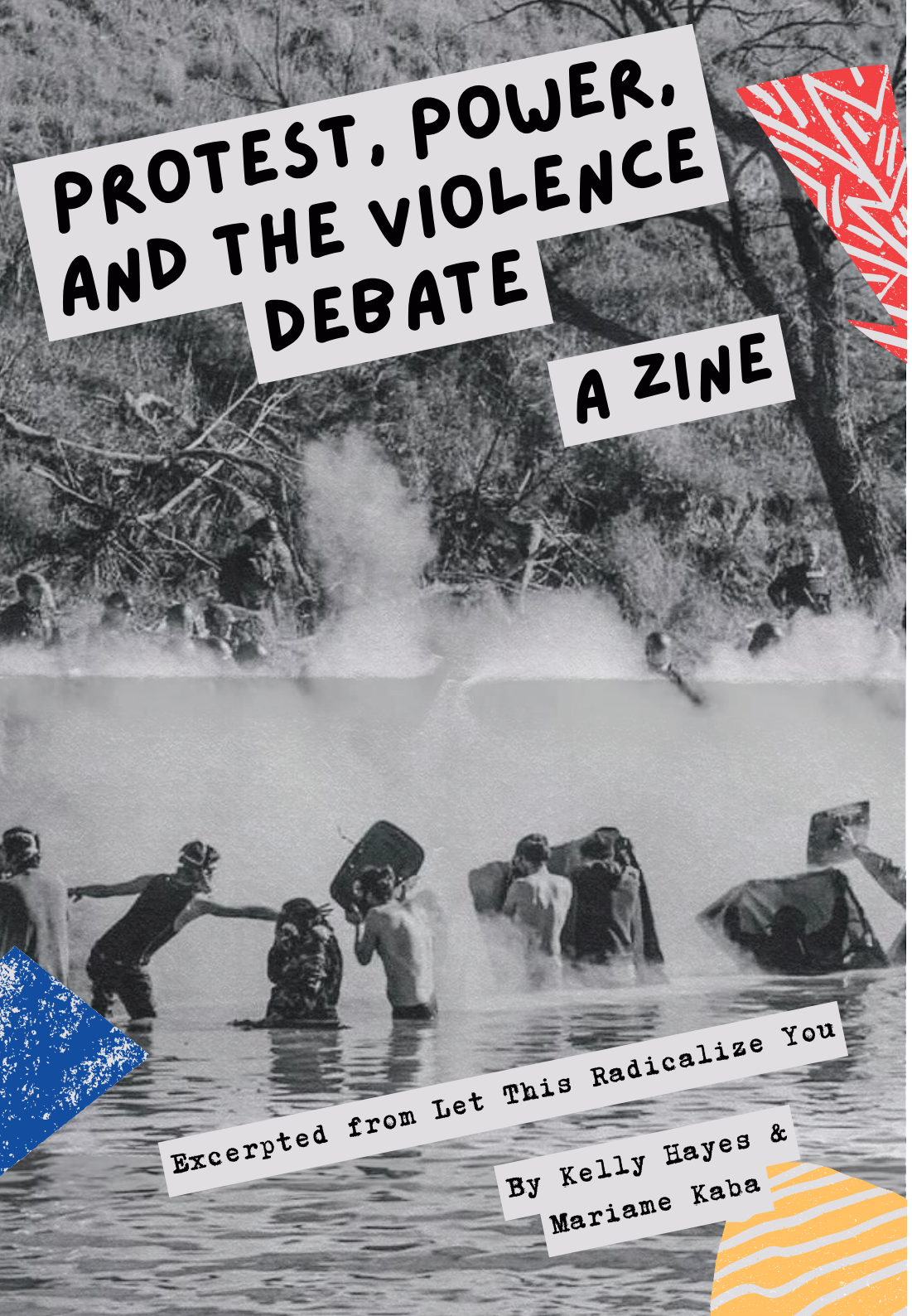
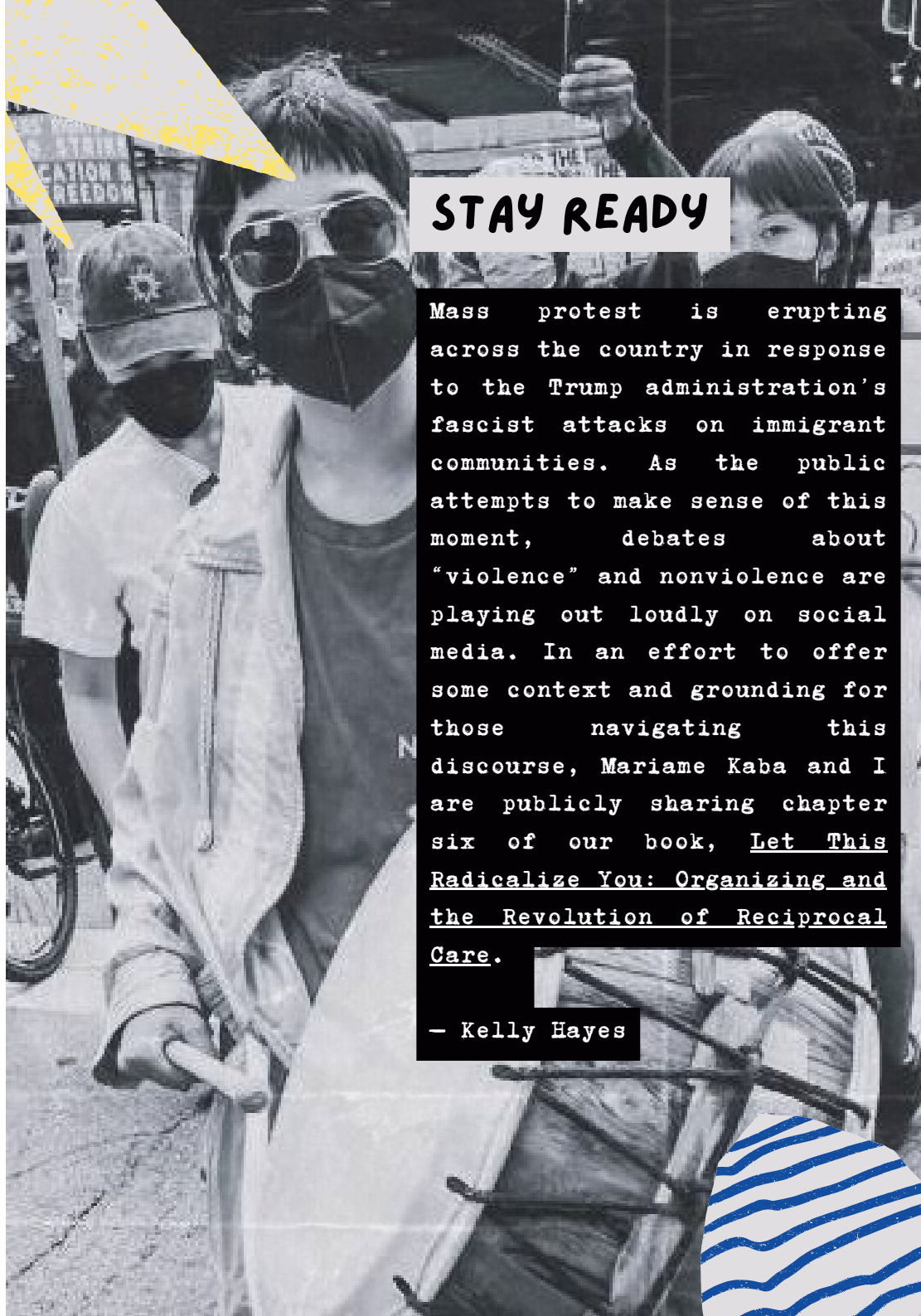




**PROTEST, POWER,
AND THE VIOLENCE
DEBATE**

A ZINE

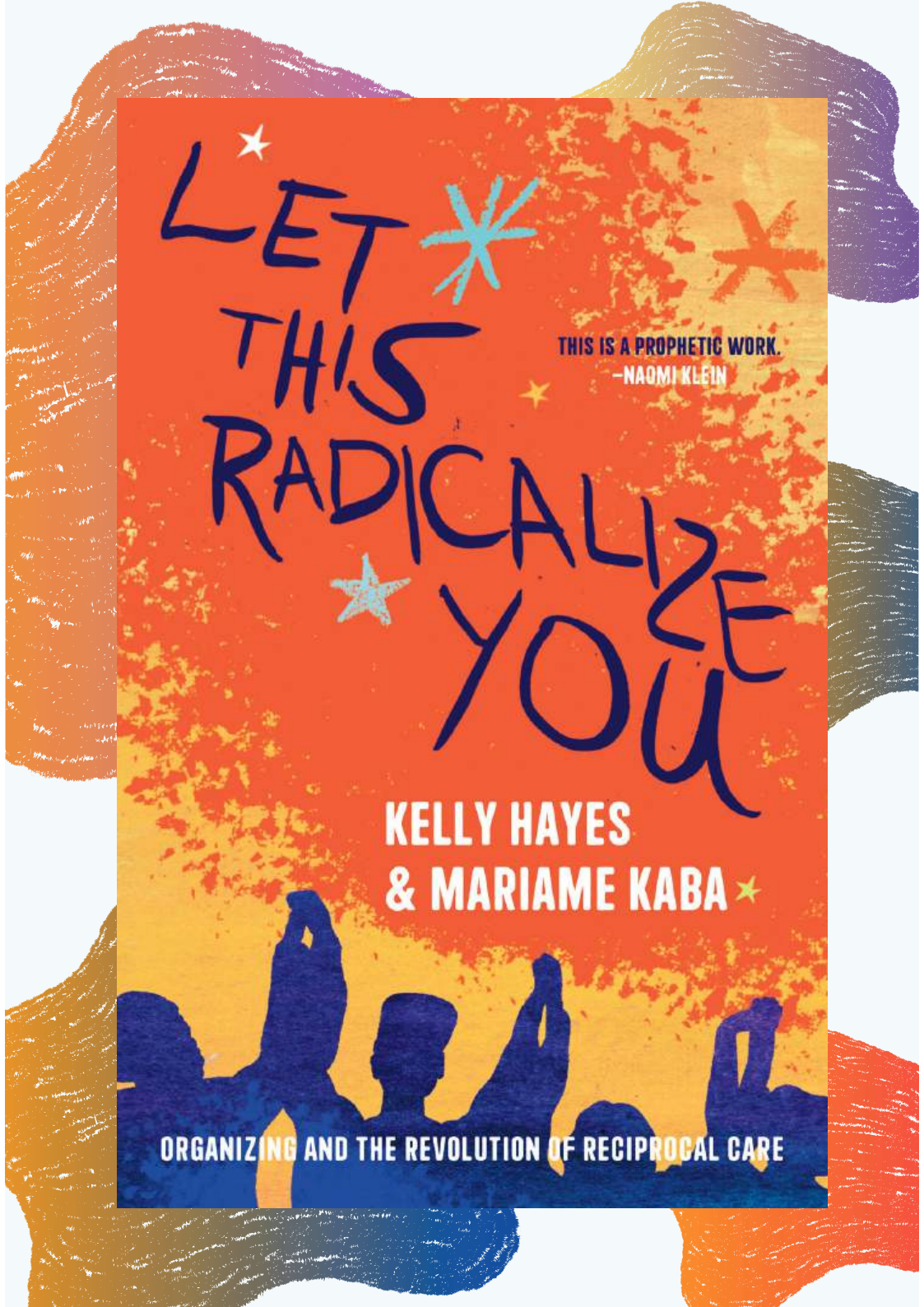
Excerpted from Let This Radicalize You
By Kelly Hayes &
Mariame Kaba



