

Gail Lewis

Gail Lewis is Reader in Psychosocial Studies at Birkbeck College in London, where she works on the shifting political, cultural and lived intersections of gender and race. Before this she taught at the Open University (OU) and the University of Lancaster. I first met Gail when she came to study for a PhD at the Open University – a process which happily taught me a lot. She has continued to help me to think ever since, even as she explores new ways of thinking that open up new possibilities. Her 2000 book on *'Race', Gender and Social Welfare: Explorations in a Postcolonial Society* remains a vital starting point for rethinking social welfare and social policy, but her published work and other interventions range much wider.

More information can be found at: www.bbk.ac.uk/psychosocial/our-staff/academic/gail-lewis.

This conversation was recorded in London on 3 April 2017.

Themes and topics

- Thinking with others
- Between certainty and uncertainty
- Thinking with and through race
- Dimensions and dynamics of crisis
- Imagining other connections

Thinking with others

John: So, I'm going to start by going back to the conversation we were just having about thinking in conversation with others, and just tell me what that means for you.

Gail: (Laughs) Gosh! What it means for me? Well, I suppose it's sort of ... I suppose there's a couple of things that come to mind immediately. One is about how, if I have a, you know, a thought comes in your mind, I don't know, as you're walking along or something, when you kind of literally say, 'Oh, what do you make of what we heard?' Or, 'What's your response to that terrible attack on that Iranian Kurdish guy in Croydon?' You know? I'm terrified that it's going to be black kids who did it. You know?

John: Yep.

Gail: There's going to be a similar issue into the national story and all this kind of stuff ... and mindset and, you know, so then I, kind of, it's that. Then I might ... but, so ... It's more that I would pose questions in that sense, and that partly then helps me to articulate what I think the questions are in my head.

John: Yes.

Gail: I don't know whether I get answers back so much though, which is the bit where I get stuck. (Laughs) But I think the other thing is it's a way of placing myself not just in a set of voices, but in a sort of time-space formation in a sense, because I might, for some things, I might find I call up my generation as it were. And then that would then make me think, 'Oh okay, so the kinds of ways I'm ... the questions are coming to me are out of our generation. Out of our time-space, our moment of formation.' So, I might, you know, call up people in the Brixton Black Women's Group, for example, for that kind of stuff.

John: All right.

Gail: Or even speak back to, I mean thinking with Darcus Howe having just died.¹

John: Yes.

Gail: The way in which we, in the Brixton Group, might have argued with him and the *Race Today* Collective, but argued from a point of view of, you know, a common

¹ Darcus Howe, broadcaster, writer and activist, was one of the founders of the *Race Today* Collective.

vision, a common pursuit, a kind of internal conversation, argument, that was about how do we get to the place we want to get to?

[0:02:52]

Gail: [That] we feel we need to get to. What's the political vision at the end of this? But I suppose I also more and more, kind of, have in my mind the conversations with some of the younger people that I am connected to through, people like Rehana Zaman, for example, who is a kind of artist, art practitioner, who I met at a group relations conference but who has put me in contact with all sorts of other people, so in those younger people, they, you know, are both sort of saying to us, 'Well, tell us about your histories because we need to know for where we want to go now.'

John: *Yeah.*

Gail: But also when they ask you that, they pose the questions in slightly different ways. Like, not so much... It's sort of... well the secondary bit of their vision is how we collectively ... what's our collective goal? But the first one is, 'How do I get on in life?' 'How do I get on as a black woman in the academy?' 'How do I get on as a black woman in the world?'

John: *Yep.*

Gail: And where it can seem like ... The phrasing of the question is in the sort of liberal, individualised context, but when you probe a bit deeper, it's not that some sense of a collective story is not there, but it's how you articulate the question, so.

John: *Yes. And I mean, my guess is I'm going to say they're right, but there is something about the configuration of this time-space moment and the academy in particular which I think both induces that as a mode of relationship and thinking, and leaves me feeling entirely disempowered.*

Gail: Yeah, I know.

John: *Because I, you know, I mean, if I talk to young people, graduates, students, around the edges, they're asking calculative questions, and I don't mean they're calculating, but their circumstances require them to make calculations that I never made.*

Gail: Exactly. Exactly ...

