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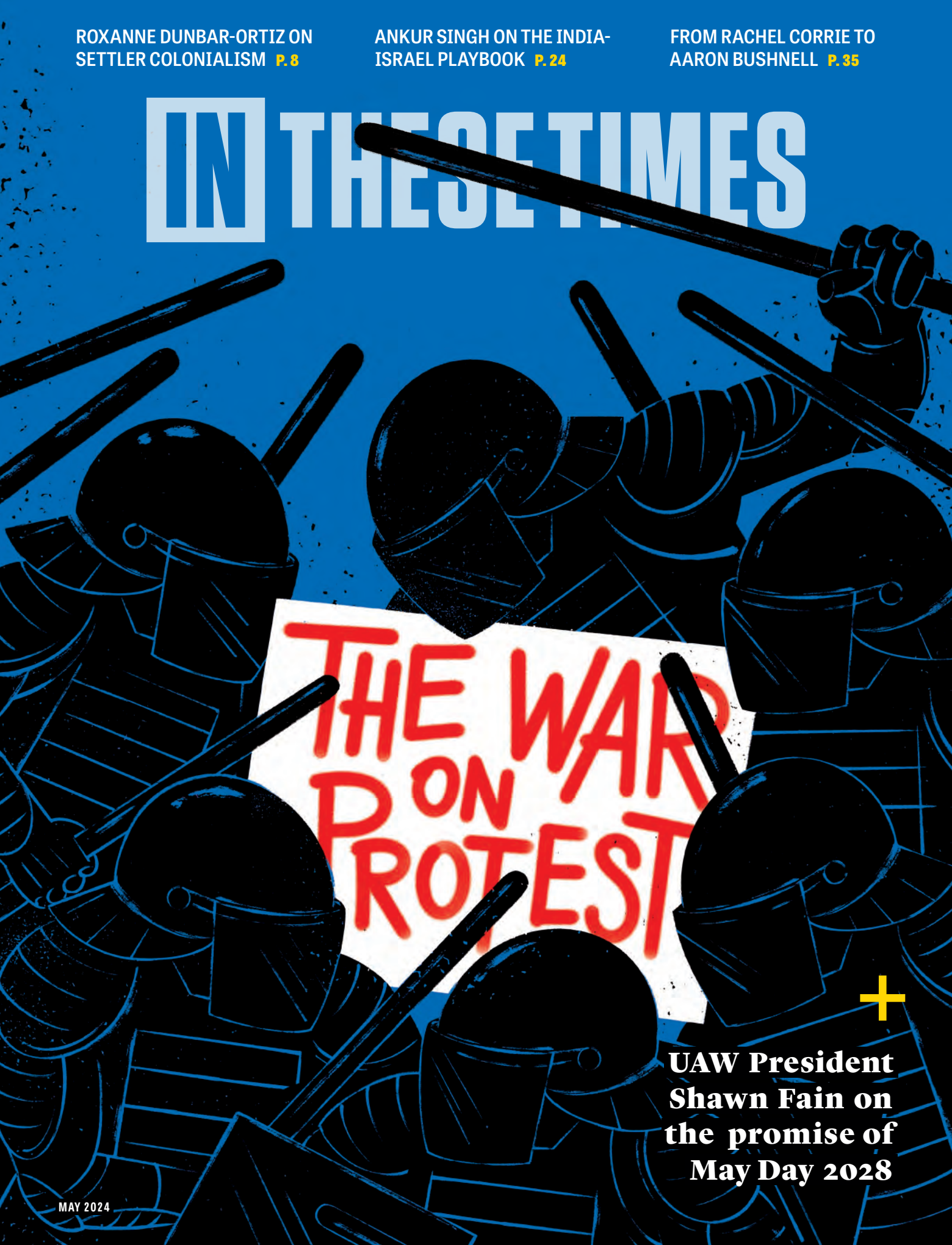
IN THESE TIMES



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UAW President Shawn Fain on the promise of May Day 2028

MAY 2024

Barn Raiser

Dear Reader,

We are writing to introduce you to *Barn Raiser*, a new nonprofit digital magazine founded on the idea that quality, accurate and contextually-driven journalism is essential to our democracy. You can sign up for our free newsletter at https://barnraisingmedia.com/newsletter/.

Barn Raiser gives voice to people in rural and small town America who, in the face of surging intolerance and even outright violence, are resisting anti-democratic forces and working to renew the democratic promise.

Yet as right-wing demagogues continue to make political inroads in rural and small town communities—emboldened by a conservative media apparatus and an eroded local news landscape—the liberal establishment has further alienated rural voters. Some, like Bill Maher, make them the butt of jokes. Others write off rural working people as a "basket of deplorables," or cast rural areas as cultural and political wastelands. And then there is the *New York Times*' Paul Krugman who, in despair, perpetuates the cliché of "white rural rage," for which he was taken to task by Wendell Berry in a recent essay for *Barn Raiser*.

Barn Raiser exists to tell a different story. Inspired by the revival of progressive organizing and movements for justice across rural America, we don't just report on the challenges rural communities face. We tell the stories of civically engaged people who are holding powerful actors to account, whether it's the native-led resistance to Enbridge pipelines in the Great Lakes or the farmers and advocates working to change a system of industrial agriculture that enriches the few and despoils the environment. As we head into the 2024 general election, *Barn Raiser* pledges to provide you with coverage that:

- Exposes growing threats to rural election workers and the efforts in many states to undermine voting rights.
- Showcases the burgeoning anti-monopoly movement bridging the Red-Blue divide by advocating for "right to repair" legislation and by opposing harmful "right to farm" laws.
- Amplifies the rural organizers building multiracial coalitions to confront systemic injustice and improve the lives of all rural working people.
- Gives voice to the more than 30 rural-oriented organizations who have crafted a 27-point rural policy platform around which they are galvanizing voters in 2024.

Sign up for a free subscription to the *Barn Raiser* newsletter. It arrives in your in box twice a week (or once a month if you prefer). Sign up here: https://barnraisingmedia.com/newsletter/. We promise to inform and inspire you.

In solidarity,

Joel Bleifuss
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> No political movement can be healthy unless it has its own press to inform it, educate it and orient it.
> —*IN THESE TIMES* FOUNDER JAMES WEINSTEIN

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Illustration by Adrià Fruitós

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The Political Coalition the Left Needs to Win

The Left in the United States is arguably at a point of greater political power today than at almost any time in the past century. More than 100 open socialists hold office across the country, from Tacoma, Wash., to St. Petersburg, Fla., from school boards to the halls of Congress.

But no advance comes without a counterattack, and the same context that has opened the space for a resurgent Left over the past decade also holds the conditions that could close that space for a generation.

We look back at the post-war era as the moment that created the modern world order, and the deep contradictions involved then are reasserting themselves as we travel into uncertain times—with new economies and politics buttressed by broken institutions on a crumbling foundation.

As a new world struggles to be born, hope and danger exist in equal measure.

To usher in this new world and ensure its trajectory is pointed toward justice, we have two critical tasks. The first is to create a new common sense around our social movements, one in which our efforts for democracy in the workplace are interwoven with freedom in Palestine and an end to the carceral state, to name just a few examples. We cannot win if these struggles are separate struggles.

Our second task is to engage in a clear-eyed assessment of the political coalition the Left needs to assemble—which must be formed around these interdependent movements. That includes strategizing about how to ensure any lines drawn around us are elastic, because it's in those borders that we are fragmented and pitted against each other. Political repression of the Left has been taking on a sharper character than our memories of the past 50 years, with the intent to exploit those divisions between and among us.

We see that repression in its most condensed form in the attacks on cease-fire activists, but it's happening in almost every space of progressive growth—and it's all connected. In Georgia, for example, the forces repressing organizing work around Cop City—whether Democrat or Republican, private or public—have deep parallels to the bipartisan support for Georgia's 2022 bill targeting the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement. Also in Georgia, new this year: Businesses that voluntarily recognize a union are prevented from receiving state economic incentives.

President Joe Biden won Georgia in 2020 by just 12,000 votes. He is increasingly in danger of losing that slim margin because of his stance on Gaza.

We see in Georgia a bipartisan political coalition arrayed to defeat the Left. There is much to learn—not from its authoritarian and anti-democratic nature, but from its flexibility and constant construction and reconstruction.

Of course, it doesn't stop there. In our cover story for this issue (page 14), journalist Adam Federman explores these links and takes a deep dive into the repression in Georgia and across the country: Activists in Portland, Ore., snatched up by the FBI. Legislation drastically increasing the penalties for blocking traffic—and protecting drivers who hit protesters. Organizers working to stop pipeline construction classified as domestic terrorists. And so much else.

This war on protest is fundamentally a war against the political coalition we need to build. It seeks to criminalize our justice projects and our formations with such severity that we are immobilized. The outcome of this November's election will decide the role that the loudest members of that political coalition will play in the repression of the Left—and our preparation and response are critical for the times to come.

The situation is, without question, daunting. But there are signs of possibility all around us—and the future is ours for the taking.

—ALEX HAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

ILLUSTRATION BY PATRICK MORGAN

MOVING MOUNTAINS

Thank you for "Can Tenants Take Back Bozeman?" (April). It was informative and heartfelt. I remember when Ranger Sienkiewicz was removed; I called the Forest Service and told them what I thought. I can't believe this is still happening. But why should I be surprised that the wealthy and entitled get what they want?

I have been donating to Wild Montana and just sent a letter to our senators today to try to prevent the [privatization] proposal, but I am sure the letter will not be read. The proposal is preposterous and is robbing people that cherish Montana and know what it was before the times of the Yellowstone Club and all the ridiculous wealth of our capitalist economy. I remember wandering the Crazies on both sides when I was younger, going fishing, hiking and adventuring. I am so sad this is happening.

Do you have any other suggestions as to what to do? I can't believe a journalist and friends were cited for trespassing. I naively thought a trail a century old could not be removed.

I feel so angry this is happening. Montana is disappearing and I feel like there isn't anything we can do. Please let me know what else might be done to help prevent this atrocity.

—Pam Grogan
via email

ON REBUILDING

Yes, unions can ("Can Labor Rebuild Our Democracy?," April). If unions build and expand on their own democratic practices, they provide a model for democratic organizations and democratic participation.

—Charles Smith
Saskatchewan, Canada
via X (formerly Twitter)

No. They are too scared to step even a millimeter off the blue party line, and the blue party hasn't given a shit about the peasants of this country in generations.

—Chad Dillinger
Oshkosh, Wis.
via Facebook

A 30-year Teamster says: Nice dream. Here in the United States, it is mostly "do the best you can for you and your family." People are more afraid of unions than they are of politicians.

—Cfwydirk
via Reddit

Stop addressing the symptoms and start addressing the cause. Capitalism and democracy are contradictions. Capitalism is about giving capitalists power, while democracy is about giving people power. Combine that with the fact the two have polar opposite material interests, and one will inevitably devour the other. When capitalism wins, you get fascism; when democracy wins, you get socialism.

*—Humanistic_*
via Reddit

Yes, but I don't want them to "rebuild" the United States. I want them to make it better than it ever has been.

—Mrhorrendous
via Reddit

LABOR, LOST AND WON

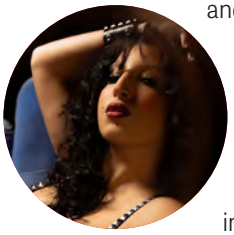
This is honestly inspiring ("How the UAW Brought Back Belvidere," April) and I wish this story would get more traction. As someone from a union family, my parents always shied away from sharing how effective unions were for them and others, as our community was strongly anti-union.

—Matthew Mansfield
San Francisco
via X (formerly Twitter)

A crucial point that challenges a fundamental principle of capitalism: Investment decisions can't be made unilaterally by management, because capital is a product of labor, and because investment decisions have direct impact on workers and communities.

—Jeffery Hermanson
Atlixco, Mexico
via Linkedin

WHAT WE'RE LISTENING TO



Amira Jazeera, local Chicago music artist and self-proclaimed "Palestinian pop princess," released her new single, "Hypnotizing," in February.

The song begins with a groovy blend of Middle Eastern and 1980s disco-inspired string riffs, setting the tone for Jazeera's angelic vocals and sultry lyrics. It's a dance floor love story and a sparkling addition to her full discography of uplifting music about self-love, relationships and spirituality.

The nostalgic chords of the single—also released with full instrumental and a cappella versions—couple with a ricocheting drum beat that should make "Hypnotizing" a club hit. It also shows the artist's versatile musical talent that has been building since the release of her first single, "Whoever," in 2019.

—Anna Busalacchi,
Editorial Intern

TELL US HOW YOU REALLY FEEL

Tell us what you like, what you hate and what you'd like to see more of by emailing letters@inthesetimes.com or tweeting @inthesetimesmag, or reach us by post at 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647.

ITT WINS BIG

In These Times is proud to take home the 2024 Izzy Award for "outstanding achievement in independent media" from the Park Center for Independent Media at Ithaca College. The award is named after I.F. "Izzy" Stone, who founded *I.F. Stone's Weekly* in 1953, which "questioned McCarthyism, the Vietnam War, racial injustice and government deceit."

The judges commended ITT's focus on economic justice and social movements, highlighting Luis Feliz Leon's two-part series on immigrant workers at Tyson Foods, Kim Kelly's investigation on black lung disease, Joseph Bullington's reporting on the gentrification of the U.S. West, and Bryce Covert's coverage of a woman forced to give birth in a post-*Dobbs* world.

We share the award with journalist Mohammed El-Kurd for powerful reporting about Palestine, Lynzy Billing for reporting on the U.S. military's environmental impact in Afghanistan, and Trina Reynolds-Tyler and Sarah Conway for their joint investigative series "Missing in Chicago," which exposes police malpractice.

This important work only happens because of the support of readers and community members like you—thank you!

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

A group of pro-choice activists rallied in downtown Manhattan in late March, a counterweight to an anti-abortion demonstration. The activists chanted slogans and made noise, just as protesters have done for decades. But this time, police started making arrests under the unusual pretext that the activists were "interfering with a permitted event and making unreasonable noise." As independent journalist Talia Jane noted on X (formerly Twitter), the message was clear: "The only protest that's allowed is protest that disrupts nothing and is visible to no one."

That dangerous and unconstitutional stance is far from limited to New York, as Adam Federman's cover story, "The War on Protest" (page 14), makes abundantly clear. Across the country, a new era of political repression is being born as state and federal legislators find new ways to erode First Amendment rights. While a few (at least dozens) new bills and laws have garnered media coverage, Federman's comprehensive account is as chilling as the legislation's intended effect on activists.

There's the unprecedented use of federal anti-racketeering laws to implicate not just protesters who commit civil disobedience, but anyone in their orbit—tied to the effort to declare nonprofits that provide training or funding for social movements as part of a criminal conspiracy. There's the array of common protest tactics (like demonstrating in the street) being reclassified as "domestic terrorism." And that increasingly violent rhetoric—of government leaders labeling protesters as "terrorists" and "rioters"—emboldens police to crack down with extreme force, and prosecutors to push cases farther than they otherwise would.

The inescapable conclusion is that some politicians are systematically working to make effective social protest impossible. And that's something we can't afford to ignore.

Kathryn Joyce
Investigative Editor

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BRANDON BELL/GETTY IMAGES

There's a Starman Waiting on the Beach

BOCA CHICA BEACH, TEXAS—I'm loafing outside my tent, waiting for the coffee to boil, contemplating a morning swim. My pit bull, Shiner, is thrashing in the sand with a look of crazed joy. Brown pelicans are cruising low over the roiling gray-green Gulf waters.

That's when a Cameron County sheriff's deputy drives up and tells us to leave. Boca Chica Beach is closed so Elon Musk's company SpaceX can conduct rocket tests at its nearby launchpad.

Such beach closures have become frequent since SpaceX started building its Starbase facility about six years ago.

Here, SpaceX is developing a massive, reusable rocket called Starship, designed, in theory, to one day carry crews to colonies on the Moon and Mars—far beyond such mundane earthly joys as pit bulls and pelicans—and fulfill the company's stated purpose to "make humans a multi-planetary species."

For enthusiasts, Starbase is a beacon of promise, transforming unused tidal wastes into a "Gateway to Mars," as a sign around the launchpad puts it. Many locals, though—for whom this place is not a "gateway" but their longtime home—are increasingly sick of SpaceX and angry at government officials they see as handing their hometown beach over to a private company.

"Families have been going to Boca Chica Beach for generations," says Bekah Hinojosa, a community organizer for the South Texas Environmental Justice Network who lives in nearby Brownsville. "SpaceX has been turning it into their own private resort."

To get to the next closest beach, residents of Brownsville—a poor, largely Latino city that lies across the Rio Grande from Matamoros, Mexico—must drive up to South Padre Island. There, if you're not staying in one of the oceanfront high rises or vacation homes, signs instruct you to pay a $12 daily beach fee. Boca Chica Beach, by contrast, is free, and locals know it as "poor man's beach."

