“The Sound of Silence”:

How can the Grenfell Tower fire be understood as an example of violence?

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Abstract

"Did they die, or us?
Did they die, for us?
Ghosts of Grenfell still calling for justice" (Lowkey 2017).

"If you want to see how the poor die, come see Grenfell Tower." (Okri 2017).

In this dissertation I demonstrate how extending the concept of violence beyond a physical, immediate event provides an understanding of the Grenfell Tower fire as the product of a long process of institutional violence. Focusing on the related concepts of violence and vulnerability, I use the framework of disposability to identify the people most vulnerable to institutional violence by recognising the political policies and ideologies involved. I use the case study of Grenfell Tower, a social housing tower block in London which set on fire in June 2017, and focus specifically on the activist blog of the Grenfell Action Group which warned local authorities of residents' concerns with the safety of the building years before the fire. I contextualise Grenfell historically, politically, and theoretically to reflect on its significance for understanding the concepts of institutional violence and vulnerability in a wider context. In particular, I focus on the intersection of class and race wherein global neoliberal ideologies make the racialised working class more vulnerable to institutional violence when the accumulation of profit is prioritised over people's needs. Analysing the discourse of the blog provides an insight into the years of social neglect experienced by the residents of Grenfell and also the broader ideology behind social neglect which impacts vulnerable populations globally. I hope to demonstrate the significance of the Grenfell Action Group and their blog as a form of resistance to institutional violence, revealing that although Grenfell residents were vulnerable, they were also politically aware and active agents. Understanding the Grenfell Tower fire as a form of violence has theoretical implications for how the term violence is conceived and applied in International Relations and practical implications for identifying and tackling the political culture of social neglect which makes certain populations vulnerable.

Key Terms: violence, vulnerability, Grenfell Tower, discourse, resistance

Dedications

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List of Abbreviations

CDA – Critical Discourse Analysis

GAG – Grenfell Action Group

KCTMO – Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Association

RBKC – Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Council

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Grenfell Action Group (GAG) titled one of the posts on their public blog, "The Sound of Silence," referring to the lack of response and action taken when the group raised numerous concerns with the safety of their building, Grenfell Tower (GAG 2014e). This silence underpins my question of how the Grenfell Tower fire can be understood as an example of violence because the lack of response by local authorities responsible for Grenfell reflects the years of social neglect that residents experienced that enabled the fire to take place. Expanding traditional definitions of violence, I use the theoretical framework of institutional violence to analyse the Grenfell fire as the product of years of social neglect and to situate the atrocity in a historical, political, and global context. The term institutional violence was developed by Cooper and Whyte (2022) to extend the definition of violence to include structural and social injustice which, though less immediate than personal violence, directly affects those made vulnerable. My research thus contributes to academic debates regarding the definition of violence. I also engage in discussions regarding vulnerability and disposability, examining the way in which governments have the power to decide which populations are protected and which are considered expendable. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and drawing on an interpretivist feminist methodological approach, the aim of my research is to examine the significance of power and resistance in discourse and to better understand a political event rather than claim to present objective or universal knowledge (van Dijk 2008, 85; Tickner 2005, 2-3).

Through a discourse analysis of the GAG's activist blog, I use this source as a documentation of the years of neglect Grenfell residents experienced which constitute a form of institutional violence. I will firstly examine the discourse of the GAG blog in its historical, political, and theoretical context, framing the Grenfell fire in relation to the intersectionality of race and class to reflect on the racialisation of the poor and the production of vulnerability

through the biopolitics of disposability. Historically, I focus on the context of British colonialism and its legacies, relating this history to the UK government's anti-immigration stances throughout the 2010s and practices of gentrification disguised as regeneration. I will then analyse the social neglect discourse in the blog which focuses on social neglect as an active choice made by those in power to put residents of Grenfell Tower at risk instead of prioritising their safety. Social neglect discourse will also be analysed as both criminal and global, demonstrating how the discourse of the blog focuses on the criminal levels of neglect experienced by residents and the global political environment and ideologies which enabled the Grenfell fire to occur. Finally, I reflect on the significance of the GAG blog as a form of resistance through their persistent and explicit criticisms of local authorities–both the policies they upheld and their attempts to ignore and silence the GAG. In analysing the GAG blog in relation to Grenfell and the broader concept of institutional violence, I hope to demonstrate the benefit of studying violence through the voices of those who experience it and contribute to debates about expanding academic understandings of violence, along with tackling political policies and ideologies which undermine the protection of populations.

The Case of Grenfell Tower

Situated in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea in London, Grenfell Tower was a social housing tower block built between 1972 and 1974 that contained over 200 households (Iglesias-Mendoza et al 2021, 5; Tombs 2020, 123). Defined by Hansson and Lundgren (2019) as housing which provides "below-market rents or prices", social housing requires "some form of public or private financial contribution" (162). In the case of Grenfell Tower, the building was owned by the local authority, the Royal Borough Council of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC), and its management was overseen by the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Association (KCTMO). The KCTMO, a form of non-profit organisation, contained members of the council but was a largely independent body, complicating the

responsibility and complicity of the RBKC, KCTMO, and private sector contractors for the Grenfell Tower fire (Bradshaw and Tunstall 2018).

On June 14th, 2017, at 00:54am, a fridge freezer exploded in a fourth-floor flat in Grenfell Tower and the external cladding of the building "succumbed to flames less than 9 minutes into what should have been 40 minutes of resistance" (Hodkinson 2020, 2). Battled by 250 firefighters for 60 hours, the official death count of the fire stands at 72 people–the deadliest fire in Britain in peacetime in over 100 years (Hodkinson 2020, 1; Ibrahim 2021, 1). The flammability of the cladding, installed in a renovation of the building from 2015 to 2016 by private contractor Rydon, has been blamed for the rapid escalation of the fire and was a cheaper alternative to the original proposals for the building, saving £2.6m (MacLeod 2018, 469). Throughout the refurbishment, residents voiced their concerns about the safety of the building with petitions and meetings and through the GAG and their blog, wherein they conducted a survey on the renovation works and found that 90% of residents were dissatisfied (Ibid, 468-472). Grenfell Tower received extensive news coverage in the aftermath of the fire and was considered an exceptional and shocking event, however, numerous tower blocks had experienced fires in previous years and, as of 2020, 468 high-rise buildings had been officially identified with similarly combustible cladding (Hodkinson 2020, 3-4). Thus, learning from the case of Grenfell is essential to protecting the lives of people living in these spaces, with a crucial step being acknowledging Grenfell residents' years of warnings and concerns about the precarity of their situation.

Discourse Analysis

My methodology consists of a discourse analysis of selected posts from the GAG blog. Formed in 2012 to document the grievances and experiences of Grenfell residents, the blog initially focused on the themes of outsourcing, disrepair, corruption, and safety concerns, with many of the posts targeting the RBKC and KCTMO for repeatedly ignoring residents' concerns with

their home (Radical Housing Network 2019, 66). One of the founders of the GAG blog described it as a "record for history", demonstrating that it was intended to be used as evidence of the treatment of residents, and I treat it as such because of the valuable insight it provides into the levels of threat and fear experienced by residents (Newby 2017). By documenting the long process of violence that preceded the Grenfell fire, my use of the blog allows residents' voices to be included alongside academic work in an analysis of the fire as a form of violence (Trevisan and Reilly 2014, 1131-1137). My methodological approach takes inspiration from interpretivist feminist research which has described the research process as a journey through which to devise a better understanding of people, places, and events (Tickner 2005, 305). Maintaining a scepticism of universal knowledge claims, my research seeks to emphasise the lived experience of Grenfell residents, focusing on how their treatment constitutes a form of violence rather than the technicalities of how the Grenfell fire happened (Ibid).

My use of discourse analysis highlights the political and ideological connotations of language use, with the meanings of words being influenced by and influencing social processes (Fairclough 1992, 77; George 1993, 191). In this way, language constitutes a social practice wherein people have the ability to construct their own language but are also confined by the contexts in which they live, meaning that discourses can both produce and transform existing societies (Fairclough 1992, 64-65). Discourse analysis can be understood as a way of reading the social world as a text, meaning that the written word can be used to interpret social and political phenomena (George 1993, 191). Loretta Lees (2004) identified two main strands of discourse analysis, one which focuses on uncovering dominant ways of thinking and speaking and the other poststructuralist strand which examines the political power involved in the construction of language and knowledge (Lees 2004, 102-103; Fairclough 1992, 92). For both strands, their analysis is concerned with the real-world impact of language construction and

use, evaluating the ways in which words are repeated, certain rhetoric or structure is used, and the social context of the texts being produced (Hansen 2006, 2; Fairclough 1992, 77-78).

