The
panopticon

The Summer of Change

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Issue 02— January 2021

Editor's note

When originally conceived back in August it was anticipated that the theme for this edition 'The Summer of Change' would provide a chance to reflect on and understand the officially unprecedented year of 2020 (for want of a better word). As the pandemic continues to reverberate though every aspect of our lives, we have here a selection of articles which we hope will either illuminate 2020 or distract from it. You'll find a fabulous range of topics and perspectives, from original photojournalism documenting BLM protests in America, to a snapshot of a sociological career to an interrogation of 'fast fashion' - naming but a few! Thank you to all our wonderful contributors for making this second edition of the Panopticon a reality!

This is an underwhelming time to be studying at university, to put it mildly, but it is also an overwhelming time to be tackling a discipline which seeks to understand human societies: always an ambitious aim, and now even more complex. The change we are experiencing really is extraordinary, everything has been affected by the pandemic and our collective response to it: the wildlife moving into cities, the PPE destined to be laid down in the geological record, our dreams...you name it.As a religious tea-drinker, one of my favourite mottos is 'you never know how good the tea is until you put it in hot water'. All of us are having to draw on deep resources of resilience now, and these articles demonstrate how, as sociologists, we are well placed to do this. One good tool in the toolbox is the 'sociological imagination': the curiosity to explore the social world and different perspectives, which should keep boredom away! And we are also good at zooming out, and when you do this there are reasons to be cheerful. There are many instances in human history when cataclysmic events have sparked positive leaps forward. What will a post-covid world look like, and more importantly what could it look like?

One last note – The journal title, 'The Panopticon' refers to a circular building conceived by Jeremy Bentham in the 18th Century as a means of ensuring control of institutional inmates through constant surveillance, and for Foucault control of a population. We know now in our daily reality that this is far from a lofty academic metaphor. But it also invokes the image of people atomised in cells, painfully fitting for the pandemic. As we go into 2021 we would urge you to make sure we really are in this together, through thick and thin. :)

Emma Jillings

Junior editor's note

Hi, I'm Meg, the Junior Editor of the journal this year. I first decided I wanted to have an editing role when I saw that the theme was 'The Summer of Change'. Having spent the majority of 2020 experiencing life from my flat in Edinburgh and watching the world's events unfold through news and social media, I was keen for a way to not only make sense of what was going on, but a way to do so whilst connecting with other like-minded people. It also felt like the perfect time to get people involved in contributing their ideas: after a summer marked by huge online activity and a rise in awareness of global issues and activism surrounding them. Having the opportunity to put together this edition has offered me insight into the unique perspectives of different students, shedding new light on sociological ideas and ways of thinking about everything that's been happening this year.

Sociology offers a fantastic lens through which to look at things as it can reduce a lot of the anxiety and confusion that we often feel when we consume news through the media, especially in a time marked by so many significant events and such constant chopping and changing. I am also a firm believer that sociology is not only for sociologists, but for anyone who has the desire to understand the social world a little better.

The Panopticon brings everything together - the theory, the ideas, and the real life context - in an engaging and readable way. We aim to make sociology accessible for everyone, whilst keeping things interesting and relevant. This edition has been great to edit, and we've had some fascinating and original submissions. I hope that the Panopticon can provide a platform for new writers, people newly interested in sociology and anyone for whom this year piqued a bit of interest, concern, or the need to get involved.

Meg Reynolds

Women, the body and the perpetuation of capitalism

Written by:

Ellie Davy (2nd Year)

Sociology and Social Anthropology

In light of recent events the title of this issue 'Summer of Change' provided a very broad range of topics each sociologically fascinating in their own right. What sparked my interest however was a slightly more recent event. Debates are still in motion surrounding the implementation of new abortion laws in Poland, a country that already has some of the tightest measures in Europe. While there are many different ethical and religious debates surrounding abortion, I wanted to look at these new measures through the lens of Marxist feminism. Particularly the ways in which these new laws and the discourse they have sparked fit into the argument put forward by Silvia Federici linking the control of women's bodies to the emergence and perpetuation of capitalism. On the 22nd of October 2020 a Constitutional Tribunal ruled declaring abortions for malformed foetuses unconstitutional, banning almost all of the few legal abortions still carried out in Poland. This sparked a huge wave of protests all over Poland the scale of which hadn't been seen since the fall of communism

in 1989. While these protests have been successful in halting the publication of the ruling in the Journal of Laws, the act which officially puts the law in motion, this ruling finds itself alongside a wave of populist discourse with regards to reproductive rights across Europe, with other significant changes in Hungary and Turkey.

Federici, a prominent scholar and activist, aligns herself with Marxist feminist and anarchist traditions. Her book 'Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation', published in 2004, maps the significant role women and their bodies held in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Federici argues, in contradiction to Marx, that primitive accumulation of this nature was not just a precursor to the development of capitalism but is a continuing fundamental characteristic of capitalism. She asserts that reproduction must be understood as a site of value-creation and hence one of exploitation under capitalism.

In other words, women's reproductive function is directly linked to the reproduction of the workforce, a central aspect of Marx's conception of capitalism.

Importantly, she also argues that when taking into consideration the perspective of women and their key role in the perpetuation, not just development, of capitalism Marx's original model suggesting capitalism as part of the transition towards human liberation is no longer realistic and capitalism is in fact more permeant than Marx suggests. While a significant proportion of Federici's work looks back to history, notably the persecution of witches in the 14th and 15th centuries, I would like to apply her argument to the current situation in Poland and other counties such as Hungry and Turkey. I will be using these as an example of the ways in which, much as Federici suggested, the capitalist depiction of the female body as a matter of public concern and control continues today.

Silvia Federici

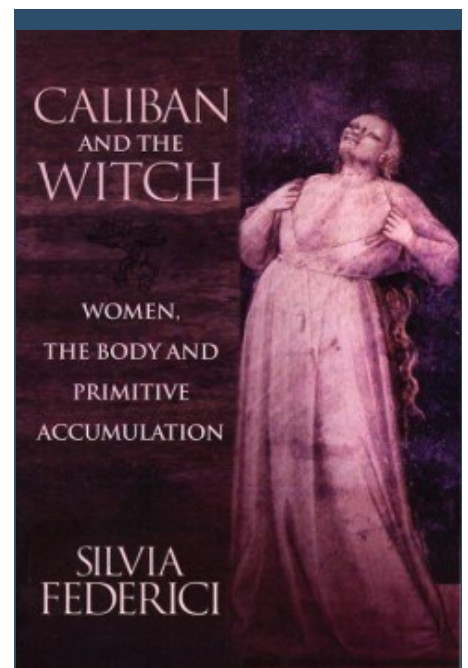Photo by Łukasz Konieczka on Unsplash

The Witches Well' in Edinburgh, a fountain and plaque which 'is near the site on which many witches were burned at the stake' during the 16th and 17th centuries

Significant points in history for Federici's argument are labour shortages and population crises which she cites as a significant push towards the conception of women's bodies as a matter of public concern. She explores the first of these in the 14th century, suggesting that as reproduction increasingly became a social concern due to labour shortage 'reproductive crimes' such a sodomy, infanticide and abortion became strongly associated with heresy. Similarly, later in the 16th and 17th centuries a second population crisis served to further cement the view of reproduction and population growth as a state matter. While we are far from a population crisis today natalist concerns pushed by right wing populists in Europe remain strongly reminiscent of those arguments addressed by Federici. The current debates in Poland regarding abortion (beginning with the election of the Law and Justice party in 2015) are not an isolated incident. Despite having considerably less restrictive measures on abortion, in 2019 Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orban introduced policies such as the abolition of income tax for women who have four or more children to encourage Hungarian women to have more children. Similarly, Turkey's president Recep Tayyip Erdogan publicly urged women to have at least three children stating in 2016 that a woman who does not have children is "deficient" and "incomplete". Each of these examples demonstrates the ways in which female reproduction continues to be controlled and viewed as a matter of public concern.

Federici's argument goes beyond the control of reproduction however, she also notes the importance of the work of women in raising children and how such work has been "mystified" with the development of capitalism. The creation of the housewife and the reconstruction of the family became the locus for the production of labour power. Federici particularly emphasises the ways in which the work of women in having and caring for children was, and is still, viewed as a natural resource, a woman's natural duty, and as such un-waged. In this way, the reproduction of labour power carried out in the home and its contribution to the accumulation of capital became invisible and arguably remains as such today where domestic work is far from equitable with that of other paid forms of work. Federici played an important organisational role in the 'Wages for Housework' movement, writing the book 'Wages against housework' in 1975 highlighting this disparity. The significance of the traditional family unit is still heralded today as evidenced in Poland's current stance on LGBT rights and reproduction. Jaroslaw Kaczynski, the chairman of the Law and Justice party, stated in 2016 that gay rights are "an attack on the family and children" despite the presence of measures banning marriage or civil partnership between same sex couples and the lack of a legal right to adopt children in Poland.

Caliban and the Witch: women, the body and primitive accumulation

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This statement echoes the ways in which sodomy was seen as a 'reproductive crime' and associated with heresy in the 14th century and once again puts women, their bodies and their expected roles within a family structure as a matter of public concern.

It is in this way that recent events in Poland and the political landscape within which they sit present to us not just ethical and religious questions regarding abortion but significant questions regarding capitalism's place in debates surrounding women and their bodies. Abortion laws across the globe vary hugely, and significant steps have been made towards the reclamation of women's bodies and the reversal of gendered perceptions of domestic work. However, I would argue the role of capitalism in the development and endurance of these inequalities and the ideas that perpetuate them is one we do not hear talked about enough.

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- Centre for Reproductive Rights, 'the World's abortion laws - Poland (https://reproductiverights.org/worldabortionlaws?country=POL&category[294]=294&category[296]=296&category[297]=297

- Federici, S., 2004. *Caliban and the witch, New York: Autonomedia.*

- Annabelle Chapman (2020)How Poland's abortion protests became a fight for democracy. News Statesman. (online) Available at: https://www.newstatesman.com/world/europe/2020/11/how-poland-s-abortion-protests-became-fight-democracy

The fast fashion problem

Is it true that there can be no ethical consumption under capitalism?

Written by:

Katrina Murray (2nd year)

Sociology

Photo by Fernand De Canne on Unsplash

Fast fashion means that clothing is produced quickly and cheaply, for us to buy clothes rapidly, often to wear just a few times before being discarded. Fashion trends are quickly translated from the designer's runway to the shelves of high street retailers, and we as consumers try to keep up with ever-changing trends by buying cheap clothes which end up going to waste. As students, many of us rely on fast fashion retailers for most of our wardrobe. In pre-pandemic days when we had lectures, you could even sit in the back row and see ASOS open on laptop screens. Now, through periods of lockdown, online shopping has surged. However there is mounting evidence and awareness that the fast fashion model is fundamentally unsustainable, having disastrous environmental and social impacts. Yet, it is inextricably bound to powerful social norms which are continually bred in our capitalist economies.