In 2022, the Carrizo/Comecrudo Nation, a tribe with longtime ties to the Boca Chica area, joined the Sierra Club and a group called Save Rio Grande Valley (Save RGV) to sue Texas and Cameron County over the beach closures. The Texas Open Beaches Act of 1959 and the state's constitution enshrine the public's right to access public beaches, says Marisa Perales, an attorney representing the groups. But in 2013, while the state was courting SpaceX, the legislature overwhelmingly passed a bill making an exception for "space flight activities." The lawsuit, which aims to block future beach closures, is waiting in Cameron County District Court.

Now, local groups are fighting a proposed land trade that would hand over more of Boca Chica to SpaceX. The company has proposed to buy 477 acres of land adjacent to the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, 10 miles to the north, then exchange it with the state for 43 acres of Boca Chica State Park, near the rocket facility, to expand Starbase.

A representative for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department told *In These Times* the agency sees it as a good trade that would protect sensitive habitats and increase public recreation opportunities. Environmental groups, however, see it differently.

Above: Locals enjoy the beach beyond the Starbase launchpad on March 13 in Brownsville, Texas.

SpaceX activities are already harming wildlife and habitats at Boca Chica, says Jim Chapman, a Save RGV board member. He describes the area's sprawling tidal flats as an "internationally recognized" habitat for shorebirds, including the piping plover, a species threatened by extinction from habitat loss. Besides Starbase's footprint itself, Chapman points to the violent impact of the launches, which, he says, will pretty much fry anything within 0.3 miles.

"Essentially you have one of the best shorebird habitats in North America being gradually decimated," Chapman says. The swap could allow the company to build a second launch tower and launch more rockets, which he worries would drastically increase its environmental impact.

SpaceX did not respond to requests for comment.

On March 4, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission voted to authorize land exchange negotiations with SpaceX, despite vehement opposition from some Brownsville locals who made the 350-mile drive to Austin to give public comment.

"Texas Parks and Wildlife is paving the way for SpaceX to take over more of Boca Chica Beach," says Hinojosa. She doesn't want to see any more of the Texas coast sacrificed for industry.

Indeed, the coastal plain around Boca Chica—where 10-foot yuccas hoist clusters of cream-white blooms above thickets of Tamaulipan thornscrub and wading birds forage across tidal flats—stands out for its intactness on a coast fractured by refineries, oil pipelines and gas terminals.

"Three-quarters of the Texas coast has been sacrificed to the fossil fuel industry," says Hinojosa. "Our little piece right here is the last piece that doesn't have massive fossil fuel refineries."

SpaceX claims it's part of the future, says Hinojosa, but to her it looks like the latest form of colonization—and not of some faraway planet. "Big companies come in, they exploit, the politicians act as real estate agents," she says. "We're going to keep calling this shit out. … We live here."

JOSEPH BULLINGTON is the editor of Rural America *In These Times*.

IN CASE YOU **MISSED IT**

ALL THE NEWS THAT WAS FIT TO PRINT—AND WHAT GOT PRINTED INSTEAD

HYPED

IGNORED

TRIVIAL

VITAL

A Glasgow man used AI-generated images to sell a "Willy Wonka Experience." Children reportedly left in tears as they discovered it was a warehouse with a bounce house inside.

More than 100,000 Michigan Democrats voted for "uncommitted" in the primary, sending Biden a stark message about his stance on Israel.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul is doing a great job increasing the militarization of New York City by sending National Guard troops to patrol the subway.

Just in from the Republican newswire: Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce rigged the Superbowl in liberal conspiracy to help Democrats win in November.

A man received more than 200 Covid-19 vaccines allegedly to collect and sell fake vaccination cards; he has experienced no medical side effects.

Australian lawyers have requested the International Criminal Court investigate a number of Australian politicians (including the prime minister) regarding their involvement in Israel's genocide in Gaza.

The Georgia state Senate voted to cut ties with the American Library Association for promoting woke literature.

New Orleans rats are getting high off the police department's drug supply after infesting the headquarters' evidence room.

VIEWPOINT

ROXANNE DUNBAR-ORTIZ

Settler Colonialism in the U.S. and Israel

While attending the University of Oklahoma in 1956–57, I met a Palestinian petroleum engineering student named Said Abu-Lughod. Said, whose older brother Ibrahim Abu-Lughod would become a renowned professor at Northwestern University, told me how Israeli settlers had violently forced his family out of their ancestral home in Jaffa during the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. This had happened only eight years earlier, when Said was 12 years old. His family fled as refugees to Jordan.

Said also gave me a book—*What Price Israel?* by Alfred M. Lilienthal—that truly changed my thinking. Now there are many excellent studies by Palestinian and other historians, but in the 1950s there was nothing else like it. (Later, I met the author while attending the 1983 United Nations' Conference on Palestine—also attended by Yasser Arafat and a large Palestine Liberation Organization delegation—and was able to thank him.)

This experience as a teenager was my introduction to the concept of settler colonialism and made me a supporter of Palestinian self-determination and right of return. It's also what led me to study history and eventually to write my doctoral dissertation on Spanish settler colonialism in New Mexico, still a major issue there today.

When I left Oklahoma in 1960 to attend San Francisco State College, I had expected—without basis—the city to be a hotbed of anti-colonial fervor. This was long before the famous strikes of 1968, but there was a very visible group on campus of mostly white activists attached to the U.S. Communist Party. I was attracted to the zeal with which they supported the burgeoning Black civil rights movement in the South, and, though I was married and working part-time, I attended their rallies on campus as often as I could. What puzzled me about them, however, was their vocal celebration of the state of Israel. Many had visited and lived and worked for a time in the socialist kibbutzim there. Most of these students were not themselves Jewish; the one who became my best friend was from a working-class Greek immigrant family in Indiana.

Their support for Israel was emblematic, I came to understand later, of the seductive mythology that settler-colonial states cultivate and depend on. These young people were drawn to the story about a state created to protect Jewish refugees from the Holocaust. Also, the mystic chords of American settlement resonated strongly then, largely due to the "new frontier" rhetoric of John F. Kennedy. The grandson of immigrants was elected president and inspired young people. In accepting his nomination in Los Angeles, Kennedy intoned: "I stand tonight facing west on what was once the last frontier. From the lands that stretch 3,000 miles behind me, the pioneers of old gave up their safety, their comfort and sometimes their lives to build a new world here in the West. ... We stand today on the edge of a new frontier." In the young students' minds, the state of Israel was duplicating that promise. They had little knowledge of the Indigenous peoples who were driven out of their villages and homelands here in North America and even less about the existence of Palestinians.

Although there are stark differences and time frames for the establishment of settler colonialism, there is a common thread that defines the process. To understand this, it's helpful to distinguish, as historian Lorenzo Veracini does, between "settlers" and "immigrants": While migrants enter existing

ROXANNE DUNBAR-ORTIZ
is Professor Emerita of Ethnic Studies at California State University, Hayward.

political orders, "settlers are founders of political orders" and carry their sovereignty with them.

Mahmood Mamdani, a scholar of South Asian origin who grew up in Uganda, puts it this way in his book *Neither Settler Nor Native*: "If Europeans in the United States were immigrants, they would have joined the existing societies in the New World. Instead, they destroyed those societies and built a new one that was reinforced by later waves of settlement."

Still, the United States celebrates itself as "a nation of immigrants," just as Israeli Zionists celebrated Palestine as "a land without a people for a people without a land," a homeland for Jews from all over the world, a nation of refugees—rhetoric that echoes U.S. "nation of immigrants" mythology. Rhetoric that ignores settler colonialism, writes Mamdani, "is essential to settler-colonial nation-state projects such as the United States and Israel," which cloak themselves in the nonpolitical project of immigration to hide their true project of fortifying the colonial nation state.

Though the apt term "settler colonialism" wasn't invented until rather recently, the practice of settler colonialism dates back many centuries. It didn't begin in Palestine in 1948 or with Dutch Afrikaners establishing the apartheid regime in South Africa around the same time, but was an invention of British colonialism, starting with the 1607 establishment of the "Plantation of Ulster" in colonized Ireland. It soon became a model for the Anglo colonization of North America.

The founding of the United States as a capitalist settler state less than two centuries later marked the beginning of a hundred-year war to erase North America's Indigenous nations and communities, violently seizing their farms and grasslands, replacing them with Anglo and other Western European settlers and creating a massive economy. This was made possible by violently kidnapping, enslaving and transporting Africans, practically depopulating the west coast of Africa.

Anglo settlers also established colonies in Canada, Australia and New Zealand, with their own ethnic cleansing of Indigenous populations. The French and Spanish, meanwhile, established their own settler colonies in Central and South America, the Caribbean, the Pacific and North Africa, the most famous being Algeria.

These settler colonies all had a common purpose, what the Nazis called *Lebensraum*—that is, the territory that a state or nation believes is needed for its perceived natural development. This was initially tied to the rise of capitalism in Great Britain and the creation of the plantation and single-crop agriculture for profit. In the case of Britain's settler colonialism in Northern Ireland, that single crop was the potato. The 13 settler colonies that Britain planted in North America starting in 1607 were required, with enslaved Africans' labor, to produce tobacco and indigo (for dye) to market in Europe initially and then, with the conquest of the Caribbean islands, rice to feed the enslaved Africans.

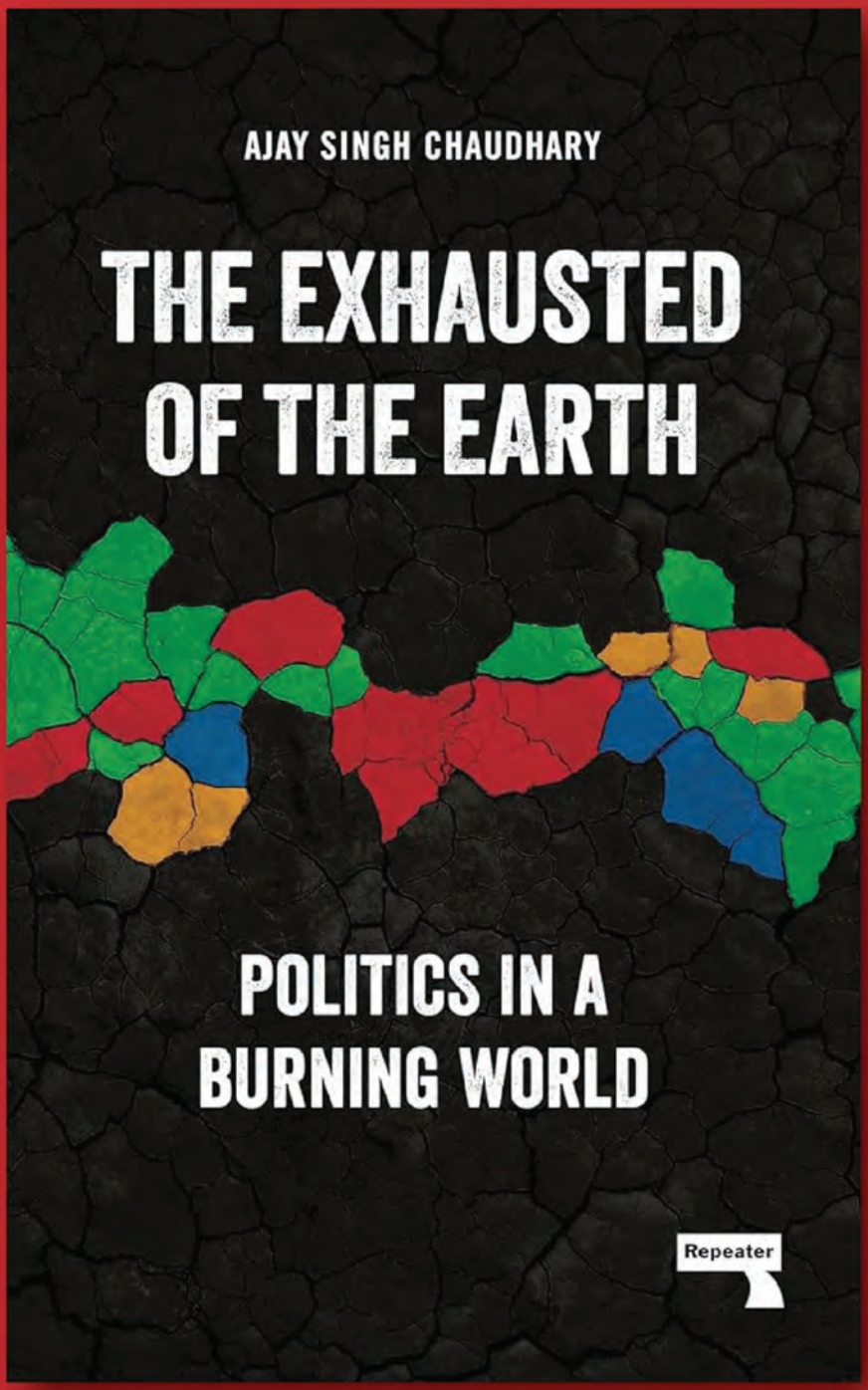
Though not the dominant form of Western imperialist conquest, settler colonialism has distinct advantages over other forms, such as European military and administrative control over India and Africa—and, if measured in terms of the land, resources and wealth accumulated by the colonizing nation, it's been the most effective. The British colonization of Ireland helps explain why: By enticing landless Scots, Welsh and Anglo settlers to usurp land from Irish farmers, Britain evicted the Irish off their small holdings in Northern Ireland—exploiting the settlers' zeal to take free land forcibly. With British colonization across the Atlantic, landless Britons were encouraged to do the same thing in North America. After its founding, the new United States used the same settler-colonial tools to seize the rest of the continent within a century.

Jewish settler colonialism, culminating in the state of Israel, was a compressed version of these earlier Anglo settler colonies, encouraged by the British under the mandate of Palestine. Jewish people had always lived in the area, along with dozens of other communities, including new monotheistic religion offshoots of Judaism with the rise of Christianity and Islam. The late 19th century rise of political Zionism

PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES

Clockwise from left: A Palestinian woman waits at a West Bank checkpoint on March 22. An ambulance takes a back road during the First Arab-Israeli War on June 25, 1948. A demonstrator joins a candlelight vigil in East Jerusalem on Aug. 10, 2009.

"Destined to be a classic, a touchstone in global climate struggles to come" – Raj Patel, *New York Times* Bestselling Author of *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*



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called for all Jews to return to and dominate Palestine.

On May 14, 1948, David Ben-Gurion, chairman of the Jewish Agency, announced the establishment of the state of Israel, immediately recognized by U.S. President Harry Truman and, a year later, by the United Nations. But settler colonialism in Palestine did not begin with Jewish Holocaust refugees. In 1908, oil was found in Iran, a discovery that would condemn the Middle East to more than a century of imperial interference and violence. British, French and U.S. oil companies came to dominate the region. It is no coincidence that these imperial powers, with their histories of violent antisemitism, became the strongest backers of a Jewish state in the midst of the Arab region. A heavily armed, Western-leaning state was just what they needed to protect their interests against a rising tide of Arab nationalism and anti-imperialist sentiment. Imperial Britain issued the Balfour Declaration in 1917, supporting a "Jewish homeland" in Palestine.

At the time of the Balfour Declaration, Jews made up about a tenth of the population of the territory. The British did not consult with the Palestinian Arab majority. By 1947, the Jewish population was about 33%. Nevertheless, the partition plan passed that year by the UN General Assembly gave them about 55% percent of the land.

It's vitally important that Israel be understood as a settler-colonial state because it would be impossible to understand the current conflict in Gaza without understanding its settler-colonial context. As historian Rashid Khalidi observes, the conflict is not between two equal national movements fighting over the same land, but rather is "a colonial war waged against the indigenous population, by a variety of parties, to force them to relinquish their homeland to another people against their will." IN

THE BIG IDEA

plea·sure ac·tiv·ism

noun

1. a movement that emphasizes joy as a form of resistance

What does that mean exactly? Pleasure activism asserts that we all need and deserve to feel pleasure and that enjoyment gives us the energy to bring about social change. It's a political framework that centers joy. The phrase was popularized with author and activist adrienne maree brown's 2019 book *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*, which draws inspiration from the Black feminist tradition, especially the works of Audre Lorde and Octavia Butler.

Like hedonism? Hedonism is seeking pleasure for pleasure's sake. Pleasure activists want to build a better society. If we're in touch with what makes us feel good, we're less likely to settle for the status quo. Embracing joy can give insight into the type of world we want to live in—and the motivation to work toward it. Pleasure activism is also about learning how to make fighting for change enjoyable.

Pleasure activism doesn't promote excess either. In her book, brown makes it clear that moderation is key: "Having resources to buy unlimited amounts of pleasure leads to excess, and excess totally destroys the spiritual experience of pleasure," she says.

