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Beyond
the Nation State



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European Alternatives team

Irene Alonso Toucido, Ana Maria Alucai, Billie Dibb, Marta Cillero Manzano, Yasmine Djidel, Ilona Hural, Viktoria Kostova, Ophélie Masson, Niccolò Milanese, Kaia Nisser, Noemi Pittalà, Ségolène Pruvot, Ruxandra Stan, Aurelia Temi, Jessica Valdez

Editing, translations and proofreading

Ana Maria Alucai, Marta Cillero Manzano, Billie Dibb and Noemi Pittalà

Art Direction and Graphic Design

Luca Pantorno - [studiolucapan](http://studiolucapan.com)

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Imagine, Demand, Enact

Printed in 2026



Sandra Alloush (EA Board Member) is an award-winning Syrian journalist, filmmaker, and political refugee based in France, with over 17 years of experience in broadcast media. Sandra is the Interim Chair of the board at the European Network Against Racism (ENAR), and Advocacy Officer for New Women Connectors, a migrant and refugee women-led organization. As a **Pact for Equality** Advocate, she consults with key stakeholders across Europe and several UN bodies on migration policy.

Sara Badri is a researcher and PhD candidate; her interdisciplinary work explores diasporic community collectives through themes of anti-colonial frameworks, transnationalism, solidarity, practices of fugitive care, prefigurative acts, futurity, and alternative world-making. Through storytelling and various media, her work captures the essence of diasporic experiences.

Diego Castel is a political scientist and Research Assistant at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC). He works at the intersection of political actors and institutions, political economy, and critical political theory, with a focus on how social movements and party competition are reshaping Europe's systems of political representation and democratic life.

Patricia Hill Collins is a sociologist, feminist theorist, and Distinguished University Professor Emerita, among the most authoritative voices in the field of Black Feminism, intersectionality theory, and social justice studies.

Dalia Maini is a writer, editor, and community builder. Their work circulates at the intersection between emancipatory politics of bodies in space, social disobedience, and civic creativity. Most recently, their work investigates the sociopolitical dimensions of affect: how emotions function as sites of both oppression and resistance, and how our feelings are constructed by, and sometimes pushed back against, systems of power. Dalia Maini is the editor-in-chief of the street newspaper Arts of the Working Class.

Oleksandra Matviichuk, human rights lawyer, head of the Center for Civil Liberties, Nobel Peace Prize recipient (2022).

Kaia Nisser (EA Ecosystem & Network Coordinator) is a journalist and researcher working at the intersection of democracy, media, and transnational civil society. Born Swedish-Australian and educated in Cambridge and Stockholm, her work spans youth participation, the arts, and democratic resilience across Europe and its neighbourhoods.

Valerii Saenko is a political and social scientist with an interdisciplinary background in development studies, sociology, and business administration. He holds a PhD from Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa. His work engages with questions of corporate social responsibility, and the role of private actors in governance. He has worked as a lecturer in corporate social responsibility and global business, and as an administrative consultant supporting international students navigating migration-related bureaucracy in Italy. His research and professional experience reflect an interest in the intersection of mobility, institutions, and structural inequality within European academia and beyond.

Scuola di Restanza e Futuro is a pedagogical, artistic and political initiative based in Palermo, Sicily. Founded in autumn 2025 with a fellowship from Fondazione Studio Rizoma, it brings together tutors under 35, artists, activists and researchers with deep ties to southern Italy, and a class of young people between 18 and 26 who explore *restanza* as a collectively lived experience and political method. The School is a founding member of the PattoxRestare, a coalition of over sixty Sicilian organisations committed to making staying a free choice rather than an economic constraint.

Joana Soares is a Portuguese freelance journalist, based in Brussels, writing about technology, privacy, and digital rights.

Dimitra Staikou is a Greek lawyer, journalist, and author specializing in geopolitics, international law, and South Asian affairs. Her work focuses on India, China, the Middle East, and the evolving global order. She writes for international media outlets offering analysis on international politics and human rights. She divides her time between Europe and India, where she continues to work on journalism and long-form literary projects.

Federica Tessari is an Italian freelance journalist, based in Brussels, covering security, migrations and digital-social rights.

Eva Verdugo-Raab is a writer and organizer. Her work is rooted in a feminist and decolonial commitment to thinking of justice, equality and freedom through the practices and imaginaries of collective struggle. Working at the intersection of studies of collective organizing and critical studies of security and (human) rights, her research traces how communities resist violence, materialize alternative futures and the power structures that shape their struggles. Eva is trained in Political Science and Human Rights at the London School of Economics and Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg.

Gareth Watkins is a writer currently based in Manchester. He has written for the Los Angeles Review of Books, Tribune, Vulture, MEL, Bandcamp, and others, and hosts the Death Sentence podcast.

Europe's Position in the World

Europe has a position in the world. It is a powerful one and it comes with a language: democracy, human rights, multilateralism, the rule of law.

What this issue examines is the gap between that language and the structures it legitimises, the persistent, organised distance between what Europe declares and what it produces.

That gap is not a failure of implementation. It is not a work in progress. It has a direction, a logic and beneficiaries. And it has costs, which are not distributed evenly.

Who bears those costs is the question this issue asks. It asks it from many positions, in many registers. But the answer, across all of them, points in the same direction: toward those who are racialised, peripheral, feminised, linguistically and epistemically marginalised, or precariously employed, toward those whose lives are shaped by European power without being reflected in its self-image.

The clearest place to see this is also the most violent.

Dalia Maini writes about the Mediterranean as a political surface on which European border governance produces what they call differential harm. The rescue protocols, the externalisation agreements, the calculus of who is saved and who is not. They are the system working as designed, allocating risk according to a hierarchy that the language of European values declines to name. The sea is the same sea. The exposure is not.

Sara Badri and **Valerii Saenko** show the same logic operating inside. Migrant academics in European universities are recruited under the sign of internationalisation and diversity, then required to demonstrate that their difference will not be epistemically disruptive, that their knowledge will enrich the institution without destabilising its frameworks. They call this *performative inclusion*. The gap it describes, between the declared value of diversity and the structural containment of what diversity might actually require, is the same gap the Mediterranean makes visible, transposed into the seminar room.

Sandra Alloush shows it in political time. Writing about Syria's transitional moment after the fall of Assad's regime, she examines how formal democratic processes such as a national conference, parliamentary appointments, can move fast enough to foreclose the participation they claim

to inaugurate. The speed of the process is how consensus gets defined before it can be contested. Her proposal – citizens’ assemblies, drawn from established practice in Ireland, France, Belgium and the United Kingdom – is a mechanism for slowing that foreclosure down, for grounding political authority in something broader than elite agreement. The question she is asking is not only Syrian.

Diego Castel approaches that tension empirically, from within Europe’s own electoral landscape. His comparative analysis across 35 countries finds that the most consistent predictor of radical left political strength is not institutional legacy or union density alone, but the sustained presence of social protest, a public culture of mobilisation that makes transformative demands feel possible. The implication is structural: if Europe’s declared commitment to democracy is to have material consequences, the domestic coalitions capable of forcing those consequences are being built, or failing to be built, right now, in squares and assemblies and movement networks that existing institutions have not designed to accommodate.

The **School of Restanza e Futuro** makes the same argument from the European periphery. Written collectively from Palermo, they document the systematic outflow of young people, predominantly women and queer people, from Southern Italy toward the economic centres of the continent. What the language of economics calls brain drain they name more precisely as extraction: the reproduction, inside Europe’s borders, of the centre-periphery logic that structures its relations with the wider world. The coloniality of power does not stop at Europe’s external frontiers. It runs between Milan and Palermo, between Brussels and Salento. Staying in the margins – *restanza* – is proposed here not as attachment to place but as political refusal.

Water runs through their piece, as it runs through this issue. **The Rivers of Democracy** initiative forms a special insert here. It proposes rivers as subjects of rights, as sites of democratic participation, as entry points for asking who governs the shared conditions of life.

Floating from a geographical periphery to a linguistic one.

The distinction between a language and a dialect is not scientific, it is political, a decision about what deserves to exist in public life and what gets classified as local colour.

Joana Rodrigues Soares and **Federica Tessari** follow Irish, *Gaeilge*, from the underground circuits of Kneecap to the interpreting booths of the European Parliament and find the same double bind that Restanza names from Sicily: recognition that arrives on the centre’s terms, inclusion that does not redistribute power. Official status, institutional visibility, managed heritage and underneath it, the same question. Who decides what a language is for? Who decides what a territory is for? Europe’s peripheries are not geographically distant from its centres, but politically produced by them.

The conversation with **Patricia Hill Collins** arrives here as a necessary anchor. Recorded live at Teatro Garibaldi in Palermo at the Earth Day Med Festival, it brings Collins’s concept of the matrix of domination – the interlocking systems of race, class, gender and territory that structure oppression – into direct dialogue with the issue’s concerns. Collins’s most recent work, *Lethal Intersections*, turns this analytical lens toward compounding harms: the slow, often invisible violence inflicted on racialised and marginalised communities through toxic exposure, ecological devastation and the theft of safe environments. The conversation also draws a distinction central to the issue’s political stakes: between coalitions of convenience, short-term and issue-specific and coalitions of conscience, grounded in long-term ethical commitment. That distinction maps, with uncomfortable precision, onto the tensions this issue has been tracing across the Mediterranean, the seminar room and the square.

Eva Verdugo-Raab’s analysis of the LASTESIS performance *Un violador en tu camino* arrives here as a different kind of answer, one that does not ask the institution to close the gap, because it does not address the institution at all. Reading the performance’s global circulation across more than 300 cities, she develops the concept of a pluriversal feminist internationalism: a politics that holds local specificity and transnational solidarity together without requiring either to disappear into the other. What makes the performance politically significant is precisely that it does not seek recognition. It enacts, in its form and its practice, the social relations it is calling for. The final movement of the issue concerns the infrastructure through which all of this is seen, narrated and contested and the mechanisms through which Europe’s power is exercised in legal and economic form.

Dimitra Staikou's analysis of the EU's Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus and the case of Pakistan makes that mechanism visible in granular detail. GSP+ grants preferential trade access to 65 developing countries in exchange for implementing 27 international conventions on human rights, labour standards and governance. Pakistan has been among its largest beneficiaries since 2014. What Staikou shows is that the gap between declared conditionality and actual enforcement is not technical but political: Pakistan continues to benefit from substantial trade advantages while progress on press freedom, minority rights and the rule of law remains uneven. The question is not whether the instrument is well-designed, but whether the EU is willing to confront the tension between its normative commitments and its strategic and economic interests. It is, in compressed form, this issue's central question.

Gareth Watkins examines the convergence of artificial intelligence and authoritarian aesthetics: the way AI tools are being used not only for surveillance and targeting but for the production of a visual and rhetorical culture that makes far-right power feel natural, inevitable, already arrived. The declared neutrality of technology platforms is one more version of the gap this issue has been tracing, between what a system claims to be and what it structurally produces.

Kaia Nisser examines the conditions under which democratic journalism survives or does not: the concentration of ownership, the defunding of fact-checking, the precarisation of the profession, the systematic online targeting of women journalists. Her argument is that the pressures undermining democratic media are transnational in their coordination and their funding and that a response confined to national systems will always be outpaced. The minimum adequate response operates at the same scale as the problem.

Oleksandra Matviichuk closes the issue by returning to the question that runs through every contribution collected here: what kind of Europe is being produced through the choices its institutions make and through those they refuse to make. As a Ukrainian human rights lawyer and head of the Center for Civil Liberties, her work documenting war crimes and systemic human rights violations brings into sharp focus the consequences of the gap between Europe's declared values and its political actions. Our conversation explores Europe's role in a rapidly changing global landscape,

with particular attention to human rights, democracy, international solidarity and accountability. It addresses Europe's response to Russia's war against Ukraine, the role of civil society and women in conflict settings and the importance of culture and national identity as foundations for democratic resilience.

Matviichuk's reflections also point beyond the immediate crises discussed in these pages. They remind us that Europe cannot be understood solely as an institutional project or a geopolitical actor. Europe remains an unfinished political and cultural space, constantly shaped through struggles over justice, participation, memory and belonging in different parts of the world. The contributions gathered in this issue come from different disciplines, countries and relationships to the institutions they examine, but they share a refusal to accept the gap between Europe's declared values and its structural effects as natural or inevitable. They insist instead on making that gap visible from the positions in which it is lived and experienced.

Europe's position in the world is continuously reproduced through decisions that are made and decisions that are avoided, through institutions that act and institutions that fail to. Yet the Europe that emerges from these pages is not only one defined by contradictions. It is also animated by the possibility of transformation. In the spirit of unity that comes with adventure, the contributors to this issue point toward a Europe that lives up to its promise as a transformative force for peace, reconciliation and democracy in the world. A Europe that remains unfinished, open, permeable and curious. A Europe that generates enthusiasm and inspiration creating the conditions for alternatives to emerge. If there is a common thread running through these contributions, it is the conviction that such a Europe will not be delivered from above, but built through the collective work of those who continue to challenge its exclusions while expanding its democratic horizons.

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These waves will tell us about violence. Differential harm in the Mediterranean

Dalia Maini



Vessel Tracker app
© Dalia Maini

At the port: witnessing complicity

I was carrying a trolley and a handbag when I walked toward the gate, where security checks would allow the crowd of people gathered in an unruly multitude to embark on the ferry. Mostly men of different ages, smoking cigarettes, waiting outside their cars loaded with goods, bags, furniture, and toys. Women and children sat in the vehicles waiting for the gate to open. Many families knew each other and greeted one another with handshakes in a congratulatory manner, as if they had all been invited to an appointment at the port of Salerno, southern Italy, yet were surprised to have made it together on that route, with so much to bring back home and more to maintain across the water.

Several gates, checkpoints, and Maersk containers built the port environment, surrounded by a rocky headland of the Salentinian coast, pierced by tunnels that allowed people and goods to reach the most remote areas inland, places where tourists paid less attention, discouraged by the rawness of the roads. And yet, the mystery and the rituals of the autochthonous population expressed themselves at their best, sheltered by a crown of mountains and nurtured by the Mediterranean sea. This was the landscape of myths and longing, but also of Europe's ongoing colonial violence against North Africa, made concrete. I photographed the Maersk containers for Instagram, a small gesture toward bearing witness to a visible reality. [A report released by the Palestinian Youth Movement](#) identifies the Danish corporation as responsible for nearly all maritime shipments of fighter jet components to F-35 production hubs in California and Texas, connecting suppliers from Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Turkey, Canada, France, and the United Kingdom to Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman, the two US-based defense contractors that run the most critical F-35 production hubs. This company was complicit in genocide, its logo floating on seas already thick with deadly policies.

While ports in Haifa and Tel Aviv welcome international ships bearing weapons and explosives from Mediterranean ports, Israel's colonial logic blocks Palestinian naval traffic

while using the sea to seal, infiltrate, and massacre. The Mediterranean bathes Palestine, yet no Palestinian ships ply its waters. Since 1993, while Oslo peace negotiations were underway, Israel imposed a naval blockade on the Gaza Strip, sealing its Mediterranean port and, in Noura Erkat's words, relegating Palestinians to "bare life" in a bid to take the land without the people. A comprehensive land and sea blockade has strangled the movement of goods and people since 2007, ostensibly to prevent weapon smuggling but functioning as collective punishment. In March 2024, six months into the US-backed genocide, President Biden announced a \$230 million temporary floating pier in Gaza to facilitate aid delivery. The pier shut down two months later, but not before evidence emerged that on June 8th, IDF and US forces used it to infiltrate the Gaza Strip and commit the Nuseirat refugee camp massacre, killing at least 274 Palestinians to free four Israeli captives.

The Freedom Flotilla and European exceptionalism

It was May 31, 2025, and the following day, the Madleen ship, launched by the Freedom Flotilla Coalition, would depart from Catania, Sicily. I felt particularly drawn to sharing the same body of water with this solidarity mission, one that had stirred more empathy in European hearts than the very siege, oppression, and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians ever had. The dehumanization that functioned as justification for the Palestinian genocide shared the same racial and colonial logic that buried, under Frontex border patrols, North Africans in the Mediterranean. Yet the freedom flotilla captured European attention in ways that the ongoing drownings of migrants never did. The spectacle of solidarity offered Europeans a comfortable narrative of their own moral goodness, one that demanded no reckoning with the constitutive violence



Salerno Port.
© Dalia Maini

perpetuated at their own borders. It was easier to support humanitarian gestures in distant waters than to confront the systems of exclusion and death operating as the foundation of their democracies on the same sea. Europeans, after all, fall for aspirational narratives of generosity and humanitarianism with ease, stories that conceal the roots of violence itself. Even solidarity initiatives can reproduce the logic of European exceptionalism: the assumption that Europeans sailing to Gaza represents a more meaningful gesture than North Africans simply trying to cross the same sea in self-exile from their homeland.

Border violence and the traveler-migrant divide

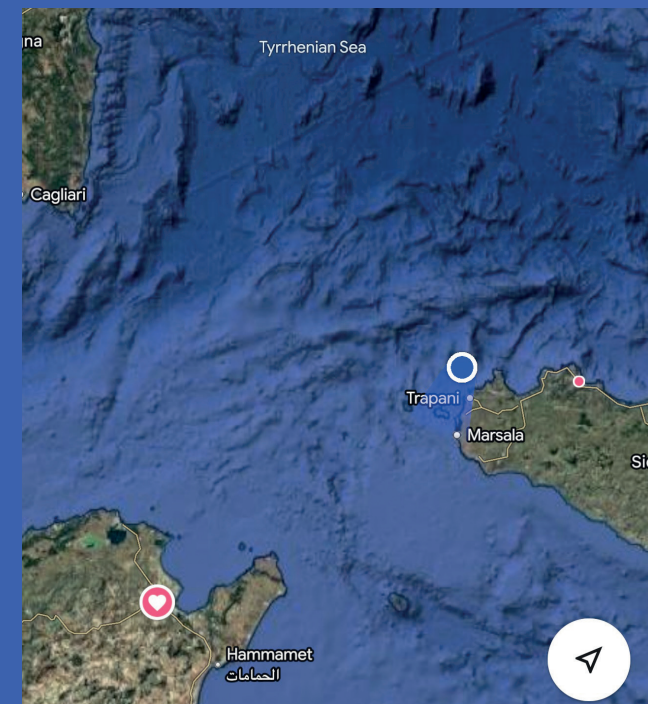
At the port, the space between the soon-to-be passengers of the 28-hour Salerno-Tunis journey was filled with reciprocal gazes, a moment to meet and recognize oneself, to prefigure the reshaping of Tunisian society already on the waters, amongst which I was still unsure about how to find my place. My attempt to mediate my presence amongst the people became more complex when checkpoint guards enforced racial violence in front of the entire group. My passport indicated that the reasons for my travel were different from those of the people around me, who mostly went back home for the Eid holiday. With my appearance suggesting privilege, I was a minority amongst a majority, yet the numeric quantity was not enough to humanize the eyes of border control; the guards waved me forward in the line of passengers. The gesture felt like an assertion of power over me, too, and a violation of any anti-racist determination I try to cultivate.