An important part of the fast fashion industry is its rapid production of goods, so that each time you refresh a retailers' page there are new items to consume. At the time of writing, Pretty Little Thing (BooHoo owned fashion retailer) lists 474 items as 'new in this week'. This abundance of stock is often achieved through global supply chains of cheap labour, representing global inequalities and worker exploitation. Cheap garments sold by major retailers are often made by workers earning below living wages, as national minimum wages are kept low by many governments in order to sell labour to foreign investors at a competitively low price. Many workers earn per garment produced, leaving them with no security and working long hours to earn well below a living wage. (For more information about the exploitation of garment workers, lots of information can be found at Labour behind the Label and The Circle.) Recently, some UK companies such as Boohoo have 'reshored' much of their production: reversing the outsourcing trend and instead bringing manufacturing back to the country of business operations and consumer markets. In the case of BooHoo this is back to Leicester factories. The key goal of doing so is to enable even more rapid turnover of goods. Affording this reshoring, when the cost of labour in the UK is significantly higher than in other parts of the world, has involved driving down this cost through the exploitation of largely migrant workers, who are paid as little as £3.50 an hour. (Ethical Consumer)

This rapid production goes hand in hand with rapid consumption of clothes, where cheaper prices encourage people to buy without consideration and fast delivery allows us to order items to receive the next day. In the UK, over two tonnes of clothing are bought every minute. (Oxfam) We consume more clothes per person than any other country in Europe (The Guardian) This kind of consumption is tied to powerful social norms - unwritten social rules defining the kind of behaviour that is considered 'normal'. Fast fashion has evolved with norms of fast use, where we value clothing items as disposable goods which we consume spontaneously in line with transient trends. These attitudes to clothes have developed alongside the fast fashion industry, in the context of an increasingly consumerist society where there are constantly new material goods for us to consume, and as a result growing levels of relative poverty. This change in norms is demonstrated in the fact that over the past 15 years the average person's consumption of clothes has increased by 60% whilst the life of those clothes before they are discarded has halved. (Ethical Consumer) A study commissioned by Barnardo's found that more than a third of young people aged 16-24 would feel embarrassed to wear an outfit more than once to an occasion.(Barnardo's) All of these norms, sustained in part by the marketing structures of fast fashion, drive our consumption and thus continually fuel the industry. However, awareness of the damaging impacts of our habits is increasing, and many of us are engaging with ways to change our actions and reduce – or altogether halt – our consumption of fast fashion. This year, as our lives have largely been migrated online, we have seen this change in surges of social media activism. Paradoxically, while lockdown resulted in the massive growth of online shopping, at the same time awareness of the associated problems has become more widely circulated in online spaces; we've all seen many an Instagram story encouraging us to boycott problematic companies and consider the environmental impact of the last pair of jeans we bought from Zara. Environmental activism involving fast fashion has given rise to new norms, and some newer brands are leading with successful business models based on sustainable production, bolstered by policies of transparency and accountability (T/ALA gym leggings, anyone?) As individuals, we can opt for these more sustainable brands and buy more durable items, as well as buying clothes second-hand.

fran hogan / Unsplash

Sustainable options like this are being more widely promoted this year on social media, with figures like Edinburgh Uni's own Nayna Florence (@naynaflorence on Instagram and Youtube) advertising sustainable companies and educating her 200,000 subscribers about how to give up fast fashion and enjoy more sustainable choices. This kind of education represents positive change for all of us. However, the ability to shop more sustainably still comes with a level of privilege, as sustainable fashion is usually much more expensive. Shopping second-hand is often linked to size privilege, where for many of us the appeal of fast fashion brands might be the size inclusivity that they offer.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall sits atop a seven-tonne pile of discarded clothes, which the UK generates in just 10 minutes. From 'Hugh's war on waste', BBC, 2015

In terms of addressing the problems of fast fashion, it is important to consider on a wider, sociological scale how the forces of our capitalist economy are at play, obstructing or entirely undermining the impact of our efforts to make change. The phenomena of 'sustainable consumption' and 'ethical consumption' are born out of Neoliberal ideologies of consumer sovereignty, where it is the responsibility of the individual consumer to opt for more sustainable products, 'voting with dollars' and driving the market to sustainability through our choices. Placing the burden for the environmental implications of fast fashion on its consumers – blaming individuals who buy fast fashion for the waste generated by the industry and assuming that the problems of fast fashion will be solved by consumers choosing to shop sustainably and boycotting problematic brands – is unproductive in several ways. Firstly, this draws our attention away from the massive environmental damage, waste and worker exploitation that happen in production processes of large corporations and are allowed to continue as a result of government policies, far beyond the realm of the consumer's influence. Moreover, modern capitalist consumer economies make the consumption of fast fashion inescapable, as the affordability of fast fashion makes it the only option for many people, in societies of inequality and relative poverty. Thus, until we address the inequalities and consumerist pressures of our capitalist society, fast fashion will most likely remain an inevitable part of it. From this perspective, it can be argued that there is in fact no 'ethical consumption' under capitalism.

It is clearly important for us to reflect on our own habits and actively aim to make any changes we can to consume fashion more sustainably. Indeed, education and awareness raising, often through campaigns and activism, are crucial to this shift. However, as much as through our activism we can hold each other accountable, it is often unproductive to criticise others for their consumption habits, as layers of inequalities inevitably underly them. The damage of fast fashion represents wider systemic problems to be analysed by sociologists. Whilst focusing on how we can all change our actions, we cannot lose sight of the structures of our capitalist society that constantly reinforce the global inequalities and environmental damage of fast fashion.

Recommendations

Ethical Fashion App

Good On You

Accounts to follow on Instagram

@naynaflorence
@wearetala
@venetialamanna
@rememberwhomadethem
@cleanclothescampaign
@labourbehindthelabel
@oxfamgb
@theniftythrifter_
@bestdressed
con@flipit_n_reverseit

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Barnardo's: 'Barnardo's calls for people to think 'pre-loved' before buying new clothes', July 2019, https://www.barnardos.org.uk/news/barnardos-calls-people-think-pre-loved-buying-new-clothes

Ethical Consumer: 'What is fast fashion and why is it a problem?' Sept 2019. https://www.ethicalconsumer.org/fashion-clothing/what-fast-fashion-why-it-problem

The Guardian: 'Fast fashion speeding toward environmental disaster, report warns' April 2020 https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2020/apr/07/fast-fashion-speeding-toward-environmental-disaster-report-warns

Oxfam: 'Fast fashion produces more carbon emissions per minute than driving a car around the world six times – Oxfam' April 2019 http://oxfamapps.org/media/7qb66

UNBIASED. WORLDLY. FRIENDLY.

JUST LIKE THE MAGAZINE.

FROM EVERY $5 ISSUE,
VENDORS EARN HALF.

THE BIG
ISSUE

THE BIG ISSUE

We caught up wit Susanne Flynn, Sales and Outreach worker at Big Issue Scotland to shine a light on homelessness in the U.K and where a sociological career could take you. Questions by Meg Reynolds, Sociology & Politics (2nd year)

Q. Can you tell us a bit about The Big Issue, and about your role?

A. The Big Issue is a social enterprise which started in 1991 and our mission is to dismantle poverty by creating opportunity, through self-help, social trading and business solutions. Our vendors buy a weekly magazine for 50% of the cover price, sell it on the street to the public and then keep the profit. Each seller is a micro-entrepreneur who is working, not begging, so it is important the customers take the magazine when they buy it so as not to leave the vendor with excess stock.

My role as a Sales and Outreach Worker involves working directly with the vendors to help start their micro-business, provide them with magazines and offer emotional support. In pre-Covid times, we would do outreach to check in on our vendors on pitch as well. We are now working in partnership with iZettle (a financial technology company) and Bank of Scotland to help our vendors get bank accounts and accept card payments and therefore be more financially included.

Q. What motivated you to get involved originally?

A. After working for an international charity, I realised I wanted to continue working in the third sector but wanted a job where my job was more 'frontline' and more active. I have always supported The Big Issue and social inclusion and social justice are things I am really passionate about after studying Geography at University. Living in Glasgow, I saw an increase in the number of homeless people and people living in poverty and wanted to make a difference. It knew it was the perfect opportunity when the job came up.

Q. What does a day look like for you? For a vendor?

Mondays are our busiest day as it is when a new magazine is released, and the majority of our vendors come into the office to buy their magazines for the week. There is a lot of sales chat and making sure we check that all is well with our vendors. I am also responsible for managing our Twitter page @BigIssueScots. I work to put vendors in touch with partner organisations to help with things like housing, mental health support and benefit entitlement. In normal times, I do drop-ins at two food banks around the city to let people know about The Big Issue and induct them to selling. Normally we also carry out outreach to visit vendors in an informal setting and make sure everything is going well.

A vendor's day is much different to mine! Depending on where their pitch is and their schedules, vendors start at different times of the day. We have pitches all over the city and beyond, so some vendors start early to get the bus and start the day. The hours are flexible so really it is down to what is best for the vendor and when they will see their regular customers. They can be out selling 6/7 days a week – it really is at the vendors' discretion. The main thing is to be on your pitch, get to know the community and be a friendly face!

Q. What are some highlights of your job? The biggest challenges you face?

A. The highlights of my job are seeing vendors make progress and breaking through barriers they have faced previously. For example, one of our vendors who had almost no tech skills and no interest in it at all now has a smart phone, a bank account for the first time ever and a contactless card machine. This has been a huge achievement and he now shows me all the Tik Toks he loves. His confidence has sky-rocketed and it is so good to see! The biggest challenge is probably dealing with misinformation and misconceptions from the public about what The Big Issue actually is and what we do. Normally when we receive complaints from supermarkets or the public, it is because people don't understand we are supporting people to earn a living and they are not begging. As an organisation, this is something we are working to change and overcome.

Q. Would you say it's important for you to be aware of social structures and social issues in your day to day working life? How has your job helped you gain knowledge/ understanding of these better?

A. It is massively important to be aware of social issues in our working life. It surprised me how tuned in I would have to be to the news and current events, especially with things like Brexit, to ensure we can give accurate information to our vendors. Since moving to Edinburgh for work, I have been more aware of the inequalities in the city– and even between different areas of Scotland- and the socio-economic and political reasons for the inequality. I have learned a lot more about how the homelessness 'system' works and the processes people have to go through. I've also learned a lot about the charities and social enterprises that are available to help people affected by poverty in Scotland. It has been eye opening to see it first hand, rather than just reading about it or researching it.
are at the heart of everything we do.

Info box

Homelessness in the UK (Shelter, 2019)

280,000 people living homeless in England, up 23,000 since 2016

That's 1 in every 200 people sleeping rough or living in temporary accommodation

Almost 5000 of these people are rough sleepers

Around 220,000 people were threatened with homelessness in the year leading up to the review carried out and published by Shelter in 2019

This is all likely an underestimate as much homelessness and rough sleeping goes undocumented
In 2019 in Scotland 31,330 households were confirmed as homeless
In Scotland 46% of the homeless population are single males, 20% single females, 17% single mothers and 10% singles fathers. (See references for more)

Q. What are some challenges facing TBI? I know that advancing tech and the increasing cashless society is creating obstacles, as well as potential difficulties around an older readership/ people less keen on having paper mags. How are things advancing in TBI to keep up with the fast-paced change in our society?

