

Mad about justice—a letter to a friend

Script

Yve Lomax 2022

screen:

When I was younger there were songs of emancipation,
demonstrations for liberation and now there is call after call for justice.
So many calls.

voice:

So many calls for justice.

I can't say exactly when I awoke to the sheer volume, although once I had—and it really wasn't that long ago—I knew something unforgettable had happened to me. From then on, I knew that with every breaking news bringing more scandal, more suffering and evermore heart thumping atrocities, there was something about 'justice' that wasn't going to go away.

Had I thought about justice before?

Not really.

In everything I've written I have never mentioned it, not even once. But now I can't stop thinking about justice, can't stop noticing. And what is truly noteworthy is that the calls for justice are coming from all sorts of situations. These situations are not at all isolated; quite the opposite, they overlap if not blend—from climate justice to racial justice, from earth justice to social justice, sexuality, gender, the seas, the forests and so many forms of life barely surviving.

Whether or not these calls for justice make a chorus or a cacophony they testify to one thing: an increasing awareness of bad treatment, *persistent* bad treatment, relentless denigration, systematic battering and exhaustive exploitation.

What is remarkable about these calls for justice is that they are coming from all over the world and exceed boundaries, flags, passports and juridical systems of the land. Indeed, I have become aware that these calls for justice see past the law, and this is *seeing* the inadequacies or even violence of existing laws and legal authorities (with regard to, for instance, polluting emissions, abuse not only human, techno bullying, land grabbing, immigration, refugees ... and so

much more). And, what's more, these calls for justice are increasingly calling for a *reimagining of justice*.

screen:

Justice?

voice:

Justice? I am confident enough to say that justice and the law can't be conflated. For sure, the laws and juridical system of the land do pronounce their 'justice' but justice is never reducible to the law and its rules. There would be no law without rules and, of course, the law knows this very well. A rule has to have applicability; it is a matter of calculation and, in one way or another, adds up to the enforcement of the law. But that is not justice.

Justice? I don't have a sharp definition. I have only the bare minimum to on: justice isn't *insured by a rule*. Without a rule in sight, justice has to have a vision. What does this mean? I heard these words a few years ago (and who said them doesn't really matter; the authors have remained stubbornly anonymous) ... 'those who don't want to see anything cannot help but produce collective disasters ... become seers for ourselves as much as others.'

For whatever reason, these words have stayed with me but it is only now that I understand the 'justice' involved with them. And it leads me to say—in fact, it is an irrepressible need to say—that justice is seeing that which has never stopped happening. This is the sheer involvement of everything with everything and with which comes (and verging on being logical) an equality that is neither owned nor unitized but *spread through*. Justice is seeing this 'there and then' and it is also seeing this as a vision of the future.

screen:

In 'Life after death: how the pandemic has transformed our psychic landscape', 'Jacqueline Rose writes, 'There can be no struggle for justice without a vision of the future'.

voice:

'There can be no struggle for justice without a vision of the future'.
When I read this line, I feel a small yet precious drop of joy.

Then I am re-reading the preface to *The Right to Sex* and notice Amia Srinivasan saying '*let's try to see*'. She is asking big bold questions about the end of the subordination of women, of what would it take for sex to be really free and twice over follows with the compelling gentleness of '*let's try to see*'. I say compelling because with this call (to try) to see I hear nothing other than a call for justice.

Feminism has been my touchstone for what feels like forever and that precious drop of joy gives me all I need to underscore the *vision* that feminism demands and, moreover, demands as 'justice work'.

Doing justice isn't about more punishment; rather, it is about more vision.

Justice is a vision of the future that sees the equality that spreads through everything and which has never stopped coming, never stopped 'persevering' as Spinoza would say. I can't see it any other way: this equality is *unforgettable*. But, at the same time, I can't deny that we have been made to forget, beaten to forget and, worst of all, distracted to the extent that we forget that we have forgotten.

Justice is being able to see the creation of an 'other' that is going to be made inferior, if not trodden on and bashed down, so that a superior one is constituted and rises up smelling of roses. Justice is seeing this happen with the conquered and the colonized and, moreover, perpetuated within the ubiquitous patriarchal family and so many 'norms'. Yet normalisations—of inequalities and classifications of lesser beings ('women' worldwide know a lot about this)—all too quickly produce blind spots or, worse still, the turning of a blind eye.

With justice becoming 'a seer' there is little that can be taken for granted or presumed and this includes those inherited conventions and customs of justice. Maybe that is precisely it: justice is to see with as little presumption as possible.

Is *that* such a tall order?

screen:

This much I can say, there is no authority to which justice is answerable or accountable. There never would be justice if that happened.

voice:

The more I think about it the more I realise that justice (unlike the law) can't be accounted for. Justice is unaccountable, but this hasn't at all stopped those calls for justice that are coming from all over the world; in fact, quite the opposite.

I have had only the bare minimum to go on and far from being debilitating it has given me a sparking clarity; not only am I able to see the unaccountability of justice but also the unaccountability of the sheer involvement of everything with everything—there isn't anything that holds everything to account or if there is it is *everything* and incalculably so. With climate change and damage to the planet we are witnessing this so often.

Take one thing away and everything begins to collapse and this can be seen in those situations where something is reintroduced after being removed. What immediately springs to mind are grey wolves and beavers. You simply can't extricate, isolate or determine *that* authority to which everything is answerable.

And these words become consolidated as I am reminded of something once said by the late Jean-Luc Nancy: 'identifying "God" is a fundamental impossibility', and it means 'God' can never be identified as *that* sort of authority.

screen:

That a rule is applicable provides for the law the element of calculation without which it could not reason or operate, but justice is incalculable.

voice:

I am coming to understand that justice isn't a matter of rules and calculation: justice is incalculable. For sure, in seeing bad treatment there is calculation—it has been *persistent*—but this isn't the application of a rule; rather, it is *calculating with the incalculable*. What strikes me about this incalculability is that it is akin to the equality that spreads through everything involved with everything.

