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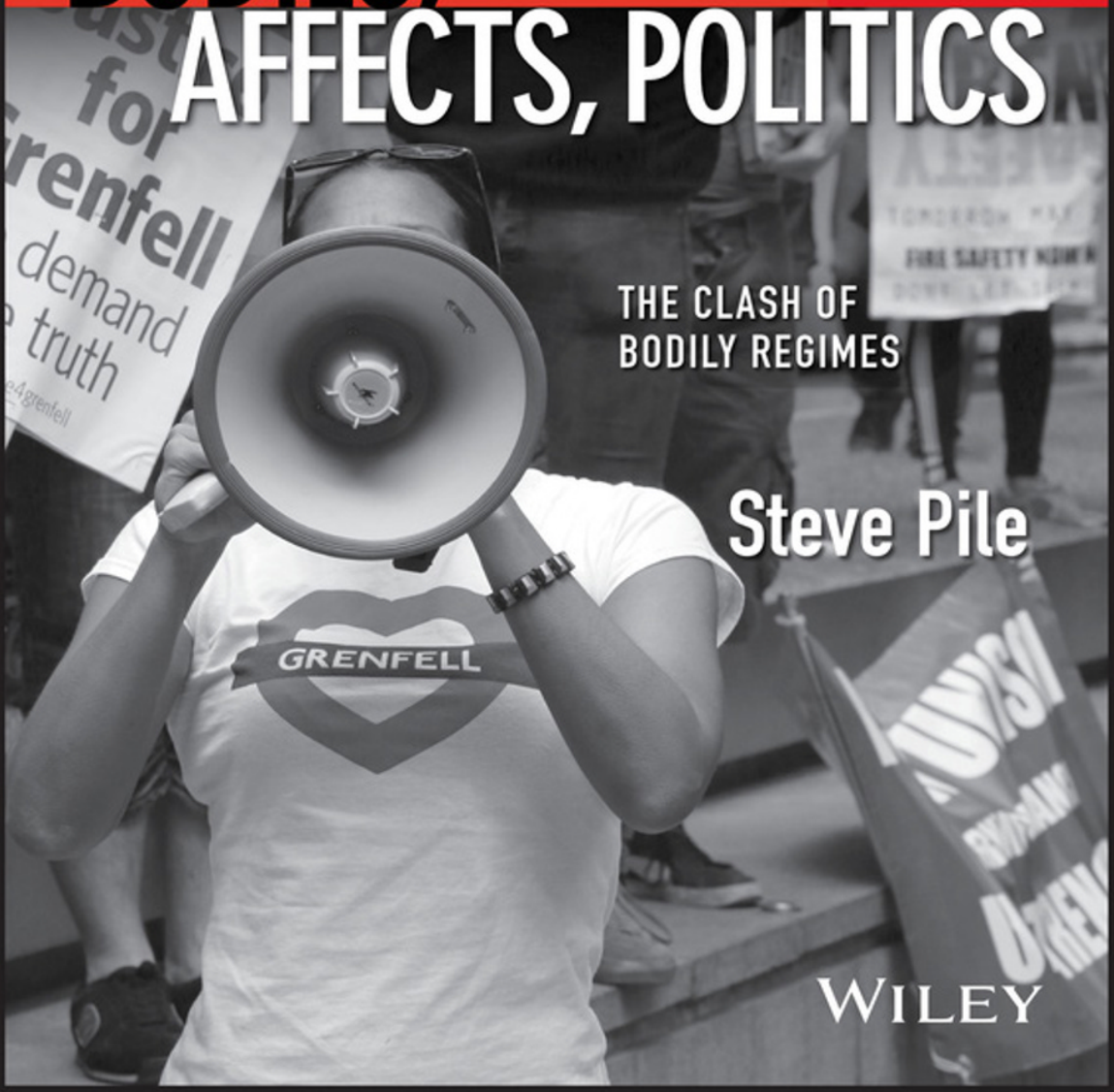

Steve Pile

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Bodies, Affects, Politics

The Clash of Bodily Regimes

Steve Pile

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David Featherstone, *University of Glasgow, UK*
RGS-IBG Book Series Editor (2015–2019)

Preface

Today, London is quieter than I have ever known it to be. The skies above are undisturbed by the noise of planes, no white vapour trails scratching the brilliant blue. The East Coast mainline normally rumbles with heavy goods trains punctuated by the shattering sound of fast inter-city services, but not for the last two weeks. Normally, the day is interrupted by at least one low-level fly-over by a police helicopter, but not recently. The hum of traffic is notably subdued, as when snow falls, muffling sound, preventing vehicles from moving around the city. This quieting, however, is not a sign that the city is calmer, rested, at peace. Instead, the quiet feels more like frustration, determination and a low-level anxiety that threatens to break cover.

