



# Bad Apple

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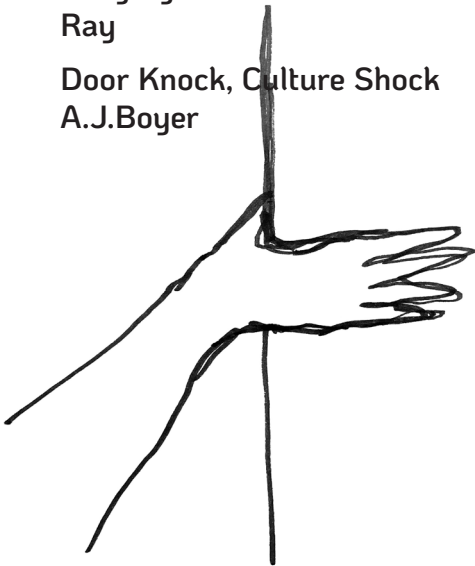
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## About Us

We are a collective of women and non-binary activists and writers based in London, Wales and Merseyside. We create this zine as a space for conversations about faith and social justice organising. We are inspired by anarchist, queer, feminist, anti-ableist, anti-racist, anti-colonial and anti-capitalist practices and thought. We want to nurture dialectical thought that challenges the boundaries between the secular and the mystical, the personal and the political.

In these desperate times it's important that we sustain interfaith and intersectional conversations and collaborations. We invite you to contribute ideas, artwork, poems, essays and stories on our themes of activism, spirituality, radical social change, building relationships across difference or anything that might be interesting for this project. We are interested in collaborative writing and are happy to work with you to bring your ideas into print.



# Bad Apple

## Aporia

Henry\_

Our introduction says we're interested in dialectical thought. Dialectical is an off-putting word for some. Even though I've been to philosophy school, and studied 'the unhappy consciousness', I'm still not quite sure what it means. I know dialectics can be painful. At the same time, 'dialectic' sounds like such a safe word, confined to school, university, academia. Not something we need worry about in ordinary life. What is anarchist dialectic but a discursive essay, something we perhaps learnt to do at school if we were lucky. Not so frightening. A both/and conversation, a but/and conversation, a both/but/and conversation with a psychological, political or educational stuffing.

But it's not safe at all! We must try and think two things at the same time, or even more than two. Or even a borrowed word: polylectic, I am a bee!

Have you ever woken up in the small hours worrying about your frail parents. What to do? We have to make a decision; whether to act, to raise uncomfortable choices. We reach out to friends with more experience. We wait for events to make the decision for us. The conclusion might be to do nothing, but is that an abdication or even worse, complacency. As the poet wrote, 'Teach us to care and not to care.'

This is applying dialectics to daily life, whether to a small scale gesture or to a universal truth. It could be what political writers call a challenge to the 'dominant narrative' or a challenge to multiple narratives. Dialectical thinking is itself a challenge to the more commonly received polarised views, opinions of right and wrong, good and bad judgements that news junkies are exposed to every day. Equally, mainstream media often pit two

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# Prayer with Hair (a sermon)

Nora Ziegler

I want to speak with you today about women's hair, which was a controversial and politicised topic for the early Christians and still is today. And I want to speak about the women in Northern Syria who have been fighting to defend the monumental achievements of the women's revolution in Rojava.

We heard a reading from one of the apostle Paul's letters to the Corinthians. Paul writes:

'God purposely chose what the world considers nonsense in order to shame the wise, and he chose what the world considers weak in order to shame the powerful.<sup>28</sup> He chose what the world looks down on and despises and thinks is nothing, in order to destroy what the world thinks is important.'

These are powerful words. But reading Paul's words as a woman gives them a whole other layer of meaning. 'God purposefully chose what the world considers nonsense in order to shame the wise'. The world often treats women's wisdom as nonsense, dismissing it as 'old wives tales' and 'gossip'. God 'chose what the world looks down on and despises and thinks is nothing, in order to destroy what the world thinks is important.' The world looks down on and despises women.

I think the Christian women in Corinth would have identified strongly with Paul's words. They would have felt seen and welcomed to fully participate in the church as equals.

We know that women were leading prayers and teaching in Paul's churches, and that he was supportive of this practice. We know from 1 Corinthians chapter 11, that some women were breaking with a traditional custom and were proclaiming God's message in public worship without covering their heads. It is likely that women felt encouraged to do this because Paul taught that in Christ there were no differences between men and women, free person or slave. All were equal.

However, in this letter, Paul argues that women should cover their heads when leading public worship. He writes, 'any woman who prays or proclaims God's message in public worship with nothing on her head disgraces her husband'. Interestingly, the word Paul uses which is translated here as 'disgrace', is the same word he uses in chapter one when he writes that God, 'chose what the world considers weak in order to shame the powerful'.

Paul is giving the women of Corinth mixed messages. On the one hand, he preaches that God chose the weak to shame the strong. At the same time, he argues that women must not shame men; that they should accept their lower status. Paul is fully aware of the contradiction he finds himself in. He awkwardly goes on to say that: 'In our life in the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.' He recognises that his advice to the women sits in tension with the inclusive message of the gospel.

