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Authoritarian neoliberalism between Johnson and Jupiter: Declining legitimacy and the elevation of home affairs in post-Brexit Britain and Macron's France

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ABSTRACT

In the face of protracted stagnation following the global financial crisis, democratic governments who remain committed to neoliberalism are still required to secure popular support for their programmes. This article evaluates how this dilemma has presaged a shift in the relationship between governmental attempts to maintain neoliberal legitimacy and the imposition of authoritarian reforms. We argue that, in the aftermath of the 2015 refugee crisis, this shift has consisted of the elevation of home affairs policy and the advance of a 'mutated' politics of legitimation characterised by explicit forms of 'othering' and hostility towards the wider political system. Drawing on the examples of the UK and France, we show how this deepening authoritarianism has manifested along two interconnected axes: (1) increased police powers and suppression of protests and civil liberties; (2) enhanced border security and restrictions on citizenship. Contributing to scholarship on authoritarian neoliberalism, we argue that this elevation of home affairs not only augurs the intensification of authoritarianism, but also reveals how governments have utilised popular resistance to authoritarian reforms to generate new forms of reactionary 'consent'.

1. Introduction

Amidst the proliferation of terms used to describe shifts in neoliberal governance following the global financial crisis (GFC) of 2007–8, perhaps the most apposite and enduring is the label of authoritarian neoliberalism (Bruff, 2014; Bruff & Tansel, 2019). Bruff's (2014) original formulation argued that since 2008, stagnation and declining legitimacy have led governments to expand their authoritarian repertoire to (re)impose neoliberal accumulation strategies. The claim was not that authoritarianism was an entirely new feature of neoliberalism, nor that it had no place within the wider history of capitalism, but rather that since the GFC, neoliberalism displayed a shift away from consent-building and towards authoritarianism in both *quantitative* and *qualitative* terms. Indeed, Bruff (2014: 117) noted an increasing number of constitutional and legal innovations which, coupled with an increased resort to repression, sought to shield policymaking from political demands. In turn, scholars have produced rich empirical analyses of the interplay between continued neoliberalization and authoritarian measures which protect 'public order' and attack the right to resist (e.g., Tansel, 2017).

However, in the 15 years since the peak of the GFC, neoliberal legitimacy has continued to decline in the face of protracted economic stagnation and the proliferation of crises of the environment, public health, and migration (Alami et al., 2023). Despite this malaise, neoliberalism has seemingly endured. The overarching question driving this article, therefore, is *how, in this context, have the attempts of formally democratic governments to safeguard neoliberalism prompted shifts in the relationship between authoritarian practices and legitimation processes?*

Scholars have begun to identify various mutations in the contours of neoliberal politics, with some heralding a 'hard-shell' neoliberalism which relies on increasingly regressive, 'distorted' forms of legitimation (Ayers and Saad-Filho, 2020; Dardot and Laval, 2019; Davies and Gane, 2021; Peck and Theodore, 2019). These shifts have hitherto been observed in quite indeterminate fashion, particularly in formally democratic contexts. In this article we contribute to the authoritarian neoliberalism literature by arguing that post-2015, in states such as the UK and France, governments have safeguarded neoliberalism through the elevation of home affairs policy, underpinned by the advance of a

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mutated form of legitimation. We empirically map these shifts in authoritarian governance along two interrelated axes: (1) increased police powers and repression of protests and civil liberties; (2) enhanced border security and restrictions on citizenship. We show how, despite clear variations, in both the UK and France state power and new legitimation processes have been deployed in order to consolidate a form of neoliberalism which lionises the nation, unabashedly commits to othering, and displaces economic anxieties onto cultural terrains. Furthermore, our analysis reveals how, in a context of declining legitimacy and neoliberal 'drift', governments have utilised popular resistance to authoritarian reforms to generate new forms of reactionary 'consent', perpetuating punitive measures and hostility towards the marginalised.

The first section situates the analysis within the framework of authoritarian neoliberalism, accentuating scholarship which has identified the role of policing, borders and home affairs in neoliberal governance and capitalism more widely. In so doing we delineate the key contributions of the article, firstly in analysing the interplay between authoritarian reforms and shifting politics of legitimation, and secondly in highlighting how resistance provoked by increasing authoritarianism is harnessed by neoliberal governments to reorient legitimacy and accelerate coercive measures. Secondly, we outline our methodological approach, designed to compare political developments in these two territories while situating them within a conceptualisation of the state accommodative of social struggle as well as the wider context of evolving neoliberal governance. We then analyse shifts in governing and legitimation processes in Britain and France, focusing on the Johnson and Macron administrations while carefully historicising authoritarian lineages in both countries. We conclude by reflecting on similarities and differences in trajectories of authoritarianism in late neoliberalism, and what this entails for resistance to neoliberalisation.

2. Mutated legitimation and the elevation of home affairs in late authoritarian neoliberalism

The authoritarian neoliberalism synthesis is predicated on the observation that, in a context of neoliberal hegemonic decline following the GFC, the increasing deployment of authoritarian measures on the part of states entailed a concomitant shift away from the search for consent (Bruff, 2014: 116). This claim has been subject to question in several more recent accounts which have demonstrated how, since 2008, governments who remain committed to neoliberal economic policy continue to seek legitimacy for ever more fragile programmes, both in so-called 'formally democratic' countries and beyond (e.g., Adaman and Akbulut, 2021; Ward and Ward, 2023). At the heart of Bruff's observation, however, is the point that prior to 2008 neoliberalism was presented as socially desirable, a project which promised a better, market-based world in which the attitudes and behaviours of citizens could be remoulded in the image of the entrepreneurial market actor (Brown, 2015; Foucault, 2008). Whilst many scholars have highlighted how this outlook remains central to attempts to preserve neoliberal legitimacy (Da Costa Vieira, 2023; İşleyen and Kreitmeyr, 2021; Kreitmeyr, 2019), following the GFC, the promise of the market utopia largely unravelled. Persistent stagnation has revealed neoliberalism for what it is, a programme which has failed to offer much beyond the 'deterioration in [most people's] living and working conditions' (Bozkurt-Güngen, 2018: 220; Dardot and Laval, 2019).

