



ROUTLEDGE  
HANDBOOKS



# Routledge Handbook of Radical Politics

Edited by Ruth Kinna and Uri Gordon

# ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF RADICAL POLITICS

Successive waves of global protest since 1999 have encouraged leading contemporary political theorists to argue that politics has fundamentally changed in the last twenty years, with a new type of politics gaining momentum over elite, representative institutions. The new politics is frequently described as radical, but what does radicalism mean for the conduct of politics?

Capturing the innovative practices of contemporary radicals, *Routledge Handbook of Radical Politics* brings together leading academics and campaigners to answer these questions and explore radicalism's meaning to their practice. In the thirty-five chapters written for this collection, they collectively develop a picture of radicalism by investigating the intersections of activism and contemporary political theory. Across their experiences, the authors articulate radicalism's critical politics and discuss how diverse movements support and sustain each other. Together, they provide a wide-ranging account of the tensions, overlaps and promise of radical politics, while utilising scholarly literatures on grassroots populism to present a novel analysis of the relationship between radicalism and populism.

*Routledge Handbook of Radical Politics* serves as a key reference for students and scholars interested in the politics and ideas of contemporary activist movements.

**Ruth Kinna** is a professor of Political Theory at Loughborough University where she specialises in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century socialist thought and contemporary radical politics, particularly anarchism and the utopianism of prefigurative politics. Since 2007, she has been the editor of the journal *Anarchist Studies*. She is the co-founder of the Anarchism Research Group and co-convenes the Anarchist Studies Network. She is the author of *Kropotkin: Reviewing the Classical Anarchist Tradition* and *The Government of No One*.

**Uri Gordon** is formerly the co-convenor of the Anarchist Studies Network and has taught political theory at universities in Britain and Israel. He has been active in climate justice, Palestine solidarity and anticapitalist movements in both countries. Uri is the author of *Anarchy Alive! Anti-Authoritarian Politics from Practice to Theory* and the co-editor of the monograph series *Contemporary Anarchist Studies*. His recent publications include a conceptual genealogy of prefigurative politics and a collaborative article on co-production in social and political theory. His work has been translated into thirteen languages.



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*Edited by Ruth Kinna & Uri Gordon*

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# CONTRIBUTORS

**Bürge Abiral** is a PhD candidate in the Department of Anthropology at Johns Hopkins University. She received her bachelor's degree from Williams College, USA, with Honours in Anthropology, and her master's degree in Cultural Studies from Sabancı University, Turkey. She is currently working on her dissertation project on the ecological agriculture movement in Turkey, and her interests include human-environment relations, multispecies ethnography, food studies, value and social movements.

**Liat Ben-Moshe** is a scholar-activist based in Chicago. Her books include *Politics of (En)Closure: Deinstitutionalization, Prison Abolition and Disability* and the anthology *Disability Incarcerated: Imprisonment and Disability in the United States and Canada* (edited with Allison Carey and Chris Chapman).

**Will Boisseau** researches the place of animal advocacy within the British left, particularly the relationship between the anarchistic/direct action and the legislative wings of the movement. His work explores the class and gender issues influencing this relationship, the marginalisation of animal rights in mainstream labour politics and a range of concepts including speciesism, total liberation and intersectionality. He completed his PhD at Loughborough University in 2015.

**Lydia X. Z. Brown** is an activist/organiser, writer and educator focused on state violence against multiply-marginalised disabled people, especially institutionalisation and incarceration. They have worked to end restraint, seclusion, and adversives; challenge police violence; close institutions; and disrupt social justice communities.

**Bonnie Burstow** is a professor at the University of Toronto, an anarchist, a philosopher, a long-time antipsychiatry activist and a prolific author. She teaches in courses in community organising in alliance with disenfranchised populations. She is the chair of such activist organisations as Coalition Against Psychiatric Assault. Her books include *Psychiatry and the Business of Madness*, *Psychiatry Interrogated*, and *Psychiatry Disrupted*, with her latest book being a novel called *The Other Mrs Smith*, where we not only see the horrific experiential effects of electroshock, but see activists organising against it.

**Emily Charkin** is writing a PhD about self-build and radical education at the UCL Institute of Education. Her previous research and writing has been about children's experiences of the Peckham Health Centre (1935–1950), Whiteway Colony (1926–today) and the educational ideas of Colin Ward (1924–2010), Leila Berg (1917–2012) and the US deschoolers in the 1970s. She also runs a community woodland in East Sussex with her husband and three flexi-schooled children, where they try out some of these ideas (<http://www.wildernesswood.org>).

**Alexandre Christoyannopoulos** is a senior lecturer in Politics and International Studies at Loughborough University. He is the author of *Christian Anarchism: A Political Commentary on the Gospel and Tolstoy's Political Thought* as well as a number of articles, chapters and other publications on religious anarchism and on Leo Tolstoy, including the multi-volume collection of *Essays on Anarchism and Religion*. A full list of publications is available via <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5133-3268>.

**Laurence Cox** is a senior lecturer at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth where he co-directs the MA on Community Education, Equality and Social Activism and runs a PhD-level programme of participatory action research in social movement practice. He co-founded the practitioner-oriented social movement studies journal *Interface* and the Council for European Studies' social movements research network. Cox is the co-author of *We Make Our Own History: Marxism and Social Movements in the Twilight of Neoliberalism* and has also published extensively on contemporary Buddhism in the west, including *Buddhism and Ireland: From the Celts to the Counter Culture and Beyond*.

**Patrick G. Coy** is a professor of Political Science and the director of the Center for Applied Conflict Management at Kent State University. He has taught both academic and practitioners' courses in mediation, negotiation and conflict resolution, and has served as an international observer and as a member of Peace Brigades International during the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Coy is the author of over 30 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters, and co-author of *Contesting Patriotism: Culture, Power and Strategy in the Peace Movement*. He has also edited eleven books including *Social Conflicts and Collective Identities* and *A Revolution of the Heart: Essays on the Catholic Worker Movement*.

**Rachel da Silva Gorman** is an academic and an artist working in dance theatre and curating. Her work focuses on political economy and anticolonial aesthetics. She teaches choreographic process in disability and queer arts communities, and is a long-time organiser in feminist, antiracist and anti-occupation movements.

**Claire Delisle** is an activist-scholar and critical pedagogue who focuses on power, resistance and leadership. Her labour, Irish republican and abolitionist activism are central to her research on social movement organising. Claire teaches criminology and sociology at the University of Ottawa. She also teaches at Discovery University, where she engages with students who were at one time homeless. She has been taking part in ICOPA since 2008, and co-organised ICOPA 15 on Algonquin territory. She is the founder and co-lead of a lifers' liaison group that collaborates with life-sentences prisoners at a maximum-security penitentiary in Ontario.

**Ruth A. Deller** is a reader in Media and Communication at Sheffield Hallam University, UK and is a senior fellow of the Higher Education Academy (HEA). She has published widely on a range of topics including: identities and media representations; audience and fan studies

and the relationships between 'old' and 'new' media. She is currently writing a monograph, provisionally titled *Religion on Television: Broadcasting Belief in the 21st Century*.

**Jim Donaghey** is a sometime anarchist agitator with a limited range of dance moves. Jim's PhD 'Punk and Anarchism: UK, Poland, Indonesia' was completed at Loughborough University in 2016, and he is currently a postdoctoral research fellow at Queen's University Belfast. He is also a member of the collective that runs Just Books radical bookshop at the Belfast Solidarity Centre. He has been involved with Do-It-Yourself (DIY) and anarchist music for the last sixteen years, playing hundreds of gigs around Ireland, the UK, Europe and South East Asia, and helping to produce dozens of records and zines. He is keeping his musical oar in with an anarcho-riot-folk outfit called Gulder.

**Francis Dupuis-Déri** is a professor of political science at Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM); has been part of many radical collectives in Québec, France and the United States; and since 2003, has published many books in French, including *The Black Blocs* (which was subsequently translated into English and Brazilian Portuguese) and *Anarchy Explained to My Father* (translated into English and Greek). The author wishes to acknowledge the financial support of the Observatoire sur les profilages (CRSH) and the translator Ellen Warkentin, who helped him with regard to the English language.

**Claire English** is a feminist mother, agitator and organiser, presently working as an associate lecturer in Organisational Behaviour at Queen Mary University of London. Claire's research explores the workings of gender and race in transnational migrant solidarity activism in the UK and Europe, particularly at the French/British border of Calais. She helped to form Calais Migrant Solidarity in 2010 and is a member of Plan C, a group that looks at the social reproduction of social movements.

**Loree Erickson** is a porn star academic and organiser. Her work is focused on transforming cultures of undesirability through creating, theorising and supporting others in the production of queercrip porn. She also organises and theorises on collective care and transformative justice.

**Mel Evans** is an artist and campaigner part of Liberate Tate. Her book *Artwash: Big Oil and the Arts* was published in 2015. Her play *Oil City* was produced by Platform and presented as part of the Two Degrees Festival in 2013. Her writing has been published in *Contemporary Theatre Review*, *Performance Research Journal*, *Internationale Online*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *New Internationalist*, *Dissent!*, *Red Pepper* and others. She regularly speaks about art and politics at events, which have included Economic Exceptionalism at the Institute of Contemporary Arts London, D&AD President's Lecture, Performing Protest Conference Leuven University, Artwash Book Tour UK and Ireland, Curating Conflict at the V&A Gallery London and Question Everything at the Cambridge Festival of Ideas.

**Anthony T. Fiscella**, born and raised in Virginia and currently living in Sweden, completed his doctorate in 2015 at Lund University in the history of religion where he also obtained his master's degree. His doctoral dissertation 'Universal Burdens' focused largely on what might be considered a decolonisation of the concept of 'freedom'. With a general interest in social change, dissemination of power and the role of life-organising stories, he has written about follower-power, Islam and anarchism, the MOVE Organization, taqwacore and the Daoist-like anarcho-primitivism of Lynyrd Skynyrd.

**Rebecca Fisher** was until recently a researcher at Corporate Watch, an independent research and publishing group, providing critical information on the social and environmental impacts of corporations and capitalism. Fisher's work has focused mainly on issues of democracy and consent, including in relation to the 2003 invasion and subsequent 'reconstruction' of Iraq, and as the editor of the Corporate Watch publication *Managing Democracy, Managing Dissent*. She has also been active in various grassroots movements, especially in alternative media and against border controls.

**Uri Gordon** is formerly a co-convenor of the Anarchist Studies Network and has taught political theory at universities in Britain and Israel. He has been active in climate justice, Palestine solidarity and anticapitalist movements in both countries. Uri is the author of *Anarchy Alive! Anti-Authoritarian Politics from Practice to Theory* and the co-editor of the monograph series *Contemporary Anarchist Studies*. His recent publications include a conceptual genealogy of prefigurative politics and a collaborative article on co-production in social and political theory. His work has been translated into thirteen languages.

**Margherita Grazioli** is a postdoctoral research fellow in Urban Studies (Social Sciences) at the Gran Sasso Science Institute (L'Aquila, Italy). Her research interest in urban geography, housing policies and social movements is rooted in her activism in the Movimento per il Diritto all'Abitare in Rome. She completed her PhD ('The right to the city in the post-welfare metropolis. Community building, autonomous infrastructures and urban commons in self-organised housing squats in Rome, Italy') at the University of Leicester.

**Sandra Jeppesen** researches with autonomous media and antiauthoritarian social movements from an intersectional queer, trans\*, feminist, antiracist, anticapitalist and decolonising perspective. She is the co-founder of the Media Action Research Group (MARG, [mediaactionresearch.org](http://mediaactionresearch.org)), and was a member of the former *Collectif de Recherche sur l'Autonomie Collective* (CRAC) in Montreal. Currently, she is an associate professor in Interdisciplinary Studies/Media Studies at Lakehead University Orillia, Canada, where she holds the Lakehead University Research Chair in Transformative Media and Social Movements.

**Ramsey Kanaan** founded AK Press as a young teenager out of his bedroom in Scotland. He's been wrestling with the eternal question 'if ideas actually matter, how do we disseminate them' for almost four decades now. He's currently the publisher of PM Press in Oakland, California.

**Ruth Kinna** works at Loughborough University and writes on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century socialist thought and contemporary radical politics, particularly anarchism. Since 2007, she has been the editor of the journal *Anarchist Studies*. She is co-founder of the Anarchism Research Group and co-convenes the Anarchist Studies Network. She is the author of *Kropotkin: Reviewing the Anarchist Tradition* and *The Government of No One*.

**Luca Lapolla** was awarded his PhD in History at Birkbeck, University of London, in January 2018. He researched post-1968 libertarian communities in Britain and Italy reflecting on the importance that memory, space and representation have in influencing the theory and praxis of anarchist movement(s). He is interested in social and cultural history and takes an interdisciplinary and comparative approach. After a BA in Modern Foreign Languages and an MA in Modern and Contemporary History, his master's thesis on the

1970s anarcho-communist organisation ORA was published in Italy. Luca aims at producing academic historical research of practical significance for present and future radical activists.

**Talila A. Lewis** is a social justice engineer, attorney, educator and organiser whose liberation struggle centres around prison abolition, correcting and preventing wrongful convictions of deaf and disabled people, and ending all forms of violence against multiply-marginalised individuals and communities.

**Michael Loadenthal** is a visiting professor of Sociology and Social Justice at Miami University, and the executive director of the Peace and Justice Studies Association. Michael holds a PhD in Conflict Analysis and Resolution (George Mason University), and a master's degree in Terrorism Studies from the Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence (University of St Andrews, Scotland). His research has involved ethnographic studies with abortion providers, Rastafarians, Mexican revolutionaries, 'eco-terrorists' and Palestinian guerrillas. His latest book, *The Politics of Attack: Communiqués and Insurrectionary Violence*, focuses on a discursive and analysis of insurrectionary anarchist networks.

**Josep Lobera** is a lecturer in the Department of Sociology of the Autonomous University of Madrid (Spain) and in the joint programme of Tufts University and Skidmore College (USA). His research focuses on the institutionalisation of protest movements and on attitudes towards immigration. He is the co-editor of the *Spanish Journal of Sociology* and scientific editor of the biannual report on Social Perception of Science and Technology.

**Martina Martignoni** has completed her PhD at the School of Management, University of Leicester. Her thesis, *Postcolonial Organising: An Oral History of the Eritreans in Milan*, explores the politics of self-organising of the Eritrean community in Milan and investigates the interconnections between postcoloniality, migration, difference and organising. Her research interests move across migrations, oral history and autonomous political practices in Italy. She has co-authored with Dimitris Papadopoulos the paper 'Genealogies of Autonomous Mobility' for the *Routledge Handbook of Global Citizenship Studies*.

**Lateef McLeod** is a disability justice activist who published a poetry book, *A Declaration of a Body of Love*, and is working on a novel, *The Third Eye Is Crying*. He is a doctoral student at California Institute for Integral Studies in their Anthropology and Social Change Program.

**Mia Mingus** is a writer, public speaker, educator and community organiser for disability justice and transformative justice responses to child sexual abuse. Her writings can be found on her blog, Leaving Evidence.

**Pamela Palmater** is a citizen of the sovereign Mi'kmaw Nation on the unceded territory of Mi'kmak'i (Atlantic Canada) and a member of Eel River Bar First Nation. She is a lawyer, author, social justice activist and former spokesperson and educator for the Idle No More movement. She currently serves as an associate professor and chair in Indigenous Governance at Ryerson University.

**Diego Parejo** is an anthropologist and researcher at the Autonomous University of Madrid (Spain). His research focuses on the new European populist movements and on immigration in highly diverse urban contexts.

**Sean Parson** is an assistant professor of Politics and International Affairs at Northern Arizona University. He is the editor of the book *Superheroes and Critical Animal Studies: The Heroic Beasts of Total Liberation* and the forthcoming book *Cooking Up Revolution: Food Not Bombs, Anarchist Homeless Activism, and the Politics of Space*. When not writing, teaching or grading, he mostly spends his time hiking the mountains and forests of Northern Arizona with his four-legged best friend Diego.

