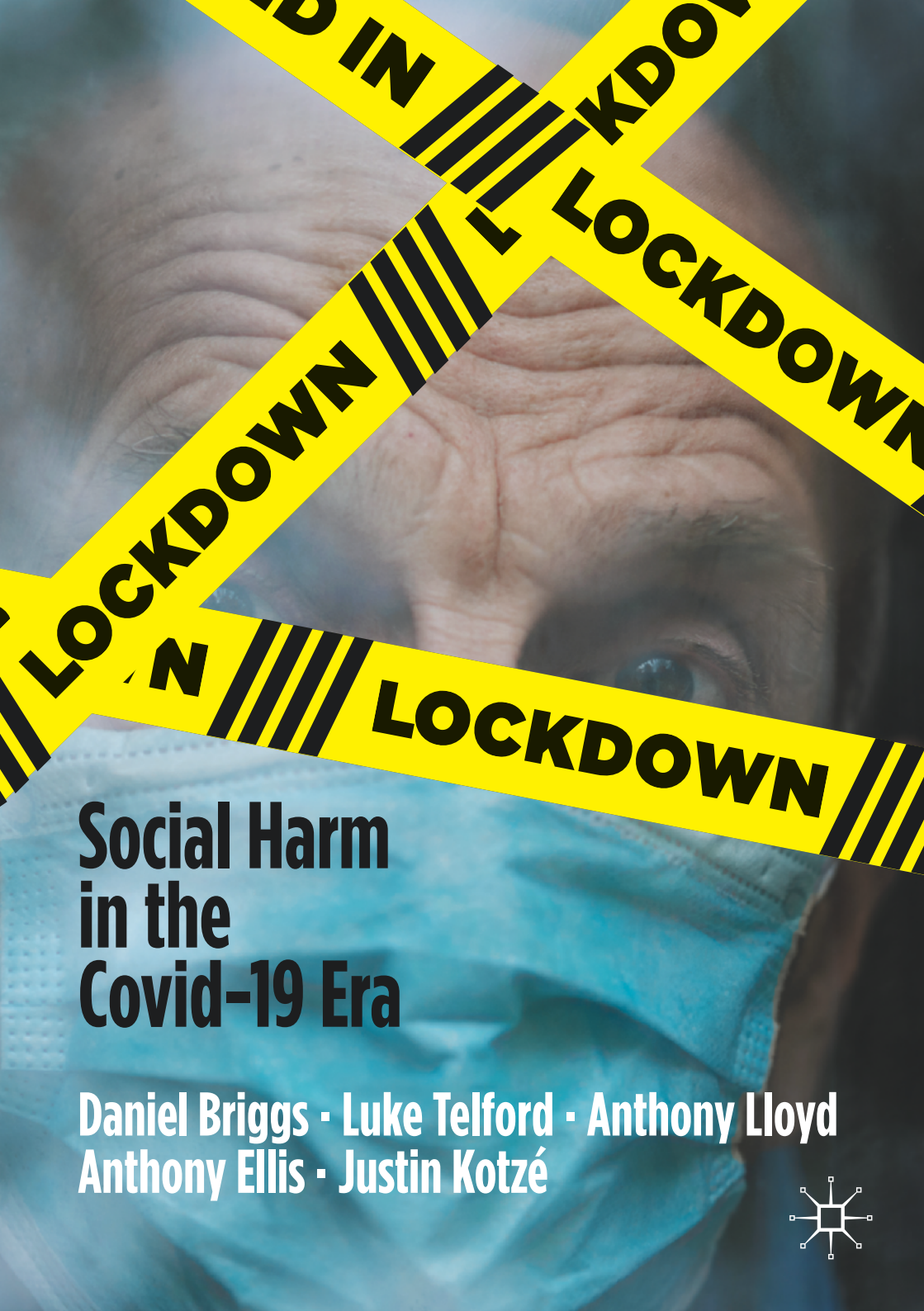

Social Harm in the Covid-19 Era

Daniel Briggs · Luke Telford · Anthony Lloyd
Anthony Ellis · Justin Kotzé

Lockdown

"Sobering, urgent and necessary, this is the first serious attempt to chronicle the colossal harms caused by lockdowns worldwide. Deeply researched, rich with statistics, and studded with personal testimonies from around the world, it should be compulsory reading for every policymaker, and anyone interested in a better post-pandemic world"

—Professor Lee Jones, *Professor of Political Economy and International Relations, Queen Mary, University of London, UK*

"These authors deserve the world's thanks for surveying the victims of covid lockdowns starting in March 2020. The pain communicated in the voices of victims woven into this book – from violence, anxiety, loss of love, meaning, and security, social disintegration, crushed dreams, and so much more – is enough to touch the most hardened 'neoliberal'. Presented within a well-referenced social scientific journey through the covid era, the authors' poignant condemnation of lockdowns and other covid policies that hijacked society is a welcome addition to covid policy analysis by left-wing intellectuals, most of whom – like governments worldwide – turned their backs on the victims of the madness"

