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The cultural politics of crisis in the UK

1. Introduction

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 triggered a global public health crisis. States, international organisations, health services, and societies struggled to contain the virus, and its potentially catastrophic social and economic effects. This chapter explores some of the political, media, and public discourse surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK, and shows how this discourse is embedded in a wider 'cultural politics of crisis'. Highlighting parallels and connections between responses to the pandemic, and those to the preceding global financial crisis that began in 2008, it is argued here that common discursive resources are engaged in both cases.

The chapter's central claim is that the cultural politics of austerity and the cultural politics of Covid-19 are heavily imbricated within the UK's wider cultural politics of crisis. Following some initial methodological reflections on cultural political economy, and critical discourse analysis, two discursive focal points structure the chapter. First, the chapter explores the erasure of racialised, classed, gendered, and ableist structural inequalities in experiences of the pandemic, through claims that 'we're all in this together'. Second, the chapter discusses the mobilisation of war metaphors and motifs like 'keep calm and carry on', and how these function to normalise mass death among targeted and 'vulnerable' (especially racially minoritised) populations, while simultaneously reinforcing discourses of racialized, contingent citizenship and the white nation.

2. Exploring the cultural politics of crisis in the UK: methodological reflections

'Cultural political economy' (Jessop, 2010) can be understood both as the social terrain in which cultural, political, and economic practices take place, and as a disciplinary lens or field of study through which to consider such practices. In the era of the 'culture wars', the role of cultural politics in shaping the wider political-economic landscape has never been clearer (Whitham, 2018). 'Culture', in the sense of social practices and media, like music, film, television, and news, has been the site of much of this struggle. Political fault-lines have been redrawn, with polarised political-economic worldviews couched in cultural-political terms. The traditional print and television news media, but especially digital social media, constitutes the space in which a resurgent and increasingly heterogeneous, feminist, anti-racist, political Left, fights it out with a declining liberal 'centrist' ideological grouping on the one hand, and a globally insurgent racist, Islamophobic, misogynist, homophobic, transphobic, transnational conservative and far-right network (sometimes styling itself the 'alt-right'), on the other. The CPE framing is therefore a useful backdrop to an exploration of public discourses around the 2020 Covid-19 viral pandemic, including the distribution of its effects, and the responses to it that are represented as possible or necessary. From this perspective, this chapter will show how British responses to the pandemic have discursively echoed the 'cultural politics of austerity' (Bramall, 2013) in both form and function.

While the discussion in this chapter necessarily consists of a relatively brief, interpretive, 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973: 7), rather than a more exhaustive and systematic analysis, it nevertheless rests upon particular, broad theorisations of how texts and discourses reflect and structure social reproduction. In this respect, the discussion that follows is indebted to the Foucauldian tradition according to which discourses are not merely extended written or spoken texts on particular topics, but are rather 'practices which systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972: 54). The undergirding analytical assumption here is that the ways in which we describe and represent the world have concrete implications for how we understand and 'know' that world, and therefore also for how we behave and interact in – and ultimately reproduce – it. A political or media 'text' of the kind explored in this chapter can thus be understood, in the Marxian-Foucauldian 'critical discourse analysis' (CDA) tradition first developed by Norman Fairclough and others (e.g. Fairclough, 2001), as 'a moment in the *material* production and reproduction of social life' (Fairclough and Graham, 2002: 188). The 'elite' discourse of politicians, mass media outlets, big businesses, and celebrities, is especially important to understanding the production of cultural politics in the UK because these 'powerful speakers' can to a significant degree select and control the 'semantic macrostructures' of national debate and public imagination (Van Dijk, 2009: 68). Furthermore, as bell hooks notes, 'popular culture' – from which the instances of elite discourse explored in this chapter are drawn – 'can be and is a powerful site for intervention, challenge and change' (hooks, 1994: 5).

Adopting an analytical approach that uses CDA as a 'methodological resource in researching media and mediation' (Fairclough, 2010: 69), this chapter explores some of the narratives, metaphors, and discursive practices through which the UK's cultural political economy of pandemic response has been articulated. The discussion that follows is structured around two powerful discursive devices, which, it is argued here, connect the cultural politics of Covid-19 in the UK to the preceding cultural politics of austerity, and in so doing offer a sense of the continuities and coherence in the UK's wider cultural politics of crisis. First, the chapter critiques the claim that 'we are all in this together', highlighting continuities with austerity discourse, and suggesting that this component of Covid-19 discourse functions to suppress the fact that deep, intersecting social inequalities and tensions structure our experiences of the pandemic. Second, the chapter explores the discursive injunction to 'keep calm and carry on' in the austerity and Covid-19 contexts, critically unpacking its ideological militarism and white nationalism, and how these dynamics might justify or obscure the brutal and socially unequal effects of the crisis.

