Article Title
A De-Civilizing Reversal or System Normal? Rising Lethal Violence in Post-Recession Austerity UK

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Abstract

This article offers incipient theoretical analysis and reflections on the recent rises in lethal violence recorded in the UK. The rises have attracted considerable media attention, with the more informed discussions drawing plausible causal associations between rising lethal violence and the policy context of austerity. Criminology, however, has been relatively silent so far on the recent rises and this potential association. In response, this article attempts to stimulate debate by critically considering the utility of one of the most widely cited theoretical frameworks in the study of historical patterns of violence in the western nations: the 'civilizing process'. The article then moves on to consider the applicability of insights from the incipient ultra-realist criminological perspective. The article suggests that the ultra-realist concept of the 'pseudo-pacification process' provides a useful means of furthering our understanding of these rises in the current socio-economic context of post-crash capitalism.

Key words
Violence; Austerity; Homicide; Civilizing Process; Pseudo-Pacification; Ultra Realism.

Introduction

At the end of his critically-acclaimed text *The Better Angels of Our Nature* Steven Pinker claimed that:

> ...the decline of violence is an accomplishment we can savor, and an impetus to cherish the forces that made it possible (2011: 696)

In the several hundred pages that precede this concluding remark, Pinker assembles an impressive array of statistical data to support the book's key assertions that levels of physical violence, of all kinds, are in decline and we are now living through the most peaceful period in human history. The theoretical framework Pinker overlays onto this assortment of data owes much to the work of social theorist Norbert Elias, who claimed that the 'civilizing process' – a series of macro-level social transformations across history that fostered greater interconnections between individuals and gradually truncated the human emotional spectrum – generated stronger internal restraints against destructive impulses, enabling populations to live in conditions of relative peace (Elias 2000). After some brief upward spikes in the early 1990s, recent successive year-on-year declines in violence and some other crime types, which were reported between the early 1990s until around 2013 (Knepper, 2012; Van Dijk and Tseloni, 2012), seemed to indicate the continuation of the longer-term statistical downward

trend in violence throughout Western history (Eisner, 2001). This trend provided Pinker with a platform to assert with some confidence that the civilizing forces he had described were intact and still steering humanity – or at least the economically developed world (see LaFree et al, 2015) – along a progressive trajectory.

However, such an optimistic conclusion appears somewhat at odds with the more recent fallout from the 2008 financial crisis in the West: a 'dead but dominant' neoliberalism that now stumbles forward having managed to haul itself from yet another crisis of legitimacy (Peck, 2010); implementation of policies of austerity that have impacted severely upon the most vulnerable groups (Varoufakis, 2016); the re-emergence of divisive and regressive political ideologies (Winlow et al, 2017); and increased inequality (Dorling, 2018; Streeck, 2016). If we take the UK as an example, the austerity agenda introduced by the Coalition government as a response to the global economic crisis actually coincided with increased wealth generation amongst the richest members of the population, but also with increased mortality, social and psychological harms concentrated largely amongst poorer economic groups (Cooper and Whyte, 2017).

While the structurally violent outcomes of austerity and the economic recession that precipitated it have been addressed by social scientists, the possible outcome of interpersonal violence has received less attention to date. Given the recent increase in recorded violence rates that has interrupted the previous longer-term pattern of decline, this outcome now demands interrogation. The latest crime figures released by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) paint a concerning picture. Consecutive increases in lethal violence have been recorded over the past four years. They have been accompanied by recorded rises in other serious or 'higher harm' forms of violence, particularly offences involving knives and firearms (ONS, 2018). Given the correlation, it would certainly not be naïve to suggest that these increases are associated in some ways with social conditions precipitated by the global recession and domestic policies of austerity. As inequality approaches levels not experienced for over a century (Dorling, 2018), as the provision of state services and protections retract, as debt levels increase, and as economic growth remains severely limited with scant evidence of the political will required to shift the direction of economic policy (Streeck, 2016), it would seem necessary to reconsider the possible associations between these recent macro-economic shifts and rising levels of lethal and serious violence.

This article attempts to outline some of the possible causal linkages between the condition of the UK's economy, the policy of austerity and recent rises in 'higher harm' and lethal forms of violence. It is structured in the following way. The first section briefly examines recent trends in violent crime and considers the shift to a pattern of inclining as opposed to previously declining rates. The second section outlines the criminological context in which the current discussions of these rises in homicide and other higher harm violence are located. It focuses on the reluctance to move detailed theory construction beyond the issue of changes in criminal opportunities to the realm of causal contexts and subjectivity. In an attempt to stimulate this debate, the third section asks whether Norbert Elias' theory of the 'civilizing process', arguably one of the most sophisticated existing frameworks, can be used to unpack this current issue. The theory's neglect of political economy and its vague explanation of social subjectivity casts doubt on its relevance and explanatory power in the contemporary period. Following this, section four introduces the ultra-realist concept of 'pseudo-pacification' (Hall, 2012; 2014) to the debate. This section suggests that in order to maintain its expansion the capitalist system requires a degree of pacification in tension with the contradictory stimulation of anxious and competitive subjects, which, as a result, generates a socially toxic atmosphere liable to experience spatially differentiated fluctuations in interpersonal violence. The fifth and final section considers the criminological implications of this new theoretical framework before ending with some concluding comments.

