

# Debates & Controversies

## Editorial note:

The following is a special section for a debate between Wood, Anderson & Richards – and Raymen and Kuldova.  
As a journal of intellectual freedom *CT&T* recognizes that intellectual freedom often involves debates and controversies and part of our response is to ensure there is a place for such debates and controversies to occur. We provide the space and trust our readers to make up their own minds as to what is offered. This also means, as a journal, *CT&T* is not aligning itself with either side of this debate.

## Notes on ultra-realism: A response to Raymen and Kuldova

Mark A Wood  
Briony Anderson  
Imogen Richards

We thank the editors of *Continental Theory and Thought* for providing us the opportunity to respond to Raymen and Kuldova's article, 'Clarifying ultra-realism: A response to Wood et al' (hereafter 'Clarifying Ultra-realism'). This article was itself a response to our article in the *British Journal of Criminology*, 'Breaking down the pseudo-pacification process: Eight critiques of ultra-realist crime causation theory' (hereafter 'Eight Critiques'). Debate is essential to theoretical innovation, and we were pleased that Raymen and Kuldova took the time to engage with and respond to our article, and that *Continental Theory and Thought* has allowed us to answer their comments at length.

That said, we dispute much of Raymen and Kuldova's argument and representation of our work in their piece. Firstly, we were surprised at the accusation that we are "centrist liberals that police the boundaries of acceptable knowledge", who Raymen and Kuldova wish, figuratively one assumes, to "push aside" (Raymen and Kuldova 2020). Our hope, as expressed in the introduction of *Eight Critiques*, was certainly not to enforce Tariq Ali's (2015) 'extreme centre' or "discourage" anyone "from straying too far from the liberal centre", nor was it to cast "all structural accounts of the economy" as "reductionist" (Raymen and Kuldova 2020). Our explicitly stated aim in engaging with two core aspects of ultra-realism's broader theoretical framework was to "assist ultra-realists in fine-tuning their theory to avoid the issues we identify [and] help foster the development of altogether new theories on the relationships between political economy and crime that avoid these issues" (Wood, Anderson and Richards 2020, 643).

As researchers who draw extensively on neo-Marxist theory, critical theory, social reproduction theory, and critical criminological theory, we flatly disagree with Raymen and Kuldova's (2020) personal characterisation of us and our work as "liberal centrist" or indeed "liberal postmodern". Much of *Eight Critiques* was informed by Margaret Archer's realist social theory and social reproduction theory – the latter of which is an intellectual descendent of Marxism. The concept of social reproduction was first conceptualised by Karl Marx and has since been taken up in multilayered and multi-system neo-Marxist approaches to political economy (Bhattacharya 2017). Similarly, Archer's morphogenetic social theory represents a form of the socialist-leaning perspective of critical realism (see Bhaskar 2009). Indeed, Archer (2019) recently emphasised the importance of 'concrete utopias' in Roy Bhaskar's critical realist model of emancipation, elaborating on how her morphogenetic perspective can contribute to the conceptualisation of such utopias. Similarly, in a *Red Pepper* obituary dedicated to Bhaskar, David Graeber (2014) emphasised how, in recognising underlying structures and generative mechanisms, a critical realist ontology – critical of strident postmodernism and positivism alike – contributes to transformative social agendas. Such theoretical approaches are not, in our view, a part of the "liberal cannon" in criminological theory, as Raymen and Kuldova (2020) argue.

So too do we feel it imperative to highlight that the intellectual traditions we drew on – social reproduction theory and critical realism primarily – are not "starkly paradoxical" (Raymen and Kuldova 2020): the jury is in fact still out on whether these perspectives can be reconciled in a holistic way (Rutzou 2018). They do intersect at several points, and, in the context of our *Eight Critiques* analysis of ultra-realist theory, interrelate in such a way that might, when comprehensively integrated, fashion a "coherent intellectual position" (Raymen and Kuldova 2020). This was not the object of our analysis of ultra-realist theory, though, and we think it reasonable to save that project for elsewhere.

We are enthusiastic to see the development of new theories that examine the impact of political economy on crime. However, as *Eight Critiques* outlined, we have several queries about the utility of the pseudo-pacification model and special liberty in explaining political-economic drivers behind crime causation. We certainly did not intend to "dismiss" ultra-realist criminology or offer a "totalising" critique of the perspective (Raymen and Kuldova 2020). Indeed, we have previously demonstrated appreciation of ultra-realism in our research and teaching. Demonstrating this, Wood (2019) drew on Raymen's (2018) ultra-realist analysis of dystopian fiction, and included Raymen's research in the curriculum of a subject he taught on crime and

popular culture. This recognition would also appear to have been reciprocated – Raymen recently (2019) incorporated Wood's (2017) theory in examining the technological unconscious of gambling.

In this article, we seek to clarify inaccuracies and formal fallacies in Raymen and Kuldova's article. As we show, owing to these inaccuracies and fallacies, their article does not refute our eight critiques of the pseudo-pacification model and the concept of special liberty. To preserve the integrity of our eight original critiques, and contest the credibility of Raymen and Kuldova's arguments, we have structured our response into subsections that address the critiques as they appear in our original article. Returning to key ideas set out in this introduction, we conclude by identifying and responding to what we believe to be inaccurate and unsubstantiated claims made by Raymen and Kuldova.

