



# Desirable Undesirables

Zé Garcia Puga



# Introduction

“Desirable Undesirables” was first presented at a conference entitled *Rethinking the War on Drugs*, which took place at Northwestern University in late February, 2014, and was organized by the Seventh Circuit Bar Association. The latter described its participants as “an all-star faculty of judges, prosecutors, medical personnel, professors, government officials (including Senator Richard Durbin), economists and journalists.” The author, Zé Garcia Puga, was asked to speak on a panel entitled “Journalists Interview People Whose Lives Have Been Impacted by Drug Use.”

Garcia Puga displays an uncompromising hostility towards this elite ‘star-system’ of jailers, judges, lawmakers, and would-be managers of a ‘reformed’ carceral apparatus. We find this hostility inspiring. Like the author, we have nothing but contempt for the so-called progressive immigration and drug reforms, whose only function is to codify and deepen an artificial division between ‘productive’ and ‘unproductive’ groups of criminalized persons. The lucky among us are funneled into the indirect coercion of what little waged labor still remains; for the remainder there awaits only the direct force relations of border guards, police predation, and prison walls. Rejecting this domesticating reformist blackmail, where one person’s chains are slackened only provided someone else’s are tightened, this text calls on the criminalized to discover in their illegality a point of maximal tension from out of which to position oneself against the bourgeois legal order as a totality. From this perspective, which is that of an affirmed social criminality, the aim is not to close but rather to widen the antagonism between the undesirables and the society

which abjects them. Henceforth, the only 'rethinking of war' worthy of our attention is one in which we avail ourselves of the means to deepen the civil war objectively thrust upon us, until that day when the prisons and all of their attendant apparatuses of control are reduced to rubble.

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D e s i r a b l e

U n d e s i r a b l e s

Of all the specific liberties which may come into our minds when we hear the word 'freedom', freedom of movement is historically the oldest and also the most elementary. Being able to depart for where we will is the prototypical gesture of being free, as limitation of freedom of movement has from time immemorial been the precondition for enslavement.

-Hannah Arendt, "On Humanity in Dark Times"

HELLO, MY NAME IS ZÉ; I am preparing a more extensive research paper on the intersectionality of the war on drugs and immigration policy. I would like to introduce myself as someone who has been criminalized by the war on drugs and also rendered expendable under current immigration policy. During my youth, I was convicted of two separate cannabis possession charges. Coming home from a visit to Mexico over the Summer of 2011 I was apprehended by immigration officials at O'Hare International Airport.

I WAS INTERVIEWED AND HELD IN CUSTODY for over two hours, paroled into the country, and given what is known as a Notice to Appear which meant I was to submit my criminal dispositions to the Department of Homeland Security to determine whether I was going to be readmitted into the United States of America permanently or put under deportation proceedings. I am now in the midst of my deportation case and my next and final court date will be in 2017. Over the last ten years, three quarters of undocumented migrants who were convicted of non-violent offenses served prison sentences and were subsequently deported. Among legal permanent residents—like myself—who were deported, 77 percent had been convicted for non-violent crimes such as possession of a controlled substance. I would like to add to the discussion that drug related convictions can also have devastating consequences for people like myself, immigrants, for whom a single drug related conviction can have a devastating effect—that of permanent banishment—from our homes, our families, and loved ones.

There is a growing number of voices concerned for those being held in captivity by the state for drug related charges. One argument that seems to have garnered particular attention is that drug related penalties for non violent offenders should be met with more leniency from the courts. I will not be joining the chorus of liberal prison apologists for whom the caging and disposability of mostly black and brown bodies with less digestible narratives remains permissible. I will not be complicit in pleading to the Masters, “afford the palatable derelicts the right to a more fair negotiation