But activism isn't always fun. True. But it doesn't always have to be miserable either. It's harder to convince people to engage in liberatory struggles if it's all doom and gloom. A line frequently attributed to Emma Goldman puts it nicely: "If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution."

> **"In touch with the erotic, I become less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being which are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial."**
>
> — *AUDRE LORDE*, USES OF THE EROTIC: THE EROTIC AS POWER

Above: Members of Latinas Acting Up! dance on the picket line outside of Warner Bros. Studios on Oct. 27, 2023, in Burbank, Calif., during the Screen Actors Guild strike.

DAVID LIVINGSTON/GETTY IMAGES

Many of us, especially Black women, have been socialized to think we must earn everything, from food to housing to education. Capitalism even makes us feel like we have to earn leisure and happiness. "Part of the reason so few of us have a healthy relationship with pleasure," says brown, "is because a small minority of our species hoards the excess of resources, creating a false scarcity and then trying to sell us joy, sell us back to ourselves." But pleasure is also something we need to survive, so we must create social and economic structures that reflect that.

—J. PATRICK PATTERSON

VIEWPOINT

SHAWN FAIN

Why May Day 2028 Could Transform Labor—and the World

Members of the United Auto Workers courageously fought corporate greed at Ford, General Motors and Stellantis last fall during the historic six-week Stand-Up Strike. Because of their determination and commitment, we won record contracts with the Big Three automakers.

After decades of falling behind, UAW autoworkers are finally moving forward again.

We made a lot of ambitious demands at the bargaining table. One in particular may not have gotten the same attention as the reinstatement of cost-of-living adjustments or the reopening of the Stellantis assembly plant in Belvidere, Ill.—but it could also prove transformational: We aligned our contracts to expire at midnight on April 30, 2028.

We are fully preparing to strike on May Day 2028, which is critically important for several reasons.

The first is that, to reshape the economy into one that works for the benefit of everyone—not just the wealthy—we need to reclaim our country's history of militant trade unions that united workers across race, gender and nationality.

May Day has its roots right here in the United States—in 1886, in the streets of Chicago, where workers were organizing and fighting for the 8-hour workday. This demand was met with brutal resistance by employers, who used both vicious mercenaries and the police to violently suppress mass protests led by unions. A bomb exploded in Chicago's Haymarket Square during a clash between workers and police on May 4, 1886, killing several police officers and others.

The result was a sham trial, and seven labor leaders were sentenced to death.

The cause of those Haymarket Martyrs became the cause of the working class around the world, and May 1 became an international holiday commemorating the fight of workers everywhere to reclaim their time and the value of their labor.

Now, about 138 years later, May Day is celebrated as an official holiday in countries from Argentina to South Africa to Sweden to Hong Kong, just about everywhere—except its country of origin.

That's not a coincidence. The billionaire class and their political lackeys have done everything they can to white out the true history of the working class in our country.

They want us to believe that corporate bosses gave workers decent wages, benefits and safer working conditions out of the goodness of their hearts. That justice and equality for people of color, for immigrants, for women and for queer communities were gifts benevolently handed down from above.

But we know the truth. Every law passed, every union formed and contract won—every improvement made at the workplace—has been won through the tireless sacrifice of the working class.

But if we are to truly reclaim the power and importance of May Day, then it can't be through empty symbolism. It must be through action.

We wanted to ensure our contracts expired at midnight on April 30, 2028, not as a symbolic gesture, but as a rallying cry. We've asked other unions to join us in setting their contract expiration dates to May Day 2028 in hopes the labor movement can collectively aspire to building the power needed to change the world.

We form unions in our workplaces because we know we have far more power together than we do as individuals. What is true for workers in one workplace is true for workers across all workplaces. When unions organize together across industries and countries, our power is exponentially amplified. The fact is: without workers, the world stops running.

If working people are truly going to win on a massive scale—truly win healthcare as a human right, win pensions so everyone can retire with dignity, win an improved standard of living and more time off the clock so we can spend more of our time with our family and friends—then unions have to start thinking bigger.

I'll give you an example.

SHAWN FAIN is the first UAW president to be democratically elected directly by the membership. He recently led the union's historic Stand-Up Strike.

PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES

Last summer, during the lead-up to the contract expiration at the Big Three, I had the opportunity to meet with Teamsters General President Sean O'Brien at their headquarters in Washington, D.C. During our conversation, he pledged that no trucks driven by Teamsters would deliver parts to struck Big Three facilities.

The power of UAW autoworkers withholding our labor during the Stand-Up Strike was massive. But with the Teamsters supporting our fight, refusing to deliver parts to Big Three facilities, we had even more power. It created another headache for the Detroit automakers. It created more pressure on the Big Three to settle.

Now, imagine that type of worker solidarity on a much bigger scale.

And because corporate greed doesn't recognize borders, neither should our solidarity. In the UAW, we've seen firsthand how companies pit workers against one another. Workers in Michigan are pitted against workers in Alabama, workers in the United States are pitted against workers in Mexico, workers in North America are pitted against workers in South America. It's a simple game. Companies shift production—or threaten to shift production—to locations where the labor is cheaper, the environmental regulations more lax, and the tax cuts and subsidies are greater.

A united working class is the only effective wall against the billionaire class' race to the bottom. For the U.S. labor movement, that means grappling with some hard truths. Like the undeniable fact that it is impossible to protect American jobs while ignoring the plight of everyone else.

There's been talk about a "general strike" for as long as I've been alive. But that's all it has been: talk.

If we are serious about building enough collective power to win universal healthcare and the right to retire with dignity, then we need to spend the next four years getting prepared.

A general strike isn't going to happen on a whim. It's not going to happen over social media. A successful general strike is going to take time, mass coordination, and a whole lot of work by the labor movement.

As working people, we must come together. We can no longer allow corporations, politicians and borders to divide us.

It's time we reclaimed May Day for the working class.

That's what our May Day contract expiration is all about.

Clockwise from left: Tim Bizzell at a Stellantis plant in Dundee, Mich., on Aug. 18, 2022. Detroit Chrysler workers picket on Sept. 14, 1973. Writers Guild members join striking autoworkers on Sept. 26, 2023, in Ontario, Calif.

THIS MONTH IN LATE CAPITALISM

- **U.S. WORKER PRODUCTIVITY IS UP!** And 90% of the total $1.25 trillion of 2022's net profits (from the 200 largest U.S. corporations) goes straight to shareholder payouts, according to a new Oxfam report. Now let's just check the cupboard: growing inequality (check), lack of social mobility (check), political disenfranchisement (check)... Yep! We have the whole recipe for a class war.

- **VISUALIZE YOUR OWN HAPPINESS AND** savor it. That's the message Amazon is allegedly sending to help workers get through the day in its grueling fulfillment centers, according to a slideshow leaked to 404 Media. To be clear, if you're Peter Pan, those instructions might help you learn to fly, but they probably won't help Amazon with the numerous safety violations that OSHA is reporting.

- **THE WORLD IS OFF TRACK TO AVOID CLIMATE** catastrophe—and it's your fault! That's according to ExxonMobil CEO Darren Woods—who was paid nearly $36 million in 2022, and who says consumers need to be willing to pay more for carbon reduction but "people aren't willing to spend the money to do that." It obviously has nothing to do with a dirty for-profit private industry that has lied about and obfuscated its own climate research since 1977.

- **HOW MUCH IS A WENDY'S BACONATOR?** Depends when you buy it! Or it would've, if the fast food chain hadn't backed down from its plan for "surge pricing" based on demand. The company said its goal was only to lower prices, which is totally a thing companies do.

THE WAR ON

PROTEST

Political repression is on the rise as the state finds new ways to criminalize dissent and collective action.

BY ADAM FEDERMAN

Amin Chaoui had been in Atlanta less than 24 hours when things took an unexpected turn. Chaoui, then 31, drove down from Richmond, Va., to attend a March 2023 music festival organized by activists trying to stop the construction of the police training facility known as Cop City. The sprawling compound in one of Atlanta's largest urban parks would require clearing at least 85 acres of partly forested land that abuts a predominantly Black neighborhood in DeKalb County. It faced growing opposition from racial and environmental justice advocates, including an occupation of the forest that began in November 2021.

Chaoui was loosely familiar with Cop City—he'd seen flyers around Richmond—but hadn't been involved in the campaign. He'd also never been to Atlanta, and was especially drawn to the music. There was also an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting at the festival that appealed to Chaoui, who had started a recovery program five months prior. "I honestly just thought I was going to spend a few days in the forest and then go home," Chaoui said.

But before the hour-long AA meeting ended his first night there, Chaoui noticed heavily armed police officers encircling the venue. About a half-mile away, a group of protesters had staged an impromptu march through the development site, setting fire to some of the construction equipment. As the sun began to set, plumes of smoke rose above the forest, providing the only pretext law enforcement needed to round up anyone in attendance. As Chaoui tried to leave, he and about 50 other people were corralled and handcuffed in a parking lot. By the end of the night, 23 of them were thrown in the DeKalb County jail.

When Chaoui was released 18 days later, he faced a very different future: He'd been charged with domestic terrorism, which, in Georgia, is punishable by up to 35 years in prison.

Several months later, in August, Chaoui and 60 others were also indicted under anti-racketeering laws designed to go after organized crime, known as the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO). Allegations against members of the group include being part of a criminal conspiracy among an "organized mob" to "occupy the DeKalb forest and cause property damage." Chaoui has struggled to find work since then; he's been relying on fundraising networks to pay his rent. Chaoui's relationships with friends and family have also frayed. As a Muslim American, the domestic terrorism charge—one of the first results that appears if you search him online—is an especially heavy burden. "My personal life is in shambles now," Chaoui told me.

The sweeping nature of the Cop City arrests and charges may be novel, but the targeting of protesters and social movements is not. Since 2017—the same year Georgia expanded its domestic terrorism law to include property destruction—21 states have passed legislation to enhance penalties and fines for common protest-related crimes, such as trespassing or blocking highways.

"We're in a really unique moment with the amount of legislation that we're seeing, [with] this legal assault on protesters and the right to protest in the U.S.," says Nick Robinson, a senior legal advisor at the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, which tallied nearly 300 anti-protest bills introduced in state legislatures since 2017, 41 of which passed.

ILLUSTRATION BY ADRIÀ FRUITÓS

Many of those laws seemed like direct responses to specific protest campaigns, says Nora Benavidez, senior counsel for the nonprofit group Free Press and lead author of the 2020 PEN America report, *Arresting Dissent: Legislative Restrictions on the Right to Protest*. "For every progressive movement—irrespective of its actual views—there's so quickly a crackdown that occurs in language and narrative and law."

Among recently passed state laws, 19 enhance penalties for or make it a felony to engage in protest on or near energy infrastructure—a clear reaction to the mass protests over the Dakota Access Pipeline at Standing Rock in 2016. After 2020's Black Lives Matter protests, five states enacted laws—and nine others have pending legislation—that impose harsh penalties for individuals who block traffic or even sidewalks. Some states added laws granting immunity to drivers who strike protesters and extending liability for crimes committed during protests to any organizations that support them. This January, in response to growing opposition to the war in Gaza, Democrats in New York proposed a bill that would expand the definition of domestic terrorism to include blocking public roads or bridges.

But it's not just state legislatures cracking down on protest. Republican senators have introduced federal legislation, also in response to protests over Gaza, to criminalize blocking public roads and highways. Another bill, ostensibly responding to "pro-Hamas leftists," would increase the prison sentence for participating in a "riot"—loosely defined as an act of violence committed by a group of three or more people—from five years to 10.

Accompanying these laws is increasingly harsh rhetoric from political figures to demonize protest movements, characterizing activists as rioters, mobs, violent extremists and terrorists. Protesters face other threats too: During the summer of racial justice protests that followed the police killing of George Floyd in 2020, the Trump administration openly discussed deploying military force to clear demonstrations, and protesters in Portland, Ore., were snatched from the street by federal law enforcement officials in unmarked vehicles, a troubling episode still shrouded in mystery. More recently, pro-Palestinian activists say they've faced home visits from police and the FBI.

Taken together, says Charlie Hogle, a staff attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union's National Security Project, these shifts will inevitably "have a chilling effect on the sort of important political speech we think the First Amendment is intended to protect."

A DECADE AGO, PROTESTERS IN GEORGIA AND OTHER states who engaged in civil disobedience—knowingly breaking the law to advocate for their cause—likely would have faced misdemeanor charges and perhaps a night in jail. Today, they can spend months in pretrial detention—as several activists involved in the Stop Cop City campaign have—before facing lengthy and expensive legal battles to clear their names. The new laws, stiffer penalties, and more aggressive policing have, in addition to landing more activists in jail, had a corrosive effect on social movements across the country.

Jamie Marsicano, a third-year law student at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill who was swept up in the same Cop City raid that nabbed Chaoui, had been arrested at protests before—including during street marches in 2020—and assumed they'd be processed quickly and released. But like Chaoui, Marsicano spent nearly three weeks in jail and had to post $50,000 in bonds to get out—money that may not be recouped for years. Upon their release, Marsicano had to wear an ankle monitor for three months and, after a decision by UNC's chancellor, was barred from setting foot on

PHOTO BY CARLOS BERRIOS POLANCO/SIPA USA VIA AP IMAGES

Above: A Georgia State Patrol officer threatens a journalist with arrest at the Block Cop City march in Atlanta on Nov. 13, 2023, as activists from across the country rallied at the construction site.

campus or even attending classes online. Marsicano was able to finish their coursework at Duke and will graduate this spring—but they can't take the bar exam in North Carolina or practice law until the case is settled, which could take years.

Even if the felony charges are ultimately dropped—as lawyers say they routinely are in protest-related arrests—the threat keeps activists off the streets and siphons resources away from political organizing.

"I don't think the goal is conviction, which is really sinister," says Xavier T. de Janon, director of mass defense with the National Lawyers Guild.

The tactics have already changed the way movements organize. Activists in Georgia are now worried about the implications of participating in routine political activities, such as putting up flyers or circulating and signing Cop City-related petitions. The fears aren't unfounded: Three activists swept up in the RICO indictment were initially arrested for posting flyers identifying the police officer who allegedly shot and killed Stop Cop City activist Manuel Esteban Paez Terán in January 2023. In September 2023, the city of Atlanta made the unusual decision to publish the full names and addresses of the more than 100,000 people who signed a Stop Cop City petition, effectively doxxing them. Afterward, according to Marlon Kautz—cofounder of the Atlanta Solidarity Fund, which has provided bail support and other resources to area activists since 2016—many locals said "they would never sign another controversial petition again."

But many states, including Georgia, are now going even further, attempting to pass new laws that could fatally undermine the support networks that social movements depend on.

A couple months after the music festival, Kautz awoke to the sound of his front door being kicked in by law enforcement. The Atlanta Solidarity Fund's home-based office, which Kautz shares with two of its board members, was ransacked, their files and computers seized. Kautz and his coworkers were initially charged, in May 2023, with money laundering and charity fraud—though they have not yet been indicted on those initial charges. But in August, they were included in the sweeping RICO indictment, which claims that the Atlanta Solidarity Fund, through its parent nonprofit the Network for Strong Communities, provided financial support to the forest defenders and published posts online claiming responsibility for acts of property destruction. According to Georgia's attorney general, these were all acts that furthered the "conspiracy." (Kautz says he is unable to talk about specific allegations while the case is ongoing but "suffice it to say the indictment contains claims which are objectively lies.")

Like de Janon, Kautz doesn't believe the RICO charges are intended "to secure convictions in the long term." Rather, he tells me, "It's to create as much disruption as possible to protesters and the nonprofit organizations which protect their rights. And in that sense, these charges are working exactly as intended."

But Kautz and his colleagues also face another threat. Republicans in Georgia have introduced multiple anti-protest bills since Cop City protests began in order to, as one said, send "a signal to troublemakers ... that they won't get a slap on the wrist" if they "engage in rioting" in Georgia. In 2023, Georgia Republican state Sen. Randy Robertson introduced what was initially characterized as a bail reform bill, which would significantly expand the number of offenses requiring mandatory cash bail to include criminal trespass and unlawful assembly—charges

frequently lobbed at protesters. That was bad enough, says Tiffany Williams Roberts, policy director at the Southern Center for Human Rights, which opposed the legislation. But this year, a new clause was added that makes it virtually impossible to operate a nonprofit bail fund in Georgia by limiting the number of people that charitable organizations, including churches, can assist in any given year—to only three people.

Kautz, who faces up to 20 years in prison and $25,000 in fines if convicted on the RICO charges, sees the bill as a direct response to the solidarity fund's successful work in bailing out nearly 100 Cop City activists. "It was shocking how blatantly targeted it was at our work," Kautz says.

The bill passed both houses of Georgia's legislature. It takes effect in July.