**David Naguib Pellow** is the Dehlsen chair of Environmental Studies and the director of the Global Environmental Justice Project at the University of California, Santa Barbara. His teaching and research focus on environmental and ecological justice in the US and globally. His books include *What Is Critical Environmental Justice?*; *Total Liberation: The Power and Promise of Animal Rights and the Radical Earth Movement*; *Resisting Global Toxics: Transnational Movements for Environmental Justice* and *Garbage Wars: The Struggle for Environmental Justice in Chicago*. He works with numerous organisations focused on improving the living and working environments for people of colour and other marginalised communities.

**Maia Ramnath** is a writer, historian, artist and activist based in New York City. The author of two books and numerous articles, she has previously taught world history, modern South Asian history and Asian studies at New York University and Pennsylvania State University. Both in writing and in action, she focuses upon the intersection of anarchism and anticolonialism. She is currently a board member of the Institute for Anarchist Studies.

**Chris Rossdale** is a lecturer in Politics and International Relations at the University of Bristol. His research focuses on social movements, resistance and international political theory. He has published in *International Political Sociology*, *Millennium Journal of International Studies* and *Globalizations*, and his book *Resisting Militarism: Direct Action and the Politics of Subversion* was published in 2019 with Edinburgh University Press.

**Peter Seyferth**. Dr. phil., political philosopher from Munich, tried to get elected to the German Bundestag as a candidate of the Anarchist Pogo Party (APPD) in 1998 while finishing his MA in Political Science. The party's slogan, 'work is shit', did not attract enough voters, so he did a PhD on Ursula K. Le Guin's utopias. Since then, he has taught political theory and philosophy at universities and adult education centres. His last publication is an edited volume on anarchist understandings of the state (*Den Staat zerschlagen!*).

**Jeff Shantz** is a long-time activist in varied radical projects from the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty to the Red Sparks Union. He currently teaches community advocacy, critical theory and corporate crime at Kwantlen Polytechnic University in Metro Vancouver, and Unceded Coast Salish Territories (British Columbia). He is a founding member of the Critical Criminology Working Group [radicalcriminology.org](http://radicalcriminology.org) and The Social Justice Centre, Surrey. Jeff has written several books including *Insurrectionary Infrastructures*, *Crisis States: Governance, Resistance, and Precarious Capitalism*, and *Cyber Disobedience: Re://Presenting Online Anarchy*, with Jordon Tomblin.

**Speaking of IMELDA** is an intergenerational, London-based collective, which includes former members of Irish Women's Abortion Support Group (IWASG), who supported women travelling to England for abortions between 1980 and 2000. The name Imelda was originally used as a code name for abortion by IWASG, who also often wore a red skirt so



as to be identified by women travelling. In reclaiming the name IMELDA and wearing red in their actions, they pay homage to previous reproductive rights activists. They deploy interventionist style performance to upend the pretence that Ireland is 'abortion free' by highlighting that people travel daily to Britain to access abortion. Their actions have been aimed at breaking down the barriers that prevent women from speaking freely about abortion. They operate against the shaming and silencing of those who have abortions, challenging the stereotypes of the quiet and pure Irish woman. Sometimes audacious and often uninvited, their actions unapologetically declare the right to bodily integrity and reproductive autonomy. They campaign to Repeal the 8th Amendment to the Constitution of Ireland, which in 1983 legislated that the unborn foetus has equal rights to life as the mother. They also campaign to enable access to free, safe, legal and local abortion services in Northern Ireland where, unlike the rest of the UK, abortion remains illegal under the 1861 Offences Against the Persons Act. They have been featured extensively in high-profile newspapers and other publications and have presented in universities, conferences, events, exhibitions and on radio.

**Judith Suissa** is professor of Philosophy of Education at UCL Institute of Education, London. Her research interests are in political and moral philosophy, with a focus on the control of education, social justice, libertarian and anarchist theory, the role of the state and the parent-child relationship. Her publications include *Anarchism and Education: A Philosophical Perspective* (Routledge, 2006) and (with Stefan Ramaekers) *The Claims of Parenting: Reasons, Responsibility and Society*.

**Leah Temper** is a transdisciplinary researcher, activist and filmmaker with a degree in communications science and a doctorate in Ecological Economics from the Autonomous University of Barcelona. She is a deputy scientific coordinator of EJOLT, a global research project that brings activists and scientists together to catalogue and analyse ecological distribution conflicts and confront environmental injustice, and the editor of *The Global Atlas of Environmental Justice* (ejatlas.org). Temper has published in numerous journals and is the co-editor of the book *Ecological Economics from the Ground Up* (Routledge). Her media work includes short films such *Life After Growth* and *Delhi Waste Wars*, as well as blogs and newspaper articles.

**M. Testa**, undercover antifascist blogger, has analysed the changing fortunes of the British far right since 2009. He is the author of *Militant Anti-Fascism: 100 Years of Resistance* and has written for the anarchist magazine *Freedom* and for *Anarchist Studies*. His blog is at: [malatesta32.wordpress.com](http://malatesta32.wordpress.com).

**Jim Thomas** is the co-executive director at the Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration (ETC), which works to address the socioeconomic and ecological issues surrounding new technologies that could have an impact on the world's most vulnerable and marginalised people. His background is in communications, writing on emerging technologies and international campaigning. For the seven years previously, he was a researcher and campaigner on genetic engineering and food issues for Greenpeace International. Thomas has extensive experience on issues around synthetic biology, geoengineering, transgenic crops, data-driven technologies and nanotechnologies. He has written articles, chapters and technical reports in the media and online as well as participated extensively in UN-level technology governance processes.

**Lisa Trocchia-Balkits**, PhD, serves as Scholar-in-Residence at Green Mountain College in Vermont, USA, where she teaches and is engaged with curriculum design in two graduate-level programmes: Sustainable Food Systems (MSFS) and Resilient and Sustainable Communities (RSC). Dr. Trocchia-Balkits researches and writes about horizontal, decentralised social structures, the diverse economies of bioregional food systems, the performance of cultural food-ways, and self-organised, community-based food system social networks as sites of radical social change.

**Aurora Trujillo** has a passion for the role that cycling can take as a motor to change the world. As part of her PhD, she researched the political and cultural barriers to cycling becoming mainstream in the UK. She was also part of setting up and running Freewheelers Bicycle Co-op in Lancaster, was a member of Bicycology and worked at the London Cycling Campaign. She is currently taking a break from research and activism.

**Bart van der Steen** is a lecturer in Modern History at Leiden University, the Netherlands. His research focuses on interwar labour movements and New Social Movements from 1968 to the present. His published works include *Party, State, Revolution: Critical Reflections on Žižek's Political Philosophy* (with M. de Kesel), *A European Youth Revolt: European Perspectives on Youth Protest and Social Movements in the 1980s* (edited with K. Andresen), *Een Banier waar geen Smet op Rust: De Geschiedenis van de Trotskistische Beweging in Nederland* (with R. Blom) and *The City is Ours: Squatting and Autonomous Movements in Europe, 1980–2014* (edited with L. van Hoogenhuijze and A. Katzeff).

**Matthew Wilson** makes beer with Bartleby's Worker Co-op and is currently based at Nottingham Business School, researching other worker co-ops. His published work includes *Rules Without Rulers*, published by Zero Press.

**A. J. Withers** is a queer, trans and disabled antipoverty activist and organiser who's worked with the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty since 2000. He is the author of *A Violent History of Benevolence: Interlocking Oppressions in the Moral Economies of Social Working* (co-authored with Chris Chapman), *The Healing Power of Domination: Interlocking Oppression and the Origins of Social Work* (with Chris Chapman), *Disability Politics and Theory* and creator of stillmyrevolution.org. He is a PhD student in social work at York University and receives support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

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# INTRODUCTION

*Uri Gordon and Ruth Kinna*

## **Aims and Scope**

This collection is dedicated to the dynamic radical social movements that have mushroomed since the late 1980s, and the social and political critiques and alternatives they have inspired. The radicalism of these movements is broadly defined by the advancement of a politics that challenges existing institutional arrangements, by an ethics supporting the disruption of the status quo, and by the interaction of theory and practice. We do not explore frames of action or cultures of protest, nor do we examine the socio-economic, cultural and political contexts in which activism takes place, or the spaces allowed for the expression of transgressive ideas. These are all well documented in a substantial and growing body of work (Flesher Fominaya, 2014; della Porta, 2015) and across the movement-facing research of academic journals like *Interface*, *Antipode*, *Social Movement Studies* and *The Journal for the Study of Radicalism*. Instead, the collection concentrates on the ways that radical politics is theorised through practice, and on the perspectives of the actual groups who participate in radical politics.

The majority of our contributors are academic activists, who combine considerable experience of movement practices with scholarship and research. Our primary concern was to invite specialists who are also participants in, or intimately connected with, the movements and projects they discuss. While we have attempted to contextualise the radicalism of our contributors' essays, the ideological content of radical politics is deliberately left open. Thus, rather than focus on conceptual or methodological debates, for which there is already a substantial literature, we invited our contributors to define their radicalism and to do so with reference to movement activism. Contributors to this volume sometimes identify or locate their positions or frameworks (for example, ecological, anarchist, feminist) but not typically in order to focus on the elaboration of the conceptual markers that define them. For example, in the case of feminism, contributors explore the campaigns that they are engaged with: pro-abortion politics and safer spaces are two areas. As a result, the volume captures the plurality and diversity of political activism, while weaving together ideas that are often linked narrowly to particular currents of thought in conceptual and methodological studies. In this way, the collection will hopefully give readers a sense of radical movements' scope while also outlining a set of responses, critiques, proposals and reflections on topics central to radical politics today.

## Introduction

Many of our contributors are based in Western Europe or North America, but not exclusively so. We have tried to make sure that different voices are well represented in the collection and we have not systematically mapped voice to issue (women are not restricted to areas of feminist politics). Nevertheless, while the scope of the collection is international, the perspectives tend to be rooted in the North America and Europe. We hope that this limitation has been offset by the inspiration that authors draw from the global movements they discuss. The diversity of radical politics, the transnational character of protest cultures, the internal complexity of global movements and the rapid shifts within radical politics all rule against the presentation of a definitive or exhaustive collection. Our ambition is to present a snapshot rather than a portrait of contemporary radical politics. The result is that we pass over the analysis of some important inspirational movements such as Occupy or Black Lives Matter and cover some less well-known political activities (for example, antipoverty campaigning, antipsych politics, biketivism) alongside more familiar campaigns, for example, climate politics and antimilitarism.

We have prioritised areas of politics that we believe have a significant presence or influence in activist movements. As well as thinking about the longevity of particular issues, we are interested in highlighting the ways that movement practices have contributed to the theorisation of radical politics – in highlighting how normative political theory inspires activism and continues to feed back into it. Decolonisation and border politics are examples. In order to capture the levels at which contemporary radical politics operates, we look both at the politics of transnational networks and the activism of micropolitical organisations. Similarly, we examine radicalism as it is practised in transgressive, antipolitical activism and by groups seeking to achieve legislative changes through direct action: bed-pushing, art and antipoverty activism.

In order to capture the dynamism and innovative practices of contemporary radical politics, the collection is structured around four themes: *Critiques*, *Solidarities*, *Repertoires* and *Transformations*. Our aim is to introduce readers to some of the major issues motivating radical activism and to show how these issues support a range of projects and networked practices, before discussing the diverse and creative activities that activism involves and the aspirations that it embraces. The sections are roughly equal. Because we asked our authors to address common questions, there are some overlaps between the sections. Given the intersectional focus of the collection, we welcome this and believe that the interplay perfectly captures the dynamic, interlocking character of contemporary radical politics.

# RADICALISM

## Situating Contemporary Movement Practices

*Uri Gordon and Ruth Kinna*

### **Situating Contemporary Movement Practices**

Our aim in this chapter is to discuss some of the specific forces pulling on the concept of radicalism. The view that radicalism is a chameleon concept is well established in the history of ideas. As Glenn Burgess puts it, there are ‘as many radicalisms as there are radicals’ (Burgess, 2006–7). Our central premise is that while the meaning of radicalism has always been context-dependent and ideologically fluid, anarchism has stepped out of the shadows to become the beating heart of contemporary left radical networks. The story we relate below tells how anarchistic politics has moved from the margins to the centre of radical politics. Our argument is that radicalism has the conceptual breadth to include anarchist currents and that these have been sidelined because of the way that radicalism has taken its content from particular historical movements. The recognition that anarchism is a key ingredient in radicalism, associating radical politics with anticapitalist direct action movements, is a seismic political shift.

An important body of recent scholarship has explored the construction of substantive radical traditions (Burgess and Festenstein 2007; Calhoun 2012). We instead survey the evolution of the concept, asking how radicalism was theorised at the cusp of the transition from the age of ideology to the age of party politics and how anarchist ideas intersected with it. The age of ideology usually describes the period following the American and French Revolutions when a political left-right spectrum began to take shape. The age of party politics is used here to describe the reduction of the spectrum to three dominant ideologies, liberalism, conservatism and socialism at the cost of other historically significant currents of ideas including republicanism, Bonapartism, anticolonialism, feminism and anarchism (Aiken, 1956; Schwartzmantel, 1998). Examining this transition enables us to recover an anarchistic strand within the framework of radicalism and identify its hallmarks.

We then examine the post-war history of social movement activism to explore the associative principles that left radicalism articulates. These have been shaped by a set of events that have stimulated the rediscovery of a left-libertarian radical tradition. In sketching this brief history, we note that democratisation is now a central theme in left radical politics and that the practice of direct, deliberative, participatory democracy has been identified as one of its outstanding features. The 2011 Occupy movement has helped cement this association

(Graeber, 2013; Szolucha, 2017). We want to make two points in respect of this analysis. First, that the concerns of the contemporary left radicalisms we examine are not wholly encompassed in a populist democratic framing. And second, that the theorisation of populism as a left radical politics helps highlight the ideological divisions within it and the fracturing of democracy along anti-elitist lines.

To do this, we first identify three associative principles of left radicalism. These are intersectionality, horizontalism and direct action. We then turn to recent scholarship on left populism. This adds another layer of complexity to the discussion of radicalism; yet, the tendency of protest movement analysts to discuss anarchism as the major component of radical left populism (Grattan, 2016; Gerbaudo, 2017) makes the populist-radical nexus difficult to ignore. The populist lens narrows the scope of radical politics because it elevates concepts of sovereignty and democracy to the forefront. In populism studies, the primary issues under discussion are how ‘the people’ is or should be theorised and what values of democracy populist movements promote (Kioupkiolis and Katsambekis, 2014: 1–15). It also leaves the ideological distinctions between left and right populism unclear.

To explore the conceptual framing of left-leaning radicalism within populism, we examine three thick descriptions advanced by Margaret Canovan, Ernesto Laclau and Federico Finchelstein. We abstract an anticonstitutional framing from Canovan, a concept of leadership pertinent to the construction of ‘the people’ from Laclau and an organisational model from Federico Finchelstein. By looking at the ways that populism can be radicalised, through the anarchistic model we develop, we attempt to make the nature of this distinction clear. Illustrating ideological distance between the populist left and right, we also seek to show where normative thrust of the currents of ideas that animate contemporary radical activist networks lies without enforcing rigid and distorting political designations upon them.

## Radicalism

Kai Artzheimer notes:

Like many other concepts in political science, the notion of radicalism harks back to the political conflicts of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. Even then, its content was dependent on the political context and far from well defined. Consequentially, being ‘radical’ has meant different things to different people in different times and countries. Moreover, radicalism is closely related, if not identical to a number of (equally vague) concepts such as extremism, fundamentalism, and populism. As of today, there is no universally accepted definition of radicalism, and, by implication, radical attitudes.

