

Remember and Resist Podcast Episode 1 Transcript

Episode 1: The Impact of Borders on Southeast and East Asian precarious migrants in the UK

This text is transcribed from the audio recording, and partially edited for readability. Time stamps are approximate.

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Tessa: You are listening to the first in a series of podcasts entitled *Remember and Resist: Borders, Solidarity and the Essex 39*. This podcast is produced by a group of people who came together in October 2019 after the deaths of 39 Vietnamese migrants whose bodies were found in the back of a lorry trying to get into the UK. We are organising around issues of border violence facing East and South-East Asian migrant communities, and we stand in resistance to the hostile environment currently being implemented in the UK.

Through events in London over the past few months, and help from other community groups and platforms like LGSM, Eastern Margins, we have fundraised over \$1000 for the families of the Essex 39. (In consideration of our skills and connections), we're also translating resources from English into Vietnamese and Chinese on migrant rights and how to navigate the complex and hostile environment. If you'd like more information on the work we're doing or to get involved, please don't hesitate to get in touch- you can email us at remembertheessex39@protonmail.com.

This first podcast is from the first panel discussion during our day event in February, where we brought together community organisers, researchers, union representatives, activists and people working in NGOs to talk about issues surrounding borders, state violence and how to resist and act in solidarity with those most directly affected.

A huge thank you to Chad and Rosa at Rainbow Collective for recording the event, and the Outside Project for hosting us.

In this episode, Jun Pang chairs a panel with community organiser Jabez Lam, and researchers Dr Tina Ma and Dr Tamsin Barber.

Jun Pang is a migration researcher and law student. She is a co-founder of daikon*, a creative and political platform for women, non-binary and all trans people in the Southeast and East Asian diaspora. She is also a member of Lausan 流傘, a collective of writers, activists, and artists sharing decolonial and left perspectives on Hong Kong.

Jun: This panel is about migration from Southeast and East Asia into the UK, and the importance of keeping these histories alive, in a world where people's stories are so often erased or subsumed by the interests of capital and state. The migration stories of people from these regions are often situated in a broad narrative of 'economic migration', that is, migration in search of a better life. This kind of migration is usually seen as 'inferior' to other forms, because of the assumption that people could pull themselves up by their bootstraps in their home countries—economic migrants, it is often said, are not 'real refugees', and do not deserve entry into the Global North. But in reality, migration is complex, and never simply an individual choice; the decision to move or to stay is always conditioned by social, political, and economic structures. Without an understanding of what conditions make a 'better life' possible in one place versus another, and the enduring effects of economic exploitation, imperialism, and capitalism on people's lives all around the world, we cannot achieve true understanding or offer meaningful solidarity. To start off our conversation, we'll be hearing from Jabez Lam, Tina Ma, and Tamsin Barber.

Jabez Lam is an activist on Chinese community affairs. He established a number of Chinese community centres in London. He will share his experience in supporting the victims' families following the Dover 58 (2000) and Morecambe Bay (2004) tragedies.

Dr Tina Ma is a lecturer in Criminology at De Montfort University Leicester. Her main research interests centre around issues of migration and crime control. At the moment Tian is working on the subjects of human trafficking and organised immigration crime from China in the UK.

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Dr Tamsin Barber is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Oxford Brookes University, UK. Her research interests are in 'race', ethnicity, youth and migration with a focus on exclusion, inclusion, belonging and identity formation among the UK Vietnamese and in the East/Southeast Asian category.

Jabez: Thank you for inviting me here. I was asked to talk about my experience organising for supporting the Dover 58 and Morecambe Bay, after the tragedy. On the late evening of 18th June 2000, 60 bodies were found at the back of a lorry in Dover, with 2 survivors. Soon after that, I worked with a group of activists to try to support the victims and their families. We found ourselves engaged in two kinds of battlefield—the first field was the battle of narrative. The other was in supporting the victims and their families it turned out to also be full of difficulties and it really was a battle all the way.