The difference between being a traveler and being a migrant was starkly visible at that node of overseas logistics: from the vividness of the families' excitement in the air, the size of their luggage, and the attitude of the port police toward me. An understanding I had reached before, mostly moving through airports and taking planes, but I hadn't felt so sharply yet. It was clear now that airports, with their tourist or business purposes, pre-select passengers and partially conceal the violence of the land borders enclosing the European Union. The route and the denigrating ritual attached to it were surely a first time for me, but not a first experience for the group of people who had remembered it at least once before, when they had crossed to reach another shore of the same sea. In this asymmetry of experience, of how racism operated, discomfort crowded out my initial enthusiasm; the

weight of it had already settled in. An embodied acknowledgment that systemic violence regulates bodies differently, but excavates us all.

Externalized borders: Europe's proxy regime

The Mediterranean's geography belies the political reality that European borders now extend far beyond its northern shores, reaching deep into North Africa through a system of externalized border control. Italy has forged agreements with Tunisia and Libya that transform these nations into buffer zones between the Saharan region and Europe, effectively outsourcing the racist work of migration deterrence. Since the 2017 Italy-Libya Memorandum of Understanding, Italy and the European Union have provided funding, naval vessels, training, and operational support to the so-called Libyan Coast Guard, despite overwhelming evidence of abuses, illegal interceptions, and systematic violence against people fleeing persecution. An estimated 169,000 people have been intercepted and forcibly returned to Libya since 2016, subjected to what survivors describe as inhumane violence in detention centers and at the hands of militias. Similar dynamics operate in Tunisia, where an EU Memorandum of Understanding has pledged €105 million in migration-related funds for coast guard equipment, return programs, and technical training designed to prevent Europe-bound migration. This apparatus is a diffused border regime that operates through proxy forces, creating zones where human rights protections dissolve and violence becomes routine, all while Europe absolves itself of guilt.



Distance. © Dalia Maini

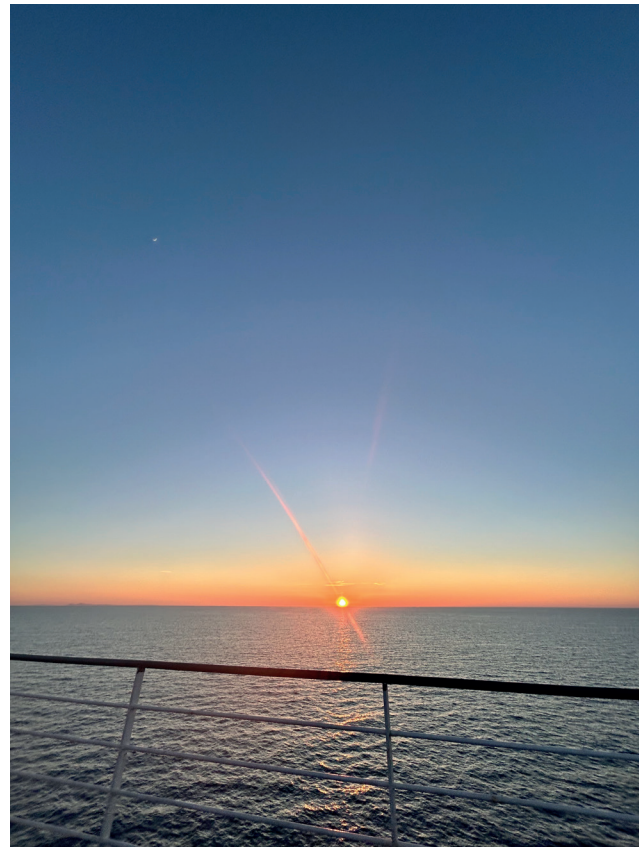
On board: infrastructural exclusion

I had reserved a chair on the ferry, where I spent the night uncomfortably. Around me, people constructed makeshift prayer spots with carpets, bending on the floor facing Mecca. Needing to charge my external battery, I asked the men near an outlet if I could use it once their phones were done. They agreed. While waiting, I went to the bathroom where another outlet was hidden. There, I met a girl, also traveling alone, about to fill her water bottle from the sink, as a bottle of water on board cost 4 euros. I stopped her just in time from drinking the water stagnating in the boat's tanks. Returning to ask for the outlet, I found more people had lined up to charge their phones. The man I'd asked seemed to have forgotten. With no alternatives, I squatted near the bathroom where the hidden outlet stood unused. From there, I observed men coming and going during prayer hours to perform wudu, passing

wet hands over their heads, and washing their feet. A crew member tasked with cleaning worked continuously to dry the floor, their effort betraying something between disgust and resignation. From this observation point, it became clear that the architecture of the bathroom, of the boat itself, was poorly designed to accommodate Muslims whose relationship with God required purification several times each day. The only ferry routing from southern Italy to Tunis had no prayer space, no infrastructure where believers could worship comfortably, and no water available to drink. The infrastructural neglect was deliberate. The ferry becomes a microcosm of how European infrastructure is designed to accommodate certain bodies while rendering others perpetually out of place.

Infrastructure as a colonial weapon

I thought about the notion of infrastructure colonialism. Water infrastructure has served as a powerful instrument of colonial control, embedding capitalist relations and state power through the strategic manipulation of essential resources. During the time of Fascist Libya, Italian colonizers transformed the environment through massive hydraulic projects that simultaneously served regime-building and settler colonization, creating a process where natural systems were reconfigured to serve authoritarian ends and facilitate Italian migration while dispossessing indigenous populations. These infrastructural interventions established ecologically unequal exchanges that privileged colonial settlers' access to water while marginalizing Libyan communities from their own resources. Similarly, in Palestine, water infrastructure has become a mechanism of territorial control and population management at the hands of the occupation, where the construction of pipelines, wells, and distribution networks has created stark disparities in water access between Israeli settlers and Palestinian communities. In both cases, hydraulic infrastructure operates beyond mere technical systems, functioning as physical networks that carve out state spaces, interrupt flows to certain populations while enabling them for others, and ultimately shape the very possibilities of life and livelihood.



Sunrise in the Mediterranean. © Dalia Maini

Smoke on water: histories of violence

Fifteen hours into the crossing, on deck, passengers smoked and gazed at the horizon where water and sky merged into a single continuum. Puffs of smoke from the boat's engines twisted in the wind, mingling with cigarette smoke. The ferry's diesel engines, descendants of the coal-powered steamships that once revolutionized Mediterranean warfare, reminded me that this sea has long been an arena of violent transformation. When Britain deployed steam-powered warships against Muhammad Ali's forces off the coast of Palestine and Lebanon in 1840, it marked more than a military innovation. Those vessels, freed from dependence on wind and current, could impose their will on any shore regardless of weather or season. The coal they burned announced a new imperial logic: nature was no longer a partner but fuel, and the Mediterranean became a proving ground for fossil-powered domination that would reshape the global economy. The presence of fire on water has always signaled the presence of violence. Standing there among the smoke and engines, I imagined how different it must have been to cross these waters by sail, carried by wind in something closer to attunement than conquest. I tried with my eyes to catch glimpses of the flotilla again.

Arrival: the persistence of asymmetry

Hours later, at night as Tunis appeared on the horizon, families began gathering their belongings, goods retrieved from under seats, prayer mats folded and packed away, and children woken from sleep. The excitement was palpable, but so was the exhaustion. We prepared for the next checkpoint, the next performance of documentation, and security; this time, their presence didn't require justification, mine was unquestioned, but neither was particularly welcomed.

The same sea, the same crossing, but never the same journey. The violence of these waters broadcasts itself with brutal precision. Systemic racism does not collapse us into shared suffering; it stratifies us, assigning different degrees of violation, different proximities to harm. My discomfort on that ferry, however sharp, remained peripheral to a regime designed to discipline, humiliate, and ultimately destroy those deemed unworthy of life. The asymmetry that cut through us at Salerno's gates would not resolve itself at Tunis's arrival, nor at any border to come. What these waves tell us about violence is this: it is never equally distributed, never random in its targeting, and those who benefit from its logic, even reluctantly, even with discomfort, remain complicit until the infrastructure itself is dismantled. The ferry will sail again, the checkpoints will remain, and Europe will continue to engineer its moral alibis while the Mediterranean swallows in an abyss those it has been instructed to exclude.

Don't Call Me Resilient: Migrant Academics, Precarity, and Epistemic Injustice in Europe

Sara Badri & Valerii Saenko



Migrant Academic Cage

As migrant academics in Europe working on migration, we recognised the persistent need to talk about migrants' lived experiences inside European universities. In response, we organised a seminar and a follow-up workshop as a collaborative inquiry into precarity, policy, and possibility, titled: *From Lived Experience to Theoretical Frameworks: Rethinking Academic Migration*. The seminar brought together migrant academics from various European universities, mainly non-European scholars, who discussed their research on the topic and anecdotes from their own experiences navigating European academia. The purpose of the event was to situate migrant academics' experiences within European institutions through examining precarity, mobility regimes, epistemic injustice, and emotional labour, amongst other draining challenges. The workshop was a necessary intervention to address gaps within the system.

The workshop, facilitated by us as the authors of this piece, extended these conversations in a more intimate setting. Over three hours, nine migrant academics at different career stages gathered to share reflections on precarity, policy, and everyday academic life. We designed this workshop with the intention to serve a dual purpose: gather reflections and apply an anti-colonial anthropological approach, to emphasise care and mutual recognition. By positioning ourselves as internal critics, we collectively researched our own tribe, working with migrant academics as migrant academics¹.

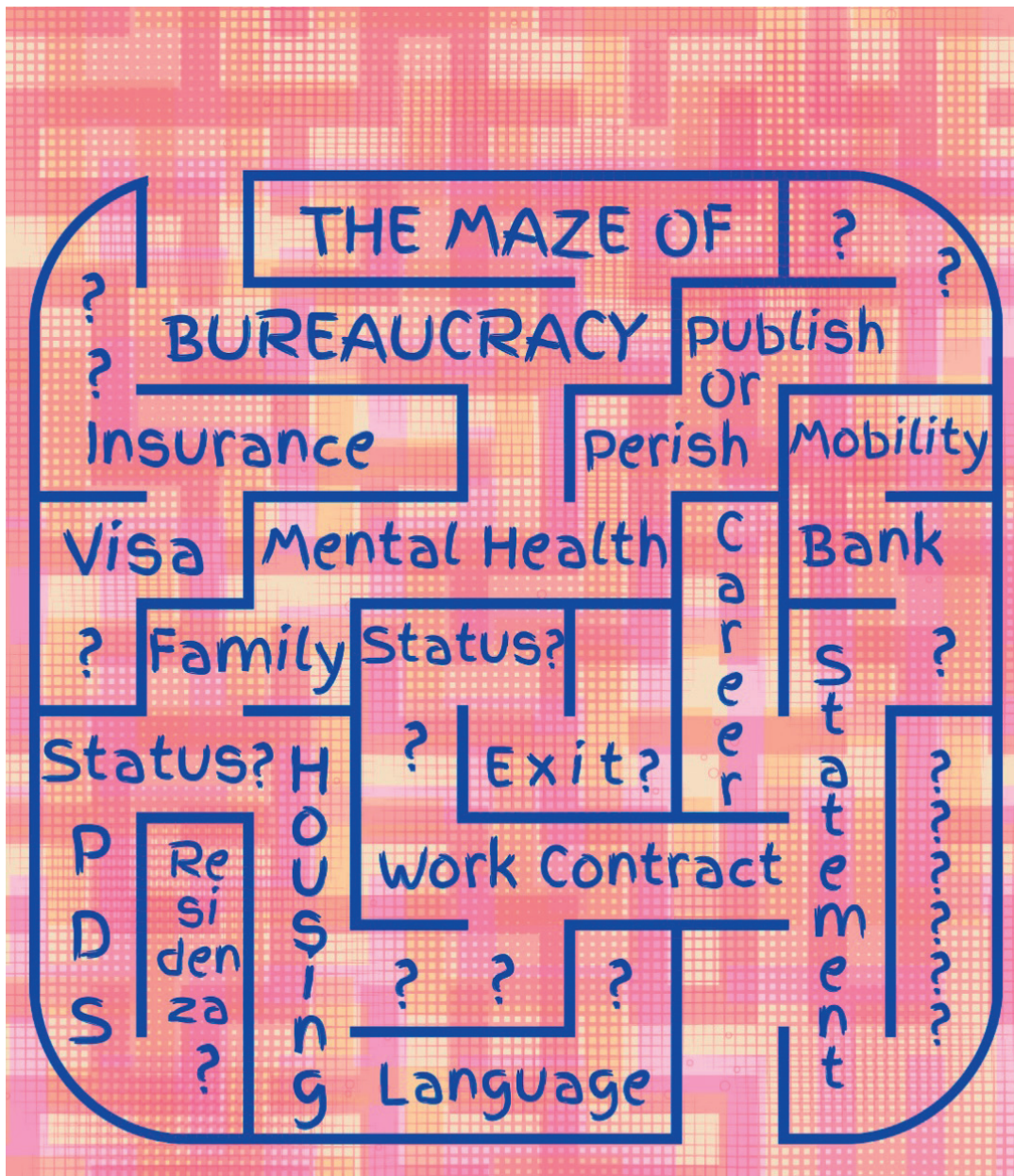
The workshop opened with an icebreaker activity. During the introductory section, keywords were collected while participants shared their reflections. They built on each other's thoughts and illustrated their ideas on interpretive posters. In this article, we draw from the themes discussed during the workshop: symbolic desirability, performative inclusion, epistemic injustice, gaslighting, resilience, anti-migrant bureaucratic systems, and other depleting challenges. This piece emphasises that embodied knowledge generates theory from lived experience, presenting alternative ways to move this unlearning debate forward.

Setting the Scene from Lived Experiences

Migrant academics often embody an ironic institutional paradox; symbolically desirable yet epistemically inconvenient. Even attending to their bureaucratic needs is often perceived as burdensome by institutions. Their difference is framed as a resource, but also as potentially disruptive. Diversity is desired, yet contained, not accommodated, engaged with, or genuinely encouraged; in fact, feared in some cases. In this context, diversity in academia can be performed symbolically by institutions for prestige, legitimacy, or EU funding. Performative inclusion², therefore becomes a form of reputational capital, enhancing institutions' moral and global standing without reconfiguring material power structures. Performative inclusion is often evident in the use of diversity buzzwords in mission statements and tokenism, while systemic biases remain unaddressed³. This performance also extends to hiring practices, superficial events, and diversity committees that fail to produce actionable internal policies for shared power, influence, and epistemic justice. Migrant academics' difference is courted for its aesthetic and symbolic value, yet carefully policed to prevent epistemic or structural disruption.

Epistemic injustice⁴ has a significant impact on migrant academics' personal well-being and careers. Their credibility and legitimacy as scholars are continually called into question. This is rooted in hermeneutical injustice⁵ whereby dominant narratives ignore marginalised experiences or cast doubt on their competence. It also manifests as epistemic exploitation, for example, when migrant academics are expected to translate cultures, languages, and act as gateways to entire regions. Migrant academics are also expected to serve as the primary explainers of their own injustices; this article and the prior workshop are clear examples of such additional labour. As their credibility is questioned, curriculum erasure ensues. Consequently, their knowledge and contributions are excluded from or misrepresented within dominant Eurocentric frameworks. This, in turn, leads to silencing or perhaps the managed containment of epistemic plurality. Institutions fear epistemic disruption: intellectual traditions, methods, or critiques that might destabilise Western or neoliberal norms. Thus, a managed-differences approach is produced, one that sanitises diversity to make it more palatable, which leads migrant academics to self-censor as a habitual response. This process is also described as epistemic domestication; that is, becoming the non-threatening grateful immigrant.

1. Patricia Hill Collins. *Learning from the outsider within: The sociological significance of Black feminist thought*. Social Problems, 1986.
2. Sara Ahmed. *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Duke University Press, 2012.
3. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *Can the subaltern speak?*. In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture*. University of Illinois, 1988.
4. Epistemic injustice is the harm that occurs when social prejudice unfairly diminishes a person's credibility, understanding, or recognition as a knower. Miranda Fricker. *Hermeneutical Injustice. In Epistemic injustice: power and the ethics of knowing*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
5. Kristie Dotson. *A Cautionary Tale: On Limiting Epistemic Oppression*. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 2012.



The Body is Data

A pervasive exhaustion emerges from the constant bureaucracy, institutional epistemic violence, exploitation, and the continuous navigation of precarity. One scholar captured this infuriating condition by stating *"I'm not coming into your space; you make the effort."*, underscoring the one-sided, draining demands of bureaucratic and neoliberal academic structures. Within this landscape, the foreign body, frequently cast as alien, is expected to absorb greater hardship and is routinely denied empathy. The precarities that accompany migration are framed as the migrant's own choice, summarised in the implicit injunction *"he should have known better"*.

Rather than reproducing the strands of dominant literature that alienate migrant bodies, flatten and silence their per-

spective, we foreground migrants' embodied experiences as crucial sites of knowledge production. Therefore, the following section provides insights into how centring views of the migrant body challenge notions of objectivity and institutional erasure of emotional and bureaucratic harm.

One participant speaks of the body as a map, a guiding instrument that is also defiant. After navigating a suffocating system for many years, her chosen illustration during the ice-break session reads: *"Do not come close. If you touch me, I have spikes and will use them against you to protect myself."* This reflects a form of impostor syndrome, she explained, not in the sense of intellectual inadequacy, but in terms of social non-belonging and a need for a support system. Another participant embodies the figure of one who is powerful, knowledgeable and burdened, yet presents himself with gentleness

and a non-threatening demeanour: *"I go to the post office and tell them, io bello, haha, I am not a threat..."* His primary defence mechanism is pre-emptive justification in response to an assumed threatening presence and ongoing marginalisation; a dynamic he experiences as deeply frustrating.

Resilience is routinely demanded of migrant academics: how much can you carry, and why can't you carry more? The term resilience has been weaponised against marginalised groups, including migrant academics. They are expected not only to be resilient but to exhibit a grateful resilience. Demonstrating an exceptional capacity to bear and navigate additional burdens to prove their competence and justify their presence within an institutional environment clearly not designed with them in mind. Institutional expectations are sustained through a romanticisation of resilience that forecloses space for envisioning alternative conditions. Resilience is not simply encouraged; it is normalised as a core requirement, embedded in the narrative that surrounds migrant academics' lives. *"Don't Call Me Resilient"*, one of the interpretive posters exclaimed. In response, there is a need for a conceptual framework that calls for less resilience and more acts of resistance. Such a framework would also shift the burden of adaptation by demanding greater resilience and responsibility from those occupying dominant positions within the academy.

Gaslighting⁶ emerged as another central theme in participants' reflections. They described intolerable, traumatising exploitation, suffocating bureaucratic demands, and relentless expectations placed on the migrant's body and mind. Conditions that make rest and rejuvenation essential rather than well-earned. These harms are intensified when migrants' lived experiences are not recognised as knowledge, but instead are repeatedly questioned in ways that imply they themselves are the problem. That they should have known better, worked harder or held the "right" papers to make things easier for the institution. This logic only compounds violence. Their circumstances are, in fact, produced and constrained by the very structures that frame these difficulties as individual failings rather than systemic violence.

