INTERSECTIONALITY

Cover Image: Mitya Ilyinov, 'Crossroads'

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EDITORIAL

When the editorial board voted on a theme for this term's *Oxford Left Review,* we chose 'intersectionality' unanimously. Intersectionality has become the watchword of various liberation movements, and the last year has seen the publication of hundreds of critiques and celebrations of its aims and consequences. Despite its popularity as a topic, 'intersectionality' is a fairly new term - the Oxford English Dictionary still lacks a proper definition for it. The website Geek Feminism provides this outline:

> Intersectionality is a concept often used in critical theories to describe the ways in which oppressive institutions (racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia, classism, etc.) are interconnected and cannot be examined separately from one another.[1]

They add that "the concept first came from legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 and is largely used in critical theories, especially [f]eminist theory, when discussing systematic oppression". This definition's focus on intersectionality's presence in feminist theory is both apt and ironic, since feminism has recently been both the champion and the antagonist of intersectionality. Whilst striving for inclusivity in many ways, feminism has often simply assimilated the power structures of the rest of society in its approach to People of Colour, working-class feminists and those with disabilities (to name but a few groups). Nevertheless, many feminist groups have shown willingness to address these internal faults,

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1   Definition of 'Intersectionality', *Geek Feminism Wiki*

and feminists like Julie Burchill (who last year published a controversial piece ridiculing trans* people[2]) have been disowned by much of the movement.

Unfortunately, when mainstream media outlets like the BBC have tried to take these criticisms on board, it has often resulted in tokenism, and the actual concerns of the speakers they choose are brushed aside during the debate, as happened to journalist Reni Eddo-Lodge this January:

> Though it sometimes feels like I am entering into a trap, I'm hyper aware that if I don't accept these opportunities, black feminism will be mischaracterised and misrepresented by the priorities of the white feminists taking part in the conversation. If you're not at the table, you're on the menu.[3]

Issue 12 of the *Oxford Left Review* aims to bring different voices to the table, providing a platform for writers to discuss a range of issues that resonate with them, considering the intersections between various oppressions and exploring the identities of marginalised and disadvantaged groups, such as the Gaelic crofters of Scotland, working-class women, people from ex-colonised nations in Africa and individuals from the LGBTQ community. Of course, we have been limited by the submissions we received; if there are any groups you feel have been left underrepresented, we would be pleased to receive contributions for our blog. Louise Livesey introduces the *OLR 12* with an argument for taking one another's "dreams of freedom" seriously, encouraging writers to turn theory into praxis and implement strategies within their activism for recognising different groups' struggles. One group who have recently been accused of ignoring others' "dreams of freedom" are 'white feminists', and Kate Bradley, Zizzy Lugg-Williams and H.A. discuss the value of (and need for) the term in 'A Round Table on 'White Feminism''. The failures of feminisms past and present are more far-reaching than a discussion on 'white feminism' alone could cover; in 'Towards a BDSM Orientation', Alice Nutting discusses feminists' fraught history with the BDSM community, arguing for the recognition of an SM orientation. In 'Performing Vulnerability', Emily Cousens points out how class and gender intersect when women are rendered economically vulnerable by their position in the capitalist system. On either side of this article, we print new poems by Oxford graduates Jay Bernard and Thos. West, both poems exploring queer identities and the idea of belonging.

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2   Julie Burchill, 'Here is Julie Burchill's censored Observer article', Jan 14th 2013, *The Telegraph*
3   Reni Eddo-Lodge, 'On the Fallout from Woman's Hour', Jan 2nd 2014, *Black Feminists*

Moving onto issues of race and cultural difference, Shanice Mahil's article 'Commodified Cultures' discusses how cultural appropriation takes place within a capitalist culture, and how the values of marginalised cultures can be expunged and forgotten by dominant cultures. 'Misremembering Mandela' by Max Leak also addresses racial oppression and its relationship to political formations, focusing particularly on how the response to Nelson Mandela's death whitewashed his biography to remove any references to his 'radical' politics, except in passing as regretful asides; Leak argues that we should restore and celebrate his left-wing identity.

Further exploring colonialism and its effects, in 'On Dark and Unarguable Blackness', Ankhi Mukherjee examines Frantz Fanon, a Martinican-born French psychiatrist, intellectual and anti-imperialist: she discusses his writing in relation to his race and nationality, showing how he "used the resources of Western thought against itself". The intersection between race and nationality is also explored by Nathan Akehurst, whose article 'Ireland at the Intersection' explores the relationship between Irish identities and post-colonialism, considering whether it is viable to place the Irish into the 'Black' political category. Finally, *Dòmhnall Iain Dòmhnallach* explores the plights of the *Gàidhealtachd*, considering how Gaelic people in the Scottish Highlands have been exploited and marginalised by their landlords, and how the land-oppression continues to be fought in modern-day Scotland.

Imagining Freedom: Activism, Intersectionality and Ethics
Louise Livesey

Intersectionality has become a contentious topic in recent years, despite the fact that the concept has been discussed for over three decades (Yuval-Davis, 2006).[1] At the core of these debates are struggles over the right to define the experience of oppression and, often implicitly, how they impact on work to alter existing social relations. I am not referring here to the frequent representation of intersectionality as being limited to overlapping, or increasingly specific (in an additive mode), *identities*. Instead I refer to a concept of intersectionality which developed directly as a response to the failures in identity politics to deal with issues of difference and the barriers this creates to the building of active solidarities within activist circles. It is fair to say that intersectionality, despite a long history, is currently in methodological infancy in terms of empirical research (McCall 2005) and still matter of ontological debate (Yuval-Davis 2006); in terms of the praxis I experience as an activist (as well as being involved in academic work), intersectionality is a key concern. [2]

This intersectionality posits that power structures, and the oppressions and exclusions they create, are mutually constitutive and mutually reinforcing – they

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1   Yuval-Davis, N (2006), 'Intersectionality and Feminist Politics', in *European Journal of Women's Studies* V13(3): 193–209
2   McCall, L (2005), 'The Complexity of Intersectionality', in *Signs* V30:3, p.1771–800

produce and reproduce each other through a complex set of inter-relations. If we take, as an example, the historical slave trade, it could not have existed without the interwoven, mutually supporting systems of capitalism, racism, imperialism, patriarchy and state control (and this list is not exhaustive). Additionally, there is no way to disentwine these mutually constitutive strands. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) discusses intersectional oppression as being caused by a matrix of domination in which intersecting systems of oppression are specifically organised through interrelated domains of structural (organising), disciplinary (managing), hegemonic (legitimising) and interpersonal power relations.[3]

To understand this conception of intersectionality, we must first begin by understanding that systems of oppression are not hierarchically structured (with a primary oppression and other secondary oppressions). For example, being a disabled working-class woman is not just one mode of being working-class or female; instead there is a complex and entwined system of material and symbolic inequalities and factors which specifically constitute this position. If we reduce these complexities to the idea of a singular primary oppression, then we are, as Yuval-Davis puts it, "render[ing] invisible experiences of the more marginal members of that specific social category and construct[ing] an homogenized 'right way' to be its member" (2006, p.195), reverting to and directly drawing upon existing forms of oppressive structuring.

Angela Davis, speaking at Birkbeck's Annual Law Lecture 25th October 2013, drew on Orlando Patterson's work to note that "the very concept of freedom which is held so dear throughout the West, which has inspired so many world historical revolutions; that very concept of freedom *had first to be imagined by slaves*" (emphasis mine).[4] Davis reminds us that it is oppressed peoples who can truly imagine what freedom would mean, what it would actually look like to not be oppressed. These visions of freedom are rooted in the experiences and understandings of what it means to be oppressed, rather than projected assumptions of the meaning of that oppression. So these dreams of freedom derive from lived realities of oppression and also from the ability to see both the conditions of oppression and the conditions of power from a specific Other-insider position, created because oppressed communities and individuals live within the structures, hegemonies and inter-personal relationships created by the powerful (as well as structures and relationships of resistance) and thus can develop a multiple-focal

vision of oppression (as Gilroy 1993 argues).[5] Compared to this, the envisioning of freedom from the position of a privileged ally is necessarily unaware of some aspects of oppression and necessarily partial, because the powerful do not have access to the same perspectives and experiences of oppression.

Clearly, there is complexity here; intersectionality reminds us that in interwoven systems of oppression, it is possible (indeed probable) that we will simultaneously be located in relations of both oppression and privilege – in other words, we will be both oppressed, privileged and sometimes oppressive to others. So white, working-class gay men benefit from racial privilege whilst also experiencing heteronormative, homophobic and class-based oppressions, and they may express (as examples) sexist, racist or transphobic viewpoints or commit transphobic (or other) violences. So whilst the exemplar men here may experience interlinking oppressions as a working class, gay man, he still has access to (and in this example wields) power within the systems of patriarchy, white supremacy and cis-sexism.

But intersectionality is not just concerned with the interpersonal power relations nor with the ways in which an individual may deploy structural or hegemonic aspects of power. Another concern is how positions are constituted as variably and complexly powerful or powerless and how this affects any consequent imagining of freedom. What is clear from this example is that the imaging of freedom by one group (or indeed one intersectional position, if we take our example of white, gay working-class men) does not automatically create a vision of freedom applicable to other groups (female, transgendered or Black people or intersectional combinations thereof). Oppressions are not identical in nature, circumstance or effects.

Intersectionality asks us to take seriously this issue of dreams of freedom, but as explored above, this is not a simple task. But as Audre Lorde (2007) argues, "It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognise, accept, and celebrate those differences […] Difference should act like polarities through which our creativity can spark like a dialectic".[6] Other groups trying to re-imagine freedom for any particular oppressed group of which they are not part will inevitably re-mould struggles, experiences and solutions in their own image, or rather in the image of the oppressions or privileges they do experience. It is only through working with intersectionality, discussing our alternate dreams of freedom, that we can build a solidarity which does not demand that one group waits longer for their freedom to be realised while other groups achieve their goals. That is, intersectionality demands not that one group waits its turn (whether on

3   Collins, P. H. (2000), *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*, NY: Routledge
4   Davis, A (2013), *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Closures and Continuities*, Birkbeck Annual Law Lecture 25th October 2013, available as podcast at http://backdoorbroadcasting. net/2013/10/angela-davis-freedom-is-a-constant-struggle-closures-and-continuities/

5   Gilroy, P (1993), *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, London: Verso
6   Lorde, A (2007), 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House', in *Sister Outsider: essays and speeches*, Berkeley: The Crossing Press.

the basis that we cannot achieve all goals at once, that ending one oppression might end another or that one group is mistaken about the root causes of their oppression) but that intersectional activism builds different ways of envisaging the dreams of freedom.

This, then, offers a driving imperative of why we have to think beyond *representing* the struggles of others and focus on creating platforms for the struggles of Others to represent themselves in dialogic and potentially dialectic processes. The importance of dialogism is in seeking to hear the dreams of others and not necessarily trying to assimilate them, but rather ensuring that each position can retain its salience and its specificity. This relates closely to Patricia Hill Collins' (2000) calls to enshrine alternative epistemologies in our challenges to the status quo, and that such epistemologies build on lived experience and dialogic rather than adversarial positions. Hill Collins also reminds us, however, that alternative epistemologies also require personal accountability, in that the knower must acknowledge their social embeddedness and that this influences the account they can give of the world, rejecting positivistic claims of value-neutral, objective knowledge as being a smoke-screen behind which knowledge producers can seek to avoid ethical and moral accountability.

This point, that we must be accountable, in the real world, for our position and our actions, is key to operationalising this notion of intersectionality. As Fred Hampton argued:

> I don't care how much theory you got, if it don't have any practice applied to it, then that theory happens to be irrelevant. Right? Any theory you get, practice it. And when you practice it you make some mistakes. When you make a mistake, you correct that theory, and then it will be corrected theory that will be able to be applied and used in any situation. That's what we've got to be able to do.[7]

This has been my experience of how intersectionality has been operationalised in activist circles – contrary to the presentation of intersectionality by some commentators, discussions rarely rely on assertion of multiple (additive) barriers but rather through dialogic and accountable acts which help develop modes of action. This is not to claim that people don't make mistakes, nor that those mistakes don't cause interpersonal and organisational pain, but that there is (and must be) space for that to be experienced, used as a way of developing intersectional activism. Making mistakes, learning to recognise those mistakes and addressing them, are key parts of ensuring intersectionality is truly embedded in activist struggles.

If we take Patterson's argument seriously, then what intersectional activism asks is that we find new ways to develop, share and allow the development and enacting of dreams of freedom. Methodologically, to date, studies of intersectionality have related more to debates about its theoretical operationalising than its actual enactment in activism and social change. This is partly explainable by the attempts by academics to co-opt and decontextualise the phrase away from the realm in which its use presents acute challenges and the most opportunities to advance social change. What I would argue we need, then, is for activists to re-engage with the discussion of intersectionality on their own terms and in terms of practice-related writing to discuss its actual use in activist settings, rather than being stifled by external demands for epistemological debates, or by theorising in a way which is detached from praxis. There is not space here to begin this task, but I would hope that other activists might take up this challenge to contribute to discussions of intersectionality based on actual campaigns for social change.

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7   Hampton, F (1969), *Power Anywhere Where There's People,* speech delivered at Olivet Church, available at http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/fhamptonspeech.html

A Round Table on 'White Feminism'

Kate Bradley, Zizzy Lugg-Williams, & H.A.

This round-table piece was inspired by a meeting of Oriel and Corpus Christi colleges' gender issues discussion group Corporiel on 4th February 2014, at which the group considered the concept of 'white feminism'. Three contributors agreed to write up their thoughts after the discussion, addressing the need for self-questioning within feminist communities, Western feminism's relationship with Islam, and the dubiousness of the label 'white feminist'.

