

Contradiction and Making the World Anew

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THE left is trying to take grandma away, now, and confiscate the kids, and this is supposed to be progressive? What the fuck?’¹ Sophie Lewis is tongue-in-cheek when engaging with critics of her proposal to abolish the family. But Lewis is clear that she is not chiding us for the love of our family, if we are lucky enough to have that. The proposal to abolish the family itself presents a very real existential challenge to us and to our economic and social systems at large. Lewis’s attack is not on our need for love or care. In fact, the book should be read as advancing a case for *more* love and *more* care. She asks us to see differently the problems of the family, its institutions, history, and how we care for each other. Lewis proposes that we instead consider the following questions: what would it mean to not need the family? Could we not imagine something *better* than the family for how we organise care?

To answer these questions, Lewis thinks we must first ask about the conditions that made the nuclear family possible. In prioritising this question, she harks back to a long and sometimes ignored feminist tradition that looks to denaturalise the family and its institutions. It is a tradition that points out that many of the standard characteristics of the Western family – mum, dad, 2.5 children, a dog, and a white picket fence – are neither necessary nor inevitable. Lewis prompts us to consider the role that patriarchy, whiteness, empire, and other systems of domination have in creating and shaping this reality, our reality.

At the centre of this analysis is a story about how the family privatises care. Drawing on Kathi Weeks, Lewis argues that all families participate in this process of enclosure.² Locked away in our households, the work that reproduces the workforce, and cares for children, the sick, and the elderly is done mostly by women working for free, perhaps out of a sense of obligation or duty, or by domestic workers on desperately low pay. Lewis proposes that this is an environment in which love cannot flourish, not really. Many critics of family abolition often stumble at this first hurdle, responding ‘But, I love

¹ A version of this commentary was first presented on Monday 10 October 2022 in All Souls College, Oxford at a roundtable on Sophie Lewis, *Abolish the Family: A Manifesto for Care and Liberation* (London: Verso, 2022).

² Kathi Weeks, ‘Abolition of the Family: The Most Infamous Feminist Proposal’, *Feminist Theory* 24, no. 3 (2023 [online first 2021]), 433–53.

my kids!' It's not that Lewis doesn't think that you love them, or that you only visit grandma out of obligation. However, Lewis repeatedly emphasises that we should all be so lucky to feel such love. She reminds readers that the family is not always the safe haven that some assume. At the heart of Lewis' point is that during this process of enclosure, where our care work is shut away from the world and routinely undervalued and under-supported, this does not lay the ground for happiness to flourish. As Silvia Federici said of this situation, 'They said it is love, we say it is unwaged work'.³

Before I read Lewis' book, I was certainly critical of the family and its functions. I don't think, however, that I would have counted myself as a family abolitionist. It is rare to find a book that prompts the kinds of personal and in-depth discussions about family, love, and care as this one does. The success of *Abolish the Family* lies partly in its patience. It takes seriously a range of critical or hesitant responses to what Kathi Weeks has called feminism's 'most infamous proposal': the complete abolition of the family.⁴ That is, the complete dismantling of the family as a particular sociological and economic unit – though "Abolish the family!" is certainly a catchier slogan. Surely, the sympathetic critic might say, it is not that we need to abolish the family, we need to *reform* its institutions. Should the aim not be to expand the definition, and so the boundaries, of the family, such that it might include queer families or other non-traditional family forms? Such a reader might be willing to advocate for the abolition of the nuclear, patriarchal family; but why should we target marginalised families, which might themselves be sites of resistance to the dominant nuclear paradigm?

Lewis is adept at handling these critiques as she takes readers through them step by step. Lewis notes how it is simultaneously possible to love one's Black family, even to see it as a site of safety in a world of white supremacy, and to understand that the family itself emerged because of the forms of violence involved in empire, colonialism, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy. This love might lead some to want to resist the family or it might mean we cling to it. For Lewis, 'reforming' or 'abolishing' the family isn't some sort of semantic disagreement. It is especially difficult terrain to discuss marginalised family forms, who often practice the kinds of kinship we might want more of. Lewis dwells on what we might salvage from these family forms, considering what other ways of organising kinship could emerge from them. Rather than electing to say that we need an *expanded* family form and specifying that we should abolish white, cisheterosexual, patriarchal families, Lewis clarifies what she takes abolition to mean in this context. When she calls for the abolition of all families, Lewis is calling for an end to the privatisation of care as its most fundamental feature. Though marginalised family forms may contain seeds of potential for Lewis to organise kinship in ways that are better than the family, she warns against forgetting to turn a

³ Silvia Federici, 'Wages Against Housework', in *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), 15.

