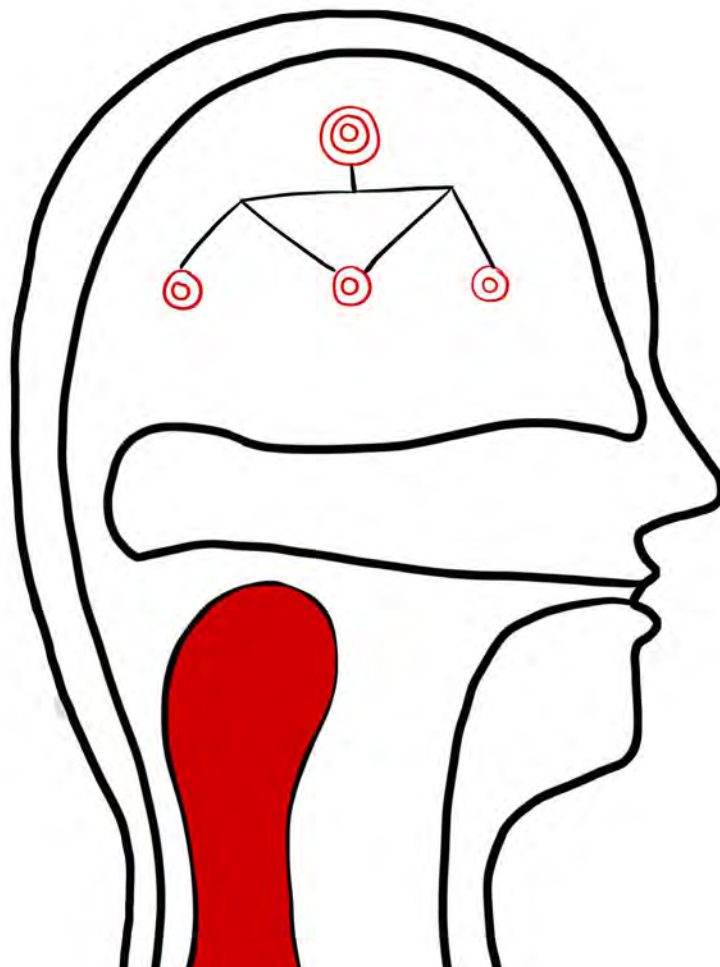


Experiments in Resistance



DeCentering Through Radical Intersectionality and Editorial Politics

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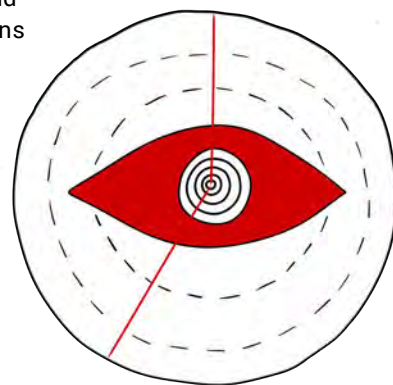
DeCenter Magazine is a collaborative space of inquiry focused on imagining the politics of decentring as a strategy of political being and doing, focused on solidarity, resistance, and experimentation. Aimed at creating a parallel, collective, and expressive space for commonly marginalized and fiercely policed discourses, DeCenter was born from surprisingly productive conversations around exhaustion with mainstream media practices in a post-truth world. When one woman turned weary of the enduring misogyny in the revolution, ten others appeared to point out the overt or covert persistence of caste, violence, and elitism in the counter-hegemonic spaces structured around the skeletal frame of Brahminical patriarchy.

What is a centre? How does it come to be? How do the centralizing forces of hegemonic discourses curate and dominate the flows of ideas, conversations, writing, and art? Examined narratively, the centre recounts the story of a single sub-continental subjectivity: the *savarna*,¹ upper-class, most commonly North Indian, heterosexual man. And yet, other ways of knowing and being have persisted on the subcontinent: other maps and markings have survived the epistemic violence of patriarchal caste hierarchies, brutal exploitation of labour, and colonization of physical and affective landscapes. To dismantle the politics of marginalization, we begin by displacing the centre – and this requires radical intersectionality.

