

Is cruelty cool?

Is cruelty cool?

Third, revised edition

Copyright © 2020-2026 Angelina Souren

All rights reserved.

Essay, non-fiction, self-published.

Amazon hardcover edition, 5.5" x 8.5", matte cover.

Printed on white paper in Britannic Bold and Bookman Old Style.

ISBN: 9798871553510

Version date: 28 February 2026

Keywords: cruelty, sadism, discrimination, racism, sexism, misogyny, homophobia, bullying, otherization, bias, stigma, gerontophobia, fear, nationalism, inequality, stigmatisation, ableism, migrants, demonisation, policy, politics, philosophy, feminism, medicine, health, inclusivity, inclusion, inclusiveness, diversity, mental health, migration, stalking, corruption, violence, crime

Notes

You are not allowed to republish or translate this work or part of this work without the prior written permission from the author. That's me, Angelina Souren. Thank you for respecting the hard work and time that I put into this book.

I haven't referenced this book the way I would in a scientific publication because that would have made it harder to read. I have included a few references at the end of the book. Feel free to get in touch me, however, if you want to know more. You can contact me for example via angelinasouren@gmail.com, but keep in mind that my emails do not always reach me.

Is cruelty cool?

Angelina Souren

Dedicated to the guy who developed a crush on
Suzanne Hulscher when she was working in Canada
and who looked out for her when nobody else did

Table of contents

Foreword	i
1. It wasn't bullying	1
2. How do you become a target for cruelty?	13
3. The words alone	29
4. Workplace bullying in England	35
5. Can cruelty bring joy?	45
6. How disparity and ultimately hate arises	69
7. Expectations and beliefs	77
8. Epilogue	93
Further reading and listening	113
About the author	117

Foreword

I'm Dutch. I have an earth and life science background. On 9 June 2008, I became the target of a phenomenon known as sadistic stalking. It is mostly fuelled by resentment and contempt. I was in England at the time. As I was not only a migrant, hence a low-skilled thief and liar but also a woman, over 45, not married, not rich yet claiming to be educated and intelligent, and now saying that someone seemed to be out to destroy me, I was unable to obtain any support with this challenge.

So I dove into the topic of personality disorders and other forms of neurodiversity, but also inequality and so on and that somehow led me to bioethics. As I was exposed to a lot of sadism and was pretty shocked by how acceptable cruelty is in England, I then started looking into the background of that too.

Bioethics is a combination of science, medicine, technology, philosophy and law. Law in itself is also based on philosophy, but legislation lags behind relative to reality whereas bioethics is often forward-looking.

Bioethics is about **equality** and **fairness**. It's about treating people as well as non-human animals fairly, about making sure that certain groups of individuals are not being disadvantaged. It's about **justice**.

- So this has to do with all forms of diversity, including so-called disabilities or impairments such as deafness and autism, and also personality disorders as well as for example bipolar disorder, along with the way we look.
- This is, therefore, also about inclusivity – and its opposite, otherization – and the neuroscience that explains how otherization comes about. It is even about phenomena such as stalking and extremism because they are often related to otherization. It's about police brutality, too.
- It is also about speciesism, consumerism and anthropogenic pollution. Do we have the right to destroy the habitat of other species just because they are other species? Do we have the right to exploit non-human animals? Do we even have the right to pollute?

It's about **politics** and **policy** and **governance** and **public administration**. It's also about encouraging **public debate**.

Discussions in bioethics largely revolve around the following two main questions:

- *Should* we do this? (That is: Would this be the right thing to do?)
- *How* should we do this? (That is: How can we do this as fairly, as equitable as possible?)

It's about the **avoidance of harm**.

A powerful example is the case of He Jian Kui and the deployment of the CRISPR technology. Not only did He Jian Kui spend three years in a Chinese prison after his illegal CRISPR experiments, in which he created gene-edited human babies, the shock effect of what he did also reverberated around the world and caused American policy to flip repeatedly in a short time period. I attended the first scientific meeting in which He participated since his release from prison. He didn't appear to have learned a thing.

Another example is the so-called Groningen protocol for neonatal euthanasia and the resistance against it around the world. You can see the controversy surrounding deep-sea mining as another example and certainly almost everything that happened within the context of Covid-19.

In a sense, it is about **balance**, about the need to maintain an **equilibrium**.

The seeking of equilibrium is a dominating factor in the physical and natural sciences. It's why a ball rolls downhill, not uphill. It's why a radiator is able to heat up a room and doesn't simply stay hot all by itself. It's why winds blow. It's why mountains develop and it's also why they crumble. It's why species can go extinct. It's why ocean flows can change and why ice caps can melt and why climate change is taking place. It's why chemical reactions occur and it's how biological organisms function. It's why you are able to have light when you flip that switch. It's why birds die and crops fail when humans kill insects. It's why dams in rivers are no longer seen as brilliant solutions.

So it's about **consequences**.

Inequality is the result of **otherization**, which is the result of power imbalances but also of **neuroscience**. So, forms of deprivation such as food poverty and fuel poverty are also tied into bioethics. So is climate (in)justice.

It was Fritz Jahr who came up with the word "bioethics" in 1927 when he published the article: *"Bio-Ethik: Eine Umschau über die ethischen Beziehungen des Menschen zu Tier und Pflanze"* (Bioethics: A look at the ethical relationships of humans to animals and plants").

Jahr also introduced what he would later call "the Bioethical Imperative":

"All living beings are entitled to respect and should be treated not as means but as ends in themselves."

So, bioethics sensu lato is about accommodating human and animal diversity and allowing everyone enough space to breathe and flourish, according to their own wishes and without harming anyone. This obviously means that we have to look after all species' habitats as well as our own (earth) and it also entails that bioethics includes medical and legal aspects. Bioethics sensu stricto is clinical or medical ethics.

Where does my knowledge come from, other than my early experiences as a woman in a traditionally male field (geology), a study into gender bias in sociobiology conducted as part of my Master's, in addition to the many meetings that I attend nowadays, usually online, papers and books that I read and the occasional course that I participate in?

Like most scientific researchers, I've emigrated a few times. I've still probably spent most of my adult life in Amsterdam, but even though I am Dutch, the Netherlands never really felt like home to me. I generally got along well with the Spanish, but to my astonishment, the States, specifically Florida, that's where I felt truly at home. Here, it wasn't considered odd to want to excel and to be an optimist with a can-do and go-for-it spirit.

After I turned thirty, the Dutch considered me too old to still start a career in academia. I'd worked in tourism and hospitality before I enrolled as a fulltime earth science student. I'd quit my job in my mid-twenties. Americans didn't have a problem with my age at all. I must

have been a very confusing graduate. I looked much younger than I actually was, with my broad smile, my enthusiasm and my smooth skin, but I was much older than most people assumed. I once even got hired in the Netherlands and then instantly un-hired after I completed my paperwork, when people discovered that I was older than they'd thought.

Here we have it in a nutshell. My first encounters with bias. In this case, it concerned gender, age and looks. As my parents had little more than primary school, I must also have built up some experience with regard to what it is like to be from an out-group. I knew nothing about academia and went on to make mistakes that probably could have been prevented, had I known a little better what I was doing when I set out to become a full professor with my own research group. (I let go of that goal when I was in my mid-forties.)

Throughout primary school and also during three of my six years in secondary school, I was in girls-only classes. During my geology studies, I noticed that I would sometimes be ignored in classes when I offered an answer or explanation, only for a guy to pipe up with the same comment next and not be ignored. That's not discrimination. It's the critical mass effect. There were very few women in my geology program and there was only one tenured female geologist in the department. It usually works the same way if you're the only guy in a group of women.

In 2004, I emigrated to England. I got to enjoy a plethora of completely unanticipated experiences there, and when I say "enjoy", I am being highly sarcastic. That's how this book came about. I borrow a lot from a talk by neuroscientist Rebecca Saxe and a book by neuroscientist Kathleen Taylor (*"Cruelty. Human evil and the human brain"*) I can't mention it in each sentence to which it applies, but I should stress that much of what I say in this book comes from Kathleen Taylor's book.

Let me finish this foreword by sharing a bunch of things that other people have said within this kind of context.

"It can be difficult at times for sure, but being a marginalised woman can also give a degree of freedom to speak that I might not have had if I were trying to win people's approval all the time. Like folks already hate me, I may as well speak my truth."

– Twyla Baker

"The only way to deal with an unfree world is to become so absolutely free that your very existence is an act of rebellion."

– Albert Camus

"When another person makes you suffer, it is because he suffers deeply within himself, and his suffering is spilling over. He does not need punishment; he needs help. That's the message he is sending."

– Thích Nhất Hạnh

"When I dare to be powerful – to use my strength in the service of my vision – then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid."

– Audre Lorde

"To be beautiful means to be yourself. You don't need to be accepted by others. You need to accept yourself."

– Thích Nhất Hạnh

"...even mild otherization primes people for aggression"

– Kathleen Taylor

"It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."

– Frederick Douglass

"Freedom is not given to us by anyone. We have to cultivate it ourselves."

– Thích Nhất Hạnh

“When you plant lettuce, if it does not grow well, you don't blame the lettuce. You look for reasons it is not doing well. It may need fertilizer, or more water, or less sun. You never blame the lettuce. Yet if we have problems with our friends or family, we blame the other person. But if we know how to take care of them, they will grow well, like the lettuce. Blaming has no positive effect at all, nor does trying to persuade using reason and argument. That is my experience. No blame, no reasoning, no argument, just understanding. If you understand, and you show that you understand, you can love, and the situation will change.”

– Thích Nhất Hạnh

“Talking about cruelty makes it easier to be cruel – unless one's talk incurs swift punishment. Acting out the otherizing ideas, especially in a group whose members compete for status and egg each other on, can push people into extreme otherization with remarkable speed.”

– Kathleen Taylor

“Most of the interesting women you know are far, far angrier than you'd imagine.”

– Laurie Penny

This book is meant to make you think before you judge and asks you to take personal responsibility for what happens in the world around you. It is intended to do some shaking up and also to get a few things off my chest.

If you can't help someone who asks for your help, at least do your best to avoid harming the person. If you can stand up when you see injustice happening to someone else, stand up, speak up, do what you can to limit or stop the harm, because if you don't and look the other way, you're as guilty of the injustice as the person perpetrating it.

1. It wasn't bullying

On 25 May 2017, I ran into an article in Metro UK about a young man who had killed himself because of extensive bullying at his place of work in Reading. Bullying is a highly deliberate public form of inflicting cruelty. Bullying is tied to a location or environment. Workplace bullying is related to work, bullying at school is related to being a student or pupil, and internet or cyber bullying is related to the internet and all electronic means of communication.

Handsome George Cheese often came home with holes in his clothes and bruises on his body, cracks in his soul and tears in his sense of safety. The holes in his clothes were the result of his colleagues having set him on fire. He was mocked after he stood up for himself after he had been locked into a car boot (trunk). He was prescribed antidepressants. He was held down and punched. He was ridiculed.

Here, we see a glimpse of a problem that I initially had no answers for. Why does it sometimes have the opposite effect than what you'd expect when you stand up for yourself? Where does it come from that people then ridicule the victim even more? From the victim's point of view, the behaviour of the others, the ones who are misbehaving towards you, is shameful and seeing those who misbehave becoming glorified can be infuriating and baffling. Are victims of bullying supposed to crawl into a corner and quietly lick their wounds, pretend nothing is going on?

It's a form of otherization. Other people get bullied. Weak people get bullied. Silly people get bullied. Children get bullied. Besides, if you confront people with something that clashes with their beliefs, such as that people like you and me do not get bullied, it can make them perceive you as a threat or at least as unpleasant. That's what neuroscientist Kathleen Taylor says. It may be related to the fact that it is metabolically disadvantageous for the brain to muster up empathy for things we are not familiar with, according to neuroscientist Lisa Barrett Feldman.

I now also know that whether you are perceived as a suitable target for bullying has to do with whether you are seen as one of us – part of the in-group – or as a member of some other group. Not one of us. You don't

even have to be part of a different group. Merely being perceived as such is enough. Not one of us.

Back to the story now.

Utterly flummoxing was the statement that Simon Wright, the immediate superior of Mr Cheese, apparently gave to Metro UK.

"I was in the workshop when a prank was played on George and he was set on fire. It did not go too far."

"We knew where to draw the line. It was not bullying."

After some contemplation, I realised that these statements seemed mostly about the risk that he, his bosses and colleagues thought they ran. To understand what I mean by that, consider the following.

"I was in the workshop when a prank was played on George and George was stabbed with a knife. It did not go too far."

"We knew where to draw the line. It was not bullying."

A relatively small cut may not get the perpetrators in trouble. It will be the perpetrators' word against the victim's word and a small cut can be explained away by a thousand things. An incident that directly lands the employee in hospital and possibly in dire straits, however, is quite another matter.

It reminds me of how utilitarian reasoning can be applied to justify such incidents. The damage and discomfort on the side of the victim are seen as negligible next to the joy experienced by the perpetrators and any passive witnesses. "It was just a prank. We all laughed about it." This happened at the expense of someone else, who was not laughing at all.

It's like eating the weakest member of the crew in a lifeboat after a ship wreck in the middle of the ocean and hunger taking over when the food runs out. It was a necessity. We all filled our bellies. At the expense of someone else.

There is a clear difference between those two situations, however. One was about survival. The other one was merely cruelty.

The coroner conducting the inquest ruled that the employer, an Audi car dealership, was not to blame. Audi UK posted a tweet with a link to a statement on its site. That statement had meanwhile disappeared, but

the critical responses on Twitter, one calling the statement "the weakest I have ever seen" and others using words like "poor", "unacceptable" and "hypocritical" had not. Not a single response was in support of Audi's statement. I asked Audi UK for a copy of that statement, both on Twitter and via e-mail, and to its credit, it dug up the statement for me and sent it to me.

This is what this 26 May 2017 statement said.

"At Audi UK, we remain deeply saddened by the news of the tragic death of George Cheese in 2015 and wish to reiterate our heartfelt condolences to his family and friends."

The inquest heard very personal and painful accounts of events leading to George's death encompassing all aspects of his life, including his time working for Sytner at its dealership in Reading. We are very sorry for the huge loss felt by all those so tragically affected."

The inquest concluded that a number of factors contributed to George's death. However, we want to make it clear that both Audi UK and Sytner absolutely condemn any behaviour which is detrimental to the well-being of employees in any of our franchises."

That sounds appropriate to me, certainly in view of what the coroner had ruled. (That the coroner may have erred is another matter.) Caring, carefully phrased, clear and at the same time diplomatic in the sense of not pointing fingers at specific individuals.

It is my understanding that some kind of training has since taken place at the dealership in question; this likely was up to that dealership, not Audi UK. I asked these good folks how they have been faring. I didn't hear back from the dealership, however.

George Cheese, to me you are still very much alive.

I too have had a colleague who committed suicide, not very long after I went to a garden centre with him to pick out a gift. If I remember correctly, his birthday was a few days before mine and he and his wife had just moved into a new home. That suicide had nothing to do with bullying. I think I had just left the company in question – this was shortly before I emigrated to the US – and the company informed me about the suicide, which I highly appreciated. We were all in shock.

So I imagine that (some of) the employees at the dealership where Mr Cheese worked may have needed counselling in view of what had happened. I sure hope that they've seen the error of their ways with regards to the pretty vicious bullying that went on there. Because folks, that is what it was.

It appears that the coroner put more emphasis on the declined mental health of Mr Cheese than on the crimes committed by the colleagues and employers of Mr Cheese. On page 51 of Kathleen Taylor's book *"Cruelty. Human evil and the human brain"*, in the first and also second paragraph under the heading "Liking and bias", you can read more about how that can play out in real life.

The coroner also sent a report to Mr Cheese's GP practice, among others mentioning the prescription that Mr Cheese had received after he started working at the car dealership, more or less suggesting that if Mr Cheese had not hanged himself, he might have swallowed all of his pills. Was the coroner suggesting that the medical practice was at least partly responsible for what went on at Mr Cheese's place of work, then? Apparently, one of the people at his place of work had actually told him that he should hang himself. That's what he did.

A year later, a similar story caught my eye. Someone set a colleague on fire at work in Bristol. The victim, Harry Hayward, was in hospital for a week because of injuries to neck, arms and legs (13.5% burns). In addition, Mr Hayward contracted PTSD. His colleague was sentenced to 18 months in jail, suspended for two years, as well as ordered to pay £7,500 compensation and carry out 200 hours of unpaid work. Apparently, the judge who gave the suspended sentence came very close to making it an immediate one. Prison time.

In this case, the intention supposedly had not been to set Mr Hayward on fire, but to alight fluid that had been poured into a toilet cubicle while Mr Hayward was using the toilet. That almost sounds too good to be true. We've all watched scenes in TV series and films in which this method is used to set fire to a house or factory. How on earth can you expect someone whose trousers are on his ankles not be set on fire when he is surrounded by flames coming from the floor all around him?

Particularly the first case – the bullying of Mr Cheese – was about the enjoyment of cruelty, pure and simple, however. It was sadistic. The second case – the bullying of Mr Hayward – sounds more like sheer

stupidity.

Mr Cheese was doused in brake fluid and then his clothes were set on fire. Mr Hayward's burns were caused by brake and clutch fluid that had been set on fire. Mr Hayward got burned and contracted PTSD. Mr Cheese got burned and became depressed. The main difference may have been that Mr Cheese seems to have suffered more – or rather a different kind of – mental health damage and Mr Hayward suffered greater physical damage.

Wait a minute. Mr Cheese is dead, while Mr Hayward is still alive.

In Mr Hayward's case, the judicial process assigned blame to the specific colleague who caused Mr Hayward's injuries. His place of work went scot-free. His place of work, however, had a tradition that explained how the injuries came about. They normally turned spray cans into flamethrowers, just for fun. This time, they had run out of spray cans. Unless you happen to be sitting on a toilet, the flame coming from a spray can may be easier to dodge. You can jump out of the way.

In Mr Hayward's case, there had been no intent to harm him while there was a clear intent to harm in Mr Cheese's case. In fact, he had been pushed onto the floor and punched on at least one occasion, leaving him with bruises. People had locked him in the boot of a car and had deliberately set him – the clothes that he was wearing – on fire.

Do you see the difference? There is nothing to jump out of the way from when you are locked into the trunk of a car or if your clothes are on fire. That makes it the deliberate infliction of harm. It wasn't "horseplay". Horseplay requires all parties to be willing participants.

What appears to have happened was that even after his death, Mr Cheese continued to be seen as "not one of us" and that this was considered a good enough reason to do to him what was done to him. He was no longer there to defend himself.

Why didn't Mr Cheese quit his job? I can't help but wonder if the following played a role besides a possible scarcity of jobs. (He was reportedly over the moon when he got hired by this Audi dealership.) When we experience physiological stress, which Mr Cheese most certainly did, we tend to underestimate real danger. This is a mechanism of the endocrine system to protect our health as long-term serious physiological stress is usually very harmful to the body.

As a result, Mr Cheese may have kept telling himself that things weren't really that bad, that he could handle it and he may have blamed himself more than he blamed his work environment. "I am being bullied at work so something has to be wrong with me. Please, fix me so that they will stop bullying me."

All it may take to remedy such a situation is one person who says *"Quit the damn job! Quit! There is nothing wrong with you, it's those jerks that have a problem."*

It appears that he had been trying to get into the army, though. I deduce that from the report that the coroner sent to Mr Cheese's GP practice.

A while after that, I came across a case of community bullying in which a family with several autistic family members was being targeted relentlessly. I think this was somewhere in Somerset. Bristol, perhaps. The local council then – supposedly accidentally – sent a confidential file on the targeted family to the bullying party. This could only have been an accident if the family that was being targeted received papers intended for the bullies. It is very hard to imagine how highly specific postal mail intended for me somehow accidentally ends up being addressed to people who live two doors or one street away from me unless both parties receive each other's mail from the same sender, so that it clearly was accidentally put into the wrong envelope. I have been living in England long enough to know how these things are often played out in practice. It was the family that was being bullied that was forced to move. It's never the bullies.

Next, I read a 2007 article about an older case, in Newcastle. A family was being bullied in a similar way as the family in which several people are autistic. Different about them is that they have red hair. That small difference alone seems to have been enough to trigger massive community bullying. They too were forced to move repeatedly as the bullying included smashed windows and graffiti. You can live with graffiti, but you can't live with smashed windows.

2. How do you become a target for cruelty?

Now I need to tell you who the woman in the photo on the cover is. It's Janice Morris. It's also me. I'll get to that.

Ms Morris was 49 years old when five young people poured water and flour over her and threw eggs at her while she was sitting on a park bench. She was spat at, too. One of the five attackers took the photo that I have used for the cover of this book and shared it online. It has since been shared so widely by the media that I consider it part of the public domain.

That specific attacker was also the only one whose name became known as he turned 18 shortly after the incident occurred. That is how I know that while he was lucky enough not to receive a custodian sentence for his attack on Ms Morris, he later still went to prison after he attacked someone else, namely Matthew Banks. The media described Matthew Banks as a "vulnerable" man. They also called Ms Morris "vulnerable". It is often used as a euphemism for learning-disabled, isn't it? It is often used for someone who "isn't right in the head", isn't it?

According to the media, most of Ms Morris's five attackers supposedly came from "good" middle-class families. This in itself speaks volumes as it seems to convey a character judgement based on one's socioeconomic status. The attackers' parents all seem to have said that the attack was the fault of one of the other attackers.

It was one of *them*. One of *them* caused all this. It wasn't one of us.

By the time that the fifth attacker, the eldest of the five, was sentenced for the next attack, he supposedly was "of no fixed address". After the first attack, he'd lost his job and his college place. Apparently, his family kicked him out. This may have happened to him before as he was described as "back with his family" after the first attack. I am curious about his background, but haven't been able to find out more.

Here's the thing. If this guy and his buddies had not shared the image material on social media and if it had not gone viral, chances are that nobody would have given a damn. The attack would likely have had no repercussions for the attackers and Ms Morris might well have become

the target of more attacks while everyone around her merely shrugged about it.

I was 47 when I was attacked while sitting on a bench, just like Janice Morris. Five thugs, younger than the ones who attacked Ms Morris as far as I can tell, threw water and sand over me and pelted stones at me. Two stones hit my head. This happened in Southampton, in Woolston.

Ironically, I had been sitting on a bench reading and annotating a report on the forensics practice in the Netherlands. See, I am not “vulnerable”. I am educated. In fact, my IQ has been assessed as 133. While it’s not stellar or extragalactic, it shows you that there is nothing “not right in the head” about me. I am quite capable and able. I was working on the Dutch version of Forensics for Dummies at the time.

The weather was lovely and I wanted to sit outside in the sunshine. I often went to the nearest Costa Coffee to work on the terrace there, but that was a long walk along the Itchen Bridge. This time, I decided to stay closer to home. There wasn’t anything even vaguely approaching a Costa Coffee in my neighbourhood, so I perched on a low wall on the left bank of the River Itchen. Starbucks hadn’t arrived yet in the UK back then, but even now, there still isn’t a Costa Coffee or Starbucks or anything like it in the streets around where I was living at the time. Nothing.

Three lads started to harass me. I told them off, but I didn’t feel comfortable with them hanging around – besides, they were distracting me – and I decided to relocate so that I could concentrate. I found a bench along a road. The location was not as good as the other one, but being able to work in peace made up for that.

The lads apparently had gone in search of me after I relocated – or maybe they even followed me – because shortly after, they showed up with two more buddies and attacked me out of the blue. I had not seen them arrive as I was concentrating on my report. The attack came completely out of nowhere. I felt fortunate that I had not been working on my laptop as it surely would have been ruined.

When I walked away from the scene, I encountered a woman about my age walking along the pavement in the opposite direction. I warned her that I had just been attacked. She scoffed at me. WTF!?! She didn’t know me. I didn’t know her. Why on earth did she scoff at me?

The attack baffled me and scared me. It made me angry, too. I was

fuming. Furious! What on earth could have motivated a bunch of youngsters to attack me while I sat working on a bench?

What concerned me even more was the degree of approval there appeared to be among a certain percentage of the adults in the community around me. Strangers evidently had been gossiping about me for a while without ever having spoken with me.

I didn’t see a doctor, but I stopped work for a week. I’d had a severe concussion before, so I knew that I didn’t have that, but it was clear enough that I had to take it easy for a little while. A physician would merely have told me the same: to take it easy. One of the bumps on my head was painful and interfered with my sleep.

The youngsters in question felt so secure that they parked their butts on the low wall surrounding the property in which I was living, one or two days later. I actually panicked. They had never done that before. They seemed to be making a point. They were part of the in-group and would be absolved of any wrongdoing no matter what they did. I was not part of that in-group. That seemed to be their message. That I had no standing.