A, Since 2019, we have been working to get all our vendors smartphones, ID and bank accounts to enable them to get contactless card readers and be more financially included. There was a massive push for this in lockdown as we knew when we returned, the public wouldn't be carrying cash due to Covid. Through our partnerships with Bank of Scotland and iZettle, we now have over 80 contactless vendors in Scotland which is a big achievement for the team. The Big Issue also developed an app this year, enabling people to sign up for digital subscriptions or digital copies with 50% of the proceeds still going to our vendors, as normal. Things are definitely becoming more tech driven and it is just about making sure our original message of a hand up, not a hand-out is still clear, and our vendors

Info box

The Big Issue

Pre-pandemic, there were over 2000 Big Issue sellers working on the streets each week (The Big Issue, 2020)

You can buy an online subscription to the magazine during lockdown to show your support for the vendors who are unable to be out working

The Big Issue Foundation is the name of the charity that works to support The Big Issue and the work it does.
(See references for more)

Info box

Poverty in the UK

The UK government measures either absolute poverty or relative poverty in terms of households' disposable income (UK Parliament, 2020)

In 2018/19 there were 14.5 million people (22% of population) in relative poverty - roughly the same level as the previous year, with 4.2 million children (30% of population) also in relative poverty (UK Parliament, 2020)

Poverty impacts different groups more than others - eg Pakistani and Bangladeshi households are the most affected (UK Parliament, 2020)

11% of working households are affected by poverty, and 21% of households where there is a disabled person (UK Parliament, 2020).

(See references for more)

Q. How has the pandemic impacted people at TBI? Both employees like you, and vendors themselves?

Obviously during the first lockdown, we had to stop our vendors from selling on the streets for their own safety. All staff had to work from home and contact vendors over the phone which was a massive change for us. Through our subscriptions and a Big Issue appeal, as well as donations, we were able to give each vendor £25 a week or a supermarket voucher for every week we were closed in lockdown. This was to ensure our vendors had enough to get by, but we also did food bank referrals and provided emotional support over the phone. We used our charitable arm, The Big Issue Foundation to provide vendors with things like laptops to stay in touch with families or to buy books for vendors' children to pass the time. It was a big adjustment to only communicate with our vendors by the phone and difficult to be limited in what we could achieve. Our offices opened again in July and our vendors flocked back to selling. It has been a challenging year for staff and vendors with reduced footfall on the high streets, less money due to job losses and some stores being reluctant to have vendors selling there due to social distancing. Obviously as well, there have been several local lockdowns throughout and with changing restrictions we've had to adapt but we are constantly looking for new pitches for our vendors and provide them all with PPE so they can confidently and safely sell the magazine.

Q. Is there still a stigma around TBI and its vendors? Who holds that stigma? Why do you think that is? If there is less stigma, what has reduced it?

A. I wouldn't say there is a stigma as such around TBI but more generalisations about what TBI is and the idea of a 'stereotypical' vendor. When The Big Issue started it was to help homeless people in London but obviously as the problem became more complex, our business model changed to help where it was needed. Personally, I've noticed when I have spoken to people about TBI and they have some negative stereotypes, it comes from false information. As an organisation, we work really hard to let people know that we are a social enterprise, not a charity, that our vendors are working, not begging and that we are open to anyone affected by poverty, not just homeless people. It is a big task to undo 30 years of preconceptions but with social media and the right marketing, we'll get there.

Q. What is something you wish everyone knew about TBI? Are there any misconceptions that you encounter / would like to challenge?

A. I wish that everyone knew that The Big Issue is not just for homeless people. It is for anyone affected by poverty to give them a chance to earn a living and get back on their feet by working for themselves with support. This is the most common question we get asked. It would be great for people to know that The Big Issue is not begging, and people put their own money into buying the magazine and time into managing their pitch, sales and stock levels. We try to have as little barriers as possible so we can reach as many people who need our

Andreea Popa / Unsplash

Further reading

On homelessness:

- https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press_release/280,000_people_in_england_are_homeless,_with_thousands_more_at_risk

- https://www.bigissue.com/latest/social-activism/how-many-people-are-homeless-in-the-uk-and-what-can-you-do-about-it/#:~:text=What%20are%20the%20current%20statistics,figures%20for%20Scotland%20and%20Wales.

- http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/housing_policy/key_statistics/homelessness_facts_and_research

- https://www.gov.scot/publications/homelessness-scotland-2019-2020/#:~:text=Main%20points%3A,35%2C654%20adults%20and%2015%2C711%20children.&text=There%20were%2011%2C665%20households%20in,increase%20on%20the%20previous%20year.

On poverty:

- https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/depth-and-profile-of-uk-poverty/

- https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn07096/#:~:text=How%20many%20people%20are%20in,level%20to%20the%20year%20before.

- https://www.jrf.org.uk/data

- https://cpag.org.uk/child-poverty/child-poverty-facts-and-figures

On The Big Issue:

- https://www.bigissue.com/about/

- https://www.bigissue.com/latest/what-to-do-if-you-see-a-homeless-person/

- https://www.bigissue.com/latest/the-big-issue-needs-your-help-supporting-vendors-through-the-new-lockdown/

- https://www.bigissue.org.uk/

In defence of preachiness

Columba Leeper, 2nd year

Sociology and Politics

'Preachiness', a term that haunts contemporary political discussion. A silencing tool. Used across the political spectrum to shut down important discussion. I am going to argue that this trend is highly pernicious as both democracy and social change rely on conversation and the exchange of ideas. To begin with though, I want to give an explore what it means 'to preach' and to separate the pejorative baggage it has collected, from its core meaning.

Going forward I will define it as the process of sharing an earnest opinion, with the intension to persuade. By earnest opinion I mean an opinion with serious ramifications. For example, on the way refugees are treated rather than the best place to get your eyebrows done. However, the aspect of persuasion is what seems to bother people. It often conjures the idea of 'talking down' which has undercurrents of superiority and self-congratulation.

I appreciate that you *can* preach with a superior manner and this I agree, this can be annoying. However, it is not implicit in the practice. Believing that your opinion is superior is very different from believing you are superior for having the opinion. By very nature of having an opinion, you believe that it is the most sensical. No reasonable person holds an opinion they think is inferior to another; without attempting to reform it.

Earnest and practical conversation is the bedrock of both democracy and social change. This conversation is cannot take place without the sharing of ideas and the sharing of ideas rarely comes about without a desire to persuade. Conversation then is stimulated by preaching.

A dialectical conversation is one where two directly contradictory ideas meet and truth is sought. When I say 'truth' I mean a better opinion, one which is synthesis of the reasonable ideas present in the conversation. This is the basis for progress. The cry of 'preachiness' halts the dialectic nature of conversation by making it personal and therefore moving away from the ideas. To clarify, demonising preachiness is not the only inhibitor to productive conversation but it definitely contributes.

Oleg Laptev /Unslash

Without dialectic discourse contradictory ideas never meet and stagnation happens. This can have severe consequences for democracy and progressive social change. Branding someone as 'preachy' can (and does) lead to deepening partisanship and an inability to communicate with people you disagree with. When this happens, democracy suffers. This failure of collaborative and reasonable discourse is, I think, partially responsible for the current unrest unfolding in America. As for social change the 'preachy' card stunts conversation which is the foundation of new ideas. Without these new ideas, creative change is hugely impeded. A good example of this is the contemporary debate around identity. It has become increasingly visceral and venomous with both sides condemning the other for preaching. The result is a stagnation in thinking on both the right and (dare I say it) the left.

Preachiness then should not be treated as something to shy away from, but something embraced! As a society, we need more discussion about issues of gravity; not less. Clearly, respect when delivering an opinion is important and smug arrogance should be avoided. However, scrutiny should be on the ideas rather than the delivery. That is how we will have meaningful conversations. We need preachiness for democratic society to progress so please stop treating it as a sin!

Exploring caste issues in India

Emma Jillings (MRes Human Geography) in conversation with Dr Hugo Gorringe

This summer, despite the pandemic's takeover of the media, we have seen several extreme cases of caste based violence in India reported in our headlines. There are accounts of horrific gang rapes and sexualised violence.[1]

India is world's largest democracy, however has been slipping backwards on political and civil rights.[2] Amartya Sen, one of the foremost Indian scholars, recently wrote of the Indian Government's 'pursuit of authoritarianism', and how this concerning trend goes hand in hand with harsh treatment of Dalits.[3]

To explore further, we spoke to **Dr Hugo Gorringe, Senior Lecturer in Sociology and co-director of the Centre for South Asian Studies** at the University of Edinburgh (words italicised). Hugo grew up in India and has been researching caste in India since the 1990s, specifically in relation to political protest and the role of social movements in Indian democracy.

So where to start? *"A good place is with* **the term 'Dalit', which is Sanskrit in origin and means literally broken, ground down, oppressed".** *Today, to talk about Dalits is to primarily refer to people otherwise termed 'scheduled castes', the constitutional designation for Untouchables: those on the lowest rungs of society historically considered unworthy of inclusion in the caste hierarchy.*

Vignesh Moorthy Unsplash

Women protesting at Dholka, Gujarat. Courtesy: Manjula Pradeep/ The Ladies Finger.

It is a political denomination which includes non-Hindus: the term emerged in the seventies, in the wake of independence, when it was self-consciously adopted by activists across the nation seeking a politicised identity. Adopting it conferred the possibility of a pan-Indian identity, as it was an umbrella term uniting lower-caste activists whose battle now was in the realisation of equality. Inspired by the Black Panther Party in the US, their challenge to the newly formed independent India was that there was no true democracy, freedom or 'swaraj' (self-rule) without fraternity, and that caste division undermined public spirit which should be the bedrock of national identity.

Tracing the roots of caste issues in India immediately reveals their complexity, not least due to their entanglement with colonial history. Given this relatively recent politicisation of caste, **are there people who defend caste on the grounds of tradition?**

"There is a whole school of thought which argues that caste at its core is a harmonious division of society but that oppression is a colonial consequence; they often follow Mahatma Gandhi, "father of the nation", in wishing to retain caste while removing discrimination."

The Dalit Women's Self Respect Yatra begins in Kurukshetra at the feet of Dr. Ambedkar' Credit: Thenmozhi Soundararajan

For Hugo, the problem here is that caste looks very different from the bottom up: since caste involves the hoarding of resources, it always entails inequality. "*Vertical hierarchies are built fundamentally on 'us and them' groupings, with social and economic life carried out on an unequal playing field.*" Entrenched caste privileges inform all aspects of life: caste disadvantage is institutionalised at school, and access to employment opportunities, occupational fields and healthcare falls along caste lines. Status is determined at birth and therefore marriage is a supremely important life event; endogamy ensures status and wealth are retained within the group. "*The key to caste is dependence.*"

In daily life then, what does it mean to be Dalit, and what are the factors which would make it more likely that someone experiences caste-based discrimination?

"*Caste is not based on any physical dif-ferences between people. It is a 'relational system' which is only made visible in particular contexts when it becomes possible to identify someone's caste by reading their attire, demeanour and appearance. It is embodied when you are locked into a system which demands certain behaviours, and so there are many stories of friendships formed in college settings which collapse on return to villages when caste identities are revealed.*"

In rural context social exclusion is more explicitly manifest, with a clear hierarchy determining land ownership and occupations. Residential segregation is not unusual, with Dalits excluded from public spaces and living in separate neighbourhoods, entering the main settlement only to carry out lowly and 'impure' occupations (such as waste disposal).

