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One Immediate Huge Voice: Raymond Williams and Community

One of Raymond Williams' most influential and persuasive ideas was the way in which he described communities as structures of feeling that persisted, developed and were expressed through words and actions. As Williams explained, "A culture is common meanings, the product of a whole people."¹ Williams placed further emphasis on culture as alive in the chapter "Structures of Feeling" in his book *Marxism and Literature* (1977), stating that the tendency to reduce culture and society into "past tense" or "finished products" was the strongest barrier to the recognition of human cultural activity.² Williams' view was shaped by his resistance both to the fixed categories of class and single path of history set out in Marxist analysis - and the contingent and diverse readings put forward by the poststructuralists. For Williams, culture was open to reinterpretation, but not the endless reinterpretation, grounded in nothing concrete, that was ushered in by the reported Death of the Author.³

Roland Barthes wrote in *The Death of the Author*, which was published in 1977, the same year as Williams' *Marxism and Literature*, that "In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be disentangled, nothing deciphered; the structure can be followed, 'run' (like the thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath."⁴ The specificity of the image of the laddered stocking seems to shoot out of the prose as a point of contradiction – eliciting thoughts of ways to stop a ladder: a touch of nail varnish, or in a pinch, a smudge of soap. My grandmother Joan went further, maintaining the wartime practice of darning her stockings long after the years of rationing had passed. In thinking about my grandmother's mended stockings, it seems obvious that 'the real' that Barthes claims cannot be deciphered persists in arresting details such as these. The repaired ladder is a signal – pointing to WWII notions, like dressing smartly as a form of respect to others, the idea of *waste not want not* and stoicism manifested through effort (*smile boys, that's the style*). Raymond Williams wasn't convinced that there was nothing underneath such signals – instead, his work foregrounds the underlying *structures of feeling*, which gave rise to common words and actions, including, for example, the singing of popular songs.

In *The Long Revolution* (1961), Raymond Williams set out the case that "the process of communication is in fact the process of community: the sharing of common meanings, and thence common activities and purposes; the offering, reception and comparison of new meanings, leading to the tensions and achievements of growth and change."⁵ This Explainer will discuss the ways in which in recent times, the meanings and values of British people "were lived in real lives, in actual communities"⁶ with a focus on football supporters and the community activism inspired by the Covid-19 pandemic. These two examples are linked together in this Explainer by analysis of the meaning and values attached to the wartime song *You'll Never Walk Alone*, which holds great significance as a public expression of collective identity both for Liverpool FC and Glasgow Celtic fans and more recently, for community activists involved in initiatives such as *Clap for Carers* and fundraising for the NHS.

In his books *Culture and Society* (1958), *The Long Revolution* (1961) and *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976), Raymond Williams built a new understanding of British society and culture, articulated from his unique double perspective: both a working class, Welsh position and one informed by his undergraduate studies at Cambridge, where he encountered both Marxism and the teachings of F.R. Leavis. The critical and theoretical framework for Williams' ideas of community was informed by his cultural materialism, which acknowledged tradition while persistently articulating an outsider's perspective. Born in the Welsh border village of Pandy a hundred years ago, in 1921, Williams attended the village school and Abergavenny Grammar School, before leaving the Welsh 'border country' to go up to Trinity College at Cambridge University in the 1930s – a scholarship boy from a 'peripheral place' travelling to the centre of the British cultural élite.

However, after graduating, Williams worked as an adult education tutor for fifteen years in Oxford, further developing his deep understanding of those on the margins, before eventually being elected Fellow of Jesus college, Cambridge in 1961. Williams, when later asked to contribute to a book called

My Cambridge, began his contribution by stating, "It was not my Cambridge. That was clear from the beginning."⁷ Williams never lost contact with his Welsh culture and heritage, and it was this foundational experience, what he characterised in his famous essay *Culture is Ordinary* (1958) as "the working class way of life", characterised by "emphases of neighbourhood, mutual obligation and common betterment"⁸ that gave his work a distinctive quality of being rooted in reality. Stuart Hall wrote that, "this other 'knowable community' provided him with certain cultural resources, which enabled him to live and feel, and later to write and think, according to a different grain from that of 'Cambridge'. It was this, in turn, which influenced the way he thought about, and gave an experiential, 'lived', dimension to, such 'key ideas' as 'culture' and 'community'".⁹

In his 1976 book *Keywords*, a record of inquiry into shared words and meanings in British society and culture, Raymond Williams notes that "community" has been in the English language since C14, with the meaning "community of relations or feelings".¹⁰ A *community of relations*, as he sets out, may often relate to geographical proximity. Community as a term, he explains, "became established in English in a range of senses, including 1) the commons or common people, as distinguished by those of rank, 2) a state or organized society 3) the people of a district."¹¹ Senses 1-3 of community indicate actual social groups, such as 19th century English rural peasants whose lives were altered by Enclosure, which as Williams rightly notes, took away the "breathing space, the marginal day-to-day independence, for many thousands of people."¹² Such other examples as experiments in group living like the Findhorn Ecovillage established in Moray, Scotland in 1985 or the inhabitants of Williams' home village of Pandy would respectively fit senses 2 and 3 of community.

However, the term community also may refer to a *community of feelings*, which Williams sets out as sense 4) the quality of holding something in common, as in community of interests and sense 5) a sense of common identity and characteristics. Such communities of feeling can be found, since the mid 1990s, and the rise of digital and internet technology and globalized culture, in places geographically distant yet linked by a community of feelings, for instance supporters of Liverpool FC across the world, who share a community of interest in such things as how manager Jürgen Klopp is coping with the recent death of his mother and when injured defender Virgil van Dijk will return to the first team, and the more than 3.8 million attendees of the global phenomenon of Saturday Parkrun, who share the common identity of being 'Parkrunners' and the common characteristic of being interested in wellness.

In *Keywords*, Williams observes, "the contrast, increasingly expressed in C19, between the more direct, more total and therefore more significant relationships of community and the more formal, more abstract and more instrumental relationships of state, or of society in its modern sense."¹³ This contrast began to be most markedly noticeable in 1830, which saw the outbreak of the Swing Riots in Norfolk, when a harsh winter followed a poor harvest, resulting in reduced wages for labourers and agricultural riots that spread across Norfolk and throughout the south and east of England. The labourers wanted to stop the spread of new threshing machines, which they viewed as a threat to one of their few winter employments. They targeted rich farmers, magistrates and clergymen, who received tithes (one-tenth of annual produce or labour given to the church). Threatening letters were sent, signed by a mysterious leader, 'Captain Swing', demanding wage rises, reduced tithes or destruction of threshing machines. Perhaps inevitably, the Swing Riots did not succeed in halting the very gradual but seismic shift from small-scale farming to agribusiness that had begun with the General Enclosure Acts of 1801 and 1836 and been accelerated by mechanization. Williams writes in *The Country and the City* (1973) that, "What happened was not so much 'enclosure' – the method – but the more visible establishment of a long-developing system, which had taken, and was to take, several other forms. The many miles of new fences and walls, the new paper rights, were the formal declaration of where power now lay. The economic system of landlord, tenant and labourer, which had been extending its hold since the sixteenth century, was now in explicit and assertive control. Community, to survive, had then to change its terms."¹⁴

