

REMEMBER THE

DEAD;

JUSTICE FOR THE

LIVING !

BORDERS KILL

Reflections on the Essex 39 deaths

Who are we?

We are a group of people who have come together after the deaths of the 39 Vietnamese migrants in a lorry in Essex to organise around issues of border violence related to these deaths. We stand in resistance to the UK border regime and aim to provide support to those affected by it.

We believe that all migrants should have a right to access safe housing, work, healthcare and other public, legal and social services - all without fear of immigration sanctions or criminal convictions.

Our goal is to resist borders through practical solidarity. For now, we are working mainly to support Chinese and Vietnamese migrants in consideration of our skills and connections. We aim to create resources and information that can be shared with others, bring people with relevant language skills into this work, and raise awareness about under-explored labour issues surrounding East and Southeast Asian (undocumented) migrant workers in order to build relationships with other connected struggles.

- We recognise that people leaving their countries — often at great risk — is a result of neo-colonial capitalist dynamics that continues to enforce inequality at a global scale, and aim to be clear about the historical and political context of border violence
- We believe in naming the deadly effects of border regimes as such — borders only increase mortality through forcing migrants to risk ever-more dangerous pathways of entry into the country
- We aim to confront the racist and dehumanising immigration policies — as well as the discussion around immigration — that disproportionately harm working class undocumented migrants and people of colour

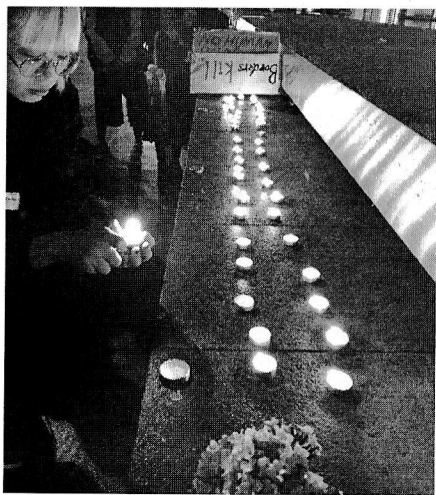
Why have we made this zine?

We made this zine to share information and our analyses about the deaths of the Essex 39. We hope it can serve as a resource, an archive of our activity, and an invitation to others to join us in resisting borders and state violence.

Timeline

Deaths of the 39, 23rd October 2019

39 people (10 of whom were teenagers) found dead in a refrigerated truck in Grays, Essex. Victims initially identified as Chinese nationals, recalling the incident in Dover in 2000 in which 58 Chinese nationals were found dead in a lorry. Driver of truck arrested at the scene on suspicion of murder. Police urge those who may have information to come forward 'without fear'.



Vigil (Photo: Daniel York Loh)

Vigil, 24th October

Members of daikon*, SOAS Detainee Support and Chinese community groups in London held a community vigil outside the Home Office to mourn the victims and centre the violent immigration policies of the Home Office as responsible for the deaths.

26th October

The driver of the refrigerated truck charged with 39 counts of manslaughter, conspiracy to traffic people, conspiracy to assist unlawful immigration and money laundering.

November

Police refuse to confirm they will not share with the Home Office the immigration status of anyone responding to public appeals for information on the 39 deaths.

British and Vietnamese governments both refuse to bear the costs of repatriating the bodies of the victims. Vietnamese government offer to pay only the costs of transporting bodies from the airport, and loan families money for the rest of the repatriation costs. Many of the families pushed further into debt, having already incurred debts to send family members abroad in the first place.

7th—22nd November 2019

25 migrants found in a refrigerated container en route to England from Netherlands. 2 taken to hospital and 23 taken to 'police for processing'.

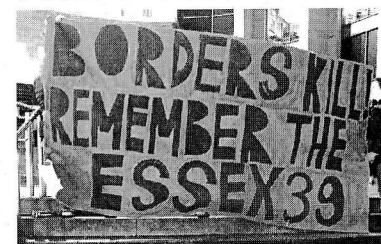
15 migrants found in lorry in Wiltshire and arrest on suspicion of entering the country illegally.

2 people found inside a lorry container on the M25 arrested on suspicion of immigration offences.

16 Kurdish people found in sealed trailer at the Irish port of Rosslare.

National Day of Action, 18th December

Unis Resist Border Controls and daikon* co-ordinated a National Day of Action on International Migrants' Day to remember the Essex 39 and all those who have died at the hands of the UK border regime (page 11). Banner drops took place in London, Glasgow, Sheffield and Manchester.



Glasgow banner

October 2019—present

Those of us that organised the vigil and friends have been meeting regularly to organise around issues related to the Essex 39 deaths.

Our main activities currently are **fundraising** for the families of the victims for funeral costs, debt relief and living costs; **creating and translating resources** for Chinese and Vietnamese migrants; and **organising a day event (February 29th)** exploring issues related to the deaths of the 39.

Members of our group have also published articles on the Essex 39, reprinted within:

- ≈ Don't Call the Essex 39 deaths a 'Tragedy', by Jun (page 5)
- ≈ Grieve the Essex 39 but recognise the root causes, by Kay (page 8)

We are also having ongoing conversations about respectability politics and language surrounding migration.