John: *I don't know, 'Which journal do you think would be best to publish in?' So, there's a set of things about the present that make me feel*

slightly, make me feel slightly old, but also make me disjunctured from it.

Gail: Yeah, yeah.

John: *And I worry. (Laughs) – I worry that my solutions are not transferable and that I should be careful about it as well.*

Gail: That's right. Yeah, yeah. But I think that ... I suppose ... Okay, what I think is, so, the kind of conversations that are in my mind now as you ask me about, 'What does it mean to be in conversation?' are things like where younger black women might say, 'How do we empower ourselves in each other?' So that discourse of empowerment. So it's not quite the same as, 'Where do you publish?'

[0:06:37]

John: *Right.*

Gail: So, it's not quite so much, kind of, framed as though this is about career, although of course it is.

John: *Yes.*

Gail: We've all got to survive and live, and all that ... And have ambition, but it's more, 'How can I generate in myself the capacity to survive this that I'm in?'

John: *Yes.*

Gail: When it constantly moves anyway. Like, apparently, you know, widening participation, increase in diversity, all that kind of stuff. But actually, it all ... I don't know where the avenues are and how I will survive it. So, that's what I mean that it seems like an individual question, but actually it does speak to something more collective if you can kind of decode it, I think.

John: *Yeah.*

Gail: And then that makes me think, I suppose, is that there is a real hunger, there's a hunger for a kind of intergenerational learning and sharing. I really think that. I really think that ... I think that the people that I'm in conversation with, at least the young people, there is a real hunger for that and it's true. It's not that you can give them, you know, we didn't know solutions for ourselves. Look, we're here! (Laughs)

John: *Yes. (Laughs)*

Gail: But we can't know the solutions, but something about sharing intergenerational experiences to think together about, 'What's the terrain we're in now and how might we begin to create

the resources that might be called empowering?’ I suppose I mean. It’s not the language that I’d use. And then that makes me think ... then of course the other people that are in my head all the time actually, are people like Jacqui Alexander, Gloria Wekker, Angela Davis, but I’d particularly say Gloria and Jacqui and Lata Mani, where things that were squeezed out of an earlier terrain, for me at least, the idea of something called the spiritual, whatever that might be, but also the idea of the body, not as something that gets ill or anything, but the body as another way of, another feltness.

John: *Yep.*

Gail: You know, all this stuff about the body’s marked and inscribed and all that kind of stuff, but beyond that, on another register, a register that isn’t ... that doesn’t come from critique but comes from construct, comes from saying something about ... We do have some resources, ancestrally if you like, another version of the intergenerational.

John: *Yes.*

Gail: If we can only really go to them and try to mobilise them [I mean the ancestral knowledges] as they live in our bodies and spark our imaginations. I mean, that’s the only access we have to them, by how we get sparked in our imaginations [and become an embodied feltness].

[0:09:49]

John: *And trying to make them speak into the conversation.*

Gail: Yeah, yeah, yeah. But often times, through the feltness. And if you can articulate the ... it’s hard to explain. I’m always doing this these days to go to stuff, you know, the feltness of stuff.

John: *(Laughs) No, I think textures, stuff and all those slightly elusive things.*

Gail: So, it is like, you know we were talking about *Moonlight* earlier, it is like the rebirth scene in the water where, you know, you’ve got that Juan the drug dealer, you know, but somehow this *ability* and *need* to father, in some sense. ... And take him into the water, take Little into the water so that you can float in something that is much bigger than yourself. That’s how you get them to speak. That’s how you get the ancestral voices to speak through the water, and the water is a kind of figure in these other modes of knowing, these

kind of ... part of a black Atlantic story of the importance of water, not just as a place where you're going to die, but the place where you can be held in the thing in which you cannot be held. It holds you even though it can't –

John: *In suspension.*

Gail: Yeah ... But suspension is something that can go on.

John: *Yes.*

Gail: You can survive in a sense. So, when he takes him into the water, I think the allusions in that, sort of, so many registers of black life, but importantly, 'Look, you can do this and I can hold you here. Fall into my arms. I've got you, I've got you.'

John: *I've got you, and you're safe with me.*

Gail: Yeah, yeah. Exactly. And he tells him, you know, the Cuban woman tells him that, 'In the moonlight, the black boys look blue.'