The solution to the problems posed by 19th Century Enclosure laws, for many of the destitute British peasantry, was to leave the countryside for the newly-industrialized big cities of Glasgow, Manchester and London, where their living situation might be even worse. By the 1840s, Friedrich Engels was

voicing his concerns about the human cost of rapid industrialization, in his seminal work *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1844). Engels' prose painted a dark portrait of the effects of the industrial revolution, which had lured farmers and peasants from the countryside to city factories. Engels wrote that industrial capitalism in Manchester had bred individualism characterised by 'brutal indifference, unfeeling isolation' and concluded that while "narrow self-seeking is the fundamental principle of our society everywhere, it is nowhere so shamelessly barefaced, so self-conscious as just here in the crowding of the great city."¹⁵ Raymond Williams notes that Engels' analysis was a departure from the insistence on "a practical underlying connection, in human love and sympathy"¹⁶ found in the city novels of both Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell. Unlike what Williams calls the *knowable community* described by Dickens and Gaskell, Engels described the streets of Manchester as being thronged with people who "crowd by one another as though they had nothing in common." Williams acknowledges that,

*The growth of towns and especially of cities and a metropolis; the increasing division and complexity of labour; the altered and critical relations between and within social classes: in changes like this any assumption of a knowable community – a whole community, wholly knowable – became harder and harder to sustain.*¹⁷

However, Williams was always cautious to avoid generalizations regarding either the reported death of the rural communities or the apparent self-regard of city dwellers. In *Culture and Society* (1958) he noted that many of the aspects of rural society reported to have vanished were still very much still in evidence in his home village of Pandy, such as "the inherited skills of work, the slow traditional talk, the continuity of work and leisure."¹⁸ Further, in *The Long Revolution* (1961) Williams methodically dismantled the framing of the city working class as "masses" who were objects rather than subjects of power, to instead put forward a view of trade unionism as a continuation of the community spirit that had its historic roots in the neighbourliness of farm labourers. Williams finds fault too, with the image painted by F R Leavis and Denys Thompson, in their *Culture and Environment* (1933)

*The modern labourer, the modern clerk, the modern factory-hand live only for their leisure, and the result is that they are unable to live in their leisure when they get it. Their work is meaningless to them, merely something they have to do in order to earn a livelihood, and consequently when their leisure comes it is meaningless...*¹⁹

Williams notes with the typical dry humour that enlivens his work that, "The points are familiar, but it is impossible to feel them to be adequate."²⁰ Instead, Williams' intellectual project carefully disassembles binary oppositions between the country labourer and the city worker, urging readers to view the country and the city as both interrelated and evolving. For example, he points out that the migration of village labourers to the big industrializing cities brought gains as well as losses in terms of the *structure of feeling* that then developed in working class city communities. He wrote, "The [Swing] riots indeed mark the last stage of the *local* confrontation, in immediate and personal terms. Such disturbances had necessarily to be succeeded by the organization of class against class, in trade unionism and its associated political movements. The *structure of feeling* that had held in direct appeal and in internal moral discrimination [...] was now necessarily transformed into a different order of thinking and feeling. The maturity of capitalism as a system was forcing systemic organization against it."²¹ Socialism was forged in the city, but it had implications for exploited people across the land. As Raymond Williams explains:

*Out of the very chaos and misery of the new metropolis [...] the civilizing force of a new vision of society had been created in struggle, had gathered up the suffering and the hopes of generations of the oppressed and exploited, and in this unexpected and challenging form was the city's human reply to the long inhumanity of city and country alike.*²²

How can we apply Raymond Williams's ideas of community to today's society, challenged and reshaped as our public realm has been by the rise of digital and internet technology, globalized culture, migration, terrorism, nationalism, economic downturn, climate change and the Coronavirus pandemic? Today Williams' ideas remain as relevant as ever, in understanding both how community functions and is expressed, *a structure of feeling* that in the pandemic year has taken shapes both creative and symbolic. Physicist Paolo Giordano observed in his essay *How Contagion Works* (2020), written from Italy in lockdown, the pandemic "has revealed something we had long known but had been unable to measure with precision until now: the multiple levels and layers that connect us to each other, everywhere, and the complexity of the world we inhabit – its social, political, financial motives and its interpersonal and psychological structures, too."²³

Many of us will remember seeing videos that went viral during the spring of 2020, of people singing from their windows and balconies, in Italian cities, after their government had enforced a nationwide quarantine on 9 March 2020. The poignant sound of voices joined in song spoke of the human beings behind the statistics in Italian cities, where the virus was claiming thousands of lives. A recording made in the city of Siena in Tuscany showing residents singing the traditional *Canto della Verbena* about the city from their windows, was viewed more than 600,000 times on Twitter. Meanwhile, in a district of Rome, neighbours entertained each other with a rendition of Domenico Modugno's 1958 popular song *Volare*²⁴ also attracting over 600,000 views on YouTube.

Volare is a song about soaring, both flying and singing (Volare, oh, oh! [Flying, oh! oh!] / Cantare, oh, oh, oh, oh! [Singing, oh, oh, oh, oh!]) Trapped as they were in their apartments, the neighbours could still share together this cultural moment. One Italian musician who played in the 6pm 'flash mobs' commented, "The reason we do it is that we feel like we are all one, and not separated" while another Italian musician explained, "Like the Italian poet Alda Merini said, "Music makes you breathe."²⁵ This phrasing is interesting, recalling as it does Raymond Williams' description of Enclosure as something that "took away the breathing space, the marginal day-to-day independence, for many thousands of people." The pandemic too, with the necessary justification of protecting the Right to Life, has been used as a justification for taking away many of the aspects that define and enliven our everyday lives. For the Italians, the nightly singing was "an appointment to be social"²⁶, perhaps even more critical in a nation known for warmth and sociability – while British people tend to have five personal encounters each day with people such as neighbours, colleagues and acquaintances, Italians on average would normally have ten such meetings on a typical day.²⁷

In lockdown, unable to see those who we would ordinarily meet on street corners, at sports facilities, at pubs and clubs, we still gravitate toward song as a means to connect, expressing community as a remote choir. In lockdown, the feeling of community, or community of shared feeling, is often unspoken. But it can be expressed through song. Raymond Williams understood community and culture as being things that everyone knows and is part of: culture is sung by many voices, like a choir. Song is a significant and vital means by which communities express what Williams called underlying *structures of feeling*, as seen in the videos of Italian neighbours singing from their balconies. As Williams saw it, "A culture is common meanings, the product of a whole people."²⁸

In England, there were several popular songs that assumed particular significance during the pandemic year of 2020-21, but the one that I will focus upon is Gerry and the Pacemakers' version of *You'll Never Walk Alone* (1963). *You'll Never Walk Alone* is a show tune from the 1945 Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *Carousel*, which gained popularity at the end of World War II and was recorded by several artists including Frank Sinatra and Judy Garland. The song is also sung at association football clubs around the world, where it is performed by a massed chorus of supporters on match day; a tradition which first developed at Liverpool F.C. after the chart success of the 1963 cover of the song by local group Gerry and the Pacemakers.