What caused this? Well, a combination of things. Certain politicians had been going on about how foreigners only came to the UK to enjoy benefits there, cleverly concealing that this wasn’t even possible, that you had to have been in the UK for a number of years (five?) before you could become eligible for benefits. In fact, you had to supply ample proof of income – in person – in order to get a National Insurance number. I was in my mid forties. I was not married. (Marriage was still the highest attainable accomplishment for most English women at the time. This may have changed in the meantime.) I did not leave home to go to my place of work every morning and I didn’t return like clockwork every evening. I was working from home, but people around me must have assumed that I was “not right in the head” and on disability benefits. Does that really make it okay to attack someone?

One woman in a shop asked me if I was alright, however, with a concerned look on her face. (Thank you, stranger. I remember you with gratitude.) People had clearly been talking about what had happened.

The local police were aware but never came over. I had said that I didn’t want them to come over, but an Englishman in the Netherlands e-mailed me about two somewhat similar attacks that I fortunately had not been

aware of at the time of the attack. Ernest Norton was attacked in a similar manner as I was when he was playing cricket with his son. He died. The youngsters even threw half a brick at Mr Norton. It broke his jaw. Sophie Lancaster was killed when her boyfriend was attacked and she came to his aid. They were both Goths.

I was in my fifties when stones were being thrown at me again. This time it was on the beach in Southsea in Portsmouth, near the South Parade Pier. While it had the semblance of a coincidence, it also had the threat of something much darker as the rest of the entire beach was clear. Why throw stones in my direction? I decided to leave, just in case. I walked away calmly.

In the same town (Portsmouth), a bucket containing a liquid was emptied over me very deliberately along Kingston/London Road near Kingston Crescent one Sunday afternoon by two young men who first greeted me with a courteous and neutral “good afternoon” or something along those lines. I returned the greeting. Should I not have? Was that my mistake? Surely not. I acted as if nothing had happened, as I did not want to give them the satisfaction that they must have been after. I went home, took a shower and washed my hair, taking the possibility into account that the liquid thrown over me hadn’t been water.

These are examples of things that sober people do to complete strangers in England. This too is bullying. It’s cruelty carried out in public and accepted by far too many people as perfectly permissible.

I still have so much trouble wrapping my head around the fact that cruelty appears to be accepted by default in England. It’s glorified. Kindness is mistaken for weakness. This only changes within the context of an attack if public opinion swings against it, for example, when something goes viral on social media and other people speak out because they are appalled. It also occurs when someone happens to die such as when Ernest Norton was attacked while playing sports with his son in his own neighbourhood.

Like I said, I am pretty sure that if the photo that the attackers took of Ms Morris had not gone viral and there had not been subsequent online outrage, the police would not have done a thing. I heard about it from someone in the United States, in fact. He’d seen it on Facebook. That the case went to court and that the attackers were sentenced is unusual.

Now it is time for me to be very blunt. British Prime Ministers signal time and time again that this kind of behaviour is perfectly okay. When Boris Alexander De Pfeffel Johnson spouted verbal abuse at random groups of people who he considers inferior, he was whipping up hate against them. EU citizens. Gay people. People from Africa. People who study hard and work hard.

Does he believe that this sort of behaviour gives him edge? “Me superman, bwah-ha-ha. Me hurl abuse. Me eat lots of spinach and carry a baseball bat at all times. Me make abusive jokes that many people find embarrassing. Me likey likey insulting people.”

When others do this, it *is* hopefully usually considered ridiculous, but when a Prime Minister does this, it encourages incidents such as what happened to Chris Whitty in June 2021. Chris Whitty was the UK’s version of Anthony Fauci in the US after the pandemic hit.

Johnson is not the only UK PM who’s done that. In early December 2023, I saw that Rishi Sunak’s Number 10 had issued a chilling statement. I had not expected this from Sunak. It’s in the style of the rhetoric of Geert Wilders and Donald Trump, but scarier. Sunak was touting us foreigners in the UK as “undercutting British workers”. I find the use of the word “cutting” particularly concerning because it subliminally suggests that immigrants commit knife crimes. It also once again blames us for Britain’s low wages, and I’m not aware at all of any undergrads bringing their families to the UK (or any other country, for that matter).

Of EU citizens wishing to live in the UK, Johnson’s Home Secretary Priti Patel claimed that we’re all “**cheap, low-skilled labour**” and that our numbers would be reduced. The latter sounded like Nazi rhetoric. I found it really creepy. Boris Johnson warned us openly that we shouldn’t dare feel at home in the UK, that it was outrageous that some of us had truly made our home there. In terms of tax contributions, EU citizens were in fact propping up Brits because the latter caused a net drain on the system whereas EU citizens were putting billions into the UK’s coffers. Can cold hard numbers trump cold hard false rhetoric? (No.)



Many English people will disagree with what I am saying, just like most whites in England believe that there is very little racism in the UK. The experiences of non-whites here contrast strongly with that idea.

Large chunks of England are fiercely misogynistic and viciously gerontophobic and many folks here still harbour laughable colonial views about everyone and everything located beyond Dover. All you find over there are banana republics with fake universities and fake degrees. Diploma mills, that's what they are, those foreign universities! Only England has real universities. They're all thieves and liars who are out to get you, those foreigners. Dentistry in the Netherlands is of a pretty high level, though, I was once told. For a banana republic? It's how British insularity often works out in practice. Yes, I am from the Royal Banana Republic of the Netherlands.

Xenophobia towards foreigners is not the whole story, not at all. There is after all also a high level of distrust against anyone else from anywhere else even if the latter is only 20 miles down the road, or even 5. This level of insularity often approaches complete paranoia towards anyone who is perceived as a stranger. It can express itself as xenophobia towards foreigners, but I think that it is often not discrimination of foreigners but much more generally of people who are perceived as "not one of us".

The emphasis on group differences in England may also have led to a tendency to go after anyone perceived as "weak" or "vulnerable" in any

way, such as people with any kind of physical disability, people with Parkinson's and autistic people, or unaccompanied women sitting on a bench. It also applies to anyone who looks a little different, such as people with red hair. By the way, is that related to the idea that red-haired people are Irish? No Irish, no coloured, no kids.



Credit: *Race Relations Board* (1969) BFI/Crown on BFI Player (<https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-race-relations-board-1969-online>)

The above image is from London in the 1960s. Maybe one day someone will explain to me what the English had against Irish people. Was it the mere fact that they were immigrants? Could it still have to do with a medieval fear that strangers might be carrying the plague just like Boris Johnson talked about Covid "washing up on our shores"? Along with refugees, eh, Mr Johnson.

Does that photo also express cruelty? I think so. The children were possibly added to the list, as an afterthought, for the same reasons that many landlords don't allow pets. Children and pets are seen as loud and messy. It is more or less also why you can't run a pub from your home. Pubs are loud and messy.

But people of colour? Irish people? That's otherization. Discrimination.

Was this cruelty? Yes. Imagine that you wouldn't be allowed a place to live just "because". It's cruel to be left outside in the cold and the rain just because.

Let's go back to occurrences such as the attack on Janice Morris and the bullying of George Cheese, which I talked about in the previous chapter. As a highly educated woman who is not "vulnerable" (in practice often a euphemism for "mentally impaired or having a mental health condition") yet became targeted, I know all too well how impossible it is to stand up for yourself in such circumstances. The mere fact that you are being targeted seems to convey that you deserve to be, that you have earned it, that there is something wrong with you, that you are "vulnerable". The fact that you are being abused seems to imply that you have been asking for abuse.

If you complain about what is being done to you, you are likely to find yourself being covertly assessed for how much there is wrong with you. I wish I were kidding. The mere fact that you are being interfered with is mistaken as a signal that there has to be something "wrong" with you, that you are "not right in the head", thus best avoided and can be easily ignored without fear of (legal) repercussions.

I wonder if this may also have something to do with what psychologist Daniel Kahneman calls the focusing illusion. It creates a mismatch between what someone experiences and what others see. It's when onlookers attach too much significance to one particular aspect of another person's life. An example is that able-bodied people tend to underestimate the quality of life of people who we still often describe as "disabled", a term that erroneously indicates that there is no ability left. Onlookers see that someone is disabled and that is all they can still see. On the basis of that tunnel vision, they conclude that disabled people must be miserable all the time and thus they deem the lives of disabled people not worth living. Just like other people, however, most disabled people experience life in all its aspects. Just like able-bodied people, different disabled people also have different characters and different ways of coping with life.

Could it be that getting bullied, abused and harassed, just like often happens with disabled people, leads to dehumanization? Observers associate the powerlessness of being abused, bullied and harassed with a complete lack of ability on the part of the victim. They may feel nothing

but pity. They consider the victims pitiful and as very different from themselves. If Mr Whitty hadn't been in the public spotlights because of the Covid pandemic at the time, he too would likely have met with mere pity, and little if any outrage. No action would have been taken.

Another example is that of poverty. Poverty is usually approached with the same narrow tunnel vision as being bullied, hassled and harassed or any kind of being different-bodied is. Homelessness is another example in which this plays an extremely limiting role. It also happens to refugees and to victims of sexual violence as well as to people who've been to prison. The focusing illusion wipes out the identity of people and equates them with one particular aspect of their lives. This can even be merely one event that happened decades ago.

Attacking someone, on the other hand, often gives you edge among your peers, among the people in your own group. Attacking someone who appears to be "vulnerable" and who is not expected to stand up for himself or herself and fight back is seen as relatively risk-free.

Does this actually express utter vulnerability – fear – on the part of the people who attack others? Is extreme insecurity their motivation?

This is a good moment to encourage you to look into the teachings of Thích Nhất Hạnh, if you haven't already done so. He was a Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk and international peace activist who passed away at the start of 2022 when he was 96.

This idea of it being considered okay to attack people who are seen as unlikely to fight back is strengthened by what I already mentioned, the fact that if the victim protests, it is often counterproductive.

The fact that you were attacked works against you, perhaps particularly if you are a woman yet aren't crying gentle tears like a lovely young weak damsel in distress, but put your foot down and say *"This isn't right. In fact, this is plain wrong! This is a violation of my most basic rights! You have an obligation to help me, to support me!"*

It does not earn you empathy. It often earns you disgust and rejection. It has to do with those perceived differences, those differences that do not even have to be real, but are often purely imagined.

I don't like the way the media were harping on about Janice Morris's supposed "disability" and "vulnerability". I didn't like the way in which

surprised local people responded when they suddenly realized that I am not learning-disabled or “perhaps schizophrenic or something” either. (It did sometimes make me laugh because their “holy shit” response was often hilarious, for example when they spotted me on a train and observed me handling a smartphone and behaving like a proper adult.)

It should not make a difference. We all deserve to be treated with the same human respect. I don’t deserve greater respect because of my intelligence and because I went to university. I did nothing to earn my intelligence. It was handed to me on a platter when I was born.

At the same time, I deserve that people don’t instantly assume that I am either making it up or am delusional when I mention my professional background, however.

Just like Ms Morris, I also deserve breathing space and to be free from getting mollycoddled and fussed over and messed with as if I were a five-year-old who just tumbled down the stairs.

Similarly, the fact that I am not married does not mean that I am mentally impaired and therefore deserve to get hassled and don’t have the right not to get hassled. Hassled? Bullied! Abused! Terrorised! Sabotaged! Become impaired by all that interference!

The prosecutor in Ms Morris’s case apparently said in court *“Effectively the whole world can see the photograph, which is quite humiliating for the victim in this case.”*

That’s odd. This photo should have been seen as humiliating for the attackers. Why are these attacks considered “humiliating” for the victims? Is that because they confirm the victims’ lowly status in society? Why is it considered to be humiliating for the *victims* to come forward and be open about such attacks?

Here, I now toss in Gisèle Pelicot’s heroism. You’ll know why.

The photo of the men hassling Mr Whitty also went viral. His response was the same as that of Ms Morris and the same as mine when I was attacked. Whitty ducked. I ducked, Morris ducked. Our bodies responded in the exact same way. You shield yourself as well as you can, turn away from the attacker in any way that you can. Being attacked or otherwise accosted makes you feel acutely “vulnerable” physically.



Let’s look at another example. It did not matter to the attackers who exactly were present in the Twin Towers on 11 September in 2001. None of these people had done anything wrong. The attackers perceived them as representing a group of people that they saw as a threat to their values and to their own in-group.

You cannot say that because the people working in those buildings were perceived as being part of a different group than the attackers, they deserved to be attacked. It surely would have been wrong if any of the survivors first would have needed to prove that there was nothing “wrong” with them before receiving any kind of help.

So, what is different about these two situations? What is different about people who get attacked when they are sitting on a bench and people who get attacked when they are sitting at a desk inside a building?

It is all about whether the people around them are able to identify with them or not. Yes, it is about whether the victims are perceived as being part of the same group, their own group, whether they are seen as “one of us”. If onlookers are not able to identify with the victims, they assign blame because this enables them to reassure themselves and tell themselves that nothing as bad as that will ever happen to them or any of their loved ones.

If they are able to identify with the victim(s), however, this provides a very strong urge to help because it assures them that if something like this were to happen to themselves or to any of their loved ones, they

would receive support from the people around them. It also provides a motivation to do something about it to ensure something like this will never happen to them or to any of their loved ones.

In 2015, Americans bombed a trauma centre operated by Médecins Sans Frontières in Afghanistan. This did not happen in retaliation for the 9-11 attack but in the mere course of doing what they were doing. There wasn't a heck of a lot of media noise about those victims, was there? It happened to some of "them". It didn't happen to some of "us".

Part of the tendency of people to reassure themselves so that they can continue to feel secure is this idea that there is a group of people who behave in a moderate and safe way and will thus be protected from certain kinds of harm and that there is another group of people who exhibit risky behaviours and are more vulnerable as a result.

I first became aware of this phenomenon after I was raped in my own bed by an intruder, decades ago. I found the responses from different people around me quite intriguing and I noticed them in spite of my state of distress. One woman said to one of my sisters: *"But she's such a nice well-behaved girl!"* Those who were most supportive seemed to be people who had been through similar experiences of harm, misfortune or injustice, situations in which they bore no responsibility for what had happened to them, such as having developed a brain tumour and ending up with a partially paralysed face (and without husband – because he left). They were able to identify with me.

Up to that point, I too had probably never given a thought to the phenomenon of rape or how it might be experienced by the victims. I too had done a great deal of unaware victim-blaming up to that point. Rape was something that happened to other people. Not to me. Never to me. How could I ever be raped? I was, for example, very careful to walk on the well-lit side of the street if the other side was dark when I had to walk somewhere after dark. I didn't engage in risky behaviours and I didn't wear miniskirts.

I had, however, been molested on a train while commuting from Baarn to Amsterdam one morning and I had not seen that coming either. I had been dozing in my seat – it was between 5 and 6 in the morning – when someone suddenly grabbed one of my breasts and squeezed it, hard. He then swiftly left the carriage and jumped out of the train. I counted myself lucky that I had been wearing a bulky tweed blazer that day

because it protected me. Still, my breast hurt. Women take these things in stride. It goes with being a woman. You don't want to pay any more thought to it than you have to. You feel lucky that it wasn't worse and you move on. I may never even have told anyone about that incident. It is part of the price you pay for being female. You take it for granted.

Again, I thought that I was safely asleep in my own bed when that rape occurred a few years later. I had quit my job and was into my Master's. Another stranger suddenly fell on top of me, yanked away my panties and raped me. Hopefully that will shake up a few people's beliefs about the kind of "risky" behaviours that get women raped.

Six months later, my rapist returned in the middle of the night but he must have made a sound because it woke me. I was well into women's self-defence courses by then, grabbed a knife and walked to the door. I moved the curtains a little bit and sure enough, there he was, crouched. He had heard it when I grabbed the knife, though, because it clanked into a glass and he must have seen the movement of the curtain too. He rose and jumped off the balcony. It was not even considered trespass. The housing association allowed me to move to a different building then.

I could not move elsewhere; my case wasn't considered urgent by the city of Amsterdam. I tried. I was told that the likely response if I challenged this would be that I shouldn't have moved into the building in the first place if I didn't want to get raped because these were student flats, so I had brought it on myself. I kid you not.

There is still a heck of a lot of victim-blaming in England with regards to rape too. We've been seeing it for decades. *"If you didn't exist, if you weren't somewhere at a certain time or if you had not been wearing white socks instead of navy socks or black socks, it wouldn't have happened."* But they'll say the same thing about the person wearing the navy or black socks. *"If only you'd worn white socks."* If you keep in mind that people do this to reassure themselves and make themselves feel safe, it becomes easier to have empathy and compassion.

It's not always that simple. Take Number 10's frequent rhetoric. Currently, 40% of the British are in poverty. The UK government has a tradition of blaming that on foreigners. Supposedly, foreigners are forcing British employers to pay them low wages. I remember when a Dutch friend of mine added up her and her English partner's salaries and hours and discovered that a friend of hers in the Netherlands made

the same in 25 hours per week, for similar work, as they were making in 60 hours per week. Poland and Slovenia were about to overtake the UK in terms of all people's level of prosperity when I wrote the earlier version of this book.

So then the UK government began raising the minimum annual wage requirements for migrants by £ 20,000 to almost 40,000 for them to be eligible for a visa. It's my expectation that something like this will make British workers even less happy about immigration because, if implemented, it means that they will be seeing foreigners live a lush lifestyle while they continue to rot away. It's bound to make them feel even more strongly that migrants are taking something from them. After all, where are those extra 20,000 pounds going to be coming from? That's how they are going to feel. They've always been told that we're taking something from them, after all. We're thieves and liars.

When I called around for volunteering opportunities in Southampton, as far back as 2005, I was already told one day *"It's not as if you'll be allowed to handle money or drugs, you know."* I've run into other people who didn't believe that I could speak English or that I was educated or that I even was who I said I was. *"I don't know you. We don't know you. You are one of them. We can't trust you. I can't trust you."* Someone once even literally recoiled as if I was handing him a poisonous snake when I reached out to give him my business card. We were associated with the same university, but he clearly didn't believe me. "We aren't scientists. We're lying thieving low-skilled cheap labour, all of us." The real solution, of course, is addressing poverty by raising wages and benefits for the lower 40% of the British.

You need to address people's real concerns, their real fears, such as that they won't be able to buy food or pay the rent or mortgage. Blaming it on foreigners is a rather strange thing to do for a Prime Minister whose own very wealthy foreign wife wasn't paying any taxes in the UK until the public became aware of it after her husband's political career began to take off. That is when she changed her tax status. (I'm talking about Sunak here.)

Effectively, the UK government is currently priming people for physical attacks on foreigners again by declaring migrants the enemy of the British people. We foreigners aren't "undercutting" Brits. That's bullshit. The UK has a lot of very low wages and the reason for that is that

wretched English class system that declares some people less deserving, less valuable. Just like all over the world non-whites and women tend to earn less for the exact same job, in England, people who don't come from a higher huppity fluppity fluppity class also are paid substantially less.

When I was still living in Southampton, I wondered why so many people around me looked so gloomy all the time. Then I spotted a vacancy in a shop window. Store manager required. The salary was an insult. I also remember later seeing a vacancy in environmental research that paid very little (12,000 or so) yet asked the candidate to collect environmental samples by using his or her own car. Car ownership required to apply.

When the government declares foreigners the enemy, victim-blaming foreigners who are attacked becomes easy. The same mechanisms remain at work. It's inconceivable that someone is attacked without good reason. If that were the case, it could happen to any one of us, after all. So we assign blame. So that we can continue to feel as safe and secure possible. It was that person's fault, surely, that he got attacked.

You can perhaps even recognise it in a description of suicide within a bullying context (bullycide), which *"often occurs with children who cannot cope with the chronic abuse of bullying, and seeing no other way to escape it, die by suicide to end the suffering."*

The phrase *"cannot cope"* assigns blame, suggests that the victims were flawed, doesn't it? There is a complete disregard for the practical aspects of bullying. Children can't relocate across the country. They can't even take themselves out of the school. They can't transfer to a different school all by themselves. Bullying can make your life impossible to live for purely practical reasons. Think of the boy whose schoolbooks or laptop just got taken from him and thrown into the pond because he comes from a poor family and wears cheap shabby-looking clothes or has red hair. What is he to do now? How can he complete his homework?

Attacks such as the one on this imaginary schoolboy or the well-paid foreigner or on Ms Morris are not about the victims, but about how others perceive themselves and how they perceive their victims in relation to that.

When a rapist or a serial killer sits at a table in a cafe and observes the people walking by in order to pick his next victim, he often chooses the

victim because her gait and posture convey a degree of vulnerability. However, the selection of targets for the infliction of cruelty in a public setting with witnesses is more complicated and is a matter in which we all play a role and bear some responsibility. It begins with how we talk about others at the breakfast table, over the heads of our children.

Do you often get hassled? Telling people off in a stern voice and not giving an inch until they have retreated seems to work best. It requires courage. It requires that you do not give in to the fear, the physical vulnerability that you feel in such situations, and not show any anger. Hold your ground. They don't expect that and that alone can deter folks who harass you. You have to visualise this, however, practice it in your mind, imagine that you are being attacked or harassed and imagine how you will respond. Did you know that there are videos on YouTube with self-defence tips for people who use crutches and canes? They don't teach you any of that at Age UK or the CAB.

3. The words alone

Some words can make your spine tingle in a bad way and that association can be hard to lose. Cruelty is one of those words, yet long before I moved to the UK, the Dutch word for cruel ("wreed") acquired the urban slang meaning of "cool, wicked, awesome". The word "wicked" ("morally bad"), of course, seems to have undergone a similar evolution, as has the word "sick".

Where do the words "cruel" and "cruelty" come from? Not surprisingly, as with so many words in English and other Germanic languages, they were derived from old French and Latin. They are related to "**crude**", which seems to suggest that cruelty goes hand in hand with a certain lack of sophistication.

Cruelty is a behaviour that causes physical or mental harm to another person.

What about humiliation? What is that?

As I mentioned before, I noticed with surprise that Lucy Miller, the prosecutor in the cowardly attack on Janice Morris, stated that the photo of Ms Morris – the one that I have used for the cover of this book – caused a great deal of humiliation for Ms Morris. Why?

I felt that this was merely Ms Miller's own view. I suspect that for her too, as it was for me until it happened to me, getting attacked on a bench is something that happens to "other people". People who are different. People who are "vulnerable" or "disabled" or perhaps "autistic". It was "humiliating" in Ms Miller's eyes because being targeted by that kind of thing "confirms" you as a lesser human being, the kind of person who gets targeted by that kind of attack. That's the basis for the "humiliation". After all, stuff like the attack on Ms Morris doesn't happen to people like Lucy Miller, do they? That's where Lucy Miller went wrong.

According to the media, Ms Morris was concerned about attracting more unwanted attention. So was I after I had been attacked. Being attacked is a really scary experience that thoroughly shakes your confidence. It makes you want to hide. It makes you hesitant to go outside. I can understand that Ms Morris was concerned. Having a photo of you go viral is of little help if you want to draw less attention to yourself. That is a different matter, though. That is not about humiliation.

Ingrid Loyau-Kennett, the Frenchwoman who stepped up in the context of the murder of Lee Rigby and subsequently was on TV a few times, had been bullied as well. Eggs and stones were thrown at her house. The bullying got worse after she had been on TV. Like Ms Morris and like me, she was in her forties and living on her own.

There is a short on YouTube, by JCS Inspired, about an elderly English woman who approaches a young English man who is sitting in a car in front of what appears to be her property. It was posted on 13 November 2023 and has had over a million views. There is an outpouring of hatred, contempt and ridicule for the woman.

Most people who are leaving these comments, however, probably have no idea of the background of the video. I not only recognize the woman's demeanour, powerlessness and anger, I also only know too well how younger people use phones and CCTV to ridicule older adults and paint them as antisocial problem citizens, sometimes at the request of rogue landlords.

I can almost guarantee you that this woman had already been pestered for a long time. Years. I can certainly guarantee that she was being provoked and that this young man in question had been waiting for her, phone in hand, so that he could shoot his video and "humiliate" her in front of the world. He did not explain the context. He was not accidentally shooting a video. He was shooting a video for the sole purpose of provoking and "humiliating" this woman. It has happened to me too, and more than once. The unbridled hatred for older women knows no bounds in England. I wish that all these women and a few men would team up and learn krav maga. Then they could teach these despicable yobs a lesson and show them who's boss. Yob is the English term for the driver of that car. There is no reason for young white English males to go pester older English women, yet they do, in droves.