Decline to incline

While the more recent consecutive rises in homicide and higher-harm violence do not place current rates as high as those recorded in the UK during the early 1990s, they nevertheless represent a concerning reversal of what had been modest but consistent year-on-year declines that had lasted for around 20 years, and had actually persisted during the early onset of the 2008 recession and the subsequent austerity programme. However, warnings were issued about the possible incline of violence rates as the recession began. In September 2008, just days after the Chancellor of the Exchequer Alistair Darling warned the UK that it was facing its worst economic crisis for 60 years, the contents of a draft letter produced by the Home Office for Downing Street were leaked to the news media. The letter contained a series of stark warnings concerning the possible effects of the impending economic recession upon crime and violence rates. As the downturn threatened to increase unemployment, stagnate wages, reduce living standards, induce greater competition between indigenous and migrant working populations, and reduce resources for public services, the letter warned of the very

real possibility of the eventual emergence of a socially divisive atmosphere that would lead to 'rising property crime and violent crime, and increased hostility to migrants' (BBC, 2008).

Before 2014, the point at which the recent consecutive rises in the homicide rate began, both recorded and reported crimes, including violence, did not follow the letter's projected pattern. Rather, between 2008 and 2014 the previous pattern of modest decline that had been observed since the early 1990s continued. This trend was duplicated in several other Western liberal democratic states (Farrall et al, 2014; Knepper, 2012; Van Dijk and Tseloni, 2012). This modest contemporary decline had begun in the mid-1990s after a period of intense social disruption catalysed by neoliberal restructuring of Western industrialised nations' economies in the 1980s and early 1990s, during which crime rates had reached their highest ever recorded point since the inception of formalised recording methods. Lethal violence rates, measured collectively across several European states including the UK, rose to levels similar to those experienced during the mid-to-late 1800s (Spierenburg, 2008). There is a consensus amongst many criminologists that the rises recorded during this period were genuine and not merely an effect of alterations to recording methods (Hall, 2012; Reiner, 2016).

Yet, immediately after 2008, as levels of inequality continued to burgeon in the UK (Dorling, 2018) and a range of social problems such as homelessness, indebtedness, under-employment and unemployment, suicide, and food bank usage were amplified as the recession and the Coalition government's programme of austerity continued (see Dorling, 2015; O'Connell and Hamilton, 2017; Horsley, 2015; O'Hara, 2017; Standing, 2011), crime and violence rates remained on what seemed like an enigmatic downward trajectory. This enigma seemed to refute the substantial body of established social scientific evidence that had identified strong correlations between unfavourable economic conditions, disruption to social institutions and communities, and inflated rates of criminality and violence (Currie, 2016; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2012).

Skirting around the various methodological issues that beset crime surveys, criminology largely accepted this decline as genuine and busied itself with identifying the factors that lay behind what rapidly became a 'surprising' and 'mysterious' drop in reported and recorded crime and violence. A range of potential explanations were offered (Reiner, 2016). None of these explanations, however, could account for this complex pattern in its entirety nor explain

a phenomenon that was occurring across a range of 'traditionally' reported and recorded offence categories. Also problematic was the associated issue of the various types of crime and other harms that the standard recording methods used by the police or victim surveys either do not measure or cannot measure effectively (Winlow and Hall, 2006). Mainstream criminology continued to confine its analyses of the 'crime decline' to legally defined 'criminal' offences, neglecting various harmful practices, such as those embedded within the consumer capitalist system and the virtual realm, or associated with the activities of the powerful (Hall and Winlow, 2015; Smith and Raymen, 2018 Treadwell, 2012). Amongst myriad competing explanations that emerged to explain the 'decline', the expansion of the security apparatus emerged as one of the more viable theses given that enhanced security measures have coincided with reductions in some specific property offences (Van Dijk and Tseloni, 2012). However, the security hypothesis is arguably less relevant for explaining falls in serious forms of violent criminality (Reiner, 2016), therefore uncertainty remained regarding the underlying reasons behind the general statistical decline.

