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# The Longest Year

The Future of Crime, Harm, and  
Justice in the Shadow of 2020/21

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## Editorial

### The Longest Year:

#### The Future of Crime, Harm, and Justice in the Shadow of 2020

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The famous quotation attributed to Lenin states that “there are decades when nothing happens; and there are weeks when decades happen.” Like many other famous quotes, it is perhaps tired and overused. But we are happy to wear it out a little more, for it nevertheless serves as a useful departure point for this introduction and for the collection of papers in this first issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Crime, Harm and Ethics*.

We tend to periodize history and attach significance to the way in which eras become defined. Hobsbawm (1994) characterised the period between 1914-1991 as the “short twentieth century” – one characterised by world wars, global politics, political economy, cultural and technological change; it bore little resemblance to the preceding period and collapsed in the aftermath of the end of the cold war. In the wider expanse of history, 2020-2021 represents little more than a few short weeks. But the significance of those weeks may shape the decades to come in ways that mark a radical departure from the world we knew before any of us had heard of Covid-19. There have been numerous years of significance in recent times: the 2008 financial crisis; the 2011 uprisings, protests, and rebellions; the political significance of 2016. However, the global coronavirus pandemic – among other events – set 2020-2021 apart as a period of extraordinary significance. As such, it may be useful to consider 2020-2021 as “the longest year”.

Coming into 2020, the global political landscape reflected increased polarisation but a general swing towards a more right-wing, populist, and authoritarian slant. In the UK, the Labour Party suffered its worst electoral defeat in nearly a century and the Conservative Party was returned with a mandate to “get Brexit done”. In the USA, President Trump was confidently heading towards re-election until the coronavirus pandemic and his inept response derailed the economy and saw Joe Biden and the Democrats take the White House in November. Trump’s loss lingered into 2021 with his supporters storming the US Capitol in apparent insurrection. The killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers in May 2020 ignited peaceful protests worldwide demanding recognition that Black Lives Matter. It also sparked instances of rioting and property damage and the establishment of ‘autonomous zones’ operating free from police and local government authority. It encouraged debate around the role and purpose of the police which ranged from suggestions for reform to calls to defund and abolish the police. Indeed, the ‘culture wars’ appear to have hit new heights. Fault lines have hardened and new divisions have emerged as opposing sides on various cultural, political, and zemiological issues talk past one another with increasing vitriol, resulting in interminable deadlocks reminiscent of MacIntyre’s (1981/2011) description of our society as gripped by a ‘culture of emotivism’.

In the weeks and months prior to the pandemic, wildfires engulfed the Australia and the west coast of the United States. Scientists estimate that global warming increased the risk and severity of the wildfires by 30% and in Australia 18.6 million hectares, an area larger than Portugal, were burned. Approximately three billion animals and over 30 people died and an estimated 300 million tonnes of carbon dioxide polluted the atmosphere. In the United States, firefighters acknowledge that what were once regarded as ‘once-in-a-career’ forest fires are now an annual occurrence. Extreme weather events are increasingly part of ‘the new normal’. Hochuli et al (2021) suggest that 2020 confirmed the transition from the cynical apathetic ‘post-politics’ at the ‘end of history’ to a new phase of ‘anti-politics’; waves of protests against climate change, lockdown and government restrictions, and racial injustice attest to rising anger and social division that spilled out onto the streets. 2021 continued this trend with protests and anger in the UK as Sarah Everard’s rape and murder at the hands of a serving police officer refocused the spotlight on violence against women.

Covid-19 and the collective response of governments around the world recalibrated the political map: the ‘libertarian’ Boris Johnson enacted a series of strict lockdowns that curtailed freedoms well into 2021 while the ‘authoritarian’ Donald Trump was reluctant to impose any restrictions. Many on the left, traditionally critical of state power, called for restrictive measures and criticised the government for not reacting fast enough or for removing restrictions too soon (Briggs et al, 2021). Globally, over 200 million confirmed cases and over 4.5 million deaths have been attributed to a virus that spread quickly through the trade and travel routes of a globalised world and triggered a series of measures that only a few months before would have been regarded as improbable in liberal societies. Lockdowns intensified our use of and reliance upon digital technologies; allowing tech corporations to exert an even tighter stranglehold in the digital era of surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019), accumulate increasing quantities of the ‘new oil’ of

data, and accelerate existing developments in artificial intelligence, deep learning, and big data, which are already being utilised for policing, security, and intelligence purposes (Bridle, 2018). Global and local criminal markets and practices have mutated in response to the pandemic as new opportunities for illicit enterprise have emerged while others have been disrupted. The enforced shutdown of large sections of the global economy has caused economic shockwaves that defy comparison. Extraordinary inequality prior to the pandemic has since widened to even greater proportions. 10 of the world's richest individuals increased their wealth by \$400 billion during the pandemic while many saw their livelihoods disappear, possibly never to return as individual businesses and entire industries undergo profound transformation or even total extinction. At its worst, oil demand declined by 29 million barrels per day (IEA, 2020), plummeting drastically enough to cause a stoppage in production to try and stabilise prices. In their 2020 Energy Outlook, petroleum giants BP declared that we have possibly reached 'peak oil', or that we are far closer to it than previously imagined; claiming that existing surpluses, the decline in demand, and the rapid advancement of technologies in alternative energy and electric vehicles mean that demand may never recover to pre-pandemic levels.

In their emergency response to the multiple challenges thrown up by the pandemic, currency issuing governments and central banks throughout the world have intervened in the economic in unprecedented fashion, spending vast amounts of money to both pay for the measures to fight the pandemic and buttress individual salaries and businesses to avoid an economic collapse of truly catastrophic proportions, potentially setting the stage for a universal basic income (UBI) in the future. In the process, they have abandoned many of the central pillars of neoliberal fiscal and monetary policy. Many will say we have been here before, referencing the substantial bailout packages that were provided to banks teetering on collapse in the wake of the 2007/2008 Global Financial Crisis (GFC). But unlike the GFC, this has been a sustained programme of subordinating monetary to fiscal policy in several areas of social and economic life; one that has exposed every neoliberal shibboleth to be a complete falsehood, and is all the more remarkable coming from political parties and governments who, for the most part, have spent decades positioning austerity and balanced budgets as an absolute and fundamentally necessary, albeit unpleasant, truth of politics. As Pavlina Tcherneva (2020) wrote when talking about progressive spending programmes in her book *The Case for a Job Guarantee*: 'Tomorrow, when politicians ask "but how will the government pay for this program?", the answer should always be "the way we paid for the pandemic."' (Tcherneva, 2020: viii)

Consequently, the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic, alongside pre-pandemic political and cultural discontent with the neoliberal consensus, seems to be accelerating the existing fractures in neoliberalism's 40-year hegemony. We seem to be witnessing the end of 'the end of history' in which neoliberalism, which was heralded as the 'final form of human government' (Fukuyama, 1992) now exists in an interregnum, with its future uncertain (Hochuli et. al, 2021; Streeck, 2016). Numerous political and economic elites such as Klaus Schwab, the executive chairman of the World Economic Forum, have called for and predicted a 'Great Reset' of the global economy to usher in a Fourth Industrial Revolution geared around

digital technology, green industries, deglobalisation and the shortening of supply chains to radically reduce carbon emissions and set the world and capitalism on a new trajectory (Schwab and Malleret, 2020).

These developments mean there has never been a more important time for social sciences to be engaged in searching, critical and penetrative research and analysis; offering clear examination of events as they unfold, utilising the methodological and theoretical tools at its disposal to make sense of both what is happening and where we are going. This issue does that. First, **Anthony Ellis, Luke Telford, Anthony Lloyd and Daniel Briggs** consider the idea of *sacrifice* in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. As millions were asked, in different ways, to sacrifice in the fight against Covid-19, Ellis et al situate sacrifice as intimately connected to the systemic violence inherent in neoliberal capitalist economies. Sacrifice is an ethical gesture that serves to reinforce the social fabric. The demand for sacrifice in the name of ‘protecting the NHS’ and saving lives must be considered in the wider context that has seen the social fabric hollowed out in favour of radical individualism, emotivism and competition. This paper asks critical questions about the relationship between sacrifice, violence and social cohesion.

Second, **Paul Bleakley** considers public sentiment and compliance in the context of lockdown in Melbourne, Australia. The pandemic response placed demands on the public and introduced new rules and governance to ensure compliance. Bleakley uses sentiment analysis from social media comments on a selection of news stories related to Melbourne’s lockdown to gauge whether or not public attitudes towards restrictions would support acts of non-compliance. While media and social media may indicate the presence of significant anti-lockdown sentiment, resistance and non-compliance, Bleakley reveals that most evidence indicated the public remained supportive of restrictive lockdown measures. This raises key questions about government intervention, freedom and restriction, and public compliance. Third, **Nick Gibbs** also considers the issue of compliance with lockdown rules within the context of hardcore gym users and image and performance enhancing drug (IPED) use. Using qualitative data collected during the pandemic, Gibbs brings together questions about body image and identity with the supply and demand of IPEDs. The UK’s lockdown restrictions, including extended closure of gyms and training facilities, significantly impacted upon his respondents for whom life was contoured around the gym and bodywork. Their decisions to flout lockdown restrictions is explored within the context of subjective motivation and identity. It offers a crucial insight into how the longest year and government restrictions are negotiated within specific contexts.

Fourth, **Thomas Raymen and Oliver Smith** offer a critical analysis of the political-economic geopolitical changes that materialized during the longest year and consider the implications for green criminology and zemiology. The Environmental Crisis Industry (ECI) favours environmental solutions palatable to corporate interests ahead of systemic change. The upheavals of the Covid-19 pandemic have seen the ECI become focused on renewable energy and securing the supply and control over the natural resources crucial to the transition to green energy. Their analysis raises significant questions about new and emerging harms associated with this transition. Our fifth paper, from **Owen Hodgkinson, Luke Telford and James Treadwell**,

considers the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in a UK context. 2020 saw the explosion of BLM support in the wake of the George Floyd murder in the United States but Hodgkinson et al offer a critical analysis of the translation of a US movement, grounded in the unique political, economic, cultural and racial context of the United States, into the UK. Hodgkinson et al also consider the theoretical underpinnings of BLM – namely Critical Race Theory (CRT) – and ask whether or not a homogenizing approach to racial injustice, through concepts such as ‘white privilege’ undermine the important task of tackling racial injustice.

Next, **Gemma Ahearne** and **Robert Freudenthal** offer an essay on the pandemic response that situates public health within the context of power, control and an authoritarian exploitation of a ‘state of exception’. Ahearne and Freudenthal contend that the state’s pandemic response used the ‘public good’ as justification for expanding interventions into our lives while simultaneously shifting responsibility onto individuals. Government action to tackle the pandemic was often regarded as benign and in the public interest yet the expansion of police power and the legislative authority to intervene further into the lives of citizens, including the expansion of bio-surveillance, is, they argue, far from benign. ‘Zemiology and the future’ is a conversation between Thomas Raymen and **Victoria Canning** and **Steve Tombs**, the authors of the recently published *From Social Harm to Zemiology* (2021). The discussion reflects the growing influence of zemiology within the social sciences and reflects on the interest that social harm and zemiology has generated within academic circles and beyond. They discuss the future of zemiology and social harm in a post-Covid world, the future of neoliberalism, the conceptual foundations of social harm, and the relationship between research and activism among other issues. Finally, Dick Hobbs provides a book review of a key publication from 2021 – Daniel Briggs’ *Climate Changed: Refugee Border Stories and the Business of Misery* – where he advocates for the power of ethnography in shining a light on the biggest and most pressing issues of our time.

The present collection of articles, essays, and conversations marks the inaugural issue for the *Journal of Contemporary Crime, Harm, and Ethics*. Given what is going on in the world, a journal interested in the interrelated issues which bear its name could not have launched at a more relevant time or in a more appropriate context. We would like to take the opportunity to thank all of our contributors and reviewers for supporting this fledgling journal. In an era of journal ‘impact factors’ and in which scholars are implored to think strategically about citations and other metrics, it would have been perfectly understandable if the contributors to this issue had elected to publish in more established and recognised journals. Similarly, in a time in which academics are over-stretched and inundated with various (unpaid) tasks, we would have understood if reviewers had politely declined yet another review request from yet another journal. All involved have shown a commitment to free and open-access academic publishing, and the team at JCCHE are extremely grateful. We would also like to thank the *Northumbria Journals* support team at Northumbria University, who host this journal, for their instrumental work in getting it up and running. We hope you enjoy the issue.

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## Article

# For the Greater Good

## Sacrificial Violence and the Coronavirus Pandemic

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### Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has ushered in an unprecedented epoch of myriad *sacrifice*. Unseen since World War Two, restrictions have been placed upon our movement at various degrees of intensity since March 2020. Across the world, citizenries have been informed by states to sacrifice their cultural freedoms to protect the *sacred* – namely, healthcare systems and thereby help to preserve life, particularly the elderly. However, little scholarly attention has been given to the presence of sacrifice throughout the pandemic. Therefore, this article is structured into four core themes. The first section outlines the moral and ethical quandaries generated by the Covid-19 pandemic. The second section explores the theoretical work on violence, since contemporary sacrifice is intimately connected to the systemic violence inherent in neoliberal capitalist economies. Next, the paper explicates the role of sacrifice during the pandemic, particularly through the sacrifices made by ‘key workers’ like care workers and nurses, outlining how neoliberalism’s systemic violence meant they were met with tokenistic gestures including clapping rather than a fundamental improvement in their working conditions. As sacrifice has historically served to reinforce the social fabric, the article closes with a discussion on whether sacrifice during the pandemic is likely to achieve this, given neoliberalism’s tendency to post-social arrangements including radical individualism, emotivism, and competition.



## Introduction

The arrival of Covid-19 has heralded a prolonged period of great and profound sacrifice. At the time of writing, around 4 million deaths worldwide have been linked to the contraction of the virus. Initially, with no known effective treatments, management of the virus across many states has relied upon non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs), such as the full closure or curtailing of economic sectors, social distancing, and confinement to domestic dwellings. Reliance upon these interventions has endured to varying degrees, despite the initiation of vaccination programmes in several countries. Non-pharmaceutical interventions demand sacrifices, and through their implementation many people have endured prolonged separation from family members and friends, as well as institutions and cultural activities that offer structure, routine, connections to others, meaning, purpose and identity. As Saad-Filho (2020) speculated, the economic shock caused by the pandemic could be ‘catastrophic’ and has already led to redundancies and therefore a swell in the numbers of those without work. The sacrifices cannot be overstated, neither can they be ignored as we seek to understand the pandemic’s impact.

Sacrifice is inherently painful, yet often regarded as necessary in the service of a perceived social or communal ‘good’. Keenan (2005) suggests sacrifice denotes a process of suffering or loss in pursuit of a noble or ‘higher’ cause. Girard (2013:1) associates sacrifice with violence and the restoration of social bonds during crises, suggesting there is ‘hardly any form of violence that cannot be described in terms of sacrifice’. Sacrifice may be regarded as a source of ‘good’ violence for its role in the prevention of greater suffering (Dupuy, 2013). Halbertal (2012: 59) claims it ‘covers immensely diverse experiences’ but can be captured within two fundamentally distinguished forms: sacrifice as an offer to another, or sacrifice that is *for* another. Sacrifice is readily associated with religion, particularly in the former sense of an offer made to gods or a deity. Yet, sacrifice *for* another, or in the name of a ‘higher’ cause, is fundamental to political and collective moral life. Sacrifices are frequently made to establish, alter or defend socio-political systems. Conflict arises when state’s demand sacrifices from citizens given their requirement to protect life, while a great burden of loyalty weighs upon those for whom sacrifices are made (Halbertal, 2012).

Crucially, it is significant, as Halbertal (2012) reminds us, to recognise the diversity of sacrifices during the pandemic and those made in pursuit of notions of social or communal ‘good’. Importantly though, sacrifice must be understood contextually, as it is entangled with social inequalities. For instance, there is an abundance of evidence that protection from the virus has been limited for some by virtue of race, gender, socio-economic status, employment, and job security (Adams-Prassl, 2020; Liao and De Maio, 2021; Saad-Filho, 2020; Schwab and Malleret, 2020). Exhortations that ‘we are in this together’, or that lay claim to a mutually shared experience of loss and sacrifice across social groups, are therefore deeply misleading and belie the myriad ways in which the impact of the pandemic and the response to it ‘has laid bare...the vast numbers of people in the world who are economically and socially vulnerable’ (Schwab and Malleret, 2020: 79). Importantly, sacrificial acts involving the killing of humans documented in previous epochs were often inflicted in a manner reflective of hierarchical social relations and

carried out with the purpose of reinforcing those distinctions (Watts et al, 2016). Indeed, Girard (2013: 13) identified a ‘wide spectrum of human victims sacrificed by various societies’ across history, including children, prisoners of war, slaves and those with disabilities. Those more readily identified as ‘sacrificeable’, he suggested, are usually those ‘exterior or marginal individuals’ whose status prevents them from ‘fully integrating themselves into the community’.

Considering the tentative, yet evident, connections that we have begun to establish, this article draws inspiration primarily from the concept of *sacrifice* and utilises this as a framework through which to consider and critically analyse the impact of Covid-19. As Covid-19 has further exposed and exacerbated neoliberalism’s inequalities (Saad-Filho, 2020; Schwab and Malleret, 2020), the article seeks to delineate some of the ways in which sacrifice became a prevalent feature of the pandemic. Furthermore, in the spirit of Girard (2013), who asked why the relationship between sacrifice and violence has not been explored in more requisite depth, the article situates the analysis offered within social scientific debates concerned with violence. In particular, the paper seeks to position sacrifice not as an exclusively rare and exceptional act of force that breaches states of non-violence, but rather an ‘integral feature of social life’ (Jackman, 2002: 389) during the pandemic and inherent to the *new* ‘normal’ state of things.

The article is structured into four substantive sections. The first section provides a brief overview of the pandemic with a particular focus on the harms that have emanated from it, as well as the various moral dilemmas that have emerged concerning appropriate mitigation of these respective harms. We suggest that sacrifice has become a means through which such moral dilemmas may be to some extent deemed resolved. However, we suggest that in the attempt to reinforce the social fabric, these sacrifices leave legacies liable to produce further harm, which we address in the final section of the article (Halbertal, 2012). In an attempt to conceptualise sacrifice more clearly in relation to the pandemic, we next consider theoretical work on violence, providing the basis for a budding framework that envelops the following penultimate section. This penultimate section offers a tentative and brief discussion, through different examples, of how sacrifice is both simultaneously evident during the pandemic and relevant as a framework for interpreting its impact and management. Furthermore, we discuss here how sacrifice has historically served to reinforce social bonds and expectations of loyalty from those who the sacrifice protects, but question whether this is possible under neoliberalism’s post-social arrangements of emotivism, competitive individualism, and self-enhancement. The article closes with a discussion and brief conclusion that addresses the key issues raised and suggests how the tentative associations developed in the article may be taken forward in further research.

### **Covid-19 and an emerging moral quandary on its various harms**

The Coronavirus pandemic represents the most significant and disruptive global event so far of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Briggs, et al, 2021). In the relatively short period of time that has elapsed since the first cases of the virus were reported in December 2019, social life has been profoundly altered in many states across the world. Initially, in the absence of any known effective treatment or vaccine, nations responded with strict social distancing measures to reduce transmission and

have relied upon these intermittently since. In the UK, restrictions on basic civil liberties, unknown since the final days of World War Two in 1945, have been applied at varying levels of intensity since the pandemic began.

The physical harms of the virus are evident. At the time of writing, the UK alone has recorded more than 6 million confirmed positive cases and in excess of 130,000 Covid-19 related deaths<sup>1</sup>. Globally, according to John Hopkins University, there have been over 200 million reported cases of the virus. In addition, there are potential, and thus far relatively unknown, consequences for those who contract the virus and suffer what has been termed ‘long Covid’: an array of debilitating symptoms that may persist for a considerable time afterwards. Health outcomes are likely to be severely affected by the pandemic and not just because of contracting the virus. For example, recent research assessing the impact of the first UK lockdown upon diagnoses for a variety of cancer types estimates substantial increases in avoidable deaths are to be expected in the future because of diagnostic delays (Maringe et al, 2020).

The social and economic consequences of both the virus and the core governmental response are considerable too. The various measures taken to shield populations from the virus are unintended generators, or catalysts, of further and future harm. Labour market indicators in the UK demonstrate that since the pandemic began the number of individuals classed as unemployed has been increasing, with 318,000 more people registered unemployed in September 2020 compared with the same period a year earlier (ONS, 2020). While a record number of redundancies (314,000) were registered in the period from July – September 2020 (ONS, 2020). Petterson et al (2020: 3) point to an increase in deaths of despair in the US as a result of drugs, alcohol and suicides, which they believe ‘should be seen as the epidemic within the pandemic’. Confinement to domestic dwellings during the first lockdown in the UK was followed by increased reports of violence between intimates (Condry et al, 2020), a trend that available evidence indicates has been mirrored in many other states across the world where lockdowns were imposed (Ellis, et al, 2021).

Placed in this context, it is perhaps not surprising that many peoples’ mental health has been detrimentally impacted by the pandemic/lockdowns in the UK, especially those from more deprived localities who already experienced anxiety or depression (O’Connor, et al 2020). Statistical research indicates that, throughout the first lockdown, around one in seven adults had suicidal thoughts, while many more reported feelings of loneliness and entrapment (O’Connor, et al 2020). As feelings of social isolation have intensified, many people have increased their food consumption to help them cope with social uncertainty and distress. Others, including those that have eating disorders, have reported an increased concern with both regulating their food intake and their body image throughout the pandemic (Robertson, et al 2021). Other studies indicate an intensification of mental ill health in the UK, particularly for those that are unemployed or on low incomes (Pierce, et al 2020).

The direct and in-direct harms arising from social distancing measures to address the virus are becoming increasingly evident too. The virus itself has caused without question

considerable harm to public health, but the measures taken in response have indirectly contributed to the generation of an array of harms distributed unevenly across the population and that manifest both physically and psychologically (Briggs, et al 2020). It is for this reason that lockdowns and related social distancing can be considered paradoxical: initiated with the intention to protect and preserve life, yet inherent stimulants of harm and threats to life. It is from this paradox that great moral discord has emerged and the presence of sacrifice during the pandemic becomes clearer.

Certainly, demands ‘for’ sacrifices, as well as their moral justification in the name of preventing the spread of the virus, have been prevalent throughout the pandemic. On the 10<sup>th</sup> May 2020 at a national address, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson thanked the public for their ‘effort and sacrifice in stopping the spread of this disease’. In October 2020, at a World Health Organisation (WHO) press conference in Geneva, Dr Mike Ryan spoke of the possible need for “many, many people” to make sacrifices in their personal lives (Lovelace, 2020). While in November 2020 the President of the United States of America, Joe Biden, delivered a Thanksgiving address to the nation to highlight the ‘shared sacrifices’ made by many Americans throughout the Covid-19 pandemic (Woodward, 2020).

Alongside various pleas and demands ‘for’ the sacrifice of personal freedom and liberty, as well as the lauding of those sacrificing themselves for the ‘greater good’, such as frontline workers (see Lohmeyer and Taylor, 2020), utilitarian questions concerning who, what, and how much, should be sacrificed, and relatedly whether these sacrifices could be justified, began to emerge. In a letter published in the British Medical Journal, a Consultant Medical Microbiologist at St George’s Hospital London questioned the moral basis of forcing young people in the UK to sacrifice their freedoms ‘so that the older generation can live a bit longer’ (Breathnach, 2020). Such sentiments were echoed by Texas lieutenant governor, Dan Patrick, who, in appealing for the application of utilitarian principles, pleaded with the US senate not to ‘sacrifice the country’ in order to protect older, more vulnerable citizens from the virus who will, he claimed, ‘take care of themselves’ (Beckett, 2020). In an interview with Channel 4 News, outspoken critic of lockdowns in Britain and member of the Conservative Party, Sir Charles Walker, raised concerns about the sustainability of ongoing restrictions and argued that the country could not continue to ‘cancel’, or in essence sacrifice, ‘life’ to preserve every life.

While states have demanded considerable sacrifices from their citizens, there have been demands made of states to offer protection from the virus as well as the unintended harms arising from the measures implemented to address it. Along with some vocal politicians, protest and lobby groups like the Save Our Rights UK movement and the Great Barrington Declaration, comprised of scientists and medical professionals from across the world, have formed a consensus that responses to the virus unintentionally represent greater social evil because of the harm they cause in both the immediate and the longer term. As we will see, as the pandemic has evolved, societies have become increasingly confronted with ethical and moral quandaries concerning the need for the preservation of both life and the quality of life.

In the pandemic response, moral arguments take clear sides: a utilitarian response that essentially accepts the sacrifice of some to protect the many clashes with a deontological response that argues moral judgements about who to sacrifice cannot be universalised and are therefore ethically unsound. The fundamental incommensurability of these starting positions is irresolvable despite both essentially advocating the protection of life. A third position, a teleological virtue ethics, situates goods external to subjective emotion but internal to social roles and practice (MacIntyre, 2016; Raymen, 2019). This calls for an understanding of what a ‘good life’ means and how we individually and collectively strive towards its realisation. The pandemic response, in this context, raises questions about individual and collective flourishing yet, increasingly, Western societies are unable to resolve moral quandaries as thorny ethical questions that require collective agreement are met with emotivism (MacIntyre, 2011; 2016; Raymen, 2019). That is, the locus of morality now sits within the individual and the concept of ‘good’ reflects how something makes us feel; this rejects the existence of a fundamental telos or external adjudicating authority (MacIntyre, 2011). Both sides talk past each other in an interminable debate that cannot be resolved. Questions about the quality of life are secondary to the administration of non-death, mere preservation, or endurance of life.

This descent into emotivism represents both the absent telos at the heart of Western society (MacIntyre, 2011) and post-political biopolitics *par excellence* (Žižek, 2008). MacIntyre (2011) situates this historic shift within the context of declining virtue ethics and the eradication of a telos, in which there is neither collective agreement nor fundamental discussion about the constitution of a ‘good life’. Human purpose is largely absent from the kinds of utilitarian and deontological positions outlined above, but their absence is reflective of contemporary politics. While MacIntyre (2016) notes that politics and ethics are inherently intertwined, contemporary politics abandons key ethical questions. The hegemonic power of liberal ideology and its current neoliberal variant have reduced politics to the administration of bare life (Agamben, 1995; Žižek, 2008). Politics is now the mechanism by which we keep people alive, a platform upon which each individual can then pursue their own freedoms and self-interest. This is more accurately a *post-political* position as it accepts the horizons of liberalism, reduces politics to the cold administrative functions necessary to maintain life and little more. The efficient functioning of neoliberal parliamentary politics and the technical administration of everyday life came to dominate the political horizon. Experts were required to administer this technocracy in a ‘value free’ manner (Hochuli et al, 2021). Liberal post-politics abandons the telos in favour of freedom in a negative sense; it provides the negative liberty of *freedom from* without any ethical, moral or political understanding of the *freedom to* pursue an external good or end (Raymen, 2019). This represents the political and ethical vacuum into which the pandemic struck; the public were asked to ‘follow the science’ and put faith in our technocratic, administration of bare life without any public discussion about the values or principles that underpinned decisions. The pandemic’s administration of non-death and mere preservation of life, regardless of the consequences, reflects the absent telos at the heart of liberal democracy and is indicative of our current political juncture. It is within this moral vacuum that numerous sacrifices were required that remain ethically irresolvable.

This became particularly pronounced as underfunded and under resourced health services like the NHS and care homes struggled to cope with the weight of additional demand for their services. Faced with being overburdened with patients, many care homes in 2020 utilised ‘do not resuscitate’ (DNR) orders on some of their residents (Booth, 2000), the majority of whom are aged over 70 and often have various health issues like dementia and frailty. Whilst DNRs were utilised to perhaps try and preserve the lives of those younger individuals that possessed a better chance of survival and to free up some capacity within the health service, an inquiry in the UK is currently underway into their usage (Booth, 2020), since many were potentially administered without obtaining the consent of the bereaved family. This has been criticised by some commentators, claiming that healthcare workers should not be compelled to make judgements on the quality of life, not least because it could potentially lead to discrimination and undermine the sanctity of human life (Bledsoe, et al 2020).

Other moral and ethical dilemmas include how the lockdown forced schools to close, impacting detrimentally on children’s’ education and thereby exacerbating educational inequalities. Children from socially and economically marginalised communities spent at least 1.5 hours per day less doing schoolwork than children from more affluent backgrounds, with the latter receiving more support and guidance from their parents (Andrew, et al 2020). Whilst the former often struggled to access a computer or device connected to the internet at their home, they also received fewer online classes from teachers, impacting upon their ability to do schoolwork. Given those children from more deprived areas were already often struggling to meet the educational attainment requirements, it is likely that lockdowns intensified educational inequalities between poorer and more affluent school children (Andrew, et al 2020), indicating that some working-class children’s education was temporarily sacrificed during the pandemic.

The sacrifices made in the name of averting the greater harm of allowing the virus to circulate unimpeded are in themselves evidently damaging and potentially generative of further harms. Importantly, Halbertal (2012: 48) suggests that sacrifices ‘for’ others can constitute socially binding constraints upon those in the future that serve as bonds between those who are sacrificed and those who are saved. In particular, Halbertal suggests:

‘...Future generations are assumed to be burdened with the onus of that early sacrifice, which demands loyalty, since betraying it means retroactively stripping the sacrifice of meaning.’

The longer-term ramifications of exacting great sacrifice in the name of responding to the virus are as yet unknown, but certainly contingent upon the extent to which they are acknowledged and honoured as societies shift into a post-pandemic period. We consider this issue in more depth subsequently, but at this juncture provide an overview of scholarship on violence, to lay the groundwork for a discussion of neoliberalism’s systemic violence and its relation to sacrifice during the pandemic.

## **Approaches to Violence**

As we have begun to outline in the previous sections of this article, sacrifice is a particularly significant feature of the Covid-19 landscape especially in light of the panic, discord, and deep moral quandaries it has generated concerning protection from the virus and the wider human consequences of responding. Therefore, it offers a potentially useful conceptual lens through which to explain the social effects of the pandemic. Given the harm that is inherent to the making or infliction of a sacrifice and its relationship to violence (Girard, 2013; Halbertal, 2012), this section of the article offers, by way of a brief but necessary detour, a discussion of theoretical approaches to violence to provide a tentative framework within which to consider more carefully the meaning and significance of sacrifice during the pandemic.

Social scientific disciplines, like sociology and criminology, have often assumed a widely held view, readily found beyond the confines of the academy, that violence involves physical harm, is inflicted wilfully by motivated individuals, and arises from a breakdown or a malfunction within institutions that perform an integrative and control function. Such an approach effectively situates the phenomenon of violence as ‘without’; an external threat that must be addressed, minimised, and contained. Violence is therefore often presumed to be an alien and threatening presence that is comprised of ‘eruptions of hostility that have bubbled over the normal boundaries of social intercourse’ (Jackman, 2002: 308). A partial result of conceiving of violence in this way for Larry Ray (2011: 2) is that ‘sociology seems to have assumed the existence of a pacified society in which violence appears in specific places and events’.

Those ‘specific places and events’ are neatly delineated spatialised territories or seemingly isolated incidents to which scholarly attention has often been directed: the less salubrious neighbourhoods of cities occupied by dangerous gangs of marginalised young men (Andell, 2019); violent domestic dwellings (Westmarland, 2015); or violent conflicts that erupt in the territories of failed or failing states (Ray, 2011). There exists, then, a discrete range of sub-fields within sociology, criminology, and the social sciences more generally that focus upon forms of violence or settings in which violence takes place and the individuals present in those spaces (Ellis, 2016). The issue of violence is of course multi-faceted in its manifestations and addressing specific forms of violence in this way has led to important contributions to the extant literature. Reflecting on this tendency within academic disciplines, Ray (2011: 2) has described research addressing violence contemporarily as ‘fragmentary’ in nature. An issue with this, Ray suggests, is that such fragmentation potentially ‘risks losing sight of the intimate connection between violence and the human condition’. Similar sentiments have been echoed by Winlow (2012) who, in consideration of criminology’s attempts to theorise human violence, suggests there is a tendency amongst criminologists to view violence as tangential to another issue rather than violence becoming the focal point of theoretical endeavours.

Violence, as intimated already, is also often regarded as the antithesis of ‘civilisation’; a view reflected in some notable academic contributions. Steven Pinker (2012) has recently contrasted what he considers are the less violent societies of modernity, with more frequently violent societies that existed historically. Crucial to Pinker’s claims about this decline of violence are insights from the work of Norbert Elias (2000) and the ‘civilising process’, which suggested

successful state monopolies of violence and the development of an attendant capacity for self-control have, over time, resulted in considerable reductions. There are various and important critical accounts of this relationship, particularly of those that suggest a declining presence of violence as modernity has progressed. Fromm (1973) posited an opposing relationship, arguing that a greater degree of human violence and destruction is evident with the development of civilisation and hierarchical social relations. In a similar and equally critical vein, Wieviorka (2009: 2) alludes to the problem of assuming that as the capacity for human ‘reason’ proceeds the resort to violence recedes. Wieviorka suggests violence may be encouraged by reason and continues to possess functional potential for various groups, including states, as a ‘resource or a means to an end’. Criminologist Steve Hall (2012; 2014) points to the fragile and precarious process that underlies declines in violence in certain territories, describing this as the result of an economically functional and paradoxical process of ‘pseudo-pacification’. The temptation to assume then that ‘advanced societies are no longer seriously troubled by violence and that theories of violence are perforce losing their *raison d’être*’ (Keane, 1996: 9) should be resisted.