STAY READY

Mass protest is erupting across the country in response to the Trump administration's fascist attacks on immigrant communities. As the public attempts to make sense of this moment, debates about "violence" and nonviolence are playing out loudly on social media. In an effort to offer some context and grounding for those navigating this discourse, Mariame Kaba and I are publicly sharing chapter six of our book, Let This Radicalize You: Organizing and the Revolution of Reciprocal Care.

— Kelly Hayes



LET THIS RADICALIZE YOU

THIS IS A PROPHETIC WORK.
— NAOMI KLEIN

KELLY HAYES
& MARIAME KABA

ORGANIZING AND THE REVOLUTION OF RECIPROCAL CARE

ZINE ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Red Schulte

Crafted in June 2025
For comrades here, gone,
and those we've yet to meet.



CHAPTER SIX: "VIOLENCE" IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

IN SPRING 2020, WHEN THE UNITED STATES SAW MASS REBELLION, PROTESTS THAT INCLUDED ACTS OF PROPERTY DESTRUCTION STRUCK FEAR INTO OFFICIALS AROUND THE COUNTRY, AS SUPPORT FOR THE UPRISINGS RAN HIGH. CITIES ACROSS THE UNITED STATES SAW BILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN PROPERTY DAMAGE. LOCAL GOVERNMENTS OFFERED SCATTERED, SACRIFICIAL INDICTMENTS OF KILLER COPS IN AN EFFORT TO APPEASE THE PUBLIC. THE WORDS "BLACK LIVES MATTER" BEGAN TO APPEAR IN LARGE BLOCK LETTERS ON ROADWAYS IN MAJOR CITIES. PAINTED BY MUNICIPAL WORKERS OR BY COMMUNITY MEMBERS AT THE INVITATION OF GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, RATHER THAN BY PROTESTERS, THE BLOCK LETTER MURALS WERE CO-OPTIVE (SYMBOLIC) EFFORTS TO PLACATE AN OUTRAGED PUBLIC AND TO DEPICT NERVOUS MAYORS AND OTHER RATTLED OFFICIALS AS "ALLIES." AS PHILOSOPHY PROFESSOR OLUFEMI O. TÁIWÒ HAS POINTED OUT, THE MAYOR OF WASHINGTON, DC, HAD A BLACK LIVES MATTER MURAL PAINTED ON STREETS NEAR THE WHITE HOUSE "ATOP WHICH PROTESTORS CONTINUED TO BE BRUTALIZED."¹

BY MIMICKING PROTEST ART, OFFICIALS SOUGHT TO REFASHION BLACK LIVES MATTER INTO A MAINSTREAM PHENOMENON—SOMETHING THAT BELONGED TO EVERYDAY PEOPLE AND POLITICIANS ALIKE. AFTER ALL, HOW COULD CITY OFFICIALS BE PART OF THE PROBLEM IF THEY WERE NOT ONLY MAKING THE PHILOSOPHICAL CONCESSION THAT BLACK LIVES MATTERED BUT ALSO OFFERING A PUBLIC VISUAL TO AFFIRM IT? WHILE SOME APPRECIATED THE MURALS, OTHERS REGARDED THEM AS PANDERING GESTURES, OFTEN FROM OFFICIALS WHO PLAYED KEY ROLES IN PERPETUATING—AND SANCTIONING—POLICE VIOLENCE.



THE MURALS WERE A PREDICTABLE RESPONSE TO THE UPHEAVAL OF THE PROTESTS. IN A TIME OF ISOLATION AND CRISIS, WHEN SO MANY PEOPLE FELT LEFT BEHIND, OR EVEN LEFT TO DIE BY THEIR GOVERNMENT, THE GEORGE FLOYD PROTESTS SAW NOT ONLY UNPRECEDENTED PARTICIPATION BUT ALSO STARTLING LEVELS OF PUBLIC APPROVAL, EVEN AFTER A POLICE PRECINCT BURNED TO THE GROUND IN MINNEAPOLIS. THE FACT THAT THE PUBLIC REMAINED SUPPORTIVE OF THE PROTESTS, EVEN IN THE WAKE OF THAT FIRE, PUT OFFICIALS AROUND THE COUNTRY IN AN UNSTABLE POSITION. WHEN A RADICAL CONCEPT OR MOVEMENT FORCES ITS WAY INTO THE MAINSTREAM, THE FIRST REACTION OF AUTHORITY IS TO EJECT IT. BUT IF THAT RADICAL PRESENCE CANNOT BE EJECTED, STRUCTURAL MAINTENANCE WORKERS—SUCH AS PUBLIC OFFICIALS AND OTHERS WHO BENEFIT FROM THE STATUS QUO—WILL ATTEMPT TO DEFANG AND RECONFIGURE IT SO THAT THE CONCEPT OR MOVEMENT IS NO LONGER DISRUPTIVE TO THE ORDER OF THINGS. WHEN SUCH EFFORTS ARE SUCCESSFUL, DISRUPTION GIVES WAY TO MERE EXPRESSION, AND THE POWERFUL APPLAUD THEMSELVES FOR WELCOMING OR EVEN PARTICIPATING IN THAT EXPRESSION. WHAT WAS ONCE AN INTERVENTION BECOMES POLITICAL WALLPAPER. RADICALISM THAT IS NOT SUCCESSFULLY CO-OPTED OR DEFANGED, THAT CONTINUES TO LINGER WITHIN THE MAINSTREAM, WILL BE MET WITH INCREASING HOSTILITY AND, ULTIMATELY, CONDEMNED AS ASSOCIATED WITH VIOLENCE. AS TAIWÒ WRITES IN ELITE CAPTURE, "WHERE CO-OPTATION FAILS, REGULAR OLD REPRESSION WILL DO."²

OVER TIME, SUPPORT FOR THE 2020 PROTESTS PREDICTABLY DISSIPATED. IT WAS A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION YEAR, AND FEARS THAT THE PROTESTS WOULD HELP FUEL A TRUMP VICTORY LED SOME LIBERALS TO INSIST THAT THE PROTESTS SHOULD CEASE ENTIRELY. OTHERS ARGUED THAT THE PROTESTS SHOULD CONTINUE BUT THAT THEY SHOULD REMAIN ORDERLY, "PEACEFUL," AND NONDISRUPTIVE. IN SOME PLACES, LIKE PORTLAND, REBELLIONS CONTINUED FOR MONTHS AS PROTESTERS FACED OFF WITH DONALD TRUMP'S FED SQUADS IN THE STREETS. BUT, IN CITIES AROUND THE COUNTRY, WE ALSO SAW THE RISE OF THE DEFUND THE POLICE MOVEMENT, WHICH UPLIFTED LONGSTANDING ABOLITIONIST EFFORTS TO REDIRECT FUNDS AND RESOURCES AWAY FROM POLICE DEPARTMENTS AND TOWARD POTENTIALLY LIFE-GIVING SERVICES FOR COMMUNITIES.

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THESE EFFORTS WERE TARGETED FIERCELY BY LIBERAL PUNDITS, PUBLIC OFFICIALS, AND THEIR POLITICAL FANDOMS. THE IDEA OF DEFUNDING THE POLICE WAS TOO RADICAL, THEY INSISTED. SOME SUGGESTED A RETURN TO THE TIRED AND FAILED RHETORIC OF "REFORM," ARGUING THAT SUCH LANGUAGE WOULD BE BETTER ACCEPTED BY THE PUBLIC. MANY MAINSTREAM DEMOCRATS, INCLUDING JOE BIDEN, ACTUALLY INSISTED THAT TO FUND THE POLICE WAS CRITICAL TO REFORM.

IT'S TRUE THAT THE LANGUAGE OF REFORM IS MORE EASILY ACCEPTED BY THE PUBLIC, BECAUSE LANGUAGE THAT LACKS SUBSTANCE IS GENERALLY INOFFENSIVE. YET "REFORM" POSES NO THREAT TO THE ORDER OF THINGS AND IN PRACTICE OFTEN LEADS TO POLICIES THAT FURTHER ENTRENCH THAT ORDER.

"REFORM" IS NOT A BATTLE CRY. IT IS A POLITICAL PACIFIER.

THE DEFUND THE POLICE MOVEMENT WAS CHALLENGING THE ORDER OF THINGS AND WOULD ULTIMATELY BE BLAMED FOR THE ELECTORAL LOSSES OF POLITICIANS WHO NEVER EMBRACED IT, AS WELL AS FOR SUPPOSEDLY RISING CRIME RATES. TO UNDERSTAND WHY, WE HAVE TO UNDERSTAND HOW VIOLENCE IS FRAMED IN RELATION TO SOCIAL MOVEMENTS.