As the debate over causes continued to rage, the statistical decline that had prevailed over two decades in England and Wales began to reverse. Since 2014 'higher harm' types of violence involving weapons have increased alongside some forms of property crime (ONS, 2018). Most importantly though, the number of homicides increased by 12% in the year ending March 2018 and had increased consecutively year-on-year during the four years prior (ibid). Most of these homicides were perpetrated in the poorer districts of several of England's large metropolitan centres, where both victims and perpetrators lived. Unlike non-lethal types of violence and most other types of crime, which are more difficult to detect and measure accurately, homicide can be measured with a high degree of accuracy (Currie, 2016). It is a category 'around which hard-line social constructionist explanations collapse' (Hall and Wilson, 2014: 636). Furthermore, most scholars accept that the number of deaths caused by violent behaviour is a useful indicator of the general patterns of violence in a society (Mares, 2009; Pinker, 2011). It is difficult to dispute the recent rise in recorded homicide as purely a product of alterations to police recording practices, and we can say with some confidence that lethal violence has increased and has been doing so for at least the past four years. Criminologists can also suggest with perhaps a little less certainty that forms of non-lethal violence have also increased. This more tentative assertion is supported by recent research addressing levels of several types of violent offence (see O'Neill, 2017; Walby et al, 2016).

Criminology's silence

It is evident that when we analyse patterns of violence 'we do see some common forces at work across societies' (Currie, 2016: 45). These forces are often strongly associated with macro political/economic contexts. As Hall and Wilson suggest after reviewing some of the available empirical evidence:

> ...studies at the macro-level present us with enough discernible evidence of the correlations between temporal and spatial patterns of socioeconomic marginalisation and high levels of homicide (2014: 651)

We know that incidents of serious physical violence in the public sphere are largely confined to specific groups of men belonging to what was once readily referred to as the working class (Ellis, 2016), and that most lethal violence is perpetrated and suffered by men from this social group (Brookman, 2003; Dorling, 2004; Hall, 2002; Polk, 1994; Spierenburg, 2008). The recent recorded rises also appear to correlate strongly with socioeconomic marginalisation, economic recession and the social consequences of austerity. Copious empirical evidence also indicates that serious violence is likely to increase where the presence of the state is absent, weak or lacking legitimacy amongst its populace (see Currie, 2014; Hall and Wilson, 2014; Roth, 2009). States provide protections to citizens but also function culturally to diffuse codes of behaviour that are conducive to reduced violence. The process of diffusion may be hampered by the retraction of important state institutions and services (Eisner, 2001; Mares, 2009). The recent increases appear to replicate differentiated patterns of lethal violence that criminologists already know are concentrated and 'embedded in multiple inequalities' (Kilby and Ray, 2013: 7), but also associated with qualitative shifts in political economy, socio-political relations and culture (Hall, 2012; Hall and Wilson, 2014; Reiner, 2016).

Despite criminology's awareness of clear spatial and temporal differentiations in rates of serious violence, absent from much criminological theorising are ways of connecting these differentiations to subjective motivations. Hall and Wilson (2014) point to criminology's inability to decide whether subjective motivations also fluctuate along with opportunities that arise when broader cultural and economic conditions change. For Reiner, subjective motivations are malleable in accordance with broader macro contexts:

> Social, cultural and economic changes affect the attractions of those behaviours that are labelled as criminal, increasing or decreasing the numbers of people motivated to commit them (2016: 160)

Ray (2011) also argues that homicide rates are affected by social and cultural changes that may be stimulated by economic fortunes, rather than in relation to alterations in policy or policing practices. This body of research suggests that increases in criminal opportunities caused by austerity-related cuts are potentially an important part of any plausible criminological explanation of currently rising homicide rates. Criminology is adequately placed to explain this aspect by drawing upon its established theoretical corpus, which emphasises the fundamental point that disruption to various social institutions and public services that perform integrative and control functions will likely increase harmful behaviour. However, what the existing evidence suggests is that the equally important issue of changes in subjective motivations during times of social, cultural and economic change has been neglected. What has obstructed criminology in this matter is that for some time now it has been mired in an aetiological crisis that still shows few signs of abating (Hall, 2012). Criminology's reluctance to address aetiology, or its tendency to rehash theoretical ideas from the 20th Century in the current context, have cast some doubt on its credibility as a discipline capable of making sense of the crime and harmful behaviour we witness today. Gadd and Jefferson captured some aspects of this rather sorry state of affairs when they argued that most current criminological arguments about the causes of crime, particularly serious violent offending, offer:

> ...depleted caricatures: individuals shorn of their social context...who act...purely on the basis of reason or 'choice'...Or...individuals who are nothing but the products of their social circumstances who are not beset by any conflicts either in their inner or outer worlds (2007: 1)