### ***The eight critiques***

#### *Critique #1: The pseudo-pacification process treats gender norms as epiphenomenal to capitalism*

Raymen and Kuldova's response to our first critique of the model of the pseudo-pacification process is that ultra-realism, as a perspective, has engaged with issues of masculinity extensively, hence the pseudo-pacification model cannot treat normative gendered behavior, or 'gender norms', as epiphenomenal to capitalism. Raymen and Kuldova are correct in the first respect – ultra-realist scholars have engaged with behaviours pertaining to masculinity and gender norms extensively. However, they raise a conclusion irrelevant to our argument. While the conclusion that Raymen and Kuldova make is sound – that ultra-realist scholars have engaged with masculinity and gender norms – it fails to address or refute our argument: that the pseudo-pacification model treats gender norms as epiphenomenal to capitalism. In their use of the term 'epiphenomenal', it also appears that Raymen and Kuldova misconstrue the implications of the term for our analysis, thereby not addressing our argument. They argue that in ultra-realist theory, "these issues [gender, class and culture] are not treated as 'epiphenomenal' to political economy, as Wood et al. claim, but central to its reproduction". As *Eight Critiques* demonstrates, though, in functionalist theories, phenomena such as gender norms can be both epiphenomenal *and* crucial to the reproduction of underlying structures. Many philosophers of consciousness, for example, would accept that consciousness is central to the ongoing reproduction of humanity (or the 'human condition') while also offering accounts of consciousness that treat it as an epiphenomenon of underlying neurological processes (McLaughlin 2006). In this respect, it is telling that Raymen and Kuldova note that gender is central to political economy's "*reproduction*" but do not go so far as to note that gender norms can modify political economy: a key dimension of the argument underpinning our first critique. Indeed, observing that ultra-realism treats gender as "central to [political economy's] reproduction" (Raymen and Kuldova 2020) does not destabilise our argument that the perspective's pseudo-pacification model treats gender norms as epiphenomenal to political economy.

In a quote cited in *Eight Critiques*, Hall (2015, 19) stated that: "mainstream culture and its institutions work on behalf of the pseudo-pacification process to socialise tough individual competitors willing to play by the rules". This communicates precisely the epiphenomenalism we challenge. If mainstream culture and its institutions work on behalf of the pseudo-pacification process, and if the

pseudo-pacification process, to use Hall's (2015, 23) words again, functions to "fuel sociosymbolic competition and energise the economy", then the pseudo-pacification process model treats gender norms as a component of culture and as an epiphenomenon of the exclusively economic tenets of a capitalist economy.

While Raymen and Kuldova do note that many ultra-realist scholars have accounted for the impact of gender on harm and crime, they do not specifically explain how the pseudo-pacification model can adequately account for gender-related disparities in the perpetration of criminalised violence without treating gender norms as epiphenomenal to capitalism – the matter at stake in our critique. We therefore suggest that Raymen and Kuldova's invocation of empirical research by ultra-realists is something of a red herring. Our article focused specifically on two ultra-realist crime causation theories, not evaluating the entirety of ultra-realist ethnographic work and its insights. In light of the above description of epiphenomenalism, we raise the possibility that insights from ethnographic studies that draw on ultra-realist theory, which Raymen and Kuldova cite, might contradict or at least contrast with the mechanisms proposed by the pseudo-pacification model, and special liberty theory.

*Critique #2: The pseudo-pacification process ignores social reproduction, offering a framework that only examines crime through the lens of capitalist production and consumption*

In responding to this critique, Raymen and Kuldova once again do not attend to our specific analysis of the pseudo-pacification process model, but instead argue that ultra-realist research has broadly examined social reproduction. Further, in developing their argument, Raymen and Kuldova appear to misinterpret our application of the concept, and the provenance of 'social reproduction' drawn upon in our article. We incorporated social reproduction *theory's* conceptualisation of 'social reproduction' as "the activities and attitudes, behaviours and emotions, and responsibilities and relationships directly involved in maintaining life, on a daily basis and intergenerationally" (Brenner and Laslett 1991, 314). With socialist intellectual origins, social reproduction theory posits that analyses of life under contemporary capitalism should examine not only the economic tenets of capitalist production and consumption, but also social reproduction – the political-economic processes, including racialised and gendered divisions of labour structuring and sustaining contemporary capitalist social life (see Bhattacharya 2017). This apparently is not the tradition of social reproduction theory that Raymen and Kuldova refer to. The term 'social reproduction' appears five times in Raymen and Kuldova's article, and in every instance it serves to misrepresent our usage of the term, equating the tradition and its orientation with, in the first instance, gender and other cultural properties of social situations, and later, with the reproduction of social and cultural norms. Discussing the concept further in connection with the cultural revolutions of the 1960s (and perhaps 1968 in particular), they state:

Since the 1960s, the left's intelligentsia increasingly shifted away from questions of political economy and towards a decontextualized 'cultural politics of everyday life' (Wolin 2010). They have played fast and loose with the imprecise term of 'relative' to the extent that it now verges on a cultural reductionism that dismisses any sustained discussion of political economy as simplistic orthodox 'Marxism'. Hence it charges anyone, even those involved in analytical integration

rather than direct monocausality, with the crimes of 'determinism' and treating factors such as gender and other forms of social reproduction as inferior, less significant analytical categories. (Raymen and Kuldova 2020)

We do not consider ultra-realism to constitute a form of "orthodox Marxism", but rather in some ways *Marxian* to the extent of its advance of what we see as a (generalised) single-system application of political-economic theory. Moreover, it is further necessary to clarify that, although social reproduction may be gendered, gender itself is not a "form" of social reproduction, illustrating a category error in Raymen and Kuldova's description of the concept. In Clarifying Ultra-realism, Raymen and Kuldova do speak about "family" – a key institution of social reproduction – however, in doing so they do not address the specific argument of our critique. Namely, they do not address how the mechanisms of functional drive stimulation and sublimation posited by the pseudo-pacification process are able to account for "breakdowns in social reproduction processes", such as "the inability of parents to engage in positive child-rearing practices as a result of the stresses of economic marginalization, marginal work, social exclusion, poverty and a lack of adequate social supports" (Wood, Anderson and Richards 2020, 650).

*Critique #3: Ultra-realism's reason for dismissing gender norms as a factor in offending is founded on a denial of the antecedent fallacy*

In responding to our third critique, Raymen and Kuldova (2020) state: Ultra-realism has argued that male violence cannot be a *direct* and *unmediated* expression of 'traditional' or 'toxic' masculinity. Making this claim is not to 'deny the antecedent' and suggest that some of the less benign forms of socially reproduced masculinity have no role to play in crime and violence. It is simply to observe that because not all men are involved in violence, there must be something more complex going on which requires more sophisticated analyses that align with reality.

