

# When does a book launch become a meeting?

Leila Prasad

Sita Balani, *Deadly and Slick: Sexual Modernity and the Making of Race*, Verso 2023

An account of a discussion between Sita Balani, Amardeep Singh Dhillon, Gail Lewis and Adam Elliott-Cooper

*This is a write-up of an event held to launch Sita Balani's new book. The event gathered a multi-generational panel of scholar-activists to respond to the book. After getting home from the event, I was determined to do something to document this meeting, so that the insights and exchanges could be shared by a wider community of activists and organisers. When I texted Sita to suggest this, she replied that the fact I'd called it a meeting made her very happy, and I was reminded of the moment when Amar, one of the panellists, was leaving, shouting over their shoulder, 'You've written something genuinely useful for activists!'. Sita was characteristically humble about this, but I would say the same of the 'meeting' she had just convened via her book: space was held for a forthrightly activist perspective, determinedly puzzling over theoretical complexities with practical applications. There was a sense of urgency. There was also a great vibe, which I have attempted to capture in this write-up.*

## **Sita Balani: What is sexual modernity?**

Sita began by discussing the origin story of the book - her observation of two dynamics that she had seen happen at the same time, at the end of the 1990s and early 2000s. This was at a time, in her own words, 'before I had the vocabulary

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to grasp the political world around me'; but, nonetheless, she 'could feel those things shifting'. The first of these dynamics was the fracturing of British Asian identity: an identity that was already full of internal contradictions and divisions of caste, religion, gender and class, yet which at the beginning of that period had still had some coherence as a term. In the early years of the 'War on Terror', that category fractured, as Muslim became a racialised category in and of itself. The second development was the rapid rise in 'gay rights': Section 28 had, until 2003, criminalised the teaching of homosexuality as a 'pretended family relationship' (in its own strange and awkward phrasing). Within a year of its repeal, in 2004, civil partnerships were introduced. So, one year, you can't talk about gay people in schools. And, the next year, gays could essentially get married.

Sita was convinced that the moving around of these categories of sexuality and race was not merely coincidental, even if those in power who were moving them were somewhat improvising. Following on from this insight, she wrote her PhD about the sexual politics of the War on Terror. But later, wanting to go deeper, she began to ask questions about the pre-history of these processes. *Deadly and Slick* is her attempt to address such questions, as well as the subsequent one of how race is made and remade in response to changing political, economic and social contexts - and how we come to accept this. She is careful not to erase our collective resistance to these processes. But at the same time, as she notes, we do seem to generally adjust ourselves to these categories. 'So it's not only that we were put into categories, it's also that the categories are put into us.'

The book's premise is that, even when we know that race is socially constructed, and that it is a tool for nationalist projects in search of a scapegoat, and for capital in search of cheap labour, we still continue to regularly understand ourselves and each other through the prism of race; and that sexuality has something to do with this.

Sita's explorations drew from Foucault's work on sexuality - with regard to confession, psychiatry, modern medicine, the schooling system and the nuclear family - as well as later critical work by researchers such as Ann Stoler and Sylvia Federici, on gender, sexuality, colonialism and the body. She began to develop the concept of what she came to call 'sexual modernity'. Just as modernity is always two-sided, bringing both freedom and punishment in different configurations, sexual modernity also had, or has, two parts. The first is the promise of self-realisation through the pursuit of romantic love, the nuclear family, and sexual adventure, and

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that this might give us a kind of fulfilment. And then the second - what 'stalks' this possibility - is everything that is disavowed, all of the sexual conduct and sexual practice that is excluded from this.

Some of what has been disavowed and repressed can be - and in many places has been - recovered for the freedom side of sexual modernity, as has happened in many countries with homosexuality. But much of it remains, or is transmuted or deepened, and its effects are seen in forms of organised sexual violence and exploitation.

Our lives, the world we live in - capitalist social relations at this late stage - are organised around that dichotomy. So, on the one hand, the promise, and on the other, ever-expanding forms of organised sexual violence. *Deadly and Slick* traces how this dichotomy and these forms follow the movement of capital.

