Above all, I hope you understand that we all have the power to make the world a better place but we must at least have the courage not to remain silent.

Because, indeed, sharing is caring.

Pact for Equality: Two Conversations on Discrimination, Power, and Collective Futures

As part of this Issue 12 dedicated to the Pact for Equality campaign, we are pleased to share two special podcast episodes that expand and deepen the reflections gathered in these pages. These conversations give voice to activists whose lived experiences and political imaginations illuminate the urgent need for structural change, across borders, institutions, and everyday life.

Episode 2

“Votes for Belonging: The Citizenship Referendum in Italy”

With Utibe Joseph (Dalla Parte Giusta della Storia), in conversation with Noemi Pittalà (Communications Officer, EA)

Here, Utibe Joseph reflects on the citizenship referendum in Italy, the mobilisation led by racialised communities, and the political imagination required to reshape who gets to belong in Europe.

Episode 3

“Equality as a Battlefront: Politics, Ecology and Decolonial Struggle”

With Maguy Ikulu, in conversation with Ophélie Masson (Deputy Director, EA)

This episode continues the dialogue opened by Maguy’s written contribution, exploring the silence surrounding the conflict in Congo, the global hierarchies of empathy, and the urgent work of building decolonial solidarities.

Listen to the episodes here

These conversations are an invitation — to listen, to learn, and to join the ongoing work of building equality in practice, across borders and communities.

BODIES OF ANTITHESIS

Andria Charilaou

I've circumnavigated this place many times.
I've entered the buffer zone many times.
I've crossed "the other side" through the checkpoints many times.
I've seen the soldier walking beside me as I drank my coffee many times.
I've had eye contact with the soldier inside the outpost many times.
I've partied on the street next to the razor wires of the Green Line, under the soldier's gaze from the rooftop, many times.
All those times, I could not see him.
Now, I can't unsee him.

Hint 1: Kinky Signs in Farmland

Nightclubs in nature © Mustafa Hulusi

I saw:
the *Sexy Lady* sign glowing in a dry, yellowish grain field,
the *Biyax* sign rising against the backdrop of Pentadaktylos,
the *Playboy* sign tucked among palm trees,
and the *Miss Me* sign surrounded by straw bales.

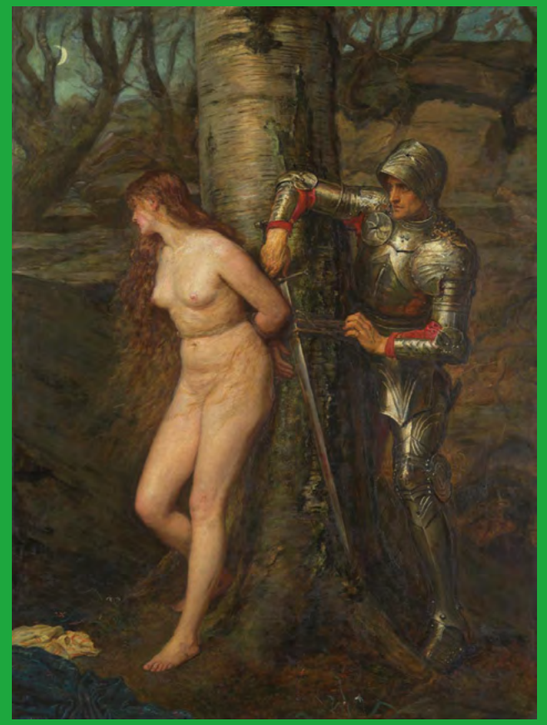
The contrast between these neon kinky signs and the empty landscape was so aesthetically pleasing.
Taking a few steps back, I could see them all together, all these *nightclubs in nature*, at Pi Gallery.
The Turkish Cypriot artist Mustafa Hulusi photographed them to expose illegal brothels in no human's land, hidden behind nightclub façades on the northern side of Cyprus.

I searched for these nightclubs on Google Maps, connecting each neon sign to a location.
A strange constellation appeared—the sites formed a cluster surrounded by three military bases.
Was the proximity between the nightclubs and the military bases a coincidence?

I traced more:
the road known as *The Strip*, next to the Akrotiri British military base in Limassol. This street was offering late-night drinking and partying for the military personnel, promising 'topless girls' and "all-day English breakfasts",
the FKK sauna club *Temple of Aphrodite*, named after the island's goddess of love and sex, near the Greek Cypriot military base at Palodia,
bars close to the Greek and UN bases in Nicosia, offering special prices for soldiers,
and illegal brothels functioning within the UN buffer zone in Pyla.

This collection of 'pleasure sites', on both the north and south sides, revealed how the off-duty activities of soldiers had colonised various districts in Cyprus. Hulusi's kinky signs thus become an expression of a broader pattern: a system of leisure-driven relationships offered to soldiers.

Hint 2: Gender roles



The Knight Errant © Sir John Everett Millais

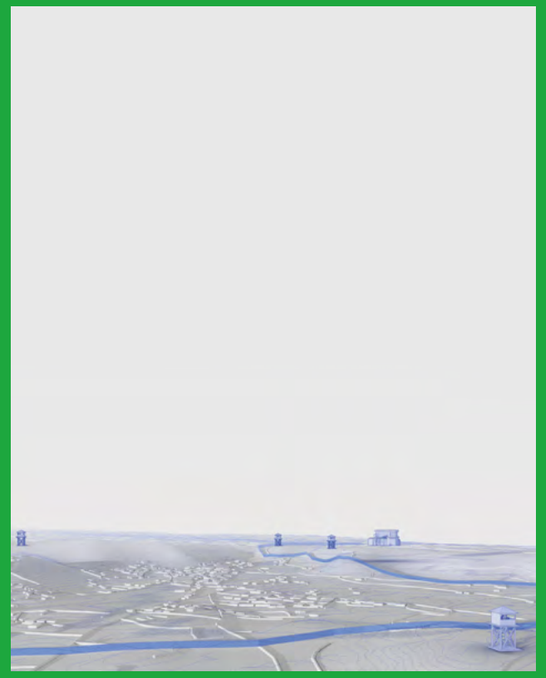
As I traced these sites and the dynamics between sex-workers and soldiers, I found myself in the role of the observer, outside the story, unable to include myself within the research groups. Yet I felt this relationship affected me too, and I wanted to understand how.

I looked at art, photojournalism, and media to find other representations of the relationship between women and soldiers—beyond those showing women as providers of leisure or pleasure.
I found images that depicted:
women static and trapped waiting to be rescued by the soldiers
women nursing and healing the injured soldiers
women admiring, loving, and worshiping the soldiers.
In total, I identified fourteen recurring representations of this relationship. In each, the woman's body performed a gendered role that gave meaning to the soldier's body. For instance, when the woman becomes the "object to be saved," the soldier becomes the "saviour."
Without her, his role loses its meaning.

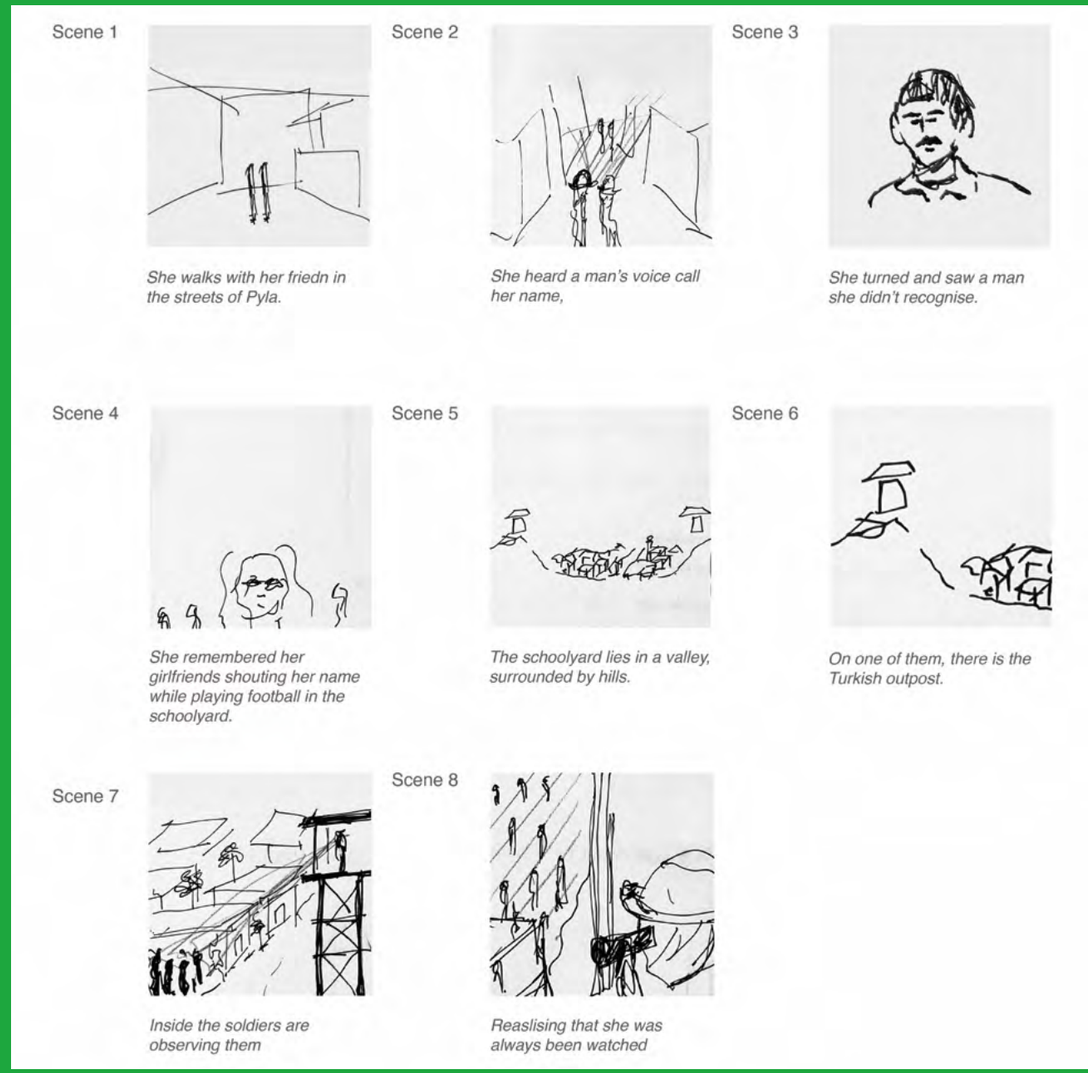
Militarisation, I realised, doesn't only occupy land. It occupies bodies. It strategically scripts gender roles to the woman's body to justify and reinforce its dominance in space and society.