They then go on to argue:

From Wood et al.'s argument, it seems that ultra-realism's sin is not 'denying the antecedent' of gender, but of problematising all aetiological antecedents, including those that progressive liberals hold dear. In this regard, Wood et al. appear to contradict themselves. They advocate 'indirect expression' theories. They suggest that ultra-realism must renounce the notion that crime is a direct expression of capitalism, which, as we have seen, it never endorsed. However, Wood et al. then proceed to critique ultra-realism for problematising the notion that crime and violence is a direct expression of a specific form of masculinity and asking for a deeper and more analytically integrated understanding of the relationship between masculinities and violence, one which takes into account the detailed micro context of personal biographies and the broader structural context of political economy and culture.

In assessing Raymen and Kuldova's response to this critique, we encourage readers to consult our original article. The above passages mispresent our argument and, possibly, also the aspects of Hall and Winlow's theory in question. Reading the

above passage alongside the Hall and Winlow quote our critique analyses reveals that Raymen and Kuldova insert the words “direct” and “unmediated” into Hall and Winlow’s argument – “because the majority of men do not commit crime, crime cannot be an expression of ‘traditional’ masculinity” (Hall and Winlow 2015, 58) – and in doing so alter it. As we argue with respect to crime and political economy, there is a key difference between speaking of direct unmediated expression and indirect expression.

The heading for this part of Eight Critiques clearly stipulates our argument that “Ultra-realism’s reason for *dismissing gender norms as a factor in offending* is founded on a denial of the antecedent fallacy” (Wood, Anderson and Richards 2020, 650, emphasis added). It is not, as Raymen and Kuldova (2020) suggest, that any and all reasons for problematising the argument that crime is a direct expression of traditional masculinity are founded upon denial of the antecedent fallacies. These are two very different arguments. The implications of this slippage are that Raymen and Kuldova mistakenly impute a second straw man argument to us, instead of addressing a logical fallacy forwarded by ultra-realism’s original architects. Namely, Raymen and Kuldova further mistakenly assert that in challenging Hall and Winlow’s reasoning we are, by corollary, arguing that crime is a direct expression of traditional masculinities. In doing so, they engage in the following ‘affirming the consequent’ fallacy:

- A. People who believe crime is a direct expression of traditional masculinity will argue that Hall and Winlow’s reasoning here is wrong.
- B. Wood et al. argue that Hall and Winlow’s reasoning here is wrong.
- C. Therefore, Wood et al. believe that crime is a direct expression of traditional masculinities.

We do not believe that ‘crime’ or criminalised violence is a direct and unmediated expression of traditional masculinity/ies, and attempt at no point render this argument – quite the opposite; we argued that such acts are “polygenetic” (Wood, Anderson and Richards 2020, 656). Just as crime can be an indirect expression of neoliberalism, so too can it be an indirect expression of traditional masculinity – we believe the two are far from either or, as we hoped the conclusion of Eight Critiques made clear.

*Critique #4: The pseudo-pacification process naturalizes violent drives, contradicting ultra realism’s claim that we are hardwired for plasticity*

Raymen and Kuldova argue that we are mistaken in suggesting that the pseudo-pacification process theory naturalises violent drives, thus contradicting ultra-realism’s claim that we are hardwired for plasticity. Omitted in Raymen and Kuldova’s discussion of neuroplasticity and the pseudo-pacification process though, is consideration of the central purpose of our initial analysis: addressing the explanatory utility of (originally) Hall’s theories as crime causation theories. While Raymen and Kuldova (2020) assert that owing to ultra-realism’s ontology of “probabilistic tendencies”, we cannot consider the breakdown of the pseudo-pacification process and special liberty theory to be crime causation theories, we think that the reasoning underpinning this claim is flawed. We can readily describe *any* theory that explains the complex concatenation of causes that lead to a crime as a crime causation theory, regardless of whether the theory is probabilistic or not. A theory does not, as Raymen and Kuldova suggest, need to make claims to (constant conjunction) universality (i.e. ‘a general theory of crime’) in order for it to be considered a ‘crime causation theory’. Indeed, Raymen and Kuldova’s supposition is,

from our perspective, further undermined by recurrent claims on the part of ultra-realism's proponents that criminology is in the midst of what Jock Young (1994) termed an "aetiological crisis" (Hall 2012; Raymen 2018; Ellis 2019), and that the discipline must return to interrogation of what *causes* crime and social harm. Ultra-realism's theories of the breakdown of the pseudo-pacification process and special liberty are clearly crime causation theories, for they attempt to explain the *mechanisms* underpinning violence and other forms of social harm. Indeed, the pseudo-pacification process attempts to do nothing less than explain rises and reductions in violent crime "from the late fourteenth century, beginning in England and appearing later in Europe ... up to the mid-1950s ... [and] over different time-scales in other capitalist nations" (Hall and Winlow 2015, 116). To rebut our analysis, Raymen and Kuldova must therefore demonstrate not only that the model of the psyche presupposed by the breakdown of the pseudo-pacification is compatible with ultra-realism's emphasis upon neuroplasticity, but also that it remains able to explain trends in interpersonal violence should such compatibility hold.

Our disagreement with Raymen and Kuldova over whether the pseudo-pacification model's approach to drives accords with the principles of neuroplasticity relates to two key matters: (1) the nature of drives; and (2) the principles and parameters of neuroplasticity. In moving this dialogue forward, it is necessary to further elaborate our reasoning in relation to these matters. First, we emphasise our agreement with one element of Raymen and Kuldova's argument; that we were mistaken in arguing that the pseudo-pacification model is predicated on a set *amount* of "libidinal" energy in subjects. We are, though, less convinced that Raymen and Kuldova convincingly address the second component of our critique: that Hall's "assertions of transcendental materialist drive plasticity and weak instincts are ... fundamentally incompatible with the 'strong' instincts presupposed by the pseudo-pacification process" (Wood, Anderson and Richards 2020: 652).