Some aspects of caste inequality sound quite similar to that of class.

"*To get your head around the two, it is useful to use a metaphor of a multi-storey house. While in a class-divided society mobility is theoretically possible as people can use the stairwell to move up or down, however caste divisions are equivalent to a house without staircases: where you are born determines absolutely your status in society. It also means that Dalits who achieve success or fame can never stand alone on the merits of their achievements, and always carry the humiliation of the prefix*".

These cultural aspects largely explain the gulf between the daily reality for Dalits and the formal measures India has in place to tackle caste inequality. Dating back to independence, there are legal measures to reserve constitutional seats at parliamentary and state level.

So what will it take for constitutional and legal equality to be realised?

"Time! As with any significant attitudinal change, there is a lag between legislation (which is gained through mobilisation) and cultural change. India's independence in some ways was a passive revolution, with equal citizenship granted without any change in the underlying unequal socioeconomic structures, meaning it has been possible for the dominant caste to retain their status. While there have been huge changes since independence and **Dalits have improved significantly on many socioeconomic indicators, nonetheless the gap between them and the castes above remains."**

To return to the issue of caste-based violence, this is most likely to manifest when the gap between Dalits and the castes immediately above them begins to close, and Dalits are perceived as posing a threat and resentment is precipitated.

Art by Priyanka Paul (Mumbai based artist)

Has there then been an increase in extreme events such as that which took place Uttar Pradesh this September?

"Unfortunately, the depressing conclusion is that these are not extreme events." You may remember the mobilisation in 2012 in reaction to the horrific Delhi rape case, however the response was so widespread largely because women across India identified with this 'every woman' victim in a way which is different from Dalit experiences.

"Stories on caste-based violence are exceptional in being stories which make it into the news. It requires more mobilisation, monitoring and activism on the ground to get these cases recognised and discussed."

As with civil rights in America, legislation remains ineffective unless there is sustained local pressure. Change needs to happen at various points across society, particularly in diversifying and training of the police force.

Here there is some good news: 'mobile telephony' is a catalyst of change, as with the surge in mobile ownership and internet access over the last decade huge potential for the capturing and circulation of evidence is unlocked. *"So issues which were brushed under carpet locally now have a broader audience"* and technology has a key role in supporting minority cases. (For an example, check out 'Video Volunteers', a network of community correspondents throughout India.

How clear is our picture of what is going on then?

"Cases are registered under the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, and while numbers are high we know they are massive underestimates, and conviction rates are pitiful." Reporting is flawed in several ways, primarily in a culture of under-reporting out of fear of repercussions, but there's also the problem of incidents being registered under different Acts. "On paper it is a law with teeth" – to the extent that some higher caste members are campaigning to repeal it on the basis that it is too draconian, but enforcement is minimal and only occurs where there has been sustained action by activists.

This brings us to a key recent development in the country: the government's shut-down of Amnesty International. On October 1st 2020 Amnesty's bank accounts were frozen, effectively halting their work in the country: the culmination of sustained pressure from an increasingly illiberal government.

"Freezing Amnesty is important in itself, as Amnesty have taken up the issue of caste quite significantly and for a long time have campaigned for it to be seen as discrimination on the basis of dissent. But moreover it is part-and-parcel of a wider de-legitimisation of protest and of government critics." Democratic rights and rights to expression are being progressively curtailed as people are arrested under sedition laws for 'anti-nationalist' opinions, and increasingly for social media postings – poets, academics…everyone.

Check out: videovolunteers.org

There have been many ways in which this has been a monumental 'Summer of Change' in India, though **Hugo singles out three major ways in which the pandemic has impacted caste issues.** Firstly, the lockdown response. *"Dalits are disproportionately represented amongst landless and migrant labourers, and bore the brunt of the 24th March overnight lockdown which halted all busses, trains etc, which led to horrendous incidents of mass migration, and with no social security net, many dying on routes, many of them Dalits."*[4]

Then there's the level of rhetoric. The social distancing mandate speaks directly to ideas about purity, and in early stages of the pandemic Dalits were blamed by default for spreading the disease, an offshoot of being occupationally restricted to 'impure' occupational sectors eg sanitation.

And thirdly, the Black Lives Matter mobilisations were widely backed across India and especially on social media. In response Dalit activists have drawn attention to the hypocrisy of upper castes, accusing them of quickly condemning discrimination abroad whilst being complicit in it at home.

However, herein lies a reason for Hugo to take a '**glass half full'** attitude – that the content of everyday conversations is changing. He draws a parallel with the issues of climate change or recent BLM protests: historically we would all be complicit in reinforcing the status quo by skirting around difficult issues and avoiding questions which prompt us to reflect on how we as individuals can do more. Now though, this summer's mobilisations have pushed previously marginal conversations to the fore, revealing clearly the structures of inequality, and when a critical mass confront issues it is the key step in cultural change.

And lastly, how can sociologists contribute to such mammoth and multifaceted problems?

In concrete terms, collaborations with NGOs and Indian academics provides essential research illuminating and evaluating social issues and identifying solutions and supporting implementation of legislation. As an example, Hugo has recent been discussing ideas around caste as descent-based discrimination with Amnesty.

But the more important thing that Sociology does – which is more difficult to measure – is in asking the right kinds of questions. Sociologists challenge the taken for granted, peeling back the layers and asking things such as: 'why does caste exist and what sustains it?', thereby acknowledging alternative configurations of social life and introducing the possibility of change.

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Panopticon's choice

We have curated a list of social multimedia for you to indulge in during these times of uncertainty .
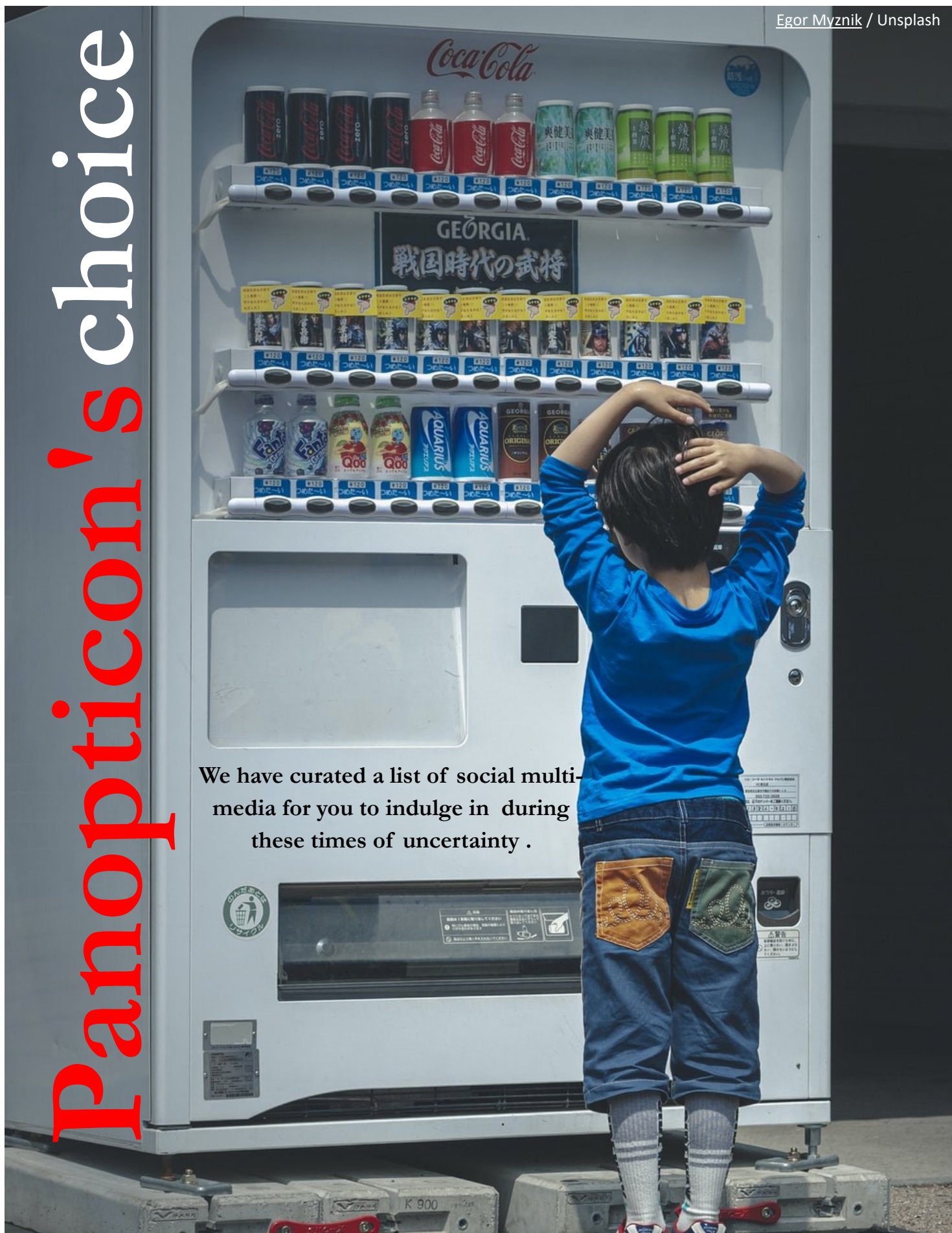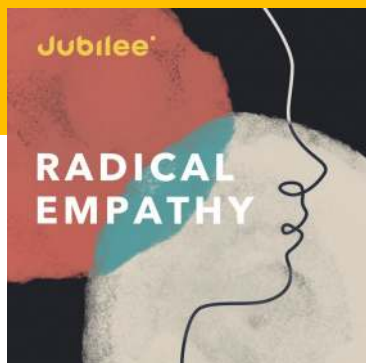
Podcasts

Difficult Conversations

Podcast hosted by Poppy Gerrard Abbott (PHD researcher on sexual violence in universities, at the University of Edinburgh). Search Poppy Gerrard Abbott on YouTube. Insightful content!
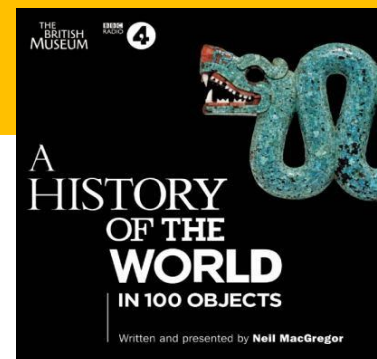

1. Talking Politics

A podcast about politics, trying politics department at the University of Cambridge to make sense of an ever changing world through political, economical and philosophical lenses

2. Radical Empathy

About distant perspectives and what could perhaps unite us.

3. A History of the World in 100 Objects.

podcast series of bitesize enchantment, a breathtaking sweep of some of the world's most fascinating pieces of material culture. Presented by the British Museum's Neil MacGregor

Books Review

Playing the Whore does an excellent job of encompassing an industry which spans such a broad range of individuals, incomes, and experiences. This book is split into ten chapters, each of which could stand alone as short essays, making for easy reading. It paints the world of sex work in all of its colours, without falling into the trap of trying to merge such diverse experiences into one muddy brown. Whilst firmly locating anti-sex work attitudes in misogyny, this text also gives a commendable amount of space to the experiences of sex-workers who are not cis women.