Gadd and Jefferson are alluding to poorly conceptualised criminal 'subjects' that occupy the discipline's dominant conservative right and liberal-left paradigms. These poorly conceived subjects are caricatures. Conservative criminologists construct subjects at the mercy of wicked pleasure-seeking hedonism yet making calculated rational choices when opportunities arise, and therefore need external systems of control and punishment. This established aetiological 'common sense' justifies the restriction of criminological theory to apolitical and unambitious situational crime prevention measures. The supposed alternative to conservative policy pragmatism, liberal-left 'moral panic' theory, has diverted most of our attention away from aetiology and subjectivity. Where these vital issues are addressed they are done so from the perspective of labelling and stigma; concepts drawn from symbolic interactionist and social constructivist positions that tell us how specific groups are marginalised and

demonised but very little about their initial motivations to act. The liberal-left research programme that focuses on social reaction is worthwhile in its own right, of course, but it lacks a convincing account of the motivations behind the violent subjectivities that inhabit the broad, shifting cultural and economic contexts of post-crash neoliberal capitalism. Mark Horsley captured the essence of this problem in his critique of moral panic theory and its underlying intellectual foundations:

> In resolutely turning the critical gaze away from the idea of underlying structural causes, the incessant restriction of analysis to social reaction leaves the art of explanation to become a hostage to fortune, often captured by conceptual narratives that deny the very possibility of structural causation (2017: 91)

While Horsley is certainly not crediting moral panic theory alone with criminology's retreat from contextualised aetiology, the dominant appeal of simplistic formulations of criminal opportunities and motivations produced by the neoliberal right 'has arguably been, at least in part, an outcome of...critical criminology's retreat into the restrictive...field of social reaction, criminalisation, panic and labelling' (ibid: 91). It would seem that the theoretical gap created by the liberal left's reluctance has been enthusiastically filled by the neoliberal right.

This absence is the main reason why liberal-left criminology has been unable to get to grips with the recent incline of violence and why, so far, detailed theoretical discussions of it have not been offered. The discipline's relative silence so far is, I would tentatively suggest here, very much a product of the direction it took from the 1960s (Hall and Winlow, 2015). Into the void generated by criminology's silence have poured mainstream media and political elites to opine on this latest issue. Some of these discussions have been rather narrow, mostly concerned with the influence of 'Drill' music, illicit drug markets, 'toxic masculinity', and the role played by social media in some violent crimes. The post-crash economic context and the detrimental impact of the austerity agenda have occasionally been mentioned, but mainly in relation to their effects upon beleaguered criminal justice agencies, labour markets, public services and diversionary activities for young people. Explanations such as these, which identify the damage inflicted by the recent austerity-driven cuts on significant public services that fulfil a social integration or control function, are useful to the extent that they identify a series of factors that are possibly associated with increased violence. Issues such as the absence of meaningful employment opportunities that possess positive symbolism and provide a sense of hope, the closure of projects that provide young people with positive diversionary activities and life skills, or the sudden retraction of previously visible

community-based policing, are all potentially important aspects of the context that underlies the issue of rising violence. But they do not penetrate to the generative structural and cultural core of late-capitalist Western societies.

The question of *why* some individuals act in the ways they do when they encounter criminal opportunities tends to be continuously neglected. For our purposes here, there is a clear absence of aetiological discussion in relation to the specific issue of rising violence rates. The specific details of this relationship between austerity and patterns of lethal violence have never been clarified. What enters into this debate then, as a result, is an unspoken set of assumptions that actually mirror somewhat the intellectual condition of criminology as alluded to earlier in this section of the article. Currently, the debate concerning rises in lethal violence remains marooned in this non-dialectical tension between the discipline's two dominant conceptions of the criminal subject. As a result, we will be unable to move towards a more sophisticated understanding of macro patterns of violence if we continue to assume a natural predisposition towards hedonism and destruction that emerges when formal and informal systems of control malfunction, or if we remain wedded to an assumed natural disposition towards creativity and goodness that is warped by repression or 'toxic' cultural forms. These two assumptions set the narrow parameters of the existing undialectical relationship between the conservative and liberal paradigms that currently hold criminology in stasis (Hall, 2012) and prevent alternative explanations of the current violence incline from emerging.

Austerity and rising violence: a de-civilizing reversal?

Having identified some of the major problems, the article will now consider the possibility that some forward movement can be made by mobilising appropriate concepts from the incipient ultra-realist perspective in a fundamental reformulation of Elias's theory of the 'civilizing process' (Elias 2000). According to some of Elias's followers, the long-term decline of homicide rates in Western European nations roughly estimated to have begun at various points in the period from the late 14th to the late 16th Century (Eisner, 2008; Spierenburg, 2008), culminating in relatively low rates throughout most of the 20th century, is the result of the sociogenesis of an increasingly civilized form of subjectivity (see Dunning and Mennell, 1998; Eisner, 2001; Fletcher, 1997; Mares, 2009; Pinker, 2011; Spierenburg, 2008). Put simply, Elias claimed that observable changes in the habitus and emotional dispositions of the majority of individuals that constituted Western European populations