THE ANTI-PIPELINE CAMPAIGNS OF THE 2010s

ushered in a new era of environmental politics and protest. The Keystone XL campaign, targeting a pipeline that would have carried oil from the Canadian tar sands to the Gulf Coast, embraced direct action, including tree-sits, to disrupt the project's construction. Though the movement was committed to nonviolent civil disobedience, it engendered heavy resistance from industry and law enforcement at multiple levels. In early 2012, before Keystone XL became a household name, the FBI opened a counterterrorism assessment of South Dakota activists with a focus on Native groups and leaders. A second FBI assessment, targeting Texas activists protesting the pipeline's southern leg, began less than a year later. In documents I obtained through Freedom of Information Act requests, the FBI hypothesized both groups—whose members they called "extremists"—would move from lawful First Amendment-protected activity (including attending public hearings) to "violent opposition."

The language of extremism—many of the FBI documents are part of larger "domestic terrorism" case files—came to permeate the federal government's characterization of the anti-pipeline movement and has dogged subsequent social justice campaigns. The charging documents in many of the Cop City arrests cite a Department of Homeland Security classification that characterized Defend the Atlanta Forest, a group affiliated with the Stop Cop City movement, as "domestic violent extremists." Similar labels have been used to describe Black Lives Matter and anti-fascist activists—labels with serious impact on movements' ability to

Dakota Access Pipeline water protectors face off with militarized police on Feb. 22, 2017, the day their camp was slated to be raided. At least six were arrested, including a journalist who sustained a broken hip.

attract new members and how law enforcement responds to those groups.

Hundreds of individuals were arrested during the roughly five-year campaign to halt Keystone XL, which declared victory when Obama canceled the project in late 2015. But none of those activists were charged, or even threatened with felonies, recalls Lauren Regan, executive director of the Civil Liberties Defense Center.

Nonetheless, policing and prosecution tactics escalated sharply during the Dakota Access Pipeline blockade the following year. In 2016, thousands of activists, including many veterans of the Keystone XL fight, descended on the Standing Rock Sioux reservation in North Dakota, where tribal leaders had set up "spirit camps" in an attempt to block pipeline construction. The standoff lasted several months and was marked by violent clashes with heavily armed state and local law enforcement, National Guard troops and private security firms. The FBI, according to newly released court documents, deployed up to 10 informants to spy on the protesters.

The language of extremism came to permeate the federal government's characterization of the anti-pipeline movement and has dogged subsequent social justice campaigns.

The legislative response to Standing Rock was equally severe. In January 2017, just weeks after the camps were cleared, North Dakota introduced and later passed two laws expanding the definition of criminal trespass and dramatically heightening penalties for so-called riot offenses—an unmistakable response to what had unfolded at Standing Rock. As with similar bills that have deployed terms like rioting or domestic terrorism, the language in these was deliberately vague, giving law enforcement and state officials broad discretion to target groups whose viewpoints they disagree with. In 2019, a third law was passed, enhancing penalties for trespassing on or near critical infrastructure and making interference with pipeline construction a felony, carrying penalties of five years in prison and fines of up to $10,000.

What all of this adds up to is that a Standing Rock-style protest in North Dakota, or many other states, is virtually impossible today.

Nearly 20 states now have similar "critical infrastructure" laws, which have been supported by the petrochemical and oil and gas industry and shepherded through statehouses with assistance from the conservative American Legislative Exchange Council.

At the same time, in the more than 20 years since 9/11, many states have passed or amended laws increasing the number of crimes defined as domestic terrorism, which can levy exceptionally harsh punishments and grant law enforcement far greater investigatory powers. Georgia, for example, updated its domestic terrorism law in 2017, ostensibly in response to the 2015 mass shooting of nine Black parishioners by white supremacist Dylann Roof in Charleston, S.C. But the law included provisions—like classifying as terrorism the disabling or destruction of critical infrastructure, government facilities or public transit systems—that had nothing to do with Roof's crimes and which were condemned by civil liberties groups as potential threats to constitutionally protected speech.

Maine and now Oregon have similar statutes. Oregon's law, passed in August 2023, is particularly worrisome, since its definition of "critical infrastructure" extends to public roads—meaning protest activity that "damages" a highway could be prosecuted as domestic terrorism. What constitutes "damage" Oregon's statute doesn't say, exemplifying how vaguely written laws open the door to potential abuse.

"It places a lot of power in the hands of state and local law enforcement and gives a lot of prosecutorial discretion to people who may be driven by political incentives," says the ACLU's Charlie Hogle. "And that should be very troubling to everyone, no matter your politics."

DONALD TRUMP'S RISE TO POWER OVERLAPPED WITH—and in many ways fueled—the surge in anti-protest legislation, as his 2016 election was met with unprecedented mass action. The Women's March on Jan. 21, 2017, marked what is widely believed to be the largest single-day protest in U.S. history, with some four million people taking to the streets in more than 600 U.S. cities. The day before—Inauguration Day—more than 200 protesters were arrested in Washington, D.C., and indicted on felony rioting charges, all but one of which were later dropped. A week after taking office, Trump signed an executive order banning people from seven Muslim-majority countries from entering the United States, prompting yet more demonstrations at airports across the country.

MICHAEL NIGRO/PACIFIC PRESS/LIGHTROCKET VIA GETTY IMAGES

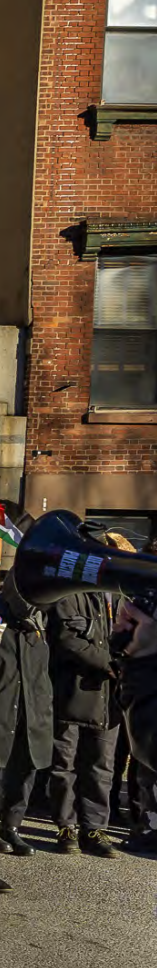
This period was also marked by a dark shift in rhetoric, as Trump and his allies vilified protesters as thugs and referred to constitutionally protected activity as crimes. During 2020's demonstrations against police brutality, Trump reportedly instructed law enforcement and top military officials to "beat the fuck out of" protesters and "just shoot them." That June, the National Guard used tear gas and rubber bullets to remove peaceful protesters from Washington's Lafayette Square, before escorting Trump to a photo-op in front of a church.

The following month, federal officers dressed in camouflage and driving unmarked vans grabbed protesters off the street in Portland, Ore., and held them for questioning without pressing charges. An attorney with the Oregon Justice Resource Center told NPR it was like "stop and frisk meets Guantanamo Bay." Mark Pettibone, one of those detained, wrote that the officers covered his eyes and he feared for his life. (The ACLU is currently suing the federal government over what it alleges were unlawful detentions.)

Meanwhile, Republican congressmembers pushed the Department of Justice to prosecute antifascist and Black Lives Matter activists under federal anti-racketeering laws. "We have laws on the books that prohibit organized crime—the kind of organized crime that we're seeing from BLM," Rep. Chip Roy (R-Texas) told reporters at an event organized by the House Freedom Caucus in June 2020. The year prior, fellow Texan and Republican Sen. Ted Cruz urged Attorney General William Barr to open a similar investigation into "Antifa," noting that RICO would enable prosecution of members of a group "even when the government cannot establish which particular individual ... committed a given crime."

State legislators heeded their call, enacting laws that empower local officials to charge not only individual activists but also the networks that support them as part of a broader "conspiracy." Many of the critical infrastructure bills, for example, include stiff penalties for organizations that aid—through funding or direct-action trainings—in impeding pipeline construction. In Montana and North Dakota, an organization found to be a "conspirator" in protesting on or near critical infrastructure is liable for fines 10 times the amount authorized for trespassing.

Still, Georgia's more recent RICO indictment against Stop Cop City activists marks a clear shift in government targeting of social movements. According to the Civil Liberties Defense Center's Lauren Regan—who's representing one Cop City defendant and has advised others—it's the first time RICO has been weaponized this way. There have been lawsuits brought by corporations against environmental activists in the past, but those were civil, not criminal, cases. And while Indiana prosecutors tried to use RICO to criminally prosecute



LEFT: MICHAEL NIGRO/PACIFIC PRESS/LIGHTROCKET VIA GETTY IMAGES. RIGHT: PHOTO BY RC COLLMAN

two Earth First! activists in 2009, the racketeering charges were eventually dismissed.

Ultimately, Regan says, the statute was never intended to be used to prosecute political activity: "Historically, we do not place political protests in the same bucket as gang drug dealers."

But now, regardless of whether Georgia prevails in its case, other states could follow suit.

"The notoriety and the commitment of resources to these cases in Georgia have made a lot of states look at their RICO statutes," says Regan, and think of them "as a potential tool."

ON NOV. 2, 2023, JEWISH VOICE FOR PEACE (JVP) AND

allied groups in Durham, N.C., staged a protest that brought rush hour traffic on Highway 147 to a standstill. About 50 protesters occupied two lanes of the highway, calling for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza, for two and a half hours.

Above Left: *Protesters block the entrance of the Holland Tunnel in Manhattan on January 8, demanding a permanent cease-fire. Hundreds were arrested during simultaneous actions at the Brooklyn Bridge, the Manhattan Bridge and the Williamsburg Bridge.* ***Above Right:*** *Cease-fire activists organized by Jewish Voice for Peace-Triangle NC block traffic on the Durham Freeway in North Carolina on Nov. 2, 2023. The rush hour frustration emphasizes the idea that "genocide is not business as usual."*

"The political mainstream doesn't like it when people awaken the conscience of the nation," Tema Okun, a JVP member who participated in the protest (but did not block traffic), tells me, but "it's deeply American to protest like this."

Two months later, North Carolina Sen. Thom Tillis and Tennessee Sen. Marsha Blackburn, both Republicans, introduced the Safe and Open Streets Act, which would make it a federal crime to block a public road or highway or, crucially, to "attempt to conspire to do so"—a clause which implicates any individual or group that might help plan such an action. A press release for the bill, which describes groups protesting U.S. support for Israel as "Hamas sympathizers," said the legislation was a "direct response to radical tactics of pro-Palestine protesters."

The Tillis-Blackburn bill is part of a wider effort among state and federal lawmakers to subvert the growing opposition to U.S. support for Israel's war in Gaza. Since the Hamas attack on southern Israel on October 7, and Israel's retaliatory assault (which has killed more than 33,000 Palestinians), mass civil disobedience has been one of the most visible ways for people to express discontent.

These campaigns, many led by progressive Jewish groups, have been met with reactionary rhetoric equating any support for Palestine with Hamas and a new round of legislation criminalizing dissent. Sen. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.), who called for deploying the military against Black

Lives Matter protests in 2020 and giving "no quarter" to participants in protests that turn violent, also introduced a bill this March: the "Stop Pro-Terrorist Riots Now Act," against "pro-Hamas mobs." And Rep. Ryan Zinke (R-Mont.), Trump's former interior secretary, proposed legislation that would "expel Palestinians" from the country.

When Sens. Tillis and Blackburn introduced their bill, Tillis declared that blocking roads or bridges—common protest tactics going back at least to the civil rights era—"needs to be a crime throughout the country."

Soon, it may be.

Alaska, Arizona, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Washington and West Virginia have all introduced bills in recent months to criminalize blocking roads or highways during protest, with some lawmakers explicitly referencing pro-Palestinian protests as justification. In Tennessee, which already criminalized highway protests, Republicans have proposed an enhancement measure that would make the offense a Class D felony, punishable by up to 12 years in prison and a $5,000 fine. (South Dakota, Oklahoma, Iowa, Florida and Arkansas have already passed similar bills, and Massachusetts may soon follow.) New York's bill, introduced by Democratic lawmakers, is perhaps the most extreme, declaring that blocking public roads, bridges or transportation facilities—or even "act[ing] with the intent" to do so—is a form of domestic terrorism.

Even if these bills fail, they contribute to a climate of intimidation that chills speech and deters people from taking action. The crackdown has been more explicit on college campuses, amounting to what JVP executive director Stefanie Fox describes as a new form of McCarthyism, as student protesters have been doxxed, suspended and threatened with deportation. In early November 2023, Brandeis became the first private university to ban its chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP); a week later, George Washington University followed suit. Around the same time, Columbia University temporarily suspended its SJP and JVP chapters. More recently, Columbia and American University have drafted policies severely limiting when and where students can protest.

Meanwhile, Florida's public university system ordered the deactivation of all SJP chapters, claiming the group's activism amounted to "material support" for terrorists, a felony under Florida law. (The order was challenged by the ACLU and has since been walked back by the chancellor, but the deactivation order remains on the university system's website.) And a growing number of states have passed laws defining antisemitism in ways that limit criticism of Israel and stifle academic freedom.

All of this is happening at a particularly volatile and perilous moment in U.S. history. The movement opposing U.S. policy toward Israel is attracting "hundreds of thousands" of new supporters, says Fox, but that's also coming at "a time where the Right is really experimenting and trying to build new tactics and legislative tools of repression."

In Democratically controlled Chicago, pro-Palestinian groups have already been denied permits to protest outside this summer's Democratic National Convention—an echo of the violent clashes between protesters and police at the 1968 convention, which also concerned racial discrimination and an unjust war. Organizers have declared that, even if Chicago refuses to allow them near the convention center, the march will take place, "permit or not."

But the FBI has already been knocking on doors in Chicago, home to the largest Palestinian American diaspora community in the country, with roots dating back to the late 19th century. Muhammad Sankari, a Chicago-based organizer with the U.S. Palestinian Community Network, says at least two Yemeni families and one prominent Palestinian community leader have faced questioning in their homes by the FBI and Chicago police, in visits that followed Democratic Rep. Nancy Pelosi's January call for the agency to investigate pro-Palestinian groups' funding.

The FBI has conducted home visits to members of the Palestinian community in the past, Sankari says, especially during periods of social unrest. But the visits now seem particularly intent on intimidating a movement that's growing nationwide. In Oklahoma, three FBI agents showed up at the home of Stillwater resident Rolla Abdeljawad after she posted comments to her Facebook page critical of the war in Gaza. The advocacy group Palestine Legal has reported numerous similar incidents. An attorney working with one of the Chicagoans who was questioned confirmed that a Chicago police officer who was present during the visits told them that the FBI again has its eye on the city's Arab American community.

The Chicago Police Department did not respond to requests for comment. In a written statement, an FBI spokesperson declined to confirm whether the Chicago visits had even taken place or if any investigations had been opened. But, the spokesperson assured, "The FBI will never open an investigation based solely on protected First Amendment activity."

Sankari is not convinced: "This sets the stage for the next phase of repression," he says.

And what that phase brings will be shaped by what happens this November. Whatever the outcome of the election, mass protest is almost guaranteed.

What all of this adds up to is that a Standing Rock-style protest in North Dakota, or many other states, is virtually impossible today.

Should Trump win—as he well might—he has already vowed to pursue his enemies with a vengeance and serve as a dictator for at least "day one." On the campaign trail, Trump has lamented not having sent troops to quell protests during the summer of 2020 and has said he'd consider suspending the Constitution to further his agenda. Meanwhile, his far-right allies have reportedly drafted plans to invoke the Insurrection Act, allowing Trump to use military force to crush opposition movements and civil unrest, making mass action like the Women's March all but impossible.

The legal landscape has shifted considerably since Trump last occupied the White House: states have many more tools to go after protesters, and, as the Cop City arrests indicate, Republican officials are increasingly willing to deploy existing laws in new ways to conduct sweeping arrests of activists.

The day after I spoke to Tema Okun, who has been an activist with progressive Jewish organizations for 20 years, she emailed to say she felt she had understated the threat posed in this moment. She wanted to try again.

As more and more laws are proposed and passed to "criminaliz[e] dissent, and as we face a possible presidency by a man who admires Putin and expresses his penchant for dictatorship," Okun writes, "we are skating closer and closer to authoritarianism." Basic freedoms, once enshrined in the Constitution, are now at risk of being eliminated. "Congress shaves off more and more rights piecemeal until we find we are unable to speak aloud our criticisms of government policies and practices. We slowly become a police state." IN

This article was produced in partnership with the nonprofit newsroom Type Investigations, where Adam Federman is a reporting fellow.

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THE ETHNONATIONALIST PLAYBOOK

As India slides toward ethnic cleansing, Hindu Nationalists are taking notes—and tech support—from the Israeli Right

BY ANKUR SINGH

PHOTO BY ANKUR SINGH

Momtaj Begum was scared, but there was no time. She immediately started packing everything her family owned—for herself, her husband and their three children.

At 11 o'clock one night in September 2021, thousands of residents of Dhalpur—a village on a sandbar in the Brahmaputra River in India's northeastern state of Assam—received notice from the government that they must leave by 10 a.m. the next morning, when their homes would be demolished. State officials claimed the villagers, who lived half a day's drive from India's border with Bangladesh, were "illegal" immigrants encroaching on government-owned land, despite families having citizenship documents and living there for decades.

