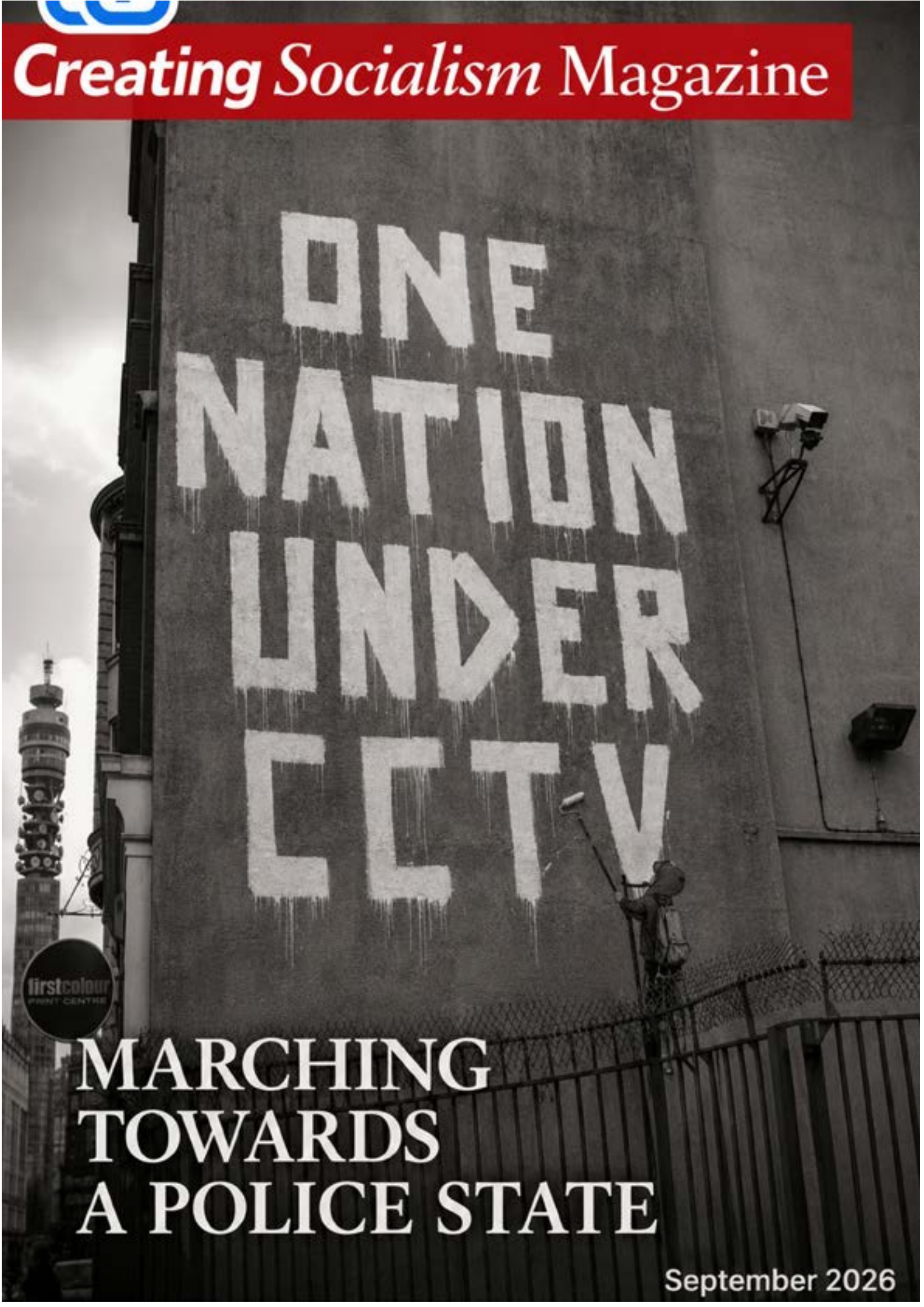




ONE
NATION
UNDER
CCTV

MARCHING
TOWARDS
A POLICE STATE

September 2026

Contents

SEPTEMBER 2026

POLITICS

The Rise of Authoritarianism 3

MIKE STANTON

My Journey Through Two NHS Systems 11

OLWYN JONES

Cuba Through My Lens 18

MARILYN TYZACK

Our Biased Judiciary Threatens the Jewel in the Crown 30

JO BUCHANAN

Kindness 42

JOHN CLEMENTS

CULTURE

The Singh Twins' Provocative and Sharply Political Work 52

JO BUCHANAN

The Tortoise 59

NICK DARKER

Poets for Palestine 60

MIKE STANTON

I Belong Here — Book Review 65

MIKE STANTON



The Rise of

Authoritarianism

Mike Stanton



I grew up with the myth of a 'free world' in which nations like the USA and the UK were supposed to stand for freedom of speech, the right to protest, free and fair elections. There was a growth in international structures, principally the United Nations, the International Criminal Court and International Court of Justice. Add in regional initiatives like the European Court of Human Rights and it felt as if, after the horrors of the Second World War, the world was beginning to move towards a rules-based order built upon the values of liberal democracy.

The major obstacle was 'communism' as represented by the Soviet bloc and China. As the old empires crumbled and newly independent states emerged, the West competed for influence with Russia and China. The Korean War, the Vietnam War, a plethora of civil wars and national liberation struggles, particularly in Africa, but also in South and Central America, tarnished the western image as defenders of the free world. How did support for corrupt and brutal dictatorships contribute to a better world? But the USA and its allies blamed malign Russian and Chinese influence for these troubles and contrasted the freedoms we enjoyed in the West with the one-party dictatorships in the communist regimes.



US Marshalls drag an anti Vietnam protester at the Pentagon in 1967

The collapse of the Soviet Union was presented as a triumph for the west and encouraged the expectation that the whole world would soon feel the benefit of liberal democracy. Probably the most popular expression of this view was expressed in Francis Fukuyama "The End of History". This was countered on the left by Alex Callinicos in "The Revenge of History". Looking at the world today it looks like Callinicos was right.

With hindsight this should come as no surprise. Franco's Spain, Salazar's Portugal, Pinochet's Chile, apartheid South Africa, Saudi Arabia were all seen as allies of western democracy, despite having human rights records as bad as anything in the Russian and Chinese spheres of influence. Western powers have always been guilty of hypocrisy and collusion with human rights

abuses in their dealings with regimes so long as these regimes upheld the values of the free market and offered lucrative contracts to big business.