Initially, Raymen and Kuldova do not adequately explain how, if the pseudo-pacification process does not naturalise violent drives, their interpretation of the process fits with key statements Hall has made about it. As we originally quoted of Hall:

The pseudopacification process' *fundamental* psychosocial drive is provided by the sublimation of the once ubiquitous physical aggression that ordered Feudal societies, and its subsequent conversion into socio-symbolic competition ordered by the signifiers of consumer culture [emphasis added]. (Hall 2014b, 155)

If the pseudo-pacification process's "*fundamental*" drive is provided by the sublimation of physical aggression, then this presupposes that physical aggression is an inherent drive of the psyche that can be sublimated; i.e. that it is naturalised. Importantly, this is not the only time Hall has described the pseudo-pacification process in these terms. As Hall (2012, 32) has elsewhere explained, the pseudo-pacification process is:

[a] complex psychosocial process in which direct and unashamed violence and intimidation were gradually sublimated into a multitude of criminalized and legalized forms of exploitation, deception, and appropriation, which ran alongside and in tension with what can only be described as a sort of insulating sleeve of ethico-legal restraints, like the thick

but flexible insulation around an electrical wire carrying a powerful current.

If other elaborations of the pseudo-pacification process contradict the implications of such quoted statements, this speaks to the fact that the pseudo-pacification process is not described or explained consistently within ultra-realist literature. While theories do evolve, inconsistency becomes a problem when interlocutors fail to acknowledge this development and instead paint critiques of foundational texts (in the development of a theory rather than its application) as 'mischaracterisation'.

In elaborating their claim of mischaracterisation, Raymen and Kuldova emphasise the historical process of pseudo-pacification. Herein, they state that the introduction of the laws of "primogeniture" and "entail" led to material competition, individualization and insecurity (Raymen and Kuldova 2020), underwritten though by "the legally-driven splitting of the family, and with it the geographically bound ethnic community" (Hall, 2014a, 17-18 in Raymen and Kuldova 2020), otherwise explained as the "legally and culturally driven dissolution of the family" (Raymen and Kuldova 2020). While we did not address this illustrative aspect of pseudo-pacification theory in *Eight Critiques*, this historical positioning of the theory does not resolve the underlying concerns pertaining to drives and sublimation that we identified.

Additionally, we suggest that the way in which *Clarifying Ultra-realism* discusses drives perhaps supports our *Eight Critiques* argument that the pseudo-pacification model naturalises *violent* drives. Raymen and Kuldova (2020) describe ultra-realism's account of drives as follows:

Drives, desires, and the anxieties at the core of the subject are always in tension with one another, and always accessible to the symbolism of the external world. Certain drives can become prominent while others remain dormant as they are stimulated in different ways by the pre-existing symbolic order.

Raymen and Kuldova, in other words, present a model of subjectivity in which humans are born with a set of virtual pre-figured drives, and human subjectivity is plastic insofar as these drives can be rendered dormant, and may remain virtual or unexercised, or they can be activated, emphasised or de-emphasised as particular socio-cultural orderings energise them. Raymen and Kuldova's account of drives presupposes an energetic conception of the psyche which, we would argue, contradicts the Lacanian understanding of drives, *das Ding* and the Real that they employ in a broader effort to refute our critical analysis of the pseudo-pacification model. In the Lacanian tradition, drives are not biologically prefigured in individuals, but are socio-culturally constituted. As Evans (2006, 47) outlines:

Lacan reminds his readers that Freud defined the drive as a montage composed of four discontinuous elements: the pressure, the end, the object and the source. The drive cannot therefore be conceived of as "some ultimate given, something archaic, primordial" [Lacan 1978, 162]. It is a thoroughly cultural and symbolic construct. Lacan thus empties the concept of the drive of the lingering references in Freud's work to energetics and hydraulics.

Raymen and Kuldova may criticise us for arguing that Hall's invocation of "weak" instincts presupposes biologically innate behaviour, but as Evans emphasises, Lacan himself is clear in distinguishing between drives and instincts, with drives being socially constituted and instincts representing pre-linguistic needs



(Evans 2006, 47). In fairness to Raymen and Kuldova, Lacan's position on Freudianesque energetics changed throughout his work, and he did, on several occasions, revert to energetic metaphors (see Lacan 2007). However, even if we do accept that an energetic conception of the psyche is consonant with Lacan's conceptualisation of drives, *das Ding* and the Real, a more fundamental query remains: the seemingly endogenous nature of drive objects within the pseudo-pacification model. Johnston (2014, 242), whose transcendental materialist framework ultra-realists draw on specifically, notes that, unlike instincts, drive objects 'originate exogenously':

Drives, unlike instincts, do not have biologically predetermined, innately hardwired orientations toward pre-programmed teloi in the form of given kinds of "objects" as natural types of entities or conditions. However, it does not mean that Freud posits the actual existence of a drive without a drive-object, as, for instance, a quick glance at the metapsychological essay 'Drives and Their Vicissitudes' reveals. In this piece, all drives are said by definition to consist of the four components of source, pressure, aim, and object. For Freud, there is no drive without a drive-object, although its objects originate exogenously, rather than, as with instincts, endogenously. This holds for Lacan too.

How well does transcendental materialism's understanding of drive objects as having an external origin square with Hall's presuppositions about drives outlined in the pseudo-pacification process model? As Hayward and Hall (2020, 11) stated recently in explaining the interpretation of Lacan drawn upon in ultra-realist theory: "the Real defines and shapes our pre-symbolic subjective psychological experience, a milieu of conflicting and unexplained stimuli and drives". Later in this article, the Real is then described as a "natural, brute force" (Hayward and Hall 2020, 12). If drives are "pre-symbolic" as Hayward and Hall (2020, 11) suggest, we cannot understand them as "a thoroughly cultural and symbolic construct", or as a product of individuals' engagement with the Imaginary and Symbolic Orders, to use Lacan's terms (Evans 2006).

Our underlying dispute with this component of the pseudo-pacification model is that it does not treat drives as fundamentally transformable. For us, the pseudo-pacification model treats drives as having a "natural" and immutable drive object that cannot be dislodged or displaced by a new drive object. In this account, the Symbolic can sublimate these drives – i.e. it can direct energy towards socially acceptable ends – but it cannot fundamentally transform them: desublimated energy will return to a "natural", "pre-symbolic" drive object. We are sceptical about whether this conception of drives accords with the key principles of "neuroplasticity", despite Raymen and Kuldova's (2020, emphasis in original) usage of this term, and their further claim that "ultra-realism ... argues that human beings are *hard-wired for plasticity*". To adhere to the material grounding of 'neuroplasticity', representing "the ability of the nervous system to respond to intrinsic and extrinsic stimuli by reorganizing its structure, function and connections" (Cramer et al. 2011, 1592) drives must not be treated as "timeless" (see Johnston 2008, 91; 2005), positing a 'naturalised' drive object that is reverted to after the mind has been reorganised through new neural connections. Nowhere did we suggest, as Raymen and Kuldova (2020) claim, that "there is no single predominant drive – such as violence – that functions as a natural driving essence of subjectivity".