Hint 3: Women's omitted stories

I went to Pyla—a village trapped within the UN buffer zone and surrounded by six different military forces—to see how these gendered roles unfold in real life.
At the village's grocery store, I met a woman behind the counter. She told me:
When she was a teenager, walking through the village with a friend, she heard a man's voice calling her name. She turned and saw a couple of men she didn't recognise.
As she looked at them, wondering how they knew her name, another memory surfaced: her girlfriends calling out to her as they played football in the schoolyard, tucked in a valley between three hills. On one of those hills stands the Turkish outpost. She had seen the outposts countless times yet had normalised them so deeply that they had almost faded from her visual landscape.
In that moment, hearing her name from unseen voices, she realised in a tangible way that the soldiers were always there, always watching them. She could touch the consequences of being watched.



Pyla's militarised landscape © Andria Charilaou



Visual narratives from women in Pyla © Andria Charilaou

In her story, the soldier turns his gaze into a form of power. What begins as *surveillance and control* becomes environmental sexual harassment, transforming her from a "disobedient object" that must be controlled into a "sexual object" to be possessed. Her story renders the subtle yet violent expressions of militarisation in women's everyday lives.

As I listened to and analysed these stories, I realised I had never been outside this narrative.
I was just on a different stage—Nicosia—my familiar militarised space. And within it, like the women in Pyla, I too had normalised living with the soldiers, erasing them from my visual landscape.

I remembered,
as a teenager,
idealising soldiers,
my girlfriends saving their virginity to offer it as a 'gift' to them,
mocking boys who hadn't yet served for not being 'men' enough.
and as a grown woman,
recognising my constant need for a male figure—'the saviour'—to protect me, unveiling how deeply these gendered roles had infiltrated my identity, body, and intimate life.

Ironically, this domino effect reached me last, shifting me from observer to observed.

ACT– RE-ACT

Leaving Pyla, I felt an urge:
to act upon the oppressive stories I had heard and lived,
to place my body, as a woman, within these spaces,
to challenge the narratives that cast women as passive, caregiving, sexualised, and helpless.

You place your body in her bedroom.
From the window, you have a clear view of the Turkish outpost on the hill.
There, a statue of a soldier, his hand raised to his mouth commands you to be silent.
Within this stage, you become the ‘disobetient’, a body that is watched and controlled.
You move your arms, hands, and fingers, head, core, and legs
mimicking magic tricks you learnt, seducing, confusing, and teasing the soldier.
You wonder if he can predict your next move.

You place your body in their public space,
at the ‘monument of liberty’, where soldiers stand above as ‘saviours’, liberating women on the lower part, sculptured as passive and helpless figures.
You step among them.
You move and walk; you climb and go up.
You refuse to wait for your rescue.

Conclusion

This was my journey of discovering how growing up as a Greek Cypriot woman in the post-colonial, divided, and conflict environment of Cyprus has affected my perception of myself and my everyday life. With this narrative, I reveal women’s omitted stories—my own included—and collective spaces of trauma buried beneath dominant national narratives.
I urge us to see how militarism, patriarchy, and colonialism are interwoven, each exploiting the female body to sustain power structures and justify its existence. By dismantling these gendered roles inscribed onto our bodies, we are not only fighting militarism but also patriarchy, fascism, and racism.

From Ruins of Order to Practices of Solidarity: Reclaiming the International Community

Anne Fock

Each time the world fractures – in war, in hunger, in flight – [1] a familiar incantation rises: 'the international community must act.' It echoes through headlines and diplomatic halls, carrying the tone of moral urgency.

The notion of the 'international community' evokes the image of a global village built on responsibility shared beyond national borders – a collective united by a shared value system, enshrined in the United Nations Charter as the constitution of the post-war international order: 'We the Peoples of the United Nations [are] determined [...] to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and to unite our strength to maintain international peace [...].' Similar language justified the creation of the European Union, founded to 'deepen the solidarity [...and to create] an even closer union among the peoples of Europe'[2].

Today, the fragility of this international order as a foundation for a 'good neighbourhood' is more visible than ever. When war returns and belligerents are left unchecked, when States retreat into militarized territoriality, when humans are left to drown at borders, when climate commitments dissolve into empty symbolism, the 'international community' appears as the ghost of a world order, only summoned in times of rhetorical need. It evokes the question of who truly is there when the veil is lifted – and the fear that what lies beneath is only the spectral remnants of ideals, without a body to inhabit.

The Ghost of the International Community

If the 'international community' haunts our political imagination, it is worth asking what kind of creature it truly is, and understanding its harsh habitat between ideal and interest. Following sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies' theory, 'society' (*Gesellschaft*) designates an artificially created construct forming around the individual purposes of its members, while 'community' (*Gemeinschaft*) designates a more organic structure based on shared values, trust, and mutual obligations;[3] comparable to the image of a village or neighbourhood.

Among the established narratives, you may choose your fighter: the 'shared vision of a better world for all people'[4], the 'dangerous reference point for the naïve'[5], or the 'club for the world's wealthiest nations'[6]. Whichever lens you choose, it is clear that the current international order was not born as a pure ideal later betrayed by national interests; it has always been shaped by power dynamics and by the very imbalances it sought to overcome.

Realist and institutionalist thinkers see it as the society of States – a system of cooperation among sovereign actors rooted in mutual interests translating to law. More idealist or cosmopolitan perspectives imagine it as a community of peoples, bound not just by treaties but by common values such as peace, human rights, and responsibility for the Earth and all she contains; a vision which can be seen as reflected in international law by terms such as *ius cogens* and *erga omnes* obligations – legal notions that express universal values and fundamental rights and duties, many of which cannot be modified by States.

A Rhetoric of Power and Hope

It is the volatility of the term *International Community* that invites rhetorical instrumentalization[7]. While it implies that 'all' have spoken, in reality, it is never 'all' in the sense of 'humankind'; not even in the sense of 'all States'. Even in a realist reading reducing the term to a 'society of States', the claim of a collective will would be an overstatement. Instead, it typically translates to a coalition of States possessing the power to make their positions heard.

In political discourse, the expression is often treated as if it moves beyond this realist reading, instead describing a concrete and morally authoritative actor. This reification – the process of turning an abstract idea into something that appears real and tangible – lends the term an apparent substance that in reality it does not possess. The notion of 'community' loses any reference to a shared substance; it is far from describing a village, a neighbourhood, or an ecosystem. And while invoking morality, it defies it by calling for obedience to an abstract system.[8]

Even more: the moral connotation of 'community' conceals the political reality of hierarchy. The international community thus becomes not only reduced to a rhetorical figure fulfilling a purely performative function; it also becomes a moral alibi: Much like a political *deus ex machina*, it resolves complex dilemmas by invoking a higher principle, allowing responsibility to be displaced rather than assumed. The effects of this rhetoric are tangible: Tony Blair's 'doctrine of the international community' justified so-called humanitarian interventions in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq; similar discrepancies can be found on the EU level, such as in the European Union describing its border violence as an 'effective system of solidarity and responsibility'.[9]

It is a paradox that the weaker the system sustaining the idea of the international community becomes, the more it is longed for: in moments of war, displacement, or ecological breakdown, the call to the international community becomes a spell of despair. When conflict-afflicted States or NGOs urge the international community to step in, it often is more than the attempt to shift responsibility to a supranational entity – it is the hope that the 'international community' has more to it than just the sum of national interests; that there is more under its veil than the spectral skeleton of imperial structures.

1. Berit Bliesemann de Guevara and Florian P. Kühn, *'The International Community Needs to Act': Loose Use and Empty Signalling of a Hackneyed Concept*, International Peacekeeping 18(2), 2011, p. 136.
2. 1992 Maastricht Treaty.
3. Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, Fues Verlag, 1887.
4. Kofi Annan, *Problems without Passports*, Foreign Policy 132, 2002, p. 30.
5. Ruth Wedgwood, *Gallant Delusions*, Foreign Policy 132, 2002, p. 44.
6. Arjun Appadurai, Broken Promises, Foreign Policy 132, 2002, p. 45.
7. Matthias Lindhof, *Internationale Gemeinschaft: ein Begriff mit Doppelcharakter*, Zeitschrift Vereinte Nationen, 2020, pp. 3-7.
8. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Viking Press, 1963.
9. European Commission, Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, *Pact on Migration and Asylum* (21 May 2024).

its protagonists. The ideals enshrined in the international order are real, but they are neither a self-fulfilling prophecy nor a priority over national interests. Community – if understood as an organic structure with its own intrinsic value – cannot be imposed, even by law.[12] One may call it a 'body of law', but it is not body enough for the ghost to become tangible.

Giving the Ghost a Body

Assuming that the international community is what the international world order sustained by States is built around, international law is the strongest attempt to give it a body. It promises a structure held up by norms and institutions, moving beyond the elusive spirit of the ideals it is supposed to embody. However, the ambiguities that unsettle the notion of the 'international community' reappear within the legal order meant to anchor it. Besides the obvious flaws of international law – fragmentation, lack of enforcement, indeterminacy, and neo-colonial inheritance – it also carries two opposing promises at once: to articulate universal ideals and to promote national interests; two weights pressing on already fragile shoulders.

The former diplomat and central figure in critical international legal theory, Martti Koskenniemi, describes this tension as an oscillation between apology and utopia – between justifying what States do anyway and projecting an illusion of morality[10]. This is not a contemporary crisis but a structural condition: International law was never a neutral framework waiting to be filled with universal meaning; even when speaking the language of solidarity, dignity, and equality, this proclaimed universalism struggles to exist within the tension created by these opposing intentions.