But there was always a subtext that this was realpolitik, an unfortunate but necessary compromise to ensure the continuation of our freedoms. This sense of entitlement and exceptionalism is now threatened by the growth of authoritarianism and the abuse of human rights inside Britain and not just here. The USA under Trump is being run like a



*Quiet Dignity at
the point of arrest by
Alisdare Hickson Flickr*

gangster state. In Europe, particularly in Germany, pro-Palestinian sentiment is being criminalised. In the UK climate activists, pro-Palestinian direct-action groups and even non-violent Palestine solidarity movements are being criminalised. The courts are being mobilised to deny fair trials and threaten defence barristers with contempt of court for doing their jobs. Laws are passed to criminalise dissent and give the police additional powers. All this has continued unabated under both Conservative and Labour governments.

There is valuable resistance from groups like Defend Our Juries and the Good Law Project. But they rely on the belief that there is a body of law that exists independent of the society it is supposed to govern. Our laws and their implementation have always been subject to pressures from society. The fight against authoritarianism requires mobilisation that goes beyond the arenas of parliament and the courts.



For years now the authorities have been trying to curb and criminalise marches in solidarity with Palestine. By regularly mobilising hundreds of thousands of people the organisers have seen off these threats. In the past mass strikes have secured the release of workers jailed under anti-union laws. The Suffragettes triumphed in the face of massive state repression.

The rise in authoritarianism is a sign that the ruling class is prepared to ditch its liberal façade in defence of the status quo. When capitalism was booming they could tolerate civil rights and social democracy. Today capitalism is in crisis and the mask is off. If they are prepared to risk cataclysmic wars and climate catastrophe to preserve their system we should not naively believe that they will continue to respect democratic norms and the rule of law. Repression is a sign of their weakness – but it is not only capitalism that is in crisis.



The Suffragettes triumphed in the face of massive state repression

The mainstream left has become thoroughly compromised. We used to describe it as a dented shield, offering some protection but incapable of taking the offensive. Nowadays it is as much use as an umbrella in a hurricane. And we are facing a hurricane.

The will to fight back is still there. Witness the sustained support for mass demonstrations in favour of Palestine. Opinion polls consistently support taking vital infrastructure like water back into public ownership. The Green Party has shown that there is a mainstream audience for eco-socialist ideas. The rise of authoritarianism is a threat, but it is also a challenge. If there is one lesson from history, it is that the exploited and the oppressed will always find ways to meet that challenge.



SCOTLAND

Holistic care

You matter
We listen
We care
Together



ENGLAND

Transactional care

- ☐ TASKS
- ☐ TARGETS
- ☐ THROUGHPUT
- ☐ DATA
- ☐ NEXT PATIENT

TIME IS
PRECIOUS



My journey through two NHS systems

Olwyn Jones



This year, 2026, I was an inpatient in two hospitals in Scotland, so had an experience of the NHS system which I had not factored into my holiday itinerary. Although I was aware that countries of the Union had devolved governments, I was quite surprised to realise that the NHS is not administered by the same authorities in these countries.

The National Health Service may appear to be a single, unified institution, but in reality it operates as four distinct systems across the UK. NHS England and NHS Scotland differ not only in governance but in culture, priorities and the way care is delivered. These structural differences with England's increasingly centralised, target driven model versus Scotland's more locally managed, patient centred approach shaped my experience in ways I hadn't anticipated when I unexpectedly became a patient in Scotland.

NHS England is currently being dismantled and taken under the Secretary of State for Health, Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), which



means under direct democratic control by government and not boards or Integrated Care Systems (ICS). This reverses the 2012 reforms that made the NHS an independent, arm's-length organisation.

NHS Scotland is one of four that makes up the National Health Service in the United Kingdom. Scotland operates 14 territorial NHS boards. This is supported by non-geographic health boards and Public Health Scotland. Following Scottish devolution in 1999, Health and Social Care policy and funding was devolved from NHS England.

Having also been a patient at a large teaching hospital in London in the last five years, I was surprised at the difference in the approach between England and Scotland.



One of the biggest surprises was that as a patient in Scotland none of your NHS England records could be seen by NHS Scotland, and vice versa.

I was told that my local GP had to request my notes from Scotland and it was my task on discharge to see my GP and ask them to carry out this function. So there was no way that the hospital in

Scotland, other than me telling them, could see my medical history. This is concerning on so many levels. What if I was unconscious or had dementia? One of the consultants I saw had to telephone a consultant in my home town to get information from my previous appointment with them. This took time and delayed any treatment that was necessary.

I experienced a different level of care

too. In the first Scottish hospital I could see they were very patient focused and listened to you and anticipated your needs. In the London hospital I had to state my needs and most of the time I wasn't listened to but was treated how they thought I should be. I even had to ask on several occasions for a bed bath, and it was several days before I had one.



Another significant difference was the use of technology. In London most of the time the consultants/ doctors and senior nurses pulled computers behind them. When I was asked questions about myself by the consultant, sometimes they were typing on the computer rather than facing me. I saw some of the notes later on and they were not accurate. It is difficult to type and listen to someone when you have your back

to them. This is something I've also experienced in A&E in England.

Scotland has not yet adopted these practices but they assured me that they will eventually.