⁴ Weeks, 'Abolition of the Family'.

critical lens to even marginalised family forms. What becomes clear is that, yes, Lewis does mean *abolition* of the family, all families.

If you read Lewi's book and you're sold on the idea of abolishing the family, then the question quickly becomes: 'How?' Abolishing the family and the necessary revolution it entails (or perhaps presupposes) is not an event anyone will be hosting next Tuesday. The answer is more complicated, and it cuts to the heart of what 'abolition' really means. For Lewis, as for other family abolitionists, to speak of abolition is not merely to call for an absence. Lewis is clear that the project is one of world-building, of institution building, which requires continuous and collective acts of creativity. Positioning the book as "critically utopian", she pushes us to reimagine social reproduction, and its organisation, from its very foundations. The family, she argues, is really what is utopian here, meant in the pejorative sense of that word. For many of us, the family can seldom live up to the myth surrounding it, and it leaves us wanting. Lewis could easily talk about the shocking domestic violence statistics and the violence that surrounds the family as an institution, which she gestures towards at points. However, even absent this, Lewis recognises that the family is often a site of discomfort and begrudging obligation. As she remarks, it is uncomfortable and often met with anger to suggest that we all deserve better than what we got growing up.

That you love your family members and yet you would also happily see the institution wither away might seem contradictory. But why are we so often allergic to seeming contradiction? Can the analysis of contradiction, as Marx showed, not be revelatory? Throughout the book, Lewis insists that the willingness to dwell in contradiction is a necessary condition for much abolitionist thought.

In their 2022 book, *Abolition. Feminism. Now.*, Angela Davis, Gina Dent, Erica Meiners and Beth Richie introduce this as 'both/and' thinking, rather than binary 'either/or' thinking.⁵ This is to say that abolition often requires that we do multiple things at once. It is a framework that does not shy away from contradictions. As the authors argue, rather than a limitation, these contradictions themselves might be a spark for change and generate necessary sites of analysis.⁶ How, for example, does the movement for family abolition speak to other abolitionist movements like prison abolition or those who hold post-work ambitions? Are there tensions between these visions of abolition, or are they movements with the same ends in mind?

Lewis writes that the family is a shield that many, particularly the most marginalised, took up to survive a war. She invites us to consider that the war does not have to go on forever. In putting down the shield, the steps to ending that war require us to do things that might be in tension. In the final chapter, Lewis indicates that for us this means reducing harms in the moment, such as through fighting forced family separations at the border or offering solidarity to a queer kid in that same family should she need it. But these actions are not our horizon.

⁵ Angela Y. Davis et al., *Abolition. Feminism. Now.* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2022), 3.

⁶ Davis et al., *Abolition. Feminism. Now.*, 3-6.

The vision Lewis presents of abolishing the family is one that is far off. As she ends the book, she remarks that it's a future that we might not yet be able to desire fully. If the task for feminism is, as Amia Srinivasan puts it in *The Right to Sex* (2021), that we transform the world beyond recognition, this complete and utter transformation might yet seem like something we are not able to fully grasp.⁷ It is nonetheless important to see that there is a kernel of this future to be found in our present. These kernels may be taken from art and architecture, poetry, protest camps, marginalised family forms or other 'experiments in imagining otherwise'.⁸ Scraps of inspiration for how to build something *better* are to be found in the here and now.

How might we bridge this gap between the near and the far-off? In reflecting on this tension, I was reminded of a quote from *Abolition. Feminism. Now.* expressing the difficult task we have in remaking the world anew:

The productive tension of holding onto a radical, real and deep vision while engaging in the messy daily practice *is* the feminist praxis: the work of everyday people to try, to build, to make. And this requires collectivity. Always.⁹

When I first read the ending of Lewis' book, I was struck with a sense of melancholy. Perhaps it is true we cannot yet fully know what it means to desire a world without the family, where we can be together as people and we end the separation of peoples. It even feels uncomfortable to recognise the radical hope that Lewis expresses in her vision of a 'glorious and abundant nothing' that may come after the family. For many of us invested in projects of abolition, including the abolition of the family or prisons, we likely won't see or reap the benefits of our collective struggle in our lifetimes. Despite this, our work remains to do what we can to build something better for a future that will not be ours to inhabit but that we have to hope for and to do our best to imagine.