While Begum and her neighbors packed, Nur Hussain, a leader in the local All Assam Minority Students Union (AAMSU), messaged villagers frantically on WhatsApp, trying to make a plan. They weren't going to leave so easily.

In the morning, hundreds of police officers arrived with bulldozers to evict nearly 1,000 Bengali Muslim families. Begum's husband, Maynal Haque, a 28-year-old farmer, was still packing

when a group of neighbors came by, en route to protest the evictions. Begum didn't want him to go, but Haque pressed her to take his handful of rupees, then left to join the protest.

There, villagers tried to negotiate with the police, asking for more time, to no avail. Hussain returned home, but several thousand people remained. Then he heard the gunshots.

On social media, chaotic videos and photos spread of police firing on protesters. Hussain checked his phone and saw pictures of people who had been shot. According to a study by Assamese researchers, dozens of villagers were left injured or missing. Hussain's neighbor, a newlywed bride, had been shot in her stomach. Begum's husband's bloodied clothes were found near the protest site, but Haque was nowhere to be seen.

Late that night, rumors circulated that two people had been killed, but nobody knew who, since police had taken the bodies. The next day they learned: One was a 12-year-old boy who'd been walking home from the post office. The other was Haque, whose body police returned to where his and Begum's home once stood.

Today, the land where the villagers lived is a government farming program to employ Assamese speakers—the majority of whom are Hindu. One nearby school was turned into a Hindu temple. A local mosque was converted into housing.

It wasn't the first time that a state led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)—the far-right Hindu nationalist party of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi—has targeted Muslim communities with what local activists call "bulldozer justice." Since 2020, similar BJP "anti-encroachment drives" have been carried out in four other Indian states and Delhi. A February report by Amnesty International concludes that evictions used to target Muslim-owned properties have "become a de facto state policy," "hailed and celebrated" by the BJP.

Over the same period, bulldozers have become a potent symbol of Hindu nationalism. BJP rallies feature bulldozer imagery, bulldozer-themed pop songs, even pictures of bulldozers on snack packaging. In 2022, an Indian Independence Day parade in New Jersey featured a wheel loader decorated with pictures of Modi and one of his key supporters, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, nicknamed "Bulldozer Baba" for his aggressive eviction campaigns. Shortly after a 2022 eviction drive in New Delhi, a BJP member of Parliament

Left: Mamiran Nessa, a Bengali Muslim woman, spent 10 years in detention after the Indian government refused her proof of long-standing citizenship. She now lives on a river island rapidly eroding because of climate change.

tweeted a taunt: that JCB, the UK-based heavy equipment manufacturer whose bulldozers have been used in evictions across India, is short for "Jihad Control Board."

After Begum's husband was killed in Dhalpur, she was told police had even used a JCB bulldozer to move his body.

If this imagery seems reminiscent of Israel's dynamics with Palestine, it should. In 2020 and 2021, roughly 120 Palestinian homes and other structures in the West Bank village of Khirbet Humsah were demolished to make room for Israeli settlements—plowed down by the same bright yellow JCB bulldozers that leveled Begum's home. Multiple human rights groups have accused JCB of failing to prevent its machinery from being used in human rights violations in Israel/Palestine and India.

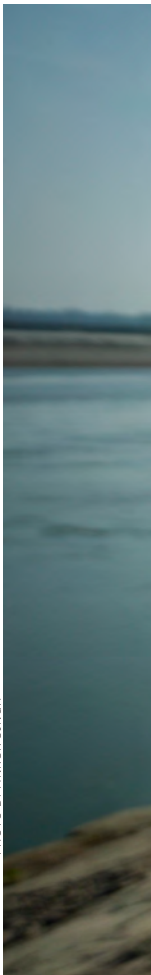
But the similarities go far beyond that.

The two countries are led by kindred ethnonationalist ideologies—Zionism, today dedicated to creating an explicitly Jewish state in Israel, and Hindutva, which seeks to build an exclusively Hindu nation in India. They also share a parallel history dating back to the end of British colonialism, when the British Empire shaped the initial borders of both countries upon their founding—India in 1947, Israel in 1948—causing the violent partition of land along ethnic and religious lines and collectively displacing millions. For nearly a century, concerted efforts have been made to model Hindutva on Zionism, with deliberate alliances made. Today, the countries are among each other's closest allies, with numerous trade agreements, shared weaponry and technology for border enforcement and a common ideology of state-sponsored violence against marginalized parts of their populations.

And as the world focuses on Israel's genocide in Gaza, where more than 33,000 Palestinians have been killed since October 7, another genocidal process is underway, in early stages, in India.

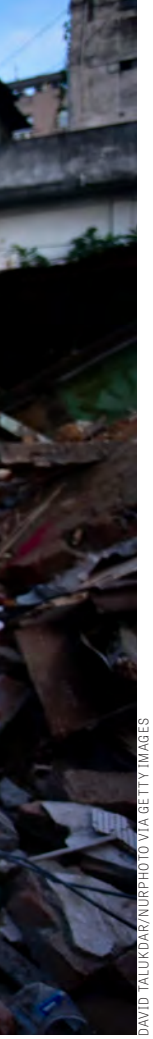
Genocide follows a familiar pattern, with stages that progress along a continuum. In 2018 and 2019, Assam's repression of Muslims prompted the international group Genocide Watch to issue reports that India was showing early signs of genocide. That assessment was escalated to a "genocide warning" in 2020, noting that India was now in the "persecution" stage—the last step before "extermination."

But genocide and ethnonationalism are not identical from country to country—or, in a nation as large as India, even from state to state. In Kashmir, a Muslim-majority



Above: Police monitor a campaign to evict residents and destroy homes in Guwahati, India, on Nov. 7, 2019. ***Right:*** *Abdel Hai, a farmer in Dhubri, points to Bangladesh from across a tributary of the Brahmaputra River. He has lost half of his land to erosion.*

PHOTO BY ANKUR SINGH



DAVID TALUKDAR/NURPHOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES

territory that came under Modi's near-totalitarian control in 2019, Indian ethnonationalism bears similarities to Israel's occupation and settlement in the West Bank, with a senior Indian diplomat lauding their occupation as an opportunity to follow Israel's "model" by resettling Hindus in Kashmir.

In Assam—a diverse state whose citizens represent dozens of ethnicities, tribes and religions—ethnonationalism instead looks like evictions, border militarization and stripping Muslim Indians of citizenship under baseless claims that they are actually Bangladeshi immigrants. The latter effort is carried out by a Kafkaesque court system that has rendered more than 150,000 people stateless, with an unknown number in detention centers. Another 1.9 million people in Assam—most Bengali Muslims, an ethnic minority culturally and linguistically similar to Bangladeshis—were left off a National Register of Citizens and potentially face the same fate.

When Genocide Watch issued its initial 2018 warning, it noted that what was happening in Assam bore a "shocking" resemblance to the ethnic cleansing campaign Myanmar was waging against its own Muslim minority, the Rohingya. The roots of that genocide began when Myanmar declared the Rohingya noncitizens in the 1980s. Likewise, Genocide Watch recently noted, the genocide currently unfolding in Gaza was preceded by decades of systematic exclusion of Palestinians from equal access to citizenship.

While Assam is currently the only state creating a list of alleged noncitizens, Modi's government has indicated a desire to replicate it nationwide, further endangering India's nearly 200 million Muslims. Meanwhile, another recent law eases the path to citizenship for certain refugees—as long as they aren't Muslim.

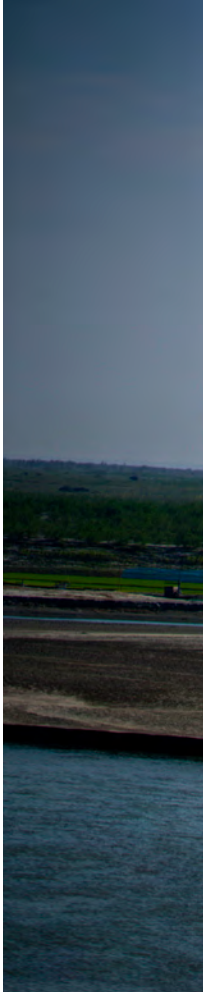
With national elections beginning in April that will determine whether Modi and the BJP get another five years to push their agenda, much is at stake.

"Hindu nationalists have been observing how Israel has been behaving," says journalist Azad Essa, author of the 2023 book *Hostile Homelands: The New Alliance Between India and Israel*. "More importantly, they're watching how the world is responding to it. They're noticing that if you have the Great America behind you, no one really can touch you." While Dhalpur residents saw their homes destroyed, Modi was in Washington to meet with President Biden, to reaffirm a "close and enduring partnership."

* * *

In many ways, life in Assam revolves around the Brahmaputra River and its numerous tributaries. Originating in the Himalayas, the river flows through Tibet and China before cutting across India and Bangladesh and ultimately emptying into the Bay of Bengal. As it flows, the river acts as a conveyor belt, carrying billions of tons of sediment from the Himalayas to the sea, making and remaking the countless "chars"—sandbar

> “Flood, then erosion, then eviction, then notice, then [foreigners tribunal] case, then detention camp. This is the chronology.”
>
> —**NANDA GHOSH**
> *ASSAM STATE COORDINATOR*
> *FOR CITIZENS FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE*



islands—that dot the Brahmaputra and are home to 2.4 million people, predominantly Bengali Muslims who farm the fertile land.

But these days, the Brahmaputra also serves as a rough map of India’s transformation from the secular multiethnic democracy it was founded as to a Hindu nationalist state. Follow the river some 200 miles west from Dhalpur, past bright yellow corn and mustard fields and homes made of jute, and you’ll reach Barpeta, where 70% of the population are Muslims, many recently stripped of their citizenship. Across the river sits Matia Detention Camp, which became India’s first formal immigration detention center in 2023, where many Indian citizens accused of being foreigners end up.

Further west in Dhubri, the Brahmaputra ceases to be just a river and becomes a 38-mile unfenced international border between India and Bangladesh. India’s Border Security Force (BSF), the largest border agency worldwide, has long struggled to maintain fencing along the river thanks to frequent flooding, now exacerbated by climate change. So in Dhubri, they’ve begun piloting the use of Israeli drone and underwater camera technology. It’s par for the course in a state that’s become one of India’s chief experimental laboratories for Hindu nationalist policies.

India’s homegrown version of ethnonationalism first emerged in the early 1920s, during the waning years of British rule. After being imprisoned by the British, Indian activist V.D. Savarkar coined the term Hindutva to describe another nationalist movement—distinct from that led by Mohandas Gandhi—that believed a future independent Indian state should also be a Hindu one. At the time, Hindu nationalists were inspired by nascent fascist movements in Europe, particularly Italy, where some traveled to learn Mussolini’s methods and apply them at home. Hindu nationalists also took inspiration from emerging strains of Zionism that eventually led to the establishment of a Jewish state in what had been British-governed Palestine.

“If the Zionists’ dreams are ever realized—if Palestine becomes a Jewish state—it will gladden us almost as much as our Jewish friends,” Savarkar wrote in the 1920s.

But when Israel did become a modern nation-state in 1948—after its own violent partition that redrew borders and expelled nearly 750,000 Palestinians from their homes—India was not an immediate ally. The year prior, during a United Nations General Assembly meeting, India voted alongside most of the Arab world in opposing Palestine’s partition, objecting to borders drawn along religious lines. Decades later, India became one of the first non-Arab countries to recognize Palestine in 1988—four years before it established formal diplomacy with Israel. But India’s relationship with Israel has deepened dramatically since then.

Over the same decades, Hindutva institutionalized. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, a right-wing paramilitary group, became Hindutva’s main proponent. It now oversees a network of dozens of national organizations and thousands of local affiliates, from schools and religious groups to labor unions, cultural clubs and its political arm, the BJP.

As the movement grew, it became increasingly violent. In 1992, Hindu nationalists destroyed a 16th-century mosque known as Babri Masjid in the Uttar Pradesh town of Ayodhya, claiming it was built on the birthplace of the Hindu god Ram. Ten years later, after a train carrying mostly Hindu pilgrims returning from Ayodhya caught fire in the state of Gujarat, killing 59 people, Gujarat’s then-chief minister—Narendra Modi—claimed the fire was an act of intentional terrorism. Vicious riots broke out, arguably stoked by the BJP, that killed as many as 2,000 people and displaced another 150,000–200,000, most of them Muslim.

In 2014, that legacy helped make Modi prime minister, marking the first time that Hindu nationalists won a majority in government. Immediately, anti-Muslim initiatives spread across India, with many states criminalizing the possession or consumption of beef. (In 2015, a man was lynched by a Hindu mob for eating beef in public.) Increased censorship of journalists, academics and artists followed, and the state sanctioned the destruction of multiple mosques. Hate crimes increased by 786%, most targeting Muslims.

When Modi was reelected in 2019, things got worse. Within months, his government revoked Article 370, which had granted partial autonomy to Kashmir, opening the region to outside investment and settlers. Tens of thousands of troops deployed to the region, instituting a full communications blackout and detaining hundreds of local leaders. The same year, the government passed the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), fast-tracking citizenship for refugees facing religious persecution in neighboring countries, but explicitly excluding Muslims—sparking protests across

PHOTO BY ANKUR SINGH

Above: The Brahmaputra River—which serves as an international border between India and Bangladesh—carries billions of tons of sediment from the Himalayas. Its "chars," or river islands, are home to millions of people.

the country that were met with brutal police crackdowns. Periods of intense ethnic violence have followed, killing hundreds in multiple states.

India established diplomatic ties with Israel in 1992. Shortly before that happened, India received some blunt advice, according to Indian Marxist historian Vijay Prashad, whose 2003 book *Namaste Sharon: Hindutva and Sharonism Under U.S. Hegemony* recounts the history of India-Israel relations. As numerous members of India's External Affairs Ministry recalled to Prashad, when India sought to enter the global market and receive international loans, "The Americans told the Indians very clearly, 'If you want to come to D.C., you have to go through Tel Aviv.'"

But Modi's election also marked a new era of alliance with Israel. When Modi first met Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, at the 2014 UN General Assembly, both committed to strengthening ties. As Azad Essa observed in *Hostile Homelands*, the leaders "immediately recognized in each other the single-minded determination to build states with a single culture, a single race and a single nation."

In 2017, Modi became the first Indian prime minister to travel to Israel, where he and Netanyahu were photographed walking on a beach together. Modi remarked that his visit "reminds us of the deep and centuries old connect[ion] between our societies"—an apparent reference to past Jewish immigration to India and historical trade ties between Jews and Hindus.

A more concrete result of the meeting was a $2 billion defense contract between the two countries—then the largest contract in the history of the Israeli defense industry. Its centerpieces were a missile defense system and a spyware surveillance program called Pegasus. Several years later, in 2021, Amnesty International and journalism nonprofit Forbidden Stories reported the Modi government used Pegasus to spy on a wide array of targets, including opposition politicians, journalists, foundations, business executives and foreign diplomats.

Delegations between the two countries have since become commonplace. Indian politicians, BSF officials, Army chiefs and other defense leaders have all undertaken official tours of Israel. Israeli counterparts have visited India in turn, including former Israeli President Reuven Rivlin in 2016, Netanyahu in 2018, and Speaker of Parliament Amir Ohana and Foreign Minister Eli Cohen in 2023. Yoram Hazony—a prominent Israeli political theorist who founded the international National Conservatism movement, which advocates for Israeli-style religious nationalism as a model for the global Right—visited in July 2023, meeting with academics, business executives and members of the BJP.

As in 2017, many official visits have been followed by major trade deals. In Modi's first term, he increased arms

imports from Israel by 175%, citing the need for defense against Pakistan and China. Today, India is Israel's largest arms purchaser, accounting for 42% of all Israeli arms exports.

Israel's role as a major weapons exporter is no surprise. Its military occupation of Palestinian territories made Israel a global defense industry leader, with more than 100 defense companies and defense exports that reached an all-time high of $12.5 billion in 2022. "The centrality of Israeli arms to the country's economic survival is impossible to overestimate," writes journalist Antony Loewenstein in his book *The Palestine Laboratory*, which documents how Israel exports weapons tested in the occupied territories across the globe. But it's not only weapons.

"What they've done is they put a Homeland Security application on a lot of their military hardware, and then they try to sell it around the world," says journalist Todd Miller, whose 2019 book *Empire of Borders* notes that Israel also has the highest concentration per capita of surveillance companies in the world, inspiring and equipping border enforcement globally. Israeli defense company Elbit Systems, for example, built many of the surveillance towers used on the U.S.-Mexico border.

"Countries buy weapons and surveillance technologies from Israel mainly because Israel does not place restrictions on their use and does not intervene in their human rights violations," explains Israeli human rights lawyer Eitay Mack. "Therefore, Israel also sells weapons and surveillance technologies to regimes that other Western countries do not sell to, such as Myanmar and Azerbaijan."