In a context of economic fragility and declining legitimacy, therefore, many governments have changed gear, dispensing with discourses that present neoliberalism as desirable and instead pursuing 'mutated', 'regressive' forms of legitimation (Davies and Gane, 2021; Peck and Theodore, 2019). This shift has been documented in accounts which highlight how elites have increasingly advanced populist tropes to maintain electoral support for the collapsing neoliberal project among sections of the population more amenable to authoritarian politics (Arsel et al., 2021). In the context of austerity, legitimation attempts in this mould sought to divide citizens along imagined social lines of 'deservingness' and merit, establishing a particularly punitive politics directed towards poor and marginalised communities (Adaman and Akbulut, 2021; Davies, 2016; Lavery, 2018). Building on this narrative of scarcity, increasingly 'distorted' attempts to maintain legitimacy subsequently emerged which stoked 'resurgent forms of nationalism… refocus[ing] attention onto territory and borders' (Davies and Gane, 2021: 13; Peck and Theodore, 2019: 261-2; also see Brown, 2019; Hendrikse, 2018). Of particular importance here is the construction of threats and barriers to national sovereignty, economic wealth, and the 'popular will', whether that be in the form of trade unions, popular movements, migrants and racialised communities, or political bodies challenging the executive (Søndergaard, 2023; Ward & Ward, 2023). In this sense, neoliberal governments hope that segments of the population, alienated by declining living standards and a sense of socio-cultural loss, can be mobilised to support coercive measures targeted at opponents of neoliberalisation through 'a reactionary recoding' of economic anxieties (Brindisi, 2021: 275-276).

This (re)configuration of neoliberal legitimacy is not entirely new. Hall's 'authoritarian populism' (1979, 1985a) presciently described how the increasingly imposing nature of the British state as experienced by most of the UK population in the late 1970 s created space for the Conservative Party to position itself 'out there "with the people"' and against those representing the bureaucracy of the social democratic consensus (Hall, 1979: 17-18; also see Prasad, 2006). Cultivation of this critique of the status quo alongside a series of 'moral panics' regarding race, law and order and the wider social malaise allowed the Conservative Party – somewhat paradoxically – to attain the 'gloss of populist consent' (Hall, 1985a,b: 116) for imposition of reforms which Poulantzas termed 'authoritarian statism'. This new regime was characterised by 'intensified state control over every sphere of socio-economic life combined with radical decline of the institutions of political democracy…with draconian and multiform curtailment of so-called 'formal' liberties' (Poulantzas, 1978: 203-4). Following this intellectual lineage, Bruff and Tansel (2019: 235) note that whilst the post-GFC moment does not necessarily signify a 'radical break' from pre-crisis governing practices, 'the crisis…did play an important role in heightening the extant anti-democratic tendencies of neoliberalism as well as generating new and mutated mechanisms'.

Here, we return to Bruff's (2014: 115) initial formulation of authoritarian neoliberalism which distinguished between measures which transparently exhibit aspects of 'brute coercive force (for instance, policing of demonstrations, racist political rhetoric)' as well as those which involve more subtle reconfigurations of 'state and institutional power in an attempt to insulate certain policies and institutional practices from social and political dissent'. Empirical contributions to this literature have, therefore, highlighted incremental reforms which enhance executive control over the political system through processes of centralisation (e.g., Cozzolino, 2019; Tansel, 2019; Ward and Ward, 2023), as well as a range of more overt expressions of coercion on the part of the state to impose, protect and extend neoliberalization (e.g., Briken and Eich, 2017; Laub, 2021).

Building especially on the latter, we contribute to the authoritarian neoliberalism synthesis by arguing that post-2008, the intensification of repressive and regressive governance in formally democratic states like the UK and France has manifested through the elevation of home affairs alongside a mutated form of legitimation. As Hall and O'Shea (2013) argued, since the 1980s political actors have tried to embed both authoritarian *and* market-oriented sentiments into the popular imaginary: a neoliberal common sense. Such moves aim at matching, responding to, and cultivating people's 'ordinary aspirations' and recurring fears (Hall, 1991: 123). We contend that the protracted collapse of the ideal of a liberal market utopia has redirected attempts to (re-)define this common sense towards increasingly reactionary sentiments. This presages a 'hard-shell' neoliberalism which has only been observed at a general level hitherto and is yet to be fully conceptualised in terms of legitimation. Importantly, the incomplete character of such

authoritarian projects is derived from the fact that this 'mutated' form of legitimation necessarily relies on othering and division, echoing Hall's (1991: 127) observation that hegemony is 'not a formation which incorporates everybody'.[1] Our contribution is thus, firstly, to empirically map and analyse the interplay between increasingly authoritarian reforms in relation to policing and borders and attempts to enlist *some* citizens to accept and shore up this elevation of home affairs policy and its repressive effects.

Secondly, we return to Poulantzas's (1978: 241-47) 'strengthening/weakening' formula in understanding the centrality of social struggle to conceptualisations of the state, and how authoritarian statism itself produces new forms of struggle that may further entrench authoritarianism. Authoritarian reforms provoke new patterns of dissidence which neoliberal governments utilise to further accelerate authoritarianism and hostility towards the marginalised. Indeed, we show how political actors seek to capitalise on instances of resistance to generate new forms of reactionary 'consent' – fragile and limited as they are – to safeguard the deepening of authoritarian 'practices, repertoires and spectrums' (Bruff & Tansel, 2019: 235). In a context of declining legitimacy and economic stagnation, this dialectical dynamic between state reforms and social struggle can accelerate and perpetuate institutionalisation of authoritarian modes of governance, the rationalisation of such practices, and attempts to normalise associated modes of thinking. Here we build on recent accounts of authoritarian acceleration (Altınörs and Akçay, 2022) and of state-citizen relations under neoliberalisation. The latter in particular highlight how attempts to reappropriate or resist encroachment of the state into everyday life can paradoxically perpetuate authoritarianism (Koch, 2018: 227), or how the weakening of public services entails the institutionalisation of harsher, securitised responses to citizens' needs (Laub, 2023).

The following analysis illustrates the intensification of authoritarian governance and elevation of home affairs along two axes: (1) increased police powers and repression of protests and civil liberties; (2) enhanced border security and restrictions on citizenship. These axes are intimately linked. While research has already emphasised the continued importance of these two spheres to neoliberal governance (Yuval-Davis et al., 2019), an appreciation of colonial history and contextualisation within racial capitalism highlights how these, ostensibly separate, spheres have historically 'been part of the same overarching system' (Axster et al., 2021: 428). Indeed, policing, incarceration and immigration policies are driven by the need to protect private property and accumulation through reproduction of racialised and other forms of oppression. Though not always explicit, this observation is threaded throughout various empirical analyses of these dynamics within the frame of authoritarian neoliberalism (see Briken and Eich, 2017; Keck and Clua-Losada, 2021). Moreover, as noted by Smith (2019: 208-9), border management and policing not only demonstrate continuities with colonial practices, they have also served as vehicles for accumulation through outsourcing and privatisation whilst 'insulating' neoliberal governments from popular dissent within a context of declining legitimacy. Our approach seeks to incorporate these insights to highlight how proper historicisation of the UK and France reveals the sedimented colonial and racialised lineages which permeate the institutions, public policies and civil societies of each territory.

