

# Healthy Cities

Andy Knox

## Abstract

This paper explores the parameters of what a healthy city might look like from the perspective of the politics of love. Beginning with some definitions of city, love and wellbeing, the paper contrasts these with features of the unhealthy cities in our current context and experience. Taking as the starting point the inequalities and inequities exposed by the current Coronavirus pandemic, the pre-existent roots of the current crisis are set out. Focusing on the impact of austerity policies of the last decade on women, ethnic minorities and children, particular emphasis is given to the significant effects of adverse childhood experiences. The negative impacts of current politics of division, exclusion and freedom are then explored as evidence of the broken ideology of capitalism in crisis. The positive remedies advocated by Mariana Mazzucato, Katherine Trebeck and Kate Raworth which are currently being explored in several cities with exciting results are then outlined. Finally, the principles of love are put forward as a participative agenda for the future health of our cities.

## Definitions

In this paper I will explore what we might mean by a healthy city, bringing some definition to how we think about health in the context of cities. I will outline the context for some of the major issues we are facing in health inequality and inequity. I will then bring some focus to how we can enable cities to become healthy.

For the purpose of this paper, a city describes a large, urban place of collective dwelling for citizens. It is a manifestation of shared, corporate life, which creates a political space, with a sociologically diverse population, within a geographical location delineated by its administrative boundaries and complex interlinking systems. Cities are important as they are now the prime place of dwelling for human beings across the globe.

Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London, recently said this in an interview with the New Statesman:  
*“I’m quite clear, the 19th century was all about empires; the 20th century was about nation states; in*

*the 21st century the action is all about cities and mayors*<sup>1</sup>. In other words, cities have become our most important political space.

If our cities are to be 'healthy' then they must be places of love and care. The Sociologist Bev Skeggs talks about Society as being a revelation of, or continual struggle for what we value<sup>2</sup>. All political and economic choices are moral choices based on our values. Society is shaped by our politics and economics. Cities are the clearest manifestation of society. Or, put another way, if we want to know what our values are, we must look at the political and economic realities of our cities.

If the city is a corporate manifestation of the collective life of the citizens, then when we speak of healthy cities, we must firstly think about the health and wellbeing of the population. I define the 'population health' of a city as: the optimal physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of the citizens, including the distribution of the health equality and equity experienced by the population across the geography. The phrase 'optimal wellbeing' is used to recognise that due to a combination of genetics and other external factors (e.g. a life-changing injury), not all citizens can necessarily experience the same level of health and wellbeing. Secondly, in thinking about 'healthy cities', we must also consider the conditions within the city, which either create or limit the health and wellbeing of the citizens. A healthy city is one which enables all citizens to live in optimal wellbeing, through its administrative systems which particularly prioritise those who experience injustice, inequality and inequity.

## **Ontology**

The concept of health and wellbeing is shaped by ontology. The ontology which gives substance to the thinking in this article is love. In other words, I believe that everything that is, is because of love and love holds it all together. Love is the foundation and without it there can be no wellbeing. We are never well outside of or without love. If we do not love, if we are not loved, we are not well. It is, however, possible to be both loved and unwell and to be unwell and loving. When we are unwell, be that physically, mentally, emotionally or spiritually, we are cared for, whether we become well or not. This is made possible by love.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2021/04/sadiq-khan-interview-brexit-and-covid-are-perfect-storm-against-london>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kzAwv07QKuQ>

## What is Love?

When we speak of love, what do we mean? I am going to draw on four particular thinkers in helping us to define it together, C.S. Lewis, bell hooks, Thomas J Oord and Valerie Kaur. C.S. Lewis helps us get to grips with love as a noun or series of nouns. The word 'love' in the English language is rather limited. According to Lewis,<sup>3</sup> love has four meanings. These are defined more effectively in Greek.

- *Eros* is the romantic kind of love and speaks of desire. "I love my wife."
- *Storges* is the love within a family. "I love my sons and daughters, my parents and my brothers/sisters."
- *Phileo* is the love between friends. "I love my friends and the bond between us allows us to achieve much together."
- *Agape* is the choice to love when it costs us, even one's enemies – those who are difficult to love. It's a sacrificial love and not an easy one.

bell hooks, the highly influential activist, feminist and writer, wrote a beautiful set of essays in her compilation, 'All About Love'. For hooks, love is more a verb than a noun. She writes:

"Imagine how much easier it would be for us to learn how to love if we began with a shared definition. The word "love" is most often defined as a noun, yet all the more astute theorists of love acknowledge that we would all love better if we used it as a verb. I spent years searching for a meaningful definition of the word "love," and was deeply relieved when I found one in psychiatrist M. Scott Peck's classic self-help book *The Road Less Travelled*, first published in 1978. Echoing the work of Erich Fromm, he defines love as "*the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth.*" Explaining further, he continues, "*Love is as love does. Love is an act of will - namely, both an intention and an action. Will also implies choice. We do not have to love. We choose to love.*" Since the choice must be made to nurture growth, this definition counters the more widely accepted assumption that we love instinctually."<sup>4</sup>

Love is an act of the will, an action – it does something.

Thomas J Oord, a philosophical theologian and contributor to this journal, takes this idea of love being "the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth" and develops it further. He defines it this way: "To love is to act intentionally, in relational

---

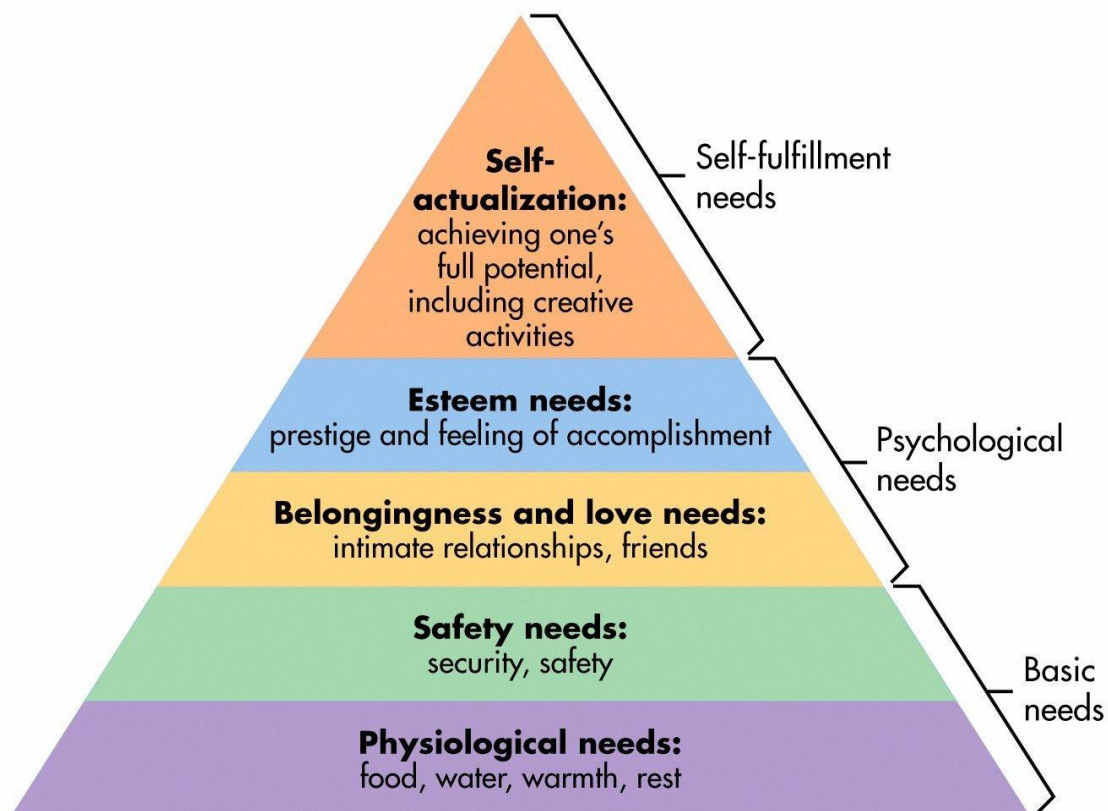
<sup>3</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1960).

<sup>4</sup> bell hooks, *All About Love* (USA: William Marrow and Company Inc., 2000), 1-14.