Let me talk about the battle of narrative first. Immediately after the tragedy, the first interview by the then Home Secretary Jack Straw was that these are illegal immigrants from China. As soon as he said that, there were reactions from the Chinese embassy saying that “they are not from China—they may be Malaysian, they may be Vietnamese”. A few weeks later the two survivors regained their consciousness and started to give statements. They said all 60 of them came from China. Eventually the Chinese embassy considered them Chinese. At the time the main narrative from the Home Secretary and Shadow Home Secretary were quite the same. Both emphasised the illegal entrance, the illegal trade of trafficking. The Chinese government reflected the same narrative—that they are illegal immigrants and the illegal trade of trafficking. However, for the Refugee Council, their narrative was that the immigration system here has become so tough, so difficult, that people suffering from persecution are unable to come to this country in a legal way. They are being forced to take such routes. They called for relaxation on immigration to allow people escaping from persecution to allow them to arrive in this country.

At the time I was working with anti-racist organisation called Min Quan in the Chinese community. Min Quan challenged the Home Secretary’s version of the story that these were illegal immigrants—simply, these people haven’t given a single statement, they are dead, the two survivors are unconscious, how do you know they aren’t asylum seekers? At the time, the Home Office had an Ethnic Minority Committee, composed of different representatives of communities across the country. After the Dover 58 they had a meeting to discuss it. All the representatives from other communities expressed their condolences and their sadness about the tragedy. Except one- the Chinese community representative. He said: “there is no political persecution in China. China has experienced double digit economic growth and there’s no reason to leave China. The only reason they chose to leave is because they believed that London is paved with gold. They are greedy people, they deserve what they got.” Yasmin Alibhai Brown was one of the representatives in the committee, she was so angered by this comment and felt, how could Chinese community be so cold blooded to their own people? In the end, Yasmin teamed up with Vanessa Redgrave

and Colin Redgrave to organise a memorial for the Dover 58 outside Number 10 [Downing Street].

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Chinese Community leaders condemned the victims for breaking immigration law. They advocate to tighten the immigration system, to stop economic migrants abusing the asylum system. When Min Quan organised a memorial service to commemorate the first year anniversary, these Chinese community leaders took our advertisement and condemned the commemoration. That is the battle of narrative we have to fight in situations of a tragedy, in comparison to a tragedy which doesn't involve ethnic minorities—if you look at Hillsborough, a similar loss of many lives, the community responded in sympathy and support. So that's the complexity we enter into. The position of Min Quan and my colleagues at that time was that these deaths were avoidable deaths. The immigration system pushed them to take such a route. The worst thing is from the trial we learnt that the lorry was actually under surveillance from the British and Holland government to trace the route to try to break the trafficking gang. But despite being under surveillance they failed to stop the theft from happening. So that just shows that the route of the problem lies with authorities' complete disregard of the lives of the people in this lorry.

The second part was about supporting the victims' families. What are the areas we needed to support? The very first thing was we needed to identify their bodies. To give them respectful burial, return bodies to families, demand compensation and quest for justice. These were the tasks we set ourselves. In identifying bodies, the Kent police, immediately after discovering the bodies, appealed for the community to come and help them. Many people came forward to help, but the problem was the Kent police had a form that they got everyone who came to help to complete. The form asked for their identity, immigration status, how they knew these people were on board the lorry, when did they know about it, which immediately put off everybody—I'm here to help, why am I being questioned? They made you feel like you were a suspect or an accomplice.

In the end it took Min Quan two weeks to negotiate with the police to agree on a process that we become the screening centre, as the first stage screening, we trained the potential victims' families, and the police, and after the initial first stage potential identification, then arrange for the victims' families to identify the bodies. Through this process we assisted two victims' families to identify their family members. Until September, from the work investigating in this country, the police only identified four bodies. In July they approached

the Chinese government and wanted to go to China to look for victims' families but it was refused by the Chinese government. It required intervention from the Foreign Office to let them go with the condition that they only worked on identification. They eventually went in September and identified all 58 bodies. After they were identified, we called Kent police on behalf of a client and wanted them to release the body for the burial. We were told that they were 'waiting for a decision from above'. We didn't know what that meant!

After pondering with a group of Chinese organisations in London, we formed the Dover 58 Support Committee to get the bodies back for burial.

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In the end we were told it was because there was debate on who should pay for the cost of the transportation. It took another 3 months before the bodies were sent home. When sent home, the Chinese government informed the families two hours in advance and specifically told them that none of them could go to the airport—when the bodies are released to you, you have to either bury or cremate within eight hours. It was done in such a rush. After the burial, there was the question of compensation. There's a scheme called the Criminal Injury Compensation Scheme whereby victims of violent crimes can get compensation. Two Manchester solicitors assisted the families to apply for criminal injury compensation. After 18 months they were not successful. The reason is that the Criminal Compensation Board said that all the victims are party to the crime so they are not entitled to criminal compensation. In the end I'm not going to announce the source but the Manchester solicitors were very inventive and managed to get a small amount of compensation for the families.