This has always been especially palpable for postcolonial and formerly colonized States. While the international legal order promises equal sovereignty, it is also a site of domination. Nevertheless, attempts to reanimate the body from within occur – though it is difficult to judge whether they reflect hope or simply a continuation of the familiar choreography of States. One such attempt is the Draft Declaration on the Right to International Solidarity, brought forward by the Group of 77, a coalition of 134 UN member States associated with the Global South. This initiative seeks to transform solidarity from rhetoric into a concrete right and promotes a transformation of the current international order to purge it of social and economic inequalities between States. While it remains stuck in the draft stage, largely due to a lack of support from Western States, the process has created 'an intellectual space for world ordering from the margins',[11] attempting to hold a system accountable that has often appropriated the language of solidarity while maintaining structures that undermine it.

Examples such as this show that there are initiatives that dare to change the fragile body from within, yet by doing so, they also reveal the struggle of confronting injustices that are bone-deep. This is not to say that international law has to be overcome at any cost – rather, it is a call to see it more realistically: as a project upholding a world order with States as

Giving the Ghost a Soul

If the international community seems absent where it is expected – or when invoked seems like a moral fiction or merely a tool to push forward an imperial agenda – it might be necessary to look elsewhere, and to consider the possibility that it might have been taking shape in places that lie outside the familiar architecture of the international world order. Moving beyond the institutionalist hope for salvation through stronger institutions, the (neo)liberal fixation on individual rights, or the postmodernist deconstruction of the hypocrisies of the international order, the idea of the international community must be reclaimed from below to give meaning to an otherwise empty promise. Especially in times when formal structures of cooperation and peace appear exhausted, the most hopeful expressions of internationalism emerge not from States but from civic action such as movements, networks, and communities, aiming for solidarity across borders in concrete ways. Hannah Arendt described this as the 'space of appearance'[13] – a public sphere that arises whenever people act and speak together, independent of any physical setting. Community, in this sense, is not a structure but a practice, taking shape between those who choose to relate rather than retreat. This is not a call to shift responsibility from governments to citizens, but to recognize the spaces where the meaning of the international community is actively being rebuilt.

Examples of this appear far beyond formal diplomacy. Civic actors enact forms of internationalism that no institution has managed to realize: International movements expressing justice and ecological claims, gatherings of indigenous people to protest the COP30, organizations such as such as SOS Méditerranée or Sea Watch refusing to watch the sea become a graveyard – by allowing for critical views and alternative world ordering,[14] they exactly provide such a 'space of appearance'.

10. Martti Koskenniemi, *From Apology to Utopia: The Structure of International Legal Argument*, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

11. Johannes Haaf and Felix Anderl, *A Right to Solidarity. World Ordering from the Margins through International Law?*, Global Studies Quarterly 4(3) (2024), p. 2.

12. Koskenniemi, *From Apology to Utopia: The Structure of International Legal Argument*, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

13. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, University of Chicago Press, 1958.

14. Patricia Rinck, Siddharth Tripathi, Christine Unrau, and Sigrid Quack, *World Ordering from the Margins: An Introduction*, Global Studies Quarterly 4(3) (2024), p. 3.

But beyond that, such initiatives also broaden the meaning of 'international community' beyond the narrow confines through which States tend to interpret it; they move to close a widening solidarity gap that appears where States retreat behind their borders. In doing so, these movements do more than attempt to give the notion a soul – they also reveal its soullessness. Their practices expose the distance between official rhetoric and lived responsibility, and implicitly articulate a critique of the very actors who invoke the international community while eroding its substance. By acting where States hesitate, they challenge the ambiguity surrounding how much solidarity the 'international community' entails. Precisely because they occupy this uncertain terrain, their work is often precarious: subject to repression, criminalization, and the precarity that comes with stepping into spaces the State prefers to leave undefined.

The international community, in this sense, is not an entity waiting to be recovered; it is a lingering presence that can come into being wherever it is lived. In this understanding, it cannot be a unified spirit, but is closer to 'a world where many worlds fit' – following the expression coined by the Zapatistas *un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos* – creating space for the coexistence of narratives, cosmologies and multiple struggles.

Imagination as a Civil Skill

To reclaim internationalism also means reclaiming imagination. The collapse of the hope in the old 'international order' is not only institutional – it is imaginative. The belief that global justice as the foundation of the international community could be guaranteed through law and diplomacy once offered a fragile sense of direction, which seems to slip away. What remains is uncertainty, cynicism, and fatigue. Yet precisely in moments of disillusionment, imagination can become political: It is the first step for world ordering outside of the fractured body of the current world order.

Utopian thinking in that sense becomes more than a flight from reality; it becomes the act of envisioning what has not yet been lived, to make space for what could be. This imaginative work is indispensable because, as shown, the 'international community' is not a static value; it is a horizon that must be constantly re-envisioned. Without imagination, justice and solidarity turn into mere procedures. In public spaces, in civil movements, even in daily interactions in classrooms or book clubs, such imaginative work can be cultivated collectively. And it cannot be left only to those suffering the most under the current world order, but must also take root where geopolitical power is concentrated.

Many conversations which could lead to opening new vistas for world ordering end with a 'but it is what we've got', a 'better than nothing'. Yet the conversation does not have to end there if imagination is allowed to intervene. Just like in the spirit world, the belief is the prerequisite for any appearance: Without the willingness to envision a different form of relation, the idea of the international community remains only an echo. Imagination might be just the path to gift the ghost both, a body and a soul.

Translocal Workers for Economic Justice: Shifting Power in the Informal Economy

Xiaoji Song

Photo was taken during the event "Navigating Informality: Intersectional Perspectives in Transnational Labor Struggles", during the panel talk with Lea Rakovsky, Gabriel Berlovitz, and Aju John.

"I wholeheartedly believe that people from the most precarious backgrounds and toughest positions have the most incentives to lead, and have the most fire behind them. "

Gabriel, the co-founder of MigLAB and a long time labor organizer told me on a typical Berlin summer afternoon. I would have doubted Gabriel's words five years ago.

However, in the past few years, I have witnessed emerging grassroots movements in Berlin and Madrid that are not yet visible enough in political discussion. In Berlin, labor organizers who support marginalized workers are forming alliances and building power with creative strategies, exemplified by the emerging South Asian diaspora communities; while in Madrid, the young and new generation of migrant activists are slowly changing the dynamics within the diaspora spaces. From translocal migrant media projects to art intervention to support sex workers' rights, they are re-shaping the community fabrics with their anti-racist, decolonial, and, queerfeminists lens. Living within frictions, the poly-crises become a historic moment of breathing changes in the air.

In the past months, I have researched and worked with some of these emerging grassroot communities, labor organizers, alongside long-established community-led organizations who have been making bridges to connect and scale movements for economic justice in Berlin and Madrid. The project, with the broader vision of strengthening financial inclusion, aims to understand: what are the root causes of financial exclusion? What sociopolitical conditions and structural violence faced by these communities push them to the margins? What infrastructure and imaginaries can be built to facilitate inclusion as an active process towards justice in our financial system?

What Are We Talking about When We Talk about Informal Economy

All of these questions arise within the context of the informal economy, a term that may not be widely known but encapsulates much of the struggle experienced by precarious workers.

In 2019, I worked for a Taiwanese chain shop that survived the mass closure of bubble tea shops during the 2012 bubble tea controversy.[1] We called the owner Brother Chen—he was one of the friendliest employers I've worked with, though he paid me far below minimum wage. Like many others, I was part of a workforce that remains largely invisible in public discourse, with political actors often intentionally severing the connection between workers' struggles and migrant justice. Current debates on migration and labor rarely address the deep entanglement between these issues; they are typically treated as separate concerns rather than interconnected realities. This disconnect leaves many people, including myself, at the margins of both political conversations and labor rights movements. At the time, I didn't yet know the term "informal economy," but I was unwittingly part of it. Labor rights, trade unions, economic justice—all these concepts, despite their immediate relevance to my conditions and everyday life, felt as distant as my childhood dream of becoming a filmmaker.

Many marginalized workers in precarious conditions share similar experiences. Defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO), the informal economy encompasses "economic activities, workers, and economic units that are not covered, or are insufficiently covered, by formal arrangements"—whether in law or in practice. As we live in an era when working lives are increasingly shaped by precarity, transnational exploitation, and shifting global political conditions, this disproportionately impacts workers who lack adequate formal labor protections, often involuntarily in Europe. While much research on the informal economy has focused on the Global South, many European workers also navigate the spectrum of informality. However, whereas informality can be seen as normative among Global South communities, European workers are often forced into informality due to their marginalized positions.

This is precisely what MigLAB, the NGO Gabriel is co-building, seeks to change. MigLAB supports migrant organizing in Berlin, particularly in the workplace and beyond. The organization's vision is ambitious: to transform labor and migration through connecting movements, interdisciplinary research, and advocacy. This ambition is politically urgent for Germany and Europe, as populist forces increasingly scapegoat migrants for ongoing economic crises. While Germany has relatively strong industrial trade unions, these unions primarily serve employees with contracts and formal positions. Migrant workers are most vulnerable to informal employment, as language and bureaucratic barriers often prevent them from understanding their rights and accessing social and legal support from the state, and sometimes even from civil society.

Informal workers don't always realize they are working informally. The spectrum of informality is often better understood through formal-informal linkages, since many informal economic activities are now facilitated through formal infrastructure. As someone who worked in migrant small businesses, I represented the typical migrant informal worker people might imagine. However, large-scale informal economy activities increasingly occur through subcontracting in the growing gig economy. Aju John, a Berlin-based lawyer, researcher, and activist, describes this as "grades of informality"—referring to how employers systematically strip away protections, creating different levels of worker precarity. As evidenced by numerous court cases and reports[2], and as Aju described to me, many delivery riders working for major companies like Uber Eats and Wolt have never even seen their contracts.

> "This disconnect leaves many people, including myself, at the margins of both political conversations and labor rights movements."

1. In 2012, unverified German media reports that bubble tea contained carcinogenic chemicals and implied significant health risk spread widely and were later rejected by authorities, but by then sales had collapsed and most German bubble tea shops had been forced to close.