The word "humiliation" is related to the word "humility" but they are strangely opposed. (Remember the word "humility" because I may come back to it at the end of the book.) Humiliation, so the internet tells me, is "*to cause a painful loss of pride, self-respect, or dignity*". Is a victim's perceived humiliation supposed to make up for someone else's pathological lack of a sense of self-worth?

How is one's pride, self-respect or dignity supposed to be affected by what someone else does?

The principle of humanity is that every human being has a right to life in dignity, but as I discussed in "*We need to talk about this*", dignity is highly personal and can only be defined for oneself and by oneself.

Dignity is often related to a loss of control, however, for example, when needing to be on a ventilator, needing to be fed or needing to be helped with the activities that you and I carry out in our bathrooms several times per day without giving it much thought.

So, humiliation seems to be about taking someone else's control away?

Was I supposed to feel humiliated when those two dudes emptied that bucket of liquid over me? One other time, in 2019, I came home after having gone for a walk, found the door to my flat not only unlocked but ajar and hairs glued onto the flattened end of the bar of soap in my bathroom. To me, it was an utterly crazy thing to do, but it has the feel of an English "prank", that unfathomable brand of humour that only English people understand and that, yes, apparently is supposed to make someone feel humiliated or embarrassed. Why on earth is that? To me, it is just as nuts as picking someone's locks, going into someone's flat and writing "I am Napoleon" or "My name is Tony Macaroni" on the kitchen wall. It does not even have to be in bat blood or chicken blood for it to be nuts.

In July 2020, someone went into my flat while I was out, took five to ten pairs of colourful dirty socks, dropped what may have been cigarette ash into the laundry basket and damaged two items. Some weeks later, I realized that I had more black socks than I used to have. Yet protesting against this kind of thing got *me* stigmatised as "vulnerable". And it was far from the only thing that went on.

In my eyes, shooting yourself in the foot in a dare with friends is embarrassing and humiliating. Shooting a stranger in the foot in a dare with friends is equally embarrassing and humiliating. For the shooter! Not for the victim.

Lexico.com, an online dictionary powered by Oxford University Press, explains "humiliate" as "*make (someone) feel ashamed and foolish by injuring their dignity and self-respect, especially publicly*". It also says that the original meaning was "bring low". That seems to refer to the sense of hierarchy experienced on the side of the perpetrator.

It seems to indicate that you cannot make someone perceived as a lesser

human make much lower than he or she already is and the cruelty to which people perceived as less are subjected to is a confirmation of their lowly status, something to “put them in their place”.

That certainly seems to have been the case when Janice Morris was attacked. She was being hassled and stood up for herself. The harassers then went into a nearby Spar, bought eggs and flour and returned to attack her. The pattern was the same in my attack. I told them off and they went in search of pals and came back to attack me, equipped with sand, water and stones.

To put someone in their place is to remind someone of his or her position, to bring somebody down or to humble or rebuke. Was it an exercise of retaliation, then? Was it retaliation for not adhering to how one is perceived and hence is supposed to behave, such as not with not too much confidence? It is intended to teach the person a lesson in humility? Perhaps.

In fact, this seems to be confirmed by the fact that others too tend to ridicule and rebuke you when you protest and seek justice and express that you want this kind of shit to stop, insist that you have the right to peace and safety in your home and to be free from harassment, abuse and violence from random others. That happened to Ingrid Loyau-Kennett and it happened to me, repeatedly. It also happened to Bijan Ebrahimi in Bristol.

How is this related to a certain lack of sophistication? How is this “*crude*”? It is very tempting to write point-blank that any person with a degree of sophistication not only knows that all people have the same rights, but also would never do anything as stupid as to attack a woman who is sitting on a bench or a man who is watering plants in his garden or playing sports with his son.

In spite of this, I dare say that someone like Boris Johnson sees himself as highly sophisticated. I also dare say, however, that many people mistake money for sophistication.

Boris Johnson has a history of verbal abuse towards people who he perceives as lesser human beings, thereby signalling that when you’re a person in power, you can get away with any degree of name-calling that even might get someone else prosecuted. He is *crude* and “*boorish*”, the opposite of sophisticated, and has often made people in his company feel

terribly embarrassed about his elephant-in-a-porcelain-shop style. (I apologize to the gentle giants. They do not resemble Boris Johnson.)

People like Boris Johnson are negative role models for how to behave, but their position of power and their ample finances make them immune to criticisms similar to how police officers used to get away with abusing and murdering people whose skin isn’t the colour of ivory until black lives finally began to matter. (The battle for the survival of black people is far from over yet, of course.)

The word “*boorish*” alone seems to confirm that. It appears to come from the 13th-century word for “herdsman” and herdsmen were seen as not having refined manners – and “sophistication”, says the online Oxford dictionary, means “*having, revealing, or involving a great deal of worldly experience and knowledge of fashion and culture*”. That is a very limited view of the word.

Sophistication also means something much more far-reaching.

“A sophisticated person,” says another website, *“is a person who is able to understand the nuances of a wide range of principles, concepts, situations, and vocabulary. Sophisticated people understand the bounds of their own knowledge, but are comfortable speaking with someone who is far more knowledgeable in a given subject than they are.”*

Words can have a big impact and very deliberately chosen words are often used when politicians attempt to otherize groups of people. As neuroscientist Kathleen Taylor pointed out in her book “*Cruelty*”: *“even mild otherization primes people for aggression”*.

Did Boris Alexander De Pfeffel Johnson actually know that? Did Priti Patel? Theresa May? Did Rishi Sunak? Did Rishi Sunak realize that he was possibly whipping up aggression against his wife, just like Geert Wilders is potentially whipping up aggression against *his* wife? These women are both migrants, after all. Akshata is from India and Krisztina is Hungarian. Wilders’ mother is from Indonesia, the world’s largest Muslim nation. Rishi Sunak’s parents are from Kenya and Tanzania. Priti Patel’s parents are from Uganda; her grandparents were immigrants from India. Suella Braverman’s parents are from Mauritius and Kenya.

Donald Trump’s wife is a migrant, too. He expedited her parents’ visas.

Immigrant. Migrant. It’s just a word. Words don’t matter. The words

migrant and immigrant do not apply to my parents, my grandparents or my wife. That's different. They are my parents, my grandparents or my wife. That's what these politicians are all saying, aren't they? So what exactly are they saying?

I think I know. It's very embarrassing but after I became otherized as a migrant in England, I found myself endeavouring to distinguish myself from migrants from countries perceived as very poor such as people from Eastern Europe. There also was a day on which I realized that I'd just selected a specific phone repair shop over another one because the English spoken by the people in the latter was heavily accented. I don't think that I had ever done anything like that before and it clearly came from being otherized. It's probably some kind of unconscious protective mechanism that was at work here. I have seen a few times that people who feel unwanted by their parents tend to try very hard to prove themselves, prove their worthiness. This is what many migrants do too.

It all makes it very easy to imagine that those politicians who you'd expect to be arguing *for* migration were otherized themselves and that this wittingly or unwittingly scarred them so badly that they are still trying to prove themselves as "one of us". I did it too, within about a year after having moved from Amsterdam to the UK. *"I'm one of you. No, no, no, no, I'm **not** one of them."*

Rishi Sunak, Priti Patel, Suella Braverman, Geert Wilders and even Donald Trump with his German heritage present the strongest arguments *for* migration. Trump's mother was an immigrant, as was his paternal grandfather. A few British business icons are also either migrants or the children of migrants, from Alex Polizzi to Karren Brady and Claude Littner.

Migrants carry diseases and are unclean? Really? Migrants steal and lie and are out to get you? If that is true, then it also goes for the parents, grandparents and wives of the politicians who spout this nonsense. It's hard to believe that right now, in 2026, we still haven't gotten rid of this awful drag on society.

4. Workplace bullying in England

Yes, it's time to talk about workplace bullying again. Could workplace bullying be linked to a country's cultural style within Geert Hofstede's classification, that is, the extent to which it is "masculine" or "feminine"?

As the traditional views of masculine and feminine are changing and masculine may become synonymous with aggressive, obstinate, expensive and obstreperous and feminine may become seen as effective, efficient, results-oriented and smooth, maybe Jacinda Ardern's style will slowly take the world by storm and set a new standard for leaders. What a wonderful ripple effect that might have. Aggressive leaders are an exhausting energy drain on everyone around them, after all, and they rarely do a country good.

New Zealand's culture, however, scores high on the masculinity dimension. So that's not it. What it does score low on, however, is "power distance". I probably often call this "the English class thing".

That clicks, doesn't it? Cruelty, after all, is about the victim's perceived place in someone else's hierarchy, as we've just discovered in the preceding chapter. It's about being put in your place, after being perceived as not knowing your place and being punished for being seen as not knowing your place. It is also sometimes about being considered a potential danger or as not quite worthy of life. It often comes from the person's own feelings of inadequacy. The cruelty in bullying can be a desperate attempt to gain, maintain or regain a higher rung on the imaginary ladder.

Is there a lower incidence of workplace bullying in New Zealand, then? Data from Statistics New Zealand state that 11% of New Zealand workers reported being bullied or harassed in 2019, but other studies found a higher percentage.

Of course, when talking about bullying and comparing numbers between countries, it is important to define it properly and calibrate the data. Some professions have a higher incidence of bullying and what is considered acceptable in one country may not be at all in another. As workplace bullying is a costly global problem, there is increasing awareness and a growing understanding, however, and it is likely to have a very similar meaning in western English-speaking countries.

Wikipedia defines it as “*a persistent pattern of mistreatment from others in the workplace that causes either physical or emotional harm*”. That boils down to cruelty. As the setting is the workplace, workplace bullying could just as easily be called “workplace cruelty”. It takes it out of the realm of pettiness, the pettiness of the idea of victims not being able to stand up for themselves and somehow asking to be bullied.

There does appear to be a much greater incidence of workplace bullying in the UK than in New Zealand, at a percentage of around 30 (2015, Trades Union Congress), with 71% of disabled women reporting some form of abuse and 91% of workers stating that bullying in the workplace wasn't being dealt with appropriately. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (HR professionals) found a percentage of 15 for the years 2017, 2018 and 2019 yet added that more than half did not report bullying. Most bullying at work in the UK appears to take place in London and the South East and most bullying is carried out by someone higher in the hierarchy. In a study by Kew Law (employment law), 71% of the employees at 131 companies in the UK stated that they had either been bullied or witnessed bullying.

If employees were to stand up for each other and call the bully out on his or her behaviour, a lot of the bullying might stop because being called out would likely be perceived as a loss of face by the bully. This is where that illusive metric “power distance” becomes important because it probably determines whether fear has the ability to hold colleagues back and the power distance empowers the bully enough to be able to persist.

Power comes in more flavours than financial (socioeconomic) and political power alone, though. There is also power in numbers. There is power in the sheer number of colleagues who stand up against workplace bullying. We also see this when photos and videos of street bullying (harassment or attacks) are shared online and go viral, when the consensus swings against the bullies. It can even motivate the police to take action and lead to the prosecution of such bullies.

Prosecution then becomes the act of putting a bully in his or her place, just like standing up to someone in the workplace, but prosecution generally has far more serious consequences. I can't help but wonder if that is likely to exacerbate the problem in some cases and make the bully spin out of control later. (This may have happened with one of the attackers of Janice Morris.) If you let a cruel workplace bully run around

unchecked, however, he or she may do more and more damage as it is seen as confirmation of the person's power and invincibility. We have seen that with Harvey Weinstein. Too many people protected him. Jeffrey Epstein's may have been a similar story.

Bullying is the crude infliction of cruelty. It is linked to hierarchies and power imbalances, which can be real or merely perceived. Bullying usually takes place in public and is intended to degrade someone in the eyes of others, whereas sheer cruelty can also take place in private. In the latter case, there are usually no other witnesses besides the victim and the perpetrator.

Bullies often team up, too. Cruelty, on the other hand, can also be a secret indulgence by one person that the person may even be deeply ashamed about.

It is important to pay attention to that distinction between these two main kinds of cruelty, the kind of cruelty that is carried out by people such as George Cheese's former colleagues within the context of bullying – let's face it; it was bullying – and the kind of cruelty inflicted by a lone wolf who may torture individual animals and humans without anyone else knowing about it. Are they related? Sure they are, but they may come about differently and they certainly usually present very differently to the outside world. (I'll come back to the other kind of cruelty later. I think that it can be related to how our bodies work. Biology. Physiology.)

Some bullies merely are after a sense of belonging. In his book “*This is marketing*”, Seth Godin talks about the strange phenomenon that some people stick to wildly contrasting beliefs, such as believing that Princess Diana is still alive yet also believing that she was murdered. They appear to do this because it affords them membership of a very select club of people. This way, they gain significance, but it is not the main thing they are after. They want to feel that they are unique. This is also why some people believe in conspiracy theories about Covid. (Godin referred to research done at the Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, Germany, if you want to know more about this. Look for work by Roland Imhoff.)

You can achieve that uniqueness in a way that actually damages your sense of self-worth. It must be devastating to be aware that you are a bully, after all. There are healthier, more effective and much more joyful and enjoyable ways to achieve greater significance than to bully someone

else. Many people who were considered worthless as children have gone on to change the world in very positive ways. When the creator of the musical “Cats”, who is now a happy and wealthy woman, was a child, she was suspected of being learning-disabled. She was lucky, in the sense that the psychologist she was sent to realised what was going on.

If you are a workplace bully – and you will very likely know whether you are or not – go find the essence of your significance and pursue that. Who are you if you ignore what anyone else is saying about you? What do you enjoy? Where and who would you like to be if you could have been born somewhere else and in different circumstances? Who do you want to be 5, 10, 20 years ago? Looking back then, what would you regret most about the things that you are doing at this point in your life or more importantly, about what you are *not* doing? Have you given up hope with regard to daring to be who you really are? It does not matter if you are the only person who sees your significance at this point. It is entirely up to you to be who you want to be and who you deserve to be. If you keep pursuing that goal of becoming the true you, your actions alone will eventually show people who you are.

Take me, for example. I am anything but an empty-headed chatterbox, but I am not exactly an extrovert. I don’t like talking about myself and I don’t like talking about my life. So I was often seen as an empty-headed chatterbox in the past. When I was a teenager, kids in school would frequently comment that I was quiet (and sometimes ask me what was wrong, which I couldn’t talk about anyway). I probably got fed up with that at some point and developed the chatterbox exterior to stop people from bugging me about being too quiet. (If that was the case, it wasn’t a conscious decision. I am actually often quite bubbly, quite naturally, but that does not mean that I am empty-headed.) The writings that I published here and there showed people that I was not quite the empty-headed and always cheerful chatterbox that they had thought I was. It didn’t matter that those people initially did not see my significance. What mattered was that I pursued it.

I’ll give you a few other examples of how it does not matter what people think about you. There was a period in my life when people thought that I always only wore skirts and dresses. It was more or less the same period when there were people who thought that I never wore dresses or skirts. When I had a lovely lazy rattan chair that I had painted red, someone said that I likely never ever sat in it (because I’ve always quite

been a workaholic). Sure, that’s why I had that chair. (lol) You can read a lot of books and scientific papers in a lazy chair, with or without a glass of wine at hand. Someone who always had to walk around my fitness equipment when she visited my home snorted loudly when I mentioned running and said that I wasn’t quite the active sports type. (I started running and sprinting when I was still in grade school. I rode horses in my teens. I had a racing bike and played squash when I was in my twenties and early thirties.) When I had a cool, white-and-steel “tech” interior in the early 1980s, someone commented that they’d expected me to have classic oak furniture. I’ve received beer glasses as a gift with an apology because I “surely never drank beer”. I can go on for a while. What people say about you makes no difference, no matter what it is. I’ve been judged as more than 15 years younger than I was and I’ve also been mistaken for my youngest sister’s mother.

There are still a lot of people who believe that the earth is flat, too. Occasionally, people even die trying to prove it. Meanwhile, the earth continues to be a cross between a football and a rugby ball. Similarly, I’ve never cared much about what people thought of me because their thoughts could never change who I was.

See what I mean, workplace bully? It does not matter. You do not have to prove anything. Your real worth comes from inside you, not from what people think of you and making people afraid of you does not serve you. You can’t please everyone. Stop trying to fortify that wall around you that makes it impossible for people to see who you really are. Be yourself. It’s enough. You have nothing to prove. The fact that you exist, the fact that you breathe in and breathe out, it’s enough.

When I was still a very young kid, a few children tried to bully me – my overly protective mother had a lot to do with that and, to a lesser extent, my self-employed father’s position in the local community – but it had no effect on me. So it was never pursued beyond a single slap in the face from my classmate Sylvia’s older sister, some occasional comments about my clothes (they were too old-fashioned and the skirts were too long) or a single weird exploratory conversation in my last primary-school year by children who had trouble figuring me out. I was the youngest and the one with the best grades. I loved school!

I knew who I was and, for me, that was enough. I seem to have radiated that. They couldn’t get a rise out of me. I just shrugged. One boy,

actually a friend called Franné, once suddenly punched me in the stomach, hard, when I passed him and another boy jumped on my back one day as I was walking home. I reacted as if nothing had happened. If such things happened to me, they must have been happening to others.

Part of this was just kids being kids. Part of it was me leading a small group of girls, competing with a small group of boys. In some cases, these kids may have felt unappreciated and were looking for a way to get noticed and feel that they were special. I never thought about it much at the time. I thought it was really strange to hit someone in the face very suddenly for no reason at all. I had read something in the bible about turning the other cheek, though, and I thought that this meant that you simply did not respond. (I went to a Roman Catholic school and had lots of nuns as teachers.)

To come back to workplace bullying in England, it sounds like it should be possible to remedy such situations by making sure that the people in question feel uniquely appreciated. As most workplace bullying in England comes from higher-ups, another person who can take decisive action – besides the bully – is the bully's superior. You run the place even though the bully may think that he does.

Talk with the person, informally, while still making clear that your interest is purely professional. Share next to nothing about your own life but show interest. Ask questions, about work and about the role the person plays at work, the specific tasks he or she has. Are there any problems? At work, at home? Merely listening may have a giant impact. It's quite possible that the person in question is actually immensely frustrated about something in the workplace. The bullying could be displaced aggression. If that is the case, you need to address the way people within your company communicate. People shouldn't be so afraid to speak out that they instead start bullying those who are lower in the pecking order. In any case, don't tell yourself fairy tales as an excuse so that you can tell yourself that you don't have to take action. Bullying is bad for business.

If all else has already failed... Experiment! What have you got to lose? A bully could simply be bored. If you think that that might be the case, give the guy a challenging task with a tight timetable, a task that cannot be delegated to others and see what happens. Maybe that is what he actually loves doing. Maybe that aspect of who he is makes him a bully

when he is forced to do something else. Promote the man or woman into a really challenging position that has him or her running around all day trying to keep up. Don't side-rail him and put him in a lonely office all by himself. That will just make him bitter. He will find ways to let you know about it.

Realise, also, that any personal strength usually is also a weakness and vice versa. It may be possible to turn what looks like a bully's biggest weakness into a strength. You could try to redirect the behaviour so that it turns into the other side of the same character trait. Can you see the advantage, the positive side, in many of the annoying things the bully does? Could the bully be the person you have to put in charge of scheduling, for example, the person who makes sure that deadlines are met? You could try to probe that by asking a question like *"You really like it when things are running like clockwork, eh?"* Explore! What have you got to lose? Someone who is always highly punctual might easily lose it and scream bloody murder when others don't see things his way, but he might be perfect for getting that timetable back on track. Whatever you do, make sure the bully is busy, that his mind has no time to dwell on unproductive indulgences.

If you are being bullied at work or witnessing someone getting bullied, an approach I saw Christine Lagarde take in an interview with the Washington Post may work well. So let's imagine that you witness John bullying Arnold at your place of work. Here's how you could address this. You could say something like *"John, I have something important that I'd like to talk with you about. Let's go into the staircase (or lobby or onto the terrace outside) so that we don't interrupt the others."* This stops him from losing face in front of the others. Moreover, it may make him feel important. Don't worry, you are not going to mollycoddle and pamper him. Consider starting your critique with something like *"I am going to be extremely biased in what I am about to say, John."* That way, you're taking some of the wind out of his sails and at the same time, you are making clear that you feel that you have nothing to apologise for or be embarrassed about.

"I've been observing how you treat Arnold and it constitutes workplace bullying. You know that our company has a very strong policy against that kind of thing. Unless you change your approach and stop your mistreatment of Arnold, it looks like I am going to have to report you." It would be very good to add *"Is there anything I may be able to help you*

with?” That way you create an opening for John to voice a problem that he just does not know how to deal with in any other way if that is the reason for his behaviour.

Cruelty and bullying are often expressions of powerlessness, desperate attempts to gain some sort of power, some sort of significance. Powerlessness is a strong driver, but it does not always drive people in the right direction. Helping a bully solve a problem that he does not know how to solve on his own can go a long way towards resolving tension. It could be that he needs a piece of equipment that he does not have and does not know he needs or it could be that he needs to talk to Janice on the third floor to get the information he needs to complete a project. It could be that someone moved his desk. It could be that he needs reading glasses. It could be that he needs an Excel course. You won't know unless you start to explore that angle and you do not have to be John's boss in order to be able to do it. You can also be a supportive colleague who resolves a tense situation.

If you are the superior of someone who bullies colleagues, it could also be that you need to place that person in a team that has at least one person with a very strong personality who you expect to be able to hold her ground against the bully.

Again, bullies perceive themselves as weak, but as our weaknesses are also our strengths, perhaps paradoxically enough, a solution for cruelty and bullying may be to empower the cruel bullies. It's clear by now that I don't mean this in the sense of supporting the behaviour that has such a massive negative impact on the people in the surroundings of bullies, but in the sense of channelling their energy. Most of us want to have a certain sense of momentum. We also want to feel significant, and see that our actions make a difference. That certainly goes for bullies.

I should fess up and tell you that I wrote this chapter without having any personal experiences with bullying at work. During two weeks on geological fieldwork practice abroad, a particular student pestered me a little. I was an older student. With her lush red curls, her flawless skin, her perfectly shaped symmetric face and her large light eyes, she looked absolutely stunning and not in a cheap way either. That's where part of the problem must have come from. I don't think she had any siblings, which can't have helped. I didn't know her and I had no knowledge of narcissism yet. I didn't know how to deal with her needling because that

is what it was. One evening, one of the other students told me that I had to tell her off, that I had to stand up to her. The student who was pestering me wasn't being serious. She was just trying to get a rise out of me, the way many narcissists operate. I probably was the polder model's poster child in those days. That approach doesn't work for all situations.

When I was 16, I had a summer job at an office products store. One day, the owner got very angry with me and literally threw something into my face. (A linen bag.) That wasn't bullying. This happened when I contradicted him in front of a customer and said that we did have a certain product in stock after he had just told her that we didn't. That could have been bullying, but it wasn't. This was one occurrence, not a pattern. His back was killing him at the time and that is why he was so irritable. Someone else told me, otherwise I wouldn't have known. By contrast, the store clerk who followed me into the basement storage and made certain silly remarks, his behaviour might have turned into bullying if I hadn't simply ignored him.

I also vaguely recall a job in which I was stacking shelves – after hours – while I was working on my Master's, years later. This was at a supermarket where the supervisor, a young lad, seemed to be particularly interested in snapping at older women and bossing them around. I have no idea whether he was a bully as I did not stay long enough to find out. For years, I had worked at a different supermarket, doing the same work, and the atmosphere was great there. The shift leader was working on his PhD in chemistry; his Portuguese wife was part of the staff too. We all got along very well. After I moved from a student flat to a nice home in Amsterdam West, travelling to the supermarket that used to be around the corner from where I lived became problematic. It wasn't so much the distance. It was the weather. Imagine having to cycle through the rain and then work inside the separate, cooled dairy section and having to cycle back again a few hours later. Work at the second supermarket, much closer to my new home, was anything but fun and that was instantly clear. “Quit!” my friend Soraya said very sternly. I did. We all need at least one friend like that. The need for some extra income might have kept me trapped in that particular side hustle if my friend hadn't been there for me. I found a once-a-week afternoon paper route shortly after.

That's the entire extent of my experience with workplace bullying. Zero.

As you will be able to deduce from the other chapters in this book, the gentle approach does not always work. While it is important to try to determine what's behind workplace bullying and address the underlying cause, some people will only respond to harsh rebukes and punitive action.

5. Can cruelty bring joy?

Although most of us think the opposite, we are all capable of cruelty. All it takes is for someone or something to push us into it. Few of us feel joy when we bite off someone's ear or stick a knife into someone's stomach, though. Even those who think that they do may actually be wrong about that. I'll come back to that.

Most of us will never even go there, fortunately.