I don't think I have time to go into Morecambe Bay but I'll say it went through quite a similar process—there is the same battle of narrative from the same people with the same argument, nothing new, quite boring, the only interesting thing is that the Chinese government became a bit cleverer. Both the police and Chinese Embassy are less confrontational. On the day of the tragedy was the 15th day of the Lunar New Year (Chinese Valentine's Day). What the Chinese government release that they are all Chinese, and put on a website that China's economic growth has allowed a lot of wealthy citizens to go out into the world and expand their experience and on Chinese Valentine's Day a group of Chinese tourists went to the seaside to worship the moon and drowned—so a gentle reminder to everyone who is a tourist going to foreign places/unfamiliar circumstances: please check the tide timings. That was the only lesson the Chinese government learnt. The other thing I'd say about Morecambe Bay is that it took several months for the bodies to return home, and the

Chinese government and British Police in cooperation, the community led by Hsiao Hung-Pai took six years, raised more than £300,000 for the victims' families to clear their debt—because when they died the debt to the snakeheads fall on the families. I'll stop here and look forward to questions later.

Jun: Thank you so much Jabez and for the reminder that the logics that under the hostile environment are global—and the people who suffer the most from these logics are not nations or states but individual people operating within their circumstances. We'll now hear from Dr Tina Ma.

Tina: Thank you very much for having me here today. Thank you for the very rich and informative information about Dover 58 and Morecambe Bay cases. Just some clarification and background to my research, expertise and interests, which are about migration crime. So my job and research is not about offering objective scientific evidence of why migrants are more likely to commit crimes or using criminological theories to 'apologise' for those people and why they are over-represented in prison populations.

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My research is mostly looking at the structure and institutional bias/discrimination about why those migrants are more likely to be profiled, stopped and searched, arrested, persecuted and imprisoned and further labelled in their life afterwards.

If we talk about the hostile environment, the first thing we think about is why migration and crime are always talked about together—using crime control mechanisms to control mobility, or using mobility control to control crime. These two things and the underlying logics, agenda and discourse is the public view, and is over-represented in media, by the Home Office and by Parliament. So it's just another example of scapegoating to take the blame of the incapable government to address this deteriorated society by scapegoating a certain group of the population here. So in this talk, I will firstly identify some major critical challenges faced by Chinese, East Asian and Southeast Asian women survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking/modern slavery in England today. Especially under current hostile immigration policy. Then I'm going to move to discuss how these challenges raise critical questions, and yet no enquiries have been made to those problems, and lastly I'm going to deliberate how we—if I may quote Eastern Margins—are we Chinese or not? We've always been tarred with the same brush and faced similar stereotypes and hostility. Sometimes hostility even dresses itself as hospitality, we've all been in that situation so we know that.

So how can we respond to those agendas, labels, categories, discourse, perspective and political views framed targeted and pinpointed at us and how can we resist to form solidarity and generate meaningful resistance which is embedded in these visible and invisible hostilities, conscious and unconscious racism, and discriminatory bias at all levels—individual and structural.

So based on my experience at working in one of the biggest national charities for supporting women survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking, I will share some experience on how the domestic violence rules and mechanisms do not protect the vulnerable but are there to control migration. It is nothing new that migrant women are especially vulnerable to various types of violence behind closed doors. For example, financial abuse such as deprivation of food and clothing are way more common among migrant women who might lack both knowledge about government allowance and I would like to say 'welfare system'—I am skeptical of using that word today especially under the current form of Universal Credit, which we all know is anything but 'universal'. It has kept more people in need outside doors by creating various hurdles and making basic allowance inaccessible. So the domestic violence rule is a settlement scheme provided to those who stay as partners of a British citizen in this country. If the relationship ended because of domestic violence they can apply to settle in the UK based on the ground of them being identified as victims of domestic violence by the Home Office.