- ≈ The Language of Borders, by Kirstin (page 17)

If you'd like to get involved with our group or have any questions, get in touch at remembertheessex39@protonmail.com

Don't Call the Essex 39 Deaths a 'Tragedy'

This piece was originally published in The New Internationalist. Republished with permission.

On 23 October, 39 people were found dead in the back refrigerated lorry in Essex, South East England, with media outlets reporting that the victims may have frozen to death in temperatures as low as -25°C. The truck had crossed The Channel from Belgium, a route that has been used increasingly by migrants after the French government tightened restrictions on departures from Calais.

These 39 deaths were not a 'tragedy'. They were not unavoidable. They were the direct result of British government policies that have made it impossible to enter the country using safe and legal means. The conditions that produced these 39 deaths emerge from the same set of policies that deny asylum, justify indefinite immigration detention, charter deportation flights, and restrict migrants' access to fundamental rights — that is, the so-called 'Hostile Environment'. The aim is to make the UK so inhospitable for migrants that they will not make the effort to try to enter. They are also the conditions that allow the Global North to continue to thrive off the exploitation of undocumented migrant workers.

THE BRUTALITY OF CAPITALISM

When I first heard of the deaths, I was reminded of the 2004 Morecambe Bay disaster, when 23 undocumented Chinese workers drowned while picking cockles off the Lancashire coast. These workers did not die of 'natural causes', they died because their gangmaster did not give them any information about how to work safely in the notoriously dangerous bay. He was willing to sacrifice these undocumented workers' lives for the sake of a higher yield.

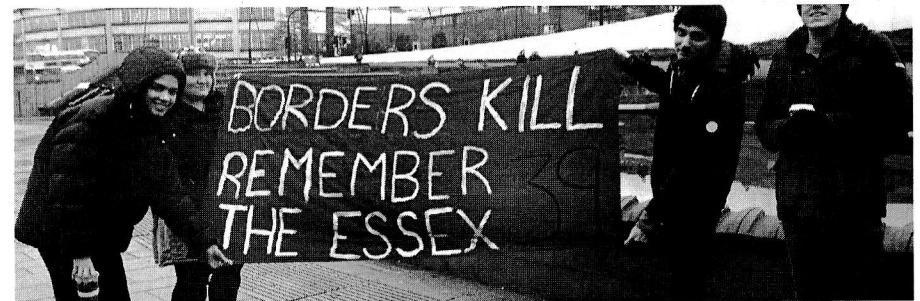
Chinese workers were described by one gangmaster as 'a half-price... more punctual and productive workforce'. Did their employers imagine that Chinese people's racialized 'productivity' somehow meant that they were also immune to the elements? One Morecambe Bay cockler later told journalist Hsiao-Hung Pai (who later wrote a book about Chinese migrant workers' lives in the UK) that 'he blamed the brutality of capitalism for the tragedy'.

At the end of 2018, China was one of the countries with the highest numbers of citizens in UK detention centres. Earlier this year, I visited a Chinese man in detention, who had come to the UK with the help of so-called 'snakehead' smugglers, who are often blamed for the deaths of undocumented migrants like the Essex 39. The man had fled to the UK for fear that he would be killed; he did not know how else he could enter. The Home Office rejected his refugee application, detained him for more than a year (despite bundles of evidence from experts on his situation) and ended up

deporting him—but not before first mistakenly deporting another man with the same surname. One of the most heart-breaking things he had said to me was that he would rather work for £1 an hour in the detention centre for the rest of his life, than go home and face persecution.

HIERARCHY OF DESERT

It is not useful to speculate on the reasons why these 39 Vietnamese nationals decided to try to enter the UK. More important is to recognize that the UK border has long been a site of racialized, classed, and gendered violence for all migrants, regardless of the reasons for entering. In 1998, the New Labour government published 'Fairer, Faster, and Firmer—A Modern Approach to Immigration and Asylum', a White Paper which warned that 'economic migrants will exploit whatever route offers the best chance of entering or remaining within the UK'. Two years later, in 2000, 58 Chinese nationals were found dead, having suffocated in the back of a lorry at Dover docks.



Sheffield banner (Photo: Leah Lapautre)

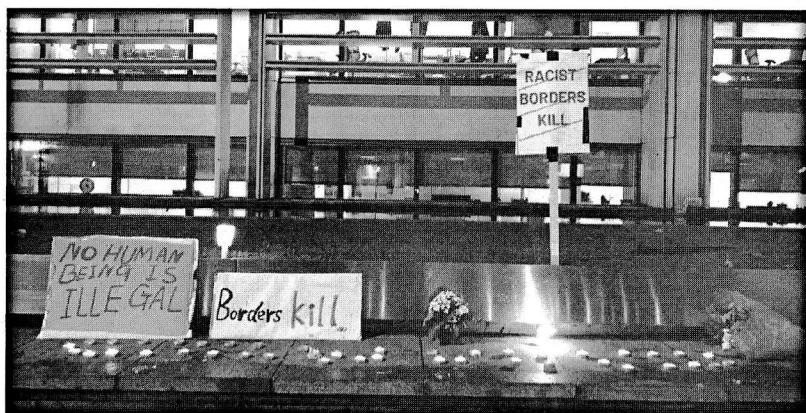
States often attempt to distinguish 'economic migrants' from 'real refugees' as a way to restrict legal entry at the border. Such categorization creates an arbitrary hierarchy of entitlement to international protection, absent of any consideration of the unequal distribution of resources across the Global North and Global South that often makes seeking employment overseas the only way that some people—and their families—can survive.