Although the failure to resist such an assertion may perhaps be the product of how violence is conceptualised or regarded. Importantly, the arguably limited scope within which violence has sometimes been viewed and understood can result in conceptual obscurity. Through reviewing attempts made to define violence, Jackman (2002: 388) has argued that scholars ‘commonly refer to a phenomenon called violence that implies a clearly understood, generic class of behaviours’ and yet, Jackman suggests, ‘no such concept exists’. While labouring under this misconception, a decidedly narrow set of assumptions about violence in human social life have emerged. Importantly, Jackman argues for the benefits of expanding the dominant view of violence to enable recognition of the fact that ‘violent actions are a normal part of the human repertoire’ rather than always necessarily ‘deviant’ from it, and that violence ‘incorporates a diverse array of actions that are an integral feature of social life’ (p.389).

Jackman’s insights take us some distance from those approaches to violence concerned with identifiable physical harm carried out by motivated individuals and groups, and which, as a result, becomes routinely positioned as deviant and in contrast to order and civility. On the contrary, violence and harm frequently result from forms of inaction and through attempts to maintain political systems, which may not require the direct application of force and may be sacrificial in nature. Ruggiero (2020), for example, describes ‘strategies of omission’ where addressing conditions of suffering or injustice are designated an economic impossibility by political authorities. Relatedly, there are the frequent failures of powerful state actors to address conditions of danger, despite possessing knowledge that if left unaddressed these will likely cause injury or death (Cooper and Whyte, 2018; Pemberton, 2016). These are representative of mere parts of the much greater ‘hidden complexities of violence in contemporary societies’ (Lohmeyer and Taylor, 2020: 2). However, such complexity is often not acknowledged due to what Evans and Giroux (2015: 3) describe as neoliberalism’s ‘most monstrous of illusions’, through which its own capacity for destruction is concealed and scripted in ways that suggest violence is becoming less of a problem. What is of further importance from Jackman’s (2002) discussion

mentioned previously, particularly for the analysis offered in this article, is the violence that arises from seemingly positive intentions, or that is an incidental by-product of other actions; even those that may be undertaken in the service of life or to avert other harm. What may be termed ‘good’ violence (Dupuy, 2013). This often remains elusive and unacknowledged, resulting in frequent neglect of the myriad ways in which many are harmed ‘unintentionally’ and sometimes because of what may also be well-meaning state interventions (Mason, 2020); indeed, the road to hell may be paved with good intentions.

This brief, but necessary, detour along the broad contours of the social scientific investigation of violence leads us towards a means of conceiving of violence as potentially unintended and yet inherent in the maintenance of contemporary political and economic systems, especially in the face of threats to their continuation. This is vital to capture more fully the complexity of violence that has often remained unacknowledged. Importantly, as Lohmeyer and Taylor (2020) have argued recently, the pandemic itself provides a moment in which the complexity of contemporary violence, particularly what they identify as the structural and cultural violence of neoliberalism, may be viewed more clearly. Furthermore, we are pushed towards a recognition of what might be termed or considered ‘good’ violence that emanates from well-meaning intentions or the very attempts to avert other perceived, possibly greater, violence and harm; something that appears to be in evidence during the pandemic and manifest in the demand for various sacrifices as briefly discussed already. Following the important insights afforded by this consideration of violence, the following section seeks to develop a clearer theoretical exposition on the relationship between sacrifice and the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **Sacrifice and Covid-19**

In the previous sections of this article, we have begun to assemble the foundations of a potential relationship between sacrifice and the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly the various moral quandaries that responding to it has presented to societies. A brief but demonstrable case has been made for these evident connections and in this penultimate part of the paper we seek to flesh this out in more detail in order to assemble upon those foundations a tentative set of assertions that speak to the utility of sacrifice as a conceptual lens through which to view the pandemic.

The previous section’s brief consideration of various attempts to conceptualise violence revealed both evident complexities and paradoxes. Girard’s (2013) work on violence and the sacred is particularly instructive in this respect for addressing somewhat the evident paradoxes that emerge from the study of human violence. For Girard, put straightforwardly, there is violence in society’s attempts to prevent violence. As Buffachi (2005: 193) cogently observed: ‘if violence is the problem, violence is also the solution’. In explicating the nature of this irony further, Girard (2013) focuses upon the sacrificial act that inflicts suffering. In doing so, Girard suggests that through sacrifices:

‘...society is seeking to deflect upon a relatively indifferent victim, a “sacrificeable” victim, the violence that would otherwise be vented on its own members, the people it most desires to protect’ (2013: 4).

For Girard (2013), sacrifice serves to avert more destructive harm and reinforces social bonds, yet, simultaneously, this is often reflective of social hierarchies particularly with regards to who becomes designated as the victims and that are deemed ‘sacrificeable’. The violence that takes place during the sacrificial act may become regarded then, as Dupuy (2013: 15) has suggested, as ‘a “good” form of institutionalised violence that holds in check “bad” anarchic violence’ that threatens stability. There is of course great irony here that Dupuy is acutely aware of. Dupuy goes on to suggest that as a result, evil works to contain evil, citing by way of example the proliferation of nuclear armament during the Cold War which, ironically, it is suggested contributed to the prevention of an outbreak of violence on a larger scale amidst escalating tensions within and between states. As a form of ‘good violence’ or ‘necessary evil’ then, sacrifice inflicted upon specific victims becomes particularly crucial during times of societal crisis. Indeed, as Ray (2011: 195) has argued, there is evidence for the fundamental process outlined by Girard ‘at the level of ...whole societies’ and ‘especially...at points of crisis’.

The crises engendered by historic epidemics of infectious diseases have previously led to the initiation of the kinds of sacrificial mechanisms that Girard outlined, particularly the systematic targeting of groups with ‘outsider’ status who became the focal point of wider society’s panic and discord. In Medieval Europe, for example, Jews were routinely identified as spreaders of diseases or were seen as responsible for transmission, and subject to violence and persecution (Schwab and Malleret, 2020). During the Covid-19 pandemic, similar incidents of wilful hostility and violent racism have been directed towards individuals of Asian origin, targeted in the belief that they are responsible for the origins of the virus as the first known cases were reported in China (Cabral, 2021; Gover et al, 2020).

Other sacrificial mechanisms during the pandemic have been subtler and structurally embedded, but nevertheless predicated on the same mechanisms and generally targeted at groups united by their lower socio-economic and minority status. Consistent then with a systemic violence that produces what Žižek (2008) terms the ‘zero level’ against which subjective, agent-led violence is rendered visible, ‘good’ violence or ‘necessary evil’, are more effectively concealed through their embeddedness within sacred and, more so contemporarily, profane institutions (Dupuy, 2013; 2014). Dupuy (2014: 11) importantly reminds us of this fundamental contemporary paradox in his critical discussion of neoliberal political economy and the functions it performs following the de-sacralisation of many particularly Western nations:

‘Economy has violence in it; it is, if you like, inherently violent. But it also acts as a barrier against violence. It is as if violence finds in commerce and industry the means of limiting itself, and therefore protecting the social order against collapse’.

On this basis, Dupuy asks whether the economy should be considered remedy or poison and seems to conclude that it is both. Its remedial qualities lie in its ability to contain and limit

internecine violence that would otherwise result in self-annihilation. Steve Hall (2014) contends, along similar lines, that capitalist political economy puts to service potentially and otherwise destructive libidinal drives, harnessing them to serve processes of accumulation and growth through non-violent interpersonal competition. The paradox exists though in economy's Janus-face, specifically the poison it simultaneously distils through exploitation, subjugation and structural violence inflicted upon sections of the human population (see Cooper and Whyte, 2018; Galtung, 1969; Lohmeyer and Taylor, 2020).

While Dupuy points towards the troubling realisation of the function of necessary evil within systemic and institutional structures that inflict an unavoidable, yet limited, amount of damage on sections of human populations to hold at bay more destructive forces, Ruggiero (2020: 28) highlights the way that power through such structures 'inflicts a form of sacrificial violence...whereby vulnerable victims suffer...so that those protected by power can thrive'. Indeed, Schwab and Malleret (2020) describe the dichotomy that emerged during the pandemic between social classes and that mirrors this violent sacrificial process. As the pandemic unfolded, the ability of different social groups to erect barriers against it and the moral quandaries and harms it has generated became increasingly evident: 'the uber-rich moved into their yachts, the merely rich fled to their second homes, the middle class struggled to work from home' (Saad-Filho, 2020: 480). Crucially, wealth softened the blow of social distancing and the restrictions placed upon movement and daily life. Members of the working class, however, were more likely to be employed in occupations that placed them on 'the front line to help save lives and the economy - cleaning hospitals, manning the checkouts, transporting essentials and ensuring our security' (Schwab and Malleret, 2020: 80).

In their analysis of media coverage during the first wave of the pandemic in both the UK and Australia, Lohmeyer and Taylor (2020) note the frequent invoking of heroism and the military in reference to the efforts made in response to the virus, particularly those individuals employed in roles where adjustments to working practices to minimise transmission were not possible. Even the use of and emphasis placed upon the term 'frontline' when describing the roles associated with and performed by these workers, denotes militaristic connotations of infantry engaged in direct close proximal combat with opposition forces.

In the UK, the frontline of the pandemic has undoubtedly been the NHS. In practice, a health care system is designed to protect citizens (Jones and Hameiri, 2021) but from the outset of the pandemic, the NHS became a sacred institution that required collective sacrifice to protect it. "Protect the NHS" became the mantra as lockdown and social distancing measures were the collective price required to preserve the sacred (Briggs, et al 2020). This required a determination concerning which parts of the economy were essential and which could be sacrificed. Paradoxically, the workers *within* the NHS became buffers against the virus and were sacrificed to protect the rest of society. The phrase 'key workers' entered popular consciousness to denote those essential workers employed on the frontline to keep our society functioning (Briggs et al, 2020). NHS staff, care home workers, cleaners, retail workers, delivery drivers and other emergency services became sacrificial offerings to protect the rest of society from greater harm.

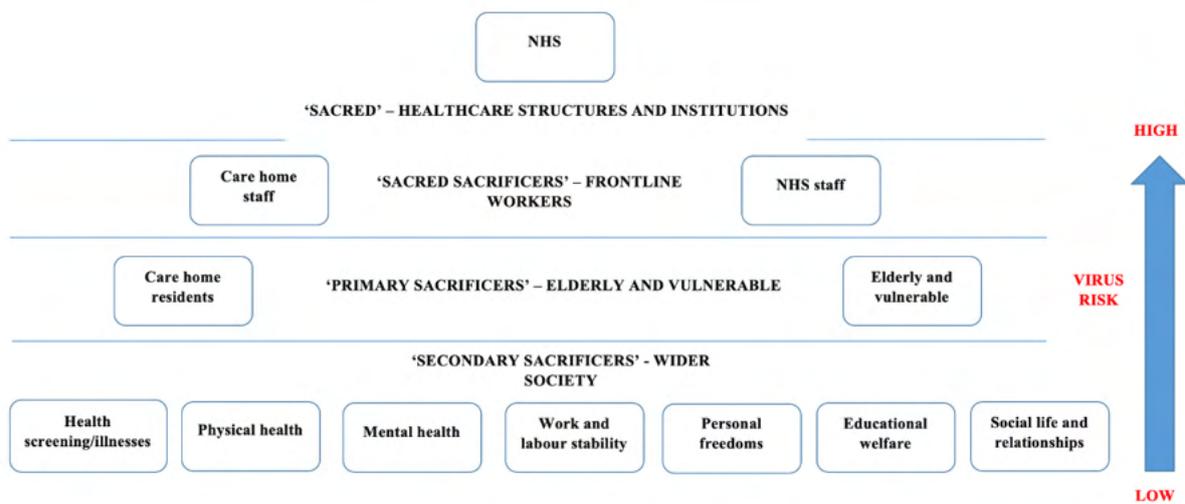
The violence inherent within this offering – their potential exposure to a deadly virus – sacralised frontline key workers and in the first weeks of the pandemic generated ritual praise through the weekly ‘clap for carers’ doorstep applause, a symbolic gesture of recognition for the sacrifice made on our behalf (Wood and Skeggs, 2020).

The ultimate sacrifice is to give one’s life in the service of a greater or collective good (Halbatal, 2012) and media reports throughout the pandemic have focused on the deaths of NHS workers and care home staff (Lintern, 2020), with the Office for National Statistics reporting that, between March and December 2020, almost 900 health and social care workers had died with Covid-19 in the UK (ONS, 2021). These workers were, in Dupuy’s (2013:117) terms, ‘scapegoats’ in the true sense of the term when ‘society causes its wrongs to fall upon an innocent individual or group’ – the failure to adequately prepare and ensure sufficient protections against a viral pandemic. Widespread appreciation and acknowledgement, like children’s drawings of rainbows in windows, weekly doorstep clapping, exclusive discounts and offers on consumer goods, arguably acted as an attempt at the expiation of society’s collective guilt for the absence of fundamental preparations and protections.

However, the absence of adequate preparation and protection is symptomatic of the contemporary capitalist system. Capitalism’s systemic violence imposes upon the sacrifice of key workers in a way that reveals the disavowed ‘real’ (Hall, 2012) – the exploitation and preparedness to harm others essential to the system’s continuation but that remains disavowed and subject to frequent denial. The absence of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) at the outset of the pandemic exposed frontline workers to harm and demonstrated the limits of both neoliberal governance structures and globalised just-in-time supply chains (Jones and Hameiri, 2021). The mad scramble for PPE revealed a system that privileged market forces, competition, outsourced supply chains and networks, global trade routes and a hollowed-out state where government had been replaced with governance (Jones and Hameiri, 2021). Despite warnings about the likely impact of a global pandemic, governments were underprepared and would rue their reliance on highly insecure just-in-time production and delivery models that reflected a neoliberal approach to governance and that suited corporate interests. The normal functioning of the capitalist economy left frontline healthcare workers at risk of harm in the early days of a pandemic where the virus had no known treatment and could be passed easily without the protection afforded by PPE. While frontline workers displayed the hallmarks of Halbatal’s (2012) and Keenan’s (2005) self-sacrifice in the service of a higher cause, the systemic violence of capitalism also sacrificed low-paid, overworked, and precarious workers (Ruggerio, 2020). Capitalism’s sacrificial offering came at a price: a proposed 1% pay rise for frontline nurses who, over 12 months into the pandemic, were now displaying signs of PTSD, stress, anxiety, and depression (Green et al, 2021). Public outrage and the official rejection of the 1% pay increase reflects a social desire for their sacrifice to be recognised and validated in a more meaningful way; yet the systemic violence of capitalism insists upon the continuation of precarity, low-pay and insecure work (Lloyd, 2018), resulting in a tokenistic gesture rather than a fundamental betterment in their material conditions.

Importantly, Girard (2013) and Halbertal (2012) suggest that sacrifice always takes place within a hierarchical structure. This is true of the Covid-19 pandemic as the greatest sacrifice appears to have been borne by the frontline workers, while many others worked from home or received furlough payments. However, a range of sacrifices are visible across the pandemic and potentially exist on several levels in what might be identified as a *sacrificial hierarchy* depicted visually in Fig 1.

**Fig 1: Conceptualising the relationship between the ‘sacred’ and ‘sacrificed’**



As indicated in Fig 1, whilst the NHS and its supporting healthcare institutions were cast as the *sacred*, frontline workers might be branded as the *sacred sacrificers* since they worked to protect what the government regarded as sacred, something which all individuals should strive to protect and uphold even at the expense of their own physical and mental wellbeing. Moreover, care home residents, the elderly and the vulnerable, could be deemed the *primary sacrificers*; as mentioned, this is clear particularly during the initial stages of the pandemic whereby the systemic violence of neoliberalism and its recent economic logic of austerity meant many healthcare services were privatised and underfunded (Baines and Cunningham, 2015), and often unable to adequately mitigate the risks of Covid-19. Lastly, at the bottom of the sacrificial hierarchy lie the *secondary sacrificers* which includes the various sacrificial losses of members of wider society, not least peoples’ mental health, cultural freedoms and other illnesses and health appointments that were transiently sacrificed to focus on the threats and harms posed by Covid-19.

## Discussion

Returning to the violence of economy, we can situate the sacrifice outlined previously within the systemic violence of neoliberal capitalism (Žižek, 2008). As noted already, violence is a normalised element of both human nature and capitalist political economy and throughout each successive ‘spirit of capitalism’ (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005), a variety of groups have been

sacrificed in order for others to flourish. This process has historically reflected existing inequalities and hierarchies within the system; from 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial workers in the UK and USA to 21<sup>st</sup> century miners and sweatshop labour in the Far East, from migrant workers to modern slaves. The unequal sacrifice of the poor, working-class, minorities, marginalised and, ultimately, disposable workers, is a persistent feature of the perpetuation of a violent system. The result of the Covid-19 pandemic's interaction with capitalist political economy bears these historic features. To keep society functioning and some semblance of economic activity in place, the lowest paid, most insecure, precarious, and exploited forms of labour were sacrificed to protect the rest and maintain some productivity.

Dupuy's (2014) contention that the 'good' violence inherent within the economy is deployed to remedy more serious forms of 'bad' violence is well-judged in relation to the pandemic. Harm and violence have been visited upon certain sections of the population such as those that are vulnerable through their employment to prevent greater harms throughout the social order. Many have survived and even flourished throughout the pandemic, and we can situate this within the context of sacrificial violence inflicted upon others. Violence as the answer to violence appears in other examples too. Domestic violence calls to the charity Refuge rose by 25% in the first month of the UK's first lockdown (Nicola, 2020). Paradoxically, the violence inherent within the normal functioning of labour markets acted as 'good' violence that was only visible by its absence. The release valves of work, socialising, and leisure disappeared with 'stay at home' orders, unemployment, furlough, and online working; families were forced into close proximity for prolonged periods without respite and domestic violence spiralled (Ellis, et al 2021). In some senses, the 'good' violence routinely meted out by the economic system averted to some extent a wave of 'bad' violence in domestic spheres. In the sense of sacrificial violence, those victims of domestic and child abuse were sacrificed for the greater good.

In conceiving of this violence in terms of harm, we see the unintentional consequences of the normal functioning of a system built on violence, but also what ultra-realist criminologists have identified as the positive motivation to harm (Hall and Winlow, 2015; Lloyd, 2018; Telford & Lloyd, 2020). Inequality emerges from a willingness to inflict harm on others (Lloyd, 2018). On a subjective level, individuals emboldened by 'special liberty' pursue their expressive and instrumental ends unencumbered by adherence to law and societal norms (Hall, 2012; Tudor, 2018). If we shift our focus to the macro-level, Dupuy (2014) suggests that sacrifice is embedded within the economy. As we have stated, violence and sacrifice are intimately connected and therefore we could argue that a measure of sacrifice is always required to avert a greater anarchy. The sacrificial process of the more disposable members of human populations represents:

'the purest and most extreme embodiment of the abusive, negligent and exploitative relationships between the capitalist socio-economic system and the individual' (Hall and Wilson, 2014: 650)

This represents a willingness to inflict harm and violence upon disposable populations. Sacrifice, as in the case of the Covid-19 pandemic, is an essential and integral feature of a society and economic system that must forestall consequences potentially more harmful than the violence it

enacts. In returning to Girard's (2013) analysis, we were never 'all in it together'; those sacrificed on the front line of the pandemic deflected violence from those that the power structures and ideology of neoliberal capitalism most sought to protect. The prevailing ideology of a post-political neoliberalism has emphasised individual competition, status, display, emotivism and accumulation for decades (Winlow and Hall, 2013); therefore, many of those sacrificed on the frontline have been those that are marginalised, socio-economically precarious and disposable, or what we might brand as the losers upon the field of neoliberal capitalism.

Girard (2013) suggests that those sacrificed throughout history have usually been an 'other', an outsider on the margins of the social fabric. Perhaps the most extreme form of 'Othering' occurred under Nazi Germany and manifested in the Holocaust, whereby Jews were cast as the cause of society's problems and were murdered in their millions (Whitehead, 2018). However, those that are cast as 'others' under neoliberalism have principally been socially and economically marginalised groups, particularly problematic drug users, the unemployed, prisoners, as well as immigrants and asylum seekers (Whitehead, 2018). Those that have been sacrificed during the Covid-19 pandemic, though, particularly frontline workers, are therefore not a traditional 'other', though they were sacrificed to protect society and those further up the social structure like neoliberalism's socio-economic winners, many of whom witnessed their wealth increase during the pandemic (Briggs, et al 2021).

Despite playing a central and important role in society both before and throughout the pandemic, many of the pandemic's sacrificial others like care workers continue to endure degrading working conditions including low-pay, non-unionization, zero-hour contracts and long working hours (Briggs, et al 2021). This is because the systemic violence of neoliberal capitalism insists upon the importance of the maximisation of profitability, market expansion and capital accumulation, severing the historic Hegelian master-slave relation (Hall, 2012; Telford & Lloyd, 2020). While capital historically required the recognition of employees to secure its hegemony, it no longer needed the acknowledgement of workers under neoliberalism, since the emergence of a reserve army of labour meant they could be easily disposed of when they were no longer required. Whilst many of those sacrificed were not history's traditional 'others', they were often in socio-economically precarious positions and thus deemed more disposable than other social groups.

However, the Covid-19 pandemic revealed that society does require the nurses, care home workers and couriers, among others, to keep society and the economy functioning. As mentioned, they were rebranded as frontline workers, often denied access to PPE and did not have the option to work within the safe and comfortable surroundings of their home. If a partial meaning of sacrifice is loyalty to a higher and more noble cause (Girard, 2013; Halbertal, 2012), then key workers - many of whom often laboured in difficult conditions to protect the most vulnerable elderly people in care homes; provided care to those that suffered with ill health in hospitals; and often travelled many miles per day and thus came into contact with countless people and thereby increased their risk of contracting Covid-19 to deliver important items - evidently exemplify this commitment to a virtuous ideal. Therefore, it might be argued that 'it is

the mark of the good that it deserves sacrifice' (Halberty, 2012: 68), not least because sacrifice has historically been a means to reinforce the fabric and bonds of the social order (Girard, 2013).

However, how well does the sacrificial offerings documented above reinforce the fabric of neoliberalism's social order; or, indeed, is there a cogent social order to be reinforced? Throughout the neoliberal era, individualism and the profit motive have seeped further into society and reached areas of life previously untouched, restructuring social institutions and relations along the cold lines of the business logic (Whitehead, 2018). Perhaps we witnessed a transient burst of communal spirit during the initial stages of the pandemic, with some relatives often dropping food off for their elderly family members who were self-isolating, as well as our shared sacrifices which meant 'me first' individualism was somewhat subordinated to the collective. Over time, though, it became clear that this sense of social cohesiveness and community was temporary, with many people longing for the return of individual freedoms and gratification, while clear divisions and tensions have emerged around one's level of commitment to the imposed restrictions (Briggs, et al 2021). As fatalism, resignation and scepticism have become doxic, many peoples' belief in the possibility of a better world has collapsed (Winlow & Hall, 2013). The solipsistic and hollow pleasures of consumer culture are embraced to mitigate a structural sense that something has gone wrong, or is missing (Lloyd, 2018). Absent is a universal and convincing political narrative to explain peoples' place in the world; the traditional tools for identity formation like social class and community have evaporated.

This is what some have referred to as a post-social world (Raymen, 2019; Telford & Lloyd, 2020; Winlow & Hall, 2013), whereby commitments to the collective Good are absent and all that matters is self-enhancement (Raymen, 2019). The longer the pandemic lasted, this absence of a telos, purpose or collective Good made the demands for sacrifice much harder to accept. The continued existence of as many people as possible – the administration of non-death – became a moral end in itself, while questions about purpose, flourishing and the virtues inherent in living a 'good life' were ignored. Whilst Halberty's (2012) point that sacrifice and recognition of it has the potential to move us beyond individual desires, drives and goals towards the Good, was clear in the short-term during the pandemic, the sacrifice of those on the frontline and our collective sacrifices more generally potentially mean that the systemic violence of neoliberalism has merely been maintained in the longer term.

## **Conclusion**

This article has highlighted the evident presence of sacrifice throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. We have begun to develop here some tentative but evidently important connections between the pandemic and the concept of sacrifice, which do require further consideration. We have also provided a demonstrable case for the utility of this concept for understanding the impact and societal response to the threat the virus poses to the social fabric, which is also in need of greater attention particularly as society shifts into a post-pandemic period.

The arrival of Covid-19 has without doubt required personal sacrifices to be made of varying kinds in an attempt to resolve the various moral dilemmas that its management presents

for human society. The various sacrifices made have frequently been lauded by politicians and others as evidence of a collective commitment to a common higher cause by individuals across the social strata. A focus purely upon personal sacrifices made by individuals though without appreciation of context, obscures the broader social and historical backdrop in which sacrificial processes are both undertaken by individuals and also enacted upon them. It also ignores the greater complexity of human violence and its centrality within social relations, which many authors discussed in this article alert us to. Contemporary sacrifices made in the Covid-19 era bare many of the hallmarks of historic sacrificial acts and processes, particularly in terms of their hierarchical nature. The sacrifices discussed here, while undertaken and enacted in pursuit of a perceived notion of common social good, must also be understood as emblematic of systemic violence that works to maintain the functioning of current neoliberal economic and political systems by routinely harming sections of human populations that are considered disposable and therefore 'sacrificeable'. While historically, as significant theorists also discussed here have suggested, sacrifice served the function of restoring the social fabric in the face of threats and crises, the potential for this in the contemporary neoliberal period requires further critical consideration.

There is the potential to recognise Covid-19, and the sacrifices entailed in the response to it, as an 'event' (Winlow and Hall, 2013) that may transform society and social life for the better by awakening populations to the importance of mutual care, support and regard for others, over individual desires, and thus hollow consumer pleasures (Briggs et al, 2020). Indeed, the myriad sacrifices made during the pandemic bequeath a great burden of responsibility upon those who were protected to ensure those sacrifices are honoured (Halbental, 2012), and act as a catalyst for reassessing and possibly altering the various harmful aspects of our socio-economic arrangements. With many contemporary critical theorists highlighting the specifically post-social character of contemporary relations and the repeated obstruction of an agreed upon notion of the 'good', the noble sacrifices made in response to the pandemic do risk being rapidly forgotten, and therefore undertaken and enacted purely for the protection and furtherance of a fundamentally unequal and violent system.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> It is important to note that in several countries like the UK, how the government has recorded Covid-19 related deaths has generated some controversy (Briggs, et al 2021). This is because Covid deaths are recorded as dying within 28 days of testing positive for Covid-19, failing to distinguish between those that died of Covid-19 or died with it.

## Article

# The Fight to Remain Compliant

## Public Sentiment, Pandemic and Policing the Second 2020 Victorian Lockdown

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### Abstract

Before 2020, the idea that an entire country would grind to a halt with businesses closed and freedom of movement curtailed at a moment's notice would have seemed a fantasy, but the COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally altered the way the public experiences control in a lockdown setting. While lockdowns have occurred around the world, one of the stricter examples of this policy occurred in Melbourne, Australia, where a 112-day shutdown lasted from July to October 2020. Such an extensive lockdown begs the question of how compliance with such restrictions over a lengthy period of time is maintained. This article offers a sentiment analysis of online discourse on the Facebook pages of four Melbourne news sources (*The Age*, *7 News Melbourne*, *9 News Melbourne* and *NewsTalk 3AW*) at key points during the second lockdown, to assess attitudes toward compliance (or, importantly, non-compliant behaviours). It shows that, despite media coverage suggesting resistance, the general public largely remained supportive of restrictive lockdown measures throughout the crisis, indicating that it is possible to achieve compliance from the majority of the public in strictly enforced lockdowns, despite the intervention of small-but-enthusiastic sets of anti-lockdown activists.



## Introduction

As countries around the world have spent 2020 grappling with the significant human toll of COVID-19, the public health response to the pandemic has sparked questions regarding the willingness of a population to comply with lockdown regulations. While the precise conditions of “lockdown” differ between jurisdictions, the term has entered the lexicon in 2020 as a way to describe an enforceable stay at home order, including the closure of non-essential businesses and restrictions on travel to-and-from an affected locale (Caulkins et al., 2020). In many countries, local or national lockdowns have been the standard course of action when community transmission of the virus reaches an unsustainably high level, and have typically been constructed as a temporary “circuit breaker” measure that is put in place to put a stop to unsafe interactions and, in turn, lower infection rates and avert additional strain being put on health services (Koh, 2020). Perhaps the earliest localised lockdown occurred at the epicentre of the COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan, China, on 23 January 2020 – two days before the first confirmed case of the virus in Australia was identified in a traveller recently returned from the region (Qian and Hanser, 2020). Wuhan was the first, but certainly not the last place to adopt a lockdown strategy: following the failure of local lockdowns in Northern Italy to curb the spread of COVID-19 in late February, the Italian government imposed the world’s first national lockdown on 9 March 2020, a policy soon adopted by other nations as the virus continued to spread unabated (Caselli et al., 2020).

As the research conducted by Reicher and Stott (2020) highlights, the level of repressive policing that occurs when enforcing a lockdown is a central component in the calculation of how likely a community is to participate in non-compliant behaviours. The response of police is, in turn, determined by the distinct public health strategy adopted by a government. While a general, growing consensus developed throughout 2020 that some degree of mandated, collective social action was needed to avert the rampant spread of COVID-19, the extent of this action has been a matter of extensive debate. Baker et al. (2020) identify five common non-pharmaceutical strategies for combatting the pandemic that emerged during 2020. The first is, conversely, to take no action at all – a strategy common in the early stages of the pandemic, but increasingly less observed as the seriousness of COVID-19’s impact became more apparent. The second identified strategy was “mitigation” in which the priority of the state is to flatten the peak and prevent COVID-19’s spread getting worse, but without taking proactive steps to *lower* infection rates (Baker et al., 2020: 1). The next strategy, one of the most common in North America and Europe, is “suppression” wherein measures like lockdowns and business closures are imposed, often for short periods when hospital admissions reach a critical point. The final two strategies that Baker et al. identify are the most strict and, in some views, repressive: common in Asian countries, “elimination” is a strategy in which lengthy, often pre-emptive actions are taken to force virus transmission levels to zero, while “exclusion” is practiced in isolated countries where COVID-19 was yet to arrive, to prevent others bringing the virus in the first place.

Unlike their northern neighbours, countries in southeast Asia had been at the epicentre of the H151 influenza (or “bird flu”) crisis, and were both socially and politically primed to enter

into a similarly repressive state response to combat COVID-19. The general acceptance of lockdown in these countries is perhaps anecdotal evidence that previous experience of a public health crisis makes compliance with public health orders more likely, though there are too many other sociocultural variables to consider making generalisations that would apply to North American and European countries at this stage. The public health response to COVID-19 in Australia is somewhat different to the overt elimination strategy observed in New Zealand and much of Asia. In the view of Dr Nick Coatsworth (2020), the Australian government's Deputy Chief Medical Officer, eliminating COVID-19 is a "false hope ... it's unrealistic - and it's dangerous". Coatsworth argues that total elimination is impossible without completely sealing borders (using an exclusionary policy), particularly as global transmission of the virus remains at such high levels. Instead, the Australian government has described its policy as "aggressive suppression": adopting "whatever measures necessary, including the difficult decisions to reintroduce restrictions and close borders, to shut down community transmission where it occurs" (Coatsworth, 2020). The distinction drawn between elimination and aggressive suppression by Coatsworth is, by and large, a semantic issue rather than a substantive difference: if the goal of elimination is to achieve a persistent zero-transmission rate, not simply flattening the curve of infections as in most suppression strategies, then Australia has pursued a pseudo-elimination strategy regardless of what label it has chosen to apply.

By late March, much of Australia had progressively entered into a nationwide lockdown in response to 1,600 active cases in the isolated island nation. Lasting (approximately) from March to May, lockdown was pursued as a national policy agreed by federal and state leaders as part of this aggressive suppression strategy, via some of the most sweeping control measures seen in the nation's relatively short history (Blakely et al., 2020). While the national lockdown eased in May, a resurgence of the virus in the Melbourne metropolitan area saw parts of Victoria begin a second lockdown from 7 July 2020; initially announced by Premier Daniel Andrews as a six-week action, the second lockdown was extended for 112-days total, until eventually the state recorded zero new cases on 26 October 2020 (Smith, 2020). Although this lockdown was seemingly smaller in scale, effecting one city in comparison to the national lockdown experienced earlier in the year, its impact (in context) cannot be ignored: with around five million residents, the population of Melbourne alone makes up around 20 percent of the total Australian population. Geographically, it is the largest metropolitan area in the country, encompassing almost 10,000 km<sup>2</sup> (City of Melbourne, 2021). Given the proportion of Australians affected by the Melbourne lockdown, the policy became a significant point of contention in the overarching Australian experience of COVID-19. The Victorian lockdowns were criticised by some as overly punitive and heavily policed compared to other lockdowns around the country (and the world) and, in some sectors, derided for committing to a zero case number before beginning to "reopen" (Smith, 2020). This article examines the potential lasting impacts of the strictly enforced elimination strategy in Victoria, the state which experienced the most severe and prolonged lockdown. Further, this article discusses whether vocal anti-lockdown activists in the state accurately reflect the collective community attitude towards Victoria's policy of aggressively policing a public health issue to ensure compliance.