The tradition of singing *You'll Never Walk Alone* at Anfield came into being during the reign of legendary Liverpool manager Bill Shankly, who came into post in 1959. Under Shankly, Liverpool gained promotion to the First Division and won three League Championships and the UEFA Cup. During Shankly's 15 year reign, he placed a key emphasis on the importance of the Kop and the contribution of the supporters to the team's morale – to the extent that he allowed fans to have their ashes scattered on the pitch so they could go on attending games even in death. Under Shankly, Liverpool adopted an all-red home strip, as he believed that his team would look more intimidating dressed in all red, symbolic of red for danger, red for power.

*The introduction of the all-red strip had a huge psychological effect. I went home that night and I said to my wife Ness: "You know something... tonight I went out onto Anfield and for the first time there was a glow like a fire was burning. Our game against Anderlecht was a night of milestones. We wore the all-red strip for the first time. Christ, the players looked like giants. And we played like giants."*²⁹

Shankly, who led the team to many victories between 1959 and 1974, was born and raised in the small mining community of Glenbuck in Ayrshire, Scotland. Shankly had always hoped to become a professional footballer but after leaving school in 1928, he worked at a local mine for two years until the pit closed. Within a few months however his footballing career began when he was signed by Carlisle United. Twenty years later, in 1948, Shankly would return to Carlisle United as a manager, where he urged the local population to support the team and would use the public address system at matches to tell the crowd about his squad changes and how his strategy was improving the team. In his autobiography, Shankly wrote: "Right from the start as a manager [at Carlisle] I tried to show that the fans are the people that matter. You've got to know how to treat them and have them on your side".³⁰ Shankly made no secret of his left-wing leanings, stating, "The socialism I believe in is everyone working for each other, everyone having their share of the rewards. It's the way I see football, it's the way I see life."³¹

In the post-war period, Liverpool (like Glasgow) suffered a pronounced and prolonged period of industrial decline. Supporting the team became ever more important during these lean years, as Bill Shankly once said, "Some people believe football is a matter of life and death. I can assure you, it is much, much more important than that."³² Dave Russell, in his fascinating social history of association football records that Liverpool's Scion Kop, which housed almost 30,000 fans, "under a roof which amplified noise levels to a frightening extent [...] became probably the most celebrated football 'end' in the world during the early 1960s, when during the club's 1961-2 Second Division promotion season, fans began to develop the collection of rhythmic chants that were soon to become the common currency of English football."³³

In the early 1960s Liverpool's Anfield Stadium was one of the first football grounds to have a PA system, and the club employed a local DJ to play a countdown of the latest top ten hits, many of which were by 'Merseybeat' bands like The Beatles and Gerry And The Pacemakers, in the run up to kick off. The fans sang along both pre-match and continued to sing during the match, often with the lyrics altered for comic affect.³⁴ As the editors of football compendium *When Saturday Comes* rightly note, "These terrace songs were part of an organic football culture that was created by the fans themselves."³⁵ – or what Raymond Williams might have described as "transformed into a different order of thinking and feeling."

While songs such as *She Loves You* by the Beatles and Cilla Black's *Anyone Who Had a Heart*, were popular amongst the Anfield support, it was *You'll Never Walk Alone*, which stayed at No. 1 in the charts for about four weeks in 1963, that ultimately became Liverpool FC's signature tune.³⁶ Motherwell-born forward Ian St John, who had joined the club in 1961 after Shankly drove to Scotland to sign him, remembered, "They would do it en masse and the whole thing would be swaying, singing and the noise that came out of it was like a roar that would go up."³⁷ The songs sung during the 1963/64 season gained extra sentiment and importance, as Liverpool went on to win the first division for the first time since 1947, delivering the first major trophy under manager Bill Shankly, and by May

1965, commentator Kenneth Wolstenholme complimented the “wonderful singing by the Anfield choir” during the FA Cup final against Leeds United at Wembley.³⁸ Liverpool had never won the cup in their history, and after Ian St John secured the 2-1 win with a header, the fans erupted in a rousing rendition of “*Ee-aye-addio / We’ve won the cup!*”

Reporter John Morgan remembered witnessing the Kop in full voice:

*I’ve never seen anything like this Liverpool crowd. Their rhythmic swaying is an elaborate and organised ritual. They seem to know intuitively when to begin. Throughout the match they invent new words to express adulatory, cruel or bawdy comments about the players or the police, but even then they begin singing these new words with one immediate huge voice.*³⁹

The legendary support of the Liverpool fans lent credence to the idea of the supporters as the “12th man”, capable of spurring their team on to victory through chanting and singing. The idea of the 12th man first appeared in print in 1900 in a Minnesota university magazine, in which “the mysterious influence of the twelfth man on the team, the rooter” was first cited as a significant influence on the home team’s success.⁴⁰ At Anfield, the supporters increasingly put the home team at a psychological advantage, while unsettling the opposition and appealing to referees with their songs, chants, cheering and shouts of disapproval. Reporter Frank McGhee wrote of Liverpool’s triumphant 5-0 victory over Arsenal which secured the league championship in 1964, “The Kop set the match to music, and sang their team to the championship with a wit and warmth woven into the pattern of play so closely it became a part of the game itself. Liverpool fans don’t just watch a game. They take part. They live it.”⁴¹ What McGhee describes is a new conception of spectatorship, similar to that outlined by Algerian philosopher Jacques Rancière in *The Emancipated Spectator*, which questions the paternalistic view of the spectator as passive and outlines a new conception of acting and watching which sees both as active partners in the generation of knowledge, as a ‘third thing’ that is constantly renegotiated as part of the production of knowledge.⁴² This ‘third thing’ can also be understood as a *breathing space* – where fans forgot everyday worries and expressed themselves collectively in song.