3. Methodology

In illustrating the relationship between authoritarian reforms and social struggles in the mutating politics of neoliberal legitimacy, we draw on the work of McMichael (1990) and Weber (2007) to structure the analysis. Orthodox comparative methodology in international political economy and political science tends to justify case selection through identification of institutional characteristics as key variables around which to centre the analysis (see e.g., Clift & McDaniel, 2021; Hall & Soskice, 2001; Prasad, 2006). The resulting centrality of the nation-state to such comparative studies has been subject to extensive critique, with scholars noting the reductive nature of solely intra-national explanations and fetishisation of the 'nation-state' itself as the primary unit of analysis (Axster et al., 2021; Bruff, 2021), as well as the concealment of social forces beyond the state which are, nonetheless, 'constitutive of social and political life' (Weber, 2007: 561).

We employ McMichael's (1990) technique of 'incorporated comparison' to account for these critiques and to situate the study within a global and more deeply historical perspective. Specifically, we utilise 'singular incorporated comparison' which seeks to analyse 'variation in or across space within a world-historical conjuncture' (1990: 389). In this sense the design echoes aspects of cross-sectional or conjunctural analysis (see Hall et al., 1978; Jefferson, 2021; Peck, 2023) in identifying interconnections between ostensibly separate processes to illuminate the characteristics of a global conjuncture. Rather than conducting a formal comparison based on identifying concordance with, or variance from, assumptions about 'cases', the design seeks to 'progressively *construct* a whole as a methodological procedure by giving context to historical phenomena' (McMichael, 1990: 386, italics original). Whilst we retain a focus on states as 'key actors' in construction of specific national imaginaries (Gallo 2021), as well as an awareness of the importance of relevant state institutions in developing and maintaining particular practices (i.e., the Home Office or *Ministère de L'Intérieur*), the focus on holistic contextualisation in McMichael's framework facilitates incorporation of struggle and resistance in political formation within and beyond the realm of the nation-state (Weber, 2007: 568).

Furthermore, in locating the elevation of home affairs in the UK and France within global historical-economic context, it is also essential to note how practices of migration and border management, policing, and incarceration are deeply rooted in colonial legacies (Axster et al., 2021). As noted above, this observation emphasises the entrenched lineage of British and French colonialism, illuminating relationships between colonial military policing and contemporary *domestic* law enforcement (Blanchard, 2020; El-Enany, 2020). Whilst the analysis necessitates special attention is paid to distinct features of the present conjuncture, therefore, this deeper historical perspective also properly contextualises the origins, interconnections, and structural continuities of state practices.

4. Incorporated comparison: The UK and France

Issues of periodisation have been subject to extensive contestation within the field of authoritarian neoliberalism, with scholars highlighting the authoritarianism inherent within the initial imposition of neoliberalism as well as the resurgence of such measures following the GFC (see Fabry, 2019; Ryan, 2019; Ward & Ward, 2023). Embracing the 'inevitable messiness' that periodisation entails (Bruff & Tansel, 2019: 238), we propose to foreground the politicisation of European borders which surrounded the 2015 refugee crisis[2] as a critical moment in the elevation of home affairs policy (De Genova, 2018). The crisis intensified pre-existing practices through the reimposition of internal border controls within the European Union (EU) as well as precipitating several externalisation agreements with Middle East and North African countries which sought to 'offshore' migration management (see Casella

[1] This point is particularly important to note in the context of Koch's work on 'everyday' interpretations of consent and legitimacy, which highlights how citizens 'invoke a situational legitimacy of the state, one which is always fragile [and] shifting' (2018: 227) and complicates the idea that ostensible popular support for authoritarian programmes equates to fulsome or meaningful consent.

[2] This was rooted in ongoing Western intervention – with the UK and France as prominent actors – in North Africa and the Middle East and the growing influence of climate breakdown (Manunza, 2017).

Colombeau, 2020; Trilling, 2018). Whilst 'juxtaposed controls' have been operational at the English Channel since the 1990s, this period also saw introduction of a similar system at the French-Italian border via both exceptional suspensions to the Schengen Agreement and *extra-legal* methods (Carratero, 2022). Utilisation of such 'shadow zones' by the French border force illuminates the spatial interconnections between externalised border management in the UK and France and illustrates how border regimes transmit across time and space as authoritarian practices rooted in colonial legacies working both above and below the state (Gurol et al., 2023).

Situated within a wider economic context of enduring austerity, the heightened tensions surrounding borders and territory the crisis provoked intensified discourses of law and order, security, and welfare eligibility in safeguarding neoliberal legitimacy. These 'populist mutations of neoliberalism' were exploited by backers of the Brexit project to build popular support in the UK, while discourses of *laïcité* and Islamophobia were concurrently foregrounded in France. Within this wider 'regime of exception' and crisis, the Macron administration secured an historically strong mandate for neoliberal reforms in its first term, while Johnson's Conservative Party sought to capitalise on the Brexit deadlock to safeguard the entrenched neoliberal regime in the UK. Hostility towards the wider political system, portrayed as stagnant, obstructive and distant, combined with a reassertion of the executive and national sovereignty, formed a central plank of both political projects. In seeking to reconstruct the whole from this analysis, therefore, the article explores how the increased contestation of borders, citizenship, and economic reforms has underpinned the elevation of home affairs policy in seeking to maintain neoliberal legitimacy.

4.1. *Preserving 'public order' and hardening the hostile environment in Johnson's Britain*

As was well documented by Hall et al. (1978), neoliberalism in the UK emerged from an economic impasse precipitated by deepening profitability crises and deteriorating capital-labour relations, which ultimately exhausted consent for the post-war Labourist compromise. In this context, Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Party reoriented their legitimation strategy, seeking to develop a divisive 'authoritarian populism' which attacked the social democratic consensus whilst strengthening and co-opting elements of the state responsible for 'law and order' (see Hall, 1985a,b; Ward and Ward, 2023). Despite substantial shifts in the global economic and domestic social policy context over the next two decades, when the Labour Party returned to office in 1997 not only did Tony Blair commit to maintaining the central tenets of Thatcher's economic reforms, but the party was also quick to adopt the mantra of 'law and order' around policing and anti-social behaviour (Koch, 2018). Moreover, the New Labour Home Office capitalised on technological innovations to increase surveillance and restrict civil liberties in light of the 'war on terror', advancing the securitisation of the British state (Laub, 2021), whilst limiting asylum seekers' ability to remain in the UK through a slew of legislative reforms (Mayblin, 2017: 15-20).