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There are two quite evident problems here. Firstly, it doesn't protect non-marital relationships. So no matter how much the evidence supports the relationship's existence and longevity, if you are fiancé, engaged, boyfriend, girlfriend, proposed future civil partners, they are not eligible because the relationship is still considered a temporary one, and they should not have any expectation of remaining in the UK if the relationship comes to an end. They have to leave immediately even though they have been abused in this relationship. Secondly, the applicants must establish that the relationship—the three pieces of evidence the Home Office requires of a victim of domestic violence—was their partner subsisting at the start of the last grant of leave as the partner- so they have to live together, have to prove they have a married life (having sex, basically is what's required), they have to fulfil all the requirements of a 'married life' - and the marriage can only have broken down in the last period and broke down because of domestic violence. I'll show you some simple evidence about why this is so unfair. The Home Office gives a table of evidence about how they can prove or apply on the grounds of domestic violence. Criminal conviction, police caution, final

order in civil court, multi-agency MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference- so have to be high risk cases by police) are considered conclusive evidence. So it's almost like this higher standard of violence has to be evidenced- they have to prove they called the police, they have to prove they went to court, and that they have fulfilled all these requirements to apply to settle in the UK if they apply on that ground.

Whereas the place I worked for, we used this so-called 'power view' to identify victims of domestic violence so clearly you can see a disparity between domestic violence victims when they have a migration status or local white British women. Here we can see: 'controlling what she does, who she sees, who she talks to, gaslighting. The Home Office has put a lot of money into- financial abuse, emotional abuse, all kinds of abuse are considered domestic abuse and domestic violence, whereas when it comes to migration and migrant women they still come into criminal convictions and police arrest. So that's why when women come to this stage where they can't bear any further abuse in that marriage, there are two ways ahead of them: when they go to solicitor to apply as a victim of domestic violence, what they face is always a dilemma of either staying in the marriage, bearing all they bear, and after that 5 years they might have a looming scare or hope that they can stay after all the suffering. Or they go to reporting domestic violence routes which highly likely they won't be granted- because who's going to call the police when they know the next day they're going to have to leave the country?

So to conclude what I've been saying here, when it comes to national charities- one problem is the Home Office stopped funding any nationality-based charities in this country, that's why the national generic charities have to take responsibility to support survivors- East and Southeast Asian. The major critique I want to make here is that they always criticise women who don't know about domestic violence, they don't know the word, in this country we have human rights and women have a right to leave a relationship if it's violent or not fulfilling, so it's almost like the way those national charities are really patronising the way they think they're 'liberating' these women.

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So on the one hand they put a label on these women as submissive, like a tiny fragile Asian woman, and on the other hand they tell you we have domestic violence laws and human rights and equal gender rights in this country. So that's why it doesn't matter if the woman hasn't heard of the word 'domestic violence', 'modern slavery', 'human rights', so what? Because what do they mean when they say these words? There are so many double

standards here and given by the home office, there's nothing about domestic violence, it's a crime, they say it's the only ground for settling here on the grounds of domestic violence, so the last thing I wanted to say- one way we can resist these double standards and labelling is we should see survivors beyond their ethnicity stereotypes. How much do they know about Asian culture? Let us define our own culture, so we don't need any revelation here- what we need is rectification. So what those national charities and Home Office really need to do is unlearn what they have never known which is to treat survivors like human beings beyond any cultural or ethnic stereotypes.

Jun: Thank you so much Tina. I think the idea of labelling and de-labelling really compliments what Jabez was saying about people being caught between different logics, and also think it was really good in dispelling this illusion that after migration your life is necessarily better because ultimately the logics of racialised, patriarchal and gendered violence are continuous. Now we'll hear from Dr. Tamsin Barber.

Tamsin: Thanks very much. Thanks for inviting me, I feel very privileged to be here today. So today I'm going to talk about some research that I've been doing with two Vietnamese colleagues which involve Vietnamese people migrating to the UK. My research prior to this has been very much to do with life experiences, perceptions, the way in which people navigate particular constraints. So I'm going to talk briefly about this research and then after that about how it fits into broader narratives around trafficking, modern slavery, and neoliberal capitalist economy, and reflecting on the deaths of the 39 Vietnamese people in the Essex lorry. Unfortunately my Vietnamese colleagues couldn't be here today- Hai Nguyen who is based at King's College London isn't in the UK at the moment and my other colleague Phuc Nguyen (not related) who works in Trung Vuong university in Northern Vietnam, so we've been involved in two projects and have another one starting this year. The first project started in 2016 looked at discussions taking place between prospective and current Vietnamese migrants on publicly open internet forums. The second project involved a trip to Vietnam where we held expert workshops, spoke to local researchers and previous migrants about their experiences of migration and the culture of migration in Vietnam.