⁷ Amia Srinivasan, *The Right to Sex* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), xi.

⁸ Lola Olufemi, *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise* (Maidstone: Hajar Press, 2021).

⁹ Davis et al, *Abolition. Feminism. Now.*, 16.

Love's Demands

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IN *Abolish the Family: A Manifesto for Care and Liberation*, Sophie Lewis weaves a compelling, generative, and accessible case for family abolitionism.¹ In under a hundred pages, the four chapters cover vast historical and theoretical ground. They take us from an introduction to family abolitionism and the arguments behind it, to a consideration of some of its history, its most challenging questions and, finally, some reflections on the family-free futures we might work towards.

The persuasiveness of Lewis' work derives in part from its willingness to reinterpret its own genre. *Abolish the Family* is not a typical manifesto. Where we might expect unshakeable convictions and bold predictions, Lewis from the very first page grants an unusual amount of space to fear and (self-)doubt. The book opens by acknowledging family abolitionism's 'explosive emotional freight', the many anxieties the idea elicits, and Lewis even admits how 'scary (psychologically challenging)' she finds it herself.² Lewis aims neither to dispel our fears nor to distract us from them, but to convince us, in the face of them, that family abolitionism is a cause worth fighting for. The light Lewis casts is that of a warm torch held by an equally frightened but determined friend offering to accompany us from where we are to where we need to go.

The case Lewis presents for abolitionism rests in part on an analysis of what the family does. The family, Lewis argues, serves as an oppressive capitalist technology that 'incubates chauvinism and competition ... manufactures 'individuals' with a cultural, ethnic, and binary gender identity; a class; and a racial consciousness ... performs free labor for the market ... [and] functions as capitalism's base unit'.³ The struggle for the abolition of the family thus becomes a fight for our liberation. Lewis is at her most absorbing and witty, however, when she builds her defence of family abolitionism on what the family fails to deliver. Here, she reminds us that the 'guaranteed belonging, trust, recognition, and fulfilment' as well as care that we often associate with the family 'remains a bit of a fiction'.⁴ All too regularly, the family turns into a horror story, the most frequent site of rape, murder, blackmail, bullying, verbal

¹ A version of this commentary was first presented on Monday 10 October 2022 in All Souls College, Oxford at a roundtable on Sophie Lewis, *Abolish the Family: A Manifesto for Care and Liberation* (London: Verso, 2022).

² Lewis, *Abolish the Family*, 1.

³ Lewis, *Abolish the Family*, 6.

⁴ Lewis, *Abolish the Family*, 10, 8.

and physical abuse. Anyone promising to treat us like family, Lewis provocatively observes, ‘ought to register as a horrible threat’.⁵ If we truly love our family members – that is, by Lewis’ definition, ‘struggle for their autonomy as well as for their immersion in care, insofar such abundance is possible in a world choked by capital’ – we will wish more for them than the ‘organized poverty’ of care that is the family system.⁶ We will reach instead for different relations and ways of distributing care, ‘for an abundance we have never known and have yet to organize’.⁷ The family, Lewis says, ‘is getting in the way of alternatives’.⁸

Lewis’s willingness to entertain critiques and alternative views makes reading *Abolish the Family* feel like an open invitation to join the discussion. In what remains, I would like to offer some reflections in the spirit of such a conversation.

One question I have asked myself is what kind of relationship Lewis sees between the family abolitionist project and the reimagining of our romantic and sexual relationships. In *Abolish the Family*, Lewis’s claim that to love someone truly means to want more care for them than the family can offer is framed in terms of the child-parent relationship. If love implies a wish for care ‘then restricting the number of mothers (of whatever gender) to whom a child has access, on the basis that I am the ‘real’ mother, is not necessarily a love worthy of the name’.⁹ Conversely, children who love their mothers would not wish on them the ‘oppressiveness’ and ‘loneliness’ of family-motherhood: ‘when you love someone, it simply makes no sense to endorse a social technology that isolates them, privatises their lifeworld, arbitrarily assigns their dwelling-place, class, and very identity in law, and drastically circumscribes their sphere of intimate, interdependent ties’.¹⁰ That is all very true and, indeed, compelling. But why the focus on the child-parent relationship? Might we not also be drawn to abolish the family because we would like our partners to experience a richer intimate life, the possibilities of freer, more fulfilling amorous relationships than the restrictive form of the family allows? And if loving someone means to wish for them an abundance of care and autonomy, should we not also be unravelling the possessive nets of monogamy?

