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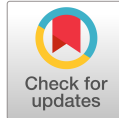


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Home as a Site of State-Corporate Violence: Grenfell Tower, Aetiologies and Aftermaths

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Abstract: Focusing on the aftermaths and consequences of the Grenfell Tower fire, this article reveals the factors which combined to produce a fire that could have such devastating effects. Further, it delineates the discrete ways in which distinct types of harms – physical, emotional and psychological, cultural and relational, and financial and economic – continue to be produced by a combination of State and corporate acts and omissions. Some of these harms are readily apparent, others are opaque and obscured. It concludes by showing how failures to mitigate these factors constitute one manifestation of the more general phenomenon of ‘social murder’.

Keywords: corporate crime; home; social murder; State-corporate violence; Grenfell

While research, writing and activism around the phenomena of corporate and State crime have burgeoned since they first reached mainstream academic attention in the 1960s, such crimes remain relatively obscured by the crimes of the usual suspects. This is despite the fact that corporate and State crimes and harms kill, injure, defraud, and poison many, many more people than so-called conventional crimes; moreover, they often do so relatively silently, with their role and mutual complicity rarely becoming apparent and, if attaining visibility, are rarely brought within the purview of crime, let alone violent crime (Tombs and Whyte 2015). Finally, if curiously, they are rarely exposed in relation to ‘the home’.

Here I cast a critical lens on a recent atrocity – the fire at Grenfell Tower in West London – and examine how we might focus on this as an instance of State-corporate violence. In indicating the ways in which a combination of State and corporate acts and omissions resulted in a fire producing a range of social harms, I bring to the fore how ‘home’ can be the site of State-corporate criminality and harm.

The article begins by setting out some of the key parameters of corporate crime, then State-corporate crime, before indicating why, and how, many of these are best understood as crimes of violence. The main sections of

the article then focus on some of the key dynamics which contextualised, produced, and then followed the fire at Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017, which killed 72 residents and detrimentally affected, forever, the lives of many, many more.

A Conceptual Introduction: From Corporate Crime to State Corporate Violence

Corporate crime is a broad term, covering a large range of offences of omission and commission with differing types of modus operandi, perpetrators, effects, and victims. Because 'corporate crime' refers to a wide range of events and processes, it is often classified into 'types', one common classification covering financial offences, crimes against employees, the natural environment, and consumers.

Academic studies have focused upon a range of financial crimes, including: illegal share dealings, mergers and takeovers; tax evasion; bribery; and illegal accounting practices. Crimes such as those by Enron, Guinness and BCCI are symbolic of the term 'financial crime', and may target other companies, shareholders, governments, or consumers. But most financial crimes are far less visible than these iconic exemplars even as they victimise millions of consumers (Slapper and Tombs 1999) – a classic example here, and one directly focused on the home, were the endowment mortgage frauds of the 1990s – mis-selling a particularly risky mortgage product to high-risk customers generated up to five million victims (Fooks 2003).

A second class of corporate crimes are offences arising from the employment relationship. These include sexual and racial discrimination, violations of wage laws, of rights to organise and take industrial action, and various occupational health and safety offences. Now, while these offences generally originate in work and the workplace, there are various ways in which they impinge upon 'home'. Although relatively obscured in discussions of work, latest figures for the UK show some 4.3 million people work at home or use home as their main base for work (Office for National Statistics 2018) – while we know that such working is generally poorly protected, not least in terms of occupational health and safety (Tombs and Whyte 2007).

Third are a series of crimes against the environment, including illegal emissions to air, water, and land, hazardous waste dumping, and illegal manufacturing practices. A focus on this area was very much at the forefront of the emergence of the sub-genre around eco-crimes, commonly referred to as 'Green' criminology (Lynch 1990).

A final category of corporate crimes are those committed directly against consumers: illegal sales/marketing practices; the sale of unfit goods; conspiracies to fix prices and/or carve up market share; and various forms of false/illegal labelling. Below, I consider some crimes and harms associated with the manufacture and sale of 'white goods' in the UK.

So there is a range of known corporate crimes and harms, some of which impact directly, others indirectly, upon the home. But there is a further set of observations to be made here regarding these crimes and

harms – namely, to highlight the role of states in their production. That is, whether at national or local level, states legitimate (through the absence of regulation) or turn a blind eye to (via non-enforcement of regulation) harmful and potentially criminal corporate practices. Indeed, even more than this, states collude in the production of crime and harm through increasingly symbiotic relationships with private companies and in newly-created markets following privatisation, deregulation or, typically, both (Bittle *et al.* 2018).

Such considerations point to the significance of the concept of ‘State-corporate crime’. Developed by corporate crime scholars in the US, the term ‘State-corporate crime’ first appeared in 1990, when Michalowski and Kramer (2006) defined this phenomenon as signifying ‘illegal or socially injurious actions that occur when one or more institutions of political governance pursue a goal in direct co-operation with one or more institutions of economic production and distribution’ (p.15). The concept directs our attention, first, towards the way in which deviant organisational outcomes are not discrete acts, but rather the outcome of relationships between different social institutions. Second, by focusing upon the relational character of the State, the concept of State-corporate crime foregrounds the ways in which horizontal relationships between economic and political institutions contain powerful potential for the production of socially injurious actions (Kramer and Michalowski 2006, p.21).

For Michalowski, Kramer and other scholars of State-corporate crime, such crime can be initiated and facilitated by states. Thus, corporations either engage in illegality at the prompt of, or with the approval of, State institutions, and/or State actors fail to prevent, respond to, or collude with such illegality. More recently, Lasslett (no date) has usefully expanded upon these subcategories:

Corporate-initiated state crime occurs when corporations directly employ their economic power to coerce states into taking deviant actions. Corporate-facilitated state crime, on the other hand, occurs when corporations either provide the means for the state’s criminality (e.g. weapons sales), or when they fail to alert the domestic/international community to the state’s criminality, because these deviant practices directly/indirectly benefit the corporation concerned.