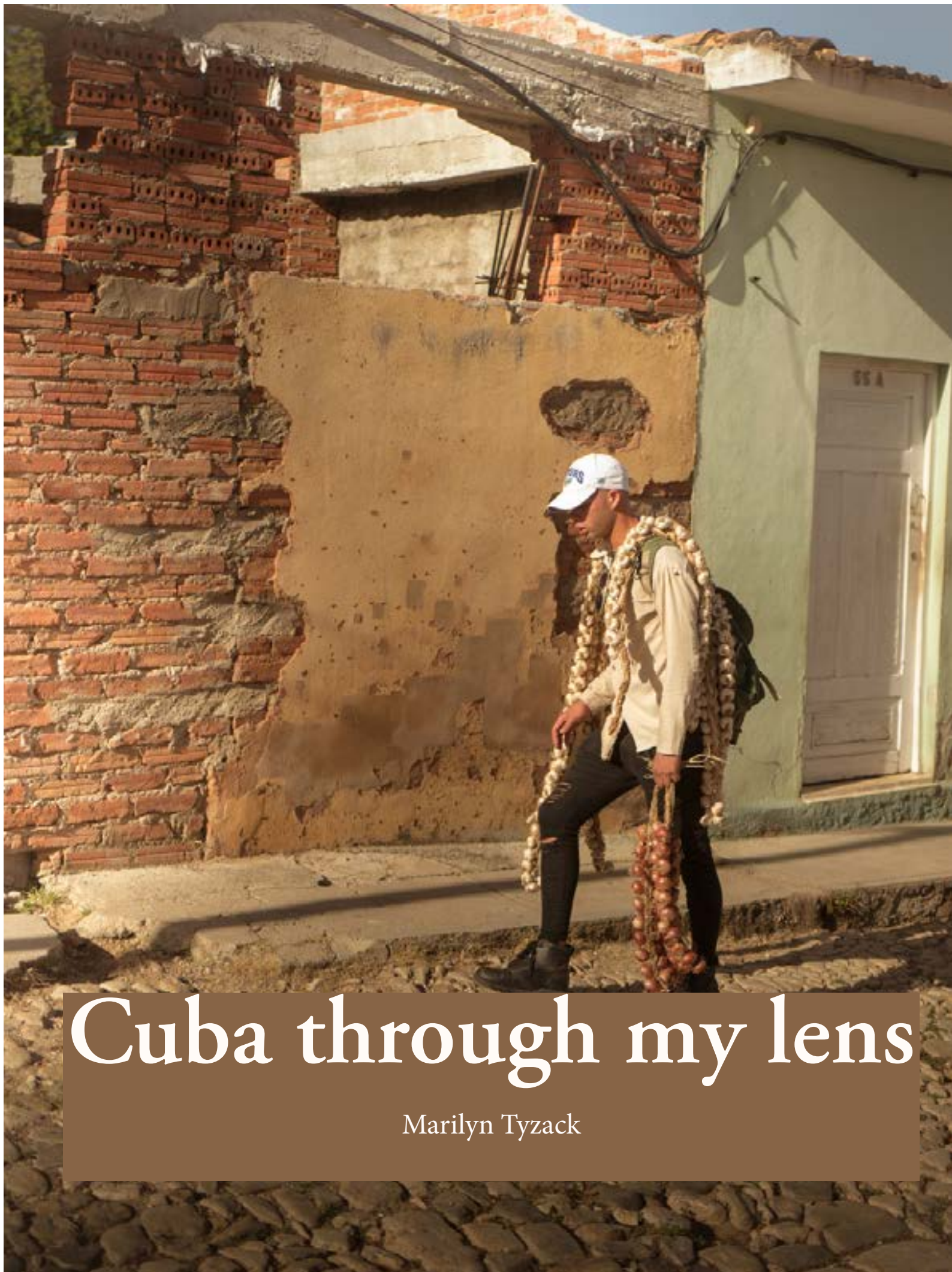
As a patient I would like a holistic approach when I'm receiving care from the NHS. I did receive this in Scotland in the first hospital; their care was exemplary.



On balance I preferred the Scottish care, and I'm sad to say this, I don't imagine it will continue now that we have sold off so much of the NHS here in England. My gut feeling is that the support grant to Scotland will diminish even further necessitating reduction in services which is what we are experiencing across the board.



A final detail illustrates the contrast in approach. When I was discharged in Scotland, my swollen legs meant I couldn't wear shoes. Without hesitation, the physiotherapists produced a new pair of slippers so I could travel home safely. It was a minor act, but it reflected a wider culture of attentiveness and humanity. These small considerations, often overlooked in more pressured systems, shape the patient experience as much as any policy reform.