To think of family abolitionism and ethical non-monogamy as deeply interrelated is nothing new. We might think of Becky Chambers’s *Wayfarers* series (2014-2021) in which the lizard-like Aandrisk follow a communal childrearing scheme where ‘house families’ composed of older Aandrisk, raise the hatchlings of their younger, fertile counterparts. This gives young adult Aandrisk the freedom to travel or study, and to pursue exciting and emotionally meaningful intimate lives with other Aandrisk adults of their own choosing, their ‘feather families.’ The nuclear family is abandoned to make

⁵ Lewis, *Abolish the Family*, 9.

⁶ Lewis, *Abolish the Family*, 2, 4.

⁷ Lewis, *Abolish the Family*, 4.

⁸ Lewis, *Abolish the Family*, 5.

⁹ Lewis, *Abolish the Family*, 2.

¹⁰ Lewis, *Abolish the Family*, 2-3.

space for greater personal, emotional, romantic, and sexual fulfilment.¹¹ In Lewis' work, too, family abolitionism and polyamory (or consensual non-monogamy) often appear together. Almost all the figures, cultures, and movements Lewis cites in her potted history of family abolitionism – from 19th-century French utopian Charles Fourier through to American indigenous tribes, enslaved and emancipated African Americans, early European socialists, Karl Marx, Soviet revolutionary Alexandra Kollontai, women's liberationist Shulamith Firestone to late 20th-century gay liberationists – all advocated for and practiced non-monogamous relationships, as Lewis emphasises. How then are we to understand the relationship between family abolitionism and the reinvention of our intimate relationships? And why not frame the family abolitionist project in part as driven by the search for more satisfying amorous relationships?

The second thread I wish to explore concerns a particular alternative to the family that is not foregrounded by Lewis but that, as a queer historian, I cannot help but examine: community. Having earlier considered a wealth of historical and contemporary traditions of organising social life beyond the nuclear family, Lewis in the final chapter once more asks her readers to explore different ways of standing in relationship to each other. 'It's time to practice being kith¹² or, better, comrades – including toward members of our 'biofam' – building structures of dependency, need and provision with no kinship dimension'.¹³ I wonder whether 'community' might feature on this list of alternative structures and relationships.

Two considerations motivate my question. First, community's historical legacy. Community has long been the practical answer some groups, especially LGBT+ people, have given to their own family horror stories. When U.S. homophile activists in 1960s San Francisco first began deploying ideas of community, it was in part because they hoped that community might provide the care they were being denied by their families. Homophile activist Guy Strait understood 'community' as a collective that would 'look after our own,' and urged his fellow activists to launch 'a great program of mutual assistance' that included a blood and clothing bank.¹⁴ Mark Forrester, another homophile activist, envisioned that the first gay community centre founded in 1966 San Francisco would act as a halfway house 'for the so-called 'rejects' of society, the unloved, the unwanted, those who do not seem to fit into society's general idea of a productive citizenship'.¹⁵ Forrester explicitly included young gays who had been disowned by their families. And James 'Robbie' Robinson, a gay bartender who had been abused as a child by his father describes how

¹¹ Aandrisk society is discussed at greatest length in Becky Chambers, *The Long Way to a Small Angry Planet* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2014), 249-78.

¹² Lewis suggests the Old English 'kith,' 'a form of dynamic relation between beings, a bond similar to 'kin,' but one whose ground is knowledge, practice, and place' as a helpful intermediary and bridge out of the familiar kin into the unfamiliar post-family society. Lewis, *Abolish the Family*, 85.

¹³ Lewis, *Abolish the Family*, 86.

¹⁴ [Guy Strait], 'The Community', *L.C.E. News* 1, No. 25 (17 Sept. 1962).