If we need increasingly to think of State-corporate crime as opposed to merely corporate crime, and if the conditions of existence of states and corporations have become increasingly symbiotic (Bittle *et al.* 2018), then the final point to be emphasised about these relationships is that they produce violent outcomes. Corporate and State activity, in their combination, their relationships, their mutual dependencies have produced, and continue to produce, a range of physical harms, the effects of which look very much like the effects of that which we most commonly understand as ‘violence’ – acute or premature death, injury, illness and long-term suffering through physical impairment (Tombs 2010). What is also clear is that the vast majority of these harms are not treated as violence by the criminal justice system (nor through the media, nor by academics, nor in popular and political discussions of the violence ‘problem’, and so on). This then begs

at least two questions: can such physical harms legitimately be categorised as violence; and, if so, why are they not treated as such?

In a previous review of some key ‘critical’ approaches to violence it was concluded that a wide range of such approaches, not least in and around criminology, shared two fundamental characteristics (Tombs 2007): first, a primacy granted to intention; and, second, a focus upon individual, as opposed to collective, sources of violence, and thus the centrality of violence as interpersonal as opposed to structural. Indeed, both of these assumptions reflect the definitions of violence which tend to be enshrined within systems of criminal law and criminal justice.

Yet if we are able to abandon an epistemological commitment to individualism, then more encompassing definitions and considerations of violence become possible. For example, Hills (1987), in introducing a collection of case histories of ‘corporate violence’, defines this phenomenon as:

Actual harm and risk of harm inflicted on consumers, workers, and the general public as a result of decisions by corporate executives or managers, from corporate negligence, the quest for profits at any cost, and wilful violations of health, safety and environmental laws. (p.vii)

Moving away from the individual and the intentional allows us to develop a much more inclusive and, I would argue, adequate understanding of violence which captures institutional and structural violence as well as that produced by policies, processes, states of affairs, omissions and non-decisions, and negligence (Cooper and Whyte 2017; Tombs 2007) Through this broader lens of what constitutes violence, we now turn to examine the atrocity at Grenfell.

Grenfell as a Site of State-Corporate Violence

These considerations lead us to an exploration of Grenfell as a site of State-corporate violence. As a preface, we need to state what is perhaps blindingly obvious: that Grenfell Tower was home to hundreds of people – in excess of 200 households. Indeed, the Tower itself sat in the midst of the Lancaster West Estate, a large estate of more than 1,000 diverse households, built in the late 1960s in North Kensington, West London. Thus ‘home’ works in several ways in this context: as a physical unit within which people lived, slept, ate, and so on, and as a place of shelter and warmth – albeit in varying ways. ‘Home’ also connotes a sense of a place to which people had various kinds of emotional commitments and cultural experiences. And, finally, home indicates a broader geographical area, a wider physical space, indeed a space to which people also felt differing levels of attachments. Taking these together, it is worth noting that the strong sense of community in the area within which Grenfell stood has been frequently remarked upon in the aftermath of the atrocity. For example:

There is a palpable sense of community in North Kensington. There is a strong community and voluntary sector with a large and varied number of organisations ... The diversity and many communities within North Kensington

make it a place with a strong sense of identity, social capital and depth of social networks. (Strelitz *et al.* 2018, p.37)

Grenfell, then, was a home in many senses of the word. As we shall see in the following three parts of this extended section, it was also a place of three aspects or forms of State-corporate violence.

Prior to this substantive discussion *per se*, a brief note on method. None of what follows is based upon primary research. That said, Grenfell is a multi-fatality disaster in the age of both 24/7 news and social media; there is a mass of material about Grenfell, and some of this consists of relatively unmediated, direct access to the voices of local people themselves, whether this be via the broadcast media (accessible long after recording), the print media, or through blogs and various social media accounts. To the extent to which here I support my claims with the voices of the residents, then these latter are the sources I have used to do so. This means that some are purely personal observations. That said, in the context of the arguments in the following section, such voices were often articulating variations on what became very clear themes, as regards, for example, the horrors of 14 June, or the experiences of temporary accommodation. For these reasons, therefore, and for reasons of space, I use these voices here relatively sparingly.

Grenfell as State-Corporate Violence I: Refurbishment as Domicide

The concept of ‘domicide’ has recently been used by Paton and Cooper (2017) to ‘describe the violent impact that austerity cuts and welfare reforms have on tenants’:

Domicide describes ‘the deliberate destruction of home by human agency in the pursuit of specific goals, which causes suffering to the victims’. In other words, ‘the murder of home’ ... At the everyday level, domicide involves the destruction of homes and neighbourhoods through ‘normal, mundane operations of the world’s political economy’ which manifests through national and local level policy changes that affect housing. Thus, the destruction of people’s homes is not inevitable but the direct result of human intervention, where policy is as mighty as the bulldozer. We extend the understanding of everyday domicide to describe how austerity cuts have increased housing insecurity and rent arrears, with tenants in social and private renting now facing the greatest risk of eviction and being purged from their home communities. (p.166)

Now, it is certainly not the claim here that Grenfell Tower was destroyed as a matter of policy, nor austerity, nor intent. But if we examine briefly the context and nature of the refurbishment of the Tower between 2014 and 2016, we can understand this both as the contextual cause of the fire and as a form of violence upon tenants and their homes.

Grenfell Tower is located in Notting Dale Ward of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC), one of the poorest wards in the Borough (Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Council 2014), and is located in the English Index of Multiple Deprivation Lower Super Output Area¹ (LSOA) denominator E01002880. In 2015, this was ranked the 3,171th

most deprived LSOA of the 32,844 LSOAs in England – that is, in the 10% ‘of the most multiply deprived LSOAs in England’ (Murray 2017).