## **Literature Review**

Before turning to the specifics of the 2020 Victorian lockdown, we must examine the contemporary resurgence of the anti-vaccination (or “anti-vax”) community, which has emerged as a committed vanguard of the COVID-sceptic, anti-lockdown movement in Australia. Hussain et al. (2018) refer to the anti-vax movement as “a regression in modern medicine” (1) and, further, one which “poses a dire threat to people’s health and the collective herd immunity” (5). While Hussain et al. propose several explanatory factors for the current state of anti-vax support, including the “misguided” support of celebrities and debunked medical studies, they point to the crucial role that the Internet has played in increasing the public’s access to medical information – accurate or otherwise (2018: 3). Multiple research studies suggest that the online anti-vax community is largely sustained by an “echo chamber” that forms on social media: in their study of six popular anti-vax pages on Facebook, Smith and Graham determined that anti-vax proponents “utilise social media to foster online spaces that strengthen and popularise anti-vaccinations discourses” (2019: 1310). Their analysis of these discourse sites revealed anti-vax as a “highly ‘feminised’ movement” where the majority of participants are women, and also revealed that (despite giving the appearance of being a global movement) the online anti-vax community is, in fact, propped up by a relatively small group of enthusiastic activists (Smith and Graham, 2019). Like Smith and Graham, Mitra et al. (2016) also focused attention on the prevalence of anti-vax rhetoric on social media, this time drawing on four years’ worth of longitudinal data on Twitter. In their study, Mitra et al. found pre-existing distrust of government to be a pre-condition of anti-vax attitudes, suggesting that the most effective approach to combat anti-vax rhetoric may not involve the normal authoritative sources like government and public health agencies – groups that the anti-vax community are already predisposed to doubt.

The anti-vax community has proven especially strong in Australia, where vaccine hesitancy has a long-established history, predating the COVID-19 pandemic. In 1994, the Australian Vaccination Network (now known as the Australian Vaccination-risks Network, or AVN) was created as a special interest lobby group dedicated to a range of anti-vaccine campaigns, including opposition to mandatory vaccination policies and the promotion of fringe scientific studies purporting health risks associated with vaccines (Aechtner, 2021). The AVN has been described as a “strong hold of the anti-vaccination movement” due to its active role as a facilitator and distributor of misinformation (Murray, 2009). While the current official membership of the organisation is unclear, the AVN’s official Facebook page (which is secure, and requires individuals to “sign up”) boasts 18,921 followers (as of 19 January 2021). The influence of anti-vax rhetoric in Australia, from the AVN or otherwise, is also reflected in vaccine-confidence data: in a 2017 study by Chow et al. on parental attitudes it was found that less than half (48 per cent) of Australian parents had no concerns about vaccines, and over 20 per cent believed that vaccines caused conditions such as autism. Rozbroj et al. (2019) note that a variety of demographic and psychosocial factors were predictors of anti-vax sentiment in Australia: they specifically list low socio-economic status, poor access to services, lack of trust in healthcare and high use of the Internet as predictors for social resistance to vaccination. Again, these findings are of significance to the current study. If, as Hussain et al. (2018) also argue, higher engagement with the Internet

and a lack of access to services are indicators of susceptibility to anti-vax rhetoric, there is perhaps no better time for such attitudes to take root than in the midst of a pandemic and lockdown, where Internet usage is generally higher than usual and public services are under severe strain (Ramsetty and Adams, 2020; Alheneidi et al. 2021).

During the COVID-19 pandemic the anti-vax community has, to some extent, evolved: while concern over the potential harmful medical effects of vaccination is still central to anti-vax rhetoric, the community has also turned its broadly anti-establishment lens to public health efforts to control the virus, becoming as much “anti-lockdown” as anti-vax. It bears noting that, though many in the anti-vax community are also (likely) critical of COVID-19 mitigation efforts like lockdown, this anti-lockdown contingent is not exclusively made up of ardent anti-vaxxers. The unique conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic have resulted in a resistance to government efforts motivated by a broader range of factors, including individuals not ordinarily anti-vax, but who are sceptical of the unusually fast development and rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine program. Others falling under this category do not question the existence of COVID-19 or the efficacy of vaccines, but are more concerned about the limits on freedom and impacts on business caused by extended lockdown policies (Lin et al., 2021). It is necessary to make this point so as not to conflate the ideology and experience of committed anti-vax campaigners with the social media analysis conducted as part of this research: while it is probable that some of the comments analysed in this study do come from conventional anti-vax advocates (or are otherwise informed by the rhetoric of this group) it is just as likely that anti-lockdown sentiment derives from another reason, whether listed here or otherwise. This is important, as it contributes to the understanding of the response to COVID-19 lockdowns not as a discrete case of being anti-vax or not, but as a complex issue with a variety of factors at work.

For some historically marginalised groups, the repressive intervention designed to target COVID-19 exists against a backdrop where repressive policing is part of their traditional relationship with the state. In a preliminary study looking at policing of public health orders (like lockdowns) in the United States, United Kingdom and France, Reicher and Stott (2020) identify several potential determinants of disorder in a lockdown-style setting: these include perceived structural inequalities fomenting anti-authoritarian perspectives, a historical context of socio-political oppression and the specific style of repressive policing as part of maintaining a lockdown policy. Ahmed Kadry (2020) refers to some examples of this “repressive policing” in the United Kingdom, where he suggests that “notable incidents including the use of drones to enforce lockdown widely [were] criticised as an overstep by policing and policing being out of touch with the communities it is meant to serve”. Ulrike M. Vieten (2020) also supported Reicher and Stott’s contention that existing structural inequalities are deeply intertwined with public health compliance, albeit in a different sense: Vieten notes that, in the United States, “pandemic populism” (and anti-lockdown activism) has largely been the domain of a generally privileged, white far-right, whereas the interests of marginalised racial or classed communities are not represented. Like Jen Schradie (2020) also argues, Vieten points to the mobilisation of anti-lockdown campaigners in this context as an example of a broader right-wing rhetorical messaging in social media echo chambers, not unlike those identified by Smith and Graham (2019) as

central to the indoctrination of anti-vax community in their own study. The shared digital space of radicalisation – social media – is seemingly central to the convergence of a general anti-lockdown agenda between two unlikely allies: the political far-right and the alternative left.

## Methods

In order to assess the implications of lockdown and related public discourse on compliance and anti-establishment attitudes, it is essential to engage in a critical observation of both media outputs and, importantly, audience response to this material. The first step in this process was to conduct a survey of relevant media and, in doing so, identify critical focus points for deeper qualitative analysis. The ubiquity of COVID-19 related news reports throughout 2020 means that any deep content analysis can only be partial: a fully comprehensive analysis is precluded due to the vast amount of media in circulation that focuses on the same issue (Mutua and Ong'ong'a, 2020). Initial selection of content here has been conducted with reference to both temporal and geographical considerations placed at the forefront. While assessing the impact of lockdown Australia-wide is a worthy project in itself, this research will specifically focus on the place where lockdown unquestionably hit hardest – Victoria – and, thus, media selected has been limited to state-based outlets only: daily newspaper *The Age*, Victoria television news affiliates *9 News Melbourne* and *7NEWS Melbourne* and popular talkback radio station *3AW*. Online searches of media from these sources were (at least, primarily) restricted to the 112-day period of the second Victoria lockdown, extending from 7 July to 26 October 2020. From this initial (and considerable) return of responses, the research survey identified several key “points of interest” where major events (such as “hotel quarantine bungle” in which internationally-acquired COVID-19 cases spread to the community) triggered a spike in media commentary. From the survey, a shortlist of pivotal “days” of the lockdown was identified for closer examination: the first day that the lockdown of Melbourne’s metropolitan area was imposed (7 July), the arrest of anti-lockdown activist Eve Black (29 July), the arrest of pregnant Ballarat woman Zoe Buhler for inciting others to breach lockdown (2 September), the arrest of 74 anti-lockdown protesters (13 September) and Daniel Andrews’s apology to the inquiry into hotel quarantine (25 September), which occurred a month prior to the lockdown’s conclusion on 26 October 2020.

The identification of these five events for further exploration was important for several reasons, not the least of which being to focus analysis on a manageable number of sources. Another benefit to this selection process was that it allowed for closer examination of audience response to these events via digital ethnographic observation – a key element of this study, which is concerned with audience response to control policy and, conversely, non-compliance with this policy. Just as each of the events listed above resulted in media reports, these reports were also posted to the social media pages of the news organisations listed above. In turn, these posts triggered community response allowing for a sentiment analysis of comments. Sentiment analysis is, at face value, a relatively basic form of content analysis that is used to identify whether audience responses are positive, negative or neutral (Kiritchenko et al., 2014). Using sentiment analysis of comments in response to the events identified as important to the Melbourne lockdown allows for a simplistic rendering of whether the general trend was pro- or anti-

lockdown. Even having restricted this analysis to the five events listed above, the vast amount of data posed a challenge: for example, a single Facebook post from *7 News Melbourne* on 29 July 2020 announcing the arrest of Eve Black returned more than 2,423 “direct” responses (i.e. not a reply to another comment). This trend was observed across the majority of social media posts (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) across all events, and so a more targeted approach was warranted.

This research limits its sentiment analysis to a sample of the first 100 direct comments on Facebook posts only, offering indicative insights into audience attitudes. Limiting the analysis of comments in this way allowed for a manual sentiment analysis, useful in that it permitted the researcher to more easily account for elements that often confound an automated approach to social media discussion, such as the use of sarcasm or subcultural references that may not be immediately obvious, but have clear implications when examined with the specific context taken into consideration. Data from December 2020 claims that 16.5 million Australians (or 66% of the population) are active monthly users of Facebook, making it the most reliable social media platform to evaluate general sentiments (Ramshaw, 2020). The same data found that Australians are the sixth-most active Facebook commenters in the world, further justifying the decision to focus on this site specifically for observation. In spite of the proven (and substantial) use of Facebook as a medium for public discourse in Australia, social media analysis is not without its challenges – particularly when it comes to determining the extent to which sentiment on social media aligns with actual public sentiment.

Some of these issues are driven by user demographics: as Biernatowska et al. (2017) concluded, gender is a major variable in social media studies when considering that women tend to be more engaged users of platforms like Facebook and are more discerning about the opinions they post when compared to male users. Based on this, it is a potential limitation that this study may capture a sentiment that is biased towards a female perspective, rather than a more representative sample. Another potential limitation is the challenge of evaluating social media discourse in the midst of a dynamic event. As Ebrahimi et al. (2017) assert in their discussion of Twitter sentiment analyses in election campaigns, it is “empirically challenging” to develop algorithms that accurately gauge public sentiment in such a context because (holistically) there are too many constantly changing factors, prompted by the ongoing unfolding of events, to account for (70). The same can certainly be true of COVID-19 which, over 2020, has proven perhaps even more unpredictable than the election campaigns that Ebrahimi et al. wrote about. While it is impractical to suggest that any social media analysis of a dynamic, global event like the COVID-19 pandemic can truly account for all potential variables, the methods here nevertheless reflect an attempt to do so – first, by focusing in on specific events to analyse a direct social media reaction, allowing for more control and appreciation of context, and then by ensuring that a manual sentiment analysis is conducted, permitting the application of this contextual understanding to the comments made to better enable recognition of shifting dynamics.

## **‘Dictator Dan’ – Rhetoric of authoritarianism in the Victorian lockdown**

By nature, policing a public health concern like the COVID-19 pandemic requires the state to impose greater restrictions on the general public than usual. Ordinarily, in a post-industrial democratic nation like Australia, public interaction with the police is minimal and (where it occurs) typically passive. When an event like COVID-19 forces this relationship to shift, with police now tasked with enforcing new rules limiting personal liberties, there is a strong chance that the state makes itself vulnerable to claims of being heavy-handed or, worse, authoritarianism (Cooper and Aitchison, 2020). While all states and territories in Australia imposed some level of restriction on its citizens as part of its aggressive suppression strategy, no Australian leader experienced the backlash of this perceived “authoritarianism” quite as much as Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews, particularly after his decision to place the approximately five million residents of the greater Melbourne area into a second lockdown in July 2020 (Shuttleworth, 2020). Until the COVID-19 pandemic hit his state, Andrews was seen (and often criticised) as one of the most progressive leaders of an Australian state or territory: since being elected Premier in December 2014, Andrews and his left-wing Labor government had ushered in contentious legislation legalising euthanasia, established Victoria’s first safe injecting rooms for drug users and established a royal commission into domestic violence (Alcorn, 2018). Despite this record, the government’s repressive approach to the elimination of COVID-19 during the second lockdown triggered a revision of Andrews’s record: far from a doyenne of country’s progressive movement, Andrews was now dubbed (by some) “Dictator Dan” and accused of curtailing the freedom of Victorians in pursuit of a political agenda (Murphy, 2020).

Though the strict enforcement of COVID-19 restrictions in the second lockdown exacerbated the claims of authoritarianism, the origins “Dictator Dan” label has been traced by Graham et al. (2020) to 17 May 2020 – more than a month before lockdown conditions resumed. While Graham et al. acknowledge that the term was “in low circulation” before this date, their social media analysis indicates that it entered into mainstream discourse after a Tweet from state Liberal politician Tim Smith in which he questioned whether Andrews should be called “Chairman Dan” (an allusion to Communist dictator Chairman Mao) or “Dictator Dan”; while “Dictator” lost the poll with 45.6 per cent of the public vote, it has enjoyed lasting resonance in anti-Andrews social media discourse (Graham et al., 2020). However, the same study questions the authenticity of this apparent anti-Andrews sentiment: Graham et al. examined the top 50 Twitter accounts using the #DictatorDan hashtag, as well as similarly popular #DanLiedPeopleDied and, for contrast, a pro-Andrews #IStandWithDan. The research showed that 54 per cent of the top 50 accounts posting anti-Andrews hashtags could be treated as “sockpuppets ... created by people using fake profiles for the sole purpose of magnifying their view” (Graham et al., 2020). Around 10 per cent of accounts posting #DictatorDan or #DanLiedPeopleDied were responsible for around three-quarters of the approximately 122,000 anti-Andrews Tweets analysed – a number 2.5 times lower than the number of #IStandWithDan Tweets, at 275,000.

What this shows is that, largely, the “Dictator Dan” label that entered the Victorian cultural zeitgeist cannot be considered as an organic (or generalisable) public backlash to Andrews’s lockdown policy. Instead, the term (a) derived from a political opponent of Andrews, (b) was propagated on social media by a relatively small, yet vocal, minority of opponents, (c) many of these opponents posted from anonymous, unverifiable accounts and, perhaps most importantly, (d) the actual number of Tweets *supporting* Andrews was more than twice as high as those who perceived his actions as “dictatorial”. This observation of anti-lockdown rhetoric being propagated by a small, motivated group on social media – giving the appearance of being part of a much larger social trend – is reflective of the same patterns observed by Mitra et al. (2016) and Smith and Graham (2019) in regard to the online anti-vax community. The extent to which the anti-vax community and anti-Andrews community online overlap is unclear, however there is reason to believe there is some degree of crossover, considering much of the anti-Andrews rhetoric targeted the lockdown policy in a way that echoes the views of virus sceptics. Nevertheless, actions in early July 2020 just prior to the second lockdown being imposed seemingly reinforced the perspective that Andrews was indeed pursuing an authoritarian path: on 4 July 2020, Andrews deployed Victoria Police to surround nine public housing towers in North Melbourne, confining 3,000 residents to their homes for between five and fourteen days due to confirmed COVID-19 cases at the complex (Boseley, 2020b; Glass, 2020). The affected population was not told of the impending lockdown before armed police arrived to surround the building, with Victorian Ombudsman Deborah Glass later issuing a scathing report stating, “the rushed lockdown was not compatible with the residents’ human rights ... [and was] contrary to the law” (Glass, 2020: 4). Glass advised the state to issue an apology to residents, but this was rejected by the Andrews government, with Housing Minister Richard Wynne saying “we make no apology for saving people’s lives” (Boseley, 2020b). It is clear that the Andrews government’s commitment to aggressive suppression, bordering on elimination by any other definition, compounded the niche conception of Andrews as a “dictator” and, in turn, contributed to a greater split in the public’s views on the necessity as such strictly enforced lockdown regulations in Victoria, just as the second lockdown was about to begin.

As the second lockdown continued, anti-Andrews rhetoric persisted and – while not necessarily focused on authoritarian aspects of the government’s policy – served to undermine public confidence in Victoria’s COVID-19 strategy. This trend towards undermining the government’s strategy can be observed in online discourse around Andrews’s appearance at the public inquiry into mistakes made in Victoria’s hotel quarantine program, where illicit encounters between private security guards and quarantined international arrivals was attributed to the resurgence of the second wave of COVID-19 transmissions in June 2020 (Coate, 2020). Despite using his 25 September 2020 appearance before the inquiry to issue an apology, the online response was largely unforgiving. A news article on Andrews’s inquiry appearance posted by Melbourne’s daily newspaper *The Age* received 494 comments total; of the first 100 of these comments, only 14 expressed a positive view on the Premier, most applauding him for being “respectful and truthful” and not shying away from public criticism (The Age, 2020c). After removing four comments expressing a neutral (or unrelated) sentiment, there remained 82

comments that are generally negative towards Andrews. This is particularly notable given *The Age* has traditionally been seen as a moderate, if not left-leaning, news source in comparison to the more conservative local newspaper *The Herald Sun* (Muller, 2017). However, of these 82 negative comments, most focused on Andrews’s perceived failures to manage hotel quarantine, or to take responsibility for its failures: despite the focus on the “Dictator Dan” label, only five referred to concepts related to authoritarianism – indeed, only two of those five explicitly used the word “dictator” (one “Dictator Dan” and one “Dan is communist and a dictator gone wild”) (The Age, 2020c).

The result of this analysis supports Graham et al.’s (2020) determination that the Andrews-as-authoritarian narrative was primarily being pushed by a small, committed group of anti-Andrews (and anti-lockdown) activists online. The responses on *The Age* post show that, while anti-Andrews rhetoric was high at this critical time in the second lockdown, the animus levelled at him was at his government’s failure to control the virus, not any anti-lockdown sentiment. Indeed, on the contrary: one interpretation is that anti-Andrews rhetoric here revolves around the inability to apply more *strict* controls on the public, rather than the opposite. Though seemingly unusual, contemporaneous research undertaken during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States suggests preferences for authoritarianism transcend the left-right political binary. Examining responses to nineteen “putatively authoritarian pandemic-mitigation policies” in a sample of 550 people, Mason (2020) concluded that support for COVID-19 lockdown policies was not based on political persuasion but, rather, how prone an individual was to authoritarianism more broadly – that authoritarian respondents from both right and left found common ground in many aspects of the response to the “menu of normally taboo authoritarian policies [that] appears on the table of mainstream public debate” during a crisis like that COVID-19 pandemic (5).

Costello et al. (2020) also make the same argument, suggesting that there are psychological similarities between authoritarians at both ends of the political spectrum, such as (a) their shared belief that the world is dangerous and (b) a common view that state control is needed to address these threats. The argument presented here is that, perhaps, anti-Andrews rhetoric should not be evaluated based on the conventional binary models of politics but, rather, with reference to cross-political preferences for authoritarianism. Based on this framework, it might be argued that sentiment towards Andrews shifted not because of a public shift towards the political right and clamour for greater restrictions, but instead because the emergence of an authoritarian push made of left *and* right was a prevalent force. Indeed, an Australia-wide survey conducted by Murphy et al. early in the pandemic in April/May 2020 found that “Australians cared less about health risks to them or to others and seemed more motivated to comply with COVID-19 restrictions out of a sense of duty to support authorities” (2020, 489). In addition, the conservative right in Victoria largely adopted a line that lockdown was harmful to the economy, and so did not provide a viable alternative for those arguing for tighter restrictions (Graham et al., 2020). If this is the case, it reflects a no-win scenario for Andrews: on one hand, a considerable segment of the population with preference for authoritarianism who felt he was

not going far enough and, on the other, a much smaller-yet-enthusiastic cohort labelling him a “dictator” for imposing any lockdown at all.

## **Anti-lockdown ‘stunts’ – public responses to overt acts of non-compliance**

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, social media played a major role in capturing both spontaneous and orchestrated acts of non-compliance by citizens opposed to mask-wearing or, indeed, lockdown. This is unsurprising, given the widespread saturation of social media in society and, perhaps more pertinently, the heightened engagement with these media within the anti-vax community found in studies by Hussain et al. (2018) and Rozbroj et al. (2019). When acts of non-compliance “go viral” and receive considerable attention, both on social media and (after that) in the mainstream media, it has the effect of signal boosting a single act and augmenting its sociocultural impact. The disproportionality of act and impact that is achieved using social media “clicktivism” is essential to what Smith and Graham (2019) described as “small world” networking in the anti-vax community, where a relatively small cadre of active campaigners gives the impression that a far larger group exists; it is also reflected in the findings of Graham et al. (2020) regarding the #DictatorDan rhetoric on Twitter, where the label entered into the lexicon despite being pushed by a far smaller group than actually existed. Such a phenomenon can inherently compromise public perceptions on compliance, especially in a situation like COVID-19: at a time when most citizens are confined to their homes in a lockdown setting, the belief (erroneously promoted on social media) that non-compliance is commonplace can have a major influence on support for ongoing collective efficacy strategies and, indeed, the strict enforcement of these strategies by the state.

Early in the second Victorian lockdown, 28-year-old Eve Black became synonymous with the use of social media to push an anti-lockdown, COVID-sceptic agenda. Black recorded a video of herself at a police checkpoint in Bunyip, south-east of Melbourne, refusing to answer questions about her reasons for travel and (instead) reading a scripted response until, frustrated, police waved her through the checkpoint (Dexter, 2020). Though Black claimed the recording was “only meant for a close group of friends” her video came to the attention of the mainstream media and experienced a significant signal boost: posts on *The Age*, *3AW*, *7 News Melbourne* and *9 News Melbourne* Facebook pages six days later, when she was arrested for breaching lockdown restrictions, were “liked” more than 19,800 times (more than 9,300 on the *7 News Melbourne* page alone), with 5,152 comments across all four posts. In sharing Black’s story (and, in most cases, video footage) across these major media platforms, what began as a relatively inane act of non-compliance became a symbol of anti-lockdown activism. However, sentiment analysis of the first 100 comments on each of the four posts indicates that, in this case, Black’s viral act of non-compliance triggered more backlash than it did galvanise support for her anti-lockdown position. In every instance, comments supportive of police arresting Black on 29 July 2020 were a clear minority: of the 400 comments sampled, a total of 26 (6.5 per cent) were either positive towards Black’s “guts” in standing up for individual freedoms or, alternatively, negative towards the heavy-handed actions of Victoria Police (The Age, 2020a). The vast majority of commenters were happy

that “karma” caught up with Black. Many openly praised the police’s action, calling it “one for the constabulary” and asserting that “she deserves everything coming to her from Vic Pol [Victoria Police]” (9 News Melbourne, 2020a; NewsTalk 3AW 2020a). Contrary to the suggestion of non-compliance, most commenters not only supported police but instead called for stricter penalties, including mandatory jail time. Response to Black’s arrest indicates that, far from mirroring non-compliant behaviour, Victorians rejected the flagrant breach of lockdown rules in overwhelming numbers. More crucially, commenters suggest greater consequences for people breaching the regulations like Black. Far from being non-compliant, the public instead called for *stricter enforcement* of compliance, again supporting the hypothesis that a preference for authoritarianism existed in Victoria separate from traditional political allegiances (Manson, 2020).

In a sense, Victoria Police acceded to this public call for stricter enforcement in the wake of the Eve Black incident, notably with the proactive arrest of pregnant anti-lockdown campaigner Zoe Buhler on 2 September 2020. Buhler, 28, was arrested for her role organising an anti-lockdown event on Facebook and charged with inciting others to break lockdown rules (McGowan, 2020). Like Black’s story, Buhler’s arrest went viral on social media when footage emerged of police handcuffing the expectant mother and taking her into custody while she was still in her pyjamas. There is little question that Buhler’s arrest had far more potential to garner support for the anti-lockdown cause, with the optics of police arresting a pregnant woman for a Facebook post raising the issue of free speech and its intersection with the enforcement of compliance during the Victorian lockdown (Zhou, 2020). However, again, the comments on articles pertaining to Buhler’s arrest indicate widespread support for curtailing these rights when used to promote non-compliant anti-lockdown activity. A selection of four Facebook posts by Victorian media sources on (or immediately after) Buhler’s 2 September arrest reveals a total of 5,316 direct comments. This is significantly lower than the number recorded in the Eve Black incident discussed above, but it must be recalled that the Black arrest occurred after six days of coverage, whereas these posts were made within 24 hours of Buhler’s arrest, leaving less time for the public to learn about the story and develop opinions. A survey of the first 100 comments on each Buhler-related post reveals 86 comments (21.5 per cent) supportive of Buhler or, more commonly, against the “draconian” actions of Victoria Police in arresting her (The Age, 2020b). The increase is, of course, a considerable increase on 6.5 per cent supportive of Eve Black’s actions several months earlier. Despite the 15 per cent increase in support for Buhler as opposed to Black, the overall total rate of support is still not even close to achieving 50/50 parity. Those opposed to Buhler’s actions typically asserted that her pregnant conditions was “no excuse” for inciting others to break lockdown and put public health at risk (7 News Melbourne, 2020b).

To an extent, the increase in support for anti-lockdown rhetoric could be attributed to Victorians tiring of prolonged lockdown. This “lockdown fatigue” was especially notable considering the nature of the exit strategy was to aim for a period with zero new COVID-19 infections in the state, an objective seen by many as impractical given the rampant spread of the virus worldwide. The longer the COVID-19 lockdown continued, the more of an economic impact was registered as well, with studies indicating that the City of Melbourne alone

experienced a 22 percent drop in economic output in 2020 (compared with projections) and saw 75,000 jobs lost (City of Melbourne, 2020). Alternatively, support for Buhler could be explained as a matter of optics: whereas Black was openly mocking in her breach of COVID-19 regulations, Buhler was taken from her home for making a seemingly “innocuous” Facebook post – as a result, the vision of her arrest offers a far more sympathetic portrayal than Black’s did. There is, however, another intervening factor: many commenters (even some in favour of Buhler’s arrest) queried why an anti-lockdown protester was charged with incitement when Black Lives Matters protests had been allowed to proceed during the lockdown without similar action being taken (Meade, 2020; 9 News Melbourne, 2020b; NewsTalk 3AWb). There is, thus, the potential that non-compliance was not facilitated by anti-lockdown activists like Buhler directly, but rather by a perceived inconsistency in policing strategy towards these distinct protest movements. As noted above, in the Black case there was a high proportion of commenters demanding stricter enforcement of lockdown, not loosening of restrictions.

Again, the pejorative references to police tolerance of the Black Lives Matters protests reflect a public sentiment to lockdown in Victoria that went beyond conventional political binaries of progressive and conservative. The Black Lives Matter protests were, inherently, motivated by left-wing political values; the negative responses to Buhler’s arrest suggest that the same group calling for tighter restrictions are also those critical of these protests going forward under pandemic conditions. It is difficult to reconcile, then, where these commenters fit on the ideology spectrum – they do not fit into a neat conservative categorisation, as their criticism of Black Lives Matter suggests, but nor do they fit into a traditional leftist category, as their preference for state intervention indicates. Instead, it appears that (once again) findings from researchers such as Costello et al. and Murphy et al. prove correct – the psychological tendency towards authoritarianism, especially in a time of crisis, goes beyond ordinary political boundaries and can, in turn, prove confounding when measuring public reactions and sentiment to dynamic events. In closing, it appears that while Buhler received a greater level of personal support than similar anti-lockdown activists, the backlash to her arrest still did little to promote the cause among the general public, who largely maintained the view that any person inciting non-compliance deserved to be dealt with seriously by Victoria Police.

### **Hitting the streets (or not) – comparing anti-lockdown protests to compliance data**

The period around Zoe Buhler’s arrest saw a peak in anti-lockdown protest action, including an incident where around 250 “freedom” protesters marched through Melbourne’s iconic Queen Victoria Market on 13 September 2020, only to be met by the Victoria Police riot squad and dispersed. Seventy-four protesters were arrested as a result of this rally, with 176 infringement notices handed out for breaches of COVID-19 regulations (Boseley, 2020a). As with the Eve Black incident in July, footage of the police clashes with these “aggressive” anti-lockdown activists gives the impression of a considerable group committed to non-compliance with public health laws – once again, the impression this event offers is far greater than the reality of public sentiment. While there were fewer Facebook postings on this event compared to the Black and

Buhler incidents (indeed, there was no post made by *The Age* on the day and a post from *NewsTalk 3AW* did not come until four days later) a sentiment analysis of the posts that were made indicate a growing tendency to rationalise anti-lockdown activity or, more over, an opposition to perceived “heavy-handed” police responses (7 *News Melbourne*, 2020c).

There were 1,170 comments made across three posts about the 13 September event (9 *News Melbourne* and 7 *News Melbourne* on the day, *NewsTalk 3AW* days later), with more than 2,729 comments when accounting for replies as well. Of the 300 comments sampled, 105 (or 35 percent) were either positive towards the protesters or (more frequently) criticised police use of force in dispersing them (37 per cent on the 7 *News Melbourne* post, 49 per cent on 9 *News Melbourne* and 19 per cent for *NewsTalk 3AW*). In the view of many, it was not the protesters but, instead, police who “wreaked havoc” and caused the Queen Victoria Market to shut down, costing struggling stallholders business (7 *News Melbourne*, 2020c). Police actions at the Market were described as “brutality” and like “some communist country being overrun by the intimidating Police Force” (9 *News Melbourne*, 2020c). The tone of comments on the *NewsTalk 3AW* post (2020c) was somewhat different to the other samples: the majority of the 19 percent who expressed support for protesters did so with a caveat, noting that they understood the reasons for the protest but were concerned that such actions would lead to further lockdown. Despite these reservations, the comments have been treated as generally supportive of anti-lockdown activists, though (admittedly) still showing favour for compliance, if not trust in the state government.

While anti-lockdown sentiment remained relatively low overall, at 35 percent, the steady increase of this rate from the Eve Black incident on 29 July to the protest on 13 September gives reason for concern in terms of the longevity of lockdown compliance. That more than a month passed between the two events is unquestionably a key element in explaining this trend: after 46 further days in lockdown, it is (in some ways) understandable and expected that Melburnians’ commitment to the regulations would begin to wane. However, Victoria Police data collated in the second Victorian lockdown suggests otherwise: over the initial three weeks after the new rules came into effect, Victoria Police issued only 42 fines to citizens for not self-isolating as directed, after doorknocking 3,000 people subject to the order – a negligible non-compliance rate of 1.4 percent (Thorne, 2020). The number of fines issued for breaking curfew (i.e. without being subject to a specific self-isolation direction) was higher, with police issuing 1,762 fines from 4 August to 31 August 2020. Even so, by the start of September this rate was on a downward trajectory, dropping from 89 fines in a 24-hour period on 17 August to 60 fines on 31 August 2020, only two weeks later (Handley, 2020). Again, while not indicative of full compliance, it does suggest that at the same time that the level of anti-lockdown (and anti-government) rhetoric seemed to rise on social media, actual compliance with the COVID regulations continued to improve, based on police data.

The strict nature of police enforcement in Victoria, while drawing criticism in relation to the 13 September protest, most likely played a significant role in promoting compliance: fines for not self-isolating when directed were high, at almost AUD\$5,000, while fines for breaking

curfew were also high at AUD\$1,652 (Thorne, 2020; Handley, 2020). Along with Victoria Police's proactive enforcement of the rules, this strategy of severe penalties coupled with proactive enforcement was seemingly effective in controlling threats to collective efficacy during the second lockdown. However, later actions by the state government may prove to undercut this effectiveness were Victoria to succumb to a third lockdown, either because of COVID or another public health crisis. Despite 19,000 penalty notices being handed out between July and October 2020, a new policy was implemented in January 2021 with police instructed to not proceed with charging offenders who had not paid their fines, issuing a caution instead. The Victoria Police union said the decision sent "a concerning message" that the government (and, indeed, police) were not serious in their actions enforcing the COVID-19 regulations, and posed a risk to "wilful compliance" (Houston and Webb, 2021). The result of the Victorian government's decision to not aggressively pursue outstanding lockdown fines remains to be seen, but (as the police union suggests) present yet another potential risk to public faith in the state's approach to lockdown.

## **Conclusion**

Despite ardent hopes around the world that the COVID-19 virus will be brought under control with the widespread public dissemination of vaccines, the sociological impacts of the pandemic will undoubtedly continue. As governments consider the flaws in their response to the pandemic, from a healthcare and economic perspective, their thoughts will also turn to the policy of lockdown that was used to control the virus and, in countries like Australia who acted swiftly, largely eliminated community transmission of COVID-19. The rapid onset of COVID-19 highlights the need for greater understanding of how lockdown is received by the public, and the best ways to ensure compliance. What is clear from the events of 2020/21 is that countries where lockdown was not strictly enforced experienced challenges in utilising the method as effectively as possible to mitigate viral transmission (Frowde et al., 2020). Cities like Melbourne, where an extended and heavily-enforced lockdown was put in place, ultimately succeeded in eliminating COVID-19 and, thus, present a useful case study for other nations who struggled to galvanise community compliance with public health orders. By studying the response to various events during Melbourne's second lockdown, this article has been able to offer insight into how the attitudes to lockdown exhibited by Melburnians changed over time, as the 112-day lockdown continued. What this social media analysis found was that, for the most part, community compliance remained high throughout the second lockdown: sentiment analysis revealed that support for adhering to lockdown measures never fell below 65 percent and, even then, data from Victoria Police indicates that issuing of penalty notices for breaching self-isolation and curfew orders continued to fall over time (Thorne, 2020; Handley, 2020). It is apparent that compliance with a strictly-enforced lockdown is possible to achieve in a state of crisis where public health is at stake, even in situations (as was the case in Victoria) where trust in government was at a low.