Kate Bradley - *Taking Offence at 'White Feminism'*

Charlotte Perkins Gilman was a first-wave feminist in the U.S.A., best remembered for her short story *The Yellow Wallpaper*, which has been lauded since its publication in 1892. However, she was also a racist: she believed in the inherent biological inferiority of non-white peoples and criticised America's relatively liberal border policies at the time for admitting "swarming immigrants" into the country.[1] In today's world, where different liberation movements are seen to be 'on the same side', each in some way fighting for equality, the blatant racism of early feminists like Perkins Gilman is often viewed as absurd and contradictory. Yet Perkins Gilman proves that feminism doesn't always go hand in hand with anti-racism, and so it is a mistake to assume that where feminism achieves things for women, racial equality will follow.

Over the last few months, the notion of 'white feminism' has become a topic of conversation across various media. Intersectionality has been a concept for decades, and so has 'womanism', a form of feminism which "accounts for the ways in which black women support and empower black men, and serves as a tool for understanding the Black woman's relationship to men as different from the white woman's".[2] However, recently, specific issues with exclusive, racially-unaware feminism have inspired writers to criticise the way many well-known mainstream feminists like Caitlin Moran and Lena Dunham depict universal womanhood: they either ignore the specific struggles of people of colour, or, like the controversial group Femen, intervene unhelpfully on non-white, non-Western issues.[3]

As a feminist who also happens to be white, I have found myself amongst those who initially felt defensive about criticisms of my feminism. But over time, and with research, I started to see the ways in which my own feminist beliefs were racially exclusive - not overtly, but through the issues that did not affect me and that I did not really address in my criticisms of society. I always saw myself as anti-racist, but I considered my feminist and my anti-racist sympathies as distinct and separable. When I started to think about my feminism, I realised that it was, in some ways, 'white feminism', and now, my beliefs continue to be enriched by noticing all the ways in which the struggles of disempowered groups' intersect, and by making myself consciously challenge any patronising or 'othering' feelings towards cultures in which I was not raised.

The blog *BattyMamzelle* recently published a very useful discussion of 'white feminism' which can help white feminists to start questioning their beliefs, and which rejects the racially essentialist connotations that the term seems to suggest. The author argues that, whilst most 'white feminism' is conducted by white, privileged women, it is actually a label for a "specific set of single-issue, non-intersectional, superficial feminist practices", and it is possible for feminists of all colours to practise a better, more inclusive feminism.[4] Yet, to achieve this, we have to acknowledge the problems within mainstream feminism today - or as Sarah Milstein puts it, "woman up, rethink our role, and help reshape feminism".[5]

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1   Denise D. Knight, 'Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Shadow of Racism', *American Literary Realism* 32:2 (2000)

2   Defintion of 'womanism', *A Feminist Theory Dictionary*, 17th Jul 2007
3   Laurie Penny, 'Lena Dunham, Caitlin Moran and the Problem of Unexamined Privilege', *New Statesman*, 9th October 2012
4   Anonymous, "This is what I mean when I say 'white feminism'", *BattyMamzelle*, 10th Jan 2014
5   Sarah Milstein, "5 Ways White Feminists Can Address Our Own Racism", *Huffington Post*, 24th Sep 2013

Zizzy Lugg-Williams - *What's in a label?*

2013 was the year that brought us the Twitter hashtag #solidarityisforwhitewomen, and within hours eyes had been opened to the glaring hypocrisies of a movement that claimed to fight for the equality of all human beings. One of those pairs of eyes was my own, and yet this is where I begin to find problems with the subsequent interest in 'Black/white feminism' and 'white privilege'. As a British citizen born and raised in the U.K., with three out of my four grandparents being ethnically white, race has never truly factored into my understanding of myself, and when I have been confronted with it, it has been at most a point of confusion. And so as the debate progresses over how to reconcile 'white feminism' with 'Black feminism', I wonder how many other women are feeling as confused as I am by suddenly being outwardly designated as a 'Woman of Colour'.

As intersectionality leaves behind its buzzword status and becomes a given goal, it is now, before the bases of the goal become solidified to a point beyond discussion, that we must really look at the significance behind the problems identified. The acceptance that there are different female experiences that need to be valued and that there are different forms of oppression is obviously helpful to the feminist cause, and there is no worse privilege than an un-checked, un-examined one. There is something commendable about the feminist movement in its self-examining nature; however, it is in the naming of the problem that I see difficulty. The previous marginalisation was not a 'white' problem, but rather one of specific Western socio-economic privilege, and the white/Black dichotomy does not do anything to explain differences, and nor does it rectify the mistakes of the past. In calling these mistakes the mistakes of 'white' feminism, a rift is caused that suggests that sides should be taken, or at least that there is a distinction between two different demographic groups. This ignores the complex, non-linear nature of race, and ignores the struggles of many other marginalised groups, ironically running the risk of alienating by trying to understand.

H.A. - *Western feminism, Islam and Objectification*

A common theme in Western discourse about the Hijab (or headscarf) is that of oppression. It is often assumed that women who choose to wear the covering are forced to by their husbands, fathers or a male figure in their life. Even when a woman claims to have chosen completely of her own accord to wear it, this is often met with claims of subconscious societal pressures. Many Western feminists will act as though they must free the Muslim woman from this cloth of oppression, as if they are somehow in a position to do this.

In reducing Muslim women down to what they are wearing, we are taking away the very agency that feminism is supposed to give women. Our obsession within feminism with the way that Muslim women look (and I would argue that it *is*

an obsession) propagates the exact objectification that we are supposed to be fighting. Furthermore, by seeing only what is on the outside, we homogenise an incredibly diverse group of women. The Hijab represents different things to those who choose to wear it. For some it is an outward representation of their faith, a form of identity marker, and for others it is a reflection of their commitment to their religion. Very few women who choose to wear the headscarf have chosen to do so lightly - in an increasingly hostile and secular society, it is a difficult choice to make. By focusing so much on the outer garments and clothing of these women, we fail to appreciate their opinions, choices, individual agency and, often, courage.

Of course women should not to be forced to dress in any particular way, and there are definitely some rare instances where the Hijab or Burka is forced on women, but we should not presume it is something that is always forced just because it is alien to us. An important point to consider is how much freedom *we* have as Western women living in a supposedly liberal and free society. We are just as influenced by societal pressures in the way that we look and dress. Why is it then that we still see ourselves as free, or freer, than Muslim women in the East? Does this tie into a larger question about a Western imposition of values onto other cultures? It can certainly be argued that people in the West are often guilty of holding the rest of the world to Western ideals, and if these are not realised, then we presume that the other culture must be backward because we are more progressive and forward-thinking. This could certainly explain why some Western women and feminists see themselves as having to 'liberate' Muslim women, implying that they are not capable of liberating themselves due to their backwardness or the backwardness of their societies.

I completely acknowledge that there is serious oppression and mistreatment of women in some Muslim countries. However, this is the case all over the world, including in the U.K.. The banning of the Burka or Hijab would be just as oppressive as forcing women to wear it. This is not really an issue about culture, but rather an issue about patriarchy as a whole: in our homogenisation of Muslim women and our implication that they are weak and need liberating, we both underestimate the meaning of the Hijab, but more importantly, the choices of the woman wearing it. We reduce her down to a mere item of clothing that we judge from the outside. This is exactly the kind of objectification that we should be opposing. Instead of using feminism to empower women, therefore, we are ironically taking away their power and agency.

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Feels

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'Yes,
I'm exactly twice as old as when I started
Sassy.' 'It's not like I pioneered
taking Ke$ha seriously.' 'If I can't say
"I fucked her," It's weird for me.'

'Please,
separate your tags with a comma:
anal orgasm, oral sex.' 'Ten
Diseases You Can Only Catch
From the Cast of Jersey Shore.'

'Sixteen
Ways To Talk About Consent.'
'You are nothing to me but an exercise
in blogging about men.' 'Must we all pee on sticks
on camera to be heard?'

'Red
is the colour of strawberries and blood.'
'A toddler and a flying dog
cannot do work intended for an adult
human.' 'I have so many feels rn.'

'She
is among the best AI companions
I've ever had.' 'Slurs include: tr*nny,
sh*male, tr*nsvestite (when used in
the wrong context), he-she, and sometimes it.'

'A pirate's tits
are like the ocean.' 'This
is how I got into Hanson.' 'When I quit
the business, I went through my phone
and deleted each and every stage name.'

'It's
just a sad case of feels today.'
'I'm going to stop being trans
and start being: video games.'
'Is there a part of your body you don't want touched?'

'What
punk rock sounds like when you're raised
on bubblegum.' 'What does 'strap on'
spell backwards?' 'We should merge the following
under the article title of External Ejaculation:'

Thos. West left Oxford after finishing a Masters in English Literature in 2012. Since then he has spent far too much time on the internet.

Towards a BDSM Orientation

ALICE NUTTING

Glossary

SM – sado-masochism, now more commonly known as BDSM (bondage/discipline, dominance/submission, sadism/masochism)

Kink – derived from the idea of having a bend, or kink, in one's sexual behaviour and appropriated by some sexual fetishists as a synonym for their practices

Vanilla – a term commonly used by fetishists and SM practitioners for non-kinky folk

Queer – umbrella term for people who are non-heterosexual or gender binary

When I was seven years old, my mother found a story – starring myself – that I'd written to fulfil my emerging platonic D/s and bondage fantasies. It was an immensely embarrassing experience for me, and clearly disturbing for her. An incredibly awkward confrontation followed; I remember thinking something along the lines of "Oh fuck, Alice, you've finally been caught out!" I hastily fabricated an unconvincing excuse about taking inspiration from a school project (I'm surprised my mother didn't immediately withdraw me from school following that revelation), but the mortification was imprinted on my developing submissive brain for years afterwards. I found myself imagining that something was wrong

with me. Perhaps I should have read Foucault, who would have reassured me that "power is not evil…to wield power over the other in a sort of open-ended strategic game where the situation may be reversed is not evil; it's past of love, of passion and sexual pleasure…".[1] Yet historically, the prevailing psychological discourse on SM has tended to agree with the seven-year-old me; perceptions of, and discourse surrounding, kink are still fraught with stigma and misconceptions. Recognition of SM as an orientation would go some way towards actively countering this stigma, protecting SM participants, and opening up healthy fetishistic avenues to those who might not otherwise be able to, or know how to, enjoy them.

In 1886 the psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing published the highly influential psychiatric manual *Psychopathia Sexualis: eine Klinisch-Forensische Studie*, which attempted to highlight and categorise numerous sexual practices. Influenced by the prejudices and standards of acceptability of his time, Krafft-Ebing compiled an extensive list of disorders that included homosexuality and SM. He considered sex for non-reproductive purposes perverse and saw women as too passive to be fetishists.[2] One might wonder what our relationship to sexuality and mental health would be were it not for *Psychopathia Sexualis*. The more modern *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) removed homosexuality from its list of disorders in 1974, following protests from gay rights activists (although 'sexual orientation disturbance' remained for a number of years); in a reflection of the stigma that still surrounds kink and its practices, the DSM still classifies some elements of SM as "paraphilic disorders", although their *de facto* stance is that "atypical sexual interests" are healthy. The exceptions outlined in the 2013 Fifth Edition are circumstances under which the patient "feels[s] personal distress about their interest, not merely distress resulting from society's disapproval" or has "a sexual desire or behaviour that involves another person's psychological distress, injury, or death, or a desire for sexual behaviours involving unwilling persons or persons unable to give legal consent".[3] Although the former criterion is clearly problematic (switch 'SM' for 'homosexuality'; would a gay person be classed as having a paraphilic disorder if he found it difficult to come to terms with his sexuality, but not as a result of social stigma?), the latter would sound more reasonable if consensual SM activity was not frequently prosecuted. The law states that in most cases you cannot consent to being hurt, and many aspects of consensual SM play are punishable under UK and US law; it is illegal to leave a lasting mark on someone else's body, a textbook example of lazy law-making that actively stigmatises and penalises those who are trying to practise their sexuality.

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1 M. Foucault (1984), 'The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom' (trans. R Hurley and others), in Rabinow, P (ed.) Michel Foucault: *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth: The Essential Works of Michael Foucault 1954-1984*, Vol. 1 (Penguin Press, 1997).
2 R. von Krafft-Ebing (1886), *Psychopathia Sexualis*, trans. Franklin Klaf (Arcade, 1965)
3 American Psychiatric Association (2013), *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* (American Psychiatric Publishing)

There have been at least four prosecutions of SM practitioners in the UK since 1990, including the Spanner Case, when five men were jailed for giving each other consensual beatings, lacerations and genital abrasions for sexual pleasure. It led to the establishment of the Spanner Trust, which seeks to defend the rights of SM practitioners and change the UK court ruling that made consensual SM activities illegal. Out or 'outed' kinky people are often extremely disadvantaged in child custody cases[4], and kinky people entering therapy regularly face stigma because of their sexuality.[5] According to the National Coalition for Sexual Freedom's 2013 survey, 82% of kinky people feel that society doesn't accept them. The effects of societal stigma are startling: Brame's survey of almost 7000 kinky people, although scientifically sketchy – especially when its rather limited questioning criteria are taken into account – found that 23% of them have "definitely" felt guilty or ashamed about their sexual desires; 4% have considered suicide; 14% are not out to anyone, including lovers or close friends.[6] She also noted that 20% of respondents had at some point tried to give up their SM/fetish interests to be more "normal", although it is difficult to tell whether social stigma was an underlying factor in all cases.