On the basis of the government’s own data, then, this is an area of absolute deprivation – but it also sits cheek-by-jowl with one of the richest areas in the country, making the extent of *relative* deprivation staggering. The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea ‘is among London’s most unequal, with extreme poverty and wealth living side by side. Data shows that the vicinity of the Tower was among the top 10% most deprived areas in England in 2015 . . . The constituency of Kensington, which makes up most of the local authority of Kensington and Chelsea, is the wealthiest in England’, where ‘The average terraced house sold for £4.3m in 2016’ (Barr 2017). Murray contrasts LSOA E01002880 with what he calls the ‘Kings Road South’ LSOA in the Borough, where ‘the rankings for income, employment, education and health are all in the most advantaged decile and in the 96 to 97 per cent range of the least deprived. For income, employment and education the ranking are in the top one per cent of the most advantaged’ (Murray 2017).

Thus, while the borough has ‘the highest average incomes in London’, its north end is characterised by ‘above average poverty rates, child poverty, and receipt of out-of-work benefits’ (London’s Poverty Profile 2017). There are other correlates of such inequalities of course, one being life expectancy. As the recent Marmot review noted, life expectancy varies across English local authorities – an average of 74 years for men in Blackpool and 79 years for women in Manchester as compared with 83 and 86 years for men and women respectively in Kensington and Chelsea. But this masks considerable inequalities *within* Kensington and Chelsea. Thus the starkest inequalities within English local authorities were to be found ‘in Blackpool, Stockton on Tees and Kensington and Chelsea’ where the inequalities translate into life expectancy differentials between the poorest and richest ‘in the region of 14 to 15 years’ (Institute of Health Equity 2017, p.3). Indeed, it is not just that the area within which Grenfell Tower sits is absolutely and relatively poor – but, as Emma Dent Coad’s (2017) report indicates, it is getting poorer. According to this collation of data by the local MP, since 2010 the poor in the constituency have got poorer, the rich richer, and inequality in the most unequal area in England has widened – for example, in one ward, average life expectancy had declined by six years from 2010 to 2017 (Coad 2017, p.1).

It is in this context that we can better understand both the conditions in which residents of Grenfell Tower and the Lancaster West Estate lived and, most crucially, their relationships with RBKC Council and the Kensington and Chelsea Tenants Management Organisation (KCTMO) to which the Council had transferred the management of the Borough’s entire council housing stock, 9,700 homes, in 1996 (Boughton 2017).

Stanning (2017) has argued that KCTMO was universally hated by those it housed across the Borough, a hatred which ‘goes beyond the usual suspicion of residents towards those who have power over them. KCTMO has for years been an unaccountable and deeply resented part of life for many Kensington and Chelsea residents’. Below, I discuss further what I

think is best characterised as an attitude of contempt by the KCTMO for Grenfell residents, but for now it should be noted that the nature of this contemptuous relationship was perhaps nowhere better captured than in the refurbishment of the Tower which was ultimately to prove fatal for at least 72 of its residents – and, in particular, the disastrous decision to clad the Tower which, according to one local resident, was taken ‘because it was an eyesore for the rich people who live opposite’ (Akala, musician and local resident, C4 News, 15 June 2017). Such relationships have been said to typify wider processes of gentrification and social cleansing in many of the UK’s inner cities, but most notably in London (MacLeod 2018).

Formed in 2010, the Grenfell Action Group (GAG) joined with Unite Community Membership in 2015, principally as a result of concerns about the refurbishment of the Tower (Grenfell Action Group 2015b). In this context, the Group documented ‘threatening and intimidatory tactics’ being used by the TMO and Rydon, the lead contractor in the Tower’s refurbishment, to get access to flats – access which had been denied in response to what GAG saw as substandard and dangerous work. The Group set out a long list of residents’ ‘primary concerns with regards TMO/Rydon’, at the top of which was the ‘(l)ack of meaningful consultation with residents and feeling of total disregard for tenant and leaseholders’ well-being’ (Grenfell Action Group 2015a). Concerns relating to the lack of fire safety instructions, power surges, the single staircase egress in the event of a fire, and the exposure of gas pipes within the flats as a result of the refurbishment were commonly expressed. As GAG posted at 5 am on the morning of the fire as the Tower was still in flames:

Regular readers of this blog will know that we have posted numerous warnings in recent years about the very poor fire safety standards at Grenfell Tower and elsewhere in RBKC. ALL OUR WARNINGS FELL ON DEAF EARS and we predicted that a catastrophe like this was inevitable and just a matter of time. (Grenfell Action Group 2017)

The starkest of these warnings had been published in November 2016, under the apocryphal but prescient headline *KCTMO – Playing with Fire!*, which included the following, chilling passage:

It is a truly terrifying thought but the Grenfell Action Group firmly believe that only a catastrophic event will expose the ineptitude and incompetence of our landlord, the KCTMO, and bring an end to the dangerous living conditions and neglect of health and safety legislation that they inflict upon their tenants and leaseholders. . . . [O]nly an incident that results in serious loss of life of KCTMO residents will allow the external scrutiny to occur that will shine a light on the practices that characterise the malign governance of this non-functioning organisation . . .

The Grenfell Action Group predict that it won’t be long before the words of this blog come back to haunt the KCTMO management and we will do everything in our power to ensure that those in authority know how long and how appallingly our landlord has ignored their responsibility to ensure the health and safety of their tenants and leaseholders. They can’t say that they haven’t been warned! (Grenfell Action Group 2016, bold emphasis in original)

It needs to be emphasised that it was these relations of contempt between the KCTMO and RBKCC on the one hand and the residents on the other which were so pivotal in *producing* the conditions in which the fire became almost an inevitability – foreseen precisely and most tragically of all by the residents themselves (Grenfell Action Group 2016). Further, these relations can only be understood in the context of the enormous and growing inequalities within the Borough – highlighted above – and the perverse nature of restructured housing markets produced by years of privatisation, deregulation, and rampant neoliberalism. These contexts together explain the politico-economic production of the harms manifest at Grenfell: ‘part of a larger story about unevenly precarious lives in today’s unequal cities ... a chilling illustration of how inequality kills’ (Madden 2017).