The tolerance for cruelty in one's environment plays a major role in how likely we are to engage in cruelty, however. Even talking about cruelty makes it easier to commit cruelty, neuroscientist Kathleen Taylor stated in her book about the topic. We are all capable of cruelty, but tend to assume that it takes a lot to get pushed into sadism. It's a sliding scale, really. The difference between us and the "bad ones" probably is much smaller than we assume.

People who engage in cruelty usually don't stop if you ask them kindly. One of the hardest and most dangerous things about cruelty, I have found, is that in order to make it stop, you sometimes have to say very ugly things. That's a slippery slope and you have to remain very aware of it. It can not only make you cross the threshold into cruelty more easily, it also has the capacity to start eating away at your soul. When people otherize you, however, they feel that it is okay to violate your boundaries. If you allow other people to violate your boundaries over and over again, you start moving into trauma territory. It's important to defend your boundaries, even if it makes you feel highly uncomfortable.

I have an example for you that will probably show you very well what I mean. When I was living in Portsmouth, I got really fed up with being hassled in the streets. This often came from guys and sometimes also women who were around forty years younger. England has a pretty misogynistic culture. (It is also shockingly gerontophobic.) One day, when another young guy started to hassle me, I asked him very politely if he wanted me to cut off his dick. I was not threatening to cut off his dick. I merely asked him if that is what he wanted me to do. I don't think that I was showing any anger, but I wasn't smiling either. I was certainly cold. I was fed up. My reaction was spontaneous and its effect

stunningly powerful. This kind of response sadly is often the only thing that works when you are being otherized in an unacceptable manner. You have to cause the other party to start feeling fear and discomfort, enough to cause him to back off and leave you in peace.

As someone once said, it's easier to raise happy, healthy children than to fix broken adults. Right now, the wars that are going on in the world, the extreme violence that Hamas imposed on the audience at a music festival in Israel, the retaliatory activities of the Israeli government, and the abduction and brainwashing of Ukrainian children that the Russian regime engages in, that's where some of tomorrow's sadists and terrorists are being created. Such people are also being moulded by the outrageous hate-mongering by people like Donald Trump, Geert Wilders and Nigel Farage.

Let's go back to bullying to explain what I mean. Childhood bullying causes deeper and longer-lasting trauma than child sex abuse. That says a lot. Can childhood bullying turn child victims into sadistic adults? Perhaps. If we believe what Scottish serial killer Dennis Nilsen told forensic psychologist Kerry Daynes, as she described in one of her books, then bullied children can even develop into adult serial killers who seek to recreate victory over their bully over and over again.

I learned a lot about cruelty and sadism after I became the target of so-called sadistic stalking in combination with community abuse in England. Sadistic stalking is also called resentful stalking. In some cases, you can see how the resentful stalking behaviour was the outcome of many years of profound otherization and rejection. People's anger and hurt begin to simmer. Eventually it all boils over and they start planning revenge. This has nothing to do with true joy, but sadism can start to play an increasingly larger role in these people's actions.

What motivates someone to go into a woman's home, take three or four birth control pills and deposit them into a cup at the woman's place of work? It causes powerlessness and it messes with the target's mind. As a victim, you can't explain it. You can't talk about it to others either because you're going to sound crazy. It pushes you into a mental prison. This is one of the things that happened in a well-known case of sadistic stalking that began in Gosport, on the other side of Portsmouth Harbour. A ferry takes you from Portsmouth to Gosport in 15 minutes.

It concerns a man who was called Anthony Burstow until he legally

changed his last name to that of one of the boyfriends of that particular woman he was stalking. It is very easy for English people to change their name. Unlike in other countries, you do not need a specific or serious enough reason, such as childhood sex abuse. You can simply do it and you can pick any name you like. I know a guy who changed his name to "DK", for example.

Anthony Burstow was working at the Navy as a communications specialist. His victim was a newly married colleague who was called Mrs Tracey Sant at the time. Burstow went to prison for life after he tried to kill his next target, a woman whose first name is the same as that of the forensic psychologist who supported Tracey Morgan. Lorraine Sheridan.

I can't help wondering if that is why he picked her. When he approached Mrs Tracey Sant-Morgan, he said that his wife's name was Tracey too, after all. He claimed that his wife was stationed far away in Asia and that this is why he was very lonely. This next victim – Lorraine – had just discovered who her colleague and new friend really was because he had been featured in a TV program, under his old name, and she recognised him. Desperate, he started cutting into her wrist to hack off her hand. As far as I know, he had intended to kill himself after he killed her, but someone – her son, I think – walked into the situation and saved her life.

Before I forget to mention it, I should say that I suspect that cognitive deficits (or cognitive differences) played a role. This appears to show quite clearly in one of his statements made during his prosecution in the case of Ms Morgan. If I had not looked at a particular stalking case in Florida earlier, I would not have spotted it. A lifetime of otherization and rejection may have made Burstow angry, resentful and desperate.

Specifically, there are similarities between Tracey Morgan's case and the stalking that happened to Laurisa Anello in another city where I have previously lived, in Florida. It's easy for me to see persistent profound otherization and rejection of the perpetrators as the cause in both cases.

Particularly in cases of stranger-stalking, stalking victims too become excessively otherized. The lack of support for these victims actually enables longer-term stalking. Mrs Sant was stalked so extensively and so persistently that even her husband left her, unable and unwilling to deal with it any longer. Apparently, he particularly couldn't stand the idea that their bedroom had been bugged. Along with all other members of his extended family, he cut off all contact with Mrs Sant. She went back

to being Tracey Morgan and moved in with her parents, in another county. Her job had gone up in smoke. Her stalker promptly followed her to the county in which her parents were living.

Sadistic stalking has a lot to do with control. It's not necessarily control to attain something else, although it can be. It is often control for the sake of control, out of resentment. It is control in the sense of having the ability to tear the wings of a butterfly to destroy its ability to fly. (Is that because it can then no longer escape or because the perpetrator cruelly enjoys watching its struggle or is curious to see how the creature will deal with that?) Control is not only a major factor in sadistic stalking; getting confirmation of the other person's powerlessness, frustration and confusion can even serve as a trophy.

Most lay people and many police officers are often overly romantic in their assessment of stalking cases, but there can be a small seed of truth in it. These so-called sadistic stalkers often seem to be after a sense of connection, of belonging, but lost the ability to connect in any other manner a long time ago. Maybe they never even had it. Control can be a way to impose that sense of connection. Maybe it's akin to how some men will rather tear something apart or rip it off a wall rather than seek a screwdriver to disassemble or remove something. It follows that such men are unlikely to be great builders or wonderful creators. Anyone can take a sledgehammer to a brick wall, but few can build one.

So in order to create a connection, some men resort to force (in the sense of controlling the other person). They don't know how else to obtain what they want. This is all about what *they* want, however. The brakes – the controls – in such a person's mind often don't work properly. It's like what you see in very young children who have not learned yet that others have needs and wishes too, as well as boundaries. They only care about what *they* want.

Some people mistakenly do believe that the infliction of cruelty brings them joy. I believe that this has to do with our biology. I learned this during my abuse in Portsmouth. I was constantly on edge for what would be next. Had they picked the locks again, gone into my home again? Had they carried out vandalism again, loosened another electrical wire, flipped a switch, caused a leak? What important postal mail had they stolen from me this time, requiring me to take instant urgent action, and likely leading to further havoc down the road? Which animal

were they going to attack next? Were they going to kill it or merely maim it? That its only sin was that it served as a suitable tool to get to me to spite me left me with a terrible burden of guilt again and again.

In Portsmouth this kind of thing was considered normal.

While others were launching successful YouTube channels about their experiences with non-human animals, I became pretty much terrified of the idea of doing anything like that. Because it would surely lead to attacks on animals if whoever was doing this to me recognised any of the animals in question. Particularly – but not only – mentioning online that I was doing or planning something or mentioning a particular animal or posting a particular photo would often result in cruelty, whether it was an attack on an animal or sabotage of a work project. Sometimes, I would get some kind of warning, such as an odd, vaguely threatening DM about “my dog” on Twitter, asking me how my dog was getting along with my bird. I didn't have a dog. It felt really creepy and, yes, it was followed up. The bird in question was interfered with in my home while I was out.

That's sadism. Vicious targeted cruelty intended to make someone feel intense physical or emotional pain. It's very hard to live with the realisation that someone hurt some innocent animal just to spite you. This happened multiple times.

My body had trouble handling this level of stress. I used to sign many petitions, including petitions related to animal abuse and cruelty and I noticed that my physiological response to cruelty began to change. I began to feel something that I initially mistook for joy. Although I fought it successfully, I hated having been confronted with this change in my response. It made me angry with the anonymous people or person around me who continued to expose me to so much cruelty that my body felt that it had no choice but to change its stress response to cruelty to preserve its health.

This is also what may have happened to many people in Nazi Germany.

Cruelty breeds cruelty.

Another thing that I noticed a few times back then was that when someone walking in front of me was using a crutch, I found myself thinking the horrifying thought “*What if I kicked the crutch away?*” (This is called an intrusive thought.) I hated that too. That kind of thought

had never crossed my mind before. Fortunately, most of the time I wasn't thinking anything like that at all.

Cruelty breeds cruelty. The more often you think cruel thoughts, the lower the threshold becomes towards acting on them, Kathleen Taylor explained in her book *"Cruelty"*. This will also happen if you are subjected to a lot of cruelty. It is very hard not to think of cruelty when you're experiencing it.

By the way, this process may have been described by forensic psychologist Lorraine Sheridan as one of the goals (or at least a result) of sadistic stalking. Its aim can be to "spoil" someone, to take a happy, good and content person and "ruin" that person. That has to come from a terrible place of powerlessness within the perpetrator, hasn't it? It's like a toddler angrily destroying a favourite toy.

I suspect that inflicting senseless cruelty, perhaps particularly to animals, can also be like a loud cry of powerlessness, a screaming of *"This much is how I hurt!"* for people who have no other way to express their pain. They fling it away and inflict it on others so that they still get to share it with someone. Could it be related to self-harm phenomena such as cutting? Is it a symptom of extreme narcissism?

In my deplorably bleak and, so I felt at the time, fairly typically English situation, there were very few sources of joy left. I am sure that this also had something to do with the change in my response to cruelty. I once used to socialise, but there was nobody left in my life to call, go have a cup of coffee or lunch with or share a pizza and watch a film with. I was trapped and alone, without support, often stuck in deep poverty with people around me pestering, mocking and ridiculing me, in a way that people around Ms Morris surely have done to her too.

Eventually, I realised that what I was feeling when I saw images of gore and cruelty was not joy at all. It was a physical sensation that I was associating with joy. It felt like the veins and arteries in my body relaxing instead of contracting, as they would do in fear (fight or flight). It was a solar plexus kind-of feeling. It was not associated with my thinking or intentions. It's not joy. It's despair.

Just like other physical phenomena such as an increased heartbeat can make some people think that they are scared and in danger when they aren't, something like the reverse can occur too. I don't know what

happens during joy, physiologically speaking, but during stress, the veins contract and blood pressure goes up and whatnot.

Emotions often serve to tell us what we need to avoid or seek out. If it becomes impossible to avoid cruelty, as had been the case for me for at least a decade at that point, something may have to change after a while. The body may have to decide that cruelty is all your life is still about now and that you had better start enjoying it because you might die of a heart attack or suffer a stroke if you don't. That's a real possibility.

There's been a sadistic stalking case in which the perpetrator dug up the bones of the target's deceased husband and dumped them on her doorstep. The woman had a heart attack. Apparently, the intended message had been *"What has he got that I don't?"* Not surprisingly, the woman's mental health had also declined greatly during the course of the stalking; she had to spend some time at a clinic to regain her balance after her stalker went to prison.

By the way, the correct term for what I call joy here may be "excitement".

Research has in fact shown that when we are physiologically stressed, we also tend to underestimate danger. The purpose of that is purely to keep this physiological stress response under control because it's so damaging to our health. It does not happen consciously. It comes from the gut, so to speak. It comes from the endocrine system.

Is that why cruelty is considered so shockingly normal in England? Are people in England exposed to so much cruelty that many no longer see cruelty as wrong?

With all of this in mind, I can imagine what may be taking place in the bodies and developing brains of young children if they are relentlessly subjected to repeated cruelty and little else. I shudder to think of what that may result in and how powerless and helpless these children are. A two- or three-year-old does not know what I know, that what he is feeling is not joy or excitement but his body's desperate attempt to stay whole. Thus he may learn that inflicting cruelty makes him feel better. Because it is all he knows. It is the only thing that still has the ability to make him feel better.

Maybe that is how you end up with adults, as malignant narcissist Sam Vaknin has put it, who have as much in common with neurotypicals as they have in common with long-necked giraffes. Sam Vaknin grew up in

Israel and used to enjoy hurting people. If he knew that people had any suffering in their lives that was related to the Holocaust, he would target them with Nazi swastikas, for example.

That was the kind of abuse I was being targeted with, except it was also often merely about my *perceived* weaknesses and as such often just childish and annoying, besides frequently time-consuming and distracting. I still find its persistence, its obsessive nature, creepy and scary.

Inspired by what I read in Taylor's book, I concluded that there was a high likelihood that the anonymous person in my life who committed the acts of animal cruelty to spite me uses the deployed rotary cutting tool on a daily basis. Perhaps he held some kind of job in construction. That alone would lower the threshold towards committing these cruelties, because of the force of habit involved in it. That makes sense. The action is semi-automatic. It could also be someone who slices into meat daily, such as a butcher, but I felt that the former option was more likely. I don't know why I believed that. It was just a sense that I had.

How did I conclude that the cuts were made with some kind of rotary cutting tool? I noticed a pattern and I asked myself what could have made such a pattern. I'm a scientist. I can figure shit out.

Then one day, someone stood behind a work van, near my home, and held a buzzing rotating tool up in the air when I walked by. It's called an angle grinder.



The town in which I was living at the time – Portsmouth – has a reputation for cruelty and violence and is known as one of the hardest places in the UK. Some even call it the hardest, and that is “hard” as in “tough” and “callous”. Callous as in cruel. Was that where all the abuse was coming from? I don't think so. I think there was some form of neurodiversity behind it or some kind of pathology, but I found it hard to tell. I didn't know anyone locally. None of the locals ever admitted to knowing anyone else in town, let alone knowing anything about what was going on.

In 2019, after I came home to vandalism in my home again, I asked two professors in the Netherlands – people who I didn't actually know but who I had been editing a paper for at the time – to contact the local city council leader on my behalf as I no longer had any standing in the town. I had already been asking for help for years, to no avail. Most people just shrugged. I was just another stupid foreigner to them or just another stupid old cow or just another whatever.

One of these professors made that call. I had sent him photos and I probably also sent those photos to the city council leader. I had an appointment with the city council leader about a month later, but meanwhile something else had happened and this guy didn't want to discuss the problems that I was dealing with at all. This concerned a Liberal Democrat, by the way.

When I met with him, this also was not long after the attack on the bird in the following photo had occurred. I informed the city council leader of this, too. The poor animal was in terrible pain and came to me for help. Someone had cut into her with an angle grinder just to spite me. (It may have happened on the window sill of the flat under mine, as I had heard some commotion. It woke me up. I later once overheard the guy who was living there take instructions over the phone. I also once caught this person leaning back against the wall to go through my postal mail at great leisure great leisure (while I was tying a shoe lace a few stairs above him, unbeknownst to him because he didn't see me sitting hunched there). The bird's previous mate had already been killed mercilessly, also merely to spite me. I'd received a warning about that, too. I'd received a warning about both events.



As I would often get very upset and scared when I talked about what was going on, I had typed up a few things and had printed that, along with a presentation given by an English forensic psychologist at the University of Leicester about sadistic stalking (Lorraine Sheridan, actually) and an article in *The Atlantic* about psychopathy. The city council leader ignored it all.

He literally shrugged when I asked him again what we were going to do about this kind of stuff, in that moment ascribing it to the problematic local culture. We were standing in the elevator. I felt so powerless. I was like a rotting potato to him. Why?

“I remember when I bit my mom really hard, and she was bleeding and crying,” Carl says. “I remember feeling so happy, so overjoyed.”

That text is a screenshot from the article in *The Atlantic*. You instantly realize that this statement doesn't make any sense. Remember what I just said about this possibly having something to do with the endocrine system? This is the sort of sadism that I was exposed to. I was even also often called “mum”, among other things. Earlier, I had asked around and tried to find someone with a foreign partner who abandoned him or something along those lines because among other things, there seemed to be a lot of anger about me even visiting the websites of CNN in the US and NOS in the Netherlands.

Was it the two brothers whose Austrian mother had suffered badly during the Second World War? One of them is a hacker and the other one apparently also used to work in IT. Growing up, the two brothers apparently weren't happy at home, complained about it and then became subjected to sexual abuse elsewhere. I don't know whether that is true or whether this is something that they merely wanted me to believe, perhaps to generate compassion and make it more likely that I would put up with their abuse. They are masters at planting ideas.

I initially thought that one of them had DID (dissociative identity disorder), but I have also been told that it may concern malignant NPD (narcissistic personality disorder) with psychopathy and in addition, it's been hinted that they both have Asperger's (or autism, more generally). How the hell should I know what is what when it concerns people who I don't actually know and who nobody in the town that I was living in was willing to admit they knew or had heard of? While there can be overlap between these states of being, having accurate information can make a big difference with regards to how you interact with people and for how you have to interpret their actions. (Later I was informed that I was dealing with an international network of people who were sexually abused as children. That sounded pretty bizarre. Some unhinged hacker who goes by the names Eden Stroet and Mrs Skelli was also involved for some reason. Whoever all these people are, they are unhinged and terribly destructive.

For about two years, they diligently tried to brainwash me into believing that I had been sexually abused as a child and had multiple personalities. If I hadn't gotten a brief reprieve at the end of 2010, they'd have driven me around the bend. There's been similar nonsense since. Most recently, they seem to have been trying to “prove” that I am severely autistic and have ADHD. When I am rigid with despair and

powerlessness because they are still targeting me after all these years, which I find terrifying, do they misinterpret the stone-faced rigidity as “autism”? Or are they using it to be able to tell other people that I have autism as part of their game? A great deal of this really is just a smoke-and-mirrors game to the people who do this stuff.

My situation was dire. When I met with the city council leader, I had already made four escape attempts. I had included that information in my statement for him too. I could no longer support myself, could no longer remain functional in any kind of paid capacity. Twice, I had walked out of Portsmouth in the dark, with two wheeled suitcases. I was *that* desperate to get out. I wanted my life back.

This had begun years before. I couldn't believe that it was *still* going on. What on earth *was* this? What on earth did the person who was doing this to me want from me? Why was he targeting me? Was it just because I was easy to target as a migrant who nobody knew and who didn't know anyone, in an extremely insular town on a tiny island where he controlled the narrative and had already pitched people against me before I even moved to it?

Or was it really merely the crazy, extremely insular and often very hostile local culture that I was dealing with? The Pompey 'ndrangheta?

At one point, I got the message that I was “actually a really nice woman”, and I thought to myself “No shit, Sherlock”. There's been a lot of painting me black throughout all of this; a lot of people seemed to have been told that I am a horrible woman (besides that I am learning-disabled and whatnot). I know that I am not a horrible woman and I've always been pretty confident, so it didn't hurt me but it did hamper me.

Things were really bad. In 2010, I lost a lot of weight, surviving on acorns and other things that I found. I didn't know that my locks were already getting picked back then. It would take me until 2022 to figure *that* out. I had no idea. I knew that someone had been in my home and I did talk this over with the police and with someone else at the time, but I thought that it had been the estate agency. Later, I learned something that made clear that it couldn't have been the estate agency and that it had happened several times. At my next address, the lock-picking became very frequent.

The sadism that I was subjected to was relentless and horrific and

remained relentless for years. I often lived without electricity, hot water and heating, and frequently survived on food and coins that I picked up from the streets. Sometimes, food was left for me on the corner of the street. One time, a woman with some kind of mental health problem walked up to me and handed me half-frozen meal. (Another time, a young woman with Down syndrome was sent after me to mock me, whoever did it ruthlessly abusing her by getting her to smear lipstick all over her face.) People saw me rummage through garbage cans and I attended various food handouts. I had no choice. I had to survive.

At one of those occasions, one of the pastors played a little prank on me. The result was that I walked two hours through the pouring rain, not once but twice, for a non-existing food handout. When you're hungry, that is the kind of thing that you do. In the homes of the poor, wet shoes and clothes takes days to dry. The food handout was “the body of Christ”. This prank was possibly suggested to the pastor by someone who has relatively little cognitive empathy, but on the part of the pastor, the prank was pure sadism.

What went on was unbelievably extensive, often very sadistic and utterly relentless. So massive, also geographically speaking. The latter makes it likely that there was 4chan involvement. There was a tremendous amount of hacking and the lock-picking meant that I couldn't stop that either. The longest I've been able to keep “them” out was about a month.

Meanwhile, random people around me were often openly abusing me too, verbally and sometimes also physically as you'll remember from the bucket incident. I had no social life whatsoever. I basically couldn't go anywhere in that town without being pestered. (It also sometimes happened that people pretended that I wasn't there.) Nobody knew me, but I knew that other women who were deemed too independent had also been pestered. It happened to Alice, for example. It had also happened to Audrey, who I hadn't believed. I thought that she sounded crazy. Successful Scottish business owner Paul was driven out of town. He was treated to his personal version of Pizzagate; it got the attention of the national media and was referred to as a xenophobic campaign.

At a business workshop, someone said to me that I was being targeted because I was from Amsterdam as if this was a perfectly normal thing to do. I've also received the suggestion that I was being targeted because someone hadn't liked the name of my business. I was self-employed. My

money came from mostly clients outside of the UK, however, and I was spending it in the UK. I wasn't taking anything away from the Brits. Why push me into deep poverty? Why turn my life into a nightmare?

All of this got me thinking a bit more about England and cruelty and joy. England is often such a joyless place. Could cruelty also somehow be related to things like the "stiff upper lip" phenomenon? I found some explanations for the really crazy place that England often is in Victorianism and I found a few more in utilitarianism.

Then I started to ponder the stiff upper lip. This came about in England as a result of a fascination with the stoics. It is the opposite of taking a Buddhist or Zen approach because that would acknowledge feelings without judgement whereas the stiff upper lip approach suppresses them completely. It's been described as "unwholesome" and as "leading to stunting". Might the stiff upper lip also in part explain for example the massacre at Amritsar? Wasn't that, too, cruelty and perhaps even sadism? Wasn't that like what happened in Nazi Germany?

If you repress all your emotions, which the English appear to believe all "proper" adults should do and which they probably still teach their children, cruelty can become seen as okay. That's because you will eventually no longer have a good sense of what you're doing. You lose touch with your emotions – those so important signals from your body that steer you towards or away from things – and they may eventually stop meaning anything to you.

Are empathy and compassion still possible if you don't allow yourself to feel much? Cognitive empathy, yes, we all have that (perhaps not so much if you happen to be autistic but then you likely have oodles of emotional empathy), but what we usually call empathy is emotional empathy. Aren't you in danger of behaving like a stereotypical psychopath while seeing nothing wrong with that if you suppress your emotions for far too long? After all, you'll think it's normal. You may even think that it is cool, that it means that you are super-tough now.

Could cruelty then become the only thing that can still evoke an emotional response in people and can make them feel alive? Is this why England can be so horrifyingly cruel?

And, again, if you grow up while not being allowed to feel anything good but are exposed to a heck of a lot of cruelty, might this teach the body

(including the brain) that no longer getting stressed out over cruelty means that you are enjoying it? If you grow up, from baby to toddler to young child to teenager, with cruelty being the only constant factor in your life, how do you know that other things exist such as spontaneous bubbly laughter, hugs or tickles that bring genuine joy? If cruelty is the only thing that produces something in your body that feels like it might be joy – even if it has only developed to protect your health – how can you avoid not pursuing it as the only source of joy that you know?

I am getting into some really dark territory here.

I am also sure that I am upsetting a lot of English people with my lack of diplomacy, my refusal to ignore the elephant in the room. English culture is cruel. I've even called it hate-based, but it's more appropriate to call it otherization-based, except that this otherization comes with contempt. I blame that archaic class system for it because it's something that no other country has. Remember the apparent tradition of setting young low-level staff on fire in the automotive industry in England? I've not heard about anything like this happening in other countries. There was also a case of bullying at Landrover Jaguar in England. A subsequent tribunal agreed with the employee in question, a landmark decision. It ruled "constructive dismissal".

If you look into for example the murder of Bijan Ebrahimi in Bristol, you have to conclude that his murder was a lynching. Saying that it happened because a rumour was spread that he was a paedophile is no more than a weak attempt to explain away a shocking level of hate and cruelty. The elephant is right in the room there with you.