were the product of macro-social transformation across a long period of history. The process gradually negated the requirement for personal violence in defence of reputation, honour, social position, land and property because established states became increasingly capable of offering legal protections. To enforce these protections, the state monopolised the entitlement to perpetrate acts of physical violence. Elias argued that concomitant political and economic development led to the growth of interdependencies between individual human agents, which gradually induced a greater capacity for empathy and understanding. The behavioural shift set in motion amongst the majority by the state's repression of violence and the social genesis of empathy was reproduced by the cultural diffusion of social etiquette or 'manners', which were initially conspicuous amongst emergent social elites but gradually diffused outward to other social groups that became enmeshed in the civilizing 'spurt'. These increasingly pacified behaviours were reflective, Elias claimed, of an increased psychological capacity for self-restraint. As a result, the habitus of Western European populations became oriented towards feelings of repugnance and shame in relation to the open display of emotions, the body and its functions, and an aversion to both inflicting and witnessing violence, cruelty and suffering.

However, the outcomes of the civilizing process are 'never completed and constantly endangered' (Fletcher, 1997: 178). Here Fletcher is reminding us that 'decivilizing' processes, which weaken the aforementioned psychosocial restraints on human behaviour that are crucial to the maintenance of civilizing momentum, are a constant danger should the foundations of the process be neglected. For Fletcher, these 'decivilizing' conditions arise when states and their institutions experience reduced legitimacy and capacity to control and integrate their citizens. As a result, groups on the fringes of society become further disconnected from the state institutions, social systems of interdependency and cultural norms that together inculcate the restraining values of the civilizing process. It is here where increases in violence will be concentrated.

Although Elias's theory seems to be a good fit with the data produced by criminologists on spatial patterns of violence, it tends to neglect the underlying economy as a primary precondition on which the health of state legitimacy and social interdependencies relies. As Mares (2009) argues, a closer examination of historical homicide rates with a specific focus on local as opposed to national data, reveals a complex and spatially uneven pattern characterised by periods of heightened levels of violence amid the longer-term pattern of

overall decline. LaFree et al's (2015) comparative research on national trends in lethal violence also indicates a more varied pattern. Such unevenness in rates of homicide by space and place, for Mares, is connected to a lack of alignment between economic growth and the concomitant development of state institutions, which, in spaces where the economy is in a condition of rapid uncontrolled growth or contraction, undermines the pacifying effects of the process that Elias described. For Mares, these two processes have throughout history been uneven, generating spatially specific 'de-civilizing' periods in which the growth of capital outstrips the integrative capacity of state institutions and 'levels of homicide appear to surge' (2009: 420).

It would appear on initial reflection that this body of theoretical work fits the current context of rising lethal violence amongst groups of 'outsiders' in the UK's more socially excluded communities. Certainly, one can make the argument that the state's attempt to resolve economic convulsions in the post-crash context with policies of austerity have continued to erode the types of supportive social institutions, services, and modes of collectivism that are capable of fostering a sense of inclusion, self-worth and empathy. Austerity increasingly distances the state and its social protections from individuals' lives (Cooper and Whyte, 2017), reducing its capacity, as Mares suggests, to act as a vehicle for diffusing and reproducing the values of the 'civilizing process'. Thus, those individuals already disconnected from social institutions become more likely to act on violent impulses (see also Roth, 2009).

However, there is a major problem with these assertions concerning the relationship between capital, state, and excluded communities in contemporary liberal democracies. Arguments based on the principles that underlie the theory of the 'civilizing process' rely on the assumption that internal and external restraints must be maintained to prevent outbursts of violence from subjects. This in turn assumes a pre-existing subject with an innate propensity for violence. Therefore, this theoretical perspective's underlying logic and domain assumptions have never compelled it to explain the underlying forces or conditions that might *animate* subjects to violence. Despite its sophistication in its theorisation of the complex system of external restraints and the sociogenesis and psychogenesis of emotional sensibilities, there was always some violent impulse in the subject to be tamed. There is no substantive theory of the underlying economic, social and cultural conditions that generate the initial motivations for violence that require restraint and eventual transformation. An

inescapable omission from this body of work is Elias' 'apparent reluctance to plumb the depths of political economy' (Horsley et al, 2015: 19) in order to examine its potential to shape the social relations, cultural norms and subjects that might motivate initial acts of violence amongst marginalised populations.

This crucial weakness of Elias' and his followers' otherwise impressive theoretical work compels criminologists interested in understanding long-term patterns of violence to draw upon an alternative theoretical framework, which offers a deeper engagement with the criminogenic potential and subjectivising influence of political economy. The rapidly emerging criminological perspective of ultra-realism (see Hall and Winlow, 2015), which provides an advanced framework for theorising contemporary subjectivity in its socioeconomic context, may be able to fill the gap. In particular, one of ultra-realism's foundational concepts, the *pseudo-pacification process* (see Hall, 2007; 2012; 2014), is capable of redirecting criminology's thinking in the field of violence and subjectivity.