(sympathetic/empathetic) response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being.”<sup>5</sup> Love acts in response to others to promote the wellbeing of everyone (and, I would argue) the whole of ecology. Valerie Kaur, lawyer, author, feminist and activist, describes love as ‘revolutionary’<sup>6</sup>. Like Martin Luther-King Jr, hooks and many others longing for social justice, Kaur sees love as a deep motivation and driving force for action.

Love then, enables wellbeing. If cities are to be places of health, then they must be places of love and care. If we are going to understand how cities become places of care which create health and wellbeing, then we first need to understand how people become truly ‘well’.

### Reconfiguring Maslow



<sup>5</sup> Thomas J. Oord, *Defining Love: A Philosophical, Scientific, and Theological Engagement* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Valerie Kaur, *See No Stranger: A Memoir and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love* (London: Octopus Publishing Group Ltd, 2020).

Maslow's work has been fundamental in thinking about how human beings develop and become flourishing individuals.<sup>7</sup> In his pyramid model, he describes how from the moment we are conceived and all through our lives, we need to have our physiological needs met in order to survive. Once these are in place, we also need to be protected, to be safe. From this develops our sense of belonging and knowing we are loved, which in turn builds our self-esteem, motivated by our ability to learn, developing skills and experiencing the sense of success – from taking our first steps to passing our first spelling test and so on. As we go on through life, with each of these motivational steps being fulfilled, we become energised and self-actualised to bring our full potential to the community around us. However, I think Maslow needs a bit of adaptation. I'm not absolutely convinced by the idea of a pyramid or a hierarchy. Maybe that's because I generally have an aversion to such things, but I think it's more because there is genuinely something missing if we're going to see people become truly well. What's missing is the concept of transcendent love.

Transcendence literally means 'that which is beyond us'. So, in an ideal scenario, and I realise that this is sadly all too often not the case, our lives actually begin from a place of love. Whether it's the ecstasy of the love making process in which we are conceived, or simply the desire to co-create life with another as a celebration of our love, love forms us. Even if our own life started as the result of violence or abuse, somewhere in our story, even if in generations past, is the deep magic of love creating life. It is not all down to biological urges. There is something far more profoundly beautiful which underpins our stories. I believe there something beyond that – something more – the idea that all life is created out of love by the community of God, who is love.

The creation of life itself is not only miraculous but is incepted and infused with love. It is love which motivates the provision of our physiological needs through caring for us, creating a safe environment, which helps us to know that we matter, that we are seen and that we belong in a family and community. It is love which gives us our sense of esteem and provides the springboard for us to become actualised as a human being, able to flourish. The problem here is that we can become spectacularly selfish and spend the rest of our lives ensuring that our own individual physiological, safety, belonging, esteem and self-actualisation needs are met in an ever repeating cycle – perhaps leading us to the goal of launching our own rocket into space someday.

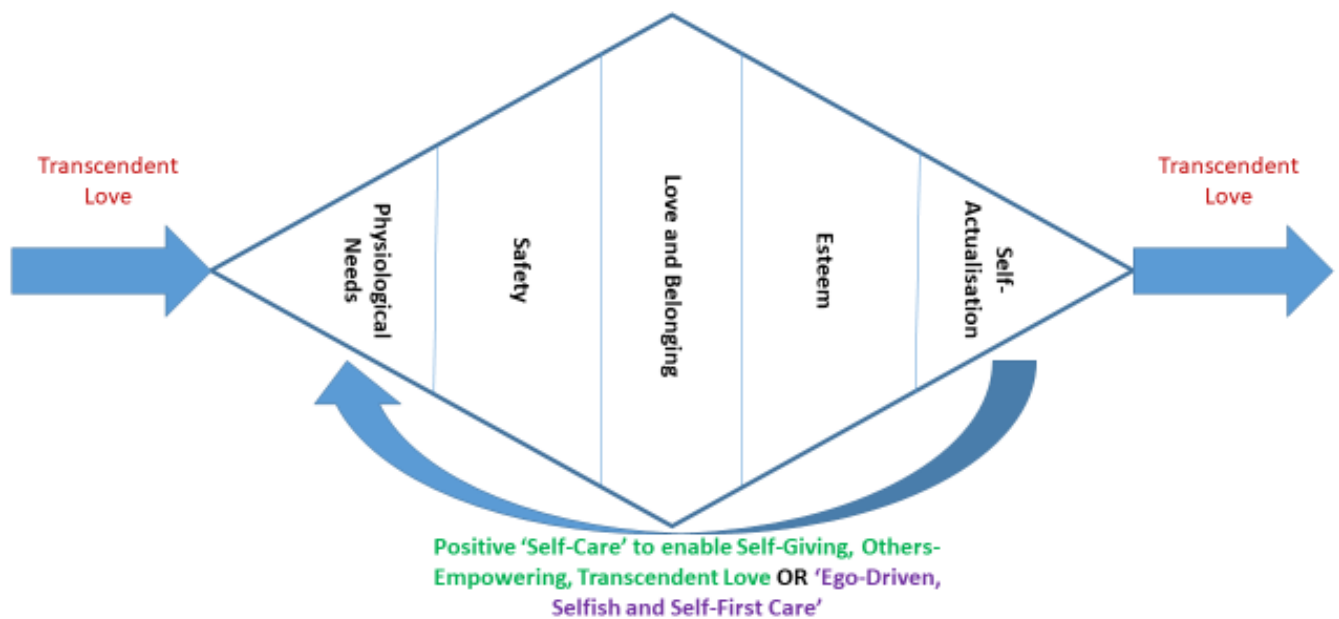
The invitation to us is to move beyond individualism and our own ego-driven need for self-perpetuation and importance. This is something which actually makes us unwell and is the pre-

---

<sup>7</sup> See Abraham H. Maslow, *Hierarchy of Needs: A Theory of Human Motivation* (Mansfield Center CT: Martino Publishing, 2013).

cursor to the loneliness epidemic we see. We are, rather, invited to enter into the place of transcendent love. To enter into a sense of partnership with divinity to bring and perpetuate life in the world around us. To enter into the dance of reciprocity of gift<sup>8</sup>. Our lives flow from transcendent love into transcendent love – we are born from that which is beyond us and live our lives into that which is beyond us – becoming truly well and fully human in the process.

### The Diamond of Development



### Love is Foundational

Every human being is inherently worthy of love. The most basic human need is to be loved unconditionally, just for who we are. There is much debate amongst psychologists about how the personality develops for each person and multiple fascinating theories exist. Where they all agree, it seems, is that love is the deepest human need. So, if we are to be well, then we must be loved. And therefore love must infuse the ways that we think about our health and wellbeing. Our own wellbeing as human-beings demands that love must be experienced from our earliest days. Love gives us a healthy sense of distinct 'self'. It is what nurtures us as we grow, holds us when we wobble, restores us when we fall, forgives us when we fail and embraces us when we are undeserving. Unconditional love says, 'I'm going to love you, no matter what.' We need this from

<sup>8</sup> Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance* (London: SPCK, 2016), 169-174.

our prime care givers – usually our parents, to begin with. But where this is not possible, through death, illness or some other reason, it is vital that someone else steps in to provide this for us. It is why we must, in my view, be unashamed to talk about love as a core motivation in our health and care systems, including our schools.

*Knowing* we are loved is not enough. Love must be experienced. To be loved means to be seen. We need to be seen, recognised, acknowledged as a person. To be seen is to know that we are precious, that our life has a meaning and a purpose. This is what developmental psychologists refer to as attunement. The gaze between a mother and her/their new born child. A point of connection that begins to build a sense of attachment – the vital sense of belonging. Love means that we are seen as precious. And being seen as precious means that we can belong.

Belonging creates the space for us to be provided for and cared for and this allows us to feel safe – knowing we are protected by those who love us. All of this builds our self-esteem, our sense of being precious – that we actually matter. Being honoured as a person allows us to develop a sense of purpose – our 'ikigai'<sup>9</sup>, which calls us to take responsibility for our own actions, choices and behaviours, developing our soul. And this enables us to become a gift – a net contributor to the community, economy and ecology in which we live. In this way, we become activated spiritual beings who bring life to our environments.

### **Caring Cities**

If cities are to be places of health and wellbeing, they must be places in which each and every person is able to experience love. Love enables wellbeing. If we take the diamond of development and consider our cities as places which can create health and wellbeing, then we must think about cities as places of care, where health is curated. Healthy cities are those which create the conditions in which optimal health and wellbeing are normative. In order for cities to become healthy, they must therefore first become caring, rather than self-serving.