My research draws largely on the poststructuralist approach to discourse analysis as I use Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which highlights the role of ideology, inequality, and power in the construction, dissemination, and resistance of discourses (Blommaert and Bulcaen 2000, 447; Fozdar and Pedersen 2013, 375; van Dijk 2008, 67-68). Using CDA, I focus on the way in which social power, abuse, dominance, and inequality can be "reproduced and resisted by text" (van Dijk 2008, 85). The GAG blog is particularly useful because it provided the opportunity to access relatively unmediated and democratic public dialogue (Fozdar and Pedersen 2013, 373; Myers 2010, 4). As power often determines who is allowed to speak and who is listened to, I consciously chose to listen to activists who lived in Grenfell and focus on their representations of their experiences (Milliken 1999, 229). As a blog, the GAG source offered a space for some residents to articulate a counter-hegemonic discourse along with an active form of organisation and resistance to their neglect and dismissal by the RBKC and KCTMO (Dean 2010, 3; Fozdar and Pedersen 2013, 377; Bouvier 2015, 157). My research involves a discourse analysis of the GAG blog because I believe that it contributes to academic analyses of Grenfell Tower and provides an insight into the impact of institutional violence in a specific case, with my analysis focusing on the context of the blog, its use of social neglect discourse, and its role as a form of resistance.

Chapter 2: Violence and Vulnerability

Academic work on the Grenfell Tower fire often focuses on this singular event as part of a long process of violence experienced by Grenfell residents who were made vulnerable by government policies and ideologies, and the active dismissal of their concerns. I focus on these intersecting themes of violence and vulnerability, defining the Grenfell fire as an example of "institutional violence", a term coined by Cooper and Whyte (2017) to extend understandings of violence beyond personal or immediate individual acts. In examining the applicability of institutional violence in the case of Grenfell, I reflect on the origins of these extended understandings of violence, specifically Friedrich Engels' (1845) notion of social murder and Johan Galtung's (1969) concept of structural violence. In relation to vulnerability, I draw on Henry Giroux's (2006) concept of the biopolitics of disposability, outlining the theory of biopolitics which it is based on using Achille Mbembe (2019) and Michel Foucault's (2008) analyses. These theories will be situated in a global and historical context, with reference to the influence of neoliberal capitalist ideologies and the impact of colonial legacies, demonstrating the intersection of social class and race. Overall, I will outline the theoretical debates in which my dissertation is situated–the expansion of the definition of violence and understandings of vulnerability–to argue that institutional violence helps understand the long process of violence involved in Grenfell Tower and how the fire was able to take place because Grenfell residents were made vulnerable and considered disposable by the state.

How should violence be defined?

Violence is often understood in popular consciousness as the deliberate attempt by individuals to cause harm (Cooper and Whyte 2017, 22). However, in understanding the slow violence of the Grenfell Tower fire, I expand the definition of violence as Jenny Edkins (2019) does, to recognise the everyday trauma of Grenfell residents who suffered decades of neglect,

discrimination, and inequality (170). In doing so, I draw on Nadine El-Enay's (2019) question of "when did the Grenfell fire begin?", to understand how the Grenfell fire marks a visible event of violence which reflects the years of "violence and disintegration" that preceded the fire (51). In this way, extending understandings of violence enables me to assess the long-term processes of violence, rather than focusing on a singular instance of violent action.

Marxist theorists have historically defined violence more broadly than the deliberate attempt by individuals to cause harm, extending definitions beyond violence as a physical tool to include deaths caused by neglect (Harris 1974, 192). Friedrich Engels (1845) highlights this in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, when he states that,

> *"Murder has been committed if society places hundreds of workers in such a position that they inevitably come to premature and unnatural ends. Their death is as violent as if they had been stabbed or shot" (Harris 1974, 192).*

Some critics of the Marxist perspective argue that the label of violence should focus on deliberate and immediate acts to maintain the status of violence as something exceptional (Ibid, 214). However, John Harris (1974) defends the notion of social neglect as violence, arguing that the death and degradation experienced under capitalism can be considered a less direct but nevertheless highly serious form of violence, exceeding that of certain more direct acts such as petty assault or bar fights (214). In the case of social murder, the state sanctioning of this form of violence means it can be felt more widely, noted in Engels' analysis when he refers to "hundreds" of workers being at risk in contrast to some more direct forms of violence which operate on a smaller scale and are more easily punished by the legal system (Ibid).

Echoing Marxist understandings of violence as more than just personal immediate actions, Johan Galtung, considered the founder of Peace and Conflict Studies, devised the concept of "structural violence" (Galtung 1969, 167-169). Defined as, "the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual", Galtung argues that social and political

structures can be violent because they have the power to put people in danger by disadvantaging them (Ibid, 171-173). In this way, structures have the ability to disallow people from realising their full potential, for example if someone is deprived of adequate healthcare causing them to die from a treatable illness (Ibid, 168). Both Engels' conception of social murder and Galtung's understanding of structural violence focus on the state, structures, and institutions as producing social injustice which constitutes indirect, but nonetheless extensive forms of violence (Ibid, 171).

Cooper and Whyte (2022) build on Galtung's theory, agreeing that the definition of violence should be extended, but disagreeing that forms of structural violence are less direct than immediate acts (211). Their concept of "institutional violence" focuses on the involvement of specific individuals and institutions in creating and upholding structures, defining the term as the "routine detached administration of policies, implemented by public and private authorities, that produce acute physical and psychological violence" (Ibid, 208-211). For example, in the case of austerity which Cooper and Whyte focus on, the decision to cut public spending can lead to people becoming ill and dying if public health and welfare systems are not sufficiently funded (Cooper and Whyte 2017, 17). Emphasising the direct effects of these policies on people, they suggest that these forms of violence are not less direct, but rather less immediate, as their effects are felt in a different time and space from that being enacted (Ibid, 24).

This lack of immediacy between the abstract decisions taken by governments and their real material effects demonstrates the importance of understanding how the contexts of time and place complicate what is defined as violence (Ibid, 3; Springer 2021, 137). Spatio-temporal context underpins Rob Nixon's (2013) concept of slow violence, as he argues that some forms of violence are not recognised because they occur gradually and out of sight, with their effects being dispersed across time and space (2-3). In the case of time, Jenny Edkins (2019) uses the

concepts of institutional and slow violence in relation to the Grenfell Tower fire to reveal the ways in which the context of the global capitalist economy can produce forms of violence by determining whose needs are satisfied and whose are neglected or not even recognised (173). Thus, neglect over a long period of time can produce violent effects such as the Grenfell fire. Nixon also argues that slow violence is often not considered violence because it is hard to understand across geographical distance (Nixon 2013, 38-41). Thus, Edkins' focus on the global capitalist economy and Springer's analysis of "neoliberalising violence" provide an insight into how the global economic practices of violence are felt locally and individually (Springer 2012, 138). In the case of Grenfell Tower, the global ideology of neoliberalism which justified the prioritisation of profit over people's lives meant that these global structures and institutions produced a form of violence felt at a local level (Ibid, 137). Therefore, the concept of institutional violence is useful to understand the Grenfell Tower fire temporally, by taking back the clock to recognise the long processes of violence, and geographically, by analysing the global context and local effects of violence.

Who is vulnerable to institutional violence?