So firstly just to flag up- most of you will be aware of the press coverage on anti-trafficking and anti-slavery. The NGO narrative around Vietnamese migrants in the UK where they're often discussed and depicted as vulnerable victims of modern slavery and exploitation, or sometimes illegal migrants who are ring leaders of gangs who are very much criminalised. So we see this labelling of Vietnamese migrants as either passive victims in need of saving or illegal criminals who need to be prosecuted by the legal system. So in our research on the

chatrooms, we looked at over 2000 discussion threads by Vietnamese people and our findings on these discussions were unexpected.

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Generally what they did was rejected these polarised narratives of them as victims of modern slavery. So I'm going to run through some of what we found before contextualising this in terms of the broader debate and what it tells us.

Some key findings: for the majority of the contributors to these websites, and these are 2000 people/conversations, a small proportion in the UK- so there are lots of caveats around this data and its illustrative rather than solid data we can take away and apply to everyone, but it shows something different. So coming to the UK for most of the contributors was largely an active choice. People spoke generally very frankly about the risks and hardship they were likely to be facing when coming to the UK, and largely they were prepared to do this, and I'm going to unpack this more later on. There was a lot of sharing of advice between prospective migrants, those in the UK, and those who had already returned to Vietnam, about what the process involved and what could be done to mitigate some of the experiences. We found that there were multiple reasons for people making the journey, so this ranged from ofc economic reasons, want to find a better life and improve conditions for our families and communities back in Vietnam, as well as environmental degradation, family reason, but also individual motivations- seeking a better education, personal freedom, adventure and travel (you know, people seeing travellers from all over the world coming to Vietnam and were interested in this too). Now this is not to say that these migrants were opportunists just out there trying their luck, but I'm trying to say that there are multiple reasons one individual might have for migrating. These people importantly are human beings, there are economic imperatives, but there are also a range of other aspects of their lives that they might want to be fulfilling through this journey.

So advice shared on the website often related to realising life goals, how one might get an education whilst working in the UK, how one might safely return to Vietnam or how one might stay in the UK, or raise a family in the UK. Only 231 posts were about how to find work in the UK, which nail shops would hire undocumented workers, how much one could earn, and how its possible to earn money through the cannabis industry if you were willing to take high risks to try and earn money more quickly, how this could be done.

Importantly, the majority of enquiries (1564) related to sharing advice on how to negotiate or survive the UK immigration system. How to remain in the UK, until they were ready to return to Vietnam rather than being yanked out and deported by immigration officials. So in these discussions, the contributors certainly proved that they were not simply passive victims, portrayed through the media, like Tina mentioned these orientalisng labels that are applied to East and Southeast Asian groups as passive, in need of saving, infantile and so forth- this is not the story that we saw. For some of the contributors this involved claiming they were younger than they actually were, that they were under 18, in order to avoid being deported, or access social support, legal protection or rights in the UK. I'm not trying to say here that these people are devious by claiming they are under 18. What I'm trying to say is that this is the only route for them to claim any protection under this very restrictive immigration regime in the UK. Also this links to the age presumption clause in the Modern Slavery Act, which says that if in doubt, the officials should presume someone is under 18. Again, orientalist eyes often view these people as being younger than they actually are. So this is one route people could take to protect themselves. There were other aspects too, but I'll move on a bit.

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The majority of people didn't want to remain in the UK indefinitely, but did want to have some control over how and when they returned to Vietnam. Returning to Vietnam before a sufficient amount of money could be earned and sent back could have very negative repercussions on them and their families when they return- shame, stigma, and of course debt to smugglers. This is why the rescue raids that we've been seeing on nail shops are particularly problematic. The majority of Vietnamese migrants we encountered did not want to be saved by British authorities, because to the contrary being saved by British authorities would worsen their situation. If they were returned back to Vietnam- they might be identified as a Việt Tân follower plotting to overthrow the Vietnamese government, which would have a big implication for them on their return. So it is not in their benefit to be 'rescued' by UK authorities. Lastly, what was distinctive was that none of the discussions referred to experiences of trafficking or immigration involving coercion or deception, now we don't know enough about this, but we didn't see any evidence of people talking about being trafficked or coerced, so this is a very different story to the one we see in the media. Nor do they talk about labour exploitation, they talked about how hard work it was but not about themselves being 'exploited'. In Vietnam our research showed that migrating to the UK to grow cannabis was not seen as an 'illegal' strategy but more quite a commonplace labour strategy, which was interesting.