Raymond Williams noted in *Television* (1974) that the televising of football games in the 1960s “has created new kinds of interest, not only among spectators but among potential participants.” Describing the sub-culture of ‘sporting gossip’, which once only appeared in newspapers, but since its 1964 had been the cornerstone of BBC’s *Match of the Day*, Williams concludes that, “The national and international sporting networks form a social dimension of an increasingly significant kind in urban industrial culture. [...] television has been a powerful agency of certain trends which were already active in industrial society.” Astutely, he adds that, “Some of the best television coverage of sport, with its detailed close-ups and its variety of perspectives, has given us a new excitement and immediacy in watching physical action and even a new visual experience of a different kind.”⁴³

The 1960s was also the first era in which travelling fans became a major phenomenon, which led to songs spreading through groups of rival supporters, and finding new iterations as different teams produced their own ‘cover versions’ of popular songs. It was during these years that the Anfield anthem *You’ll Never Walk Alone* began to be sung by supporters at Celtic Park in Glasgow. Celtic later returned the favour when Liverpool fans created their own version of the 1979 Pete St John folk ballad *The Fields of Anthenry*, set during the Great Famine of the 1840s. An estimated 100,000 Irish famine victims emigrated to Glasgow during the 1840s, giving the song great resonance on the terraces of Celtic Park. Around 49,000 Irish migrants already lived in Liverpool by 1841, but when the Irish potato famine began, in 1845, an estimated 1.5 million desperate people crossed the Irish Sea in ‘coffin ships’ headed for Liverpool. Today, an estimated 75% of Liverpool’s population have some Irish ancestry.⁴⁴ The Liverpool version of *The Fields of Anthenry*, called *The Fields of Anfield Road*, with adapted lyrics referencing their history and stadium, has also taken an important place in the Kop’s repertoire, and was poignantly updated with an additional verse in 2009 with a verse to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Hillsborough Disaster.

During the 1960s, Celtic had their own legendary manager, Jock Stein, who was born in Burnbank, Hamilton on the outskirts of Glasgow, and guided Celtic to nine successive Scottish League championships between 1966 and 1974. Like Shankly, Stein came from a coalmining background, and as young man he got his footballing break while still working as a coalminer, playing football part-time for Blantyre Victoria and then Albion Rovers. Also like Shankly, Stein greatly valued his devoted fanbase, commenting, "Football is for the fans. It can be the greatest game in the world but if there are no people to watch it, it becomes nothing. The fans are the lifeblood of the game." The alliance between Liverpool and Celtic that flourished during the eras of Shankly and Stein stems from commonalities between the two cities, notably each's large Irish diaspora communities, which informed the development of the predominantly left-wing and working class culture of both Liverpool and Glasgow during the Industrial Revolution. In addition, the fans of both Liverpool and Celtic were renowned as being more zealous than most. As Tommy Burns, Celtic midfielder between 1975-1989 and later club manager, observed,

There are parallel lines to be drawn not only between the teams but also the cities we are proud to represent. Glasgow and Liverpool both have much in common. We both suffer from deprivation and the scourge of unemployment. The comparisons stand up to scrutiny for both the Glaswegians and Liverpoolians that have risen above that. They share a wit and friendliness that had formed a common bond. Both sets of supports are fanatical, the type whose lives revolve around football.⁴⁵

This common bond was strengthened following 1989 Hillsborough disaster, when 96 Liverpool fans died after they were crushed within Sheffield Wednesday's stadium during the 1989 FA Cup semi-final with Nottingham Forest. From the outset, South Yorkshire Police had sought to establish a case emphasising exceptional levels of drunkenness and aggression among Liverpool fans, alleging falsely that many arrived at the stadium late, without tickets and determined to force entry.⁴⁶ Ch Supt Duckenfield told key people that a gate was "forced" by Liverpool fans, an untrue claim reinforced in briefings to media sources. Newspapers took up the story, pointing the finger at "drunk and ticketless" supporters. *The Sun* printed its now infamous front page alleging Liverpool fans had "urinated on police officers" and "picked the pockets of the dead", these serious and baseless allegations adding considerably to the pain of the survivors and the bereaved.

During the time of the Hillsborough Disaster, Glasgow-born Kenny Dalglish was manager of Liverpool. Dalglish had been the star forward for six years at Celtic, before leaving Stein's team to move to Liverpool in 1977. Already beloved by both Celtic and Liverpool fans, Dalglish's conduct in the aftermath of Hillsborough, earned him even greater lasting respect and affection. Dalglish attended many funerals of the victims – including four in one single day.⁴⁷ Fifteen days after the tragedy, Celtic invited Dalglish and his team to Glasgow, to play a friendly memorial match, raise money for the families affected and to show solidarity with the Liverpool fans then being blamed by the police and mainstream media for the events in Sheffield.⁴⁸ Martin Donaldson, a Celtic fan with a Liverpool-supporting son, attended the memorial on 30th April 1989. He said,

I remember approaching the main stand that day and seeing so many different coloured scarves in the stadium as people from across the UK had come to pay their respects. On getting to our seats, we found we were sitting next to a group of family and friends who had made the trip up from Liverpool for the match. They were still raw with emotion but grateful for the welcome given by fans around them on their journey. Before the match kicked off a Celtic fan lay flowers on the pitch at the Celtic end of the ground, then fans held their scarves high and joined in a rendition of You'll Never Walk Alone.⁴⁹

Out of the chaos and misery of Hillsborough, came a human reply –

*Walk on, walk on
With hope in your heart*

In 2012, a report compiled by the Hillsborough Independent Panel, was released that said that despite obvious signs of distress, it was a while before the police fully reacted and launched attempts to rescue those who were being crushed. The report found that the safety of the crowd admitted to the terrace was compromised at every level and that the management of the crowd by South Yorkshire Police and the Sheffield Wednesday FC had suffered a number of key operational failings, due to a policing and stewarding mindset predominantly concerned with crowd disorder. Importantly, for the families of the dead and the survivors who had been wrongly blamed for causing the crush, the report also found “there is no evidence to support these allegations, other than a few isolated examples of aggressive or verbally abusive behaviour clearly reflecting frustration and desperation.”⁵⁰ Almost all of the 96 had died from compressive asphyxia, being unable to breathe because of the external pressure of other supporters’ bodies. Following the publication of the damning report, Liverpool Walton MP Steve Rotherham started a campaign to get *You’ll Never Walk Alone* back into the UK charts. After 48 years, the song returned to the UK top 20 in September 2012 with the proceeds being donated to Hillsborough-related charities.⁵¹

*Walk on through the wind
Walk on through the rain
Though your dreams be tossed and blown*

*Walk on, walk on
With hope in your heart
And you’ll never walk alone
You’ll never walk alone*

Today, Anfield stadium and Celtic Park are places that encourage a feeling of premonition: something is happening that happened before. Being there, you join a tradition, a community. You join in with the singing, you sing *You’ll Never Walk Alone*. The German team Borussia Dortmund also began singing *You’ll Never Walk Alone* in 1996, when a five-piece local band called Pur Harmony covered the English classic. After being played on the Stadium speakers, the song was quickly adopted by the 25,000 BVB fanatics who sit in the club’s “Yellow Wall” stand at Signal Iduna Park.⁵² In 2015, BVB manager Jürgen Klopp was appointed the new manager of Liverpool FC, leading to moments such as the emotionally-charged evening of 14 March 2016 when following a joint rendition of *You’ll Never Walk Alone* by the rival fans, the Reds defeated Borussia Dortmund 3-2 in the quarter final of the Europa League. Like his famous predecessor Bill Shankly, Klopp has been outspoken about his socialism, saying, “I’m on the left, of course. More left than middle. I believe in the welfare state. I’m not privately insured. I would never vote for a party because they promised to lower the top tax rate. My political understanding is this: if I am doing well, I want others to do well, too.”⁵³ In addition to echoing Shankly’s belief in “everyone working for each other, everyone having their share of the rewards”, Klopp has also guided Liverpool to numerous victories, including two successive UEFA Champions League finals in 2018 and 2019, winning the latter to secure his first – and Liverpool’s sixth – title in the competition.