Expectations and Practice

Much is expected of migrant academics entering the world of higher education and research in the EU context. As mentioned previously, migrant academics are often presented as part of the positive virtues of institutions and countries. Reflecting the breadth and depth of EU institutions' acceptance of foreign visions or presenting institutions as spaces of many opportunities for migrants.

In relative terms, the presence of migrant academics at a university or a country is already a major step. There are relatively few spaces that consider facilitating migrants. Academia in the EU is one of those spaces. In absolute terms, this picture is somewhat misleading. Formally, universities are not responsible for migrant academics' success in obtaining the needed paperwork, e.g. residence permits, or lack thereof. Nor are institutions responsible for academics' ability to travel for fieldwork, participate in conferences or other activities. The migrant academic alone is responsible for preparing and obtaining all the legal foundations for equal opportunities as the EU colleagues.

This burden is the foundation of the pervasive exhaustion of migrant academics. This work is expected with partial support from universities. As one presenter from the seminar mentioned, the support from universities is highly differentiated, often connected to the academic's background. There is a fine line between what the university is responsible for in terms of supporting migrant academics' bureaucratic struggles and what the staff can actually facilitate. These are often not clearly outlined responsibilities and become, in essence, care work that staff members are morally inclined to do. Yet such work is often outside of their clearly defined duties, and staff do not always have the capacity for it.

This often results in individualised help based on individual relations between the staff members and academics. It relies on whether the migrant academic and the staff member have the capacity to find solutions together. The atmosphere of informality, while it has its traditional and useful sides, un-

6. Paige L. Sweet, *The Sociology of Gaslighting*. *American Sociological Review*, 2019.

fortunately fails to address the systematic problems faced by all migrant academics. A single request from the university's international office to the migration police headquarters can successfully expedite bureaucratic processes. Yet there is no system of accountability in the event of failure.

Migrant academics cannot hold the university fully accountable for their difficulties in navigating bureaucracy to ensure their "legality". Universities, as well as migrant academics, have very limited channels to hold the state accountable for the anti-migrant bureaucratic system. Migrant academics expect the university to facilitate the same opportunities as those available to native and EU academics. Universities expect migrant academics to deal with much of the legal and cultural burden themselves. In practice, both end up doing extra work that distracts them from their core roles.

Essentially, European universities are embedded within a specific system where they often depend on state and/or EU funding to continue their operations. A major part of such funding is the requirement for internationalisation. It brings prestige and funding under the ideals of knowledge and brains crossing borders into the host country. At the same time, the policy of host countries, especially in recent years, drifts towards stricter migration regulations, quotas, control over what constitutes a high-quality expert, and threats of deportation in case the migrant speaks up against the host country's policies.

This puts the requirement on universities to bring in international minds, yet it does not create opportunities for structural shifts that help universities facilitate their arrival. As a result, responsibility and burden for such facilitation are shifted from the host country and university to the guest. It becomes the guest's responsibility to figure out how to stay and thrive in a potentially hostile host environment. All while the host university is limited by jurisdiction and the individual capacity of the internationalisation office's staff. Both lack the capacity to introduce systemic change and sit only in the space of changing their internal procedures.

Collaborative Reflection

The collaborative workshop functioned as a space of collective sense-making, methodological intervention, and practice of group introspection. Through its emphasis on shared authority over authorship, agency, meaning, and above all, mutual vulnerability, it models horizontal forms of facilitation. Within this framework, researchers acted as facilitators of a safe and prolific environment in which both participants and researchers contributed to and engaged with every phase of the process. Considering the heaviness of the themes discussed, participants variously described the workshop as therapeutic and healing, noting that it brought them closer together and generated a sense of joy, highlighting collegial solidarity and support systems.

We found that the shared positionality between researchers and participants shifted power dynamics. This shift affected the kind of data generated and how that data can be mobilised, interpreted, and narrated. Participants' emotions and experiences were acknowledged, reflected upon, and mirrored back. Precisely because participants and facilitators shared closely aligned, perhaps often identical experiences, the space enabled forms of recognition not typically available in more conventional research settings. Essentially, this intentional methodology demonstrates that data is situated within and between the researchers and participants. In this sense, the workshop drew on a deeper, introspective, embodied knowledge that could only surface through shared experience and a carefully designed atmosphere of trust, co-produced by researchers and researched-with⁷.

7. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*. (2nd ed.). Zed Books, 2012.

Syria Needs a National Dialogue: Why Citizens' Assemblies Could Be the Start of a Real Political Solution

Sandra Alloush

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When the regime of Bashar al-Assad fell on December 8th, 2024, the country stood on the verge of a historic moment. After decades of authoritarian rule and long years of war, a rare opportunity emerged to rebuild the state on new foundations, based on genuine political representation, democratic institutions, and a social contract that recognizes the diversity of Syrian society.

However, the trajectory taken by the transitional phase since then has generated growing disappointment among wide segments of the population.

The National Conference held in February 2025, shortly after the fall of the regime, was supposed to serve as a starting point for an inclusive national dialogue. Yet the speed of its organisation, the narrow scope of participation and the rapid issuance of its outcomes made it, for many, closer to a fleeting political event than a genuine platform for discussing the country's future. Instead of opening the door to broad representation of all components of Syrian society, the conference appeared limited and incapable of hosting the national conversation Syria needs at this critical moment. It thus became the first missed golden opportunity of the transitional president.

This was followed by the announcement of parliamentary elections, presented as a step toward building new political institutions under the leadership of Ahmed al-Sharaa. However, the process was largely symbolic, relying heavily on appointments rather than open electoral competition. As a result, many Syrians once again found themselves excluded from the political process, whether from civil society, youth, women, religious, ethnic and social minorities, or the millions of Syrians in the diaspora. To date, the new parliament has not even convened, reinforcing the perception that these national milestones have not translated into real political institutions, but rather amounted to a political performance aimed at appeasing external observers.

For many Syrians, both the National Conference and the parliamentary elections were not merely routine political

procedures, but pivotal moments that could have reopened the public sphere after years of closure and monopolization by power. Yet the way these processes were managed created the impression that the transitional authority has no intention of changing its monopolistic mindset or opening the public space for meaningful participation in decision-making, as if society were not a genuine partner in shaping the transitional phase.

At the same time, the country has witnessed security and political developments that have deepened internal divisions. Acts of violence and sectarian massacres carried out by forces linked to the transitional government against Syrian communities such as the Druze and Alawites have widened the trust gap between the authorities and large segments of society. Other regions have seen tensions and clashes with Syrian Kurds, while Christian figures and institutions have expressed growing concern over marginalization, repression and incidents of arbitrary killings.

Taken together, these developments have revived long-standing fears among Syrians that the transitional phase could turn into a battleground of competing identities rather than the beginning of a unifying national process.

In such moments, the central question is not only how to build political institutions, but how to rebuild trust between society and the state and how society can assert its will without resorting to violence.

One model worth considering in the Syrian context is what is known in some democratic settings as **citizens' assemblies**. This idea involves bringing together a group of citizens selected through a carefully designed random process that reflects the true diversity of the society. Participants meet for a defined period, receive input from experts, listen to different perspectives and then deliberate among themselves before issuing recommendations to decision-makers.

Citizens' assemblies are not merely theoretical - they have been implemented in several countries facing complex

political or social divisions, particularly when traditional institutions have struggled to build broad consensus. Their purpose is not to replace elected bodies, but to expand participation and give society a direct role in public deliberation.

In Ireland, for example, the government established a citizens' assembly in 2016 composed of randomly selected individuals to discuss highly sensitive issues, including abortion legislation. After months of deliberation and consultation with experts and supporters of different positions, the assembly produced recommendations that helped pave the way for a national referendum that changed the law.

In France, a citizens' assembly on climate policy was created in 2019, bringing together 150 participants representing the country's social and geographic diversity. The assembly formulated environmental proposals and policies that were later submitted to the government and parliament.

Similar democratic practices have taken place in the United Kingdom and Belgium, where such assemblies have been used to address complex public issues or even integrated into the democratic system itself.

These experiences demonstrate that citizens' assemblies can become an effective tool when countries face sensitive political moments or deep social division. They allow citizens to participate in public debate outside of party or union frameworks and provide a structured space for dialogue that can help build broader societal consensus.

In the Syrian case, such assemblies could offer the beginning of a different kind of national dialogue, one that moves beyond traditional political formats that have been restricted or sidelined by the transitional authority. Instead of confining political discussion to narrow elite circles or closed arrangements, they could open the door to broader participation that reflects the country's diverse social and cultural reality.

These assemblies could include participants from different Syrian regions and backgrounds, including Arabs,

Kurds, Druze, Alawites, Christians and non-religious individuals, as well as representatives of the millions of Syrians in the diaspora.

The issues they could address are numerous: the future political system, mechanisms of transitional justice, reconstruction, refugee return and the protection of the rights of various social, ethnic, religious and cultural groups.

Naturally, citizens' assemblies cannot replace elected democratic institutions. However, they may open a necessary window for dialogue in a country still emerging from years of war and division and one that has yet to experience genuine political participation or a true national dialogue.

Perhaps Syria today, more than ever, needs spaces that allow Syrians to sit together outside the logic of political, sectarian or regional alignment, and to collectively reflect on the future of their country. In such a sensitive transitional phase, giving society this space may be a first step toward building genuine political legitimacy grounded in agreements developed from the bottom up and meaningfully reflected in the policies and laws shaped by those in power.

From factories to squares: how protest is rewiring Europe's radical politics, and what that means for transnational futures

Diego Castel



Amsterdam (Dam Square), 16 May 2021. Protest banner linking feminist and anti-fascist politics to transnational solidarity with Palestine. Photo © Karen Elliot, CC BY-SA 2.0.

Europe likes to speak the language of values: democracy, rights, peace, multilateralism. But values are never just slogans. They are practiced through institutions, and institutions only move when someone builds power that can endure. If Europe is serious about listening, unlearning, repairing, and redistributing power beyond its borders, we should first ask what kind of power is being built inside European democracies right now, and through which infrastructures of collective action people learn to act together.

For much of the twentieth century, that question had an obvious answer. Parties were anchored in workplaces. Trade unions were not only bargaining machines but civic schools, capable of turning everyday routines into political identities. That ecosystem has been thinning out for decades. As Richard Sennett argued in *The Corrosion of Character*, de-industrialization, precarious work, fragmented careers, and neoliberal restructuring have made “class” harder to live as something shared and easier to carry as something private. The demand for radical change, however, did not disappear. It moved, sometimes quietly, sometimes all at once.

You can see that relocation in the electoral fortunes of Europe's radical left. Over the last fifteen years, these forces have swung between breakthroughs that, in the old communist phrase, ‘stormed the skies’ and painful collapses. Explanations often retreat into internal factors: charismatic leadership, organizational novelty, freshness of brand and message. All of that matters. Still, it does not fully explain why some radical left parties become viable vehicles for social anger while others stagnate. To understand the difference, we need to look outside: at the social ecology around them, what happens in the streets and not only in parliaments.

To explore that ecology, I assembled a comparative dataset of 35 European countries, using their most recent national elections between 2021 and 2025¹. I examined the aggregated radical left vote and, where it made sense, the vote for the main radical left party. Then I tested whether protest and trade union strength help account for these outcomes once we control for macroeconomic conditions, distrust in the EU, turnout change, and party competition.

1. Diego Castel, *Datos y código del TFG: “Entre fábricas y plazas: sindicatos, movimientos sociales y el voto a la izquierda radical en Europa”*. Version 2.0 (Harvard Dataverse, 2025). <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/KAMMYS>.
2. Diego Castel, *Entre fábricas y plazas: sindicatos, movimientos sociales y el voto a la izquierda radical en Europa* (undergraduate thesis, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, 2025), Table 3.

A necessary caveat: correlation is not causation. This is not a causal design. The association can run in both directions, and unobserved factors can shape both protest and voting. The aim here is more modest and, I think, still useful. I want to see which correlates stand out consistently across contexts, and then ask what that pattern implies for strategy, organization, and the future of European democracy.

Two variables stand out. The first is protest intensity, measured as the number of protest events per 100,000 inhabitants in the two years preceding each election. The second is institutional legacy: whether the radical left held parliamentary representation in the previous legislature. Across specifications, both protest and legacy are positively and statistically significantly associated with radical left electoral strength, while other factors do not show robust effects once protest and legacy are included.

The protest signal is striking. Holding other variables constant, more protests are associated with higher radical left vote shares. In the aggregated vote model, each additional protest event per 100,000 inhabitants corresponds to roughly four tenths of a percentage point more support². It may sound small. But aggregated, and across countries that do not look the same politically, it points to something meaningful: when mobilization becomes routine, the radical left is more likely to become electorally relevant.

This suggests a concrete dynamic. When protest becomes part of the political “weather,” radical left parties stop looking like marginal options and start looking like plausible vehicles. Legacy matters too. A party that already occupies institutional space, with seats, staff, media access, local networks, and a recognizable name, has an advantage when new waves of anger arrive. When people search for a way to turn grievance into effective power, an already legible actor changes what feels realistic.

Together, protest and legacy suggest that radical left success today depends less on the classic labor nexus and more on an interaction between movement energy and institutional memory. Protest creates intensity: an atmosphere in which ordinary people experience politics as something they do, not only something done to them. Institutional footholds create continuity: an organizational bridge that can keep that intensity from evaporating once the media cycle moves on and the pressures of everyday survival return.

This helps clarify a puzzle in recent European politics. Many radical left parties emerge as movement parties, or as parties interwoven with movement networks, especially in moments of crisis. But movement energy is volatile. It rises, then it exhausts itself. Without durable structures, episodes of

collective action can burn bright and fade quickly. Institutional footholds do not replace organizing. They can, however, store and redeploy political capacity over time, and they give movements a public face that is harder to ignore. Recent work describes this relationship as movement party co-evolution, with meaningful variation across contexts³.

Put simply: protest is not just noise or anger. It is recruitment, learning, and cultural signaling. It teaches what can be demanded, what can be risked, and what solidarities become imaginable. When that learning consolidates, parties can speak and act as part of a broader collective force. That force shifts what becomes politically thinkable and therefore politically transformable. People do not only vote; they also learn what they are entitled to demand.

So what about unions? The lack of robust effects here does not mean unions are irrelevant or that they no longer shape policy. It means something more specific: in this electoral cycle, standard indicators such as union density and bargaining coverage do not consistently predict radical left vote shares once protest and legacy are included. Union membership is often more stable, and frequently older, than the precarious sectors where anger concentrates. Institutional strength can coexist with political caution. The left has to treat that mismatch as a strategic reality, not as an abstract debate.

If protest tracks radical left breakthroughs more consistently than union density does, we should take seriously the idea that Europe's organizational bases are shifting from factories to squares, from long term workplace membership toward episodic, networked mobilization. That shift can be energizing. It can politicize people who were never reached by older structures. It can also be fragile. Without durable care, training, and internal democracy, movements and movement linked parties can burn out, fragment, or become dependent on media cycles. The square is powerful, but it is not automatically durable.

All of this matters for Europe's position in the world in a direct way. Europe's global role is not only a question of foreign policy elites. It is shaped by domestic struggles over borders, climate, militarization, trade, and the meaning

of solidarity. A Europe that claims it wants to "repair" beyond its borders must confront a hard fact: much of its stability rests on exclusion through border regimes, unequal mobility, outsourced violence, and selective memory. Whether those contradictions are challenged depends on who holds power inside Europe and how they obtained it.

Protest driven representation is double edged. On the hopeful side, contentious politics can generate new forms of internationalism. Movements learn transnationally even when institutions pretend they do not. Tactics travel, slogans translate, networks cross borders. We have seen it in solidarity mobilizations for Palestine across European capitals, and in housing movements growing in many cities, from tenants' unions to mass demonstrations against speculation and evictions. When radical left parties respond to movement pressure, they can connect street level demands to legislative and municipal action.

But protest does not automatically produce inclusive internationalism. It can be captured by nationalist or exclusionary projects, and it can be met by securitization that normalizes emergency politics. In many countries, the far right also grows in polarized contexts. If the left fails to channel discontent expressed through mobilization, other actors can co-opt it and turn a moment of conflict into regression, where fear and punishment replace demands for justice. That is why institutional footholds and media presence matter. They make it harder for anger to be monopolized by reactionary entrepreneurs and help keep solidaristic frames visible in public life.

This is also why the presence of a transformative left inside institutions is vital. Street mobilization creates pressure, but without parliamentary footholds, national and European, that pressure often dissipates or gets absorbed into symbolic gestures. A left that is present in national parliaments and in the European Parliament can confront far right narratives and, at the same time, make social democracy sweat. It can force reforms and concrete proposals that shift the baseline of what is politically possible.

In Gramscian terms, this is a dialectic across three spaces that must reinforce one another if a counter hegemonic bloc is to last. Parliamentary institutions translate demands into binding decisions. Ideological arenas shape frames and common sense through media, culture, and everyday conversation. Street politics makes power visible, expands participation, and changes what people believe they are entitled to demand.

What does this mean in practice for a democratic, decolonial, solidaristic Europe? It suggests that Europe's futures

will be shaped by infrastructures that connect everyday life to collective action. If unions are no longer the primary anchor for radical left electoral change, new anchors must be built and defended: tenants' unions, care worker networks, climate justice coalitions, migrant led organizations, and cross border solidarity structures that do not rely only on elite NGOs. Some of these already exist; the task is to scale them, connect them, and protect them.

An inclusive internationalism capable of real change can only be understood transnationally, because the defining conflicts of this century are already transnational: anti racist struggle against anti immigrant discourse, feminist politics centered on care and social reproduction, and climate justice against extractive economies. Internationalism is not a slogan. It is a practice of building power across differences, linking the defense of migrant lives to housing and labor rights, and treating climate justice as a fight that crosses borders by definition.

We should also be humble about what elections can do on their own, without becoming cynical about institutions. Electoral breakthroughs are more likely when they are embedded in broader cycles of contention and when there is a party with enough accumulated capacity to convert contention into representation, a bottom up voice that can travel from barricades to plenary sessions, with enough public presence to compete in the terrain where common sense is formed.

Europe's position in the world will not be transformed by nicer speeches about values. It will change when domestic coalitions are strong enough to force coherence between Europe's words and Europe's practices. If coalition building infrastructures are shifting from factories to squares, the central task is to build bridges between movement energy and institutional memory so that moments of uprising become long term projects of repair and redistribution.

This is also a strategic opening. If protest ecosystems are the most reliable companion of left representation today, then the European left has an opportunity to make internationalism material again: coordinated transnational campaigns, shared organizing infrastructures, solidarities that travel beyond borders, while keeping that internationalism inclusive and firmly opposed to racism, fascism, patriarchal care regimes, and climate denial.

That requires an active movement in the streets and a transformative left inside institutions, capable of confronting far right narratives, preventing the co-optation of discontent, and pressuring social democracy into reforms that would otherwise remain off the table. That is what the protest leg-

acy pattern points to: a Europe whose contentious politics is being rewired toward new forms of collective action. The question is whether those forms will become inclusive, transnational, and solidaristic, capable of real repair and redistribution, or whether they will remain fragmented and vulnerable to the politics of exclusion.