The research does, however, identify some risks for employing such a strategy in future. While support for compliance did not fall below 65 percent (based on the data presented here), it was nevertheless on a downward trend as lockdown stretched on. While only 6.5 percent of

commenters expressed support for Eve Black’s defiant actions in July, that number had risen to 35 percent when the (much more aggressive) anti-lockdown protest was carried out at Queen Victoria Market on 13 September 2020. From this, it can be inferred that the longer a strict lockdown continues, the more likely it is that public support for it will fall and, in turn, negative responses to examples of police enforcement will increase. While police assert that actual compliance remained high (despite this online discourse) the decision to not pursue penalties issued to COVID rulebreakers could have significant repercussions for later enforcement actions, impacting on coerced compliance should another lockdown be required. However, at the same time online opposition to lockdown increased, it did not follow a path reflective of the anti-vax community: there was little scepticism of whether COVID-19 was real, or conspiratorial theories about vaccination found in the discourse of other nations grappling with anti-lockdown behaviours (Vieten, 2020). Instead, focus was directed at Daniel Andrews and his government’s mishandling of programs like hotel quarantine, suggesting a political partisanship to the anti-lockdown debate rather than adherence to an alternative ideological agenda like libertarianism or vaccine scepticism.

In a sense, this is good news: while the use of terms like “Dictator Dan” are unquestionably hyperbolic, the focus on political leadership in a crisis indicates a sense of “business as usual” among Melburnians who judged the success or failure of the COVID-19 response largely on fact, not misinformation and conspiracy. Again, while there were elements of this observed throughout, these were relatively minimal, generally supporting the findings of Graham et al. (2020) regarding the use of the #DictatorDan moniker on Twitter in the same period. Ultimately, this study shows that compliance with the 112-day second lockdown in Victoria remained high throughout, in spite of rising anti-government rhetoric online and the attempted incitement of a small core of anti-lockdown activists like Eve Black, Zoe Buhler and the 13 September protesters. While public sentiment invariably turned against the Victorian government for several perceived failings, this did not trigger widespread rejection of lockdown orders and, indeed, actual compliance appears to have increased, rather than fallen. There have been several further COVID-related lockdowns in Victoria since the lengthy 112-day lockdown of 2020 and, given the potential for more in future, this research offers some level of hope that strict measures can (and will) be accepted by the public, even if the political costs are high.

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## Article

# 'No one's Going to Buy Steroids for a Home Workout'

The impact of the national lockdown on hardcore gym users, anabolic steroid consumption and the image and performance enhancing drugs market

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## Abstract

How has the COVID-19 pandemic, and the subsequent restrictions upon public life, affected those whose lives are centred around the gym and bodywork? Utilising data procured through semi-structured interviews with image and performance enhancing drug-using bodybuilders, this article sets out to provide a glimpse into the realities of life in the hardcore fitness community in 2020. The impact of lockdown on the men's training is first explored, and their flouting of the restrictions is described. Following this, the sample's image and performance enhancing drug (IPED) consumption during this period is examined, noting an overall reduction in use and a homogenisation of their favoured substances. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the IPED market itself are then considered, wherein the sample's accounts of panic-buying, supply chain issues and declining demand are presented. Ultimately, it is hoped that this article will serve to paint a picture of life under lockdown for the bodybuilding gym users in the population, and follow the community's challenges during the 'longest year'.



## Introduction

Living in the UK in 2020, with its rolling lockdowns, homeworking and numerous governmental U-turns has been an unprecedented experience for us all. Among the voices clamouring to be heard above the din, however, have been the nation's hardcore fitness enthusiasts, who have proven particularly vocal in their opposition to the closure of their beloved gymnasias. Nowhere was this more apparent than last November's anti-lockdown protests where, cheered on by an unmasked crowd of bodybuilders and powerlifters, supplement company Grenade triumphantly drove a vividly-painted orange tank past the Houses of Parliament (Warrington, 2020). Beyond the deeply commodified nature of this stunt, the support for the anti-lockdown movement within the hardcore fitness community was unwavering as they counted down the days to 'gymdependence day', craving the barbells whilst the rest of us were more concerned with the return of the bar (Salinas, 2019). Alongside this, with most bodybuilding and powerlifting competitions restricted or indefinitely postponed, many trainers found themselves with nothing to train for, leaving their intricate exercise and supplementation schedules redundant and their well-calibrated image and performance enhancing drug (IPED) cycles unneeded.

Set against this context, this article examines the bodybuilding community's experience of 'the longest year', first exploring their disregard for both the law and the 'spirit of lockdown' (Shaw, 2020) before analysing their altered consumption of IPEDs during this unprecedented period. Following this, the IPED market itself will be put under the magnifying glass and the impacts of global supply chain disruption and reduced local demand will be considered.

## A note on the health and fitness industry

Before commencing further, it is first worth briefly laying out the role of leisure in the contemporary economy and the subsequent importance of the gym as a source of identity formation. According to Raymen and Smith (2019), late-capitalism has seen a fundamental alteration of the nature of leisure. Where once organised leisure was viewed as fundamentally antithetical to labour, a means of escaping the Fordist generation of capital, citizens' 'free time' now primarily functions to further the neoliberal drive for capital growth and the stimulation of consumer desire (Winlow and Hall, 2006; McGowan, 2016). In line with the Western economic shift from production to consumption then (Amin, 1994), our economy now relies more upon the insatiable appetite for transient consumer goods and experiences (stimulated within the commodified spaces of leisure) than the traditional bastions of industrial modernity. Nowhere was this more apparent than Rishi Sunak's now infamous 'Eat Out to Help Out' scheme, which essentially tasked customers to consume their way out of economic recession in the form of half price meals.

The subsequent growth of leisure within our society of consumption has proven extremely fertile ground for the UK's health and fitness industry which, prior to the pandemic, was growing exponentially year upon year (Smith Maguire, 2008; Sassatelli, 2010). Contoured along the same lines of capital extraction, the contemporary health and fitness industry encompasses a range of goods and services including gymnasias, health supplements, wearable

fitness monitoring devices and activewear (Andreasson and Johansson, 2014; Cederström and Spicer, 2015). Illustrating the scale of this market, the most recent (pre-pandemic) figures suggest that approximately 6,700 gym facilities exist in the UK, playing host to around 9.7 million members (Lange, 2019). As a result, the gym has become a prime site for identity formation within contemporary society and, for the men under study, formed an epicentral part of their existence. Indeed, in the height of the UK's lockdown we saw home gym equipment and subscriptions to online fitness platforms rocket (Waldmeir and McGee, 2021), signalling the centrality of bodywork for swathes of the population.

Importantly however, this article focusses upon the so-called hardcore fitness market, characterised by advanced level bodybuilding, 'spit and sawdust' gyms (Brighton, Wellard and Clark, 2020) and a rejection of mainstream health and fitness. Whilst, on first glance, this community seems at odds with the commodified gym chains and glossy fitness influencer market which represent the growth areas of the industry (Deloitte, 2018), further examination reveals the same commodification and consumption in the increasingly 'gentrified' spaces of hardcore strength training (Brighton et al., 2020) as well as the sport of bodybuilding itself (see Andreasson and Johansson, 2019). With that in mind, this article asks the question; *what happens when your primary site of identity formation gets locked down?*

## **IPED consumption and supply**

The meteoric rise of the health and fitness industry has brought with it a shadow in the form of image and performance enhancing drugs that, despite the ever-broadening anti-doping movement (Mulrooney et al., 2019), remain indelibly connected to hardcore gym work. IPEDs, within this article, can be defined as 'substances that enhance muscle growth and reduce body fat' (Underwood, 2017: 78), encompassing drugs like anabolic androgenic steroids (AAS), human growth hormone (hGH) and fat burners like ephedrine (Hope et al., 2013; Sagoe et al., 2014; Begley et al., 2017). By far the most popular IPEDs are AAS, a class of drugs that include the male hormone testosterone, or a synthetic derivative of it, that can be administered either orally or as an intramuscular injection (Begley et al., 2017). AAS are commonly used as part of a 'cycle', whereby a course is taken in a set period (typically eight to twelve weeks) before the user is 'off-cycle', where they assume a period of abstinence (Evans-Brown et al, 2012) and post-cycle therapy (PCT). PCT describes taking drugs and supplements to mitigate or reverse negative side effects of AAS and restore natural hormone levels in the body (Christiansen, Vinther and Liokaftos, 2017).

Across the literature, a consensus has emerged that, prior to the pandemic, the consumption of IPEDs was increasing rapidly both nationally and internationally (McVeigh and Begley, 2017; Mullen et al., 2020), particularly in younger generations and those outside of the hardcore fitness community (Hall and Antonopoulos, 2016). However, the academy is yet to examine the impacts of the pandemic on these previously burgeoning figures of use (for an exception, see Zoob Carter et al., 2021). This article, therefore, aims to shed light upon the

sample's IPED use during the 'longest year' and how the closure of gyms has affected both the compounds that they use and the quantities they consume.

The supply of IPEDs is also of interest to this work. Although Fincoeur, van de Ven and Mulrooney (2015) note that existing literature has somewhat neglected the supply of IPEDs, a growing body of work has addressed the various aspects of the market. According to van de Ven and Mulrooney (2017), most transactions can be described as 'social supply', whereby sellers provide substances to their acquaintances, typically within the hardcore fitness community, for little financial gain (Coomber et al., 2014). However, Fincoeur et al. (2015) contend that, alongside the growing customer base, supply has become increasingly commercialised and less culturally-embedded. This has been exacerbated by the market's online growth (Hall and Antonopoulos, 2016), where substances can be purchased across the globe using online pharmacy websites and social media sites (Mackey and Nayyer, 2016; van de Ven and Koenraadt, 2017; Shukman, 2020). These various means of supply offer a vast range of IPED compounds, which, in the UK, are typically produced by underground laboratories (UGLs) (Fink et al., 2019) which rely upon global supply chains to import raw materials (Turnock, 2019). However, given the globalised nature of the trade and its reliance upon these imports, how has lockdown impacted the market? And, if users have altered their consumption habits given the closure of gyms and cancellations of competitions, what effect has that had on these suppliers? As yet, no literature has tackled these questions and therefore this article aims to fill that gap in knowledge.

## **Methodology**

This work draws upon five interviews from members of the hardcore bodybuilding community in an English Midlands city as well as immersive digital ethnographic data, collected as part of the author's PhD fieldwork. The project, which can be described as a 'connective' ethnography (Leander and McKim, 2003), was a year-long study encompassing traditional ethnographic observation, digital ethnography and semi-structured interviews. Reflecting a broader concern with immersive, in-depth criminological and sociological research (see Treadwell, 2020; Matthews, 2021), the study gained significant, original and rigorous insight through access to this hardcore fitness community, which resulted in a rich data set. Crucially, the COVID-19 pandemic, and subsequent national and regional lockdowns, occurred mid-way through data collection, giving unique insight into the sample of twenty-eight hardcore gym users and practitioners during this unprecedented moment in history. After the closure of gymnasia, follow up interviews with the most committed participants were conducted using video conferencing technology in November 2020. This period, for those for whom the myriad iterations of lockdowns have become blurred, coincided with the second national lockdown, wherein all hospitality, leisure and non-essential retailers in England were closed (BBC, 2020). The interviewees, chosen according to their elevated status in the local bodybuilding community and relative openness about their IPED consumption, ranged from twenty-one years old through to thirty-three and all competed in organised open bodybuilding contests. The most successful, Ben, was an International Federation of Bodybuilding and Fitness Pro (IFBB), whilst Sam, Dom and Ed were well-respected amateur bodybuilders and personal trainers. Finally, Jake, the youngest

of the sample, was a highly thought-of upcoming bodybuilder and semi-professional model. The interviews, which lasted between thirty minutes and an hour, encompassed the men's experiences of training during the pandemic, their views on the lockdown policy and their IPED consumption during this time period. All participants were assigned a pseudonym and any identifiable information has been redacted. Further, each signed a consent form to indicate their informed consent and were afforded the right to withdraw from the research at any time.

## Findings

### **'I am literally just trying to train but it's illegal': rule breaking and the compulsion to lift**

Given the widespread contempt for England's coronavirus restrictions within the hardcore fitness community, it is perhaps unsurprising that all five participants vehemently opposed the government's second national lockdown. During the interviews, the decision to close gymnasia was variously branded '*an absolute farce*' (Jake), '*a bit of a joke*' (Dom) and '*crazy*' (Ed) by the men, particularly given the decision to allow fast food takeaways to remain open. Jake argued:

'Eat Out to Help out was something like thirty percent of all cases and gyms were like three. McDonalds, Burger King, KFC, takeaways are all still open, manufacturers of obesity and fatness and diabetes are all still open, but the gyms where people go to relax and release, and go to get fit and healthy to take strain off the NHS are all closed.'

Alongside this, Ed stressed the importance of the gym as a means of catharsis and mitigation against mental health struggles, and the consequent impacts of their closure:

'I don't think gyms should be closed, they should be essential because I've known gyms whose members have committed suicide with lockdown because of the fact that they don't have their greatest anti-depressant, which is just going to the gym. It's so simple, they go there and they sort themselves out – it requires no government help and that's been taken away from them.'

Here, drawing upon the well of literature linking gym work to improved mental health (see Hefferon et al., 2013; Serra et al., 2017), Ed's words captured wider protestations within the community which underpin the growing calls for the reopening of the health and fitness industry. Whilst these claims are hard to dispute however, a hubris underlay the men's attitude towards the virus as they continually downplayed its severity and perceived themselves to be essentially immune, given their heightened state of fitness. This was epitomised by Ben:

NG: Do you feel vulnerable to the virus yourself?

Ben: No, not one bit. My brother works as a physio over at the hospital and very similar to me he trains every day. They tested him and found out that he had the anti-bodies for it. So he had had it and not realised. He didn't have a day off work and he didn't even miss a training session. So yeah, I don't feel vulnerable to it at all. If someone said to me "I'll give it to you right now and then you've had it and you've not got to worry about it", I'd say go for it."

Responding to this same question, Jake stated, '*I know my body's always fuelled up, my immune system's good, I train hard, so I don't feel vulnerable or threatened*'. As Ben and Jake's accounts illustrate, despite a number of reported cases of deaths and long-term health issues in otherwise young and healthy COVID-19 sufferers (Schraer, 2021), the men assumed that their worked-on bodies would ultimately protect them from the virus and therefore felt unnecessarily constrained by the lockdown. Notably absent from their accounts however, was a regard for the 'duty to the other' (Bauman, 2009) and the notion of collective sacrifice that motivated so much of the population to abide by the restrictions and protect those more vulnerable.

As a result of these interlinking justifications, each of the men opted to continue attending the gym throughout the second national lockdown. The most common strategy employed by the sample to this end was to travel across the border to Wales (which had just emerged from its own national lockdown just as England tightened restrictions). Of the five interviewees, both Ben and Jake opted for this approach, as Ben explained:

Ben: I mean with this latest one, for the last two weeks I've been driving to Wales every day to train because they came out of their lockdown as we came into ours. So I've been driving down to [retracted], it's about fifty minutes, so yeah I've been doing that basically every day to go and train. I think if the desire to train and improve is there then you'll find a way to do it.

NG: Didn't a lot of the Welsh guys come over here during their lockdown as well? So there's been like a bodybuilders' exchange programme.

Ben: Yeah [laughs] I didn't realise at the time but since we've been down there, we've been chatting away and they've said that they travelled over.

Similarly, Jake smiled wryly as he admitted:

'I am going over to Wales and training there. It's a hundred-mile round trip so I can't do it every single day, but minimum of three/four times a week I'm going over there. Speaking to the gym owners, they were doing the same, they were coming over here. [...] I think everyone's just got on the whole 'we'll go to Wales' thing. If you put a fifty-mile ring into Wales, you'd find quite a few gyms with English lads in. They're not really that fussed because we were doing it for them. Everyone was doing it. I've bought a membership for the month because I'm going to be going lots of times.'

Despite the overt illegality of crossing the border in order to train, Jake acknowledged that '[e]veryone was doing it', both within the Welsh bodybuilding community and the 'English lads'. Evident within both of these accounts is the sentiment that those with the requisite commitment to lifting will '*find a way*', elevating their desire to train above the collective health of the nation and the law itself. Therefore, such was the significance of gym work as a means of identity formation in Ben and Jake's lives, they were willing to make the '*fifty-five mile*' journey to the nearest legally open gym in order to retain their physical conditioning.

Ed, however, opted to remain in England during this period and, at great personal risk, covertly attended a bodybuilding gym in the North West (which has since been raided by police):

Ed: This lockdown I am going to a gym in [retracted] that is open. Basically, how they do it is, their doors are locked from the inside so the police can't come in. You have to wait outside and they're constantly checking cameras, and then they'll come and let you in if there are no police about. If there are police around, they won't come and get you, so that stops you from getting fined as well as them. And all the windows are blocked out as well and nobody parks in the car park so it's kind of crazy. But I am doing it so I can train, it's my only way of training properly. I made myself a promise that I want to be an IFBB Pro and at the start of this year I decided I'm gonna do whatever it takes. I didn't know it was gonna be as hard as this to stay on track, I didn't know I'd need to sneak into a gym [laughs].

NG: How did you hear about this gym?

Ed: So on social media the guy said he's going to stay open but then when I was enquiring to the guys about whether they were still open they weren't replying. Then I was ringing up and they weren't answering. So my friend actually drove down not knowing if it'd be open when he got there, and there was no cars in the carpark and it was completely blacked out. But then he just walked up to the door and they let him in. So that was a massive risk but I'm glad he took it because obviously that confirmed I was able to train. So it's not advertised, it's more of like an underground type of thing.

Going beyond Ben and Jake's illicit border crossing, Ed performed something of a covert mission in order to continue to train in a specialist bodybuilding gym in England. Although he admitted that *'I do feel a little bit like a criminal'*, he accepted the high likelihood of being caught and fined (which he eventually was in February 2021) due to this absolute commitment to becoming an IFBB Pro athlete. This *'underground'* gym operation therefore speaks to the community's compulsion to build their bodies and their single-minded focus on *'training properly'* to achieve their bodily goals.

Finally, given their occupations as high-end personal trainers, both Dom and Sam were able to *'blag it'* (Dom) by invoking the government's guidance that *'elite athletes'* and their coaches could use specialist facilities (Gov.uk, 2021). Dom explained, *'I've kind of blagged this with my boss, because I'm semi-professional/professional with the level I coach and compete at, legally he's allowed to let me use the gym. Because elite athletes who earn their living through sport can use the facilities'*. Similarly, the owner at Sam's bodybuilding gym allowed his staff to continue to train in the facilities as *'a bit of a treat'*, meaning that both of these users were spared the extreme lengths that Ben, Jake and Ed needed to go to in order to keep up their training schedules. The participants also spoke of members of the community *'bending the rules'* (Dom) by taking advantage of the government's hesitancy to close England's borders in order to fly to countries where gyms remained open, chiefly Dubai. Indeed, discussing this, Ed conceded:

*'A lot of people have been going to Dubai. There have been a number of online coaches and bodybuilders who've gone there, which is kinda crazy but it does make sense because that way they get a nice holiday in the sun, they're able to still work and the gyms are open so they can then create content and they're not*

putting themselves at risk by showing everyone that they're breaking the rules here.'

This rather staggering admission speaks not only to the UK government's ineptitude in locking down the borders during the height of the pandemic, but reflects what Yar (2012) describes as the 'will-to-representation', whereby the contemporary subject requires their actions to be validated through online dissemination, leading to the phenomena of social media influencer culture (Abidin, 2020). Therefore, the lengths these online coaches went to in order to 'create content' illustrates the centrality of digital prosumption (Yar, 2012) in their lives and the attendant harms of these online fitness practices (Smith and Raymen, 2018; Gibbs, Forthcoming). Ultimately, this further illustrates the hardcore fitness community's myopic focus upon their own corporeal development, even at the expense of the 'spirit of lockdown' (Shaw, 2020). But why, besides the auxiliary benefits of *'get[ting] a nice holiday in the sun'*, does the community feel so compelled to continue their bodywork? Whilst this is a deep-reaching question that is beyond the scope of this article (see instead Gibbs, Forthcoming), what is immediately striking is the men's loss of identity without the commodified leisure environment of the gym. Jake admitted that he *'fell apart'* during the first national lockdown without access to the gym, whilst Ben conceded that, faced with the prospect of home workouts, he would *'go for a drive around for fifteen/twenty minutes, you know sort of listen to some music and get in the right headspace for it, and then just pull up back at home and train'* as a means of replicating his pre-lockdown routine. These admissions, alongside the extreme lengths the men went to in order to further their bodywork, illustrate the fundamental role of the gym in their lives and how their selfhood is entirely bound up in these spaces of fitness.

### **'I basically treated it as a prolonged time off any chemicals': IPED consumption under lockdown**

Whilst the hardcore gym community's opposition to the government's COVID-19 restrictions has been widely reported on (see Richardson, 2020; Blackall, 2020; BBC, 2021), trainers' IPED consumption during this period remains relatively undocumented. Having been purposively sampled due to their openness regarding their extensive IPED use, the men therefore represent a glimpse into the community's drug use under lockdown. Dom, who was well-connected within the local IPED scene, first provided an overview of his contacts' consumption:

NG: Are most users off-cycle at the moment or have people tended to stay on?

Dom: completely fifty/fifty. For example, myself because I was still able to train nothing really changed for me, so I continued with my cycle and now I've come off. Out of the people that I know, some of them have stayed on because of their mental health. I personally from knowing them, I don't think they could have coped with coming off and not training, because they would have lost size obviously. But on the other hand, some of them came off completely because they just didn't see the point in running anything for the time when they weren't training.

Due to his training remaining unaffected by lockdown, Dom was able to continue his full cycle. However, for users without access to a high-quality training facility, he concluded that they either remained on-cycle due to their chemical and mental dependency upon AAS (Kanayama et al., 2009), or simply ceased consumption. Notably, during the first national lockdown, when Ben did not have access to a gym, he opted for the latter:

'I basically treated it as a prolonged time off any chemicals. It was a period of fourteen weeks or whatever where I wouldn't have necessarily been taking the time off. Normally, I'll do my cycle, my PCT, I'll do my bloodwork and get everything back to normal and then it'll be straight back onto cycle again. But there wasn't the urgency that there would be normally because the training wasn't there, the stimulus wasn't there. I knew that if I was just maintaining then I could do that through diet and the basics of training, so there wasn't really the need for it.'

Here, Ben's description of the lack of '*stimulus*' to justify his habitual use points to a more general reduction in consumption throughout the community because, in Jake's words, '*No one's going to buy steroids for a home workout*'. Following this period of abstinence, Ben completed a full cycle following the reopening of the gyms, before dropping down to a testosterone replacement therapy (TRT) dose of '*350mg of testosterone every ten days*' at the time of the interview. This was echoed by Jake who, given that his upcoming bodybuilding shows had been indefinitely postponed, stated, '*I went TRT for the [first national lockdown] because if I had just come off having been on prep then my body would have just shut down. This time I'm on TRT anyway because that's what we were going to do, then once January hits we're going onto a proper cycle*'. Again, given the unprecedented lack of events to train for, Jake took the opportunity to scale back his consumption, although his lack of natural testosterone production precluded his complete withdrawal (see Underwood et al., 2020; Dunn et al., 2021).

In terms of compounds, unsurprisingly shorter ester AAS (which are typically taken as part of the '*cutting*' phase immediately prior to a competition) were abandoned in favour of longer esters, and IPEDs like hGH and the various fat burners that the men ordinarily took were also neglected. Dom explained:

'The people who've stayed on, unless you're an idiot, will have dropped down to test retention or test therapy. Somebody smart during the lockdown period would stay on TRT rather than running a full cycle, especially if you're a young guy. And with your test retention you're going to go through about one tenth of the gear in a month than what you'd use in a full cycle anyway.'

As is evident here, with most users either ceasing their use or dropping down to a TRT dose, Dom estimated that demand would have substantially dropped within the community during lockdown. Finally, Ben emphasised the unique level of forethought demanded by the cyclical nature of IPED consumption compared to recreational drugs, and the subsequent difficulties of rolling lockdowns and cancelled contests for high-level users:

'It's not like when people are trying to sort out some cocaine or something, I need to know that my cycle and PCT are in place for that twelve-week period or

whatever, because I don't want to just be stopping midway and my body crashing because I've stopped putting test into my system.'

Therefore, hampered by the Conservative government's U-turns and repeated misdirection, Ben was conscious that improper use or the unavailability of certain PCT compounds would impact negatively upon his body. This was supported by Ed, who also chose to remain on a TRT dose of AAS during the first lockdown and was off-cycle during the interview:

'For people who haven't been as lucky [at purchasing their full cycle], I can see how it would bring up anxiety if you're mid-course and then there's uncertainty about whether you can follow all your protocols properly. I know for a fact I didn't have a plan in place when this second lockdown was announced because obviously it was quite sudden.'

As Ed's acknowledgement illustrates, despite a general reduction in variety and quantity of IPEDs, the issue of procuring a full cycle represented a great stressor to the community, given the uncertainty of the various lockdowns and users' inability to envisage the near future. This therefore represents yet another challenge during this unprecedented period.

### **Impacts on the IPED market**

Given the reduction in IPED consumption and the reduced range of products used by the community, 2020 was a turbulent year for the IPED market. Before exploring this however, it is worth providing a brief account of the participants' means of supply. Importantly, Ed, Jake and Sam sourced their IPEDs through Dom, who was something of a local name in the market. Although he did not personally profit from their purchasing (van de Ven and Mulrooney, 2017), Dom acted as the primary means of contact for these men to order their products from the same UGL. As such, their accounts refer to a specific segment of the local supply chain. Ben, on the other hand, used pharmaceutical-grade IPEDs (including AAS and hGH) sourced through a contact within the pharmaceutical industry. As such, Ben's experience of the market was markedly different to the others.

Firstly, Ed recalled the panic buying that occurred at the onset of the first national lockdown as, whilst others were stockpiling toilet roll and hand soap (Briggs et al., 2020), the hardcore fitness community were bulk buying their AAS cycles:

'People have definitely panic bought their gear at the start of lockdown. I have a friend who bought his whole course beforehand because when [March's] lockdown was announced there was talk that suppliers might struggle to get the ingredients to actually make the compounds. That made people nervous and I think some people panic bought because of that.'

This was supported by Ben who, despite sourcing his IPEDs through different channels, admitted '*pretty much at the start of [the second national lockdown] I got everything that I needed to do with my PCT because I didn't want to get caught out*'. Aware of their customers' mindset, many UGLs advertised discounts and special 'pandemic offers' during March and April 2020 (see Figure 1.) in order to bolster sales and mitigate against the market's uncertainty. As Figure 1 and 2

demonstrate, UGLs also diversified their product range to include COVID-19 related items like facemasks and licit immune system supplementation.

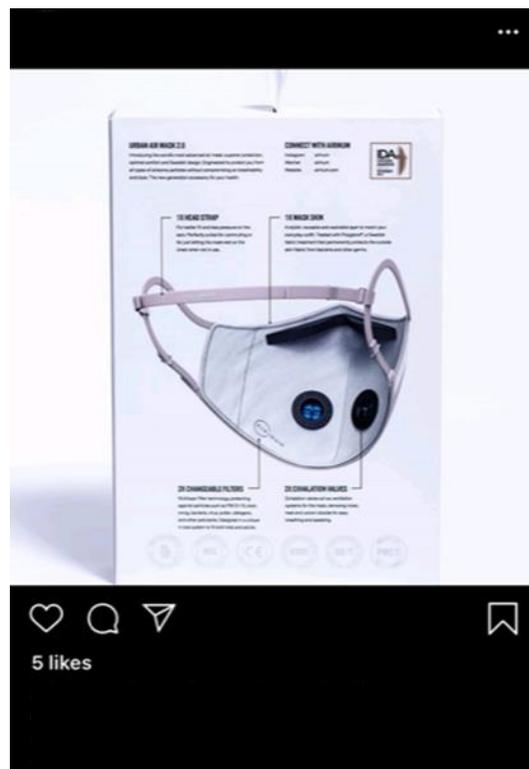


Figure 1. UGL supplier @goodtimesgear offering a one-off sale using Instagram's story feature in order to 'help out the community' at the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown (08/04/20).

Figure 2. Instagram supplier @raginroids advertising a range of pharmaceutical-grade facemasks (22/04/20).

Following this initial surge in demand however, the market appeared to wane somewhat as lockdown progressed, as Dom stated, 'speaking to a couple of people I know, they said it was dead, it had really dried up. With gyms being closed, even your regular users, they're not going to be using and even if they are, they're going to be using a lot less'. Similarly, Jake opined, 'I think that purchasing will have gone down anyway because nobody will have bought anything over lockdown, so there's nothing really coming through'. Thus, as the previous section made clear, the closure of gyms and postponement of competitions negatively impacted the previously lucrative IPED market. Compounding this,

although the sample themselves did not experience any issues in receiving their orders, Ben stated:

'I imagine that things are harder to get hold of, a lot of the stuff that's imported has probably been held up at the moment. Even ordering something from Amazon and eBay is taking like double the time to get to people, so I imagine ordering things overseas has been difficult. Saying that, I've not heard of a massive shortage of anything, but I do imagine there's been problems around getting PEDs if you're relying on UGLs.'

Here, Ben implicitly acknowledges UGL suppliers' reliance upon importing raws from countries like China (Turnock, 2019) and, given the impact of COVID-19 on exports and licit global supply chains, assumes that powder form AAS have been similarly '*held up*' alongside the billions of consumer products in transit. However, despite Ben's postulations, all five men reported that their purchasing and subsequent acquisition of IPEDs was '*as easy as it was before*' (Ed) during both lockdowns. Indeed, Ben, recounting his experience of purchasing AAS following his off-cycle period, stated '*I asked about it and picked it up later that day. For me, there was no difference*'. This encapsulates the inherent short-sightedness of panic buying more generally as, just like the ransacked supermarket shelves of the licit economy, IPED suppliers ultimately had adequate provision and it was only the perceived scarcity of products and supply chains that led to the initial consumer anxiety (Arafat et al., 2020). From these accounts, it would appear that the market remained functional during 2020, albeit with lower levels of consumer demand.

Looking forward, there was a consensus that the illicit IPED economy will '*pick back up*' (Sam) following the opening of gyms and subsequent spike in demand. Indeed, Ed described how, in his view, the market will experience a dramatic increase in custom as '*people try and gain back what they have lost*'. As such, Jake attributed the slump under lockdown as a '*plateau*', which will soon be stimulated given that, in his words, '*the demand's not going anywhere, and lads are desperate to get back in and put their size back on*'.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

This article has provided insight into a sample of five English bodybuilders' experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic, encompassing their disregard for the national lockdown(s), their altered consumption of image and performance enhancing drugs and their reading of the pandemic on the IPED market. Clearly, the hardcore fitness community, with the sanctity it places upon the gym as a site of identity formation and meaning making, has been severely affected by the closure of the sites of leisure which form the backbone of the contemporary consumption-driven economy. Combined with an underlying hubris that their enhanced physiques would protect them from the virus, the sample's compulsion to train inevitably led them to flout the lockdown rules, variously travelling across the border to Wales, attending a covert '*underground*' (Ed) gym in the North West, and manipulating their special dispensation to use their employers' training facilities. Looking deeper, whilst this behaviour is widely considered deviant by the population at large, within the hardcore fitness community, with their mantra that those most committed

to gym work will '*find a way*' to train, the men's actions are essentially hyper-conformist (Kotzé and Antonopoulos, 2019). Indeed, Jake's perception that '*Everyone was doing it*' as he discussed his regular trips into Wales, speaks to a complete acceptance that the rules need not apply to his bodybuilding peer group. Therefore, disregarding any sense of 'duty to the other' (Bauman, 2009), the sample prioritised their own corporeal development over the health of the wider population and somewhat undermined the collective effort to 'stop the spread of coronavirus' (NHS, 2021). As such, their transgressions represent a symptom of the wider (global) hardcore fitness community's anti-lockdown sentiment and distrust of governmental intervention.

Although the sample were all able to train during the time of the interviews (November 2020), they had no such avenue in the initial national lockdown (March to July 2020 (when gyms were first permitted to reopen)). As a result, their IPED consumption over 2020 as a whole was dramatically reduced, with fewer compounds used and more time spent off-cycle. Indeed, the men reported the use of longer ester AAS and a disregard for substances typically used in the cutting phase of bodybuilding show preparation. Instead, those who did remain on-cycle opted for TRT doses of testosterone in order to retain their muscle mass and avoid their bodies '*shut[ting] down*' (Jake) as a result of withdrawal. This dramatic reduction in consumption was reflected in the IPED market's decline after a period of panic-induced stimulation, wherein hardcore trainers stockpiled AAS, PCT drugs and hGH as the wider population hauled three-kilogram bags of pasta and twenty-four packs of toilet roll to the supermarket checkouts. However, despite the sample's concerns that their IPED supply chains, which mostly relied upon the importation of raw AAS powders from China, would be compromised, ultimately the market appeared to prevail in delivering their products. More than anything, the clear parallels between the illicit IPED market and the licit consumer economy under lockdown illustrate the core neoliberal logic behind each, as UGL suppliers utilise the same globalised supply chains and commerce platforms as licit businesses in order to continually stimulate their customers' desire and perpetuate capital growth (McGowan, 2016; Hall and Antonopoulos, 2016). To this end, when the global economy initiates its inevitable post-pandemic resurgence and the UK's sites of commodified leisure are able to welcome back their devoted consumers, Ed and Jake predicted that the IPED market will also continue its rapid expansion (Mullen et al., 2020). We may, perhaps, even see the popularity of IPEDs grow to unprecedented levels as '*people try and gain back what they have lost*' (Ed) and the health and fitness industry begins its perpetual cultivation of bodily dissatisfaction once again (Gibbs, Forthcoming).