On the 8 March 2020, Hannah Jane Parkinson published a feature in *The Guardian* about her lifelong support of her local team Liverpool. She wrote,

*I am 30. I have never witnessed my beloved Liverpool FC lift the title. Two months from now, this is going to change. As I write Liverpool have a 22-point lead at the top of the table. Of 84 points available this season, they have taken 79 [...] Four more games. Eyes on the prize. For me, at last, 30 years in the making, eyes on the prize.*⁵⁴

Liverpool would only play one more game in the 2019/2020 season, a game that would in hindsight prove to be highly controversial. On 11 March, the government allowed the UEFA Champions League Football Match between Liverpool and Atlético-Madrid to go ahead at Anfield stadium in Liverpool. 54,000 people attend the game, including 3,000 fans from Madrid, which was already in partial lockdown. On the day of the match, 782 of the confirmed 1,646 Covid-19 cases in Spain were located

in Madrid. Spain had already marked 35 Covid-related deaths and the country had closed its schools the day before. Now the 3,000 fans from Madrid were in Liverpool: out and about, drinking, mixing with local people, in the hotel, at the ground, in the souvenir shop at Anfield. There were just 6 confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Liverpool on 11 March, but that number swelled to 309 less than three weeks later.⁵⁵ Later, it would be estimated that the Liverpool-Atletico match is linked to 41 extra deaths at Liverpool hospitals between 25 and 35 days after the game, nearly half the death toll of Hillsborough. By 15 May, Liverpool had the highest Covid-19 death rate outside of London.

One of those who died from Covid after attending the game was lifelong Liverpool fan Richard Mawson, 70, who passed through the Spanish fans on his way to Anfield on March 11.⁵⁶ A season ticket holder, Richie had been attending Liverpool matches since he was a teenager. He had been at Hillsborough in Sheffield on 15 April 1989, with his son, Jamie, and had helped pull fans to safety into the stand above. Richie became ill two weeks after the game, and could not breathe when he last spoke to Jamie on the afternoon of 3 April. “He was saying: ‘I can’t get my breath,’” his son remembers. Only 10 people were allowed to attend his funeral, but when Richie’s wife Mary and Jamie arrived at the crematorium, they found a socially distanced crowd of 200 people waiting there. One of the most poignant impacts of Covid-19 has been the UK government advice that, “Communal (congregational) singing should not take place indoors or outdoors. This applies even if social distancing is being observed or face coverings are used.” However, at Richie’s funeral, the funeral director turned on the speakers, so that the crowd outside could hear the music. When the coffin disappeared behind the curtain, strewn in red roses, the gathered supporters listened together to *You’ll Never Walk Alone*.⁵⁷

On 11 March, “deeply concerned by the alarming levels of spread and severity, and by the alarming levels of inaction, WHO made the assessment that Covid-19 can be characterized as a pandemic”. Confirmed UK cases of coronavirus rise by more than 200 in a single day, and in the face of UK government inaction, large numbers of institutions, organisations and individuals across the UK cancel or postpone public events, including the Six Nations Championship and the London Marathon. On March 12, addressing the question of banning major public events such as sporting fixtures, Prime Minister Boris Johnson says that the scientific advice [...] is that banning such events will have little effect on the spread.” The next day, March 13th, Premier League football fixtures are suspended, and a week later, on 20 March, all English schools close. On 23 March, in a televised address, Boris Johnson announces new strict rules applicable to the entire United Kingdom with the aim to slow the spread of the disease, by reducing transmission of the disease between different households. The British public are instructed that they must stay at home, except for certain “very limited purposes” – shopping for essential items (such as food and medicine); one form of outdoor exercise each day (such as running, walking or cycling), either alone or with others who live in the same household; for any medical need, or to provide care to a vulnerable person; and to travel to and from work where this is “absolutely necessary” and the work in question cannot be done from home. It was in the month that followed that in some areas of the UK and Europe, *You’ll Never Walk Alone* became the anthem of support for medical staff, first responders, and those in quarantine during the Covid-19 pandemic.⁵⁸

The community of Liverpool fans, like the community of Celtic fans, is linked by what sociologists might characterise as “weak ties” – at a football game, you may cheer and sing and even embrace together with a fellow supporter who is in all other respects a stranger. Yet as fans you share *a community of feelings*, you share *a community of interest*. Lifelong Celtic fan Matt McGlone wrote that, “When we are all singing and dancing together on the terracing we are a tribe and make no mistake about it! There will never be another occasion in your life when you will turn around and hold a stranger close to your body, grab his hand, and maybe end up kissing him as well, is there? Let’s face it we have all done it, as the ball bulges in the net!”⁵⁹ Such connections are made possible by the ‘weak ties’ that exist between such people as fellow supporters. Social networks commonly consist of hierarchical layers of relationships, ranging from emotionally close ties (e.g., spouses/partners, children) to weaker ties like those, for example, that exist between season ticket holders who sit close together in the Kop or at Celtic Park. While these relationships are emotionally less close, they are still important for an individual’s overall well-being.⁶⁰

On 25 June, Liverpool won their first Premier League title after second place team Manchester City lost to Chelsea. It had been a long wait for the club to be crowned champions of England again, having earned that honour 11 times between 1973 and 1990, the last time just before Kenny Dalglish resigned in 1991, due to the stresses of Hillsborough. Around two thousand fans gathered outside the Kop at Anfield to celebrate, in contravention of social distancing guidelines. Many of the supporters who congregated at the club's ground wore face masks and some lit red flares. No attempts were made to disperse the crowd by police officers at the ground.⁶¹

For over a year, the pandemic has problematised and restricted social contact in unprecedented ways. Nightclubs and football grounds lie silenced; shut down. The virus has made handshakes, hugs and physical proximity to others dangerous. The feeling of belonging facilitated by public congregation, a sort of psychic community of bodies, concentration, actions and atmosphere, was consigned to poignant memory. People stayed at home, and danced alone in their kitchens, singing along to music playing on the radio. Figures showed people staying at home due to the pandemic listened to more radio - Capital FM said online radio listening had risen by 15%, while BBC Radio reported an 18% rise in streaming figures. BBC Radio and Education director James Purnell said: "People turn to us during significant events for our news and analysis but also for music, entertainment and companionship."⁶²

The football season resumed on 17 June 2020, but behind closed doors – the fans stayed at home, watching the 'Project Restart' games on tv. But this was a new football – without fans, the game was altered in so many ways. Watching with natural sound, you could hear the shouting and swearing of the players. Watching with artificial 'crowd sound', you became aware of how organic and dynamic an actual crowd is – how sound lives rise and fall, in peaks of energy, excitement and small explosions of disappointment. Raymond Williams had noted in *Television* (1974), "a new excitement and immediacy in watching physical action and even a new visual experience of a different kind".⁶³ In Covid times, the change to televised football brought a new aural experience of football – muted, lacking the 12th Man. The players too, seemed to feel the change. Some struggled with fitness and sustained injuries after three months without competitive games, some just seemed to play differently without the crowd cheering them on. Many games ended as goalless draws. The home advantage was also diminished – Liverpool without the Kop played as a different team, as did Celtic without their loyal Green Brigade. After winning the league in 2020, in 2021 Liverpool are currently in seventh place, 25 points behind leaders Manchester City. Meanwhile Celtic have endured a similarly galling season, losing the league to arch-rivals Rangers for the first time in ten years.