Some sex therapists genuinely believe that people who are sexually aroused by non-sex related stimuli are displaying forms of pathological behaviour, but Peggy Kleinplatz questions the nature of sexual purpose itself and those who feel they have the authority to dictate it. She accuses psychologists of perpetuating a "pernicious process about a particular set of social mores being disguised in scientific jargon and harnessed to further sexual oppression…all too often such judgements are moral – not scientific in nature", citing examples of someone who dislikes missing their morning workout and someone "who progresses from sailing a boat down a river to circumnavigating the globe" to illustrate societal double standards.[7] Why is it that some interests are allowed to be addictive or intensive but not others? The struggle for SM rights is depressingly similar to the debate surrounding queerness that raged amongst academic and feminist circles a few decades ago. There is no real scientific evidence that practising kink is caused by a physical or mental disease; nor is there any evidence that it is inherently harmful or traumatising. More outdated academic attempts to explain SM tendencies, such as that of Roy Baumeister some 25 years ago, often conclude that masochism is a form of escapism, "a systematic attempt to eradicate (temporarily) the main

features of the self".[8] This holds water, but there is little empirical evidence to support his theory that the masochist loses self-awareness during SM play, which, I would argue, is a misconception. It is not uncommon for submissives to experience an *increased* sense of self-awareness during intense scenes of pain and humiliation as they explore deeper, often unexplained elements of their psyche. Baumeister, at least, was careful to emphasise that he did not intend "to stigmatise or condemn masochism", although whether his paper truly avoided stigmatising and condemning masochism is debatable. [9]

It was unfortunate, although unsurprising, that the queer liberation movement of the 1970s saw many writers trying to distance queerness from kink, presenting the former as a healthy sexual orientation worthy of protection and the latter as a sociopathic disorder. The "sex wars" of feminism were to a large extent wrapped up in issues of SM and intersectionality. The radical feminist anthology *Against Sadomasochism*, published in 1982, slammed SM practices as a product of "patriarchal sexual ideology",[10] although it must be remembered that radical feminist theory in America around that time generally saw lesbianism as a liberating political act, a sort of "decolonization of the body",[11] and rejected biological determinism. It would therefore have been far more plausible to them that SM be wholly influenced by external factors, especially as in many cases it seemed to mirror real-life violence and oppression. Radical feminism now tends towards acceptance of 'innate' lesbianism, but kink is still ostracised in most radical feminist circles, along with sex work and, in some cases, trans* identities. Historically, gay rights advocates have focused on queerness as an innate sexual orientation, in response to opponents who portray it as a deviant lifestyle choice that could be eradicated, although some feminists and many social conservatives still do not subscribe to the 'innateness' theory. This makes the relationship between queerness and kink even more complex and fraught, despite evidence that suggests SM practitioners are more likely to be queer: Kolmes, Stock and Moser found in 2006 that over 50% of their survey participants identified as non-heterosexual.[12] In a survey of 24/7 slaves carried out in the same year by Dancer, Kleinplatz and Moser, roughly 60% of respondents identified as queer.[13] It is

4   C. Moser & M. Klein (2006), 'SM (Sadomasochistic) Interests as an Issue in a Child Custody Proceeding' in *Journal of Homosexuality*, 50 (2/3)

5   K. Kolmes, Wendy Stock & Charles Moser (2006), 'Investigating bias in psychotherapy with BDSM clients' in *Journal of Homosexuality*, 50 (2/3)

6   G. Brame (2000), *Come Hither: A Commonsense Guide to Kinky Sex* (Fireside)

7   P. Kleinplatz (2006), 'Learning from extraordinary lovers: Lessons from the edge' in *Journal of Homosexuality*, 50 (2/3)

8   R. Baumeister (1988), 'Masochism as Escape from Self' in *The Journal of Sex Research*, Vol. 25, No. 1, pp. 28-59

9   *Ibid.*

10   T. Murphy (2000), *Reader's Guide to Lesbian and Gay Studies* (Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers)

11   C. Clarke (1981), 'Lesbianism: An Act of Resistance' in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Colour*, ed. C. Moraga & G. Andalzua (Kitchen Table Press, 1983)

12   K. Kolmes, W. Stock & C. Moser (2006), 'Investigating bias in psychotherapy with BDSM clients' in *Journal of Homosexuality*, 50 (2/3)

13   P. Dancer, P. Kleinplatz & C. Moser (2006), '24/7 SM Slavery' in *Journal of Homosexuality*, 50 (2/3)

also worth noting that, in the same year, Cross and Matheson found that kinky people had slightly more pro-feminist leanings than their control group;[14] other studies have not discovered any correlation between women's feminist values and their sexual fantasies. In short, there is no evidence that kinky people are not as feminist as their vanilla counterparts.

Research subjects themselves have often been the most vehement advocates of theories of 'innateness' within kink. Krafft-Ebing was told by a heterosexual male masochist (Case 57) that

> …masochism, according to my experience, is under all circumstances congenital, and never acquired by the individual…as long as I have been capable of thinking, I have had such thoughts. If the origin of them had been the result of a particular event, especially of a beating, I should certainly not have forgotten it. It is characteristic that the ideas were present before there was any libido. At that time the ideas were absolutely sexless.[15]

Sexologist Dr Charles Moser reported similar findings in a court testimony.[16] Psychologists from Freud to Kinsey have suggested that human sexuality can be learned and conditioned, but the reality is more complex and nuanced. It is not uncommon for SM practitioners to claim that they have always been kinky: 43% of participants in Yost and Hunter's 2012 study claimed that their SM sexuality was innate, compared to 35% who believed that their interest was influenced by outside factors.[17] I count myself as an example of the former category, having first had platonic thoughts about kink before patriarchy was really perceptible to me. I felt ashamed of and confused about my thoughts for a number of years before finally discovering the SM community, a world of acceptance, at the age of fifteen. The expectation, however, that you must have always 'known' you were kinky to consider it a valid part of your sexual orientation doesn't hold up to scrutiny; it's not uncommon, after all, for queers to discover their preferences later on in life – and the fact that queerness may not be genetic does not invalidate its status as an orientation.

And what of modern depictions of kink in the vanilla world, in which humans rely increasingly on popular forms of media to convey information about sex

and its associative practices? The lazy and predictable association drawn between kinkiness and past abuse or mental illness in the relatively few contemporary fictional depictions of SM relationships out there is arguably far more harmful for SM's image than a classification in the DSM. Lee Holloway in the popular soft kink film *Secretary* is a sexually masochistic recovering self-harmer who has just been released from a psychiatric unit; Christian Grey in the nauseatingly ubiquitous *50 Shades of Grey* suffered abuse as a child, revealed when he projects his hatred of his mother onto Ana. He also violates the principles of Risk Aware Consensual Kink on numerous occasions, but one mustn't let the dullness of positive, realistic depictions of SM and its practitioners get in the way of a scandalous story. E. L. James and Steven Shainberg would do well to take note of the findings of a 2008 study that concluded SM-practising participants were no more likely to have been abused or coerced into sexual activity, and were not much more likely to feel unhappy or anxious, than their vanilla counterparts.[18]

The implications of thinking about SM as a sexual orientation are potentially significant and far-reaching. It would help dispel the myth that SM is proof of emotional trauma or an abusive childhood and that people can be 'treated' for it; it would go some way towards protecting SM practitioners against prejudice and discrimination; it would encourage awareness and understanding of SM practices; it could even provoke a change in the law over the treatment of those who engage in consensual SM play. The American Psychological Association speaks proudly of its record on disassociating queerness with mental illness;[19] a validation of SM as an orientation amongst the psychiatric community could hypothetically lead to a future endorsement from the APA, a huge step towards destigmatisation. But there is perhaps something inherently problematic about the argument that something should be accepted because it is innate. Kink, whether practiced as occasional experimentalism or as a significant and long-standing part of a person's sexuality, has the potential to be an intensely liberating mode of exploration, as articulated by Kleinplatz:

> Whereas many couples are willing to settle for merely functional sex, SM practitioners may be more interested in contact that necessitates intense, erotic connection; sophisticated communication of subtle differences in intent; and eventuates in profound self-knowledge and transcendent levels of intimacy.[20]

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14   P. Cross & K. Matheson (2006), 'Understanding Sadomasochism' in *Journal of Homosexuality*, 50 (2/3)
15   R. von Krafft-Ebing (1886), *Psychopathia Sexualis*, trans. Franklin Klaf (Arcade Publishing, 1965)
16   N. Barsotti (2009), 'BDSM lifestyler unfit to drive a limo: police', available at: http://dailyxtra.com/vancouver/news/bdsm-lifestyler-unfit-drive-limo-police
17   M. Yost & L. Hunter (2012), 'BDSM practitioners' understandings of their initial attraction to BDSM sexuality: essentialist and constructionist narratives' in *Psychology and Sexuality*, 3.3, 244-259

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18   J. Richters et al (2008), 'Demographic and psychosocial features of participants in bondage and discipline, "sadomasochism" or dominance and submission (BDSM): data from a national survey' in *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, vol. 5, issue 7, pp. 1660-1668
19   American Psychological Association (2008), 'Sexual orientation and homosexuality', available at: http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/sexual-orientation.aspx
20   P. Kleinplatz (2006), 'Learning from extraordinary lovers: Lessons from the edge' in *Journal of Homosexuality*, 50 (2/3)

As an SM practitioner with no interest in vanilla sex, I find Kleinplatz's analysis convincing. The mechanics of sex are not enough for me; climax is never the ending, highlight, or purpose of a sexual encounter. My numerous vanilla sexual experiences have always been somewhat unsatisfying and anticlimactic; my masturbatory fantasies focus around kink, usually not involving sexual activity but always sexually stimulating. My successful SM encounters with others are highly charged forms of expression, intimacy and mutual respect. I occupy a different space to vanilla people. I will campaign against the stigmatisation of my sexuality as long as its practitioners are still shamed, stereotyped and ostracised for it. SM is not yet recognised as a valid part of someone's sexual psyche, only as an element of sexual expression and deviance – and, according to the DSM, it can even be a pathological disorder. The American Psychological Association defines a sexual orientation as "an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to men, women, or both sexes" and "a person's sense of identity based on those attractions, related behaviours, and membership in a community of others who share those attractions".[21] Is it not possible, then, for SM practitioners to have an enduring pattern of attractions to those who share their fetishes? Is kink not considered an identity by many of the people who practise it? Are there not thriving kink communities across the world that organise events and socials around their shared sexual interests? My theory, that SM tendencies can be classified using an equivalent to the Kinsey scale, would suggest that, much like queerness, kink is a spectrum, with those who enjoy both kink and vanilla sex considered loosely equivalent to bisexuals.

We conceptualise sexuality through 'orientations'. For many SM practitioners, applying this label to kink would be a helpful way of coming to terms with, and validating, their desires – and it would undoubtedly be an improvement on the current classification of elements of consensual SM as a pathological disorder. But labels can be limiting and reductive if leaned on too heavily; centuries of stigma do not evaporate with the altering of a definition. No, we must look beyond the label and cast aside our prejudices in an attempt to realise the abundant erotic and emotionally liberating potential of kink – or, as Kleinplatz says, "to discover the transformative potential of intense erotic intimacy".[22]

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21   American Psychological Association (2008), 'Sexual orientation and homosexuality', available at: http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/sexual-orientation.aspx
22   P. Kleinplatz (2006), 'Learning from extraordinary lovers: Lessons from the edge' in *Journal of Homosexuality,* 50 (2/3)

Laughing Boy

Jay Bernard

8
It must be hard   with hips like that.   Must be shit
with lips like that.   What's it like to be gripped   like that?
Must be shit to   live   like that.   No friends to give
a shit n' that.

9
In the park off Brigstock Road, I saw you say yes to Laughing Boy,
who with a grin said come we go - so behind the train-track
and the Tesco loading bay that was a serious plunging.
I heard his knees in the leaves.

I feel an arching up when I see a boy's bare ass clench.
I feel that trapped in my perineum is a trunk
that thinks and acts like his - I move like he does,
walk with bollocks like him; mid-way through a film I feel
compelled to check what isn't there.

And when the house is silent, all mouths wet holes in the pillows,
I watch twinks ramify their points in this boy and this boy -
I watch them wince, nearly-men with their gruff gasp of completion,
muscles in neck and ass locked in.

10
After the news, we spent the day between your garden
and the corner shop. Single cigarettes, maltesers melted solid
in the packet. When we went to take them back, the bus pulled up:
boys from the year below were staring down, their white tongues
flicking the tip of their lollies, their ice-poles pushed deep into their cheeks.

II
I held your hair and pulled you close. Your collar was black,
the dampness of your two fat staffs met the smell of P.E.
It's true what they said about your hips - wide and womanly.
I pressed mine to yours, ran a hand over your head and asked
how you'd like it shaved. How would you like to be smooth,
like molé on a knife? How about I cut under each breast
and sup the yellow roe? And then you touched my hand
and pushed it off, said please like you were asking for a polo.

I cannot know power from power, shame from shame,
I cannot be that young again. I cannot part the fibre from the flesh,
the error from the act, the hour from the afternoon.
Your body in my hands; the caution when you spoke.
And how we laughed it off, as though it were a joke.

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Performing Vulnerability - Class and Gender: Two Sides of the Same 'Can'

EMILY COUSENS

Historically, class and gender have been fraught categories of intersectional analysis. From feminist critiques of Marx's economic analysis as resting on 'gender blind' categories[1], to last year's Institute for Public Policy Research finding that "feminism has failed working class women"[2], theorising these two oppressed groups together has proved difficult. I will look at how we understand the two categories, examining their differences and similarities, before considering the specific nature of working-class women's oppression.

When speaking of 'gender' I recognise the problems that can result from using this term. However, following Joan Wallach Scott, I use it simply as "a useful category of historical analysis" and thus do not intend to be making any metaphysical claims as to the essence of gender.[3]

Analyses of the axes of oppression that are class and gender have frequently involved diametrically opposed understandings of the social regulations and structures at play. Feminism has looked at the way in which women's (and men's) position

1   Hartmann, HI. *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*, 1979
2   Institute for Public Policy Research, 'How feminism has failed working class women', 31st March 2013
3   Scott, Joan W., 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis' in *The American Historical Review,* Vol. 91, No. 5. (Dec., 1986), pp. 1053-1075

in society is constructed, whereas theorists focusing on economic oppression, both following and opposed to Marx, have focussed on the structural (material) nature of economic oppression. Consequently, simply changing social structures to remove hierarchies of social positions is enough to deal with class issues, but there is no analogous structure for feminism. Patriarchy cannot simply be removed in the expectation that gender oppression will just wither away. Gender inequalities are constantly reproduced at the individual level, in and through the very performance of gender.