In theory, this hierarchy of 'desert' is illegitimate because human rights violations, including deprivation of socioeconomic rights, are not subject to ranking. In practice, the hierarchy also fails to give 'priority' to 'real refugees' due to the culture of disbelief around asylum applications. So migrants are forced to rely on smugglers to gain entry.

Smugglers facilitate the entry of migrants through different pathways. This entails significant risks, as states establish stronger barriers to entry, including visa restrictions, carrier sanctions, and interceptions at sea. The journeys do not stop; the conditions simply become more and more deadly.

Smuggling is different to trafficking, which is the forced movement of a person for the purpose of exploitation, including labour and sexual exploitation. Anti-trafficking policies, however, are often criticized for failing to protect, and sometimes causing direct harm to, undocumented migrants. In the UK survivors of trafficking are detained and in some cases deported; even after being recognized as survivors, they often do not receive adequate social support.

Part of the 'anti-trafficking' movement is also rooted in an anti-sex work politics that conflates sex work with sexual exploitation. This perspective presents all migrant sex workers as 'victims' requiring 'saving'. In the end, this only pushes migrant sex workers into more insecure working conditions, subjecting them to the threat of arrest, detention, and deportation.



Vigil at Home Office (Photo: Hau-Yu Tam)

States often conflate smuggling and trafficking to introduce blanket restrictions on entry and to criminalize particular forms of work in order to eject unwanted migrants. But blaming migrants' deaths on smugglers and traffickers does nothing but mask the structures of racism and capitalism that both restrict the movement of, and exploit, undocumented workers.

We do not at the time of writing know if the 39 people in the back of the lorry were hoping to come to the UK as workers; or whether they were being trafficked into labour exploitation. But the objectification of their 'bodies' reminded me of the way that migrants are only useful until they are not; and then, they are, quite literally, disposable.

A man is being questioned in connection with the murder of the Essex 39; but the blood is ultimately on the hands of the British state, and the global system of borders that entrenches exploitative and deadly relations of power.

Jun Pang

Grieve the Essex 39, but recognise the root causes

This piece was originally written for the daikon* blog. Versions have been republished by Institute of Race Relations News Service and Race & Class.

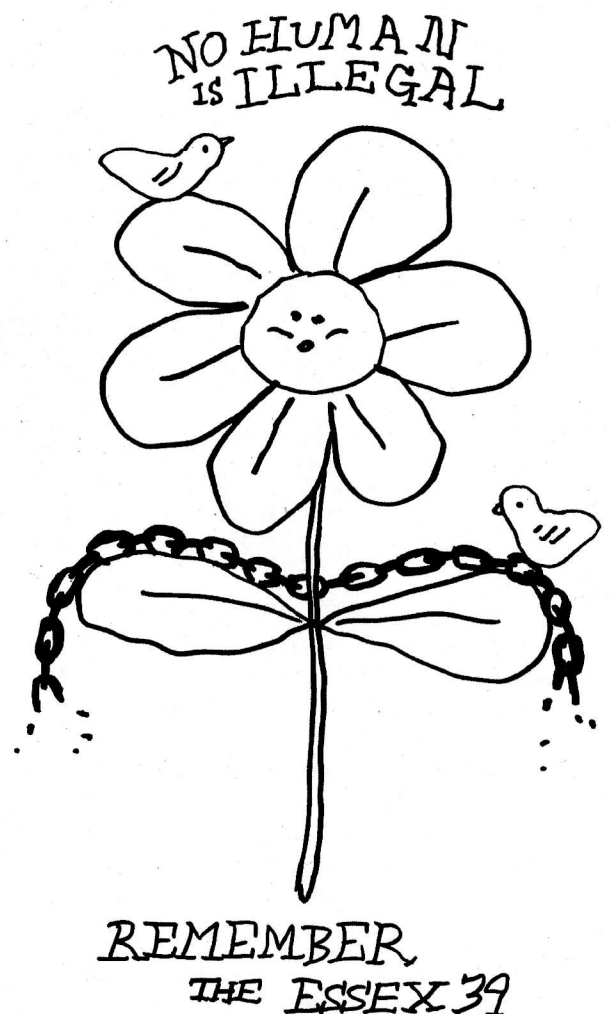
On 24th October, we organised a vigil outside the Home Office with SOAS Detainee Support and members of the Chinese community to grieve for the 39 people found dead in a lorry container in Essex—39 people who died horrific deaths in miserable conditions in a desperate attempt to reach the UK.

