

# Exquisite Comics #3



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**The Sleeping Beauty Dreams: A side note on snowfall, sleepwalking and the self in processes of decolonisation**

*Shelda-Jane Smith*

*I still marvel at how swiftly my previous life's thinking pattern slid away from me, like snow off a roof – Malcolm X (1965)*

This third round of Exquisite Comics responded to the resurgence of mainstream efforts toward decolonisation of public spaces, institutions, practices and knowledge itself. Inspired by U.S. civil rights ‘preachies’ of *EG Comics* (Whitted, 2019), our current theme centres upon a terribly vague question – *How do you decolonise?* – asking contributors to reflect on this before diving into the comic making process. It was intentionally vague – who (or what) is ‘you’, and who (or what) can claim to be decolonising.

Using surrealism as a framework allowed us to centre the psyche and internal processes of self-discovery and confrontation when exploring what it means to decolonise. Our methods comprise collage, automatism, and child-led drawing that, in the face of grand gestures (such as rewriting curriculums and reforming institutions) may seem rather small. And yet what is larger than the worlds we create in our minds? Herein lies the possibility of transformation. Therefore, *Exquisite Comics #3* turned toward moments of deep and uncomfortable reflection. Not to point the finger in accusations of wokeness but to consider the texture and character of ‘the self’ in any process of decolonisation. And yet wokeness, despite what its detractors say, remains a significant metaphor for assessing the amount of snow still left on one’s roof, in other words the old ways of thinking and being.

*How will you ever wake her up when she is deep in her dreams – Nneka*

The WEIRD<sup>1</sup> are in a state of slumber. And whilst, it is not sufficient to binarize: us and them, Global North and Global South, East and West, I use this term regardless of race, gender, sexuality or religion. There are norths inside the south and souths within the north, nonetheless the dominance of WEIRD persists. The dichotomy is a lie, we are them as much as they are us.

But there are sleepwalkers with much to keep them sedated. Sleepwalkers are in need of an intervention to ‘shake themselves and stop playing the game of the *Sleeping Beauty*.’ (Fanon, 1963). But in all of their gameplaying can we really characterise these sleepers as beautiful? Furthermore, are methods of introspection, art and creativity sufficient to wake them from their dreams? Dreams wherein billionaire superheroes are saviours of planet earth, developers of the third world, exporters of universal standards edging out from the west to the rest. No, these are not dreams at all, they are illusion.

Dreams have movement, agitation and desire. Illusions mollify the soul and keep us where we lay.

*We shall slip our fingers of laughter and calabash, between the icy teeth of the Sleeping Beauty in the woods – Aime Césaire*

Where can I situate *Exquisite Comics #3?* Possibly via its contributors, born mid-late 20th century. Artists and writers. 2020, Liverpool.

The irony of decolonisation is not lost on us. The fruits of our city’s colonial past surround us; docklands, slave gates, Windrush descendants, Catholic Irish

[1] WEIRD: Inhabitants of western, presumably educated, industrialised, rich and supposedly democratic countries. Interchangeable with ‘the west’, ‘Global North’, ‘Minority World’ – but none truly represent the state of the world.

heritage and universities that celebrate genocidal politicians. We know and live alongside our histories but sleepwalk between them, conscious of the fact that, on the whole, we are unconscious. But snow tends to fall silently.

For the WEIRD, sleepwalking carves a schism in the mind; a mental collage of sorts. This duality is formed by decrying violence and subjugation on one hand, whilst comfortably benefiting from it on the other. It is amongst our sleepy wakefulness that I situate *Exquisite Comics #3*. This is what decolonisation wrestles with, the fact that human lives and livelihoods are a dream and a nightmare all at once. Yes, the WEIRD are indeed sleeping but they are certainly no beauties.

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In its response, *Exquisite Comics #3* is nascent. Largely because decolonisation deserves so much more than ‘nice’ liberal people offering uncertain and emerging gestures towards their own fable of equality. As Paulo Freire cautions us against false generosity, we know that our response does not go far enough to directly undo systems of oppression, nevertheless our goals lie in raising our own critical consciousness.