Moreover, the emancipatory goals of class and gender analysis are entirely different. The totalising and multi-faceted nature of gender oppression means that within feminism there is no agreement as to what a society without patriarchy would look like. What is clear, however, is that it is not simply a question of making genders equal to one another. This is because we can have no understanding of what gender *is* prior to the performance of it. Yet if we recognise gender as performative, we can go some way to addressing the aspects of the performance that are most clearly problematic. Feminists disagree on which aspects are most problematic: for some feminists, it is the gender binary; for others it is the presumption that gender maps onto sex; for some it is the socially constructed cultural meanings attributed to and constitutive of gender; for others it is sex binaries. Class oppression presents a simpler picture, as there is no question of whether we simply need to make classes equal; it is the very existence of class that is problematic. Theorising class is far less controversial, because, whilst there are cultural signifiers, to occupy a class is largely to occupy a particular economic station. Class only exists in unequal, hierarchical and coercive societies, and thus, doing away with economic oppression and doing away with class are largely the same undertaking.

Whilst these tensions within intersectionality constitute part of the difficulty of any identity-based politics, I do not believe it is helpful to take a radical deconstructionist approach to these categories. This would take us close to nominalism and its understanding of radical subjectivity. There are clearly respects in which women - despite their differences and their heterogeneity - have been oppressed as women, just as there are clear ways in which the working class has been oppressed economically and socially.

It is also evident that there are similarities in the manner in which these oppressions manifest themselves in contemporary capitalist society. The categories of class and gender are able to be projected onto bodies, given the social and bodily signifiers (such as accent, dress and gait) and these signifiers must be carefully navigated by the performer. Moreover, particularly in the case of gender, certain signifiers

will be exploited. In women's work, for example, 'feminine charm' is required to generate a particular emotion in the beneficiary of the labour power (Arlie R. Hochschild calls this "emotional labour"[4]). In order to examine an instance of class and gender oppression in contemporary capitalist societies, I will look at the concept of vulnerability in the instance of "emotional labour".

In relation to my (albeit crude) depiction of these two complex theories, I suggest that we can understand two different poles of vulnerability. The first is material vulnerability, which has been understood in sociological terms as "precariousness". Subjects are vulnerable here in the sense that they are dependent on a collective other for their means of subsistence. This collective other may be the state or an employer. These are particularly important in a post-Fordist capitalist society, complete with the phenomenon of zero-hour contracts, where dependence renders a subject vulnerable. The other pole of vulnerability is vulnerability as 'liability to succumb' - to use the dictionary definition - which is oriented towards a particular other: the liability to succumb to the desires of another. Women's sexuality has been historically cast in these terms. Whilst men have assumed the role of dominance in normative heterosexual relationships, women have performed vulnerability (read: coyness, ability to 'tease') that makes them the potential objects of male desire.

These two poles of vulnerability provide an insight into the specific nature of working class women's oppression. An example of this is in customer-service jobs such as waitressing and 'hostessing'. Catering companies that specialise in the mass provision of both of these employ workers on zero-hour contracts. Women (and men) relying on such work as full-time employment are required to travel long distances (uncompensated) and work fluctuates depending on the number of clients the company has in a particular week or month. Economic vulnerability, to both the employer and often the state, is clear here: workers depend on the provision of work by the employer, and frequently, given the inadequacy of the pay, will also depend on the state for benefits. When these benefits are late, this vulnerability is acutely realised.

Luce Irigaray noted that women's exchange value is determined by society. In jobs such as waitressing and 'hostessing', women's exchange value becomes clear. In these jobs, women's exchange value is their sexuality, which is construed in terms of vulnerability. It is this that allows them to become the objects of men's fantasies, and if the performance of this vulnerability is not adhered to, it is demanded: "Go on, give us a smile love." For women in low-paid customer-service jobs, this exchange value is exploited, and sexuality as exchange value is what ultimately

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4   Hochschild, Arlie, *The Managed Heart,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983

leads to the commodification of women. All women have sexuality as a potential exchange value within a heteronormative, capitalist society, but women who are educated and high earners tend to have other values that may be exchanged instead (or additionally), like degrees and social capital. Given our post-Fordist society's requirement for one to become a "walking CV" (to use Nina Power's term[5]), when sexuality is the only potential exchange value one can lay claim to, both forms of vulnerability are exacerbated. Working class women are therefore liable to sexualisation though the performance of femininity as vulnerability, whilst further being made materially vulnerable due to a lack of other tradable 'skills'.

Performative vulnerability can be seen as a feature of jobs like these, highlighting their gendered nature. The case of 'hostessing' is the most explicit example of the sexualisation of women's low-paid labour (although workers do get paid more than in waitressing given their greater exchange value deriving from their looks - read: greater potential for objectification). Companies such as Lola Events Staffing proudly promote these women on their website: "All around the country our event personnel can be found dressed as bunnies..."[6] The institution of 'booth babes' at electronic/trade shows also embodies this gendered, sexualised, low-paid form of labour. Even in waitressing, however, an insidious form of sexualisation takes place. Workers become faceless and homogenised; clothes are regulated, along with jewellery, makeup and hair, so that each waitress becomes simply another invisible person. Whilst some of these requirements are distributed equally for male and female workers (the men are also de-personified and objectified), the specific objectification of women requires the performance of sexual vulnerability. Where men are simply required to be 'professional' or 'efficient', for women this takes the form of performing 'feminine charm'. Such a requirement exploits their exchange value as more than just blank objects for the customers' consumption; they must be homogenously sexualised objects onto which customers can project their own desires.

By focussing on one aspect of intersectional oppression, I intended to shed light on the specific nature of class and gender oppression. Despite the differences between 'class' and 'gender' as categories of analysis, it is important to draw out specific similarities and recognise the dual oppression experienced by those at the intersection of these two axes of oppression. Moreover, I have suggested that the relation between the two oppressions is somewhat dialectical. In the instance outlined above, women's economic vulnerability leads them to be exploited in terms of performative vulnerability, as this is their only exchange value. However, the constant performance of feminised sexuality that is

required by the employment-logic vision of the body as a "walking CV", becomes a signifier of and thus dialectically reinstates economic vulnerability.

Class and gender then, are two sides of the same 'can' in terms of potentiality. What working class women 'can' do is limited by their material position and also takes specific shape due to the feminised and sexualised nature of many low-paid jobs. Dependency on the employer, the state and the male gaze intersect specifically in particular types of work to require the performance of sexuality-as-vulnerability, which at the same time reproduces the material vulnerability necessary for this form of exploitation.

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5   Power, Nina, *One-Dimensional Woman*, Ropley: O Books, 2009
6   Lola Events, 'Promotional Staff', http://www.lolaevents.co.uk/promotional-staff/

Commodified Cultures: The Effect of Cultural Appropriation on Successful Cultural Exchange

Shanice Mahil

The term 'cultural appropriation' is one that ignites controversy and division, exacerbated by ambiguities caused by the numerous definitions that are attributed to it. Cultural appropriation, for the purposes of this article, will be taken to mean the adoption or theft of icons, rituals, symbols and behaviour from one culture by another. As is evident from this definition, this is not always *prima facie* a negative and harmful thing. Instead, an immense difficulty arises in pinpointing when appropriation is respectful and appreciative and when it is exploitative. Furthermore, it is important to consider whether the perpetuation of the notion of certain forms of cultural appropriation being unacceptable prevents the successful exchange of cultures within a multicultural society and unnecessarily demonises those who see it as appreciation. In order to do this, I will consider the ways in which certain forms of cultural appropriation can cause offence through distorting the meaning of cultural symbols, and also how it can reinforce privilege within the context of an asymmetrical relationship between two cultures.

When trying to understand the ways in which cultural appropriation can be perceived as exploitative or offensive, it is useful to take into account the nature of the relationship between the culture being appropriated and the culture doing the appropriating. This is particularly relevant within the context of a neo-colonialist society, shaped by a past in which Western countries endeavoured to impose their cultures onto others and to shape the cultures of the countries under domination. Many writers now see the representation of certain cultures within Western consumer markets as reinforcing the dominance of the colonising culture, with commodification resulting in certain cultures being reduced to fashion trends or stereotypes which ignore their depth and diversity (or are wholly inaccurate). This is exemplified by the commonplace sale of the Native American headdress, which contributes towards reducing broader Native American culture to an image of an extinct and spiritual race, undermining its rich history and also its present-day forms. The appropriation of the headdress also reveals ignorance about Native American history and culture: the headdress was only a feature of the Plains tribes' culture, when there are over 566 federal Indian nations in the United States with distinct cultures, ethnicities and languages. The version of the culture perpetuated by its commodification also overlooks the fact that the current Native American population is made up of distinct groups, each with differing socio-economic circumstances and a different relationship to American society. The headdress is presented by Western markets as a fashion accessory, ignoring its intended symbolism of honour, bravery and strength. This degradation can also be seen in items of clothing depicting Hindu gods, which reduce an entire religion to an exotic fashion statement made by those who are not themselves religious.

As Edward Said wrote in *Orientalism*, romanticised images of subaltern cultures depicted by a dominant culture reinforce a schism which regards those geographical areas as fundamentally different to the West.[1] This categorisation of those cultures as 'other' does not facilitate a beneficial and successful exchange of cultures, but instead perpetuates the inequality of the relationship. This is also why even the commodification of items which can clearly be attributed to a particular culture but are not deemed to carry any immense cultural meaning is deemed to be problematic by many.

It is interesting to consider the role that capitalism plays in orchestrating this cultural degradation. As Richard Rogers argues in his article 'From Cultural Exchange to Transculturation: A Review and Reconceptualisation of Cultural Appropriation', under the conditions of capitalism, any object that enters the exchange system is inescapably commodified and its value abstracted.[2] In this process, the use-value and the specificity of the labour and social relations invested in the commodity are lost and it becomes equivalent to all other commodities. It is inevitable within this context that the cultural value of something is degraded, as the drive for profit silences dialogue on maintaining respect for its cultural

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1   Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Pantheon Books 1978

2   Richard Rogers, 'From Cultural Exchange to Transculturation: A Review and Reconceptualisation of Cultural Appropriation', *Communication Theory* 16:4 (2006)

meaning or significance, and consumers are consequently unaware of their participation in the exploitation of others' culture and identity. This can be mitigated to some extent by consumers' awareness of their choices, as that helps to prevent the offensive reduction of other cultures that occurs when profits are prioritised.

The neo-colonialist context in which cultural appropriation takes place is also relevant to whether it can be seen to constitute an exercise of privilege; this is another reason why it may be deemed to be harmful, rather than a mere manifestation of appreciation for another culture. Many writers argue that ethnic clothes and hairstyles are only deemed to be fashionable in our society when adopted by certain Western fashion industries. This certainly appears to be a plausible argument, and indeed I, myself, would never have considered wearing a bindi outside the context of an Indian social event before it was recently made popular by its use as a quirky fashion item, worn largely by white women. Although the introduction of these cultural symbols in mainstream Western fashion can be construed as a positive thing, constituting a long-overdue acceptance of certain elements of Indian style, it nevertheless highlights the unequal relationship which still exists between the two cultures, and hence the sensitivity that must be deployed before wearing a bindi.

The existence of this inequality, and the need for awareness of it, can be further supported by a recent advert for the clothing company Diesel, featuring a white female model with tattoos donning a burqa as part of a campaign which seeks to "baptise a new era of energy, bravery and bold iconography at Diesel".[3] In this context, the burqa is perceived as being 'edgy' and 'rebellious' because it is stripped of its cultural and religious significance and worn by a non-Muslim woman. Conversely, when Muslim women wear burqas, they are marginalised and deemed to be oppressed and unable (or unwilling) to make any attempt to integrate. This clearly affirms the inequality which underlies numerous forms of cultural appropriation, and the question therefore remains: can there ever be a successful and beneficial exchange of cultures in a context such as this?

Certainly, cultural appropriation appears to be more clear-cut in some cases. For example, T-shirts sold by the American clothing company Urban Outfitters depicting Hindu gods are arguably more objectionable than white women donning saris. This is perhaps due to the immensely clear religious and cultural significance of the former, which is being distorted, and the largely stylistic nature of the latter. However, difficulties arise when attempting to distinguish

between exploitation and appreciation, particularly due to fears that if the bar for appreciation is set too high, there can never be a beneficial and successful exchange of cultures, which would have a detrimental impact on our multicultural society. The most important aspect of appreciation is an adequate level of understanding and respect for the other culture and the aspect of it that is being appropriated. Acknowledgement of privilege and the asymmetrical nature of the relationship between certain cultures is also important. I believe we can facilitate a successful and beneficial exchange of cultures through striking the correct balance between reducing the negative consequences of certain forms of cultural appropriation, as outlined, and allowing people to appreciate and access information about other cultures, which is integral to the understanding and incorporation of cultures within a multicultural society.

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3   Laura Leibowitz, 'Diesel Burqa Ad: Too Edgy for Comfort?', Sep 9th 2014, *Huffington Post*

Misremembering Mandela

Max Leak

It is fair to say that Nelson Mandela's death last December did not go unnoticed. The sheer quantity of coverage devoted to the event was certainly commensurate with his stature. Most media attention portrayed a kindly, statesmanlike figure of great grace and dignity, and accurately eulogised the strength and magnanimity of the departed leader. And yet, though the sheer quantity of words expended upon Mandela was enormous, the debate on his life was most remarkable for its poverty.