We have been clear that these deaths were no accident, but the direct result of global structures of capitalism and imperialism that marginalise, if not violently exclude, working class undocumented migrants and people of colour. Inevitably, we have had people in our Twitter mentions criticising us for shoe-horning in racism and capitalism, who instead call for 'watertight' borders and lay the blame at the feet of 'Chinese communism'. But damaging ideologies are not limited to right-wing trolls - the mainstream focus on criminal justice for 'greedy and unscrupulous' traffickers and safe passage for 'genuine' refugees also represents a failure to interrogate the actual global conditions that lead people to risk dangerous travel, and the deadly effects of border controls on all migrants.

THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

Although initially identified as Chinese nationals, it is now believed that all victims were from the neighbouring Vietnamese provinces of Nghe An and Hà Tĩnh, both amongst the poorest regions in the country. In 2016, Hà Tĩnh suffered a water pollution disaster affecting over 200km of coastline, resulting in at least 70 tonnes of dead fish washing up on local shores. It was found that the Hà Tĩnh steel plant—a joint venture between the Taiwanese company Formosa, China Steel Corporation and Japan's JFE Steel—had been discharging toxic waste into the ocean, devastating local marine life and directly affecting some 40,000 workers who relied on fishing and tourism for their livelihood. The affected communities have faced crackdowns on protest and are still seeking justice. Today, the region is a hotspot for people-smuggling.

We can see neo-colonial dynamics playing out here. Big corporations from richer countries come in to exploit resources and low labour costs to produce wealth for themselves. When they cut corners to maximise profit, local working class communities bear the brunt of the fallout, often in the form of irreparable environmental damage. These same countries then benefit from a hyper-exploitable migrant workforce: Taiwan and Japan, for instance, are on the receiving end of Vietnamese labour export programmes. These are effectively



Artwork by Mina Owen

systems of debt servitude, whereby migrants work long hours for low pay in often poor conditions in order to send remittances to support their families back home, on top of repaying debts incurred to obtain work abroad. In Taiwan, low wages and rampant abuse drive many workers to break away from their contracts and seek criminalised forms of work. In Japan, Vietnamese workers commonly report experiences of racism and social exclusion, with many even dying of overwork.

This year, we also saw the inclusion of an investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) style mechanism in EU-Vietnam trade deals. This effectively gives foreign investors the power to sue host governments when their court rulings, laws and regulations - many of which serve the public interest - undermine their investments. Globally, ISDS has been used by corporations to sue governments when hard-won social and environmental protections negatively impact their production and profits. Currently, two British oil firms are using ISDS to sue the Vietnamese government to avoid paying taxes in the country. With the EU-Vietnam trade deal, we can expect European corporations to continue to exploit this mechanism at the expense of the local environment and people, who may increasingly seek to build their lives elsewhere.

THE UK RESPONSE

It is in this context that smuggling networks develop and operate. Those seeking the prospect of a better life abroad may hire the services of smugglers who facilitate illegalised movement across borders. Many will incur debts to finance their journeys, and expect to undertake difficult work upon arrival at their destination. One response of the UK Home Office is to support IOM (International Organization for Migration) Vietnam, both in delivering propaganda campaigns that attempt to deter people from illegalised migration, and in criminal investigations aimed at prosecuting smugglers and traffickers - policies that do nothing to address the conditions that lead people to migrate.

Politicians and commentators are also insisting that to avoid migrant deaths, we need increased border security and continued collaboration with EU law enforcement and anti-smuggling units. Yet we have witnessed the prosecution of aid workers helping migrants to safety under EU anti-smuggling laws, and there are countless reports of police brutality against migrants in EU border enforcement operations. In reality, tougher borders only lead migrants and smugglers to risk increasingly deadly and secretive migration routes in order to evade detection by improved military and security technology. Securitised responses also shift the smuggling industry away from community-based networks towards increasingly violent and highly organised criminal networks that are able to maximally exploit migrants' vulnerability to increase their profit margins. In short, borders kill.

If we want to prevent migrant deaths, we need to work towards abolishing borders, starting with practical solidarity resisting their entrenchment in public life and in our communities—refusing complicity in the hostile environment, visiting people in detention, and resisting immigration raids.

We are also concerned about how an increased emphasis on anti-trafficking may further endanger precarious migrant workers. In 2016, we saw 'anti-trafficking' police raids on massage parlours in Soho and Chinatown lead to the violent arrest of many migrant sex workers on immigration grounds. Whilst ostensibly aimed at addressing exploitation, these kinds of 'rescue' raids on brothels, nail bars and cannabis farms are basically indistinguishable from immigration raids, leading as they often do to the detention of migrant workers, who then either face deportation or a protracted legal battle to remain. Often underlying such operations are gendered and racialised assumptions about Asian migrant women as passive and helpless victims in need of rescue, and Asian men as unscrupulous and predatory traffickers, who control and exploit those helpless victims. The reality is that in the context of border regimes that push them into debt and underground economies, many migrants make a constrained choice to work under conditions that are to varying degrees exploitative or abusive in order to pay off debts to smugglers, send money to dependents, and indeed, to survive. The fact that the British state does not guarantee indefinite leave to remain, nor adequate social support even to those it identifies as survivors of trafficking shows its fundamental failure to grasp the central role that global capitalism and border regimes, rather than individual traffickers, play in reproducing conditions for exploitation and abuse.