The author, Melissa Gira Grant, who has her own experience in sex work, excellently treads the line between owning her voice as a sex worker (which grants her with specific insights) and allowing her written word to be a vehicle for wider contexts. I particularly enjoyed this book's discussion of the "rescue" industry and the specific case studies it covers. I would have liked to have seen a viewpoint from an individual who has been sex trafficked alongside those of the consenting sex workers whose work is obstructed by dubiously motivated "rescue" industries. Having said this, Gira Grant makes me uncomfortably aware of my own voyeurism into the industry and wary of demanding a pornography of victimised women.

This book provides a complex and nuanced commentary on the sex work industry whilst also being accessible and to the point, I would strongly recommend it to anyone interested in the topic, re-
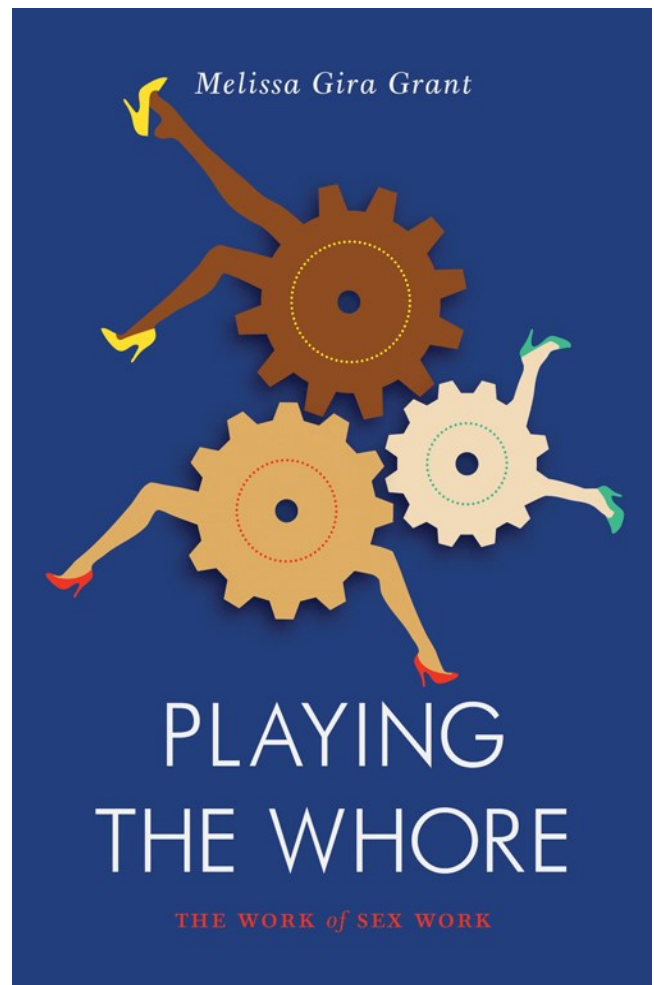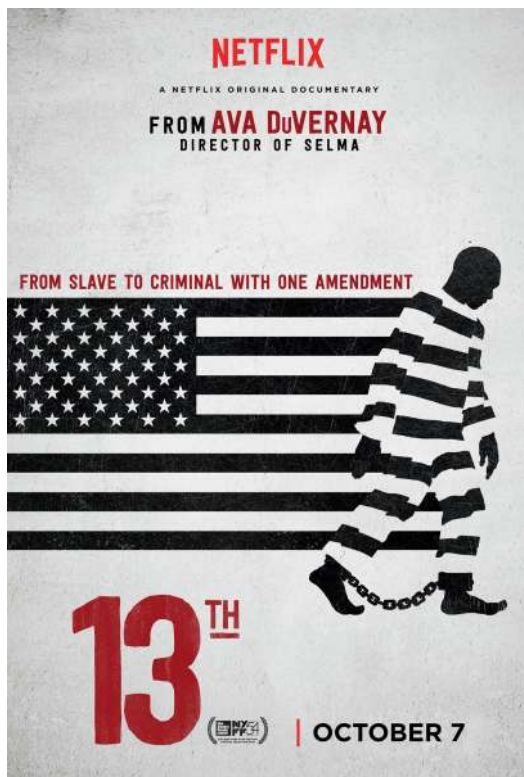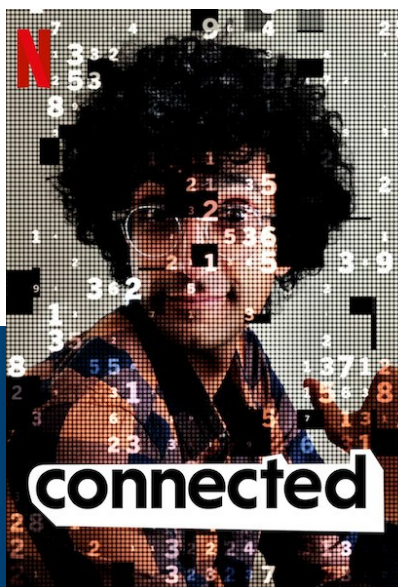
YouTube

Tiffany Ferguson

A very interesting and relevant You Tube channel that includes accessible analyses of internet trends, TV/film and social issues

finally… documentaries

13TH

History of racial inequality in the United States. Exploring as to why the nation's prisons are disproportionately filled with African-Americans.
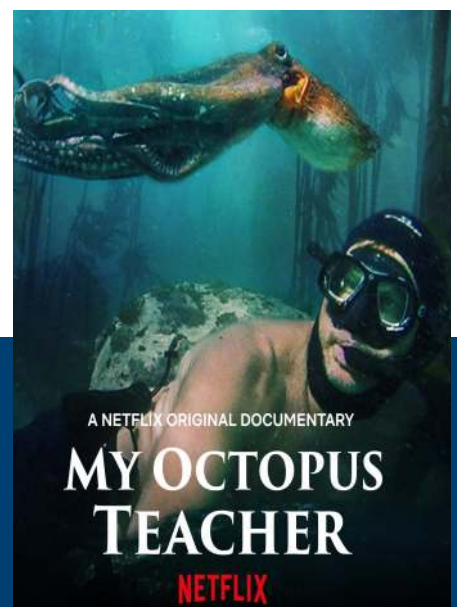

Connected: The Hidden Science of Everything

Latif Nasser (from Radio Lab!) explores the surprising ways in which humans, the world and the universe is connected

Daughters of Destiny

Follows the journey of a group girls at the Shanti Bhavan. A Children's Project designed to empower children from India's most impoverished
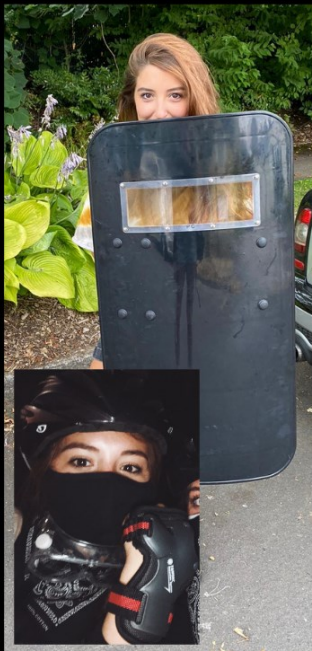
families.

My Octopus Teacher

A heartfelt documentary about a filmmaker Craig Foster develops a rather peculiar relationship with an Octopus that lives in a kelp forest off the coast of South Africa.

Summer of Floyd, Portland Oregon, 2020

After the murder of George Floyd, the Black Lives Matter movement was reignited. Fed up with police brutalization of black bodies, we took to the streets to demand justice and to amplify melanated voices through protests, mutual aid efforts, community building and the exchange of lived experience and knowledge. Portland, Oregon has never been a stranger to social movements, but the Black Lives Matter protests rocked the city for countless months. Every summer night, hundreds of Portland residents would eat dinner, mentally prepare for the long night ahead and then Bloc up. At half-past 9 pm, we carried our shields, outfitted with knee and elbow pads, helmets, bullet proof vests and gas masks ready to march for black lives and against police brutality - only to be met with more police brutality. After hours of CS gas exposure, smoke bombs and physical beating by the Portland Police Bureau - if we were not arrested, we would make the trip either home or to jail support as the sun was rising.

Many nights we truly wondered if it would be a summer of change - it was and the movement continues to shake the US. We are seeing Portland police resignation at a higher rate than ever before, defunding of bureaus in other major US cities, a community dedicated to daily mutual aid and increasing awareness of the effects of over-policing on black bodies and marginalized communities.

These photos were taken at BLM events and protests over the summer of 2020. I wrote the poem about my experiences as an active participant of the BLM movement after a PTSD attack during the summer.