John: *Blue. Indeed.*

Gail: So, that's what I mean. That stuff, and it's those kinds of ways of thinking, of analysing, of visioning of politics, that's summed up in that scene that's in the writing of people like Jacqui Alexander and Gloria Wekker that are there in my head.

Between certainty and uncertainty

John: *But the bit that fascinates me, you know, there are two lines at least, at least, if not three, if not four, out of this and I'll come back to some of them, but one of them is precisely the peculiar oscillation, I think, as I experience it, so this might just be projecting wildly, is the oscillation between thinking that I know where I am and thinking that I don't know where I am, and that the conversational mode of being with others is in part trying out the confident bit and saying, 'If I say I think it's about this, does that make any sense?' And the other bit is about being able to say, 'And there's stuff here, but I can't get my head around but I know you've thought about this before?' So, it seems to me that there's something about that interplay of conversations that are about having something to say and asking questions that have sustained me in ... not just sustained, it won't do. Sustained is not a good enough metaphor. Has dragged me along in its train that's been vital.*

[0:13:58]

Gail: No, absolutely. Absolutely. And I think, I suppose, it's precisely in that kind of dialectic or whatever between having something to say or having a sense of some semblance of a sense that you know where you are and another one says, 'Well, I don't at all know where I am. I don't know how I got here. I don't know where I can go from here. I don't know?' You know, I know something. I don't know something is precisely in that dialectic, that third pathway if you like.

John: Yeah.

Gail: Or another pathway can emerge to another point where you're caught between those two poles and you go on again ... And that's the spiral space, you know?

John: Oh! Yes.

Gail: Because it's not that it's just an iteration.

John: It is not.

Gail: And it's not just a return to the same, it's a moving on, even as we go around if you (over-speaking).

John: *I should have brought a movie camera for the hands today because I can feel it coming! (Laughs)*

Gail: (Laughs) Yeah, yeah.

John: *But I think the spiral's right and I don't necessarily think it moves in any given axis.*

Gail: No, no.

John: *But I do think that one of the strains, and this is to go back to institutional settings, is about an academic life in which saying, 'I'm not sure,' 'I'm uncertain,' 'I don't really know about this,' or, 'I don't know what's going on?' are at least frowned on, and are I think also a problem about what expectations are held out for young people, and I think the models of certainty, certitude, definitiveness have a sort of even bigger hold than they used to. I'm bored by, and I shouldn't say this, I'm bored by reading people who know things.*

Gail: Yeah, I know what you mean. Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. Usually nothing to say. (Laughs)

John: *Well, and the ones I read have said it before and it just turns out that today is just another day where the thing that they knew is still true and I mean, I think one of the hard ... I mean, I think it's always been true, but one of the hard things about the present moment is I'm even less sure about the things that I thought were true, you know?*

Gail: Yeah, absolutely.

John: I mean, you know, I think people have tried to teach me how to think, but I don't think I have a set of ten points that I could write down and say, 'There you go. That's today!'

Gail: Yeah, exactly. Exactly. And, you know, and isn't that just another way of saying that actually we can't do it on our own? Nobody can do that. It's not just who do you have in your mind as being the people you are in conversation with and that that gives the vitality. It's absolutely essential, it's vital to have conversation because we can't do it on our own. But of course, that makes you vulnerable too, you know?

[0:20:19]

Thinking with and through race

John: But I want to go back because the other thing that you said right at the start and is part of our ongoing conversations, even if they've not happened very much lately, is thinking with and through race. And I remember when I first met you that you were one of the few people around the Open University who had it in their head as a category (over-speaking).

Gail: Yeah. (Laughs)

John: Much less as a lived experience.

Gail: Yeah.

John: Much less as a politics, but one of the things that's been clear ever since I did meet you is how do you think the present without that? All right? How is this moment imaginable without racialisations, multiple effects, presences, relations?

Gail: Yeah, yeah. No, I mean, you absolutely can't. You can't even begin to make sense of it, I don't think. You know, the formation that we're in, without thinking about, as you say, racialisations, multiple, and how complex it is because on the one hand, you know, you've ... it's sort of everywhere, I think, you know, I really do think there's a return to an earlier structure of feeling, I guess.

John: Yep.