3. #allinthistogether: erasing structural inequalities

In a Conservative Party conference speech, a few months prior to being elected Prime Minister of the Conservative / Liberal Democrat coalition government that would implement the UK's post-crash austerity programme from 2010 to 2015, David Cameron used a cliché that would become a central feature of British austerity discourse: 'we're all in this together' (Cameron, 2009). This soundbite was emblematic of the wider 'Big Society' and reanimated 'One Nation' conservatism narratives that Cameron – with support from his key spin doctor Steve Hilton – used to bring the Conservatives back to power in 2010, following thirteen years of Labour government (Espiet-Kilty, 2016).

The Big Society discourse represented the Conservatives as a more socially progressive force than they had previously been, yet simultaneously as more economically 'responsible' than the Labour Party's alternative. In a context where both major parties were openly committed to major public spending cuts under the sign of 'austerity', but where the incumbent Labour government could be associated with the effects of the global financial crisis, the Big Society discourse was well-placed to succeed. While concrete achievements can certainly be attributed to this discourse, it did not attain hegemonic status. Though 2010 marked a victory for the Conservative Party, it was a narrow one. The general election that year produced the first hung parliament since 1974, with the Conservatives forced into coalition with the Liberal Democrats. 'We're all in this together', meanwhile, became a touchstone for media commentators to criticise the Conservative government, highlighting Cameron's Old Etonian, Oxford University, and Bullingdon Club background (Bell, 2013). The 'Piggate' affair in 2015, when traditional and social media widely reported an anecdote that claimed Cameron had placed his genitals in the mouth of a dead pig's head as part of his initiation to Oxford University's Piers Gaveston Society 'dining club', underscored the difficulties faced by Tory spin doctors seeking to present 'Dave' as an everyman (Khomami, 2015).

When newly-elected Prime Minister Boris Johnson, a British 'alt-right' icon for his various racist, Islamophobic and homophobic public statements, said 'we're all in this together' with regard to Covid-19 in May 2020 (Johnson, 2020), he was tapping into this existing austerity discourse. As with Cameron's use of the phrase, there was short shrift for its sentiment on the political Left, and its ironies and contradictions were exposed in some critical media coverage (e.g. Burnham, 2020). A fellow Old Etonian, Johnson was in the same Bullingdon Club cohort as Cameron at Oxford and the men are pictured together in a widely shared image of the 'champagne-swilling, restaurant-trashing, "pleb"-taunting' club, dressed in 'black tie' and tails (Sherwood, 2019). Furthermore, whereas Cameron's political image was carefully cultivated as that of a 'safe pair of hands' – an upper-middle class, pragmatic managerialist – Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson retained or cultivated an eccentric, unashamed aristocrat persona. It is a shared commitment to a white nationalist understanding of Britain, rather than a shared class position, that is supposed to animate Johnson voters.

And while some pointed out that we really were *not* all in it together with regard to Covid-19, the discourse did find considerable purchase. Corporate supermarket chains used the term in their advertising and management around the crisis, seemingly as a marketing tool on the one hand, aimed at an endearing folksiness, and as an instrument of governmentality on the other, disseminating moralising messages on how people should conduct themselves. The hashtag '#allinthistogether' was plastered across not only corporate social media but also shop-floors and windows (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. #allinthistogether? Author's image of a supermarket floor sticker in Leicester, the deprived, and majority-BAME, English midlands city hit particularly hard by the pandemic.

Evidence that we are not, in fact, 'all in this together' with regard to the pandemic is incontrovertible. Racist political and social structures, and economic and health policies, have produced vastly higher death rates from Covid-19 among those communities racialized as minorities in the UK (BBC, 2020) and the US (CDC, 2020). In particular, in the first months of the UK outbreak, official statistics showed that 'Black males are 4.2 times more likely to die from a COVID-19-related death and Black females are 4.3 times more likely than White ethnicity males and females' (ONS, 2020), while British people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds have also suffered disproportionately from the virus. This racialized targeting of the pandemic intersects with its class dynamics. In the UK's working-class urban neighbourhoods, where people racialized as minorities are more likely to reside, death rates have been double those of wealthier areas (Devlin and Barr, 2020).