2. TG Durutti, Riders without rights, The Left Berlin, 30/07/2025

From Transnational Exploitation to Translocal Workers

The lack of a proper contract is only the tip of an iceberg, deskilling, wage theft, unlawful termination, bureaucratic hurdles and violence have accompanied the lives of many of these delivery riders, primarily South Asian migrants who come to Germany to study, I was told by Nitesh Kumar, an activist and member of Lieferando Workers Collective. In the past years, from Lieferando Workers Collective to the fights against Wolt in court, delivery riders in Berlin are building power from the ground up, case by case, person to person, connecting, meeting, organizing, and fighting. These works not only reveal the harmful operational patterns of gig platforms, but also how the wider social and economic conditions that impact migrant communities a whole directly influence their labor conditions: from housing registration (Anmeldung) to Tax-ID, from working hours restriction for student resident permit holder to skill recognition system, the access to the financial system, economy, and the society at large—all these factors influence the agency of the workers in light of obvious and violent extraction of their time and bodies.

Aju is also one of the most active organisers in the emerging movements of delivery workers organizing and advocacy work and founded Migrant*innen für Menschenwürdige Arbeit. His work is deeply rooted in diaspora community organizing: from cricket to curries, he gathers people through play, food, and care. Building on his community work, he contextualised the struggles of many delivery riders, who are workers with translocal connections: international students, migrants, diaspora, exiled, in whatever way they identify: for them, it often starts with the lack of decent employment opportunity in their home countries, they take a loan to come to Germany to study, then with limited access to almost everything in Germany and pressure from debts and high living cost, they are basically forced into the low-wage market.

Many established organisations in Berlin have been supporting the fight for translocal workers that live under transnational exploitations for a very long time. Ban Ying e.V. is a legendary example. Founded in 1988, Ban Ying fights for the rights of migrant women who have experienced violence, exploitation, or human trafficking. Lea Rakovsky, the project coordinator of Ban Ying, detailed to me some examples of sectors where these women often work: sex workers, domestic workers, care workers, and also workers in gastronomy. With the violence they experienced, they fought for their rights and conditions to be improved. The root cause of their conditions have some similar elements: (illegal) debts, residency rights, and lack of decent choices. The conditions of these workers illustrates textbook example of transnational exploitation: building on global inequalities that are resulting from colonial continuities, vicious cycles of financial and economic exclusion made possible by closed infrastructure, and the transnational capitals taking advantages of the mobile communities navigating a system that is never designed for them to live a decent life.

Shifting Power for Economic Justice: Practical Attempts for a Better World

MigLAB has been working hard to build bridges across these established organizations and emerging grassroots communities who essentially work for overlapping communities and topics, from migrant workers to domestic workers, from subcontracting to visa hurdles. I joined forces. We are not the only ones, of course. Grassroots movements in Madrid from the Chinese communities show similar attempts: even in a system that was never created to be just, people do not stop fighting, and they are particularly resourceful because of the translocal networks they are part of. Being part of different activist networks, I have connected with many activists of similar heritage over the past years and identify as part of the migrant, diaspora, or exiled communities. It is through some of these translocal networks that I can connect to the communities and organizations in Madrid.

For example, while doing preliminary research on informal work in Madrid, I stumbled upon an article on "Working on black jobs" in Spain on social media by a new media platform called 欧洲新客 (The Newcomers). Chu Yang, the founder of 欧洲新客 (The Newcomers), detailed the platform's mission as focusing on "practical problems" that concern "everyone," with labor as one of the primary topics, exemplified by the article I read. The writer Huang Chen, who left China after the COVID-19 pandemic, told me that a new generation of Chinese people left China after the pandemic and the white

paper movement. Faced with limited options for formal employment due to visa restrictions and language barriers, she had fallen into jobs that her employer called “half-formal.” 欧洲新客 (The Newcomers) is only one of many examples of such attempts to build bridges across the newly emerged Chinese communities.

Another example is the Archive of Sino Women in Diaspora, a collective archive of Sinophone diasporic women that is building a decentralized, sensitive, and anti-gender-based-violence archive on Github. They write on their website: “We believe the accumulation of lived experiences can transform into potentials for powerful social action.” Qianchi, the co-initiator of the Archive, while previously living in Madrid, also conducted research and archival work on the conditions of Chinese sex workers and used art interventions to make their invisible struggles visible through self-made stickers that display stories including social violence and financial struggles.

In parallel to grassroots and emerging attempts, there are many established advocates fighting for economic justice in Madrid. Asociación Rumiahui, a nonprofit in Madrid with a history as long as Ban Ying, has been connecting and advocating for Ecuadorian workers since 1997 and now fights for all migrants in Spain, providing counseling and unconditional solidarity support. They recognized early on that labor conditions and informality were central topics of their work. Migrant workers in their communities mostly work in agriculture, services—especially domestic work for Latin American women, sometimes under conditions we call modern slavery—as well as construction, transport, and cleaning. The most concerning are domestic service and cleaning, as they are the most exploited sectors. On January 3, 2001, twelve Ecuadorian immigrants were killed by a commuter train while on their way to agricultural work in Lorca, Murcia, which triggered discussion on the inhumane conditions faced by migrant workers. In response, Asociación Rumiahui organized the “March for Life,” a protest covering 80 kilometers, demanding an investigation and better regulation of migrant labor rights. Their work combines grassroots support, policy advocacy, and development with migrant communities of their home region. Their president, Vladimir Paspuel, detailed to me how their mission has grown: they start by helping one person, fixing one life; then they strive to change laws that affect an entire community. Then, by recognizing the root causes of their (forced) migration, they work on co-development. They are a prime example of how a migrant-led organization that centers migrant workers’ lived experiences can grow their political work.

> “Even in a system that was never created to be just, people do not stop fighting, and they are particularly resourceful because of the translocal networks they are part of.”

> “Collective resistance from the margins is not only politically urgent but also the only way to reveal complicity in exclusive and oppressive systems, and then, to create a blueprint for a just world.”

Building from bottom-up imaginaries and lived experiences, the emerging movements in Berlin and Madrid are connecting with established organizations to build power to support informal workers. For marginalized, racialized, and migrantized bodies, the continual efforts of self-organization and centering precarious and marginalized voices show us that collective resistance from the margins is not only politically urgent but also the only way to reveal complicity in exclusive and oppressive systems, and then, to create a blueprint for a just world.

This article is written based on field work and interviews conducted under the framework of Project Shifting Power in the Informal Economy, supported by the Interledger Foundation.

3. https://matters.town/@eunewcomers

4. https://sinowomenindiaspora.github.io/

5. Más de 1.500 inmigrantes participan en la ‘Marcha por la vida’. El Mundo. 2001

On Collective Action: Strike, Boycott and Solidarity in Times of Genocide

Stellar Meris

Fuck Germany, Fight Zionism, 2025.
© Stellar Meris

"Imagine a strike not as an attempt to improve one's salary alone but rather as a strike against the very raison d'être of these institutions. Imagine a strike not out of despair, but as a moment of grace in which a potential history is all of a sudden perceptible, a potential history of a shared world that is not organized by imperial and racial capitalist principles."[1] — Ariella Aïsha Azoulay

Strike and boycott play an increasing role in the context of contemporary art, as various forms of solidarity emerge from shared struggles for justice. The controversy around documenta[2]—one of Europe's most prestigious art events—reveals the political tools that the German parliament has set up in recent years to censor and criminalize critical voices. Currently, two legally non-binding resolutions function in Germany to silence dissent from people who stand up for Palestinians' rights and to defund and outcast academics, artists and activists who embody a decolonial and anti-imperial perspective on the cause. The anti-BDS resolution[3] delegitimizes the call for boycott, sanctions, and divestment of complicit companies and institutions while the IHRA resolution[4] weaponizes antisemitism to conflate anti-Zionism and critique of the Israeli state with Jew-hatred. The overbroad application of both frameworks risks to undercut several articles of Germany's federal constitution such as the freedom of expression, arts, information, science, and assembly, and negates basic democratic equality before the law.

January 31, 2020: Representatives and supporters of BDS groups from across Europe have come to Berlin to protest against the anti-BDS resolution passed in May 2019 by the German parliament. © ESLC

The claims of these two repressive instruments to "resolutely protect Jewish life" are inscribed in the collective consciousness of the German people who have been brought up over at least three generations with the belief that supporting the Israeli regime is to repair their national socialist past.[5] This belief has been challenged with documenta fifteen[6], as many art collectives from the Global South decentered the German and European gaze on the liberation struggle of Palestine and other colonized contexts. Instead of redemption and reconciliation, the support for Israel manifests the German government's continuous support for ongoing structures of colonialism, militarism, fascism, and exclusionary nationalism—at the expense of the Palestinian people and other communities affected by the transatlantic military industrial complex. The broader intersections of systemic violence have been exposed by countless contributions of art collectives chosen by ruangrupa, a socially engaged Indonesian collective and the curatorial team of documenta fifteen.

Taring Padi's mural "People's Justice" covered up following a public outcry over antisemitic imagery, at the documenta fifteen in Kassel, Germany, 2022. © C. Suthorn, licensed under CC-by-SA 4.0

When a controversial banner by the Indonesian collective Taring Padi – originally created as a critique of state violence and military oppression – was displayed at documenta and later found to contain antisemitic and anti-Black caricatures, the German cultural establishment reacted with swift and one-sided outrage. Rather than allowing for dialogue about the work's complex political history, this response produced harmful backlash for the artists, curators, and audiences who attempted to engage in a difficult, nuanced conversation.[7] The state apparatus immediately seized upon the incident to foreground Zionist interests and control what can and cannot be said in the unfolding debate. Not one single politician has condemned the anti-Black depiction, while the antisemitic stereotype has sparked the instalment of a new state-led committee that will screen the coming documenta for antisemitism allegations guided by said anti-BDS and IHRA-resolutions.