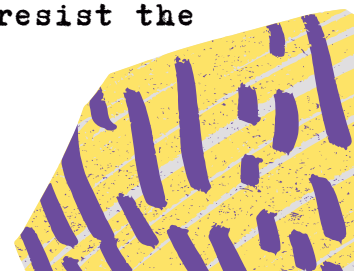
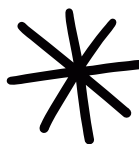
ON VIOLENCE AND NONVIOLENCE

THE TERMS "VIOLENCE" AND "NONVIOLENCE" DON'T HAVE STATIC AND INDISPUTABLE DEFINITIONS. DIFFERENT PEOPLE DEPLOY THESE TERMS IN A WIDE VARIETY OF WAYS TO SERVE THEIR DISTINCT POLITICAL PURPOSES. TO SOME PEOPLE NONVIOLENCE IS A STRATEGY, A PRACTICE, AND AN APPROACH, AND TO OTHERS IT IS A MORAL ETHOS. POPULAR DEFINITIONS OF VIOLENCE TEND TO INCLUDE PROPERTY DESTRUCTION. BUT UNDER THESE DEFINITIONS, THE DESTRUCTION OF PROPERTY IS USUALLY VIEWED AS VIOLENT ONLY IF IT DISRUPTS PROFIT OR THE MAINTENANCE OF WEALTH. IF FOOD IS DESTROYED BECAUSE IT CANNOT BE SOLD WHILE PEOPLE GO HUNGRY, THAT IS NOT CONSIDERED VIOLENT UNDER THE NORMS OF CAPITALISM. IF A PERSON'S BELONGINGS ARE TOSSED ON A SIDEWALK DURING AN EVICTION AND CONSEQUENTLY DESTROYED, THAT IS LIKEWISE NOT CONSIDERED VIOLENT ACCORDING TO THE NORMS OF THIS SOCIETY. THOSE DESTRUCTIVE ACTS ARE PART OF THE "ORDER OF THINGS."

The maintenance of global capitalism necessitates mass death, just as the maintenance of capitalism in the United States requires the violence of the carceral system. If these systems function without interruption, you will be told you are experiencing "peace." After all, police are often cast as "peace officers," and soldiers are called "peacekeepers."

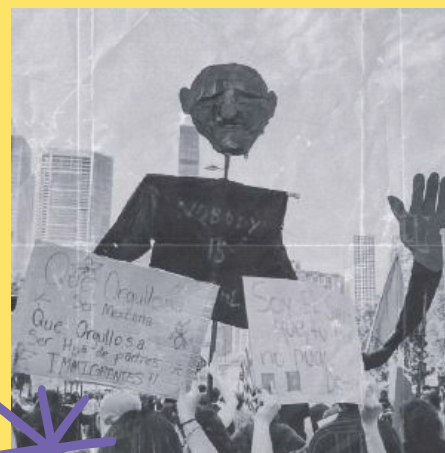
If you choose to disrupt these systems, passively, destructively, or by way of extending mutual aid, the concept of violence may be stretched and manipulated by the powerful to encompass your work. That is why we must not allow the frameworks of the powerful to define the bounds of morality in our politics and our action. The elastic concepts of criminality and violence, as controlled by the powerful, will always be bent against us.

Instead, we must expose and dismantle the supposed moral frameworks of the death-makers. We must craft our own narratives and uplift our own frameworks, which implicate the system itself. We must, as Tatour says, "resist the colonialist's onslaught."



As Tatour wrote,

They burned blameless children;
As for Hadil, they sniped her in public,
Killed her in broad daylight.
Resist, my people, resist them.
Resist the colonialist's onslaught.



As organizers, we are practitioners of nonviolence, but we also recognize that fetishizing distinctions between violence and nonviolence can lead to the indulgence of rhetoric about “good” and “bad” protesters, where “peaceful” protesters are celebrated and “violent” protesters—for example, those who engage in property destruction that disrupts profit—are viewed as disposable and disreputable.

THIS LICENSES PEOPLE TO CARE ABOUT THE CAUSE BEING PROTESTED WITHOUT CARING ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS TO THE "BAD" PROTESTERS. FOR EXAMPLE, EVEN AS SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS OF PEOPLE SUPPORTED THE UPRISINGS FOLLOWING THE RACIST MURDER OF GEORGE FLOYD, MANY FEWER PEOPLE VOCALLY DEFENDED THE RIGHTS OF PROTESTERS WHO WERE ARRESTED FOR ACTS OF PROPERTY DESTRUCTION AND FUNNELED INTO THE RACIST CARCERAL SYSTEM.

IN MOMENTS OF UNREST, IT'S IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT, AS MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. STATED, THERE IS NO GREATER PURVEYOR OF VIOLENCE IN THE WORLD THAN THE US GOVERNMENT. FROM WAR TO POLICING TO INCARCERATION TO BORDER VIOLENCE TO THE SLASHING OF THE SOCIAL SAFETY NET, THE US GOVERNMENT KILLS UNTOLD MILLIONS. THE VIOLENCE OF REBELLION IS INFINITESIMAL BY COMPARISON. MOREOVER, GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IS PERVASIVE IN THIS SOCIETY, AND POLICE OFFICERS THEMSELVES ARE FIFTEEN TIMES MORE LIKELY TO COMMIT ACTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE THAN PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT INVOLVED WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT. WHILE IT IS UNUSUAL FOR POLICE OFFICERS TO BE ARRESTED FOR ACTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, ONE STUDY FOUND THAT, OF OFFICERS WHO ARE CHARGED AND CONVICTED OF DOMESTIC ABUSE, MORE THAN HALF KEEP THEIR JOBS. RESEARCHERS HAVE ALSO FOUND THAT PEOPLE WHO PERPETRATE INCIDENTS OF MASS VIOLENCE, SUCH AS MASS SHOOTINGS, OFTEN HAVE A HISTORY OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. ONE STUDY ARGUED THAT "PRIORITIZATION OF MEASURES TO DECREASE ACCESS TO FIREARMS TO PERPETRATORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE MAY ALSO REDUCE THE INCIDENCE OF MASS SHOOTING."³ THE FREQUENCY WITH WHICH POLICE KILL PEOPLE—BOTH WHILE ON THE JOB AND IN THEIR OWN HOMES—ALSO ILLUSTRATES THIS CONNECTION BETWEEN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND MORE WIDESPREAD VIOLENCE, BUT THE UNITED STATES IS NOT ABOUT TO DISARM ITS POLICE OFFICERS.

YET, EVEN WITHIN THE US ITSELF, STATE VIOLENCE AGAINST PALESTINIANS CONTINUES. THE BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT, AND SANCTIONS MOVEMENT (BDS), WHICH "WORKS TO END INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL'S OPPRESSION OF PALESTINIANS AND PRESSURE ISRAEL TO COMPLY WITH INTERNATIONAL LAW" HAS BEEN CRIMINALIZED IN MULTIPLE COUNTRIES, INCLUDING MANY PARTS OF THE US.²⁶ IN JUNE 2022, THE US COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE EIGHTH CIRCUIT UPHELD AN ARKANSAS LAW FORBIDDING PUBLIC CONTRACTORS FROM PARTICIPATING IN THE BDS MOVEMENT, ARGUING THAT BOYCOTTS ARE NOT A PROTECTED FORM OF SPEECH. ARKANSAS IS JUST ONE OF MORE THAN THIRTY STATES THAT HAVE PASSED ANTI-BDS LAWS IN THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS. IN THE UNITED STATES, CANADA, FRANCE, GERMANY, AND THE UNITED KINGDOM, PALESTINIAN ACTIVISTS—AS WELL AS JEWISH ACTIVISTS WORKING IN SOLIDARITY WITH THEM—HAVE BEEN TARGETED AND ACCUSED OF ANTISEMITISM FOR CONDEMNING ISRAELI APARTHEID.

KAYALI NOTED THAT, FROM ISRAEL TO THE US AND BEYOND, PALESTINIANS' ARMED STRUGGLE AND NONVIOLENT STRUGGLE ARE BOTH TREATED AS "TERRORISM," OR AS AN ATTACK ON ISRAEL, OR EVEN ALL JEWISH PEOPLE: "STUDENT ACTIVISM [IN PALESTINE] IS CRIMINALIZED, NONVIOLENT STRUGGLE IN THE DIASPORA IS CRIMINALIZED, INTERNATIONAL MUTUAL AID OR CHARITABLE SUPPORTS, INCLUDING PURELY HUMANITARIAN SUPPORT, IS ILLEGAL. NONENGAGEMENT THROUGH BOYCOTTS [IN THE] DIASPORA IS CRIMINALIZED."

THE REPRESSION OF PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE OFFERS A PROFOUND EXAMPLE OF THE ELASTICITY OF VIOLENCE AS A CONCEPT AND SHOWS HOW, WHILE THE POWERFUL CAN WAGE WAR ON PARTICULAR COMMUNITIES WITH IMPUNITY AND CLAIM INNOCENCE, THE OPPRESSED CAN BE DEEMED A VIOLENT THREAT SIMPLY FOR ATTEMPTING TO ASSERT THEIR RIGHTS OR DEFEND THEIR HUMANITY.

