## 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 considerations 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 <u>all</u> 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 conservativism. It also comes down to what is considered 'conservativism'. 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, conservativism 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 you 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 or 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 ciminalise 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, whist 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 reform*ism* 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 jab. 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!