I cannot think of equality as a possession, something belonging to bodies as units, measurable and calculable. Equality is extremely radical; it spreads through everything and is profoundly incalculable. But saying this I am not at all denying the brutal mutilation, cruelty and violence done to bodies, be they of flesh and blood or wood and water.

With calls for justice, from climate justice to racial justice, earth justice, social justice, sexuality, gender and so many forms of life treated so badly, what I perceive is an understanding, even if not directly expressed, of the incalculability of both justice and equality. And maybe with these calls for justice, in their chorus and cacophony, there comes yet one more justice call, which is for the *incalculability of life*.

Let's try to see ... become seers for ourselves as much as others—of course this isn't seeing at a distance, something like the (mythical) position of the objective gaze. For the individualistic point of view the call may seem impossible, which is to see by including yourself.

And doing that myself, I have to say: the seeing that justice calls for is the most radical aspect of the formation of friendship, which is something more than friendship being a nice thing that happens between individuals (be they human or not), and most certainly more than what happens in the playground (our awful political system) where friendships are made or broken for personal (or economic) gain.

screen:

What is truly radical with the formation of friendship is being free from *one being better than an other*, one becoming better by putting down, denigrating or exploiting an other.

voice:

With friendship there is freedom from being either superior or inferior and it makes for one thing: equality. What stands out about this equality is that it is never apportioned. In friendship *equality spreads through us*.

We experience it, I know I have.

It's easy to think that friendship is about sharing stuff, be it food or things like that, but first and foremost friendship is about sharing friendship itself. This sharing, rather than linking what is separate, involves us much in the same way that I spoke earlier of everything being involved with everything. And this is really to say that friendship isn't architectural; it doesn't construct sides with the one facing the other.

From the start, friendship has been 'non-binary'.

So many calls for justice and with each call there comes a

demand for me and you to see not only bad treatment and the inadequacies of existing laws but also *seeing* in the sense of having vision and, at least for me, both these ways of seeing call upon—and *call for*—the most radical aspect of the formation friendship.

Friendship gives me a paradigm of equality and, what's more, it gives me a paradigm of freedom born through sharing and sharing not just stuff but also ourselves. The Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta did get it right when, in the 1890s, he put freedom and friendship together '*... such a society of free human beings, such a society of friends ...*' and let's include all other sorts of beings.

There is something else to say about friendship. It took me awhile to understand although it was staring me in face all along: friendship doesn't do merit or obedience or disobedience; it also doesn't do imperatives (you must) or commands (you will) or duties (you ought). With friendship no one is giving orders, but there is giving, perhaps nothing but giving. I have had little to go on but now I'm confident to say that justice is not and never will be revenge or 'payback time' and, what's more, it isn't based upon a model of exchange.

Justice and friendship are both free of debt of any kind.

screen:

'*Justice means everyone*' writes Lola Olufemi in her *Feminism, Interrupted*.

voice:

'*Justice means everyone.*' Today, as I re-read these italicised words, I sense the presence of a radical equality spreading through them, added to which they are saying and *emphasising* that justice doesn't divide the world into the 'good guys' and the 'bad guys'. Justice demands, sometimes quietly and sometimes loudly, that we don't settle comfortably in these divisions

... there are no just wars there is just war.

Friendship is truly remarkable, and as all of the above sinks in, particularly in the face of so much bad treatment that needs fixing, the smallest drop of joy I experienced earlier swells to become—I'll dare to say this—oceanic. We don't need more government or less government, what we need first and foremost, and the sheer volume of calls that are mad about justice attests to this, is friendship—*let's try to see*.

P.S.

At the end of his epic book, *Debt: the first 5,000 years*, David Graeber says that freedom—‘real freedom’—is the ability to make friends. Friendship, along with justice, is giving without a debt of any kind. And giving without debt is the one thing I feel makes sense of doing art.

Notes/references

- *Mad about justice*—I borrow these words from Jacques Derrida’s astounding and intense text: ‘Force of law: The “mystical foundations of authority”’ published in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice* (Routledge, 1992).
- Jacqueline Rose, *Life after death: how the pandemic has transformed our psychic landscape* (Guardian, 7 December, 2021).
- Amia Srinivasan, Preface, *The Right To Sex* (Bloomsbury, 2021).
- Lola Olufemi, *Feminism, Interrupted: Disrupting Power* (Outspoken, Pluto, 2020, p121).
- David Graeber, *Debt: the first 5,000 years* (Melville House, 2014, p391).

Footage

- G8 protesters clash with police, 11 June, 2013.
- Elephant run, Kenya (Amboseli Trust) for elephants, 2015.
- New Jersey protest against racism and police brutality dancing the ‘cupid shuffle’ May 2020. (The ‘cupid shuffle’ comes from Cupid 2007 album and connects to the Electric Slide created in 1976 by the Broadway performer Richard L. ‘Ric’ Silver.)
- Performance of ‘Un violator en tu camino’ by Chilean feminist collective Las Tesis at Santiago Centro, Chile, Nov 2019. (This dance would be performed world wide.)
- Iranian girl dancing on Tehran metro Nov 2014.
- Iranian girl dancing July 2018 at night in support of Maerdeh Hojabri who was arrested for dancing on instagram. (In Iran and other countries in our world it is ‘illegal’ for women to dance publicly, which includes social media posts. Yet women have danced and they have been incarcerated. In protest, other women have danced ‘illegally’. Seeing this I see nothing short of a vision of friendship and justice.)