As I wait patiently in the queue at my local supermarket, I am paying attention to who is – and who is not – wearing face coverings, but especially noting the facemasks. Facemasks are as sure a measure of the level of anxiety and fear in the city as the intensification of the policing of bodies (which is not only conducted by the police). I know I am 2 metres back from the person in front of me and that the person behind me is 2 metres away from me. I know because the pavement has suddenly become covered in sticky tape that tells bodies where they should be. Sometimes, there are big stickers with footprints; 'stand here' they instruct. I am self-policing. I stand where I should, as do most people. Some people do not. They are policed: the supermarket has employed a company that, judging by their jackets, normally stewards entertainment events. A woman in a high vis jacket, continually adjusting her ill-fitting facemask, waves us forward, then halts us, with only the use of her right arm. The queue dutifully obeys these wordless commands.

I reach the point where the orderly queue awkwardly passes the store's exit. At first I do not notice the man leaving the supermarket, but then I realise he's walking backwards. A tall security guard is escorting him out. 'Don't touch me'! the man shouts. 'Don't fucking touch me! Don't fucking touch me! Don't fucking touch me'! he screams. The security guard puts his hands up, as if to nudge the

man out of the exit. The man jumps back, and yells some more. The security guard says nothing; he does not touch the man; but, he keeps moving half steps forward, shepherding the man out. Now, another security guard appears. And some supermarket employees. They say little, but make 'calm down' gestures with their hands. The man yells: 'You've got anger issues, you. You've got fucking anger issues. Fucking anger issues, you'! The second security guard intervenes, says something in the ear of the first security guard, who then starts to leave. 'I'll fucking have you', the man yells after him. 'Come and have some of this'! he shouts as he also starts to leave. We, in the queue, who witness this look at each other, over the top of our facemasks: we have not yet learned to communicate with just our eyes, but they all seem to be rolling. Our eyes seem to be saying: 'We live in mad times'. And, I think to myself, the proper response to living in mad times is to be mad. In a short few months, we will learn that security guards are amongst the most vulnerable occupations to COVID-19 – and that black and minority ethnic people are overrepresented in these occupations. It matters that the woman security guard is Black and the men from the store are Turkish and Asian.

Inside the supermarket, there's clear evidence of fear. Vast swathes of the shelves are empty: there's no toilet paper, pasta, tinned foods, surface cleaners of any kind, eggs, flour or paracetamol. People wander slowly past the shelves because this is something to see: it is a sign of the times, so worth looking at. People mutter about 'panic buying', but, of course, the panic buyers are the sensible buyers as they are the ones who anticipated the panic buying. Panic has been normalised. As I leave, a man outside is yelling 'This is Great Britain! Tell the truth! Tell the Truth'! He is holding a black leather-bound book, with gold lettering that I make no effort to read. 'We tell the truth in Great Britain', he screams at no one in particular. I avoid eye contact as he passes. 'Tell the truth'! I hear him shouting as I disappear across the road. As I walk, I listen, but there's no clue to what truth he means. Part of me would like to know, but a larger part is afraid to find out.

I write (and rewrite) in a moment of indeterminacy; we do not know when the COVID-19 crisis will end, nor what it will have done to bodies, affects or politics. People want it over. They want to know when it will end and what the plan is. There is a lot of talk of curves, peaks and plateaus, and second waves; each day, there's an accountancy of the dead, with bar graphs and imagined bell curves. The virus has not told us what its plan is: we cannot reason with it, so it feels like the disaster is the fault of the virus, as if it were a terrorist or a mugger. Yet, it is a mistake to think that the coronavirus is a natural disaster or to anthropomorphise it. That said, we do not yet know what kind of disaster it is. Indeed, it seems to be a disaster many times over. Every death is an individual, a person dying unforgivingly, causing inexpressible loss and grief for untold families, friends, colleagues. So many are dying, so few stories make the news. Yet, we are also told it is an economic disaster. We are told it will change everything. A disaster impacting every corner of our lives. (Although, apparently, it's been good for the planet.