—Professor Gigi Foster, *School of Economics, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia*

"Finally! Left-wing intellectuals writing about lockdowns who are truly on the side of the poor, the elderly, the migrants, the sick, and the young: the forgotten victims. This timely book documents how many academics and politicians fell for the illusion that one can control covid and failed to see the damage right under their nose that they were party to"

—Paul Frijters, *Emeritus Professor of Wellbeing Economics at the London School of Economics, London, UK*

"This is an absorbing account of lockdown harms, told in part through fascinating first person testimony and surveys collected throughout the pandemic from around the world. 'Lockdown' tells the global stories of moral quandries, mistrust in government and fault-lines between 'sheeple' and 'covidiots'. Bitter truths are made palatable by the engaging human stories. In one example, the bizarre management of this epidemic is illustrated in the description

of a 'Covid-safe' child's party in which fun is 'broken down into sequential bouts of potential excitement followed by disappointment'. This is an essential account of lockdowns!"

—Laura Dodsworth, *author, journalist, photographer and filmmaker and author of* A State of Fear: How The UK Government Weaponised Fear During The Covid-19 Pandemic*, UK*

"As social scientists begin to interrogate the harms caused by the response to Covid-19, this book drops a bomb into the discussion which will help to demolish the myth that the destruction of so many lives and livelihoods was somehow inevitable. *Lockdown* is a brilliant analysis of the 'collateral damage' caused by the pandemic response, of the human experience of this nightmare, and of the implications for the futures of societies around the world. It is urgent, gripping, vital, and demands to be read"

—Professor Toby Green, *Professor of Precolonial and Lusophone African History and Culture, Kings College, London, UK*

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Anthony Lloyd · Anthony Ellis · Justin Kotzé

Lockdown

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Foreword

Perhaps the biggest single error in the management of the Covid-19 pandemic has been the assumption that this is a public health problem where responses should be led by biomedical science. Pandemics challenge the whole of society and require a whole of science response, a definition of science that includes knowledge from the social sciences and humanities as much as from physics, engineering, computing or whatever. In a globally integrated world, the challenge is to the whole of global society, not just to individual nation states. An obsession with the choices of one government or another obscures the extent to which the problems to which these respond are created by global processes which, in turn, both constrain the options available and create common experiences for citizens.

The strength of this book is precisely its refusal to settle for a story about one country or another but to deal with the sources of the crisis in globalisation and the interdependencies that this has created. We should not exaggerate the novelty of these interactions—Australia was no more successful in excluding pandemic influenza in 1918 than it has been

with Covid in 2021—but the acceleration of mobility in the contemporary world has greatly enhanced their impact. A virus originating in China can arrive in Europe overnight by plane rather than in weeks by steamship. The authors begin, then, with an analysis of the international division of labour, the forces that have driven it, the associated models of governance and the consequent patterns of inequality. Pandemics are a stress test for any system of social organisation—and this is no exception. Viruses find the fault lines in society. The Black Death played its part in the decline of feudal society. Will Covid-19 result in a similar shift in power or will new technologies of population control protect elites from the consequences?

The politics of the Covid-19 pandemic play out in slightly different ways in the countries studied. There are, however, notable common features, particularly in the way elite groups have seized the opportunity to entrench themselves and to remodel political discourses in their own interests. Human rights and liberties are no longer the preconditions for democracy but privileges granted by elites that may be withdrawn if inconvenient. Public assemblies of political opponents may be suppressed by invoking the language of infection control. Private spaces, such as homes, may be penetrated and policed. The Chief Medical Officer for Canada can even give advice on sexual positions that minimise the risk of transmitting infection. Public health has always had a panoptic dimension. Sometimes this can be justified in terms of protecting individuals—women and children—with limited access to the public sphere but these incursions have always been regulated by the forms of law. In the pandemic, habits of governing by decree are being formed, which will be difficult to shake off. Everyone is to be considered diseased and subject to control unless they can, repeatedly, prove their health. The basic principles of the rule of law are inverted: innocence is not assumed from the start.

Elites, however, get to opt out. Their status buys protection and privacy. This is not simply a matter of wealth, although the private jet brings a more relaxed biosecurity regime than economy class. Although the openness of biomedical career paths can be exaggerated, their meritocratic claims can be just as oppressive. If success is not an accident of birth or intergenerational wealth, then those left behind clearly deserve to

be. They are the helot class, Huxley's Deltas and Epsilons, to be managed in a kindly but firm manner by those entitled to rule by virtue of superior intellect. Their fear of Covid-19 is a useful diversion from the deaths of despair engendered by globalisation, and accentuated by the pandemic—the uncounted legions of victims of suicide, cancer, heart disease, drug dependency and the like.

Medical sociologists have charted the rolling-back of biomedical imperialism since the 1960s. This has not been without struggle but the assumption that biomedical science should dictate to society had been substantially constrained. The lesson from this book is that most of those changes have been reversed in the twinkling of a historic moment. Commitments to partnership, dialogue, co-production, even to evidence-based practice have been abandoned in a resurgence of biomedical paternalism. The language of 'compliance' has re-emerged from the dark cupboards where it has been lodged for a generation.