Grenfell residents' vulnerability was made hyper-visible in the aftermath of the Grenfell fire as their status as victims of institutional violence was only acknowledged upon the deaths of 72 residents (Edkins 2019, 174). Contrasting to their invisibility and marginalisation by the local authorities and the mainstream media in life, the residents of Grenfell exemplify what Achille Mbembe (2019) describes as "necropolitics," wherein their bodies took on significance in their death (88). However, the residents were victimised for years by a state which had the power to decide who mattered and who did not, with this concept being identified by Michel Foucault in his conception of "biopower" (Foucault 2008; Mbembe 2019, 71). Through public institutions and policies, such as housing and healthcare, the state can control populations' bodies and determine their levels of state protection. Influenced by government ideologies, Eve

Darian-Smith (2021) argues that the categorisation of who matters and who does not is determined in the US by the neoliberal economy, noted in the cases of Covid-19 and the opioid epidemic, wherein the prioritisation of profit over people's lives has acted as a pervasive aspect of policy for the past fifty years (61-62). Although focused on the specific case of the US, Darian-Smith's analysis of the neoliberal influence on levels of political protection is echoed in Sanya et al's analysis of Grenfell which combines neoliberalism and necropolitics to reflect on the "money-versus-life trade-offs" that governments regularly made when devising policies (Darian-Smith 2021, 64; Sanya et al. 2018, 5). Termed "necrocapitalism", Sanya et al. (2018) argue that, in the UK, Grenfell residents were considered non-citizens and their lives were devalued when decisions were taken to compromise the safety of their home (5).

Grenfell thus exemplified the devaluation of certain human's existence, as residents' lives were considered less important than removing the red tape of regulation and saving money on social housing (MacLeod 2018, 473-474). Comparisons to Hurricane Katrina, described by Henry Giroux (2006) as an example of the "biopolitics of disposability", demonstrate how the adoption of neoliberal policies in the US and UK mean that they failed in "one of society's most basic covenants" of caring for the helpless (173). Giroux argues that this was not just an example of government incompetence but reflective of deep-rooted systemic problems, as what made people so vulnerable to the natural disaster of Hurricane Katrina was the dismantling of the welfare state (Ibid, 175). Thus, Giroux focuses on the vulnerabilities which expose people to abuse, which can be applied to the Grenfell Tower fire–an entirely preventable atrocity that occurred because of institutional violence which not only failed to protect but actively endangered residents (Ibid).

Acknowledging the global context of these vulnerabilities, Bulley (2019) argues that Grenfell cannot be understood without examining the way in which globalisation impacts on the "global production of death" as well as everyday life (3-4). In attributing the vulnerability

of populations like Grenfell residents to a global neoliberal ideology, it is important to understand the significance of race and the relevance of colonial legacies. Housing is considered "the key aspect of immigrant welfare" and the "immigrant" question by historians Jim House and Andrew Thompson (2014) in their analysis of welfare policies in Britain from 1945 to 1974 (241). This provides important context for Nadine El-Enay's (2019) analysis of the Grenfell fire which focuses on its racial and colonial dimensions and the insight they provide into the vulnerability of those racialised in Britain as non-white (Ibid, 55-56). Post-colonial British immigration policies highlight the vulnerability of racialised communities in Britain, with certain populations not being considered citizens of the countries they inhabit, both because of their actual legal status if they are immigrants, and due to the pervasive discourse of the villainization of migrants (El-Enay 2019, 52; Sanya et al. 2018, 1-2).

Race cannot be considered "epiphenomenal" or a "distraction" to the real effects of global neoliberalism or to the Grenfell fire, as residents of the tower came from across the world and lived in one of the most diverse areas of the UK (Bulley 2019, 6; Bulley and Brassett 2021, 557-558). Ruth Wilson Gilmore defines racism as the "state-sanctioned and/or extra-legal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death" (Wilson Gilmore 2007, 28). When applying this definition of racism, it is no longer considered an individual transgressive mentality but rather an institutional form of discrimination which puts racialised people at risk (Danewid 2020, 296-297). Ida Danewid's work on Grenfell and racial capitalism focuses specifically on the ways in which racism is embedded in capitalist structures and institutions, making Grenfell residents vulnerable and subjecting them to premature death (Ibid). In highlighting the global political context of the Grenfell Tower fire and the production of vulnerability, race emerges as a significant factor which cannot be ignored. Yasmin Ibrahim (2021) intersects the concept of neoliberal violence with disposability and vulnerability in her analysis of Grenfell, arguing that the betrayal of health and safety

governance constitutes a form of symbolic and material violence which labels some bodies disposable, specifically the racialised working class (2-4). Thus, Grenfell-specific literature can provide important insights into the practical application and relevance of vulnerability in the aftermath of an atrocity, the effects of which are still being felt.

Grenfell-specific literature draws on themes of violence and vulnerability to understand why the fire happened and who was made vulnerable. The concept of institutional violence helps understand the structural embeddedness of violence within political systems such as social neglect by the UK government, local authorities, and global systems of neoliberalism. Cooper and Whyte (2022) recognise through institutional violence the role of specific institutions and individuals in producing and reproducing such violence, rather than attributing responsibility to abstract structures. The question of who is vulnerable to institutional violence is essential to understanding why the fire was able to take place, with theory providing the tools with which to undermine systems of power and expose the role of colonial legacies and global neoliberal violence in producing vulnerability (Springer 2012, 140). In asking, 'How can the Grenfell Tower fire be understood as a form of violence?', the two intersecting areas of violence and vulnerability are essential to do justice to the experiences of residents over a number of years.

Chapter 3: Grenfell in Context

To understand the violence of the Grenfell tower fire, it is necessary to look at the broader historical, political, and theoretical context surrounding the event. I will contextualise the neglect of Grenfell residents in relation to Britain's colonial history and the racialisation of class, linking this history to contemporary attitudes towards immigration. In particular, I will analyse the GAG blog's references to their living conditions as "slum like", which draws on the history of the area surrounding Grenfell as former slum housing and residents' understandings of their treatment as a form of extensive neglect. I will then reflect on the GAG blog's insistence in framing contemporary political practices of regeneration as a form of gentrification which prioritises richer residents of an area over their poorer neighbours. I will also demonstrate how the GAG blog's perceptions of their treatment as a deliberate decision by the RBKC to enforce the "managed decline" of their estate can be understood through the theory of the biopolitics of disposability. Examining the ideas of managed decline and social cleansing referred to by the GAG within this theoretical context provides an understanding of the ideologies which justified the neglect of Grenfell residents.

In referring to the political context of the UK from 2012 to 2017, it is necessary to clarify definitions of austerity, regeneration, and gentrification. Austerity in the case of the UK's implementation of the policy since 2010 entails cuts to public expenditure in an attempt to reduce the national deficit, for example the 50% and 40% cuts to social housing and local government budgets respectively from 2010 to 2017 (O'Hara 2015, 1; Gordon MacLeod 2018, 474). The culture of cost-cutting which resulted in risks being taken with the safety of Grenfell Tower during its refurbishment justifies Gordon MacLeod's (2018) argument that it is "impossible to view Grenfell in isolation from austerity" (474). Regeneration is a difficult concept to define, as the aims and intentions behind the policy are not always reflected in reality. Roberts' (2000) defines urban regeneration as a,

"Comprehensive and integrated vision and action which seeks to resolve urban problems and bring about a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of an area" (9).

However, Leccis (2019) argues that the reality of regeneration is often the displacement of existing residents who can no longer afford the increase in monthly rent payments when an area has gone through regeneration, resulting in gentrification rather than social mixing between social classes (1). The term gentrification was first used by Ruth Glass in 1964 to describe the way the middle-class were taking over working-class spaces in London through a restoration of housing which resulted in property price increases (Knieriem 2023, 4; Leccis 2019, 2). I adopt a broad and open definition of gentrification which includes a combination of investments into the local area and the displacement of current residents through being out-priced from their area (Knieriem 2023, 5). In the case of Grenfell and the Lancaster West Estate where it was located, the significant difference in socio-economic status between these residents and the rich residents of the borough contributed to extensive fears amongst residents who feared their community was being taken from them by the RBKC (Ibid).

Slum-Like Conditions: Grenfell in a Historical and Political Context

Notting Dale, the ward of North Kensington in which Grenfell Tower was located, was home to one of the UK's most diverse communities, however it was also consistently twice as socio-economically deprived as the borough and London overall in census data conducted by the RBKC in 2011 (Bulley 2019, 7). The racialisation of the poor in Britain is often dismissed in the mainstream media which continues to depict a white-washed mould of the left behind or forgotten working-class, reflected in the exclusion of race from media explanations of Grenfell and the official Grenfell inquiry (Shilliam 2018, 170-171; Bulley and Brassett 2021, 558). One explanation for the exclusion of race is the categorisation of racism as an individual mentality or attitude rather than an institutionalised form of discrimination (Danewid 2020, 295-296). In

the case of Grenfell, an institutional definition of racism is necessary to understand the way in which the UK government's anti-immigration stances have villainized migrants to the extent that their needs have been deliberately neglected (Sanya et al 2018, 2).