Religious minorities – especially Jewish and Muslim people – also saw higher than average rates of infection and death from Covid-19. Far-right white supremacist discourses, meanwhile, represented both Jews and Muslims, in different contexts, as creators or spreaders of the virus on the one hand, and as especially susceptible to it on the other (Dearden, 2020). The pervasive global trend in rising Islamophobia that has marked the resurgence of the far right in recent years, has fed directly into official and unofficial pandemic responses in the UK's cultural politics. Just as Islamophobic racism has been integral to the project of austerity (Ali and Whitham, forthcoming), so the cultural politics of Covid-19 immediately took on Islamophobic and white nationalist dimensions. National media uncritically shared images and footage of white Britons engaging in street parties and conga lines, during the crucial early period of the

national 'lockdown', to celebrate VE Day (discussed further in the next section of this chapter), while amplifying the government's grave warnings to Muslims that they must not expect to be able to celebrate Eid al-Fitr with their families as usual.

Structural racism is a key point of connection between elite discourses on austerity and Covid-19. Far from being extrinsic to, a side-effect of, or merely residual in, capitalism, racism is one of its central and foundational logics. This is what Cedric Robinson and others mean by 'racial capitalism' (Robinson, 1983: 2): it is a political-economic system in which race and class are mutually constitutive, and in which the 'deservingness' and 'entitlement' of citizens to economic resources is determined through racialized hierarchies (Shilliam, 2018). The focus of pandemic media discourse – especially in its early stages of development – on 'underlying health conditions' as the key criterion for lethal vulnerability, meanwhile, cast people with disabilities and long-term health conditions as what Judith Butler calls 'ungrievable life' (2009). Two of the starkest representations of ableism in the pandemic response were the forced return of older and vulnerable Covid-positive patients from hospital to residential care homes where there were subsequently huge numbers of (initially unreported) preventable deaths (Rushton and Barnes, 2020), and an 'unprecedented' number of requests for 'do not resuscitate' (DNR) notices from doctors for people with learning disabilities (Thomas, 2020).

Nor are structural racism and ableist discourse entirely disconnected, both being rooted in eugenicism. When the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis led to a new, global wave of Black Lives Matter (BLM) demonstrations in May and June 2020, the context of the pandemic and the global 'lockdown' was also at the front of many demonstrators' minds. The UK's BLM protests targeted institutionally racist policing, and highlighted Black deaths in custody, as well as symbolic celebrations of colonialism and slavery, but also directly referenced the disproportionate effects of Covid-19 on Black people. BLM activists suggested that in a society where anti-black racism is so entrenched, being Black is itself an 'underlying health condition'. This is not hyperbole. In the US, despite the clear video evidence of Floyd being strangled to death by a police officer kneeling heavily on his neck for nearly eight minutes, as he exclaimed 'I can't breathe' and 'don't kill me', a state medical examiner initially noted that 'Mr Floyd had underlying health conditions' and went on to suggest that 'The combined effects of Mr Floyd being restrained by the police, his underlying health conditions and any potential intoxicants in his system likely contributed to his death' (Williams, 2020). The ideological function of the various discursive formulations that suggest 'we're all in this together' lies in its erasure of empirically observable racialised, classed, gendered, and ableist structural inequalities in the way the virus actually affects society. In this sense, it mirrors the way this same soundbite functioned to erase the unequal distribution of austerity effects after the global financial crisis.

4. 'Keep calm and carry on': British nationalism, war metaphors, and the cultural necropolitics of crisis

In March 2020 the UK television chef Jamie Oliver, whose 2008 series *Jamie's Ministry of Food* used Second World War nostalgia to win people over to austerity in the context of the unfolding global financial crisis (Ali, 2012), launched the Channel 4 show '*Jamie: Keep Cooking and Carry On*, a series created as a direct response to [the pandemic] lockdown' (Channel 4, 2020a). The series' theme drew upon the 'Keep Calm and Carry On' British Second World War (WWII) propaganda poster, which has also been widely reproduced during

the Great Recession and austerity period, and the show offered 'recipes, tips and hacks tailored for the unique times we're living in' (Channel 4, 2020b). This was swiftly followed by another Channel 4 series, *Kirstie: Keep Crafting and Carry On*, in which presenter Kirstie Allsopp, a minor British aristocrat, 'learns new crafts to help us navigate lockdown' (Channel 4, 2020c), and a further series from Oliver, *Jamie: Keep Cooking Family Favourites*, aimed at addressing the fact that '[w]e've all been spending more time cooking at home' (Channel 4, 2020a).