This is a passionate book, filled with the voices of the pandemic's global victims. Like many instant books, its arguments and judgements will be subject to revision with the passage of time and the accumulation of more detailed and reflective accounts. Its importance, however, lies precisely in its passion, its anger and its provocation to think more widely and more deeply about what the management of the pandemic is doing to societies around the world, and to the values and assumptions on which they have been based for generations.

August 2021

Robert Dingwall
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Contents

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Daniel Briggs, Ph.D. is a Professor of Criminology at the Universidad Europea in Madrid, Spain. As a researcher, writer and interdisciplinary academic who studies social problems, he has undertaken ethnographic research into social issues from street drug users to terminally ill patients; from refugees to prostitutes; and from gypsies to gangs and deviant youth behaviours. He also lectures across the social sciences and has published widely. One of his most recent books about the harms of drug addiction in the urban wastelands, *Dead End Lives: Drugs and Violence in the City Shadows* (Policy Press, 2017), won the Division of International Criminology's Outstanding Book Award 2018 (selected by the American Society of Criminology). Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, his most recent book about the refugee crisis was published as *Climate Changed: Refugee Border Stories and the Business of Misery* (Routledge, 2020). In collaboration with members of an International Covid-19 research team he leads, he has just published *Researching the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Critical Blueprint for the Social Sciences* (Policy Press, 2021) and is writing *Hotel Puta: A hardcore Ethnography of a Luxury Brothel* (RJ4ALL Publications).

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List of Figures

1

Conceptualising Covid-19 Times: Post-politics and Social Harm

The spectre of catastrophe on the horizon of popular consciousness had, until early 2020, been generally reserved for climate change and environmental disaster. Europe and North America were also experiencing extreme political polarisation, which had riven new cleavages and fault lines into a once relatively settled political landscape.[1] A global pandemic was at the forefront of very few minds. However, within a few short months in early 2020, SARS-CoV-2 (hereafter Covid-19) had fundamentally reordered political, economic and social life across much of the world.[2] Or, more accurately, the *global response* to Covid-19 had fundamentally reordered the lives of billions of people across the planet.[3] Daily press conferences announced increasingly restrictive measures, new rules on social contact, working patterns, educational activity and leisure, alongside grim updates on infection numbers, hospitalisations and deaths became commonplace. Social media debate, already liable to extreme polarisation, demonstrated further antagonisms between those seeking

[1] Winlow et al. (2017) and Nagle (2017).

[2] Schwab and Malleret (2020).

[3] Briggs et al. (2021).

D. Briggs et al., *Lockdown*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-88825-1_1

the security of restrictions and those seeking the return of freedom. In short, Covid-19 and the global response to it not only reshaped material realities but also became firmly embedded within political, social and cultural imagination.

However, a global pandemic should not have been a surprise. History is littered with examples of pandemics and plagues and, over the last century, a surprisingly high number of epidemics and pandemics have claimed the lives of millions.[4] From the Spanish flu of 1918 through to Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), Swine Flu, Ebola, Zika virus and more, the last 100 years have encountered new forms of disease that have often been transmitted from the animal kingdom to humans and resulted in a wide range of infection, illness and death. However, the emergence of Covid-19 in late 2019 and early 2020, principally in the Chinese province of Wuhan, seemed to catch many by surprise.[5] Within a matter of weeks, Europeans who had been aware of SARS, MERS, Zika virus and other recent pandemics—yet not directly affected in any meaningful way—went from paying little attention to news reports of a new respiratory virus in China to transferring work online, gearing up for home-schooling and preparing to enter an unprecedented lockdown. From its origins in China, Covid-19 quickly spread across trade and travel routes through to Europe and the United States of America (USA), and by 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) had declared a global pandemic.[6] Within weeks, most countries across the world were reporting cases of the virus and governments had enacted a range of restrictive public health measures including social distancing and working from home, enshrined through emergency legislation, to prevent the spread of infection and insulate healthcare systems. For much of the world, this involved the curtailment of freedoms and liberties in unprecedented ways.

This book offers a critical account of lockdown policies and employs a social harm framework to consider the implications of sustained

[4] Honigsbaum (2020).

[5] Zizek (2021).

[6] World Health Organization (WHO) (2020).

restrictions. Government intervention has been framed as the careful management of risk and therefore ostensibly designed to reduce the harms of the virus, prevent hospitals and healthcare workers from being overwhelmed, reduce short-term and long-term illness, and, ultimately, deaths. However, other harms have proliferated throughout the pandemic, including rising levels of domestic abuse and child abuse,[7] hate crime,[8] increased loneliness and isolation,[9] rising levels of mental ill-health,[10] unemployment,[11] educational inequality,[12] suspected corruption[13] and fraud.[14] While not dismissing the risk of harm presented by the virus itself, we intend to shine a light on the various harms associated with the way in which governments have responded to the pandemic. We seek to explore the experiences of those across the world who have lived with the consequences of both the virus and our collective response to it.