The Grenfell Tower fire cannot be understood without an acknowledgement of its history and location, which contributed to the composition and demographic of residents. Nicknamed the 'Moroccan Tower' because of its high proportion of Moroccan residents, Grenfell Tower in 2017 comprised residents from all over the world, over 20 countries in all– meaning it should be understood in the context of London as a global city (Danewid 2020, 297; Bulley and Brasset 2021, 555; Bulley 2019, 6). Britain's history of colonialism provides context for the levels of diversity in Grenfell and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea as a whole which has one of the most diverse populations in the UK, with more than half of its population being migrants (Bulley 2019, 6). Contemporary discourse surrounding immigration is reflective of the rhetoric of the 1950s wherein the government presented "colonial migration" as a "problem" which placed a strain on public services, especially because of the housing shortage (House and Thompson 2014, 247). In the 1960s, this prejudice against immigrants was explicitly linked to the experiences of empire, with fears of a lack of integration creating societal problems (Ibid, 255). In the 2010s, immigration was also presented as a problem to be solved, suggesting that racialised migrants were undeserving of state assistance (Sanya et al 2018, 2). Former Home Secretary Theresa May's hostile environment policy from 2012 explicitly stated the government's aim was to create, "a really hostile environment for illegal immigrants" and ensure that people do not "come here and overstay because they're able to access everything they need" (El-Enay 2020, 1). Although targeted at illegal migrants, the presence of vans in racially diverse areas of London with the words "GO HOME" encouraged an environment that was hostile to legal and illegal racialised migrants (El-Enay 2020, 219; Sanya et al 2018, 2). Similarly, David Cameron explicitly linked welfare to immigration when

he stated that, “we [the government] will never control immigration properly unless we tackle welfare dependency”, fuelling hatred targeted at migrants and welfare claimants for supposedly exploiting public services (David Cameron 2011, Burnett 2017, 217-218). Contemporary policies and discourse surrounding immigration are embedded in a history of colonialism as related to housing policy, with the UK government in the 2010s creating a toxic environment for legal as well as illegal migrants, scapegoating migrants for societal problems and painting them as unworthy of state assistance (Macleod 2018, 475).

Grenfell residents were aware of the historical and political context of their treatment, with repeated references in the GAG blog to the conditions of the Tower as “slum like” (GAG 2013e; GAG 2014b). The word “slum” reflects the history of London housing as North Kensington, the area in which Grenfell was located, once comprised slum housing before being replaced by high-rise tower blocks after World War II (House and Thompson 2014, 251; Shilliam 2018, 169; Lees and Whyte 2020, 1703). Thus, the racialised poor in the global city of London continue to experience the legacies of colonialism through their segregation in high-rise estates which maintain their vulnerability (Sanya et al. 2018, 7; El-Enay 2020, 2). In comparing their contemporary conditions with those of the slums of the past, the GAG demonstrate the extent of their suffering and accuse the RBKC of neglect sending them backwards. The GAG documented local councillors’ resistance to the blog’s use of the word slum, noted in their post entitled, “DON’T MENTION THE SLUM WORD” (GAG 2014a). Such a reaction reflects a denial on the part of the council of the residents’ experiences in Grenfell and a form of resistance on the part of the GAG, using the power of language to define their situation on their own terms and drawing on the history of housing inequality in London.

Reference to the lack of investment in the building, “for forty years now”, resulted in the GAG questioning, “How could our Estate be anything else but a slum?”, suggesting that they believed the slum-like conditions to be an inevitable result of years of neglect (GAG

2014d). Sanya et al (2018) echo the words of the GAG blog when they describe the treatment of racialised people from former British colonies as an example of "slum administration" replacing colonial administration (4). Similarly, the lack of investment into these areas can be contextualised within the political landscape of austerity wherein there was a 76% reduction in the RBKC's spending on housing from 2009/10 to 2016/17 (Benjamin 2017). In the case of Grenfell Tower, residents felt the effects of years of funding cuts which allowed the conditions of their building to deteriorate to the extent that they reflected the historical slums that had been demolished 80 years earlier. Colonial history along with contemporary political discourse and policies provide the context in which the poor of Britain have been racialised and racialised migrants find their lives are villainized and neglected to the point of death in cases such as the Grenfell Tower fire (El-Enay 2019, 57).

Regeneration or Gentrification?: The Rich Get Rich and the Poor Get Forgotten

"It is known around the Royal Borough as the "forgotten" Estate and for very good reasons" (GAG 2014d). The GAG articulated it clearly when they expressed their position as residents of a "forgotten" estate, depicting their status as invisible and reflecting a key criticism of gentrification and regeneration policies–that they prioritise richer residents to the detriment of the poorer (Leccis 2019, 1). The intention to improve an area through regeneration is often not a reality and can result in gentrification whereby an area is 'improved', the cost of living in the area increases, and poorer, working-class residents are forced to move away from their communities (Knieriem 2023, 4: Leccis 2019, 2). Grenfell residents were well aware that regeneration could be used as another term for gentrification, with the GAG arguing in their blog that the aim of regeneration is "not to improve the living conditions of the existing community, but to create additional housing for private sale" (GAG 2013g). This is evidenced by the fact that in 2016, during the Grenfell refurbishment in which dangerously flammable,

cheaper cladding was installed on the building, the RBKC accumulated £4.5m from the sale of two council houses in Chelsea (MacLeod 2018, 469). This demonstrates that the benefits of 'regenerating' the area around Grenfell were felt not by local residents, but by the council who could make more money from selling houses without giving that money back in the form of safe improvements to Grenfell Tower and the surrounding area.

Similarly, the GAG described the policy of regeneration as a "heavily disguised expression of the Council's determination to destroy our homes and communities", again recognising the deceit in the use of the term regeneration over gentrification as it does not address the extreme negative impacts on the residents of towers like Grenfell (GAG 2015d). Resisting attempts to frame regeneration as a "force for good rather than evil" the GAG argued that the RBKC failed to address the "ill-considered negative impacts" (GAG 2013f). This mission to expose the Council's true aims for themselves and "other vulnerable communities in the Royal Borough" reflects their role as activists raising awareness and documenting their abuse (GAG 2015d). It is also evidence of their attempt to counter the discourse of the government which presented its prioritisation of infrastructure over welfare as positive in the context of austerity. Chancellor George Osborne in 2015 argued that the government was improving the economy by spending "a lower proportion of its money on welfare and a higher proportion on infrastructure" (HM Treasury and George Osborne 2015). In praising the decrease in welfare spending, he revealed what the GAG acknowledged, that the vulnerable were considered collateral damage in the continued cuts to welfare for the recovery of the national economy (Slater 2018, 878; Cooper and Whyte 2017, 10). In this way, the most vulnerable were side-lined and such treatment, as evidenced by the GAG blog, did not go unnoticed by these communities, creating a sense of injustice and loss of trust in the state (MacLeod 2018, 570).

The GAG blog demonstrates an awareness amongst residents that they were being treated as an unwanted problem to be solved. In a post which suggests that the "ghettoization of working-class communities" has been identified as a problem, they referred to the "Tory Council" that has "despised what they regard as an unwanted and problematic underclass" (GAG 2016b; GAG 2015d). Gentrification as a policy has been defended by some as a way to prevent such "ghettoization" and increase social mixing, however, Lees (2004) argues that there is a lack of evidence that this is the case, especially at a local level when there are clear disparities in wealth and social and cultural differences between communities (2456). In this way, the GAG used adjectives such as "unwanted" and "problematic" to reflect on the way in which they were considered a problem rather than a community worthy of protection. The GAG therefore countered the presentation of regeneration or gentrification as an opportunity for social mixing and acknowledged that they were being priced out of their homes, with gentrification providing the middle class with greater claims over cities, rather than enhancing integration (Ibid, 2457).