For cities to be healthy, they must provide care for the physiological, psychological, emotional and spiritual needs of the citizens. They must create a sense of safety and security, including good housing for all. The space must enable and encourage health in all its forms and curate the experiencing of belonging within a loving community across old lines of separation<sup>10</sup>.

---

<sup>9</sup> 'Ikigai' is a Japanese concept that means your 'reason for being.' 'Iki' in Japanese means 'life,' and 'gai' describes value or worth.

<sup>10</sup>[https://pureadmin.qub.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/214441187/Mouth\\_pieces\\_of\\_the\\_limit.\\_Liminal\\_spatial\\_praxis\\_in\\_Israel\\_Palestine\\_and\\_Northern\\_Ireland.pdf](https://pureadmin.qub.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/214441187/Mouth_pieces_of_the_limit._Liminal_spatial_praxis_in_Israel_Palestine_and_Northern_Ireland.pdf)

Healthy cities then develop a healthy sense of corporate personality, self-esteem and become actualised as gifts. As they have their own personality and identity, to which their citizens align, the challenge for cities is to avoid building themselves to the sky to dominate others through their own greatness, but rather become gifts to the wider ecology and global network of cities, enabling us all to learn how to live well together.

### **Unhealthy Cities**

However, the current reality and context of our cities does not paint a picture of health and wellbeing, even though we do find the subversive practices of love in all cities. Unhealthy cities are those where there is a lack of wellbeing. In unhealthy cities we see high levels of inequality and inequity, trauma and violence, and division.

### **The Context of Health Inequality and Inequity**

Health inequalities and inequities are widening. The life expectancy gap from the poorest to the wealthiest areas of Glasgow is a staggering 28 years<sup>11</sup>. In Birmingham, England's second largest city and third economically poorest, the 10% richest residents have 850 times the wealth of the poorest 10%. Those living in the areas experiencing most social injustice have a significantly shorter life expectancy and are three times more likely to be living in poorer health. This is even worse for the Black-Caribbean-British citizens of Birmingham, who are four times more likely to end up in hospital than their fellow residents<sup>12</sup>.

Even before Covid-19, extremely disturbing trends in health were emerging in England. Increasing child poverty, homelessness, and food poverty led to an unprecedented rise in infant mortality, mental health problems, and stalling life expectancy, especially for women in the poorest areas and cities<sup>13</sup>. Healthy life expectancy shows an even wider inequality gap than that of life expectancy alone. Those who live in our poorest communities live more of their shorter lives in ill-health than those in wealthier areas, who live longer and in better health<sup>14</sup>. Covid-19 has exposed for us yet again how unequal our society is, when it comes to poor health for those living with the

---

<sup>11</sup> Michael Marmot, *The Health Gap: The Challenge of an Unequal World*, (UK: Bloomsbury, 2015), 25.

<sup>12</sup> <https://urbanhealth.org.uk/insights/reports/neighbourhood-level-initiatives-in-birmingham-england>

<sup>13</sup> D. Taylor-Robinson, B. Barr and M. Whitehead, "Stalling life expectancy and rising inequalities in England" (*The Lancet* 2019; 394:2238-9. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(19)32610-8. pmid:31868623

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.health.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-](https://www.health.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-03/Health%20Equity%20in%20England_The%20Marmot%20Review%2010%20Years%20On_executive%20summary_web.pdf)

[03/Health%20Equity%20in%20England\\_The%20Marmot%20Review%2010%20Years%20On\\_executive%20summary\\_web.pdf](https://www.health.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-03/Health%20Equity%20in%20England_The%20Marmot%20Review%2010%20Years%20On_executive%20summary_web.pdf)



greatest amount of social disadvantage. Infection rates have been far higher in those working in low-paid, precarious, manual work. Over-crowded and poor quality housing has led to faster spread in our poorest communities. Rates have also been higher in these areas due to pre-existing illness, leaving communities more vulnerable to severe infection. Mortality rates have therefore been highest amongst our elderly and 'ethnic minority' communities, especially in our areas of greatest economic disadvantage<sup>15</sup>.

The biomedical centre has shown that racism in the UK affects both mental and physical health outcomes<sup>16</sup>. The race equality foundation also demonstrates this troubling reality in their report on ethnic inequalities in health<sup>17</sup>. By being unfairly discriminated against, people of British ethnic minority groups end up in poorer housing, with fewer job opportunities, higher levels of poverty and poorer health outcomes. And Sir Michael Marmot's important work, in particular his work with the World Health Organisation on the social determinants of health, has made many face up to the reality of health inequalities in our societies. Social determinants of health influence how individuals are born, grow, live, work and age in a specific environment. The unequal distribution of resources, money and power at various levels influence these determinants and promote health inequities among various groups<sup>18</sup>.

In thinking about population health, we also have to examine what lies beneath and perpetuates the current staggering and worsening health inequalities in our society<sup>19</sup>. As Marmot points out, some might argue that within society there are 'equal opportunities' (although this is patently untrue), but there is certainly not equity from the start nor equity of outcome<sup>20</sup>. Both matter. So, although there is a temptation for the health and care services to think about "Population Health Management" as a series of interventions we can make to improve the health of the population, without wider societal change, it will make little lasting difference. It is true that we can and will make some important inroads with this approach in our integrated care systems<sup>21</sup>. However, unless we dig deeper and think about how we create real health and overall equity in society, we will never substantially shift the dominant narrative. Levelling up actually has to mean something. It can't just be empty words. This matters too much.

---

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.bmj.com/content/372/bmj.n376>

<sup>16</sup> <https://bmcpublihealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-020-09792-1>

<sup>17</sup> <https://raceequalityfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/health-brief3.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> <https://equityhealthj.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12939-020-01307-z>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.hospitaltimes.co.uk/new-report-health-inequality-worsening-for-poorest-in-england/>

<sup>20</sup> Marmot, 95-129.

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.england.nhs.uk/integratedcare/what-is-integrated-care/>

The last decade in the United Kingdom, prior to the pandemic, saw the deepest cuts in the British welfare state in its history<sup>22</sup>. It was a deliberate and orchestrated political move, motivated by an ideology that believes in a small state and the benevolence of the free market. In 2008, George Osborne promised the Conservative Party that he would introduce the ‘most far-reaching programme of welfare reform for a generation’ by providing the ‘tough medicine’ necessary to drive people off benefits and into work. This would, he believed, “end the shameful dependency culture in Britain, free up supply of capital and labour, unleash billions of pounds, restore the health of the public finances, liberate those stuck on benefits and transform the life chances of millions of families<sup>23</sup>.” He unleashed this package of austerity in 2010 when he became Chancellor. Tough medicine, as I understand it, should lead to better health and wellbeing. Unfortunately, the political experiment failed. In 2018, the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights came to the UK at the invitation of the British Government. His report is a devastating account of the effects of the politics of austerity on the poorest and most vulnerable in our society. His overall summary is this:

*“Although the United Kingdom is the world's fifth largest economy, one fifth of its population (14 million people) live in poverty, and 1.5 million of them experienced destitution in 2017. Policies of austerity introduced in 2010 continue largely unabated, despite the tragic social consequences.*

*Close to 40 per cent of children are predicted to be living in poverty by 2021. Food banks have proliferated; homelessness and rough sleeping have increased greatly; tens of thousands of poor families must live in accommodation far from their schools, jobs and community networks; life expectancy is falling for certain groups; and the legal aid system has been decimated.*

*The Special Rapporteur concluded that the social safety net has been badly damaged by drastic cuts to local authorities' budgets, which have eliminated many social services. The bottom line is that much of the glue that has held British society together since the Second World War has been deliberately removed and replaced with a harsh and uncaring ethos<sup>24</sup>.”*

---

<sup>22</sup> Peter Taylor-Goody, *The Double Crisis of the Welfare State and What We Can Do about It* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), viii.

<sup>23</sup> <https://conservative-speeches.sayit.mysociety.org/speech/599696>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/Pages/CallforinputUK.aspx>

In her vital book, *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*, Caroline Criado Perez exposes and lambasts the vast injustice being meted out to women<sup>25</sup>. She details how following the 2008 financial crash and the introduction of austerity economics, children's services, children's centres, social care budgets, social security payments and carers' allowances were all cut drastically. On paper, this looked like lots of lovely money-savings for the government. In reality it meant a massive shift of costs from the public sector onto women, who were left to pick up the bill. This led to a huge rise in female unemployment (a rise of over 20% by March 2012 alone – the highest figure in 25 years), whilst male unemployment stood still. By 2014 this had risen to a 74% underemployment for women. Between 2010 and 2020, *86% of all budget cuts fell on women* and hit their incomes twice as much as men's.