The tone struck by left-leaning commentators in discussing Mandela was not always constant, but generally centred around what might be summarised as 'cautious triumphalism'. Commentators like the *Guardian*'s Marina Hyde and the *Independent*'s Peter Vallely set out to pay their respects to Mandela whilst also, reservedly, reminding the world of the ultimate vindication of the anti-Apartheid left. Meanwhile, however, the right showed signs of a schism in its approach to the news. Many right-of-centre figures moved to head off any discussion of the politics of Mandela's life by engulfing the occasion in hyperbolic praise. The eulogies to the dead man's character were so overblown as to obscure any mention of his political convictions. The tactic was to say a great deal, but to say nothing of consequence, and to craft a sanitised, sanctified Mandela devoid of radical anger. The *Daily Telegraph*'s Timothy Stanley took the trend to its illogical conclusion

when he declared Mandela to have been, in his own sickly-sweet phrasing, "[a] secular saint for the whole world".[1]

While most commentators on the right preferred to avoid the topic of Mandela's ideological convictions, a few conservative writers did attempt to tussle with the question of Mandela's lifelong links to radical politics. Perhaps the best example of this was a trio of articles written for the *Spectator* and the *Telegraph* by the Afrikaner writer Rian Malan, culminating with a lengthy article for the former publication on January 18th. In this final article, Malan contended that new evidence (a draft manuscript of Mandela's autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*, written in the author's own hand) had definitively debunked the mainstream depiction of Mandela: the late president was never, in fact, a heroic figure, but was rather a pro-communist radical who espoused "Stalinism" and saw himself as part of "the communist vanguard, imbued with the higher doctrine of dialectical materialism".[2] The intervention was less fascinating for what Malan said than for what he did not feel the need to say - with very little discussion, the premise was assumed that Mandela's alignment with militant leftism somehow serves to discredit the idea of his moral superiority. Both Malan's protestations and the silence of other commentators are rooted in the same curious and significant misconception: even when discussing a famously good-hearted individual, it is still presumed out of hand that alliance with the militant left is necessarily a vice. The nature of Mandela's personal relationship with communism is still unclear – although it was revealed by the ANC in January that he was indeed a member of the South African Communist Party during the 1960s, the extent of his own embrace of Marxist ideology is difficult to gauge. What is clear, however, is that the African National Congress fitted, for the vast majority of its history, into a broader context of communist-backed independence movements across Africa and the colonial world. If anything, what is unique about the ANC is the fact that it achieved independence later, and in a somewhat *less* militant fashion, than other independence movements. Indeed, by isolating one largely peaceful transfer of power in the post-Cold War period, we succeed in ignoring the bloody, difficult, and inconclusive struggles which were fought by white regimes to suppress black freedom across much of the sub-Saharan landmass. Conflicts like the Portuguese Colonial War, which ravaged Angola and Mozambique in the 1960s and '70s, and the 23-year armed guerrilla struggle for independence in Namibia, have been largely forgotten in comparison with South Africa's isolated pocket of relative non-violence. My own uneasy suspicion is that the West's disproportionate emphasis

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1   Tim Stanley, 'Nelson Mandela was a secular saint for the whole world', 5th Dec 2013, *The Telegraph*
2   Rian Malan, 'What a lost prison manuscript reveals about the real Nelson Mandela', 18th Jan 2014, *The Spectator*

on South Africa is born less out of genuine respect for Nelson Mandela than out of a desire to endorse those colonised peoples that behaved the least aggressively, and the least impatiently, in their quest for freedom.

The issue which makes colonial independence truly problematic in capitalist collective memory is the fact that the alliance between modern capitalism and European colonialism was based on ideology as well as pragmatism. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion, for example, that racist convictions informed the strategic decisions of the Western bloc in the early period of the Cold War. United States government memoranda on decolonisation throughout that period are filled with suggestions that, in the words of one 1958 report, "the African is still immature and unsophisticated with respect to his attitudes towards the issues which divide the world today", and colonial powers evidently regarded their subjects as easily-manipulated stooges for white communist factions. [3] While the purity of the Soviet Union's motives in backing anti-colonial rebels can certainly be impugned, it is not insignificant that the communist bloc consistently co-operated with non-white people in a way which would often have been anathema to capitalist powers. Mandela himself certainly understood that the ideological struggles convulsing Africa as colonialism fell were about more than just old-world, 19th-century imperialism. Indeed, he wrote, in a quote which Malan evidently believes to be a smoking gun, that: "To a nationalist fighting oppression, dialectical materialism is like a rifle, bomb or missile. Once I understood the principle of dialectical materialism, I embraced it without question."[4] Liberal defenders of Mandela have often dismissed these sentiments as pardonable excesses of youthful passion. In the context of the racial ideologies of West and East during decolonisation, it might be better-founded to argue that the alignment of anti-colonial and anti-racist activism with the Soviet bloc was a considered decision, and one that was fully justified.

It is not my intention to sing the praises of 20th-century communism. When discussing colonialism generally, and Africa in particularly, it must be remembered that most communist-backed independence movements failed to rule successfully after gaining power. It is nevertheless important to highlight the Western world's lack of awareness of the process by which it arrived at the ideology it now professes. We commonly conceive of the shedding of racial prejudice as a natural process of our progressive societies, but the truth is that that this process did not occur in a linear fashion, or indeed within a cultural vacuum. Ideas of racial interchangeability were not particularly compatible with capitalist conformism throughout much of the 19th and 20th centuries. Modern racism is often analysed as having originated as the ideological corollary of Victorian colonial capitalism, and the progression of the 19th and early 20th centuries saw a rapid growth, not a gradual decline, in ignorant, nationalistic conceptions of racial hierarchy. It was undeniably Marxism, and radical theory more generally, which positioned itself as the champion of racial equality from the mid-19th century well into the second half of the 20th. Internationalism, or at least the assumption of racial interchangeability which underpins it, was gradually appropriated from the radical left even whilst Western-style economic liberalism was absorbed by the East.

When the capitalist world remembers Mandela, it will largely praise his generosity, his compassion and his pragmatism. None of these were qualities which South Africa's liberator lacked, but we must never cease to be aware of the agendas which shape this eulogy. Mandela was no saint, and it is a disservice to his very real human virtues to seek to pretend otherwise. Indeed, our very desire to focus on Mandela to the exclusion of all other African stories, as much as the foregrounding of his magnanimity over his other traits, reflects our desire as a society to ignore the more difficult legacies of our general past. When remembering the whole of Mandela's life, certain nations must concede that we were wrong – that we lost certain battles of ideas, and that the world was highly fortunate that we did so. We must be careful to remember him properly; at present, I fear that we are remembering him in order to forget him.

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3   National Security Council Report, 'Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960 Volume XIV, Africa, Document 8', available at http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v14/d8
4   Nelson Mandela, Long Walk to Freedom manuscript, available at http://specc.ie/longwalkms

On Dark and Unarguable Blackness

ANKHI MUKHERJEE

When the *Oxford Left Review* invited me to write on intersectionality in relation to race, writing, and colonial/postcolonial literature, I was preparing for a class on the Martinican-born French psychiatrist, intellectual, and anti-imperialist writer Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, a treatise on the deep disorder of identity and identifications whose genesis can be traced to traumatic colonial intersections. Fanon wrote *Peau noire, masques blancs* (translated into English in 1967) while preparing for the exams that would enable him to join the august ranks of France's psychiatric health system. He had wished to submit it as his doctoral thesis, though it is debatable whether *Peau noir* would pass with flying colours. The book came together in Lyon between 1951 and 1952, a period marked by, as his biographer Alice Cherki puts it, "a triple junction" of encounters and experiences. First there was psychiatry, his chosen vacation, and a discipline Fanon believed was equal to the task of curing psychic maladies. Then, Cherki lists, there was his discovery of phenomenology, existentialism and psychoanalysis and the influence these schools of thought had on his early work. Finally, there was the encounter with a racist white French society and the ways in which Fanon assimilated this experience, both in the army and during his years in Lyon, as a black man and a minority.

The doubt and trepidations of the introduction - "Why write the book? No one has asked me for it" - juxtapose with the author's quiet determination that the book will be a "mirror with a progressive infrastructure, in which it will be possible to discern the Negro on the road to disalienation". According to the biographer David Macey, Fanon plundered the libraries and bookshops of Lyon and then strode up and down, dictating his text to his wife, Josie. The main materials to hand were the phenomenology of Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the discourse of the Négritude movement, the psychiatry in which Fanon had just trained, and fragments of psychoanalytic theory he had absorbed from books. *Black Skin, White Masks* is what Patrick Taylor calls a "phenomenological examination" of the experience of racialization in a colonial world: experience is designated not as the effect on a subject of events unfolding in the world around it, but rather as a mode of being in the world. Fanon situates the man of colour in a world where he is seen and heard by others, and *is* for others. And so is the white man. Trapped in their respective 'whiteness' and 'blackness', they create one another, though this does not imply any reciprocity. Fanon, whose mother was of Alsatian descent, grew up in Martinique thinking of himself as white and French: his painful reconstitution as a black West Indian occurred only when he arrived at the French capital. In France, Fanon had come to realise that volunteerism on behalf of abstract principles of 'freedom', 'France' and 'anti-fascism' counted for nothing in the eyes of the majority of French citizens, for whom he remained a black man, inferior, inassimilable, nothing but an interloper. According to Albert Memmi, this marks the point when Fanon loses himself as a black Martinican: "Fanon's private drama is that, though henceforth hating France and the French, he will never return to Negritude and to the West Indies."

It is true that Fanon never went back to Martinique. Fanon's decision to leave France for Algeria in 1953 was made suddenly. In an undated letter, he unexpectedly told his brother Joby: "I'm going to Algeria. You understand: the French have enough psychiatrists to take care of their madmen. I'd rather go to a country where they need me." While Fanon identified with Algerians on the basis of their colonization by France, he did not move to Algeria in 1953 out of a sense of political commitment (his first contact with the Front de Libération Nationale happened in late 1954). The culture at the hospital was racist and punitive, marked by mutual incomprehension and mistrust. As Fanon wrote in his letter of resignation to the Resident Minister, "the Arab, permanently an alien in his own country, lives in a state of absolute depersonalisation." Fanon resigned from the post at Blida-Joinville in 1956 – from service in the French colonial state – to join the cause of Algerian liberation. Yet his attempts to identify himself as an Algerian proved equally doomed. For Algerian revolutionaries he was an Antillean, an outsider. Fanon worked as a psychiatrist in Algeria and Tunisia, but did not understand the language in either country: his consultations were conducted through an interpreter. Little wonder then that Fanon dreamed of

a world where one could look into a mirror and have no colour, and see what Memmi calls "a completely novel man". As he writes in *Black Skin, White Masks*:

> The body of history does not determine a single one of my actions.
> I am my own foundation.
> And it is by going beyond the historical, instrumental hypothesis that I will initiate the cycle of my freedom.

Black Skin, White Masks is an exercise on theorizing whiteness as much as it is on blackness. In Fanon's work whiteness gains a spectral presence through the desires and fantasies played out in its constructions and interpretations of blackness. Fanon reclaims the colonized from what Memmi calls "an anonymous collectivity", averting the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject, "from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers", to borrow a formulation from Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark.* Primarily, however, *Black Skin, White Masks* is about the psychopathology that attaches to the "lived experience of the black man". In intellectual terms, he was the most thoroughly assimilated of Francophone colonial activists, and the person who imbibed contemporary French philosophy, literature, and culture more voraciously than any of his African or Caribbean contemporaries. As an international activist, moving from Martinique to Paris to Algeria to Tunisia, from which he travelled frequently, his interest in local cultures was limited: while he manoeuvred his general Marxist perspective towards tricontinental priorities, unlike almost all Anglophone and Francophone Marxists, he did not attempt to graft it on to the specifics of African cultures, of which he had a relatively restricted experience. He was also known to have a shaky grasp of the facts of the "African Revolution". As Robert Young observes, "He always remained intellectually centred in Paris, and never resisted European thought as such, as much as he resisted European domination of the colonial world. A product of the Western-educated colonial elite, Fanon used the resources of Western thought against itself. What he did was to translate its epistemological location."

Fanon uses the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's theory of the mirror stage to reveal the mechanisms of the colonial psyche. The text he refers to is a chapter on family written by Lacan for volume eight of the *Encyclopedie Francaise* (1938), not the article published in 1949 that appeared in *Écrits*. The mirror stage, in Lacan's formulation, occurs at the end of the period of weaning and entices the subject to realize a specular unity and cohesiveness of the ego where the other has no place: "In this world, we will see, there is no other." Lacan's essay posits the child, who experiences its body as in pieces, as jubilating at the sight of the 'whole' mirror image, which it takes as the promise of its own future coherence. This moment of jubilation is a moment of the misrecognition of the image as one's ego ideal. The task of psychoanalysis, Lacan suggests, would be to show that

our ego ideals are false and imaginary. The body cannot be pure image, an ego identification produced in the mirror of error. The white child constructs its ego ideal on the basis of an egregious exclusion: the mother or carer propping him up, and of course the cultural and racial other disallowed to enter the scene. Fanon analyses the colonial racial schema as one in which the imaginary oneness of the white subject is threatened, where the "other takes a hand", and the fantasy of the Negro as "murderer" intervenes. This is how Fanon rewrites the mirror stage in *Black Skin, White Masks*:

> When one has grasped the mechanism described by Lacan, one can have no further doubt that the real Other for the white man is and will continue to be the black man. And conversely. Only for the white man The Other is perceived on the level of the body image, absolutely as the not-self – that is, the unidentifiable, the inassimilable.