This contradiction reflects a wider tension that the early Christians wrestled with, which is still relevant for us today. How do we live and survive in a society, while also challenging that society? Where do we make compromises and where do we put our foot down? How can we be peacemakers while also speaking out against injustice?

Paul believes that the women of Corinth should conform to a patriarchal custom rather than challenge it. I can offer an extremely charitable, feminist interpretation of Paul's position. In the beginning of his letter, Paul shows that he is concerned with people seeking individual status. He is critical of people using their intellect and education or their wealth and social status to lord it over others. It is possible that some women who had wealth or high social status were using their privilege to take liberties which lower

class women could not afford. Wealthy women may have been able to flout traditional customs, whereas if lower class women did so, they may have risked violence and marginalisation.

We know that Paul prioritised the needs of the community over the freedom and desires of individuals. So, it is possible that Paul was concerned that women were seeking individual status, rather than working to shift the power dynamic between men and women more broadly, which we know takes time, requires immense patience and compromises along the way.

Paul wanted Christians to be unified as one body in Christ. But whose responsibility is it to create that unity? Who must make the compromises and swallow down their pride to smooth over divisions? If a woman praying with her head uncovered disgraces men, maybe that is a good thing. Maybe the men should be ashamed that they are treating women as inferior even though women are called by Jesus Christ to be equal partners in his kingdom.

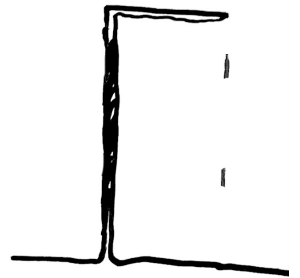
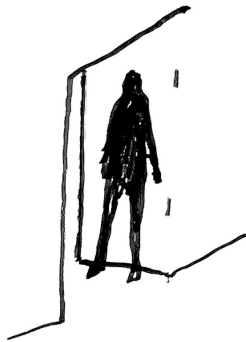
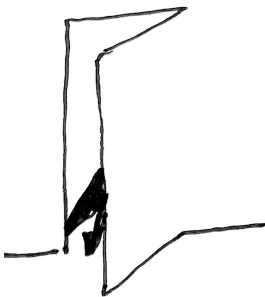
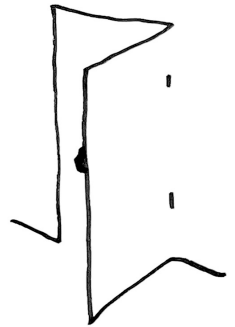
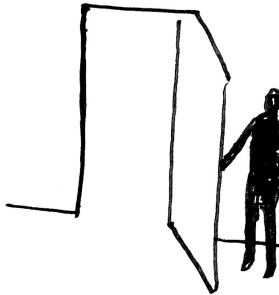
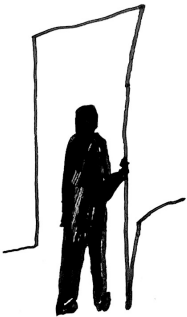
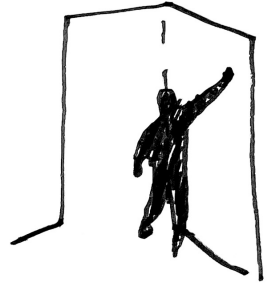
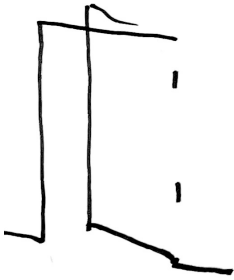
Hierarchical power dynamics have a way of turning shame around. It is the victim who is made to feel ashamed for the hurt that has been done to them, instead of the other way around. For example, it is shameful that in the UK, one of the richest countries in the world, almost one in three children is growing up in poverty. But who bears this shame? The rich are celebrated and admired, while the poor are blamed for their poverty and humiliated.

In January 2026, there was a video on social media of a male soldier in the Syrian army who cut off a female Kurdish fighter's braid and proudly displayed it like a trophy. In response, Kurdish women around the world braided each other's hair in videos shared on social media, at protests and on the front



lines of the war. They show that women's hair is a symbol of strength and dignity. It is only shameful to those who would deny women their freedom.

When women turn their shame around against the men who oppress them, this is an act of love. Shame can move us to repent, to seek forgiveness and draw closer to God. But if the shame of injustice is turned against the oppressed, against women, against the poor, we remain divided, from each other and from God. God chose what the world considers weak in order to shame the powerful; to heal us and restore our relationships with each other and with God. Amen. ■



# Invisible Labour, Bodies that Refuse

Sumaiya Shameem

I was raised in a culture where adapting and accepting were seen as common, especially for women. From a young age, I was taught when and how to speak. While some of this shaped manners and respect, much of it was rooted in gender expectations. Softness was praised; assertiveness, even when justified, was discouraged. Growing up, I watched women across generations carry the weight of their families with quiet resilience. They were not always the breadearners, but they were breadmakers in countless unseen ways. Despite their constant effort, their contributions often went unrecognised. This invisible labour extended beyond physical tasks, managing emotions, maintaining relationships, anticipating needs, and holding everything together, often alongside full-time work. These expectations were treated as normal, leaving little room for acknowledgment or rest.