Rising violence and pseudo-pacification: system normal?

The architect of the concept of pseudo-pacification, Steve Hall, agrees with the claim that Western Europe was indeed characterised by a long-term pattern of declining violence rates. He also agrees with Mares' claim that the process is spatially differentiated, non-linear, and associated with the historical development of the market economy (Mares 2009). Mares theorises a relationship of oppositional tension between the state's development of the culturo-legal field and capital expansion, in which the former acts to diffuse the norms and values of the civilizing process while the latter, during periods of change, threatens to undermine this diffusion. In contrast, Hall posits a process that is far more instrumental, fragile and unstable. For him the culturo-legal process that diffuses pacifying norms and values was established between the 14th and 16th century in Europe largely to service capital's relentless accumulation. As such, it fundamentally obstructs the formation of a cultural hegemony firmly based on altruism and empathy – the type of norms and values that would encourage greater social solidarity, political participation and equality of status. These are precisely the social conditions that a large body of evidence suggests are much more likely to reduce levels of harmful violence (see Currie, 2016; Ray, 2011). For Hall (2012; 2014), the 'civilizing process' is a myth that must be replaced by a concept that fully explains why the process behind the decline of violence and brutal punishment in Western Europe is so fragile and susceptible to 'decivilizing' phases in which interpersonal violence rises in specific

locales. The reasons offered by Eliasians such as Dunning et al (1988) and Speirenburg (2008) – that the civilizing norms diffused by the middle class fail to penetrate some of Europe's 'rougher' locales – are weak because they are restricted to a spatial analysis that cannot account for notable temporal variations in rates of lethal and higher-harm violence in poorer locales (Dorling, 2004; Ray, 2011).

Hall's concept of the pseudo-pacification process grew out of an attempt to explain such anomalies. Throughout a complex body of work (see for instance Hall 2012, 2014) he argues that there is little evidence or convincing theorisation that supports the standard liberal progressive assumption behind the theory of the civilizing process – that behind the decline in interpersonal violence lies a timeless human yearning to foster nurturing social relations that have enabled human beings to live in peace by developing peaceful sensibilities. Hall reminds us that Europeans had become accustomed to high levels of interpersonal and inter-communal violence in the centuries between the decline of the Roman Empire and the beginning of the capitalist-modernist epoch (Hall 2014; see also Ward-Perkins, 2005). For Hall, the pseudo-pacification process seems to be an economically functional paradox that was instigated in the Early Modern period as a culturo-legal aid to the development of the market economy. It is paradoxical in the sense that it releases violent drives in the hope of reducing violence. It represents a concerted attempt to liberate and democratise the human drives that fuel interpersonal competition and normalise violence and violent subjectivities, yet, if these drives can be sublimated and converted into more pacified forms of interpersonal symbolic competition, they can generate the human libidinal energy capitalism needs for continual growth. However, this energy can be pacified and controlled only to the extent that a social order, however fragile, can be maintained.

What seems to have given Hall the primary empirical clue that some sort of Platonic Ideal form of 'civilizing' individuals and societies was not behind the decline of lethal and higher-harm violence in public space in Western Europe was the claim that, while they did decrease quite markedly after the 16th Century, various acquisitive crimes and exploitative, unethical and harmful behaviour did not. In fact, as violence declined, non-physical crimes and harms, ranging from property crime to death at work and fraud, began to increase. The accompanying fact that many of these inclining crimes and harms were perpetrated by the middle class refutes the weak Eliasian notion that they can be lauded as the agents of a genuine civilizing process.

For Hall, the primary drivers of the decline in rates of lethal and higher-harm violence lie in the dual economic function of the pseudo-pacification process (Hall, 2014). Firstly, on the supply side, it services the need to create safer environments to facilitate the production, distribution and trading of goods; secondly, on the demand side, it sublimates violent competitive urges into non-physical forms of aggressive interpersonal competition that provide the libidinal fuel required for sustained competition between individuals for socio-symbolic status via the acquisition and display of consumer goods. Hall puts forward this point very succinctly:

> …the primary purpose behind reducing and sublimating physical violence was not to establish a peaceful, sociable existence for human beings but to maintain a safer environment for the intensification and democratic expansion of aggressive yet rule-bound sociosymbolic competition (2014: 14).