The austerity programme which followed the GFC ushered in an increasingly punitive, toxic and racialised 're-nationalising' discourse rooted in the moral economy of 'deservingness', epitomised and institutionalised through the advent of the Hostile Environment in the Home Office (Goodfellow, 2019; Stanley, 2022). The institutional architecture to accelerate anti-migrant policies was, therefore, well established prior to the 2015 refugee crisis, with measures such as the Immigration Act 2014 and the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 laying the ground for increased hostility towards racialised minorities. This legislation deputised immigration control throughout public services via measures such as PREVENT, and the removal of protections for Commonwealth citizens, culminating in the Windrush scandal (Griffiths and Yeo, 2021; Kaleem, 2022). As noted by a range of post-colonial scholars, these events: 1) set the stage for pro-Brexit campaigners to exploit the onset of the refugee crisis as an example of the inadequacies EU border management (Virdee & McGeever, 2018: 1806); 2) clearly illuminated the relationship between Britain's colonial past and safeguarding neoliberal legitimacy contemporarily, as racialised citizens were further victimised in an effort to secure some form of consent for austerity (El-Enany, 2020).

This context is essential in identifying the structural factors built into the institutions and practices of the British state over decades as well as aspects of the elevation of home affairs more contingent to the aftermath of the EU referendum and the Johnson administration. Appreciation of these foundations illustrates how the politics of legitimation in this context have become ever-more dependent on hostile discourses which seek to 'other' certain communities and attack elements of the political system outside the executive. Johnson's Conservative Party capitalised on both elements, exploiting the nationalist, anti-migrant narrative foregrounded during the Brexit process and wider anti-political sentiment cemented by the 2016–19 parliamentary deadlock to secure a strong mandate in 2019. In substantiating the argument, the following analysis focuses on shifts in legitimation processes and institutional and legislative reforms across two areas: 1) increased police powers and restrictions on protests and civil liberties; 2) enhanced border security and restrictions on citizenship and human rights.

4.1.1. *Increased police powers and restrictions on protests and civil liberties*

The depth and entrenchment of austerity in the UK post-2010 ensured no area of public services was spared, including policing. From a record high of over 140,000 officers under New Labour, the total number of police fell by 20,600 from March 2010-March 2019, with an attendant 19 % cut to the overall budget (Full Fact, 2019). Despite extensive cuts, scholars studying the intersection of austerity and the wider 'punitive turn' in UK state-citizen relations noted that the revival of tactics such as stop and search from 2015 onwards, as well as the extension of surveillance mechanisms in poorer communities, ensured these cuts 'did not reduce the relevance of the police for the governance of austerity' (Laub, 2021: 6). A turning point in this context was the murder of a young black man – Mark Duggan – in London in 2011, which led to nationwide unrest and provoked Prime Minister David Cameron and London Mayor Boris Johnson to authorise especially hostile policing and sentencing in response (Tiratelli, 2021). The increasingly punitive conditions experienced by marginalised citizens in their engagements with the state, along with the 'deputisation' of law enforcement throughout public services entailed a shift in the politics of policing under austerity (Griffiths and Yeo, 2021).

Following the extension of these more punitive tactics, the 2019 Conservative manifesto pledged to reinforce overall policing capacity, devoting one of its six pillars to guarantee '20,000 more police and tougher sentencing for criminals' (Conservative Party, 2019). Recapitulating regular Tory tropes of law and order, the manifesto granted additional police powers regarding stop and search and use of tasers, as well as enshrinement of the Police Covenant to recognise the bravery of frontline officers (Conservative Party, 2019: 2, 18). The promise to return policing to pre-austerity levels chimed with the public mood and drew on the Thatcher playbook by entwining the Conservative Party with public safety to elevate the role of law enforcement within Johnson's politics of support.

Several events during the first 18-months of the majority Johnson administration complicated this agenda, including Covid-19, Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests, and the murder of Sarah Everard. Though a discussion of the restrictions on individual freedoms due to Covid-19 lies beyond the scope of the present paper, it is important to note that during the pandemic the fragmented nature of policing in England especially led to several forces overreaching their already considerable powers granted through Coronavirus legislation (see Liberty, 2020).

The outburst of protest and anti-racist campaigning triggered by the murder of George Floyd in the USA and the increased consciousness of structural racism it provoked was central to how the Johnson

administration sought to adapt this narrative. As BLM grew in prominence across the UK, with protests targeting monuments that glorified Britain's colonial past, Johnson and Home Secretary Priti Patel responded by accusing protestors of criminality, stating that the movement had been 'hijacked by extremists intent on violence' (BBC, 2020). The government exploited the protests to stoke a divisive 'culture wars' rhetoric in opposition to anti-racist demands, with ministers seeking to delegitimize and 'other' the movement as 'neo-Marxists' and 'anti-capitalists' whose primary concern was to overthrow the system rather than tackle institutional racism (Chaddah, 2021). This theme developed throughout the administration, pivoting to target the direct-action tactics of climate activists especially to initiate measures which clamped down upon, and delegitimised, freedoms of assembly and expression.

Within this context a wave of legislation was introduced providing protections to police officers whilst enhancing their discretionary powers to curtail protest and civil liberties. The Covert Human Intelligence Sources (CHIS) Act 2021 provided additional legal protections for undercover officers from prosecution for criminal conduct. This legislation illustrated the intimate connections between Britain's colonial past, the violent initial neoliberalization of the UK economy, and the contemporary elevation of home affairs. In a context where the government was increasing police powers in general, the CHIS Act was introduced whilst the government was also pursuing amnesty for British soldiers responsible for violence in Northern Ireland. Moreover, an ongoing inquiry into undercover policing uncovered evidence of specific undercover units who infiltrated the trade union movement during the late 1970s–1980s to undermine resistance to neoliberal reforms, as well as institutional racism through infiltration of the campaign for justice for Stephen Lawrence (Kelly & Burns, 2023).