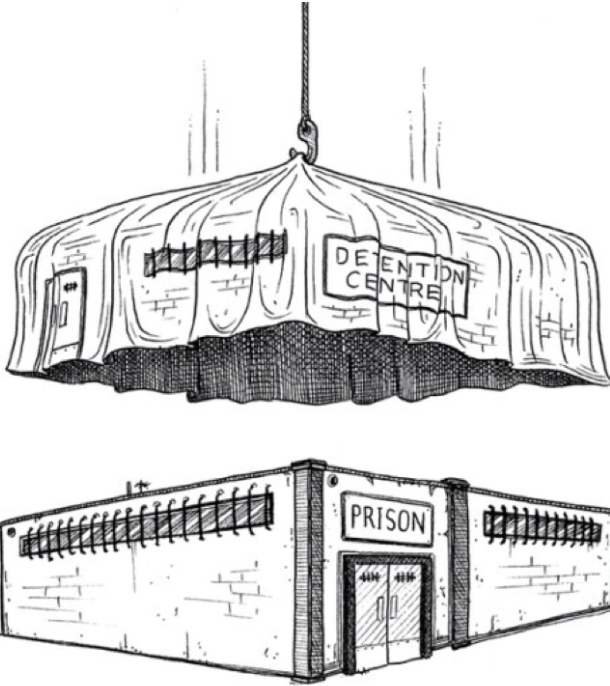


over their movement. As if saying, the militarized policing of the hood has become too obviously racist and perhaps the time is now to cosmetically redesign the stipulations of their ransom. This is reform, negotiating the release of some captives, especially when the narratives of those hostages can more easily fall in line with the prototypical citizen, yet never fully challenging the plurality and proliferation of power and its mechanisms, its obsession with controlling human movement and its economic necessity of funneling certain populations into the respective industries that can exploit their convenient undesirability. But mercy for non-violent “criminals” is not the maxim of those who desire total liberation. As if the state itself wasn’t guilty of the utmost psychopathic violence against the people it holds hostage, by restricting violently and quantifying clinically the very thing that makes us wild, free, and purposeful – our movement.

My aim is not to acquire sympathy because the petty offenses I committed in my youth will be met by such brutality from the state. My aim is not to allow power—its institutions and mechanisms—to cosmetically redesign its practices of banishment and capture, to perennially ensure the subservience of people to the state. My aim is to contribute to ongoing struggles that seek to destroy the conditions that allow the social category of criminal to be subject to the entirety of state terror and exploitation. If one is black, one can be born illegal in this country, as we are shown time and time again how anti-blackness manifests itself in this society. Or one can become illegal on arrival if we are migrants fleeing the conditions set forth by capital in our

homelands. The liberal cacophony of the day points to the obvious, that which we know, the incarceration rates of the largest prison population in the world are highest amongst people of color. We see the state agents in our neighborhoods every day, mostly white, caging mostly people of color behinds bars, beginning the process of deportation proceedings against us. We have been illegalized by our masters, and now, in attack mode, our point of tension with the established order, our brand as pernicious and profitable desirable undesirables, we declare, our illegality is our power. We must not allow ourselves to be domesticated by their qualifications, limitations, or restrictions upon our bodies. We understand that politicians will not defend our identities as social criminals. We also won't be defended by the liberal, reformist, profiteers of the non-profit industrial complex (whose scope of justice is limited to citizenship). Our bodies and the stigma thrust upon us—as illegals and or criminals—are desirable and convenient because the immigrant military-prison-industrial detention complex can profit from us. Senator Dick Durbin who was also invited to speak at this Symposium, and other members of congress can profit, economically and politically. DREAM Activists, and the non for profit industrial complex—the supposed allies of the immigrant community—also benefit economically and politically from our fabricated undesirability as we have seen, specifically in regards to the current immigration reform bill (of which Senator Dick Durbin has been a main architect of), how eager they are to promote the total militarization of the US-Mexico border, the proliferation of the security and surveillance apparatus of the state, the latest expansion since 1996 of what determines new quali-