(Sage, 2011)

As some of our contributors mention, standard dictionaries define radicalism as pertaining ‘to the root or origin; original; fundamental; as a *radical* truth or error; a *radical* evil; a *radical* difference of opinions or systems’ (Webster’s 1828). Radicalism is equally about starting points, novelty and extremes. In both common parlance and politics, the responses that radicalism provokes often reflect subjective judgements about the promise or threat that radical prescriptions imply. As a political discourse, it is often associated with change, upheaval and upset. Considering eating as a ‘kind of proselytising’, the Victorian novelist and satirist Samuel Butler warned against radicalism, advising that all ‘thoughts are more easily assimilated that have been already digested by other minds’. Just as indigestion could be explained by the ‘naughtiness of the stiff-necked things that we have eaten’, he suggested that it ‘may

also arise from an attempt on the part of the stomach to be too damned clever, and to depart from precedent inconsiderately'. Butler concluded, 'the healthy stomach is nothing if not conservative. Few radicals have good digestions' (Butler, 2014 [1912]: 112–13).

In political theory, radicalism is linked strongly to the progressive programmes of pre-socialist democrats and the reform agendas of the early nineteenth-century utilitarians (Halévy, 1928; Thomas, 1979; Scriven, 2017). Yet, the turmoil and upset modelled by the great eighteenth-century revolutions account for the early and still common association of radicalism with left politics. Radicalism had acquired this reputation by the early nineteenth century, if not before, as self-described radical movements variously calling for democratic reforms, civil liberties and the extension or protection of republican values sprang up across Europe and in America. By the 1840s, radicalism was linked with programmes of social as well as political change and as its exponents fled Europe, radicalism took root in this form in the new worlds as well as the old (Gollan, 1967: 15). In 1881, the antisocialist liberal academic Maurice Block<sup>1</sup> observed that 'radicalism and radicals are applied to democratic doctrines more or less advanced, and to their adherents' (1884). Five years later, the journalist Henri Rochefort defined '*Radicalism*' as that 'body of political doctrines which the Republican party has constantly professed, and ... [the] social reforms which it has unceasingly demanded' (1886: 11). Like Block, Rochefort linked radicalism to a set of principles forcefully elaborated in 1789 and believed that it had a stable ideological content. Even if radicals subsequently adopted different labels and called themselves socialists, for instance, for as long as they faithfully advanced the ideals expressed in the Revolution, they were radicals. Still listing 'radicalisme' as a neologism, the 1873 *Dictionnaire De La Langue Française* similarly connected radicalism to the progressive programmes advanced by those who called themselves radicals. Radicalism described the 'system of the radicals, advocates of the complete reform of political society'.

Yet, the relationship of radicalism and post-revolutionary progressive or left politics was always contingent. The emergence of European socialist and social democratic parties after 1848 caused self-styled radicals to reassess their convictions and as new currents of ideas entered into the political fray, radicalism fractured. Nietzsche and Dostoevsky are often credited with stimulating a rightward drift in radical politics and with the radicalisation of conservatism. From the late nineteenth century, the term radicalism became as firmly attached to antidemocratic aristocratic political values as it had previously been to liberal-egalitarian philosophical movements and progressive democratic traditions (Detwiler, 1990; Dahl, 1999: 51–59). Boulangism and Randolph Churchill's Tory radicalism were two of its earlier European manifestations; Rochefort was one of those who moved across the spectrum while still remaining radical. In the 1870s, he had participated in the Paris Commune. Twenty years later, he backed General Boulanger.

In the twentieth century, demands for root and branch change increasingly emanated from both the left and the right. The 1932 *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française* defined radicalism blandly as the 'system or party of radicals'. Kurt Zube's<sup>2</sup> German-language interwar almanac *Radikaler Geist* spoke to a progressive politics shaped by the embrace of new ideas and subversive thinking in politics and the arts. Zube was radical in the sense that he encouraged social innovation and change. His aim was to open up 'new perspectives' and help readers give 'them completely different content'. Before the Nazis shut it down, his magazine promoted the work of (amongst others) Brecht, Freud, Silvio Gesell, Herman Hesse, Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Marx and Engels, Romain Rolland, Margaret Sanger, Max Stirner and Stefan Zweig. As a radical, Zube endorsed critique, reflection, pluralism and socialistic change (Zube, 1930). However, by this time, the far right was fully mobilised against the liberal-social democratic centre and the revolutionary socialist left in large parts of Europe,



and it was better-positioned to initiate fundamental radical transformations. Historians and political scientists argue about the closeness of the relationship between nazism, fascism and the religious right, but however the boundary-lines are drawn, all varieties of reactionary politics are commonly labelled 'radical' (Copsey, 2016).

Early political scientists struggled to differentiate one type of radicalism from another. Block introduced two measures for comparison. The first placed radicals as opponents of absolutism at the extreme left of a political spectrum that centred on a tolerant, liberal core. The second was based on political style or convention. On this scale, a radical was someone '*absolute*, in all opinions' including those 'in the monarchical as well as in the republican party'. Pursuing a line of thought that appeared perfectly designed to muddle the politics of radicalism, Block further noted that radicalism was 'characterized less by its principles than by the manner of their application'. Radicalism had the 'character of the boy'. It was 'enthusiastic, imaginative, to a certain extent generous, lives in an ideal world, pursuing a single idea, and pursuing it frantically, without regard to the evils caused by the efforts to realize it' (1884). Block believed that the juvenile politics radicals practised were tempered by the reforming programmes they promoted. But in the absence of any more precise measures, this perceived overlap with liberalism could never be more than a happy coincidence. Block's contention that radicalism was as much about dogma and the manner in which change was promoted as it was about policy innovation made it difficult to determine radicalism's limits and decide where the convergence with liberalism began and ended.

Radicalism remains a chameleon concept and the fuzziness of the correlation of style and substance still resonates in modern scholarship. Familiarly contrasted with reformism, radicalism is used normatively to assess change agendas by exposing gaps between the perception and the actuality of political programmes. Dolowitz et al. (1996: 455–70) use radicalism as one of three 'R's' to dissect Margaret Thatcher's brand of conservatism and question the novelty of the changes she introduced. Downey (2007: 108–90) similarly deploys radicalism to assess radical democracy, finding that recent articulations can appear 'piecemeal and pragmatic' and 'naive and timid rather than radical' (2005: 109).

The idea that radicalism describes politics on the margins also still resonates in contemporary scholarship. There are two common trends here. First, radicalism is used as a synonym for extremism. Specifically, radicalism is used to describe the combative politics of (usually right-wing) political parties that compete for power to destabilise liberal-democratic regimes (Capoccia, 2005: 233). In a secularised, securitised world, radicalism is also tied to religiously inspired terrorism. For example, the Islamic Supreme Council of America defines Islamic radicalism as a form of 'fundamentalism' built 'on the concept of political enforcement of religious beliefs' (n.d.). Second, it describes the activism of right-leaning antiglobalisation and left-leaning alterglobalisation activists that are either partially or fully detached from the institutional mainstream: marginal in another sense. As Cristina Flesher Fominaya notes, radicalism is a moniker for complex political groupings that express fears about national identity and diminished national sovereignty as well as those that rally around anticorporate, anti-austerity and pro-democracy campaigns (2014: 3–4).

The link between radicalism and antisystem grassroots activism, while not conceptually essential, opens up new perspectives on the familiar histories. Often bypassed in accounts that focus on the radicalisation of emergent political systems, the antisystem currents that Flesher Fominaya finds in today's political landscape were nevertheless deeply rooted in nineteenth-century radical movements influenced by anarchists. Craig Calhoun notes that the first self-designated anarchist, Pierre Joseph Proudhon, found a following with nineteenth-century American radicals, 'artisans, outworkers and others' who conjoined

‘economic grievances’ with ‘appeals for social inclusion, and approaches to solidarity rooted in craft and community’ (2012: 7).

In the early age of party politics, pro-anarchist ideas were frequently voiced by socialists critical of those who identified as radicals, and so appeared to be antiradical and rightly placed beyond its traditions. Yet, the distinctive marker of the pro-anarchist critique was the focus on the elite institutionalisation of revolutionary values and their parliamentary disappointment. These activists were critical of the political systems that radicals inhabited, not the values that they claimed to advance. In this respect, they deserve to be placed within the frame.

Unlike other radicals, those influenced by anarchism championed extra-parliamentary action and were wary of campaigns that turned on demands for more political rights or greater representation. Their view was that a narrow focus on institutional politics distracted radicals from the real issues that confronted them. Joseph Lane<sup>3</sup> explained: ‘the Radical stands helpless, shouting loudly about the cost of Monarchy and the pension list’ and fails to see ‘that this is a drop in the ocean compared to the robbery of the landlord and the capitalist class’ (Lane, 1887). Similarly, admitting that radicalism was a byword for ‘the best and most advanced opinion’ William Morris<sup>4</sup> argued that radicals were deluded in thinking that they could realise their demands for education, ‘a steady and tolerable livelihood undisturbed by disgraceful wars abroad, or ruinous commercial crisis at home’ by ‘persisting in pushing’ for change ‘at the polling booth’. Radicalism would only be worth something when the Radical Party became the ‘Party of the People’. Yet, this was hardly a realistic prospect because it entailed a complete reversal of practice: Morris urged radicals to work outside parliamentary institutions and give up dreams of universal suffrage. He told their constituents to ‘take part in affairs yourselves and don’t look on while your leaders pretend to work for you’. Leaders and their rivals were either tyrants or hypocrites who would only manage exploitation rather than fight for its abolition (Morris, 1994 [1884]: 47–49).

For most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries this anarchist-inflected critique of parliamentary radicalism confined its exponents to the political wilderness. Today, the tables have turned. The anarchistic commitment to organise outside the institutional framework and coordinate activity through grassroots social movements and associations is an established current within radical politics. In what follows, we plot some of the shifts that have propelled anarchism from the sidelines to the centre ground of radical politics and identify its conceptual markers.

## Radicalism and Anarchism

It would be disingenuous to say that left radicals have habitually traced their roots back to late Victorian radicalism, but not inaccurate to say that the traditions that left radicals have constructed in the last fifty years chime with the forms of left-libertarianism that Morris and others articulated. In the 1960s, *Radical America*, the iconic mouthpiece of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), found one of the antecedents of their movement in the early twentieth-century syndicalist union, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Not everyone agreed about the IWW’s record, but even those who judged it most harshly acknowledged that it had left a potent anticapitalist, revolutionary legacy that fed into sixties radicalism. The IWW was celebrated as ‘a brave and imaginative labor organisation that once seemed as though it might pose a threat to the stability of American capitalism’. The reason why New Leftists joined it in the 1960s was ‘primarily because it seems to offer a heritage of militant, dramatic warfare against the rules of America’ (Buhle, 1967: 6).

Voices in the Occupy movement located themselves in longer histories. Tom Paine, the great radical who ‘galvanized the attention, hopes and enthusiasm’ of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century democrats (Calhoun, 2012: 6), re-emerged as a champion of ‘real democracy’ in literature on Wall Street (Graeber, 2013). Perhaps more immersed in the traditions E.P. Thompson discussed in *The Making of the English Working Class*, occupiers in London variously found the lineages of their movement in the Magna Carta, the Levellers and the Putney debates. Yet, Morris, too, interpreted the Magna Carta as a declaration against tyranny and argued that it had contributed to the struggle against domination and arbitrary authority (Morris, 1887).

Constructing histories is fraught with problems. In the case of Occupy, the identification of ‘the people’ with the revolutionary campaign for American independence had the effect of sidelining Indigenous groups in the struggle against re-colonisation. Yet, leading figures within left radical movements have argued that their construction is an essential part of transformative struggle. C.L.R. James, in a talk delivered in Detroit in 1967 and reprinted in *Radical America* said: ‘when I was a boy I lived in Trinidad. My parents were Trinidadian. We knew nothing about Africa except what we learned from the British. And what they taught us was what they themselves believed about Africa – or perhaps what they wanted us to believe’ (James, 1968: 24). For James, the discovery and recovery of history was a tool for empowerment. Following James, we argue that movement history tells us something about the continuities of the currents contained within radicalism and the political aspirations of left-leaning radicals.

The current convention is to treat the emergence of the New Left in the 1960s as the noteworthy reference point for contemporary radicalism (Maacklebergh, 2012). However, as Dan Berger remarks of the North American movement, this rendering of radicalism’s modern history creates a misleadingly dichotomous picture of the 1960s as an era of creative ferment and the 1970s as one of political quiescence, even desolation (Berger, 2010: 4). Casting aside this decade-based periodisation, Berger recommends taking a long view, stretching the ‘sixties’ into a period extending from the 1950s to the 1970s. This not only makes better sense of the innovative transnational anticapitalist, antinuclear, antiwar and antiracist initiatives that flourished after the evaporation of mass student and worker protests, but also foregrounds shifts in liberal democratic politics that mobilised left radicals into action.

For Berger, the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 is the watershed moment for contemporary radicalism. Perceived as the culmination of a struggle that had raged throughout the long sixties, his presidency marked the full retrenchment of post-war progressive politics. As Berger argues, the attempt to ‘wipe out radical protest’ by the adoption of liberal domestic politics during the 1970s gave way to the adoption of a fully reactionary programme of economic neo-liberalism, nationalism and ‘aggrandized militarism’ (Berger, *ibid.*: 2–3). A commentary in *Radical America* reinforces this analysis. The journal described the long-feared 1980 election result as a confirmation of the ‘impact of the New Right [and] the strength of a reaction that has been growing for some time’. The election meant that the ‘antigay, antifeminist, and racist campaigns of recent history have now been legitimized under the banner of states’ rights, military supremacy, free enterprise, and religious fundamentalism’ (*Radical America*, 1980: 2).

On this reading, the ascendancy of the New Right did not represent a disappointment of libertarian aspirations. Rather, it reaffirmed a familiar critique of power while simultaneously drawing attention to the significance of the global policy shift Reaganism represented. In 1966, the American anarchist and pacifist Paul Goodman had rejected the idea that politics is ‘prudent steering in difficult terrain’. His view was that politics was a

craft shaped by Machiavellianism: ‘how to get power and keep power, even though the sphere of effective power is extremely limited and it makes little difference who is in power’ (Goodman, 1966: 61). Reagan’s victory reinforced the anti-elitist thrust of this critique but cast Goodman’s casual dismissal of the liberal democratic consensus in a new light. *Radical America* (1981: 4) declared itself numbed and ‘chilled’ by the ‘scope of the electoral gains of the conservatives and the frightening prospects – national and international, personal and collective – that their program portends’. The contributors had found the lesson of the sixties in constant activist vigilance: ‘when social movements have been able to bring about progressive legislation, leaving the protection of the newly-won “rights” up to the government can render the movement passive and make the reforms vulnerable to the shifting winds of electoral politics’ (1980: 3).

The mobilisation against the conservative reaction led to the widely, if belatedly, acknowledged anarchistic turn in radical movement organising and ethics (Epstein, 2001; Blumenfeld, Bottici and Critchley, 2013). It also involved significant shifts in the cultures of left radicalism. Central to these was the increasing importance of radical democratic practices, recently seen in global movement activism through affinity groups, networks, consensus decision-making and horizontal leadership cultures (Cornell, 2010). Murray Bookchin captured the mood. Radicalising meant developing ‘libertarian institutions’ and ‘democratizing the republic and radicalizing the democracy’. It meant stopping ‘the centralization of economic and political power’ by means of building a ‘free municipal confederation of towns and cities and villages structured in a libertarian form’ (Bookchin, 1985: 29). If the Zapatista insurrection of 1994 was not the seminal event for this reimagining of radical politics, the global protests it inspired were certainly an incubator for democratic practices through the social justice campaigns in the early 2000s.