After the October 7 attack on southern Israel by Hamas, which killed roughly 1,200 people, India emerged as a prime defender of Israel, even as much of the rest of the world quickly grew alarmed by the scale of Israel's response. In October, a fact-checking company found that 20% of posts on X (formerly Twitter) that used the hashtags #IsraelUnderAttack and #IStandWithIsrael were from India-based accounts. Indian social media accounts also became amplifiers of disinformation about the war on Gaza. And after Israel canceled hundreds of thousands of Palestinian work permits, the country requested that India send 10,000 workers to replace them, and immediately began recruiting.

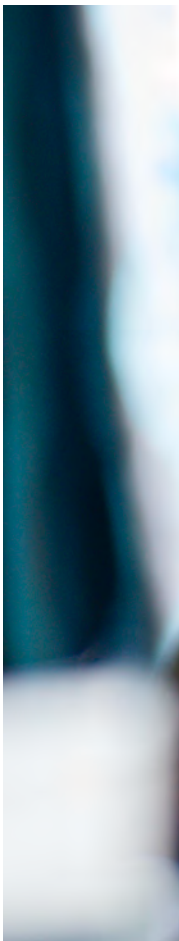
Meanwhile, arms deals continue. In November, Elbit Systems sold the Indian military four Hermes 900 armed drones—which are also currently being used to bombard Gaza. In February, India became the first country outside Israel licensed to manufacture Elbit's drones, and it soon shipped 20 of them back to Israel.

* * *

Much as Palestine has been used as a laboratory for Israeli weapons and border technology sold across the world, Assam has become the primary testing ground for Hindu nationalist policies expanding across India.

Anti-immigrant sentiment has been prevalent in Assam since colonialism, when the British recruited farmers from Bengal, sparking the region's first major migration. After the 1947 Partition of India and Pakistan, tens of millions migrated across the subcontinent. In 1971, as Bengalis in present-day Bangladesh fought for independence from Pakistan, millions more sought refuge in India. After each wave, many in Assam—from caste Hindus to ethnic Muslims to numerous indigenous tribes—felt they were losing jobs, culture and language to the new migrants.

In the late 1970s, those resentments birthed the anti-immigrant Assam Movement, which



Above: Nur and Sahera Hussain review their Indian citizenship papers with their daughter at their home in Guwahati. The couple spent 18 months in a detention center upon accusations of being undocumented Bangladeshi migrants. ***Right:*** *Immigration attorney Aman Wadud watches a livestream of an Indian Supreme Court hearing regarding the fate of the National Register of Citizens in Guwahati.*

demanded the government deport undocumented immigrants. The movement's widespread campaigns of civil disobedience and political violence—culminating in the massacre of thousands of Bengali Muslims in 1983—helped lead to the signing of the 1985 Assam Accord, which created government mechanisms to oust suspected foreigners and seal the border with Bangladesh.

Militarization of that border has increased dramatically since then. Where, in the 1990s, border fences had just a single layer of barbed wire, today there are three layers of sandwiched fencing. BSF agents with AK47s strapped to their backs bicycle down border roads too narrow for cars. A border outpost stands roughly every two miles, a BSF camp every three.

In the past five years, Assam launched a pilot program for even more draconian border enforcement—including sensors, radar and more—known as the Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS). Inspired by Israel's border with Gaza, it's being tested along sections of India's borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh. In Assam, the system was launched in Dhubri in 2019, with a government press release boasting, "the entire span of River Brahmaputra has been covered with data network generated by Microwave communication, OFC Cables, DMR Communication, day and night surveillance Cameras and intrusion detection system."

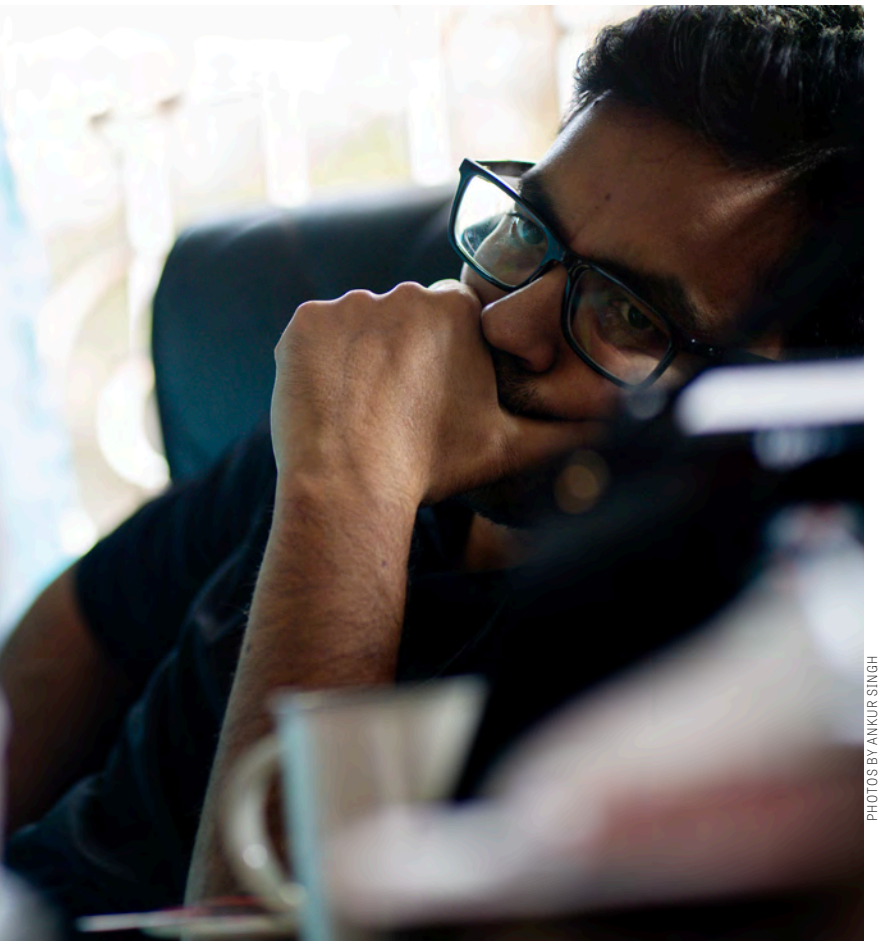
The BSF did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

Despite much local fanfare about the Israeli technology, implementation of the system has been rocky. According to local journalist Mehtab Uddin Ahmed, who attended a Dhubri demonstration of Israeli tethered drones and 360-degree cameras in 2019, the equipment is currently damaged and not in use. An internal 2021 audit of the system obtained by the *New Indian Express* called it a "failed project."

But CIBMS isn't the only Israeli tech being deployed in Assam. In 2021, Corsight AI, headquartered in Tel Aviv, announced a partnership with Assam state agency AMTRON, "to provide Facial Recognition services, capacity development, research and skilling services," as well as creating a "Facial Recognition Center of Excellence" in Guwahati, Assam's largest city. Corsight technology is currently being used in Gaza for mass surveillance of Palestinians, often targeting civilians who are later detained.

Their work in Israel may foreshadow what Assam residents can expect. But already, these early experimental efforts are helping create an atmosphere that's hard to ignore.

When I traveled to Assam's border areas in December, I felt a constant sense of being watched. A shop owner in Karimganj said he might have to relay my presence to the BSF since they'd asked him to report anyone not from the area. In Dhubri, a hotel receptionist said I had to submit a copy of my passport to police before I could check in. It seemed nearly everyone had been deputized to be on the lookout for foreigners—whether or not they were there.



PHOTOS BY ANKUR SINGH

For decades, Indian politicians have hyped fears of an overwhelming Bangladeshi immigration crisis. In 2005, Assam's governor claimed 6,000 Bangladeshis were crossing the border daily. In 2018, former BJP President Amit Shah claimed India had 4 million undocumented immigrants nationwide—while referring to Bangladeshis as "termites." In 2022, former BJP spokesperson Ashwini Upadhyay escalated that figure dramatically, claiming there were 50 million.

Despite these claims, recent BSF data reports that only 5,492 people were apprehended at the India-Bangladesh border in all of 2023. Anecdotally, no one I spoke with in Assam had seen the swarms of migrants the Hindu Right is fortifying the border against.

"There are no Bangladeshis here," said Abdel Hai, a local Dhubri farmer who also volunteers with his local Village Defense Party, which patrols the area. Hai says he's never encountered an undocumented Bangladeshi who has settled in his village—only a handful of smugglers, often youth trying to make quick money in an economically distressed region by transporting cattle and medicine. "We're all Indians and we're from here," Hai said. "We were born here."

It was as if the Indian government had armed the BSF for war against a nonexistent foreign enemy. Then, in lieu of a real invasion, it turned on its own citizens instead.

* * *

Imagine if, in an effort to identify undocumented Mexican immigrants, the United States required every Arizona resident to prove their ancestors had lived there since at least 1821, when Mexico became an independent country. Now imagine if those unable to do so were declared foreigners, locked in detention centers and stripped of their citizenship. That's what's happening in Assam.

In addition to sealing the border to prevent new immigration, the 1985 Assam Accord sought to detect and deport migrants already present in the state, by sending them to "foreigners tribunals": quasi-judicial bodies that decide whether a person is an undocumented immigrant through what Amnesty International has called "bias[ed], prejudice[d] and arbitrary decision making." First established in 1964, but expanded dramatically after 1985, there are currently 100 such tribunals throughout Assam, although the BJP-run state government has called for tripling that number.

People end up before the tribunals if they're referred by either India's Border Police or its Election Commission, which maintains a list of eligible or "doubtful" voters. In theory, those accused can prove their citizenship by providing documents that attest their ancestors have been present in India since before March 24, 1971, two days before Bangladesh gained independence, and that prove their relationship to those ancestors.

But Zakir Hussain, an attorney who has represented roughly 100 clients facing citizenship challenges, says that genuine Indian citizens often struggle to meet these demands. Women who changed their names after marriage have difficulty proving family relationships; misspellings or inconsistencies on documents are common; historically, many Indians were not issued birth certificates; and those who moved or were displaced by flooding—an increasingly pressing concern—struggle to prove they're the person their documents claim. And of course, many can't afford lawyers to navigate the process.

Those who fail to convince the tribunals find themselves in limbo. Bangladesh won't take them (because they're not Bangladeshi citizens), while India no longer recognizes their citizenship. Many end up in detention centers, sometimes for years. Those released on bail return home, but without the right to vote or access public benefits, and unsure whether they'll be detained again.

I spoke to nearly a dozen Indian citizens in Assam who were swept up by the tribunals.

There was Minara Begum, who was declared an undocumented Bangladeshi by a tribunal in 2009, despite her family having resided in the same village for seven generations—before the borders of India and Bangladesh existed. When her daughter was just a month old, border police took Begum into detention. Begum pleaded to keep her newborn; little did she know it would be 10 years before they were released, and her daughter would grow up not knowing there was a world outside.

There was Aklima Bewa, a domestic worker from Dhubri. In 2022, border police arrived at her employer's home to serve her notice to appear at a tribunal. When she was handed the notice, Bewa fainted. Her case is ongoing.

Then there's Mamiran Nessa, a 52-year-old Bengali Muslim woman who lives on a char in the Brahmaputra. In 2009, after Nessa returned from tending her family's livestock, a neighbor's child told her that police had come by with a tribunal summons. She had previously been accused of being an undocumented Bangladeshi immigrant, despite having documents showing her grandfather and father were registered Indian voters well before 1971. Unable to afford a lawyer, Nessa had struggled to make her case, and was detained for a decade.

Nessa was pregnant and nursing when she was detained. She alleges police beat her and that shortly thereafter, she miscarried. Six months before her release, Nessa's husband died.

"What could I even do?" Nessa said. "I didn't eat. I cried and shouted."

Above: A Bengali Muslim couple, once detained on allegations of being undocumented migrants, look on from their home in Baksa, India.

PHOTO BY ANKUR SINGH

Stories like these abound. But the 150,000 people already rendered stateless since 1985 aren't enough for the BJP. In 2013, the Supreme Court ordered Assam to launch a parallel process of identifying supposed foreigners: the National Register of Citizens. Rather than accusing specific individuals, every resident of the state was considered suspect, with all 31 million required to submit documents proving their family lineage.

When Assam's government published a final draft of the list of verified citizens in 2019, 1.9 million Assamese residents were left off without explanation, immediately placed at risk of becoming stateless.

Mohammad Azmal Hoque, a retired Army officer who was excluded from the registry, described the process as confoundingly arbitrary: a government bureaucrat at a desk, deciding who is or isn't a foreigner at whim, with "no evidence, no witnesses, no investigation"—an echo of the colonial past, when bureaucrats drew borders on maps with no regard for their impact.

The list's publication outraged stakeholders across the political spectrum, including targeted Bengali Muslims, but also many Hindu nationalists, who argued that the list excluded *too few* people from citizenship while having also cast doubt on too many Hindus. An array of right-wing organizations, including civil society groups, the All Assam Students Union and the BJP, announced they would file lawsuits with India's Supreme Court, seeking to "reverify" the list. Until that verdict, the BJP's plans to build an additional 200 tribunals and 10 detention centers are on pause.

Regardless, the BJP has signaled its intent to replicate the registry nationwide. In 2019, BJP leader Amit Shah proposed as much, but backtracked after widespread protest. This year, in the lead-up to April's elections, BJP officials in multiple states have campaigned on instituting similar state-level registries.

"The bottom line is that Indian citizens are accused of being illegal migrants," explains Aman Wadud, an Assam-based human rights attorney who says that, after a decade of representing "suspected foreigners," he hasn't encountered a single actual migrant. "They're not undocumented, they're not irregular migrants. They're Indian citizens—just their citizenship has been taken away."

"Two, three, four years ago, I thought that a Rohingya-like situation will not happen," Wadud continued. "Now, I hope and pray that it doesn't."

* * *

As I waited on the riverbank in Barpeta for Mamiran Nessa's teenage son, the Brahmaputra was full of life: Men attended to shops in a bustling marketplace, mothers bathed their children in the shallows and produce trucks parted the water as they drove between the bank and nearby sandbars, loaded with mustard and jute.

Nessa's son arrived in a wooden rowboat to ferry me and Iftikar Hussain Siddique—a paralegal who helped free Nessa from detention—across the river to the tiny char where they lived. Called Takakata, the sandbar is about four miles long by three miles wide, dotted with wild peanuts, a soccer field with bamboo goal posts and children burying each other in straw. Roughly 200 Bengali Muslims live on Takakata—for now. But they face a constant threat of displacement from rising waters and rising Hindu nationalism: threats so interconnected in Assam that it's hard to tell where one stops and the other begins.

As climate change accelerates snowmelt in the Himalayas, more catastrophic flooding follows along the Brahmaputra. Each monsoon season now pushes thousands into relief camps, causes food shortages and kills hundreds. Some chars—predominantly inhabited by Bengali Muslims—are washed away entirely. Government figures estimate nearly 427,000 hectares of land in Assam have eroded since 1950. Yet, in what some see as a deliberate omission, Assam's government doesn't provide documents proving a person once owned land that is now underwater. In a region where documents are vital to proving one's citizenship, the worsening floods represent another path to statelessness.

"After erosion where do people go? They move," said Siddique, who contends that Assam's purported immigration crisis isn't about an influx of Bangladeshi border crossers, but Bengalis internally displaced by flooding.

> “When you have ethnonationalism in conjunction with the prospect and expansion of statelessness, then you’re talking about a potent cocktail, that leads to dehumanization, and that leads directly to ethnic cleansing and genocide.”
>
> —AZAD ESSA

“Flood, then erosion, then eviction, then notice, then [foreigners tribunal] case, then detention camp,” said Nanda Ghosh, the Assam state coordinator for Citizens for Justice and Peace. “This is the chronology.”

When Genocide Watch issued its warnings about Assam, it has cited examples throughout history of countries rendering minority populations stateless before launching violent ethnic cleansing campaigns, from the Rohingya in Myanmar to Jews during the Holocaust.

Yet nowhere is the issue of statelessness more potent than in Israel/Palestine. Israeli citizenship is awarded to almost all who can prove Jewish ancestry, regardless of where they were born. Meanwhile, Palestinians who can trace their heritage to the land for generations have overwhelmingly been denied citizenship since 1948. Without citizenship, most Palestinians are subjected to an apartheid system enforced through occupation, eviction, detention and barriers to movement—tactics becoming increasingly common in India as well.

“We have accepted the idea of ‘ethnic homeland,’ that is why conflicts arise,” says Parvin Sultana, a professor in Dhubri. “Because then we don’t want to share our space with another ethnic community.”

“When you have ethnonationalism in conjunction with the prospect and expansion of statelessness, then you’re talking about a potent cocktail,” says Azad Essa. “That leads to dehumanization, and that leads directly to ethnic cleansing and genocide.”