In the aftermath of the fire when the flammability of the cladding was revealed to be a key cause, the GAG argued in a blog post that the cladding was "intended to pimp it [Grenfell Tower] up so that it wouldn't spoil the image of creeping gentrification" (GAG 2017b). Using words such as "spoil" highlight the prioritisation of rich residents by the council, more concerned with how their lives are impacted by the existence of Grenfell Tower than the Grenfell residents' safety. Such a sentiment is echoed by Ben Okri in his poem *Grenfell Tower 2017* when he wrote, "All around the beautiful people in their beautiful houses / Didn't want the ugly tower to ruin house prices" (Okri 2017). The Grenfell refurbishment is thus presented as a reflection of the priorities of the council in choosing to make the building look better from the outside rather than safe for the residents inside (MacLeod 2018, 468; Bulley and Brassett 2021, 555).

The language used by the GAG in reference to regeneration and gentrification reveals an understanding of the prioritisation of richer residents to the neglect of those most vulnerable. Grenfell residents constituted a group reliant on the state for protection, but the local and central government failed in this duty, acknowledged by residents in their loss of faith in the RBKC to listen to their concerns (MacLeod 2018, 470). Described by Gordon MacLeod as "disavowing even the basic principles of local democracy", the RBKC was part of a culture of political policy-making which prioritised rich residents over poor and produced the conditions in which an atrocity like the Grenfell fire could take place (Ibid, 469).

Managed Decline: The Biopolitics of Disposability and Necropolitics

Was the violence against Grenfell residents deliberate? This is an important question for understanding how residents' concerns about their condition could be ignored for years with no action from local or central government. The theories of the biopolitics of disposability and necropolitics can help explain the way in which residents were made vulnerable by a system which did not prioritise their needs and ignored their concerns. The biopolitics of disposability aims as a theory to explain who is considered expendable in society and why, extending Michel Foucault's concept of biopower, focused on governments' abilities to manage populations through the control of their bodies (Foucault 2008). Mbembe argues that the concept of biopolitics emphasises the power of government actions to determine, "who is able to live and who must die" (Mbembe 2019, 66). Using the biopolitics of disposability framework, Henry Giroux (2006) argues that entire populations can be rendered disposable through systemic deep-rooted ideologies of the state, in particular the dismantling of the welfare state which results in governments no longer guaranteeing the safety of those most vulnerable in society (174-175).

Relegated to spaces of invisibility and disposability, populations such as the Grenfell residents relied on the state to maintain the safety of their homes but instead were subject to

what the GAG blog refers to as "managed decline" (Giroux 2006, 181; Springer 2012, 139). The term "managed decline" refers to the process by which buildings or areas such as Grenfell are neglected to the point that they are uninhabitable, thus forcing residents to vacate and the building to be demolished (GAG 2013a: GAG 2013f; GAG 2014c; GAG 2014d; GAG 2015c). There is evidence that the GAG's concerns were well-founded, as plans from 2010 were uncovered in which the RBKC proposed bulldozing the whole Lancaster West Estate in which Grenfell was situated (Shilliam 2018, 168). In this way, Grenfell residents were considered disposable subjects who had their social supports weakened with no regard for people's lives and communities, as concerns with their building were dismissed in favour of a proposed demolition which would have left residents without homes (Ibrahim 2021, 4: Sanya et al 2018, 5).

The GAG blog's use of the term "social cleansing" is also significant as it reflects broader housing activist discourse in London which often uses the slogan, "social housing not social cleansing" (GAG 2014a; Watt 2018, 117). Social cleansing in housing is defined by Lees and White (2020) as a "geographical project made up of processes, practices, and policies designed to remove council tenants from space and place" (1702). This process was evident in the council's plans to demolish the estate in 2010 but the GAG's concerns were dismissed in 2015 as "scaremongering" (GAG 2015c). By neglecting residents to the point that they suspected they were being gradually socially cleansed from the area and dismissing their concerns, the RBKC treated Grenfell residents as both disposable and invisible. The GAG blog is evidence of the invisibility and silencing of Grenfell residents in the years preceding the fire, making Mbembe's (2019) theory of necropolitics useful as he argues that death can be a significant political force and symbol of victimhood (87). In the aftermath of the fire, Grenfell residents transitioned from an invisible to a hyper-visible community, receiving extensive national and global news coverage (Edkins 2019, 174). This attention contrasts starkly to the

silence regarding their situation in the years preceding the fire, despite activists' continued attempts to draw attention to their situation, reflecting the prioritisation of spectacle and catastrophe over everyday decisions which reveal the institutional violence experienced by residents (Ibid, 172).

Although residents were not removed through the deliberate demolition of the estate by the RBKC, the fire in June 2017 had the effect of forcing residents out of the area, a reflection of years of neglect which made the building unsafe. The biopolitics of disposability offers a framework to understand why Grenfell in particular, a tower block housing a majority of non-white migrant residents in one of the poorest wards in the borough, was able to burn (Bhandar 2018). The classification of the racialised poor as invisible and disposable was recognised by the GAG blog in its claims that residents were subject to the RBKC's "managed decline" and fears of their attempts to socially cleanse the borough. Situating Grenfell within a broader theoretical context demonstrates that the Grenfell fire was preventable because residents had identified the neglect that put them at risk years before. Therefore, although residents' concerns were validated in the aftermath of the fire, if they had been listened to in the years prior, then such an atrocity could have been prevented.

Chapter 4: Grenfell as Social Neglect

Friedrich Engels' concept of social murder focuses on neglect by the state as a less obviously identifiable form of violence as deaths resulting from neglect do "not appear to be murder" because responsibility "cannot be pinned on any individual assailant" (Engels 1845 in Harris 1974, 195). The concept of institutional violence helps identify those responsible for the violent consequences of such social neglect, as it focuses on the institutions and individuals which convert abstract policies to a material reality (Cooper and Whyte 2017, 3). The Grenfell Tower fire exemplifies the violence of social neglect which constitutes an active dismissal and abandonment of populations in need of state protection. Focusing on the GAG blog's discourse of social neglect which targeted the policies, actions, inactions, and ideologies of the RBKC and KCTMO responsible for their building, I will focus on the discourse of social neglect which presents it as an active process. Specifically, I will analyse social neglect discourse in relation to residents being ignored, risks being taken with their safety, and the systemic nature of this neglect. I will also examine the discourse of social neglect as criminal, reflecting on the effectiveness of a legal approach nationally and globally to identify those responsible for the Grenfell fire. Finally, I will focus on the discourse of social neglect as global, arguing that Grenfell exemplifies a broader problem with the global neoliberal capitalist ideology which justifies the expansion of profits over the protection of people, particularly in housing policy.

Active Social Neglect: Ignoring, Risk-Taking, and Systemic Neglect

In actively ignoring residents' concerns, the RBKC and the KCTMO can be seen as practising a form of "wilful neglect" (MacLeod 2018, 474). The intentional or deliberate nature of this social neglect is evidenced in the GAG blog, notably in January and February of 2013 when Grenfell residents became concerned that the removal of the car park for their building would result in non-emergency vehicles parking in the emergency access spaces. In one post entitled,

"FIRE SAFETY SCANDAL AT LANCASTER WEST" the GAG group suggested that the TMO had removed staff and service vehicles parked in emergency spaces to ensure that the Fire Safety Officer did not discover any wrongdoing (GAG 2013b). Sarcastically claiming that they are "not in a position to accuse TMO officers… of playing Russian roulette with the safety of local residents", the GAG took photographs over a number of days of vehicles parked in emergency access spaces, inviting readers to review this evidence and "form their own conclusions" (Ibid). The GAG thus imply that they have clear and inarguable evidence of wrongdoing by the KCTMO that would be obvious to anyone reading the blog. In this way, they suggest that there was a lack of willingness by the KCTMO to act on the knowledge residents shared with them, rather than a lack of knowledge itself. Similarly, they refer to the KCTMO "knowingly compromising this essential emergency access" suggesting that it "could prove lethal", with the tone being both accusatory and admonitory (Ibid). In documenting the experiences of residents and warning the KCTMO, the GAG blog makes it impossible for the RBKC and KCTMO to claim they lacked knowledge of the fire safety issues in Grenfell, reflecting an active form of neglect in which they ignored residents' concerns (Iglesias-Mendoza et al 2021, 5).