A key point I want to say here is I'm not denying that trafficking, forms of exploitation, and slavery does take place in the UK and has been experienced by Vietnamese migrants. What this research does show is that this is not the only story, and these people should not be our only concern. We need to review more carefully the appropriateness of policies which serve to so-called 'protect' these 'victims'.

I want to fleetingly outline the problem with the Modern Slavery Agenda. For most people encountering it for the first time we think its a really good intention, to protect people who have been exploited, to protect them from slavery- however, there are quite a few problems with the Modern Slavery Agenda in its execution and also its conception, and this links to the broader capitalist economy. That is that the Modern Slavery Agenda is based on this idea that exploitation in the capitalist system is exceptional. And that exploitation can be cocooned off, it happens over here and can be dealt with and tackled and the problem is solved. Far from that- what we know is that exploitation happens everywhere on all spectrums of relations in the capitalist system. And some scholars actually argue that western labour market liberalisation is actually complicit with modern slavery. Some people argue that the Modern Slavery Agenda simply acts as an arm of the immigration system. And actually what's been shown to do is be very strong on law enforcement but very weak on protection of victims. I also wanted to just say briefly that what we see in the UK, we have a very deregulated labour market that encourages shadow economy sectors such as the cannabis industry and low wage labour, which is in high demand if you think about nail shops and how we're happy to consume very cheap nail services, this is going to have an impact on wages that people are being paid to do, and who is willing to work for those sorts of low wages. And so the whole thing sort of ignores our own complicity in the production of modern slavery.

Very quickly going back to the Essex 39; how did they die? Who is responsible for their deaths? These people were navigating very very strict border controls, to enter into a labour market which is very liberal, in demand of this labour, there is currently no legal route into the UK for low skilled Vietnamese migrants to work but a very strong demand for their labour in the UK. The focus was very much on the people traffickers who trafficked them into the UK, ignoring the broader structural conditions that invite and draw in migrants to work and to be exploited, but at the same time punch them at the borders in very severe ways.

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So I think we shouldn't just be focussing on individual traffickers, who are just a link in the broader system.

Jun: Thank you so much Tamsin. I think your talk really complimented Tina's in terms of this idea of crime and immigration and how these are categories constructed for state security, I also wanted to note the rescue raids in particular- probably some people in this room know that guardian journalist Amelia Gentleman, who broke the story of Windrush, also accompanied a rescue raid on a Vietnamese nail salon recently and it's one of those examples where all of these logics combine and the media is also complicit in perpetuating these logics even under the guise of objective reporting. I like how you complicated the idea of choice, and that all of our choices every day are conditioned by different factors including our own personal preferences, and to exceptionalise people because they are racialized/gendered in different ways is also drawing into the logics that lead to people's deaths.

A question I wanted to ask is, as daikon* and SDS, a lot of us work between different racialised communities. You've each touched on Chinese and Vietnamese communities but I wanted to ask all of you - what is the relationship between Vietnamese, Chinese, other East Asian and Southeast Asian migrant communities in the UK, whether there have been efforts to mobilise together, and also if there have been other efforts to mobilise in solidarity with other migrant communities especially Black, Muslim, South Asian communities against this structure- historically and now.

Tina: So I think currently we do see the communities here are quite divided and segregated, we don't see much meaningful or organic solidarity being formed. One thing, if I may take from what Dr. Barber just said, I think one way we should see this is through the structural perspective instead of the race/ethnicity based categorisation (which someone has put on us). I would say bringing back the concept of class would be very useful, or we see the passport, nationality, ethnicity we attach to see it from a periphery instead of from the country. China is a big country, if you think about megacities like Beijing and Shanghai, compared to people from a remote village, someone from Shanghai would share more life experiences with people living in New York or London. Bring back the class - who are those in power and those being exploited? Deportability/employability are framed together and in terms of who is in the core and the periphery. Boys exploited for county lines in this country are very much another form of modern slavery, so that's one way I'm seeing this problem of how solidarity can happen between those who are powerless, marginalised and targeted.