Becca Bowers, MSc Social Anthropology

Say their names... Tete Gulley, Andre Maurice Hill, Casey Christopher Goodson Jr., Angelo "AJ" Crooms, Sincere Pierce, Marcellis Stinnette, Jonathan Dwayne Price, Dijon Durand Kizzee, Rayshard Brooks, Carlos Carson, David McAtee, Tony "Tony the Tiger" McDade, George Perry Floyd, Dreasjon "Sean" Reed, Michael Brent Charles Ramos, Daniel T. Prude, Breonna Taylor, Manuel "Mannie" Elijah Ellis, William Howard Green, John Elliot Neville, Atatiana Koquice Jefferson, Elijah McClain, Ronald Greene, Javier Ambler, Sterling Lapree Higgins, Gregory Lloyd Edwards, Emantic "EJ" Fitzgerald Bradford Jr., Charles "Chop" Roundtree Jr., Chinedu Okobi, Anton Milbert LaRue Black, Botham Shem Jean, Antwon Rose Jr., Saheed Vassell, Stephon Alonzo Clark, Dennis Plowden Jr., Bijan Ghaisar, Aaron Bailey, Charleena Chavon Lyles, Jordan Edwards, Chad Robertson, Deborah Danner, Alfred Olango, Terence Crutcher, Terence Crutcher, Terrence LeDell Sterling, Korryn Gaines, Joseph Curtis Mann, Philando Castile, Philando Castile, Bettie "Betty Boo" Jones, Quintonio LeGrier, Corey Lamar Jones, Jamar O'Neal Clark, Jeremy "Bam Bam" McDole, India Kager, Samuel Vincent DuBose, Sandra Bland, Brendon K. Glenn, Freddie Carlos Gray Jr., Walter Lamar Scott, Eric Courtney Harris, Phillip Gregory White, Mya Shawatza Hall, Meagan Hockaday, Tony Terrell Robinson, Jr., Janisha Fonville, Natasha McKenna, Jerame C. Reid, Rumain Brisbon, Tamir Rice, Akai Kareem Gurley, Tanisha N. Anderson, Dante Parker, Ezell Ford, Michael Brown Jr., John Crawford III, Tyree Woodson, Eric Garner, Dontre Hamilton, Victor White III, Gabriella Monique Nevarez, Yvette Smith, McKenzie J. Cochran, Jordan Baker,, Andy Lopez, Miriam Iris Carey, Barrington "BJ" Williams, Jonathan Ferrell, Carlos Alcis, Larry Eugene Jackson Jr., Kyam Livingston, Clinton R. Allen, Kimani "KiKi" Gray, Kayla Moore, Jamaal Moore Sr., Johnnie Kamahi Warren, Shelly Marie Frey,, Darnisha Diana Harris, Timothy Russell, Malissa Williams, Noel Palanco, Reynaldo Cuevas, Chavis Carter, Alesia Thomas, Shantel Davis, Sharmel T. Edwards, Tamon Robinson, Ervin Lee Jefferson, III, Kendrec McDade, Rekia Boyd, Shereese Francis, Jersey K. Green, Wendell James Allen, Nehemiah Lazar Dillard, Dante' Lamar Price, Raymond Luther Allen Jr., Manual Levi Loggins Jr., Ramarley Graham, Kenneth Chamberlain Sr., Alonzo Ashley, Derek Williams, Raheim Brown, Jr., Reginald Doucet, Derrick Jones, Danroy "DJ" Henry Jr., Aiyana Mo'Nay Stanley-Jones, Steven Eugene Washington, Aaron Campbell, Kiwane Carrington, Victor Steen, Shem Walker, Oscar Grant III, Tarika Wilson, DeAunta Terrel Farrow,, Sean Bell, Kathryn Johnston, Ronald Curtis Madison, James B. Brissette Jr., Henry "Ace" Glover, Timothy Stansbury, Jr.,, Ousmane Zongo, Alberta Spruill, Kendra Sarie James, Orlando Barlow, Nelson Martinez Mendez, Timothy DeWayne Thomas Jr., Ronald Beasley, Earl Murray, Patrick Moses Dorismond, Prince Carmen Jones Jr., Malcolm Ferguson, LaTanya Haggerty, Margaret LaVerne Mitchell, Amadou Diallo, Tyisha Shenee Miller, Dannette "Strawberry" Daniels, Frankie Ann Perkins, Nicholas Heyward Jr., Mary Mitchell, Yvonne Smallwood, Eleanor Bumpers,, Michael Jerome Stewart, Eula Mae Love, Arthur Miller Jr., Randolph Evans, Barry Gene Evans, Rita Lloyd, Henry Dumas
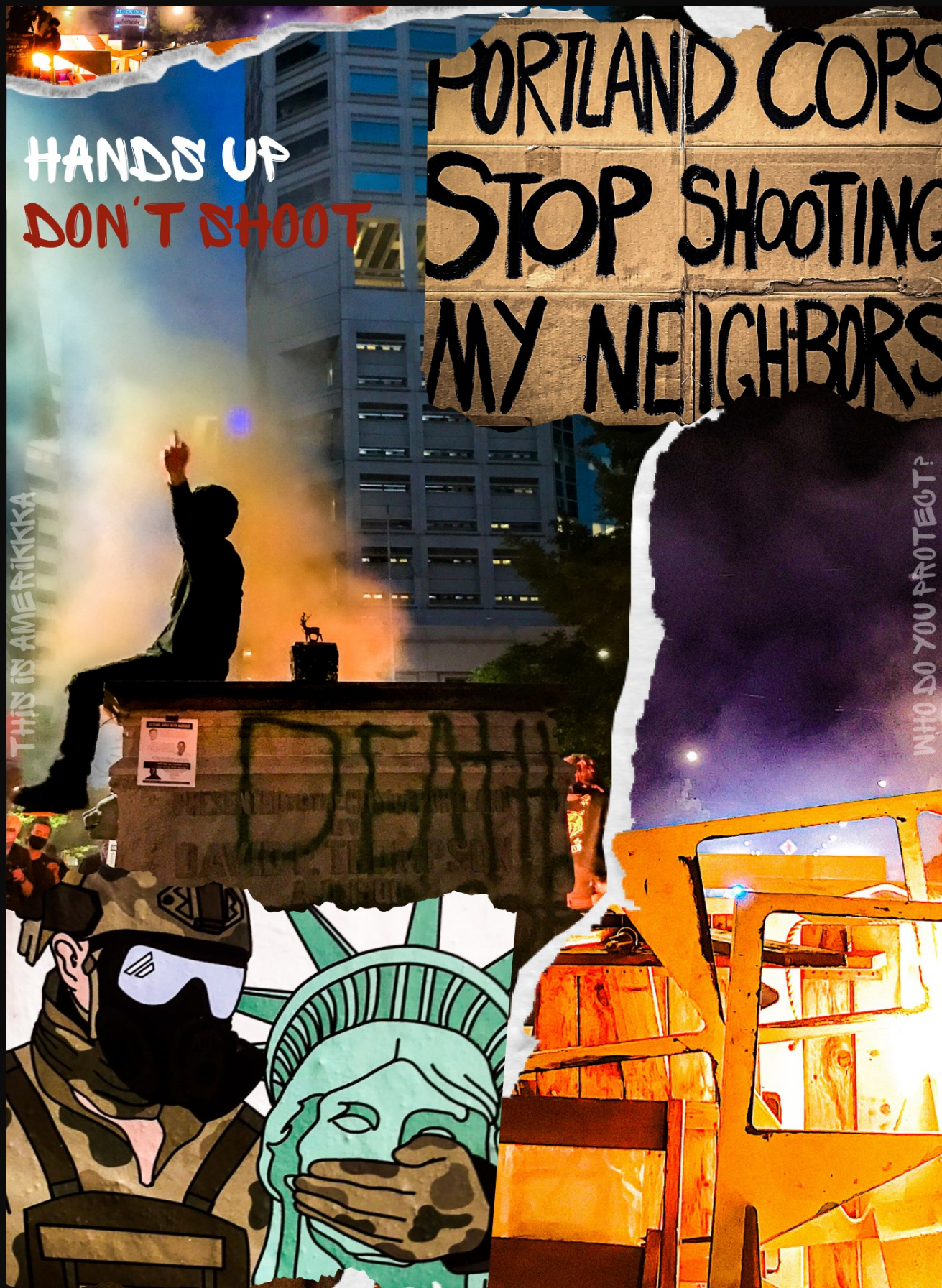
a summer to remember

You hear fireworks,
I hear a CS canister.
My throat burns.
You hear a car door slamming,
I hear a flashbang.
I see a flashbang.
I *feel* a flashbang.
It's deafening - its shrapnel pierces my leg, but we keep moving.
We stay together, stay tight.
Be water.

I jog,
I run.
Behind me, an army of pigs, decorated in riot gear.
I have only a shield.
I feel pepper bullets grazing my bare neck.
Over my shoulder is Raven, her eyes glistening with desperation as a man three times her size beats her
down with a billy club.
He leaves her laying in a gasping heap.
'That's what you get for running past a police officer'

We wait at the injustice center for our friends to be freed.
We dance, we cheer for our comrades, we lose a night of sleep.
All night, we collectively process our trauma.
Smoking cigarettes, hand in hand, heads held high
3 am comes and goes.
A riot van picks up fresh pigs, armed for a fight.
Sleepily, we watch them as they pass, chuckling as they yell
'Good game, good game. Can't wait for tomorrow night'
Trivializing the anxiety we feel as we march,
The pain we feel as they beat us to the ground,
The anger we feel when they arrest members of the press,
The frustration we feel when they target our medics,
The indignation suffered when yet another black life is taken by those who have sworn to protect us.

HANDS UP
DON'T SHOOT

PORTLAND COPS
STOP SHOOTING
MY NEIGHBORS

THIS IS AMERiKKKA

WHO DO YOU PROTECT?

a summer to remember, continued

Last night, I closed my eyes to sleep.
Instead, I saw the face of a man gunned down in the streets.
On whose streets? Our streets.
Bleeding out as the police refuse the help of our medics.
I try to shower, but the echoes bring memories of the screams and muffled chants trapped between towering dark buildings, lit only by red street lights and flashbangs.
I rub my eyes until they burn, reminded of the bear spray that dripped down my forehead, covering my sweating body in a sting that could not be relieved.
I breathe deeply, trying to slow my heart rate as I relive my summer -- night after night.

I am tired.
We are tired.
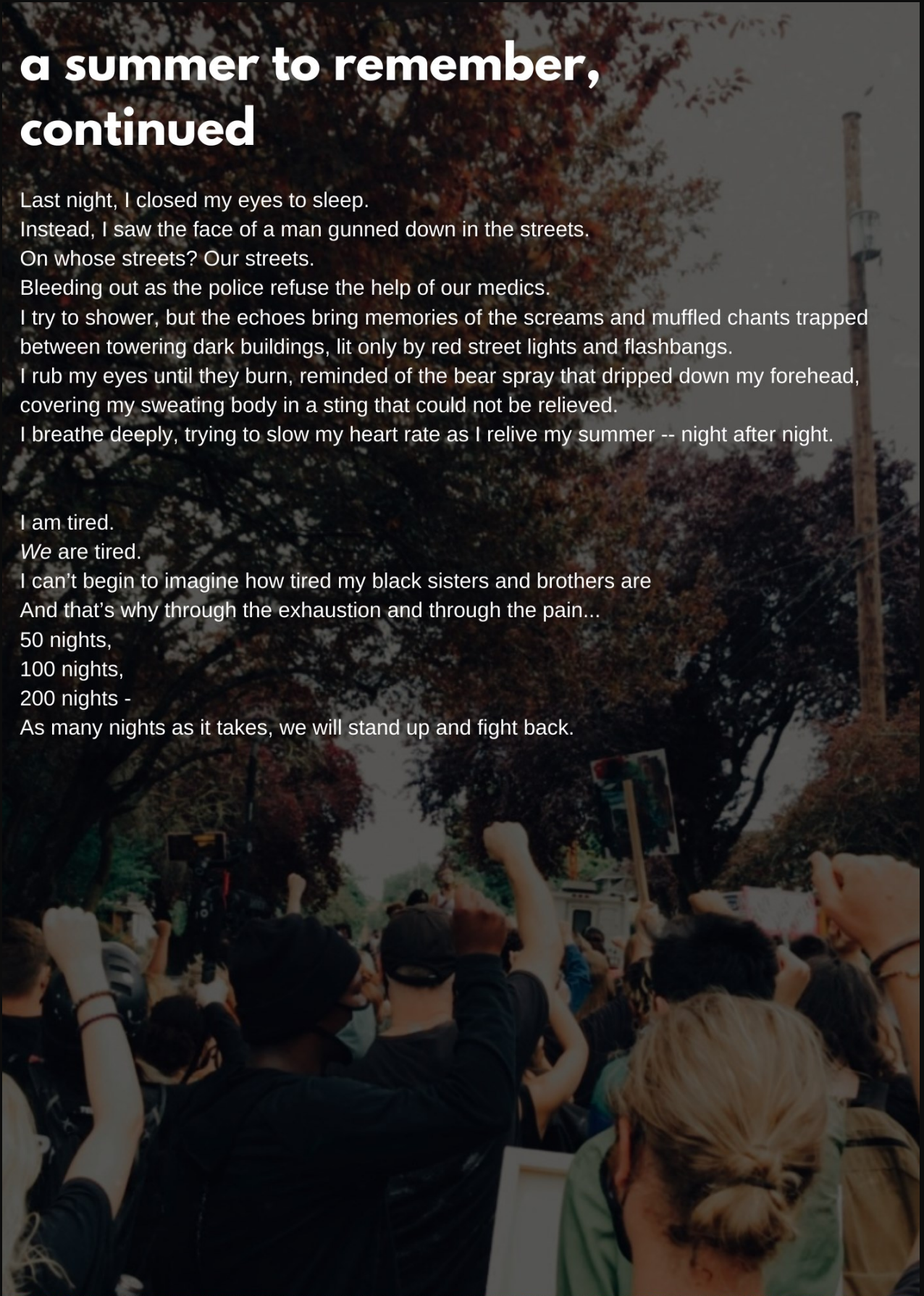I can't begin to imagine how tired my black sisters and brothers are
And that's why through the exhaustion and through the pain...
50 nights,
100 nights,
200 nights -
As many nights as it takes, we will stand up and fight back.