3. Daniel Keith and Myrto Tsakatika, "Linkages between Radical Left Parties and Social Movements: Mapping Co-evolution, Explaining Variation," in *The Palgrave Handbook of the Radical Left*, eds. Luke March, Fabien Escalona, and Daniel Keith (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 69-97.

Staying as a refusal Notes from Southern Europe on extraction, care and internal coloniality

Scuola di Restanza e Futuro



Palermo, 8 November 2025. Restanza/Futuro: A Self-Narrated and Imaginary Assembly, curated by the Scuola di Restanza and Futuro as part of the Between Land and Sea Festival. Photo © Tito Puglilelli.

Who can afford to stay?

Every Saturday afternoon, a circle of young people between 18 and 30 sits in a deconsecrated church in the historic centre of Palermo. We ask this question. We already know the answer.

Europe speaks the language of values: democracy, human rights, multilateralism, shared futures. It also speaks, more quietly, the language of logistics: talent flows, human capital mobility, labour market flexibility. Between these two languages, a third remains mostly unspoken: the language of extraction.

Southern Italy is inside Europe. It is not, in any formal sense, a colony. But it performs a colonial function. It trains graduates and exports them. It maintains military infrastructure for powers that make decisions elsewhere. It receives structural funds calibrated to metrics defined by northern institutions. It is told that the problem is its own backwardness, that the solution is to become more like the North, and that the highest form of emancipation available to its young people, above all young women and queer people, is to leave.

This article is a refusal of that story. It is written from inside the School of Restanza and Future: a pedagogical, artistic and political initiative operating in Palermo since autumn 2025, and from within the broader movement of the **PattoxRestare**, sixty-plus organisations across Sicily that have committed collectively to making staying a political choice rather than an economic constraint. We write from a position that is hybrid, peripheral and connected, critical and privileged, inside the systems we critique, and we name that position explicitly, because epistemic honesty is part of what we mean by decolonial practice.

The internal periphery

The concept of ‘internal coloniality’ has a long theoretical genealogy, from Gramsci’s analysis of the *Questione Meridionale*¹ to Michael Hechter’s sociology of cultural division of labour², but it tends to disappear when applied to contemporary Europe. A clarification is necessary here. We use Quijano’s term coloniality, not colonialism, deliberately. Coloniality names the persistence of colonial hierarchies after formal colonial endings, the continuation of extractive relationships through institutions, norms, and epistemologies rather than through juridical status or direct occupation. Southern Italy is not a colony in any formal sense. It does not require that designation to be recognised as a site where coloniality operates. The distinction matters: it is not a weakening of the claim, but a more precise one.

Europe’s colonial history is framed as external: something done to Africa, Asia, the Americas. The internal hierarchies of the European space, between its productive cores and its peripheral regions, are coded instead as matters of development policy, regional cohesion, or lagging institutional capacity. The word “colonialism” is not used. Neither, for that matter, is “extraction”.

We think both words apply. Anibal Quijano’s concept of the coloniality of power, the persistence of colonial hierarchies beyond formal colonial endings, reproduced through institutions, norms and epistemologies³, does not require crossing an ocean to operate. It operates between Milan and Palermo. It operates between Brussels and Athens. It operates, with structural consistency, between the productive cores of the European economy and its internal peripheries.

Consider the data. The SVIMEZ report *A Country, Two Emigrations* (February 2026, with Save the Children)⁴ documents the following: between 2002 and 2024, almost 350,000 graduates under 35 left southern Italy for the Centre-North. The net loss, after returns, is 270,000 people. The share of graduates among southern migrants aged 25 to 34 has tripled in two decades: from 20% in 2002 to around 60% in 2024. A further 63,000 graduates under 35 have left Italy entirely, with a net loss of 45,000.

The emigration is gendered in ways that make the structural dimension impossible to ignore. Between 2002 and 2024, approximately 195,000 graduate women left southern Italy for the Centre-North, 42,000 more than men. By 2024, nearly 70% of female southern migrants were graduates, compared to 22% in 2002.⁴

The interpretation is straightforward: the southern labour market has no adequate place for its most educated



Palermo, 22 November 2025. DIASPORA MERIDIONALE, a workshop and collective action curated by Sidonie Pellegrino with the School of Restanza and Future © Peppe Tornetta.

women. Or rather, it has the place it has always had for them, domestic, unpaid, invisible. The female employment rate in the south is 35%, the worst in Europe. The gap between male and female employment rates stands at 23.8 percentage points, against 13.9 in the North. There are no reliable data on queer people, because the data collection framework does not ask.

Immanuel Wallerstein's world-system theory⁵ describes global economic geography as structured into core, semi-periphery and periphery, regions whose relationship is not of difference but of function. Value produced in the periphery flows systematically to the core. That structure reproduces itself inside the borders of the European Union with considerable precision: Southern Europe is not outside Europe, it is Europe's internal periphery, actively incorporated into capitalism on terms that serve the centre.⁶ The intellectual tools for naming this were built, in large part, in Recife and Mexico City, dependency theory emerged from precisely the experience of regions that generated wealth they did not retain. What is specific to the European case is the institutional architecture that naturalises this transfer – structural funds, cohesion metrics, development frameworks – while calling it solidarity.

The militarisation of the margin

The peripheral function of Southern Europe is not only economic. It is also strategic and military, and this dimension of internal colonialism is rarely named.

Sicily alone hosts at least five NATO and US military installations. The MUOS system at Niscemi, a global satellite communications relay for US military operations, occupies nearly 20 square kilometres inside a protected nature reserve, in an area of high geomorphological risk, chosen precisely for its Mediterranean position. In Sardinia, military firing ranges cover more than 35,000 hectares.

These territories are fully integrated into European and Atlantic geopolitical strategy. The communities that inhabit them have had no meaningful say in the decisions that shape their land, their health, their futures.

The parallel with Puerto Rico is not incidental. Since 1898, Puerto Rico has hosted extensive US military infrastructure – at its peak covering around 13% of the island's territory – while its population has held no voting representation in Congress. Roosevelt Roads Naval Station was closed in 2004 following years of mass protest against live-fire training on the neighbouring island of Vieques; in 2025, the Trump administration reactivated it. The lesson holds for Niscemi: militarised peripheries can impose political costs when they organise, but popular pressure alone is never permanent without structural change.

We draw this parallel as a structural one, not a historical equivalence. To inhabit a militarised European periphery is not to experience what Puerto Rican communities have experienced. But borrowing their analytical frame without acknowledging the asymmetry would be precisely the kind of epistemic extraction this article argues against.

The Mediterranean, seen from the north of Europe, is a military theatre, a migration corridor to be managed, a southern flank to be secured. Seen from its shores, from Palermo, from Cagliari, from Lampedusa, it is something else entirely: a sea of historical connection, of circulation, of cultures that have no need of a border to recognise each other. The foreclosure of the Mediterranean as a common space, its transformation into a frontier, is itself a form of dispossession. Frontex does not only exclude migrants. It reorganises the entire geopolitics of the sea at the expense of those who live on it.

Similarly, the proposed Messina Bridge, presented by the current Italian government as a development project for the South, operates as a 'vertical integration mechanism': it connects Sicily more rapidly to the productive North, while the horizontal infrastructures of the island, its internal roads, its hospitals, its universities, remain underfunded. This is not compensation for decades of underinvestment. It is its continuation by other means.

Differential mobility and the selective internationalism of Europe

Sandro Mezzadra has argued that contemporary mobility is not a universal condition but a differentially distributed regime: there is no mobility in the abstract, but rather regimes of mobility that produce inclusion for some and exclusion for others.⁷ This insight is indispensable for understanding what European internationalism actually does, as opposed to what it claims to do.

European transnational programmes – Erasmus, Creative Europe, the structural funds, civil society networks – present themselves as spaces of openness and exchange. In practice, they are accessible primarily to those who already hold specific forms of capital: English as a first or near-native



Palermo, 25 October 2025. Workshop on building a collective visual identity and the flags of the School of Restanza and Future, curated by Martina Mirante and Ilaria Cascino © Noemi Pittala.

language, familiarity with project-management formats and accountability logics, and the practical capacity for continuous mobility, to attend conferences, residencies, network events across the continent. These are not neutral requirements, but class requirements geographically distributed: the capacity to meet them is systematically higher in northern and western Europe than in its south and east.

To be clear: The critique is not against mobility. Movement has always been part of how peripheral territories survive, resist, and connect. What we refuse is the structural condition in which departure becomes the only rational response to injustice, in which the choice to stay is made impossible by underfunded hospitals, absent nurseries, a labour market that has no adequate place for its most educated women. A mobility regime that leaves no real alternative to leaving is compulsion with better branding.

Brigitte Vasallo has analysed how hegemonic language functions as a mechanism of class exclusion: dominant groups define the rules of access, then use the discourse of backwardness, or underdevelopment, or incapacity, to naturalise the exclusion of those who cannot comply.⁸ In the case of Southern Europe, this produces a double marginalisation. It is not only that resources flow elsewhere. It is that the way of knowing, speaking and being in the world that characterises these territories is systematically devalued, positioned as provincial, as local, as particular, in contrast to the universal that is actually the specific cultural formation of northern European educated classes.

The question of language is the sharpest illustration. The distinction between “language” and “dialect” is not a linguistic judgment but a political one, a decision about what deserves institutional recognition. To abandon one’s language in order to access opportunity is not integration. It is the expropriation of the self.

The transnationality that European institutions celebrate is, in this sense, a selective transnationality. It is open to those who can already move on the centre’s terms. It is closed to those who cannot afford to. And since the capacity to move on these terms is not equally distributed, since it follows, with considerable precision, the same unequal geography as the brain drain, the military installations, the underfunded hospitals, the promise of a common European space remains structurally unfulfilled for those who need it most.

Restanza as decolonial practice

Vito Teti, who developed the concept of *restanza*,⁹ defines it as critical and conscious permanence in territories marked by depopulation: not immobility, not nostalgia, not a conservative attachment to the local, but an intentional, rooted presence capable of transforming the territory rather than abandoning it to its designated fate. *Restanza*, in Teti’s formulation, is not the opposite of mobility. It is the refusal to accept that departure is the only rational response to structural injustice.

We want to push this concept further. We want to argue that *restanza*, organised, feminist, politically articulate, connected across territories, is a form of decolonial practice. It is decolonial in three specific senses.

First, **it interrupts the logic of extraction.** The southern Italian economy extracts not only material resources but reproductive and intellectual labour: the care work, community-building and educational investment that produces the graduates who then leave. Staying, collectively, intentionally, with political consciousness of what staying means, is a refusal to make that extraction available. It is a demand that the value produced locally nourish the place that generated it.

Second, **it produces a counter-epistemology.** The School of *Restanza* and Future, meeting every Saturday in Palermo, working through three thematic groups (Disobedient Margins, Care Ecosystems, Imaginary Narratives), generates what we call situated knowledge: knowledge produced from the experience of inhabiting a territory the system has decided is marginal. This is not folk wisdom or local colour. It is a rigorous epistemological position, aligned with what Silvia Federici¹⁰ has analysed as the political economy of reproductive labour and what Françoise Vergès¹¹ has theorised as a decolonial feminism: an insistence that the knowledge produced in the margins, by women, by queer people, by those whose first language is not supplementary to theory but constitutive of it.

This counter-epistemology does not produce only text. The School works through artistic practice as a primary method of knowledge-making: breadmaking as ritual and collective memory, zine-making as self-archiving, photography as a tool for rendering visible what institutional narratives leave out. On 8 November 2025, in Piazza Magione, the three groups arrived having designed their own flags – a collective visual identity occupying physical space in a public square in Palermo. These are acts of counter-archiving: they produce a record of what it means to stay, in a language the territory itself has generated.

Third, ***restanza* creates an alternative infrastructure for transnational connection.** The PattoxRestare connects

over sixty Sicilian organisations around a shared political programme. On 29 April 2026, in regional assembly at the Sicilian Regional Assembly in Palermo, the movement launched the proposal “Sicily Zero Unemployment”: a regional fund, co-financed with EU structural funds, inspired by the French model *Territoires Zéro Chômeur de Longue Durée*, to create stable employment in sectors not covered by the traditional market. The proposal targets 1,500 to 3,000 people across ten pilot territories, starting with the internal areas of the *Madonies* and the *Sicani* mountains.

This is a concrete model of how peripheral territories can generate policy proposals that travel upward, to the regional, national and European level, rather than waiting to receive policy designed for them elsewhere.

The feminist dimension: care, reproduction, and the body politic

The coloniality of the southern Italian periphery has a specific feminist dimension that must be named explicitly, not treated as a subcategory.

Claudia Fauzia and Valentina Amenta, in their *Femminismo Terrone. Per un'alleanza dei margini* (Edizioni Tlon, 2024),¹² develop the concept of the North gaze: by analogy with Laura Mulvey’s male gaze, it describes the objectifying way in which the South is observed, evaluated and represented, positioned as backward, irrational, in need of civilisation, through a parametric norm of productive efficiency that presents itself as universal but is in fact the specific cultural norm of northern European capitalist modernity. Against this gaze, ‘*femminismo terrone*’, taking its name from the slur ‘*terrone*’, the derogatory term for southern Italians in northern Italian social geography, constructs what Fauzia and Amenta call a ‘*contro-memoria terrona*’: a counter-memory of southern feminist genealogies, an archive of figures of resistance that the hegemonic narrative has erased or rendered invisible. Following bell hooks,¹³ they reclaim the margin as a site of radical possibility, not a space of lack, but a space of surplus knowledge.

Read through this lens, the data acquire a different weight. The 195,000 graduate women who left southern Italy between 2002 and 2024 are not a sign of individual aspiration or feminist advancement. They are, as Chandra Talpade

Mohanty argues against Western feminist universalism,¹⁴ the rational response of subjectivities navigating structural constraints, not the triumph of a universal emancipation, but the specific form that extraction takes when it targets educated women in peripheral territories. The southern labour market offers them no adequate place. Or rather, it offers the place it has always reserved for women: domestic, unpaid, uncounted in the GDP.

There is one data point that concentrates all of this into a single, concrete figure. In Calabria, only 16.4% of women between 50 and 69 years of age actually undergo mammography screening, against a national average of 55.4% (Fondazione AIOM, 2025; Osservatorio Nazionale Screening, 2024).^{*} This is not bureaucratic inefficiency. It is the material measure of what a female body is worth, depending on where it is located. Silvia Federici demonstrated that every system of accumulation rests on a foundation of invisibilised reproductive labour, care, nourishment, the construction of communal fabric, systematically extracted and uncompensated.¹⁰ Françoise Vergès extended this analysis to the colonial peripheries: reproductive social labour has always been taken from the margins without recognition.¹¹ Applied to southern Italy: the crisis is not only economic. It is a crisis of reproduction. Territories empty because the system extracts not only qualified labour, but the very conditions that make collective life possible.

To stay, in this context, is a feminist act. It is a refusal to render invisible the labour of care and reproduction. It is a demand that the value produced locally feed the place that generated it, rather than being exported to the centres where it will count.



Monreale, 4 October 2025. Is There Space to Stay?, an assembly curated by the School of *Restanza* and Future as part of the Sanacore Festival. Photo © Carlo Vitrano.

What we ask of Europe, and what we refuse

The European Alternatives call for this issue asks what it would mean for Europe to listen, unlearn, repair and redistribute power. These are verbs that sound good. We take them seriously. But taking them seriously requires applying them inward, to the hierarchies that Europe reproduces inside itself, not only those it reproduces beyond its borders.

We do not want more structural funds administered through project formats designed in Brussels. We do not want transnational networks that require English fluency and continuous mobility as implicit conditions of membership. We do not want cultural programmes that celebrate southern European heritage while the systems that reproduce that heritage, the languages, the care economies, the community fabrics, continue to be actively dismantled.

We want the following:

1. Recognition of the brain drain as structural extraction. Not the “talent circulation” of European Commission communications, a phrase that transforms dispossession into a virtue, but a structural transfer of public investment from peripheral to central regions, equivalent in magnitude to a fiscal mechanism that would never be accepted if it were called by its name. The SVIMEZ figure, 6.8 billion euros per year, should be on the table of every European cohesion policy discussion.
2. Permanent infrastructure, not project funding. Nurseries, hospitals, universities, transport: the conditions that make staying materially possible. Southern Italian women do not leave because they have no attachment to their territories. They leave because the territory cannot give them what they have a right to expect. A salary gap of 375 euros per month between a female southern graduate and a male northern one⁴ is not a cultural problem. It is a structural one.
3. Direct connections between peripheral territories. Not through the mediation of central institutions, not through Brussels, not through Rome, not through Berlin, but directly: Sicily to Greece, Sardinia to Portugal, the Sicani mountains to the Carpathians. The Patto x Restare is already building this kind of connection. Europe should fund it.
4. Recognition of marginalised languages as political rights. Not heritage tourism. Not UNESCO patrimony. Political rights: the right to access

public services, institutional life, and formalised knowledge in the language in which one thinks and lives. This is not a cultural demand. It is an anti-colonial one.

5. An honest account of military occupation. The southern Mediterranean cannot be asked to host the military infrastructure of Atlantic security while being denied sovereignty over its own land and futures. If Europe is serious about decolonial solidarity beyond its borders, it must begin by accounting for what it does inside them.

The refusal is the proposal

There is a phrase we hear sometimes, addressed to us with good intentions by people who think they share our analysis: “It must be hard, being young and feminist in Sicily.” The phrase assumes a South that is irredeemably backward, and positions our staying as a sacrifice, a heroic but probably futile resistance against a tide that flows inevitably northward.

We refuse that framing. We are not staying because we cannot leave. We are staying, some of us, with full awareness of the contradictions this involves, as a political act. As a form of counter-power. As a practice of building, on the margin, the conditions of a different kind of belonging.

Vito Teti has written that ‘restanza’ is not the opposite of mobility: it is a different relationship to place, to time, to the question of what counts as a future.⁹ We would add: it is also a different relationship to Europe. Not exit, not rejection, not the nostalgia of those who have given up on the European project. But a demand, precise, documented, politically articulate, that Europe become what it claims to be. That it applies to itself the decolonial vocabulary it occasionally borrows to describe the world beyond its borders. That it recognises, finally, that its internal peripheries are not problems to be solved through development policy. They are political actors with something to say about what kind of Europe is possible.

The School of Restanza and Future meets every Saturday. The PattoRestare held its regional assembly on 29 April 2026 and brought its proposals to the Sicilian Regional Assembly. We are not waiting for Europe to listen to us. We are building the infrastructure of a different listening platform. But we extended the invitation.

Who can afford to stay? As long as the answer depends on where you were born inside Europe, the promise of transnationality is a selective promise.

We are in the process of making it less selective.

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Rivers are archives,
political bodies,
spaces where
democracy can
be lived.



