

A line was crossed in Clapham last night: the reality i...

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I watched live streaming of the events in Clapham last night. As I tweeted at the time, the image of male police officers fighting women whose simple wish is to be safe on the streets is not one that is going to be easy to erase from the memory.

Nothing will bring Sarah Everard back. I cannot imagine the grief her family and friends are going through. Nothing I say here changes my sense of shock at the senselessness of her death. And the anger that any man did this, because a man did.

40 years ago I lived in Clapham, with my then girlfriend and another female friend. Both worried about walking home at night. There were occasions then when I went to the tube with them, or to meet them. It's shocking that in all that has happened since then nothing has been done to reclaim the streets of Clapham or anywhere else from the threat of men. I am ashamed of that.

But there was something deeper about last night. The failure of the police to accommodate the need for women to hold a vigil was profoundly wrong, Covid or not.

The attempt to stop a protest demanding that most basic of rights - to walk free from fear at night - is indication that something is deeply wrong in our society, Covid or not.

The reality is that the police should have been joining this vigil. They should have been hanging their heads in shame, for so many reasons.

But instead they attacked women, and it was broadcast on livestream. The world saw it happen. Days after a woman was murdered and the night before Mother's Day misogyny, which is one of the building blocks of the fascist state, was out in force and on ugly display. And all because a fascist Home Secretary would not accommodate the needs of women to speak as they wished.

Next week the [Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill goes back before Parliament](#). The whole purpose of that Bill is to remove the right to protest in this country. Of course the target of that Bill was hinted to be XR, or BLM, and others considered 'woke'.

But now 'woke' includes women who simply want to be safe. After all, wokeness only refers to an awareness of inequality, and there isn't a woman I know who is not aware of the inequality that they face. And that awareness could now be a crime, because to annoy another person by protesting in support of an opinion will be a crime punishable by up to ten years under that Act. It would just take a man (maybe wearing a police officer's uniform) to say they had been annoyed by a woman for peacefully demanding equality for a crime to have been committed in this country very soon.

Do I think that awareness of that Act would have changed last night's protest? I am sure it would not have done. Angry people will not be told that they cannot express that anger. That is not going to happen in this country. In fact, I think the opposite might happen. The illegality of protest might be the tipping point that makes protest much more likely.

This is not a country that backs oppression. This is a country where people want to be free. That is exactly what the vigil last night was all about. But in the fashion of a tinpot dictatorship a vigil for a murdered woman was violently attacked by police officers. They no doubt used the cover of Covid regulation to break up what was a wholly appropriate act of remembrance because it offended those who think that they have power that they can exercise without responsibility.

The reality is that for differing reasons none of us are safe in this country now.

We are not safe because we have a government that wants us to live in fear, and is going out of its way to make sure that we do.

A line has been crossed.

When the state comes for women holding a vigil they can come for anyone. And that includes you, and me. We have reached the last line in that poem now. There are no excuses left. All we can do now is oppose.