fications of criminality, under the context of immigration policy (poverty, employment history, gang affiliation). All this, in exchange for the documentation of some categories of immigrants, and surely, in the case of the NGOs, an increase in the federal funding of such organizations who can demonstrate a willingness to work alongside the state in managing immigrant populations and funneling them into the prison detention industrial complex. It seems interesting to point out that conversations taking place at the highest levels of government about the decriminalization of certain drugs and even a certain self reflection about the explosion of the prison population and what social groups are targeted, mostly black and Latino, are happening as the economic opportunities of immigration detention centers become more evident to the players like GEO Group and Corrections Corporation of America. In fact, the immigration reform bill would afford millions of dollars to companies like GEO Group and Corrections Corporation of America to build the for profit detention centers that will house current and future manufactured criminals.



YES, WE ARE CRIMINALS, AND UNCOMPROMISING struggles of resistance are making it harder for power to separate us from our communities. In fact, there are an increasing amount of groups that organize explicitly for and with criminals whose uncompromising vision of social relations imagine a world free of cops, border patrol, prisons, and borders themselves. In many major cities, prison abolition groups are supporting and coordinating rebellions inside the prisons with the mantra of “every prisoner is a political prisoner, reduce the prison walls to rubble.” Here in Chicago, the Moratorium on Deportations Campaign is continuing their education workshops throughout the Chicagoland over the proposed immigration bill in addition to

their successful campaign to stop the construction of an immigrant detention center in Crete, Illinois, all done in the name of dismantling the immigration detention system. Groups around the continent are building solidarity with the struggles of indigenous nations along the border, whose way of life and claim to the territory known as the United States spans thousands of years. A flame is burning that will not be domesticated and cannot be coopted by the Left or its state actors. We can continue being a threat to the social order that is holding all of us hostage. One anthem of autonomous resistance states: “We are and will always be illegal because we don’t obey their laws of misery, exploitation, hate and separatism, their laws that make sure we are always poor, their laws that kill us slowly.” We should be clear that our paramount desire is not for family friendly detention facilities, or better food, or to decriminalize certain drugs, for less harsh prison sentences, or to abolish the death penalty, or to make solitary confinement a thing of the past. We should be clear that a reformed prison industrial complex is still antithetical to the premise of human liberty, of total liberation. From the brutality of local turned transnational oligarchies of the countries many immigrants flee, to the cities and counties in the US who receive federal money to house, (read cage) undesirable populations, at every stage of the so called “immigration crisis” or the “war on drugs” the capital state is culpable in engineering the horrors along the border and in the hood. It was the capital state that engineered the economic policy and social conditions people flee from, it is the state and its agents who flooded our communities with crack and heroin and continue to support the global drug war, with

logistics and impunity, as we have seen with the Sinaloa Cartel in Mexico.

Perhaps it is the belief of some that “the system” needs an overhaul that is less punitive, more transparent, and less obviously racist. To this we say, fire to every cage, under any name, be it reform, correctional center or immigrant detention center. No piece of legislation to reform the immigrant military prison industrial detention complex would suffice in ultimately answering the question of the “immigration crisis” or “mass incarceration.” One, because these crises are manufactured and created by economic players and their paid for legislators. We cannot trust the capital-state to alleviate the crises unfolding in our neighborhoods, because they have created the ultimate crisis, their ideal prison; the very notion of the nation-state and the power relations that ensure its dominion over our bodies. We know that drug addiction is a disease that deserves compassion and treatment, not incarceration. We must no longer forsake justice to a third party, namely the state or its courts. Justice, is something we can only give ourselves and each other, through a brutal understanding of our common enemy, and a clear and uncompromising vision that will make no concessions, no contracts with our clear enemies, or the sirens of liberalism.

I end now, with a quotation from an Eritrean migrant being held in a detention center in Greece: “clean rooms, clean beds, warm showers - none of that will change anything. Don’t help us if that’s all you’re going to ask for. What we need is freedom.”

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