RIVERS of democracy

STATIONARY ROUTE
Wiener Festwochen
18-21 June



BICYCLE ROUTE
Sziget Festival
5-11 August



BOAT ROUTE
Fluctuations Festival
Urban Boat
TBD July



**From subculture to
bureaucracy.
The anti-colonial
Irish language in the
EU institutions**

Joana Rodrigues Soares and Federica Tessari

Irish – *Gaeilge* – became a full official and working language of the European Union in 2022, nearly fifty years after Ireland joined the bloc in 1973. Today, every regulation, directive and legal act must be translated into Irish, supported by a growing workforce of more than 200 translators and interpreters across the institutions. With Ireland’s upcoming EU Council Presidency in July 2026, that institutional visibility is set to deepen further.

At first glance, this looks like a straightforward victory. A language long treated as marginal now sits inside the legislative machinery of Europe, with material consequences: jobs are created, terminology is standardized, and states have reason to invest in training.

I speak, so I am

The derogation of the Irish language “was a huge political issue at the time”, said Kevin Lally from Galway, who first started working for the Sinn Féin delegation and dealing with regional minority languages and lesser-used national languages like Irish, now Political Advisor in the European Parliament. One of the examples of the tensions back at that time was regarding the Republican Irish party Sinn Féin which “had an MEP who was from a Gaeltacht area and who would have been very active on language rights and then for a time went on language strike because they weren’t facilitating this MEP to have Irish interpretation at committee level, so they kind of refused to speak English”. In the same year, 2020, the Irish Commissioner Phil Hogan also resigned.

In 2023, Róisín De Bhaldraithe, helped establish the Brussels branch of Conradh na Gaeilge - the democratic forum for the Irish-speaking community - upon relocating to Brussels for work. Róisín grown up with the Irish language and her grandfather, Tomás de Bhaldraithe, authored the seminal 1959 Irish-English dictionary, an influential work that modernised official terminology and remains the standard for contemporary Irish. Róisín’s dedication to the language is lifelong; she attended an Irish language primary school, participated in the Cumann Gaelach, the Irish language society. Now, the social community is a place where the city’s Irish-speaking residents can regularly connect and engage with the language and the culture.

EU official recognition has been “good for the credibility of the language”, Roisin said, disrupting the long-running narrative that Irish is dying and that “there is no real benefit” to learning it. However, if Irish now circulate through EU corridors, the path to reach there is one of great struggle. Centuries of British rule pushed the language out of power and English dominated the country courts, administration, schooling and economic life. In the nineteenth century, the national school system promoted English even in Irish-speaking areas, while children could be punished for using Irish. The Great Famine then devastated many of the poorest communities, where Irish was more present. Seen against that history, EU recognition, places a language marked by colonial displacement inside one of Europe’s most powerful legal machines.

“The languages of the EU are all given equal standing - meaning that the identity and self-determination derived from those languages is also given equal standing and importance”

But Irish revival does not originate in institutions. Beyond the meeting rooms of Brussels, Irish is undergoing a different kind of resurgence: cultural, insurgent and defiant. Artists like Kneecap - whose name comes from the punishment given by Northern Irish paramilitaries who shoot people in the knees, legs or ankles - have pushed Irish into global underground circuits, using the language as a tool of irreverence, resistance and anti-colonial memory. Films, fashion and visual culture have widened its presence in everyday life. For Alannah Fitzgerald Murray, who came to Brussels - from Dublin - in 2023 for a Bluebook internship and now works as a linguist agent at the European Commission, that official recognition carries a specific meaning: “The languages of the EU are all given equal standing - meaning that the identity and self-determination derived from those languages is also given equal standing and importance”, she said. “Irish, as a language that nearly died out and now on an island where everyone also speaks English, I think adds another layer to its power, carrying identity and self-determination”, concluded.

Alternative forms of internationalism

De Bhaldraithe describes a landscape in which more bands are singing in Irish, Irish-language cinema has broken through to wider recognition, such as the movie “An Cailín Ciúin,” nominated for a BAFTA award, and new clothing brands are using Irish text and iconography. In her account, all of this is “joined up”.

This dual movement, from Belfast subculture to the Berlaymont’s interpreting booths, raises a deeper question. When minority languages move from the margins into institutional adoption, does this represent an expansion of democratic internationalism? Or does it risk absorbing living political practices into elite frameworks that smooth over their disruptive potential?

“Those worlds seem to be operating in an entirely different space - but also they need each other. The language needs political, governmental and social and cultural support behind it to truly strengthen the use of a language”

To De Bhaldraithe, the two sides “complement each other”. If Irish were only an EU working language, she suggests, it would not attract many people on its own; if it were only underground cool, it might struggle to expand its material base. What is striking, she says, is that “it’s all kind of happening at the same time” and that the process has accelerated over the past five to ten years. Also, the linguist agent Fitzgerald Murray echoed it. “Those worlds seem to be operating in an entirely different space - but also they need each other. The language needs political, governmental and social and cultural support behind it to truly strengthen the use of a language”.

That broader revival is also generational; a recent poll points to stronger interest among younger adults in learning or using Irish more often. De Bhaldraithe describes this phenomenon through people she knows in Dublin who had little interest in Irish at school but are now returning to classes as adults.

Among younger people, Kneecap matters not simply because they sing in Irish, but because of how they use it. “It’s an anti-colonial movement through art and expressions, it has really grown and is strong in and out of the Island”, said Lally. As De Bhaldráithe says, they have been “revolutionary” for the language in making it “actually cool.” Their outspoken politics and support for Palestine, she notes, resonate with younger audiences too. According to Lally, even if the musical products are well received by the younger, “their songs

“their songs are very much about generational trauma, maybe the impacts of austerity on communities, the impacts of a post-conflict community”

are very much about generational trauma, maybe the impacts of austerity on communities, the impacts of a post-conflict community” in a way that everyone could get the message - also the adults.

Historically, the language has been associated with anti-colonial struggle and republican identity. “I don’t think each time I speak Irish, I feel this heavy political weight. But also, Irish to me will always have a deeper meaning. It’s something my parents had to go back and relearn to raise my brother and me in it. Something that they would not have had to do if the colonisation of Ireland had not occurred. So already it bears the weight of that. We know what has been fought and lost to ensure the survival of the Irish, and so really it feels like there is always meaning to it when it is spoken - even if you don’t feel that all the time,” told Fitzgerald Murray.

As De Bhaldráithe notes, that meaning is not fixed. Irish is nowadays also being appropriated by anti-immigrant groups trying to use it as a form of exclusionary nationalism. Against this, many speakers insist on a different vision of Irish: one in which migrants learning the language, even just a few words, are welcomed and cheered.

In Brussels, the limits of institutional internationalism become visible when recognition meets practical reality. De Bhaldráithe’s group organised what she describes as the first ever fully Irish-language public event in the European Parliament. But “the European Parliament doesn’t employ any Irish language interpreters”, she explains. Interpreters working for other EU bodies could not simply be used because of contractual restrictions. That left organisers dependent on scarce freelance interpreters, dramatically increasing costs. In one case, sourcing interpretation through official channels ended up “like quadrupling the price.”

A public event in an official EU language thus became an exercise in improvisation, assembling precarious labour to

compensate for institutional gaps. “It was actually very problematic,” De Bhaldráithe notes, making such events “much less accessible.” This reveals a broader contradiction: the EU proclaims multilingual equality, but without sufficient infrastructure, that equality remains uneven in practice.

Today, even after the derogation ended and the EU institutions hired a lot of Irish language staff, there still is a “technical derogation” in place within the European Parliament. It “just hasn’t hired enough, are given enough full-time contracts for Irish language interpreters so that if you were speaking in committee, you’d have an opportunity to speak Irish. MEPs generally only have an opportunity to speak Irish in the plenary session, which usually happens once a month. Outside of that, if they wish to speak Irish in the committee, it can be a bit complicated because you have to request Irish language interpretation. It’s not as straightforward as it should be”, explained Lally.

Dialect, minoritised or minority language: who are you?

From inside EU institutions, the same question often appears in a different register. MEP Herbert Dorfmann (Südtiroler Volkspartei / European People’s Party), from South Tyrol, a German-speaking autonomous region in northern Italy, suggests that his own experience suggests that minority-language politics can produce a distinctly post-national relationship to Europe. “I do not really feel Italian. I’m closer to a European approach than the national approach.”

Regarding the feeling of belonging to a country or not due to the language spoken, “it’s negative from the perspective of people’s professional development and from a historical-geographical perspective, because people can’t orient themselves and understand where they are. I mean, I think that to understand the world a little, you first need to understand and know the place where you grow up and with which you interact daily”, said Marco Piras, a Sardinian linguist activist and teacher who’s living in the Basque Country.

Regarding the identity and its consequences, Piras also underlined the differences between a dialect, a minority or “minoritised” language, such as the Sardinian. “The difference between language and dialect is only a political issue, in the sense that it can’t be; there are no limits, no scientific boundaries that can define where language ends and dialect begins”.

MEP Dorfmann is also part of the Intergroup on Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages, one of the main cross-party spaces in the Parliament where minority-language issues are discussed. Talking about the recognition of other languages, such as Catalan and Basque, he demands recognition to support regional languages, but immediately frames the issue in terms of “extra costs” and asks whether translating “every document” is the best use of resources for those communities. His distinction between

“The difference between language and dialect is only a political issue, in the sense that it can’t be; there are no limits, no scientific boundaries that can define where language ends and dialect begins”

robust and fragile languages is even more revealing. German, he notes, will survive whether or not it is spoken in his region because it is already one of Europe’s major languages. Others will not. “If, for example, in Galicia, the people do not speak the Galician language anymore, the language will die because nobody else speaks it”. “Language is also part of the cultural heritage, and we should protect it as such. And for this, I think the European Union should engage much more than it does now, because fundamentally, it’s doing nothing to protect these languages”, he added.

In this converge the vision of Lally too. “The EU isn’t great on the protection of regional minority languages or lesser-used national languages - it should be doing more to protect language rights and linguistic rights in terms of the ask for Galician, Catalan, and Basque to be EU languages”. The European Commission had estimated a preliminary cost of €132 million per year, of which €44 million for Catalan, Galician, and Basque based on past experience with Gaelic in Ireland. However, even if Spain will take charge of the expenses, there are still a lot of “legal issues” to be resolved according to several EU ministries. In total, Catalan, Galician and Basque speakers are around 20 million. In this sense, the EU language-stack, for Spanish authorities, is not just a political issue but more a linguistic standpoint. “Catalan is a huge language. They’re all like large spoken languages, there’s no reason why they would have any less rights than other languages. Language is a huge part of a person’s self-identity and a huge part of, like, it tells a story about where they’re from”, said Lally.

In conclusion, supporting minority languages could be empowering, but there is always that risk that “when something is said institutionalised it can be altered”, said the linguist agent in the EC. “However, perhaps it can mean that the interest in minority languages becomes more about opportunities than the languages themselves. But then you have the

bigger question of whether the attention on the language is worth it anyway? In a harsh way perhaps beggars can’t be choosers, you know. I think of it in a very similar sense to performative activism. Is it better that a movement is bigger even if some in the movement are not there for genuine reasons?”

Kneecap vs. the Crown aka Irish vs. EU

Although the Irish language conquered institutional power, some of its main figures used their language to defy establishment power. Kneecap revived the island’s history of oppression and colonisation in the hands of Britain through lyrics, clear in songs such as “Get Your Brits Out”, where they turn the republican slogan “Brits out”, a demand for the end of British state presence in Northern Ireland, into a provocative wordplay on “get your tits out”.

As they have knowledge of how a colonized language works, they express solidarity who’s been colonized today, showing what internationalism is nowadays. Kneecap have repeatedly expressed solidarity with Palestine and condemned Israel’s war in Gaza as genocide. In 2025, Mo Chara - one of the trio members - faced a terrorism charges after displaying a Hezbollah flag during a London concert in 2024. The case was later dismissed, after the Court found that the charge had been brought too late. Besides, the band denied support for Hezbollah or Hamas and argued that they were being targeted because of their pro-Palestinian views. “The Irish not so long ago were persecuted by the Brits, but we were never bombed from the fucking skies with nowhere to go! The Palestinians have nowhere to go”, the group said during a show, connecting the two countries’ history.

Therefore, despite being celebrated as part of Europe’s multilingual diversity, Irish anti-colonial statements are far from consensual, with Kneecap making that tension visible. Hungary banned the group from entering the country for three years, citing national security. In France, local and regional officials opposed festival bookings. Yet the French Interior Ministry ultimately allowed the concert to proceed, judging that there was no longer a public-order risk sufficient to justify a ban. While Irish may now be accepted inside the institutions of Europe, the symbolic meaning carried by some of its speakers remain contested.

Lethal intersections: a conversation on environmental racism, coalition-building, and the long work of resistance

with Patricia Hill Collins



Palermo, 18 April 2026. Patricia Hill Collins Conference, Earth Day Med Festival. Photo © Viviana Bonura.

How do the most hidden forms of violence sustain themselves, and what does resistance look like when the damage is invisible, cumulative, and gendered?

These were among the questions at the heart of a special episode of our podcast, recorded live at Teatro Garibaldi in Palermo on the occasion of Earth Day Med Festival.

Patricia Hill Collins needs little introduction to readers of this journal. A sociologist, feminist theorist, and Distinguished University Professor Emerita, she is one of the defining voices in Black feminism, intersectionality theory, and the study of social justice. Her concept of the matrix of domination – the interlocking systems of race, class, gender, and territory that structure oppression – has shaped decades of scholarship and activism across the world. Her most recent work, *Lethal Intersections*, turns this analytical lens toward the compounding harms produced when multiple forms of discrimination converge in a single life or community.

Welcoming Collins to **Teatro Garibaldi** carried a particular weight for us. The theatre, a magnificent and storied space in the heart of Palermo, has been closed for over eight years. Fondazione Studio Rizoma and European Alternatives have taken on its management with a vision: to make it a site of experimentation, long-term thought, and resistance, a place where coalitions are built across the Mediterranean and beyond. That Collins was among the very first guests to reopen it felt, to us, like more than a coincidence. Her presence placed this new chapter squarely under the sign of audacious thinking and the kind of solidarities we want to cultivate.



Palermo, 18 April 2026. Patricia Hill Collins Conference, Earth Day Med Festival. Photo © Viviana Bonura.

The conversation, led by **Ségolène Pruvot**, co-director of European Alternatives and Fondazione Studio Rizoma, alongside sociologist **Ignazia Bartholini** from the University of Palermo, moved across several urgent territories. It began with environmental racism: the slow, often invisible violence inflicted on racialised and marginalised communities through toxic exposure, ecological devastation, and the theft of safe environments. Collins reflected on how these forms of harm are structurally designed to remain unseen, under-researched, gendered in their effects, and severed from the political visibility that might generate accountability.

The conversation then turned to the question of coalition-building, one of Collins's central preoccupations in her recent work. She drew a distinction that has stayed with us since: between coalitions of convenience, short-term and issue-specific, held together by strategic alignment rather than shared ethics; and coalitions of conscience, grounded in long-term commitment and ethical foundation. This distinction is not merely theoretical. For those of us working at the intersection of feminist organising, transnational advocacy, and cultural practice, it maps onto tensions we live every day.

This episode is an invitation to think alongside one of the most rigorous and generative thinkers working today, in a space that is itself a work in progress, in a city that knows what it means to build from ruins.



Listen to the episode [here](#)



Embodying the Otherwise: 'Un violador en tu camino' and the Practice of Internationalist Feminisms beyond (Neo) Liberalism and Eurocentrism

Eva Verdugo-Raab



Performance "Un violador en tu camino"
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1. Sylvia Wynter, *Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation-An Argument*, CR: The New Centennial Review, 2005, pp. 257-557; Walter D. Mignolo, *Who Speaks for the 'Human' in Human Rights?*, *Hispanic Issues On Line*, 2009, pp. 7-25; Maria Lugones, *Toward a Decolonial Feminism*, *Hypatia*, 2010, 742-759.
2. Anibal Quijano, *Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America*, *International Sociology*, 2000, pp. 215-252; Rita Laura Segato, *La guerra contra las mujeres*, *Traficantes de Sueños*, 2016; Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, *Autonomea*, 2004.
3. Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*, *Zone Books*, 2015, pp. 17-24; Catherine Rottenberg, *The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism*, *Cultural Studies*, 2014, pp. 418-437.
4. e.g. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, *Duke University Press*, 2005; Elizabeth Bernstein, *The Sexual Politics of the 'New Abolitionism'*, *Differences*, 2007, pp. 128-151; Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women (Still) Need Saving?*, *Harvard University Press*, 2015, pp. 27-55; Sara R. Farris, *In the Name of Women's Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism*, *Duke University Press*, 2017.

Liberal feminisms emerged from the European liberal tradition. Liberal political theory frames the category of 'the human' as universal. In reality, this universality is a fiction. The modern figure of 'the human' was constituted through colonial-patriarchal hierarchies that positioned the white, Christian, bourgeois man at the top and center. Those positioned outside this category were governed and exploited¹. With the rise of capitalism, this hierarchy was deepened through a racialized division of labor, the restructuring of social reproduction to sustain profit-making and the consolidation of a violent patriarchal order². Liberal feminism has historically sought to expand women's access to the category of the liberal subject: Feminist ideals are translated into governmental power through formal legal equality, criminalization and punishment, international gender legislation, technocratic policy integration and diversity initiatives. In their neoliberal iterations, liberal feminisms have increasingly been articulated through market logics: Gender-equality is recast as human capital investment and individual competitiveness within existing capitalist structures³. Critics have convincingly argued that these (neo)liberal gender-equality efforts are limited in their potential to realize material equality and non-domination for the global majority of women. Instead, they enable women's incorporation into larger projects of neoliberal governance and Eurocentric hegemony.⁴

Distinct feminisms beyond liberalism have been mapped: centering the human as constituted through interdependence of beings; focusing on lived practices, organizational collective power and material redistribution rather than institutional recognition or inclusion; reworking universalist abstractions through situated and, in decolonial thought, ‘pluriversal’⁵ horizons; and understanding domination as an intersectional constellation of colonial, capitalist and patriarchal power. Here, feminisms emerge as continuous collective and internationalist practices oriented toward transforming the social relations through which domination and oppression are sustained.⁶

In order to make these alternative feminisms more imaginable, I want to think with and through the performance action *Un violador en tu camino* by the feminist collective LASTESIS, which was first performed in Valparaíso during a social uprising against inequality in Chile in 2019. Its lyrics speak to how patriarchy, from the moment a woman is born, subjects her to violence, sometimes overt, sometimes more insidious. Patriarchy is portrayed as a judging force that disciplines and confines, effectively incarcerating women from birth. The lyrics dismantle the illusion of state protection⁷. I read the performance of *Un violador en tu camino* first as a structural indictment of patriarchal violence, whose form extends that indictment to capitalism itself, then as a reimagination of the human as relational and co-constituted and finally as a pluriversal constellation of feminist internationalism enacted through its global circulation.

Structural Indictment as Prefigurative Practice

Un violador en tu camino uncovers that (gendered) hierarchies are (re)produced through patriarchal violence. Its critique is structural and challenges the thinking that reform within a broken system is sufficient.