"Accepting an advisory board will become a precedent and will create an environment of fear and self-censorship that will make it impossible for curators and artists to engage openly in a safe environment with the public. Art is not only about aesthetics and comfort zones, art has a significant role in opening channels and dealing with our histories, let it be. This is what artistic freedom means." — lumbung community[8]

Instead of interrogating on a deeper level how racism and antisemitism intersect throughout colonial histories, a

1. Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*, Verso, 2019, p. 159.

2. The artists, ruangrupa, and the artistic team of documenta fifteen, *Censorship Must Be Refused: Letter from Lumbung Community*, e-Flux, July 27, 2022, accessed September 21, 2025, https://www.e-flux.com/notes/481665/censorship-must-be-refused-letter-from-lumbung-community.

3. Antrag der Fraktionen CDU/CSU, SPD, FDP und BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN, *Deutscher Bundestag: Der BDS-Bewegung entschlossen entgegentreten - Antisemitismus bekämpfen*, Deutscher Bundestag, May 15, 2019, accessed October 23, 2025, https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/19/101/1910191.pdf.

   The anti-BDS resolution was implemented on 17.5.2019 by the German parliament. It declares the methods and arguments of the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) movement "antisemitic," and says the government should not support or fund projects that call for boycott of Israel or question Israel's right to exist. It refers to the IHRA working definition of antisemitism in its extended German form as the guiding benchmark.

4. Die Wissenschaftlichen Dienste des Deutschen Bundestages, Kurzinformation - Implementierung der Definition von Antisemitismus in Deutschland, Deutscher Bundestag, March 4, 2019, accessed October 23, 2025, https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/644710/d67e59af202ecc55821da685bb28e2fd/WD-1-005-19-pdf-data.pdf.

   The IHRA definition of antisemitism was adopted in an extended German form by Germany's federal government in 20.9.2017, adding a particular sentence about Israel to the basic IHRA definition: „Darüber hinaus kann auch der Staat Israel, der dabei als jüdisches Kollektiv verstanden wird, Ziel solcher Angriffe sein." ("Furthermore, the State of Israel, understood as a Jewish collective, can also be the target of such attacks.") This sentence was added to the core definition, whereas in the original IHRA version, it appears as an illustrative example.

   Antrag der Fraktionen SPD, CDU/CSU, BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN und FDP, *Nie wieder ist jetzt - Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland schützen, bewahren und stärken*, May 11, 2024, accessed October 23, 2025, https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/136/2013627.pdf.

   After 7 October 2023 the Bundestag passed a broader antisemitism resolution, titled "Nie wieder ist jetzt: Judisches Leben in Deutschland schützen, bewahren und stärken" ("Never Again Is Now: Protect, Preserve and Strengthen Jewish Life in Germany") by a large, cross-party majority on 7.11.2024. It makes public funding for culture and science projects conditional on adherence to the IHRA working definition.

   Antrag der Fraktionen SPD, CDU/CSU, BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN und FDP, *Antisemitismus und Israelfeindlichkeit an Schulen und Hochschulen entschlossen entgegentreten sowie den freien Diskursraum sichern*, January 11, 2024, accessed October 23, 2025, https://fragdenstaat.de/dokumente/250171-antisemitismus-und-israelfeindlichkeit-an-schulen-und-hochschulen-entschlossen-entgegentreten-sowie-den-freien-diskursraum-sichern/.

   On 29.1.2025 the German parliament implemented another IHRA resolution that reaffirms the IHRA definition of antisemitism and calls for measures to implement it at schools and universities in Germany, despite widespread criticism and legal concerns about the freedom of speech. It includes the potential withdrawal of public funding from institutions that do not adhere to the definition.

5. Antony Loewenstein, *Germany's Israel Obsession*, Al Jazeera, September 11, 2025, accessed October 23, 2025, https://www.aljazeera.com/video/featured-documentaries/2025/9/11/germanys-israel-obsession.

6. Johanna Koehler, *The Statement of Finding Committee*, Documenta Fifteen, September 15, 2022, accessed October 23, 2025, https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/news/the-statement-of-finding-committee/.

7. Michael Rothberg, *Learning and Unlearning with Taring Padi: Reflections on Documenta*, The New Fascism Syllabus, July 2, 2022, accessed October 23, 2025, https://newfascismsyllabus.com/opinions/learning-and-unlearning-with-taring-padi-reflections-on-documenta/.

8. The artists, ruangrupa, and the artistic team of documenta fifteen, *Censorship Must Be Refused: Letter from Lumbung Community*, e-Flux, July 27, 2022, accessed September 21, 2025, https://www.e-flux.com/notes/481665/censorship-must-be-refused-letter-from-lumbung-community.

simple narrative has been carved out: Muslim and mostly Arab artists are deemed guilty of importing a "new form of antisemitism" to the "denazified Germany". This racist perspective is now cemented through the new code of conduct[9] and institutionalized censorship.

The anti-BDS and the IHRA resolution operate to limit the official discourse in cultural and educational sectors, while simultaneously also affecting asylum processes and leading to unlawful deportations of immigrants and refugees.[10] This is why the implementation of these resolutions expose cultural workers with an insecure residency status not only to the rhetorical limits of the German discourse but also to harsh, life-threatening consequences: Without a German citizenship, speaking out for Palestine can lead to losing one's work visa or asylum status. Therefore, what is at stake in public debates is never equal but bound to the positionalities and realities that the speakers have inherited precisely through these global and interconnected histories of colonialism that are up for debate.

The many curators, cultural institutions, and universities that adopted the anti-BDS and IHRA resolutions are complicit in eroding freedom of speech and are putting racialised cultural workers at risk. They act in accordance with the state's interests to maintain discursive hegemony and a fictional moral supremacy. In this dynamic, documenta fifteen has become the focal point of a shift towards a right-wing cultural agenda in Germany—affecting not just present but also future debates. Instead of offering and holding space for critical dialogue on the intersections of various oppressive and violent systems and modes of resistance, documenta's management contributed to a climate of fear, intimidation, and racist accusations—opening its doors for more politically motivated censorship.

To side with German *Staatsräson*, the declaration of Israel's security as the German state's main interest, is a decision against artistic freedom that's impossible to overlook. Art is meant to unfold its power beyond purely aesthetic and performative expressions of political outcry. In these times of a massive militarisation campaign not seen since WWII coinciding with dramatic financial cuts of cultural and social projects, the German establishment is likely to abuse the next documenta to entertain a conversation that further distracts from its complicity in the exploitation and mass murder of Palestinians abroad and the increasing shift towards authoritarianism and fascism at home.

Those who profit from the discursive twist and victim-perpetrator reversal are the German weapons manufacturers like Rheinmetall and ThyssenKrupp who increased their margins ten-fold since October 2023.[11] International stakeholders welcome and profit from these developments, while 83% of German citizens oppose the weapons deliveries to Israel. The large majority of Germans who oppose the genocide in Gaza, unfortunately, have been starkly silent in the past two years. The Palestine solidarity movement is carried largely by Palestinians, Arabs, Muslims, Queer people, and immigrants; many at risk of losing their residency status, jobs, and apartments over wrongful allegations of antisemitism. Only in recent months is a broader media and political turn noticeable in Germany, condemning Israel's actions in

Protesters holding a banner saying "Staatsräson ist Genozid" ("Reason of state is genocide") to denounce Germany's complicity in the Gaza genocide during the opening of Nan Goldin's retrospective at the New National Gallery. © Michele Faguet

Protest against Elbit Systems and Germany's weapons export to Israel in April 2025 in Berlin. © Ian Cassidy

9. Documenta, *Code of Conduct*, documenta, accessed September 21, 2025, https://documenta.de/en/code-of-conduct.

   Sybille Fuchs, *Documenta's New 'Code of Conduct' Paves the Way for Cultural and Artistic Censorship in Germany*, World Socialist Web Site, February 18, 2025, accessed October 25, 2025, https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2025/02/18/ntez-f18.html.

10. Amnesty International, *Human Rights in Germany*, Amnesty International, accessed September 21, 2025, https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/western-central-and-south-eastern-europe/germany/report-germany/.

11. *Legal Action to Stop Arms Exports from Germany to Israel - The European Legal Support Center (ELSC) %*, Press Release, April 5, 2024, https://elsc.support/legal-action-to-stop-arms-exports-from-germany-to-israel/.

12. "Mehrheit fordert mehr Druck auf Israel," ZDFheute, August 14, 2025, https://www.zdfheute.de/politik/zdf-politbarometer-israel-gaza-kritik-waffenlieferungen-100.html.

Demontration "Alle zusammen für Gaza" ("All together for Gaza") with over 100'000 participants in Berlin on September 27, 2025. © Alle zusammen für Gaza.

13. "Zusammen für Gaza.," Zusammen für Gaza., accessed September 26, 2025, https://www.zusammen-fuer-gaza.de.

14. "Palestinians and Allies auf Instagram: 'Total Liberation, Fight Normalization - Demo on 27 September in Berlin" Instagram, September 7, 2025, https://www.instagram.com/pa_allies/p/DOTnLOSCMgm/.

15. The Index of Repression collects data from cancellations, terminations, to police violence and other forms of repression that target Palestine solidarity. "Index of Repression: A Database on the Systematic Repression of Palestinian Solidarity in Germany," accessed September 23, 2025, https://index-of-repression.org/.

Gaza, and advocating for a halt of weapons exports—public opinion is slowly but visibly shifting too.

The protest "Alle zusammen für Gaza" ("All together for Gaza") on 27 September 2025 in Berlin[13] with over 100,000 participants is the largest protests in solidarity with Palestine that Germany ever witnessed. While its demands were not aligned with a decolonial and anti-imperial stance, as Israel's "right to exist" was not explicitly put into question and the focus on *peace* rather than *justice* watered down the message for liberation, the call for a ceasefire was clear. The protest offered a chance to raise the bar in Germany, and raise awareness about the imperial and colonial structures that underlie the systemic oppression that persists until today. While some protesters organized their own anti-colonial protest in response[14], many activists and political groups from the Palestine solidarity movement in Berlin called for unity rather than division. Among them was long-term political activist Ramsis Kilani, who had been expelled from the German party *Die Linke* for his outspoken support of Palestinian armed resistance. In a questionable maneuver that circumvented basic democratic principles, the party's bureaucracy pushed him out to protect its parliamentary ambitions. Nevertheless, as a Marxist and socialist, Kilani and many other progressive forces urged participation and unity across political differences in the demonstration co-organized with "Die Linke." Some protesters chose to boycott and hold a separate march, while others joined the main protest to intervene with a clear stance for the full liberation of Palestine—without diluting the cause to accommodate more liberal NGOs and other political actors. Kilani stands out as an inspiring and much-needed voice within Berlin's antifascist movement, who links local struggles to broader imperial structures while fighting for Palestinian rights. This example reflects a recurring tension in approaches: whether to boycott events that don't fully represent one's politics, or to join and to transform them from within.