To start this book, we feel it is important to contextualise the world before Covid-19 and offer an outline of our social harm perspective. Before we delve into this, it is important to make several points clear from the outset. First, as critical social scientists, we went to work right from the start of the crisis in March 2020 to capture public opinions on the pandemic and governmental responses.[15] We wanted to capture views from a range of people who were experiencing the pandemic in different countries with different circumstances and so we launched an international online survey, promoted via social media. Thereafter this study used other methods which we discuss later in the chapter. What we present here is based on the findings from this work.

Second, we have characterised this as a book about 'global lockdown'. 'Lockdown' has been interpreted and implemented differently across the

[7] Sediri et al. (2020).
[8] Gover et al. (2020).
[9] Killgore et al. (2020).
[10] Zizek (2021).
[11] Blakeley (2020).
[12] Scott et al. (2021).
[13] Abassi (2020).
[14] Grierson (2021).
[15] Briggs et al. (2020, 2021) and Ellis et al. (2021).

world and some countries followed different approaches.[16] Some countries, such as New Zealand, entered a short restrictive lockdown in early 2020 but lifted internal restrictions after only seven weeks (although more severe border restrictions were kept in place). Others, such as the United Kingdom (UK), used full national lockdowns on three occasions, as well as a regional tier system with varying degrees of restriction on travel, leisure and social interaction. 'Lockdown' here refers to restrictive 'non-pharmaceutical interventions' (NPIs) designed to prevent the spread of disease.[17] While we recognise a global study has limitations in terms of scale and the vast and diverse nature of global experience, we felt that a global pandemic required, as much as possible, a global perspective to try and identify similarities and differences in experience in a wide range of contexts. We know we cannot capture everything and we make no claims to having done so, but we have gathered over 2,000 perspectives from 59 countries. Considering the conditions under which the data was collected, we think this is pretty good going.

Finally, it reflects the rather simplistic nature of our national and international discourse on the pandemic that we even have to make this statement, but we feel it is important to state the following: we are not Covid-19 deniers. We know the virus is real. We have friends and family members who have been diagnosed with Covid-19, some experiencing mild symptoms while others experiencing more severe symptoms. Friends of friends have died with/from Covid-19. What we are saying is that our argument is not that the pandemic is somehow fake news or a conspiracy. We are also not epidemiologists, biologists or virologists. We are social scientists and, as such, are interested in the impact of social forces, including pandemics and states' responses, upon the lives of people in a range of different settings and contexts. We study and question the political, economic, cultural and social ramifications of various phenomena, including pandemics and the response of governments, political officials and media.

Our work has led us to ask critical questions that we feel have not always been sufficiently raised within academic, political or media

[16] Arshed et al. (2020).

[17] Flaxman et al. (2020).

spheres.[18] As critical criminologists engaged in the study of social harm, we have asked whether NPIs or lockdowns were the only available option. What harms emerge from the restrictive measures placed on people's lives throughout the pandemic, and finally, what is the balance of harm between lockdown in the name of public health and the growing list of damage experienced by individuals, families and society as a whole? When we look back on the pandemic in the future, we will ask whether the measures were worth it. Here we offer a preliminary assessment of the harms of lockdown. Before we move onto presenting the data that underpins this assessment, let us first outline life before the pandemic as the virus, and the response to it, emerged within a specific broader context.

Context

It is difficult to outline an entire global context in a few short pages but the world into which Covid-19 emerged was a world divided politically, economically, culturally and socially. Most, if not all, of the world today exists under a capitalist political economy and while 'varieties of capitalism'[19] exist, and inevitably shape countries and regions in different ways, it is reasonable to say that capitalism and its imperatives of maximising profitability and market expansion dominate the globe. China represents a form of state-managed capitalism[20] while 'developing' nations of the Global South and East provide the labour and natural resources for the advanced service and financial neoliberal economies of the Global North and West. David Harvey[21] notes the geographical element to capitalism; capital moves spatially as opportunities emerge in different parts of the world where returns on investment are more likely. When the USA and UK abandoned their productive economies in the

[18] Briggs et al. (2021).
[19] Hall and Soskice (2001).
[20] Liu and Tsai (2020).
[21] Harvey (2010).

1970s in favour of financial and service-based economies,[22] production was relocated to other parts of an increasingly interlinked and globalised network and supply chain. The global economy is also interconnected along lines of production and consumption. What one country produces another consumes, and this is true of both material commodities and experiences such as tourism. When we think about production and consumption, this is often underpinned by labour. Local and regional economies and labour markets rely on this interconnected network of global capitalism; what factory workers in Bangladesh make, consumers in the US purchase. What Pacific Island holiday resorts offer in employment opportunities for locals, wealthy tourists enjoy as dream holiday experiences. The interconnections of trade, production and consumption create conditions whereby the relationships between states and markets differ across the globe. The bottom line, however, is that the global capitalist economy remains a dynamic process that creates winners and losers.