These changes made life considerably more difficult for women in our poorest communities, especially for single mothers and British Asian women in particular, whilst men in the richest 50% of households actually gained from tax and benefit changes! This is occurring because the UK government is simply not looking at the data. Women are not considered when it comes to economic decisions! The economy is anti-female. (It is also failing to consider the climate). Despite the 2010 Equality Act, which requires them to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity, the government has repeatedly refused to produce a comprehensive equality impact assessment of its budgets and policies. This model of economy is morally and ethically defunct. It leaves women in our most economically deprived communities utterly trapped, especially if they are living with a disability. Period poverty is also causing significant stigmatization and shame. The Scottish government have made massive strides to end this injustice,<sup>26</sup> but England lags woefully behind.

Michael Marmot puts it this way: "Health inequalities are not a footnote to the health problems we face, they *are* the major health problem. Inequalities in health arise from inequalities in society<sup>27</sup>." High levels of inequality and inequity within a city leave the citizens less happy and those who suffer the most have significantly poorer health. The economist Amartya Sen argues that those who are trapped in poverty, be that relative or absolute, are unable to participate in the life of the society or city<sup>28</sup>. To be healthy, one must be able to participate in society. Where participation in the decisions being made about one's own life and community are not possible, then there will be

---

<sup>25</sup> Perez C. Criado, *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* (UK: Penguin Random House, 2019), 244-245.

<sup>26</sup> [Period poverty: Scotland first in world to make period products free - BBC News](#)

<sup>27</sup> Marmot, 28-42.

<sup>28</sup> A. Sen, *Inequality Re-examined* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

greater inequality and inequity in health outcomes. A city where there are high levels of inequality and inequity, worsened through low levels of participation, cannot be called a 'healthy city'.

### **The Context of Trauma and Violence**

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) or Childhood Traumas, are perhaps our most important Public Health issue, secondary only to poverty. So I want to be really clear about what they are, and how and why they affect people so profoundly. The research done in the UK and USA in particular, focuses on ten ACEs.<sup>29</sup> Five of them are considered to be direct and five are indirect. These are not easy things to talk about and if you have been a victim of one or some of these, then please be kind to yourself as you read what is ahead. The five direct causes of ACEs are: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, psychological abuse and neglect. The five indirect ACEs are: living with someone who abused drugs or alcohol, exposure to domestic violence, living with someone who was sent to prison, living with someone with serious mental illness and parental loss through divorce, death or abandonment.

There have been some really wide ranging studies across the UK and USA into the numbers of us who have experienced ACEs. Although amplified in areas of greater economic injustice or disadvantage, we also see stark statistics in predominantly white, middle class areas. Depending on the study you read, between 50 and 65% of people have experienced at least one ACE. And shockingly 1 in 10 of us have experienced more than 4.<sup>30</sup> The more ACEs we experience, the greater the potential impact on our physical, mental and social health and wellbeing. If a person experiences one ACE, they have an 86% chance of being subject to several. If they experience more than 4, their health and wellbeing is highly likely to be significantly affected. If they experience more than 6 then they have a 46 times higher chance of becoming an IV drug abuser, a 35 times higher chance of committing suicide and an overall 20-year decrease in life expectancy.

The toxic stress levels caused by trauma significantly change the way in which the human brain grows and functions. This has a profound impact on day to day functioning. Victims of multiple traumas can get stuck in the fight-flight-fight response due to their brains feeling under constant threat. As demonstrated by Prof Van Der Kolk in his book *The Body Keeps the Score*, our bodies

---

<sup>29</sup> <https://acestoohigh.com/2012/10/03/the-adverse-childhood-experiences-study-the-largest-most-important-public-health-study-you-never-heard-of-began-in-an-obesity-clinic/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://warrenlarkinassociates.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/03-Feb-2021-ACEs-trauma-and-system-change-slide-pack.pdf>

literally experience the reality of these traumas in an ongoing way.<sup>31</sup> So, people with multiple ACEs become more likely to develop chronic pain, inflammatory conditions, heart disease, cancer and mental health issues. The toxic stress actually alters the way their DNA works and therefore changes the genetic information that is passed onto future generations. As an example, domestic violence in pregnancy is predictive of child developmental issues. Offspring of the survivors of the holocaust or genocide are far more likely to develop chronic anxiety. This highlights just how important our family history really is.

The impact of trauma on an individual can be absolutely profound. Yet we are poorly informed about its consequences and how it can impact on a person's wellbeing or associated behaviours. Take, as an example, a school pupil labelled as 'naughty' or 'disruptive'. What if their behaviour is actually a communication about an underlying trauma or an ACE they are experiencing? What if it is because they were 'triggered' by a loud bang or a particular word or smell without any conscious understanding? What if isolating them, excluding them or punishing them in some other way actually compounds the issue?

In England alone we have over 78,000 children in care and rising,<sup>32</sup> at an eye watering cost to local government budgets, which have already suffered staggering cuts. Three quarters of these children have experienced more than 4 ACEs.<sup>33</sup> But the reality of ACEs does not just affect those in the care sector. It is far more widespread and ACEs are believed to cost the economy of England and Wales in excess of £43 billion per year.<sup>34</sup> Our understanding of the type of ACEs is growing also, and we are yet to understand the full issues surrounding county-lines, online child exploitation, modern day slavery and cyber-bullying. So many of the problems we are seeing in society now are as a direct result of things we could and should have prevented in the first place, including homelessness. At the end of 2019, there were over 280,000 people in the UK who were classed as homeless.<sup>35</sup> That is more than the entire population of Sunderland or Hackney. By April of 2020, the number of those who were street homeless had risen to nearly 17,000. 90% of homeless people report having experienced at least one ACE (compared to 50% in the general population) and with 54% saying they

---

<sup>31</sup> B. Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score* (UK: Penguin Random House, 2014), 74-86.

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-59365725#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20children%20in,36%25%20rise%20in%20a%20decade.>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.cycj.org.uk/news/aces-distance-resilience/#:~:text=The%20census%2C%20conducted%20in%202019,recorded%20in%20the%202018%20census.>

<sup>34</sup> <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/10/6/e036374>

<sup>35</sup>

[https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press\\_release/280,000\\_people\\_in\\_england\\_are\\_homeless,\\_with\\_thousands\\_more\\_at\\_risk](https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press_release/280,000_people_in_england_are_homeless,_with_thousands_more_at_risk)

have experienced at least four (compared to 9-11%).<sup>36</sup> The average age of death for a street homeless person is 45 for a male and 43 for a female.<sup>37</sup> During the covid-19 crisis of 2020, deaths of homeless people rose by over a third.

Violence is on the rise in our cities.<sup>38</sup> Society is also slowly waking up to the reality and impact of violence and sexual violence against women. A very recent report has shown that the majority of female students at school feel regularly pressured to send nude photos of themselves to boys. 50% of girls experience sexual harassment at school. By the time they reach year 13, this has reached over 95%.<sup>39</sup> One in five women has experienced some form of sexual violence since the age of 16.<sup>40</sup> Approximately 85,000 women are raped and over 400,000 women are sexually assaulted in England and Wales every year.<sup>41</sup> Sexual violence is even more prevalent for younger women as one in three teenage girls has experienced some form of sexual violence from a partner.<sup>42</sup> Coercive control is used much more frequently by partners than physical force, as 16% of girls have been raped using pressure and coercion and 6% have been raped using physical force. Young women and girls affected by gangs experience high levels of sexual violence including sexual exploitation, sexual assault, individual rape and multiple perpetrator rape.<sup>43</sup> In 2013, the police recorded at least 1,052 reports of sexual violence in schools, of which 134 were reported as rape.<sup>44</sup> 31% of young women aged 18-24 report having experienced sexual abuse in childhood; 90% are abused by someone they know and 66% are abused by other children or young people under 18, yet they rarely talk about it.<sup>45</sup> In 2012-2013, 22,654 sexual offences against under-18s were reported to police in England and Wales with four out of five cases involving girls.<sup>46</sup> Conviction rates for rape are far lower than other crimes,<sup>47</sup> and only 5.7% of reported rape cases end in a conviction for the perpetrator.<sup>48</sup> Most women in the UK do not have access to a Rape Crisis Centre.<sup>49</sup> A third of people believe women who flirt are partially responsible for being raped.<sup>50</sup> This (sexual) violence against women has to stop.