In the original LASTESIS enactment, participants stand a few feet apart from each other. They wear everyday clothing and black blindfolds. The blindfolds recall societal blindness to the structural nature of patriarchal violence. The choice of clothing insists that this violence is embedded in ordinary life. Through moving in synchrony, the performers make the systemic character of violence tangible: When they chant about femicide, rape and disappearance, they squat in unison, a posture associated with police searches.⁸ Through this, they expose the complicity of state institutions in sustaining patriarchal violence.

The performance offers no safe distance. At one point, the performers point at the audience, chanting ‘And the rapist was you. And the rapist is you.’ When the chant names the police, the judges, the system, the president, the performers point outward in all directions. They visually map out that patriarchal violence is sustained through state institution and society at large. By naming state institutions as perpetrators—they refer to the oppressive state as a ‘male rapist’—the performers refuse to position the state as a protector or site of redress. This refusal echoes abolitionist feminist arguments that carceral responses to patriarchal violence reproduce the racialized and economic structures through which patriarchal oppression is organized and maintained.⁹

The form of the performance connects its structural critique of patriarchy and its refusal to appeal to or seek inclusion within state institutions to an implicit critique of capitalism, enacting the understanding that these systems are intertwined. *Un violador en tu camino* is a form of art activism, a live, embodied practice that combines artistic and political expression.¹⁰ As such, it disrupts the logics of cultural production within a capitalist system: singular or small-group authorship, art as property, mediation through institutions, and the circulation of art as exchangeable goods. LASTESIS describe their method as ‘collage’: the collective borrowed and transformed ideas from feminist, women, queer, trans, and non-binary thinkers and translated them into a more embodied and accessible language, grounded in a commitment to collectivity over hierarchical authorship.¹¹ The performance spreads through replication rather than institutional reach and carries no monetary value, bypassing the cultural hierarchies through which middle- and upper-class audiences and wealthy collectors tend to be the sole beneficiaries of cultural work.

The performance does not just indict and refuse. It anticipates the political community it calls for: one grounded in solidarity, horizontality, collectivity and open access to artistic and political participation. In refusing the logics of capitalist cultural production and institutional inclusion simultaneously, it does not only critique the existing order but begins to enact an alternative to it through its very form and practice.

Transgressing towards a Relational Human

This transgression also happens through the performance’s (re)imagining of the individual being as relational and constituted through the collective. Each participant forms themselves as a feminist subject by enacting their oppression through their body. A performer from Bolivia describes how it helped them embody their grievance: ‘I was in a process of realising that talking about what had happened to me was no longer working for me. Neither talking, nor thinking, nor theorising about it. I felt that it had to go through my body’.¹²

In doing so, they shift from victimhood to political agent. No longer are they judged and confined by the patriarchal state, but instead they become the one issuing the judgment. They further describe: ‘A real feeling of catharsis. To say, ‘the blame was not mine, not where I was or what I was wearing.’ It is so simple, but to say it and hear it being repeated [...]’.¹³ The embodied reversal of culpability for them seemed to enact a process of liberation from a state of paralysis.

This reconfiguration of political subjectivity is not an isolated process. The collective is formed through the individual’s experience and the individual is constituted through the collective enactment. The performance creates a space in which personal experience resonates through the body and finds articulation within a collective political message. Affect acts as a driving force in this process. Emotions such as pain, rage and hope, amplified through synchronized gestures, rhythmic chanting and movement connect the collective and create a shared affective space. The intensity generated within the group also circulates outward, moving through the bodies of the surrounding crowd and drawing them into the performance. Spectators are thus interpellated into this space through emotional affection tied to the political message. The performance thus creates a relational environment in which transmission (of feeling, of critique, of agency) takes place and enables the audience to let the experience resonate.

Un violador en tu camino goes even further. Through the performance, individuals come together to act as one.

They form a shared embodied presence in which the rigid boundaries of the liberal individual are momentarily suspended. Through this collective body, a feminist political subject emerges that moves fluidly between the individual and the collective and centers interconnection and mutual dependence. The performance thus actively transgresses the liberal understanding of the individual as an autonomous and self-contained subject and embodies in its place a human that is relational and collectively constituted. It disrupts the individualizing logics through which patriarchal, capitalist and carceral orders govern. At the same time, it embodies a new social order in which gendered bodies feel supported by the collective and imbued with agency through their very relationality to others.

A Pluriversal Performance Constellation

The circulation of the performance action across the world cultivated a field of differentiated, yet interrelated, situated enactments. The collective body expanded beyond one enactment in the Chilean city of Valparaíso. *Un violador en tu camino* was ultimately performed in over 300 cities worldwide. The enactments generated a ‘performance constellation’¹⁴ of digital and physical sites of feminist agency. Its global iterations embodied the difference of situated local struggles, which are united through a shared resistance to systemic oppression. The decentralized, non-hierarchical structure of the performance facilitated this global circulation without enforcing homogeneity.

In San Juan (Puerto Rico), performers changed the original lyrics to denounce the pigs (the police), the Senate, the colony (the US), Wanda Vázquez (the governor). They played bomba, plena, and reggaetón to connect feminist resistance with class struggle.¹⁵ In Toronto, Latina women sang in English and Spanish to connect their experiences across borders and challenge the silencing of

8. Paula Serafini, *A Rapist in Your Path: Transnational Feminist Protest and Why (and How) Performance Matters*, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2020, pp. 290-295.
9. e.g. Angela Y. Davis, Gina Dent, Erica R. Meiners, and Beth E. Richie, *Abolition. Feminism. Now.*, Haymarket Books, 2022.
10. Paula Serafini, *Performance Action: The Politics of Art Activism*, Routledge, 2018.
11. Susana Draper, Damaris Valdés Vargas, Paula Cometa Stange, Sibila Sotomayor Van Rysseghem, and Molly Gittleman, *Feminist Performance: An Interview with Colectivo LASTESIS*, *Critical Times*, 2024.

12. cited in Aina López Ricoy, *South-South Symbolic Transnationalism: Echoing the Performance ‘A Rapist in Your Path’ in Latin America*, *Gender & Development*, 2021, pp. 495-511.
13. cited in Aina López Ricoy, *South-South Symbolic Transnationalism: Echoing the Performance ‘A Rapist in Your Path’ in Latin America*, *Gender & Development*, 2021, pp. 495-511.
14. Marcela A. Fuentes, *Performance Constellations: Networks of Protest and Activism in Latin America*, University of Michigan Press, 2019.
15. Mia Liinason, *The Performance of Protest: Las Tesis and the New Feminist Radicality at the Conjunction of Digital Spaces and the Streets*, *Feminist Media Studies*, 2025.
16. Nae Hanashiro Ávila, *Women’s Voices Resonating in Public Space: LASTESIS’s A Rapist in Your Path in the Streets of Toronto*, *Canadian Theatre Review*, 2024.

GSP+: The Politics of Selective Enforcement and the Case of Pakistan

Dimitra Satikou



diasporic voices in Canada.¹⁶ In Bolivia, participants added “ecocide” to link patriarchal violence to extractivist development policies.¹⁷ In Rojava (North and East Syria), women performed while wearing their rifles, which situated their feminist resistance within an armed struggle against state oppression, imperialism and colonial domination.¹⁸ Indigenous nations of Latin America, such as Kichwa, Shuar, Waorani, Quechua and Mapuche, enacted the performance. Some of them wore their traditional clothing and spoke their indigenous languages. Their performance explicitly linked patriarchal violence to colonialism enacted on their land and bodies.¹⁹ In Kolkata, the piece was performed during protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act to coincide with Modi’s visit. Sexual violence was thus connected to religious nationalism and the targeting of minority communities.²⁰ In Berlin, *Un violador en tu camino* was performed four times. One of the enactments deliberately showed solidarity with people in Rojava, which demonstrates that their practice of internationalism is also sustained by acts of solidarity across differences.²¹ In New York, the performance was staged outside the courthouse during the Harvey Weinstein trial. This grounded the performance in a globally visible moment of sexual violence.²²

The performance constellation thus situates patriarchal oppression as entangled with historically specific forms of colonialism, imperialism, capitalism and racism. It amplifies local struggles without subsuming them into a homogenized framework. What holds the performance together is solidarity through difference: a shared refusal to erase the specificities of being. Thus, its global circulation creates a feminist internationalism that is pluriversal in nature and operates beyond hegemonic liberal feminisms and their tendency to (re)produce Eurocentrism.

Concluding Thoughts

Un Violador En Tu Camino does not ask to be included in or protected by the existing order. It begins to enact something beyond it. In the above, I showed that the performance action prefigures feminisms beyond liberal, Eurocentric frameworks. In its place emerge internationalist feminist practices, bound together through resistance to systems of (globally prevalent, but locally specific configurations) of capitalism, racism, colonialism and patriarchy. I demonstrated this through the protest action’s structural indictment of patriarchal state violence, its artistic form that critiques and transgresses the logics of capitalism, its prefigurative reimagination of the individual as collectively constituted and relational and the pluriversal constellation of enactments that together materialize a feminist internationalism.

Performance alone will not dismantle systemic domination and oppression. Sustained collective action that addresses material redistribution and challenges Eurocentric domination remains necessary. Still, I contend that *Un violador en tu camino* starts this work and renders the path towards alternative political imaginaries more tangible. Following Audre Lorde’s insistence that ‘the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house’²³, it invites us to orient our collective action toward addressing intertwined systems of domination rather than merely focusing on institutional and legal inclusion, reform or carceral redress; to build and practice new ways of relating as much as we critique existing ones; and to let other contexts of feminist struggle resonate with our own without universalizing them, building resistance that is rooted in our local specificities and open to solidarity across difference.

17. Mia Liinason, *The Performance of Protest: Las Tesis and the New Feminist Radicality at the Conjunction of Digital Spaces and the Streets*, Feminist Media Studies, 2025.

18. KKB-Kadın Özgürlük Gücü, *Dünyanın her yerinde, Arjantin’de, Lübnan’da, İspanya’da, Türkiye’de kadınlar direniyor. Rojava’da, işgale, çetelere ve erkek egemenliğe karşı...* X, 2019.

19. Ana Chávez, *Mujeres indígenas se unen al performance ‘Un violador en tu camino’*, *Expreso*, 2019; Mariana Gutiérrez, *Crean versión en quechua de ‘Un violador en tu camino’*, *SDP Noticias*, 2019; archivo REDES, *Un violador en tu camino ‘El violador eres tú’ versión Mapuche*, YouTube, 2019.

20. Mia Liinason, *The Performance of Protest: Las Tesis and the New Feminist Radicality at the Conjunction of Digital Spaces and the Streets*, Feminist Media Studies, 2025.

21. Inter kiezionale, *Feministischer Flashmob in Solidarität mit Rojava - Feminist flashmob in solidarity with Rojava*, YouTube, 2019.

22. Mia Liinason, *The Performance of Protest: Las Tesis and the New Feminist Radicality at the Conjunction of Digital Spaces and the Streets*, Feminist Media Studies, 2025.

23. Audre Lorde, *The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House*, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, Persephone Press, 1981

In April 2026, the European Union’s ambassador to Pakistan stated that the country’s access to GSP¹⁺ is “neither guaranteed nor automatic”, pointing to concerns over blasphemy laws, enforced disappearances, and minority rights. This was not an isolated remark, but part of a broader shift in Brussels: the question is no longer whether Pakistan has ratified international conventions, but whether it is implementing them in practice.

The agreement reached in December 2025 between the European Commission, the European Council, and the European Parliament on the revision of the Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) reaffirmed its role as a central instrument of the European Union’s effort to link trade with sustainable development. The updated framework, covering 65 developing countries, aims to strengthen the social, labour, environmental, and climate dimensions of EU trade policy, introducing stricter monitoring mechanisms, greater transparency, and the possibility of withdrawing trade preferences in cases of serious violations.

Yet the practical application of these ambitions remains under scrutiny. The visit of a European Parliament delegation to Islamabad in April 2026 further highlighted the gap between institutional design and political reality. While Pakistan continues to present itself as committed to reform and compliance with the GSP+ framework, discussions in Brussels increasingly reflect a more critical perspective. Reports from 2025 and 2026 point to recurring challenges in areas such as press freedom, rule of law, and the protection of minorities²—underscoring the persistent gap between formal commitments and real-world outcomes.

This shift—from formal compliance to actual implementation—reveals a more complex structural issue. Pakistan continues to benefit from the trade advantages of the GSP+ system in a context where the full implementation of its commitments remains uneven. The core debate surrounding its participation is no longer technical, but political: whether preferential access to the EU market is matched by meaningful progress in fulfilling its obligations. GSP+ provides countries like Pakistan with duty-free or reduced-tariff access to the European Union market in exchange for implementing 27 international conventions covering human rights, labour standards, environmental protection, and governance. However, Members of the European Parliament and civil society organisations continue to point to areas requiring further progress, including the use of blasphemy laws, the protection of religious minorities, freedom of expression and media, and the enforcement of labour and human rights protections.

The European Union has sought to address these concerns through a comprehensive reform of the GSP frame-

work. Initiated in 2021 and concluded in 2025, the revised system preserves its core structure—divided into Everything But Arms, Standard GSP, and GSP+—while introducing significant changes aimed at reinforcing conditionality and enforcement. These include an expanded list of international conventions, the requirement for detailed implementation plans, enhanced transparency, greater involvement of civil society, and faster procedures for the withdrawal of trade preferences in cases of violations.

In practice, the GSP remains a cornerstone of the European Union’s strategy to connect trade policy with sustainable development and institutional convergence. As a unilateral instrument, it grants preferential access to the EU market to 65 developing countries, covering two-thirds of their exports. Its three-tier structure provides increasing levels of benefits, with GSP+ offering the most extensive access conditional on compliance with international standards.

The new framework, set to enter into force in 2027, further strengthens this approach by expanding obligations and enforcement tools. It introduces additional international conventions, stricter monitoring, enhanced transparency mechanisms, and the possibility of rapid withdrawal of preferences in cases of serious violations. It also introduces new elements linking trade preferences to cooperation on migration-related issues, such as the readmission of irregular migrants.

The case of Pakistan illustrates the challenges inherent in this model. Since joining GSP+ in 2014, Pakistan has become one of its largest beneficiaries, with a significant share of its exports entering the EU duty-free—particularly in the textile sector. The economic importance of the scheme for Pakistan is considerable, creating a relationship of mutual dependence between the two sides.

At the same time, monitoring reports from 2025–2026 indicate that progress in implementing commitments remains uneven. This raises broader questions about the effectiveness of conditionality and the credibility of enforcement mechanisms within the GSP+ framework.

The implications extend beyond the bilateral relationship. For European industries, concerns arise regarding fair competition, while for the European Union, the issue is one of credibility as a normative power. In an increasingly competitive geopolitical environment, consistency between declared values and actual policy implementation becomes strategically significant.

In this context, some critics extend their analysis beyond Pakistan and turn to the European Union itself. They argue that the continuation of GSP+ may be shaped not only

by compliance assessments but also by broader geopolitical and economic considerations. Pakistan remains a key partner in a sensitive region, while European industries—particularly textiles—benefit from access to competitively priced imports. Within this framework, it is often suggested that enforcement mechanisms may be applied cautiously, in order to balance normative commitments with strategic and economic interests.

The debate surrounding Pakistan’s participation in GSP+ also reveals a broader and more politically sensitive dimension of the scheme: the degree of influence it grants the European Union over the domestic policy orientation of third countries. Through the conditional structure of GSP+, the EU effectively extends elements of its normative framework beyond its borders, linking access to one of the world’s largest consumer markets with expectations regarding governance, human rights, labour protections, judicial practices, and even migration cooperation. In this sense, GSP+ operates not merely as a trade instrument, but as a mechanism of external governance, allowing the European Union to project regulatory and political influence without relying on traditional diplomatic or coercive tools.

This dynamic reflects the European Union’s longstanding ambition to function as a “normative power” in international affairs. Rather than exercising influence primarily through military or hard power capabilities, the EU seeks to shape the behaviour of partner states through economic incentives and regulatory convergence. For developing countries heavily dependent on access to the European market, the leverage generated by GSP+ can become substantial, particularly in sectors such as textiles and manufacturing where tariff preferences directly affect competitiveness and employment. Consequently, debates over the implementation of international conventions are no longer confined to legal or technical assessments, but increasingly intersect with questions of sovereignty, political autonomy, and the legitimacy of external conditionality.

At the same time, this influence exposes the European Union to accusations of inconsistency and selective enforcement. Critics argue that the effectiveness of conditionality often depends less on the gravity of violations than on the geopolitical or economic importance of the partner country involved. In cases where strategic interests, regional stability, migration cooperation, or commercial dependencies are at stake, enforcement mechanisms may appear more cautious or politically calibrated. This creates a structural tension at the heart of the GSP+ framework: the European Union seeks simultaneously to defend universal values and preserve strategic flexibility. The credibility of the system therefore depends not only on the existence of conditions and monitoring

mechanisms, but on whether the European Union is willing to apply them consistently, even when doing so may conflict with broader political or economic interests.

GSP+ is not a failed instrument—but it is one being tested in practice. The challenge for the European Union is not only to maintain its economic effectiveness, but to ensure that it remains aligned with the principles on which it is built. Ultimately, its credibility will depend not on its design, but on its implementation—and on whether the EU is willing to confront the tension between values and interests.

1. The Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) constitutes one of the European Union’s principal trade instruments for engaging with developing countries through preferential market access. Established as a unilateral trade mechanism, the system grants reduced tariffs or duty-free access to the EU market for a broad range of exports originating from developing economies. The framework is structured around three pillars: the Standard GSP, which offers partial tariff reductions; Everything But Arms (EBA), which provides full duty-free access for least developed countries; and GSP+, the enhanced arrangement that grants the most extensive trade preferences in exchange for compliance with a series of international conventions related to human rights, labour standards, environmental protection, climate governance, and good governance practices.
2. European institutions, Members of the European Parliament, and civil society organisations continue to point to structural shortcomings in areas related to human rights, rule of law, and minority protection. Particular criticism has focused on the continued use of blasphemy laws, which have repeatedly raised concerns regarding religious discrimination, arbitrary detention, and violence against minority communities, especially Christians and Ahmadis. Although Pakistan’s textile sector has emerged as one of the principal beneficiaries of preferential access to the European market, criticism persists regarding weak enforcement of labour protections, inadequate working conditions, limited trade union freedoms, and insufficient oversight mechanisms. At the same time, reports published during 2025–2026 highlighted recurring issues involving enforced disappearances, restrictions on press freedom, intimidation of journalists, and limitations on freedom of expression.

AI: The New Aesthetics of Fascism

Gareth Watkins

This article was first published at [The New Socialist](#) and [El Salto](#)

Tommy Robinson tweets an image of [soldiers walking into the ocean on D-Day](#). Britain First's co-leader produces imagery of Muslim men laughing at sad white girls on public transport. An [AI-generated song](#) combining kitsch schlager pop with crude racial stereotypes makes it into the German top fifty and becomes number three on Spotify's global viral chart. Benjamin Netanyahu conjures a vision of [an ethnically-cleansed Gaza](#) connected by bullet train to the equally ephemeral [Neom](#). Keir Starmer's Labour Party posts, then is [forced to take down](#), a video of its policies as embodied by anthropomorphic animals. A few days later, they promised to "[mainline AI into the veins](#)" of Britain.