He further summarises the vital point that the pseudo-pacification process was in the reality of its human drives, actions and consequences, a risky experiment in the conversion and intensification of libidinal energy:

> Liberal-capitalism was an experiment with the length of the libidinal leash, to see how far it could be released and in which ways drives could be stimulated, sublimated, restrained and disciplined before they became socially toxic. The culture that accompanied this epoch cannot be seen as a 'civilizing process' (2014: 28)

Hall is quite convincing in his claim that so much historical evidence points towards the fragility of the pseudo-pacification process. The long period in which lethal violence gradually declined also experienced frequent eruptions of state violence, organised criminal violence and riots alongside continuous domestic and workplace violence. But for him the 'decivilizing' dips, which for the Eliasians were temporary phenomena caused by the failure to maintain the process' three mainstays discussed above, are built into the dynamic forces that constitute the pseudo-pacification process. The pseudo-pacification process appears as a 'civilizing process' because it has the 'ability to inculcate durable civilised emotions in subjects' (Hall, 2014: 15). However, because liberal culture is so adept at denying the crimes, harms and violence that are products of its own culture and political economy (see Losurdo, 2014; Seymour, 2008), preferring to posit their causes as external forces that run counter to liberalism, it fails to recognise the decivilizing forces that have been integral and functional in its dynamic structure all along. Hall's work here is instructive, providing a more thorough

examination of the historical development of political economy and its contributions to today's fragile socio-cultural conditions. The article now turns to a discussion of the implications of these arguments for the contemporary context of rising lethal and higher-harm violence.

Discussion: pseudo-pacification and austerity – a perfect storm?

Western states have during the past several decades entered an unprecedented phase of politico-economic development and change; one that has fundamentally re-oriented capitalism's traditional relationship to states and citizens (Evans and Giroux, 2015; Hall and Winlow, 2015; Winlow and Hall, 2013). Historically, capitalism in the West was dependent upon labour and regularly found itself in direct conflict with workers and their vocal representatives. Recently, however, the system has become increasingly less reliant upon physical labour. Today it is also less reliant on many mundane forms of mental labour, a situation likely to persist as new technologies and Artificial Intelligence are adopted in the production, distribution and administration processes. If technologisation and outsourcing are allowed to develop unchecked to serve market imperatives, they will swell the size of economically redundant, disposable 'outsider' populations in the old industrial nations (Evans and Giroux, 2015). In the current era of 'capitalist realism' (Fisher 2009), in which talk of an alternative to market capitalism is suppressed and unfashionable, the system can afford to dispose of elements of the population, quietly confident that they are sufficiently de-politicised, lacking in effective representation, and fully absorbed in consumer culture to pose no real political threat. The current era of largely unopposed neoliberal capitalism is characterised by a 'permanent inability...to absorb these populations' (Winlow and Hall, 2013: 1); repetitive cycles of economic recession and governmental crisis (Peck, 2010); socio-cultural sterility rooted in dominant commercialised consumerism (Fisher, 2009); and increased inequality and social division (Dorling, 2018; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2012).

Despite the ever-increasing evidence of their utter economic redundancy and political abandonment, members of socio-economically excluded populations, like more socially-included groups, remain largely preoccupied with the system's surrogate socio-symbolic world of consumerism (Winlow and Hall, 2013). In other words, despite the brutal exclusion of an increasing number from the supply-side of the pseudo-pacification process, the vast majority remain subjects of the demand side that is fuelled by sublimated interpersonal competition. The absorption of the majority into consumer culture's injunction to compete for

and ‘enjoy’ the acquisition and display of socio-symbolic objects and immediately gratify personal desires, casts some doubt on the Eliasian notion that truly disconnected ‘outsider’ groups actually exist (see Kuldova and Quinn, 2018).

Ultra-realist ethnographic research supports the claim that those males hooked into criminal markets in politically abandoned ex-industrial and urban communities, where we are now seeing the majority of the recent increases in lethal violence, actually remain unopposed to liberal capitalism’s consumer values and therefore may be more appropriately termed ‘hyper-conformists’ (see Treadwell et al, 2012). These recent findings challenge established views that theorise acquisitive criminality and violence in affluent liberal democratic states as ‘oppositional’ to mainstream values and therefore ‘subcultural’ in nature. Here we must respond then to Steve Hall’s call to distinguish more clearly between what we identify as contemporary values and norms, which, in the pseudo-pacification process, do not operate in harmony but in a tense and problematic functional opposition (see Hall et al, 2008). Those who engage in criminal violence indeed break laws and ignore the cultural norms that attempt to restrain the pseudo-pacification process’ deliberately stimulated libidinal desires. These restraining norms, which seek to hold in check motivations to physically harm others, are now problematically misrecognised in the neoliberal era as the system’s civilizing values (ibid.). For Hall (2012; 2014), the pseudo-pacification process’ principal cultural move was to evacuate sociable values from the core of everyday life and repurpose them to inform and energise restraining norms, which attempted to pacify the libidinal drives activated by capitalism’s intense socio-symbolic competition. The supposed ‘outsiders’, who in traditional sub-cultural theory are assumed to be conforming to oppositional values (Cohen, 1955; Hall and Jefferson, 2006), are actually incorporated in capitalism’s libidinally-driven competition, which is fetishistically disavowed in neoliberal cultural discourse but active in consumerism’s surrogate social world. The majority are resolutely determined to ascend its purportedly open and fluid meritocratic hierarchy to the extent that in disadvantaged circumstances some are willing to reject the system’s restraining norms (Ellis, 2016; Hall, 2012; Hall et al, 2008; Treadwell and Ancrum, 2017; Treadwell et al, 2011). The only thing the ‘outsiders’ are ‘outside’ is neoliberalism’s mainstream production and distribution circuit.