For example, in Canada, research has shown how organised sexual violence against indigenous women often follows the development of extractive projects like mines and pipelines. And then we also see organised sexual violence when capital flees, as in de-industrialised towns and cities in the UK such as Rotherham and Rochdale, which have quite a complex relationship to the politics of race. The book argues that race was made in and through these conditions of sexual modernity, in two distinct ways: racial others are marked by their distance from its promise; and they are also made by assumptions about who this kind of sexual violence can be used against - two distinct and related tools of racialisation.

Finally, the book's argument operates in two different times: the first half is more historical, exploring, for example, the role of the UK in state-regulated sex work in colonial India. The second half spans from the late 1990s and the rise of New Labour, to the end of the 2010s, deepening austerity, and the so-called 'culture wars'.

### **Amardeep Singh Dhillon: nationalism, fracturing and direct action**

Amardeep began with an observation that among activists and organisers it is common to say that race is a technology of power, but that this book provides a real analysis of how that technology is functioning, what is motivating it, and how it unfolds through multiple, uneven and shifting processes. As activists and organisers, it was really useful - 'having an analysis of the terrain that we're fighting on ... of the discourses we buy into, and therefore which ones are useful and which ones ultimately re-inscribe the same categories that we're meant to be fighting to abolish'.

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They also remarked on the ironic feeling of arriving at the venue [the ICA] - which was just up the road from Buckingham Palace. The last time they'd been there was at Pride in London 2022, when they were organising - alongside many comrades who were also in the room - a storming of the parade, as Lesbians and Gays Support the Migrants, in protest at the inclusion of police officers in the parade. (At this point the room erupted in cheers of solidarity with that action.)

This was happening 'after the police repression at Clapham Common, after the police repression at the Bristol uprising ... after a long litany of violences by the state' against various marginalised groups, including queer people. 'That sense of incongruity [within] what we're told is our march towards our liberation is exactly what LGSM was trying to interrupt.'

They recalled the moment months ago when Sita texted them to invite them to speak at the event. In their reply, they mentioned they were struck by the resonance of the book with the recent news that Keir Starmer's Labour Party was putting forward a new iteration of ASBOs to punish parents of unruly children. Sita had replied, 'God only knows what wild developments we'll see between now and May.' At the meeting Amar told us that he now had 'a little list of them, actually...' - and then proceeded to tell us that list.

The first was the recent resurgence of far-right activity on the streets, with a consistency and longevity not seen for years. Notably, white nationalist groups like Patriotic Alternative and civic nationalist groups like Turning Point UK have been organising demonstrations targeting two types of locations: hotels housing asylum seekers, and pubs where drag queens are performing (most prominently drag queen story hour). While reading the section of *Deadly and Slick* about the construct of the child, and about moral panics, 'it was quite wild to be seeing a moral panic crystallise in real time'.

The second on the list was the Bibby Stockholm - the boat the Home Office has converted into a prison barge for asylum seekers, more specifically, for 500 people deemed by the state to be single men. And while the Tories' position is clearly based on the imperative to produce and maintain Racial Hygiene by keeping these 'single men' off land, much of the local opposition to this - aside from anti-racist and anti-border opposition - consists of white people saying, 'What about our women and girls?'. 'What happens when you let single [racialised] men off the prison ship to wonder about the ports, and about the town?' The links drawn in the book -

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between the regulation of sex work, the virginity testing in the 1970s of South Asian women arriving in the UK as dependents, and other forms of border violence - reappear in the Bibby Stockholm story. Add to this the Bibby Line's mythology as 'the oldest family-run shipping businesses in Britain' - the very same one that made its name moving produce from slave plantations, and goods that were required by the plantation economy. 'There's a through line there that gets articulated really well in the book around sexual modernity and state violences.'

Finally, there was the National Conservative conference - 'Nat C is literally the fucking abbreviation of it, right?' And in this conference, Danny Kruger, supposedly a 'liberal, reasonable, pragmatic' Tory MP, came out with a defence of the normative family as the basis for a safe and stable society. Meanwhile, Miriam Cates blamed 'Cultural Marxism' for falling white birth rates. Demographics and the 'great replacement' theory are hinted at. Suella Braverman says conservatism 'is order or it is nothing'.