We further note that if, as Raymen and Kuldova suggest, we are comprised of multiple and conflicting drives, this would add weight to our initial analysis of the pseudo-pacification process in Eight Critiques, for unless pseudo-pacification coordinates the orientation of all these “unnameable and conflicting drives” (Raymen and Kuldova 2020) to a single drive object (i.e. unless it has a totalising control over subjectivity – see Critiques #7 and #8), then pseudo-pacification cannot effectively be characterised as the primary source of violence reduction in societies. Further, for the breakdown of the pseudo-pacification process to account for a rise in prevalence of interpersonal violence, it must posit that aggression sublimated into socio-symbolic competition is desublimated into physical violence as opposed to other outlets. The breakdown of the pseudo-pacification process must therefore posit that interpersonal violence is the *natural* channel of desublimated socio-symbolic competition. If this is not the case, then the breakdown of the pseudo-pacification process is not, as some ultra-realist scholars have suggested, a sufficient condition to explain rises in interpersonal violence.

*Critique #5: In presupposing a hydraulic model of the psyche, the pseudo-pacification process sets up a zero-sum game between socio-symbolic competition and physical aggression*

In their response to this critique, Raymen and Kuldova argue:

Wood et al.’s simplified ‘hydraulic’ interpretation of the pseudo-pacification process is that capitalism is to the human being’s violent drives what the dam is to the current of a river. It can redirect the flow of the river, slow it down or distribute its energy and force, but the flow of the river will never stop. This is precisely the misreading of Hall’s theory that Kotzé (2019, 27-28) has explicitly warned against, and we address this critique first because it arguably constitutes the original error that feeds Wood et al.’s subsequent misunderstandings.

We observe, firstly, that from our reading of Kotzé (2019), they do not, as Raymen and Kuldova claim, explicitly caution against a hydraulic or zero-sum reading of the psyche in Hall’s pseudo-pacification theory. Kotzé (2019, 24, 29, 31) uses the term ‘hydraulic’ on three occasions in the book Raymen and Kuldova refer to. On these occasions, Kotzé does not appear to ‘warn against’ a ‘hydraulic’ interpretation of the pseudo-pacification process. Rather, he warns against using a hydraulic analogy to understand shifts from relatively well-measured forms of crime to poorly measured new forms of crime:

Accordingly, as the criminal terrain evolves with certain ordinary crimes becoming obsolete whilst others mutate into adaptive crimes, and entirely new forms of crime begin to emerge as the continuum of technological innovation expands (McQuade 2006), a process of technology-mediated criminal transference occurs.

Again, rather than being understood in ‘hydraulic’ terms, it should be acknowledged that this process is mediated by agentic energy and individual levels of technological complexity. Essentially, it involves individuals becoming increasingly involved, to varying degrees, in either adaptive or new forms of crime which are poorly, if at all, measured by conventional indicators. (Kotzé 2019: 30-31).

Kotzé also does not appear to explicitly caution against a hydraulic reading of the psyche in the pages Raymen and Kuldova refer to. Interestingly though, Kotzé (2019, 127) does use a hydraulic metaphor to explain the pseudo-pacification process, stating that in the pseudo-pacification process, “rule-bound sociosymbolic competition” functions as a “spillway”, (a passage for surplus water from a dam): “Brutally unleashed within the fragile spillway of rule-bound sociosymbolic competition, this intensity is relentlessly stoked by harnessing the envy and insecurity that consumer society inevitably cultivates within the subject”.

Though Raymen and Kuldova are critical of the dam analogy we evoke to analyse pseudo-pacification, Hall (2012, 32) and Raymen (2018) have respectively explained the pseudo-pacification process using an electrical wire analogy that we believe exemplifies the zero-sum game problem identified in Eight Critiques:

Outbursts of physical violence can be seen as a breakdown of the pseudo-pacification process; a situation in which the stimulation of these violent desires and energies come to the surface, breaking through the ‘electrical wire’ which provides the ethico-legal restraints which harness and direct such energies. (Raymen 2018: 437)

We do not see how (our) water and (their) electricity analogies truly differ in their characterisation of pseudo-pacification’s ‘zero-sum game’. Both analogies, like the pseudo-pacification process, are contingent on the transference of energy (whether it be electrical, ‘libidinal’, or hydro), contained and channeled for functional ends (powering electrical/hydro technologies and powering capitalism). This energy then escapes its containment (electrocution or flooding in first instance, interpersonal violence in the other) and in doing so, that energy is diverted away from the initial direction in which it was originally channeled. This channel therefore loses the energy that escapes in this manner: a zero-sum game. As we highlight in Eight Critiques, this creates a problem for the theoretical coherence of this aspect of ultra-realism. For one, it is unable to explain how interpersonal violence committed in the service of consumerism and ‘anything to get ahead’ capital accumulation can still occur within late capitalist societies, while also explaining violence reduction as a product of libidinal energy being directed into these functional directives of consumerism and capital accumulation. This corresponds to our related observation that there are at least partly autonomous mechanisms underpinning the formation of socio-symbolically competitive subjectivities and the formation of “violent subjectivities” (Wood, Anderson and Richards 2020, 652).

Raymen and Kuldova might argue that the difference in our analogical interpretations lies in the fact that, as they note, the flow of water cannot be stopped, whereas capitalism as an energy generator can be switched off, leading to a cessation of the source of aggressive energy. If we are to push the analogy of capitalism as an electrical energy generator a little further then, we might ask, who switches the generator on and off? Relatedly, we suggest that Hall and Raymen’s separate accounts of the ‘electrical analogy’ illustrate our argument in Critique #8 about downward conflation and direct expression. Namely, the pseudo-pacification model traces acts of violence back to a single ‘energy generator’ (capitalism). In tracing the energy underpinning violence back to this *single system*, the pseudo-pacification model treats gendered prejudice and other forms of oppression and domination such as racism and ableism as functional components of capitalism and as ultimately epiphenomenal to capitalism.