Whatever their circumstances, we need to ensure migrants are able to assert labour rights and access safe housing, work, healthcare and other public, legal and social services - all without fear of immigration sanctions or criminal convictions. At a minimum, this means ending the 'hostile environment' which embeds immigration checks throughout public life, and decriminalising industries such as sex work, whose criminalisation only pushes undocumented workers deeper into secrecy and silence.

As heart-breaking stories of victims continue to emerge, we must recognise that such deaths are an inevitability of the neo-colonial, securitised regimes being built globally, designed to marginalise working class migrants and people of colour, whom they render exploitable or disposable. Systemic analyses that centre anti-capitalism, no borders, building migrant workers' rights globally, and the decriminalisation of sex work are not distractions but central to bringing an end to deaths such as those of the Essex 39.

Kay Stephens



Artwork by Kay, adapted from Vietnamese propaganda poster (c. 1970s)

National Day of Action for International Migrants Day: Borders Kill, Remember the Essex 39

The National Day of Action to remember the Essex 39 took place on International Migrants' Day (18 December 2019). It was co-ordinated by daikon* and Unis Resist Border Controls, and supported by Newham Anti-Raids, Community Action on Prison Expansion, Lesbians and Gays Support the Migrants and Migrants in Culture.

Some of the reasons why it was important for us to take this action:

≈ Remembering the dead

The deaths of the 39—in horrific and preventable circumstances—were too quickly forgotten. We wanted to use International Migrants' Day to remember the Essex 39 and all those who have died at the hands of the border regime, and to reflect on how we can prevent similar deaths in the future.

≈ Centring 'no borders' in migrant solidarity

Borders do not stop people migrating, but rather make migrants' journeys more dangerous. For migrants that make it to the UK, the border regime then denies many of them secure immigration status—excluding them from accessing resources and making them vulnerable to exploitation. 'No borders' can seem like a utopian ideal and it is often necessary to work within the system to support migrants. However, borders have not always existed, especially in the heavily securitised, deadly and pervasive forms they exist in today. We believe migrant solidarity must involve resisting borders as a cause of death, destitution and suffering for so many—borders were made and they can be undone.

≈ Connecting anti-borders and anti-prison struggles

One response to the Essex 39 deaths has been to find and convict smugglers. The blaming of individuals obscures the role of borders both in endangering migrants and in creating the demand for smugglers in the first place. We were glad to be joined by Community Action on Prison Expansion for our National Day of Action as we believe prison and border regimes are interconnected systems that simply criminalise people as a 'solution' to social problems without addressing the structural conditions that lead to criminalised activity. In fact, we believe one major function of prisons and detention centres is to lock up or deport people rendered 'useless' for the needs of a capitalist economy—those un(der)employed or in insecure employment, disproportionately poor people of colour and migrants.



London banner drop (Photo: Hanna Stephens)

Further, many of the same private companies (Serco, Mitie) that manage prisons also manage immigration detention centres, overseeing poor conditions and abuse.

≈ Contextualising border violence within global racial capitalism

While Britain and other countries in the Global North enrich themselves through ongoing forms of colonial violence against the Global South (through war, trade deals, land expropriation, resource extraction and labour exploitation), they build ever more militarised and securitised borders to hoard their wealth from those they have dispossessed—locking them up in detention centres, excluding them from accessing public services and creating the conditions for labour exploitation. People will always move but we believe migration must be contextualised in a global political economy of capitalism and colonialism.

≈ Naming borders as racist state violence

In the run-up to the recent election, racism was weaponised the media and politicians for political point-scoring, while the racist state violence of borders, as well as policing, prisons and 'counter-terror', were completely ignored. The Home Office's assault on Black British citizens as part of the so-called Windrush scandal—and the pathetic pay-outs it is offering those affected—went unmentioned, highlighting the ways in which racism is reduced to offensive comments and gaffes, while structural violence against black people and people of colour carries on as normal. We want to recentre state violence in any understanding of racism in Britain, and to name border violence as racist state violence.



Artwork by Kay, adapted from Vietnamese propaganda poster (c.1972)

~ Highlighting the pervasiveness of borders

Had they survived, the 39 would have faced a Hostile Environment which restricts their access to basic rights and safety, and lived with the constant threat of workplace raids, of being detained, or being deported back to somewhere they'd risked so much to leave. We wanted to highlight how the border doesn't exist just at the point of entry into a country, but pervades much of public life—immigration checks and data-sharing with the Home Office operate in schools, higher education, police, housing, banking and employment, to name a few. We were glad to co-ordinate the National Day of Action with Unis Resist Border Controls, who fight border controls on UK campuses, and to be supported by both Newham Anti-Raids, who share information with local communities about how to resist immigration raids, and Migrants in Culture, who organise to hold the cultural sector accountable to cultural workers affected by the hostile environment.