Our attempts are embryonic;

they require thinking about and then eventually enacting changes within ourselves;

they negate recourse to what society ‘ought’ to be doing;

they are ostensibly quieter, subtle and mostly introspective;

they are unlikely to topple statues or propose any directive.

Their power lies in planting a seed. A seed that will germinate into something more marvellous and beautiful than what is presently tying us down and keeping us locked in inertia.

*Surrealism, tightrope of our hope – Suzanne Césaire*

Of course, tackling decolonisation via means of introspection is not nearly enough. Furthermore, it runs the risk of becoming yet another iteration for liberals to perform virtue.

However, I'd like to offer introspection as a starting point, a means to an end. For me, the place where decolonisation begins is within our minds. This approach does not carry mouthpieces and placards. This approach takes seriously all attempts towards liberation, but prioritises the fact that if we want to unsettle the status quo then we need to unsettle ourselves.

And yet the internal conflict remains; a self-made anxious juxtaposition. It's easy to point the finger, stating what everyone else ought to be doing, but the onus is also on us. Revolution from below, never above; within and without. The value and use of our quiet methods of dissent (e.g comic making) is something we can judge for ourselves – figuring out whether our efforts are true or false, i.e. for liberation or business as usual.

I don't want to run the risk of providing explanation, so I will stop here and let Audre Lorde (1984) ask the final question: *"Perhaps for some of you here today, I am the face of one of your fears. Because I am woman, because I am Black, because I am lesbian, because I am myself – a Black woman warrior poet doing my work – come to ask you, are you doing yours?"*

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# DREAM OF DOMINION?





To produce is to co-operate to

reach out to ask to support to provide

...tightrope  
of our hope

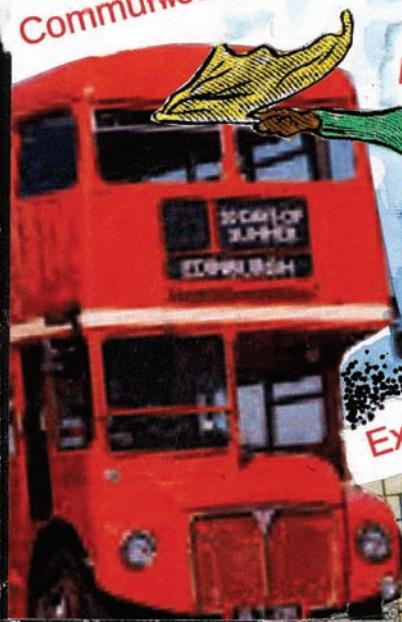
Communication

Language

Expression

Disseminate

Interact



A surreal illustration featuring a figure with a long, brown, snake-like arm. The figure is wearing a white t-shirt and light-colored pants, and is walking on a sidewalk. A human skull lies on the ground in front of them. The background is a textured, light-colored wall. The figure's head is replaced by a large, crumpled, grey mass that looks like a brain or a cloud. The figure is looking down at the skull. The overall style is painterly and dreamlike.

democratic human liberation

is forged by the

common language

of humankind



Sapphire  
as  
Praxis



A human community  
is a product  
of many hands





Of Capital power ''

*"Behold, the perversion*

WHEN, IF EVER, WILL  
THEY LEARN TO LIVE  
IN PEACE... AS  
BROTHERS?

WHEN WILL THEY  
LEARN... THAT LOVE  
IS THE POWER  
SUPREME?

*Communicable information through  
the common language of real life*

It's my opinion. I don't have to prove a gut feeling. Cheerio

Embrace acknowledge explore discover

Embrace acknowledge explore discover

**BINGO**



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# Exquisite Comics #3

Exquisite Comics is a game of 'exquisite corpse' in comic-book form. There are four players, eight panels, envelopes, stamps and a pile of imagination. The players exchange the part-completed panels with each other through the post, until all have contributed to each panel. None of them sees all the other panels in progress until the eight are complete. Finally, the panels are randomly assembled into an order that reveals (or otherwise) the previously unconscious storyline. Exquisite Comics #3 was played by Sue Comer, Jah Jussa, Shelda-Jane Smith and Slim Smith