

Anohni speaks on war, inequality and Obama

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6 June 2016

The new album by Anohni, *Hopelessness* tackles many pressing issues, such as drone bombings, war, the Obama administration, mass spying, global warming, and more. The WSWs spoke to Anohni about her music and her views on the current political situation.

Published below are our questions and Anohni's responses.

Thanks for taking the time to respond to our questions. We found many parts of your new album moving, but also striking in its direct criticism of state spying, drone bombings and Obama himself. Could you speak on some of the reasons why you made the new album? What motivated you?

I wanted to participate as vigorously as I could and use direct language to articulate long held concerns.

Your singing voice is strikingly unique. How would you describe your approach to singing and your artistic evolution over the years?

At first I sang to help myself. Then I sang to comfort others, and to share creative process. Today I want to use my voice to break bones that I fear are healing in deformed ways.

You have spoken out against war and President Obama's drone bombing campaigns. As reports have shown, and as our web site has analyzed, the Obama administration has escalated the war efforts of the previous Bush administration. The United States has been at war continuously now for more than 15 years. How did this inform your work on the song "Drone Bomb Me," "Crisis," and others?

I attended protests in Washington in 1991 against Bush senior's invasion of Iraq. We carried signs saying "NO WAR FOR OIL." It has been more than 15 years. In my view, we are surrounded by an array of seemingly disparate issues: income disparity, the collapse of biodiversity, the death of the oceans and forests, overpopulation, apocalyptic sky-god religious

ideologies, the weapons industry, corporate sovereignty, global warming, banking corruption, the collapse of checks and balances in democracy, capital punishment, drone bombing campaigns and corrupt American foreign policy, the suspension of habeas corpus, the reintroduction of torture, addiction to fossil fuels, misogyny and racism.

I look at these not as separate issues but as a network of codependent conditions that amplify and exacerbate one another and climax in ecocide. To address any one of them is just like playing a game of whack-a-mole. I feel like it's time for us to try to inhale the big picture. That is what I am clumsily trying to do in my recent work.

The songs "Obama" and "Watch Me" address questions of mass surveillance and the disillusionment with the Obama administration felt by many. Few artists have even attempted to address such issues, let alone truthfully. What is your assessment of the Obama administration and its punishment of whistleblowers like Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning?

I obviously think it is a terrible disappointment, especially in light of Obama's early promises to create transparency in government. During Obama's tenure, a performance of diplomacy and sympathy for identity politics has taken a front seat. Yet Chelsea Manning is serving a 35-year sentence for being the only one with the courage to expose American war crimes, we are all iris scanned when we enter the country, our emails and phone calls are all recorded, and Obama continues to sign kill lists of targeted suspects for instance in Pakistan, escalating the Republicans' stance of merely imprisoning suspects in Guantanamo Bay and elsewhere without trial. Europe is heaving under the strain of millions of refugees fleeing 25 years of dubious American military intervention in the Middle East. By not prosecuting the previous administration's

war crimes, and by using automated drones to kill suspects and innocent bystanders in the name of the war on terror, I believe that Obama has contributed to the escalation of the terrible destabilization unfolding in the region.

You have argued that “identity politics” is a distraction from more fundamental issues at stake today. How and why did you arrive at this conclusion?

Every election cycle since I arrived in the US in the early 80s, I watched as the gay community was wheeled out as evidence that if you didn't support Republicans, people like THIS were going to be teaching your children in schools and spreading AIDS through Christian churches across the nation. If you didn't vote for Ronald Reagan, millions of unborn fetuses would be executed in their third trimester, etc etc. It seemed clear to me that we were being played, used as a front to manipulate working and middle class people to vote for corporations masquerading as advocates of “Christian family values”.

Dick Cheney and Ronald Reagan both have gay children. But they knew that if they toyed with the knee-jerk biases of the populace, while retracting their access to receiving a meaningful state funded education, and get them hooked on powerfully manipulative corporate propaganda like Fox News, then they could convince huge swaths of misinformed and plainly ignorant Americans to vote against their own best interests.

Many working class people still vote for corporate representatives who are only interested in taking away their pensions and securities, firing them and rehiring them as temps, dismantling their unions, making obsolete cultural program funding, shipping jobs overseas, dismantling working class access to university education, and otherwise consciously widening the chasm between themselves as the rich and the increasingly poor electorate. By redirecting the growing frustrations of the disempowered working and middle classes to focus on the real or imagined shortcomings of their neighbors, or simply by inflaming deep rooted prejudices, they could distract and manipulate voters while they laughed all the way to the bank. The only real threat to the establishment in the last couple of decades that I have seen was the Occupy movement, which was shut down by the Obama administration with the same brutal efficiency

that the Black Panthers were once wiped out.

The election campaign in the United States is fraught with dangers, with Trump and Clinton being, according to polls, the most widely hated candidates ever to run in a US presidential election. Sanders, for his part, is working within the very political system that has produced such immense social inequality and endless wars. We have closely analyzed his record as well with an eye to clarifying what genuine socialism is.

According to polls, a majority of young people are favorable to socialism , and there are millions today who now identify as “socialists.” At any rate, what do you think of the elections ahead, as well as the question of socialism?

I feel like the choices are dire. I hope Bernie wins the nomination as I think he is the only viable candidate. Hillary will peddle more of the same, which might be OK if we had all the time in the world, but things seem to have gotten much worse on the world stage since Obama took office. If Trump wins I fear that he will send a nuclear bomb to the middle east. He is such a volatile figure. He is already boasting about his willingness to engage in nuclear warfare. I think he is a hugely dangerous man.

Could you speak on the title of your album, “Hopelessness”? Where do you see hope?

I see hope in taking action and trying to speak up.



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