With India’s election just weeks away, the rhetoric of exclusion and dehumanization is in high gear.

In December, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma urged people in the state to not sell land to “suspected foreigners”—meaning Bengali Muslims. In January, millions celebrated the opening of a new Ram temple built on the remains of the Babri Masjid, the mosque Hindu nationalists demolished in 1992. And in early March, at the start of Ramadan, the BJP announced that implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act—paused in early 2020 in the face of mass protest and the onset of Covid-19—would finally begin, ushering in an era of religion-based citizenship tests.

Meanwhile, the Indian government continues to send guest workers to Israel, despite a missile strike killing one in March. Weeks prior, protesting farmers in the Indian state of Haryana were met with drones firing teargas—a tactic Israel used in Gaza in 2018, the same year Haryana’s chief minister visited Israel to study police tactics he could bring back home.

But resistance can also cross borders. Indian farmers have used kites to block those drones, just as Palestinians have in Gaza.

“Indian dockworkers made a statement saying, ‘We won’t load ships to Israel,’ ” adds historian Vijay Prashad. “That’s also India. The Indian farmers joined the [Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions] movement. That’s also India.”

“I’m very particular about not allowing Modi to define India,” Prashad continues, noting that the BJP’s transformation of India into a Hindu nationalist state cannot be presumed. The fact that the announcement of the CAA triggered massive protests contradicts the notion that India is already a “Hindu state.” So does the fact that Modi and his party have had to campaign on promises of new development, and not just on anti-Muslim, Hindutva politics. “People are still contesting this,” says Prashad.

And where there’s contingency, there’s hope—and a responsibility to act.

Because in Hindu nationalists’ vision of India, there is no room for people like Nessa, who returned from detention to a home where her husband had died and family responsibilities rest solely on her shoulders. Every week, she must travel to check in with local police—a costly, all-day process, which she skips meals to afford.

Meanwhile, the riverbanks are eroding, putting her family—who’s lost track of how many times they’ve moved already—at risk of being displaced again.

Leaving Nessa’s home, the sun began to set as we walked along the char. But the horizon couldn’t have been clearer, and it was frightening: looming and intertwined threats of climate catastrophe, political repression and escalating ethnic cleansing, while bombs raining down on Gaza, a continent away, embolden India’s Hindu nationalist regime.

“At night, I can’t sleep,” Nessa said. “Look: Here the water levels are rising. Where do I go now?” ■

Sanskrita Bharadwaj provided additional reporting in Dhubri. This article was supported by the Leonard C. Goodman Institute for Investigative Reporting.

ANKUR SINGH is a Cicero-based, Chicago-adjacent freelance journalist and organizer.

IN THOSE TIMES

Like Bushnell, Corrie Shouted for Palestine with her Last Breath

Rachel Corrie, an activist from Olympia, Wash., was murdered by the Israeli military on March 16, 2003. She was in Gaza trying to prevent Palestinian homes from being destroyed. Geov Parrish, an *In These Times* contributor, soon wrote about his worry that Corrie would be forgotten. Her legacy has only grown. Corrie's story is still brought up when people ponder what it means to be in solidarity with Palestinians.

Aaron Bushnell, a 25-year-old U.S. service member stationed in San Antonio, answered that question for himself February 25, the morning he lit himself on fire in what he called an "extreme act of protest": "Many of us like to ask ourselves, 'What would I do if I was alive during slavery? Or the Jim Crow South? Or apartheid? What would I do if my country was committing genocide?' The answer is, you're doing it. Right now."

In memoriam, in Jericho, Palestinians have already named a street after him.

IN 2003, GEOV PARRISH WROTE: Rachel Corrie, a 23-year-old senior at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Wash., was killed by Israeli soldiers in the Rafah Refugee Camp in the Gaza Strip on March 16.

Corrie was run over—and run over again, when an army bulldozer backed up over her a second time—as she tried to prevent soldiers from demolishing a Palestinian home in the camp. She was in Palestine as a volunteer with the International Solidarity Movement (ISM), the most prominent of several nonviolent groups that in the last year have been bringing international activists—primarily Americans and Europeans—to work as peacekeepers: witnessing Israeli treatment of Palestinians, trying to provide assistance to Palestinian civilians.

The circumstances of her death were disputed by the Israeli military and government, which claim that the bulldozer's driver was unaware of Corrie. This is flatly denied by other ISM volunteers who witnessed Corrie's death; in their version, Corrie talked with the driver only a few minutes before the incident and was wearing a bright, fluorescent orange jacket.

The Israel-Palestine conflict has largely disappeared from American news reports, but that's not because the violence has ended. Quite the opposite: It has become routine, with daily violence and humiliation inflicted upon Palestinians, deaths (often children) almost every day.

The level of economic deprivation, house and crop demolitions, shoot-to-kill curfews, restrictions on employment and movement, random arrests, beatings, torture, and worse inflicted by the Israelis have all essentially become background noise for most Americans. A few, however, have been intentionally putting themselves in harm's way.

As in many conflicts where the protagonists are averse to publicity—especially in America—Israelis have often hesitated in inflicting their usual levels of violence when there are Western witnesses. Israel itself has tacitly acknowledged the effectiveness of such programs; in recent months, the IDF has begun arresting the volunteers, and both deportations and denial of entry into Israel (the only way to get into Palestine) have also increased. Corrie's death was the first among the international volunteers.

Repeatedly, over the last year, returning American volunteers have reported the same thing: Ordinary Palestinians and their families both thank the internationals for caring enough to come, and beg them to tell their countrymen—that's us—what is being done in our name and with our tax money. The munitions scattered like confetti around Palestinian streets all have "made in USA" on them; likely, the bulldozer that killed Corrie was manufactured in her home country.

It's likely that the death of Rachel Corrie will be soon forgotten by most. But there are now hundreds of other Americans serving as nonviolent peace-keepers and witnesses in both Palestine and Iraq. It's worth taking a moment to remember not only Rachel, but all of these brave activists. They're putting their lives on the line for their beliefs, for the love of humanity, and because they feel a need to take responsibility for the actions of our elected government. We should all be so committed. ITT

This article has been edited for length.

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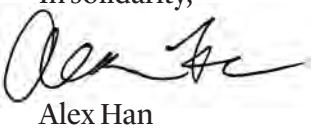

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IN THESE TIMES REMEMBERS

While thanking our supporters with this issue, we also remember and honor those who recently passed away.

RAYMOND J. AHEARN passed away in 2023 in Northern California. Raymond was born in New York in the 1930s and lived there until he completed his undergraduate degree. He married, then earned his master's degree from the University of Chicago in the 1960s. He and his family moved to California for Ray to work in county government near San Francisco, where he remained until retirement in the 1990s.

Raymond was involved in progressive politics and causes throughout his adult life, supporting many good organizations and candidates. Raymond is survived by his daughters and grandchildren.

DANIEL ELLSBERG passed away on June 16, 2023 and was a Marine Corps veteran, military analyst and Vietnam-era whistleblower who changed the course of U.S. history when he leaked the Pentagon Papers to the *New York Times* in 1971. He earned his Ph.D. from Harvard University in 1962 and worked for the RAND Corporation, the State Department and the Department of Defense.

Daniel, who remained a dedicated antiwar activist, passed away of pancreatic cancer in his home in Kensington, Calif. He is survived by his wife Patricia Marx, children Robert, Mary and Michael, five grandchildren, and one great-granddaughter. He was a founding sponsor of *In These Times* in 1976.

CHRISTOPHER LLOYD passed away Feb. 18, 2023, at his home in Woodstock, Vt. Vassie—Chris' wife of nearly 40 years—his twins, Daniel and So, stepson Cherif, cousin Arthur, and granddaughter Maya were all with him on his final day, surrounding him with love and care.

Chris was born in Evanston, Ill., on January 7, 1946, to Mary Norris Lloyd and William Bross Lloyd Jr. Chris served as a justice of the peace for many years in Woodstock, officiating weddings, including many same-sex marriages. He was also a member of the Billings Park Commission and served on the board of the Norman Williams Public Library in Woodstock.

Chris' family lovingly called him a "little bird"—and many mornings he could be found humming uplifting melodies as he drank his coffee. Singing was one of his great joys, and he was part of the North Universalist Chapel Society choir for more than 30 years. His sweet presence will be dearly missed.

FRANCES MARCUSE passed away quietly in her apartment at Vista del Monte in Santa Barbara, Calif., on Jan. 19, 2023. She was born in Yonkers, N.Y., in March 1930, to parents who had emigrated from Germany. While working as an au pair for Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany she met her future husband.

The couple's first date was at the 1948 New York City May Day parade, where they carried a capitalist dragon banner. Frances was involved in progressive politics, working for Henry Wallace's presidential run, with a platform that included the desegregation of schools, gender equality, national health insurance, and public ownership of large banks, railroads and utilities.

Peter and Frances married in 1949. After Frances's graduation, they moved to Connecticut, where Frances earned a teaching certificate and Peter practiced law. Over the next 35 years she worked her way up, teaching every odd grade in Waterbury schools from first to 11th, earning a master's degree, organizing a teachers union, and raising three children along the way.

She is survived by her sons, Harold and Andrew, as well as seven grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

EDWARD DAVID PILLAR, 82, of Lombard, Ill., passed away June 19, 2023, after extended illnesses.

Edward was born in Chicago and attended college in St. Paul, Minn., where he met Bunny Haugh, his wife of 58 years. He was devoted to his wife, his three children and their spouses, and five grandchildren.

He taught high school U.S. history for 35 years in the Chicago area, and he and Bunny spent their retirement watching their grandchildren grow up and traveling to their cabin in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. He was a teacher throughout his life, a mentor to colleagues, a loyal friend and a source of strength to his family. He was a good man who lived a full life and he left his family with many great memories.

LEO SOLAR, 87, passed away in 2022 and was a champion for justice who could not be intimidated, even in cases he brought against a Florida county sheriff and the IRS. Raised in Pennsylvania by his immigrant mother in an impoverished environment, Leo went on to forge an eclectic career. He began as an Arthur Murray dance instructor and studio owner, then moved to Palm Beach County, Fla., and drove trucks. In his 40s, he earned an accounting degree and worked as an IRS auditor, but returned to the more satisfying truck driving, which led to his avid support of the Teamsters Union.

Union advocacy spurred his interest in contributing to many other progressive causes. As a devoted election canvasser, he earned a county volunteer-of-the-year award. Leo wrote countless advocacy letters and rarely missed a picket line or protest.

IN MEMORIAM

We regret to announce but are honored to recognize In These Times *supporters who died in the past year.*

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- ***CHRISTOPHER LLOYD***
- ***GREGORY LUND***
- ***FRANCES MARCUSE***
- ***HARRY PHILO***
- ***EDWARD D. PILLAR***
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- ***LEO SOLAR***
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Dear Reader,

I've heard it all (and perhaps one too many times) when I tell people what I do for a living. *You ask people for money to run a nonprofit newsroom? Oof. I couldn't do that. Sounds tough and thankless.*

The reality is—I sought this job out. In my 30 years on this planet, I've come to understand the power a dollar has in making change. And there's something transformational that happens when resources can be moved from one hand to another: Deep relationships, solidarity, and an enormous sense of hope and promise.

In this issue of *In These Times*, we recognize each individual, foundation and organization that donated in 2023. Every name listed represents someone who helped publish independent, progressive journalism, in print and online at InTheseTimes.com.

We are incredibly grateful for our community of supporters. You represent a collective hope—thousands of people who believe a better world is possible. In the past year, so many of you were willing to put your money behind your beliefs.

With your support, *In These Times* has promised to continue providing news and analysis to inform and advance movements for social, economic, racial, gender and climate justice—movements we all want to see thrive. Our magazine has weathered many, many storms over nearly 50 years to amplify these voices and help shape these struggles.

But one thing about fundraising for a Leftist publication is that the work never stops.

Ongoing donations from readers like you don't just keep our lights on and our hope alive. They remind us all of the collective commitment we have to one another—and to the movements on the ground.

Will you donate to *In These Times* in 2024? Are you looking for hope and promise in an important election year? Can you help give momentum to movements for justice when it's needed most? Use the attached envelope or donate online at InTheseTimes.com/Movement.

In Solidarity,

Lauren Kostoglanis
Development Director

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Weaving a Feminist Movement

How women in Bengaluru are unraveling patriarchy in India, stitch by stitch, song by song

BY PANTHEA LEE

Artist Indu Antony was enjoying conversation over chai at a women's center in Bengaluru, India, when an angry man walked in. He tore a piece of art off the wall, took a lighter from his pocket, and set it on fire. Antony's companions recognized the man as a local official in a right-wing political party; they scampered away.

"This is a center that is attacking men," the official fumed. It was three in the afternoon, and Antony smelled a day's worth of drink on his breath.

"You cannot burn our stories," Antony shot back. The man's eyes flared; he was not used to being challenged.

The two went back and forth, debating the community center she had founded: Is something created for women inherently against men? In a city with so few safe spaces for women, why did he think it was okay to charge in? Just as the official's voice grew louder, his tone more belligerent, Antony sensed movement behind her.

"Don't talk to her like that!" All of her sisters had returned, and now formed a wall behind her. The official was catatonic. The women were all most likely lower-caste; those who worked did so as domestic workers and street cleaners. Women—especially poor women—were not supposed to talk back.

After he stormed off, the women huddled over the singed fabric. It was part of an art-piece they were creating, stitching fragments of their lives onto shreds of cloth and into a room-sized tapestry of stories.

The words on this piece read: "It hurts a lot when he beats me." They recognized the stitching—it belonged to one of their sisters. She had recently been hospitalized after what neighbors shrugged off as a lover's quarrel. The official had come to destroy the evidence.

THE MOST DANGEROUS COUNTRY FOR WOMEN

In 2018, a poll of international experts on women's issues declared India the world's most dangerous country for women, citing the high risks of sexual violence and being forced into slave labor. That year, women reported a rape in India every 15 minutes.

The poll generated intense national debate: Surely we weren't the *most* dangerous—worse than war-torn Afghanistan and Syria, which ranked second and third, respectively? But the results confirmed what many women had long suspected, even if they never articulated it.

Politicians insisted that great strides were being made, but too many women were familiar with the routines to gaslight and mollify. Following high-profile crimes against women, elected officials would inevitably wring their hands and promise change. Take the case of "Nirbhaya," a 23-year-old student in Delhi who, in 2012, was beaten, gang-raped and tortured on a bus, by the driver and five passengers. When she arrived at the hospital, doctors found only 5% of her intestines left in her body; she died two weeks later.

Shalini, a member of the Namma Katte women's center community in Bengaluru, India, takes a rest on a swing amid walls of sarees embroidered with community stories.

COURTESY OF INDU ANTONY

The tragedy sparked nationwide protests and led to stronger rape laws; a victim's character could no longer be considered in a case, and the length of minimum sentences increased. But more than a decade later, advocates say little has actually improved. From 2011 to 2021, the rate of crimes against women in India increased 87%.

While the safety of women has continued to decline, their importance—and thus their instrumentalization—in Indian politics has grown. Women are now a crucial voting bloc, and political parties have been courting them with promises of income assistance, subsidized gas and electricity, and all-women police stations.

Women are also vital to India fulfilling its promise as an economic powerhouse. While women currently perform 91% of daily unpaid care work, their participation in the formal workforce is only 24%. According to McKinsey, women's underrepresentation in India's formal economy translates to $2.9 trillion in annual lost opportunity. Eager to seize this potential, the government has rolled out skills development programs, entrepreneurship support and new maternity leave policies.

But what does it mean to be a woman in a world that commits unspeakable violence against you, then demands you serve its economic ambitions? How to exist in a world that ignores your suffering, yet insists you support its "progress"?

Women enjoy each other's company at Namma Katte, taking refuge in the community center. Three hundred community members contributed a piece to "Nanna Langa" ("My Skirt," right), seen here on display at the Museum of Art and Photography Bengaluru.

A ROOM OF OUR OWN

The pain and precarity of being a woman once filled Indu Antony with rage. In her youth, she was a regular at demonstrations: "if someone was protesting something, I was there." But she soon saw the limits of protest: Rallies were largely led by upper-class people who had the time to organize and the confidence to demand change, but who lacked the ability to imagine radical alternatives—perhaps because, for them, there was less at stake.

Antony was eager for true grassroots change she could touch. To realize such change, she suspected, women needed to come together regularly, not just in crisis. They needed to rally around shared dreams, not just commiserate over shared heartaches.

They needed a space of their own.

In 2022, Namma Katte ("Our Space" in Kannada) was born. It is a rectangular, 25-square-foot room in Lingarajapuram, a working-class neighborhood in Bengaluru, where women are typically at home by 6 p.m.; it was risky to be out later.

Months before Namma Katte's opening, locals had found a mysterious bag on a nearby street; inside was a woman's body parts, chopped up and caked with blood. Locals told Antony this was not the first such discovery.