In this moment of history, similar questions arise in the field of contemporary art. How can artists and cultural workers interact with the political surroundings they find themselves in? Can they support the liberation struggle of Palestinians from within institutions, even if they are holding liberal positions? Is cultural boycott a viable way to move forwards or does it hinder critical debate? What to do with political structures—such as the anti-BDS and IHRA resolutions—that are implemented to exclude anti-colonial, anti-imperial voices from public debates? Can fruitful conversations be held in spaces that don't resist these resolutions actively? When are strikes and boycotts able to create meaningful, material change? How can artists sustain their collective and coordinated resistance in times of repression—financially and mentally? How to overcome intimidation that often leads to self-censorship?

Artists and organizers who challenge the imperial war machine are widely defunded and deplatformed[15], a phenomenon that will most likely increase in the near future. The Palestine solidarity movement needs to support those who speak out publicly and suffer financial backlash if it wants to sustain itself in the long run. Economic pressure and the social isolation that comes with cancellations often lead to distress; mental health issues, burnout and suicidal ideation has been reported by many cultural workers who experience

harsh repressions. Peer-to-peer care networks are viable for emotional recovery. On a material level, collectively funded scholarships for artists from Gaza, such as the Hassala initiative[16], as well as requests for mutual support through GoFundMe-campaigns[17] show both the need and the willingness to build independent funding structures.

The Gaza Biennale[18] and the Palinale[19] offer examples of how to build inclusive structures for showcasing Palestinian art and movies within the current climate of censorship. These alternative events bring together cultural workers to think critically through the current funding structures that exclude many artists and perspectives, and how to offer mutual support in times of crisis. Over 400 Berlin-based artists, including well-known figures such as Adam Broomberg and Olafur Eliasson, donated more than 1100 works on paper to be sold during a two-day fundraising event for the Gaza Biennale Berlin. The artworks were presented anonymously on several tables and sold for 50 euros each. As works were sold, volunteers replenished the tables with new pieces, and buyers learned the names of the artists only at the checkout.

The turnout was remarkable, people queued for up to an hour just to enter the showroom, highlighting a shared understanding that art structures must change and adapt rapidly in the face of rising right-wing and fascist regimes across Europe. The atmosphere was one of comradeship rather than competition; people were engaging in conversations about art and politics as inseparable fields, as it should be. The Gaza Biennale Berlin that showcases artists from Gaza is still on display until December 22 at Flutgraben, Agit, and Khan Aljanub, made possible through the donations of local artists and various supporters. At several locations, including Spore Initiative and around the streets of Berlin, an expanded program takes place, inviting the public to gather and cultivate a communal strength. The project sends a strong signal that art cannot be censored, and that people can resist and rise collectively against state censorship.

Cooperation with artists from Palestine can take on multiple formats. Many projects work as digital residencies and online publications, making use of the reduced production costs involved in such formats when funding is scarce. However, safety protocols need to be in place when collaborating with surveilled artists to avoid exposing them to further danger. The Ramallah-based collective The Question of Funding concludes: "What we came to understand was that institutional practice within NGOs and organizations had become entirely focused on navigating crises, which are manifold and which inevitably transformed how we perceived our practice as producers and organizers, our work within our community but also cultural work itself."[20] The Palestinian collective has been attacked and harassed by anonymous actors during documenta fifteen, and in the aftermath experienced a lack of institutional support and protection. The board members of documenta dismissed their need for physical and emotional safety, leaving them alone with the racist outburst that has followed the smear campaigns of German media—where they were accused of antisemitism. Instead, the shareholders of documenta built a "Committee for the academic supervision of documenta fifteen" to scan the entire exhibition for antisemitism, based on the IHRA definition.[21]

2025 poster for the Berlin Pavilion of the Gaza Biennale
© Gaza Biennale

16. "Hassala.Art," accessed September 25, 2025, https://hassala.art.

17. "Donate to Mutual Aid for Recovery, Resistance & Return, Organized by Cibelle Cavalli Bastos," Gofundme.Com, accessed September 25, 2025, https://www.gofundme.com/f/mutual-aid-for-recovery-resistance-return.

18. "Gaza Biennale," Gaza Biennale, accessed September 25, 2025, https://gazabiennale.org/.

19. "Palinale (@palinale.festival)" accessed September 25, 2025, https://www.instagram.com/palinale.festival.

20. "Home – The Question of Funding," accessed September 26, 2025, https://thequestionoffunding.com/Home.

21. "Furthermore, the one-sided negative portrayal of Israel repeatedly turns into open anti-Semitism. To give just one example: Israel is accused of being 'fascist' and of committing 'genocide' against the Palestinians – thereby equating it with Nazi Germany. Such an equation of Israeli policy with that of the Nazis is considered anti-Semitic according to the definition of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, which has been adopted by many nations, including some countries in the Global South." "Presseerklärung Gremium Zur Fachwissenschaftlichen Begleitung_kurzversion_final__.Pdf," Google Docs, accessed September 26, 2025, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Af9kbnINaSLww3oEP4mbKRhfkkC4JQf6/view.

22. "Auch in den Reihen von Kunst und Kultur sowie der Medien darf es keinen Raum für Antisemitismus geben. Die Ursachen und Hintergründe der großen Antisemitismusskandale der letzten Jahre in diesen Bereichen, insbesondere auf der „documenta fifteen" und der Berlinale im Februar 2024 müssen umfassend aufgearbeitet werden und es müssen Konsequenzen gezogen werden.[...] sollen Länder, Bund und Kommunen – soweit noch nicht erfolgt – rechtssichere, insbesondere haushälterische Regelungen erarbeiten, die sicherstellen sollen, dass keine Projekte und Vorhaben insbesondere mit antisemitischen Zielen und Inhalten gefördert werden. Kunst- und Kulturveranstaltungen sowie -einrichtungen sollten gemeinsam mit Experten antisemitismuskritische Codes of Conduct und Awarenessstrategien als Leitfaden ihres Handelns anwenden." ("There must be no room for anti-Semitism in the arts, culture or the media either. The causes and background of the major anti-Semitism scandals in these areas in recent years, particularly at documenta fifteen and the Berlinale in February 2024, must be thoroughly investigated and consequences must be drawn. [...] states, the federal government and local authorities should – if they have not already done so – develop legally secure, particularly budgetary, regulations to ensure that no projects or initiatives with anti-Semitic aims and content are funded. Art and cultural events and institutions should work with experts to apply anti-Semitism-critical codes of conduct and awareness strategies as guidelines for their actions.") Rolf Mützenich et al., "Antrag_Nie wieder ist jetzt – Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland schützen, bewahren und stärken," Antrag der Fraktionen SPD, CDU/CSU, BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN und FDP, May 11, 2024, https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/136/2013627.pdf.

23. "Documenta Resignation Letter – Notes – e-Flux," accessed September 24, 2025, https://www.e-flux.com/notes/575318/documenta-resignation-letter.

24. Lisa Deml, *Lumbung Will Continue (Somewhere Else): Documenta Fifteen and the Fault Lines of Context and Translation*, 2023.

While documenta still frames itself as a progressive and inclusive hotspot for contemporary art, it has become an example par excellence for gaslighting, exclusion and double standards. Documenta officially upholds the IHRA resolution in its code of conduct[22], erasing poignant and urgent critical voices that might address all these layers openly and contribute to a vivid and vulnerable engagement with the issues of our time. The anti-BDS resolution is not mentioned explicitly in the code of conduct, but as stated on e-flux in November 2023 "several well-known international curators who had already officially signed up for the Committee were suddenly removed, due to fears of BDS sympathies based solely on their ethnicity, or to their having expressed concern over the stifling consequences of the wholesale conflation of opposition to Israeli politics with anti-Semitism.[23]" As a consequence of BDS-related antisemitism accusations Ranjit Hoskote, well-known Mumbai-based author and curator, resigned from the Finding Committee for the upcoming documenta sixteen. It's undeniable that both the IHRA- and the anti-BDS resolutions forge a climate of fear and censorship and hinder fruitful debates, putting precarious voices at even higher risk instead of supporting and protecting them.

> *"Ultimately, the discourse surrounding documenta fifteen could have facilitated a multidirectional and critical consideration of intersecting colonial, ethnic and religious ideologies. But, instead, the growing tendency of anti-antisemitism in Germany reinforces the supposedly irreconcilable differences between antisemitism and racism and uses the notion of 'competition of victims' to pit Jewish, Muslim and migrant voices against each other."*
> – Lisa Deml[24]

Art students, tutors, and cultural workers must ask how to continue and specify their creative and political work in times of genocide. After witnessing a tremendous amount of institutional violence, initiatives like the Art Not Genocide Alliance (ANGA)[25], and Strike Germany[26] call for strike and boycott as an active engagement with and against the status quo. Protests in front of the Israeli and the US pavillions at the opening of the Venice Biennale refused "to accept genocide, to normalize the ongoing decimation of an entire population, to deny human rights, to create a precedent for justifying totalitarianism."[27] A petition for the exclusion of the Israeli Pavillion from the Venice Biennale gained over 24'000 signatures, calling out the state's apartheid policies and genocidal violence against Palestinians. The statement underlines that "any official representation of Israel on the international cultural stage is an endorsement of its policies and of the genocide in Gaza." We can learn from the successful boycott of the apartheid regime of South Africa, when it was excluded from participating in the Venice Biennale from 1968 to its abolishment in 1993, following protest campaigns similar to those we are now seeing for the liberation of Palestine.