Over time, this conditioning turns agreement into instinct, while refusal feels like a breach of expectation. I have smiled in rooms to make others feel comfortable. Whispered to myself, this too shall pass. Yet there comes a quiet shift, an internal moment of awareness. Refusal does not have to be loud or confrontational; it can be subtle and deeply personal. It is the decision to pause, to decline, to stop carrying what was never yours. In choosing not to comply automatically, boundaries begin to form. This quiet resistance holds power because it does not seek permission, it simply reclaims space and challenges the idea that enduring is the only role available. It's not a destination I would say, but more

of a journey. A journey that I started very slowly, but keen to see how far I can go on. Even though I am pursuing this act of quiet resistance to protect my consciousness, there is still sometimes, an underlying guilt, which is hard to shift.

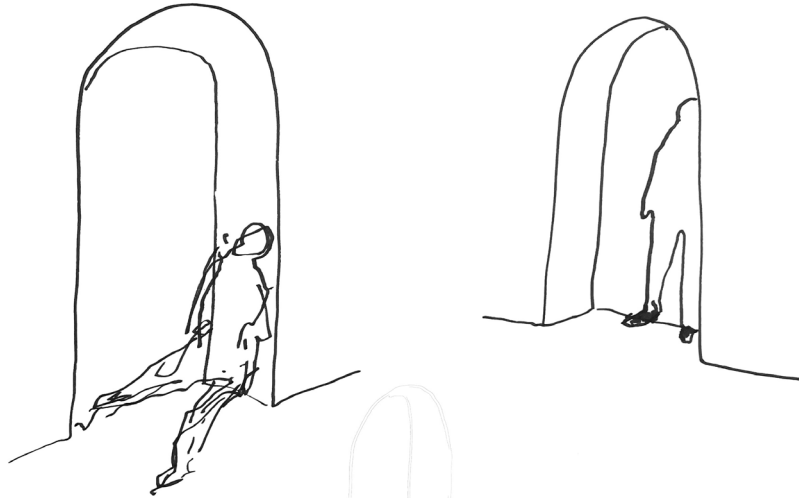
Refusal becomes less about defiance and more about self-preservation: a conscious decision to stop overextending and to no longer respond out of habit. It is not driven by anger, but by the recognition that continuing in the same way is unsustainable. In this moment, exhaustion shifts from being only a burden to becoming the point where change begins.

As I continue to go through the process of self-realisation and chaos, faith becomes a place of return. As a Muslim, spirituality offers grounding when expectations feel overwhelming. It creates space to step back without guilt and to accept that not everything must be carried alone. Through prayer and quiet reflection, there is relief in trusting that what is unseen is still understood. Faith becomes a source of strength, not through constant striving, but through surrender. In a life shaped by demands, it offers a space of honesty and rest, where there is no need to perform, only to exist and be held.

Perhaps liberation doesn't come through loudness but rather a quieter act. It's not about not loving a person, but rather knowing a place for every person. The journey is not about becoming someone untouched by expectation, but about learning what no longer deserves access to your energy. In that sense, refusal is not absence or withdrawal, but a return to the self. ■

# A Monster Roams our Churches

Ruth



In 1993, trans theorist and historian Susan Stryker gave a performance at a conference entitled 'My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage.' Using Mary Shelley's novel, Frankenstein, as her basis, she wrote a powerful piece in which she laid bare the vitriol that is directed towards transsexuals and boldly claims it as her own. She writes:

'The transsexual body is an unnatural body. It is the product of medical science. It is a technological construction. It is flesh torn apart and sewn together again in a shape other than that in which it was born. In these circumstances, I find a deep affinity between myself as a transsexual woman and the monster in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein.'

As I have come to claim my own unnatural, transsexual body, Stryker's words have been invaluable to me. Here is a woman, responding powerfully to a growing movement of feminism

that could only see the monstrous transsexual. Mary Daly, pioneering feminist theologian and hater of trans people wrote in 1978, 'today the Frankenstein phenomenon is omnipresent not only in religious myth, but in its offspring, phallocratic technology... Transsexualism is an example of male surgical siring which invades the female world with substitutes.' Despite this rhetoric, Stryker doesn't decide to calmly lay out a counter-argument about why transsexuals are not monsters. Instead, she follows in the great tradition of queer activists and reclaim this slur as our own:

'I want to lay claim to the dark power of my monstrous identity without using it as a weapon against others or being wounded by it myself. I will say this as bluntly as I know how: I am a transsexual, and therefore I am a monster.'

Over the past year, these words have become even more potent to me. I am currently exploring a call to religious life in the Church of England, an oddity

even within the Anglican Communion. While I knew this process would not be a simple one, it turns out that my body has become the main barrier to me exploring this. While some communities have been open to the idea, there have been others who have expressed that I would not be welcome; this has included people I have not met saying that they would never accept being in community with a transsexual.

In some ways, this discernment process has pushed me to ask some essential questions. What kind of body do I want? How passable do I need to be to roam the institutional church? I am grateful to know that I am not alone in this. Transsexual friends of mine exploring calls to ordained ministry are bombarded with questions about their bodies, their sex lives, their plans to have children as a normal part of the discernment process. There's solidarity in our shared experiences.

The more pernicious side of this process is a question that plagues me and my fellow transsexual religious: how well will you assimilate? Do you 'pass' well enough that you won't be a problem? How much of a problem will you be?