As Amar pointed out, we've been seeing 'the brazen return of Christian nationalist rhetoric at the same time as US-funded, evangelical, Christo-fascist networks are starting to reappear on the streets outside of hotels housing asylum seekers, and outside pubs hosting drag queens'. So, 'in terms of the developments that we're seeing since we had that conversation two months ago, in May, it's quite clear that this book couldn't be more prescient.'

Amar moved on from these observations to reflect on their own upbringing, and their own experience of the fracturing of post-9/11 South Asian identity. They reflected on the generational shifts in their family: their grandfather, a trade unionist and activist in the Indian Workers Association, had lived through Partition before arriving in the UK, and later found solidarity among communist friends belonging to Hindu, Muslim and Sikh families. Their parents, uncles and aunts, on the other hand, had grown up with Thatcherite promises of social mobility. How this played out in their own generation was complicated: while they were raised on narratives of solidarity between Indians or South Asians against the imperial British, once they went to school - and a very white one at that - they were consistently encouraged to distance and differentiate themselves from Muslims.

It took time to notice this happening, but once they did, they noticed how much the Sikh community that attended the local gurdwara was buying into and affirming narratives of assimilation and loyalty to the British, from the colonial period to today,

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through a lens that was at once strikingly masculinist and militarist, yet based on servility and notions of saintliness. ‘Supposedly, you know, even the white people recognised that really, we were a martial race...’. As Amar gestured at their gorgeous, flowing femme outfit: ‘I don’t know if this is giving martial race...’, the room laughed with them.

They drew parallels here with *Deadly and Slick*’s discussion about measuring different re-racialised South Asian demographics in terms of their distance from, or relation to, white (and especially bourgeois) kinship norms. As much in Amar’s teenagehood as now, the concept of the ‘double life’ was popular among British South Asians, and with it also a tendency to see one’s circumstances as a ‘crisis of identity’, as expressions of a ‘cultural anxiety’. For many Sikhs, given the context mentioned above, the way through this was to embrace the position of model minority, to articulate anti-racism or solidarity between migrants primarily in terms of our capacity to be productive economically. ‘It’s been a long, long time before many of us have been able to articulate what it means to express solidarity in a way that isn’t explicitly identitarian about the salience of our particular identity to the demands of capital, and then the demands of various myths involved in race making.’

Amar noted at this point that, in *Deadly and Slick*, Sita discusses how the ‘double life’ concept is popular not only for British South Asians but also of course for queer people (of various backgrounds), who supposedly all reach a point where we ‘come out of the closet’ to be ‘our authentic selves’, leave family, religion and all ‘backward’ kinship systems behind and enter liberated white society as individuals. Among the realities obscured by such a myth is that this liberated white society is built on multiple - and multiplying - forms of state violence: Abu Ghraib, the violences of the border, the violations of the police, are all discussed in the book. Amar reminded us also of ‘Spycops’ - the undercover police officers who coerced women into relationships to infiltrate and discipline women in the anti-war movement. They also mentioned the violences committed against Black children through strip searching - state-sanctioned legalised assault - as another way of disciplining unruly populations.

Amar lives near Honor Oak in South East London, where they have since February been involved in joining and organising counter-demonstrations against far-right groups who have been trying to stop drag queen story hour - ‘which

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is, if anything, the most respectable form of a queer or trans identity, exactly the kind of thing that's not sexual, that's actually child friendly. That's what we're told we're meant to be aspiring to in order to be safe, right?'. Through head-spinning inversions of safety and threat, the activists turning up to protect such events have been facing shocking levels of police violence - including physical beatings and arrests. 'So at the same time as we're being told that actually Britain is a bastion of queer rights, and this is what holds us apart from [the places where asylum seekers are migrating from, like] West Africa or from the Middle East, at the same time, the British state is engaged in exactly the same kind of queerphobic violence that we're taught to expect only from racialised others'.<sup>1</sup>

Amar closed with a question to Sita that concerned six elements of this most recent age of sexual modernity: (1) the emergence of the gay, often-white, often-male, often-cis, often-moneyed, monogamous subject as a liberal paradigm; (2) the sponsoring of official pride marches by corporations, arms companies, armed forces and other organs of state-sponsored racialised violence; (3) a rise in street violence against queer/trans people and Black and brown people; (4) the calling into question of hard-fought legislated protections and freedoms for these same demographics; (5) the incursion of increasingly overtly far-right ideology into supposedly mainstream political discourse; (6) increased police violence against queer and trans people resisting fascists. The question was - simply! - what do these multiple, simultaneous developments mean for the positioning of that liberal gay subject in sexual modernity? And what does that mean for how we understand the terrain that we're fighting on?