Gail: Where it does feel, to me, much more like the sort of mid-'70s than the late '90s, say, in the sense that it feels frightening, that all, everywhere as you walk around, you hear racist epithets. You know, it could be all kinds, it's not necessarily only anti-black, it's, you know, anti-Semitic, anti-Arab, anti-Eastern Europeans, or European generally, where there's another –

John: Yes. Indeed.

Gail: – you know, all sorts of ways in which the world is made ... seemed to be made meaningful in people's mouths through some kind of racialising process of us and them, you know? Insider or outsider and all that, and of course led by politicians, media, just often through a failure to address it properly ... in its ordinariness, so you've got that, but you've got the multiplication, the ways in which, you know, that people seemed to be offended if some European people speak in whatever their European language is to each other. As though this is the most outrageous offence to their very core, the core of the listener, you know? And, like, that's just so frightening and at the same time you think, 'What has happened that people's cores are so unravelled to even hear a European language ...' and we're not talking about someone from Africa or East Asia, you know, or Asia, or East Asia ... that that feels so dismantling of their core, that they, kind of, have a right, but also they have a right too.

John: Ah. Right.

Gail: So, they're dismantled or crumbling on one hand and at the same time they have a sovereignty (laughs) through which they can, kind of, express their hatred and all that kind of stuff. So that ... all of that, alongside the mobilisation of the so-called settled minorities, that was the term for a while wasn't it, you know of the people who come from ... people like me who come originally from the Caribbean, or South Asia.

John: Yep, yep.

Gail: The settled minorities, and, you know, an incorporation into the national bigotries. 'You too ... We must make sure that when we do our vox pops for the TV and the radio, it's going to be your voices that say there's too many of them here now. Too many immigrants. We've got to stop. And I noticed that you might ... Did your parents come from ...?' 'Ah yeah, but when my parents came, we worked.' (Laughs) I mean, it's like it's through the paradox of the ... it's sick paradox of the same mobilisation.

[0:24:56]

John: It is. Indeed. Or both paradox and parody! I mean the ...

Gail: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, we've got all of that, but the ways in which, you know, you ... Every ill, every kind

of hurt, every dispossession is encoded through those languages of immigration, otherness, racialised in some way as not legitimate, and it's really, really frightening. I'm frightened! (Laughs)

John: I mean, I think that frightening is different, differently embodied, no doubt about it. But I think it's frightening, and it's partly because I think both the proliferation that, I think you're right, there's hardly anything which is not coded into that register and the speed of it as a default reaction, so I do think that, I mean, when you say that there's a sort of doubleness, or fragility, I mean, what is going on that means whatever we're going to call it, the white, English, British-ish identity, and the legitimation of that as the mode of expression is, and ... I mean, you know, I've been trying to write something with Janet about what the sense of loss around Brexit and Trump might mean, and what a complicated set of losses that might be that they are both, you know, material losses of jobs and industry and places to live, and there are also psychic losses about a sense of life, you know, the famous 'way of life' that we used to have and, but how wrapped up, I mean, both nationally and internationally in privilege all of that is and that the loop back is, and the privilege is to be able to express it in that register and I've no idea.

Gail: Yeah.

John: I have no idea, but every time I read about journalistic and academic versions about the left behind, the sense of loss, the ... you know, I think, 'Yeah, but there are many psychic dimensions to the loss that you're talking about.' And, you know, especially having just come back from the States, the Trump question about the loss of supremacy seems to me to be a really contradictory and unnerving, and scary ... and I mean, I think you're right about scary, political formation and it's a political formation drenched in, I don't know, you know more about this than I do, psychic, affective stuff that profoundly unsettled, I don't mean it's not been there for a long time, but it's out and about in an entirely new ... Well, not in an entirely new way, it's more out and about than it used to be.

Gail: I mean, certainly the licence to speak in ways that ... at least, the very speakers would say that they were not allowed to speak.

John: Yes.

Gail: You know, I don't know if that's right, but that's what they often say, or at least I overhear people say it, and it's kind of interesting. Sometimes, I do want to say, 'What happened?'

Has it changed? I hope you don't mind, I just overheard you say ...' (Laughs) But I don't in case I get hit or something!

John: Yes.