We also suggest that in another aspect the pseudo-pacification process fails to acknowledge how micro-level interactions and relationships between individuals may serve as 'energy generators' of huge import in shaping the drives and desires of individuals within wider social systems. Though these micro-level interactions are heavily shaped by political economy, the content of these interactions isn't reducible to the economic conditions described in the pseudo-pacification process.

Here, it is important to remember that the key issue at stake in our analysis of ultra-realist theory is its capacity to explain violent crime, and whether ultra-realism's theoretical premises can convincingly account for rises and falls in interpersonal violence. It is therefore worth investigating again how ultra-realist scholars have recently described the theory we analyse. In a recent article, Lynes et al. (2020, 1211) describe the pseudo-pacification model's capacity to account for an early 20<sup>th</sup> century decline in physical violence as follows:

This fall in physical violence involved a *concomitant rise* in symbolic violence. Actual physical violence needed to be curtailed in order that the early capitalist economy could grow ... However, violence did not disappear. Rather it was forced into the symbolic dimension, where its energy could be harnessed and used to drive forward the economy [our emphasis].

If this is the case, and falls in physical violence involve a "concomitant rise" in symbolic violence/socio-symbolic competition, then the pseudo-pacification process does rest on something of a zero-sum game between physical violence and socio-symbolic competition. Some of those who draw on ultra-realist theory might disagree that the pseudo-pacification process presupposes a specifically 'hydraulic' account of the psyche, but we suggest a zero-sum game between 'physical violence' and 'socio-symbolic competition' still predominates in accounts of the pseudo-pacification process.

*Critique #6: It is incoherent to understand special liberty and the pseudo-pacification process as mutually reinforcing processes*

Our sixth critique of ultra-realist theory is addressed by Raymen and Kuldova only in passing. They argue:

Wood et al. also suggest that the pseudo-pacification process sets up a zero-sum game between physical aggression and socio-symbolic competition in a manner which renders its relationship with the concept of special liberty internally incoherent. Since this claim is based upon the now-debunked critique that ultra-realism presents a 'hydraulic' model of the psyche which 'naturalises' violent drives, dispensing with it is a quite straightforward. (Raymen and Kuldova 2020)

In the above statement Raymen and Kuldova collapse two different critiques: 1) the pseudo-pacification process sets up a zero-sum game between socio-symbolic competition and physical aggression, and 2) that it is incoherent to understand special liberty and the pseudo-pacification process as mutually reinforcing processes. In doing so, they pass over the crux of our argument for why, according to Hall's foundational explanation, the two theories are incompatible: namely, that it "is incoherent to simultaneously argue that: (1) increasing prevalence of violence can be explained by rises in special liberty (Hall and Winlow 2015); (2) reduction in rates of violence can be explained by the pseudo-pacification process

(Hall 2007; 2012); and (3) special liberty and the pseudo-pacification are mutually reinforcing processes (Hall and Wilson 2014, 651)” (Wood, Anderson and Richards 2020, 653). Raymen and Kuldova’s response to Eight Critiques does not explain how pseudo-pacification and special liberty can be mutually reinforcing processes, given that special liberty encourages individuals to “transcend the normative restrictions” (Hall and Wilson 2014, 650, in Wood, Anderson and Richards 2020, 653), set by pseudo-pacification. Nor do they explain how, drawing on Hall’s concept of criminal ‘undertakers’, the pseudo-pacification process can, on the one hand, create a “general cultural current” (Hall 2012; 2015; Raymen 2016, 21, in Wood, Anderson and Richards 2020, 653) of special liberty that they attribute rises in violence to, but on the other, lead to a reduction in interpersonal violence.

*Critique #7: Ultra-realism’s crime causation theory ignores the array of values, beliefs and vocabularies of motive for crime that are not an expression of capitalism*

The specifics of our seventh critique of special liberty theory and the pseudo-pacification process model are, like several of our other critiques, not systematically addressed by Raymen and Kuldova. Again, they argue that, since ultra-realists have researched an array of values and beliefs that are not primarily an expression of capitalism, our specific criticisms of the pseudo-pacification process and special liberty theory are invalid – an irrelevant conclusion. Once again, we suggest that this potentially speaks to contradictions between tenets of ultra-realist theory, as it currently stands. If, as Raymen and Kuldova (2020) argue, ultra-realist theories do not elevate “political economy to a ‘more important’ rung on the analytical ladder”, this provides the pseudo-pacification model little latitude for explaining why rates of violence are primarily an expression of capitalism’s “functional stimulation and control of the libidinal Real” (Hall 2012, 247).

*Critique #8: In setting up a dichotomy between ‘causative’ political-economic factors and merely ‘symptomological’ factors, ultra-realism engages in downwards conflation, leaving it unable to explain the formation of the structures it discusses*

In examining Raymen and Kuldova’s response to our eighth critique, it is important to qualify that our argument is not that all the theories ultra-realism draws upon and develops deny individual agency, but that the two theories subject to analysis deny individual agency. Indeed, we state this clearly in the abstract of our piece: “we suggest that in treating political economy as the underlying source of all causative power in society, both theories [the breakdown of the pseudo-pacification process and special liberty] engage in what Archer (1995) terms ‘downwards conflation’” (Wood, Anderson and Richards 2020: 642). Here, perhaps, a minor mea-culpa is in order. In the wording of our critique above, there is slippage between ultra-realism and the two specific ultra-realist crime causation theories we examine. In the very next sentence of our critique and those that follow it, however, we make clear that our appraisal is directed at ultra-realism’s crime causation theories (as opposed to, for example, the ‘transcendental materialist’ model the perspective draws upon, which, as noted in Eight Critiques, one of us has addressed elsewhere (Wood 2019)).

