Conclusion:
What now?

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The breadth of analysis and recommendations that our authors have produced is testament to the wide-ranging effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Crucially, though, very few of the problems highlighted are themselves unique to the pandemic. By throwing the whole world into crisis, the pandemic has shone a light on pre-existing divisions, inequalities, and other social problems. It has revealed procedural issues in local and national governance, and in the dispensation of justice. The institutions we are supposed to rely on have been given a stress test and in many cases have not passed. But it has also revealed the range of other problem-solving mechanisms that we do already have at our disposal, and which we turned to at a moment of intense and widely-felt need.

In various ways, our authors have highlighted these alternative – and seemingly radical – problem-solving mechanisms in attempts to resolve governance-related issues and contribute to violence prevention in the broadest sense. In some cases, this has involved pointing towards ways in which certain groups have dealt successfully with the problems COVID brought up, ways that may not have occurred to others. In other cases, we have been reminded of historical interventions that may hold the keys for better understanding and addressing our present concerns. And in yet others, COVID has served as a spark that has drawn wider attention to long-fought battles for social justice. In all cases it has been shown that what may seem radical in one context is perfectly plausible and acceptable in another. Moreover, it has been shown that seeking out these radical solutions is absolutely necessary if we are to make our societies more equitable and peaceful.

In showing a diverse range of radical *solutions* to governance issues, our aim is to move beyond problem-identification and to positively inform critique, which otherwise can be liable to misfire. The partiality of the institutions charged with neutral and effective governance, and the structures they both support and rely on, can severely impede the effectiveness of interventions that genuinely are enacted for the good of the population. This is true not just in terms of misallocation of resources, but also to the extent that it undermines people's faith in those institutions. Over the last year and a half, we have seen large-scale rejection of public health measures and an intense proliferation of conspiracy theories regarding vaccination programs in several countries, often orbiting around a generalized suspicion of vaguely defined elites. This skepticism is not without justification, of course. Vaccine hesitancy among Black and minority ethnic populations in the UK and US must be understood in historical context. Health systems in both countries have historically been used to promulgate racist ideology, and under their auspices non-white populations were the subject of violent experimentation[1]. More generally, measures implemented by various governments have required tremendous sacrifice of our civil liberties and this raises the stakes of the relationship between the state and its citizens. Missteps and misuse of office stand out particularly starkly when the full power of the state is laid bare, and systemic inequalities are even harder to swallow than usual.

It is not just the case that established mechanisms for governance don't work, but that they often *do* work for an increasingly narrow subset of people. To clutch that critique from the jaws of conspiratorialism, which often

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1   Esan Swan (2021), 'History is key to understanding vaccine hesitancy in people of colour'. Financial Times. Available at: https://www.ft.com/content/a25a2463-9367-4a79-9f7c-012ba728bd3a

ends up counterproductively serving the interests of those very same elites anyway, collaboration, cross-pollination between social movements, and collective education are crucial. The more we can share with one another the diverse mechanisms already available for challenging power and solving problems on macro and micro levels, the more a generalized sense of dissatisfaction with an unjust system can give way to constructive solutions to reorientate and rebuild it. And that is the process we hope to be making inroads on.

Given this, and given the urgency of the issues our authors have discussed, it is important for us to be able to present their thoughts and findings in a digestible and surveyable way. We have compiled bite-sized summaries of each contribution below accordingly:

- **Birjandian** argues that there is analytical value in understanding individual human beings in the masses *as* "administrations of justice" because such thinking can help to more accurately chart the types of social change required to establish just societies.
- **Calvete** documents a conversation between university students and lecturers based in Brazil, who identify the need to overcome a hegemonic individualism as fundamental barrier to significant progress.
- **Clay-Robinson** explores how governments, especially during a public health crisis like COVID, could combine the research expertise of the social sciences and the communicative power of the arts to create partnerships with communities experiencing social and economic issues.
- **Kirabira** proposes that the disruptions of COVID allow for the reimagining of justice and how court systems operate to ensure the focus is on healing and/or justice for the victim and not the punishment of the perpetrator.
- **Macias** dissects the individualist worldview prevalent in western countries like the United Kingdom in comparison to more collectivist countries like South Korea in the context of each country's response to the COVID pandemic, concluding that collectivism fosters more effective response to crisis.
- **Okoth** suggests that we cannot understand the response to COVID in Uganda without recognizing the legacy of authoritarian rule and military violence and considers the family and the clan as a possible pressure point to address brutality.
- **Sample** discusses the ways COVID made us rethink