A historic reminder to Black Lives Matter Activists

Written by:

Julia Marques da Silva (2nd year)

Sociology & Politics

Clay Banks/ Unsplash

The Black Lives Matter movement has become a huge force calling for social change in recent months in the United States. Ever since the death of George Floyd, thousands of people have been protesting against police brutality and other racial injustices across the country and around the world. Previous protests in response to the deaths of other African Americans in recent years have been unmatched by the movement this summer and the momentum it has gained. The United States is also now heading into a heated election year where legislators on every level of federal and local governments are being pressured by their constituents to pass legislation to address these concerns. This may seem like a big wave heading to the U.S. to finally eliminate the remnants of its turbulent history with racism, but the same country's history would say otherwise.

Much of African American history is marked by downfalls after major victories have been met with further regulations and loopholes that keep them in their second-class status in American society. After the Thirteenth Amendment was passed, slavery as a system evolved into the huge prison system that we see in the U.S. today, as one of the clauses in the amendment allows free labor as a punishment for crimes. The amendment states the following: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, **except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted,** shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." Racial and ethnic disparities characterise US policing and imprisonment practices, with research finding that African Americans are five times more likely to be incarcerated than their white counterparts (Nellis, 2016). I would argue that in this sense the incarceration system in the U.S. has allowed basic system of slavery to persist.

However, this phenomenon is not exclusive to the issue of slavery, but with all of the major legislation that has been passed to further African American rights. The last legal victory brought about by civil rights movements was the passing of the Voting Rights Acts of 1965, which prohibits racial discrimination in voting. The Act largely aimed to eliminate barriers such as literacy tests that allowed local governments to actively undermine African-American voting rights, and contributed to a white majority in states that have a high black population. Although often weakly enforced, the passing of the Act gave black voters the legal means to challenge the barriers they faced, and voter turnout amongst the black population began to increase greatly. Voting obstacles remain pervasive however, as seen in recent election years. In 2018, for example, the state of Georgia was able to unregister a significant number of black voters due to small discrepancies in paperwork. This heavily affected the governor's election race, which was between a black woman named Stacey Abrams, who had been active in community outreach encouraging electoral registration of African Americans and a white man, Brian Kemp, who was Secretary of State and allowed the disenfranchisement of African American voters, majority of whom were registered due to Abram's voter outreach program, Fair Fight. This has been the most blatant example of voting discrimination in the previous election. The United States' democracy is littered with gerrymandering, voter ID laws, as well as insufficient time to go and vote during a workday, all of which disproportionately affect black people.

Despite many years of protest and legislative reforms, these issues have still not been properly addressed, and until they are eliminated the democratic system will remain severely undermined.

Clay Banks/ Unsplash

W.E.B. Du Bois/ Getty Images
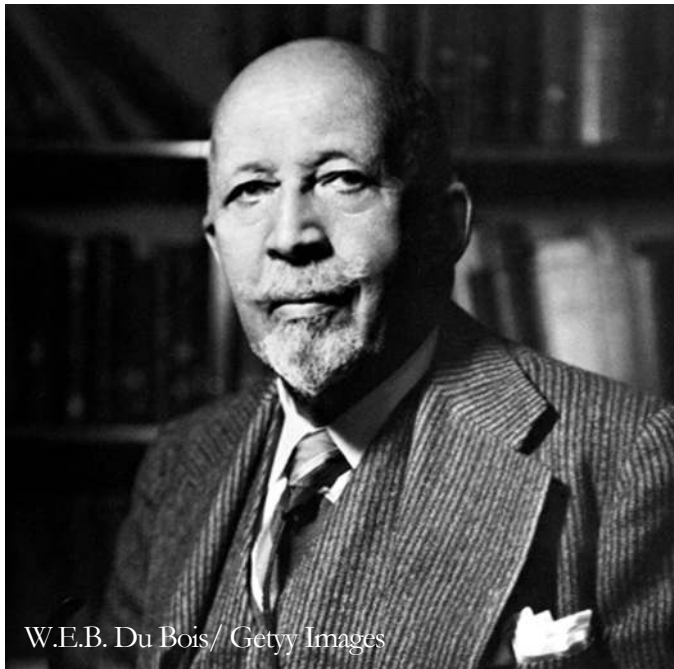
Just as African American sociologist and activist W.E.B. DuBois believed, legislative reform is not enough for social change to enable African Americans to rise from their second-class citizenship that society necessitates they succumb to. With all of the context behind the Black Lives Matter movement, it is essential for activists to understand that these social and legal systems have the capability to change their legislative structure but still maintain the same oppressive functions that they have stood for throughout American history. This phenomenon is being allowed to occur under the jurisdiction of the federal government, which is a huge sphere of influence for how individuals behave in the U.S. While the 2020 election has provided a lot of promise for change in policy and legislators that will be able to meet the demands that people are protesting for, social change does not stop there.

For those who are outside of sociology, social change might seem like a sudden flash or a moment when the circumstance is right to make a history altering change in society; however, real social change often takes place over longer periods of time. Those who are active and supporting the BLM protests should bear this in mind, as now that their demands are being met with new proposals in the federal and local government sustained pressure is required in order to ensure the full realisation of political and civil rights and social

equality. The lesson from history is that as rights are newly gained, there still is a requirement to maintain a watchdog role on government at all levels to ensure that it is not a case of 'one step forwards two steps back.'

The oppression of black people in America is so ingrained in our society that when the country takes a leap forward in leveling out racial inequalities, often the system of oppression in our society evolves and morphs into another hurdle that must be jumped over to stop African Americans being treated as second class citizens. With this history in mind, it is essential to actively check these systems so they do not become an instrument of oppression for minorities.

The predominant narratives of history also play a role in perpetuating racial inequality. In particular, with regards to the way Americans are socialized to understand the nation's history with its discourse of racial relations as progressively improving without acknowledging the major setbacks that exist or have existed in America's history. We are led to believe that minorities have had a constant level of improvement in their lives in the United States, which neglects the basic facts that we still allow these structures in our society to oppress them and it teaches people a false illusion about social change.

The reality is that Americans have been socialized into perceiving a false view of social change for African Americans in the U.S., and it is time for Americans to recognize that this fight is not over until we do not allow for these systems to continue to oppress minorities and get away with it.
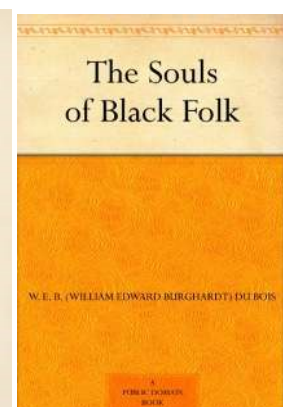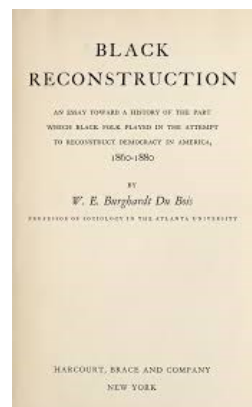
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disparity-in-state-prisons/

Documentary "13th"

Book by Michelle Alexander "The New Jim
Crow"

Voter Suppression:

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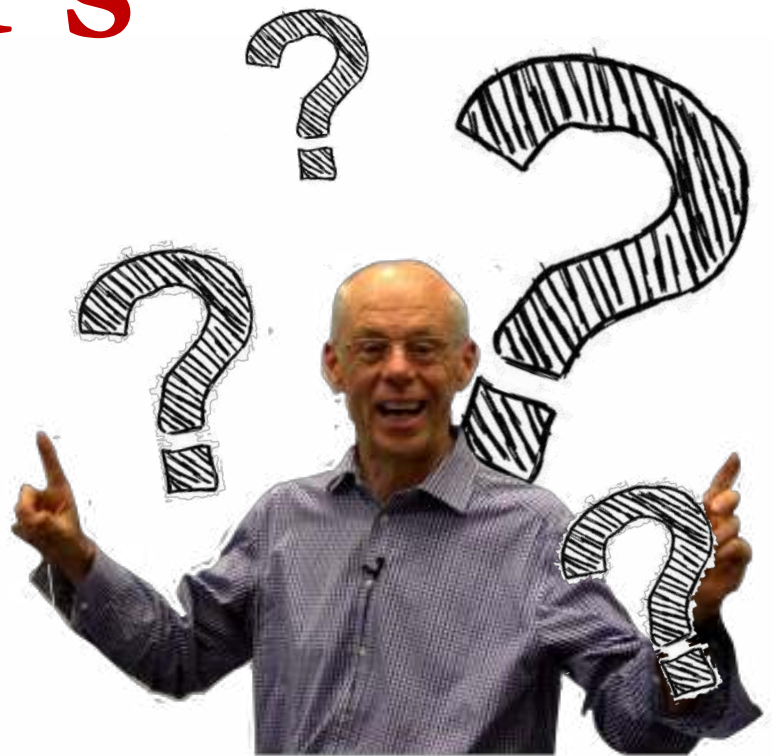45a1-91c5-8643e07a31dc

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Donald's Corner

Edinburgh Sociology icon Donald Mac-Kenzie is here to answer your questions about Sociology. He's learnt a thing or two in his 40-year career so this is your opportunity to ask him anything! (Email your questions to edipanopticon@ gmail.com for your question to be featured in our next issue).
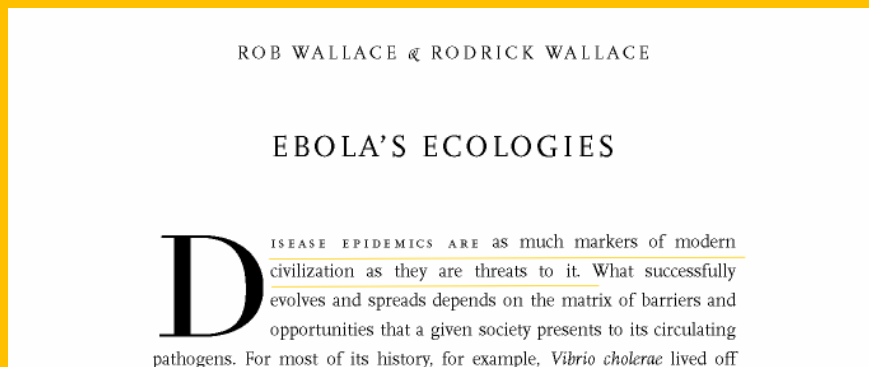
Q. What is your earliest sociological memory?