The right loves AI-generated imagery. In a short time, a full half of the political spectrum has collectively fallen for the glossy, disturbing visuals created by generative AI. Despite its proponents having little love, or talent, for any form of artistic expression, right wing visual culture once ranged from memorable election-year posters to 'terror wave'. Today it is slop, almost totally. Why? To understand it, we must consider the right's hatred of working people, its (more than) mutual embrace of the tech industry and, primarily, its profound rejection of Enlightenment humanism. The last might seem like a stretch, but bear with me.

The first point is the most obvious. 'AI' – as embodied by large language models like ChatGPT, and largely diffusion-based image generators like DALL-E and Midjourney – promises to make anyone who can write a single-paragraph prompt into a copywriter or graphic designer; jobs generally associated with young, educated, urban, and often left-leaning workers. That even the best AI models are not fit to be used in any professional context is largely irrelevant. The selling point is that their users don't have to pay (and, more importantly, interact with) a person who is felt to be beneath them, but upon whose technical skills they'd be forced to depend. For relatively small groups like Britain First, hiring a full-time graphic designer to keep up with its insatiable lust for images of crying soldiers and leering foreigners would clearly be an unjustifiable expense. But surely world leaders, capable of marshalling vast state resources, could afford at the very least to get someone from Fiverr? Then again, why would they do even that, when they could simply use AI, and thus signal to their base their utter contempt for labour?

For its right wing adherents, the absence of humans is a feature, not a bug, of AI art. Where mechanically-produced art used to draw attention to its artificiality – think the mass-produced modernism of the Bauhaus (which the Nazis [repressed](#) and the AfD have [condemned](#)), or the music of Kraftwerk – AI art pretends to realism. It can produce art the way right wingers like it: Thomas Kinkade paintings, soulless Dreamworks 3D cartoons, depthless imagery that yields only

the reading that its creator intended. And, vitally, it can do so without the need for artists.

Javier Milei, a [prodigious user of AI-generated art](#), wants Argentinians to know that any of them could join the [265,000, mostly young people](#) who have lost jobs as a result of the recession that he induced, to the rapturous praise of economic elites. He wants to signal that anyone can find themselves at the wrong end of his [chainsaw](#), even if doing so means producing laughably bad graphics for the consumption of his 5.9 million deeply uncritical Instagram followers.

Companies can't launch a new AI venture without their customers telling them, clearly, "nobody wants this."

On the subject of Instagram, anyone old enough to read this will also be old enough to remember when Mark Zuckerberg, and by extension the rest of Silicon Valley, was broadly perceived as liberal. 'Zuck' was even touted as [the only presidential candidate](#) who could beat Donald Trump. (It's worth noting that as Zuckerberg has drifted to the right he has also started dressing badly, a fact which we will return to later.) But even Zuck can't make AI happen. The weird AI-powered fake profiles that Meta deployed in 2023 were [quietly mothballed](#) six months later, and would have disappeared from history completely, had [Bluesky users](#) not found some that had escaped deletion. This appears to be the fate of all commercial AI projects: at best, to be ignored but tolerated, when bundled with something that people actually need (cf: Microsoft's Co-pilot); at worst, to fail entirely because [the technology just isn't there](#). Companies can't launch a new AI venture without their customers telling them, clearly, "nobody wants this."

And yet they persist. Why? Class solidarity. The capitalist class, as a whole, has made a massive bet on AI: \$1 trillion dollars, [according to Goldman Sachs](#) – a figure calculated before the Trump administration pledged a further \$500 billion for its ['Project Stargate'](#). While previous bets on the Metaverse and NFTs didn't pay off, their bet on cryptocurrency has paid off spectacularly – [\\$3.44 trillion dollars](#), at

the time of writing, have been created, effectively out of thin air. All of the above technologies had heavy buy-in from the political right: Donald Trump co-signed an [NFT project](#) and a [memecoin](#); the far-right, shut out of conventional banking, [uses cryptocurrency almost exclusively](#). This isn't just about utility, it's about aligning themselves with the tech industry. The same is true of their adoption of AI.

OpenAI is unable to make money on [\\$200 subscriptions to ChatGPT](#). Goldman Sachs [cannot see any justification](#) for its level of investment. Sam Altman is [subject to allegations](#) of sexually abusing his sister. 'Slop' was very nearly [word of the year](#). And then, to top it all off, the open-source DeepSeek project, developed in China, [wiped \\$1 trillion off the US stock market](#) overnight.

In other words, the AI industry now finds that it needs all the allies it can get. And it can't afford to be picky. If the only places that people are seeing AI imagery is @BasedEphedrophile1488's verified X account – well, at least it's being used at all. The thinking seems to be that, if it can hang on long enough in the public consciousness, then, like cryptocurrency before it, AI will become 'too big to fail'. Political actors like Tommy Robinson won't be the ones to make that call, but they can normalise its use, and Robinson certainly moves in the digital circles of people who can offer the AI industry far more concrete help. Just as we might donate to a GoFundMe, the capitalist class will provide mutual aid in the form of billions in investment, adding AI to their products, and attempting to normalise AI by using it. This process of normalisation has led to the putatively centre-left Labour government pledging vast sums to AI infrastructure. If one of the key features of the Starmerite tendency is their belief that only conservative values are truly legitimate, their embrace of AI and its aesthetics may be part of this.

The capitalist class will provide mutual aid to the AI industry in the form of billions in investment, adding AI to their products, and attempting to normalise AI by using it.

We have seen how sensitive the tech industry's leaders are to criticism. Marc Andreessen's [techno-optimist manifesto](#), when not conferring sainthood upon deeply evil figures like Nick Land, largely consists of its writer begging the world to love him. Mark Zuckerberg's [recent interview with Joe Rogan](#) featured lengthy sections on how he does not feel validated by the press and governments. Just as when they reach out to 'cancelled' celebrities, the right is now proactively creating an alliance with the tech industry by communicating that, even if they can't materially support companies like OpenAI, they can at least offer emotional support. We may all be good materialists, but we can't underestimate the effects that non-material support has in creating networks within capital.

No amount of normalisation and 'validation', however, can alter the fact that AI imagery looks like shit. But that, I want to argue, is its main draw to the right. If AI was capable of producing art that was formally competent, surprising, soulful, then they wouldn't want it. They would be repelled by it.

There was a time when reactionaries were able to create great art – Dostoyevsky, G.K Chesterton, Knut Hamsun, and so on – but that time has long passed. Decades of seething hatred of the humanities have left them unable to create, or even think about, art. Art has always been in a dialectical push and pull between tradition and the avant garde: 'art is when there is a realistic picture of a landscape, or a scene from Greek mythology' versus 'a urinal can be art if an artist signs it'. The goal of the avant-garde, as their name suggests, has been to expand art's territory, to show that Rothko's expanses of colour, or Ono's instructional paintings, can do what Vermeer's portraits can, and do it just as well. There was even a time when the right partook in this, the Italian Futurists being a prime example. There were, at one point, writers like Céline and artists like Wyndham Lewis, who not only produced great work, but developed and pushed forward the avant-garde styles of their day. Are there any serious artists on the right today who do not parlay in nostalgia for some imagined time before art was 'ruined' by Jews, women, and homosexuals? Perhaps only Michel Houellebecq, and he is long past his two-book prime.

The right wing aesthetic project is to flood the zone with bullshit in order to erode the intellectual foundations for resisting political cruelty.

Art has rules – like the rules of the physical universe they are sufficiently flexible to allow both [Chopin](#) and [Merzbow](#) to be classed as music, but they exist, and even internet memes are subject to those rules. The most burnt-out shitpost is still part of a long tradition of outsider sloganeering stretching back through 60s comix to Dada and Surrealism. They aren't nothing, and if they're ugly then, often, they're ugly in an interesting, generative way. A person made them ugly, and did so with intent. No matter how deeply avant-garde art has engaged in shock and putative nihilism, no artist, to my knowledge, has ever made art with the sole aim of harming the already vulnerable. Even the most depraved Power Electronics acts or the most shocking performances of the Viennese Actionists had something more to them than simply causing suffering for its own sake. Andy Warhol's mass-produced art did not create enjoyment by enabling its viewers to imagine their class enemies being made unemployed. Those are the goals of AI art, and that is why it resonates with the right.

If art is the establishing or breaking of aesthetic rules, then AI art, as practiced by the right, says that there are no rules but the naked exercise of power by an in-group over an out-group. It says that the only way to enjoy art is in knowing that it is hurting somebody. That hurt can be direct, targeted at a particular group (like Britain First's AI propaganda), or it can be directed at art itself, and by extension, anybody who thinks that art can have any kind of value. It can often be playful – in the way that the cruel children of literary cliché play at pulling the wings off flies – and ironised; Musk's Nazi salute partook of a tradition of ironic-not-ironic appropriation of fascist iconography that winds its way through 4Chan (Musk's touchpoint) and back into the countercultural far right of the 20th century.

AI imagery looks like shit. But that is its main draw to the right. If AI was capable of producing art that was formally competent, surprising, soulful, they wouldn't want it.

I would not be the first to observe that we are in a new phase of reaction, something probably best termed 'postmodern conservatism'. The main effect of this shift has been to enshrine acting like a spoilt fifteen-year-old boy as the organising principle of the reactionary movement. Counter-enlightenment thought, going back to Burke and de Maistre, has been stripped of any pretence of being anything but a childish tantrum backed up by equally childish, playground-level bullying. It is, and has always been, "irritable mental gestures which seek to resemble ideas," and to 'post-liberal' 'intellectuals', that is in fact a [good thing](#) – if anything, they believe, the postmodern right needs to become more absurd; it needs to abandon Enlightenment ideals like reason and argumentation altogether.¹

The right wing intellectual project is simply to ask: 'what would have to be true in order to justify the terrible things that I want to do?' The right wing aesthetic project is to flood the zone – unsurprisingly, given their scatological bent, with bullshit – in order to erode the intellectual foundations for resisting political cruelty.

Truth does not set you free. Once you know that 2+2=4, that the administrative capital of the Netherlands is The Hague and not Amsterdam, or that immigration is a net economic positive for Britain, then you are forever bound to that truth. Your world has become, in some respects, smaller, your options diminished. If it would be more enjoyable – because this is, at the end of the day, about enjoyment – to create your own truth then you are out of luck. Combine truths with a concern for human life and thriving, and suddenly rules start to proliferate: we have established the truth that heating milk reduces the bacteria and viruses in it that can harm human beings, which is undesirable to us, therefore we must heat all milk that is sold. A lot of people are fine with this, accepting small impositions on their freedom in the name of the greater freedom from disease. Some are not.

There is no reason, of course, that any rule made in the name of Enlightenment humanism should be necessarily good: liberal politics, Labour's current mania for austerity, or the interminable justifications for the Iraq war, are often framed as being based on reason and humanism while being anything but. If you've been subject to computer-says-no rules governing your access to the basic necessities of life, then you'll know how easy it is to disguise arbitrary and highly politicised whims as laws of nature, as ironclad as $A = \pi r^2$. The application of rationality and compassion in the real world

1. There are, of course, important left critiques of those values, and of the European Enlightenment project itself. These are not the same as the revanchism of the right.
2. Jean-Paul Sartre. [1948] 1995. *Anti-Semite and Jew*. Translated by George J Becker. New York: Schocken, p.20.

brings to mind the (likely apocryphal) Ghandi quote about Western civilisation: "I think it would be a good idea."

The right is a libidinal formation; it is, for many of its proponents, especially those who aren't wealthy enough to materially benefit from it, a structure in which to have fun. A hobby, almost. Sartre's injunction to remember that anti-semites are primarily "amusing themselves"² is true of most – perhaps all – right wing discourse, no matter how serious it seems or how terrible its real-world effects. As such, the right are strongly averse to any sort of reality-testing. It is, to them, beside the point whether anything they say stands up to the tests developed by the sciences and humanities, including those which determine (insofar as such a determination can be made) whether a piece of art is 'good', or at least serious. When they do invoke objectivity, it is misplaced, and as deeply naïve as their artistic output, premising their objection to the existence of trans people on 'basic biology', when not only can biology not define 'woman', it is having difficulty deciding what a fish or vegetable is. Serious engagement with the world as it is – with the facts that emphatically don't care about your feelings – doesn't often, if ever, yield the simple explanations that the right require. In the face of this complexity, most people will conclude that it is best to be humble: *What is a woman? No idea, don't really care, but let's act in a way that causes the least suffering.* But the right seem incapable of doing this. Despite all their absurdist posturing, they struggle to come to terms with a contradictory world that does not conform to their pre-decided categories. They want to assert, simultaneously, that unambiguous laws govern all aspects of being, while acting as though 'truth' is whatever they want or need it to be at any given moment.

Despite all their absurdist posturing, the right struggle to come to terms with a contradictory world that does not conform to their pre-decided categories.

Gender revanchism is one of the main organising principles of the postmodern right, and much everyday AI usage demonstrates a particularly gendered form of cruelty: deepfake nudes, AI 'girlfriends' used as a rhetorical cudgel to show real women that they are being replaced, AI 'art' of Taylor Swift being sexually assaulted. It's no coincidence that the internet's largest directory of deepfakes uses Donald Trump as a mascot. These attitudes are reflected in the upper echelons of the tech and AI industry. OpenAI CEO Sam Altman – the man we are being told is a generational talent, a revolutionary, on a par with Steve Jobs or Bill Gates – is also, allegedly, a rapist and paedophile, who considered his own sister his sexual property since she was three years old, and who responded to allegations by lamenting that "caring for a family member who faces mental health challenges is incredibly difficult." A love of sexual violence is a key part of the identity of the contemporary right, and it is no coincidence that, the further right one goes, the more likely one is to encounter open celebration of rape and, particularly, paedophilia. Altman's legal trouble will, for many on the right, only confirm that he is one of them. Meanwhile, on the Joe Rogan podcast, Mark Zuckerberg described the tech industry as "culturally neutered" and called for more "masculine energy" and "aggression".

Let's return to Zuckerberg's clothing. It was he that established the ubiquitous 'grey hoodie' style for tech CEOs. But recently he has begun to exhibit a new style. Oversized t-shirts emblazoned with 'It's either Zuck or Nothing' in Latin, the unwieldy lines of his Meta AI glasses, a gaudy and unnecessary gold chain. This isn't taking risks with fashion, like Rick Owens or Vivienne Westwood. It's just ugly and stupid. Zuckerberg is also significantly more muscular than he used to be, despite doing nothing in his life that would seem to require a bodybuilder physique. I don't think that it's a coincidence that, as he embraces corporate incelism and AI, he has felt liberated to ignore what does and doesn't look good, choosing instead to display that he is wealthy and powerful enough to look terrible if he wants. All the emperor has to do, when the child laughs at his nudity, is ignore them. Trump's haircut, which we all seem to have become inured to, serves the same purpose. It looks like shit and that's the point. It is a display of power and a small act of cruelty.

The Cybertruck – itself a work of anti-art that could only be the product of a mind addled by the far right – failed, largely because it is embarrassing to be seen in one.

AI is a cruel technology. It replaces workers, devours millions of gallons of water, vomits CO2 into the atmosphere, propagandises exclusively for the worst ideologies, and fills the world with more ugliness and stupidity. Cruelty is the central tenet of right wing ideology. It is at the heart of everything they do. They are now quite willing to lose money or their lives in order to make the world a crueller place, and AI is a part of this – a mad rush to make a machine god that will liberate capital from labour for good. (This is no exaggeration: there is a lineage from OpenAI's senior management back to the Lesswrong blog, originator of the concept of Roko's Basilisk.) Moreso even than cryptocurrency, AI is entirely nihilistic, with zero redeeming qualities. It is a blight upon the world, and it will take decades to clear up the mountains of slop it has generated in the past two or three years.

AI is, unfortunately, a fever that will have to burn itself out. It may be the case that, like cryptocurrency, elites are simply so invested in this technology that, despite its total lack of utility, they will keep trying to make it happen. Given how great a fit it is for them psychologically, I would say that this is more likely to happen than not. However, as we saw in those two brief weeks of last year's US election campaign, the right wing psyche is incredibly fragile. For some reason, they are able to process any inversion of empirical reality, but are acutely sensitive to being laughed at. Calling them weird absolutely works, and telling them their sole artistic output looks like shit also works. Laughing at people who treat AI art as in any way legitimate works. Talking about AI's environmental impact or its implications for the workforce will not work - they like that, it makes them feel dangerous. Instead of talking about taking money from artists, talk about how it makes them look cheap. If hurting and offending people is part of the point, then we can take that fun away from them by refusing to express hurt or offence, even if we feel it.

Technological progress isn't linear, and it's not wholly undemocratic. We, ordinary people, stopped Google Glass from being widely released because we mocked its users, calling them 'glassholes'. The Cybertruck – itself a work of anti-art that could only be the product of a mind addled by the far right – failed, largely because it is embarrassing to be seen in one. We have already seen that the AI industry is vulnerable – it was possible for Chinese grad students to build the same thing for a fraction of the price, calling into question the entire model of growth through massive investment in data centres. The left is powerless across much of

society, but a training in ruthless criticism of all that exists has made us masters of negativity, while always keeping one eye on the better world that is possible when the slop has been cleared away. Our most effective weapons against AI, and the right wing that has adopted it, may not be strikes, boycotts or the power of dialectics. They might be replying "cringe," "this sucks," and "this looks like shit."

How do we write stories that make a difference? The case for a transnational journalism

Kaia Nisser



Transeuropa Festival Venice 2024.
Photo by Giuseppe Drago

“It was the tension between these two poles - a restless idealism on one hand and a sense of impending doom on the other - that kept me going.”

— Hunter S. Thompson, *The Rum Diary*

The vagabond reporter described a sense that many journalists share. The desire to inform citizens collides with a rapidly changing political landscape. This leaves many of us torn. Exhausted by the demands of the industry and yet sure that stories make a difference. If only people knew, they would act. This belief is at the heart of the press.

But the status of the journalist has undergone quite the transformation since Thompson wrote these words. What was once an adventurous endeavour grew institutionalised; it shifted into the aspirational suite of intellectual office jobs; and again into the cutthroat rat race that it is now. The field faces consistent challenges in terms of cronyism and nepotism combined with a shift toward freelancing and the financial precarity that comes with it. The fact that the global average age of journalists is now nearly 40¹ reflects the increasingly tough environment for those entering the profession. Despite its domination by those in upper income brackets, in general it no longer pays more than national averages, forcing nearly a third of journalists to seek a secondary income.

Last year, the Freedom of the Press Index found that ‘in 160 out of the 180 countries assessed, media outlets achieve financial stability “with difficulty” or “not at all”². The insidious impact of economic pressure on news platforms is crushing their ability to maintain public confidence as the top priority. Instead, increasing paid advertising is essential for their survival as public funding dries up. Much of media ownership is now concentrated between very few hands. We are all aware that buying up the press is one of the most effective tools in the politically opinionated billionaires’ handbook.