In the West, neoliberalism has represented the dominant ideology for four decades.[23] Despite earlier assertions that neoliberalism represented the withering of the nation state, it would be more accurate to suggest the role of the state changed to provide the support mechanisms for global markets to emerge, consolidate and thrive.[24] The primary values of neoliberalism, both economically and ideologically, revolve around competition, individualism and the protection of private property rights. This has been evident in the UK, Europe and the USA for decades in the economic realm of trade, finance, markets, and, increasingly, the social and cultural realm, where individualism and aggressive competition for status, respect and material reward has moved to the centre of society.[25] This resulted in a focus on privatisation, outsourcing and market forces with the belief that economic competition generated both innovation and efficiency.[26]

[22] Varoufakis (2013).
[23] Harvey (2005).
[24] Slobodian (2019) and Mitchell and Fazi (2017).
[25] Hall et al. (2008).
[26] Lloyd (2020).

However, neoliberal capitalism has failed to maintain consistent economic growth in recent decades, despite a bloated financial sector generating huge profits uncoupled from the real economy.[27] As Wolfgang Streeck has noted, neoliberal capitalism has become increasingly volatile and unable to resolve its own contradictions.[28] The global financial crisis of 2007–08 led to a decade of austerity and deficit reduction measures in the West which further demonstrated the limits of neoliberalism and showed that the service of capital markets was more important than democracy.[29] The UK and USA imposed austerity upon its populations with devastating consequences,[30] while the European Union's (EU) anti-democratic structures demanded austerity measures from periphery nations, such as Greece and Ireland, to access loans needed to pay off bank loans.[31] While the willingness to uncouple capitalism from democracy raised some consternation in Europe, China had shown that capital markets did not necessarily go hand in hand with democracy.[32]

In Europe, the UK and the USA, these political-economic shifts hollowed out traditional manufacturing and heavy industry, outsourcing and relocating jobs to the Global South where costs and labour were cheaper.[33] The West has increasingly come to rely upon financial services, the public sector, digital technologies and traditional service economy work. Labour market polarisation has seen high-paid work in emerging sectors contrast with stagnant wages and poor conditions in the precarious service economy.[34] While unemployment fell before the pandemic, it masked the rise of insecure forms of temporary, part-time and 'non-standard' forms of employment characterised by zero-hour contracts, gig economy work and self-employment.[35] The USA has recently witnessed

[27] Streeck (2016).
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] O'Hara (2014).
[31] Lapavitsas (2019).
[32] So (2019).
[33] Lloyd (2013).
[34] Standing (2011).
[35] Lloyd (2018).

fights for an increased minimum wage,[36] while France saw sustained 'gilet jaunes' protests, as many people are angry at job insecurity, conditions and the overall growth of inequality in French society.[37]

As a consequence, the Global South and East have become the engine of production, but lax regulation and worker protections create profitable opportunities for multinationals while exposing workers to harsh conditions and a lack of safety that has resulted in significant workplace accidents. Factory collapses in Bangladesh[38] and a wave of suicides by jumping off Foxconn factories in China[39] serve as just two examples. It is telling that the response to the latter did not prompt a change in working conditions, but rather called for the introduction of protective netting around buildings. Pay and conditions within the formal labour market are poor while an informal and casual labour market represents a significant proportion of labour in India, Central and South America, and Africa.[40]

The Global South and East also relied on thriving tourist industries, catering to travellers from more affluent places which bolstered local labour markets; for example, luxury 'trophy hunting' holidays in Africa afford rich Westerners the chance to kill big game and simultaneously generate between $100-$400 million for the African economy and somewhere between 7,000 and 50,000 jobs.[41] Finally, labour exploitation takes place globally with different features in different parts of the world, but the interconnected nature of supply chains and trade routes facilitates the legal and illegal movement of people for the purposes of exploited labour.[42] The financial opportunities available to, for example, militias and dictators in African countries such as Democratic Republic of Congo, which control mines and their natural resources, as well as trade routes, often result in significant harms. These include the exploitation of 'workers' who effectively become slaves, huge resource extraction

[36] Pietrykowski (2017).
[37] Jetten et al. (2020).
[38] Large (2018).
[39] Chan (2013).
[40] Singhari and Madheswaran (2017), Jinnah (2017), and Milkman (2020).
[41] Smith (2019).
[42] UNODC (2016).

from local economies by corrupt political actors and global corporations, and the continuation of poverty among the local population.[43] These inequalities are interconnected while maintaining a localised imprint.