We must understand our responsibility in the time and place we find ourselves in, as Kelly Oliver puts it, "as a responsibility to response-ability, to the ability to respond"—not to remain reactive and defensive in the face of genocide, but to engage in strong, coordinated and collective action. The BDS-movement, and particularly the PACBI-guidelines[28] that focus on the cultural boycott of institutions rather than individuals, offers viable guidance in how to tackle complicity

Protest against the participation of the Israeli Pavillion during the opening of the Venice Biennale, 2024.
©Matteo de Mayda

and demand accountability. For this we must organize, unionize and stand together in firm solidarity with Palestine and other oppressed people, rejecting artwashing of genocide while embracing critical debate. We must be careful not to confuse identity with implication, coordinating our collective action based on PACBI principles. And we must build spaces within our communities for that very exchange to happen, where we can educate ourselves, and where emotionally charged conversations can take place. We need to strengthen our networks and offer support for those who are at the frontline. Care, transparency, and accountability must guide us through conflicts and mistakes; we must show up for each other in difficult times. Most importantly, our solidarity must reach out to the artists that are trapped in Gaza. Their stories and voices must be amplified. We must encourage artistic and scholarly practices that are rooted in collective thoughts and experiences, creating alternatives to the Western model of the stand-alone successful contemporary artist. We are together in this—and we are able to respond with courage, clarity, and no faulty compromise.

This article was written for the student-led Palestine Teach-Out #10 that took place on September 29, 2025, at the Dutch Art Institute, hosted by Olfa Arfaoui and Stellar Meris. A member of The Question of Funding, Kari Rosenfeld and Tobi Haslett, were invited to give short inputs on documenta 15, Strike Germany and Boycott Whitney Biennale, while welcoming questions and remarks from the audience. The Palestine Teach-Out and the Assembly on Palestine are two formats of the Dutch Art Institute that are part of an ongoing debate around artistic and cultural work, institutional failures, and collective attempts to pave a way towards a decolonized and inclusive future—with a free Palestine at its core.

Text: **Stellar Meris**

Editing: **Oliver Turvey**

25. Instagram Account of ANGA, accessed October 23, 2025, https://www.instagram.com/angalliance.

26. Instagram Account of Strike Germany, accessed October 23, 2025, https://www.instagram.com/strikegermany.

27. Avedis Hadjian, "Activists Say "No to the Genocide Pavilion" in Biennale Protest Against Israel," *Hyperallergic*, April 17, 2024, https://hyperallergic.com/903608/activists-say-no-to-the-genocide-pavilion-in-biennale-protest-against-israel/.

28. "PACBI Guidelines for the International Academic Boycott of Israel | BDS Movement," July 8, 2014, https://www.bdsmovement.net/pacbi/academic-boycott-guidelines.

'I am an extension of you': The role of photography in the Palestine solidarity protests in Berlin

Franca Marquardt

Photographers and participants documenting police intervention at a protest
Photo by Magda @just_magda_and_myself

I stand in the middle of the street, surrounded by protesters moving with care, shouting: '*Free, free Palestine,*' '*No Pride in genocide.*' From the beginning, the police have tried to interrupt the protest, but now they charge in, shoving people aside, tearing through the crowd with violence. Almost instantly, the protesters respond, forming kettles to hold their ground while looking out for one another. The stewards of the demo try to direct the crowd towards the centre and make sure the police cannot break their bonds. I raise my camera, pausing to register what's unfolding before taking a few photos. We were so close to the end point of the internationalist Pride, but now the police have decided to disperse the protest. I look at the other photographers, people I deeply admire. The way they move, attentive to every detail, weighing when to photograph, when to stop, when to intervene. Their work is a delicate balance between what to witness, what to photograph, and which stories to carry forward.

Movement photographers, those who document protests for the Palestine solidarity movement in Berlin, challenge what we perceive as journalism and explore solidarity as an ethical practice. In Palestine, journalists and photographers are actively targeted by Israeli genocidal attacks, which reflects Israel's strategy to eliminate any information getting out of Gaza. Among four other journalists, Maryam Abu Daqqa was killed on duty at Nasser hospital on the 25th of August 2025. Just a few days before her death, she said in an interview, '*We continue with the journalistic coverage and send our message to the world. I have a love for this profession. I'm not just taking pictures.*' Maryam also highlighted that the situation for journalists in Gaza is distinct, as journalists want to live and report just like any of their colleagues around the world. Photographers in Germany find themselves in a different situation, albeit one of relative safety. However, repression and police violence follow a similar logic: fighting the agency and visibility of activists and solidarity photographers. As the struggles against imperialism and capitalism are intertwined, this raises the question of the common responsibility of photographers in Europe and how visuals carry the movement in times of systemic violence.

In Berlin, weekly solidarity protests have been organised since October 7th 2023, which are constituted of a growing alliance between Palestinian-led groups and feminist, socialist and migrant collectives, challenging the complicity of the German state in the genocide. In times of growing police violence and repression, photographers play a crucial role in documenting, mediating, and archiving what can be understood as a revolutionary moment. Cherry is active in *The Left Berlin* and has been closely documenting the protests, drawing on her earlier background as an artist. Zaira comes from a long history of political involvement in the autonomous movement in Genoa before moving to Germany. Photography, for her, was always about keeping a record of collective practices, of making visible what might otherwise be forgotten. Magda started documenting the protests after experiencing activist burnout and seeing it as a necessity to expand the movement through visuality. Xenia has been involved in the movement for a long time and has made a documentary in Palestine before. She decided to focus on movement photography to create a counter-narrative to the state media. Zaira, Magda and Xenia are part of the collective *from the river to the streets*, a network of journalists experiencing repression due to their engagement in documenting Palestine solidarity in Berlin.

Photography, historically, has been a tool of power and domination. Susan Sontag[1] warns in *On Photography* ([1977] 2014) that '*to photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed.*' A photograph transforms its subject into an image, an object that can be circulated, framed, and consumed by others. The work of photographers based in Berlin who are documenting solidarity protests is an attempt to resist this appropriation by rooting their work in political accountability and co-creating a counter-narrative to the dehumanising and distorted view by the German state that paints protesters as terrorists and anti-semites. Highlighting the agency and emotions of the protesters, they engage in what bell hooks[2] ([1992] 2014) describes as the 'oppositional gaze,' an exercise of reclaiming visuality from systems of domination. As hooks writes, '*not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality* (116),' which encapsulates the idea that the act of looking can be a form of resistance against systems of domination. Zaira's picture embodies this rebellious desire, where a young woman with a Keffiyeh stares back at the police in determination.

Movement photographers are caught up in an in-between position: they are emotionally connected to the activists within the protest, but at the same time stand outside to observe and capture the action. As Xenia explains,

> *'We are not in the kettles, but somehow we are still part of it. It's a different way of being part of it. But I also experienced police violence and sexual harassment by cops, and they recognise my face. People see us as comrades, not photographers. Comradery cameras.'*

1. Sontag, Susan. (1977) 2014. *On Photography*. Penguin UK.
2. hooks, bell. (1992) 2014. "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators." *In Black Looks*, 2nd ed. 2nd ed. Routledge.
3. Azoulay, Ariella. (2008) 2021. *The Civil Contract of Photography*. Princeton University Press.
4. Fanon, Frantz. 1968. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Grove Press.
5. SZ. 2025. "Berlin: Aggressive Stimmung und Rangeleien bei verbotener propalästinensischer Demo." *Süddeutsche.de*, October 8. https://www.sueddeutsche.de/panorama/berlin-aggressive-stimmung-und-rangeleien-bei-verbotener-propalaestinensischer-demo-li.3325220.
6. Flinta is a commonly used word in Germany for Women, Lesbian, Inter, Trans and Agender people

A young woman looks at the police (photo by Zaira @zairabiagini)

Xenia emphasises that being present at protest after protest and bearing witness through images also creates a kind of complicity with the protesters. As Ariella Azoulay[3] ([2008] 2021) describes in the *Civil Contract of Photography*, taking and circulating images becomes an ethical obligation toward others and toward the future. Images operate in a relational space of politics between the photographed person, the photographer, and the spectator that demands a type of contract. However, as the conversations with the photographers in Berlin reveal, an ambition or common political goal does not automatically make photography an ethical practice. Cherry reflects on this balance, describing the tension between technical precision and a deeper solidarity with those she photographs. She says:

> *'When I'm editing the photos or selecting what I want, I'm seeing everything more from an analytical point of view, like, 'the light is good here, and let me do this and that.' But when I'm there, I just try to become one with the collective. Because I don't want them to feel that I'm an outsider taking photos of the show. I'm there because I'm part of you. I'm kind of an extension of what you're doing.'*

As Frantz Fanon[4] (1968) explained, coloniality is sustained by the aesthetic forms of respect for the established order, from flags and parades to monuments and museums, which were central to the formation of visuality as a colonial technology. While the media is already censoring and silencing the voices of the Palestinian community, it actively paints and visualises protesters as violent, disorganised, and hateful. This can be seen in various articles in newspapers such as the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*[5] (SZ 2025), with headlines such as '*aggressive mood at Palestine protest*' that also show videos of protesters supposedly '*attacking*' the police. Here, the media uses affective frames that are perceived as harmful or dangerous to categorise the protesters, to justify police violence and, more broadly, Germany's complicity in the genocide.

Movement photography unsettles taken-for-granted ideas behind journalism, which are still tied to objectivity and emotional distance from the subjects studied. The photographers in Berlin seek to change the normative narrative and create images that show how the protesters are in charge of their own representation. As Zaira says,

> *'I want to describe the Palestinian community as what it really is. A movement of solidarity. And in some way, to go against this mainstream narrative that we are a bunch of terrorists. That we are violent, a danger to the state. I like to focus a lot on the Flinta[6] community and immigrants. They are sometimes taken for granted, but make up the majority of the movement. I also show the police brutality that targets Arabs, Muslims and Palestinians. I think that the goal is to amplify the message of the Palestinian community. And also to go against this shameful and very dangerous narrative of how they paint us. Because it's totally untrue.'*

According to Nicholas Mirzoeff (2025)[7], there are three components of visible relation: the right to look, the right to be seen, and the right to opacity. Therefore, seeing becomes a crucial part of resistance struggles and building coalitions. He asks us to reflect on '*what action is required when you and I become both bare witnesses and part of a new "we".*' In other words, when we reach a point of association, how can we live internationalist solidarity in practice? As the photographers show, building visual narratives of protest is part of the affective work of associating with each other's struggles despite the dominance of Western visual culture and domination.