For anyone who diverts from the archetypal Christian because of their body, their race or their background, they will know this dilemma that I am facing all too well. We are offered an open door of welcome, only for it to be slammed in our face the minute we reveal our true selves. On one side of the slammed door is a religious community discussing what kind of genitals I can have before joining them. On the other side is me, hoping and praying that they'll just stop debating my existence.

In Stryker's piece, she speaks of rage in response to transsexual dehumanisation. 'Like the monster', she writes, 'I am too often perceived as less than fully human due to the means of my embodiment; like the monster's as well, my exclusion from human community fuels a deep and abiding rage in me that I, like the monster, direct against the conditions in which I must struggle to exist.' Rage is a complicated topic for Christians; Jesus shows us in scripture that anger can be righteous when pointed towards the religious authorities of the day (Matthew 23), like grabbing a 'whip of cords' and driving the money changers out of the temple (John 2:13-22). But when he faced his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus also told Peter to, 'put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword' (Matthew 26:52). So often,

the message we receive from Jesus is that the most Christian response is one of disruptive peace. Is there a place for transsexual rage in all of that?

## **“A transsexual body is a prayer to the Creator.”**

I do not wish to be consumed by rage over this. I do not feel anger towards the Church or towards my body. If anything, this closed door has forced me not to cower away but to hold onto whatever monstrous power I possess. A transsexual body is a prayer to the Creator. It is a person taking agency of their body and their life, giving thanks for the body that they have been given and taking an active part in their creation. There might be closed doors to me, but for now I am content with being another monster roaming our churches; 'beware, for I am fearless and therefore powerful.'\* ■

\*Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (Chapter 20)

# Leftie. Woke. Feminist. Oh dear!

Samsara Lind

## **How to navigate Catholic dating apps for a Liberal Catholic.**

After hearing enough horror stories from my Muslim friend about religious dating apps, I wasn't exactly optimistic. But 2026 was around the corner and I had been single for nearly a year, so I decided to give it a go.

Signing up to Catholic Match quickly revealed that, as a woman in her late 30s (apparently well past the prime age for producing 5+ children—yes, that was literally a profile filter), my chances were pretty slim. Once my profile was live and I started browsing, cautious hope gave way to the realisation that this was less a path to romance and more an accidental field study—perhaps source material for a future Bad Apple article?

I'm a cradle Catholic who grew up attending Catholic school in Asia and had a generally positive experience of the faith, staying involved during University through a vibrant chaplaincy community. But after graduating into "real parish life" while simultaneously working intense hours, my Mass attendance gradually declined. A relationship with an Anglican priest sparked a kind of faith revival, as Anglicanism seemed to offer familiar liturgy with a more progressive outlook, but his abusive behaviour and the breakdown of that relationship left me disillusioned with religious institutions altogether. After a period of soul-searching, especially while walking the Camino de Santiago, I came to realise that faith is not only personal but something to be lived in community, which led me back to Roman Catholicism.

Today, I feel most at home with a group of religious sisters who follow the Ignatian spirituality, living out their faiths in action. I am active in an inner-city parish with a strong outreach

ministry, while also occasionally attending Latin Mass elsewhere for practical reasons of proximity, where I have come to appreciate the serenity and deep reverence of Eucharistic adoration. Perhaps this unusual combination reflects the contradictions and complexities of my own faith journey.

## **How about men on Catholic dating apps?**

Many profiles carried an unmistakable air of loneliness and desperation, often paired with signs of a heavy diet of 'masculine' life coaches, online influencers, or Catholic men's groups. Some selectively quoted teachings often found on these profiles:

- that women must obey their husbands (Ephesians 5:22-24),
- women must be silent in church (1 Cor 14:34-35),
- women may not preach (1 Timothy 2:12),
- that men can correct their wives by words and blows (Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae Q62, 13th century),
- that wives should remain at home, and never leave home without her husband's consent (Catechism of the Council of Trent, 16th century, note: the Catechism of the Catholic Church has had many revisions since then),

## **Are there really no Liberal Catholic men out there?**

Like finding a needle in a hay stack, I occasionally came across a profile that felt uncannily familiar, as if I could have written it myself. Unfortunately, in this case, the promising profile quickly unravelled into someone so profoundly lacking in basic social skills... a clusterfuck who used ChatGPT to write his messages but forgot to remove the prompts and copied/pasted everything. More than once.

I was talking to another Cradle Catholic. We bonded over our dogs and he received brownie points for adopting the puppy from Benedictine nuns who were fundraising to repair their convent. He was good at asking me very deep questions but was very evasive when I asked him the same thing back. For a while I could not make out, which flavour of Catholic is he? Like a vegetarian who isn't sure if this burger is veggie or meat. When he decided to ghost me (so much for Catholics being nice), I braced myself before I googled his name. Turned out in his previous life he studied theology and ferociously wrote for various traditional Catholic publications. Including about feminism (TL/DR. feminism = bad).

I also found an Anglican there infiltrating our Catholic space. When I gently turned him down because "we don't vibe", he went a little bit nuts (like my priest ex). When Archbishop Sarah Mullally announced a pilgrimage to Canterbury, he wrote that he hoped she would reflect on 1 Timothy 2:12 while on the pilgrimage.