This fragmented and divisive labour market reflects a growing gap between the rich and poor that has a clear spatial context, both nationally and globally.[44] Globally, China has seen an overall reduction in poverty but a huge increase in inequality; the richest one per cent own as much wealth as the bottom half of Chinese society.[45] The USA and UK have seen wages lag over the last forty years while inequality has risen,[46] demonstrating Thomas Piketty's thesis that inequality grows when profits grow faster than wages.[47] Western countries have clear geographic wealth divides; between urban and rural communities, between North and South (in the UK) and between (and within) urban metro areas and rural communities (in the USA).[48] With those inequalities, both countries have seen increases in poverty, mental health problems, addiction and suicide.[49] These social problems are also persistent within the peripheries of Europe's great cities.[50] Economic inequality is not only reserved for middle- and lower-income nations and economies; extremes of income disparity exist in Brazil, India, South Africa and the Middle East, with the rich often comparable to Europe and the USA but with much greater poverty among those at the bottom of the income distribution.[51] Capital seeks new markets and new opportunities to reproduce. Increasingly, this involves the grossly uneven distribution of profits, resources and wealth. At the same time national and global economies continue to stagnate, masked by the success of a few businesses and sectors that enrich their shareholders.

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[43] Pitron (2020).

[44] Piketty (2014) and Dorling (2015).

[45] Chen (2020) and Jain-Chandra et al. (2018).

[46] Blundell et al. (2018).

[47] Piketty (2014).

[48] Manduca (2019), Silva (2019), and Hazeldine (2020).

[49] Case and Deaton (2020), Quinones (2016), and Wilkinson and Pickett (2009).

[50] Briggs and Gamero (2017) and Briggs (2020).

[51] Assouad et al. (2018).

Consideration of wealth disparities and global, regional and local economic inequalities sits against the backdrop of climate change and environmental concerns which have loomed on the horizon for decades. Concerns that are beginning to now materialise and are being experienced in the context of existing inequalities.[52] As carbon emissions rise, most of the scientific community agrees that the consequences for the natural environment will be significant.[53] Increasing calls for intervention demand we either slow down or reverse the potential effects of climate change, with those calls becoming louder and more panicked with each passing year.[54] Human destruction and appropriation of the natural environment has been central to our advancement as a species and civilisation, yet planetary warming since the Industrial Revolution is now beginning to affect water supplies, biodiversity, weather systems, sea levels and agriculture; not to mention the effects of melting ice caps and heating permafrost.[55] Indeed, some suggest that the increased prevalence and spread of novel viruses—from MERS, SARS and Swine Flu, to Ebola, Zika and Covid-19—stems from human encroachment into the natural environment.[56] The result is greater proximity to virus-carrying animals, such as bats, and the destruction of their natural habitat.[57]

Environmental catastrophe has generated popular protest and unrest as well as political action. The 2015 Paris Agreement committed most countries around the world to limit carbon emissions, although the USA withdrew under President Trump and re-joined under President Biden. Political disagreement also characterises the climate change debate as newly industrialised countries such as China, India and Brazil criticise the hypocrisy of those countries who commenced the Industrial Revolution and now call for curtailment of industrial expansion. Meanwhile, countries such as the UK and USA may not emit carbon through

[52] White and Heckenberg (2014) and White (2013).
[53] Klein (2014).
[54] Taylor et al. (2019).
[55] White and Heckenberg (2014).
[56] Schwab and Malleret (2020).
[57] Honigsbaum (2020).

industrial production, but their consumer societies are far from environmentally friendly,[58] leading to suggestions that we must learn to live more modestly.

In contrast, technological developments are heralded as the solution, from geoengineering[59] to net-zero economies, electric cars and hydrogen batteries.[60] However, new technologies require different natural resources, the control of which become conflict points and effectively represent a different form of natural exploitation; switching from exploiting fossil fuels to rare metals such as palladium and cobalt creates a new dependency on resources with an as-yet undetermined lifespan.[61] While climate change represents an ecological challenge, it is also a human challenge. International migration has always occurred throughout human history but today is driven by a range of factors including escalating civil war in the Middle East and North Africa, climate change and deepening economic inequality.[62] As migrants leave war zones, climate hotspots and economically marginalised spaces in search of safety and a better future, many are arriving in countries with hostile political climates and moving into spaces that are already deprived, fragmented and problematic.[63] Cultural tensions around assimilation, multiculturalism and tolerance combine with economic tensions around resources, jobs and opportunities.[64] Each of these factors requires passionate political debate and intervention, though as we explain in the next section, our current epoch represents a 'post-political' era which is ill-equipped to deal with these challenges.

[58] Smart (2010).
[59] Buck (2019).
[60] Schwab (2017).
[61] Pitron (2020).
[62] Parenti (2011) and Briggs (2020).
[63] Lloyd et al. (2021).
[64] Winlow et al. (2017).