Beyond neoliberal representation

The word “decentre” is a negation. To begin our work of imagining the political and creative work of decentring, i.e., deconstructing and dismantling presumed centres, we imagined the dissolution of tried and tested internal structures of known spaces of resistance. We began by resisting the exploitative and objectifying – if not politically redundant – recourse to token diversity, understood as a politics of representation that does little more than coddle the centre’s impulse of swallowing emerging tropes of resistance and repurposing them as empty slogans for sale in a neoliberal market. Over a period of six months, we assembled a team of academics, journalists, lawyers, and artists to collectively shape a radically intersectional vision of resistance. Around 95% of our team is now made up of Dalits, Bahujans, Adivasis, Muslims, Queer Folks and Minorities. We have editors from South, East, West, and North India.

Kashmir and the Northeast are represented on our geographically and linguistically decentred team. DeCenter is thus distinct from mainstream media, where the illusion and façade of objective equality and reality cloud meaningful practice of inclusion, restricting who gets to speak, how much, and when. We are ambivalent towards terms like “representation”, or “slow journalism”, which are co-opted, emptied of their radical potential to alter the nature of reporting and the voyeurism of the “gaze”, and then turned into marketing slogans for media houses. We resist the temptation of using these terms to define and therefore confine, or shape, our editorial process. The easiest way of describing our editorial praxis is as resistant. In a time where being outside of the so-called mainstream is not enough, de-centring offers something beyond the tried, tested, and defanged “voice of the people”/“representation”/“slow journalism” model. We took that offering to shape DeCenter, and the content on our website is its most tangible and visible form.



Zones of encounters

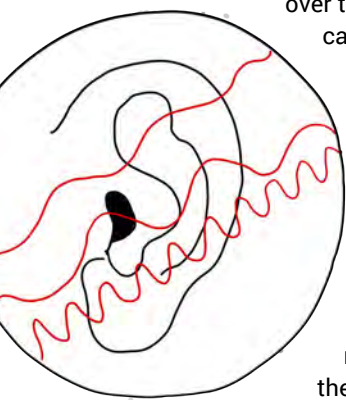
Our first issue arrived on the heels of major protests in India and movements against racism globally, and in the midst of the Indian farmers' movement. The incessant sexual violations and the coercion of Dalit women in villages, streets, or on the frontlines of protests shaped our sense of urgency. The brutal incarceration of journalists, activists, writers, academics, and students, too, moved us to publish without indulging in languid pauses over the proper use of punctuation. The issue encapsulated the anti-authoritarian potential of decentring. It included Rupsa Nag's interview with subversive poet and musician, Akhu Chingangbam from the Imphal Talkies;² Afrah Asif's conversation with Dalit transgender activist Grace Banu;³ Pranjali Kureel, Sankul Sonawane, and Preeti Koli's dedicated analyses of the Indian education system and the impact of the 2020 National Education Policy on Dalit students;⁴ Sheikh Saqib's narration of everyday experiences during the siege of Kashmir;⁵ and Randeep Maddoke, Varinder Maddoke, and Nav Rahi's photographic documentation of the farmers' protests.⁶ As the farmers occupied Delhi's city borders and choked its centre, we reflected on the organic and potent eruption of a decentred yet cohesive movement.

Our carefully drafted calls for submission – broad, open-ended, and malleable – offer a potent way to reimagine political allegiances, solidarity, liminality, marginality, and relationships. As a result, submissions to DeCenter are both subjective and reflexive, which are qualities shunned and shunted by mainstream media. One of our editors quoted Adivasi poet and activist, Jacinta Kerketta, to remind us: "telling your journey, your story, is also the story of this society, this world." The ideas, thus, are fashioned by the magazine's contributors and not by the magazine; they do not take the shape for the container that is the magazine, but the magazine snugly envelopes them. The works of our contributors are different to those produced in highly structured and rigid arrangements. They act as decentred associations and they can be visualized as zones of encounters marked by the remarkable ability

of ideas to touch and travel. The decentred view is a plane of possibilities, enlivened with movements of ideas that bounce, interact, change, develop, become, and sometimes – crucially – dissolve and un-become.