Resisting the attempt of the Mexican government to remove land rights from Indigenous peoples (demanded as condition of Mexico’s entry to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)), the Zapatistas declared war on the Mexican government ‘and the neoliberal economic politics implemented since 1982’ (Gómez, 2016: 205). The demands they made against the government brought forth assemblages that self-consciously refused uniformity, championed autonomy and created global horizontal, leaderless networks based on affinity. As Gómez notes, the Zapatista demands for ‘democracy, liberty, respect, land, dignity, and autonomy’ that ‘resonated throughout Mexico and the world’ were not demands made of elites or even against them. In mobilising against the ‘neoliberal Mexican state’ the Zapatistas importantly redefined ‘their relationship to the state’, the ‘balance between politics, culture and rights and most notably, the meanings of citizenship and indigenous identity’ (Gómez, 2016: 205). Drawing attention to the imperial and colonial drives of Western politics, liberal and socialist alike, the Zapatistas openly rejected the vanguard models of politics embedded in Western liberalism and orthodox socialism. As Staughton Lynd explains, the Zapatista’s spokesperson, Subcomandante Marcos, refused to step into the shoes of the enlightened elite and also rejected the other dominant vanguardist model, proletarian dictatorship. Refusing to ‘occupy the place from which all opinions will come, all the answers, all the routes, all the truth’, Marcos denied the possibility of speaking and acting for ‘the people’ at all (quoted in Lynd and Grubacic, 2008: 8). His blunt message was ‘I shit on all the revolutionary vanguards of this planet’. This was the message he gave to the ‘Zapatistas’ critics’

We know that the Zapatistas don’t have a place in the (dis) agreement of the revolutionary and vanguard organizations of the world, or in the rearguard. This doesn’t make us feel bad. To the contrary, it satisfies us. We don’t grieve when we recognize that our

ideas and proposals don't have an eternal horizon, and that there are ideas and proposals better suited than ours. So we have renounced the role of vanguards and to obligate anyone to accept our thinking over another argument wouldn't be the force of reason.

(Marcos, 2003)

'By the 1970s', Eladio Gómez argues of Chicana/o movements, 'the language of civil rights no longer sufficiently represented the political desires and demands of political movements'. These movements were 'now composed of constituencies that had new goals and targets and employed a range of different tactics' (Gómez, 2016: 4). Radicalism not only rediscovered its antiparliamentary roots but also asserted an antiprogrammatic politics.

What are its significant features? We think that there are three: one is intersectionality, a second is horizontalism and a third is direct action.

Associated with the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality has been understood in terms of the ways that formal power – notably law – operates to reinforce social oppressions (Crenshaw, 1989). In contrast, movement critique often involves contesting structural, but often informal and/or normalised, hierarchical relationships which marginalised groups experience as domination. The altered dynamic was apparent in the general statement of the Combahee River Collective. This talked about the commitment to struggle against 'racial, sexual, heterosexual and class oppression' and defined the Collective's 'particular task' as the development 'of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking' (Combahee River Collective, 1977). At the moment of Reagan's victory, *Radical America* argued in a similar vein that the success of the radical left was that it had 'fumbled toward an understanding of the ways that class, race, and sex interact in American society, and the ways that the quality of individual lives reflects the contradictions of society as a whole' (1981, 3).

For left radicals, these relationships reflect historical power advantages that are entrenched in existing institutions. To give an example: in the late 1990s, activists involved in a wider US 'reclaim the media' campaign produced *The Declaration of Media Independence* in order 'to build meaningful participation from communities of color and indigenous communities to claim the undeniable right to communicate – to liberate our airwaves, networks and cultural spaces' (McGee et al., 1997: n.p.). The document emphasises the systematic exclusion of non-white and non-male voices from public communications, and the undemocratic character of existing constitutional provisions. The authors explain: 'We are interested in more than paternalistic conceptualizations of "access," more than paper rights, more than taking up space in a crowded boxcar along the corporate information highway'. Because media justice takes 'history, culture, privilege, and power' into account, the authors also seek 'new relationships to media and a new vision and reality for its ownership, control, access, and structure'. They continue:

At the heart of our work is a rigorous power analysis, with race, class and gender at the center ... We need a unique space so that our communities can move forward the visions and strategies for this work that are grounded in their own reality, which we believe will lead our society towards a truly free and democratic media.

(*ibid.*)

The ambition, then, is not just to reconstitute formal decision-making bodies, but to reconstruct social relations within grassroots institutions.

The second feature is horizontalism. This, as Laura Grattan argues, is a term adopted from workers' movement in Latin American, *horizontalidad*, to describe 'experiments in constituting popular power' (Grattan, 2016: 163). Democracy is a central component of horizontalism,

but as Maria Sitrin explains, it is distinguished by the quality of the relationships that flat organising fosters and entails.

Horizontalidad is a new way of relating, based in affective politics and against all the implications of ‘isms’. It is a dynamic social relationship. It is not an ideology or political program that must be met so as to create a new society or new idea. It is a break with these sorts of vertical ways of organizing and relating, and a break that is an opening.

*(Sitrin, 2012: 32)*

Because of its antiprogrammatic bent, horizontalism is also associated with movement diversity. This was the idea that David Solnit (2004) advanced in the late 1990s: radicalism ‘is a movement of movements, a network of networks, not merely intent on changing the world, but – as the Zapatistas describe – making a new one in which many worlds will fit’.

Its common-sense principles and rebellious spirit have always been with us, but this new radicalism is a dramatic departure from previous efforts to effect change. It transcends simplistic generalizations about form or method: It has no international headquarters, no political party, no traditional leaders or politicians running for office, and no uniform ideology or ten-point platform. Rather, it takes many forms and expresses itself differently in different places and communities across the globe.

*(Solnit: xii)*

The final component is direct action. Like intersectionality and horizontalism, this can be interpreted in different ways. The rejection of representative politics ties it to late nineteenth-century anarchistic radicalism. The Do-It-Ourselves ethics that direct action is also associated with is another feature common to historical and contemporary left radicalism. The innovation of modern radicalism, now one of its key components, is the idea that activists create the social relationships they want to promote directly by their activism. David Graeber describes it like this:

When protestors in Seattle chanted ‘this is what democracy looks like’, they meant to be taken literally. In the best traditions of direct action, they not only confronted a certain form of power, exposing its mechanisms and attempting literally to stop it in its tracks: they did it in a way which demonstrated why the kind of social relations on which it is based were unnecessary. This is why the condescending remarks about the movement being dominated by a bunch of dumb kids with no coherent ideology completely missed the mark. The diversity was a function of the decentralized form of organization, and this organization *was* the movement’s ideology.

*(Graeber, 2004: 84)*

Solnit explained that this ‘common theme’ of the new radicalism is ‘the practice of letting the means determine the ends’. He continued:

Unless the community or world we want is built into and reflected by the struggle to achieve it, movements will always be disappointed by their efforts. Groups political parties, or movements that are hierarchically structured themselves cannot change the antidemocratic and hierarchical structures of governments, corporations, and corporate capitalism.

*(Solnit, 2004: xiv)*

To conclude this section, our argument has been that there are strong continuities between the pro-anarchist forms of radicalism that emerged as antiradical movements in the late nineteenth century and the currents of ideas that emerged in the 1960s as self-consciously radical movements and which feed existing grassroots radicalism. Articulated as a response to Reaganism and animated by insurrections against the imposition of neo-liberal policies in degraded liberal democratic regimes, twenty-first-century left radicalism is a democratic movement. In this, it diverges from nineteenth-century pro-anarchist antiparliamentary, antiradical radicalism. Yet, it operates through associative principles that challenge the fundamental elitism of representative liberal democratic systems, as those pro-anarchist movements also did.

## Radicalism and Populism

If present-day radicalism is frequently linked to a type of activism that is positively shaped by mistrust of elite politics and politicians, recent literature on populism demonstrates that such mistrust continues to have purchase on the right as well as the left. Populism describes an anti-elite politics that manoeuvres for power within existing institutional frameworks as well as for its dispersal without them. Populism, Grattan remarks, defies ‘firm theoretical grasp’ (2016:9). Tapping into a similar vein, Margaret Canovan notes that populism diverges from other ‘ism’s’ in lacking a ‘common history, ideology, programme or social base’ (2004: 243). Like ‘radicalism’, it has often taken its meaning from its alignment with a shifting left-right political axis. Conflating radicalism with populism has often muddled political terminology. Yet, the observed closeness of the relationship between the two offers a useful framework for assessing contemporary left radicalism and facilitates consideration of what is at stake in the pro-democracy politics that left leaning radicals promote. In this section, we explore some recent approaches to populism in order to tease out the conceptual markers that will allow us to further these tasks.

One driver for recent analyses of populism is the desire to detach the concept from its specific manifestations. As Katsambekis explains, ideological conceptions derive core characteristics of the phenomenon from particular instances of it. Since the 1980s, populism has consequently been associated first and foremost with right-wing authoritarian movements that issue highly personalised appeals to advance illiberal or antiliberal social agendas. Canovan (2004: 242) acknowledged that her view of populism could be extended to include Tony Blair’s New Labour and the regime of Hugo Chavez but she also took as her starting point Ross Perot, the 1992 US presidential candidate, Pim Fortuyn’s List, Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party in Australia, Preston Manning’s Reform Party in Canada, Jean Marie Le Pen’s *Front National*, Jörg Haider’s Freedom Party and Umberto Bossi’s Northern League.

For Katsambekis, this approach wrongly attributes ‘a predominantly moralist and homogenizing character’ to populism (2016: 391). In order to provide a ‘high level abstract’ definition, he theorises populism discursively, employing Ernesto Laclau’s work to identify two ‘operational criteria’ (Katsambekis, 2016: 391). Populism is ‘articulated around the nodal point of “the people”’ and it is rooted in a perception or ‘representation of society’ as ‘predominantly antagonistic’ and divided into ‘two main blocs: the establishment’ or elite and ‘the people’ (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014: 123). Kioupkiolis and Katsambekis similarly observe that a central concern of populist research is to discover the degree to which ‘the people’ emerges as a hegemonic or unified force and a second, related to it, turns on the character of the antagonisms that democratic politics is expected to negotiate (2014: 1–15).

This approach facilitates the close analysis of populist groups and parties and detaches populism from the exclusive association with antidemocratic mobilisations. It also facilitates the inclusion of movements within the populist family that do not rely on charismatic leaders or adopt top-down organisational structures. It frees populism from the contingent shifts in the left-right spectrum, and so alleviates the problems that arise from the default classifications of the phenomenon. Observing that ‘populism’ is often applied as a term of abuse by critics standing outside the movements they brand, Margaret Canovan was moved to designate the illiberal and antiliberal far right parties that had mushroomed in recent decades as ‘New Populist’, precisely in order to distinguish them from other pro-socialist or liberal progressive manifestations (ibid.: 243; 247). However, the discursive approach does not overcome entirely the tendency to moralise populism. For example, Roman Gerodimos’s discourse analysis of Greek anarchist movement publications concludes that ‘far left populism’ is a ‘vengeful, violent response’ to representative systems that appropriate ‘agency from the individual citizen’ by appealing to a ‘proto-totalitarian utopia’ (Gerodimos, 2015: 622). Moreover, it risks leaving open the identification of the ideological trends within populism and their distinctive theoretical commitments.

Rather than present an abstract conception of populism, social movement historians have opened up its history to identify ideological trends within it. The driver here has been to challenge dominant associations with reactionary politics and models of charismatic leadership. Nineteenth-century Russian populism is a familiar touchstone for theorists casting about for an attractive alternative (Gerbaudo, 2017: 72–74),<sup>5</sup> though apart from the clue in the name, the links between this diverse set of revolutionary movements and contemporary activist groups are far from obvious. Populism’s backstory has also been related more broadly as a history of radicalism. Dating the association back to the European wars of religion, ‘the anti-Roman Catholic or Protestant agitations of the late middle ages and early modern period’, Terrell Carver suggests that there is a long-standing relationship ‘between radical politics and populist anti-elitism’ (2009: 53). English Chartism is identified as another important early expression of radical populism (Canovan, 243). Calhoun describes nineteenth-century American radicalism as a ‘populist politics’ (ibid.: vii). Examining the history of the American People’s Party which emerged in the late 1870s as the progenitor of modern US populism, Grattan uses the idea of ‘aspirational populism’ to ground populist politics in radical democracy (2016: 4). This form of populism is ‘openly premised on its ability to reach ordinary people’ and mobilises around a notion of democracy that ‘is not defined by the existing institutions and procedures of liberal, capitalist governance’ (ibid.: 11). Gerbaudo coins the term ‘anarcho-populism’ to draw radicalism and populism together.

This blending of radicalism with populism can be slotted comfortably into the discursive framework that Stavrakakis and Katsambekis propose, and it shines a light on the distinctive organisational features of modern left populist movements. Yet, the radical politics we discuss in this collection emerges as a form of anti-elitist politics that promotes special modes of participation and pursues particular logics of action to standard models of populism. When it is collapsed into populism, this difference is lost and the problem of conceptualising radicalism is only referred back to other ideologically contested ground.

To remedy this problem, we explore the models of populism that Margaret Canovan, Ernesto Laclau and Federico Finchelstein have developed. Not all these models fit within the high-level definition that Katsambekis recommends. Indeed, Finchelstein defines populism as a reactionary authoritarian politics. Yet in different ways, each reveals something about the ideological gap between left and right populisms and helps reveal how populism intersects with the radical traditions we want to explore.



Like Katsambekis, Canovan argues that populism's signature tune is the invocation of 'the people' to expose the illegitimacy of established elite power and the demand for its return to its rightful custodians (Canovan, 2004: 247). The demand springs from a commitment to the idea of popular sovereignty, an idea that lies at heart of democracy. Yet in populism, the demand picks at a tension between citizens and their representatives. Canovan argues that this tension is almost unavoidable because the mechanisms intended to integrate citizens into democracy are so complex and removed from everyday life that they appear designed to rob the people of its power. Populism thus expresses a disappointment in the existing political order and populists perpetually return to it in order to expose the variance between the promise of empowerment and the experience of representative democracy, and to assert the people's legitimate power against the sectional interests which appear to usurp it.

Canovan uses this general conception to argue that populism is at once antivanguardist and redemptive. Antivanguardism encapsulates a rejection of progressive liberal agendas, but it is systemically rather than ideologically specified: vanguardism is 'built into liberalism, socialism and feminism and is present even in modern conservatism' (ibid.: 246). Populist antivanguardism thus represents a rejection of the view that 'in the long run everyone is going to be liberated and made better off' because the experts who occupy positions of power are capable of 'showing the way to the rest' (ibid.). Populism redefines the progressive agenda by challenging the vanguard, preaching renewal through the replacement of the dishonest, inauthentic and self-serving professionals. This is populism's redemptive quality.

The second model, Ernesto Laclau's analysis of populism, centres on the construction of 'the people' as a social agent (Laclau, 2007: 118). While Canovan identifies three political meanings extending from the Latin, *populus* (the people as sovereign, as nations and as the commoners distinct from the ruling elite (2004: 247–8)), Laclau focuses on the antagonistic relationship between a *populus* and a *plebs*. A *populus* is the 'body of all citizens' and a *plebs* is the 'underprivileged'. Their relationship is not fixed either juridically or ideologically. For in populism, 'the people' has no given unity. Rather, Laclau argues, it is an identity in formation, which comes into being when 'a *plebs* claims to be the only legitimate *populus*', and 'wants to function as the totality of the community' (ibid.: 81).

The identity that populism brings about proceeds from the demands that the *plebs* advances. This can be understood both as a request and a claim; the dynamics of populist politics is explained by the transformation of one into the other (ibid.: 73). The process is driven by the failure or inability of institutions to meet a plurality of individual demands. The frustration bred by this failure hastens the symbolic unity of the people by triggering its identification of the existing order as the institutionalised 'other'. Laclau rejected the criticism that this account of populism reifies the people. Responding to Slavoj Žižek's accusation that it does, Laclau explained: where 'there is a more permanent tension between demands and what the institutional order can absorb ... requests tend to become claims, and there is a critique of institutions rather than just a passive acceptance of their legitimacy'. At the same time,

when relations of equivalence between a plurality of demands go beyond a certain point, we have broad mobilizations against the institutional order as a whole. We have here the emergence of the people as a more universal historical actor, whose aims will necessarily crystallize around empty signifiers as objects of political identification.