Post-politics

There may be unprecedented prosperity across the world, but there is also division, inequality, poverty and the impending threat of catastrophic changes to our climate. Solutions to these challenges ordinarily emerge from politics, yet the West, in particular, has moved into an inertial state of post-politics[65] where nothing exists beyond the horizon of capitalism. Indeed, as critics from Fredric Jameson to Mark Fisher have noted, it is now easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.[66] Politics, in its traditional sense, means the articulation of a vision for the future based on a belief system in how society could and should function.[67] However, politics has been increasingly reduced to the efficient management of the system as it exists today. Fundamental questions are rarely, if ever, asked about whether our political and economic model is the right one, with no political figures arguing for an alternative to capitalism or presenting an alternative vision. Some may argue that the Black Lives Matter protests, #MeToo movement, pro-democracy rallies in places such as Hong Kong and anti-austerity marches in the UK, France and USA represent the vibrancy of our political system. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Each of these issues is easily incorporated within the field of capitalist political economy—they do not threaten the system or call for an alternative vision, only a fairer version of what currently exists.[68] For years, Francis Fukuyama's[69] claim that liberal democratic market capitalism represented 'the end of history' was derided, while most people *acted as if it were true*.

Some may suggest that the rise of the right and a return to authoritarian government represents the return of a particular kind of alternative politics, one characterised by nationalism, populism and security. The political divisions over Donald Trump, Brexit, and the growing support for right of centre and far right parties, as well as democratic socialists

[65] Winlow et al. (2015).
[66] Fisher (2009).
[67] Badiou (2012).
[68] Winlow et al. (2015).
[69] Fukuyama (1992).

such as Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn, would seem to signal the recommencement of political division. However, before the pandemic, these divisions remained within the confines of what Fisher called 'capitalist realism' and called for, on the left, greater equality and distribution and, on the right, greater protection and security. The political fault lines in Europe now largely exist on the field of culture, rather than political economy. Issues of identity, participation and recognition are often rights-based and are easily subsumed within the capitalist system. In fact, what has emerged could be accurately described as 'anti-politics'. Issues-based movements increasingly appear to be satisfied with defeat in the political arena as long as ideological purity remains and gains are made in the cultural field. The Left appears content to lose electorally as long as they can colonise the cultural imagination and continue to criticise political leaders for not transforming society in the way they want. Political division exists but it does not, we suggest, represent the vibrancy of liberal democracy.

Instead, it demonstrates the decline of symbolic efficiency—the narrative that ideology presents to us a set of signifiers that allow us to make sense of our place in the world, a narrative that we can usually apply with a degree of consistency to our experiences in life. Neoliberalism increasingly fails to account for the reality of life in many parts of the world and the gap between that rhetoric and our realities is becoming more evident. Yet, despite this, protests continue to call for greater recognition *within the existing system* rather than a fundamental overhaul and movement to a different form of political economy.[70] It is necessary for us to acknowledge this post-political context precisely because it is within this context that governments tried to address the pandemic. Framed by the ideologies they uphold, the tools they were willing to use reflected a strong commitment to the existing system. Moreover, as we shall go on to demonstrate, our willingness to both adhere to and deviate from restrictive NPIs such as lockdowns reflected the *same* level of commitment (Chapters 6 and 10). We now turn to a brief discussion of the ultra-realist harm framework that we employ to make sense of our empirical data.

[70] Kotzé (2020).

Social Harm and Ultra-Realism

Our analysis here draws upon a social harm framework developed within the field of critical criminology.[71] Social harm, or zemiology, emerged from a critique of crime as a concept without firm foundation or ontological grounding.[72] Criminology had traditionally focused upon transgressions of the criminal law but the foundational concept, crime, was flawed.[73] What constitutes 'crime' is constructed by society and enshrined in laws made by us. Crime reflects wider power relations and structural dynamics that often reveal what some rather flippantly call 'petty events'.[74] While we would caution against trivialising the experiences of those who fall victim to these events, it is worth acknowledging that these incidents are generally taken up by the criminal justice system and are often punished. However, many other forms of crime and harm, often emanating from the boardroom rather than the barroom, go unreported, undetected and unpunished. Although harm has a longer history within the field of criminology, the last two decades have seen a growth in zemiological analysis and theorisation.[75] Social harm acknowledged the limitations of 'crime' as a category and recognised that wider events, processes and actions that were entirely legal could still have harmful consequences for individuals, families, communities and entire societies.[76] This positive step opened a new direction for social research which has subsequently produced work in a range of areas including work and employment,[77] climate and environment,[78] borders,[79] fashion[80] and health and safety failures.[81]

[71] Kotzé (2018), Lloyd (2018), and Raymen (2019).
[72] Hillyard and Tombs (2004).
[73] Pemberton (2016).
[74] Hillyard and Tombs (2004).
[75] Canning and Tombs (2021).
[76] Pemberton (2016).
[77] Lloyd (2018) and Scott (2017).
[78] White and Heckenberg (2014).
[79] Canning (2018).
[80] Large (2018).
[81] Tombs (2014).