And some are profiting beyond their wildest dreams.) The coronavirus is accreting ever more meanings, as its impacts multiply and intensify. We do not know which of its many meanings will persist and which will not. We do not know how the necropolitics to follow after the coronavirus will play out. We live, right now, not knowing. I am guessing, perhaps hoping, none of the above surprises you.

The coronavirus will teach us many things. Like as not, virology aside, it will mostly teach us what we already know. And I am no different. The coronavirus teaches me that we live in a precarious world, made scary and infuriating by the (extra)ordinary politics of the body and of bodies (from facemasks to lockdowns). But, the world was already fractious and precarious, people already living everyday with crisis after crisis (from floods to droughts, species extinction to financial collapse, from sexual abuse to police brutality), living with deep anxiety and apprehension alongside the propensity for great kindness and generosity. And, I guess, in some small way, this book is a response to the already existing and long-standing 'unsettlingness' of modern life, an ordinary indeterminacy that runs through bodies, through affects and through politics.

This book has been in process for a long time, longer even than the torturous process of writing. There are three things to say about this. First, it is normal to thank specific people when writing academic works. Part of the argument of this book is that it is never that clear where ideas (or feelings) come from. So, I want to thank everyone I have talked to about the matters contained in this book. You have all made some difference to what is here. I admit, in ways that I am probably unaware, and more profoundly I am sure than I know. So, thank you. Second, to contradict myself, I need to thank three people without whom this book would not appear in the world: David Featherstone, whose insights have been incalculable; Jacqueline Scott, whose patience I have sorely tested; and Nadia Bartolini, who has had to endure far too much. Third, I need to acknowledge the source material for certain chapters. Chapter 2 reworks 'Skin, Race and Space: The Clash of Bodily Schemas' in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks* and Nella Larsen's *Passing*, which was published in *Cultural Geographies* in 2011 (pp. 25–41). Chapter 3 draws on 'Spatialities of Skin: The Chafing of Skin, Ego and Second Skins' in T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, which was published in *Body & Society*, also in 2011 (pp. 57–81). Chapter 4 recasts 'Beastly Minds: A Topological Twist in the Rethinking of the Human in Nonhuman Geographies Using Two of Freud's Case Studies' by Emmy von N. and the Wolfman, which was published in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* in 2014 (pp. 224–236). Chapter 5 adds a case study of Dora, drawing on a sole authored first draft for the introduction that Paul Kingsbury and I wrote for *Psychoanalytic Geographies* (2016, pp. 8–15) to my chapter in that book, 'A Distributed Unconscious: The Hangover, What Happens in Vegas and Whether It Stays There or Not' (pp. 135–148). Similarly, Chapter 6 removes substantial material from 'Distant Feelings: Telepathy and the Problem of Affect Transfer over Distance', as published in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* (2012, pp. 44–59) so as to add

material from the case study of Dora, drawing on a sole authored first draft for the introduction Paul Kingsbury and I wrote for *Psychoanalytic Geographies* (2016, pp. 15–19). I am grateful to Paul for allowing me to use these 'pre-Paul' drafts for this book. Finally, Chapter 8, the conclusion, reworks short passages of material taken from 'The Troubled Spaces of Frantz Fanon' (published in *Thinking Spaces*, edited by Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift, in 2000, pp. 260–277). In general, I have retained the empirical stories within these previously published papers, but they have been re-purposed, up-cycled or re-gifted (depending upon how you look at it). I therefore thank the publishers of the journals and the books for their permission to reprint previously published material.

Every effort has been made to trace the copyright holders and obtain their permission for the use of copyrighted material. The publisher apologises for any errors or omissions in the preceding list and would be grateful to be notified of any corrections that should be incorporated in future reprints or editions of this book.

This book is dedicated to Ben Robinson who, despite his most determined efforts, still suffers from geography.

North London
April 2020

Chapter One
Introduction: Bodies, Affects and Their Politicisation

It is impossible to discuss the relationships between bodies, affects and politics in the abstract: that is, abstracted from the material and ideological conditions of their production, from the processes of politicisation and depoliticisation that bring bodies and affects into, or keep them away from, politics (to paraphrase Harvey, 1993, p. 41). To introduce this book, then, I will start with the story of a particular neighbourhood in West London. It is a story worth telling in its own right, for it involves social murder, as Labour MP John McDonnell put it. However, my purpose is to show how bodies, affects and politics have been entangled at various moments in the area's recent history. But, more than this, I want to argue that there are different regimes of bodies, affects and politics operative in these moments – and it is in the clash between these regimes that different forms of politics can emerge. The problem that animates this book, then, is this: how are we to understand these regimes and what are we to make of them?