### What about meeting people IRL?

The Protestants think Catholics are heathens, the activists are atheists, anarchists, or both (I'm too conservative for them), the outdoorsy folks are at best agnostics or humanists. They might be open to letting me practice my faith, donate to charitable causes like SVP (Society of St Vincent de Paul) but would eschew

going to church. From admin/legal POV this could be problematic in the future.

### Why are young men now so traditional?

It seems we are going backwards by 80 years/pre-Vatican II?

A recent Guardian article described a global survey which found that Gen Z men are twice as likely as Boomers to believe wives should obey husbands, a trend not limited to religion. Experts suggest this may be linked to shifting gender roles, with some men struggling to define masculinity beyond being the provider and protector.

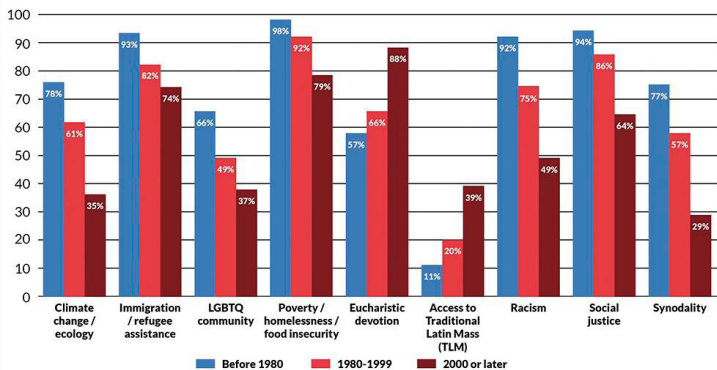
A similar pattern appears in Catholic circles. From a survey of US clergy, younger priests (ordained after 2000) are the cohort most concerned with access to Latin Mass and eucharistic devotion. Priests ordained before 1980, could not care less (11%) and are more focused on poverty (98%), social justice (94%), immigration/refugee assistance (93%), and racism (92%).

Whenever I attend justice & peace events, the majority of attendees are boomers, and this can feel culturally out of sync with younger generations, e.g. some still don't use smartphones, their social media of preference is Facebook, meanwhile Millennials use Instagram and Gen Zs use TikTok. Pope Francis introduced us to the art of acclamation and one aspect of that is gradualness. Maybe

organise a eucharistic adoration/rosary night with ecological reflections to celebrate Earth Day?

As for me, I have neither the time nor the missionary zeal to rehabilitate bigoted trad men, perhaps I should discern the single vocation? ■

Figure 12: Variation in priorities by ordination cohort



Left: The Catholic Project, Catholic University of America, 2025

# When the Olive Branch Becomes a Hanging Tree...

Ray

There can be no dialogue with those who reject the humanity of others. There's no reasoning with people who celebrate drowned bodies in the Mediterranean; mock those whose bodies aren't doing 'what they're supposed to' with wanted pregnancies; nor with those rejoicing in the government 'seeing sense' as mere handfuls of children's bodies assigned-male at birth are barred via administrative reforms from Girlguiding...

'Go Home' vans trailing billboards encouraging communities to rat out their neighbours as 'illegal immigrants' were scrapped by then-UK Home Secretary, Theresa May, after outcry of 'borrowing the language of the 1970s National Front'; whilst 'benefit scrounger' narratives became commonplace under both red and blue UK Governments during the early 2010s with adverts on public TV and posters on telephone boxes. Communities were disaggregated into individual bodies pitted against each other. Peer-on-peer policing continued, emboldening advocates of exclusionary politics; galvanising a far-right current to believe that 'devil's advocate' is a legitimate political position. Where extremists once hid in the fringes of larger electoral parties, many who snuck their way into office are renegeing on their promises, joining openly far-right groups with no renewed remit from those they feign to represent.

Some years ago, I contributed to an upcoming book on teaching from marginalised identities, arguing that for all the emphasis we place on dialogue as solving differences, 'political and social responses can - and should - form part of the discussion, but not over anyone's right to exist'. Whether the realities have become more intense or exposure has simply increased, discourse over whose bodies matter has become 'fair game'. So much so that on 31st March 2026, the genocidal state of Israel adopted a new law making the death penalty the default sentence for Palestinians convicted of lethal attacks. How can there be

any devil's advocate suggesting state-backed murder of Palestinian bodies as a topic of reasonable debate?

'Where they burn books, in the end they will burn humans too.' Heine (1823)

Dehumanising entire populations is something the state apparatus is well-prepared to enact. Where, in 1933, the Nazi youth division Deutsche Studentenschaft's burning of the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft (ENG: Institute of Sexology) collections required physical violence, destroying the recorded care and compassion witnessed via free gender clinics, all mentions of transgender (T) people were removed from US Government websites by merely refreshing the webpage... Overnight, the long-standing abbreviation for queer (Q) communities of 'LGBTQ+' was shortened to merely 'LGB' (lesbian, gay, bisexual) on thousands of national websites including The Stonewall Inn - the site many understand as the catalyst for the modern queer liberation movement.