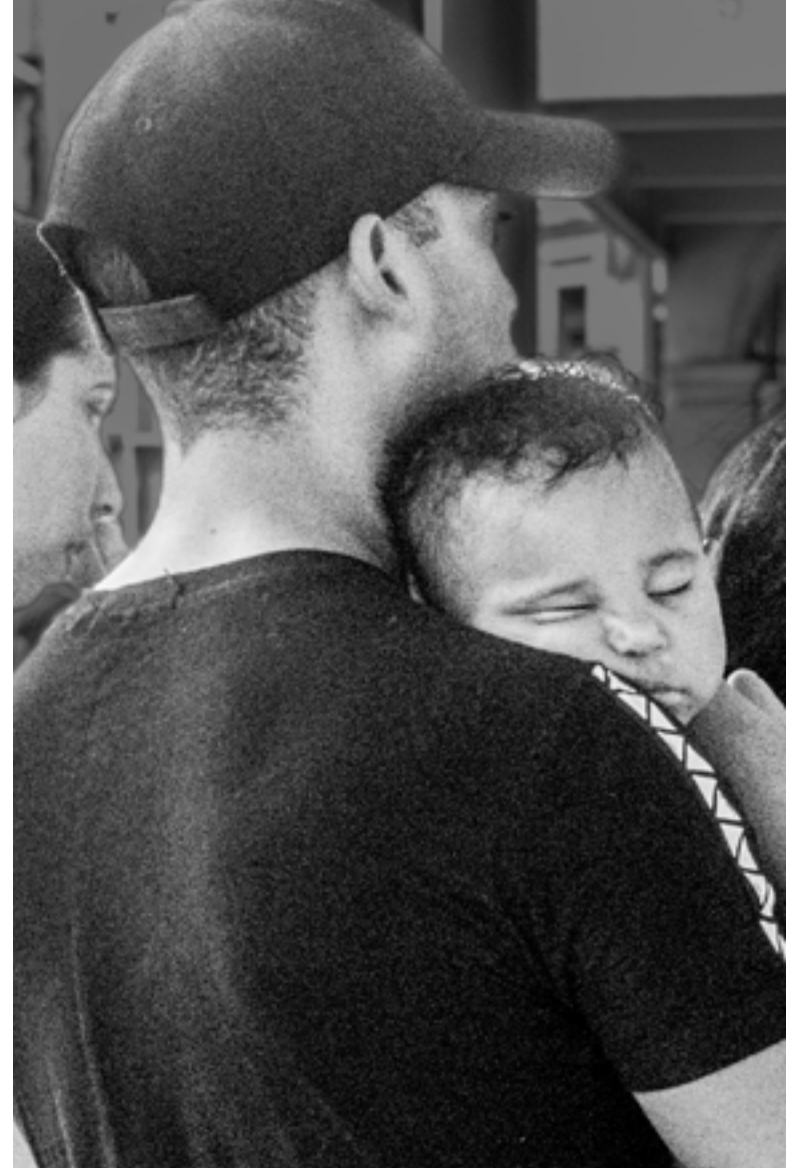


Cuba through my lens

Marilyn Tyzack

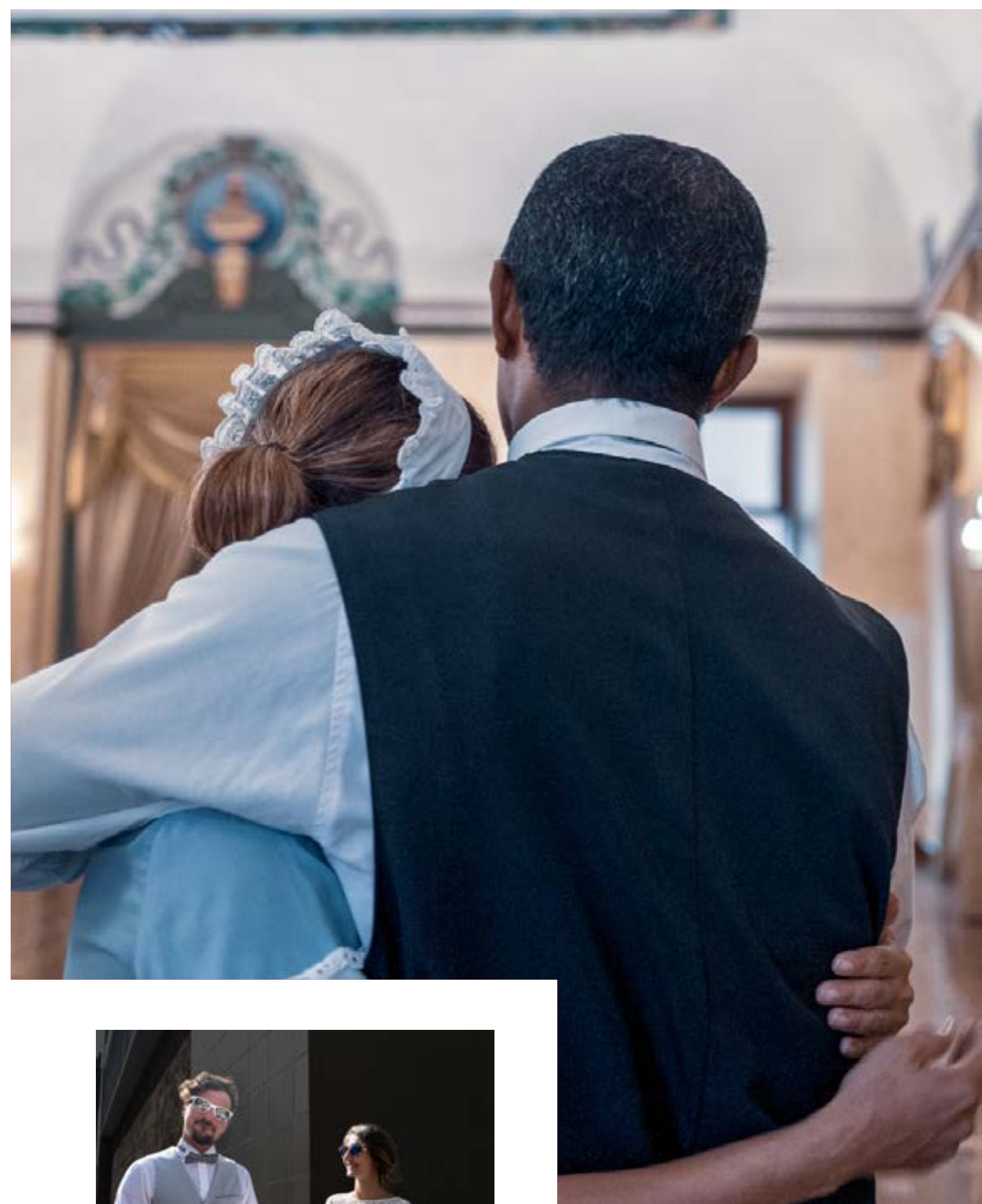
This is a series of photographs taken during a visit to Cuba in 2019 with my Leica camera.

They certainly do not pretend to offer an in-depth analysis of the Cuban people or their culture but merely reflect the scenes that made me press that shutter button.



Cuba is a nation that has spent more than sixty years under economic siege. Generation after generation has been forced to endure the consequences of a vindictive USA blockade designed not merely to isolate a government but to inflict suffering on a population.

However, the memories highlighted by these images are of a people with a deep-rooted self respect, resilience and friendliness. This was despite the huge economic hardships that were clearly visible in the empty shops and decaying buildings. They had great pride in their excellent medical services, the education offered to all their children and the focus on community, solidarity, and mutual support .





are enduring power cuts lasting up to twenty-two hours a day. Hospitals struggle to keep generators running. Medicines are scarce. Food is increasingly difficult to obtain. Children are seeing their education disrupted as schools and homes are plunged into darkness.



Havana



A place to play

Today that suffering has reached intolerable levels. Donald Trump's tightening of sanctions and restrictions on fuel supplies has struck at the lifeblood of the country.

Across the island, families





There is no justification for policies that deliberately deepen the misery of ordinary people in pursuit of political ends.