Our eighth critique was, in part, informed by ultra-realist authors counterposing ‘causative’ political-economic factors against ‘symptomological’ non-political economic factors. The statement by Raymen quoted in our article is not a ‘one off’ within the perspective – ultra-realist theorists have repeatedly made statements that affirm our argument the perspective is inclined to distinguish

'aetiological' political-economic factors with 'symptomological' (non-political-economic) factors. We might, for example, take Hall and Winlow's (2015, 115) statement:

Unforgiving interpersonal competition, inequality, separatism, racism, sexism, fraud, corruption, violence, securitization and punitiveness are merely some of the crude visible symptoms that lie on the surface of the complex of underlying forces activated by the system's constant provocation of the subject's anxiety and obscene enjoyment.

As Hall and Winlow argue in *Revitalizing Criminological Theory*, 'the system' that generates the afore-listed social harms (through seeming 'economic anxiety'), is capitalism. Indeed, in a following passage in this chapter, Hall and Winlow (2015, 115) attribute (seemingly singularly) to "capitalism's destructive forces", the demonstrations that broke out in 2011 in London after the police killing of Mark Duggan, a British man of Irish and African-Caribbean descent. Also attributed to those forces are the protests that rallied thousands in 2014-2015 in Ferguson, extending to many US states in the Black Lives Matter movement, after a local police officer killed African American man Michael Brown. While the first of these events was widely associated with the deleterious social impacts of neoliberal capitalism, it also occurred off the back of racialised prejudice and imperialist histories in UK policing, contextualised by entrenched institutional racism and White supremacy in England. The second event, occurred in the context of a 400-year history of racial targeting, brutality and murders by US law enforcement nationwide, extending importantly to the foundational subjugation, enslavement and disenfranchisement of African American people. In Hall and Winlow's (2015, 115) explanation:

Recent incidents such as the London riots of 2011 and the Ferguson riots of 2014 are two of the most spectacular amongst many other concrete universals which suggest that the point of intolerability is being approached in some of the most badly affected locales from which the abject perspective on capitalism's destructive forces is notably clear.

In the following passage, Hall and Winlow argue that to understand these harms, "we must understand the basic principles of capitalism's *pseudo-pacification process*" – a theory that, as our argument here and in Eight Critiques demonstrates, treats social processes including racialisation as epiphenomenal to capitalism. In such accounts, 'racism' and 'sexism' are not causative forces shaped by but ultimately irreducible to capitalism, but are rather "merely some of the crude visible symptoms that lie on the surface" (Hall and Winlow 2015, 115) of the system of contemporary capitalism. As Ellis (2019, 871) further elsewhere explains:

For Hall, the pseudo-pacification process seems to be an *economically functional* paradox that was instigated in the early modern period as a culturo-legal aid to the development of the market economy. [our emphasis]

It is precisely this economic functionalism and its implications that we challenge. By attributing primary influence to pseudo-pacification, such cases of racialised violence as that highlighted by the historical and contemporary Black Lives Matter social movement are, perhaps, misinterpreted as consequences of the 'left behind' phenomenon, where racism and violence are explained as a rational product of the disenfranchisement of culturally homogenous (often 'White') lower socio-economic status groups by the machinations of cultural and economic globalisation.

Racialised violence is not, in this reading, viewed as a dominant deleterious product of social prejudice, promulgated for capitalist ends by media and political elites, and underwritten by entrenched neo-colonialism and long-historically enshrined cultural White supremacy in ‘the West’ (Mondon and Winter 2020).

Instead of asking whether the presuppositions of the pseudo-pacification process point to key contradictions in ultra-realist theory, Raymen and Kuldova instead emphasise cases where ultra-realist writers have made statements contradicting what might be understood as economic functionalism, and in doing so draw a series of irrelevant conclusions. In raising ultra-realism’s transcendental materialist framework, for example, Raymen and Kuldova presuppose that there is theoretical coherence and consistency between a transcendental materialist model of the subject and the presuppositions of Hall’s earlier theories, such as pseudo-pacification and special liberty. It is precisely this internal incoherence we highlight, arguing that the transcendental materialist model of the subject promoted relatively late in the development of ultra-realism is incompatible with Hall’s earlier theories that continue to lie at the heart of the perspective.

Such theories withhold causative power from key dimensions of society, underwritten by social hierarchies, alleged ‘natural hierarchies’, and power differentials co-existent with capitalism. Withholding causative power from key dimensions of society is one of the hallmarks of what Archer (1995) terms ‘conflationary theorising’, and it is her useful work on this subject that informed much of our analysis in *Eight Critiques*. While Archer’s emergentist ontology informed our final critique of the breakdown of the pseudo-pacification process and special liberty theory, neither her work, nor the central concept of emergent properties, are mentioned in Raymen and Kuldova’s piece. They do not therefore address a key component of our final critique: If the pseudo-pacification process is an emergent social structure that rests upon specific relations between the ‘parts’ of society, then any changes in the relations between these parts (for example, owing to changes in meso-level relations between societal groups and macro-level noteworthy political events) would lead to the restructuring, destabilisation or dissolution of the pseudo-pacification process.

### ***Inaccurate claims***

Thus far we have focused on Raymen and Kuldova’s claims pertaining to our eight critiques of ultra-realism. We now finally respond to several additional inaccuracies in *Clarifying Ultra-realism*, several of which relate to our broader work and professional-political commitments. Firstly, Raymen and Kuldova (2020) claim that our critique rests on a “series of decontextualized quotes which misrepresent the overall structure and the central conceptual components of Hall’s theory”. This is a serious claim, but Raymen and Kuldova provide no evidence for how the quotes we incorporate have been taken out of context; that is, how the material immediately surrounding the quotes we draw upon alters their meaning. Additionally, they argue:

In attempting to outline ultra-realist accounts of violence, Wood et al. focus on a single article written by Hall and published in 1997, a full eighteen years before the birth of ultra-realism, and a magazine article, written by Hall and Winlow in 2003 to stimulate debate amongst ‘A’ Level and first-year undergraduate students. (Raymen and Kuldova 2020)

This is an erroneous and odd assertion, given that the two texts Raymen and Kuldova refer to are discussed in only one of our article’s eight critique sections,

appearing in only three of its sixteen pages. In Eight Critiques we refer to and engage with the arguments of fifteen articles, chapters or books explaining the pseudo-pacification process, special liberty, and/or ultra-realism's approach to understanding violence, citing a total of twenty-three ultra-realist texts. Moreover, we include direct quotations from fourteen publications, including works published as recently as 2019. Contrary to Raymen and Kuldova's claim, many of these articles do not represent "minor works" within the perspective, but are crucial to outlining its theories of pseudo-pacification and special liberty, and are often cited to that end in ultra-realist scholarship post-2015. Further, contradicting the assertion that we advocate a "broad-based dismissal of their collective research output", Wood (2019, 96), for one, has elsewhere communicated his view of ultra-realism that "the perspective makes a number of valuable contributions to criminology".