---

<sup>36</sup> [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667\(21\)00210-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(21)00210-3/fulltext)

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/about-homelessness/>

<sup>38</sup><sup>38</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-49923129>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-59552169>

<sup>40</sup> MoJ, Home Office, (ONS, 2013).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> University of Bristol for NSPCC, 2009.

<sup>43</sup> University of Bedfordshire for the OCC, 2013.

<sup>44</sup> FOI, 2014.

<sup>45</sup> NSPCC, 2011.

<sup>46</sup> NSPCC, 2014.

<sup>47</sup> Jo Lovett, Linda Regan and Liz Kelly, *A gap or a chasm? Attrition in reported rape cases* (Google Books, 2005).

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/about/data-on-violence-against-women-and-girls/>

<sup>49</sup> Maddy Coy, Liz Kelly and Jo Foord, *Map of Gaps: The Postcode Lottery of Violence Against Women* (End Violence Against Women 2007).

<sup>50</sup> Amnesty, 2005.

Where there is systemic violence against women and prolific harm suffered by children, a city cannot call itself healthy.

### **The Context of Division**

In his book, “Fractured”, Jon Yates paints a devastating picture of just how divided our society has become.<sup>51</sup> We are now divided, perhaps more than ever before, across all categories: rich and poor, old and young, labour and tory, Brexit and Remain. The divisions are racial, economic and educational, with the gaps widening all the time. Yates suggests that the reason we are so divided now is that we have destroyed any sense of a ‘common life’ and there are two main culprits for this. Firstly, many have chosen to increasingly spend time almost entirely with ‘people like me’, and secondly, the sheer pace of transformational change has left us with little that connects us. The growing distance and difference between us (geographically, sociologically, politically and economically) are causing us to become less healthy, less safe, less creative, less productive and less prosperous.<sup>52</sup>

Our neighbourhoods,<sup>53</sup> workplaces<sup>54</sup> and schools<sup>55</sup> are divided along lines of income, equality and race. Very few of us have any meaningful relationships with people who are not ‘just like me’. Some of this is our own fault. We have chosen it. We have also not adapted well to changing paradigms and work patterns. But it has also been engineered to some extent as we shall see, through two distinct but interlinked felons: the politics of exclusion through stigmatisation and the politics of freedom through defending personal sovereignty. The problem for us all is that our increased division is having a profoundly negative effect on our wellbeing and it is the driving force behind the widening gap in inequality in our society.

### **The Politics of Exclusion**

We see the politics of exclusion around us in so many ways. People are excluded from participation

---

<sup>51</sup> Jon Yates, *Fractured: Why Our Societies are Falling Apart and How We Put Them Back Together Again* (Manchester: HarperNorth, 2021).

<sup>52</sup> Yates, 153-169.

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/cfe/divided-cities.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> See Miles Hewstone, “Levels of Integration Within the Workplace” (Social Integration Commission Research, 2005); and Xavier de Souza Briggs, “‘Some of my best friends are’: Interracial Friendships, Class and Segregation in America” (MIT, 2005).

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.integrationhub.net/module/education/>

in the decisions which affect them the most. In his book, *Exclusion and Embrace*, Miroslav Volf demonstrates four ways in which the practice of exclusion pervades our society. According to Volf: “Exclusion takes place when the violence of expulsion, assimilation or subjugation and the indifference of abandonment replace the dynamics of taking-in and keeping-out as well as the mutuality of giving and receiving”. He sees exclusion as taking four particular forms: elimination, assimilation, domination and abandonment.<sup>56</sup> Elimination is the most brutal and barbaric form of exclusionary politics. Threatened by the ‘other’, the only way to protect ‘freedom’ is to annihilate those who threaten us. Assimilation is where we disregard and dishonour a people group’s heritage and ensure that they become just like us. In this way they are no longer our ‘other’. We see this with the Chinese government in their treatment of the Uighur people.<sup>57</sup> Recent changes in British law will potentially make it far more difficult for the Gypsy-Roma -Traveller communities to continue with their traditions, a more subtle form of assimilation.<sup>58</sup> It also occurs when we mock the cultural and religious practices we don’t understand, like banning the Burqa in several European countries<sup>59</sup> or referring to Muslim women as letterboxes,<sup>60</sup> a phrase which it is suggested led to a 375% increase in islamophobic incidents across the UK.<sup>61</sup>

Domination describes how people groups are subjugated in order to extract value from them. They are allowed to live, but really serve as an under-class to the rich or powerful, providing almost slave labour and with few legal rights. This is certainly the case with the caste-system in India, was seen in Apartheid in South Africa and describes the way in which the West uses cheap labour from overseas. There is also a type of abandonment, in which we turn away so that we cannot see those who are enslaved by the corporate and individual life choices we make. Without knowing it, most of us have the equivalent of several slaves. We just don’t ever see them. But you can take a test to find out how many hidden slaves your lifestyle requires, if you can bear to face it, through the Slavery Footprint website<sup>62</sup>.

Abandonment can take several forms. An example of the politics of abandonment was seen through the Windrush scandal in the UK, through which hundreds of Commonwealth Citizens were

---

<sup>56</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, (Revised and Updated, UK: Abingdon Press, 2019), 69-71.

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2021/03/the-nightmare-of-uyghur-families-separated-by-repression/>

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.politicshome.com/thehouse/article/gypsy-roma-and-traveller-groups-fear-new-government-measures-could-harm-their-nomadic-way-of-life>

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.dw.com/en/where-are-burqa-bans-in-europe/a-49843292>

<sup>60</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-45083275>

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/boris-johnson-muslim-women-letterboxes-burqa-islamphobia-rise-a9088476.html>

<sup>62</sup> <https://slaveryfootprint.org/>



detained, deported and denied legal rights, some of whom died as a result.<sup>63</sup> More starkly, we see exclusion through abandonment in the thousands of refugees now lying at the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea or English Channel.

In her book, “Stigma: The Machinery of Inequality”, Imogen Tyler demonstrates how stigmatisation has produced a toxic climate of fear and hatred that is enveloping and dividing societies and communities.<sup>64</sup> She quotes Salil Shetty, Amnesty International’s General Secretary, who in 2016, warned that we are witnessing “a global trend towards angrier and more divisive politics, in which the idea of human dignity is under vigorous and relentless assault from powerful narratives of blame, fear, scapegoating, propagated by those who sought to take or cling onto power. Across the world, leaders and politicians wagered their future power on narratives of fear and disunity, pinning blame on the ‘other’ for the real or manufactured grievances of the electorate.”<sup>65</sup> Every time we degrade or shame our fellow humans, we stigmatise them. The politics of exclusion through stigmatisation divides us and perpetuates cycles of violence and subjugation. It gives us a false sense of security. But it makes us more unwell because we are all connected to each other and the wider ecology. A city cannot be considered healthy where the politics of exclusion through stigmatisation persist.

### **The Politics of Freedom**

The concept of ‘freedom’ in politics is two-fold. Firstly, it relates to the freedom won hard from slavery or emancipation of any kind. This is a good thing! The second concept of ‘freedom’ is what modern liberal democracies are built on. The pillar of ‘freedom’ with its ‘free’ market. The idea is that people should be free to make their own choices, live life the way they want to and express themselves however they so choose, as long as it doesn’t hurt anyone else. In fact, we consider people to be oppressed when they are restrained from their own personal freedom by the state or a dominant culture. But what of the motivations that sit behind our notion of freedom? Or what of its consequences? Sure, we are free to live exactly how we want (if we are privileged enough). We hold onto and defend our own sense of sovereignty, but at what cost? The USA calls itself ‘the land of the free’ with its bill of rights. So it is every man’s right to own a gun ... but the consequences?

---

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.jcwi.org.uk/windrush-scandal-explained>

<sup>64</sup> Imogen Tyler, *Stigma: the Machinery of Inequality* (London: Zed Books, 2020).

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

The reality is that this kind of freedom is both relative and a luxury for the few. This kind of freedom is often used to protect the rights of the 'elites', who do not want other people poking into their business. However, freedom is actually the power to live with dignity. And so, socialists argue that when people are kept in abject poverty and illiteracy, while others grow rich and develop their personalities at the former's expense, we speak of oppression. However, when structures and persons which perpetuate powerlessness are replaced by structures that allow people to stand on their own feet and own voice, we speak of liberation.<sup>66</sup> But how do the politics of freedom work for those who live with little choice about what happens to them? How many choices do people in our most economically disadvantaged communities really have? Or how do we best love those who have no ability to make choices?