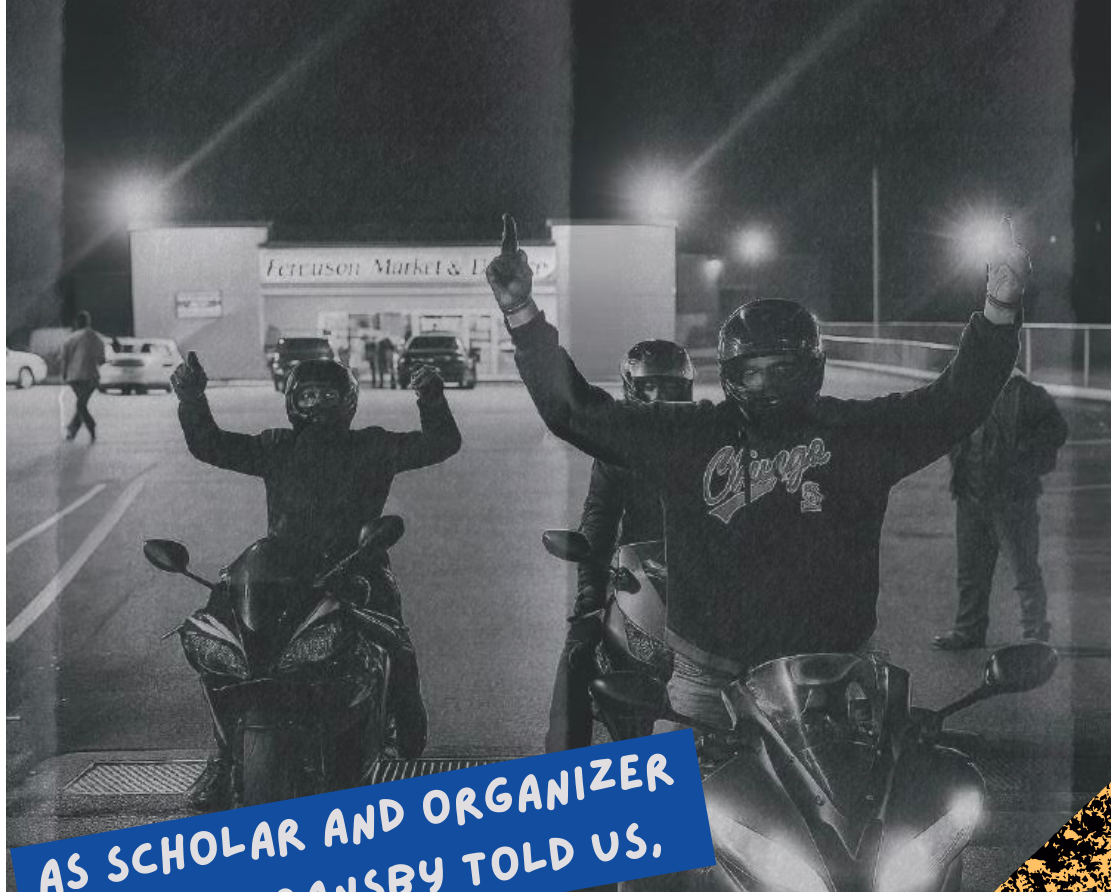
KAYALI POINTS OUT THAT UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW, PALESTINIANS HAVE THE RIGHT TO VIOLENTLY RESIST ISRAEL'S UNLAWFUL OCCUPATION OF GAZA, BUT SHE ALSO CAUTIONS AGAINST PLACING AN OVEREMPHASIS ON "STRUCTURES OF LAW AND LEGALITY." AS KAYALI TOLD KELLY ON MOVEMENT MEMOS IN MAY 2021, AS ISRAELI BOMBS WERE RAINING DOWN ON GAZA, "WHAT THIS COMES DOWN TO, IN MY MIND, IS KIND OF THE OMNIPRESENCE OF NEOLIBERALISM AND ITS TIGHT GRIP ON OUR FRAMING OF JUSTICE."²⁵ KAYALI EXPLAINED, "AFTER THE OSLO ACCORDS, WHICH WERE THE PEACE DEALS THAT HAPPENED IN THE 1990S, WE SAW A REALLY DETRIMENTAL SHIFT IN INTERNATIONAL DISCOURSE ABOUT PALESTINE THAT REALLY FRAMED EVERYTHING IN TERMS OF THE RIGHTS OF THE INDIVIDUAL, EVERYTHING CENTERING THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE ASCENDANCE OF THE STATE AS THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE." KAYALI SAYS THIS SHIFT USHERED IN AN ERA OF DISCOURSE ABOUT A "TWO-STATE SOLUTION" AND PROTECTING THE "HUMAN RIGHTS" OF PALESTINIAN PEOPLE. DISCUSSIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS ARE INHERENTLY LIMITED, SHE NOTED, BECAUSE RIGHTS ARE AFFORDED TO INDIVIDUALS BY LARGER STRUCTURES OF POWER AND CAN BE REVOKED BY THOSE STRUCTURES. "I WANT MY EXISTENCE AND LIBERATION TO BE VALID, WHETHER OR NOT THE UN AGREES WITH ME," KAYALI TOLD US. "SO I THINK WHAT THIS FRAMING CAN DEPRIVE US OF IS AN UNDERSTANDING OF COLLECTIVISM AND AN UNDERSTANDING OF LIBERATION."

EVEN THOUGH ISRAEL BLATANTLY AND REGULARLY VIOLATES INTERNATIONAL LAW, THE UNITED STATES AND OTHERS ROUTINELY DEFEND ISRAEL AS AN IMPORTANT ALLY, INSISTING "ISRAEL HAS THE RIGHT TO EXIST." THIS LANGUAGE NOT ONLY POSITIONS ALL PALESTINIAN STRUGGLES FOR SELF-DETERMINATION AND SURVIVAL AS AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT, BUT IT ALSO CONFERS UPON A STATE A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT THAT ISRAEL DOES NOT EXTEND TO PALESTINIANS, WHO ARE NOT TREATED AS THOUGH THEY HAVE AN INHERENT RIGHT TO EXIST. IN THE UNITED STATES, ISRAEL'S MANY CRIMES ARE OFTEN GLOSSED OVER OR DEFENDED BY THOSE WHO INSIST THE SITUATION IS "COMPLICATED." WITH RARE EXCEPTION, THE WORD "VIOLENCE" IS SELDOM INVOKED BY US OFFICIALS TO DESCRIBE THE EXECUTIONS, IMPRISONMENT, AND TORTURE PALESTINIANS EXPERIENCE AT THE HANDS OF THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT OR THE APARTHEID CONDITIONS IN WHICH PALESTINIANS ARE FORCED TO LIVE. AS IS THE CASE IN THE US, INSTITUTIONALIZED VIOLENCE IS NORMALIZED. WHEN PEOPLE IN THE UNITED STATES DO RALLY AGAINST ISRAELI VIOLENCE, IT IS USUALLY IN RESPONSE TO AN ACTIVE BOMBING CAMPAIGN BEING PERPETRATED BY ISRAEL AGAINST GAZA. DURING SUCH TIMES, MARCHES AND OTHER PROTESTS MAY TAKE PLACE IN THE US, BUT ONCE THE BOMBS TEMPORARILY STOP FALLING—WHEN SUPPOSED "PEACE" IS "ACHIEVED"—MOST AMERICANS TYPICALLY TURN THEIR ATTENTION ELSEWHERE.

WE ARE SURROUNDED BY VIOLENCE IN THIS SOCIETY, EVEN UNDER CONDITIONS THAT GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES WOULD CHARACTERIZE AS "PEACEFUL," BECAUSE VIOLENCE HAS ALWAYS BEEN EMBEDDED IN THE NORMS AND FUNCTIONS OF THIS SYSTEM.

SOME PEOPLE BLAME THE UPRISINGS OF THE LATE 1960S AND EARLY 1970S FOR THE DERAILEMENT OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, AND WE SAW A RESURGENCE OF THOSE ARGUMENTS IN 2020, FROM PEOPLE WHO CONDEMNED SOME FORMS OF PROTEST AND DISCOURAGED CERTAIN ILLEGAL ACTS. BUT THAT ASSIGNMENT OF BLAME IS AHISTORICAL AND ERASES THE RESPONSIBILITY OF RACIST WHITE PEOPLE, WHO ORGANIZED EN MASSE TO DESTROY THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT BY USING TACTICS LIKE THE FORMATION OF WHITE CITIZENS COUNCILS, WHICH SOUGHT TO SOCIALLY AND FINANCIALLY SUPPRESS BLACK COMMUNITIES, IN ADDITION TO ENACTING PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AGAINST BLACK PEOPLE. IT ALSO ERASES THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT, WHICH RAMPED UP IMPRISONMENT, BRUTALITY, AND ASSASSINATIONS AND LAUNCHED PROGRAMS OF INFILTRATION AND DISRUPTION, LIKE COINTELPRO, TO DESTROY BLACK-LED MOVEMENTS. RACIST WHITE PEOPLE HAVE ALWAYS LASHED OUT AGAINST BLACK-LED MOVEMENTS, AND WHITE LIBERAL SUPPORT FOR BLACK-LED MOVEMENTS IS HISTORICALLY FICKLE AND UNRELIABLE.

AS MOMENTS OF REBELLION SUBSIDE, EVEN PEOPLE WHO SUPPORT THE CAUSE TEND TO HAVE SHORT ATTENTION SPANS, AND CRIMINALIZED PEOPLE—OFTEN, THOSE WHO'VE BEEN ACCUSED OF "VIOLENCE"—ARE OFTEN LEFT BEHIND. PRISON AND COURT SUPPORT WORK IS USUALLY MAINTAINED BY SMALL, COMMITTED GROUPS OF PEOPLE WHO ARE OVERWORKED AND UNDER-RESOURCED. IF WE ARE SERIOUS ABOUT SUPPORTING PEOPLE WHO REBEL, WE MUST UNDERSTAND THAT SUPPORT AS A LONG-TERM PROJECT. WE MUST NEVER ABANDON OUR CO-STRUGGLERS WHO'VE BEEN CAST AS "VIOLENT" AND THEREBY SUBJECTED TO THE VIOLENCE OF THE STATE.



**AS SCHOLAR AND ORGANIZER
BARBARA RANSBY TOLD US,**

[People can become] distracted by the next thing that's happening. So many things have been happening, and the bodies are piling up of people killed by racist cops, and so people are on to the next thing. But when people are tried and convicted of charges involved in movement work, we really have to rally to their defense, and I don't think we do a good enough job, and that's certainly a lesson from the '70s. Many people were set up by COINTELPRO, went to jail for many years, and we didn't do an adequate job to publicize those cases and defend those political prisoners.