Bodies are not a space for debate; they're domains we negotiate with ourselves through expression, art, and movement in an often hostile culture. Much of how we experience our bodies is imposed externally - racialised, segregated, covered, owned, sexualised, infantilised, and violated. Consent should not be up for negotiation; existence is not awaiting the approval of others, yet, barely a week goes by without major media outlets publishing supposedly 'balanced' articles exploring what they consider the societal challenges of the inclusion of asylum seekers, transgender people, young adults, the disabled, or queer persons.

Angela Y. Davis (1971) once wrote of 'seek[ing] out all the doors which still remain ajar, however slight the opening might be' with a view to demanding people 'prove their antifascist commitments'. Her argument demanded use of

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## When the Olive Branch Becomes a Hanging Tree...

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petitions, block meetings, and rallies. She argued that dismissing reformism risked losing ground amongst the masses. However, whilst minor actions may showcase unity, frequently, the call is coming from inside the house... gay cisgendered men, for example, have contributed to bi-erasure and transphobia alongside the heterosexual homophobes who condemn all same-sex attraction. Hell, a 2023 YouGov poll found gay men to be the least supportive of transgender people of all queer identities (65% accepting compared to, for example 84% amongst lesbians).

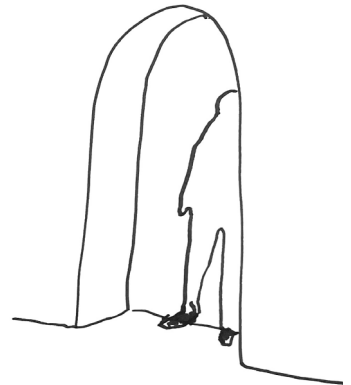
A politics that forces itself on others by use of power over, intimidation, and violence is not something that should be permitted to breathe. That a bigoted, white supremacist like Charlie Kirk deserves (inter)national mourning when millions are killed through denial of access to food, priced out of essential medicines and other forms of healthcare, 'man-made' environmental catastrophes, demonstrates a double standard in who counts.

'Liberals who are free speech absolutists worry more about curbing the freedom of fascists to spread their violent bigotry than about the very real impact of that bigotry on the lives of people [...] and more broadly, speaking for vulnerable communities who live under the threat of racist, anti-immigrant, transphobic violence from those whom Kirk radicalized.' Sonali Kolhatkar (author of Talking About Abolition)

Where Davis saw the door as an opportunity to alter minds, I believe, more often than we may admit, we need to lock that door for the well-being of all inside. Where others choose to be in that moment is their decision, but sharing a platform with fascists extends legitimacy to the extreme-right. In the classroom, so-called radicals propose that where intolerance is voiced, educators "push back" by providing a different perspective, or ask pointed questions to encourage them

to reconsider their initial statements'. My concern is, that's not enough. The Mishkan's Directors and Rabbinic Team, Chicago (US), were unequivocal in condemning transphobia, reminding their kin that 'The Torah teaches that life and death are in the power of the tongue (Proverbs 18:21)'; stressing the need to 'use our words carefully because we know that words can stoke hatred and fear, and contribute to real violence done to real people', yet, many continue to posit religious texts as excuses for their homophobia or to advocate abortion bans.

As Kolhatkar reminds us, many educators 'have long fallen prey to the idea that treating fascists with respect is the way to win them over', and, yet, '[t]here is no winning over a person or a movement whose ideals are rooted in dehumanization'. Indeed, '[o]n the contrary, it is a dangerous validation of an ideal that has no place in a democracy' - whatever one's vision of 'democracy' constitutes. It's a false promise, misplaced faith offered in a system of compromise with the safety of marginalised persons often amongst the first bargaining chips. Historian Tariq D. Khan (2025) was correct to state that, '[t]he way that we deal with fascists is no tolerance [ - d]on't give them any concessions whatsoever [a]nd absolutely don't capitulate to any of their demands'. There's no reasoning with the far-right, '[d]on't treat any of their demands as reasonable[,] don't even give them the dignity of a debate'. To do so allows them to twist an olive branch into a hanging tree. ■



# Door Knock, Culture Shock

A. J. Boyer

There's something supremely un-British about door-knocking as a neighbour. That's why I love it!

I'm originally from the southern great plains of Texas (trying to make Dallas sound as whimsical as I can); Wichita land, as well as Comanche and Tonkawa. For me, a lot of my pre-teen and teenage years were spent hanging out on the street, playing guitar at the park, and tossing a football around with neighbours. We didn't all wear ten gallon hats, nor did we hoist guns or rope cattle. That being said – there was still a steady sense of Texan hospitality that radiated from nearly everyone in the neighbourhood. I'm not about to romanticise it, however. My hometown, like other areas, had issues (mainly social isolation, drug usage, and mental health struggles). And like any other person my age, I wanted out.

I eventually left the USA to work on cruise ships, fell in love and moved to England on a fiancé visa to get married and ultimately settle in Salford, Greater Manchester. Foolishly, I expected the UK to be similar to home, apart from the funny accents, grey weather and fancy buildings. Within a good few months after the novelty wore off, I realised something felt off about Britain. I was somehow consistently finding myself in situations where I was looked down on as rude or brutish. This was usually from speaking too loud, being too direct, or (heavens forbid!) being earnest.