### **Gail Lewis: Solidarities, repetitions, and social critique**

Gail began by acknowledging Sita's parents who were present, and also Sita's 'community of radical production that is also here in the room'.<sup>2</sup> After all, the analytic brilliance and political commitment demonstrated in *Deadly and Slick* is itself 'nurtured by parents and communities of solidarity - it always is.'

She prefaced her own contribution to the discussion with the memory of her childhood, and the sense that, living as Black girl in 1950s and 1960s London, growing up would not be simple. As she became a teenager, this became more defined as a keen sense of the need to 'make solidarity'. 'For us that solidarity was absolutely grounded in the need to hold together Black and Asian unity ... We

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knew all the legacies through which we've been divided, of course, we'd either come directly from the colonies where that was happening, or we were schooled in it. We knew that Asians and Black people couldn't talk to each other. We knew that Black people from the continent couldn't talk to Black people from the Caribbean. All of that. But we knew also that we absolutely had to hold it together.'

In this regard she paid tribute to Ambalavaner Sivanandan, claiming that *Deadly and Slick* was very much in the tradition of Siva's work. Relating this back to the question of solidarity, she recalled what she had learned from him: 'the need to notice when the fracturing was happening, and in whose interests and how.'

Her own experience of this was - amidst the breakdown of the social-democratic consensus of the post-second-world-war era, along with its mode of citizenship and solidarity among white working-class people - to see the need to look at the question of how to build a politics that was fundamentally anti-state, but also to obtain a share of the resources and services that 'our labour' as Black and Asian workers had made possible. This was what made trade unionism and the labour movement important - like Amar, she here referenced the Indian Workers Association. But this politics was laid to waste under the attacks of Thatcherism and Blairism, particularly under a renewed injunction to work, as a pre-requisite of citizenship. All of this Gail offered in order to demonstrate the importance of work like *Deadly and Slick*, as a 'tool for activism' that helps us understand our terrain, because 'the repetitions go back longer', while 'the transformations have been radical'.

Gail praised the book's imaginative scope, analytical incisiveness and depth, and its determination to link together state policies and practices with the production of symbols and narratives in the cultural industries as well as the news media, which both work so actively for the making and remaking of sexual modernity. This is crucial, in a context where understanding the state's role in the forming of racial regimes has never seemed more urgent or more difficult. *Deadly and Slick* 'demonstrates to us precisely why we have to understand the state and its agents and its practices of governance and violence in relation to cultural productions through which these are reproduced as normal. We need that ability.'

The book's particular contribution lay in its charting of the state's racial taxonomies alongside its mobilisation of categories of sexuality and gender, a process which Sita applies both to the historical colonial context and the contemporary imperial centre. This charting works 'in and through the dictates,



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promises, fantasies, obligations, and constraints of sexual modernity, and the form of personhood this constructs and requires'; and in this way identifies its 'continuities and shifts' - and therefore the 'overlaps and ruptures' between and among the constructions, archetypes, hierarchies and value regimes of sexuality, race, citizenship and gender.

'Interesting as all this might be, in anchoring the analysis in the violences and urgencies of now - *We know how urgent now is*. We know how this urgency is in part historically produced. We know it's also full of contradiction and uncertainty as to exactly where it will go. *But we know it's urgent*.'

In the context of the UK's repressive, crisis-ridden population management, amidst old and new nationalisms, and the global emergence of neo-fascist regimes and ecological breakdown, such critique and analysis, Gail argued, is more urgent than ever and must be able to comprehend the everydayness of these oppressions.