The clothes shop

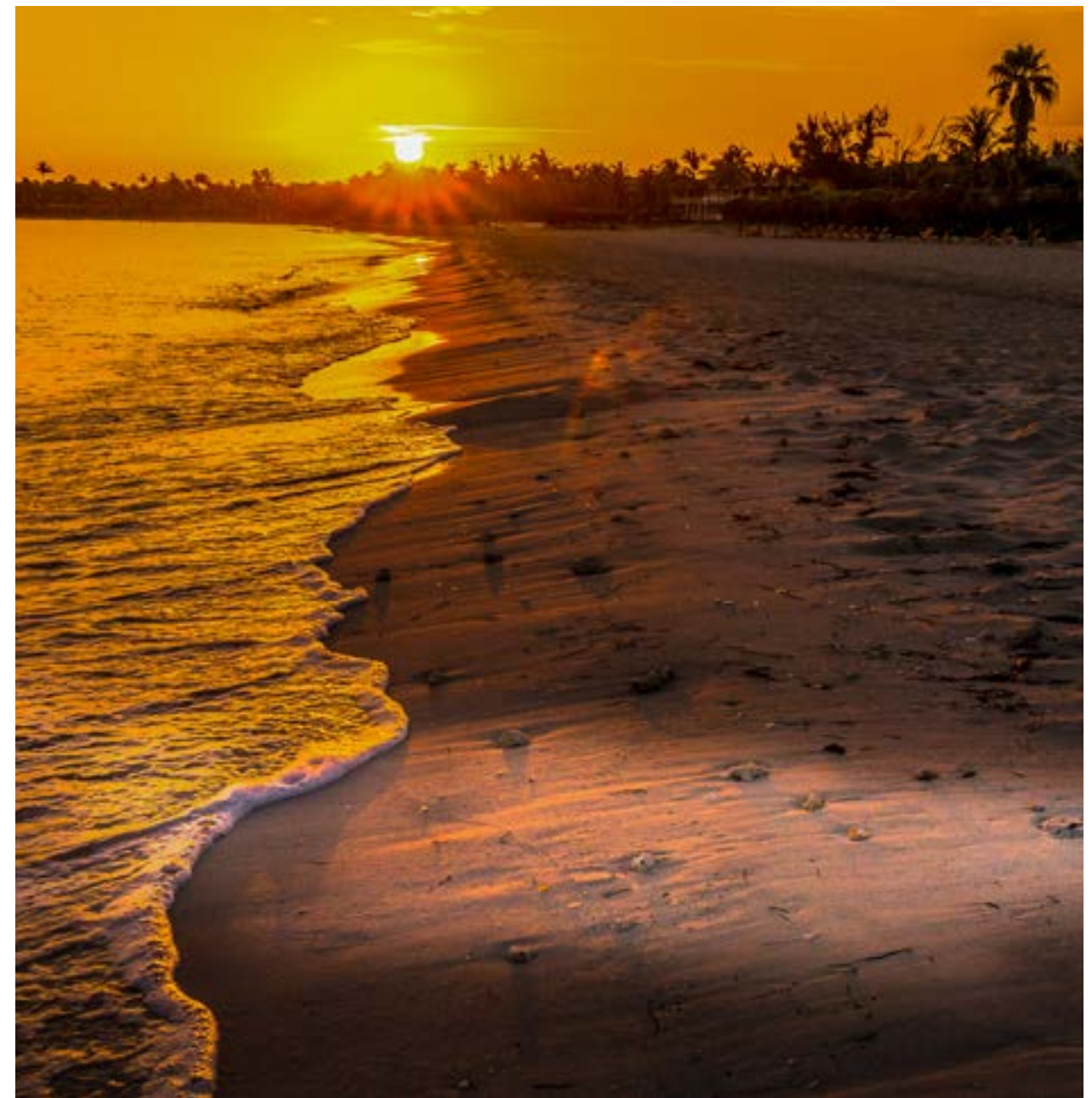


These photographs are therefore not simply travel images. They are portraits of dignity, resilience and humanity in a nation that continues to have to fight for its survival and independence against a voracious and powerful neighbour.



Che Guevara Wall outline - Until Victory Always





Varadero Beach

Havana by night



Our biased judiciary threatens the jewel in the crown of the British justice system

Jo Buchanan

In the Old Bailey, the Central Criminal Court in London, there is a plaque to commemorate the [1670 Bushell's Case](#).

Edward Bushell was the foreman of a jury that defied pressure from a presiding judge and refused to convict two Quaker preachers, William Penn and William Mead.

The jurors were locked up without food, water, or heat by the furious judge. But they still refused to give in. Their courage established the principle that jurors should decide on the verdict of anyone on trial. As a result of their bravery, future jurors, rather than a judge, would have the independence to make this decision for those on trial according to their conscience.



In 2023 I wrote of the 1984 trial of Clive Ponting: “The Ponting case underlines how vital it is to have a jury composed of people who do not have a vested interest in our corrupt, shallow and discredited establishment.”

Ponting was a senior civil servant in Margaret Thatcher’s government. He could not live with the lie that had been told about the sinking of the Belgrano in May 1982 and leaked the papers containing the true information to MP Tom Dalyell. He was prosecuted under Section 2 of the Official Secrets Act in August 1984 and was tried at the Old Bailey. Ponting’s legal team expected a prison sentence, especially after the judge directed the jury to find him guilty. The totally unexpected not guilty verdict was sensational. There was applause in court and overall the British public approved that a matter of conscience had proved more important than government secrecy.



Clive Ponting

An equally famous case was the 1991 trial of Pat Pottle and Michael Randle. They had helped the double agent George Blake escape from Wormwood Scrubs prison 25 years earlier in 1966.

They admitted their actions but argued that they were right to help Blake because the 42-year sentence that had been imposed on him was inhuman and hypocritical. The judge gave the jury a clear direction that they must convict the pair, but nevertheless the jury refused to do so.

Much more recently, between 2021 and 2023, there have been several examples of juries acquitting climate protesters of criminal damage at the headquarters of corporations such as Shell and HSBC. The juries made their decisions to acquit the defendants even though judges had told them that the defendants had no defence in law.



There have been cases too this summer where juries have proved invaluable to us but clearly unacceptable to our increasingly authoritarian establishment. [Paula Akban](#) and her co-defendants were cleared of criminal damage at the Inner London Crown Court two years after their protest at genocide-linked bank, Scotiabank. “I feel like I can breathe again,” she said after having felt “the weight of the state” against her. Tony Greenstein has been declared not guilty at Kingston Crown Court, a unanimous decision by the jury after less than two hours. Tony was prosecuted under Section 12 of the Terrorism Act 2000. The prosecution was based on some tweets and a blog post in October 2023, and he was accused of inviting support for Hamas. Three tweets and a blog post and he could have been imprisoned for 14 years. [Cage International](#) welcomed his acquittal:

Tony Greenstein



“Greenstein delivered his own closing speech to the jury. His central argument went to the heart of the case against him: that supporting an act of resistance against a colonial power is not the same as inviting support for a proscribed organisation. It is a distinction the jury, deliberating for under two hours, plainly accepted.”

In 2023 the Attorney General decided to launch court proceedings for criminal contempt against 68-year-old [Trudi Warner](#) who held a sign outside a court reminding jurors that they could acquit climate campaigners on the basis of their conscience: “Jurors you have an absolute right to acquit a defendant according to your conscience.” She risked a two-year jail sentence. In solidarity, 40 people, including an Olympic gold medalist, a retired bus driver, a number of health professionals, a group of Quakers and a former government lawyer, who had all held up similar signs, wrote to the Solicitor General to say that they too should face prosecution. However, in the end a High Court judge threw out the case. Mr Justice Saini said there was “no basis for the prosecution of Trudi Warner, 69, for criminal contempt”.

But protesters are still being arrested for holding signs outside UK courts that state jurors have the right to acquit according to their conscience. The police arrest them under Section 14 public order powers which allow police to impose conditions “if they reasonably believe an assembly may cause serious public disorder, serious damage to property, or serious disruption to the life of the community”. Nine people including Trudi Warner were arrested outside the Filton 24 trial at Woolwich Crown Court in April. Their signs read “Jurors have an absolute right to acquit according to their conscience” and “Jurors deserve to hear the whole truth”. Do they seriously think this retired Quaker threatens to cause disorder, damage and disruption?

There have for years been threats to the independence of the judiciary but brave jurors and other individuals have continued to stand up for the principle of jurors’ independence and the right to make decisions based on their conscience.



Trudi Warner

At the end of last year our Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, David Lammy, introduced proposals to impose a substantial restriction on the ancient right to be tried by a jury, arguing that it should only be guaranteed for charges of rape, murder, manslaughter or other cases of public interest. His argument was that such measures would address the backlog of more than 78,000 cases currently waiting for trial.



