

On Not Being The Protagonists



This is a piece about 'australian' anti-fascism and why I don't see a way out of this mess. I am writing this as someone who has made major life changes to be part of the struggle against fascism. I mention this, not because personal history renders any positions I might take more 'correct' – 'I was there at X protest/battle/confrontation, therefore I'm right!' is a pernicious form of idpol that's distressingly common (and frankly annoying) amongst anti-fascists. Rather I want to affirm the seriousness of what's at stake as well as my love and respect for those who treat it with the weight it deserves, even where I think they're incorrect.

Fascism is an outgrowth of colonialism and imperialism. It is intrinsic to white/ Western civilisation, not external to it. These statements are so obviously true as to be barely worth articulating. I could rehash the old arguments, the imperial boomerang, zines and treatises from here and the 'US' and Turtle Island, writers and martyrs from Cesaire to George Jackson to Lorenzo Ervin to Keiran Stewart-Assheton... but why bother? These concepts have already been affirmed and verified by literally generations of de-colonial comrades. Even now, I regularly see them shared and circulated round organising circles in Naarm of which I am a part, without the substantive meaning ever getting integrated into people's practical ways of being or of doing politics.

The priority, if not the entirety, of anti-fascist praxis continues to be centred on *at best* mostly white-on-white street confrontations (which are themselves a step up from liberal cop-collaboration). Community defence or self-defence – practical interventions to empower and support those targetted by fascism in day to day life – are not on the agenda. When the NSN show up at a symbol of the 'australian' state, i.e., parliament steps, everyone acts like it's URGENT! Which, sure, it's bad. But how much energy goes into this compared to, say, the physical defence of First Nations or non-white peoples against cops and racist vigilantes?

Obviously it's good to physically confront fascists, and even better that some anti-fascists have had a go at cops in the process. No principled person should have time for the counter-insurgents suggesting otherwise. Yet these confrontations *only* seem to happen in response to fash rallies – not the everyday violence of the colony that actually deports migrants, snatches First Nations children, represses and kills people. It's hard not to feel like the priority is some kind of purification or redemption of 'australia', rather than the defence of people actually under attack from fascism. Anti-colonialism exists in the form of lip-service or idpol-deference to First Nations liberals (or the white people who have inveigled themselves into proximity), while anti-imperialism barely exists at all.

The NSN attack on Camp Sovereignty and subsequent 'anti-fascist' responses showcased this dynamic well (badly). On August 31, anti-fascists launched physical attacks on fash March for Australia attendees from Camp Sov – a commendable goal, but no-one thought to be ready to defend the site in case of backlash. Predictably, the NSN arrived some hours later and beat people up. Subsequently and in response to a callout from the Black Peoples Union, volunteers arrived and set up an overnight 'spotters' roster to protect Camp. They received mixed directions from Mob on-site (as well as non-Mob who'd self appointed as leaders, including a white guy who described the source of his authority as 'the gestalt') – whether to punch on in case of attack or remain 'peaceful'.

In the end, these differences were moot. Vicpol were patrolling the camp's outskirts and Mob at Camp chose to work with the police. It's hard to blame them – a lot of 'spotting' activity seemed to consist of people working themselves into a state of fear over totally normal aspects of city life, including the presence of a homeless guy, a personal trainer and, most hilariously, someone dressed in 'black bloc' i.e. black. (We live in Naarm...) I'm not trying to have a go – well, just a little – those who came gave up their time and some comfort with the intent of protecting Mob from racist violence. I'm just pointing out that if this is the level of autonomous security apparatus we are able to offer, it's hardly surprising when Mob turn to the cops, a sick cycle reinscribing those cops' violent control over Black and non-Black life.

It's also worth noting that while the 'March for Australia' rallies were described by their organisers and attendees as protests against non-white immigration, there was little discussion from anti-fascists about how to support migrants who are under attack from state and extra-state fascism – fighting against immigration raids, for example. Nor does migration *as an outgrowth of imperialism* seem to figure in most people's consciousness at all. This isn't meant to be another screed about the pitfalls of the white, anarchist left, certain elements of which I think as principled or even heroic as anyone in the imperial core. If they don't, for the most part, know anything about racism, there's no reason why they should, especially when the whole apparatus of Eurocentric propaganda conspires to keep them ignorant. And frankly, the failure of POC radicals to build our own base who could intuitively understand these issues and act on them – that's on us, not them. Seeing how diaspora organising circles have (not) mounted militant solidarity with Palestine does not put me in a mood to be throwing stones.

The whites keep circling the drain of their whiteness; the migrants are too busy chasing upward mobility in a settler-state to consider risking that progression, even in the face of genocide. So why keep talking?

If there's something new going on, it's the question of why we are experiencing intensifying fascism right at this moment. I personally believe it is about declining US-hegemony and the transition to a new world order. The decline will be chaotic and could take a while, but it's happening. Here is a quote from Mousa Abu Marzouk, the Hamas negotiator:

I believe that in stopping the genocide, there is a responsibility on the Arabs and Muslims. As for them not fighting Israel—I'll speak frankly here. When the Arabs became friends with America, especially in Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Qatar, Jordan—and now Syria is on the way—the main weapons of those armies became American weapon. American weapons are also present in Israel. ... How can these U.S.-friendly states that possess American weapons confront Israeli aggression when their defenses cannot engage Israeli aircraft? Here a great responsibility lies with the United States: to protect its allies and friends in the region, or the Arabs will find another path.