¹⁵ Mark Forrester, 'A Halfway House,' undated, *Don Lucas Papers*, Box 11, Folder 4, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco.

discovering the idea of a community meant that ‘We were a ‘family’ and could speak about our needs and demand that they be recognized.’¹⁶ While some of these activists conceived of community rather narrowly as a gay community that only included homosexuals, others imagined community more broadly as a collective that would include and nurture a great variety of different groups.¹⁷ The inventors of ‘gay community’ were themselves following in the footsteps of earlier traditions. Most notably, they were able to draw on ideas circulating in the Civil Rights movement, particularly Martin Luther King’s ideas of ‘beloved community’, as models for reimagining care and interdependence.¹⁸ Feminist thinkers like Chela Sandoval, Judith Butler, and Audre Lorde have likewise all expressed their desire for new, inclusive visions and instantiations of community.¹⁹

The second reason ‘community’ strikes me as a possible paradigm for post-familial relations and webs of care lies in its continued popularity with grassroots movements. ‘Community’ has found widespread appeal since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. Self-styled community groups have sprung up all around the country to provide the solidarity and support neither the state nor the family could reliably provide. In my hometown of Oxford, ‘community’ was most prominently taken up by Oxford Community Action (OCA). OCA is a community-led group composed mostly of multi-ethnic BAME working-class and immigrant activists who provide food, childcare services, and many other services to many different local communities, including some of the most marginalised groups in Oxford. The way many people practice ‘comradeliness’ today, for better or for worse, is not as self-proclaimed communists but as proud ‘community members’.

Let me close with a reflection on the proximity of family abolition. Lewis’ book ends on a pessimistic note, with her belief that she is unlikely to witness the abolition of the family in her lifetime.²⁰ Across the book, she gives reasons for this conclusion: the failure of varied and powerful movements and activist-thinkers to abolish the family; the absence of family abolitionism in contemporary liberal politics. ‘To attack the family is as unthinkable in liberal-democratic politics as it has ever been’, Lewis laments.²¹ And yet, Lewis’s wide-ranging historical survey contains grounds for optimism, too. Family abolition might have failed to achieve widespread uptake, but it is an idea that never

¹⁶ James ‘Robbie’ Robinson, *My Story, One Gay’s Fight: From Hate to Acceptance*, (GLC 197), James C. Hormel LGBTQIA Center, San Francisco Public Library, [2017], 75.

¹⁷ Mori Reithmayr, ‘The Invention of Gay Community in San Francisco, 1953-1969,’ [unpublished MS].

¹⁸ On Martin Luther King’s idea of ‘beloved community,’ see for example Michele Moody-Adams, ‘The Path of Conscientious Citizenship,’ in Tommie Shelby and Brandon M. Terry (eds), *To Shape a New World: Essays on the Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 269-89, 270-5.

¹⁹ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 118-19; Kai Cheng Thom, *I Hope We Choose Love: A Trans Girl’s Notes from the End of the World* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2019), 9; Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007 [1984]), 112; Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 69.

²⁰ Lewis, *Abolish the Family*, 88.

²¹ Lewis, *Abolish the Family*, 7.

gone away, despite powerful opposition. Taking seriously Lewis's appeal to think about what our love for one another should entail can amplify this optimism. Our desire to see our loved ones enjoy an abundance of care and freedom can push both self-identified and reluctant family abolitionists to reorient themselves and reach beyond insufficient familial patterns of care. And the 'everyday utopian experiments' such love can inspire 'do generate strands of an altogether different social tissue: microcultures which could be scaled up if the movement for a classless society took seriously the premise that households can be formed freely and run democratically', as Lewis herself emphasises.²² After putting down *Abolish the Family*, the family's abolition can seem both near and far.

Perhaps, then, those of us convinced of the importance of the cause need to develop a kind of double vision. As Ursula Le Guin, an author Lewis often takes as an interlocutor, once suggested, 'if you look at us at certain odd times of day in certain weathers' we are as androgynous as the inhabitants of some of her own fictional worlds. How might we today, in the light of our reality, already be family abolitionists at certain odd times of day here on Earth, whether we realise it or not?²³

²² Lewis, *Abolish the Family*, 6.

²³ Ursula Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, (New York: Ace Books, 1976), ix.