**DEFENDING PEOPLE WHO'VE BEEN INCARCERATED FOR ACTS THE
STATE DEEMS VIOLENT IS AN ESSENTIAL ACT OF ANTIVIOLENCE—
CHALLENGING THE VAST HARM PERPETRATED BY THE STATE ITSELF.**



**GIVEN THE REGULAR
THEFT AND DEMOLITION
OF PALESTINIAN
HOUSING, THE
FREQUENT MURDER OF
PALESTINIANS AT THE
HANDS OF THE ISRAEL
DEFENSE FORCES, AND
THE OVERALL VIOLENCE
OF ISRAELI APARTHEID,
ONE CAN EASILY
UNDERSTAND WHY
TATOUR WOULD WRITE,**

**RESIST, MY PEOPLE, RESIST THEM.
RESIST THE SETTLER'S ROBBERY
AND FOLLOW THE CARAVAN OF MARTYRS.
SHRED THE DISGRACEFUL CONSTITUTION
WHICH IMPOSED DEGRADATION AND HUMILIATION
AND DETERRED US FROM RESTORING JUSTICE.**

IN 1981, ISRAEL SHAHAK WROTE ABOUT ART BEING CONFISCATED FROM PALESTINIAN SHOPS BECAUSE IT WAS ILLEGAL TO USE THE COLORS WHITE, BLACK, GREEN, AND RED "TOO CLOSELY" IN ANY PUBLICLY DISPLAYED WORK. OTHER WORKS OF PALESTINIAN ART WERE ALSO TARGETED. AS SHAHAK WROTE, "A HORSE WILDLY REARING ON HIS HIND LEGS WAS CONFISCATED BECAUSE, SO THE GOVERNOR SAID, THE NAME OF THE PICTURE, WHICH WAS 'THE HORSE REFUSES,' IS OF COURSE A 'NATIONALISTIC INCITEMENT.'"24

AS KAYALI TOLD US, THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT'S DEFINITION OF VIOLENCE "CONTORTS ITSELF TO REPRESS ANY AND ALL FORMS OF OUR RESISTANCE." KAYALI EXPLAINED THAT EVEN DURING PERIODS WHEN IT WAS NOT OFFICIALLY ILLEGAL TO RAISE THE PALESTINIAN FLAG, NONSTATE ACTORS ENFORCE ITS PROHIBITION BY REMOVING OR DESTROYING FLAGS THAT ARE DISPLAYED IN PUBLIC AND TARGETING THOSE WHO CARRY THEM. SHE NOTED THAT THIS KIND OF DELEGATED VIOLENCE, AS RUTH WILSON GILMORE WOULD CALL IT, IS ALSO OCCURRING IN THE UNITED STATES, WHERE NONSTATE ACTORS HAVE BEEN RALLIED TO ENACT VIOLENCE AGAINST THE SAME COMMUNITIES TARGETED BY STATE VIOLENCE. IN ISRAEL, NONSTATE ACTORS PARTICIPATE IN ACTS OF ETHNIC CLEANSING, SUCH AS THE MASS THEFT OF PALESTINIAN HOMES, IN WHICH MOBS OF ISRAELIS INVADE AND MOVE INTO THE HOMES OF PALESTINIAN RESIDENTS, FORCING THEM FROM THEIR COMMUNITIES EN MASSE, IN ADDITION TO OTHER ACTS OF VIOLENCE.

THEY WILL CALL YOU VIOLENT

IF YOUR TACTICS DISRUPT THE ORDER OF THINGS UNDER CAPITALISM, YOU MAY WELL BE ACCUSED OF VIOLENCE, BECAUSE "VIOLENCE" IS AN ELASTIC TERM OFTEN DEPLOYED TO VILIFY PEOPLE WHO THREATEN THE STATUS QUO. CONDITIONS THAT THE STATE CHARACTERIZES AS "PEACEFUL" ARE, IN REALITY, QUITE VIOLENT. EVEN AS PEOPLE EXPERIENCE THE VIOLENCE OF POVERTY, THE TORTURE OF IMPRISONMENT, THE BRUTALITY OF POLICING, THE DENIAL OF HEALTH CARE, AND MANY OTHER VIOLENT FUNCTIONS OF THIS SYSTEM, WE ARE TOLD WE ARE EXPERIENCING PEACE, SO LONG AS EVERYONE IS COOPERATING. WHEN STATE ACTORS REFER TO "PEACE," THEY ARE REALLY TALKING ABOUT ORDER. AND WHEN THEY REFER TO "PEACEFUL PROTEST," THEY ARE TALKING ABOUT COOPERATIVE PROTEST THAT OBEDIENTLY STAYS WITHIN THE LINES DRAWN BY THE STATE. THE MORE UNCOOPERATIVE YOU ARE, THE MORE YOU WILL BE ACCUSED OF AGGRESSION AND VIOLENCE. IT IS THEREFORE IMPERATIVE THAT THE STATE NOT BE THE ARBITER OF WHAT VIOLENCE MEANS AMONG PEOPLE SEEKING JUSTICE.

IN THE PAST, ACTIVISTS FREQUENTLY LEVERAGED THE VIOLENCE OF POLICE, TAKING ACTIONS THEY BELIEVED POLICE WOULD LIKELY RESPOND TO WITH VIOLENCE, IN ORDER TO EXPOSE THE BRUTALITY OF POLICING AND FORCE THE PUBLIC TO WITNESS AND CONFRONT IT. MANY OF THOSE ACTIONS, INCLUDING PROTESTS CARRIED OUT BY THE SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE OR THE STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE DURING THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, TOOK PLACE IN A CONTEXT THAT WAS VERY DIFFERENT FROM TODAY'S WORLD OF PERVERSIVE MASS MEDIA. TODAY, PEOPLE ARE MUCH MORE ACCUSTOMED TO WITNESSING VIOLENCE, INCLUDING VIOLENCE AGAINST PROTESTERS, AS SUCH IMAGERY IS SHARED WIDELY ON A REGULAR BASIS, PARTICULARLY THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA. THE PUBLIC HAS LARGELY BECOME INURED TO SUCH IMAGERY.

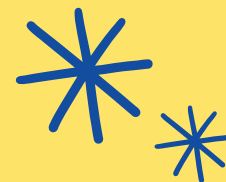


THE VIOLENCE OF THE STATE IN RESPONSE TO PROTEST IS RARELY SCRUTINIZED TO THE DEGREE THAT PROTESTERS ARE SCRUTINIZED. THE IDEA THAT IF YOU ARE DEFIANT IN THE FACE OF AUTHORITY YOU SHOULD EXPECT TO INCUR ITS WRATH IS FIRMLY ENTRENCHED IN OUR CULTURE. WHEN PEOPLE WHO DEFY POLICE ARE ABUSED, WE OFTEN HEAR PEOPLE ASK, "WHAT DID THEY THINK WAS GOING TO HAPPEN?" THE UBIQUITY OF THE ABUSE PUTS THE ONUS ON THE ABUSED TO AVOID IT, BECAUSE THEY SIMPLY "SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER." PROTESTERS ARE EXPECTED TO REMAIN "NONVIOLENT" AT ALL TIMES, REGARDLESS OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES, WHILE THE STATE IS ASSUMED TO BE JUSTIFIED, AT LEAST SOMETIMES, IN INFLECTING VIOLENCE TO QUELL "UNREST."

PROTESTERS ARE EXPECTED TO ABSORB VIOLENCE BUT NEVER INFLICT IT—TO FUNCTION AS SHOCK ABSORBERS TO BE ACTED UPON, WHOSE SYMPATHETIC VALUE IS NULLIFIED BY ANY DEVIATION FROM THAT STANDARD. THIS EXPECTATION BRIEFLY WAVERED DURING THE HEIGHT OF THE GEORGE FLOYD PROTESTS, STRIKING FEAR INTO THE HEARTS OF PUBLIC OFFICIALS, BUT LARGELY RESTABILIZED OVER TIME.



IN HER POEM, TATOUR WROTE,



RESIST, MY PEOPLE, RESIST THEM.
IN JERUSALEM, I DRESSED MY WOUNDS AND BREATHED MY SORROWS
AND CARRIED THE SOUL IN MY PALM
FOR AN ARAB PALESTINE.
I WILL NOT SUCCUMB TO THE "PEACEFUL SOLUTION,"
NEVER LOWER MY FLAGS
UNTIL I EVICT THEM FROM MY LAND.

THERE IS A LONG HISTORY OF THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT SEEKING TO SUPPRESS PALESTINIAN ART AND CULTURAL EXPRESSION. THE US PASSED SIMILAR LAWS AS IT SOUGHT TO STAMP OUT NATIVE CULTURES IN THE UNITED STATES. IN ISRAEL, PALESTINIAN ACTIVIST LEA KAYALI TOLD US THAT, AT ONE TIME, IT WAS ILLEGAL FOR PALESTINIANS TO USE THE COLORS OF THE PALESTINIAN FLAG—RED, WHITE, GREEN, AND BLACK—IN COMBINATION IN ANY SINGLE PIECE OF ART. "I GREW UP ON STORIES ABOUT [HOW IF] YOU WERE STOPPED WITH RED, WHITE, GREEN, AND BLACK PAINT THAT YOU WOULD JUST CLAIM YOU WERE PAINTING WATERMELONS INSTEAD. SO THEN WATERMELONS BECAME A SYMBOL OF RESISTANCE."



POETRY AS VIOLENCE

On July 31, 2018, Palestinian poet, activist, and filmmaker Dareen Tatour was convicted in an Israeli court of “inciting violence” and “supporting a terrorist organization.” Tatour’s crime, as defined by the state of Israel, took the form of a poem. The poem, titled “Resist, My People, Resist Them,” was written in response to the extrajudicial execution of Palestinian student Hadil Hashlamoun and the burning of two Palestinian children, Mohammed Abu Khdeir and Ali Dawabsha. While the idea of a poem being criminalized may sound unthinkable to some, Israeli investigators argued, “The content, its exposure and the circumstances of its publication created a real possibility that acts of violence or terrorism will be committed.”²³

Arguing that her work had been mischaracterized, Tatour received support and expressions of solidarity from around the world. She had already been under house arrest for nearly three years at the time of her conviction. She would ultimately serve two months in prison before being released in September 2018.

In 2019, Tatour’s conviction for inciting terrorism via poetry was overturned, while other convictions regarding her social media posts remained intact. It’s important to note that Israel’s belated acknowledgment that Tatour’s poem was not a crime does nothing to address the violence the state of Israel inflicted on Tatour. Her arrest, house arrest, and imprisonment were not undone by the court’s eventual acknowledgment that Tatour had a right to artistic expression. State violence around the world is routinely dealt out in such a manner: the state reserves the right to overstep its own laws, and even when it subsequently acknowledges its mistakes, it has already subjected people to the indignity of arrest, deprived them of their liberty, or subjected them to other violence. Such abuse is intentionally crafted to discourage others from expressing themselves or taking action, because it sends a message: even if the government is in the wrong and is ultimately forced to acknowledge as much, it can make you suffer and ruin your life in the meantime.