~ Resisting 'left nationalism'

After the December 12 election, we are facing a violent Tory government and emboldened far-right. We know the immediate effects of this will be further state (sanctioned and enacted) violence against Black, Muslim, people of colour, migrant and all racialised minority communities. Sections of the left too are again reviving the idea that we need to protect the interests of the nation state, the 'British working class' and 'heartland' communities by strengthening borders and curbing immigration—misguided strategies that only displace the blame for the very real economic issues in the UK. We believe this so-called 'left nationalism' can only feed a racist, nativist politics that increases the danger of precarity and violence for migrants and people of colour.

Resisting Raids

Had they survived, the Essex 39 may have found them subject to violent raids on their workplaces. Look out for Immigration Enforcement vans, and check out this Bystander Intervention guide about what to do if you witness a raid.

SEE A RAID?

Don't walk by! We can resist the raids together!

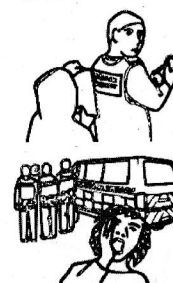
MAKE SURE PEOPLE
KNOW THEY DON'T
HAVE TO ANSWER
ANY QUESTIONS
AND CAN LEAVE.



IF THEY WANT TO
LEAVE, WALK AWAY
WITH THEM.



FILM IMMIGRATION OFFICERS AND POLICE. IF
SOMEONE IS BEING DETAINED, CHECK WITH
THEM FIRST OR ONLY FILM OFFICERS.



CHALLENGE THE OFFICERS — WHY ARE
THEY QUESTIONING SPECIFIC PEOPLE?

TELL PEOPLE AROUND
YOU WHAT'S
HAPPENING.
CALL YOUR FRIENDS.
TWEET @ANTIRAIDS
TO GET WORD OUT.



✕ ——— IF SOMEONE IS DETAINED GIVE THEM THESE NUMBERS ——— ✕

BAIL FOR IMMIGRATION DETAINEES
02074569750

SOAS DETAINEE SUPPORT
07438407570

Anti-Raids Network

The Home Office undertake about 600 workplace raids per year, usually based on uncorroborated tip-offs from the public, employers reporting on workers, and Immigration Officers acting without legal warrant. The main pressure for employers to co-operate is not legal but financial — businesses are liable for penalties of £20,000 per undocumented worker. Immigration Officials also regularly fail to act with the legally required consent of those they question.

The language of borders: respectability, race and class

Two weeks after the deaths of the Essex 39, fifteen people were arrested on suspicion of illegal entry into the country after being discovered in the back of a lorry. In January this year, eight people were arrested after jumping from a lorry on the A38. In death, 'illegal' migrants are recognised as people deserving of empathy. Alive, they are criminals—dehumanised and unworthy of belonging.

The public discourse surrounding migrants has long been violent — from “rivers of blood” to the “swarms” and “floods” of people described by journalists and leading politicians. The message is clear: they are as threatening as natural disasters.

How we talk about people who migrate means navigating an ever-shifting landscape. As damaging as the outright vilification of migrants are labels like ‘economic migrant’ and the binary of ‘legal/illegal.’ These categories are ambiguous and weaponised in ways that disproportionately affect working-class people of colour.

THE TERMS OF ILLEGALITY

The hostile environment shows that borders exist throughout society and are enforced even by non-state groups. The system is intentionally complex: designed to be changed as needed, quietly violent, and difficult to navigate.

In *Hostile Environment*, Maya Goodfellow writes that people become ‘good refugees’ and ‘bad migrants’, or ‘bad refugees’ and ‘good migrants’, as governments decide which people are (un)acceptable depending on the political context. This reductive and inflammatory rhetoric leads to deep-set ideas about who has a right to enter a country—and who doesn’t. As Natasha King says, the word ‘illegal’ implies criminality or threat; ‘asylum seeker’ suggests ‘victim.’ Even the term ‘refugees’ is granted only to those who meet the “strict (and state-defined) bounds of persecution.”

‘Migrants’—particularly ‘economic migrants’—are often condemned as ‘scroungers’ who choose to move for better standards of life. The assumption, as Goodfellow writes, is that “they are here to ‘take’ out of no real necessity.” This avoids the essential truth that global histories of exploitation created the very socio-economic inequality many migrants are attempting to escape.

Even the practical use of such terms is questionable. All it takes for someone to become ‘illegal’ is existing in a state-controlled space where they aren’t allowed, based on governmental decisions that are either arbitrary or cruel. Most asylum applications are rejected the first time but succeed the second, if someone can reapply. Many people born and raised in the country—to asylum seekers, for example—become ‘illegal’ because of documentation errors. The assignment of illegality makes people’s

lives extremely precarious and can lead to homelessness, incarceration and death. Through no fault of their own, asylum seekers cannot work, don’t have access to healthcare or housing, and live in fear of detention or deportation.