Furthermore, the GAG blog presents the treatment of Grenfell residents as a form of risk-taking in which the policies of cost-cutting and privatisation reflect a form of institutional violence by placing residents in precarious living situations. Regarding the Grenfell refurbishment, a blog post quoting from a residents' meeting in 2015 suggests that there was "concern that the TMO/Rydon are using cheap materials" and workmanship "cutting corners"" (GAG 2015b). Similarly, residents complained about the quality of the work, leading them "to strongly suspect that the contract may have been inappropriately awarded to the cheapest bidder" (GAG 2015e). Words such as "concern" and "suspect" reflect the worries of the GAG and other Grenfell residents that the work being done was sub-standard and potentially

dangerous. The lack of care taken with the work, exemplified by words like “cheap”, “cutting corners”, and “cheapest bidder” reflect the perception that risks were taken with residents in order to save money, meaning that the substandard work reflected the priorities of the TMO rather than their incompetence. These statements, made in 2015, were validated in the aftermath of the 2017 fire wherein investigations showed that the contractor Rydon secured the contract for the refurbishment by promising to deliver the work for £8.7 million in comparison to their competitors’ £11.7 million bid (Cooper and Whyte 2022, 209).

Central government discourse praised the decrease in government action by celebrating the reduction of regulation and government spending. In 2015, they stated their intention to meet their “red tape challenge commitment to simplify and reduce planning regulation”, whilst George Osborne suggested that in “reducing government spending… public satisfaction with our local government services has risen” (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government and Lord Pickles 2015; George Osborne 2015). If there was any increase in public satisfaction it was not reflected in Grenfell residents’ perceptions of their “cheap” refurbishment as the GAG found that 90% of residents were dissatisfied with the works (GAG 2016d). Constituting what Cooper and Whyte (2022) refer to as an “avoidable disaster”, the Grenfell fire demonstrates that institutional violence in the form of long-term social neglect can have disastrous consequences which, though not explicitly intentional, reflect conscious decisions to take risks with people’s lives for the benefit of making profits (210). The years of neglect prior to the Grenfell fire, which involved cutting costs and taking risks with residents’ lives and safety, thus have to be considered a contextual cause and key part of the atrocity of the fire (Tombs 2020, 124). The concept of institutional violence allows for an understanding of how everyday experiences can constitute a form of violence which is legitimised institutionally, noted in the GAG’s presentation of the residents’ experiences in contrast to the government praising cost-cutting measures as saving money (Cooper and Whyte 2017, 23-24).

In labelling social neglect a form of institutional violence, it is essential to recognise the levels of neglect and the institutional embeddedness of the problem. Arguing in 2016 that an investigation was, "the only way that the negligence, incompetence, and systematic failings of the KCTMO can be exposed", the GAG's use of the adjective "systemic" suggests that neglect was not individual but rather justified and enforced at an institutional level (GAG 2016c). Concerns with this systemic neglect are reflected in the increase in the intensity of accusations against the KCTMO, stating that, "many local residents believe the TMO is little better than a mini-mafia which treats its residents with contempt and never misses an opportunity to bully, intimidate, disrespect, and belittle them" (Ibid). Comparison to a criminal organisation such as a "mini mafia" along with active verbs such as "bully", "intimidate", and "disrespect", highlight that the GAG did not think that the KCTMO just failed to care for them, but that they were actively harmful in their actions (Ibid). In describing the active harm produced by systems and institutions, it is necessary to consider who should be held responsible for institutional violence wherein there are actors who both caused and sanctioned harm directly through their decisions (Cooper and Whyte 2022, 210-211).

Criminal Social Neglect: Negligence, Social Murder, and the Right to Adequate Housing

Echoing Engels' claims that in cases of social murder it is difficult to attribute responsibility, the rapper Potent Whisper in his spoken word rap *Grenfell Britain* demonstrated the complexity of responsibility in the case of Grenfell when the local government outsourced its responsibilities for the building to the private sector. Stating that…

> *"The cladding, at the start, came from Omnis Exterior … Harley Facades bought it and installed it for Rydon / the lead contractor in the process that supplied them / Rydon worked directly for the KCTMO / the TMO managed the building for the Council / The Council owned the building." (Potent Whisper 2017).*

Potent Whisper's explanation of the numerous actors involved in the Grenfell fire suggest that the council and the KCTMO remain significantly responsible as they owned and managed the building. Years before the fire, the GAG similarly accused the KCTMO and RBKC of criminal levels of neglect. In relation to the fire safety issue of the removal of the Grenfell building's car park and the repeated incidences of staff and service vehicles blocking emergency access to the building, the GAG argued that "this reeks of criminal negligence to us", stating that the KCTMO were "highly dangerous" and "criminally negligent" (GAG 2013a; GAG 2013b). Repetition of the word "criminal" highlights the extent of the neglect residents perceived themselves to be victims of and suggests that they place blame and responsibility on the KCTMO who were supposed to maintain the safety of their building. Similarly, "ongoing neglect and criminal negligence" in relation to "fire safety systems at Grenfell Tower" was exposed in the blog when residents uncovered a fire risk assessment of the tower from November 2012 which revealed that the last test date of some of the fire equipment had been in August 2011 (GAG 2013c). The addition of the adjective "ongoing" demonstrates that these were not individual instances of incompetence but rather repeated crimes, reflective of a broader institutional and systemic problem with neglect.

The suggestion that crimes were being committed was amplified in the aftermath of the fire after 72 people died due to this continuous neglect. The GAG blog drew on Friedrich Engels' concept of violence when they stated that, "over 170 years after" Engels' initial writing on social murder…

> *"Britain remains a country that murders its poor. When four separate government ministers are warned that Grenfell and other high rises are a serious fire risk, then an inferno isn't unfortunate. It's inevitable. What happened wasn't a "terrible tragedy" … it was social murder" (GAG 2017c).*

This language reflects an escalation in terminology from criminal neglect to social murder. The GAG blog garnered much attention in the wake of the Grenfell fire for these criminal negligence posts centred around fire safety. Echoing the discourse employed in the blog, one article in The Guardian described the residents as "victims of possibly criminal levels of neglect" (Hanley 2017; MacLeod 2018, 467). Similarly, Shadow Chancellor at the time, John McDonnell, referred to the fire as social murder, arguing that, "political decisions were made which resulted in the deaths of these people" (Press Association 2017). Thus, in the wake of the fire, the mainstream media recognised the criminal aspect of these actions raised by residents years earlier,

Steve Tombs (2020) considered Grenfell an example of state-corporate crime, defined as the failure of the state to prevent the crimes of corporations or a deliberate collusion with private companies (122). Phase 1 of the Grenfell inquiry has focused on the liability of corporations and contractors, with Grenfell being treated as a domestic disaster for which people have looked to the state and its legal systems to hold the people responsible accountable (Bulley and Brasset 2021, 559). However, the Grenfell fire can also be framed within the context of international law, notably the international right to adequate housing, first recognised as universally applicable in 1948 (OHCHR 2002; Leccis 2019, 1). Encompassing legal protection against forced evictions, harassment, arbitrary demolition, and for the expression of cultural identity, the international right to adequate housing demonstrates that the extreme neglect of social housing for residents can be considered a crime against international law (OCHR 2009; Leccis 2019, 2). This human rights approach focuses on legal justice as the solution to such abuses, with Hohmann (2019) arguing that Grenfell should be considered a breach to the human right to adequate social housing (1). Both to hold people to account and as a form of activism, Hohmann suggests that an international human rights approach can provide a critique of national legal systems, noted in the case of Grenfell, wherein the national

legal system in the form of the Grenfell inquiry has not taken a global approach (Ibid, 14). Taking a broader approach to the right to adequate housing and framing the Grenfell fire in an international context complicates the number of actors involved and their levels of responsibility. However, this complexity has to be acknowledged to do justice to the experiences of Grenfell residents.