WHITELASH

LEFTIST ORGANIZERS ARE CURRENTLY CONFRONTING A SURGE OF WHITE SUPREMACIST VIOLENCE, REACHING LEVELS THE UNITED STATES HAS NOT EXPERIENCED IN DECADES. WHEN ACTIVIST HEATHER HEYER WAS STRUCK AND KILLED BY A MAN WHO PLOWED HIS CAR INTO PROTESTERS DURING THE 2017 “UNITE THE RIGHT” RALLY IN CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA, PUBLIC OUTRAGE WAS TREMENDOUS AND WIDESPREAD. EVEN SOME REPUBLICAN OFFICIALS FELT THE NEED TO DENOUNCE THE VIGILANTE ATTACK AND DISTANCE THEMSELVES FROM THE WHITE NATIONALISTS WHO HAD BESIEGED CHARLOTTESVILLE (WITH THE NOTABLE EXCEPTION OF DONALD TRUMP, WHO MAINTAINED THAT THERE WERE “VERY FINE PEOPLE ON BOTH SIDES”).⁴

BUT BETWEEN MAY 27, 2020, AND SEPTEMBER 5, 2020, THERE WERE AT LEAST 104 INCIDENTS OF PEOPLE STRIKING PROTESTERS WITH CARS, 96 BY CIVILIANS AND 8 BY POLICE.⁵ SOME MIGHT ARGUE THAT THOSE INCIDENTS WERE SIMPLY LOST IN A LARGER BLUR OF POLITICAL CHAOS AND UNREST. YET IN JUNE 2021, DEONA KNAJDEK WAS STRUCK AND KILLED BY A CAR THAT DROVE INTO A CROWD OF PROTESTERS IN THE UPTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD OF MINNEAPOLIS. WHILE THE ATTACK DID GARNER MEDIA COVERAGE, KNAJDEK’S NAME DID NOT ECHO ACROSS THE COUNTRY AND HER DEATH DID NOT SPARK CALLS FOR POLITICIANS TO DENOUNCE THE ATTACK OR ITS PERPETRATOR. DEONA KNAJDEK HAD TWO DAUGHTERS AND WAS JUST SHY OF HER THIRTY-SECOND BIRTHDAY WHEN SHE WAS KILLED. SHE WAS STRUCK WHILE PROTESTING THE KILLING OF WINSTON BOOGIE SMITH JR., WHO WAS GUNNED DOWN BY FEDERAL MARSHALS ON JUNE 3, 2021. LIKE HEATHER HEYER, KNAJDEK WAS AN ANTIRACIST WHITE WOMAN KILLED BY A WHITE MAN WHO INTENTIONALLY RAMMED HIS CAR INTO A PROTEST, BUT KNAJDEK’S DEATH DID NOT GALVANIZE OR POLARIZE THE COUNTRY, BECAUSE THE VIOLENCE SHE EXPERIENCED HAD ALREADY BECOME A STANDARD FEATURE OF AN ONGOING (CULTURE) WAR.



THERE ARE A NUMBER OF FACTORS THAT HAVE PROPELLED THIS UPTICK IN VEHICULAR VIOLENCE, INCLUDING THE FACT THAT HITTING PROTESTERS WITH CARS BECAME A RIGHT-WING MEME AFTER HEYER'S MURDER IN CHARLOTTESVILLE. RACIST WHITE PEOPLE ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND FORUMS LIKE 8CHAN HAVE AVIDLY SHARED IMAGES OF PROTESTERS BEING STRUCK AND EGGED EACH OTHER ON, ENCOURAGING FURTHER VIOLENCE. THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION ALSO STOKED RACIAL HATRED. MORE BROADLY, WE ARE WITNESSING A RISE IN RIGHT-WING NATIONALISM AND VIOLENCE ACROSS THE COUNTRY THAT HAS LED TO INCREASED VIOLENCE AGAINST MARGINALIZED PEOPLE AND ACTIVISTS DEMONSTRATING SOLIDARITY WITH MARGINALIZED GROUPS.

REPUBLICANS IN AT LEAST THIRTY-FOUR STATES INTRODUCED EIGHTY-ONE ANTIPROTEST BILLS IN THE 2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION. MUCH OF THIS LEGISLATION SEEKS TO CONFLATE ALL UNPERMITTED PROTEST WITH RIOTOUS ACTS OF REBELLION. MANY OF THE BILLS INCLUDE PROVISIONS THAT WOULD LEGALIZE HITTING PROTESTERS WITH CARS IF PROTESTERS ARE UNLAWFULLY OBSTRUCTING ROADWAYS, EVEN THOUGH OBSTRUCTING STREETS IS A COMMON PROTEST TACTIC THAT IS GENERALLY CONSIDERED NONVIOLENT. OTHER BILLS WOULD INCREASE PENALTIES FOR TEARING DOWN MONUMENTS, BLOCKING SIDEWALKS, AND WRITING OR DRAWING ON SOMEONE ELSE'S PROPERTY. MANY OF THOSE BILLS DID NOT PASS,⁶ BUT EVEN IN STATES WHERE SUCH BILLS DO NOT BECOME LAW, THEIR PROPOSAL SENDS A MESSAGE OF VALIDATION TO WOULD-BE WHITE VIGILANTES. BY FORWARDING THESE BILLS, REPUBLICANS ARE TELLING WHITE PEOPLE WHO ARE ANGRY AT BLACK PROTESTERS THAT EVEN IF IT ISN'T LEGAL TO HIT THEM WITH CARS, IT SHOULD BE, AND THAT PEOPLE WHO COMMIT THESE ACTS HAVE THE BACKING OF SOME GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS.

THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN A RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RACIST ELECTED OFFICIALS AND WHITE VIGILANTE VIOLENCE, AND WE ARE WITNESSING A MOMENT OF INTENSIFICATION ON BOTH SIDES. THIS KIND OF ORDER-MAKING, THROUGH THE STATE SANCTIONING OF OUTRIGHT RACIST VIOLENCE, IS DEEPLY EMBEDDED IN THE UNITED STATES AS A POLITICAL PROJECT. RUTH WILSON GILMORE REFERS TO THIS PHENOMENON AS "THE DELEGATION OF VIOLENCE."⁷ AS ORGANIZERS, WE MUST UNDERSTAND THAT THESE LATEST ANTIPROTEST LAWS ARE PART OF A LONG AND UNCEASING TRADITION THAT BECOMES LOUDER AND MORE RECOGNIZABLE IN THE FACE OF RESISTANCE BUT NEVER ABATES.



KLEMP'S REJECTION OF THE AWARD, POSTED ON FACEBOOK, SUBSEQUENTLY WENT VIRAL. ADDRESSED TO ANNE HIDALGO, THE MAYOR OF PARIS, THE POST READ,

MADAME HIDALGO, YOU WANT TO AWARD ME A MEDAL FOR MY SOLIDARIAN ACTION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA. BECAUSE OUR CREWS "WORK TO RESCUE MIGRANTS FROM DIFFICULT CONDITIONS ON A DAILY BASIS." AT THE SAME TIME YOUR POLICE ARE STEALING BLANKETS FROM PEOPLE THAT YOU FORCE TO LIVE ON THE STREETS, WHILE YOU RAID PROTESTS AND CRIMINALIZE PEOPLE THAT ARE STANDING UP FOR RIGHTS OF MIGRANTS AND ASYLUM SEEKERS. YOU WANT TO GIVE ME A MEDAL FOR ACTIONS THAT YOU FIGHT IN YOUR OWN RAMPARTS. I AM SURE YOU WON'T BE SURPRISED THAT I DECLINE THE MEDAILLE GRAND VERMEIL.

PARIS, I'M NOT A HUMANITARIAN. I AM NOT THERE TO "AID." I STAND WITH YOU IN SOLIDARITY. WE DO NOT NEED MEDALS. WE DO NOT NEED AUTHORITIES DECIDING ABOUT WHO IS A "HERO" AND WHO IS "ILLEGAL." IN FACT THEY ARE IN NO POSITION TO MAKE THIS CALL, BECAUSE WE ARE ALL EQUAL.

WHAT WE NEED ARE FREEDOM AND RIGHTS. IT IS TIME WE CALL OUT HYPOCRITE HONORINGS AND FILL THE VOID WITH SOCIAL JUSTICE. IT IS TIME WE CAST ALL MEDALS INTO SPEARHEADS OF REVOLUTION!

DOCUMENTS AND HOUSING FOR ALL!²²

KLEMP'S STATEMENT CALLS OUT THE HYPOCRISY OF GOVERNMENTS THAT WOULD OBSCURE THEIR OWN VIOLENCE WITH SYMBOLIC GESTURES. FROM BLOCK-LETTER STREET MURALS TO STATE-SANCTIONED AWARDS THAT EXCEPTIONALIZE INDIVIDUAL ACTIVISTS AS "HEROES" WHILE DEATH-MAKING POLICIES REMAIN UNCHANGED, WE MUST REJECT THE EMPTY PR MANEUVERS OF THOSE WHO SUSTAIN THE OPPRESSIONS WE STRUGGLE AGAINST.

Recent antiprotest bills have notably been accompanied by a fresh barrage of voter suppression bills, propelled by conspiracy theories about the 2020 election being "stolen" from Donald Trump. These mythologies have fueled a phase of Republican politics that some are calling Jim Crow 2.0, as Republicans double down on voting restrictions and work to criminalize protest at the state level, while also lending legitimacy to white vigilante violence. According to Toni Watkins, a voting rights organizer with the New Georgia Project, some activists are now taking precautions usually reserved for protests—such as writing their lawyers' phone numbers on their bodies and wearing glasses instead of contacts, in case of pepper spray—"when we go to poll monitor or even to vote," due to escalating police harassment and right-wing interference.⁸

An example of the current onslaught is the antiprotest law HB 1 in Florida, which Republicans promoted as an "antiriot" bill. One federal judge has stated that the law "arguably criminalizes mere presence at a protest where violence occurs—even if that violence is caused by counter protesters."⁹ Among its many draconian provisions, HB 1 aims to prevent local officials from reducing funding for police departments while severely escalating penalties for protest-related offenses. It also prohibits protesters from posting bail prior to their first court appearance, ensuring they'll remain incarcerated during that time. As Ransby has written, the antibail provision of the law "is reminiscent of the detention without charge policies that characterize dictatorships around the world and regimes like the former apartheid system in South Africa."¹⁰ The law also provides an affirmative defense for motorists who strike protesters with cars.