Jabez: I think the Chinese/East Asian community in this country has benefited a lot from Black and Asian communities' struggle.

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Many of our own community leaders of the Chinese community like to perpetuate a view that the Chinese community are passive, non-violent people, that we are unlike Black and Asians who for different reasons will go and throw stones or... we are nice people and different from others. That is the kind of survival strategy of the early arrival of our communities in the 50s and 60s. Very much because we did not have the skills and ability to connect with other communities. Their economic environment was very self-contained. Unlike the Black and Asian communities, many of whom came in the Windrush etc. and went straight into mainstream society and faced racism from day one of their arrival. So in a way, our community grew in a different path. Our community grew on a path of "self-reliance" which we like to perpetuate as the beauty of our culture, of Confucianism or whatever they want to call it. In reality we are forced by the same reasons, racism in employment, because we don't speak the language, we have the qualifications but aren't recognised here, it's tough, you have to find your own environment to survive. So very much for the first generation of Chinese and East Asians here, were very marginalised within their own community businesses and cut off from mainstream community. I can say from my experience- I've worked in this field for more than 40 years- and for the first 15 years there is a certain level of Chinese chauvinism, in the sense that we apply for funding for the Chinese Community Centre which only serves the Chinese community- there are plenty of problems for us to solve in the Chinese community. So we did not associate with other communities, and when other communities came to the door, we would tell them to go to the council and get them to help you organise. It was exciting during the Morecambe Bay and Dover 59 campaigns in that a lot of people were working together who were not just from China or Hong Kong- but from Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam. Local one I was still excited about but they were all Chinese diaspora. Only in the last few years that I have started feeling encouraged- the second generation of East Asians who were born and grown up here, they started to realise that whether you are Chinese or not, because Chinese have such a large population, when they face racist attack, they think you're all Chinese, even today, many of you will know that outside because of coronavirus, people are targeted as chinese, but when you see the news report you see there are Korean, Japanese, Thai people being attacked, asked to take the virus back home- but they are not Chinese. So our fates are tied together. But we need to learn from Asian and Black community that when they struggle, they don't struggle for Jamaica, they don't struggle for Nepal, they struggle for the Black and Asian community.

Identity politics is a double edged sword. We can become so proud of our identities that it becomes xenophobic.

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But then identity politics do give us the strength to share experience and to use that experience to work together and form alliances, that not only amounts to the Chinese and Asian community needing to work together as the East Asian community and form alliances with the Black and Asian communities. Of course all these communities also need to work together to fight the class struggle that Tina mentioned. For the Hackney Chinese Centre, we are starting the path, we're not very successful at the moment but that is the path we are developing and see our vision and would like to see that as a way to go forward and we allow working with the council in Hackney want to make a building to become a resource centre for East Asians. So I'm really happy to see a lot of second generation East Asians working together here. By looking at you I don't know whether you are Chinese or Vietnamese.

Audience: I'm wondering do any of you Chinese activists trying to organise with Black and Asian communities and what are the obstacles?

Jabez: I think the Black and Asian community have a long experience of struggle here, and I have taken part in their campaigns, in some of their struggles, and they are very well organised. They take the lead and we have worked with them (me and some of my colleagues) in other campaigns. When I worked for Min Quan, it was actually initiated from an Asian community organising monitoring group. At the time the Chinese community did not acknowledge we had a problem of racism, and when I said earlier that we benefit a lot from the Black and Asian community, for the work of Min Quan I can clearly say we benefit from the struggle of the Stephen Lawrence campaign, which we solved with the Macpherson report- first time recognition of institutional racism, first definition of racist incident. I and a lot of colleagues learnt from that and for decades we see our Chinese restaurants Chinese takeaways every weekend someone throws stones at the window or eat and run- we would say 'oh, a hooligan, youth nuisance'. But now we have the definition that racism is victim perception, and that a repeated incident, whether people are explicitly racist or not, a repeated victimisation of a place in itself is a racist attack. Then we started to realise, this Chinese takeaway every weekend was being repeatedly attacked, that is a racial incident. And that coincidentally started the realisation that we also experience racism every day, and

yet our community denies it, and that is why it is important for us to work with others and learn from them and form bigger alliances.

Jun: Have you noticed any differences in the way the public, media or community organisations have responded to the Dover 58, Morecambe Bay and Essex 39 incidents?