Mr Ebrahimi was still quite young, pleasant-looking, kind and gentle. He had dreamed of getting an education but became physically disabled and loved looking after plants. He had a back problem. He was Iranian. So he wasn't old and he wasn't ugly, but enough about him was "different" to result in the community bullying that eventually caused his lynching.

His lynching – with the aid of the police – did not take place because people thought he was a paedophile. It took place because at that point people had already been hounding him for seven years. He'd even relocated within Bristol to get away from the abuse.

Saying that he was killed because people thought that he was a paedophile is just an excuse for looking away and doing nothing. I'm

sure that they'd called him many other names too. To protect himself, he started using cameras. People then pestered him about that. They said that he was using cameras because he was a paedophile.

Two police officers went to prison over this. Upon his release, one of them still claimed that he had done nothing wrong. City council staff was found guilty by the court too. It's just like the story of George Cheese except that Bijan Ebrahimi didn't kill himself. If he had, no police officers would have gone to prison and no city council staff would have been found guilty. You can bet on that.

So I am saying hard things in this book about England and its stiff upper lip, the general glorification of cruelty and the tendency to look away when bad shit happens to other people. I cannot pretend that it isn't there.

This chapter is about to get more personal now hence a little messy. Feel free to skip forward to the next chapter.

Part of me wants to remain silent. I always worry about the backlash. I've had enough of being terrorized. I have also had enough of being treated like trash because I must be deserving of abuse because, after all, why else would anyone be abused. I often used to be scared in Portsmouth, afraid of retaliation. I was supposed to keep my mouth shut. I was supposed to pretend that Portsmouth was like sweet Chichester-by-the-Sea.

Particularly also the callousness of people in the so-called Establishment in Portsmouth, people who could and should have supported me or at least should have treated me with normal human respect, has shocked me deeply. The way they treated me was so dehumanizing, so disempowering.

I wonder if these people have any idea what persistent nutritional deprivation does to you when you're in your fifties or sixties. Because of the constant lock-picking and there having been meddling with the water supply as well, when I had a little money, I had a water analysis carried out to make sure that nothing had been added to my water supply that was making me ache all the time. No, it was a matter of far too often only eating rice with or without tomato paste and little else. I needed far more protein than I was usually getting. The stress, too, was killing me. I was basically forced to live in fear and deprivation for

around fifteen years. Examples? In 2010, I lost a lot of weight and survived on acorns. In late 2011, I began to develop two painfully frozen shoulders that had me completely incapacitated by Easter 2012. In 2016, I survived on coins and food from the streets. In 2017, I had pneumonia. I often lived without heating, hot water and electricity. In 2021 going into 2022, I lived without electricity about six months. In 2022, I had a little cardiac incident. I still have a broken-off molar, too. I know what I need to thrive. Portsmouth was the opposite. Portsmouth was killing me. I desperately had to get out. I had to make sure that I had nothing to go back to. You see, unlike Tracey Morgan, I had no parents who I could move in with. My only option was homelessness with no access to income. That's scary.

In December 2023, while I was working on this version, I suddenly realized that **this** probably remains my biggest challenge. To be persistently treated like you're no more than a rotting potato that fell out of a garbage bag ripped open by an urban fox, by the people who are supposed to be there for you, that is indescribably destructive and debilitating. I no longer trust a soul. I probably need to find a way to recalibrate my relationships with humans.

When the hacking followed me to the Netherlands, when there was new hacking there, that really did me in. I was absolutely totally completely gutted, creeped out and so so so terrified. You cannot function in any paid capacity with someone so incredibly intent on overpowering all your equipment, and able to delete or alter grant proposals and alter captions or add a letter-scrambling LaTeX virus to a file for a scientist who's dyslexic – as well as tamper with e-mails, phone calls and text messages, dump tons of videos of women's thighs on your computer and gaming videos on your mobile. Yes, there is 4chan involvement. There has to be.

Yes, I know a little about IT. I've had some programming as part of my education, I have once programmed a modem so that I was able to use e-mail on a late model XT, I have created huge websites in Notepad – yes, Notepad – and I have built computers from scratch. The fucking despicable gerontophobia and misogyny that crops up every time I mention hacking is awful; most of the zombies who indulge in it have never even heard of 4chan.

It's all brought me closer to a lot of people who are treated like this all their lives, however. It's brought me closer to for example Jewish people

who were seen as stinking rotting disease-causing potatoes too about a century ago because other people were whipping hate up against them. That realization makes me ache. How do people survive that without going bad? It also makes me realize that the world is currently dangerously close to another Holocaust. The level of hate that is being generated by various politicians around the world is damn scary.

About that local Establishment... In the course of all this, I stumbled upon a stinking cesspit of local corruption. In April 2023, a local builder and property developer suggested to me that he and that Lib Dem city council leader who I had that meeting with in 2019 had been behind my abuse. He literally said that they wanted me to leave Portsmouth.

“Gerald and I want you to leave Portsmouth.”

I had merely wanted to be allowed to live my life and support myself. I had been allowed to do that everywhere else where I've lived, even in Southampton, the bigger town to the west of Portsmouth. “Gerald” and I have a university in common, but he got to have a life whereas he felt that it was okay for me to be powerlessly stuck in poverty and abused relentlessly? Why? Was it because of medieval ideas about women that he and many others in that town still held high?

“Gerald” knew very well that I was dying to get out of the damn place! I wanted my life back! My 21st-century life.

It's more complicated than that, however.

In 2010, when the Lib Dems had the overall majority at the local city council, they sponsored my participation in a successful national pilot for a NCFE-accredited course in community leadership within the Take Part (in democracy) initiative. I became one of only 11 graduates; austerity interfered with the roll-out in the rest of the country. Austerity also interfered with the graduation ceremony; the venue was changed from the Spinnaker Tower to the Aspex gallery.

During this course, it was emphasized that one shouldn't go about upsetting any apple carts. When I was a member of an environmental forum that had been set up by the council, someone told me that that too basically was a cosmetic exercise.

Now these Tories in sheepskin wanted me to leave town? Hmm.

Might that for example have something to do with me advising tenants of

their rights and telling them not to accept everything that was done to them meekly? (Might that have had something to do with some of the videos I posted on YouTube, even?)

Might it perhaps also have had something to do with me having taken a local estate agency to court, as a LIP (pro se), and a local so-called “traditional” solicitor likely having lost her business if I had not agreed to settle for over £10,000? Said solicitor paid half of that settlement. Towards the end of that lawsuit, I was only still talking with the lawyers for the estate agency's insurance company and a lawyer for that solicitor's insurance company. Said solicitor, just like Gerald and the property guy, is part of the local old-guard Establishment. I had started that lawsuit also for the sake of a local Navy woman, to whom I forwarded half of the settlement sum, to her surprise.

Yes, I guess I can understand why they had a problem with someone who stood up for tenants' rights and so on (yes, also other people's rights). That makes it so much harder to keep the plebs dumb and under the thumb. I think that the reason they wanted me gone was that I was upsetting the local apple carts of power too much. Why else? Anyone who is a bit of an activist will run into resistance at some point.

That property guy, whose right hand and legal advisor went to prison for three years and was no longer allowed to practice law, let alone be a judge, certainly had been up to all sorts of targeted harassment. He didn't even try to hide it any longer in the end. He makes use of very young poor Albanian guys and such. I'd seen some ugly messing with people's tenancy agreements, too, to cover up mistakes. More shockingly, although I have no physical proof of the act, I am pretty sure that the property guy's tenants' housing benefits used to get meddled with by the council if the property guy asked for it. Maybe it's a good thing that British housing benefits are no longer paid by the councils these days but are part of universal credit. If “discretionary” stands for “corruption”, we're all in trouble. Unfortunately, within a year, I ran into a similar stinking mess in a small Dutch town of which the name is nearly a literal translation of “Portsmouth”. So disappointing.

I am sure that Gerald at least suspected most of this. (Gerald's full name is a long double double-barrelled one, by the way, a bit like Boris Johnson's.) Gerald possibly even knew about it in detail. He probably thought that all the bizarre stuff that was going on in my life, including

the relentless sadism, was that property guy's doing. *This* must have been why he had not wanted to talk with me in 2019 about what was happening. Kerrist.

In hindsight, I can see that it initially was very hard for me to know what to make of this particular English politician. I misjudged him. He seemed a nice and friendly chap, but the friendliness was a mere facade. I had been active in various activities in town and I knew several Lib Dem city councillors from an environmental forum that I had been part of. They seemed regular okay people; they weren't career politicians. In addition, I used to frequent a popular pub and music venue that was run by a guy who later also became a Lib Dem city councillor, then deputy city council leader and city council leader next. He wasn't a career politician either at the time and he seemed an okay guy. Back then, he had integrity as far as I could tell.

By contrast, that particular city council leader had always been a politician, to my knowledge. I should have realized that. (His mother had been a politician, too.) It's a totally different beast, isn't it? A career politician?

I had voted for this guy. I had voted Lib Dem for years; it made me feel like such a fool later. The first time I voted Green Party, I felt that I was finally doing the right thing. What I had not counted on at all, is that many of these Lib Dem folks also adhere to these ridiculous outdated and dangerous class ideas. Tory ideas. Gerald once even publicly suggested that the local poor could be helped by giving them wealthier people's discarded white goods. This idea displayed a stunning lack of insight into what causes poverty and what needs to be done to remedy it. Holy cow. I wonder what Oscar Wilde would have said about that.

I'd also encountered a young Lib Dem volunteer, however, who was profoundly unpleasant. She was abrasive and disrespectful, but at the same time not hampered by any knowledge about even such a basic concept like human rights, just hankering for political power.

The local Lib Dems seemed to have no interest at all in the many people in town whose nationality wasn't British. After the Brexit referendum, the local Lib Dems sent out a newsletter in which they asked us how we had voted, completely ignoring that foreigners had not been allowed to. That was so hard to grasp. It struck me as very odd. Portsmouth had the UK's largest number of foreigners and most were highly educated hence

quite likely to vote. Although we were not allowed to vote nationally, we were and still are certainly allowed to vote locally. (This may change soon.) We foreigners, were we like aliens to them? Did they see us the way you may look at a four-year old who walks up to you at the mall?

I remember receiving the course certificate for that community leadership course from the mayor; she too was Lib Dem but I didn't know her. It was a very strange experience. She was clearly very uncomfortable around foreigners. This sort of encounter always somehow feels personal, but it can be regular English social awkwardness. As this concerned a mayor, however, someone who surely was used to talking with strangers, it must have been a display of the focusing illusion. I've only just become aware of that concept and am intrigued by it because it explains so much. I want to find out how it comes about and how you can change it.

As a foreigner in England, you're often not seen as a person but are like olives or moussaka or baklava or anchovies and artichokes. Retsina. Maybe you used to live in a mud hut with a straw roof. "Who knows, with these foreigners. Who can tell, really." You're not expected to have much command of the English language either. This view may be typical for the southeast, though. I didn't only run into it in Portsmouth, but I didn't encounter it in places like Bristol and Bournemouth.

Still, I find it very hard to imagine that Gerald and this property guy somehow had learned of my existence and decided that I was not welcome in their city. I can't see them as having targeted me from that moment in 2009 when I collected the keys to my lovely garden flat in Southsea, around the corner from the Southsea Common. The Southsea Common is a grass expanse where I loved to go for my daily hop-skip-runs and attended many bandstand gigs. I loved it there. It borders the saline waters of the Solent, the water body between the Isle of Wight and Portsea Island and the rest of the south coast. I had been over the moon at the time. Over the moon! Literally everything in my life was looking up. A home in a dream location, all of a sudden. It was all too good to be true.

I really don't think that it was the city council leader and his Trumpian real estate pal who had been picking my locks all the time and who'd been doing a lot of other strange things. Why on earth would they have been pestering me? For starters, the lock-picking and other

unpleasantness was already happening before I had even heard of either of these two guys. In fact, the pestering began before I moved to Portsmouth. I thought that I was moving away from it. I had no idea that it was coming from within Portsmouth. I didn't know anyone there.

Besides, I arrived in Portsmouth when Mike Hancock was still running the local Lib Dems. I can't see Mike Hancock sneaking over to my house to write a slogan on a white wall with an arrow to my name and do other unpleasant things to me. The idea is preposterous. Why would he? In addition, some of the interference – the digital interference that had made it impossible for me to support myself in Portsmouth – followed me after I left Portsmouth again. Surely those two guys weren't *that* obsessed and vengeful?!

Among other things, the location for my weather report on a computer that I purchased after I left Portsmouth was changed to "Shomron Regional Council, Netherlands", on 5 December 2023. The Shomron Regional Council, that's the West Bank. Yes, *that* West Bank.

Another example is that someone hacked into my tablet's Google account early in June 2023. It was first accessed on 7 June 2023. At around the same time, I received six e-mails from a property guy I have mentioned. That property guy had also flooded me with phone calls in April. All spoofed and somewhat sadistic.

Heck, who knows. Maybe this city council leader is a deranged nutcase. Maybe his property pal is a far greater nutcase than I already thought he was. Maybe they both have secret PhDs in advanced computer science.

The few fairly normal interactions that I've had with English strangers were with usually highly educated folks. I remember a London-based barrister, a woman who'd just given a workshop in London and who I talked with at a train station and another professional, also at a train station, who was on her way to Devon for a short break. She rode horses. Two folks who I met behind the scenes at the London Assembly (i.e. Greater London Authority) also seemed quite normal, as well as motivated and capable, just like many Dutch people and American folks.

Certainly not everyone in England has that bizarre paranoia towards strangers and that reticence of the stiff upper lip.

In Portsmouth, however, I once attended a court hearing concerning a man who had bitten off someone else's ear after he saw his girlfriend

flirting with the victim in a pub. (This incident did not take place in Portsmouth.) Biting off someone's ear can certainly be considered the deliberate infliction of harm and therefore cruelty. That man went to prison for four years. Alcohol surely played a role. Had this man felt a brief moment of joy when he bit through the other person's ear? Perhaps. But if so, was that really joy?

I see this incident as an example of the havoc that the stiff upper lip syndrome can wreak, that pathological suppression of swirling feelings which can explode like an underwater volcano when alcohol is added to the mix. There is a severely diminished capacity for dealing with emotions on the side of stiff-lipped perpetrators like this poor sod. When alcohol then removes the inhibitions that normally keep that suppression of feelings in check... Kapow! Kaboom! Kaput.

Cruelty rarely brings joy. When people think it does, they're kidding themselves. What cruelty does do, however, is corrupt people's souls and characters. Although we are all born with the capacity to be cruel, very few people are actually born cruel. Once we have made it safely to adulthood unscathed, cruelty becomes a personal choice. It's a moral choice, an expression of your character and of your principles.

Cruelty is usually an expression form of mental, moral and spiritual poverty and sometimes of extreme inner turmoil or prolonged extensive suffering. True joy has nothing to do with it.

6. How disparity and ultimately hate arises

In 2019, neuroscientist Rebecca Saxe gave a presentation at the Petrie-Flom Center for Health Law Policy, Biotechnology and Bioethics at Harvard Law School that had as its topic “the neuroscience of hate”. She had been asked to talk about this. She normally works on human social cognition and the development of the human brain. Saxe dove into the matter and decided that the question was “*How do we humans tolerate and even perpetrate violence against weak and defenceless strangers*” as that is most baffling.

The intuitive answer, she said, is that it has to be something like hate that causes it. She went on to say that if you look at this kind of anomalous behaviour as the result of a form of brain damage, then you might also come up with ways to remedy hate from an almost medical point of view. That intuitive approach, however, was not the one she chose to take. As it turns out, it probably would not have led anywhere as hate is something we are all capable of. So is cruelty.

The tolerance of disparity – treating others as less and the damage it results in for them – does not require hate, Saxe said she had found. Saxe then talked about group differences, about parochialism (investing in and helping exclusively our own as opposed to helping others as well) and the creation of imaginary groups and even imaginary resources to fight for. Is a mother’s first goodnight cuddle worth more than the second? Is the first comment on a YouTube video worth more than the tenth? It is if you want it to be.

Is hate an extension of typical human behaviour or is it anomalous?

I have the feeling that Saxe might say that attacks such as on Janice Morris and myself are likely not an anomaly but an expression of our shared humanity, in the sense that we were both perceived as not being from the same group as the attackers and the people around them. That boils down to what I have said so far, that we were perceived as different and that that was the reason for the attack, not in itself the fact whether someone is, for example, disabled. So one way to do something about this kind of hate, or to protect yourself, is to do things that cross boundaries between groups.

Breaking through group boundaries can be done in many different ways, but before you do this, you first have to have become aware that you are perceived as being from a different group. Secondly, people often assign you to a particular group on the basis of externalities. I have mentioned the fact that working from home can make people assume that you are on disability benefits and that the fact that you are not married means that you are “not right in the head”.

Ditching glasses in favour of contact lenses can instantly put you in a different group. You know how kids who wear glasses sometimes get teased about their glasses. That is the group thing. “Wears glasses. Not one of us.” The same sometimes happens with kids who have red hair.

When I left the area in which I grew up and moved to the central part of the Netherlands, I instantly announced myself as a member from a different group as soon as I spoke, through my strong regional accent. I found that very annoying because it always led to the question “I bet you’re from the southeast.” It became pretty boring after the first few times it was said and I was relieved when I started to lose my accent.

As I am typing this, I have a sudden realisation. I used to have a beautiful British accent before I moved to the US in the 1990s. Not wanting to lose that, I “parked” it in my mind – ditched it – and decided to learn American English as a sort of new language. Later, I found myself often automatically switching between a British accent and an American accent and I’ve even found myself automatically mimicking someone else’s broken English on occasion. I found it embarrassing, as it might come across as mockery if someone noticed it, what I was doing was crossing that group boundary between the stranger and myself. Do I have a natural strong urge to want to cross group boundaries? If so, then it seems to come from my natural tendency to want to make people feel accepted and safe.

In those days when I was still trying to get rid of my regional Dutch accent, I experimented a few times with what I wore and how people treated me when I went into a shop. Amazing! Whether I was wearing a long grey coat or something casual really impacted how people saw me. This was in the city of Leiden where I briefly studied the German language and its literature.

Several decades later, I accidentally did something similar. I dyed my hair blue and turquoise. Gone was the instant trustworthiness I used to

radiate because of my often stern, studious dark-haired exterior. I had to make a conscious effort to convey the nature of my character. Dying your hair in a certain colour is not necessarily associated with trustworthiness. Why is that? What it is about dying your hair pink that makes you less trustworthy? It’s because it marks you as someone from a different group, as not “one of us”. On trains and buses, very different types of people would sit down next to me. Certain people would spontaneously see me as “one of them” and one guy yelled loudly and enthusiastically “Where did you have your hair done?” “Did it myself!” Some people were downright wary of me and I have gotten some highly disapproving looks from strangers. I also remember one occasion when I was using an ATM and an older woman walked up with clear hesitation. Eye contact and a smile were enough to break the ice and convince her that I was likely not about to rob her.

I also noticed with a sense of pleasure and something akin to gratitude that, after I stopped colouring my hair and allowed myself to go grey again, I became a very safe person for young women to sit next to on benches in waiting areas at stations and in public transport. I like being able to provide that source of comfort and if I place myself in these young women’s shoes and think back to how I used to approach various situations, then I realise that I am happy to play that role. I have meanwhile gotten into the habit of dying my grey hair a vibrant henna-red, though, and that too brings its own peculiar responses (from men), usually depending on whether I am wearing glasses or contacts.

Whether my hair is red, grey or blue, it’s me. I am the same person, yet I am perceived very differently. That shows you some of the silly ways in which otherization works. This is how group differences play out. What group of people I get assigned to tends to be based on what I look like. Con artists know this very well. Catch me if you can.

Speaking of groups, in England, men and women have their own separate activities and don’t socialise in groups, or so I was once told. It’s my impression that this is very different for younger English people. Also, I know that it’s not entirely true. I was a member of an English samba band for a while and also a member of an environmental forum. I was the only foreigner, but both groups contained men and women in fairly equal proportions.

Several times I was an accepted member of the group within a specific

setting and treated without any animosity within that group in England, yet treated as a complete stranger outside of that setting. Sometimes, any association with me was even clearly felt to be embarrassing. I assume that this came from local gossip. From time to time, I could tell that a fresh new wave of rumours has been unleashed about me in the pubs over the weekend, but I was never privy to what the rumours were about. The town where I was based has been dubbed “the UK’s biggest village”. Everybody there thinks they know everything about everybody else in town. As they don’t, they have to make stuff up. The less people know about you, the more likely they are to make things up about you in that kind of environment. The locals also whipped up deep-fake porn with my face in it one time. That too caused expectations around town, I noticed.

Years ago, I attended workshops organised by Her Majesty’s Customs and Revenues (HMRC, that’s the tax people, the British version of the IRS or the *Belastingdienst*) for self-employed people and people intending to incorporate a company or just having done so. I was the only one who handed out business cards and engaged in conversation with the others, asking them about their businesses and so on (to the amusement and pleasure of the guys running these workshops). This social awkwardness is an expression of insularity. It expresses that every English person sees himself or herself as an island that must be carefully guarded.

It is very hard to do something about group barriers against a background like that. The entire world saw it and continues to see it within the context of the Brexit negotiations as well. What negotiations? You can sum it all up with a cartoon of an English person crossing his arms and stubbornly saying nothing and not hearing a word, proudly being an island all by himself on his chair, like a concrete mule. The thought cloud over his head might read: “That’ll show them!”

Socialising as a goal in itself is not something the English do a lot of, not within a professional context either, even though they may think they do. Networking often is no more here than an expression of the old boys’ club phenomenon in which people rigidly stick to members of their own group and only trust and help each other. It’s not socialising. It’s an exchange of favours. If you scratch my back, I will scratch yours. My neighbour across the road, who is not in your social circles, might actually do a much better job scratching your back than I as his company provides the services that you need while I don’t. Sadly, that is

not what this is all about, getting a job done well, solving something proactively and interactively. It is about gathering favours to be cashed in on later. It’s about keeping outsiders out and insiders in.

You could also see it in July 2020, with all those government contracts going to personal friends of a small circle of people in government (several mysteriously enough for the exact same amount). It’s the same thing. I am pleased that plenty of people in England are not happy with these injustices either. For injustices is what they are. Favours exchanged within a small circle of friends are injustices, certainly when public funds are involved and when getting the job done well is of no concern. It’s also happening in the US and in Canada. The Netherlands had one contract for PPE that stank and the Dutch state – not some counterpart to Jo Maugham’s Good Law Project – pursued the matter.

Rebecca Saxe said that just the positive effects of what she calls parochialism alone – helping our own kind – can create a massive degree of disparity. It does not require hate or negative feelings towards members of another group to cause that group to become hugely disadvantaged. All it takes is that one group has more power.

(That’s also what is so tragic about Portsmouth,)

This matches what Daniel Goldberg (attorney, historian, public health ethicist) said on Twitter on 8 June 2018) about how to tackle stigmas, namely by “*addressing oppressive macrosocial power structures*”.

Parochialism combined with an over-the-top sense of entitlement also explains a lot of the UK’s animosity towards the EU and the way the Brexit negotiations went. There was a strong feeling that the other members of the EU were part of a different group and a strong feeling that membership in the EU had resulted in a loss of sovereignty even though the British government has publicly admitted that no such loss had occurred. That’s part of official government documentation, yes.

Remember what I wrote about Seth Godin’s findings and Roland Imhoff’s work about how conspiracy theories come about?

It’s British exceptionalism all over again. Predominantly the English see themselves as fiercely independent and immensely different, and then use their own view of themselves and their own attitude as an excuse to distrust and reject others.

English entitlement is the story about the cake. You can't eat it and expect to still have it and keep it. You can't leave the EU and then demand from the EU that it continues to treat you as if you are still a member and then make that non-negotiable just like you can't join the EU yet at the same time insist on not being a member of it. The UK has often held the EU's decisions back.

Britain wants to feel as unique as the people who believe that Princess Diana passed away yet faked her own death and the people who insist that Elvis Presley is alive yet at the same time mourn his death. Some are convinced that the earth is flat because the planet is so huge that they cannot conceptualise its shape. They, therefore, conclude that the earth is flat and keep trying to find its edges. Some people die trying to prove that, you know.

How can you not form a highly divided country that way, if everyone has such a strong urge to want to be part of an exclusive and elusive group? It's a form of poverty to live this way. Self-inflicted spiritual poverty.

Education has to be part of the answer. Education must not only take place at schools, and involve ditching the ridiculous school uniforms (unless all schools start requiring the same uniforms) but also at businesses. It must include revealing people's own intersectionality to them and make them realise that they have a lot more in common with everyone around them than they probably thought.