Glasgow-based artist Nathan Coley is a lifelong Celtic fan who in normal circumstances attends home games as a season ticket holder. He explains, "I miss the weather, the travelling to and from the stadium, and of course the communal singing. I miss the effort. Getting there through the pissing rain, seems to be part of the contract. Watching on my computer is easy, sanitised, dull and flat by comparison. The footage is dull - as there is no atmosphere in the stadiums due to the absence of fans. It feels very removed, and somehow a little perverse to be watching. On a few occasions I've watched the matches as I felt I should rather than I really wanted to. This is a more fundamental issue to do with loyalty and superstition - If I don't watch, they will get beat. You have to keep being a fan, especially when the team are playing badly. [...] I really miss the rituals of physically going to the game. As we approach Celtic Park, and only then. I (and no-one else) will ask the others for a prediction. "What will the score be?" This is a tiny part of my life, but I feel in a way it's the accumulation of all these small things that have fundamentally changed us during Covid."⁶⁴

There are so many accumulations of the small things we are missing now. Over the past year most of us will have seen our close family and friends somehow, even if only during a socially distanced walk or through a window. The people we haven't seen are the familiar strangers that bring colour and variety to our lives, in unplanned encounters that often happen in urban parks and streets. Often, curiously, it's not always really close friends I have found myself missing, but people like the grey haired man who sat in front of us at Carrow Road, who always turned round and smiled wryly, raising his

eyebrows at the young man in the yellow anorak who sat on our right and remonstrated “How many, referee?” over and over. I missed the older woman who ran the course in about same time as me at our local Parkrun but sometimes encouraged me to overtake her. I missed the other parents from my son’s football team. These ‘weak ties’ are made possible by the convergence of lives that occur naturally in towns and cities, and have been halted by Covid this past year.

*When you walk through a storm
Hold your head up high
And don't be afraid of the dark*

In the pandemic year, a number of links were drawn by right-wing British commentators between the pandemic and WWII, not least by Prime Minister Boris Johnson. On 17 March 2020, Johnson said,

*We must act like any wartime government and do whatever it takes to support our economy. That's the main purpose of this press conference this afternoon. [...] Yes this enemy can be deadly, but it is also beatable – and we know how to beat it and we know that if as a country we follow the scientific advice that is now being given we know that we will beat it. And however tough the months ahead we have the resolve and the resources to win the fight.*⁶⁵

Such comparisons resonated partly because the generation most vulnerable to the effects of Covid-19 were the war-time generations, the over-80s, born in 1940 or earlier. UK Hospital admission rates have been the highest in the 85 years and older age group throughout the pandemic. Their hospital admission rate is almost 50 times higher than for those aged between 15 and 44 years.⁶⁶ Throughout the pandemic, Johnson has continued to employ wartime phrases in relationship to ‘fighting’ Covid-19, for example in July 2020 he announced he hoped “It’ll be over by Christmas”, which proved inaccurate - and in February 2021, Johnson announced plans for a mass testing ‘blitz’ as part of the plan to lift lockdown. However, Johnson’s recurrent use of military rhetoric struck many medical professionals as inappropriate, given that humans can never ‘win’ against a virus but instead must learn to live with it.

Many who had survived the war remarked that difficult though that conflict was, people were able to get through it partly because of camaraderie between both soldiers and civilians, and opportunities to meet in military bases, air raid shelters, wartime allotments and dancehalls, where many relationships formed. My own paternal grandparents met in such a way - Peter met Joan during the war, when he was in the Royal Navy and she was a WRN, working as an engineer fixing planes. Such practical communal activities as fire-watching, ‘digging for victory’ and the myriad applications of ‘make do and mend’ gave shape and meaning to the lives of the wartime generation, who were literally defending their communities with their hands. In contrast, the lockdowns of 2020-2021 placed individuals into isolation, able to express solidarity with one another only through such actions as *Clapping for Carers* on their doorsteps, displaying *Thank You NHS* signs in their windows, and online activism of various sorts, such as signing Marcus Rashford’s petition to end child food poverty or donating to NHS fundraising drives, notably Captain Tom Moore’s sponsored walk.

Perhaps inspired by the Italian balcony singers, *Clap for Carers* was initiated by Annemarie Plas, a Dutch national living in England, a few days after the UK went into its first lockdown in March 2020. The clap took place every Thursday at 8pm for ten weeks. The first clap was on 26 March, when millions of people stopped what they were doing to stand on their doorsteps to applaud NHS staff, carers and other health workers, sometimes playing instruments or bashing pots and pans. *The Guardian* reported,

*Few can have predicted the wall of noise that followed that first Thursday night and every Thursday since – the applause rising from doorsteps, the smiles and waves between neighbours who had never previously spoken to each other, the new national ritual that, for many, became the clearest fixed point in the week. Isolated in our homes, we were speaking together as never before.*⁶⁷

Many described the weekly clap as a positive communal experience, such as Kay Pallister, who described how her mostly elderly neighbours on a quiet village street in Buckinghamshire looked forward to Thursdays as a weekly chance to see and connect with others. She remembers,

While they were very careful, not going out and getting online shopping etc. - they were VERY keen to get 'together' in any way we could think of - all outdoors and at a distance but it was amazing... they instigated it all... We did a lot of Clapping for Carers - had themes each week from 'Black Tie' to 'Beach wear'. We had an extra big clap on the Thursday it happened to be one of our favourite neighbours 80th Birthday and gave her a bunch of flowers...so much crying!!⁶⁸

Others have said that they had mixed emotions about *Clap for Carers* but felt obliged to take part. Campaigners and trade unions suggested a pay-rise for key workers would serve as a more fitting tribute. Some didn't Clap for Carers as they were angry about the lack of PPE and Covid testing for NHS workers and thought the clapping was an empty gesture which failed to address the pressing problems faced by frontline healthcare workers. Boris Johnson and Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Matt Hancock joining in the clap while failing to fully acknowledge difficulties faced by NHS staff caused anger, particularly given the increasing numbers of NHS staff contracting and dying from Covid-19. By the end of May, Annemarie Plas announced it was time to stop the weekly clap because, "Without getting too political [...] I think the narrative is starting to change and I don't want the clap to be negative."⁶⁹