Lancaster West Estate, North Kensington

In 1972, work began constructing the Lancaster West Estate in North Kensington, London. The Estate was intended to redevelop part of the Notting Hill area, which had become notorious for its slums, poverty and criminality. This reputation has, for decades, been racialised. Since the HMT *Empire Windrush* first docked (in 1948), the neighbourhood's cheap rooms for rent had proved attractive to new

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immigrants from the Caribbean (see Phillips and Phillips 2009). Notting Hill also attracted ruthless slum landlords, such as (most infamously) Peter Rachman. By the 1950s, local white people, especially working-class Teddy Boys, were starting to display hostility towards black people moving into the area. In the summer of 1958, there were increasing attacks on black people as well as the rise of right-wing groups, such as the White Defence League; its slogan, 'Keep Britain White'. On Sunday 24 August 1958, armed with iron bars, table legs, crank handles, knives and an air pistol, a gang of white young men bundled into a battered car and drove around Notting Hill for three hours on what they called – in a ghastly echo of lynching culture in the South of the United States – a 'nigger hunt' ('The Nigger Hunters', *Time Magazine*, 29 September 1958, p. 27). They attacked six Caribbean men in four separate incidents: nine of the gang were arrested the following day in the nearby White City estate, after their car was spotted by police. (Later, in September 1958, to their shock, they were each sentenced to four years in prison by Mr Justice Cyril Salmon.)

The following Friday, 29 August 1958, Majbritt Morrison, a white Swedish woman (who would later author *Jungle West 11* about her experiences) was arguing with her Jamaican husband, Raymond Morrison, outside Latimer Road tube station (which is situated on the western edge of the Lancaster West Estate). A crowd of white people gathered to protect a white woman from a black man (see Dawson 2007, pp. 27–29), despite Majbritt herself not needing nor wanting to be defended. A scuffle broke out amongst the gathering crowd, Raymond and some of Raymond's Caribbean friends. On Saturday 30 August, a gang of white youths spotted Majbritt leaving a dance, recognising her from the evening before they started hurling racist abuse – and milk bottles. Someone hit Majbritt in the back with an iron bar. Yet, she stood her ground and fought back, but, when she refused to leave the scene, the police arrested her. The situation quickly escalated. Soon, a 200-strong mob of young white men was rampaging through the streets of north Notting Hill (half a mile or so to the east of the tube station), armed with knives and sticks, shouting 'down with niggers' and 'we'll murder the bastards' (reported in *The Independent*, 29 August 2008 and *The Guardian*, 24 August 2002, respectively). The mob attacked police with a shower of bottles and bricks. This led to five nights of constant rioting (until 5 September), fuelled by the arrival of thousands of white people from outside the area, and by the retaliation of the local Jamaican population, which eventually armed themselves with machetes, meat cleavers and Molotov cocktails.

Ironically, these events were described at the time as the Notting Hill Colour (or Racial) Riots, implying that these riots were the fault of, and conducted by, black people – when, in fact, black people were the target of white riots. Indeed, it was only the Jamaican fight back that brought the riots to an end, with the police singularly failing to control the situation. Afterwards, the Metropolitan Police refused to acknowledge white racism as a cause of the rioting, despite the testimony of officers on the ground to the contrary. Of the 140 arrested during the riots, 108 were charged with offences, with 9 white youths eventually being

sentenced: each was given the 'exemplary' punishment of 5 years prison along with a £500 fine. One response to the riots was the creation of a Caribbean Carnival, first held indoors on 30 January 1959, by Claudia Jones – a Trinidadian activist, who had been deported from the United States in 1955, having famously written about the subordination and struggle of Negro women from a Communist perspective (Jones 1949; see Boyce-Davis 2008). The Caribbean Carnival was an important precursor to the now world-famous Notting Hill street carnival, itself policed as if it were a riot in 1976 and 1977.

Partly as a consequence of the so-called 'Colour Riots', the 1960s saw the north Kensington area embody a reputation for poor housing, drug use, prostitution and violence. Of course, this is characteristically an unfolding story of class and racial inequality, with factions of the white working class remaining antagonistically opposed to the developing Caribbean community, yet with new working- and under- class solidarities being formed across racial lines, through cultures associated with sex, drugs and music. This reputation was consolidated in novels, such as Colin MacInnes' *Absolute Beginners* (1959), which is set against the background of the riots, where race and racism are unavoidable. The area's evident social inequalities and antagonisms also attracted filmmakers.