Against the background of current developments, I feel a duty to keep repeating what Saxe said. In-group favouritism – refusing to help those who are not part of your own group – can do great harm without there even having been any dislike of the out-group.

This probably explains why white people in the UK feel that there is no or very little racism in the UK whereas black people feel that there is and why many of the British see themselves as highly tolerant and certainly not xenophobic. They are merely so extremely focused on themselves and on protecting and favouring people in their own group that they push other people out without realising it.

Rebecca Saxe defined parochialism more or less as *“at least devoting more resources to the in-group than to the out-group”*. Resources do not have to be of a financial nature, but can also be for example empathy. It is conscious and explicit. If it is conscious and explicit, isn't in-group

favouritism racism, then, if the in-group is “whites”? This is also at the heart of the English class system. If you're from a lower class you are paid less for the same work than someone from a higher class. The lowest wages are very low. That's not an accident. That's deliberate.

Rebecca Saxe ended up concluding that hate has a lot to do with whether people have the feeling that there is enough to go around for everyone. A sense of scarcity induces people to want to look out for “their own kind” first. In other words: Inequality fosters hate.

Now I have to remind you that it is metabolically costly for the brain to be empathetic toward people (in situations) that we are not familiar with, according to neuroscientist Lisa Barrett Feldman. It is tempting for, say, Democrats and Republicans to point the finger at each other, and reject these other folks because they seem to have little empathy. Those others usually simply have empathy for different groups of people, but we don't experience it that way. We aren't as much to blame for these things as we like to think, but overcoming that empathy gap requires a conscious effort (and circumstances that support this). It can get even you perceived as one of those despised others, too, I've learned, if you don't see things as black and white.

Greater equality benefits everyone, including those in the top layers of society, English researchers Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett found. They're saying the same things that people like Rebecca Saxe are saying. It's not the EU. And it's not me, because I am not English. It's you. You, the English, do this to yourself. Because you all want to be unicorns and you all want to claim that migrants are forcing you to be poor abused unicorns. You refuse to accept that you're as human as everyone else on the planet. You refuse to accept that even among yourselves, you all have the same need for food, shelter and all the other things that you need (besides diamond tiaras and private cinemas and basement swimming pools). In continuing to insist that you are unicorns and must be treated with exceptional care and be granted exceptional favours, you short-change yourself. That also applied to the negotiations with the EU.

If you don't see how this is connected to the infliction of cruelty, well, then I will have to stop by, hit you over the head with a frying pan, hand you the frying pan and ask you to prepare a meal for me, oblivious to the fact that you are bleeding from a cut caused by my frying pan.

What Saxe said in her talk also more or less matches what

neuroscientist Kathleen Taylor wrote in her book *"Cruelty. Human evil and the human brain"*. Otherization, as Taylor called it, can be the excuse that overcomes the threshold to cruelty. Cruelty is often only considered cruelty when other people do it, certainly when they do it to your kind of people instead of to others. Most people don't see themselves as people who are capable of cruelty. But we all are.

Rebecca Saxe concluded that hate is a natural extension of these phenomena, of feelings of scarcity leading to parochialism, and that it is not an aberration. All over the world, among widely varying groups of people of various ages, when there is a scarcity of resources and a conflict with another group, violence against that group or, more generally, harming that other group is seen as justified, as required for the own group's survival.

(She was, in essence, also explaining how acts of terrorism come about, without explicitly saying it. Various terrorism experts have already said this out loud.)

Thankfully, from a very young age, humans also feel a strong need to cooperate and help altruistically. Toddlers will hurry over to open the door for a stranger, said Saxe, and love to play cooperative games. So to make the world a better place, we really should teach these things in schools. We should teach kids how we create disparities in the world. We should show them that we often do this without consciously setting out to do so, sometimes even without being aware of the existence of the disadvantaged group. We should open children's eyes to how this can ultimately lead to hate without each of us having a clue of the role that we played in the creation of that hate.

We should also provide positive antidotes. We should invite that sparkling bright and bubbly, not to mention often hilarious, former BBC news journalist over from Plum Village to talk at British schools. Write to her, teachers. She studied History & Political Thought at Cambridge University and worked at BBC's politics news desk in London. She is now called Sister True Dedication (Chân Hiến Nghiêm). Her address in France is Meyrac 47120, Loubès-Bernac and the central phone number is +33 553 947540.

7. Expectations and beliefs

Words. They can be so damaging yet may seem so innocent.

Stereotyping is when you associate red hair with being Irish. Stereotyping can also be a positive thing, such as in "all Dutch people are great ice skaters". It becomes discrimination when you disadvantage all people with red hair on the assumptions that they are probably Irish and that being Irish excludes or disqualifies them from something. If the latter is according to the law, then it's not considered discrimination as long as you check passports to verify whether they are Irish or not, though it is if you were to say something along the lines of "I just don't like red hair" or "I just don't like Irish people".

Last Updated: Saturday, 2 June 2007, 17:36 GMT 18:36 UK

[E-mail this to a friend](#)

[Printable version](#)

Red-haired family forced to move

A Newcastle family claim they have been forced from two homes by thugs who have targeted them over their ginger hair.



Kevin and Barbara Chapman say they and their four children, aged between 10 and 13, have endured years of taunts, smashed windows and violence.

Kevin Chapman says he was attacked in the street

They said they moved from Walker to Newbiggin Hall to try to escape the bullying, and then again to Kenton Bar.

I see prejudice as merely something that you think, not as a view that you act upon, not as something that by definition has negative consequences for others. Discrimination, by contrast, is an act, of doing something that you would not have done if it hadn't concerned a certain

quality on the basis of which you are distinguishing people or an act of not doing something that you would have done otherwise.

If you assign for example criminality to all people who have red hair or all people who are Irish, then you are stigmatising them, though you can also still see this as prejudice, as long as you don't act on it so that the people with red hair or all Irish people aren't disadvantaged as a result. Discrimination does. Discrimination can cause people to become marginalized. If you push them out of your community or society very deliberately, such as is happening to the Uyghurs, then you are not only marginalizing them but also traumatizing and ostracising them. In the case of the Uyghurs, it goes even further than that because many Uyghurs are effectively imprisoned.

If you have red hair (or imagine that you do), think about what would you call it if the chapel on the corner closes its open doors very quickly every time the people standing at those doors happen to see you approach on the pavement? You had no intention to go into the chapel, so it does not affect you. You probably didn't even notice it, but someone else who lives next-door to the chapel might.

When I go to a Level 42 concert and a security guard keeps eying me because he expects me to storm the stage to accost Mark King because I am an unaccompanied middle-aged woman, until he sudden realizes that I'm actually looking at something else and turns around to see what it is, yeah, I think that that's the result of stigmatisation. I might call it discrimination in real life, but I might not actually care in real life as long as it does not interfere with my enjoyment of the concert. That would be the point at which someone else's prejudice begins to disadvantage me and it would turn into discrimination, if they would escort me out or would not even let unaccompanied middle-aged women into the venue.

We all engage in otherization – I do too – yet we are most aware of it when others practice it. Only others do certain bad things. That too is otherization. Both Lloyd-Roberts (*"The war on women"*) and Taylor (*"Cruelty. Human evil and the human brain"*) said very little about misogyny and otherization in Britain. They looked predominantly at what goes on beyond Dover.

The latest UN assessment of the human rights situation of women in the UK found an in-your-face sexism that is worse than in any other

country, however. The difference between calling a woman names and hitting her or going berserk and battering her into a coma is a mere few pints. Domestic violence – men physically injuring women – soars in England at Christmas time and during football matches.

Again I am reminded of what Taylor wrote: *"even mild otherization primes people for aggression"*. Does the in-your-face sexism in Britain prime British men for aggression against women?

The same UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences was also told by NGOs in the UK that there were *"serious concerns about the problematic narratives surrounding violence against black and minority ethnic women and girls."* *"This then ignores the harms emanating from other sexist practices that are prevalent in the United Kingdom, and which impact women and girls of all ethnic and racial backgrounds."*

Here, otherization spreads the false belief that mainly foreign, black and other minority women suffer violence and that English people do not engage in violence against women and girls. It colours people's expectations. In reality, the situation in the UK is worse than elsewhere.

According to the UN report, *"a 2014 Europe-wide survey on violence against women found that 29 per cent of respondents in the United Kingdom had experienced physical and/or sexual violence committed by a current and/or previous partner since the age of 15. This is above the European Union average for the survey, which was 22 per cent."*

A hilarious example of otherization with regards to other species in Taylor's book is that she described trees as involuntarily causing cracks in the pavement but overlooks that it's humans who put the pavement there and obstruct the trees' growth. Sure, blame the tree. Bad, bad tree. (The scarce resource is the space taken up by the pavement in this case. Taylor did not appear to believe that the tree had any rights.)

There is also a more serious display of otherization at work in Taylor's book. The Amritsar massacre and the praise it initially resulted in at home is a prime example of what both Rebecca Saxe and Kathleen Taylor were talking about. Taylor did not mention it, however, even though it is part of Britain's fairly recent history. Saxe limited her talk mainly to the here and now. She is Canadian. Taylor is British.

Was Taylor carefully avoiding upsetting any apple carts for some reason?

On page 195, she did discuss the anti-Jewish sentiments that surfaced in London in the 1930s – adding that such blatant anti-Semitism would not be tolerated today – as well as current irrational fears regarding anyone of the Muslim faith surely busily plotting murder in order to turn Britain into a sharia state. (Remember that Taylor published her book in 2009, hence in the aftermath of various extreme-Islamist attacks and that most of the present anti-Semitism in the UK had not seen daylight yet.)

There is no word about any of the other atrocities that the British inflicted abroad either. The Chagossians driven from their home, the destruction wreaked in India's social system through the deliberate application of discrimination, the damage done in African countries, the UK's willingness to go to war over Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands.

Taylor did not say much about that quintessentially English example of otherization known as the class system, besides that she used the phrase *“loving middle-class environment”* on page 142 to refer to the life of a child that had wanted to take a cat for a walk and accidentally almost strangled the cat. Maybe Taylor said enough when she wrote that, without being aware of it. Was she suggesting that lower-class people do not love their children or did she want to stress that the child lacked nothing and had no reason to be angry about anything? Taylor also said a lot between the lines when she quipped about “uppity” women who attend university and choose not to destroy all that invested capital after they graduate but have a career in their chosen field.

However, on page 177, she gave the example of the British scientist who is likely to feel much more at ease among colleagues from Germany, China and Pakistan than with non-scientist Britons (particularly if the later are lower class or upper class) *“because the shared ‘British’ culture is thin compared with the segregating force fields of class and profession”*. That's as far as she went, but for anyone who knows what she is talking about, it's probably enough.

Taylor stated that she wrote her book in favour of two claims. One is the fact that anyone can inflict cruelty, which I think I've meanwhile shown too without going too deeply into the darkest abysses of cruelty. The second claim was the following:

“The difference between someone hurling verbal abuse at an immigrant and someone beating an immigrant to death is a difference of degree, not a difference in kind.”

This is exactly why the outspoken animosity that prominent Conservative politicians in the UK so often display towards migrants continues to worry me. It worries me every time I hear a new display of this animosity, regardless of who exactly it comes from. The difference between one – yelling at someone – and the other – beating someone to death – is a mere few pints of beer, perhaps preceded by a quarrel with the wife or with the manager at work.

Kathleen Taylor wrote:

“even mild otherization primes people for aggression”

It's also why people like Donald Trump and Geert Wilders are so dangerous, not just the UK's politicians. That Kathleen Taylor's claim is correct became shockingly clear on 6 January 2021 when Donald Trump turned out to have whipped up masses of people into attacking the US Capitol. They were specifically targeting many lawmakers who Trump had been badmouthing, including Nancy Pelosi and Mike Pence.

I have a question about otherization (group differences) that neither Saxe nor Taylor addressed. Men are far more likely to commit lethal acts of violence than women. The difference in muscle power provides part of the explanation for that. Also in Geert Hofstede's model about masculine and feminine cultures, we see that women are believed to place a much higher emphasis on cooperation while men are usually thought of as more competitive, fighting for a place in the male pecking order.

Does this mean that otherization predominantly comes from men? Is it instigated by men? If so, then this could provide an easy avenue towards making the world a less cruel place and prevent the deaths of people like Mr Cheese, who clearly was subjected to cruelty at his place of work.

It is well known that having even one woman present in a setting changes the dynamics and can stop men from inflicting cruelty. A woman watching what men do often has the effect of making men behave better, as belittling as it may sound towards men.

As far as I have been able to find – I found a group photo online of the team – Mr Cheese had no female colleagues. Could the mere hiring of a

woman have prevented the development of the apparent tradition of setting trainees on fire at Mr Cheese's place of work? Do women ever habitually engage in practices as daft, cruel and destructive as trying to set fire to colleagues? What was the situation at Mr Hayward's work?

Taylor seems to believe that otherization exists to help steer us away from pain and towards pleasure. That could explain why I started otherizing other migrants after I became otherized as a migrant in England. It matches my idea that it is something you do in an attempt to protect yourself. This is partly related, obviously, to whether we see others as posing a threat to us. This in turn is tied into the notion of scarcity, of whether there is enough to go around. (Non-human animals can display an astonishing level of compassion towards other species if they feel secure and have plenty of food at their disposal.)

You can see this idea of the avoidance of pain and the seeking of pleasure as a reason for otherization reflected in utilitarianism, when Jeremy Bentham proposed to round up the beggars and disabled, along with others whose visible presence decreased the happiness of the more fortunate, according to him. He wanted them tucked away in workhouses, out of our sight, in an order that, also according to him, would reduce unhappiness. He wanted the deaf and dumb "next to raving lunatics, or persons of profligate conversation", aged women next to "prostitutes and loose women", and the blind next to the "shockingly deformed".

You can also see how something like this may once have made sense from a biological perspective, our instincts wanting to protect us against disease, just like we white people from Europe exposed indigenous populations to infections that they had no immunity against when we began exploring the planet. During the pandemic, we quarantined people just because they might be carrying COVID-19. The difference is that we let them go and gave them access to the rest of the country if they still hadn't fallen ill after their two weeks of quarantine. If they became ill, then we looked after them and nursed them back to good health to the best of our abilities. We didn't deport them to an uninhabited island.

The idea is that we apply rationality when we quarantine people coming into a country in such conditions, particularly from countries with a known high incidence of infection. We did not respond with utter paranoia, but there were attacks on people who looked as if they might

be from Asia even if their families had been in the UK, the Netherlands or the US for generations. The attackers asked no questions. Their focusing illusion instantly caused them to jump to conclusions; their fear did the rest. As far as I know, there were no mass demonstrations at airports to stop people from coming into the country, however.

Instead, many other protests occurred during the pandemic, namely against otherization of black people and its massively damaging effects, the many preventable deaths as a result of police brutality and health disparities.

The colleagues of Mr Cheese treated him as if he had a virus and posed a lethal danger. You could say that the rituals with which they reacted to him when he joined their firm came from the "crocodile" parts of their brain, that they quite literally treated him as if he carried the plague, even though the response was a drawn-out, delayed one. They set him on fire. That probably goes for Mr Hayward's experiences too.

We are cruel because we are emotional and insecure, responding from our gut rather than from our rational thinking, no matter what we tell ourselves. We are not cruel because we are clever or suave or experienced or seasoned. And the more cruelty we inflict, the more cruelty we receive in return.

Do I believe that if everyone were to read this book, the world would instantly become a better place? Of course not. Do I expect everyone who reads it to understand exactly what I mean, with regards to every sentence that I have written in this book? No. I am not perfect and neither is my writing.

Beliefs can be changed, however, if sufficient evidence can be shown that the belief needs to be adjusted, according to Taylor. While people will always continue to try to stick to beloved misconceptions, as Kathleen Taylor also points out in her book, education helps a lot, she adds. I refer you back to the end of the previous chapter.

Education can only do so much, however. As adults, we need to do more than agree and nod. We need to put our learning into practice. Maybe this book can help people reach out to each other. Maybe organizational psychologists can play a role in such a transition from an otherizing environment to an inclusive one.

Portsmouth City Council comes to mind again. From the media and from

other people's freedom of information requests, I have learned that bullying has been reported to be taking place within the housing department, the city council itself and the local Lib Dems. In its interactions with the public, Civic Offices staff has also been setting national records in how it deals with non-visible disabilities and illnesses such as Parkinson's and autism. False beliefs held by these employees are resulting in incorrect expectations of how for example autistic people behave but also of the abilities of poor people and older adults.

We all suffer from biases, even those of us who are convinced we are right. We are so convinced that we are right that we have trouble seeing the merits of other people's beliefs.

In her talk, Rebecca Saxe pointed out that some people – notably liberals, she said – tend to believe that more parochial people are less empathetic, but that is not the case. I have seen this in the automatic rejection of American Democrats of Republicans. Republicans are merely committed to a different distribution of their empathy. The level of empathy they have is just as high. It's very useful to keep that in mind. We tend to overlook this because we simply don't see where their empathy is going. It makes it appear absent. People who appear to share our values, on the other hand, we will experience them as related to us and it will be much easier for us to be empathetic towards them.

Did you know that when you challenge someone else's beliefs, you are bound to be experienced as unpleasant? Were you aware that having one's beliefs questioned can be quite stressful?

Did you know that people who do not behave according to what they are believed to be like (weak, disgusting, evil etc) are experienced as most threatening?

Read that again.

I am emphasizing that for a reason.

Many people still believe that England is an open and welcoming nation that knows no such thing as racism. I was dumbfounded to see how many people commented that the Black Lives Matter (BLM) surge that began sweeping the world after the killing of George Floyd had nothing to do with Britain and was a quintessentially American thing. Labour Leader Keir Starmer was one of them. Excuse me?

On 23 June 2020, the CNN website headlined "We have an unhealthy culture in the UK that calling out racism is more offensive than racism itself" (Nova Reid) and "The greatest trick racism ever pulled was convincing England it doesn't exist". CNN added: "Most Black people think that Britain is racist, most White people don't."

"We have an unhealthy culture in the UK that calling out racism is more offensive than racism itself."

Nova Reid

See how this clicks with what I just wrote? Unwelcome ideas such as the existence of racism in Britain are rejected and one's worldview, if necessary, is adjusted to fit the belief that there is no racism in England. That black man who was stopped and searched after that TV interview in which he talked about racism, well, he clearly must have acted suspiciously. That Italian pizza restaurant in London that treated one of the world's top jazz musicians in such an atrocious manner because he was guilty of being black, well, they couldn't have known that he was not some kind of street thug, could they? (I do hope that Julia Roberts has stopped endorsing the place.) That black man who was tasered in front of his own home and who did not in any way behave like a suspect but seemed to resemble another black man who was a suspect, well, those police officers couldn't have known that they were tasing one of the police's own race relations advisers, could they? After all, he looked like that black suspect.

Remember the video of the dad whose small child apparently took a doll from a store without him noticing? The police treated him as if he was a suicide bomber with an invisible suicide vest. The target had to be disarmed a.s.a.p. in front of his two young daughters. But that's okay, eh? Because he was black. Not a real human. Not one of "us". That

happened in the States. I've lived there too. I was living in the city where two waves of riots broke out after Tyron(e) Lewis was killed. I'd just left.

Racism is a major problem in Britain that is costing lives here too. Whether you are aware of it and hence believe it exists or expect it to be an American thing may, depends on who you associate with and which accounts you interact with (follow) on social media.

A few years ago, I looked into taser incidents. That was sparked by a taser case in the Netherlands. This concerned excessive taser – in so-called compliance or pain mode – of a mentally unwell patient who had already been put in isolation. I wanted to know how often tasers were deployed against patients in hospitals. What I found was that, in Britain, tasers were also often used against black people (people of colour, people whose skin is not lily-white or ivory-white or milk-white; I hate having to make these distinctions but in contexts like these, I have to, and I struggle with it because it shouldn't make a difference). I found that people were dying here as a result of police violence and these people were often mental health patients and black people. One of them was a trainee security guard who had called the police and was subsequently attacked by police officers.

White people have to learn to adjust their beliefs and expectations about black people just like I want English people also to adjust their beliefs and expectations about women and about older adults and about disabled people and migrants and poor people and everyone else who is constantly being otherized in England.

It's not true that every older adult is senile and the perceived slowness of slightly older adults is often a mere appearance, the mere result of declining near-vision. In this digital world, that matters. Mobile phones are not designed with the over-40s in mind. Not being able to read the numbers on your screen may make you look like you don't know what to do with your phone, but does not mean that you don't know what to do with your phone. (It used to be that all number pads had the numbers in the same places, but that is no longer the case.) This alone can so easily turn into the belief that all older adults are, well, senile, sort of. Of course, neither is it appropriate to make fun of people who do have dementia. They did nothing to deserve dementia and they certainly do not deserve ridicule and abuse.

It is also not true that women are defective humans. If we were defective,

then how come the entire world depends on us? It's not true that migrants are thieving, lying, low-skilled cheap labour and out to take from you what is rightfully yours. It's not true that a great deal of the poverty in the UK is not deliberately caused by the government. (Read that again.) It's not true that that is the fault of the poor sods who weren't born with a silver spoon in their mouths. It's not their genes that cause it. It isn't the result of character flaws either.

These beliefs, where do they come from? Well, some of them are installed in us by devious politicians and other demagogues. And we are not even aware of it. Want an example of how this works?

If the first thing you heard about abortion was that this was when little babies were yanked out of their mothers' wombs, ripped apart and discarded like garbage, that likely produced a strong emotion in you that you may from then on forever associate with the word "abortion". If the next four occasions on which you hear the word are similar, that association becomes reinforced. It will then be so much harder for you not to feel pain, horror and disgust when you have to consider abortion as a solution to stop a mother from dying during childbirth or a young girl who has been raped from having to discontinue her education and abandon her plans for a bright future.

If the first time you heard the word, it was in association with, say, a mother in her forties who did not want to bring a child into a life of deep poverty as she would have been forced her to quit her two jobs or as a solution to stop a mother from dying during childbirth or a young girl who had been raped from having to discontinue her education and abandon her plans for the future, you will have a very different, much more positive association with the word, hence a different belief. Am I right? It has to do with where your empathy is directed, with who your compassion is for.

If the first dog you encountered bit you, hard, you may expect all dogs to bite. If you grew up with dogs, you likely roughoused with them and learned that a playful bite during horseplay is very different from a dog biting you to bite you. So based on your belief, you expect a certain behaviour from dogs and you know what, with dogs, that often determines how they behave towards you. So, sometimes, your beliefs can make your expectations come true. That's worrisome, isn't it?

The strongest beliefs, the hardest to change or root out, "come with an

emotional booster“, Kathleen Taylor explained. That is what happens during the application of rhetoric, such as when you are told about little babies being yanked out of their mother’s womb to stop the mother from dying during childbirth, even if that baby is only still a clump of cells at that point, not a baby.

Accomplishing otherization, Taylor elaborated, depends on three casually spread core messages. Core beliefs. The first one is the one that causes distancing. It portrays people as disgusting and not quite human. The second one is installing the belief that these not-quite humans are out to harm you or have already done so, wrote Taylor and she continued with the third “removing these people will solve your problems”.

Here you suddenly have the Brexit rhetoric in its full simple glory. Migrants are low-skilled. (This is part of the reason why I was often believed to be delusional. Migrants are low-skilled, after all. Everybody knows that.) Migrants are the cause of England’s low wages. (No, they’re not, unless the English have been keeping them as slaves. Minimum wages are set by the government and people like Richard Branson voluntarily choose to pay their employees low wages.) “*We will bring their numbers down.*” (Priti Patel about EU citizens in the UK) Migrants must go home. They must be stopped from renting homes and making a living, must be hunted, rounded up, kept in removal centres for an unlimited duration during which they lose their jobs and homes, often also their bank accounts and their driving licence and possibly their passports. Surely, they’ll bugger off after that.

We’re persistent vermin, aren’t we? Many of us have so many friends and relatives here, including children and parents. We often have none in other countries. Just like you. But these days, the main questions I still get as to who I am is “Where are you from?” and “How long have you been here?” The same people who ask these questions never ask me my name or what my professional background is.

I probably switch between “us” and “you” and “them” and “we” and “they” and “I” so often in this book that it is hard to keep track of who’s who. Maybe that’s intentional. The people who lost their homes, jobs and more during the Windrush debacle suffered similar damages as the many people on disability benefits that were illegally cut by the DWP with the hope of the poor sods not noticing it or at least not being very

able to fight back. “*Blatantly discriminatory*” ruled the English High Court in 2017 (RF v Secretary of State for Work and Pensions [2017] EWHC 3375 (Admin)) with regard to one of those cuts. The UK government has been taking its time paying its dues after such debacles, hasn’t it? Remember the bedroom tax, the suicides and evictions that led to? And most of you’ve read how badly Jack Monroe used to struggle to feed herself and her kids. Do you see now that there may not be such a big difference between us as you may have been led to believe?