Gail: But what I can't fathom really ... well, I suppose the question in my mind is, so when Brexit happened, as I was saying to you, I was in hospital and I was reading in the paper, I think it was maybe one of the weekend papers, and there was a lot of kind of interviews with people from different areas that had been heavily leave.

John: Yep.

Gail: And one of them was Wales ... and they had a picture of this town or whatever, and there were all these EU signs, you know, with all this money ... indicating all this money that had come in, and the person they spoke to was a young guy, in his 20s or something, who said, 'Oh yeah, it's great. Brilliant, brilliant. I voted ... I absolutely voted Brexit. Good, we ... bit of ... get our country back.' This is Wales, so they're not getting it back from England, but you know?

[0:30:21]

John: Yep.

Gail: Get our country back and stuff, and you know it went on like this and, 'They've done nothing for us, nothing for us, but we're paying billions and they've done nothing for us.' And then the interviewer said, 'I've noticed all these signs ...' and they were plants for jobs, you know, jobs, the industries had been supported and that kind of stuff, and the guy sort of laughed and he said, 'Yeah, I suppose so actually. Yeah, I suppose they've put quite a lot in here. It's true. But I don't care. The main thing is that those London elite, they got it, didn't they. We showed them in our vote.' So suddenly, the whole shift ... to, 'I know we might have been a bit of a material struggle here, but actually the people who we're voting against is really the London elite,' and that gets on my nerves anyway as though they're ... You know, because they've never even been to London to see all the poverty and material deprivation in London anyway, but nevertheless, I do live on the edge –

John: Yeah, but we know where the elite lives.

Gail: Exactly, and I live on the edge of the City, so I do know about finance capital, and the kind of global side in London and all

that. There's all that. But what I ... in that register of, sort of, triumph, the triumphalism against the kind of an idea of an elite that's taken from you, taken all of your rights from you, that runs right alongside that is some kind of ... could care less about the possible material effects of Brexit on you as well. So it's not like a sustaining of a ... It's such a flimsy moment of victory. It seemingly, you know –

John: Indeed.

Gail: It seems to be a flimsy moment of victory against some, you know ... Again, it's an 'other' over there; not a racialised other now, a classed other in that sense because it's about those people there.

John: Yeah.

Gail: And then more and more of those sort of conversations that go on where people say on this sort of terrain of, 'Get our sovereignty back.' 'Get our country back.' 'Get our thing back.' And you know that ... of course, at one level, there has been massive material dispossession. People don't have jobs. People don't have ... men don't have the possibility of the masculinities that their fathers had in those places, if they wanted them, you know. There are real losses in that sense, but I get stuck. How does it travel out to this? And the Marxist version can't ... doesn't, you know, that it's dividing the class and all that, doesn't help me because I don't get it. You know, it's one of those points where I'm lost. I don't get it.

John: I think, I mean, I think you're right about the Marxist versions of 'get it' because the worst one ends up celebrating Brexit as a working-class victory.

Gail: Oh, I know.

John: And I just want to cry.

Gail: Well, that's just pathetic, infantile.

John: Indeed. (Laughs) But the other is that, I mean, you captured it in the description of the particular interview with the slide and it seems to me that there are three or four slides, I mean, one of which is, 'You're a sovereignty, we want our country back.' 'Yeah, but, you know, is it going to be a material disaster?' 'Yeah, but we stuck it to the London metropolitan, multicultural elite.'

[0:34:02]

Gail: I don't even know for this particular person. (Over-speaking)
It was, yeah, it seemed more, yeah –

John: *But there's a gloss there about, 'London is different than the rest of us.'*

Gail: Definitely that. And London has imposed all this on us.

John: *Its will on us, yes.*

Gail: Yeah. Yeah, and some of that is to impose multiculturalism on us.

John: *Yes, indeed.*

Gail: There's definitely that.

John: *And then there's ... but then the next little beautiful slide is immigration, which is something to do with both of them, but it isn't quite the same thing.*

Gail: Exactly.

John: *And one of the things I think ... I mean, you're right about the racialisation of immigration because it now carries the capacity to hit one of about ten registers ... we've always hated other people. (Laughs)*

Gail: Yeah.

John: *Sorry, I speak on behalf of the white British here, we have always hated other people anyway, and then, you know, we hated Europeans and then we hated East Europeans. They're not black, so it's not racist.*

Gail: Exactly, exactly.