In 1970, in advance of the imminent destruction of the original street layout by the development of the Lancaster West Estate, John Boorman filmed *Leo the Last* on a set built on Testerton Road. The film dramatically dealt with issues of class and race conflict. In the film, Leo, an exiled prince from a foreign country, becomes a Marxist after he witnesses the exploitation of his poor black neighbours by rich white landlords. Rallying his neighbours together, Leo stages an uprising, quickly overcoming the intellectual classes (in the form of a doctor and lawyer). However, the capitalist class (in the form of rent collectors, shopkeepers and shareholders) proves harder to defeat. Leo retreats to his house. Eventually, Leo is forced to flee, burning down his house (repeatedly) in the process – an uncanny portent of the tragedy to come. Within a couple of years, Testerton Road (along with much of the surrounding area) would be demolished by the wrecking ball of slum clearance and redevelopment. Following Boorman, we might think the wrecking ball represents the inevitable victory of capitalism over the working class, with the antagonisms of race and class flattened by the bulldozer.

Although the Lancaster West Estate redevelopment required the displacement of about 3000 people, few were against the plan to replace the crumbling Victorian housing stock. The original plan was a grand design, involving the creation of a modern housing estate with workplaces, shops, offices and amenities, with improved access to the Latimer Road tube station. The master plan was drawn by Peter Deakins, who had been involved in the first stages of designing the Barbican Centre. Though the grand plan would never be fully realised, building went ahead. The initial phase, starting in 1970, would construct three 'finger blocks' (three- and four-storey housing blocks) and a tower block to the north of the site. The finger blocks had large, enclosed, open spaces with children's play areas.

One finger block, Testerton Walk, replaced the former Testerton Road. The finger blocks were seen as tower blocks laid on their side, with internal walkways to keep the housing as compact as possible and a central covered walkway to provide access. To the north, the finger blocks were anchored by a single tower block, designed by Nigel Whitbread applying principles derived from Le Corbusier and the modernists. Building of the tower block began in 1972 and was completed two years later. The first four of the 24 floor tower contained commercial and administrative units; on the remaining 20 floors, there were 120 one- and two-bedroom units, six dwellings on each floor, to house about 600 people. This building would be named Grenfell Tower (as it stood on Grenfell Road).

London's Burning

By the 2010s, nearing forty years after the Lancaster West Estate had been completed, Notting Hill was best known for its flamboyant Afro-Caribbean carnival, a saccharin romantic comedy film, and massive inequality: popstars, super models and politicians lived in multimillion-pound homes, ordering the latest 'flat white' coffees and quaffing Chenin Blanc wine from South Africa, while the new model estates of the 1970s visibly deteriorated. The area had become trendy, with beautiful and exclusive and increasingly expensive private housing sitting side by side with the rundown Lancaster West Estate. In 2012, Westminster Council began an £8.7M renovation of the Grenfell Tower, which received new windows, a new heating system and, on the outside, aluminium cladding was introduced to improve the block's appearance and rain-proofing. The renovation was completed four years later in May 2016. A new story of class and race had been set in motion.

At 54 minutes past midnight on 14 June 2017, the emergency services received the first reports of a fire at Grenfell Tower. Starting in a faulty fridge-freezer on the fourth floor, the fire quickly engulfed the Tower Block. The fire burned for 60 hours, despite the attendance of 70 fire engines and over 250 firefighters. The fire killed 72 people, in 23 of the tower's flats, mostly above the twentieth floor.

On 21 May 2018, the Grenfell Tower public inquiry began, after completing its procedural hearings in December 2017. (Complete proceedings are available online at grenfelltowerinquiry.org.uk and on YouTube.) It opened with a commemorative hearing, with testimony from the relatives of all the dead. Along with the memories and feelings of the relatives, the inquiry included pictures and videos. There are many stories in the fire – all are heart-breaking.