TV presenters were not the only public figures to reproduce this WWII metaphor in answer to the pandemic crisis. In response to media coverage of a possible suspension of parliamentary activity due to the pandemic, the arch-Blairite and former New Labour minister Lord Adonis, said in parliament on 5th March 2020 that: 'Parliament sat all the way through the war […] Surely the best advice that we can give ourselves is to keep calm and carry on' (Hansard, 2020). The reference to 'the war', in the abstract here, underscores the persistent discursive centrality of representations of the WWII, specifically, to the cultural politics of crisis in the UK. In the context of Covid-19, as in the context of the global financial crisis and subsequent austerity programme, the discursive function of 'keep calm and carry on' is to suggest that 'business as usual' is the correct response to crisis, and that angry responses – protests, strikes, or other forms of radically democratic political action – should be avoided. But given the particular formulation and history of 'keep calm and carry on', this appeal to business as usual is made with specific reference to a wartime imaginary and to the nation as that for which we 'carry on'.

In public discourse on the pandemic, this militaristic and nationalistic response plays out in a range of different ways. For example, at the height of the national 'lockdown' on Friday 8th May, celebrations took place to mark the 75th annual 'Victory in Europe' (VE) Day, memorialising the end of WWII in Europe. Despite the obvious dangers (at that time, hundreds of people were dying from Covid-19 each day, while tens of thousands had tested positive), and likely illegality under the Coronavirus Act 2020, mass gatherings were organised. A widely-shared digital flyer proclaimed a 'nationwide "stay at home" street party!', to include: '**11am** 2 minutes silence on your doorstep **3pm** Churchill speech shown on BBC […] **4pm** Tea & scones […] **6pm** Dinner and raise your glass to your neighbours **9pm** Nationwide sing-a-long to "We'll meet again" with Royal British Legion after the Queen's address' (Bristol Mum, 2020). But contrary to the 'stay at home' sentiment, perhaps the most abiding images from the day were of one BBC News anchor reporting from a street party, in front of a large crowd of flag-waving white people – some dressed in 'period costume' and WWII military uniforms – in Cosham, Portsmouth (Duffield, 2020), and another reporting from the scene of dozens of people performing a VE Day-themed 'conga line' dance, each holding the same rope, on a bunting-filled street in Grappenhall, Cheshire (Gill, 2020). Both incidents sparked considerable backlash on social media, subsequently reported in traditional media, though this was framed as a 'culture war' between leftist and liberal killjoys on the one hand, and well-intentioned patriots demonstrating the spirit of Britishness on the other.

A further aspect of the discursive invocation of WWII in response to the pandemic emerged in the government-backed 'Clap for Carers' initiative, which, following the example set by other European countries, saw vast numbers of British people coming to the windows or doorsteps of their homes to applaud the health and care workers on the 'frontline' of the crisis. As Sophia Grace (2020) notes, there is a strong resemblance between Clap for Carers, as a discursive

practice, and the wearing of red 'poppy' symbols in the UK in the run-up to the annual Remembrance Sunday. She notes of the practice of poppy-wearing:

> Initially to honour those in the World Wars, it slowly spread and was used to drum up support for all troops in all conflicts […] It has become a farce of judgement and jingoism each year, with one-upmanship in getting fancier poppies or putting up larger displays, in condemning those who wear them incorrectly or refuse to, and strong criticism of anyone who dares to question the increasing nationalism behind the symbol (Sophia Grace, 2020).