(Laclau, 2006: 656)

'The people' does not exist. It is constructed through its negativity in common opposition.

Leadership plays a central role in the process, but not in a conventional manner. Stating that populism ‘concerns the centrality of the leader’ (Laclau, 2007: 99), Laclau dismissed the familiar idea that leadership amounted to an elaborate form of stage-management or crowd manipulation. Structural analysis shows that when institutions collapse, the glue that once held society together also dissolves. New assemblages come into being but only through their naming. In other words, Laclau’s contention was that the unity of ‘the people’ does not result from the internal development of the heterogeneous movements that coalesce around unfulfilled demands. Rather, it comes from its symbolic identification. In Laclau’s words, ‘the popular symbol or identity actually *constitutes* what it expresses through the process of its expression’ (Laclau, 2007: 99).

Unlike Canovan and Laclau, Federico Finchelstein presents an explicitly ideological conception of populism. He examines the dominant modes of participation promoted in post-war populist governments. Historicising populism, Finchelstein distinguishes a pre-populist phase (running from Boulangism to the ascendancy of Karl Lueger, the early twentieth-century Viennese champion of political anti-Semitism) from its proto-populist expression in post-war Latin America. On this view, populism describes ‘a form of authoritarian democracy for the post-war world; one that could adapt the totalitarian version of politics to the post-war hegemony of democratic representation’ (Finchelstein, 2014: 467). The experience of fascism is central to populism’s appearance and so too is the perceived threat of communism. But it differs from both. For Finchelstein, Peronism is populism’s exemplar. The more-or-less marketised, egalitarian, participatory and nationalist regimes and movements that have emerged since the 1980s, not only in Latin America but also across Europe, are variations on this theme, often ‘crude imitations of the original’ capable of mimicking populism’s ‘rhetoric and rituals’ but unable to produce the ‘autarkic industrialisation’ that once mobilised ‘multiclass urban coalitions’ (Schamis, 2006: 21; 34).

These three thick descriptions illuminate a facet of populism that can suit both left and right political agendas, but also help tease out the distinctiveness of the radicalism we explore.

To begin with Canovan, Benjamin Arditi has already drawn out the illiberal politics that extend from populist antivanguardism. As it plays fast and loose with established norms, using the idea of the people as its nodal point, Arditi argues that populism rounds on ‘the political and economic establishments *and* elite values of the type held by opinion-formers in the academy and the media’ (Arditi, 2004: 136). As it does so, it ‘slips all too easily into authoritarian practices’ by demonising the existing elite while keeping the concept of elitism intact. It brings ‘a quasi-Hobbesian theory of political obligation’ into play (*ibid.*: 142). The insight Arditi draws from Canovan’s analysis is that elitist and anti-elitist populists easily turn a ‘classic exchange of obedience for protection’ into a ‘passionate allegiance to a political grouping in exchange for jobs and security’. The people’s champions become ‘infallible sovereigns’ whose decisions are ‘unquestionable because they are theirs’ (*ibid.*: 143).

As we have already seen, radical politics contains another option, an anarchistic option that distinguishes elite rule from egalitarian and democratic norms. The left-libertarian radicalisation of Canovan’s antivanguardist thesis turns on the generalisation of the critique of the ruling class or elite. Instead of fixating on the disappointment with the progressive agendas that Canovan associates with vanguardism, left radicals challenge its technocratic premises. In this version of anti-elitism, there can be no replacement of corrupt elites with peoples’ new, authentic champions, since the anarchistic option entails the eradication of the power distributions that elitism assumes. From this perspective, elitism does not represent the factional degeneration of democracy or the corruption of the constitution, but an

unacceptable alternative to democracy. A.J. Bauer's (2012) reflections on the incommensurability of Tea Party populism with the populism of the Occupy movement capture the difference:

The fundamental debate between the Tea Party and Occupy ... has little to do with the economy, per se, and even less to do with the horse race of contemporary electoral politics. Rather, it is a debate in which two movements, each responding to a perceived crisis in state legitimacy, seek to advance contrary alternative models of authority – one rooted in the historical founding of the nation (i.e. the Constitution) and the other in the contemporary and quotidian performance of political action in concert.

Laclau's account of populism and the construction of 'the people' illuminate a second conceptual fracture. Arditì's work on Laclau's concept of leadership fleshes out one pole. Recalling Laclau's arguments that 'the symbolic unification of the group around an individuality ... is inherent to the formation of a "people"', Arditì explores the relationship between the *populus* and the *plebs* to theorise the concept of leadership. In accordance with Laclau, he acknowledges that the naming of the people does not refer 'to actual persons but to the name of the leader as a structural function' (Arditì, 2010: 490). Nevertheless, naming points in the former direction for the name is necessarily a singularity, and singularity, as Laclau put it, leads to 'identification of the unity of the group with the name of the leader' (Laclau, 2007: 100). Likewise, populism does not 'lead automatically' to 'actual ruling', but naming positions the *plebs* as the *populus*-to-be. The theorisation Arditì develops paints populism as a contest for the right to rule in the name of the people, hinting at a process of replacement rather than transformation. Indeed, Arditì compares the constitution of the 'signifying totality' to the formation of Hobbes' sovereign. Arditì notes that for Laclau, as for Hobbes, 'without a leader there can be no "people" and therefore no politics either' (Arditì, 2010: 490).

Miguel Vatter's analysis of plebeian politics captures an alternative to this conception of leadership, one which resonates with anarchistic radicalism. This reconfigures the relationship of the *plebs* to the *populus*. While Laclau described the power relationship between the *populus*, the 'body of all citizens' and a *plebs*, the 'underprivileged' as a rivalry for right to function as the 'totality of the community', Vatter recovers a classical conception that recasts this relationship philosophically as a disagreement about power and the rights it entails. In a review of modern and classical republican democratic theory, Vatter admits the rivalry between the *plebs* and the *populus* but argues that the *plebs* 'distinguish themselves from the *populus* because they struggle for a form of power ... called "no-rule"'. This 'is exercised in the absence of the distinction between those who govern and those who are governed' (ibid.: 244) and it points to a distinctive form of anti-elitism. Plebeian politics 'understands the constitution, and its division of powers, as that which makes possible a political life that lies "beyond" the rule of the state and which places the achievement of equal law above the achievement of unitary order'. Rejecting the 'consensus of the law', it advances the right to 'an equal power to make law' but not 'an equal right to rule' (Vatter, 2012: 256). The sovereignty that Arditì detects in Laclau's notion of leadership is absent in this conceptualisation.

The third fracture emerges from Finchelstein historical modelling of populism. This usefully outlines an ideal type that has seven features:

- (i) an extremely sacralizing understanding of the political; (ii) a political theology that considers the people as being formed by those who follow a unique vertical leadership;

(iii) an idea of political antagonists as enemies who are potentially (or in fact) traitors to the nation; (iv) a understanding of the leader as a charismatic embodiment of the voice and desires of the nation as a whole; (v) a strong executive and the discursive, and often practical, dismissal of the legislative and judicial branches of government; (vi) a radical nationalism and an emphasis on popular culture, as opposed to other forms of culture that do not represent “national thought,” (vii) and, finally, an attachment to a vertical form of electoral democracy that nonetheless rejects in practice dictatorial forms of government.

(*ibid.*: 468)

Finchelstein suggests that these features define populism. Scholars of populism like Katsambekis may disagree, yet the organisational model is instructive for our purposes. It is also possible to treat it as the institutional foil against which grassroots social movements have mobilised in the last fifty years. Insofar as the alternatives they advance can also be described as populist, as Katsambekis, Grattan and others argue, Finchelstein’s ideal represents only one possible type. Either way, the associative principles practised by current radicals turn this model on its head.

Neither Grattan nor Gerbaudo lists the essential characteristics of an alternative model of populism; yet, both outline some of its key features. Grattan uses Occupy to think about aspirational democratic populism and identifies its hallmarks in the aversion to making demands, a commitment to horizontalism, a refusal to ‘define the boundaries of *peoplehood*’ and the adoption of consensus decision-making. Ploughing a similar furrow, Gerbaudo describes anarcho-populism as ‘libertarian, participatory, or leaderless populism’ that ‘articulates the neo-anarchist method of *horizontality* and the populist demand for *sovereignty*, the mass ambition of populist movements, with the high premium placed on individual participation and creativity’ (Gerbaudo, 2017: 7). Our construction of contemporary radicalism suggests a different theorisation, pointing to the rejection of sovereignty and the promotion of intersectionality consistent with horizontalism.

To sum up, populism can be understood as a discursive strategy that turns on the idea of ‘the people’ and which is rooted in a perceived antagonism between it and the elite. Yet, it can be inflected in different ways to advance conflicting normative principles. There are ideational trends within populism that resonate with the concerns and expressions of radical movements, but attention to the distinctly anarchistic strain in left radicalism helps us identify three lines of fracture. One turns on normative values, a second on the constitution of power and the third on the structure of governance. As will become clear from reading the chapters in this collection, these associative principles can be understood and applied in diverse ways. They do not exhaust the theoretical ground of contemporary left radicalism. Our argument is that they underpin the politics of contemporary radicalism and the democratic, egalitarian aspirations that analysts of populism have explored.

## Notes

- 1 Maurice Block was an economist and member of the l’Académie des sciences morales et politiques. His publications include the *Dictionnaire de L’Administration Française* (2nd edn. Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1877); *Les Progrès de la Science Économique Depuis Adam Smith* (Paris: Gullaumin, 1890); and ‘The Progress of Economic Ideas in France’, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (July 1893), pp. 1–33.
- 2 Kurt Zube (1905–91) also wrote under the name of Soleman. He was the author of *An Anarchist Manifesto* (1977) online at [www.panarchy.org/solneman/solneman.html](http://www.panarchy.org/solneman/solneman.html).

- 3 Joseph Lane (1851–1920) was involved in a number of radical clubs and projects before turning to socialism and anarchism in the 1880s. See Nicholas Walter’s biography at <https://libcom.org/history/lane-joseph-1851-1920>.
- 4 William Morris (1834–96) founded the Socialist League in 1884 to advance revolutionary socialism. Influenced by anarchism, he identified as communist. See the biography at <https://williammorrissociety.org/about-william-morris/>.
- 5 Franco Venturi’s *The Roots of Revolution* (1983 [1960]) is the seminal history of the nineteenth-century Russian movements which shaped revolutionary politics in the period between the 1825 Decembrist Revolt and the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881.

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## SECTION 1

# Critiques

We begin the collection with a section on critique in order to identify some of the antagonisms and oppositions that animate radical politics. Anti-oppression politics is often used as the umbrella term to describe this critique (Désil, Kaur, Kinsman: n.d.), and this section explores some of its facets. How is oppression understood by activists, and how do their critiques of domination and inequality complement and challenge one another? These are the central concerns linking chapters in this first section.

As it turned its interest in the 1990s to the sweeping changes associated with globalisation, political sociology tended to rest content with the truism that class politics and mass parties had given way to a disjointed ‘politics of identity’. According to this logic, the class antagonisms rooted in material demands and/or revolutionary socialism had given way to a landscape populated by groups seeking redress for ‘post-material’ grievances and demanding equal institutional treatment and sociocultural recognition within capitalist democracy.

The eruption of a globally networked movement against neo-liberalism around the turn of the millennium revealed that other more significant processes had been taking place. On the one hand, movements of rural and urban workers in the global south, who mobilised against multinational corporations and neo-liberal policies, were often integrating their original forms of feminist, ecological and epistemological critiques; hence, while material and revolutionary demands were far from abandoned, they were no longer couched in traditional Marxian formulations. On the other hand, movements associated with ‘post material’ politics – from environmentalism to LGBT+ rights and beyond – had in fact been among the first to articulate how systemic features of capitalism, as well as discrete concentrations of corporate power, had shaped the conditions against which their protests, direct actions and campaigning were directed.

Global activist networks have consequently displayed an increased awareness of the interdependence of their struggles and the intersection among different axes of oppression (Shannon and Rogue, 2009; Jeppesen, Kruzyński, Sarrasin and Breton, 2014). The chapters in this section clearly demonstrate the traction which these perspectives have gained, even as radicals continuing to focus on particular causes or grievances in their practical work.

In the opening chapter, a collectively written contribution, the London-based Irish diasporic group Speaking of IMELDA reflects on its direct-action campaigns for **reproductive rights** in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Providing an overview of the



group's history and explaining some of the actions the collective have undertaken, *Speaking of IMELDA* uses the idea of 'cutting loose' to expound a form of radical feminism that challenges gendered cultural constructions of the home state and experiments with do-it-ourselves aesthetics to develop creatively disruptive and empowering actions. Irish republican history is an important touchstone for *Speaking of IMELDA*'s radicalism, and the discussion shows how the collective interrogate the past and its disappointments to push revolutionary initiatives in the present and for the future.

Will Boisseau offers a discussion of the **animal liberation** movement, which takes direct action to save the lives of animals while causing economic damage to the industries that exploit them. Having grown rapidly since its beginnings in the late 1960s, radical animal liberation became a significant threat to corporations and its activists were heavily repressed in the 2000s. The chapter considers the movement's principal concerns and action repertoires, before turning to the main concepts and political theories which relate to animal liberation including ecofeminism, anarchism and critical animal studies. Despite its advances and risks, animal liberation remains dogged with accusations that it represents bourgeois reformism and the preoccupations of privileged individuals. In response, the newest animal liberation activism focuses on concepts such as total liberation and the intersectionality of human, animal and Earth liberation.

In his chapter on **antifascism**, M. Testa locates its radical manifestations among activists who both reject the ballot box effort to outvote fascism and disdain state intervention, knowing that repression of fascists will invariably extend to their militant opponents. Radical antifascists' primary political space is on the viciously contested streets of their towns and cities, but while their principal concern is to physically smash fascist mobilisation, they also recognise the need to organise within their communities. Here, the task is to put forward arguments based on class rather than race which show how housing shortages, privatisation and underemployment are not the result of immigration but of vindictive austerity measures. Militant antifascism therefore involves an openness to cooperation with people whose politics may not be the same, but to whom the threat of fascism is no less dangerous.

Chris Rossdale outlines a history of **antimilitarism** and discusses the politics of a number of antimilitarist groups to demonstrate the intersectional politics of contemporary antimilitarism. Antimilitarism is analysed as a network of institutions, a body of values and a set of practices. It draws on a range of traditions: anarchist, feminist, religious, anti-imperialist and antiracist. The chapter shows how anticolonial and antiracist campaigns intersect with antimilitarist peace activism and how religiously rooted pacifism fuels nonviolent grassroots direct action. The chapter closes with two case studies – resistance to US military bases in Okinawa and the Trident Ploughshares movement against nuclear weapons – which show how the theoretical lineages identified earlier find concrete expression.

Bonnie Burstow examines **antipsychiatry**, psychiatric survivor and mad movements from an anarchist perspective and as part of an intersectional anti-oppression politics. Sensitive to the differences between these movements, the chapter explores their radicalism by (i) developing an antiauthoritarian critique of state-sanctioned professional practice and normalising discourses and (ii) rejecting reforms directed at mitigating the worst excesses of established psychiatric practice. Reflecting on the experience of antipsychiatry activism, the chapter recommends a model of radical activism that synthesises anarchist cultural values with the adoption of strategic goals. And looking at the challenges that antipsychiatry presents to other radical movements, it links radicalism to the willingness to confront the power-relationships that emerge in the intersections of anti-oppression politics.