I think the Pakistan lesson for America on the world map is clear: when the U.S. failed to resolve the problem between India and Pakistan and placed restrictions on Pakistan, Pakistan turned to China. It turned out China has weapons that surpass the American or Russian weapons that India had. Pakistan ended the battle within hours with Chinese air power and air defenses. Consequently, the Arabs will find themselves looking for a third option.

'Looking for a third option'. He's talking about the military dimension, but you could look at it economically as well. Not that the two are unrelated. The 800-ish US military bases worldwide are not *not* related to the favourable terms of trade enjoyed by the US, 'australia' and its allies in the Global North, whose peoples do 10% of the labour in the world economy but receive an estimated 79% of [global income](#). What's that about the working class?

We can talk all day about whether China (or BRICS) are 'good' or 'bad'. It doesn't matter, and tbh, I think the fixation on these judgements is an outgrowth of imperial narcissism – the idea what we think or feel inside just inherently has some kind of significance, some material force. We're used to thinking our opinions are important because of, well, all those military bases – the whole world reconfigured to keep the Western masses comfortable (enough). Class conflict gets exported to Global South, so you can buy your bananas at 7-11 365 days per year. Well, that is changing and that is going to visibilise things that were previously conveniently avoided.

Imperialism... I get the sense that for a lot of people this means, 'it is bad to bomb brown children'. *Why* the bombing happens, the connection with our way of life, is almost totally obscured. Migrants come 'looking for a

better life' from countries that just happen to be poorer than ours... I have lost count of the times I have seen some leftist say something like, 'healthcare not bombs'. Where did universal healthcare in the West come from if not the wholesale bombing of places like Malaya, communist and anti-colonial movements destroyed so that liberal-socialists and their preferred trading partners could build up their precious welfare states?

Imperialism divides the world into rich and poor and migration is the human expression of that division. 'We are here because you were there.' Now the ability of the US-led West to bomb whoever the fuck they want and take whatever the fuck they want is in decline, not to mention climate change, and people – by which I mean (mostly) white settlers in 'australia' – know what this means for them. They might not know the particulars, but they understand an approaching transition from a world that is ordered by force on their behalf to one that is not. It's terrifying! That's why they're lining up with seigheiling Tom Sewell on the Parliament steps.

Whether these developments change our lives is not a choice. Whether they change the character of our political movements, is. I think things have to change if we are to dwell in reality and therefore have some prospect of shaping it.

In terms of 'what is to be done', I don't know and nor does anyone really (unless you've lived through a warring states period at the same time as catastrophic ecological breakdown). What I do feel sure is that it's not about us, it's about the wretched of the earth. Some of them are here in First Nations or non-citizen migrant communities, but most are not. They're in the Global South and if anyone will make revolution, it's them. Obviously I'm thinking about Palestine, but also, if the decolonisation of 'australia' ever happens, it's not going to be because the settler-state found a conscience or because settlers (in large numbers) renounce the privileges they get from colonial occupation. It's going to be because regional decolonial struggles from Kanaky to West Papua, as well as a changing balance of power in the Asia-Pacific, open up opportunities for those First Nations people who are ready to take their chance.

This is not an invitation for privileged settlers of any colour to tap out and let oppressed peoples take all the risks and do the dying. That's opportunistic and gross. It's also not some liberal bullshit about refusing to act without 'permission' from First Nations or Third World peoples. In a day to day sense, there is no apparatus to get meaningful permission anyway – asking the few First Nations people you personally know, or know on Instagram, is not the same as substantive consent. You don't ask for permission to live on stolen land or pay taxes to a colonial government, and this selective obsession with getting permission *only* in cases of resistance, but not for every single way you uphold the colony all the time, is a recipe for doing nothing.

Rather, I am questioning how we can open up space for oppressed peoples to do whatever they need to, *returning to take their own place in history* as Cabral put it. This might mean fighting, destabilising, making every kind of weakening and chaos in the imperial core and in the 'australian' colony. It might also mean care work or infrastructures of care, doing everything we can to keep those wretched of the earth alive and in fighting condition. But tbh, mostly it's the former. I've noticed I've used the words 'this is not' a lot; not because I'm trying to be negative (though I am), but because I think anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism fundamentally require a series of renunciations – at least for those of us materially benefiting from colonialism and imperialism. *It is not for us to determine the positive content of the future.* We've done enough of that already.

Empires fall; everything happens very slowly and then all at once. There will be panic and lashing out as (especially) white settlers lose the way of life to which they are accustomed. I don't know what things will look like, but what they – we – have known and gotten used to, isn't going to be there any more. Don't like it? It's happening anyway. Welcome to what it's been like for the rest of the world. I can't pretend I don't feel a certain vengeful satisfaction.