Like Amar, she referred to where we were holding this meeting - once again we were here, up the road from 'their palace'. And in this place, all the work had gone into installing new Union Jacks, and no provisions had been made for wheelchair users. She'd just seen someone struggling to reach the street level from The Mall. 'His family had to lift him up the four or five steps ... and we're supposed to bow down to these ...'.

Gail listed some of the subjects to which Sita applies her critique and analysis:

Priti Patel's embodiment of the sadism of the state

the question of why young women and girls are subjected to the violence of grooming, whether in cases like Rotherham, or the case of Shamima Begum, who was criminalised and sadistically expelled from citizenship

the fracturing of the South Asian population into Hindu, Sikh, East African-Asian on the one hand, and Muslim on the other

the relationship of this to whiteness and interpolation into sexual modernity

the toxic alliance between conservative Christians and reactionary feminists, who work together to turn trans life into a condition of endangerment

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the conflict at Parkfield Community School in Birmingham, the No Outsiders programme, with its own logics of the Prevent agenda and homonationalism, and its own relation to the self-actualising and individualising potential of sexual modernity.

This was how Sita shows us ‘the field of battle and its character’ and thereby ‘gives us a tool with which to help build aligned constituencies of opposition *and vision*’.

Gail closed her thoughts with a question to Sita: while the book rightly critiques sexual modernity’s promise of self-actualisation, with that it also critiques the idea that identity can provide the ground on which we can cohere - identity being one of the categories that are ‘put into’ us coercively. And yet, remembering how important it was for her generation of activists to cohere on the ground of their own racialisation as Black and brown people, in order to declare their own class politics, she wanted to know: what category, or term, or process is left to us, to build the solidarities we need?

### **Adam Elliott-Cooper: Slick histories**

Adam began by praising *Deadly and Slick* for asserting that sexuality isn’t merely an add-on to understanding racism, as they don’t just ‘intersect’. Instead, sexuality is fundamental to racism, they are co-constitutive. ‘Racist ideas are constructed through ideas of sexual difference. Racial governance is rationalised through sexual stereotypes and racist culture becomes legible through sexual paranoia.’ And it is by dwelling on these aspects of racism that we see, not just its deadly side, which we are used to seeing, but also its ‘slick’ side.

Like Amar and Gail, he brought further examples into the mode of analysis that the book proposes. One of these examples is historical, the other more contemporary.

After chattel slavery ended in several of the Anglophone Caribbean islands, the colonial administrations began a huge crackdown on crimes of a sexual nature, employing laws against rape, bestiality and ‘sodomy’ against the Black population. Effectively, this was the slave owners’ response to emancipation, seeking to demonstrate that it had been a mistake, by proving that without being policed by chattel slavery, Black people had full rein on their supposed wayward and violent sexual urges. As a result, the colonial administrations and British

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parliament established a series of laws and punishments intended to impose a new regime of sexual control, and thereby established a continuity of corporal and capital punishments brought over from pre-emancipation times. 'But instead of being justified through the need to control, maintain and discipline slaves, they were rationalised through the necessity of controlling sexuality.' Once again this is an example of how sexuality was required in order to rationalise a form of racial governance.

Adam referred to an image offered by Sita of government officials in London during the colonial period trying to determine who, many thousands of miles away, should have sex with whom. Originally, this image referred to a system of state-regulated sex work run in India by the British government. But, as he pointed out, this case and the Caribbean case were the inverse of each other. Referring to the common practice of slave owners of committing rape against enslaved people, he observed that, 'rather than sexual violence being the norm in the context of Jamaica, in which it is almost encouraged in order to reproduce property, it becomes a source of paranoia in the context of the colony of India.' This paranoia was translated into astonishingly philosophical - and arguably *slick* terms - by Georges Hardy: 'A man remains a man as long as he stays under the gaze of a woman of his race.' In other words, in India, Britain wanted to avoid sexual violence - and the associated miscegenation - being normalised as in the Caribbean, and so it needed to act. And, aside from legislation, this meant literally transporting white women to India, 'in order to ensure that these men remain men'.