A. It's from the autumn of 1970, when I was a maths undergraduate here at the University of Edinburgh. I loved maths, but felt frustrated by the way in which it was taught as if it was an entirely self-contained activity without any connection to its context. I discovered a little outfit, the Science Studies Unit, with just four members of staff, one of whom, Barry Barnes, taught a course on the sociology of science. It helped me to see how even an activity as specialised as science can be thought of as a subculture, for sure with its distinctive reward system but also manifesting dynamics of cultural change that are found elsewhere too. Barry also demonstrated, in his research as well as his teaching, that sociologists can be rigorous in their thinking – even if it was a different form of rigour from mathematics.

Q. What do you think is a major challenge faced by the field of sociology today?

A. Since I came into the field via the sociology of science, you won't be surprised to hear that I see a major intellectual challenge as being integrating human beings' interaction with the material world into our sociological analyses. What has become known as 'actor-network theory' – practised by Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, Annemarie Mol and many others – has achieved a lot in this direction, but doing it well remains an art as much as it is a science. It is a sensitivity, even an aesthetic sensitivity, rather than an issue of methodological rules.

Q. What book last changed your thinking?

ROB WALLACE & RODRICK WALLACE

EBOLA'S ECOLOGIES

DISEASE EPIDEMICS ARE as much markers of modern civilization as they are threats to it. What successfully evolves and spreads depends on the matrix of barriers and opportunities that a given society presents to its circulating pathogens. For most of its history, for example, *Vibrio cholerae* lived off

A. It is actually an article, not a book: 'Ebola's Ecologies', by Rob Wallace and Rodrick Wallace, which came out in New Left Review in 2016. I didn't read it at the time, but Alice Bamford pointed me to it earlier this year. It begins strikingly: 'For most of its history, Vibrio cholerae lived off plankton in the Ganges delta. It was only after significant layers of the population had switched to an urban, sedentary lifestyle, and later had become increasingly integrated by nineteenth-century trade and transport systems, that the cholera bacterium evolved an explosive, human-specific ecotype.' That bacterium has killed far more people than SARS-CoV-2 so far has, but the article's message holds for it too: that 'nonhumans' (to use Latour's term) co-evolve with us. They change us, but we – in our numbers, our lifestyles, our destruction of 'rough-and-tumble' ecosystems that limited the spread of potential pathogens, our creation of vulnerable monocultures also change them.

Cartoon by Awantha Artigala

Q. Are we all doomed?

A. A horrid misunderstanding developed about the sociology of science in the 1990s: that it was somehow anti-science. That's not right. Science is indeed a subculture, a unique subculture, and that is what gives scientific knowledge its remarkable robustness. We need that knowledge more than ever to help us interact more wisely with the material world and deal with global warming, the loss of biodiversity, and so on. And, right now, I can't wait to get my vaccine!

Written by :

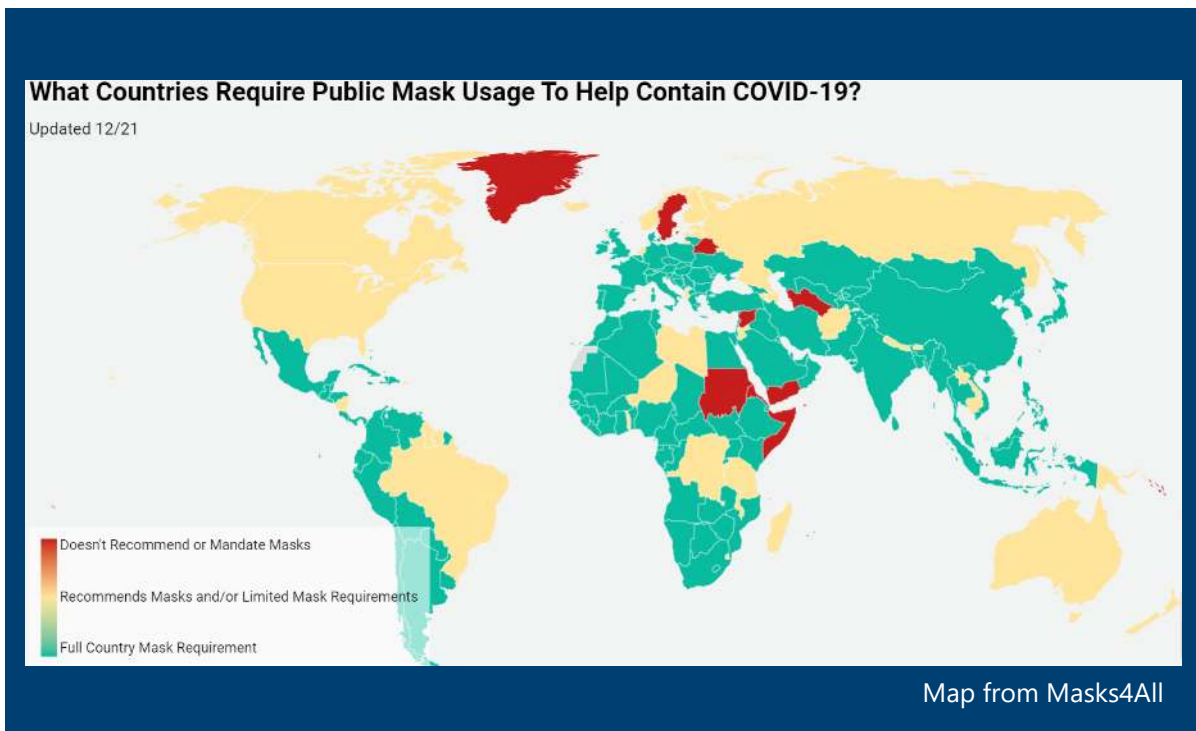Lara Kratzer (2nd Year)

Sociology

Normal? What's that?

Corona this, COVID-19 that, is all we have been hearing for almost a year now. I think we are all tired of it dominating our conversations and lives. Whether we like it or not, this virus has had an enormous impact on what is perceived as 'normal' or 'socially acceptable' in today's society. Even though 'normal' is such a widely used term, it doesn't have an exclusive definition. For the sake of this article, I will take 'normal' to mean behaviour that conforms to social norms based on "behavioural regularities that generate social expectations". What is referred to as 'normal' varies from one society to another, however, there are some almost universal things such as the handshake. However, even that is now no longer a 'normal' way of greeting others, as there is a constant underlying fear of the virus spreading. Instead, we have reverted to using nodding or a simple wave. This article is going to focus on the drastic shift of 'normality', and specifically wearing masks and social distancing as particularly revealing visible manifestations of this.

Masks have become part of the new 'normal' in an effort to protect others from the virus, changing society's ways, and even its looks. Walking into a shop used to be as simple as that; you walked in. However, now there is one additional step: putting on your mask, and if you don't have one, access denied. One day in September, just as uni started again, I was sitting in a cafe, the social changes happening right under my nose sank in, causing my anxiety levels to go through the roof for a minute. Not because I was scared of the virus, but because I understood the full extent to which society and its norms have changed and continue to do so. For instance, when in Spain for the summer, I had to wear a mask everywhere I went due to the local restrictions there, as soon as I left the house. One got stared down by people when not wearing a face covering at 38 degrees celsius. A year ago this was an unthinkable reality, now it is the one we live in. So much has changed in what is 'normal' and what is not; If I had walked past a group of people wearing masks a year ago, I would have probably taken a long way around them. However, now I even feel weird when seeing people in a shop or on public transport without masks on. I am not scared of the virus at all, so surely it has got to do with something other than Covid-19.

As part of the research on this article I conducted a questionnaire to find out more about how the pandemic affected people's lives and minds, with some of the inquiries concerning masks. I asked how effective the subjects thought masks were, and the answers were very evenly split between 'somewhat' and 'mostly'. Whilst masks might be essential in the fight against coronavirus, the next question asked what they thought about wearing masks, and the majority answered in regards to others' feeling of safety, rather than the actual prevention of germ spreading or their own health. One subject said they only wear them 'indoors in public spaces if it makes people more comfortable'. *This underlines the point that it has simply become another 'norm', as it is socially expected behaviour and not an active safeguarding measure.*

What Countries Require Public Mask Usage To Help Contain COVID-19?

Updated 12/21

Doesn't Recommend or Mandate Masks

Recommends Masks and/or Limited Mask Requirements

Full Country Mask Requirement

Map from Masks4All

Another major change in society was the introduction of social distancing. When working at a nursery last September, the effects became particularly apparent. Nurseries are an interesting place to consider social distancing measures, as places which are 'essential' and have had to adapt rather than close, and which are generally extremely socially interactive places. Whilst there I had to be two meters apart from any other member of staff, and the dynamics in the nursery was what I would have described as very 'weird' by pre-pandemic standards. As no more than two adults were allowed in the same room, and even then two meters distance had to be held at all times. This felt strange to me, as usually everyone would have lunch together, but now people would have to keep distance to the extent where they could not be in the same room. Social distancing is the product of change due to the lockdown, that emphasised the power that anxiety holds over people and their behaviour. Social behaviour has certainly changed, especially with strangers. For instance, during the initial lockdown, I was stuck in Edinburgh; when walking past certain people with 1-meter distance rather than two you got snarled at and insulted, one woman even swore at me. You would likely never be exposed to this kind of treatment from anybody pre-lockdown simply for walking too close to someone.

This brings me onto another topic: anxiety. The Guardian recently reported on a study investigating mental health, which found that 'in the early stages of lockdown 57% ...reported symptoms of anxiety'. This anxiety can cause usually social people to choose to stay alone to be as far away from the virus as possible, even if it has adverse effects on their mental health. A surge in mental health issues is an important element of the far-reaching social change we are experiencing.

Covid-19 has introduced a new way of life, and a new 'normal'. Masks and social distancing are two prime examples of how social norms have changed at a fascinating speed during the coronavirus pandemic, and how such changes can have unforeseen consequences.

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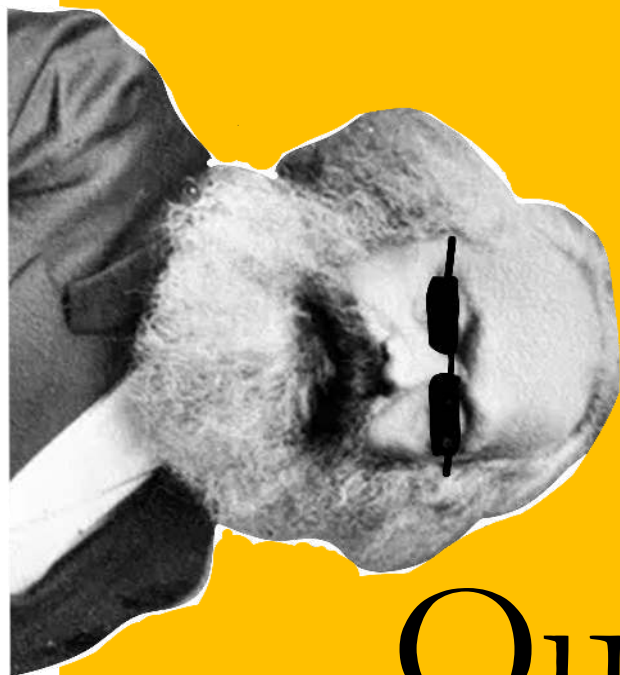
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for reading!

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