Marcio Gomes was in tears as he recalled the excitement that news of his wife's pregnancy had brought the family. Hours after the fire, he was holding his stillborn child in his arms, while his wife and two daughters lay in a coma having escaped from their twenty-first floor flat at around 4 in the morning. He told the hearings on its first day: 'I held my son in my arms that evening, hoping it was all a bad dream, wishing, praying for any kind of miracle…that he would just open

his eyes, move, make a sound'. The family had plans for Logan; he was going to be a superstar; he was going to be a football fan, supporting Benfica and Liverpool. Marcio added, 'He might not be here physically, but he will always be here in our hearts forever […] Our sleeping angel he was. We let him go with the doves so that he can fly with the angels. We are proud of him even though he was only with us for seven months'. Later that day, the West End Final Extra edition of the *Evening Standard* chose Marcio's words for its headline: 'I Held My Son In My Arms Hoping It Was A Bad Dream', reinforcing this with a picture of Grenfell Tower in flames. This front page replaced the earlier West End Final headline: 'Grenfell: Don't Make Us Wait 30 Years for Justice', which (curiously) had no accompanying pictures of the tragedy.

The change in the headline might, on the surface, seem innocuous for both are highly emotional: one headline speaks to the families' angry demand for justice, while the other picks up on the families' unbearable loss. These two stories have the same source – yet, in this moment, the unrelenting anger that inhabits the demand for justice is replaced by the unspeakable grief and horror of the tragedy. Perhaps, maybe, because a story about the tragic loss of a child would have more appeal for the *Evening Standard* (a free paper that relies on advertising revenue) than the demand for justice. Yet, although the headlines both draw on Marcio's words, the switch in headlines represents the first signs of the separation of different strands of the Grenfell story: with the raw emotion of unbearable loss becoming detached from the rage-filled demand for justice.

That said, in this moment, anger and grief and hope and love and justice and truth are not yet cauterised from one another. Listen to Emanuela Disaro, mother of Gloria Trevisan, a young Italian architect who was trapped on the twenty-third floor by flames coming up the single stairwell. In a phone call on the night of the fire, Gloria had told her mother, 'I am so sorry I can never hug you again. I had my whole life ahead of me. It's not fair'. Speaking through a translator, Emanuela told the inquiry on 29 May 2018 that she had taught her children not to hate, but that she felt a lot of anger: 'I hope this anger is going to be a positive anger. I would like this anger to help to find out the truth of what happened'. A positive anger would, Emanuela hoped, lead to justice.

Anger, Truth, Justice. Intimately connected. Yet the *Evening Standard*'s West End Final edition headline suggested that this might not be enough: bound up in the demand for justice was the feeling that justice should also mean not having to fight for justice. Maria 'Pily' Burton, wife of Nicholas, was the seventy-second victim of the fire: although rescued by firefighters from the nineteenth floor, she eventually died in January 2018 after months of medical care. Nicholas voiced the concerns of many of the bereaved. He told the *Standard*: 'We should not have to fight so hard to be heard, but every step of the way so far has been a battle. You look at the Hillsborough families, still suffering after almost 30 years. We have to make sure we don't have to wait 30 years for justice' (*Evening Standard*, 21 May 2018 West End Final, p. 4; West End Final Extra, p. 5). The demand for justice and truth may be

embedded in and motivated by anger, grief and suffering, but it also reaches out to feelings of sympathy, generosity and urgency. Or, their lack.

Nicholas Burton's reference to the Hillsborough families is highly significant. Hillsborough refers to the deaths of 96 Liverpool fans, crushed to death on the Leppings Lane terraces of Sheffield Wednesday Football Club on 15 April 1989. In fact, if justice is the punishment of those held to be responsible, the Hillsborough families will never see it. Criminal trials associated with the disaster only began on 14 January 2019. Indeed, as a forewarning for those seeking justice for Grenfell Tower, the original intention to prosecute six people, including four senior police officers (including the chief constable), weakened. In the end, only two of the six faced trial: David Duckenfield, the police officer in command on the day, and Graham Mackrell, former Sheffield Wednesday club secretary and safety officer; charges including gross negligence manslaughter (Duckenfield) and breaches of safety regulations (Mackrell). The outcome of the trial, on 3 April 2019, was under a fortnight short of the thirtieth anniversary of the tragedy. While Graham Mackrell was found guilty of a single health and safety charge, and later fined £6,500 (with £5,000 costs), the jury could not agree a verdict for David Duckenfield. At his retrial in November 2019, after over 13 hours of discussion, the jury eventually found Duckenfield not guilty. Afterwards, the Hillsborough families asked a simple question: given that the 96 people killed at Hillsborough were found to have been unlawfully killed, who will be held to account? No one will ever be convicted of their deaths.