An attempt by Annemarie Plas on 7 January 2021, to revive the clap as "Clap for Heroes" during the second wave of the UK pandemic and the third English lockdown, met with negative reactions. The change in mood was palpable: Plas received online abuse and *Nursing Times* reported that while recognising the good intentions behind the initiative, all most nurses wanted was for the public to adhere to the Covid-19 rules and safety guidelines in place. Palliative care doctor Rachel Clarke tweeted, "Please don't clap us. Just wear a mask, wash your hands and respect lockdown." Nurse Kirstie Hill added that they believed hero was a "dangerous" term, because it "implied invincibility". "We are not invincible and when we do say we're struggling, we're not believed."⁷⁰

On 6 April 2020, at the age of 99, Captain Tom Moore began to walk one hundred lengths of his garden in aid of NHS Charities Together, with the goal of raising £1,000 by his 100th birthday. The image of this elderly war veteran taking practical action struck a chord and in the 24-day course of his fundraising, he attracted over 1.5 million individual donations. On the morning of Moore's hundredth birthday, the total raised by his walk passed £30 million. Also during April 2020, Moore performed in a cover version of *You'll Never Walk Alone* sung by Michael Ball and the NHS Voices of Care choir, with proceeds going to the same charity. The single was the fastest selling single of the year and reached number one in UK music charts by 24 April, making him the oldest person to achieve a UK number one.⁷¹

How did this latest version of *You'll Never Walk Alone* differ in significance from Gerry and the Pacemakers' version, which was the model for singing on the terraces of Anfield and Celtic Park? Probably the most significant difference was the way in which this version harked back to the song's legacy as a 1940s showtune. When a version was released by Frank Sinatra in 1945 it resonated strongly with those who had survived WWII and lost loved ones, who took solace in the lyrics. Captain Tom Moore was himself a survivor, who had served with the 146th Regiment Royal Armoured Corps in India and subsequently with the Fourteenth Army, the so-called "Forgotten Army", who fought a brutal and gruelling war in the jungles of Burma (now Myanmar) but who largely went uncelebrated in Britain. Captain Tom's version of *You'll Never Walk Alone*, like Vera Lynn's *We'll Meet Again*, which also saw renewed popularity during the Pandemic Year, hearkened back to wartime separations and the eventual triumph through adversity felt by many on VE Day and afterwards.

On the 2 February 2021, Captain Sir Tom Moore died in hospital aged 100 after testing positive for Covid-19. His family, like many others, was forced to arrange a small funeral for just eight mourners.

Boris Johnson urged people to take part in a “national clap” that Thursday to honour his memory. Mr Johnson said: “Tonight let's clap together for Captain Tom at 18:00 and let's clap for the spirit of optimism that he stood for. But let's also clap for all those he campaigned for - our brilliant NHS staff and care workers - and let's do everything we can to carry on supporting them. “Because if we stay at home, protect our NHS and save lives then, in the words of Captain Tom, tomorrow will be a good day.”⁷² Palliative care doctor Dr Rachel Clarke, initially a supporter of what she called in April 2020, “the gorgeous, uplifting weekly claps for carers”⁷³, tweeted in response to Johnson’s call that “clapping doesn’t feel right [...] amid the vastness of our death & grief. Nor will clapping protect others.” That same month it had been reported that 230 frontline health and care workers had died from Covid-19. As Raymond Williams observes in *Culture is Ordinary*, “meanings are made by living, made and remade in ways we cannot know in advance.”⁷⁴

A Church of England clergyman, Reverend Jarel Robinson-Brown then caused a Twitter storm when he tweeted in response to Johnson’s request, “The cult of Captain Tom Moore is a cult of white British nationalism. I will offer prayers for the repose of his kind and generous soul, but will not be joining the ‘national clap’.”⁷⁵ The clergyman removed his post later the same day and offered an “unreserved apology for the insensitive timing and content” of his tweet. Yet Robinson-Brown’s tweet did point to what has been called elsewhere, the “positive affirmation of whiteness”⁷⁶ that dominates much British culture. While many found Reverend Robinson-Brown’s tweet about refusing to clap for Captain Sir Tom Moore offensive, it yet touched on simmering anger over systemic racism in the United Kingdom, and notions of Britishness that excluded people of colour. In his 1987 book, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*, Paul Gilroy had described how a notion of ‘cultural belongingness’ functioned as a coded language for race and colour, which “constructs and defends an image of national-culture, homogeneous in its whiteness yet precarious and perpetually vulnerable to attack from enemies within and without.”⁷⁷ Reverend Robinson Brown’s tweet pointed to an uncomfortable truth about conflicting ideas of what it means to be British. Raymond Williams urged, “A good community, a living culture, will [...] not only make room for but actively encourage all and any who can contribute to the advance in consciousness which is the common need. Wherever we have started from, we need to listen to others who stared from a different position.”⁷⁸

The pandemic had foregrounded the differences of experience and perception that co-exist within the population of the United Kingdom. Raymond Williams was someone highly attuned to such differences: after returning from service in WWII, he found that he and many of his countrymen *did not speak the same language*.⁷⁹ What he meant by this, was that although English was still their common language, he was aware that the war had created difference – “we have different immediate values or different kinds of valuation, or that we are aware, often intangibly, of different formations and distributions of energy and interest.”⁸⁰

At the last UK census, in 2011, the population of the United Kingdom was 63 million. At that time, East Asians (originating from countries and territories such as Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, China and Taiwan) comprised 1.1% of the UK population. In 2011, those identifying as Black British (British citizens of either Black African descent or of Black African-Caribbean background) made up 3.0% of the UK population. By far the largest minority ethnic group in the UK is South Asians (people who trace their ancestry to the former British Raj and Ceylon (the modern countries of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Maldives) who at the time of the 2011 census made up 6.9% of the population.

