

We were initially approached by Pluto, well I wasn't even approached, Avia was initially approached by Pluto, she's a lecturer in criminology at Birkbeck. The idea was to write an ABC on what abolition means but specifically situating it within the UK context, because as a political movement, as a set of theories, it is considered to be quite US centric. So that was the initial kind of idea, but then obviously things kicked off, so in 2020 we had the horrific murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis which sparked a global uprising of ordinary people, and in the UK. So, the very first piece of work that we quote, that we cite in the book, is an article by from the Guardian that says that those protests in 2020 in the UK were the biggest anti racist protests since the abolition of slavery and so a really huge movement centred on the question of race, its connection to policing and capitalism. But not long after that, and of course while that movement did make huge strides in the UK, there were towns all over the country rising in resistance and then of course we had the famous toppling of the Colston statue in Bristol and the culture war that emerged and arose, and the debates that came out around that.

A few months later, about eight or so months later, there was another quite formative event for British politics and British policing, which was in March 2021 the murder of Sarah Everard by a serving Metropolitan Police officer. Avia and I were involved in both the uprisings during the summer of 2020 around BLM, which of course was fraught from another perspective, thinking of the question of the state, state control and state violence and policing because of the pandemic, and the restrictions that were on movement and socialising because of the pandemic. So, there was already that kind of question there in the background that was the underpinning to the BLM protests here in the UK. But I think the murder of Sarah Everard by a serving Metropolitan Police officer who was off duty at the time but who was serving in one of the armed units in London, I think really underscored the fundamental issue with policing and raised a series of questions of - OK well, how are these two events, the Black Lives Matter movement and the murder of Sarah Everard connected. And out of the murder of Sarah Everard arose the kill the bill movement. So, for those of you who aren't aware, just days after Sarah Everard was murdered, a bill was going through parliament called the police crime sentencing court bill, which is unfortunately now an act, but it was a bill at the time, and that bill was going to give police more powers off the back of COVID to stop and search specific communities. The disproportionate impact of that would have been on black communities, would have increased police powers in the context of policing gangs, again disproportionately impacting black people, would increase, would change the law of trespass from a civil to a criminal matter which would impact the gypsy Roma traveller community. A whole series of new bits of legislation around protest, the right to protest, the right to gather in public space. And so, I think connecting the BLM movement, and connecting the murder of Sarah Everard and the kill the bill movement, was this broader context of a tightening of state power, police power and control that the state exercises over our lives and over our right to protest, right to gather in public

and simply right to be a human being in the public sphere. And I guess part of what the book then became, instead of being a kind of ABC on abolition, it actually became more of a theorising of the moment that we were in, and also a bit of a conversation with the movement, where we tried to understand how the question of for example race on the one hand and the murder of Sarah Everard and the sexism and misogyny the underpinned that were connected.

And so, I'm going to try and tell a little bit of that story of that connection, of the purpose of policing in society and how these events are connected today. And I guess the place that we need to begin is by really looking at the formation of policing in the UK. So, the police in the UK were formed in 1829 and were actually the first state funded policing force in the world. So, in many ways policing in this country is a blueprint for policing around the world in terms of it being state funded and in terms of it operating on this notion of policing by consent. So, what does this notion of policing by consent, which is quite unique to British policing mean. and of course, not all policing in the context of the British Empire has occurred by consent. So, if you look for example in the colonies it was policing by force almost entirely, violent policing, murderous policing, policing that would really put quite restrictive control over the bodies, over the labour, over the time over the social and private space, of colonised subjects. But of course, that was the method of policing that worked in the colonies, because colonised bodies and subjects are highly disposable in terms of slaves and colonised subjects, you use them and their labour for a bit of time and then you discard and replace them. And for many reasons that was a formula that couldn't work on the mainland in the same way that it worked in the colonies. So, although of course there were many experimentations with various forms of military policing in the colonies it didn't work exactly the same way in the mainland and in fact there's a really good example of this. The Peterloo massacre is a really good example of when the cavalry were used to try to control an uprising and try to control the big mass demonstrations of people, and they attempted to use lethal force in order to control that demonstration, and instead of quelling the demonstration it led to greater mass resistance and greater mass protests. And so lethal force didn't work and operate in the same way against a population who weren't disposable like in the colonies. And so out of this then arose this notion of policing by consent, and what policing by consent means is you police on the basis that you get consent and legitimacy from the very population that you are policing.