As of this writing, HB 1 is being challenged in the courts by groups like the Dream Defenders, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, the ACLU of Florida, and the Community Justice Project and was denounced by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Still, the bill enjoys broad-based right-wing support and is consistently referenced as a tool against the "violence" of protest.

The elasticity of violence as a concept allows vigilante violence to be legitimized by the state or even attributed to its victims, if they are protesting the white supremacist order. The conceptual elasticity of violence also allows police to commit casual acts of brutality and gender violence and to kill three people per day in the US, while robbing countless others of life and dignity, without being viewed as inordinately violent. The everyday violence of policing is protested by a select few, while the broader public views the need for intervention narrowly, only supporting protests in cases where police violence is popularly deemed extraordinary, and even then only if the victim is viewed as helpless and relatively innocent. In such cases, much of the public may join calls for the offending police officer to be indicted. Such indictments are rarely granted, and most do not lead to convictions. Occasionally a conviction or a hollow reform is offered up. In such cases, many perceive the system to be redeemed—an officer has been convicted, so it must be working! This perception erases the pervasive violence of the system itself. The status quo is then restored, until the next time.

Meanwhile, organizers campaigning to defund the police and redirect funds toward life-giving services are blamed for alleged spikes in violent crime, even though no correlation exists between defund efforts and crime rates. Elites have merely conjured an association between violence and efforts to disrupt the status quo, and that narrative has been allowed to gain traction in the mainstream. It is a thematic association, propagated through rhetoric, in the hopes that fearful people will reject Defund the Police and eject its radical ideas from the mainstream. Because, under capitalism, “peace” is the maintenance of violence on the state’s terms. Organized efforts to disrupt those harms will always be characterized, by any necessary stretch of the imagination, as violent.

As Ransby writes, “The challenge to social movements, then, is to be ever courageous and creative in speaking truth to power, no matter what censoring measures those in power attempt to impose in Florida and beyond.”

In order to ward off surplus people and discourage migration, governments narrow migration routes to scenarios that will necessarily result in mass death. At least seven thousand migrants are believed to have died along the US-Mexico border from 1998 to 2017. More than thirty-three thousand migrants died at sea trying to enter Europe between 2000 and 2017. People who disrupt this cycle of violence are accused of human trafficking and smuggling because they chose to preserve life. This should not surprise us. When laws encode violence and law enforcers maintain it, those who attempt to prevent this violence are indeed breaking the law and challenging its enforcers. Such is the perversion of “violence” under imperial and colonial rule: the maintenance of state-sanctioned violence is considered peaceful, while the disruption of those death-making processes is deemed violent.

In March 2021, Italian prosecutors charged more than twenty rescuers from NGOs including Save the Children and Doctors Without Borders with crimes carrying sentences of up to twenty years. The charges, which include collaborating with smugglers, have been vehemently denied by rescuers and contradicted by a forensic study by academics at Goldsmiths, University of London. Italian officials have complained that NGO-led rescues hamper their investigations of human smuggling at rescue sites—investigations that often amount to questioning migrants about who steered a rubber boat, held a compass, or even bailed out water as the boat sank, so that migrants themselves, who have been thrust into survival roles, can be charged as smugglers.

Among the rescuers facing charges is Pia Klemp, a German biologist who commanded two rescue ships for the nonprofit organizations Jugend Rettet and Sea-Watch between 2016 and 2018. Her ships rescued about fourteen thousand migrants during that time. In 2019, with Klemp’s future in jeopardy due to criminal charges, the council of the city of Paris announced that Klemp and another rescue captain, Carola Rackete, would receive the Grand Vermeil Medal, the top award of the city of Paris, for rescuing migrants at sea.

RESCUE AS VIOLENCE

In an era when nation-states are experiencing and anticipating the instability of climate collapse, laws are being passed to ensure our continued cooperation with the system responsible for those catastrophes—by casting rescue efforts as acts of violence. With millions of people being displaced by climate disasters, rescuers who have retrieved drowning migrants from the Mediterranean Sea are being charged under laws that supposedly target “human smuggling” operations.²⁰

Similarly, Scott Warren, an activist with the humanitarian organization No More Deaths, was charged with a felony by the United States government after giving food and water to migrants crossing the Arizona desert in 2018. In such cases, activists are being penalized for disrupting what Harsha Walia calls a “violent warscape of premeditated fatalities.” Acts of care and rescue disrupt the deterrence strategy of governments whose border security measures herd desperate refugees into deserts and oceans. “The doctrine of deterrence requires mass border deaths to instill fear and prevent migration,” Walia explains in her book *Border and Rule*.²¹



LAND AND WATER DEFENSE AS VIOLENCE

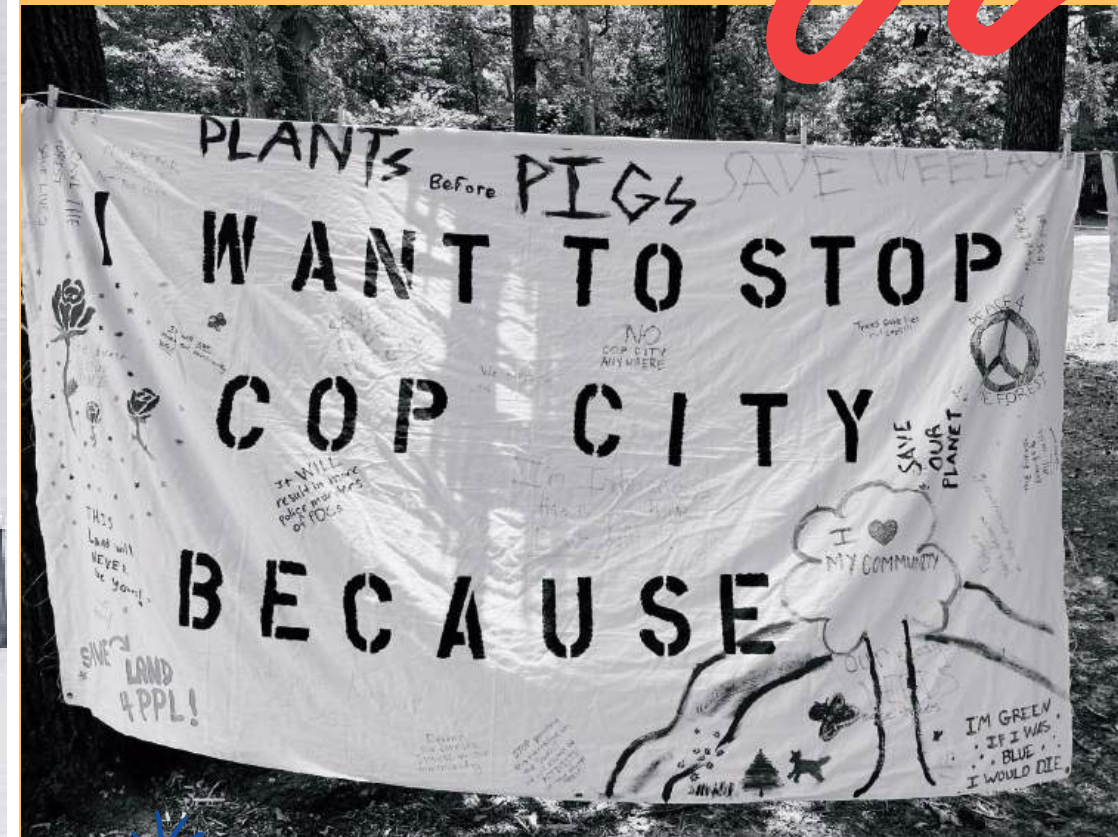
In recent years, amid a rise in Indigenous-led efforts to defend land and water, we’ve witnessed a push to designate these types of protest as “violence” and to simultaneously permit brutally violent state-sanctioned tactics to quell them. Indigenous land defenders and other environmental activists have been targeted with dystopian antiprotest provisions, including enhanced penalties for those who hinder “critical infrastructure” projects, like pipelines, through acts of protests.

ACCORDING TO THE BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE,

Since 2016, 13 states have quietly enacted laws that increase criminal penalties for trespassing, damage, and interference with infrastructure sites such as oil refineries and pipelines. At least five more states have already introduced similar legislation this year. These laws draw from national security legislation enacted after 9/11 to protect physical infrastructure considered so "vital" that the "incapacity or destruction of such systems and assets would have a debilitating impact on security, national economic security, national public health or safety."11

The fact that these laws draw on national security legislation created in the wake of 9/11 is illustrative of two important facts: laws that supposedly target "terrorists" will always be used to target activists, and those who would interrupt systemic violence will in turn, be associated with violence by those who maintain the system. While Indigenous land and water defenders face surging rates of targeted violence around the world, it is the potential disruption of "critical infrastructure" projects that is associated with the catastrophe of 9/11, and it is environment activists who are depicted as terrorists.

STOP BOMBING CHILDREN



FROM THE UNITED STATES TO THE UK AND BEYOND, THE SUPPRESSION OF DISSENT IS BEING RAMPED UP, NOT TO "KEEP THE PEACE" BUT TO PRESERVE A STATUS QUO SO VIOLENT THAT IT IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH MOST LIFE ON EARTH.