The millionaire actress and model Priyanka Chopra shared a video of herself on social media clapping enthusiastically from the balcony of her mansion, to her vast empty lawns. This 'somewhat dystopian footage' (Independent, 2020) illustrated the hollowness of Clap for Carers as a symbolic endeavour. Clapping from the safety of a home so vast and secluded, in an area so affluent, that it is physically impossible even a neighbour, let alone a low-paid health or care worker might hear. But Clap for Carers was also explicitly militarised at times. In April 2020, as broadcast television supported the initiative, Channel 4 used an advertising break to remind viewers to Clap for Carers, 'from the NHS to the armed forces'.[i] To interpret soldiers as a variety of carer seems to stretch the concept of 'care' work to breaking point. People whose main purpose is to mete out 'legitimate' state violence, people who are trained and armed to maim and kill, are to be applauded for their 'care' work? The creation of 'field hospitals' – a direct reference to hospitals used during armed conflict – was itself a militarisation of the pandemic response. The Nightingale 'emergency field hospital', constructed by the British Army inside London's ExCel exhibition centre (erstwhile home to the world's largest arms fair), opened with a major photo opportunity for Matt Hancock, the UK's health minister, who culturally capitalised on the military connection.

Meanwhile the pandemic was widely represented in media and political discourse as an 'invisible enemy', and the response to it as a 'war' (Moses, 2020). This militarisation of Covid-19, and the prior militarisation of austerity, fit within a broader tradition of discursive practice wherein politicians, journalists, and elite discourse more broadly seeks to re-contextualise political issues through what George Lakoff calls the 'war metaphor' (Lakoff, 1991). The discursive transformation of social security issues – like public health crises – into militarised 'national security' issues, and even 'wars', enables a number of further ideological achievements. Representation of Johnson as 'our Churchill' – significantly at a time when, perhaps more than ever, Winston Churchill's actual legacy is viewed critically for its white supremacist and politically reactionary dimensions – saw social media memes that superimposed Johnson's face onto Churchill's iconic 'V'-sign photograph. This performs an ideological double-movement, at once signalling devotion to Churchill himself, in spite of – or in fact as *a direct answer to* – recent discussions of his record of racism, and devotion to Johnson as a crisis Prime Minister of the alt-right (again in spite of, or precisely in response to, his widely-documented mishandling of the Covid-19 pandemic).

The contemporary cult of Churchill perhaps crystallised in 2002, when a BBC television series, *100 Greatest Britons*, saw the former Prime Minister win first place with nearly half a million votes from members of the public. The list was controversial at the time, since it appeared to associate Britishness with whiteness, with not a single black person included. Patrick Vernon, in response created a '100 Great Black Britons' poll, which was topped by Mary Seacole in

2004 (Vernon and Osborne, 2020). As Victoria Basham (2016: 883) notes in her analysis of the UK's annual 'Poppy Appeal', militarism and racialisation are tightly linked in public discourses that seek to embed an idea of Britishness in 'remembrance' of WWII:

> 'Although thousands of West Indians and Indians fought for Britain in the Second World War for example, 'this fact hardly registers in public memory'; instead, the war is celebrated as exemplifying the best of Churchill's (white) 'island race' (Cesarani in Mason 2000, 133)'.

Basham argues that poppy-wearing practices of 'remembrance' in the UK constitute a form 'everyday militarism' (2016: 891) and 'everyday geopolitics', shaping public discourse on the nation and its place in the world. This practice involves a form of racialized out-casting, and a claim for the homogeneous whiteness of what is, in fact, a highly mixed postcolonial society. To understand the discursive functions of 'keep calm and carry on', in the face of the pandemic crisis, just as in the face of the global financial crisis, is to recognise its appeal to WWII 'remembrance', and the discursive intertextual chain through which this remembrance is linked to racialisation, the denigration of people racialized as minorities, and the maintenance of the system of white supremacy.

As Camilla Schofield argues, memorialisation of WWII has been central to constituting white nationalism in post-Windrush Britain, with 'memories of war' often being 'applied to the question of immigration' (Schofield, 2013: 19). Perhaps the most influential white supremacist politician in recent British history, Enoch Powell, Schofield points out, maintained that colonial troops who fought for Britain in the war were never truly British troops, and this shaped his view that 'The West Indian or Indian does not, by being born in England, become an Englishman. In law he becomes a United Kingdom citizen by birth; in fact he is a West Indian or an Asian still' (Powell in Schofield, 2013: 57). Interestingly, this racialized theory of citizenship also highlights the elision of 'Englishness' and Britishness in white supremacist discourse in the UK, a result of what Robinson called the 'Anglo-Saxon imperialism in the development of Great Britain' (Robinson, 2019: 30) and of the wider centrality of hierarchies of 'race' to the development of 'Western civilisation', even among peoples who would today all be racialized as 'white' (Robinson, 1983: 27). The militarism and nationalism mobilised through 'keep calm and carry on' and 'clap for carers', and the broader WWII metaphor, sit within this tradition of racializing Britishness as whiteness and Englishness.