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts (PCSC) Bill clearly exemplified the agenda of the Johnson government to strengthen mechanisms of 'brute coercive force' to curtail civil liberties and elevate home affairs in its politics of legitimation. The Bill further extended police discretion and explicitly targeted protestors and activists that presented extra-parliamentary obstacles to the continued neoliberalization of the UK economy. However, introduction of the Bill coincided with another upsurge in resistance triggered by the kidnapping and murder of Sarah Everard by an off-duty police officer. Aggressive policing of peaceful vigils to commemorate the murder, along with the fact that Everard's killer had utilised the pandemic context to conduct a false arrest of a young woman, intensified resistance to the legislation. As opposition to the legislation gained momentum, there were clashes throughout the UK between police and protestors, providing further ammunition for the government to stoke hostility towards those resisting these draconian reforms (Skopeliti, 2021).

Following a pattern of executive centralisation associated with the administration (Ward & Ward, 2023), 18-pages of late-stage amendments were introduced when the bill was near assent in an attempt to avoid scrutiny in Parliament. These amendments sought to expand discretion around stop and search for protest-related matters, introduce additional restrictions on 'disruptive' protests, as well as create a host of new offences related to obstruction of highways and transport infrastructure, expressly targeting the tactics of climate activists (Gayle, 2023). As noted in an independent assessment of the measures, this raft of amendments 'interfere[d] with the rights of freedom of expression and freedom of assembly' protected by the European Convention on Human Rights (Lines, 2022).

Opposition in the House of Lords ultimately led to government concessions to pass the legislation. However, the same measures were repackaged in 2022 as the 'Public Order Bill', with Home Secretary Patel couching the legislation in the same 'law and order' discourse: 'From day one, this Government have put the safety and the interests of the law-abiding majority first…we need to back our police officers by giving them the powers and the tools they need to fight crime and protect the public' (HoC Debates, Vol. 715, 2022). Despite myriad challenges to this trajectory, therefore, throughout the duration of the Johnson premiership the discourse of law and order and legislative reforms to enhance police powers and restrict protests and civil liberties constituted a wider attempt to elevate home affairs in constructing an increasingly hostile politics of legitimation.

4.1.2. *Enhanced border security and restrictions on citizenship*

As several post-colonial scholars have highlighted, the history of the British state vis-à-vis the politics of citizenship and migration is imbued with the racism of its colonial past, clearly manifest through the cultivation of the Home Office Hostile Environment and the narrowing of British citizenship encapsulated by events such as the Windrush scandal (Goodfellow, 2019; El Enany, 2020). Although the Thatcher administration pivoted between overtly Powellite rhetoric of Britain being 'swamped by migrants' and less racialised appeals to all citizens to develop entrepreneurial instincts (Shilliam, 2018: 116), migration and border management are intimately connected to neoliberalization in the UK, with borders and asylum infrastructure continuing to offer new opportunities for accumulation through privatization (Davies et al., 2022: 135-152). The coincidence of the 2015 refugee crisis and the nascent Brexit campaign enabled Leave advocates to draw together borders, migration and EU membership, cultivating the 'perception' of a migration crisis in Britain to connect Euroscepticism with anti-immigration attitudes (Evans and Menon, 2017: 20).

Building on the prominence of Brexit and its associations with sovereignty and immigration in the 2019 election, Johnson's Conservatives focused another of their pledges around creation of 'an Australian-style points-based system to control immigration' (Conservative Party, 2019: 5). The enduring focus on imitation of the Australian model is notable in that it connotes a more punitive, disciplinary system, strengthening the perception of a hard border enforced through measures such as offshore detention and processing to protect the national interest (Smith, 2019). In this sense, the commitment to implement an 'Australian-style' system formed a central plank of the Conservatives attempts to secure legitimation through the elevation of home affairs.

Discourses of race and migration returned with renewed impetus during 2020–22 as bilateral agreements to strengthen the juxtaposed controls regime at the English Channel throughout 2018–19 led to increased numbers of asylum seekers crossing in small boats (Bosworth, 2022). In terms of legislative and institutional reforms which strengthened both the physical and constructed border infrastructure, the Johnson Home Office accelerated aspects of the Hostile Environment in this context. Whilst successive governments developed an inhospitable asylum system based on the principle of deterrence and diffusion of the border through everyday life, the ostensibly electoral motivations of the policy along with its misconception of refugee decision-making have contributed to its failure (Tecca, 2021). As a consequence of this and the demise of other safe and legal routes for entry to the UK, under the Johnson government the number of people crossing the Channel from France in small boats reached record levels: 28,526 in 2021 and over 45,000 in 2022. Pressured by the far-right, the government cultivated a moral panic over the issue which legitimised increasingly militarized management of the UK-France border through use of drones and private security firms. This has worked in tandem with the privatization of detention centres within the UK, constituting the creation of a border-industrial complex worth £billions to a range of multinational security firms (Davies et al., 2022: 135-152).

The hardening of state borders manifested through implementation of the foundations of a 'points-based' migration system and limitations on free movement of EU citizens in December 2020 (McKinney et al., 2022). These measures were strengthened and consolidated through the Nationality and Borders Act introduced in July 2021, which was positioned by Patel as the next step in the Home Office strategy of deterrence (HoC Debates, Vol. 699, Col. 706, 2021). This legislation introduced a two-tier system for asylum in the UK under which so-called 'irregular migrants' receive less support from the state, it is more difficult to prove refugee status, and access to British citizenship is further restricted. The

latter had implications not only for new entrants, but also for those who had spent decades in the UK with no requirement to prove their citizenship due to shifts in the status of former colonies. The legislation also granted powers to the Home Secretary to remove citizenship without prior notice if an individual was deemed to present an unspecified security risk, leading campaigners to accuse the government of precipitating a second Windrush scandal (van der Merwe, 2022). These measures sought to further coarsen the state's interactions with migrants and redraw the requirements for citizenship whilst simultaneously centralising power to determine these matters with the Home Secretary.

Finally, the legislation paved the way for offshoring of asylum processing through the 'Migration and Economic Development Partnership' with Rwanda announced in the summer of 2022. Despite repeated concerns raised by senior civil servants as to the practicability of the policy, Patel issued a ministerial direction – a diktat to override officials' concerns regarding value for money – to implement the agreement, yet a further example of centralisation of power (Gower & Butchard, 2022). Once again, the policy faced significant resistance, and was found to be in breach of the European Court of Human Rights. However, the government's continued commitment to the policy contributes to the wider narrative which seeks to 'other' and filter migrants according to apparent measures of deservingness, as well as to push against political and legal institutions which present barriers to the executive. It thus presents an abject example of state hardening, realising the next stage of the hostile environment and elevating home affairs in an attempt to maintain legitimacy.