Author's Response

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THE theory and praxis of family abolitionism is in good hands with Mori Reithmayer and Kushti Westwood, both of whom approach the method of critical utopia, the dialectical structure of abolition (qua *Aufhebung* of the present state of things), and the trouble of communization's partial unknowability with striking thoughtfulness and skill. Both critics prioritise the task of connecting the problematic of *Abolish the Family* with the evolving abolition struggles of the present – struggles around police, prisons, and child protective services – from which family abolition must never be parted (and can never be parted, without betraying itself). As Westwood rightly frames it, the project of care communization, no more nor less than these other active struggles, is a 'world-building' one, 'which requires continuous and collective acts of creativity.' Between them, these two very generous commentaries also illuminate (for me) much fresh terrain. I've quite obviously been spoiled here, in the sense that it is a rare treat to receive critical attention from fellow travellers as radically engaged and thoughtful as these. To see my pamphlet described as 'a warm torch' held out by an 'equally frightened but determined friend,' as Reithmayer puts it, makes me suddenly conscious that there's something in my eye. By the same token, it touches me greatly that Westwood now counts herself something of a family abolitionist, when she did not self-describe that way before.

For Reithmayer, quoting Ursula Le Guin to great effect, the actualization of family abolition can already be perceived slantwise in the present, 'at certain odd times of day in certain weathers'. I am in complete agreement, and these odd times of day are perhaps, indeed, the moments when speculative fabulations or science fictions tell the truth more accurately than any putative 'realism.' Sometimes all it takes to glimpse the post-scarcity future is a rereading of 'now', a denaturalising gesture. After all, as one UK-based research collective noted in its own review, for a Science Fiction 'creator, to abolish a so-called law of nature is not a ridiculous proposition which can be used to embarrass utopians into giving up on their belief that 'things could be different'.¹ As Reithmayer aptly suggests, it is the immanence of an anti-proprietary love or (following Alexandra Kollontai) *red love* in the present, that gives the lie to the 'law of nature' currently defining love as possession. In other words, it is oftentimes our very family members who inspire our family abolitionism, for instance when it is 'our desire to see our loved ones enjoy an

¹ Beyond Gender, 'Abolish the Family' by Sophie Lewis', *Vector* 8 June, 2023: <https://vector-bsfa.com/2023/06/08/abolish-the-family>.

abundance of care and freedom’ that fuels our zeal to disestablish private nuclear householding.

This insight is borne out beautifully in a new oral history of the near future, *Everything For Everyone* (2022), in which the U.S.-based sociologists Eman Abdelhadi and M.E. O’Brien interview a range of individuals about the fall of capitalism, the task of ecological restoration, the communising of care (abolition of the family), and the final victory of the Palestinian intifada, among other topics. Subtitled *An Oral History of the New York Commune, 2052-2072*, the book in question is a novel – a work of Science Fiction – albeit one presenting itself as an anthology of interviews conducted by real women: older version of the authors themselves. Perhaps *Everything for Everyone* is really non-fiction, masquerading as a fiction? Either way, one of the people from the future is a New Yorker called Latif Timbers, interviewed by Abdelhadi in the year 2069. In a chapter on ‘Gestation Work’ Timbers recounts how the upheaval of the revolution that began in 2052 separated them from their family of origin and tipped them into a situation where, initially, many children were surviving together in the ruins of New York City in a big group. At the time of the interview, however, little Latif has grown up. Following several years spent in a massive childcare crèche called ‘AfroCarr’ (founded by adult militants) they and the others chose to re-form their autonomous group from before the revolution. ‘Familiyng,’ here, is a verb.

In this future, older people have not all dropped every shred of family ideology overnight. There are ‘conferences and citywide meetings’ which routinely address the question of ‘how to shift people’s focus away from the bio of it all,’ as Timbers stresses. ‘But honestly, the very structure of the commune has already done that.’² Communes come in different sizes; Latif’s is mid-sized. Semi-autonomously, then, the teenaged survivors *familied* together again, and set up a group house separate from AfroCarr, making plans, in Latif’s case, to receive a uterus transplant in the hopes of realising a powerful desire to make new life. But, unfortunately, Latif’s body turned out to be medically unsuitable for transplantation on account of the various physical traumas they’d incurred after living on the street for so long. Finally, now, somewhat adjusted to this grievous disappointment, Latif works as a ‘gestation care coordinator’ at a Gestation Center, meaning they’re the ‘point person’ for an extensive care-team charged with supporting anyone, male or female, doing pregnancy labour.