Furthermore, the centrality of discourses on WWII to the constitution of Britishness has been integral to the development of 'the myth of the heroic sacrifice of "the people"' (Schofield, 2013: 19). These themes – heroism and sacrifice – have been unquestionably central to Covid-19 discourse in the UK. Health workers who have faced infection and death at disproportionate rates are cast as 'heroes' and 'angels', and with politicians including the foreign secretary Dominic Raab referring to the 'sacrifice' of dead NHS workers (Guardian, 2020). A major local news corporation ran a national fundraising campaign under the banner 'support our NHS guardian angels' (InPublsihing, 2020) – 'angelic' in this context seemingly signalling also the NHS workers' mortality. The discourse of heroism and sacrifice represents the lives of key workers as forfeited in advance, and fundamentally 'ungrievable' (Butler, 2009). And this of course overlaps with the fact, outlined in the previous section, of disproportionate numbers of NHS staff being infected and killed by the virus being of Black, Asian and other backgrounds that are racialized as minorities in the UK. 'Keep calm and carry on' is, in this context, a sort of cultural 'necropolitics' (Mbembe, 2019), encouraging and furthering 'white ignorance'

(Mills, 2007) of the pre-existing racist structural violence that the pandemic exacerbates and makes ultra-visible. Representing 'our NHS' as 'heroic' and 'angelic' in the context of the pandemic, while simultaneously presenting the pandemic as a 'war' (WWII, specifically) and Johnson as 'our Churchill', and engaging in acts of 'remembrance' – but also of deliberate 'colonial amnesia' (Shilliam, 2012) or erasure – produces a social order in which the 'sacrifice' of mass death, particularly among people racialized as minorities and among health care workers, is normalised and justified. Achille Mbembe puts it eloquently:

> To a large extent, racism is the driver of the necropolitical principle insofar as it stands for organized destruction, for a sacrificial economy, the functioning of which requires, on the one hand, a generalized cheapening of the price of life and, on the other, a habituation to loss (Mbembe, 2019: 38).

The claim that 'we're all in this together' and the 'keep calm and carry on' war metaphor have been central features of the UK's cultural politics of Covid-19, just as they were in the cultural politics of austerity. While they have not achieved ideological hegemony, and face regular challenge in left-of-centre media outlets and some parts of social media, there is significant evidence that these discursive devices have helped to structure the public imagination with regard to the pandemic.

5. Conclusion

This chapter sought to show how elite political and media discourse on the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic in the UK connects to the cultural politics of austerity, and thus also to a wider 'cultural politics of crisis'. Through its analysis of the claim that 'we're all in this together', and the injunction to 'keep calm and carry on', the chapter has shown that there are at least four distinct but overlapping ideological functions of the cultural politics of crisis in the UK:

- To obscure structural inequalities linked to race, class, gender, and disability, that are exacerbated and otherwise laid bare by crises.
- To cast the lives of those positioned to be most vulnerable to crisis effects (including, in the pandemic context, people racialized as minorities, and disabled people) as always-already forfeited and essentially 'ungrievable', and thus to necropolitically normalise their mass suffering and death.
- To (re)define 'Britishness', reinscribing whiteness and Englishness as its central features, and emphasising stoicism, suffering, and resilience as the correct cultural modes of crisis-response.
- To ideologically mobilise racism, white nationalism, and militarism, as interpretive frames through which to understand major national crises and their uneven structural effects on British society.

The cultural politics of crisis in the UK does not spring from nowhere. As the analysis in this chapter has demonstrated, it is carefully crafted through elite political discourse across our mainstream media and political landscape. But like all ideological discourse, it does require active engagement and reproduction by a critical mass of the population. This chapter has highlighted contradictions and weaknesses in the core messages of UK crisis discourse, but it nevertheless clearly obtains significant purchase among the British public. How long this willingness to consume the discursive response to the pandemic will last will, perhaps, be

determined by how soon further austerity measures are introduced to pay for the crisis, and which sections of society are hit fastest and hardest by them.

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i From the author's observation of Channel 4's live digital terrestrial broadcast at approximately 19:00 on 16th April 2020.