Various harm perspectives have sought to develop typologies of harm that allow us to see the various ways in which perfectly legal processes can have profoundly negative consequences. Paddy Hillyard and Steve Tombs[82] delineated 'physical harms', 'financial and economic harms', and 'emotional and psychological harms'. Simon Pemberton[83] sought to locate 'preventable harms' across varieties of capitalism and identified 'physical and mental health harms', 'autonomy harms' and 'relational harms'. Majid Yar,[84] grounding his harm framework in the concept of 'recognition', suggested that harms represented the loss of 'respect' at a macro-level where our rights are not recognised, 'esteem' at a meso level where we are not recognised through solidarity, social identity and cultural characteristics, and 'love' at the interpersonal level where we are not recognised by family, friends and partners. Each typology offers different ways to characterise and categorise social harm across a wide variety of examples.

Simon Pemberton has argued that neoliberalism represents the most harmful form of capitalist ideology and political economy, given the exacerbation of inequality in recent decades.[85] This would indicate that the world into which Covid-19 emerged was not only divided and unequal but profoundly harmful and damaging to individuals, families and communities. While we would not disagree with this assessment, it potentially does not paint a full picture and so this represents the point where our interpretation of social harm begins to deviate from the normative social harm frameworks at the centre of this new discipline. There are undoubtedly harms that happen to us which are the result of social processes and structures. These are not necessarily intentionally harmful but do have problematic consequences. For example, deindustrialisation and globalisation are both structural processes that some may argue have positive consequences but also have negative and harmful outcomes for others. The unintentional functioning of our social

[82] Hillyard and Tombs (2004).
[83] Pemberton (2016).
[84] Yar (2012).
[85] Pemberton (2016).

system can result in harm and this can be characterised as the *negative motivation to harm*.[86]

However, we feel that this only tells half of the story and doesn't adequately explain the positive motivation to harm; in other words, the *individual's willingness to inflict harm on others for expressive or instrumental gain*.[87] Harm does not emerge from growing inequality, rather inequality stems from a willingness to inflict harm on others.[88] There are *harms done to us* by unintentional processes but also *harms inflicted by us upon each other*. Accordingly, while most harm perspectives 'look up' at social structures and macro-level processes rather than 'down' at street-level events,[89] we adopt a more integrated approach that explores both systemic *and* singular harms.[90] That is to say, we look at the harm emanating from 'up there' in the corridors of power and 'down there' on the streets.[91] From this perspective we are able to account for both the negative and positive motivation to harm. By looking at both forms of motivation we can begin to highlight their connections and understand how they feed into each other to produce both legal and illegal harms. This more integrated approach towards the study of crime and harm is informed by an ultra-realist theoretical framework. While it is not possible for us to fully explore this here, it is worth outlining some of its main components.

Ultra-realist criminology is an emerging framework on the periphery of the discipline that has made some useful contributions in relation to understanding motivation and the causes of crime and harm.[92] At its core, ultra-realism rejects the standard interpretations of subjectivity in favour of Adrian Johnston's Žižek-Lacan inspired transcendental materialism. This rejects the belief that we are rational actors or subjects of socially constructed discourse and takes us back to our biological roots, albeit in a way that shows the real dynamism between our individual

[86] Hall and Winlow (2015).
[87] Lloyd (2020).
[88] Hall and Winlow (2015).
[89] Canning and Tombs (2021).
[90] Kotzé (2021).
[91] Hall and Winlow (2015).
[92] Ibid., Hall (2012), and Raymen and Kuldova (2021).

agency and social and symbolic structures. The subject is constituted through 'lack', a fundamental split at the unconscious level where we pass from a state of raw nature into a state of culture.

Think here of a new-born baby: she arrives in the world that already exists yet is psychologically unable to make sense of her surroundings. That baby is bombarded by a terrifying array of stimuli. In Lacanian terms, this represents 'the Real'; an unnameable, unsymbolised world experienced as trauma. The subject, in order to stave off this trauma, unconsciously *solicits* an external 'Symbolic Order', a network of values, signs, symbols and language that allows us to make sense of our surroundings. For it to be effective, that Symbolic Order must have a degree of consistency, it must tell us a story of the world that makes sense to us and our experience of it as we make our way through life. This Symbolic Order is inscribed in our neurological circuits and, effectively, rewires the neuronal receptors in our brains. Our material being is changed by the world around us. We then act in the world and have the agency to make choices and change and adapt to our surroundings.[93]

Different Symbolic Orders exist in different parts of the world and so each individual adapts to, and is shaped by, their surroundings. The 'lack' or split at the heart of the subject creates the desire that fuels us to act in the world, seeking the 'lost object' at the centre of our being. This creates a huge current of libidinal energy that can be directed in different ways, according to political-economic systems and ideologies. For Steve Hall,[94] Western society was pseudo-pacified over centuries, channelling libidinal energy away from brigandry, violence and predation and towards economic competition and market forces that culminated with the emergence and reproduction of capitalism. Since the second half of the twentieth century, aggressive competition has emerged in the field of consumer culture and our libidinal energy has been directed towards consumer choice. While not, as critics have suggested, a direct-expression theory of crime or an economically reductionist model,[95] ultra-realism connects the reality of daily life with what critical realists call the domain

[93] Ellis (2016).

[94] Hall (2012).

[95] Wood et al. (2020).