This contrasts strikingly with another of Sita's examples - the assertion by David Goodhart that 'transnational marriages' are holding back racial integration by creating 'a first generation in every generation'. After all, if Black and brown people continue to marry Black and brown migrants, how will the state ever fully assimilate them? This turns Hardy's argument on its head - sexual modernity once more showing its slick, slippery tendency to invert the terms where required.

The second, more contemporary, example involved two different but conspicuously similar archetypes that emerge from Sita's comparison of the 2001 and 2011 riots in various English towns and cities. On the one hand, there is the narrative of the South Asian Muslim woman, a victim who if not saved becomes a threat, by joining whatever spectre of terrorism is under current construction. And, on the other, there is the narrative of the Black boy, another victim in need of

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saving - who, without intervention, will join not 'the terrorist cell' but 'the gang'. In both cases, family and sexuality are central to the state's civilising mission. For the brown Muslim woman, the role of motherhood supposedly insulates her from the self-actualisation and integration promised by sexual modernity - 'she's too single minded, too engrossed, too repressed into the home and family life by the excesses of Asian or Islamic patriarchy'. While that narrative is based on too-much-patriarchy, that of the Black boy is premised on not-enough-patriarchy, with the absent father failing to discipline the child and 'make a man out of him'. Black women are erased from this narrative, or are only included on the basis of their inability to perform this gendered task themselves, and so themselves becoming absent, 'due at best to work commitments, but more often to wayward social lives, visible frustrations, or, of course, anger.'

The proposed saviours of these problematic victims bear comparison too. First there is the one that represents 'the right kind of patriarchy' - the sports club, the organised social event, for Black boys especially the boxing club, usually police-adjacent. Then there are the processes which enable people to become their authentic selves - sometimes through sexual freedom, though for Black boys more often it's through intellectual aspirations (see Tony Sewell's 'Generating Genius' programme). Then there are state-approved community leaders, as in the Mayor's mentoring scheme, or those recruited by Prevent. Finally, for high-risk cases, there is recruitment into the Army Cadets, Police Cadets or Air Cadets. 'And failing that, of course, there's always prison.' 'The greatest heroes of these processes are the former gang member, or the former radical Islamist, who has been to prison and come out a changed person.'

'And there's sometimes a lighter side to these processes. Sita talks about the fantastic social media accounts run by the counterterrorism unit called This Is Woke, which includes posts such as "Meet the Syrian ballet dancer using art to defy terror". And of course Black boys have got their own one because no-one can forget the knife crime warnings that went on the inside of fried chicken boxes.'

All such forms help us to make the connections between these different manifestations of racism, 'often overlapping, often intertwined, and always changing, always slick.'

Adam closed by asking Sita about a figure not mentioned in *Deadly and Slick* but who manages to personify the spectres of Black masculinity and Islam, as well as far-

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right nationalism and chauvinism, all at once - how does Andrew Tate fit into this whole picture?

### Heavy threats and absent promises

In Sita's response to Amar, she brought together their points about how quickly things had got even worse in UK politics and their question about what this means for the figure of the assimilated gay subject: precisely because of this deterioration, the assimilated gay subject no longer functions as an alibi for the system. It's increasingly implausible to work hard and become the kind of upwardly mobile gay subject - or 'good immigrant' for that matter - who actually gets ahead. That promise isn't being made any more. The postwar settlement is so distant that now: 'if I get an appointment with the GP, I'm so excited I text a friend - "Do you know what, I just got an appointment with the GP!"' Responding to Adam's question, she pointed out that the Andrew Tates of this world are the ones still making those kinds of promises, which is what makes them popular. People want to hear that 'you can do it for yourself'.

But the question of this promise is also key to understanding the shift since Thatcherism, when the murderous destruction of the welfare state was supposedly compensated by the promise of self-aspiration. The rescinding of that promise could be part of a broader shift from hegemony to domination, and this might be another reason for the apparent contradiction Amar mentioned, between corporations celebrating gay pride and the police attacking gays on the street. What used to be a promise offered to straights, and a threat dealt out to gays, had lost its structure. The promise is empty and the threat has only deepened.