Leah Temper examines radical **climate justice** politics – a network of anticapitalist and anti-extractivist movements fighting for ‘System change, not Climate Change’. Climate justice activism includes struggles against oil and gas extraction, coal plants and fracking, organising by the victims of floods, hurricanes and tornadoes, as well as movements fighting for food sovereignty and access to resources. Based on the understanding that those least responsible for the production of greenhouse gases are the most affected by the disruption and chaos they cause, this radical approach draws attention to the colonial and gendered dimensions of the climate crisis. Instead of the false techno-fixes poised to further exacerbate these inequalities, climate justice prompts us towards the proactive construction of a post-petroleum society and a consideration of how the economy, energy, food and transportation systems can be radically rethought and redesigned.

David Pellow focuses on the possibilities for a deepening and broadening of social justice politics within radical **environmentalism**. Based on data gathered from fieldwork, interviews, archival analysis and participant observation, he argues that while environmental movements have a long and troubled history of racism, nativism, heteropatriarchy and classism (to say nothing of misanthropy!), there are significant segments of these social formations that have invested time and energy into reimagining their work, including the very framing of the problem of the environmental crisis, along with strategies and tactics to address it. The chapter suggests new ways of defining environmental justice politics, and new ways of framing democracy and the polity itself.

In her chapter on radical **research**, Rebecca Fisher discusses the work of Corporate Watch – an independent research and publishing group which campaigns against corporate power and spreads ‘information for action’. The group approaches its research with a different ethic to the one prevalent in institutional contexts – from academia and media to NGOs and think tanks. This ethic is defined by its commitment to, and position within, struggles for radical social change, and by affirming the independence that permits such an engagement. Rather than provide seemingly neutral analysis, expert advice or compromised lobbying, Corporate Watch aims to take an active, autonomous and non-vanguardist role within radical struggles.

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# 1.1

## A RADICAL FEMINIST DIASPORA

### Speaking of IMELDA, Reproductive Justice and Ireland

#### *Speaking of IMELDA*

#### **Introduction**

This chapter situates the London-based, direct-action performance collective, Speaking of IMELDA, within a tradition of alternative feminist Irish diasporic activist groups in Britain who have campaigned for reproductive rights. By contextualising Irish feminist activist collectives in London from the 1970s to the present day, we argue for the political efficacy and vitality of the Irish feminist diaspora. Written collectively by members of Speaking of IMELDA, the chapter maps the actions we have undertaken to challenge the restrictions on abortion in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. We further detail our attempts to raise awareness in Britain of the inequity experienced by Northern Irish women, due to the rigid opposition to abortion maintained by dominant political parties in Northern Ireland and the British government's failure to uphold equal access to reproductive health-care to all UK citizens.

We frame our actions as being influenced by what we are terming a 'feminist diasporic political radicalism' – a form of radicalism that is informed by being 'cut loose' from the gendered cultural constructs of the home state, enabled by our geographical positioning outside of the island of Ireland. We further situate feminist diasporic political radicalism as being informed by the untethered freedom of 'loose women' within our collective. We theorise the idea of 'loose women' not only in terms of the looseness of our methods and aesthetics, but in how, within our actions, this sense of looseness informs the specific approaches we use to challenge oppressive cultural ideals of femininity. We argue that our actions are a messy alliance between art and politics; our loosely framed DIO (Do It Ourselves) aesthetics spill out crudely from artistic representation into the political realm where they demand a response.

This chapter traces the influence of feminist diasporic political radicalism on activist strategies. Throughout the chapter, we outline the strategies we have devised to act in solidarity with the ongoing battle for reproductive rights across the island of Ireland. First, we outline the origins of Speaking of IMELDA and situate our work in relation to the past Irish diasporic feminist activist groups that originated in Britain, in particular those focused on reproductive rights. We then explain how our work responds to the religious fundamentalism influencing legislative restrictions on reproductive rights in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Following this, a discussion of our use of direct action and performance

demonstrates the ways in which the concept of ‘looseness’ is central to the methods we use to subvert the constructs of femininity associated with Ireland. Finally, we outline how the positioning of the tactics deployed by Speaking of IMELDA within the intersection between culture and politics upsets the cultural hegemony of both Irish states.

Speaking of IMELDA is a collective comprised largely, although not exclusively, of Irish women living in London. Our collective is comprised of a diversity of women of all ages and from many walks of life, including those working in education, the creative arts, health, social care and activism. Our collective history of activism spans reproductive rights, antiracism, LGBTQI rights, anti-austerity movements in England and Ireland, Irish Travellers’ rights, support for refugees and migrants and formerly challenging the human rights abuses by the British Army in Northern Ireland, including supporting the rights of women political prisoners during the Troubles (1968–98).

The group was initiated by women who had emigrated from Ireland since 2000 with the aim of challenging the legislative restrictions on abortion across the island of Ireland. In the Republic of Ireland, the Eighth Amendment to the Irish constitution, which equates the life of a pregnant person with that of an unborn foetus from conception, exerts a ‘chilling effect’ on the reproductive rights of women in Ireland (Amnesty International, 2015: 8). In the North, access to reproductive health services is also heavily restricted, due to the failure of the British state to extend the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland, alongside continued political opposition to abortion within the Northern Ireland Executive.

Speaking of IMELDA was formally established in December 2013 following a meeting at which Ann Rossiter was invited to speak about her activist history. A member of Speaking of IMELDA since that meeting, Rossiter is also a former member of Irish Women’s Abortion Support Group (IWASG), a long-time abortion rights activist and the author of *Ireland’s Hidden Diaspora: The Abortion Trail and the Making of a London Irish Underground 1980–2000* (2009).

### **Maintaining Links to the Past: Irish Feminist Diasporic Radicalism**

Placing our actions in a historical context has been central to the ethos of Speaking of IMELDA. From the outset, we have sought to retrieve and activate the work of our feminist predecessors. For example, the name Imelda, a common girl’s name in Ireland, recalls the work of IWASG – a group of activists who provided support to women travelling from Ireland to England for abortions between 1980 and 2000. IWASG, discussed in more depth later, used Imelda as a secret code word for abortion. This code word enabled Irish women travelling to England for abortions to keep their plans secret so as to avoid stigma and, up until 1992 when the right to travel for abortion was implemented, criminalisation. We use IMELDA as an anagram for ‘Ireland Making England the Legal Destination for Abortion’. We also wear the colour red in tribute to the work of IWASG, whose members sometimes wore a red skirt, so as to be identifiable, when collecting women travelling for abortion at train stations and airport terminals. Notably, we also harness the association of red with danger and the deviant sexuality of ‘loose women’. We see maintaining these links to the past as crucial to removing the long-standing barriers to progress on reproductive rights in Ireland. Such connections with past activism also make us proud and give us the commitment to continue the work.

Up to 6,000 women from the Irish region continually travel to the UK each year to access abortion services, often at considerable expense and stress. Furthermore, in 2013, the Irish Republic implemented a fourteen-year prison sentence for women who have abortions in

Ireland illegally. This has dire consequences for women who take pro-abortion medication because they cannot afford to travel or are not permitted to leave the country. We want women in the Irish region, and more widely, to have control over their own bodies and access to medical services which support their choices. In reclaiming the name IMELDA, we wish to act in solidarity with women's groups who have sought to counteract the inhumanity of state legislation in both Northern and Southern Ireland, while operating against the silencing and shaming of women who have abortions.

Irish feminist activity in Britain stretches back to the early 1880s when branches of the Ladies Land League, a proto-feminist organisation fighting against eviction and for land reform in Ireland, were established in south London (Russell, 1987). Although there were many factors and influences that differentiated the Irish and British social formations, not least Ireland's colonial position versus Britain's imperial one (Cullen Owens, 1984:103–12), interaction continued across the Irish Sea, and in Britain itself between native British women and Irish émigrés, as feminist activism evolved into a social movement in the early 1900s before the advent of First World War, Ireland's Rising against British rule in 1916 and the War of Independence, 1919–21. These interactions between first-wave feminists were notably in the areas of female suffrage and labouring women's rights (Sylvia Pankhurst being a key figure on the British side), thereby creating an early form of transnational feminism in action (Murphy, 1989). This was also visible in East London suffragette newspaper *The Women's Dreadnought* (Pankhurst, 2016), it being the first British newspaper to report on the Dublin 1916 Rising and its aftermath.

With the arrival of second-wave feminism in the late 1960s and early 1970s, an Irish diasporic feminist identity took shape within the broad parameters of the Women's Liberation Movement in Britain, and against the backdrop of three decades of the Northern Ireland 'Troubles' (1968–98). Once again, there were factors and influences differentiating Irish and British feminism. While bread-and-butter issues, such as reproductive rights, childcare, equal pay and sexuality, were common to both, Irish feminism also faced the fallout from an armed conflict in Northern Ireland including British military occupation (28,000 troops at its peak in 1972), a bombing campaign carried out mainly by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in Northern Ireland and on the British mainland, and large-scale incarceration of men and women in Northern Irish and British jails. Following the descent into armed conflict in Northern Ireland, and coinciding with the rise of the women's movement in the western world, feminist groups, such as the Women on Ireland Collective (1973–74), the Women and Ireland Group (1976–80) and the London Armagh Coordinating Group (1980–87), were initiated mainly by Irish women around Britain. Primarily, their work involved highlighting the lives of republican women in their shattered communities in the conflict zones in Northern Ireland, drawing attention to the treatment of women political prisoners, especially the practice of strip searching as a form of sexual harassment ('Strip Searches in Armagh Jail', *Women Behind the Wire*, London Armagh Group, 1984) campaigning against the Prevention of Terrorism Act (1974) and for the removal of British troops (Irish Women at War: Papers from the Feminism and Ireland Workshop, 1977).

These feminist groups were open to all regardless of nationality or ethnicity. Non-Irish feminists joined with their Irish sisters in campaigning in the British movement on the various issues related to the Troubles, but their collective efforts failed to make a significant impact due to ideological differences over militant nationalism, colonialism and religion (Rossiter, 2017: 153–68). Despite international slogans of the movement like 'sisterhood is global', a lesson well learned from the experience was that unless a global sisterhood is consciously placed in its historical and political context, as it is in the notion of 'intersectionality'

(the recognition of difference and the interlocking of systems of oppression), feminist solidarity is 'shaky at best' (Delmar, 1972; Mohanty, 1992: 74–92). After the Socialist Feminist Conference on Imperialism and Women's Oppression Worldwide (1980) and the mid-1980s shift towards embracing a non-unitary experience of womanhood (Wallsgrave, 1985), socialist feminism was better able to relate to the multiplicity of issues stemming from the Troubles and the Irish national question.

### **The Irish Women's Abortion Support Group (IWASG) 1980–2000**

The formation of the IWASG (1980–2000) and the London-Irish Women's Centre (1983–2012), both exclusive to Irish women, can be viewed as a response to the marginalisation of Irish issues in the wider feminist movement and to the 'othering' and essentialising of Irish people in Britain during the Troubles. The London-Irish Women's Centre, with recognition and support from bodies such as the Greater London Council, set about articulating women's perspectives, ultimately contributing to the shaping of an 'alternative Irish community' in Britain (Rossiter, 2009: 53–74).

The London-based Irish feminists who set up the voluntary IWASG in 1980 were following a tradition of philanthropic work at ports and railway stations in Britain established in the latter half of the nineteenth century. While lay and religious welfare agencies such as the Legion of Mary (founded 1921) provided unaccompanied Irish females with practical support, emanating primarily from a desire to flag up the grave moral dangers to which women would be exposed in their new lives (Redmond, 2015: 55–76), IWASG's concern was directed specifically at pregnant women seeking a safe and legal abortion under the 1967 British Abortion Act. Such philanthropic and advocacy work has been described variously as feminist voluntarism and 'civic' or 'practice-focused' feminism (Fletcher, 2015). Importantly, it implicitly subverted the obdurate, anti-abortion stance of both Irish states in thrall to the Catholic and fundamentalist Protestant churches.

IWASG was a non-hierarchical feminist collective whose members defined themselves as lesbian, bi or straight, from Catholic or Protestant backgrounds. They had working-class, middle-class and rural origins in Northern Ireland or the Republic, or were British-born second- and third-generation Irish. The all-Irish nature of the membership, rather than being ethnically exclusive by design, was a response to abortion seekers' reports of the judgemental attitudes of their non-Irish hosts – an experience all too common during the thirty years of the Irish Troubles and the one that would be recognised by members of the Muslim community today (Casey, 2017: 213–26; Finch, 2017: 137–52), although probably not by Irish migrants of the Celtic Tiger period. The Celtic Tiger refers to the unprecedented economic boom during the 1990s, which followed the Republic of Ireland's entry into the European Economic Community in 1973 (now the European Union). During this period, wealth was generated by the provision of tax breaks to foreign, largely American, companies who set up in the Republic, alongside a disproportionate inflation in the housing market. This period of prosperity ended with the global economic crisis in 2008 and the collapse of the banks in the Irish Republic in 2010, which led to the acceptance of International Monetary Fund (IMF) and EU bailouts.

The services provided by IWASG ranged from helping to organise travel and escorting abortion seekers to and from transport hubs, to making clinic appointments, sorting out fees and providing hospitality and overnight accommodation in IWASG members' homes. In addition to fundraising and practical support, a lot of campaigning was directed at securing legal changes in Ireland and the UK. By 2000, the combined impact of the Internet, mobile

phones, the widespread availability of credit and the advent of cheap airline travel eliminated the demand for help. IWASG closed down. In 2004, ESCORT, a Liverpool-based service, set up in 1988, providing escort and accommodation services (Fletcher, 2015), also ceased. However, the economic crash of 2008 impacted heavily on women with unwanted pregnancies in Northern Ireland and the Republic. The Abortion Support Network was formed in London in 2009 in response to renewed cries for help and support (ASN, 2016). Although not specifically an 'Irish' organisation, the Abortion Support Network dealing mostly with Irish clients.

The positioning of Irish feminist groups in Britain allows for a greater freedom to critique the boundaries of women's roles in Ireland. Strategically, we form a diasporic radicalism. The four current London-based voluntary groups concerned with Irish women's reproductive rights – the Abortion Support Network, Speaking of IMELDA, the London-Irish Feminist Network (founded after the London-Irish Women's Centre closed in 2012) and the London-Irish Abortion Rights Campaign (formed in 2016) – have come into existence in the third-wave feminist environment. All use social media extensively and are connected with pro-choice activists in both parts of Ireland and across the world.

### ***Raising a Radical Diasporic Voice Against the Moral Regulation of Women in the Republic of Ireland***

While Speaking of IMELDA has duly harnessed social media to heighten our message, we prioritise public interventions that are direct, loud and unapologetic. These actions have sought to radically challenge the stereotypes of the quiet and pure Irish woman so imposed by religious forces. For instance, in our first action, Speaking of IMELDA acted as dissonant voices intervening in a conference in Camden attended by Catholic clergy on the subject of faith and the Irish diaspora on International Women's Day 2014. Here, IMELDA called upon the so-called 'radical and engaged' church to take action on the silenced – but daily – reality of pregnant people travelling abroad to access reproductive healthcare (8 March 2014 action, 2014). Not only did this action make vocal a rarely spoken issue, it also infiltrated a religious space where women were able to serve an alternative role to that predetermined by church teachings – that of activists, autonomous over their own bodies and selves.

Since the formation of the Irish State in 1922, the Catholic Church has been a dominant political force in the Republic of Ireland. The interaction of church and state has not only imposed Catholic teaching on all matters of policy – from education, to social security, to health – it has also heavily infiltrated the social and cultural life of the Irish populace. This has translated into the reverence of domesticity and subservience in women, motherhood being valorised as a woman's primary sexual purpose. Female purity, as Fischer (2016) notes, became conflated with national identity. The Irish woman did not just represent herself; she was the symbol of a pure, superior and – notably – Catholic Ireland. Any deviation from this archetype was seen to tarnish not only the individual, but also to taint the idealised nation state, which had been carefully constructed by the church. As such, 'deviant' acts – particularly those concerning female sexuality – were shrouded in guilt, shame and secrecy. The Magdalene Laundries, mother and baby homes and non-consensual practices of symphysiotomy (an outdated surgical procedure whereby the pelvis is severed during childbirth that was replaced by caesarian section, which Catholic doctors revived in the Republic between the 1940s and 1980s) were emblematic of this systematic maltreatment of women (Inglis, 2005; Inglis and MacKeogh, 2012). Inglis and MacKeogh (2012) note that, despite some waning of the Church's influence, its long domination has left deep and enduring scars.