So, there are a number of ways in which policing by consent works and how you get consent from a population. Some of those ways are being amenable to a population, and so when the police were formed in 1829 by Robert Peel - and a slight side-track - before Robert Peel was a state leader on the mainland he was actually a leader in the Irish colonies and practised a lot of his policing tactics and techniques, particularly control of mass demonstrations, against the Irish colonised, and of course there's another important connection there. But some of the key ways in which you can garner

consent and one of the key philosophies of Robert Peel's formation of police in 1829 was this idea that police were kind of more like civilians than the army so there's this soft side of policing by consent where you draw your policing population from the civilian population. And so, although in many ways they stand above and sit above civilians with the powers that they get, actually the idea behind policing by consent is that there is this connection, there is this almost one to one relationship between civilians and police. Police are civilians and civilians are police is the famous way of phrasing that.

But there are also more nefarious ways of establishing consent against a population and so before I go into those, I guess it would be helpful to draw out why a police force was necessary in the first place. So, there is this myth that policing arose because of Victorian crime waves and the need to protect the urban working classes from themselves. And this couldn't be further from the truth. The reality is that the first experimentation with an organised police force on the mainland of Britain came about with the transition to wage labour. So previously the ways in which some forms of labour operated is you would make stuff and you would get some of that stuff to take back as wages. The introduction of the wage meant that the products that you produced could no longer be taken away as payment and you are paid a wage. And what many early capitalists found was that some of the labourers were still taking away products to either sell on black markets or to use in their own homes. And so they started introducing in the mining industry, in the docking industry, organised policing forces to make sure that workers essentially weren't nicking extra produce and subsidising their crappy wages. So those were the initial experimentations in the docks, for example of East London in the early 1800s, but really the context that finally wins the UK state round to the idea of a state funded police force, because Robert Peel attempted to pass it through parliament many times before he eventually did in 1829, and it had failed previously, but it was the air of revolution in the ether in that those first few decades of the 1800s. Strike wave after strike wave, and then when they tried to ban strikes, direct action against factories and equipment and capitalists being targeted and of course mass demonstrations.

So, I believe it's 1819 or 1818 you have the Peterloo massacre as a result of you know the mass demonstrations. So, in the early 1820s they tried to unban trade union organising in the hopes that that would quell working class urban area resistance. It had the opposite effect. There was a new strike wave and so eventually in 1829 the idea to form a state funded police force was finally won. And I think this context is really important because there's this mythology that surrounds police as them being there to stop crime, stop ordinary people from being harmed, protect your ordinary worker. When actually, if you look at the context in history in which they arose it's a very different situation.

So that then leads us to another question, which is do police work at their stated aims, because it's one thing for me to say that there is this mythology around policing and policing doesn't exist to serve the ordinary person, but that's actually an empirical question not an ideological question. We can judge the impact of policing in society based on the work that they actually do. So that's a question that we're going to come back to and we're going to ask this question does policing actually work? But just before I get there, I want to make just one final point on this idea of policing by consent. And so, there are many ways in which you can garner consent in the modern era that looks like recruitment drives to make the police look more like the populations that they serve, or reports done into policing to try and quell public resistance. So, the latest one that we've had is the 2023 Casey report, but there was also the MacPherson report before that, and the Scarman report before that. So, these are cycles and tools that the police use in order to create this idea that policing is on this kind of forward march, policing is really all about protecting and serving.

But there are more negative ways in which policing manufactures consent. One of them being division. Another one of them being race and gender and this notion, for example, you might have heard of this concept of the enemy within, this is a really classic ideological tool often used by the state and the right wing but others to create a them and us which defines the boundaries of who is to be protected in society and who is to be policed. And those boundaries are also shaped and defined by things like race, gender, class etc.

OK so let's pause there, because now I'm going to try to, that's kind of the history of policing in the UK, so what I'm going to try to do now is break down this question of does policing work and does policing work in terms of who they're meant to be protecting and serving and do they protect and serve us. And of course that is one of one of the key ways in which consent to policing is manufactured, this idea of protecting and serving, this idea of the Bobby on the beat who's just like you, who's there to keep you safe. So, I have to ask the empirical question - do police keep society safe from harm and violence, and I think I want to preface that discussion with two stories. The first one being around the murder of Mark Duggan which took place in 2011 which you might be aware of. Mark Duggan was after his murder, I mean he was he was slated in the media as being you know one of the most dangerous criminals and gangsters in Europe, that he shot a police officer, that he was a bad guy. It turned out in reality he was unarmed when he was shot and killed by the Metropolitan Police. That he was actually working and in employment when he was shot and that he wasn't a known criminal or gangster. But that is one example of the way in which policing actually causes harm in society. I want to compare and contrast Mark Duggan's murder to the murder of Sarah Everard. And although of course we have in these cases two dead people, the response and reaction to the murder of Sarah Everard was very different. So the judge in her case, for example, described her as a helpless victim and politicians

and the media all came clambering out to say this death should never, this murder should never have happened, it's horrific, it's disgusting. And of course, the police officer who was responsible for that is now in prison. So, what I want to do by telling the story of asking the question do police actually work in societies I want to illustrate how the murders of Mark Duggan and Sarah Everard are actually connected and why the struggle against police racism is also connected to the struggle against police sexism.