Unfortunately, these little tensions were never sufficiently out in the open for me to realise or try to fix. It took years of me feeling this weird sense that something

was off, while Brits (some, not all) would be polite to my face and scoff behind my back. Needless to say, this was heartbreaking! When I immigrated to this island, I viewed its residents' attitudes as a reflection of my own self-worth. I hadn't learned yet that Britain is a place that really requires a disclaimer: this is a place that still suffers from rigid social rules stemming largely from its Victorian era.

It's probably not fun to read this critique coming from a non-English person, and certainly the USA has its own social issues. However, most of my validation for these thoughts came after reading 'Watching the English' by English social anthropologist Kate Fox. She maps out what she calls the 'social dis-ease' that England faces, and helped me realise that privacy and modesty are coveted on this relatively small chunk of land. 'Home may indeed be our substitute for a Fatherland,' Fox states, 'but at another level, I would suggest that home is what the English have instead of social skills.'

Despite breaking plenty of social rules and having many awkward encounters – my ultimate test came during the Covid-19 lockdowns.

By then, I had moved from an urban environment in Salford to a suburban one in Cheadle. Like many, I was drawn into learning about mutual aid, social anarchism and how communities can organise together to take care of each other in times of crisis. Unlike Salford's challenges of gentrification and housing, Cheadle's issues were largely atomization and social isolation. Of course, I didn't live near a squat or a

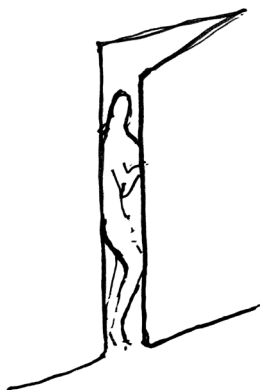
**[continued on page 16]**

university. My area had no activist hubs, social centres or scenes. Any mutual aid in my neighbourhood was going to require me to knock on doors and get it going.

It would require me to do the unthinkable: actually speak to my neighbours.

Neighbourliness is often winced at in activist scenes as un-cool; not radical. Usually, when I discuss the importance of neighbour networks it tends to give off less Russian Anarcho-communist Peter Kropotkin vibes, and more Ned Flanders (the annoyingly kind, clean-cut, Christian neighbour of Homer Simpson). Yet to this day, the neighbourhood pod I managed to scrape together in Cheadle remains one of the most radical and organic projects I've been involved with. It was a specific period where my door-knocking on English people's 'castles' was met with curiosity. My usual intro was something along the lines of:

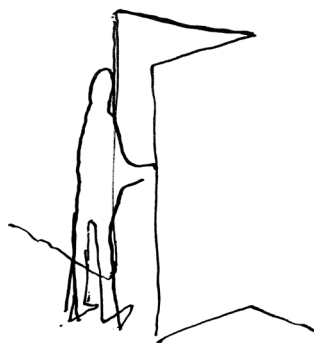
'Hi, I'm Andrew. I'm not a politician, not trying to sell you anything. I'm your neighbour from down the street. We're getting a little group together to look out for each other. Here's a leaflet. Let us know if you want to join, or if there's any way we can help.'



I went into it thinking I'd be cursed at, or would have doors slammed in my face, but instead, I saw isolated and scared neighbours finally have sparkles in their eyes. I had an amount of houses in mind that I intended to knock on, yet had to cut that amount in half because so many neighbours wanted to talk.

Some of these exchanges were funny. One resident in particular went through great lengths to tell me about her granddaughter who moved to America for work. A separate resident told me he loves watching westerns, and asked if I knew how to ride a horse. Another resident was utterly convinced that I was part of the council. No matter how much clarifying I did, she wanted to have her municipal grievances heard then and there! And, unfortunately, some were sad; an elderly resident fought back some tears whilst telling me about her son who passed away earlier in the year. I was her first visitor in over a month.

After a quick several days of knocking, a good handful of neighbours joined in hopes of benefitting from face-to-face connection that was so scarce in that specific point in time. Our first meetings were held online until lockdown lifted,



then we began to meet at the local community centre. All that being said, our neighbourhood pod didn't bring forth the revolution. But we managed some alleyway clean ups, mental health walks, and built a small, free library. It was enough to get us hooked on neighbourhood organising for the coming years. I've since moved to a new town, new area, and am gearing up to start it all over again.

Door-knocking and organising with neighbours is profoundly un-British.

Since becoming a bit more involved in activist scenes and spaces, I've noticed a trend of incredibly noble English activists who bravely traverse the front lines of demos and risk getting arrested – and yet are terrified of knocking

on their neighbour's door. I don't say this as a call-out. I say it to highlight a much needed social issue that Britain struggles with; one that should be of concern to anyone who considers themselves remotely socialist.

To me, door-knocking represents more than just an exercise in prefiguration or mutual aid. Door-knocking is my form of eliciting culture shock. It's my way of making my presence known that I am a neighbour, and that regardless of our nationalities, I have every right to knock on your door and see how you're doing. It is my business to make sure we are all fed. It's my business to make sure we're all safe and mentally well. Most importantly, it's my business to look other neighbours in the eye and remind them that there's a life we can build outside of the doomscrolling on our phones and the fear-mongering slop of the state. ■

**“The Bad Apple is a thought that sticks around in your mind, a conceptual brain worm, that ...wakes you up at dawn.”**

[continued from page 3] views against each other which barely differ, ignoring more extreme or unfamiliar or uncomfortable narratives.