Although the country has undergone significant social and economic shifts in recent decades (for example, achieving equal marriage in 2015), restrictions on reproductive rights remain the stronghold of a patriarchal, punitive and largely Catholic state. Such ideology is enshrined in the Irish Constitution, which since 1983 has endowed the foetus with the same rights as those of the pregnant person, charging the state with the vindication of the foetus' rights. In practice, 'vindication' sanctioned, among other things, a court injunction in 1992, which forced an underage victim of rape, whose family had taken her to the UK for an abortion, to return to Ireland (known as the X-case). This court injunction was challenged on the grounds that the fourteen-year-old was suicidal as a result of the pregnancy. Although the Supreme Court ruling following the X-case asserted that suicide counted as a threat to life, this was not enacted in law until 2013 under The Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2013). Notably, this Act also put in place a fourteen-year prison sentence for those who have an abortion illegally in the Republic. Despite the outlawing of interference in travel to another jurisdiction for an abortion or the provision of information about services in another state, the tentacles of the Eighth Amendment have continued to expand. In October 2012, a miscarriage was not medically assisted because of the presence of a foetal heartbeat, so risking the development of septicaemia, which resulted in the death of Savita Halappanavar. In 2014, a suicidal and clearly vulnerable asylum seeker, pregnant as a result of rape, was cajoled into agreeing to a caesarian section. Later in the same year, doctors cited the Eighth Amendment as the reason that a dead woman, who had been seventeen weeks pregnant, was kept on a life support machine until the courts ruled that the machine could be turned off (Carolan, 2014). In October 2016, the Health and Safety Executive tried – again citing the amendment – but failed, in a legal action to force a third-time mother to deliver by caesarean section.

In March 2015, Speaking of IMELDA humorously intervened in the London St. Patrick's Day Parade. This intervention into a long-established cultural event for the Irish diaspora, as well as Londoners and visitors to the city, proved a radical articulation of the presence of the issue of Ireland making England the legal destination for abortion. It also acted as a symbolic challenge to the Catholic Church and the patriarchal culture underpinning it. A twelve-foot puppet of St. Patrick, the first bishop of Ireland, garbed in green with his staff and mitre is rolled out annually in the London parade and in 2015 was greeted by a fleet of IMELDAs wearing red mitres and cloaks, as if female bishops had been permitted by the Catholic Church, and shouting 'down with Patrick-archy!' and 'stop in the name of choice!' (IMELDA disrupts the St. Patrick's Day Parade, 2015). Catholic ideologies, which seek to moralise individual choices, stretch far wider than Ireland alone. In September 2015, Pope Francis announced in a public letter that, between 8 December 2015 and 6 November 2016, absolution would be offered to women who have had abortions, so long as they expressed remorse and sought forgiveness from a priest (Kirchgaessner, 2015). The interpretation of abortion as a sin that needs to be forgiven is emblematic of Catholic ideology, where the shame lies not only in the act itself, but in failing to properly conceal it and show remorse (Inglis and MacKeogh, 2012).

IMELDA reacted to the papal comments at a 2015 nationwide pro-choice march in Dublin. Dressed as bishops once again and reading from 'the word', we sharply contradicted the Pope's language and message. Definitively counteracting the hypocrisy that cloaked the papal comments, the speech linked the statement from the Vatican to the hypocrisy of the Irish government in maintaining Ireland's abortion-free character and offering the right to travel as a substandard concession. IMELDA's pro-choice bishops drew upon Ireland's troubled history, identifying the country's lack of reproductive rights as emblematic of the systematic punishment of women, which has been a feature of the State since its conception. The speech was definitive in its proclamation: 'We do not need phoney concessions



or absolution from those who have enacted such brutal misogyny against women in Ireland historically' (Solidarity Times, 2015). Here, we emphasised the autonomy vested within Irish people, acknowledging the moral agency they held over their own bodies.

These actions are particularly radical in the context of Ireland's blasphemy law. Introduced in 2009, the Defamation Act carries a penalty of up to €25,000 for anyone who 'publishes or utters blasphemous matter' in a manner intended to cause 'outrage' (Irish Statute Book, 2009). IMELDA has directly challenged this law through highlighting the hypocrisy and misogyny inherent in the Irish Church and state, both from their base in London and – importantly – at home on Irish soil. In doing so, in relation to the country's archaic abortion regime, IMELDA offers a double challenge to church and state. Embodying a dissonant voice which speaks of the oft-silenced reality of Irish abortions, we offer compassion to those who themselves have felt symbolically bound by Church and state. Similarly, in playing with the ritual emigrants return to Ireland each Christmas, we raise concerns for those forced to travel for abortions.

In 2014, we travelled by train and boat to Ireland, offering sups of choice from teapots to fellow travellers reminiscent of the housekeeper Mrs Doyle in the well-known television series *Father Ted* (A Sup of Choice for Christmas?, 2014). In Dublin, we made our arrival known by hanging a huge pair of knickers outside Dáil Éireann (Irish Assembly), carrying the message 'women are not breeding machines'. This referenced the aforementioned case of the clinically dead pregnant woman, who was being kept on life support, against her family's wishes. In 2015, we strolled around Dublin airport in our red costumes, dressed as nativity-play angels, complete with red-tinselled halos. Holding up a sign that said 'Welcome Home IMELDA', we drew attention to the fact that some of the arrivals would be returning from having an abortion abroad, with resentment rather than love in their hearts for 'the old sod'. The disruption of tradition continued with the placing of a miniature model of a Christmas angel decoration disguised as an abortion seeker with her trademark red suitcase, into the airport's Christmas crib. To ensure that the state would know that offence was intended, we tied tampons dipped in red ink, to simulate menstruation, to O'Connell Street's Christmas tree – a centrepiece of Dublin's festivities – and rounded off our return with a rendition of pro-choice carols under the iconic Clery's clock in collaboration with local pro-choice activists (IMELDA in collaboration with the Choicemas Carol Singers, 2015).

### ***'We are not second-class citizens left to rot:' Challenging Restrictions on Abortion in Northern Ireland***

Although it is the Catholic Church specifically which is credited with upholding cultures of shame, secrecy and repressed sexuality in Ireland, its underlying teachings mirror closely those of other Christian faiths. This is borne out in the Northern Irish context, where both Catholic and Protestant regimes conspire to keep abortion illegal (Fletcher, 2001). Indeed, the teachings of the Catholic Church in Ireland are emblematic of those of the Protestant faith in Victorian England where women were expected to adhere to a higher moral code than their male counterparts (Rowbotham, 1989; Inglis, 2005). Almost half of the population of Northern Ireland describe themselves as Protestant, Presbyterians being the largest group, followed by Anglicans (Church of Ireland founded by Henry VIII in 1537), Methodists and small sects such as Assemblies of God and the Plymouth Brethren. This identification with Protestantism holds, even where significant minorities are not churchgoers and, indeed, may well be atheist or agnostic. The conflation of ethnic identity with a religious affiliation is the product of a political history stretching back to the Plantation (organised colonisation) of Ulster in the early seventeenth century and the establishment of a Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland,

thanks to the victory of the Protestant King William of Orange at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. Archaic as these events may now seem, they nonetheless set in train an enduring belief system asserting Protestantism's theological and moral superiority over Catholicism, a linking of Protestantism with Unionism (union with the British Crown and Empire), a bulwark against Catholicism, and an imperative to safeguard the union. The construction of political allegiances around religious identity has strengthened the power (paralleled in the Catholic/nationalist community) of the Protestant Churches' promotion of conservative views on social issues, particularly in relation to the family, the role of women in society, sexuality and reproductive rights. Furthermore, the Protestant Churches are integrated into the fabric of society through the clergy's involvement in secular life, whether at the social, personal or community level. As Rosemary Sales (1999, p. 141) points out, this close ethnopolitical association makes dissent a difficult prospect for many Protestants, believers and non-believers alike for fear of being seen as 'disloyal' to their community. Interestingly, opposition to abortion and gay rights has been one of the few areas of agreement between politicians and clergy across both Protestant/unionist and Catholic/nationalist communities and traditions.

Currently in Northern Ireland, abortion can only be obtained if a doctor acts 'only to save the life of the mother' or if continuing the pregnancy would result in the pregnant woman becoming a 'physical or mental wreck' (Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, 2015). Very few people are referred to have an abortion in Northern Ireland (Jowit, 2016). Most people needing an abortion travel to England and have to pay privately as they cannot obtain it on the NHS. However, due to the fear and confusion surrounding the wording of existing abortion legislation, alongside the hostile political environment, doctors and health professionals are entirely unsure as to how they can advise people needing abortions without facing prosecution themselves for doing so. For instance, Section 58 of the 1861 Offences Against the Persons Act, on 'the offence of using drugs or instruments to procure abortion', states:

Every woman being with child, who, with intent to procure her own miscarriage, shall unlawfully administer to herself any poison or other noxious thing, or shall unlawfully use any instrument or other means whatsoever with the like intent, and who-soever, with intent to procure the miscarriage of any woman whether she be or be not with child ... to be kept in penal servitude for life. (Offences Against the Person Act 1861, The National Archives)

The consequences of these laws were recently demonstrated, resulting in the prosecution of a young woman in Northern Ireland for taking the abortion pill in April 2016. The woman was given a three-month sentence (suspended for a year) for accessing medication that is approved by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and freely available to other women in the UK on the NHS. This woman could not afford to travel outside of Northern Ireland to access safe and legal abortion services and was reported to the police by her housemates because they felt that she was not 'remorseful' enough (McDonald, 2016). Since then, another woman who had been committed to stand trial for obtaining the abortion pill for her fifteen-year-old daughter because she could not afford to pay for a flight and private abortion won the right to contest the decision to prosecute her (Gentleman, 2016). Were she to be prosecuted, she could face life in jail if the judge has a strong anti-choice stance. It is interesting to note that abortion cases are tried as serious criminal cases similar to murder and are heard on indictment at the Crown Court. This indictment permits the judge wider discretion in sentencing, which can be anything from life in jail to a suspended sentence.

In response to the prosecution of the aforementioned woman who received the three-month suspended sentence, we created and filmed the action, *Game of Shame*. Taking the format of a game show, the *Game of Shame* demonstrated how the current law targets the most vulnerable in Northern Irish society, particularly those who cannot afford to travel to access safe and legal abortion services or those who are not permitted to travel due to their residency status. The interactions between the contestants and game show host hold a mirror up to the lack of concern for women's welfare and human rights both within the current law and the actions of those who push for increased sentencing of women. The *Game of Shame* loudly declares the right of women to have agency over their own bodies and to be fully supported in making reproductive choices without moral condemnation (*Game of Shame*, 2015). In 2016, we attended the first Rally for Choice in Belfast to stand in solidarity with activists resident in Northern Ireland. Dressed as super 'sheros', we delivered a speech praising Diana King, Colette Devlin and Kitty O'Kane, also known as the 'Derry Three' (Solidarity Times, 2016). In opposition to recent prosecutions, the 'Derry Three' handed themselves in to the police for procuring the abortion pill.

As a diasporic voice, *Speaking of IMELDA* also seeks to raise consciousness in Britain of the plight of Northern Irish women. In May 2014, we paid an uninvited visit to the Secretary of State for Health, Jeremy Hunt. Turning up unexpectedly to his advice surgery at a Sainsbury's supermarket in Farnham, we offered Mr Hunt advice on legislation change (*Speaking of IMELDA with Jeremy Hunt*, 2014). We consulted with a lawyer who informed us that a slight legislation change would at least allow women in Northern Ireland to have an abortion on the NHS in England or Scotland rather than having to pay privately. During this action, we presented Mr Hunt with bitten red apples with messages attached concerning the travesty of justice impacting on Northern Irish women. Mr Hunt stuck to the line that abortion is a devolved issue (under the control of Northern Irish Assembly and not the Westminster Parliament).

In 2015, we raised awareness of the situation faced by women in Northern Ireland at the Women of the World (WOW) Festival in London. We were not there as official participants but as Jude Kelly, the founder of WOW, asks people to be activists each year at this festival, we did not think she would mind our pop-up action. We were right: the festival staff even provided us with a microphone and amp. We performed a *Political Pageant* with entrants from England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Entrants were judged on their access to reproductive care. Symbols from all countries adorned the entrants' costumes (Imelda Pageant 8 March, 2015). Of course, the Northern Irish entrant, wearing a necklace made of cut-out green shamrocks and red hands of Ulster, lost the political pageant. She subsequently marched around the group in a rage banging her drum (reminiscent of the Orange Marching Parades in Northern Ireland), using Virgin Mary bottles as drum sticks (a reference to Catholicism), chanting 'we are not, we are not, second class citizens left to rot'.

### **Reframing Femininity: Loose Methods and Loose Women**

*Speaking of IMELDA* uses direct action and performance as an embodied method of provoking pro-choice discourse in the public realm. We aim to bring the often silenced, but very real issues impacting on women in Ireland into the public domain, thus challenging the institutional confines that maintain these silences. In our campaign video *The Quiet Woman* (2014), we challenged the valorisation of motherhood within marriage and domesticity as the primary roles for women (as enshrined in Article 41.2 of the Irish Constitution), by playfully subverting the domesticated submissiveness of a character played by Irish actress,

Maureen O'Hara, in the 1950s film *The Quiet Man* (Ford, 1952). In the video, we appear dressed in our trademark red clothing, each wearing a headscarf and sunglasses, simultaneously referencing a 50s glamour-puss, a washerwoman and a revolutionary in disguise. We then strung a washing line of knickers up in front of the Irish Embassy building in London and polished the building with the knickers, all of which were decorated with pro-choice slogans. The low-paid worker has been the valorised identity of the Irish in Britain, and in this action, we made visible the vast numbers of Irish women engaged in domestic work in Britain until the late twentieth century. The earthiness of the washerwoman, with her rolled-up sleeves, metaphorically cleaning Ireland's dirty secrets, while signalling her disgust and contempt, poses a stark challenge to the shame heaped on women who were victimised for pregnancy, poverty, sexuality and vulnerability in both Irish states. A group of IMELDA washerwomen were photographed with Panti Bliss, the iconic Irish drag artist, prior to the same-sex marriage referendum in Ireland. This act of mutual solidarity forged a new image of how 'femininity' might be reframed outside of current patriarchal norms. Indeed, our 'knicker-bombing' of the Irish Taoiseach Enda Kenny provides an apt example of our refusal to comply with patriarchal ideals of femininity. Interrupting the Taoiseach's party fundraiser at the Crown Moran Hotel in London in 2014, we landed a pair of 'knickers for choice' bearing the slogan 'Repeal the 8th Enda' on his dinner plate (Irish Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, served pro-choice knickers at fundraising dinner, 2014).

Our use of performance has been recognised as feminist Live Art practice and featured at Live Art events, for example, alongside *Are We There Yet?: Study Room Guide on Live Art and Feminism* by the Live Art Development Agency (LADA), London (LADA, 2015) and in the online exhibition, *Live Art and Feminism in the UK*, curated by LADA (2015) for the Google Cultural Institute. The subversions of domesticity and patriarchal constructions of femininity apparent within our actions are reminiscent of the aesthetics and strategies used by feminist artists such as Martha Rosler and Bobby Baker, among many others. Lois Keidan (2016, 'What Is Live Art?'), Director of the LADA, London, notes that 'Live Art is not a description of an art form or discipline, but a cultural strategy to include experimental processes and experiential practices'. She situates Live Artists as operating 'in between, and at the edges of more traditional artistic forms' (2016). Most certainly, our approach to performance is experimental and situated at the periphery of more traditional practice. We employ various methods of performance and theatre in our direct actions. For instance, in the spirit of Invisible Theatre as developed by Augusto Boal where interaction lies in improvised public action, we interjected in the London St. Patrick's Day Parade (St. Patrick's Day London, 2014) acting as women who had travelled from Ireland and asked bystanders the way to the nearest abortion clinic. Influenced by live artists, performance artists from the 1960s and the Situationists, who sought to break free of institutional confines and merge art with life, we are equally interventionist in our use of direct action. We are inspired by the aesthetics of performance-based activists, such as Pussy Riot, Sisters Uncut, Liberate Tate and the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army. We not only perform *in* the public sphere; we actively engage *with* situations as an interventionist strategy. In turn, the actual world also intervenes and meets with our actions. Once we are in a situation, we improvise in the moment, responding to the inter-group dynamic and the inter-social dynamic with the people around us.