So, one of the easiest ways to analyse how effective policing is, is by looking at the statistics and the turnover rates of reported crimes. So, at the point of us doing the research, and I believe the year is 2020 only 6% of recorded crimes ended in charge, 6% of recorded crimes, so that's even before you get to whether they're prosecuted successfully or not. That's just whether they're charged and of course, when we think of sexual violence, the statistics fall even further, so we're talking about only 1.2% of recorded rapes, for example, end in charge. And once again that's before we even talk about prosecution. So essentially, we live in a society where harm and violence against your neighbour, you know these sorts of quite daily events that happen to people, whether that's sexual violence, physical violence, burglary etc are de facto, maybe not in law, but in practise decriminalised. So, this is one way of empirically answering the question well do police work. Well actually if you look at the statistics clearly not. But there are other ways to look at that as well. So, we can break down the individual tools of policing and ask ourselves well how far they work. And one tool that is worth looking at is stop and search. The previous commissioner for the Metropolitan Police describes stop and search as an essential tool. The exact quote is in the book in thesis 3. But a tool to help protect black young black boys from themselves because they're essentially stabbing and killing each other. And so, Boris Johnson similarly when he was Prime Minister, there was quite a famous quote from him saying that stop and search is absolutely essential and one of the most effective policing and crime prevention tools. But actually, there's evidence from the government data where we can look to assess this.

So, in the years before the 2011 riots, so I mentioned the murder of Mark Duggan earlier which was in 2011, and the 2011 riots were partially sparked by the murder of Mark Duggan and the way in which his family were mistreated. What people don't know is in the years 2008 to 2011, so the three years before the riots, there were section 60's in place in the poorest boroughs in London for the entirety of those three years, day in day out. So, what is a section 60? Section 60 is a bit of legislation that the senior officer in policing can put in a particular area, and it enables police in that area to stop and search anyone without reasonable suspicion, without any cause or reason, at any time, for any purpose, at the discretion of any police officer. And so just conceptualise this for a second. Section 60s are usually only put in place in specific small areas for a limited amount of times at major events. So, for example, maybe there's a big football match happening, and they want to prevent social disorder, so they'll put a section 60 in

place around the football stadium in order to stop and search people at that stadium. Or they might introduce a section 60 around a protest so they can stop and search anyone going to and from a protest. So these are you know quite significant police powers that are in place 365 days a year 24 hours a day for three years in the poorest boroughs in London. So, of course as you'd expect, stop and search is massively increased in those boroughs, disproportionately impacting young black youth, particularly young black boys. So, now that raises the question did this massive increase in stop and searches actually have a statistically significant impact on crime and the rates of crime in those areas. So, there was a 2016 report commissioned by the government called Operation Blunt 2. So, you can go away and you can and read this report yourself and they found that this massive increase in stop and searches had no statistically significant impact on the rates of crime. And in fact, the fluctuations in crime that they did notice correlated with the season and the weather more than they did the rates of stop and search. Kind of makes sense; in the cold there's less people outside, crime tends to go down. In the summer there's more people outside, crime tends to go up, but this is actually a trend that we observed during the pandemic as well, crimes committed during lockdowns because people went out and about.

This raises though really significant questions, because if stop and search doesn't actually work at its intended aim, well then what is its purpose, what is it supposed to do and what does the disproportionate impact of stop and search on black communities and the way in which, for example, Cressida Dick uses black communities to justify the use of stop and search at disproportionate levels in working class and poor areas. What function does that play in society? And many people, myself included, would argue that there's a function here of control, coercion and control. So, if you look at 1829, the formation of the policing force in 1829, the real key question wasn't how do we protect the working class from themselves, it was actually how do we protect the economic system, the state, the social order from working class resistance. And that is continually how race shows up for example in policing. The police often use working class and black communities to legitimatise the powers that they have. And those powers that they have that are increasing are essential to the functioning of a Liberal Democratic society that also is based on exploitation and division and naturally creates fractures and resistance and rebellion.