It must, then, be utterly devastating for anyone remotely connected to Grenfell Tower to realise that this atrocity was the result of a conscious decision by the council to save £293,000. This does not mean that there was any intention to cause the fire nor the deaths that resulted. But this level of cost-cutting by the richest council in England could be viewed as indicative of the contempt which Grenfell residents stated that they had ‘endured ... for years’ (C4 News, 19 July 2017). What has been described by their MP as ‘a real disdain for people lower down the social order’ (Dent Coad (2017), cited on C4 News, 25 July 2017) must generate an enduring sense of worthlessness that the residents in and around the area will find hard to shake off. As one teenaged resident stated outside the Tower as it continued to burn: ‘We’re dying in there because we don’t count’ (Wynne Jones 2017). As another local resident put it: ‘The people who died and lost their homes, this happened to them because they are poor’ (C4 News, 15 June 2017). Such views were widely articulated by the local community across media coverage in the immediate aftermath of the atrocity.

Very quickly after the fire, ‘cost-cutting’ emerged ‘as a key theme in the Grenfell refurbishment’ (Booth and Evans 2017). It was revealed that, in 2014, a decision was taken to replace fire-resistant zinc cladding in the refurbishment contract ‘with cheaper aluminium panels to save £293,368’, with further evidence of the drive to cut costs in an ‘urgent nudge email’ which KCTMO’s project manager sent to Artelia, its cost consultant, about cladding prices. It said: ‘We need good costs for Cllr Feilding-Mellen² and the planner tomorrow at 8.45am!’ (cited in Booth and Grierson 2017). This option was chosen. It was an option chosen by a Council with £274 million in reserves at the time of the fire, and one which had, in 2014, ‘decided to hand back £100 to residents paying the top rate of council tax after a claimed overachieving efficiency drive’ (Syal and Jones 2017). This is also the same Council which, in 2016, had raised £4.5 million from the sale of just two of its homes, more than the cost of all of the cladding used in the Grenfell Tower refurbishment (Booth and Evans 2017). As one resident said to the new Council leader at a public meeting: ‘the culture that you promote is the same culture that brought Grenfell into being. Because you don’t listen, you don’t care’ (C4 News, 4 November 2017). Indeed.

Grenfell as State-Corporate Violence II: The Ongoing Production of State-Corporate Harm

Grenfell was, and is, many things: an atrocity, the biggest fire in Britain for generations, perhaps a crime of corporate manslaughter (the latter under consideration by the Metropolitan Police as I write) – and, for some, a testimony to the violence of austerity (Cooper and Whyte 2018).

Whatever else Grenfell was, or may prove to be, we can surely agree that the fire both was, and remains, a source of considerable social harm. Harms produced by the fire are perhaps most obviously physical, as well as emotional and psychological – even if not all of the harmful effects of the fire within these categories are as immediately apparent as others, as we shall see. Moreover, there is also a range of financial, economic, cultural, and relational harms associated the fire, which I discuss, below.

I will not rehearse the arguments ‘for’ a social harm perspective here (see Hillyard and Tombs 2017), suffice to say that for all the problems associated with the latter perspective there are good reasons why it is a useful lens through which to view the tragedy at Grenfell Tower. A social harm perspective overcomes (or some might say *augments*) the focus on crime and criminal law, which, in the context of fatal injury, tends to be on acts, usually between proximate individuals, alongside the establishment of intention behind these acts. This lens of crime all too often restricts us to a ‘snapshot’ of social life. By contrast, a social harm perspective allows us to incorporate omissions, decision and non-decisions taken, policies developed, defended, and implemented, and practices and cultures established, over long periods of time – so that we can think of these in combination in terms of conditions, states of affairs, incubating phenomena and chains of processes. Thus, the harms of Grenfell have been, and will continue to be, produced by a combination of State and corporate acts and omissions which both produced, and then have in combination failed adequately to respond to, the fire. This complexity characterises the necessary antecedents to high-consequence phenomena such as Grenfell, but many others known to readers of this journal, such as Bhopal, Hillsborough, Piper Alpha, and so on.

These are relatively familiar arguments ‘for’ a social harm approach. But while such an approach would prevent us from looking at Grenfell – and other harmful phenomena – *merely* as an event, it at the same time *is* an event, albeit one which sets in train a whole series of further, rippled, layered harmful consequences. A social harm lens is able to capture the range of harmful consequences that *follow* from any specific event; to capture the various *dimensions* of social harms; to explore how these *unfold*; to note that these unfold in *ripples*, initially and perhaps most intensely within a specific time and place – here, a burning tower – but then disperse geographically and longitudinally. Nor, indeed, despite being discussed through discrete categories, do such harms exist nor unfold in a discrete sense – they are layered, they interact, often complexly – thus producing new or heightened levels of harm through their synergistic effects.

To turn to these harms per se. Clearly, the fire produced a series of physical harms. The most manifest harms associated with the fire are, of course, the 72 immediate deaths which it is recorded as causing. Moreover, a week after the fire, the clinical director of the major trauma centre at King's College Hospital, said that: 'Many of the people who have survived will go on to make a good recovery, but how many will have life-changing injuries remains to be seen. It may take weeks and months for some patients to recover physically' (cited in *The Scotsman* 2017).

There are other possible physical health effects of the fire which are perhaps less identifiable. It is not fully known what airborne toxins might have been emitted as a result of the fire, and what long-term effects exposures to these might be felt by residents and those living in the vicinity. However, we do know that asbestos was present in the building – denied by Public Health England for almost a year after the fire, and thus denying any health screening to possibly affected local residents – while hydrogen cyanide was emitted from the burning insulation and will be a cause of long-term detrimental health effects for an unknowable number of survivors (see, more generally, *Stec et al.* 2019).