We use edited video of our public interventions as a means to heighten our impact, circumvent male-stream media and share our actions more widely. We equally use video as a means of sharing strategies and methods that enable those, who might not be in a position to be vocally pro-choice, to voice their dissent. For instance, *The Quiet Woman* video invites

wider participation by encouraging people to decorate knickers with pro-choice slogans and hang them up in public. Our cheap and cheerful, 'loose' and 'DIO (Do It Ourselves)' aesthetics can be replicated and improvised by others.

The concept of 'looseness' has several connotations within the methods and aesthetics of Speaking of IMELDA. Our actions are loosely planned and improvised within their moment. The term 'Loose Theatre' is used by Margaretta D'Arcy (2005) to refer to her lifelong work as a 'guerrilla theatre activist'. In an article written by Speaking of IMELDA (2015) for *Contemporary Theatre Review*, we situated our activism within the lineage of D'Arcy's work, alongside the work of first-wave feminist activists in an Irish context, such as the women involved in the 1916 Rising and the Irish suffragettes. The term 'loose' is also used by Maggie B. Gale (2015) to refer to examples of 'women's protest performance'. Gale examines the 'gestural potential of women's activist bodies as occurring in public spaces in which those bodies are not socially, politically, or economically equal' (Gale, 2015: 313). Drawing on Sandra Lee Bartky's concept of the 'loose woman', Gale outlines 'the performative activism of "loose" women' as at once enabling a violation and affirmation of 'social constructions and projections of "normative" femininity' (Gale, 2015: 314).

In parodying the cultural constructions of a domesticated submissive femininity, Speaking of IMELDA, on the one hand, highlights these stereotypical ideals. On the other hand, in our loose formations, aesthetics and diversity, we simultaneously transgress and unsettle these oppressive social constructions. A loose woman has been used as a pejorative criticism – we reclaim it as free and liberatory in a similar sense to the way 'The Slut Walk' protests appropriated the derogatory labels applied to women to subvert the oppressive power of these judgements. We enjoy the association of 'loose women' and revel in subverting it to our advantage. This is evident in our Rogue Rose of Tralee action (2015) in which Speaking of IMELDA parodied the format of the annual *Rose of Tralee* pageant on the streets of Tralee, an action that ran synchronically to the main festival. The festival started in 1959 to bring Irish immigrants back to Ireland and to support tourism in the rural area of Tralee. Focused on beauty and personality, female contestants are attended by male escorts who vouch for their virtue and personality. In our version, similar to the action we performed at the WOW Festival, the winners were those who lived in countries with the best reproductive healthcare services. Ms Northern Ireland and Ms Republic of Ireland were the tragic losers, deprived of the reproductive choices available to their sisters living abroad. The action was reported by national broadsheet, the *Irish Times*, which understood Speaking of IMELDA's playful subversion of national cultural institutions that proliferate patriarchal images of women (McTiernan, 2015). On the other hand, the action also showed how national nostalgia in diasporic communities is a yearning for the past, which is often at odds with the contemporary and future needs of Irish women. As such, our 'rogue roses' not only parodied the construct of the hyper-feminine 'lovely girl', but also transcended accepted norms by speaking out about the lack of reproductive rights afforded to women across the island of Ireland (Rogue Rose of Tralee, 2015).

The extent to which women are publicly policed was made apparent a year after our action, when the Sydney Rose Brianna Parkins used her onstage interview in the 2016 pageant to call for a referendum on the repeal of the Eighth Amendment, while wearing a red dress. While her intervention was applauded by many, it was, predictably, criticised for politicising this harmless 'much-loved' ritual. Similarly, Speaking of IMELDA is often told in response to our performances that 'it is not the time or the place' to speak of abortion. While we employ humour, parody and satire in our arsenal of 'loose methods', we are also proud to be spoilsports, or killjoys to use the term as Sara Ahmed defines it in 'Living in a Feminist Life' (2010). For Ahmed, the killjoy is the one who speaks out and upsets the apparent acceptance

of the status quo. She is following the advice of Audre Lorde, who warned that ‘your silence will not protect you’ (Lorde, 1977 paper in *Sister Outsider*, 2007: 41), a pertinent reminder to Irish women that the worst has already been inflicted on them and that speaking up can hardly make matters any worse. Speaking of IMEDLA are killjoys just as Pussy Riot, the Guerrilla Girls, Sisters Uncut, Black Lives Matter and Liberate Tate are. We speak up, we speak out, we break the silence and we invite others to do so too.

Writing of the Rose of Tralee Festival and the now (thankfully) defunct annual pageant, the *Calor Housewife of the Year*, Fintan Walsh, outlines the production of a ‘homelysexuality’, a domesticated, tempered femininity, which constitutes a ‘female sexual accent in particular, emptied of depth, eroticism or even what might be understood as subjectivity’ (Walsh, 2009: 206). Within our public performances, we aim to unsettle domesticated femininity. We do this by maintaining space for the diverse individual identities, sexualities, aesthetics and styles of group members to shine through. We purposely draw on the eclectic, intergenerational and intersectional mix of women in our group. While we wear red in our performances, members of the group self-fashion their red clothes in accordance with their own taste and style. All of our actions are devised collectively in group sessions, drawing on the expertise and, importantly, identities, of group members. Above all, Speaking of IMELDA celebrates the collectivity of women coming together.

### **Monuments of the Past and Future: Intervening between Politics and Culture**

The collective and collaborative working practices established by Speaking of IMELDA, alongside our refusal to quietly disappear into the diasporic ether, offer a retort to the Irish state’s persistent attempts to exclude women from having agency within political and cultural spheres. Describing the lack of a participative class within Irish political spheres, Michael D. Higgins responded presciently to the Finance Bill 2011 in the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament) paraphrasing the political scientist, Jürgen Habermas, ‘really you can’t invite people to be bound by rules and bound by decisions in which they haven’t had a chance to consciously participate’ (Higgins, 2011). Indicating the historical emergence of the Irish Republic in 1922 as a socialist revolutionary project as much as a project for independence from the British colonial rule, Higgins stated his disappointment between what the manifesto for Irish freedom, *Poblacht na hÉireann*, proclaimed and how those liberties have been upheld:

I feel that those who wanted Ireland to be independent would have envisaged a country in which there would be far greater distribution of power, that it wouldn’t just be confined to the exercise of parliamentary democracy only. There is more to political power than voting once every four or five years. There is the exercise of power in every dimension of life and if a real republic had been founded, we should have been spending decades extending and deepening political power (2011).

Further on and with specific reference to the Global Financial Crisis, Higgins declared in this, his final parliamentary speech before successfully running for the office of President, that ‘an enormous price is now already being paid for the broken connection between the aspirations of the people of this planet and those who take decisions on their behalf’ (2011). Indeed, since 2011, the Irish Republic has witnessed a rise in cultures of dissent, from protests against the privatisation of water and the emergence of left-wing groups such as *People before Profit* to the growing social movement for reproductive justice. In identifying how

the state was not operating dialectically with disenchanted public spheres, Higgins confessed that administrative power was a kind of rarefied and hegemonic apparatus.

In 2014, after Higgins had become the President of Ireland, he made the first official Irish state visit to the UK. This opened an opportunity for Speaking of IMELDA to highlight how Ireland was making England the legal destination for abortion. The IMELDAs fretted about staging an intervention that would face off with the most symbolically powerful representative in Ireland. Higgins was respected in the group and had championed the reproductive rights of women in Ireland. However, in his role as the President, he could not be politically partisan. Additionally, as the symbolic head of the Irish state, the President represented national values that strategically needed to be challenged. We mapped his itinerary, dressed in our traditional red and protested outside his appointments at the Irish Embassy and a festival gala at the Royal Albert Hall in April 2014 (Irish Embassy, 8 April 2014). Inserting the unspoken arrangements on abortion into the first ever official Irish state visit to Britain felt risky at the time. The visit was seen in the Republic of Ireland as a coming of age in the relationship between the former colony and the colonising power. Speaking of IMELDA was therefore a cause of embarrassment to the Irish state and its reputation abroad and this action was largely repressed by the mainstream media but reported briefly by RTE (the Irish National Broadcaster) and the *Journal* (an online Irish newspaper). These tactics set Speaking of IMELDA up as a 'counter public' (Warner, 2002) that tackled the political administration on how Irish cultural values regarding women were reproduced. Ironically, in achieving the participative effects invoked by Higgins in his appeal for the emergence of public spheres, Higgins became the symbolic object of contestation.

Thereafter, Speaking of IMELDA began to contest cultural institutions and monuments in which we could physically trace the symbolic reproduction of androcentric attitudes and highlight how the symbolism of these institutions led to a hegemonic subjugation of women. Examples of such institutions – as explored earlier – were the *Rose of Tralee* festival for 'comely maidens' of Irish descent and the annual St. Patrick's Day Parade in London, an event heavily frequented by the Irish diaspora. Yet another was the 100-year commemoration of the 1916 Easter Rising which historically led to the emancipation of Ireland from Britain, and in which the original revolutionaries envisaged a state where women were equal. These institutions enact Irish popular culture at a liberal arm's length from the state but work to enculturate the following Irish values: the domesticated Irish female, favour for religious patriarchies whose 'moral cruelty' (Haughton and Kurdi, 2015) has punished Irish women and the Irish nation's manifesto for self-governance while forfeiting any inclusion of female participation in power. These events were intuitive interventions for Speaking of IMELDA where the cultural norms of Irish life could be publicly examined both within our country of origin (as in actions at the *Rose of Tralee Festival* and at the GPO building in Dublin) and outside it, in our adopted nation (London St. Patrick's Day celebrations, 2014, 2015, 2016). By broaching Ireland making England the legal destination for abortion as a discussion point at public cultural occasions, we demonstrate how gender is usually erased as a concern in Irish public spheres. In doing so, we conceivably critique models of public spheres as un-gendered, recognising Nancy Fraser's insights that the 'gender subtext' for Habermas' reading of public spheres is 'unthematized' (Fraser, 2013: 34).

IMELDA's interventions interrogate Irish culture and how it represents itself in terms of gender. We leverage cultural production for political ends: our cultural tactics interfere with the representational logics of mainstream institutions by aiming to create cultural shifts in popular opinion that may lead to legislative and political changes. Our work appears in popular culture where an alternative expectation for Irish society and the explicit hope for

the repeal of the Eighth amendment can be shared with a broad public base. This is how we view the intersections of culture and politics, aligning ourselves with Rancière who states that a ‘community of sense woven together by artistic practice is a new set of vibrations of the human community in the present; on the other hand, it is a monument that stands as a mediation or a substitute for a people to come’ (Rancière, 2009: 59).

Attending to the actual monuments of the past and their capacity to mediate people to come, our Easter 2015 action focused on Poblacht na hÉireann, the manifesto of Irish freedom delivered at the General Post Office (GPO) in Dublin in 1916, the headquarters of the Easter Rising. Rearticulating the contents of the document to account for female bodily autonomy, Speaking of IMELDA performed in chains around one of the columns of the GPO, costumed in the era of 1916 (Imelda chains herself to the G.P.O., 2015). The imagery evoked the original socialist revolutionary claims for equality expressed in Poblacht na hÉireann, but the action also took the notion of the monument literally by restaging a revolutionary proclamation at the very site in which Irish national values were inaugurated 100 years earlier. Echoing Higgins’ disappointment in the republic and acknowledging that monuments are an embodiment of the future to come, IMELDA aimed to show the contradictory relationship between monumentalised past hopes and present disappointments. In this way, one of IMELDA’s cultural functions is to propose a realignment in the Irish Republic to its originating principle that women are embraced equally. We situate our art activism as a proposition for a ‘people to come’ and as a ‘monument to its expectation, a monument to its absence’ (Rancière, 2009: 59).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated the vital role that feminist diasporic collectives such as Speaking of IMELDA play in disrupting dominant patriarchal codes – both at home and in their adopted nations. Being ‘set loose’, so to speak, in another jurisdiction has emboldened us with greater freedom to act as radical members of the Irish diaspora and directly expose the misogynistic norms of our home country to a new audience, in our trademark imprecise and liberated style. Acting as one of many diasporic feminist collectives in England (both throughout history and from across the globe), our actions challenge the ongoing issue of Ireland making England the legal destination for abortion, while also highlighting the broader pattern of maltreatment perpetuated against women by the Irish state. By nodding to radical diasporic networks of the past (such as the IWASG), we maintain steady traditions of diasporic activism in protesting the continued denial of bodily autonomy across the island of Ireland.

Our loose and experimental methods challenge some of the silences that surround abortion in Ireland through brazenly subverting public spaces and traditional feminine identities to make known the plight of Irish women. By intruding into areas and in forms that are traditionally unwelcome in patriarchal structures, we give voice to – and indeed embody – our dissatisfaction and broadcast the stark realities of the privileging of the unborn above the living woman to a wider populace. Our style of action is radical in its demanding of a response and forces situations to mould and engage with our interventions, in turn, enabling us to respond and adapt to the situation and drive issues forward to new terrain. We engage dissonant voices further afield through our employment of ‘do it yourself’ aesthetics in a manner which extends the reach of our message far beyond the boundaries of our home and adopted nations.

Although aesthetically loose, the dangerous relationship between church and state for women’s autonomy is a prevailing theme in our radicalism. Our engagement with, and



consistent confrontation of, religious symbolism in our performances serves to assert directly the role that both Catholic and Protestant institutions have had in policing female sexuality both North and South of the Irish border as well as internationally. Our all-island radicalism has equally brought us into direct combat with statespersons both in Ireland and the UK, and provided us with important opportunities to provoke those in positions of authority and assert the rights of people across Ireland. We recognise and welcome our place in broader channels of pro-choice and diasporic radicalism. By acting in solidarity with groups from Poland, Spain, Central America and elsewhere, as well as engaging with others fighting for bodily autonomy across Ireland and in the UK, we further the goals of radical feminist activism, by extending the struggle for reproductive rights into broader global focus and boldly asserting the power of female agency and action.

### **Final Note**

Some advances in reproductive rights in Ireland have been made in the period between the drafting of this chapter and its publication. Following the June 2017 General Election in the UK, the Government's very narrow majority was threatened when some Conservative MPs announced that they would support an amendment to the Finance Bill by Labour MP, Stella Creasy, calling for access to NHS abortions for NI residents. The Government introduced a means-tested travel grant and access to free abortion for women travelling to Great Britain for terminations.

The law on the importation of abortion medication to NI has not changed.

Following a referendum in Ireland on 25th May, 2018, in which two thirds of the electorate voted to abolish the eighth Amendment, the right to abortion in the first twelve weeks of pregnancy, for any reason, became legal in the Irish Republic on 1st January 2019. The enabling legislation also repealed the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act (2013).

In April 2018, *Speaking of IMELDA* went on a Referendum Road Trip in the South West and West of Ireland, performing alongside sixty five local activists, singers, songwriters and film makers working for repeal. Four films recording these encounters reflecting the deep and broad cultural change that was manifested in the referendum result are on our website at [www.speakingofimelda.org/referendum](http://www.speakingofimelda.org/referendum).

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