Lacan's mirror stage testifies to the fleeting moment of illusory self-possession before otherness – I is an Other – constitutes the very entry into subjectivity. Fanon's translation of the mirror stage essay for the Antilles forcefully makes the point that behind the mess of images in the mirror stage is a black body, biologically, historically, and economically marked. The black man under colonial rule is, however, denied an oppositional subjectivity and sealed instead into a "crushing objecthood". In the white racial phantasm, the black man is forced to occupy the static ontological space of the timeless primitive. Through the violence of a racist system – "Dirty nigger!" Or simply, "Look a Negro!" – Fanon registers the self-shattering process of becoming an object. "I took myself off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object," he reflects. However, while the black man must be black in relation to the white man, the converse does not hold true: the white man can be white without any relation to the black man because, as Diana Fuss states, "the sign 'white' exempts itself from a dialectical logic of negativity." As a self-identical, self-producing term, white draws its power from its transcendence of the category of race. White is freed from any dependency upon the sign 'black', whereas "The Negro *is* comparison" (B 211) and "with the Negro the cycle of the biological begins". Fanon points out that historical and economic factors influence the ways in which the black man's psyche is constituted, and that it is material privilege that causes the white man's psyche to be untroubled by similar vicissitudes of embodiment.

Just as the white child constructs its ego ideal on the basis of an exclusion, the black child in the Antilles, who looks in the mirror, also excludes its own colour. The confusion of the Antillean is that his mirror *imago* does not appear to have a colour that would oppositionally construct him. While blackness, for the white man, is most visible, the black man cannot lock eyes with the white – colourless – other in the mirror. Thus, for the delirious Antillean, the mirror hallucination, Fanon

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writes, is always neutral. "When Antilleans tell me that they have experienced it, I always ask the same question: 'What colour were you?' Invariably they reply: 'I had no colour.'" The black child comes to being through disavowal – the inability to accept its own blackness, while the white child individuates through phobia – the inability to connect with the other's image.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for Fanon was to choose between the violent forging of a hermetic racial identity and the rich ambivalences and admixtures of identities. Frantz Fanon stands at the intersection of colonial and psychoanalytic discourse, Marx and Freud, psychology and politics, "ontogeny and sociogeny", as Henry Louis Gates puts it. According to Homi Bhabha, Fanon "is too quick to name the Other, to personalise its presence in the language of colonial racism". These, Bhabha says, detract from the complexity of psychic projections in the pathological colonial relation wherein the post-Enlightenment man is "tethered to, not confronted by, his dark reflection . . . that splits his presence, distorts his outline, breaches his boundaries, repeats his action at a distance, disturbs and divides the very time of being." In other reappraisals, such as Abdul Jan Mohamed's, Fanon's Manichean struggle is an accurate representation of a profound conflict. In an overview of the conflicting ways in which Fanon has been appropriated by literary and cultural critics, Henry Louis Gates comments on the double bind of representing the colonised psyche. He points out that when we see the native as discursively empowered, we stand the risk of downplaying the impact of the real and epistemic violence of colonialism: the opposite stance, of playing up the absolute nature of colonial domination, threatens to erase the resistance and solidarity of the colonised. Perhaps, Gates wonders, we should no longer let Fanon remain a kind of icon or "screen memory", standing for collective dreams of postcolonial emancipation. It means neither to elevate him as a "Global Theorist", nor simply to cast him into battle, "but to recognize him as a battlefield in himself".

The body of the black man is at the centre of *Black Skin, White Masks* – mocked, beaten, raped, assaulted, tortured, caught in the web of fantasy and perversion. Fanon rages against the racism that captivates the black male body and transforms it into a "thing". White men and white women desire the black man's body, not out of love, but to fulfil perverse fantasies (passive homosexual fantasies for the white man, rape for the white woman). And black women reject the black man because, out of internalised racial hatred, they want the white man. The black body is a phobic object that variously attracts and repulses. It is important to remember that Fanon's deeply troubling comments on white women – he imagines the negrophobic woman saying "I wish the Negro would rip me open as I would have ripped a woman open" – are formulated within a historical context in which the racially charged stereotype of the oversexed and beastly Negro put all black men at perpetual risk. Cultural historians and critics urge us to read Fanon

in the historical context of a society where fabricated charges of rape were used as powerful colonial instruments of fear and intimidation against black men.

For Fanon, to be exiled from language was to be dispossessed of one's very subjectivity. Fanon emphasizes the importance of speech to the assumption of subjectivity: "to speak is to exist absolutely for the other...To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture. The Antilles Negro who wants to be white will be the whiter as he gains greater mastery of the cultural tool that language is." Fanon says bitterly that his facility with the French language accords him what he calls "honorary citizenship" as a white man. In *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*, Shoshana Felman's book on literary speech acts, she reads the seductive promise of speech as a seductive promise of love. She uses phrase "seduction in two languages" to refer to acts of translation: translation between languages, between the theoretical and the rhetorical, between language and praxis. Seduction is the promise of meaning and truth in all these various reckonings and exchanges, and testifies to the desire that mobilises and survives the many acts of translation. Fanon also realizes, however, that this citizenship is never more than 'honorary', insofar as an epidermal racial schema ceaselessly works to keep the black man in his "infernal cycle".

Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* is more a flashing question mark than a polemic, one that begins with a "What does the black man want?" and ends with the dream of perpetuating the questioning corpus: "O my body, make of me always a man who questioned." This is probably why this text has been variously appropriated in our times as the key Fanon text, leaving behind the text of Black Marxism, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon's rallying cry to arms to third world nationalist movements. As Kobena Mercer asserts, *Black Skin,* less clearly formulated and more contradictory than the later work, curiously appears more pertinent today as nation-states are losing their power to multinational conglomerates and to global capitalism. The book explores what it might mean to be saddled with a "dark and unarguable blackness" through the politics of racialisation in the colony and the visual, aural, and olfactory economies of metropolitan imperial discourse: "Dirty nigger!" . . . "nigger underwear smells of nigger" . . . "nigger teeth are white". In turns made to feel brittle, distorted, and recoloured, the Antillean is reinvented as negro in the imperial metropolis. In 'The Fact of Blackness', often regarded the most forceful of chapters in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon puts up a bitter struggle, hoping to cancel Western discourse with Western discourse, the "shameful" sciences on African primitivism and hard-wired degeneracy with the scholarship of Schoelcher, Frobenius, Westermann, and Delafosse - "all of them white" - which presented fair-minded accounts of the antiquity and glories of a pan-African civilization. His momentary triumphalism is, however, crushed by the voice of "real reason" of a post-industrial and post-teleological world, ruled by "integers and atoms", in which Africa is, at best, the cradle of civilization,

and at worst, the site of arrested development and perpetual dependency on betters. "Every hand was a losing hand for me," Fanon concludes. Refusing to capitulate, yet powerless to conquer, feeling in himself a soul as immense as the unfeeling, unreflecting world around it, "I began to weep." More than sixty years after its publication, in the very different but relatable dynamics of racist societies where the inquest of Mark Duggan, marked by rank inaccuracies and discrepancies in police reporting, is lost long before it even began, or where the murder, in cold blood, of the Florida teenager Trayvon Martin is blamed on the "thug wear" (a hoodie) he had sported on the fateful evening, Fanon's poetics of black melancholia continues to speak to the quandary, pain, and mortality of epidermalized subjects, especially those whose voiceless misery is systematically engendered and perpetuated. "It feels as though we are living in a parallel universe from mainstream society," Stafford Scott had written from Tottenham after the Mark Duggan verdict.

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Ireland at the Intersection: Ireland's Experience of Race, Class, and Capital

NATHAN AKEHURST

In 1890s London, the O'Houlihan gang (a group of thieves and petty criminals) were apprehended by police. The coverage following their arrest systematically linked their criminality with their Irish heritage, relating it to a distinct set of shared racial stereotypes, a typology of Irishness established by centuries of creeping colonialism. Thirty years later, those same stereotypes provided a level of ideological cover for British Auxiliary and 'Black and Tan' units as they burned down entire towns and cities during the Irish War of Independence. Over a century later, in 2010, a Rochdale-based group were brought to court for grooming and molesting children. Despite the fact that they were found guilty, the English Defence League protested at the court about the police's perceived leniency toward "Muslim criminals". The gang's Asian heritage became the centrepiece of the Rochdale debate, used to hammer home racist points about "Islamic culture" being responsible for the criminals' behaviour, and to open a wider debate about the consequences of immigration. (In the Greater Manchester area that covers Rochdale, 95% of those on the Sex Offenders' Register are white.[1])

The Rochdale gang and the O'Houlihans do not share skin colour, language, religion or national background, but their crimes were racialised through the lens of the media in remarkably similar ways. Proceeding from the hopefully uncontroversial view that racism is a phenomenon created and deployed by 'White' formations under capitalism, conceptions of 'Black' and 'White' were invented by the colonial

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1   'Racism is not the issue in Rochdale', *Counterfire*, 2012

elites that developed racism as we understand it today.[2] By this argument, it is not merely that racists and imperialists have 'othered' Black people, but that Black as an idea exists so that it may be othered. A discussion of race as a neutral scientific concept is both flawed and irrelevant here. Skin pigmentation is in this account indicative but not inherently necessary for Blackness, hence the development of Black as a *political* category, to highlight the common ground shared by all those who have experienced racism. There is a comparison here to be drawn with gender; the radical feminists of the 1970s may have come to the conclusion that 'masculinity' and 'femininity' were of themselves patriarchal constructs, but that did not preclude the importance of liberating 'women'. Similarly, the idea of political Blackness acknowledges the falsity of 'black' as a concept, and that it is useful only to unite the victims of racism and imperialism. Since the 1970s, Irish students have been allowed to attend the National Union of Students' Black Caucus. Yet terminology is consistently divisive in the student movement, with Anti-Racism or Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Officer being used by a range of student unions.

The term has met with increased opposition from anti-racists. 'People of Colour' is more widely used today. Asian and Arabic activists, for instance, felt as if their identities were being erased by the universalisation of Blackness. The idea that light-skinned people (such as the Irish or indigenous people of Northern Europe) could be Black has offended a number of black activists. Others have drawn a corollary that Blackness being merely a political term invalidates their cultures and identities.

It is with this background that I want to situate the debate in a specific geographical context: Ireland (both the Republic and the North) today. The idea of political Blackness is complicated in the relationships between black People of Colour and other traditionally marginalised peoples. An anecdote I heard involved an African man being ejected from a pub in County Kerry by an Irish barman who refused to serve his "type". On the surface, it looks like a clear-cut case of racism, a white person oppressing a black person; it seems intuitively to have more social power than another African reproducing a racist comment. In such contexts, does the argument for the Irish as Black hold? One answer might be to say that since the end of British rule in the twenty-six counties of the South, the Irish are no longer as othered as they once were. In the British public psyche, the 'terrorist' is now an Arab Islamist rather than an Irish republican. Another explanation is that the barman in our case is exercising the privilege of 'passing' as white due to the roles

of skin tone and shared culture in our understanding of race. Ireland has a shared experience of oppression with the colonised world, and yet is by no means in the state that ex-colonies in, say, sub-Saharan Africa are today. It is difficult to situate without creating some form of hierarchy of racism, something which I would feel very uncomfortable doing.

To shed some light on the problem, it is worth highlighting the racial politics of the sectarian divide in the North. In the republican Bogside district, the Palestinian flag flies alongside the Irish tricolour, and murals to South American independence struggles blend in with memorials to the victims of the Troubles. West Belfast republicans produced welcome packs for incoming immigrants, and Sinn Fein produced leaflets in Polish to welcome migrant workers. On the loyalist side, as might be expected considering its militant British nationalism, an uglier approach to race is manifested. The unionist paramilitaries had significant links to Combat 18, the National Front and other British fascist groups.[3] These sentiments continued after the end of the Troubles: according to a 2006 report 90% of racist attacks in Northern Ireland were carried out in loyalist areas[4], and in County Tyrone at the end of 2013, threatening signs appeared warning landlords not to let properties to foreign nationals.[5] In one incident, a Filipino hotel-worker was locked in a freezer by colleagues.[6] Whilst the Progressive Unionist Party campaigned to portray racism as "anti-British", many of their rank and file were involved in intimidating the Chinese community in Donegall Pass, Belfast. (Northern Ireland, incidentally, has the UK's lowest immigration rate, which is not especially unsurprising.) According to a Queen's and Ulster University survey, 42% of Northern Irish pupils have witnessed racist abuse at school, whereas 78% of Catholic and Protestant children now have friends on the "other side"; in other words, even where sectarian tension is lessening, racism is unabated.[7]

Before falling into a narrative that targets the racism of the pro-British alone, 10% of the Northern Ireland cases *did* occur on the republican side, and the South is facing its own growing racism problem. The Irish branch of the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) report an alarming increase in incidents. According to Siobhan O'Donoghue of the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland, the Dail aren't helping: "The Government is displaying a baffling reluctance to release European

2   This article will use capitalised forms of the terms 'Black', 'White' and 'People of Colour' to designate when they are being used as political categories. The inverted commas will be removed from this point onwards.

3   Wood, I., *Crimes of Loyalty: A History of the UDA*, Edinburgh 2006
4   'Loyalists linked to 90 per cent of race crime', *The Guardian*, 2006
5   'Locals outraged by menacing sign from racist thugs', *Belfast Telegraph*, 2014
6   'Filipinos "suffer workplace racism"', *Irish Independent*, 2012
7   'Sectarian hatred is being overtaken by xenophobic racism in Northern Ireland', *The Telegraph*, 2012

funds already allocated to Ireland for integration and refugee services."[8] The Irish Council of Immigrants reported an 85% increase in racist incidents reported to them between 2012 and 2013, the sharpest rise being among young people: one in five of the cases cited involved a perpetrator under the age of eighteen.[9] One could draw a conclusion that the Irish postcolonial process has (in the South, at least) reached the stage at which Ireland is fully assimilated into racist power structures. The oppressed adopting the ideas and preferences of the oppressor is by no means uncommon, whether it is white indentured servants and black slaves uniting to kill Native Americans by the thousand in early colonial America, or the English-speaking zones still extant in modern India. The concept of 'passing privilege' readily applies in Ireland, not just in terms of skin tone, but also in terms of a Gaelic cultural identity which, though reasserted, occurs through the lens of an irretrievably Anglicised culture.