Racial tensions in the UK have been heightened during the Coronavirus pandemic, with increased incidence of racist attacks on Chinese people and growing awareness of the disproportionate numbers of minority ethnic people and migrant populations who are key workers (for example in health and social care, transport, food production and processing, delivery services and waste disposal). People from ethnic minority communities are disproportionately impacted by Covid-19 – although all the reasons for this are not fully understood, it seems probable that this is connected to lower life expectancies in these societal groups which were already present even prior to the outbreak of Covid-19. A report published by the National Institute for Health Research, co-authored by the University of Bristol, found that the risk of death from Covid-19 is generally higher amongst ethnic minority

communities than White British people. “This appears to be due to a complex mixture of factors, and no one factor alone can explain all of the difference. Contributing factors include, in no particular order: being poorer, where people live, overcrowded housing, types of job, other illnesses, and access to health services.”⁸¹ More recent analysis has shown that Black patients were 1.8 times, and Asian patients 1.54 times more likely to be admitted to an intensive care unit (ICU) and need mechanical ventilation than their white counterparts. Recent analysis from Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), found that mortality rates were twice as high among Black ethnic groups compared to their White counterparts.⁸²

Following the death of George Floyd, who died on May 25th while being forcibly restrained by police officers in Minneapolis, thousands of people attended largely peaceful Black Lives Matter demonstrations in cities across the UK on 7 June, including in Manchester, Wolverhampton, Nottingham, Glasgow and Edinburgh. Floyd’s last words, “I Can’t Breathe” had marked resonances for the Black British population, denied adequate “breathing space” within British culture and society, and also more at risk of becoming seriously ill from Covid-19 than the white population. In London, an estimated 20,000 people attended the demonstration, which saw some unrest and resulted in eight police officers being injured and 12 arrests. The protests divided public opinion, with many concerned that the mass gatherings would lead to a second wave of Covid-19 infections as social distancing was not being adhered to - some who were sympathetic to the cause, opted to ‘attend’ live streaming of events from home rather than breach lockdown guidelines. Senior Black politicians and campaigners rounded on the Home Secretary Priti Patel and Health Secretary Matt Hancock for suggesting that the UK was not racist and for claiming that the protests were simply based on anger about prejudice in the US. David Lammy, the shadow justice secretary, said it was “real ignorance” to suggest that the protesters were angry only about police brutality in the US rather than discrimination in the UK as well, while MP Dawn Butler, said suggestions that the protests largely related to America were a sign that the government was “again not listening and shows no commitment to resolving the issues of racism in our own country”.⁸³

While Britain is a multicultural society, it is also a nation currently de-stabilized by nationalism, provincialism, racism, intolerance and the additional physical and emotional stresses wrought by Covid-19. The pandemic has redrawn the rules that govern our daily lives and brought forth new ways of acting, some of which were reactionary, such as the All Lives Matter sloganeering devised in response to the Black Lives Matter movement. However, many of the new ways of acting prompted by the pandemic were positive, and orientated towards neighbourliness, helping and protecting others. Initiatives such as local WhatsApp groups to distribute groceries and medicine to shielding and self-isolating neighbours are instances of community politics in action. Raymond Williams states in *Keywords* that from the 20th century onwards, community, “in some uses has been given a polemical edge, as in community politics, which is distinct not only from national politics but from formal local politics and normally involves various kinds of direct action and direct local organisation, “working directly with people.”⁸⁴ Yet while the community politics prompted by the pandemic have all been orientated towards working with people in local areas, this has been done in a socially distanced way. The pandemic has forced a paradoxical situation in which we kept away from others in order to look after them. We wore face masks to protect others as much as ourselves. We stayed at home, to save lives.

In the pandemic, community has still found ways to express itself, even in lockdown. Palliative care doctor Rachel Clarke wrote in her recent book *Breathtaking: Inside the NHS in a time of pandemic* (2021) that in April 2020, “just weeks into our hellish immersion, everywhere, already and with astonishing agility, people are doing their utmost to make things better”, listing such initiatives as notices on lampposts asking neighbours if they need assistance, Captain Tom walking laps of his garden to fundraise for the NHS and children making visors in their local scout huts... “All of these tiny eruptions of kindness. We are learning and striving, with imagination and empathy, to help each other, together.”⁸⁵ This kind of activity was familiar to Raymond Williams as the neighbourliness he viewed as an intrinsic part of his “knowable community” in his home village in the border country of Wales. What Raymond Williams characterised as “the working class way of life” was one that he described as

having “emphases of neighbourhood, mutual obligation and common betterment” and he also posited the view that these emphases were “in fact the best basis for any future English society.”⁸⁶ He recalled in moving detail the ways in which his neighbours in his home village of Pandy had shown practical support to his own family, writing:

*When my father was dying, this year, one man came in and dug his garden; another loaded and delivered a lorry of sleepers for firewood; another came and chopped the sleepers into blocks, another – I don't know who, it was never said – left a sack of potatoes at the back door; a woman came in and took away a basket of washing.*⁸⁷

Paolo Giordano notes in his persuasive essay *How Contagion Works*, that “The epidemic encourages us to think of ourselves as belonging to a collective. It pushes us to behave in a way that is unthinkable under normal circumstances, to recognise that we are inextricably connected to other people, to consider their existence and wellbeing in our individual choices. In the contagion we rediscover ourselves as part of a single organism. In the contagion we become again, a community.”

*Walk on, walk on
With hope in your heart
And you'll never walk alone
You'll never walk alone*

Raymond Williams notes with typical insight that, “The complexity of community thus relates to the difficult interaction between the tendencies originally distinguished in the historical development: on the one hand the sense of direct common concern; on the other hand the materialization of various forms of common organization, which may or may not adequately express this.”⁸⁸ 150,000 people have died from Covid in the United Kingdom at the time of writing, a devastating toll which will take years to comprehend. Time will tell the impact of the common organization in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and whether the common concern to save lives failed to adequately protect some of those who were also vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic, notably ethnic minority communities, and the 8.7 million young people who have missed half a year of school. A key question for those who have had to make sacrifices during the pandemic concerns the sort of society they want to see, once levels of Covid-19 infections, hospitalisations and deaths are reduced to manageable levels. What will the politics be of that generation, those born in the United Kingdom between 2002 and 2016? Will this rising generation of under 19s, demand changes that reflect their *structure of feelings*, their community of interests? Amongst those issues heightened by the pandemic, for instance, are calls to end child food poverty, fund universal basic income and to introduce free WIFI for vulnerable low-income groups.

Let us return to Raymond Williams thought that, following the Industrial Revolution, “the civilizing force of a new vision of society had been created in struggle, had gathered up the suffering and the hopes of generations of the oppressed and exploited, and in this unexpected and challenging form was the city's human reply to the long inhumanity of city and country alike.”⁸⁹ Can we see the pandemic, like the Industrial Revolution, as forcing the formation of a new politics, one that is alert and responsive to the community of interests of British people of all ethnicities, and all ages? Raymond Williams wrote that , “A culture in common, in our own day, will not be the simple all-in-all society of old dream. It will be a very complex organization, requiring continual adjustment and redrawing. At root, the feeling of solidarity is the only conceivable element of stabilization in so difficult an organization.”⁹⁰ It is that feeling of solidarity that produces a *breathing space*.

*At the end of a storm
There's a golden sky
And the sweet silver song of a lark*

Walk on through the wind
Walk on through the rain
Though your dreams be tossed and blown

Walk on, walk on
With hope in your heart
And you'll never walk alone

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- ¹ Raymond Williams, "Culture is Ordinary" (1958), *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism* (London: Verso, 1989), 3-14.
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- ³ I am grateful to Dr Sharon Clancy, Assistant Professor in Educational Leadership and Management at Nottingham University and Chair of Raymond Williams Foundation, for suggesting the inclusion of this quotation from *Marxism and Literature*, as well as her other insightful feedback on this text.
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