Why is it that the same politicians who demonise foreigners go abroad as soon as things are not going very well for them in the UK? Prime example: Nigel Farage, of course. If foreigners are such dangerous, low-skilled criminals out to rob you blind and eat your gorgeous English swans, then why do these politicians spend their leisure time among these dangerous, low-skilled criminals that are out to rob you blind? Yet you continue to believe them. Okay, maybe not you literally, but you know what I mean. Theresa May took two walking holidays that summer break – yeah that one, the one after which she returned to work later than expected – but she had not been walking in the Lake District or in Cornwall. She went abroad. That’s where all those filthy dangerous foreigners live, you know.

In my sweeping generalisations, you get a glimpse of how otherization works. It’s not true, of course, that everyone in England demonises foreigners. I, for example, remember a conversation with an older gentleman who I encountered at one of the local launderettes who told me about all his travels and waited a very long time to ask me where I was from to make clear that he was genuinely interested and that he really enjoyed experiencing and interacting with other cultures. I also remember what may have been my first conversation here, with a bank employee whose name I don’t recall. He too wanted to make clear that he had nothing against us foreigners but I was so new to the country that I wasn’t aware of the anti-foreigner sentiment yet and didn’t get what he was going on about. Initially, some people had nothing against me because they believed that I was American whereas they had a bit of a problem with Polish people.

I have seen mild otherization at work in the African-Caribbean community in the UK as well. When we feel threatened, we all build walls around us and we may even lose the connection that we share with other otherized people. (I am from Holland, not Poland. The Netherlands,

you know. Amsterdam.)

Very important, however, is that stories intended to accomplish otherization, said Taylor, use a familiar language that fits the local culture. That makes them much more palatable. It lulls people into a state of sleep and stops them from acknowledging the reality behind the lies that they are fed. (This makes me think of Trump's language use.)

"Otherization," continued Taylor, produces the effect that while you normally consider it wrong to hurt people, declaring some people "not really people" allows you to get away with hurting them.

It enables you to justify to yourself why you threw stones at someone, doused someone in flour or why you spread nasty rumours about barmy Dutch madwomen. Or set fire to trainees...

If I don't go around spreading the rumour that you are a nasty paedophile who hurts little children, then why do you go around spreading similarly damaging rumours about me? Why do you go around telling people who don't even know me that I am delusional, that I merely imagine that I went to university and perhaps that I might throw acid at people?

I consider you a human being, just like me, and I do not consider it right to spread nasty made-up rumours about other people, people who don't even know me. Yet to you, I am "not really a human being" – and in your mind, you have a whole list of arguments that "prove" to you why that is so – and that makes it okay for you to spread rumours about me that marginalise me in so many ways. Is it? Is it really okay to do so?

Adjusting your belief about me is not "a deathly threat to your identity" in the sense that it will literally get you killed, but it may push you out of your in-group of people who believe that I am a barmy Dutch madwoman. That takes guts. It also requires you to admit to yourself that you were wrong about me. That too takes guts.

Dismantling your own beliefs about me is unpleasant. It may also lead you to start questioning your beliefs about many other people, specifically other older women and other foreigners, and also people like George Cheese and Janice Morris. That idea may really scare you. It will likely rattle your sense of identity, your sense of self.

Next time, it could be your nephew who gets set on fire at work and then

hangs himself or your mother who gets attacked while sitting on a bench. Consider that possibility. Isn't that a better starting point for figuring out whether an attack was "deserved" or "excusable" than instantly otherizing victims so that you can continue to feel safe and secure?

For me, breaking down the boundaries that trap people in poverty became very and probably far too important after I moved to Portsmouth. Instilling a sense of abundance for the locals, I dreamed of that for a long time. I often found the widespread poverty in Portsmouth very hard to stomach. I remember a day on which I felt like screaming and running out of the local large Tesco, the one near Commercial Road. I no longer could bear the sight of all those poor sods literally counting their coins. I later started going to an extra large Tesco that had much more affluent customers. I couldn't stand the massive pervasive poverty and misery any longer. It's so depressing and it really robs you of your hope and perspective. You can taste people's misery and despair. They often get treated as if they are rotting potatoes.

I thought that it sucked that "free" food festivals were often announced at which nothing was available at no charge. Walking around was free. That was the only thing that was free about it. There wasn't even any free food tasting. So among many other things, I cooked up the idea of a sponsored annual festival by pairing the city of Portsmouth and the city of Amsterdam. There would be music for the young folks (no lindy hop dancing but trippy hip hop and of course Dutch buskers with barrel organs), free food and free orange juice, there would be tourism stands and there would be something there for everyone, for all sorts of people from within Portsmouth and people from around Portsmouth. I figured that the appeal of Amsterdam alone would draw people from within England to Portsmouth and I figured that I would be able to find enough Dutch sponsors. I envisaged it in Guildhall Square. This was before Brexit, when Portsmouth was still interested in drawing more visitors to it. The music festivals that take place in Portsmouth nowadays bring in a lot of money – also for the police – and large masses of people, but are a big practical burden on the local population.

I have also fantasized about Europeans flying across the UK in small planes and dropping pound notes all over the place as a way to breach that boundary between us and them and shake up these beliefs that the EU is only out to shaft Brits. I do think that breaching stubborn negative

beliefs about others requires physical acts that are accompanied by emotions. It might be good to do unexpected and possibly barmy things, such as people from the EU dropping pound notes all over the UK.

I've thought about us EU citizens in the UK all going to their local job centres and handing out goodies from their countries, such as Dutch *stroopwafels*, to everyone coming out of the place. This would be sufficiently unexpected to be able to affect people. But could it be so unexpected that it might be met with a lot of distrust? I've never gotten around to it.

I have, however, left Danish pastries on the counter of a local advice agency once. They were eagerly instantly tucked into by a guy who happened to be standing there and had not eaten anything yet that day. He recognised me in Kingston Road weeks later and thanked me a second time. After the pandemic, I went out a few times to offer a bag with goodies and a stylish black thermal turtleneck to random people I encountered. Sometimes, it really is as simple as that.

I did that because the negativity around me was really affecting me and I had to keep fighting against incorporating the belief that everyone around me was rotten. It wasn't healthy. I didn't want to go around distrusting everyone, even though I was surrounded by excessive insularity. So I went out, and crossed boundaries.

The answer to otherization is humility. Not humiliation.

Ask psychologist Abigail Marsh. According to Marsh and many others, altruism is increasing in the world and altruism goes hand in hand with humility. She also believes that many and probably even most people can become altruistic. So, care. Help make the world a better place for everyone. That's how we can slowly diminish otherization and hate in the world and the resulting cruelty.

It might be good if embassies and consulates in the UK did more outreach that touches a much broader range of people than diplomats, captains of industry and government officials. It might be good if embassies in the US and the Netherlands did that too. Allow people from different backgrounds to familiarize themselves with those backgrounds and do it in a positive, giving way. Hand out *stroopwafels* at train stations.

8. Epilogue

This is a book about otherization and various forms of cruelty. We are all capable of cruelty, but in order to be cruel, we first have to otherize. We have to declare the other as not one of us, and see him or her as less, as less worthy, less powerful, and less able. Less human. An underdog. In some cultures, underdogs receive the benefit of the doubt and tend to be defended by others, but there are also cultures in which the underdog gets deserted and cruelty against them is glorified. Besides, it also depends on what kind of underdog we are talking about,

People who engage in cruelty usually don't stop if you ask them kindly. One of the hardest and most dangerous things about cruelty, I have found, is that in order to make it stop, you sometimes have to say very ugly things. That's a slippery slope and you have to remain very aware of it. It can not only make you cross the threshold into cruelty more easily, it also has the capacity to start eating away at your soul. When people otherize you, however, they feel that it is okay to violate your boundaries. If you allow other people to violate your boundaries over and over again, you start moving into trauma territory. It's important to defend your boundaries, even if it makes you feel highly uncomfortable.

I have an example for you that will probably show you very well what I mean. When I was living in Portsmouth, I got really fed up with being hassled in the streets. This often came from guys and sometimes also women who were around forty years younger. England has a pretty misogynistic culture. (It is also shockingly gerontophobic.) One day, when another young guy started to hassle me, I asked him very politely if he wanted me to cut off his dick. I was not threatening to cut off his dick. I merely asked him if that is what he wanted me to do. I don't think that I was showing any anger, but I wasn't smiling either. I was certainly cold. I was fed up. My reaction was spontaneous and its effect stunningly powerful. This kind of response sadly is often the only thing that works when you are being otherized in an unacceptable manner. You have to cause the other party to start feeling fear, enough fear to cause him to back off and leave you in peace.

This book focuses on the United Kingdom, and specifically England. That's because I've just spent two decades there and started writing this

book there. This is its third edition, unless you count the Dutch edition in which I covered the Dutch childcare tax credits scandal. That was caused by severely biased algorithms that decided that people from abroad and people with foreign-sounding names were likely committing fraud. They were told to repay the credits they'd received. It resulted in huge debts. Families were even literally torn apart over it as children were removed from some of the affected families.

That's not what this book is about. It is mostly about what goes on in the UK. As Geert Wilders has just won the majority of the votes in the Dutch election, you can easily see this book as addressing the kind of future that Geert Wilders wants to create, perhaps without realising it, a multi-tiered world of so-called deserving people and marginalized lesser folks who are pushed out of society and become powerlessly stuck in poverty. In that world, the latter only exist to serve the former.

However, the UK has something that no other country has. That has an amplifying effect and that makes it easier to see what the problem is with dividing people in worthy ones and smelly unclean dirty ones. I'm talking about the English class system. It strikes me as English rather than British. This is bound to be a confusing statement for people outside of Britain. These are folks who don't normally think of Britain as consisting of four separate nations and a collection of places like Gibraltar, the Falklands and tax havens in the Caribbean. Don't worry about it. (If an English person ever says that to you, he may be very annoyed with you. It can serve as a euphemism for "Piss off! Go away! Leave me alone! Stop bothering me!".)

The English class system applies a pretty extreme form of otherization. It comes quite close to how Uyghurs are otherized pretty badly in China and also to how nomadic people, people of Jewish decent, Slavs and many more groups of human beings such as people with physical impairments became otherized in Germany nearly a century ago. (Make no mistake. The idea of eugenics originated in England. Darwin's half-cousin Francis Galton came up with it.)

The English class system is toxic and results in excessive inequality. It's eugenic in nature. When the UK was still part of the EU, its inequality score was so high that it impacted the value for the entire EU, far outweighing the scores for the other 27 countries in the EU. I am a

Dutch citizen; it's hard for someone in the Netherlands to realize what that means in practice. The Netherlands is a fairy tale candy floss country, by comparison. The contrast is utterly surreal, that the two realities are sheer irreconcilable in one's mind.

At the moment, about 40% of the British population is living in poverty and many Brits – also called Britons – are destitute. They can't afford the mere basics. So that's not about being unable to afford that Buddha statue for your garden, needing to cut piano classes for your children from twice a week to once a week, asking the cleaner to come once every fortnight instead of on a weekly basis or cancelling your newspaper subscription. It's not about turning the thermostat down from 22 to 20 degrees Celsius either. That's 71.7 Fahrenheit and 68 Fahrenheit, for those of you who think in Fahrenheits.

In England, poverty is about living without electricity, heating and hot water. I've lived like that very often in England, so I know what it is like to be part of the underclass there; it doesn't matter that the reason for my poverty was a different story. You have no idea how it impacts your life. You can't organize and chair online panel discussions if you don't know whether you will have lighting and internet access on the day of the discussion. I've often needed to survive on food and coins that I picked up from the streets. I also learned how to process acorns so that you can eat them. I was fortunate enough to have a type of oak trees around the corner that produced acorns with a low tannin content. I taught myself how to recognize certain edible mushrooms and to deploy extreme caution when encountering something new. I also did that when I found *Agaricus augustus*, the prince of all edible mushrooms, the best mushroom of all. It's nicknamed "the prince".

Those circumstances, that's how the English class society works out in practice. Too many people there have no basic furniture. Kids may sleep on the floor. You become obsessed with finding food in circumstances like that. Your thoughts revolve around where you are going to find food that day, and whether you will manage to keep the electricity on.

You see, in addition to regular billed energy, England uses a prepaid energy system, something that Amsterdam briefly had after the Second World War. It's for the poorest in society. They pay higher prices for their energy, too, just like the current cost of living crisis is not as genuine as

you may believe but deliberately caused by a handful of powerful business magnates who have raised their prices excessively, not to cover rising expenses but purely to increase profits. An example of how prepaid energy can work out in practice is diabetics unable to refrigerate their insulin.

While I am rewriting this book, I am at a location where the heating went on before the end of September. Having lived in England for nearly two decades, I am now often sleepy in my home country during the colder seasons because it's so warm indoors. In England, nobody will turn on the heating before the end of September and many people never turn on the heating at all. They can't afford it. Even before the pandemic hit and many people's incomes suffered, tens of thousands of people passed away in England each year as a result of their inability to heat their home in cold weather, far more than in countries with much colder climates.

I have to be fair and admit that there is another side to all that, too. If deep poverty happens to you as a foreigner in England, it makes you realize how consumerist you've been in the past. I have never been particularly wasteful and often took discarded furniture home when I was living in Amsterdam. But I pretty much used to run to the shops whenever I needed something that I thought I didn't have. I've learned to look at what I already have and examine whether I can repurpose it, much more so than I used to. In England, I made a standing desk as well as a tall camera tripod from materials that others had thrown away.

We produce way too much trash in our modern western societies, but our personal value is still assessed in terms of how wasteful we are, of how much we buy. Because how much we buy is supposed to represent our income, our earning power, and that is often still considered the only thing that really matters. In that light, an excess of abundance and prosperity can start to look quite obscene. The words "equality", "equity" and "egalitarian" do not need to equal consumerist excesses. Your value is not determined by your bank's opinion of your creditworthiness. That mostly reflects how much money the bank thinks it can make off you anyway. Your value is how you contribute to society, whether you help make the world a better place, regardless of whether you do it in small ways or in big ways.

My own otherization in England and particularly what I went through in Portsmouth have made me think a lot about how otherization comes about and what it can result in. Otherization begets otherization. It often builds up into a lot of anger, too. Resentment.

Please don't tell me that I am wrong because my experiences are not the same as yours. In fact, that's exactly my point, isn't it?

It started with me being a migrant. I learned the hard way that in the eyes of many people in England, migrants were akin to something disgusting that fell from an overflowing rubbish bin. I had never seen myself as resembling a rotting banana peel so it took a long time before it sank in what was going on. I wasn't exactly welcomed in England, but I ascribed my first encounters with what later became the hostile environment to either some people's weird mood or the sloppy way in which they ran their businesses.

The hostile environment is the official name of the policy later introduced by Theresa May when she was Home Secretary. It was meant to deter foreigners from coming to the UK as well as convince foreigners in the UK to go home. Please don't tell me that this policy only applies to illegal migrants because you know that that's not true. It has impacted even British people. They too were sometimes threatened with deportation or told to pay the double fees that many foreigners are charged for their use of the health services. I remember reading about a pregnant Englishwoman in Oxford who was married to a foreigner; her foreign-sounding name was a problem when she needed healthcare. Both were professionals employed by Oxford University. I also remember reading about a guy who was informed by letter from the Home Office that he was going to be deported to Australia.

My otherization was about much more than being a migrant, however. It took me a long time to figure it all out. I asked questions, read books, took a course here and there and kept my eyes and ears open. Initially, I found the culture pretty baffling. They were so easily offended, these English people, and I was taken aback by it. They seemed so insecure! It was like walking on egg shells. Now, many years later, I know that it's often – but far from always – just a silly game. It's that passive aggressive communication style that they have. It doesn't

necessarily mean anything, just like friendliness from English people doesn't necessarily mean much either, other than perhaps a desire to sell you something. It resembles how David Frost operated during the Brexit negotiations with his EU counterparts. There is this deliberate tendency to annoy you, to drive you crazy, so that you'll give in. In negotiations, you'll do anything to make it stop and be done with it. That's how people often behave in daily life too. They want the upper hand. They like keeping you off-balance enough so that you are less likely to rip them off.

It's more complicated than that, of course. The English landscape is a kaleidoscope of colours and characters. There is a rich world of in-groups and out-groups of which the members rarely seem to interact.

I also had a great deal of trouble navigating the intricacies of the English class system. As I didn't fit into any of those classes, it often felt like everyone saw me as from a different class, hence as not one of them. This is why there is an obsessive focus on external attributes such as what car you drive and what the colour of your hair is and what the length of your fingernails is and whether you wear trainers. Sneakers. I learned a long time ago that nothing was ever "right" about me. No matter what colour my socks were or what kind of coat I was wearing or what the colour of my bank card was, there were always English people who would find fault with it. They'd even sometimes comment on it in passing. Complete strangers.

What I found pretty soul-destroying is the fact that most English people lie about just about everything all the time. I have no words for it. I'd never encountered anything like it before and I probably never will. How on earth can a population hold the view that integrity and honesty is for losers? You only have to look at the Grenfell tragedy to get the answer.

In addition, many English folks have really fucked-up views about women. They also have shockingly messed-up opinions about people of a certain age. In practice, that age works out as 45 and above. It's not just me who's saying this. Amelia Hill, in *The Guardian* in 2019, used the word "demonise" to characterise the gerontophobia in the UK. The 2014 UN inspector Special Rapporteur on Violence against women, its causes and consequences (Rashida Manjoo) caused a storm when she talked

about her findings after having explored what life was like for women in the UK.

The problem with otherization is that most people think that only other people engage in it. What you grow up with and are familiar with seems completely natural to you. It's like what you have for breakfast and as natural as brushing your teeth. It can be pretty shocking to others, who can place it within a broader context, to see what you find natural. When I looked at the property that I ended up moving into, a guy who was from northern England and saw no problem with addressing a stranger came outside and warned me about the traffic problem. He said that others had just moved out after only two weeks. He also begged me not to tell the landlord that he had said this, otherwise he would get evicted, he said. That would have struck me as over-the-top paranoia, if his demeanour had been different. In the Netherlands, this certainly would have been over-the-top paranoia.

I should have listened to him. As I was from Amsterdam, I figured that I could handle the traffic. I was wrong about that; the problem was more complicated as I would soon find out and very real. I was behind schedule, I needed a place to live and so many people had not called me back or e-mailed me after I contacted them. No Irish, no coloured, no kids.

After I accepted the apartment, the estate agency that I was dealing with fed me lies for so long that I eventually ended up paying rent for two apartments for a few months. I was self-employed and was really busy. I had planned my move in between projects, but as the agency didn't get back to me, I couldn't. They said that they had sent me a letter but when I asked them to fax it to me, the letter they faxed me had that day's date on it was dated that same day. Nearly two months after I had accepted the flat, I flew to England with a big bundle of cash tucked against my body because the agency wouldn't allow me to wire the money. Can't trust those foreigners, better not give them the banking details. Granted, my own bank required me to complete a form explaining why I was withdrawing so much cash. This wasn't long after 9-11 and many governments had become obsessed with the idea of their citizens secretly funding terrorist attacks.

All was well and I flew home again. Agency staff had promised to be there and let the BT Business engineer in to install my landline and broadband, but the BT Business guy ended up wasting his time that day. The facilities that I had counted on were not in place when I finally arrived to move in. I ended up outsourcing most of the project I was working on at the time. That estate agency cost me thousands in lost revenue and in double rent payments.

The English class system is highly toxic. It makes it legal to abuse people and violate their most basic rights. It is legal in for example the case of no-fault evictions, a concept that I cannot explain to Dutch people because it's completely unimaginable to them. Even in cases in which abuse is not legal, it works out that way in practice because it is all about keeping the plebs under the thumb and make sure that they don't fight back, and that is often because they're unaware of their rights and make assumptions on the basis of the class system inequality. So many people in England slave at low wages to make the rich richer. As I would later discover in Portsmouth, the word "work" has a very negative connotation and requires no motivation, no drive of any kind. If the bare minimum will get you by, the bare minimum is what you do. Why would you do better than that? That explains why the estate agent wasn't there when the BT guy stopped by. Besides, the guy who showed me the flat was a new employee. He wasn't a bad kid, but he probably had no choice but to let me down.

In Southampton, a landlord once told me proudly that he had tricked a woman with beginning Alzheimer's out of her flat so that he could move her into a much bigger place. As the city council would not pay the full rent for a home that was much bigger than this pensioner needed, it didn't get him what he apparently had hoped to get. Her family refused to make up the difference. To me he said "I would do that for my mother, wouldn't you?" suggesting that they were evil people. Her daughter stopped by every day to look after her mother and she and I both agreed that the word "nasty" applied to that landlord. To his credit, he didn't evict the lady with Alzheimer's. He easily could have.

He was a builder, which at the time was still a barely regulated profession in England and it probably still is. Anyone could call himself a builder and start building homes, with no knowledge about construction whatsoever. He and his wife sailed their yacht over to France each

summer. He also once told me when he was constructing a new building: "It's only for tenants so it does not need to be good." Another landlord called tenants "bad" if they called him because the heating wasn't working or because the washing machine provided by him wasn't working. I'd met at business networking event. He wasn't a professional landlord but was merely renting out one home that became empty when he and his wife moved in with each other.

In a study of 1,420 people in the UK as published in the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health, researchers from the University of Essex and the University of Adelaide found that renting privately ages you faster in the UK. Now you know why. The effect visible in the DNA of the private tenants in that study was half that of smoking and twice that of obesity.

According to these English class ideas, some people are real humans and others simply aren't proper humans and accordingly do not have the same rights. They are considered a lower subspecies. They are expected to be stuck in poverty and have no access to a decent income. They are supposed to be too "stupid" to know that they need to pay the rent and other bills. It's about keeping the plebs dumb and under the thumb. If you're on benefits in England, you are often not allowed to pay your own rent. It means that as a tenant, you have no idea what gets paid to whom and when. That can actually get you evicted because of accruing arrears that you are unaware of.

Some years ago, there was a Channel 5 TV program that carried out an experiment in which people were given the entire sum of benefits that they would normally receive over the course of a year. In almost all cases, this restored their agency. Now they were allowed to pay the rent again. Some had to learn how to do that. Most of these people started businesses and even the ones that I thought wouldn't make it, made it. I remember one woman who focused on looking presentable enough to be able to get a job who was still without income after that year. She probably had been victimized for too long. Poverty shrinks your mental and physical world. It really impacts you. It's not because you're stupid. It's because almost all of the rest of the world becomes inaccessible to you, so you lose your awareness of what is out there. After a long time in poverty, I briefly forgot that laptops existed. They had become out of

reach so I had forgotten about them, but laptops can really increase your mobility relative to an old-fashioned bulky desktop.

In a different TV program, with a similar goal, a woman with a law degree and a daughter was found working in a betting shop because she couldn't get a pupillage, the traineeship that would allow her to work as a barrister afterward. Solicitors and barristers are both lawyers, but barristers have passed the bar exam that allows them to speak in court, and are instructed by a solicitor. A wealthy entrepreneur stepped up for this woman, but while he was able to help lift her out of poverty, he was not able to get her the traineeship. He too was from the wrong class. The woman in question chose academia instead, obtained her PhD and is a legal scholar now.

Margaret Thatcher, a Conservative politician, pushed the idea that poverty was the result of a character flaw. Other Tories have suggested that poor people should be sterilized. However, these English class ideas are not exclusive to so-called Tories, the extra-conservative folks within the Conservative Party. They are pervasive throughout English society so you can also spot them among the Liberal Democrats ("Lib Dems") and Labour. Tony Blair (Labour) is an example of someone who did a lot of damage in that area by adding a layer of legal abuse to the otherization of lower-class people. It made it possible to incarcerate people without them having anything done. At the moment, you can still be prosecuted and sentenced in England for no other reason than that there is some kind of superficial association between you and someone who has committed a crime. Skin colour plays a role.

If you're a marginalised person, which applies if you are from the "wrong" class in England but also if you're a migrant in a country in which government politicians and other hotshots rant and rave against your kind, it feels like you constantly have to watch your own back. Being part of an abused minority means that you have little power and that makes you vulnerable. It makes it easy for people to abuse you and get away with it. It also often comes with legislation that has the ability to take your agency away.