To add a layer of complexity to the analysis, however, it is important to consider the effects of austerity. Mayo Intercultural Action and Galway Refugee Support have been crippled by budget cuts. ENAR Ireland director Shane O'Curry states that "austerity measures in Ireland are hitting minority ethnic groups worst". Though very little about Irish politics is simple, there seems to be a basic explanation in this case: economic instability is acting as a seedbed for racism. One of the explanations provided for the loyalism-racism link in Ulster has been housing: immigrants are mostly being moved into Protestant areas. (For historical reasons, pressure on Catholic areas for space is at an all-time high.) One cannot dispute the importance of accommodation politics in the region; the starting gun for the Troubles was a protest movement against poor housing, the sectarian element being that the loyalist-led Stormont government had essentially ghettoised Catholic residents into small and deprived areas.[10] The government's drive recently has been to prove that Northern Ireland is "open for business", which, in reality, means sacrificing labour rights in the interests of capital. Neoliberalisation is a work in progress in Northern Ireland: according to the Antrim-born writer Richard Seymour, "where once few "mainland" companies or multinationals would fancy settling in an urban shopping centre in Northern Ireland, the local Crazy Prices and poky little shops have been replaced by Tesco and Sainsbury's."[11] Yet the old politics hasn't gone anywhere; sectarian incidents are at a six-year high. In the last year, 411 cases of people being forced from their homes were reported to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, a situation which is at an impasse

due to the propensity of the paramilitaries to terrorise their own side more than "the other", and police reluctance to admit their own failures.[12] Resource issues, Seymour argues, are predicated along sectarian lines partially because that is what the Good Friday Agreement enshrined in parliament: "If a hospital is faced with closure, the first question is not whether it will be closed, but will it be closed in a unionist or a nationalist area?"

Nowhere is the deliberate implementation of a divide-and-rule strategy more clear than in Northern Irish history. The 1970s saw a string of murders of Catholics carried out by the 'Glenanne Gang', an alliance of loyalists, police officers and British Army troops, and there is some evidence that military and state authorities were aware of the gang's operations and did not act.[13] In the earlier half of the twentieth century, Lord Brookeborough's creation of the infamous 'B Specials' (a loyalist para-police) and the original Ulster Volunteer Force was inimitably tied to the British ruling class and conservative elites. The timing of such initiatives is telling. 1907 and 1919 saw dock strikes that paralysed Belfast and involved tens of thousands of Catholic and Protestant workers, the latter case resulting in the formation of a radical 'Independent Orange Order', a loyalist force that promised to favour candidates on the other side of the divide in elections if their policies were more left-wing.[14] In both cases, employer-sponsored pogroms of Catholic workers followed shortly after. The Irish nationalists of the time, obsessed with either a pan-class spiritualised vision of the Republic or a moderate parliamentary solution, were not especially helpful in challenging divide-and-rule strategies.

It has been argued that the Irish experience was class- rather than race-based. That would rely on a historiography that throws together English enclosures, the Highland clearances, and the maladministration that led to the potato famine, creating a narrative of class oppression alone, which would be transparently false. Irish citizens were sent into slavery long before the imperial slave trade in Africa began in earnest.[15] Even the Irish ruling class were disenfranchised to a large extent by British civic institutions, their religious institutions tolerated at best and suppressed at worst, and their land settled or taken over by absentee landlords in a pattern conforming to every colonial stereotype. To engage in non-English sports, music or art was subversive, and even now, Irish Travellers in Britain face racism. Of course, many Irish joined the British military and were instrumental in developing racism overseas, but the military recruited from

8   'Racism rising at an 'alarming rate' in Ireland', *The Journal Ireland*, 2013
9   'Warning of rise in racism among Irish children', *Irish Examiner*, 2013
10   McCann, E., 'War and an Irish Town', *Pluto*, 1993
11   'In an era of austerity, Northern Ireland looks more fragile than ever', *The Guardian*, 2013

12   'High in homeless cases over paramilitary and sectarian threats', *Belfast Telegraph*, 2013
13   *The Cassel Report*, 2006
14   Ellis, P., *A History of the Irish Working Class,* Pelican 1972
15   Jordan and Walsh, *White Cargo: The Forgotten History of Britain's White Slaves in America*, New York, 2008

colonised populations the world over. This said, class played a central role in the articulation of racism both in Ireland and across the colonial world. From Cork to Calcutta, local elites, whilst they might still be regarded through the lens of racist ideology, were brought into the fold, more often than not to collude with the implementation of classist-racist systems in their own nations. The race-class intersection is perhaps a defining reason why liberal anti-racist narratives of tolerance and multiculturalism do not effectively tackle racism anywhere. The racialisation of society was implemented to provide an ideological framework of support for colonial projects that enriched European elites. Nowhere is this more the case than in Northern Ireland, where sectarianism and racism have been repeatedly stoked up and structuralised as a tool of division.

I wrote this article to question whether the Irish should be categorised as People of Colour, or Black, and how appropriate and effective our terminologies are. In a sense, it is a moot point: oppressed people can speak for themselves and define themselves in whatever terms they wish. A perfect typology of oppression will never exist, because it is not something that can be solved with tick-boxes and categories, but through individual social relations, solidarity, understanding, debate and action. There will always be a surfeit of analyses of oppression, but the most useful are the ones that directly help us to end it. The progressive movement has come a long way in listening and responding to the voices of the oppressed, and in recognising the existence of white 'privilege' (the word jars because living free of discrimination is surely a *right,* not a privilege). Yet in all the talk of microaggressions and social interactions, we cannot lose sight of the wider picture. The point here is one that has been slightly lost in all the arguments between orthodox old-left ideologues and intersectionalists. Marxist class analysis is not a reason to ignore the separate and distinct patterns of all forms of oppression, and how they could continue to exist in a post-capitalist world. But with an integration of liberation issues into our activist work, aiming towards working-class unity remains fundamental to ending racism. In Belfast today, politicians that might once have shot at each other now administrate neoliberalism in tandem while austerity fans the flames of racism. Ordinary people suffer, with migrants facing hatred and oppression not just from the state and capitalism but from their fellow citizens as well.

Any person of a dominant culture can be a racist, but questions of race and class are inseparable. Anti-racists must recognise the face of racism as not just white, but also belonging to the ruling elite.

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Whose Land Is It Anyway?: Radical Land Reform in Gaelic Scotland

Dòmhnall Iain Dòmhnallach

It was in my last year of primary school that I realised I was a socialist and a radical. We were learning about the Highland Clearances – *Fuadach nan Gàidheal,* the Expulsion of the Gaels – which saw tens of thousands of people forcibly transported overseas or evicted to the overcrowded, rocky coast in the name of economic progress. And then the bombshell: the estate owners, the landed classes who had tried to empty half of Scotland, were still here, hunting, fishing, and landlording it over the natives in the 21st century. But not for much longer. It was 2005, and the island I grew up on – Eriskay – was bought, alongside neighbouring South Uist and Benbecula, for £4.5 million, not by another syndicate of deerstalking families, but by people of the islands themselves, to be held under community ownership.

It was the culmination of over a century of struggle, of which most of Britain – reared on tourist-friendly tales of the wild 'heilans' – is completely unaware. After the Clearances of the 19th century, crofters in the Highlands and Islands, inspired by the Land League in Ireland, began to campaign for rights of tenure. The Highland Land League had as its slogan *"Is treasa tuath na tighearna"* (The people are mightier than a lord), and with its newspaper *An Gàidheal* (The Highlander), inspired and organised radical action such as rent strikes and land raids. In 1882, after having been denied access to what they saw as their rightful

common grazing land on Ben Lee, the crofters of the township of Braes on Skye, with their wives and children, fought the police who had been dispatched to extract rent from them. The 'Battle of the Braes', as the newspapers dubbed it, inspired similar acts of resistance in Skye and Lewis. In response, in 1883, the Napier Commission took evidence from crofters all over Gaeldom of landlords' abuses during the Clearances and after, and public opinion began to turn in favour of the crofters. In 1885, the Highland Land League returned four MPs, Britain's first ever working-class MPs, and the ruling Liberal government was moved to pass the Crofter's Act of 1886, which guarantees security of tenure and inheritance to crofters.

Yet, though this legislation succeeded in its aim of preventing a repeat of the Clearances, the inequitable pattern of land occupation prevailed. Thus, land raids continued apace until 1914, and peaked after the First World War, when soldiers returning home from the Front discovered that Lloyd George's manifesto promise to forcibly buy land back from the landlords was illusory. Gaelic Scotland suffered some of the highest casualty rates in the British Empire, and understandable bitterness drove direct action like the Vatersay Land Raids of 1906. However, despite landlords being forced by default to give land up to the raiders, these direct actions did not solve the problem of concentrated land ownership. Land reform stalled until the 1970s, when the agitprop theatre company '7/84' and the radical (now the UK's first wholly employee-owned) newspaper the *West Highland Free Press* inspired the people and politicians to finally tackle the issue that 84% of Scotland was controlled by just 7% of the population. Finally, after the people of Eigg bought their island from an absentee landlord, the Scottish Government in 2003 legislated for a right to buy, so that any community that so desired could buy their own land back, even against the wishes of the landlord, making radical land reform a right in law.

This short history I've provided of land reform in the Highlands and Islands disguises a long and complex story, of which the historian James Hunter provides a much fuller account in his polemical histories *The Making of the Crofting Community* and *The Last of the Free*. Both scholar and activist, his primary thesis is that the economic, cultural and demographic decline of Gaeldom was a consequence of the wresting of political power southward, and that recent improvements are down to the political re-empowerment of the region, central to which is land reform. The ideology behind this land reform stems from the idea that Highland conceptions of landownership differed from those of Lowland Scotland. *Dùthchas*, or belonging to the land – working it and occupying it – was what defined ownership, not bits of paper. The rise of legalistic and financial thinking among landed classes in the Highlands is traced by the activist Andy

Wightman in his book *The Poor had no Lawyers*, a primer for radical land reform in Scotland. He says:

> The land on which many of our lairds sit was stolen in the 17th century, but these ill-gotten gains were protected by acts which maintained their hegemony after the rest of Europe ditched feudalism and concentrated land ownership.[1]

But the quest for a fair pattern of landownership has not been easy. 432 private owners control half the land in Scotland, a quarter of the country is still sporting estate and, as Figure 1 shows, much of the Highlands remain in the hands of the 50 largest estates. The community of the 26,800 hectare *Pairc* estate on Lewis, whose starving ancestors took part in the infamous Deer Park Raid of 1887, fought in the courts for over ten years, and only now in 2013 were able to come to a deal to purchase the land from an obstructive landlord. Landlords have begun to speak out, defending themselves. In BBC Scotland's *The Men Who Own Scotland*, broadcast in January 2014, James MacKenzie, defended the fact he owns 53,000 acres across Scotland by quipping "it may not be fair but is it fair that your wife is prettier than mine, that you win the lottery when I don't?"[2] This kind of fatalism, which presumes landownership patterns arising unjustly in the past should just persist for the sake of preserving the sanctity of private ownership, has retarded progress for decades. But the Scottish National Party (SNP), led by environment minister Paul Wheelhouse, after years of avoiding what in Gaelic is termed *Ceist an Fhearainn* – the Question of Land – have decided to face up to what James Hunter calls "the most concentrated, most inequitable, most unreformed and most undemocratic land ownership system in the entire developed world,"[3] by, for example, giving tenant farmers the undisputable right to buy the land they work from even unwilling owners. And Lesley Riddoch, an influential nationalist journalist and thinker, in her book *Blossom,* has named these land reforms as a major priority for social justice in an independent Scotland.

Yet community ownership has not turned out perfectly. In its early years, the elected board of *Stòras Uibhist*, South Uist's community estate, was riven by scandal and power-plays. Other communities have struggled to find the required funds to purchase land. And there are questions to be asked of whether lottery money is

1   Quoted in Kevin McKenna, 'Scotland has the most inequitable land ownership in the West. Why?', 10th Aug 2013, *The Guardian*
2   Quoted in Simon Johnson, 'SNP ministers warn lairds about need for 'radical' redistribution of Scottish land', 5th Jan 2014, *The Telegraph*
3   James Hunter, 'The most concentrated, inequitable, and undemocratic land ownership system in the entire developed world', 3rd Jun 2013, on *Land Matters*, Andy Wightman's blog
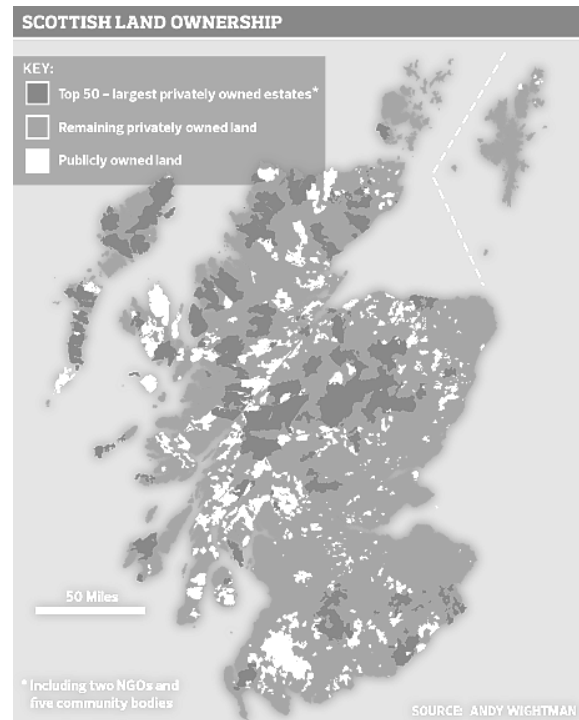
Figure 1: Whose Land Is It Anyway?

