

Editorial

The Longest Year:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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