John: *It was just that we hate them. We don't want them –*

Gail: They come to you with 'just an island' ...

John: *They cook pickles! They're ... you know, it's just. So, it seems to me that one of the really ... actually, I do think one of the unnerving things is the ability of those to fold into the next one.*

Gail: Yeah, sure.

John: *At almost any moment, right? So it's not ... there's this thing which has happened, Right?*

Gail: No.

John: *It's this combination, articulation, set of half-connected things that are at stake.*

Gail: And it's that they're relatively empty that allowed the slide because they can be filled in by any one of the bits that can happen, any one of the kind of narratives, or the elements of a narrative can fill into any point of the story. That's the thing. So, there's always that slide, and then in the end, in that

case, you know, a young man who's still not going to have a job. (Laughs)

John: Yeah, yeah.

[0:36:06]

Gail: Or anything ... And about whom nobody cares.

John: Well, I ... *that's the awful bit, isn't it?*

Gail: Certainly, the Farages of this world do not care.

John: No. You know, we have a government that announces that it's going to be for everybody as it dismantles yet more of the welfare system and –

Gail: Exactly, exactly.

John: But there was one horrible, I mean, there have been several, but one particular horrible crystallisation of those narratives into one person and one place which was Gina Miller.

Gail: Yeah.

John: How awful to be part of the cosmopolitan/metropolitan elite, a liberal constitutionalist ... And not British, or not the right sort of British, or not white British. And then suddenly you have the, whatever the opposite of perfect, focus for all of those things to condense into, right? So, not that they're the same, even when they go for Gina Miller, but she becomes a point of condensation for almost all of them; she is in the wrong place, of the wrong sort, doing the wrong thing and I wouldn't have wanted to be Gina Miller at that moment.

Gail: No. Absolutely. And of course, there's Gina Miller and there's Jo Cox.

John: And there's Jo Cox.

Gail: So, there's the two together. There's the one who, you know, the white woman who is clearly a fabulous MP. Really cares, but who must be taken out because she's a betrayer. She's absolutely a betrayer.

John: Yes. Yes. *From the inside.*

Gail: From the inside. And she's a she ... And Gina Miller is also a she. Yeah, yeah. I mean, the point is that the kind of gendered terrain, the way in which what is felt to be lost is so much a kind of gendered terrain as well.

John: Yes. Yes.

Gail: That gets represented by these two women, I think, in particular ways. The kind of fantasy of whiteness. Of the kind of the voice of the nation. The critical ... the voice that can indeed represent the constitution and try to hold the

nation to the constitutional process, but in the wrong body, and that wrong body being both a wrong-raced body and a wrong-sexed body ... And then Jo Cox, the wrong kind of ... doing the wrong kind of work as a woman and not doing it in a way that tends to the white boys.

[0:38:48]

John: Yes, yes. *Indeed.*

Gail: But actually tends to everybody, so not doing the right, kind of, womanly stuff. So, I think that speaks to, you know, the ways in which what feels in crisis and we've known it for so long, is precisely the normativity of gender that have been collapsed by all sorts of cultural pluralities really. You know, in the sense of not just ... I don't just mean in that sense of ethnicities, but the ways in which, you know, the diversification of kind of the sexual life and its visibility.

John: *Yep.*

Gail: Diversification of, kind of, ways of doing gender and its visibility. All of those things that lead to a kind of crisis of, 'What does it mean?' 'What does it mean?' There is a, kind of, in that sense, a multicultural crisis [emerging from challenges to ideas of the normal]. (Laughs)

John: *Yes. And it does seem to me that it's right about the different registers of that, and that I'm despairingly struck by one of the key terms in the online discussions after Brexit has been, 'Grow a pair.'*

Gail: Yeah. (Laughs)

John: *Well, (laughs) if you want to find the correct register for the reassertion of a masculinity of a rather, would-be to fantastical, I mean, you know, in the fantasy sense, fantastically tough version, it would be the injunction to everybody to grow a pair ... Because this is the only way of being a person.*

Gail: Exactly. Exactly. And it's so captured in that, you know, that's just ... It is scary though.