To wonder what kind of reading, writing and thinking we look for from ourselves and others at Bad Apple takes some thought. The intention moves with the relationships of people involved, the hopes and trust we have in others and them in us.

At the heart there must be some kind of tension, curiosity, doubt. Sometimes writing follows thoughts and experiences that are very private and yet radical, in the sense they are all our own. We think this is the first time anyone has

thought them. We need to hear views we don't necessarily agree with. We need to continue conversations, have doubts, interrogate.

The Bad Apple is a thought that sticks around in your mind, a conceptual brain worm, that keeps you awake at night or wakes you up at dawn. It could be a personal dilemma. One voice is clamouring, persistent, a clashing symbol while the other one is more true but hard to articulate. (Write it!)

As we've settled into a collective of three women, situated across the country, Merseyside, Pembrokeshire and London, the relationship between us has grown. The zine has been a way of building a personal and working relationship, trying to sense what the others would like to see in the zine, not always obvious, endeavour to be supportive, to be sensitive to each [turn over]

other's needs, for space, or for energetic working, for agreed standards. We need to be sensitive and curious about the ways our different minds work.

Widening a network of contributors and readers, online and in real life: this is still a stage in the cycle of forming. Building an audience, a name for ourselves, however tiny, is a welcome shove from behind, which makes us want to continue.

Bad Apple has learnt much from going out in public, to zine fairs, workshops and talks. Zine fairs can be many things: strictly academic, some a bit gate-keepy, some self-labelled, some super inclusive and sensitive, finally some anarchist. Stepping from laptop to church hall or library is not so easy. Whether for the first time or umpteenth time, whether a newbie or seasoned writer, we hope we are helping the ones who write for us to do just that.

Writing in Bad Apple, is to pin your doubts to your sleeve. It is to show your working. The teacher who writes on the interactive whiteboard in front of a class knows this with trepidation. The activist who writes on the wall of a government building will know all about this too. It's a courageous and powerful move. (The janitor soon comes by with a bucket of warm, soapy water.)

Even if you post on social media, it's quite another thing for our contributors to commit to their thoughts, write them down, work out what they mean, and entrust them to Bad Apple. To stand behind a table at a zine fair is strength training of ideas. If someone has made the effort to come to a zine fair or book fair or any kind of publishing fair, that's very different from clicking like or an emoji. Even the shyest among them will eventually say something! ■

## Contributors

### **Sumaiya Shameem**

'Rooted in kindness, resilience, and inclusion, I value peace in how we connect with one another.

I hope to create spaces where voices are heard, respected, and every individual feels they belong within a safe place.'

**Nora Ziegler** is a writer and community organiser. She is currently training as a local preacher in the Methodist Church.

**Henry\_** is a poet, writer, teacher and peace activist.

**Ray** is an anarchist, academic and agitator. They research and teach community-engagement and non-hierarchical approaches to organising, positionality, and anarchist-feminist theory. They live in Glasgow with their young family and run a pay-what-you-can barbering service at the Glasgow Autonomous Space.

**Samsara Lind** is a writer and community organiser exploring the intersections of faith, justice, and works of mercy. She is passionate about widening outdoor access for underrepresented groups and can usually be found hiking, fell running, or plotting her next mountain adventure with her loyal companion, Fuji.

**Ruth** is an organiser based in London, working with groups focused on trans liberation, Palestine and climate justice.

**A.J.Boyer** is a jazz pianist, writer and communitarian anarchist based in Manchester UK. They've previously written for Freedom News, Tempest Magazine, Organise Magazine, Dissident Voice and The Manchester Meteor.

## Illustrations

**Johnny Cullinan pages 2, 6, 8 and 16**

**Henry\_ page 3**

**Nora Ziegler page 5**

**x e oaks original artwork commissioned (2026) p13**

**Layout: Henry\_**

**Cover design: Nora Ziegler**

Nora writes:

‘The front cover represents a vision of open doors: doors between heaven and earth, between different worlds, different lives and different species. We can learn each other’s languages and wisdoms. We can share our burdens, our needs and resources and be one with another and with God.

The back cover suggests a different reality of faith and social struggle, of waiting beside closed doors. Waiting is an important part of relationships, organising and personal growth. There are lessons that I know I must learn but I am not yet ready for. Living in community often means powerlessly witnessing to each other’s loneliness. There have been times when I sat in silent prayer with someone and I prayed, ‘God, I hate this person so much right now. I give my anger into your hands. Please help us to find a way to move through this’.

At times like these, I feel I am waiting beside the doors. I don’t feel love for others, I don’t feel at peace, but I am sure it is there. I am learning to patiently keep building my life on that faith.’

## Bad Apple Collective

Reham Bastawi, Henrietta Cullinan, Nora Ziegler

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***Bad Apple wish to offer huge thanks to all the contributors and illustrators for this issue. Thank you for trusting us with your work!***

### Support Us!

You can support our work by subscribing to our Patreon for £1 per month! Our monthly running costs come to about £40 which cover printing the zine, maintaining our website and tabling at radical bookfairs and events.

[patreon.com/badapplemagazine](https://patreon.com/badapplemagazine)



Blessed is the one who listens to me,  
watching daily at my gates,  
waiting beside my doors.

Proverbs 8:34