So how does this connect the murders of Mark Duggan and Sarah Everard. Well I think the key thing is the way in which state institutions, whether they are policing, whether they are prison systems, whether they are the arms trade, mental health incarceration, rely on social dynamics that are based on control and coercion of other people's physical space, bodies, private lives, ability to move and be free in society. And so if that is the function of policing as a state institution, it is therefore no surprise that that state institution would also body embody one of the world's oldest forms of social control and social coercion which is sexism. And so it's in that sense that you can see

the ways in which the very foundation of policing gives rise to not only the violence that we see against black men and black youth but also policing violence against women. And it's therefore no surprise that behind the police officer, I don't even remember his name he's not relevant. But behind the police officer who murdered Sarah Everard, he wasn't just a lone sexist wolf, there was a sexist culture predicated on the control of women's bodies, the shaming of women's bodies, that sat behind his ability to rise through the ranks and be a protected and respected officer.

So, to sum up, that's been a lot on policing. I also wanted to draw to your attention to the prison system. So, you might say OK I get it policing doesn't work, the stats are terrible, it doesn't work, but we need to make sure bad people are put away because well how else are we going to deal with bad people in society. Well, I want to raise to you again the fact that not even prisons work. So, if we take, for example, domestic violence. Domestic violence has the highest levels of recidivism. so that means once someone goes into prison they come out and they repeat the offence. That's most likely to happen with domestic violence. We know for example from a study that Kings College London did that if you go into prison with an opiate addiction and then come out of prison, you're 7 times more likely to come out of prison and die of an opiate overdose. We know that 50% of people in general prisons are in prison for what I interpret and what we interpret in the book to be crimes of survival. So around 50% of crimes are crimes against other people. So that's your physical violence, sexual violence etc. The other 50% are crimes against property or crimes for survival, so that's your theft, sex work, drug use etc. And so, we know that there are huge numbers of people in prisons who are not served by those institutions, who come out and face greater housing insecurity than when they went in, who come out and face greater poverty than when they go in. And I think that's important to say and contextualise within women's prisons, for example, where we know huge percentages of women that are in prisons, I believe around 40%, have histories of child abuse.

So, the reason why I raise prisons to finish is because I think it brings us quite neatly onto the question of what is to be done. Because the reality is there is a problem in society of harm and violence, there is a huge problem of harm and violence, whether that's harm between ordinary people, or that's harm from the state, or violence between ordinary people and violence from the state. And it is an entirely legitimate question to ask, well what do we do about that, because it's not a tolerable situation. To live in a society that allows harm and violence to perpetuate. And I think the first thing that I would say on that is, well we already know that we do live in a society in which harm and violence is allowed to perpetuate because policing and prisons don't actually work at their stated aims. So that then raises the next question for us, well what can we do to protect the ordinary person in society, to build a society with less harm and with less violence. There are, for example, public health approaches that I think are really relevant. So, knife crime is a huge issue in places like London, Glasgow, in certain

places in Birmingham. And again, stop and search is touted as this fix all solution. If we just stop the people who have knives and take their knives and put them in prison, then we will solve the problem. Well, we know this is not true because actually there are social causes to things like youth violence. But there are actually attempts at trying a different approach that have worked. So, in Glasgow, for example, they took a public health approach to youth violence where they, quote, had police at arm's length and they gave identified people who are at risk of youth violence, gave them mental health support, domestic violence early intervention, because we know that there's a strong link between youth violence on the streets and domestic violence in the home. They gave people housing solutions and stable housing, vocational and educational opportunities, and they only took the criminalisation approach as the last resort. So, the police were kind of the last resort, and they saw a statistically significant drop over several years in the numbers of youth violence on the street.

So, there's that kind of need for us I guess in some ways to take the arguments of defunding the police from the US and contextualise them within our own UK context. And we might say something along the lines of - defund the police and fund these critical public health services that actually have a proven track record of reducing harm and violence on our streets. But there is a more fundamental question, and this brings us to why the book was called Abolition Revolution. And I'll end here, which is that the vast majority of harm and violence in society isn't from random evil people who have a genetic mutation that just make them bad, but it's because of social relationships. A society that is built on scarcity and precarity, increasingly so, a society that's built fundamentally on violence and war and coercion and control, and a society that's built on exploitation. And of course that is not a society that's going to reproduce peace, that's a society that's going to reproduce harm and violence from the state level all the way down to the private sphere. So that's why in Abolition Revolution we make an impassioned case for that public health intervention and building kind of mutual aid and communities of solidarity that can support each other and fill in for where the state doesn't support people. But that actually is a broader struggle also for a society built on the backs of workers to be reclaimed by those workers and built in the service of peace.