In the immediate aftermath of the Grenfell fire, the families and survivors were already acutely aware of the struggle for justice in the wake of the Hillsborough disaster. Indeed, groups from both tragedies would meet each other and share some of the same lawyers. In many ways, theirs is a shared struggle over truths: not just over what happened and whose testimony counts, but also over how these truths are to be interpreted and contextualised.

Justice for Grenfell

After completing the commemorative hearings, on 4 June 2018, the Grenfell inquiry began to hear evidence about the events that led to the tragedy. The fire had begun when a Hotpoint fridge-freezer had caught fire in Flat 16, Floor 4, where Behailu Kebede lived. It was Kebede who had first called the emergency services, asking them to come 'quick, quick, quick'. Representing him was a lawyer who had also represented families at the Hillsborough inquiry, Rajiv Menon QC. Towards the end of a prepared statement, Rajiv Menon rounded upon the remit of the inquiry. He noted that the judge, Sir Martin Mason-Brick, was unlikely to reverse his earlier decision and take the wider context into account. However, Menon was not to be deterred. It is worth hearing him at length (video is available at www.youtube.com/channel/UCMxYjfZsqLa8DanN0r2eNJw. Extract from minute 30:30 to 35:51):

> There are certain stark irrefutable facts that one cannot simply ignore about the underlying social, economic and political reality and conditions that culminated in 71 people dying from smoke and fire in a high rise residential building, and a seventy-second person dying a few months later, in one of the richest boroughs in one of the world's great cities in one of the richest countries in the twenty-first century. It is no coincidence that this fire occurred in a building consisting of social housing and former social housing purchased under the right to buy scheme and not in one of the posh swanky high-rise residential buildings around London that cater to the extremely wealthy. It is no coincidence that this fire occurred in a building owned by a Tory flagship borough that has been at the forefront of promoting austerity cuts and deregulation and promoting business and profit over health and safety….

Off camera, someone in the audience shouts 'Justice for Grenfell'; others clap in support. The presiding judge, Sir Martin Moore-Brick, turns to the audience and solemnly insists that there will be no (further) interruptions of proceedings. Menon continues:

> … It is no coincidence that the vast majority of the residents of Grenfell Tower were first or second-generation migrants and refugees, the remaining residents being largely local people with long-standing roots in the north Kensington area. Amongst the 72 that died, 23 countries and more were represented. So, race and class are at the heart of the Grenfell story whether we like it or not, whether the inquiry acknowledges it or not, whether the terms of reference are extended or not. Consequently, we say that what happened at the Grenfell Tower in the early hours of June last year was as political as it gets and symbolic of a deep inequality in our society.

The parallels between the Grenfell Tower and Hillsborough tragedies are not connected to the high number of victims, nor to the length of time that public inquiries take, nor to the uncertain possibility that anyone will ultimately face what Menon calls 'real justice' and 'real accountability'. The parallels lie in deep and persistent inequalities in society, especially around class. Indeed, for writers such as Gordon Macleod (2018) and Stuart Hodkinson (2019), the core of this inequality is to be understood in the context of a systematic neoliberal assault on the welfare state, which has rendered public housing marginal, neglected, devalued and stigmatised. They point to the way that the local council, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, ignored regular complaints by the residents of Grenfell Tower about its safety, including the lack of a sprinkler system. To this is added the actions of an austerity-driven ruling Conservative Party and unscrupulous private contractors. This view positions Grenfell in a long history of neoliberal assaults on the working class, especially on conditions of work and housing, since Thatcherism in the 1980s (see de Noronha 2019; and also Radical Housing Network, Hudson and Tucker 2019). Indeed, Hillsborough is easily seen as part of this assault.

As importantly, there is a shared struggle not only to voice the injustice, but to have their voices heard and recognised. Those voices are heard in moments.

All too often, justice is undermined by a logic of blame: the claim for justice – formed around a much wider experience of inequality and injury – reduced to a demand for someone to be held responsible. Just as the police had sought to blame the victims, Liverpool fans, for their own deaths at Hillsborough, so the finger of blame has begun to be pointed at the firefighters for their supposed failure to evacuate people from the burning tower.

The parallels in the aftermath of the tragedies also lie in the difficulty of making anger, truth and justice stick together, especially over long periods of time. The parallel lies in the ease with which political institutions can detach heartbreak from anger, anger from the demand for justice, and justice from the political will to change public institutions, such as the police (Hillsborough) or the council (Grenfell): for example, by circumscribing the terms of reference of inquiries. Facts and affects are cauterised from one another: justice de-politicised by its gradual assimilation into the legal process. Thus, broader questions about what justice looks like – which are as political as it gets – are transmuted into narrow socio-technical questions, about cladding, about cost efficiency, about sprinkler systems. These are, of course, important issues, but this transmutation effectively converts the politics of social change into a politics of small changes.