Our sub-editing overlooks the restraints of peg, angle, and hook – all of which are weaponised to gatekeep, and privilege fixations and click-bait material. In our second issue, "Contexts" (April 2022), one of our editors writes on how our ideas about politics are produced through processes of automation, wherein news, art, and "content" are reduced to algorithmic communications in service of authoritarian ideologies. This model of consumerism where news, art, writing, and politics become goods to be consumed and discarded, works hand-in-hand with regimes of surveillance and complacency. DeCenter's editorial practices, in contrast, do not view news – or "content" – as a consumer product, nor do they reduce the reader to a buyer of goods and services. It disturbs the algorithmic familiarity of the news cycle as well as the repetitive newness of content.

"Contexts" includes an interview with labour activist Nodeep Kaur, reflections on mainstream media's clinging to "objectivity", and a text on photography in times of protest, among others – aiming to trouble the assumptions that undergird our times of conspiracy, boredom, and Netflix. Writing about the rehearsed indifference expected of mainstream media journalists, writers, and artists in an ephemeral, fast-paced, and facile news and content consumer industry, an editor asks in her piece, "How sustainable is it to not stop, feel, grieve, and heal?" The editor profiling Nodeep writes, "Marginalised bodies are written about in binaries in mainstream media – valorized as a revolutionary or demonized for as much as critiquing the appropriation



of their struggles” (see illustration on the right). DeCenter revels in the liminal space between the two. This space also offers fertile ground not just for the production of a magazine, but also for fostering relationships and building solidarities.

Anti-authoritarian modes of engagement

Decentring as a strategy requires resisting the urge to simply recentre; we do not aim to privilege any one counter-hegemonic idea or group, but rather to imagine the margins and edges as an infinite productive perimeter of anti-authoritarian modes of engagement. To produce this anti-structure internally, we designed for ourselves an editorial politics of horizontalism, i.e., there is no editorial hierarchy or chain of command. We work together collaboratively and resolve conflict through mutual discussions with each editor volunteering their labour, according to their interests and abilities. Each of our team members has different experience of and with the centre, none any less or more important than the other. We aim to subvert the pitfalls of homogeneity, avoiding hegemonic editorial slants unwittingly becoming tools of tone policing, often brought to a media platform by hierarchical editorial teams (see lead illustration). All this to show that, in the absence of the hegemonic logic of the centre or, in other words, an organizational strategy marked by concentric circles and flowcharts, we are not left with chaos – a claim pushed by authoritarian rhetoric – but rather, naturally moving forms of ideas and subjectivities. We envision these worlds as topographical idea maps and anti-structures that emerge from the convergence of thoughts. Thus, we advocate a reclaiming of the map, a coercive tool of control often invoked to justify the centre. Our topographical maps are both bereft and brimming over with centres – both being forms of decentring. We imagine the work of decentring as an embodied strategy. The centre, with its perennial, inescapable, panoptic

gaze, watches the margins always from a distance, noting any and all movements. Even as we hope to resist, we remain entrenched in the scopophilic practices of the centralizing and bureaucratizing gaze we have internalized. That gaze coerces us into reproducing spectacles of our subjectivities for a consumerist world. In sharp contrast to the gaze, which travels in linear form like radii on a circle, we support shifts to the metaphorical ear, capable of 360 degrees of reception, convergence, and reflection. Listening is an intimate embodiment of decentring – away from the centre and the naval-gazing self, and in proximity with the infinite and uncertain, shifting and slippery topographical slopes on the margins swirling in the untamed clamour of resistance (see illustration on the previous spread).

However, our work is too nascent to say with certainty what a decentred world would look like. Inhabiting the very violent structures we hope to dismantle, we experiment and grow as a self-reflexive collective willing to walk the path of liminality and ambiguity.



Endnotes

- 1 Editor's note: Savarna is a term to describe those "within" the caste system, belonging to the four castes (*Varnas*). This term is used in opposition to those that are excluded from this status and who subsequently face the majority of violence, exclusion and discrimination by the caste system. Those are sometimes referred to under the political banner of *bahujan* (the majority) or by the constitutional category Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). Among these *Dalit* is a term coined by B.R. Ambedkar, referring to those belonging to the lowest castes, formally excluded from the caste system, while *Adivasis* refers to indigenous communities in the Indian subcontinent.
- 2 decentermag.com/interviews-akhu-chingangbam
- 3 decentermag.com/interviews-grace-banu
- 4 decentermag.com/politics-post-matric
- 5 decentermag.com/politics-kashmir
- 6 decentermag.com/photography-farmers