best spent benefiting a few hundred islanders rather than thousands of deprived people in urban areas. However, economic and infrastructural improvements have been fast in coming. South Uist has seen substantial developments in harbours in Loch Boisdale and Eriskay. On Eigg, only after the buyout did the islanders have access to regular electricity, through the building of a community windfarm. The theologian Alastair MacIntosh, native of Lewis and prominent land reform activist, recounted the story of this aggressive Eigg buyout in his book *Soil and Soil: People versus Corporate Power*. Through his writing, MacIntosh has championed a postcolonial approach to Gaelic history and politics, linking Highland land reform to indigenous rights movements the world over. This thinking made its way into policy in proposals for a Crofters' Assembly in 2008, modelled on the Saami Parliament, and inspired by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples:

> The Scottish Crofting Foundation calls on government to: recognise crofters as indigenous people of the Highlands and Islands; respect

the growing body of international law on indigenous peoples; and devolve power and decision-making on indigenous issues to the people who maintain the indigenous cultures of the Highlands and Islands.[4]

Michael Newton, a Celtic scholar, uses the land reform issue to justify distinctively postcolonial studies of Gaelic culture. He has attacked revisionist 'Whig' accounts of the Clearances (such as the work of Michael Fry) which do not engage with Gaelic sources and rewrite repression as a voluntary economic choice:

> The infamous Clearances in the Highlands were not just a process of physically dispossessing Gaels, they were also a process of dislocating them from the minds of Scots, especially those with power and privilege, and placing Gaelic culture firmly in the "dustbin" of history, where it need not concern or trouble any "civilised" person. There are still academic volumes being published by scholars on "Scottish" history and literature and any number of subjects which make no mention of Gaelic culture, as though Gaels were not bone-fide Scots or people who mattered.[5]
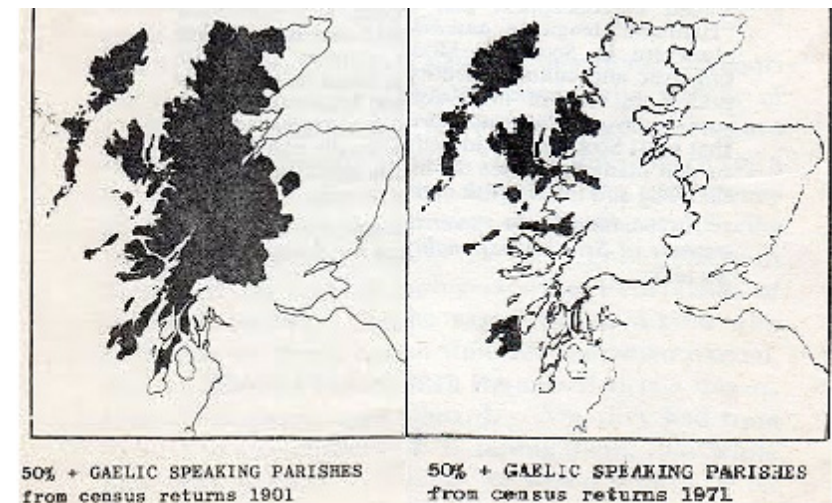

Figure 2

The *West Highland Free Press* has as its slogan *An Tìr, an Cànan, 's na Daoine* (The Land, the Language and the People), showing how intertwined issues of cultural

4   Iain MacKinnon, 'Crofters: indigenous people of the Highlands and Islands', 2008, Scottish Crofting Foundation

5   Michael Newton, 'Cultural Appropriation: Gaels and Other Natives', 30th Aug 2013, *The Virtual Gael*
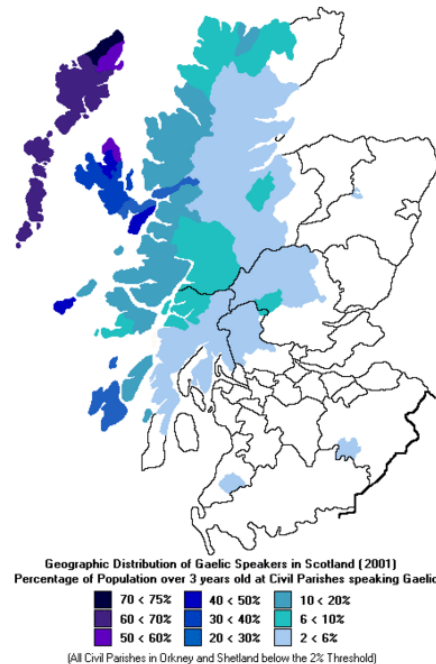
the busiest weekends of the crofting calendar (*Là Buidhe Bealltainn*, Mayday, when livestock are moved to the common grazing) so no wonder no crofters had put in an appearance. This was illustrative of the social divide that persisted between environmentalist 'white settlers' and the indigenous crofters, and showed the problem of allowing the debate over Highland development to be dominated by outsiders.

'White settler' is a once-common derogatory term for the Anglophone incomers who moved in their droves to islands like Skye in search of the good life in the '80s. However, its use has dwindled as these islands have been assimilated into mainstream Anglophone society. But political journalist and Gael Torcuil Crichton has revived the slur to describe what he names the 'white steriliser' culture:

> These are the people who object to the windfarms, who object to the fishfarms, to more ferry services or any other development that might detract from the "visual amenity" at the end of their "private road - no entry" track. In the case of one west coast village, Torridon, the sterilisers succeeded in stopping an active crofter build a home on her croft because it might ruin the landscape. They are joined by the vested interests of landed
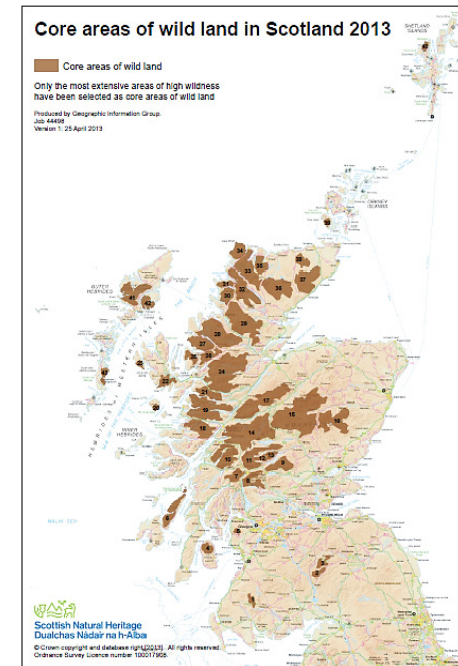

Figure 3

and territorial decolonisation have been viewed in Gaeldom. Over the past century or so, Gaels have dwindled in number from 230,806 in 1901 to 57,375 in 2011. By 2011, only 51.7% of Gaels were living in so-called 'heartland' Highland areas, and the incidence of Gaelic-speakers in the language's last stronghold of the Western Isles was now just at 52%, a 10.5% drop since 2001, showing the effects of wholesale language shift, depopulation and Anglophone in-migration. This process of language death is summarised in Figures 2 and 3.

Anecdotally, I first began to explore ideas of indigenous land use to understand Gaelic Scotland after meeting Alastair MacIntosh at an Eco Festival in Uist in 2010. I was taking part in a panel discussion alongside MacIntosh, a geographer from St Andrews University, and an (incomer) representative of Sustainable Uist, a sustainable development organisation from the Western Isles. The crowd was large and there was much self-flagellation among the assembled academics and eco-activists about how hard it was to get local crofters involved with their sustainable development schemes – indeed, not one crofter had even turned up to the Eco Festival. I vividly remember the perplexed silence when I pointed out that the weekend they had chosen to host the festival on coincided with one of

Figure 4

class, lairds like Mark Pattison of Kinlochdamph, who thinks that the revival of the nearby Kishorn oil yard would be an environmental disaster…[6]

'White steriliser' culture sees the value of the Highlands as a wilderness as trumping economic development or active land use. For example, Scottish Natural Heritage, buttressed by the John Muir Trust, recently drew up a map of proposed wildland designations in Scotland, scenery deemed too precious for development. As Figure 4 shows, this includes a huge swathe of South Uist community estate.

But this untamed, untouched image of the Highlands is a construct which erases millennia of occupation by Gaels and other peoples – indeed, the region of South Uist deemed 'wild' is where my great-great-great-grandfather was cleared to in the mid-19th century (and from where he was subsequently cleared again to make way for the deer). As Huw Francis, Chief Executive of Stòras Uibhist, writes:

> The so-called 'Wild Land' of South Uist has been occupied, managed, altered, built on and farmed by island residents for thousands of years. Calling it an untouched wilderness disparages the long history of island living and imposes a romanticised and erroneous external construct on this community that will perpetuate the economic decline of the island economy. […] Much of Scotland was once designated as land fit only for sheep, which resulted in the Clearances. If Scotland continues to be designated as fit for nothing but conservation, a new clearance of rural Scotland will take place.[7]

Perhaps understandably, the Left in Britain is primarily an urban force. Especially in England, rurality is associated with the conservatism of the foxhunting brigade. But the Western Isles, as an example, is the local authority with the lowest male life expectancy in Britain (tied with Glasgow city), and has the highest rates of fuel poverty. Radical land reform gives marginalised societies control of their own resources – whether for agriculture, renewable energy generation, or even as community-run sporting estates. Now, in 2014, the 'Our Islands, Our Future' campaign seeks control of the seabed and crown estate revenues for the Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland communities, whatever the outcome of the independence referendum. We are living in an exciting time in the process of decolonising the Highlands and Islands. As I wrote for the radical independence group National Collective:

I believe strongly that an independent Scotland should not be a colonialist

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6   Torcuil Crichton, 'Planning "sterilisers" dictating to the Highlands', 12th Aug 2013, *Whitehall 1212* blog
7   David Ross, 'Islanders fear new Clearances', 14th Nov 2013, *The Herald Scotland*

nation. If Scotland's raw wealth is to be based on the riches of the seabed surrounding these three archipelagos (whether oil, wave and wind power or fisheries), then a truly socially-democratic Scotland must give the islands it exploits the right to benefit economically from their own resources.[8]

Yet it's no use wresting back the land from the landlords and the seabed from the Crown if environmental agencies just turn round and tell poverty-stricken communities like the Western Isles that they can't do anything with it. When the Scottish government decided to designate the area around my island as a Special Area of Conservation, they put the fish ahead of the people – despite the fishermen marching on Edinburgh to defend their livelihoods. When crofters were banned from shooting the birds who ruined their crops, wildlife groups gave more value to geese than Gaels. When animal rights activists attack the men of Ness in Lewis for harvesting 2000 guga chicks a year, they choose a tiny fraction of a massive colony of seabirds above deprived islanders living in the most distal part of the UK. And when land that's been settled for centuries is called wildland, when the government embraces the ideology of the Highlands as a wilderness, Scotland is entrenching and upholding a vision of Highland land use belonging to the age of Clearance.

But, still, the Highlands have come a long way in the quest for radical land reform. *Màiri Mhòr nan Oran*, Big Mary of the Songs, was a fifty-year old Skye-woman who was falsely sent to prison in 1872 for stealing a pound. She came out radicalised, and through her songs became the bàrd and propagandist of the Highland Land League. The last of her Gaelic poems, *Faistneachd agus Beannachdan do na Gàidheil* (Prophecy and Blessing to the Gaels), while over-romantic to modern ears, is filled with a hope for land reform now on its way to partial fulfilment:

'S pillidh gineal na tuatha,	And they will return, the seed of crofters
rinneadh fuadach thar sàile.	who were driven over the sea.
'S bidh na baigearan uasal	And the aristocratic beggars
air an ruaig mar bha 'adsan;	will be routed as the crofters were;
fèidh is caoraich gan cuibhleadh	deer and sheep will be carted away
'S bidh na glinn air an àiteach…	and the glens will grow again…[9]

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8   Dòmhnall Iain Dòmhnallach, 'Gaeldom in an Age of Independence', 23rd Jul 2013, *National Collective*
9   Dòmhnall Eachann Meek (ed.), 'Mairi Mhòr Nan Oran: Taghadh De a h-Orain.' Glasgow: Gairm, 1977 (pg. 221). Translation by Dòmhnall Iain Dòmhnallach.

To the Gaels, she had this advice:

Ach cuimhnichibh gur sluagh sibh,   But remember you are a people
is cumaibh suas ur còir;   and remember to defend your rights,

tha beairteas fo na cruachan   there is wealth under the land
fon d' fhuair sibh àrach òg   where you were born and raised[10]

A century and a half ago, the people of Gaelic Scotland were forced from their homes, 2000 people a day at the Clearances' height, and sent overseas or settled in reservation-style crofting communities on the poorest land. But because of this, the Highlands and Islands can claim a proud history of direct action against landlordism. I hope I've shown that the Gaelic crofters were radicals on par with the Chartists, the Trade Unionists and the Suffragettes. But with inequitable patterns of landownership persisting and conservationist ideologies striving to keep the Highlands an economically-dependent backwater, the work of radical land reform remains unfinished. The Gaelic scholar Angus MacLeod, challenging anti-Gaelic attitudes within the leftwing Radical Independence Campaign, has summed up well why the Left in Scotland and the wider UK should pay attention to these problems facing the Highlands and Gaelic Scotland:

> The economic processes which exploited the Gàidhealtachd, consolidated the power of the landowners and still sends its young people to the cities for work, housing and opportunity is the same process wreaking havoc elsewhere. If you want to get an understanding of the experience of those marginalised by economic exploitation, then a genuine engagement with an exploited culture close to home, is in terms of sheer practicality, a good place to start.[11]

The year is 2014, and this September, Scotland faces an existential choice over independence. If Scotland votes yes and brings its people autonomy, but leaves the land of Scotland in the hands of the landlords, then Scotland will not be an independent state worth living in.

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10   ibid (pg. 108). Translation by Dòmhnall Iain Dòmhnallach.
11   Angus MacLeod, 'Know Your Place – Gaelic and Elements of the Left,' 6th Feb 2014, *Bella Caledonia*

Fazriz: Reach OUT! and theQueen. This artwork is featured on a full-size insert in the first 100 copies of OLR 12.

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