how we use public space, and who gets privileged access to it. She advocates for investment in community gardens as a way to strengthen intra-community relations and improve environmental education.
- **Tramontano** explains the ways that COVID accelerated the movement to defund and abolish the police.
- **Yamahata** shows us how looking at the role of international institutions during the AIDS and COVID pandemics reveals ways in which populations have the power to influence states, moving away from traditional theories of international relations.

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It has become a trope to suggest that the 'post-COVID' world will be a totally different one to before. And yet this is not really true. Historical (and colonial) distributions of power, money, and influence map – with some exceptions – closely onto what has been described as a system of global vaccine apartheid[2]. Wealth has been further concentrated in the hands of a few, while countless others face joblessness, increasingly precarious employment, depressed wages, and worse. Well-worn prejudices have demonstrated their immense staying power thanks to their deep roots in the structures of our societies; historically marginalized communities have largely experienced the worst health outcomes in many of our countries, and in the UK, police were twice as likely to fine Black people than non-Black people for breaching lockdown restrictions[3]. This is not to mention the months of protests against ongoing and systemic racial inequality following the murder of George Floyd in the US.

One major (and hardly surprising) thread that winds through almost all of the essays in this volume is a rejection of the dominant, top-down, liberal model for organizing societies and propelling change. This is a model according to which change comes from formal institutions and via policy. There is a clear division between the public and private sphere, and we assent to public institutions through which we may lobby for change in return for privacy and liberty in our lives as individuals. What is highlighted during a time of crisis, but shown through this to nevertheless be the case in general, is that this model is at best incomplete and at worst an obstacle.

2   Reuters (2021), 'World has entered stage of "vaccine apartheid" - WHO head' https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/world-has-entered-stage-vaccine-apartheid-who-head-2021-05-17/

3   Vikram Dodd (2021), 'Met police twice as likely to fine black people over lockdown breaches – research'. The Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jun/03/met-police-twice-as-likely-to-fine-black-people-over-lockdown-breaches-research

Conclusion

We should take note of Okoth's observation that the line drawn between institutions that can and can't legitimately affect change in the public sphere is ultimately arbitrary. More than this in fact, it simply does not reflect where change *actually* comes from, and who we listen to and let ourselves be guided by. In doing so it precludes structures and people – families, clans, neighbours – from positively affecting change. Similarly, some of our responses to the pandemic – for example the growth in mutual aid groups in the UK – show us ways in which what we might euphemistically call 'the masses' can be more directly impactful when our status as a collective is not mediated by the state and its constituent institutions. Focusing on collective efforts at the local level is one way of doing this, drawing on the shared experience of a particular place, our relationship to which, and therefore to each other, might be reinforced by Sample's proposals. We should remain vigilant, however, about the potential for local solidarity to turn into hostility towards outsiders. To paraphrase Tramontano, we should not be aiming for the positive peace of the suburbs, built as it is on structurally violent and frequently racialized exclusion. Thinking seriously and critically about institutions like the police that help to reinforce that exclusion is therefore crucial.

The issues raised and solutions proposed within this volume vary in terms of who they target as *agents of change* (i.e. who it is that should be enacting the proposed change), and who they target as *beneficiaries of that change* (i.e. who the change is *for*; whose problems it solves). And this is a key point to take away. Social change is a complex thing. Faced with such grand problems it is easy to feel overwhelmed or deflated. But what we hope to have shown through the contributions presented here is that there are ways to make inroads and importantly that everyone has a role to play.

None of us has to try to tackle all of these governance issues at once, alone. Indeed tackling any one requires collaboration. Collaboration not just in the simple sense of working together to achieve a common goal, but in a deeper, richer sense, in which we learn from each other's experiences in order to show how tackling several seemingly discrete problems *produces* a global community and in doing so helps us work to address the bigger picture. Each of us is necessary; none of us is sufficient.

We hope that these contributions, individually and as a whole, can inspire the reflection and action necessary to move forward from this crisis, and allow us to better deal with whatever comes next.

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