As also mentioned at the beginning of this article, Raymen and Kuldova (2020) claim that "the unacknowledged goal of Wood et al.'s paper is to insist that political centrism and mid-twentieth century social constructionism together represent the permanent horizon of politics and the knowable world", elaborating:

For Wood et al., any attempt to move beyond this horizon represents a dangerous intellectual radicalism that threatens to disrupt the political, social and cultural systems of the extreme centre (Ali 2015). From this view, all structural accounts of the economy are 'reductionist' and all accounts of subjectivity that appear to challenge the staid repertoire of liberal philosophy are, Wood et al. claim, 'simplistic'. Liberal social constructionism becomes the limit of criminological imagination. (Raymen and Kuldova 2020)

They further state: "Overall, Wood et al.'s critique suggests a deep and possibly unconscious attachment to philosophical liberalism and its preoccupation with autonomy, choice, decision-making and identity formation" (Raymen and Kuldova 2020). These accusations are entirely unsubstantiated. At no point did our article challenge the emancipatory potentials of an "intellectual radicalism", or advocate "political liberalism". Indeed, the words "centrism", "constructionism", "simplistic" and "reductionist" are not mentioned once in our article. A glance at our other published work should readily reveal that we are not political centrists, averse to structural accounts of political economy, or adherents to "liberal social constructionism" (Raymen and Kuldova 2020). Indeed, structural accounts of political economy have featured heavily in both Richards' and Wood's work to date, from analyses of academic capitalism and its impact on public criminology (Richards et al. 2020), to the political economy of US-led counterterrorism in the Global War on Terror and neo-jihadism (Richards 2016, 2020), and political-economic imperatives underwriting new media (Wood 2017, 172). The allegation that we oppose structural accounts of political economy is also invalidated by the argument of our Eight Critiques article, which concludes by explicitly promoting attention to the "material structural emergent properties" (SEPs) and "ideational cultural emergent properties" (CEPs) of neoliberal capitalism (Wood, Anderson and Richards 2020, 658). In light of this, we suggest that Raymen and Kuldova's claims add weight to Ilan's (2019, 10) observation that:

There has been a tendency among some on the left, and in particular 'ultra realist' criminology, to criticize and reject what they call 'identity politics' ... or what others might call analyses of race and gender in power relations. A distinction is drawn



between what is viewed as empty 'lifestylism' and 'real' politics, and borders are placed around what might be considered legitimate inquiry and political analysis

In a similar vein, we submit that Raymen and Kuldova's inaccurate claims about our political views gives weight to Phillips' and her co-authors' observation that ultra-realist criminology's "colour-blind socialism" treats analyses attuned to racialisation and racism as "a feeble-minded throwback to obsolete and inadequate critical traditions" (2020, 436, our emphasis).

As described in *Eight Critiques*, by unpacking ultra-realism's crime causation theories and identifying constructive frameworks for their interpretation, we hoped to "provide [...] a lens for examining the emergent and mediated nature of the relationship between crime and political economy" (Wood, Anderson and Richards 2020, 644). To extend upon our statements in this article's Introduction, we did not in any way seek to problematise the critical necessity for extensive and radical change to social and economic systems on an international scale to reduce social and economic harm, or undermine research that addresses this. We called into question certain specific theoretical mechanisms set out in the ultra-realist theoretical framework, which, in our view, cannot effectively explain the impact of various existing power differentials in racialised, gender, and other hierarchies, experienced by diverse populations, that generate patterns in violence, exploitation, and other forms of social harm. This imputation of false meaning and intent to our work catalyses another error in Raymen and Kuldova's (2020) argument, that "we refuse to follow the convention of proposing an alternative framework that provides a more convincing means of capturing, explaining and responding to key trends in contemporary social reality".

We disagree with this assertion, as elaborated in our earlier article and in the Introduction section of this one. Indeed, *Eight Critiques* concludes by asking: "How then might we overcome these issues associated with ultra-realism's crime causation theory?" (Wood, Anderson and Richards 2020, 658), detailing then how Archer's morphogenetic perspective, combined with the emergentist principles of wider critical realism, offers a useful set of conceptual tools for countering these issues.

On the point of critical realism, Raymen and Kuldova (2020) make an erroneous claim about the perspective that has also similarly been expressed by Hall and Winlow (2015): that, "Bhaskar's critical realism continued to posit the existence of an eternal moral essence in the subject, which exists in timeless opposition to the corrupting influence of society's cultural, political-economic and ideological systems" (Raymen and Kuldova 2020). Bhaskar's critical realism asserts no such eternal moral essence, as is clear from attention to his central works on human emancipation (see Bhaskar 2009), and his conceptualisation of 'in-gear' freedom (Bhaskar 2013). Raymen and Kuldova do not provide evidence to support their claim of an eternal moral essence in Bhaskar's philosophy, and indeed, the only of Bhaskar's (2008) works they cite is his philosophy of science text, *A Realist Theory of Science*, which precedes his work on in-gear freedom.

We look forward to seeing what the future holds for ultra-realism, and hope that supporters of the perspective remain receptive to constructive analyses of their theories. Academic debate need not be acrimonious, and we all benefit from robust but respectful dialogue about the explanatory potentials and limitations of our theories. These are the debates we hoped our original piece would stimulate discussion about, and, given the important place of political economy in explaining

crime, violence and exploitation, we look forward to engaging in further such debates in the future.

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