But there has been criticism from many quarters. Riel Karmy-Jones KC, chair of the Criminal Bar Association, commented, “The consequences of their actions will be to destroy a criminal justice system that has been the pride of this country for centuries, and to destroy justice as we know it.”

Some of those imprisoned for direct action against Elbit Systems were locked up on remand for months. Many of them were kept in prison even before the proscription of Palestine Action as a terrorist organisation. In February the jury who were sitting on the case of six Filton activists either acquitted them or refused to convict them. Typically the CPS, clearly unhappy with the jury’s decision, asked for more time to decide on whether to press for a retrial. In June Charlotte Head, Samuel Corner, Leona Kamio, and Fatema Rajwani, were convicted of criminal damage in a retrial and given punitive jail terms.



The Filton Four - Courtesy of Andy Worthington

In the recent trial of the Teledyne Three, which began in the middle of last month, a judge has threatened defendants with a ‘terrorism connection’ if they explain the motives behind their activism.

[The Grayzone](#) has reported details of this trial, although there are restrictions on reporting, and reveals how the government has ‘muzzled defendants’ and ‘blinded jurors’. Defendants are very much at the mercy of judges. In another recent trial [the Barclays 5](#) were told they will not be sentenced as terrorists, but remain convicted of criminal damage.

For the first time in our history a defence barrister, [Rajiv Menon](#), faces a trial for contempt of court as a result of a closing speech, in which he reminded the jury of the 1879 Bushell’s case which has been spoken of in court for centuries. Menon denies informing the jury of the existence of the principle that jurors can acquit a defendant according to their conscience and inviting them to do so, but that he simply told them about the Bushell’s case and about the plaque that celebrates the case.

Menon has spoken cautiously about his case recently to [Democracy Now](#) and pointed out that, “ultimately, the facts are for the jury, not for the judge. The jury are the sole judges of the facts”.

He has also stated that the case against him is intended to have a “chilling effect” against pro-Palestine protest, and carries “serious constitutional implications.”



Rajiv Menon

Menon is now waiting for an appeal to be heard but could face up to two years in prison for his speech to the jury in his defence of Charlotte Head in January this year. challenge judges when they are in the wrong and hold the state to account. Juries give us hope and are a reminder that human beings are generally decent and that a jury of 12 is the best judge of what is right and what is wrong. We depend on juries to maintain balance and make fair decisions. They are prepared to decide against the advice or ruling of a judge when they see that a defendant has been wrongly charged or detained. No wonder David Lammy and his allies dislike jury trials, and no wonder we applaud them and need to fight to preserve them. These jewels are a beacon of light in an increasingly biased judiciary.

Judges are not representative of British society. In 2025 the Ministry of Justice found that only 1% of all judges are Black. 62% of senior judges were educated at a private school and three quarters of them studied at Oxford or Cambridge. Senior judges exemplify wealth and privilege and form [one of the most elitist professions](#) in our country. And now, more than ever, we need 12 ordinary people to dispense justice, to act according to their conscience, to



KINDNESS

By John Clements



Kindness is often perceived as a simple act or a fleeting emotional response. Aristotle defines kindness (charis) as helpfulness toward someone in need, emphasising that it should be rendered freely, without expectation of reward, and directed toward those in significant need or crisis.

In many respects that now seems simplistic. It is easy to become disheartened by the world. News bulletins are dominated by war, political division and human suffering, leaving the impression that selfishness and cruelty are becoming the norm.

Although most of us are not selfish or cruel, we can be thoughtless, and, the reality is that we are all guilty of prejudice, even if we think we are immune.



One day I looked at a woman in front of me in the supermarket queue, with her big trolley stuffed full. I had only two items, but am loath to use the automatic tills, making people redundant and preventing human contact, as the machine ever more takes over and cuts us off from each other. So, I stood there, thinking of my parking time running out, and looking at the unsmiling woman in front, making stereotypical judgements about her appearance.

Then she turned and smiled and said, “Oh, you go, you’ve only got two things.” And we started to chat. Yes, she always let people go ahead when they had only a few items. I agreed, saying I did the same, but failed to mention the other important lesson. Unconscious prejudice is a dangerous thing.

On another occasion in a supermarket I didn’t have much and the woman in front invited me to go first and I told her that I was about to write an article on random acts of kindness. We chatted for a bit and bonded over these small acts of consideration and awareness and then she said, “Recently I was with my husband and small son in a restaurant and when we asked for the bill we were told that it had already been paid!” The woman who was swiping items through the till as we chatted told us about a homeless person having a meal in the cafe, and how she decided to pay for him.



Technology now prevents several possible acts of kindness. I have a few times in supermarkets offered to make up the shortfall of the person ahead when they find themselves embarrassed on paying their bill. But as cash dies that is increasingly impossible, as is human contact when nearly all tills in supermarkets are self-service. No chat, no interesting discoveries. Just multiple pings and gone.



There is of course the whole question of altruism and virtue signalling. Is altruism possible or is a kind deed simply an act to make someone feel good about themselves? Well, whichever, it does not affect the way kindness can lead to more kindness. Small acts of kindness in an unkind world can seem insignificant, and the world that capitalism has created is certainly unkind. There is little kindness in the grasping corporate mind.

Indigenous peoples in North America had very different ideas from us about private property. They barely believed in it. And to make sure things did not get out of hand they would have an annual potlatch, a gathering, a party, where goods would be redistributed, so those with a surplus would give to those lacking. American Indians did not love money or lust after things. But this was considered ‘wrong’ by the 19th century colonisers. This prompted Merrill Gates, the president of Amherst College, Massachusetts, to say in 1883: ‘The Indian must be made to be intelligently selfish...got out of blankets and into trousers—and trousers with a pocket in them, and a pocket that aches to be filled with dollars.’ But John Collier, Commissioner of Indian Affairs under Roosevelt, believed that Indian culture was “precisely the shot-in-the-arm that materialistic Western Capitalism needed”. Still the colonisers banned the potlatch at the end of the 19th century and instead materialism, greed and selfishness bounded into the future, fed by a powerful advertising industry. However, potlatches are part of these indigenous peoples’ heritage and the ban was lifted in 1951 so that the practice, and with it kindness, could be celebrated again.



One encounter had a profound effect on me. Stamford Hill in London, where we were staying recently, is a Hasidic Jewish area, and my partner had heard that Hasidic Jews keep themselves largely to themselves. I was in Lidl walking towards the wine, when I heard two Jewish men talking. They were wearing their very distinctive black clothes: black wide-brimmed hat, long black coat, black trousers and white shirt. One of them caught my attention. I liked his voice, and I liked what he was saying, and I vaguely thought that I would like to talk with him. But, as I had heard that they keep themselves to themselves, I thought nothing further of it, selected my wine, and joined a slow queue for the checkout. And then the man appeared behind me, later middle-aged, long white beard, and kindly intent. “Why don’t you lift your basket up there and then you won’t have to bend.”



