

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نپاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

Ray Acheson

10.02.2025

The Time of Monsters



Image by Alessandro Benassi.

In *Fire Weather*, author John Vaillant describes the “Lucretius Problem,” a phenomenon wherein people can have all the information about what is happening yet fail to understand that it *is* happening. People tend to perceive reality within the confines of what they have already experienced, and struggle to grasp a worst-case scenario even as it unfolds around them. Vaillant, writing about the Fort McMurray fire in Alberta, Canada in 2016, is talking about the increasing destructive potential of fire due to the climate crisis, the fossil fuel extraction industry, and changes in the materials and methods for building towns and cities. But the concept is equally applicable to the devastation being wrought by the new US political regime.

The *New York Times*, as just one example, used its morning newsletter on 6 February to describe Trump's first weeks in office as relatively weak, focusing primarily on the walk-backs of tariffs on Canada and Mexico. The newsletter only briefly mentioned the executive orders aimed at eliminating immigrants and trans people, and failed to mention at all that tech bros and incels are gleefully running amok in the corridors of power under (unelected) Elon Musk's command, gaining unprecedented access to Social Security payment systems, closing agencies and firing federal workers, and, at this point, who even knows what else. As journalist Parker Molloy noted, "If this were happening in any other country, we'd call it what it is: a coup."

Yet in certain quarters, US exceptionalism persists. Many mainstream politicians and pundits are still clinging to the notion that "it can't happen here," that the system's "checks and balances" will prevail, even as the institutions they claim to believe in are being lit on metaphorical fire. These same folks also refuse to take responsibility for building the scaffolding upon which these acts of fascism are taking place, by building and feeding the surveillance, border, deportation, incarceration, and war machines for decades.

Putting aside the liberal "Lucretius Problem," though, we need to focus on—and exploit—the same failure of imagination of the fascists leading the coup.

As writer John Ganz points out, "Musk's total idiocy is structural: it goes back to the very origin of the Greek term *idiotes*, a person who cannot understand the shared political life of the city. These people cannot understand that their wealth and power are not their sovereign creations but the shared product of the wider state and society that supports and sustains them."

We see the same structural idiocy in Israel's belief that it can bomb, starve, or genocide its way to what it wants in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Iran. We can also see it in Trump's arrogant belief that he can buy or invade Canada, Greenland, the Panama Canal, and now Gaza, too, because why not? The Biden administration helped Israel destroy Gaza, now he just needs to get rid of those pesky Palestinian people—and if there's anything he's good at it's getting rid of people; he is flexing his ethnic cleansing muscles already by shipping immigrants off to Guantánamo Bay and perhaps El Salvador's notoriously brutal mega-prison.

One destructive impulse feeds off the other. Structural idiocy is fueled by a lack of consequences. Like the Fort McMurray fire described by John Vaillant, the flames and heat become more intense the more the fire burns. The more Trump, Musk, or Netanyahu can get away with, the more invincible they will believe themselves to be. US support for, and the

world's failure to stop, Israel's genocide of Palestinians will haunt us here; as Tariq Kenney-Shawa warns, "When children can be sniped at will, when hospitals and journalists are apparently legitimate targets, when a military can posthumously deem their victims 'terrorists' with no need for evidence and still receive unconditional funding and support from the defenders of the so-called rules-based international order, then we are all dragged back to a point in our evolution we thought we left in the past."

The pardoning of the January 6 insurrectionists, too, will haunt us—not only were the consequences for those would-be coup-mongers removed, but they are now trying to go after the people who prosecuted them and seek reparations for their temporary incarceration. It's like the men who sue for libel after being accused of sexual assault—the message is one of intimidation and dominance: "I am allowed to abuse you, and if you try to stop me, I will ruin your life." It is a form of sadism, as Judith Butler explains, a celebration of a certain kind of masculinity that "parades as freedom, while the freedoms for which many of us have struggled for decades are distorted and trampled as morally repressively 'wokeism'."