### **Freedom and Oppression**

Freedom is, as Volf argues, caught in a cycle of freedom and oppression. We ourselves live free, but incarcerate the traumatized. We are free to bomb the countries whose political ideas we oppose, but allow those who flee from the nightmare to drown in our seas. We 'freely' fly around the world, drive our cars and heat our homes with fossil fuels, but what of the climate crisis we are causing? We can go online and watch all the pornography we want to, but what about the women who are literally enslaved to serve at our pleasure? How can we live free and fully without it being at the expense of those around us or indeed at a cost to the wider environment? Maybe it's time to accept that we can't. Maybe it isn't loving. So where does love demand of us that we limit our freedoms in order to build a society that works for everyone? Where a city creates freedom for some but oppression for many, it cannot be called a healthy city. Where a city affords freedoms for its own citizens at the expense and oppression of others in 'unseen' cities, it cannot be called a healthy city.

### **A Broken Ideology**

The inequality and inequity, violence, trauma and division of our cities is perpetuated through an economic system which is unable to create health and wellbeing for all, due to its exploitative and extractive nature. The ideology of free market capitalism is broken, as Katherine Trebeck, Professor of Economics and advisor to the Scottish Government, and Jeremy Williams, co-

---

<sup>66</sup> Volf, 99-104.

founder of the Postgrowth Institute, so insightfully show us in their book, *The Economics of Arrival*.<sup>67</sup> In it, they illustrate three ways in which our addiction to the growth of GDP is no longer delivering what really matters to us, given the issues we are facing.

Firstly, it is delivering **diminished margins of return**. In fact, since 1978, genuine social progress has effectively flat-lined in most western economies; whilst GDP has continued to grow we are no happier, there is no increased equality and key societal indicators haven't changed. So we're working harder and longer simply to maintain things as they are, but we are less able to enjoy the fruit of our labour.

Secondly, we are experiencing significant **failure demand**, leading to defensive expenditure and the rise of consolation goods. It is estimated that 40% of the Local Authority expenditure in Scotland is given over to responding to things which could have been prevented in the first place. We are spending colossal sums of money cleaning up the mess we are making, both socially and ecologically. We see this through the thoughtless use of inappropriate cladding on the outside of buildings, leading to the devastating fire in Grenfell<sup>68</sup>, or in having to clean up after floods, having cleared the uplands for Grouse shooting<sup>69</sup>. Or trying to 'fix' childhood obesity after filling our most disadvantaged neighbourhoods full of take-aways, with poor transport, little space for exercise, no job opportunities, adverts on TV for sugary foods at peak times and high use of foodbanks, not to speak of the impact of ACEs on eating habits.

Thirdly, we have created a whole economy around **pseudo-satisfiers**. This means we are spending money on extrinsic goods to compensate for the reality that our intrinsic needs are not being met<sup>70</sup>. Our obsession with growth is having a direct impact on our happiness. Just witness the huge rise in anti-depressant prescriptions in the UK over the last five years<sup>71</sup>. This is not only because mental health has become destigmatized. It is because we are spending our time, energy and resources only to find that we are not satisfied. Rather we feel used and abused by the economy, instead of being resourced by it for life.

---

<sup>67</sup> Katherine Trebeck and J. Williams, *The Economics of Arrival* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2019).

<sup>68</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grenfell\\_Tower\\_fire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grenfell_Tower_fire)

<sup>69</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jun/27/moors-grouse-shooting-saddleworth-fire-sport-land>

<sup>70</sup> Trebeck and Williams, 11-64.

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.chemistanddruggist.co.uk/news/antidepressants-dispensed-almost-quarter-last-five-years>

What good is a growing economy to those who continue to experience social injustice and inequality? They are at the mercy of a system which fundamentally doesn't value them.

### **Capitalism in Crisis**

Mariana Mazzucato, Professor of Economics at UCL, highlights in her latest book *Mission Economy*, that capitalism is in total crisis.<sup>72</sup> She diagnoses the problem with the current construct with pinpoint accuracy.

Firstly, the finance sector isn't actually doing its job properly. It is merely funding itself and resources are not getting to where they are needed. In the UK only 10% of all bank lending helps non-financial firms; the rest supports real estate and financial assets. This leads to really unhealthy behaviour and risk-taking by the financial sector to try and make more money. This leads to is ever more debt, which people get trapped in and struggle to pay back. The financiers basically bet on certain things growing or working out. This leads to the growth of what economists' call 'speculative bubbles.' When things don't go as predicted, these bubbles then burst. So, the sector then has to go on bended knee to governments, begging for bailouts, as happened in the 2008 financial crash. Incredibly, it means that profits stay in the hands of private companies, but all the risk remains with the public and the taxpayers, who have to pick up the bill when things inevitably go wrong. The pockets of the 1% are lined even further, whilst the planet is destroyed, and the poor suffer what they must.

Secondly, business focuses on quarterly returns. In other words, there is no long-term investment in the kind of things which could bring genuine transformation to society. Not only so, the vision in government to fund such initiatives is lacking. The focus has become all about 'shareholder value' with no thoughts about what is actually good for society. Short-term gains for a few, but long-term disasters for the rest.

Thirdly, the planet is warming. We have until 2029 before climate breakdown becomes irreversible, with catastrophic results. Evidenced by solid science, the way we are currently living is causing devastating loss. And rather than invest in that which would stay the rising tide and instead seed life for future generations, the financial sector is still massively investing in fossil fuels, blinded by the profits, which can be creamed off by those unlikely to suffer the consequences. You might

---

<sup>72</sup> Mariana Mazzucato, *Mission Economy: A Moonshot Guide to Changing Capitalism* (UK: Allen Lane, Penguin Random House, 2021).

think governments would step in to stay this madness. However, in 2019, the USA gave £20 billion in subsidies to this industry, whilst the European Union dwarfed this with £55 billion. It is bad for health and bad for the environment. We will see if the promises made at COP26 make any difference at all.

Fourthly, Mazzucato demonstrates that governments have lost the habit of leading and are tinkering around the edges, whilst global corporations, many of whom have larger economies than entire nation states, call the shots.<sup>73</sup> The lack of accountability in this is startling. Governments are in the pockets of billionaires and simply bowing to their desires, rather than serving the needs of those who elected them.

### **How come such crisis?**

How did it get to this? Mazzucato tells us it is because we have believed some false myths about economics. We have believed that businesses create value and take risks, whereas governments should only de-risk and facilitate. We have coned ourselves that the purpose of government is to fix market failures, rather than to set the agenda. We've swallowed a lie that governments should behave like business, rather than hold them to account. Finally, we've accepted the false narrative that governments shouldn't try and pick winners, when of course they should. Sectors of the economy that really need to be enabled to thrive should be encouraged. For example, right now, if governments are serious about tackling climate change, they should be massively disinvesting in fossil fuels and igniting the green economy. Somehow we have taken as truth that the private sector is more efficient, when in reality its aim is profit. It's why privatization of healthcare is an oxymoron. Shareholders care about profit, not care. Those who need the most care make no financial sense. So, in an economy driven by this motive, the inequality gap widens and health outcomes for the poorest in society get worse. We see this in the USA most starkly, which, despite having one of the highest GDP spends per head of population on health care, has the widest inequality gaps<sup>74</sup>.

---

<sup>73</sup> Mazzucato, 11-25.

<sup>74</sup> <https://inequality.org/facts/inequality-and-health/>

In his book *The Impulse Society*, Paul Roberts details the problem of instant gratification, driven by rampant individualism and the fear of lack.<sup>75</sup> According to Roberts, our society has focused on consumer goods and the overabundant accumulation of whatever is sought, whether food or money or adulation. Walter Brueggemann argues that this set of economic ‘values’ leads to an individualistic society of toxic competition, that in turn leads to isolation, the disregard of the common good and the collapse of a viable social infrastructure.<sup>76</sup> This is why we so desperately need to listen to the pleas of Mazzucato, and develop a new set of values on which to build our economy together. Our current model is failing to make us well together.