In addition to causing death, injury and illness, various aspects of the aftermath of the fire are likely to have caused detrimental health effects. First, it is likely that anyone with existing problems of alcohol and/or drug dependency at the time of the fire would have experienced heightened dependency as a result of the trauma of the fire. Second, many illnesses associated with deprivation – the residents of Grenfell were among the 10% most deprived in England – such as diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure and cholesterol, are likely exacerbated by their having to live in hotel or B&B accommodation where control over diet is more difficult to exercise.

Coupled with a range of physical harms was a gamut of psychological and emotional harms produced by the fire and its aftermath, generating problems with which many survivors will live for years to come. These harms are searing and likely experienced in combination: they are associated with loss – grief was consistently expressed at the loss of loved ones, of pets and of possessions which cannot be replaced; they are related to the recall of the horrors of trying to exit the building – and of seeing others unable to do so, perhaps, then, also generating guilt at survival. Moreover, these latter horrors were not restricted to the residents but were also experienced by residents around the Tower, by bystanders, members of the emergency services, and others who provided on-the-ground support. These have all variously been reported in the aftermath of the fire. None are surprising. None are easily imaginable by those unaffected. None are, one suspects, easily remediable, not least given the parlous state of socially-provided mental health services in the UK. In this context, within a month or so of the fire, reports began to circulate about suicide attempts and other manifestations of mental health problems, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), stress, depression and anxiety, as well as increased levels of drug and alcohol use (see *Strelitz et al.* 2018).

Further, there is no way of knowing what financial costs were, and continue to be, incurred by former residents of the Tower, as well as those

living in the vicinity, but these would include extra travel costs to work or school, the costs of eating out, of time off to attend meetings, funerals, medical appointments, and so on. In addition to these financial harms borne by households are the much more significant (in quantitative terms) economic costs impacting upon local, regional, and national levels which will be incurred for many years to come. Many local businesses closed down in the vicinity, as a housing estate had been transformed into a disaster zone (Local Enterprise Partnership for London 2018). At the local level, the Council faces heavy financial costs following the fire. Costs to central government will be significant. The costs of the inquiry itself will run into millions. None of this is to mention the fallout costs for other councils across the country. Numerous councils have tested cladding on high-rise tower blocks and other public buildings, notably hospitals, and student accommodation, and many are seeking central government funding for major cladding-replacement programmes.

Thus, these economic effects of Grenfell Tower are not confined to residents, the local community or even the Borough – there are ripple effects that are flowing and will continue to flow through communities across the UK. This, in turn, means that those who are most dependent upon central or local services and facilities – those with the least financial independence – will be hardest hit. The poor, the disabled and the sick, those on various forms of benefits, children in the mainstream school system, and, with no little irony, those in social housing or who lack access to adequate or any accommodation at all – all will be impacted upon. The least hardest hit will be the most financially independent – the wealthiest.

Further, discrete categories of harms are those which we might deem to be cultural and relational. In terms of cultural harms, it is clear that in their physical relocation from the Tower and area – their dispersal – that many of both the routines and the networks which constitute social life, at school, work, the local shops, around the flats, and so on, were ripped away. People lost their social networks and social supports when they needed them most; dispersal does not just mean loss of community, it can mean isolation, desperation or, at best, a state of painful limbo (Topping 2017).

More than this, and directly linked to the forms of State-corporate violence which helped to produce the fire, there are relational harms that follow from mistrust of central and local government, each of which were absent in the immediate aftermath of the fire, and for which Prime Minister May apologised; families expressed their sense of being ‘abandoned’ by the State (INQUEST 2019b, p.14). These relational harms – harms of *misrecognition*, defined by Nancy Fraser (2000) as ‘institutionalized subordination’ (p.114) – have proliferated in the aftermath of the fire. They are evidenced in central government’s uncertain and shifting ‘amnesty’ offered to so-called ‘illegal immigrants’ (a harmful term in itself) – whether residents of the Tower, or relatives of such. Another was the palpable failure to meet the commitment made by the Prime Minister in the immediate aftermath of the fire – namely that ‘every person made homeless would receive an offer of accommodation within three weeks’. In fact, this was

subsequently 'clarified' as meaning temporary accommodation (BBC News 2017). Exactly one year after the fire, only 82 of the 203 households that needed rehousing were in new, permanent accommodation (Booth and Bowcott 2018).

These failed commitments further implicated the local authority, RK MBC, and the TMO. Also, contrary to assurances from government, local residents were not consulted before the appointment of Judge Sir Martin Moore-Bick to lead the public inquiry in the light of which Justice4Grenfell concluded that this 'further compounds the survivors and residents sense of distrust in the official response to this disaster' (Justice4Grenfell 2017). This underscores the sense of contempt experienced by the residents after the fire – one which entirely reproduced the attitudes displayed towards local residents prior to it. And the very lack of consultation does not augur well for the ability of the inquiry to produce lessons which might generally be learnt to prevent future Grenfells – lessons which had clearly not been taken on board from a series of preceding high-rise fires in the UK (BBC2 2018). More generally, the failure to learn lessons from the avoidable deaths of the vulnerable – such as, for example, those generated by Inquest verdicts following deaths in custody (Coles and Shaw 2012; INQUEST 2019a) – seems to be a defining characteristic of the relationship between the powerful and the powerless.

Grenfell as State-Corporate Violence III: Consumer Goods, Safety and Regulation

In these ways, then, Grenfell appears to have been caused by varieties of State-corporate violence. But there is a third sense in which this observation can be made in terms of the triggering event of, rather than the context which incubated the conditions for, the fire. It is with this triggering event that this section is concerned.