Amar offered another illustration of this here. They mentioned that the same Danny Kruger who later praised the normative family at the Nat C conference had in 2020 been commissioned by Boris Johnson to write a report on mutual aid networks. The report's eventual recommendation was to mobilise people primarily concerned with feeding and clothing the most vulnerable in their communities, to be trained as a national reserve army of volunteers in the criminal justice system, so that they could then deal with the inherent tendencies towards crime of those same vulnerable people. So, where promises are still being made, it is the promise of active participation in the carceral state.

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This new moment in sexual modernity, Sita claimed, requires a new politics from us, and here she quoted Gail's point that, just as the book was a conversation had in community - at meetings, at protests, at banner making sessions - it will be through such conversations that we will have to work to define that new politics. 'We have to be as quick, as able to move, as our enemies are, and I think that's where my thinking stops and I hope everyone else's can take over.'

A final question, from the audience, was whether the people who are still being promised something are those living in the former colonies who are arriving in the UK now. Amar's response was that such promises are not needed any more. As Sita had pointed out, sexual violence follows the flow of capital - but in different ways. However, they do not do so in freedom. Instead, new paths to migration are often defined through 'carceral cosmopolitanism'. One example is the Romanian and Bulgarian seasonal agricultural work visa, which lasts six months, thus preventing someone from building a life, and forcing them to live where they work, far from any possible enforcement of labour protections, and with no potential for trade union representation.

Sita did not claim to have a definitive answer to this question, but instead offered a relevant observation. She had recently been at an action resisting the removal of a group of asylum seekers from their Home Office accommodation to Napier Barracks. This is part of a shocking (though not surprising) pattern whereby asylum seekers are uprooted from places where they have often forged local networks and support systems, to areas where they face higher levels of racism and are housed in increasingly uncomfortable accommodation. While chatting with some of the men facing removal, Sita learned that they were in phone contact with friends who were already at the barracks. They had news and updates making up a complicated and contradictory picture of what was going on there. This struck Sita as reinforcing the need for activists to do more than simply say how terrible such removals are. Alongside protesting them in solidarity with those affected, there is a need to understand the migrants' own networks, to get a better grasp on how such processes play out, and work out how they can really be resisted.

The conversation continues.

**Amar Singh Dhillon** is a queer Sikh journalist and bartender. They are programme co-coordinator at the World Transformed and co-editor at Red Pepper magazine, and

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organiser with South London Bartenders Network and Lesbians and Gays Support the Migrants.

**Gail Lewis** is a feminist, anti-racist, socialist, and member of the historic Brixton Black Women's Group as well as OWAAD. In her own words, 'Gail is brought into being in and by the company, care and joy of Black women, women of colour, feminisms and queer knowings and livings'.

**Adam Elliot-Cooper** is a lecturer in politics at QMUL, anti-racist researcher, author of *Black Resistance to British Policing*, a co-author of *Empire's Endgame: Racism and the British State*, and member of Black Lives Matter UK. Adam chaired the event.

**Sita Balani** is a writer and teacher living in London. She is a co-author of *Empire's Endgame: Racism and the British State* in 2021, and author of *Deadly and Slick: Sexual Modernity and the Making of Race*, out now from Verso Books.

**Leila Prasad** is a researcher and video-activist doing a practice-based PhD at Goldsmiths University of London. She is currently active in Trans Worker Solidarity and the associated discussion series 'Trans Liberation and the Struggle Against Capitalism'.

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### Notes

1. One month after the event, Amar was convicted of a breach of Section 14 of the Public Order Act 1986, for failing to leave the road during one of the Honor Oak protests. In an Instagram post they wrote: 'While nothing new, this case is another instance of the police and the courts functionally protecting the "rights" of neo-Nazis to disrupt our communities while punishing those who resist them.' They added: 'If you're in SE London, go follow @selondonlove who are doing important work resisting hate in our community. And if you're Lewisham-based, check out @wekeepussafelew and fill out our People's Consultation on the proposed imposition of increased police powers across the borough - if not, look out for PSPOs in your area, and get in touch if you want support fighting their renewal. Love and solidarity always.'

2. Sita's father, Kumar Balani, has since passed away. In his retirement, he turned his hand to writing, and has left a manuscript which Sita is preparing for publication.