

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.