4.2. *Militarised protest management and authoritarian secularism in Macron's France*

Despite the popular images of resistance that France conjures up, the transformation of its economy has been underway since at least the proto-neoliberal period of Valery Giscard d'Estaing in the 1970s. Since then, successive privatisations, liberalisations, welfare and labour market reforms have been achieved by the French state — although always at the cost of substantial concessions to labour (Amable and Palombarini, 2021; Godin, 2019; Masquelier, 2021: 66). Emmanuel Macron can be understood both against this background as well as in comparison to the UK. In short, he has been described as France's Margaret Thatcher, a missionary bent on neoliberalising France to (re)impose market discipline, boost national competitiveness and restore profitability (Biscahie, 2022: 324-341; Amable and Palombarini, 2021: 132–144). Macron's novelty and importance however lies not in his principled economics, but rather in the unprecedented means he is ready to employ to transcend the state's legitimation crisis and complete France's neoliberalisation (Cos and Escalona, 2022: 68). In that sense, he is France's 'last neoliberal' (Amable and Palombarini, 2021), that is the 'authoritarian representative of [neoliberalism's] final assault' (Godin, 2019: 14).

We however argue that not only do the means employed for this final assault bear the hallmarks of authoritarian neoliberalism, increasingly they are underpinned by a 'mutated' form of legitimation. Macron's initial legitimation strategy was one of market utopianism, promising to shape France into a 'start-up nation', a competitive international hub that would attract investors and unleash the entrepreneurial energies of the French people (Godin, 2019: 140–142). However, this optimism rapidly floundered as the new government entered its second year and Macron faced his Thatcher moment. In the Autumn of 2018, France's post-GFC tensions crystallised in the form of the Yellow Vests, the biggest social movement since 1968 (see Chamorel, 2019; Laval, 2020). We argue that the rejection of neoliberal reforms epitomised by the Yellow Vests precipitated the government's movement towards the elevation of home affairs, while simultaneously bringing a hostile form of legitimation — which both justified, and was facilitated by, this deepening authoritarianism — to the forefront. As with the UK case, the formation and development of this approach may be grouped in two broad, non-exhaustive categories: 1) increased police powers and restrictions on protests and civil liberties; 2) enhanced border security and restrictions on citizenship and human rights.

4.2.1. *Increased police powers and restrictions on protests and civil liberties*

The resort to authoritarianism in policing, protests and civil liberties governance precipitated by the Yellow Vests crisis should be located in longer historical trends. Two intertwined elements are of importance here. First, it can be argued that despite the French state's determination to implement neoliberalism, the French people are yet to be won over by this political project. Indeed, studies show that the French have long distrusted many neoliberal principles and capitalist values more widely (Girerd, Verniers and Bonnot, 2021). Consequently, France's neoliberalisation unfolded without the multidirectional legitimacy (however incomplete) brought by the 'kind of neoliberal "moral order" found in other countries like the US and UK' (Masquelier, 2021: 67).

Secondly, and partly because of this partial resistance to neoliberalisation, in the 1990s an already strong French state grew increasingly impatient with both popular protests and riots from marginalised communities and went down the path of militarisation and authoritarianism over successive decades. One of the key moments here was the 1995 strikes against pension and welfare reforms which inflicted a traumatising defeat on the state, pushing it towards an increasingly authoritarian management of protests through repressive policing (Fillieule and Jobard, 2020).

These events, and others during Nicolas Sarkozy's term as *Minister de l'Intérieur* (2002–2007) and later President (2007–2012), increasingly exacerbated the characteristic centralisation and coercive nature of the French state's repressive apparatus. For instance, after riots in the 2000s, police forces were mandated to use techniques and weapons (such as GLI-F4 grenades, or the LBD-40 'Flash ball') forbidden in almost all other European countries (Trouillard, 2021: 4-5). The police thus became a political tool used ever-more aggressively by French governments to repress the population. Backed by a revolutionary legacy which underpins the claim of the central state to act as the sole legitimate guardian of the people (Mouhanna, 2020), the French state has instituted particularly harsh policing techniques, providing an acute expression of the 'imperial boomerang' effects of France's unique colonial heritage on domestic law enforcement (see Blanchard, 2020).

The Yellow Vests brought these trends to a head in a cocktail of violence and resistance. Macron's government was overwhelmed by the size and militancy of the movement, and quickly resorted to coercion. The CRS (riot police) were deployed *en masse*, and the BAC, another segment of the police that works aggressively in the banlieues and is not trained with protests, was called to support them. The BAC, a unit marked by colonial and racialised legacies, generalised its resort to violent tactics traditionally developed and used primarily against marginalised citizens of colour (Blanchard, 2020: 45-47; Dayan-Herzbrun, Löwy, and Varikas, 2021).

Yet in the Yellow Vests crisis, it was not just the violence of the police response that was noteworthy — several dead, dozens losing eyes and limbs, hundreds severely wounded (Laval, 2020; Trouillard, 2021). Rather, it was how the government and state institutions intensified legal and illegal repression, and entrenched police violence. The government immediately responded to the Yellow Vests protests by embedding a new protest strategy that authorised large-scale use of 'non-lethal' weapons and normalised violent contact with protesters (Trouillard, 2021: 4-5). The judicial apparatus quickly turned to problematic practices, from overusing existing laws to criminalise peaceful protesters, to giving unprecedented sentences involving prison, fines, and even forbidding protesters to take part in demonstrations and to return to Paris for years. In an instance which epitomised the state's propensity to initiate and conceal illegal practices, in Paris judicial authorities reinterpreted Sarkozy-era legislation to instruct magistrates to keep protesters in jail for days even if innocent, specifically to reduce the protesters' ranks (Laval, 2020: 14-15; Loriol, 2020: 147).

Moreover, the government institutionalised the criminalisation of protesters with a raft of new laws. Legislation creating a new range of offences was announced and passed in early 2019, establishing unparalleled surveillance of and constraints on protesters' rights (Cassia, 2019: 121-122). Other legal and judicial innovations curtailing civil liberties and preemptively criminalising protests were developed the same year through introduction of new means to preventatively ban individuals from joining protests and expose protestors' identities while providing additional protections for police. Building on Hollande-era terrorist laws, this effectively led to a 'trivialisation', or normalisation, of the 'state of emergency' (Laval, 2020: 14-17; Trouillard, 2021: 11).