The insight here into some of the hardcore fitness community's experience of the COVID-19 pandemic and their reactions to it adds richer detail to our understanding of the impacts of the 'longest year' of 2020. By holding a magnifying glass over this specific population's flouting of the lockdown rules, we are better able to add texture to the emerging picture of normalised deviance that occurred during the pandemic and how this unprecedented global event sent reverberations through many more localised communities. Testament to the immersive methodology of this study (Matthews, 2021), these wider issues have been brought to the fore in a style, it is hoped, that will long be continued. Ultimately, whilst the closure of the

gyms, the cancellation of bodybuilding and powerlifting events and the subsequent effort of retaining muscle mass has been an unprecedented challenge for community members, 2020 will most likely be remembered as an unfortunate blip in the men's unending cultivation of their physiques and, although the IPED market can be assumed to have generated far lower revenues than its previous lucrative levels (Fincoeur et al., 2015), it too will return to service the inevitable post-pandemic appetite for enhanced health and fitness.

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## Article

# The Post-Covid Future of the Environmental Crisis Industry and its Implications for Green Criminology and Zemiology

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## Abstract

Smith and Brisman (2021) have argued that our social and cultural orientation toward environmental crises is influenced by the existence of an 'Environmental Crisis Industry' (ECI hereafter) that favours environmental 'solutions' that are palatable to state corporate interests and the global consumer classes ahead of systemic change. This article, however, argues that the ECI is evolving in the context of political-economic and geopolitical changes that have emerged as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and is becoming increasingly focused on renewable energy and the shoring up supply and control over the minerals and natural resources crucial to the energy transition. These, however, are not without their own harms. While green criminology has spent a great deal of time considering the harms and consequences of failing to seriously tackle climate change, it has scarcely considered the potential harms that could emerge if the ECI decided to seriously pursue zero-carbon targets. As the ECI gets more serious, this article considers these potential harms and the implications this has for criminologists and zemiologists interested in climate change and environmental harm.



## Introduction

We write this article amid events that put beyond doubt any question that we are experiencing environmental crises on several fronts. Unprecedented wildfires in Siberia, calamitous floods in Germany and Belgium, and ‘heat domes’ ravaging the Canadian coastline dominate the environmental news. Despite unequivocal evidence from climate scientists and endless award-winning television documentaries and celebrity endorsements, little meaningful change appears to have occurred over the last several decades, and for many environmentalists we are still hurtling toward environmental disaster.

Smith and Brisman (2021) have argued that our social and cultural orientation toward environmental crises is influenced by the existence of an ‘Environmental Crisis Industry’ (ECI hereafter) that favours environmental ‘solutions’ that are palatable to state corporate interests and the global consumer classes ahead of systemic change. The ECI is loosely defined as a ‘convoluted and chaotic assemblage of media, government, and corporate interests that epitomizes a neoliberal apparatus comprising political actors, corporations and organizations, aided and abetted by charities and career academics that, in combination, close the loop on the creation and absolution of the anxiety of inaction in relation to environmental crisis (ibid. 3). Narratives are generated around environmental issues by a range of actors by providing imagery, infographics, and soundbites to create new forms of eco-anxiety that have the capacity to negatively impact our lives. The very same actors then offer up a series of responses to these crises that promise to lead us from the brink of extinction and bring an end to our anxiety. In truth, such responses target the low-hanging fruit of climate change and environmental harm. Typically, the solutions endorsed by the ECI revolve around green consumerism and small-scale community activism; easy wins of government legislation around plastic use; and a ‘technosalvation’ that assures us that new technologies will be developed to counter or reverse environmental harms.

Rendered complicit by the connections made between our consumer habits and the devastation on our screens, we vow to shop more ethically and consider buying an electric vehicle or a bamboo toothbrush. We applaud governmental decisions to tax plastic bags and relish the opportunity to mitigate the harm of our travel through carbon offset schemes. These environmentally sympathetic decisions accrue admiration from friends, colleagues and online followers, providing us with a sense of identity and assuaging our guilt and anxiety by assuring us that we are making a difference and are on the right side of history.

In reality, engagement with the ECI has done little to impact the underpinning dynamics of global capitalism or climate change. Neoliberal political economy and consumer culture has remained broadly unaffected, while engagement with green consumer markets legitimates some of the worst aspects of consumerism rather than threatening them. The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the gross insufficiency of the measures put forward by the ECI. Lockdown measures around the world brought commercial flights to a grinding halt. With stay-at-home orders and large numbers working from home, the number of car journeys reduced dramatically. Carbon

emissions from commercial airlines declined from 905 million tonnes in 2019 to 495 million tonnes 2020, a single year decrease of 45.3% (IATA, 2021). Outside of the Covid-19 pandemic, such measures would be among the most drastic and authoritarian environmental policies imaginable. Yet this still only amounted to an 8% reduction in global carbon emissions (IEA, 2020). While this is the largest annual reduction of carbon emissions on record, it is only just above the annual 7.6% reduction that the United Nations Environment Programme (2019) believes is required over the next decade to stay below the 1.5°C global temperature increase. The reason for this being that some of the usual targets of the ECI, such as air and car travel, are not among the biggest emitters. The electricity required to work from home, power our various electronic devices, and store our data generates just as much CO<sub>2</sub>, if not more. ‘Even unprecedented and draconian lockdowns with a third of the world population confined to their homes came nowhere near to being a viable decarbonization strategy’ (Schwab and Malleret, 2020: 141).

However, we cannot assume that the environmental crisis industry will, by default, continue in limiting itself to individualised feel-good solutions that assuage our anxiety and guilt while remaining entirely ineffective. The Covid-19 outbreak has opened a number of fissures in the current social and economic fabric and has exposed the fragility of our commitment to meaningful levels of behavioural change. Campaigns and legislation to reduce our use of plastic were rapidly jettisoned as supermarkets once again embraced plastic packaging and erected miles of PVC screens in bars and retail stores, while many of us who might previously have eschewed a plastic disposable coffee cup filled our shopping trolleys with throwaway PPE. Simultaneously, there appears to be a concerted shift toward technosalvation with increased public investment and government intervention in green infrastructure, renewable energy and, perhaps most importantly, a concerted effort to claw back control over the most crucial minerals for a ‘green’ energy transition. As we intend to show, the ECI’s targets are becoming loftier. The push to substantially increase the share of renewable energy and take meaningful steps toward a ‘green’ energy transition is real, and the political-economic and geopolitical transformations surrounding these targets make them more achievable (and market friendly) than they have been previously.

Whether or not these measures are *sufficient* is an entirely different argument. But they are significant. Consequently, we should avoid an infantile postmodern cynicism in which our analytical efforts are limited to a default tendency to dismiss all policy changes as meaningless rhetoric. Even if these developments are ultimately insufficient in the battle against climate change, they nevertheless raise important questions which require analytical adaptability from green criminologists and zemiologists.

In the first part of this article we will outline the reasoning behind our contentions above by examining how the Covid-19 pandemic has set in motion political-economic changes, accelerated pre-existing trends, and sharpened certain geopolitical tensions in ways that have significant consequences for the environmental crisis industry. First, we examine how the pandemic has prompted many sovereign currency issuing nation-states to abandon many of the

central tenets of neoliberalism, particularly those regarding fiscal and monetary policy (Fazi, 2020; Hochuli et. al, 2021; Jäger, and Zamora, 2021). While it is still early days, there are signs to suggest that this shift away from neoliberal economic orthodoxy is not a mere emergency measure but will be selectively sustained as governments across the world attempt to fumble their way out of the pandemic. Relatedly, as the global economy attempts to recover from the pandemic, many of capitalism's political and economic elites have suggested that the time has come for a 'Great Reset' of the global economy that will usher in a Fourth Industrial Revolution geared around digital technology, green industries, deglobalisation and the shortening of supply chains (Schwab, 2016; 2018; Schwab and Malleret, 2020). Numerous heads of state and governments are openly advocating a 'green industrial revolution' as being central to the challenge of 'building back better' from the economic shock of the Covid-19 pandemic. The term 'energy transition' is now being openly used in shareholder reports and mass media interviews by politicians and corporate energy giants. Furthermore, the pandemic revealed the fragility of the elongated, just-in-time supply chains that have been a feature of globalist neoliberalism and have left deindustrialised Western states in highly precarious positions, particularly when it comes to essential goods and resources.

This latter point is particularly pertinent as we turn our attention to the importance of a range of metals and rare earth elements (REEs) for the energy transition, the fight against climate change, and the evolving ECI. In addition to being vital to military defence technologies and the electronics industry, REEs are also essential components for solar panels, wind turbines, and batteries to store energy and power things such as electric vehicles (EVs) (Abraham, 2015; Pitron, 2020). Consequently, the success of the energy transition and the so-called 'fourth industrial revolution' largely hinges upon the establishment of stable supply chains for these vital resources. However, China has established an overwhelmingly dominant position in this market in recent decades, holding a near monopoly over the extraction, processing, and exportation of these natural resources. This dominant position significantly enhances China's geopolitical influence, with concerns around their ability to effectively hold the global supply of REEs hostage as a new geopolitical trump card bringing significant uncertainty and potential volatility to the ECI and other markets reliant on REEs (MacDonald, 2021). Given the significant financial expense and legal and environmental complexities in establishing a foothold in the market for REEs – and returning to the shift away from neoliberal economic policy – we explore how Western governments such as the UK and US are leveraging monetary and fiscal policy to invest public funds in green infrastructure and green technology industries in order to 'address shortfalls in the provision of private finance to make projects happen that would otherwise not have had the necessary support' (HM Treasury, 2021: 4).

In the second part of this article, we consider the implications of these developments for green criminology. A somewhat neglected but undeniable reality is that mining is an essential pre-requisite for the drive to achieve net zero carbon emissions and a 'green energy transition' (Abraham, 2015; Hund et. al, 2020; IEA, 2021a; Pitron, 2020; World Bank Group, 2017). Significant reductions in carbon emissions and the shift toward these 'greener' forms of energy

therefore necessitate not just the continuation of mining, but a substantial *increase* in the mining of these metals, minerals and REEs in order to meet demand. But mining is an inherently dirty business irrespective of what is being extracted, and the mining, processing, and refinement of REEs in particular is extremely energy-intensive, pollutive, and destructive to the natural environment and local populations in ways that are distributed unevenly along existing lines of global inequality (Pitron, 2020). This basic and seemingly unavoidable contradiction – that combatting climate change and achieving ‘green’ societies and energy infrastructures is necessarily built upon mining, environmental destruction, and pollution – poses some difficult political, ethical, and policy conundrums for those who critically study environmental harm and climate change.

*Where* and *who* is mining and processing these vital resources for the energy transition are also crucial questions for a variety of environmental and human rights reasons that are of significant interest to green criminology and zemiology. The major players in the mining of REEs have extremely dubious track records when it comes to human and workers’ rights, and the geographic areas in which REEs are found in high enough concentrations to be mined profitably tend to be in South America, Africa, China, and other parts of Asia where global inequalities and forms of exploitation can be exacerbated and intensified and environmental regulations have historically been lax, poorly enforced, or both. In all of these locations, illegal mining operations also make up a significant proportion of the global supply of REEs, complicating matters further in ways that should be of central importance to green criminology (Lee and Wen, 2018). Furthermore, as the ECI becomes increasingly entangled with geopolitics (Harasim, 2020; Pitron, 2020), green criminology must also broaden its gaze to consider the harms, violence, and corruption that emerges from such resource wars, geopolitical jockeying, and industrial change.

Therefore, while green criminology has invested a lot of time and energy analysing the harms that will occur through failing to tackle the climate crisis; now it seems that green criminologists must also take into consideration the potential harms involved in actively *combatting* climate change. Who and what is harmed in the process, what is the severity of these harms, what new inequalities will be created in the process, and how can they be avoided? Expressions of outrage and dismay over the failure of political and business elites to take climate change seriously and laying blame at the door of neoliberalism is no longer sufficient for a truly critical green criminology, if it ever was in the first place. The emerging picture that we paint in this article is far more complex and will require green criminology to adjust and adapt its analytical lens in accordance with events unfolding in reality.

## **The End of the End of History**

For our purposes in this article, one of the most significant outcomes of the Covid-19 pandemic was that it revealed the fundamental falsity of many central pillars of neoliberal political and economic thought (Fazi, 2020). The first and most significant pillars to fall were the interlinked ideas that there is 1) a scarcity of money; 2) that taxes fund public spending; and 3) that removing the alleged independence of central banks to control the supply of money and subordinating

monetary policy (i.e. how much money is in the economy and issued by the central bank) to fiscal policy (i.e. government spending) would lead to runaway hyper-inflation that would be reminiscent of Weimar Republic Germany in the 1920s. For decades these pillars of neoliberal economic policy have justified reduced public expenditure, the privatisation of public services, and brutal austerity cuts. To depoliticise austerity it was frequently reasserted by politicians and economic commentators that these measures were not ideological choices. While they were unpleasant and unfortunate, they were a necessary and unavoidable factual reality of the economic and fiscal position in which we found ourselves. Utilising the notion that taxes pay for public spending through the use of the now commonplace term “taxpayers’ money”, successive governments operated according to the household budget analogy (Mitchell and Fazi, 2017). Governments could not spend more than they had coming in through tax revenue, and therefore had to ‘balance the budget’ either through reducing public spending or raising taxes. Every instance of progressive or redistributive government spending was met with the same question: ‘How are you going to pay for it?’ Even the most allegedly ‘radical’ political manifestos in British political history, such as that put forward by the Corbyn-led Labour Party, adhered to the ‘fiscal credibility’ rule that any government spending must be balanced by a hike in taxes (BBC, 2016).

Proponents of Modern Monetary Theory (MMT) have been attempting to challenge this narrative for some time and cut through these ideological falsehoods to provide a more accurate description of how modern monetary systems actually work<sup>i</sup> (Kelton 2015; 2020; Mitchell and Fazi, 2017; Mitchell and Wray, 2016; and Tcherneva, 2020; Winlow and Hall, 2019). Their basic argument is that for many countries there is no scarcity of money. Nations such as the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, and many others are *sovereign currency issuers*. In simple terms, this means that these nations’ central banks – such as the Bank of England in the UK or the Federal Reserve in the United States – hold a monopoly on the legal power to issue and create their nation’s currency, and because of this power any nation that issues its own currency can never ‘run out’ of that currency. On the contrary, it has an infinite supply of its own currency. Whenever a government wants to spend the central bank simply issues the currency to enable it to do so, adding numbers to a balance account. Taxes, therefore, do not fund public spending and governments do not have to wait to ‘raise money’ in taxes before they can spend. If central banks ‘create’ currency by issuing more of it, then taxation simply ‘destroys’ money and removes it from the economy; and one of the key purposes of taxation, among other things, is to create *demand* for currency.

This is logical when one thinks about things a little closer. Given that central banks hold a monopoly on the legal creation of their currency, they have to first issue currency before individuals can use it to pay their taxes. Theoretically, therefore, a government can buy anything it wants that is for sale in that currency, and is limited only by the availability of land, materials, labour, and knowledge – in essence the productive capacity of its economy. It is only when a government exceeds this ‘internal speed limit’ of its economy at which inflation becomes a problem. But MMT proponents argue that what successive governments have done is to erroneously treat currency *issuing* governments like currency *users* – individuals, households,

business and so on – who do not have this power to create money and have to work, save, or borrow in order to find money to spend. Because sovereign currency issuers can issue the currency and never have the problem of ‘finding’ money, they do not (and should not) behave like currency users.

The response of governments from all over the world to the Covid-19 pandemic effectively vindicated the arguments of MMT. After decades of declaring that ‘there is no money’, that taxes fund public spending, and that the state has no source of money other than taxpayers’ money, governments across the world all of a sudden had vast sums of money at their disposal to spend on a variety of measures to fight the challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic; and they had this money at their disposal at precisely the moment when tax revenue was shrinking at unprecedented rates. As of May 2021, the British government spent £64 billion on the furlough scheme to cover the wages of workers whose jobs were affected by lockdown restrictions. In total, between April 2020 and April 2021, the British government spent £299 billion, the highest figure since records began in 1946. The United States similarly spent in excess of \$4.5 trillion dollars in response to the pandemic, and other governments around the world have engaged in prolonged periods of significant spending, while inflation has remained low<sup>ii</sup>, sitting at only 0.7% in the UK as of February 2021. As the executive chairman and co-founder of the World Economic Forum, Klaus Schwab, has written:

Measures that would have seemed inconceivable prior to the pandemic may well become standard around the world as governments try to prevent the economic recession from turning into a catastrophic depression [...] All these changes are altering the rules of the economic and monetary policy “game”. The artificial barrier that makes monetary and fiscal authorities independent from each other has now been dismantled, with central bankers becoming subservient to elected politicians. It is now conceivable that, in the future, government will try to wield its influences over central banks to finance major public projects, such as an infrastructure or green investment fund. (Schwab and Malleret, 2020: 67)<sup>iii</sup>

We have been here before, of course. In 2007/8, governments leveraged the power of central banks in an emergency fashion to provide government bailouts to over-exposed banks in the global financial crisis. But Schwab and Malleret’s prediction that big government spending will be a continued feature of fiscal and monetary policy, rather than a mere emergency measure, appears to be correct. Shortly after taking office, US President Joe Biden announced a \$1.9 trillion stimulus package. While the furlough schemes were effectively a trial of a universal basic income (UBI), Germany has explicitly trialled a UBI, and one is being discussed in Wales. Under this proposed trial, each adult would receive £11,106 per annum and each child would receive £6,264 per annum which would be paid to their parent or guardian.

Along more environmental lines, the British government launched the UK Infrastructure Bank (UKIB) in June 2021 with an initial financial capacity of £22 billion that is projected to rise significantly in the years to follow. The UKIB’s explicitly stated objective is to help tackle

climate change and achieve net zero targets by 2050 and a number of other ambitious targets that have been set by the British government along the way. In April 2021, the British government made a legally binding<sup>iv</sup> commitment to reduce carbon emissions by 78% by 2035 compared to 1990 levels (equivalent to a 60% reduction on today's levels); a world-leading target that is actually in keeping with the Climate Change Committee's recommendations for the sixth carbon budget. During the pandemic, they also announced that a ban on the sale of petrol and diesel cars would come into effect in 2030 – ten years earlier than the original ban which was set to take effect in 2040 – a law which would require the automotive industry to significantly accelerate electric vehicle production in the coming years. The UKIB intends to contribute to meeting these goals by allocating £12 billion for cornerstone investment, loans, and equity for green infrastructure projects, in addition to offering up to £10 billion in guarantees for high-risk projects in an effort to try and 'crowd-in' private finance and kick-start new sectors in green technology and infrastructure<sup>v</sup>. Underpinning the rationale behind the UKIB is a recognition that while "much of [UK] infrastructure is financed, built, operated and maintained by the private sector...the private sector cannot always shoulder the burden alone" (HM Treasury, 2021: 2). While there are "significant pools of private finance" to invest in green infrastructure projects, "there can be a mismatch between market appetite and the risk profile of projects" (ibid, 8). Infrastructure projects are notoriously susceptible to market failure and under-investment due to the long-term nature of such projects and the complexities involved. On its own, the private sector simply won't take the risks at a meaningful scale. The purpose of the UKIB, therefore, is to "address shortfalls in the provision of private finance to make projects happen that would otherwise not have had the necessary support" and, "[a]cting as a cornerstone investor, it will leverage private sector finance into underdeveloped or challenging markets" (ibid, 4).

Similarly in the US, the federally funded International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) has invested \$25 million in the UK-based mining investment firm TechMet (Sanderson, 2020), who invest in mining projects for metals and rare earth elements that are key to the energy transition and now count the US government as its biggest investor. The US have also awarded \$30.4 million to Australia's Lynas Rare Earths Ltd. – the largest rare earths mining and processing company outside of China – to build a Texas-based facility for the processing of rare earth elements that are indispensable resources for the transition toward low-carbon or 'renewable' energy sources. This state of affairs is almost a reversal of traditional neoliberal public-private partnerships – such as private finance initiatives (PFI) in the UK – where private companies handled the initial costs of a project to alleviate government spending, and then leased the project to the government in return for a profitable repayment at a later date. Through subordinating monetary to fiscal policy, governments (via central banks) now appear to be taking on the role of financiers – a friendly bank manager for the Environmental Crisis Industry.

Such actions are consistent with calls from numerous political and economic elites to take the opportunity provided by the Covid-19 pandemic to institute a 'Great Reset' of the global economy, and usher in a fourth industrial revolution that centres around a 'green industrial revolution'. Klaus Schwab, the founder and executive chairman of the World Economic Forum

(WEF), has openly denounced ‘neoliberalist ideology’ by name as thoroughly inadequate for addressing our current crisis and has talked of the necessity to radically ‘reimagine capitalism’ to respond to both Covid-19 and climate change (Schwab, 2020). For such a figure to publicly write such words was almost unthinkable not long ago, and he has advocated aggressive interventionist economic policy from nation states, central banks, and the likes of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to set capitalism in this new direction. For someone of the ‘Davos Set’ to advocate such ideas so publicly and talk of pulling key policy and public finance levers to induce such change is not something to be casually and cynically overlooked.

A key aspect of the so-called ‘Great Reset’ – which has been misunderstood and misrepresented as a Covid-19 conspiracy theory<sup>vi</sup> – has been advocacy for deglobalisation and shortening supply chains for key goods, materials, and resources. Long and intricate supply chains have been a feature of globalist neoliberalism, providing access to the cheapest sources of labour, loose regulations, and optimising cost and efficiency to provide low prices whilst maintaining high profits. The Covid-19 pandemic exposed the fragility of long globalised supply chains and the vulnerability of deindustrialised nations that are heavily reliant on foreign nations for key resources. Surveying the emerging post-pandemic landscape, Schwab and Malleret are quite emphatic in their verdict that greater economic protectionism and shortened and more resilient supply chains will be a feature in the future:

The pandemic has placed the last nail in the coffin of the principle that companies should optimise supply chains based on individual component costs and depending on a single supply source for critical minerals. In the post-pandemic era, it is “end-to-end value optimisation”, an idea that includes both resilience and efficiency alongside cost, that will prevail... “just-in-case” will eventually replace “just-in-time”.

[...] Simplification is therefore the antidote, which should in turn generate more resilience...companies dependent upon complex just-in-time supply chains can no longer take it for granted that tariff commitments enshrined by the WTO will protect them from a sudden surge in protectionism somewhere. As a result, they will be forced to prepare accordingly by reducing or localizing their supply chains (Schwab and Malleret, 2020: 180-181)

This call for deglobalisation and greater economic protectionism is undoubtedly being reflected in the environmental crisis industry. There has been a concerted effort to ramp up domestic manufacturing and reshore certain industries in order to establish secure supply chains for resources that are vital to the energy transition and the electric vehicles market, in addition to military defence and electronic goods. Some examples of this trend have already been listed above, but there are numerous additional examples worthy of mention. Just recently, the British government invested £100 million in the construction of a Nissan factory in Sunderland dedicated to the manufacturing of electric car batteries. Pensana Ltd., a company who mine and source rare earth elements for magnets that are crucial for wind turbines and electric vehicles, have recently commenced construction of a rare earths separation facility at Saltend Chemicals

Plant, located at a freeport on Humberside. This facility will process a range of REEs, including neodymium and praseodymium – two of the most important REEs for magnets in wind turbines – that it will source from the new Longonjo mine in Angola, which is set to be the first major rare earths mine in over a decade. However, the Saltend freeport facility will also, according to Pensana’s announcement, serve as an ‘attractive alternative to mining houses who may otherwise be limited to selling their products to China [for processing], having designed the facility to be easily adapted to cater for a range of rare earth feedstocks’<sup>vii</sup>. In 2020 in Cornwall, UK, a project publicly funded by UKRI’s InnovateUK, discovered ‘globally significant’ levels of lithium – a crucial metal for energy storage batteries – and in January 2021 announced the first domestic production of battery-grade lithium carbonate from UK sources (BBC, 2020; Wardell Armstrong, 2021). The United States are also trying to revive rare earth mining, of which they were a global leader up until the 1980s when China began to exercise global dominance (Abraham, 2015), with MP Materials resuming operations at the Mountain Pass mine in California (Reuters, 2021).

The list of examples could go on for quite some time and have been limited for the purposes of space. But it is no coincidence that all of the examples listed above refer to securing the supply chain for rare earth elements and other key metals or industries reliant upon such resources (such as EVs). As the energy transition and market for electric vehicles gather pace, demand for such resources is expected to spike rapidly. The International Energy Association (IEA, 2021a) has estimated that reaching the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement would require a quadrupling of mineral requirements by 2040, with demand for Lithium being 40 times higher than present-day demand; demand for Cobalt being between 20-25 times higher; and demand for rare earth elements being seven times higher than present-day demand<sup>viii</sup>. There are significant concerns that a sharp increase in demand would overwhelm current levels of supply (Ballinger et. al, 2020).

These concerns are amplified by the fact that at present, there is a high geographic concentration of the mining and processing of many of these minerals, with global supply for certain minerals overwhelmingly reliant on one nation, and in some cases even one mine (Abraham, 2015). In 2020, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) were responsible for 67.8% of global cobalt production, while China was responsible for 58% of global production of REEs (US Geological Survey, 2021). When it comes to the processing of REEs, China holds an even more dominant position, responsible for the separation and refining of 90% of REEs (IEA, 2021a). China has a history of using its REE hegemony quite aggressively as a leveraging chip in international trade agreements, geopolitical relations, and international conflicts (Alves Dias et. al, 2020). To provide just one example, in response to an incident regarding a long-running territorial dispute with Japan, China imposed an informal ban on the export of rare earth elements to Japan in September 2010. All thirty-two of Chinese REE suppliers stopped trading on the same day, refusing to fill Japanese companies’ orders for REEs which are a vital resource for Japan’s high-tech economy. As a consequence, prices for REEs spiked as much as 2000% over the following eighteen months, revealing the volatility of a market that is so heavily

reliant on one nation for resources (Abraham, 2015). In recent years, China have also implemented production and export quotas in an effort to drive up prices (Lee and Wen, 2018).

This is now a key and openly admitted concern for Western nations – particularly amidst growing tensions between China and US – prompting US President Biden to make an executive order for a 100-day review of critical supply chains with a particular emphasis on metals and minerals crucial for combatting climate change and clean energy transitions (The White House, 2021). The review heavily recommended ‘onshoring’, ‘nearshoring’, or ‘friendshoring’ critical supply chains, and ‘pursuing measures such as loans and other financial incentives to encourage domestic manufacturing as well as efforts to work with like-minded allies and partners abroad’ (ibid). As these metals and minerals become a new geopolitical trump card, it is quite clear that the environmental crisis industry will become intimately entangled with geopolitical battles (Pitron, 2020), creating its own dangers and forms of violence that have been a feature of geopolitical battles over other global resources. As the likes of Abraham (2015) and Kiggins (2015) have argued, the age of metals and rare earth elements is not just imminent but has already arrived.

Big government spending, large deficits, deglobalisation and economic protectionism. These are all significant departures from neoliberal orthodoxy. As numerous commentators have observed, neoliberalism has always relied upon strong government despite frequent mischaracterisations that neoliberalism is about weak government and a retraction of state power (Davies, 2017; Harvey, 2005). But as Slobodian (2018) points out, neoliberalism has required strong states and supranational organisations to achieve the separation of *imperium* – the realm of bounded territorial nation-states and their sovereign power – and *dominium* – the realm of property, money, resources and so on. The purpose of the neoliberal state was to ensure that the latter was as autonomous from the former as possible, protecting private property, free markets, free trade and preventing the supposedly dark and backwards forces of economic sovereignty and protectionism. Therefore, whatever it is we are witnessing it is not the neoliberalism we have known for the past several decades. Nor does this form of monetary, fiscal, and economic policy interventionism constitute a shift toward state capitalism or progressive socialism, either. The measures taken remain highly individualistic and pro-business, with Jäger and Zamora (2020; 2021) borrowing from Sloman (2019) to describe this as the emergence of a cash ‘transfer state’.

Aspects of neoliberal thought will undoubtedly remain, and big government spending will be highly selective, with certain areas likely to remain severely under-funded. There has also been recent pushback within the Conservative Party in the UK over enhanced public expenditure on green infrastructure, with certain MPs and Ministers reverting to neoliberal discourse over fiscal policy by expressing concern that working class communities will have to ‘foot the bill’ of such spending (Malnick and Gatten, 2021)<sup>x</sup>. It remains to be seen whether or not this constitutes a legitimate attempt to put the MMT genie back in the bottle, or whether this is just standard political theatre to try and diminish the extent of the U-turn on fiscal and monetary policy that has taken place over the past 18 months. Overall, there is not a great deal of ideological coherence to be detected. This much is evidenced by big government spending and pushes for the

deglobalisation of supply chains co-existing alongside the use of freeports, which have traditionally reeked of neoliberal free-market ideology. Such freeports are extra-legal economic zones that, while sitting within a nation's borders, legally exist outside its borders in terms of taxes, and in other nations have seen relaxed workers' rights and environmental regulations which raise crucial questions for green criminology interested in green industry taking place in these freeports. This smorgasbord of policies is indicative of a post-neoliberal interregnum (Streeck, 2016) as governments stumble out of the Covid-19 pandemic, described by Hochuli et. al (2021) as 'the end of the end of history' which began in earnest in 2016 and has been confirmed in 2020-21 through the coronavirus pandemic. It is roughly analogous to what Wainwright and Mann (2018) have previously described as 'Climate Leviathan', one of the four potential political responses to climate change they envisage. Under Climate Leviathan, 'capitalism is treated not as a question but as the solution to climate change' (ibid. 31), viewing the energy transition as an economic opportunity for climate profiteering, and draws upon concentrated political power, economic sovereignty, and novel state financial tools to initiate market change.

The issue of climate change is one lathered in an array of powerful emotions, drives, and affective states. Fear, guilt, anxiety, lack, self-loathing, narcissism, enjoyment, desire, ambition, hope, and loss. Historically, this has been the libidinal engine room of the environmental crisis industry. It is the same libidinal engine room as consumerism, of which the ECI has been an offshoot (Hall et. al, 2008; McGowan, 2013; 2016). But as we have attempted to demonstrate in this section, the engine room of the ECI is transforming, becoming oriented more around metals, rare earth elements, mining, supply chains, central banks, economic sovereignty, energy transitions, and geopolitical competition. The question for green criminologists and zemiologists is the harms and dangers that emerge from the ECI moving beyond the long-hanging fruit of 'ethical consumerism'. What new harms will it generate or relocate? What existing inequalities will be deepened and what new ones will be created? Who is going to be affected? And lastly, how does green criminology and zemiology respond to this?

### **The Dirty Underbelly of the 'Green' Energy**

'[A]ll green technology begins prosaically as a gash in the Earth's crust. This new demand on the planet replaces our dependence on oil with an addiction to rare metals' (Pitron, 2020: 45). This is the warning of journalist Guillaume Pitron in his book *The Rare Metals War*. While it is fair to say that green criminology overall has shared Pitron's justifiable anti-mining position (see for example Bedford et. al, 2020; Carrington et. al, 2011; McClanahan, 2020; Davies et. al, 2019; White, 2013), it is an undeniable truth recognised by academics, political leaders, supranational organisations, and the energy industry alike that an increase in mining is integral to tackling climate change, achieving net zero and eventually moving toward zero carbon emissions (Abraham, 2015; Alves Dias et. al, 2020; Hund et. al, 2020; IEA, 2021a; The White House, 2021; World Bank Group, 2017). We have already alluded to the reasons for this above, with a discussion of the importance of certain rare earth elements to wind energy technologies and other metals such as lithium and cobalt to batteries and energy storage. But there are many

others. Silicon, cadmium, gallium, germanium, indium, selenium, tellurium, and nickel are all vital for the photovoltaic cells (PV) in solar panels. In 2020 renewable energy made up 29% of global electricity generation and is set to increase by another 8% in 2021, the largest year-on-year increase since the 1970s (IEA, 2021b). Given that solar PV and wind are set to make up two-thirds of renewable energy use, significant reductions in carbon emissions requires a substantial increase in the mining of these minerals.

Here we are only referring to the more exotic specialty minerals, whose almost magical properties have significantly advanced renewable energy technologies. But these technologies also rely on huge quantities of base metals such as iron, copper, and aluminium. Vidal et. al (2013: 895) observed that as of 2013, demand for base metals was increasing by 5% annually, and that increasing the contribution of renewable energy to 25,000 terra-watt hours (TWh) by 2050 would require metal production in the next forty years to match the cumulative production of metals throughout the entire history of humanity. It should be noted that the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA, 2019) project that to meet global climate goals, the share of renewables would have to rise to 86% by 2050, amounting to roughly 47,000 TWh compared to the 7,000 TWh in 2019. All of this raises a number of issues for green criminology and zemiology.