### **A Question of Values**

In her book, *The Value of Everything*, Mariana Mazzucato implores us to reimagine the economy based on what we value. There is no place for the arrogant view that economics is some kind of exact science. She tells us that economic policy is not scientifically ordained. She goes on to demonstrate how political choices can significantly affect economic policies, as with austerity. In this case, an under-valuing of the public sector led to communities paying the price of a global economic crisis caused by a combination of high private debt and reckless financial-sector investment. It was easier to cut public services to the bone in response to the financial crash, than to take stock of just how broken and morally rudderless our global economy has become.<sup>77</sup> When governments want to do something, like go to war, they seem to be able to find however much money is needed. But when it comes to ensuring citizens all have a good quality home to live in or are properly cared for when living with a disability, the money is harder to find.

We need to think of our public services not as a cost to the economy but as an investment in our future. Our discussion should not be about how much money we can save from one part of the system in order to invest further upstream. Rather, we need to ask ourselves how we can create an economy which builds overall wellbeing, based on an ethic of love (or care) and kindness. This is fundamentally different to the broken framework of Utilitarianism, on which we have placed far too much emphasis. This notion of ‘the greatest good for the greatest number’ is too exclusionary for those who need the most care.

---

<sup>75</sup> Paul Roberts, *The Impulse Society* (USA: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014).

<sup>76</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Gift and Task: A Year of Daily Readings and Reflections* (USA: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 101.

<sup>77</sup> Mariana Mazzucato, *The Value of Everything: Making and Taking in the Global Economy* (UK: Penguin Random House, 2019).

## The Wellbeing Economy in a City

Katherine Trebeck describes a foundational shift in values to be about building an economy of wellbeing<sup>78</sup> in our cities as places where people can meaningfully participate and contribute. It is the political nature of a city because of its dynamism which enables real change to happen.

What might an economy of wellbeing in a city actually be like? Providing overall well-being through the tackling of inequality is at the heart of what it means to create a loving or caring city. There is a massive mismatch between what the economy is set up to do and what people and the planet really need. We need different measurements and different tools to build an altogether different kind of economy. The purpose of economics is not infinitive growth but rather to ensure the appropriate stewardship of our resources to serve the needs of the environment, humanity and our fellow species. There is a world of difference between the notion of ‘the American Dream’, which hugely influences our current economic values and Martin Luther-King’s ‘I have a dream...’ One is true emancipation for all people, the other is about freedom for a few, based on the slavery of many – a dream for some, maybe, but an utter nightmare for the majority.<sup>79</sup> We cannot talk about population or planetary health if we do not radically shift our values base and therefore our model of economics. We must open up our imaginations to a much more socially just and environmentally sustainable way of stewarding our resources together. In time, this will lead to much healthier and well communities in our cities.

Kate Raworth, Economist and Professor of Practice at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, suggests we move away from an obsession with GDP and into a “doughnut economy” mindset with two new parameters of environmental sustainability and social justice.<sup>80</sup> We define an economy as healthy if it sits in the ‘sweet spot’ between the two. Raworth says we must stop thinking of the economy as a machine and see it more as something embedded in our ecology (or city). We need to move away from the model of the patriarchal, self-centered and selfish man (‘homo economicus’) and recognize people as social and adaptive human beings; away from the idea of mechanical equilibrium between profit and loss towards that of dynamic complexity. We need to put distribution and ecological regeneration into our economic design. And we need to become

---

<sup>78</sup> <https://www.citizensassembly.scot/sites/default/files/inline-files/weekend%20%20-%20sustainability%20-%20position%20paper%20-%20Katherine%20Trebeck%20-%20FINAL.pdf>

<sup>79</sup> Brueggemann, 92.

<sup>80</sup> Kate Raworth, *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to think like a 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Economist* (UK: Penguin Random House, 2017), 26-27.

agnostic about growth, rather than addicted to it. Raworth isn't saying that growth is bad. She's asking us to recognize that sometimes it is vital and sometimes really harmful; some parts of our (city) economies need to grow, whilst others must shrink.

The truth about inequality is that it exposes our values. Our cities don't have to be built this way. We can change policy. We can re-evaluate our values and infuse our economy with them. We can transfer meaningful power to people who are destitute members of society. We can change hearts, mindsets and attitudes through compassionate leadership and the refusal to 'other' our human brothers and sisters any longer.

### **Applying the Principles of Love**

Love begets health and wellbeing. If we are to develop 'healthy cities', tackling inequality and inequity, violence, trauma and division in the process, I suggest we draw on the seven political and economic priorities of 'Kenarchy'. Healthy cities prioritize the economically poorest because love is good news to the poor. Love means that every person has a warm home. Love ensures people are paid enough to live well. Love provides a good safety net of welfare that helps pick people up when they have fallen down, or provides long term support to those who need it, without stigmatization and shame. Manchester has something to teach us through its homelessness charter.<sup>81</sup> Leeds can help us adopt Poverty Truth Commissions.<sup>82</sup>

A healthy city must instate women at the heart of our economic policies and practices. They continue to carry the vast strain of child rearing, and yet suffer economically for it. They are paid less, valued less and experience more exploitation.<sup>83</sup> A healthy city must therefore be one in which women enjoy true equality with men. There are currently very few global cities where this is happening. Vienna is considered to be the most gender equal city.<sup>84</sup> Toronto currently fares well among leading business cities,<sup>85</sup> but still leaves much to be desired.

A city which truly prioritizes children, especially those who are currently at the receiving end of systemic and ingrained injustice becomes like "the city of God".<sup>86</sup> Cities need to be places where

---

<sup>81</sup> <https://charter.streetsupport.net/>

<sup>82</sup> <https://www.leedspovetrytruth.org.uk/>

<sup>83</sup> <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Gender-and-Poverty-Briefing-June-2015.pdf>

<sup>84</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20210524-how-vienna-built-a-gender-equal-city>

<sup>85</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/features/best-business-cities-women-ranking-2021/>

<sup>86</sup> Mark 10 v 15 & 16.



children truly get the best start in life,<sup>87</sup> are able to live in safety, knowing they are unconditionally loved, seen and belong within a community. Healthy cities are places where children are taught the way of love. Unicef<sup>88</sup> and World Vision<sup>89</sup> have both set helpful visions and criteria to help cities focus on how they can become places where children really thrive.

Healthy cities welcome refugees and asylum seekers with generous hospitality, according to their gift. They contribute to ending the inhumane, degrading treatment of these precious human beings in our outsourced detention centers. Healthy cities create schemes which enable its citizens to build relationships across lines of division and so promote inclusion and unity that celebrates difference and diversity. According to the UN Refugee Agency, there are four cities in particular which are doing this really well. They are: Milan; Italy, Sao Paula; Brazil, Victoria BC; Canada, and Vienna; Austria.<sup>90</sup> The City of Sanctuary movement in the UK is also trying to do similar work.<sup>91</sup>

Healthy cities have an integral relationship to the wider ecology. Healthy cities must therefore invest in regenerative farming and fishing practices, reforestation, recycling and green technologies. They must do all they can to keep carbon in the ground and clean it from the air. Healthy cities cannot exist if the environment is unhealthy. There are many cities leading the way in becoming truly eco-friendly, with the top ten currently considered to be: Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Stockholm, Berlin, Portland, San Francisco, Cape Town, Helsinki, Vancouver and Reykjavik.<sup>92</sup>

Rather than being on the back-foot with violent crime, restorative justice is a proactive approach seen in healthy cities. Working with young people and gangs to break the destructive cycles involved, through a trauma-informed lens enables the possibility of building positive peace. Glasgow and London have Violence Reduction Units and are looking to learn from one another in how to do this well.<sup>93</sup>

Healthy cities enable people to be active participants in their own health and wellbeing. They provide fantastic health and care, free for all, provided by the 'state' and delivered with compassion and excellence. The World Health Organisation have produced a very helpful frame to

---

<sup>87</sup> <https://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/resources-reports/build-back-fairer-the-covid-19-marmot-review/build-back-fairer-the-covid-19-marmot-review-full-report.pdf> p50-77

<sup>88</sup> <https://childfriendlycities.org/initiatives/>

<sup>89</sup> <https://www.childinthecity.org/2021/01/15/cities-for-children-framework-promoting-just-and-inclusive-cities-where-children-thrive/>

<sup>90</sup> <https://medium.com/@UNHCR/4-cities-that-embrace-refugees-yours-should-too-10b43903d2be>

<sup>91</sup> <https://cityofsanctuary.org/>

<sup>92</sup> <https://www.openaccessgovernment.org/top-10-eco-friendly-cities-around-the-world/53998/>