Most people can gestate now, if they want to, Latif explains. About half the people who perform gestation choose to do so at home in their big households – and ‘care structures vary a lot between communes’ – while the other half opt for the immersive care of a Gestation Center, with counsellors, doctors, therapies, and even self-organised theatres. Either way, ‘DNA doesn’t give anyone ownership of children,’ Latif emphasises. ‘Children are children, they’re precious and beautiful and it doesn’t really matter who made them or how.’ Such an immanent logic of ‘full surrogacy’ (as I put it elsewhere) will necessarily snag and roil painfully, even as it spreads, against the ghostly reproductive stratifications of the past – what Westwood calls ‘the role that

² Eman Abdelhadi and M. E. O’Brien, *Everything for Everyone: An Oral History of the New York Commune: 2052-2072* (Philadelphia: Common Notions, 2022), 187.

patriarchy, whiteness, empire, and other systems of domination have in creating and shaping this reality, our reality'.³ But in the context of an evolving overhaul of social relations as a whole – including the decommodification of food, shelter, and medicine, thoroughgoing decarceration, and the reversal of the once-regnant priority of accumulation over life—an idealistic-sounding principle can, in fact, become hyperstitional, not just aspirational.

Westwood wisely wonders 'how ... does the movement for family abolition speak to other abolitionist movements like prison abolition or those who hold post-work ambitions?' *Everything for Everyone*, I think, shows us how, as does the authors' follow-up epistolary short story, *Sharaner Maash* (2023).⁴ There Latif reveals that they have moved on from gestation support to become a death doula or hospice worker, alongside running a 'memorial park' with holograms of people from the early 21st century. These holograms are used to explain to people in the year 2086 'the basic concepts of poverty and houselessness' and that justice, 'back then,' meant putting people in cages. According to Latif's friend Kayla – who is talking, essentially, about you and me – 'Living under the rule of money was already death; they were never alive in the first place.'

In a different genre, Katie Gibson, an anthropologist and self-described 'former ward of the state of New York,' likewise knits together the struggles against the private nuclear household and the racial capitalist state. Gibson's essay 'Bringing Abolition Home: Why Family Abolition Needs to be at the Heart of the Movement to Abolish Family Policing,' notes that the U.S. system known as 'family policing' comprises 'child welfare systems, work-first welfare policies, welfare retrenchment, and carceral expansion,' all of which 'have worked in tandem to systematically surveil, criminalize, displace, and traumatize generations of Black mothers and their children'.⁵ And yet, insists Gibson, a revolutionary movement in the U.S. cannot simply stop at defending the criminalised family against policing or vindicating the black family against the state's destruction of familial bonds. No, it is just as important to be 'advocating for laws that recognize children's rights and human rights *beyond* the family.' Yet many activists for the abolition of the family policing are silent with regard to foster care survivors and runaways who keep running and don't look back, i.e., who don't return to their families of origin. If the movements on Turtle Island are to be truly abolitionist, Gibson suggests, they must resist the romanticization of motherhood (including black motherhood) and rise to the task of treating 'the family as an invention of the capitalist state rather than its precursor or alternative.' One place to start would be: replacing custody laws with children's rights, beginning with a right to safe and consistent shelter and a basic income. (Reithmayer and Westwood can no doubt – will, I hope – educate their North American family-abolitionist peers on the analogous struggles for children's rights in Britain.)

³ Sophie Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism Against Family* (New York: Verso, 2019).

⁴ Eman Abdelhadi and M.E. O'Brien, 'Sharaner Maash, or a haunting from the time before', *e-flux*, May, 2023: e-flux.com/architecture/tomorrows-myths/532327/sharaner-maash.

⁵ Katie Gibson, 'Bringing Abolition Home: Why Family Abolition Needs to be at the Heart of the Movement to Abolish Family Policing', *Blind Field: A Journal of Cultural Inquiry*, 6 June, 2023: blindfieldjournal.com/2023/06/06/bringing-abolition-home.