Cruelty is the mentality of this US political regime. Hate, abuse, humiliation, intimidation, incarceration, and physical violence are the mainstays of the men occupying DC. Built on the cruelties of US empire that have led to this moment, the increasing criminalization of migrants, trans people, and abortion are the devastating beginning of this administration's onslaught against human life and dignity. It does not seem like the oligarchs taking control of the country have a line they won't cross; given that much of their action since taking over the government has been unlawful and unconstitutional, it's not clear where they will stop or who they will harm or eliminate in their quest for absolute power, power that they perceive to be their own personal Manifest Destiny.

But nothing is inevitable. And as has been demonstrated with Trump's capitulations in various ways to Canada, Colombia, Mexico, and in relation to the attempt to freeze all federal funding, even things that do occur can be undone, delayed, mitigated, frustrated. Due to their structural idiocy, Musk and Trump and their lackeys do not understand consequences for their actions. "Their theory of change seems to be that they are going to do stuff and then it will be done," writes Rebecca Solnit. "Like they're moving furniture around, like you and I and the trans and immigrant communities and federal workers and Canada and Mexico are just so many sofas and chairs that are going to sit where they place us. Like we're inanimate objects." But this, she warns, is a fundamental misunderstanding of human nature.

We have the capacity to make fascists feel the consequences of being fascist. We have the capacity to revolt, oppose, slow things down, challenge every order. Many are already

engaged in this work, led by immigrant, trans, and Indigenous communities. Teachers in Chicago prevented ICE from entering their school, students in Los Angeles walked out of classrooms to protest detention and deportation, school systems across the country have declared they will not comply with Trump’s anti-trans executive orders, lawmakers and community members are holding hospitals accountable for refusing to provide gender-affirming care, unions have launched a lawsuit to prevent Musk from accessing the Department of Labor.

Mass harm is being done and more is to come. But there is a revolutionary potential to this moment, both within the United States and in terms of US relations with other countries. We can make sure there are consequences for fascism—if we are in solidarity with one another, if we act, if we confront their hate with love for justice and each other.

The last few weeks has given new life to Antonio Gramsci’s quote, “The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: now is the time of monsters.” As usual, Gramsci is right. But also, monsters are what we make of them. While their actions are monstrous, the men performing them are human beings. We should be wary of giving them the power of monsters, of affording them mythical, unopposable status. They are men. They can be defeated.

The ways that cultures have told stories about threats taking the form of monsters offers key insights into the consequences of hubris and greed—monsters arising from the displacement or elimination of Indigenous or Black or communities, or from nuclear weapon explosions; monsters that take root in misogyny or transphobia or racism; monsters that grow from people’s own fears and hatreds only to turn against those that imagined them into existence. There is a myriad of ways that US imperialism and warmaking can be told through tales of monsters, as so well articulated by W. Scott Poole in *Dark Carnivals*.

But monsters are many things. Monsters can also be defenders, conscience, resistance. Throughout social and cultural history, many outcasts from mainstream society—including queer, Black, Indigenous, and disabled folks—have been cast as monsters. Our marginalization from mainstream politics and economics has made us leaders in mutual aid, popular education, resilience, art, creativity, and joy. Our struggles for survival are generational. We know there are ebbs and flows to the way we are treated and perceived, and that the only way we win is by fighting back and being in solidarity with each other. Just like the *kaiju* that rise to take on other monsters that are bent on destroying society, so will we rise and resist again.

FEBRUARY 7, 2025

Ray Acheson (they/them) is Director of Reaching Critical Will, the disarmament program of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). They provide analysis and advocacy at the United Nations and other international forums on matters of disarmament and demilitarization. Ray served on the steering group of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), which won the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize for its work to ban nuclear weapons, and is also involved in organizing against autonomous weapons, the arms trade, war and militarism, the carceral system, and more. They are author of Banning the Bomb, Smashing the Patriarchy (Rowman & Littlefield, 2021) and Abolishing State Violence: A World Beyond Bombs, Borders, and Cages (Haymarket Books, 2022).