For starters, as green criminologists have been at pains to stress, mining is an inherently dirty and destructive business irrespective of what is being extracted, and it is particularly the case for rare earth elements. While abundant, their concentration in the earth's crust is extremely minute, requiring a painstaking process of refinement to separate rare earths from the rock or the soil which usually relies on two methods, both of which use a number of chemical processes. One method is to remove the topsoil and move it to a 'leaching pond' where a wide range of chemicals, such as sulphuric and nitric acid, are used to separate the rare earths. Another method involves drilling into the ground and inserting pipes and hoses which pump chemicals in to flush out the earth. The mixture is pumped into leaching ponds for separation just as they are through topsoil removal. The toxic and hazardous chemicals used in both of these processes can cause erosion, overflow, leach into groundwater and create air pollution (Langkau and Erdmann, 2018; Lee and Wen, 2018).

In China, the major supplier of rare earths globally, pollution levels from rare earth mining are high. At Baotou, Inner Mongolia, the site of one of the largest rare earth mines in the world, lies the Weikuang Dam, an artificial lake where black toxic effluent from rare earth mining and separation processes is disposed. Lacking a proper lining, the contents of the Weikuang Dam seep into the groundwater, and occasionally pollute the Yellow River which lies just 10 kilometres away (China Water Risk, 2016). Other leaching ponds have been known to overflow during heavy rain periods. Nearby local populations have felt the effects, with some communities being dubbed as 'cancer villages' due to the high levels of cancer and other physical ailments caused by pollution from the REEs industry (Maughan, 2015; Pitron, 2020). Crops and livestock die in these conditions, with many residents being relocated. Rare earth deposits often contain radioactive elements such as uranium and thorium as well, adding radioactive waste into the list of pollutants from rare earth mining and processing (Zhu et. al, 2015). In Malaysia, a new

rare earths plant run by Lynas was given the go-ahead by government despite significant opposition from local residents over fears around a disproportionate number of birth defects and leukaemia cases in the town of Bukit Merah, the site of another rare earth refinement facility (Looi, 2018).

None of this is to mention the fact that, at present, many of the facilities that are producing essential components for renewable energy technologies are carbon intensive. The mines themselves have a serious impact on the natural landscape and local eco-systems and they also use extraordinary quantities of water. To process one ton of rare earths requires 200 cubic metres of water (or 200,000 litres). Moreover, the most significant global deposits of the vital minerals for the energy transition are typically found in some of the more impoverished parts of Africa, South America, and Asia. It has become customary to speak of the ‘slow violence’ or ‘systemic violence’ of climate change (Nixon, 2011), which has generated harm, displacement and exploitation of the world’s environmental poor as global powers have sought control over fossil fuels and other natural resources (Briggs, 2020). But there is equally a ‘slow violence’ to the energy transition, one that is once again being borne by the rural populations and working class of the far east and the global south along existing and predictable patterns of global inequality. Quite simply, the fact that combatting climate change is necessarily built on mining, environmental destruction and pollution is a fundamental and urgent tension for green criminology, one that has yet to be addressed in the criminological and zemiological literature. Notions of ‘eco-justice’ (White, 2013) need to be extended to cover issues of workers’ rights for those operating within these parts of the green industry’s supply chain; particularly as efforts to reshore the processing of these minerals in Western nations is, in some cases, taking place in freeports (such as the plant in the Humber freeport) that historically have had relaxed environmental regulations and workers’ rights and have been an express concern of parliamentary committees<sup>x</sup>.

A related question for green criminology is how renewable are renewable energies? We think of wind and solar energy as ‘renewable’ energy sources because we cannot ‘run out’ of wind or sunshine to generate power. However, the name is misleading. The technologies that convert these renewable energy sources into power rely on natural resources which are not renewable whatsoever. Like most natural resources, they exist in finite quantities in the earth’s crust. The initial scaling up of renewable energy sources will make a significant dent in current global reserves, and as wind turbines and solar panels require replacing as they come to the end of their lifespan (between 20-25 years and 25-40 years respectively, depending on the quality), materials will have to be recycled or new materials will have to be extracted. Currently, recycling of REEs is extremely low, verging on non-existent (US Geological Survey, 2021: 132). This is largely due to the fact that they are not used in their pure form in green technologies, with manufacturers preferring alloys which combine the properties of various elements, making the recycling of rare earths time-consuming, costly, and energy intensive.

It is difficult to provide any reasonable estimates of when we are likely to reach a critical juncture with regards to depleting mineral reserves for green technologies, given that the quantity

of known reserves changes as we discover new significant reserves of various minerals, thereby altering the reserves to production ratio and the reserves depletion rate. However, Jowitt et. al (2020) have argued that while some estimates that suggest certain metals reserves will be exhausted within the next 50 years are misguided, there are nevertheless a number of economic, environmental, socio-political, and governance factors that place the supply of a number of metals and minerals at risk, potentially contributing to future resource conflicts. Over a decade ago, Parenti (2011) wrote of the small-scale inter-tribal resource wars and skirmishes being fought in parts of East Africa, witnessing neighbouring tribes kill one another over water, patches of fertile land, and cattle raids for livestock, all of which are dwindling as a result of climate change. As we alluded to earlier, resource conflicts in the future are likely to be far bigger and more nakedly geopolitical in nature, fought between nations rather than tribes. Wainwright and Mann (2018: 151) have written that this is ‘one of the most worrisome aspects’ of their analysis:

If the principal change wrought by climate change is the adaptation of the political, the greatest source of uncertainty in its adaptation lies in the complex geopolitical relations between the United States and China. We could see a world war between two spheres of influence, leading to a collapse in the world system, or the consolidation of Climate Leviathan through collaboration between the United States and China, or a US-centric Leviathan (ibid.)

Lastly, a more traditional criminological issue in this area is that of illegal mining and illegal employment practices. Returning to REEs for a moment, small scale illegal mining operations and artisanal rare earth mining remain a significant issue in China, despite efforts from the Chinese government to crack down on such operations. According to Wübekke (2015), this can be traced back to the 1980s, when the Chinese government welcomed small private miners and weak regulation to try and ramp up extraction and establish their hegemonic position in the global market. However, Lee and Wen (2018) estimate that in 2010, illegal miners still contributed around 40,000 tonnes of rare earth elements to global supply, rising to approximately 45,000 tonnes in 2016, with much of this being sold overseas due to the imposition of production and export quotas in China. Naturally, illegal mining operations are typically among the most environmentally hazardous as well (Langkau and Erdmann, 2018). As global demand rises and the Chinese government continues with production and export quotas in order to drive up prices and slow resource depletion, it is not unreasonable to speculate that there are opportunities for these illegally mined resources to make their way into the global supply chains. Shifting our attention to cobalt, a key component in lithium-ion batteries, there are already well-documented concerns around artisanal mining and the use of child labour in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The majority of the world’s supply of cobalt comes from the DRC, and Amnesty International’s (2016) report showed that 20% of this comes from artisanal mines in which approximately 40,000 children labour for long hours in hazardous conditions for miniscule pay, often exposed to violence, sexual exploitation and drug abuse. The report details how the cobalt mined by these children is making it into the supply chain for some of the world’s largest electronics and automotive companies. Understanding the dynamics of the

illicit market for metals, rare earth elements, and other minerals crucial for the energy transition, how these illicit minerals make it into the supply chain, and the role of organised crime groups, corporations, and corruption is a potentially rich field of empirical and theoretical study for green criminology (Zabyelina and van Uhm, 2020).

Dupuy (2014) observes that sacrifice always entails an original violence which, put in service of the Good, is transformed into the Good itself. The innocent child or animal is sacrificed before the Gods in a sacred ritual in order to stave off their wrath or further disaster, and thereby becomes sacralised. We should be aware of the potential emergence of a ‘sacrificial environmentalism’, in which a zero-carbon fetishism trumps ‘lesser’ social and environmental harms to communities and eco-systems, which come to be seen as unfortunate but necessary forms of collateral damage that are to be systematically disavowed from collective consciousness. It appears that the energy transition and global climate security will be built on extracting wealth from globally poorer nations and exploiting both their natural resources and working class in potentially harmful ways. Will these be the sacrificial children of the energy transition and the fight against climate change? As we have attempted to demonstrate in this article, there is already a geopolitical race underway for control over the resources for the energy transition which could be construed as a form of ‘green imperialism’; and green imperialism could well beget the proliferation of sacrificial environmentalism or *vice versa*. This creates serious tensions for the political left and their atomised advocacy for various causes and marginalised groups. Will it be sustainable to champion environmentalism and the energy transition while also claiming that black lives matter? Similarly, is it possible to champion the pursuit of carbon neutral policies while advocating for the health of ocean environments, given the destructive impact of deep-sea mining for minerals crucial to the energy transition? The ramifications are numerous, and we are certain that we have not considered all of them here. The purpose of this article, therefore, has been to urge green criminologists and zemiologists to take the baton and start asking these important questions that have previously been absent from the literature.

### **Closing Remarks<sup>xi</sup>**

The prevailing assumption among many leading thinkers and commentators on climate change seems to have been that capitalism is fundamentally incapable of tackling climate change (see, for example, Klein, 2014; Monbiot, 2016; 2019). With good reason, such thinkers have argued that the market simply would not abandon its short-termism and drive to accumulation of its own volition; and that the only way to resolve the deadlock between capitalism and climate change would be through the formation of organic global climate justice movements – such as Naomi Klein’s (2014) aspirational vision of ‘Blockadia’ – that would ‘overturn fossil fuels and capitalist political economy in the name of a new relationship to community and the environment’ (Wainwright and Mann, 2018). The Covid-19 pandemic, however, was something that few people saw coming (see Malm, 2020 for an exception). Even fewer people could predict how long it would last, how it would affect the global economy, and how governments would respond; and absolutely nobody was going to factor a global pandemic into their analyses. But in the wake of this pandemic and the various processes we have explored in this article, we can no

longer dismiss with incredulity the idea that capitalism and capitalist nation-states are willing to and potentially capable of seriously addressing climate change. Even prior to the pandemic, respected anti-capitalist commentators did not rule out the possibility that capitalism could address carbon emissions and climate change (Parenti, 2011; Wainwright and Mann, 2018).

Let us be clear. We are not for one moment acting as capitalist apologists, cheerleading the market as our climate saviour, or suggesting that a ‘Great Reset’ or ‘fourth industrial revolution’ will be benign and that capitalists, corporations, and governments will have all of a sudden transformed into environmentalist humanitarians. Capitalists and professional politicians are first and foremost pragmatists and any changes that occur will undoubtedly remain driven by the profit motive, with the resultant ineffectiveness, cronyism and corruption that characterised parts of the UK response to the coronavirus. Nor are we suggesting that the changes being made are sufficient or happening fast enough, or that fossil fuels are being outright abandoned by political and economic elites. We are simply arguing that the political-economic and geopolitical shifts we are witnessing is making the energy transition a far more profitable, attractive, and realistic possibility than it has ever been previously in late-capitalism.

While much stands to be lost by global elites in the fight against climate change, there is also plenty to be gained. The environmental crisis is an existential one. Wainwright and Mann (2018) correctly characterise the looming environmental crisis as a Leviathan. It is the return of a monstrous and absolute authority in the proper sense of the term, ready to exert its force over us and expose our frailties in the face of its indiscriminate power. Our origin myths and legends are littered with stories of heroes who triumphed over beasts that threatened the security of the tribe or the village—Perseus over the Gorgon, Theseus over the Minotaur, St. George over the Dragon, David over Goliath (Ehrenreich, 1997). In more recent times, political and military leaders who defeated mortal enemies have been elevated to the status of Hero. They are physically and culturally etched into eternity with statues, monuments, and celebratory Hollywood biopics. Scientists who have provided cures or medical solutions to fatal diseases are canonised as academic departments, awards and fellowships bear their names. These individuals do not experience the symbolic death that awaits most of us after a few generations, fading from the collective memory (Becker, 1973). Their names echo throughout history. For those who promise us salvation from climate change, who tell us that we can cheat death and tame the threat of climate catastrophe, similar prestige and accolades await—not to mention unimaginable wealth.

The likes of Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, and Mark Zuckerberg amassed unprecedented wealth as a result of the third industrial revolution in the digital economy—leaving a number of zemiological questions in their wake that are currently dominating academic journals, news media, and mainstream culture alike. Under the right political and economic conditions, there is significant wealth and power to be accumulated in seriously tackling the climate crisis; and there is growing evidence that is compelling enough to suggest that political and economic elites are serious about creating the conditions to incentivise entrepreneurs and businesses to set about the task. Whether capitalism and its elites are capable of doing so in a

humane way that does not cause other environmental issues is an entirely different question, one that it is up to green criminology to answer.

Therefore, in considering the energy transition, we need to ask: who and what is harmed in the process, what is the severity of these harms, what new inequalities will be created in the process, what new forms of entrepreneurial and organised crime and violence will emerge, and how can they be avoided and policed? Does it still make sense to couch our critiques exclusively in terms of ‘neoliberalism’, given the substantial departures from neoliberal orthodoxy being displayed by nations the world over? More abstractly, it suggests that we must begin to ask ourselves the question: at what human, social, and environmental price are we willing to allow capitalism to halt the climate crisis? Will most of the general populace care much about the fate of faraway nations and communities who are rich in the minerals key to the energy transition, and are therefore the most likely victims of such harms and crimes? Will they care much about *who* is addressing the crisis and what new global inequalities it is creating? Or will they gladly disavow such harms if it means avoiding the worst effects of climate change and having the self-satisfaction of living in net zero cities with environmentally sustainable lifestyles, feeling like we have cheated death, outflanked the monster of climate change and saved the habitability of our planet? How do we rank order the environmental harms that emerge from the energy transition? Climate change and reducing carbon emissions is just one of many important environmental issues, and as we have attempted to demonstrate in this article, renewable energy is not necessarily as environmentally friendly as it first appears. What ethical, moral philosophical tools do we have at our disposal to answer these questions and are they equipped for the task (Raymen, 2019)? Can we avoid becoming crude consequentialists on these matters? Or will we continue as we have done for centuries and exteriorise this original violence by putting it in service of a larger good, thereby transforming this violence into the Good itself (see Dupuy, 2014; Ellis et. al, this volume; Hirschman, 1977; Raymen, 2021)? These, we argue, must become increasingly central questions for green criminology and zemiology. Questions which could become the great ethical conundrums of our time.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> In addition to the texts cited here, this video animation also provides a useful visual overview (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDL4c8fMODk&t=53s>).

<sup>ii</sup> Inflation can also be considered too low, with economists typically viewing 2% as an ideal level of inflation (Kelton, 2020). Therefore, concerns around large government deficits driving dangerous levels of inflation are often overstated. As Mitchell and Fazi (2017) observe, Japan has long maintained large government deficits without causing high levels of inflation.

<sup>iii</sup> It should be noted that this is not without concern for political and economic elites such as Schwab. On the following page to the quote cited above, he discusses his political concerns around MMT in a way that is typical of the anti-democratic tendencies of liberal globalists who have always been hostile to popular opinion (see Slobodian, 2018; Zevin, 2019). Schwab and Malleret (2020: 68) write: 'The idea [of MMT] is appealing and realizable, but it contains a major issue of social expectations and political control: once citizens realize that money can be found on a 'magic money tree', elected politicians will be under fierce and relentless public pressure to create more and more'.

<sup>iv</sup> The Climate Change Act 2008 included the provision of legally binding carbon budgets, a statutory cap on greenhouse gas emissions. The UK met the first and second carbon budgets, is

currently in the process of meeting the targets of the third carbon budget, but is not on track to meet the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> carbon budgets. The sixth carbon budget was the first to be set in line with net zero targets. While these carbon budgets are legally-binding, it is unclear how the seemingly inevitable transgression of these carbon budgets will be enforced.

<sup>v</sup> Szwarc et. al (2021) of the London School of Economics Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment have also written about the potential of the UKIB. <https://www.lse.ac.uk/granthaminstitute/news/the-new-uk-infrastructure-bank-can-drive-the-just-transition-heres-how/>

<sup>vi</sup> There have been individuals and groups who believe that the Covid-19 pandemic is not real and has been orchestrated or exaggerated in order to initiate the ‘Great Reset’. For others, any mention of the Great Reset is viewed as a far-right conspiracy theory dog whistle. Neither position is valid. The former is fanciful conspiracy theorising, imagining some hidden power pulling the strings at a global level. The latter is to dismiss the fact that elites of the political and economic mainstream have made strong public calls for a Great Reset of the global economy, and that political and economic elites have frequently sought to take advantage of unexpected crises to pursue their own goals and ends (see Klein, 2007; Mirowski, 2013). For us, the Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the fragility of neoliberal capitalism and disrupted its normal functioning to such an extent that there is now a unique opportunity for a significant political-economic shift to pursue some of the goals of the Great Reset and the so-called ‘fourth industrial revolution’. This is precisely the language that Klaus Schwab and Thierry Malleret (2020) have used in their book *Covid-19: The Great Reset*.

<sup>vii</sup> See the following link for the details of the full announcement <https://pensana.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/FINAL-Pensana-Company-Update-05.07.21.pdf>

<sup>viii</sup> While this is the lowest increase projected, it needs to be put into perspective. The properties of REEs have almost magical qualities which make them indispensable for green energy technologies. However, they are used in extremely small quantities, and while they are abundant in the earth’s crust, they are seldom found in high enough concentrations to be mined viably, and even where they are the separation and refinement process is time-consuming and resource intensive. Global production of all 17 REEs in 2020 amounted to only 240,000 metric tonnes, roughly 15,000 times less than total iron production (Pitron, 2020). Therefore, seven times increase in supply to meet growing demand is an extremely tall order.

<sup>ix</sup> The political cartoon accompanying this article actually sarcastically invokes the typical neoliberal discourse around fiscal policy. It depicts Boris Johnson as a hippie-like figure, covered in placards demanding environmental action, while a stern-looking Rishi Sunak – Chancellor of the Exchequer – is sat in front of a bank vault asking Johnson sardonically, ‘And how do you propose to pay for all this, young man?’

<sup>x</sup> See for example, the written submission from the Wildlife and Countryside link to a parliamentary committee on freeports in 2020 <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/5465/pdf/>

<sup>xi</sup> We are cognisant of the fact that this paper has not discussed nuclear power, and that to some readers this is a significant omission. According to the IAEA, it is the energy source for approximately 10% of global electricity and one third of global low-carbon electricity, making it the second largest low-carbon energy source for electricity production. Environmental activists, politicians and commentators have objected to nuclear power because it still produces greenhouse gases, produces long-lived radioactive waste, and there remains risks of nuclear meltdown, the consequences of which are catastrophic. However, there has been significant progress made around nuclear *fusion* reactors. These are substantially different from traditional

nuclear fission reactors as they utilise opposite atomic processes. Nuclear fusion does not produce carbon emissions, its radioactive waste is not long-lived, it is an abundant and replenishable source of power, and perhaps most significantly there is zero chance of reactor meltdown and explosion. Within the past year, scientists have proven that nuclear fusion reactor designs are theoretically capable of working and producing net energy gain, in which more energy is produced than consumed (Creely et. al, 2020); and in the last few months they have also been successful in producing this net energy gain, albeit in small quantities (Turrell, 2021). These are substantial leaps forward that have surprised even the scientific community, and some estimate that nuclear fusion reactors can start providing electricity to the grid by the end of this decade. Nevertheless, nuclear energy is not discussed here for two reasons. Firstly, there remain questions of its viability. Secondly, public funding institutions such as the UKIB have vowed that public money will not be given to nuclear energy projects. Thirdly, discussion of nuclear fusion was beyond the scope of this paper, in that it diverged from the primary argument which considers the *immediate* future direction of the ECI and its potential human and environmental consequences.

## Article

# A Critical Assessment of the Black Lives Matter Movement in Britain

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## Abstract

The death of George Floyd in May 2020 in the United States of America (USA) generated protests across the world, fronted by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. The BLM movement cast the killing of Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin as emblematic of the criminal justice system's (CJS) long history of racism. Whilst the core message that Black Lives Matter is indisputable, noble and a worthy rallying call, little scholarly attention has been given to the movement's underlying philosophy and aims, particularly in relation to the CJS in Britain. This article explicates Britain's BLM movement by considering four core themes – (a) critical race theory and British social science, (b) the policing of black people in Britain, (c) the omission of social class from the analyses of BLM scholars and activists in Britain and, (d) the aims of Britain's BLM movement. It suggests that the BLM movement potentially offers a flawed understanding of racism within the CJS. The paper also critiques and problematizes BLM's use of the terms 'white privilege and 'whiteness'. It closes with a critical discussion of the movement's aims, including defunding and abolishing the police, suggesting that critical engagement with both CRT and BLM should form a core part of criminological debate.



## **Introduction**

Black Lives Matter (BLM hereafter) is a decentralized political movement that protests racial injustice and discrimination against black people across the world. Founded in 2013 in the USA, the movement has gained traction as numerous incidents of black people dying during interactions with the police have been framed as indicators of systemic police racism. For instance, in 2014 an unarmed 18-year-old black man, Michael Brown, was fatally shot by law enforcement in Ferguson, Missouri. Subsequent protests and riots erupted in Ferguson, led by BLM activists, thrusting the movement headlong into the mainstream media spotlight and political life, where it has remained to various degrees across different countries including Britain (Ransby, 2018). Whilst 2020 was dominated by the global Covid-19 pandemic and the associated increase in mortalities, unemployment, and mental distress (Briggs, et al 2021), it was also a significant year for BLM and the British public's awareness of the movement. George Floyd, an African-American man who was living in Minneapolis, USA, was murdered at the hands of the police in May 2020, as officer Derek Chauvin knelt on Floyd's back and neck for nearly 10 minutes. Floyd's last words - 'I can't breathe' - then became the rhetoric utilised by both protestors and those who engaged in riots, which spread to other cities across the West such as London (Cornelius, 2020). The phrase originates from the last words of Eric Garner, an unarmed man who was killed in 2014 after being put in a chokehold by a New York Police Officer. Many black people like Javier Ambler, Manuel Ellis and Elija McClain, who have died during similar encounters with US law enforcement officers and whereby criminal proceedings to charge officers are currently underway, also spoke the same phrase prior to their death.

Indeed, growing social and media connectivity allowed the BLM movement to move quickly around the globe. However, as it did so, its central narrative remained unchanged even though very few countries globally have anything like the forms of deep-rooted racial animus that can be found in the United States of America. Nonetheless, Britain's BLM protesters voiced their discontent at the racism present in British society in its core institutions like the CJS. Britain's BLM movement largely focusses on police brutality, racial violence, and systemic racism. Regarding the desire to eradicate racism within the CJS, a core policy proposal is defunding and abolishing the police, an institution that is alleged to be systemically racist, directing more resources towards community support programmes (Joseph-Salisbury, et al 2021). Perhaps the most notable form of political action taken by Britain's BLM supporters was the toppling of former slave trader Edward Colston's statue in Bristol in June 2020.

Such methods of protest arguably intensified Britain's political, social and cultural divides. YouGov polling found that 40% of respondents believed the BLM protests had a negative impact on the UK (Nolsoe, 2020), perhaps in part because while BLM insist that racism is rising in Britain, there are numerous indicators that it has fallen significantly since the 1980s, with the majority of the British population now being perfectly fine with their child marrying someone from a different ethnic background (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018; Goodhart, 2017). Opponents have dismissed BLM as a neo-Marxist organization (Buckley, 2020), and while some have praised the movement for bringing racial prejudice to the attention of millions of people

(Szetela, 2020), ex Labour Party Prime Minister Tony Blair noted that the BLM movement's aim to 'Defund the police' "may be the Left's most damaging political slogan since 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'" (Blair, 2021). Considering the above, we believe criminology should join the conversation on BLM, since too little critical and scholarly attention has been given to BLM's underlying philosophy, and the movement's aims for the British CJS.

This has played out in a political climate characterised by division and the reductionist slandering of people who hold different worldviews as bigots, xenophobes, and racists (Telford & Wistow, 2020; Winlow, et al 2017), stifling critical discussion on the BLM movement. However, as Raymen & Kuldova (2021: 244) outline:

"Ongoing critique and reconstruction are integral to all academic disciplines. The absence of informed critique and continuous adherence to dominant theoretical models leads our disciplines to ossify and stagnate".

Criminology and sociology, for instance, are arguably more conformist than they have ever been, with both disciplines having already ossified and stagnated (Hall & Winlow, 2015). New and bold ideas are increasingly difficult to find, with most criminologists and sociologists content to reproduce old conceptual tools that may have once possessed some currency but are no longer able to adequately explain the core issues that clutter neoliberal society (Winlow, 2021). This conformity has become so ubiquitous and rigorously enforced that those who disagree with key criminological themes – like systemic racism in the British police – are forced to keep quiet or else be denounced as racists. Indeed, MacIntyre's (2011) work outlines this descent into emotivism. He highlighted how Western societies have abandoned a commitment to the telos; a consensus on what constitutes the 'good life' whereby universal morality has disappeared from our world (also see: Raymen, 2019). Debates no longer have a set of moral or ethical criteria to measure the veracity of an argument. Instead, opponents endlessly talk past one another, with debates being ethically and morally unsolvable. As emotivism indicates that all arguments and feelings are mere 'expressions of preference' (MacIntyre, 2011: 12), we often try to undermine our opponent rather than their argument. This is designed to have a silencing effect, and to force the will of one to align to that of another (MacIntyre, 2011). MacIntyre also outlines how our emotivist culture means that the force of one's belief should indicate the veracity of one's argument. Therefore, getting angry, frustrated and shouting can assist in triumphing over one's opponent. This is clear to the BLM movement, with some activists clearly believing that their account of reality is true, and the only possible explanation for disagreement is racism.

However, if we are to move forward intellectually, we must be committed to challenging core societal ideas and discerning partial truths. It is in the spirit of intellectual advancement that this article asks scholars to consider a nuanced interpretation of the British BLM movement. Therefore, this paper is structured into four core themes, including (a) critical race theory and British Social Science, (b) the policing of black people in Britain, (c) The omission of social class from the analyses of BLM scholars and activists in Britain, and (d) the aims of Britain's BLM movement. In the first section, we critically explore CRT's assertion that Britain's CJS continues

to be shaped by the transatlantic colonial project. Next, we discuss how the movement omits historical and geographical differences in the policing of black people. The article then critiques Britain's BLM movement's focus on 'white privilege' rather than social class and neoliberal political economy. The paper closes by discussing several of the BLM movement's aims regarding the CJS; particularly calls to defund and abolish the police.

## **Critical race theory and British social science**

We are not denying that structural disadvantage or racism exist in both the UK and the USA. Rather, very few criminological accounts have considered critical race theory (CRT hereafter) and its development from US legal scholarship and how this influences Britain's BLM movement's philosophy. While the BLM movement have been circumspect in being associated with CRT, the overlap between BLM, CRT and its associated activists and scholars studying the relationship between race, racism, and power in society is difficult to ignore. CRT is a perspective that was formulated within US legal studies in the 1980s (Warmington, 2020). Many CRT scholars including Richard Delgado and Alan Freeman believed the gains made by the civil rights movement were being reversed (Cole, 2009), while US legal scholar Derrick Bell criticised the illusion of social progress toward racial equality, suggesting that:

“Black people will never gain full equality in this country [USA]. Even those herculean efforts we hail as successful will produce no more than temporary —peaks of progress, short-lived victories that slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance. This is a hard-to-accept fact that all history verifies. We must acknowledge it, not as a sign of submission, but as an act of ultimate defiance”. (Bell, 1992: 12)

CRT first emerged in Britain through educational research (Cole, 2009; Parker & Gillborn, 2020), with the first international CRT seminar taking place in Britain in November 2006 at Manchester Metropolitan University. The theoretical framework has been employed in other disciplines like geography (Price, 2009), sociology (Meghji, 2021) and criminology (Ross, 2017), and since 2013 it has been central to the Centre for Research on Race and Education at the University of Birmingham, while Birmingham City University have embedded CRT in their 'Black Studies' degrees at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. Therefore, CRT is a perspective that is 'growing in popularity in Britain' (Meghji, 2021: 374). In criminology, it finds structural conditions favourable to its adoption, since it is concerned with the injustice and harms of racial subordination, prejudice, and accentuates the socially constructed nature of race (Andrews, 2018, 2021; Meghji, 2021). Methodologically, it advocates qualitative approaches, activism and analyses concerned with the intersections of race, sex, class, and critical pedagogy (Warmington, 2020). Many of those supporting the perspective have often positioned it as maligned and misinterpreted, such as claims on the University of Birmingham's website that it is “frequently attacked by detractors who over-simplify and caricature the approach”.

Since racism is systemic and exists at a fundamentally systemic level, CRT asserts that race should be the core optic to understand social inequalities in society (Cole, 2009). Essentially, it structures all social institutions as it started in the age of Empire (Dunham & Peterson, 2017; Parker & Gillborn, 2020; Warmington, 2020), meaning all forms of racial discrimination ‘are often rooted in slavery and colonialism’ (Cornelius, 2020: 15). However, racism continues to manifest through racialized rhetoric, conscious and unconscious bias, and the unnecessary and discriminatory use of police force (Andrews, 2019, 2021; Dunham & Peterson, 2017). CRT also focuses on institutional power and discourse in favour of a materialist focus on neoliberal political economy and social class, preferring to *deconstruct* what society regards as fundamental truths. As we will see, this fails to challenge neoliberalism and thus a core causative process underpinning today’s racism, potentially aiding its hegemony. Indeed, this also means that CRT focuses principally on race rather than class, utilizing terms like whiteness and white privilege. Such logic is underpinned by social constructivism, suggesting this is important in seeing how racism manifests both overtly and discreetly. Therefore, the idea that society has witnessed what Goodhart (2017) casts as a great liberalization throughout neoliberalism, whereby people are more tolerant and accepting of the BAME community, is a myth. Rather, CRT claims that racism is everywhere (Andrews 2019, 2021), and that whites often only give rights to black people as it is in their interest to do so (for an overview, see: Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). Moreover, it suggests that structural inequalities are reducible to racism and that capitalism embodies racism (for example: Andrews, 2018, 2021).

Whilst we recognise that some CRT scholars may dismiss our argument because we are three white, male academics explicating CRT ideas, we assert that our ethnic background is irrelevant. For us, this is the central thrust of anti-racism, as it was with the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, embodied through Martin Luther King’s assertion that we ought to focus on the content of one’s character and not the colour of their skin. However, CRT does the opposite. It makes skin colour central, and the value of an argument is judged by the colour of the person making it. As the recent report by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities also claimed:

“We no longer see a Britain where the system is deliberately rigged against ethnic minorities. The impediments and disparities do exist, they are varied, and ironically very few of them are directly to do with racism. Too often ‘racism’ is the catch-all explanation, and can be simply implicitly accepted rather than explicitly examined. The evidence shows that geography, family influence, socio-economic background, culture and religion have more significant impact on life chances than the existence of racism”. (Sewell, 2021: 8)

Therefore, more critical engagement with CRT, the BLM movement and race within the CJS is of fundamental importance. While racism exists in British society and the CJS, other evidence indicates that it is not the only issue that structures social relations and interactions. This is an issue we now turn to.

## The policing of black people in Britain

In Britain, civil rights laws and the criminalization of segregation began in the 1960s (Ross, 2017). The UK's Race Relations Act 1965, for instance, was the country's first legislative attempt to outlaw discrimination based on ethnicity, though it was criticized for failing to address racism in employment relations, leading to the passing of the 1968 Race Relations Act. The act was modified in 2000 to place duty upon public authorities to promote racial equality. However, as Waddington (1999) outlined, since the MacPherson inquiry in 1999 into the racially motivated murder of 18-year-old black teenager Stephen Lawrence in 1993, whereby the report found evidence of institutionalised racism in the Metropolitan Police, the routine actions of police officers have frequently been branded as racist. Waddington warned that there was a "danger that racism comes to be seen as a parochial problem for the London Metropolitan Police in particular, and the British police in general. It in no way mitigates responsibility for racism at either level to note the obvious and well-established fact that racism is endemic in policing across a broad spectrum of jurisdictions" (Waddington, 1999). However, in today's CJS the issue, we argue, is not the failure to see racism, but a universal view of racism that disregards the specifics of both history and place.

As noted, according to CRT the CJS and policing originate from the days of Empire and colonialism (for instance: Cornelius, 2020; McCoy, 2020). This is when the transatlantic slave trade was hegemonic, whereby white Europeans captured African people and sold them as slaves mainly to the USA. Therefore, the colonial project lives on in the CJS, shaping policing practices and thereby whites' 'maintainence of racial and economic supremacy' (Castle, 2020: 2). Some argue that the US police were formed to protect imperialists' quests to conquer new lands, suppressing native populations (Castle, 2020). Imperialists therefore socially constructed the category of race to justify a racialized hierarchy and slavery, thereby maintaining white supremacy which is thus intimately connected to capitalism's historical development (Andrews, 2019, 2021). Accordingly, law enforcement's role was to police this arbitrary social order (Castle, 2020), whereby black people were cast as savages and inferior (Horne, 2018). Long (2018) applied much of this CRT to the British CJS, arguing that the creation of the police force in Britain originated in the imperial age where the police served the interests of the colonisers and white property owners, while suppressing and criminalizing the 'racialized Other'.