<sup>93</sup> <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/patterns-of-violence-glasgow-london/>

enable cities to tackle the social determinants of inequalities in health.<sup>94</sup> Here in the UK, there are some important lessons to learn from Wigan, which took a citizen-led approach to doing this.<sup>95</sup>

Helping cities to become healthy isn't going to happen by accident. We need to use design very deliberately and our political and economic priorities must become action because love is a verb. There are many initiatives which point us in the right direction, but for those at the receiving end of injustice, they need to be multiplied with some urgency. Change is only possible when we harness the power of social movements, build with humility and integrity and take a full-stack<sup>96</sup> approach to the way we work, breaking down the silo-mentality which prevents us from working well together. There is no way that the scale of change we need to see is possible if we only tackle one or two areas. However, if we each play our part, even though we may have faith as small as mustard seed, we can say to this mountain of generational poverty and injustice, "be uprooted and thrown into the sea."<sup>97</sup>

### **Healthy Cities are Participative Cities**

If politics is fundamentally about the interconnectedness of human relationships, if economics serves to resource this priority and cities are the place where this is primarily manifest, then creating health and wellbeing must be a participatory experience. The politics of love is, by definition, the invitation to participate in the community (of God/Love). It is the antithesis of the hierarchical, dominating politics of Empire in its various guises through the centuries.

Our cities do not need to be places of inequality and inequity. We do not have to tolerate violence and generational trauma. We do not need to be divided. No. It's time for us to put love, forgiveness and kindness at the heart of our politics. It's time to recognize that the person we consider to be our 'other' is utterly necessary to us, if we are to become truly human. Learning to really deeply and truly love the marginalized, the 'different' and those we currently consider our 'enemy' is the path to a new political and therefore a healthier future. This is both an internal and an external journey – I myself must do this work, as must you. And together we must dismantle the oppressive systems of injustice and see new life and hope break through. We see glimpses of it all over the place. We began to see what might be possible in a society where love and kindness were

---

<sup>94</sup> [https://www.euro.who.int/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/166137/Frameworkforaction.pdf](https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/166137/Frameworkforaction.pdf)

<sup>95</sup> <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/wigan-deal>

<sup>96</sup> Jeremy Heimans and Henry Timms, *New Power* (UK: Picador Macmillan, 2018), 253-254.

<sup>97</sup> Luke 17: 6.

at work. We remember the Covid lockdown when people lovingly cut out material and sewed scrubs for those working in the NHS; we remember the extraordinary acts of neighbourliness and care shown to the lonely.

The ability to participate, to feel we're involved in something bigger than ourselves and to have a sense of connection with those around us is at the heart of what it means to belong to community. It is what lies at the heart of the politics of love, and is beautifully framed by Cormac Russell when he talks about the connection between community and state. **The vast majority of decisions and initiatives should be by the people in their communities.** Some things will be done *by* communities *with* help from other local and national organisations. A few things will be done *for* communities, but this will be decided *by* those communities. On occasion things will be done by institutions but only with the free, prior and informed consent of the community.<sup>98</sup> This is so beautifully radical. Empire looks at communities, decides what is wrong, and does things to them to make it better. Or it withdraws its support and tells people that it's each for themselves and the market will sort things out in the end. Love, on the other hand, listens, recognises the innate capabilities within communities and cedes power and resources into them to enable them to thrive.

This calls for a radical transformation of the political systems, particularly in our cities. It calls for a much greater focus on connectivity, with investment in digital infrastructure, literacy and more accessible and affordable transport links, so that participation is possible. There are some great examples and places we can learn from, like Wigan<sup>99</sup> and Coventry.<sup>100</sup> Personally, I think that proportional representation, citizen juries and citizen assemblies are a step in the right direction. But political representatives must actually spend significant time in these settings. And they must not only involve the usual suspects! We must actively include those who are the political priorities due to their marginalization and the injustices they experience.

Devolved city/regional budgets are likewise a positive step. Mayoral cities are making great strides towards a more inclusive, participatory and collaborative politics across the UK which is a key building block for healing society. As Marmot shows, inequality strips people of opportunity, empowerment, security and dignity.<sup>101</sup> It is the ability to participate in society with dignity that begins to break the yoke of inequality and creates a society that is more whole.

---

<sup>98</sup> Cormac Russell, *Rekindling Democracy: A Professional's Guide to Working in Citizen Space* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2020).

<sup>99</sup> <https://www.wigan.gov.uk/Council/Digital-Wigan/index.aspx>

<sup>100</sup> <https://letstalk.coventry.gov.uk>

<sup>101</sup> Marmot, 44.

Power does not necessarily corrupt, but it does expose what is in the hearts of those who hold it. We are staring into the void of a leadership vacuum, as now we primarily need feminine leadership skills to hold power loosely and distribute it well (this is not about male/female). We need those who can hold space for unlearning and the emergence of new and creative solutions for the problems we are facing. We need people adept at holding tension and complexity, who can listen deeply and assimilate multiple perspectives. We need leaders who are willing to stop trying to be the heroes or heroines of the hour and become hosts of political spaces in which all are welcome and able to participate.

Healthy cities then are ones which are diverse and yet have high levels of equality and participation in place of inequality and inequity, nurture and positive peace in place of trauma and violence, and inclusion and integration in place of exclusion and stigmatisation. Healthy cities are built on a politics and economics of love. This love enables all citizens to know they are seen, are important and belong. They are therefore able to contribute to the life of the city. A healthy city is a loving city, where love is a verb.

## **Bibliography**

Briggs, Xavier de Souza. "Some of my best friends are': Interracial Friendships, Class and Segregation in America." MIT, 2005.

Brueggemann, Walter. *Gift and Task: A Year of Daily Readings and Reflections*. USA: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017.

Coy, Maddy, Liz Kelly and Jo Foord. *Map of Gaps: The Postcode Lottery of Violence Against Women*. End Violence Against Women, 2007.

Criado, Perez C. *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*. UK: Penguin Random House, 2019.

Heimans, Jeremy and Henry Timms. *New Power*. UK: Picador Macmillan, 2018.

Hewstone, Miles. "Levels of Integration Within the Workplace." Social Integration Commission Research, 2005.

hooks, bell. *All About Love*. USA: William Marrow and Company Inc., 2000.

Kaur, Valerie. *See No Stranger: A Memoir and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love*. London: Octopus Publishing Group Ltd, 2020.

Lewis, C. S. *The Four Loves*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1960.

Lovett, Jo, Linda Regan and Liz Kelly. *A Gap or a Chasm? Attrition in reported rape cases*. Google Books, 2005.

Marmot, Michael. *The Health Gap: The Challenge of an Unequal World*. UK: Bloomsbury, 2015.

Maslow, Abraham H. *Hierarchy of Needs: A Theory of Human Motivation*. Mansfield Center CT: Martino Publishing, 2013.

Mazzucato, Mariana. *Mission Economy: A Moonshot Guide to Changing Capitalism*. UK: Allen Lane, Penguin Random House, 2021.

..... *The Value of Everything: Making and Taking in the Global Economy*. UK: Penguin Random House, 2019.

Oord, Thomas J. *Defining Love: A Philosophical, Scientific, and Theological Engagement*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos, 2010.

Raworth, Kate. *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to think like a 21st-Century Economist*. UK: Penguin Random House, 2017.

Roberts, Paul. *The Impulse Society*. USA: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014.

Rohr, Richard. *The Divine Dance*. London: SPCK, 2016.

Russell, Cormac. *Rekindling Democracy: A Professional's Guide to Working in Citizen Space*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2020.

Sen, A. *Inequality Re-examined*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Taylor-Goody, Peter. *The Double Crisis of the Welfare State and What We Can Do about It*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Taylor-Robinson, D, B. Barr and M. Whitehead. "Stalling life expectancy and rising inequalities in England." *The Lancet*, 2019; 394:2238-9.

Trebeck, Katherine and J. Williams. *The Economics of Arrival*. Bristol: Policy Press, 2019.

Tyler, Imogen. *Stigma: the Machinery of Inequality*. London: Zed Books, 2020.

Van Der Kolk, B. *The Body Keeps the Score*. UK: Penguin Random House, 2014.

Volf, Miroslav. *Exclusion and Embrace*. UK: Abingdon Press, 2019.

Yates, Jon. *Fractured: Why Our Societies are Falling Apart and How We Put Them Back Together Again*. Manchester: HarperNorth, 2021.