In announcing Namma Katte on Instagram, Antony wrote: "This space is to bring back the sense of community and laugh together. A space to gossip and start change with conversations. A space where we will dance with no control and where we will sell *idlis*. ... A space to wait and think. A space to read and scream. A space that will eventually be taken over by the people themselves. To bring about a new form of solidarity economics."

The early months were tough. Local men ignored Antony's insistence that Namma Katte was a women's center and sprawled out across its floor. She told them off: Every other public space in the city is yours, let us have this one humble room.

Local women also did not know what to make of Antony's vision, or Antony herself. She is from Kerala, tattooed and unmarried at 41. She speaks English and has traveled outside of India. Any of these facts alone would have rendered her suspicious; together, Antony was illegible.

Some men used Antony's incongruity to dissuade their wives from going to Namma Katte, claiming that people like Antony would inevitably leave, and they are the ones who would be there when she did.

But Antony persisted. She continued to show up, day after day. Sometime around the third month, the shy trickle of women grew to a curious stream. Some were

COURTESY OF INDU ANTONY

lured by Antony's offer to teach them embroidery. After learning the craft, one woman, who was illiterate, marveled at the cloth on which she had marked her existence: "I have never signed my name, but now I am stitching it."

Once they knew how to embroider, Antony invited each woman to stitch a personal story onto salvaged saree scraps. The women hesitated … could they really talk about their lives? And if they did, who would care? But slowly, as they grew comfortable with each other, small talk about their children gave way to tales of their lives:

"She didn't actually trip and fall down the stairs; her sister-in-law pushed her."

"Can you believe her husband just stood there and let her burn to death?"

One day, a woman said she'd heard her neighbor drunkenly beating his wife. Such stories were not uncommon, but then another added: "That happens to me too." Antony felt time stop. All of the stories so far had been of neighbors and friends—of misfortune somewhere else. No one had yet shared her own story.

But courage begets courage, and once the floodgate opened, more tales of intimate heartache flowed:

"I hardly slept during those days; he drank a lot."

"I woke up after the acid attack to see that I have lost one eye."

Thirty stories became 100, then 300. Six months after Namma Katte's opening, women were marching in to declare, "I want to stitch my story, give me a cloth!" A year later, the women of Lingarajapuram had stitched 547 stories, then joined them to create "Nanna Langa" ("My Skirt"). When hung, the piece is about 20 feet tall and looks like a protective cloak, large enough for all of them.

Antony was shocked by the stories shared in those afternoons of stitching and chai. But even more stunning was the women's nonchalance as they recounted tragedy after tragedy. But was it actually nonchalance, or was it resignation, or stifled grief? Was their indifference feigned, a defense against pain? Antony was haunted by the harrowing deaths recounted by this whisper network, and vowed to commemorate these lost sisters' lives.

To do so, Antony turned to the *oppari*, a traditional mourning song performed at Tamil funerals. An increasingly rare art form, Antony scoured Bengaluru for singers. She eventually found six grandmothers, all of whom were surprised to hear from her because "no one calls us anymore."

The grandmothers first looked at Antony askance. An art project? What did they know about art? They knew only funerals, where their performances praised the recently deceased and lamented their passing. While their lyrics were effusive, they were also generic; the singers generally knew little about those they were hired to mourn.

Antony, however, had a different kind of oppari in mind. Once she gathered the singers, she told the stories of 10 women from the Namma Katte community who had been killed. As the grandmothers listened, their wariness dissolved: Antony was no longer a strange artist asking them to participate in strange art; she was a sister who knew the pain of womanhood. For in these stories, they heard the truth of their own lives.

Once Antony finished, they joined hands and began singing:

"We are all old but you are too young to die, my dear. Why did your mother-in-law have to torture you so much? Why has she hit you like this? Does God even have eyes or does he not?"

"You brother's wife, what a heartless traitor she has to be to push you off a building when you were pregnant. Oh my dear, what pain that unborn child must have suffered, oh God, dear God! It doesn't matter how many temples I go to, this pain will always leave me unfulfilled, within me."

The grandmothers soon shifted from singing about the tragedies they heard to freestyling about the tragedies they lived. One's daughter had also suffered a dowry death—her mother-in-law had set her on fire—and she now wailed for her child. Arm-in-arm, these women were no longer mourning strangers. They were mourning their neighbors, their friends, their daughters, their granddaughters, and all of the women they had not met but whose pain they knew.

"I came to this town in '62, when I was a small girl. I wasn't even a big girl when I got married. My mother-in-law would hit and kick me, not even feed me. I would eat raw onions and water for my hunger."

Women are also vital to India fulfilling its promise as an economic powerhouse: While women currently perform 91% of daily unpaid care work, their participation in the formal workforce is only 24%.

A Namma Katte member practices her stitching outside the community center's entrance.

"I am the sinner that bore children for him. He said he will cry for me and stay with me, but even he left me. My troubles do not seem to end. Who will I go and tell my troubles to?"

"In the land I was born, I don't have anything to call mine. I have no joy to call mine."

The grandmothers sang for 27 minutes without pause, then looked at each other's tear-drenched faces, startled. They were used to performing grief, but they rarely dared to let themselves feel it.

"We should do this more often," one said. Another nodded, then another. Yes we should, nodded the *dadis* who had seen it all.

What happens once we acknowledge the pain permeating our collective? Once we let ourselves really cry, can we ever stop? The grandmothers had once feared their grief—but what were its possibilities?

MOURNING AS A SITE OF SOLIDARITY

In 2020, a 19-year-old Dalit woman was gang-raped by four high-caste men in Uttar Pradesh. She died two weeks later. Her remains were hastily cremated by the police without the consent of her family, who were put under house arrest and barred from organizing a funeral.

An obvious reason for a hurried cremation might be to destroy evidence, but cultural theorist Brahma Prakash suggests another logic: The Indian government feared what might emerge from collective mourning. The woman's death had already created an uproar among Dalit communities, and authorities feared a funeral would turn into a political procession.

"What is it that we are mourning?" Prakash asks in *Body on the Barricades: Life, Art and Resistance in Contemporary India*. "Are we mourning the loss of an individual life or are we mourning our collective failure? Are we trying to see death in isolation and fatalism, or are we also mourning our democracy and justice systems?"

Prakash observes that grief is first felt and processed individually, but many cultures have rituals—through dress, prayer, food, music—to channel individual grief into collective expressions. Because mourning can also carry a political function: to bear witness and, when the cause of that which we mourn is unjust, to organize against future such injustices.

Authoritarian governments understand the power of mourning to radicalize and mobilize. Prakash believes clampdowns on mourning processions across India, in the Uttar Pradesh case and beyond, stem from this recognition. "[Mourning processions] become a last time where solidarity can be forged [in response to an injustice] and it can get out of hand at any time," he observes. "This has happened several times in Kashmir, and in other parts of India where people come together in social mourning rituals. And that is what authorities are scared of."

In 2016, prominent Kashmiri liberation fighter Burhan Wani was killed by Indian occupation forces. To the government, he was a terrorist; to many Kashmiri youth, he was hope. About a week after his funeral, authorities suspended mobile data services, closed schools and blocked roads to his village. Yet thousands of people were determined to pay their respects and endured beatings from security forces to

COURTESY OF INDU ANTONY

do so. After the funeral, many young people joined the separatist group Hizbul Mujahideen, in which Wani had been a commander.

The practice of collective mourning, Prakash observes, helped reignite the Kashmiri freedom movement.

What other freedom struggles might mourning fuel?

It was at Antony's exhibition *Mindscapes: In the company of others*, at Bengaluru's Museum of Art and Photography, that I first encountered the grandmothers' oppari. As I approached 10 clay busts, each on an individual plinth, I was drawn to their lowered gazes—a mix of sorrow, regret, resignation. I put on the headphones to listen to "Us," a recording of the oppari's wails; I gasped in recognition. I did not understand Tamil, yet I knew of what these women sang: This was a song chiseled out of grief generations long and galaxies deep. It is the same timbre of sorrow my mother knows, as does her mother, as does her mother's mother. As their daughter, it is the sorrow I carry in my bones. I had long known its weight; now I knew its sound.

The faces of the women of Lingarajapuram flashed across my mind. Sisters who had paid the ultimate price for being born a woman in a world that hates women. The grandmothers' song was the cry of tormented helplessness.

It was a commitment to steadfast witnessing through the agony.

SLOWLY SLOWLY, SMALL SMALL CHANGES

In February, Namma Katte celebrated its second anniversary. It recently hosted a skills-sharing workshop where women taught each other how to tailor. There is now chatter about organizing a community nursery. For local women, having a trusted place to put their children would mean they could work, which would mean more autonomy, more freedom.

Watching more and more women take ownership over Namma Katte, and using it to root their rest and organizing, has been illuminating for Antony. "I see these small, small changes happening," she says. Men used to get drunk and break bottles outside; today, the corner is free of glass shards. In the early days of Namma Katte, men used to scowl as they walked by; today, many keep a respectful distance and greet the women. Before Namma Katte, interaction between most women in the neighborhood was limited to exchanging pleasantries at the market; today, the women of Namma Katte laugh together and watch one another's children; they have become beautifully entangled.

One regular, Glory, who works long hours as a maid, often visits after work to collect herself before returning home. She savors her Namma Katte drop-ins: "When I come here, my mind is free."

What happens once we acknowledge the pain permeating our collective? Once we let ourselves really cry, can we ever stop?

Namma Katte shows the revolutionary potential of women resting, gathering and laughing together. And it is not just women who have succumbed to its energy. Recently, some young men from the neighborhood formed a group called the Namma Katte Squad. Many used to ban their sisters from leaving home; now, they are permitted to go to Namma Katte.

Antony remains frustrated that the women need to ask permission, but she knows directly challenging the boys would be ineffective. "Patriarchy is so ingrained, I cannot come in with a poster that says 'smash patriarchy,' I cannot [dismantle it] overnight," she says. "It's a slow unravel. It takes a lot of time. But slowly, slowly, slowly, we can break things one by one."

For the recent Ganesha Festival, an annual celebration of the elephant-headed deity, the Namma Katte Squad organized a celebration outside the space. For Hindus, Lord Ganesha is the god of wisdom and prosperity, the remover of obstacles. The significance of the men choosing to observe this festival at the women's center was not lost on Antony. They are proud that the women have a community space and want to show support.

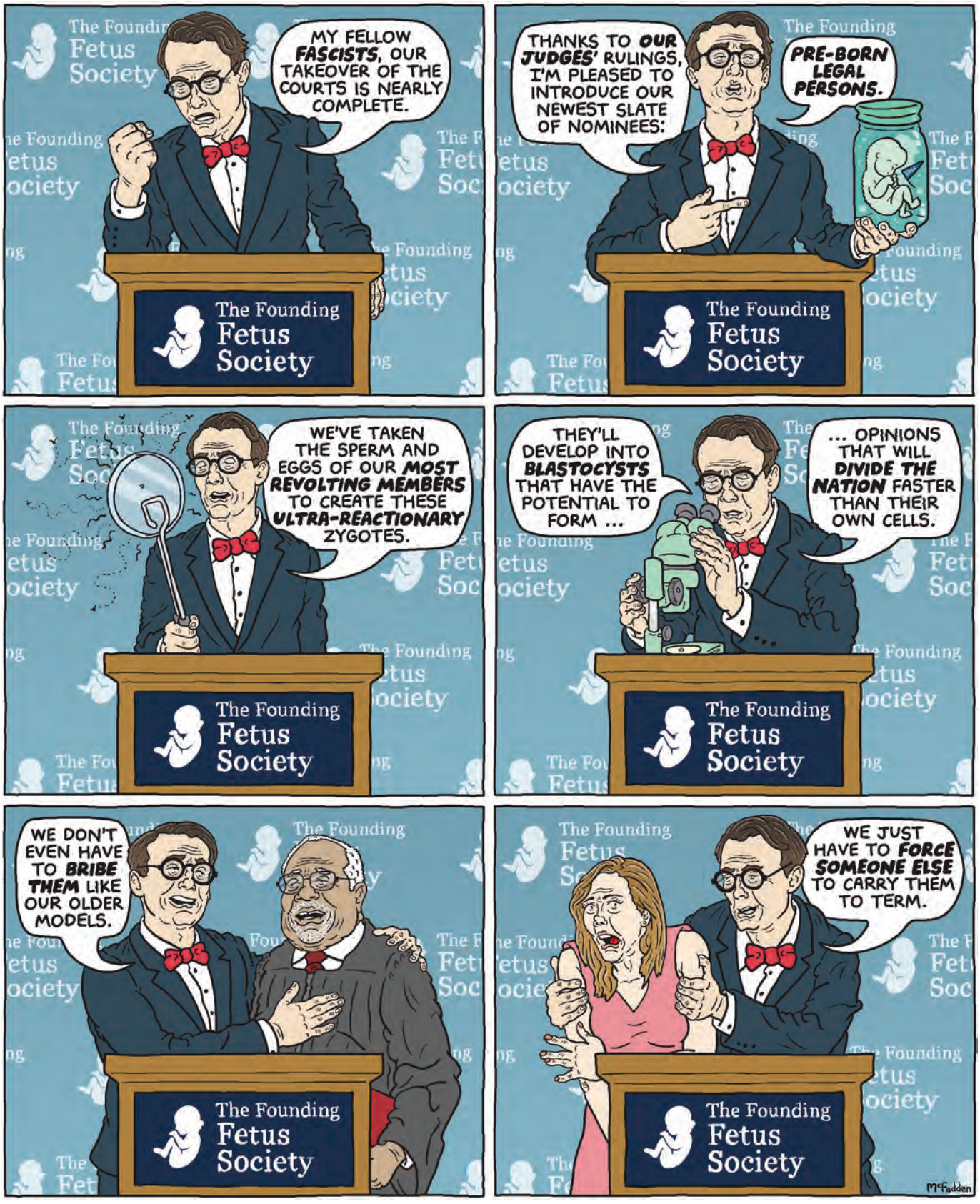
A year after he came to burn the woman's stitching, the political official returned. Antony saw him walking up to the center and braced herself, but as he got closer, she noticed something strange: He was smiling.

"You are doing such great work," he cooed. "I'm seeing such important changes from what you are doing!" Antony, he had come to understand, was a crowd-puller among women. Would she like to stand for his campaign in the upcoming election?

She stifled a chuckle. Perhaps the change Namma Katte was seeding was not so small, small after all. ITT

PANTHEA LEE is a writer, activist and transdisciplinary facilitator based in Taipei. She is writing a book on healing, imagination and structural justice.

BRIAN MCFADDEN



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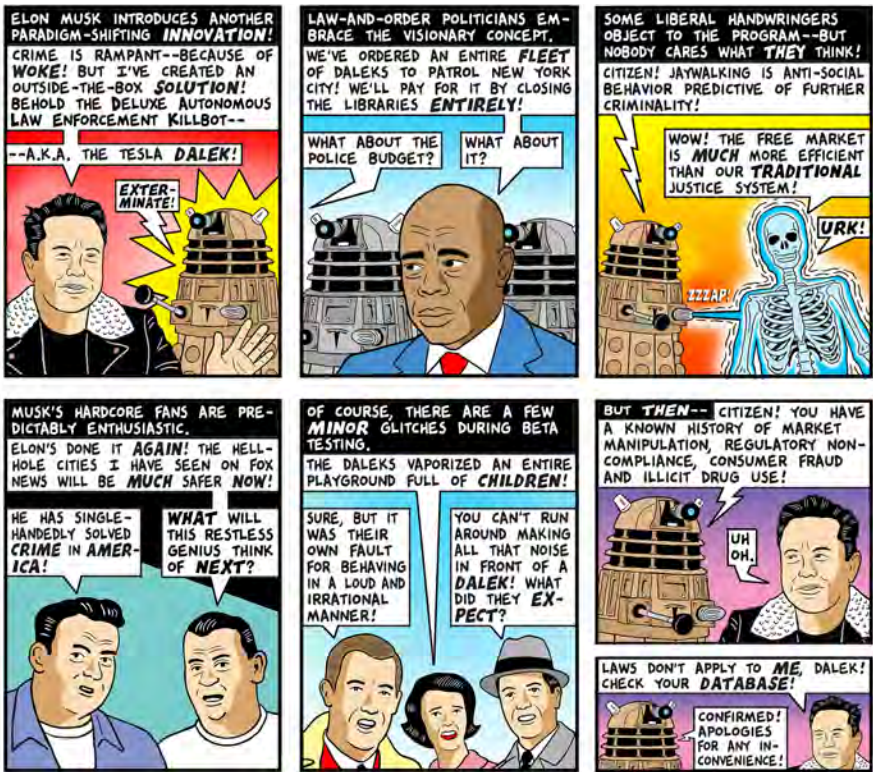

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