Whilst most criminologists would not disagree that black males in Britain are disproportionately stopped and searched by the police, often face harsher punishment in the CJS, and are at higher risk of dying at the hands of police (Webster, 2012), there are potential deficiencies in CRT's explanations outlined above. Firstly, it could be argued that the creation of the British police does not match what CRT argues as shaped through colonial policing. Scholarship on policing history in Britain, focusing largely on England and Wales (for an overview, see: Reiner, 2010), highlights that the formation of the British police in the early nineteenth century can be viewed as a class instrument formed by the state to ensure the ruling class's hegemony. This is because poverty, socio-economic deprivation, slum-like conditions, and economic inequality in the Georgian era generated criminal gangs and a sizable increase in

property crime, particularly in London, engendering public anxiety and distress (see also: Emsley, 1983; Storch, 1975). Thereafter, the modern police were formed in London in 1829, and most police headquarters were situated in locales where the propertyless classes resided to monitor, regulate, and police those who were cast as rebellious and deviant (Reiner, 2010). In effect, the British police emerged to protect the financial assets of the middle and ruling classes (Emsley, 1983; Reiner, 2010; Storch, 1975).

Some scholars identify how the formation of the British police involved the construction of new police instructions, outlining how their *raison d'être* was to prevent criminal activity; secure property; and preserve public order against the criminality of the lower classes (Lentz & Chaires, 2007). Others highlight how the formation of the British police was a natural response to the social dislocation generated by the industrial revolution, which local government could not adequately deal with, in part because of the speed and scale of structural change (Emsley, 1983). Relatedly, Storch (1975) suggested that the introduction of a modern, bureaucratized professional police force was a tool of social control, and that their introduction into Northern industrialised working-class England was resisted by working class people (Storch, 1975). Accordingly, ordinary people understood the police as interlopers sent by the ruling class to discipline them and ensure a stable social order. Although this view increasingly drew criticism that police-public relations were more complex, and that encounters with the police were contingent and contradictory (for example, see: Klein, 2010), there is little evidence that the British model was, or is, colonialist (Cole, 1999; Emsley, 1983; Klein, 2010).

However, other countries' police forces including the USA's emerged from slavery and colonialism (Castle, 2020). In the USA, which became a global superpower in the nineteenth century in part because of its enormous slave labour force and abundance of cotton which was exported globally (Beckert, 2014), 'slave patrols' regularly occurred in parts of the south like Virginia to monitor those that were enslaved. Although this culminated in the Fugitive Slave Act (1850) whereby police powers were extended to also police poor whites (Castle, 2020). BLM's proponents argue that this historical legacy has remained with police forces in America, especially in the South, where police have continued to view black people as more criminal than whites and in need of more surveillance, criminalization and imprisonment (Castle, 2020). However, 'slave patrols' were absent from the formation of the police in Britain; therefore, the British police was not founded on the same principles of the USA's police force including ensuring racial division and slavery's hegemony (Webster, 2007).

It is important to note that BLM's account of racist history only goes back to the transatlantic slave trade. However, slavery dates as far back as 4000 years ago and has occurred in most societies throughout history (Davis, 2003; Webb, 2020). Most civilizations, though, believed that it was wrong to enslave an individual from one's own nation, compelling captors to venture beyond their nation's borders and enslave people from different countries. Indeed, according to Webb (2020), ancient societies regarded slavery as a convenient way to order society, with kings at the top of the social structure and slaves at the bottom. Starting in the seventh and eighth century AD, white Europeans were taken to Africa to be sold as slaves, with the Vikings

often capturing and selling them to African countries. The Ottoman Empire routinely enslaved its white European enemies, while the Barbary coast corsairs also enslaved white Europeans to sell in slave markets in the Middle East (Davis, 2003). However, the ‘European experience of slavery has been almost entirely forgotten today’ (Webb, 2020: xii).

Returning to policing, though, the above highlights an issue with CRT and Britain’s BLM movement: the Americanization of some of Britain’s criminological issues and a lack of awareness of different historical contexts. It is important to bear in mind that the development of the CJS differs across the world (see Cole, 1999). While America has historically formed its policing in a colonial model and is largely influenced by the transatlantic slave trade, with myriad racism and discrimination persisting into the post-war era (1945-1979), the UK’s post-war policing culture regarding racial perception, particularly in England and Wales, was largely shaped by the Windrush generation. As large-scale immigration occurred in post-war Britain from the British colonies for the first time (Webster, 2007), often to fill gaps in industrialised labour markets in areas like Middlesbrough (Lloyd, et al 2021), some argued that it resulted in a lack of integration often because neither the public nor police were willing ‘to accept what were regarded as alien cultures’ (Whitfield, 2006: 3). As the native population’s cultural environment significantly changed – also in part because of material advances brought by stable industrial work, the development of the welfare state and unprecedented gains in the working class’s living standards (Hall, 2012; Telford 2021) – immigrant populations experienced racism from parts of the white working classes who believed in the myth of *imagined superiority* (Winlow, et al 2017). Although immigrants often turned to the police for help with racial discrimination from the local community (Whitfield, 2006), most police officers were drawn from these communities. Therefore, they reproduced negative stereotypes of black people, including that they were more likely to commit crime, severely damaging relations between law enforcement and some local communities.

While race riots have been frequent throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the USA, racialized public disorder in Britain has been relatively infrequent. In 1919, in Cardiff, riots emerged as white dockers took exception to the presence of black African workers and their contact with white women (Scobie, 1972), while in 1958 in Notting Hill, London, race riots occurred for eight days (Fryer, 1984). Relatedly, in Middlesbrough in the 1950s, migrants arrived from Pakistan, settling in different areas of the town separate from white residents and thereby resulting in a lack of integration (Taylor, 1993). As a young white resident was fatally stabbed in August 1961 in an incident linked to the immigrant community, race riots occurred across four days, involving white residents vandalising immigrants’ local businesses and homes (Taylor, 1993). Similarly, disturbances in the inner cities in the neoliberal era, particularly in the 1980s, were aimed at immigrants from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh in the form of what instigators termed ‘Paki bashing’ (see: Treadwell and Garland, 2019).

BLM’s assertion that the CJS in Britain is a mere imported version of the USA from the age of colonialism also neglects how police practices have changed throughout Britain’s history. There are similarities between the more militarized police that emerged in Britain with the shift

to neoliberalism – particularly after Margaret Thatcher utilized the police in the 1984-1985 miners' strike to diminish the miners' solidarity, break the strike and cement political economic change (Cole, 1999) – and concerns about more militarized US police under neoliberalism (Kraska, 1997). Relatedly, as Wacquant (2009) outlined, law enforcement in both the UK and the USA have stepped into areas of permanent recession throughout neoliberalism to deal with cultural problems generated by deindustrialisation, unemployment, and the emergence of a reserve army of labour. However, historical, social, and cultural awareness from Britain's BLM movement would be useful here, particularly as they recently listed Fred West among those 'murdered by the state'. However, they may not have bestowed such sympathy had they known he was a serial killer who killed at least 12 young women between the 1960s and 1980s, eventually taking his own life in HMP Birmingham in 1995:



**Fig.1 – Tweet from BLM, the name of serial killer Fred West appears in the top left-hand corner and appears with others adapted from a list of all those who have died in prison in England and Wales. It should also be noted that West was white.**

This section has explored how the British BLM movement's view on the CJS, and policing practices is underpinned by CRT, which hinges upon a potentially problematic assumption that a colonialist, imperialist age lives on in the CJS of England and Wales. The next section turns to another potential deficiency with CRT and the BLM movement and its explanation of issues within the CJS - namely, the refusal to acknowledge the importance of social class (Cole, 2009; 2019).

## **The omission of social class from the analyses of BLM scholars and activists**

Indeed, CRT's and the BLM movement's emphasis on the imperial age living on in the CJS, and therefore that black people are victimized and criminalized to maintain the hegemony of white people, possibly neglects social class and how it shapes the subjugation of black people. Whilst BLM have endorsed the importance of gender and the LGBTQ+ community in shaping experiences of the CJS (Lindsey, 2018), they have largely neglected the structural conditions of neoliberal capitalism and social class. While there has been some discussion from BLM and its supporting movements on economics – such as the call for economic justice through restructuring the tax system, an increase in the living wage, and dwindling the power of the main banks (MB4L, 2021) – they tend to focus solely on black people rather than impoverished persons of all races. Both white and BAME groups have lost out under neoliberal capitalism through deindustrialization, the ascent of non-unionized and insecure employment and the retrenchment of the welfare state, which sometimes propels them into various forms of crime to forge a livelihood (Treadwell, et al 2013; Winlow, et al 2019). However, this *universal experience* is not considered. Instead, the issue is often framed as 'black communities', suggesting that all black people are oppressed regardless of their class and financial position (McCoy, 2020). Such an approach to tackling racial discrimination has been cast as politically exclusionary (Szetela, 2020); therefore, perhaps it is BLM and CRT that analyses 'race' and particularly the experience of being black in rather monolithic terms (Cole, 2009; 2019).

As the Sewell (2021) report highlighted, perhaps racial segregation in Britain no longer exists in any significant way, though it might be argued that social class is the main segregating feature of neoliberal Britain (Telford, 2021; Treadwell, et al 2013; Webster, 2012; Winlow, et al 2017). Many of the multi-ethnic working class's localities that were once at the forefront of postwar industrial capitalism's relative prosperity are locales of permanent recession under neoliberalism (Hall, 2012; Telford, 2021). Economically destitute and politically abandoned, these places are home to high levels of crime, particularly acquisitive crime, illicit drug dealing and problematic drug use (Ancrum & Treadwell, 2017; Hall, 2012; Webster, 2012). Some have suggested that the only viable form of stable and potentially remunerative work in these areas is involvement in criminal markets (Ancrum & Treadwell, 2017). Such a constitutive context often means that law enforcement over-police the populations of these areas, regardless of the color of their skin (Webster, 2012; Rowe, 2012); yet BLM omit these conditions from their analysis of racial discrimination within the CJS.

Placed in this context, BLM and CRT prefer to utilize the terms whiteness or privilege rather than class (Cole, 2009; 2019), highlighting that being white is a privilege in Western society since white people are awarded more structural advantages to prosper (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020; Warmington, 2019). White supremacy, therefore, is inherent in white societies including within the CJS (Warmington, 2019). However, utilising this term to describe those living in high crime zones of permanent recession bears little relation to their experiential reality of struggling to ascertain remunerative and stable work (Ancrum & Treadwell, 2017), as well as

often enduring profound mental distress like anxiety and depression. Moreover, focusing on white privilege serves to individualise social inequalities rather than focusing on neoliberal political economy and where real privilege and power lies (Zalloua, 2020) – that is, with both the nation state and the richest members of society who have now accumulated more wealth than capitalists during the brutal years of the Gilded Age (Winlow, et al 2019). Therefore, CRT and proponents of BLM are not concerned with privilege within a profoundly unequal socio-economic system, they just want individuals to have earned it. As we will see, this ensures the reproduction of neoliberal ideology (Zalloua, 2020).

Accordingly, Zalloua (2020) suggests that proponents of BLM offer a potentially futile approach to solving racism. They know that slandering white people who espouse racist language as privileged is not enough to solve racism. Yet they engage in a psychosocial act of *fetishistic disavowal*, suppressing this unpalatable knowledge from the conscious to the unconscious in part to feel morally superior. However, some have argued that to solve racism under neoliberalism a fundamental politico-economic restructuring is required (Winlow, et al 2017, 2019). Recent research demonstrated how racism in locales of permanent recession is not attached to the transatlantic slave trade and white privilege but generated through industrial job loss and the ascent of precarious employment (Winlow, et al 2017, 2019). When combined with the absence of a universal political narrative that explains the cause of the multi-ethnic working class's plight in these crime-ridden areas, people often search for somebody else to blame. Therefore, racism exists as a timeless narrative to explain their structural position. Considering this, it might be argued that a moralistic stance on racism is a politically safe position, failing to challenge the conditions that engender racist sentiments. Ultimately, we might ask:

“What sense does it make to suggest that a white man queuing at a food bank is privileged when the top 0.1% of the population are worth as much as the bottom 90%? What sense does it make to talk of ‘white people’ as if they possess shared interests, cultures, aspirations, and dispositions? What sense does it make to connect a white homeless man asleep in a shop doorway with a white super-rich investment banker? (Winlow, et al 2019: 33).

This failure to emphasise the importance of social class leads to more issues – namely, the movement's demands for the police to dispense with stop and search, end the war on gangs and defund and abolish the police. It is our contention that these policies would cause further damage to the multi-ethnic working class in Britain's most deprived locales.

### **The aims of Britain's BLM movement**

Britain's policing policy of stop and search has been highlighted by Britain's BLM activists as an example of racial discrimination and bias in the police (Joseph-Salisbury, et al 2021). In comparison with the US, where the picture is often one that regards Britain favourably, BLM scholars claim that ‘the UK is not innocent’ (Joseph-Salisbury, et al 2021: 22) as stop and search is utilized as a *racial tool* to suppress, control, and criminalize black people. Black people are more likely to be stopped and searched, accounting for 8% of deaths in police custody over a ten-year

period, despite only accounting for 3% of the British population (Afzal, 2020). These structural trends potentially indicate that Britain's BLM movement is correct to highlight the disproportionate rate at which black men face the CJS when compared to whites, a fact that seems apparent in a range of stages of the justice process (Lammy, 2017). However, as mentioned, proponents of BLM suggest that disproportionate policing practices are symptomatic of systemic racism, which engenders racist sentiments, behaviors, and outcomes (Joseph-Salisbury, et al 2021).

However, policing largely takes place in high crime, impoverished areas in big cities, involving a high number of incidents of interpersonal violence especially with a bladed implement (Ellis, 2019). Black people tend to cluster in the lower socio-economic categories and are therefore actively policed, with young black men constituting the 'available population' and are stopped and searched. In high crime neighbourhoods populated mostly by white British men and women, there is often less use of bladed implements, meaning they are less likely to be stopped and searched (Andell, 2019). Further, in large metropolitan areas stop and search is used far more than in smaller towns in rural areas. Considering this, race plays some part with BAME people more likely to be associated with factors that subject them to over-policing including being younger, more likely to be jobless and living in locales characterized by higher-than-national-average levels of poverty and crime (Webster, 2012). Therefore, black people *in certain areas* are more involved in crime than white people (Rowe, 2012). Others point to the potential role of high levels of marital breakdown in the British African community, when compared to whites, and the often-associated social problems like their children being more likely to be involved in crime and therefore stopped and searched (Webster, 2007). However, social class is a key contributing factor as localities characterized by poverty and socio-economic deprivation often possess higher levels of relationship breakdown, family friction and divorce rates (Webster, 2007).

Moreover, there are other factors that may influence police forces usage of stop and search, with a large bulk of the stops by the Metropolitan Police being at the Notting Hill Carnival (Gov, 2019). 61% of the Metropolitan Police's stop and searches in 2018 occurred in August, the same month of the carnival (Gov, 2019). The carnival celebrates black British culture in Notting Hill, London, taking place across the August bank holiday. It is attended by around two million people, though it is only policed by 13,000 officers (Kilgallon, 2020). Police officers have spoken about the high levels of gang-related violence at the carnival, as well as tensions between law enforcement and attendees (Kilgallon, 2020). Indeed, the carnival has a history of serious crime; for instance, four knife attacks and 90 arrests were made for possession of weapons at the 2016 carnival, while black people are statistically more likely to be both a victim and a prime suspect of serious violence (Gov, 2019). Therefore, it is possible that this may have influenced the use of the order and the high number of arrests rather than racial bias and discrimination. Moreover, the success of stop and search at this event suggests it may be too simplistic to abolish the practice when such a large quantity of weapons are often successfully recovered; weapons that may have been used in serious violence against racial minorities.

Relatedly, the war on gangs has been highlighted as racialized by Amnesty (2020), claiming that in 2020 there were 1,943 people classified as African/Caribbean out of 2,444 individuals on the Metropolitan Police's 'Gang Violence Matrix', a list that documents and monitors potential gang members in the nation's capital. Although criminology has been slow to address the problem of gangs on Britain's streets, their association with rising knife crime, violence and illicit drug markets means they have become too difficult to ignore (Andell, 2019). Whilst David Cameron's coalition government pledged to wage a war on gangs after the 2011 English riots (Andell, 2019), it is an agenda that has continued with ensuing governments. However, it has been criticized by Britain's BLM advocates for its criminalization of black youth culture, though some have claimed that this can be based on their interest in drill music as it is linked to violent crime (Andell, 2019).

Drill music has proliferated since 2010, particularly in London, and it is primarily associated with young black men in deprived localities where knife crime is prominent (Ilan, 2020; Kelly, et al 2020). However, it should not be viewed as directly attributable to rising knife crime. Rather, Kelly et al (2020) claim drill music should be seen by those in power as an indicator of structural issues that young people face under neoliberalism including poverty, labour market insecurities and a sense of powerlessness. Others suggest that the police's view is street illiterate and based on the assumption that young black men are violent, though this is a crude racist stereotype with the reality being more complex (Ilan, 2020). Whilst those involved in drill music often rap about selling drugs, being involved in knife crime and are hostile to the police and gang rivals (Ilan, 2020), interpreting the music as solely about violent crime omits how many of the rappers are not involved in crime and produce 'abstract artistic expression and cultural complexity' (Ilan, 2020: 1003). Moreover, as mentioned, the racialization of gangs may be geographically variegated, with gang membership in Scotland being primarily linked to young white working-class men (Harding, et al 2019). This further reinforces Webster's (2012) view that the intersection between race, crime and policing is dependent on localized situations. While the racialization of gangs may be true for London, it may not be for police forces in locales home to primarily white working-class males, providing further evidence that Britain's BLM movement fail to consider specific contextual conditions.

The most controversial aim espoused by the BLM movement is defunding and abolishing the police. Largely imported from the USA in the summer of 2020 after Floyd's murder, the notion was popularized by the American academic Alex Vitale (2017), who believes policing is rooted in imperialism, racism and is an agent of social control and oppression, particularly of black people. Essentially, he suggests reform of the police force has persistently failed and we need to question the police's role in society, though he does not draw on the abolitionist politics movement in penology and prison scholarship in the USA or Britain. Vitale avers decriminalisation, harm reduction, economic development, and community empowerment in deprived locales as alternatives to controlling crime through policing, regarding defunding as a means of stripping back increasing militarisation in the USA. Although the call for defunding the police was formulated in the USA - where, as mentioned, the CJS's development is different

to Britain – it also has proponents amongst some of Britain’s BLM/CRT practitioners (for instance: Joseph-Salisbury et al 2021) and associated groups such as the ‘4 Front Project’ who have also called for the defunding of the police in exchange for increased investment in black communities, using social services to combat criminality.

Whilst many criminologists would agree that the police are not equipped to prevent criminal activity, defunding the British police has been ongoing since the 2008 global financial crisis. The decade that followed the 2008 crash witnessed unprecedented cuts to the public sector (Winlow, et al 2017), as the police lost nearly 17% of full-time employees between 2010-2020 (Jackman, et al 2021), as well as a significant reduction in police community support officers and police forces’ overall budgets. Recent research shows that this detrimentally impacted upon serving police employees, increasing anxiety, depression, stress, workloads, and absenteeism (Jackman, et al 2021). Serious forms of crime have also increased, including lethal violence in locales of permanent recession, with cuts to the CJS being identified as a contributing factor (Ellis, 2019). The Home Office also highlighted that an increase in murder was directly linked to austerity police cuts, with black people being the most likely ethnic group to be killed (Dearden, 2020). Criminologist Elliott Currie suggests issues like these are often left out of the debates surrounding Black Lives Matter, not least the sizable volume of black men who die at the hands of other black men each year in the most impoverished cities (Currie, 2015). Considering this, it could be argued that defunding an already underfunded police force would generate further social problems in areas of permanent recession, including lethal forms of crime.

As BLM’s aims such as defunding and abolishing the police fails to challenge neoliberal capitalism, the BLM movement potentially aid its hegemony as the core political economy. It might be argued that they remain rooted to altering neoliberalism, hopeful that this will eventually engender more racial equality and justice. Despite the movement’s ‘radical’ self-image, it endorses neoliberal ideology. They are not against competition; they simply want competition to be fair. They are not against privilege; they just want privilege to be earned. They are not against a hierarchical society; they just want to remove racist barriers that are preventing talented black people from rising. And they are not against obscene wealth; they simply want black people to have a bigger share of it. As Cole (2019: 104) outlined, ‘Critical Race Theorists have no identifiable strategy to achieve social change, nor any concrete proposals for a more just future’. Moreover, their endorsement of neoliberal ideology is also reflected in calls to defund the police to fund other community initiatives (Joseph-Salisbury, et al 2021). This potentially depends upon a problematic view of macroeconomics that suggests governments are like a household in their spending. Whilst local and state USA police forces are funded by tax bases and are therefore not federally funded, a third of the funding for British police forces’ budgets comes from localized council tax, with the remaining two-thirds coming directly from the central government (Gov, 2020). Modern Monetary Theory (MMT) suggests sovereign governments – such as the UK – are not constrained in their spending since they hold the monopoly on the creation of their currency (Kelton, 2020). They are currency issuers, and consequently are profoundly different from households, individuals, or local councils and municipalities who are currency users and are

therefore incapable of creating and issuing currency. Rather than taxation being used to fund the CJS and community support programmes to tackle crime and its associated social problems, MMT indicates that the government must first spend into the economy before it takes money out through taxation, to both create demand for its currency and to prevent runaway inflation (Kelton, 2020).

Kelton (2020) provides a useful overview of how the modern monetary system operates by comparing it to the board game Monopoly, whereby the game cannot function without a currency issuer and players can accumulate monies or go bankrupt. However, the currency issuer can never go broke. It also suggests that balancing the economy is better for all individuals in society rather than balancing the deficit, since a deficit is required to put money into the economy, stimulating economic activity and growth. Therefore, it might be argued that MMT is not Conservative or Socialist; rather, it represents the economy as it stands. Countries who are not sovereign including those that have signed up to the Euro have less economic tools to utilize to solve issues of social and racial inequality within the CJS. The lack of mechanisms to address social problems has been demonstrated throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly in 2020. While many EU states asked for a joint rescue package to address the biggest drop in economic output since World War Two, sovereign states have continually shaken the magic money tree to finance vast sums of money for personal protective equipment for frontline workers like police officers, furlough schemes for workers, as well as the development of vaccines (Briggs, et al 2021). Perhaps money is not as scarce as neoliberal ideology suggests, meaning the British government potentially has the power to adequately fund the CJS and its agencies like the police to uphold the law, tackle criminality and try and protect people from the damaging impact of crime.

## **Conclusion**

Tackling racism within society and the CJS should be a core part of criminology. We welcome scholarship that adds evidence to how we conceive of structural inequalities, particularly within the CJS. However, we agree with Raymen & Kuldova's (2021) assertion that a critical social science should not exist to reproduce social orthodoxies and conform to dominant theoretical models, expunged of critique and nuance. The murder of George Floyd by the US police force in 2020 intensified social anger and was rightfully a call for action against racial injustices. Such protest should form a core part of a vibrant democracy and civil society. Whilst we believe the movement's core claim – that Black Lives Matter – is indisputable and important, this article explicated how Britain's BLM movement is not politically neutral but underpinned by CRT, problematizing its claims that the imperialist age lives on in today's society and criminal justice system(s) in Britain. The movement's homogenizing approach to tackling racial injustice means it omits context and localized histories, particularly regarding police forces in Britain who were perhaps not formed to maintain empire but to protect the ruling class's socio-economic interests against the threats posed by the lower orders (Elmsley, 1983; Reiner, 2010; Storch, 1975).

This omission of social class results in a potentially reductionist account (Cole, 2009; 2019), implying that all injustices and inequalities involving black people can be narrowed down

to racism (Andrews, 2019, 2021; Castle, 2020; Joseph-Salisbury, et al 2021). Whilst we do not deny that racism exists, we have an intellectual duty to offer more potentially comprehensive perspectives on racial inequalities; one that is attuned to the specifics of history and place. The paper also explored how the call amongst some BLM advocates to defund and abolish the police force is deeply problematic, not least as Britain's police forces have been underfunded since 2010, coinciding with a rise in lethal knife crime which reached record levels in some of Britain's locales of permanent recession (Ellis, 2019). Indeed, the BLM movement's reproduction of neoliberal ideology by not challenging structural competition, obscene wealth, and the idea that the state is fiscally constrained, means they may be inadvertently sustaining the underlying structural conditions that generate racial antagonisms in neoliberal Britain. Ultimately, we must accept that the past is gone. We must turn the page and commit to reconciliation and forgiveness. And we must enact a politics of universality. Only then can we begin to move forward.

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## Essay

# The Health-Power-Criminality Nexus in the State of Exception

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## Background

The positioning of the 'other' as a dangerous vector of disease is a long-standing trope. This has existed both in racial terms, such as the 1905 Aliens Act, and for others positioned as on the outliers of society, such as sex workers, under the Contagious Diseases Acts 1864, 1866, 1869 (Hamilton, 1978). The public health system has long been used as a system of control, alongside its self-described role as existing for the betterment of population health. Similarly, other aspects of our health system have long functioned both as a foundational part of the welfare state, and as key perpetrators of racial injustice and part of the carceral state. This is most obvious in the psychiatric system, where there continues to be a disproportionate detention of black men (Singh, 2007). Injustice, surveillance, and even mass detention, that is enacted within a health systems framework is rarely given the same critical focus as other systems of power, such as the criminal justice system – which has been highlighted by the reality that various recent reports into racial discrimination only give a brief mention to the role of healthcare systems in perpetrating various injustices (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2016). During the pandemic the healthcare system has increasingly been used as a justification for advancing a state apparatus of biopower and has experienced little resistance from the organised left.

## The State of Exception

The State of Exception is based on the state's ability to transcend the rule of law in the name of 'public good' (Agamben, 2005). In practice this has resulted in the government threatening large fines and the possibility of prison sentences for travellers arriving in the country and not complying with quarantine (BBC News, 2021). Labour's Shadow Health Secretary Jonathan Ashworth told the Commons: "Our first line of defence is surely to do everything we can to stop

[new variants] arising in the first place. That means securing our borders to isolate new variants as they come in” (Ibid). In the same article we are reminded of the moralising discourse of self-responsibilization by Conservative Health Secretary Matt Hancock who states: "People who flout these rules are putting us all at risk” (Ibid). This shifts the responsibility onto individual actors and deflects blame from the multiple failings of the state during the pandemic. It also positions the threat as coming from a foreign agent, and as such represents a strong boundary-marker of the dangerous 'other' and pollutant (Douglas, 1966).

Hudson (1997) argued that punishment can never lead to justice, and we argue that a criminal justice approach cannot medically nor ethically be used to solve a public health crisis. Indeed, there have been a raft of ethical medical debates during the crisis, including the ethical issues of the mass testing of asymptomatic people (Pollock, 2021) and the counterproductive measures of issuing Fixed Penalty Notices to people using outdoor spaces such as beaches, country parks, and sitting on benches, displacing people into less safe indoor spaces. These should be questioned and critically challenged, especially given the lack of gendered risk assessment and the hostile architectures presented to disabled people through such measures.

The ‘state of exception’ is compounded further by health exceptionalism whereby oppressive government action is considered to be benign as is perceived to be carried out to advance health and avoid mortality. This has led to a mass expansion of police power, including into fine details of all of our personal and private lives, detailing specifics such as whether it is permitted to sit on a park bench, or who an individual may invite into their home. Almost every aspect of civic society, including religious and political activity, has been criminalised. These restrictions have, as expected, been disproportionately enforced in those the state has the most control over – in particular people who are in state institutions such as prisons, care homes, mental health hospitals, and supported accommodation units (Freudenthal & Campling, 2021). Given that people in such institutions are disproportionately working class or disadvantaged in other ways, this has led to a disparity in the enforcement of the restrictions of liberty. People whose liberty may be curtailed due to other legal frameworks (e.g. the Mental Health Act or Mental Capacity Act) have been placed in isolation in mental health hospitals and care homes, using legislation that was never intended to be enacted to manage a public health risk.

### **Stay the f\*ck at home: The class politics and the erasure of risk**

The aggressive slogans telling citizens to ‘stay at home’ have created a confusing labyrinth of legal restrictions that reinforce the government’s divide and rule strategy. These strategies have failed to consider the classed and gendered implications (Boyce Kay, 2020; Preston and Firth, 2020; 2021). Nor have such tactics accounted for the violence and danger that exist within the home. Scholars such as Walklate, Richardson and Godrey (2020) have referred to this risk as the shadow pandemic (2020).

We can also see that the widening-web of governmentality (Hudson, 1997) has spread to using celebrities and Influencers as tools of state propaganda, Boyce Kay argues that “celebrity

culture has become the soft arm of law enforcement” (2020, p. 885). Indeed, a government spokesperson has admitted that Influencers from the television show Love Island were paid to make social media posts promoting Test and Trace (BBC News, 2020). The body of the working-class woman has long been a site of regulation and a construction of moral decay (Commane, 2021; Tyler, 2005) and this is influenced through the public disciplining of women influencers who ‘flout’ lockdown rules (Packer, 2021) whilst middle class males such as Professor Neil Ferguson and Matt Hancock MP are spared such punishment.

This presents an issue with the legitimacy of public health advisors and their guidance. This self-responsibilization agenda can be seen as part of a widening-web of governmentality that uses a variety of actors to regulate individuals. In *Society Must Be Defended* Foucault has a preoccupation with the schema of war that is central to his positioning of force and power-relations (Foucault, 1998, p. xviii). We must ‘fight’ the Indian variant and ‘defend our borders’, no matter the harm to vulnerable people. This military language is problematic and promotes xenophobia and racism behind the guises of saving ‘us’ from ‘them’, promoting an agenda of nationalism.

## **Covidiot**

Reicher and Drury have written that the public are adhering to the regulations despite the many hardships they are facing (Reicher & Drury, 2021). Therefore insults used in the mainstream press such as ‘Covidiot’ must be seen as part of the moralising discourse that places ‘blame’ for the pandemic at an individual level whilst erasing the failing of the government. There is also a strong classed element to the Covidiot slur. The middle classes have largely been able to stay at home and transfer their risk to the working-class workers through ‘invisible’ means such as ordering online from warehouse staff, or having food delivered by precarious staff. As Preston and Firth rightly argue, capitalism has provided the “human factories” for virus transmission (Preston and Firth, 2020, p. 2). Whilst the middle classes have been baking banana bread and saving money from long commutes and leisure activities, the working classes have had their risks increased as a *direct* result of the middle classes’ desire for comfort and convenience.

The securely employed mocking those at most financial and biological risk due to their socio-economic disadvantage is particularly cruel. An example of this has been the criticism of the longing for pubs to reopen. Hospitality has been one of the worst impacted industries, with the hospitality sector in the UK usually providing 3.2 million jobs which equals 10 percent of UK employment (UK Hospitality, 2021). Individual pub landlords, independent bar, cafe and restaurant owners, have been disproportionately harmed by the various and changing lockdown regulations. The acute stress of not knowing when, or if, they will be able to pay mounting bills, re-open, and retain staff, is a serious cause for concern for mental ill health (Khan et al, 2021). It is also important to recognise that pubs are the centre of many communities and help those who struggle with social isolation. Alcohol-related deaths in the home increased during the period of lockdowns (Limb, 2021). This illustrates why a blinkered approach to combating medical and social harms are not desirable. It is not feasible to ‘protect’ society from one specific

harm whilst exacerbating other harms. The lack of nuance in the public health approach to Covid has caused untold harms to the most marginalised in our societies.

### **Failure of the institutions of the organised left**

Many of the institutions of civic society are established to advocate for particular groups or activities yet have been unable to during the course of the pandemic. This is most striking within the institutions of the organised left, such as the Labour party, that rather than campaigning for the rights and advancing the interests of the working class, has instead wholeheartedly supported the lockdown policy programme and even advocated for stricter lockdowns. This is despite the lockdown programme representing an austerity-type policy, with the forced closure of services, that will have a disproportionate impact on working class communities (Preston and Firth, 2021).

This may reflect a disconnect between the institutions and the people that they claim to represent, which perhaps suggests that if the institutions are not benefiting, and sometimes actively harming those whose interests they purport to advance, than perhaps the institutions primarily exist to advance the interests of those people that lead them rather than those they seek to represent. The majority of party members, across all political parties including the Labour party, are in higher social classes (Audickas et al, 2019), and are therefore poorly equipped to recognise the impact that such policies might have on working class communities. Working class people, no longer fully represented in the political parties that claim to advocate for them, have therefore been locked out of the positions of influence that is awarded to those in charge of large institutions, which may have contributed to the conditions arising which has allowed for a public health response that has been detrimental to those with less influence.

### **Bio-surveillance and control**

As the pandemic has progressed, an increasingly complex system of bio-surveillance has been constructed, ranging from the primitive, such as police patrolling parks ensuring public health restrictions are adhered to, to the complex and technical, including a variety of different types of tests and tracking systems for logging test results. The prohibition against group activity has led to a significant curtailment against most of the structures of civic society – community organisations, religious communities, political activities, pubs, cafes – which means that individuals do not have the opportunity to meet one another and exist in groups together. This has led to an authoritarian societal structure, where our relationship is with the government, but not with our peers and fellow citizens. This relationship is acted out in terms of power control – the government dictates what we can and cannot do and maintains this through surveillance.

The rupture of group structures is further maintained not just by the means of meeting having been criminalised, but also through an encouragement to live in a state of paranoia, such that any individual should be considered primarily as an infection risk and therefore a threat to our life, or the lives of those around us (Douglas, 1966). The systems of control and paranoia (Harper, 2008) are further maintained by the hostile adjustments made to public spaces, such

that playgrounds are closed, park benches sealed off, and picnic benches prohibited, and the government makes the decision on behalf of the public regarding what activities are considered “essential” or “non-essential”.

