

## being ... here ... now ...

A message arrives during a meeting of the padkos committee and our colleague starts crying. Yet another dear friend has died in the midst of COVID-19. We take time out from the business of the meeting to be present with each other in the face of yet more sadness and trauma. But we realise that the business of the meeting is and was the same subject-matter anyway: if padkos is ‘food for the journey’, what does that mean here and now?; what nourishes and sustains us individually and together in this current moment? We are surrounded by death, hunger, desperation, anger, pain, loss, anxiety, fear, exhaustion, frustration and hardship at a level that is extraordinary. It is being lived personally and collectively. If we’ve tended to say that we start with ‘the scream’ of dignified rage against injustice and the mutilation of life by capital (acknowledging John Holloway’s work), perhaps right now we start with the ‘keening’ - the anguished lament in the face of suffering and the assault on humanity and our world.

From a meeting of the staff collective earlier this year that was held outdoors, we remember an image someone brought after walking mindfully along the bank of a stream where it entered the dam – she talked about watching the reeds and how they bend with the flow of the water, able to rise at the appropriate time; how we too must find our own forms of acceptance and resilience in the face of the battering the world has taken over the past year and more, so that we too find our ways to rise.

As ever, padkos is just a part of our organisation’s total work, most of which continues in the work of presence, solidarity, and mutual learning, with grassroots spaces of organised thought and action changing the world. Across all our work there is an undying fidelity to the realisation and flowering of human being, including valuing self-compassion and self-care for the journey. As CLP director, Graham, commented: “as we enact being human ourselves, we help enable other’s humanity and being”. It is true that self-care under capitalism can degenerate into a commodified wellness industry - its offerings accessed by those with cash, and deflecting attention and responsibility away from undoing important causes of harm and injustice<sup>1</sup>. But there is no inherent contradiction in an integrated commitment to self-care and revolutionary change in the world<sup>2</sup>. Like reeds in the water, our own ways of being and doing need to sustain us and build our resilience in the environment we’re in. We should practice ways of being, of relating, and of doing in the world, that nurture the good and stop re-creating the bad.

Valuing abundant life, and expanding the practices that do so, marks a complete rupture with the logic of death, with the logics of money and profit, of competition and individualism, of exploitation and domination that otherwise rule our society. And breaking with the logic of death by doing according to the logic of life instead, is how we change the world ... here ... now...

---

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4979-emma-dowling-examines-the-mantras-of-self-care-and-what-they-tell-us-about-our-anxieties>

<sup>2</sup> We find this resonates with thinking within the ‘Extinction Rebellion’ movement and their commitment to building a regenerative culture. In their “statement of principles and values” (see: <https://rebellion.global/about-us/> or <https://www.xrebellion.ch/about/>), they advocate creating a regenerative human culture that “includes a healthy focus on mutually supporting categories of: self care – how we take care of our own needs and personal recovery from this toxic system; action care – how we take care of each other whilst we undertake direct actions and civil disobedience together; interpersonal care – how we take care of the relationships we have, being mindful of how we affect each other, taking charge of our side of relationships; community care – how we take care of our development as a network and community, strengthening our connections and adherence to these principles and values; People and Planet care – how we look after our wider communities and the earth that sustains us all.”

## **Post-script:**

We recall these comments from John Holloway in his seminal book *Crack Capitalism*: “We need revolution now, here and now. So absurd, so necessary. So obvious. *Nothing more common, nothing more obvious*. There is nothing special about being an anti-capitalist revolutionary. This is the story of many, many people, of millions, perhaps billions.

It is the story of the composer in London who expresses his anger and his dream of a better society through the music he composes. It is the story of the gardener in Cholula who creates a garden to struggle against the destruction of nature. Of the car worker in Birmingham who goes in the evenings to his garden allotment so that he has some activity that has meaning and pleasure for him. Of the indigenous peasants in Oventic, Chiapas, who create an autonomous space of self-government and defend it every day against the paramilitaries who harass them. Of the university professor in Athens who creates a seminar outside the university framework for the promotion of critical thought. Of the book publisher in Barcelona who centres his activity on publishing books against capitalism. Of the friends in Porto Alegre who form a choir, just because they enjoy singing. Of the teachers in Puebla who confront police oppression to fight for a different type of school, a different type of education. Of the theatre director in Vienna who decides she will use her skills to open a different world to those who see her plays. Of the call centre worker in Sydney who fills all his vacant moments thinking of how to fight for a better society. Of the people of Cochabamba who come together and fight a battle against the government and the army so that water should not be privatised but subject to their own control. Of the nurse in Seoul who does everything possible to help her patients, Of the workers in Neuquen who occupy the factory and make it theirs. Of the student in New York who decides that university is a time for questioning the world. Of the community worker in Dalkeith who looks for cracks in the framework of rules that constrain him so that he can open another world . Of the young man in Mexico City, who, incensed by the brutality of capitalism, goes to the jungle to organise armed struggle to change the world. Of the retired teacher in Berlin who devotes her life to the struggle against capitalist globalisation . Of the government worker in Nairobi who gives all her free time to the struggle against AIDS. Of the university teacher in Leeds who uses the space that still exists in some universities to set up a course on activism and social change. Of the old man living in an ugly block of flats on the outskirts of Beirut who cultivates plants on his windowsill as a revolt against the concrete that surrounds him. Of the young woman in Ljubljana, the young man in Florence, who, like so many others throughout the world, throw their lives into inventing new forms of struggle for a better world. Of the peasant in Huejotzingo who refuses to allow his small orchard to be annexed to a massive park of unsold cars. Of the group of homeless friends in Rome who occupy a vacant house and refuse to pay rent. Of the enthusiast in Buenos Aires who devotes all his great energies to opening new perspectives for a different world. Of the girl in Tokyo who says she will not go to work today and goes to sit in the park with her book, this book or some other. Of the young man in France who devotes himself to building dry toilets as a contribution to radically altering the relation between humans and nature. Of the telephone engineer in Jalapa who leaves his job to spend more time with his children. Of the woman in Edinburgh who, in everything she does, expresses her rage through the creation of a world of love and mutual support. This is the story of ordinary people” (John Holloway, *Crack Capitalism*, Pluto Press, 2010.)