Shortly after the fire, attention began to turn to its immediate cause – with the 'culprit' likely being a Hotpoint fridge freezer. Of interest for the analysis here – how State-corporate violence enters peoples' homes – is the much longer backstory to this, one of the regulation of the sale and use of 'white goods' in the UK. And to narrate this we can, in fact, use the example of Hotpoint. Let us start with what we know, before turning to consider how we understand these events as a form of State-corporate violence in the home.

Within days of the fire, the Metropolitan police (the Met) stated that it suspected its immediate cause to be a Hotpoint fridge freezer. As part of their press release in response to this, the manufacturers of the Hotpoint brand, Whirlpool, stated that:

We are working with the authorities to obtain access to the appliance so that we can assist with the ongoing investigations. Under these circumstances, we are unable to speculate on further details at this time. We are addressing this as a matter of utmost urgency and assisting the authorities in any way we can. We will provide additional updates as our investigations progress. The government said that consumers do not need to switch off their fridge freezer pending further investigation. (cited in Snowdon 2017)

It is of interest that neither that brand name nor the manufacturer have featured very much at all in the mass of coverage around the fire and its aftermath.

It is also worth noting that the consumers' organisation Which? and the Chartered Institute for Trading Standards (CTSI) had been campaigning for several years for a ban on plastic-backed electrical goods. Whirlpool and other manufacturers had opposed this. In this opposition, Whirlpool had been consistently supported by Peterborough trading standards – on which more, below.

Following the Met's statement, the business secretary, Greg Clark, ordered an examination of the model – which concluded in May 2018 finding no inherent fault and no need for a national product recall, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) stating that: 'the product met legal safety requirements and that the risk associated with the model is assessed as low' (cited in Smithers 2018). Whirlpool said that its own second investigation also found there was no fault with the model, announcing: 'We wish to reassure consumers that these models are safe and that people may continue to use them as normal. We have fully cooperated with BEIS as it undertook its investigations, and it has now confirmed that there are no concerns with these models' (Smithers 2018). The reassurance was challenged by the consumer group Which? asking for clarification as to whether the model tested had a flammable plastic backing (Smithers 2018).

Then, almost a year after the fire, on the opening day of the Grenfell Public Enquiry, a fire safety expert introduced a report which stated that it was not possible to be certain that the fridge freezer was the initial cause of the fire, even if it was 'more likely than not that the area of origin of the fire was in, or around, the tall fridge freezer in the southeast part of the kitchen' (cited in Agerholm 2018). The issue remained dormant until close to the very end of Phase 1 of the Enquiry when, in November 2018, an expert witness concluded that faulty wiring in the fridge freezer had been the source of the fire. He added that: 'models made in the US must have a back casing made from metallic steel, which can help contain internal fires', whereas the 'plastic allowed for back casings on UK and European models were combustible and could contribute to fires' (cited in SkyNews 2018). Whirlpool challenged the findings, stating that the models were safe to use. Two weeks later, the company floated at the Enquiry the claim that the owner of the company which produces the fridge believed to have started the fire may have been sparked by a lit cigarette (Giordano 2018). In response, the lawyer representing the occupant of the fourth floor flat where the fire started told the Inquiry:

As far as the theory of the fire having started as a result of something being thrown through the open window is concerned, this is pure speculation, desperate to put it politely. There is no evidence in support, it would have been impossible for a cigarette or some other mystery item to have been launched from ground level four floors down and it is equally impossible to imagine how a cigarette or some other mystery item discarded from a flat above could have miraculously entered the kitchen through the open window, let alone set anything in the vicinity alight. (cited in Giordano 2018)

In the Phase 1 report on the fire, therefore, Moore-Bick concluded that: 'Although some questions remain unanswered, the evidence, viewed as a whole, leaves me in no doubt that the fire originated in the large fridge-freezer' (Grenfell Tower Inquiry 2019, p.514). Wherever the truth lies – and on balance it seems that the fridge freezer *was* the trigger for the atrocity – there is a backstory to the fridge freezer and Whirlpool, one of corporate power, regulatory failure, and the victimisation of consumers, which makes it of criminological interest.

In August 2016 – ten months before the Grenfell Tower fire – that latter fire was chillingly foretold in a relatively unreported event. In a tower block in Shepherd's Bush Green, West London, just over a mile from Grenfell, a fire caused the 18-story tower block to be evacuated. No one was injured but images of the tower block burning closely resemble Grenfell (see BBC News 2016a, 2016b). Moreover, the cause of the fire was found to be a faulty tumble drier, the Hotpoint brand made by Whirlpool. In fact, having acquired Indesit (and thus its brands, including Hotpoint) in 2014, Whirlpool began a series of appliance testing which identified faults in three brands of tumble driers, namely Hotpoint, Indesit, and Creda, whereby a build-up of fluff could lead to fires (Pepin with Conway 2017). Parliamentary hearings later revealed that the problems with some Whirlpool driers had first come to light in 2005, and the Chartered Trading Standards Institute believed they should have been recalled by 2006 (House of Commons Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee 2017). In November 2015, Whirlpool estimated that about 3.8 million tumble dryers were affected by the fire risk. Owners were told (i) to contact Whirlpool for a repair, and (ii) not to use unattended. Whirlpool offered a programme of repairs, a response supported by Peterborough trading standards, its regulator under the Primary Authority (PA) scheme – on which more, below. Despite some political and consumer group pressures, it perfectly legally resisted calls for a product recall. Note, no product recall was offered or required, simply a commitment at some point to repair a product which could not do that for which it had been bought. Owners were told that they could use the driers, but should be in attendance while they were in use and not to use the timer button. In fact, it was only in February 2017, following intense pressure from the London Fire Brigade, that Whirlpool advised its customers to unplug and not to use the dryers.