He indicated a pile of stacked baskets at the beginning of the conveyor. “Thank you,” I said, and indeed did lift my trolley basket up higher. I glanced at his basket, and said, “If you had less I’d say to go first.” “No, not necessary. There’s no rush. I am a patient man, patience is one of the gifts of the world.”

And then he observed the wine I had bought and told me he buys wine from his brother-in-law's organic wine shop and I told him that I grow a lot of our vegetables, all organic, and he agreed that it must be very good to have only a half an hour between picking and eating. "You can't get fresher than that."

It could have stopped there, but it didn't. "How are you finding the heat?" I asked, glancing at his black, heavy-looking clothes. His answer surprised me. "It suits me very well. I have a calcified heart valve, it's the cold I dislike, I'm much better in the heat." "Well, as they say, it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good." And we laughed. "But I will get it sorted out. I'm only a young man. It may just take a little time."

He told me that in two weeks he was going to Israel to visit relatives there. How I would have liked to talk with him, get his views on what was happening in Israel and Gaza. Perhaps I should have suggested we meet again, but the conveyor took our purchases and then I was loading my bag and it was time to go. But I couldn't just walk away, so I went up to the man and held out my hand, which was taken in an affectionate shake. "It's been a pleasure talking to you." I said. "And you."

And now I regret not having introduced myself for I would have liked to have known his name. The whole encounter could not have taken more than ten minutes, but it was significant. It was a pleasant friendly chat, only made possible by refusing to use the check-out machines, but it seemed a lot more. It felt like a handshake across a divide, across a cultural barrier. And his words, the words which first drew my attention reverberate in

my head, those wise words in a mellow tone. If only we could all take his mild but profound directive. For what he had said was simply, "We need to talk more of this".



“The end of politics is never truly over.”

— H. Wilson

CULTURE



The Singh Twins' provocative and sharply political work

Jo Buchanan



“They combine traditions from both Eastern and Western art to make provocative and sharply political work.” [Grayson Perry](#).



His Perfect Garden - The Singh Twins

The first impression of the [Singh Twins'](#) exhibition in Kew Gardens' Shirley Sherwood Gallery was of beauty, vibrant colour and fascinating detail.

This was their Botanical Tales and Seeds of Empire exhibition, “Exploring art, empire and the enduring significance of plants”. It ran from October last year until April this year.

Much of their work is in the tradition of Indian miniature painting, and the Twins were awarded an MBE in 2011 for their services to Indian miniature

painting within contemporary art. The colour and beauty suggest that this is a joyful display of work and indeed they are celebrating the cultural value and significance of plants across different global traditions.

But the Twins' views on empire are soon apparent from the subject matter of their work and from the quotes on the gallery walls which emphasise the harm colonial expansion did to local people: "The failure of the English to render races in tropical countries happy is due to the fact that they go to rob them of raw material and not to develop native races and native agriculture."

Colonial expansion was tied up with certain plants, such as cotton, spices, indigo and dyes.



Slaves of Fashion - Cotton

The bright colours and bold images show how central such plants were to colonial expansion.

A short film, *King Cotton: An Artist's Tale*, was shown at the exhibition. It underlined the role played by cotton in the colonial empire and how it was traded to the detriment of local people.

It is often in the details that the Singh Twins are the most hard-hitting. The centre piece in *Dying for a Cuppa* is a lace doily with flowers and intricately decorated cups and saucers and teapots. But in the centre in small writing we see, "Let the English who read this at home reflect that it is not the tea alone, but the impoverished blood of the slaves, devoid of its red seeds of life and vigour that they are



Tea and Gossip by the Singh twins - Photo by Jo Buchanan.

drinking”.

There are other works of art with similar messages. We can see well-to-do English people enjoying a drink of cocoa, a firm favourite in the 18th century, and it is clear in the artwork how cocoa was tied up with the transatlantic slave trade.

The Twins emphasise that education is essential when there



are those who remain unaware. They see their art as a powerful way to challenge prejudice and misinformation. “There is often a perception in the West that colonialism was a benevolent force, something to be proud of. After all, the British built roads and canals and railways. We wanted to reset that compass.” They state that their goal is not to instil shame, but to encourage reflection and awareness.

Kavitha Rao, in [a review](#) of the exhibition, emphasises the murky origins of many “British treats” and quotes the bluntly spoken William_Johnson-Hicks,

British Home Secretary from 1924 to 1929: “I know it is said in missionary meetings that we conquered India to raise the level of the Indians. That is cant. We conquered India as an outlet for the goods of Britain... We went with a yardstick in one hand and a sword in the other.”

Increasingly the [myths of colonialism](#) have been exposed and the atrocities of empire builders fully understood. But there are still some who have a nostalgic sense of pride in empire and argue that the colonial era introduced railways, industry,



administrative order and infrastructure. But these innovations were for the benefit of the colonisers, and there are times that we still need to be reminded of the cruel exploitative nature of colonial regimes. Such a reminder is something the Singh Twins do so forcefully in their unique artwork which serves so successfully as a powerful visual tool to provoke thought and aid our understanding.



Two hundred million years ago
You might have met his ancient
dad
Who spread each rib and made a
cage
So well protected, fully clad.

He tottered and he nibbled grass
Though best of chums would say
“not quick”
His stumpy legs were squat and
slow
But he could move – he wasn’t
thick!

Ancestral years have now gone by
We wandered slow on Gabon’s
plain
The men had burned the grassy
field

This tortoise would not walk
again!

Darwin may not have been
surprised
To study beasts in armoured
bone
But if you look at every joint
A natural genius surely shown!

We took him home, then well
displayed-
But heat and dust have made
their claim!
Alas his carapace has cracked
But he still ranks in my acclaim!!



Poets for Palestine

By [Mike Stanton](#)

As a poet I feel a duty to use my voice
against injustice and oppression,
and there is no greater example of injustice and oppression
in the world today than the genocide that Israel is carrying out in Palestine.
First I must acknowledge the Palestinian poets who continue to write against all the odds
like [Yahya Alhamarna](#).

Alhamarna's current situation is unknown. Many others have been killed. Some, like [Refaat Alareer](#) were deliberately targeted by Israel. Others were victims of indiscriminate bombing. [Hiba Abu Nada](#) (1991-2023) was killed along with her son by an Israeli airstrike on 20th October 2023. She was an internationally renowned poet and novelist. A few days earlier she published [her final poem](#) on X, formerly Twitter.