Jabez: There's already a difference between Dover and Morecambe Bay. With Dover, they started by saying they are illegal immigrants.

[1:00:00]

But for Morecambe they didn't use that term once- from day one they used 'migrants'. That is a slight improvement. Maybe we're too easy to satisfy. The shift in media is that I think the Morecambe in particular, made them realise that the media world knew very little about the Chinese East Asian community. And that is why after that you start to see, I was actually approached by the BBC and Channel 4, who put aside money to do a programme specifically about the development of the Chinese community- and I took part in one of these. It became a learning process. The media has an agenda. That reflects the political economy of the time. But then equally, the media has certain paths and development that so-called professional ethics that they need to follow e.g. based on fact/evidence. There has been a shortage of Chinese East Asian community narrative to fit into this conversation that all we have heard about were biased and imaginary narratives, mostly from a film or story rather than real life. I would say the media is learning and needs to continue to learn. And the absence is clear in our community. But in particular, when the dominant voice perpetuates stereotypes from our own communities, that is a bigger challenge we need to look at- I always say it's very easy to be a Chinese Community leader, I am a Chinese Community leader, not because I was elected, but because nobody in Chinese community talks, most talk rubbish, when they want someone to talk some sense they come and talk to me and they don't think Oh I talked to some Tom, Dick or Harry in the Chinese community, they say I talked to Jabez Lam! Right, and that's what happened, every single one of you can be a community leader. Speak up, be honest, say what you see it as.

Tamsin: To the previous question, I think the change in the word trafficking has been a big change in the treatment. It was very interesting how the Vietnamese people were presumed to be Chinese straight away, so I mean based on that legacy, racial stereotypes, they must be Chinese, and then it was a shock that they were Vietnamese, and then of course the immediate links with the cannabis industry and illegal migrants came out very strongly. So

you know I'm trying to remember back to the Morecambe Bay coverage and it was still at that time about the gang leaders, a focus on ethnicised criminal networks. That's what I thought was particularly distinctive with the 39 coverage, oh they're Vietnamese people, they're involved in illegal trafficking, so that must be very distinctive to the Vietnamese community. This is across the ball, it's a global phenomenon, this is not just about the Vietnamese community and what's happening in Vietnam, although of course in this case it is, but this is not a Vietnamese problem, and I think that's what I thought was distasteful in my view of the coverage- that this was somehow a Vietnamese problem, rather than a UK problem and a global problem. We know that many migrants sadly die in the back of lorries coming into the UK every year, but it's just that we happen to find a lorry full of Vietnamese migrants, so there are some very narrow framings of the event.

[1:05:00]

Tina: Yes it's very disturbing for me when they were first identified as Chinese, most of the questions I got from the media were framed in terms of 'China is the second economic bully in the world, why are people still risking their lives to come on the back of a lorry and such a tragic case?' When their identity was later confirmed as Vietnamese, you can feel how the media cools down around the incident- it's almost like they've normalised economic migrants moving from a poor area to the UK, nothing about that, it's really shocking, there was this realisation that their whole agenda is about China in today's society and it would be news if they were Chinese but now it's not news. That was very disturbing. In the meantime I also experienced the disparities between western media and Chinese media. I didn't accept any Chinese media enquiries and they suddenly pinpointed me saying 'why don't you want to share your expert knowledge with your fellow citizens?' So this was also a shock, later on they learnt they were Vietnamese and said 'we know, we told you, we're such an economic body, nobody would risk their lives doing this'- so this shows portrayal by UK and Chinese media on this case.

Jun: Thank you so much. Just a couple of notes to end on, we didn't get to discuss but hopefully we can think about broader global political economy, and even in our discussion today it's been quite Chinese-centric, but we also want to recognise that of course particular Southeast Asian communities are marginalised and erased from already silenced narratives, so we want to be aware of that and hopefully the rest of the day will be talking more about the relationships between racialized communities and tackling things like anti-blackness and islamophobia, in producing more meaningful solidarities in our future panels. Thank you

everyone for your questions, for your interest in the topic, and to our speakers for sharing so much history and information with us all.

Tessa: Thank you for listening to the first in our series of podcasts *Remember and Resist: Borders, Solidarity and the Essex 39*. We have two more podcasts to release from this event, as well as some individual interviews planned. To stay updated, please follow daikon* zine on social media, or drop us an email at remembertheessex39@protonmail.com.