The burden of conformity and ‘respectability’ is placed on migrants not only by dominant groups, but also by migrant communities themselves. The ‘politics of respectability’ was coined by Evelyn Higginbotham to discuss the oppression of black women in America by other black people who considered them ‘morally deviant.’ Now, it is used to describe a set of strategies through which members of a marginalised group show their social values are aligned with dominant ones. These attempts to counter negative stereotypes and gain social mobility generally reproduce white, middle-class moral standards and leads to the policing of those considered ‘outsiders’.

The idea that marginalised people should change to be ‘acceptable’ is nothing new. In this case, using the terms of ‘illegality’ creates a sense of safety and distance, but it doesn’t challenge the structural inequalities and arbitrary rules created by those in power. Instead, this vocabulary displaces blame and becomes a way to confine and sentence innocent people. Resisting it is therefore important for those of us who are not considered ‘illegal.’

RACE, WEALTH AND BELONGING

As normal as states may seem now, they haven’t always existed—and certainly not as we know them. Borders have evolved over time and aren’t just geographical boundaries—they form a whole network that defines the limits of state power over select people. As such, migration is inherently tied to global history. It is no accident that some of the most impoverished and depleted countries in the world are former colonies, nor that most migrants seek to move to former empires in the global North. It is impossible to separate migration from racism, classism and extractive power dynamics. As Harsha Walia writes in *Undoing Border Imperialism*, “what remains unquestioned are the capitalist and colonial logics that make immigration an issue in the first place.”

The Windrush scandal is a stark example of how legality isn’t and has never been a question of citizenship. In the 1940s, members of the Commonwealth—people who were born British citizens—were encouraged to come to the UK to work in the health service and aid its expansion. The government wanted a workforce that would provide cheap labour as and when necessary; allowing people into a country built on their colonisation was never anything but continued exploitation. Soon after, immigration controls were introduced to restrict the influx of migrants and preserve the “racial character” of Britain. Seventy years on, those citizens who came in the post-war period—dubbed the ‘Windrush generation’—were wrongly detained, denied legal rights, and, in at least 83 cases, illegally deported by the Home Office.

The Windrush Generation are 'legal,' have lived in the UK most of their lives, and have contributed significantly to the country's development. But they are also black. The lie of respectability politics is that black people and people of colour can be accepted if they follow the rules of white capitalist supremacy. As this example—and many others—shows, the rules were never created to accept people of colour. They were made to control them.

The arbitrary nature of citizenship and legality is clearly reflected in who does have entry. In 2002, Labour introduced the Highly Skilled Migrant Programme, a points-based system that awarded more to those with higher earnings. In 2017, it was reported that over 3,000 wealthy people were granted 'golden visas' into the UK, gaining residency in exchange for investing £2m in UK bonds or shares. Applicants are eligible for indefinite leave to remain and even full citizenship after five years. Those offering £5m can settle after three years, and those with £10m after just two.

The system doesn't just favour the wealthy—it also restricts the poor. Two years ago, the cost of submitting an indefinite leave to remain application was £2,297—a sum that most working-class migrants cannot afford, and certainly not without work. The process is deliberately made to be near-impossible to navigate, and a mistake means having to apply (and pay) again. 'Illegal' without citizenship but unable to gain citizenship because they are 'illegal,' they are trapped.

A 2017 social integration report by Louise Casey stated that "where there's high concentrations of ethnic minorities [...] British values are less likely to develop." She went on to suggest that "everybody in the country" should speak English. The parameters of 'national values', then, are forever changing. What remains constant is that they are somehow innate to white people and must be learned by ethnic minorities, who can never truly belong.

The language used by those in power isn't about prioritising people seeking better conditions. It's about masking systemic violence and maintaining control over who constitutes the nation. History and current events show that working-class people of colour—even with citizenship—are ultimately considered outsiders and therefore disposable. For migrants, the attainability of safety cannot be divorced from white supremacist, capitalist 'ideals.'

We must consider whether people's safety can be determined by inherently harmful institutions. Removing these false binaries, arbitrary distinctions and deliberate distractions from our vocabulary allows us to name the intentional cruelty of the state and all its auxiliaries and to hold them responsible. Ending border brutality must and can only come from centring the needs of working-class people from the global South, formerly-colonised countries, and places British foreign policy has wrought violence. As much as we can, our work is challenging the borders that we encounter in our daily lives—including those in our language.

Kirstin Wu Latimer

Further reading and resources:

Feel free to e-mail us at remembertheessex39@protonmail.com if you have any problems finding these.