Hiba Abu Nada
1991 - 2023

Gaza's night is dark apart
from the glow of rockets,
Quiet apart from the sound
of bombs,
Terrifying apart from the comfort of
prayer,
Black apart from the light
of martyrs.
Goodnight, Gaza.

When I heard the news I wrote this poem.

A Sonnet for Gaza

*Am I alone in feeling guilty when
I feel the deaths of poets more than those
Whose deaths, women --- children --- men,
Are equal in their agony of loss?
We've lost their hopes and dreams 10,000 fold
Blasted, bombed and buried under rubble
Without a chance to hear their stories told
In witness to the lives they led so noble.
Except that they were captured in the words
Of poets who were living in their midst,
Their dreams and dangers, perils, nightmares shared.
And that is why the poets are so missed.
In Gaza where their lives, their pens are broken,
Those who survive will hear their words out-spoken.*



It is easy to become overwhelmed by the daily catalogue of horrors, and despair for the Palestinians in their victimhood. Except that every day it is not just the poets, ordinary Palestinians also strive to assert their dignity through myriad quiet acts of courage. This next poem takes its title from a painting by Vermeer who painted people going about their business in their own home and is based on an image I glimpsed on social media of two women in Gaza.



The Milkmaid, Johannes Vermeer, c. 1660



The Art of Painting

*The picture on my screen, the one that I recall,
which blanks the memory of images that
scream,
is worthy of Vermeer in its studied
domesticity.*

*In the foreground a woman sits and tends
a homemade oven, baking bread
in a not quite bombed out building.*

*Three walls are standing, holding up the roof.
Curtains hang in place of doors and windows.
A younger woman paints upon a wall.*

*In this salvaged place they strive against
the savagery, enacting memories of home
that will survive so long as bombs and missiles
pass them by and tanks and bulldozers do not
arrive.*

There are wars going on all around the world . Statistically, Palestine, Ukraine, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo are probably the worst in terms of casualties and human rights abuses. Going beyond the numbers every victim is important. I try to capture that in this poem

Counting the Cost

*When the numbers mount it can be numbing.
If all we do is count the cost are we becoming
Complicit in the slaughter?*

*This girl is not a number.
She is --- she was somebody's daughter.*

*How do we count the cost of grief?
The loss of dreams and lives of those
who never will be born?*

*One, Two - It could be me or you.
Three, Four - We did not ask for war.
Five, Six - This rubble once was bricks.
Seven, Eight - We stand at heaven's gate.*

*Nine, Ten - And so it starts again
And again and again and AGAIN.*

I will give the last word to [Yahya Alhamarna](#).

“Writing is not just letters on paper; it is an act of survival, a voice of resistance, and a promise for tomorrow.”

[YAHYA ALHAMARMA](#)



Mike Stanton



I [Belong Here](#) is a book about walking the Pennine Way written by Anita Sethi. It is also an exploration of what it means to be British, an exploration of self and identity and a powerful personal response to the racism she experienced on a train when travelling from Liverpool to Newcastle in 2019.

She asked a man in her compartment to turn his music down. He reacted with a stream of [race hatred](#). “Do you have a British passport?” he shouted. “Get back on the banana boat. Paki cunt. Fuck off!” Most of the other passengers stayed silent apart from one woman who came to her defence. Sethi had recorded the abuse on her phone and went to find the train guard. At the next stop the man was arrested and eventually convicted of a race hate crime.

But the damage was done. Anita is a successful author and academic. She was born and bred in Manchester. The assault not only traumatised her. It rekindled memories of racist abuse from her childhood. And it did not stop there. Later in the book she recounts a memorable encounter with King Charles when he was Prince of Wales.

I have been questioned about my Britishness many times apart from by the racist on the train. I was asked that question: “Where are you from?” by the heir to the throne when I met Prince Charles in 2018 at the Commonwealth People’s Forum at which I was a speaker.

“And where are you from?” asked the prince as I shook his hand.

“Manchester, UK,” I said.

“Well, you don’t look like it!” he said and laughed.

He was then ushered to the next person, leaving me stunned by the gaffe.

“I belong here” is impossible to categorise. At one level it is a personal story, an act of defiance. A woman made to feel that she did not belong asserts her right to belong by walking the Pennine Way.

“This land is my land too,” she declares, “and I belong in the UK as a brown woman, just as much as a white man. Journeying through the so-called backbone of England also feels symbolic, a way of showing backbone myself and that I will not let having been the victim of a race hate crime curtail my movements through the world, despite the trauma and panic attacks that followed.”



Anita Sethi Walking the Pennine Way - Photo by George

The book contains a detailed account of the racial attack, the visceral hatred and the fear it generated in her. It also records her courage in recording the assault, contacting the train guard and the detailed interviews she gave, first to the police in Darlington and again in Newcastle. All of this compounded the trauma.

Then Anita was invited to join a five day walk inspired by The Canterbury Tales, in the company of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants who had previously been held in indefinite detention. [Refugee Tales](#) was part of the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group and the walk was to raise money for their work. It also gave Anita a renewed thirst for the open spaces of the north of England in order to alleviate her own anxiety and anger that was becoming “rage against the systemic injustice and inequality about which I was feeling a heightened awareness”.



Ali Smith - Patron of Refugee Tales Photo by

Sarah Wood

So it is a travelogue of sorts. A city girl stepping out into the countryside, quite ill-prepared but learning fast about having the right gear, how to read a map and not get lost again. She grows in confidence to leave the path on purpose to explore and then regain the path. Along the way she meets strangers and leaves them as friends.

She experiences the healing effects of nature and of human kindness. The trauma will never leave her but Anita has found a way to deal with it. At the end of the book she is on a new journey, walking Hadrian's Wall.



Hadrian's Wall - Image by Pete at Pixabay

If that was all she had written, so well and good, but there are other journeys woven into this tale. First and foremost is Anita's own journey of self discovery and her quest to reclaim her identity and her place in this land. Along the way she weaves in discussions on the US civil rights movement,



Anita as a child

Black Lives Matter, the nature of trauma and strategies for dealing with it, climate crisis and so much more. She writes about nature and landscape and our relationship with it in a language that is lyrical and inspires hope. It came as no surprise for me to discover that she is also a poet when I met her at a creative writing workshop.

Her poem “We All Have Wings Within Us” was written for Manchester Museum. If you ever visit the museum on Oxford Road you can read the whole poem on the wall inside the entrance. This is an excerpt.

Sing of a world broken and remade,

Sing of a world as beautiful as can be.

Sing of a world born on a wing and a prayer.

Sing of all the things here so wondrous, so rare.

It also provides a very good summary of the achievement of “I Belong Here.” From being wounded by hate to finding wonder in this world is in itself both wondrous and rare.



Sing of a world as beautiful as can be