In September 2017, an inquest found that a fire in a flat which killed two men in Conwy county in October 2014 was most likely caused by a fault in a Whirlpool tumble dryer. The coroner concluded: 'On the balance of probabilities, the fire was caused by an electrical fault in the tumble dryer in the laundry room of the flat'. The one occupant who survived said the dryer had been switched off at the time of the fire (Leigh Day 2017).

Alongside this emerging evidence of the hazards associated with some of its tumble driers, Whirlpool was also more broadly associated with safety problems with its white goods in the UK. In November 2017, the London Fire Brigade responded to a Freedom of Information request revealing that white goods had triggered 2,891 fires in houses, flats, and public settings such as care homes and nurseries, from January 2009 to September

2017. These had led to ten deaths and 348 injuries. Brands under the Whirlpool umbrella accounted for 895 fires – the highest of any manufacturer (Smithers 2017).

Such data help to explain the establishment, in 2017, of a House of Commons cross-party committee on *The Safety of Electrical Goods in the UK*, producing its report in early 2018. Aspects of the hearing were astonishing, the report itself damning. On the issue of Whirlpool's dangerous tumble driers in particular, the Select Committee's report found that there were 5.3 million driers affected and that only about half had been repaired. More broadly, the report noted, variously:

- Between 2010 and 2016, there were 1,598 fires in England caused by fridge/freezers alone. In 2015/16, 676 fires in England were caused by tumble dryers, leading to a total of 46 injuries and fatalities. There have been specific problems identified with defective tumble dryers and there has also been a campaign to ban plastic-backed fridges because of the fire safety risks associated with them'. (House of Commons Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee 2018, para. 1)
- Whirlpool failed to provide an appropriate representative to give evidence, gave incomplete answers to questions and were required to provide subsequent clarifications and reassurance regarding its actions. This does not strike us as the actions of a company seeking to repair consumer trust after serious safety failures with its products'. (House of Commons Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee 2018, para. 30)
- Cuts to local government budgets have affected local Trading Standards' abilities to deliver consumer protection services, so that '[b]etween 2009 and 2016 total spending on local Trading Standards fell from £213m to £123m ... This has led to a reduction by 56% of full-time equivalent Trading Standards staff between 2009 and 2016'. (House of Commons Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee 2018, para. 11)
- The independence of local Trading Standards within Primary Authority partnerships has been questioned because they provide both advice to local businesses whilst also ensuring enforcement'. (House of Commons Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee 2018, para. 10)
- We were shocked to hear that Whirlpool and Peterborough Trading Standards continued to advise consumers they could use defective appliances, even after a major fire and in the face of criticism from consumer safety organisations. The advice to consumers to attend appliances while in operation was unrealistic and – given that a fire occurred when this advice was followed – patently inadequate'. (House of Commons Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee 2018, p.26)

This latter relationship – between Whirlpool and Peterborough trading standards – is one of the crucial aspects of this whole episode. Elsewhere I have considered some of the ways in which the relationships between the State, the private sector and regulation have been transformed in the UK in the past 15 years – a changing relationship within which private business, ostensibly the object of regulation, has increasingly become a

key vehicle of regulation (Tombs 2016). A paradigmatic instance of this is being achieved through the PA scheme. This scheme was introduced by the Labour government in 2009, but given considerable impetus by the coalition government from 2010, notably following the establishment of the Better Regulation Delivery Office (BRDO) in 2012, for which oversight of the scheme was its main priority (Tombs 2016).

According to the BRDO, the scheme:

allows businesses to be involved in their own regulation. It enables them to form a statutory partnership with one local authority, which then provides robust and reliable advice for other councils to take into account when carrying out inspections or addressing non-compliance. The general aim is to ensure that local regulation is consistent at a national level, but sufficiently flexible to address local circumstances. The business can decide what level of support it requires, and the resourcing of partnerships is a matter for the parties concerned. A primary authority can recover its costs. (Better Regulation Delivery Office 2014, p.2)

When this statement was issued, in April 2014, 1,500 businesses had established PA relationships across 120 local authorities. The PA since mushroomed: within three years of this statement, there were 17,358 such relationships across 182 authorities. And in that year, government stated that: ‘The number of businesses in Primary Authority is expected to increase from 17,000 to an estimated 250,000 by 2020’ (Regulatory Delivery 2017, p.4).

PA applies across a vast swathe of areas of regulation, but its main areas are pollution control, occupational health and safety and other local environmental health enforcement areas, food safety, trading standards, fire safety, licensing, petrol storage certification, and explosives licensing. It is a key regulatory initiative. It allows a company – and, since April 2014, franchises and businesses in trade associations – operating across more than one local authority area to enter an agreement with one specific local authority to regulate *all* of its sites, nationally. So, a manufacturer and retailer like Whirlpool which has production sites and retail outlets across most of the local authorities in England and Wales can, under the PA scheme, reach an agreement with *one* local authority to regulate its systems across *all* of its stores in *every* local authority for complying with a relevant body of law – Peterborough City Council in the context of trading standards, for example. To regulate its systems, the company makes a payment to the local authority, agreed through contract. The benefit for the company, of course, is the absence of oversight in the vast majority of its premises. These can be visited in other areas, but any enforcement action needs to be undertaken through the local authority which is the PA. Should a local authority wish to prosecute a company signed up to a PA agreement, for example, it can only do so with the permission of the local authority which is party to that agreement – an enforcement visit finding non-compliance with a Hotpoint tumble drier in a retail outlet in St Ives, for example, would need to raise that with Peterborough trading standards. The likely outcome of this is that Peterborough trading standards commit to resolving the issue with Whirlpool in the absence of any enforcement action. In the

unlikely event of Peterborough agreeing to the latter proceeding, then, under the scheme, any such action must then entail prior notice being given to the company; the company can then request that the matter be referred to the BRDO for determination (Williams 2013). In effect, then, the scheme is a formal series of barriers to enforcement in the event of business offending. Government advice on this to businesses is explicit:

