

PANDEMIC POWER



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The Covid Response and
the Erosion of Democracy

A Liberal Critique

Muriel Blaive



Central European University Press
Budapest–Vienna–New York



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Published in 2025 by
Central European University Press

Nádor utca 11, H-1051 Budapest, Hungary

E-mail: ceupress@press.ceu.edu

Website: <https://www.aup.nl/en/imprint/ceu-press>



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Research funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) via Elise Richter grant no. V912-G. Published with the support of the Austrian Science Fund (FWF): PUB 1183-P (DOI: 10.55776/PUB1183.)

FWF Austrian
Science Fund

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ISBN 978-963-386-933-8 (paperback)

ISBN 978-963-386-934-5 (ebook)

ISSN 3004-1430

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available

"Pandemic Power is a decisive intervention in the growing critical literature from the social sciences and humanities on the Covid-19 pandemic response. Muriel Blaive draws brilliantly on her expertise as a historian of communism to ask searching questions both about the pandemic and of the response of the liberal left to it. Her argument is compelling: without a full engagement with its missteps during the pandemic, the academic and political left cannot overcome the divisions and authoritarian impulses of the new Trump era."

Toby Green, King's College London

"Much more than a book about Covid, this is a plea for the possibility of critical debate—essential to both science and democracy. Muriel Blaive brilliantly highlights the responsibility of (social) scientists and politicians who, by accepting the rules of the neoliberal game, have abandoned the defense of freedom of expression and the rights of the most vulnerable—traditional left-wing causes—leaving them to the far-right."

Éloïse Adde, Central European University

"There is certainly no shortage of books analyzing responses to the Covid pandemic, many of which have monopolized scholarly attention in recent years, often with an apocalyptic flair. Yet most follow a predictable pattern: they either extol policies such as lockdowns and mandatory vaccinations, critique their impact on minorities and women while studiously avoiding any fundamental questioning of their compatibility with liberal democracy, or, conversely, veer into conspiracy theories and outright Covid denialism.

Muriel Blaive's book stands out precisely because it does none of these. With encyclopedic erudition, razor-sharp logic,

and eloquent prose, Blaive methodically dismantles the notion that locking down populations and imposing mandatory vaccinations with fines could ever be reconciled with liberal democracy and the rule of law. More strikingly, she demonstrates that such measures were indefensible even as emergency exceptions, given the statistical evidence available just months after the outbreak.

As the author brilliantly exposes, the mainstream approach to pandemic governance in Western democracies was shaped by extreme censorship and a betrayal by the left of poorer social classes—who, unlike their laptop-class counterparts, lacked the privilege of working remotely. Particularly sharp is her critique of the role played by the media, politicians, and academics in perpetuating these policies and fueling mass hysteria, often with a level of hypochondriac rhetoric that would have made even the most anxious Victorian physician blush.”

Uladzislau Belavusau, University of Amsterdam

“This marvelous short book offers a comprehensive and thought-provoking discussion of “Covid censorship,” initiated by democratic governments and endorsed by liberal intellectuals to silence dissenting voices challenging the dominant expert narrative. *Pandemic Power* is a lucid analysis of contemporary surveillance democracies, which tend to abandon their core values and commitments—such as freedom of expression—in times of crisis.”

András Bozóki, Central European University