This unparalleled governmental and judicial authoritarianism and police violence were legitimated by giving unconditional support to the state's repressive apparatus through outright lies and victim-blaming. Macron's starting assumption, formulated in his 2016 book, was explicit: 'democracy isn't the streets'. Thus, as state-mandated coercion flared up for months, the Interior Minister claimed not a single member of the police had committed violence, and the President made clear that it was 'unacceptable' to talk of 'repression' and 'police violence' in France, 'a country with the rule of law' (Macron, cited in Jobard, 2022: 252–253). The Interior Minister even remade Max Weber into an authoritarian thinker by asserting that 'the monopoly of legitimate violence is that of the police forces' (Darmanin, cited in Dayan-Herzbrun, Löwy, and Varikas, 2021: 159).

This not only signalled a government trying to capitalise on the popular desire to see order restored, it simultaneously betrayed a generalised attempt to discredit the popular and institutional forces opposing liberalisation and 'modernity' (Chamorel, 2019: 55-56). During his campaign, Macron had painted a picture of a country blocked in an impasse, shackled by corporatist bodies, and reluctant to take necessary risks (Bickerton & Accetti, 2021: 62). French syndicalists were labelled as 'those people leading to the country's ruin' (Tervé, 2018), and those protesting labour market flexibilisation as 'cynics, the lazy and extremists' (Jobard, 2022: 252–253). In 2018, shortly before the Yellow Vests crisis, he even depicted the French as 'Gauls resisting change' (L'Express, 2018). Though the Yellow Vests crisis provoked some concessions and a momentary stop to the roll-out of his neoliberal agenda, Macron ultimately sought to utilise the crisis to build legitimacy for the acceleration of restrictions on protest and to secure further neoliberalization of the French economy (Chamorel, 2019).

4.2.2. *Enhanced border security and restrictions on citizenship*

Meanwhile, the Macron government sought to prop up its support base by pursuing state hardening and authoritarian legitimation in the interrelated fields of immigration, religion, terrorism and human rights. Historically, like many European welfare states, France developed through processes of accumulation that simultaneously marginalised colonised people while relying on their influx to provide cheap labour. While racialised difference and the role it plays for national accumulation has longstanding precedent, under neoliberalism welfare retrenchment and austerity have exacerbated marginalisation and social tensions. This has underpinned the state's search for legitimation through securitisation, that is, a rationale for preventing migration and controlling the colonial 'other' in the name of national integrity (Bhagat, 2021: 635-636). In France, this securitising drive is visible under the guise of preserving national 'community', and builds on the well-entrenched, imperial-era notion of 'mission civilisatrice'. This perceives French culture and *laïcité* as 'inherently superior to the culture of immigrants', especially Muslims, and thus concludes that secularism and strict assimilationist policies are needed to safeguard national 'unity' (Haddad & Balz, 2006: 25-26).

In this equation, differences in values, ideology and religion are threats to the nation's indivisibility. In the context of neoliberalisation, both the UK and France have seen a gradual reconceptualisation of citizenship through 'neoliberal communitarianism', whereby citizenship is viewed not as an automatic right but as a sacralised privilege to be earned – and which can be lost if one does not adhere to the host country's values and norms (Van Houdt et al., 2011). Pressed by the gradual rise of the far-right, French governments have instrumentalised this concept of earned citizenship to feed into a new consent-building strategy. This strategy seeks to redirect public anxieties away from the context of economic stagnation and austerity, and towards a crisis of national identity, whose existence justifies the need to 'perform sovereignty' via an increasingly authoritarian management of immigration and religion. This "blood and soil" neoliberalism (Brindisi, 2021: 275) entailed the shift to a narrative of desired and undesired immigration, and policies that increased deportations and tightened inward flows (Ocak, 2016). These themes were linked to the issue of Islam, with the infamous debate around the niqab, which was denounced as a danger to *laïcité* and Republican values (Mielusel and Pruteanu, 2020: 61-62). The Hollande government swiftly built on this, using the migrant crisis and terror attacks of 2015 to extend control of Islamic organisations, normalise state of emergency measures and use counterterrorist laws to entrench securitisation. 'Undesirable' immigration and religion became permanently framed as causes of social disintegration and economic stagnation (Mielusel and Pruteanu, 2020).

Altogether, Cohen-Almagor (2022) argues that these shifts express how in many ways, the old French trinity of 'liberty, equality, fraternity' has now been replaced by a new trinity: 'indivisibility, security and laïcité'. This new trinity represents the remaking of solidarity into totalising national integrity, of unconditional equality into normalised securitisation, and of freedom into the repressive use of secularism .

The Macron administration continued this trajectory, taking this new trinity to unprecedented heights in response to the 2015 migrant crisis and the rise of the far-right Rassemblement National (Mielusel and Pruteanu, 2020). Inheriting a regime which had reimposed controls at the Italian border post-2015 (Casella Colombeau, 2020), Macron instantly adopted far-right themes on issues of migration and bordering. The new administration signed off on the renewed brutalisation and criminalisation not only of migrants and asylum seekers, but also those who help them inside the country and at its borders — leading the UN to judge situations such as the one in Calais as 'inhuman'. This approach to asylum similarly aims to actively discourage claimants, by reducing accessibility of support (for example by accelerating and weakening review procedures) as well as the number of successful claims (Cassia, 2019; Dravigny, 2017; Mielusel and Pruteanu, 2020: 68-70). It also increases the "policiarisation" of asylum seeking, which sees refugees surveilled, moved and expelled from urban centres and ultimately from the country in the name of security. This treatment is justified by narratives of undesired immigration and 'asylum-shopping' that France and other European countries allegedly experience (Bhagat and Soederberg, 2019; Slama, 2018).

The Macron government's main legitimation attempt here is to resort to a now well-honed 'electoral quadriptych of fear' (Geisser, 2022). Building on the work of his predecessors, Macron has sought to recode economic anxieties onto socio-cultural issues, using the ongoing terrorist threat to link immigration, Islam, insecurity and national identity in one securitisation endeavour. This is best seen in Macron's programmatic February 2022 speech on immigration, where he clearly established a link between terrorism and immigration — asserting that open European borders entail an increased external 'terrorist risk' — while simultaneously emphasising the 'separatist' Salafist threat from inside the country (Geisser, 2022: 10-12). Such rhetoric, which only reinforces the pre-existing authoritarian management of Islam in France, places Islam at the centre of an ongoing conspiracy aiming to threaten French Republican and secularist values (Bechrouri, 2023; Geisser, 2021; Portier, 2021).