Articles:

- ≈ 'The 39 Migrant Deaths in Essex Are Proof That Borders Kill' Gracie Bradley, *Vice*
- ≈ 'MPs' empty condolences won't open up safe migration routes to the UK' Leah Cowan, *gal-dem*
- ≈ 'Modern Vietnamese slaves in the UK: are raid and rescue operations appropriate?' Nicolas Lainez, *OpenDemocracy*
- ≈ 'Race, Class and the State: The Political Economy of Immigration' A. Sivanandan, from *Catching History on the Wing*
- ≈ 'Britain as the spoils of empire' Nadine El-Enany, *Manchester University Press blog*

Books:

- ≈ 'Undoing Border Imperialism' Harsha Walia
- ≈ 'Hostile Environment: How Immigrants Became Scapegoats' Maya Goodfellow
- ≈ 'Chinese Whispers: The True Story Behind Britain's Hidden Army of Labour' Hsiao-Hung Pai
- ≈ 'The UK Border Regime' Corporate Watch*
- ≈ 'A Guide to Hostile Environment' edited by Liberty*
- ≈ 'The Right to Remain Toolkit'*

*books freely available online

In memory of:

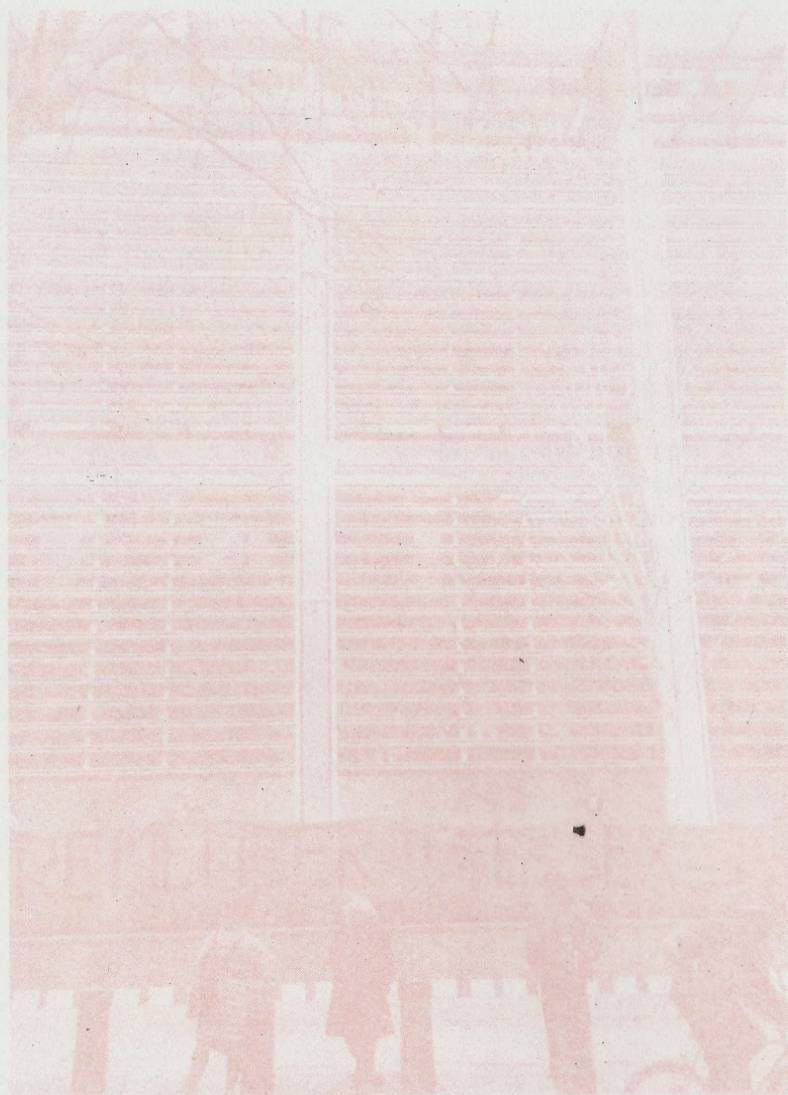
Pham Thi Tra My, aged 26
Nguyen Dinh Lurong, aged 20
Nguyen Huy Phong, aged 35
Vo Nhan Du, aged 19
Tran Manh Hung, aged 37
Tran Khanh Tho, aged 18
Vo Van Linh, aged 25
Nguyen Van Nhan, aged 33
Bui Phan Thang, aged 37
Nguyen Huy Hung, aged 15
Tran Thi Tho, aged 21
Bui Thi Nhung, aged 19
Vo Ngoc Nam, aged 28
Nguyen Dinh Tu, aged 26
Le Van Ha, aged 30
Tran Thi Ngoc, aged 19
Nguyen Van Hung, aged 33
Tran Thi Mai Nhung, aged 18
Nguyen Minh Quang, aged 20
Le Trong Thanh, aged 44

Cao Tien Dung, aged 37
Cao Huy Thanh, aged 33
Hoang Van Tiep, aged 18
Pham Thi Ngoc Oanh, aged 28
Hoang Van Hoi, aged 24
Nguyen Tho Tuan, aged 25
Dang Huu Tuyen, aged 22
Nguyen Trong Thai, aged 26
Nguyen Van Hiep, aged 24
Nguyen Thi Van, aged 35
Tran Hai Loc, aged 35
Duong Minh Tuan, aged 27
Nguyen Ngoc Ha, aged 32
Nguyen Tien Dung, aged 33
Phan Thi Thanh, aged 41
Nguyen Ba Vu Hung, aged 34
Dinh Dinh Thai Quyen, aged 18
Tran Ngoc Hieu, aged 17
Dinh Dinh Binh, aged 15

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If you have content for a zine that you want printed and distributed, email antipress2020@gmail.com

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