While the systems of bio-surveillance have become more entrenched as the pandemic has progressed, with ever increasing demands for testing of the public to participate in daily civic life, the public health discourse has also become ever more divorced from the fundamental biological realities of human existence. Many of the “lockdown” policies have been based on an idea that human interaction can be “frozen” and resumed once it is safe to do so. Such policies have at their core a denial of our own mortality and the realities of the passing of time. This has been most stark in the treatment of older people who reside in care homes, where the assumption has been made that they can wait until after the pandemic has passed to see relatives. However the mortality in care homes is high (Collingridge Moore et al, 2020) and many other residents have progressive cognitive illnesses such that spending time with their family cannot be reasonably delayed for a period of months or longer.

Similarly, biological realities such as the inevitability of viral mutations, have been denied, with a fantasy that mutations can be prevented by closing our borders. The government has likewise sought to expand its control over innate human behaviour, by legislating bans on physical contact such as hugging, and sexual activity with a new partner. At its heart, this is rooted in a fantasy of control, in which it is considered possible for the government to control behaviour in this way. It has long been understood that such ‘total abstinence’ policies are rarely successful in modifying human behaviour (Arnold, 2021), however such knowledge and realities has been overlooked in the desire for government control over our relational lives.

## **Overwhelming medicalisation**

Pandemics impact every aspect of society and the decision-making involved in our response requires consideration of fundamental societal realities such as how we support one another, how civil liberties are protected, how risk is distributed, how behaviour change takes place and its potential interaction with law enforcement, and how people are economically protected so as to reduce the risk of destitution. Yet during the Covid-19 pandemic, the government has de-facto devolved key decision making on many of these factors to the scientific bodies, by using the “follow the science” rhetoric. This has functioned to remove responsibility from the government should mistakes be made and has resulted in the response being viewed first and foremost through a scientific and medical framework (Abbasi, 2020). Interventions are considered in terms of how they might impact the outcomes on an epidemiological model, with little or no consideration given to existing human rights and civil liberties. This has resulted in deprivations of liberty taking place without any significant safeguards being put in place for those impacted by them, and all activities are considered first and foremost in terms of the risk the activity might pose of viral transmission, irrespective of the meaning or importance of particular activities for individuals.

## Conclusion

2020-21 has overseen the dismantling of the fundamental building blocks of our society. Almost all the institutions of civic society, other than those involved with the direct delivery of healthcare and emergency services, have at some points been closed to in-person activity. Much has been written about the austerity politics that was spearheaded by the coalition government from 2010 and continued by subsequent Conservative governments, yet the withdrawal and closure of services during the pandemic has represented a far greater removal of support from some of the most vulnerable in our society than was ever threatened by austerity politics. This has resulted in a more isolated, lonely, and disconnected society. While the driving rationale that has led to this has been primarily medical, with a goal of reducing the risk of viral transmission between humans, the rebuilding up of society cannot be done by medicine. Perhaps a multi-disciplinary led pandemic response - one that includes historical and political considerations, a human rights framework, and democratic oversight - would have prevented some of the policies that took place, which were seemingly unaware of many of these considerations. Potentially the hyper-specialisation in academic disciplines, unaware of the perspectives of other ways of understanding human relationships and societal structures, contributed to the lockdown-related fragmentation, and the path forward to rebuilding society will need to be multidisciplinary, across different sectors and areas of expertise. Perhaps multi-disciplinary work such as this - between psychiatry and criminology, with consideration given to health care, mental health, and the intersection between law enforcement and healthcare, can be a stepping-stone towards dismantling medical authoritarianism, re-asserting our legal rights and civil liberties, and ultimately rebuilding our community structures free from an oppressive system of medicalised control.

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## Conversations

# Zemiology and the Future

## An Interview with Victoria Canning and Steve Tombs



At the time of writing, seventeen years have passed since the publication of *Beyond Criminology* in 2004, an edited collection which is arguably *the* foundational text for the field of zemiology and the systematic study of social harm. In the intervening years since *Beyond Criminology* was published, the study of social harm has undergone a period of quite astounding growth. Social harm has been deployed as the conceptual bedrock for entire bodies of critical criminological research and their emergent ‘criminologies’. Greater numbers of scholars identify explicitly as zemiologists, while there are many established and emerging criminologists who spend as much or most of their time talking about the systemic harms of various political-economic systems, ideologies, industries and institutions as they do crime and the criminal justice system. This is reflected in the proliferation of book series, edited collections, special issues, research networks, and conferences which all take social harm as their conceptual starting point.

So what does the future hold for the study of social harm and the field of zemiology? This journal had the opportunity to discuss this very topic with two scholars who are among the most prominent contemporary academics working in the field: Victoria Canning and Steve Tombs. They kindly agreed to a conversation via email with the journal’s editor-in-chief, Thomas Raymen. Together, they discussed the future of zemiology in the post-Covid world; the relationship between activism and research; the future of neoliberalism, whether we are witnessing the end of the ‘end of history’ and what that means for zemiology; and the state of the concept of social harm, among other topics. They also discuss their most recent co-authored book, [From Social Harm to Zemiology](#), published in 2021 with Routledge.

Dr Canning has established herself as one of the most significant voices in this field through her research and activism on issues around borders, migration, asylum seeking and sexual violence, and the socially harmful aspects of asylum processes in a number of nations across Europe. She is the author of *Gendered Harm and Structural Violence in the British Asylum System* (Routledge,

2017) and co-editor of *Stealing Time: Migration, Temporalities and State Violence* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

Prof. Tombs can be considered one of the founding fathers of zemiology. An editor of *Beyond Criminology*, Tombs is known for his research on corporate and state crime and harm. In particular harms, death, and injuries that occur in the workplace, in addition to reflections on the concept and study of social harm more broadly. He is the author of dozens of journal articles, and co-editor and author of numerous books such as *Beyond Criminology* (Pluto Press, 2004), *The Corporate Criminal* (Routledge, 2015), *Social Protection After the Crisis* (Policy Press, 2016), and *Criminal Obsessions* (Crime and Society Foundation, 2008).

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**Editor:** You've recently published a book together, **From Social Harm to Zemiology (Routledge, 2021)**. Firstly, what was the rationale for writing this book? And relatedly, what, in your eyes, is the significance of this book? What does it bring to the table that other books on social harm haven't?

**Tombs:** For me, as someone who has been involved in discussions about zemiology since their inception, I was increasingly frustrated about the prevalence but lack of clarity in the uses of 'social harm' and 'zemiology' and how this looseness implied or asserted a variety of relationships of this concept and perspective to 'crime' and 'criminology' which were simply confusing.

So in the book we identify at least four sets of relationships between crime and harm, all of which – often unreflexively – seek to incorporate within the ambit of crime 'harms' which on, a strict ('black-letter law') definition of crime, do not belong therein. In summary, these are: the extension of 'crime' into other forms of legal violation, beyond the criminal law; a consideration of harms which are formally punishable but not punished; the harms produced by criminal justice systems themselves – and, by implication, the category of crime and the discourses of criminology; moral critiques of non-criminalised harmful acts which are considered morally wrong if not legally so. My view is not that any of these juxtapositions is necessarily illegitimate but that when we operationalise them we need be clear what we are doing and why.

I had earlier written about the need to take a political position as to whether one was talking about criminology or zemiology, crime or social harm – this was in the (2018) edited collection by Avi Boukli and Justin Kotzé, *Zemiology* – and part of the rationale for this book was to tease out the relationships between these concepts and perspectives to allow a fundamental break between them. So while the book is called *From Social Harm to Zemiology*, it might more accurately have been called, as we state somewhere in it actually, *From Crime to Social Harm to Zemiology*. So we spend a lot of time in the first part of the book trying to distinguish between these concepts and disciplinary ventures. We may not have achieved absolute clarity in this but I think we have contributed to progress in this respect.

**Canning:** This book came from many discussions about whether or not zemiology can or should be a separate subject. Many colleagues consider it a sub-section of criminology. For us, and in discussions with Paddy Hillyard who coined the term, this completely limits the study of social harm to the legacies of state centric criminology. This conflation can make social harm difficult to teach: my own research-led modules are not tied to criminological discussions of social harm and yet criminology texts continuously repeat the mantra that zemiology is under the umbrella of criminology. Like Paddy, we are explicitly saying that this is no longer the case. Social harm is often completely unrelated to transgressions of law or criminalisation – border harms, emotional harms, pharmaharms for example. Moreover, although criminology sells itself as interdisciplinary, it seems to be increasingly tied to oppressive systems pertaining to criminalisation – even if mitigating harms inherent to the systems. Many harms we are interested in originate from or are studied in anthropology, medicine, human geography and physical sciences – not criminology. By this then, we can encompass broader and more nuanced studies of social harm and the impacts thereof.

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**Editor:** *You are both obviously very prominent figures in the study of social harm and zemiology, albeit at different stages of your academic careers. Thinking about the future, where do you see the field of zemiology going? What do you think are going to be some of the key zemiological issues of the future, particularly in the post-Covid world?*

**Tombs:** I'd like to look *back* and say that social harm and zemiology have already come a very long way in just over 20 years – we review these developments in the book and I will not rehearse these here, but the very fact that we are having this discussion is a testimony to this point. Moreover, looking forward, as inequalities within and between nations increase, not least as indicated by the current grotesque inequalities in access to vaccines as 'intellectual property' and associated patents are protected by 'Big Pharma' and their state allies, Covid remains an unfolding crisis – there is no 'post-Covid' of which to speak. Meanwhile, the severity of a global virus may fade into relative insignificance, or indeed be overlain by, the manifestations of climate catastrophe as these become present realities not just across South East Asia or The Sahel, but become stark presences in the hitherto relatively comfortable heartlands of the Global North. In these contexts, zemiological analyses and responses become ever-more pressing.

**Canning:** Zemiology is already gaining more traction as more people come to see that harm is more influential and generally impactful in their everyday lives than constructions of crime. This is explicitly what we have been told by colleagues, but also outside of academia. Moreover, the book has already been sold in more than 20 countries – Indonesia, Columbia, Hong Kong, New Zealand – which indicates to us that there is a contemporary want for people to engage in different ways of seeing many of the problems we have around us. In some senses, the structural violence inflicted through responses to Covid, and the harms that these have accumulated, gives an insight into the endemic impacts of unchecked power and inequality, as well as a lack of

political accountability as we continue to see. As the planet, and the people and non-humans on it, become ever more affected by the impacts of climate catastrophe and capitalistic consumption, the more a zemiological influence can support us to see how and why these harms come to be, and how and we can or should dismantle them.

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**Editor:** *You are both activists in different areas, and this activism has always seeped into and informed your work – something which I expect many of our readers will identify and sympathise with in terms of their own activism and research. But in recent years it seems that there has been an ever-greater fusion of academic research and political activism. It's no longer necessarily the case, to provide a crude distinction, that people do their academic research in the week and then in the evenings or at the weekend go off and engage in their respective forms of political activism. The two seem to be increasingly fused together. In your book you make the case for what you describe as an 'activist zemiology'. As you emphasise in that part of the book, social scientific research has always been imbued with particular politics and values, and the idea that social scientific research can be 'value-free' is in many respects a fantasy. But what seems to be happening is a step further, in which academics are directly taking up the cause of a particular group or movement. And it seems that this is a starting point of much research, rather than its conclusion. So what I wanted to ask you both is whether there are there any risks, as you see it, with taking up the cause of particular movements or groups of people? Of academics positioning themselves on the 'side' of a particular movement or group? In the sense that it can prevent or disincline academics to engage in valid critique of such movements or groups; encourages academics to ignore certain realities; or forecloses certain lines of enquiry, analysis, and theorisation?*

**Canning:** As with the points we made in relation to the myths of value freedom, the points this question raises already assumes that activist work is different in its endeavours to non-activist work. Who develops any given project is already embedded in how or what that person – or group of people – see the world. The very questions we ask and lines of inquiry we all take are based on this. Moreover, there is a power and positionality that allows for certain groups to develop research in the first place – and this disproportionately excludes those most likely to be seriously affected by harm. So, the question effectively reiterates the myth that we untangle in the book.

In relation to 'taking sides', and as we are clear on, if harm is evidently being inflicted, or systems are inherent to its production and reproduction, then the question comes down to whether or not the researcher is ethically OK in themselves to be a bystander to harm. That, by the very nature of researching harm, is the crux of it.

I do want to pick up on one point, however. The term 'activist' is being increasingly derided in political circles, as we have seen in relation to the undermining of 'activist lawyers' in immigration law in the UK. Quite basically, they are doing their job – upholding legal processes – in the face of a government which is hell bent on reducing specific forms of immigration, even

if it means breaking their own laws. So, this term becomes derogatory when it is used in counter hegemonic processes. On the other hand, there is a tendency for academics to embrace the term ‘activist’ when not necessarily engaging with activist movements, but instead discussing them from positions of privilege. In this sense, the term is complex and can be a double-edged sword.

**Tombs:** Yes, Vicky has said pretty much all I might have said and more. Just a few points of emphasis. To reject value-neutrality is not to deny that there are implications of viewing the world from a particular perspective. But such problems – always highlighted by those with pretensions to value-neutrality and commitments to liberal virtue of ‘balance’ – are at least mitigated where researchers recognise, describe and are honest and open about the perspective from which their research commitments, questions, and modes of analysis and dissemination originate. Put simply, we can only start to value objectivity in social research after we recognise that much of the research conducted in western liberal democracies is highly partisan in the first place. The historical development of the social sciences has been inseparable from ‘partisanship’, never ‘value-neutral’. To eschew value-freedom does not deny openness, accountability, rigour, honesty and transparency. But following our previous points, these requirements should apply to all researchers. All research is value laden, and if there are value commitments which underpin any piece of research then there are, therefore, implicitly or explicitly, particular interests which it might further (and might not). These are choices which all researchers make, whether they recognise them or not.

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**Editor:** *I think it is fair to say that a lot of critical criminology and zemiology is left leaning and/or socially and culturally liberal in nature. Do you think there is any place for certain brands of conservatism in critical criminology and zemiology?*

**Canning:** This positions these disciplines as separate to society. In the UK, we have been living under a conservative government for more than a decade. Simultaneously, there has been a rise in right leaning governments globally across the same time trajectory. By default then, we are always engaged in conservatism. It also comes down to what is considered ‘conservatism’. For me, many of the texts I read in critical criminology remain dependent on predominately white male interpretations of the world around us. Others do not break away from the narrow, state-centric confines of crime and criminal justice – so although often critical in their engagement, can still be conservative in their vision for moving away from these processes.

Moreover, even in critical criminology and zemiology, there has been some shifts to employing fairly restrictive means of controls on who or should be ‘allowed’ to speak – as though we can pretend discussions or opinions we don’t like just don’t exist. For me that is not helpful – some of our students may hold the very opinions we protest, certainly many of my family and friends do. Life is not like Twitter – we cannot just block who we don’t like to hear.

To summarise – for me, conservatism in various ways already exists in these spheres. Do I think that zemiology will benefit from conservatism in its progression? Given that so many of the harms we document in the book are inextricably linked to conservative rule then – no.

**Tombs:** Again Vicky has answered the question really, but one more – obvious! – observation. We both – as do you and many readers – work in universities which are pretty conservative institutions, whether at the more or less elitist ends of the spectrum. And wherever we work in the sector, we work from positions of relative privilege as academics – albeit that privilege is highly differently distributed of course, not least by age, gender, ethnicity, employment status, and so on. Universities and academia are microcosms of the structural inequalities that define the societies of which they are a part and which, in an Althusserian sense, in turn function to produce and reproduce. That is, they and we are part of, by definition, an essentially conservative social order.

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**Editor:** *The question of providing some coherence and stability to the concept of social harm is obviously one of the big issues confronting zemiology and the study of social harm. Arguably, it is an issue which has yet to be adequately resolved. I was drawn to the following passage from your book on this topic, which I found interesting:*

[I]n our view, we can reflect very fruitfully on the question of what makes harm harmful and how we recognise harm without setting out an ontology of harm per se. This may be a provisional state of affairs – beyond the scope of this text but something to be determined or achieved subsequently. Or, it may be that interrogating the question rather than reaching an answer is the key here: it might be a productive process without endpoint, so that what is experienced as harm, recognised as harm and approximates some of the criteria discussed in this chapter to date, therefore counts as harm in an empirical sense, perhaps always subject to challenge, contest, confirmation and in the absence of any epistemological or ontological certainties? (Canning and Tombs, 2021: 102)

*This passage, particularly the latter half of it, is arguably a borderline emotivist take on the question of harm. How, then, do we avoid the tendency for zemiology to become a relativistic list and descriptive account of things we don't like very much?*

**Canning:** Again, like value freedom, the idea that something is emotive is only really ever applied when the arguments being made are counter to dominant narratives. Harm is not about what 'we don't like very much'. Let's take the example of my main research area: borders. I don't like borders very much. I dislike airports, passport queues and now – with Covid and Brexit – the bureaucracy that comes with international travel. I hate delays and rescheduling of flights. Add my fear of flying to this and it's fair to say I hate borders and waiting – the longer the queue, the more anxiety I experience before I get on a plane.

But my dislike of borders in this sense is completely inconsequential. Borders do not cause me harm. I am Irish – my passport is in the top three most powerful passports in the world, so the bureaucracy I experience is comparatively negligible. I am a white woman – amongst the demographic *least* likely to be stopped for searching. My movements across borders are usually for work or leisure travel – not to ensure family reunification, safety from persecution, or to leave

poverty behind. Only if restrictions were implemented which were to affect my freedom to cross borders might this dislike turn into potentially *harmful* circumstances: the emotional harms of stuckness, the loss of months and years that cannot be recouped, state inflicted poverty or bureaucratic violence. These are harms, and they are based on global and demographic inequalities.

Moreover, and as I've covered in in-depth analyses in *Gendered Harm and Structural Violence in the British Asylum System*, harm does necessarily not come in lists or descriptive accounts – it is intricately tied to complex social relationships and concepts which explain the intricacies of harms as they are experienced and indeed produced at micro, meso and macro levels – some of which we use as examples in Chapter Three of our text.

**Tombs:** Yes, I think we can avoid a relativism. It is reasonable to consider including in our understanding of social harms any “descriptive account of things we don't like very much”, to use your phrase. Or, indeed, things *other people* “don't like very much” – because, as we say in the book, taking account of peoples' lived experiences and what constitutes harm for them is one reasonable starting point in defining social harm, and certainly, for us, preferable to simply accepting state defined hierarchies of harm. But these are *suggestive* only. We then have to evidence and argue any claims for harm – as we would expect. This entails measurement and it entails analysis. So as Vicky makes the point about border harms, I might say similar about one of my own longstanding concerns – deaths, injuries and illnesses caused by work. To me these represent harms, and to those who experience them, directly or vicariously, they are harmful, too. But this is more than a labelling exercise based upon preference or prejudice. Deaths, illness and injury at work are relatively normalised in our society – yet they are the source of profound physical, emotional and psychological, financial, economic and cultural harms – harms which myself along with a handful of other academics and, more significantly, a gamut of campaigning organisations and activists have long documented empirically and analytically.

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**Editor:** *Getting a little bit more specific on your particular areas of research, the issue of borders and migration is always a hot topic, but particularly so over the last few years. Your work, Dr Canning, is very much focused on the issue of borders and the harms of contemporary border regimes. What, in your eyes, is a progressive kind of border policy? And are there potential harms to consider around open border and free movement policies that are perhaps neglected in the criminological and zemiological study of borders?*

**Canning:** Let's be clear here: borders are very open for very specific travellers. As the Passport Power Index shows, people from the Global North, Australia and New Zealand are able to travel almost freely across most corners of the globe. Compare that to the Global South, where visas restrict travel or criminalise those crossing borders as 'illegal'. To be specific, if you are from New Zealand you can travel without a visa to 92 countries; Germany, 101; Spain, 100; Australia, 91;

Austria, 100; Italy, 100; Ireland or Switzerland 97 countries. If you are from Afghanistan or Iraq, you can enter visa-free to just 4 countries; Syria, 8; Somalia, 8; Pakistan, 7; Yemen, 8 countries. What do the latter have in common? Well, they are all countries which have been affected by conflict, war, occupation (including by allied forces), and colonialism. Indeed, as we speak and as Kabul falls, the implications of this inequality in visas and travel is becoming ever more obvious, including for Afghans who have been working with the British or US governments.

What is being referred to here is a challenge to opening borders or facilitating free movement for people who most need to travel for safety or survival – ie, fleeing poverty, conflict or persecution – rather than those who may need to cross borders the least – holiday goers, bright eyed world wanderers and wealthy businesspeople. So my answer is this: until we actually start to approach terms and contexts critically from the offset, we will continue having false debates about ‘opening borders’ and ‘free movement’ because – inherently – we are not acknowledging the processes of power that are constructed by legacies of racism and coloniality through which borders are enforced against *some* people from *some* places, and not others.

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**Editor:** *It's reasonable to suspect that we're going to see a lot of zemiological analyses of the way in which various governments handled the pandemic. You're both UK-based academics. Where would you begin with a zemiological analysis of how the British Government handled the pandemic?*

**Tombs:** Yes, for sure, and of course as we completed this text we were located in England, so got a devastatingly up-close view of state-imposed social harm as the Johnson Government in particular delayed, prevaricated, obfuscated and lied, whilst in general distributing the harms of the virus and its wider effects disproportionately onto the poorest and most disadvantaged sections of society whilst at the same time capitalising upon aspects of it as a source of political, economic and financial opportunities.

But rather than focus on the English and UK government responses per se – I've just written about these with Joe Sim for a special issue of the journal *Justice, Power and Resistance* – I'd like to say this. From the very end of 2019 onwards, and through 2020, Governments around the globe were all confronted with the novel, deadly challenge of coronavirus. Across the globe there were significant variations in the level of preparedness for a health pandemic and then when and how Governments approached the management of Covid-19 in particular – with markedly differing aims and, importantly, outcomes, with ‘what works’ varying markedly. So what this of course tells us is that if the virus was a naturally occurring phenomenon – viruses, after all, are essential agents of human existence – the disaster that it provoked was not at all natural – it was social, the result of social priorities and choices, related to existing economic and social inequalities, and to decisions to maintain or develop systems of health care and social protection which were more or less robust, more or less effective, more or less harm preventing or mitigating.

One of the other conversations that emerged as the effects of the virus began to become manifest was how to measure the harms that it had produced – and would continue to produce. Most crudely, these were measured in most extreme form of physical harm, namely loss of life (even if there were considerable controversies in determining who or what counted as a coronavirus death in many jurisdictions). But to measure the harms generated by the virus in deaths alone is wholly inadequate. Many lives were changed detrimentally by the lasting health effects of contracting the virus. Nor is there any there any knowing, for example, the emotional and psychological trauma experienced during ‘lockdowns’, as a result of fear, isolation, bereavement, of abuse within households and so on, nor the damage caused by the closure of schools, in some states for months, nor of the legacies of the economic and financial harms via un- and under-employment, deprivation, increases in poverty-related illnesses and morbidities, suicides, and so on. Nor is it to account for the harms associated with the damages to the cultural lives of states and their citizens - theatre, film and music industries have all been altered irrevocably and detrimentally. All of these harms – and the dimensions of harm are far greater than indicated here - will be continue to be felt across the globe for years to come, irrespective of how the virus is managed in national and international contexts in the future. And they will, as you state, be the focus of zemiological analyses.

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**Editor:** *I'm going to broaden out a little bit now to talk about neoliberalism and its future. Zemiology has often taken aim at neoliberalism as the source of many forms of social harm. But we're currently at quite an interesting and uncertain moment with regards to neoliberalism. In the emergency response to the Covid-19 pandemic, governments all over the world completely abandoned the whole 'fiscal credibility' rule and spent vast sums of money on furlough schemes and other measures to fight the pandemic. And it seems big government spending is not just a one-off emergency response – as it was with the bailout of the banks during the global financial crisis in 2007/2008 – but is going to be sustained into the future, albeit selectively. Joe Biden's stimulus package and other policies is running his budget deficit into the trillions of dollars. In the UK, the Conservatives are spending significant sums of money on infrastructure and are launching a National Infrastructure Bank as part of their apparent commitment to tackle climate change and facilitate the 'energy transition' away from fossil fuels. One significant role of this bank, to reference the UK Government's literature, is to try and kick-start this energy transition by directly intervening, investing, and providing equity to those projects where there is a 'shortfall of private investment' (HM Treasury, 2021). Numerous countries globally are beginning to trial a universal basic income (UBI). Elites like Klaus Schwab, the executive chairman of the World Economic Forum, has quite publicly denounced neoliberalism, globalism, and advocated deglobalisation and a shortening of the world's supply chains, particularly as Covid-19 showed their fragility (Schwab and Malleret, 2020). These are significant departures from neoliberal orthodoxy, and scholars such as Anton Jäger and Daniel Zamora (2021) have spoken about the emergence of what they call the 'transfer state', while the likes of Jodi Dean (2020) suggest that we're moving beyond neoliberalism into an era of neofeudalism.*

Given all of the above, do you think this another false dawn? Or are we moving beyond neoliberalism? And if so, into what? Some kind of hybrid ideology? And what are the implications of this for zemiology, which has often organised its analyses around neoliberalism as a key culprit of various social harms.

**Tombs:** Let me respond to your question slightly tangentially rather than directly if I may, and in ways that draw upon some of the arguments in the book. As we argue in the book, a defining feature of the zemiological enterprise must be to identify alternative forms of harm response and mitigation in ways which are coherent with some version of the ‘good society’, a *post-capitalism* where social harms – those assumptions, practices, policies, processes and social arrangements which deny or inhibit the flourishing of what it is to be human – are minimised if not absent. This demand to seek alternative responses to social problems might at first appear to be highly challenging – but on closer inspection the problems it poses are less about identifying alternative policy responses to social harm, but in overcoming the political obstacles to implementing them. So I would argue, for example, there is now clear evidence that corporate harm is less amenable to legal reform due to the essentially destructive nature of the corporate form – so that corporate structures at best need disruption via redistributions of power or at best dismantling so that the corporation must be abolished. I argued this with David Whyte in *The Corporate Criminal* in 2015.

For me, zemiology requires us to be imaginative, idealistic, utopian and pragmatic. Thus, being opposed to being reformist does not mean eschewing reforms. **The first thing we have to do is reject the idea that being idealistic can never be pragmatic or useful in winning concessions or influencing policy by way of reform.** But it depends what these reforms are, what they achieve – and what they pre-empt. For us, then, avoiding reformism is dependent upon us retaining an element of utopianism – our demands and our actions must be achievable yet at the same time unashamedly utopian, and this is intrinsic to the zemiological enterprise. Not least if we are to avoid political immobilisation likely to be induced by a perceived need to set out a blueprint which lays down an image of a future utopia in detail, we should, as Wolfgang Streeck put it in his (2017) book *How Will Capitalism End?*, that we need to learn to think about capitalism coming to an end without assuming responsibility for proposing what to put in its place. Thinking and achieving post-capitalism will not be done by academics called zemiologists, nor will it be done by ‘them’, some unspecified activists ‘out there’, beyond academia. It will be a collective, participatory imaginative enterprise. Zemiology, however, can at least be a part of the solution rather than a part of the problem – an academic activity where it is not just possible but necessary to be part of the struggle for social justice.

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**Editor:** To close I'd like to ask you what you are both working on right now? Without giving too much away, is there anything our readers should keep an eye out for?

**Canning:** For the past few years and alongside our Zemiology projects, I have been working on the impacts of definitional boundaries of torture on organisations working with survivors of torturous and sexually torturous violence, as well as survivors themselves. So currently my project *Unsilencing Sexualised Torture* is underway with the Danish Institute Against Torture, where I'm heading back to know I've had my second job. My book *Torture and Torturous Violence: Transcending Definitional Boundaries of Torture* will be out with BUP early next year.

In the meantime, I'll be catching up with the family and friends I missed during lockdown. The pandemic definitely showed that I have prioritised work over family back in Northern Ireland for much too long, so if one thing will come out of the pandemic for me it is that that will be changing!

**Tombs:** Work-wise, at the moment – and for the foreseeable future – most of my time is taken up working as part of the REF 2021 Social Work and Social Policy panel – to which a lot of 'social harm' and zemiological work has been submitted, I must say. Reading and 'evaluating' hundreds of pieces of published work is pretty full-on, intense, and of course fascinating at times. It's been and remains extremely collaborative and collegiate too, a great reminder that it is possible to work co-operatively at points of intense disagreement and even across apparent incommensurability. It is certainly a role I never envisaged taking up, having published critical work about REF and its relationship to the neo-liberalisation of the University as far back as 2003. It is still a process I think should be scrapped, by the way – which should probably be the cue for some smart 'pissing in the tent' comment which, as I speak, eludes me!

## Book Review

### **Briggs, D. (2021) *Climate Changed: Refugee Border Stories and the Business of Misery.***

Routledge. ISBN 9878-0-367-43673-5

**Dick Hobbs**

*Emeritus Professor, University of Essex*



Most academics are loathe to abandon their ergonomically designed chairs in seats of learning defined by the deathless quest for prestige. In recent years this charmless enterprise has been enhanced by monolithic regimes of surveillance, making ethnographic work increasingly rare, and with many early career academics now work as teaching drones on short-term hourly paid contracts, selective affiliation to citation clubs has largely replaced theoretical exploration, while ever decreasing periods spent on fieldwork inspires work that has little human resonance. However, Dan Briggs has been lurking in and around the field for years, somehow emerging as a skilled ethnographer with a proven ability to explore alcoves of humanity that defy the languid exclusivity of academic enterprise, displaying personal and academic commitment that stretches beyond the light touch fieldwork, concluding platitudes and unconnected theory a la mode that defines much contemporary ethnographic work.

While, as I will discuss, *Climate Changed* is a fine and innovative example of contemporary ethnography, first let me get my criticisms out of the way. The early chapters are in places little more than affirmations of the authors theoretical allegiances, and I would have much preferred for key theoretical propositions in particular to have been made as part of the narrative, rather than nailing the authors theory to the mast before the fieldwork sets sail. This is particularly relevant to the key section on neoliberalism and social harm, which would have had far more impact reinforcing Briggs conclusions. In an attempt to situate his endeavours within a political and institutional framework, the author writes of the problems of conducting research within the neo-liberal university. While Dan Briggs clearly has something to say, there is a considerable body of work already available, and I am not convinced that he has sufficiently mined the

available literature or added to the canon. Overall the methodology chapter could have been briefer, perhaps presented in an appendix and limiting itself to a bare, non-technical description of the methods used. This is a fine, mature, and innovative study, and there is certainly no need to justify its methodology in the orthodox manner of a PhD thesis.

The focus of the book is border stories and tales of life in refugee camps along with stories of travelling, hustling, working, starving and of risk and rejection, as the desperate and displaced struggle to get into Europe against a backdrop of global warming, conflict, and instability. In his approach to contemporaneous problems Briggs is something of an anomaly in academic research, for while the traditional ethnographic qualities of empathy and engagement are retained, Briggs is able to shift these qualities to focus upon the plight of individuals, tracking and tracing as they trek westwards across the globe. The resultant multi-site ethnography blows away some of the cobwebs that have gathered on a methodology that is too often entrenched in a simplistic industrial urban mindset set and played out against a backdrop of whining academic spats. For this ethnography is made up of disjointed spaces and places, clusters of interviews, observations and social media data that somehow retains the depth of classical colonial era anthropology. However, none of those pith helmeted generations of scholars were confronted with anything as profoundly overwhelming as climate change.

In *Climate Changed* Briggs seeks out the individual narratives and insights of the everyday lives, of refugees of climate change, the problems they face and how their ultimate destination in the West evades, exploits, humiliates and in many cases, ultimately kills them. Briggs moves deftly across and around both literal and metaphorical borders, as he locates a vast range of refugees, whose individual and communal traumas are conveyed to the reader, and in this readers case I was left sickened by what I read. Here I must point out that Briggs' fieldwork has more in common with that of elite investigative journalists than with academics. He chases stories across continents, creating contacts and developing relationships in a most impressive manner that are free of the ludicrous restraints currently imposed on ethnographic research by academic bureaucrats. Briggs is particularly effective in using technology to stay in contact with some of the more blighted lives, whose stories are genuinely heart-breaking. War, capitalism, crime, post-colonial attitudes and more come together in cafes and street corners, refugee camps and care centres, in the form of complex sets of problems whose mind-bending scope and scale has been long predicted, but whose consequences seldom as sensitively portrayed.

Dan Briggs has brought to the fore the essential humanity in these stories of displaced, desperate, physically and mentally damaged souls. He concludes most stylishly with a staunch refusal to indulge in simplistic gestures, neither raving at the burning skies of neoliberalism, nor reaching for the holed bucket of racist relief. The complexity and interconnectedness that pervades this book are at times daunting, as nation states, and organised crime groups combine to commit atrocities upon the most vulnerable. However, as this book explains, this vast expansive story often boils down to an understanding of the basic human desire for food, shelter, education, and rudimentary security against a backdrop of slash and burn capitalism aided and

abetted by war, and the kind of sordid nationalism that turns on the most vulnerable in times of crisis: and is there a bigger crisis than the impending end of humanity?

This is the second time that Dan Briggs has brought me close to tears with one of his books. The importance of this study is matched by its quality.

Anyway, enough of all this gloom and doom, where are you going for your holiday?