The child qua proto-property under capitalism, struggling for liberation, may be central to family abolition, but ‘what about our partners,’ asks Reithmayer? ‘Why not frame the family abolitionist project in part as driven by the search for more satisfying amorous relationships?’ Reithmayer, here, raises questions about the abolitionist transformation of sexual and romantic intimacies that my pamphlet somewhat deprioritises (however unintentionally). They also gently interrogate *Abolish the Family*’s neglect of the category of ‘community,’ noting this terminology’s ‘continued popularity with grassroots movements’ and pointing to the homophile movement’s – sometimes radical – anti-bourgeois practices of ‘gay community’. In this way Reithmayer adds further historical backing to M.E. O’Brien’s communist vindication of Martin Luther King’s horizon of ‘beloved community’.⁶

Reithmayer is perceptive to pinpoint a certain reticence on my part on the question of romantic love and the couple-form. To be sure, as a married queer person I have stated unequivocally where I stand on the question of marriage: ‘LGBTQ discourse used to position marriage as irredeemable, a form of “property love.” In 2015, our inclusion into it didn’t just give the sagging institution a new lease of life. It demoralised and defanged the queer movement’.⁷ I have always been open and vocal about my green-card marriage, but nonetheless, trans-exclusionary radical feminists are extremely fond of tweeting cruelly about it as though it were a supreme ‘gotcha.’ Whatever the reason (and perhaps it is cowardice, or, more sympathetically, protectiveness of my transsexual wife and publicity-shy boyfriend) I have avoided centring conjugal questions in my public speaking and writing about the communisation of care. I do not consider my domestic practices *radical*, nor do I wish to excuse or justify myself for falling short of anti-mononormative praxis, but I speculate that part of the explanation for my (non-)focus is the context of a social-democratic left rife with queerphobic and conservative tendencies to mock ‘polyamory’ and ‘ethical nonmonogamy’ as an ‘elite fad,’ a response I find alarming, not to mention personally hurtful. Simultaneously, I share some of antiwork philosopher Kathi Weeks’s concerns about ‘the limits of the alternative’: to wit, ‘some forms of polyamory not only repeat but deepen the individualism that remains at the heart of the couple form’.⁸ Yet, along with Reithmayer, Weeks, and myriad utopianists past and present, I want to reaffirm, here, that I consider myself wholeheartedly committed to the decolonization of love, and to the destruction of private property along with the possessive settler sexuality that flows from it.

When it comes to ‘community,’ I take Reithmayer’s points and humbly accede, therefore, to the inclusion of this term in the proliferation of possibilities for actualising ‘red love.’ I would gesture, in so doing, towards all the usual caveats—classically, those itemised by Miranda Joseph in her book about neoliberalism and the non-profit industrial complex, *Against the Romance*

⁶ M.E. O’Brien, *Family Abolition: Capitalism and the Communizing of Care* (London: Pluto, 2023).

⁷ Sophie Lewis, ‘A Marriage Abolitionist Says “I... Do?”’, *Red Pepper*, 19 November, 2023: redpepper.org.uk/society/lgbtqplus/a-marriage-abolitionist-says-i-do.

⁸ Kathi Weeks, ‘Abolition of the family: the most infamous feminist proposal’, *Feminist Theory* 24, no. 3 (2023): 433–453, at 445.

of *Community* (2002). In addition, following M.E. O'Brien (who sees the risks attendant on what we might perhaps call 'strategic communitarianism'), I am inclined to think of real community as a prospect 'beyond the end of the world.' This brings me, finally, to Westwood's wrestling with the melancholic inevitability of 'building something better for a future that is not ours.' My response to this sadness is deeply and fundamentally sympathetic. I will remember how discomfited I felt the first time I heard Kathi Weeks put the point: 'The future is not for us'.⁹ Rather than offer false comfort, I will end by with the poet and comrade Diane di Prima's 'Revolutionary Letter #2'. There she affirmed that 'we are endless as the sea, not separate' making false the idea that 'you only live once' ('a credo they taught us / to instill fear, and inaction'). 'Get up,' she wrote, 'put on your shoes, get / started, someone will finish'.¹⁰

⁹ Johanna Isaacson, 'Defamiliarizing Family', *Blind Field: A Journal of Cultural Inquiry*, 25 August (2022): blindfieldjournal.com/2022/08/24/defamiliarizing-family.

¹⁰ Diane Di Prima, *Revolutionary Letters: 50th Anniversary Edition*, (London: Silver Press, 2021), 216.