While this might be viewed as evidence of elites lacking popular legitimacy, it should not simply be seen as a 'distraction' from neoliberalism's failures, but as a distinctive legitimation process, as Wolfreys (2023: 177-178) argues. Indeed, the Macron government is seeking to entrench an authoritarian inflection of *laïcité* to win on the cultural-

societal terrain while neoliberalism fails economically. Here, notably with the 2021 law on 'separatism', the Macron government has built on Sarkozy's legacy of using secularism — as inscribed in the 1905 law to separate religion from public life and state institutions — to surveil, control and ban even moderate Muslims and Islamic organisations in the name of national security and identity (Bechrouri, 2023; Geisser, 2021). This 'conspiratorial racialisation' of Muslims as bent on undermining Western society (Zia-Ebrahimi, 2018) is exemplified by the creation of more than a hundred dedicated surveillance units in locations around the country since 2018. Under the 2021 legislation, these units are granted wide-ranging powers to monitor Muslim communities and organisations, ultimately banning numerous groups and closing hundreds of religious and social sites. This ever-present state-sponsored Islamophobia entails practices ranging from forcing religious leaders to pledge allegiance to the Republic to trying to enlist the French population by asking citizens to watch Muslims for signs of deviant behaviour in public, connecting security concerns to the broader attempt to (re) articulate reactionary forms of 'common sense' (Wolfreys, 2023).

5. Conclusion

This article has illustrated how post-2015, formally democratic states such as the UK and France have seen the intensification of authoritarian governance through the elevation of home affairs via two interconnected axes: 1) increased police powers and suppression of protests and civil liberties; (2) enhanced border security and restrictions on citizenship. This process has been animated, and supported by, an increasingly mutated politics of legitimation, characterised by explicit forms of 'othering' and attacks on the wider political system. Moreover, our analysis indicates that in a context of declining legitimacy and neoliberal 'drift', resistance to neoliberalisation provokes the acceleration of hostility towards the marginalised, as states lash out to reimpose governing autonomy. The article contributes to the literature on authoritarian neoliberalism by empirically mapping the relationship between authoritarian reforms and legitimation processes in formally democratic contexts, and by illuminating the role of resistance and social struggle in how governments attempt to dis- and re-articulate forms of 'neoliberal common sense' to maintain legitimacy (Hall, 2011: 711).

As the foregoing outlines, however, not only did Britain and France undergo very different transitions to neoliberalism, each state has displayed a singular trajectory on a range of issues from policing to religion. These unique political, social, and cultural lineages ensured that, despite both facing the politicisation of borders and home affairs following the 2015 migrant crisis, across the two territories the rise of authoritarian neoliberalism and its subsequent intensification has displayed a distinct character. For instance, the Macron administration's response to the Yellow Vests moment, from the use of police forces to the courts' behaviour, cannot be disentangled from the French state's historical trajectory of increasingly aggressive and militarised protest management. In the sphere of policing, this pits French governance in contrast to the UK. Similarly, authoritarian secularism as characterised by the conservative radicalisation of the concept of *laïcité* is a uniquely French way to re-code economic anxieties through a culture-based legitimation strategy. In the UK, hostile racialised and misogynistic practices evident within the Home Office or Metropolitan Police illustrate the particularly prominent place of *institutionalised* discrimination in the UK's authoritarian trajectory, as politicians refute evidence of structural factors to reorient their politics of support towards issues of race, territory and borders.

Nonetheless, illuminating these differences also reveals a common trajectory of authoritarian governance and legitimation in the late neoliberal conjuncture. The French state's response to the Yellow Vests entailed a comparable criminalisation and suppression of protests evident in the UK under the Conservatives, and especially the legislative turn of the Johnson government. France's authoritarian secularism, and the increasingly apparent state-sponsored Islamophobia entrenched under Macron, serves strikingly similar objectives to British governance of marginalised and immigrant communities, from PREVENT to the moral panics directed at the English Channel. Altogether, these processes highlight comparable institutional, legislative, and discursive developments which we argue exemplify a clear acceleration of authoritarianism occurring across both territories, compounding previously existing practices. While scholars have noted how the exhaustion of neoliberalism as an economic project has fuelled authoritarian forces in both the Global North and South (Altınörs and Akçay, 2022: 1034), the shared, deep-rooted colonial legacies of both the UK and France arguably provide a particularly propitious context for the intensification of hostile governance of policing and border management, as traces of these legacies in the national imaginary can be 're-activated' in the articulation of mutated, nationalising narratives to preserve legitimacy for a failing socio-economic model (Hall 1985b: 111).

In identifying the acceleration of these dynamics post-2015, it is important to consider implications for contested processes of neoliberal governance and the role of resistance especially (Bruff & Tansel, 2019; Piletić, 2022). In France, a kaleidoscope of more or less organised movements throughout 2023 — from riots in response to the murder of Nahel Merzouk by a police officer through to the sustained protests against pension and budget reforms – initially seemed to increase consciousness of institutional racism and resistance to neoliberalisation, respectively (The Guardian, 2023). Yet Macron's reversion to the language of 'order, order, order' following the riots, and the deployment of anti-democratic constitutional tools (i.e., Article 49.3) to force through the pension changes indicated the resumption of archetypal authoritarian neoliberal governance (Brunet, 2023; *La* Tribune, 2023). In the UK, passage of the Public Order Act and deployment of the powers it bestowed to arrest peaceful – 'slow marching' – climate activists exemplified how governments have utilised resistance to neoliberalisation to intensify authoritarianism and restrict the right to protest (Gayle, 2023). This intensification entails the further weakening of organised labour as well as increased repression and criminalisation of various types of dissent, affecting possible avenues for contestation in uncertain ways. A recent study suggests such restrictions may lead to "zombie" forms of resistance, where workers and citizens explore alternative, if fragmented, avenues of grassroots struggle (Lawreniuk, 2023). As Lawreniuk (2023: 41) notes, this should be 'discomforting for most': while demonstrating the resilience of struggle, zombie resistance constitutes an 'uncanny substitute for genuinely free and democratic labour organisation'. Yet in a context where the task of neoliberal elites to maintain and renew legitimacy for a failing socio-economic model seems increasingly desperate, research into these novel, uncertain forms of resistance is imperative to reveal the myriad ways in which the 'healthy nucleus' of common sense continues to break through (Hall & O'Shea, 2013: 10).

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