John: *Well, I mean, I'll have the next bit of the conversation which I had in the States which is we had a long argument about whether the moment of Trump was the moment of fascism. Some of us said, no. You know, there are conditions about fascism that this doesn't quite ... I mean, it's horrible. It's, you know, executive authoritarianism, but my response was ... My worry is in one sense is not Trump. It's when Trump fails on all those promises. So, when ... post-Brexit, after we have done all of these horrible things, and then when that*

young man in South Wales looks round and there's less, what's the political repertoire that ... I mean, my current version is, I keep myself awake at night worrying about ... and that's when you want a strong leader because, you know, the political parties are clearly not capable of delivering on the insane, fantastic promises that were made, you know? We know that NHS money on the bus from 'Leave' went the day after. We know that, you know, actually we might not be able to control immigration because corporate capital needs some.

Gail: Yeah. Exactly, exactly. (Laughs)

John: *Well, you know, we might not be able to give you any houses because actually, we're going to give the rich a tax cut.*

Gail: Exactly. And the jobs? Well, we'll see.

John: *Yeah, well, you know, in another generation. They'll be a couple of apprenticeships down the odd street.*

Gail: Yeah, exactly.

[0:42:53]

John: *But they might not actually lead to jobs.*

Dimensions and dynamics of crisis

Gail: Exactly. Exactly. No, it really is ... And I suppose that kind of crisis of, I mean, profound crisis in a kind of belief of liberal democracy, or the delivery of what it can deliver, how it can kind of govern in a way that feels sufficiently satisfactory to those who are invited to invest in it in particular ways. But, there was this programme on the TV, I don't know if you saw it, about young people, sort of, post-Brexit? And some of them ... What were they ...? They don't call themselves, the alt-right here, but they were kind of alt-right but I can't remember what they called themselves, something conservative. Some of them were social conservative, kind of people, but some were something else and they were all certainly authoritarian, kind of right authoritarian, economically liberal, and they ranged between, the people they interviewed, sort of 18 and 25 or something like that, all speaking to this thing ... And some had come from the Left or something, 'Yeah I used to think and then I realised and got mobilised on the net, or from social media ...' And then connected up into things and all these instances, you could see what they could be invited to. Because the thing about

the Trump thing I suppose is that it's not so much him, on his own, you know?

John: Yes.

Gail: It is when he fails. But most importantly, and it's about the kind of international formation as well.

John: *Indeed.*

Gail: The right-wing formation, led by Bannon and his whole kind of architecture that they fund and then kind of set up institutionally with all the links to ... That's the thing. It's about the kind of Right axis. ... So, they are not fascists and they're not fascists here, but they may be linking with fascists. (Laughs) ... And helping them to mobilise elsewhere, all in this much more Right authoritarians and white supremacist, male supremacist. I don't even want to call it patriarchy in a sense, but kind of supremacist because of a particular kind of masculinity that must be in control in the image of a class, and in the image of whiteness ... Not white-skinness, but whiteness of the horizon and what it means to be a human, you know?

John: Yes.

Gail: And that's why I think it's so frightening because what ... Thank God, Wilders, in the Netherlands, you know, didn't get in. But we don't know what's going to happen with Le Pen. ... We don't know what's going to happen just with the gathering of forces, that's the point.

John: *And one of the things is, I mean, you know, they don't have to win everywhere to be connected ... Or to be effective.*

[0:45:56]

Gail: Exactly.

John: *And I think, I mean, I don't, I probably don't think Bannon and his connections are fascist, but they're certainly not liberal constitutionalists either.*

Gail: No, but I was thinking about the connections into Putin and these other and they're setting up.

John: *And the old hard Rights around Europe.*

Gail: That's right. And they're setting up. They're setting up, you know, they're going to. Oh, I can't remember the name of the site that they've got on the kind of TV or something, but they're going to set up in difference places in France.