Global Social Neglect: Capitalism, Neoliberal Violence, and the Housing Crisis

A global approach is necessary to understand the long-term contextual causes of the Grenfell fire, demonstrated by one former residents' comments that "Grenfell burned for local and global reasons" (MacLeod 2018, 278-279; Danewid 2020, 290). Although the GAG primarily focused on the specific context of Grenfell and targeted the local government, the fire itself cannot be understood without acknowledging the global contexts in which such an incident was able to take place (Bulley 2019, 1). The GAG did acknowledge this in their post focused on "The International Housing Crisis" wherein they question what can be done to…

> *"curb the apparently limitless power of the banks and the class of oligarchs in whose interests the so-called democratic governments of the so-called free world perpetrate… such crimes against the powerless populations on whose behalf they are allegedly elected to govern" (GAG 2014f).*

Undermining the concepts of democratic governments and the notion of the free world by referring to them as "so-called" demonstrates the way in which the GAG perceives there to be a global institutional problem of injustice wherein those who claim to speak for the majority prioritise a minority elite. With specific reference to the "limitless power of the banks" in contrast to "the powerless populations", this reflects the understanding that many governments elected by the majority do not work in their interests. This lack of power is seen throughout the blog in which the GAG's concerns are repeatedly ignored, but in this case their struggle is

contextualised in the global context of a struggle of the powerless majority against a powerful minority whose interests determine government policy.

Such a sentiment was reflected in the post-Grenfell fire discourse in which one of the coordinators of Justice 4 Grenfell, an organisation established in the aftermath of the fire to secure justice for residents, stated that "around the world lethal and reprehensible conditions are permitted by wealthy elites operating from protected positions of financial privilege or bureaucracy" (Balgrove 2017; MacLeod 2018, 477). In this way, Grenfell cannot be understood without acknowledging the role of global systems and ideologies which prioritise profit over people, notably the failure of global capitalism to protect the needs of millions of people (Danewid 2020, 289; Robinson 2014, 4-5). In valuing the economy over individual's lives, Eve Darian-Smith has characterised such policies as "economies of death" which blur the boundary between "letting die" and "making die" (Darian-Smith 2021, 62-63). Underpinned by a neoliberal ideology which Gordon MacLeod (2018) refers to as "neoliberal violence", the practice of removing essential protections or outsourcing them to the private sector need to be considered when evaluating the responsibility for the Grenfell Tower fire (473-474).

The ideology of neoliberalism influenced the UK government's decision in 2008 to bail out the banks after the financial crash and in 2010 subject the population to imposed austerity (Bulley and Brasset 2021, 560-561). The GAG's comparisons between the power of the banks and the lack of power of the masses articulates the way in which capitalism produces casualties–the residents of Grenfell who saw their protections diminish–along with winners–the businesses who were less regulated (Tombs 2017, 136). Neoliberalism and austerity politics have also been used to justify an increase in privatisation wherein the state has out-sourced its responsibilities to private companies who are motivated by the accumulation of profit rather than the protection of people (Hodkinson 2020, 9; MacLeod 2018, 473). From 2011 to 2016, £120bn of government work in the UK was awarded to private companies, with social housing

policy being less influenced by government and more heavily steered by private sector agendas (MacLeod 2018, 473-474; Mackintosh and Heywood 2015, 787). Thus, when 'red tape' and regulation make private business harder or more expensive, essential public protection can be compromised to maintain the government's contracts with these companies (MacLeod 2018, 473-474). There is a fundamental misunderstanding of the government's responsibilities when it outsources its duty to protect citizens, especially those most vulnerable and in need of welfare assistance, to private companies who aim to save money rather than protect lives. The case of Grenfell Tower, wherein the winning contractor promised to deliver its refurbishment for £2.6m less, resulted in an inevitable drop in quality and standards that resulted in the loss of people's lives (Macleod 2018, 469). Overall, social neglect operated in the case of Grenfell at criminal levels and was underpinned by the global ideology of neoliberalism, meaning that it can be considered active in continuously ignoring residents' concerns and taking risks with their safety.

Chapter 5: Discourse as Resistance

Reflecting on the significance of the Grenfell Action Group and their blog, it is important to recognise the way in which their writing acted as a form of resistance to the institutional violence they experienced–demonstrating their persistent attempts to speak despite "The Sound of Silence" from local authorities (GAG 2014e). Hegemonic discourses are dominant narratives used to legitimise and naturalise political agendas and policies, meaning that resisting them can be difficult, as they often constrain the agency of those who attempt to undermine their claims (Heslop and Ormond 2020, 146- 148; Bamberg 2004, 360). However, non-academic forms of writing can provide space for resisting hegemonic discourses as they constitute a form of political action free from institutional demands and focused on the voices of individuals and communities (Bamberg 2004, 351; Vijay, Gupta, and Kaushiva 2020, 491; Flynn 1996, 172-173). Through blogging, the GAG used a form of activism that focused less on extreme singular events and more on the long and slow process of violence they experienced, with the blog making their everyday lived experiences of such violence visible (Macgilchrist and Böhmig 2012, 83; Nixon 2013, 14-15). Highlighting the political importance of mundane everyday practices, these forms of resistance reflect the experiences of the Grenfell Action Group fighting in whatever way they could, and, though it could not prevent the fire, it serves as evidence of their continued abuse and neglect and demands that their experiences be read and heard after the fire.

I will focus on the GAG blog's discourse as resistance through the discourse of speaking and silencing in which residents, especially the GAG, tried to voice their concerns but were repeatedly silenced by local authorities. I will then analyse the discourse of exposing agendas in which the GAG revealed their activist aims to highlight the ideologies and policies which put them at risk. Overall, the GAG blog is evidence that the people who lived in Grenfell Tower

were aware of the precarity of their living situation and the dangers of their concerns being ignored (Renwick 2019, 32). In the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire, discourses around preventing similar fires in the future rely on understanding the residents' attempts to speak truth to power for years before, offering the opportunity to learn from the atrocity and act on people's concerns with everyday violence before they reach such levels (Ibid, 21-22).

Burying and Silencing: The Unheard Voices of Resistance

In the aftermath of the Grenfell fire, residents of Grenfell and the surrounding area had a spotlight shone on their communities. Local reverend Mike Long used this spotlight to highlight the importance of listening to residents in any subsequent justice process, arguing that, rather than focusing solely on "technical detail" justice was "also about having your story heard and being acknowledged" (Garner-Purkis 2021). Reflecting on the importance of residents' stories and experiences, these words offer a perspective on justice in which residents being heard is valuable as well as attributing blame or responsibility. Similarly, Ben Okri in his poem *Grenfell Tower 2017* writes, "the voices here must speak for the dead", reflecting the power and importance of writing as a form of activism and respect for those who can no longer speak for themselves (Okri 2017). The GAG blog is an example of residents' continued attempts to speak of the violence they experienced in the form of persistent neglect, but their words were often not listened to or were actively silenced by the local authorities. This was noted by the group in the aftermath of the fire when they suggested that their warnings "fell on deaf ears", explicitly stating that they would continue to "speak for" the residents, speaking "truth to power whether or not they choose to listen" (GAG 2017a; GAG 2017b). In this way, the group saw their attempts to be heard as acts of resistance in themselves–a responsibility and a necessity in the face of the indifference of the local authorities. Years prior, the GAG had repeatedly demonstrated that the RBKC were "denying them a voice", referring to "The Sound of Silence" in response to their concerns and residents' pleas falling on "deaf Tory ears" (GAG

2014d; GAG 2014e; GAG 2015f). By continuing to speak in the face of years of silence in response, the GAG blog demonstrates a persistent resistance to government indifference to the violence they experienced.

The group not only felt unheard, but they also felt that they were deliberately silenced. Referring to the RBKC and the KCTMO "burying the legitimate concerns of the Grenfell Tower community", the blog suggests that they "quashed all our attempts to get sunlight shone on our legitimate complaints" (GAG 2016d; GAG 2016e). These metaphors of burying and hiding their concerns in the dark reflect the perception that residents of Grenfell Tower were not prioritised by the local authorities and were deliberately ignored. This is notable in the fact that the GAG, along with other local resistance networks, were told to be quiet by the KCTMO and the RBKC (Prescod and Renwick 2017). When residents dared to voice their grievances, they were not only silenced but regarded as troublemakers and threatened with legal action (MacLeod 2018, 473). The GAG in particular were dismissed and accused of engaging in class warfare rather than defending themselves and their community (Renwick 2019, 26-27).