An effort in Atlanta known as Stop Cop City further illustrates the connection between environmental destruction and the extractive violence of policing and prisons. Stop Cop City is an organized effort to prevent the destruction of 381 acres of Weelaunee Forest for the construction of “a police military facility funded by corporations.”¹⁷ Waging struggle at an intersection of state violence and environmental destruction, Stop Cop City protesters have been the targets of extreme charges and extraordinary violence—including the first known killing of a forest defender at a protest site by law enforcement in the United States.¹⁸ As Atlanta organizer Micah Herskind told us,

On January 18, 2023, a joint police task force marched into the Weelaunee Forest and murdered a queer, Indigenous Venezuelan forest defender named Tortugita. And as of February 2023, nineteen forest defenders have been charged with domestic terrorism in an attempt to suppress and intimidate others in the movement against environmental devastation and police expansion. These charges are not about individual protesters’ conduct—they’re about using the state violence of cuffs and cages to undermine a movement that threatens Atlanta’s ruling class.

As climate change intensifies, legal efforts to suppress environmental activism are not limited to the United States. In the United Kingdom, the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act has ramped up police power to curtail protests. Among other powers, the law gives police the authority to choose start and stop times for protests and to impose noise limits on protests when their sounds affect “activities of an organisation” or have a “relevant impact on persons in the vicinity.” The bill also gives the home secretary (a member of the UK cabinet) the power to create laws, without legislative approval, that dictate what constitutes a “serious disruption,” giving police further license to restrict the actions of protesters. These rules apply to all protests, even those that involve just one person, and any refusal to comply with police directives, or directions police claim protesters “ought” to have known about, can result in heavy fines.¹⁹ The provisions are largely a response to the massive Extinction Rebellion protests of 2019, in which activists shut down roads and bridges, occupied public spaces, and intentionally incurred arrests in order to draw attention to the climate emergency. Critics say the UK antiprotest law’s provisions violate international human rights laws and seek to extinguish all forms of disruptive protest, including the occupation of public space.

MUCH LIKE THE ANTIPROTEST LAWS FORWARDED IN THE WAKE OF THE GEORGE FLOYD PROTESTS, THESE “CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE” LAWS INVOKE VAGUE TERMINOLOGY THAT CONFLATES PASSIVE ACTS OF RESISTANCE WITH MORE DESTRUCTIVE ACTS AND RAMPS UP THE PENALTIES FOR BOTH. AS KAYLANA MUELLER-HSIA WRITES, “VAGUE LANGUAGE LIKE ‘DAMAGE,’ ‘TAMPER,’ AND ‘IMPEDE’ IN CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE LAWS MAKES IT UNCLEAR IF, FOR EXAMPLE, KNOCKING DOWN SAFETY CONES AND STARTING A FIRE NEXT TO A NATURAL GAS FACILITY ARE THE SAME UNDER THE LAW.” SOME STATE LAWS SEEK TO CRIMINALIZE THOSE WHO “TRAIN” OR “CONSPIRE” WITH PROTESTERS.

IN JUNE 2021, ANTIPIPELINE ACTIVIST JESSICA REZNICEK WAS SENTENCED TO EIGHT YEARS IN PRISON AND ORDERED TO PAY NEARLY \$3.2 MILLION IN RESTITUTION AFTER SHE PLED GUILTY TO DAMAGING AN ENERGY FACILITY. THIS HEFTY PENALTY WAS DUE TO A TERRORISM SENTENCING ENHANCEMENT ENABLED BY THE PATRIOT ACT. NO ONE WAS HARMED BY REZNICEK’S ACTS OF PROPERTY DESTRUCTION, WHICH WERE INTENDED TO HALT CONSTRUCTION OF THE DAKOTA ACCESS PIPELINE, BUT THE JUDGE IN REZNICEK’S CASE DETERMINED THAT SHE COULD BE CONSIDERED A TERRORIST BECAUSE “NOT ONLY THE FLOW OF OIL, BUT THE GOVERNMENT’S CONTINUED RESPONSE WERE TARGETS OF THIS ACTION.”¹² REGARDLESS OF WHETHER ONE AGREES WITH THE VALIDITY OF PROPERTY DESTRUCTION AS A POLITICAL INTERVENTION, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE CONSIDER THE IMBALANCE OF POWER WHEN IT COMES TO THE STATE’S TARGETING OF PIPELINE PROTESTERS AND HOW THE LABEL OF “VIOLENT” IS ASSIGNED. FOR DECADES, OIL EXECUTIVES HAVE KNOWINGLY CONTRIBUTED TO CATASTROPHIC CLIMATE CHANGE WHILE SUPPRESSING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE SEVERITY AND TRAJECTORY OF THE PROBLEM, ENDANGERING ALL OF HUMANITY AND MANY OTHER SPECIES. THESE EXECUTIVES’ ACTIONS HAVE ALREADY CONTRIBUTED TO THE DEATH AND DISPLACEMENT OF MILLIONS OF PEOPLE. MEANWHILE, ACTIVISTS WHO CHALLENGE THOSE EXECUTIVES’ ACTS ARE DESIGNATED “VIOLENT” TERRORISTS DESERVING OF LENGTHY PRISON SENTENCES.

CONTRIBUTING TO MASS DEATH WHILE DESTROYING THE EARTH FOR A PROFIT ARE NOT CONSIDERED VIOLENT ACTIONS, WHILE DAMAGING EQUIPMENT IN AN EFFORT TO INTERRUPT THOSE HARMS IS CONSIDERED TERRORISM.

IN EXAMINING HOW—AND TO WHOM—LABELS OF “VIOLENCE” ARE ASSIGNED, WE MUST ALSO CONSIDER THE WAYS THAT THE FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY HAS DIRECTLY MERGED ITS EXTRACTIVE POWER WITH THAT OF THE CARCERAL STATE. THE STANDING ROCK MOVEMENT’S EFFORTS TO STOP CONSTRUCTION OF THE DAKOTA ACCESS PIPELINE REPORTEDLY COST MORTON COUNTY, NORTH DAKOTA, \$40 MILLION. RATHER THAN SERVING AS A DETERRENT TO FURTHER PIPELINE CONSTRUCTION, THESE ASTRONOMICAL COSTS LED THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION TO CREATE A MECHANISM BY WHICH OIL COMPANIES LIKE ENBRIDGE COULD FUND POLICING TO PROTECT PIPELINE CONSTRUCTION THEMSELVES. WHEN THE COMMISSION ISSUED ENBRIDGE A PERMIT FOR WORK ON ITS CONTROVERSIAL LINE 3 PIPELINE IN DECEMBER 2020, THEY INCLUDED A PROVISION THAT REQUIRED THE COMPANY TO ESTABLISH AN ESCROW TRUST THAT WOULD REIMBURSE LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT FOR MILEAGE, WAGES, PROTECTIVE GEAR, AND TRAINING RELATED TO PIPELINE CONSTRUCTION.

MEANWHILE, LINE 3 PROTESTERS ALSO FACED ESCALATED CHARGES: TWO WERE CHARGED WITH “ATTEMPTED ASSISTED SUICIDE” FOR ENTERING A PIPELINE TO HALT CONSTRUCTION. LINE 3 OPPONENTS ALSO ENCOUNTERED INTENSIFIED POLICE-PERPETRATED BRUTALITY. IN SEPTEMBER 2021, NOT LONG BEFORE LINE 3 BECAME FULLY OPERATIONAL, WATER PROTECTOR TARA HOUSKA TOLD KELLY IN TRUTHOUT, “THE LEVEL OF BRUTALITY THAT IS EXPERIENCED BY INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND ALLIES IN STRUGGLE WITH US IS EXTREME.” HOUSKA IS THE FOUNDER OF THE GINIW COLLECTIVE, WHOSE NAMEWAG CAMP BECAME A HUB OF RESISTANCE AND CARE FOR WATER PROTECTORS TAKING ACTION AGAINST LINE 3. “I WAS A PART OF A GROUP THAT EXPERIENCED RUBBER BULLETS AND MACE BEING FIRED AT US AT VERY, VERY CLOSE RANGE,” HOUSKA TOLD KELLY. “I WAS HIT SEVERAL TIMES, BUT I ALSO WITNESSED YOUNG PEOPLE WITH THEIR HEADS SPLIT OPEN, BLEEDING DOWN THEIR FACES . . . AND SHERIFFS HAVE BEEN USING PAIN COMPLIANCE [INDUCING PAIN TO FORCE PEOPLE TO COMPLY WITH ORDERS] . . . WHICH IS ESSENTIALLY TORTURE. THEY DISLOCATED SOMEONE’S JAW A COUPLE WEEKS AGO.”¹³

Police arrested over a thousand people struggling to stop Line 3,¹⁴ and, as of this writing, hundreds of water protectors were still facing charges, including bogus felony charges. Thanks to the escrow fund Enbridge established, police agencies received a \$2.9 million infusion for their efforts. From militarized “field force” trainings and helicopter and drone excursions to overtime and mileage costs, the escrow fund served as a piggybank for policing.

Water protectors who resisted Line 3 have been subjected to carceral violence. They have been jailed, and some are being threatened with years of incarceration. In retaliation for their protests against profit-driven resource extraction, they are being threatened with what Ruth Wilson Gilmore characterizes as the extraction of time. In her essay “Abolition Geography and the Problem of Innocence,” Gilmore writes,

Today’s prisons are extractive. What does that mean? It means prisons enable money to move because of the enforced inactivity of people locked in them. It means people extracted from communities, and people returned to communities but not entitled to be of them, enable the circulation of money on rapid cycles. What’s extracted from the extracted is the resource of life–time. If we think about this dynamic through the politics of scale, understanding bodies as places, then criminalization transforms individuals into tiny territories primed for the extractive activity to unfold—extracting and extracting again time from the territories of selves.¹⁵

A Giniw Collective member named Siihasin also tied the struggle against pipelines (resource extraction) to the struggle against prisons (time and life extraction) when she spoke to Kelly in November 2021 for an episode of Movement Memos. Siihasin, a Diné and Mescalero Apache water protector, was still facing protest-related charges. She said that in addition to showing direct support for water protectors facing charges, people could act in solidarity by “showing support for people who are advocating for the abolition of prisons and for the ending of incarceration” and “tying the struggle that we have had as water protectors in this fight against Line 3 to the struggles that are happening across the world around extraction, [and] to our borders where children are being held in concentration camps.” Siihasin emphasized that “[these] systems and structures of violence” are “all one in the same.”¹⁶ Siihasin was providing a corrective, emphasizing that the main perpetrators of violence are these extractive systems, which—in varied but connected ways—extract the resources that sustain life.