John: *Yeah, yeah. Breitbart?*

- Gail: With the Breitbart people. That's right ... So, to give a kind of an infrastructure into which, you know, the fascists can kind of lob their stuff ... and gather up more people.
- John: *And where the distinctions don't matter, at least. You know, whether it's Putin. Whether it's Putin. Whether it's the Klan. Whether it's Le Pen, the distinctions matter less than their connections.*
- Gail: And we know here in this country, we know how successful, kind of, Right, small Right, semi-fascist, authoritarian, profoundly racist organisations so easily pull everything rightward ... So easily do.
- John: *And, you know, and there's the, I mean it's not an area of knowledge of mine, but there's the thing about Wilders losing in the Netherlands. Well, yes, he lost ... But on the other hand, the political culture –*
- Gail: Took up a lot of his stuff –
- John: *Took up half at least of those things ... And there have been moments in France where one view of how to outflank Le Pen is to be more anti-Muslim with [than] the Front Nationale.*

[0:47:45]

- Gail: Exactly, exactly ... And knowing what it's like for people who are obviously identified as Muslim, whether they are or not, out there, you know, this is in London let alone anywhere else.
- John: *Yep.*
- Gail: It's a complete nightmare ... And just the kind of ordinary, everyday insults, micro-aggressions that have just become part of the fabric.
- John: *The texture of the everyday.*
- Gail: Yeah, yeah. Exactly, exactly. And that's what's so awful and that ... I suppose, the worry is how much, and this comes back to the collective conversations really, how much we, whoever 'we' is, might be able to mobilise a kind of another vision that can just be a bit like Velcro, you know? And just connect a bit ... Stick to people, say, 'Actually, no I want to think through this other frame? I don't know the answers, but I want to think it through this other frame, not what you're offering me. I can imagine myself differently and in relation to others in a different kind of way than what I'm being invited to do.'

Imagining other connections

John: Yeah.

Gail: And that's what I think is so frightening that, how do we make that intervention? Because partly, because we used to be able to do it more through the formations of the welfare state.

John: Indeed. And through bits of the local state and all those things.

Gail: All of that, that's what I mean, all that stuff that were ... that gave an institutional infrastructure and a sort of, a distorted, difficult, wrong culture, or cultural form that said, 'We have a relationship to strangers.'

John: Yeah.

Gail: I don't mean foreigners, I mean strangers. Those who are living in Birmingham, John ... Or, those who live in Sunderland.

John: Yes.

Gail: We are connected.

John: Yes.

[0:49:49]

Gail: Not those elite in London – we're going to kick it to death ... But actually ordinary, working-class Londoners ... Connected to ordinary, working-classes people from Llandudno or wherever it was, you know?

John: Yeah, it's true. It's true.

Gail: That sense of a connection, you know, it is the bloody thing, isn't it, about the blood transfusion as the metaphor for the welfare state (laughs) I mean, God! (Laughs)

John: I mean, only last week, in Nashville, somebody said, 'We don't have the, the Left doesn't have an imagery like, you know, ethno-nationalism. It doesn't have that visual thing.' And I said, 'Well, I think we have had. You know, the NHS and the blood transfusion as an example connected, both materially and emotionally, 96% of the people in this country, but why didn't we ever know how that worked!' (Laughs)

Gail: (Laughs)

John: And why did we think it could be mobilised just by saying, 'Let's see if the National Health Service', you know ... in that sort of rather flat tone ... because it did connect. And it was, you know, it was the blood transfusion, it was the notion that you'd have shared

experiences, and so I think you're right, there is something odd about the way that London is talked about as if there is not misery, impoverishment, homelessness etc, as well as wherever finance capital lives, you know?

Gail: Yeah.

John: *But the breaking of their imaginary, that sense that other people share good things and bad things, that you know, in different registers of all sorts of things, but that was both a national imaginary and occasionally, on its good days, wandered into being an internationalist imaginary that, you know, there are people like us all over the place to whom we are connected.*

Gail: Yeah, yeah. I know and because we also know that what a long journey that's been because we, you know, obviously all that work that we did in the OU, we are making an intervention into this field called social policy, we are trying to say something really, really serious is happening here ... And the distortion of the movements, the claims of the movements, exposing the problems with the old version that distortion into that ... but we're saying that ... because this is the continuation that the Thatcherite Project began.

John: *Absolutely, absolutely.*

Gail: This is where she wanted to take us. Absolutely. This is it, you know, and it's going on into who knows where, but that breakdown as we're trying to say in all that work –

John: *Yeah.*

Gail: That breakdown of the idea of the social relation, and the imaginaries of that that we're dissing it, you know. Why are we connected to anybody other than our families?

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