The serious and lethal forms of violence now statistically rising in the UK seem to bear some of the hallmarks of the inherent fragility and instability of late-capitalist pseudo-pacified culture and subjectivity. If neoliberalism has a fundamental need to ensure the demand-driven

expansion of capital via an intense interpersonal competition held in the ruins of political representation, social solidarity and equality, it is finding its most extreme cultural and subjective reflection in some of its marginalised locales. In the vast majority of cases those marginalised males left seriously injured or killed by acts of interpersonal violence in post-recession austerity Britain are the victims of apolitical altercations and rivalries that result from personal insecurity and socio-symbolic struggles over market sectors, reputation and status (Ellis, 2016). While those individuals pulling the trigger or plunging the knife have very often been socialised in micro-climates of insecure, brutalising conditions and display an acute sensitivity to humiliation (Ellis et al, 2017), such violent subjectivity is manifested in ways reflective of the system's mainstream 'values' – as Hall argues, libidinal drives in a Platonic disguise – of competitive individualism, personal resilience, self-reliance, opportunism and self-protection (Ellis, 2016) while indifferent to the laws and norms that restrain actual physical violence. The latest increases in lethal and serious violence do not represent subcultural deviations amongst groups of 'outsiders' from a 'civilizing' value system that restrains primal violent urges and maintains civilizing sensibilities. Rather, they appear as unrestrained and often quite extreme manifestations of neoliberal capitalism's disavowed dark heart (Hall, 2012). Now, in austere times, where the stimulation of libidinal energy in competitive markets continues unabated while economic exclusion intensifies and the traditional institutions of politics and culture that maintain restraining norms are further eroded, increased violence on the margins becomes more likely.

Conclusion: Clearing our vision to look at the future

One of the aims of this article was to stimulate theoretical debate in a rather aetiologically reticent criminological discipline on rising levels of homicide and non-lethal 'higher harm' violence. More specific objectives were, firstly, to offer deeper insights into the issue than current arguments that have emerged so far in response to these increases. These arguments identify 'opportunities' arising from austerity-related cuts as the underlying reasons for rises in violence. Secondly, the article stressed the importance of a critical engagement with the currently neglected issue of subjective motivations to inflict violence on others, contextualised in culture and political economy. To begin this project of theorisation it is necessary to locate the recent rises in lethal and higher-harm violence in the context of the longer-term statistical decline of violence in Western Europe. This does, at first sight, lead us towards arguments founded upon Norbert Elias' concept of a 'civilizing process' and its possible faltering or reversal in the contemporary post-recession period. However,

explanations of fluctuations in the rates of violence and the subjective motivations to perpetrate it that rely on the theory of the civilizing process not only neglect current economic conditions, but also either ignore or misunderstand 'the spatial localization of inequalities and economic transformations' (Ray, 2011: 126) that are evidently important if criminology is to make sense of the current rises in specific locales. The alternative ultra-realist theory of pseudo-pacification offers a more sophisticated and revealing account of the historical processes, socio-cultural context and subjectivity that underlie neoliberal socioeconomic systems. However, if these macro-processes and their consequences are to be illuminated further, it is necessary to explore in finer detail the motivated subjects and situational contexts associated with lethal and higher-harm violence, which in the majority of cases are located in poorer disadvantaged communities. In particular, it is vital to shed more empirical light on the cultures and subjective motivations of those who are trapped on the margins yet compelled to act out their lives in neoliberalism's paradoxical forces of competition and pacification.

The optimistic conclusions of Steven Pinker's investigation into macro-patterns of human violence across history appeared at the beginning of this article. However, a fresh look through a more advanced theoretical lens at the empirical evidence of recent rises in lethal and serious violence and their underlying macro-economic and cultural contexts not only challenges these assertions but casts some doubt on the assumptions that underlie them. Pinker's overly optimistic analysis clouds perception (Evans and Giroux, 2015) at a time when more searching questions about violence need to be posed and located in the context of an increasingly unstable neoliberal system and the culturo-historical processes that brought it into being. The contemporary context of 'zombie' neo-liberalism, widening inequalities, resurgent fascism, environmental degradation, and the paucity of politico-economic alternatives to a capitalist system facing terminal decline (Parenti, 2011; Peck, 2010; Streeck, 2016; Winlow et al, 2017) raise important questions about the future and the presence of violence within it.

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