Cherry, Zaira, Magda and Xenia have been actively involved in the Palestine solidarity movement for a long time, and therefore feel a responsibility to represent the community and the movement as they really are. As Xenia explains,

> *'It's always this aggressive view of the people who are fighting mostly for their family members in Gaza and for the country where they come from. But getting to know the people, I have to say that they are mostly like teddy bears, being beaten up for no reason. So I felt the need to document the people, how they fight for their lives, and with all kinds of emotions, of being happy together, but also fighting together. The love and the anger, and this passionate feeling of: we need to do something.'*

Images can also serve practical purposes, for example, supporting activists in court cases when accounts of events are disputed. At the same time, photographs can be taken up by the state as a means of surveillance and registration of activists. Protests are often assumed as spaces of hyper-visibility where claims for consent are ignored and pictures taken freely. For photographers working within movements, this creates a constant negotiation between the need to document and the responsibility to protect the people and struggles they are representing. As Magda says,

> *'When people are getting beaten or arrested, whether to show their faces is a big question we are having in our collective. The face belongs to the story somehow. But we are not only photojournalists, we are also part of the movement, so we need to have more sensitivity not to expose the people of the movement and misuse their trust.'*

The picture shows the last moments of the Internationalist Pride in July 2025, where protesters face the police and film them. The Palestine solidarity movement in Berlin has shown how the struggle for national liberation and feminist and queer fights can come together, despite their differences and conflicts. This builds powerful alliances to challenge the very structures of the neoliberal state and its apparatus of repression. In these important moments, it is crucial to

Protesters facing the Police at Internationalist Pride (photo by Franca @francamidore)

seek visual manifestations that strengthen these processes of solidarity-building, giving the movement a visual proof and memory of their actions. Movement photography becomes a way of apprehend the diversity of emotions that arise during protest, the anger, the guilt, the love, the comradeship, and, therefore, to be in charge of our collective feelings and revolutionary practices. As Cherry says,

> *'My task is to mirror what you're doing in order for you to then remember how important your role was within the collective. From an individual point of view and from a collective point of view. That allows me to channel all the emotions at the same time, because I'm happy and excited and moved by the whole solidarity movement.'*

Rather than solely taking pictures of the violence, Cherry decides to focus on the narrative of the protesters who are experiencing it, as well as their mechanisms to fight against it. As can be seen in the image, Xenia, as the photographer, is part of the crowd of protesters, capturing their gestures, gazes and shouts as collective agency. In this sense, movement photography is a practice of care for the emotional intensities that animate struggle, where the photographer assumes responsibility for mediating feelings. Cultivating the oppositional gaze means strengthening the movement to form a collective identity that includes its differences. Visual representations can help us to entangle and understand emotions, collectively process traumatic experiences of police violence, and gather strength to continue showing up. Zaira

7. Mirzoeff, Nicholas. 2025. *To See in the Dark: Palestine and Visual Activism Since October 7.* Pluto Press.

Protesters shouting (photo by Xenia @xeniagomes_)

explains that for her, taking pictures also includes feelings of guilt that sometimes become overwhelming:

> *'Every time after the demo, I come back home, and I feel like shit. I need some time to decompress and to process. Process not only what I see, but especially the fact that what I'm seeing is something that I need to document. And I can't stop it. So, I feel a massive sense of guilt. Because either I take a picture or I try to stop the action. I can't do both. I mean, there are moments where it's really, really escalating. Then, I go in between. Fuck the pictures, fuck the camera, fuck the publication, fuck it all. I need to do something. I do this when it comes to very, very dangerous situations.'*

In protest photography, attending to emotions becomes a form of resistance: by documenting struggle with care, photographers remind us that behind every image, there are real lives, grief, and resilience, keeping the humanity of those affected at the forefront. Coming back to Azoulay's ([2008] 2021) description of photography as the creation of a 'civic contract,' activist photography sheds light on how emotions such as compassion, solidarity or guilt organise the oppositional gaze. In this space of the contract, the point of departure cannot only be empathy but must be a covenant for the rehabilitation of humanity in the political sphere. Crucially, we need to move beyond the conception of empathy towards a deeper understanding of the emotional dimension of suffering and protest, to create pathways for lasting collective action and internationalist solidarity.

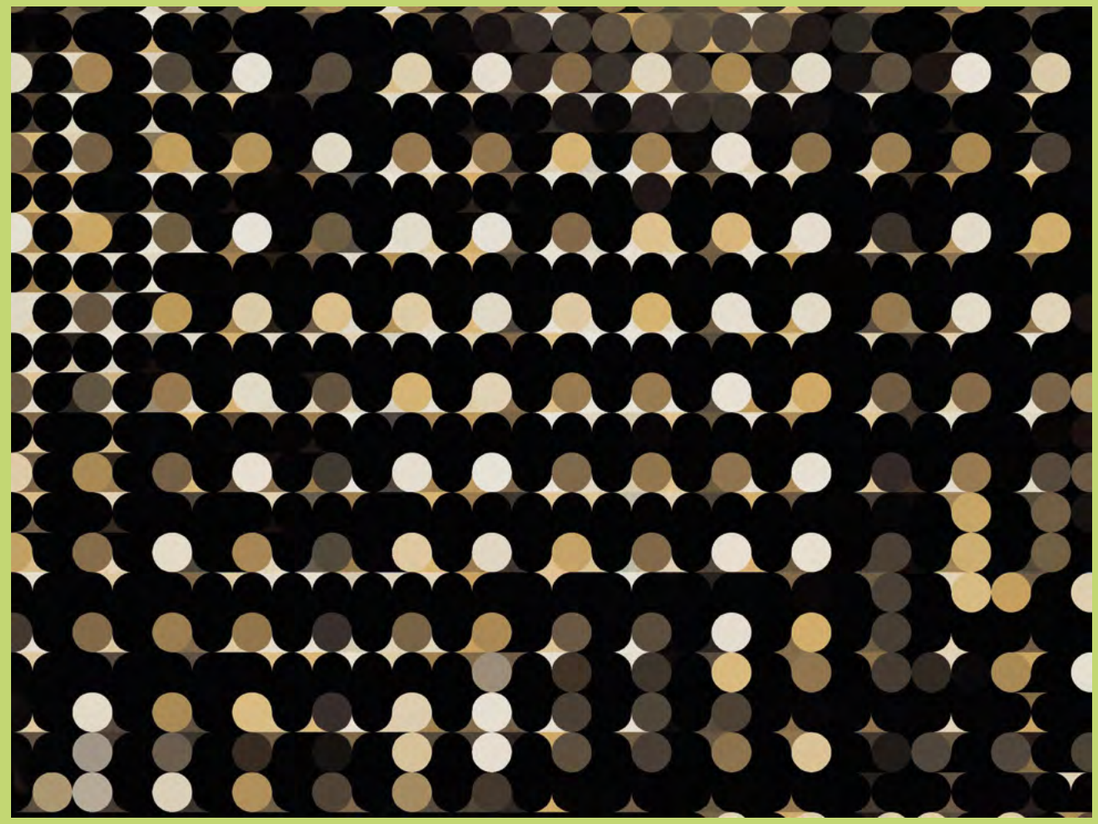
Acts of solidarity show that photographic practices are not isolated; they are embedded in networks of support and resistance, connecting local struggles globally and reinforcing the ethical responsibility to bear witness. Even after more than two years of continuous protests, photographers show up every week to document, share, and build the movement. Their images have already circulated and led to identifications in Palestine, and global protests across Europe and the world. As the movement photographers in Berlin demonstrate, these images concern all of us, no matter where we live. They reveal not only the violence, but also the love for a better world and a liberated Palestine that our actions need to

Protester sitting with a sign
(photo by Cherry @cherryland)

be built on. Photography always includes a fantasy of solidarity; it makes real what is perhaps not real yet. But this is also what we need. It doesn't have to be perfect or aesthetically pleasing, but it becomes an ethical practice that sees our vulnerabilities and agencies as intertwined.

The Third Way: A Manifesto

Nata Simebaji



The Power of the Overlooked
© Nata Simebaji

In every direction, black birds take flight,
Their forms carved against the tempestuous heavens.
As they circle above, they cry their foreboding chorus —
Black birds. Black birds.

Constantly seeking refuge within,
a retreat from the world outside,
may not be the best way to greet a new dawn.

You will learn
To feel the trembling
Of fingertips, which hold
All or nothing at all.
Nothing, just nothing —
Fear not this void.

Words, just words
Streaming like a river's flow
Standing resolute as pines
Cutting like paper's sharp side

Colors dance, blend
On your temples,
Graying with time's ebb and flow.
Past and future intermingle,
Wednesday comes and goes —
Meaningless.

Believe in a third way,
A path beyond these dualities,
Where new possibilities await.

The journey leads not from answer offered,
But from groundless hunch, intuition proffered.
Justice dwells not in the eye's pale light,
The grand cannot serve the grand's sheer might.

The small must seek, must find its own way,
Beyond the trappings of the great's display.

invisible lines in front of our eyes

We step forth,
Feet planted on uncertain ground,
Yet resolute in our stance.

Birds may choose to stay,
Curtains no longer trace the same dance on glass.
The sun's gentle kiss upon the brow,
Guided by coordinates whispered in words.

Revelations evade our sight,
Yet we know, Light, from its boundless grace,
Always births itself anew.

Sparks are cherished,
For the weight of darker days.

Bitterness, once a hollow within,
Now fills with the fire of determination.
Names entwine like roots beneath the soil,
Drawing strength from shared history.

We hear the descent of old orders,
But our ascent has just begun.

all to become a point of anchoring

Will you reveal to reason,
How one suffers from ecstasy?

Let all lose their minds,

For we are all yearning for love.

Join
European Alternatives