In regard to the refurbishment of Grenfell from 2015 to 2016, in which the combustible cladding was installed, the GAG was angered by a TMO press release that did not "even mention the hardship and severe and continuous inconvenience that the local community had to endure for over three and a half years" (GAG 2016d). In this way the RBKC and KCTMO are presented as the controllers of the narrative surrounding the Grenfell residents' experiences, actively ignoring and silencing them and refusing to communicate. Silencing and burying the concerns of the GAG group had lethal consequences for the residents of Grenfell on June 14th, 2017. Although these consequences were not a result of the deliberate intent of the RBKC or KCTMO, they reflect a failure to act on concerns that were raised repeatedly over years and thus reflect a level of responsibility that must be acknowledged.

Exposing Agendas: The Masked Visibility of Government Action

Activist discourse in the aftermath of the Grenfell fire, particularly in poetry, felt it important to attribute responsibility for the fire to both local government failures and a broader ideology which justified the mistreatment of Grenfell residents. Lowkey (2017) used his writing in the form of the song *Ghosts of Grenfell* to highlight the government's agenda, criticising the "political class" for being "so servile to corporate power" and labelling the Grenfell fire a form of "corporate manslaughter" that "will haunt you". These words reflect a discourse of blame and criticism of a culture around central and local government which allowed for years of abuse and neglect, framing the problem in the context of the broader issue of corporatisation. Potent Whisper (2017) reflects on the notion of blame in his rap *Grenfell Britain* when he argues that that, "what happened at Grenfell, that wasn't just tragic / It was a deliberate attack, it was managed". The claim that the incident was "managed" reflects the complicity of local government and is evidenced in the GAG blog which continuously tried to highlight the agendas of local authorities which did not prioritise the lives of Grenfell residents.

Focusing on the way in which the local government was able to conceal its actions and motivations, the GAG wrote that, "one has to wonder about the standard of health and safety… in hidden areas that are not so visible to the public" (GAG 2016a). Referring to the potential of "hidden fire risks" at Grenfell, they suggest that the obvious neglect that they were experiencing could be reflective of more serious issues that were not as visible (Ibid). The seemingly prophetic statement of the "hidden fire risks" reflects the knowledge, understanding, and willingness of the GAG to expose and highlight the potential risks to their safety over a year before the fire. Furthermore, the GAG referred to the KCTMO as capable of "manipulating changes to housing policy" when it "serves their hidden agenda and there are reasons to avoid doing so overtly" (GAG 2016b). Emphasising the ability and willingness of the KCTMO to hide their actions, the use of language such as "avoid", "hidden", and

"manipulating" reflects the GAG's perception of the levels of power that the KCTMO had in contrast to their own position in which residents were reliant on the local authorities to protect them. Such sentiments are echoed in the work of Mackintosh and Heywood (2015) wherein they refer to the "unseen exercise of power" in housing policy, arguing that the agenda of government policies has been to prioritise economic and political factors over the needs of existing tenants (771). This hidden dimension of power reflects the way in which businesses are often consulted in the division of housing policies, but residents are ignored, reflecting the way in which discourses reflect power imbalances as they reveal who has a say in government policy (Ibid, 772-773).

The Grenfell fire is presented in the GAG blog as an event which exposed such hidden agendas, power imbalances, and the silencing of residents. Suggesting that the KCTMO's failures in fire safety "speak volumes", the GAG employ the discourse of silencing and speaking to continue to expose the poor treatment of residents (GAG 2017b). The neglect and abuse of residents had been obvious to residents for years, but upon the event of the fire, the media began to make such violence visible on a national and international scale (Nixon 2013, 14-15). However, the media exposure failed to challenge what Nixon refers to as the "privileging of the visible" wherein the effects of everyday violence have to be seen visually and deemed legitimate before action is taken (Ibid). This idea is echoed in Ben Okri's poem, wherein he writes that the deceased Grenfell residents "did not die when they died; their deaths happened long/ Before" because residents were ignored and neglected to the point that policy-makers did not see them as important and, in the end, "They died because money could be saved and made" (Okri 2017). In this way, the GAG blog's documentation of the years of "complacency, indifference, and negligence" by the local government reveals that residents understood "for many years" what the media was only just getting a glimpse of with the atrocity of the Grenfell fire (GAG 2017b). In analysing the GAG blog's years of documented evidence,

discourse, and concerns, I hope I have demonstrated the importance of reading their words and recognising their attempts to resist their continued neglect.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In this dissertation I have demonstrated that the Grenfell Tower fire was the product of a long process of institutional violence against Grenfell residents, exemplified by the discourse of the GAG blog which documented the years of systemic social neglect they experienced. Using a definition of violence which extends the concept beyond an immediate physical act, I have focused on the importance of time and place; taking back the clock to recognise the years of abuse prior to the event of the fire and recognising the global dimensions of institutional violence. Similarly, I have demonstrated who is vulnerable to this violence by employing the theories of the biopolitics of disposability and the racialisation of the poor to examine the significance of race in understanding the violence of Grenfell.

My research suggests that expanding understandings of violence in academia, listening to the voices of activists on the ground, and focusing on historical and political context provide lessons for tackling institutional violence at an academic and practical level. In relation to academic understandings, the case study of Grenfell Tower helps ground the idea of institutional violence in the reality of specific cases and helps identify the policies and ideologies open to critique as forms of violence. In centralising the Grenfell Action Group blog and the discourses used by them, I hope to have demonstrated the effectiveness of using sources such as activist blogs in tandem with academic work. I argue that paying attention to the voices of people on the ground could help in acts of criticising and possibly preventing institutional violence. Labelling Grenfell a form of institutional violence also has practical implications. As of 2020, 468 high-rise buildings in the UK have been officially identified as having combustible cladding and as of 2017, 3.5m homes in England were estimated to have serious health or safety risks (Hodkinson 2020, 4; Schifferes 2017, 36). The continued safety risks in housing make it essential to learn lessons from the Grenfell fire and assure residents' safety in

these buildings. However, improving the quality of housing requires not just a removal of certain materials but changing the culture of housing policies to ensure that they prioritise the protection of residents above all else and building a system effective at identifying and removing risks to safety (Schifferes 2017, 34). Overall, I hope to have shown that academic research extending the definition of violence and intersecting understandings of vulnerability can be used as a step towards tackling the problems with government policies and ideologies which can be considered violent and produce vulnerability.

My analysis of vulnerability has been focused on the intersection of race and class; however, a more comprehensive analysis of intersectionality would include the factors of gender, disability, age, and sexuality in the creation of vulnerability. It was beyond the scope of my dissertation to do justice to the differing factors of vulnerability, and though many of the works I read referred to intersectionality, factors outside of race and class were not centred in these analyses (Cooper and Whyte 2017, 13; O'Hara 2015, 123; 230-232; Nixon 2013, 4). Thus, future work concentrating on other factors relevant to intersectionality could contribute to better understandings of who institutional violence targets and could broaden discussions about the effective methods to protect those made vulnerable. Similarly, research on Grenfell and institutional violence could benefit from a more in-depth analysis of its psychological impact, helping to understand how the trauma of experiencing extensive neglect impacts on people's health and wellbeing. Psychological violence is referenced in Cooper and Whyte's theorisation of institutional violence and Chris Shannahan's comments on PTSD in the aftermath of the Grenfell fire (Cooper and Whyte 2017; Shannahan 2022, 275). However, a specific and deliberate focus on the significance of psychological violence over time rather than in response to an event could help understand the extent of the impact of institutional violence.

Writing of the lessons that should be learned from the Grenfell Tower fire is in itself uncomfortable. The numerous warnings from the Grenfell Action Group demonstrate that these lessons could and should have been learned well before the fire ever took place and reflect the devastating reality of the consequences of the silence from the RBKC and the KCTMO. Situating this silence and neglect in a historical, political, and global context hopefully provides a better understanding of the complex web of actors, policies, and ideologies which enabled the Grenfell Tower fire to happen. Overall, understanding violence as more complex than a physical immediate act allows for an acknowledgement of Grenfell residents' experiences and the ability to identify broader problems with disposability, neglect, and neoliberalism which prioritise the making of profits over the protection of the vulnerable.

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