Holy cow. It appeared that when I left Amsterdam and moved to England, I somehow signed away my humanity. Signing away the first 44 years of my life and everything that I had accomplished in those 44

years was never the plan. Signing away your humanity also means that you sign away your present and your future. As a result, I found myself confronted with a bleak present that I didn't like much. My here and now was very empty.

When I cried and cried in anguish over what I perceived as the loss of my life and purpose, when I cried my heart out, my male English downstairs neighbour at the time yelled "I can love you too-hoo!". Here we go again. Excuse me? The only thing any woman wants is a man, any man? Is that because women are defective humans and need a man to complete them? Is it because women have no value on their own, nothing to contribute? I wanted to do more with my life than read library books and watch YouTube videos all day long. When you're born with a great brain, certainly if you have fought your way through challenging circumstances, you want to put your abilities to some use. You want to soar! You want to do pirouettes in the sky like my pet pigeon used to do.

In England, women over roughly the age of 35 who are walking along the pavement alone – on their own – on a Friday evening are perceived as sad and in desperate need of a man or, apparently, as a lesbian. It's happened to me that someone in a group of younger people yelled something along the lines of "Hey daisy! Wear a skirt", again suggesting that I was desperate for a man, I presume. I was on my way to the supermarket. A daisy is someone who is six feet under, pushing up daisies. In practice, that seems to be anyone over 45, in England. It's also happened to me that someone who I thought was going to ask me for directions told me that I had dropped my lesbian club card; I was on my way to a Level-42 concert at the time. I'd never run into such bonkers nonsense before. It also happened numerous times that people would yell "Slag!" at me from passing cars. I had to look up what it meant. "Cherry!" was another one. I had to look that one up too.

England takes offence, it seems, if you do not fit the rigid moulds of what you are supposed to look and sound like, what you are supposed to be doing and on which day of the week for someone of your age and gender.

I know that in reality, it is often more a matter of you having made people uncomfortable. Your independence reminds them of the fact that there are choices in life, choices that they may not have been aware of

and never made or that they simply find too scary. Imagine going your own way instead of doing what everyone else does. Imagine that. Scary!

People have for example expressed awe at the fact that I emigrated on my own. I didn't see what was supposed to be so special about it. (I've done it four times now.) Maybe it comes from the following. When I was about 16, all the kids in my year and above were eligible for discounted theatre subscriptions. I asked whether anyone wanted to join me, but nobody was interested in the same performances. I said to myself that if I was going to let that hold me back, I'd never go anywhere and would have to stay home all my life. So the year after, I no longer asked around, but simply signed up and went on my own. I've been going to the movies and the theatre on my own ever since. It's magical because there are fewer distractions. That does not mean that I never take company along, but I like having the option of going on my own. I like having choices.

An abundance of choices is not necessarily something English people are at peace with, but this has changed in the time I spent there. I remember being baffled by an article in *The Guardian* back in 2010 in which someone complained that having too many options was bad for people. I also remember the odd responses I got after I had just moved to England when I asked for specific Belgian beers in my local large Coop. Did it mean that I had "ideas above my station"? Alcohol is alcohol. That seemed to be their view. How different things had been in the US. I remember standing at the Publix or Albertson's, staring at the immense range of options. Brands, sizes, flavours, fragrances, colours. It was unbelievable!

While writing and editing this chapter, I feel the same resistance that I always feel when I look at English negativity. It's ugly. It's unattractive. It imposes so much powerlessness on me. It makes me want to run away. I feel like I can't breathe and I feel my stomach protest, too. How can people live under such a heavy yoke, in such tight steel corsets? I miss many English things. I miss English supermarkets, I miss the food, I miss the options, now richer than in the Netherlands. I don't miss having abuse yelled at me, I don't miss the sneers and the slurs and the other expressions of hate. I got so thoroughly fed up with it and I got sick of there being no way to avoid it. It could rear its ugly head at any time, whether I went to the local Asda or merely went for a walk or

collected my postal mail. It was like living in a guerrilla war zone. I got so tired of it, so fed up with it, and there is nothing you can do about it so all you can do with your anger and powerlessness is bottle it up. One day, I yelled abuse at a random Englishwoman in another town. Because I was in another town, it felt safer to do so, because she likely wouldn't know who I was and where to find me. I wasn't actually yelling at her. I was yelling at all the people who had been abusing me in the vicious town where I was stuck at the time, with its culture of intimidation and retaliation, not to mention corruption.

Have you noticed that I am now often otherizing the English? I am often talking about them as if they are a completely different species. While thinking about otherization and being painfully aware of the immense and rather shocking effect that otherization in England has had on me, I could not help but wonder if mental illness in England often has a lot to do with – is caused by – being otherized because of for example a mere minor difference in neurodiversity. Or having red hair.

In any case, I too became part of a misunderstood minority after I moved from Amsterdam to England and yes, it has impacted my mental wellbeing. (I became depressed.) I was otherized for a range of reasons, some of which never even occurred to me because such reasons can be profoundly cultural.

It meant that I had no access to all sorts of resources that would have been available to me in my home country. I had no conventional power of any kind here, no influence, no contacts and not even friends to go have coffee or lunch with. I was living the life of a zombie. After a while, you get used to it. You may find yourself becoming more creative, start writing stories for example. The brain needs stuff to do. It needs input. It does not exist in a vacuum.

My nearly two decades in England have shown me a country that is often vastly different from how many of the English seem to see it. This book came about as a result of my time in England after all, a country with a stigma-riddled culture with a fabric of insularity that often borders on downright paranoia. Is that sentence over the top? Hmm. It depends on who you ask and on which day.

Group differences play a huge role in England and this is emphasised – and manipulated – non-stop. You see it in the sometimes utterly ridiculous miniature uniforms with utterly ridiculous hats that march through England’s streets in the morning before school starts and after 3 pm. These hats and uniforms have kids in them, live children. It does not matter how bizarre some of the kids look in their little uniforms, as long as it emphasises that the kids are one of us, not one of them.

From a young age, kids are taught that they can get away with just about anything as long as they make sure they do it to someone from another group, to someone who is different. Do it to one of them, not one of us. You see it everywhere. They hear it at the breakfast table. They hear it in high school. They hear it at Eton and at Cambridge They hear it at Highbury College.

I hate having to resort to something as drastic as asking if someone would like me to cut off their penis, but that is what abuse can force you to do. In the Netherlands, it is currently not even permitted any longer to snap at people because you’re stressed or hurried, so is my understanding. If so, I would see that as equally skewed.

Communication is a matter of give and take. One day, you are the one who hasn’t slept well and is very grouchy and irritable, the next day it may be someone else. As long as people aren’t hurting each other on purpose, as long as we aren’t dedicating our lives to making everyone else miserable, I think we all have room to give each other some leeway for merely being human.

When I moved to England at the end of 2004, which was only supposed to have been for a few years, I moved into what often seems a veritable guerrilla war zone with lots of deep poverty as a result of massive inequality. Daily life here truly is often like fighting a war, with every day a fight for survival for most people. I didn’t see that coming either. I had heard about the poverty and the high prices in the UK, but I did not know that it was this bad.

I certainly had not pictured me as being perceived as “the enemy” by many people here. For the Southampton University professor who recoiled as if it was a poisonous snake when I extended my arm to hand him my business card, it appeared to be my foreignness that scared him, but he had a Greek student with him. For the RSPCA employee who I

had informed of my background and my reasons for wanting to volunteer but who replied “It’s not as if you’d get to handle money or drugs you know”, it certainly was.

For the ophthalmologist who made fun of me when I asked him about side effects of a medication, it was not. Mustn’t strain my pretty little female brain by thinking about such complicated matters. Much better to focus on long-lash mascara. I am pleased that I inadvertently put him in his place with my off-the-cuff retort, but I should not have needed to. My foreignness was not a problem either for the woman who spontaneously handed me a fiver at the Lidl when I’d run out of cash. She didn’t see any major boundaries between the group she was in and the group I was in. It seems she thought that I was probably just like her. Perhaps she felt she had enough money and could easily spare it, so why not. She was anything but cruel.

The problem with cruelty is that whether we consider something cruelty or not tends to depend on who it is done to. Cruelty is permitted if you do it to anyone who is seen as the enemy, isn’t it? Indeed, the problem of cruelty, Taylor wrote on page 10 of her book about cruelty, shows us otherization at work. She calls it otherization, but the phenomenon goes by various different names. Parochialism is one of them, but I like “otherization” because it indicates so well what it is. Otherization, I now realise, is also what I described in my book *“We need to talk about this”* when I gave examples of how utilitarian reasoning can be deployed to disadvantage and even harm people.

Parochialism is probably what happened when my English vet expected me to trust him blindly with my beloved pets yet appeared to have no faith whatsoever in my academic credentials. “I don’t know you.” “We don’t know you.” Well, you know what? I don’t know you either. Next time I need a professional, I will fly someone in from the States or from my home country, then. Rarely is there even a semblance of an extension of professional courtesy (collegiality) among strangers. “I am English; therefore, I am who I say I am. But you? You are surely merely out to get me.”

This constant distrust, this paranoia, from people not believing that you are you say you are and even sometimes suggesting that your passport

may be fake to people not believing that you went to university and are quite capable and god knows what else, it really wears you down, certainly if it is combined with sneers and slurs and ridicule. It's enabled me to start having an idea of what it may be like to be a Muslim in a western country. It must be horrible and it must cause so much anger. Years ago, when I left Christmas cards for all my neighbours, one card was returned. I think I understand why, by now. You get so fed up that you don't want to deal with it any longer, with any of it. You start to change and one day, you notice that you no longer like yourself much. You've changed too much and have become far too negative.

Otherization is what resulted in the atrocities committed in the days of Nazi Germany, by people who had convinced themselves that just about everybody else presented lethal danger. This imagined enemy had to be destroyed. The mass killings themselves soon became reason for continuing them because if the Germans lost their battles, they expected the revenge from any survivors to be overwhelming. They could no longer afford to let anyone live who wasn't part of their own group.

The killings seemed to have been mostly considered a sheer necessity, Taylor indicated in her book, approached with what the Germans thought was superb rationality. Sadism against members of the hated out-groups was publicly condemned by the Nazis and perpetrators of sadism were often sentenced and punished, Taylor found. That did not stop sadism from taking place, though.

Cruelty – the infliction of true atrocities – is something people all over the world respond to in the same way, emphasized Kathleen Taylor in her book. She mentioned rage, grief, pity, horror and disgust. Sadness and hopelessness are other examples. But cruelty is so much more than we usually think of when we hear the word. Taylor went on to define cruelty as a voluntary and unjustified (unjustifiable?) and intentional behaviour that harms an innocent and undeserving victim. You can see several problems with that and Taylor is aware of them too.

Who defines what “justified” is, and what “voluntary” is? And who defines what “undeserving and innocent” is?

When you stop to think of this for a moment, you can already tell that we are all capable of cruelty even if we think it is something only other

people do and even if we think that whatever we are doing is perfectly normal. You are a kind person, after all, not a cruel one. Cruel people, that's other people. Other people are cruel. Not you.

Are people who have done nothing wrong but who have been kept at Guantánamo Bay for more than a decade innocent and undeserving victims of the US government or is the mere fact that they are citizens from a certain nation or were encountered in a certain location at a certain time enough to justify the cruelty that they are exposed to? The act of depriving them of their freedom on the other side of the world is a gratuitous act of cruelty. The various acts of torture – globally agreed on as being acts of torture – that many have been exposed to at the hands of Americans representing the US government come on top of that.

Do the American individuals who are keeping foreign nationals imprisoned at this American naval base on the island of Cuba inflict this cruelty voluntarily? Does the voluntary action of signing up to serve in the US Army or Navy or Air Force mean that from that point on, all other actions within that role are voluntary actions or does it, by contrast, mean that they have ceased to be voluntary from that point on? “It wasn't us. We were just following orders.” You could say that they could have quit, but you could also say that if they had left their jobs, they would have left the prisoners in the hands of people who considered them undeserving and anything but innocent. “Honor-bound to defend freedom?” Not so much!

What does “innocent” mean in daily life? Does it mean something along the lines of “mentally impaired”? Is an innocent person someone who has the mind of a three-year-old?

If a random indigenous white English person is attacked while sitting on a park bench on a sunny day, is that person innocent and undeserving of the attack? What if the person in question is a refugee or asylum seeker, a drug addict, a drug dealer or mentally ill? Or wearing very dopey-looking glasses and badly in need of a haircut? Does it matter whether the person is wearing a smart suit or paint-spotted coveralls? I want you to step up and interfere if you ever see a person on a bench getting attacked. Stepping up carries a certain risk. You could be perceived as part of the same group as the victim and you might want to

avoid that at all cost. You might even get attacked too, so you have to take your physical strength into account including your ability to run away fast.

You might discover that the person who looked exactly like you and who was being attacked is schizophrenic and taking medications for it or undergoing some other kind of mental health treatment. You might also learn that the person in question is in the terminal stage of some form of cancer and therefore appeared to be a “worthless benefit scrounger” to the people who attacked him or her.

Is someone on unemployment benefits more deserving of getting attacked while sitting on a bench than someone who will soon die from cancer? Should it make a difference? Those are the kinds of questions that I want you to think about.

I want you to define for yourself what it is that you would never want to happen to you or to any of your loved ones. I want you to decide – now – that if you see such an act being done to someone else, or being threatened to someone else, regardless of who or what the person is, you’ll step up and do what you can to either prevent or limit harm done to that other person.

When that moment arrives, I want you to be fearless – free from irrational fears such as what the neighbours or your pals might think if you stepped up, not “stupid” as in “facing five guys with guns”.

When you see a situation that looks like it might escalate – such as a conflict between exes or police officers stopping a car and you wonder if what they’re doing is right – announce yourself very loudly as a witness. You can do that without uttering a word. You stop in your tracks and face the scene. Make yourself tall, not small. Show no fear. Become a highly visible observer. Make yourself feel and look authoritative. I have found that approach to work remarkably well. After a few inquisitive and puzzled and sometimes annoyed glances in my direction, the person will usually decide to move on. What I’ve also done a few times was yell “Hey! Get a grip! Get. A. Grip.” Not angrily, not in a high squeaky voice, but from a position of strength and authority.

Where I was living in Portsmouth in England, such interventions were often required, whether it was to stop two young people who run after a car to pull the driver out from behind the wheel or to deter young people who climb roofs to intimidate tenants. Sometimes it served to distract people’s attention and that can be enough. At other times, telling people what to do can be all it takes. It’s like you serve as their conscience. Taking personal responsibility in such situations means that you can no longer point the finger at someone else. “It wasn’t me.” It wasn’t you, indeed. You didn’t step up. You looked the other way and walked off. Taking personal responsibility in such situations means that you are changing the world towards making it a better place for everyone. That’s what I want you to do.

It means that you may have to explore who you are, so that you know what your own personal weaknesses are and stop being afraid of them. That is because, as Taylor discussed in her book, cruelty obviously also often affects anyone who observes it. Is something only cruelty when you observe and you feel empathy for the victim and disgust for the perpetrator? If you look at it that way alone, you can instantly see why cruelty is such a difficult concept.

Like beauty, cruelty is in the eyes of the beholder. Observers of cruelty – in other words, you – may also feel disgust for victims of cruelty. That disgust – or even the mere lack of empathy – comes from a place of weakness within you. Disgust and fear are closely related.

You too bear the daily responsibility for what happens in your environment. That’s “society”, the total of our individual actions. The act of doing nothing can also harm people as Taylor pointed out on page 22 of *“Cruelty. Human evil and the human brain”*. So if you have the power to interfere and relieve or prevent someone else’s suffering yet decide to look the other way or turn your back, you are also doing harm. Taylor repeats it again. *“Cruelty is clearly a moral concept.”*

Whether we see something as cruelty or not therefore reflects our values, so whether we step in to stop or prevent cruelty does too. Maybe stepping up to stop cruelty against other beings is the only true value that we can ever hope to have.

Further reading and listening

If you are looking for references for the various incidents I mention in the book, you can search the internet on some of the names but if you do, please do not limit yourself to the Daily Mail or the Guardian. This book is not about the incidents themselves, however, but about what they present and what your role is in why they happened.

Alston, Philip. 2018. Statement on Visit to the United Kingdom, by Professor Philip Alston, United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights.
https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Poverty/EOM_GB_16Nov2018.pdf

Alston, Philip. 2019. Visit to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights. United Nations, General Assembly.
A/HRC/41/39/Add.1
<https://undocs.org/A/HRC/41/39/Add.1>

BBC (2007) "Red-haired family forced to move" BBC News.
<https://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/tyne/6714735.stm>

BBC (2007) "Man 'died at hands of young mob' " BBC News.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/6923987.stm>

BBC (2007) "Boys sentenced for stoning death" BBC News.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/7052267.stm>

Bindel, Julie (2005) The life stealers. The Guardian.
<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/apr/16/ukcrime.weekend7>

Booth, Robert, 2023. Living in privately rented homes linked to faster biological ageing, study finds. The Guardian.
<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/oct/10/living-in-privately-rented-homes-linked-to-faster-biological-ageing-study-finds>

Bregman, Rutger. 2017. Poverty isn't a lack of character; it's a lack of cash.
https://www.ted.com/talks/rutger_bregman_poverty_isn_t_a_lack_of_character_it_s_a_lack_of_cash

CIPD (2022) Bullying and harassment at work. Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. <https://www.cipd.co.uk/>

Daynes, Kerry (2019) "The dark side of the mind: True stories from my life as a forensic psychologist" Octopus Publishing Group. ISBN: 9781788402170

Daynes, Kerry (2021) "What lies buried: A forensic psychologist's true stories of madness, the bad and the misunderstood" Octopus Publishing Group. ISBN: 9781913068578

Evans, Jules (2013) "Being a Stoic saved me from the curse of the British stiff upper lip" <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jan/30/stoic-stiff-upper-lip-feelings>

Godin, Seth (2018) This is marketing. You can't be seen until you learn to see. Penguin. ISBN: 9780241370148

Hill, Amelia. 2019. Older people widely demonised in UK, ageism report finds. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/mar/19/older-people-widely-demonised-uk-ageism-report>

Lanier, Heather. "Good" and "bad" are incomplete stories we tell ourselves. https://www.ted.com/talks/heather_lanier_good_and_bad_are_incomplete_stories_we_tell_ourselves

Lewis, Richard D. (2000) "When cultures collide. Managing successfully across cultures." Revised first edition. Nicholas Brealy Publishing. ISBN: 1857880870

Lloyd-Roberts, Sue. The war on women. And the brave ones who fight back. Simon & Schuster.

Lumby, Tommy and McMenemy, Rachael (2018) "'Vulnerable' woman attacked with flour and eggs speaks out" Cambridge News. <https://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/news/local-news/vulnerable-woman-attacked-flour-eggs-14973146>

Manjoo, Rashida. 2015. Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Addendum. Mission to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. United Nations, General Assembly. A/HRC/29/27/Add.2. https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session29/Documents/A_HRC_29_27_Add_2_en.doc

Mann, Tanveer (2018) "Boys who 'attacked disabled woman with flour get police protection'" Metro News. <https://metro.co.uk/2018/07/31/boysattacked-disabled-woman-flour-get-police-protection-7779513/>

Marsh, Abigail. 2016. Why some people are more altruistic than others. https://www.ted.com/talks/abigail_marshall_why_some_people_are_more_altruistic_than_others/

Moss, Dawn (2018) "Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson: 'Inequality strikes at our health and happiness'" The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2018/sep/18/kate-pickett-richard-wilkinson-mental-wellbeing-inequality-the-spirit-level>

Potter, Tom (2018) "Flour bombing' teen sentenced for 'nasty attack' on woman" East Anglian Daily Times. <https://www.eadt.co.uk/news/cohan-semple-court-flour-eggs-howard-estate-social-media-1-5806320>

Press TV Documentaries. 2015. Murder in Bristol (The Tragic Case of Bijan Ebrahimi's Murder) <https://vimeo.com/149993525>

Reynolds, Emily. 26 May 2020. We're less likely to spread alarming information while experiencing physiological stress. The British Psychological Society. <https://www.bps.org.uk/research-digest/were-less-likely-spread-alarming-information-while-experiencing-physiological>

Saxe, Rebecca. 2019. The neuroscience of hate. <https://vimeo.com/333105887>

Serani, Deborah. 2 June 2018. Bullycide When a bullied child dies by suicide. Psychology Today. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/two-takes-depression/201806/bullycide>

Solomon, Andrew. 2013. Love, no matter what.
https://www.ted.com/talks/andrew_solomon_love_no_matter_what

Statistics New Zealand (2019) "One in 10 workers feels discriminated against, harassed, or bullied at work"
<https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/one-in-10-workers-feels-discriminated-against-harassed-or-bullied-at-work>

Taylor, Kathleen. 2009. Cruelty. Human evil and the human brain. Oxford University Press.

TUC (2019) "Bullying at work" Trades Union Congress.
<https://www.tuc.org.uk/resource/bullying-work>

Wilkinson, Richard. 2011. How economic inequality harms societies.
http://www.ted.com/talks/richard_wilkinson

Younge, Gary. 2027. 'It was pure racism': the family of Bijan Ebrahimi on their fight for answers The Guardian.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/05/it-was-pure-racism-the-family-of-bijan-ebrahimi-on-their-fight-for-answers>

About the author

Nowadays, Angelina Souren talks about tough topics. She explores bioethics subjects such as otherization – which is the opposite of inclusivity – and their science & technology aspects, including how this relates to issues like economic inequality, stalking and extremism. You can also see this as human and animal rights issues and as related to equality.

According to the urban slang dictionary, Angelina Souren is a boss. She is not into consumerism, she's a feminist, went to university relatively late in life and goes her own way. She's lived in the US, in the UK and in her native the Netherlands, mostly in Amsterdam.

She holds a Master of Science, with distinction, in isotope geology, petrology and geochemistry from the Vrije University of Amsterdam, where she studied the geochemistry and structural geology of the Precambrian of the Loftahammar area in Sweden (near Västervik).

As part of her degree requirements, she carried out a study into gender bias in sociobiology. Angelina also obtained certificates from the Netherlands School for Journalism and an extracurricular graduate diploma for research into rare earth elements (REEs) in waters around Antarctica, carried out in conjunction with the Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research.

For the University of South Florida and for the University of Southampton (NOC) / University of Plymouth, she investigated the marine cerium anomaly and the potential role of oxidizing fungi as well as the exchange of atmospheric iron at the sea-air interface against the background of the impact of rising atmospheric CO₂ on ocean acidity and also the resulting switching between cobalt and iron pathways in marine cyanobacteria. She's worked with and at other universities and scientists, both as an employee and in self-employment.

She has served as Associate Editor for the US-based Geochemical Society, as board member of the Environmental Chemistry (and Toxicology) Section of the Royal Netherlands Chemical Society and as board and committee member for a Dutch foundation for women in science and technology. In England, she briefly was a member of the Portsmouth Environmental Forum, which was launched and supported by Portsmouth City Council.

IS CRUELTY COOL?

She has a previous background in tourism and hospitality. She also has gained an understanding of some areas of mostly English and American law. In addition, she knows a thing or two about rehabbing wild birds, a journey that she began in Florida. There, she volunteered with the well-respected wildlife rehabilitator, educator and oil spill contingency planner Lee Fox, who often worked with organizations like NOAA.

From the bird hospital, she adopted two rehabbed non-releasable quaker parrots (*Myiopsitta monachus*) who went on to teach her a heck of a lot about birds and non-human animals in general. She's also rehabbed a few pigeons (*Columba livia*), equally smart as parrots. Angelina learned that parrots and pigeons are capable of compassion. The *conditio sine qua non* may be an ample supply of food and a sense of security. This is likely how it also works for the species *Homo sapiens*.



That was Angelina in 2009, at a rehearsal in Bristol.

Personal note



The pigeon sleeping against my chest under the red-and-white fleece blanket in this photo would sleep like this for up to an hour, sometimes occasionally purring softly. She arrived during the first Covid lockdown in 2020, with about 50% of her feathers gone. She had a minor impairment, which made it hard for her to feed herself. I rehabbed her successfully, after which this little pigeon decided to stay.

*It was not unusual for English wildlife to be much more sociable and far less hostile and barbaric than the specimens of *Homo sapiens* around me. I then discovered that pigeons were much smarter than I'd always assumed. I also learned to my astonishment that female pigeons, just like female humans, ovulate once a month. The eggs they lay often aren't fertilized, just like the eggs that female humans shed monthly are not fertilized and are excreted unnoticed.*

This pigeon lived the last three years of her life the way many housecats do, still interacting with her pals outside. I'm pretty sure that she was killed by someone who I suspect of being one of Portsmouth's most callous inhabitants, a cold and seemingly soulless character who would probably sell his own mother to the mob. I may be wrong about that, though.

Proof