And as we gaze up this dark chain of command, there is absolutely a sense of impending doom, and not just in the familiar faces of Musk and Bezos. It is no secret that print media has been dying a slow death since the proliferation of the internet, and in many cases around the world, it was the very wealthy that stepped in to ‘save’ them. In France, most private media is owned by around a dozen people, predominantly men³. The incentive behind this, once shrouded, has emerged more clearly with the far right gaining political offices. This is clear when considering the strange nexus of fact checking initiatives and their funders over the past decade. Despite the reality that disinformation is considered a serious threat by European security analysts, most of the attempts to combat it have been supported by big tech itself, such as Google and Meta. With the advent of Trump 2.0, there was a decisive withdrawal of financial support.

With the mass defunding of factcheckers, the relationship between media platforms and far right actors stepped decisively out into the light. Notions of public interest regulation were largely scrapped, and the private media of Europe

1. [Executive Summary | Worlds of Journalism](#)
2. [RSF World Press Freedom Index 2025: economic fragility a leading threat to press freedom | RSF](#)
3. [Exploring France's media landscape: A billionaire's playground? - French connections](#)

appears now as an oligopoly shaped by brazen political deal making⁴. In 22 countries in the European Union, 'media owners' economic interests in non-media sectors raise serious concerns.⁵ Public media are similarly crippled by defunding, national debates critiquing their performance and threats to merge or decommission them entirely. It is no surprise that they are lacking resilience when the latest Monitoring Media Pluralism Report reveals 'a severe politicisation of governance and funding structures, as well as the mechanisms of European public service media... especially regarding regulatory provisions aimed at limiting political ownership, criteria for the allocation of state advertising,..., as well as the conditions and mechanisms through which political advertising is distributed.'⁶

Parallel to this, there has been a steadily increasing number of attacks on women in the field, as a major UNESCO report found⁷, online violence leads to physical violence. The corporate control of social media, which structures the way we consume information, repeatedly reveals algorithmic bias. The rise in the popularity of misogynistic content, AI driven targeting of those in public facing roles and the proliferation of mis- and disinformation all overwhelmingly target women. Online harassment and even hacking present a risk to journalists⁸ as it did in 2024 when two immigration activists and a journalist in Italy were struck by an "infection campaign". Those giving voice to the tales of the climate crisis similarly face a hostile response: 'In a consultation of over 900 environmental journalists from 129 countries carried out by UNESCO in March 2024, 70% reported experiencing attacks, threats or pressure linked to their reporting. Among these, two-in-five subsequently experienced physical violence.'⁹

However doom inducing this picture may be, optimism may be found in a call to action. The age of the multipolar crisis requires storytellers. The informational maelstrom we navigate is exhausting and induces passivity by design. Your passivity generates profit. But these challenges are not unique, individually or nationally. This is made especially clear when considering various cross-border investigations that have uncovered a wide range of injustice and foul play. These are the greatest victories against the otherwise bleak picture of modern media. From revealing the ways in which pharmaceutical companies exploit IP law and opaque pricing, to the documentation of attacks on journalists in Gaza, to the European Fortress' ongoing dedication to expelling migrants into deserts¹⁰. In amongst the dire picture painted here, these stories are written and they speak to a deep resilience.

And the best of these stories, the Panama and Pandora papers come to mind, require us to break out beyond national divisions. Such complex unveilings of power required political safety in number, in context and in access. If such collab-

orative networks were stronger, they would act as a protective buffer, against the forces exploiting globalisation to divide us.

The pressures undermining democratic journalism, from disinformation threats, kleptocratic capture of national media markets, strategic litigation, to platform dependency, are structurally supranational. They are coordinated across borders, exploit the gaps between national regulatory systems, and are funded by actors who operate globally. A response confined to national media systems will always be outpaced, because it is fighting transnational problems with national tools. A transnational media network is not just about solidarity, but necessity. It is the minimum adequate response to the scale of the threat

Often, what we see is national outlets platforming the country's momentary debate or a European outlet zooming into the corridors of power in Brussels. What we need is a dedicated coalition of outlets and journalists that work to remind us of the transversal and shared experience that takes no heed of borders. A reminder that holding power accountable must happen from multiple points. At European Alternatives, we intend to build this much needed transnational media network. If you too oscillate between these two poles, and consider yourself an occasionally doomful optimist, reach out and get involved. That oscillation is a fuel for change.

4. [The Art of the \(Platform\) Deal](#)
5. P11, <https://cadmus.eui.eu/server/api/core/bitstreams/6f562946-bb17-49fc-ab81-9a4b79b4d0ce/content>.
6. P12, *ibid.*
7. [New report: UNESCO warns of serious decline in freedom of expression and safety of journalists worldwide](#)
8. [Italian activists and journalist targeted by spyware in 2024, prosecutors confirm | Italy | The Guardian](#)
9. [UNESCO report reveals 70% of environmental journalists have been attacked for their work](#)
10. <https://www.ecpmf.eu/ij4eu-impact-award-2025-winners/>

Europe's Values on Trial: An Interview on War, Justice, and Accountability

with Oleksandra Matviichuk



We are joined by Oleksandra Matviichuck, a leading human rights defender from Ukraine and the head of the Center for Civil Liberties, which received the Nobel Prize in 2022. Since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion, she has helped document war crimes through the Tribunal for Putin initiative under the Rome statute of the International Criminal Court in all regions of Ukraine which became the target for attacks by the Russian Federation.

In this interview, Marta Cillero Manzano (European Alternatives) discusses Europe's role in the world, international justice and the importance of civil society in times of war.

Europe often presents itself as a global defender of human rights and the rule of law. From your perspective, how consistent is it in living up to that role today?

I think that these dramatic times test all of us regarding our dedication to our values. Europe is now in a situation where the current generations who live in European countries have inherited freedom and democracy from their parents, which means that they've never fought for it. They became consumers of democracy. They've started taking these values for granted and they've started to see freedom as the possibility to make a choice between cheeses in the supermarket. They forget that freedom and democracy are very fragile and you cannot maintain these values forever without making a choice everyday.

We also observed how people in European countries started to challenge the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And when elections come, people in different European countries that see themselves as stable democracies start more and more to exchange their freedom for populist claims, for economic benefits, for security promises, but first and foremost, for their own comfort. So we are now going through a test, and I really hope that Europe will pass this test.

How has Russia's war against Ukraine reshaped Europe's sense of responsibility and its role in global politics? Has the war pushed Europe to become a more autonomous geopolitical actor, or has it reinforced its dependence on the United States?

I see that Europe slowly starts to wake up. The first alarm bell was in 2022 when Russia invaded Ukraine

and started the large-scale war. It is not the first time Russia has invaded Ukraine, but in 2013 Europe didn't see this war as a problem for itself, but now, since 2022, it became obvious that Putin started this war not only to occupy a larger part of the Ukrainian land - he wants to occupy and destroy the whole country and move further. He sees Ukraine as a bridge to Europe. His logic is historical. He dreams about his legacy. And that is why the people in European countries are safe only because the Ukrainians are still resisting and are not letting the Russian army move further.

The second alarm bell was the peace negotiation process initiated by President Donald Trump where Europe was not even a party. Because if you want to be at the table, you have to put something on the table. This situation needed changes in the way of thinking, taking a lot of decisive actions. And Europe, slowly, since 2022, started to do that.

In a context where the number of wars and conflicts is increasing, do you think it is important to show solidarity across different contexts, whether Ukraine, Palestine, or elsewhere? Why is that?

Sure, it's important if you want to fight for justice, you have to do it globally. We live in a very interconnected world. You can't build a Paradise, even on an island, when a part of the world is bleeding. The problem is that people are very selective in their solidarity, unfortunately. Let me illustrate with an example how we are all interconnected. When Russia invaded Ukraine in 2014 and occupied Crimea, it was unprecedented in post-World War history. It was the first time when a country officially annexed a part of another country.

We have not seen that since the Second World War. Not just occupy, but officially annexed and made the changes in their constitution. It is the total ruination of the international system of peace and security. It is breaking the principles. The non-use of force, the inviolability of state borders was violated.

But, let's be honest, the reaction of the world was very weak. And this year, in Davos, I heard the speech of the Prime Minister Carney of Canada and he said that the world order had collapsed. I asked myself why it took 12 years to acknowledge this - a fact that is so obvious for Ukrainians. And then I understood that probably the Prime Minister of Canada and people like him thought that before the world order had collapsed only for Ukraine. But for their countries, the UN statute was still working. And the domino effect became obvious: if you turn a blind eye to Crimea, sooner or later, you will also face a security threat to your country directly.

Building on that, what role do civil society and individual citizens play in situations of conflict, and how can they meaningfully contribute?

I can talk about the Ukrainian experience, because we have a unique system of governance. It is not a widespread system in well-developed democracies. Because in well-developed democracies, when something happens, you can rely on sustainable and effective state institutions. It is not the case for Ukrainians, for obvious reasons. Just three decades ago, we got the chance to restore our independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Just 12 years ago, we got a chance after a revolution of dignity and the collapse of the Russian authoritarian regime to build sustainable and effective state institutions. So, we are a nation in transit. We are in a process. And this situation had an impact on the way of thinking of people and produced another pattern of behaviour. We are not waiting for the intervention of state institutions. We self-organised, and the Ukrainian example is a bright example of how important it is to have a vibrant civil society. Because in times of existential crisis, it is literally a back-up for the state.

Five years ago when the large-scale war started, not just Putin, but all international partners were confident that Ukraine had no potential to resist such an enormous opposing power and that Kyiv would fall in just 3-4 days. I was in Kyiv at the time and I refused to evacuate. We continued our work on the ground. When Russians tried to circle round my city, I remember how international organisations evacuated their personnel. They left us alone, but ordinary people remained, and ordinary people started to do extraordinary things. And suddenly it became obvious that when an enormous number of people, again ordinary people, I emphasize this, create a state behind the state institutions, which are not very developed, not very strong, not very effective, these institutions can continue to do the work properly. And this is a Ukrainian lesson learned even in the 21st century - the fact

that experts and analysts from Western democracies don't see the people for more than numbers or ratings behind numbers and ratings. They estimate the potential of Ukraine only by the potential of state institutions. They don't understand the impact of the people and ordinary people can have such a great impact, more than they could ever imagine.

Beyond states, there is growing discussion about the role of the municipalities and cultural actors in international politics. How do you see their contribution, particularly in times of war?

The municipalities and the cultural actors are very important. I can talk about an Ukrainian example. When we are speaking about cities, we have to acknowledge that the strength of Ukraine is not centralised or vertical. The strength of Ukraine is in local democracy, in self-organisation, in grassroots initiatives, in freedom of speech, in the agency of ordinary people and local communities, in their belief that their efforts matter. So this is a decentralised approach. When you see the country as a community of communities. It is vital and essential because it's very difficult to crush in one moment all the communities.

When we speak about culture, about a cultural community, it's something that is still not understandable for international partners because they are not in our shoes and they still don't understand clearly that this war has genocidal character. Putin openly says that there is no Ukrainian language, there is no Ukrainian culture. For 12 years, we have been documenting how these words converted into horrible practice in occupied territories, where Russians physically exterminate active local people and communities, mayors, children, writers, teachers, environmentalists, musicians, human rights defenders, journalists, how they banned Ukrainian language and culture, how they destroyed and robbed Ukrainian cultural heritage, how they took Ukrainian children to Russia, put them in Russian reeducation camps, told them you are not Ukrainian, you are Russian children, and your parents refused you and you will be adopted by Russian families who will bring you up as Russians. So in this situation, we see the increase of cultural waste from Ukraine. Because it's very natural, I would even say a biological response of a national group who is told that they do not exist.

We are. We exist. We have our culture. We have our traditions. We have our language.

We are not Russians. We exist.

In parallel with this aspect, culture provides the people with the possibility (for those who are not experiencing war, like in Italy) to understand what is going on in Ukraine. Because it's a huge difference when you read the news, look at photos and videos, and when you are on the ground and experience it. It is a huge difference. I would never wish on anyone to go through this. War is horrible. Probably the most hor-

rible thing that can happen in human life. But culture makes a symbolic space where the people without this experience can enter, safely, and they can understand the main senses.

For example, when the large-scale war started, my life was totally ruined. Everything that I call normal life was ruined. Sometimes journalists ask me how my life has changed after winning the Nobel Peace Prize, and I always answer that it is not the Nobel Peace Prize that changed my life: the large-scale war changed my life completely for me. And for millions of people in Ukraine. Suddenly I understood that the hundreds of things you recognise as important, are not actually important at all in your life, and just certain things have real value, to live for them, to fight for them, and, unfortunately as we see in Ukraine, to die for them.

Women are often portrayed primarily as victims in conflict. To what extent does this narrative obscure their role as political actors and agents of change?

We have in our database more than 100.000 episodes of war crime and among these episodes there are a lot of crimes against women. But let me assure you that women in Ukraine are not just victims. Women are fighters. I know an enormous amount of fantastic women in different fields of society. Ukrainian women joined the armed forces. Ukrainian women make political decisions. Ukrainian women coordinate the work of huge civil initiatives. Ukrainian women document war crimes. Women are in the far front of this battle of freedom and democracy, because bravery has no gender. And through this gender perspective, it's very visible for what this war is about. Putin invaded Ukraine in 2014 not because he was not afraid of NATO, but because we had neutrality in our constitution and nobody planned to join the military block. Vast populations were against it.

Now the situation changed for obvious reasons because the Ukrainian population started to see NATO as a possibility of collective defence. But in 2024 it wasn't the case, and Putin invaded Ukraine because he was afraid of the idea of freedom. Freedom is very important for everyone but especially for women because, in authoritarian countries, women can perform only assigned roles for them in families and societies. This is the basis for an authoritarian regime. The existing relation between people and society always reflects a society's idea, what the government can do towards its own people and that is why the private became political and that is why women in Iran now are being killed for wearing inappropriate clothes. Women in Afghanistan are prohibited from studying in schools and universities. When we speak about Russia, even domestic violence was decriminalized. Once again it's always a projection of what the government is doing towards its own people and that is why in this war with Russia, while we, Ukrainian women, resist Russian aggressions and occupation of our homes, we are also fighting for our daughters. Because we want our daughters to live in an European civilized dimension,

not in a Russian world where they have to prove that they are also human beings.

Within this context, how should Europe also in order to protect its people balance its strategic interest and the need of infrastructure around security, energy, water migration with the protection of its people and human rights?

When I said that Europe slowly started to take some steps, I also mentioned the changed perception of security, because generations in Europe started to see security like oxygen - like it has always existed. They haven't invested in security and their defence, they rely on the United States and now it's obvious that the United States is not a guarantor for Europe. That is why I see a new right way of thinking of European leaders and different countries starting to develop Europe's security autonomy. It's good also that they start to see Ukraine as an integral part of this collective European security. It's a complete change of perception in the right direction. Ukraine is not just a beneficiary of Europe's support, Ukraine is a strong contributor to European security. What is still lacking? Let me return to the beginning of the large-scale war. The European Union told Ukraine not to fail. Together with other international partners, they started to provide Ukraine with weapons to be able to defend itself and the first real sanctions against Russia came into force and we, as the people of Ukraine, are extremely grateful. It's also a good opportunity for me to say thank you because it helped us survive.

But it's also an explanation as to why Ukraine was waiting for a first modern tank for more than a year. Why was Ukraine waiting for the first modern plane for more than three years? Why was still waiting for the creation of special tribunal oppression? For confiscation of Russian frozen assets? For long range distance weapons? For a more precise and honest policy to confiscate and arrest Russian shadow fleets? That bypasses the sanctions of oil and gas which is not a shadow, It's possible even for students from universities to identify these ships. I can continue this list, but I will tell you it's a huge difference between: let's help Ukraine not to fail and let's help Ukraine to win this war. We can practically measure this difference with the types of weapons, with the speed of decisions, with the gravity of sanctions. The problem is that for us time is running differently: while European leaders are still debating, we are dying. The time for us converted into numerous deaths on the battlefield and in numerous deaths in the deep rear, and numerous deaths in occupied territories. I think it's irresponsible when we talk about European countries themselves - they also have no time.

For the last decades, it was only Russia who was proactive. Russia committed something horrible and then presented it as a fact, like the new normality, and pushed European countries to reckon with it. That is why we are here in this historical moment. Last December, Putin openly said that he's ready for war with

Europe. It's only Russia that has a strategy, the European Union was always just reactive, having no strategy for Russia. The tactic was called "non-escalation management". This approach has completely failed and it's time to acknowledge that. If you have an aggressive neighbour who wants to restore a destroyed empire, your tactics to non-escalate will not save you. Russia is an empire. The empire has a centre, but has no borders. Empires always try to expand and it depends not on your non-escalate management, but only on one thing - whether or not the empire has energy. If the empire has no energy, the empire will wait to have this energy and will start to attack other countries. I hope that it's not too late for Europe to return to initiative-taking, to the implementation of their own strategy. When you just react, it means that you play by Putin's rules of the game, and you will never succeed.

What would real accountability for war crimes in Ukraine look like in practice for you?

I work with people affected by this war and I know that people see justice very differently. For some people, justice means to see their perpetrators behind the bars. But for other people, justice means to get compensation because they lost everything, and without this they will feel unsatisfied. For some people, justice means to just know the truth, like what happened with their beloved ones. For other people, justice means to get public recognition, what happened to them and their families is not just immoral but also illegal, for this purpose to be publicly heard, to share this pain with others. So it means that we have to develop the comprehensive justice strategy with different elements and institutions to reach all these needs, we have to create a special tribunal and to acknowledge that in the 21st century it's not okay to invade another country, to kill people there, to erode their identity, to steal their children, to occupy their territories. Aggressive war is prohibited as such. We have to continue investigating the war crimes, the crimes against humanity, the genocide. We have to confiscate the Russian frozen assets because justice has financial meaning as well. We have to do a lot.

Just to finish with one very important feeling, my colleagues organised meetings with the survivors of Russian war crimes, they tried to facilitate the communication between legal enforcement bodies in Ukraine, the survivors and their representatives. They would always ask them during that meeting what justice meant for them. More and more people started to answer that for them it meant that the world had to know - to call a spade a spade. Russia is an aggressor that uses war crimes as a method to refine Ukraine, and they're doing horrible things to people, things beyond any sense of humanity. It's interesting that for the people who went through hell this symbolical level of justice, to just acknowledge the truth and to call spade a spade, means a lot.

If we would be able to be looking beyond the war, what would be your visions for the future of Europe?

I believe in Europe. I think that while these dramatic times test all of us for true leadership, true courage, and true responsibility, we also have to remember that only readiness to defend our values define a society with a future. I know that in different parts of the globe, people are also fighting for freedom and human dignity. Europe historically created a space with a very high level of human rights standards and played an essential role in the process of spreading freedom around the globe. Europe is less about geography and more about their values of freedom and democracy. I think that Europe can, in the future, create this non-formal union. I don't mean the bureaucratic formal structures of the European Union itself, I mean a platform for countries who start their democratic path or are currently going onto this path, like Ukraine's national transit, to help them strengthen freedom as well, and I hope that when it will be happening, Ukraine would be a part of the European Union and can do it from the inside.

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