Primary authorities generally report low levels of enforcement action against the businesses they partner with. In the event that an enforcement officer decides to take action against a business that is in a direct partnership with you, or covered by a co-ordinated partnership with you, he or she is required to notify you via the Primary Authority Register. As a primary authority you can direct against (block) an enforcement action being taken against the business when you have issued relevant Primary Authority Advice and the business was following it. (Office for Product Safety and Standards 2018)

The PA scheme is, in effect, a regulatory system which encourages non-enforcement – and, one might say, collusion in wrongdoing, since the financial benefits of such contracts to cash-strapped local authorities are real incentives to avoid adversarial relationships with businesses. This is more than capture or co-option of an autonomous regulatory agency by specific private interests (Stigler 1971). Rather, it is an instance of a regulatory accommodation with, and tolerance of, the institutionalisation of the unequal distribution and externalising of risk (see Tombs and Whyte 2014). Thus it was, in effect, the shield of Peterborough trading standards, through their contractual PA agreement, which allowed Whirlpool to continue to refuse to recall products they knew were not fit for purpose and, indeed, posed a proven safety risk, which had led to fatalities. Regulation, ostensibly in existence to protect consumers, residents, workers, and so on, is being transformed into a form of State-corporate collusion by contract which protects the private sector from law enforcement. A form of State-corporate violence, no less.

Conclusion: Social Inequality, Social Murder and State-Corporate Violence

Shildrick (2018) has observed that: ‘the people who died in the Grenfell Tower or have been affected by the disaster were victims of a neoliberal regime that inevitably produces casualties and losers along with its winners’ (p.794). Quite so. But in this article I have sought to add some detail to this rather bald statement: Who, or what, were the authors of this violence? How is it generated and sustained? And what should be the objects of popular struggle if it is to be mitigated? Moreover, in so doing I have attempted to highlight some of the ways we might use the lens of State-corporate violence, not least in the home, to uncover phenomena which receive relatively little criminological, criminal justice, nor indeed wider political attention. Certainly, such a lens was not employed in producing the Phase I report of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry (2019), published as this article was being written – therein, the easier targets proved to be those

on the scene, the London Fire Brigade, whose commissioner, Dani Cotton, went on to resign.

Consistent with the lines of argument developed herein, I conclude by noting one further way in which we need to understand Grenfell, a final dimension of State-corporate violence in the home. For one of the effects of Grenfell has been to support the resuscitation of a concept first circulated by Engels in the mid-19th Century, a concept he named 'social murder':

When one individual inflicts bodily injury upon another, such injury that death results, we call that deed manslaughter; when the assailant knew in advance that the injury would be fatal, we call this deed murder. But when society places hundreds of proletarians in such a position that they inevitably meet a too early and an unnatural death, one which is quite as much a death by violence as that by the sword or the bullet; when it deprives thousands of the necessities of life, places them under conditions in which they cannot live – forces them . . . to remain in such conditions until that death ensues which is the inevitable consequence – knows that these thousands of victims must perish, and yet permits these conditions to remain, its deed is murder just as surely as the deed of the single individual. (Engels 1845/1969, p.106)

Thus 'social murder' referred to the systematic and routine killing of workers and citizens in the horror of the emergence of industrial capitalism. It was these conditions which generated the inter- and intra-class struggles for laws to regulate business and to mitigate much of their profit-driven, harmful effects which took place in Britain during the 1800s. Then began the long-term construction of regulatory regimes in Britain.

But this 'social murder' is not a matter of historical record – the scale of contemporary harm remains significant (Tombs and Whyte 2015, pp.30–70). So it is hardly insignificant that these long-standing regulatory regimes have been systematically dismantled under conditions of neoliberalism and, more particularly, in the UK, under neoliberalism in the turbo-charged context of austerity.

I have considered these trends towards the dismantling of a system of social protection at length elsewhere (Tombs 2016), through a mass of quantitative data across a range of enforcement activities on the part of local (and national) State regulators. What is most remarkable about this for a set of social scientific data, is that it uniformly points in the same direction – it highlights consistent and generalised declines in enforcement activity since the launch of a new regulatory initiative in 2004, and then in particular under post-2010 conditions of austerity. For the purposes of this article, and to state baldly, if we look at enforcement trends in four key areas of social protection in the UK, from 2010 to 2016, we find, at local authority level: health and safety at work inspections down by 69%; food 'safety' – hygiene and standards – inspections down 15% and 35% respectively; pollution control inspections down 55%; and, tellingly, fire safety inspections down 25%.

More generally, at local authority level, since the post-2010 cuts began to bite, campaigns to enforce regulation against business have become almost extinct. This is because most councils, unlike RBKC, have reached rock

bottom in terms of their ability to maintain services (Sparrow 2014). As an environmental health officer in Merseyside put it to me: ‘it’s going to come to the point where it’s going to affect the residents, the local population, in many ways we are at that point now, public health and protection is being eroded’ (Tombs 2016, p.167).

It is in this context that it is worth recalling why regulation emerged – namely, to mitigate the worst effects of capitalist production. Yet in the last 15 years or so, it has become fashionable – even ‘natural’ – to deride regulation and those who enforce it. There is a gruesome irony in the fact that on the morning of the Grenfell Tower fire, 14 June 2017, I was speaking on ‘The State, Social Murder and Social Protection’ at a conference in Liverpool (‘Emotions and State Power’). My topic was how regulation had become an object of hatred, facilitating the dismantling of social protection. At the same time, the scale of harm, not least death, continues – virtually under any political, popular or academic radar. As I have indicated here, this is a story about social inequality and social murder. And it is one well captured through the lens of State-corporate violence, a violence which extends into people’s homes – and, as Grenfell indicates, can destroy those homes.

Notes

- 1 The smallest unit of analysis, drilling down to an area of some 500–600 households or 1,500 people.
- 2 Deputy leader of Kensington and Chelsea Borough Council and Head of Housing.

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