What replaces justice is, as we have seen, heart-breaking. Yet, the over-riding heart-break of the tragedy can itself shape how we understand what went before. It can be easy only to see the tragedies that led up to the tragedy, making the tragedy appear inevitable, the only possible outcome of all the injuries and inequities that went before. Yet, Grenfell Tower, as a microcosm of London life, has more than one story to tell.

Tower of London

For most news outlets, including the BBC, and the Inquiry itself, the single most important story about Grenfell is the story of the fire and its victims: its causes, its shockingly quick spread up and around the tower, the horror of the escape… and tragic, heart-breaking, unbearable death. Yet, out of this story emerges another story: the story of a tower that was teeming with life, giving us a glimpse of a different kind of London – not broken, but getting along. To show this, let's turn to the BBC's remarkable reconstruction of the twenty-first floor (which was chosen by the BBC because it was emblematic of the fine line between life and death) for a *Newsnight* special, put together by Katie Razzall, Sara Moralioglu and Nick Menzies, broadcast on 27 September 2017 (see www.youtube.com/watch?v=-cY_fgeeCzc). The report contains interviews with residents, talking about their beautiful homes. A BBC News webpage recounts the story:

> Two IT workers. A civil engineer. A hospital porter. A charity worker. A management consultant. A supervisor in a clothes shop. A market stall employee and part-time

> student. A beauty salon owner. A retired waitress. Ten adults and five children lived on the 21st floor of the Grenfell Tower. Nine of them survived the fire. Six of them – and one unborn baby – perished. (www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/Grenfell_21st_floor. Last accessed July 2020)

As Rajiv Menon observed at the inquiry, the story of Grenfell was wrapped up in histories of class, race and social inequality (see also Shildrick 2018). After the fire, these grand narratives were replaced with ordinary stories about family, home, work and living alongside different people. Like all other floors (above the fourth floor), the twenty-first floor was organised into four two-bedroom flats and two one-bedroom flats. The two-bedroom flats each had a corner of the tower, with the one-bedroom flats sandwiched between them. All had access to a central lobby, with lifts and a single stairwell. The Gomes family – Marcio and Andreia and their two primary school-aged daughters, Luana and Megan – lived in Flat 183. Like many residents, they enjoyed living in the tower. The flats had big rooms for the family, but the kids would also play in the tower's communal spaces. Marcio and Andreia are first generation migrants from Portugal. They had lived in the tower for 10 years, but still considered themselves 'newcomers', as many of their friends had been in the tower more than 20 years. Marcio works in IT, while Andreia is a supervisor in a clothes shop. In the tower, Marcio observes:

> The diversity was great, you'd meet all sorts of different people – Irish, English, Arabic, Muslim, Portuguese, Spanish, Italians. You'd get to see different cultures. You'd go up in the lift with lots of different people; you'd talk; the kids would play. The tower itself was a community; it was very family oriented. It's been portrayed as a poor tower, a broken tower. It was far from that.

The Gomes family escaped because they were woken by Helen Gebremeskel and her 12-year-old daughter Lulya, who lived in Flat 186, a two-bedroom flat diagonally opposite Flat 183. Helen Gebremeskel was born in Eritrea and arrived in the United Kingdom as an asylum seeker when she was a child. She had been living in the tower for 20 years, but only moved into Flat 183 in 2014. She had spent the last few years renovating and decorating her new home. Helen Gebremeskel is the managing director of, and hairstylist at, H&G International Hair and Beauty Salon. Lulya's best friends were the Choucair family, which lived on the twenty-second floor. On the night of the fire, they had called Bassem Choucair to tell them to get out. The Choucair family did not get out; all died in the fire.

Helen Gebremeskel decided no one was coming to help, so made the decision to leave, against the advice of the emergency services (following accepted procedure). By the time she and Lulya went to the Gomes' flat, the fire had already been burning for over half an hour. Thick black smoke forced them all back into the Gomes' flat. For two hours, they attempted to keep the smoke out: they opened the windows, ran the bath and shower water. At around 3.30 a.m., the Gomes bedroom caught fire. The six of them wrapped themselves in wet tea